Writing History, “Preserving the Ephemeral”: Trauma and Aufhebung in Penelope Lively’s Moon Tiger

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Claudia Hampton is at her end. Dying in the sterility of hospice, her memories and speech slowly disintegrating, she starts at her beginning, writing a “history of the world and in the process, [her] own” (Lively 1). Claudia’s own, personal history grows out of a depiction of the “history of the world,” but Lively’s protagonist is quick to qualify her initial statement: she is writing a history of the world “as selected by Claudia” (1). Though public conceptions of history may encompass the personal, every public rendering bears the mark of a personal vision. Intrinsic to her craft as historian, then, is to attend to personal experiences as a means to challenge the public historical record. According to Claudia, “the voice of history, of course, is composite” (5), but not every voice is appreciated with the intensity of personal experience. Statistics, like death tolls, for example, paper over the anguish felt from the loss of a loved one. Claudia therefore not only orchestrates the public and private tenors, but also fundamentally concerns herself with the voices that fail to be recognized at the public level. Moon Tiger’s narrative structure echoes a similar plurality. Though written primarily from the first person perspective or with focalized narration, Lively also affords other characters first person interludes. The novel thus offers a comprehensive depiction of the protagonist’s life, but one that privileges certain experiences and perspectives over others. As Claudia says, “I’ve always thought a kaleidoscopic view might be an interesting heresy” (2). Lively’s novel reflects its protagonist’s disclaimer, presenting a refracted and layered narrative: Moon Tiger showcases personal recollections in conjunction with an alternative history that lays bare the atrocities of war, the private resonance of public trauma, and the way in which the historical record never fully captures the veracity of the past.

Lively’s novel reads with unabashed rawness, with splats of gore and racy episodes punctuating the text. Against the bloody backdrop of mass human loss in World War II, Lively
disrupts Claudia’s tale with moments of intense personal trauma, from the sudden death of her lover, Tom Southern, to the excruciating pain of her subsequent miscarriage. Yet, the primacy of these events directly challenges the way Claudia perceives public conception of history: “… the tidying up of [what actually happened] into books, the concentration of the benign historical eye upon years and places and persons” (6). As an established polemical historian, Claudia is fundamentally concerned with attacking both the traditional “tidy” forms of history and what she deems to be historical misrepresentations. Having spent her formative years – professionally, personally, and sexually – in Egypt, Claudia is attuned to the appropriation of Egyptian history by British imperialists. Her traumatic experiences there, however, catalyze her concern for alternative histories and the way in which history is recorded – particularly because she is told to forget her own loss. Claudia’s private traumatic moments, amplified by public trauma, are therefore fundamentally untidy, rippling throughout her narrative. Through Claudia’s historical rendering of loss in her life, Lively uncovers the way in which trauma continues to morph and unfurl throughout a person’s history.

*Moon Tiger* records historical change on four core registers: topography, time, language, and the human body. These four elements inform and inscribe one another, converging into Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotope: literally, the union of time and space. As the anchor of the novel, Egypt exemplifies the most notable chronotope, signaling the crucial plot turn and juncture in Claudia’s life. Indeed, *Moon Tiger* is built upon fundamental contestations – life and death, public and private, East and West, trauma and reconciliation, and memory and forgetting. Most notably, the novel contrasts Claudia’s experiences in Egypt before her traumatic loss with her life thereafter. This contrast introduces my analytical contestation: if Claudia’s time in Egypt before loss is chronotopic, her life thereafter is achronotopic. The chronotope indicates the
development and thickening of narrative plot; the achronotope shatters narrative control, splaying the four chronotopic elements and signaling the presence of trauma. Together, the chronotope and the achronotope funnel the novel’s exploration of loss, mortality, and memory.

*Moon Tiger* borrows its name from the incense brand that appears poetically throughout the novel. Comprised of three parts, the green coil, the twin ash spiral, and the unfurling smoke, *Moon Tiger* operates as a guiding image throughout the novel. Though a remnant, the tendrils of smoke achieve the incense’s purpose. Similarly, Claudia’s aim – to write a history of the world – is bound up in paradox: like smoke, that which remains after a personal experience often fails to make an indelible mark in public historical discourse; the historian’s challenge is not only to commemorate the memory of an event, but also to register the individual felt experience of that occurrence. History writing is thus both an acknowledgement of what has been lost or what has changed, but also a process of recuperation and preservation, a contestation mediated in the curious process of *Aufhebung*. A Hegelian term meaning supersession, *Aufhebung* paradoxically implies both change and preservation. *Moon Tiger*’s success as a novel and Claudia’s success as an historian are in their execution of *Aufhebung*: Claudia’s past recuperates the lost figures unrecognized by the collective record, and lingers amongst the people and works which remain after her death; history writing, in acknowledging and working through loss, facilitates the preservation of the past, even as memories of personal experiences dissipate.

The paradoxical intertwining of loss and preservation presents one of the fundamental elements of Claudia’s tale. Her goal is to encapsulate her memories in her “history of the world,” even as she recognizes her own quickly declining mental and physical capacities. As she descends into her memories, she muses, “Let me contemplate myself within my context: everything and nothing. The history of the world as selected by Claudia: fact and fiction, myth
and evidence, images and documents” (1). There is no better place to wade through these pairings than in Claudia’s memories of Egypt, where “images and documents” rise out of the sand, and “fact and fiction” and “myth and evidence” are embedded within the country’s fertile topography. Egypt influences public and private histories to such a degree that Claudia qualifies her own “history of the world” formula:

> Not even the most maverick historian – myself, perhaps – would deny that the past rests upon certain central and indisputable facts. So does life; it has its core, its centre. We reach, now, this core (70).

As narrator, Claudia utilizes meta-narration, explicitly highlighting the turns and developments of her story. The indentation serves as one of these markers, but also demonstrates the personal vantage point from which she writes. Though she parallels the collective past with the individual experience of life, public and private conceptions of “central and indisputable facts” are often incongruous, evidence of the inherent dissidence to her historical craft.

