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THE AMERICAN DREAM AND AMERICAN PASTORAL AS CONCEPTS IN PHILIP ROTH'S "AMERICAN PASTORAL"

Research article

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Abstract

The article offers an analysis of Philip Roth's novel "American Pastoral" (1997) in the context of its embodiment of two key concepts in American consciousness, the American Dream and American Pastoral. American Pastoral by Philip Roth who was named by Harold Bloom one of the greatest American writers of the turn of the millennium depicts the collapse of the American dream in its materialistic form in post-war America in the second half of the twentieth century. Protagonist's ideal life has been vanished devastating the perfect picture of the American dream. His daughter's rebellion shows that the new generation is seeking again for the spiritual component. This reflects the search by modern American society for a new spiritual paradigm that is not solely focused on material success.

Keywords: American dream, American pastoral, inequality, contemporary American literature, novel.

АМЕРИКАНСКАЯ МЕЧТА И АМЕРИКАНСКАЯ ПАСТОРАЛЬ КАК КАТЕГОРИИ В РОМАНЕ ФИЛИПА РОТА «АМЕРИКАНСКАЯ ПАСТОРАЛЬ»

Научная статья

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Аннотация

В статье предлагается анализ романа Филипа Рота «Американская пастораль» (1997) в контексте воплощения в нем двух ключевых концептов американского сознания — американской мечты и американской пасторали. «Американская пастораль» Филипа Рота, которого Гарольд Блум назвал одним из величайших американских писателей рубежа тысячелетий, изображает крушение американской мечты в ее материалистической форме в послевоенной Америке во второй половине двадцатого века. Идеальная жизнь главного героя исчезла, разрушив картину американской мечты. Бунт его дочери показывает, что новое поколение снова ищет духовную составляющую, что отражает поиск образованным современным американским обществом основ для новой духовной парадигмы, не связанной исключительно с материальным успехом.

Ключевые слова: американская мечта, американская пастораль, неравенство, современная американская литература, роман.

Introduction

The American Pastoral in it itself it is a concept that reflects the American dream in its pure clothes. Its meaning may have its origin that dates back to the Puritans who tried to create their own Utopia based on their religious understanding for a new dream that may take them from the swamp of slavery and loss to the right path of God. The American dream that we know nowadays is having new different features that limit the dream within the frame of material life and seeking for identity, as the many different generations have lost their ways to find what they have been looking for within the boundaries of the United States.

If we get back to the origin of the word, pastoral as a term typically indicates an idealized form of life that is based on simplicity, harmony with the inner world of a person with nature that bring inner and outer peace to the whole society [4, P. 12].

The word pastoral has its own influence on the American literature, as it draws the themes of idyllic rural and virtue that may an ideal society follows to achieve happiness. Literary masterpieces like William Carroll Williams's book "Patterson", or the writings of Willa Cather and Sherwood Anderson, explore the ideal of rural life. These works often highlighted the beauty of nature, community bonds, and the slow, tranquil life, in contrast to the complexities and challenges of urban life.

The article offers an analysis of Philip Roth's novel "American Pastoral" (1997) in the context of its embodiment of two key concepts in American consciousness, the American Dream and American Pastoral. The objectives of the study include the

analysis of the concepts of American Pastoral and the American Dream in the historical context and their embodiment in Philip Roth's novel "American Pastoral". The aim of the study is to show how Philip Roth's novel "American Pastoral" reflects the transformation of the concept of the American dream in relation to the departure from the material component towards the spiritual development of both the individual and the country.

The importance of this work lies in rethinking the presentation of these two different concepts and their impact on American society in the search for a new spiritual paradigm that is not solely focused on material success.

Research methods and principles

The article offers an analysis of Philip Roth's novel "American Pastoral" (1997) in the context of its embodiment of two key concepts in American consciousness, the American Dream and American Pastoral.

The importance of this work lies in rethinking the presentation of these two different concepts and their impact on American society in the search for a new spiritual paradigm that is not solely focused on material success.

The novelty of the article is that although Philip Roth's novel "The American Pastoral" has already been the subject of literary studies [1], [2], the issue of the transformation rather than the collapse of the American Dream concept in this work in the context of the spiritual quest of America in the second half of the twentieth century cannot be considered fully explored.

Main results

The Pastoral ideal is a rebellion understanding of the materialism that has been accompanied by industrialization which tried to demolish the core of nature whose meaning is connected to nature, spiritualism and simple values.

The Pastoral ideal evokes nostalgia for perceived simpler, spiritual time that has been founded by the first travelers to the USA who emphasized on their new life that left materialism behind them to create an utopia based on authenticity and purity of a person as a new era of being in a purified society.

