

“Resolving Dichotomies: John Cheever’s Comic Imagination and *Expelled* as Debut”

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Abstract

Often called as the Chekov of suburbs, John Cheever’s literary errands and his status as an American canonical writer have remained underprojected and the critical attention he received was very often silent about the several dynamics of his art including the comic dimension. The objectives of this study are to argue that Cheever is a leading exponent of what is called the “new comic” of the American literature and the corresponding vision unfolds itself in his first short story *Expelled* that inaugurates his five-decade long productive literary engagement. This research paper examines his place in the American novelistic tradition, his contributions to it and the uniqueness of his vision through the analysis of the story *Expelled*. The discussion also highlights how as a debut literary piece the story exhibits the germination of the entire body of work. *Expelled* is a satire, an ironical statement and a moral protest by an adolescent school dropout against the American Prepschool Education system that inhibits creativity and freedom. It also is an intense expression of a young literary artist who discovers himself as a misfit not only in the prepschool but also the New England puritanical psyche. The nucleus of the Cheeveresque successfully anticipates, as early as 1930, the literary promises of Cheever’s in the future.

Keywords: American Comic, New Comic, , Absurd, Cheever, Satire, Formalism

1. Introduction

A discussion of Cheever's first story *Expelled* in the vein of the comic in his work can ideally begin with a brief analysis of what Ihab Hassan calls the "New Comic." Hassan wonders whether the comedy that appears in the works of Bellow, Ellison, Purdy, Salinger and Cheever and which is characterized by a great deal of bitterness and a good deal of madness should be described as the death or birth of a new comedy. The books he names as examples are *Henderson the Rain King*, *Invisible Man*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *The Wapshot Chronicle*, *Malcolm* and *The Catcher in the Rye*. Hassan comments:

I believe it is the birth of a new sense of reality, a new knowledge of error and of incongruity, an affirmation of life under the aspect of comedy. For comedy, broadly conceived, may be understood as a way of making life possible in this world, despite evil or death. Comedy recognizes human limitations, neither in broken pride nor yet in saintly humility but in the spirit of ironic acceptance (636).

Hassan’s description of the New Comic that dominated the American fiction writing of the middle decades of the twentieth century has similarities with other interpretations of the literature of the same period. Marcus Klein describes the predominant theme of these writings as "accommodation after alienation." Jonathan Baumbach calls the imagination of these writers a "landscape of nightmare." There have been several other interpretations too, Black Humour being the leading one. There are some common features that inform the imagination of the post-Second-World-War American writings. An analysis of these features will be helpful in reading Cheever's comic, the factors that form the background, placing him in the twentieth-century American comic tradition and a discussion on the relevance of his first publication to those.

2. The New Comic, American Fiction and Cheever

In his book *After Alienation*, Marcus Klein observes that the American fictions of the mid-century and their protagonists encounter a moral dilemma that “agonizingly” surfaces in their lives and which is “at the center of our most serious contemporary fiction,”

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Pushes the protagonists to withdraw from the “grander social and political phenomena” of the contemporary time and develop intensely serious concern to locate themselves in this world (Klein 1965, 30). The heroes demonstrate a negotiation with the dismal and uncertain worlds they live in by a special kind of acceptance and adaptation. They try to achieve redemption or through transformation move beyond the dilemma.

