

Swede Levov's Tragic Fall from the "Paradise": Competing Narrative Discourses in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*

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Philip Roth has often been accused of misogyny. A close and unbiased reading of Roth's *American Pastoral*, however, reveals that beneath its surface patriarchal narrative discourse simmers an undercurrent of a female subtext, which engages a dialogue as well as a confrontation with its counterpart. Swede Levov, worshipped as an indestructible, active and masculine semi-god, turns out to be weak, passive and indecisive, while the women belittled by him are actually independent, insightful, wise and proactive. Such patriarchal binary oppositions as male/female, active/passive, strong/weak having been subverted, patriarchal myth and authority represented by Levov has thus been deconstructed and the gender politics has been rectified. Women in the novel win the domination held by the male protagonist Levov, the narrator Nathan Zuckerman.

Keywords: *American Pastoral*, patriarchal narrative discourse, masculinity, female narrative discourse, subtext

Introduction

Philip Roth (1933-2018) has long held a reputation of being a writer of "men's novels". His novels are mostly narrated by male characters, focusing mainly on the world of men, and he is thus "accused by many readers of stacking the deck against his female characters, contorting women's issues, and even engaging in blatant misogynist stereotypes" (Royal, 2010, p. 9). Roth is notorious for his flat women characters. It seems to be commonly agreed that "while Roth's male characters are famously vivid, so lifelike in fact as to prompt decades of critical inquiries into their fictionality, his female characters are mere types, never rising to the complexity or depth of the fully human" (Gooblar, 2012, p. 9). Julia Keller has perhaps most effectively expanded upon this argument, in her 2006 article in the *Chicago Tribune* titled "Philip Roth Hates Women," Keller claims that "his (Roth's) women are incomplete. They come with two legs, two arms, two breasts and no soul" (2006). She believes that "they generally exist only to serve or to annoy men. Actually, they don't seem to exist at all, independent of men" (Keller, 2006). In her review of *The Dying Animal* in *Guardian*, Linda Grant claims that "for Roth, women are always the art, never the artist; always—to use a term from the feminist 1970s—the sexual object rather than the sexual self" (Grant, 2001).

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Critics tend to characterize Roth's portrayal of women in dichotomous terms. Sondra G. S. Bleich wrote in *New York Times* in 1981: "Roth's women either materialize out of a Dewing landscape, so ethereal as to be unattainable, or lunge at us from a De Kooning abstract, so gross as to be totally undesirable. In either case, they are unreal" (Bleich, 1981, p. 28). These dichotomous terms are echoed repeatedly by other critics. George Stade holds that Roth's women fall into two polar camps, "one vicious and alluring, the other virtuous and boring" (Stade, 1981, p. 1). Hermione Lee, interviewing Roth in 1984, employed similar terms in characterizing the women in Roth's fiction: "There's the woman who cooks and consoles and is sane and calming, or the other kind of woman, the dangerous maniac, the obstructor" (Roth, 2001, p. 132).

However, such a one-sided reading of Roth's fictions fails to do them justice. Derek Parker Royal raises our awareness of a "sorely neglected area" in Roth criticism—"a serious assessment of the novelist's handling of female characters and gender relations" (Royal, 2010, p. 9). Some Roth critics endeavor to address this critical gap and provide new perspectives on Roth's representation of women. Debra Shostak notes that Roth's "attention to the insatiable, transgressive, and often stultified appetites of men has laid him open to charges of misogyny, especially in his early work" (Shostak, 2007, p. 113). She admits that Roth's male characters "project their fears" onto women as a way of attempting to clarify their own shaky definitions of their masculinity. But the flatness of the female characters is the product of stories told "almost exclusively through the male character's point of view, if not literally in a first-person voice, then as mediated through the focalized consciousness of the male protagonist" (Shostak, 2007, p. 112). What this does, Shostak claims, is put some distances between the reader and the conceptions of women put forward in the fiction. In this way, "Roth's work can appear as much a prescient critique of misogynist attitudes as a purveyor of them" (Shostak, 2007, p. 112). As Marshall Bruce Gentry has pointed out, Roth's representation of women, and of gender roles in a broader sense, are quite complicated and should not be discounted as merely "anti-woman" or "male-centered" (Gentry, 2010, pp. 74-83).

