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**JOHN CHEEVER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE  
MARKETPLACE, 1930 to 1964**

**JAMES RICHARD MONKMAN**

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

John Cheever published over two hundred short stories in an array of small-, mid-, and large-circulation magazines between 1930 and 1981. One hundred and twenty of these stories appeared in *The New Yorker*. During Cheever's career and since his death in 1982, many critics have typically analysed his short stories in isolation from the conditions of their production, lest Cheever's subversive modernist tendencies be confused with the conservative middlebrow ethos of *The New Yorker*, or the populist aspect of other large-circulation magazines. Critics, including Cheever's daughter and his most recent biographer Blake Bailey, also claim that Cheever was a financial and, ultimately, artistic victim of the magazine marketplace. Drawing on largely unpublished editorial and administrative correspondence in the *New Yorker* Records and editorially annotated short story typescripts in the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts collection, and using a historicised close-reading practice, this thesis examines the influence of the magazine marketplace on the short fiction that Cheever produced between 1930 and 1964. It challenges the critical consensus by arguing that Cheever did not dissociate his authorship from commerciality at any point during his career, and consistently exploited the magazine marketplace to his financial and creative advantage, whether this meant temporarily producing stories for little magazines in the early 1930s and romance stories for mainstream titles in the 1940s, or selling his *New Yorker* rejections to its rivals, which he did throughout his career. Cheever also developed strong working relationships with his editors at *The New Yorker* during the 1940s and 1950s. This thesis re-evaluates these relationships by analysing comparatively the drafts, archival materials that have hitherto been neglected by critics, and published versions of some of Cheever's best known New

Yorker stories. In so doing, this thesis demonstrates the crucial role that editorial collaboration played in Cheever's writing process.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the AHRC for funding three years of my PhD studies and awarding me a travel grant to travel to New York in 2013 to conduct research in the New Yorker Records at the New York Public Library. Thanks to CLAS, my parent school, for awarding me two Travel Prizes during the course of my PhD. These prizes enabled me to examine the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts in 2012, and the New Yorker Records in 2013. Thanks also to the editors of Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory for publishing a shorter version of the first chapter of this thesis in the Spring 2015 issue of the journal.

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Thanks also to my partner Jen, my parents, my brothers, my closest colleague at the University of Nottingham, John Tiplady, and practically everyone else I know for supporting me emotionally, intellectually, and financially throughout this process.

This work is dedicated, with love, to *Michael 'Mick' Hall* (1976-2013). Thank you for helping me to negotiate the wilderness of my mid-twenties and encouraging me to pursue my passion for literature.

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## Introduction

For most of his professional career, John Cheever was both a literary artist and a popular writer. Cheever came to rely on writing short stories for a mixture of small-, mid-, and large-circulation magazines between 1930 and the early 1960s because of his lack of financial independence and struggle with the novel form. It was by publishing the majority of his stories in *The New Yorker* that Cheever was able to develop both aspects of his career. This thesis proposes that understanding the nature of the creative and financial relationships that Cheever developed with *The New Yorker* and its employees during this period, as well as his other interactions with the American magazine marketplace, broadens our understanding both of his sense of literary professionalism and, moreover, his approach to writing short fiction. Using a historicised close reading of mostly unpublished editorial and interoffice correspondence in the *New Yorker Records*, and short story typescripts in the *John Cheever Literary Manuscripts*, this thesis argues that Cheever was not, as some critics have suggested, a victim of the magazine marketplace, but rather a willing, if occasionally frustrated, participant in it.

Cheever published one hundred and twenty of his short stories in *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1981. From the late 1940s until his death in 1982, Cheever signed a first-reading agreement annually with *The New Yorker* which provided him with something approaching the stability and security of regular extra- or non-literary employment. This agreement was invaluable to Cheever because it enabled him to make writing his job in the absence of novel publication early in his career. Moreover, appearing in *The New Yorker* on average every other month in the 1940s provided Cheever with a national, primarily middle-class, audience for his stories, and within that whole, a readership for the books he began to publish with more frequency in the late 1950s and



throughout the 1960s. Cheever also formed strong professional and personal bonds with New Yorker editors William Maxwell and Gustave S. Loblano. Both of these editors became, at different times, stylistically influential collaborators on Cheever's stories during the most prolific period of his career, 1940 to 1964.

When critics attempt to separate Cheever's short fiction from *The New Yorker*, they often emphasise his circumvention of, or conflict with, its middlebrow literary ethos and editing system. Susan Cheever claimed that her father's association with *The New Yorker* deteriorated because of his experimentation in his short stories with what his editors felt was 'appropriate and believable' for the magazine's readers.<sup>1</sup> Cheever's first biographer Scott Donaldson acknowledged that *The New Yorker* was a 'patron to [...] Cheever for four decades' but refused to accept that he consciously authored New Yorker stories, cultural products that Donaldson dismissed as being 'elegant, charming, [and] inconsequential'.<sup>2</sup> Agreeing with Susan Cheever's portrayal of her father as a surrealist, Wayne Stengel argued that Cheever was 'anything but a glib writer' of New Yorker stories.<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Morace posited further that Cheever practiced an 'innovative, open, even experimental' form of the short story that was 'at odds with the compression of incident and tight narrative focus [...] of the conventional short story'.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Cheever's second biographer Blake Bailey has depicted the author's transition from short story writer to novelist as an ultimately doomed attempt to liberate himself from the constraining label of "New Yorker writer".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark: A Biographical Memoir of John Cheever by His Daughter* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Donaldson, 'John Cheever', in *John Cheever: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989), ed. by James E. O'Hara, pp. 128-32 (p. 129) (first publ. in *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, suppl. 1, part 1, ed. by Leonard Ungar (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), pp. 195-7).

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Stengel, 'John Cheever's Surreal Vision and the Bridge of Language', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 2 (1987), 223-33 (p. 223).

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Morace, 'From Parallels to Paradise: The Lyrical Structure of John Cheever's Fiction', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 4 (1989), 502-28 (pp. 505, 506).

<sup>5</sup> Blake Bailey, *Cheever: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 222.

Much of this criticism draws on the enmity that Cheever himself felt towards writing for *The New Yorker* during his career, which he recorded in the journals he kept from the 1940s until a few days before his death in 1982, and in his correspondence with friends and family. Portions of Cheever's journals and letters were excerpted for the first time in *Home Before Dark* in 1984 before being collected for publication in *The Letters of John Cheever* in 1988 and *The Journals of John Cheever* in 1991. Using roughly twenty per cent of the wordage of the original journals, Robert Gottlieb, Cheever's editor at Alfred A. Knopf Inc. from 1969 to 1982, shaped the material to reflect Cheever's profound sense of dissatisfaction with his personal and professional life by foregrounding the themes of marital discord, family pathology, repressed bisexuality, alcoholism, and professional resentment. In this way, Gottlieb's selection reinforced many of the negative aspects of freelancing for large-circulation magazines that Susan Cheever emphasised in *Home Before Dark*, such as the stress her father suffered writing short stories expressly for money and his confusion with what she calls *The New Yorker's* 'Byzantine' payment system.<sup>6</sup>

John Cheever complained, in 1948, that *The New Yorker's* rejection of three of his stories, as well as its failure to pay him a bonus and living wage for the year, set him off, 'frequently, on an unreasonable tangent of petulance'.<sup>7</sup> 'This is a patriarchal relationship', wrote Cheever in the same journal entry, 'and I certainly respond to the slings of regret, real or imaginary'.<sup>8</sup> Cheever acknowledged, in 1953, that there were 'mixed opinions about the suburbs' amongst members of *The New Yorker's* editorial staff following his submission of 'O Youth and Beauty!' (*The New Yorker*, 22 August 1953).<sup>9</sup> In another journal entry dated 1959, Cheever commiserated that 'nearly every time he thought of the

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, pp. 135-36

<sup>7</sup> John Cheever, *The Journals of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Cheever, *The Journals*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Cheever, p. 33.

stories he had been writing for ‘three months, [...] wanting money, really’, he saw them ‘set up in the magazine opposite a cartoon’.<sup>10</sup>

Critics have used these complaints, and others like them, to argue that Cheever’s affiliation with *The New Yorker* was marked throughout by creative limitation and financial dissatisfaction. Yet it is not surprising that Cheever was, from time to time, disenchanted with his function as a producer of mass fiction. After making writing his ‘day-job’ in the 1940s, he gradually and unavoidably stripped away much of what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as ‘the charismatic vision of the writer’s “mission”’ from the practice.<sup>11</sup> But the *New Yorker Records*, which contain surviving and mostly unpublished editorial correspondence between Cheever, his editors, and administrative employees concerning Cheever’s creative and financial affairs with the magazine, reveal a discrepancy between what he said privately and did professionally that adds further nuance to our understanding of him both professionally and artistically.

The *Records*, which are held at the New York Public Library, were opened to researchers in the spring of 1994. Despite having access to this resource, however, many critics continue to be informed by *Home Before Dark*, *The Letters*, *The Journals*, and Donaldson’s *John Cheever: A Biography* (1988), texts that were all published before 1994 and do not accurately reflect Cheever’s relationship with *The New Yorker*.<sup>12</sup> Even as recently as 2015, Tamara Follini knits together threads from each of these texts in order to characterise Cheever’s experience of writing for the magazine: ‘Yet while this was an affiliation from which Cheever frequently benefited, it was also one increasingly marked

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<sup>10</sup> John Cheever, *The Journals*, p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Market of Symbolic Goods’ (1971), *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 1-34 (p. 22).

<sup>12</sup> It is also worth noting that Donaldson was not granted access to Cheever’s original journals by the Cheever family during the writing of his biography. Donaldson discusses his personal and legal difficulties with the Cheevers in more detail in Scott Donaldson, *The Impossible Craft: Literary Biography* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

by financial frustration, creative limitation and personal discord with the editors with whom he was most closely associated'.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the editorial and interoffice correspondence in the Records shows that Cheever had a largely positive working relationship with *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1964, and that not only was he a willing collaborator on his stories with the magazine's fiction department even after becoming a published novelist from 1957 onwards, but also that he understood and regularly exerted control over his financial arrangements with the publication. Conversely, the editorial correspondence provides evidence that *The New Yorker*'s fiction department supported Cheever unequivocally, providing him with confidence and financial aid whenever they deemed it necessary.

Cheever's vision of what constituted his professional identity and approach to writing did not dissociate his authorship from commerciality, which is to say that he rarely rejected opportunities for commercial and short-term economic profit during his career. But, in order to take advantage of these circumstances, Cheever had to be cognisant of his financial and artistic worth. The fact that, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Cheever used popular techniques and genres in his stories to profit financially suggests he understood his value in this respect. When Cheever began writing material expressly for *The New Yorker* in the mid-1930s, he incorporated several of the key characteristics of *New Yorker* stories by frequent and popular contributors John O'Hara, Sally Benson, and Kay Boyle into his own in order to maximise the chance of their being accepted. 'Buffalo' and 'Brooklyn Rooming House', the first works of fiction that Cheever sold to *The New Yorker* in the spring of 1935, shared variously with these stories a single setting for their action, dialogue-driven narratives, indirection, and ironic twist endings. After a spate of rejections

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<sup>13</sup> Tamara Follini, 'The Distractions of John Cheever', in *Writing for The New Yorker: Critical Essays on an American Periodical*, ed. by Fiona Green (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 137-57 (p. 139).

from *The New Yorker* in 1935, Cheever wrote a novella-length story about a young middle-class American who falls briefly under the spell of a charismatic communist for the more politically-engaged publication *The Atlantic Monthly*. Two years later, in 1937, he wrote a conventional sentimental story set against the backdrop of horseracing for *Collier's Weekly* because he needed money to leave Yaddo, an artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. And when Cheever increased the length of his *New Yorker* stories in the mid-1940s, he was driven not by aesthetic ambition but by a desire to earn additional money on each sale: as the magazine paid contributors per word rather than per piece, it was simply more lucrative for him to submit longer stories and articles to the magazine. Even after Cheever established a readership outside of the large-circulation magazine marketplace by publishing collections of his short stories and novels in the 1950s and 1960s, he continued to produce short fiction that met market demands, as evidenced by the appearance of his work in popular publications *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire*, and *Playboy* between 1965 and 1976.

In addition to being influenced by a number of sympathetic biographical and autobiographical texts, critical evaluation of Cheever's short fiction has also been influenced by the tension between what Bourdieu identifies as 'art for art's sake and middle-brow art which, on the ideological plane, becomes transformed into an opposition between the idealism of devotion to art and the cynicism of submission to the market'.<sup>14</sup> As a novelist, Cheever was a cultural producer working in what Bourdieu terms 'the field of restricted production', a system that produces 'cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods'.<sup>15</sup> But, as a short story writer, Cheever worked, for the most part, in 'the field of

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<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, 'The Market of Symbolic Goods', p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu, p. 4.

large-scale cultural production’, a system that is ‘specifically organized with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods’, who more often than not in the case of Cheever were the subscribers and readers of *The New Yorker*.<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu notes that there is little more than a ‘limiting parameter construction’ in the opposition between these two modes of production, and it is clear that Cheever, working in collaboration with Maxwell and Lobrano, frequently produced short stories for *The New Yorker* that referenced the restrictive market on the one hand and the expectations of an audience that was comfortable with the formulaic style of the magazine’s fiction on the other.<sup>17</sup>

Several critics have acknowledged this referentiality in Cheever’s *New Yorker* fiction as it relates to the paratextual frame of the magazine in which it appeared. In the 1960s, George Garrett observed Cheever’s narratorial exploitation of the incongruity between dream and the actual world, and the relationship between narrator and magazine reader in his *New Yorker* stories.<sup>18</sup> James E. O’Hara contended that stories like the fantastical and socially morbid ‘Torch Song’ (*The New Yorker*, 4 October 1947) challenged both the sensibility of *The New Yorker*’s fiction editors and the aesthetic of the magazine by deliberately disrupting the comfortable status quo of postwar American middle-class life that the magazine endorsed, particularly in its advertising.<sup>19</sup>

Follini has suggested that Cheever’s use of advertising in the form of billboards, window displays, and even copy in his *New Yorker* stories is intended to parody the reading experience for a reader encountering them for the first time inside a magazine that

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, ‘The Market of Symbolic Goods’, pp. 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> George Garrett, ‘John Cheever and the Charms of Innocence: The Craft of *The Wapshot Scandal*’ (1964), in *Critical Essays on John Cheever*, ed. by R. G. Collins (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), pp. 51-62.

<sup>19</sup> O’Hara, *John Cheever: A Study of the Short Fiction*, pp. 25-26.

was financially dependent on advertising culture.<sup>20</sup> Other critics, however, have persistently sought to separate Cheever's short fiction not only from the enclosure of the *New Yorker's* newsbreaks, cartoons, and advertisements, but also from the middlebrow literary ethos that helped to shape the fiction it published.

Steadfastly refusing to publish sentimental or moralistic short stories with elaborate plots in the style of O. Henry, a popular American writer in the early 1900s, and wary of the kind of aesthetically experimental fiction that appeared in little magazines in the 1920s and 1930s, *The New Yorker* gradually developed its own form of short story, a blend of realism and naturalism with an objective focus on a single character and a minimal plot. Janet Carey Eldred suggests that *The New Yorker* created its own type of story for commercial reasons because, although the magazine was committed to 'the promotion of high letters and quality literature', its editors wanted to 'secure a market share in the middlebrow publishing niche that marketed "best of" literature'; they also understood that 'healthy circulation figures depended on participation in the mass book sector'.<sup>21</sup> Definitions are by their nature prescriptive, but it is fair to say that while the "New Yorker story" always dealt with various subjects ranging from murder to romance, and developed formally and structurally to accommodate more changes in point of view, time, and space between the 1930s and 1960s, the version that Cheever mastered possessed an anecdotal quality and concentrated on white middle-class experience as it manifested in regional settings. Lionel Trilling, who described *The New Yorker's* fiction in terms of malformation, as 'a kind of [my italics] short story', captures a sense of the thematic and dramatic movement of some of the magazine's stories as Cheever practiced them in his 1942 review of the anthology *Short Stories from the New Yorker* (1940):

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<sup>20</sup> Follini, 'The Distractions of John Cheever'.

<sup>21</sup> Janet Carey Eldred, *Literate Zeal: Gender and the Making of a New Yorker Ethos* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), p. 65.

Every week, at the barber's or the dentist's or on the commuting train, a representative part of the middle class learns about the horrors of snobbery, ignorance, and insensitivity and about the sufferings of children, servants, the superannuated, and the subordinate, weak people of all sorts.<sup>22</sup>

Again, definitions are problematic, and not all New Yorker authors were cruel to their characters, but it is important to note that Trilling's assessment of the form applies to many of the stories that Cheever produced for *The New Yorker*, not just in the 1940s, but also in the 1950s and 1960s as well. While Cheever introduced innovation to *The New Yorker* story and did experiment more with narratorial functions as his career progressed, he rarely deviated from exploring white middle-class experience in urban, suburban, and expatriate contexts in the fiction he submitted to the magazine. This type of decision making on the part of Cheever was born of financial necessity.

The *New Yorker's* development of an idiosyncratic short story form was also a bi-product of the magazine's editing system, which Ross designed from the outset to be more rigorous than those of the magazine's middlebrow competitors. Unlike at other large-circulation magazines, fiction was subjected to more or less the same editing process as non-fiction at *The New Yorker*. This meant that fiction was read for grammar, spelling, and sense by copy-editors, and had its 'facts'—references to the real world—reviewed by fact-checkers. Final editing on a story also introduced the questions of cuts, rewording, and punctuation, usually for reasons of journalistic clarity and a readership that Katharine S. White, head of fiction at the magazine between 1925 and 1942, referred to as 'rather straight forward and not esoteric'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lionel Trilling, 'New Yorker Fiction', *The Nation*, 11 April 1942, p. 425.

<sup>23</sup> New York, New York Public Library, *The New Yorker Records* (1924-1984), Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (herewith *New Yorker Records*, NYPL), Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, General Correspondence 1928-1951, Box 135, fol. 10, Katharine S. White to Djuna Barnes, [n.d.] c. 1928.



This iteration of The New Yorker's editing system was established by around 1936, yet the parameters of fiction editing at the magazine were constantly in flux during the first four or five decades of its existence. An example of one of Ross' numerous interventions is a letter to The New Yorker's editorial staff dated 26 April 1949 instructing them not to suggest changes to authors' styles 'unless absolutely necessary to correct faults of structure, conflict, error, grammar, etc.' and not to alter or replace authors' wordings 'merely to get [an] orthodox wording'.<sup>24</sup> Editors were invariably 'tactful with writers, even deferential, and their preferences were always couched as suggestions', explains Thomas Kunkel, but writers, like Cheever, 'who wanted to see [their stories] published in the New Yorker discounted them at their peril', and were therefore encouraged to use editorially-preferred stock characters and situations in their work.<sup>25</sup>

Partly because, from the late 1940s onwards, The New Yorker held the first right of refusal on the short fiction that Cheever produced, and partly because it accepted submissions with various provisos, it was financially imperative that he calibrate the majority of his work to suit the editorial requirements of the magazine.<sup>26</sup> The John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963 at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts

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<sup>24</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 1: Editor 1917-1984, Harold Ross General Files 1917, 1924-1957, Box 36, fol. 1, Harold W. Ross to 'Editors', 26 April 1949.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise: Harold Ross of The New Yorker* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers Inc., 1995), p. 263.

<sup>26</sup> The New Yorker did not intend its first reading agreement to prevent writers from conceiving and producing pieces for other magazines. White understood writing with other publications in mind to be 'a natural and inevitable and sensible thing for a professional writer to do' and she encouraged contributors to do likewise. 'If having an agreement with the New Yorker prevented a writer from doing this', she explained to contributor Frances Gray Patton in 1952, 'I think we would have much to answer for in a literary sense'. 'All we ask', added White, '[...] is that we see the manuscript first'. Cheever was a model contributor (and professional writer) in this respect, submitting everything he wrote to the magazine first throughout his career, sometimes to the point of incredulity. For example, towards the end of the Second World War (December 1944), a period during which The New Yorker was prioritising the publication of reportage and realistic short stories about the conflict, Cheever submitted a science fiction story, 'The Conquest of Space', to the magazine. After Lobrano rejected the story because its 'combination of realism and something that comes close to fantasy' did not work, Cheever renamed it 'A Trip to the Moon' and sold it to Good Housekeeping instead. New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, Fiction Correspondence 1952-1980, Box 512, fol. 8, Katharine S. White to Frances Gray Patton, 5 January 1952; New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, General Correspondence 1928-1951, Box 403, fol. 8, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 10 December 1944.

includes one hundred and four annotated typescripts of short stories Cheever published in *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1964 that reveal the extent to which this was indeed the case. These typescripts each feature varying degrees of annotation in the hands of Cheever's editors and printers at the magazine. Editorial annotation appears in both the margins and the body text of the typescripts as pencilled comments, queries, suggestions, substitutions, additions, and excisions (words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs struck through with straight or scribbled lines). Printers' comments appear in heavy blue or black pencil and indicate slug-lines, line-breaks, and font (size and type). There are no comments in Cheever's hand on these typescripts; his corrections are, instead, typed inserts featuring minor and occasionally major rewrites of material.

Comparative analysis of both these typescripts and the published versions of Cheever's *New Yorker* stories suggests that, in the majority of cases, Cheever incorporated numerous editorial suggestions, substitutions, additions, and excisions into his work during the editing process. This is something that prospective and established *New Yorker* contributors who generated income other than from writing fiction for magazines (be it from the sales of their novels, screenwriting assignments, or other literary and non-literary professions) were often reluctant to do; if they did not want to spend time reworking a story to meet *The New Yorker's* editorial requirements, they could simply sell it to another mainstream title with fewer restraints on content and genre, or ignore the magazine marketplace altogether. As Cheever was not in as fortunate a position financially as his contemporaries during the 1940s and 1950s, he acquiesced to *The New Yorker's* editorial restrictions and demands partly out of economic necessity.

Although critics have examined the short story typescripts at Brandeis, they have not made the extent to which Cheever collaborated with his *New Yorker* editors the main focus of their work. In 1994, Francis J. Bosha published an itemised rather than analytical

overview of the collection to assist future researchers; in the late 2000s, Bailey spent the last day of a research trip to Boston ‘mostly examining the typescripts of Cheever’s New Yorker stories’ but only mentions them in two footnotes in *Cheever: A Life*.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps because Bailey used Cheever’s journals to shape the narrative of his biography, he was instead interested in the differences between a number of journal pages that Cheever donated to the collection and the original versions.<sup>28</sup> James E. O’Hara’s *John Cheever: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1989), the seminal monographic study on Cheever’s short fiction, omits the existence of the collection at Brandeis altogether. O’Hara reads published versions of Cheever’s stories comparatively and critically only in his book. Despite acknowledging and exploring throughout his study the role played by writing regularly for a variety of magazines in Cheever’s technical development as a writer, O’Hara also struggles to reconcile the ideological tension between the concept of the artist-as-genius and the artist-as-technician. At the end of his book, O’Hara leans towards the former concept by including Cheever’s essay ‘What Happened’ (1959) in an appendix of primary sources and further secondary criticism.

In ‘What Happened’, Cheever documents the way in which his Puritanical understanding of morality, failure to write a story in which the rules of backgammon become a metaphor for familial relationships, and observations concerning the topography of New Hampshire and the nostalgic longings of friends, influenced the composition of his New Yorker story ‘Goodbye, My Brother’ (25 August 1951). O’Hara describes this essay as ‘the best record we have of Cheever’s creative “method”’, but this method, particularly as it relates to Cheever’s production of short stories, cannot be separated so simply from

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<sup>27</sup> Francis J. Bosha, ‘The John Cheever Literary Manuscript Collection at Brandeis’, *Resources for American Literary Study*, 1 (1994), 45-53; Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 300n, 669n.

<sup>28</sup> Bailey, p. 669n.

the New Yorker system towards which it was frequently directed.<sup>29</sup> Although this labour is not visible in the published versions of Cheever's stories, it is an integral part of their production. Both the New Yorker Records and the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts are valuable archival resources within which researchers can situate more pragmatic readings of Cheever's short story craft, which evolved out of a combination of the skills needed for market success and the aesthetic values of a creative artist.

This thesis also draws heavily on editorial and interoffice correspondence in the New Yorker Records, the editorially annotated short story typescripts in the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts collection, and other contextual materials such as the published portions of Cheever's journals and letters to friends, in order to re-evaluate the part The New Yorker played in Cheever's literary development between 1935 and 1964. By emphasising the influence of The New Yorker on Cheever and connecting his art to the culture of commerce, this thesis participates in the field of periodical studies, a sub-field of book history. The development of periodical studies has, over the past few years, been driven by the proliferation of digital archives, which, Sean Latham suggests, allows us to see magazines as 'autonomous objects of study' rather than 'containers of discrete bits of information', and the larger cultural and material turn in literary and textual scholarship.<sup>30</sup> Periodical studies is also distinguished by its interdisciplinary approach to analysis, which is attuned to the way in which magazines can range broadly across subjects in a single issue, from commentary on international affairs and scientific advancement to fiction and cartoons; this aspect is even more acute in The New Yorker as a single page of a Cheever story could be arranged alongside a variety of thematically unrelated advertisements, newsbreaks, and cartoons. The approach of this thesis is historicist and comparative. Its

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<sup>29</sup> O'Hara, John Cheever, p. 93; John Cheever, 'What Happened', in *Understanding Fiction*, ed. by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), pp. 570-72.

<sup>30</sup> Scott Latham and Robert Scholes, 'The Rise of Periodical Studies', *The Journal of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)*, 2 (2006), 517-31 (pp. 517-18).

four chapters are multi-layered with biographical, historical, and critical contexts pertaining to Cheever, the magazines and editors with which he collaborated, and the style, content, form, and themes of the stories he produced at specific points in his career. The chapters of this thesis also feature historically attentive and, where archival manuscript materials are utilised, comparative readings of short story typescripts and published stories. The intention is to demonstrate the impact of commercial motivations and collaborative impulses on the final form of a number of Cheever's stories during his career.

Chapter One examines the emergence of Cheever's professional pragmatism in the early 1930s when he temporarily stopped producing work for large-circulation magazines and began writing formally and stylistically experimental stories for various little magazines instead. Chapter One analyses the first of these stories, 'Fall River', an ostensibly proletarian story about mill closures and mass lay-offs in an economically depressed textile city. Cheever published 'Fall River' in the second issue of *The Left: A Quarterly Review of Radical and Experimental Art*, a communist little magazine published in Davenport, Iowa, in late 1931. Bailey claims that Cheever's turn away from the large-circulation magazine marketplace towards an emergent Midwestern literary radicalism in 1931 was a short-lived political digression by an otherwise apolitical middle-class writer. Chapter One contests this view by re-evaluating Cheever's professional relationship with *The New Republic* (the first large-circulation magazine to publish his fiction), his personal experiences of the magazine marketplace and left-wing politics, and his readings of little magazines between 1930 and 1931. It argues that Cheever made this decision for professionally pragmatic, rather than political, reasons. In short, it was easier for Cheever to publish his work in little magazines in the early 1930s because they were more receptive to the work of younger writers than were their mainstream counterparts. This is not to say that 'Fall River' was not an apolitical story, however. A historicised close-reading of the

story demonstrates the extent to which Cheever's ambivalent relationship with American communism influenced some of the formal, generic, and thematic properties of 'Fall River'. Far from being a political digression or work produced quickly for money, 'Fall River' is in fact a self-reflexive critique of the politicisation of middle-class writers during the Depression.

Chapter Two uses Bernard Lahire's argument that professional authorship is a 'game' that authors play occasionally, fanatically, or professionally as a lens through which to re-examine Cheever's larger experience of producing short fiction for the American magazine marketplace between 1930 and 1964. Lahire's theory, which is influenced by Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the field of cultural production, compares most forms of literary activity to the act of playing a game because writers, like players of games, cannot afford to invest all of their time in what is ostensibly a 'free' activity.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, there are three types of player in the literary game: occasional players who practice literature as a form of recreation; fanatical players who make writing 'the main driving force for their existence' but are forced to subsidise their play with a secondary paid literary or non-literary activity; and professional players who earn their living by playing and living off their proceeds from the literary game.<sup>32</sup>

Chapter Two applies two of Lahire's typologies to distinct periods of Cheever's literary career. The first section of Chapter Two draws on unpublished and published personal correspondence and biographical material to propose that, between 1930 and 1945, Cheever was a fanatical player of the literary game who relied on a number of different paid activities to supplement his income from short story sales and book advances. The second section of Chapter Two uses editorial and interoffice

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<sup>31</sup> Bernard Lahire, 'The Double Life of Writers', trans. by Gwendolyn Wells, *New Literary History*, 41 (Spring 2010), 443-65 (pp. 457-58).

<sup>32</sup> Lahire, 'The Double Life of the Writers', pp. 459-60.

correspondence in the New Yorker Records to demonstrate the variety of ways in which Cheever used his working relationship with *The New Yorker* to become a professional player of the literary game from 1945 onwards. This section uses archival material to reappraise Cheever's financial relationship with *The New Yorker* thoroughly and, by offering evidence of Cheever's immersion in, and absolute understanding of, the magazine's payment system, counters Susan Cheever's claim that her father was exploited by his editors. Chapter Two concludes by suggesting that although *The New Yorker* paid less on a per-story basis than its competitors, it was instrumental in terms of Cheever's literary development between 1935 and 1964. Cheever's loyalty to the magazine throughout this period indicates that he understood this from the outset. As well as providing Cheever with the minimum income that he and his family required for subsistence during the 1940s and 1950s, *The New Yorker* offered a level of creative inspiration and editorial advice that other publications and publishing houses could not match. The magazine also exposed Cheever's work to a national audience, which provided him with a readership for his books and granted him access to other more lucrative markets like the American film industry.

Chapter Three uses unpublished editorial correspondence in the New Yorker Records and published extracts from the journals to consider how both Cheever and Lobrano approached the production of *New Yorker* fiction in the 1940s, and how they reconciled their differences of opinion during the editing process. On the one hand, their conflict was aesthetic: Lobrano preferred realism and Cheever was apt, from the late 1940s onwards, to incorporate elements of fantasy into his work. On the other hand, Lobrano accepted two of Cheever's most fantastical and reflexive *New Yorker* stories during the late 1940s: 'The Enormous Radio' (17 May 1947) and 'Torch Song'. The former is a story in which a radio malfunctions and tunes its apartment building-dwelling owners into the quarrels of their

neighbours, while ‘Torch Song’ is an ostensibly supernatural story about a woman named Joan who always wears black clothes and dates morally or physically unhealthy lovers, all of whom die after coming into contact with her. Lobrano’s acceptance of these stories demonstrates that he was not a creatively inflexible fiction editor, despite his preference for realism.

Again emphasising the importance of a strategic financial imperative in Cheever’s navigation of the magazine marketplace, Chapter Three argues that Cheever allowed Lobrano to edit his 1947 story ‘Torch Song’ according to the middlebrow literary ethos of *The New Yorker* because he had accepted an advance payment for the story and could not afford to complain. Chapter Three examines the editorially annotated typescript of ‘Torch Song’ in order to provide a detailed description and explanation of the way that Lobrano typically edited Cheever’s fiction. Highlighting, amongst other features, heavily-crossed out sections of material that Cheever dutifully revised and retyped onto new pages, this chapter suggests that Cheever played a largely subordinate role during the editing of ‘Torch Song’. Not only did Cheever respond to these changes, he also accepted Lobrano’s excision and/or substitution of metaphors and more sonorous passages of prose that he felt might confuse the imagined ordinary reader of *The New Yorker* for more detail-oriented and explanatory material without disturbance. In short, while Lobrano accepted the supernatural premise of ‘Torch Song’, he demanded that Cheever foreground realism in the story in an attempt to normalise the narrative as much as he possibly could for the magazine’s readers.

Chapter Four examines the opposite of Cheever’s editorial experience with ‘Torch Song’ by focusing on the collaborative effort between Cheever, Lobrano, and Maxwell during the spring and summer months of 1955. Together, they transformed a rejected story draft, ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, into the ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ (*The New*



Yorker, 14 April 1956), the title story and thematic fulcrum of Cheever's third collection of suburban short fiction, *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill and Other Stories* (1958). This chapter analyses two drafts of the story ('The Reformed Housebreaker' and 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill') that were discovered during the researching of this chapter at the New York Public Library. They exist in 'Series 8: Magazine Make-Up: Copy and Source 1950-1981' in the New Yorker Records, a series that contains the copy and art which made up each issue of *The New Yorker*.

Comparing and explaining the editorial and authorial changes between the first two drafts of the story, the third draft (the original copy of which is held at Brandeis), and the published version that appeared in *The New Yorker*, Chapter Four argues that 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' is the product of what G. Thomas Tanselle calls 'the author's intention'.<sup>33</sup> Tanselle defines 'the author's intention' as the 'merging of the separate intentions of the individual authors' in a collaborative effort, a utopian form of editing that applies in the case of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'.<sup>34</sup> Chapter Four reconstructs the collaborative effort between Lobrano, Maxwell, and Cheever on the story using the surviving typescripts and editorial correspondence in the Records. It reveals that Lobrano provided Cheever with the incentive to revise 'The Reformed Housebreaker' when he suggested that the story might be more suitable for *The New Yorker* if Cheever enlarged the idea of the main character's personality souring after he steals cash from his wealthy suburban neighbours following a party.<sup>35</sup> These editorial nudges could upset writers, especially when there were better-paying magazines to sell rejections to, but Lobrano's suggestion inspired Cheever to fix the narration in the story, which alternated between

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<sup>33</sup> G. Thomas Tanselle, 'The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention', *Studies in Bibliography*, 29 (1976), 167-211 (p. 190).

<sup>34</sup> Tanselle, 'The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention', p. 190.

<sup>35</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 734, fol. 27, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 18 April 1955.

third-person-limited and omniscient narration in the first draft, to first-person-limited from the second draft onwards. The newly discovered first and second drafts of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' show that Cheever then worked closely with Maxwell to revise the story over a period of months and, in the process, accepted and incorporated the majority of his editor's corrections and suggestions into the published version. In the sense that it is a synthesis of editorial excision and substitution rather than a concession to it on financial grounds, or a story that was published with minimal editorial intervention, 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' is unique amongst Cheever's corpus of New Yorker stories. Yet, as this chapter concludes, the story is also emblematic both of the value that Cheever placed in the professional judgement of his editors at The New Yorker, and the manner in which he benefited artistically and commercially from his association with the magazine between 1935 and 1964.

## Chapter One:

### **‘Go Left, Young Writer’: John Cheever and the Writing of ‘Fall River’, 1931**

Chapter One examines ‘Fall River’, a proletarian short story John Cheever wrote and published in *The Left: A Quarterly Review of Radical and Experimental Art* in the autumn of 1931. It functions as a prelude Chapter Two, which assesses Cheever’s professionalisation process between 1930 and 1964 at both the macro- and micro-level through sociological and economic lenses. Chapter One argues that Cheever temporarily stopped producing work for *The New Republic*, the popular journal of liberal opinion that published his fiction debut ‘Expelled’ (1 October 1930) and a few of his book reviews between October 1930 and May 1931, in order to write ‘Fall River’ for *The Left*, a communist little magazine published in Davenport, Iowa, for professionally pragmatic, rather than personally political reasons. This counters the view that Cheever’s turn away from what Douglas Wixson refers to as ‘the old order of centralized, hegemonic literary expression’ towards an emergent Midwestern literary radicalism in 1931 was a short-lived political digression by an apolitical middle-class writer.<sup>1</sup> It also contests James E. O’Hara’s view that Cheever abandoned the autobiographical, realist style of ‘Expelled’, a fictionalised account of his expulsion from a preparatory school, to write experimental, impressionistic stories ‘astonishing in their formlessness’ ‘in error’ before returning to ‘realism within structured story lines’ in the mid-1930s.<sup>2</sup>

The first section of Chapter One re-evaluates the genesis of ‘Fall River’ by re-examining Cheever’s relationships with *The New Republic*, American communism, and

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<sup>1</sup> Blake Bailey, *Cheever: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 55; Douglas Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p. 317.

<sup>2</sup> James E. O’Hara, *John Cheever: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989), pp. 5-6.

the little magazine community in the early 1930s. This section makes a number of claims. First, although communist and homosexual literary critic Newton Arvin encouraged Cheever to write about the American working class, *The New Republic's* rejection of Cheever's piece of reportage about the Nazi Party exerted a far greater influence on his decision to experiment with non-fiction and fiction elements in his work and target the result at more radical little magazines. Second, while Cheever socialised with left-wing writers and artists in Boston and New York, he did not engage artistically or politically with either the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) or the John Reed Club of Boston between 1930 and 1931. David A. Taylor contends that Cheever was a member of the John Reed Club of New York 'for a while' after moving to the city in 1934, but he offers no corroborating evidence to support his claim and notes that, despite an admiration for Russian writers such as Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, Cheever was never a 'politically opinionated' writer.<sup>3</sup> The absence of contact between Cheever and these organisations in the Boston area between 1930 and 1932 suggests a reticence on the part of Cheever to allow his writing to be subjugated to political ideology. Suffice it to say, Cheever was far more involved with the little magazine community in the early 1930s. Third, and on a related note, Cheever did not necessarily intend for 'Fall River' to appear in a communist little magazine; based on surviving correspondence and the chronology of publication, it is more likely that Cheever wrote the story with the apolitical and experimental little magazine *Pagany: A Native Quarterly* in mind, a publication that he read and corresponded with in 1930.

'Fall River' was not a completely apolitical story, however. The story grew just as much out of Cheever's personal experience of American communism in the early 1930s as

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<sup>3</sup> David A. Taylor, *Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. 190.

it did his aesthetic interest in the innovative American writing that Pagany and other little magazines were publishing. The second section of Chapter One addresses this tension by evaluating Cheever's documentary approach to writing 'Fall River', which was informed by his local knowledge of New England and its historically important textile industry. It also assesses the extent to which the story can be read as a criticism of the politicisation of writers and literature in the United States during the 1930s.

Joseph Freeman claimed that middle-class writers who 'went left' in the 1930s 'abandoned the poem, the novel, and the play and began to write solemn articles on unemployment, fiscal policy, and foreign trade' after they were forced 'toward the viewpoint of the workers' by the difficult economic conditions of the period.<sup>4</sup> Cheever expresses his resistance to the political turn of middle-class writers as Freeman understood it by using literary techniques, including abstraction and repetition, to undermine and defamiliarise the journalistic discourse of the story.

Generically, 'Fall River' can be understood as a self-conscious variation on the "strike story", a common form of American proletarian fiction that appeared regularly in little communist magazines like *The Left*. Jon-Cristian Suggs explains that the movement of a strike story is 'always away from the individual or even the biological family as the locus of value formation and realization to class affinity'.<sup>5</sup> 'Usually', Suggs continues, 'this transfer is foreshadowed by scenes wherein the comradeship of labor is made momentarily manifest by personal sacrifice in times of physical danger, when a worker risks his life for a comrade who is not a member of his own family'.<sup>6</sup> There are no equivalent empathetic acts in 'Fall River'. The story ends with its middle-class narrator, an obvious surrogate for

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Freeman, 'Introduction', in *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*, ed. by Granville Hicks and others (London: Martin Lawrence, 1935), pp. 9-28 (p. 26).

<sup>5</sup> Jon-Cristian Suggs, 'Marching! Marching! And the Idea of the Proletarian Novel', in *The Novel and the American Left: Critical Essays on Depression-Era American Fiction*, ed. by Janet Galligani Casey (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2004), pp. 151-71 (p. 158)

<sup>6</sup> Suggs, 'Marching! Marching! And the Idea of the Proletarian Novel', p. 158.

Cheever, leaving the city in a ‘new shiny car’ that belongs to his middle-class friend Paul, a ‘prosperous’ business owner who lives in a farmhouse.<sup>7</sup> In the sense that class affinity is the impelling force of the story, ‘Fall River’ can be read as a subtle parody of the strike story and, by implication, a rejection of the broader politico-cultural movement responsible for the proletarian and working-class fiction on the part of Cheever.

### **Cheever, the Little Magazine, and Communism**

O’Hara argues, not incorrectly, that ‘[rejection] replaced acceptance with a vengeance’ for Cheever between 1931 and 1935.<sup>8</sup> Yet O’Hara is mistaken when he identifies ‘Fall River’ and two other experimental stories that Cheever published in little magazines, ‘Late Gathering’ (in *Pagany*, October-December 1931) and ‘Bock Beer and Bermuda Onions’ (*The Hound & Horn*, April-June 1932), as portents ‘of the need [for Cheever] to make his stories comprehensible [...] to magazine editors’ prior to the breakthrough sale of ‘Buffalo’ to *The New Yorker* in 1935.<sup>9</sup> This is because Cheever did not target these stories at the large-circulation magazine marketplace; he wrote them expressly for little magazines instead.

Blake Bailey acknowledges this when he observes that ‘Fall River’ was saleable because ‘elegant Hemingway pastiches on proletarian themes were at the height of their vogue as most of the arty little magazines had been replaced by organs of radical propaganda’ in the early 1930s.<sup>10</sup> Here, Bailey suggests, without saying as much, that

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<sup>7</sup> John Cheever, ‘Fall River’, *The Left: A Quarterly Review of Radical and Experimental Art*, Summer and Autumn 1931, 70-72, repr. in *Fall River and Other Uncollected Stories* by John Cheever, ed. by Franklin H. Dennis (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2009), pp. 1-8 (p. 7). Because there are no differences between these versions of ‘Fall River’, further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>8</sup> O’Hara, *John Cheever: A Study of the Short Fiction*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> O’Hara, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 55.

Cheever did not write 'Fall River' for politically motivated or artistically pretentious reasons; rather, Cheever calibrated the story to meet the stylistic and thematic demands of a non-commercial literary marketplace populated with radical little magazines. Cheever would use this strategy more frequently during the second half of the 1930s when he was writing stories for an array of large-circulation publications including *The New Yorker*, *Collier's Weekly*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

However, neither O'Hara nor Bailey considers whether or not Cheever's decision to write 'Fall River' was influenced by the condition of his relationship with *The New Republic* in 1931. O'Hara presents Cheever's break with the mainstream in terms of artistic experimentation by suggesting that, following the publication of 'Expelled', Cheever wanted both to test his stylistic range and 'to break out of the strictly autobiographical mold'.<sup>11</sup> This led Cheever to engage in 'a brief flirtation with impressionism' between 1931 and 1932, and to make the 'damaging mistake of trying to sound like another Hemingway' until the early 1940s.<sup>12</sup> There are several issues with this line of argument. As Cheever had only published one autobiographical story by the summer of 1931, it is unlikely that he was frustrated with, or had exhausted this approach to writing. 'Fall River' and 'Late Gathering' are themselves based on Cheever's personal experiences of New England life during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Furthermore, the intellectual disillusionment that influenced Cheever to write about the American working class in 'Fall River' is present beneath the surface level of the narrative of 'Expelled'. In his debut, Cheever encodes the personal anger he felt towards the systemic self-delusion of American society both before and after the Great Crash of 1929 in the student-narrator's critique of the ethos and culture of preparatory school. Their stylistic differences aside,

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<sup>11</sup> O'Hara, John Cheever: A Study of the Short Fiction, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> O'Hara, p. 5.

‘Fall River’ is structurally and thematically similar to ‘Expelled’ in the way that it uses a micro-event—the closure of a textile mill—to make larger claims about Depression-era American society.

O’Hara ignores any economic considerations Cheever made in shifting his attention to writing for little magazines instead of large-circulation ones. Bailey, meanwhile, recounts but fails to connect a sequence of events involving *The New Republic* and Cheever during the summer of 1931 that offer the most plausible economic explanation as to why Cheever decided to write short stories for the non-commercial magazine marketplace. Towards the end of summer in 1931, Cheever returned from a walking tour of Europe with his older brother Fred ‘appalled by [the] Nazi militarism’ he had witnessed in Germany.<sup>13</sup> Cheever either pitched the idea of, or submitted a non-fiction article about his experiences of Nazi Germany to *The New Republic* but, as he explained to his friend and mentor Malcolm Cowley, the literary editor of *The New Republic* who bought his short story ‘Expelled’ (1 October 1930), ‘no one, especially Bruce Bliven [then editor-in-chief of the magazine], seemed interested in my accounts of the National Socialist Party’.<sup>14</sup> Frustrated, Cheever turned to Newton Arvin, an instructor in the English department at Smith College, for literary advice. Arvin informed Cheever that his work was ‘contemptible’ because it failed to address the experience of the American working class.<sup>15</sup> Bailey claims that Cheever immediately hitchhiked to Fall River, a cotton textile city in Bristol County, Massachusetts, and took a room in a boarding house inhabited by unemployed mill workers.<sup>16</sup> He was determined to write about their experiences.

A biographer focused on narrative rather than analysis, Bailey does not consider the extent to which *The New Republic*’s rejection acted as a catalyst for Cheever to write for

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<sup>13</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> Bailey, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Bailey, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, p. 55.



the non-commercial magazine marketplace in the early 1930s. It is more accurate to argue that Bliven's rejection persuaded Cheever that he faced difficult odds trying to publish his work regularly in large-circulation magazines at this early stage of his literary career. Cheever turned to little magazines in this moment because, despite their limited circulation, they were dedicated to publishing the work of relative unknowns and bringing writers, editors, and publishers, many of whom were struggling in difficult economic conditions in the early 1930s, into contact with each other. Wixson stresses that many radical little magazines 'replaced one kind of literary politics with another' eventually, but even so, they were more likely to publish experimental art, literature, unconventional social ideas, and political theories than were their large-circulation counterparts.<sup>17</sup>

The receptivity of little magazines to experimentation played an important role in Cheever's professionalisation. Not only did writing for little magazines afford him greater imaginative flexibility when it came to selecting the style and subject matter of the stories he was writing, but it also allowed him to work through some of his literary influences, which included Hemingway and John Dos Passos in the 1930s, in order to find his own voice. Viewed in this way, then, Cheever's decision to produce a range of fiction pieces for an ideologically diverse array of little magazines including communist *The Left*, avant-garde *Pogany*, and scholarly *The Hound & Horn* instead of the topically and formally restrictive *The New Republic* between 1931 and 1932 was not the result of an ill-conceived, youthful impulse towards political radicalism and unprofitable artistic experimentation on his part as O'Hara and Bailey posit. Cheever was merely displaying the professional opportunism typical of young freelance writers who lived from sale to sale.

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<sup>17</sup> Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990*, p. 318.

Had Cheever been politicised by his dismal experiences of elite education and Nazism rather than frustrated by Bliven's rejection of his journalism, it seems likely that he would have had some personal or professional involvement with the John Reed Club of Boston, the local branch of a national Communist organisation that not only sought to develop working-class writers and artists, but also to encourage all writers, artists, and intellectuals in the United States to identify and engage socially, politically, and creatively with the American working class in an effort to create a mass proletarian movement. But despite associating with an eclectic mix of radical writers and artists, including Cowley, E. E. Cummings, Hazel Hawthorne Werner, and John Wheelwright, in the bohemian intellectual circles of Boston, Provincetown, and New York in which he moved during this period, there is no clear evidence of Cheever being a member of the CPUSA or the John Reed Club of Boston in the 1930s.

The John Reed Clubs were named in honour of John Reed, the American journalist, poet, and activist who wrote *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), a first-hand account of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, and helped to found the Communist Party in the United States. The creation of the John Reed Clubs was inspired in part by the Proletcult, a politico-cultural federation of local cultural societies and avant-garde artists set up outside of Communist Party control in Soviet Russia in 1917. The Proletcult sought to improve the Russian proletariat's low level of education and experience with cultural production so that they could develop their own distinct class culture. To this end, the Proletcult established factory cells and a network of studios to discover and nurture the artistic and intellectual talent of the working-class. Whereas both the Party leadership and those at the grassroots level of the Proletcult favoured a break with Russia's aristocratic cultural heritage altogether, the leaders of the Proletcult, which included Bolshevik philosopher A. A. Bogdanov and the People's Commissar of Education of Soviet Russia

A. V. Lunacharsky, defended the right of workers to critically evaluate and incorporate aspects of cultural forms that were alien or hostile to their class, such as bourgeois literature published during the Tsarist era.<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of creating a similar politico-cultural movement in the United States, Jewish-American Communist Michael Gold, editor-in-chief of *The New Masses* between 1928 and 1934, interpreted the aims of the Proletcult in Russia as an extension of Western concerns with workers' education and a rejection of the bourgeoisie's autotelic understanding of art.<sup>19</sup>

Eric Homberger argues that Gold, in conjunction with the editorial board of *The New Masses*, formed the inaugural branch of the John Reed Club along these ideological lines in New York in the autumn of 1929.<sup>20</sup> Homberger asserts that the decision-making process responsible for the establishment of the club represented a mixture of ideology and pragmatism: pragmatism because the readers who regarded *The New Masses* as a literary-art magazine rather than as a political organ were not wholly supportive of the proletarian writing Gold was publishing in it during the late 1920s. As Gold did not want to endanger the existence of *The New Masses*, he made the commercial decision to adopt a less doctrinaire editorial policy that prioritised the publication of writing by more established middle-class writers and intellectuals.<sup>21</sup> Alan M. Wald counters this foundational narrative, using Rose Carmon, the wife of Walt Carmon, the managing editor of *The New Masses* from 1929 to 1932, to corroborate the anecdotal claim of the leftist writer Norman Macleod that the John Reed Club of New York was formed after Carmon ejected a group of young writers who had been spending too much time at *The New Masses* office with an

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<sup>18</sup> Eric Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics, 1900-39: Equivocal Commitments* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 122.

<sup>19</sup> Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics*, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Homberger, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> Homberger, p. 129.

instruction to ‘go out and form a club’.<sup>22</sup> In either case, and especially given the courting of liberal writers with substantial commercial and critical reputations by *The New Masses*, Gold and Carmon appear to have intended the John Reed Club of New York as a consolatory platform for younger, less well-established writers to develop their talents.

Wald notes that the clubs ‘created a new complication’ insofar as they attracted ‘many Young Turks with ultrarevolutionary opinions’, many of whom were not members of the working class but unemployed and unpublished high-school and college graduates seeking careers in journalism.<sup>23</sup> Some of these members turned on Gold and Carmon, criticising both their editorial pandering to middle-class writers and what they perceived to be their ideological indiscipline as members of the CPUSA.<sup>24</sup> The John Reed Clubs of the United States only received institutional recognition from the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (IURW) after the organisation accepted Party criticism made at the second congress of the union in Kharkov in November 1930 that its preference for placing proletarian literature in the context of class rather than content and ideology was damaging the project.<sup>25</sup> Gold agreed on this point with the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. In ‘Notes from Kharkov’, published in *The New Masses* in March 1931, he explained that it was vital for John Reed Clubs and other auxiliary groups to enlist ‘all friendly intellectuals into the ranks of the revolution’.<sup>26</sup> These internecine difficulties did not prevent the John Reed Clubs from expanding rapidly, however. By 1934, there were

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<sup>22</sup> Macleod quoted Carmon in an interview with William Ruben on March 28 1969; Rose Carmon confirmed Macleod’s version of events in an interview with Ruben on April 25 1969. Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 105, 362n.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 206.

<sup>24</sup> Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time*, p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics*, pp. 137-39.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Gold, ‘Notes from Kharkov’, *New Masses*, March 1931, pp. 4-6.

thirty clubs in cities across the United States and over twelve thousand registered members.<sup>27</sup>

A letter Cheever sent to Elizabeth Ames, the executive director of Yaddo, an artists' working community in Saratoga Springs, New York in the spring of 1933 suggests that he was aware of the John Reed Club of Boston but dismissive of its personal and professional value to him. Pitching a novel that examined what he referred to as 'the horror and the glory' of the city to Ames in the final paragraph of the letter, Cheever described '[the] Communists [...] clubbed in front of a staid, Georgian facade [sic]'.<sup>28</sup> The verb 'clubbed' suggests that Cheever was referring specifically to members of the John Reed Club in this description. The 'staid, Georgian facade' was probably the exterior of the club's first headquarters, the basement of 825 Boylston Street in Back Bay, a neighbourhood of Boston.<sup>29</sup> The club ran a number of cultural activities at this address: the dance club met on Tuesdays, the writers' group on Wednesdays, the artists' group on Thursdays, and the dramatic group on Fridays.<sup>30</sup> There are no surviving records of club membership or attendance and minutes from the various group meetings at the Boylston Street address. But neither *Red Boston*, the organ of the Communist Party in Boston before the establishment of a John Reed Club in the city around 1930 or 1931, nor *Leftward*, which superseded *Red Boston* and was published monthly by the club from November 1932 to December 1934, feature any contributions from Cheever.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Homberger, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> New York, New York Public Library, Yaddo Records, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (herewith Yaddo Records, NYPL), Series V. Yaddo Corporation Records 1926-1980, A. Guest Files 1926-1980, 1. 1926-1940, John Cheever to Elizabeth Ames, [n.d.], c. Spring 1933.

<sup>29</sup> This information appears on the verso of the cover of the first issue of *Leftward*, November 1932.

<sup>30</sup> *Leftward*, June 1933, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> There is no evidence whatsoever of Cheever writing under a pseudonym during the 1930s. If he published work in *Red Boston/Leftward*, he would have done so either as 'John' or 'Jon' Cheever. After making his fiction debut in *The New Republic* as John Cheever in 1930, he instructed the editors of *The Left* to print his name as Jon Cheever in 1931. Cheever stopped spelling his name this way after Richard Johns, the editor of *Pagany*, returned the 'h' to 'Jon' prior to printing 'Late Gathering' in the October-December 1931 issue of the magazine.

