



Consequences

Penelope Lively

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The Booker Prize-winning author's first novel since *The Photograph* is a sweeping saga of three generations of women, their lives, and loves

A chance meeting in St. James's Park begins young Lorna and Matt's intense relationship. Wholly in love, they leave London for a cottage in a rural Somerset village. Their intimate life together---Matt's woodcarving, Lorna's self-discovery, their new baby, Molly---is shattered with the arrival of World War II. In 1960s London, Molly happens upon a forgotten newspaper---a seemingly small moment that leads to her first job and, eventually, a pregnancy by a wealthy man who wants to marry her but whom she does not love. Thirty years later, Ruth, who has always considered her existence a peculiar accident, questions her own marriage and begins a journey that takes her back to 1941 —and a redefinition of herself and of love.

Told in Lively's incomparable prose, *Consequences* is a powerful story of growth, death, and rebirth and a study of the previous century---its major and minor events, its shaping of public consciousness, and its changing of lives.

Consequences Details

Date : Published June 1st 2007 by Viking Books (first published January 1st 2007)

ISBN : 9780670038565

Author : Penelope Lively

Format : Hardcover 258 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, War, World War II, European Literature, British Literature, Romance, Relationships

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From Reader Review Consequences for online ebook

Jennifer says

I just finished this about 5 minutes ago so I might need to let it marinate a bit before finalizing my review but since I'm on GR I'm going to jot down my first impressions....

I've got a few Livelys under my best at this point and this one may be my least fave so far. Everything about it was fine...but nothing really held my interest the way the other books did. Basically we follow a lineage through multiple generations and each of them meander along and make decisions -- which is basically life, right? I do tend to like a wee bit more plot in my novels. Perhaps the premise was actually the precursor to her future novel "How it All Began" -- the idea that your choices or actions create your life, impact future generations etc (which I assume is what the title means??) is similar but I thought had less impact than in HIAB where she takes an event and extrapolates how it impacts people far beyond the people directly involved.

I like Lively a lot and will read more, but I would have to recommend that there are others to read before this one.

Daniel says

I approached this book as a case study. What I found when I read this was an author who is beyond smart, doing interesting things with her writing, changing styles on purpose from main story to main story and all the while I wondered if she planned it this way or if it just happened and she went along for the ride.

Wondered is the wrong word. Marveled...that she planned it this way.

The first story is broken into wonderful "snippets" almost short stories or glimpses into England just before and during the time of the second world war. Each glimpse should be relished and enjoyed for what it brings in a sparse but beautiful vignette that can stand alone, or when strung together make for a most exquisite but sad storyline. That someone's life can be broken down into so few, small chapters is almost a crime. That said chapters can be expressed with such beauty, longing, and meaning more than makes up for it.

Then, Lively does an interesting thing with the second part of the book. She abandons that style all together. It is almost as if she was switching gears to tell you about the next generation. The slower, prettier style fits the more distant past. The faster, more modern approaches encompass all that is new. All while spinning the stories around a common axis, which is the fact that the smallest decisions or choices have the greatest impact in our lives, something we never realize until much, much later.

It takes an author of real skill to realize this and to trust their talent enough to pull it off. I have a lot of respect for what Penelope Lively did with this novel. I felt like it was an amazing read, worthy of all the great reviews it has received.

I heard that V.S. Naipaul once claimed that there were no women authors who matched his skill. I would hold this novel as exhibit A that his opinion is erroneous.

Dianne says

This was my first Penelope Lively book and I read it for my postal book club. I'll be reading more Penelope Lively I'm sure. The story line kept me captivated and the writing is good. I was interested in the strong female characters and the bit of history woven in. I'm not giving it more stars because it was not a particularly memorable read, enjoyable though none the less.