American Pastoral, the 1997 Pulitzer Prize winner, is perhaps one of the most read fictions in light of feminism. Marshall Bruce Gentry regards *American Pastoral* as "a beautiful novel" and maintains that its beauty is "in part because of its feminist subversion of male authority" (Gentry, 2010, p. 76). Gentry sees the women Dawn, Merry, and Marcia Umanhoff as the true heroes in the tale, for they are the ones who challenge both Levov's male attempt to mold the women into conventional gender roles and their self-serving acceptance of the inequities of capitalism (Gentry, 2010, p. 76). Christopher Eagle compares Merry in *American Pastoral* with the protagonist of Gail Jones' novel *Sorry*, arguing that "Roth and Jones deploy the stutter not only in gendered terms, as a symbol for the suppression of the female voice, but also as a broader symbol for the struggle to achieve political voice in the face of injustice" (Eagle, 2012, pp. 17-30). Sarah Bylund also discusses the figure of Merry Levov in *American Pastoral*, in particular her relationship with food and how she uses food as revolt to define herself against middle-class conventions as well as to free herself—even to self-destructive extent—from the subjugation of the body.

These more recent appraisals of Roth's works, in Royal's words, "serve as a much-needed corrective to the kind of shortsighted readings that labeled him as unfriendly to women" (Royal, 2010, pp. 9-10). This article will continue this practice of rereading Roth's *American Pastoral* in a new light, focusing on the women characters in the fiction. This article argues that instead of being unfriendly to his women characters, Roth has constructed a narrative that asks us to reflect on the distortions and misrepresentations of women. Besides the surface

patriarchal narrative constructed by Zuckerman and Swede Levov, there lies an undercurrent of a female subtext, which competes and engages a dialogue with its counterpart. Swede Levov, worshipped as an invincible, active and masculine semi-god, turns out to be weak, passive and indecisive, while the women belittled by him are actually independent, insightful, wise and proactive. Such patriarchal binary oppositions as male/female, active/passive, strong/weak having been subverted, patriarchal myth and authority represented by Swede Levov has thus been deconstructed and the gender politics has been rectified. Women in the novel win the domination held by the male protagonist Swede Levov and the narrator Nathan Zuckerman.

Swede Levov's Fall from the "Paradise Remembered"

American Pastoral is mainly about how the protagonist, Seymour Levov, a third generation Jewish immigrant and a romantic idealist growing up in Newark during World War II, endeavors to achieve assimilation and his American dream only to end up in disillusionment. Roth constructs the three-part narrative of Seymour Levov's Adamic fall from his paradise. Evoking both Genesis and Milton's epic, Roth titles the novel's three parts as "paradise remembered," "the fall," and "paradise lost," through which Levov stands as a Jewish American Adam who creates "his version of paradise" (Roth, 1998, p. 86) in the form of the American pastoral. Thanks to his flawless good looks and athletic prowess, Levov becomes the embodiment of the Newark Jewish community's hopes for assimilation. And when the quasi-mythic Levov later marries a former Miss New Jersey, inherits his father's glove factory, and moves into a stone house in the idyllic hamlet of Old Rimrock, the novel's narrator Nathan Zuckerman marvels at how Levov has indeed succeeded in achieving the assimilationist vision of the American dream. But then Levov's beloved daughter Merry destroys his seemingly innocent world by setting off a bomb that kills a local doctor. Overnight Levov is driven out of his longed-for American pastoral and into the indigenous American berserk. Levov spends the rest of his life agonizing over what on earth has propelled him out of the Edenic paradise.