As for the American dream as a concept, it has another understanding that has been changed over the time from being spiritual to move towards the materialism that may bring happiness to the individual. As the American dream has no specific slandered to be judged from one point of view, it becomes more flexible concept that may change its features throughout the history to cope with the needs of the era where it exist. "The American dream — a powerful set of ideals about the possibilities for individual fulfillment and universal opportunity — became a realistic vision for many Americans..." [5, P. 2].

The dream in the beginning was a religious dream when the Puritans wanted to create a perfect city that has principles of the Bible and God where as now it is more has belief in a person who can achieve prosperity regardless to his original, historical and racial background. So the USA as a government has adopted the American dream as a material thing that brings happiness to the society through the hard work of the individual who live within the USA.

The American dream as a concept has been evolved over the history but the modern understanding for it is related to the post WWI and WWII [3, P. 36–37]. America has experienced the economic fail and growth within and after these two wars. After WWI, the American lived the Great depression that people had lost their savings while the WWII had brought prosperous era to the American who were involved in the material corruption that based on definitely the prosperousness era that brought to everyone self-made success.

The American dream is really being admired and adored by a lot of different type of people, especially the immigrants; it has also been criticized for being unattainable for many of them because of the systematic inequalities related to race, class and access to resources "Recent criticism of the notion of the American Dream has ... real and the opportunities may be tinged by inequality" [6]. As we can see, in many American different works like "The Great Gatsby" where Fitzgerald has been trying to explore the gloomy material side of a romantic dream that has disillusionment in its core and moral decay because money was the biggest ideals to the heroes.

As we have discussed, the American pastoral is connected to return to nature, spirituality, and simplicity to fill the emptiness of the soul of the society with spiritual values and nature that a man has already exiled himself from it. However, the American dream in modern understanding has been concentrating on ambition and materialism to achieve physical happiness and needs. So the Pastoral ideal is a revolutionary line that protest against materialism that has covered the dream from the inside and outside to bring to people spiritual sufferings within a material so society that has adopted by the government. So the Pastoral ideal is a line that can be followed to escape the American dream's materialism and call for accomplishment not with the frame of wealth only but within the spiritual values.

The American dream and The American pastoral both reflect almost the total American values and aspirations but have different point of views to people who wanted to follow an ideal in life to make some dreams come true. As the American pastoral sends messages to people to achieve the American dream by living simple good life that spiritualism plays huge role in happiness. On the other hand, the core of the American dream calls for and encourages the individual within a limited society to strive for a personal accomplishment and societal progress.

The American dream and The American pastoral keep on resonate as people have been trying to grapple with many different problems that they have faced all the time as a matter of solving theses issues like economic inequality, environmental sustainability and other cases to seek for the core meaning to understand who can a person cope with his own dreams that hard to reach and how to keep with the changing meaning of different concepts that control the mind of people who live in a special society that have as we can say a unique mentality.

These both ideals that have formed the mentality of the American citizen and the American society in general work as an engine that moves everything around to reach to some understanding of the American new culture that have been striving to put itself. So they can highlight different values and aspiration 'that would present the American narrative to the whole world.

The "American Pastoral" (1997) by Philip Roth (1933-2018) as a novel provides a deep journey that has explored the America dream and its resentment through the lens of the pastoral ideal. The novel was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1998.

The novel depicts the successful life of Seymour "Swede" Levov a businessman who lived the sweetness of the material accomplishments in post-WWII [7]. "Swede" Levov was living his achievements in the promised land as a dreamer who



reached and grabbed the American dream with his own hardworking character. He was admired by the society he has got a very beautiful wife, prosperous career and gorgeous life in the suburban of New Jersey. He wasn't expected that his dream may be destroyed by the nearest person to him, his daughter, as she had become involved in radical politics point of view. "He had made his fantasy and Merry had unmade it for him" [10, P. 417]. Her radical thoughts pushed her towards radical acts represented by committing an act of local terrorism. In February 1968, Merry plants a bomb in the Old Rimrock post office, which kills a bystander; she goes into permanent hiding. The terrorist act of Swede's daughter has changed the meaning of material successes to a spiritual inner suffering. The historical basis of the work is related to the social agenda of the 1960s and 1970s, the Vietnam War, the New Jersey riots of 1967, the Watergate scandal, and the sexual revolution.

