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THE IMAGE OF THE PRISON-CAGE IN JOHN CHEEVER'S *FALCONER*

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ABSTRACT
The study aspired to investigate the human trauma of captivity through the utilization of the prison-cage image in John Cheever's ***FALCONER*** (1977). Comparing the protagonist to caged animals or birds endowed both with shared characteristics of helplessness and loss that augmented our sense of man's entrapment and dehumanization. It also triggered off a subsidiary cluster of themes, events and imagery to trace the best means to set up equilibrium between man and his surroundings and before his entire shaky psyche.

Key words: Cage, Cave, Metaphor, Alienation, Captivity, Cheever, Falconer

INTRODUCTION

The prison – cage image widely recurs in Western secular and religious literature with a prime target of signifying man's predicament of captivity. The controversy whether he is a free agent responsible for his deeds or a slave to certain personal, psychological or social limitations that inhibit his freedom and shape his fate has been constantly a moot point open for discussion.

In ***the Dictionary of Symbols and Metaphors***, the cage is defined as "the box or the basket in which birds were kept" (De Vries, 1981:130). It is also identified in ***Oxford Encyclopedia of English*** as "a structure of bars or wires, especially for confining animals or birds" (Allen& Joyce, 1991: 206). The word, etymologically, dates back to probably before 1200 A.D. As mentioned in ***Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology***, it is "borrowing of old French cage from Latin cavea coop, cage, from cavus hollow, cave" (Barnhart, 1995: 98). It can be deployed in a symbolic or metaphoric sense, as a synonym for prison or jail, "a place to which persons are committed by a court for detention" (Ibid.).

Michael Ferber, in ***A Dictionary of Literary Symbols***, explains the use of birds as metaphoric for human society. They resemble man in their fondness of freedom, socialization with other members of their species and family life. On soaring to sing, they "link the sky with the earth and the sea "to take flight from "the gravity-bound lower world" (Ferber, 1999: 27). In Christian myth, it was a heavenly dove that filled Mary with the Holy Spirit. Souls, in the underworld, are believed to wear garments of bird feathers to be well guarded outside the body and probably do penance. In general, the image of the bird released from the cage usually stands for the liberation of the soul from the fetters of the body.

The aforementioned concept of the cage is tightly related to that of the "cave". It has been always considered an underground place hidden in the wilderness that can be the site of burial, a shelter from the

desert, a secret hideout to consummate love or hide a treasure or a location associated with supernatural powers. Besides signifying " life at an animal level "(Seigneuret, 1988: 222), it also acts as a refuge that " connotes purification from worldly luxury and a closer approach to God's unadorned creation " (Ibid.225) – a situation that made it frequently inhabited by the persecuted or holy men and women in early Christianity. Subsequently, despite its pain, physical confinement can be desirable for man to overcome his personal shortcomings and screw up his courage in order to be physically free to lead a stable life based upon the harmony of body and soul.

The Thematic Function of the Prison – Cage Metaphor

John Cheever (1912 – 1982) is a major twentieth century novelist and short-story writer. Pertaining to the Post-World War Π generation, Cheever was always concerned with suburban troubles to expose the grim reality and the collapse of the illusion of modern American stability. In that sense, ***Falconer*** meticulously mirrors modern man's confusion in a futile universe. It prompted favorable critical appraisals of Cheever's work and remained for weeks a best seller as his true masterpiece that "established his position in the canon of American Literature as one of the century's most brilliant writers" (Scott, 1988: 522). It is tightly related to his own life: After the stock – market crash in 1920, his father lost his job. Therefore, his mother had to work as a florist in order to finance the family. Such a reversal of roles led to marital discord between his parents. Meanwhile, young Cheever had problems at school. After being expelled for his misdemeanor, he got involved into drinking and homosexual affairs. He was prone to fatal heart attacks – a situation that precipitated his being committed to Smithers Clinic for Alcoholics in 1975. Unlike his other writings, the novel is located in a real prison – not the usual urban world. It, thus, ventures into a new territory that "plunges us into the unexpected world of prison confinement" (Hilfer, 1992: 160) – a drastic alteration in Cheever's fiction driven by his elation at his freedom from the bondage of liquor and consequent recourse to meditations on the variant types of confinement in human life.

