

Modern Suburbia: Environment Devastation in John Cheever's

The Wapshot Scandal

V. Rajmohan
Ph.D. Research Scholar
Department of English
Annamalai University
veerarajmohan@gmail.com

Dr. K.N. Sharmila
Assistant Professor (FEAT)
Department of English
Annamalai University
sharmilanatarajan@gmail.com

Abstract

The Wapshot Scandal is a novel written by John Cheever. He is an American novelist, essayist, and short story writer. This study focuses on the duality of human nature between dramatized as the disparity of character's decorous social persona and inner corruption. His work covers the subject of nostalgia for a vanishing way of life, characterized by abiding cultural traditions and a profound sense of community. It can be opposed to the alienating nomadic of modern suburbia. *The Wapshot Scandal* is the debut novel finds about an eccentric family that lives in a Massachusetts fishing village. The similarities between *The Wapshot Scandal* and *The Wapshot Chronicle* are readily apparent the similar cast of characters though Leander and Sarah are both. His fiction is mostly set in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, the suburbs of Westchester, New York, and old New England villages based on various South Shore towns around Quincy.

Keywords: American Dream, Wapshot Tradition, Nostalgia and Modern Suburbia.

Introduction

The Wapshot Scandal is John Cheever's follow up novel and his National Book Award fiction. The narrator really enjoyed the earlier novel *The Wapshot Chronicle*. It has

only a sort of humor and darker fiction. It is set in contemporary early 1960s New England, several decades later than the end of the former novel. Cheever described life has become more troubled even though prosperity has been brought by the postwar boom. *The Wapshot Scandal* published in 1964, six months later, Barry Goldwater was nominated as the Republican candidate for President. Goldwater, who in many ways exemplified the cresting spirit of paranoia of the period, argued in his book *Why Not Victory?*

The Cold War, the threat of nuclear annihilation, hangs like a miasma of anxiety over the two Wapshot brothers. It festers as a deep ennui for their wives. The matriarchal great-aunt of the Wapshot family, whom the brothers are counting on for a large inheritance, failed to pay her income tax and stands to lose her fortune to the IRS. Though the Wapshots were always a crumb outside the laws and conventions of their late 19th and early 20th century New England society, these brothers and their wives are stuck between an unthinkable future and the realities of their present. The wives want passion, freedom and a meaningful life. The men don't seem to know what they want.

The two stories about Honora Wapshot that were most frequently told in the family concerned her alarm clock and her penmanship. These were not told so much as they were performed, each member of the family taking a part, singing an aria so to speak, while everyone joined in on the Grand Finale like some primitive anticipation of the conventions of nineteenth-century Italian opera. (66)

The Wapshot Scandal is a logical or probably illogical continuation of *The Wapshot Chronicle* children grow up and the problems that used to be their parents become the problems of the grown up children and problems always tend to accrue and multiply. America aglow *The Wapshot Scandal* by John Cheever is an American novelist and short

story writer, sometimes called “the Chekhov of the suburbs” or “the Ovid of Ossining.”, Massachusetts, where he was born. *The Wapshot Scandal* is a novel sequel to *The Wapshot Chronicle*. John Cheever discusses about the American life. His characters are troubled in their marriages, house, or with the law. Their struggles are what some of us go through in real life. *The Wapshot Scandal* was not different. It focuses on the Wapshot family as they struggle to live. But, life is unpredictable. If we do, we must pray to have the inner strength to overcome our problems.

John Cheever’s *The Wapshot Scandal* is a Shady Hill stories, a man comes from home to his town after a plane trip. The plane has crashed in a field, but everyone has tremendously lived. The man comes into his house in a sublime mood. He is even on time for eating, but his wife is distracted and his children are squabbling. He tries to tell them he has escaped from death, but they go on selfishly eating and scolding. He has the intelligence that he is a secret angel, but-everything is just the same as always, and no one wants to perceive. This was a brilliant satire on the early 1960s in the USA, as it began to throw off the innocence of the 1950s. The Wapshot family degenerates into many scandals, even though it still means well in some cases.

