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During this week our projector is broken. We anticipate its return early next week with another showing of fine movies!

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Co-Feature
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Angela Allen/Books

The evolution of two American dreams

"Oh What a Paradise It Seems"
By John Cheever
Alfred A. Knopf, 1982
100 pages, \$10.00

John Cheever's swansong to the literary world, "Oh What a Paradise It Seems," is nothing short of his finest work.

It's difficult to review this slim novel without some sadness and regret. Cheever died of cancer this summer on the edge of his 70th birthday. He has published four novels and seven collections of short stories during the past four decades. Most recently, "The Stories of John Cheever" won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1978.

"Paradise" is a rather simple story of Lemuel Sears, "an old man not yet infirm," who discovers that the lovely pond on which he has ice skated for some years is being poisoned. Some shady Italians have converted it to a dump, and the community is going along with the scam. Outraged and repelled, Sears makes it his mission to investigate. He eventually sees the pond clean again.

At the same time Sears falls in love with Renee, a rather mysterious woman. They pursue an unusually erotic relationship at odd hours and places. In the end, she dumps him heartlessly. Sears, through fortuitous timing, then takes up

with Renee's elevator operator, Eduardo. By this time, the mutual pollution of Beasley's Pond and Lemuel Sears is apparent, and the two stories become one.

But with dignity and grace, Sears overrides his despair of ugliness and cheapness (fried food, bank machines, Buy Brite shopping centers) through his celebration and salvation of beauty.



Cheever achieves this resolution through his mastery of simple symbolism. His fictional world contains obvious evil and obvious good: there are no grey areas to explain, just the human spirit to make sense of them.

Through Sears, Cheever offers us a beautifully tempered look at despair while still bargaining for affirmation:

It was that most powerful sense of being alive on the planet.

"The Cinderella Complex"
By Colette Dowling
Summit Books, 1981
266 pages, \$12.95

Women are apparently experiencing some dangerous fallout from their modest feminist dreams of the '60s and '70s: nothing's turning out right. They're still underpaid, unappreciated and expendable in the "adult world."

The goals were substantial — gaining the "freedom" to choose to be wife, worker or both. But making emotional and practical sense out of this independence appears to be an even taller order.

So says Colette Dowling. She updates the feminist struggle and follows it through the last 25 years with a critical, if slightly self-righteous eye.

Face it, she argues, women have come a long way but haven't gotten anywhere. They've been sabotaging their own ability to be self-reliant. Nursing the same fairy tale that made Cinderella famous, they still wait in the wings for the Prince, dingy grey though he may be, to arrive and deliver them from drudgery and responsibility. Unfortunately, dependency is not a male conspiracy.

Even though Dowling notes that 80 percent of the working female population brings home a lean share of the bacon (less

than \$10,000 a year), she dotes on the fortunate woman — bright and educated but frustrated. She has a tendency to look at women from old-order standards — what you do and how much you make define what you are. Women are aware that their deplorable financial status perpetuates their low self-image, but their emotions haven't caught up enough to let them fundamentally change things.

Though this isn't particularly new stuff, Dowling does look at it from a pragmatic view. Women have to believe that what they do, say and think has both social and emotional value. She calls this "springing free." If women "spring" right (push-button freedom?), they'll land on their own two feet and avoid another empty ritual.

If she's not recycling myths, she may be sprucing up cliches. Nonetheless, Dowling writes clearly, sincerely and from experience.

Certainly emotional health is a respectable goal, and certainly Dowling deserves to be read. Working toward a more egalitarian community where both men and women can reach around each others' limitations may be a more noble effort. Men are having a hard time too. But we'll leave that problem to Dowling to tackle in her next book. With her born-again autonomy, this time for real, she ought to be cranking them off the press.

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