

## Dialogue of Prose and Poetry in the Works of Doris Lessing (the novel «Alfred and Emily» and the poetic sequence «The Fourteen Poems»)

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Стаття The article is dedicated to the work of the contemporary English writer, Nobel laureate Doris Lessing. The object of the analysis is the artist's last novel «Alfred and Emily» (2008) and the poetic sequence «The Fourteen Poems» (1959), in which a deep motivic relationship was revealed. It was found that the motif of memory is a crucial one in author's works, and the motifs that correlate with it (in particular, war catastrophe, childhood, oblivion, and guilt) create a common associative field.

D. Lessing's last novel, which thematically fits into the discourse of texts about the First World War, reveals the features of an autofictional text. The author organically combines documentary and fiction in the work, creating a personal history of the beginning of the 20th century. The writer resorts to an alternative development of history: excludes the event traumatic for humanity (the First World War) from the novel, so the story acquires features of subjectivity. The second part of the work, a documentary, dissonates with the first, revealing the tragic consequences of the Great War. D. Lessing tries to comprehend the nature of war as a catastrophe through the traumatic experience of several generations.

The novel events are connected with the fate of D. Lessing's parents – Alfred and Emily, whose names are mentioned in the novel's title. The fictional and documentary parts of the work have symbolic subtitles («Alfred and Emily: a novella», «Alfred and Emily; two lives»). The paratextual elements of the text perform several functions: suggestive (title; epigraph – lines from the novel by D. H. Lawrence «Lady Chatterley's Lover»), reflexive (preface and author's comments; encyclopedic article), visual (photographs from the family archive).

It is proved that the poetic sequence «The Fourteen Poems» can be considered from the point of view of intertextuality as an autocontext to the novel «Alfred and Emily». The leitmotif of memory visualizes the meaningful connection between the novel «Alfred and Emily» and the poetic sequence. Both the lyrical heroine and the characters of the novel are immersed in their memories and demonstrate the existential vulnerability of the individual to the catastrophe of war. For the characters, their childhood symbolizes a safe and cozy world – home, but it is also marked by parental experience and permeated by war.

**Keywords:** Doris Lessing, English literature, novel, poetry, character, motif, intertext.

The name of the contemporary English writer, Nobel laureate in literature in 2007, Doris Lessing (1919 – 2013), is usually associated in the research discourse with postmodernist prose and feminist novels. This is due to the fact that foreign scholars have largely studied the writer's works of the early («The Grass Is Singing», the Children of Violence pentalogy) or mature («The Golden Notebook», the «Canopus in Argos» series) periods, while her literary heritage of the late twentieth – early twenty-first century was outside the focus of those researches. However, in the works of this

period the author realizes a synthesis of feminist, science fiction, alternative historical, and psychoanalytic themes.

Ukrainian literary critics also focused mainly on feminist, psychoanalytic, or narratological vectors of research (M. Horlach, O. Derykoz, L. Miroshnychenko, M. Mykolaychuk, V. Kramar, V. Lutsyk, V. Savina). For example, the Ukrainian scholar L. Miroshnychenko [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7], also addresses the study of the last period of D. Lessing's work, in particular, the novel «Alfred and Emily». However, the researcher rivets more on the feminist and

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narratological aspects of the work. Highlighting the concept of nostalgia as an important component of the writer's «anti-skeptical pole» [5, pp. 69–70], she concludes that the narrator's nostalgia in the mentioned novel reflects the feelings of the author herself.

However, it should be noted that D. Lessing's last novel «Alfred and Emily» (2008) is significantly different from the works of previous periods, primarily by comprehending the events of the writer's past, moreover, the poetic sequence «The Fourteen Poems» (1959) and the cycle of ballads «The Wolf People» (2002) reveal through motifs with this novel. Until now, there have been no studies in the current literary discourse on the correlation between the novel «Alfred and Emily» and the writer's lyrical works, which determines the **relevance of this article**.

**The aim of the study** is to analyze D. Lessing's novel «Alfred and Emily» and the poetic sequence «The Fourteen Poems», to identify common motifs of memory, childhood, catastrophe of war, oblivion, and guilt in prose and poetic texts.

«Alfred and Emily» is D. Lessing's last novel, so the writer essentially comprehends her experience, creativity, and life, addressing the key motif of memory. The writer creates a personal history of the beginning of the 20th century, from which an event significant for humanity – the First World War is excluded. The title of the novel indicates the main characters with whom the main storylines will be connected: this will be a story about the fate of two people – D. Lessing's parents, Alfred and Emily.

