Chapter 4
"EVIL IN SUBURBIA" - A STUDY OF
BULLET PARK

Five years after the The Wapshot Scandal appeared Cheever’s third novel Bullet Park (1969). It looks like a radical departure from the Wapshot novels and moves in a different direction. ‘Bullet Park’, the suburban locale for this eponymous novel, is no St. Botolphs. Further, there are no references whatsoever to old New England, its legacy, and the energising unity it is supposed to have fostered among its people until it got disintegrated. And the characters are far more isolated than the Wapshot. There is no one among them who feels the necessity to invoke the distant past or tradition to connect meaningfully the past and the present, and to test how far the values of the past are viable in the changed and changing circumstances of the modern world. The fictional world of the novel belongs entirely to the chaotic present. The issues which engage the novelist’s attention in his novel seem to be different. The title Cheever has chosen for it itself indicates that it is likely to be different from its predecessors: It is an unusual like ‘Bullet Park’ is rather an ominous name for a place, combining as it does the sinister (‘Bullet’) and the idyllic (‘Park’). It is indeed a precarious combination, and may have been intended to suggest that life is lived rather precariously in Bullet Park. Samuel Coale has called the suburban landscape of this novel ‘Lethal Eden’.

By the time Bullet Park was published, Cheever had been established as an important writer. This fact explains why his new novel was widely reviewed. But it was not a critical success initially. Many of the first reviewers, who were all familiar with Cheever’s previous work, and some of whom were admirers of Cheever, felt startled or annoyed by it, and expressed
serious reservations about its theme, form and structure, and its ultimate meaning. Benjamin, DeMott, whose front page review in the New York Times Book Review could be said to indicate the general time of adverse reviews, faults the novel rather harshly for its inconsistency in characterisation, its flimsy structure, and its careless and perfunctory composition.² Pau Schlueter, who reviewed it for The Christen Century, described it as "an example of the kind of bad book --- that good novelists sometimes turn out when their creative impulses are at low point and which would probably never have been published if the another were unknown."³ Reviewing it for Yale Review Mary Ellman accused Cheever of writing about "fashionable Pain", about "the easy availability of trials, temptation, and salvation", and the "moral insufficiency of power mowers and martinis" in the middle-class suburbs of around New York City.⁴ The "short story objection" was brought against Bullet Park by Peter Bell who found its episodes little more than" rough notes for a short story."⁵

To cite just one more instance of an adverse review. Reviewing Bullet Park in the New Republic, Anatole Broyard levelled specific charges against Cheever and the novel touching almost every aspect of it. We proclaimed that the novel " deserves to be called Gothic, with all the reservations that term implies" and that Cheever "appears to be almost helplessly carried away by the flood tides of his imagination". Regarding the plot of the novel he felt that "no one would believe it of a writer as talented and sophisticated as Cheever. On almost every page, someone is doing something highly improbable for a remarkably obscure reason - - - Dreams, visions, insanity, religious mania, sexual obsession - Cheever's palette seems to have nothing but screaming colors - - - The book abounds in coincidences that would make Dickens blush - -
- Cheever's arbitrary manipulation of his characters betrays a deep contempt for - or at least a disinterest in - people's manifest motives and concerns - - "

Fortunately there were a few perceptive reviews too which took a positive view of the novel, but they tended to express their appreciation in tentative terms. In a short review for The Nation, Charles Shapiro pointed out that the conflict between Hammer and Nailles, the protagonists of the novel, was "replete with mythic and biblical parallels", that Nailles and his family, "beneath the station - wagon trimmings", actually acted out "certain timeless rituals", and that their anguish was " worthy of our attention and concern". Peter Collier, in spite of having some genuine reservations about the novel, could perceive that Cheever in Bullet Park was trying "to create a fable for our time, a tentative allegory of the peculiarly modem operation of good and evil as seen through the confrontation of two men with strange names of Nailles and Hammer". Two favorable and perceptive reviews appeared, one in Time and the other in Newsweek, soon after the novel was published. And both were by Annette Grant who could see at once that Cheever in this novel was much less interested in the manners and morals of suburbia than in ancient religious and philosophical concerns with good and evil, chance and accident, will and fate. In the Time review, she makes the very interesting observation that Cheever " has always been something of a Christian soldier in mufti, a man more akin to John Bunyan than to John Updike. - - - On the level the book (is Bullet Park) is outwardly crude, yet mysteriously provocative. Its theme suggests source as far back as the story of Abraham and Isaac, with a youth seen as a sacrificial lamb". In the other review Annette Grant describes Bullet Park as "a spare, architectural book centered upon the question of identity", and characterises the
relationship between the two protagonists "as an essentially religious one" which reveals itself gradually. Contrary to many other reviewers who found *Bullet Park* structurally defective, she finds that it "moves toward its climax with deliberate speed and single-minded attention. There are no extravagant mannerisms, no exaggerated emotions, no superfluous flesh. Gone are the curves and dalliances of the Wapshot books, leaving the practically bare bones of religious symbolism and ritual".  

It was John Gardner who in his retrospective review essay on *Bullet Park* written a few years after it was published, not only held the earlier reviewers "wrong" for their negative responses to it but asserted confidently but somewhat over emphatically, that "The Wapshot books, though well-made, were minor. *Bullet Park*, illusive, mysteriously built, was major - in fact a magnificent work of fiction". It is a book to taken very seriously. He convincingly argues that the novel is about good and evil, and above all chance rather than about the manners of American suburbanites. For Gardner *Bullet Park* is "a religious book, affirmation out of ashes". He makes several insightful remarks. Perhaps the most important as well as perceptive remark he makes and which counters the objection against the form and structure of the novel is that it is Cheever's "dependence on voice" and his deft handling of different voices in the narrative that makes the novel as effective as this. Gardner is given to using somewhat hyperbolic language and his critical terminology is not always as precise as it should be. One may not be able to share his degree of enthusiasm for the novel. However, his review essay succeeds in redirecting the reader's attention to the novel for a fresh understanding and reappraisal of it. Since Gardener's essay, there have been valuable analysis of *Bullet Park* in the
book length studies of Cheever by Lynne Waldeland, Samuel Coale, and George W....unt. This chapter on this novel draws upon all of them and owes them a great deal of debt their observation and assessments would serve as a scaffolding for the present attempt.

Whatever, the subject of *Bullet Park* be, at least one thing is certain about it: The facts of the novel cannot be connected or related even remotely to the facts of Cheever's personal life and there is no scope for such a temptation at all. The novel, therefore, is entirely a work of imagination, all of its facts characters, situations, and locale wholly invented or imagined by the novelist. In short, it is purely a work of fiction. Therefore there is no occasion or need at all to look into the facts of Cheever's biography to understand it. If many of the first readers and reviewers of the novel found it different to get at what it was precisely about, it is not surprising. Because there are real difficulties especially for those who approach it with the background of the wapshot novels. And there is no need to underestimate them. There are several bizarre and incredible things which are presented as essential to its plot. To start with, the two protagonists, who find themselves in a position of confrontation are given such funny and gimmicky names as Nailless and Hammer. It is not easy to take these names seriously. The plot of the novel includes several things which strain one's credulity. There is the mysterious and prolonged illness of Tony the healthy teenage son of Nailles, which is cured mysteriously by a 'swami' (who is actually a light - coloured Negro, probably a Jamaican) all in a matter of a few hours. Not only does the black swami succeed where such professionals as a physician, a psychiatrist, and a specialist in somnambulatory phenomena fail, but effects the cure as mysteriously and almost as quickly as the young man became ill. Then, there is the plan of
Hammer, to crucify Nailles on the alter of a local church, which he for no known reason alters to make Nailles's son Tony his victim and almost succeeds in his crazy plan. Nailles himself, who for all practical purposes is a normal and happy man, becomes and remains a drug-addict even when all things seem to go well with him. Further, there are instances of coincidence and the dominance of chance in the novel. All these may not make it easy for the reader to feel that he is on firm and serious ground.

To understand what cheever makes of this apparently 'Gothic' material, it would be helpful to have the story of the novel in outline. As George Hunt has remarked, "the story is simple in outline, perhaps the tidiest of all his (i.e., cheever' inventions". It can be recounted in simple outline unlike that of either of the wapshot novels, in which one gets the feeling of having the ride several houses at the same time. There are three parts in the novel. Part one exclusively concerns Eliot Nailles, his wife Nellie to whom he is attached passionately and monogamously, and their teenage son Tony, and they all live in apparent happiness in Bullet Park, a suburban place which is the locale of the novel. They are ordinary and conventional. The peaceful tenor of their life is suddenly upset when Tony for inexplicable reasons is possessed by a sadness and takes to bed from which he refuses to get up. The whole of part one narrates the Nailles's efforts to save their son from this predicament. Finally in their desperation, they approach a self-styled 'Swami', who is not an Indian at all but a light-coloured Negro of West Indies, who revives the young man from his depression by the ritual repitition of optimistic chants. Part one is all authorial narrative. Part two is concerned with Paul Hammer who becomes a resident of Bullet Park and comes to live nearby the Nailles. Thus,
their fates get involved. It is all first person narration as recorded in Hammer's journal, in which he recounts the different phases of his life, its ups and downs, in order to explain to himself and thus to the reader why as wished by his mother, he plans to sacrifice a suburbanite like Eliot Nailles on the alter of Christ Church. The ostensible reason he gives to make Nailles the scapegoat is to shock the world to waking up to the commercialism squalor, spiritual poverty and selfishness in America. In part three matters come to a head. In the last minute Hammer changes his mind about his victim and makes Tony rather than Nailles the sacrificial lamb. Having kidnapped the boy he brings him to Christ church to burn him near the alter. But before he can accomplish this ritual sacrifice Nailles arrives on the scene and saves his son. Then Hammer is sent to the Hospital for the Criminally insane and security and serenity are apparently - apparently only - restored to Bullet Park.