Klein suggests that the act of "accommodation" is the appropriate tool to deal with the chaotic world and make adjustments to the social facts. This act could minimize the effects of confrontation between the self and the society. By accommodation he means "a simultaneous engagement and disengagement, which is the characteristic movement of the novel in these past years. The hero begins in freedom of the self and discovers that he is isolated. The hero chooses community, he assumes racial obligations, or he declares himself a patriot, or he makes love—and he discovers that he has sacrificed his identity, and his adventures begin all over again." Klein recommends a "tentative" and "cautionary" accommodation that is necessary for social engagement and that is like an exercise of "acrobatics," which needs a new balancing after each achievement of a position. According to Klein, this exercise of realigning oneself to the social needs gives birth to comedy. The hero lives within his dilemma by either "exercising his wits" or by undergoing comic transformation. When he manages to achieve either of the two he "proposes the possibility of living"(30). Klein's accommodation has another dimension; its movement towards reconciliation and submission to affirmation, however temporary it may be. In a hopeless situation, such submission becomes an act of faith, not necessarily a religious faith, but a secular one, which is followed by a comic celebration; one that Richard Rupp explains as to find meaning in a cluttered and trivial world whose acceptance focuses on the livability of the modern American life (24). Celebration is possible when there is an acceptance of the odd, of the incongruities, of the disruptions and of the asymmetrical. Comic acceptance has been made possible by these writers who have "acquired a tolerance for the mixed, causeless quality of experience: its loose ends, its broken links, its surprises and reversals. Knowing how outrageous facts can be, they do not pretend to subdue them with a flourish and a symbol" (Hassan 363).

The exercise of accommodation arguably results in a concern for self-definition. Ralph Ellison considers this as the major theme around which the twentieth-century American literature revolves. He says that the nature of American society is such that Americans are prevented from knowing who they are. In *Invisible Man* this struggle towards self-definition is applied both to individuals, and to the society as a whole. *Invisible Man*, in Ellison's words, demonstrates a clash of innocence and human error, a struggle between illusion and reality. In this sense, the book is part of the literary tradition of initiation tales, stories of young men or women who confront the larger world beyond the security of home, and attempt to define themselves in new terms. Through the misadventures of his naive protagonist, Ellison stresses an American individual's need to free himself from the powerful influence of societal stereotypes and demonstrates the multiple levels of deception that must be overcome before an individual can achieve self-awareness. The concern for self-definition has been a theme of the comic since Washington Irving created Rip and Mark Twain created Huck a century back and continued in John Barth, John Hawkes, Bruce J. Friedman, Richard Farina, Thomas Pynchon, and Phillip Roth, among others, who wrote comedy that are qualified by a blackness; their heroes are engaged in such a moral mission which suggests the absurdity of the American heroes' "coming of age." These novelists create heroes who are, in their search for identity, exhibitors of the new comic spirit that includes a mixture of boisterousness and bitterness, hope and despair. Despite the grim, absurd or “surreal contortions” of the time, the reactions and the responses of the hero can be positive. The protagonist finds ways of restoring sanity through madness or buffoonery. In their search for identity, the question "who I am?" does not bother them. Rather, they put in efforts to reach a point where they can ask themselves what they have made of their identity; an assessment tool to recognize the absurd and to empower the protagonist to reject living in it long. Protagonists are empowered to choose to reestablish a moral norm, to return to a social order or create another social order though sometimes the task of finding an alternate social order becomes difficult. A nihilistic, irredeemable world defy the hero's attempts for a comic affirmation and in such a situation, the protagonist is under pressure to create an imaginative world or accept the tragic as his destiny. Ellison shows the solution when he says that an individual is not trapped by geography, time, or place; can overcome these obstacles to independence, if they are willing to accept the responsibility to judge existence independently. Faulkner's protagonists reach maturity in the tragic as well as the comic way. For Faulkner, therefore, a simultaneous recognition of the comic and the tragic acts as an affirmation. Both the authors legitimize anarchy and chaos in human existence. Existence is a kind of comic alternative and neutralizes life's disruptions and the incongruities. Both demonstrate a desire to somehow return to a social order rather than substitute an individual for a universal principle.

By making these themes his fictional engagement, Cheever shares with the other contemporary writers a tradition that Hassan calls the "New Comic." Cheever's comic quality has both parallel and divergent forms and his affiliation can be explored at three different levels.

Like most of his contemporaries, Cheever dramatizes the conflict between the American surface life and the deeper interpretations of the American dream. His responses to the contemporary anxiety, ennui and absurdity are expressed in his description of men and women suffering from the American inability to make sense of their lives in the absence of a deep-rooted cultural heritage. Like his contemporaries, he is sensitive to the metaphysical plights of his time and resorts to the American treatment of the absurd. At the end, Cheever adopts emancipation from all the confining forces and transcendence of the limitations of human existence, resulting in an affirmation that is central to his imagination.

