



The Wapshot Scandal

By John Cheever
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The Wapshot Scandal Introduction

In this, the sequel to *The Wapshot Chronicle*, we find that the Wapshots have drifted away from St. Botolphs, their once estimable and self-important family image under threat of discredit from the I.R.S. -- Honora has never paid income tax. The family members are set adrift into the humiliating abyss of adultery, into the company of fellow hapless prisoners of human nature, and into confrontation with themselves.

Discussion Questions

1. Cheever's characters lead largely unexamined lives filled with pessimism and a degree of boredom and frustration. Are Coverly, Moses, Melissa, Betsey, and Honora leading unexamined lives? Does their level of introspection impact on their relationships with their spouses and family? Are they able to freely express themselves? What might be inhibiting them? Could any of them be described as happy?
2. Consider that Honora chose to leave St. Botolphs, for the first time in many years, rather than pay her taxes and that, when leaving Italy, Honora passed out many lire to strangers of all types. Is this behavior contradictory? What is Honora's relationship to money? How does this extend to her concept of family and self? Did Honora's time away from St. Botolphs change her?
3. Coverly's boss, Cameron, experiences paranoid delusions. Despite this, he holds a seemingly important position within the organization in which he and Coverly work. What elements of Cameron's personality lend validity to him as character? Is he simply a "mad scientist" stereotype? What was in the suitcase? How critical was its loss by Coverly? Why didn't Coverly try to open it?
4. Adultery and promiscuity play an important role in *The Wapshot Scandal*. Why? What are the characters hoping to gain? Are they successful?
5. *The Wapshot Scandal* takes place in the Cold War period. How tangible is the characters' fear of science -- how fully do they understand the world outside themselves? Can insularity be an effective protection against an unknowable world?
6. Cheever is skilled in using seemingly insignificant events in his characters' lives to expose their emotional complexities. Can similarly insignificant events in our lives help us to better understand ourselves and others? Is it possible to recognize these moments in the midst of our daily routine? Or, is this merely a method novelists contrive to help them tell their stories?
7. *The Wapshot Chronicle* and *The Wapshot Scandal* are studies of sadness, madness, and melancholy and portray individuals who yearn for self-expression within a society whose values make it difficult to achieve this freedom. Do any of the characters achieve freedom in this way?

About the author

A writer for most of his life and best known for his short stories, John Cheever was born in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1912. He published his first short story at the age of 17 and, in 1979, was the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for his collection of short stories, *The Stories of John Cheever*. He was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1951, a Howells Medal Award (awarded by the National Academy of Arts and Letters for *The Wapshot Scandal*) in 1964, and winner of the 1978 American Book Award for *The Stories of John Cheever*. His later novels include *Bullet Park* (1969), *Falconer* (1977), and *Oh What a Paradise It Seems* (1982). *The Journals of John Cheever* was published posthumously in 1991. He died in 1982, at the age of 70.

John Cheever is considered a master storyteller and one of America's most original writers. He is also deemed a virtuoso of characterization; the characters that people his works of fiction, short stories, and novels alike are a unique blend of individual glory and eccentricity. He was insatiably fascinated with the dynamics of human relationships and the unique responses of ordinary individuals to the shifting, if otherwise commonplace, entanglements of life. *The Wapshot Chronicle* and its sequel, published two years later, *The Wapshot Scandal*, illustrate the breadth and scope of Cheever's vision, his interests, and his narrative style.