Perpetuating Our Secrets: Ageing and Memory in Doris Lessing's *The Grandmothers*

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Abstract: Appearance and secrecy have been recurrent elements in both families and nations. Hidden love affairs, unsaid personal preferences, even illegitimate children have led to important decisions, either for the good or for the bad. In the four short stories that constitute *The Grandmothers*, Doris Lessing explores the perpetuating secrets that have marked families and nations at different points in history. In the collection, forbidden passion and unofficial love invade the lives of grandmothers who must keep them to themselves in order to be accepted within their communities. In *The Grandmothers*, trauma is counterbalanced by the memory of the moments in which feeling outlanded social norms and restrictions. At the same time, those memories enlighten the process of ageing that scandalously makes the older person invisible within society. This paper aims to explore the complicated interconnection between emotion and norm, memory and trauma, ageing and society within *The Grandmothers*; topics which have long inhabited the fictional world of Doris Lessing.

Keywords: grandmotherhood, ageing process, old age, transmission of memory, secrecy, contemporary British literature, Doris Lessing.

The line separating personal and social memory merges continually so that, as Michael G. Kenny explains, the nature of memory becomes a "key to personal, social, and cultural identity" (420). Thus, memories contribute to the shaping of the individual and also of the community, as individual memories are passed on to members of the community, usually the younger ones. It is precisely at this point that memory and ageing become almost complementary. The ageing process implies an accumulation of life experiences and knowledge most of which are shared with selected members of the community. Those life experiences which have been traumatic in some way and which form part of one's personal story compose those perpetuating secrets which mark both, the individual and society.

In Doris Lessing's *The Grandmothers*, published in 2003, ageing and memory merge together with the personal and the social while they prove that cultural beliefs and prejudices are constantly being outlanded in some cases, or reshaped in others, by passion and emotion. The choices each of the protagonists makes in relation to their personal experience are depicted as influencing the course of events in the community they belong to. The secrecy of those situations is disclosed through storytelling, either understood as the passing of information to younger members of the community or as the written stories that have reached us.

The lives of the protagonists of the four stories that form the volume have been marked by the uncontrollable passion which invaded them in the moment in which they actually most needed it. Their ageing process envelops and uncovers those moments by bringing wisdom and understanding to them. As Kathleen Woodward explains, "Erik Erikson has postulated that the wisdom of old age lies in the achievement of 'integrity'"

which he imagines as "the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions" (5). It is in this sense that the ageing process is presented as positive, although their communities fail to see through it, due to the negative aura that has traditionally surrounded old age since the Industrial Revolution.

The title of the volume, *The Grandmothers*, which coincides with the title of the first short story, already informs of the close relationship existing between memory and ageing, the personal and the community. The grandmother has been defined as the acceptable image of old age. In "Wrinkles of Vice, Wrinkles of Virtue: The Moral Interpretation of the Ageing Body" Mike Hepworth points to the moralising aim of images of ageing in Western culture, specifically focusing on the figure of the grandmother rooted in Victorian England and developed throughout the following decades. In a world that was advancing rapidly and in which high value was placed "upon youthful energy", Hepworth argues that "old age became perceived as a threat to the values of a competitive, youthfully-oriented, commercialised society where there is also a strong allegiance to the promotion of scientific solutions to human problems" (56). In this context, the sweet, placid grandmother figure is spread so that it becomes "a socially acceptable symbol of a positive attitude towards old age" (55). By analysing the figure of the granny as portrayed in Victorian painting, Hepworth not only reaches the conclusion that this innocent figure became prominent in Victorian times, but also that it represented an acceptable side of old age in the English society of the end of the nineteenth century.

In fact, nowadays images of positive ageing are not far away from that of the Victorian grandmother. When analysing contemporary images of positive ageing, Mike Hepworth introduces the pervasive influence of consumer culture as suggesting and constantly reminding those in their 50s and 60s that, by acquiring a number of products and services, the path leading to old age cannot be stopped but, at least, it can be soothed. Thus, Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth refer to the cover of the Spring 1993 issue of *050* (Association of Retired Persons) as a contemporary example of positive ageing, where "an exuberant middle-aged couple are displayed clinging lovingly together in a wild country garden" (32). Indeed, this idyllic image is superimposed by "signposts to this month's selection from the stock-in-trade ingredients of the commercialized version of positive ageing: 'healthy living' for the over 50s; 'cosmetic surgery–would you dare?'; 'seven ways to improve your memory'" (32). Featherstone and Hepworth conclude that "following a lingering tradition dating at least back to images of later life in Victorian painting, positive aging is intimately associated with the countryside" so that "[r]ustic imagery" becomes "a pervasive characteristic of successful retirement" (32). It is in this sense that the Victorian image of the placid and quiet grandmother is still present in nowadays' conception of positive ageing. However, an important difference is that British contemporary grandmothers have certain economic status and, thus, the intrinsic fear of biological ageing and senility present in any human being is lured by constant consumerism.

