

UDC: 821.11-31“19”:81’37:115.4

THE SEMANTICS OF SPACE IN THE NOVEL «CROME YELLOV» BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

Ivanna Devdiuk

Ph. D in Philology, Assistant Professor, Doctoral student,
Department of World Literature and Comparative Literary Criticism,
Vasyl Stefanyk Precarathian National University (UKRAINE),
76018, Ivano-Frankivsk, 57, Shevchenka str.,
e-mail: dev.ivanna@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Aim. The article deals with the semantics of space in the novel «Crome Yellow» by Aldous Huxley. The aim of the paper is to determine the content and functionality of spatial markers as meaningful components of the author's conception of the artistic reality. **Methods.** The structural and semiotic works by Y. Lotman and V. Toporov served as the theoretical and methodological basis for the research. According to the scholars, the space is considered to be the model of the artistic world of the author, therefore the language of spatial relations is an important means of perception and comprehension of the artistic reality as its integral structure. The research refers to M. Heidegger's doctrine which emphasizes the existential nature of space, its ontological determination. That created the theoretical ground for studying the artistic space in terms of versatile connections between man and his subject environment. **Results.** It is proved that the space continuum of the novel «Crome Yellow» is marked by the semantics of isolation and closeness, the key concepts of which are silence, emptiness, and static character. The article concludes that the intellectual and moral atmosphere of the post-war Britain marked by uncertainty, disappointment and despair are reflected in the image of the estate and its habitual intellectuals who spend time in meaningless conversations. **Scientific novelty.** For the first time the novel «Crome Yellow» by Aldous Huxley is analyzed through the prism of the spatial organization of the text in correlation between the characters and the objective world. **Practical significance.** The article is of great help for further study of Aldous Huxley's creative heritage in the context of British and world literature. The results of the research can be used for writing course projects and qualification papers.

Key words: artistic space, semantics, closed, static, carnival, despair.

СЕМАНТИКА ПРОСТОРУ В РОМАНІ «ЖОВТИЙ КРОМ» ОЛДОСА ГАКСЛІ

Іванна Девдюк

Кандидат філологічних наук, доцент, докторант,
Кафедра світової літератури і порівняльного літературознавства,
Прикарпатський національний університет імені Василя Стефаника (УКРАЇНА),
76018, м. Івано-Франківськ, вул. Шевченка, 57,
e-mail: dev.ivanna@gmail.com

РЕФЕРАТ

Мета. У статті розглядається семантика простору в романі О. Гакслі «Жовтий Кром». Мета статті – визначити наповнення та функціональність просторових маркерів як репрезентативних доміант авторської концепції дійсності. **Дослідницька методика.** Теоретико-методологічною основою розвідки є структурно-семіотичні напрацювання Ю. Лотмана й В. Топорова, згідно з якими художній простір становить модель світу даного автора, відтак мова просторових відношень розглядається як важливий засіб сприйняття й осмислення художньої дійсності як цілісної структури. У дослідженні використано вчення М. Гайдеггера, в якому акцентовано екзистенційність простору, його онтологічну визначеність, що сформувало теоретичну базу для дослідження художнього простору крізь призму різнобічних зв'язків між людиною і її предметним оточенням. **Результати.** Доведено, що художній простір роману «Жовтий Кром» позначений семантикою замкненості та ізольованості, ключовими концептами якої виступають

тиша, пустота, статичність. Визначено, що в образі маєтку та його завсідників-інтелектуалів, які проводять час у безцільних розмовах, зображено духовну атмосферу повоєнної Англії, пройнятої настроями песимізму та розчарування. **Наукова новизна.** У статті вперше роман «Жовтий Кром» О. Гакслі розглядається крізь призму просторової організації твору у взаємозв'язку персонажів і предметного світу. **Практична цінність.** Стаття може слугувати базисом для подальших досліджень творчої спадщини Олдоса Гакслі в контексті британської та світової літератури. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані при написанні різного роду наукових робіт.

Ключові слова: художній простір, семантика, замкнений, статичний, театральність, відчай.

The spatial organization is one of the important aspects of a literary work, which allows to represent the artistic reality in dynamics, deployment, as well as in correlation between characters and their surroundings. The concept of space, being one of the main characteristics of the author's style, influences all the artistic means applied by the writer. As a relatively independent literary category, 'space' was first outlined in the structural and semiotic studies by Y. Lotman, V. Toporov, E. Faryno and others who proposed a universal model of the spatial structure of the artistic world, introducing the notions high / low, open / closed, limited / unlimited, right / left, etc. According to Y. Lotman, these categories, forming the basis for the construction of cultural models, transcend spaciality and therefore take on the meanings of valuable / invaluable, good / bad, own / alien, available / unavailable, mortal / immortal etc. Thus, as the literary scholar argues, the language of spatial relations becomes «one of the main means of the comprehension of reality» [4, p. 266–267]. This approach provides vast opportunities for space continuum analysis in the light of social and moral attitudes of the time.