How does cheever make this story replete with improbable and fabulous elements credible and humanly possible and also make it convey significance? John Gardener has suggested that "the willing suspension of disbelief that normally carries the fantasy or tale" is necessary on the part of the reader to grasp the novels' vision. The point is well made. But his related remark that cheever has in Bullet Park "abandoned the fact-bound novel of verisimilitude which is by nature important to dramatize the minds' old secrets" has to be taken with more than a grain of salt. In fact it is an important aspect of cheever's narrative strategy in Bullet Park to provide the reader at the very outset with the security of a very similar world before introducing him to the realm of the improbable and fantastic. The choice of a suburban place like Bullet Park, which resembles several such places around New York and therefore, readily recognisable, as
the locale for this novel is deliberate. But as the novel unfolds itself gradually, the reader is made aware of the fact that the happenings in this suburban place have larger implication which extend well beyond its narrow confines.

In the opening paragraph itself in which a description of the railroad of buller Park and its environs is presented the attempt of the novelist to give the reader topographical security begins:

Paint me a small railroad station then, ten minutes before dark. Beyond the platform are the waters of the Wekonsett river, reflecting a somber afterglow. The architecture of the station is oddly informal, gloomy but unserious, and mostly resembles a pergola, cottage or summer house although this is climate of harsh winters. The lamps along the platform burn with a nearly palpable plaintiveness. The setting seems in some way to be at the heart of the matter.¹⁷

The description, as it would appear at first is a depth sketch of a specific place and time. But on closer reading, it will be found that it is much more than an objective account of the railroad station. Adjectives such as 'somber', 'gloomy', and 'unserious' "Connote psychological and emotional impressions". By the time one comes to the end of the opening paragraph, as George Hunt points out, "We realise that the railroad station is less a specific place than it is a state of mind, a more universal perception that is shareable".¹⁸ The importance of the setting which is conjured up in the opening paragraph, and the significance of the narrator's observation that "the setting seem in some way to be at the heart of the matter" become obvious before long.
A harmless-looking stranger gets off the train at the railroad station and is met by Hazzard, a real estate agent. This visitor, who is much later identified as Hammer, one of the two chief characters in this story, is in quest of a house in Bullet Part. It is said of him: "The search for shelter seem to him to go on at a nearly primordial level - the house or the flat he looks - will have had to have appeared at least twice in his dreams. On this evening the blood-memory of travel and migrations course through his veins". That is, he is a rootless man and has been a wanderer looking for a settled home. The people of Bullet Part, contrary to their belief, are not permanent residents: "Disorder, moving vans, bank loans at high interest, tears and desperation had characterized most of their arrivals and departures". That human beings are constantly in search of a permanent home, is a very traditional theme and particularly dear to a Christian imagination. What distinguishes modern man from his predecessors is that he is not only rootless but condemned to be an eternal migrant and wanderer not knowing where he should turn and what his destination is. This is a recurrent motif in cheever's writings. The modern express ways, which are a technological marvel are for cheever diabolic symbols of modern man's plight, his rootless and eternal meandering in a world without beliefs and values.

Hazzard the real-estate agent takes the visitor on a guided tour of Bullet Park, a fabled realm of ease and affluence, so that he may choose the house he would like to buy and settle in. This device enables the reader also to tour the place and get a sense of its physical as well as its social dimensions. However, a little before the stranger visitor is shown the houses ready for sale, the narrator records the indignant and critical outbursts of an unnamed "adolescent"
against the suburbanites and their style of life: "Damn their hypocrisy, damn their cant, damn their credit cards, damn their discounting the wilderness of the human spirit, damn their immaculateness, damn their lechery and damn them above all for having leached from life that strength, malodorousness, color and zeal that give it meaning". As if to modify this excessive condemnation the narrator adds the remark, "But the adolescent, as adolescents always are, would be mistaken". The effect of this remark in fact is to make the reader take a closer look at the way people live in Bullet Park rather than be taken in by the adolescent's jeremiad. The Wickwires, whose house Hazzard and the visitor pass by, are instanced as a convenient example. They are among the "tribal elders" of the place who are supposed to set the standards and uphold the values of the suburban scene. They are said to be "charming", "brilliant", and "incandescent", dedicated to the good life. They are such active socialites that their engagement calendar is always full. They are "quite literally social workers - celebrants - using their charm and their brilliance to make things go at a social level". With some comic exaggeration Cheever describes their many social activities to which they take in all earnestness. In this effort they exhaust themselves and sometimes even injure themselves physically. It is as though they have turned their social mission into an almost religion sacrificial rite. The social rites in which the Wickwires and their like in Bullet Park participate "betray a transmuted imitation of the traditional religion ceremonies of their "Christian and Jewish forebears". These ardent social celebrants appear differently at home at the weekend. The wickwires are physically and mentally exhausted. Spiritually they are empty. They are filled with vague tears. Monday morning tests their ardour. Mr.Wickwire "groans. He swears. He stands. He feels himself to be a hollow man". And she "whimpers in pain and covers her face with a pillow". She cries
in pain, "Oh I wish I were dead". After several unsuccessful attempts Mr. Wickwire finally "dresses and "racked by vertigo, melancholy, nausea and fitful erection", he boards the morning train as if he is entering his "Gethsemane". 22

The visitor to who may wonder what kind of songs are sung, if they are sung at all, in this seemingly quite place, may, as he makes his four of the place, observe Mr. Elmsford, singing of his agonies in a bar. He "dusts off his tarnished psalter which is something he never mastered and sings: "Hotchkiss, Yale, an indifferent marriage, three children, twenty three years with the universal Tuffa corporation, Oh, why am I so disappointed, why does everything seem to have passed me by - - - why does everything taste of ashes". 23

Then there is Mrs. Heathcup who explains to the visitor why she wants to sell her house: " - - - the only reasons I am selling is because there's nothing here for me, now that he is gone. Nothing at all. There is nothing in a place like this for any single women - - - Widows, divorcees single men, the tribal elders give them all the gate". 24 speaking of her neighbours who are all wonderful people, although they take some knowing", she mentions Harry Plutarch for illustrative an example, totally unaware of the ironical implications. Plutarch's wife ran away with someone virtually emptying the house but for a chair, a single bed and a parrot cage, before going away. Ever since he has been living with these articles. 25

But there are also those "affirmative singers" in Bullet Park who find the place ever growing and improving. They have no doubt in their mind about the premanence of the place.
"Bullet Park is growing, growing, Bullet Park is here to stay, Bullet Park shows great improvement, every day in every way - - -. Later on in the novel the narrator provides with some comic exaggeration two more instances of the excesses of suburban life in Bullet Park. They also illustrate the emptiness and senselessness of their lives. There are "the Ridleys", who always refer to themselves thus, never as George and Helen Ridley. They are described as "a couple who brought to the hallowed institution of holy matrimony, a definitely commercial quality as if to marry and conceive, rear and educate children was like the manufacture and merchandising of some useful product in completion with other manufacturers. - - - They presented their handsome children to their guests with the air of salesmen pointing out the merit of a new car in a showroom". Their identification with their commercial enterprise is so complete that "the lusts, griefs, exaltations and shabby worries of marriage never seemed to have marred the efficiency of their organisation."

Then there are the Lewellens, another but slightly different couple belonging to the commercial world. Like the Ridleys they too give parties, but with a difference: "The Amalgamated Development corporation and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Lewellen cordially requests the pleasure - - -." The business name on the invitation was put there so Lewellen could claim the party as a tax exemption - - - Lewellen was more interested in the financial arrangements of his wife's parties than in anything else". But he is also a man bored even offended with the staid parties where well-dressed men and women make friendly conversation and eat ham and chicken. "No one would get drunk, no one would fight, no one would likely get screwed, nothing would be celebrated, commemorated or advanced." The Ridleys and the Lewellen's are
easy targets of attack for the hyper-critical adolescent mentioned earlier.

To balance this none too complimentary view of suburbanites Cheever presents through Nailles (who of course is not his creator's spokesman) a positive view of suburbia. Nailles makes to her son Tony who is going through depression, a rather lengthy statement about living in a suburb which he loves and about other things he has had to face in life, which is as much addressed to his son as to himself:

I suppose there's plenty to be sad about if you look around, but it makes me sore to have people always chopping at the suburbs. I've never understood why. When you go to the theater they are always chopping at the suburbs but I can't see that playing golf and raising flowers is depraved. The living is cheaper out here and I'd be lost if I couldn't get some exercise. People seem to make some connection between respectability and moral purity that I don't get. For instance, the fact that I wear a vest does not necessarily mean that I claim to be pure in heart. That doesn't follow. All kinds of scandalous things happen everywhere but just because they happen to people who have flower gardens doesn't mean that flower gardens are wicked - - 29

The sanity of these observations of Nailles is quite obvious, although Nailles in other respects, as the novel would show, is simplistic. "The view of suburban life in the novel is complex" as Lynne Waldeland has rightly observed 30. It is certainly incorrect to say that Bullet Park involves a cheap, fashionable criticism of suburban life.

However, the ultimate focus of the novel is not on the manners of suburban life, although the suburban phenomenon, the vivid description of bullet park, its people and the way they live
their lines - gives the impression that the chief aim of the novelist is to desist suburban people and their life style. As noted briefly earlier the choice of a suburban place as the locale as the workable setting, for the novel is intentional and an important aspect of the novelist's narrative strategy. It brings certain definite advantages to the novelist. It gives him a manageable locale into focus attention on the characters, events, and the chosen theme for exploration. Secondly, a clearly delineated suburban arena with its people, both men and women engaged in their favorite routine activities, strengthens and sustains the impression. Of a believable and realistic setting. And the picture of suburban Bullet Park is indeed realistic. It is very important to create this impression since the novel involves improbable and bizarre events and some characters who strain the reader's credulity. Further, to enable the readers (including those who willingly suspend their disbelief) to feel a sense of a credible world, in which these events could occur, the novelist makes it the point to cite throughout the novel "the routine, everyday activities of suburban life, such as parties, gatherings at church on Sunday mornings, commuter trains, volunteer fire companies chain saws etc. Moreover, as Lynne Waldeland enlighteningly points out, "because he (Cheever) is anxious that the reader get past the issue of suburbia, its merits and defects, to the novel's underlying concern with good and evil accident and will, he has taken pains to complicate his portrait of suburbia so that the reader has to see it as the same mixture of positive and negative possibilities that marks any terrain where people live their lives."31 (emphasis added). Another and equally important aspect of Cheever's narrative strategy in this novel may also be pointed out here itself. It relates to the characters, particularly Nailles and Hammer the two chief characters, mainly through whom the profound theme of the novel is mediated to us; and whom he places in the believable world of Bullet Park. In the Wapshot
novels Cheever generally does not try to follow closely and consistently the goings on in the minds of his characters. (with the possible exception of Melissa in The Wapshot Scandal). But in Bullet Park he gives the reader an insight into the minds, backgrounds, dreams and motives of his major characters. By this device he is made to feel that their behaviour, which would have appeared incredible in the normal course of events, is humanly possible however, illogical and actually proceeds from their nature and the inner workings of their minds. Thus the novel becomes credible. The smooth and realistic surface given to the narrative strengthens its credibility.