In an interview published in *Sequoia*, Stanford's literary magazine, in 1976, Cheever attempted to clarify his reluctance to become extensively involved in the American communist project at both the local and national level in the early 1930s. Recalling 'the force of the Communist Party in the United States as a literary lever' when he was in his late teens, Cheever explained that he felt alienated from the political movement: 'I was not concerned with social reconstruction. I was concerned with literature as an intimate and acute means of communication'.<sup>32</sup> The appeal of the John Reed Clubs to socially conscious writers who, like Cheever, were not communists was undermined by the intimidating presence of a Party faction that was less interested in literature than it was in using the clubs for political work. Homberger suggests that, in most cases, the process of selection within the clubs probably favoured political commitment over creativity and aesthetic expression.<sup>33</sup>

The editorial transformation that *Leftward* underwent between 1932 and 1934 is indicative of the way in which political commitments were prioritised in John Reed Clubs. Until the summer of 1933, *Leftward* was comparable to a radical little magazine in content. A typical issue of *Leftward* featured opinion, journalism, criticism, poetry, and illustrations. Most of the content published in the magazine was revolutionary in spirit, engaging as it did with the subject of class struggle in the United States and defending the achievements of communism in Russia, rather than experimental or innovative. The November 1932 issue of *Leftward* published 'O Leisure Class' by Mary Ahlquist, a vitriolic poem that likened the marks left by the 'naked footsteps' of the 'oiled, sponged, [and] rubbed' American wealthy elite to 'dark pools of swarming bacteria'; and 'Contrasts-1932' by Alexander Levitt, a full-page illustration consisting of two panels, one

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<sup>32</sup> Dana Gioia, Millicent Dillon, and Michael Stillman, 'An Interview with John Cheever', *Sequoia* (Summer/Autumn 1976), pp. 29-35, in *Conversations with John Cheever*, ed. by Scott Donaldson (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1987), p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics*, p. 130.

a line drawing of a fully-operational Russian factory headed and tailed by the captions ‘SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF FIVE YEAR PLAN’ and ‘U. S. S. R’, and the other a line drawing of an American city street packed with unemployed people tailed by the caption ‘U. S. A. 16,000,000 UNEMPLOYED’.<sup>34</sup> This is not to say that Leftward lacked a sense of humour. The magazine also ran a section called ‘The Little Red Notebook’, an irreverent leftist variation on The New Yorker’s ‘Talk of the Town’, which printed short political, satirical, and humorous news items. In the November 1932 issue of Leftward, a reader reported seeing a handwritten sign hung on the door of a shop-front in Alabama that read ‘Gone out to lynch’.<sup>35</sup> In October 1934, however, Leftward became *Leftward: New England’s Revolutionary Review*, a shorter, more programmatically political publication in a newspaper format that featured less poetry. Cheever agreed with the communists that capitalism was responsible for the economic crisis in the United States, but he was too anti-political a writer to tolerate a decision process that favoured political commitments over individual aesthetic autonomy and development. The short story, his preferred mode of literary expression, was also severely underrepresented in the pages of Leftward. For these reasons, it is unlikely that Cheever identified the John Reed Club of Boston as either an optimum creative environment in which to discuss his work with other writers or Leftward a viable publishing platform for it.

Cheever instead targeted ‘Fall River’ at one of the many radical literary magazines being published in the United States during the early 1930s. Outside of his professional dealings with the mainstream magazine marketplace in 1930, Cheever corresponded with Richard Johns, the editor of *Pogany*, a broad and inclusive literary quarterly that appeared between 1930 and 1933. Before meeting Johns in person and submitting ‘Late Gathering’

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Ahlquist, ‘O Leisure Class’, *Leftward*, November 1932, p. 3; Alexander Levitt, ‘Contrasts-1932’, *Leftward*, November 1932, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Warner Wolcott, ‘The Little Red Notebook’, *Leftward*, November 1932, p. 20.

to the magazine in the summer of 1931, Cheever sent him a letter of complaint about an opinion piece he ran in the October-December 1930 issue of *Pagany* concerning the demise of *transition*, an experimental literary review based in Paris that had folded a few months earlier.<sup>36</sup> Cheever began and ended his letter with praise for Johns' short story 'Solstice', which also appeared in the October-December issue of *Pagany*. But the crux of the letter was a charge of hypocrisy against Johns: 'when a publication like *pagany* [sic] prints an article on the publication that was *transition* giving it an all around hell for its enormous strength and incongruity [...] there is something funny', remarked Cheever.<sup>37</sup> This letter is important because it shows that Cheever was an informed reader of little magazines who was taking an interest both in their editorial policy and their content from late 1930. More importantly, it is evidence that Cheever was considering writing short stories for little magazines instead of large-circulation publications.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way in which Cheever bookended his brief complaint with two pieces of praise for 'Solstice' in his letter to Johns. A few months earlier, in the spring of 1930, Joseph Vogel, an established worker-writer who was editor of prose at *Blues* (he resigned when Ford changed the capital letters in a James T. Farrell story to lowercase ones) and publishing work in *The Anvil* and other little magazines including *Pagany* on a regular basis during this period, criticised what he perceived to be a similar instance of editorial hypocrisy on the part of Johns far more vehemently after he rejected Vogel's 'Peace Conference', a satire of Depression-era American society. Notwithstanding having his fiction fragment 'Section VIII: From a Work in Progress' appear in the debut issue of *Pagany*, Vogel was irritated by Johns' aversion to the formally

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<sup>36</sup> Johns recalled being introduced to Cheever through a mutual friend in East Gloucester, Massachusetts after publishing the July-September issue of *Pagany* in the summer of 1931. Shortly after their first meeting, Johns invited Cheever to a party hosted by the actress Doris Rich. Stephen A. Halpert, ed., *A Return to Pagany 1929-1932: The History, Correspondence, and Selections from a Little Magazine* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 331-32.

<sup>37</sup> John Cheever to Richard Johns, [n.d.], c. October 1930, in Halpert, *A Return to Pagany 1929-1932*, p. 160.



and stylistically inventive ‘Peace Conference’, an intermittently absurd and profound conversation between a scientist, a lunatic, a religionist, a manufacturer, a capitalist, a poet, a politician, a labourer, a philosopher, a psychoanalyst, an engineer, a dancer, a social worker, a philosopher, and a group of spectators, structured by Vogel like a one-act play.

In a letter to Johns dated April 29 1930, Vogel wrote:

Your manifesto in *Pagany* No. 1 was excellent...like most other manifestos. But you will find [...] that *Pagany* will not achieve [sic] its worthy goal of presenting a cross section of Amer. Literature. No magazine can...as long as it has to be edited by one man of a group with similar ideals. [...]

‘Peace Conference’---regardless of its merit---satirised modern poets as well as politicians. Perhaps that is what you don’t take to the piece. More likely, that is why it doesn’t fit in *Pagany*, which publishes a number of artists who lend themselves to satire.<sup>38</sup>

‘Peace Conference Spasm One Nine Three One’, as Vogel retitled the submission, was eventually published a year later in the debut issue of *The Left*. In contrast to the critically astute and more aesthetically assured Vogel, Cheever appears to have been concerned about offending Johns in his letter. This is most likely because Cheever, a young, non-professional writer with just one published story to his name in the winter of 1930, was wary of undermining his chances of selling a story to *Pagany*. The tact Cheever deploys in his letter of complaint to Johns can therefore be understood as an early example of literary professionalism on his part.

Johns did not reply to Cheever in 1930. He later informed Stephen A. Halpert that while he welcomed critical comment and assessment of the material he published in

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Vogel to Richard Johns, April 29 1930, in Halpert, *A Return to Pagany*, pp. 98-99.

Pagany, he refused to give editorial approval to one opinion above another, lest he compromise his open editorial policy.<sup>39</sup> (A caveat to this is that Johns did correspond with Vogel following his complaint, however). Johns conceived Pagany in 1929 as a forum for ‘the best and most exciting American writing being done, primarily from the experience of American writers’ and regardless of their affiliation with constrictive literary camps.<sup>40</sup> The magazine typically featured a mixture of poetry, fiction, and critical writing by published novelists and poets, editors of other little magazines, and, later on in the life of the publication, upcoming young writers. The fiction and poetry Johns selected for publication ranged in style from realist and proletarian to self-consciously experimental. For example, Pagany’s debut issue, which was published on 1 January 1930, featured poems by Gertrude Stein, Kenneth Rexroth, Forrest Anderson, Norman Macleod, Charles Henri Ford, and Louis Zukofsky; a diverse range of fiction by Mary Butts, Erskine Caldwell, Edwin Seaver, Margery Latimer, and Vogel; and a piece of critical writing on Stein’s development as an artist by William Carlos Williams, a supporter and frequent contributor to the magazine who refused to accept any ‘official editorial status’.<sup>41</sup>

Given his readerly appreciation for Pagany, it is plausible that Cheever wrote ‘Fall River’ with publication in Johns’ literary quarterly in mind. There are a number of circumstantial reasons that support this claim. First, Cheever began working on the story towards the end of summer 1931, the period during which he met Johns in person. As ‘Fall River’ ran to just over one thousand five hundred words, Cheever probably finished it within a couple of weeks of returning from the city. Second, the ‘Notes on Contributors’ section of the ‘Summer and Autumn 1931’ issue of *The Left* in which ‘Fall River’

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<sup>39</sup> Halpert, *A Return to Pagany*, p. 94.

<sup>40</sup> Halpert, *A Return to Pagany*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> William Carlos Williams to Richard Johns, July 12 1929, in Halpert, *A Return to Pagany*, p. 11.

appeared states that Cheever had previously contributed a story to Pagany.<sup>42</sup> This is interesting because the second issue of *The Left*, which was delayed by financial problems arising from difficulties in collections from bookstores and newsstands and a low rate of subscription following its launch, includes an advertisement for the July-September 1931 issue of Pagany, not the October-December 1931 issue of the magazine in which Johns ran Cheever's story 'Late Gathering'.<sup>43</sup> This discrepancy suggests that the editors of *The Left* knew about Cheever's impending publication in Pagany prior to completing their work on the second issue. Third, Cheever was not in the habit of submitting his work to magazines during the 1930s without meeting their editorial staff beforehand. He met Cowley before submitting 'Expelled' to *The New Republic* in 1930 and he only submitted two stories to *The New Yorker* in 1935 after Cowley introduced him to the magazine's then head of fiction, Katharine S. White, at a party. Cheever conducted himself similarly with regard to Johns and Pagany in 1931. Having corresponded with Johns in the winter of 1930 and socialised with him as an acquaintance in the summer of 1931, Cheever acquired enough confidence to submit 'Late Gathering' to Pagany.

The *Left* typically featured work by writers who were editors of and/or regular contributors to other little magazines. In contrast to these individuals, which included Macleod, Zukofsky, Gregory, and Seaver to name a few, Cheever was only just beginning to orient himself within the different types of intellectual circles that were producing little magazines in the early 1930s. Because Cheever had no personal or professional relationships with the editorial staff at *The Left*, then, it is unlikely that he would have submitted 'Fall River' to the magazine as an unsolicited manuscript.

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<sup>42</sup> 'Notes on Contributors', *The Left*, Spring and Autumn 1931, p. 94.

<sup>43</sup> The editors of *The Left* introduced the second issue of the magazine by way of explaining the struggle to produce it. *The Left*, Spring and Autumn, p. 2.

Befriending the editor of *Pagany* was one way in which Cheever potentially addressed this disadvantage. The extent to which Johns assisted Cheever outside of publishing 'Late Gathering' in *Pagany* cannot be accurately determined due to a lack of surviving archival material. Nevertheless, it is clear that Johns was in a unique position to introduce Cheever's work to the editors of *The Left* in 1931. The insularity of the little magazine community was such that writer-editors were not only dependent on each other for free exchange advertising, but also on the solicitation of new material from their respective literary stables during the Depression. Johns ran advertisements for *The Left* in *Pagany*; he also received the support of Ford, editor of the experimental little magazine *Blues*, while planning the first issue of *Pagany* in 1929. Ford encouraged some of the regular contributors to *Blues*, including Rexroth, Anderson, Macleod, and Caldwell, to get in touch with Johns about appearing in *Pagany*. Ford's intervention resulted in the development of a reciprocal working relationship between Johns and Macleod that endured throughout the first half of the 1930s. As well as contributing poems and stories to *The Morada*, a little magazine Macleod edited, Johns also published poems by Macleod in every issue of *Pagany* between January 1930 and October 1931. This connection expanded to include *The Left* in the spring of 1931 when Macleod became a contributing editor at the magazine. During the planning of the second issue in the summer of 1931, Macleod also introduced Johns to John Wesley 'Jack' Conroy, another influential proletarian writer-editor and contributing editor at *The Left*, at a Sunday picnic for workers in the Bronx.<sup>44</sup>

'Fall River' was the result of a similar engagement with the working class on the part of Cheever. The story would not have been out of place in *Pagany* in 1931 because Johns published a small selection of proletarian material in which leftist writers examined the psychological and social impact of the Depression on different strata of American society

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<sup>44</sup> Halpert, *A Return to Pagany*, pp. 304-05.

throughout the lifespan of the magazine. Notable amongst these are ‘The Boss’, a chapter from Seaver’s book *The Company* (1930), a polemic against American office culture, which appeared in the debut issue of *Pagany*, and Vogel’s short story ‘Counterfeit’, which Johns ran in the July-September 1931 issue of the magazine.<sup>45</sup> Seaver describes the behaviour, personality, and character of a corporate vice-president from the resentful perspective of a group of office clerks under his employ in ‘The Boss’. In the paranoiac ‘Counterfeit’, meanwhile, Vogel considers the prevalence and problem of counterfeit money in the United States during the Depression, narrating the story of a working man in possession of counterfeit money who falls under suspicion when he tries to pay for a sandwich worth twenty cents with a ten dollar bank note in a busy New York cafeteria. Despite the contemporaneity of their subject matter though, ‘The Boss’ and ‘Counterfeit’ were but a small part of a larger miscellany of experimental American writing in the issues of *Pagany* in which they appeared. Johns refused to think in terms of right or left, realist or modernist, when planning the contents of each issue. He was also aware that the diversity and opportunity of the little magazine marketplace in the early 1930s left him under no obligation to support regular contributors such as Seaver, Vogel, Macleod, and Zukofsky, all of whom were proactively selling their more identifiably proletarian short stories and poems to *The Left* in 1931.

The *Left* was founded by a group of young, communist, middle-class writers—George Redfield, Jay Du Von, Marvin Klein, Robert C. Lorenz, and Willis K. Jordan—in Davenport, Iowa in 1930. The editors of *The Left* followed the example of the *New Masses* by publishing a combination of literature, poetry, and criticism by proletarian and bourgeois writers. Unlike the *New Masses*, however, *The Left* straddled the ideological and

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<sup>45</sup> Edwin Seaver, ‘The Boss’, *Pagany*, January-March 1930, pp. 74-82; Joseph Vogel, ‘Counterfeit’, *Pagany*, July-September 1931, pp. 121-25.

aesthetic division between the two types of little magazine being produced in the United States from the late 1920s onwards: the radical modernist magazines like *Pogany* that proliferated during the early years of the Depression and the proletarian magazines like *The Anvil*, *Left Front*, *Hub*, and *The Dubuque Dial*. These publications aligned their editorial perspective with the social, economic, and political realities of the Midwest, the region in which they were produced.<sup>46</sup> Alan Filreis notes that, in addition to using stills from Soviet films for covers and running a section dedicated to experimental Soviet cinema in the magazine, the editors of *The Left* also refused to distinguish between modernism and left-wing prose and poetry.<sup>47</sup> *The Left* identified strongly with proletarian and revolutionary writers, and much of the content it published was constellated around the experience of the working-class in the United States. Its manifesto implored prospective contributors to experiment with ‘new forms and techniques [...] to express the fresh substance, the faster tempo and rhythms of the new world order’.<sup>48</sup> The aesthetic openness of *The Left* attracted many of the writers who appeared in *Pogany* to its pages, including the aforementioned Macleod, Vogel, Zukofsky, and Seaver; Sherry Mangan, a writer-editor who put Johns into contact with American writers living in England and Paris such as Stein and Robert McAlmon; and Horace Gregory, Solon R. Barber, and Albert Halper as well.

On a per-issue basis, *The Left* printed more proletarian material than *Pogany*. *The Left* devoted a third of the pages in its first issue and three-quarters of the pages in its second issue to proletarian fiction and poetry.<sup>49</sup> The increase in proletarian writing between issues was most likely due to the involvement of Conroy, a worker-writer who edited a

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<sup>46</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, p. 206.

<sup>47</sup> Alan Filreis, ‘Modern Poetry and Anticommunism’, in *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Stephen Fredmen (London: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 173-91, (p. 183).

<sup>48</sup> *The Left: A Quarterly Review of Radical and Experimental Art*, Spring 1931, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> The Spring 1931 issue of *The Left* ran to ninety-three pages; the ‘Summer and Autumn 1931’ issue ran to ninety-four pages.

number of proletarian little magazines including *The Anvil* and *The Rebel Poet*, as a contributing editor. Wixson argues that Conroy was unlike the founding editors of *The Left* because he believed a new radical consciousness would develop amongst workers and intellectuals from ‘the ground up’ rather than through the dissemination of ‘top-down ideological views’.<sup>50</sup> The notion taking shape in Conroy’s mind in the early 1930s was of a ‘polycentric, non-hierarchical and progressive’ cultural revolution that would produce literature for a broad audience of blue- and white-collar workers alike.<sup>51</sup>

Conroy’s ideological stance is reflected in the dynamic between the fictional and non-fictional content of the second issue of *The Left*. In addition to featuring twenty-two pieces of proletarian prose and poetry across thirty two pages, the first issue of *The Left* included two sizable sections of revolutionary criticism and film theory, titled ‘A Critical Department’ (which ran to thirty-nine pages) and ‘A Cinema Department’ (which ran to fourteen pages), respectively. In comparison, the second issue featured sixteen works of proletarian prose and poetry across roughly seventy of its pages. The critical and cinema departments were cut from this issue altogether. This left four non-fiction pieces (one of reportage and three of criticism), eleven pages of film and book reviews, and four pages of correspondence.<sup>52</sup> Most of the drama, short stories, and poems that appeared in the second issue of *The Left* chronicled contemporary American working-class experience in offices, factories, textile mills, cotton fields, and mines in a manner that was more consistent with Conroy’s vision for revolutionary writing centred on workers.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America*, p. 317.

<sup>51</sup> Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America*, p. 265.

<sup>52</sup> ‘A Critical Department’ was intended to draw the reader into the ideological framework of the magazine. Articles included ‘A Footnote for “Proletarian Literature”’ by Bernard Smith and ‘Pure Propaganda and Impure Art’ by Oakley Johnson. ‘A Cinema Department’ explored, amongst other things, the potential for a working-class cinema in the United States and the development of Soviet Cinema.

<sup>53</sup> The reportage in the second issue of *The Left* was ‘Red Dynamo’, a dispatch by Ed Falkowski about the impact of the Five Year Plan on the daily lives of Russians living in and around Moscow. The criticism was: ‘T(h)inker Pound and Other Italian Legends’, a critique of Ezra Pound by Donal McKenzie; ‘Plechanov and the Marxian Approach to Art’, an essay about the influence of Marxist theorist Georgi Plechanov on Russian

Consequently, ‘Fall River’, a part journalistic, part literary account of Depression-era life for unemployed mill workers in a bankrupt New England textile city, was situated amidst an array of proletarian writing including ‘Timeclock’ by Herman Spector, a derisive poem that compared blue- and white-collar labour in the United States; ‘Food’ by Robert Cruden, a bleak sketch about hunger in the city during the Depression; ‘Picket Line’, a short story by Conroy about a railroad strike in the 1920s; ‘Looking for a Job’, a short story by Halper about the interviewing of applicants for the position of shipping clerk at a downtown office that is told partly from the perspective of an African-American lift operator; ‘Design in Cotton Fabric’, a fatalistic poem by Macleod about the life-cycle of Southern American mill workers, a group who were exploited more heavily by their employers than were their Northern counterparts; and ‘Episodes Traced in Iron Ore’, an evocative and sympathetic short story by Joseph Kalar about the conditions of life and work for Kentuckian miners. The editors of *The Left* sequenced ‘Fall River’ between the thematically similar ‘Design in Cotton Fabric’ and ‘Episodes Traced in Iron Ore’ in the magazine, pieces that also depict the experiences of a regionally specific group of American workers. There was no organisation of stories and poems along aesthetic and thematic lines elsewhere in the second issue of *The Left*, however. This material appears instead to have been sequenced according to the space available rather than their interrelationship with each other. *The Left* appears to have belatedly followed the example of the more idiosyncratic Pagany in this respect.

### **‘Fall River’**

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revolutionary art by Leon Dernen; and ‘The Intellectual Cinema’, a translation of a piece about the social effectiveness by the Russian filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein.



Cheever rarely searched beyond his immediate environment—rural and urban New England in the 1930s; the city of New York in the 1940s; the suburbs of New York in the 1950s and 1960s—for material to write about during his career. Despite being instructed to write about the working class by an acquaintance, ‘Fall River’ was no exception to this rule. It is likely that Cheever used New England’s cotton-textile industry as the subject of his proletarian story for personal reasons. Cheever had familial ties to shoe and cotton-textile production, two of the most dominant industries in New England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His father, Frederick Lincoln Cheever, worked as a commercial traveller for a New England boot and shoe manufacturer until the mid-1920s. Several years later, in the spring of 1931, his brother Fred got a job in the advertising department of the Pepperell Manufacturing Company, a large textile manufacturer established near Saco, Maine in 1850 that produced sheets. Cheever based his short story ‘The Autobiography of a Drummer’ (The New Republic, 23 October 1935) on his father’s experiences of selling shoes throughout the United States during the early 1900s. Although ‘Fall River’ is not equivalent to ‘The Autobiography of a Drummer’ in terms of its biographical approach to narrative, it is conceivable that Fred’s employment at Pepperell inspired Cheever to use the cotton-textile industry as the subject of the story.

Cheever set the story in Fall River partly because he lived nearby and partly because, in 1931, Fall River was in a worse fiscal condition than other textile cities in the region. In 1931, Cheever lived forty-five miles north of Fall River with his parents in Wollaston, a neighbourhood in the city of Quincy. Quincy was nineteen miles southwest and thirty-seven miles southeast of Lynn and Lawrence, two other important centres of textile production in New England that were wrestling with shifts in their fortunes in the Depression-struck early 1930s. Cheever chose instead to hitchhike south to Fall River because of the city’s recent, financially fraught history. Mills began closing in Fall River

from 1924 onwards following the failure of the city's corporations to adequately modernise their mills (as their Southern competitors were doing), diversify their product line to include imported fabrics such as silk and rayon rather than cotton print cloth, and curtail the repeated reductions in the wages of mill operatives. In 1920, Fall River had one hundred and eleven mills that contained nearly one eighth of the nation's spindlage and employed thirty thousand workers; by 1930, more than half of these mills were closed.<sup>54</sup> The remaining mills operated just two or three days a week. Part-time hours and substandard wages forced fourteen thousand people to leave the city between 1925 and 1930, nearly eleven per cent of its population.<sup>55</sup> The situation worsened in February 1928 when a fire broke out in Fall River's business district, destroying twenty-five buildings and damaging over a hundred stores and restaurants. The Fall River Board of Assessors estimated the value of the buildings destroyed in the fire at \$10,000,000 (\$138,361,988.30 in 2015) and the value of personal property loss at \$2,200,000 (\$30,439,637.43 in 2015).<sup>56</sup> In January 1931, Fall River declared bankruptcy and filed a bill that granted the state of Massachusetts 'drastic authority in the city's financial affairs' for ten years in an effort to restore its credit, which had suffered as a result of the ailing textile industry and devastating fire causing a falling-off in taxable valuations.<sup>57</sup> As a native to the area, Cheever would have read newspaper reports about the problems affecting Fall River in 1931. The city doubtless appealed to Cheever as a compelling subject for a story about the American working class.

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<sup>54</sup> William F. Hartford, *Where is Our Responsibility? Unions and Economic Change in the New England Textile Industry, 1870-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph A. Conforti, *Another City Upon a Hill: A New England Memoir* (Dartmouth: University of Massachusetts, 2013), p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> 'ASK STATE TO GOVERN FALL RIVER FINANCES: Business Interests Back Bill to Set Up a Board to Restore City's Credit', *New York Times*, 18 January 1931, p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> 'ASK STATE TO GOVERN FALL RIVER FINANCES', p. 37.

Laura Hapke argues that most American proletarian and working-class writers focused on ‘the consciousness of the solo hero, however extensive his travels among the courageous syndicalists or the politically unaware’ during the 1930s, despite the calls of Marxist critics for ‘collective’ short stories and novels in which the whole of the working class was a protagonist rather than an individual character.<sup>58</sup> But tracing the thematic movement of a mill worker from an uninformed outsider to an optimistic striker—the traditional movement of the strike story, as well as other forms of proletarian and working-class writing—was problematical for Cheever given the socio-economic conditions of Fall River in 1931.<sup>59</sup> More than half of the city’s mills were either closed or operating at reduced capacity. Mill workers were isolated, struggling to make ends meet, and working only two or three days a week. Fall River unionism was undermined by interethnic conflict between the American, British, French Canadian, and Portuguese textile operatives. It was also isolated from other New England operatives by its localism. At the same time, even if Cheever had travelled to Fall River with the intention of writing a non-fiction narrative about its mill closures and unemployment, as his earlier experimentation with journalistic reporting and meetings with Arvin suggest he did, he still faced what Melvin P. Levy, a reviewer for *The New Republic*, identified in 1930 as the ‘difficulty of [writing] in terms of the mass, of whole classes of people caught up in the [economic] circumstances of their time’.<sup>60</sup>

‘Fall River’, a series of interrelated observational sketches and descriptions emphasising different foci of daily life in the city in 1931, neither reconciles nor evades

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<sup>58</sup> Laura Hapke, *Labor’s Text: The Worker in American Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p. 11; Jack Conroy, ‘Introduction to the 1982 Edition’, in *The Disinherited: A Novel of the 1930s* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), pp. 25-33 (p. 27).

<sup>59</sup> Hapke identifies two dominant plots in American proletarian and working-class novels and short stories published during the early 1930s: the ‘conversion to radicalism’ and ‘the coming of age of the hero or group’. Hapke, *Labor’s Text: The Worker in American Fiction*, p. 231.

<sup>60</sup> Melvin P. Levy, ‘Michael Gold: Jews without Money’, *New Republic*, 26 March 1930, p. 161.

this difficulty. Key passages of the story describe unemotionally individual mill workers struggling to adapt to adjusted wage scales and unemployment. Another evokes the excitement and uncertainty of life on a picket line for a collective of mill workers in the east end of Fall River. The penultimate paragraph of 'Fall River', meanwhile, defends the mill-owning portion of the Boston plutocracy against charges of injustice by implying that the textile crisis of the 1920s, which was primarily the result of overcapacity in a market that was no longer expanding, and the Great Crash of 1929 were 'enormous conditions that had been thrust into their hands' without warning (6). What is clear is that although Cheever makes workers visible in the story, he does not privilege their perspective over others as left-wing writers such as Conroy, Kalar, Vogel, Caldwell, and Halper did in their proletarian and working-class fiction. If anything, by characterising individual workers in terms of their physical inaction and psychological frailty, as well as conveying the uncertainty of collective action in 'Fall River', Cheever subverts the iconography and discourse of the left during the early years of the Depression, which associated socialist transformation with heroic masculinity rather than situational pragmatism.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, whereas many leftist writers would have focused the main action of their short story or novel on the experience of the working class, whether examining the collective physical and psychological risk that striking posed to workers as Conroy does in 'Picket Line' (1931), or altering the facts of a strike to make their worker-characters more archetypally heroic as Clara Weatherwax did in her proletarian novel *Marching!* (1935), the narrative Cheever threads through the sketches and descriptions that make up 'Fall River' is autobiographical. This is to say that the movement of the narrative involves a pair of young writers chronicling worker disillusionment in Fall River for only a

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<sup>61</sup> Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 221-22.

few months before returning to the comforts of middle-class life, which is what Cheever himself did after compiling enough material to write 'Fall River'. Parodying, by inversion, the dramatic and thematic movement of a strike story is one way in which Cheever expresses his ambivalence towards writing about the working class in complete accordance with communist political doctrine and socialist ideals.

Another is his use of the first-person plural point of view to tell the story. 'Fall River' is narrated by one of the visiting writers, an unnamed surrogate for Cheever. The collective voice enforces and reinforces the social division between the writers and the working-class inhabitants of the city. The narrator refers to himself and his acquaintance as 'we' and the collective unemployed variously as 'people', 'the people', or, metonymically, 'the town', throughout the story (4; 5). He also describes life in the boarding house through a paranoid lens that reveals the writers' mistrust of their working-class subjects:

We had sent our books away in big boxes a month ago. These were things we did not want to do but even in this building of steep brick the people were not the same. The landlady would have taken our books and typewriter and sold them. Cigarettes were not safe if you left them on the table for a minute. (3)

By using the collective voice in this way, Cheever implicates the reader in the middle-class writers' alienation from and wariness of the mill workers. In so doing, Cheever displays an awareness of one of the ideological dilemmas at the heart of American literary radicalism in the 1930s: the problematic relation between bourgeois cultural authority and working-class cultural production.<sup>62</sup> Lawrence Hanley observes that, '[at] a certain point [...], texts

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<sup>62</sup> Lawrence Hanley, "'Smashing Cantatas" and "Looking Glass Pitchers": The Impossible Location of Proletarian Fiction', in *The Novel and the American Left: Critical Essays on Depression-Era American Fiction*, ed. by Janet Galligani Casey (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2004), pp. 132-50 (p. 136).

that “speak” for and about subaltern constituencies—working-class, African American, queer—often end up “speaking to”, and claiming recognition from, hegemonic audiences and institutions’.<sup>63</sup> This is arguably true of much of the proletarian material that appeared in radical little magazines in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Despite its political affiliation with communism, *The Left* sourced the majority of its contributors from the same literary talent pool of left-wing or Party-affiliated middle-class writers as did *Pagany* and other avant-garde or apolitical periodicals. The readership of *The Left* and other little magazines was similarly middle class. With the exceptions of material by worker-writers like Conroy and Kalar and worker-correspondents like H. H. Lewis and Ed Falkowski, *The Left* relied for the most part on politicised middle-class authors writing about working-class experience. Cheever acknowledges this culturally and ideologically ambiguous situation in ‘Fall River’ by drawing the attention of the reader to the artifice of his story. The first-person plural point of view allows Cheever to self-reflexively write himself into the narrative of ‘Fall River’ and undermine the presentation of some of the essential details of effective proletarian fiction, which Conroy insisted were ‘a credible picture of the industrial worker, his day-by-day activities, his speech, and his primary concerns’.<sup>64</sup>

The narrator confines his observations of mill workers to three passages in the story. Two of these passages are capsule anecdotes set in the boarding house. The third is an impressionistic description of striking workers occupying a picket line in the east of the city. In the capsule anecdotes, Cheever depicts the negative psychological impact of financial hardship on mill workers, in the form of reduced working hours in the first and unemployment in the second, as a movement towards social isolation. The first capsule anecdote runs to nine lines and describes a disagreement between a landlady who, the

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<sup>63</sup> Hanley, “‘Smashing Cantatas” and “Looking Glass Pitchers”: The Impossible Location of Proletarian Fiction’, p. 136.

<sup>64</sup> Conroy, ‘Introduction to the 1982 Edition’, p. 28.

narrator alleges, made ‘the silence [of the boarding house] miserable with her complaints’ (2), and an employed tenant who cannot afford to pay his rent:

There was a man on the third floor who had a job and who earned ten dollars a week. In the evenings we would see him sitting on the edge of his bed looking slowly about the empty room. The landlady would weep when she saw him and tell him that she must eat and that he must pay his rent. That he would have to pay his rent. The man’s face was square and his hair was straight like plain wood. You will have to pay the rent, the landlady shouted on the small landing outside of his door. He looked at her and closed the door gently. I will pay you the rent next week. His mind was confused with the impossibility of his debt. With the broken face of the landlady shouting for her rent. (2-3)

The narrator describes this incident objectively for the most part, reporting only what he witnessed and overheard in the boarding house. His characterisation of the landlady is unsympathetic, however. In addition to criticising her for making the boarding house ‘miserable with her complaints’, the narrator uses the emotive verbs ‘weep’ and ‘shouting’ to characterise her behaviour as hysterical and alienating, particularly in terms of how her remonstrating forces the impoverished tenant to behave evasively in the boarding house. The narrator characterises the worker more sympathetically than he does the landlady by portraying him as a helpless victim. The worker is ‘confused with the impossibility of his debt’ and his movements, which are described in adverbially deliberate and ponderous ways (he looks ‘slowly’; he shuts his door ‘gently’), reinforce this idea. The narrator also describes the worker having a ‘square’ face and hair ‘straight like plain wood’. Cheever’s intention with this image is not immediately clear but it generates a number of sympathetic associations. The simile of plain wood supports the characterisation of the tenant as a loner

by likening him to raw material or an off-cut of wood remaining after the main pieces have been cut. This is analogous to the tenant's employment situation: he has retained his job but has had his wages, his hours, or both reduced. Plain wood is also impressionless, a detail that corresponds with the passivity of the tenant during the argument. Finally, the physical contrast between the tenant's square wooden head and the 'broken face' of the landlady also suggests their physical resemblance to a pair of puppets that, although still attached to the strings of the textile industry, have been discarded by their capitalist puppeteers, the mill owners. The point Cheever is making in this scene is that neither character is fully responsible for their behaviour in the boarding house. The tenant is paralysed by his debt and the landlady is motivated by hers to harass him, and other tenants, for rent. They are ultimately both victims of the socio-economic conditions in Fall River.

The second of these capsule anecdotes runs to eighteen lines in length and recounts the story of a similarly embattled tenant in the boarding house: an elderly unemployed mill worker who, after spending two months 'going across the river to the city looking for work [...] and coming back across the great river at night talking to the men who did work', falls over and hurts his leg (3). When his leg heals, he loses 'his desire to walk' and only leaves his room to buy food. The narrator adopts a more omniscient and objective perspective in this capsule anecdote. Consequently, the narrator intrudes occasionally into the narration. These intrusions typically take the form of evaluative commentary concerning the emotional response of the old man to his unemployment and subsequent injury: 'At first he could not stand the leisure' (3); 'When his leg was better he had lost all his desire to walk' (4); 'You could see that when the wheels began to turn and the long bands quivered with the sharp motion he would not go back' (4). Overall, however, the narrator maintains distance from the events of this capsule anecdote. He achieves this by using emotionally



neutral adjectives ('great', 'long', 'sharp'), verbs ('going', 'looking', 'talking'), and nouns ('river', 'city', 'room') in sentences that are focused on dispensing objective information about the old man's personal circumstances and daily routine in Fall River.

On the one hand, the confinement of these tenants to their rooms at the end of each narrative is emblematic of Cheever's reluctance to foreground working-class experience in 'Fall River'. On the other hand, their narratives are part of a vacillation between individual and collective working-class experience in the story. In the third passage about workers, the passivity of the disillusioned tenants in the boarding house yields, briefly, to labour activism as Cheever transports the reader to the east end of Fall River where a gathering of workers is on strike and picketing:

In the east the workers had complained and the drums and the pickets and the sound of their complaint in the fine rain was like thunder beneath the hills. The church had stopped it. The church had quieted it but it had not stopped the thunder. The workers were still dissatisfied and in the fine rain they remembered their complaint and the sound of their drums. There were few who could forget the sound of the Internationale and although in the east the wheels were moving again they were moving under a stranger master. They were waiting for hands that knew them and the ways to control their levers. (5)

Cheever prioritises mood over incident in this passage, combining observational details and rhetorical devices to create a vivid atmosphere and draw the reader into the environment. The workers are described as striking in a 'fine rain', an observational detail that not only enhances the dour mood of the city, but also conveys their commitment to protest. They also perform 'The Internationale', the official anthem of the Communist

Party of the Soviet Union. Cheever uses anaphora to establish the atmosphere of the event. The anaphora of the first sentence, ‘and the drums and the pickets and the sound of their complaint’, visually emphasises the rhythm of drums and voices, which, in turn, creates a sense of synaesthesia in the reader. At the same time, the simile comparing the workers’ complaint to ‘thunder beneath the hills’ undermines their display of solidarity. What is typically inferred from thunder is not lightning but that there was lightning.<sup>65</sup> As such, this simile alludes to the deterioration of Fall River unionism, which, prior to the slump in the textile industry during the 1920s, combined conciliatory gestures, market-based economic demands, and shop-floor militancy to potent effect.<sup>66</sup> When Cheever arrived in the city in 1931, mill workers had been enduring annually declining wages, increased work assignments, and mill closures for almost a decade.<sup>67</sup> The Fall River Textile Council had grown apart from workers and passively accepted one wage reduction after another from 1925 onwards.<sup>68</sup> Impoverished and divided along ethnic and technical lines, many workers became situationally pragmatic rather than politically activist during this period. Nevertheless, Cheever attributes strength, in numbers and conviction at least, to the working-class of Fall River for the first and only time in the story in this passage. Insofar as it illustrates the potency of responsible collective action against structures of oppression over individual action, the description of the striking workers marks a point of ideological intersection between ‘Fall River’ and the work of other more politically committed proletarian writers like Conroy.

Although William F. Hartford maintains that most workers were more concerned with economic survival than they were with social justice in the early 1930s, it is plausible

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas E. Hill, *The Concept of Meaning* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 307.

<sup>66</sup> Hartford, *Where is Our Responsibility?*, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Hartford, *Where is Our Responsibility?*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>68</sup> Hartford, pp. 54, 57.

that Cheever witnessed striking over low pay or overwork during his stay in Fall River.<sup>69</sup> The narrator notes that the mill is operating again towards the end of the passage under a ‘strange master’, an oblique reference that suggests a common tactic in labour disputes over money and working hours: business owners employing non-union affiliated workers to undertake the work of union-affiliated striking textile operatives.<sup>70</sup> This being said, the kind of large-scale strike activity Cheever describes in ‘Fall River’ was rare, if not non-existent in the city by 1931. Newspaper reports published during the period corroborate this: after 1928, a year during which there were a number of strikes in Fall River, and before 1934, the year of the general textile strike in New Bedford which rekindled labour activism in the city, very few large-scale strikes or pickets are recorded in newspaper articles about the cotton textile industry in Fall River. Most reports focus instead on the closures and re-openings of mills with adjusted wage scales, a condition Cheever alludes to in the capsule anecdote about the employed tenant but not in this passage.<sup>71</sup> The strike Cheever describes in ‘Fall River’ may therefore be imagined rather than observed. It functions more as an evocative collage that acknowledges historical record—short-lived strikes demanding the restoration of a ten per cent reduction in wages and the implementation of a forty-hour five-day week at the Lincoln Mill, the American Printing Company, and the Algonquin Print Works during the summer of 1928—and the literary presentation of worker solidarity in proletarian fiction.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Hartford, pp. 57-58.

<sup>70</sup> The narrator later claims that if the mills ‘started again by the summer [...] they would still be under foreign control’ (7). This reference is puzzling because there is no evidence of foreign investors and corporations purchasing cotton mills in Fall River during the early 1930s; nor were many members of the immigrant communities of the city, the two largest groups of which were the Portuguese and the French Canadians, rising to positions of prominence within either the rank and file or the main union structures of the city.

<sup>71</sup> ‘FALL RIVER MILL TO REOPEN: Printing Company Cotton Plant to Employ 400 at Adjusted Wage’, *New York Times*, 6 March 1931, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> ‘FALL RIVER STRIKERS ABANDON PICKETING: Textile Head’s Denunciation of Walkout Cools Ardor of Agitators’, *New York Times*, 8 August 1928, p. 37; ‘FALL RIVER STRIKE EXTENDS: 150 Employes [sic] of Algonquin Mill Demand 5-Day Week’, *New York Times*, 10 August 1928, p. 31.

Irrespective of its veracity, the description of workers striking in the east of the city reflects the extent to which 'Fall River' originates not in a sense of class struggle, as proletarian fiction was typically wont to do, but in an impressionistic sense of place. The narrative passages about workers are interspersed with paragraph-length descriptions of the city's mills, harbours, and skyline. Cheever incorporates recurring phrases, images, and motifs into these descriptions of the physical environment to evoke, psychologically and visually, the monotony of daily life in the economically depressed city for its inhabitants as he experienced it. The story opens with a collective description of the interiors of vacant and idle cotton mills in the city:

People had known it for two years but it was obvious in the winter. The mills had stopped and the great wheels were still against the ceilings. The looms blocked off the floor like discarded machinery in an old opera house. On the floors and on the beams and on the brilliant flanks of steel the mist of the web was covered with dust like old snow. (1)

This passage resembles reportage in the sense that it appeals to the reader's senses and possesses a symbolic dimension. Cheever uses the image of an empty stage to emphasise the residual effects of abandonment. One of the most striking features of the passage is the simile of the opera house in the third sentence, which transforms the inactive mills of Fall River into empty stages that are bare not of scenery but of actors and action. Susan Koprince argues that many playwrights use the empty stage as a dramatic device at the beginning of their plays to call immediate attention to the setting and to allow the audience a few moments to examine the dramatic scene and become aware of its symbolic

importance.<sup>73</sup> The simile of the opera house causes the collective portrait of Fall River's mills to function in a similar way to an empty stage at the outset of a play, particularly in terms of how it shapes the mood and pathos of the story going forward. Cheever repeats and alludes to the inaugural image of the empty mill throughout 'Fall River'. Indeed, it becomes the defining symbol of socio-economic and psychological stagnation and isolation in the story.

As well as documenting the daily lives of tenants in the boarding house, Cheever also uses the building, which sits on 'a steep hill' overlooking 'salt marshes and the high gray river moving into the sea' as a vantage point from which to describe the physical appearance of the city's skyline:

The dark city grew up from the river and all winter the spires of the wooden church were held up against the sky like enormous fingers. From our window we could see the piles of the hill out of the river and the dirty houses blown with smoke and blousy with sunlight. [...] The full river moved into the ocean. The great wheels of machinery were still waiting against the ceiling. The round stacks shot out into the sky vacant without the dark plumes of smoke. (2)

Ostensibly, the description in this passage is more impressionistic than specific. Cheever describes the city from the window of his boarding house using visual and tactile textures in a style that synchronises reportage and abstraction: the city is 'dark'; a church's spires are 'like enormous fingers'; the 'dirty houses' (most of which were tenement buildings that housed mill workers) are obscured by 'blown' smoke and 'blousy' sunlight, visual phenomena that introduce movement into static cityscape. The city is characterised in much the same way as the employed tenant is in the story: as a passive object being acted

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<sup>73</sup> Susan Koprince, 'Inge and the Empty Stage', in William Inge: Essays and Reminiscences on the Plays and the Man, eds. Jackson R. Bryer and Mary C. Hartig (North Carolina: McFarland, 2014), pp. 127-36 (p. 127).

upon by its environment. Cheever returns to this notion via the motifs of seasonal change and the river whenever he describes or reflects on the overall condition of the city in the story. In a later paragraph, these motifs are first expressed independently of each other: ‘The winter had come and gone’ (4), is followed, a sentence later, by ‘The river was running always but there was no smoke over the city’ (4). They are next combined and used in conjunction with the image of the empty mill: ‘The river and the seasons came and went but the machinery was quiet and we did not know when it was going to move again’ (4). ‘[Empty] boats resting in the harbors waiting for a cargo’ move not under their own power but ‘back and forth with the currents of the tide’; the seasons also pass the boats by: ‘We had seen them in the summer and if we went back in the spring we knew that they would still be there’ (4). These patterns of abstraction and repeated observation slow narration in ‘Fall River’, thus increasing the degree of contemplation versus action. Most of the description in ‘Fall River’ features these patterns, or variants thereof.

Rereading this description of the Fall River skyline with knowledge of the city’s layout in the early 1930s also draws attention to the accuracy with which Cheever employs architectural, geographical, and spatial detail in his descriptive prose. It is possible to use this description to identify (approximately) the location of Cheever’s boarding house in relation to Fall River, as well as a few of the city’s notable buildings and topographical features. Fall River ‘grew up’ from the Taunton River, the longest coastal river in New England, because the eastern part of the city was higher in elevation than the western part. If Cheever was able to observe the city rising panoramically out of the ‘full river’, then he was viewing Fall River from a boarding house in Somerset, a town to the west of the city, across the Taunton River (see Figure 1). This is corroborated later on in the story when Cheever describes the old, unemployed mill worker ‘walking over the city all day and coming back across the great river at night’ (3). The old man (and Cheever) would have

travelled back and forth between Somerset and Fall River either via the Bridgeman Street Bridge, a four-lane wide drawbridge, or the Slade's Ferry Bridge, a smaller steel swing-span bridge, in 1931. The church that Cheever describes in this passage is probably the Unitarian Society Church. Of the two wooden churches located near Fall River's waterfront (the other being the First Baptist Church) that were visible to someone from across the river, this is the only wooden church that had multiple spires (it had four: see Figures 1 and 2). As for the 'round stacks' of chimneys attached to mills that Cheever notes in the final sentence of the passage, there were several mills along the waterfront with chimney stacks protruding from them (see Figure 3). The narrator's cartographic view of the city from the window of the boarding house has a documentary aspect and value that connects 'Fall River' aesthetically and thematically to the novel-length project about life in New England that he was working on during this period.

It is clear upon reading 'Fall River' that, throughout both his stay in the city and his writing of the story, Cheever experienced the dualism that Freeman claimed 'paralyzed [middle-class writers] as both men and as poets' and precluded some of them from moving politically to the left during the early 1930s. 'As men', explains Freeman, middle-class writers

supported the working class in its struggle for a classless society; [but] as poets, they retained the umbilical cord which bound them to bourgeois culture. Either the man had to follow the poet back to the camp of the bourgeoisie, or the poet had to follow the man into the camp of the proletariat.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Freeman, *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*, p. 20.

Cheever foregrounds this dichotomy formally and stylistically throughout 'Fall River' by mixing direct observation with abstraction, but he does not address it directly until the last few paragraphs of the story, however.

In the final paragraph of 'Fall River', Cheever transplants the action to a middle-class milieu that resembles the bohemian creative environment of Amy Henderson's farmhouse, the setting of 'Late Gathering' and its sequel 'Bock Beer and Bermuda Onions', two further experimental New England-set stories that also combined subjective descriptions of the physical environment with the motif of seasonal change. At the beginning of the final paragraph, the narrator and his acquaintance leave the city in Paul's sports car. They are driven to a 'large white farmhouse' where they meet Mani, Paul's partner (6). 'Fall River' ends with Mani leading the men into a flower garden, stamping a cigarette out on the edge of the garden, and saying, 'It is spring again' (7). The symbolic importance of a character that is willing to discuss the spring cannot be understated in terms of the political context of 'Fall River'. Shortly before leaving the city with Paul, the narrator describes the reluctance of the locals to 'talk about the spring' despite the trees being 'dusty with new buds' and the river 'carrying sticks of bright wood and waste that had come down in the thaw': '[...] there was no doubt about the spring', the narrator asserts, '[and] yet the wheels were not moving and the looms were still like nervous dancers and there were few people who wanted to talk about the spring because of these things' (6). Cheever uses the narrative voice self-reflexively in this excerpt, with the noun 'people' referring to both the mill workers that Cheever met in the city and middle-class American writers who were '[following] the man into the camp of the proletariat' during the Depression.

Whereas the reference to people being unwilling to 'talk about the spring' alludes to the left's rejection of what Gold identified as the infiltration of bourgeois ethics into



proletarian writing, Mani's acknowledgement of spring at the end of 'Fall River' tacitly welcomes such an incursion.<sup>75</sup> Middle-class writers that went left in the early 1930s downplayed their authorship and, in some cases, abandoned fictional genres altogether in order to present the experience of the American working-class as viscerally and as truthfully as they could in their writing. Although Cheever did not identify with this camp of writers, he understood the challenge they were responding to. It was, as Freeman observes, 'no longer an abstract question of art and class' for American writers, 'but a specific challenge: which class?'.<sup>76</sup> In much the same way as the narrator of 'Fall River' leaves the working-class of the city behind for his middle-class friends, so Cheever elected to return to the camp of the bourgeoisie rather than stay in the camp of the proletariat a moment longer than was necessary.

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<sup>75</sup> Gold admonished Conroy for having Larry, the protagonist of his novel *The Disinherited*, '[quote] some romantic verses by Arthur Davidson Ficke to impress a girl in a rubber heel plant'. 'The boy, [Gold] chided, is "literary" in the way of Jack London, a "literariness" that "begins by believing that to mouth a few lush stanzas by Swinburne makes one superior to illiterate drill press hands and factory girls"'. Gold also worried more broadly about mainstream authors finding ways to give historical, cultural, and aesthetic legitimacy to the ethics of the genteel bourgeoisie. Conroy, 'Introduction to the 1982 Edition', p. 27; Gordon Hutner, *What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920-1960* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Freeman, *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*, p. 20.

## Chapter Two:

### **‘And then I sold a mediocre story for forty-five dollars’: John Cheever and the Economics of Writing Short Fiction, 1930-1964**

Chapter Two uses Bernard Lahire’s understanding of professional authorship as a ‘game’ that writers play occasionally, fanatically, or professionally to examine John Cheever’s experience of writing short stories for various publications between the early 1930s and mid-1960s. The first section of Chapter Two uses a mixture of biography and personal correspondence to analyse Cheever’s professional development as a young writer between 1930 and 1945. The second section of Chapter Two assesses Cheever’s relationship with *The New Yorker* between 1945 and 1964 as it manifests in the surviving editorial correspondence in the *New Yorker* Records between Cheever and his editors, as well as in the interoffice correspondence between editors and administrative employees of the magazine. While Cheever held a number of jobs throughout the 1930s, he experienced professional authorship as a central part of his personality from 1940 to 1964. Writing was Cheever’s primary source of income during this period, and he did not take on a secondary job to supplement this income following the end of the Second World War, a decision that made him increasingly dependent on the magazine marketplace.

Lahire argues that this situation simply does not apply to most writers, many of whom, for economic reasons, ‘work a “day job” [and] have a cultural and “personal” foot in literature and a material (and sometimes also “personal”) foot outside of literature (the second foot freeing the first from dependence on market constraints)’.<sup>1</sup> Yet Cheever’s feet, cultural and material, were both planted squarely in the magazine marketplace during the

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Lahire, ‘The Double Life of Writers’, trans. by Gwendolyn Wells, *New Literary History*, 41 (Spring 2010), 443-65, (p. 445).

interwar and postwar years. Chapter Two contends that writing stories for *The New Yorker* was Cheever's 'day job', and selling the stories it rejected to other magazines was, at least until the sales of the film rights to the *Wapshot* novels and 'The Swimmer' (*The New Yorker*, 18 July 1964) in 1964, the only alternative he entertained in terms of meeting his financial needs. This meant that, for better or worse, Cheever earned his living from writing short stories for publication in magazines for more than half of his literary career, and writing novels for the remainder.

In *Home Before Dark: A Biographical Memoir of John Cheever by His Daughter* (1984), Susan Cheever overlooks the fact that her father arguably imposed these economic constraints on himself in order to expose his work to the largest possible readership, a decision that indicates a strong literary ambition on his behalf as well as a certain degree of pragmatism about the difficulties inherent in producing novels at a sustained pace. Cheever's daughter is also resistant to the fact that even if *The New Yorker* could not pay her father what he felt he was worth once he became a published novelist, the magazine provided her father with a drawing account of two thousand dollars typically reserved for employees, and his editors did not hesitate to issue advance payments for his stories when he requested them. These perks ensured Cheever was a relatively well-paid freelance contributor in the context of the magazine's payment system throughout much of his career; they also helped to alleviate some of his intermittent financial difficulties. Although writing short fiction for magazines between 1935 and 1964 did not provide Cheever and his family with enough money to live on, it helped Cheever to share his work with a national readership, many of whom went on to purchase volumes of his short stories and novels. Ultimately, the professional relationship Cheever forged with *The New Yorker* during this period was integral to his commercial success in the long-term.

### **A Familial Perspective: Susan Cheever's Critique of The New Yorker**

Susan Cheever argues that The New Yorker's payment system for fiction contributors left her father confused and resentful, despite the strong professional and personal bonds he developed with his editors at the magazine, William Maxwell and Gustave S. Loblano.<sup>2</sup> Cheever recalls that her father published six stories in The New Yorker in 1959 and received cheques as 'diverse' as \$792 for 'A Woman Without a Country' (The New Yorker, 12 December 1959) and \$2170 for 'The Events of That Easter' (The New Yorker, 16 May 1959) without explanation.<sup>3</sup> 'Sometimes,' Cheever elaborates, 'my father expected a large check for a long story, only to find that it had been applied to money taken from his drawing account. Other times money that he assumed was payment, or a bonus, or a COLA [cost of living adjustment] check, turned out to be an advance'.<sup>4</sup> Cheever argues that this confusing situation was compounded by 'discussions of money' being considered 'both ungentlemanly and infra dig at the magazine', and her father's stories of the late 1950s and early 1960s becoming too experimental for The New Yorker to publish.<sup>5</sup> It is Cheever's view—a view which Chapter Two contests—that her father renewed his first-reading agreement with the magazine each year between 1935 and 1982 out of affection for it, while knowing that he 'could get more money' and more editorial freedom for his stories from its large-circulation rivals, including *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

In making this argument, Cheever ignores three important factors pertaining to her father's professional authorship and his working relationship with The New Yorker. First, after parting company with the Maxim Lieber Literary Agency in 1942, her father dealt

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark: A Biographical Memoir of John Cheever by His Daughter*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Cheever, pp. 136-37.

