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Yazar/ Author **ORCID ID**
Aylin ATİLLA 0000-0002-0348-4763

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Yazar: Aylin ATİLLA*

Yaşam-Anlatıları, Bellek ve Benliğin Sınırları:
Penelope Lively'nin *Making It Up* Adlı Romanı

Özet: Edebi yaşam-anlatılarındaki dönüşümler ve yüzyıllar boyunca otobiyografik kurmacadaki gelişmeler dil, benlik ve toplum arasındaki ilişkiye veya değişen ideolojiler ve inanışlar, sosyal gelişmeler ve insan psikolojisindeki yeni yaklaşımlara bağlı olarak çeşitli şekillerde açıklanabilir. Yirmi birinci yüzyıl İngiliz Edebiyatında otobiyografi, biyografi ve kurmacanın sınırlarının geçişli olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Bu gelişmeler ve kuramlara göre, benlik kavramı da temsil, inşa ve yeniden yaratı süreçlerinden geçen ve anlatıyla somutlaşan bir sorunsal olarak karşımıza çıkar. Çağdaş İngiliz yazarı, Penelope Lively, *Making It Up* (2005) adlı romanının önsözünde, yazma girişimini psikiyatri terminolojisinde "hayali anıların hikâye edilerek yaratılması"(konfabülasyon), "hafıza bozukluğunun bıraktığı boşlukların doldurulması" gibi psikiyatrik terim ve açıklamalarla tanımlamaktadır.[1] Yazar kitaptaki her bölümde, önce anılarını tarihe bağlamlandırıyor, daha sonra "hayali alternatifler" üretiyor ve sonunda bu ikisi arasında bir karşılaştırma yapıyor. Penelope Lively, kitabını, anılara-karşı ya da "karşı anı kitabı" olarak adlandırıyor. Seçim ve olasılık arasında karşılaştırma yapan yazar, yaratıcılık ve sözün büyüsüyle kendini yeniden inşa eder. Lively, yazın hayatı boyunca, kimliği yeniden tanımlama sürecinde, bellek ve anlatının yaratıcı potansiyelini de tartışmış bir yazar olarak edebi kimliğini şekillendirmiştir. Bu makalenin amacı, *Making It Up* (2005)'ın çoklu bakış açılarının ve olası anı/yaşantıların yeniden gözden geçirilmesini amaçlaması yanı sıra, yaşam-anlatılarının benliği yeniden yaratmanın bir yolu olduğunu önerdiğini göstermektir. Bu yaratı sürecinde bellek ve dil her zaman sınırları çizecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yaşam- Anlatıları, Otobiyografi, Bellek, Benlik, Penelope Lively, *Making It Up*

Borders of Memory, Life-writing and the Self:
Penelope Lively's *Making It Up*[2]

Abstract: Transformations of literary life-writing and developments in autobiographical fiction through centuries can be accounted for in numerous ways depending on the relationships among language, self, and society or on present tendencies in ideology, sociology and human psychology. In the twenty-first century English Literature, the borders of autobiography, biography, and fiction become harder to draw. According to new directions in autobiography and life-writing, 'the self' becomes a self as it is represented, mediated, constructed and sometimes reconstructed. The aspects of constructing the self includes: self-creation, multiplicity, narrativity, fictionality or performativity. In the preface to her novel, *Making It Up* (2005), contemporary British writer Penelope Lively defines her writing attempt as a "form of confabulation", a term which, in psychiatric terminology, is described as "the creation of imaginary remembered experiences which replace the gaps left by disorder of the memory."[3] In each episode, she first contextualizes her memories in history, later she produces "imagined alternatives" and writes the fictionalized version of the episode, and finally she makes a

* Doç. Dr. Aylin Atilla, Ege Üniversitesi, aylin.atilla@ege.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0348-4763
[1] Penelope Lively, *Making It Up* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 2.
[2] This article is the extended version of my paper presentation at the 6th BAKEA "Borders" Conference in November, 2019, Kayseri, Erciyes University.
[3] Ibid.