The plot proper effectively begins with Chapter-II of part one, the bulk of which is about Eliot Nailles, his wife Nellie and their son Tony. This part explores mainly the relationship between the father and son which is not happy and happens to be the weakest link in Nailles’s otherwise comfortable and lucky chain of being, or so it seems to be. The real crux of the novel is, in fact, in the confrontation between Eliot Nailles and Paul Hammer, which takes place in the last part of the novel. All that happens in part one and two has to be viewed as a preparation for it and its outcome, although at first it might seem otherwise. Part two, as noted earlier is wholly about Hammer, his autobiography and the account is brought up to the point when he decides to settle at Bullet Park for his crazy purpose of a ritual sacrifice. The first two parts seem to run on independent lines and the first part in particular gives the impression of being a slenderly connected serpentine of episodes. It is in the third part that these impressions are modified, the connections are realised and established, and the underlying unity worked from the start is also discovered.
Eliot Nailles, who is introduced first in Chapter II is to be seen against the background and setting of Bullet Park, and its residents presented in the opening chapter. Before other details of Nailles are mentioned, he is shown at his devotions in the local church attending Holy communion on sexagesima Sunday. If it is pointed out that the closing episode in the novel in which the two chief characters are involved critically, the novel also takes place in this very church, the significance of showing Nailles first at the church would be obvious. But there is more to it Nailles and Hammer meet for the first time by chance or accident there. They are introduced to each other by the priest who also makes Hammer's acquaintance for the first time. Not only does the meeting of these two strangers prove momentous and result in grievous consequences for either of them in the long run. But it also indicates the play of chance or accident in the novel. Their meeting there is first of several such occurrences. Their first formal meeting is not particularly friendly. They hardly exchange even the routine courtesies. In fact the looks they exchange is "deeply curious and in some ways hostile".\(^3^2\) But yet Nailles, who though not "superstitious", did believe in the mysterious power of nomenclature" is the first to see that their destinies are wedded by the accident of their names. Later one gets to know that Hammer two has a like feeling. The conjunctions of their names is not a matter of fun for him thought it might be for his neighbours, nor does Cheever depend upon or aim at a simple-minded play on the names of Nailles and Hammer for humour. As Nailles lies in bed a few days later having attended a dinner party given by the Hammers, a medley of linked pairs of words pass through his mind confirming his first impression that by virtue of their names their fates are intertwined. The combination that pass through his mind are revealing and suggestive:
Hammer and Nailles spaghetti and meatballs, salt and pepper, oil and vinegar, Romeo and Juliet, block and tackle, thunder and lightening - - - true and false, - - - tears and laughter, - - - war and peace, heaven and hell good and evil, life and death, love and death - - .3

Both are now more than nominally allied, and their fates will soon be more dramatically joined.

As Annette Grant points out in her review of the novel, "Only gradually does the relationship of the two men reveal itself as an essentially religious one".34 At first Hammer and Nailles seem to be contrasting and sharply opposed characters, as their names are likely to suggest. But gradually it would be seen that in some essentials they are complementary and could even appear to be alter-egos or spiritual doubles. Of course this remark has to be substantiated from the text.

It may however be pointed out here that many of the first reviewers of this novel missed this point and saw in simple black and white opposition.

To come back to Nailles and his devotion at church on sexagesima Sunday, it is easy to notice that his attention is easily and frequently distracted from the worship which is on. The narrator points out that "this division of Nailles’s attention during worship had begun when, as a young boy, he had spent most of his time in church examining the form captured in the grained-oak pews."35 On this particular day, while he says his prayers, he hears " a cricket in the chancel and the noise of a drum from the rain gutters". And his "sense of the church calendar (is) much more closely associated with the weather than with the revelation and strictures in Holy Gospel".36 His keen sensitiveness to the changes in weather of course reveal his closeness to nature, his delight in the natural world, and his almost pagan celebration of the
natural cycle of seasons. This love of nature is indeed a commendable quality especially when life has become increasingly mechanised and the machine has established itself in the garden. This quality is conspicuously absent in Hammer and indicates a certain deficiency in his character and perhaps some discord between him and his environment. However, Nailles's love of nature and his associating the church calendar with the seasonal changes in weather, does not necessarily assure that he is deeply religious particularly because he is so easily distracted during church worship and this "lack of concentration" on his part does not "distress" him.

It follows that Nailles is religious only in a conventional and routine way though there is nothing hypocritical or insincere about it. In fact he attends church regularly and ritualistically and in this regard is a model member of the Parish. There is nothing overtly demonstrative about his participation in worship, and he is even amused somewhat by the "competitive churchmanship" of Mrs. Trenchman a recent convert from unitarianism who is bellicosely demonstrative of her grasp of the responses and courtesies in the service. The narrator tells us that Nailles's concerns in church service" has remained at least partially a matter of fact." Driving away from church to go back home, he turns on his wind-shield wiper although there is a let-up in rain. The reason for this, the narrator explains, is that "society had become so automotive and nomadic that signals or means of communication had been established by the use of headlights, parking lights, signal lights and windshield wipers". With his tongue in the check, to indicate ironically how every walk of life has been affected by the machine which has blunted human sensibilities, he goes on to say : the diocesan bishop had suggested that church-goers turn on their windshield wipers to communicate their faith in the resurrection
of the dead and the life of the world to come." It is left to us to surmise whether or not Nailles is expressing such a faith by turning on the wipers. All this however indicates that he has only a simple and imaginative mind and is capable of comprehending routine and simple matters only. In his conventional piety be is quite representative of the suburban community. Such perversion of religious gestures indicates the spiritual condition of the community.

Next Nailles is seen in the environs of his own house and in the midst of his family comprising himself, his wife Nellie, their only son Tony, and of course the family dog, an old red setter named Tessie. Not only is the reader made aware of Nailles's relationship with every one of them but is given a peep into his mind. This man, who had specialised in chemistry, and who is now principally occupied with merchandising 'spang', a mouth wash is essentially a warm and affectionate man whose love is spontaneously extended to his dog too, which is getting to be deep and nervous due to age. Nailles talks to the bitch "with a familiarity that could seem foolish": "He wished her good morning and asked her how she had slept --- he asked her opinion on the weather. He invited her to have a piece of toast, talked with her about the editorials in the Times and urged her --- to have a good day when he left for the train. --- And often lighted a wood fire as much for her pleasure as anything else". As one more instance of Nailles's special attachment to his dog, the narrator adds: "He had decided that should a time come when she would have to be killed he would take her out behind the rose garden and shoot her himself." That this remark about mercy killing introduced with seeming casualness could have an unsuspected and somewhat ominous implication becomes clear later in the narrative when Hammer makes a similar suggestion to him. It sheds an oblique light on his mental make-up.
A genuinely loving and uxorious husband, Nailles has steadfastly remained monogamous, resisting provocation and temptation. "The intenseness of his monogamy, the absoluteness of his belief in the holiness of matrimony, was thought by a surprising number of people to be morbid, aberrant and devious. His wife Nellie is his emotional arch-support. The "Keystone to his love of the visible world" is in what he regarded as "his spiritual and fleshly love" for his wife. In his naivety he even thinks that she would be "immortal". His love for their only son Tony is equally intense, and he cannot bear to have him out of his sight. He rhapsodises about his protective and enveloping love for his wife and son. The love he feels for them seems "like some limitless discharge of a clear amber fluid that would surround them, cover them preserve them and leave them insulated but visible like the contents of an aspic." George Hunt has pointed out that amber here is "ironically double-edged: Hammer, demonical driven by the color yellow, will in fact 'surround' them later". It does not occur to Nailles that his love for his wife and son is actually possessive rather than protective.

On the surface Nailles appears to be really fortunate in the circumstances of his life: loves his wife and son, his work, his house, Bullet Park, happily works with a chain saw to cut wood, renders voluntary service to the fire company, enjoys ecstatically like a child the music of Guys and Dolls, and is in close touch with nature. However on closer scrutiny we become aware of some serious limitations of character and vision in him as well as some dark and violent impulses of his own which are revealed by his memories and dreams. The first of his limitations is that his sense of reality and his perception of it is obtuse, and he lives under a false sense of security. In his simplemindedness he literally believes that wages of sin is death, and
therefore the "wicked" are "sick" while the "good" are "robust". But this belief of his does not square with the fact of his mother's illness. Since she suffered a stroke some months ago she has been in a nursing home unconscious, inert and uncomprehending with practically no hope of recovery. That one Who "had been in all things a fair woman - kindly decent and loving shall be so cruelly smitten and left so close to death challenges Naille's "belief in the fitness of things". He thinks that at least she "should have been rewarded for her excellence by a graceful demise." He visits his mother in the nursing home every week and tries to make a conversation with her knowing quite well that in doing so he is just talking to himself. Unable to bear to see her mute suffering, he even for a moment thinks of ending her pain once for all by mercy-killing. But he refrains from it lest his mother regains consciousness long enough to see that her son is a matricide. This is the second instance of his entertaining the thought of euthanasia.