The first part is narrated by a male narrator called Zuckerman, the perennial alter ego of Roth, in a first-person narrative. Told from Zuckerman's male perspective, the first part reveals Zuckerman's patriarchal ideology to the full. This part is replete with the blind worshipping of Levov's masculinity by Zuckerman as well as by the whole Newark Jewish community. Zuckerman glorifies Levov as a hero and an idol, and even sanctifies him as a god. He is not conscious of or is rather reluctant to accept Levov's weakness until at the end of the first part. He finally has to admit that Levov in his mind is merely his fantasy rather than a fact. The second and the third parts switch to a combination of an omniscient narration with Levov's third-person limited point of view, delving deep into his inner heart, presenting his self-reflection and self-analysis. The implied author is more receptive to the weaknesses of Levov, who, totally different from the hero Zuckerman worships, turns out to be indecisive, passive, unable to take initiatives, and with more of a feminine temperament. Roth claimed in an interview that his adoption of a narrator was intentional (Searls, 1992, p. 182). The shift from the first-person narrative in the first part to the third-person narrative in subsequent two parts is intentional and significant. As there is a stark difference between the fantasized Levov in Zuckerman's narration and the real Levov in the latter two parts, the implied author reveals the unreliability of Zuckerman's narration, insinuating that the patriarch-centered myth and the fictional paradise Levov and Zuckerman have taken great pains to build are

doomed and Levov is bound to fall out of "paradise" with independence and rebellion of female characters in the story.

In "paradise remembered," the narrator Zuckerman adopts a first-person narrative to create a god-like male character with athletic prowess, masculinity, and dazzling Marine Corps experience. Seymore Levov, a third-generation American Jewish immigrant has an anomalous face, which looks more like a Viking rather than a Jew, is thus nicknamed "the Swede". Unlike the traditional image of a weak Jewish scholar who is focused on academic achievement, the Swede is endowed with unusual athletic prowess, he "starred as end in football, center in basketball, and first baseman in baseball" (Roth, 1998, p. 3). He is "a magical name" in the Newark neighborhood (Roth, 1998, p. 3) with "great looks," "larger-than-lifeness" and "manly properties" (Roth, 1998, p. 86). Swede Levov is elevated into "the household Apollo of the Weequahic Jews" (Roth, 1998, p. 4). The high school cheerleaders support Levov with the "frenied adoration" (Roth, 1998, p. 4) and everywhere he looks, people are "in love with him" and shower him with "idolatrour adulation" (Roth, 1998, p. 5). For the Jewish community, Levov represents "the hopes and dreams of advancement and assimilation into the greater, and largely Gentile" (Royal, 2001, p. 4). Many years later even when Zuckerman has become a well-known writer, he is still obsessed with Levov his childhood hero. Despite his parents' strong opposition and infamous anti-Semitism in marine, Levov joins the Marine Corps to meet "manly patriotic challenge" and strive to be "one of the toughest of the tough" (Roth, 1998, p. 14). The Swede's success in Marine Corps and engagement with a gentile wife make him "all the more glamorously heroic" (Roth, 1998, p. 15). The Weequahic High School corridor and classrooms are resonate with the legend of the Swede. The Swede becomes "indestructible hero of the wartime Weequahic section, our neighborhood talisman, the legendary Swede" (Roth, 1998, p. 65).

Levov's myth as a school hero continues when he becomes a successful businessman after taking over his father's leather company. According to his brother Jerry, "At Newark Maid he was an absolute, unequivocal success. Charmed a lot of people into giving their all for Newark Maid. Very adroit businessman" (Roth, 1998, p. 67). "Everyone loves him, a perfectly decent person who could have escaped stupid guilt forever" (Roth, 1998, p. 68). Levov is all the more successful in realizing his American Dream by marrying a beauty queen, Miss New Jersey. "A Beautiful wife. A beautiful house. Runs his business like a charm...He was really living it out, his versions of paradise. This is how the successful people live" (Roth, 1998, p. 86). Levov's story fulfills all the male fantasy of success in life. In the first half of the first part, Zuckerman portrays a manly and indomitable hero who succeeds in school sports field, Marine Corps, and business.

