

**FACTUAL REFLECTION OF URBAN SPACE IN WILLIAM DEAN
HOWELLS'S SHORT PROSE**Natalia L. Fesyanova¹Ekaterina A. Khuzina²

Abstract: American writer William Dean Howells led an intensive search for artistic means to represent reality throughout his creative journey. His creative method was characterized by an acute sensation of the world's objectivity and the understanding of art as a special language. In this article, various types of art (landscape, music) are examined by which the writer created a factographic reflection of the urban space that determined the artistic specifics of his works. The theme of the city and the motive of the road in W. D. Howells creative destiny became fundamental ones and were reflected in his small prose. The studied texts of the American writer focused the attention on the inner world and the feelings of the author-narrator. He has a phenomenal memory that helps to save not only the experienced events, but also the emotional fabric of his wanderings in

detail. The urban pictures conveyed by W.D. Howells are as detailed as possible, demonstrate both the author's picture of the world and the specific norms of the urban space of the XIXth century. In the stories the writer shows such power of the urban environment, which adversely affects the development of urban culture, not only ecological but also psychological pollution occurs, the break with the surrounding reality and the construction of an artificial world. Thus, it allowed the author to combine documentality and artistic generalizations, confirming everything with specific names, titles, and events. Throughout the narrative in the small prose by W. D. Howells, the idea of the organic development of small towns and the existence in harmony with the surrounding natural environment is the main one, which is of enormous importance for the modern world. An

¹ Kazan Federal University, Naberezhnye Chelny Institute e-mail: birujza@yandex.ru tel. 89270465157.

² Kazan Federal University, Naberezhnye Chelny Institute.

original translation from English in the article was performed by the author.

Keywords: art, landscape, music, urban space, factography.

Introduction

The artistic world of the writer is a kind of ray, from which the streams of his creative "I" diverge, and also the source for the understanding of the author's worldview and attitude. Each writer creates a certain world, the events in which always occur in a certain place and are characterized by a certain spatial location. According to the native literary critic N. K. Gay: "Nothing can exist anywhere and never, any content suggests that it is correlated with someone, it took place somewhere and sometime" [1, p. 239]. Of course, the space transferred in the work is determined by the creative intention, the peculiarities of the artist's worldview, because each writer in his work seeks to convey something that is close to him physically, emotionally, morally and intellectually. As M. Lotman rightly noted, a space is the "model of this author's world, expressed in the language of his spatial representations" [2, p. 6].

The theme of urbanism in literature has always attracted an increased attention of literary scholars. A great contribution to the history of urban research was introduced by Lewis Mumford. In his understanding "a city is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses all aspects of human life" [3, p. 29]. The practice of urban space narratology is considered in the works by Michel de Serto, where a city is a text, and the walks along it are a fascinating reading [4, p. 29]. Russian culturologist, historian and local historian N.P. Antsiferov wrote in his "Book about the City": "All roads lead to the city. Cities are the meeting place. Cities are the knots that connect economic and social processes. They are the centers of various forces attraction with which human society lives. The growing dynamics of historical development was born in cities. The disclosure of cultural forms is carried out through them" [5, p. 3]. The history of text creation dedicated to a city has a long history. At the dawn of American literature appearance, many writers turned to the theme of the city in their works, since starting from the times of new lands development urban literature became a national tradition due to migration, rapid urbanization in the

19th century and the development of a new urban community and culture.

Materials and Methods

According to some researchers, a city often reflects the feelings of people, it is an expression of their internal state, the quintessence of their experiences [6, p. 33]. So, in the work by W. D. Howells, the city became the main object of the image. It is enough to recall his anxieties "Life in Venice", "Italian Travels", "Tuscan Cities", in which a wide city panorama is presented, the contradictory feelings of a foreign author about another remote reality are expressed. It was the Italian atmosphere in which the past and present mingled and which influenced the American writer, formed the ability to pay attention to the smallest details, to notice the facts, to recognize the shades and the geometry of space. After the government service in Italy as consul (1861-1865), he returned to America, bought a new home in Cambridge, Massachusetts and witnessed urban evolution. Cambridge is no longer an idyllic suburban "policy" for the people of Boston. The city was embraced by "revolutionary" transformations: the creation of

factories, the construction of railways, the wave of Irish and Italian immigrants, which changed the urban and social landscape. The writer saw dramatic transformations, which made a tremendous impression on him. It was this urban abundance that inspired him for his new works, in particular those ones published in the Atlantic Monthly "Suburban Sketches" (1871) which provide the kaleidoscope of American countryside life of the XIXth century.