As Nailles thinks of his ailing mother, he is led on to recall his dead father with whom he had only a touchy relationship. His father had the reputation of a crack shot, a lucky fisherman, a heavy drinker and the life of the club. But he did not feel concerned for his wife or son. Now Nailles particularly recalls the occasion when embarrassed and angered by the drunken antics of his boisterous father in a hotel ball-room in front of a collegemate of his, he had wished his father dead and had he possessed a pistol, would have shot him in the back. The emotion he had felt on that occasion was unmistakably murderous. In fact his private memories are homicidal. Two more instances of the homicidal tendency in Nailles may be noted here. One of them, the most serious, he recalls when his son takes, seriously ill, leaving him
(i.e., Nailles) bewildered. And the other occurs much later when he and Hammer become acquainted well enough to go together fishing. To take the latter first while returning from a fishing expedition Nailles's dog Tessie fails to jump into the car and he has to pick her up and lay her on the back seat. Then Hammer with "contemptible callousness" suggests to Nailles that he would do well to shoot her. The heartless brutality of this suggestion to murder "a beloved and trusting dog" fills Nailles with such "towering" and "pure" rage "that for a moment he might have killed Hammer".45 Ironically, he does not know that Hammer has already chosen him as his victim. He does not also remember that he himself had thought of ending Tessie's life quietly when the time came for it.

"Far too simple to understand the psychological relationship of love and hate in the human psyche, Nailles is prey to anger that mystify him".45 says Lynne Walledland.

The most mystifying is the occasion when Nailles is filled with murderous rage towards his son. It happens thus, both father and son go to play golf. Nailles is already in a disturbed state of mind because of an unnecessary and avoidable row he had with his wife about her fidelity. In the middle of the game, Tony gives his father a rude jolt by telling him that he is going to leave school because he is not learning anything there. Nailles patiently tries to make his son see reason and suggest that he should first get a diploma even if it is phony and then do whatever pleased him. This conventional advice sparks off heated exchanges between them. Tony tells Nailles bluntly that "he might want to be a thief or a saint or a drunkard or a garbage man or a gas pumper or a traffic cop or a hermit". But he would not be a conventional married
man living a dull routine conventional life. He would like to do something useful. At any rate he would like to do anything that is more useful than "pushing mouthwash". This last jibe hurts NaiUes deeply because it coincides with his own dimly perceived doubt about mouthwash. He is roused to such rage: "Then I lifted up my putter and I would have split his skull in two". But Tony ducks and escapes. That it is no mere threateninggesture is admitted by NaiUes himself: "So there I was- - - having practically murdered my son but what I wanted to do then was to chase after him and take another crack at him with the putter. - - I couldn't understand how my only son, whom I love more than anything else in the world, could make me want to kill him.47 All these reactions of NaiUes show that murderous impulses which are potentially evil may reside in any human heart, even in the heart of a man like NaiUes who is an apparently normal and god-fearing man.

Other limitations of NaiUes surface themselves more easily. In spite of his age and contact with the outside world he is ignorant of the darker side of life. He remains inexperienced in pain and suffering and believes that he and his family are completely isolated against them until he is rudely shaken out of this complacent ignorance by his son’s taking suddenly ill by a malady he cannot understand. Till then rather fancifully he "thought of pain and suffering as a principality, lying somewhere beyond the legitimate borders of western Europe", Further "he felt vaguely that one had one’s share of brute pleasure, hard work, money and love and that the rank inequities he saw everywhere were mysteries that did not concern him".48 "Ostrich fashion he shuts his eyes to the unpleasant but inescapable realities of life. It is his son’s sudden illness and suffering from what looks like a mysterious and incurable disease, and his lying close to
death that compels him to learn about the obsessiveness of pain and suffering. He realises that they are not a far away landscape but a condition of mind. Childishly and simplistically he asks himself again and again: "Why, of all the young men in Bullet Park, should Tony have been singled out to suffer a mysterious and incurable disease?" Yet another of Nailles's limitations of perception according to the narrator is his "inability to judge people on their appearance." But this is not as great a liability as his naive thought that all men and women are "honest, reliable, clean and happy" even though he is "often surprised and disappointed". He does not seem to learn from experience.

Tony's lingering illness destroys Nailles's sense of order and tranquility. The simple faith which had guided his life till then, he realises now, is utterly inadequate to help him to cope with the situation of grief and pain. Unable to understand the cause for his son's persisting "sadness", and without trying to find out what the cause could be whether he might not be responsible for it he indulges to the illusion that all will be well very soon. On a morning of fine weather he feels so exalted that he declares confidently to himself: "I feel that everything's going to be the way it was when it was so wondrous. Tony will get up today or perhaps tomorrow and go back to school. I just know that everything is going to be wonderful. (Emphasis added. This word is repeated in the my last sentence of the novel with ironical implication). He even tries to inject this baseless optimism into his son, and draws him out of bed to the window to look at the "paradise" like scene. Tony's response is to sob and sink to the ground, and cry, "Give me back the mountains". The significance of this request Nailles does not and cannot understand. That the "Mountains" may have a symbolic significance
becomes clear later in the narrative.

Meanwhile, Nailles is unsettled further when he is overwhelmed by a train phobia. He cannot ride any longer the accustomed commuter train every morning without getting off at every second stop and boarding another train until he reaches his office several hours afterwards. Though this is precipitated by the fact that he is a helpless witness to a neighbour of his being sucked away under a rushing train, the real cause of his phobia is the illness of his beloved son. His irrational behaviour would appear ridiculous if one did not know the compulsiveness of the urge to get off and get into the train during his daily pilgrimage to the city. The narrator explains Nailles's strange and absurd behaviour thus: "Nailles's sense of being alive was to bridge or link the disparate environments and rhythms of his world, and one of his principal bridges—that between his white house and his office—had collapsed." It could be merely coincidental that Nailles's losing control of this important connection in his life takes place the very next day after the bizarre incident which is witnessed by him and Hammer together. This casualty thrusts into an intimate relationship these two who were till them mere acquaintances. As in the case of the murderous impulses in him, his irrational psychological behaviour too links him with Hammer, who too acts under irrational compulsions. This fact becomes clear when we get to know more about him from part Two onwards of the novel. It may however be noted here that Hammer's behaviour is that of a psychotic, whereas Nailles's behaviour, crazy as it might seem occasionally, does not trespass the limits of sanity entirely. Nailles' struggle to get into the city on the train becomes so acute that panic-stricken he goes to a doctor who prescribes him a massive tranquilizer which gives him the illusion of floating upon a cloud
Zeus. Soon he becomes such an addict of the illegal pills that he frantically buys them from ilars. Even after Tony is cured of his depression, Nailles’s addiction to drugs remains with him. He cannot go to work without it. He fails to understand his phobia. That it could be due to an inner inadequacy which is spiritual does not occur to him. In fact he makes no attempt to probe the cause for it.

Nailles also does not understand the nature of Tony’s illness though he persistently calls it "mononucleosis". But it makes him introspective. He racks his memory to ferret out a connection that could explain Tony’s terrible sadness and his refusal to get up which might well have extended to death. Nailles honestly believes that it is the duty of fathers to help their children to know what is good for them rather than give them unbridled freedom to do what they like. But he can give him little real help because of his own grossly limited perception of life and vision.

The evening after his disconcerting train journey, he sits by his son after dinner and attempts to draw him into a conversation so that he may discern what ails him and help him. But it turns out to be virtually a long monologue partly critical of the world, and partly confessional, and partly a defence of his beliefs. At the end of it he finds that Tony has fallen asleep. As he looks lovingly at his son, he is reminded of the boy’s difficult birth in Rome, the possible threat to his wife’s life, the suspense and anxiety he went through and the tremendous relief he experienced when he learnt of the child’s birth and the safety of Nellie, of the birth however, as he recalls them, appear portentous to him.

Nailles’s next recollection brings to his mind vividly the quarrel he had with Tony when
he was nine years old over his appalling addiction to television programmes at the expense of his studies and his very poor school grades. He saw in it "withdrawal symptoms", because the boy "won't play ball, he won't do home work, he won't even take a walk because he might miss a program". When his wife had tried to caution him against being overbearing, he had confidently asserted : "- - - You don't grow out of an addiction. You have to make some exertion or have someone make an exertion for you. You just do not outgrow serious addictions," although at the same time he was defensive about his own love of liquor and cigarettes. Incidentally, he could not have known or foreseen at that point of time of oozing selfconfidence that he himself would become an incurable addict to drugs. Instead of handling the delicate situation of his son's addiction tactfully and ignoring the frantic appeals of his son and wife, he had tossed the television out of the door into darkness. In recalling this incident, obviously Nailles thinks that it may have contributed to his son's present illness.

That Tony's studies hardly improved even though he was deprived of his television set and restriction imposed on his television viewing may be assured. The next incident recalled and narrated from Tony's point of view, also refers to his poor progress in his studies especially in French, and his experience of the trauma of being pulled off the football team of the school so that he could devote the time spent on the game to improve his French. This staggering injustice he had not anticipated. Football and everything about it he loved intensely, he had gone out for it and had made the second squad in his junior year. Roused to indignation he had threatened off handedly to kill Miss Hoe the French teacher. Her hysterical screams brought in a crowd of people on to the scene and a hilarious sequence of accusation and
misunderstanding followed leading to Tony's arrest. Nailles who arrived at the police station to pick up his son rather surprisingly felt such empathy for him that he "had no counsel, advice, censure, experience or any other paternal qualities to bring to that crazy hour. He understood the boys deep feelings about being dropped from the squad and he seemed to have shared in his son's felonious threatening of Miss Hoe."^54

Tony's murderous impulse, manifesting itself though only as a mere threat, links him with his father and later with Hammer. Another and a very significant recollection recounted in the first person by Nailles himself is about his confrontation with his son on a golf course. This episode has already been briefly described earlier in this chapter. Nailles who could sympathise with his son's backwardness in French and his being dropped from the squad, could not do so about his wish to quit school. Their talk at cross purposes angered him so much that he swung at Tony with his golf putter. Since this happened Tony had been in bed. This seems to Nailles, the most immediate cause for his sorrowful depression. All these events recollected, as Lynne Waldeland points out," could add up to some explanation, but Tony himself brings up none of them, saying only that he feels sad". Cheever implies perhaps that there is a much deeper cause than these.