The hero, Ezekiel Farragut, is a prestigious university professor who faces the living hell of prison life in Falconer jail as a drug-addict convicted of fratricide. Like Cheever, he lacks family harmony, whether with his parents or his wife. His misery actually dates back to his early childhood due to the non-existence of any sound understanding between his parents. Upon its financial deterioration, his mother who tried to assert her autonomy ran his family. Her subsequent failure as a businesswoman led to her emotional frigidity with her husband and children. Unable to properly satisfy their needs, she was always accused by Farragut's father of being an inefficient wife, mother and even woman. In his turn, the father – obsessed with failure and despair – tried to drown himself and to have his son aborted before his advent to the world – an attitude that stresses the motif of the unwanted child again. Such a prevalent domestic discord widened the gap between the hero and his brother Eben. Almost like enemies, they were constantly in the habit of quarreling and fighting. In a moment of tension, Farragut kills his brother on informing him of the father 's intentions to have him aborted. On the other hand, his marriage is a rotten copy of that of his parents. Failure of reciprocity dominates his contact with his wife who hardly cares about him before or after his imprisonment. During her short visits in prison, she always taunts and condemns him for defaming the family. Consequently, unstable family relationships prove to be the major backdrop of Cheever's fiction: they form one of the "various emotional and erotic contracts we've formed, while one may regret", "but it is difficult to find one way out of it" (Firth, 1977: 22). They heavily torment the hero and heighten within him "the malady of harrowing loneliness"(Ibid.), a common human dilemma also identified by Cheever: "Imprisonment is our general condition, since all of us like Farragut live behind a border of sorrow between ourselves and the world " (Meisel, 1977: 76).

Opting as an escapist attitude for "the bliss of drugs" (187), Farragut seeks to assuage his physical and emotional uneasiness. He was introduced to drugs during his participation in war on an island with suffocating weather. They made him feel "at peace with suffocation, suppuration and murder" (44) and more able to tolerate his existence. Belonging to "the generation of addiction" (43), his case reflects a contemporary socio-economic problem affecting youth, manhood and society at large. It can be attributed to the rise of anxiety due to the recurrence of many other problems, namely, family disunity, joblessness and insecurity.

In that sense, his ardor for methadone endows him with elusive liberation to redress his misery. Turning into a slave to drugs that rob his consciousness and true selfhood, he gradually loses his physical freedom because of his recurrent detention in drug-addiction clinics and rehabilitation centers for having heart attacks – a new threat to his life that constantly renders it at stake. Thus, addiction turns to be another cage – similar to his family and marriage – that worsens his bleak situation.

In his cell, Farragut is gradually amenable to a new insight about himself and others. Buoyed with his friendship with the other prisoners, he can gain a superior kind of freedom and feels secure from the hostile, external world. Their stories correlate with his tale of betrayal, deception and frustration and elucidate the banality of his dilemma. He desires their warm company, which erases his sense of being "unloved" (75), particularly his junior Jody who embodies his lost youth. Their relationship introduces Cheever's theme of homosexuality in an open, glaring way unprecedented in his work. In his **Letters,** he declares that "homosexuality seems to be commonplace in our time – no less alarming than drunkenness and adultery – but my anxiety in the matter is very deep and seems incurable" (Cheever, 1988:56). It is a tangible evidence of its "pervasive moral callousness" (Johnson, 1981:29) as the only available alternative for men, forsaken by their female partners.

Farragut begins to love himself and restore his self-worth. Capable of defying his inward prison of selfish love, he is happy for Jody's successful flight in the visiting acolyte's helicopter and later marriage incognito. Such an altruistic, selfless love teaches him "love can be emotionally sustaining without being possessive" (Aldridge, 1966:132). Only then can he become more positively involved with his fellowmen in their confederation in the riot against the prison tyrannical authority. Furthermore, he nurses Chicken Number Two in his sickness. On the man's deathbed, he re-considers his crime from a new angle; he finally regrets murdering his brother and confesses the enormity of his guilt. His recollections alert him to their being both victims of a topsy- turvy world – a denouement that releases his physical and psychological entrapment: he is now weaned from addiction and willing to shape his new selfhood.

