

# Urban Existence in the Interwar English Literature

**Ivanna Devdiuk**

Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University  
Department of World Literature and Comparative Literature  
Shevchenko str. 57, Ivano-Frankivsk 76018, Ukraine  
Email: [dev.ivanna@gmail.com](mailto:dev.ivanna@gmail.com)  
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3435-4694>  
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**Summary.** The paper highlights the peculiarities of the artistic modifications of urban existence in the English literature of the interwar period. We have analysed such novels as *Death of a Hero* by Richard Aldington, *Antic Hay* by Aldous Huxley, and *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, in which in the light of M. Heidegger's analytic of Dasein, we investigated the ways of the main characters' awareness of their own possibilities in a city. The article follows through the correlation between the heroes' existence and urban reality, in which it is projected. We have discovered that in the novels *Death of a Hero* and *Antic Hay* urban discourse is characterised by eschatological markers, in which the semantics of the heroes' loss of spiritual values and beliefs is expressed. Because of the lack of understanding of the world, George Winterbourne and Theodore Gumbrell are not capable to perceive true nature of their own selves and achieve maturity. This leads to self-alienation and dissolving in the 'they', which is a manifestation of falling into average everydayness. The mode of projection of oneself into the future is illustrated by the image of Mrs. Dalloway from the eponymous novel by Virginia Woolf, in which the horizon of existence is revealed as a free choice in the face of finitude. The study demonstrates how differently characters can perceive the city in the face of a choice between true and untrue existence, between themselves and others, between freedom and dependence.

**Keywords:** urban; existence; mode; authenticity; thrownness.

## Introduction

An increase in the number of cities growing into metropolises in the early twentieth century resulted in radical changes in the social and cultural life of humankind. On the one hand, cities promised freedom and independence, on the other hand, they led to alienation and loneliness. Man was confronted with the question of preserving "the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of *external* culture, and of the technique of life" (Simmel 1969: 47). Analysing the challenges of the time, R. Sennet admits, "Something tangled and complex

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was involved in these industrial cities, something to be explored as a problem, something that could not be understood by the use of a few easy labels or categories” (1969: 4). It is not surprising that just at the same time urban space as a complex structure is coming into the focus of research in the humanities. Sociologists and anthropologists of the first decades of the past century make attempts to explain the phenomenon of the industrial city from the perspective of human existence. G. Simmel in his notable essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903) sees the tasks of the 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars in seeking ways “to solve the equation which structures like the metropolis set up between the individual and the super individual contents of life” (1969: 47). Other ideas on this subject were outlined in the studies of Max Weber (*The City*, 1922), Max Scheler (*The Human Place in the Cosmos* 1928), Helmuth Plessner (*The Limits of Community. A Critique of Social Radicalism* 1924), Marsel Mauss (*Civilisations, their elements and forms*, 1929/1930), Louis Wirth (*Urbanism as a Way of Life* 1938), Lewis Mumford (*The Culture of Cities*, 1938) and others who viewed urban space in relation to human existence.

Socio-cultural and anthropological studies laid the ground for the development of literary urbanism in which the city is seen as a text filled with certain markers and codes which give the key to understanding the world picture of the author. In this field an important contribution has been made by such researchers as Diane Levy (*City Signs: Toward a Definition of Urban Literature*, 1978), Michael Jaye and Ann Watts (*Literature and the Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature*, 1981), Mary Caws (*City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, 1991), Hana-Wirth Neshet (*Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, 1996), James Donald (*The city as text*, 1992), Richard Lehan (*The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*, 1998), Juliene Hanson (*Presentiment, contrast and ambiguity in fictional space: the London novels of Charles Dickens and Peter Ackroyd*, 2012), etc. The works are focused on the features of the artistic representation of an urban fiction text both as a place of action and in characters’ development.

But even until now, urban studies critics still have not paid sufficient attention to the correlation between the character and the environment in the light of existential concepts, according to which an urban person stands out as a separate reality that builds itself up and, at the same time, degrades in the urban world. From existential philosophy viewpoint, the city stands out as a world of condensed existence, in which a person is forced to make a choice between himself / herself and others, true and false being, freedom and dependence, etc. And it is the urban space that by evoking anxiety, boredom, alienation etc. fills human existence with true meaning. The person’s individual experience is coming to the fore, as well as the process of his/her self-awareness and identification, which is the object of artistic reinterpretation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature.