> Egypt, however, establishes itself as core in multiple facets of *Moon Tiger.*

Claudia’s section on Egypt falls at the very center of the novel, physically anchoring the novel and signaling its importance to narrative, historical, and personal registers. In Egypt, her career in journalism evolves into one as historian; in Egypt, she meets and falls in love with the English tank commander, Tom Southern; and in Egypt, she experiences the trauma of Tom’s death and her miscarriage. Her personal traumas become amplified when one recognizes the critical role colonial Egypt played in World War II and in Britain’s sense of self as empire nation. From the Western perspective, Egypt is shrouded in mystique, antiquity, and evidence of exoticism that serve to legitimize the British Empire; its colonization represented an important development in

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1 Mary Moran, in “Penelope Lively” notes Lively’s personal connection to Egypt. Having grown up in Egypt, Lively focuses on the presence of the past in her fiction because of her “early exposure to the modern and the ancient existing side by side” (8). Egypt is therefore also “core” within Lively’s own authorial history.
the British Empire’s history. During World War II, however, Egypt became the Desert Front, a site of mass human loss. The carnage of war was therefore brought to the explicit attention of Britain. The Desert Front not only threatened Britain’s imperial identity, but also brought the public trauma of mass human loss to the fore. Claudia thus operates in an Egypt that constantly reminds her of death’s presence, whether through news reports tracking casualty counts, or through encounters with individual victims of the war. Consequently, impersonal losses – the death of an unknown soldier, for example – become profoundly personal for Claudia, and trigger her memories of Tom and her miscarriage in her later years. So too, her trauma resonates within the larger public register. Tom’s death not only contributes to Claudia’s individual trauma, but also to her experience of the collective trauma of World War II. So, Claudia’s task as historian thickens: she concerns herself with recuperating and commemorating both publically and privately felt experiences of historical and traumatic events.

Egypt’s historical past is fraught with multiple perspectives and presences, laying a rich foundation for Claudia’s analysis of alternative and competing histories. Egypt was the brightest ray of sunlight of “the empire on which the sun would never set.” Yet, as a colony of Britain, Egypt fell under the paradoxical gaze of the Orientalist: while simultaneously recognized, studied, and revered, Egypt’s historical stature only exists because of the presence of the West. Edward Said, in his influential Orientalism, articulates this paradox between absence and presence: “…in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist’s presence is enabled by the Orient’s effective absence” (Said 146). One might consider Claudia as then simultaneously giving voice to Egypt – she does, after all, mark Egypt as the “core” – but also as appropriating Egyptian history to magnify her own. Egypt is rendered through Claudia’s
perspective – Egyptian characters are never given voice in *Moon Tiger* – and functions as the core of the “history of the world,” but only “as selected by Claudia Hampton” (1). Claudia thus traces the Orientalist’s path, subsequently “reduc[ing] the Orient in [her] work, even after [she] has devoted a good deal of time to elucidating and exposing it” (Said 146). At the same time, though, Egypt functions as a catalyst for Claudia’s narrative and how she approaches her role as historian because it fundamentally challenges conceptions of time and history (Burton 58).

Egypt, and the Orient more generally, challenge historical and temporal notions because they are rendered as unchanging. The Orientalist concerns herself with the essences of the Orient, “the Oriental character, Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, and the like,” and the way in which they all “converge” (Said 142). Said uses these facets of the Oriental “character” as evidence of the Orient’s unchanging nature as perceived by the Orientalist. In Claudia’s perception of Egypt, four crucial interconnected essences converge to illustrate Egypt’s eternal and transitional state: the temporal, the topographic, the linguistic, and the corporeal. Ancient monuments dot the landscape; Egyptian hieroglyphics and English graffiti both reside on Egyptian walls, juxtaposing the historical with the modern, and the colonized with the colonizer; the body records the passing of time in a scar, or in a mended broken bone, or in stretch marks evidencing childbirth (Lively 166). This convergence invites Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope; the four aforementioned essences act as chronotopic elements. Characterized as “(literally, time and space), the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin 15), chronotopes function as “the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel” (Bakhtin 22). They are, as Claudia

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2 Mary Moran writes on *Moon Tiger* with a feminist lens and notes that the “radical rejection of established notions about history, time, and nature of personal identity” (90) is a feminist act. One might conceive of Egypt as not only exotic, but also feminine in the eyes of an Orientalist.
dubs them, the “essentials” (78) of a narrative, where the plot thickens and turns. The chronotope is a narrative means of coalescence, bringing together multiple manifestations and iterations of history into an episode set in a specific location.

Temporally, Claudia tends to flit as a narrator, springing from memories of her childhood to the present in the flip of a page. As Claudia herself states, “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” (2). Yet, in Egypt, her narrative settles, and Claudia sinks into the depths of Egypt’s complex and influential history. Within Claudia’s history, the world’s history, and Moon Tiger, Egypt acts as a chronotope, braiding together narrative and historical strands. Anchored by stunning monuments, and marked by British imperialism and the carnage of war, Egypt’s topography bears evidence of historical grandeur and appropriation. In turn, the sheer magnitude of Egypt functions as a dramatic setting for World War II; Claudia, in all her “spinning, mixing, and parting” versions of herself, is able to harmonize her a-chronology in Egypt because the country is built upon multiple histories. Claudia consequently notes that within her history of the world, “Egypt will have its proper place as the complacent indestructible force that has perpetuated itself in the form of carved stone, painted plaster, papyri, granite, gold leaf, lapis lazuli, bits of pot and fragments of wood to fill the museums of the world” (80). Every artifact encapsulates different moments of Egypt’s layered past – the papyrus represents the advanced intellectual nature of Egyptian civilization, the gold indicates periods of opulence and splendor, while the broken bits of wood and clay carry over from moments of destruction. Claudia juxtaposes these artifacts, crafting a spectrum of experiences and memories; in chronotopic Egypt, the past and the present are simultaneously represented in her narration.
The result is a relative lack of linearity or chronology in Claudia’s memories, and therefore, within her narrative. As she descends into Egypt, she begins: “I cannot write chronologically of Egypt. Ancient Egypt. So called ancient Egypt” (80). The steady march of qualifiers Claudia attaches to Egypt establishes it as a space of oscillating temporalities, conflating time periods and perspectives. She even erodes temporal barriers, stating, “past and present do not so much co-exist in the Nile valley as cease to have any meaning” (Lively 80). That is, Egypt seems to disregard and blur the bounds of past and present:

What is buried under the sand is reflected above, not just in the souvenirs hawked by the descendants of the tomb robbers but in the eternal, deliberate cycle of the landscape – the sun rising from the desert of the east to sink into the desert of the west, the spring surge of the river, the regeneration of creatures – the egrets and herons and wildfowl, the beasts of burden, the enduring peasantry (80-81).

Claudia perceives Egypt as occupying a space of intense traffic between the past and present, where elements of the past seem to spring into the present. Claudia evidences this temporal blur in multiple ways: in marking the street vendors as “descendants,” she enacts the cyclical nature of the past returning in the present. The souvenirs, items meant to commemorate an experience later in life, double as signifiers for the items stolen by tomb raiders of ancient times, whose descendants, of course, now “hawk” these items. Explicitly, the “eternal, deliberate cycle” of the sunrise of the East and sunset of the West represents the regenerative cycle of life and death, while the juxtaposition of the dryness of the desert and the fertility of the “spring surge” illustrates the contrast between the two ends of the life and death spectrum. To Claudia, Egypt is eternal and enduring, but also constantly transitions and regenerates.