In the four short stories, the figure of the grandmother is presented as far away from this nurturing, quiet and almost elusive Victorian grandmother. Each of the stories depicts a grandmother within a very different cultural context and, thus, community. In each of them, no matter the age of the old person or her cultural background, a secret is kept in order to protect younger generations. Indeed, this imbues the grandmother with wisdom; however, it also places a cultural or familiar weight onto those younger

generations who will have to make sense of those secrets. In this sense, Doris Lessing's personal circumstances come to the surface in this volume. As a woman in old age who lived in South-Africa until her early twenties and who emigrated to a post-world war London quite transformed from the contemporary one; as an ever acute observer of the society around her as well as analyser of her personal and historical circumstances, she seems to picture the ruined bridge that exists between older and younger generations, from both parts and in a reciprocal way. From older to younger generations, because the grandparents overprotect their descendants with their secrets; that is, keeping valuable information about their personal and public lives to themselves. From younger to older generations, because in a globalised world in which consumerism is increasingly becoming a religion, old age is synonymous with old fashion and sterility. In an interview with Billy Gray, published in 2007, Lessing explains "I read something the other day that was quite interesting… a little phrase that said: "Lucky the culture where the old can talk to the young and the young can talk to the old, and it's true, the young can't talk to the old" (Gray 94). In this sense, Lessing manages to question the place and significance of recurrent boundaries still existing at the beginning of the twenty-first century: between generations, between races and cultures and, even, between genders. Furthermore, as mentioned above, passion–as intrinsic to the human condition–is the continuing line present in all the stories.

In the first short story, "The Grandmothers" Roz and Lil are two women reaching their sixties who had been friends since their childhood. As young women, they were attractive and assertive and, thus, they soon got married and had a son each, Tom and Ian respectively. However, the strong friendship which united them had made their husbands feel they were left apart. After one of the husbands leaves and the other dies, the mothers and the sons are left on their own. The ties between mothers and sons become so strong that the caring Roz and Lil had for their sons push them into having love affairs. Roz and Lil contribute to the sexual initiation of Ian and Tom and, that initiation results in passionate relationships that last for a few years throughout which the boys became adults and the women enter old age. It is then, when Roz and Lil feel their bodies ageing, that they urge their sons and lovers to get married and have a family. As Roz shouts to Ian one occasion, "What did you think? We'd all just go on, indefinitely, then you and Tom, two middle-aged men, bachelors, and Roz and me, old and then you two, old, without families, and Roz and I, old, old, old ... we're getting on for old now, can't you see?" (50).

Therefore, Tom and Ian marry younger women. However, it is in this new life, in which the secrets that the future grandmothers have allowed to perpetuate, interfere with the happiness of all of them. Tom and Ian never fall in love with their young and beautiful wives, despite the fact that they have a daughter each. Instead, the young women always feel there is something from which they are left out until Mary, Tom's wife, finds out about the secret. The secret is always present in the lives of the protagonists in "The Grandmothers", a secret which is unseemly and which cannot be disclosed, but which contributes to create a lack in the emotional part of present and coming generations; that is, the two little girls who have Roz and Lil as their grandmothers, since the two girls will never understand the origin of their mothers' unhappiness and of their fathers' unloving attitude towards their mothers. As Mary concludes at the end of the story, "[w]hen she stood on the path with Hannah, below Baxter's Gardens, and heard Roz's laughter, she knew it was a mocking laughter. It mocked her, Mary, and she understood everything at last. It was all clear to her" (56). In