<sup>5</sup> Cheever, p. 136.

with *The New Yorker* directly until late 1963, when he employed literary agent Candida Donadio, whose clients at that time included Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, and Philip Roth, to liaise with the magazine and some of its rivals on his behalf.<sup>6</sup> This means that Cheever conducted his own business arrangements with *The New Yorker* during the most prolific period of his career as a short story writer, 1935 to 1964. This period saw Cheever publish one hundred and five stories in *The New Yorker*, as well as two excerpts from his debut novel, *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), and two from its sequel, *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964). In addition, Cheever placed thirty-three more stories in the following publications: *The New Republic*, *Story*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Yale Review*, *Collier's Weekly*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Harper's*, *Mademoiselle*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Reporter*, and *Esquire*.

More than half of these stories were initially rejected by the *New Yorker* before Cheever sold them to these magazines. It is therefore unlikely that Cheever would operate for long periods of time without an agent if he did not have confidence in his ability to negotiate the magazine marketplace on his own artistic and economic terms. As Lynn Nesbit, a literary agent who represented Cheever as a novelist during the late 1960s, points out, the separation from Lieber most likely worked to her one-time client's advantage as far as the relationship with his editors at *The New Yorker* was concerned: '[the] *New Yorker* made it clear they didn't like agents fussing around. It was a gentleman's club, and they dealt with each other in a gentlemanly way'.<sup>7</sup> The editorial correspondence in the *New Yorker Records* supports Nesbit's view. Based on this archival material, it is more accurate to say that, between 1935 and 1982, Cheever's editors were open and pragmatic in the way they handled his editorial and financial arrangements with *The New Yorker*. Rejection

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<sup>6</sup> After parting company with the Maxim Lieber Literary Agency in 1941, Cheever appears to have been without literary representation for five years before signing with Curtis Brown Associates in 1947.

<sup>7</sup> Blake Bailey, *Cheever: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 320.

letters were usually couched in personal remarks, solicitation for more stories and, if necessary, words of encouragement; editors also explained the cheques for story, COLA, bonus, and royalty payments they enclosed in these and other letters to Cheever without fail.

Second, Cheever supplemented his income from *The New Yorker* by selling the stories it rejected to its rival publications throughout his career. Surviving editorial interoffice memoranda in the Records indicates that this was not an act of frustration on Cheever's part, as his daughter indicates, but common practice amongst many *New Yorker* contributors, both full-time staff and freelancers alike. When Brendan Gill, an employee of the magazine and a steady contributor of fiction, humour, reminiscence, and casual essays to the *New Yorker* both before and after the Second World War, sold three stories the magazine rejected to *Collier's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Liberty* in 1943, he got double the fees *The New Yorker* would have paid him for each.

In 1940, Sally Benson sold a story *The New Yorker* rejected (according to Maxwell, the magazine wanted her to change the ending but she refused) to *Collier's* for \$600 (\$10139.96 in 2015), roughly \$100 (\$1689.99 in 2015) more than *The New Yorker* offered her.<sup>8</sup> Despite these sales, both Gill and Benson signed new first-reading agreements with the magazine. Concerning Gill, Harold W. Ross, editor-in-chief of *The New Yorker*

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<sup>8</sup> Like Cheever, Benson was another prolific contributor to *The New Yorker*, selling ninety nine stories to the magazine between 1929 and 1956. As such, Benson was most likely paid at what the magazine referred to as the A-rate in the 1940s. In 1944, this was twenty cents for the first 1500 words of a piece and ten cents for the remainder. Given that *New Yorker* stories did not typically run longer than 3000 words in the early 1940s, and two full pages of text (figured at 2597 words by the magazine) paid at the A-rate were worth \$410 (\$5511.68 in 2015), Benson received a total between \$400 and \$500 for each story she sold to the magazine during the early 1940s before adjustments for COLA and quantity bonuses were made. While this is a rough calculation, it indicates the attraction of selling rejected stories to rival publications for contracted *New Yorker* writers. The information concerning rates of pay is sourced from a comparative study of prices paid by the magazine for art and text for one full page and two full pages in 1944. New York, New York Public Library, *The New Yorker Records*, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (herewith *New Yorker Records*, NYPL), Series 1: Editor 1917-1984, Harold Ross General Files 1917, 1924-1957, Box 35, fol. 1, William Maxwell to Harold W. Ross, [n.d.] c. 1940; *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Thomas M. Brassel to Harold W. Ross, 29 March 1944.

between 1925 and 1951, remarked in a memo to Lobrano, then head of the magazine's fiction department, 'This is an indication of our prestige, or something'. Maxwell was blunter than Ross on the matter of Benson selling her story to *Collier's* for an improved fee, however: 'Thank God we've got that agreement, is all I have to say'.<sup>9</sup> Writers like Cheever remained loyal to *The New Yorker* because it sustained them financially during the Depression and nurtured their talent between the wars. Although the magazine paid less than its competitors on a per-story basis during the 1930s and 1940s, it paid writers for stories more promptly than its counterparts, and, through a mixture of COLA payments, bonuses, and even drawing accounts, provided young writers with the means to live off their literary production.

Third, there is simply not enough evidence in Cheever's editorial correspondence in the *New Yorker Records*, his published correspondence with friends, or his journals to corroborate his daughter's claim that *The New Yorker* was reluctant to publish Cheever's more experimental fiction. In fact, what evidence there is suggests the contrary. In a letter from Maxwell to Cheever dated 12 November 1959, Maxwell expressed a concern that Cheever had moved 'too fast' from 'straight writing' to 'incredible farce' in the introductory paragraph of the story, 'A Woman Without a Country'. As a result, there was, in Maxwell's words, 'a little toning down' of this paragraph during the preliminary editing of the story.<sup>10</sup> Reading the introductory paragraph of the published version of 'A Woman Without a Country', though, it is unclear what Maxwell, Katharine S. White, and William

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<sup>9</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Maxwell to Ross, [n.d.] c. 1940. It is also worth noting that Maxwell, who was himself a contributor of fiction to *The New Yorker*, also sold his rejections to competitors. Ross makes a note of one such sale on a scrap of paper in pencil: 'Maxwell got \$150 for Hippotomus [sic] [...] from *Harper's Bazaar*', before adding, 'Said Cheever got as much as \$200'. Ross dates the scrap with only a month and a day '4/18'; fortunately, a staff member has pencilled in 'c. 1940' as a possible year for the comment. The date given suggests that the Cheever story Maxwell was referring to was most likely 'The Edge of the World' because it was published in the June 1940 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Harold W. Ross, 18 April c. 1940.

<sup>10</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, Fiction Correspondence 1952-1980, Box 767, fol. 5, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 12 November 1959.

Shawn toned down.<sup>11</sup> The paragraph sees Cheever rapidly push an act of reminiscence, the author-narrator recalling the time he saw the titular woman ‘between the third and fourth races at Campino [sic] with the Conte de Capra’, into farce by adding six more sightings of the woman during the same year in a variety of upper-middle-class destinations in Austria and Italy, including the five-star Hotel Tennerhof in Kitzbühel and the Gritti Palace in Venice, and undermining the reliability of the author-narrator by having him announce in the final one-word sentence of the paragraph what the reader has perhaps suspected throughout, that the preceding descriptions are ‘Blooeey’.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1950s, *The New Yorker* published a large number of non-fiction reminiscences, and had an index that directed the reader to its various departments but did not indicate what was in them, or mention an issue’s fiction at all; writers’ names also appeared at the end of a piece, not the beginning. It is plausible, therefore, that the magazine’s editors’ toning down of ‘A Woman Without a Country’ was not intended to obfuscate the irony of Cheever’s paratextual parody of writerly reminiscence but to amplify it, so that the reader knew beyond a doubt that the author-narrator was fantasising and that this was a work of fiction.

The *New Yorker* did reject Cheever’s 1960 story, ‘The Death of Justina’, a story about a suburban community that attempts to exclude death through zoning, however. ‘The

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<sup>11</sup> It is not clear what Maxwell, White, and Shawn did to the introduction of the story because its surviving typescript appears to be a master proof rather than a working varitype proof. Once assigning editors, copy editors, and fact checkers had annotated the working varitype proof of a story (typically the typescript the author submitted to the magazine), it was retyped as a master or author’s proof, which would, following consultation between an author and its editor, be revised (if necessary) and set in galleys for publication. In the case of ‘A Woman Without a Country’, the first two pages of the master proof are more or less identical to their counterparts in the published version. If any ‘toning down’ occurred, then it was earlier on in the editing process, on the working varitype proof of the story, which has not survived. Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963 (herewith Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963), Series 1: Short Stories 1935-1963, Box 2, fol. 54, ‘A Woman Without a Country, December 12, 1959’, pp. 1-8 (pp. 1-2).

<sup>12</sup> John Cheever, ‘A Woman Without a Country’, *The New Yorker*, 12 December 1959, pp. 48-50, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 542-48 (p. 542). Because there are no differences between these versions of ‘A Woman Without a Country’, further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.



Death of Justina' includes a nightmare sequence about a crowded supermarket in which 'thousands and thousands' of shoppers are made to feel guilty for purchasing unlabelled products, many of which are concealed in brown paper bags and parcels, by 'brutish and unregenerate' men at the checkout counters. Many of the paragraphs in the story evolve in this manner, devoted as they are to the thoughts of the protagonist, Moses Coverly. Indeed, Cheever's favouring of abstract over concrete forms of thought in 'The Death of Justina', and his foregrounding of these thoughts at the expense of narrative action is perhaps what worked against the story being purchased by the magazine.<sup>13</sup> This being said, it is ironic to note that *The New Yorker* published Cheever's most self-reflexive work of fiction, 'Some People, Places, and Things that Will Not Appear in My Novel' (12 November 1960), not long after rejecting 'The Death of Justina'. 'Some People...' was not a work of narrative prose at all, but a critique of postwar American fiction in the form of a list that broke one of the magazine's general editorial rules that pieces expressly about the act of writing were to be discouraged.<sup>14</sup>

Four years later, in 1964, *The New Yorker* published Cheever's most synchronically experimental story, 'The Swimmer', a mystery story with a mythic aspect that follows Neddy Merrill, a jovial family man, as he decides to leave his wife with his neighbours and swim home through a series of suburban pools one Sunday afternoon only to discover, upon completing his journey, that his house is locked and has been empty seemingly for months. As Robert A. Morace argues, '[although] Cheever is not the closet postmodernist

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<sup>13</sup> According to his eldest son, Benjamin, Cheever liked to tell audiences at his readings that *The New Yorker* thought of 'The Death of Justina' as 'an art story'. John Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, ed. by Benjamin Cheever (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> This appears tenth in Wolcott Gibbs' list of thirty 'general rules' for editing *New Yorker* contributions, 'Theory and Practice of Editing *New Yorker* Articles': 'To quote Mr. Ross again, "Nobody gives a damn about a writer or his problems except another writer". Pieces about authors, reporters, poets, etc. are to be discouraged in principle. Whenever possible the protagonist should be arbitrarily transplanted to another line of business. When the reference is incidental and unnecessary, it should come out'. Wolcott Gibbs, *Backward Ran Sentences: The Best of Wolcott Gibbs from The New Yorker*, ed. by Thomas Vinciguerra (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 650.

of Shady Hill, his approach to writing is less traditional and closed than it is innovative, open, even experimental (in the best sense of the word).<sup>15</sup> Their rejection of 'The Death of Justina' notwithstanding, Cheever's editors, who bought and published one hundred and twenty of Cheever's stories in *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1981, appear to have not only understood this, but to also have been more tolerant of the interpenetration of realism of place, language, and character in Cheever's stories with ironic meta-commentary and metaphorically complicated psychological activity than his daughter allows.

Cheever's daughter acknowledges both the editorial and economic importance of *The New Yorker* in her father's career, but remains antagonistic towards both the magazine and the marketplace in which it competed. She is adamant that her father was writing short stories for a publication that encouraged loyalty from its writers without remunerating them fairly for the work they produced, or endorsing their creative ambition.<sup>16</sup> In this way, Cheever's argument exhibits a similar tension between aesthetics and economics as does William Charvat's earlier and influential definition of professional authorship. Charvat contends that professional writing provides a living for the author, like any other job, and is typically a main and prolonged resource for the writer for as long as he or she writes with reference to buyer's tastes and reading habits.<sup>17</sup> The problems a professional writer faces are not identical with those of a literary artist, however, and 'when a literary artist is also a professional writer, he cannot solve the problems of the one function without reference to the other'.<sup>18</sup> Charvat's definition implies that a literary artist earning their living writing fiction for magazines, to use Cheever as an example, must, as Leon Jackson notes, write out of both an ideological commitment to their aesthetic and the need for

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<sup>15</sup> Robert A. Morace, 'From Parallels to Paradise: The Lyrical Structure of Cheever's Fiction', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 35 (Winter 1989), 502-28 (p. 503).

<sup>16</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, pp. 135-37.

<sup>17</sup> William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870*, ed. by Matthew J. Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America*, p. 3.

financial remuneration.<sup>19</sup> This is difficult if not impossible for most writers. As Bernard Lahire explains, professional writers typically fall into two camps: there are those who successfully establish a readership by producing work that is either nominated for, or the recipient of prestigious literary awards, and other less ideologically invested writers who used tested techniques or genres in their work in order to profit financially.<sup>20</sup> Susan Cheever regards the *New Yorker* as the primary source of economic and aesthetic tension in her father's literary career despite the fact that the magazine provided Cheever with a living until the late 1950s when additional sources of income, including M-G-M's \$25,000 (\$218,570.77 in 2015) for the film rights to 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' (*The New Yorker*, 14 April 1956), and the proceeds from the sales of *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), enabled Cheever to ease up on producing fiction for magazines for the first time in his career and to pursue other literary and non-literary activities instead.<sup>21</sup>

### **Playing the Literary Game**

Lahire uses the metaphor of the game to describe writers' involvement in the literary marketplace. He argues that the notion of the 'game' is well-suited 'for describing activities that, like literature, are practiced with very different degrees of investment, but which, overall, involve individuals who cannot afford to spend all their time playing the game in question'.<sup>22</sup> In 'The Double Life of Writers', Lahire uses the definitions of 'play' and 'game' put forth by Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois in *Homo Ludens: A Study of*

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<sup>19</sup> Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economics in Antebellum America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Lahire, 'The Double Life of Writers', pp. 459-60.

<sup>21</sup> This amount of time was roughly one year. The M-G-M money allowed Cheever to take his family abroad to live in Rome, Italy for a year between 1956 and 1957. During 1957, *The Wapshot Chronicle* was selected by the commercially influential Book-of-the-Month Club, and went on to sell more than twenty thousand copies in hardcover; a subsequent Bantam paperback sold almost 170,000 in the United States alone. Bailey, Cheever: *A Life*, pp. 239-40, 245.

<sup>22</sup> Lahire, p. 454.

the *Play Element in Culture* (1955) and *Man, Play and Games* (2001), respectively. Lahire clarifies these definitions thus:

that the game is a “free” activity (an obligation to play would be the very negation of the game as a leisure activity), “separate” from daily life (it takes place in an arbitrarily delimited space-time, circumscribed and distinct from “ordinary life”), “orderly” (with specific stakes and rules that are distinct from “ordinary laws”), “uncertain” (its progress and outcome are in part unpredictable), “nonproductive” (it is “gratuitous” in the sense that for Huizinga, it is “connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it”), and “fictive” (accompanied by a clear sense of “unreality” compared with “ordinary life”), but “at the same time [capable of] absorbing the player intensely and utterly”.<sup>23</sup>

Taking issue with the descriptors ‘nonproductive’ and ‘fictive’, Lahire modifies them. First, he suggests that the literary game is productive in the sense that it produces ‘works’ but considers its productivity restricted in the sense ‘that literature must be practiced independently of any commercial end’.<sup>24</sup> Second, he claims that the literary game is only fictive in the sense that, ‘working with the words of language, writers create poetic, novelistic, or theatrical worlds that are separate from the everyday (practical) uses of language’.<sup>25</sup> Whereas losing players are typically reminded that ‘it’s only a game’, in the sense that everything that happens is ‘without consequence’ for their everyday life, writers ‘make of literature the only means of access to reality, the only life worth living, the only serious thing in the world, as opposed to everyday, ordinary life’, which is to say, that

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<sup>23</sup> Lahire, ‘The Double Life of Writers’, pp. 457-58

<sup>24</sup> Lahire, p. 457.

<sup>25</sup> Lahire, p. 457.

players of the literary game are invested in it to the degree that it may become their ‘only reality’ or ‘true reality’.<sup>26</sup>

Lahire identifies three notable types of players of the literary game: occasional players, fanatical players, and professional players.<sup>27</sup> Occasional players practice literature as a form of recreation, writing in the free-time that remains after their social and professional obligations. Fanatical players make writing ‘the main driving force for their existence’ but are ‘usually forced to maintain a paid activity outside the game that affords them the means to keep playing’.<sup>28</sup> Lahire maintains that in the history of the literary game, very few fanatical players have been able to devote themselves fully to their art ‘without any concern for economic profitability (thanks to an inheritance or the support of a spouse, for example)’.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to occasional and fanatical players, professional players earn their living by playing and living off their proceeds from the literary game. Some professional players are former fanatical players whose strong literary ambitions have helped them establish a readership and earn critical accolades for their work over a number of years. Another group of ‘literarily less “pure”’ professional players use commercially popular techniques and genres in their work ‘in order to make money’.<sup>30</sup> Although players ‘with very different degrees of investment, returns (income from publications), productions, and ambitions can coexist’ in the literary game, Lahire reasons that ‘only professional players, who rarely enjoy this status throughout their entire lives, can live exclusively from what their participation in the game provides’.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Lahire, ‘The Double Life of Writers’, p. 457.

<sup>27</sup> Lahire, p. 459.

<sup>28</sup> Lahire, p. 459.

<sup>29</sup> Lahire, p. 459.

<sup>30</sup> Former occasional and fanatical players conceivably belong to this group of professional players. Lahire, p. 460.

<sup>31</sup> Lahire, p. 460.

Using Lahire's conceptualisation of the literary 'universe', Cheever's trajectory as a short story writer can be divided into two significant periods: 1930 to 1945, and 1945 to 1964.<sup>32</sup> Between 1930, the year in which he made his fiction debut in a large-circulation magazine, *The New Republic*, with the short story 'Expelled', and 1945, the year in which the Second World War ended, Cheever was a fanatical player of the literary game who relied on secondary employment to supplement the income from the sales of his short stories and a small number of book advances. Between 1945 and 1964, however, Cheever became a professional player in the literary game. He achieved this by consolidating his professional relationship with *The New Yorker* and establishing a readership for himself by publishing one hundred and nineteen of his stories in the magazine between 1935 and 1964.

As a professional player of the literary game, Cheever not only lived exclusively off the income generated by the sales of his short stories and books, but also off the supplemental payments provided by his annually renewed first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker*, which included a COLA payment calibrated according to the cost of living index of the United States Department of Labor intended to assist writers with their living expenses, quantity bonus payments of twelve-and-a-half, fifteen, or twenty-five per cent applied to stories submitted in cycles of six, eight, or ten during the twelve month period covered by a writer's agreement, and royalties. Cheever profited from his high productivity and creative ability as a short story writer during the 1930s and 1940s in other, more prestigious ways as well. In 1951, The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship worth \$3000 (\$27,299.88 in 2015) to Cheever. This source of income was instrumental in enabling Cheever to concentrate more

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<sup>32</sup> Gwendolyn Wells, the translator of 'The Double Life of Writers', explains that although 'world' would be more idiomatic in English, she retains Lahire's use of the term 'universe' to differentiate his analysis from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'fields' and Howard Becker's theory of 'art worlds'. Lahire, 'The Double Life of Writers', p. 461n.

fully on writing his debut novel in the 1950s. Between 1951 and 1964, Cheever also supplemented his literary income with the proceeds of the sales of the film rights to ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ in 1956, and ‘The Swimmer’ and both Wapshot novels in 1964. Cheever profited handsomely from the sales of these rights, and used the proceeds to finance extended periods of time outside of the literary game in which, alongside working on novels, he pursued non-literary activities as well.<sup>33</sup>

### **Cheever as a Fanatical Player of the Literary Game, 1930 to 1945**

When examining the economics of Cheever’s professional authorship, it is important to consider the nature of his mobility both inside the literary game and outside it. While participating in the game between 1930 and 1945, Cheever moved gradually from a sector of restricted, more personal production to a sector of large-scale, mass-market production. It is worth noting that Cheever did not spend all of his time inside the game during this period. A few of his absences were self-imposed and self-financed following the lucrative sale of a story to a large-circulation magazine. But others were externally imposed by his temporary inability in the early 1930s to modulate his fiction to meet the commercial demands of the large-circulation magazine marketplace, and/or the necessity of securing and working a regular job in the harsh economic environment of the Depression. It is arguably the case that all of these activities, whether taking place inside or outside the

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<sup>33</sup> Lahire argues that professional players tend to publish a book ‘inside the game’, leave it for a period of time, and then reappear when a new book is published. After 1964, Cheever slowed his hitherto prolific short story production down considerably, from an average of four per year between 1935 and the end of 1964, to just one per year between 1967 and 1982. Although Cheever’s contractual dispute with *The New Yorker* in December 1963 and his worsening alcoholism throughout the 1960s are important factors for his declining short story production, his desire to be recognised foremost as a novelist should not be underestimated. It is also worth noting that there are remarkably consistent periods of gestation between each of Cheever’s five novels. There is six years between the publication of *The Wapshot Chronicle* in 1957 and *The Wapshot Scandal* in 1964, five years between the publication of *The Wapshot Scandal* and *Bullet Park* in 1969, seven years between the publication of *Bullet Park* and *Falconer* in 1977, and five years between the publication of *Falconer* and Cheever’s final novel, *O What a Paradise It Seems*, in 1982. Lahire, ‘The Double Life of Writers’, p. 444.

literary game, and whether literary or non-literary in nature, contributed in some way to the professionalisation of Cheever between 1930 and 1945, however.

After making his debut in the 1 October 1930 issue of the large-circulation magazine, *The New Republic*, with ‘Expelled’, Cheever began working on material constellated around Boston and the New England countryside, ‘where occasionally an abandoned house or a view surviving the hoardings and the hot-dog stands gives the memory an unexpected twist’.<sup>34</sup> He appears to have struggled to realise this literary project. In the two years following his debut, Cheever reviewed Philip Stevenson’s boarding school novel, *The Gospel According to St. Luke’s: a Novel of Turbulent Youth* (1931), for *The New Republic*’s issue of 6 May 1931, and published only three of his New England stories in small-circulation little magazines: ‘Fall River’, which was examined in the previous chapter, appeared in *The Left: A Quarterly Review of Radical and Experimental Art* in the autumn of 1931; ‘Late Gathering’ was published in *Pagany: A Native Quarterly*’s issue of October-December 1931; and ‘Bock Beer and Bermuda Onions’, which featured in *The Hound & Horn*’s issue of April-June 1932.

Little magazines like *The Hound & Horn* and *Pagany* proliferated during the first two decades of the twentieth century on both sides of the Atlantic. While artistically innovative and supportive of young writers, these modernist magazines did not offer Cheever the same level of public exposure as *The New Republic*, which had a circulation of between 20,000 and 25,000 during the 1930s.<sup>35</sup> *The Hound & Horn* averaged roughly a

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<sup>34</sup> New York, New York Public Library, Yaddo Records, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (herewith Yaddo Records, NYPL), Series V. Yaddo Corporation Records 1926-1980, A. Guest Files 1926-1980, 1. 1926-1940, John Cheever to Elizabeth Ames, [n.d.], c. Spring 1933.

<sup>35</sup> Estimated circulation figures for *The New Republic* in the 1930s are sourced from Beulah Amidon, ‘The Nation and the New Republic’, *Survey Graphic*, 1 January 1940, p. 36. The circulation figure for *The New Yorker* is sourced from Ben Yagoda, *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made* (New York: Scribner, 2000), p. 96. Amidon argues that circulation was less important for liberal journals like *The New Republic* insofar as ‘their influence is largely indirect—in the thought, discussion, writing [of] those who read them, particularly the editorial writ of the daily press’. Amidon, ‘The Nation and the New Republic’, p. 37.



tenth of the circulation of *The New Republic* during its seven-year run.<sup>36</sup> There are no circulation figures for *Pogany* but given that it promoted itself through free exchange advertising with other little magazines including *The Left* and *The New Masses*, its circulation was likely comparable to that of *The Hound & Horn*, if not lower. This being said, and despite persistent financial difficulties, *Pogany* ran for three years from 1930 to 1933, whereas *The Left* ran for just two issues in 1931. The low circulation of these magazines did not just limit the readership for Cheever's stories, it also impinged on him financially. Because little magazines derived their revenue from circulation rather than advertising, they could not afford to pay high rates for submissions. So, while having his work published alongside that of John Dos Passos in *Pogany* and E. E. Cummings in *The Hound & Horn* was critically and socially desirable for Cheever, it was not especially commercially or financially lucrative to him.

Most fanatical players of the literary game are reliant on full- or part-time employment to supplement their income from writing. There are a few exceptions, however. Ernest Hemingway, whose writing exerted a strong aesthetic influence on Cheever's writing throughout his late teens and twenties, is an example of a fanatical player of the literary game who used spousal support to supplement his income from writing during the 1920s and 1930s on his way to becoming a professional player. Hemingway's first wife, Hadley Richardson Hemingway, had several trust funds that provided the couple with between two and five thousand dollars a year. His second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer Hemingway, was wealthier still, and her uncle, Gustavus Adolphus Pfeiffer (a major shareholder in Richard Hudnut's cosmetics empire), paid for the

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<sup>36</sup> *The Hound & Horn* was founded by Lincoln Kirstein, an undergraduate at Harvard University, in 1927. The magazine ran from September 1927 to September 1934 and averaged a circulation between 2,500 and 3000. Cheever met Kirstein through Morris and Hazel Hawthorne Werner, writers who split their time between Greenwich Village, New York and Provincetown, Massachusetts. Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 208.

Hemingways' first Paris apartment and other expenses, including their African safari in 1933. With the Pfeiffers supplementing his income, not only did Hemingway not have to work a secondary job, he could afford not to sell his stories to large-circulation magazines and write about what he wanted.<sup>37</sup> Although Cheever was writing similarly about what he wanted between 1930 and 1932, he was doing so at a financial loss, and, unlike Hemingway, he could not depend on a significant amount of financial assistance from his family or a spouse.

In 1932, Cheever's father, a retired shoe salesman, lost his life savings when the Kreuger and Toll International Match Corporation in which he had invested them went bankrupt. Within a few months, the bank foreclosed on the family home and Cheever's parents separated.<sup>38</sup> Under these financial constraints, Cheever's mother rented an apartment in Quincy near the gift-shop she ran and his father lived in poverty in a farmhouse in Hanover, some sixteen miles away.<sup>39</sup> Cheever, who had been moving in the bohemian intellectual circles of Boston, Provincetown, and New York since the publication of 'Expelled' in 1930, did not find employment quickly, struggling to sell his stories to magazines from the second half of 1932 onwards. Living as a bachelor with his college-educated older brother, Fred, in Boston, Cheever relied instead on Fred to cover his subsistence until early 1933 when, after not having sold a story for more than a year, he finally, reluctantly, took a part-time job as a reporter for a newspaper in Boston.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Robert W. Trogdon, *The Lousy Racket: Hemingway, Scribners, and the Business of Literature*, (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>39</sup> Bailey, pp. 59-60.

<sup>40</sup> According to Bailey, Cheever is listed in the Boston City Directory as a 'reporter' in 1933 but despite some vague details of his daily routine in an unpublished portion of his journals, and a reference to having worked 'on a small newspaper' in a letter to Elizabeth Ames, the Executive Director of Yaddo, an artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York which Cheever frequented over the years, there are no more details of his employment. Bailey, p. 60n; Yaddo Records, NYPL, A. Guest Files 1926-1980, John Cheever to Elizabeth Ames, 2 May 1935.

Blake Bailey, Cheever's second biographer, uses the trope of the starving artist to explain Cheever's reluctance to enter into full- or part-time employment during the first half of the 1930s.<sup>41</sup> The quintessential image of the starving artist is one of a Bohemian outsider who sacrifices status, money, and material comfort in order to focus on creative expression.<sup>42</sup> Bailey panders to this image on numerous occasions in his biography when he discusses Cheever's experiences during the Depression. He depicts Cheever growing his hair long, becoming a regular at 'raffish saloons' in Boston, and befriending Brahmin socialists and burlesque dancers following the publication of 'Expelled'.<sup>43</sup> Bailey also glorifies Cheever's lack of material comfort, describing him shivering over his typewriter in an unheated shack on a wharf in Provincetown, and living on a diet of stale bread, raisins, and milk in New York in an 'exquisitely squalid' rooming house in New York in 1934.<sup>44</sup>

As Alison Bain notes, '[the] idealization of artists is fundamentally rooted in a romanticization of their creative abilities', and this idealisation is problematic in that it underplays the socioeconomic loss that such marginalisation causes artists.<sup>45</sup> Lahire argues that most unexceptional fanatical players of the literary game invest in the game at a financial loss, as Cheever clearly did in the early 1930s, not because they desire an unconventional way of life and creative freedom, but because they find the game 'more demanding than professional activities that are considered "serious"'.<sup>46</sup> This is to say that fanatical players are compulsive insofar as they approach writing as a professional activity from the outset, and continue to do so no matter how unsuccessful they are. Developing this point, Lahire suggests that, alongside using non-literary activities to supplement their

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<sup>41</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 50-78.

<sup>42</sup> Alison Bain, 'Constructing an Artistic Identity', *Work Employment & Society*, 19 (2005), 25-46 (p. 29).

<sup>43</sup> Bailey, pp. 51-53.

<sup>44</sup> Bailey, pp. 57, 71.

<sup>45</sup> Bain, 'Constructing an Artistic Identity', p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> Lahire, 'The Double Life of Writers', p. 459.

literary income, fanatical players often create their own style of play in order to ameliorate the artistic and commercial insecurities of the literary game.

This is very much the case with Cheever. Between 1930 and his debut in the 22 June 1935 issue of *The New Yorker*, Cheever evolved a sociable style of play inside the literary game that limited his need for permanent, non-literary jobs. Although Cheever's self-identification as a bohemian rebel in the early 1930s came at the expense of his material comfort, it put him into regular contact with other, better established writers including Cummings, Malcolm Cowley, Morris and Hazel Hawthorne Werner, James Agee, John Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, and many more.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, and as Bailey attests, Cheever enjoyed the friendship and hospitality of Cummings, the Werners, and others. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that he was building, however haphazardly, a network of contacts inside the Northeastern American sector of the literary universe.

Cheever's sociable style of play helped him to minimise the disruption of being temporarily outside of the literary game. Moreover, many of the writers Cheever befriended inside the game during the early 1930s became active supporters of his professional development. After a few months of working as a newspaper reporter, Cowley, the literary editor of *The New Republic* who bought and published 'Expelled' in the magazine, intervened, suggesting that Cheever write to Elizabeth Ames, the executive director of Yaddo, an artists' working community in Saratoga Springs, New York that offered room and board to struggling artists during the Depression, about the possibility of a vacancy. Although Cheever's application was unsuccessful despite Cowley providing a letter of recommendation on his behalf, Ames was drawn into Cheever's burgeoning

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<sup>47</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 56-57.

professional network and, in the spring of 1934, she accepted a new application from Cheever.<sup>48</sup>

Between 1934 and 1939, Yaddo became an important part of Cheever's strategy for playing the literary game. Cheever stayed either at Yaddo, or forty miles north of the Saratoga Springs estate at Lake George where Yaddo had joined together three islands to form a camp called Triuna, on at least eight occasions during the second half of the 1930s. In 1934, he stayed from spring to July, and September to October; in 1935, he stayed from May to autumn; in 1936, he stayed at Yaddo from February to early summer before heading north to run the launch at Triuna until the end of summer; in 1937, he was a resident at Yaddo for most of the year; and he visited again to run the launch at Lake George during the summer of 1939.<sup>49</sup> Bailey concedes correctly that Cheever would not have survived the Depression as a writer without Yaddo: 'it [was] an oasis where he could work in peace until four in the afternoon, then have drinks and a swim and a good dinner with (usually) congenial company'.<sup>50</sup> He does not do so without reservation, however. Returning to the trope of the starving artist, Bailey argues that Cheever ingratiated himself with Ames in order to avoid permanent employment and prolong his unconventional 'freewheeling life'.<sup>51</sup>

During the Depression, Ames made sure that every building on the property could house artists and writers. She also decreased the operating budget of Yaddo so that the

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<sup>48</sup> Cowley was recommended as a viable candidate for Yaddo by Irita van Doren, book review editor at The New York Herald Tribune, in 1928. He wrote his first book of literary criticism, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934), at Yaddo in 1932, and became influential in shaping policies and admissions at the artists' retreat until his death in 1989. Cheever was clearly aware of Cowley's good standing at Yaddo when he reapplied to stay there in 1934. He mentions him three times in the opening two paragraphs of his letter of application. First, Cheever reminds Ames that he wrote to her in 1933 at the suggestion of Cowley. Second, he informs Ames that it was again Cowley who suggested he reapply to Yaddo in 1934. Finally, he refers hesitantly to Cowley's letter of recommendation: 'He wrote you, I think, about my work. What, or how much he said I don't know'. Yaddo Records, NYPL, A. Guest Files, John Cheever to Elizabeth Ames, [n.d.] c. 1934.

<sup>49</sup> Bailey, Cheever: A Life, pp. 63-100.

<sup>50</sup> Bailey, p. 68.

<sup>51</sup> Bailey, p. 91.

community could support as many artists and writers as possible. Formal breakfasts and dinners were replaced by a breakfast buffet and packed lunches, saving on staff time, and guests were instructed to perform their own housekeeping.<sup>52</sup> While Cheever undoubtedly took advantage of Ames' altruism, he also worked a variety of jobs in between his residencies at Yaddo. In 1935, he moved to New York and wrote synopses of books for M-G-M at a rate of five dollars per book. He also worked as a darkroom assistant for the photographer Walker Evans, for which he earned twenty dollars a week. And, finally, in 1938, with the assistance of Nathan Asch, a writer he met while staying at Yaddo, Cheever got himself hired as a junior editor by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) on a salary of \$2600 (\$43,628.18 in 2015). He worked on the Federal Writers' Project's American Guide Series for six months. Returning to Yaddo to write and socialise with other writers in between these periods of full- and part-time employment did not represent a retreat from a conventional way of life for Cheever as Bailey accuses, but a renewal of his commitment to establish himself as a professional writer and a literary artist.

Yaddo was part of a trend in the early twentieth century toward alternative means of artistic patronage and a desire to separate the production of art from the labour of everyday life and the restrictions of the marketplace.<sup>53</sup> Alternative arts-driven communities like Yaddo were an attractive proposition for younger, less socially conventional artists, especially during the years of the Depression. But, as Micki McGee observes, one of the hazards of working 'in a world apart' from conventional society is that the work a writer or an artist produces 'may fail to garner either recognition among a broader public or a spot in the literary or artistic canon'.<sup>54</sup> The problem Cheever faced while at Yaddo in 1934 was that, if he wanted to begin to establish himself as a professional writer without first

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<sup>52</sup> Micki McGee, 'Creative Power: Yaddo and the Making of American Culture', in *Yaddo: Making American Culture*, ed. by Micki McGee (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 1-17, (p. 4).

<sup>53</sup> McGee, 'Creative Power', p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> McGee, p. 12.

producing a novel, he needed to write more stories to the specification of large-circulation magazines such as *Collier's*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

It is not clear whether Cheever went to Yaddo in 1934 with the intention of writing more commercial short stories or beginning a novel as he refers only to 'the work in hand' in his letter of application to Ames. This work was to focus more specifically on his experiences of living in Boston, which he claimed was to be 'old' and 'out of step with the century'.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to separate the focus of this project from the focus of his earlier stories, however. In 'Expelled', 'Fall River', 'Late Gathering', and 'Bock Beer and Bermuda Onions', Cheever also examined life in contemporary New England from the perspectives of temporary and permanent social outcasts alike. Although these stories lacked commercial appeal, Cheever was still able to sell them to little magazines. The same cannot be said of the only piece Cheever managed to complete amongst the striking and diverting mix of personalities and sensibilities he met at Yaddo in 1934, which included writers such as James T. Farrell, Leonard Ehrlich, and Reuel Denney, the poet Muriel Rukeyser, and painter Martin Craig.<sup>56</sup>

The unpublished 'Letter from the Mountains' is not a story but a meditation on Cheever's generation and their tenuous place in American society. Bailey, who has examined the manuscript, describes it as 'an odd document' written in the style of a manifesto.<sup>57</sup> Cowley attempted to get *The New Republic* to publish 'Letter from the Mountains' as 'a picture of the state of mind of the youngsters'.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately for Cheever, Cowley's colleagues do not appear to have held the piece in the same esteem as they had 'Expelled', which intersected with a number of the magazine's social and political concerns, including the influence of militarism on everyday American life, the

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<sup>55</sup> Yaddo Records, NYPL, A. Guest Files, Cheever to Ames, [n.d.] c. 1934.

<sup>56</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>57</sup> Bailey, pp. 70-71.

<sup>58</sup> Bailey, p. 71.

teaching of history, and the unduly harsh treatment of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, the Italian-born anarchists who were controversially charged with, and later executed for, the murders of two men during the armed robbery of a shoe factory in South Braintree, Massachusetts in 1920.<sup>59</sup> The failure of 'Letter from the Mountains' to attract the interest of *The New Republic* coincided with Cheever's departure from Yaddo in July 1934. Cheever moved to New York where he lived in Walker Evans' basement flat in Greenwich Village on an allowance of ten dollars a week from his brother. It was yet another sequence of events that left Cheever temporarily outside the literary game.

In early 1935, after a few months of writing synopses for M-G-M, spending his free-time with the Werners and other members of the New York literati, and a brief return to Yaddo, Cheever had sold only one story, 'Homage to Shakespeare', which was not published in *Story* until November 1937. When Cheever complained to Cowley about his stalling literary career over dinner, Cowley told him that his stories were 'too long for other magazines to accept from new writers'.<sup>60</sup> Of the four stories Cheever published between 1930 and 1932, not one was shorter than one thousand five hundred words. Acknowledging this, Cowley challenged Cheever to write four stories of no more than a thousand words in four days. The new rules Cowley imposed on Cheever resulted in him producing four stories: 'The Teaser', 'Bayonne', 'Buffalo', and one other story, the title of which is unknown. Cowley bought 'The Teaser' on behalf of *The New Republic*; he also

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<sup>59</sup> Cheever makes reference to each one of these concerns in 'Expelled' and Giles Y. Gamble makes a compelling argument for Cheever having studied back-issues of *The New Republic* scrupulously during the writing of 'Expelled' in order to 'shape his experience to reflect most directly the current concerns of [the magazine]'. Giles Y. Gamble, 'John Cheever's 'Expelled': The Genesis of a Beginning', *American Literary History*, 7 (1995), 611-32 (p. 623).

<sup>60</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 79-80.



helped Cheever sell 'Bayonne' to *Parade*, a periodical that folded after one issue in 1936, and, perhaps most importantly for Cheever's career, 'Buffalo' to *The New Yorker*.<sup>61</sup>

'Buffalo' was more appealing to magazines than the work Cheever had published previously for a number of reasons, not least of all that it was eight hundred and seventy-eight words in length. Although *The New Yorker* accepted stories up to around three thousand words in length from established writers and staff during the mid-1930s, its preference was for stories of about one thousand words from new contributors.<sup>62</sup> This is because stories by new contributors were typically placed towards the back of the magazine alongside a raft of advertisements. A story's continuations would only be one or two columns wide, rather than the full three columns, at the back of an issue so as to allow two- or one-column advertisements. Because of its length, 'Buffalo' was especially well-suited to meet these requirements. The story ran just one column wide from the top of page sixty-seven to the middle of page sixty-nine in the 22 June 1935 issue of *The New Yorker*. Black and white advertisements for Williams' Aqua Velva after-shaving tonic, holidays in Austria, a variety of New York- and New Jersey-based hotels, Great Western champagne, a carpet cleaning company, and films filled the columns to its left and right (see Figure 4).

'Buffalo', 'The Teaser', and 'Bayonne' were also topical, insofar as they engaged with the ongoing Depression by depicting a largely urban working-class American scene. The stories Cheever published between 1930 and 1932 focused on the travails of predominantly middle-class characters, and took place in and around the states of Massachusetts and New York. These settings included a private school in Braintree, Massachusetts ('Expelled'); an economically depressed textile town in Fall River, Massachusetts ('Fall River'); and a bohemian alternative community on the outskirts of

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<sup>61</sup> 'Bayonne' was published in the Spring 1936 issue of *Parade*, 'The Teaser' in the 8 September 1937 issue of *The New Republic*, and 'Buffalo' in the 22 June issue of *The New Yorker*.

<sup>62</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, p. 103.

Boston ('Late Gathering' and 'Bock Beer and Bermuda Onions').<sup>63</sup> In contrast, 'The Teaser' follows a burlesque show from Boston to Portland, Oregon; 'Bayonne' is set in a lunch cart beneath the Ninth Avenue El line in New York's Lower West Side; and 'Buffalo' is set in a bakery in the city of Buffalo, New York. The protagonists of these three stories are identifiably working-class. The main character of 'The Teaser' is Harcourt, the manager of a burlesque show who, as the story begins, is about to cut Beatrice, a dancer in her fifties, from the bill and replace her with a younger performer; in 'Bayonne' it is a waitress in her forties who is reluctant to work alongside younger women; and in 'Buffalo' it is Joe, a fry-cook, who flirts with a German waitress over his breakfast in a bakery.

The subject matter of these stories, in conjunction with their working-class realist style, also meant they could function as colour pieces, human interest stories about particular people, places, and events in magazines like *The New Republic*, a socially and politically engaged publication that did not publish much fiction. For example, Cheever's sensitive description of the goings on behind the scenes of a burlesque show during the 1930s in 'The Teaser' saw it included in the 'On the Labor Front' section of the 8 September 1937 issue of *The New Republic*. This section featured articles on the social and labor issues affecting Americans living in Depression-hit rural and urban areas by political activist Alexander L. Crosby and social scientist Raymond G. Fuller, respectively, as well as the magazine's regular political features, 'Washington Notes' and 'Other People's Money'.

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<sup>63</sup> Although 'Fall River' examines the physical and psychological decline of the working-class community of a once prosperous textile town, the narrator is an author-surrogate rather than a member of this struggling community. 'Expelled' is set in a military academy, the students of which were middle- and upper-middle-class during the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the action in 'Late Gathering' and 'Bock Beer and Bermuda Onions' takes place in the grounds of a New England farm house that a woman, Amy, appears to be running as a boarding house for an eclectic, international mix of artistically-minded guests.

Unlike shortening the length of his stories to make them more attractive to large-circulation magazines like *The New Yorker* in which space for submissions by new contributors was restricted by the amount of advertising space sold per issue, Cheever's decision to write stories about working-class life in Depression-era Boston and New York does not appear to have been a commercially motivated decision on his part. Cheever was arguably more influenced to write about the Depression by a mixture of his own experiences of living through it in Boston and New York in the early 1930s, and also by the work of some of the artists he came into contact with at Yaddo and in New York during the same period. While at Yaddo in 1934, Cheever socialised with Farrell, who was at Yaddo to work on *Judgment Day* (1935), the final novel in the Studs Lonigan trilogy, a working-class realist examination of life for Irish-Americans living in Chicago during the Depression. And, after moving to New York in the summer of 1934, Cheever made the acquaintance of Evans, then a young photographer documenting life for ordinary Americans in and around New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania.

The absence of an obvious authorial voice in 'The Teaser', 'Bayonne', and 'Buffalo', which places the reader inside the lives of its characters with more immediacy than the detached first-person plural narration Cheever uses in 'Fall River', is a strategy not unlike the one Farrell employs in *Young Lonigan* (1932). There are also similarities in way in which Cheever, in these stories, and Evans, in his photography of the late 1920s and early 1930s, scrutinise the relationship between ordinary Americans and their built environment during the Depression. Whereas Cheever's meetings with Farrell were isolated to Yaddo though, his friendship with Evans blossomed during the 1930s. Not only

did Cheever rent Evans' old flat in 1935, he also frequented the same intellectual circle as the photographer.<sup>64</sup>

Given their affinity for each other, it is worth considering how Evans' approach to photography might conceivably have influenced the stories Cheever wrote for Cowley in more detail. Commenting on Evans' photography in the 1930s, Cheever remarked: '[Evans' photographs] are, for all of their contempt, snobbery, preciosity [sic], an impressive record. [...] There are beautiful shots of razed houses, vacant lots, a tin ceiling smashed and twisted, [and] peeling bill-boards'.<sup>65</sup> Joseph Anthony Ward argues that Evans 'insists on disconnectedness [...] of person and person, person and house, person and work' in his photographs of everyday American life during the 1930s.<sup>66</sup> 'Most of the few group photographs show individuals detached from each other, self-preoccupied, or gazing at something beyond the picture [and] the most common setting for individual portraits is a public street'.<sup>67</sup> In the individual portrait, 'Girl on Fulton Street, New York, 1929', a photograph taken during the same period as some of the photographs Cheever praises, Evans renders the profile of a white woman, wearing a cloche hat and a coat with a fur collar, in sharp focus against a blurred busy downtown street lined with people, stores, and advertising signs.<sup>68</sup> By capturing the woman pensively observing something outside of the camera's frame and blurring the activity around her, Evans isolates and disconnects her from both the people and the environment around her.

Cheever disconnects people from people, and people from place similarly in the stories he wrote in 1935. In 'Buffalo', for example, Cheever uses characterisation and

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<sup>64</sup> Lincoln Kirstein connects the two men. Kirstein published a selection of Evans' writing and photographs in *The Hound & Horn* during the early 1930s.

<sup>65</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 75.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph Anthony Ward, *American Silences: The Realism of James Agee, Walker Evans, and Edward Hopper* (Louisiana: Louisiana State Press, 1985), p. 130.

<sup>67</sup> Ward, *American Silences*, p. 130.

<sup>68</sup> Walker Evans, 'Girl on Fulton Street, New York, 1929', in *American Photographs: Seventy-Fifth-Anniversary Edition* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), p. 39.

incident to frustrate an attempt by the main character of the story, a fry-cook, to make a personal connection in his new home, the city of Buffalo. The fry-cook is new to Buffalo but has no time to explore the city because of his job. When he is not working a shift at the lunch-cart where he is employed, the fry-cook eats his meals in a variety of local restaurants. He stays in the same restaurant for a period of one week before moving onto a new one. When he goes for breakfast in a German bakery, he befriends the young waitress serving him only to discover to his dismay after flirting with her that she is married to the middle-aged owner of the establishment. The owner does not take kindly to the fry-cook flirting with his wife, and the story ends with the fry-cook beating a hasty retreat from the bakery.

In 'The Teaser', Cheever disconnects Beatrice, a dancer in her fifties, from people and place through incident and focalisation. In the story, Harcourt fires Beatrice from the burlesque show she stars in and leaves her at a hotel in Boston as the show travels to Portland. Rather than filter this turn of events through the consciousness of Beatrice, Cheever has the narrative follow Harcourt and the show to Portland. Harcourt's guilty feeling concerning his firing of Beatrice emphasises her sudden isolation from both her vocation and her friends more profoundly in the story; it also makes her eventual return to the stage more triumphant. After Harcourt is forced to recall Beatrice following an injury to her replacement, he witnesses her bringing the house down with a performance she developed while alone in her hotel room in Boston. Irrespective of whether Cheever took part of his inspiration for 'Bayonne', 'The Teaser', and 'Buffalo' from the photography of Evans or not, these stories show that, by 1935, Cheever clearly understood and appropriated the seriousness with which the Depression was forcing American artists to

reconsider their understanding of what Ann Douglas refers to as ‘the entire project of the United States’.<sup>69</sup>

Third, these stories are evidence of Cheever being more willing and able to tailor his material to suit the different editorial requirements of magazines. Bailey argues that Cheever did not show his ‘ability to modulate his prose [...] to suit the market’ until the early 1940s, when he was transforming his experiences of basic infantry training in the army into stories for *The New Yorker*.<sup>70</sup> ‘Buffalo’, which Cheever also sold to *The New Yorker*, shows that he was able to do this much earlier on in his career than Bailey allows, however. Unlike other large-circulation magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, *The New Yorker* was reluctant to publish melodramatic short stories that emphasised sensational incidents and surprise endings over characterisation, despite their popularity and prevalence.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, the magazine developed its own form of short story, a realist character study with a minimal plot. Not only was ‘Buffalo’ short enough for *The New Yorker* to run towards the back of an issue, but it was also stylistically comparable to stories by some of the magazine’s regular contributors. Like Kay Boyle’s story, ‘Kroy Wen’ (25 July 1931), which takes place onboard a boat bound for Italy, ‘Buffalo’ is set in one location, a German bakery; like Louise Bogan’s ‘Conversation Piece’ (12 August 1933), ‘Buffalo’ is told mostly in dialogue, the conversation between Joe and a German waitress; and like John O’Hara in ‘Over the River and Through the Wood’ (15 December 1934), Cheever uses indirection to withhold what is actually happening in ‘Buffalo’, that

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<sup>69</sup> Ann Douglas, ‘Introduction’, in James T. Farrell, *Studs Lonigan: A Trilogy Comprising Young Lonigan, The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, and Judgment Day* (New York: Penguin, 2001), pp. i-xiii (p. vii).

<sup>70</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 123.

<sup>71</sup> The sentimental and moralistic short stories O. Henry was publishing in newspapers and magazines during the early 1900s are representative of the conventionally popular type of short story *The New Yorker* did not want to publish. Although early *New Yorker* stories were neither sentimental nor moralistic, many featured ironic twist endings, however.

Joe is being watched by the waitress' husband on each of the occasions he flirts with her in the bakery.

Wolcott Gibbs edited 'Buffalo' for *The New Yorker*. Gibbs praised Cheever's use of indirection in the story directly on its typescript, writing '[n]eat trick' in the left-hand margin next to the climax of the story in which the waitress' husband, enraged at having overheard Joe asking his wife if she wants to see a movie, finally reveals his true identity and tells Joe to leave the premises. This is the climax of 'Buffalo' as it appears in the typescript (with Gibbs' edits in italics):

He had not expected it. He had not expected anything less. She gasped as he had seen people gasp who were attacked by sudden pain.

"Don't you go asking her to any movies, young man," the baker shouted at him. "She's my wife. You keep away from and you stop looking at her." The young girl walked away from the table towards the kitchen. "You get out of here," the baker shouted, "You leave her alone".

"Alright, alright," Joe said. He took his coat down off the hook and slowly put his arms ~~up~~ in the sleeves.

"Hurry up, hurry up. I'm sick of seeing your face around. We don't want customers like you. Get out."<sup>72</sup>

The ironic twist ending Gibbs complimented in 'Buffalo' is a device common to many of the stories *The New Yorker* published during the 1930s. Cheever uses this type of ending in 'Buffalo' but not in the longer, more conventional 'Bayonne' and 'The Teaser'. This

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<sup>72</sup> Gibbs pencils his compliment in the left-hand margin towards the bottom of page three of the typescript. Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories 1935-1963, Box 1, fol. 7, 'Buffalo, June 22, 1935', pp. 1-3 (p. 3).

suggests that he was familiar with the style of the New Yorker story and that 'Buffalo' was targeted directly at the magazine.

Cheever appears to have been familiar with more than just the style of New Yorker stories. As well as its use of indirection, the plot structure of 'Buffalo' is noticeably similar to O'Hara's earlier New Yorker story, 'Over the River and Through the Wood'. The plot of 'Over the River and Through the Wood' concerns an elderly man, Mr. Winfield, as he travels by car to his daughter's house in Lenox, Massachusetts, in the company of his grand-daughter and her two young girlfriends. It is revealed that the house used to belong to Mr. Winfield until he sold it to his son-in-law following the death of his wife. Mr. Winfield sells the house back to his family largely out of guilt for having cheated on his wife. The story ends with Mr. Winfield being given a tray of cocoa with two cups on it by the maid and deciding that he will share one of the cups with Mrs. Farnsworth, one of the girls he travelled to Lenox with. Mr. Winfield knocks on Mrs. Farnsworth's bathroom door and thinks that she has authorised him to enter but when he opens the door he realises, to his dismay, that she is naked. 'There was cold murder in the girl's eyes,' writes O'Hara, 'and loathing and contempt and the promise of the thought his name forever would evoke. She spoke to him: "Get out of here, you dirty old man"'.<sup>73</sup> As in 'Buffalo', the protagonist is a lonely male, the conflict of the story grows out of the protagonist's refusal to give into this loneliness, and O'Hara does not resolve the story's startling climax.

If 'Over the River and Through the Wood' was better written and more psychologically textured than 'Buffalo' then it was because O'Hara was a more experienced writer than Cheever in 1934. Before publishing his first short story in The

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<sup>73</sup> John O'Hara, 'Over the River and Through the Wood', *The New Yorker*, 15 December 1934, p. 23, repr. in *Short Stories from The New Yorker 1925-1940* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), pp. 9-16 (p. 16). Because there are no differences between these versions of 'Over the River and Through the Wood', further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.



New Yorker in 1928, O'Hara had, in addition to writing short stories and poetry, worked as a film critic and a press agent; he also published his debut novel *Appointment in Samarra* in 1934. Later on in his career, Cheever referred to O'Hara as 'a pro'.<sup>74</sup> It is therefore arguable, especially given the renewed commitment Cheever made to writing stories for large-circulation magazines like *The New Yorker* in 1935, that the technical and structural similarities between 'Over the River and Through the Wood' and 'Buffalo' were more than coincidental.<sup>75</sup>

As *The New Republic* did not publish much fiction and *Parade* ran for just one issue, the sale of 'Buffalo' to *The New Yorker* was a professional coup for Cheever. *The New Yorker* was a large-circulation general interest publication that occupied a strong financial position in an otherwise Depression-ravaged magazine market. Unlike several of its competitors, including Condé Nast's *Vanity Fair*, which was absorbed into its sister publication *Vogue* in early 1936 following the contraction of national advertising in the United States, *The New Yorker* was never seriously threatened by the Depression.<sup>76</sup> The circulation of the *New Yorker* grew annually between 1925 and 1935 (its first decade) with sixty per cent of the magazine's subscribers consistently renewing their subscriptions each year, and buyers of single issues at newsstands roughly the same in number as these subscribers.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> John Cheever, *The Journals of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 105.