Egypt functions as a masterful example of the intertwined relationship between time and space: time is always a function of space, and reciprocally, place is a reflection of time. Egypt’s topography lays bare the “continuous phenomenon” of historical happenings in Egypt, where
ancient and modern elements neighbor one another. Claudia visits Egypt multiple times in her life, both before and after her miscarriage and Tom’s death. Though the trauma of these occurrences creates a void in Claudia’s narrative topography – she perceives Egypt with Tom differently than she does without him – she remains sensitive to the Egyptian topography’s ability to depict the fluidity of its past:

when I think of how I am going to invoke Egypt within the story of the world – I have to think of it as a continuous phenomenon, the kilted pharaonic population spilling out into the Nile valley of the twentieth century, the chariots and lotuses, Horus and Ra and Isis alongside the Mameluke mosques, the babbling streets of Cairo, Nasser’s High Dam, the khaki convoys of 1942, the Edwardian opulence of Turkish mansions (80).

Claudia’s imagery streams from evocations of the ancient Egyptian civilization, to commemorations of the early 20th century, to the present day; she layers mythic references with royal ones; and she juxtaposes the grandeur of landmarks with colloquial babble. Indeed she exemplifies the “continuous” nature of the Egyptian topography, but simultaneously encapsulates it “within the story of the world.” Thus, Claudia demonstrates the chronotopic effect of topography: it records and defines shifts in history even while it demonstrates the blurring of the past and present.

Similarly, language charts temporal shifts as it registers movements in the population and dominant discourse, further evidencing the way in which the past resurfaces into the present. New languages emerge, older languages fade into obscurity; these linguistic undulations mirror the ways in which landscapes erode and accumulate through time’s passing. Claudia links language and topography when she notes, “Speech regenerates itself like the landscape; words die and others are born, just as buildings melt away and others take their place, as the sand blew
over the carcasses of the Matilda and the Honeys and the Crusaders” (68). The historical references juxtapose the different facets of Egypt’s identity for the West: the infantry tank signifies the Desert Front; the Honeys represent Egypt’s seemingly unchanging, eternal nature; and the Crusaders connote imperialism and expansion. The West’s perception of Egypt shifts as historical events pass, and thus, language and topography are subject to the regenerative cycle of life and death too. Furthermore, as Claudia notes, speech is referential, and manages to linger even after it moves into obscurity. Consider Claudia’s critique on the human discourse:

We open our mouths and out flow words whose ancestries we do not even know. We are walking lexicons. In a single sentence of idle chatter we preserve Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Norse; we carry a museum inside our heads, each day we commemorate peoples of whom we have never heard. More than that, we speak volumes – our language is the language of everything we have not read (41-42).

Claudia manages to flit between temporalities, languages, and peoples, yet she also establishes a sense of solidarity through the pervasive language of “we” and “our.” The language of “preserve,” “carry,” and “commemorate,” layers hopefulness onto solidarity, gesturing towards the possibility of recovery from oblivion. Truth and meaning are buried within words; as “walking lexicons,” humans are meant to excavate this meaning. Every time we unconsciously echo a language from the past, we act as bearers of history and bring the past into our present.4

Fundamentally then, language functions in two familiar ways: first, just as the smoke of Moon Tiger proliferates throughout the room, acting as the unseen but consequential extension of the twin green and ash coils, language disseminates the memories of past generations while

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3 Matilda refers to the infantry war tank used in World War II, while “the Honeys” references the still fresh honey found during excavation of Egyptian tombs.
4 This is indicative of the postmodern period in literature. Ursula Heise notes this postmodern characteristic as, “time dividing and subdividing, bifurcating and branching off continuously into multiple possibilities and narratives” (Heise 367). Eileen Williams-Wanquet adds her own iteration of temporal distortion: “Simultaneities intervene, extending our point of view outward in an infinite number of lines connecting the subject to a whole world of comparable instances, complicating the temporal flow of meaning” (Williams-Wanquet 100).
also signaling the arrival of new ones. Second, language, in its profound connection to
topography and time, acts as another form of the chronotope. Indeed, Bakhtin characterizes
language as “a treasure-house of images” and as “fundamentally chronotopic” (23). Specifically,
individual words function as chronotopes, echoing their place of origin as they also demonstrate
the manner in which that place has changed. Consider “gyppy” (Lively 117), a word Claudia’s
“frothy” (88) roommate, Camilla, utters with regular nonchalance. Though clearly connected to Egypt, “gyppy” is an ethnic slur, a remnant of the English colonial presence. Language thus
signals crucial junctures within historical narrative, even as topography starkly juxtaposes
historical events.

Bakhtin’s characterization of language demonstrates chronotopes’ mutual engagement of
each other. His approach to the transient nature of languages mirrors the manner in which Claudia discusses the plurality of populations running through Egypt:

Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form... Therefore languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways (Bakhtin The Dialogic Imagination 291).

Egypt occupies a space of not only intense cultural, linguistic, and human interconnectedness,
but the colonial presence embeds natural hierarchy into the landscape. The Western gaze and Claudia’s perception of the country converge within the word, Egypt. Recalling Bakhtin’s notion of narrative knots, the language of “intersection” and the many spectrums of thought – signaled with the multiple instances of “between” – demonstrate his insistence on the thickness of linguistic interplay. The thrust of Bakhtin’s theory and of Claudia’s narrative mode lies in the
plurality of meanings and mutually engaging interpretations of language. So, Claudia does not only merge temporality, topography, and language; she stitches her own temporalities together with those of Egypt’s and Britain’s, melds the Egyptian topography – already marked with evidence of the British presence – with the linguistic landscape, and delineates the genealogical relationship between languages; in so doing, she overlays alternative histories, perspectives, and memories in a dialogical fashion.

Yet, Claudia still directs these myriad topographies, perspectives, and languages, so she privileges her own voice. The events of her life govern the flow of her narrative, and in casting Egypt as her core, time and narratives “bifurcate and sublimate” (Heise 367) not only within Egypt, but also because of it. It is a space of multiple histories interacting and informing one another, both collective and personal: collectively, the unnamed but memorialized pharaohs, the Crusaders, the British and French colonial presence, the unnamed but quantified casualties of the Desert Front, and the American interest in the area after World War II; personally, her relationship with Tom, her budding career as journalist and historian, her sexual maturation and her experiences with traumatic loss. Indeed, for Claudia, Egypt represents a juncture where her life splits; her vision of the future is continually informed by the critical disruption that rumbles through her time in Egypt.