The hero is soon open to a sudden revelation; his love for Jody has been a projection of his love for himself. As his inner salvation precedes the social one, it has to be complemented with his physical liberty. He, like Jody, escapes while hiding in Chicken 's burial sack to be re-instituted into the ebb and flow of normal life he deeply misses. Having no more fears, he eventually possesses the potentiality of facing a new life – though ambiguous at that stage. His final optimism is in tune with Cheever 's words to John Firth in ***The Saturday Review***:

> All my work deals with confinement in one shape or another, and the struggle toward freedom. Do I mean freedom? (Only as a metaphor for a sense of boundlessness, the possibility of rejoicing (Firth, 1977:22).

That final epiphany articulates Cheever 's belief in the human capacity of love as the best shield to overcome depression and loneliness.

Metaphor Dramatized: Caged Characters

In ***FALCONER***, the action is centered on one single hero who – along with a wide range of subsidiary figures – wrestles free from his physical imprisonment in jail and psychological confinement in his addiction and troubles. In *Harper 's,* John Leonard comments on Cheever's subtle characterization:

> By writing about any of us, Mr. Cheever writes about all of us, our ethical concerns and our failure of nerve, our experience of the discrepancies and our shred of honor (Leonard, 1977:88).

In this sense, Farragut, the focal hero is an "impersonation of a man tormented by confinement" (157). He faces physical captivity in jail after committing the heinous sin of fratricide. The murder, in effect, was targeted against himself to get rid of a latent part of him – embodied by his brother – that keeps reminding him of his unstable childhood and adolescence within his family. However, the attempt to destroy the cage of the past leads to another entry into a new cage, namely prison, serving a ten- year- term of confinement.

Marital problems, mostly with his wife Marcia, contribute their share. In fact, she is one of the chief causes of his " keen alienation" (51) as she portrays the aggressive, cruel, unsupportive, shadowy but

domineering female often used by Cheever, manifesting his lucid misogyny and negative depiction of women "primarily as the inexplicable makers and more often, destroyers of male happiness" (Bosha, 1994: 252). Due to her lesbianism, she can be best dubbed as a "quintessential bitch" (Nash, 1981:52). Incapable of achieving independence and professional success, she does not reciprocate with her husband and denies him love and respect. In his turn, Farragut is highly disturbed by their matrimonial clashes: he is liable to a profound sense of failure for reiterating his parents' discord and thus re-living the past he diligently aspires to escape. Behind bars, the hero's desertion by his family worsens his state of being. While his son never shows up, his wife makes her appearance in fleeting visits during which she complicates his situation by her explosive, detrimental, stigmatizing reproaches for his being a homosexual drug-addict. Though passive, Farragut projects the figure of a non-retaliate partner. He is not callous; especially that he yearns for domestic tenderness and warmth.

Upon his wife's departure, Farragut is overwhelmed by the realization that their marriage has been a sexual battlefield – "a jay-naked male and female discussing their bowels" (21). Lured by Marcia's physical attractiveness that camouflages her true colors as an ill- fit wife and mother, he was devoted to their marriage that only turns to be a social institution, another form of imprisonment that oppresses him. Ironically enough, he reaches such a conclusion after forfeiting his physical liberty, a fact that makes him potential for more revelations about himself and his life while in jail away from external turbulence that robs his humanity and distorts his contemplation. Accordingly, the physical cage, though somber, leaves room to catch a wide glimpse of the inner one of himself in order to re-assess his entire life.

Jail turns to be "a microcosm of society" (Johnson, 1981: 25). Though distanced from daily tension, it is not an entirely safe cage. In it, the hero – denied self-worth as an eminent academic – is known as "fratricide, zip to ten, #, 734 – 508 – 32" (4). Wearing no iron leg on his first admission, he is "manacled to nine other men, four of them black and all of them younger than he" (Ibid.) and consequently unable to exercise the free movement of his limbs for a while. Robbed of his watch by one of the inmates, he also loses any sense of time and nobody lends a listening to his complaint. Aside from his physical suffering, he is, meanwhile, subjected to the misdemeanor of his junior colleagues and the sadistic, bullying officers who ask them all to be obedient, "good boys" (6) and succumb to their captivity. Perceiving " nothing but paralysis and terror"(7) in such an odd milieu he could not sense any belonging to, he craves for methadone – another cage that afflicts his body and soul – to overcome his dejection, surmount his contemptuous repudiation by his world and lose his identity. Consequently, his deprivation of his regular dose by the prison-officials who even enjoy the throes of his pain leads to his attempt to hang himself in the solitary confinement to terminate his agony – another reiteration of his father's reaction to his despair. Substituting one cage with a worse alternative, he is enmeshed into a vicious circle of despair and suffering.