Hugh says

This is an intricately plotted, warm and intelligent story following three generations of an English family since the mid 30s. On one level this is an exploration of the significance of apparently random events, rather like Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life*, though without the alternative narratives, and there is nothing random about the range of the novel or the ideas behind it. It is also about the changes in women's lives and expectations since the 1930s, and about memory, what is remembered and what is forgotten, not least what is forgotten about the political and social struggles of the recent past.

Laura says

Consequences is a thoughtful, elegantly written book that I keep thinking of as graceful. While the plot is filled with drama, spans three generations, and includes war, death, sex, and every deep and dramatic emotion possible, it nonetheless floats along without ever bogging down in sentimentality or morbidity. Lively's prose is clear and concise, and after slogging through some of too-long books recently, it was also something of a breath of fresh air.

The book tells the story of a chance meeting on a park bench which leads to a life-changing romance and a very unique family; Lively explores themes of family and identity while following the lives of three members of this family. I really liked the characters and their relationships to one another, and I was extremely impressed at the way Lively managed to sketch out an entire character in just snippets of daily life and conversations (I don't think there was a single conversation in this book that was written in its entirety; mostly the narration dipped in and out, giving us the good bits).

I'm definitely going to check out more of Lively's work after this.

Marigold says

I really like P. Lively – there's a certain something about the way she writes. Big things are understated while little things are lovingly described in great detail. I see from other reviews that a lot of people feel the characters in *Consequences* were given short shrift in an effort to create this short multi-generational saga. For me, Lively pulled it off & it was a success. I felt like rather than creating fully fledged life stories for these characters, Lively was creating a sense of the timelessness of life, life flowing on, characters coming & going, each individual's choices creating consequences for someone else, & though our choices may seem

momentous to us, & they may BE momentous in that moment –still whatever happens, for someone life goes on, & people throughout the generations want the same things – to give & receive love, be free of war, to find enjoyable work, maybe have children, have a nice place to live. Every character is important and yet - also not - it's kind of Zen! I also love that one of her themes in this book is that love may be found in unexpected places with unexpected people! I thought it was a lovely, gentle book with, also, a wonderful sense of place—the descriptions of the cottage in Somerset in particular were just gorgeous.

Amy McG says

There is something in the writing of Penelope Lively that never fails to captivate me. Perhaps it is due to the subtlety of her writing, the way in which the characters are built up so slowly and perfectly that you feel like you know all you need without any of the long soliloquies found throughout much contemporary literature. Perhaps it is because many of them are set in an England similar to the one that I myself have experienced, a past that I know of and have been told about by my grandparents, a history I can relate to. Perhaps is because she is simply a remarkable author.

I particularly liked this book for the progression, the way in which the story spans three whole generations without dragging. The book is somewhat eternal, as highlighted by Lucas, when he argues that "perhaps some stories never end... aren't there other people in your story?" This book certainly has a story that I believe starts long before the first page and continues long after the book ends. It is a story of consequences, of the little moments in which history stumbles across the turning points, and I really rather enjoyed it.

Jane says

I did not finish it. So do take that into consideration. Alas, alas, this isn't the same at all as the writer who authored "How it all began." I found it started awkwardly, but persevered. The author is at great pains to show how unique those characters she loves are and her method of showing this is to view those not like them with a certain contemptuousness. I found that unpleasant. "How it all began" had a certain humility about it which I admired. I just hope I can locate another book by this remarkable author that I can enjoy.

I started paging through it about half way through and saw it was more of the same. The only character I found believable was the lovable Lucas, who didn't seem to have an exaggerated sense of his own uniqueness or importance.

Katie says

Moon Tiger was five incandescent stars; this is more like 4.5. It sagged a bit at times but the final stretch completely won me over.

