

GENDER ISSUES AND THEIR VERBAL EXPRESSION IN N.GAIMAN'S NOVEL "NEVERWHERE"

Baronova E.V.

Nizhny Novgorod State University, Arzamas branch, Arzamas, e-mail: ipprepod@gmail.com

The article analyses one of the important aspects of gender studies: peculiarities of male and female verbal behavior in the outstanding bestseller of the contemporary English writer – Neil Gaiman. He proves that the gender discourse is influenced by a number of socio-cultural features and that the resurgence of masculinity in the modern world is achievable only through escapism. In the universe of fantasy a man can acquire his own voice, retrieving the half-forgotten but significant roles of a warrior, hunter and leader.

Keywords: masculinity, escapism, feminism, gender, verbal expression

Currently the verbal behavior strategies have become a central part of gender studies. The content of the statements, and, more importantly, the hidden meaning of the uttered phrase, define the essence of our ideas about gender and relationships between the sexes. There is no doubt that they are also influenced by socio-cultural and historical aspects.

The second wave of feminism in the United States of America (1960–1970) created a new perspective on language. However, at that time, researchers were more interested in the problem of reflection of discrimination against women and the domination of patriarchal values in the linguistic system. For example, the fact that the lexeme *girl* was used in relation to a woman was seen as an example of a derogatory assessment indicating a lower social status of the nominated object.

At the end of the XX century all that was mentioned above led to the emergence of gender-neutral terminology, for instance, to indicate the occupations: *police officer* instead of the *policeman*. This period is marked by the beginning of the studies of the effect of the sphere of activity on the use of groups of terms by representatives of the opposite sex. In particular, the vocabulary associated with the preparation of food, especially desserts and fruits, is supposed to be the prerogative of women. While the men's discourse is dominated by linguistic units, indicating the food consumption and words connected with violence.

Thus, this discussion of the XXI century has gone so far as to argue the possibility of the use of the word *marriage* not only in relation to the union of opposite-sex individuals in European countries and the USA.

The content and form of expression is important for self-identification. Linguists have paid attention to the pronunciation of vowels, tone, rhythm, tempo and other phonetic features of speech. Researchers did not disregard

other levels of language: lexical (the frequency of use of terms, obscene (taboo) words, slang, euphemisms); grammatical and syntactical (sentence structure, a choice of one or another form). Much of the early research work on the problem of gender-based discourse gave rise to a lot of unfounded stereotypes.

The difficulty in the identification of strategies of verbal behavior is caused by different factors. First, people often deliberately change the communication strategy by choosing a role which is not peculiar to them in everyday reality in order to meet the expectations of the listener or interlocutor. Secondly, the language units cannot be considered in isolation. It is essential to consider them in social situations of light flirtation, humiliation, domination in the dispute. One should take into account social factors that are much more complex than a simple count of the number of various forms in the "female" or "male" speech: how many times he said the word *dude*, or she uttered the lexeme *sorry*.

An important step in the XX century studies was the distinction between masculinity as a biological and as a gender category, which is the result of interaction of cultural, psychological and social principles. It has alternative components and a hierarchy of the main components.

The culture of the XXI century, especially mass media, creates in its products (books, films, articles and photos of glossy magazines) an image of the ideal masculinity, which is supposed to be followed by every one. Accepting this model, a man shows his agreement with the existing gender stratification of society.

V. Seidler in his work on the manifestations of masculinity in thought, language, and sexual relationships, says about the crisis of the phenomenon in the modern world: "We are left as observers, rather than participants, in our own lives" [5, 131]. We cannot but agree

with the fact that new technologies, changes in the value system limit the scope of application and manifestations of the “ego” for a man. The experience of masculinity is realized only in the surrogate form: a man takes on the role of a pack leader in online games or risky business projects. In this case, he uses the “language of action” [5, 133], when the purpose of the interaction is to prove something to somebody.

