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Pretty, Petite, Polite Dawn: Beauty Pageants, Housewifery and the Feminine Mystique in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*

DIOGO OLIVEIRA

University of Porto

ABSTRACT: This article studies gender roles in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, published in 1997. It addresses the housewife condition in 1960s America through the character of Dawn Dwyer, drawing from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, and the second edition of Silvia Federici's *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, published in 2020. Moreover, it analyses how American history is told and fictionalized in Roth's work, comparing the scenes from the novel to Friedan's non-fiction narrative of the 1960s. This analysis builds on previous works on gender roles in Roth's literature, aiming to contribute to the body of literature on the American celebrated author.

KEYWORDS: Philip Roth, Betty Friedan, Silvia Federici, *American Pastoral*, *The Feminine Mystique*.

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa os papéis de género em *American Pastoral* de Philip Roth, publicada em 1997, abordando a condição da dona de casa na América dos anos 1960 através da personagem Dawn Dwyer, apoiando-se numa leitura de *The Feminine Mystique* de Betty Friedan, publicado em 1963, e na segunda edição de Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* de 2020. Ademais, este artigo estuda como Roth trata e ficciona a história americana e contracultura em *American Pastoral*, através da comparação de episódios do romance com a narrativa verídica de Friedan dos anos 1960. Este estudo fundamenta-se em trabalhos anteriores sobre papéis de género na literatura de Roth, a fim de contribuir para o corpo de literatura sobre o celebrado autor americano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Philip Roth, Betty Friedan, Silvia Federici, *American Pastoral*, *The Feminine Mystique*.



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1. INTRODUCTION

To Philip Roth, during the 1960s, “life was becoming so fantastic that it was outstripping the capacity of the novelist’s imagination” (Roth 1960, qtd. in Alexander 1999, 183). Therefore, the novelist waited until the late 1990s to explore this turbulent period through fiction. When writing *American Pastoral*, the author enhanced his fiction to a “fake autobiography, false history (...), half-imaginary existence out of the actual drama of my life” (Roth, in *ibidem*). The novel opens the *American Trilogy* and is followed by *I Married a Communist* (1998) and *The Human Stain* (2000). In this series, Roth explored the three events that marked his generation the most: the Vietnam War and 1960s counterculture, McCarthyism in the 1950s, and the impeachment of Bill Clinton, respectively. Starting with *American Pastoral*, the study of Roth’s work seemed to shift from “What is he saying about the Jews” to “What is he saying about America”, as argued by Laura Tanenbaum (2004, 42). Still, the author warns the reader that his work is “[not] a report card about America but [rather] a work of fiction about America” (Roth 2000, qtd. in Aliko Varvogli 2007, 102).

In “Paradigmas Masculinos, Mulheres Revolucionárias e a Mística Feminina: História e Gênero em *American Pastoral*”, the third chapter of my Master's dissertation, I delved into the character of Dawn Dwyer and her importance in understanding gender roles in this American context. This article springs from that research. It seems to me that, for the study of this specific character, the wife of the protagonist Seymour “Swede” Levov, a parallel reading of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), written to challenge the notion that “fulfillment as a woman had only one definition for American women after 1949 – the housewife-mother” is required (Friedan 1965, 70). Dawn, as a housewife (who will later build a business, dissatisfied with her path until then) and former Miss New Jersey, fits fully into some of the categories addressed by Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, and more specifically, in the chapters “The Problem That Has No Name” and “The Happy Housewife Heroine”. To compliment this approach, the study *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (2020) by Silvia Federici will also be relevant in theoretical terms, focusing on the essay “Wages Against Housework”, written in 1975.

