Chapter 3
"FAREWELL TO ST. BOTOLPHS": A STUDY OF
THE WAPSHOT SCANDAL

It would be most natural of one were to assume that The Wapshot Scandal, Cheever's second novel, is a sample sequel to its predecessor The Wapshot Chronicle. Their respective titles give the impression that they must be necessarily and sequentially related. But in actual fact they are not strictly sequential, although they are surely related, and the issues involved in each are different. In so far as it traces the fluctuating fortunes of the surviving members of the Wapshot family, Leander and Sarah being dead - the elderly. Honora, the two sons of Leander Moses and Coverly, and their wives Melissa and Betsey - into our own times, The Wapshot Scandal is a continuation of the previous novel. And that is only part of what happens, and there is much more in it. One misses the sense of familial solidarity strongly felt in The Wapshot Chronicle. The Wapshots of the later novel appear to have changed and modified with the passage of time so that they do not seem to be quite the same people. Their relative importance also appears to have changed, whereas in the first Wapshot novel the focus is almost unwaveringly on one or the other or all of the Wapshots. There are in fact certain omissions and changes in characterization, as it shall be shown later in this chapter. But to cite just one example for the present, in The Wapshots Chronicle, Melissa is a flat character and little more than a desirable damsel sought after by Mosses. But in the later novel she becomes a centrally important character who virtually overshadows her husband, and the novelist tries to interest her with a certain tragic dignity.
Apart from the half a dozen Wapshots, there are a number of new characters in The Wapshot Scandal; some of them enjoy principal importance and several others are minor and figure in the episodes involving the principal characters. The action is spread over St.Botolphs, Talifer a suburban town near a missile site where Coverly lives with his family, Proxmire Manor an elegant suburb where Moses and Melissa live, and it extends to Italy in Europe, to Rome in particular, to where Melissa and Honora escape for different reasons. The world in which these many characters live and move is very much the contemporary world of the Space Age subject to its inexplicable convulsions and compulsions. The gap between the world of St.Botolphs and the modern world already felt in The Wapshot Chronicle, is seen to widen further and very rapidly too, as if it cannot be narrowed down or bridged at all. In the words of George Garrette; things disintegrate, decay, blur out of focus, fall apart. There seems to be no centre to hold them together. Old patterns have collapsed. Uncertainty, and restlessness of change, mark the world of the novel. And finally St.Botolphs and all that it stands for in spite of its limitations, so very central to an understanding of the people and places in The Wapshot Chronicle, is bidden farewell at the end of the later Wapshot novel.

More fundamentally, the thematic concern of the two novels are also different. the overriding concern in The Wapshot Chronicle is with the question whether one can make the traditions of the past usable in the present day changing world. This concern emerges through the experiences and adventures of the main characters, Leander, Honora and Coverly in particular, and their reactions to them. Of course Coverly continues to be concerned with it in the later Wapshot novel too. However, the focus now is increasingly directed on the social and
cultural issues pressing upon the contemporary society, on the generation to which Moses, Coverly and their like belongs and the world with an extraordinary urgency. These issues are only obliquely referred to in *The Wapshot Chronicle* and are not allowed to sour its hopeful view of men and the world. In *The Wapshot Scandal*, which is much more than a family chronicle, we are in the world of the 1960s, which is afflicted by 'the strange disease of modern life' (to use an expressive phrase of Matthew Arnold's), and where a sense of loneliness, emptiness, abrasive boredom and spiritual sterility has become pervasive. It is a world which is ranged by constant and unilluminating change, and inhabited by people who are rootless weary and unenlightened wanderers without a sense of direction. Direct depiction of social phenomena and issues tends to become more important than delineation of the complexity of characters in this novel. In setting, social phenomena, and details of everyday life this novel is very close to the times in which it was written. In the words of George Hunt, Cheever is "not addressing the past but the present and the future". The amount and force of social criticism which the novel includes distinguishes it from the previous Wapshot novel. Therefore, Cynthia Ozick, who is generally critical of Cheever's fiction, make the following though somewhat exaggerated comment on the novel: The chief character is the 20th century. The attempt of Cheever in this novel is to turn into fiction these 'facts' of everyday life in the present day world.

The difference between the two Wapshot novels is well brought out by perceptive observation made by George Garrett, which deserves to be cited:

Cheever's writing has always been marked by its representative use of the five senses. But in *Chronicle*, it is smell, the odors of the world, the flesh and the devil, which predominate. There are great patches and lists of good odors, rich
savors. Scandal, is by contrast, practically odorless. Most of the odors are bad or sordid and linger to haunt us like ambivalent ghosts --- In contrast to Chronicle the predominant sensuous patterns of Scandal are all black and white, the presence or the absence of light².

However, it goes without saying that a knowledge of the first Wapshot novel is necessary for an understanding of the second.

Although Cheever has repeatedly maintained that fiction, his fiction in particular, is not 'crypto-autobiography', yet the questions has been raised by more than one critic of his novels. It was pointed out in the preceding chapter that in spite of a few similarities between some facts and situations in the Wapshot Chronicle, and those in Cheever's own life, there is not enough ground to build a sustainable argument that the novel is autobiographical. In the case of The Wapshot Scandal in fact, the limits between the authors life and the happenings in the novel are much slender and far fewer. Yet, such a sensitive critic as Lynne Waldeland chooses to argue that 'the question of autobiography in this novel is very hard to ignore, especially when one considers Cheevers' disposition of the character of Sarah Wapshot⁴, who resembles the novelists own mother. In the first Wapshot novel, as noted already, Sarah Wapshot is given an insignificant role in spite of being the mother of the two boys. In the present novel, she has no place at all. Unlike Leander, who though dead, is a felt presence. But for a brief mention of her death which happened a couple of years before the beginnings of the present story, and for a few bitter dismissive sentences about her activities, nothing more is said: 'Mrs. Wapshot died two years later and ascended into heaven, where she must have been kept very busy since she was a member of that first generation of American women to enjoy sexual equality. She had
exhausted herself in good works: - - - (She) was one of those women whose grasp of vital matters had forced them to consider the simple tasks of a house to be in some way perverted. For very similar reasons Cheever was resentful of his mother, who was a business. Women and activist rather than homemaker, often not accessible to her family. While all of this may be true, it is of little relevance for The Wapshot Scandal and could be ignored. Without any loss to our understanding of it. The novelist would have done well had he left altogether out any reference to Sarahs Wapsho's civic activities.

The Wapshot Scandal is also episodic like The Wapshot Chronicle, large parts of it having been already published as short stories. There is considerable looseness of structure. A series of incidents not obviously related to each other are described, some of them at considerable lengths. Two Christmas celebrations in St.Botolhps, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the novel, frame the period covered by the novel, during which the fortunes of the Wapshots change drastically. Since the novel begins and ends with Christmas, it derivs a semblance of unity. However, its structural unity remains questionable, even though there are a number of dazzling and memorable episodes and events in it.

There are three parts in the novel, of which part one in the biggest, and part three the shortest. The chapters are of unequal length depending upon the episode or event described. The novel has a masterly opening. Chapter one describes a Christmas Eve in St.Botolphs 'not so very long ago', but perhaps at a time when the traditional values of the New England community were still alive. As in the opening chapter of The Wapshot Chronicle, the
description is cinematic, the camera moving from person to person and from one part of the
town to another, as the people prepare for a celebration of the Eve. As the narrator’s eye
surveys the village, we get a glimpse of the people there: Old Mr. Jowitt the station master
waiting for a late train at the railroad station, the Reverend Applegate with gin on his breath and
the midnight mass at the church the carolers getting ready to serenade and sing the Ryders — a
peculiar but not unfriendly family, whose parlour window shades are always drawn and the
parlour door always locked, rousing their neighbour’s curiosity and suspense, — busy decorating
their Christmas tree in their dining room, and the Tremaines who have brilliantly dyed persian
rugs all over their house. The particular Christmas Eve is vividly recreated and the description
gives the authentic feel of Christmas in the lives of the ordinary and average. It is important
to note that the narrator does not go into ecstasies nor does he take a romantic view of the
human condition, which such an occasion as Christmas is likely to prompt especially in a
novelist who is deeply Christian at heart. Some discordant notes heard on the occasion at
St. Botolphs are also noted. An ominous note is heard in the death by drowning of old and
lonely Statford who, trying to drown some unwanted kittens slips and drowns himself. No one
hears his desperate call for help and it takes weeks before he is missed. While most others in
the community are properly dressed for the occasion and are occupied with the tree-trimming
ceremony, widow Wilston and the itinerant carpenter Alby Hooper or without any clothes and
are drunk though they too are trimming a Christmas tree. As Granville Hicks observes: ‘——
in the village that evening there are lust and drunkenness and aridity of the spirit and sudden
death. But one nonetheless feels the dignity of man. The peace fo the beautifully recreated
Christmas village scene disturbed by the unnecessary death foreshadows the changes that come
about before the next Christmas.

In The Wapshot Chronicle, the novelist used the occasion of the 4th of July parade to introduce the members of the Wapshot family. In the present novel he utilises the occasion of Christmans Eve to reintroduce the indomitable and eccentric. Honora Wapshot whose money troubles are going to overtake and affect her as well as the younger Wapshots at once, very much as her legacy had made them prosperous formerly. It is appropriate that this forceful personality is presented first not only because she is the last of the Wapshots of the previous generation that really matter but she alone among the Wapshots has not stirred out of St.Botolphs yet she takes the place of Leander in this novel. The other Wapshots are briefly referred to in the next catch-up chapter which gives a glimpse of the old days when the whole Wapshot family was still together a recapitulates the events that have taken place in the interim between the two novels. The narrator claims to have close knowledge of the Wapshots and been their chronicler, to give credence to his account. Honora is deeply rooted in St.Botolphs which has given her her identity. Her encounter with the fast changing contemporary world is one of the three principal narrative strands of the novel. While the other two strands concern Coverly and Melissa. However, surprisingly she is given a rather smaller role in this novel than in its predecessor. She appears in just a few chapters, probably because she belongs to a fast vanishing tribe of people to whom custom and tradition has meant a great deal. In the first chapter this lady who is in her seventies, who inspite of her eccentricities, retains her dignity and strength of character, stands in her parlour to welcome the Christmas carolers as she had always done, sing on their request the poem "Announced by all the trumpets of the sky" without
making a mistake, give all of them generously buttered rum to drink and share with them momentarily the joy of the occasion and "happiness all around them" and the abundance of life. This would be her last Christmas, although none ever suspects it.