None of the three doctors who are brought in to examine Tony, a general physician, a psychiatrist, and a specialist in sleep analysis, can understand his malady or rouse him from the oppression of him. They seem to be more interested in other matters than curing their patients. Their visit to the Nailles gives Cheever an opportunity to have a mild satirical dig at
their professions and their way jargons. The narrator says that Tony's mother "was to think of the three doctors - - - as suitors in some myth or legend where a choice of three caskets - Gold silver and lead - was offered to the travelers." It is a familiar practice of Cheever's to draw implicitly and explicitly mythical and legendary parallels and analogues to his characters and situations to invest them with a deeper and universal significance. In this novel implicit analogy is seen between Tony and the prodigal son of the Biblical parable, and between Bullet Park and Eden after the fall. There can be little doubt that these analogies enrich the meaning of the context. However in the instance of the three doctors being compared to the three suitors of the caskets, the relevance of the parallel is not clear. It hardly helps to clarify the situation which is considerably serious. Instead it gives a touch of irrelevant amusement because of the implied analogy between Tony and Portia of Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* in which the legendary casket story forms an important part of the plot.

The Nailles reach a point of desperation about Tony who shows no sign of rising from the refuge of his bed although it is three weeks and more since he got into it. During these weeks Nailles's need for massive tranquillisers becomes so compelling that he frantically goes in search of even drug pushers. Without the pill he cannot take the train to the city and complete his journey. It is then that he asks his wife to try the faith healing guru recommended to them by their former cleaning woman. The play of chance in their lives is seen once again here. Not only does the suggestion to meet the faith-healer comes unexpectedly but the person who makes it on her own is the least expected. She is not a trustworthy person apparently. For she had been fired from their service for stealing their small diamond rings and a pair of gold
cufflinks. That her suggestion is taken is a measure of their hopelessness, apart from being rather odd. This guru is sought out and brought home by Nellie. He cures Tony’s malady in a few hours and restores him to health. Where all the other specialists had failed, he succeeds remarkably as if he had worked a miracle or magic.

This episode of the faith-healer, Swami Rituola, is likely to challenge more than any other episode in the novel, however fanciful or fantastic, the reader’s credulity. For he is apt to be suspicious of the healer and deeply sceptical of the way he effects the cure. Because he is not even a quack, let alone being a specialist of any kind. He is neither a churchman, nor a spiritual healer nor a holy man, although he calls himself a 'swami' he is a light-coloured Negro, the son of a carpenter, and blind in one eye. Educated upto the eight grade only, he has no pretentions to learning. For having stolen a bicycle as a boy he served sentence for six months in a reform school where he lost his left eye because of the brutality of his fellow prisoners. After his release, he worked under his carpenter father for some time. Before he came to work part time for Pencham the carpenter, and live upstairs on over Peyton’s funeral parlour in a slum area, he was cleaning toilets in Grand Central Station in New York. All these facts are given out to Nailles’s wife by Rituola himself. One may very well wonder why Cheever chose to bring in such a character as this, and whether he was serious at all, because the 'guru' appears at a crucial point in the narrative and plays no mean role in the novel. The context of the novel shows that Cheever is indeed in earnest and expects the reader to take this eccentric if not ludicrous character seriously. Obviously the novelist was taking a risk in introducing him. It is therefore worthwhile examining what strategy does he employ and with what success to render
the character as well as the entire episode plausible and present them from falling into bathos'.

It may be assumed that the novelist depends upon the reader's willingness to set aside his reservations about this new character and enter into the spirit of the episode with imaginative sympathy.

This episode is presented from the view point of three characters, Nellie, Nailles and Tony. It should be borne in mind that Nellie and Nailles seeking the help of the swami about whom they know nothing, is a desperate measure, and not an act of faith. Nellie goes in search of him because it is her duty. She thinks that he must be just another "shrink". Whatever faith she had in the efficacy of psychiatric treatment was destroyed by the psychiatrist who attended on her sick son. She is therefore unsure and sceptical of the outcome of her visit. In this regard she reflects the reader's sceptical attitude to the healer and his reservation about him. Cheever's method in this episode seems to be to take the readers from disbelief through suspense to belief for the time being, by encouraging them to empathize with the characters involved in the episode. Nellie is full of misgivings as she approaches the residence of the guru in a slum area close to the black cemetery notorious for mugging and robbing women in broad daylight. She is disturbed and frightened by the environs of the shabby house. The sign on one of the doors, "the temple of light", is no more reassuring than the surroundings. When she makes bold to enter a room she sees a light-coloured Negro carpenter at work and catches a smell of shavings. Then involuntarily - it could be a matter of chance - the thought crosses her mind: "which came first, christ the carpenter or the holy smell of new wood?" The significance of this casual thought will be realised at the end of the episode. Christ, as is well-known, was a great healer.
It is not surprising that Nellie in a state of great distress and anxiety should have thought of Christ, though she is religious only in a routine fashion. The readiness with which this Negro healer responds to her request must have been a tremendous relief to Nellie's ruffled nerves.

Soon after arriving at the residence of the Nailles's the Swami sets about his work methodically and unostentatiously contrary to the practice of such men, who are generally given to a lot of show and pretentious display. In this respect he is a contrast to the three professional men who examined Tony. Moreover any suggestion of solemnity to surround him is avoided and no halo is cast around him by the novelist. This should come as a pleasant surprise to the sceptical reader. Left with the sick young man, the swami not only does not make any claim for himself as a healer, but tells him with disarming modesty "I've come here to help you, or that's what I hope to do". He has no sophisticated tools or instruments to display but for a narrow stick of incense made of sandalwood, known for its mild and clean smell. By giving Tony a very brief and simple matter of fact account of his background his experience as a cleaner of pubic toilets, his sympathetic understanding of lonely human beings and by tidying up the sick man's room, with swift efficiency, he not only establishes his ordinariness but unobtrusively with the confidence of the patient. Then he tells how by accident or chance he discovered the talent in him to effect cures. On a gloomy and cold night when he was mopping the floor at Grand Central a well-dressed man, who was gripped with thought he was going to die at any moment, came upon him and begged him: "- - - don't leave me, I don't want to die alone". Moved by his distress, the Swami led him up to the concourse where, to take his mind off his fears, together they gazed at big coloured pictures displayed by camera advertisements which showed a
happy family on a beach and "behind them, way off in the distance were all these mountains covered with snow". Then together they prayed and then repeated over again and again at his suggestion cheer words like "valor". This therapy accidentally hit upon worked and the affected man went away to get some sleep. That was the beginning of his career as a spiritual cheerleader and healer. Incidentally, it may be recalled that in the early days of Tony’s depression, when his father had tried to cheer him up, sobbingly he had asked: "Give me back the mountains". The symbolic significance of the mountain now becomes clear.

Continuing his account the Swami tells Tony of his own attitude to his vocation as a healer:

Ever - since my experience in the station I have believed in prayer. As I am not a member of any organised religion you might well ask to whom it is that I Pray and I would not be able to answer you. I believe in prayer as a force not as a conversation with God and when my prayers are answered, as they sometimes are, I honestly don’t know where to direct my expressions of gratitude. I have cured several cases of arthritis but my methods don’t always work. I pray they will work for you.

It may be presumed that this transparent honesty, modesty, humanity and total freedom from boastfulness of the healer make deep impression on Tony - and on the reader too - and make him unconsciously responsive and receptive to his therapy, which is actually a sort of auto-suggestion by means of cheer words, chants and repetitious incantations, while repeating them earnestly the patient has to exercise his imagination and realise as vividly and concretely as possible the contents of the words if they refer to persons, places and the like, and dwell on their meaning if they are value-charged words such as Love and Hope. The therapy works and Tony
is cured of depressions apparently as mysteriously and almost as quickly as he became ill. There is nothing occult about it. There is only the wizardry of words without its harmful associations.

While the guru is busy with the therapy, Nailles, who has just returned home, and Nellie are restless with anxiety and suspense. To keep their composure and self-control Nailles has stiff doses of drink while Nellie tries lying down hoping for the best. The narration here is presented in the immediate present tense to suggest the sense of urgency felt by the parents of Tony. Reading fiction cannot take Nailles’ mind off his wretchedness. As he listens to the cheer cries from from Tony’s room he thinks that a voodn way have invaded his hour. A neighbour in distress calls on him for monetary help. She needs bail money as her husband has been arrested on charges of assisting their son to evade draft and for possessing dangerous drugs. This bizarre situations resembles that of Nailles and Tony. What is to be noticed here is that Nailles momentarily forgets his own consuming distress and a humane gesture gets the neighbour two hundred dollars. Soon he himself will receive a gift from the guru. Just about then Tony, completely released from the terrible sadness, walks down along with the healer : " I don’t feel sad any more and the house doesn’t seem to be made of cards. I feel as though I’d been dead and now I’m alive". Nailles and Nellie are just overwhelmed. It is characteristic of the guru that he politely declines to take any fee or recompense for his service and merely observers : "You see whatever I have is a gift and I must give it away". The episode and this part of the novel close with the narrator’s significant observation that Tony returns to his school and his father continues with his drugs. Even at the end of the novel he remains a drug addict and there is no indication that his perception or vision has in anyway improved by this experience. This
episode of faith or spiritual healing has been dwelt on to show how Cheever has, by and large, successfully rendered the improbable plausible. The only question that may remain in the reader's mind is whether the cure could be effected in such a short time. It should be noted that he is not making a plea on behalf of faith-healers. Nor does he suggest even remotely, that it is a panacea. He only recognises its possible usefulness in a trouble-ridden world while real spiritual guidance is rare. Incidentally he is pointing out the inadequacies of the more popular modes of cure as they prevail now, particularly the absence of concern on the part of the professionals for the suffering human being.