We consider existentialist approach appropriate for the analysis of the interwar English literature, in which the motives of despair and disillusionment run through, where the post-war chaos caused by spiritual degradation, loss of moral orientations and values is objectified. The aim of the article is to determine the extent to which the characters are aware of their own abilities in urban space when faced with the choice between

authentic and inauthentic being, in the novels *Death of a Hero* by R. Aldington, *Antic Hay* by A. Huxley, *Mrs. Dalloway* by V. Woolf. The novelty of this research lies in the fact that it is the first essay to investigate the image of the British capital city in the light of existentialist concept on the basis of three novels, and this enabled us to outline similar and specific features of the literary representation of urban space in the projection of its experience by an individual consciousness. The article may be of some help for further studying of urban literature through the correlation between the heroes' existence and urban reality, in which it is projected.

The study follows the theory of existential ontology by Martin Heidegger, according to which "everything spiritual and all space-time occurs essentially in the dimensionality which Being itself is" (Heidegger 2000: 93). In the light of Heideggerian analytic of Dasein, characters' experience of a city is viewed on the ontological level of thrownness – a kind of Being when possibilities of Being by something are revealed. M. Heidegger asserts, "But thrownness, as a kind of Being, belongs to an entity which in each case is its possibilities, and is them in such a way that it understands itself in these possibilities and in terms of them, projecting itself upon them" (Heidegger 2001: 225). Dependig on external and internal factors, "Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already" (Heidegger 2001: 33). Thrownness, along with fallenness and projection, constitutes the main qualitative components of ontological wholeness of Dasein, articulated by Heidegger as care. Care creates an existential space of individual being, determined by three aspects: being already-in-the-world, being alongside-others, being ahead-of-itself, each of which is corresponded by a certain modus of temporality – the past, the present and the future that mutually permeate each other. Dasein, which reveals its own thrownness into certain socio-cultural situations, is to be found in the modus of the past, which, depending on a certain choice, determines a person's present and the future. Fallenness means turning away from oneself, falling into the mediocrity of everyday being. The core of Dasein is the future, which corresponds to the essence of existence, that always tries to go beyond its boundaries, projecting itself into tomorrow.

An important issue in the research context is the question of the character's self-awareness in a city – to be oneself or not to be oneself, to be or to have. The solution lies in the plane of Heideggerian interpretation of authenticity / inauthenticity as two modes of being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world as being-with presupposes intersubjectivity, communication with others who are a part of 'the I project'. As such they help to materialise its needs, consequently self-isolation, escape or evasion are viewed as an obstacle on the way of meaningful being. In this process it is important to preserve one's own authenticity which is true being. Inauthenticity means dissolving in the world of others, it leads to the loss of one's opportunities. We have structured this article in accordance with the defined concepts, where in the first and second sections we investigate the models of inauthentic being, while the third section looks at the process of achieving authenticity through self-projection into the future.

## 1. The mode of self-alienation: *Death of a Hero* by R. Aldington

The development of the main plot in the *Death of a Hero* by R. Aldington is connected with the movement and reflections of the protagonist George Winterbourne, whose life path is fragmentarily followed from birth till death. The second part of this novel, which is in the focus of this paper, deals with the hero's experience of pre-war London, where he arrives after a falling out with his parents as a result of a failed attempt to defend his own choice. His move to London is more of an exile than an intentional act. The protagonist finds himself in the status of a homeless person who has lost his own environment which is the equivalent of losing his own authenticity. We have a situation when Dasein did not choose possibilities to be something, but got into them, which is reflected in George's contemplations that are permeated by the nostalgia for the lost scenery, nature, beauty and art, and consequently loathing of mechanical London. The hero's awareness of being alienated and un-homely of the city reflects the state of thrownness, determined by the mode of the past as being already-in-the-world. Thus, in the opening pages of the second chapter of the novel, we encounter the existential anxiety of the protagonist, depressed by the view of the British capital,

Puritan fervour relapsed to negative depression, Gigantic wings of Ennui folded irresistibly over millions. Vast trails of automobiles hopelessly hooting to escape. Epic melancholy of deserted side-streets where the rhythmic beat of a horse's hoofs is an adagio of despair (Aldington 1958: 127).

Despite being aware of his own thrownness, George does not attempt to go beyond his own Self. It leads to the existential escapism – an abyss between the person and society, which means rejecting the others. In this situation Dasein is becoming similar to a stone that finds out that it is a stone, yet does not attempt to rise up to the surface of being. Instead, it is only in communication that the real essence of the world which exists as much as an understanding Dasein exists is disclosed.