The loss of the human body, specifically Tom’s, marks this crucial turn in Claudia’s life. As she nears her own death, our protagonist acknowledges that in her telling, she will “omit the

5 Stacy Burton writes thoughtfully on Bakhtin, claiming that the human world is “characterized not only by heteroglossia, but equally by multitemporality or heterochrony” (Burton 48). One might also then consider Bakhtin’s argument in terms of Roland Barthes. In his influential “The Rustle of Language,” Barthes argues that Text is bound up in language and a multiplicity of readings and interpretations: “what [the reader] perceives is multiple, irreducible, issuing from heterogeneous, detached substances and levels: lights, colors, vegetation, heat, air, tenuous explosions of sound, tiny cries of birds, children’s voices from the other side of the valley, paths, gestures, garments of inhabitants close by or very far away” (60). Barthes helpfully illustrates the layering effect of time and speech’s partnership, one that manages to capture and separate a synesthetic reading ingrained in the human experience.
narrative.” Instead, “what [she] shall do is flesh it out; give it life and colour, add the screams and the rhetoric” (2). Much of Claudia’s language is familiar: “the screams and rhetoric” and the language of “flesh” invite the comparison with the final version of Bakhtin’s chronotope: “In the literary artistic chronotope… time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible” (Bakhtin 15); put more succinctly, “The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic” (Bakhtin 16). In Moon Tiger, what becomes “artistically visible” is the human body as a depiction of traumatic loss in a particular time and place. The human body indeed arises at crucial points in Claudia’s narrative, from the centrality of Tom, to her horrific, traumatic interactions with corpses. The “screams” focus her narrative to coalesce around pivotal moments of loss and discovery, moments where a scream may be warranted.

The private and personal nature of the image of man – the particularities of a face, the nuances of individual musculature, the subtle expressions and tendencies – often fails to be recognized within records of war. Instead, deaths are papered over, reified into impersonal statistics. War is the site where bodies die and individual histories are thus forgotten. Bodies, however, function as concrete records of time in specific places. Tom and Claudia’s first moment of intimacy, a physical union of bodies, serves two functions: first, the scene illustrates the way in which bodies can register the past when language fails; second, against the backdrop of the Desert Front, the episode highlights the juxtaposition of the vivacity of their relationship and the death pervasive in Egypt. When Claudia recounts the first time she and Tom were intimate, their visceral communication expresses much more than their words: Tom, “misinterpreting what he must have seen as panic in her eyes, said, ‘You’re not… Claudia, I’m not the first?’ She could not speak – only hold out her arms. She could not say: ‘It’s not you I’m afraid of, it’s how I feel!’” (109). Tom is not Claudia’s first; her brother, Gordon, was. Her sexual maturation is
bound up in taboo – unspeakable – and so her body assumes the responsibility, expressing that which cannot be verbalized. This is not to dismiss the immensity of emotions Claudia fails to articulate; the intensity of her emotions is reflective of the intensity of her relationship. In turn, the speed and passion of their relationship is reflective, or is in reaction to, the dangerous climate of the Desert Front, where one constantly confronts the finite nature of the human life.

The preserving nature of language, previously explored through the charting of linguistic lineages, becomes personal for Claudia in the aftermath of Tom’s death. Her relationship functioned as a preserved instance of the intensity of life and love, an escape from the constant reminder of death and destruction in Egypt; Claudia approaches Tom’s death in a similar manner, appropriating the Egyptian concept of the ka for her private grief: “… if the body is preserved either actually or symbolically, if it is hidden away and provided with the equipment of daily living, then death will not have happened. Something – soul, ka, memory, whatever you like to call it – will live for ever” (114). The ka operates on multiple levels of temporality. As Claudia notes, it has the potential to “live for ever,” escaping the erasures of history, but it also facilitates time that is both “instant and frozen” (73). Instead of allowing the disintegration of memory with the corpse, the ka has the function of denying the dissipation of memories, as if death “will not have happened.” The ka preserves Tom and his memories within Claudia’s.

To our protagonist, the ka seems impervious to death’s touch, and her recollection of her time with Tom echoes a similar resistance because it invokes multiple temporal threads. When she is with Tom, time condenses, blurs, and intensifies:

There is no sequence now for those days, no chronology… they are simultaneous. It is a time that is both instant and frozen, like a village scene in a Breughel painting, like the walls of the tombs on which fly, swim and walk the same geese, ducks, fish, cattle that live in, on and beside the Nile today (73-74).
Multiple representations of time run through Claudia’s recapitulation. Lively juxtaposes the Breughel, Egyptian friezes, and natural scenes to establish continuity between Claudia’s varied conceptions of her time with Tom in Egypt. Even as she explicitly marks this time as “instant and frozen,” Claudia’s imagery still evokes movement: Breughel layered episodes and scenes in the magnitude of characters in his works; the friezes and the present day scene mirror one another, with the vivacity and ubiquity of the animals “in, on and beside” the Nile depicted on the ancient tomb walls. The four chronotopic elements register the past in the present, but here, our protagonist demonstrates how the present can also be recorded in remnants from the past. Indeed, her inclusion of “now” at the outset of the passage signals her retrospect and the presence of the past in Claudia’s “now.”

The temporal blur between the past, present, and future was a hallmark of Claudia and Tom’s time together; both considered their lives together after the war, even as they were surrounded by reminders of the past. The work of memory – Claudia is, after all, recounting her relationship – adds another temporal layer: her account of the romance in the present day is always informed by what should have happened in the past, and what could have been in the present. Lively masterfully mixes temporalities in her depiction of one of Tom and Claudia’s nights together. Against the backdrop of “the hot black velvet night – the river, the desert” (76) the two lie together: “He takes her hand. They lie, side by side. Like, thinks Claudia, figures on tomb, or the bundled shapes of sarcophagi” (76). Claudia’s references to “bundled shapes of sarcophagi” and the “figures of tombs” not only evoke the chronotope of the human body, but also invite the preserved past into their presence. Enshrouding them is the chronotopic blend of

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6 Gerard Genette, in his delineation of different temporal modes, may define this passage as an example of stasis – where historical time freezes (or in this case, lacks chronology) to allow for narrative description (Genette 126).
the Egyptian topography: blackness, fluidity, and dryness. It is in this chronotopic space – one that nearly precludes the necessity of spoken language – that Claudia is able to “simply be” (76). Even in life, their relationship had elements of death and the past. It is only fitting that the reverse is also true: as Claudia nears death, Tom reincarnates through the pages of his diary, a vessel for his ka, and transports Claudia back to moments together in life.