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Not only does the sentence come as a surprise, but by not specifying what the 'trouble' is it becomes ominous. Coverly who comes to St. Botolphs sometime in the late winter after Christmas to visit Honora is puzzled to know that their ancestral house on River Street, cannot be either rented or sold because it is supposedly haunted by Leander's ghost. He did not believe in ghosts, shades, spirits or any another forms of unquietness on the part of the dead, although he 'knew that we sometimes leave after us, in a room, a stir of love or rancor when we are gone --- either the scent of goodness or the odor of evil, to influence those who come after us'. Therefore, he takes a rational view of it all. But he is frightened out of his wits when he thinks that he has actually seen his father's ghost, flees the place and returns to Talifer. His response to this hallucination is his terrified cry: 'Oh! Father, Father, Father, why have you come back?' and this cry echoes through the rest of the novel at times of particular stress and Coverly himself repeats it.
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Leander remains a palpable presence in this novel even though he is dead. What may be the significance of the appearance of Leander’s ghost? It could be, as Marcia Gaunt has suggested, that "the legacy he (i.e. Leander) has left his sons - his anthropocentric view of the natural world and 'vision of life as hearty and fleeting as laughter' - is endangered". Coverly’s subsequent experiences confirm this impression. For "he is the one with an appreciation for the past, has the most sensitivity to aspects of the present most imimical to the values of his upbringing." Significantly, soon after returning to Talifer from St.Botolphs he asks himself the question, 'what would Leander have made of Talifer?'

The Wapshot Scandal is principally concerned with Coverly, Melissa, and Honora, Moses who has no role to play being relegated to the shadowy background. Of these three Coverly moves on to the centre of the stage and becomes the most dominating character in the novel in the sense that his life and experiences and understanding dominate it. The first three chapters of the novel are preliminary. In the remaining chapters the novel follows a relatively straightforward chronological line of development; Attention is focussed in turn mainly on the three principal characters, and the story is kept moving back and forth. Because of the episodic nature of the narrative, the stage is usually occupied by just one character at a time, with very limited interaction between the main characters, as if each lives out his or her life with its problems and perplexities almost separately and privately. Though Coverly meets Moses several times, there is very little of meaningful communication between them. He meets Honora more than once. But he never meets Melissa, nor does his wife Betsey met her at any time. Much later in the novel when both Honora and Melissa are in Rome as exiles, they are not aware of
each other's presence there, and do not at all meet. Such focus on individual characters renders
the movement of the novel rather jerky. The setting changes from time to time with the focus
being shifted from one character to another, major and minor alike and one gets the feeling that
the novel jumps about rather erratically. Minor characters like Norman Johnson, the IRS Man,
and Dr. Lemuel Cameron, director of the missile site and Coverly's boss, are given - especially
Cameron - far more detailed attention than seems necessary. All these factors justify
Waldeeland's remark that "The Wapshot Scandal is even more random in its structure than The
Wapshot Chronicle". 13

It is an irreversible mistake of the computer that switches Coverly trained to be a taper
to public relations and lands him as Talifer from Ramsen Park. Hereafter the story of Coverly
and Betsey is linked with Talifer though in different ways. This Missile Research and
Development Centre, which has a population of twenty thousand, is quite typical of the colonies
built in the present age of nuclear science and technology. Built for destructive purposes, Talifer
is obsessed with security and secrecy. It is never mentioned in the newspapers as shown on the
map, it has 'no public existence'. Most of its offices and laboratories are built underground,
as if in another world. It is a shadow world of official non-being. It concern with security
seems "to inhibit life at every level" and affect the souls of its inhabitants. The manner in which
it happens is revealed by Betsey's reaction to the accidental fatal crash of Mr. Hansen one of her
neighbours, to which she is an eye-witness. She sees him fall out of the window and land with
a thud onto the terrace. But she "looked out of the window long enough to see that his body was
inert. Then she returned to her television set". 14. It is a group of children that raise the alarm

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but not she. The narrator's explanation for her unnatural behaviour is: "The general concern for security seemed to be at the bottom of her negligence. She had not wanted to do anything that would call all attention to herself, that would involve giving testimony or answering questions. Presumably her concern for security had led her to overlook the death of a neighbour". Instead of probing the consciousness of this character for a more satisfying explanation of her behaviour, Cheever is content to give a psycho-sociological generalisation and make Betsey repressed a particular trend. Presumably he is concerned here with pointing out what a place like Talifer does to its residents.

It is as if excessive security consciousness not only puts constraints on the inhabitants of Talifer but also makes them pretend that they are non-existent. In this abnormal environment normal human relationships cannot develop. No one tries to be friendly, and no one visits or shows any inclination to speak to his or her neighbours. Tempers become short and tart. Trivial things such as a garbage can provoke a regular fight between neighbours. In this atmosphere Betsey becomes increasingly dispirited and irritable. Her longing for friends and neighbours remains unappeased. At Remsen Park in The Wapshot Chronicle she had felt the sharp edge of the absence of friendliness. At Talifer now she feels its cutting edge far more keenly. Coming as she does from a small town "where everybody’s neighbours", all that she asks is to be part of a community, a tribe. But in the isolated world of Talifer there is neither a tribe nor a community to include her. The virtues of community life are not known there. Her earnest attempts to make friends with her neighbours fail miserably. No one cares to honour her invitation for a Cocktail party for which she had made elaborate arrangements. That is the lot
of many more at Talifer to be lonely and isolated is driven home poignantly to her by the dry cleaner's delivery man, who politely declines to accept her offer of a drink, and explains to her why: 'I have to go home and cook my supper. I am living alone now — — I am so alone that I talk with the flies — — I don't have anybody else to talk to.'

Every time Betsey is disappointed with the place and its people, she turns her desperate anger against her husband Coverly and refuses to be warmed by his unfailing love and care for her. She blames him for her plight in spite of his devoted love for her, his deeply sympathetic understanding of her pain, and his efforts to cheer her up. Like the heroines of old legends who could turn themselves from hags to beauties and back into hags again so swiftly that Coverly is keep jumping. Her unpredictable and capricious ways leave him miserable. She becomes not only a tiresomely complaining woman but now and then turns hysterical: 'I hate Talifer. I hate it here. I hate you. I hate wet toilet seats.' She screams: 'you beat me. You took of your belt and you beat me and you beat me and you beat me.' Coverly bears the brunt of such baseless accusations without any bitterness. He tries to throw a ring of light around her and accounts for her quiet behaviour by the thought that perhaps she is heartlessly overburdened by a painful part about which he knows nothing. The greatest of his hardships is the breakdown in their sexual relationship, which is "the readiest source of vitality in their marriage." When she bans him from her bed, her companionship becomes painful. By the "curious process of claiming that what had happened had not happened and what was happening was not happening." Coverly tries to overcome his anxiety and reconcile himself to the situation. However, when Betsey persists in being unco-operative and wholly absorbed in herself, in quiet
desperation, he tries to go away from her leaving her free to live her own life. He would rather blame himself than her. But he cannot be away from her or seek compensatory pleasure elsewhere. He wants Betsey. "Fidelity" is "his passion: "It didn't matter that she had accused him wrongly and cut the buttons off his shirts. - - - If she locked the door against him he would climb in at the window. - - - If she met him with a tirade, a shower of bitter tears, an ax or a meat cleaver, it didn't matter. She was his millstone, his ball and chain, his angel, his fate, and she held in her hands the raw material for his most illustrious dreams". So he returns home to his wife. In view of Coverly's attitude to Betsey and his faith in love, the brief digressive episode of Coverly with the cleaning woman to whom he is supposed to teach how to work the vacuum cleaner, which some have found to be "uproarious", is totally out of character and irrelevant, and strikes a discordant note in the narrative.

In spite of its ups and downs Coverly's married life with Betsey on the whole comes off well enough, particularly in comparison with the married life of Moses and Melissa which is utterly ruined. Coverly's success is largely due to his capacity to accommodate readily with sympathy his wife's caprices and eccentricities and his devoted love for her. But it does not mean that Betsey would not try his patience or fling him into dejection or fill him with a sense of utter failure. One autumn afternoon he flees his petulant TV-addicted wife and walks across the fields to the farmland near the computer centre. The moving yellow and gold lights among the trees make the path ahead of him seem like a chain of corridors and chambers. In spite of his gloom he is touched by this inspiring scene. Then something unexpected happens. As he bends to tie a shoelace, exactly at that moment mysteriously a hunting arrow whistles over his
head and sinks into a tree near by. His sense of failure is obliterated by this unexpected brush with death and his providential escape. He views this experience as a turning point in his life:

That the arrow would have killed him had he not stopped to tighten his shoelace exploded in his consciousness, accelerated the beating of his heart and made his tongue swell. But he was alive, he had missed death at this chance turning as he had missed it at a thousand others and suddenly the color, fragrance and shape of the day seemed to stir themselves and surround him with great force and clarity. - - - He felt a sense of himself, his uniqueness, a raptness that he had never felt before23. (Emphasis added).

This self-consciousness is accompanied by his thrilling feeling of power that he has shown himself to be spiritually superior to physical death. Through this experience and awareness Coverly perceives the vital unity of life and death, and he reaffirms Leander's conviction that the gifts of life are there to be taken. So he decides that instant that "he would make something illustrious of his life"24. He also affirms, as Marcia Gaunt points out, "the abundance of life in a technological world, and thus unites past, present and future25".

This novel episode in which Coverly not only has a narrow escape from death but comes to an awareness of himself and the worthwhileness of life, is rather contrived. It is improbable though possible and therefore fails to persuade the reader to conviction.

Coverly's resolve to do "something illustrious" takes the form of a detailed examination of the vocabulary of the poet John Keats by using a computer to see what the poet's favourite and most-used words are in the order of their usage. In this endeavour he gets the help of
Griza, a polish technician. The experiment works and to his excited surprise he discovers that the words in the order of their frequency "rhyme" and result in a poem. He tells his friends that within the poetry of Keats there is some other poetry. "It was possible to imagine that some numerical harmony underlay the composition of the universe, but this harmony embraced poetry was a bewildering possibility". Coverly views himself as "a citizen of the world that was emerging. - - - Life was filled with newness; there was newness every where!"

Coverly's excitement over his discovery is understandable and the computer experiment links him to the world of technology. His endeavour to put modern technology to some humanistic purpose is commendable. However one wonders why he did not or could not think of studying some other and more meaningful aspect of Keat's poetry thus taking a numerical count of the words used by the poet, who was remarkable for his sensuous apprehensions of the world as well as his zest for life. The poetic result of Coverly's experiment is banal, and his excitement over his discovery only reveals his naivety. However the reader is expected to view it seriously, as Cheever does not seem to intend any irony. That none takes any interest in it is only natural. The only consequence is that Coverly draws the attention of Dr. Cameron, the director of the missile site, who claims to be interested in poetry. Cameron, whose brilliance as a scientist is believed to be legendary, browbeats him to join his staff immediately to ghost-write his speeches and render other kinds of service. Thus naive Coverly has a number of opportunities to observe how the minds of some influential scientists work. Cheever uses Coverly's encounter with the world of nuclear scientists and technologists to expose the dehumanising affect that technology has had on them, and the threat they holdout for all
mankind.