Rejection of the Other is at the same time the need of the Other as the subject. This aspect emerges in the novel on the level of romantic interaction, in which the ability of Eros to overcome aloneness and alienation, to get the individual to a higher level of self-awareness, is represented. The existentials of freedom, joy, hope that characterise George's here-being in his state of affection are a sign of the enlightenment of existence in transcendence, and rise above the essence of things. The state of enlightenment is expressed in the visions of London, shown in the eyes of the enamoured George. The contrast between the initial impressions of the capital, and those that emerge during the hero's promenades with the woman he loves in the streets of London at night is obvious,

They walked along the Embankment from Westminster Bridge towards the City. A serene sky hung over London, transposed to an astonishing blue by the complementary yellow of the brilliant street lights. A few trams and taxis were still moving on the Embankment, but after

the ceaseless roar of day traffic the air seemed almost silent. At times they could hear the lap and gurgle of the swift river water [...] The river was beautifully silver in the soft steady moonlight [...] Midnight boomed with majestic, policeman-like slowness from Big Ben; and as the last deep vibrations faded from the air, the great city seemed to be gliding into sleep and silence (Aldington 1958: 201–204).

In the lexemes *serene, silent, slowness, softs, gliding* we can read the semantics of reconciliation with the mechanical dynamics of the modern city which becomes a part of the hero's being-in-the-world. This mood also appears in the artistic manner of the young man. Winterbourne, who has been in love with the beauty of English valleys and meadows since childhood, suddenly admits that he is not fascinated with picturesque landscapes and he is dreaming of a different type of painting – “urban, contemporary, and hard” (Aldington 1958: 205). Yet this mood is caused primarily by the hero's self-interest, rather than his internal beliefs, which leads to alienation from the Self, fallennes in everydayness. The fullness of life looks like an illusion, the man is blinded rather than existentially open. He gets dissolved among other members of the pre-war generation, who in their aspiration for the earthly pleasures were living for today, not trying to build up their own world. Short-sightedness as narrow-mindedness separated the young people from real being, which, according to the narrator, led to “everlasting bonfires of servitude or ashy wastes of indifference” (Aldington 1958: 166). Living only in the present moment, they were deprived of the opportunity to project their own future. The narrator's reflections evoke Heidegger's conclusions,

When I speak of the “quiet power of the possible” I do not mean the possible of a merely represented possibilitas, nor potentia as the essentia of an actus of existentia: rather. I mean Being itself, which in its favourite presides over thinking and hence over the essence of humanity and that means over its relation to Being. To enable something here means to preserve it in its essence, to maintain it in its element (Heidegger 2000: 85).

The author argues that the idea of the open marriage taken up by young people in the first decades of the 20th century was ruining rather than constructive. In fact, it was just about promiscuous sexual relations. Just like the Victorian family model, it did not account for real feelings as care for the Other. Failure to understand this led either to egocentric self-focus, or loss of oneself in the others. The latter could be observed in Winterbourne's case, as he loses his own personal agency and becomes a victim of pragmatic and petty ambitions of emancipators Fanny and Elizabeth. Open relations come down to a traditional love triangle. For the naive and closed George, it becomes a confusing maze from which he cannot exit. His own helplessness, failure to build up his own happiness produces the condition of despair, which serves as evidence of the extreme level of loneliness as a deadlock and loss of authenticity. It leads to the situation when a person has a passionate desire to not be oneself, which usually has a fatal final. This is confirmed by Winterbourne's decision to go to war, which had been growing after a failed adaptation in the urban community. It cannot be viewed as a decisive act, but

rather is a symptom of one's covering-up, drowning oneself in worldly projects. In this situation, according to A. Gagarin, we observe an outward "identification of I with the so-called "nullity", the topos of negation, in which I loses life-purpose characteristics, value orientations" (Gagarin 2002: 10).

George's crisis and psychological turning point emerge in the text in the image of London Bridge, which is the last link between the void of the past and the uncertainty of the future, the city and the war. The vision of London which opens up to the hero from the height of the bridge, instead of former aggression or fascination, invokes mixed feelings of regret and sorrow. The powerful and magnificent, it now looks neglected and gloomy,

Winterbourne found himself crossing the Thames, and looked once more at the familiar townscape. He noticed that the street-lamps had been dimmed further since he had left London, and that the once brilliantly-lighted capital now lay cowering in darkness. – The dome of St. Paul's was just faintly visible to an eye which knew exactly where to look for it. (Aldington 1958: 264).