3. Cheever's Comic Dichotomies and *Expelled*

Robert M. Slabey makes some important observations on Cheever's comic when he compares him with Washington Irving and are especially helpful in identifying the special qualities of Cheever's comic that often borders on a Shakespearean brand of the tragi-comedy:

More than a century after Washington Irving described the Catskills as "Fairy Mountains" with "magical hues" produced by seasonal and diurnal atmospheric changes, John Cheever has taken that enchanted vicinity as the setting for some of his best fiction. In this continuation of Hudson River mythology, Cheever's territory, like Irving's, is somewhere between fact and fantasy, the mundane and the marvelous, "modern" life and ancient legend. And while both writers mix comedy and sadness, Irving's vision gravitates towards the first pole, Cheever's towards the second (180).

Slabey's comparison of Cheever with Irving not only place the former in the special storytelling tradition introduced by Irving, but also in the canon of the mythopoeic literature that rests on transcendence. As Slabey would further say:

They are both in the company of American writers who suggest the existence of a level — mysterious and mythic —beyond the middle range of experience and find "reality" at the crossroads of actuality and myth. In addition, Cheever's magical transformations have cultural roots in Ovid and Cotton Mather as well as in American Romanticism. Like Irving, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Faulkner, Cheever has taken a region and a time and, without diminishing their importance, has made them stand for the larger meanings of American experience; he can see the meaning of the country in the way ordinary people live their daily lives (180).

The "mysterious and the mythic", "magical" transformation, the sudden illumination, the marvelous and the fantastic, metamorphosis, transformation are tools for Cheever to combat the existential crisis of his fictional men and women and a return to a social order. The other examples are his words which are laden with moral and spiritual connotations such as "valor," "wisdom," "kindness," "virtue," "glory," "paradise" etc which help transcend the doom and talk of celebration. John Leonard, a Cheever critic, likes "these words and the emotions they evoke—love, humor, serenity, sweetness, strength, clemency, intelligence, ardor, soul" because the way Cheever uses them and his contemporaries don't. "They aren't used much, or they are not used honestly, in books by Cheever's peers... Irony can be used the way Cheever uses it... even while these words, these values, really, are inadequate to cope with the world of chance, of evil. Inside Cheever's irony, love and humor are preserved, not abused"(114).*Expelled* observes, captures the dichotomy, criticises, uses irony, satirises, transcends, celebrates and define John Cheever, the writer.

Expelled, Cheever's first story, is a witness to Cheever's unique literary temper. With *Expelled*, Cheever launches his career in 1930, at the age of seventeen that invited a long list of commendations. It was the immediate result of Cheever's sudden expulsion from Thayer Academy, Massachusetts, says Lynne Waldeland, one of Cheever's earliest critics (17-18). Scott Donaldson, Cheever's earliest biographer, comments: "The roster of brilliant people who failed in school is a long one... But Cheever was probably the only one to use such a rejection as a way of launching his career. He sat down and wrote a story about it, applying a thin veneer to his own experience"(36-37). Cowley describes Cheever's accomplishment as a writer an exceptional situation: "In the following sketches, written at the age of seventeen, he reproduces the atmosphere of an institution where education is served out dry in cakes, like pemmican"(171). Charles McGrath considers the story as "one of the most assured and precocious debuts in all of American fiction — a signal, or it should have been, that the author was worth paying attention to" (3).

While Cheever has been lauded for the story, critics and scholars have debated and are divided on its genesis and the politics of its publication in the *New Republic*. In the following excerpt of an interview with John Hersey in *The New York Times Book Review* Cheever replies the questions on his expulsion from Thayer Academy conclusively:

“Your formal, or institutional, education was broken off when you were bounced from Thayer Academy at the age of 17. I wonder if you'd like to begin by telling us about that experience.”