comparison between these two. Lively calls her book as "an anti-memoir" which allows her to distance herself from her memories. While making comparison between choice and possibility, she rewrites the self by seasoning it with creative license. Through her life- writing, Lively also discusses the creative potential of memory and narrative in the process of re-defining identity. The aim of this article is to show that *Making It Up*, as an anti-memoir, suggests not only a reconsideration of multiple perspectives and possible revisions of memories, but it also proposes that life-writing is a way of recreating and making the self. Still, memory and language will always draw the boundaries in this creative process.
Key words: Life- Writing, Autobiography, Memory, Self, Penelope Lively, *Making It Up*

"Things might have gone entirely differently, when life might have spun off in some other directions."[4]

Modern life-writing emerged as a distinctive genre during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and its emergence coincides with the emergence of the concept of "the self as unique historical identity."[5] Critics and scholars, by studying the traces of the writing process in autobiographies know the impossibility of capturing or mirroring an objective reality or truth. Each life-writing can produce a plausible, convincing version of ideas or events, of which there are many other probable versions. Along with the nature of truth and its representations as the debatable issues in autobiography, the construction of the self has also been an issue of central importance. Different interpretations of the self -like the modernist authors' pointing as self, as unified and knowable, to the poststructuralist challenge which defeats it as fragmented and decentred- call into question the existing definitions of life narratives.

As Sidonie Smith defines, it is a process in which autobiographers create a self between the "[c]ultural scripts of signification, [...] the privileged stories and character types that the prevailing culture, through its discourse, names as 'real' and therefore Readable". Autobiography can thus be read as "the way the autobiographer situates herself [or himself] and her [his] story in relation to cultural ideologies and figures of selfhood."[6] Meanwhile, deconstruction played a major role to create the current interest in the study of autobiography. By advancing a radical skepticism about the coherence and referentiality of language, deconstruction offered critics a sophisticated way to doubt the claims of historical truth in the critical theory of both literature and history. When the traditional difference between fact and fiction is questioned, autobiography becomes a subject of literary criticism. If any text is full of inherent contradictions which can be exposed by the methods of deconstruction, then life-writing can be examined for its creation of multiple and contradictory self-images. As J. Hillis Miller has argued, deconstruction reduces the "apparently solid ground" of a text to nothing "but thin air."[7] After the revolution in language theory, writing the self has become problematic. Both deconstruction and new historicism required new needs and blurring of traditional distinctions between 'Literature and History'. It

[4] Lively, 1.
[5] Robert Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), 21.
[6] Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1987), 47.
[7] J. Hillis Miller, "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure," *Georgia Review* 30 (1976), 341.

also required such narrative concerns as point of view, selection of detail, and concept of audience and the self at the center; neither literature nor history then remains as self-sufficient for the deconstruction of life-writings.

Transformations of life-writing and developments in autobiographical fiction through centuries can be accounted for in numerous ways: such as, the outcome of the problematics of Romantic autobiography -as a response to the relation between language, the self, society, and the universe in the nineteenth century-, or to changing bourgeois ideology, sociology and psychoanalysis, or as indicative of a growing skepticism not only about religious authority but also literary authority.[8] In the late nineteenth century, self-writings (such as those by Mill, Ruskin, and Nietzsche) showed themselves as narratives of multiplicity, uncertainty, breakdown, and loss rather than showing the self as essential, given, and intelligible: "This is the starting point for fin de siècle and impressionist experiments in life-writing. The self there appears elusive, liquid, intermittent, and unreliable. The skepticism about its knowability generates an uncertainty about whose self is being narrated."[9] The borders of autobiography, biography, and fiction have become harder to draw. If selfhood is only knowable through its representations, then these representations produce the subject as an object of knowledge. The self becomes a self for us as it is represented, mediated, constructed and sometimes reconstructed. The aspects of constructing the self include: self-creation, multiplicity and possibility, narrativity, fictionality or performativity. Max Saunders names it specifically as, "auto/biografiction, as not so much a historically specific instance of a hybrid form, but as a discursive system which operates through a problematic opposition between autobiography and fiction."[10]