<sup>75</sup> There is one curious reference to O'Hara in Cheever's correspondence with his editors at *The New Yorker*. In 1939, the Maxim Lieber Literary Agency submitted a story called 'Over the River and Through the Wood' to *The New Yorker* on Cheever's behalf. Maxwell returned the story to the agency, explaining in the accompanying letter that although the story could be used if it was revised, the title needed changing because O'Hara had used it earlier in 'one of the most famous stories ever printed in *The New Yorker*'. In fairness to Cheever, a native New Englander, it is plausible that he misremembered the title of Lydia Maria Child's 1844 Thanksgiving Day poem, 'The New-England Boy's Song about Thanksgiving Day', which is alternately known as 'Over the River and Through the Wood', when titling his story. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, General Correspondence 1928-1951, Box 320, fol. 2, William Maxwell to Geraldine Mavor, 24 November 1939.

<sup>76</sup> This was despite *Vanity Fair*'s circulation having reached a peak of 90,000 at the end of 1935.

<sup>77</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, p. 97.

Between 1927 and 1940, The New Yorker was also, along with Time and The Saturday Evening Post, consistently in the top three American magazines in number of advertising pages sold. The New Yorker sold its advertising space at a significantly lower rate than its competitors, however. As Ben Yagoda notes, Vogue had 28,000 readers in New York in 1934, but an advertiser had to spend one thousand five hundred dollars a page to reach them. The New Yorker, with more than half of its 125,000 readers living in the city, charged national advertisers just eight hundred and fifty dollars a page.<sup>78</sup> The New Yorker also published two editions, a ‘metropolitan’ edition and a shorter ‘out-of-town’ edition. New York-based businesses and companies could purchase a page of advertising in the ‘metropolitan’ edition for the discounted rate of five hundred and fifty dollars. Following the Repeal of Prohibition in 1933, alcohol manufacturers began to buy up advertising space in The New Yorker as well. This proved especially lucrative for the magazine. By the end of 1934, alcohol advertising represented about seventeen per cent of the magazine’s gross advertising income and forty per cent of its increased page volume.<sup>79</sup> Although magazines like Time and The Saturday Evening Post had larger circulations, The New Yorker was, in Yagoda’s view, an ‘inevitable choice’ for businesses and companies wanting upper-middle-class New Yorkers to purchase their goods and services during the Depression.<sup>80</sup>

The New Yorker paid Cheever \$45 (\$777.15 in 2015) for ‘Buffalo’. Cheever told his friend Reuel Denney that he thought the story ‘mediocre’ but was grateful for the money because it allowed him to ‘[go] around like a kid with a broken bank buying scotch and sodas and dating up everyone I could lay my hands on’.<sup>81</sup> Cheever was being slightly disingenuous. The clearest indication that he viewed the sale of ‘Buffalo’ as an important

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<sup>78</sup> Yagoda, p. 97.

<sup>79</sup> Yagoda, p. 98.

<sup>80</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, p. 97.

<sup>81</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 81.

landmark in his career as a writer is that, within a few weeks of *The New Yorker* accepting the story, he signed with the flourishing Maxim Lieber Literary Agency.<sup>82</sup> Lieber was a Communist, and his agency represented all but a few writers who were close to the American Communist movement during the 1930s and 1940s, including Asch, Louis Adamic, Alvah Bessie, Erskine Caldwell, Albert Halper, and Saul Bellow. Bailey claims that Cheever began to self-identify as an apolitical conservative and ‘regarded his leftist contemporaries with a majestic (if peevish) detachment’ by 1934, but it is clear that Cheever was still socialising with pro-Communist artists and writers in Boston and New York in the mid-1930s.<sup>83</sup> Cheever had also published at least one explicitly proletarian story in 1931 (‘Fall River’); and, when he came to the attention of Lieber in 1935, he did so with stories about working-class experience in the United States (‘The Teaser’, ‘Bayonne’, and ‘Buffalo’). Although Cheever was never politically committed to the Communist cause, he clearly used his affiliation with pro-Communist artists and writers to his professional advantage in this instance.

Cheever wanted a literary agent like Lieber to represent him because of his continuing lack of confidence in his ability to sell stories. On the one hand, Cheever thought this partly the fault of his stories. ‘When an editor hits an extraordinary [sic] story they know it and so far my stories haven’t been good enough to jolt them’, he wrote in a letter to Elizabeth Ames a month after receiving his cheque from *The New Yorker* for ‘Buffalo’.<sup>84</sup> Yet the problem lay less in the quality of Cheever’s stories and more in the

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<sup>82</sup> Cheever submitted ‘Buffalo’ and one unspecified story to Wolcott Gibbs at *The New Yorker* on 7 March 1935, and received a cheque for ‘Buffalo’ from Katharine White on 22 March. The first letter Lieber’s agency sent to *The New Yorker* is dated 9 April 1935. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 224, fol. 10, John Cheever to Wolcott Gibbs, 7 March 1935; *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Katharine S. White to John Cheever, 22 March 1935; *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 222, fol. 5, Maxim Lieber to Katharine S. White, 9 April 1935.

<sup>83</sup> Bailey argues that Cheever adopted a more conservative and deterministic view of history after reading a volume of letters by the historian Henry Adams, which he loaned from his brother Fred in 1934. Bailey, p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> Cheever to Ames, 22 April 1935, in Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, p. 35.

way he promoted them to magazine and book editors. As sociable and confident as Cheever was around writers and artists, he was shy and self-deprecating around most editors. The cover letter for 'Buffalo' and an unspecified story that Cheever sent to Gibbs at *The New Yorker* is a case in point, beginning as it does with the following declaration: 'Neither of these are world-beaters but the words are pretty accurate'.<sup>85</sup> Remarks such as this did not help to raise the expectations of editors because they betrayed Cheever's status as a fanatical, rather than professional player of the literary game.

Where Cheever was more retiring in his dealings with *The New Yorker*, Lieber was more assertive. When Lieber submitted Cheever's story 'Brooklyn Rooming House' to *The New Yorker* on 26 April 1935, for example, he introduced the story confidently to White as 'another piece by Jon [sic] Cheever, whose work surely needs no introduction to you'.<sup>86</sup> Lieber even went so far as to make his own editing suggestions for some of the stories he was submitting to *The New Yorker* on Cheever's behalf. In a letter accompanying a story called 'Santa Claus', which the magazine rejected, Lieber remarked, 'the last paragraph can be omitted as it strikes me as being somewhat irrelevant'.<sup>87</sup> It is clear that Lieber had more confidence in his ability to place stories in *The New Yorker* than he did in Cheever's ability as a writer at this early stage in their relationship, yet this is unlikely to have concerned Cheever because when he joined Lieber's agency in 1935, Lieber represented eight leftist writers with one or more stories published in *The New Yorker*, including Asch, Caldwell, Halper, Langston Hughes, Grace Lumpkin, Leo C. Rosten, Tess Slesinger, and Leane Zugsmith.<sup>88</sup> Having deferred to Cowley for his professional advice on writing saleable stories, Cheever now deferred to Lieber for his

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<sup>85</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 224, fol. 10, Cheever to Gibbs, 7 March 1935.

<sup>86</sup> White accepted the story, paying Cheever \$90 (\$1554.30 in 2015) for it. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Maxim Lieber to Katharine S. White, 26 April 1935.

<sup>87</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Maxim Lieber to Katharine S. White, 30 April 1935.

<sup>88</sup> Lieber also represented Robert M. Coates, *The New Yorker's* art critic.

commercial experience of selling them to large-circulation magazines like *The New Yorker* in an effort to establish himself as a professional player in the literary game.

Cheever's seven-year association with Lieber was important for his professional growth as a writer during the second half of the 1930s for two reasons. First, with Lieber handling his administrative duties, Cheever was free to concentrate fully on writing. This caused Cheever's literary productivity to increase quickly and significantly. He submitted nine stories to *The New Yorker* between 9 April and 15 November 1935, and around seventy more between 27 April 1936 and 9 November 1942.<sup>89</sup> Cheever consciously targeted the majority of his stories at *The New Yorker* between April 1935 and November 1942 because although *The New Yorker* paid comparatively low rates to freelance contributors in the 1930s, Lieber's good relationship with the magazine guaranteed sales. In addition, *The New Yorker* potentially offered Cheever a wider readership for his fiction as the magazine had high national circulation figures, being especially popular amongst the taste-making, book-buying American middle class. In short, appearing in *The New Yorker* was an opportunity Cheever could not afford to pass up.<sup>90</sup>

The second reason is one of the natural outcomes of Cheever submitting an average of roughly ten stories a year to *The New Yorker* while signed to Lieber's agency: rejection. *The New Yorker* published just eighteen of the estimated eighty stories Cheever submitted to the magazine between 1935 and 1942. *The New Yorker's* rate of rejection was higher

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<sup>89</sup> Although I have counted a total of seventy-five stories and one article submitted by Cheever and/or Lieber's agency to *The New Yorker* between April 1935 and November 1942, there are discrepancies in the Records that potentially put the number of stories closer to eighty. Of the seventy-five stories I counted in the correspondence between Lieber's Agency, Cheever, and his editors, sixty-six are mentioned by title, but nine are unspecified. More problematically, in a letter dated 4 May 1939, a grouping of submissions is referred to as 'a real stack of scripts' by one of Lieber's employees. I have included only the story the magazine accepted from this 'stack' in my calculation. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 320, fol. 2, Geraldine Mavor to William Maxwell, 4 May 1939; *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, William Maxwell to Geraldine Mavor, 9 May 1939.

<sup>90</sup> In this respect, Cheever was operating no differently to the companies and businesses taking weekly advantage of *The New Yorker's* cheap advertising space in order to target their products and services at middle- and upper-middle-class consumers.

than its rivals because, as the magazine was developing its own form of short story during the 1930s, its editorial requirements were stricter than those of other publications. In the 1930s, *The New Yorker* rejected Cheever's stories for being 'too much the routine short story, the sort of thing the monthly short story magazines use rather than the sort of thing we use' ('The Cameos', submitted on 9 April 1935), too long ('Santa Claus', submitted on 30 April 1935), and 'too slight' ('Journey to Saratoga', submitted on 17 November 1936). Rejection was not solely a negative experience for Cheever, however. He quickly learned to handle it in one of four ways: rewriting and resubmitting stories to *The New Yorker* weeks or even years later; submitting them to other magazines, sometimes with a new title; saving sections for use in subsequent stories and novels; or throwing them out altogether. He also benefited professionally and financially from having his stories rejected by the magazine just as much as he did from having them published in it.

This is because *The New Yorker's* rejections placed Cheever into direct contact with better paying, less editorially exacting large-circulation magazines such as *Collier's* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Two years after *The New Yorker* rejected 'Journey to Saratoga', a conventional sentimental story about a man struggling to give up gambling, Cheever sold the story to *Collier's* on the basis of his having sold them a similar story, 'His Young Wife' (*Collier's*, 1 January 1938), more than six months earlier.<sup>91</sup> 'His Young Wife' concerns a husband who nearly loses his younger wife to a gambler she meets at a horse racing track. Cheever wrote the story towards the end of 1937 because he needed money to leave Yaddo and return to Boston and New York. Having worked closely with *The New Yorker* for over two years, the by now more experienced Cheever understood that the magazine paid a lower rate for fiction than *Collier's* and similar 'glossy' magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Esquire*, so he wrote the more conventional 'His Young Wife' with

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<sup>91</sup> 'Saratoga' appeared in *Collier's* issue of 13 August 1938.

these publications deliberately in mind. *Collier's* paid Cheever \$500 (\$8390.04 in 2015) for 'His Young Wife', more than double what *The New Yorker* would have paid him. Cheever sold six of the *New Yorker's* rejections to other magazines, including *The New Republic*, *Story*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Collier's*, and *Harper's Bazaar* between 1935 and 1942; he also wrote six original stories specifically for *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Collier's*, and *Mademoiselle* during the same period. The latter strategy in particular is indicative of Cheever's growing confidence as a professional writer towards the end of the 1930s.

Joining the Maxim Lieber Literary Agency clearly helped Cheever to enhance his knowledge of the magazine marketplace and improve his skill and productivity as a professional writer between 1935 and 1942. By electing to submit the majority of his stories to *The New Yorker*, a commercially successful large-circulation magazine with rigorous editorial requirements, Cheever exposed himself simultaneously to both the specialist and commercial aspects of the magazine marketplace. *The New Yorker* rejected more of Cheever's stories than it purchased during this period, and this forced Cheever to overcome his perceived inability to sell his stories because if he wanted to continue writing for a living, he had no option but to approach other large-circulation magazines including *Collier's* and *The Atlantic Monthly* with *The New Yorker's* rejections. Between 1935 and 1942, Cheever sold rejections to, and wrote original stories for a variety of magazines. He also became more capable of maintaining a moderate to high level of literary productivity during the occasions when he had to work non-literary jobs in the late 1930s and early 1940s, selling three stories while working for the WPA for a year in 1938, and an average of six stories a year during his time in the United States Army between 1942 and 1945. For the first time in his writing career, then, Cheever's accomplishments were catching up with his ambition.

### **Cheever as a Professional Player of the Literary Game, 1945 to 1964**

Just as Bailey uses the trope of the starving artist to describe Cheever in the 1930s, Susan Cheever uses the trope of victimhood to describe her father's relationship with *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1964. In addition to criticising the magazine's payment system for confusing and frustrating her father, she makes his experience of writing short stories for it seem like a Sisyphean struggle: 'my father devoted most of his considerable creative energy to writing short stories for the magazine, and he expected more than they were willing to give. The money they paid him just wasn't enough to live on—even in the years when we children were in public schools and the family in a rented house'.<sup>92</sup> Compounding this, argues Cheever, was the highly personal nature of her father's relationships with his editors at the magazine, as well as his broader lack of financial acumen: 'There were two or three years in the mid-1960s when my father made a good deal of money, but he never even thought about investment [...] I'm not sure he knew the difference between principal and interest at that point'.<sup>93</sup> Susan Cheever makes a salient point about her father failing to consolidate his earnings from the sales of his books and film rights in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but she is too dismissive of his professional aptitude in relation to the magazine marketplace. This section of Chapter Two argues that having developed a strategic understanding of the magazine marketplace during the 1930s using a freer, sociable style of play, Cheever adopted a more rational style of play in the 1940s. Cheever used this style of play to consolidate his position in the marketplace and make writing short stories for *The New Yorker* his main source of income until the early 1960s.

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<sup>92</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, p. 136.

<sup>93</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, p. 152.



Lahire argues that most writers rely on non-literary or extra-literary jobs to support their literary ambition.<sup>94</sup> Using the concept of ‘habitus’ as Pierre Bourdieu theorises it, ‘[a] system of schemes of [...] perception, thought, appreciation, and action which are durable and transposable’, Lahire contends that writer-editors, writer-teachers, writer-doctors, and so on can suffer an identity crisis as a result of their belonging to two sets of institutional ‘habitus’ that are not concurrent with each other in terms of their subjective and motivating structures.<sup>95</sup> Cheever avoided this identity crisis because he relied on a literary job to support his literary ambition. But, at the same time, he also recognised that freelancing, ‘even for the mass magazines, [wasn’t] enough of a living to get married on’ in the 1940s.<sup>96</sup> ‘[Trying] to write one’s way out of debt’, as Cheever put it in his journal in 1953, could be as stressful as any journalist’s deadline. ‘There are seven more days; six more days etc. [...] I have at times been able to sweat out a story, at times I’ve failed’, wrote Cheever in 1953.<sup>97</sup> For Cheever, then, writing stories for magazines could be as emotionally depleting and time consuming as any non-literary job.

The editorial correspondence in *The New Yorker Records* shows that the magazine’s fiction department supported Cheever unequivocally between 1935 and 1963, providing him with confidence and financial aid. The *Records* also reveal that Cheever was at no point during this period an inferior in his relationship with *The New Yorker*. Cheever negotiated short-term payment arrangements with the magazine while signed to Lieber’s agency in the early 1940s, and, later, agreed the terms of his first-reading agreement each year. Cheever’s editors did not apply a single story payment, cost of living adjustment, or quantity bonus payment to his debt with the magazine without his authorisation. Cheever

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<sup>94</sup> Lahire, ‘The Double Life of Writers’, p. 448.

<sup>95</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, (London: SAGE, 1990), p. 35; Lahire, pp. 448-49.

<sup>96</sup> John Cheever to Mary Winternitz, [n.d.] c. 1940, in John Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, p. 57.

<sup>97</sup> John Cheever, *The Journals*, pp. 29-30.

was not a victim of the magazine business during his career as his daughter insists he was. Rather, he acted pragmatically: in lieu of any viable professional alternatives in the early 1940s, he prioritised his relationships with large circulation magazines and utilised his primary skill-set to earn his living.

The United States Army discharged Cheever on 27 November 1945. Cheever served in the army for three years, six months, and twenty days; it was the last non-literary job he would ever work. From 1945 until his death in 1982, Cheever was a professional player who earned his living by playing and living off the proceeds from the literary game. But this did not happen overnight. Cheever realised as early as 1940 that it was possible to earn a living from writing short stories if he adopted a rational style of play. And in September 1940, he made the best move consistent with his circumstances. After failing to get a job as a junior editor at *The New Republic*, Cheever signed an arrangement with *The New Yorker* to write twelve stories in return for thirteen weeks of advance payments.<sup>98</sup> Cheever approached *The New Yorker* instead of other popular magazines for a number of practical reasons.

First, Cheever got on well with his editors at the magazine. Between 1935 and 1937, Gibbs oriented Cheever in the editorial and financial practices of *The New Yorker*'s fiction department. Gibbs also provided Cheever with significant professional encouragement and personal support. Cheever's next editor at the magazine, Maxwell, enhanced this professional dynamic by developing a close friendship with Cheever. Between 1938 and 1939, Maxwell got cheques for stories sent out quickly to Cheever when he could not afford to leave Yaddo. He also invited Cheever to his office to discuss revisions to stories

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<sup>98</sup> In a letter to Ik Shuman, managing editor of *The New Yorker*, dated 1 October 1940, Lieber returns the carbon copy of Shuman's letter to Lieber, dated 30 September 1940, in which Shuman outlines the agreement to issue advance payments to Cheever for a period of thirteen weeks. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 340, fol. 10, Maxim Lieber to Ik Shuman, 1 October 1940.

on the cusp of rejection.<sup>99</sup> Lobrano, who became Cheever's editor in late 1939 and helped to broker his agreement for advance payments in 1940, maintained this bond.<sup>100</sup> Second, although novels were Cheever's best hope of long-term critical and commercial success, he could not afford the spare time to write them without a main source of income. Having struggled to settle into a non-literary career, Cheever realised writing short stories for magazines could become a second job for him in the way that non-literary professions such as teaching and extra-literary professions such as editing were for other writers. Third, *The New Yorker* was the only popular magazine that offered freelance contributors like Cheever a salary arrangement. Cheever experienced modest commercial success from his writing towards the end of the 1930s, but, if he could not get a non-literary or extra-literary job, he needed his writing to provide long-term subsistence rather than short-term profit. In this respect, *The New Yorker*, which rewarded exclusivity with annually renewed contracts, was Cheever's best option.

The magazine had two payment systems for writers after 1938: a drawing account for employees and a first-reading agreement for freelance contributors. Staff reporters had drawing accounts with *The New Yorker*. This system was put in place during the late 1920s and it allowed staff reporters to draw a fixed amount of money from the magazine each week—one hundred and twenty-five dollars a week was common in the 1930s and 1940s.

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<sup>99</sup> Geraldine Mavor refers to one of these meetings in a letter to Maxwell dated 8 December 1938. She asks Maxwell to read a new story, 'New York Background', so that he can discuss it with Cheever at his office the next day. Just under a year later, in a letter dated 29 September 1939, Maxwell tells Cheever that he would be 'very glad of a chance to talk to [him] in person' about the revisions to 'Nothing Has Happened', a story published as 'The Happiest Days' in *The New Yorker's* issue of 4 November 1939. New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 299, fol. 18, Geraldine Mavor to William Maxwell, 8 Dec 1938; New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 312, fol. 15, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 29 September 1939.

<sup>100</sup> Maxwell met with Cheever on several occasions during his first stint as his editor between 1938 and 1940. Yet most of Cheever's correspondence was filtered to him by Lieber and his staff. When Lobrano became more involved in editing Cheever's work in late 1940, he corresponded directly with Cheever. Their friendship developed rapidly as a result. In a letter dated 1941, for example, Cheever suggests that he, Lobrano, and their partners go to see the play 'Arsenic and Old Lace'. New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 353, fol. 5, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, [n.d.] 'Thursday' 1941.

Staff reporters were also able to sell their pieces against this increasing debt over an agreed period of time.<sup>101</sup> Ross intended the drawing account to encourage productivity and assuage a contributor's financial insecurity.<sup>102</sup> Young freelancers found the drawing account appealing for the latter reason; but, as Thomas Kunkel points out, it was 'anxiety-inducing' for staff reporters.<sup>103</sup> If they struggled to maintain steady productivity and generate new ideas that interested Ross, their debt only increased.<sup>104</sup> In recognition of this, the magazine offered freelance contributors the more flexible first-reading agreement from 1938 onwards.

Lobrano implemented the first-reading agreement when he took over as *The New Yorker's* head of fiction in 1938. The agreement affected the relationship between a freelance contributor and the magazine in several ways. It granted the magazine first refusal on any fiction, humour, reminiscence, and casual essays contributors produced. This meant that contributors could only sell their work to other publications once *The New Yorker* rejected it. The agreement also guaranteed contributors a basic rate of payment for their work. It did this according to an alphabetical rating system designed to check the length and quality of submissions. Using this system, editors graded each submission, 'AAA', 'AA', 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D'. In 1944, an 'AAA'-rated fiction submission earned its contributor twenty eight cents for the first one thousand five hundred words and fourteen cents for the rest. Whereas a 'D'-rated submission earned its contributor just eight cents for the first one thousand five hundred words and four for cents the rest (see Figure 5).

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise: Harold Ross of The New Yorker* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1996), p. 321.

<sup>102</sup> Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, p. 321.

<sup>103</sup> Kunkel, pp. 320-21.

<sup>104</sup> Kunkel, p. 321.

Each contributor agreed a specific rate with *The New Yorker* when they signed the first-reading agreement. The magazine maintained a policy of paying them more than their agreed rate if it considered their work exceptional though. This alphabetical rating system applied to work by staff reporters and freelance contributors alike. The first-reading agreement also offered contributors extra payments in return for their exclusivity, adding a twenty-five per cent premium calculated on the base price of each submission. The *New Yorker* paid contributors a quarterly cost of living adjustment payment (COLA) as well. It calculated COLA as a percentage of how much the cost of living index increased during the month preceding the sale of a story. The magazine then added this percentage to the base price of the purchased story. A further incentive not mentioned in the first-reading agreement was the quantity bonus. For example, if a contributor sold six or more stories to *The New Yorker* during a twelve-month period, the magazine added a quantity bonus of twelve-and-a-half, fifteen, or twenty-five per cent to the base price of each. Like the alphabetical rating system, quantity bonuses also applied to staff reporters and freelance contributors. Both Lobrano's first-reading agreement and the staff reporters' drawing account rewarded consistent productivity with long-term subsistence. But of the two arrangements, only the first-reading agreement encouraged productivity and loyalty without financial indebtedness. Accepting this risk, Cheever opened a drawing account with *The New Yorker* in 1940.<sup>105</sup>

Critics assume that Cheever's inaugural financial arrangement with the magazine was a first-reading agreement rather than a drawing account. This assumption is based on Susan Cheever's claim that her father signed a first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker* every year between 1935 and 1982.<sup>106</sup> Cheever's letters reveal that, in 1940, at

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<sup>105</sup> Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, p. 321.

<sup>106</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, p. 137. Even Blake Bailey and Francis J. Bosha, a critic who has written on the Cheever material in the *New Yorker* Records, accept Susan Cheever's claim about Cheever's

around the same time as he was attempting to get a job at *The New Republic*, he was writing a Christmas story for *Mademoiselle* ('A Present for Louisa, December 1940) and a story for *Harper's Bazaar* ('The Edge of the World', June 1940).<sup>107</sup> This would not have been possible under the terms of *The New Yorker's* first-reading agreement, which gave the magazine first refusal on a contributor's work. If Cheever was under contract, he could only sell a story to another magazine after *The New Yorker* rejected it, not before, so it is unlikely that he was writing expressly for other publications. Furthermore, *The New Yorker's* first-reading agreement incentivised productivity, whereas the steadily increasing debt of a drawing account demanded it. The spike in the number of stories Cheever published in the magazine between 1940 and 1942, the period through which Cheever extended the arrangement, suggests an urgency on his part that was absent towards the end of the 1930s.<sup>108</sup> Cheever published just two stories in *The New Yorker* in 1939. He published eleven stories in the magazine in 1940; seven in 1941; and seven in 1942. Indeed, after opening his drawing account with *The New Yorker* in 1940, Cheever referred to it as his 'contract' with the magazine, and wrote the following statement of intent in his journal: 'I have twelve stories to write and they'll be good'.<sup>109</sup>

The amount of money Cheever drew from the magazine each week is unknown. But, if one hundred and twenty five dollars a week was the going rate for employees during this period, then it seems reasonable to assume that Cheever's draw was worth a similar amount. One hundred and twenty-five dollars was roughly half the amount Cheever received from *The New Yorker* for a story in the early 1940s: the magazine paid him a base

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contractual relationship with the magazine as fact. Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 111, 319-21; Bosh, 'The John Cheever Papers at the New York Public Library's Manuscripts and Archives Division (Part 1)', *Resources for American Literary Study*, 27 (2001), 78-112 (p. 111).

<sup>107</sup> John Cheever to Mary Winternitz, [n.d.] c. 1940 and Cheever to Winternitz, [n.d.] c. 1940, in Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>108</sup> Cheever asked Lobrano to close the drawing account in a letter dated 3 July 1942. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 373, fol. 5, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, 3 July 1942.

<sup>109</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 111.

price of \$210 (\$3548.99 in 2015) for 'The New World' (9 November 1940) on 8 October 1940, for example. It is therefore easy to see what Cheever was thinking in September 1940: if he produced twelve stories in thirteen weeks for *The New Yorker*, he would make for himself a sum of money equal to the initial total advance payment made by the magazine. Of course, the reality was somewhat different. On 25 March 1941, three days before the arrangement was due to expire, Cheever's deficit with the magazine was seventy dollars.<sup>110</sup>

There is no reference to Cheever having a first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker* before 1943 in the Records. The first piece of editorial correspondence in the Records about Cheever's first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker* is a letter from Lobrano to Cheever dated 30 January 1945. Lobrano confirms that the magazine is extending the bonus cycle for writers in the Armed Forces to eighteen months in the letter. '[That] means,' writes Lobrano, 'that you've earned the 12½% bonus on your last six stories. So here's our check'. Cheever would have only been eligible for this payment if he was under contract to the magazine. The bonus cycle to which Lobrano is referring began in July 1943, which is roughly a year after Cheever terminated his drawing account with the magazine.

The second piece of evidence in the Records is a letter from Ik Shuman, the managing editor of *The New Yorker*, to the army on 4 May 1942. Shuman asked the army to give Cheever a ten day furlough so that he could write stories for the magazine. He explained that if Cheever's work was not completed, it 'would be without value either to us or to him, and would result in a loss to us both'.<sup>111</sup> The army refused to issue the furlough. Some critics argue that this is evidence of *The New Yorker* wanting 'to keep

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<sup>110</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 360, fol. 13, Ik Shuman to Maxim Lieber, 25 March 1941.

<sup>111</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 373, fol. 5, Ik Shuman to 'UNITED STATES ARMY/To Whom It May Concern', 4 May 1942.

[Cheever] out of harm's way' during the war.<sup>112</sup> But Shuman is moving to protect The New Yorker's financial loss in this letter. Both the magazine and the contributor lost money under the terms of a drawing account if the latter could not produce work. The contributor was also liable for the money The New Yorker paid to them via a drawing account. In contrast, the magazine's first-reading agreement had less risk attached to it for both parties. A contracted freelancer was under no financial obligation to write stories for the magazine because a non-productive first-reading agreement only cost the magazine a signing-on bonus of one hundred dollars (this amount varied depending on the reputation of the author but one hundred dollars was the basic rate) and a couple of thousand dollars of COLA payments. There would be little need for Shuman to request a furlough for Cheever if he had a first-reading agreement with the magazine.

The third piece of evidence in the Records is an interoffice memo dated 15 January 1947 from Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman. Mason handled the magazine's money matters between 1937 and 1952. A liaison between the magazine's editors and its book-keeping department, Mason's responsibilities included ordering office equipment, scheduling vacations, assigning office space, and calculating payments for contracted and non-contracted contributors. In his memo to Norman, Mason explains that Cheever's bonus cycle should not be extended to include a story called 'The Beautiful Mountains' (8 February 1947) as 'the tenth piece' in an extended bonus cycle which began on March 18, 1945.<sup>113</sup> The dates Lobrano and Mason give in their correspondence for Cheever's bonus cycles suggest he signed a first-reading agreement with The New Yorker in July 1943.

If Cheever signed a first-reading agreement with the magazine in 1943, as the Records suggest, then it is because his circumstances changed during the Second World

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<sup>112</sup> Boshka, 'The John Cheever Papers at the New York Public Library's Manuscripts and Archives Division (Part 1)', p. 84.

<sup>113</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 4: Editorial Business 1926-1984, Administrative Files - Harding T. Mason 1937-1952, Box 960, fol. 15, Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman, 15 January 1947.



War. Writing stories for other magazines was a lucrative part of Cheever's working practice in the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>114</sup> The drawing account complemented this style of play because it guaranteed Cheever a regular income from *The New Yorker* without decreasing his flexibility to write for more commercial magazines, such as *Collier's*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Harper's Bazaar*.<sup>115</sup> Cheever was also actively seeking an extra-literary second job before the war, and there is evidence to suggest he viewed *The New Yorker* as a potential employer. During the second year of his drawing account, Cheever instructed Lieber to submit an article about the Saratoga Springs racecourse to William Shawn, the head of the fact department at *The New Yorker*. In a letter dated 19 August 1941 accompanying the submission, Lieber wrote: 'Although John Cheever fills a portion [of the magazine] quite regularly with his fiction, you may not be averse to having an article of his'.<sup>116</sup> Shawn disagreed, and rejected the article a week later: '[it] just didn't stand up as a factual story for us, because the material wasn't fresh enough', he explained to Lieber.<sup>117</sup>

After the army inducted Cheever on 7 May 1942, it became difficult for him to find time to write stories or articles for magazines. He joked in a letter to Maxwell that he spent as much time 'mooning over literary ideas' as he did 'chasing a training stick with a bayonet' in the first few weeks of his basic infantry training.<sup>118</sup> But in reality, training took

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<sup>114</sup> As it was for many writers associated with *The New Yorker* in the late 1930s and early 1940s. After leaving the magazine towards the end of the 1930s, Brendan Gill devoted a year to writing short stories. Gill used his cordial relations with White and Maxwell at *The New Yorker* to sell some stories to the magazine during this period. Yet he also wrote 'longish' stories 'with elaborate plots' for more commercial, large-circulation magazines, such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *Liberty*, and *Good Housekeeping*. Brendan Gill, *Here at The New Yorker* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 157.

<sup>115</sup> Cheever wrote 'A Bird in the Hand' and 'From This Day Forward' for publication in *Mademoiselle* while drawing weekly payments from *The New Yorker* in 1941.

<sup>116</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 360, fol. 13, Maxim Lieber to William Shawn, 19 August 1941.

<sup>117</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, William Shawn to Maxim Lieber, 25 August 1941.

<sup>118</sup> John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] 'Sunday' c. 1940, in Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, pp. 77-78.

precedence over writing early on in his enlistment. During the first two months of his basic training, Cheever managed to submit just two stories to *The New Yorker*, 'Where Will It All End' and an unspecified piece. Lobrano rejected both stories, and towards the end of June, Cheever stopped his drawing account with the magazine altogether. This was a sensible decision by Cheever because the drawing account was untenable for someone in his circumstances. It put him into debt with *The New Yorker* while demanding a high level of productivity he could not achieve in the army. In contrast to the drawing account, the first-reading agreement put no financial pressure on Cheever to produce stories; it also provided him and his wife with subsistence in the form of COLA payments.<sup>119</sup>

Even so, the Records show that Cheever did not sign a first-reading agreement with the magazine for a year immediately after ending his drawing account. It is most likely the case that Cheever was able to supplement his income from the army with the proceeds from his literary activities between July 1942 and July 1943. After completing his basic training at Camp Croft in South Carolina, Cheever's platoon relocated to Camp Gordon in Georgia. By October 1942, Cheever conceded to his friends, Cummings and his wife, model Marion Morehouse, that life in the army was not 'bad at all': 'the American soldier is in greater danger of being killed by kindness and indigestion than [sic] he is of being killed by the Germans'.<sup>120</sup> He also found time available to write stories and correspond both with his editors at *The New Yorker* and book publishers in New York. In the autumn of 1942, Cheever sold 'Problem No. 4' (17 October 1942) and 'The Man Who Was Very Homesick for New York' (21 November 1942) to *The New Yorker* for \$250 (\$3628.82 in 2015) and \$365 (\$5298.08 in 2015). He also met with Bennett Cerf of Random House while on furlough in mid-September to negotiate the publication of his debut collection of

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<sup>119</sup> Cheever married Mary Winternitz in March 1941.

<sup>120</sup> Cheever to 'Marion and Cummings', [n.d.] c. 1942, in Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, pp. 81-82.

short stories, *The Way Some People Live* (1943). Cerf paid Cheever an advance of \$250 as part of the deal, and Random House published *The Way Some People Live* in early March 1943. With no weekly draw to pay off, these payments were, if not ample, then at least enough money for the Cheevers to live off during the last few months of 1942.<sup>121</sup>

Cheever was also exploring opportunities for advancement in the army, partly to keep himself away from the European and Pacific combat theatres, and partly to increase his earnings. In early 1943, Cheever began editing a weekly regimental newspaper. Then, in March 1943, *The Way Some People Live*, which sold almost two thousand copies at full-price, caught the attention of Leonard Spigelgass, a former M-G-M executive who was a major in the United States Army Signal Corps. As well as developing and testing communication, information, and weapon systems, the Signal Corps employed writers and film-makers to produce training films for army and civilian personnel. The Signal Corps Photographic Center was responsible for this, and it operated out of the old Paramount Studio in Queens, New York. Within a few months of reading *The Way Some People Live*, Spigelgass had Cheever transferred to Queens to write scripts for training films.

This decision returned Cheever to New York, the centre of his personal and professional life before the United States entered the war, and to his wife, who was pregnant with their first child Susan; it also re-established writing as his second job. The first-reading agreement complemented Cheever's more stable professional situation at the same time as providing extra subsistence for his young family. Between August and November 1943, Cheever published three stories in *The New Yorker*. This took the total number of stories he sold to the magazine during 1943 to six. In 1944, Cheever published

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<sup>121</sup> Cheever's financial situation after a year in the army is best embodied by the increase in the price he was willing to pay for a fountain pen. In the spring of 1942, Cheever spent two dollars on a fountain pen to write letters and stories with instead of a typewriter. In the spring of 1943, just before his transfer to the Signal Corps, Cheever bought a new fountain pen for twenty dollars. John Cheever to Mary Cheever, [n.d.] 'Wednesday' c. 1942 and Cheever to M. Cheever, [n.d.] 'Sunday' c. May 1943, in Cheever, pp. 69, 104.

three stories in *The New Yorker*, and a rejection in *Good Housekeeping*. During 1945, the last year of the war, Cheever published four stories in *The New Yorker* and a rejection in *Good Housekeeping*. Cheever's literary productivity during this period was lower than it had been in 1941 and 1942, which is understandable given his military responsibilities. Nevertheless, both Cheever's productivity and his decision to write stories specifically for *The New Yorker* again are consistent with that of a freelance contributor working under the terms of a first-reading agreement.

Cheever committed himself to writing stories for *The New Yorker* at a point in time when the magazine was re-evaluating its method of pricing the fiction pieces it bought from staff writers and freelance contributors. The earliest sign of this in the Records is an interoffice memo dated 12 November 1946 from Ross to R. Hawley Truax, the treasurer of the magazine, and Mason. In the memo, Ross explains that *The New Yorker* set 'the fifteen hundred word bogey with humourous pieces primarily in mind '(or I did, at any rate)', but that '[it] is hopeless to think that we can hold fiction stories to fifteen hundred words'.<sup>122</sup> Ross was responding belatedly to this issue because contributors had, in fact, been extending the length of the *New Yorker* story since the early 1940s. Irwin Shaw's 'The City Was in Total Darkness' ran just over six thousand words in *The New Yorker*'s issue of 30 August 1941. This was more than double the three thousand word limit preferred by the magazine's fiction department. Only one of the three stories Shaw published in the magazine during 1941 was shorter than five thousand words ('Material Witness', 1 February), whereas Cheever's stories ran no longer than three thousand five hundred words on average during the same year. Although Ross instituted all-fiction issues of *The New Yorker* to accommodate the work of contributors like Shaw, he did not amend the

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<sup>122</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Box 35, fol. 8, Harold W. Ross to Hawley R. Truax and Harding T. Mason, 12 November 1946.

payment system.<sup>123</sup> This suggests that Ross regarded Shaw as the exception rather than the rule amongst freelance contributors during the early 1940s.

However, the almost year-on-year increase in the average length of Cheever's fiction submissions to *The New Yorker* between 1941 and 1946 implies that Shaw's behaviour gradually became the norm amongst contributors. From 1935 to 1942, Cheever wrote a novella-length story for *The Atlantic Monthly*, and stories of more than four thousand words for *Collier's* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Yet he more or less adhered to the fiction department's limit of three thousand words when writing stories for *The New Yorker* during the same period.<sup>124</sup> Cheever only began to write longer stories for the magazine after joining the Signal Corps in 1943.<sup>125</sup>

The average length of the six stories Cheever sold to *The New Yorker* in 1943 was roughly four thousand words, making them twice as long as any of the stories he sold to the magazine in 1941 and 1942. Cheever's army story, 'Sergeant Limeburner', ran just short of six thousand words in *The New Yorker's* issue of 13 March 1943. During 1944, the average length of Cheever's stories decreased to three thousand two hundred words. Between 1945 and 1946, however, the average length of Cheever's *New Yorker* stories increased to four thousand four hundred words. Cheever's 'The Sutton Place Story', which appeared in the magazine's issue of 29 June 1946, rivalled one of Shaw's at nearly seven thousand words long. A few months later, on 20 December 1946, *The New Yorker* informed its staff reporters and freelance contributors that it was no longer 'rewarding brevity', and paying the higher word-rate for the first two thousand words of each

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<sup>123</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, p. 162.

<sup>124</sup> In comparison to Shaw, none of the six stories Cheever published in *The New Yorker* during 1941 was longer than three thousand five hundred words. To put this comparison another way, in 1941, a story by Shaw took up an average of fourteen columns of text in an issue, whereas one by Cheever took up seven.

<sup>125</sup> Cheever had more time to write in the Signal Corps. He also worked and socialised with Shaw in the Signal Corps during the early 1940s. Cheever would almost certainly have read Shaw's stories in the magazine. It is also plausible that he discussed the experience of writing fiction for *The New Yorker* with Shaw, both an outspoken critic and avid practitioner of the form.

submission.<sup>126</sup> ‘After considerate thought’, read the closing sentence of the letter, ‘it has been agreed that this is fairer’.<sup>127</sup> The increased word bogey proved lucrative for contributors. Cheever, who was paid the A-rate of twenty cents for the first one thousand five hundred words of a piece and ten cents for the remaining wordage in the mid-1940s, made an additional one hundred dollars on each story he sold to *The New Yorker* from December 1946 onwards.

On the one hand, the increase in the word bogey in 1946 can be viewed as part of the magazine’s profit objective between the mid-1930s and the mid-1940s. During this period, the *New Yorker* used the revenue it generated from advertising to increase the budget of its editorial department by an average of ten per cent each year.<sup>128</sup> Managing editor Ik Shuman was responsible for this strategy. ‘[The] more we spent on the magazine’, he explained to his colleague James Thurber in the 1950s, ‘the longer we held contributors, the greater grew the circulation and the higher grew the advertising rate’.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, by the early 1940s, every dollar *The New Yorker* spent on its contributors produced about three dollars in revenue.<sup>130</sup> On the other hand, the change to the word bogey was one of a series of measures undertaken by Ross during the mid-1940s to ensure that authors were, in his words, ‘done right by’.<sup>131</sup>

Two of these measures—notifications of payment for contributors, and inter-departmental liaising regarding contributor payments—were the result of the magazine’s administrative infrastructure, which depended on strong inter-departmental communication. In a memo dated 10 October 1945, Ross instructed Mason to ensure that

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<sup>126</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Box 35, fol. 4, ‘The Editors’ to ‘To Our Writers’, 20 December 1946.

<sup>127</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, ‘The Editors’ to ‘To Our Writers’, 20 December 1946.

<sup>128</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, p. 98.

<sup>129</sup> James Thurber, *The Years with Ross*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1957), p. 143.

<sup>130</sup> Thurber, *The Years with Ross*, p. 143.

<sup>131</sup> Harold W. Ross to James Thurber, 23 March 1948, in Harold W. Ross, *Letters from the Editor: The New Yorker’s Harold Ross*, ed. by Thomas Kunkel (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 259.

‘[all] writers on drawing accounts [...] get a slip telling them that such and such a piece has been paid for and that such and such an amount has been applied to their accounts’ after discovering that Gibbs was not notified of the amounts the magazine paid for his contributions.<sup>132</sup> This system kept any staff and contributors on drawing accounts up to date with their indebtedness. There is also evidence in the Records of Mason supplying editors with calculations of contributor payments in advance of contract negotiations. On 23 January 1948, Mason sent a memo to Lobrano ahead of his meeting with S. J. Perelman about a new first-reading agreement. The memo included a comparison of the prices the magazine was willing to pay for a casual Perelman had recently submitted, ‘The Sweeter the Tooth, The Nearer the Couch’ (7 February 1948), both with and without an agreement.<sup>133</sup> Mason informed Lobrano that Perelman was paid at the AAA-rate (twenty-eight cents for the first two thousand words and fourteen cents for the remainder).<sup>134</sup> Without an agreement, Perelman stood to earn \$690 (\$6774.00 in 2015) for the casual; with the agreement (which included COLA at twenty-five per cent, as well as a twenty-five per cent premium), the price of the casual doubled to \$1309.20 (\$12,852.92 in 2015).<sup>135</sup> This measure complemented the magazine’s business model because its rates of pay were transparent and the magazine was not significantly disadvantaged in negotiations.

The New Yorker also turned to technological solutions to ensure that staff reporters and freelance contributors were paid as quickly as possible during the second half of the 1940s. In a letter dated 15 September 1948, Ross informed Thurber that the magazine was now using a Varsity, a specialised Hammond typewriter (the Hammond Multiplex, first

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<sup>132</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Box 35, fol. 7, Harold W. Ross to Harding T. Mason, 10 October 1945.

<sup>133</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Box 960, fol. 10, Harding T. Mason to Gustave S. Lobrano, 23 January 1948.

<sup>134</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Mason to Lobrano, 23 January 1948.

<sup>135</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Mason to Lobrano, 23 January 1948.

produced in 1913) capable of using over three hundred different type styles, adjusting the space between characters, and producing right-justified copy, to ‘cut down corrections at the printers and [...] to get things measured up, and paid for quick’.<sup>136</sup> The Varityper produced multiple final proofs of stories and articles at a much lower cost than did conventional printers’ methods.<sup>137</sup>

Consequently, The New Yorker’s editors were able to issue contributors a cheque worth up to seventy-five per cent of the base price of a submission within a few days of the magazine agreeing to purchase it.<sup>138</sup> In the early 1940s, Cheever was used to waiting for up to two weeks for a cheque from *Harper’s Bazaar*.<sup>139</sup> At The New Yorker, Cheever received the initial payment for a submission within one week of its sale, and, if the wordage of the piece increased during editing, a cheque for an additional payment within another week or so. This measure shows that although The New Yorker could not always pay its freelance contributors as much as its large-circulation competitors on a per-submission basis, it understood that many of them lived from sale to sale and adapted its payment system to suit this practice.

Having committed himself to earning his living from his literary activity following the end of the Second World War, Cheever worked comfortably within the parameters Ross established for The New Yorker’s payment system in the late 1940s. It was the

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<sup>136</sup> Ross to Thurber, 15 September 1948, in Ross, *Letters from the Editor: The New Yorker’s Harold Ross*, p. 346.

<sup>137</sup> The typescript of a story became a working varitype proof after an editor corrected its punctuation and prose, and printers’ wrote instructions regarding font size and style, the placement of slug-lines including the story’s title, author and date of publication, line breaks, paragraph indentation, letter capitalisation, and speech marks. Editors’ made annotations in grey pencil; printers’ and copy editors’ made theirs in blue.

<sup>138</sup> Several instructions for these advance payments exist in Mason’s files in the Records. In a memo dated 8 February 1949, Mason asks his colleague, Fred Norman, to have a cheque ‘in the amount of \$500.00 to John Cheever as an advance, requested by Mr. Lobrano, against a casual, ‘The People You Meet’, which has been approved for purchase’. In another memo dated 6 May 1949, Mason informs Norman that Lobrano has requested a payment for the piece ‘for three-quarters of the present wordage; additional payment to be made when the piece is revised in the final wordage’. New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Box 961, fol. 3, Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman, 6 May 1949; New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman, 8 February 1949.

<sup>139</sup> John Cheever to Mary Winternitz, [n.d.] c. 1940, in Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, p. 56.



responsibility of the magazine's editors to issue and explain each payment to contributors, and Cheever's editors did this without exception via letters throughout his association with *The New Yorker*. These notifications ranged in their level of detail. At their simplest, they informed Cheever of a complete payment for a story: 'Here's the check for *The Children*,' wrote Maxwell in a letter dated 23 June 1953, 'and it is the third piece in a bonus cycle that doesn't end until next December'.<sup>140</sup> When they became more complicated, it was usually because of a unique situation. In a letter to Cheever dated 26 July 1950, Lobrano explained that an additional payment of \$415 (\$4074.22 in 2015) was due on Cheever's story, 'The Pot of Gold' (14 October 1950), because

when we bought that piece we had the old payment system in effect—you know, so much for the first 2000 words and half of so much for the balance—and that the new 50-50 system went into effect about three weeks later. So everybody feels that it would be fair to make the additional payment. Now, I've been asked to ask you whether you want any of that additional payment applied to your debt here, and meanwhile the check is being held up.<sup>141</sup>

Susan Cheever argues that while her father had 'tremendous respect' for the professional judgement of his editors at *The New Yorker*, he was the clear inferior in the relationship.<sup>142</sup> This letter is important because it acts as a corrective to his daughter's view, at least in terms of Cheever's financial relationship with the magazine. As part of Cheever's first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker*, he had a drawing account of two thousand dollars. Unlike the account he had with the magazine in the early 1940s, this drawing

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<sup>140</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 711, fol. 5, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 23 June 1953.

<sup>141</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 488, fol. 12, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 26 July 1950.

<sup>142</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, p. 35.

account functioned like an overdraft facility. When Cheever sold a story to *The New Yorker* under the terms of his agreement, he decided whether or not to put some or all of the payment towards his debt. This put Cheever in a much stronger financial position in relation to *The New Yorker* than his daughter allows.

The editorial correspondence in the Records shows that Cheever was not at all confused by his financial arrangements with *The New Yorker* during the 1940s and 1950s. If anything, the combination of the magazine's financial transparency and the flexibility of his drawing account emboldened Cheever in his dealings with his editors after 1946. Replying to Lobrano's letter concerning the additional payment on 'The Pot of Gold' on 28 July 1950, Cheever wrote: 'I would appreciate it very much if no deductions were made on the additional payment for *The Pot of Gold*. I am bound to complete some good stories in the next few weeks. This over-payment seems to me to be a very generous agreement and my sincere thanks'.<sup>143</sup> Cheever's letter to Lobrano is characteristic of his conduct towards *The New Yorker* during the 1940s and 1950s. This is to say that Cheever received all of his payments graciously, but he rarely accepted any deductions to advance payments for submissions that had been set up in the working varitype format, or additional payments for submissions after they had been revised to their final wordage.

Cheever's editors handled him delicately as a result of his reluctance to accept deductions to these payments. Cheever frequently relied on his historically steady productivity to secure his outstanding debt with the magazine. Lobrano also agreed to the majority of Cheever's requests for advance payments against future submissions during the late 1940s and early 1950s, irrespective of Cheever's indebtedness with, or the financial success of his literary activities outside of *The New Yorker*. In a memo dated 22 October

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<sup>143</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 488, fol. 12, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, 28 July 1950.

1947, Mason asked a cheque for \$300 (\$3182.95 in 2015) to be made payable to Cheever ‘as an advance against future writings (requested by Mr. Lobrano)’.<sup>144</sup> In another memo, issued on 6 June 1950, Mason requested a cheque for \$300 (\$2945.22 in 2015) to be deposited in Cheever’s account at the Sutton Place Branch of the Corn Exchange Bank.<sup>145</sup> This advance was also for ‘future work’, but Cheever requested it over the telephone rather than by letter after he realised he was overdrawn while on holiday in New Hampshire.<sup>146</sup> On 28 September 1951, Cheever asked Lobrano for an advance payment of \$500 (\$4549.98 in 2015) in a letter devoted to the matter of Victor Gollancz, the British publisher, agreeing to publish *The Enormous Radio and Other Stories* (1953) in the United Kingdom. Although Cheever would have received an advance from Victor Gollancz as part of this agreement, Lobrano still sent him a cheque for the advance payment a week later.<sup>147</sup>

Maxwell’s interaction with Cheever during the 1940s and 1950s is best described as friendly but occasionally hesitant. Unlike Lobrano, who had worked previously as a travel agent and an editor at *Town & Country*, Maxwell was a writer; editing was his second extra-literary job. Consequently, Maxwell sympathised with contributors like Cheever who lacked extra- or non-literary income. In 1940, an unidentified member of staff pencilled the word ‘Handler’ instead of ‘Editor’ ahead of Maxwell’s name on the verso of the typescript for Cheever’s story, ‘Tomorrow is a Beautiful Day’ (3 August 1940). This is apt

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<sup>144</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Box 961, fol. 1, Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman, 22 October 1947.

<sup>145</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Box 961, fol. 4, Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman, 1 June 1950.

<sup>146</sup> Mason recounts this anecdote in his memo to Norman on 6 June 1950, and Cheever elaborates on it in a letter to Lobrano dated ‘18 Junly [sic] 1950’: ‘I drove into the village in the Packard and cashed a check for twenty-five dollars at the IGA store’, he explained. ‘The Packard aroused a lot of comment and the check bounced. I was not able to return to the village until after I had telephoned you’. New Yorker Records, NYPL, Administrative Files, Mason to Norman, 6 June 1950; New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 488, fol. 12, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, 18 July 1950.

<sup>147</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 3 October 1951.

because, throughout his correspondence with Cheever about financial matters, Maxwell frequently framed his professional opinion in personal terms to ensure that he fulfilled his obligation to *The New Yorker* without antagonising Cheever. It proved to be an approach that yielded mixed results.

In a letter dated 22 July 1953, Maxwell sent Cheever a cheque for a story, and explained that a COLA payment worth \$435.79 (\$4041.71 in 2015) was ‘ready to send [...] at any time’.<sup>148</sup> In the second sentence of the letter, Maxwell qualifies the pending status of the COLA payment by notifying Cheever of the amount he owes the book-keeping department, which is \$442.33 (\$3939.64 in 2015). He also suggests to Cheever that if ‘you’d like to cut [the debt] in half or, in effect, obliterate it, I expect this would be a painless time to do it’.<sup>149</sup> In the third and fourth sentences of the letter, however, Maxwell retracts his suggestion altogether: ‘On the other hand, if you have a better use for a cola check, don’t hesitate to say so. The office really doesn’t care which you do’.<sup>150</sup> The problem with Maxwell’s strategy in this letter is that while it is personable, it is inconsistent: by attempting to placate Cheever, Maxwell implicitly criticises the magazine’s working practices, and validates Cheever’s reluctance to repay his debt in the process.

Moreover, ‘the office’, by which Maxwell meant *The New Yorker*’s book-keeping department, did care. In a letter dated 10 March 1954, Maxwell was instructed by the book-keeping department to caution Cheever about his drawing account. ‘The bookkeeping [sic] department has given me the enclosed nudge. I hope, for more reasons

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<sup>148</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 711, fol. 5, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 22 July 1953.

<sup>149</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 711, fol. 5, Maxwell to Cheever, 22 July 1953.

<sup>150</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Maxwell to Cheever, 22 July 1953.

than bonus-making, that you are just about finishing a new story', he wrote to Cheever.<sup>151</sup> Maxwell strikes a better balance between motivation and pressure in this letter, and he received a new story from Cheever—'Just Tell Me Who It Was' (16 April 1955)—within a few weeks of sending it. But in the letter that followed, Maxwell did not reiterate the warning he relayed to Cheever on behalf of the magazine's book-keeping department, despite discussing the financial implications of the submission for Cheever in detail.

