

**TOWARDS OLD AGE THROUGH MEMORY AND NARRATIVE IN
PENELOPE LIVELY'S *THE PHOTOGRAPH* AND *HOW IT ALL BEGAN***

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ABSTRACT. *This article analyses two novels by contemporary British author Penelope Lively by focusing on a recurrent topic in Lively's fiction: the interrelation between memory and narrative in order to make sense of lived time as opposed to chronological time. In Lively's *The Photograph* (2003) and *How It All Began* (2011), two apparently insignificant episodes force the two main characters, Glyn and Charlotte respectively, to revise their memories as well as life stories when entering their old age. Revising their life narratives by going back to their memories and making sense of their present situations proves to be a rewarding exercise which helps both protagonists to be ready to step into a new life stage. On the other hand, the narrative of each of the novels is constructed through the voices of those family members and friends who are part of Glyn's and Charlotte's past and present, and who contribute to add information to the respective revision processes of the protagonists, showing that time and memory, as well as narrative, are subjective constructed categories.*

Keywords: Time, memory, life story, contemporary novel, ageing process, narrative.

HACIA LA MADUREZ A TRAVÉS DE LA MEMORIA Y LA NARRATIVA EN LAS OBRAS *THE PHOTOGRAPH* Y *HOW IT ALL BEGAN* DE PENELOPE LIVELY

RESUMEN. *En este artículo, se estudian dos novelas de la autora británica Penelope Lively a partir del análisis de un tema recurrente en la ficción de Lively: la interrelación entre memoria y narración como reflejo del tiempo vivido, el cual no siempre coincide con el tiempo cronológico. En sus novelas *The Photograph* (2003) y *How It All Began* (2011), dos episodios aparentemente insignificantes son el detonante para que los dos protagonistas principales, Glyn y Charlotte respectivamente, vuelvan a sus recuerdos pasados y se vean forzados a revisar sus historias de vida a las puertas de la vejez. El hecho de revisar las narraciones que componen sus vidas con la finalidad de entender situaciones presentes es un ejercicio que acaba resultando positivo y que ayuda a los dos protagonistas a prepararse para entrar en una nueva etapa vital. Por otra parte, la narración de cada una de las novelas se construye a través de las voces de familiares y amigos que son parte del pasado y del presente de Glyn y Charlotte, y que añaden información a los respectivos procesos de revisión vital de los protagonistas. La línea narrativa de las novelas muestra que tiempo, memoria y recuerdos, así como el hecho de narrar, son categorías subjetivas y revisables.*

Palabras clave: Tiempo, memoria, biografía, novela contemporánea, envejecimiento, narración.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Penelope Lively is a prolific contemporary British author who has published around seventeen novels since she started her writing career in the early seventies. Despite the different characters, settings, situations and plots that each of Lively's novels presents, there is a common and recurrent feature in all of them: her exploration of the relationship between time and memory both at an individual and at a collective level. As Mary Hurely Moran argues in her monograph on Penelope Lively, the author is fascinated by the paradoxical nature of time since, while through our everyday lives and recurrent errands we approach time as chronological and objective, we actually often experience it as simultaneous and subjective (1993: 2). Lively resources to literary techniques such as the use of different narrative voices to explain a same episode and realistic descriptions that combine with unreliable interior monologues in order to offer a multiplicity of views and perspectives which aim to express both this paradoxical nature of time and the unreliability of our

memories in trying to make sense of the chronological events that explain a human life. Instead, Lively understands time and memory as entangling past and present, individual and collective memories that vary depending on the person or group that retells them. As it is described in a BBC article entitled “Penelope Lively’s life in books”, her editor at Penguin, Juliet Annan, defines her as being “interested in the operation of memory – how it works and how we use it – and with the nature of evidence” (2011: 1). In Lively’s fiction, memory and narrative are presented as exploratory tools necessary to make sense of time lived as a means to get ready to face old age.