this short story, the limited role of a grandmother is clearly trespassed. Far from the nurturing figure, quiet and sterile, "the grandmothers" could be considered the "matriarchs" of this small clan in which everything is under their spell. Despite their own expectations, the ageing of their bodies have not deprived them of the power they still have over their sons and, by extension, over their families. In her article "Aging and the Scandal of Anachronism", Mary Russo acknowledges the fact that the advances on technology and medicine have allowed women to face old age, not only as a time of loss and decrepitude, but as a time of empowerment in which "the developmental model of a woman's life" is disrupted by "an untimeliness in relations between women." (24) Thus, in the contemporary texts Russo analyses, she focuses on the fact that "the mother-daughter dyad is not erased so much as it is transformed by the anachronism of thinking backwards towards a future through a cross-generation bonding which outlives the norms of reproduction" (25). In Lessing's short story "The Grandmothers", it could be argued that "Roz's mocking laughter" was actually making fun of the restrictive image of positive ageing as passive grandmothers as well as of the limited role ageing and old women are granted in contemporary society when, at least in case of the short story's protagonists', their accumulated experience has empowered them rather than weakened their status as ageing women.

In "Victoria and the Staveneys", the grandmother, Jessy Staveney, is presented as a character who becomes the apparently passive agent of the facts that will follow. Victoria meets the Staveneys when she was nine years old. The Staveneys were an unusual family in the sense that they were open to help and take home any child who needed it. It is after Victoria's mother's death, when her only family, her aunt, is taken to hospital that Victoria spends a night in the Staveneys and meets Edward, a young boy who becomes her only close acquaintance for that night. Over the years, Victoria remembers Edward as a charmed cavalier, attentive and caring, the kind of person who could fill in the emptiness the loss of her mother and aunt had left in her life. Over the years, she also remembers the first impression Jessy caused in her: "Her eyes were large and green and Victoria thought they were witches' eyes. Her mother talked often about witches, and while her aunt never did, it was her mother's sing-song incantory voice that stayed in the child's mind, explaining the bad things that happened. And they so often did" (68).

As if having been cursed by Jessy Staveney and enchanted by Edward Staveney, Victoria's life suffers a turn when she meets Edward's younger brother, Thomas, a few years later and they start a love affair over the summer. Whereas Victoria is looking for that young man who would save her from her harsh life, as he had done when she was nine years old, Thomas is lured by Victoria's black skin. However, after the summer, Victoria finds out she is pregnant so that the link with the Staveneys becomes stronger, even though Victoria will not become aware of it until her daughter is six years old. After having her daughter, Victoria marries another man and has another baby but her husband dies and, once again, almost without being aware of it, she finds herself strolling near the Staveneys' home and decides to call Thomas to tell him about his daughter. As Victoria reflects about those past years, she realises her life had been driven by some external force she could not control even if she had tried to:

> Good luck and bad luck. What could you call it, that day, when they had forgotten her and her aunt was sick, and Edward had taken her home? Good luck–was it? She had lived for years in a dream, she knew that now, thinking

> about that house, all rosy golden lights and warmth and kindness. Edward. And Edward had led to Thomas. What sort of luck had that been? Well, she had got Mary from it, a solemn little girl with beautiful eyes–like her own. [...]
> Victoria seemed to herself like a little helpless thing that had been buffeted about, by strokes of luck, not knowing what was happening, or why. But now she was not helpless, at last she had her wits about her. What did she want? Simply that Mary should be acknowledged by the Staveneys, and after that-well, they would all have to see. (104)

Despite the fact that Victoria's secret, her daughter Mary, is disclosed, the difference between social classes and, even, races is perpetuated. As the Staveneys get to know Mary, they literally fall in love with the child and gradually drag her towards their world and, thus, Victoria becomes fully aware of the actual secret that will be perpetuated, that is, a barrier between these two worlds:

> Mary would go to that good school where most girls were white. She would have many battles to fight, of a different sort from the rough-housing of Beowulf. The Staveneys would be Mary's best support. Probably, when the girl was about thirteen, the Staveneys would ask if she, Victoria, could consider Mary going to boarding school. Neither they nor Mary would have to spell out the reasons why Mary must find things easier, for she would no longer have to fit herself into two different worlds, every day. Victoria would say yes, and that would be that. (128)