“I was delighted to be expelled from Thayer. It was not unreasonable on their part. They would have very me to go on sensed intuitively that that would have been disastrous. So I was very happy when the headmaster threatened me with expulsion, and I immediately went home and wrote an article for *The New Republic*, called “Expelled,” which *The New Republic* published. I was 17 when it was published, and I was very happy about it.”

“What was the immediate cause of your expulsion?”

“Smoking, an expulsion offence.”

“Who caught you? Were you caught with the crime blazing?”

“I was caught by a teacher.”

“Was it exciting?”

“It was intentional, John” (31).

Like to his interviewer, Cheever has been massively convincing himself and his readers about the myth (or reality?) of his expulsion from the Academy. Talking about the honorary degree from Harvard, he wrote in one of his journals: “[t]o have been expelled from Thayer Academy for smoking and then to have been given [this honor]...seems to me a crowning example of the inestimable opportunities of the world in which I live and in which I pray generations will continue to live” (Bailey 581). Cheever was a fictionist and the expulsion story also was part of fiction. The truth is that when Cheever was asked by the school administrators at the Thayer Academy to work on his dismal grades repeatedly and was warned more than once, he dropped out on his own. *Expelled's* publication in the *New Republic* and the news about it brought the headmaster reveal that Cheever was “not expelled from the Academy...He left entirely on his own volition in the late spring season, presumably because of the added attraction of the May orchard blossoms, which he characterized [in the story] in his unique way” (46). Dramatising the expulsion from the school and publishing it in the *New Republic*, then a left-inclined journal, and “...shaped the stuff of his experience and imagination to fit the accepted formulas of the journals of opinion,” Cheever certainly had design (Gamble 611). Malcolm Cowley, the junior editor of the *New Republic* felt he was “hearing for the first time the voice of a new generation” when he read Cheever’s *Expelled* that slammed the American prep schools’s dichotomous character. Cowley defended the young writer’s intention of providing a pure literary work, not a political opinion by saying “John wasn't given to expressing opinions; by instinct he was a storyteller” (16).

Notwithstanding Cheever’s lie and the critical debates on the publication of the story, *Expelled* received favourable comments from the critics of the contemporary time and has been continuing to do so. Updike considered *Expelled* as “alarmingly mature...with a touch of the uncanny, as the rare examples of literary precocity—Rimbaud, Chatterton, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Green—tend to be” (Pitofsky 111). Bailey, Cheever’s most recent biographer, in his biography calls it “an astonishing debut” (47). Not completely convinced about the story’s literary merit, O’Hara, writes that Cheever and Cowley “had made a bold statement about the stultifying atmosphere of America’s educational establishment. The application of the storyteller’s talent made the statement into art of a sort, but not necessarily first-rate art. The distinction would have been of little concern to the *New Republic*; the story cut close enough to the bone of reality to interest its left-leaning readers” (3). But he concludes that the story indeed “demonstrates the remarkable gifts that, years later, would reappear in his best work: skillful pacing, sharp characterization and place description, and careful thematic development based on a clear narrative view- point” (3). Cheever’s literary objectives are expressed when in a 1977 interview with Robert Baum Cheever admitted that *Expelled* “was meant to be an attack”, not simply a satire (142). Cheever's attack is aimed at the “the hypocritical, tradition-bound, and ‘regressive’ Massachusetts preparatory school system” with which Charles is “unable to identify with” and of he is a victim (Gamble 619). Satire begins with the beginning of the story when after the "Skirmish" with each of the school's departments, Charles has to meet the headmaster who "was never nice to anybody unless he was a football star, or hadn't paid his tuition or was going to be expelled"(Cheever 171). The "cordialities," and the "nice" behavior of the headmaster is, of “two kinds.” “One heartfelt and extended to football stars,” and the other is to handle “distasteful matters” in a “civilized” fashion of the New England.

Expelled is divided into three sections in which Cheever describes three different individuals from the school to reflect on the Academy's values. These sections are called *the Colonel*, who gives a speech on the Memorial Day, *Margaret Courtwright*, who teaches English in the way Thayer finds acceptable, and *Laura Driscoll* who teaches history in a way Thayer does not approve.