In *The Photograph* (2003) and *How It All Began* (2011), Penelope Lively presents her recurrent concerns about time and memory from the prism of two characters who are in their sixties. Approaching retirement and having lived a full life would be read as synonymous of deserved quietness and peace. However, in both novels, an apparently insignificant episode triggers a reconsideration of the lives of the protagonists as well as of those around them and prove that time and memory are human constructs and, as such, they allow for constant reinterpretation. In *The Photograph*, Glyn comes across a photograph of his late wife, Kath, when he is trying to tidy up some of his belongings. However, it is not an innocent photograph since, in it, Kath is holding hands with her brother-in-law and the word *love* is written in the photograph. In *How It All Began*, Charlotte is forced to stay in her daughter’s home for a few months after having been mugged. With the aggression, Charlotte has a bad fall, gets hurt and will have to depend on crutches and her daughter for a while. The fact of distancing herself from her daily routines and from her home as well as her temporal restricted mobility gives Charlotte a new perspective of both of her life story and that also of those who surround her daughter and herself.

Well in their sixties, both Glyn and Charlotte find themselves in an inflection point at which they will have to reconsider their life stories as well as the paths to follow in the future. Memory, time and narrative come together in both novels and through them, the sixty-year-old protagonists are forced to review their memories and redo their life narratives. Despite the fact that the unreliable nature of time and memory is a recurrent topic in Lively’s fiction, *The Photograph* and *How It All Began* are written from the perspective of two protagonists who are entering into old age and whose day to day lives are momentarily and unexpectedly stopped, as above-mentioned. Whereas clock time blurs in Glyn’s and Charlotte’s narratives, the protagonists’ past memories become more vivid and the reader is asked to go from past to present to future and back. In this sense, both novels question the reliability of time, narrative and memory from the perspective of characters who have lived a good part of their lives. When destabilising these three concepts, Lively also

challenges restricted conventions of ageing and old age since, in these two novels, time is depicted as a fluid entity and, thus, age is also presented as a chronological convention to which a number of cultural concepts is attached.

2. CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVE THROUGH MEMORY

In *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh consider the question “how we construct [...] our lives and how we create ourselves in the process” (2001: 1). Narration is indeed the means through which we make sense of our lives within time both to ourselves and to others. Moreover, as Brockmeier and Carbaugh point out, as we narrate those episodes of our lives that define us, we also construct our selves as personal and cultural beings. Thus, when we are forced to revise specific episodes of our life stories, we destabilise our life narrative and the new information needs to be ingrained within that narrative in order to move on. William L. Randall and Gary M. Kenyon, also define humans as “fundamentally storytelling creatures” (2004: 333) and quote literary scholar Barbara Hardy who states that “we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love in narrative” (2004: 333). Randall and Kenyon understand narrative as “the paradigm for human time” (2004: 334) since, through narrative, human beings organise and make sense of time. However, this time is what Randall and Kenyon define as “human time” because it is measured according to feeling and memory rather than according to clock time. For their part, Cassandra Phoenix, Bett Smith and Andrew Sparkes consider that narratives help us “guide action”; they are “psycho-socio-cultural shared resources that give substance and texture to people’s lives” (2010: 2). Narratives are the means through which human beings organise their memories according to a chronological order. In her two novels, *The Photograph* and *How It all Began*, Lively explores to what extent memories are reliable and questions whether chronological order, in other words, clock time, is a valid approach to make sense of a human life.

It is significant the fact that Charlotte is in her early seventies and Glyn is in his sixties; that is, both main characters are entering old age and have accumulated a number of experiences that make their life narratives longer and more entangled with different episodes than if they were younger characters. The moment of crisis in which they have to incorporate new episodes and a new perspective to their life stories comes at a time when they thought that their life trajectories and thus, their human time, would follow a straight line, without many changes and secondary roads. By destabilising their day to day lives with an apparently insignificant episode, Lively also destabilises the life narratives of the protagonists and proves that

conceptions attached to old age as a time of indomitable decline do not apply to human time. In "Identity Construction in the Third Age: The Role of Self-Narratives", Gerben J. Westerhof analyses the role of self-narrative in identity development between the ages of sixty and seventy-five by interviewing one informant. Westerhof reaches the conclusion that narratives are used "to create unity and purpose in the manifold experiences occurring across the course of one's life and thereby to find meaning in life" (2009: 56), especially as the informant gets older. In fact, Westerhof goes one step further and argues that the construction of an ongoing life narrative is especially needed to keep a "healthy identity development" because it guarantees a balance between "maintenance of structures and openness to new experiences". Thus, for Westerhof "self-narratives can be seen as important means to coordinate existing identities with changing situations" (2009: 57).

