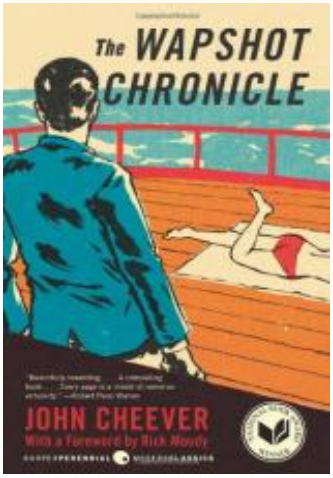
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The Wapshot Chronicle

by John Cheever



About the Book

The Wapshot Chronicle is the telling of the history and circumstances of the eclectic Wapshot family. The small, perhaps antiquated, New England river town of St. Botolphs is the home of the Waphot family: Honora, born on Oahu of missionary parents but raised by her paternal Uncle Lorenzo; Leander, an aging and gentle ferryboat operator and would-be suicide; his wife Sarah (Coverly) Wapshot, mother of Moses, the errant and mischievous elder brother to Coverly, the adoring and somewhat lambent brother. **The Wapshot Chronicle** is an exploration of the clash between pious and bourgeois respectability, the slippery mores of a new and vigorously changing America and the inner drives of hearty, small-town New England stock.

Discussion Guide

1. Describe the Wapshot family. What is it, beyond the tie of blood relation, that connects them? How attuned are they to each other's internal strife? Describe the family dynamic -- why do Leander and Sarah allow themselves to continue to be bound to Honora? Is it only that she controls the family purse strings and their income? Is the wielding of this control a flaw of Honora's character? Is this the only element of control that Honora impresses upon them?

2. Even though it is Moses who is commanded to leave St. Botolphs, Coverly follows him. Why does Coverly also leave St. Botolphs? What do Moses and Coverly stand to gain by seeking futures outside of St. Botolphs and what do they actually accomplish? Do they cling to one another at the expense of their individuality -- or does their separation release them and allow them to grow independently of one another?

3. Uncle Lorenzo, whom we never directly meet, travels to the South Pacific on a voyage of expiation with his wife, where, subsequently, Honora is born. How do Honora's standards of decency live up to the missionary precedent set by her parents? How does she diverge from those standards? What do the townspeople come to expect of Honora, what does she expect from herself, and how is this brought to bear on other Wapshots?

4. Leander keeps a journal in which he regularly writes rules by which a man should live. To what extent did Leander live by these rules? What did he gain in his specificity? To what extent did the other residents of St. Botolphs, including the Wapshots, organize their lives by rules? Did the mores of the town reflect the changing mores of the nation?

5. Purity and carnality are major themes in Cheever's works. Which of the characters abide by traditional sexual codes? How does their behavior reflect their attitudes about mid-20th-century America? Are the male characters more concerned with carnality than the female characters?

6. The Wapshot Chronicle is a family saga that focuses on intergenerational differences. Think about the differences between the earlier, esteemed Wapshots, Thaddeus and Lorenzo, and a comparison of Honora, Leander, and Sarah's generation to that of Coverly and Moses. How does each generation come of age? Does St. Botolphs nurture them all in the same way?

7. The Wapshots traditionally place great importance on family lineage. Do you think this was a factor in the choice of brides for either Moses or Coverly? How do Melissa and Betsey compare to Sarah and Honora? How do they compare to their husbands?

8. The beginning of the novel is comparable to that of the Bible's Genesis. What place, if any, does God occupy in the lives of the Waphsots? Why did John Cheever structure the novel in this way? What response from readers might he have been trying to evoke?

9. Did Honora apply her moral dictates to her own behavior? Who was Honora's fiercest judge? Does Honora see the new and emerging America as powerful and progress-minded? Does she harbor a patriotism for the nation that matches her love of St. Botolphs?

10. Many of Cheever's characters feel a compelling need for rebirth. The desire human beings have for a cleansing or baptism is universal and is evident in his characters. How do Leander and Sarah achieve this? To what extent is the Topaze a part of it? Are Cheever's women more desirous of inner rebirth than the men?

Author Bio

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.

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