In the character sketches of the Colonel, the English teacher and the history teacher, Cheever attempts to raise crucial questions on the contradictions of the American values and practices, American myth and reality through the symbolic use of the prep school, its pedagogy, convictions and moral standards. The last section, *Five Months Later*, Charles, the young protagonist looks back and reflects on the expulsion, broods over the general climate of the American prep schools and their curricula, and above all, American self-delusion.

In the section "The Colonel", Cheever dramatizes the collusion between the academic world of the school and the political, military, athletic world outside. The Colonel comes on the Memorial Day as a special speaker, since the everyday practice of the school remains that the students "went up into the black chapel" in the morning and listen to the same speech again and again: "In the spring life is like a baseball game. In the fall it is like football" (172). On the Memorial Day, since the school does not get a governor or a mayor to speak, it gets the Colonel. If it was the governor, he would tell the students "what a magnificent country" America is. He would tell the students to be "beware of the Red menace." He would want to tell them "that the goddam foreigners should have . . . stayed in their own goddam countries if they didn't like ours" but he "will not dare say this though" (171). If the Mayor spoke, he would "tell us that our country is beautiful and young and strong. That the War is over, but that if there is another war we must fight. He will tell us that war is a masculine trait that has brought present civilization to its fine condition. Then he will leave us and help stout women place lilacs on graves" (171). The Colonel with "a chest thick with medals," and with an experience of having "been to war" was nervous and "spoke as quickly as he could" (171). According to him war was bad and there would never be another war. Looking at the young innocent faces of the boys who "were all very clean", and whose "knees were crossed and . . . soft pants hung loosely", the colonel "began to whimper" (172). The colonel is in a position to see the discrepancy between the innocent boys in the school and the surrounding of the battlefield which the other two cannot. The Colonel spoke, revealed and confessed what the Governor "will not dare say." "The governor and the mayor celebrate a shallow yet belligerent patriotism that authenticates both their citizenship and their gender" (Gamble 621-22). Both represent the American Dream of "a city upon a hill", American Exceptionalism, and the idea of a perfect country. The irony lies in the contrast between the colonel and the other two, who have not been to wars, but promote "military masculinity" and the Colonel, by breaking down, "compromises" with the same. Meanor adds that "the colonel's greatest transgression is that he has begun to teach" (31). "It took the school several weeks to get over all this," Charles concludes and the colonel would never be invited back "Nobody said anything, but the Colonel was never asked again. If they could not get a Governor or a Mayor they could get someone besides a Colonel. They made sure of that" (172). Charles reflects with irony the contemporary society's attitude to gender, to the freedom of expression, a society built upon the statement of liberty and equality.

The English teacher, Margaret Courtwright who has an "antiseptic office" is protected in her position by a combination of seniority and compromise. "People said that she was the best English teacher in this part of the country, and when boys came back from Harvard they thanked her for the preparation she had given them." (174). Her pupils and the Academy never noticed how dated seemed her tastes in literature: "She did not like Edgar Guest, but she did like Carl Sandburg. She couldn't seem to understand the similarity. When I told her people laughed at Galsworthy she said that people used to laugh at Wordsworth. She did not believe people were still laughing at Wordsworth." Charles comments satirically "That was what made her so nice" (172). Her teaching of literature in the most uncreative, monotonous and standardized manner which is encouraged by the Academy becomes the source of humour as well as satire: "After having seen twenty-seven performances of Hamlet, and after having taught it for sixteen years, she became a sort of immortal. Her interpretation was the one accepted on College Board papers. . . No one had to get a new interpretation" (172). Charles reads to her plays he wrote that she could not understand. Confused and concerned, she first praises the play and then tells Charles a story about another pupil from Japan who liked to write. "She was afraid I would go the way of her Japanese pupil. She doubted anyone who disagreed with Heine on Shakespeare and Croce on expression" (175).