As Zuckerman approaches Levov and gets to know more about him, the halo of Levov as a perfect and manly school hero begins to fade. Zuckerman starts to wonder whether he has "imagined an outright fantastical creature, lacking entirely the unique substantiality of the real thing; whether that meant my conception of the Swede was any more fallacious than the conception held by Jerry" (Roth, 1998, pp. 76-77). He confess, "I began gazing into his life—not his life as a god or demigod in whose triumphs one could exult as a boy but his life as another assailable man" (Roth, 1998, p. 89). From the more objective examination of the omniscient perspective and the conscious self-reflection of Levov's third-person point of view in the latter two parts of the novel, the reader gradually pieces together the real nature of Levov: he turns out to be passive, vulnerable, indecisive, obedient, and unable to take action.

First, Levov is unable to take initiative and always tends to settle for the reality passively. Jerry claims that Levov is a "passive" and "a socially-controlled character" who doesn't burst out and is "fatally attracted to responsibilities" (Roth, 1998, p. 72). Following his father's instruction, Levov gives up the offers to play professional ball after college to join the family glove business. When his daughter presses him to kiss her like he kisses her mother, Levov fails to reject her, instead he transgresses the boundary as a father and gives his 11-year-old daughter a passionate kiss on the lip, which later turns into his hidden torment and torture. When his daughter's friend Rita tries deliberately to seduce him, Levov passively succumbs to Rita's temptation, which leads to further transgression as to some extent Rita is the surrogate of his daughter. Just as Merry's speech therapist and Levov's mistress Sheila has said, "the influence you allow others to have on you, it's absolute" (Roth, 1998, p. 357). Levov reveals the stereotypical feminine feature of passivity.

Secondly, the seemingly powerful Levov is actually weak and vulnerable. Levov meets Rita to find out the whereabouts of his daughter, reflecting on himself, "A desperate man was giving himself over to a treacherous girl not because she could possibly begin to know what went wrong but because there was no one else to give himself over to" (Roth, 1998, p. 138). Merry's bombing devastates Levov and reduces him to depression. Zuckerman says Levov's nerve is shattered and "this man who, used himself mainly to conceal himself had been transformed into an impulsive, devitalized being in dire need of a blessing" (Roth, 1998, p. 29). Betrayed by his wonderful body that has furnished him with assurance, Levov seeks Zuckerman's help to write a biography for his father, so as to "grasp his dead father and call up the father's power to protect him" (Roth, 1998, p. 29). When Levov meets her daughter's speech therapist Sheila, he is so attracted by her wisdom and composure that he falls in love with her, just like a drowning man desperately clutching at a straw. The omniscient narrator comments, "immobilized, ineffectual, inert, estranged from those expansive blessings of openness and vigor conferred on him by his hyperoptimism. A lifetime's agility as a business man, as an athlete, as a U.S. Marine, had in way conditioned him for being a captive confined to a futureless box" (Roth, 1998, p. 337). The seemingly powerful and manly Levov is actually very frail and weak, with the stereotypical feminine properties ridiculed by the patriarchal society.

Being obsessed and encumbered with his school hero responsibility throughout his life, Levov conceals himself and rarely shows himself in his true colors. "You are a hero, so then you have to behave in some way—there is a prescription for it. You have to be modest, you have to be forbearing, you have to be deferential, you have to be understanding" (Roth, 1998, p. 79). Under the aura of a hero, Levov lives an unreal and double life. He wears masks to put on the perfect appearance to others. What agonizes him most is that his daughter Merry has blasted the perfect image he once worships. He tries to hold on to "the painstaking impersonation of impregnability", "elaborate false front of self-certainty" (Roth, 1998, p. 300).