The specific space of the novel «Crome Yellow» already comes to the fore in the title of the work. It is the Crome Yellow estate, located in the suburbs of London, where the representatives of the intellectual elite arrive at the invitation of the hosts – Mr. and Mrs. Wimbush. Hence, the personages are united by their forced or voluntary staying at someone else's place marked by limitedness and isolation. It creates a «situation of conversation» in which the personages, talking with each other, express their views on morality, politics, arts etc. The plot as well as the narrative conflict are limited; the action develops through discussions and conversations between the characters every one of whom embodies a definite idea. Such a paradigm corresponds to the author's concept of the 'novel of ideas', which was explained by him in the novel «Point Counter Point», «Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are rationalisations of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of soul, this is feasible. The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express – which excludes all but about 01 per cent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books. But then I never pretended to be a congenital novelist. The great defect of the novel of ideas is that it's a made-up affair. Necessarily: for people who can reel off neatly formulated notions aren't quite real; they're slightly monstrous...» [3, p. 294].

The characters of «Crome Yellow», unlike those of A. Huxley's later novels, have not completely lost their human identity therefore they evoke readers' compassion rather than condemnation. In addition, the main character – the 23-year-old writer Denis Stone, who has certain autobiographical features, stands out among a

bunch of eccentrics. This peculiarity, however, does not give grounds for his absolute identification with the author. The narrator is ironic about his hero revealing his hidden complexes. Such interpretation of the main character provides the text with the elements of theatricality and parody.

The semantic meaning of the protagonist's surname, 'Stone', generates the idea of a 'thing-in-itself' underlining Denis' concentration on his own self, hence his withdrawal from worldly concerns. In this regard, Wim Tigges admits, «Denis Stone, equally doomed (or saved?) to celibacy, is the most central character of Huxley's novel, because he is so self-centred and selfoccupied» [6, p. 21]. It is not surprising that the departure out of London arouses in the aspiring writer, who believes in his high destiny as a novelist, guilty conscience. Having interrupted his work on a new novel, he mercilessly reproaches himself for wasting his time and even doubts whether he has the right to live, «What right had he to sit in the sunshine, to occupy corner seats in third-class carriages, to be alive? None, none, none...» [2, p. 36]. Yet, in the depths of his soul, the young man cherished the hope that he would be deprived of obsessive anxiety at a new place. The magnificent view of Crome, which opened before him from the height of the hill, was really nice to look at: «The house basked in full sunlight; the old brick rosily glowed. How ripe and rich it was, how superbly mellow! And at the same time, how auster!» [2, p. 38]. So, Denis was open to the outer world expecting an enthusiastic welcome of the hostess. But he was disappointed – the majestic estate was gripped by total silence («All was quiet» [2, p. 38]), moreover, nobody has come to meet him. Trying to keep on the role of a confident man, Denis convinces himself that «it was amusing to wander through the house» [2, p. 39]. However, the association between the house, filled with antiques, and a dead Pompeii implicitly points out the absence of a real life in it. This idea is stressed in the final sentence of the estate presentation: «Among the accumulations of ten generations the living had left few traces» [2, p. 39]. Such an introduction conveys a negative connotation signaling the uselessness of Denis' seeming efforts to acquire a mental balance in a new place. No wonder the name of the estate contains the lexeme 'yellow' which symbolizes death, hopelessness and decay. This thought is confirmed by the tragic past of its first owners, pursued by an evil fate.

The efforts of the inhabitants of «Crome Yellow» to give the appearance of booming activity to their monotonous existence look grotesque and even absurd. Their being is so colorless that even the hostess herself, Priscilla Wimbush, suggests that its dullness might be compared to that of a «ditchwater» [2, p. 43]. The gloom and shyness of the estate, which in the distant past was a monastery, are masterfully accented in the details of its descriptions: the wall of the terrace in front of the house «had the almost menacing aspect of a fortification – a castle bastion» [2, p. 45], the swimming pool was «stone-brimmed» [2, p. 46], the body of Anna's bed «was like a great square sarcophagus» [2, p. 72], the books in the library smell «of dust and mildew» [2, p. 124] etc. The routine of lasy pastime is regularly cut by piercing sounds of the gong, reminding about a next meal, hence, the intellectual ambitions of the guests are ironically narrowed to primitive physiological needs.

All the personages, whose stay in a limited space excludes an active and purposeful activity, are busy carrying on meaningful conversations, not even trying to

hear one another. They look like puppets, every one of which performs some role function reflected in a certain oddity or an obsessive idea: Priscilla Wimbush, for instance, is concentrated on astrological predictions using them as a horse racing player; Henry Wimbush explores the history of the estate, eventually reducing it to the historical study of the bathrooms and closets of the building; Mr. Scogan is constantly making fun of the others voicing their secret thoughts and weaknesses; the childish Mary enjoys reading serious philosophical theories; Mr. Barbecue-Smith, a modern author, boasts about the speed with which he writes his exceptional opuses, etc. In reference to the above characteristics Ronald Sion admits, «It is not that the inhabitants of Crome gathered together for a summer holiday are without valid ideas, but often it is in their self-centered, materialistic meanderings, far removed from worldly concerns» [5, p. 30].