From the day Coverly came away from St. Botolphs, where the past continued into the present as a living force and stepped into the world of New York, he had become aware of the total lack of continuity between the world he had left behind and the contemporary world he had entered. He set himself the task of building a bridge between them. This thought of his, presented in the earlier novel *The Wapshot Chronicle*, becomes sharpened further especially after his coming to live in the missile centre at Talifer. How extremely difficult almost impossible, this task seems is made clear in *The Wapshot Scandal*. The problem is indicated by a brief description of the location of the missile base, *Where Coverly works*. "Beyond the dim glass walls of the one visible story of the centre, which merely contained elevator terminals and the security offices, all the other offices and hardware being underground, "one could see some flat pasture land and the buildings of an abandoned farm. There was a house, a barn, a clump of trees and a split-rail fence, and the abandoned buildings with the gantries beyond them had a nostalgic charm. They were signs of the past and whatever the truth may have been, they appeared to be signs of a rich and a natural way of life." To those who have built the missile base the abandoned farm is too inconsequential to trouble themselves about razing its buildings. To one such as Coverly who has a keen appreciation of the past and who is most sensitive to aspects of the present which are inimical to the values of his upbringing, the mere juxtaposition of the missile centre and the callously abandoned farm, must have driven home, the poignant contrast between the two worlds. He just cannot connect the old farmhouse and the Talifer base in spite of their proximity. He functions in the novel, as Lynne Waldeland points out, "as one
observer of the changes space-age technology is bringing about, and his inability to completely bridge his new world and the world of St.Botolphs is finally a comment on the contemporary scene. His computer exercise to take a count of Keats's favourite words in the order of their appearance, and thus use technology to serve a humanistic end, is one way in which he tries to build a bridge between the two worlds between the old and the new. That it can hardly achieve this object is obvious. But it is his intention that needs to be appreciated. As a man of average intelligence, though keenly sensitive to the issue, this is all what he can think of.

There are several episodes in the novel which describe Coverly's disillusioning experiences with the new masters of the space-age, their gross deficiencies as human beings in particular. Long before he discovers that Dr. Cameron, a man of unchallenged authority by virtue of his achievement as a scientist is a monstrous egotist, a bully and a barbarian at heart, he comes to know that his boss is an unabashed liar. This happens well before Coverly is arbitrarily attached to Cameron's team. During a skiing trip to the mountains one week-end, to which Cameron, goes dressed in fine ski clothes and a scarlet head-band, Coverly actually sees him not skiing down like others but "descending sedately in the chair lift". At the inn, however, he tells his retinue in detail in his penetrating voice the "hairpin turns, the long stretch of washboard, the icy schusses and the drifted snow" he had to negotiate while skiing down. Coverly is "fascinated" and puzzled: "Here was a man responsible in a sense for the security of the nation, who could not be counted upon to tell the truth about his skiing. He was notorious for his insistence upon demonstrable truths and yet in this matter was a consummate liar."
At a scientists’ meeting in Atlantic only which he is obliged to attend along with cameron and listen to their speeches, coverly is struck by a lack of coherence among them and afrightening contradiction between what they say and what they actually are as human beings. He is naturally inquisitive, as he is associating himself with men of this echelon for the first time. But he cannot understand their language, "one that seemed to him with the bleakest origins".

(He) supposed that the palest of them could suite a mountain but they were the most unlikely people to imagine as being armed with the powers of doomcrack. They spoke of lightning in their synthetic language but with the voice of men - strained from time to time with nervousness, broken with coughing and laughter, shaded and colored a little with regional differences - - -

The question, profound in its implications, that troubles coverly is:

They were men born of women and subject to all the ravening caprices of the flesh. They could destroy a treat city inexpensively, but had they made any progress in solving the clash between light and day, between the head and the groin? Were the persuasions of lust, anger and pain any less in their case? Were they spared toothaches, nagging erections and fatigue?

That they have not is proved by Dr.Cameron himself. Obviously it is Cheever who raises the question through Coverly. He seem to ask implicitly, as Clinton S.Burchas, Jr.ponts out, "what can save a world in which the needs and anger once vented in spears and arrows can now find outlet in nuclear missiles?"

Coverly also listens earnestly to some open lectures on space technology. One of them
is on the legal problems of interstellar spaces and another dealing with experiments in sending a man into space in a sac filled with fluid". He tries to know what they have in common with actual life. But he cannot find any point of contact between the world in which he has grown up and the world implied in the lectures:

- - - how could he square the image of a man in a sac with the small New England village where he had been raised and where his character had been formed? It seemed - - - that the world around him was changing with incomprehensible velocity, but if these changes were truly incomprehensible what attitude could he take, what counsel could he give his son? Had his basic apparatus for judging true and false become obsolete? 33.

What disturbs Coverly - and therefore Cheever - is not only the nature of contemporary change but much more than that, the rate of change and the vast incoherence it has brought about. Of the men at work at the missile site who are wholly involved in their work, only Coverly is able to distance himself from it to express fears about its implications though only to himself, and worry about what guidance he can give his son who has to grow up and survive in this rapidly changing world, from which recognisable values have retreated.

The suspension of Coverly's security clearance because of his cousin Honora's being criminally indicted for failing to pay tax, comes to him as a bolt from the blue, and puts him into an unexpected predicament. A good deal of incidental satire in the novel is directed against the bureaucracy. To Coverly's protest that he cannot be held responsible for what his eccentric cousin does, there is no explanation whatsoever from the security official. The vagaries of the administration are such that on an earlier occasion a janitor in the computation centre was fired
because his mother worked briefly as a prostitute during the second world war. However, Coverly is given is temporary security clearance and advised to appeal through Cameron's office. But this is not the first time that Coverly faces the caprices of the bureaucracy. Soon after he is attached to Cameron's team, he finds it necessary to take Cameron's brief case to him which he has left behind after a meeting. Coverly anxiously the next plane to follow him. His plane is hijacked and along with other passengers and he too becomes the victim of an airplane robbery. He is deprived of the brief case as well as his wrist watch. Fortunately they are all rescued. But all of them including Coverly are taken to the Police Headquarters where they are made to answer a lengthy police questionnaire, which has such searching questions as 'How often do you take a bath?', 'If you are forced to debase, the American flag or the Holy Bible, what would be your choice?' 'Do you love your mother?' 'If you are a man, would you classify your sexual organs as being ---? etc.' Coverly attacks all the questions "with the intentness of a guilty sinner", only to find subsequently that the police are least interested in his exercise. He is let out and asked to go home.

On the suggestion of two scientist friends Coverly goes to Washington to catch Dr. Cameron, who is already there to appear before a Senate Investigation Committee, and seek his help regarding his security clearance. Ironically Cameron's own security clearance is now suspended by the committee because it is revealed during the interrogation that though he is a man of vast scientific knowledge and influence, he is intellectually arrogant, incorrigibly self-centred, cold and grossly and woefully wanting in essential human and moral qualities. There is also a significant suggestion in the portrayal of Cameron that his education and experience as an
influential scientist and technocrat has not trained his feelings and heart at all. Coverly, one of whose roles in the novel is that of an observer of the changes that space-age technology is bringing about, with, awe and bewilderment listens to the entire exchange between the Senate subcommittee and Cameron. His earlier fears of an utter absence of contact between the world of St Botolphs and the contemporary technological world, and his own inability to bridge them, are once again confirmed. Further, his apprehensions are also strengthened that Cameron and those of his kind have not made any progress "in solving the clash between night and day, between the head and the groin."

Puzzled and confused by Cameron’s lengthy technical talk on space technology, which obviously is above their head, the interrogators turn their attention to the lapses in his character, temperament and behaviour his ungovernable temper, his bad manners and behaviour, for which he expresses no regret whatsoever. However, in the middle of the interrogation, a very old senator from a small town who has lived long enough to know "the difference between this noisy and public world in which we now live" and the quieter world of former days, when presumably the world transforming technologies were not yet known, breaks and embarrasses everyone present by eloquently pleading with Cameron:

Men of my age, I know, are inclined to think sentimentally of the past and yet even after discounting those deplorable sentiments I think I can find much in the past that is genuinely praiseworthy. However - - - - I find in your thinking some narrowness, some unwillingness - - - to acknowledge those simple ties that bind us to one another and to the gardens of the earth. We possess promethean powers but don’t we lack the awe, the humility, that the primitive man brought to the sacred fire? Isn’t this a time for
uncommon awe, supreme humility? If I should have to make
some final statement --- It would be in the nature of a thanks-
giving for stouthearted friends, lovely women, blue skies and wine
of life. Please don’t destroy the earth.35

Incidentally, the thanks giving words could have been spoken by Leander Wapshot, Coverly’s
father.

Mawkish and oversimplified as the old senator’s response to Cameron might seem, it cannot
be gainsaid that there is a great deal of truth in what he says. The old man means that in the
kind of investigations undertaken by Cameron and others like him, human values are ignored.
That Cheever shares in essential his point of view may be presumed. However, lest he should
be taken as indicting all scientists and technocrats, he make the old senator, whose mind
sometimes swanders express his reservations so that they may be taken with suitable
modifications. Cameron’s own reaction to his appeal — “Cameron courteously overlooked this
outburst”36 — is ample proof it. As if to confirm it further, almost immediately in answer to a
question by another senator about the inevitability of hydrogen warfare is and its consequences
without batting an eyelid he says at once: If we cannot survive, we are entitled to destroy the
planet”.37 While condescendingly he allows “Some bond of human warmth” among people, he
views men and women as “chemical entities, easily assessable, easily altered by the artificial
increase or elimination of chromosomal structures — —”38 His ruthlessness lack of feeling for
human kind and mental instability are demonstrated by his vicious and cruel treatment of his own
son who has become an insane invalid because of it. He justifies this inhuman treatment if his
son for a trivial lapse on the ground that he only “wanted to teach him right from wrong”. he
refuses to accept that his son has become mentally ill because of his treatment, and maintain that his son is suffering from an incurable glandular deficiency. However, that he is not wholly and irretrievably dehumanised is shown when his sickly son puts his head on his father’s knee and says "Daddy. It’s raining", Cameron in response says feelingly ‘Yes, dear’. The narrator, commenting on these two brief words, says: "It was the most eloquent thing he had said - - - He seemed immersed in some human, some intensely human balance of love and misgiving as if the feelings were a storm with a circumference and an eye and he was in the stillness of the eye". But this softening of feelings in Cameron is only momentary, and seem inconsistent with the character presented so far. On an earlier occasion, when Coverly reports to him about the loss of his briefcase, he bursts into uncontrollable grief and cries in misery to the bewilderment of Coverly.

There are a few other instances of Cameron’s contradictory behaviour. He is said to have "classified as obsolete his own sexual drives", and yet he is "one of those blameless old men who had found that lasciviousness was his best means of clinging to life. - - - his best sense of forgetfulness, his best way of grappling with the unhappy facts of time". He flies all the way to Rome in quest of his prostitute - mistress, unto he is disillusioned. The inconsistencies of his behaviour are apt to strain our credulity. But Cameron, as George Hunt points out, "is a representative rather than a realistically realised character: he embodies the detached rationalism at its most extreme, and so is a symbol of the forgetfulness of the modern world. Scientists like him often assume the perspectives of the scientific community and speak with its voice; as a result they often forget the human existential problems they as individuals are heir to".
senate subcommittee heroically disarms Cameron and rescues the world for humanism for the
time being by revoking his security clearance.

Although Cameron is not a Wapshot, he is given considerable importance in this Wapshot novel because of the authority such men as he wield and the influence they exert in the modern world. They play now the role once proper to prophets and religious figures. By virtue of their achievements they have become arbiters of life and death, and they may decide the fate of the world and of mankind. It is Cheever’s contention that they have failed to take a complete view of human nature and of man as an individual as well as one of humanity. Cheever does not in any way belittle all scientists and technocrats nor is he insensible of their positive contribution to human civilisation, but draws necessarily attentions to the lacunae in them thinking of some of them and the possible drastic consequences if they are not remedied. On the dedicatory page of the novel Cheever forewarns the reader that "All the characters in this work are fictional, as is much of the science". This precaution is unnecessary because one approaches the novel as a work of fiction, and follows the career of Cameron and his science for their human implications and consequences rather than for their factual accuracy and correctness. In this regard the novelist’s focus is very clear, and significantly he makes the reader look at Cameron and his association through the eyes of Coverly.