In London swallowed up by the gloom, the idea of tucking away the horizon of the possible is generated, the reason for this is the loss of sense and motivation, the loss of everything for the sake of who or what coming to the world happens. In this connection M. Heidegger argues,

In the "for-the-sake-of-which", existing Being-in-the-world is disclosed as such, and this disclosedness we have called "understanding". In the understanding of the "for-the-sake-of-which", the significance which is grounded there-in, is disclosed along with it. Significance is that on the basis of which the world is disclosed as such (Heidegger 2001: 182).

Without motivation wholeness as a form of organisation is disrupted, which is a symptom of the loss of freedom, and hence the loss of a chance to be the master of one's own being, to rise up above the existent.

We see that the mode of incomprehension characterises the whole pre-war generation. Because of the loss of their own space, young people became a tool for the will of others, which means self-alienation and oblivion of one's facticity. Without waiving responsibility for their choice, the author focuses on its determinacy of external conditions, which set about in the pre-war years. After the war London will come back to life again, but the veterans who had been exposed to all the horror of being, would not find their place in it. In the city deprived of sensitivity, only those who rejected true human values will persevere, those who became pragmatic and rational, having become a part of the crowd, which one can see in the novel *Antic Hay* by Aldous Huxley.

## **2. The mode of dissolving into others in *Antic Hay* by Aldous Huxley**

If in R. Aldington's novel we have the representation of Dasein which gets into possibilities, in *Antic Hay* by A. Huxley we see the situation when it grows up in them

which is shown in the image of the protagonist, Theodore Gumbrill. The specific reality of the capital city is just a decoration for the implementation of the author's concepts. As A. Huxley wrote in his letter to his father, "the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch" (Huxley 1969: 224). The epigraph to the novel, taken from Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*, accurately conveys the author's intentions, "My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns / Shall with their goat-feet dance the antic hay" (Huxley 1923: 1). A. Huxley consciously compares his characters to forest deities, half-people, half-beasts, that in ancient Greek mythology personified the primeval rough power of nature. Having lost all reference points, the representatives of the war generation are wasting their time in idle talk, visits to restaurants, cafes, parties, exhibitions etc., as long as they do not stay alone with themselves and their thoughts. This life turns into an insane dance whose participants are doomed to emotional devastation. It is in the context of the characters' constant moves that constitute the outline of the novel, that London text is presented in the image of streets, squares, buildings, houses, etc. The urban objects dragged into the wild dance, it seems, play up to the residents with bright fires, the noise of the cars, loud music, creating an illusion of carelessness, behind which there is only perplexity and unrest. Hence, the metaphor of the 'antic hay' reveals the concept of chaotic movement as of London's and its residents' form of existence, for whom a halt is equal to death. In this concern, Liliana Ciocoi-Pop claims,

Almost all the characters of *Antic Hay* are true intellectuals, for each of them is characterized by an impossible passion, by a profound discontent, by an evident handicap in facing the world. Thus, the characters' existence becomes a grotesque dance without any aim or direction, with the more or less accidental "clashes" of "the dancers" doing nothing than contributing to the hideous character of the scene (Ciocoi-Pop 2004).

The main character in the novel, Theodore Gumbrill in this ensemble stands out as a person who is aware of the inauthenticity of his own being. He experiences "the sharp disjointedness between the ideal and reality" (Ciocoi-Pop 2004). The man is depressed by the way of being in which he is devoid of his own identity. Dependency on the circumstances or decisions of other people, as Gumbrill is convinced, is the result of his melancholy, indecisiveness and gentle nature, which do not correspond to the severe pragmatics of London. Like George, he finds himself in the state of thrownness, in which his Dasein, capable of seeing, and hence projecting himself, is revealed. The realisation of one's own possibilities is manifest in Theodore's decision to give up teaching, in which he does not feel comfortable. Yet acquiring another I comes down to hiding one's inner Self under the mask of the so called 'Complete Man', which was supposed to give him masculine confidence and even rudeness. The wig with a beard, the broad coat, the wide-brimmed hat turn the man into a "broad and powerful and exuberant and with vitality and hair" (Huxley 1923: 118). This metaphor is more of a pseudo-initiation, as instead of the choice of his own way, Theodore with this act adds more illusiveness to his own

existence, alienating himself from his true self. It comes as no surprise that he becomes the focus of women's attention, whose image invokes mixed feelings of disgust, irony and pity. Instead, he has authentic feelings to a woman who loved him for what he is – sensitive and gentle.