As a contradiction, Laura Driscoll, the history teacher, displeases the authority because she teaches to educate her pupils. In contrast to the unnamed history teacher who talks of little but "discipline," of "covering the ground," Laura Driscoll teaches history to shape their characters. The unnamed history teacher makes Charles comment: "I do not know how long history classes have been like this. One time or another I suppose history was alive. That was before it died its horrible fly-dappled unquivering death" (173). Laura dares to resurrect history from its grave filled with "dead dates and names." As a result, she is considered "terribly dangerous" and "never a good history teacher." Charles then proceeds to enumerate Laura's "failures" that might have upset the authority at school:

She is the only teacher I have ever had who could feel history with an emotional vibrance ... with a poetic understanding ... She was the only history teacher I have ever had who was often ecstatical.

She would stand by the boards and shout out her discoveries on the Egyptian cultures ... She taught history as an interminable flood of events... She taught history as a hypothesis from which we could extract the evaluation of our own lives (173).

But Laura Driscoll's principles of progressive and creative education; the freedom she uses and grants to her pupils while teaching history are objectionable by Thayer's standards. She knows that the College Board will not allow her to exercise the academic liberty when she tells her students: "Do not let me impose my perceptions upon you"(173). The Academy "didn't care about Charters as long as you knew the date. They did not care whether history was looked at from the mountains or the sea. Laura spent too much time on such trivia and all her pupils didn't get into Harvard"(173). Laura got fired from the Academy since she "did not think much of America." She announces openly and makes this "obvious and the faculty heard about it." The faculty who all thought America was beautiful "didn't like people to disagree"(173). Cheever's narrator indicts the pragmatic value system because of the "blind arrogance of its self-canonization"(Meanor 31). Laura Driscoll is made an exile like Charles, since both revolt against the system.

Cheever ends the story using juxtaposition. The concluding paragraph is unquestionably Cheeveresque where Charles is a mix of sadness and acceptance, hope and hopelessness, confinement and freedom when he says:

And now it is August. The orchards are stinking ripe. The tea-colored brooks run beneath the rocks. There is sediment on the store and no wind in the willows. Everyone is preparing to go back to school. I have no school to go back to.

I am not sorry. I am not at all glad.

It is strange to be so young and to have no place to report to at nine o' clock. That is what education has always been. It has been laced curtsies and perfumed punctualities. But it is nothing. It is symmetric with my life. I am lost in it. That is why I am not standing in a place where I can talk.

The school windows are being washed. The floors are thick with fresh oil.

Soon it will be time for the snow and the symphonies. It will be time for Brahms and the great dry winds... (174).

Cheever's engagement with opposing polarities and contradictory descriptions in this paragraph marks the beginning of the craft he would negotiate throughout. The novelist Paul Harding considers them as "essential move or method for art" and he says these are applicable in all art forms. "You put contradictory things next to each other, and in the intermingling of them you get something like the mystery of human experience. The same kind of principle works for juxtaposition... the great and the small, the good and the bad, the light and the dark, all are intermingled"(5-6). Charles's ambivalent response to his own situation anticipates the intermingling of many such Manichean conflicts that would be the thematic pattern of Cheever's future work, the organizing aesthetic principles of his organic comic imagination.

The ending of the story directs towards the inevitability of the rhythm of the natural cyclicity that Northrop Frye identifies as the essence of the modern comic literary sensibility. Charles reflects on the season that is the month of "August," on the ripening of fruits that signifies the endless cycles of death and renewal. Secondly, there is a sense of hope embedded in the pattern of Charles's discussion of the changing seasons. Charles is sad but looks forward to a world and a time he would be happy. His special medley of melancholy and irony, his discovery of the heroic in the mundane, of the importance of the moral choice, and his lyrical voice give a special significance to the story, as it does to all his other works.