A wonderful and perceptive novel about the American Dream, in all its guises: a Christmas morning in New England, a perfectly clean, upper-middle class house where groceries are delivered by attractive young men, a government job with housing provided, to be so rich as to be a benefactress, golden eggs buried for Easter Sunday. This is also a story about flights, continental flights, trans-Atlantic flights, flights of fancy, ski-run flights. For the Wapshots, their family, and the others who are ensnared in their world, the American Dream is not a privilege, but a right, a kind of standing in society which elevates them from depressing and sordid things. Cheever’s writing is both empathetic yet firm, and the book has

balances a satisfying narrative with well-written observations on human nature, frailty, and hunger.

In the Wapshot novels, this sense of reminiscence is known by several kinds of Cheever's characters. Leander, Honora, and Coverly Wapshot all explore a desire to recapture. Thus the longing is not moved by an individual or unique memory, nor is it a memory-motivated desire for return to a wondrous and fresh childhood, to a previously-lived life, or to an angelic rebirth existence. Piety and morality are appreciated, pain is comforted, and love is offered to all the mankind in this world. Unlike the modern world, this paradise, as Cheever sometimes labels the nostalgically recalled vision, is calm and orderly and is viewed by a sense of permanence. Although most of his characters have attained a material version of the American Dream, which, by announcing comfort and security, is expected to bring psychological satisfaction, they have not found the happiness they realistically expected.

In the Wapshot novels, both Coverly and Moses Wapshot experience the painful reality of being an isolate in the modern world, and their existence in twentieth century America becomes a series of isolated journeys and events that seem to have no meaning. Moses and Melissa Wapshot lived in Proximire Manor, a place that was known up and down the suburban railroad line as the place where the lady got arrested. The incident had taken place five or six years before, but it had the endurance of a legend, and the lady had seemed briefly to be the genius of the pretty place. The facts are simple. With the exception of one unsolved robbery, the eight-man police force of Proximire Manor had never found anything to do. Their only usefulness was to direct traffic at weddings and large cocktail parties (46). The brothers must leave the quiet village of St. Botolphs so Cousin Honora is the controller of the family financiers. He demands that they follow the Wapshot tradition of young men

achieving financial security and starting a family before they receive their inheritance. There is no chance for the younger Wapshots to become financially successful in the small town. Each obtains employment and loses it several times, not because of individual shortcomings but because of the idiosyncrasies of others. Each moves frequently, and neighbors and acquaintances come and go in their nomadic lives without leaving any imperfection. Their alienation is intensified because in Cheever's modern world even married couples do not speak successfully or make a lasting emotional connection, so the brothers are essentially alone despite their marital status.

This disturbing sense of personal loneliness plays a major flaw in the world as Cheever views it, and his characters contest their loneliness in various traditions. Moses drinks heavily; his wife, Melissa Wapshot, has an affair with a teenage boy; and Coverly counts by computer the number of times certain words appear in Keats' poetry. Melissa Wapshot shares her feeling with the modern world must be inadequate because she knows that "loneliness was one thing, and she knew herself how sweet it could make light and company seem, but boredom was something else, and why, in this most prosperous and equitable world, should everyone seem so bored and disappointed?" (34)

Conclusion

John Cheever signifies nature imagery, particularly images of light and water, to sustain his main themes of nostalgia, memory, tradition, alienation, travel, and confinement in his novels. In the novels these images interweave and intersect to reveal Cheever's vision of an achievable earthly paradise comprised of familial love and an appreciation of the beauties and strengths of the natural world. In Cheever's world, memory is not a passive accretion of past incidents, but a strong power in itself that may push characters into unexpected thought or action. Both nostalgia and memory are vital role of an individual's

personality, and Cheever uses a variety of natural images to encourage both memory and nostalgia in a constantly positive way. Thus the sound of thunder may prompt a man of what it was like to be young or the feel of rain may trigger a memory of love and happiness.

Works Consulted

Cheever, John. *The Wapshot Chronicle*. New York: Ballantine, 1983. Print.

---. *The Wapshot Scandal*. New York: Ballantine, 1983. Print.

Breslin, John B. "John Cheever in the Critic's Circle." *America* 140 (17 Feb. 1979): 115-16.

Print.