Consequences is like a family tree fairy story. The ending is maybe a bit contrived but I loved it! We get the lives of three women – grandmother, daughter and granddaughter. All three we see as young women making their way in the world. Thus Lively provides a fascinating evocation of every decade from the 1930s through to the first decade of our century. It's a novel that manages to be tremendously romantic but without any schmaltz or syrup. There are things Lively does supremely well in this novel. Most of all perhaps to show the

colossal changes in personal life that WW2 brought about. Before the war she creates an atmosphere in which liberating change is possible, the sense of an old stifling order about to birth something more expansive. Her portrait of a young family setting up home in the country is ravishing. The war takes away these new freedoms. Post war life is grim and still more stifling than what came before. The sixties, seventies and eighties she didn't do so well. The trouble with multi-generational narratives is they tend to ramble on in a soap opera fashion, slowly losing a sense of purpose and this was true of this novel now and again. But I love Lively's writing, love how vividly she sometimes returns to me memories of my own. And her observations about life are often inspired. Her observations on modern life I especially enjoyed, coming as they do from a woman who has lived through so many decades.

Marita says

This story might start with a case of love at first sight, a *coup de foudre*, but this novel does not belong to the Romance genre. It is a moving tale of love and loss, but more than that it is a tale of three women (of three generations) who dare to make their own choices; who dare to go against what is expected of them, who dare to seek their independence. But some of the men are interesting too - unconventional, loving, lovable and perhaps even loved. I could wax lyrical about the characters, but I'll refrain from doing so. And did I mention that the writing is excellent? With wit and compassion Penelope Lively explores love and happiness, the meaning of happiness, possibilities for happiness, paths chosen or not, chance, change and memory. So many interesting thoughts... Throw in books and art - yes, I'm hooked! This one goes straight to my favourites-2018 shelf.

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“And in another year everything will be different yet again. It is always like that, and always will be; you are forever standing on the brink, in a place where you cannot see ahead; there is nothing of which to be certain except what lies behind. This should be terrifying, but somehow it is not.”

“The mind is cluttered with images, he thought – everything we see refers us to something else. Perhaps only children see with absolute purity of vision; they see things for what they are and nothing else. The rest of us see signals from elsewhere, and always have done, ever since people began to think.”

“‘The thing is,’ she said, high on sunshine and Campari, ‘that surely as you get older you shed skins, rather like a snake, and each time you end up slightly different. You leave your other selves behind. So you are also various people I have never known.’”

“Years after, she would think that you do not so much make decisions, as stumble in a certain direction because something tells you that that is the way you must go. You are impelled, by some confusion of instinct, will and blind faith. Reason does not much come into it. If reason ruled, you would not leave home in the morning, lest you stepped under a bus; you would not try, for fear of failure; you would not love, in case it hurt.”

“More provocative was the erratic process whereby you went in one direction rather than another, did this, not that, lived here, not there, found yourself with this person and not someone else quite unknown, quite inconceivable. How did this come about? Oh, you made choices, but in a way that was sometimes almost subliminal, at others so confused that, in recollection, the area of choice is obscured entirely: what was it that was not chosen? And, sometimes, choice is not an option.”

“They are never alone, and yet entirely alone; they are surrounded by other people, but no one else signifies. When they manage to speak to one another, what is said is inconsequential, but they are in tacit alliance; they are a secret unit.”

“Ruth said, ‘The last time I saw him – a month or so ago – we had this weird conversation about whether life is a switchback or a maze. I said switchback – hurtling from a down to an up. He said no, no, it’s a maze – there’s a secret correct route, but one always picks the dead ends.’”

“As she reads – the letter, the books – time is collapsed. Past and present seem to run concurrently: what happened, what is thought to have happened.”

*“And three days isn’t long.
Except that it is, she thinks. These three days have had their own dimension – time out, time suspended, time confused.”*

“Things went on as they had before, except that they were different.”

“I have no idea where I am going, she thought, but I have begun.”

Ayelet Waldman says

This book lost me in the end, although I liked it very much for a while.