Jody is Farragut's true mentor in jail. He is described as "a slight young man with black hair" wearing around his neck "a simple and elegant gold cross" (87). Denied higher education to support his family, his need for money leads him to rob a store in complicity with a friend. Arrested and sent to Falconer prison to serve his penalty, he shares common aspects with the leading figure as driven to delinquency by social and domestic overpowering troubles. On meeting Farragut in the shower, Jody soon experiences strong, potent homosexual predilections for him, and both share a tender love affair with each other. Farragut deems Jody faultless and cherishes the intention to declare his passion to everyone. Shortly after, Jody masquerades as an acolyte in co-operation with DiMatto, the chaplain 's assistant, in charge of the altar costumes, who provides him with red attire in his size to escape and lead a new life incognito. Though the hero " misse(s) his youth, misse(s) it as he would miss a friend, a lover "(104), he is never mad at him. DiMatto, six weeks later, shows him a newspaper photo of Jody sent by mail on his wedding under a pseudo-name. He is married to a young, rich oriental girl who employs him in her father's factory. While the man carries Jody's cross and accuses him of dishonesty for not keeping his word to wait for him, Farragut believes that he looks "at his most beautiful and triumphant" (137). Their clandestine involvement behind his back does not trouble him. Instead, the whole experience sparks off his inner hope to outgrow his immature self-love and attain spiritual renewal. He realizes that he has to love himself first and handle his errors in order to properly approach others. Such a new, illuminating fact alerts him to the rejuvenative power of love as a spontaneous emotion he can simply acquire to heal himself:

> Why did he long so for Jody when he had often thought it was his role in life to possess the most beautiful women? Women possessed the greatest and the most rewarding mysteriousness… Women were Ali Baba's Cave, they were the lift of the morning, they were waterfalls, thunderstorms, they were the immensities of the planet (100).

Thus, while exercising shame and remorse, he is overwhelmed by the immensity and majesty of the realm set upon normal man/ woman contact – a new impression that paves the way to a further, serious development in his character.

His novel self-knowledge enables him to face his chaotic universe and even volunteer to cure others' emotional epidemics and restlessness. His drastic alteration is clearly exposed in his courage during the riot arranged by the inmates at the upstate prison of "Amana", commonly known as "The Wall". He manages to construct a radio, using copper wire and toilet paper to exchange news with the other prisoners. Amid riot, the hero suddenly discovers that he is "clean" (186) of drugs. Social liaison with others, thus, acts as a liberating force to overcome his enslavement to drugs. In that sense, he sighs on building the radio that attaches him and his colleagues with the roar of the world of the living – "like a gratified lover" – and mumbles: "Praise be to Thee, O Lord" (156). The riot noises "worked on him like the blessing of some destructive drug" (153). Though the authorities eventually crush rebellion, less discipline is imposed on the culprits – an achievement he participates to accomplish. Hence, the magical, newly experienced strength resulting from gathering with others endows him with self-control and power to relinquish his bondage to liquor. His inner salvation is complemented with a spiritual one likewise. At the Mass, he realizes that "the raptness of prayer enthralled (him) as the raptness of love" (129). Stimulated by his desire for redemption, he prays for "the happiness of his son, his wife, the safety of his lover, the soul of his dead brother" and "would have liked to pray for some enlargement of wisdom" (127).