2. FROM MISS NEW JERSEY TO OLD RIMROCK HOUSEWIFE: A PORTRAIT OF DAWN DWYER

Dawn appears in the first pages of the novel, in Nathan Zuckerman's long nostalgic description of Swede Levov, when Zuckerman describes her as a *shiksa* and as Miss New Jersey: "Swede's marriage to Miss New Jersey. Before competing at Atlantic City for the 1949 Miss America title, she had been Miss Union County and Spring A queen at Upsala. From Elizabeth. A *shiksa*. Dawn Dwyer. He'd done it" (Roth 2019, 15). Dawn is presented to the reader, first, as an award that Swede received, to be seen later as one of the novel's antagonists, with Zuckerman only mentioning the character's higher education and musical career more than a hundred pages after introducing her: "I had the job. I had it waiting. To teach kids music in the Elizabeth system (...) I never wanted to be Miss America!" (Roth 2019, 78). This first section of the article intends to explore precisely the deconstruction of these two antagonistic conceptions that recall old dichotomies: woman/devil or temptation/destruction. These dichotomies are very popular female stereotypes in cinema and literature, as in the case of Marlene Dietrich, Louise Brooks, and Greta Garbo (Macedo and Amaral 2005, 135). According to the *femme fatale* stereotype, the woman is someone who wants/needs to be desired, having her affection vilified when she does not return the feeling. Consequently, the woman has to be punished for rejecting male advances, ending up ruined because she neither accepts nor conforms to the patriarchal role that is required of her, whether it is motherhood or domestic work. As Macedo and Amaral argue, in *Dicionário da Crítica Feminista*, the two fundamental characteristics of the *femme fatale* are coldness and extreme beauty (2005, 135). In *American Pastoral*, we find two *femme fatales*: Merry, characterized by her coldness, and Dawn, denoted by extreme beauty, both of whom reject Swede's affection.

In the essay "Femmes Fatales" published in *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982), Angela Carter tells us about *Earth Spirit* (1895) by the German Frank Wedekind, the first of two plays about Lulu, a prostitute, against the backdrop of the case of Jack the Ripper. Carter argues Lulu is a *femme fatale* since she "has a man wholly in her power" (Wedekind 1895, qtd. by Carter 1982, 119). Fate leads her into the hands of the murderer, Jack the Ripper, as if it were a punishment, leading Carter to the following conclusion:

So, Lulu (...) will be murdered by a sexual maniac, a man whose repression has turned into a monstrous scourge of whores (...). She pays the price of expressing an unrepressed sexuality in a society that distorts sexuality. This is the true source of the fatality of the femme fatale: that she lives her life in such a way that her freedom reveals to others their lack of liberty. So, her sexuality is (...) destructive, not in itself but in its effects. (1982, 123)

In *American Pastoral*, it is not only Swede who is mistaken and who looks at his wife as an object since, due to her participation in the beauty contest, like Lulu, Dawn is stuck in the condition of objectification by all people that surround her, leading to a certain kind of condemnation. When a local newspaper interviews her, the beauty contest is remembered despite her express refusal:

She had consented to be interviewed only if the journalist promised not to mention her having been Miss New Jersey of 1949 (...) the caption read, "Mrs. Levov, the former Miss New Jersey of 1949, loves living in a 170-year-old home, an environment that she says reflects the values of her family". (2019, 204)

The reader is also told that Dawn tries to resume the narrative in her favor and mentions that she never had the ambition to be Miss America:

[I]t didn't matter what she said or how often she mentioned the piano: nobody believed her. Nobody believed that she ever wanted to look better than everybody else (...). "For some strange reason," she said, "the women always think that because I'm a former whatever I want their husbands". (2019, 194-195)

However, we can see that who referred Dawn to this condition was society itself: "All through high school people were telling me, 'You should be Miss America.' I thought it was ridiculous. Based on what should I be Miss America? I was a clerk in a dry-goods store after school" (Roth 2019, 179). In this way, the pressure to live up to the expectations of the people around her reaches Dawn, who, during her campaign to be Miss America, even confesses to Swede, "I hate to let them down" (*idem*, 183).