Seidler identifies as a main component in a hierarchical masculinity system such traits as independence (“showing we do not need anything from others”) [5, 141]), excellence and joy of challenge (“superiority over our wants, desires, emotions and feelings”) [5, 124]. Modern man compensates for the lack of adrenaline and quenches the thirst of domination in society participating in extreme sports and in historical reconstructions of medieval battles. For adventurers like these the Hollywood film industry has created many examples to follow, from the heroes of westerns to fantastic creatures, saving the world from one more disaster. All these methods of self-realization are only poor imitations of this activity, a pathetic semblance of life, because they have neither real danger, nor struggle in which the winner is the one who is physically and mentally stronger.

Overcoming the blurred boundaries between masculinity and femininity, the crisis and the revival of masculinity are in the center of Neil Gaiman’s novel “Neverwhere”. The protagonist is Richard Mayhew. His surname comes from French and means “Gift of God”. The personage gradually comes to understanding what he really strives for: independence, realization of the natural potential aggression (it is no longer necessary to suppress it, guided by the rules of modern etiquette), i.e. all the necessary elements of masculinity.

The storyline of the novel recalls the story of a young knight’s road to manhood. The reader can see how he leaves home, and is instructed by friends before parting, dreams of “great” future, and even meets with the “prophetess, Sibyl” – a homeless old woman who predicts: “You got a long way to go...” [4, 5]. This is the way to the discovery of the God’s gift in a person, acquisition of masculinity.

Richard Mayhew’s fate in the novel is shown in several different ways: in the form of real existence in *London Above* and adventures in *London Below*. This young man goes through a few turning points. For the first time he experiences a shock when he realizes that in his *London Above* nobody notices him (taxi do not stop, ATM does not accept the card, ex-girlfriend does not remember his name): “It’s

like I’ve become some kind of non-person” [4, 31]. This metaphor suggests that in fact he, as a man, has long ceased to exist. He is taken into account neither by his boss nor by his landlord, when he is evicted. He is an invisible, amorphous, sexless creature, causing contempt.

The dependence of the young man from the others is expressed in the text of the novel on the lexical and grammatical level. As the main characteristics of the masculine verbal behavior Seidler emphasizes restraint in the manifestation of a number of emotions: “mask emotions other than anger and hide quests for intimacy with others” [5, 141]. Richard Mayhew at the beginning of the story, on the contrary, is very emotional in the statements. This can be seen in a large number of parenthetical structures, signaling the uncertainty (“I mean”, “I think”), incomplete sentences which show confusion, with a large number of homogeneous members forming the gradation (“I could not get a taxi this morning, and then the office, and the Tube and – ...”). He kept apologizing for something in front of his colleagues and his girlfriend Jessica: “I’m sorry”, which is also characteristic of the “female” speech. In a moment of crisis, he rushes through the city in search of a kindred spirit, which would not ignore him, repeating his own name, desperately urging others to attract their attention, to hear him: “Listen”, “Look”, “I need to talk”. All ends in a helpless “I do not know what to do” [4, 35].

J. Coates sees the masculine purpose of the communication as the search for recognition among the “tribesmen” [1, 2] and building a hierarchy [1, 141]. In describing the role of Richard in a relationship with Jessica the author uses the verbs “trail”, “accompany” (which is used twice), the form of the passive voice “had been awed” [4, 9], which indicates the low status of the personage, he is on the very last step of the social ladder. The girl in this situation dictates the rules of the game, trying to make him fit the model of a “perfect guy”. She chooses for her man books, clothes, tells him what to do to succeed and when to laugh, when to be quiet, and confronts him with a choice. Her activities are aimed at the transformation of the object. All the verbs she uses are only in the form of the active voice: *gave*, *told*, *would pick out*. Complete loss of independence becomes even more evident, as Gaiman uses words like *drag*, *tugged into motion*, when Jessica takes Richard to the restaurant [4, 14]. To create a picture full of sarcasm the author shows how a girl drags the young man, like a tugboat pulls a heavy barge. Only her speech contains modal verbs

with the imperative meaning of categorical obligation: “he *should* wear, *must* make sure, laugh, dial 999, you put that girl down”; ob-scene language: “You are an *idiot*” [4, 15].