From the contradiction and contrast between Levov's outer appearance and true face, the implied author reveals the false myth of male determination, bravery and strength in the patriarch-centered culture, thus deconstructs the binary opposition of positive / negative, decisive / hesitant, strong / frail, and active / passive. Levov steps down from the altar of a school hero and has a tragic fall from the "paradise". The readers witness "the brutality of the destruction of this indestructible man" (Roth, 1998, p. 83).

Female Narrative Discourse as a Subtext

Beneath the surface text of *American Pastoral*, there is a subtext—a female narrative discourse, which competes and forms a dialogic relation with the male narrative discourse represented by Zuckerman and Levov. With a strong confrontational nature, this dialogue reveals the contradictions and absurdity of the traditional male values, and revises the gender politics. The women in the works represented by Merry, Dawn, Rita, Marcia and Sheila are breaking through the barrier of male-centered tradition. They are independent and courageous to voice their opinions, fight for their own rights and pursue freedom and happiness.

The name of the family glove company is highly symbolic: Newark Maid. The glove is like a maid who is to be shaped by the glovemaking into the lady he intends her to be. "Swede expects his wife, Dawn, as well as his daughter and probably all women, like his gloves, to be the perfect products of his own manufacturing process" (Gentry, 2000, p. 79). Just as Sarah Bylund astutely analyzes, "If Merry is a 'glove' in her father's eyes, then her grandfather's statement that 'a Levov makes a glove that is perfect' certainly gains a new layer of meaning. Within her willful transformation into an overweight, slovenly teenager lies a kernel of a young girl rebelling against her father's expectations—not just those of her mother or society" (Bylund, 2010, p. 19).

Levov appears to be a benign and sacrificial father, he is actually authoritarian towards his daughter. "Whenever he saw her going too far he drew the line" (Roth, 1998, p. 104). He cuts his daughter's thoughts and actions like cutting gloves and leather. Instead of trying to understand and respect his daughter's anti-war thoughts and protests, Levov prevents Merry from going to New York in the name of love and family peace. In more than sixty conversations about New York trip, Levov keeps on questioning and grilling Merry and repeatedly uses commanding words, such as "never," "don't," "can't," in an attempt to control Merry's thoughts and actions. Merry confesses that "every day in this house is like being under house arrest" (Roth, 1998, p. 109). Levov's patriarchal oppression of her daughter leads to her further rebellion and resistance, and Merry eventually becomes Rimrock's bomber, setting a bomb explode in the middle-class living room.

Born in a middle-class "perfectionist" family, her father a school hero, her mother former Miss New Jersey, Merry grows up with the burden of high expectation. In her childhood, Merry tries hard to be her father's sweet little girl. She takes speech therapy lessons twice a week and keeps stuttering diaries diligently. She goes to ballet classes twice a week. She collects the photographs of Audrey Hepburn, an icon of elegance. "For months she went in and out of pretending to be gaminish instead of herself, daintily walking to her room like a wood sprite, smiling with meaningfully coy eyes into every reflecting surface, laughing what they can an 'infectious' laugh whenever her father said a word" (Roth, 1998, p. 95). Merry also tries to imitate Audrey Hepburn's charming way of singing "Moon River". But no matter how hard Merry tries, she can never become her father's ideal girl. She is hurt and frustrated and her stuttering turns even worse. Merry grows up to be an angry and rebellious teenager, refusing to obey all the rules.

Merry has three rebellious weapons against patriarch: through food and weight, stuttering, and participation in anti-war and revolutionary activities. Merry sees food as a weapon of self-liberation. From early childhood, Merry "ate almost nothing she was served at home" (Roth, 1998, p. 100), instead she would choose Americanized food which is unhealthy in her parents' eyes. To quote Sarah Bylund, "She is rejecting the food along with the parental concern and authority it represents...To some extent, Merry's food-propelled

insurrection is caused by her father's subtle, patriarchal oppressiveness and by her burgeoning middle-class guilt" (Bylun, 2010, pp. 18-19). Moreover, by eating tons of junk food purposefully to gain weight, Merry is protesting the Western female bodily narratives that promote the "you can never be too thin" adage. "Almost overnight she became large, a large, loping, slovenly sixteen-year-old, nearly six feet tall, nicknamed by her schoolmates Ho Chi Levov" (Roth, 1998, p. 100).