Part Two of *Bullet Park* is Paul Hammer’s section. It is all about him, beginning with circumstances of his illegitimate birth. But he is a significant enough figure in Part One, which indirectly prepares us for his importance, in this novel although the emphasis in it is on Nailies and his family searching for a house. The fact that Hammer is the first person we meet in the novel though he is not named, is an indication of his importance in the novel. In three other situations he is seen, at church where he accidentally meets Nailies and marks the beginning of their peculiar and fateful relationship, at the dinner hosted by himself, and on the railway station platform when a neighbour of theirs is sucked away by the train leaving him and Nailies "stunned by the mysteriousness of life and death". In fact be bursts into tears and sobs when he gets to know about the accident, although he did not know the dead man at all. In all these situations he seems very much a harmless individual. However as the novel develops, especially from this point onwards we learn that by a series of occurrences, accidental and otherwise this man becomes unknown to himself a centre for demonic malevolence, a potential Cain.
The entire Part Two is cast into the form of an autobiographical journal the author of which is Paul Hammer. It is his voice that is heard mainly from first to last, in contrast to the different voices one hears in Part One. John Gardener has drawn attention to the special importance of 'voice' in this novel in which the novelist is trying to "dramatise the minds' old secrets". With what subtlety Cheever shifts the narrative voices in Part One, Gardener has explained, and his remarks deserve to be cited:

Cheever's voice - compassionate, troubled, humourous - control the action, repeatedly calling attention to itself in phrases like 'at the time of which I'm writing' where his voice fades out, character voices come in. Without explanation or apology, he shifts, early in the novel, to the cry of an unnamed and never-again-to-be heard of adolescent, a cry against suburban hypocrisy. - - - Later, telling how Eliot Nailles nearly murdered his own son, Cheever shifts to Nailles's own voice as Nailles goes over the incident in his own mind. With similar abruptness he introduces the other voices - - - of Nailles's wife, neighbours, a zodiac - trapped French teacher, a Negro swami and the harmless looking stranger mad Paul Hammer.

Hammer's journal significantly begins with how he obtained his first knowledge of Nailles from a brief article in a trade magazine, and ends with his decision to settle in Bullet Park chiefly to murder Nailles, and without apparent reason change his victim to Tony. When exactly does Hammer write his journal and why? In all probability he tries this autobiographical exercise while he is in the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane as suggested by Marcia Gaunt. And the purpose of writing it is to reconstruct the formative events of his life to explain to himself how he happened to decide to commit a murder on the suggestion of his crazy mother. One may see that there is a method in this crazy man's narration. Could not the novelist himself have
narrated Hammer's story allowing him now and then to speak in his own voice and explained his mysterious conduct? He certainly could have but might not have carried conviction to the reader. For, the real point of knowing Hammer's story is that he is led on to decide to kill Nailles for which there is no explicit motivation, except the mysterious binding power of their names. There is not even a semblance of an excuse for suddenly making Tony his victim instead of his father. It is not easy to render a strange phenomenon such as this by means of third person narrative. Therefore, as Gardener puts it, "Instead of explaining, he (i.e., Cheever) inserts Hammer's journal" which gives a direct insight into the workings of his psyche. "With a mad man's objectively, Hammer sketches the story of his life,"66 in his own voice.

Hammer's journal brings to one's mind another and very different kind of journal inserted into an earlier novel of Cheever's. Leander's journal in The Wapshot Chronicle does not only have any sinister intention but it vibrates with the narrators love and lust for life, breathes his warm humanity and generous sympathies, and a willingness take in his stride whatever life offers, despite his occasional protests and expressions of frustration. His is a healthy attitude to life, subject of course to the limitations of perception imposed on him by the circumstances of his life. His journal reveals his moral sense, his values, and his sense of what is just right. In short contrast to Leander's journal, Hammer's sketches the story of his life in a cold matter-of-fact voice which, contrary to one's expectations, hardly creates any sympathy for him, and has the effect of distancing the reader from him. John Gardener has remarked: "The coldness of tone (even when the scene is comic), the flat description of his enfeebled quest for relationship, his survival by flight into symbolism (yellow room, a dream-castle, pieces of
string) explains magically what the fact-bound novel would turn to the dry unreality of a case study."}

Hammer, as he traces the story of his life, does not at all seem to be aware of the sinister implications of his decision, albeit in deference to his crazy mother’s suggestion, to murder Nailles to wake the world towards which his autobiographical narrative moves. This is rather strange, because in the very first episode in his journal described very accurately he tells us how once on a beach he chose to be with a family of husband wife, and two children and helped them to fly a kite and rejected the seductive invitation of a faggot. On that occasion he "longed for a moral creation whose mandates were heftier than the delight of children, the trusting smiles of strangers and a length of kite string".

In birth and outward circumstances of upbringing Hammer’s life is a contrast to Nailles’s. Nailles is born more fortunately and raised and educated conventionally. Blessed apparently with marital and family happiness, he is also in touch with nature. He seems to be an appreciative, creative participant in the world. But Hammer is very much a lonely figure destined to be a perennial wanderer, outsider from the start of his life, as his journal reveals. Born outside wedlock to two firebrand socialist Frankling Pierce Taylor, a wealthy young man and Gretchen Schurz Oxencroft of humbler origin belonging to the mid west, Hammer is troubled by the question of his identity all through his life. His wealthy socialist father merely provides sufficiently for his mother without marrying her. He does not mean to marry her. He does not acknowledge his son either, Therefore he has to suffer all the disadvantages, notoriety
and embarrassments of illegitimate birth. In fact, Gretchen discovered that she was pregnant only after she was separated from her lover, the reason for the separation being that she was a kleptomaniac. It means that mentally she is not normal, if not mad. It is as if accident or chance rules Hammer's life from the time of his birth. He is brought up by his paternal grandmother who adopts him because he had "a head of yellow curls". Chance again intervenes and his hair turns "dark" after a few years. As George Hunt says, "later his passionate quest of the room with yellow walls will be emblematic of his nostalgic desire to retrieve that past and fix, as it were, his true identity now lost". He does not know the love of his parents. His mother thinks it "her privilege, practically her vocation, to travel around the world and improve her mind". she takes off to Europe. Therefore he knows only the love of his grandmother as long as she lives. Otherwise his is a loveless life. He is named Paul Hammer, instead of Paul Oxencroft, because at the time a suitable name for him is being discussed by his grandmother, a gardener passes the window carrying a hammer. This is yet another instance of chance or accident intervening in his life. Hammer is no name at all.

It is not only about his parents who hardly cared for him and condemned him to an illegitimate birth and a life of social ostracisation, but even about his grandmother, the only person ever to love him, that he writes in his journal in a matter-of-fact tone, and generally without any particular feeling. Even the two comic incidents - his repeating from memory the gist of two pages from his ancient history text-book in a bid to participate in the conversation with elders at the dinner table, and his playing a practical joke on one of the guests at dinner by inserting a phony pearl into an oyster in the guest's plate - are narrated in a flat humourless
voice. These and many other disconcerting details of his life—his being dropped from the social register and losing a dozen friends because of his bastardy, to cite one example at random—are recorded in the same manner when we would expect him to express himself in anger and pain and guilt or fly into a rage. This is patently abnormal. Gardner’s remark is apposite here: "The rendered proof of his (i.e., Hammer’s) demonic nature in his voice, a quiet stovelid on terror and rage."71 (emphasis added).

Dogged by loneliness and designing love and relationships Hammer makes a feeble attempt to visit his father first and his mother afterwards during Christmas because he is left alone in the school dormitory, all his schoolmates having gone home to their parents. In his journal he narrates these disillusioning visits too in the same manner as he does the other incidents of his life. He had not met his father at all and had in a fashion seen him in the duplicate, as one among the male caryatids supporting hotels and operas in many European cities. His father was known to be a muscular weight lifter and had posed for many a statue. Now he goes to Boston to meet him in a hotel and hopes to receive from him at least a bottle of beer as Christmas gift. This visit proves to be his first as well as last to his father. He discovers his father in his bedroom sprawling on his bed "in a poleaxed, drunken sleep, naked". Hammer's impulsive thought is to kill him, the first ever indication of the murderous instinct in him, reminding us of Nailles. Instead he chooses "an uneasy brand of forgiveness", and goes all the way from Boston to visit his mother at Kitzbuhel in Austria, and hopes to get from her at least a cup of tea. Of course she makes a cup of tea for him. But otherwise the visit proves a great disappointment, although he should have known it advance because he had always
found her disappointing and disconcerting.

Whether Hammer visited his mother earlier anytime is left ambiguous. Perhaps he did not. But she writes to him at least twice a month. And her letters faithfully reflect her self-absorption, her dreams, fads and fantasies, and reveal practically no thought of her son. They are all long and tiresome monologues without any consideration for the response of the person for whom they are meant. After a seemingly effusive welcome to her son, as an one time member of the Socialist Party she sets out on a tirade against American capitalism, commercialism, addiction to drugs, squalor, spiritual poverty and selfishness. Several others have criticised American society on similar grounds. But she has a plan to rouse her one-time country to its senses, if ever she visits it:

I would settle in some place like Bullet Park - - - I would single out as an example some young man, preferably an advertising executive, married with two or three children, a good example of a life lived without any genuine emotion or value - - - I would crucify him on the door of Christ's Church. Nothing less than a crucifixion will wake that world.72

At the time of listening to his mother outline her crazy plan Hammer does not know that in none two distant a time he himself would faithfully try to execute this plan of his mother's. For the time being, however, he retains enough sanity to know the sheer absurdity of this plan as well as some of his mother's idea. This Christmas visit to his parents only sharpens further his conscience of his want of identity. He views himself as "the only son of a male caryatid - - - and a crazy old woman". He sees his mother as a sterile and self-absorbed intellectual
woman who repudiates her maternal functions. When he hears his mother psychoanalysising herself aloud when she is all by herself, he decides to depart quietly, because she is incapable of love and he cannot tolerate her eccentric babblings.