The whole stream of instructions from his companion makes contrast with the male personage’s sentences containing two or three words: “She’s hurt”, “Look”, “She’s bleeding” [4, 15]. As he has to repeat everything twice, it can be concluded that the “companion” is absolutely deaf to his point of view and to the needs of others. Thus, Gaiman underlines the lack of dominance in the male personage’s verbal behavior. Aggressiveness and brutality as masculine features appear only in the woman’s discourse.

Substitution of roles continues further in London Below. The name “Richard” (Rycharde) goes back to the proto-Germanic roots *rik – “ruler” and *harthu – “hard” (stern ruler), but the main character is not a Leader, but a Follower in the world below – a weak, sometimes hysterical, lost in his strivings. The role of a leader again belongs to a woman. This is a guide in the dark city – teenager Anaesthesia, bodyguard – militant Hunter, the leader – Door. Even a rat, which scours the sewage, is more respected by the strange locals than Richard.

One of the symbolic scenes takes place when Richard talks on the phone with Croup. First, in response to the killer’s words he *threatens* to call the police. Croup remarks: “... but I’d hate you to think we are making a threat ... We’re making a promise” [4, 38]. Croates attributes “promise” to so-called “trouser words” (masculine words) [1, 131]. It’s not just the intent but understanding that every action or threat should be carried out. The result must be achieved.

Up to a certain point almost all the other male characters in the novel represent a grotesque caricature of the archetypes traditionally opposed to femininity. The Earl is a half-mad old man, who almost lost his memory, the lord, riding with his retinue of elderly knights on the subway; the killing machine – a half-animal Croup, pulverizing with his teeth the statue of the Tang Dynasty into powder. At first glance it seems that the only positive character is Door’s father, as for the sake of his memory she decided to avenge the killers of the family. However, he himself appears in the role of a victim because of his naivety. It is symbolic that in the suicide video message to his daughter, he does not speak in his voice and Vandemar’s voice helps to trap the girl.

Every crisis in Richard’s world view is indicated by Gaiman in the images and symbols

that are associated with the urban environment. These are bridges, the station BLACK-FRIARS, District metro lines, the maze, at the end of which there is the bloodthirsty monster; the doorway at the end of the novel. All these man-made objects imply the choice of a situation change, and the link between the worlds.

The most important turning point in Richard’s life – the rejection of “powerlessness, meaninglessness and uncertainty” [2, 6] – occurs during the test at the station of the London Underground. It turns out that the meeting with himself is still much worse than a host of monsters. It is difficult to reconcile with the one who is “the-other-Richard-who-wasn’t-him” [4, 112]. The second self cannot be deceived. The apotheosis of Richard’s depression is the moment of epiphany when the station advertising signs he sees show some suicidal slogans: “BE A MAN-DO YOURSELF IN. HAVE A FATAL ACCIDENT TODAY” [4, 114]. Racing through the dark tunnel, the train can stop his pain in an instant. However, the quartz bead in his pocket, the only reminder of the deceased Anesthesia, reminds him that the way of the warrior is thorny and full of suffering, and he should go for it, gritting his teeth in pain. Suicide in this case is the simplest, but wrong way to solve his internal problems. So Richard fearlessly enters the train full of dead men, sighing: “I I think I got through it...” [4, 115]. Hence it is logical that he rejects self-pity on the part of the abbot, saying: “- I am not ... not the poor creature ...” [4, 327]. We see that the personage of the novel has already got rid of the role of the victim. He is to take another step and see who he really is: “who am I?” [4, 115].