In fact, over Victoria's relationship with the Staveneys, it is Mary's grandmother, Jessy Staveney, who insists on nursing Victoria the night her mother died, when she was a child, and it is also her who convinces her family to take care of Mary. In a way, she is the one who bewitches Victoria the first time they meet, with her nice manners and her comfortable house, and the one who makes Mary fall in love with her family. However, as Victoria's words uncover in the previous quote, Jessy Staveney's generosity towards Victoria and her daughter can be translated as perpetuating the unbridgeable gap that still exists between their two communities. In her critical review of *Spiritual Exploration in the Works of Doris Lessing* by Phyllis Sternberg, Kyle Friedow defines Doris Lessing's short stories as "superb" and characterises them as communicating "truths concerning humanity by presenting clear, well-written images of human interactions" (1). According to Friedow, "[t]hese interactions' major effect on individuals and society are recognized immediately by a reader. The reader has been led to the plot's climax, and while appreciating the ending, the reader often continues to ponder how things might continue" (1). Thus, in "Victoria and the Staveneys", the reader becomes witness of the unequal relationship between Victoria and Jessy Staveney, as the matriarch of the Staveneys, and is almost imbued to question the future of Victoria and Mary within the Staveneys' community and, thus, to consider why those differences exist and how they are perpetuated.

In the third text, "The Reason for It", Doris Lessing presents the story of a community quite different from our own, set in an undefined time and place. Similar to the previous story, the grandmother and ruler of the community, Destra, becomes the agent of a number of events that will lead that community from being a model of prosperity and peace to being laughed at by their neighbours. And, as in "Victoria and

the Staveneys", a number of questions related to the changing values in our present-day society come to the surface for the reader to consider.

The story starts when Destra, the wisest ruler the community has known until then, realises she is growing old and decides to take twelve children from families that were known "for their probity and their good sense" in order to become "The Guardians of the people" (139); in other words, Destra intends to prepare those twelve children to make sure that her reign of prosperity and peace is continued. Among the twelve chosen ones, there is also Destra's son, DeRod. When Destra's time to die arrives, she gathers her twelve apprentices and asks them to choose the next ruler. Despite the fact that they are aware that DeRod is not the best candidate for the throne, "the Twelve" are guided by their willingness to please Destra on her death bed, even though she had told them several times that they had to choose the best ruler for their country. In fact, the narrator of the story, himself a grandfather, considers they had also probably chosen DeRod because they "were all a bit in love with" him. As he explains,

> [t]here was nothing much about him to dislike ever. Perhaps he was too eager to please, always, to fall in, to agree. He was such a beautiful child, and then as beautiful a youth. He was tall and slight, with dark eyes that compelled, and brooded, and with a gleam in them that we joked was because of his inheritance: Destra had those eyes too. (143)

However, DeRod turns to be a deeply unwise ruler not only because he was incapable of taking decisions considering what would make their country advance, but also because he seemed to be devoid of emotion and intelligence. However, it is not until his old age, nearing his hundredth birthday, that the narrator of the story, called Twelve, becomes aware of the reason behind their wrong choice. The twelve youngsters whom Destra had instructed acted out of deep admiration that had turned into passion both for Destra and her son. They had been outshone by Destra's beauty and common sense; the deep love they felt for Destra, who had acted as their surrogate grandmother, had eclipsed their realisation that DeRod was actually an idiot. As Twelve explains,

> This was the fearsome, feared DeRod; he was a giggling old man, an old buffer, naughty, like a child.[...]
> And that was the moment I understood. Oh, all kinds of enlightenment came flooding, rather late, but there it was, right in front of me. It was not that he had forgotten. Not that he had deliberately destroyed what was good. He had never known it was good. (178, 179)

This palpitating secret comes up to the protagonist almost all of a sudden when he meets DeRod again, after almost forty years, and they both are old men. In fact, it is suggested that old age had provided Twelve, the only wise man left in the community, a panoramic view of the last forty years through which he understood the decaying of his community was partly his mistake due to the wrong choice "the Twelve" had made in the past. Thus, he is determined to redeem that mistake before he dies.

One of the most outstanding activities in Destra's time was storytelling. She had actually created "The College of Storytellers and The College of Songmakers" in order to instruct and inform the community about their history, their good and bad deeds and learn from them. The role of the two colleges was also to educate children and teenagers on the prosperous values that had made their community advanced. When DeRod

became ruler, he had substituted both colleges for military instruction, so that all the economic resources in the community would be directed to the army. After having met DeRod and having realised their choice had been a mistake, Twelve decides to start educating his grandchildren himself, following Destra's teachings and, thus, plant the seed that may erase the ignorance and simplicity that DeRod's reign had promoted.