Nevertheless, as Marshall Bruce Gentry argues, much of the pressure for Dawn to remain in the condition of beauty queen comes from Swede himself, and there are numerous situations during the novel in which this happens, according to Zuckerman's

narrative (2000, 75). For example, Dawn refuses to return to the skin of Miss New Jersey, although Swede insists that she does so: “she never wore the white Catalina one-piece suit that she’d worn on the runway in Atlantic City, with the logo just below the hip (...). He loved that bathing suit (...), but after Atlantic City, she never put it again” (Roth 2019, 195). Zuckerman hints that the beauty pageant logo is something Swede likes to see, almost as if it were a reminder of Dawn's status.

On the other hand, Roth does not write Dawn exclusively as a victim. Her participation in the beauty pageant shapes the way Dawn tries to raise her daughter, Merry, a thesis that is defended by Rita Cohen, a character who claims to be a disciple of the Levovs’ daughter. During their meeting with Swede, Cohen mentions that Merry's education was directed towards living as a successor to her parents’ good looks: “the little shirtwaist dresses (...) disgusted she couldn't have a baby beauty queen that could grow up in her image to become Miss Rimrock” (*idem*, 136). Swede mentions his wife's cattle business, which Cohen dismisses as a middle-class fantasy, to try to reverse the idea that people around Dawn have of her as a beauty queen. Cohen's accusations reach a climax when she accuses Dawn of never having loved her daughter, as she could never live to achieve her mother's legacy, due to her stuttering and poor appearance, concluding that Merry is the antithesis of her parents: “You have a *shiksa* wife, Swede, but you didn't get a *shiksa* daughter” (*idem*, 138).

Likewise, Dawn can be cruel to the other contestants of the Miss America pageant, even claiming, in confidence with her husband, the prize of the contest for herself: “Those tall girls with their big feet. None of them gifted. All of them so chummy!” (*idem*, 180). Therefore, Dawn manages to get into the shoes of Miss New Jersey and takes the contest seriously enough to evaluate her performance, also going so far as to objectify herself in the process: “I was so introverted. I was so unpolished” (*ibidem*). Finally, Dawn even admits that the monetary prize for one of the categories of the contest would be worth all the humiliation: “imagine if I'd won the booby prize. Though (...) it would have been nice to bring home the thousand dollars” (*idem*, 94). Gentry alludes to Roth’s “Coronation on Channel Two” to argue that the author shares the opinion of the character Marcia Umanoff, that beauty pageants border on prostitution (2000, 76).

Bill Orcutt appears late in the novel but turns out to be one of the most important characters, as he is the one who provokes an abrupt end to the Levovs’ marriage by having

an extramarital affair with Dawn. At first, Dawn's impression of Orcutt is not favorable: “He works so hard to be one-dimensional. That Wasp blandness. Living completely off what they once were” (Roth 2019, 336). If Swede fantasizes about being Johnny Appleseed, who, wherever he goes, leaves seeds to plant trees, Orcutt's legacy is the graves of his family members. Swede has the fantasy, but Orcutt presents something concrete. This description of Orcutt reminds the reader of Thomas Buchanan's in *The Great Gatsby*:

His family was enormously wealthy (...). Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty, with a hard mouth and a supercilious manner (...). His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward the people he liked. (1992, 11)

Similarly, Orcutt's artistic work differs from Swede's manual work, with one man painting abstracts and the other making gloves in downtown Newark. During their time dating, Swede offers Dawn a pair of Newark Maid gloves, but at the end of the marriage, the female character is surrendered to Orcutt's abstract art, clashing with the worldview of the Levovs: “That it isn't finished,’ said Dawn, ‘is the idea, Lou” (Roth 2019, 324). Likewise, Zuckerman mentions that Orcutt's Meditation #27 replaces Merry's oil painting.

Lastly, it is important to mention that the union of Swede and Dawn raised criticism from both their families, with religion being a fundamental issue, but in different magnitudes. Dawn's mother labels her as the family's rebel: “But her choice was to fall in love with and marry Seymour Levov of Newark instead (...) of Catholic boys” (*idem*, 197). In turn, Lou Levov, Swede's father, is more vocal about his son's choices, subjecting Dawn to an interrogation reported for over ten pages in *American Pastoral*. Before it started, the union between Swede and Dawn already seemed doomed. The concerns about religion illustrate the generation gap between the young couple and their parents, as Jerry Levov says: “She's post-Catholic, he's post-Jewish” (*idem*, 73).