In the writer's work, documentary and fiction are organically combined, which is a defining feature of the autofictional text, as the foreign researcher S. Doubrovsky [8] rightly notes.

The compositional structure of the novel has certain features: the analyzed text is divided into two parts, which have subtitles («Alfred and Emily: a novella», «Alfred and Emily; two lives»), moreover, the writer singles out these parts. The part of the work with the subtitle «Alfred and Emily: a novella» contains fictional events, and the second part of the novel, which has the subtitle «Alfred and Emily; two lives», is based on real facts related to the coverage of the collective and personal traumatic experience of people as a result of the war.

Therefore, the «fiction» of the first part of the work correlates with its comprehension in the second, which turns out to be an alternative narrative – these are novellas about the imaginary life of D. Lessing's parents, from which the tragedy of the First World War is excluded: *“I have tried to give them lives as might have been if there had been no World War One”* [10, p. V]. Thus, the second part of the novel appears as a kind of metacommentary, a memoirs of D. Lessing herself.

To visualize the semantic division into two parts (fiction and memoirs), the writer uses a

number of paratextual elements: subtitles, an epigraph to D. H. Lawrences' novel «Lady Chatterley's Lover», author's explanations, photographs from a personal archive, as well as the involvement of an encyclopedic article.

The epigraph, which precedes the metacommentary of the second part, contains lines from D.H. Lawrences novel «Lady Chatterley's Lover», to the re-publication of which D. Lessing joined and wrote an introductory article in 2006. The writer noted that this work is one of the most powerful anti-war novels ever written [11, p. XXI]. The epigraph outlines important problems for humanity related to war – the horrors of war and incurable psychological trauma: *“Slowly, slowly the wound to the soul begins to make itself felt, like a bruise which only slowly deepens its terrible ache, till it fills all the psyche”* [9, p. 49].

The encyclopedic article contains valid information about the work of the Royal Free Hospital during the First World War. A real person worked in this hospital – Emily McVeagh, D. Lessing's mother, who witnessed its horror and cruel consequences: countless deaths and mutilations of soldiers during the war.

The 2008 edition of «Alfred and Emily» also contained photographs from the writer's archive, which are presented in a certain order to enhance perception through visualization. Photos as an intersemiotic art object captured important moments in the life of D. Lessing's parents. The images of these young people compositionally separate the author's preface from the novella. Two portraits of Alfred Tayler, a joint photograph of patient Alfred Tayler and nurse Emily McVeagh in the hospital clearly separate the encyclopedic article from the epigraph and the second part of the novel. The last one is a photograph of the Tayler couple, which is presented before the epigraph to the second part of the work. The rest of the photos in the second half of the work serve as illustrative material for D. Lessing's autobiographical memoirs. In particular, photos of the couple with children (Doris Lessing and Harry Tayler), a photo of a farm in Southern Rhodesia, etc. The visualization of the characters and the semantization of the topos provide an increase in meanings by involving documentary materials and deepens the narrative of the second part as the personal experience of the narrator.

Thus, the use of various paratextual elements in the novel «Alfred and Emily», performs several functions: suggestive (title, epigraph), reflexive (preface and commentary), and visual (photographs from the family archive).

The novel's chronotope of the first part of the novel contains objectified features: the titles of the chapters are marked with exact dates (1902, August 1905, August 1907, etc.), the text also contains references to the years and places of events (1916, 1924). The spatial dimension of the fictional part of the work includes the toposes of Great Britain, which are the town of Longfield (Kent) and its capital – London. The plot events take place in different locations: in the houses of Alfred's neighbour Mary Lane, the Redway-Tayler

family in Longfield, the Royal Free Hospital, as well as Emily McVeagh's apartment in London.

The pseudo-objectivity of time in the first, fictional, part performs the function of contrast with real historical events. In the real life of Alfred Tayler, D. Lessing's father, due to illness, he was hospitalized in 1916, so he did not participate in the Battle of the Somme, but after recovering, he received an injury that later led to the amputation of his right leg. While in the Royal Free Hospital, he met Emily McVeagh – his future wife. After being demobilized, Alfred felt «survivor guilt» because many of his comrades died in the battle near Passchendaele in 1917. The writer's father frequently mentally came back to those war times, he often felt the futility of his own life and even dreamed of death.