This is actually the path that Glyn, in Lively's *The Photograph*, will have to follow after finding the photograph that gives name to the novel. Despite the fact that the narrative of both novels, *The Photograph* and *How It All Began*, is carried out by a heterodiegetic narrator who is external to the action, rather than by the same characters, the focalization is set on the characters' thoughts and emotions. In the novel, Glyn is presented as a successful Professor whose wife, a beautiful and artistic young woman named Kath, died a few years after they had met and got married. The fact of finding a photograph of Kath holding hands with her brother-in-law in an intimate way makes Glyn go back to the past. What starts being a search for the truth, a carving need of Glyn to know if his wife had been unfaithful to him, ends up being a realisation that he had never known nor understood Kath when she was alive. He was very much entangled in his professional career and Kath ended up being one more ornament in Glyn's life, beautiful and bright but unhappy and unfulfilled inside. Once Glyn finds the photograph, he realises that "[t]his illness that he now has – this fever – has given everything a twist. Kath is both what she ever was, and she is also someone else. He is looking differently at her – he is looking differently for her" (2004: 12). Glyn goes back to his memories but he realises that he needs more information to find a path out of "this illness" (2004: 12).

He actually needs to know Kath in a different way, through the eyes of those who also knew her and actually spent time with her. Thus, in his search for the truth, Glyn brings the past to the present, to the social and family background who was close to Kath and himself when Kath was alive, that is, Kath's sister and brother-in-law and their common friends. As a consequence, his action has an effect that modifies these characters' future by bringing in revised and/or new information into their past memories and making them redefine their position within the life episodes in which Kath and Glyn were present. However, the one who is most affected by the situation is Glyn himself since, by contrasting information with other characters,

Glyn is forced to revise his memories and find a different position of himself in the part of his life story in which Kath was also present: “Interesting. The operation of memory would seem to be largely receptive: what is seen, what is heard. We are the centre of the action, but somehow blot ourselves out of the picture” (2004: 20). Glyn tries to “lay those years out for inspection”, “[h]e places them in order. There were the immediate marriage years in London, before he got his Chair. The house in Ealing, The daily termtime tube trek to the college; teaching snatched hours in the library. The vacation escapes – field trips, conferences, extended library time. And what was Kath doing?” (2004: 24).

By going back to his memories, Glyn realises that he cannot trust them because they are indeed guided by subjective time. Thus, the chronology he establishes is also subjective and responds to his main interests at the time. Glyn realises that he has to accept his own guilt in Kath’s unhappiness and fatal suicide since he neither integrated her and her personality traits into his life nor let her go. While Glyn is researching on the details of the part of Kath he could not see at the time, Kath is presented as a kind of ghost within Glyn’s reality; a haunting memory that had been well-under control for twenty years, since Kath’s death, and that has reappeared to be reallocated into Glyn’s memory as well as life story. As Glyn explains, “The house is full of her. Coming in through the front door – ‘Hi! You’re here – great!’; in the bath, scented, foam-flecked, humming to herself [...] He has lived with these ghosts for years, they were tamed, under control, but now things have shifted; he summons her up in anger and frustration. There she is, as ever, but unreachable in a different way” (2004: 25). In his book *The Seven Sins of Memory*, Daniel Schacter argues how memory constitutes a double-edged sword since, on the one hand, we rely on memory to pursue the most ordinary everyday tasks as well as to construct our life episodes and identities and, on the other hand, we easily distort or forget our memories and, thus, according to Schacter, “they can get us into trouble” (2001: 1). For Schacter, the “sin of bias”, as he calls it, “reflects the powerful influences of our current knowledge and beliefs on how we remember our pasts. We often edit or entirely rewrite our previous experiences – unknowingly and unconsciously – in light of what we now know or believe” (2001: 5). With the appearance of the photograph and the subsequent research on Kath’s concerns, emotions and way of life when they were together, Glyn realises not only that his memories of their life together were distorted, but he also becomes aware of how his storage of Kath’s image into some hidden place of his memory after her death kept on haunting him.