'Just Tell Me Who It Was' was the fourth story in Cheever's bonus cycle, which meant the magazine had to pay fifteen per cent quantity bonuses on each of the four stories in the cycle. Maxwell mailed the cheque for a quantity bonus payment on three of the stories to Cheever on 22 April 1954. This payment did not include the quantity bonus on 'Just Tell Me Who It Was'. In the accompanying letter, Maxwell explained that the total payment, including quantity bonus, on 'Just Tell Me Who It Was', was \$2044 (\$18,069.64 in 2015). Maxwell subtracted the advance payment of \$500 (\$4420.17 in 2015) made against the story on 5 April 1954 from this sum, which left Cheever with \$1544 (\$13,649.48 in 2015). This was standard working practice if a contributor requested an advance against the price of a recently accepted submission. Maxwell concluded the letter in a similarly non-committal fashion to his letter of 22 July 1953: 'Whether you apply any of this to your indebtedness, which is now \$1000, is, as always, entirely up to you. I'll send you the check as soon as you tell me how you want it'.<sup>152</sup> Unsurprisingly, Cheever did not apply any of his payment for 'Just Tell Me Who It Was' to his drawing account.

Mason's files in the Records show that Cheever, under no pressure from his editors to apply the payments he received for his submissions to his debt, devised a specific form of debt management during the late 1940s: he applied his quantity bonus and COLA

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<sup>151</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 727, fol. 3, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 10 March 1954.

<sup>152</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 727, fol. 3, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 22 April 1954.

payments to his debt with the magazine. On 30 January 1948, Cheever asked that the magazine deduct three hundred dollars of outstanding advances from his fourth quarter COLA payment.<sup>153</sup> On 6 May 1949, after earning his quantity bonus on ‘Christmas is a Sad Season for the Poor’ (24 December 1949) and the five stories preceding it, Cheever requested that ‘the five hundred and fifty dollar balance of advances outstanding be deducted from the bonus check, thus clearing his account with [the magazine]’.<sup>154</sup> There is nothing confused or confusing about Cheever’s financial behaviour. As a freelance contributor living off his earnings from the literary game, he treated payments for submissions from the magazine as his salary, and used additional payments for COLA and quantity bonuses to clear his debt with *The New Yorker*, which was interest-free, in one instalment. This was responsible, if not financially optimal, behaviour on the part of the writer.

Cheever also received another, lesser form of irregular income from the magazine from the 1940s onwards: royalties for the reprint rights to his stories. In 1940, one of Cheever’s earliest attempts at a suburban story, ‘The Happiest Days’ (4 November 1939), was collected in Simon & Schuster’s *Short Stories from The New Yorker 1925-1940* (1940). In a letter dated 6 September 1940, the magazine informed Cheever of the story’s inclusion in the anthology, and explained that the publisher had paid *The New Yorker* on the basis of ten per cent royalty for the reprint rights, and that this amount was to be divided and distributed to the contributors represented in the book ‘on a space basis’.<sup>155</sup> The exact amount Simon & Schuster paid the magazine in 1940 is unknown, but a memo in William Shawn’s files in the Records reveals that *The New Yorker* received a cheque for

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<sup>153</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Administrative Files, Box 961, fol. 2, Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman, 30 January 1948.

<sup>154</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Administrative Files, Box 961, fol. 3, Harding T. Mason to Fred Norman, 6 May 1949.

<sup>155</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Box 36, fol. 10, R. D. Paladino to Mrs. Cornell, 5 February 1942.

\$9298.44 (\$157,142.97 in 2015) from Simon & Schuster on 5 February 1942 for the third royalty payment and share of the second Book-of-the-Month Club payment on the anthology.<sup>156</sup> Shawn instructed his secretary to distribute the entire amount in cheques to the contributing writers, with \$127.96 (\$2162.51 in 2015) of it going to Cheever.<sup>157</sup> The individual worth of Cheever's royalty cheques is not specified in the majority of his correspondence with his editors at *The New Yorker*, but it is unlikely that any of these cheques exceeded two hundred dollars. The Records suggest that Cheever considered the royalty cheques he received from the magazine to be low priority payments, which is to say that there is no evidence of him applying royalty payments to his drawing account, or of him discussing them with his editors.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the film and television rights of the stories Cheever published in *The New Yorker* proved to be the most lucrative aspect of his professional association with the magazine. *The New Yorker* allowed contributors to negotiate their own deals for these rights, and only took ten per cent of the sale price. In 1950, the magazine even decided to abandon its practice of asking for film credit on stories acquired by film and television producers to ensure that no contributors' deals were endangered.<sup>158</sup> In the spring of 1956, Cheever sold the film rights to 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' to M-G-M for \$25,000 (\$217,462.32 in 2015). A few months later, Cheever sold the television rights to another *New Yorker* story, 'The Country Husband' (20 November 1954), to CBS for an undisclosed fee. 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' never made it into production,

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<sup>156</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Paladino to Cornell, 5 February 1942.

<sup>157</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Paladino to Cornell, 5 February 1942.

<sup>158</sup> This decision was made during the sale of several *New Yorker* stories by Edward Newhouse to M-G-M in the spring of 1950. Ironically, M-G-M hired Irwin Shaw to adapt several of Newhouse's stories into *I Want You* (1951), a dramatic feature film about small-town Americans struggling to come to terms with the prospect of military conscription into the Korean conflict. As the film was not adapted from one story but several, M-G-M was reluctant to credit *The New Yorker* in the film's opening credits. 'I have read the attached letter from M-G-M, and in my opinion, we should yield and not endanger Newhouse's deal, if we are doing that', Ross explained to Truax in a letter dated 29 May 1950. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Box 35, fol. 3, Harold W. Ross to Hawley R. Truax, 29 May 1950.

but ‘The Country Husband’ aired on 1 November 1956 as the fifth episode of the first season of Playhouse 90, an anthology of live and, later on in the series, pre-recorded dramas that ran for four seasons from 1956 to 1960. In 1964, Cheever sold the film rights to his novels, *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957) and *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964), to the producer-director team of Alan J. Pakula and Robert Mulligan (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1962) for \$75,000 (\$572,416.94 in 2015).<sup>159</sup> He also sold the film rights to his story, ‘The Swimmer’, to the writer-director team of Eleanor and Frank Perry about three weeks after its publication in the *New Yorker*’s issue of 18 July 1964.<sup>160</sup> The Wapshot novels did not make it to the screen, but *The Swimmer*, featuring Burt Lancaster as Ned Merrill, was produced by Horizon Pictures and distributed by Columbia Pictures in 1968.

Cheever put the proceeds of these sales to a variety of uses. The M-G-M money for ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ encouraged him to go on temporary hiatus as a short story writer for the first time in his career. In a letter to White in the summer of 1956, Cheever described his plan to go abroad to Italy in ‘the fall for a year’ as ‘the best way of getting away from the Shady Hill stories [because] there have been enough of these’.<sup>161</sup> The fulfilment of this desire is evident in the number of stories Cheever published in magazines between May 1956 and November 1957. Before selling the film rights to ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ in May 1956, Cheever published three stories in *The New Yorker* and one rejection in *The Reporter*. After the sale, and prior to departing for Italy, Cheever published an excerpt from *The Wapshot Chronicle* (‘Miss Wapshot’, 22 September 1956) and the story, ‘Clear Haven’ (1 December), in the *New Yorker*. While living in Italy throughout most of 1957, Cheever published just one story in the magazine, ‘The Trouble of Marcie Flint’ (9 November). Cheever put the money he received for the

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<sup>159</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 335.

<sup>160</sup> The price the Perrys paid for the film rights to the story is unknown.

<sup>161</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 742, fol. 7, John Cheever to Katharine S. White, [n.d.] 1956.



film rights to ‘The Swimmer’ to domestic use. In a letter to his friend John Weaver dated 1 August 1964, Cheever wrote: ‘I guess The Swimmer will be settled today. I shall have the drainpipes and the house repaired and put a new toilet into the boy’s [sic] can’.<sup>162</sup> These sales were profitable but limited, and Cheever spent the proceeds of them quickly on a range of leisure activities and practical matters. Ultimately, the sales of the film and television rights to stories supplemented, rather than supplanted the money Cheever earned writing stories for *The New Yorker*.<sup>163</sup>

As well as allowing its contributors to get the best possible deals for the film and television rights to their work, *The New Yorker* supported its contributors’ literary careers further by actively promoting their novels in its pages. In the same way that the magazine devoted all-fiction issues to writers like Shaw in the 1940s and J. D. Salinger in the 1950s, it printed excerpts from Cheever’s Wapshot novels during the late 1950s and early 1960s. On 22 September 1956, *The New Yorker* published ‘Miss Wapshot’, an excerpted account of a day in the life of Miss Honora Wapshot, an eccentric matriarch who is one of the main characters in *The Wapshot Chronicle*. Seven years later, on 6 April 1963, the magazine ran ‘The International Wilderness’, a farcical section of Cheever’s second novel, *The Wapshot Scandal*, in which a passenger plane bound for San Francisco is hijacked by a disqualified pilot. Maxwell also encouraged Cheever to develop parts of *The Wapshot Scandal* into original stories for *The New Yorker*. ‘The Embarkment for Cythera’, which was published in the magazine on 3 November 1962, is an example of this practice. The story is set in the same fictional upper-middle-class suburb as *The Wapshot Scandal*, and its conflict—a

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<sup>162</sup> Cheever to John D. Weaver, 1 August 1964, in *Glad Tidings: A Friendship in Letters: The Correspondence of John Cheever and John Weaver, 1945-1982*, ed. by John D. Weaver (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 170.

<sup>163</sup> Unlike Shaw and other *New Yorker* contributors, Cheever was reticent about breaking into screenwriting. Writer-producer Jerry Wald invited Cheever out to Hollywood for a few weeks in the early 1960s to write a treatment for D. H. Lawrence’s *The Lost Girl* (1920) at Twentieth Century-Fox. Cheever agreed because he needed the money, but he did not enjoy his stay in Hollywood, and his treatment of the novel was not developed into a screenplay. Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 285-90.

housewife falling in love with a supermarket delivery boy—is the scandal alluded to in the title of the novel. Although their characterisation is similar, the husband and wife in ‘The Embarkment for Cythera’ do not have the same names as their counterparts in *The Wapshot Scandal*: Moses and Melinda Coverly become Tom and Melissa Coliver in the story. The resolution of Jessica’s affair with the delivery boy is also more downbeat than its equivalent in *The Wapshot Scandal*. In the novel, Melissa and her younger lover escape Proxmire Manor for a new life in Rome, Italy; in the story, Jessica breaks off her relationship with the delivery boy after he fails to reconcile her wealth with his poverty. Within a few weeks of receiving ‘The Embarkment for Cythera’, Maxwell wrote to Cheever asking him to find ‘a couple more stories embedded in the ms of the novel’ because the ‘fix piece bonus is financially important, and I would be happy sending it to you’.<sup>164</sup> Although Cheever wanted to make his bonus for the year, this practice concerned him: cannibalising the draft manuscript of *The Wapshot Scandal* into original stories for *The New Yorker* was counterproductive for a short story writer who wanted to be taken seriously as novelist because it publicly fragmented the novel into a series of nonlinear vignettes.

By the early 1960s, Cheever resented the manner in which his second job had come to define him both publicly and professionally. Although he ignored Maxwell’s request to tease more stories out of *The Wapshot Scandal*, without a non-literary or extra-literary job to rely on, he had no choice but to write for *The New Yorker* in the lead-up to the publication of the novel in January 1964. In a letter Cheever sent to Maxwell in late August or early September 1962, he could not conceal his disappointment with the prospect: ‘It seems that I must write some stories and I don’t know what to do about this

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<sup>164</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 791, fol. 24, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 13 June 1962.

since most forms of the story seem to me, related to what one knows of life, obsolete'.<sup>165</sup> Cheever persisted despite his despondency, submitting 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin' (27 April 1963) to the *New Yorker* in the spring of 1963, 'Montraldo' (6 June 1964) and 'Marito in Citta' (4 July 1964) in late August, and 'The Swimmer' (18 July 1964) in December. 'The Swimmer', which tells the story of Neddy Merrill's attempt to swim the eight miles home via his neighbours' swimming pools only to discover his house inexplicably unoccupied and in disrepair, is widely acclaimed as one of the best American short stories of the twentieth-century. Yet in the context of Cheever's economic relationship with *The New Yorker*, 'The Swimmer' was his last gambit: a final play intended to improve the financial terms of his first-reading agreement with the magazine.

Two months before he submitted 'The Swimmer' to *The New Yorker*, Cheever received a new first-reading agreement from the magazine covering 1 January 1964 to 1 January 1965.<sup>166</sup> The consensus of opinion between Yagoda and Bailey is that, having recently finished *The Wapshot Scandal* and 'The Swimmer', and having been informed that he was to be the subject of a *Time* cover story in its issue of 27 March 1964, Cheever decided to ask the magazine for an increase in pay shortly after receiving this agreement in the mail.<sup>167</sup> Only the first page of the amended first-reading agreement survives in the Records. In it, Cheever is specified a 'contractual consideration' or signing-on bonus of \$2600 (\$19,843.79 in 2015), and a word-rate of eighteen cents for the first half of his submissions and nine cents for the remainder.<sup>168</sup> Yagoda argues that Cheever re-negotiated

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<sup>165</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 791, fol. 24, William Maxwell to John Cheever, [n.d.] c. September 1962.

<sup>166</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 805, fol. 25, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 10 October 1963.

<sup>167</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, pp. 291-93; Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, pp. 318-21.

<sup>168</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, 'John Cheever's first-reading agreement', 10 December 1963.

a larger signing-on bonus, but failed to realise how low his word-rate was in comparison to the word-rates of other contributors to the magazine during the 1960s.<sup>169</sup>

The Records suggest that this analysis is incorrect on both points. First, it is unlikely that the signing-on bonus was the result of Cheever's negotiation with *The New Yorker*. The only obvious amendment to his first-reading agreement in the Records is the phrase 'with certain exceptions', which follows the section outlining what the agreement covers: 'First-reading of all fiction, humor, reminiscence and casual essays, "with certain exceptions"'.<sup>170</sup> This phrase does not appear on standard first-reading agreements.<sup>171</sup> Moreover, if either a contributor or the magazine wanted specific terms and conditions added to an agreement, then it was rewritten with new clauses.<sup>172</sup> For example, the first-reading agreement covering the period 19 March 1946 to 19 March 1947 O'Hara signed with the magazine on 7 February 1946 has five terms rather than the standard three. The agreement was amended to include a repayment plan for a loan of \$3000 (\$36,399.85 in 2015) made to O'Hara by the magazine on 5 January 1945. Under this agreement, twenty five per cent of every payment O'Hara received for his fiction went towards his debt. Because the pages containing the terms and conditions of Cheever's first-reading agreement are missing, it is difficult to know for certain what exceptions he requested. This being said, and although most of the stories Cheever published in *Playboy* and *Esquire* from the mid-1960s onwards were *New Yorker* rejections rather than original pieces, it is plausible that he wanted to exempt a certain number of pieces from the

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<sup>169</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, p. 293.

<sup>170</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 805, fol. 24, 'THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, INC.' to John Cheever, 10 December 1963, p. 1.

<sup>171</sup> In the first-reading agreement covering the period 23 June 1966 to 23 June 1967 Frank O'Connor (the pseudonym of Michael O'Donovan) signed with the magazine on 9 December 1965, it states that the agreement is for the '[first] reading of all fiction, humor, reminiscence and casual essays' only. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Series 5: Legal and Financial Files/Milton Greenstein/R. Hawley Truax 1943-1983, Box 1326, fol. 5, 'THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, INC.' to Michael O'Donovan, 9 December 1965, p.1.

<sup>172</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Legal and Financial Files, Box 1326, fol. 6, 'The F-R Publishing Corporation' to John O'Hara, 7 February 1946, p. 2.

exclusivity clause in the first-reading agreement in order to sell them for more money to some of The New Yorker's competitors. Of course, The New Yorker did not appreciate this sentiment because it undermined the most important term of their first-reading agreement: exclusivity.

Second, Yagoda compares the contractual circumstances of Shirley Hazzard, an Australian contributor in her thirties on a minimum word-rate of twenty cents for the first half of her submissions and ten cents for the remainder, with those of Cheever, who was on a minimum of eighteen and nine cents, in order to show how far The New Yorker undervalued its older, more dependable contributor. The problem with this comparison is that the word-rate for a contributor as specified in their first-reading agreement was not necessarily the word-rate they received for their work in practice. It is stated clearly in the terms of a standard first-reading agreement with the magazine that 'The New Yorker will continue its policy of paying more than your minimum rate for work it considers of exceptional value', and there is evidence in the Records to suggest that Cheever's editors applied this policy to the majority of his submissions between the late 1940s and early 1960s.<sup>173</sup> In a memo dated 17 July 1947 from Mason to Ross, Mason informs Ross that Cheever's story 'The Common Day' was 'paid for at the A-rate (24/12)'.<sup>174</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume that other submissions were paid for by the magazine at the A-rate, despite Cheever being contracted at the B-rate. In defence of the magazine's financial treatment of Cheever, there is limited evidence of The New Yorker contracting some of their more prolific contributors to lower word-rates than they did their less prolific counterparts during the 1940s. O'Hara was guaranteed the A-rate of twenty and ten cents in 1945, despite having published a number of bestselling novels, and more than one

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<sup>173</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Legal and Financial Files, Box 1326, fol. 5, 'THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, INC.' to O'Donovan, 9 December 1965.

<sup>174</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Harold Ross General Files, Box 35, fol. 4, Mason to Ross, 17 July 1947.

hundred stories in *The New Yorker* at that point in his literary career. In 1964, Cheever was on the B-rate of eighteen and nine cents, despite having published two novels, and over one hundred stories in the magazine. Premium, quantity bonus, and COLA payments also increased the prices the magazine paid for submissions, and this offset some of the losses incurred when a piece was purchased at the minimum word-rate. In a letter Maxwell sent to Cheever on 23 May 1960, Maxwell used this fact to reassure Cheever that, although the base price of the story was below one thousand dollars, 'the story is paid for at the highest rate, and by the time you get the cost of living adjustment and the adjustment to that, at the end of the year, it will be considerably more'.<sup>175</sup>

Although 'the highest rate' was not above thirty cents per word for the first half of a submission in the case of Cheever, nor was it below twenty four cents. Writing stories for *The New Yorker* was Cheever's second job following the Second World War, and he collaborated as closely with the magazine on his work as many of its staff reporters did. Cheever was not ignorant of *The New Yorker's* working practices, or of what other contributors earned. He understood that his annually contracted word-rate was lower than the word-rate his editors used to calculate the prices for his work, and that additional payments increased the value of every submission he sold to *The New Yorker* by up to a thousand dollars or more.

*The New Yorker* refused to yield to Cheever's request for a raise for a number of reasons. Writing talent was not scarce in the 1960s: the magazine was publishing work by Salinger, John Updike, Maeve Brennan, Harold Brodkey, Elizabeth Spencer, and Arturo Vivante. At the same time, the additional payments offered by the first-reading agreement guaranteed a modest rate of retention amongst younger, materially poor, but up-and-

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<sup>175</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 776, fol. 13, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 23 May 1960.

coming contributors. Consequently, the magazine's management may have felt they could afford to lose a fifty-one year old contributor who found the commodity they paid him to produce 'obsolete'. Cheever also made several errors in judgement in advance of his meeting with *The New Yorker*. He based his value to the magazine in late 1963 on his more recent achievements as a novelist and literary personality. Although *The New Yorker* contributed to these professional achievements, they were not important to the magazine in commercial or critical terms. Cheever also mistimed his request for an increase in pay. On 15 July 1963, he accepted an advance payment from *The New Yorker* that took his indebtedness with it to two thousand dollars.<sup>176</sup> Although Cheever submitted three stories to the magazine between July and December 1963, there is no evidence of him applying any of the payments to his debt before asking the magazine for a raise. Finally, Cheever discussed personal issues—'several long speeches about how I [was] harassed by indebtedness', as he described it in his journal—during his meetings with Maxwell, and, later, with Shawn, the magazine's editor-in-chief, and Truax, its treasurer. This emphasised both Cheever's outstanding debt with the magazine, and his lack of long-term financial planning, rather than his accomplishments as a *New Yorker* writer and the value he added to the publication.

Cheever's professional commitment to the magazine he branded as 'a blameless, monolithic and capricious organization, hobbled [...] by its own prosperity' was challenged within minutes of his meeting with Maxwell ending on 10 December 1963.<sup>177</sup> Having delivered both the typescript of 'The Swimmer' and his request for more money to Maxwell, Cheever exited *The New Yorker*'s offices and walked to a pay phone on Forty-Fourth Street. He called Donadio and asked if she could get him a better deal. Donadio

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<sup>176</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 798, fol. 30, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 15 July 1963.

<sup>177</sup> John Cheever, *The Journals*, p. 189.

called back and said that *The Saturday Evening Post* was willing to pay Cheever \$24,000 (\$185,567.84 in 2015) a year for a first-reading agreement and a minimum of four stories. Although Cheever made less than half this amount per year writing for *The New Yorker*, he elected to remain under contract with the magazine following a second meeting, this time with Shawn, Truax, and Maxwell in attendance.

Cheever was ‘not sure why’ he made this decision, yet it fits comfortably into the established pattern of his financial behaviour as a professional player of the literary game between 1946 and 1964.<sup>178</sup> In short, Cheever prioritised short-term expediency over long-term gain during this period. *The Saturday Evening Post* offered Cheever more money than *The New Yorker*, but it was a salaried contract. This was a point of contention for Cheever. While negotiating with *The New Yorker* in 1963, he owed the magazine more than one thousand dollars; he also required money to meet the monthly mortgage payments on his house, and to cover the cost of enrolling his son at the Scarborough School and his daughter at Brown University. He knew that if he signed with *The New Yorker*, the magazine would deposit the contractual consideration into his bank account within a couple of days. Given his strained professional and personal financial circumstances, and his lack of leverage in the negotiations, this appealed to Cheever.

Susan Cheever argues that one of main reasons her father stayed with the magazine in the 1960s was his affection for Maxwell: ‘as his financial needs became more pressing and his reputation grew, the *New Yorker* rates began to seem less adequate and their payment system even more infuriating [but] in inveighing against [the magazine], he would leave Maxwell out of it’.<sup>179</sup> In her view, Cheever’s loyalty towards *The New Yorker* was an extension of his proclivity for forming fraternal bonds with other men, be it

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<sup>178</sup> Cheever, p. 189.

<sup>179</sup> Susan Cheever, *Home Before Dark*, pp. 137; 140.



Cowley and Cummings in the 1930s, or Lobrano and Maxwell in the 1940s. This is to say that Susan Cheever understands her father's loyalty to the magazine as a naively personal loyalty in an organisational context. While there is undoubtedly some truth in this assertion, Cheever ignores the negative impact of her father's financial short-termism on his earnings from *The New Yorker*, preferring instead to accuse the magazine's complicated payment system of confusing and frustrating him. If anything can or should be blamed for the conflict that erupted between Cheever and *The New Yorker* in 1963, it is his habit of requesting advance payments against future writing and his unwillingness to apply story payments—advance, initial, or complete—to his indebtedness with the magazine. Cheever was not financially irresponsible by any means, but the advance payments of three and five hundred dollars he regularly requested against payments for his submissions cut the sums he received for them by up to a third. If Cheever had saved more of his irregular income from *The New Yorker* during the 1940s and 1950s, he may have been better able to absorb some of the losses incurred to his regular income by advance payments.

Excepting this, it is more the case that Cheever's loyalty to the magazine is perhaps best understood as institutional loyalty in a professional context. Cheever's participation in the literary game between 1935 and 1964 is characterised by two styles of play: sociable and rational. Using these styles of play, Cheever established and optimised relationships at both the individual and institutional level to varying degrees of critical and financial success. Before he sold 'Buffalo' to *The New Yorker* in 1935, Cheever was a fanatical player of the literary game who struggled to earn his living from literary production. Unable to secure a non-literary or extra-literary job, Cheever persisted with writing, relying on the literary advice of Cowley to ensure that his work was relevant, and the professional service of Lieber to ensure that some of it sold. Ten years later, having

published forty-five stories in *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1945 due, in part, to the persistence of Lieber, Cheever was able to commit himself to writing on a full-time basis by making writing for *The New Yorker* his secondary job. This strategy was sensible given his inability to find other types of work, but it was not without risk: despite issuing him with one of the drawing accounts it reserved for its staff reporters in the early 1940s, the magazine never recognised Cheever as anything other than a freelance contributor. It also demanded exclusivity from him, which limited his opportunities to sell stories to the magazine's better paying rivals.

This being said, *The New Yorker* sustained Cheever financially during the Depression, the Second World War, and throughout the 1950s and 1960s when he lived with his family in the suburbs of New York. Although it paid less on a per-story basis than did other large-circulation magazines, *The New Yorker* carried with it more cultural prestige for Cheever than its competitors. Moreover, Cheever's collaboration with Lobrano and Maxwell on stories during the 1940s and 1950s improved his confidence in his literary ability, and produced material that was not only critically and publicly well-received, but commercially attractive to film and television producers. 'The Swimmer' did not earn Cheever the raise he wanted, but it is unlikely that Cheever sold the film rights to the story for less than twenty thousand dollars in the summer of 1964. *The New Yorker* did not make Cheever rich between 1935 and 1964, but it provided him with the minimum income he required for subsistence, inspiration and editorial advice, and nationwide exposure for his writing, which in turn helped him to establish a readership for his novels. By offering these different types of support to Cheever during this period, *The New Yorker* did more to build his professional reputation as a writer in the United States than either the other magazines he sold his work to, or the publishers that published collections of his stories and novels.

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **Compromised Fiction: The Editing of John Cheever's 'Torch Song', March to July 1947**

Chapter Two demonstrates some of the ways in which financial necessity shaped Cheever's working relationship with *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1963. Chapter Three uses a case study of Gustave S. Lobrano's editing of 'Torch Song' (*The New Yorker*, 4 October 1947) in order to show some of the effects that Cheever's financial short-

termism had on the style, tone, and content of the short stories he submitted to *The New Yorker*. ‘Torch Song’ is about a woman named Joan Harris who allows a string of sickly and abusive men, including a con-man and a political refugee, to take advantage of her, much to the consternation of her childhood friend Jack Lorey.<sup>1</sup> Jack nicknames Joan ‘the Widow’ because ‘she always wore black, and he was always given the feeling, by a curious disorder of her apartment, that the undertakers had just left’ (122). While Joan maintains equanimity towards her ex-lovers and a youthful appearance despite her ordeals, Jack becomes depressed, having suffered two costly divorces, military service during the Second World War, and, finally, a mystery illness that leaves him bedridden. When Joan comes to tend to Jack in his reduced circumstances at the end of the story, he becomes convinced that the ‘big, handsome girl’ with ‘a mane of dark hair’ (122) is a ‘lewd and searching shape of death’ attracted to social, moral, and physical decay (139).

For Ben Yagoda, the transmogrification of Joan, a shop girl, into a female death figure during the course of ‘Torch Song’ is representative of Cheever moving away from the journalistic style that had dominated both his and *The New Yorker*’s fiction for most of the decade ‘in the direction of poetry’.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, argues Yagoda, Cheever was beginning to reject realism in his *New Yorker* fiction in order to answer the question of how a writer ‘who contributes to a magazine stocked with funny pictures, expensive ads, and droll comments on typographical errors’ should confront issues it typically ignored, such as abortion, domestic abuse, illness, and death.<sup>3</sup>

This reflexivity is manifested in a couple of ways in ‘Torch Song’. A shapely femme fatale from the Midwest, Joan is comprised of the characteristics of two popular New

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<sup>1</sup> John Cheever, ‘Torch Song’, *The New Yorker*, 4 October 1947, pp. 31-39, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 122-39 (p. 122). Because there is no difference between these versions of ‘Torch Song’, further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Yagoda, *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made* (New York: Scribner, 2000), p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, pp. 230-31.

Yorker feminine stereotypes that appeared in cartoons throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Peter Arno's physically attractive twenty-something gold-diggers and Helen Hokinson's eccentric plus-sized clubwomen.<sup>4</sup> The socio-political component of the 'Torch Song' also engages with the same liberal postwar anxieties about nationalism versus internationalism that The New Yorker was itself concerned with following the end of the Second World War. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, one of the magazine's best known and most popular contributors, E. B. White, championed the globalism of the United Nations in a series of editorial pieces ran in 'Notes and Comment', while 'Letters' from Europe 'matter-of-factly reported the rise of Socialist and Communist parties in Italy, France, and England as historical events that intelligent readers would want to follow'.<sup>5</sup> As Mary F. Corey explains, in the aftermath of the Second World War, The New Yorker adopted an editorial position which argued that 'nationalism, in a nuclear age, was a lethal option', and ideological conflict could only be avoided if nations accepted that they shared fundamental human goals, such as the desire for peace and economic prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

Cheever mischievously interrogates the magazine's utopian geopolitical attitude in 'Torch Song' by presenting the decay of European political, social, and cultural hegemony in a fraught domestic American context. Whether Lobrano acknowledged this sentiment in 'Torch Song' or not is unclear, but he retained a scene in the story in which German refugees embrace their nationalism in order to denigrate the American educational system and other aspects of postwar American life at a party; he also left intact another scene in which a platoon of refugees from countries that have been invaded by the Axis powers march up Broadway urging the United States to enter into the Second World War. But, notwithstanding these scenes, Lobrano was still more resistant towards Cheever's use of

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<sup>4</sup> Mary F. Corey, *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 152-55.

<sup>5</sup> Corey, *The World Through a Monocle*, p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Corey, *The World Through a Monocle*, p. 60.

metaphor and hyperbole to encapsulate and emphasise the disorder of the world both during and after war in ‘Torch Song’ than he perhaps needed to be, particularly given the broadly similar geopolitical stance of *The New Yorker* in the late 1940s.

Although Lobrano accepted some of the supernatural, socio-political, and self-reflexive elements of ‘Torch Song’, he imposed a journalistic prose style on the text by way of his revisions, many of which pressured Cheever into foregrounding everyday details of domestic life in an effort to normalise the narrative for readers. In this sense, Lobrano’s editing of ‘Torch Song’ reveals that Cheever made a significantly greater artistic compromise with *The New Yorker* than Yagoda is willing to acknowledge. Indeed, selected correspondence in the *New Yorker* Records suggests that Cheever accepted the majority of Lobrano’s edits for economic reasons. An undated letter from Cheever to Lobrano’s colleague, William Maxwell, reveals that *The New Yorker* authorised an advance payment against the ‘Torch Song’ shortly after accepting it for publication.<sup>7</sup> Throughout his career, Cheever typically requested advance payments when he did not have enough money to meet his living expenses. Consequently, it would have been financially harmful for Cheever to contest the magazine’s editing of a story to the point of impasse if he had accepted an advance payment for it. In January 1947, roughly two months before he submitted ‘Torch Song’ to *The New Yorker*, Cheever had also renewed his first-reading agreement with the magazine.<sup>8</sup> Under the terms of this agreement, an accepted submission contributed to a bonus cycle that earned Cheever the reward of quantity bonus payments on each story in the cycle. It was simply more profitable for

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<sup>7</sup> New York, New York Public Library, *The New Yorker* Records, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (herewith *New Yorker* Records, NYPL), Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, General Correspondence 1928-1951, Box 445, fol. 12, John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] c. March 1947.

<sup>8</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 445, fol. 12, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, 2 January 1947.

Cheever to submit to the authority of *The New Yorker's* fiction department than it was for him to resist it.

In making this argument, the personal and professional dynamic of the relationship between Cheever and Lobrano cannot be overlooked, particularly as there is evidence of creative and sexual tensions between both men impacting upon their working relationship from the late 1940s onwards. The first section of Chapter Three, therefore, is an overview that examines Cheever's working relationship with Lobrano through personal and professional lenses. This section of Chapter Three focuses on two interrelated aspects: how Cheever and Lobrano approached the production of *New Yorker* fiction in formal and practical terms, and how they mediated their differences of opinion during the editing process.

The second section of Chapter Three is a case study that enlarges on these issues by analysing Lobrano's editing of 'Torch Song' for the magazine and Cheever's response, which was a combination of editor-directed and self-directed additions, substitutions, and excisions. While Lobrano was sensitive to issues of plot, narrative structure, and characterisation in 'Torch Song', he edited Cheever's stylistic idiosyncrasies more intensely, crossing out and replacing metaphors and more florid sections of prose with more detail-oriented, explanatory material. Lobrano's style of editing reveals that he did not have as deep a personal or cultural investment in writing fiction as did his colleague William Maxwell, whose creative collaboration with Cheever on 'The Reformed Housebreaker'/'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' (*The New Yorker*, 14 April 1956) is examined in detail in Chapter Four.

Lobrano's approach to editing also reflects the literalness of editing at *The New Yorker* during the 1940s, much of which was performed under the assumption that the average magazine reader was too impatient to re-read ambiguous sections of prose in a

story until they could follow it clearly, or intolerant of any factual inaccuracies. Whereas other New Yorker contributors including Kay Boyle, John O'Hara, and Roald Dahl complained about and occasionally resisted the addition of explanatory passages, non-restrictive clauses, and serial commas to the prose of their stories in the 1940s, Cheever allowed Lobrano to work his first drafts up into New Yorker stories largely without reservation. Cheever's willingness to occupy a subordinate role during the editing of 'Torch Song' reflects an integral part of the reality of producing short stories for the magazine marketplace: that economically expedient decisions concerning short stories frequently took precedence over artistic ones based on an author's inner values.

### **Lobrano at The New Yorker**

Lobrano was The New Yorker's head of fiction from 1938 until his death from cancer in 1956. He relinquished his editorship at *Town & Country*, an American lifestyle magazine, in order to join The New Yorker. Lobrano got the job after his friend, E. B. White, the author of the anonymous weekly 'Notes and Comment' section that opened the 'Talk of the Town' department of The New Yorker, quit the magazine to write a signed department, 'One Man's Meat', for *Harper's*. Lobrano met White while both were studying at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York in the early 1920s; for a year in 1921, Lobrano edited White's contributions to 'The Berry Patch', a column in The Cornell Daily Sun, the university's independent student newspaper. Both men were elected to Cornell's Senior Honorary Society, Quill and Dagger; they also shared an apartment together in Greenwich Village following their graduation. White's decision to leave New York for his farm in Maine also forced his wife of nine years, Katharine White, to resign her full-time position as head of fiction at The New Yorker. Having dedicated more than a decade of her life to



shaping the style and content of the magazine, and owning a significant amount of its stock, White agreed to allow Lobrano to assume her position.

Very little of Lobrano's editorial correspondence survives in the *New Yorker* Records and what does is largely administrative. This is because Lobrano preferred to bond with his stable of contributors in person.<sup>9</sup> Cheever, Eddie Newhouse, Irwin Shaw, Jerome Weidman, Walter Bernstein, S. J. Perelman, and E. J. 'Jack' Kahn played tennis, squash, and badminton with Lobrano; they also spent weekends at his house in Chappaqua in Westchester County, New York, and fishing at his camp on Cranberry Lake in the Adirondacks. *New Yorker* contributor Brendan Gill is critical of the hegemonic nature of Lobrano's engagement with the writers whose work he edited. Gill contends that Lobrano was sceptical about writing and based their editorial relationship on 'a conventional bantering rivalry in games and not on the fact that he was an editor and that I was one of his writers'. Gill concludes that Lobrano preferred to praise writers 'in terms of how well they played ping-pong or badminton' rather than how well they wrote.<sup>10</sup>

While Lobrano's lack of interest in literary craft irritated Gill, it was not an issue for Cheever. He habitually established personal and professional mentoring relationships with male writers, editors, and artists during his career. In the late 1930s, Lobrano became part of a continuum that included Malcolm Cowley, E. E. Cummings, Maxim Lieber, and Walker Evans. Cheever went on regular fishing and hunting expeditions with Lobrano to Cranberry Lake throughout the 1940s.<sup>11</sup> After returning from the Adirondacks in the early 1940s, he wrote the following in his journal:

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<sup>9</sup> Yagoda, *About Town*, p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> Brendan Gill, *Here at The New Yorker* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 292.

<sup>11</sup> Cheever describes a two day trip to Cranberry Lake beginning on 11 May 1948 in John Cheever, *The Journals of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 17. He also mentions staying at Cranberry Lake in a letter to his in-laws, Milton and Polly Winternitz, dated 29 May 1949 in John Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, ed. by Benjamin Cheever (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 138.

The big point of this is that this is a man's world. Raised in a matriarchal environment by an iron woman I am profoundly used to feminine interference, feminine tastes. Here there is no trace of it. [...] I returned with the world in focus for the first time in weeks, the possessor of much self-respect.<sup>12</sup>

A libidinous but closeted bisexual throughout much of his adult life, Cheever ostensibly relished these trips because they allowed him to restate his idea of hetero-normative masculinity and bolstered his self-esteem. Paradoxically, the sexist rhetoric Cheever employs to describe his enjoyment of a trip to the Adirondacks in the early 1940s betrays his persistent personal insecurity about his masculinity and heterosexuality.

Cheever confronts these insecurities in a journal entry dated 1948. Describing a trip to Cranberry Lake with Lobrano and his wife, Jean, Cheever alludes to feeling homosexual desire towards Lobrano. Recalling Lobrano's impatience with Jean, Cheever projects his own negative experience of marriage onto the couple: 'I think of them as a man and a woman not speaking, who are bound together by the knowledge they share of some tragedy, some hideous miscarriage of their efforts, but who will remain together because of their love of their children and their regard for law'.<sup>13</sup> The 'hideous miscarriage' of the Lobranos' efforts was, Cheever conceded, nothing more than 'an unkind word here, a disappointment there, but it lies on them as heavily as any vice'.<sup>14</sup> Then, shifting his focus onto Lobrano, Cheever writes:

He has an exalted regard for social law, a puritanical regard for this, and is so diffident that it was hard for him to point the privy out to me, and when I

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<sup>12</sup> Cheever qtd. in Blake Bailey, *Cheever: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> Cheever, *The Journals*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> Cheever, p. 19.

took my pants off to dry them I think he disapproved. I like him; sometimes I feel for him the profound delight of friendship but when I feel this, it seems like misery speaking to misery. [...] He is not a guilty one, but he seems to move, ahead of me, down the trail to the lake, like one who has become involved by chance in a hideous crime.<sup>15</sup>

Cheever characterises Lobrano as a moral man in the first sentence of this entry who, although unhappily married, is law-abiding and uncomfortable with male intimacy outside of leisure and recreation activities. In contrast, Cheever self-identifies as a transgressor during the course of the trip, albeit one who meets Lobrano's behavioural expectations for a married man. Cheever is able to commit a subtle act of provocation that teases his private self to Lobrano because he is wearing a heterosexual mask. However, while Cheever's disguise ensures his respectability, it does not prevent him from worrying that Lobrano's disapproval of him is the product of homophobia rather than shyness as they walk to the lake the next morning.

This episode reflects Cheever's broader and longstanding conviction that his life was precarious, that the 'light and water and trees and pleasant people' he valued both emotionally and aesthetically could be brought 'crashing down by a neck, a hand, an obscenity written on a toilet door'.<sup>16</sup> The point is that Cheever was not always able to separate friendship from sexual attraction in his mentoring relationships with other men. Cheever claimed in his journal that he had had sex with the photographer Walker Evans, his friend, sometime landlord, and occasional employer, on at least one occasion in the mid-1930s.<sup>17</sup> There is no evidence of a sexual relationship between Cheever and Lobrano,

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<sup>15</sup> Cheever, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Cheever, *The Journals*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 75. The late James R. Mellow is doubtful that Cheever had sex with Evans because Cheever did not write about the one-night stand until he was fifty-one and 'out of the closet far

but this journal entry suggests that, having spent a considerable amount of their free-time together during the 1940s, Cheever was concerned that Lobrano knew he was bisexual towards the end of the decade.

Cheever's concern appears to have been unfounded. Indeed, even if Lobrano was aware of Cheever's sexual proclivity, the editor's professional loyalty was to *The New Yorker*. The tropes Lobrano uses in his editorial correspondence reflect this. Lobrano often assumed the editorial 'we' when discussing submissions either with Lieber, Cheever's literary agent, in the early 1940s, or Cheever directly from late 1942 onwards. In a letter to Lieber dated 10 October 1941, Lobrano rejected 'A Tale of Old Pennsylvania' (*The New Yorker*, 10 May 1943) because 'it seems pretty unconvincing to us [my italics]'.<sup>18</sup> In a letter to Cheever dated 31 July 1944, Lobrano conceded that while he 'was in a pretty favoured position reading this one ['An Interview with the Colonel'] [...] [there] was a general feeling [...] that the author's (your) sympathies and viewpoint weren't clearly focussed [sic], which left the readers somewhat confused'.<sup>19</sup> Lobrano's handling of Cheever in this letter, and others, was an extension of both his senior position and the reading procedure at the magazine. As a submission was read and commented on by more than two editors before a decision about whether or not to purchase it was made by the editor-in-chief, Lobrano had to reflect the consensus opinion in his letters to Cheever, rather than his own.

At the same time, it is important to note that as Cheever had a drawing account with *The New Yorker* in the early 1940s and a first-reading agreement thereafter, he had no

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enough for certain friends and younger men to be aware of his propensity'. Mellow also notes that, while the majority of the 'authoritative details' Cheever includes in the letter are accurate, there is no evidence of Evans owning the Matisse lithograph that Cheever claimed he ejaculated on. James R. Mellow, *Walker Evans* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 245-46.

<sup>18</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 360, fol. 13, Gustave S. Lobrano to Maxim Lieber, 10 October 1941.

<sup>19</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 403, fol. 8, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 31 July 1944.

option but to send everything he wrote to the magazine, irrespective of its suitability. As White observed in a letter to Frances Gray Patton dated 5 January 1952, 'We have never wanted a writer to feel hampered by his New Yorker agreement and we feel that no good writer should be prevented from trying his hand at any type of material [...] writing with a certain type of magazine in mind [...] is a natural and inevitable and sensible thing for a professional writer to do'.<sup>20</sup> By encouraging contributors to think of themselves as professional writers rather than artists, the magazine ensured that they were more accepting of its criticism. Viewed in this context, Lobrano's reluctance to discuss the literary component of Cheever's stories is not necessarily literary ignorance on his part but evidence of him treating Cheever as a professional writer as the vocation was understood at *The New Yorker*.

Issues with narrative point of view and the definition of theme and character recur in the letters of rejection Lobrano sent to Lieber and Cheever during the 1940s. These issues arose not out of Lobrano's prejudices but the magazine's requirement that no detail in a short story force the 'ordinary reader', an imagined reader whose reading was frequently impaired by ambiguity and indirection, to 'double back' while reading a story.<sup>21</sup> Although Maxwell spoke highly of Lobrano both during his career and while in retirement, he was prejudiced towards first-readers and editors at the magazine with non-literary backgrounds because they pandered more heavily towards the ordinary reader. 'The thing is', Maxwell explained in a letter to Sylvia Townsend Warner dated 8 December 1939, 'if you do a

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<sup>20</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, Fiction Correspondence 1952-1980, Box 512, fol. 8, Katharine S. White to Frances Gray Patton, 5 January 1952.

<sup>21</sup> Maxwell refers to the 'ordinary reader' of *The New Yorker* in a letter to Frank O'Connor dated 11 December 1958. Broaching the fact that editor-in-chief William Shawn had complained that he could not follow some of the action in O'Connor's story, 'The Mass Island' (10 January 1959), Maxwell explained to O'Connor that, 'since [Shawn's] detailed questions seem to me, on the whole, ones which any ordinary reader might ask', he had added some explanations that make things clearer on the final proof. These edits were place-holders in case O'Connor was unable to put them into his own words. Maxwell to O'Connor, 11 December 1958, in Frank O'Connor and William Maxwell, *The Happiness of Getting it Down Right: Letters of Frank O'Connor and William Maxwell*, ed. by Michael Steinman (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 107.

rounded story, you're safe from the journalistic boys and girls [my italics], who seize upon things like the luminous dogs [a description in the Townsend story 'The Viking Strain' that Maxwell was rejecting], and with that and very little else make a just possible story for *The New Yorker*'.<sup>22</sup> Maxwell identified himself as the kind of reader who, 'when they don't understand it, they're patient until they do', which suggests that he felt that many of his colleagues, Lobrano included, were ordinary readers in both spirit and practice.<sup>23</sup>

In a letter to Lieber dated 25 February 1941, Lobrano rejected 'A Border Incident' (*Harper's Bazaar*, July 1941) as it felt 'somewhat unfair to the reader to have the German turn out to be a Dane, and we feel that Miss Slattery is hardly real enough to make this psychopathic ending seem convincing or moving'.<sup>24</sup> In another letter of rejection, Lobrano explained to Cheever that, in order for the unspecified story to be successful, 'the central idea—a man's release from and his subsequent return to the army—should be treated with a good deal more economy of incident and concentration of emotion and definition of character'.<sup>25</sup> A decade later, Maxwell rejected 'The Reformed Housebreaker', the first draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', on behalf of Lobrano with the caveat that his colleague felt the story might succeed if Cheever 'extended and enlarged an idea that is already there—that before the theft he [Johnny Hake, the main character] is cheerful and likeable and easygoing [sic], and after it his point of view is [...] entirely changed'.<sup>26</sup> These letters reveal that Lobrano favoured realism, both physical and psychological, in fiction submissions; this is a position that reflected the shift the magazine made in the early

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<sup>22</sup> William Maxwell to Sylvia Townsend Warner, 8 December 1939, in William Maxwell and Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Element of Lavishness: Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner & William Maxwell, 1938-1978*, ed. by Michael Steinman (Washington: Counterpoint, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Maxwell to Steinman, c. 1983, in O'Connor and Maxwell, *The Happiness of Getting it Down Right: Letters of Frank O'Connor and William Maxwell*, p. 109n.

<sup>24</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 360, fol. 13, Gustave S. Lobrano to Maxim Lieber, 25 February 1941.

<sup>25</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 403, fol. 8, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 4 February 1944.

<sup>26</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 734, fol. 27, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 18 April 1955.

1940s from humour, which was popular amongst readers during the Depression, to realism.<sup>27</sup>

Yet the more pressing problem for Cheever's editors, as Maxwell later diagnosed it, was that 'Cheever was really a modernist' and that

at a certain point fantasy came into his stories. Usually those stories were rejected. At another point he abandoned the consistency of character.

Characters in his stories did things which it was not in their character to do.<sup>28</sup>

Despite his criticisms, Maxwell was willing to tone down these elements of Cheever's stories when possible. This is because Maxwell was more empathetic towards writers than Lobrano: only after reading the story as a fellow professional writer and discussing it with the contributor did Maxwell 'feel obliged to read for the reader' and remove 'what [seemed] like pointless difficulties' from the text.<sup>29</sup> Lobrano, on the other hand, read and edited stories solely as a magazine editor. If the interrelation between plot and character development was unclear or inconsistent in a submission to the point that it would confuse The New Yorker's readership, then Lobrano normally rejected it.

Although Lobrano was resistant to Cheever's literary experimentation, he was sympathetic to his economic situation as a freelance contributor. When Cheever was struggling financially, Lobrano encouraged him to rewrite rejected submissions for the magazine. Lobrano also authorised Maxwell to do the same when he was Cheever's full-time editor from 1950 onwards. In the case of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', for example, the development of which is examined in more detail in Chapter Four, Lobrano charitably

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<sup>27</sup> Janet Carey Eldred argues that the popularity of humour pieces during the Depression suppressed the publication of more serious fiction in the magazine. Janet Carey Eldred, *Literate Zeal: Gender and the Making of a New Yorker Ethos* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Kay Bonetti, 'An Interview with William Maxwell', *The Missouri Review*, 19 (1996), 79-98 (pp. 93-94).

<sup>29</sup> Maxwell to O'Connor, 11 December 1958, in O'Connor and Maxwell, *The Happiness of Getting it Down Right: Letters of Frank O'Connor and William Maxwell*, p. 109.

created an editorially controlled context within which Cheever and Maxwell were able to produce a saleable story. But these interventions, however well-intentioned, were not always successful. On 2 June 1950, Lobrano rejected a story by Cheever called 'Mrs. Beauchamps'. In the rejection letter, Lobrano argued that the theme of the story needed to be brought 'into sharper focus' and invited Cheever to discuss the possibility of revising it but only as long as it was not 'too painful or unprofitable' to him.<sup>30</sup> This remark is at once honest and facetious insofar as it exposes Lobrano's lack of interest in collaborating with Cheever unless he followed instruction. It also shows that while Cheever self-identified as a *New Yorker* writer, he became reluctant to revise rejected submissions for the magazine. The reason for his reticence was economic. As it took anywhere between a week and a few months to revise a story for *The New Yorker*, Cheever could not afford to do it without assurances. Unfortunately, Lobrano typically gave Cheever none. Thus, Cheever's preference was to sell his *New Yorker* rejections to other large-circulation publications who accepted pieces without conditions as quickly as possible. Unsurprisingly, Cheever elected not to revise 'Mrs. Beauchamps' for Lobrano.

Cheever and Lobrano had another similar professional disagreement towards the end of 1950 when Lobrano rejected 'The Bus to St. James's' (*The New Yorker*, 14 January 1956), a story about an affair between two parents whose children attend the same Episcopalian boarding school in New York. After editing the draft and crossing out portions of it, Lobrano encouraged Cheever to rewrite the story. Cheever agreed and mailed Lobrano a revision on 9 October 1950. 'It's on yellow paper because there are still some points I want to clear up and I wanted to get your opinion before I did another

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<sup>30</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 488, fol. 12, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 2 June 1950.



revision', Cheever explained to his editor.<sup>31</sup> To Cheever's consternation, however, Lobrano criticised the revision and asked to see the deleted material again to see if he could rework the story before giving up on it altogether.<sup>32</sup>

Lobrano's opinion on 'The Bus to St. James's' is not on record, but it is likely that any issues he had with the story were at the level of narrative structure. A case in point is Cheever's use of third-person omniscient narration to describe the events of 'The Bus to St. James's' from multiple character viewpoints. Cheever presents the conflict of the story—a New York stockbroker, Stephen Bruce, becomes attracted to and has an affair with a married woman, Mrs. Sheridan—through Stephen for much of the narrative. Midway through 'The Bus to St. James's', however, Cheever switches to the viewpoint of Stephen's lover, Mrs. Sheridan, in order to describe a scene from her domestic life; then, in a sequence set nearer the end of the story, Cheever switches to the viewpoint of Stephen's wife, Lois, as she hires a private investigator to determine whether or not her husband is having an affair. Neither of these sections of the story are more than a page in length, but Lobrano may have found this broadening of focus unnecessary and distracting to the reader in a story that is otherwise predominantly filtered through the consciousness of Stephen. Cheever compartmentalised his discontent with Lobrano in his journals, preferring not to confront his editor in person. Writing about Lobrano's reaction to the 'The Bus to St. James's', Cheever acknowledged that his editor and friend was trying to be helpful but resented 'the fact that my stories, imperfect as they are, must undergo so much manipulation from people who are paid much more than I for tampering with my fiction'.<sup>33</sup>

Returning briefly to the notion of Maxwell as a more empathetic editor, it is worth noting that when Maxwell collaborated with Cheever on 'The Bus to St. James's' two

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<sup>31</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 488, fol. 12, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, 9 October 1950.

<sup>32</sup> Bailey, Cheever: A Life, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> Cheever qtd. in Bailey, Cheever: A Life, p. 173.

years later in the spring of 1952, he allowed Cheever to retain both the multiple character viewpoints and the associative, dream-like domestic and urban scenes that constitute the plot of the story. Maxwell and Cheever foregrounded the psychological and socio-cultural components of 'The Bus to St. James's', which ruminate on both the father-daughter relationship and the reason for extramarital affairs in postwar upper-middle-class New York society. The importance of these two strands of thought to 'The Bus to St. James's' becomes clear in the epiphany at the end of the story. While waiting for his daughter to finish her dancing lesson at the Chardin Club in the city, Stephen is struck by the notion that, in sending their children to boarding school, to parties, and to various classes, he and the other parents he knows in New York are selfishly putting 'the burden of order' they resist in their own lives 'onto their children and [filling] their days with specious rites and ceremonies'.<sup>34</sup> After receiving an initial payment for 'The Bus to St. James's', Cheever thanked Maxwell for '[raising] the story from the dead'.<sup>35</sup> It is clear that Maxwell was more willing than Lobrano to help Cheever strike a balance between his realistic and modernist tendencies.

There are a couple of practical reasons for Lobrano's lack of enthusiasm for artistic collaboration though. First, Lobrano was foremost a magazine editor, not a professional writer. While he certainly understood the lot of the professional writer, he was not as interested in the literary process as his predecessor White, who was influential in shaping *The New Yorker's* literary project in the 1920s and 1930s, or his colleague Maxwell, a published novelist and occasional contributor of short stories to the magazine. Nor did Lobrano equate reading with interpretation. He rarely discussed stories at the metaphorical

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<sup>34</sup> John Cheever, 'The Bus to St. James's', *The New Yorker*, 14 January 1956, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 351-69 (p. 369). Because there are no differences between these versions of 'The Bus to St. James's', further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>35</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 711, fol. 5, John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] c. 1952.

level in his correspondence with Cheever during the 1940s and 1950s. When editing submissions, Lobrano did so according to *The New Yorker's* style rules: he focused on correcting grammatical errors, cutting verbosity in sentences and paragraphs, and clarifying details and narrative action. In this way, Lobrano did not allow a positive affective response to a story to impair his critical evaluation of it in terms of its suitability for the magazine.