The expectations placed on Merry to be a sweet little girl reflect the kind of social restraints on young girls of her era to be demure not only in conduct but also in speech. To live up to the expectations, Merry has once tried desperately to overcome her stuttering, however, she later concludes that "what was deforming her life wasn't the stuttering but the futile effort to overcome it. The crazy effort" (Roth, 1998, p. 101). After Merry's awakening to liberation, "Vehemently she renounced the appearance and the allegiances of the good little girl who had tried so hard to be adorable and lovable like all the other good little Rimrock girls—renounced her meningless manners, her pretty social concerns, her family's 'bourgeois' values" (Roth, 1998, p. 101). Merry calmly accepts her stuttering, and even wields stuttering as a weapon to win the attention of her parents. Stuttering has become Merry's intentional way of manipulating her parents. From a feminist point of view, female stuttering is a representation of social oppression and represents the rejection of gender expectations. In patriarchal discourse, women are usually silent, and "making their voices" is a proxy of identity and power for repressed and silent female groups and individuals. Merry's stuttering is not only a symbol of the suppression of the female voice at the gender level, but also a symbol of an effort to win a political voice in the face of unfair treatment. Merry's stuttering unites the power struggle within the family with the broader political struggle for women's voice. No longer bothering with the ancient obstruction of stuttering, a brand new Merry "experienced not only her full freedom for the first time in her life but the exhilarating power of total self-certainty" (Roth, 1998, p. 101).

Merry's third weapon against patriarchal power is her independent thinking, political concern, and her participation in anti-war activities and some other political rallies. She finds her voice in the debate on politics with Levov. She sneers at her father's only concern about his own glove business, his indifference to the outside world as well as the ordinary people. Merry accuses her father of living a luxurious life by exploiting workers. When Levov prevents Merry from going to New York to take part in anti-Vietnam war activities, Merry accuses her father of considering only his middle-class family, with no sympathy for the pains of the Vietnam people. Merry loudly protests, "I want to be free" (Roth, 1998, p. 107) and "I'm not just one of Mom's dumb cows" (Roth, 1998, p. 109). She points out that Levov and the patriarch he represents merely do not want women to have their own thoughts. Merry asks his father, "What are you so angry about? That I might have a real idea of my own?" (Roth, 1998, p. 110). Levov's authority is challenged, he laments, "she is not in my power and she never was" (Roth, 1998, p. 256).

In the eyes of Zuckerman, Swede Levov's mother is, like his own mother, "a tidy housekeeper, impeccably well mannered, a nice-looking woman tremendously considerate of everyone's feelings, with a way of making her sons feel important—one of the many women of that era who never dreamed of being free of the great domestic enterprise centered on the children" (Roth, 1998, p. 10). The mothers of Levov and Zuckerman are both the ideal women, "angels at home," in a patriarchal society. According to Levov, his wife, Dawn, should also stay at home like his mother whose main concern is to tend her husband and children. Levov

dreams of living in a centuries-old stone house, "it looked indestructible, an impregnable house that could never burn to the ground and that had probably been standing there since the country began" (Roth, 1998, p. 190). The house is the symbol of Levov's pastoral dream, the embodiment of inviolable patriarchal power, also the epitome of male imagined society with women playing the role of "angel at home". Even when Swede Levov is still a high school sophomore, he has all kinds of fantasy about his future domestic life with a sweet daughter and a gentle wife. He could imagine "a daughter of his own running to kiss him, see her flinging herself at him, see himself carrying her on his shoulders into that house and straight on through the kitchen, where standing by the stove in her apron, preparing their dinner, would be the child's adoring mother" (Roth, 1998, p. 190). As Levov sees it, women should be willing and happy to play the role of wife and mother and live at home taking care of her husband and children.