Besides the relationship between the two, if the reader meditates on the tumultuous relationship between Dawn and Merry, they will realize that there are not many scenes between mother and daughter. We also do not know to what extent Swede did not mediate the mother-daughter relationship. For example, Swede never tells Dawn that he has discovered Merry's whereabouts, refusing to take her to her daughter. However, it is difficult to disagree with Rita Cohen's opinion on Dawn and Merry's

relationship, as there are no great moments of tenderness between them. For example, Marcia Umanoff fantasizes about Merry being her daughter, as this would explain her revolutionary side because Dawn does not have that in her: “For Marcia to have spawned a self-styled revolutionary – yes had Merry been raised within earshot of Marcia's mouth (...) but Dawn? Pretty, petite, unpolitical Dawn” (Roth 2019, 340).

The Dawn-Merry relationship enters Swede's idyllic pastoral fantasy in some moments, for example, when Roth opens “Paradise Lost”¹ with a scene between mother and daughter: “Dawn's grazing along the hill (...) Merry, in her pajamas, wanted to see them before she went to bed (...) the next day Merry and Dawn would be out at sunrise getting them all together again” (*idem*, 285). The only major episode shared between Merry and Dawn takes place with Count, the animal they raised in the family cattle business, a narration that lasts only three pages. However, Swede recalls the moments when Merry worked with her mother: “Merry, as a grade school kid, was lying on the floor of the study next to Dawn's desk, drawing pictures of Count while Dawn did the accounts for the farm. Merry emulates her mother's concentration, enjoying working with the same discipline” (*idem*, 202). In *Dicionário da Crítica Feminista*, Macedo and Amaral explore and explain the issue of the mother:

Since the Neolithic period, the Mother Foundress of generations has also been entrusted with the care and feeding of offspring because she is designated as more capable of caring for and loving. Always coerced by patriarchal power, (...) in every age, the mother cared for or rejected, cradled or avoided contact with her children. (2005, 119; my translation)

As previously noted, Dawn did not intend to be a mother, a decision that had to be reversed by Swede's will and which would create an obstacle to Merry's education. Since Dawn already suffers scrutiny from third parties due to her past in beauty pageants, the character is also concerned with the opinions they may have about her performance as a mother since she knows that she can only belong to one of two categories: “the good mothers” or “the bad mothers” (Macedo and Amaral 2005, 119). It is also necessary to point out that Dawn's concerns result from the social circumstances in which the character is inserted, that is, the post-World War II in the United States of America. In a society centered on the ideology of work, paradoxically, a phenomenon of intensive motherhood coexists, that is, the belief that mothers, and not fathers, need to spend enormous amounts of physical and

emotional energy (*ibidem*).

As far as Merry is concerned, Dawn tries to teach her how to survive in a patriarchal society, one that she knows well. However, Merry does not resign herself to her mother's rules. In his essay on the American trilogy, Mark Shechner presents the following thesis about Merry: "Incendiary? Jain? American Bakunin? (...) She isn't an aberration, after all. She is her father's Jewish unconscious; she is the return of the repressed" (Shechner 2007, 147). The same holds for Dawn: while the latter reclaims her place as the narrative unfolds, the former is aware from a young age of the difficulties of achieving gender equality. The book *Why We Should All Be Feminists*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, closes with a passage about the Nigerian author's grandmother: "She didn't know the word feminist. But that doesn't mean she wasn't one" (Adichie 2014, 47-48). This statement could well be applied to Dawn in *America Pastoral*.