On washing and nursing the dying Chicken Number Two, he starts to reminisce about his crime from a mature perspective: his fraternal tension with Iben turns him blind to his being a partner in their tragic family life. On their confrontation, hostility erupts as he proves to be his alter ego who projects a dark side of himself he deeply abhors. He can now pity him for his miserable marriage and disastrous children; his son is in jail and his daughter thrice tried to commit suicide. Such a new vision of the past liberates him from the shell of his psychological captivity in old scars and motivates him to attain physical freedom, similar to his friend Jody. Hidden in the deceased Chicken's burial sack to flee from prison, "the sensation of being carried" (203) within a coffin alleviates his fears and inspires him with an old, "unlikely feeling of innocence and purity" (Ibid.). Now reborn into a better shape, he is fully prepared to implement his plan, break his physical cage and step beyond prison bars to chart a new beginning. Farragut's appearance does not shock anybody in the street. On board of the train, he meets a stranger willing to pay his fare and give him a raincoat. The man even wants to be his roommate and share a life together. His friendly, generous attitude touches a cord in Farragut 's heart, provides him with due confidence to face the world and reassures him about his vague future. Emancipated from all the fetters, he ends by his elation at the fact that

> He had lost his fear of falling and all other fears of that nature. He held his head high, his back straight, and walked along nicely. Rejoice, he thought, rejoice (211).

In conclusion, Farragut's freedom from his prison -cage is the outcome of his liberation from the cage of his own self. Driven by his new-found faith in others and before all himself, his new position sums up Cheever's authorial message in his portrayal of characters: they are figures in creative writing that dramatize issues " not really " concerned with " people scrapping for social position and money, but people rising toward grace"(Morace, 1989: p. 510). Once again, the caged bird attains its selfhood in its rejection of the past and embracement of emancipation to head for the future.

Structure and Technicalities Enhancing the Prison – Cage Metaphor

Adhering to his habitual creative deployment of an episodic, non-creative plot based upon series of sketches and patches of disparate events, Cheever offers an explanation of his effort: "I don't work with plots. I work with intuitions, apprehensions, dreams, concepts" (Grant, 1976: 51). In other words, he works with

"sequence of feelings, depending on the logic of imagination" (Ibid.), not logically linked events, to trace the hero's physical and spiritual journey behind bars. To dramatize Farragut's quest for salvation, Cheever resorts to coincidences and gusts of chance endowed with "touch of the miraculous"(Cowley, 1977: 8), which makes the book " not a novel bent on achieving verisimilitude, but rather a moving parable with biblical overtones of sin and redemption " (Ibid.9). The open inconclusive ending allows admission for a variety of predictions of the hero 's future and progress on the right path.

Throughout, Cheever's brilliant use of language is highly praised. Dubbed as his "stylistic triumph" (Coale, 1977: 111), ***F*** signals his frank use of crude, profane, coarse language – a new striking aspect in his fiction that suits the prison climate. Yet, he does not wholly abandon his well-known genteel style that still "retains its polished elegance" (Ibid.) displayed in his penchant for economical, graceful, dazzling, witty prose. Being "lyrical without being flowery", "precise without being coldly analytical" (Wadeland, 1979: 143), it evokes audio, visual, tactile and sensual details through a language that can translate "the quotidian into fleeting moments of grace" (Ibid.). Thus, its verbal splendor and richness make "each sentence he writes an innovation" (Hunt, 1983: 317). To spotlight the hero's emotions and probe his mind, Cheever "can refine, deepen and expand his prose style into one of the most lyrically elegant voices in modern American literature" (Meanor, 1995, p. 57). He articulates the hero's perceptions in evocative diction – that "edges closer to the cadences of modern poetry" (Hunt, 1979: 20) –written in effortless simplicity to pinpoint the disparity between him and his surroundings.

The setting in ***F*** is also a new, shocking departure from the terrain of Cheever's previous books. No longer suburbia the scene of action, it is the callous, bleak Falconer prison – a shabby, nightmarish place that stands for man's physical and mental confinement. In fact, it is not a mere location, but "a state of mind" (Meisel, 1977: 76) the hero undergoes. The opening scene comprises a minute description of the location from outside that effectively creates the ambience of captivity:

> The main entrance to Falconer – the only entrance for convicts, their visitors and the staff – was crowned by an escutcheon representing Liberty, Justice and, between the two, the sovereign power of government. Liberty wore a mobcap and carried a pike. Government was the federal Eagle holding an olive branch and armed with hunting arrows. Justice was conventional, blinded, vaguely erotic in her clinging robes and armed with a headsman's sword. The bas-relief was bronze, but the black these days – as black as unpolished anthracite or onyx (3).