However, Twelve realises that this is a difficult task to do and to succeed in, because the young people in his community had been lured by the well-built bodies and militarised looks of the army as well as by the childlike messages enclosed in the military songs that had filled their city for the last forty years. In fact, with the disappearance of values such as study, effort and an eagerness to learn, his society had almost erased the word *wisdom* from their vocabulary and had accepted a set of values based on external appearance. Thus, as an old man, the protagonist was not respected among teenagers and young people, therefore, his task of trying to permeate his community with knowledge and a critical mind would become a real challenge. In fact, the few encounters he has with younger members of his community are never friendly. On one occasion in which Twelve was strolling in the woods,

> [a] gang of seven young men appeared, running up though the trees towards me; they saw me, and then with the cries of excitement, as if they had glimpsed a running animal, came towards me. I stopped and faced them. They stopped, a few paces away. Each face was distorted into that sneer which is obligatory now.
> 'What have we got here?' said the leader. […]
> He snatched my stick away, so that I stumbled and nearly fell, and then used it to lift up the bottom of my robe far enough so they could admire my ancient sex (176)

In a way, this process is also present in our contemporary society in which, as pointed out in the introduction, the values of strength, power and youth are also enhanced and promised to be kept by consumer culture in detriment of the natural process which makes a human body become physically old, although not necessarily senile. As Hepworth and Featherstone argue in *Surviving Middle Age*, "[t]he media have played an important role in creating and maintaining this moral climate which challenges the view that the body naturally and inevitably runs down with age", a process that can be stopped with "the help of the ever-expanding range of slimming, health food, fitness and cosmetic aids and techniques" (6). Thus, Hepworth and Featherstone's study demonstrates that, in an increasing fashion, our worthiness as a person is more dependent on how successful we have been in keeping the signs of ageing at bay, than in the experience and wisdom acquired over a lifetime. In the society present in the short story, it is not the media and a culture based on consumerism, but a militarised state based on external appearance the one which turns the grandfather, understood as the old man who can offer his experience and wisdom to his community, into an insignificant member. However, Twelve will have to live with the fact that, supporting the wrong decision taken by "the Twelve", he had secretly contributed to the ignorance and superficiality in which his community was immersed. Ultimately, it was Destra's method of choice which had not ensured the continuation of a wise leader.

In "A Love Child", the fourth story in the collection, James is a university student who is called up to join the army in spring 1939. He is sent to a mission in India in a ship in which five thousand men were fit even though it was only designed for

seven hundred and eighty. After a voyage in which not only space, but also food and hygienic conditions were poor, the soldiers are allowed to spend four days in Cape Town in order to recover from the harsh conditions of their journey.

During that long trip, James could only think about his mother's sweetness which contrasted with his father's barren character and dreamt of finding a nice girl to love and care, to be loved and cared; something his parents had not managed to do with each other. It is during these four days in Cape Town that he comes quite close to one of the two hostesses that take care of the soldiers' well-being. Her name is Daphne, a delicate English girl who had moved to South Africa after having got married. An immediate attraction exists between Daphne and James, one that, once it is consummated, makes Daphne realise she has never really been in love with her husband and which makes James remember Daphne's gracefulness during the rest of his mission and his life. While in India, completing his mission, James finds out about Daphne's pregnancy quite by chance. As he reflects:

> Pregnant. Nine months. It fitted. The baby was his. It had to be. Funny, he had not once thought of a baby, though now he felt ridiculous that he hadn't. Babies resulted from lovemaking. But that was a bit of an abstract preposition. His lovemaking, with Daphne, what did it have to do with progenitive? With baby-making? No, it had not crossed his mind. Now he could think of nothing else. Over there, across all that sea, beyond the appalling Indian Ocean, was that fair city on its hills, and there in that house was his only love with his baby. (277)

When the war finishes, James goes back to England, gets married and has a baby, but still feels quite incomplete. As soon as he is allowed to travel to Cape Town, he goes there and tries to find Daphne and his son. However, he only finds Daphne's friend who convinces him to go away not to destroy Daphne's life; and, so, James goes back to his home and his family with the sense of incompleteness that would accompany him all his life.