In the next phase of his life, which he chooses to record in his journal, Hammer is possessed by a "cafard", an obsessive oppressive and crippling melancholy, a beta noire (a bugbear which one dreads) which is "no more visible than a moving column of thin air", and a consequence of it he becomes a restless, rootless wanderer going from place to place and seeking his escape from it in drunkenness, though in vain. Momentarily he feels relieved of the cafard when he can summon up images of a snow-covered mountain which seems to represent for him "beauty, enthusiasm and love". His longing for the snow-capped mountains and his cafard recall Tony's malady with the difference that in its immensity as well as pervasive intensity there is no comparison between Hammer's and Tony's. One may also notice a sort of parallel between Nailles's addiction to drugs to escape his train phobia consequent upon his son's illness, and Hammer's drunkenness to escape his melancholy. Hammer becomes afraid of light—the golden light of sunrise and sunset which is a source of hope and courage to many of Cheever's characters—and prefers darkness. He can neither sleep nor be awake. Psychiatric consultation does not help him in the least. He even denounces the expert whom he consults. Cheever, who has reservations about psycho-analysis, here implies that Hammers is, like Tony's depression, a moral and spiritual malady which cannot be resolved by limited Freudian insight. The voice in which Hammer describes his plight hardly creates sympathy for him.
Struggling under the strangle - hold of cafard, Hammer zigs and zags from hotel to hotel room from city to city, and country to country, searching for some place where he would be permanently free from it. Wherever he goes his melancholy follows him like his shadow. Unexpectedly he happens by chance upon a room with yellow walls in Rome. As he looks up at them from the sidewall, he feels that he is standing at the threshold of a new life, and it seems to him to be a place where his cafard cannot enter. When that room is denied him he literally searches the world for one like it. This insane delusion about a room with yellow walls gets coupled with his cafard. His quest takes him finally to Blenville, Pennsylvania where he finds a similar room in the farmhouse of Dora Emmision, a divorcée. She generously lets him spend a night in the yellow room and at once he feels that he is reborn the weight of his melancholy lifted, and the peace of mind he has longed for descend on him. He is not able to persuade her to sell her house to him. when she dies in a road accident while driving on a dangerously foggy night in a drunken condition he loses no time to buy the house for himself and move into it feeling no compunction whatsoever. He may have been, moreover, indirectly responsible for her death because even while seeming to dissuade her from driving out on the dangerous turnpike on a foggy night, he plies her with drink. Hammer’s obsession with yellow coloured walls suggest he is out of touch with nature and the bounty of myriad colours that nature provides. For all his shortcomings Nailles has this saving grace of being in close touch with nature which according to Cheever, is inexhaustible source of solace and regeneration to troubled minds. Hammer’s obsession is a sure sign of his mental ill-health.

In his journal Hammer admits that he "frequently (falls) in love with men, women,
children and dogs. These attachments are unpredictable, ardent and numerous".73 This seems most natural to one who has known little love in his life and longs for it. Thus, this child of chance falls suddenly in love with Marietta, the grand-daughter of Gilbert Hansen, who believes in Alchemy and experiments with scents. The white thread on her coat, which appears to have "some mysterious power" for him, acts as a magic catalyst" on him and propels him into loving her and marrying her very soon. His decision, impulsive and random as they always are, seem to depend on such slender things as a kite string and white thread, which perhaps symbolise his vulnerability. Hammer's marriage disintegrates almost as soon as it is contracted. Marietta not only shifts from mood to mood capriciously, alternating between tenderness and distemper. She becomes gentle, loving, yielding and wifely when there are hurricanes, thunderstorms and blizzards, but "spring and its uncertain zephyres - any sort of clemency -(seem) to create a barometric disturbance in her nature that (provokes) her deeper discontents".74 On such occasions she turns cold and hostile. This is indeed a most abnormal, if not insane, behavior. Hammer, like Nailles, is capable of love and thirsts for it. But instead of finding like Nailles a Nellie who remains faithful to him though precariously, he has the misfortune of being enchanted by a witch-like woman. What disconcerts the reader is that Hammer recounts his experience of falling in and out of tone and his fantasies about dream girls in a stilted and detached tone. It is this tone of his which strengthens the impression that he is insane.

In spite of the growing distance between Hammer and Marietta continue to live under the same roof. When she gets the walls painted with pink, as the yellow has been to discolour, Hammer's cafard returns. They resume their restless and pointless travels which end only after
Hammer while they are in Rome, sympathetically participates in a parade for a dead communist hero and finds that his cafard is lifted soon afterwards they return to New York. The following summer he finds that his crazy old mother's plan to crucify a man is "sound" and decides at once impulsively to settle in Bullet Park and crucify Nailles. He does not choose to explain on what grounds he regards his mother's plan "sound."

Part Two of the novel ends with this decision. Hammer does not explain either why of all people he chooses Nailles as his victim. The decision is as arbitrary as it is insane and sinister. Moreover Nailles does not conform to the kind of victim envisaged by Hammer's mother who wants for the sacrifice a "young man, preferably an advertising executive, married with two or three children, a good example of a life lived without any genuine emotion or value. Nailles is not a young man. He has an only child, and he certainly does not live without any genuine emotion or value. Therefore, strictly speaking, he does not and cannot serve, the purpose of a scapegoat. Much less does Tony, who is equally arbitrarily made to take the place of his father. All of which means that Hammer is demented and is living under a delusion. His Journal, which ends with Part Two of the novel, "is effective because if builds some motivation for an almost inexplicable act and also because the manner of the telling increases both credibility and horror."

Part Three is presented in the third person authorial voice. By the time it begins, Hammer the stranger has intruded into Bullet Park and well settled there. But he is treated primarily as a mysterious stranger in this small place. Credulous and gullible, Nailles, who is
a poor judge of people, takes to Hammer, the coincidence of their names being sufficient basis for building up friendship. He gets the other elected to the local fire department. For him the force of friendship is nearly as important as love, worth this difference that in the "contentment" it brings him there is "no trace of jealousy, sexuality or nostalgia". It is as if the friendship of his conception and experience is free from the taint of selfish possessiveness. It is again another mark of his short sightedness that he has not bothered to consider whether those whom he regards as his friends also view friendship as he does. On his suggestion together Hammer and he along with his dog Tessie go fishing in a stream. On the way, following the contours of the land, Nailles he becomes aware of the smell of eucalyptus, maples, sweet grass, manure from a cow barn and the smell of pine, all suggesting his intimate and pleasant contact with nature. In the stream they are to fish he hears nothing but "the sound of laughter", "giddy laughter, the laughter of silly girls and nymphs" ringing through the bleak spring woods.  

To all these sentiments and sensation Hammer is a complete stranger. He is virtually trapped in his lonely and isolated self. While Nailles is very happy drinking bourbon in the woods with him, he is preoccupied with the decision he has already taken to murder Nailles, and the appropriateness of it as well as the choice of his victim. It is during this friendly fishing expedition that Hammer suggests callously to Nailles that he would do well to shoot down his aged dog Tessie, which rouses momentarily his murderous impulses. The concluding chapter of the novel which is narrated in the narrator's voice, is concerned with the climax of Hammer's attempt at purgative violence. On the morning of the day he has fixed for action, the day on which the Lewellems have their party, he is filled with a "sublime feeling of rightness"
The opening paragraph of the chapter has a number of rhetorical questions which refer to Hammer and his preparedness for committing the murder. On second thought they are found to imply hammer’s failure in the act contemplated. The day seem most propitious. His wife is away leaving him free to be busy with the lawns. Then he equips himself a can of Mace and a truncheon. Probably about this time, he decided to impulsively to make Tony rather than his father the scapegoat. As the hour for action approaches, he pours himself a "stiff drink---not for courage or stimulation but to make the ecstasy of his lawlessness endurable." He drinks so much that "the inflammation of his thinking" becomes "hazardous". Towards dusk he feels the need of a confidant to whom he can tell his plan to burn Tony on the altar of Christ Church. And he settles on the holy man Rinuola" This development could be due to a weakening of his nerves as well the effect of drink. It could also be that the novelist desires to hint that Hammer may after all not succeed in his evil design.

Just as at the end of Part One swami Rinuola becomes the means of saving Tony now once again he, as chance would have it, becomes the instrument of salvation. He rushes to the Lewellen where the Nailles have gathered for a party : By that time Hammer, dead drunk, has managed to kidnap Tony, who has been directing traffic at the party, and take him to the church. As soon as he is warned by the swami, Nailles with unusual composure, neither frightened nor confused goes to the church with his chain saw, cuts though the door and rescues his son well before. Hammer is able to immolate him on the altar. It is Hammer’s desire for a cigarette before getting into action that gives Nailles all the time he requires to save his son. Hammer’s need for a cigarette may be due to his nervousness. He confesses to his attempted crime and is
remanded to the State Hospital for the criminally Insane. Thus, the long series of almost unbelievable events reach their end.

As the title chosen for this chapter is intended to suggest the novel is about evil manifesting itself with seeming unexpectedness in a suburban place like Bullet Park. The stress is on evil rather than on suburbia. What is imagined as happening in suburban Bullet Park may happen anywhere else, and Bullet Park is only a convenient and manageable locale to explore the theme. Though many facets of suburban life and its people are presented vividly in the novel, evil-its random and unpredictable appearance as if from nowhere, the suffering and pain it causes and the confusion it creates in the lives of its victims chosen as if by chance, its motiveless malignity - is its most important theme. Hammer, who intrudes into Bullet Park after prolonged aimless wandering, is the chief instrument of evil, and Nailles and Tony are his victims chosen by chance. If there is a remotely plausible motive - seemingly socialistic and world - bettering - to choose Nailles as the scapegoat for the so-called sacrifice on Christ's altar, there is none whatsoever for switching over to Tony at the last minute. It suggests perhaps that malignity does not have a motive. It is of course providential that Tony escapes more or less unhurt. Although Hammer proves to be an ineffective instrument of evil, it cannot be said that his failure is the triumph of good. His incarceration does not mean that he is completely defeated. There is not enough evidence in the novel to make the assertion that good has really vanquished evil. In fact, contrary to one's expectation, there is no energetic conflict or confrontation between good and evil in it, and evil in the person of Hammer is offered hardly any resistance or fight, mainly because no one in Bullet Park is aware of his sinister intentions,
nor does he reveal them till the penultimate moment of his proposed sacrifice. By his drunken procrastination he allows himself to be all too easily overcome before he could do any material harm. In fact this absence of a stiff resistance is a limitation in Cheever's handling of the theme of evil in this novel.