Susan says

liked this novel. I always enjoy a Penelope Lively novel. This one is superbly written. The tone of the novel is soft and thoughtful, with little that jars. Considering the fact that two of the three heroines in the novels die prematurely, as does the man who's the center focus of the novel, that's an achievement. Lively has a way of muting the traumatic by focusing on ancillary things. The way one gets through periods of great sorrow or stress by cleaning the bathtub as it's never been cleaned before--or some other task that's inconsequential in the face of one's feelings. Several parts of the book begin after a death has occurred and the reader picks up the basic fact and the details bit by bit. Each new part indicates the passage of some years and a new focus; there are no chapters, just informal breaks which also indicate smaller gaps in the action. I liked that technique. It avoids "scenes" in a way that's not covering up emotion (the way my mother discouraged "scenes") but enhancing it.

It's the story of three generations of women, mothers and daughters, starting in the 1930ies, and their small, odd, unconventional family where the women are always at the center. The three women are distinctly different characters without being terribly different in their basic sensibilities and approaches to life. They could so easily just have been reincarnations of the same character.

There might be a problem, I'm thinking though, in moving as quickly as Lively does from one main character to another and depending on a dead artist (who died in WWII at the end of the first section) to unify the book. The conventional generational novel is longer, with a broader focus, more events, more characters so there's more closure when one moves from one generation to the next. This novel is much sparser and can't really be compared with a generational novel. It is a bit artificial to kill off two of the women; it needs to

happen for the novel to work though.

Jeanne says

Boring. The entire concept of fiction is that a character's choices lead to consequences. It is how any novel is meant to move. Lively, however, decides to skip forward and try to do too much. Each generation gets replaced by the next in her narrative and as I've thought about it, I feel that the author's approach comes off as naive and disrespectful of characters as they age. In an attempt to express some feminist ideals, she ignores the rich cause and effect relationship that I long for in following one character to the end of their own story. I could go on and on, but I don't think it's worth it. Not a waste of time, entirely, but really not my style. Give me Anna Karenina, and then we can talk about CONSEQUENCES. Seriously.

Shane says

The stories of three generations of women told in sparse but elegant prose, Lively covers 70 years of social history in England, beginning just before WWII, in this rather short novel, with characters entering and leaving the stage often. Of the three female protagonists, the grandmother Lorna and mother Molly emerge, play their roles in centre stage, and exit rather suddenly and it is left to daughter Ruth to tie the loose ends and bring the novel to its circular close.

The character's lives are probably echoed in many women who lived during this period, but it is in the telling that this story comes alive. Lorna loves beneath her social class, falls for the engraver Matt, spends a few idyllic years with him in a farmhouse which Matt adorns with frescos celebrating their love life, and loses him to the battle for Crete. Molly has an affair with a benevolent boss and art collector, gives birth to Ruth, but never marries her lover, because she does not love him. Ruth marries and has two children but in an age when divorce has become easier, leaves her husband and her loveless marriage to live an independent life. All three women find love eventually with other men, but not without long periods of aloneness and a dawning of self-awareness in-between. There are parallels between the women too - all of them are attracted to men of the arts, all find work in and around the arts and all are surrounded from start to end by step-grandad Lukas and his aging printing press that becomes the fulcrum of their lives.

The author's style is unconventional, as tenses are juxtaposed, second and third person narratives are mixed, dialogue is intellectual and loaded with social commentary, and passive voice is used frequently - all "bad habits" that writing schools tell us to avoid - but here it seems to work - which reminds me of the newer adage, "If it works - use it!"

Jana says

It's hard not to rate a book by the previous books by the same author. This one may deserve more than 3 of my 5 stars to award. It IS good. You should read it. But if you've not read Penelope Lively I'd start with Moon Tiger or How It All Began.

I'm so glad I missed all the spoilers on this one. They abound on almost every review and synopsis. So I'll skip to the end and say: Enjoy some Lively. She can write!

Theme: Maybe the passage of time? Don't really see where the title comes from. Hmmmm...