The location – an emblem of imprisonment – carries the implications of a real, dark blocked, iron-cage. It is aptly named Falconer Correctional Facility Prison, derived from a species of birds of prey with hooked talons trained to pursue other birds by human captors, which initiates an extended metaphor of conventions and institutions metamorphosed as falconers dehumanizing people and tearing them apart. Such a masochistic falcon/falconer relationship pervades the confines of prison. In addition, the personification of liberty as a blind erotic vengeful female holding a mobcap and carrying pike followed by the image of the government as a "federal eagle holding an olive branch and armed with hunting arrows " intensifies the irony to finally confirm that justice is " blind " – also personified as "vaguely erotic in her clinging robes and armed with a headsman's sword " – due to the pervasiveness of cruelty and hypocrisy. All these images embody the government's despotic authority camouflaged behind the hollow motto of justice and liberty for all. Arriving in the van, Farragut fails to neither cast a glance at the external world nor see the light of the day. His cellblock is also "like everything else … shabby, disorderly and malodorous" (9) with a small, high, dusty window that allows him a limited view of his milieu. Even the visitors' room, though having no bars, contains glass windows that are "chicken-wired and open only at the top" (14). The walls, devoid of pictures, contain signs prohibiting smoking, writing letters, exchanging objects and the like. Denied his human freedom, Farragut used to meet Jody in his hideout – "an abandoned water tower, a wooden catwalk over roofs of old cellblocks and walls" with a view of "a two mile stretch of river with cliffs and mountains on the western shore" (87). The site grants him moments of stolen freedom in the openness of nature. On Jody 's escape, the hero visits the Valley, "a long room off the tunnel to the left of the mess hall. Along one was a cast-iron trough of a urinal" (117). Due to the dim light, "the wall above the urinal was white tiling with a very limited power of reflection" (Ibid.). Despite its dark, dirty

atmosphere, the place – similar to a primitive cave – enables the prisoners to have fleeting moments of self-liberty and companionship while exercising their basic instincts.

Cheever's recital is compressed and compact. He usually sets the scene before the action, aiming to show and represent, not describe or tell. While assuming the third-person viewpoint, he remains a detached, outside observer. Most of the events are filtered via Farragut 's consciousness to give access to his thoughts and trace his internal change. In addition, his disrupted memories, reveries, dreams and reminiscences prompt the audience complicity to share his pain and unfold his chagrin. The novel commences with the hero's advent to Falconer prison "on a late summer 's day" (2). Reference to time and place helps the readers to keep abreast with the drama and share his dilemma before his emergence. Cheever's voice is so distinct to declare his role as the one monitoring the action and the characters. He directly addresses the audience to single out the prisoners on their first coming on stage: "By the time of which I'm writing, leg irons were still used in Auburn. You could tell the men from Auburn by the noise they made" (4). Recognized by their attire, rather than their names, their identities are annihilated. Farragut is soon introduced as one of the "miscreants" (Ibid.).

Cheever, via his third-person narrative, reports his hidden impressions to clearly expose his degradation and entrapment. Being out of touch with humanity, he "perceived nothing but paralysis and terror" (7). Silence is enforced by one of the guards whose voices "spread out … like a train whistle, a hound's belling, some late-night lonely song or cry" (6). The image reflects the wardens' violence and toughness as the voice of the administration. Sensing Farragut's fragility and humiliation, Cheever gives a peek at his inner trauma to get us closely in touch with:

> This was not pain, nothing as simple and clear as that. All he could identify was some disturbance in his tear ducts, a blind, unthinking wish to cry. Tears were easy: a good ten-minute hand job. He wanted to cry and howl. He was among the living dead. There were no words, no living words, to suit this grief, this cleavage (29).

His bondage to methadone is also embodied in a series of images that reflect his physical and mental imbalance. Thinking of his possible death, he covets the dead's wholeness of vision as they

> Compared to the imprisoned, would have some advantages. The dead would at least have panoramic memories and regrets, while he, as a prisoner, found his memories of the shining world to be broken, intermittent and dependent upon chance smell – grass, shoe leather, the odor of piped water in the showers (Ibid.).

The analogy testifies to the enormity of his despair. While the dead have their memories intact, his are fragmentary and disorganized.