How can we say that Dawn is a feminist without knowing it? Dawn slowly challenges the social norms of the generation that precedes her. Similarly, when it comes to defining a woman as a sexual object, Dawn does not embrace her past as a former beauty pageant winner, defying the label imposed on her years into this phase of her life, as we witnessed during her interview about her cattle business. Returning to Adichie, the author tells us that her grandmother ran away from home to marry the man she wanted, just as Dawn does with Bill Orcutt. Even though there is no marital relationship, Dawn makes her choice, freeing herself from Swede, no longer subjugating to his fantasies. Finally, Adichie tells us her definition of the word feminist: "My definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, 'Yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it, we must do better'" (2014, 48). Dawn does not say this phrase in the book, even though she acts according to this motto: she imposes herself on Lou Levov, seeks her financial freedom regardless of her gender, seeks emotional support away from her husband, and pushes away society's view of her as a sexual object.

3. AMERICAN PASTORAL, THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE AND REVOLUTION AT POINT ZERO

The end of World War II brought the return of male labor, and the role of women in

American society was conditioned. As Betty Friedan documents in *The Feminine Mystique*, “interior decorators were designing kitchens with mosaic murals and original paintings, for kitchens were once again the center of women's lives” (1965, 15). This new reality introduced young American women to a new problem, silent at first but glaring as the decades passed. According to Friedan, the danger of this new problem is precisely its silence since the difficulties brought about by it are all new: “Part of the strange newness of the problem is that it cannot be understood in terms of the age-old material problems of man: poverty, sickness, hunger, cold” (*idem*, 24). When discussing an issue that affects only one part of society, how can we bring this problem to center stage? Alternatively, as Federici questions, in *Revolution at Point Zero*, “the problem, then, becomes how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and the bedroom and into the streets” (2020, 14).

This problem was not unique to American women. Friedan recalls the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as a crucial point in affirming the second wave of the feminist movements. However, in the United States, the book did not have the necessary reach to trigger the discussion about husband-and-wife dynamics and domestic work:

[A]n American critic commented that she obviously “didn't know what life was all about,” and besides, she was talking about French women. The “woman problem” in America no longer existed. If a woman had a problem in the 1950s and 1960s, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage or with herself (...). Even the psychoanalysts had no name for it. (1965, 16)

The psychiatric issue is present in the novel, with Dawn's hospitalization after Merry's terrorist attack. Dawn's state mirrors a situation that Friedan reports was standard to thousands of American women who, in private practices, express their existential discomfort: married women sought help because they were frustrated with domestic life and marriage, while single women sought help when struggling with loneliness, anxiety, and depression. In the novel, Dawn aspires to be a music teacher but is seduced by Swede's domestic fantasy. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan gives voice to women who, from a certain age, felt impelled to abandon their aspirations for good to dedicate themselves to domestic life: “The ones in their forties and fifties who once had other dreams gave them up and threw themselves joyously into life as housewives” (1965, 24). Similarly, the author

evokes the testimony of a psychiatrist who argues that women have been transformed into sexual objects, with no identity other than life as mothers and wives, thus ignoring themselves: “We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: ‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my home’” (1965, 29).

As already mentioned, single women behaved subversively, challenging the status quo by simply deciding to remain "alone". Both Friedan and Federici agree that the problem with domestic work stems from the misconception, which has been widely spread in the United States, that it is part of a woman's natural behavior. Consequently, women cannot be separated from domestic work, as they will lose their femininity. Federici problematizes this issue as follows:

The difference with housework lies in the fact that not only has it been imposed on women but also transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework was transformed into a natural attribute rather than being recognized as (...). We must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expense of women. (2020, 12-13)

In this section of *Revolution at Point Zero*, Federici introduces the proposal of paid domestic work since this is as relevant as a male job in building a family. Instead of looking at domestic work as a “labor of love”, Federici demands that it should be looked at as labor, or, in her own words, “call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love” (*idem*, 12, 15). Therefore, the struggle for wages is a struggle against women’s social role, making it “a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it forces capital to restructure social relations in terms more favorable to us” (*idem*, 15). Moreover, the author argues that demanding wages “does not mean that if we are paid, we will continue to do it. It means precisely the opposite” (*ibid*). However, this position presents yet another problematic layer for the condition of housewives, as Federici exemplifies: “Many women are (...) afraid of identifying for a second with the housewife. They know that this is the most powerless position in society, and they do not want to realize that they are housewives too” (2020, 18).

