

items, traditional users of these foods did not have a clear understanding of their scientific property and medicinal potential. An aspect of everyday culture in these societies is that everybody is expected to have access to traditional knowledge systems, food items and also healing systems. In everyday tribal life or belief, a community confines a democratic dissemination and absorption of knowledge systems, which may be treated as specialist knowledge in other communities. Further, Graham talks about social visits in India as a burden on the host. As she says: As visits in the East are matters of ceremony, not of kindness, they are considered as a burden on the visitor, from which the person visited relieves him, as soon as he is satisfied with his company, by ordering refreshments, or offering the paung, which is a signal to depart" (Graham, 19). Here, Graham's inability and lack of knowledge to understand the cultural or social ritual is in turn drawn to the lack of kindness among the Indians. The social visits in India are always honoured by offering refreshments to the guests; and significantly offering betel nuts is not meant as a signal to depart, rather it is one of the means of showing respect and hospitality to the guest. But for a Westerner, all these appear to be curious as well as exotic and thus the real meanings of these everyday living practices are miscommunicated.

III

Conclusion: Everyday activities or practices may be different to persons belonging to two different cultures, but everyone's everyday life is unique to them. The everyday practices are seldom questioned and observed critically; rather, they are followed instinctively without knowing why certain things are done in a certain manner. To a person familiar with these practices, there is nothing strange; these are mundane activities performed on a regular basis and is taken for granted. But when an outsider to that particular culture questions those everyday practices or describes them as bizarre, then only the obscurity of those practices is realized. Moreover, the everyday life of others can seem alien to one due to its banality. Thus, it appears that colonial discourse creates conditions for realignment of the everyday and the exotic. These texts should be seen as archives of knowledge systems; they are important because they point out in paradoxical ways the differences between and the relatedness of the everyday and the exotic. It can be said that the everyday is also historically constructed. The exoticization of the 'Other' renders these everyday living practices as primitive and queer. These representations in turn denigrate the Indians as primitive and uncultured, and thus justify the colonial intervention and domination in India. Women's travel writing in colonial India collaborates in the colonial project of knowing and producing knowledge of India. Therefore, such representations of the 'Other' serves to locate both the ideological underpinnings of the text, as well as the rhetorical strategies that allow the ideological process to sustain itself within and across. British women are implicated in the growth and in the downfall of British

rule in India in part through the influence of their writings about day-to-day experiences of Indian cultures, history and people upon the ideals of domesticity, nationhood, and empire.

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Monomyth in John Cheever's Short Fiction *The Swimmer*

- Arati Thakur

Abstract: According to Cortland Auser, Cheever “created an imaginative vital myth of time and modern man” that “uses the age old themes of quest, journey, initiation and discovery.” This paper specifically focuses on how Joseph Campbell's monomyth pattern operates in relation to John Cheever's short fiction *The Swimmer*. My work uses the monomyth as a framework to show Neddy Merrill's expedition of Departure, Initiation and Return and his dealing with the knowledge and power that he has acquired on the journey as a failed quester.

Keywords: Short fiction, monomyth, John Cheever.

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about, (The Power of Myth, 3) says Joseph Campbell, one of the most enthralling writers in the field of mythology. John Cheever also carried a similar view about life, when he said that fiction is not suggestive of something in particular; it's rather what astonishes us in our life. According to his observation, man's inclination towards light and brightness is almost spiritual and it is man's constant endeavor to strive and struggles to attain that light. According to Cortland P. Auser, Cheever, “created an imaginative and vital myth of time and modern man” that “uses the age old themes of quest, journey, initiation and discovery” (18-19). This paper specifically focuses on how Joseph Campbell's monomyth pattern operates in relation to John Cheever's *The Swimmer*, the failed quest of the hero Neddy Merrill, as he returns not to the triumph and victory of a welcoming and grateful community but, rather, to a dark, empty house. Neddy, the main protagonist of the story, considers himself as “a pilgrim, an explorer, a man with a destiny” (604) in the suburban world to celebrate the very beauty of that world by swimming long in the waters that stretch from one end of his world to the other, while undergoing different changes of nature, climate and the lost time which has already passed to come home with the revelation that not only the beauty of the landscape, as well as the self-righteous and social hierarchy of the place, but he himself has also been expelled from the beneficent world, its comfortable surroundings and from the social regulations that go with it. My work intends to show how the protagonist voyage begins initially with a dream like effect but leads him ultimately to some dark and terrible revelation. Cheever leads the reader to see the stunning transformation that takes place between his first impressions of Neddy Merrill and his final understanding of it. Through the legends of dreams, Cheever presents a fundamental monomyth, symbolic of the primordial experience of a