The prisoners' riot acts as another dramatic incident in Farragut 's life. It imposes upon him involvement with others to rebel against the unfair, tyrannical codes of prison. The event inspires him with a more objective vision of his mates as "souls who could not be redeemed "; "in the white light they seemed to (him) to be fallen men" (153). Such a moment of illumination is complemented with a dream "in the most vivid colors" (173) on a cruise ship. While "experiencing a familiar mixture of freedom, boredom and sunburn" (Ibid.), he sees a schooner with a flag – a symbol of victory and deliverance. The sea itself is symbolic of resurrection and expectations of a new life for him set upon his harmony with his universe. On waking up, he realizes that only then he has not been given his methadone during the days of the revolution. Clean from "his spiritual and his chemical dependence upon drugs, for which he would likely have killed a man" (186), his body is finally free from the destructive drugs. Stimulated by his novel sense of self-composure, he can care for the dying Chicken and wash his body that is full of tattoos representing verbal and pictorial old heroes, portraits of swords, shields, serpents, landscape and words of legends; some of them are taken from Dante 's Inferno: " Abandon all hope, ye who enter here "(190). The message activates a new tape of memories in the hero's mind about his family- life and his brother. For the first time, he claims responsibility for his brother's murder after poking fun at his tragic life: On being in prison, he turns into another copy of his dead brother – a man rejected by his family and community

for the shame he brought on himself and others likewise. In neglecting his brother's emotions and underestimating his troubles, he certainly has committed a fatal mistake

Chicken's death restores him back to reality. Dominated with "a deep sense of freeness" (201), he is more apt to screw up his courage and latent cunning in order to make best use of the situation. On cutting the shroud with a razor blade zipper, the hero cuts his fingers, trousers and thighs. The blood stands for his rebirth and regeneration. Retrieving his old innocence, he walks in the "lighted" (206) streets like a newborn baby, while harboring a fear, similar to Jody on his escape, of walking lest "some hysteria of his brain might cripple his legs" (Ibid.). While hearing a piano music from a distance and witnessing a crowd by a Laundromat down the street, he happens to see a three-legged washing machine, a husk of a car, an electric heater with a golden bowl, shaped like the sun and a sky-blue motorcycle helmet; a symbolic crown for winning liberty. Such items impersonate his being free and stand for the course of normal life he is about to lead. The "rectangle of pure light" (207) signifies his own inner light that monitors his physical liberty. Approaching a bus stop, he meets an old version of himself in the form of a slightly drunken man, wandering in the rain – a lucid proof of the commonness of his problems. His chat with the stranger he meets in the "brightly-lighted bus" (209), which declares, "I'm a human being"; "a disturber of peace" (209), also clarifies the normalcy of his troubles. After inviting him to be his roommate, he gives him a coat that perfectly suits his body – another sign of hospitality and generosity that regains his confidence in others as well as himself and buttresses self-assurance regarding his ambiguous future as a free man physically, mentally and spiritually.

In his predicament, Farragut nails his identity to nature and its "invincible potency" (Coale, 1977: 107). He always seeks "light of day" (5) in the blue sky. Upon his advent to his dungeon, he is struck by the image of a convict in prison grays feeding bread crusts to a dozen pigeon coupled with a vision of "a tarnished silver Christmas garland" (7) on a water pipe at the ceiling. The scene, revealing "an extraordinary reality, a promise of saneness … a grain of reason" (7), symbolizes his quest for harmony with nature to enjoy the unrestrained freedom of birds. Disturbed by the vision of wax flowers in a tin pitcher on a window, he believes that their "colors, in that somber place, seemed fiery" (8). The general gloomy atmosphere distorts his awareness of his surroundings. More than once, he feels that light in jail is "unkind" (17), particularly during his wife 's visits as she is "equal to its harshness" (17). Driven by his emotional imbalance, he shares a strong bond with cats, despite his once being a dog-breeder that can assuage his pain. Furthermore, his observations of a flock of red-winged blackbirds in a nearby swamp, seen across the blue sky above the walls in their gathering and flight that " had the choppy flight of caged birds "(86), inspire him with " a sense of power of the magnetic stamina of the planet"(Ibid.). On Jody's non-existence, Farragut 's harmony with nature becomes stronger. He works as a part-timer with the greenhouse crew, cutting lawns and hedges, barefooted. In such a condition of simplicity and innocence, he is obsessed with the impression that

> to cut the grass one followed the contour of the land. To study the contour of the land – to read it as one did on skis – was the study and read the contour of the neighborhood, the county, the state, the continent, the planet … Some oneness was involved, some contentment (138).