The theatricality of the situation is perceived in the image of a yearly charity fair held on the day of St. Bartholomew in the park area of the Wimbushs for the residents of the nearby villages, «Beginning as a sort of glorified church bazaar, Crome's yearly Charity Fair had grown into a noisy thing of merry-go-round, coconut shies, and miscellaneous shows – a real genuine fair on the grand scale» [2, p. 196]. The organizers of the holiday are primarily the guests of the estate. Being responsible for a certain entertainment, each of them takes the role which suits him / her most of all: the doll-like beauty Anna, for instance, works in the tea tent; the bored Priscilla agrees to cheer the villagers up; the naive Mary looks «after the children's sports»; the cynical demagogue, Mr. Scogan, concentrates his attention on «telling fortunes»; Denis is made to create «Ode on Bank Holiday» in order to print it and sell two pence a piece; the avant-garde painter Gombo is asked to draw instant portraits for «a shilling in five minutes»; Jenny, who has hearing problems, takes the decision to play the drums, etc. [2, 198-199]. In this way, the idea of the meaningless nature of the inhabitants of the estate, hidden behind the masks of their personal significance is conveyed in a grotesque manner. The author's depiction of the consequences of the noisy amusement proves the above assertion, «An expanse of worn grass, a shabby brown patch in the wide green of the park, would be all that remained. Crome Fair was over» [2, p. 221–222]. In the article «White Peacock in a Waste Land» Wim Tigges, emphasizing aimless nature of the inhabitants of Crome, figuratively compares them to the «odious and monstrous peacocks» which preen «their plumage in what turns out to be an emotionally as well as intellectually waste land» [6, p. 22].

Denis' sense of confidence is subject to similar transformation: his attempts to create the impression of being the man of action, made by him just at the arrival, have ended with a complete disappointment in his abilities. The young writer's stay among the elite guests of the Wimbushs, who did not show much interest in his creative work and even ridiculed his efforts, questioned all Denis' previous activity. Being delighted by words, as Ronald Sion notes, he «often fails to find the right ones to fit the mood» [5, p. 21]. The awareness of own insignificance, already felt by him during the first talk with Priscilla, was getting stronger, resulting in a state equivalent to death. The concept of death as one of the dominant components of the text is actualized in the scene of Denis' departure which he associates with the funeral

procession, as well as the car, ready to take the man to the railway station – with a coffin and a hearse.

To underline the absurdity of the situation the author introduces the «third-person eye» in the image of the silent Jenny. Sitting in the secret tower of her deafness, she creates caricatures of all the people present at the estate, masterfully picking out their hidden complexes. Having accidentally looked through the drawings, Dennis reluctantly admits the precision of his own image, a subtle exaggeration of his physical peculiarities as well as his poses and affectations. Out of Jenny's notebook the man learns more about himself than he would expect and like.

Significant in the light of the hero's self-identification is the concept of the 'highest point' represented in the image of the tower of the estate roof from where the moonlight sky was clearly observed. Feeling confused about his last midnight at Crome, Denis decides to climb there not being sure of the purpose of this act – whether to commit suicide or to look at the moon. Having got to the roof he felt "fresh, cool air of the night" that contrasted with a stuffy smell in the estate. At that time «His misery assumed a certain solemnity; he was lifted up on the wings of a kind of exaltation. It was a mood in which he might have done almost anything, however foolish» [2, p. 224–225]. Being the 'absolute top' in the life scale of values, the highest point symbolizes an existential boundary between freedom and non-freedom, life and death, true and false existence. The universal emptiness of the estate, in which one feels «the inherent lack of proper communication» [6, p. 21], covers not only the outlying landscapes but the sacred tops as well. The night air on the roof loses all the charm and ease as soon as there appears a silhouette of the childish Mary that gives Denis' high intentions the form of the farce. From the point of view of the semantic theory one can observe an existential situation when the space becomes alien to the person, who is gripped by fear of «making some progress towards cognition of things in the world outside (the very knowledge of the space in this case is questioned)» [7, p. 250]. It is an inner fear, caused by the loss of one's own space (V. Toporov calls this state 'Schopenhauer-Nietzscheian horror') that becomes decisive in the process of Denis' self-consciousness and assessment. Though the young man leaves for London not knowing what «he is to do with himself there» [5, p. 25], he is likely to have got rid of the illusions of his own uniqueness. It gives hope of Denis' personal identification and determination in the world full of disharmony.

Thus, the analysis of the novel «Crome Yellow» by Aldous Huxley proves that the spatial organization of the text is a meaningful component of the individual-author's model of the artistic world. The specific space is just the scenery, against the background of which various concepts and views are represented expressing the fears and anxieties of the post-war generation. The article underlines that the fictional space of the text overcomes the borders of everyday life conveying existential-philosophical ideas.

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