However, locking his wife Dawn in the old stone house is only Levov's wishful thinking. Dawn does not like this lifestyle, instead she longs for a different one. Dawn wants "from life something other than to be the slavish mom to half a dozen kids and the nursemaid to a two-hundred-year-old house—she wanted to raise beef cattle. Because of her being introduced, no matter where they went, as 'a former Miss New Jersey,' she was sure that even though she had a bachelor's degree people were always dismissing her as a bathing beauty, a mind-less china doll, capable of doing nothing more productive for society than standing around looking pretty" (Roth, 1998, p. 194). Dawn does not want to be imprisoned in a dependent position. She wants to walk out of the stone house and raise cattle to prove that she is able to earn her own living. When local newspapers interview her on her cattle business, Dawn insists the reporter should not mention she was elected Miss New Jersey, however, the reporter fails to keep the promise, the caption under Dawn's photo reads, "Mrs Levov, the former Miss New Jersey of 1949, loves living in 170-year-old home, an environment which she says reflects the values of her family" (Roth, 1998, p. 204). It can be speculated that such a label is both welcomed by Levov as well as by the male-centered society. Dawn becomes Levov's family property, and her greatest characteristics are her beauty and her faithful following of the family values. For a patriarchal society, "she's nothing but a face" (Roth, 1998, p. 194). Women are objectified and reduced to the objects of gazing.

The Swede considers it is not only Dawn's great honor to be chosen Miss New Jersey, but also his own glory to have such a beauty queen as his wife. He is happy to show Dawn's photos as Miss New Jersey to guests because "they always made him so proud of her" (Roth, 1998, p. 405). Men want to have a beautiful wife to prove their success, satisfy their own vanity and show off their superiority to others. Levov does not understand Dawn, who actually competes in the beauty contest to win a college scholarship for her brother. She is resistant to the beauty contest. Dawn complains, "They were coaching me how to sit and how to stand, even how to listen... They didn't like the way I walked. I didn't care how I walked—I walked!" (Roth, 1998, p. 180). Dawn wants to be a self-reliant teacher, claiming, "I never wanted to be Miss America! I never want to marry anyone! But you wouldn't let me breathe—you wouldn't let me out of your sight... Do you know what Miss New Jersey did for my life? It ruined it... You have to make me a Princess" (Roth, 1998, p. 178). Dawn even donates all her former clothes when running Miss New Jersey to a charity. It is the Swede who is obsessed with vanity and the highlight of Dawn's era that is reluctant to give the clothes away.

Levov can not understand his daughter, nor can he understand his wife. He does not understand why Dawn goes to raise cattle, why she hates his beloved old stone house, and why she still feels lonely with him. Levov

has long lived in a self-centered patriarchal mansion, until one day this mansion disintegrates. In the pursuit of freedom and happiness, Dawn wants to reshape herself and builds a brand new house. If the previous beauty pageant has somewhat appealed to the male "gaze", this time Dawn has her face reshaped just to please herself and start a new life. In discussing the design of the new house with his neighbor Orcutt, she is full of expectation for a brand new life and has found the fun of life. Although Orcutt is far from being perfect, he at least tries to understand and appreciate Dawn's ideas. When Dawn discusses the lighting of the house, she repeatedly emphasizes "sunshine", a symbol of the wonderful outside world, implying that she hates the ancient dark stone house that Levov loves, and wishes for a brand new life. Dawn is determined to flee Levov's stone house to start a new life she longs for.

Swede Levov regards women as his personal property. When Levov finds Dawn has a love affair with Orcutt, he realizes he will lose Dawn and thinks, "if we even get those things by working our asses off for them, still never feel entitle to?" (Roth, 1998, p. 359) equating Dawn with things and lamenting he has no right to have them. Rita also accuses Levov of being selfish and treating her daughter as private property, "She is not a possession, you know—she's not property. She is not powerless anymore. You don't own Merry the way you own your Old Rimrock house and your Deal house and your Florida condo and your Newark factory" (Roth, 1998, p. 139).

