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ГЕНДЕРНОЕ НЕРАВЕНСТВО В АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ СЕРЕДИНЫ 20 ВЕКА

В статье рассматриваются качественные и количественные характеристики женских и мужских персонажей в художественном дискурсе Нила Кэссиди и Джексона Керуака – двух главных писателей поколения «битников».

Ключевые слова: художественный дискурс, гендер, языковая личность, бит-поколение.

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GENDER INEQUALITY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE MID 20TH CENTURY

Abstract: The paper studies the difference between the quality and the quantity of speech characteristics of male and female

characters in fictional discourse of Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac - two key-writers of Beat generation.

Key words: fictional discourse, gender, language personality, beat-generation.

Introduction

Though the 19th amendment to Constitution, giving American women the right to vote, opening new horizons and expanding the boundaries, passed in 1920 it was not until the late 60s when the status of women really changed in the society, women's rights started to have a real impact on American life and to be taken seriously. During the 1950s the majority of women stayed at home taking care of their husbands, children and houses but in the beginning of 1970s this cult of home-fire stopped dominating and more and more women managed to combine different jobs and the household [1, 326-333].

Definitely this change was connected with many other processes in the society and the altering world of the middle of the 20th century was reflected in fictional discourse of the writers who were the witnesses and active participants of the new coming era.

The most influential group of authors during the post World War II period in US was the Beat Generation whose appearance on literary stage coincided with the «birth of new America and new American consciousness» [2, 13]. Writers of Beat Generation proclaimed rejection of traditional and material values, spiritual and sexual freedom and their writing style was characterized by tendency to epatage, sincerity and frankness. Many of their books are semi-autobiographical, thus by analyzing the characters and their speech in their novels we can draw conclusions on the role of women in the life of «Beat» authors and in the society in general.

Empiric material

Our study is based on the only book by Neal Cassady [3], one of the major figures of the Beat Generation, protagonist and inspiration for many characters in fiction of other «Beat» writers and on 4 books by Jack Kerouac [4; 5; 6; 7], the leader of the literature and social movement of the «Beats» who like Elvis Presley and James Dean became an image icon for his contemporaries [8, 68].

Results and discussion

Firstly, let us consider the most vivid expression on the obvious discrimination of women in the fictional discourse mentioned above, i.e. the quantity factor. In Neal Cassady's novel «The First Third» only 19 % of speech characteristics belong to women characters. In Jack Kerouac's fiction that number accounts to 15,6 %. The number of personal pronouns and possessive pronouns and adjectives in characters' speech can also be illustrative. In the studied speech characteristics of both male and female characters created by Neal Cassady such personal pronouns and possessive pronouns and adjectives as «she» and «her» are not detected at all. In the analyzed novels by Jack Kerouac lexical units «he», «his», «him» can be found in 14 % of male characters' speech characteristics but the percentage of such lexical units as «she» and «her» is much lower - only 3,9 %. Female characters also tend to speak about the men's world, the numbers are 19 % and 5,1 % respectively.

One more factor which is closely connected with the usage of pronouns and adjectives is the number of proper nouns in the characters' speech characteristics. Both in Cassady's and Kerouac's prose women almost never address each other by names. Only 18 cases of the use of proper female names by women characters were detected and 17 of them were found in the first novel by Jack Kerouac «The Town and the City», Neal Cassady's prose has none. In Kerouac's fictional discourse male

characters more often use female names not to address female characters but to discuss them among themselves:

«...In that time Dean is balling Marylou at the hotel and gives me time to change and dress. At one sharp he rushes from Marylou to Camille - of course neither one of them knows what's going on - and bangs her once, giving me time to arrive at one thirty. Then he comes out with me - first he has to beg with Camille, who's already started hating me - and we come here to talk till six in the morning. ...Then at six he goes back to Marylou - and he's going to spend all day tomorrow running around to get the necessary papers for their divorce. Marylou's all for it, but she insists on banging in the interim. She says she loves him. - so does Camille» [5, 43].