Second, Lobrano was the head of *The New Yorker's* fiction department, which meant his workload was considerable. In addition to dealing with his stable of contributors, Lobrano had to read and give his opinions on each and every submission the magazine received. This was time consuming, and it meant that Lobrano could not always allocate time for collaboration and discussion with contributors. Ultimately, though, Lobrano was a company man who edited fiction submissions according to the editorial style of the magazine rather than the personal style of their authors. Nowhere is this more evident than in his editing of 'Torch Song'.

### **Lobrano's Editing of 'Torch Song'**

The most important characteristic of Lobrano's editorial style is that it is instructional rather than collaborative. Unlike Maxwell, who made notes, suggestions, appreciative comments, and queries about a word, phrase, or image in the margins of many of the typescripts he edited on behalf of Cheever, Lobrano confined his editing to the body-text of the submissions he edited. When Lobrano had queries about one of Cheever's stories, he discussed them with Cheever in person or in letters; he rarely engaged with Cheever via editorial marginalia. This allowed Lobrano to work a typescript up into a working varitype proof quickly and without impediment. The body-text of 'Torch Song' is covered with Lobrano's crossings out, substitutions, diagonal lines, asterisks, question marks, and

arrows. In addition to removing existing sentences and paragraphs, Lobrano also provided substitutes for some of the sentences he deleted, and, when he deemed it necessary, instructed Cheever to submit revised versions of paragraphs or sections he cut for being too digressive on inserts.

The first significant example of Lobrano's editing is a piece of crossing out that occurs on pages eight and nine of the typescript (see Figure 6). Lobrano drew lines in a cross-hatch pattern through paragraphs of fourteen lines (twelve on page eight, two on page nine), and twenty-one lines (all on page nine). The first of these paragraphs described Jack and his wife's experience of pregnancy during the late 1930s. Lobrano drew a downwards facing arrow over his crossings out on the paragraph on page eight and an asterisk next to the last ten lines of the paragraph on page nine, which described several of Jack's sightings of Joan around the city.

As well as crossing out the paragraph about Mrs. Lorey's pregnancy on page eight, Lobrano pencilled two question marks in the left-hand margin alongside a compound sentence that ran from the third to the ninth line of the paragraph. The original version of this compound sentence as it appears beneath Lobrano's crossings out reads:

She chose in time to see only other couples who were expecting children and oddly enough Jack had to search for these; for even in those years the imminence of war made many marriages, many human relationships tenebrous and wary as if all their promises were conditioned by the fears and the prudence that is excited at that stage in the progress of a gathering storm when the porch furniture comes in and the dead leaves and the waste paper are bedeviled in the black air.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963 (herewith Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary

Lobrano likely highlighted this sentence because it is unwieldy. The verbosity of the second dependent clause in the sentence labours the image of a gathering storm disturbing a domestic scene, an otherwise apt metaphor for the impact of the Second World War on the lives of married couples. This being said, it is worth noting that Cheever uses a similar rhetorical style to the one E. B. White uses in some of the editorial pieces he wrote for *The New Yorker* about the geopolitical aftermath of the Second World War in the compound sentence. For example, in the ‘Notes and Comment’ of the 18 August 1945 issue of *The New Yorker*, White bridged the international and the domestic spheres when he complained that, in light of the threat of nuclear weapons, the arrangements being made in San Francisco for the United Nations were like ‘the preparations some little girls might make for a lawn party as a thunderhead gathers just beyond the garden gate’.<sup>37</sup> Given Cheever’s ability to calibrate his fiction to meet the stylistic and thematic requirements of different publications ranging from the politically-conscious *The New Republic* to the more populist *Harper’s Bazaar* in the 1930s and early 1940s, it is perhaps no coincidence that he adopted White’s approach to reducing the problems of the larger world into more domestically relatable terms through metaphor.

Lobrano also pencilled an ‘x’ above the adjective ‘tenebrous’, the Latin root of which, *tenebrōsus*, means gloomy, dark, or obscure in the compound sentence on page eight. Given that Cheever paired ‘tenebrous’ with ‘wary’ in the adjectival phrase ‘tenebrous and wary’, he likely intended ‘tenebrous’ to characterise relationships under threat of war as being despondent or depressed, both of which are synonyms of ‘gloomy’. Lobrano perhaps felt that this adjective introduced semantic ambiguity into the sentence.

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Manuscripts, 1859-1963), Series 1: Short Stories 1935-1963, Box 2, fol. 48, ‘Torch Song’, 4 October, 1947’, pp. 1-25 (p. 8). Further references to this version of the story are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>37</sup> E. B. White, ‘Notes and Comment’, *The New Yorker*, 18 August 1945, p. 13.

As Lobrano did not pencil a substitute onto the typescript before crossing the paragraph out, it is likely he instructed Cheever to revise the paragraph and retype it on a new page either in person or by letter.

This was a practice particular to Lobrano. Cheever generally submitted revisions to *The New Yorker* either after the working varitype proof was transformed into an author's proof, or after the author's proof was set into galleys. Editors sent author's proofs (sometimes referred to as final proofs in editorial correspondence) to contributors so that they could review the changes made during the early stage of the editing process. They were allowed to mark this proof up with answers to outstanding editorial queries and, if they were unhappy with the magazine's edits, their own changes as well. They could do the same on galley proofs as well. Depending on time constraints, Cheever discussed author's proofs and responded to editorial queries either by letter or in person; he tended to avoid correcting galley proofs in pencil whenever possible because, he claimed, in a letter to Maxwell, he never did it 'with any confidence'.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, he retyped heavily edited or queried sections on new pieces of paper and mailed them to *The New Yorker*. Once Cheever submitted his revisions to the magazine, his full-time editor or a copy-editor would transcribe them onto the galley proof if they were handwritten, or insert the new material into it if it was typed on additional pages so that the printers could update the version set in galleys.<sup>39</sup>

The working varitype proof of 'Torch Song' reveals that Lobrano requested these types of revisions much earlier in the editing process than Maxwell did. The insert labelled '8a' following page eight of the working varitype proof of 'Torch Song' is one of four examples of retyped pages Cheever submitted during the marking up of the draft into a

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<sup>38</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 719, fol. 7, John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] c. July 1953.

<sup>39</sup> It was usually a combination of both.

working varitype proof. (The other retyped inserts in the typescript are pages headed '14a', '16a', and '16b', respectively). Lobrano annotated each of these inserts to varying degrees, which suggests that they were originally handled and included as part of the working varitype proof. The first of the paragraphs Cheever typed on page '8a' is a revision of the paragraph about pregnancy running from page eight through to the top of page nine (see Figure 6). Although there is no correspondence in the Records in which Lobrano elaborates on his problem with the paragraph on page eight, Cheever notably excised the material he highlighted amidst the crossing out in his revision of it.

This is the revised paragraph as it appears on the insert labelled '8a' included in the typescript (Lobrano's additional edits are in italics):

Jack's wife got pregnant early in the fall, and she seized on all the prerogatives of an expectant mother. She took long naps, ate canned peaches in the middle of the night, and talked about the rudimentary kidney. She chose to see only other couples who were expecting children, and the parties ~~she~~ that she and Jack gave were temperate. He did not see Joan during these months of intense domesticity, and there was nothing in his life to remind him of her. ~~A son~~ The baby, a boy, was born ~~to them~~ in May, and Jack was very proud and happy. The first party ~~they~~ that he and his wife went to after ~~his wife's~~ her convalescence was the wedding of a girl whose family Jack had known in Ohio. (8a)

Cutting the discursive sentence Lobrano queried in its entirety, Cheever reduced the paragraph on page eight down from fourteen lines to nine on page '8a'. Cheever transforms the external pressure of impending war, encapsulated in the metaphor of 'a gathering storm' tearing through a domestic scene of 'porch furniture' and 'dead leaves' in

the original version of the paragraph, into an internal pressure in the revision, as pregnancy engenders a period of ‘intense domesticity’ that prevents Jack from seeing Joan. This is not the reason for the lack of contact between Jack and Joan in the original version of the paragraph on page eight. In the last two sentences of this paragraph prior to the revision, Joan, referring to herself as ‘Mrs. Harris’, telephones Jack at home but his wife ‘was listening and there was nothing Jack could do but tell Mrs. Harris that it was impossible for him to see her’ (8-9). Cheever omitted this melodramatic scene from the revised version of the paragraph on page ‘8a’, preferring instead to evoke a more realistic, and therefore more appealing to the *New Yorker*, sense of people drifting apart due to major changes in their lives.

Moreover, the deletion of this scene enabled Cheever to add a sentence marking the return of Jack and his wife to New York society following the birth of their son: ‘The first party ~~they~~ that he and his wife went to after ~~his wife’s~~ her convalescence was the wedding of a girl whose family Jack had known in Ohio’ (8a). This sentence is transitional insofar as it belongs with what precedes it, but prepares the reader for the meeting between Jack and Joan that follows in the next paragraph. As a piece of editing, the introduction of this sentence reveals the extent to which Cheever had internalised *The New Yorker’s* style of editing prose by sentence rather than by paragraph so that stories (and readers) moved forwards without confusion.

Lobrano edited the paragraph on page ‘8a’ for the purposes of clarification only, which suggests he was content with Cheever’s revision. Lobrano’s most notable pieces of editing see him replace two personal pronouns, ‘she’ and ‘they’, with the adjectival phrases, ‘that she and Jack’ and ‘that he and his wife’. These edits are intended to avoid any confusion on the part of the reader. If Lobrano preferred this version of the paragraph, then it is probably because it is a more compact piece of narrative prose than its



predecessor. Cheever wrote it in the journalistic prose style Lobrano preferred, cutting extraneous details about pregnancy, such as Jack's wife complaining about her 'swollen feet and varicose veins' (8), and the psychological impact of war on young couples; avoiding metaphorical digression; and compressing a year in the lives of the Loreys into six sentences. Not all of these changes serve the story well. In particular, by cutting the metaphor of a gathering storm in favour of a more flatly descriptive view of the Coreys' experience of pregnancy, Cheever aligns the story with the contemporary moment in which he is writing rather than the interwar period in which this part of the story is set.

The socio-political context of the paragraph on page eight is concerned with the ways in which threats to domestic and international peace rupture, to use Rita Felski's formulation, 'the association of the everyday with repetition, home and habit'.<sup>40</sup> The metaphor of a gathering storm complements this idea by anticipating both the United States' entrance into the Second World War and Jack's struggle to find happiness in marriage and fatherhood during the course of 'Torch Song'. In the paragraph on page '8a', however, Jack's experience of marriage and impending parenthood reflects the experiences of Americans following the end of the Second World War, when marriage rates, birth rates, and homeownership increased dramatically in an economically prosperous United States. While this change perhaps made the character of Jack resonate with New Yorker readers, many of whom were marrying and having children themselves during the early postwar years, it is anachronistic. More importantly, the paragraph loses a measure of its linguistic eloquence and thematic resonance as a result of this change.

But if Cheever's revision of the paragraph on page eight was, in the absence of any criticism from Lobrano beyond crossings out and question marks, self-directed and

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<sup>40</sup> Rita Felski, 'The Invention of Everyday Life', *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 39 (1999-2000), 15-31 (p. 18).

ultimately over-compensatory, then his response to Lobrano's more specific and instructional editing of the largest paragraph on page nine of the typescript was more deliberate. Despite crossing out all twenty-one lines of this paragraph, Lobrano drew around the last ten lines of the paragraph in pencil, and added a pilcrow (¶) to designate a new paragraph beginning with the sentence, 'That June a girl from Ohio was married at Saint James's and given a reception at one of the big clubs that he wanted and Jack went with his wife' (9). He also drew an asterisk alongside this sentence in the left-hand margin.

This section of the paragraph dramatises Jack's experience of seeing Joan being physically assaulted by an unidentified man during a wedding reception at the club. To accommodate this scene in the narrative, Cheever added the transitional sentence about the Loreys accepting an invitation to a wedding in the preceding paragraph on page '8a', and cut the eleven sentences Lobrano crossed out on page nine of the typescript, an expository mixture of interior thought and description, with Jack ruminating on how the 'divergence in their lives had become so great' that he and Joan 'no longer had anything in common'; seeing Joan at a cocktail party eight months after the birth of his son; and seeing her again in Central Park with 'a cowboy' (9).

The rising action of 'Torch Song' consists of a series of dramatic scenes, focalised through a sympathetic Jack, that examine and escalate both Joan's attraction to lewdness and her almost inhuman imperviousness to it. In the first of these scenes, Jack sees Joan with a man in a diner in Pennsylvania Station 'who had obviously passed out' from too much drinking (123). Jack, who is on his way home from a weekend in rural Pennsylvania with his girlfriend, observes Joan shaking the shoulders of the man gently and speaking to him. What surprises Jack is that Joan 'seemed to be vaguely troubled, vaguely amused' by the embarrassing situation (123). The second scene is told retrospectively to Jack by one of Joan's friends. She reveals that a man called Nils, whom Jack saw dining with Joan in a

restaurant in Greenwich Village, was not a Swedish count as he claimed he was to Joan, but a violent and abusive morphine-addict. After Nils gets Joan pregnant and leaves her for a seedy hotel near Times Square, she has an abortion. 'But', Jack laments, '[Joan] was so impressed by then with his helplessness, so afraid that he would die without her, that she followed him there and [...] and [continues] to buy his narcotics' (124). The third of these scenes takes place at a cocktail party in Joan's apartment a few months later. Joan is by then dating an alcoholic called Howard Bascomb (renamed Hugh Bascomb in the published version of 'Torch Song'). When Howard/Hugh verbally attacks a photographer, loses his balance, and knocks over a lamp at the party (126), Jack is struck by the obliviousness of Joan 'to the raging drunk at her back': 'Her voice remained soft, and her manner [...] seemed genuinely simple' (127). The fourth scene is set at another cocktail party in Joan's apartment. On this occasion, Joan is living with a German refugee called Franz Denzel. When Franz notices that one of the coffee cups he took from Germany when he escaped from the Nazis is chipped, he blames Joan. After following Joan into the kitchen, Franz hits her. Each of these scenes carries the action of the story forwards and exacerbates its level of conflict. This is to say that, on a personal level, witnessing the physical and emotional abuse of Joan by a succession of lovers exposes Jack to human misery and moral degradation, undermining his efforts to integrate socially into his New York milieu through marriage and child-rearing. In addition, the episodic rhythm of the narrative complements the repetitive and compulsive nature of Joan's behaviour.

Lobrano deleted the expository material from the paragraph on page nine of the typescript in order to make the scene at the wedding reception, which shows Joan in similarly fraught circumstances, more identifiably a part of this rising action. This stands as a piece of editing that displays Lobrano's appreciation of the dramatic structure of 'Torch Song' as established by Cheever. The transformation of the scene at the wedding

reception into a single paragraph involved a further combination of reactive editing by Cheever and, later on, complementary editing by Lobrano. Consequently, the finished scene stands out as one of the most collaborative pieces of editing in the typescript of 'Torch Song'. Having established that the Loreys were going to the wedding in the final sentence of the first paragraph on page '8a', Cheever revised the opening sentence in the new paragraph so that it set the scene quickly: 'The wedding was at Saint Jameses [sic] and afterwards there was a big reception at the River Club' (8a). He also replaced the line 'and Jack had a good time' with 'and scotch' in the sentence, 'There was an orchestra dressed like Hungarians and a lot of champagne and scotch', in the paragraph on page '8a'. This change is cosmetic insofar as the addition of more alcohol to this description of the party is suggestive of the deleted 'good time'. The remainder of the second paragraph as it appears on page '8a'—a description of Jack 'looking for a toilet' in 'a deserted corridor' of the club and witnessing Joan having her arm twisted by her new lover—is similar to the original version.

One of the most striking aspects of this part of the scene is Jack hearing Joan's voice before he sees her in the corridor of the club: 'Toward the end of the afternoon, Jack was walking down a dim corridor when he heard Joan's voice. "Please don't darling," she was saying. "You'll break my arm. Please don't, darling"' (8a). Cheever combines Joan's term of endearment for the man and his violent intention to unsettling effect here. Building on this juxtaposition of speech and act, Lobrano intensified the violence of the confrontation further by crossing out the reference to Jack looking for a toilet before he hears Joan, and substituting the verb 'standing' in the first part of the multipart descriptive verb phrase that follows her plea, 'She was standing with a man who seemed to be twisting her arm', with the more forceful verb phrase, 'being pressed against the wall by [...]'. Lobrano's addition makes the implicit explicit, and, on this occasion, it is a meliorative change because it

enhances the shock of the scene. Although the revision of the second paragraph on page '8a' was instigated by Lobrano's excision of eleven lines of material from the original paragraph on page nine of the typescript, both he and Cheever merge their separate intentions successfully on this occasion.

Another merging of authorial and editorial intention occurred during the latter stages of the editing process, either after Cheever reviewed the final proof of 'Torch Song' or while the story was in galleys. On page twelve of the typescript, Lobrano drew eighteen thick black lines through material ranging from single words to sentence parts (see Figure 7). He wrote substitutions above ten of his deletions, all but one of which Cheever included verbatim in the published version of 'Torch Song'. Lobrano intended the substitution in question to replace a description of Jack getting in after a day spent celebrating Russia shifting to the side of the Allies in the war with Joan and her new partner, Pete Bristol. This is how the description appears in the typescript (with Lobrano's substitution in italics):

Joan had always been tireless in her gentle way. She hated to see the night end and it was after three o'clock when Jack stumbled into his apartment. He had no recollection of the last hour or so of the evening, but ~~He had lost his hat, and could not remember where he had checked his suit coat his clothes were soiled, as if he had fallen in the street or on a dirty floor. He was haggard and sick in the morning and didn't get to his office until eleven.~~ *He had lost his hat, and could not remember where he had checked his suit coat his clothes were soiled, as if he had fallen in the street or on a dirty floor. He was haggard and sick in the morning and didn't get to his office until eleven.* (12)

Cheever conveys the confusion of a drunken stupor by moving rapidly from a description of Jack 'stumbling' into his apartment in the second sentence of this passage to a description of his hatless and coatless appearance in the third sentence. Despite his

preference for concision and brevity of expression elsewhere in the typescript, Lobrano added material to this passage. In the third sentence, he bookended, ‘he had lost his hat, and’, with two independent clauses, ‘He had no recollection of the last few hours of the evening’, and ‘his clothes were soiled, as if he had fallen in the street on a dirty floor’. As Cheever describes Jack, Joan, and Pete drinking champagne ‘with their dinner’, at ‘the Lafayette’ (a hotel), and in ‘two or three other places’ (12) a few sentences earlier in this paragraph, these additional clauses elaborate unnecessarily on Jack’s drunkenness.

While this example suggests another instance of Cheever accepting Lobrano’s edits over his original intention, the published version of ‘Torch Song’ reveals that Cheever revised and reorganised the passage using a combination of authorial and editorial material. Only the description of Jack stumbling into his apartment remains intact in this passage as it appears in the published version of ‘Torch Song’. Working through Lobrano’s revisions, Cheever combined the independent clause Lobrano inserted as the opening part of the third sentence, ‘He had no recollection of the last hour or so of the evening’, with the original fourth sentence of the passage, ‘He was haggard and sick in the morning and didn’t get to his office until eleven’, to produce a new third sentence: ‘The following morning he woke up haggard and sick with no recollection of the last hour or so of the previous evening’ (132). Cheever created a fourth sentence by conjoining the adjectival phrases ‘His suit was soiled’ and ‘he had lost his hat’ (132). Rather than accepting Lobrano’s edits outright, Cheever integrated his editor’s pieces of descriptive prose with his own to form a version of the passage that largely honoured his original intention.

Other instances of Cheever attempting to wrestle editorial control away from Lobrano in the working varitype of ‘Torch Song’ are scarce, however. In most instances, if Lobrano crossed out more than one paragraph on a page, Cheever either revised the deleted

material on inserts or rejected it altogether. After Lobrano crossed out a conversation between Jack and Joan in which she answers Jack's questions about the fates of four of her lovers on page fifteen of the typescript, for example, Cheever cut the exchange between Jack and Joan from twenty lines in length to twelve, and replaced three of Joan's four utterances with short, summarising sentences of narrative prose. Subsequently, Joan's explanation of what happened to Franz on page fifteen—

“‘Franz?’” she asked. “Franz killed himself. He came to my house that night in September, the night Germans bombed Warsaw. He listened to the news on the radio and then went back to his hotel and took poison. They called me at the office. I'll never forget that morning. The maid found him in the bathroom. None of the other refugees would help. I had to do everything myself.” (15)—

became, ‘Franz, the German, took poison the night the Nazis bombed Warsaw’, on an insert headed ‘14a’. Lobrano added his own revision of this piece of dialogue to the insert: “‘We listened to the news on the radio’, Joan said, “and then he went back to his hotel and took poison. The maid found him dead in the bathroom next morning”” (14a). He drew a line from the first word of this revision to the period following ‘Warsaw’ to indicate where this material should be inserted into the story once it was being set into galleys. As Lobrano deleted this piece of dialogue originally, it is likely that he pencilled it onto the insert. It is not clear whether Lobrano did this of his own volition, or at the behest of Cheever, who, having to work under time-pressure, may have felt that he rushed his revision of the paragraph on page fifteen.<sup>41</sup> When Lobrano drew heavy diagonal lines

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<sup>41</sup> In the absence of archival evidence, this is conjecture. But Cheever did feel, on occasion, that the revisions he made to stories, both in pencil on the galley proofs and in the form of typed inserts, were ‘hasty’ or ‘lazy’.

through all but three lines of page sixteen of the typescript, Cheever retyped the page on an insert labelled '16a', paying careful attention to Lobrano's editing of the body-text prior to his scribbling lines over it. Cheever made a description of one of the guests at Joan's party, 'a pessimist who stayed close to the radio waiting for the announcement of cataclysim [sic]' (16), less hyperbolic and more precise when he revised it on the insert: 'and a man who stayed close to the radio, listening for news from the Balkans' (16a). Rather than retain the suggestive nouns 'pessimist' and 'cataclysm', both of which are semantically pertinent to the context of socio-political upheaval that pervades the story, Cheever again uses the more impersonal journalistic prose style Lobrano preferred to revise this description. Cheever's reliance on this strategy throughout the editing of 'Torch Song' indicates his reluctance to enter into a creative dispute with Lobrano, lest it jeopardise the publication of the story in the magazine.

It is for this reason that Lobrano's editing of 'Torch Song' is best understood as an act of institutional control that Cheever pragmatically accepted for economic reasons. Unlike Maxwell, a more flexible and creatively collaborative editor who worked closely with contributors throughout each stage of the editing process, Lobrano consciously limited both his paratextual and personal interaction with Cheever while editing 'Torch Song' for publication. Lobrano did this because he lacked an artistic vision for the story; his main priority was to edit it so that it met the stylistic requirements of the magazine. When comparing the typescript with the published version of 'Torch Song', it becomes clear that Lobrano performed this task aggressively. In several instances, his heavy crossings out of words, phrases, and sentences appear to have intimidated Cheever into making revisions that were more conservative than was his original intention. In this sense,



Cheever tolerated and accommodated Lobrano's editorial interference in much the same way that the character of Joan maintains her conviviality towards men despite being conned and abused by them during the course of 'Torch Song'.

Cheever's reasons for doing this are less ambiguous than Joan's, however. Not only did he have a first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker* that rewarded the quantity of stories a contributor published in the magazine annually, a cycle of which 'Torch Song' was a part, he had also received an advance payment for the story. Consequently, Cheever had little choice but to place professional pragmatism over artistic ambition on this occasion. Despite having made this decision, as well as some of his own changes to 'Torch Song', Cheever was left disappointed with the final version of the story. Shortly after the publication of 'Torch Song' in *The New Yorker*, he complained to Lobrano that he had received a few telephone calls but 'very little first-class mail' concerning the story; it was, Cheever conceded, only a success 'among the cheap seats'.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, 'Torch Song' became a story that fell somewhere between the artistic and commercial extremes of the magazine marketplace as Cheever understood them during the 1940s.

That Cheever had artistic expectations for 'Torch Song' is perhaps surprising given his lack of resistance towards editing that impinged sporadically on his personal style. But a part of the reality of producing short stories for large-circulation magazines for Cheever was that his artistic ambition was proportional to his financial needs. Despite 'Torch Song' being a subversive work of *New Yorker* fiction, and not being written expressly for money as some of his other stories occasionally were, the story appears to have been compromised creatively by Cheever's financial short-termism. This was not always an issue for Cheever, however. During the 1950s, several of his suburban *New Yorker* stories,

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<sup>42</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 445, fol. 12, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, [n.d.] c. October 1947.

including 'The Country Husband' (The New Yorker, 20 November 1954) and 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' (The New Yorker, 14 April 1956), were the products of artistically fulfilling and reciprocal editorial collaborations between Cheever and The New Yorker's fiction department. As Chapter Four reveals, in 1955, Cheever enjoyed one of his most successful collaborations with The New Yorker on the rejected first draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', which he originally submitted to the magazine under the title of 'The Reformed Housebreaker'. Working in the absence of economic pressure from The New Yorker (if not from his personal financial commitments), Cheever was able, with the support of Maxwell, to transform the draft formally, structurally, and stylistically into a New Yorker story without compromise.

## Chapter Four:

### **The Reforming of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ by John Cheever and The New Yorker, 1955 to 1956**

Chapter Four examines how Cheever collaborated with his editors at The New Yorker to transform ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ into ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ (The New Yorker, 14 April 1956) by analysing the editorial and authorial changes between the first two drafts of the story, the working varitype proof, and the published version. G. Thomas Tanselle argues that the ‘author’s intention’ in a collaborative effort results from ‘a merging of the separate intentions of the individual authors’ so that ‘the final result is thus intended by each of the [authors]’.<sup>1</sup> While this utopian notion of collaboration could not be applied to the editing of ‘Torch Song’ in 1947 in Chapter Three, it more accurately describes the transformation of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ into ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ in 1955.

The substantial level of creative collaboration between Cheever and his editors, William Maxwell and Gustave S. Loblano, on ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ has been hitherto neglected by critics. Chapter Four argues that the subsequent drafts of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ were strongly influenced by Loblano’s initial criticism of the first draft and the meticulous editing of each draft by Maxwell. Although Loblano was less interested in creative collaboration than Maxwell, his opinion that ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ lacked focus led to perhaps the most significant change in the story: the switch from alternating third-person limited and omniscient narration of its first draft to the

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<sup>1</sup> G. Thomas Tanselle, ‘The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention’, *Studies in Bibliography*, 29 (1976), 167-211 (p. 190).

first-person limited narration of its second draft and working varitype proof (both titled ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’). At the same time, and alongside the changes that Cheever himself made to the story’s setting, narrative prose, dialogue, set-pieces, and structure during the editing process, he also accepted and incorporated almost all of Maxwell’s corrections and suggestions into the subsequent drafts of the story. Crucially, rather than selling the original draft of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ to another large-circulation magazine for more money than *The New Yorker* could ultimately pay for the story, Cheever deferred instead to the professional judgement of Maxwell.<sup>2</sup> It was an adroit move on the part of Cheever. The published version of the story would help to define the suburban aesthetic of Cheever’s third collection of short fiction, *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill and Other Stories*, which was published in September 1958. Unlike the majority of Cheever’s stories, ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ derives its final form from synthesis rather than excision or substitution; in this sense, the story is a true model of collaborative work.

The editorial collaboration between Cheever, Lobrano, and Maxwell on ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ began in earnest during the spring of 1955. In a letter dated 18 April 1955, Maxwell, who had been editing Cheever’s short stories for *The New Yorker* on and off since late 1938, asked the author on behalf of the magazine’s head of fiction, Lobrano, if he could be persuaded to work some more on an original story manuscript he had submitted to the magazine a week earlier entitled, ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’.<sup>3</sup> In Cheever’s submission, Hake, a suburban family-man protagonist, is forced to steal money from his wealthier neighbours in the suburb of Bayard Manor when his wife, Christina,

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<sup>2</sup> *The New Yorker* paid \$2075 for the story (\$18,318.77 in 2015). John Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, ed. by Benjamin Cheever (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> New York, New York Public Library, *The New Yorker Records*, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (herewith *New Yorker Records*, NYPL), Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, Fiction Correspondence 1952-1980, Box 734, fol. 27, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 18 April 1955.

overcomes her feeling that the suburb is ‘worldly and wicked’ and develops an addiction to clothes shopping after being encouraged by her husband to accept more of the social invitations that came their way.<sup>4</sup> Lobrano, Maxwell explained to Cheever, liked the story ‘in principle’ but felt that it was ‘not quite in focus’ and that it might help if Cheever ‘extended and enlarged an idea that [was] already there—that before the theft [Hake] is cheerful and likeable and easy going, and after it his point of view is so entirely changed that he becomes a different person [...]’.<sup>5</sup> Cheever agreed, submitting an undated second draft of the story to the magazine within a couple of weeks of receiving Maxwell’s letter. During his editing of the story’s second draft, Maxwell picked up on Cheever’s change of setting from the suburb of Bayard Manor to the ‘banlieue of Shady Hill’ and, crossing out the word ‘Reformed’ and adding ‘of Shady Hill’ after ‘Housebreaker’, retitled the story ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’.<sup>6</sup> Cheever subsequently produced one more draft of the story which Maxwell worked up into a working varitype proof and, in conjunction with the magazine’s make-up department (printers, copy-editors, and fact-checkers), scheduled to run sometime in the early spring of 1956.<sup>7</sup>

‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ was eventually published in the 14 April 1956 issue of *The New Yorker*. The published version of the story is told exclusively through the point of view of Hake, and it begins with him losing his job at a plastic wrap manufacturing company that he has worked for since the end of the Second World War. Reluctant to tell his wife about his unemployment and concerned about being able to keep

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<sup>4</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 8: Magazine Make Up: Copy & Source 1950-1981, Box 1840, ‘Original Copy Apr 14, 1956 [2 of 8]’, John Cheever, ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ (1<sup>st</sup> draft), pp. 1-25 (p. 1). Further references to this version of this story are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>5</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Maxwell to Cheever, 18 April 1955.

<sup>6</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Magazine Make Up, Box 1840, ‘Original Copy Apr 14, 1956 [1 of 8]’, John Cheever, ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ (2<sup>nd</sup> draft), pp. 1-25 (p. 1). Further references to this version of the story are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>7</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Magazine Make Up, Box 1840, ‘Original Copy Apr 14, 1956 [1 of 8]’, John Cheever, ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, (working varitype proof), pp. 1-23 (p.1<sup>v</sup>). Further references to this version of the story are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

up with the mortgage payments on his ‘nice house with a garden and place outside for cooking meat’ in the Westchester-like upper-middle-class suburb of Shady Hill, Hake’s relatively optimistic outlook on life quickly erodes.<sup>8</sup> Haunted by a premonition of his own death from bronchial cancer and growing increasingly resentful of his rich neighbours who were ‘always spending money’ (332), Hake makes the desperate decision to commit a series of burglaries in order to steal the money he needs to maintain his place within his suburban community.

Maxwell once described Cheever’s style of writing as an escalation from ‘straight writing’, during which the reader was warned that liberties would be taken, ‘into incredible farce’.<sup>9</sup> It is in this spirit that Hake’s housebreaking ends almost as abruptly as it begins, and without repercussion, in the published version of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’. As Hake himself observes after getting his old job back towards the end of the story, ‘a world that had seemed so dark could, in a few minutes, become so sweet’ (349). The final set-piece of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ subtly problematises Hake’s sense of the ‘sweetness’ of life in Shady Hill, however (329). Upon his receipt of a cash advance from work, Hake spends one last night as ‘a common thief and an impostor’ (336) in order to repay his debt to his community when he breaks into the Warburtons’ house for the second time to return the nine hundred dollars he had originally stolen from them. Having left the money in an envelope on his neighbours’ kitchen table, Hake is walking home when a police car pulls up alongside him and an officer asks, “‘What are you doing out at this time of night, Mr. Hake?’” (350). Under suspicion because he is out of place—walking the streets of Shady Hill ‘when the last lights of the neighbourhood had been put out’ (349)—

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<sup>8</sup> John Cheever, ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, *The New Yorker*, 14 April 1956, pp. 42-71, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 329-50 (p. 329). Because there are no differences between these versions of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>9</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 767, fol. 5, William Maxwell to John Cheever, 12 November 1959.

Hake has no choice but to criminally mislead the policeman into thinking he is out walking his dog: “‘I’m walking the dog” I said cheerfully. There was no dog in sight, but they didn’t look.’ (350). Hake being left alone, ‘whistling merrily in the dark’ after a non-existent dog (350), reinforces the central irony of the story: despite having stolen money from his neighbours, Hake only falls under suspicion of disturbing the moral order of Shady Hill when he is caught walking the neighbourhood after dark.

Despite the fact that ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ was the seventh story Cheever published in *The New Yorker* between 1953 and 1956 set in the fictional suburb of Shady Hill, critics have emphasised the aesthetic influence of the story on *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill and Other Stories*. Not only did Cheever use the story’s title as the title of the collection, he also placed the story first in the sequence of eight stories, all of which are set in Shady Hill. Keith Wilhite argues that ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, a story that reflects Cheever’s own ambivalence towards living in the suburbs of Westchester in the 1950s, is ‘the reader’s introduction into the corruption that runs through the Shady Hill collection—into the adultery, drunkenness, burglary, occasional violence, and other trespasses that constitute the social fabric of Cheever’s suburb’.<sup>10</sup> Scott Donaldson, meanwhile, makes a broader claim for the collection, identifying its publication as the moment Cheever ‘became fixed in the public mind as a chronicler of suburban life’—an important element of his literary reputation today.<sup>11</sup> In 1956, however, ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ was, foremost, a surprise financial success for Cheever. A couple of weeks after its publication in *The New Yorker*, M-G-M bought the film rights to the story for \$25,000 (\$218,570.77 in 2015), a sum of money Cheever used, in part, to

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<sup>10</sup> Keith Wilhite, ‘John Cheever’s Shady Hill, or: how I learned to stop worrying and love the suburbs’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 34 (2006), 215-40 (p. 225).

<sup>11</sup> Scott Donaldson, ‘Cheever’s Shady Hill: A Suburban Sequence’, in *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*, ed. by R. Gerald Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 133-150 (p. 135).

relocate his family from the suburbs of Westchester to Italy, where they lived for a year prior to the publication of his debut novel, *The Wapshot Chronicle*, in 1957.<sup>12</sup>

The similarities between the fiction department's criticism of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', which Maxwell homogenised in his 18 April 1955 letter to Cheever, and the criticism that appeared in earlier rejection letters (several of which were examined in Chapter Three) to Cheever from *The New Yorker* indicate that the story was initially rejected by the magazine. In a rejection letter for one of Cheever's war stories dated 31 July 1944, 'An Interview with the Colonel', Lobrano, who was then editing Cheever on a full-time basis, highlighted the fact that 'the young man asking for the transfer doesn't come out at all clearly as character, nor does the colonel'.<sup>13</sup> Lobrano also mentioned 'the prevailing opinion that the author's (your) sympathies and viewpoint weren't clearly focused, which left the reader somewhat confused'.<sup>14</sup> According to Maxwell, Lobrano identified and criticised a similar lack of focus on character and viewpoint in 'The Reformed Housebreaker' in 1955.

Consequently, the most likely reason for the story being salvaged is a financial one. As explained in Chapter Two, Maxwell was responsible for managing Cheever's drawing account of two thousand dollars with *The New Yorker* and administering all of his story payments to him by mail.<sup>15</sup> Given that Cheever's primary source of income before his debut as a novelist in 1957 came from selling stories to the magazine, the offer to help Cheever develop 'The Reformed Housebreaker' may have been made in order to alleviate

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<sup>12</sup> Cheever, *The Letters of John Cheever*, p. 176. According to his biographer, Blake Bailey, Cheever also sent his friend, the radical writer and journalist Josephine Herbst, a cheque for \$1000 out of 'the Hollywood money'. Blake Bailey, *Cheever: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 224.

<sup>13</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, General Correspondence 1928-1951, Box 403, fol. 8, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 31 July 1944.

<sup>14</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Lobrano to Cheever, 31 July 1944.

<sup>15</sup> To put Cheever's drawing account with the magazine into perspective, the average (median) income of men in the United States in 1956 was \$3600 (\$31,314.57 in 2015), a gain of about two hundred and fifty dollars on the previous year. US Department of Commerce, 'Current Population Reports: Consumer Income', December 1958 < <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-030.pdf> > [accessed 29 September 2014]



some of his financial indebtedness to *The New Yorker*. When Maxwell was concerned that Cheever was about to hit the ceiling of his drawing account, he sent Cheever a financial statement, a few words of encouragement, or both as an incentive for him to produce new stories. 1954 turned out to be a relatively successful year for Cheever with *The New Yorker* publishing four of his stories: ‘The Five-Forty-Eight’ (10 April), ‘Independence Day at St. Botolph’s’ (3 July), ‘The Day the Pig Fell Into the Well’ (23 October), and ‘The Country Husband’ (20 November). But 1955 was a less successful year overall, with just two of Cheever’s stories appearing in the magazine: ‘Just Tell Me Who It Was’ (16 April) and ‘Just One More Time’ (8 October). When Cheever received Maxwell’s letter concerning ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ in April 1955, the author had sold just one story to *The New Yorker*, ‘The Journal of an Old Gent’, (*The New Yorker*, 18 February 1956). It is therefore probable that Maxwell and Lobrano ignored departmental practice as a favour to Cheever, a writer they had both edited throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and a writer who had, by 1955, been contributing stories to the magazine for two decades.

**Draft #1: ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ (11 April 1955)**

‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ broadly follows the schema of two earlier stories that Cheever published in *The New Yorker* in 1953 and 1954, respectively: ‘O Youth and Beauty!’ (22 August 1953) and ‘The Country Husband’ (20 November 1954). Like ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, these stories are told through a mixture of third-person omniscient and third-person limited narration, set in a suburb, and feature a male family-man protagonist struggling against the physical and emotional confinement of suburban life through limited acts of personal rebellion and transgression. ‘O Youth and Beauty!’ and ‘The Country Husband’ also possess similar dramatic arcs to ‘The Reformed

Housebreaker'. In 'O Youth and Beauty!', Cash Bentley, a former college athlete in his early forties, rearranges his neighbours' furniture at the end of each Saturday night's cocktail party in order to stage a solo hurdle-race in their living rooms. Before he breaks his leg hurdling furniture, Bentley is 'one of the best-liked men' in Shady Hill, and the community's warm feeling towards both him and his family ensures that they are members of the country club even though they cannot afford to be.<sup>16</sup> But after the accident, Bentley sinks into depression, and, like Hake, who after his first burglary in 'The Reformed Housebreaker' finds his surroundings 'subtly to have changed for the worse', becomes depressed (280).

Unlike 'The Reformed Housebreaker', however, 'O Youth and Beauty!' ends tragically, with an inebriated Bentley ordering his wife to fire a pistol to start him off on a final hurdle-race in their living room. The pistol goes off unexpectedly in his wife's hands and Bentley is killed instantly. In 'The Country Husband', Francis Weed is a corporate middle-manager who finds it difficult to readjust to his comfortable life in Shady Hill after surviving a plane crash on the way home from a business trip. Weed's post-traumatic stress isolates him from both his family and his community, and causes him to contemplate having an affair with the seventeen year old babysitter of his children.<sup>17</sup> After fantasising about the babysitter and insulting the community gossip, Mrs. Wrightson, Weed rows with his wife. Teetering on the brink of exile from Shady Hill, Weed agrees to visit a psychiatrist to whom he confesses his love for the babysitter. The story ends with Weed in his garage, having taken up woodwork as a therapy. Like Hake at the end of 'The

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<sup>16</sup> John Cheever, 'O Youth and Beauty!', *The New Yorker*, 22 August 1953, pp. 20-25, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 275-85 (p. 276). Because there are no differences between these versions of 'O Youth and Beauty!', further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>17</sup> John Cheever, 'The Country Husband', *The New Yorker*, 20 November 1954, pp. 38-48, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 420-46. Because there are no differences between these versions of 'The Country Husband', further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

Reformed Housebreaker’, Weed goes unpunished for his temporary disturbance of Shady Hill’s moral and social order.

The similarities between these stories suggest that Cheever was writing ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ according to a formula, having set five stories in Shady Hill between 1953 and 1955.<sup>18</sup> But if ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ was completed in early 1955 as the submission date of ‘4/11/55’ pencilled in the top right-hand corner of the manuscript indicates it was, then Cheever’s setting of the story in the suburb of Bayard Manor suggests that he was conscious of having set five of his stories in Shady Hill previously (1). Bayard Manor is a socially, economically, and geographically different suburban environment to Shady Hill. It is described scathingly in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ as a twenty year old development of ‘shabby’ white frame houses on ‘lots so small that the owners could gaze freely into one another’s lives’ (24). Although, within the chronology of the story, Bayard Manor pre-dates the large-scale suburban developments of the 1940s and 1950s that were subsidised by the federal government, its shabbiness—small lots, leaky toilets, little living rooms, and fireplaces that do not draw—is intended to evoke images of the mass-produced postwar suburban homes of Levittown in New York and Lakewood in California (24). The ‘large and splendid’ automobiles parked outside the homes of Hake’s neighbours in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ can be read not just as familiar symbols of middle-class consumerism, but also as a countermeasure against the suburb’s shabbiness (24). In contrast, Shady Hill is an older, wealthier, and more rural neighbourhood. It has more in common with the elitist suburban neighbourhoods of Llewellyn Park in New Jersey and Riverside in Illinois, both of which

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<sup>18</sup> ‘O Youth and Beauty!’ (22 August 1953), ‘The Sorrows of Gin’ (12 December 1953), ‘The Five-Forty-Eight’ (10 April 1954), ‘The Country Husband’ (20 November 1954), and ‘Just Tell Me Who It Was’ (16 April 1955).

were privately developed in the mid-nineteenth century to accommodate upper-middle and upper-class businessmen and professionals.

Neighbourhoods like Llewellyn Park and Riverside were designed to be romantic communities in harmony with nature, featuring curvilinear roads, spacious parks, and naturally open areas. Similar neighbourhoods were established in Westchester between the 1880s and 1940s. Cheever locates his fictional suburb of Shady Hill within this more historically respectable Northeastern American suburban lineage. The neighbourhood is frequently harmonised with its rural surroundings in ‘O Youth and Beauty!’ and ‘The Country Husband’. The suburb is seen through ‘heavy foliage’ ‘in a bath of placid golden light’ from a train in ‘O Youth and Beauty!’ (281); and even though Shady Hill is said to ‘[hang] morally and economically, from a thread’ in ‘The Country Husband’, it does so in the aesthetically pleasing ‘evening light’ (445). Bayard Manor, on the other hand, is condemned and isolated in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ as ‘kind of a spawning ground, a place for raising and bringing the young to maturity and nothing else’: ‘Who would ever, in the darkest night, [...] come back?’ asks the author-narrator towards the end of the story (24).

Hake’s place in the community of Bayard Manor is far less secure than either Bentley’s or Weed’s in Shady Hill. In the introduction to ‘O Youth and Beauty!’, Bentley is the life and soul of ‘a long, large Saturday-night party’ with his neighbours (275); in ‘The Country Husband’ Weed is returning to a Dutch Colonial home that was ‘larger than it appeared to be from the driveway’ and where ‘nothing [...] was neglected; nothing had not been burnished’ when his plane crashes (422). But in the introduction to ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, the author-narrator informs us that Hake is becoming increasingly irritated with his wife’s reluctance to assimilate into the community. Christina, the daughter of a Unitarian minister, ‘[scorns] the invitations that came their

way' and prefers to stay at home making curtains for windows and darning Hake's socks (1). The crux of this introduction is that Hake has endured a year of social isolation because of Christina's attitude and he is fearful of maintaining his place in community as a result. Worried that her reluctance to embrace this new way of life is damaging her marriage, Christina resolves to travel into the city and 'go into someplace like Bergdorf Goodmans and spend a hundred dollars' in order to please her husband (2). After overcoming her reluctance to travel into the city and buy goods for herself, however, Christina becomes addicted to shopping. Her extravagance leaves very little money in the Hakes' joint account and, after falling behind on his mortgage payments and losing his job, Hake becomes desperate enough to consider stealing from his neighbours to be a practical solution to his financial difficulties.

The responsibility for editing 'The Reformed Housebreaker' fell primarily to Maxwell. Cheever made some revisions to this draft, but they were confined to crossings out and word substitutions on a few pages only.<sup>19</sup> Maxwell added numbered and unnumbered marginal queries and suggestions to the manuscript, and he queried, crossed out, and corrected a variety of words and sentences, some of which he reworked substantially. Numbered queries were part of a submission's preliminary and penultimate editing at *The New Yorker*. They usually reflected the collective opinion of the staff who had read the piece both prior to its purchase and, later on, just prior to its publication. While there is no surviving equivalent letter in which the numbered queries on 'The Reformed Housebreaker' are explained, there are several letters from Maxwell to Cheever in which queries on other stories are discussed in detail in the *New Yorker Records*. In a letter concerning the preliminary editing of Cheever's story, 'A Woman Without a

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<sup>19</sup> During the editing of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', Cheever substitutes 'barb' for 'fish hook' and crosses out the dependent clause 'quite independently and unknowingly' in a sentence (14).

Country' (12 December 1959), Maxwell makes several queries about the clarity of expression, or lack thereof, in Cheever's writing. In the third query in the letter, Maxwell identifies issues with a 'mumbled objection' from a character that 'can be read two ways'; in the fourth, he also isolates the phrase 'the volume of an echo' which, he explains, 'didn't seem quite right—that is, I didn't understand what you meant, literally'.<sup>20</sup> Maxwell asks Cheever, 'will you fix it?'.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of the story drafts that Maxwell transformed into working varitype proofs, Cheever responded to editorial queries by letter. Maxwell then implemented the changes and Cheever checked them over once the story was set in galleys. Maxwell made eight queries on the manuscript of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', the majority of which Cheever addressed in the second draft of the story, 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'. Maxwell's queries on 'The Reformed Housebreaker' were routine. In the fifth of his queries on the typescript, Maxwell objects to the name 'Charlie Frisco', one of Hake's neighbours and fishing companions in the story (7). While Maxwell offers no explanation for the query in this instance, Cheever removed the character of Charlie Frisco from the second draft, attributing his lecherous nature instead to Carl Warburton, a conflation of the characters Charlie Frisco and Mark Warburton, and the owner of the first house Hake breaks into from the second draft of the story ('The Housebreaker of Shady Hill') onwards.

In the third query Maxwell made on the typescript of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', he points out an issue with the clarity of Cheever's expression in a sentence:

Life seemed generally to him to have the flavor of an excellent apple and he had a good appetite for his breakfast, the weather outside his window, open or shut, seemed palatable and he actually smiled out of the train window at

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<sup>20</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 767, fol. 5, Maxwell to Cheever, 12 November 1959.

<sup>21</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Maxwell to Cheever, 12 November 1959.

those silly girls who advertise sweaters and girdles on the hoardings in the Bronx. (4)

Maxwell most likely queried this because it is a sentence fragment rather than two complete sentences. Cheever concludes the main clause—‘Life seemed generally to him to have the flavor of an excellent apple and he had a good appetite for his breakfast’—with a comma, and expresses his next idea, which concerns the weather being ‘palatable’ enough to make Hake smile at advertising hoardings he normally finds irritating, following a comma. Although the word ‘palatable’ is thematically connected to the image of Hake having an appetite for life in the previous clause, the linking of weather and mood could be developed more clearly in a separate sentence. The sentence is perhaps symptomatic of Cheever writing the first draft of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ quickly, and Maxwell does not correct it, which he would almost certainly do when working a story draft up into a working varitype proof; his reluctance to do this suggests that he found Cheever’s imagery unclear and therefore worth querying. Maxwell’s confusion was enough for Cheever to reword this description and insert it towards the end of the second draft of the story as a reflection of the re-employed Hake’s new-found contentment: ‘The sidewalks seemed to shine with the lights of a practicable candor and going home on the train that night I beamed at those foolish girls who advertise girdles on the sign-boards in the Bronx’ (24).

Maxwell also made queries about some of the financial detail Cheever includes in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, such as the Hakes’ use of a joint account on page three and Cheever’s suggestion that Hake had taken out several chattel mortgages, loans obtained from a bank or financial institution that use personal property as security, to secure his suburban home. On page five of the typescript, Maxwell suggests in the left-hand-margin

that 'chattel mortgage' is 'out of date', although he offers no alternative. It is probable that Maxwell was querying this term because it was a financial arrangement upper-middle-class readers of *The New Yorker* were perhaps unfamiliar with and, therefore, not a term to be used in one of the magazine's stories. In most cases, these types of queries were forwarded to the magazine's fact-checkers by editors. It is interesting to note, however, that once Cheever relocated 'The Reformed Housebreaker' from the shabby middle-class suburb of Bayard Manor to the wealthy upper-middle-class suburb of Shady Hill in the second draft of the story there is no mention whatsoever of Hake having taken out chattel mortgages. In fact, other than having Hake reveal that he makes 'between seventeen and twenty thousand' (1) a year in the introduction and that he needs more than five hundred dollars to alleviate part of his debt shortly after losing his job (4), Cheever avoids mentioning the technicalities of Hake's financial situation in the second draft.

Hake's financial difficulties are, instead, focused through a lens of personal stigma in the second draft. Cheever attributes Hake's reluctance to tell his wife that he has lost his job, and to muster the confidence to ask one of his friends for the money he needs, not to a socially embarrassing over-extension of credit on his part, but to his mother, an overbearing woman who taught him not to speak about money (4). This change underlines more forcefully the conflict between the upper-middle-class values Hake learnt from his mother as a child and the prosaic reality of his reduced financial circumstances as an adult. These reduced circumstances also compound Hake's feeling of social isolation from his rich neighbours in the affluent suburb of Shady Hill. Cheever's decision to frame Hake's financial difficulties as the result of his upbringing make the character and his flawed motivation for doing what he eventually does in the story resonate emotionally for the reader. This change between the first and second drafts was upheld in the published version of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'.



The development of Hake's character between drafts was not solely the result of editorial queries, however. Maxwell's edits typically impacted the story in combination with each other, and alongside making the aforementioned routine queries about character names, grammatical issues, and factual details during his editing of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', Maxwell also made technical changes to the draft. Chief among these was his decision to shorten the narrative distance between the main character and the reader of 'The Reformed Housebreaker' by reworking the third-person narrative of the story into a first-person narrative.<sup>22</sup>

With the exceptions of the penultimate paragraph of 'The Reformed Housebreaker' in which the author-narrator criticises postwar suburban life, and a section during which a number of Hake's neighbours get into an argument with each other, Cheever focalises the majority of the narrative through the character of Hake. 'The Reformed Housebreaker' opens with a series of statements that confirm Hake's privileged upbringing and his suburban status, while both the story's exposition—Christina's descent into shopping addiction and Hake's unemployment—and its rising action—Hake breaking into his neighbours' homes—are written with clear indicators of Hake's worldview being evident: 'It often seemed to Johnny in the months that followed that if extravagance could be discussed as openly as alcoholism Christina's frailty would have been easy to conquer' (3) and 'Everything was pretense [sic], he thought, looking around at his friends, everything was artificiality, show, nonsense, and rot' (5). In the view of Lobrano, the expository sections involving Christina and the Hakes' neighbours undermined the central idea of 'The Reformed Housebreaker'—that a likable family man is forced to steal from his

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<sup>22</sup> There is no evidence in the New Yorker Records to indicate whether Maxwell decided to change the narrative mode of 'The Reformed Housebreaker' prior to contacting Cheever about reworking the story in his letter of 18 April 1955, nor whether he made the decision together with Cheever while reflecting on Lobrano's suggestion in the weeks that followed, but what is clear is that the changes to the first draft are in Maxwell's hand, not Cheever's.

neighbours to maintain his comfortable life in the suburbs. Lobrano preferred a short story to develop its central idea with an economy of incident, concentration of emotion, and definition of character.<sup>23</sup>

In order for 'The Reformed Housebreaker' to work in accordance with Lobrano's principle, Hake's psychology needed to occupy a more central role in the narrative of the subsequent drafts. With this in mind, Maxwell introduced the first-person narrative mode into 'The Reformed Housebreaker' by replacing the third-person pronouns 'Hake', 'he', and 'his' with the first-person pronouns 'I' and 'my' (8). The first sentence Maxwell corrects in this manner narrates the morning after Hake's first burglary. As part of the original third-person narrative, the author-narrator describes the morning after the first burglary in the Hake household: 'Hake finally got to sleep that night and was sitting at the breakfast table next morning talking with Christina and his little daughter Judy when he suddenly remembered what he had done' (8). Maxwell annotates this sentence so that it is Hake who describes his morning to the reader: 'I was sitting at the breakfast table next morning talking with Mathilde and the children when I suddenly remembered what I had done' (8). Uttered in the first-person, the comment, 'I suddenly remembered what I had done', introduces the rhetoric of confession into 'The Reformed Housebreaker'. The 'I' not only constitutes a closer sign of relation between Hake and the reader, but also signals a level of complicity or collusion, at least figuratively speaking, between the two as Hake shares his guilt about breaking into the Warburtons' house with the reader instead of his wife. Having experienced the break-in as part of the main story, the reader is subsequently invited to imagine themselves as Hake's accomplice in crime.

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<sup>23</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 403, fol. 8, Gustave S. Lobrano to John Cheever, 4 February 1944.