The collection of "Suburban sketches" consists of ten stories: Mrs. Johnson, Doorstep Acquaintance, a Pedestrian Tour, by Horse-Car to Boston, a Day's Pleasure, a Romance of Real Life, Scene, Jubilee Days, Some Lessons from the School of Morals, Flitting. The author acts as a hero-narrator, an inquisitive town-dweller, whose notes are filled with a review and description of city panoramas and sad reflections on the life of people around him. The world depicted in the work is not invented, the characters too, the author is familiar with them. Sometimes he does not take direct part in the events, but he constantly reminds himself about himself, referring to the reader. The reading and the analysis of artistic texts

served as the methodological and empirical basis for the article.

Results and Discussion

In this article the space is the place where the depicted events take place, in which the characters move, their meetings and dialogues take place. Cambridge became such a place, which is veiled in such text as "Charlesbridge", which helped the writer to show the surrounding world without embellishment. So in his sketches he presented the picture of the city life of America of the XIXth century skillfully, he reflected the life and the morals of people. W. D. Howells wrote: "We are the creations of the moment; we move from one space to another, and only one interest fills them temporarily" [7].

Traditionally, there is an open and a closed space. In small prose W. D. Howells has the open space. The open space is represented by the things that have no borders - this is nature, which has a special role. It appears as

something infinite, infinite, absolute. Nature is interpreted not just as the living space of people, but as a world linking a person to the surrounding reality: "The whole suburb of Charlesbridge stretches about me, - a vast space upon which I can embroider any fancy I like as I saunter along"³ [8]. Each story begins with a day description: "*It was on a morning of the lovely New England May that we left the horse-car, and, spreading our umbrellas, walked down the street to our new home in Charlesbridge, through a storm of snow and rain so finely blent by the influences of this fortunate climate, that no flake knew itself from its sister drop, or could be better identified by the people against whom they beat in unison. A vernal gale from the east fanned our cheeks and pierced our marrow and chilled our blood, while the raw, cold green of the adventurous grass on the borders of the sopping sidewalks gave, as it peered through its veil of melting snow and freezing rain, a peculiar cheerfulness to the landscape*"⁴. [8]. All

³ the whole suburb of Charlbridge extends around me - it's a huge space where I can walk and fantasize.

⁴ It was a beautiful May morning in New England when we got out of the tram and opened our umbrellas walking down the street to our new home in Charlbridge through a storm of snow and rain, merging

with this favorable climate so that people did not distinguish whether they were drops rain, or snowflakes moving with them in unison. A spring storm from the east swelled our cheeks, pierced our brains and cooled our blood, while the damp cold grass along the wet sidewalk, looking through the veil of

natural phenomena become the symbol of global changes in human life. On the one hand, nature warns of danger, tries to show some human capabilities and needs leading to disaster, and on the other hand - the hope for their overcoming.

In the following story, W.D. Howells makes a beautiful landscape like a skilful artist painting natural phenomena with a brush: "*Crimson and purple the bay stretches westward till its waves darken into the grassy levels, where, here and there, a hay-rick shows perfectly black against the light. Afar off, southeastward and westward, the uplands wear a tinge of tenderest blue; and in the nearer distance, on the low shores of the river, hover the white plumes of arriving and departing trains. The windows of the stately houses that overlook the water take the sunset from it evanescently, and begin to chill and darken before the crimson burns out of the sky*"⁵ [8].

It was landscape art that became fundamental in the writer's small prose

who tried to plunge into the essence of natural phenomena, to understand and to convey a certain state of mind, to find the basis in the picturing of space, and place semantic accents skillfully. And at the same time these works are filled with the freshness of the first impression, the direct perception of the things that were seen. He draws numerous colors, plots, a variety of details from nature itself.