The contrast between Moses and Coverly, began to develop in The Wapshot Chronicle, becomes conspicuous and complete in The Wapshot scandal. Early in the first Wapshot novel the contrast between the two brothers is initiated, apparently to the disadvantage of Coverly:
"Coverly was sixteen or seventeen then - fair like his brother but long necked and with a ministerial dip to his head and a bad habit of cracking his knuckles. He had an alert and sentimental mind --- Moses was in college and in the last year he had reached the summit of his physical maturity and had emerged with the gift of judicious and tranquil self-admiration". Significantly, little is said about his mind. Once again, the brothers are contrasted by the narrator in The Wapshot Scandal: "Everybody loved Moses, including the village dogs, and he comported himself with the purest, the most impulsive humility. Everybody did not love Coverly". Handsome, pushing and quick to succeed Moses, who lives now at Proxmire lawyers with his wife Melissia, works" for a shadowy brokerage house "at present. He is a changed and different man now. He has taken to extravagant ways and has even heavily "mortgaged his trust on the strength of Honora's age". Obviously he has no particularly strong scruples, and hopes for her early death. He goes "on a wild-goose chase across the country to raise fifty thousand dollars on the strength, largely, of his charm", although this sum "would barely cover his obligation". If he is quick to succeed, he is equally quick to degenerate. His addiction to drink increases, especially after he discovers his wives infidelity, and before long he becomes emotionally as well as financially a bankrupt. Life appears meaningless to him. Ironically he wanders listlessly into shabby adulteries of his own. Though he is "the better looking, the brighter, in the more natural" of the two brothers, "yet in his early thirties he had aged as if the crises of his time had been much harsher on a simple and impetuous nature like his than on Coverly, - - - Who suffered seizures of melancholy and petulance." At the end of the novel is a total collapse.
Does it mean that the lessons Leander indulgently and hopefully taught this favourite son of his about the ceremoniousness of life and the continuity and excellence of things, have been of little avail to him and have failed to sustain him in the crises of his life? Obviously they have not. But it does not necessarily follow that they are irrelevant or without value. The blame lies with Moses who does not seem to have made any attempt to learn any useful lessons either from her father or from others. Coverly, the tenor of whose life has been different and less fortunate, manages to survive the times better than Moses. But, as Lynne Waldeland has pointed out, Cheever's provides no real clues as to why Coverly succeeds. "We know relatively little about his temperament and his motivations and in fact witness very little of the petulance and melancholy" the narrator attributes to him. On the basis of what we learn about him from the previous novel, and from his behaviour in the present one, we have "to surmise that it is his reflectiveness, his attempt to retain some connection with the past and his greater family orientation that distinguish him from his brother"⁴⁶, enable him to survive the troubled times.

It is appropriate that he returns to St.Botolphs and hosts the Christmas dinner to eight blind guests as desired by Honora. Samuel Coyle says that in the two Wapshot novels "Coverly and Moses Wapshot enact the episodic drama of spirit and flesh"⁴⁷. And in this sentence he has summed up the fundamental difference between the two brothers.

When Honora decides to die by deliberate starvation, it is Coverly and not Moses that she sends for. She understands his essential worth. He sits at her bedside talking to her consolingly and sharing her memories. When she dies Coverly is the only member of the family to be present at her funeral. He has no way of finding where his brother and sister-in-law are.
It is doubtful whether they would have cared to be present in case they were contacted. Even Betsey, it is implied, shows like interest. She is said to be busy closing up their establishment at Talifer, asCoverly has been served a ten-day eviction notice. Coverly is not at all upset or disturbed when the dying Honora tells him that because of her default everything belonging to her will be confiscated soon. Yet readily he promises to host the annual Christmas dinner on her behalf. This Christmas dinner actually turns out to be her legacy to him. Beset by who arrives at St.Botolphs the day before Christmas cannot understand at all Coverly’s attachment to this backward place or Honora. Further, she sees no sense in his keeping a promise given to one who is now "dead, dead and buried". But to him, "It was unthinkable that he should break his promise to the old women, it was some part of his dignity", although he understands why his wife cannot share his view. All the attempt to understand sympathetically her points of view is his. He is one of the few who attend church on the Christmas Eve, and the only one to stay in the church till the end in devout prayer even though the minister is hardly sober. In complete contrast Moses, who is also now in St.Botolphs, is found in the company of a whore in the Viaduct House, both dead drunk. Coverly has to bring him home for celebrating Christmas. He understands the "wisdom of Honora’s choice" of inviting eight blind guests for the Christmas dinner while most people are blind to the passing away of traditions. Later a few more observations would be made on the significance of this dinner while considering the Christian implications of the novel. It is enough to say at this point that Coverly has imbibed the true Christian spirit and that Cheever feels that between the brothers he is infinitely the better lot in spite of his limitations.
There are a number of episodes in the novel concerned with Melissa and her disillusioning experiences, which together form the second important strand in the narrative. Not only is Melissa given for greater importance in this novel than her husband, but she becomes a forceful and an almost new creation, when compared with what she is in the previous novel. There is very little in *The Wapshot Chronicle* to indicate even remotely the dimension her character acquires in the later novel. She become, a character of major interest, next in importance only to Coverly. Early in this chapter it was pointed out that the focus in this novel is increasingly directed on the social issues and dilemmas and cultural problems pressing upon the contemporary society on the world of the 1960's, which is afflicted by a sense of loneliness, boredom, emptiness, and of life becoming sterile. The novel in fact raises many of these issues while following the course of Melissa's life, particularly her experience of a cruel midlife crises which begins with boredom, is exacerbated by a serious illness, leads to marital infidelity, and ends with exile"48.

When the narrative takes up the story of Melissa and Moses, they have been living in Proxmire Manor, an elegantly surfaced but spiritually troubled suburb. Cheever is deeply concerned with the corrosive effect that metropolitan cities as well as proliferating suburbs have on essentially decent people, who feel isolated, defeated, or deprived of their individuality in the virtually anonymous lives they have to live in these areas. Melissa's life and experiences are obviously intended by the novelist to be representative of such people. Proxmire Manor is such a place that while a trivial incident such as arresting a lady for violating a trivialer traffic regulation is long remembered, "it seemed to have eliminated, through adroit social pressures,
the thorny side of human nature.” Like those living in Talifer the residents of this place too are haunted by a sense of insecurity and abrasive boredom, although for different reasons. They give little help to each other much less understanding. For all the superficial elegance of their lives, they do not hesitate to indulge in callous and harmful gossip about others with astonishing complacency. This fact is driven home to Melissa when one of her neighbours calls on her one afternoon only to tell her that Gertrude Lockhart, a resident of the place scarcely known to Melissa, is “a slut”, who “has been intimate with just about everybody”, and that they are “getting her out”\textsuperscript{51}, virtually forcing her out of their society. A few days later rather unexpectedly Melissa learns to her dismay that Gertrude Lockhart “was dead” and that “she hung herself in the garage”. This simple inescapable fact of life, namely death, comes as a blow to her high spirits. It is not “a force of discreetness” that has kept Melissa from knowing the Gertrude Lockhart story but that in the community she lives in that story is “more easily forgotten than understood”\textsuperscript{52}.

Melissa is disturbed and moved by the fate of Mrs. Lockhart. She cannot understand how or why this singularly winsome woman fairly prosperous happily enough married, and mother of three children, should have not only acquired a widespread reputation for licentiousness but met with such an absurdly tragic end. At first it might seem rather amusing that the housewife cannot cope with the irritations caused by her labour-saving appliances which fail one after another as if by design. But it becomes less funny when she gives up in despair, seeks escape in drink and sex, and ends up in suicide. Like Betsey Mrs. Lockhart is a lost soul because she too has no friends and is miserably alone. But her lot is far more terrible. Her husband is most
of the time away. She receives neither help nor understanding but only scorn her neighbours, who are self-righteously bent upon driving her away from their midst. No one regrets her death except her husband. It is a bitterly ironical comment on the community that her funeral is attended by just a handful of near strangers mustered by her husband. Scott Donaldson has said that "a characteristic Cheever story ... begins with a credible, realistic situation, proceeds to farce or satire, and finally descends to nightmare". This remark is eminently applicable to the Lockhart episode which at first appears to be an irrelevant digression she is unable to adopt herself to the mechanised world in which she has to live, nor can she find help or guidance from anyone: "she cried for her discomforts, but she cried more bitterly for their ephemerality, for the mysterious harm a transparent bacon wrapper and an oil-burner could do to the finest part of her spirit, cried for a world that seemed to be without laws and prophets". (emphasis added). Through this and other episodes Cheever is implicitly warning that technological progress, impressive and rapid as it is, has not only unsettled people's lives but has swept away all received values in its wake and has not provided suitable alternatives to them or given a sense of directions to them. And hence the loneliness, restless, boredom, insecurity and the compelling urge to escape that may are victims in the contemporary world. With remarkable skill Cheever depicts in this and other works of his this fact of contemporary experience.

In several ways Gertrude Lockhart's plight anticipates Melissa's. As Clinton Burhans points out, "in a different but equally shattering way Melissa Wapshot is unable to adopt to the contemporary world. In the midst of her rich, comfortable and apparently happy life, she is suddenly stricken by the oldest of human ills: the awareness of her own inevitable extinction".
Melissa too is friendless, and lonely. But far more trying is her boredom. In the midst of a dance party she feels bored: "Loneliness was one thing—- but boredom was something else, and why, in this most prosperous equitable world, should everyone seem so bored and disappointed?" Her accidental disturbance of the tryst between two housewives at the party fills her with "a profound nostalgia, a longing for some emotional island or peninsula that she had not discerned in her dreams". She is stirred by "its elevating possibilities of emotional richness and freedom", and filled with the feeling "that the world was not divided into rigid parliaments of good and evil but was ruled by the absolute authourity and range of her desire". As a consequence of this train of thought," her feelings of boredom are changed to "a ruthless greed for pleasure". She gets no help whatsoever from her husband in managing her feelings and the confusion in her mind, although he has been a very attentive husband. Because their married life is based almost entirely on their sexual compatibility. Outside the dark circle of love, immense though it is, they have nothing in common, no shared interests of any kind. That his "boisterousness" and "attentiveness" is "not entirely spontaneous" is revealed to Melissa when she unexpectedly discovers his "Drink Score" for a month. All that she can do is to forget it, and go questing for greater fulfillment elsewhere.