By contrasting his memories to those of family and friends around Kath, he realises that his own memories were unreliable, since they had gone through the sieve of time and emotions. In his sixties, Glyn has to incorporate this new knowledge into his life so that he can move on. As he explains by the end of the

novel, "Glyn knows now that he has to find a new way of living with Kath, or rather a way of living with a new Kath. And of living without her, in a fresh sharp deprivation" (2004: 236). Glyn has had to revise his life narrative in order to accommodate the new information he has acquired about Kath and of himself in relation to his late wife. In "Critical Turns of Aging, Narrative and Time", Jan Baars considers that "one of the defining characteristics of aging is that an important part of life has already taken place" and, thus, "the past will remain important in the shaping of the future" (2012: 151). For Baars, the past, in the same way as the present and the future, is never complete but it keeps on changing as life goes on. In *The Photograph*, the conception of time as a fluid entity which cannot be grasped because we "*are living (in) it*" (2012: 144) is a leading issue. Precisely because of the fact that Glyn is approaching old age, the process of coming to terms with his memories also becomes a matter of identity; of recognising his own role in Kath's life and suicide as well as in picturing how he will go on with this new information.

3. NARRATING HUMAN TIME

In the case of Charlotte, the female protagonist in Lively's *How It All Began*, the fact of moving with her daughter and son-in-law and the fact of starting teaching literacy to someone from Eastern Europe, gives her a new perspective both on time and on her own remembered life-trajectory. By mirroring herself in her middle-aged daughter, she realises she had not chosen much over her life. She had married young and become a teacher almost without intending to. Her husband had died young and she had got used to living on her own, with her routines and schedules. Once in her daughter's house, she realises that her daughter's marriage is not going well and that she barely knows her son-in-law. The presence of her late husband Tom, through constant recollections of her marriage triggered from observing her daughter and son-in-law, make Charlotte realise she only knew the couple from Saturday meetings. In Charlotte's mind, the past intrudes into the present as she realises she is aware her daughter's marriage "is not like her own; it is colourless, by comparison. It lacks the zest, the give and take, the hours of discussion and debate, the hand on the knee, the arm round the shoulder, the silent codes of amusement and of horror. The laughter" (2012: 67). The fact of changing her usual routine gives Charlotte a new perspective of what surrounds her as well as of her own memories. Variations on her day to day routines marked by clock time makes Charlotte get immersed in her human time in which the boundaries between past and present, memory and fact get blurred.

While being in her daughter's house, Charlotte starts teaching literacy to a man from Eastern Europe. Through Anton, she reflects on the constructed nature of

cultural constraints and the human construction of time. What for Charlotte is common knowledge, normality, for Anton is at times new and uncorrupted; at other times incomprehensible, due to his limited knowledge of English. However, through narrative, represented by the reading of children's books as reading practice for Anton, both Charlotte and Anton understand human life in similar terms, that is, as an unconnected sequence of events which we connect through our memories and organise chronologically through narrative:

'Story go always forward – this happen, then this. That is what we want. We want to know how it happen, what comes next. How one thing make happen another.'
 'Exactly,' said Charlotte. 'Narrative. But a contrivance – a clever contrivance, if successful.'
 'Con...trivance?'
 'Made up. Invented.'
 'Yes, yes. And that is why we enjoy. Because it is not like our life – the way we live, which is' – he frowned – 'very much accident. You get job. Your wife go. You lose job. You are knock down by bus, perhaps.'
 'You get mugged,' said Charlotte. 'Your break your hip.'
 Anton frowned further, then smiled. 'And so I am here, like this, in your daughter house, because of that.'
 'We have a word for it – an odd one. Happenstance.' (2012: 76).

