



**A DISTINCT SIGNIFICANCE OF SOLITUDE LIFE IN JOHN CHEEVER'S *FALCONER*:**

**A STUDY**

*D. Chitra, Ph.D Research Scholar*

*Department of English*

*Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu.*

*Dr. R. Bharathi, Assistant Professor*

*Department of English*

*Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu*

John Cheever is one of the most important American novelists and short story writers. Mostly Cheever's work described, often as fantasy, life, ironic comedy, manners, and morals of middle-class and especially about suburban America. He is well known for his clear and elegant prose and his careful fashioning of incidents and anecdotes. And Cheever is a master of the short story and *The Stories of John Cheever* (1978) won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. He published the novel *Falconer* in 1977 and Samuel Coale in *John Cheever* mentioned *Falconer* as "a remarkable sensitivity and a grimly humorous assessment of human behavior that capture[s] the anguish of modern man" (2).

Ezekiel Farragut is the protagonist of the novel, is a professor, forty-eight years of age and methadone addict, , married, and the father of a schoolboy—who was sentenced for the murder of his brother Eben. Cheever never had explored the complex and strained relationship between brothers, this was the one and final incident of fratricide in the fiction. Also Cheever introduces several changes in this fiction: a seamy environment, extensive Christian symbolism and coarse language. And *Falconer* surprised readers, since Cheever dispensed with suburbia to write about life in prison. Cheever maintained that all his work was about confinement and that Ezekiel Farragut's final escape from prison was a symbol of the kind of redemption and renewed spiritual liberation Cheever had celebrated throughout his fiction.

In the mid-1970s, Cheever become roughly two decades of alcoholism and started to work on this novel. Through Farragut's hellish experiences and eventual escape, Cheever weaves a meditation on the themes of confinement and liberation, crime and punishment, and fear, love, and sin. *Falconer's* critical reception was mixed: some reviewers found it "sloppy," "forced," and "quite disappointing," while others praised it as "beautiful," "stunning," and "a parable for our times."

Though Cheever writes a prison novel, he is not interested in routine and sordid details--bursts of violence or boring rituals--than in striking transcendental visions. The structure of this novel, indeed, alternates between "highs" and "lows".

Farragut is a fratricide; he is given a number (#734-508-32) by the state. The man is a addict of alcoholism, experiences the heartless pressures of the prison system, goes through the routine inhumanity, homosexuality, and sheer boredom of prison life—and has enough energy left to contrive his escape into a world whose qualities are not necessarily superior to the concentrated hell of the prison. In prison Farragut is assigned to cellblock F, where his methadone and placebo cure, his relationships with Tiny and Walton, the guards, and with the other prisoners there—namely, Stone, Chicken Number Two, and Cuckold—and near where his homosexual relationship with his best friend Jody all eventually, but not easily, lead him out of the lower depths of his dissociation and fragile identity to a sufficient degree of association and self-confidence to make his break, just as his lover and mentor Jody had done some months before him.

Falconer explores the emotional and psychological alienation, infidelity, fratricide, drug addiction confinement, dishonesty and self-depiction. But the end of the novel Farragut is no longer an addict, remains how to pray and escapes from prison. In the first three part of the book speaks about Farragut alienation because of his mistake, he gets out from the community of outside Falconer prison. Farragut shows less romantic interest to his wife Marcia. Farragut seems as selfish man, concerned only with his own physical and mental comfort. If selfishness separate Farragut from other, Farragut's evasiveness separate him from himself basically, Farragut tries to evade thoughts of responsibility to for his sin. While a conversation with his wife Marcia, he tries to deny the crime itself:

‘That’s good. I wouldn’t want to be married to a homosexual, having already married a homicidal drug addict.’  
 ‘I did not kill my brother.’  
 ‘You struck him with a fire iron. He died.’  
 ‘I struck with him a fire iron. H was drunk. He hit his head on the earth.’...  
 ‘You’re so superficial, Farragut. You’ve always been a lightweight’  
 ‘I did not kill my brother’  
 ‘Shall we change the subject?’  
 ‘Please.’ (22-23)

Farragut's moral and physiological alienation gets over here. With the backdrop of alienation in the first three parts, Cheever brings out Farragut's gifts of redemption and grace in the last three parts of the novel. Jody, another prisoner, a young handsome with whom Farragut enjoys a homosexual affair, is the first grace to him. With Jody, Farragut enjoys a deep, selfless love and sense of humanity. When Judy decided to forgo his diploma from the Fiduciary University of Banking as it comes in to Falconer prison. When a cardinal comes in a helicopter to award Fiduciary U. diplomas and to offer Holy Communion to a select twenty-five of the prisoners, Jody escapes among the acolytes.

In *Falconer* grace is just like mysterious as damnation, and it reappears when Farragut construct a makeshift radio o receive news about the prison riot. As like Jody, the radio is an instrument of connection, a kind of balm for Farragut's hellish alienation:

Farragut got his copper wire and his toilet paper roll and began to build his radio  
 How beautiful the wire seemed, a slender, clean, gold-coloured tie to the world of the living... some

bond or lock or shining buckle that could fasten two worlds. When it was done he sighed like a gratified lover and mumbled. (165-166)

And Farragut another inmate Chicken Number Two, who is nearly dying, Farragut was nursing him, precipitates his painful memories and he recalls the pain, guilt, hostility of Farragut relationship with his brother Eben. After this long recollection about himself, Chicken dies, not before his lecture on the importance of love and hope. The gift is freedom as Farragut changes places with the dead man in a body bag. Again Cheever distorts narrative possibility and a conveniently cloud obscured moon aid another “miraculous” escape.

Ezekiel Farragut is selfish and self-absorbed, he does change by the end to include a larger vision of the world—if not more tolerant, at least more open to possibilities than he had been in the past. Halfway through the novel Cheever writes, “Farragut considered transcendent experience to be perilous rubbish. One saved one’s ardor for people and objects that could be used.” Later he seems to recognize that his closeness to Chicken and Jody will lead him to better self-knowledge and will direct him toward some version of joy for the rest of his life, whether he is imprisoned or not. Like the protagonist in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “Young Goodman Brown,” Ezekiel sees that people are hopelessly fallen, but unlike Hawthorne’s protagonist he chooses for his dying hour not to be gloom. Farragut has committed a crime against his fellow man but seeks and finds redemption in renewed self-worth, a homosexual affair with Jody, and his ultimate acceptance of faith is recurring part of the novel.

Cheever’s own confinement from the addiction of alcoholism which resulted in a spiritual rebirth of creativity and reaffirmation of religion is partially responsible for Farragut’s characterization and the overtones religious expressed in the novel. Cheever gave more authority in *Falconer* and he genially forced his materials into the mold of his optimistic imagination.

At the end of the novel Farragut whines rather than suffers; he dwells in fantasies and dreams; he privileges the flesh; he is judgmental; he is secretive; and he is a schemer who rationalizes his actions. He never suffers the dark night of the soul typically necessary for moral redemption. Thus, the novel may evoke caution in readers who are unconvinced by Farragut’s improbable escape, amused by the “angel” who happens to be waiting at the bus stop for the escaped convict, and doubtful of Farragut’s too easy embrace of joy that closes the text.

Farragut has escaped from *Falconer* and is reborn. Walking in the street a free man, his head is high, his back straight, “Rejoice” he thinks “rejoice”.

## References

1. Bosha, Francis J.,ed. *The Critical Response to John Cheever*. Westport, conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994.
2. Cheever, John. *Falconer*. 1977. New York, Ballantine, 1980.
3. Coale, Samuel. *John Cheever*. New York Ungar, 1977.