Melissa's feeling of frustration begins well before she ever comes to know about the fate of Gertrude Lockhart which only speeds up her quest for fulfillment. About of illness and a few days' stay in a hospital make her realise for the first time in her life two things: her stubborn love of life ("The sound of the rain seemed to (her) - - - like the repeated attention of a lover"), and "horror of death". But the presentiment of death is general. One of Cheever's strongest
strictures against the world of his times is that it shies away from recognising the fact of death and an awareness of it. In "The Death of Justina", one of Cheever's short stories which has a comic surface, this very issue is raised. And the narrator, who obviously speaks for the author, asks in exasperation": How can a people who do not mean to understand death hope to understand love? But in the infinite technological progress and material magnificence of the contemporary world, death would seem inconsistent, something vaguely shameful and unmentionable. At Proximire Manor "the grappling hand of death" is "disinfected by a social conspiracy of all its reality". Chapter 10 begins "Now that was the year when the squirrels were such a pest and everybody worried about can't use and homosexuality". On this Lynne Waldeland makes the following perceptive and pertinent comment: "Not only does this line remind us of American concerns in the early 1960s, but the juxtaposition of the squirrels with the other grounds of anxiety indicates Cheever's sense of the trivializing of feeling which may be the worst danger in a world in which change is the only constant".

Faced with loneliness, boredom, frustration and a haunting fear of death, Melissa has none to go to for help or guidance. Moses who has a closed mind cannot understand her agony. She has like Coverly no father to turn to for wise counsel, and no traditions to fall back upon in times of a crisis. As Clinton Burbanks points out, "Nothing in her world had prepared Melissa for this basic existential awareness; a society that hides the reality of death into itself off from traditional ways of living with that reality nor is it likely to evolve new ones. Forced to cope with in terrifying emptiness and loneliness, she turns to its apparent antithesis in the immediate life of the senses to a desperate escape into sex." Her society cannot give her any help to
restrain or control her unruly urge. She becomes infatuated with Emile the teenaged boy grocery and takes him as her lover in an effort to reassert the possibilities of life. But lust or sex for her, as it is for Cameron, is more a desperate defence against death than a journey into life. Her affair with Emile has its ups and downs. It proves sterile ultimately in the sense that far from bringing her a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, it only increases her frustration. Still she persists in it in spite of feeling guilty.

Cheever makes it clear that Melissa should not be written off as a mere thoughtless inconstant wife or a lust driven women. He wants us to understand her dilemma and take a sympathetic view of her plight. Part of sympathy derives from the fact that we are allowed to know what her thoughts and feelings are throughout her trials. It is suggested that her errant behaviour is symptomatic of the time rather than scandalous. Had she been able to live in a less circumscribed environment perhaps she would have managed her frustration better. As it is, she makes attempts throughout to regain her equilibrium and stability, though with little, success. Her affair with the ever hungry teenaged grocery boy begins with a supposed picnic to Nantucket and it is continued in Boston and New York. Each time she is disappointed although they do revel in each other’s flesh. Back at Proxime Manor she wanders around the streets restlessly. "wondering what had been the first in the chain of events that had brought her to where she was". Cheever devotes a whole chapter (Chapter-24) to project vividly in detail her confused state of mind and suffering. Further to rouse the readers sympathy for her he even uses rhetorical pointers*: **regard this lovely woman then, getting off the train in Proxime Manor. See what she does. See what happens to her** (emphasis added).
Alone in her bedroom Melissa is torn between her need for Emile, her "golden Adam", and her sense of guilt for doing something sinful. She wants to "forget him" and seek "absolution". She thinks of confessing to Moses, but she knows his pride well enough what the consequence of such confession would be. But what she has done is nothing extraordinary or "revolutionary". It was her hope to be "a natural woman, sexual but unromantic, able to take a lover cheerfully and to leave him cheerfully when the time came". But what has been revealed to her is "the force of guilt and lust within her own disposition". She has "transgressed the cannons of a decorous society" and is now "impaled on the decorous she despised". The pain caused by this train of thought is so great that she tries to drown it in drink. She feels better but is not able to exorcise the image of Emile. She now seems to see him in a new light. He appears as the image of evil, one who has wronged her innocence and is bent upon debasing and destroying her. But the comfort of attributing evil to him is only momentary because she cannot claim to be innocent or to have been wronged. To distract herself from the vivid image of Emile she tries the renovation of her kitchen, as if this exercise would bring her some peace of mind. The next afternoon she goes to see a doctor for an examination. Distorted by lewd dreams, drunkenness, and a nearly sleepless night her feelings are out the summit of their confusion. Her "accumulated frustrations, her sorrow for Moses and her lust for Emile" threaten to overwhelm her. And she encourages the doctor to respond to her lust. The result is keener pain and greater misery than she had felt before. She feels humiliated because she has always detested impostures—that she can with consummate skill "appear respectable" and greet a friend with a smile after this experience as if nothing had happened. She refuses to regard herself as sick or mentally ill: "--- if she was sick so was Moses, so was Emile, so was the doctor, so
was mankind." Therefore refuses to seek the solace of psychoanalysis that would make the town forgive her. There is something heroic in her defiance and insistence on the reality of her suffering as well as the validity of her needs: "She could not believe that her sorrows might be whitewashed as madness. This was her body, this was her soul, these were her needs."

For all her defiant attitude about her needs and urges, Melissa cannot but be anxious about finding forgiveness and recovering her innocence. She seeks out her minister to confess to him and ask for compassion. Having met him she feels that "she might better have asked for compassion from a barn door or a stone. For a moment his stupidity, his vulgarity (seem) inviolable." He appears to be as much of a failure as she is and therefore in need of sympathy and compassion. "Shocked and disgusted" by her frank confession, he recommends being very much a man of the modern world that she would better see a psychiatrist. It does not occur to him that her malady may be something more serious than mental illness. She of course rejects the suggestions, and seeks out Emile. Mrs. Cranmer, Emile’s mother, comes to know about the affair between her son and Melissa, and complains to Moses. They separate, and marks the end of their relationships.

Emile the grocery, boy whom Melissa chooses as her lover is not presented as a gigolo. Even his conduct is presented as a symptom of the malady of the times: "The times were venereal and Emile was a child of the times." For Cheever, as Clinton Burhams has observed, "the major casualties in the disruption of social coherence are traditional human values and relationships and the process by which they are sustained and extended." With all
received values swept away largely by technological progress, the young of the permissive generation, to which Emile and his companions, both boys and girls belong, and who are left with nothing to guide them, become easy prey to drink, drugs and sex. Such parties are a commonplace of their generation. On one such occasion Emile and his companions are seen at the drive in movie near the Northern Expressway sitting in their cars, all in "various stages of undress", commenting on Emile sitting undressed in the back seat of a car Cheever says that it "might be accounted for by the fact that the music he danced to and the movies he watched dealt less and less with the heart and more and more with overt sexuality, as if the rose gardens and playing field buried under the Expressway were enjoying a revenge". Sex has ceased to be what of was a "rite", and become casual and sterile, a perversion rather than source of real pleasure and a healthy exercise. The novel presents very vividly this aspect of contemporary life.

Emile, however, is somewhat different from his teenage associates in the sense that he is dissatisfied with his date's casual attitude to sex. Although she does what she is expected to do to get along, "Yet in her readiness she sometimes seemed to debase and ridicule the seat of desire, toward which he still preserved some vague and tender feelings "He has a deep and undefined yearning for "something that would correspond to his sense that life was imposing; something that would confirm his feelings that, as he stood at the window of Narobi's grocery store watching the men and women on the sidewalk and stream of clouds in the sky, the procession he saw was a majestic one". This may explain his considerate attitude towards Melissa. He thinks of her, rather oddly, "as a tragic figure, frail, lonely and misunderstood",
"a fair prisoner in a tower," to whose help he as her knight errant would go. He does not exploit her or make undue demands on her, even though he is fully aware of the hold he has on her. He is always conscious of the difference between her and himself in rank, status, wealth and educational and cultural background. There is a revealing instance of it, and it is one of several. At Nantucket, during one of their first outings together, Emile makes the following observations to Melissa, perhaps recalling her earlier occasion when she had said that he was 'divine': "- - - you speak differently you know - people like you. You say lots of different things. Now, you say divine - you say lots of things are divine - but, you know, my mother, she wouldn't even use that word, excepting when she was speaking of God." Although Emile is not aware of the implications of his observation, it points to the debasement of highly charged words the changes that gave come about in the values of life, and the gap between the generations.

However, there is nothing in the novel to show that Emile is particularly sensitive morally, or prompted by any altruistic motives. On the contrary he is guided by the instinct of self-preservation and self-interest. When his affair with Melissa apparently ends with his mother’s intervention, he hardly feels any regret holds himself to blame for what has happened. The narrator says of him: "It is doubtful that Emile had ever loved Melissa, had ever experienced a genuine impulse of love for anyone but himself and the ghost of his father. He thought now and then of Melissa, always concluding that he was blameless; that whatever suffering she endured was no responsibility of his." But it is not quite clear why he chooses to plant the commercial golden egg which promises a trip to Rome on Melissa's lawn. To be
air to him, one may view it as his return gesture for having received from generous favours from her. Unexpectedly it paves the way for their reunion in Rome sometime later, when winds of chance lands them in Italy though separately and she buys him off in an auction of male beauties in Ladres$ and takes him to her villa in Rome. He is quite happy to be with her again, and enjoys all the comforts of life made available to him.

But there are some significant changes in him as well as Melissa. In his case, he himself becomes aware of a change in his moral outlook. He begins to doubt whether, now that he is away from home and in alien and unfamiliar surroundings, he has been able "to take his personality, his sense of good and evil, across the Bay of Naples". Although he claims that as an American he does not believe in men being auctioned off, he consents to participating in the auction "in an intoxication of pride". After being bought by Melissa as he is being driven to her villa, he "discovers" that he has "not brought his sense of good and evil across the bay". He feels liberated from the "burdens of life" completely. He seems "violently to destroy and renew himself, demolish and rebuild his spirit on some high sensual plane". But this elation does not continue undiluted. Although he may not admit to himself he is no longer the same self-assured young lover of Proxmise Manor days, whom Melissa sought. She has acquired a far greater hold on him now. When she goes out on some necessary errand, he becomes impatient for her return and begins to doubt her "constancy": "Her inability to resist his touch and his looks make him wonder if she could resist the touch or look of any other man". His intense jealousy is a measure of the weakening of his hold on her as well as his self-assurance.
As for Melissa, who is now in Rome as an exile, the trip to Rome made possible by the golden egg" planted by Emile on her lawn she is very much a sad dispirited lonely and bewildered figure although she is able to earn a comfortable living by working on a sound stage dubbed Italian spectacles into English. The fulfilment she has been longing for and the equilibrium for which she was seen struggling eludes her even here, in this supposed sanctuary for fugitives. If she feels homesick, it is not for "the pathos, the sweetness and the vigor of American life". She carries with her as any another person in a foreign country her burden of habits of eating, drinking, dress, rest, hope and in her case the fear of health, and remains very much of a foreigner in Rome. With Emile joining her again, a number changes take place in her. She dyes her hair red, affects girlish ways, and develops extraordinary sexual control over Emile. But despite these change, she remains an uneasy and troubled soul, struggling in rain to find real peace and tranquility.