Both Charlotte and Anton acknowledge the fact that, despite human time being lived as random and unconnected, narrative provides order and meaning to those event that conform a human life. For Glyn and Charlotte, the protagonists of Lively's novels, this process of remembering, introspection and examination of events in their past lives is painful and filled with melancholy. However, at the end of the novels, both characters realise that their lives could not advance unless they solved those gaps that had been haunting them for a long time. Ultimately, in both novels, the reconstruction and revision of their narratives is presented as the necessary step to solve their moment of crisis and move into their next life stage.

During the two months Charlotte spends in his daughter's house, time goes very slowly for her. Her painful body, due to the fall and to the broken hip, as well as the cold relationship between her daughter and her husband, make Charlotte feel she has been leading a "complacent" life (2012: 202) up until that moment. Moving from the past, to the recent past, to the present, Charlotte's present time moves from "yesterday" to "quite a while ago" (2012: 202). She believes that "[o]ne thing old age does is play tricks with time. Time is no longer reliable, moving along at its inexorable pace, but has become febrile, erratic. Mostly, it accelerates" (2012: 202). However, the episode described has actually forced Charlotte to slow down and reflect on the relationship between time and memory and on how human beings make sense of their own narratives. When Charlotte goes back home a few weeks

after her accident, she is grateful to her daughter for taking care of her but she is mostly grateful “to be once more her own woman” (2012: 242). And being her own woman has much to do with being in her own home surrounded by her past and her present; alone with her memories and their internal logic. As she explains, “[t]he past is our ultimate privacy; we pile it up, year by year, decade by decade. It stows itself away, with its perverse random recall system. We remember in shreds, the tattered faulty contents of the mind. Life has added up to this: seventy-seven moth-eaten years” (2012: 243). Charlotte realises there has been a sudden stop in the unstoppable sequence of her life narrative. She has been forced to rest, to be quiet and to be dependent; she has been forced to move away from her usual landscape and look at other realities. On the other hand, the long hours Charlotte spends sitting in her daughter’s house also make her go back to her memories – her marriage with Tom, her younger daughter – as well as her recent past and her ageing process from a different perspective. By the end of the novel, Charlotte concludes that despite the accident she has suffered, despite her feeling frail and lost, her life story is still not concluded. As she holds her young neighbour’s baby after going back home, she reflects that “[s]he [the baby] is a demonstration of the power of time. [...] And this is a story that will indeed end. But not for a while, she thinks, not for a while” (2012: 243).

4. “KALEIDOSCOPIIC” NARRATIVE

Despite the fact that Glyn and Charlotte are the main protagonists in Lively’s *The Photograph* and *How It All Began*, and the ones who both trigger and are forced to reconsider their life stories, the novels are constructed through the voices and thoughts of other characters who contribute to build the reality of the novel. In that sense, the reader is even more aware of the subjective condition of time and memory in the construction of the different episodes that constitute a life story. Whereas in *The Photograph*, Glyn contributes to shaking everyone’s memories by forcing those around Kath to remember and talk about specific episodes they had lived with her, in *How It All Began*, the different characters in the novel get entangled through clock time, rather than memory time. Charlotte’s accident makes Rose, Charlotte’s daughter, leave her boss unattended. Rose’s boss, a retired extravagant man called Henry, has to resource to his niece Marion to take him to an event to which he has been invited. Thus, Marion is forced to cancel a date with her lover Jeremy Dalton. Marion can not reach Jeremy through his mobile, so she leaves a message in his home phone which, unluckily, is heard by Jeremy’s wife who finds out about the affair through Marion’s voice message and forces Jeremy to leave their home and move to Marion’s, who is actually not prepared to get into a serious relationship. In Lively’s *How It All*

Began, the coincidence of events in clock time has a butterfly effect in the lives of all the characters in the novel. As the narrator of the novel explains at the beginning of the second chapter, “The Daltons’ marriage broke up because Charlotte Rainsford was mugged. They did not know Charlotte, and never would; she would sit on the perimeter of their lives, a fateful presence” (2012: 16). In fact, in both novels, *The Photograph* and *How It All Began*, the fact of shaking either memory time or clock time contributes to modifying life time too, the life time of each of the characters whose voices are also heard in the narratives. All the characters are affected by the apparently insignificant actions that open each of the novels; namely, the finding of a photograph in the case of Glyn and the fact of being mugged in the case of Charlotte.