The introduction of Tom’s diary at the very end of the novel is the most notable and unexpected elevation of another character’s perspective and voice. His diary entries are grounded in hope, gesturing towards alternative histories within Claudia’s kaleidoscopic narrative. He opens with an explicit address to Claudia, “To whom it may concern. C., I hope” (200), as he introduces words he never had the chance to verbalize during life. In Luxor, Claudia asked him to tell her a story, a story that survived only within the diary’s pages:

I never told her the other story, in which she stars, in which she is always the heroine – a romanticized story full of cliché images in which I am telling her all the things there has not been enough time for, in which we are doing all the things there has not been enough time for, in which this damn thing is suspended and we are living happily ever after, world without end, amen (200).

Tom’s simultaneous ache and excitement for “all the things there [was] not enough time for” is palpable. The repetition of “in which,” each marking a new possibility of adventure and joy, increases in speed, culminating into the pulsing triad of “happily ever after, world without end, amen.” His hope, then, is that the world he will share with Claudia is “without end” when she finally shares his thoughts. In that manner, he suspends the reality of the war. Neither, however, is able to suspend the impossibility of their projected future together. Tom’s diary commemorates the promise of their love, but is unable to restore it. The diary highlights the language of “suspension” when reconsidering conceptions of history; to suspend history is to
displace it from time’s linear movement and to allow it hang, linger, and gently unfold in a manner reminiscent of the Moon Tiger’s smoke.\(^7\)

Though this episode appears at the end of *Moon Tiger*, it justifies why Claudia so deeply concerns herself with the manner in which history is recorded, recuperated, and suspended. One may read *Moon Tiger* as a tale culminating in emptiness, specifically when considering the pervasive nature of sand, or focusing on the ashes falling from the incense coil.\(^8\) Yet, it is Claudia’s ultimate goal, and accomplishment, that she is able to revitalize and recuperate memories from a sandy and slipping historical landscape. Her reading of Tom’s diary is one example, the image of the poinsettia another. The poinsettia provides the single injection of color and vivacity into the sterility of Claudia’s hospice room. Our protagonist describes the plants as “indestructible things. They grow in sand. I should let it take its chance with the rest of us”\(^9\) (100). The poinsettia in the hospice room triggers Claudia’s memory of another, one that “grows in the [Egyptian] sand.” The phrase “the rest of us,” invites the other figures in the desert, soldiers, to her narrative: “She looks at his feet; one of his sand-encrusted boots rests upon a huge brilliant poinsettia flower, a scarlet star with golden foam at the centre” (102). Lively’s juxtaposition of the “sand encrusted boots” with the “brilliant poinsettia flower” and the richness of the “golden foam at the centre” illustrate resiliency and vivacity, but against the backdrop of grit and loss. The image illustrates a critical tension within the novel – that between life and death, memory and forgetting – and introduces the chronotope’s antithesis, what I dub the achronotope.

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\(^7\) Paul Ricoeur, in “Narrative Time,” writes about three structures in the depth of time. Here, Lively uses “within” time, the constantly forward moving aspect of time.

\(^8\) Debrah Raschke in particular adopts this reading, arguing that Tom’s love is in fact stabilizing within a historical sandstorm. After his death however, her dissolves into ‘funerary moments’ (Raschke 131). In fact, she further argues, that “Claudia’s life, as well as the stories she tells, dissolve like the incense after which this text is named” (131). Her assertion prompted my critical reaction.
If the image of man is “intrinsically chronotopic,” as Bakhtin notes, then logically, the loss of the image of man, or the loss of flesh, is achronotopic. That is, in contrast to the coalescing aspect of the chronotope, the achronotope pulls apart the interconnectedness of the body, time, topography, and language in a move towards narrative entropy. Coldness, emptiness, and narrative disarray emerge as a result. The achronotope is a signifier of trauma and human loss; war, as the site of continuous trauma and mass human loss, is fundamentally achronotopic.

While on an assignment in Egypt, Claudia accidentally happens upon a bomb-victim: “One of his eyes is a purple purply mess, the sand under him is dark black, his trousers have been ripped half from him and in the flesh of one thigh is a red hole into which you could put your fist. From it there crawls a line of ants” (99). The graphic intensity of Claudia’s description offers a disturbing contortion of her earlier descriptions of Egypt. If one recalls blue lapis lazuli and the gold shimmers accenting Claudia’s description of Egypt, the darkness and the “purple purply mess” intensify in their morbidity. In and amongst the mangled corpse crawl “a line of ants,” implicitly foraging through the “purple purply mess” of a missing eye and the fist-sized hole in the unnamed man’s thigh. The ants, peppering and slowly disassembling the body, are achronotopic cues, demonstrating the destabilizing nature of trauma and the war. Indeed, the achronotope works as the chronotope’s converse for every element: the achronotope emerges from the image of the corpse; achronotopic time is chaotic, with the past intruding into the present; achronotopic topography is jagged, disintegrating, and evidences a painful historical landscape; with the presence of the achronotope, one is denied the ability to recuperate what was lost through language. The achronotope splinters narrative and throws Lively’s protagonist into doubt and denial.
The corpse in the sand is a public marker of the intrinsically achronotopic nature of war, but it does not register with Claudia or her narrative personally. The image of the dead man, and the narrative chaos set to follow, only gains clarity when the deceased has a name – Tom Southern. When his death is confirmed – nonchalantly too as the Press Office asks, “Was he a chum of yours?” (126) – Claudia collapses, grasping desperately at possibilities she knows to be impossible:

First there is disbelief, resolute disbelief. No, it is not possible. Not him. Others but not him. And then there is hope because missing does not necessarily mean killed, missing men turn up – wounded, taken prisoner. Or they walk in out of the desert days later, unscathed; Cairo is full of such tales (127).

Whereas Claudia had previously offered descriptions with multiple timelines and alternative histories, she now spins in alternative “tales” out of her control. Claudia’s invocation of “hope” echoes the hope that anchored Tom’s diary entry, but whereas Tom’s hope acknowledged the distance between them, Claudia’s is a form of denial. Denial contorts into a form of desire when considering Hayden White’s work in “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality.” White discusses the very human nature of satisfying storytelling, noting, “this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (27). White’s focus on the imaginary is painfully poetic when applied to Claudia’s case; the full life without closure that she so desired with Tom is now unattainable. Her imagination indeed compensates for her desire, crafting scenarios akin to Tom’s “happily ever after.” These scenarios, however, dissipate in the face of reality, and Claudia is left with only her desire as the achronotope sends her to a traumatic fall.