hero's departure from the physical world; his discovery of the changing world around him, initiation into his spiritual realm, and his return, with his boon, to his natural existence. My work uses the monomyth framework to show the expedition Neddy Merrill takes, which includes the *Departure* (sometimes called *Separation*), *Initiation*, and *Return*; the "Departure" dealing with Neddy Merrill's adventure prior to his quest to go swimming across the country; "Initiation" dealing with the hero's many adventures along the way, while he is swimming across different pools in the country; and his "Return" back home which deals with knowledge and powers he has acquired on the journey, as a failed quester; a modern man who has lost his spiritual bearings as the lifesaving waters can only be viewed for pleasurable swims rather than cleansing of his deep stained soul. Neddy Merrill decides to begin his quest on a Sunday, as he views himself as a "pilgrim, an explorer, a man with the destiny" (604) in the suburban world that he lives, eager to celebrate the very beauty of that world by swimming from pool to pool on a beautiful summer day. According to Lynne Waldeland, Sunday in Cheever's stories is not considered a safe day and a part of the weekend, because of its uncertain nature and social rituals. The story begins with everyone at Westerhazy's speaking of having drunk too much. The polite conversation and exclamation is like some kind of progress one makes toward improving responsiveness to our strangeness, still, to this planet. It's here that he has begun his journey towards southwest, an ironical Odyssey, which will later turn out to be confusing as he comes face to face with reality that he has been suppressing under the hangover of the alcoholic drinks that he has been having throughout his journey. Interestingly enough, alcohol in this story acts as a talisman motif which is like a polite casual gesture in suburbia but symbolically signifies an invitation to cast aside reality, to join others in masking of that reality. When Lucinda, his wife had asked him on the beginning of his journey, where he was heading to, he had aptly replied that he was going to swim back home. Ironically enough, the spiritual journey that he decides to undertake by swimming fifteen mythopoeic pools, which he has named after his wife Lucinda, originating from the word Lucy which meant "light"; he fades into darkness, as he tries to follow the light. Moreover, his answer to her question is suggestive of the fact that he is answering to the call of adventure which he is undertaking, and even snubs people who deny their call to it. He even provides a complete map of the pools that he is going to plunge into the suburbs:

He seemed to see with a cartographer's eye, that string of swimming pools, that quasi-subterranean stream that curved across the county. He had made a discovery, a contribution to modern geography; he would name the stream Lucinda after his wife. He was not a practical joker nor was he a fool but he was determinedly original and had a vague and modest idea of himself as a legendary figure. The day was beautiful and it seemed to him that a long swim might enlarge and celebrate its beauty. (603-604)

He swims at the pool of Hammers', the Lears', the Howlands' without any kind of resistance. But as he arrives in the middle of the party at the Bunkers', accepting gin and tonic after his swim in the pool, and giving

into the temptation of shaking hands with man and being kissed by eight to ten woman, the time lapses. And, though he delights in the natural beauty of the growing and expanding suburban realms, he hears the thunder of an approaching storm, significant of the fact that he is about to get into the unknown realms of his quest. As he reaches the Levy's, the seventh pool of his quest, he realizes that the family is not at home, though the word Levi in Hebrew meant "joining". It's also at this threshold that natural and supernatural forces hinder Neddy Merrill's heroic progress. As he pours a drink for him after swimming in the Levy's pool, he realizes that he has covered nearly half the length of the Lucinda River, but fails to remember if it's his fourth or fifth drink. It's here that though he feels himself clean and pleased with everything around him, he is at the same time starts experiencing, feeling of tiredness and loneliness. He even happens to arrive at the Levi's just before a terrifying storm, and he takes a shelter at their gazebo which provides him with safe haven during the storm. As he advances to the Welcher's pool, the next threshold of his quest where he is about to enter the unknown, he is absolutely disappointed and bewildered to find it dry. The dry pool upsets him, as he tries to reason out that "no one ever drained his pool" (606) and that "this breach in his chain of water" (606) has broken the coherence of his mythic journey, where "he felt like some explorer who seeks a torrential headwater and finds a dead stream" (606). "Water" in Cheever's stories, is often a source of life and healing, but with Welcher's dry pool he starts experiencing a kind of sterility and lifelessness around him. The Welcher's dry pool has in fact failed to oblige the Narcissus in Neddy, of providing him with water for his thirst of egoistical swimming. As he tries to cross the menacing bend at Route 424, he enters the Dantean phase of unknown world. While crossing the route or threshold, he experiences trials and tribulation of a hero in quest; as traffic doesn't permit him to cross the highway, several drivers jeer at him, a can is thrown at him, and some even think him to be a fool. The aid or help comes from an old man, when he slows down at fifteen miles per hour, so that Neddy can "get to the middle of the road, where there was a grass divider" (607), the speed limit of the old man, numbered fifteen again alludes to the fact the number of pools he has chosen to swim. It's at this perilous threshold crossing, aided by an old guardian, that we see the beginning of Dante's *Inferno*.