Penelope Lively refers to the expression “kaleidoscopic narration” (Moran, 1997: 103) to refer to this presentation of a multiplicity of points of views in relation to the same event in a circular structure rather than a chronological one. According to Mary Hurley Moran, through this technique, Lively reinforces “the subjective, solipsistic way” in which we perceive the world and “suggests the lack of an objective meaning of reality” (1997: 105). In *The Photograph*, each chapter is narrated from the point of view of a different character or the confluence of two characters. In the first chapter, Glyn finds the photograph and decides that he is going to find out what had actually happened between his wife Kath and his brother-in-law Nick. In the second chapter, we are introduced to Elaine, Kath’s older sister, and to her particular vision of Kath. For Elaine, Kath is her extremely beautiful younger sister who has always had things easier than herself. Once Elaine and Glyn meet, after a long time, Elaine’s well-established life routine will be shattered when Glyn tells her about the twenty-year-old photograph in which Nick and Kath are holding hands.

With this information, Elaine’s memory goes back to the past and stays there until the end of the novel. This process is clearly marked when we are informed of Elaine’s thoughts: “Yes, indeed – time out of mind ago. But not entirely out of mind, and that is what is at issue. We were both there, after all, thinks Elaine; nothing can change that. We are the same people. Up to a point” (2004: 66). Elaine’s peaceful life at sixty is not only shattered because she decides to tell Nick, her husband, to move away after a long and monotonous marriage, but mainly because different Kathes keep on appearing in Elaine’s everyday routines. By going back to her memories, Elaine realises she has never understood or supported Kath as an older sister should. Thus, in the same way as in the case of Glyn, Kath becomes a ghost in Elaine’s everyday reality: “Elaine finds other Kathes crowding in. These Kathes are not clear and precise, they do not say anything that she can hear, they are not doing anything in particular; they are somewhere very deep and far, they swarm like souls in purgatory, disturbing in their silent reproach” (2004: 153). As a successful

gardener, Elaine knows how to deal with chronological time; she knows how to read the seasons and how to treat plants accordingly; however, she finds it difficult to deal with human time. In the novel, time and memory are related to Elaine's relationship with plants as a gardener. Past memories of Kath come about as Elaine sees the blossoming colour or smells the scent of specific plants and flowers. Her coming to terms with the new knowledge she acquires of Kath's unhappiness and the reason that brought her to commit suicide get entangled with her gardening business: "Elaine plans out some pulmonarias and tries to concentrate on current projects. She has plenty of work in hand, but since her visit to Mary Packard she has felt disoriented; [...] it is a question of coming to terms with a revised vision, with a new set of responses" (2004: 233). Incorporating a revised vision of her memorised past as well as her role in Kath's life and suicide helps Elaine to reconstruct her identity too.

In the same way as Glyn and Elaine have to go back to the past, to understand and acknowledge new details related to Kath's life and death, those characters who were close to Kath are also asked to go back to their memories of Kath as requested by Glyn and Elaine. Oliver Watson, the friend who took the photograph, and Mary Packard, Kath's only confidant at the time of her suicide, have to explain the particular vision they had of Kath, a creative being ready to give much more than she would take. Within the novel, these two characters who are external to the family are the ones who introduce the parts of Kath that neither Glyn nor Elaine were able to see and acknowledge. Through the voices of these different characters as presented by the narrator, we are introduced to a multiplicity of perspectives of Kath. The presumably unfaithful wife that Glyn was ready to hate when he found the photograph turns into an extremely sensitive and unhappy being who had been primarily judged by her extreme beauty all her life. After listening to the different voices and versions that compose Kath's story, Glyn realises that his own version was far from the reality he remembered. The "kaleidoscopic narration" to which Lively refers when defining her narrative emphasises the subjective nature of memory and time and, thus, the potential of narrative to include new data when constructing our life stories and reconstructing our identity as we grow older.