In the twenty-first century, many of the authors in English Literature have discussed this problematic inter-relation among biography, autobiography, fact and fiction in their works. One of them is Penelope Lively, a contemporary British writer who has published eighteen novels, two collections of short stories and five memoirs. She frequently claims that the fact of spending her childhood in Cairo-Egypt and her education as a historian led to develop an interest in the concepts of historiography, time, memory and narrative inter-relations. Her narrative technique problematizes the borders of memory and narrative as well as borders of human perception and time. In

[8] Max Saunders, *Self-Impression: Life-writing, Autobiofiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010), 501.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 502.

Making It Up, published in 2005, within a specific historical context Lively imagines different outcomes to the real events in her real life. As a writer, she believes that this exercise on "confabulation" --"in psychiatric terminology, it refers to the creation of imaginary remembered experiences which replace the gaps left by disorders of the memory"[11] -- may be a way of imposing "order upon chaos, to impose a pattern."[12] Here, Lively may be inspired by Freud who in his studies of the processes of memory used the model of a writing pad to explain the relations of the conscious and the unconscious mind. In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), Freud with Breuer made an analogy between the treatment and the archaeological excavation, stating that "this procedure was one of clearing away the pathogenic psychical material layer by layer, and we liked to compare it with the technique of excavating a buried city."[13] By fictionalizing these specific episodes, Penelope Lively tries to give meaning to some of the incidents which created moments of crises in her life that were triggered by key historical moments. She confesses that they all affected her personal life in the long term. By historicizing what is personal and fictionalizing the common history, in each episode in the novel, Lively emphasizes the limited and the constructed nature of time and memory: both individual and collective. In this sense, Lively's novel, which she also calls an "anti-memoir"[14] structured in eight different chapters, intends a final aim of looking at the future from a different angle. What is really remarkable and appeals the readers' attention is that after setting each episode in a specific historical context, the story is completed with a final comparison between the real episode and the fictional one.

The first chapter, entitled "Mozambique Channel", fictionalizes the voyage of an 11-year-old Penelope Lively from Cairo to Palestine in the context of World War II. Lively starts the chapter explaining, "[m]y childhood was spent in a garden. This garden was in Egypt, a few miles outside Cairo, but its furnishing were English. […] I had been born in Egypt and knew nowhere else; England was a vague memory of a cold, damp place visited when I was young."[15] As a child Penelope Lively was born and raised in Egypt. In the fictional story, the chapter "Mozambique Channel" is told by an omniscient narrator who focuses on the character of Shirley Manners, the nanny of little Jean. Jean, --11-year-old fictional Lively-- hits her head in the

[11] Lively, 2.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud [1895], *Studies on Hysteria*. Vol. 2, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (*London: Hogarth Press, 1995), 139.
[14] Lively, 2.
[15] Ibid., 3.

sinking ship and never wakes from her unconsciousness. The sudden death of the child, the fictional alter-ego of young Lively in the story, reverberates with the traumas at the bottom of Lively's own experience at the time. The real story of the fictionalized version comes at the end of the story: "This never happened. […] the fate of the sunken ship is confabulation."[16] Lively explains that it was only by great chance that her mother, Lucy and herself set to Palestine instead of Cape Town, so that they survived. Actually, a number of ships that headed to Cape Town were sunk, and a lot of people died. As the note of the fictional story, Lively addresses the real moment of crisis in which her 11-year-old world changed suddenly as a result of the advancing of troops in Africa during World War II, which also changed the fate of the lives of the British and European citizens who were living there.