As early as this story, young Cheever knew how to use stylistic control and restraint over the play of humor, satire and irony. Charles calmly explains: "It is not the fault of the school at all. It was the fault of the system—the non-educational system, the college preparatory system..." In certain descriptions, the humor and satire hide sadness. As Charles reflects: "I was sorry, but I was not sorry over the fact that I had gone out. I was sorry that the outside and the inside could not have been open to one another... I was not sorry that I had left school. I was sorry that I left for the reasons that I did. ... I am not sorry. I am not at all glad"(174). The irony is heavy-handed and the dichotomy too very artistically constructive. Observing Cheever's use of ambivalences Harding says: "It goes back to what Cheever's character is attempting, but failing, to do —trying to deny the dark part and show only the light. But in the model, that conceptual model, no subject has any meaning if it's been separated from its opposite. It's Einstein, it's relativity: nothing has meaning without being relative to its opposite" (6). Cheever could dramatize the essential ambiguity that was fundamental to the existence, both personal and societal.

Young Cheever continues with the description of the dualities while he rebukes the self-delusion of the American psyche. An ironic detachment is heard and felt in his satiric attack on the American complacency:

Our country is the best country in the world. We are swimming in prosperity and our president is the best president in the world. We have lager apples and better cotton and faster and more beautiful machines. ..It is the gem of the ocean and it is too bad. It is bad because people believe it all. . . . Because the tempered newspaper keeps its eyes ceilingwards and does not see the dirty floor. Because all they know is the tempered newspaper (174).

The technic once again is building of moral conflicts pointing towards the artistic climax to be followed by a transcendence. As a consequence, Cheever's and his narrator's world experiences the threat of losing its centre but there is a counter response. The lies in the tempered newspapers are countered by the orchards, the symphonies and the dry winds. There is a faint sound of an alternative narrative, a restored Eden that Charles is expecting to establish, one that is of reconstruction after the loss and the exile, like the protagonists of several other novels of the time, especially Malamud, Bellow, Faulkner and Ellison. Cheever, like many of his peers strive for an alternate social order in his fictions when his characters recognise absurdity. He ironically perceives the situation and places the character in some dilemma, some crises or unexpected danger. The characters and situations become fabulous because Cheever makes them undergo metamorphosis. A mythic dimension is attached to the characters and situations to revitalize them and to achieve transcendence. Accordingly, the situations, which are so commonplace, now become classical or biblical myth. *Expelled* uses the myth of fall and resurrection and is an early example of a rite of passage, from a prelapsarian to a postlapsarian Charles. The characters' rite of passage from innocence to self-knowledge fulfils the requirements of a tradition of conventional comic writing. Cheever uses this technique not only to move out of the ironic premises, but to transcend the tragic that he so ironically hides or exploits with a sinister laugh. Stories like "The Enormous Radio," "O Youth and Beauty," "The Country Husband," "The Chimera," "The Angel of the Bridge" and "The Swimmer" are a few of many examples where Cheever uses such a technique.

Cheever understands the timeless desire of mankind for reconciliation and the pressing need to make life possible. Charles, like his author, would ultimately seek coherence, order, meaning, celebration, acceptance and harmony. The story is an expression of Cheever's unique writing and anticipates the most remarkable achievement in his career which is the simple way by which he finds harmony between our inner and outer selves, consistently fighting to soar above the ambivalences, confinements and frustrations in the lives of men and women in his fiction. Cheever, the man, had experienced the same struggle, the same ambivalence. "Life for my father," Susan Cheever has noted, "was either unbearable or transcendent"(87). R.G. Collins, an important Cheever critic observes that Cheever "seems to be suspended between a tragic pessimism and a raptured expectancy; he writes as an impaled victim believing that, somewhere near, there sounds unearthly salvation; he seems to be listening for the tone of angels, as the earth smoulders underneath him" (175). Cheever does sing the song of angels himself, doing for himself and his readers what the girl does for the narrator in the story "The Angel of the Bridge;" what the rain does to Johnny Hake in "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill;" or the smell of wood does to Francis Weed in "The Country Husband." Cheever "sings over the incongruities of their world, and over the abyss of spiritual ungainliness and unfulfilled longings"(510). In *Expelled* Cheever's angels are outside the classroom that insulate contact from the beautiful, free outside natural world. Life for Cheever is "in its full range, irreducible, in its full, heartbreaking complexity. . . . heartbreaking mystery of being a human being" (Harding 7).