The writer, according to the French novelist M. Büthor, is "the one who discovers that the objects surrounding him begin to whisper, and then he brings this whisper to an audible speech" [9, p. 70]. W. D. Howells had visual perception, and also a perfect hearing. He managed not only to visualize the surrounding reality, but also listen to it, catching every sound, rustling, and even hear the silence. He "wrote" urban melodies as on notes, in which the past and the present merged: "*There are fences about all the houses, inclosing ampler and ampler dooryards; the children, which had swarmed in the*

melting snow and icy rain, gave a special vivacity to the landscape

⁵ The crimson and purple gulf extends to the west while its waves darken on the grassy cover, here and there, a pile of snow seems completely black from the light. From a distance, in the southeastern and western

directions, the mountainous parts of the country have a shade of gentle blue; and at a short distance, on the low banks of the river, white feathers of arriving and departing trains hover. The windows of the majestic houses that overlook the water area reflect the sunset lightly, and start to freeze and darken before the scarlet colors the sky

*thrifless and unenlightened purlieus of Dublin, diminish in number and finally disappear; the chickens have vanished; and I hear – I hear the pensive music of the horse-car bells, which in some alien land, I am sure, would be as pathetic to me as the Ranz des Vaches to the Swiss or the bagpipes to the Highlander: in the desert, where the traveler seems to hear the familiar bells of his far-off church, this tinkle would haunt the absolute silence, and recall the exile's fancy to Charlesbridge*⁶ [8].

The created notes of city vanity (silence in the street, sound of bells) create the melody, full of inner emptiness. This breathless music has the majority of people, as the conditions of real life have changed, mankind has ceased to think about its place in the world, about its frailty, about the community of human destinies. The story most full of music is "Jubilee Days", narrating about the national holiday of June 15, 1869 in Boston. The

music woke up the city and this event became the symbol of the unity of people for the author. He was embraced with euphoria and a sense of pride, as people became "*sentient atom of the mass*"⁷ [8].

Conclusions

The city can be interpreted as a kind of dual symbol containing the attributes of the old and the new world, uniting light and darkness, life and death. Urban space appears as a kind of boundary place where art and everyday life come into contact, the possibility of unlimited communication and isolation, the indifference of people to each other, their total loneliness. U.D. Howells does not give complete descriptions of the city, but sketches out individual places, depicting the details of the city, reality, conveys his impressions and feelings. An effect of a moving object is detected in his small prose, which assumes the function of the "camera" and allows the reader to see what is happening around with his own eyes. Road acts as the

⁶ There are fences near all houses with extensive and spacious front gardens; the number of children, who formerly crowded in abandoned and low cultural neighborhoods reduced and then completely disappeared; the chickens disappeared; and I hear - I hear the music of a tram bell that in a foreign country sounds as touching as Ranz

des Vaches for a Swiss or as a bagpipe for a highlander: in a desolate place where the familiar bell of his distant church sounds for a traveler, appearing in absolute silence, it is the dream about the return of the wanderer to Charlbridge

⁷ living atom of the weight.

motive here, the space that, according O.A. Dashevskaya, "creates an environment for movement, and it changes in time, its values vary, gradually acquiring new meanings in the process of an action unfolding" [10, p. 9]. Consequently, the road is an unlimited space and the idea about the way as a norm of life is developed: *"Most of our people come from Boston on the horse-and it is only the dwellers on the Avenue and the neighboring streets whom hurrying homeward I follow away from the steam-car station. The Avenue is our handsomest street; and if it were in the cosmopolitan citizen of Charlesbridge to feel any local interest, I should be proud of it. I perceive its beauty, and I often reflect, with a pardonable satisfaction, that it is not only handsome, but probably the very dullest street in the world. It is magnificently long and broad, and is*

*flanked nearly the whole way from the station to the colleges by pine palaces rising from spacious lawns, or from the green of trees or the brightness of gardens. Commonly, when I emerge upon it from the grassy-bordered, succory-blossomed walks of Benicia Street, I behold, looking northward, a monumental horse-car standing – it appears for ages, if I wish to take it for Boston – at the head of Pliny Street; and looking southward I see that other emblem of suburban life, an express-wagon, fading rapidly in the distance"*⁸ [8]. Thus, the road is the main philosophical theme connected with the thesis "the road is life".