"Each of us", the psychologist Jerome Bruner maintains, carries in his or her mind "the rough and perpetually changing draft of his or her autobiography."[17] Telling our life's story involves connecting past and present to futures we hopefully anticipate: it involves projection as well as retrospection. Then and past, here and now, as well as the future are all inseparable from our sense of self and of personal identities. In *Making It Up*, the second episode is entitled "Albert Hall" which tells the experience of an 18-year-old woman who had a very short affair with a man after attending a ball. As Lively explains, "[t]he single mother was not a recognized social category then, accepted and inviting sympathy."[18] Chloe is a woman in her forties, married and with two teenage children. She is the daughter of a mother who got pregnant before getting married. She liked to tell her story, if only to demonstrate what can be done as a single mother who suffers from "the absence of a role-model."[19] However, the story finishes with Sophie, Chloe's 18-year-old daughter, announcing her pregnancy unexpectedly: "I'm going to have a baby, she said, and smiled modestly round the table."[20] The following story is set in a real archaeological excavation in the south of England known as the "Temple of Mithras" in 1970s: "Professor Grimes is real enough, and he did excavate the Temple of Mithras in 1954. And the student was real enough also."[21] Alice, Lively's 21-year-old "alter ego", believes that her generation "will see the end of the world,"[22] and they live with the nuclear

[16] Ibid., 44.
[17] Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Mass., 1990), 33.
[18] Lively, 46.
[19] Ibid., 51.
[20] Ibid., 63.
[21] Ibid., 73.
[22] Ibid., 77.

threat. She is a student in her early twenties with a future in front of her; however, "she does not see herself as being in her prime"[23] due to this fear. Likewise, in the story, Lively explains later how she really feared from nuclear war and how she used to look at her children and think they might never grow up. The archaeological dig gives her alter-ego-Alice a different perspective about history and time, since she recognizes that contemporary society is not so far away from her ancestors: "She thinks about the language that should hang in the air up here, centuries of it, the reverberations of a million exchanges about love and war, birth and death, and what to have for supper. Instead of which, all that is left, is this entirely tangible array of broken rubbish."[24]

Narrativity is not purely retrospective. Stories are imaginative constructions through which we can envisage the future as well as the past, and also they make sense of any given moment – by relating it to past experiences, to ongoing projects and to future possibilities. In the fourth episode, entitled "Imjin River", Lively concentrates on a historical event which could have changed her future husband, Jack Lively's life. Before she starts her story, she writes the real story of her husband: "Jack was in the last months of his National Service. He was twenty-one years old; it would be five years before we met [...] Jack was lucky […] A thousand British soldiers were killed, wounded or went missing at the Imjin River."[25] She narrates the episode from the point of view of a young soldier, a promising Oxford graduate who had been sent to Korea as part of an extension of his National Service. This coincides with Jack Lively's case. Within the last months of his National Service, he was commanded to stay and travel to Korea after the outbreak of the war in 1950. By combining historical facts and personal knowledge of the event, which struck Lively's generation when they were in their early 20s, she rewrites history from the perspective of those who are victimized. As she states in her personal explanation of the episode: "I might never have known him. We might never have met. There might never have been our children, and theirs, and the forty-one years of love and life and shared experiences, and those long hard months at the end. What follows supposes what so nearly happened: the fate of a young man who is a shadow of Jack for whom events ran differently."[26] In this story, Lively once again underlines that history is the accumulation of personal histories. She

[23] Ibid., 105.
[24] Ibid., 103.
[25] Ibid., 113.
[26] Ibid., 113-14.

reconsiders and points out how history is very much related to the collection of individual stories and experiences that have been told and heard.