She experiences not merely a fall, but a tumble, a cascade, an utter avalanche of grief and loss, coupled with the smack of reality and the bluntness of a narrative cut short. Tom’s death...
represents an epistemological and personal implosion, leaving a void in Claudia’s life. It is the emotional twin of her fall as a child:

… a piece of cliff, of the solid world which evidently is not so solid after all, shifts under her clutching hands… crumbles… and she is falling thwack backwards on her shoulders, her head, her outflung arm, she is skidding rolling thumping downwards (4).

The language of instability splinters through Claudia’s imagery, mapping out the achronotopic topography. Bakhtin denoted the chronotope as the place where narrative “knots are tied and untied.” I distinguish the achronotope as the specific place of narrative untying. Tom’s sudden, achronotopic death “unties” the narrative threads he and Claudia began to weave together: she in her narrative, he in his diary. Between the two conceptions of their future, the distinction between reality and what should have been eerily blurs. The achronotope dissolves the “core” of Claudia’s time with Tom in Egypt, ejecting her with the same speed with which she marches through the cascade of concluding, comma-less verbs. Yet, whereas Lively buffers her young protagonist’s physical fall with lighthearted tone, Claudia stutters through her realization over Tom’s death. Recall the rapidity and choppiness of her diction upon confirmation of Tom’s passing: “No, it is not possible. Not him. Others but not him.” Fragments, incomplete clauses, choppy syntax, negatives marching throughout – Claudia’s very language has been traumatized with a “thwack” of the achronotope.

Achronotopic time signals trauma as it coalesces the past and present in a manner that denies the possibility of the future. Trauma operates on two familiar registers within *Moon Tiger*: the public and the private. Claudia experiences a personal trauma in Tom’s death, but his death is doubly deafening when paired with her professional work interviewing soldiers of the Desert Front. When she is first out in the desert, she questions one soldier about what it’s like “out there” (101). He responds with a conglomeration of seemingly disparate adjectives: ““Boring,
uncomfortable, terrifying, exhilarating. In rapid succession…” (101). The “rapid succession” of the soldier’s diction mimics the effect of the description of Claudia’s fall, but in a manner that is simultaneously desensitized and hyper-aware as he juxtaposes “boring” and “terrifying” within his list. As he continues, the soldier eerily describes his experience in a manner that evokes Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope: “‘It’s like the whole of life in a single appalling concentration’” (Lively 101). Indeed, a concentration of a “whole life” may seem to possess the coalescing temporal quality of a chronotope, but the soldier’s qualification of “appalling” gestures toward achronotopic time, where the past intrudes into the present and precludes the future in a chaotic “concentration.”

Claudia and Tom’s future is indeed precluded with the miscarriage of their child. A cruel ripping of one body from another, the miscarriage functions as an achronotopic counterpart to the chronotopic human body. Fittingly, the image of the ants returns in an ominous foreshadowing of loss when Claudia is still with child. After checking into a nursing home, she is welcomed by a graphic warning: when she asks why the babies’ cots stand in tins of water, the nurse responds, “‘It’s because of the ants. If we didn’t do it you’d have the ants getting to the babies’” (131). Even more disturbingly, the nurse continues:

‘You’d hardly believe it, but I’ve been told – it was before my time, see, quite a few years ago – there was a girl didn’t keep the tins topped up and they found one of the babies dead. The ants had got it. Eaten the little thing’s eyes out. That was how they found it – the eyes gone and the ants all over it’ (131).

The nurse’s disturbing recollection echoes the image of the bombed man in the sand, but with an added emotional sting. The victim of the achronotopic ants is not a fully formed dead man, but rather a still alive newborn. Lively juxtaposes the vulnerability of new life with nature’s indifference toward human life as it “takes its course” (132). The nurse herself is wholly unconcerned with the disturbing nature of the tale, calling the baby, “the little thing,” as if she
witnesses this tragedy on a quotidian basis. Therein lies the emotional gravity of the image. The searing personal pain of Claudia’s miscarriage fails to register within an Egypt already marked by collective trauma.

Consequently, Egypt becomes a space that refuses to acknowledge loss. Upon the news that Claudia has lost her and Tom’s child, the nurse responds with equal nonchalance as when she recounted the image of the baby covered in ants, “‘Twas neither a girl nor a boy… Over and done with now, it is. The best thing you can do is forget all about it” (132). The nurse’s aloof comment gnaws at Claudia in a manner similar to the ants’ many-sided attack. First, in insisting that Claudia forget the incident, the nurse turns the miscarriage into a secret, compromising Claudia’s ability to recuperate her past in her narrative because the secret does not acknowledge loss.9 Second, in refusing to acknowledge the baby’s sex, the nurse deprives Claudia of her ability to name her unborn child. Naming is a crucial element of narrative control, as our protagonist notes, “I control the world so long as I can name it” (51). In not being able to name her child, Claudia is unable to use language to reconcile loss; instead, achronotopic language, which does not register the changes in the past, supplants loss with an historical void, or absence. Dominick La Capra, in his “Trauma, Absence, and Loss,” articulates the distinction between his titular focuses: “Loss” is loss that actually happened; “Absence” is a void that has been written into a historical narrative, but never existed in the first place.10 Her child did exist, and Claudia

9 I intentionally use language from Frank Kermode, who noted, “Secrets, in short, are at odds with sequence, which is considered as an aspect of propriety; and a passion for sequence may result in the suppression of the secret” (Kermode 88). In this case, in order for Claudia’s career and life to continue seamlessly – in sequence – her trauma must become and remain a secret, or something forgotten.

10 One might think about absences in Claudia’s life: first, the lack of recognition for her intellectual abilities and her professional capacities as historian and journalist. Jasper, the father of Claudia’s daughter, often dismisses her capacity to be able to craft a “history of the world.” She is repeatedly marked as female, and therefore less able as a journalist, within a male-dominated war zone. Second, because her incestuous relationship with her brother, Gordon, fails to be socially recognized, her sexual maturity may be rendered as “absent” because she had not previously had a socially acceptable
did experience traumatic loss. Yet, in suppressing the memory of her miscarriage and not naming her unborn child, Claudia conceives of her miscarriage as absence. To deny the existence of traumatic loss, however, is to deny a fundamental characteristic of the historical past. According to La Capra, the historical past is, by definition, “the scene of losses that may be narrated, as well as of specific possibilities that may conceivably be reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present or future” (700). There is no conceivable end to trauma because it has the potential to continuously arise, just as the memories of her miscarried child continue to haunt Claudia many years after the fact.