An ordinary person with his everyday life is the subject of the picture, and therefore U.D. Howells heroes are inactive and do not perform feats. Focusing on the properties of the outside world, the writer tries to understand the

⁸ Most of our people come from Boston on horse-drawn trams, and this is just the hurrying residents of the avenue and the nearby streets, behind which I hurry home from the station on the steam car. Avenue is the most beautiful street; and if the cosmopolitan inhabitants of Charlesbridge had some local involvement, I would be proud of it. I feel the beauty of the Avenue and often reflect with an indulgent satisfaction that this is not only a beautiful, but probably very dull street in the world. It

is strikingly long and wide, and it is surrounded around the whole way from station to college with pine palaces, seen on spacious lawns of tree greenery or from the density of gardens. Often, when I go out to the grassy alley of Benicia Street, looking north, I see a huge forever frozen tram at the beginning of Pliny Street. I can't go to Boston on it. And looking to the south, I notice another symbol of country life - an express-car, quickly disappearing in the distance

problems of life and to comprehend reality from within: "...*They were the only men seated, in a car full of people; and when four or five ladies came in and occupied the aisle before them, they might have been puzzled which to offer their places to, if one of the ladies had not plainly been infirm. They settled the question – if there was any in their minds – by remaining seated, while the lady in front of them swung uneasily to and fro with the car, and appeared ready to sink at their feet. In another moment she had actually done so; and, too weary to rise, she continued to crouch upon the floor of the car for the course of a mile, the young men resolutely keeping their places, and not rising till they were ready to leave the car. It was a horrible scene, and incredible, – that well-dressed woman sitting on the floor, and those two well-dressed men keeping their places; it was as much out of keeping with our smug respectabilities as a hanging, and was a spectacle so paralyzing that public*

opinion took no action concerning it"⁹[8]. In the "Suburban sketches" W.D. Howells showed different strata of society, from drunks to secular circles, and the pictured portrait of this social environment does not arouse sympathy for him, because he was exposed to false ideas about the homogeneity of American society. He was struck by the gloominess of people, dark clothes, their unsociability, unfriendliness and indifference.

Summary

Thus, in order to create urban space, W. D. Howells resorts to certain art forms that give factographic and artistic quality to his small prose. The author who returned from a sleepy Europe was startled by the changes that have taken place around him. He was not against progress and understood that the world is changing, but he dreamed of the cultural environment preservation in the suburbs as a special life - young, lively,

⁹ These were just men sitting in a crowded horse tram; and when four or five ladies came in and took the passage in front of them, they might have been puzzled by the issue of their seats offering, since one of the ladies was clearly unwell. But since nothing came to mind, they decided to stay in their places, while the lady before them swung awkwardly back and forth along with the horse tram and was ready to fall at their feet.

At another time she did so; too tired to get up, she was sitting on the floor of the horse tram during the whole journey, but the young people resolutely kept their seats until they left the tram. This was an incredible and terrible scene - a well-dressed woman sitting on the floor, and two well-dressed men guarding their seats; ... it was a startling scene that public opinion took no action with regard to this situation

prosperous, humanistic, always in search of something new, healthy and interesting.

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

References

Gay N.K. Art of the word / N.K. Gay. - Moscow: Nauka, 1967. - 364 p.

Lotman Yu. M. The problem of artistic space in Gogol's prose // Proceedings on Russian and Slavic philology XI. Literary studies. Tartu: TSU., 1968. - Issue 209. - pp. 5-51.

Mumford L. What is a City // The City Cultures Reader / L. Mumford. - Routledge, 2004. - 29 P.

Serto of M. Around the city on foot//Sociological review / M. de Serto. - M.: Higher School of Economics. 2008. - No. 2. - Volume 7. - pp. 24-33.

Antsiferov N.P. A book about the city / N.P. Antsiferov. - L.: Brockhaus-Efron, 1926. - 224 p.

Nabilkina L.N. The city as a cultural phenomenon in Russian, American and Western European literature: author's abstract. dis. ... by the doctor of cultural studies / L.N. Nabilkina. - Ivanovo, 2014. - 54 p.

William Dean Howells // Quotes, poems, messages and poetry to share. - 2015. URL:

http://www.litera.co.uk/author/william_dean_howells/, free. Checked on 10.06.2017.

Howells W. D. Suburban Sketches // Gutenberg.org: The Project Gutenberg Ebook. - 2002. URL: <http://public-library.uk/ebooks/05/88.pdf>, free. Checked on 12.05.2017).

Byutor M. Novel as a research / M. Byutor. - M.: MFU, 2000. - 208 p.

Dashevskaya O.A. The structure of the action in the modern Soviet drama (spatial-temporal organization): the author's abstract from the dis. ... of Philology cand. / O.A. Dashevskaya. - Tomsk, 1987. - 18 p.