The final view of Melissa in the novel is designed by the novelist to retain the reader’s sympathy and compassion for her and to lay stress on the dignity of her suffering. She is seen pushing a grocery cart in an American Supermarket, through the walls of American food finding some solace in it:

Grieving, bewildered by the blows life has dealt her, she takes her path. Her face is pale. A stray curl hangs against her cheek. Tears make the light in her eyes a glassy light — She moves indifferently with the alien crowd as if these were the brooks and channels of her day. No willow grows aslant. This stream of men and women and yet it is Ophelia that she most resembles, gathering her fantastic garland not of crowflower, nettles and long purples, but of salt pepper, Bab-O- Kleenex, (etc)
- an American comic book for her son and for herself a bunch of carnations. She chants, like Ophelia, snatches of old tunes and when her coronet or fantastic garland seems completed she pays her bill and carries her trophies away, no less dignified a figure of grief than any other.

There is no doubt that the picture of grief-stricken Melissa is very vivid, impressive and moving. Cheever is trying hard to invest her situation with tragic dignity. The passage cited above, taken by itself, may serve Cheever's purpose, and the parallel drawn between Melissa and Ophelia strengthens the impression. However, one may very well ask how appropriate and convincing is the parallel which is deliberately drawn and is expected to be taken seriously. Ophelia in Shakespeare's great play is entirely a creature of circumstances, her fate determined though unwittingly by a well-meaning but worldly-wise father, an affectionate but over-cautious brother, and a princely lover Hamlet who is so obsessively preoccupied with his own worries and anxieties that he cannot understand the gross limitations under which she has to live and talks cynically to her doubting her very innocence and chastity. She is hardly free to act or choose, has to endure silently Hamlet's vile and intemperate language, and allow her love to be frustrated silently. She has a totally submissive and passive role to play. Unable to withstand the shock of her father's murder, by which time her cup of agony is full, she goes mad. She sings snatches of songs and talks at random, all expressing her inexpressible grief. In the heartless prattle of her lunacy she becomes the very personification of pathos. Surrounded by flowers and searching for them, she apparently falls into a brook from a willow that grows aslant it and dies. These in brief is the story of Ophelia, which is intensely pathetic rather than heroic.
Now, it cannot be said of Melissa of the novel, whom the narrator calls a later-day Ophelia, that she is entirely a victim of circumstances or an indifferent society, although it is time that neither her circumstances nor her society is helpful to her in her crisis. She does have a measure of freedom to act or choose, and it should not be forgotten that it is she who chooses the grocery boy for a lover, although it is a wrong choice. She does not seem to regret it, and her infatuation for Emile persists till the end. She does not know what she wants to achieve fulfilment in her life. Se cannot be absolved of some responsibility for her actions, though one might take a sympathetic view of them. It is her continual effort to stabilise herself emotionally and win back equilibrium that makes the reader sympathetic. The changes that come about her in Rome - her resorting to girlish ways and gestures and dying her hair red etc to retain the attention of a much younger lover - would have made her comic had her situation as a lonely exile not been pathetic. It is difficult to attribute to her Ophelia - like innocence by any stretch of imagination. Of course the way she bears her helpless lot, caught up as she is in a blind alley is dignified, though there is more of resignation than resistance. On the whole Melissa remains a pathetic character rather than a tragic character, unless one uses the term 'tragic' rather loosely as in common parlance. However her situation is potentially tragic in that her world" does not allow her avenues to identity and outlets for her awareness"9. Cheever should have explored further and more fully Melissa's crisis, her struggles to achieve a more fulfilling life than domestic routine and sordid love appear to elevate her to the status of a tragic character and bring her crisis tragic significance.

The Wapshot of what has been said above is that in the light of Melissa's course of life
with all its ups and downs as presented in the novel, the parallel drawn between her and Ophelia does not carry as much conviction as intended. What they seem to have and in common is the pathos of their respective situations, although it is not of the same intensity. It may not be totally irrelevant to add that it seems rather odd to compare a woman who is going through her mid-life crisis with one who is both very young and innocent and at the very threshold of her life. Melissa, however remains most vital and sensitive young woman who wins the readers sympathy, because compassion, not condemnation characterise Cheever's treatment of the distortions of love.

The third narrative strand in the novel is concerned with Honora Wapshot, the grand old woman. It is universally agreed that Honora is one of Cheever's most memorable women characters. Her character is already fully developed in the Wapshot Chronicle, along with Leander's. These two seem titanic figures - - - representing in their vitality and even in their eccentricity the power of the tradition of which they are so conscious of being descendants. In The Wapshot Scandal she retains the essential strength of her character and remains a mentally alert, energetic, forceful and powerful redoubtable personality in spite of her age. However she appears now a shade more idiosyncratic and eccentric than in the earlier novel. She remains a powerful presence even though she appears in only four of the thirty two chapters of the novel and is mentioned anecdotal in two others. Her limited appearance is due to two comparatively small role she plays in this novel. Those of the younger generation are necessarily in the fore-front, as noted already. She is not and cannot be any longer the dominating personality of the previous novel in which her hold on the Wapshot family is great
because of its dependence on her finacially. By making the sons of Leander heirs to her property contingent upon their finding wives and begetting sons, Honora sets them on their picaresque endeavours which form much of the substance of that novel. In The Wapshot Scandal too her wealth or whatever remain of it influences the Wapshot young men but in a different way as she herself comes upon bad days, as it shall be seen shortly. At the beginning of this novel this redoubtable old woman continues to live in her own house in Boat street, in St. Botolphs maintaining her sturdy independence. She is first seen in this novel on a Chirstmas Eve entertaining, as she has always done according to the traditions of the family, Christmas carolers who have always been sure of a warm reception at her place.

In The Wapshot Chronicle one of Honora's several eccentricities, apparently harmless, is to destroy at once every one of the letters she receives without ever reading it by throwing it into the fire perhaps to be free of care and also the claims of the world. In the present novel she appears not only more eccentric than before but has to pay very dearly for one of her eccentricities, thereby affecting herself as well as those who are dear to her, Moses and Coverly. She has not paid income tax and has ignored it altogether. It is not very clear why. She does so. That her uncle Lorenzo did not want her to give any of their money to the government is not a convincing argument. The thought of her dereliction does pass through her mind now and then and she feels a "fleeting pang of guilt" is "one of the privileges of age". In any case her "oversight" or "criminal negligence" to pay tax creates an unprecedented crisis in her life, and it cannot be regarded as her idiosyncracy. The tax official Norman Johnson calls at her place to serve a note of "criminal indictment" on her. Although Honora treats his
warning with her characteristic indifference, the process of law against her, once set in motion cannot be stopped. One can ignore the claims of the world only for a while, but never for ever.

The visit of Norman Johnson to St. Botolphs, the inconveniences he has to put up with in that small place before he can call on Honora and his background - his abortive attempts to make and sell dog food, for instance - before he became a tax official in sketched in some detail. Such a detailed account of a very minor character whose role is also grossly limited is rather out of proportion. The episodic nature of the novel largely accounts for it. However, some justification for it may be seen in the fact that Johnson is seen as typical of thousands of the present day world, which is also the world of the novel, in his experience of the "miseries of loneliness", "the violence of its sexuality", "the hankering not to be alone", boredom and his seeking an escape in pulp fiction. In a world where the pursuit of money and acquisition of wealth and making it breed further by all possible means are a chief preoccupation of many, Honora has this rare virtue of being indifferent to it. As she tells the tax official, she has given away most of her money and has not cared to keep a record of it. She is least attached to money and material possessions, though she is by no means otherworldly. Judge Beasley's advice to her that she should rather leave the country at once with substantial money to escape being arrested and sent to "the poor farm", does not appeal to her, because it goes against her sense of self-respect, dignity and independence. She intends to hang herself. As she steps into the airless attic of her house holding a lengths of clothesline to commit suicide, she at once feels how she has always "admired all sorts of freshness: rain and the cold morning light, all winds, all sounds of running water in which she thought she heard the chain of being, high seas but
specially the ram". Having looped the clothesline over a rafter, she walks to the window to see the twilight. She wonders: why had she always stood up to the evening light as if it could instruct her in decency and courage. This love of life reminds one of Leander. Marcia Gaunt has pointed out that "two of Cheever’s recurring natural symbols of human continuity, namely ‘running water’ and ‘evening light’, run through Honora’s mind. She and Coverly are never shut away from light" which instructs them in decency and courage.

As Honora gets ready to hang herself, she happens upon "some pages of that execrable journal — — that had occupied the last months of (Leander’s) life. The recorded observations are as sharp as ever. Leander calls her in his journal a skin-flint. He goes on to describe in these pages another amorous adventure of his, this time with Lottie Beanchamp a Shakespearean actress, which ends badly for him. He concludes his account of the affair with an observation which is very characteristic of him: "No hard feelings. Laugh and the world laughs with you. Weep and you weep alone." Leander blames none and takes in his stride the consequences of the affair. But in his journal he makes very uncharitable remarks on Honora for refusing to give him money to make bad investments yet reading it affects Honora positively. It is not explained why it affects her so and we love to cipher it. His refusal to weep over his disappointments restores her courages, and convinces her that she should not take herself so seriously as to contemplate suicide and that life is worth living.

Next Honora is seen on her European voyage as a "fugitive". She undertakes it unwillingly because she does not want to leave St.Botolphs where she has her roots. Over the
ars she "had developed - - - a conviction that St. Botolphs was the fairest creation on the
place of the earth. Oh, it was not magnificent, she well knew - - - But she had no taste for
significance". The place had its attractions of course": "Where else in the world were there
such stands of lilac, lambent winds, and brilliant skies, such fresh fish?" But much more than
these is her experience of the unbroken continuity of her life and experiences there that binds
her to the place: "She had lived out her life there, and each act was a variation of some other
act, each sensation she experienced was linked to a similar sensations, reaching in a chain back
through the years of her long life when she was a fair and intractable child - - - The fragrant
smoke from her fire mingled with smoke from all the fires of her life. Some of the roses she
pruned had been planted before she was born. It is clear that it is no mere sentimental
attachment to her place. Therefore, "She did not want to leave her home and move on into an
element where her sensations would seem rootless, where roses and the smell of smoke would
only remind her of the horrible distances that stood between herself and her own garden."  