The fictional Alfred in the first part of the novel does not reflect on the futility of his life, but he is sad because of the «end of the dancing days» because after marriage he could not go to bachelor parties. The «dancing days» of Alfred in the first part of the novel oppose the «walking days» and his limited mobility in real life. The second part of the novel depicts Alfred, who limped on a wooden prosthesis and felt constant pain: *“His walking days were with him still but his dancing days [10, p. 45].*

The first, fictional, part of the novel omits the description of events terrible for humanity related to the First World War in Europe, as well as the bombing of London by German aviation (September 8, 1915): *“Britain had not had a war since the Boer War; nor were there wars in Western Europe, which was on a high level of well-being” [10, p. 84].*

Thus, a happy Edwardian past is depicted. D. Lessing's parents did not suffer from the consequences of a terrible war, and achieved their dreams: Alfred dreamed of being a farmer, Emily – about family and good fortune. However, in this fictional past of these young people, Doris herself did not exist, because Alfred and Emily did not marry. They created two different families: Emily McVeagh married her beloved – Dr. William Martin White, who in the fictional reality did not drown in the Channel. Alfred's fate also came up differently: he received a plot of land in Longfield and married a neighboring girl, Betsy. The «Best Years» chapter of the first part of the work depicts this imaginary future of «Alfred and Emily.»

Accordingly, the writer omits the events of the First World War from the first part of the novel, and along with this the fact of her birth, so the second part of the novel turns out to be a self-reflection on the traumatic experience of the war and the artist's existence. Even though D. Lessing was born after the end of the First World War (1919), throughout her life the writer psychologically felt its negative impact: *“I still am, trying to get out from under that monstrous legacy, trying to get free” [1010, p. VI].*

The subtitle of the second part of the novel («Alfred and Emily; two lives») reflects the intertwining of two different destinies: D. Lessing's

parents and her own, which were influenced by the traumatic experience of the First World War: *“That war, the Great War, the war that would end all war, squatted over my childhood. The trenches were as present to me as anything I actually saw around me” [10, p. VI].*

D. Lessing refers to the memories that remained after the Great War, which turn out to be the collective unconscious of generations: *“Two old people may exchange a look where tears are implicit, or say: Do you remember... signposts to something worth remembering for thirty years [10, p. 139].*

The desire to comprehend life experience at the end of her life path led the artist to turn to its beginning, to the times of her formation as a person, which is discussed in the novel «Alfred and Emily». In D. Lessing's lyrical poetry, this is reflected as «a model of the poet's personal world is outlined, inclined to create a personal myth within its limits» [1, pp. 19–20].

D. Lessing's poetic sequence «The Fourteen Poems» (1959) correlates with her autofictional novel «Alfred and Emily» and reveals the author's world in another plane – the poetic one.

The poem «Fable» is dedicated to memories of the past, and understanding the concept of human memory. D. Lessing implements, both in poetry and prose, the return to the world of childhood and the associated theme of coming of age: *“When I look back I seem to remember singing’./ Yet it was always silent in that long warm room./ Impenetrable, those walls, we thought” [12].*

In her memories, the lyrical heroine seeks refuge in the world of childhood, which seems safe and cozy to her, in contrast to the cruel and indifferent world of adults. Memories of childhood, as a place of protection, come to life in her memory through the word «remember». The room for her is a safe space where she can forget about mental suffering for a while: *“If one of us drew the curtains,/ A threaded rain blew carelessly outside./ Sometimes a wind crept, swaying the flames,/ And set shadows crouching on the walls,/ Or a wolf howled in the wide night outside”.* Memories of childhood turn into a kind of escape from the external real world. The shadows, darkness, and wolves in the poem appear as the shadow of war. These are memories of parents and D. Lessing herself about a psychological trauma that distorts the optimistic worldview, the world appears hostile to man: *“It might have gone on, dream-like, for ever./ But between one year and the next – a new wind blew?/ The rain rotted the walls at last? Wolves' snouts came thrusting at the fallen beams?/ It is so long ago”*

The key word of the poem «remember» encourages the lyrical heroine to recall and comprehend her life, which was influenced by the traumatic experience of her parents. The second part of the novel «Alfred and Emily» also affirms this idea of the influence of traumatic war experience: *“The fate of parents who most terribly need their offspring to listen, to ‘take in’ something of their own substance <...> So I had the full force of the Trenches, tanks, star-shells, shrapnel, howitzers” [10, p. 170].*

Memories of the war experienced by the writer's parents were too difficult for her. D. Lessing tried to neutralize them first in lyrics: by returning to the world of childhood, and then – in prose. In the first part of the novel she completely excludes the historical event (the First World War), which traumatized not only her parents, but also her, and reflects on the need to atone for the sin committed. She suffers and mourns the deaths, which her parents' memories of fallen comrades made her witness.