The nine lettered Lancaster public pool, also the ninth pool of his quest alludes to the modern day inferno that he is getting into. The long list of rules and regulations and the general chaos of the damned of Dante's descent into hell, is very well evident from the following lines of the story: "the sounds were louder, harsher, and more shrill, and as soon as he entered the crowded enclosure he was confronted with regimentation" (608) In other words, Lancaster public pool is a replication of Dante's *Inferno* as he is shouted out of the chlorinated public swimming pool, because he did not carry a proper identification disk. Even when Neddy wades through Lancaster's acidic and dangerous water, he remembers the sapphire waters at the bunkers with longing, as the most painful aspect of being among the damned is the remembrance of happy times while they were alive. Neddy also realizes the fact that he can no longer

reject his call to adventure, as he has come too far. Cheever hero seeking youthfulness and Neddy's growing anxiety over losing his youth and becoming middle aged modernizes the Dantean allusion more. At the next threshold, the "Dark Wood" of the Halloran estate, reality starts surfacing which Neddy has been denying for a long time, as the hangover of having drunk too much starts wearing out. The Hallorans are affluent and live their life according to their wish by sitting naked around their natural pool nurtured by a brook. It's here that he notices that the beech hedge is yellow and not green, suggestive of the fact that spiritual metamorphosis takes place, at their Ovidian-like pool. When Mrs. Halloran expresses sympathy for his misfortunes, which he is completely unaware of, he begins to doubt his senses. He also grows conscious of the physical and emotional metamorphoses he has undergone during his quest: "He was cold and tired and the naked Hallorans and their dark water had depressed him...His arms were lame. His legs felt rubbery and ached at their joints....Leaves were falling down around him and he smelled wood smoke on the wind" (609). The change of season from midsummer to autumn reminds Neddy of his former wound, and his confession of wanting a drink, makes it clear that he wants to repress the growing awareness of reality around him.

The next pool of his quest belongs to his friend Eric Sach. Ironically enough, though the name Eric meant rich leader of realm, his present state was in ruins, of which Neddy is unable to remember anything. In fact, Cheever uses the word "realm" several times in the story to characterize the landscape that Neddy has found so elegant and ideal. He even notices the missing navel of Eric, because of radical abdominal surgery he had, symbolically suggestive of the fact that though he has entered the belly of the whale, which would separate him from his known world and self, to ultimate self-transformation, he is actually not ready for it. In fact, the absence of the navel in his friend Eric, a link to birth is considered as a breach in his adventurous quest. Neddy has no luck in getting a drink, at their place, which would have acted as a stimulant, in continuing his quest and having lost his Talisman of getting drinks, he goes into retrospect:

Was he losing his memory, had his gift for concealing painful facts let him forget that he had sold his house, that his children were in trouble and that his friend had been ill? (609-610)

After passing through various trials and tribulation, and in order to restore his talisman of getting a drink, he gatecrashes at the Biswangers party to get a drink. The tone and direction of Neddy's next halt turns very ugly at his unannounced visit to the Biswangers. Ironically enough, Neddy had always refused to their invitation, and now it was his turn to be snubbed by them. In addition, the dark water of the pool has a "wintry gleam." (610) This threshold reveals Neddy's growing awareness of the metamorphosis he is undergoing- from being a hero to an outcast. And, that money and position dominate the existence of suburbs. Though he manages to swim quickly in their pool, he recognizes his transformation into the foreigner, the exile and the outsider. At the next stage of his swimming he is bestowed with reality and knowledge from his mistress