Emily is one of the bright images in Huxley's works. It is different from the common for his works type of the femme fatale, represented in the character of Myra Viveash, whose emancipation is a way to escape oneself, which means unfreedom. Instead, for Emily, who has not lost her true values and ideals, freedom is first and foremost a choice and responsibility. The latter is decisive in her attitude to love as care and building. It is understandable why Theodore who is suffering an emotional crisis, feels that she is a soulmate associating her with his late mother. The hero's sorrow for authenticity and wholeness is objectified in the characteristics of the girl represented through Theodore's eyes, "pure of heart, and flawless in her bright pellucid integrity, complete as a crystal, in its faceted perfection" (Huxley 1923: 204). Emily's purity and completeness is the projection of his inner Self, lost in the chaos of London. The girl's decision to rent a country house outside the city opens up possibilities to step outside the usual existence. Yet the fatal meeting with Myra who at the time of Gumbrell's departure did not have someone to share her breakfast with, ruins the man's intentions to bring some subjectivity into his own life and thus obtain freedom. Like others, he remains a puppet in the theatre of urban absurd.

If Gumbrell Junior gets the shape of the city, becomes an ordinary person, then his father dissociates himself from reality, lives in an anachronistic world of the past. A professional architect, he devotes himself to the production of a gigantic model of London, grounding his work in the ancient principles of city building, in which a person, as he says, lived "like an aristocrat, in privacy, by oneself" (Huxley 1923: 31), and at the same time felt free and independent. Instead, contemporary London for him is a repository of "ugliness and pettiness and dirt" (Huxley 1923: 172), which result from erroneous concept of city building, oriented at people's base instincts. The man attempts to rectify this mistake by putting the principle of human freedom in the centre of the project. The architect's house is full of models of cathedrals, libraries, town halls, universities, warehouses, stores, factories, mansions with springs, fountains, canals, bridges, etc. He believes that in the future these models will certainly be brought to life. Yet the shakiness of the structures which would fall apart to pieces from a careless movement, proves the old man's ideas to be utopian. From Heidegger's perspective this life is not building, as it is not open to the world, on the contrary, it becomes a means of escaping people, with whom, as Gumbrell Senior himself admits, he "is not good at" (Huxley 1923: 29). In Theodore's eyes, his father, shaking his head, when talking about his concept of the city, reminds him of "one of those old shepherds who stand at the base of Piranesi's ruins demonstrating obscurely the prodigious grandeur and the abjection of the human race" (Huxley 1923: 177). Even though he is ironic of Gumbrell Senior's fascination, Gumbrell Junior at the same time is not capable of displaying resolution and making a breakthrough in projecting himself into the future. Both heroes, like all other characters in the novel, live in an isolated world of

illusions, moving away from true existence. Thus, their being in the world is marked by the mode of fallenness, in which there is no awareness of their own abilities.

### 3. The mode of one's projection into the future in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf

If R. Aldington's and A. Huxley's heroes associate London in their consciousness with chaos and destruction, then for Mrs. Dalloway, who lives in Westminster, it is the centre of the universe, the repository of beauty, grandeur and thrilling dynamics. The city's concentricity is objectified in the image of Big Ben, which rises above the city's space and moderates the life of its residents. Next to it, there is a level of internal time, which consists of the moments of individual consciousness being. Its core is the soul of the main heroine, which beats according to the laws of the internal rhythm, combining the external and the internal, the past and the future into one torrent. Clarissa's London is a polychrome range of sounds, colours, odours which constantly change the combination of their own shades, expressing the heroine's emotional state filled with love to the city with its swing, tramp, trudge, uproar, carriages, motor cars, "sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs [...] the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead" etc (Woolf 1984: 34). The life itself, according to Clarissa, is dressed in "robes of sound from the street", it is "sunny, with hot breath, whispering, blowing out the blinds" (Woolf 1984: 136). This London belongs to her, Mrs. Dalloway, a lady and a wife to the member of Parliament, who is trying to pretend that everything is all right.