4. Conclusion

The story foreshadows the themes and techniques Cheever would use in his later works. Patrick Meanor points out that the story is "the first example of the single most important thematic pattern in all of Cheever's fiction: the fall. In a certain sense, most of Cheever's short stories and all of his novels are variations on this persistent theme; his work is obsessed with Edenic crises in every conceivable form. . . . to recreate a permanent paradise" (Pitofsky 111). As a resolute believer in both Fall and Redemption Cheever strove towards an easing of two contradictory sensibilities, the tragic and the comic. He comes out triumphant on most occasions believing that comedy always contains potential to transcend tragedy within it and tragedy will remain an incomplete comedy. He said that conflicts between love and death, youth and age, war and peace, light and dark, loss and regain—"are simply that vast vocabulary we use for the divisions of life. And it seems to me that literature is the best way to refresh this conflict, to embrace it, to admit it in our lives"(Hersey 24). Cheever's narrative temper approximates what Ihab Hassan describes as the New Comic imagination. It includes a rejection of complete annihilation, a new knowledge of human error and incongruity, an affirmation of life.

Broadly conceived, the voice of the New Comic may be understood as a way of making life possible in this world by difficult means, despite evil or death. Cheever makes Charles transcend the tragic failure and move to a different world where he could give a free voice. His getting expelled from the Academy and writing a narrative on the experience is a release from the past, from the confinement. When Charles declares that he “will not say any more” since he does not stand in a place where he can talk, he knows that his losing voice and identity in Thayer is not the end of hope because he would eventually find voice in another world, a world of writers; “the world of those who write imaginatively. He will stand with Joyce and Fitzgerald, with E. E. Cummings and Cowley... to tell tale after tale on himself and us all” (Gamble 631). He will inhabit the world of the other exiles, the Colonel, the boy from Japan and Laura Driscoll, those expelled who never came back. “As winter moves again into spring,” Charles will wait for the cycle to complete, may be in “Provincetown”, a symbolic mythopoeic place like many such places in Cheever stories. The story's viewpoint is well defined; narrative tone is clear and resonant. Cheever shifts his satiric attack from the school authority to the entire nation. The story is an early example of a rite of passage, from a fall to resurrection, from childhood to maturity, a theme that is traditionally associated with the form of the comic.

Cheever's controlled use of irony makes his writing more than a reaction to the situation of modern man. He creates another identifiable and significant comic voice of his own that makes his writing unique. His ironic tone, like that of all serious writers of his age, makes him a product of the "Age of Irony" (Hunt 9). There have been other American writers who have dramatized an ironic ambience from different perspectives. For example, novelists like Bellow, Salinger, Malamud, Roth, Vonnegut, and Heller use an ironical tone to explore the contemporary American loss of identity and loss of self. Cheever shares with his contemporaries a keen perception of the irony of recent American history. He uses the full range of ironic techniques that some of his contemporaries used. However, he differs from his contemporaries and his postmodernist counterparts; he eschews the extreme flank of ironic discourse. Unlike his colleagues, he believes that still there is a possibility of non-ironic fictions, and he remains convinced that fiction is "the bright book of life," and it can probe deep to *reveal man's* deepest moral and spiritual aspirations. Cheever uses irony with a geniality and celebration which his peers probably failed to do, whose irony is so "hyper-developed it becomes a form of suicide" (Booth 178). *Expelled* embodies Cheever's vision of the world and art that also becomes the final statement of his long literary career ending with *Oh What a Paradise It Seems*. In the last paragraph of his novella, Sears, the protagonist, is morally resurrected when the Beasley's pond is resurrected from a state of ruin, since he was committed to save the pond for ecological reasons. Cheever describes:

“What moved him was ... that most powerful sense of our being alive on the planet. It was that most powerful sense of how singular, in the vastness of creation, is the richness of our opportunity. The sense of that hour was of an exquisite privilege, the great benefice of living here and renewing ourselves with love. What a paradise it seemed! (Cheever 100).

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