Fight with the Beast in the maze is crucial to the determination of Richard. On the way to the angel’s dungeon Richard is in the company of two men: Hunter and Marquis. He was the only one completely unarmed. The Marquis has a famed for centuries long bow, which had brought so many victories to the English in the Hundred Years War, as it punched steel plate armor of the French easily. The Hunter has daggers and a spear, for which she had committed treason. Weapon has always been sacred to a warrior. It was given a name and was decorated with ornate patterns, it was a desirable award for valor, and was placed in a grave mound after a leader’s death. Hunter treats her weapon like something precious: she calls the knife by a feminine personal pronoun (*she, her*). It is more important for her than a human life, loyalty, love. That’s why not the Hunter but Richard, who makes it to the victory over his childhood terror, for the sake of saving the

lives of those who were dear to him. He carries out an ancient magic ritual without any disgust; the blood of the defeated beast helps him to find a way out of the maze.

There is a final transformation of a miserable spineless creature, bored in the limited space of the London apartments and offices, into the Warrior: "... So now you're the greatest hunter in London Below, The Warrior" [4, 143]. His head is throbbing with some melody of an ancient song which Gaiman has chosen as the second epigraph to the novel. The soul of the hunter, warrior is free from the confines of progress and stereotypes imposed by modern society: "he could be anyone at all-able to try on any identity; ... And in waking he found that he was Richard Mayhew, whoever that was, whatever that meant" [4, 151]. It seems that in this way the plot is "looped", having exhausted itself, if not the next, full of bitter irony, dissonant note in this majestic hymn of victory, – Richard's knighting ceremony by the Earl. Firstly, the comic effect is created by the description of the situation: the "action" returns to the same London subway car that immediately detracts us from the solemnity of the occasion; secondly, it's in the tone of Earl's speech: "Sir Richard of Maybury With this knife I do give to you the freedom of the Underside May you be allowed to walk freely, without let or hindrance and so on..... and so forth et cetera blah blah blah, "he trailed of vaguely" [4, 155]. The following "blah blah blah" completely destroys the gravity of what is happening, turning the medieval saga into a comic.

Gaiman shows us that history takes the form of a spiral. So if Richard in his new identity stayed in London Above, having become a more confident person, whose opinion is respected, with a new, higher status, he would again be deadlocked in the dull monotony of everyday reality. Anyway something constantly troubled him not letting him unpack his possessions in the old apartment, making him ask "strange" questions.

The verbal behavior of the protagonist changes radically. During the last meeting with Jessica he makes reticent, brief remarks "no", "yes". However, the reader understands

that the situation is totally different compared with the way it happened in the first chapters of the novel. Here Richard is full of confidence, categorical; he dominates due to significant pauses before formulating his thoughts. The protagonist has no doubt that he is right. Now he dictates how to act: "You keep it, Jessica" [4, 162]. His masculine verbal strategy is even more evident when his former girlfriend turns to a typically feminine manner of a conversation. She uses the subjunctive mood ("well, if things worked out, well, perhaps one day you'd give it back to me", modal verbs, and lexemes with the meaning of the possibility of committing the action (may, perhaps), fillers (well, ...) and tag-questions ("It's not important, though? Is it?") [4, 162], demonstrating her weakness and vulnerability.

Thus, Gaiman sees the crisis of masculinity in the modern world, since it is no longer given as a gift but requires constant confirmation. On the pages of the novel we see the tragedy of a failed personality: an amorphous, invisible being, worthy only of contempt. However, according to the writer, masculinity should not be seen as some kind of an "anti-femininity" [3, 3]. He is inclined to believe that the acquisition of his own voice for the man at this stage of development of society is possible only through escapism, flight into a different reality. For Gaiman's personage the platform for dominant masculinity is a fantastic world London Below, where he can realize himself as a hunter, warrior and leader. The awakened masculinity leads Richard to cut a door in the wall, frantically pound his fists on the brickwork, begging to let him back to Neverwhere – into the world of battles and desperate acts, real feelings, defeats and victories.

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