But through the thick of Clarissa's vitalistic confessions, the existentials of sorrow, hopelessness and death show through, and the heroine's inner emotions, hidden behind the mask of exterior restraint and pomposity, are emerging. Her love for life may be viewed as a form of self-defence, a preventive measure to save her internal harmony and wholeness, which are becoming more and more difficult to keep after years. On the opening pages of the novel, the woman's confession of love to a bright June day intertwine with the awareness "that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (Woolf 1984: 37). In the space of consciousness, an absolute abyss of Mrs. Dalloway's loneliness is revealed; she feels "the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence" (Woolf 1984: 57). The comprehension of absolute loneliness as virginity, "which clung to her like a sheet" (Woolf 1984: 58) comes to the woman in the emptiness of her own room. In the metaphoric comparison of the room with "the heart of life" (Woolf 1984: 57) Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein which reveals its fallenness is explicated. It is here that Clarissa faces up to her existence as a possibility to be herself, not Mrs. Dalloway, but Clarissa, who consists of incompatible fragmentary particles, "composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond" (Woolf 1984: 63). Ontologically, the woman's life is alternation of the modes of fallenness and thrownness, authenticity and inauthenticity, concentration and falling apart to pieces. By constantly

balancing in her thoughts between life and death, common sense and madness, Mrs. Dalloway chooses life with its noise, gossip, intrigues, external lustre, parties, porcelain and silver – the things that save her from cruel reality. Hence, she dissolves in the ‘they’ – the residents of London, which do not “permit Clarissa the courage for anxiety in the face of death” (Wakefield 2013: 63). Thus, like Gumbrell from A. Huxley’s novel, in the urban noise Clarissa finds rescue from loneliness, turning away from the tragedy of existence.

The boundary situation, in which the existence of being-towards-death reveals itself, is the suicide of Septimus – a representative of the lost generation. The man feels absolute loneliness in the capital, which is indifferent to his sufferings, and gradually he approaches self-destruction. Septimus represents a different London – abandoned and ruined by the war, not inspiring, but depressing and mortal. The news of the poor man’s death which comes from Dr. Bradshaw, makes Mrs. Dalloway feel anxiety, admiration and guilt for the powerlessness in the face of death, for one’s own life that she has:

Somehow it was her disaster – her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success. Lady Bexborough and the rest of it. And once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton (Woolf 1984: 192).

Heidegger’s concept of care which appeals to conscience is explicated in the heroine’s reflections, revealing the nullity “by which Dasein’s Being is dominated primordially through and through” (Heidegger 2001: 354). Clarissa’s awareness of Being-towards-death means a return to her own individuality, understanding of her own life as one’s “ownmost possibility”. The heroine’s exit from her own “small room” and arrival to the guests in the final of the novel is the explication of her renewal, comprehension of existence which asks and searches.

## Conclusions

The existential discourse of the analysed novels manifests itself on the level of experiencing the urban reality by the main heroes who encounter the situation of existential choice between real and unreal being. The existentials of sadness, grief, fear, boredom, which characterise the main personages’ state, prove that their Dasein is in the mode of thrownness, to which the possibilities of being something open up. The decision to be or not to be their own depends on their understanding of here-being, which is in the moment between the past and the future. In *Death of a Hero* by R. Aldington we see the situation when the tragic experience of the past becomes a barrier for the understanding of the present, the comprehension of which is possible only through communication. A failed attempt to fulfil oneself in the urban space leads to the hero’s inner isolation, and hence to rejection of oneself. The latter manifests itself in George’s decision to go to war, which is viewed as drowning into worldly projects. *Gumbrell Junior* (Antic Hay), on the other

hand, in his search for self-identity is not capable of showing determination and making a breakthrough, projecting himself into the future. Just like others, he finds oblivion in the chaotic movement of London, losing himself in the “they” and moving further from true being. Being-in-the-world of both Gumbrill Junior, and George Winterbourne, is marked by the mode of fallenness, which is devoid of the understanding of their own abilities. The mode of projection of oneself into the future is illustrated by the image of Mrs. Dalloway from Virginia Woolf’s eponymous novel. The experience of deep anxiety caused by the death of Septimus Smith reveals the horizon of her being which is free from choice in the face of finitude. In the novel’s final, the moment of truth of Dasein is articulated, in which it chooses itself, rejecting the anonymity of existence. The article reveals tragic concepts, shared by all the texts, through which runs the authors’ vision of the inter-war reality characterised by disillusionment in the future of human civilisation and the city as its embodiment.

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