Women characters do not make any decisions even in such areas as sexual relations:

«Hey Ross you take Mardou home tonight I wanta make it with Rita for a change» [6, 23].

Secondly, the cognitive aspect of male and female characters' speech characteristics i.e. the quality factor must be considered. As women characters speak less in the authors' fictional discourse the reader can figure out that there are less concepts in their world view. Both authors describe men's feelings, thoughts and intensions in details, female characters, however, remain the objects of sexual pleasure with neither a full description of their appearance nor an interesting personality. Very few of them correspond to the stereotype of a good wife or a girlfriend and most of them seem to be dissatisfied with men around scolding them:

«That Gables, the darned old rascal, he'll be the death of me... kept me awake all last night with his creaking and moaning. I swear, some night the roof will fall right in bed on» [3, 8];

«When Tom's money runs out Ed'll be back. Damn fool - he doesn't know anything and never did» [5, 181];

«It's him or me goddamit» [6, 56].

Thus the number of concepts that are reflected in the speech of male and female characters is different. Having analyzed the speech acts of the characters of the books by both authors we can make a conclusion that such concepts as «family», «home», «disease» dominate in their fiction revealing the discrepancy of the Beat culture. On the one hand concepts «family» and «home» represent those values and features of the traditional society that the members of the movement want to escape from but stereotypes and ideas of a happy family life still keep prevailing even among the leaders of the movement. On the other hand the concepts of «disease» and «madness» were typical of the Beat culture because madness was understood by the Beat generation as freedom of an individual from the rules of the society. The expression of these concepts can be found in the speech of both male and female characters:

«Since, as our sad hearts know so well, dear son, there can be no home for you here beside your mother» [3, 30];

«Well, I hope - I sure wish I could - well, yes, if anything like that comes up I'll certainly come home - It will be the sensible thing to do - » [4, 245];

«Tomorrow. I hear music right now. Chords, melodies, chords— if I could hit the chords I hear, I'd be so great. Mad chords full of new sounds and all kinds of ... colors almost . . . » [5, 224].

Apart from these the concepts of men are quite diverse and include «food», «drinks», «literature», «drugs», «money», «work», «road», «music», «law». Women characters in the books by both authors are represented as less intelligent and their interests are less varied. The dominating concepts are «food» and «gender» thus showing the reader that the main thoughts of women should be cooking and building up the relationship with men. Syntactic and stylistic structure of the speech acts of the characters also depend on their gender. Women characters'

phrases are usually short and simple whereas men characters tend to use long complex sentences:

«Mankind will someday realize that we are actually in contact with the dead and with the other word, whatever it is; right now we could predict, if we only exerted enough mental will, what is going to happen within the next hundred years and be able to take steps to avoid all kinds of catastrophes. When a man dies he undergoes a mutation in his brain that we know nothing about now but which will be clear someday if scientists get on the ball. The bastards right now are only interested in seeing if they can blow up the world» [5, 146];

«It sounds silly to me» [5, 146].

Conclusions

Comparing the quantity and the quality of male and female speech characteristics the results showing gender inequality in the novels of the mid 20th century becomes obvious. Drawing a conclusion it can be mentioned that the most famous authors of the Beat generation grew up in a highly segregated society and apparently some conventions and stereotypes of woman's role in life of a man remained the same as it had been in their childhood. Though some changes in the traditional women's behaviour are reflected in their novels (women swear, use blatant and harsh words, travel along with the men having no definite purposes) women still stay unequal to men and are regarded as beautiful addition to the surroundings with plenty of restrictions imposed. The male characters easily find and leave girlfriends and never care about their feelings afterwards. Actually, the message encoded in fiction discourse of the writers of Beat generation contradicts the main ideas of the movement: removing taboos and liberating both sexes.

It has been proved by the researches that Western culture is man-centered [9, 124] and USA is characterized by a peculiar masculine culture [10, 29] and the validation of these conclusions

can definitely be seen in the books by American authors of the mid 20th century.

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