Past is peopled with lost selves: the shadowy selves we once were but no longer are. On the other hand, remembering carries a sense of regret, of nostalgic yearning, of loss. The emotional meanings that specific memories carry with them are never simply found in the past episodes that are being recalled; nor are they simply rooted in the situation. They are rooted rather in the mind's continuous efforts to preserve the connections between past and present, prospect and retrospect. The next two stories in *Making It Up*, "Transatlantic" and "Comet" focus again on lives Lively could have had lived if she had chosen to follow different trails. In "Transatlantic" the author imagines how her life would have been if she had moved to the United States for postgraduate studies in her early twenties. In "Comet" she imagines to have a half-sister who stayed in Cairo after she moved to England as a child. The protagonists of both stories are middle-aged women, who go back to "some other time frame."[27] They are Lively's alter-egos. Once again, Lively revisits two main topics recurrent in her fiction: other possible selves that one could have become, and how the perspective of time and place give form to our memories and later experiences. As Lively argues in "Comet": "There is no shrewd navigator, just a person's own haphazard lurching from one decision to another. Which is why life so often seems to lack the authenticity of fiction."[28] Any decision one takes may be unescapably important or traumatic. She acknowledges how history, primarily traumatic history, shapes individuals. In this respect, Lively argues that the narrative and fiction are leading forces in her life, precisely because they tolerate "a crucial adjustment here and there."[29]

In these stories, Lively also analyses the constructed conception of time, memory and narrative and their borders. Time is actually perceived and lived as subjective and synchronous. In the novel, as in most of Lively's fiction, memory and narrative are presented as exploratory devices necessary to make sense of the lived time; since, for Lively, "the experience of time is linked to what is going on in our consciousness."[30] Interrelationship of time, memory and narrative contributes to the subjective reconstruction of our experiences and the construction of the self, in which a number of possibilities are in concern. Lively questions the historical boundaries by creating fictionalized

[27] Ibid., 138.
[28] Ibid., 136.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 129.

versions of her personal experiences in which her alter-egos or fictional selves are presented.

In the last two stories, Penelope Lively shares with the reader the positive effects of "reading" in her life. In "Number Twelve Sheep Street", Lively introduces the reader to George Bain, an antiquarian and a second-hand book shop owner who worships books. In the last story, entitled "Penelope", following the Penelope of Andrew Lang's *Tales of Troy and Greece*,-one of the books that the writer introduces to have been an important book in her life-she writes: "[w]hen I was nine, I identified with Penelope because my mind was happy to confuse fact and fiction—and what was she doing with my name, anyway, if she was not some form of myself?"[31] and she adds: "everything that I read was woven into a fantasy world that merged with reality. [Reading] continues to fuel fiction, but differently. Penelope is no longer myself. This exercise in confabulation has been another kind of experiment, a different way of enlisting story to complement reality, at the opposite end of my life."[32]

Autobiographical remembering is a constructive activity. In reconstructing the past events mentally, we concurrently construct and maintain ourselves as remembering subjects. The relationship between the psychic phenomena of memory and of selfhood remains vague and debatable. In relation with the remembered self, the psychologist Jerome Bruner states that "the crucial cognitive activities involved in self-construction seem much more like thinking than memory."[33] Regarding this interpretation, 'selves' are things we mentally construct out of a choice of materials, including memories, but also out of some narrative conventions and expectations. "Self is a perpetually rewritten story", Bruner writes, "what we remember from the past is what is necessary to keep that story satisfactorily well formed."[34] For contemporary theorists, the self is in the process of construction or of revision: it cannot become a stable object of memory, but remains a kind of project. The historian, Alistair Thomson explains this as: "the stories that we remember will not be exact representations of our past, but will draw upon aspects of that past and mould them to fit current identities and aspirations. [. . .]. Memories are 'significant pasts' that we compose to make a more comfortable sense of our life over time, and in which past and current identities are brought more into line."[35]

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[31] Ibid., 233.
[32] Ibid., 248.
[33] Bruner, 43.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne, 1994), 10.