It is out of necessity rather than choice that Honora undertakes the trip to Italy. Once
she is out of St. Botolphs she feels that she is losing her identity. Her going out seems "lonely
and meaningless". Her roots are in St. Botolphs and are a source of her identity, and they enable
her to live with vitality. Marcia Gaunt has pointed out that in his fiction "Cheever insists place
is a crucial source of identity. And it is exactly her (in Honora's) sense of personal sameness
and historical continuity', that Erik Erikson calls identity - - - which (she) feels is threatened
when she leaves her home to journey to Italy." One of the attractive qualities of Honora is her
abhorrence of idleness and love of "motion", even if movement should give her a keen pain in
e heart. Her sense of life is "a sense of motion and embroilments". On board the ship "to stretch out in a deck chair - - - made her feel idle, immoral, worthless and - - - like a ghost - - - The need to move, to talk, to make friends and enemies, to involve herself was resistible". Thus she gets embroiled with a seeming young man of excellent manners who win her sympathy telling her that he is actually a 'stowaway' and that his wife and children have deserted him. She feels a great pity for him and gets him fed in her own cabin. She even thinks of taking up his case as his advocate with the captain of the ship and impress upon him the "loneliness and emptiness of his life". Soon she discovers that he is a liar, a shabby fraud preying upon the lonely. But even then she does not inform against him. But when he tries to steal her money belt, she is besides herself with anger: "she was terrified - not by him but by the possibilities of evil in the world - - - she was too angry to be afraid of him." She hits him hard full on the skull and knocks him out with a brass lamp, courageously defending her own moral values. He appears to be dead. Since he has no legitimacy on the ship as a passenger, Honora could have shoved his body into the sea out of the porthole and no one would know about it. But this goes against her praise: "this was the wrong thing to do. The right thing was to get the doctor, whatever the consequences." Before she is able to find one, the imposter makes good his escape from her cabin. When she happens to see him again some days later, he is with a woman in his arms. This "final cheapness" of the fellows conduct infuriates her so much that rather impetuously she plugs in her old curling iron and blows out the ship's generator, as she had done one earlier equally impetuously. Irrational though her act is on either occasion, it is "one of the few triumphs in the novel of her way of life over the contemporary world". Marcia Gaunt says that by blowing out the generator of the ship Honora
abolically triumphs over both technology and threat to her values".94

In Rome Honora is seen in two brief episodes. The first is her comic audience with the pe. Their conversation is like that of two deaf persons, since neither understands what the her says. In the next episode we find the long arm of the tax department catching up with her the distant land. Norman Johnson, the IRS man, shows up at her hotel with orders for her tradition as well as the confiscation of her property. She receives them unruffled and without regret, and feels sorry for Johnson who feels shamefaced to serve these orders on her. She is happy to end her self-exile in a country where she has no roots. She tells him reassuringly: "Don't you worry about me. It's all my fault. It was just that I was afraid of the poor farm -- But now I am homesick and I want to go back".95 On their way to the airport, she withdraws all her money from the bank and distributes it among the multitude, not as an act of "charity". But this is no mere eccentric gesture: "The good her money might do would never cross her mind. The impulse to scatter her money was deep as her love of fire, and she sought selfishly, an intoxicating sensation of cleanliness, lightness and usefulness. Money was filth and this was her ablution."95 With remarkable dignity, restraint and courage she conducts herself in this situation.

Honora returns to St.Botolphs only to die. She chooses to die of drink and starvation before the trial date. Her body is wasted but her spirit remains unbroken. As Coverly who comes to sit by her side and engage her by reading from books that they had read together long ago when he was still a boy, and watch over her until she closes her eyes once for all, remarks
himself: "She had not only lived independently, she seemed at times to have evolved her own culture. There was nothing palliative in her approach to death. Her rites were bold, singular and arcane." Actually Honora lives and dies on her own terms. She retains her identity till the last, not only by returning to St. Botolph's but choosing to die in her own home. Hers is no ordinary suicide. There is something heroic in the way she meets death. She is content to die. She reconciles both life and death and thus affirms life. She risks death, as it were to affirm life, as Leander had done, Marcia Gaunt has pointed out that the imagery with which her death rites are described indeed affirm human continuity". 

As for Coverly who proves himself to be Honora's true heir just as he increasingly shows himself to be his father's true son, and who has known first hand the strengths of her spirit, he cannot believe that she would ever die: "She would stop breathing and be buried in the family lot but the greenness of her image, in his memory, would not change and she would be among them always in their decisions. She would move freely through his dreams, she would punish his and his brother's wickedness and guilt, reward their good works with lightness of heart, pass judgement on their friends and lovers. The goodness and evil in the old woman were imperishable". It is as if she becomes for a sort of guardian spirit, a genius". "Clearly this is", as Lynne Waldeland observes, "a personal act of imaginative assimilation by Coverly: for Moses no such sense of personal continuity with the past and its values sustains him".

Heroic as Honora's death is, it is also poignant. George Hunns comment on it is opposite, and deserves to be cited: "One reason why the death of Honora is so poignant is that
scene with Coverly are marked by invitations to 'remember'. To remember the mas dinner, the tomato fights, to remember her reading *David Copperfield* to him when she was sick and their shared feelings about the book. -- - Her final gift to his memory is her description of the gates of Heaven. -- - Thus she and Coverly are yoked in a memory world more mysterious than Talifer, more continuous and real than Cron's abstract cosmos, intent only on the future. -- -

The very last episode in the novel, before the narrator bids farewell to St. Botolphs, is the celebration of Christmas and the hosting of Christmas dinner by Coverly to the guests already invited by Honora. Having begun with Christmas celebration at St. Botolphs, the novel ends with other. Thus the wheel comes full circle. But between the two Christmases there have been several changes in St. Botolphs, the most conspicuous being a weakening of the hold of tradition in the community. When Coverly arrives at St. Botolphs for Christmas, there is hardly any one to welcome him. In sharp contrast to the first Christmas celebration with which the novel begins, in which almost the entire community participated and carol singers meet from street to street, particularly Boat Street where Honora warmly welcomed them, now Coverly waits in vain for them. He finds that either the carol singers have either given up this ceremony or taken Boat Street off their route. There are hardly any signs of celebrations in the place. At church where he goes to attend the Mass, there are only four worshippers in all including him and three of them are women unknown to him. The interior of the church is gloomy and the service itself is a travesty. Pastor Applegate who is haughty, scornful and dead drunk fumbles with the prayer and mixes up the liturgical order of the ceremony. Moses, who also arrives at St. Botolphs,
and in the Viaduct House on Christmas Eve drunk and in the company of a prostitute. Christmas brings no cheer to him. He wakes up in a paroxysm of anxiety. He takes a wholly cynical view of it: "The brilliance of light, the birth of Christ, all seemed to him some fatuous game invented to dupe a fool like his brother while he saw straight through into the nothingness of things." 102

However, the Christmas dinner that Coverly hosts in honour of Honora completely contrasts with Moses's petty adultery at the Viaduct House and his cynical view of Christmas. Also dispels the misgivings caused by his drunkenness. The table is set for twelve guests as Honora had always done, the number reminding one of the twelve apostles of Christ. It is only when the guests eight in number, arrive sometime in the afternoon Coverly comes to know whom Honora had invited. They are all inmates of the Hutchins Institute for the Blind. Honora's practice of choosing guests for her Christmas dinner was always unique, and could be easily attributed to her eccentricity if one did not sense the sanity and deep humanity of her choice:

After thanks giving she would begin, in public places trains, buses and waiting rooms - to look around for those faces that bore the inexpungeable mark of loneliness and invite them to her house for Christmas dinner - - - she could single out her prey unerringly and yet, knowing as she did how the passion of loneliness runs through the lives of all men, she was oftener rebuffed than accepted by strangers - - -.

But she was not discouraged, and once she had gone up to the railroad station waiting room on
mas morning and corralled the strays who were warming themselves there at the coal

Coverly realises the "wisdom" of Honora choosing blind guests, as he seats them in the

ing for unseen strangers to help them through the traffic, judging the gentle from the self-
titious by a touch, suffering the indifference of those who so fear conspicuousness that they
ul not help the helpless, counting on kindness at every turn, they seemed to bring with them
landscape whose darkness exceeded in intensity the brilliance of that day. - - - They seemed
be advocates for those in pain; for the taste of misery as fulsome as rapture, for the losers,
egoners, the flops - - - for all those who fear death - - - 104 Lynne Waldeland has aptly
remarked that there is "a devastating irony" in inviting the blind to the dinner "in view of most
of the characters' blindness to the passing away of tradition". 105 One by one the guests are led
into the dining room. On this note of compassion and faith the novel ends. It is a profoundly
moving conclusion and comes very close to an explicit statement of Christ.

The Christmas motif in the novel, its Christian dimension, may be briefly looked at.
That this motif has been consciously introduced into the fabric of the novel hardly needs
mention, because its both obvious and conspicuous. Sammel Coale has pointed out that much
of the imagery of the novel is "explicitly Christian". 106 And Beatrice Greene refers to "the
marked frequency of imagery from Christian tradition and the Bible" 107 in the novel. The two
Christmas celebration, at the beginning and the end, certainly mark much more than the passage
ne. They indicate that the author intends to give the narrative a Christian dimension of
ing. In this regard the second Christmas celebration concluding with the unique dinner
n to blind guests who are both destitute and lonely is explicit. It is a clear manifestation
arity and compassion, two cardinal Christian virtues. George Hunt illuminatingly elaborates
he particular significance of the Eucharistic ceremony in Christ Church on Christmas Eve and
Christmas dinner on Christmas day, in both of which Coverly participates. They are "symbolic
ion of meal-sharing".

Both are agape meals, Christian love feasts, and the drabness of the circumstance is meant to highlight, through contrast, their spiritual
significance. The agape meal concentrates, in one symbolic action, all the paradoxically truths about the mystery of Christ's
coming in the novel it dramatically concentrates Coverly's many complex and ambivalent realizations. For the agape meal is - - -
is a memorial, a reminder, less we should forget, of the human commingling of good and evil, of salvation and sin that prompts
its celebration; - - - it is (or attempts to be) a sign of both reconciliation and atonement - - - Not only do the human and
divine meet in renewal and commemoration of the Incarnation - - - but the humans present, by acknowledging their communal
weakness, demonstrate their need-filled desire for union with the divine, for strengths to embrace decency and make permanent
loves, for assistance in remembering the joys and challenges - - - offered them.102

This, as George Hunt explains, becomes apparent during the Mass at which Pastor Applegate
officials. The drunken priest at the beginning mixes up the liturgical order of the ceremony.
But suddenly there is a transformation, and he changes over from blasphemy and nonsensical
mumbling to "heart-felt prayer" and "an impassioned for the alleviation of modern man's more
easily observed miseries". He concludes with a prayer for the lecherous and the impure. In
contrast to this scene the immediately following two scenes in the novel show a lecherous and
ken Moses for whom Christmas is a 'fanous' game to dupe the credulous. The Christmas offer which follows them recapitulates and embraces all themes in tension through the presence of symbolic characters participating in a symbolic act'.