It must be noted, however, that Cheever does not present the problem of good and evil in a simplistic way by showing it as a simple conflict between an unalloyed good man and an unadulterated evil man. This is more than amply clear by the way the characters especially of Nailles and Hammer, are presented. The reader is given an insight into their minds. It is clear from Hammer's autobiographical journal. What factors of his life - his unfortunate illegitimate birth, loveless upbringing, total denial of parental love, loneliness and isolation owing to social ostracisation on account of his bastardy, and the consequent absence of societal restraint and control etc - feed and foster the inherently present seeds of evil and demoniac qualities in him are revealed in his own voice. These facts and their impact in him cannot be missed even though the cold and matter-of-fact manner in which he narrates them does not win our sympathy for him. These facts don't by themselves explain or account for his becoming an instrument of evil and his motiveless malignity. But they do serve to remind us of the human side of Hammer. Nailles is apparently more fortunate in the circumstances of his life. He is happily married and happens to be a generally respected member of the suburban community in which he has his identity, and in whose social life he actively participates. In these respects and in his close and delighted association with nature he seems a complete contrast to Hammer. But in his irrational psychological behaviour and in his murderous feelings obvious on more than one
occasion, he comes very close to Hammer. If murderous thoughts and emotion are evil, then Naille's, too has inevitably his share of the bent towards evil. In this regard, the 'hero' and the 'villain' are alike. It follows then that he is not to be seen as a good man, pure and unalloyed. Neither Hammer nor Nailleless is aware of the fact of evil in them: Moreover it is not only Naille but the Bullet Park community itself is obtuse in its perception and fails to recognise evil when confronted by it. Ignorant or aware Hammer, Nailles, and the members of the Bullet Park community have their share of evil in them in varying degrees, as post-lapsarian creatures.

Naille's ignorance of the presence and power of evil, his inability to judge people, and his almost child like enthusiasm for friends make him an easy target for Hammer. It would seem that it is the courage of the moment rather than religious grace in terms of his character that saves him and Tony. Naille has to go a long way in his religious education. This is clear from his reaction to Hammer's attempt on his son's life. It affects him in so far as it exposes him to acute grief, pain and suffering and brings him a taste of evil, with which he was not previously acquainted. But, as Lynne Waldeiland points out, "the last line of the novel makes clear how unredemptive the suffering of Naille's has been. 'Tony went back to school on Monday and Naille - drugged - went off to work and everything was wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful as it had been" His dependence on drugs continues. He does not seem any the better for this experience; and remains totally unchanged, lacking in self-knowledge.

The word "wonderful" repeated four times immutatively is indicative of more than sceptical scoffing. It acquires, says George Hunt, "multivalent connotations" including
cynicism, - "awesome, unique, miraculous, curious, strange, marvelous, extraordinary, fabulous".

One is rather puzzled bewildered, and filled with a sense of awe by the way Nailles as well as the Bullet Park community respond to the Hammer's attempt to immolate Tony on Christ altar. It causes only a momentary sensation in the community which comes to know about it from the matter-of-fact reporting in the newspapers. The serious and sinister implications of the episode don't register themselves on the people's minds.

John Gardner has made the claim that Bullet Park is "A religious book, affirmation out of ashes." Peter Collier and Annette Grant too, in their respective reviews of the novel, draw attention to the religious dimensions of the novel. Annette Grant sees in the biblical story of Abraham, and Isaac with a youth as a sacrificial lamb a possible source for the conflict between Nailles, Hamner, and Tony. One may also see a parallel between the biblical Abel and Cain and Nailles and Hammer, who as noted already, could be alter-egos to each other. That the novel is replete with biblical images and symbols is shown by George Hunt in his study of the novel. There is no need to labour further the religious contents and implications of the novel. But Gardner's claim about the affirmation it makes seems rather over-emphatic. It may be assumed that Cheever, as an earnest christian is convinced that good ultimately triumphs over evil. But in the novel there is nothing to forshadow this triumph. There is hardly any fight against evil in the novel to speak of a victory or triumph over it. Both contenders are unheroic men essentially. Nailles is feeble, dull, bland though optimistic, and Hammers is much too ineffective in spite of his murderous intentions and therefore is all too easily overpowered.
Lynne Waldeland’s observation on the affirmation the novel makes seem closer to what happens in it than Gardner’s: "What affirmation there is in the novel lies in the fact that a simple, optimistic man has been able to assimilate grief and suffering and awareness of evil without being totally destroyed. It is the affirmation of survival rather than of transcendence." Only a qualified affirmation of faith may be gleaned from the novel. It is made clear that purgative violence, with whatever motive, is ultimately useless. On the whole the novel holds out a warning more than an affirmation, to those of today’s world. It says that evil makes its appearance unpredictably as if by chance or accident: It may enter any place, not only a suburb, and its manner and form cannot be easily detected. Because, given the natural inclination of human nature towards evil, there is no one who cannot become an instrument of evil. Nailles, for instance, could have been an active agent of evil like his adversary Hammer. Therefore the presence of evil inside one’s own self as well as outside has to be recognised. This calls for vigilance and spiritual guidance especially in today’s world devoid of saints and prophets. Confining a man like Hammer, with dehydrated and dehumanised self, in the House for Criminally Insane on the ground that he is a psychopath, though necessary, is not an answer to the problem. Love, selflessness and the readiness to give rather than possess - these may mitigate the power of evil. Swami Rituola is a case in point.

The structure of the novel has come in for sharp criticism. It is contended that its structure is faulty and lacks the coherence a novel requires. "Despite the overall plot involving Hammer and Nailles, the book all too easily fragments into a series of separate incidents as if several short stories has been unsuccessfully stung together", says Sammuel Coale. More or less
similar objections are raised against the book by some others. They fall in line with the objections raised against the structure of the Wapshot novels though with greater justice. Having been accustomed to writing episodically, Cheever could not have easily overcome the habit while writing this novel. But the real issue is not whether one should write episodically or not but whether the episodic structure adopted for this novel really subserves its design and theme. The simple plot structure of devoting Part One to Nailles, Part Two to Hammer, and Part Three to the climax of attempted murder, accommodates the episodic mode of narrative. And Cheever by and large successfully makes it serve the purposes of the novel. It is true that some episodes particularly in Part One - Tony’s affair with the war widow and the conflict between him and his French teacher, to cite off hand two instances have been given more importance and space than is appropriate and they tend to distract one’s attentions from the concerns of the novel. But on the whole one does not feel in this novel, as one does invariably in the Wapshot novels, of moving in differing directions, all at the same time. As Lynne Waldeland points out, "the novel is episodic only in that the characters systematically think back over the past in order to understand the present". It has already been pointed how Part One, in which Hammer is introduced, prepares subtly for his importance and centrality in the next part and his role in the last part.

John Gardner has drawn attention to Cheever’s deft handling of different narrative voices as a crucial and effective device of organising into a whole the different components of the novel and projecting his vision. First of all there is the voice of the narrator with which the novel begins and also ends. This voice is in full control of the entire narrative and intervenes whenever
necessary. The narrator's distance, his judgements, and his irony, when he wishes it, are always clear. Then there is the voice of Nailles, his point of view. The lyricism in the novel which is criticised as inconsistent with its serious theme, is actually not the author's but Nailles's and a function of his viewpoint. It is he who vaxes lyrically eloquent about nature, his wife and son, and even his chain saw though in an unimaginative way. Enough has already been said about the distinct voice of Hammer and its function in the novel as a whole. It is the assured voice of the narrator which makes the novel, full of implausible and fabulous elements, convincing.


7. Charles Shapiro, "This Familiar and lifeless Scene", The Nation, June 30th, 1969, p. 836.


13. Ibid; p. 259.


16. Ibid.
17. *Bullet Park* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p.3. All quotations from the text are from this edition.


20. Ibid; p.5-6.


23. Ibid; p.10.

24. Ibid; p.11.


26. Ibid; p.10.

27. Ibid; pp.100 - 11.


29. Ibid; p.9.


33. Ibid; pp.56-57.


35. *Bullet park* p.16.

36. Ibid; p.15.

37. Ibid; p.16.
38. Ibid; p.21.
39. Ibid; p.23.
40. Ibid; p.24.
41. Ibid; p.25.
42. George W. Hunt; p.166.
43. Bullet Park, p.27.
44. Ibid; p.28.
45. Ibid; p.234.
46. Lynne Waldeeland, p.112.
47. Bullet Park, p.118.
49. Ibid; p.51.
50. Ibid; p.53.
51. Ibid; p.59.
52. Ibid; p.65.
53. Ibid; p.72.
54. Ibid; pp.87 - 88.
55. Lynne Waldeeland, p.113.
57. Ibid.p.130.
58. Ibid; p.131.
59. Ibid; p.134.
60. Ibid; p.139.
61. Ibid; p.142.
62. Ibid.
63. Critial Essays, p.259.
64. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Bullet Park, p.147.
69. George W.Hunt, p.186.
70. Bullet Park, p.151.
73. Ibid; p.205.
74. Ibid; p.216.
75. Ibid; p.168.
76. Lynne Waldeland, pp.110-111.
77. Bullet Park, p.229.
78. Lynne Waldeland, .114.
81. Lynne Waldeland, p.114.
82. Samuel Coale, p.103.
83. Lynne Waldeland, p.115.
84. Ibid.