Following Federici’s argumentation on wages for housework, it is also relevant to recall one of the most striking cases in Friedan’s work, "Occupation: Housewife" (1965,

35). In this section of the book, Friedan writes about an article that portrays the situation of a housewife who has completed her higher education and is asked to fill out a questionnaire about her occupation. Interestingly, like Dawn, the woman in question also has a professional background in music. In an attempt at subversion, after recounting her frustrations at never being able to use her potential and realize her ambitions, the woman is manipulated into admitting that the role of housewife did not restrict her but rather liberated her: "You might write business manager, cook, nurse, chauffeur, dressmaker, interior decorator, accountant (...) or just put down philanthropist (...). All your life, you have been giving away your energies, your skills, your talents, your services for love" (*idem*, 36). The last sentence is especially significant as it tries to disarm what Federici will, a decade later, write about the manipulation of women until they accept that domestic work is a unique and exclusive aspect of their gender, which is a service of love, in Friedan's words. Moreover, Federici also argues that all the second jobs that women employ are mere extensions of their domestic tasks, as is Dawn's case, who, instead of raising a daughter, starts raising cattle: "the second job not only increases our exploitation but simply reproduces our role in different forms" (Federici 2020, 18). Thus, it is even more complicated to escape the mystique, since it is not only a generational problem or an isolated case in a woman's life, but an ingrained idea deeply rooted in the social fabric of the United States: "The material details of life, the daily burden of cooking and cleaning, of taking care of the physical needs of husband and children – these did indeed define a woman's world a century ago when America were pioneers" (Friedan 1965, 59).

Still, on the topic of labor outside of the household, Friedan documents that the only career reported in magazines with a female target audience was one in the artistic world, namely acting. However, the focus of the articles on these women continued to be their domestic chores:

The one "career woman" who was always welcome in the pages of women's magazines was the actress. But her image also underwent a remarkable change: from a complex individual of fiery temper, inner depth, and a mysterious blend of spirit and sexuality to a sexual object, a babyface bride, or a housewife (...). When you wrote about an actress for a women's magazine, you wrote about her as a housewife. You never showed her doing or enjoying her work as an actress unless she eventually paid for it by losing her husband or her child or otherwise admitting failure as a woman. (1965, 46-47)



The novel illustrates this similarly, when Dawn is interviewed about her cattle ranching company, and the journalist mentions that she is a former beauty queen and claims she is now a housewife. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan writes about how “women” journalists wrote about women with professional careers. This position winds back into the hands of men during the post-World War II period, contributing to the construction of this feminine mystique. Federici also states that the “career woman” escapes from her condition of domestic work not through collective power and sonority but through capitalist and patriarchal means, something that is also visible in Dawn, who only achieves her limited independence through financial means of the Levov family: “The old image of the spirited career girl was largely created by writers and editors who were women (...). The new image of woman as housewife-mother has been largely created by writers and editors who are men” (Friedan 1965, 47).

When mentioning Swede's financial support, discussing what Friedan and Federici write about sharing household chores between the couple is relevant. Friedan gives the following example: “Ed and Carol have ‘centered their lives almost completely around their children and their home.’ They are shown shopping at the supermarket, carpentering, dressing the children, making breakfast together” (*idem*, 43). The couple shares Merry's upbringing and education, with Dawn taking over domestic and daily life while Swede is left to resolve her daughter's medical and political issues. However, as Friedan argues, this division of tasks does not solve the problem because the woman still does not leave the house, ending up being even more harmful since it devalues her precarious position. Swede's tasks turn out poorly executed, as Merry interprets her father's advice radically, solving her political issues, as well as her stuttering, through terrorist activities. Dawn is unable to intervene in these issues due to the gender roles established in the novel's time of action, as women were not expected to make decisions or intervene in political office: “They may have the vote, but they don’t dream about running for office (...). If you write a political piece, they won’t read it. You have to translate it into issues they can understand—romance, pregnancy, nursing, home furnishings, clothes” (Friedan 1965, 45).