Swede's ideal life has been vanished as some realities appeared in his life to devastate the perfect picture of the dream that has been based on the disillusionments of the material dream that exposed to fragility. The upheavals of the society, a person's radical thoughts can have a huge influence on peoples' life when it comes to their own dreams. So Swede's dream has become a nightmare as he was struggling with his daughter as he was started suspecting his own identity Swede Levov interrupted pursuit of the American dream by his daughter [8], his ideal, values and thoughts that he believed in. The protagonist discovers his wife's infidelity. Levov is forced to see the truth about the discord rumbling beneath the "American pastoral", which has brought about profound personal and societal changes he no longer can ignore. "The old system that made order doesn't work anymore. All that was left was his fear and astonishment, but now concealed by nothing" [10, P. 421]. So the novel investigates the changes that happened to the notions of American Dream in the society." Three generations. All of them growing. The working. The saving. The success. Three generations in raptures over America. Three generations of becoming one with a people. And now with the fourth it had all come to nothing. The total vandalization of their world" [10, P. 237].

As it is seen from the beginning of the novel, Swede Levov was standing for the archetype of the American materialism dream accomplishment via his own hard work, social mobility with a good steady family life, but after all the writer thought out the novel, he reveals that such kind of achievements can be demolished by many different conditions that are not in the hero's hand. The collapse of the American pastoral, which we witness in the protagonist's life at the level of the writer's thought, leads to a reconsideration of the American Dream. Levov's daughter detests the bourgeois ideals of her parents, who, standing on the shoulders of their immigrant ancestors, achieved the American Dream in a material sense. "He loved the America she hated and blamed for everything that was imperfect in life and wanted violently to overturn, he loved the 'bourgeois values' she hated and ridiculed and wanted to subvert" [10, P. 214]. However, Roth represents a new generation that, paradoxically, also strives to realize the American Dream, but instead transforms it into a spiritual one. Merry also feels the strength to rise up and change the world and her place in it. Roth shows how each generation in America faces its own challenges but never ceases to believe in the possibility of change.

Discussion

Philip Roth tries to depict a picture of successes that can be destroyed because of material thoughts. When the writer connects the idea of materialism with the American dream, he tries to raise peoples' attention towards the tragedy that may occur while thinking of materialism. So nothing protects Swede from the disaster that happens to his daughter and his family in general. The collapse of the American pastoral, which we witness in the protagonist's life at the level of the writer's thought, leads to a reconsideration of the American Dream. Levov's daughter detests the bourgeois ideals of her parents, who, standing on the shoulders of their immigrant ancestors, achieved the American Dream in a material sense. "He loved the America she hated and blamed for everything that was imperfect in life and wanted violently to overturn, he loved the 'bourgeois values' she hated and ridiculed and wanted to subvert" [10, P. 214]. However, Roth represents a new generation that, paradoxically, also strives to realize the American Dream, but instead transforms it into a spiritual one. Merry also feels the strength to rise up and change the world and her place in it. Roth shows how each generation in America faces its own challenges but never ceases to believe in the possibility of change.

"American Pastoral" is kind of a rebellion novel that challenges the traditions that have spread in the late 20th century. Swede's daughter Merry was the main key to this revolutionary change in political, social and economical understanding of the new modern world. She symbolizes with her generation the rejection towards the old values, as the whole generation was looking for social justice and spiritual growth. Radicalization, as shown in the novel, is kind of severe conflict with the conventional values aspired to by Swede.

The pastoral ideal in the novel is depicted as a counterfeit appearance that has been exposed to chaos and violence. This violence was a main reason to shatter the protagonist's dream, which has its own root in ignorance of the real needs of the new generation that was looking for identifying itself in a society [9]. As for the chaos that has its influence on the whole in general was represented by the idea that the life in the suburban is an ideal place to achieve the American dream or to have a piece of it not far from the cities.

Conclusion

The illusion of perfection in this novel has been criticized by the writer himself. The post WWII showed that the prosperous suburban life was such a kind of mirage that reveals the beneath surface of the American dream. The conflicts and the complicity of life in the suburbs have revealed that the dream that has been raised as an ideal to the post war life has descended to reach its own decay feature that has been covered by solid surface. Philip Roth shows the realities that have been covered by illusion and fake identity.

The novel of Philip Roth "American Pastoral" is one of the novels that reveals the remains that have stayed in the souls of people who lived in the late 20th century and who couldn't have the space to criticize the American dream's deformity. So the writer wants to tell us that his novel does a favor to people to make their own commentary on what is the American dream as he reveals its complexity and contradictions.

Philip Roth's novel American Pastoral reveals the lingering resentments of those who lived in the late 20th century, who found no space to criticize the distortions of the American Dream. Thus, the concept of American Pastoral offers a different



perspective, one with its own understanding within American society, in an attempt to salvage the American Dream. The author wants to tell us that his novel allows readers to reflect on the essence of the American Dream, revealing its complexities and contradictions through this concept.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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