Levov's patriarchal discourse is replete with derogatory words for women to demonize them, especially those women with independent minds. He calls his daughter "insane murderer," "devil" and "monster," blaming her for ruining his American dream. When he learns that his mistress Sheila has hidden Merry and helped her to escape after the bombing, he calls her an "icy bitch". His daughter's alleged associate Rita has also been compared to a "sheepdog". Levov thinks, "This completely insignificant little pebble!" (Roth, 1998, p. 134). The exclamation mark is used in the original to indicate Levov's free indirect speech, revealing Levov's belittling of and contempt towards women. But even Levov can't imagine that he will fall in Rita's control, whether to meet him or not, when and where to meet, and how much Levov can know about Merry are all controlled by Rita. Levov can do nothing but follow Rita's instruction passively. When Rita deliberately lures him to taunt his decent middle class status (which might be Merry's idea), Levov fails to resist the temptation. Levov has again passively transgressed the boundary by having sex with his daughter's friend. Rita is in some sense an extension of Merry's self, hence, Levov's image as a "responsible great father" tumbles. Barry is Levov's best friend in high school and his wife Marcia is a literature professor and anti-war personage. In Levov's eyes, Barry condescends to marry Marcia, who is "difficult", wearing heavy glasses, a very ugly robe, and is a "oddball from another world" (Roth, 1998, p. 341). Levov regards Marcia as the opposite of Dawn just because she does not conform to the traditional image of woman of the object of male desire. Perhaps Levov dislikes Marcia because of two reasons: Firstly, Levov thinks that Marcia's anti-war remarks might be inflammatory to Merry. Secondly, Marcia is too opinionated, and rebellious against tradition. Levov seems to be afraid of autonomous, intelligent and independent women, feeling his male authority threatened because in their presence Levov has to "battle to stay awake" (Roth, 1998, p. 340).

Sheila is Merry's speech therapist, replacing Audrey Hepburn as Melie's heroine. Levov is so attracted by Sheila's wisdom and composure that he is determined to lose his mind and fall in love with Sheila to escape his dilemma. However, Sheila is a candid rather than a romantic mistress. She asks Levov to face the fact,

reminding Levov that the love towards her does not help and that he is "to sabotage everything" (Roth, 1998, p. 356). Merry hides in Sheila's house after the Rimrock bombing, but Sheila tells Levov nothing. Sheila's decision to keep Levov out of the fact implies women are more courageous to face the reality than the fantasy-embracing men.

Conclusion

Swede Levov appears to be powerful, decisive, masculine and invincible in the sports field, in Marine Corps, and in his glove industry, but turns out to be frail, passive, indecisive, and vulnerable. The paradox between Levov's outer appearance and true inner self fills the text with tension, and Levov's masculinity is deconstructed. In *American Pastoral*, under the surface text of patriarchal narrative discourse, there is a subtext of female narrative discourse, which competes and forms a dialogic relation with patriarchal narrative discourse. Regarding his wife and daughter as his private properties, Levov attempts to control both of them, however, they escape from his control in pursuit of their own freedom and happiness. His mistress, Sheila, whom he regards as a lifeline and spiritual mentor, remains independent and free from his life. The patriarch-centered myth constructed by Levov and Zuckerman disintegrates. If we disregard the stereotyped view of Roth being a misogynist, and read the subtext of *American Pastoral*, we can find out that Roth has actually written a feminist fiction which reveals the hypocrisy and irrationality of Levov and the male-centered society he represents. The patriarchal society represented by Swede Levov has at least indirectly caused the female suffering and nightmares. The competing subtext of a powerful female narrative discourse reveals women's awakening consciousness and independence, their courageous effort to make their counter-voices heard in family and social affairs, and brave pursuit of their own happiness and universal well-being. Levov's imagined pastoral falls into an elegy because of the departure of his daughter and wife. No wonder Levov's "paradise" of an ancient stone house has been turned into "paradise lost" due to the lack of gender equality and dialogue.

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