The outward articulations of memory are usually in narrative form. The process is based on a three-phase model including experience-memory and narration, which are interconnected and simultaneous: "experience and memory and narrativity are aspects of consciousness that unfold together, penetrating each other, nourishing each other and modifying each other, as human beings strive continuously to maintain and develop and articulate their working understandings of a changing world and of their own changing place within it."[36] Autobiographies/ life-writings are 'translators', struggling to convert the private sensations of experience present in memory into a language to share. The selection of words to describe the image or impression sometimes brings about distortions or misrepresentation. Still, narrativity transforms the memory it tries to articulate. It adds a kind of dramatic unity and narrative coherence that may hardly have been present in the daily flow of our experiences. Benstock, in her article "Authoring the Autobiographical", states that "autobiography reveals gaps, and not only gaps in time and space or between the individual or the social, but also a widening divergence between the manner and the matter of its discourse. That is, autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumptions of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction."[37]

Regarding the idea of the constructedness of subjectivity, "the self as performance" is the view that has been discussed over the last two decades: "Where earlier cultures have understood selfhood as fate or character, we prefer the more ironic view: selfhood as a part we play; a view that, if it expresses our alienation from a dream of unmediated subjectivity, also promises to empower us to rewrite ourselves at will," writes Saunders.[38] Autobiographical texts from this point of view are not considered as they can transcribe a self that already exists and as narration brings that self into being. Self-creation and invention are possible scenarios. Performativity theorists of life-writing like Sidonie Smith, in her article, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" (1995), distinguishes different types of the self: the "I before the text"; "the I of the narrator"; and "the I of the narrated subject" where performativity theory refuses the identity of these three subjects. She maintains that "there is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating. Nor is the

[36] Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 2012), 95.
[37] Shari Benstock, "Authoring the Autobiographical," in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: North Carolina U.P., 1988), 11.
[38] Saunders, 501.

autobiographical self expressive in the sense that it is the manifestation of an interiority that is somehow ontologically whole, seamless, and 'true' [...] the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an effect of autobiographical storytelling."[39] The self of a life-narrative is a reconstructed self that is created in the autobiography both by the writer and the reader. Therefore, both narrating and also reading the self can be considered as performance. The 'I' that is narrating is other than the 'I' that is being narrated. Penelope Lively makes this issue clear in her fiction,

> the distorting feature of anyone's perception of their own life is that you are the central figure. Me; my life. But nobody else sees it thus. For others, you are peripheral. You may indeed be of significance to them- […] So in the interest of truth and reality, most of these alternative lives of mine abandon the solipsistic vision. I am around, but shunted to one side. Stepping in as a novelist, I have woven myself into the general cast – an aspect of a narrative, which is all that any of us can be.[40]

As Lively points out, as a novelist, creating lives in fiction gives her the chance to recreate her self. She also indicates that life-writing and fiction, while considered as mutually exclusive, are in fact deeply and paradoxically interdependent. Such relationship is suggested in Slavoj Žižek's *The Parallax View,* where he proposes the idea that the "parallax gap" reveals "the object's non-coincidence with itself," which has particular relevance when applied to autobiography.[41] Because autobiography proves that the self is non-coincidental with itself, since the written self can never coincide exactly with the lived sense of self. Along with the deconstructive theories of autobiography, Žižek's account of this non-coincidence is articulated as loss, gap and absence. He draws attention to the conventions that limit the autobiographical genre which question the authenticity that a life-writing often claims, yet cannot really provide.

In acknowledging the role of memory as the main constituent of the self, Penelope Lively affirms a widely-accepted claim about the inter-connectedness of memory and identity. Lively has made the presence of the past which is one of the permanent concerns of her purpose of writing. In narrativizing her memories, she acknowledges the contingency of memory and the potential for distortion inherent in all kinds of narratives. She

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[39] Sidonie Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader,* eds. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: Wisconsin U.P., 1998), 108-109.
[40] Lively, 73-74.
[41] Slovaj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 4-17.

confesses that "when we made choices, we did not look back, life seemed to have its own momentum,"[42] and adds, "contingency: the great manipulator. Under the laws of contingency, human evolution is an overwhelming improbability […] Bizarre elaborations; the routes that evolution might have taken, the alternative scenarios. I took at these and find myself thinking of the lives I have not had."[43] For contemporary writers, like Penelope Lively, despite its borders like memory and language, life-writing still seems to be a suitable genre in which the self or the individual provides itself a re-definition.

[42] Lively, 165.
[43] Ibid., 164-65.

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