The third-person narrative mode, which typically offers writers the flexibility to move in and out of the minds of different characters using free-direct and free-indirect style, intermittently hindered Cheever's treatment of the story's central idea in 'The Reformed Housebreaker'. On page sixteen of the first draft, for example, Christina instructs Hake to visit their neighbours to ask them if he can borrow a fever thermometer for his sick daughter. This request yields two extended scenes featuring the Goslins, the Pewters, and the Trenholmes—the neighbours whose gardens Hake crossed to burgle the Warburtons' earlier in the story—spanning five pages of the draft (17-22). While both of these scenes are framed by Hake's search for a fever thermometer, they are filtered more obviously through the consciousness of the author-narrator. Hake is absent from the scene in the Goslins' kitchen where the Pewters row drunkenly with each other before turning on Donald Goslin until the conclusion of the disagreement. Instead, it is the author-narrator who explains to the reader that the Goslins, 'a very quiet couple' who were 'very happy', would 'gladly have loaned Johnny a fever thermometer [...] had it not been for the Pewters, a quarrelsome couple from California who occasionally 'forcedthier [sic] way into the Goslin's [sic] orbit' (17-18), turning up at the Goslins' house in the early evening and rowing in their kitchen (18-21).

After Goslin turns Hake away, however, 'The Reformed Housebreaker' jumps to the living room of the Trenholmes just as their television breaks down. Incensed, Henry Trenholme calls a number of repairmen, all of whom live in 'a widening periphery from the axis of Bayard Manor' (21). It is only after Trenholme mistakes Hake for one of these repairmen and shuts the door in his face that Hake becomes the centre of consciousness in the narrative again:

He closed the door in Hake's face. All the other houses on the street were dark and Hake smiled sadly at this world where one couldn't even borrow a fever thermometer for a little girl who was sick. His mood was tearful as he thought of man's high purpose and his inability to help his own kind. (22)

That Maxwell left this section largely unmarked and intact in the first draft suggests that he felt it supported the story thematically: that by briefly pushing Hake into the background of the narrative for four pages and taking up the lives of his neighbours, each of whom is characterised as being no more or less capricious than Hake, Cheever was highlighting the absurdity of Hake's perpetual fear of social exclusion. In this way, Cheever was reinforcing one of the key aspects of Hake's character development in the story: his ubiquitous sense of impostorship.

Keith Wilhite, a critic who does not appear to have examined the drafts of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', argues that Hake is a trespasser rather than an impostor in the published version of the story. Wilhite identifies Cheever's arrest for vagrancy while living in the suburbs of Westchester County during the 1950s as an act of suburban trespassing that epitomised the author's ambivalent relationship with his new home. Wilhite claims that this incident, and the tension between the public and private nature of estates in Westchester, 'pervades [the] Shady Hill stories'.<sup>24</sup> There are a number of issues with Wilhite's argument, however. First, Wilhite misrepresents the suburban geography of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'. Although Cheever's first experience of suburban life was renting a small residence on a private estate belonging to the National Bank tycoon Frank A. Vanderlip in the village of Scarborough-on-Hudson in Westchester between 1952 and 1961, in 'The Reformed Housebreaker' the residents of Bayard Manor are described as living on plots, not estates. Even in Shady Hill, the more recognisably upper-middle-

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<sup>24</sup> Wilhite, 'John Cheever's Shady Hill', pp. 219-23.

class suburb which replaces Bayard Manor in subsequent drafts of the story as well as the published version, there is no indication of its residents living on estates as Wilhite supposes. Second, Wilhite's presentation of trespassing as an everyday occurrence that, in the words of Hannah Arendt, 'is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing in order to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly', is misleading.<sup>25</sup> Understood in this way, trespassing becomes an ontological adventure, but this is simply not the case in Cheever's story: Hake knowingly exploits his neighbourly relations in order to commit burglary—a combination of criminal trespass and theft—once, and criminal trespass twice.

Third, Cheever's ambivalence towards life in the suburbs arguably had more to do with his long-standing anxiety about his own social status within the middle- and upper-middle-class company he kept in both the city and in the suburbs. Writing in his journal in 1948, Cheever said:

I was born into no true class, and it was my decision, early in life, to insinuate myself into the middle-class, like a spy, so that I would have an advantageous position of attack, but I seem now and then to have forgotten my mission and to have taken my disguises too seriously.<sup>26</sup>

Hake is similarly concerned about his social status in the suburb. It is notable that as 'The Reformed Housebreaker' evolved into a publishable story, Hake became more complimentary of his suburban home. In the published version of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', Hake tells the reader confidently: 'Shady Hill, as I say, [...] open to criticism by city planners, adventurers, and lyric poets, but if you work in the city and have children

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<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 239.

<sup>26</sup> John Cheever, *The Journals of John Cheever*, (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 16.

to raise, I can't think of a better place' (336). Consequently, Hake does not trespass as a way of staking claim to the uncertainty of the suburban spaces he inhabits, as Wilhite suggests; he trespasses because he fears losing a life of best fit in the suburbs for his family if he cannot secure the money he needs to pay off his growing debts.<sup>27</sup> Because Hake feels socially unequal to his neighbours in each version of the story, referring to Hake's impostorship conveys his pathology more accurately than identifying him as a trespasser does.

Throughout 'The Reformed Housebreaker', and despite having a similar social origin to his neighbours, Hake is uncertain of his social status in the suburb of Bayard Manor for a number of reasons. Initially, these reasons are that his wife, who is from a working-class background, is reluctant to socialise, and that her addiction to shopping, a belated attempt on her part to align her personal taste with the aesthetic criteria of her neighbours, causes him financial difficulties. Hake's sense of impostorship increases after he steals Charlie Frisco's wallet. The morning after Hake's crime, he is described as feeling like 'a common thief and an impostor' because he has broken 'the unwritten laws that held the community together' (9). It is this feeling that is exacerbated when Hake's neighbours turn him away from their homes without a thermometer. Indeed, by rejecting Hake, the residents of Bayard Manor undermine Hake's basic human right to have his concerns count alongside their own. They do this not because they are aware of Hake's crime, or dislike him, but because they are thoroughly self-absorbed in their own problems. The central irony here is that Hake, who has already internalised an individual sense of both his social and, owing to his crime, moral inequality in relation to his neighbours, is powerless to respond to their snub.

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<sup>27</sup> Wilhite, 'John Cheever's Shady Hill', p. 223.

Cheever encapsulates Hake's powerlessness by isolating him physically on a street of 'dark' houses, and by juxtaposing his moral sentiment, 'man's high purpose and his inability to help his own kind' (22), a biblical allusion to the creation of man in God's image and the dominion God granted man over all living things in Genesis 1.26, with the farcical incidents that have taken place in the Goslins' kitchen and the Trenholmes' living room in the preceding scenes. Maxwell's acceptance of this thematically resonant yet structurally digressive section of 'The Reformed Housebreaker' notwithstanding, his introduction of the first-person narrative mode into the story suggests that not only did he want Cheever to present Hake's character arc to the reader in more psychological detail, but that he also felt this narrative mode would facilitate a clearer coordination between the intense, outwardly experienced events of the story's plot and the emotional, inwardly felt events taking place in Hake's mind.

#### **Draft #2: 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' (undated)**

The collaborative work of Cheever and Maxwell began in earnest during the production of the second draft of the story, which Maxwell appears to have retitled 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'. This section of Chapter Four analyses two editorial aspects of the second draft of the story in order to show how revisions motivated from without affected the style, structure, and meaning of Cheever's writing. First, this section focuses on Cheever's acceptance of the first-person limited point of view, and its impact on the style and structure of the second draft in comparison to the first draft, which is arguably representative of the story as Cheever originally intended it. Second, this section appraises the various ways in which Cheever responded to Maxwell's substitutive editing of the second draft of the story at the level of its punctuation, words, phrases, and sentences. The

transformation of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ into ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ indicates not only the extent to which Cheever trusted Maxwell’s editorial judgement, but also Cheever’s ability to intuit and incorporate effectively Maxwell’s editorial attention into his writing.

Working under the influence of Maxwell’s technical idea that Hake tell his story directly to the reader, Cheever wrote the second draft in the first-person limited with Hake as the main narrator and focal character of the narrative. To revise the introductory paragraph of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ accordingly in the second draft of the story, Cheever bookended its first sentence, which detailed the facts of Hake’s privileged life to date through a series of status indexes concerning his education, the type of neighbourhood he lives in, and some of the organisations and clubs he was a member of as a young man growing up in New York City, with a salvo of personally revealing sentences concerning Hake, and a short evocative vignette of the Hakes’ married life in Shady Hill. As a result, the second draft of the story begins with two confiding statements:

My name is Johnny Hake. I’m thirty-six years old, stand five feet eleven in my socks, weigh one hundred and forty-two pounds stripped, and am, so to speak, naked at the moment and talking into the dark.<sup>28</sup> (1)

Hake’s formal introduction in the first sentence provides the reader with a sense of the point of view of the story (first-person limited) and the name of the character (Johnny Hake), but not the setting of the story or any hint of the potential conflict to come. It also suggests that Hake is a character for whom social etiquette is important, a detail that hints towards his having a middle-class background. The second sentence offers a stronger sense

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<sup>28</sup> Cheever originally intended this opening as a complete sentence, inserting a comma between ‘My name is Johnny Hake’ and the details of his age, physical appearance, and whereabouts that follow. But shortly after completing this draft he replaced the comma with a period, thereby separating it into two sentences. When this draft of the story was made up into a working varitype proof by The New Yorker’s fiction department, however, Maxwell restored the comma, making the opening of the story a complete sentence once again (1).



of how the story will be told by having Hake describe his physical appearance self-deprecatingly to the reader. Hake's voice is appealing, but his description of himself emphasises his disrupted physiology: at one hundred and forty-two pounds, he seems underweight for a man of five feet eleven tall; his being naked and talking into the dark also suggests that he is not sleeping properly. Despite having been plunged, proleptically, into an unspecified point of time in the narrative, the reader is aware that something has either happened to Hake, or is happening to him as he speaks. Hake's use of the phrase 'so to speak' prior to revealing his nakedness to the reader indicates that whatever is bothering him is in some way embarrassing to him.

Unlike the opening sentences of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', then, which provide the reader with a substantial amount of biographical information relating directly to Hake's privileged upbringing and an exposition of the early courtship between him and his wife, the first two sentences of the second draft are deliberately intriguing. The second sentence, in particular, leaves the reader with the tantalising impression of a man under psychological duress due to causes unknown. Consequently, the reader is left with a set of questions pertaining to the story at large: Who is Hake? Where is he? Why is he unable to sleep? The last of these questions is the kind of narrative hook that was absent from the introductory paragraph of 'The Reformed Housebreaker'.

By having Hake expose himself physically and emotionally to the reader in the opening of the second draft, Cheever engenders concern for the character and, by extension, a readerly interest in how the story is going to develop. At the same time, by having Hake 'talking into the dark', Cheever leaves a space in the discourse into which the reader can project themselves. After all, if Hake is addressing the reader and not talking to himself, then it is because he assumes the reader will relate in some way to the situation he finds himself in. In order to consolidate the affinity between protagonist and reader,

Cheever segues from the image of Hake ‘naked [...] talking into the dark’ into a modified version of his biographical background from ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’.

In both the first and the second drafts of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, this biographical passage reveals Hake to be a member of the upper-middle-class, and a native of New York City. This character background is intended to make Hake appeal to the readers of *The New Yorker*, many of whom were members of the middle- and upper-middle-class who, though living increasingly in the suburbs from the 1950s onwards, still visited the city regularly. In ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, this passage was largely expository:

Johnny Hake was conceived in the Hotel Saint Regis, born in the Presbyterian Hospital, raised on Park Avenue, christened and confirmed in St. Bartholomew’s Cathedral, drilled with the Knickerbocker Greys, played football and baseball in Central Park, learned to chin himself on the framework of east-side apartment house canopies, spent all his holidays in New York after going away to school and college, attending the assemblies and the best of the cotillions and—being reasonably familiar with this much of the city—went, when the time came for him to find a wife, far afield. (1)

In the second draft of the story, however, this section follows Hake’s personal introduction to the reader and a scene that suggests something has disrupted the routine of his life. As such, the biographical content of this section is the product of Hake’s mental activity as he stands naked and alone in the darkness; the effect is very much like the phenomenon of a life review, which typically occurs during near-death experiences:

I was conceived in the Hotel Saint Regis, born in the Presbyterian Hospital, raised on Sutton Place, christened and confirmed in Saint Bartholomew’s

Cathedral. I drilled with the Knickerbocker Greys, played football and baseball in Central Park, learned to chin myself on the frame-work of east-side apartment house canopies, and met my wife (Mathilde Levy) at one of those big cotillions at the Waldorf. (1)

Cheever also edited this section to the point that it ran two lines shorter in the second draft. He changed ‘Park Avenue’ to ‘Sutton Place’, a short street in Manhattan known for its upscale apartments and townhouses that were not as expensive as those on Park Avenue. Sutton Place is also the setting of a number of stories Cheever published in the *New Yorker* during the late 1940s and early 1950s which examined the lives of urban middle-class families struggling, emotionally and financially, to live in the city. The period after ‘christened and confirmed in Saint Bartholomew’s Cathedral’ is not Cheever’s, however: Maxwell pencilled it on the typescript of the second draft while editing it. Cheever, following the punctuation of this section as it appeared originally in the ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, had initially separated Hake’s christening and confirmation and his drilling with the Knickerbocker Greys with a comma. Hake’s drilling with the Knickerbocker Greys Cadets Corps—an elite military youth group founded in 1881 that did not become coeducational until 1986 and counts Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, and Roosevelts amongst its membership—is an especially strong marker of Hake’s upper-middle-class background, so it is not surprising that Cheever retained this detail in the second draft. Cheever also cut the extraneous line of narrative prose ‘spent all his holidays in New York after going away to school and college’, and amended the line ‘attending the assemblies and the best of the cotillions and—being reasonably familiar with this much of the city—went, when the time came for him to find a wife, far afield’ into ‘and met my wife (Mathilde Levy) at one of those big cotillions at the Waldorf’.

The phrase ‘one of those’ goes further than simply underlining Hake’s social status in the story. By using the phrase, Hake is assuming that the reader not only shares his values but also his experiences of upper-middle-class life in postwar New York. At the same time, in terms of Cheever’s own style, ‘one of those’ is a signature phrase in many of the short stories he published from the mid-1950s onwards. Typically, Cheever uses the phrase to introduce elaborate codes of behaviour and observations into his stories with the intention of ridiculing the exclusivity of different social circles and their attendant manners. In ‘The Lowboy’ (10 October 1959) a spring day is ‘one of those green-gold Sundays that excite our incredulity’.<sup>29</sup> In ‘A Woman Without a Country’, the author-narrator describes the protagonist as ‘one of those tireless wanderers who go to bed night after night to dream of bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwiches’.<sup>30</sup> ‘The Swimmer’ (18 July 1964) begins, ‘It was one of those midsummer Sundays when everyone sits around saying, “I drank too much last night”’.<sup>31</sup> The phrase ‘one of those’ is not used as humourously in the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ as it is in some of Cheever’s other New Yorker stories, but its inclusion in the draft is important because it demonstrates one way in which the author was beginning to re-impose his established style onto the story.

Following both the opening scene and Hake’s life review in the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, the reader is left with two impressions of Hake: he is simultaneously a troubled male in his thirties struggling to sleep at night, and a prideful,

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<sup>29</sup> John Cheever, ‘The Lowboy’, *The New Yorker*, 10 October 1959, pp. 38-42, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 519-29 (p. 520). Because there are no differences between these versions of ‘The Lowboy’, further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>30</sup> John Cheever, ‘A Woman Without a Country’, *The New Yorker*, 12 December 1959, pp. 48-50, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 542-48 (p. 542). Because there are no differences between these versions of ‘A Woman Without a Country’, further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>31</sup> John Cheever, ‘The Swimmer’, *The New Yorker*, 18 July 1964, pp. 28-34, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 776-88 (p. 776). Because there are no differences between these versions of ‘The Swimmer’, further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

upper-middle-class New Yorker who drilled and danced his way into some of the city's most influential military, political, and social circles during his twenties. In the final two sentences of the introductory paragraph of the second draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', Cheever uses an evocation of the suburbs to reveal the setting of the story and to offer a third impression of Hake as a suburbanite. These sentences were entirely new to the second draft of the story, and the result of Cheever cutting the last four sentences of the introductory paragraph of 'The Reformed Housebreaker'. Two of these sentences concerned Hake's journey to rural New England to find his wife, Christina, and the impact of her family's poverty on her character from the concluding section of the introductory paragraph in the second draft. The remaining two sentences of the four remarked, ironically, on the culture-shock Christina felt upon moving to the suburbs.

Cheever retained the idea of Hake embracing the suburban lifestyle in the second draft of the story but presented it more sympathetically. In the second draft, for example, Hake no longer appears to enjoy life in the suburbs at the expense of his wife:

I've swung my cutlass in the salt-marsh (New Guinea and the Phillipines [sic]) have four kids now and live in a banlieu [sic] called Shady Hill. We have a nice house with a garden and a place outside for cooking meat and on summer nights, sitting there with the kids and looking into the front of Mathilde's dress as she bends over to salt the steaks and just gazing at the lights in heaven, I am as thrilled as I am thrilled by more hardy and dangerous pursuits and I guess that this is what is meant by the pain and sweetness of life.<sup>32</sup> (1)

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<sup>32</sup> Maxwell inserted commas following the clauses ending 'have four kids now', 'a place outside for cooking meat', 'just gazing at the lights in heaven', and 'by more dangerous and hardy pursuits' on the typescript (1).

In the first sentence, Hake's experience of fighting in the Pacific theatre during the Second World War is contained within a list of personal details about his family: 'I've swung my cutlass in the salt-marsh (New Guinea and the Phillipines [sic]) have four kids now and live in a banlieu [sic] called Shady Hill'. Hake's use of 'now' in this sentence not only returns the story to the present tense of its fraught opening scene, but also reveals how far Hake's memories of combat are subordinated to those of his family. In this way, the sentence alludes to the difficulties returning veterans faced upon encountering and adjusting to family life in the suburbs after 1945, a reality they had no previous experience of.<sup>33</sup> The phrase 'I've swung my cutlass in the salt-marsh' also echoes a line in Gerontion's negation of heroism in the first stanza of T. S. Eliot's poem 'Gerontion' (1920):

I was neither at the hot gates  
 Nor fought in the warm rain  
 Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving  
 a cutlass,  
 Bitten by flies, fought.<sup>34</sup>

Hake is unlike Gerontion, an elderly man living in poverty following the end of the First World War, insofar as he relates a part of his experience as a soldier to the reader and does not set modern misery and dissolution against what things were once like in his narration, primarily because post-Second World War American life demanded the opposite of this from war veterans. Nevertheless, by attempting to use the superficial comforts of postwar suburbia to neutralise the chaos of his wartime experience, Hake engages in a similar act

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<sup>33</sup> Cheever examined the identity crisis of the returning veteran in more detail in his 1954 story, 'The Country Husband', which perhaps explains why he did not enlarge on Hake's experience of the Second World War in 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'.

<sup>34</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Gerontion', in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), pp. 21-33 (p. 21). Further references to this poem are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

of historical and heroic negation in ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ to that of Gerontion in Eliot’s poem.

There is a further, if more allusive, echo of Eliot’s poem in the way in which Hake focuses on his suburban house (a property Hake cannot afford) as a symbol of the culture for which he fought during the war (a domestic culture centered around motherhood and consumer goods from which Hake is alienated). Following his denial of having any heroic identity in the first stanza of the poem, Gerontion states flatly: ‘My house is a decayed house, | And the Jew squats on the window sill, | the owner’ (21). Cheever conceals something of the depressing imagery of familial and mental deterioration and anti-Semitism in the lines of Eliot’s poem in Hake’s superficially admiring description of Shady Hill as a suburban pastoral in the first part of the second sentence. Hake depicts familial bliss as a ‘nice house with a garden and a place outside for cooking meat’, ‘sitting there with the children’, and his Jewish wife, Mathilde, ‘[bending] over’ both ‘to salt the steaks’ and titillate Hake. In the second part of the sentence, Hake claims that he is as ‘thrilled’ by this scene as he is ‘by more hardy and dangerous pursuits and I guess’, he concludes, ‘that this is what is meant by the pain and sweetness of life’. It is here, in the concluding, commiserative line, ‘I guess that this is what is meant by the pain and sweetness of life’, that Cheever introduces a note of uncertainty on the part of Hake that speaks to Gerontion’s sombre outlook on modern life. Hake’s use of ‘I guess’ implies that he does not necessarily agree with his positive assessment of his circumstances. It suggests instead that the details of Hake’s life—a house with a garden, a dutiful wife, and carefree children—are actually an illusion of beauty and a source of pressure upon him, not comfort.

This uncertainty provides the reader with a context in which to read the opening scene of the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’: Hake is awake in his house

while his family sleep, fearful that his comfortable middle-class existence is about to come to an end, perhaps as a result of him getting into financial difficulties, or because an extra-marital affair he was conducting in private has suddenly gone public. It also shows the extent to which Cheever wanted to make Hake more relatable to the reader from the outset of this draft of the story. Whereas Hake is presented as an arrogant and condescending husband who intends his wife to be ‘shocked [...] by the artificiality and providence of [...] suburban life’ in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, Cheever draws him as a less confident, more modest character who appreciates his family life despite his reticence towards the suburbs.

By characterising Hake more complexly (and contradictorily) as a proud, devoted family man but reluctant suburbanite who sentimentalises his younger days in the city, Cheever imbues the protagonist with traits that underpin, thematically and psychologically, the action of the story. In order to protect his family, Hake lies to his wife about their financial circumstances, and steals money from his neighbours so that the family’s home in Shady Hill will not be repossessed. Hake’s ambivalence towards suburban life enables him to justify this course of action, but only until it begins to negatively affect his relationship with his wife and children.<sup>35</sup> This psychological texture was lacking in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, which sporadically favoured exposition over characterisation.

In the introductory paragraph of the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, then, Cheever places the reader into the middle of a compelling and mysterious situation, establishes the sarcastic yet amiable voice of Hake, and introduces the reader to his writing style, which is self-consciously witty and rich with detail. The result is a more

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<sup>35</sup> Cheever used Hake’s description of being out in the garden with his wife and children as a motif in the second draft. Although Hake goes out on several occasions with the intention of stealing money from the Maitlands’ and the Pewters’ homes after arguing with his wife about his emotional absenteeism late on in the second draft, it is a recurrence of the suburban-pastoral scene he describes in its introduction—of his ‘loving the kids and looking down the front of Mathilde’s dress’—that encourages him to stop housebreaking for good (23).



engaging opening to the story. Installing Hake as the narrator of the second draft gave Cheever some work to do in terms of editing, however, as he had used the third-person narrative mode to present parts of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ from the point of view of Hake’s wife, Christina (who is renamed Mathilde in the second draft), and several of his neighbours. In the second draft, Cheever elected not to use Christina/Mathilde as the catalyst for the action of the story, cutting the exposition of her struggle to adapt to suburban life and her addiction to shopping, which runs from the bottom of page two to the top of page five in the first draft, altogether.

In place of this, Cheever wrote a new section of the story that elaborated on Hake’s loss of employment at a parablendeum manufacturer (parablendeum was an early form of plastic wrap). This detail that was confined to just two sentences in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’: ‘he lost his job as a parablydeum [sic] engineer’ (4); ‘In his defence it must be said that he tried to find work, but that was a bad year for parablydeum [sic] and all its allied abrasives [...]’ (5). In the second draft, Hake narrates the experience of being sent to fire his alcoholic superior, Gill Bucknam, by the owner of the company. Cheever utilises the characterisation of Hake as a family man in the new opening of the second draft to positive effect in this sequence, which runs from the bottom of page one to the top of page four of the typescript. Confronted by Mrs. Bucknam, a woman he describes as having ‘all the trouble of that past year [...] in her face, hastily concealed by a thick coat of powder’ (3), Hake recalls parenthetically that the Bucknams have ‘three kids in college [...] and many other expenses’ (4). Making the situation more excruciating for Hake, Gill informs him that he had bought ‘a lot of presents’ for Hake’s children when he was last in Bermuda and sends his wife off to find them (3). ‘I think of my children mostly with delight and I love to give them presents’, says Hake, before acknowledging that the Bucknams’ show of generosity towards his family is ‘a ruse’, ‘one of many that [the Bucknams] must have

imagined over the last year to hold their world together’, suggests Hake (3). It is a ruse that foreshadows Hake’s own later on in the story. With ‘sympathy leaking out of every joint’, Hake loses the nerve to fire Gill and leaves with the gifts (3). Hake’s compassion costs him his job when a sober Gill returns to the office a week later with the intention of forcing him out of the parablendeum industry for good. This act, which plunges Hake into the financial chaos that causes him to steal money from his neighbours, becomes the inciting incident of the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’.

Cheever cutting out the argument that takes place between Donald Goslin and the Pewters, as well as the breaking down of the Trenholmes’ television set from the second draft of the story is a further example of him excising a section of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ from the second draft for reasons of narrative focus. Hake is largely absent from these scenes in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, which take place while he is searching the neighbourhood for a thermometer for his daughter, and run from the middle of page seventeen to the top of page twenty-two of the typescript. Cheever replaced both scenes, as well as Hake’s search for a thermometer, in the second draft with a scene in which Hake meets Tom Maitland, the wealthiest resident in Shady Hill, at the clubhouse pool, and a set-piece in which Hake breaks into the Maitlands’ home to steal money only to discover Tom’s wife, Gracie, in bed with Bill Ricker, a nineteen year old delinquent (21-22).

Like Hake, Ricker too is an impostor, and, after seeing him in bed with Gracie, Hake is shocked into reflecting on the debilitating irony of having a sense of impostorship in a neighbourhood where residents who ‘seem to be at odds with reason and decency’ can reach ‘such positions of advantage as Tommy Maitland’s bed’ (22). Cheever describes Hake’s reaction to finding Charlie Frisco in bed with Louise Warburton after breaking into the Warburtons’ house similarly in the first draft of the story:

Charlie Frisco was one of his fishing companions and a man he thought he knew intimately; a man who, had he been lecherous, would at least have hinted at this [...] Mark Warburton was uxorious and often praised his wife for her tenderness and intelligence and Louise Warburton, with her showery boarding-school laughter and her three identically dressed daughters separated herself in all her public ways from lewdness. [...] If these two models of probity were lewd and if Mark Warburton's praise of his wife was meant to conceal cuckoldry then who could be trusted'. (7)

Cheever cut this passage from the second draft yet transposed its central idea, that the probity of Shady Hill hides an otherwise selfish culture, to the scene inside the Maitlands' home. This scene is instrumental in Hake breaking his cycle of antisocial behaviour in the story. Although Hake admits to going out 'the next night, this time to the Pewters', he does not trespass; he walks home in the rain and thinks, instead, of what he already 'possessed', which is a family that loves him (23).

The impact of Cheever adding two further episodes of housebreaking to the second draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' cannot be overlooked in this regard. These scenes strengthen the emotional aspect of Hake's character by showing the extent to which his normality is transformed into pathology by the distress of both losing his job, and, potentially, his social status. Showing Hake's neighbours to be every bit as surreptitious and self-absorbed as he is, the scenes both in the clubhouse and in the Maitlands' bedroom support the story thematically in much the same way as the scenes in the Goslins' kitchen and the Trenholmes' living room do.

What sets these scenes in the clubhouse and in the Maitlands' bedroom apart from their predecessors in 'The Reformed Housebreaker' is that, by being presented through the

point of view of Hake, the former are not set off at a remove from the larger narrative context of the story. Because it mirrors Hake's dysfunctional relationship with Shady Hill thematically, the image of Ricker in bed with Gracie resonates in Hake's mind strongly enough to make him question his own behaviour. Moreover, Hake's meeting with Tom sets up the next paragraph of the second draft in which Hake breaks into his home. Character motivation drives the action of these scenes, and as a result, both scenes move the second draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' forward more successfully than do their more digressive counterparts in 'The Reformed Housebreaker'.

Cheever's rewriting and re-sequencing of 'The Reformed Housebreaker' was completed following Lobrano's instruction that he foreground the transformation of Hake's normality into pathology, and according to Maxwell's suggestion that he present this transformation in the first-person limited. In the process of producing the second draft of the story along these lines, Cheever addressed the majority of the numbered and unnumbered queries Maxwell made in the margins of 'The Reformed Housebreaker'. He also rewrote pages eight through twelve of the latter roughly according to the revisions Maxwell made to each of them.

This is unsurprising as these pages contain the highest concentration of editorial annotation in 'The Reformed Housebreaker' by far. Maxwell made crossings out and corrections to the prose on pages eight, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve, renumbering them '9a', '9b', '9c', '9d', and '9e' in the process. These annotations indicate that Maxwell considered it feasible for Cheever to condense the contents of pages eight through twelve of the first draft of the story into one page in the second draft. For his part, Cheever appears to have done his best to comply with Maxwell, working flexibly to combine his editor's revisions and cuts with his own in order to compress the material on pages eight, nine, and ten of the first draft into a twenty-line paragraph on page ten of the second draft.

An example of this constructive engagement between writer and editor is visible on page eight of the typescript of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ when Maxwell crosses out a sentence concerning Hake’s conviction that, in the wake of his stealing Charlie Frisco’s wallet, he is denied the memory of men and women being ‘animated by high purpose’; everything is, instead, ‘lechery and theft’ (8). Maxwell appears to have agreed with the sentiment of this sentence—Hake feeling isolated from his neighbours in moral terms—but perhaps felt that the paragraph following on from this sentence, in which Cheever translates Hake’s feeling into action by having him search a newspaper for stories of theft while riding the commuter train into the city, emphasised the character’s newfound sensitivity to duplicity more effectively.

As it appears in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, this paragraph begins not with action but with stasis as Hake waits to catch the train to work on the morning after breaking into the Warburtons’ home. Standing on the station platform, surrounded by his neighbours, Hake recalls how, as a child, his favourite toy was a microscope. Noting the disparity between salt crystals as they appeared on his egg and the same crystals under the magnification of his microscope, Hake studies the faces of his neighbours for ‘lewdness and theft’; when ‘old Mr. Godfrey’ holds the waiting-room door open for ‘pretty’ Julia Timkin, for example, Hake wonders if they are lovers (8). This analogy, which runs to eight lines in length, is intended to show Hake struggling, mentally, to cope with his feeling of anomalousness after committing a crime in his community.

Despite the labourious nature of this analogy, Maxwell revised it only lightly in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, changing the pronouns from third-person to first-person, making a few routine corrections to Cheever’s punctuation, and substituting ‘lewdness and theft’ for ‘lying and other forms of dishonesty’ (9a) in order to better complement the example Hake gives of two of his neighbours being potential adulterers. A possible reason for

Maxwell retaining this analogy in 'The Reformed Housebreaker' is him editing under the impression that Cheever himself knew the analogy was diffuse and needed either to be revised or cut altogether from the second draft of the story.

The sentence following Hake's observation of Mr. Godfrey and Julia is suspiciously self-conscious in this regard, as Cheever uses free-indirect style to take on the speech of Hake and criticise the value of the analogy: 'The ridiculousness of this train of thought turned [Hake's] attention to his newspaper' (8-9). When Cheever reworked page eight in the second draft, he cut the sentence Maxwell crossed out that preceded this paragraph, as well as the analogy between the difference in salt in culinary use and under magnification, and the public and private behaviour of people in Shady Hill (9a). Subsequently, in the opening two sentences of the revised version of this paragraph as it appears in the second draft of the story, Cheever emphasises Hake's mental and physical isolation more directly: 'Out of the house the next morning without facing anyone and when I bought my newspaper the first thing I looked for were accounts of other thefts. I was that lonely' (10). Rather than expressing what Hake is feeling through introspection, Cheever expresses what the character is feeling through action, which, in this example, is his avoidance of eye contact with his neighbours on his way to the train station, and his searching the newspaper for crime reportage.

Cheever showing Hake's psychological decline primarily through his actions is the main difference between the first and second drafts of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', with Hake's selective reading of the newspaper becoming one of the early symptoms of this decline in the second draft of the story. While editing page eight of 'The Reformed Housebreaker', Maxwell also rephrased Hake's description of the stories he discovers in the newspaper in order to make it as clear as possible to the reader where the character was getting this information from. Maxwell amended, 'A thirty thousand dollar payroll had

been stolen in the Bronx' (8), to, 'There had been a thirty thousand dollar payroll robbery in the Bronx' (9a). Cheever accepted Maxwell's amendment and revised Hake's description of the newspaper's contents in the second draft so that, instead of there being a ratio of three reports to three sentences, the reports were compiled more succinctly into a list running to just one sentence in length:

There was an eighteen thousand dollar pay-roll robbery in the Bronx, some furs and jewels were gone from the suburbs, and some medicine had been stolen from a warehouse in Brooklyn but this was slim cheer. (10)

In the process of making this description pithier, Cheever cut its concluding sentence in 'The Reformed Housebreaker'—'Hake felt a faint cheer at discovering the commonality of his sin and he leafed through the paper anxiously, looking for accounts of robberies' (9)—from the second draft. He did not do this at the behest of Maxwell, who had merely rephrased this sentence in 'The Reformed Housebreaker' so that its phrasing was more colloquial and everyday: 'I felt a little better at discovering how common the thing I had done was, and I leafed through the paper anxiously, looking for more accounts of robberies' (9b). Cheever cut this sentence from the second draft out of necessity because he had relocated the description of Hake looking through the newspaper to the beginning of the newly revised paragraph on page ten. This being said, Cheever's addition of the shorter subordinating clause, 'but this was slim cheer', to Hake's description of the newspaper stories in the second draft is certainly similar to Maxwell's revision in both its style and function. These revisions yielded the first and second sentences of the central paragraph on page ten of the second draft of the story.

Guided roughly by the editing of Maxwell in terms of what he rejected and what he retained, Cheever worked scrupulously to abridge material on pages nine, ten, eleven, and

twelve of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ into the remainder of this paragraph in the second draft of the story. What appears to have been a lapse in concentration while typing ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ saw Cheever repeat himself in the new paragraph following the sentence, ‘Hake felt a faint cheer at discovering the commonality of his sin and he leafed through the paper anxiously, looking for account of robberies’:

But this was faint cheer and short-lived too and he was back with the bleak and painful realization that he was a common thief and an impostor and that he had done something so reprehensible that it broke the tenets of every known religion. He had stolen and what’s more he had criminally entered the house of a friend and broken all the unwritten laws that held the community together. (9)

Maxwell addresses Cheever’s repetition in the first of these two sentences, as well as correcting Cheever’s grammar by adding commas after ‘impostor’, ‘stolen’, and ‘more’, and replacing the third-person pronouns in each sentence with first-person pronouns (9b). The repetitious unit of the first sentence, which begins with a coordinating clause, ‘this was faint cheer and short-lived too and he was back with the [...]’, was truncated by Maxwell to the sentence, ‘[But] only a little a better, and only for a while’ (9b). This maintained the continuity of Hake’s thought going into the paragraph while simultaneously delineating it from his next thought, which Maxwell introduced in a new sentence following, ‘after a while’. To construct this sentence, Maxwell pencilled in, ‘Then I was faced once more with the [...]’, ahead of Cheever’s line, ‘bleak and painful realization of the fact that [...]’ (9b). This alternative opening emphasises Hake’s next thought—that he is a thief and an impostor. In the last of the revisions he made to this sentence, Maxwell also crossed out ‘of the fact’ (9b). The revised first sentence, now two sentences, read:



But only a little better, and only for a short while. Then I was faced once more with the bleak and painful realization that I was a common thief and an impostor, and that I had done something so reprehensible that it broke the tenets of every known religion. I had stolen, and what's more, I had criminally entered the house of a friend and broken all the unwritten laws that held the community together. (9b)

Reworking two sentences, one in which Hake describes reading newspaper reports about other thefts in the New York area, and another in which he reveals that reading these reports brought him 'faint cheer', into one sentence in the second draft of the story enabled Cheever to correct his own repetition. While working on the second draft, Cheever rejected Maxwell's conditional sentence, 'But only a little better, and only for a short while', which, although stylistically effective, was redundant in the wake of this revision. He also cut Maxwell's suggested opening for the next sentence, 'Then I was faced once more with the bleak and painful realization', which left, 'I was a common thief and an impostor and that I had done something so reprehensible that it broke the tenets of every known religion'. This became the third sentence of the paragraph on page ten of the second draft of the story, albeit in modified form: 'I was a common thief and an impostor and had done something that broke the tenets of every religion'. This is a more declarative sentence than its counterpart in 'The Reformed Housebreaker'; it also magnifies Hake's threat to his suburban community by emphasising his deviancy.

Perhaps as a consequence of this, Cheever deemed Hake's elaboration on this feeling in the sentence following this one in 'The Reformed Housebreaker', 'I had stolen, and what's more, I had criminally entered the house of a friend and broken all the unwritten laws that held the community together', unnecessary to the story. Cheever opted, instead,

for shorter sentences that did not focus on the titular theme of the story in the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’: ‘I had my conscience to labor with, and what a fight. This faculty worked so on my spirits that my left eye began to twitch’ (10). These sentences were themselves abridged versions of two sentences that Maxwell left largely intact in the first draft:

His conscience was not content with the admission that what he had done was wrong. It worked so relentlessly on his spirits—like the hard beak of a caniverous [sic] bird—that his left eye began to twitch and he seemed to stand at the brink of a general nervous collapse. (9)

Maxwell changed the pronouns to first-person pronouns again, added the letter ‘r’ to the misspelt ‘caniverous’; inserted a comma after ‘twitch’; and replaced ‘to stand at’ with the preposition, ‘on’, a correction that introduced the more commonly used phrase, ‘on the brink’, into ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ (9b).<sup>36</sup> Despite Maxwell’s confidence in these sentences, Cheever did not include them in the second draft of the story, however.

The absence of these three sentences from the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ is surprising for three reasons. First, Maxwell did not appear to have any editorial issues with these sentences as they appeared in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ much beyond their lack of punctuation, and errors in spelling and phrasing. Indeed, by transforming the phrase ‘and what’s more’ into a sentential adverb with the addition of commas, Maxwell made the sentence beginning, ‘He had stolen [...]’, more rhetorically effective, increasing the emphasis on Hake’s wrongdoing by making the reader stress ‘He

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<sup>36</sup> Amusingly, neither Cheever nor Maxwell could spell ‘carnivorous’. Maxwell added an ‘r’ to ‘caniverous’ [sic] while editing the first draft. When the simile was reinstated in the working varitype proof of the story, the word was still spelt ‘carniverous’. Fortunately, the copy editors at the magazine caught the misspelling before the issue went to press.

had stolen' on one side of phrase, 'and what's more', and 'he had criminally entered the house of a friend' on the other. Second, these sentences serve an important rhetorical function in 'The Reformed Housebreaker'. Hake's acknowledgement that he has violated the norms of a traditional property regime—that people must not cheat or steal—and must cooperate with others, contributes significantly to the irony of his situation in the story, particularly at the end, when lying to his family and stealing from his neighbours proves, incongruously, to have been the correct course of action for Hake to retain his place in upper-middle-class suburban society. Third, these sentences deepen Hake's characterisation in psychological terms. Cheever juxtaposes Hake's moments of guilty contemplation in these sentences with two scenes of action, Hake visiting the bank to pay off his mortgage interest with the money he stole from 'the house of a friend' and his shock at witnessing a stranger stealing a customer's thirty-five cent tip from a restaurant, in order to characterise Hake as a hypocritical criminal (9-10).<sup>37</sup>

Hake's hypocrisy distinguishes him from another of Cheever's male suburbanite protagonists, the traumatised yet non-hypocritical Weed in 'The Country Husband'. Weed publicly embarrasses himself when he insults Mrs. Wrightson at the train station, and eventually confesses his love for the babysitter to a psychiatrist. Hake, on the other hand, purposefully keeps his moral transgression secret in each version of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'. Despite responding favourably to Hake's personality, and identifying with his social class and milieu, more conservative New Yorker readers may have found Hake more deserving of punishment than Weed as a result of his characterisation as a hypocritical criminal. Hake is a compelling and provocative character in this sense, and this is largely

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<sup>37</sup> Hake visits the bank to deposit Frisco's money in the largest paragraph on page nine of 'The Reformed Housebreaker'. The scene in the restaurant begins a new paragraph towards the bottom of this page, and continues to the top of page ten. In the second draft of the story, Cheever compresses this action into the largest paragraph on page ten. Hake visits the bank in the seventh sentence of this paragraph, and the restaurant in the eighth sentence. Also, in this draft, Hake's walk from the bank to the restaurant is uninterrupted, which increases the overall pace of the story.

due to the contrast between his moral rhetoric, of which these sentences are important examples, and his immoral action in the story.

It is plausible that Cheever cut the sentence in which Hake acknowledges his violation of the ‘unwritten laws that held the community together’, and removed the simile likening his guilty conscience to the pecking of a carnivorous bird from another sentence in the second draft of the story because he was working quickly to rewrite ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ for Maxwell and Lobrano. While there is no evidence of either editor setting a deadline for the completion of the second draft of the story, Cheever was under pressure to turn a rejected submission into a saleable one nonetheless. When working under editorial pressure of any kind, Cheever’s revisions could, by his own admission, be ‘hasty and lazy’.<sup>38</sup> In July 1947, Maxwell sent Cheever the corrected galleys of ‘The Common Day’, (The New Yorker, 2 August 1947) for him to check over prior to the story being printed in the magazine. Cheever explained what happened next in an apologetic letter to Lobrano: ‘There seemed to be a lot of things I hadn’t done. I tried to mark the galleys and then I tried to type the inserts for the galleys and then I ended with retyping the story [...]’.<sup>39</sup> The rewritten version of ‘The Common Day’ cost Cheever \$203.68 (\$2161.01 in 2015) because it was nine hundred and ninety-seven words shorter than the original.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the revision of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ appears to have proceeded without incident, and to have also been more collaborative.

This does not mean that Cheever was content with the revisions he made to the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ though. Late in the editing process, Cheever reinstated the edited version of the sentence he originally cut from the second

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<sup>38</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, Box 445, fol. 12, John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] c. 1947.

<sup>39</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, General Correspondence, John Cheever to Gustave S. Lobrano, 6 July 1947.

<sup>40</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 1: Editor 1917-1984, Harold Ross General Files 1917, 1924-1957, Box 35, fol. 4, Harding T. Mason to Harold W. Ross, 17 July 1947.

draft, ‘I had stolen, and what’s more, I had criminally entered the house of a friend and broken all the laws unwritten laws that held the community together’, along with the original versions of the two sentences he had rewritten for it, ‘My conscience was not content with the admission that what I had done was wrong’, and, ‘It worked so relentlessly on my spirits—like the hard beak of a carnivorous [sic] bird—that my left eye began to twitch, and again I seemed on the brink of a general nervous collapse’, in the working varitype proof of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ (9).

Having cut one of these sentences and revised the others despite Maxwell’s display of confidence in them during his editing of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, why did Cheever return to them towards the end of the editing process? Although there is no evidence in the New Yorker Records to answer this question concretely, the reinstatement of this material is most likely a qualitative issue. These sentences are thematically and rhetorically enriching to the story, and it is possible that, after discussing the changes he made to the second draft with Maxwell by letter or in person, Cheever acknowledged that the original sentences in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ conveyed Hake’s psychological turmoil (and, by extension, his hypocrisy) more effectively to the reader than the shorter sentences he replaced them with in the second draft. Whether this reason is valid or not, that Maxwell did not prohibit Cheever from experimenting with new versions of sentences that, grammar aside, he had left intact on page nine of ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ suggests he wanted Cheever to feel as creatively empowered as possible during the rewriting process.

Maxwell’s substitutive editing of these pages at the level of words, phrases, and sentences in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ was attentive to and amplificatory of the formal and aesthetic principles of Cheever’s style. Most of the deletions Maxwell made in these pages were to phrases that were verbose or misused, and to sentences that featured

too much discursive commentary with no immediate plot purpose. Maxwell's revisions in the first instance were typically succinct fixes such as the substitution of a one-word preposition for a longer phrasal verb, while in the second instance, he either rewrote or added sentences to the first draft for possible inclusion in the second that were syntactically and thematically suggestive of the authorial material they replaced. Even Maxwell's insertion of a more autobiographical point of view into 'The Reformed Housebreaker' was not an aesthetic preference on his part. Rather, it was an attempt by Maxwell to transform a condition of purchase for 'The Reformed Housebreaker'—Lobrano's demand that Cheever define the character of Hake more clearly for the reader—into a practical suggestion for how Cheever could shift the narratorial focus of the story more fully onto Hake.

**Draft #3: 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', 4 August 1955**

In the majority of cases between 1935 and 1963, Cheever submitted the first drafts of his stories to *The New Yorker* and allowed its editors to transform them into working varitype proofs. In the case of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', however, the working varitype proof is the third draft of the story. As a result, this draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' represents a story on the cusp of publication in *The New Yorker*. This is reflected on the typescript by an array of annotations from editors, fact-checkers, and copy-editors. Although the third draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' is similar both in structure and content to its predecessor, it notably features a scene Cheever rewrote using a combination of material from 'The Reformed Housebreaker', and new material Maxwell pencilled onto the second draft; there are also nineteen queries, instructions for printers, and several pieces of substitutive editing on the proof.

The scene in which Hake burgles the Warburtons' home in the working varitype proof of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' is an example of the way in which *The New Yorker* encouraged and sustained the collaborative process during editing. In 'The Reformed Housebreaker', the burglary takes up eight lines of the last paragraph on page five, and runs for four paragraphs through page six to the first six lines of page seven. In the second draft of the story, Cheever condensed this scene into a paragraph of just fifteen lines by cutting two sentences of narrative prose, and three of descriptive prose. As it appears in the working varitype proof, this scene is comprised of material from the first and second drafts of the story, as well as several of the suggestions Maxwell made on the typescript during his editing of the second draft.

While editing Cheever's revision of this scene in the second draft of the story, Maxwell reinserted several of the author's deletions back into the working varitype proof. One of these was the sentence, 'The dim and clear night-lights that came in at the windows seemed to fall in arcs so that the house looked like a shell, a nautilus, shaped to contain itself'. In 'The Reformed Housebreaker', Cheever placed this description towards the end of the first full paragraph on page six. It follows Hake gaining entry to the Warburtons' home through the front door, and rubbing the ears of their old cocker spaniel until he '[trots] back to his bed [...] and [falls] asleep' (6). Maxwell wrote the sentence verbatim onto the typescript of the second draft near the top of page nine, immediately following Hake's entrance into the Warburtons' home, and moments before he disturbs their sleeping cocker spaniel (Cheever opens the first full paragraph on page nine of the second draft with this action). By putting the sentence here, Maxwell establishes the atmosphere of the scene in aural, visual, and psychological terms.

First, the description of light and its effect on the interior of the house amplifies the stillness of the scene. Second, the simile of the nautilus—a marine mollusc whose bone

structure is externalised as a coiled shell divided internally into chambers—is not only a reference to Oliver Wendell Holmes’ famous poem, ‘The Chambered Nautilus’ (1858), but also conveys the idea of the house as both a physical and psychological shelter, and the idea of compartmentalisation along similar lines. Holmes uses the life-cycle of the nautilus—as it grows, it closes off a previous shell and inhabits a new one connected to the old one—to contemplate human mortality in his poem, claiming, finally, that no matter how many homes a human inhabits on earth, their final resting place awaits them in heaven.<sup>41</sup> Cheever bases his use of the nautilus in a psychological reality in ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’. Hake breaks into the Warburtons’ house because a financial crisis arises and breaches his psychological compartmentalisation. His mental transposition of the image of a nautilus onto the interior of the Warburtons’ house can be read as being symbolic of this breach. Accordingly, Cheever incorporated a shortened version of the sentence, ‘The dim and clear night-lights that came in at the windows seemed to fall in arcs so that the house looked like a shell, a nautilus, shaped to contain itself’, into the working varitype proof of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’: ‘In the dim night light that came in at the windows, the house looked like a shell, a nautilus, shaped to contain itself’ (7).

Maxwell restored other pieces of descriptive prose from ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ to the paragraph following this one in the second draft of the story. In ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, Cheever divides the advancement of Hake up the stairs, across the landing, and into the Warburtons’ bedroom into three sentences:

Then he started up the stairs. All the bedroom doors stood open and from  
each he could hear deep breathing. It was only a few steps to the bedroom

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<sup>41</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, ‘The Chambered Nautilus’, in *Poetry of the New England Renaissance 1790-1890*, ed. by George F. Whicher (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1962), pp. 293-94.



of his friend Mark Warburton and he stood in the doorway for a second to take his bearings. (6)

This sequence is effective for several reasons. Cheever makes use of the verb ‘started’, which means to begin and also suggests a sudden movement, to describe Hake’s transit up the stairs in the first sentence. The verb ‘started’ introduces tension into the scene by suggesting simultaneously that Hake is apprehensive about his action but also irrevocably caught up in the excitement of the moment. Cheever develops this further in the second sentence by externalising Hake’s mental apprehension in the form of a physical obstacle: occupied bedrooms that Hake must pass in order to reach the Warburtons’ bedroom. Cheever uses free indirect speech in the third sentence to show Hake overcoming this sudden moment of hesitation.

In the second draft of the story, Cheever sacrificed atmosphere for brevity by combining these three sentences into a compound sentence:

Then I went up the stairs, and down the hall to the Warburton’s [sic] where I had left my coat at many big cocktail parties. (9)

Cheever makes the simple sentence, ‘Then I started up the stairs’, an independent clause in the compound sentence, ‘Then I started up the stairs, and made my way down the hall to the Warburton’s [sic] where I had left my coat at many big cocktail parties’ (9). By cutting the description of the landing, ‘All the bedroom doors stood open and from each he could hear deep breathing’, and connecting Hake climbing the staircase and crossing the landing with ‘and’ in this sentence, Cheever attempts to convey a rapid, more confident quality of movement on the part of his character.

It is clear that Maxwell preferred the composition of this sequence as it appears in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ because he divided a further revision of it in the left-hand

margin of the working varitype proof into three sentences. Moreover, Maxwell reinstated the independent clause, ‘Then I started up the stairs’, which introduces tension into the scene, as a simple sentence, and followed it with sentences complex and compound:

Then I started up the stairs. All the bedroom doors stood open, and from Carl and Sheila’s bedroom, where I had often left my coat at big cocktail parties, I could hear the sound of deep breathing. I stood in the doorway for a second to take my bearings. (9)

Following the first sentence, Maxwell reorganised, rather than rewrote, this section of the working varitype proof by adapting and incorporating existing material and ideas from the previous drafts into the second and third sentences.

Maxwell begins the second sentence with the same independent clause Cheever used in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’: ‘All the bedroom doors stood open’. He then adds a new dependent clause, ‘and from Carl and Sheila’s bedroom’, to the sentence. Rather than extend the description, as its forebear, ‘and from each I could hear deep breathing’, does, this clause orients the reader spatially; it also conveys Hake’s focus in the scene without sacrificing the establishment of atmosphere. After referencing the Warburtons’ bedroom, Maxwell reintroduces a detail from the second draft of the story—Hake recalling that he used to leave his coat in the Warburtons’ bedroom during their cocktail parties: ‘and from Carl and Sheila’s bedroom, where I had often left my coat at big cocktail parties [*my italics*]’. The friendship between the Hakes and the Warburtons is mentioned briefly during this scene in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ as Hake crosses the landing: ‘It was only a few steps to the bedroom of his friend Mark Warburton’ (6). By using Hake’s memory of leaving his coat in the Warburtons’ bedroom as a symbol of their friendship, Maxwell adds more risk to the scene.

To conclude this sentence, Maxwell completes the dependent clause beginning, ‘and from Carl and Sheila’s bedroom’, with ‘I could hear sound of deep breathing’, a restructured version of the dependent clause, ‘and from each he could hear deep breathing’, that appears in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’. The third sentence of this revision as it appears in the working varitype proof, ‘I stood in the doorway for a second to take my bearings’, is a further instance of Maxwell recycling a clause Cheever used in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, ‘and he stood in the doorway for a second to take his bearings’ (6). As Maxwell implies rather than expresses Hake’s movement across the landing in the second sentence, the third sentence indicates to the reader the completion of this action.

Overall, Maxwell revised this sequence so that it was structurally and tonally similar to the version that appeared originally in ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, which is to say that Maxwell improved on what Cheever already had. The other types of editors who handled submissions during the late stage of the editing process at *The New Yorker* were less sensitive to the style of the contributor, however. In the case of the editor-in-chief, this was due in part to the high volume of submissions they were required to read through and comment on during a typical working day. Copy editors and fact-checkers had more specific roles: copy-editors dealt with issues of spelling, style, and grammar in submissions; fact-checkers tested the verifiable accuracy of any factual assertions contributors made in their submissions. As this part of the editing process at *The New Yorker* is equally as visible as the editing by Maxwell on the typescript of the working varitype proof of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, it is worth examining in more detail.

In the mid-1950s, every submission to *The New Yorker* was read by two editors. After reading a typescript, each editor attached their opinion sheets to it, and sent it to the editor-in-chief, William Shawn, for his final approval. Shawn’s secretary, Harriet Walden, made machine copies of all the ‘non-timely’ typescripts, including the attached opinion

sheets, before they reached Shawn.<sup>42</sup> Walden sent machine copies of ‘non-timely’ typescripts to Shawn, and original copies back to the fiction department. If typescripts were designated as ‘timely’ or ‘rush’, Walden sent the original copy to Shawn immediately without making any machine copies.<sup>43</sup> When Shawn finished reading a typescript, he released it to Walden, with his opinion sheet attached, for return to the fiction department.

Upon receiving a typescript from Shawn, editors compiled the opinion sheets into a shorter, more workable set of queries. Editors did this because, as opinion sheets were for internal use only, they frequently included pedantic and harsh criticism of submissions that would have offended contributors. In an opinion sheet dated 30 June 1953, Lobrano complained to Maxwell about Cheever using the Latin for ‘Rest in Peace’, ‘Requiescat in Pace’, as the last line of ‘O Youth and Beauty’: ‘I wish to God there were another last line’, Lobrano confided. Maxwell ensured that this line was cut from the published version of the story.<sup>44</sup>

Once a submission became a working varitype proof, copy-editors and fact-checkers also contributed their suggestions, corrections, and queries to it. Cheever discussed each query with Lobrano and Maxwell by mail, over the phone, and in person at The New Yorker’s offices. An undated letter from Cheever to Maxwell in the Records shows how he normally responded to queries from the magazine about his work by mail. In the letter, Cheever makes a list of answers to ten queries about the retyped version of his 1947 story ‘The Common Day’:

1. Ellen Brown, Jim’s wife, is staying all summer.

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<sup>42</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 1: Editor 1917-1984, William Shawn, Box 129, fol. 3, ‘II: White, Katharine S.- Procedures – ‘What I Do’, [n.d.] c. 1956.