The story questions to what extent James and Daphne were exposed to the circumstances brought about by previous generations, their parents and grandparents. James was marked by the cold relationship between his parents and his experience in the war, whereas Daphne was trying to become the perfect wife and mother of a man she did not even love because this was what was expected of her. As James expresses, both of them were living a life which was not their own. Still, there was that secret which would unite them for ever; that is, their son. In a way, James and Daphne had somehow managed to deceive the social patterns and historical circumstances that had brought them together and apart at the same time. In fact, the paths their lives were following could be compared to James's conception of the war: "War is not a continuum, but long periods of inaction and boredom interrupted by fits of intense activity; that is to say, fighting, danger, death, and then boredom and quiescence again" (280). James and Daphne's lives had actually followed the pattern of a war. They had been led by boredom and quiescence interjected with their short love affair, a moment of action and danger that would remain in them.

In all four stories, passion is the conducting line which makes their protagonists counterbalance those social norms and expectations that would have made their lives devoid of it. As they grow older, they realise that deep admiration and love had been an uncontrollable force that had kept the outcomes of their passion as secrets they could

only display to a few. It is in that sense that their deep feelings contribute to maintain vivid memories of past events alive so that they can be taken as examples to follow or to reject. As Linda Belau explains, trauma "is the source of repression, which bars and distorts every possible memory of the past" (xviii). In all the stories, trauma is compensated by memories of those moments in which passionate love was present.

At the same time, the restricted image of the Victorian grandmother, as an acceptable image of old age, is questioned by presenting attractive, powerful and assertive grandmothers and grandparents, who not always take the right decision and whose mistakes have a direct consequence on the coming generations. Whereas Lil and Roz and Jessy Staveney, the grandmothers in the first two stories, are depicted as empowered elderly women whose power contributes to perpetuate their own standards within their respective families, the lack of perspective of the almost invisible grandmothers in the two last stories make their children live in an unfair world and, thus, wish for a better one. In "A Reason for It," Destra's and Twelve's wrong decision results in a disastrous future for their country, a puzzle that only someone from her own generation, another grandfather, can understand and try to solve. Similarly, in the last story, "the love child," will be a victim of the historical circumstances –a war– brought about by his grandparents, at the same time he will become a redeemer of such circumstances, since he is the natural result of love and passion.

The perpetuating secrets enclosed in this volume, in each of the families and communities depicted, bring to the surface the fact that bridges still have to be built between generations, between cultures and even between genders. The figure of the grandmother or a grandfather, is presented differently in each of the stories in the volume. However, the four perspectives previously analysed contribute to make the reader question the place left to the ageing process as well as to old citizens in a society which is not only rapidly changing, but also ageing. The fact that no human being can escape the ageing process places the question of ageing centre-stage as it not only informs of the kind of society which is being built, but mainly of the values that become the pillars of the culture intrinsic to that society, as it is clearly posed in the short story "The Reason for It".

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Özet

Sırlarımızı Ebedileştirmek: Doris Lessing'in *The Grandmothers* Adlı Eserinde Yaşlanma ve Bellek

Dış görünüş ve gizlilik hem aileler hem de uluslarda yinelenen öğeler olmuştur. Gizli aşklar, söylenmeyen kişisel tercihler ve hatta gayri meşru çocuklar bile hem iyi hem kötü önemli kararlara sebep olmuştur. *The Grandmothers* eserine uyan dört kısa öyküde Doris Lessing tarihte farklı noktalarda aile ve uluslarda iz bırakmış ebedileşen sırları keşfetmektedir. Bu derlemede, yasak tutku ve gayri resmi aşk konusu toplumlarında kabul görmeleri için bunları sır olarak saklamalarını gerektiren büyük annelerin yaşamlarını işgal etmektedir. *The Grandmothers* eserinde travma olgusu duyguların sosyal norm ve kısıtlamaları aştığı anların belleği ile dengelenmektedir. Aynı zamanda bu anılar yaşlı kişiyi toplumda şaşırtıcı biçimde görünmez kılan yaşlanma sürecini aydınlatmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Dorris Lessing'in kurgusal dünyasında uzun süredir yerleşmiş konular olan, *The Grandmothers* eserindeki duygu ve norm, bellek ve travma, yaşlanma ve toplum kavramları arasındaki karmaşık ara bağlantıları incelemektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: büyük annelik, yaşlanma süreci, yaşlılık, belleğin iletilmesi, gizlilik, çağdaş Britanya edebiyatı, Doris Lessing.