This sentiment resonates with Cathy Caruth’s conception of a traumatized history as an “impossible” one (5). The impossibility of a traumatized past stems from the multiplicity of histories that pull and push the victim through the past and the present. Memories of Claudia’s unborn child serve this function, transporting Claudia back to the incident many years later:

Her mind and body howl. All that she can normally keep tamped down springs into life. She aches and howls for Tom. It is not that he is ever forgotten, but mostly emotion is dormant; it lies quiet, biding its time. And then every so often something brings it raging forth, and she is back ten years ago, back in that Cairo summer, back with the raw new truth of it (Lively 150).

As her lover, Tom had the capacity to present different time periods simultaneously, melding chronologies and isolating specific instances. Memories of his lost child, however, brings the past “raging forth,” pulling Claudia “back with the raw new truth of it,” in an unwanted form of time travel. Claudia herself marks grief and travel as analogous: “It is like travel. You journey from the event and as it becomes more distant it becomes less potent and poignant, like a remembered home. As the weeks go by the knife turns differently” (130). Claudia’s description is reminiscent of her fall, with the knife’s different turns paralleling the bumps and tumbles down relationship. Her relationship with Tom acts as a substitute. As a result, his death is even more painful, because Claudia experiences the loss of the person substituting for her absence.
the cliff’s side. One might consider each bump, each twist of the knife, as a new pang of the traumatic reminder, blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, between hope and acknowledgment of reality.

The traumatic past is therefore disorienting, simultaneously obscuring and sharpening memories of the trauma so that they are both distant and immediate. The deliberate erasure of her miscarriage, for example, positions Claudia in a paradoxical role as mother: she is far more distant from Lisa, her daughter from a later relationship with Jasper, than she is from memories of her miscarriage. Her distant relationship with children, then, demonstrates the iterative nature of trauma:

Children are not like us. They are beings apart: impenetrable, unapproachable. They inhabit not our world but a world we have lost and can never recover. We do not remember childhood – we imagine it. We search for it, in vain, through layers of obscuring dust, and recover some bedraggled shreds of what we think it was.

The language of recovery reverberates through the passage, slipping between “imagine” and “search” in an attempt to recuperate what has been forgotten. The task of recuperation extends across the roles of historian, trauma survivor, and the way Claudia conceives of her role as mother. Yet, Lively’s protagonist obscures this relationship, instead using her argument to rationalize her cold and detached relationship with her daughter. Her invocation of the “obscuring dust” recalls the Egyptian sand, but for Claudia, the lost world of childhood lacks the preserving nature intrinsic to Egypt, where new and old were wholly juxtaposed. Instead, childhood is a realm that is unequivocally lost upon the transition into adulthood. Therefore, in Claudia’s mind, children are necessarily precluded from the information of their predecessors, who “grow old and tell each other what really happened,” while their children “of course, will never know, just as they never know at the time” (104). Yet, knowledge of the past is never fully precluded for Claudia and Lisa, instead reiterating across generations: Claudia’s mother was
flighty and inattentive, oblivious to, and therefore partially catalyzed, her children’s intertwined sexual maturation. Lisa always felt her mother’s aloofness and distance from her, but never explicitly knew why – she supplanted the child her mother really wanted. Yet, in her consciousness of her mother’s lack of affection, Lisa recognizes the remnants of her mother’s traumatic past, and is therefore able to imagine “what [she] thinks [Claudia’s past] was.” So, though the traumatic aftermath entails the conflation of memory and imagination in an attempt to move past the incident, remnants of the traumatic past still arise as a result.

Yet, with each iteration, one makes a small recuperative move. Indeed, Claudia’s final recovery, “of what we think it was,” gestures toward the way in which conceptions of the past morph, altered by individual perceptions and recollections; one might consider the “bedraggled shreds” as the remnants of each individual rehashing of the past. The introduction of Laszlo, a young Hungarian man whom Claudia essentially adopts, represents another repetition of Claudia’s relationship with children. Initially, she pities him, with his “baggy kneed trousers and his too tight sweater” (174) indicating his misfit nature and prompting perhaps another absent mother-child relationship. Yet, Claudia offers him sympathy and guidance, emotions she was never able to offer her biological daughter. Her sympathy initially surprises her – “Good grief… who is this talking?” (Lively 175) – but she comes to recognize the recuperative role Laszlo plays in her life, and she in his: “I remember feeling a curious satisfaction, as though one had been enabled to frustrate Fate. Hubris, of course; I too was Laszlo’s fate” (175). Here, “Fate” may be rendered as traumatic, where memories of the past never cease to reactivate. The relationship Laszlo and Claudia share is the mechanism with which to frustrate the traumatic “fate” for both parties. Reciprocally, Laszlo’s biological mother died when he was an infant; just as Laszlo’s introduction recuperates Claudia as mother, Claudia recuperates Laszlo as loved son.
His arrival provides Claudia with the opportunity to break from her traumatic past (and Laszlo from his), because arrivals act as “those innocent dawn moments from which history accelerates” (Lively 28). As Claudia prophetically states, Laszlo is “one of those for whom history really pulls out the stops” (174). Indeed, he pulls out the traumatic stops for Claudia, easing her guilt over being an absentee mother to Lisa, and enabling her to reconcile the lost world of Tom and her child.

Laszlo thus acts as a substitute for Lisa and Claudia’s miscarried child. Indeed, the substitutive action is one of the most effective recuperative means for dealing with loss. With loss, La Capra notes, “the object of desire is specified: to recover the lost or lacking object or some substitute for it” (708). Claudia depicted the world of childhood as unrecoverable, and indeed, she will not recover her lost child. Yet, she fails to recognize that the memory of the lost object may resurface in the incarnate substitute – Laszlo – or be encapsulated within an object. Consider Tom’s gift to Claudia, a “complex ring, the front of which is a little compartment with a conical lid that opens on a hinge” (110), which Lisa finds in her mother’s bedroom. The ring, filled with Egyptian sand, not only encapsulates memories in the sentimental value from its connection to Tom, but also physically holds remnants of the Egyptian topography. The ring acts as a “spatio-temporal, cross-cultural shifter” (Purdy 36), bringing evidence of the Egyptian past into the present.¹¹ Claudia presumed that children “will never find out” what happened in the past, and indeed, she always unequivocally denied Lisa knowledge to her past in Egypt. Yet, though Lisa is unaware of the charged sentimentality of the ring, Claudia still inadvertently

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¹¹ Anthony Purdy argues that within these objects lies a “refusal to forget, to divorce the present from the past, an abiding concern to show the many ways in which the weave of the present is shot through with threads of the past” (Purdy 2), a point I have made throughout the essay, but nuanced with respect to chronotope and achronotope. He also references *Aufhebung* as bound up in “cultural artifacts” and this served as the springboard for my larger analytical framework.
leaves a clue for her daughter to deduce her past. So, whether evidence of the past resurfaces in a substitutive action or within a physical object, “something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or revenant” (La Capra 700). These substitutive actions and objects operate as methods of recuperating what was lost, and they also prevent the past from dissipating; they are “cultural artifacts” (Purdy 2), providing entry points to and commemorating the past.