<sup>43</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, William Shawn, ‘II: White, Katharine S.- Procedures – ‘What I Do’, [n.d.] c. 1956.

<sup>44</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Series 8: Magazine Make Up: Copy & Source 1950-1981, Box 1767, ‘Mr. Lobrano’s notes on Cheever’s “Oh Youth and Beauty”’, 30 June 1953.

2. The price of the abandoned farm is six thousand dollars.
3. Timmy is five years old.
4. Mrs. Garrison would say bitch.<sup>45</sup>

In each of the first three answers, Cheever provides *The New Yorker* with journalistic details and facts about the characters and the environment they inhabit in 'The Common Day', including the duration of a character's vacation, the price of a farm, and the age of another character. These types of queries were common at the magazine as the founding editor-in-chief, Harold W. Ross, was a former newspaper journalist who valued clarity and precision in writing. Ross especially disliked contributors omitting expected details from descriptions and scenes. In the version of 'The Common Day' Cheever originally submitted to *The New Yorker*, Jim and Ellen Brown, a married couple, view an abandoned farm but do not discuss its price. Ross would have queried this omission because it impaired the verisimilitude of the scene: most couples viewing a property with the intention of buying it would discuss its price. Thus, Cheever acknowledges this observation by suggesting a price for the farm.

In his fourth answer, Cheever defends his use of the word, 'bitch', in 'The Common Day' by insisting that the character of Mrs. Garrison, Ellen's widowed mother, would use no other pejorative term to describe Enid Clark, an acquaintance who was struck dead by lightning. In 'Theory and Practice of Editing Articles for the *New Yorker*' (1937), editor and contributor, Wolcott Gibbs, explained that the magazine was 'liberal about expletives' and that 'the only test' for editors was 'whether or not they are really essential to the author's effect'.<sup>46</sup> Although Cheever argues that Mrs. Garrison saying 'bitch' is in line with

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<sup>45</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 445, fol. 12, Maxwell to Cheever, [n.d.] c. 1947.

<sup>46</sup> Wolcott Gibbs, *Backward Ran Sentences: The Best of Wolcott Gibbs from The New Yorker*, ed. by Thomas Vinciguerra (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 650.

her characterisation in his story, it is evident that *The New Yorker's* editors disagreed with him. Having described Mrs. Garrison as 'impulsive, generous, and very kind' in the story, Cheever eventually conceded this point.<sup>47</sup> In the published version of 'The Common Day', Mrs. Garrison recalls Clark being 'an extraordinarily disagreeable woman' instead (45).

During the spring of 1954, a year before Cheever submitted 'The Reformed Housebreaker' to *The New Yorker*, Cheever sent a letter to Maxwell thanking him for calling to discuss 'Just Tell Me Who It Was' (16 April 1954), another of his Shady Hill stories. Their conversation by telephone inspired Cheever to suggest four changes to the story in the letter. The suggestions as Cheever typed them no longer exist, having been cut out of the letter by an unidentified member of staff, perhaps to aid the correction of the story in galleys. Fortunately, Cheever's justifications for the changes survive, as does the original typescript of the story. Whereas the magazine initiated the query process on the retyped version of 'The Common Day', it was Cheever who did so on this occasion. Indeed, the manner in which Cheever and Maxwell negotiated the first change to 'Just Tell Me Who It Was' reveals the extent to which the query process empowered contributors.

'Thanks a great deal for calling yesterday', Cheever wrote to Maxwell. 'In thinking back over the story it seems to me that the scene in the woods is not right; that green and silver, green and silver is not right and that it might go like this: [text missing]'.<sup>48</sup> In the original typescript of the story, this scene involves Will Pym, a middle-aged vice-president of a rayon-blanket firm, stopping to carve the initials of himself and his younger wife, Maria, into a tree while out walking in the woods one autumn afternoon.<sup>49</sup> Will intends the

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<sup>47</sup> John Cheever, 'The Common Day', in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 35-48 (p. 42). Further references to the published version of this story are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>48</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 727, fol. 3, John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] c. 1954.

<sup>49</sup> Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963 (herewith Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary

act as an expression of his love for Maria: ‘It was Maria’s youth and beauty that had left his senses so open that the earth seemed spread out before his eyes [...] It was her company that made the old-man singing of the crows so fine to hear’ (5). Cheever undermines Will’s sentiment in the next paragraph by using free indirect speech to present the unspoken thoughts of Maria as she watches him carve their initials into the tree. Preoccupied with the logistics of her social life in Shady Hill, Maria bemoans Will’s immature display: ‘They were expected at the Trenchers for cocktails and this carving [...] would make them so late she wouldn’t have time to press her red; she would have to wear her green or silver’ (5). After he finishes carving, Will embraces Maria, but it does not ‘change her train of thought. Green or silver, she wondered, green or silver’ (5).

After receiving Cheever’s letter, Maxwell crossed this paragraph out on the typescript of ‘Just Tell Me Who It Was’ (5). Maxwell then either sent the typescript back to Cheever in the mail so that he could revise it, or asked Cheever to mail him the change as a typed insert (it is not clear which, although the latter seems most likely, given the fact that Maxwell had not yet set the story into galleys). The typed insert follows page five in the typescript: it is an unnumbered blank sheet of yellow A4-sized paper with a piece of white paper affixed to it; a paragraph of eight lines is typed onto the white paper (see Figure 8). This paragraph is three lines shorter than the original paragraph on page five of the typescript and, in it, Maria is defined by her familial obligations as a wife and mother rather than by her youthfulness, which Cheever previously characterised as indecision about which dress to wear to a cocktail party. Maria remains cold and tired during the scene, but instead of wanting a drink, she is hungry and unable to decide whether to serve cold cuts or lamb chops to her family for supper: ‘When they got home she would have to

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Manuscripts, 1859-1963), Series 1: Short Stories 1935-1963, Box 2, fol. 38, ‘Just Tell Me Who It Was, 16 April, 1955’, pp. 1-25 (p. 5). Further references to this version of the story are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

cook their supper. Cold cuts or lamb chops, she wondered while she watched Will enclose their initials in the shape of a heart and pierce the organ with an arrow'.<sup>50</sup>

By reversing their roles, and establishing an ironic parent-child dynamic between Maria and Will in the revised paragraph, Cheever makes Maria a more sympathetic character for the reader; in particular, the coupling of the image of a heart being pierced by an arrow and the image of two different cuts of meat is a macabre projection of Maria's growing frustration towards the infantile Will. In this form, the scene contributes more forcefully to the psychological and emotional impact of 'Just Tell Me Who It Was'. This is because the conflict of the story arises out of Will's loving condescension towards Maria—specifically, his need to protect her 'innocence' in the adulterous community of Shady Hill, and her desire not 'to be lovely and innocent all the time'.<sup>51</sup> Maxwell retained the paragraph in the published version of the story but made minor corrections. He changed 'organ' to 'outline', and cut a repetition of 'cold cuts and lamb chops' patterned on the repetition of its forebear, 'green or silver' (480).<sup>52</sup> Given the allusion to butchery and murder, and The New Yorker's sensitivity to causing offense to its readers, it is not surprising that Maxwell did not want the arrow to pierce an 'organ' nor for there to be a repetition of the phrase 'cold cuts and lamb chops'. 'Organ' also has sexual overtones, suggesting male genitalia. In this original context, the piercing of the carved heart can be read as an act of self-emasculation on the part of Will. Consequently, it is clear that the neutering of this moment makes the scene appear more straightforwardly sentimental than Cheever originally intended it to be in the published version of the story.

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<sup>50</sup> Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories, 1935-1963, Box 2, fol. 38, 'Just Tell Me Who It Was, 16 April, 1955', typed insert, p. 5a.

<sup>51</sup> John Cheever, 'Just Tell Me Who It Was', *The New Yorker*, 16 April 1955, pp. 38-46, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 475-95 (p. 480). Because there are no differences between these versions of 'Just Tell Me Who It Was', further references to the published version of the story refer to the reprint and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>52</sup> Maxwell made these changes to Cheever's typed insert. Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963, Short Stories, Box 2, fol. 38, 'Just Tell Me Who It Was, 16 April, 1955', typed insert, p. 5a.



In comparison with ‘Just Tell Me Who It Was’, the query process on the working varitype proof of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ appears routine. Members of staff at The New Yorker, including Shawn and Maxwell, proposed nineteen queries on the proof for Cheever’s consideration and reply. No letters survive in the Records in which Cheever discusses these queries with Maxwell, yet tracking some of the changes between the working varitype proof and the published version of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ provides a sense of how Cheever worked through The New Yorker’s queries about his misspellings, choice of adjectives and verbs, offensive dialogue, repetition, verbosity, and phrasing during the late stage of the editing process.

Queries ‘1’ and ‘1a’ are interrelated, and appear on page one and five of the working varitype proof, respectively. The first of these queries is pencilled in the margin to the left of the name Cheever selected for Hake’s wife from the second draft onwards, ‘Mathilde Levy’. In ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’, Hake’s wife is named Christina Lewis, and she is the impoverished daughter of a Unitarian minister. In the second draft of the story, Cheever renamed the character Mathilde Levy, and made her part of the same upper-middle-class New York milieu as Hake. Most of the couples in Cheever’s urban and suburban stories of the 1940s and 1950s share the same class origins, so this change is not surprising (especially not when Cheever also relocated the story from Bayard Manor to Shady Hill, the setting of a couple of his earlier suburban stories). It remains unclear why Cheever changed the name of the character between drafts though.

The surname ‘Levy’ is Hebrew in origin, which means that Cheever made Mathilde a Jewish character from the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ onwards. This change was not essential to the story, but it is plausibly a further, if slightly more oblique, reference to T. S. Eliot’s poem ‘Gerontion’. Mathilde is initially and boldly portrayed by Hake as a goddess of efficient domesticity and motherhood in the second

draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, but in the paragraph Cheever added to page four, Hake explains that he cannot borrow money off his mother because she ‘hated Mathilde’ (4). Maxwell ignored both the change of name and the absence of motivation for Hake’s mother’s hatred of Mathilde when he edited the second draft of the story. Although Maxwell deemed further elaboration unnecessary in this instance, Cheever modified this paragraph to include a motivation for Hake’s mother’s hatred of Mathilde. In the working varitype proof of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, Hake reveals his mother to be anti-Semitic: “‘I couldn’t live with that Jewess.’ That’s what she writes. I send her flowers and presents, and write her every week, but these attentions only seem to fortify her conviction that my marriage was a disaster for her and for me’ (5). The mother’s line, “‘I couldn’t live with that Jewess’”, suggests the anti-Semitic image of Gerontion’s unnamed Jewish landlord squatting on a window sill in Eliot’s poem. While Hake’s admission suggests a marriage in which he cannot truly be happy, a state of alienation without independence which is similar to that which Gerontion, who relies on the Jewish landlord to house him in a property he can never own, experiences.

An anonymous New Yorker editor pencilled ‘1a’ in the margin to the left of this section of the third draft. It is plausible that The New Yorker would have retained Hake’s mother’s derogatory statement had ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ dealt more directly with issues surrounding Jewish identity in postwar America. But the main character of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ was not Jewish and, irrespective of whether Maxwell and his colleagues appreciated this anti-Semitic remark as part of Cheever’s literary allusion to ‘Gerontion’ or not, they excised it, presumably lest it offend New Yorker readers who had not read the poem. Although Cheever perhaps felt that his readers—a ‘pleasant and intelligent’ subset of The New Yorker’s readership—would understand and interpret the nuances of his literary allusion to ‘Gerontion’, he assented to the cut, restoring

the paragraph from the second draft of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ to the galley proof of the story shortly before its publication in *The New Yorker*.<sup>53</sup>

The second query on the working varitype proof concerned the sentence, ‘I’ve swung my cutlass in the salt-marsh (New Guiana [sic] and the Phillipines [sic])’ (1). A *New Yorker* editor circled a number ‘2’ in the margin to the left of this sentence, but did not make an ‘x’—the magazine’s method of indicating misspellings on working varitype proofs in the final stages of editing—above ‘New Guiana’ or ‘Phillipines’; nor did they underline the sentence, or cross words out in it. The sentence as it appears in the working varitype proof is grammatically correct: Cheever uses the present perfect tense to describe an experience without expressing the specific period of time in which it occurred. Yet, at the same time, the action of the sentence—Hake swinging his cutlass in the coastal wetlands of New Guinea and the Philippines—is a specific memory: Hake serving in the United States Marine Corps during the Pacific War between 1942 and 1945. As the Pacific War ended ten years prior to the events of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’, the editor may have felt that the sentence should be written in the past tense so that it was clear to the reader that this action started and finished at a specific time in the past. Although, in its original form, this reminiscence conveys a sense of Hake living nostalgically with one foot in his recent past, Cheever appears to have cut it from the galley proof of the story and settled, instead, for the sentence, ‘I served four years in the Navy’ (329). Unlike its predecessor, this seemingly straightforward biographical detail is functional, rather than psychologically illustrative of Hake’s character.

Queries ‘3’, ‘9’, and ‘11’ address misspellings in the working varitype proof of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’. Query ‘3’ is about the word ‘shupplattel’, a misspelling of

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<sup>53</sup> Annette Grant, ‘John Cheever, The Art of Fiction No. 62’, *The Paris Review*, (67) 1976  
<<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3667/the-art-of-fiction-no-62-john-cheever>> [accessed 29 September 2014]

‘schuhplattler’, a traditional German folk dance (3). The editor queried this and corrected it on the proof. Query ‘9’ relates to the word ‘Pontrecino’, another misspelling, this time of ‘Pontresina’ (4). Pontresina is a Swiss mountain resort and spa town in the Southern Alps, and a popular holiday destination for the wealthy. Cheever includes Pontresina in a mockery of the Warburtons’ conversation, which Hake accuses of always being about money in the proof: ‘The floor of their front hall was black-and-white marble from the old Ritz, and their cabanas at Sea Island were being winterized, and they were flying to Pontrecino [sic] for ten days, and buying a pair of saddle-horses, and building a new wing’ (4). The editor pencilled an ‘x’ above ‘Pontrecino’ but, rather than correct his spelling, Cheever elected to use the Swiss city of Davos in the published version of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ instead. There is no obvious reason for this change, although Davos was, at the time, the more famous ski resort. Accordingly, the make-up editors included an advertisement for Swiss-Air alongside ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ when it appeared in the 14 April 1956 issue of *The New Yorker* (see Figure 9). Finally, as opposed to a misspelling, query ‘11’ appears to highlight a typographical error in the line, ‘I’ve been homesick for countires [sic] I’ve never seen, and longed to be what I couldn’t be’ (6). Using a pencil, the editor indicated a reversal of the letters ‘r’ and ‘i’ in the word. It is unlikely that Maxwell troubled Cheever with this issue, however, as any typographical errors in a working varitype proof were corrected when the story was set into galleys.

It is worth noting that query ‘11’ may also refer to a piece of substitutive editing in the sentence featuring the typographical error. This is the sentence as it appears in the working varitype proof of ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ (the editorial additions are in italics):

I have experienced all kinds of foolish melancholy—I've been homesick for countires [sic] I've never seen, and longed to be what I couldn't be—but all these moods ~~seemed~~ were trivial ~~in the face of~~ compared to my premonition of Death. (6)

The substitution of 'seemed' and 'in the face of' for 'were' and 'compared to' make this sentence more concise. In particular, the shorter participle phrase, 'compared to', helps to emphasise Hake's premonition of death, a psychologically important moment in the story in which Hake's anxiety about money mutates into a fear of death.

The fifth query on the working varitype proof of the story prompted Cheever to reconsider his use of the adjective, 'perfect', in a sentence describing Christina: 'She is a pretty woman in the prime of life, and her ignorance of financial necessity is perfect' (4). An editor pencilled a cross above 'perfect' on the proof. No reason for this query is specified on the working varitype proof or in the editorial correspondence in the Records, but one possible issue the editor had with Cheever's use of 'perfect' in this sentence is that, instead of indicating the extent to which Christina is ignorant of financial necessity, it suggests her ignorance to be as desirable a quality as her physical beauty. This has the effect of making Hake's description of Christina boastful and condescending. As Cheever attempted to make Hake a more sympathetic character from the second draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' onwards, it is doubtful that this was his intended meaning. Indeed, he changed 'perfect' to 'complete' in the published version of the story (332). Although equal emphasis is still given to the two main clauses of the sentence in this version, 'complete' does not have connotations with idealised perfection.

In all, Cheever responded to fifteen of the nineteen queries the magazine made about the working varitype proof of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'. Although Cheever

sometimes found dealing with *The New Yorker*'s fact-checkers to be 'madness', he handled their queries with a mixture of patience and good humour on this occasion.<sup>54</sup> This is not surprising. Having submitted 'The Reformed Housebreaker' under the terms of his first-reading agreement and had it rejected, Cheever was under no economic pressure from the magazine to accept its editing of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' as he was eight years earlier when he accepted an advance payment on 'Torch Song'. But he was, by his own admission, 'damned near broke' while redrafting 'The Reformed Housebreaker' during the spring and summer of 1955.<sup>55</sup> Financial need undoubtedly influenced Cheever's willingness to merge his creative intentions not just with those of Lobrano and Maxwell, but with those of *The New Yorker*'s more specialised editors as well. Indeed, with Cheever reluctant to pursue his tested strategy of selling 'The Reformed Housebreaker' to another publication, the successful transformation of a rejection into a saleable story depended entirely on him being receptive to a creative collaboration with the magazine.

Whereas the positive tenor of Cheever's collaboration with Maxwell and Lobrano on 'The Reformed Housebreaker/The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' is largely representative of the author's experience of producing short stories for *The New Yorker* during the 1940s and 1950s, his simultaneous financial and artistic satisfaction with the finished story is something of an anomaly. While Cheever enjoyed a more equal and creatively stimulating editorial relationship with Maxwell in the 1950s than he did with Lobrano in the 1940s, most of the stories he produced for *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1963 reflect, to varying degrees, the impact of authorial and editorial compromise on artistic and economic grounds. It is to Cheever's credit, however, that he was pragmatic enough, on the one hand, to expect this experience as the rule when it came to writing stories for *The New*

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<sup>54</sup> *New Yorker* Records, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, Fiction Correspondence 1952-1980, Box 791, fol. 24, Cheever to Maxwell, [n.d.] c. September 1962.

<sup>55</sup> Cheever, *The Journals*, p. 47.

Yorker and, on the other hand, opportunistic enough to embrace more creatively collaborative situations as and when they arose.

A different but related extreme to the largely positive collaboration on ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’ in 1955 is Maxwell’s editing of ‘The Swimmer’ in 1963. Maxwell received the typescript of ‘The Swimmer’, the most famous of Cheever’s suburban New Yorker stories, in early December 1963 and did little more than correct a few typos and substitute one word on the typescript during the editing process. The paucity of these changes contrasts sharply with the abundant and more influential changes that Maxwell made to ‘The Reformed Housebreaker’ during its transformation into ‘The Housebreaker of Shady Hill’. And yet far from indicating the esteem in which Maxwell held ‘The Swimmer’, his lack of intense editorial engagement with the story appears to have been a result of Cheever’s contractual dispute with *The New Yorker*, which began shortly after the story was submitted to the magazine, and what Maxwell regarded from the late 1950s onwards as Cheever’s overuse of fantasy elements in his stories.<sup>56</sup> As a mere fiction editor, Maxwell was in no position to secure a better rate of pay for Cheever from *The New Yorker* and, while he acknowledged that Cheever’s more ‘surrealistic work’ of the late 1950s and early 1960s was popular amongst readers, he refused, as a constant reader and adherent of Russian writers such as Anton Chekhov and Ivan Turgenev, to ‘follow him there’.<sup>57</sup> The gradual withdrawal of Maxwell’s support for Cheever’s work from the early 1960s through the mid-1960s destabilised the nurturing editorial environment that made creative collaboration between *The New Yorker* and Cheever possible in the 1940s and 1950s. This, rather than Cheever’s critical and commercial

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<sup>56</sup> Kay Bonetti, ‘An Interview with William Maxwell’, *The Missouri Review*, 19 (1996), 79-98 (pp. 93-94).

<sup>57</sup> Bonetti, ‘An Interview with William Maxwell’, pp. 93-94.

success as a novelist, ultimately marked the dissolution of his working relationship with the magazine.

### **Conclusion**

The submission of 'The Swimmer' to *The New Yorker* in December 1963 marked the end of John Cheever's active collaboration with the magazine. Three months before the story ran in the 18 July 1964 issue of *The New Yorker*, Evan Welling Thomas II, an editor at Harper & Row, described 'The Swimmer' as 'one of [the author's] greatest' to sales representatives tasked with promoting *The Brigadier* and *the Golf Widow* (1964), the collection in which the story later appeared.<sup>1</sup> Thomas was correct, insofar as 'The Swimmer' became Cheever's most famous and most anthologised story over the years that followed.

Initially, though, 'The Swimmer' was a financial success for Cheever. In early August 1964, he sold the film rights of the story to the Academy-Award nominated film-making couple, Frank and Eleanor Perry. The combined earnings from this and the sale of the film rights to his *Wapshot* novels, also in 1964, enabled Cheever to become considerably less reliant on earning his living from writing stories at least through 1965, a year in which he did not sell a single story to magazines for the first time in his career. This hiatus would not have been possible without the editorial and financial support of *The New Yorker*. Between 1954 and 1962, the magazine published five excerpts from the in-progress *Wapshot* novels. And, in late 1962, Cheever's editor William Maxwell appears to have encouraged the author to continue working on a series of short stories

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<sup>1</sup> New York, The Carter Burden Collection of American Literature, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, 'The swimmer: mimeograph of a typescript story', Evan Thomas to 'The Salesmen', 17 April 1964.



that modernised the Roman poet Ovid's retellings of ancient Greek myths, one of which would eventually become 'The Swimmer'.<sup>2</sup>

Cheever renewed his first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker* annually until 1982, but his relationship with the magazine was irrevocably damaged by the contractual dispute of 1963. There is evidence of this in the fact that, within weeks of his confrontation with *The New Yorker* over pay, Cheever employed the literary agent Candida Donadio to handle his administrative and financial affairs with the magazine, which she did until Maxwell's retirement in 1976. Cheever's editors Maxwell and, from 1976, Charles McGrath, also rejected all but two of his short stories and two novel excerpts between 1965 and 1981. Cheever sold the majority of *The New Yorker*'s rejections, along with four novel excerpts, to *Esquire* and *Playboy* during this period. While these magazines lacked the prestige of *The New Yorker*, they were better-paying and possessed reputations for publishing innovative short fiction by commercially and critically successful American writers such as Joseph Heller, Norman Mailer, and Kurt Vonnegut with minimal editorial interference. The receptivity of these magazines and their readers to Cheever's writing went some way towards proving his thesis correct that 'the people who read my fiction have stopped reading *The New Yorker*'. With *The New Yorker* reluctant to purchase Cheever's work, this 'breach', which he had tentatively imagined in his journal in 1959, appeared to be 'real' and financially profitable, if not entirely 'happy' by the second half of the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

Up until this disagreement, however, it was *The New Yorker*, more so than any other publication in the American magazine marketplace, that provided Cheever with

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<sup>2</sup> New York, New York Public Library, *The New Yorker Records*, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (herewith *New Yorker Records*, NYPL), Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, Fiction Correspondence 1952-1980, Box 791, fol. 24, John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] c. September 1962.

<sup>3</sup> John Cheever, *The Journals of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 121.

the conditions to flourish creatively and subsist financially largely without non-literary employment between 1935 and 1964. There is little doubt that Cheever would have continued to write and publish short fiction in a variety of small-, mid-, and large-circulation magazines after making his debut in *The New Republic* in 1930 if he had not, with the assistance of his early mentor, editor-writer Malcolm Cowley, and first literary agent, Maxim Lieber, sold two of his stories to *The New Yorker* in 1935. But the writer Cheever became, and the way he was perceived (and still is, for better or worse) by critics and readers alike, was shaped in part by the regular publication of his work in *The New Yorker* between 1935 and 1964.

Moreover, Cheever's short stories, in the form in which they appeared in the magazine and in his books, were typically the products of collaborations with Maxwell and Gustave S. Lobrano, rather than virtuoso performances of aesthetic technique that subverted the norms of *New Yorker* fiction. Although the magazine's middlebrow literary ethos frustrated Cheever intermittently, he rarely fought against it as did some contributors. Rather, the surviving typescripts of Cheever's stories in the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts collection at Brandeis and the editorial and administrative correspondence in the *New Yorker* Records reveal that Cheever embraced it thematically and stylistically in much of the short fiction he produced for the magazine. And, even when he did not, as in the case of later work such as 'The Swimmer', a fabulist reinvigoration of the verisimilar *New Yorker* story that was purchased by the magazine, and 'The Jewels of the Cabots' (*Playboy*, May 1972), a non-linear and digressive reminiscence about a treacherous New England family that was rejected, he still expected his editors at the *New Yorker* to respond favourably. 'I will give the

Cabots to Bill [Maxwell] and his enthusiasm will be boundless', Cheever wrote in a letter to Donadio shortly after finishing the story in 1971.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on Cheever's early career as an aspiring professional writer, and mostly unpublished authorial, editorial, and administrative archival materials in the Records and the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, this thesis reframes and reconstructs the narrative of Cheever's experience of freelancing for magazines between 1930 and 1964. The predominantly archival and institutional approach of this thesis is motivated by the absence of thorough critical engagement with these collections during Cheever's career and since his death in 1982. In particular, many critics and biographers have simultaneously celebrated the stories that Cheever produced for *The New Yorker* and derided the middlebrow literary ethos of the magazine they were calibrated specifically to meet. They also cite Cheever's private complaints in journals and letters to colleagues, friends, family members, and others about his working relationship with *The New Yorker* over the course of his career as evidence of irreparable dysfunction between the two parties.

Although Tamara Follini has recently reversed this trend by analysing some of the editorial correspondence in the Records and several of Cheever's *New Yorker* stories in the context of the magazine's 'distractions' (such as its cartoons and advertisements), she still approaches the author's relationship with the magazine as a disruptive element in his career.<sup>5</sup> She also examines Cheever's short fiction from the perspective of its reception rather than its production. In contrast, this thesis examines some of the motivational and financial factors involved in the production of Cheever's short stories.

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<sup>4</sup> John Cheever to Candida Donadio, [n.d.] c. June 1971, qtd. in Blake Bailey, *Cheever: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> Tamara Follini, 'The Distractions of John Cheever', in *Writing for The New Yorker: Critical Essays on an American Periodical*, ed. by Fiona Green (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 137-57.

It demonstrates that many of Cheever's stories, whether they were written for little magazines, *The New Yorker*, or other mainstream publications, were influenced not only by his personal experiences and interests, but also by the interpersonal and institutional relationships he established with editors and magazines.

The most enduring of these relationships were undoubtedly formed with editors Maxwell and Lobrano, and their employer, *The New Yorker*. Yet the aim of each chapter in this thesis is to contribute a new perspective to our understanding of Cheever's dual career as a professional writer and literary artist both before and after he began selling his work to *The New Yorker*. To this end, Chapter One of this thesis demonstrates the speed with which the young Cheever, who was frequently characterised as a struggling artist by biographers and critics, adapted to the literary requirements of small-circulation little magazines following *The New Republic's* rejection of his work in the early 1930s. Cheever's ability to produce short stories that appealed to avant-garde and communist little magazines between 1930 and 1932 not only reveals his artistic versatility, but also the burgeoning of the professional pragmatism he displayed as a *New Yorker* writer throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter Two provides an overview of Cheever's professionalisation between 1930 and 1964 that disputes the critical consensus of him as an artistic and financial victim of the magazine marketplace. Professional writing is theorised as a 'game' in Chapter Two that authors play according to their financial resources, available time, and other commitments. Chapter Two argues that Cheever was a highly adaptive player of the literary game who, from 1930 onwards, networked to enhance his opportunities for magazine publication, calibrated short fiction for a diverse array of titles, and understood all aspects of his financial dealings within the marketplace.

Chapters Three and Four use case studies of The New Yorker's editing of Cheever's short story typescripts to counter the enduring assumption amongst some critics that it is best to re-evaluate his New Yorker stories apart from the magazine. Critics cite The New Yorker's association with middlebrow culture and Cheever's financial frustrations with freelancing, which he recorded in his journals, as justifications for this. Chapter Three contends that the final version of 'Torch Song' (4 October 1947), a supernatural story set in postwar New York City that critics regard as both an artistic breakthrough for Cheever and a subversion of the typical 1940s "New Yorker story", was simultaneously influenced and compromised by Lobrano's journalistically-minded editing. On the one hand, Lobrano's lengthy excisions and succinct additions of narrative and descriptive prose exacerbated effectively the relationship between careful realism and underlying horror (Death refigured as a shop-girl) in 'Torch Song'. On the other hand, Lobrano's editing, which was conducted in the knowledge that Cheever had taken an advance payment for 'Torch Song' and could not, therefore, necessarily contest all of the editor's changes and additions, obfuscated aspects of the author's original intention for the story.

Similarly, Chapter Four analyses the authorial, editorial, and institutional intentions on display in the four surviving drafts of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' (14 April 1956). The revision of this story, which was initially rejected by The New Yorker, was authorised by Lobrano and overseen by Maxwell. Unlike Lobrano, Maxwell was a published novelist and occasional contributor of short stories to the magazine, and he frequently offered Cheever technical advice on how to improve his work. In the case of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', Maxwell encouraged Cheever to rewrite the story in the first-person limited, as opposed to the combination of third-

person omniscient and third-person limited the latter typically employed in his New Yorker fiction during the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> This was unusual insofar as *The New Yorker* preferred contributors to avoid using the first-person narrative mode in their short fiction throughout the 1940s and 1950s lest they confuse the magazine's readers into thinking they were reading non-fiction reminiscence. That Cheever followed Maxwell's instruction, and incorporated the majority of his further suggestions and corrections into the final version of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', is representative of how creatively intuitive and supportive Cheever found *The New Yorker's* editorial practices to be.

The archival approach of this thesis has not been without its methodological limitations, however. The criteria for selection of the short stories examined in this thesis are deliberately narrow in focus for two reasons. First, the story selection was intended to be stylistically and thematically representative of the work Cheever produced for magazines during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, respectively. Although Cheever produced stories in a variety of genres throughout his career, including war and romance, the majority of his work featured middle-class protagonists and was set in and around Northeastern urban, suburban, and exurban environments. 'Fall River', published in 1931, reflects Cheever's early preoccupation with literary modernism on the one hand, and the psychological intersection between the working- and middle-class experience of Depression-era life in New England on the other during the 1930s. 'Torch

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<sup>6</sup> Bizarrely, *New Yorker* editor-in-chief Harold W. Ross and influential fiction editor Katharine S. White felt that the average reader of the magazine best understood that a story was fictional when it was written in the third-person. In their view, readers' confusion concerning this matter arose because the magazine ran so many reminiscences alongside its short stories. *The New Yorker* did, of course, run stories narrated in the first-person but only when it was immediately obvious to the reader that they were not about the author. 'My name is Johnny Hake', the opening sentence of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', succeeds in this respect. *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Series 3: Editorial Correspondence 1928-1980, General Correspondence 1928-1951, Box 438, fol. 5, Katharine S. White to Frances Gray Patton, 7 November 1946; John Cheever, 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', *The New Yorker*, 14 April 1956, pp. 42-71, repr. in *The Stories of John Cheever* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 329-50.

Song', published in 1947, is a work of urban realism that explores the lives of middle-class New Yorkers in the postwar city. 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill', published in 1956, is an example of the transgressive and satirical suburban New Yorker story form with which Cheever became synonymous from the mid-1950s onwards. Also implicit in this selection is a sense of Cheever's early pre-New Yorker stories being thematically continuous with his later work in the way that they, too, focus on the experience of working- and middle-class Americans in urban and suburban environments.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the criteria for short story selection in this thesis was also influenced by the use of a historicised close reading practice that was reliant on the availability and content of unpublished editorial and archival materials relating to Cheever's New Yorker stories in the Records and the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts. In the case of Chapter Three, for example, editorial correspondence in the Records between Cheever and Maxwell concerning his advance payment for 'Torch Song', as well as Cheever and Lobrano regarding the disappointing public reaction to the story, provides a compelling lens through which to examine the aggressively revised typescript of 'Torch Song' and interrogate criticism that identifies it as a self-reflexive subversion of the 1940s "New Yorker story". While in the case of Chapter Four, the combination of a letter from Maxwell instructing Cheever (on behalf of Lobrano) to revise the rejected first draft of 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill' allows for a comprehensive analysis of the way in which authorial, editorial, and institutional intentions were synthesised in a typical New Yorker story.

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<sup>7</sup> By the early 1970s, Cheever appears to have become bored with these themes and their accompanying settings in his work. Bailey suggests that Cheever began teaching creative writing to inmates at Sing Sing Correctional Facility near his home in Ossining, New York in 1971 because he felt that he had 'exhausted his old landscapes'—New York, Saratoga, greater Boston, Rome, and the suburbs—in his short fiction and required new material. John Cheever to Malcolm Cowley, [n.d.] c. May 1971, qtd. in Bailey, Cheever: A Life, p. 449.

There are, in fact, many other short story typescripts, ranging from 1940s New Yorker stories such as ‘Tomorrow is a Beautiful Day’ (3 August 1940) and ‘O City of Broken Dreams’ (24 January 1948), to 1950s Shady Hill stories such as ‘The Country Husband’ (20 November 1954) and ‘The Trouble of Marcie Flint’ (9 November 1957), that feature substantial amounts of editorial substitutions, excisions, and additions (typically by Maxwell). The problem, however, is that there is significantly less editorial and administrative correspondence concerning justifications for, and reactions to, the revision of these typescripts. Typescripts lacking in this supporting archival material can and should, in future studies, certainly be analysed comparatively alongside their published versions to further illustrate Cheever’s approach to revision, some of the concessions and contributions that he made to The New Yorker’s literary ethos, and the trust he placed in the professional judgment of his editors at the magazine. But, at least in the methodological context of this thesis, the absence of corroborating editorial and administrative archival materials causes close readings of these editorially annotated short story typescripts to be inadequately historicised.

A similar issue prevents a detailed examination of ‘The Swimmer’ in this thesis. On the one hand, there is enough evidence in both Cheever’s journals and some of the correspondence in the Records to identify some of the difficulties he experienced during the composition of the story. By the summer of 1962, Cheever was frustrated with ‘[making] his living writing stories about the country-club set’ for The New Yorker, struggling to finish his second novel, and losing his battle against alcoholism.<sup>8</sup> He was also failing to generate new ideas for short stories. ‘It seems that I must write some stories’, he lamented in a letter to Maxwell in either August or September of 1962, ‘but

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<sup>8</sup> Cheever, *The Journals*, pp. 93, 169, 175.



most forms of the story seem to me, related to what one knows of life, obsolete'.<sup>9</sup> Cheever asked Maxwell for advice, knowing that his editor had become increasingly critical of submissions that contained fantasy elements and unfolded as voice rather than narrative prose. Recalling that the magazine had purchased 'Metamorphoses' (The New Yorker, 2 March 1963), three modern revisions of the Greek myths of Actaeon, Orpheus, and Echo, from him, he asked if his editor thought he should produce some more work in this vein. 'I don't seem to be able to do the obvious, Venus and Narcissus', Cheever complained before joking that when he last saw Narcissus, he was 'driving a bottle-green Lancia convertible down route 9' (a highway in Westchester, New York).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is likely that 'The Swimmer' evolved from this dialogue between Cheever and Maxwell in 1962.

On the other hand, archival, biographical, and critical materials concerning the writing and editing of 'The Swimmer' are too fragmented to support a historicised analysis of its composition and revision. In his 2009 biography, Blake Bailey cites interviews in which Cheever discussed writing enough material for a 'perfectly good novel' before condensing it down to the length of a short story but offers no evidence that alternative versions of the story survive.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Cheever mentions 'The Swimmer' only sporadically in his journals. Shortly after starting to write the story in the autumn of 1963, Cheever questioned the compatibility of the image and activity of a swimmer with the static figure of Narcissus as he appears in myth: stretched out on the grass near the edge of the fountain, and transfixed by the vision of his reflected form. 'It is natural and fitting that a man should in some way love himself', reasoned Cheever,

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<sup>9</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 791, fol. 24, John Cheever to William Maxwell, [n.d.] c. September 1962.

<sup>10</sup> New Yorker Records, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 791, fol. 24, Cheever to Maxwell, [n.d.] c. September 1962.

<sup>11</sup> Cheever qtd. in Bailey, Cheever: A Life, p. 316.

‘So it is natural and fitting that the roof leaks, but it is hardly universal’.<sup>12</sup> Later, contemplating how to create the effect of the seasons changing in an afternoon in the story, Cheever wrote: ‘Might the seasons change? Might the leaves turn and begin to fall? [...] One does not grow old in the space of an afternoon. Oh, well, kick it around’.<sup>13</sup> There is no archival evidence that Cheever worked through some of these issues with Maxwell at any stage of the writing or editing process. The typescript of ‘The Swimmer’ also features just one editorial substitution—Maxwell replaced ‘fine’ with ‘pale’ in the description of the Westerhazys’ pool, ‘The pool, fed by an artesian well with a high iron content, was a pale [my italics] shade of green’—and a few corrected typos.<sup>14</sup> The absence of more editorial annotation suggests that either the magazine ran the story as Cheever intended it, or that the typescript is not a working varitype proof but an author’s proof, a penultimate version of a *New Yorker* story that incorporates authorial and editorial revision, copy editing, and fact checking. Maxwell’s reticence towards literary experimentation and Cheever’s dispute with *The New Yorker* over pay are, however, uncertain factors in either of these conclusions.

More broadly, what this thesis has not done and cannot do is to ascribe the development of Cheever’s career and reputation wholly to the influence of *The New Yorker* and the magazine marketplace. Even for an author who made writing short stories his primary source of income between the mid-1940s and mid-1960s, there were too many influences and pressures on Cheever during his career to say that he was formed by one relationship, not least his experience as a novelist. As much as Cheever appeared to improve annually as a short story writer with the assistance of Maxwell and

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<sup>12</sup> Cheever, *The Journals*, p. 187.

<sup>13</sup> Cheever, pp. 187-88.

<sup>14</sup> Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University, John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories 1935-1963, Box 2, fol. 35, ‘The Swimmer’, pp. 1-15 (p. 1).

Lobrano during the first three decades of his career, he remained an uncertain novelist well into the 1960s. Cowley urged Cheever to produce a novel in the early 1930s but the result had been a couple of ‘separate’ chapters that ‘came to a dead end’.<sup>15</sup> Bailey suggests, not incorrectly, this was a problem that Cheever would struggle with for the next twenty-five years, ‘and arguably never resolve’.<sup>16</sup>

One reason for Cheever’s difficulties with the novel form that is not argued in this thesis is the pressure on American novelists from high- and middlebrow critics to produce works of art rather than entertainment following the end of the Second World War. The late 1940s and early 1950s, the period during which Cheever was working on his debut novel *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), was, as Mark Greif observes, ‘an era of excitement and almost desperate expectations for individual novelists (with the near religious belief in the novel’s office), coupled with unremitting pessimism about new novels as a group’.<sup>17</sup> What is implicit in this thesis concerning Cheever’s struggle to produce novels is that he felt the pressure of competition from the authors of some of these new novels, such as Saul Bellow and Norman Mailer (both of whom he admired), as well as from popular contributors to *The New Yorker* who were also having their novels published to critical and commercial acclaim, such as John O’Hara in the 1930s and 1940s, and John Updike in the 1960s.

What this thesis contends more explicitly, however, is that Cheever invested in the literary game as a short story writer in the 1940s at an artistic loss. As Cheever was not in a financial position to stop producing short stories for *The New Yorker* until the late 1950s, he could not afford the luxury of leaving the game for some amount of time to

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<sup>15</sup> Malcolm Cowley qtd. in Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 114.

hone his craft as a novelist. Editorial correspondence in the Records suggests that Cheever's relationship with *The New Yorker* exerted both a positive and negative impact on his progress as a novelist during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955, and with work once again stalled on *The Wapshot Chronicle*, Cheever wrote two chapters of Leander Wapshot's journals, the bulk of which was adapted verbatim from his father's journals, and passed them on to Maxwell, 'hoping for a little feedback at best', explains Bailey.<sup>18</sup> Enamoured of the narrative voice that Cheever had created from his father's descriptions of life in late nineteenth-century New England, Maxwell purchased the chapters and published them in *The New Yorker*'s issue of 18 February 1956 under the title of 'The Journal of an Old Gent'.

This is an example of Maxwell acting as both editor and confidant insofar as he provided Cheever with money and confidence enough to continue writing his debut novel. But, at other times during their relationship, and as stated in Chapter Two, Maxwell put financial pressure on Cheever to submit chapters or stories embedded in the manuscripts of his novels in order to attain bonus payments.<sup>19</sup> This practice was responsible for the publication of four excerpts from *The Wapshot Scandal* (1963) in *The New Yorker* between 1959 and 1962. Despite being a creatively helpful and profitable decision to sell these excerpts to the magazine, the appearance of large portions of *The Wapshot Scandal* in *The New Yorker* undoubtedly consolidated the critical perception of Cheever in the 1960s as a short story writer who produced episodic novels that did not always hold together tonally or temporally.

Subsequently, and perhaps ironically, in the 1980s, critics such as Robert A. Morace and Wayne Stengel attempted to rehabilitate Cheever's reputation as a novelist

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<sup>18</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 216.

<sup>19</sup> *New Yorker Records*, NYPL, Fiction Correspondence, Box 791, fol. 24, Maxwell to Cheever, 13 June 1962.

by identifying experimental similarities in terms of his approach to writing both short stories and novels. Despite this intervention, no critics have yet examined Cheever's approach to, and experience of, editorial collaboration with the publishers of his short story collections and novels, Harper & Brothers (Harper & Row from 1962) and Alfred A. Knopf. Although this is excluded from the scope of this thesis because of its focus on short stories and magazines, it is worth noting that anecdotal and archival evidence indicates that Cheever's editorial relationship with Harper & Brothers/Row between 1955 and 1968 was as artistically influential as the one he experienced with *The New Yorker* during the same period. For example, Bailey observes that Cheever's editor at Harper Brothers/Row, Frances Lindley, 'laboured extensively over *The Wapshot Scandal*' between 1959 and 1963.<sup>20</sup> Lindley recalls supplying Cheever with 'page after page of ruled paper with comments and queries'; without her efforts, conceded Cheever, the novel 'would have withered and died unknown'.<sup>21</sup> Lindley's handwritten notes on *The Wapshot Scandal* do not appear to be available in any archival collections. But, fortunately, early drafts of the novel are collected in the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts alongside final corrected drafts and printer's proofs. A future study of Cheever's disposition towards revision and editing as a novelist is certainly warranted, both given the findings of this thesis and his tumultuous personal experience of writing novels; the archival material relating to *The Wapshot Scandal* in the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts makes such a project viable.

Ultimately, this thesis provides a partial corrective to the pathology ascribed to Cheever in works authored and authorised by his family since his death in 1982, including *Home Before Dark: A Biographical Memoir of John Cheever by His*

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<sup>20</sup> Bailey, *Cheever: A Life*, p. 408.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Lindley qtd. in Bailey, p. 408; John Cheever to Francis Lindley, 17 September 1968, qtd. in Bailey, p. 408.

Daughter (1984), Benjamin Cheever's *The Letters of John Cheever* (1989), Robert A. Gottlieb's *The Journals of John Cheever* (1990), and Bailey's *Cheever: A Life* (2009). Although these biographical works are indispensable resources, they invariably emphasise issues concerning Cheever's repressed bisexuality, alcoholism, status and financial anxiety, and contempt for the magazine marketplace in their analyses of his work and reputation. This thesis demonstrates some of the ways in which reframing Cheever's literary activity and production through an institutional lens, and using the existing biographical material more selectively and objectively in service of this approach, allows us to re-evaluate Cheever's literary activity and production both creatively and professionally. While this thesis accepts that issues of sexuality, alcoholism, and professional frustration are intrinsic aspects of Cheever's artistry, and engages with them where necessary, they should not obscure Cheever's work or reputation.

Accordingly, this thesis avoids romanticising Cheever's misery and foregrounds instead his literary creativity and professionalism within the magazine marketplace. Archival materials in the *New Yorker* Records and the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts, whether examined in isolation or alongside existing biographical works, suggest that Cheever was a financially cognisant and creatively engaged contributor of fiction to the *New Yorker* and other magazines between 1930 and 1964. Perhaps most crucially of all, the archival materials reveal the important roles that mentoring, editing, and revision played in Cheever's writing process, especially at *The New Yorker*, where he clearly depended on editors such as Maxwell and Lobrano to shape many of his stories for publication. Contributing regularly to *The New Yorker* throughout the 1940s and 1950s undoubtedly accelerated Cheever's literary development and earned him a

national readership for his work. Yet, as Cheever's numerous collaborations with the magazine attest, his association with *The New Yorker* was about more than just raising his literary profile: after all, he could have achieved this by publishing his work in other large-circulation titles without editorial interference and for more money. For Cheever, collaboration with *The New Yorker* throughout the 1940s and 1950s was, above all, and in the face of personal issues and professional frustrations with the novel form, a reassuring and rewarding creative constant that enabled him to reconcile his art with the commerce of the magazine marketplace.

## Appendix

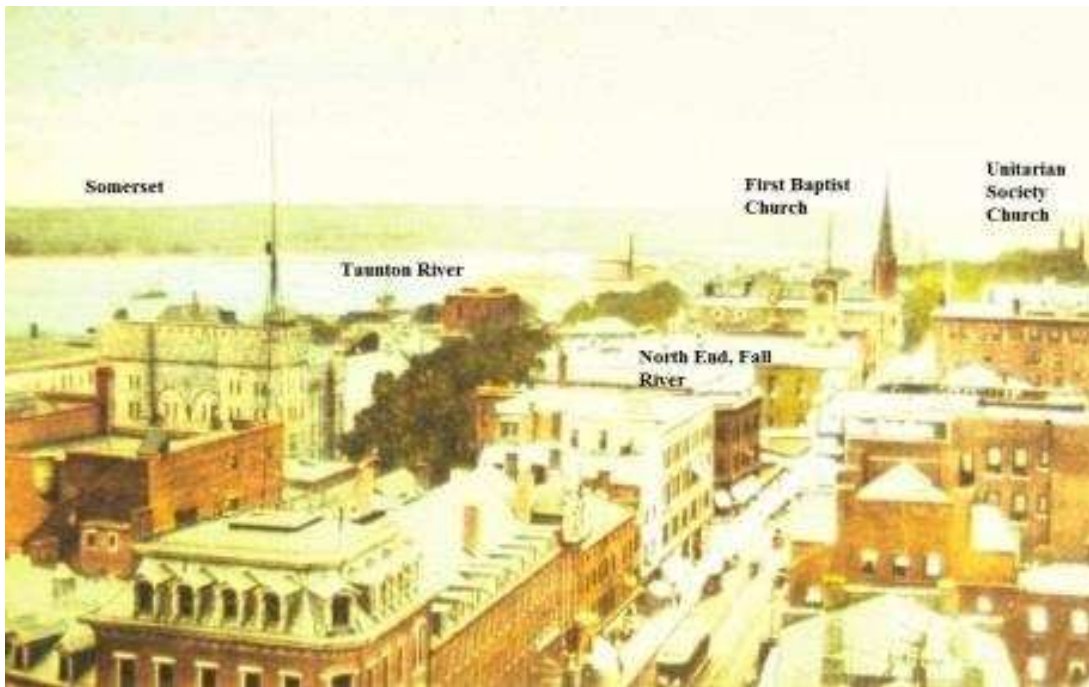


Figure 1. 'Aerial View Looking North', [n.d.], Keeley Library – Fall River Local Slides, <<http://www.sailsinc.org>> [accessed 29 September 2014]

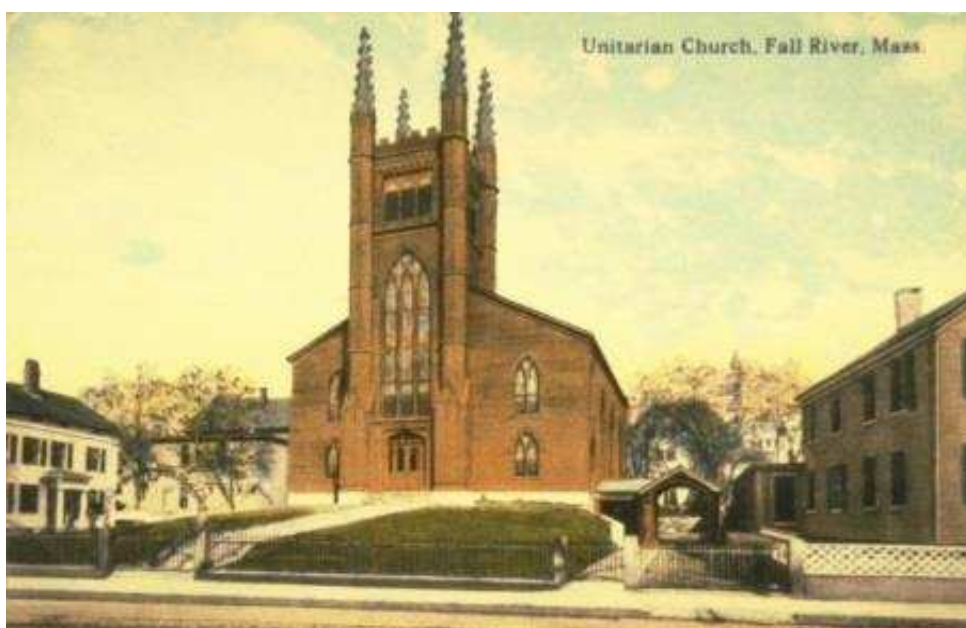




Figure 2. 'Unitarian Church', [n.d.], Keeley Library – Fall River Local Slides, <<http://www.sailsinc.org>> [accessed 29 September 2014]



Figure 3. 'Lighthouse in Fall River Harbor', [n.d.], Keeley Library – Fall River Local Slides, <<http://www.sailsinc.org>> [accessed 29 September 2014]

Figure 4. The two images originally presented here, *reproductions of Cheever's short story 'Buffalo' as it originally appeared in the pages of The New Yorker's issue of 22 June 1935*, cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The images were sourced at [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com) using my paid subscription to The New Yorker.

ONE FULL PAGE PAYS			TWO FULL PAGES PAY			***SINGLE PAGE OF TEXT PAYS
Rate	*Art	*Text	Rate	**Art	**Text	
AAA		\$ 365.00	AAA		\$ 575.00	\$ 180.00
AA		\$ 310.00	AA		\$ 490.00	\$ 155.00
A	\$ 182.00	\$ 260.00	A	\$ 336.00	\$ 410.00	\$ 130.00
B	\$ 165.00	\$ 210.00	B	\$ 305.00	\$ 330.00	\$ 105.00
C	\$ 149.00	\$ 155.00	C	\$ 275.00	\$ 245.00	\$ 80.00
D	\$ 132.00	\$ 105.00	D	\$ 244.00	\$ 165.00	\$ 50.00

\*1 page of art figured at 70 sq. in. (7x10")

\*1 page of text equals 1298 words -- 1 page of 3 cols, each 10-1/8" long, 2" wide (fig to nearest \$5)

\*\*2 pages of art figured at 140 sq. Inches

\*\*2 pages of text figured at 2597 words

\*\*\*Single page of text (1298 words) figured at word rate paid for over 1500 words

1st 1500 words		Above 1500 words	
AAA	\$ 0.28	AAA	\$ 0.14
AA	\$ 0.24	AA	\$ 0.12
A	\$ 0.20	A	\$ 0.10
B	\$ 0.16	B	\$ 0.08
C	\$ 0.12	C	\$ 0.06
D	\$ 0.08	D	\$ 0.04

Figure 5. A comparative study of prices paid by The New Yorker for art and text for one full page, and for two full pages. New Yorker Records, NYPL, Harold Ross General Papers 1917, 1924-1957, Box 35, fol. 1, Thomas M. Brassel to Harold W. Ross, 29 March 1944.

Figure 6. The image originally presented here, *page eight of the typescript of Cheever's short story 'Torch Song'*, cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced amongst the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories, 1935-1963, at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

The image originally presented here, page nine of *the typescript of Cheever's short story 'Torch Song'*, cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced amongst the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories, 1935-1963, at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

The image originally presented here, page of *the typescript of Cheever's short story 'Torch Song'*, cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced amongst the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories, 1935-1963, at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Figure 7. The image originally presented here, page twelve of the typescript of Cheever's short story *'Torch Song'*, cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced amongst the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories, 1935-1963, at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Figure 8. The image originally presented here, the typed insert '5a' of Cheever's short story 'Just Tell Me Who It Was', cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced amongst the John Cheever Literary Manuscripts 1859-1963, Series 1: Short Stories, 1935-1963, at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.



Figure 9. The image originally presented here, a *reproduction of a page of Cheever's short story 'The Housebreaker of Shady Hill'* as it originally appeared in the pages of *The New Yorker's* issue of 14 April 1956, cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The images were sourced at [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com) using my paid subscription to The New Yorker.

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