The green color of grass is highly symbolic. The riot – held by the inmates at the upstate prison of 'Amana' – a name expressive of man's power they try to exercise –leads only to one result; namely, the change of uniform of gray to green – an ironic, trivial achievement mocked by Cheever via Falconer's consciousness:

> The new issue was a noncommittal green, scarcely, thought Farragut, a verdant green, scarcely the green of Trinity and the long summer months, but a shade up from the gray of the living dead. Considering the solemnity of this change of color, skepticism and sarcasm would have seemed to them all trifling and contemptible … for it was for this light - greenness that the men of Amana had died or had lain, vomiting and naked, for hours in the mud (179-80).

The song of "Green *sleeves* "prisoners keeps singing highlights the pathetic irony of the situation. It, simultaneously, acts as a stimulus for Farragut to demolish his prior cage of isolation to play a role in life.

Amid riot, he strips off his clothes and washes his body with cold water. The snowy, ominous, rainy weather correlates with his attempt to cleanse his body and soul from his old impotence and inaction to master his fate. Glancing at the hanging plants on the warden's window, he feels that they are "the beloved of the true lonely" (145) and uses some as a wire to construct a radio. Generally, prison, in its bleakness, reminds him of a large, vast forest he skied through on some winter afternoon. In other words, it forms a mystery he has to solve and overcome to finally achieve full control of himself and his existence. Now having his wisdom tooth, though at forty-eight, he is mature enough to carry out his escape plan – a new vision symbolized by the white light; " an ending light but one that seems to bring the optical nerve, the powers of discernment to a climax"(153). That "simple phenomenon of the light – brightens angling across the air – struck him as a transcendent piece of good news" (85). Thus, his co-relation, organic unity with nature is his sole means to endure prison -life. The clouds signify the troubles he is going to face in daily life, but still unaware of and has been detached from in his cell.

Thus, Cheever's knack for employing such images to dramatize the moral conflict justifies Janet Groth's assessment of the novel in *Commonweal*: " This is no ordinary novel ", but " better to say a parable … for our times ", prefiguring " a kind of divine comedy, from Farragut 's down-laden entry into the gates of Falconer, through a time in purgatory, to a miraculous, grace-bestowed happy ending "(Groth, 1977:374).

Conclusion

The lack of freedom reverberates as an omnipresent, universal human dilemma meticulously expressed by Cheever and extolled via his variant aspects of structure and technique. The protagonist's trauma of entrapment proves to be the logical outcome of his chaotic society that prohibits, not nurtures, his freedom His physical, may constrain, but never stifle his potentialities: While it secures him for a while, it paradoxically thwarts his self-fulfillment and causes his disorientation – exactly like birds when detached from their natural environment. This dominant metaphor unravels key themes, spotlights human psychology and frames structure as well as technical tools in order to ultimately provide a thorough understanding of captivity and elaborate the available means to surmount it: To underscore his estrangement, Farragut has to control both internal and external forces to map a new avenue in life. Therefore, he first should develop a positive self-image through triumphing over internal, persona infirmities and re-assessing the bitter past memories that constantly chase him and jeopardize his stability. Upon the attainment of that deeper, mature approach, he can proceed onward to destroy the bars of their inner cage, announce pride in his individual worth that has to be coalesced with group pride to loosen the bars of their cage and undo the split between self and society. Though plunging into the uncertain, he ends up by bravely joining the normal march of time like other average people. Only by accepting his foibles can he easily grasp that of others as a fact of existence he should adjust to, rather than shun or evade within the fake safety of the confines of his cage. Throughout, the abiding belief in the rejuvenative power of love to oneself, others and life as a whole is a prerequisite to gear the quest for freedom and concoct a synthesis between the hero and his universe. It is the best tool to ensure that his abrupt drift into the outside world with no guarantees. In brief, human captivity is, after all, a self- imposed condition man can easily overcome by controlling his deficiencies and looking at life from a brighter angle.

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