Impressive and profound as this elucidation of the significance of the Christmas "meals" one cannot but notice that few characters in the novel are aware of it or understand it. Overly is possibly an exception, because he continues to endeavour to pressure as best he can some of the traditional values in his life. For the others life has become completely secularised. They live in an environment in which many traditional images such as nightingales, water, skies, palaces, stairways, thunder and lightning - (all used in describing Emile's activities) - which in other contexts were charged spiritual emblems have become ironically debased and transformed. The Easter egg episode deserves to be recalled in this context as a further illustration of the extent of secularisation of life. This episode is certainly "the most accomplished and beautifully written episode in the novel" and has been justly admired as marvellously funny and rollickingly farcical. It is much more than a severe "indictment of human greed". That the word 'redeem' has only a commercial meaning for all those involved in the contest, and that it does not even remotely bring to their mind the idea of the redemption of man, is one of the significances of the episode. Cheever blends in a masterly way in this scene the motif of Resurrection and Deliverance with the pagan contest of the golden apple, Emile being the modern Paris deputed to distribute the prizes by the goddess of discord. Instead of the biblical saints in white roles and crown praising the Easter Lamb, here we have a pack of housewives in nightgowns and "crowns", 'like angels in night clothes' and savagely chasing
Emile. Instead of Gabriel's long trumpet one hears cries of children forsaken by their
thers in their mad rush after the golden eggs.\textsuperscript{112}

There is enough evidence, therefore, in the novel to show that the novelist has tried to
vide a christian perspective to view the characters and events. As a last effort to sustain it
narrator, directs the reader's attention to the steeple of Christ's church at night during a
nder storm and describes as: "that symbol of our engulfing struggle with good and evil", and
ses the novel with the affirmative words found in Leander's wallet: 'Let us consider that the
al of man is immortal, able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil'.\textsuperscript{113} Does the
ristian perspective provided by the novelist really control the narrative consistently? Samuel
ale, who has analysed this novel sensitively, doubts it: "Despite the calculated use of
ristian and biblical imagery, the reader cannot be certain that these ancient and traditional
ages will help him grasp the full dimensions of this restless new world of spiritual and
ysical wanderers".\textsuperscript{114} It may be suggested that it is not the traditional faith that is inadequate
much as cheerve's narrative strategy in the novel. The assertion made about the steeple of
he church and the affirmative words of Leanders, both cited earlier are no doubt powerful but
y are generally unsubstantiated as they do not derive from events or characters in the novel.
he structure of the novel is loose as the narrative consists of a series of isolated episodes and
events. As Lynne Waldelean points out, because the structure guides our response, the
ooseness of the novel is likely to make the reader feel that, despite the vividness of certain
enes and the velocity of telling, we really do not quite know what the novel is driving
towards".\textsuperscript{115} Samuel Coale too expresses a similar view though in different words: "In the novel
episode seems almost to be tossed into the path of the others in hopes that some revelation, moment of recognition and wisdom may be found. It is as if Cheever has set up these posed events and waited for these meanings to be revealed in the juxtaposition selves. An equally important reason for the Christian perspective to be not more explicit it is that Cheever’s immediate focus is on the contemporary experience of social problems, immas, defeats and their poignancy on the threats posed by advancing technology its meaning impact the the break with the past it has caused, the social incoherence it has ught about and the fears rush and restlessness it has caused in the lines of people in general.

The novel ends with a coda. Having given an impressive account of the Christmas dinner St Botolphs, the omniscient narrator indicates that it is time for him-and for the reader-to pull it of the place of which he is nostalgic. He bids a final farewell to the place on a note which autumnal and plaintive: "I will never come back, and if I do, there will be nothing left, there will be nothing left but the headstones record what has happened, there will really be nothing at all". These closing words emphasize the elegiac tone. With them St.Botolphs, which is entirely a creation of the novelist’s imagination, vanishes for ever. What does it imply? Does it mean that Cheever having realised that St.Botolphs is nothing but a creation of his idle fancy, a mythical place, a mere airy nothing to which her imagination has given a local habitation and a name with all the authenticity of an actual place, but without any meaning or significance, gives it up as well as whatever it is supposed to stand for? Does he reject St.Botolphs as mere illusion? The Wapshot novels provide evidence to the contrary, although the narrator at the end of the second novel says that he will leave St.Botolphs for good and will never return.
This imaginary old town of New England is presented in the novel as embodying certain values, beliefs and relationships of the past which have sustained life, and it is used as a contrast to the "vigorous and incredibly changing contemporary world whose inhabitants face the unchanging and inescapable existential problems stripped of the values, beliefs, relationships which traditionally have sustained human life". But his equally important to note that St.Botolphs is not presented as an ideal or idealised place. Much less is it presented the Eden of the American dream, even though it has its special attractions for one like Leander or Honora or the narrator of the second Wapshot novel to be nostalgic about. It is, at its core, a remote and faint shadow of Eden. Even by Leander's time (recorded in *The Wapshot Chronicle*) this once prosperous river-side town had declined and been reduced to be an consequential place with few opportunities for its young, who therefore had to go out to distant places like New York and Washington to seek and make their fortunes. Most of them migrate and never return either by choice or necessity. In a fast changing world in which several complex forces are at work and things change faster than they can be comprehended, small places like St.Botolphs nor its people can ever survive. And hence the narrator in *The Wapshot Scandal* has to say, 'I, will never come back, and if I do there will be nothing left - - -'. With Honora dead and all her property, which had helped the young Wapshots to live in comfort, confiscated by the government, the chances of even coverly who is attached to the place returning to St.Botolphs appear very remote. The Wapshot novels record the downfall of the Wapshot family as well as that of their small town. And it is complete by the end of the second novel, and there is no return to either St.Botolphs or to New England's past.
While all this is true, it does not follow that St. Botolph's and the values it stood for are lly undermined or have lost their relevance and therefore been abandoned. It also does not ow that one can ignore one's links with his background or past. It is good to remind oneself such times as the present of upheavals and unprecedented changes on a large scale, that a lost use is not necessarily a worthless or an unworthy cause. On this aspect of Cheever's writing inton Burhans has some illuminating observations which deserve to be cited. He writes :

In his complex feeling for the past, for man's relationship to his background and his deep need for social coherence, Cheever is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor a naturalistic determinist. He is thoroughly aware that man cannot return to or repeat the past—however tempting an escape it may seem. To Cheever, man is the complicated product of his past, of heredity shaped by natural and cultural environment, and he is convinced that the identity and the values man's lives by are rooted with him in the past. If man cannot return to or repeat the past, neither can he with impurity move very far beyond a coherent relationship to it. Deeply disturbed by his perception of vast change exploding in an apparently geometrical progression, Cheever senses that man may be incurring a catastrophic penalty for progress that the brilliance and power which have given man dominion over the earth may finally be operating to eliminate him from it.\(^{119}\)

And that is the significance of the endeavours of Coverly, who realised that we are all "ransomed to our beginnings", to connect the past and the present and to build a bridge between St. Botolph's which he has had to leave, and the outside world. It also explains why so much of importance is given to Dr. Cameron and his tribe in the novel. The upshot of what has been said so far is that the narrator of this novel bids what may be called a qualified farewell to St. Botolph's in the sense that the place disappears but not the validity of the values of life it stood for though they are at present discounted.
The title of the novel, *The Wapshot Scandal*, is misleading and rouses the wrong kind of expectations in the reader. To what events and persons does 'scandal' in the title refer, is it all clear. The word 'scandal' means any act, behaviour etc., that causes feelings of rage, or indignation. It also means any action or attitude that is disgraceful or shameful. As Ieland says, the title is "too strong a word for the events that befall the protagonists or for public reaction to them". Further, the title makes the reader expect a degree of continuity seen in *The Wapshot Chronicle* and this, but that is not forthcoming. *The Wapshot Scandal* is neither completely a sequel to its predecessor nor completely separate from the world of Botolphs. As seen already Cheever's attentions is drawn more and more to the social problems and cultural phenomena of his immediate times than in *The Wapshot Chronicle*. Therefore in settings, social phenomena and details of everyday life it is very close to the times in which it was written. As a result "we have in the novel a mixed bag - a sequel *The Wapshot Chronicle*, a polemical novel of social criticism, a book of comic episodes but an overridingly autumnal mood". Once Cheever told an interviewer that fiction is meant to illuminate, to explode, to refresh. This novel does these things effectively in isolated moments rather than consistently.

It is also quite apparent that the evils of contemporary American life which Cheever attacks in this novel are by no means a fresh discovery of his. The comments of preceptive reviewer of this novel for *Minnesota Review* (1964) deserve to be cited: "The debasing of human values, the fading of significance in relationships, the unprecedented acceleration of change, the rootlessness and corrosive boredom of suburban life, the destruction of landscape
land mark in the interests of mobility and progress - these are common themes of complaint, only by writers of fiction, but by learned sociologists, sermonizers, both lay and official, journalists --- etc. The value of Cheever's writing is the superiority of his perceptions and wers to those of most writers who have approached the same subject. He brings to the treatment of the contemporary American scene a boisterous sense of farce, a severe appreciation of moral tragedy, and an unusual understanding of the importance of people as individuals with potentialities of goodness and happiness. Cheever's distinction in this novel lies in enabling the reader to participate imaginatively and sympathetically in the dilemmas, confusions, fears and hopes of his many characters, despite its structural lapses.
Notes of References


2. George H. Hunt, John Cheever: The Hibgoblin Company of Love

3. Critical Essays, P.58

4. Lynne Waldeland, p.50


6. Granville Hicks, "Where Have All the Roses Gone?", Critical Essays, p.45.

7. The Wapshot Scandal, p.15


12. Lynng Waldeand, p.56.


15. Ibid, P.2.


17. The Wapshot Scandal, p.28

19. Ibid; p.45.
20. Ibid; p.52.
21. Ibid; p.53.
23. The Wapshot Scandal, p.86.
24. Ibid.
27. Ibid; p.25.
29. The Wapshot Scandal, p.94.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid; pp.122-123
33. The Wapshot Scandal, p.123.
34. Ibid; p.135.
35. Ibid; p.148.
A little later (on p.150) the same old man repeat for the benefit of Cameron the words of some man from another planet seen in one of his reveries who urges his friends to "rush to the earth which is" covered with fertile seas and continents, warmed and lighted by the sun*, where "churches of indescribable beauty are raised to the gods", where there are thousands of museums where man's drive to celebrate life is recorded and preserved", and where "They have invented ceremonies to exalt the love of men and women". The significance of these words in the novel is obvious.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid; p.149.
38. Ibid.
41. George W.Hunt, pp.133 - 34.
42. The Wapshot Chronicle, p.4
43. The Wapshot Scandal, p.13.
44. Ibid; pp.60 - 61.
45. Ibid; p.167.
46. Lynne Waldeland, p.58.
49. Lynne Waldeland, p.52.
50. The Wapshot Scandal, p.32.
51. Ibid; pp.32 - 33.
52. Ibid; p.71.
54. The Wapshot Scandal, p.74.
56. The Wapshot Scandal, p.34.
57. Ibid; p.35.
58. Ibid; p.64.
59. Ibid; p.65.

60. Ibid; p.64.

61. Lynne Waldeland, pp. 60-61.


63. The Wapshot Scandal, p.158.

64. Ibid; pp.158-59.

65. Ibid; p.160.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid; p.162.

68. Ibid, p.78.


70. The Wapshot Scandal, p.79.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid; p.80.

73. Ibid; p.83.

74. Ibid; p.169.

75. Ibid; p.191.

76. Ibid; p.193.

77. Ibid; p.194.

78. Ibid; p.205.

79. Lynne Waldeland, p.54.

80. Ibid; p.43.
82. Ibid; p.55.
83. Ibid.
84. Marcia Gaunt, p.110.
86. Ibid; p.60.
87. Ibid; pp.96-97.
88. Ibid; p.97.
89. Marcia Gaunt, p.110.
91. Ibid; p.107.
92. Ibid.
93. Lynne Waldelean, p.55.
96. Ibid; p.196.
97. Ibid; p.203.
100. Lynne Waldelean, p.56.
103. Ibid; p.209.

104. Ibid; p.211.

105. Hynna Waldeland, p.58.


110. Samuel Coale, p.87.

111. Granville Hicks, "Where Have All the Roses Gone", *Critical Essays*, p.46.


114. Samuel Coale, p.90.

115. Lynne Waldeland, p.60.


119. Ibid; p.120.

120. Lynne Waldeland, p.58.

121. Ibid; p.61.