When Claudia described her historian self as, “myriad Claudias who spin and mix and part like sparks of sunlight on water” (2), she acknowledged the amorphous and fleeting nature of history. Yet the task of Moon Tiger and its protagonist is to reincorporate and recuperate the tendrils of historical narrative that manage to escape the historical record, even after death. At the novel’s opening, Claudia likened her “kaleidoscopic view” to an interesting “heresy” (1). The novel’s close coincides with Claudia’s death, so her memories and the novel conclude in tandem. The conclusion, however, is not based in heresy: Claudia comes to a sobering conclusion: “the past is true, which both appalls and uplifts me” (207). Claudia’s past rests on the traumatic fulcrum of Tom’s death and her miscarriage in Egypt, therefore splitting her narrative into her experiences with Tom and her experiences after his death. To acknowledge the veracity of her past is to remember his existence, which is to acknowledge his death. Claudia’s working through of Tom’s death exemplifies the historian’s task: to somehow elevate truth while embedding, and therefore preserving, memories from personal narrative. Her writing of history is thus a recuperative and commemorative process, but her private history does not necessarily register at

12 Tom’s sister figures out Claudia as the “C.” in her brother’s diary in a similar manner, linking Claudia’s article about being a war correspondent in Egypt to his diary. The ring and the diary are thus both “cultural artifacts” which offer others a means to piece together others’ pasts.
13 Mark Freeman explains the triangulation of history, memory, and narrative, summarizing, “the history one tells, via memory, assumes the form of a narrative of the past that charts the trajectory of how one’s self came to be” (33).
the collective level. Instead, her story preserves individual memories as it dissipates into the collective memory.

The opposition between preservation and loss are mediated in a process of supersession, one translation of the Hegelian Aufhebung. In philosophical terms, the process of aufheben is the paradoxical process whereby the thesis and the antithesis synthesize. Supersession, however, more aptly conveys this curious phenomenon because it connotes elevation and transcendence; the German prefix auf means to elevate or to advance. Aufhebung is not in fact reconciliation, but a dialectical sublation of the thesis and antithesis. This process simultaneously preserves and changes meaning in the elevation of the synthesis.¹⁴ Both opposing forces are necessitated in the process of Aufhebung, a necessity Claudia acknowledges as she slips between life and death: I need the [truth of the past]; I need [Tom], Gordon, Jasper, Lisa, all of them. And I can only explain this need by extravagance: my history and the world’s” (207). Moon Tiger achieves Aufhebung for “all of them” because her narrative is bound up in the “walking lexicons” of her readers, her loved ones, and her historical works: the conical ring unhinges her mother’s memories of Egypt for Lisa; Claudia’s article about being a war correspondent allowed Tom’s sister to identify Claudia as C.; in turn, Tom’s diary allowed Claudia to retrace their memories. Claudia’s experiences and memories are inscribed into the spaces she inhabited, into the objects and historical works she leaves behind, and into the lives of those remaining after her death. Just as her family, Egypt, and her work as historian were parts of Claudia’s past, she too was a part of others’. Within this reciprocity, Lively spurs Claudia’s final revelation: “Because unless I am part of everything I am a part of nothing” (207). Claudia’s story is bound up in everything – in

¹⁴ Hegel provides the image of “the opening of a fern or a shell” to help illustrate the process of Aufhebung, where “nothing is lost or destroyed but raised up and preserved in a spiral” (Spencer and Krauze), an image analogous to the unfurling smoke.
the opposition of life and death, of past and present, of public and private, of trauma and reconciliation, of chronotope and achronotope, of her life before and after Tom’s death – and therefore, necessarily cannot dissipate into nothingness. Through the process of Aufhebung, these oppositions uphold Claudia’s memories, even as her body disintegrates and her voice dissipates into an empty hospice room.

Lively’s protagonist dies in physical solace, but Lively envelops Claudia with the fullness of her memories as she passes. Death arrives without surprise and without pain: “she can feel it, drifting in and out of some pounding sea that is full of the din of her own existence” (207). Suspended between the “in” and “out,” Claudia occupies a liminal space between life and death that is all her own, a space reverberating with echoes from her past existence, another dialectical moment awaiting synthesis. Her surroundings reflect the fullness of Claudia’s passing experiences, with a poetic light prompting death:

Gradually, the room is filled with light; the bare criss-crossing branches of the tree are hung with drops and as the sun comes out it catches the drops and they flash with colour – blue, yellow, green, pink. The branches are black against a golden orange sky, black and brilliant (207).

Claudia’s last vision is indeed kaleidoscopic: the maze of tree branches segment Claudia’s vision, while the adorning rain drops refract with the full spectrum of colors Claudia once witnessed in Egypt. The blues evoke the Egyptian artifacts, such as the lapis lazuli, and the greens the topography, such as the fronds lining the Nile; the “golden orange sky,” throwing the black branches into rich relief, recalls her nights with Tom in the desert; the spinning, mixing, parting sparks of sunlight return in the flashes of the sun’s rays, encapsulated in each rain drop’s radiance. Claudia ascends from life into death on the immensity of her being: “it as though the spectacle has been laid on for her pleasure and she is filled with elation, a surge of joy, of well-being, of wonder” (207). One might consider the kaleidoscopic rendering of “the history of the
world” to be Claudia’s spectacle; indeed, the process of history making, coinciding with the imminence of death, brings about the release and elevation of Claudia’s life.

The protagonist’s death engages *Moon Tiger*’s final task: to reconcile departures with arrivals. Claudia’s ascension coincides with the sun’s descent, and “the glittering tree is extinguished” (207) in tandem with Claudia’s passing. The omniscient narrator, taking over Claudia’s narrative pedestal, notes, “a change has taken place. It is empty. Void” (208). Her absence registers with no one and with everyone: no human being is there to witness the “change;” simultaneously, “the world moves on” with the banality of a passing aeroplane (208), implicitly acknowledging the collective nature of death in its obliviousness to Claudia’s. Yet, the reader, having become a part of Claudia’s history as much as Tom, Lisa, or Gordon, is acutely aware of the juxtaposition of motion and stillness, and of ascent and descent presented at the novel’s close. The collective reader experiences *Aufhebung* as they recognize that they now preserve and carry Claudia’s history even after her death, thereby allowing her story and the stories of her loved ones to disperse and dissipate just as the smoke unfurls from the Moon Tiger.
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