In *How It All Began*, the voices of the characters are heard through a third person omniscient narrator as well as through the dialogues between and among characters. In the novel, the older characters, Charlotte, the protagonist, and Henry, Charlotte's daughter's boss, are presented as living mostly within memory time whereas the younger characters live mostly within clock time. Both Charlotte and Henry reflect on their old age from different memories that get entangled with each other and with the persons with whom they share their present time. As Charlotte sees herself in hospital after having been mugged, she "views her younger selves with certain

detachment. They are herself, but other incarnations, innocents going about half-forgotten business” (2012: 8). In this episode, as well as in other moments in the novel, Charlotte acknowledges her other selves as an enriching part of the person she is at present. The multiple layers that conform her memory and her personal narrative contribute to defining her in her seventies. In *How It All Began*, neither Charlotte nor Henry regret the time they have already lived, how they have lived it or what they have become after living it; rather, they regret being seen as old and useless people because the signs of ageing are present in their bodies. As Penelope Lively writes in her memoirs *Ammonites & Leaping Fish. A Life in Time*, “old age is in the eye of the beholder” (2013: 9). Although Henry is presented as a somehow extravagant character, from the beginning of the novel, he defines old age as an “insult. Old age is a slap in the face” (2012: 26). As an academic who has spent all his professional life researching on historical matters, Henry takes for granted that “[a]ge would lend *gravitas*, authority” (2012: 84). However, he finds himself overwhelmed by the media as well as the new technologies which, to his mind, only offer a very partial image of history. Henry remembers how in his youth, categories were clear and easily recognisable. In his old age, he sees how any young person with jeans and a dishevelled hair style considers their knowledge of history superior to that of Henry’s, which he has acquired over long years of dedication. In the case of the characters of Charlotte and Henry in *How It All Began*, lived time is diminished over chronological time understood as the natural biological decay of the ageing body by some of the younger characters who appear in the novel. These characters themselves perceive they are sometimes judged by their appearance rather than by their experience.

5. CONCLUSION

Penelope Lively starts her memoir *Ammonites & Leaping Fish. A Life in Time*, stating that she is “interested in the way memory works, in what we do with it, and what it does to us” (2013: 4). Lively defines her last memoir as “a view from old age itself, this place at which we arrive with a certain surprise” (2013: 3). In the novels analysed in this article, *The Photograph* and *How It All Began*, the main protagonists, Glyn and Charlotte respectively, both of whom are entering old age, are forced to stop their daily routines, come out of their comfort zone and revise their memories. Within the novels, both protagonists experience their time lived as an inexorable accumulation of events which forces them to question and redefine their memories and reconstruct their life narratives in order to face the future time ahead of them. What they thought would be a quiet time in which they would be able to adopt a more passive role both within their lives and in their social relations, turns to be a

time of reflection and redefinition. When analysing the positive effects of oral narration as a way of understanding the ageing process of real-life participants, Randall and Kenyon state that “when aging is considered as a biographical process, in which, over time, we are continually storying or composing [...] our lives, then we are permitted a fresh perspective on the spiritual dimension of the developmental process” (2004: 334). The process of recounting their lives from the moments of crisis presented at the beginning of each novel turns out to be enriching for both main characters in Lively’s *The Photograph* and *How It All Began*, since both of them are successful in integrating new perspectives to the remembered versions of their younger selves and, thus, they can move into the new stage with a revised and renewed vision of their life trajectories.

At a literary level, Penelope Lively resources to what she calls “kaleidoscopic” narrative in order to present a multiplicity of perspectives of different key episodes that conform each of the novels. When a same episode is narrated through the experiential sieve of different characters, the reader is confronted to various versions of a same episode which, at the end of the day, contribute to getting a more general and probably realistic picture of the episode. With this technique, as Mary Hurley Moran states, Lively “suggests the potency and fluidity of memory” to show to what extent “individuals are embodiments of all their younger selves and earlier experiences” (1993: 3). In *The Photograph* and *How It All Began*, Lively goes one step further when she requires her main characters to revise those “younger selves” and contrapose their memories to those of their contemporaries. At the end of the day, Lively suggests that both from a biological perspective and also from a psychological one, ageing is a complex process in which narrative becomes a valuable source to order memories and make sense of time lived in order to set the grounds of a healthy old age.

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