The idea that women could not share in the country's political life explains not only Dawn's despair in the face of her daughter's radicalism but also her inertia. This sums up the feminine mystique, something so ingrained and familiar in the daily lives of these women that acting oppositely was seen as unnatural, as Friedan argues: “When a mystique



is strong, it makes its fiction of fact. It feeds on the very facts which might contradict it, and seeps into every corner of the culture, bemusing even the social critics" (*ibidem*). It is this contradiction that leaves Federici, in 1975, with the following questions: "we deluded ourselves that we can escape housework. But how many of us, in spite of working outside the house, have escaped it? And can we really so easily disregard the idea of living with a man? What if we lose our jobs?" (2020, 18).

Adapting this last question to *American Pastoral*, what happens to Dawn if she decides to leave both the Swede and Orcutt, quitting her job as a housewife? In *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman's narrative is subversive enough to make the reader think in extremes: either you blow up the house like Merry and die in the streets, or you clean the house and live under a man's rule like Dawn. Or, resorting to Federici's words, "why are these our only alternatives and what kind of struggle will move us beyond them?" (*idem*, 18). Yet, the novel closes with Dawn neither blowing nor cleaning the house, instead, she projects one, believing that she has found her alternative and deciding to go through with it.

4. CONCLUSION

At the end of the novel, did Dawn escape the feminine mystique? It is complicated to answer this question since the mystique itself results from a century-old problem, preceding her generation and continuing through her daughter's. We only know that, at the end of the novel, Dawn creates a path of her own, separating from Swede, with Bill Orcutt or not. As for Swede, through direct contact with Zuckerman, we know that the protagonist remains a highly superficial person, not subverting or even challenging the feminine mystique. Also, Dawn can see her first marriage being repeated in her relationship with Bill Orcutt, even if the latter, on an intellectual level, is different and more modern than Swede.

Although imagining Dawn's life as a single woman, with Orcutt being a one-time lover, is not difficult, the rejection of Dawn's feminine mystique will, unfortunately, also depend on her companion and his power over her life. Therefore, two possibilities arise. She may either perpetuate with Orcutt the cycle of individual constraint she endured while married to Swede or, on the contrary, be – in our minds, at least – free. Indeed, if Roth

allowed Swede to recover from his fall from Paradise, the reader may hope that the author would also allow Dawn to teach music in the Elizabethan system, like she wanted when she was unmarried and, thus, finally turn the mystique into mystery.

END NOTES

¹ Roth organizes the three sections of *American Pastoral*, “Paradise Remembered”, “The Fall”, and “Paradise Lost”, inspired by the epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) by John Milton. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan seeks to corrupt God's creation, Adam and Eve, by sowing distrust that will lead to disobedience. In this way, Eve is seduced into tasting the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which leads Adam to turn his back on God and join his companion. However, the poem ends with Adam and Eve turning their back to God, contrary to Satan, and Archangel Michael informing the two that, although they have been expelled from Paradise, they may find another within themselves. In *American Pastoral*, Swede can be compared to Adam, while Merry and Dawn can be seen as Eve. In turn, the revolutionary forces of the Weather Underground may appear as substitutes for Satan. Merry, as Eve, is a transgressive figure in that she tastes the fruit of a tree that Johnny Appleseed does not plant; Dawn, as Eve, produces her transgression by having an affair with Orcutt. As in *Paradise Lost*, Swede, as Adam, encounters judgment by association with his “Eves”. At the end of the novel, although there is no reconciliation with God, Swede finds his paradise through a second marriage, Merry converts and becomes a Jain, and Dawn leaves her husband, i.e., the characters eventually find a paradise within themselves.

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DIOGO OLIVEIRA

Diogo Oliveira (Porto, 1999) holds a BA in Languages, Literatures and Cultures (2021, FLUP) and a MA in Anglo-American Studies (2023, FLUP), with a dissertation on Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. He currently works as an English teacher and form tutor at Escola Profissional de Comércio Externo do Porto.

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