The lyrical heroine feels the echo of the tragedy of the war in the relationship between her parents, who need an attentive listener to quench the unbearable pain and the feeling of their guilt for the death of other people: *"I remember crouching in the bush, my hands tight over my ears: 'I won't, I will not. Stop. I won't listen.' My mother's voice? I could have listened, but it was all too much"* [10, p. 170].

Therefore, D. Lessing's novel «Alfred and Emily», which has features of autofictional prose, fits into the discourse of texts about the First World War. The motif of memory is pervasive in this novel and the artist's poetic sequence «The Fourteen Poems».

In the novel «Alfred and Emily», D. Lessing comprehends the nature of war as a catastrophe that traumatized several generations of humanity. The situation of war testing ends chronically, but for the heroes, it becomes a daily test, and their experience affects their descendants.

The motif of memory, which reveals the immersion of the main characters of the novel and the lyrical heroine in their memories, is connected with the experienced war and reveals the existential vulnerability of the individual to the catastrophe-war, the catastrophe-death. Both the lyrical heroine of the poetic sequence and the characters of the novel «Alfred and Emily» try to return, at least in their memories, to the safe and caring world of childhood to find refuge there, but even there the parental experience, permeated by war, is present. In the studied novel, the writer resorts to an artistic experiment: excludes this traumatic event for humanity from the text of the first part, so the story acquires features of subjectivity. The second part of the work, which is documentary, dissonates with the first, revealing the tragic consequences of the Great War, and paratextual elements (epigraphs, author's comments, an encyclopedic article, photographs from a personal archive) visualize this division.

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#### Діалог прози й поезії у творчості Доріс Лессінг (роман «Альфред і Емілі» й ліричний цикл «Чотирнадцять поезій»)

Статтю присвячено творчості сучасної англійської письменниці, нобелівської лауреатки Доріс Лессінг. Об'єктом аналізу є останній роман мисткині «Альфред і Емілі» (2008) і поетичний цикл «Чотирнадцять поезій» (1959), в яких було виявлено глибинний мотивний взаємозв'язок. З'ясовано, що мотив пам'яті є ключовим у цих творах авторки, а мотиви, що корелюють з ним (зокрема, війни-катастрофи, дитинства, забуття та провини), створюють спільне асоціативне поле.

Останній роман Д. Лессінг, який тематично вписується в дискурс текстів про Першу світову війну, виявляє риси автофікціонального твору. Авторка органічно поєднує у творі документальність і вимисел, створюючи особистісну історію початку ХХ століття. Письменниця вдається до альтернативного розвитку історії: вилучає травматичну для людства подію (Першу світову війну) із роману, тож історія набуває рис суб'єктивності. Друга частина твору, яка є документальною, дисонує з першою, викриваючи трагічні наслідки Великої війни. Д. Лессінг намагається досягнути природу війни як катастрофи через травматичний досвід декількох поколінь.

Романні події пов'язані з долею батьків Д. Лессінг – Альфреда й Емілі, що зазначено в заголовку роману. Фікційна й документальна частини твору мають символічні підзаголовки («Альфред і Емілі: новела», «Альфред і Емілі: два життя»). Паратекстуальні елементи роману виконують декілька функцій: сугестивну (заголовок; епіграф – рядки з твору Д. Г. Лоуренса «Коханець леді Чаттерлі»), рефлексійну (передмова та авторські коментарі; енциклопедична стаття), візуальну (фотографії із сімейного архіву).

Доведено, що ліричний цикл «Чотирнадцять поезій» можна розглядати з погляду інтертекстуальності як автоконтекст до роману «Альфред і Емілі». Лейтмотив пам'яті унаочнює змістовний зв'язок твору «Альфред і Емілі» й поетичного циклу. І лірична героїня, і персонажі роману занурені у власні спогади і демонструють екзистенційну беззахисність особистості перед катастрофою-війною. Для персонажів їхнє дитинство символізує безпечний і затишний світ-дім, однак і він позначений батьківським досвідом, пронизаним війною.

**Ключові слова:** Доріс Лессінг, англійська література, роман, поезія, персонаж, мотив, інтертекст.

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