

Leander's Absurdity in John Cheever's The Wapshot Chronicle

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Abstract

The study aims at analyzing 1) the absurdity portrayed by Leander, the main character, in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle*; and 2) the final result of such absurdity. The qualitative method is used, and the findings are presented in the form of a descriptive analysis. The study shows that certain characteristics of absurdity such as stupidity, ridiculousness, and irrationality as well as meaninglessness and hopelessness are presented through the character of Leander especially when he loses the boat *Topaze* of which he is the captain. The study also finds that the absurdity is presented twice. For the first time, it is seen when the boat *Topaze* is put up for sale but does not get sold. For the second time, the absurdity is portrayed when the *Topaze* is transformed from a boat whose main duty is carrying passengers from a fishing village to a small island into a gift shop whose duty is just selling small things. The second loss of the *Topaze* and the celebration of the new gift shop lead Leander to drown himself in the sea. It can be concluded that such circumstances of absurdity lead Leander to death, the final result of his life.

Keywords: absurdity, *The Wapshot Chronicle*, Leander

John Cheever is an American author, born in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1912. He is known as a novelist and short story writer. Furthermore, he is called "the Chekhov of the suburbs" and recognized as one of the most important short story writers of the 20th century. His short stories were published around the middle of the century such as "Goodbye, My Brother" (1951), "The Enormous Radio" (1953), "The Five-Forty-Eight" (1954), and "The Swimmer" (1964). His novels include *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964), and *Falconer* (1977). The novel *The Wapshot Chronicle* won the National Book Award in 1958. In 1978, *The Stories of John Cheever* which consisted of sixty-one stories became a national bestseller and won the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Cheever was also awarded the National Medal for Literature by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters on April 27, 1982. John Cheever died on June 18, 1982.

The main themes of Cheever's works are about the chaotic social and economic conditions and middle-class suburbia in a modern capitalist city which is normally run by private businesses. However, nostalgia for the old days is presented in *The Wapshot Chronicle*. The story especially depicts certain behaviors of Leander, the main character, who is strongly influenced by such nostalgia, and these behaviors reflect some characteristics of absurdity. The word *absurd* means totally stupid, irrational, or ridiculous; the word *absurdity* is the noun which is derived from it. In *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays*, Albert Camus (1991) explains the state of being absurd by using the key word *divorce* to depict the separation of two things that are closely connected such as a man and his life and an actor and his setting, "This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" (p. 6). A setting is a specific area where something happens or where something is. In the actor's case, when he is separated from his setting, he loses his chance to perform. In *Reading against the Grain*, Chusak Pattarakulvanit (2005) takes the word *hopelessness* to explain the state of becoming absurd in his critique of Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. Pattarakulvanit particularly connects the feeling of hopelessness with the devastation of all beliefs happening in the periods of the First World War and the Second World War, "The idea of absurdity of life is the product of a state of complete hopelessness of humans in the periods of the first and the second World Wars. The two terrible wars caused the people to become aware that all values, beliefs, ideals, ideologies, and religions as well as hopes are fallacies" (p. 205-206). That is to say, tragic situations, untold difficulties, and regrettable failure share their meanings with absurdity. In *A Little History of Literature*, John Sutherland (2013) analyses Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* as one of the literary works demonstrating the essence of absurdity. Sutherland defines the absurd as 'meaninglessness' which appears beyond human tragedy and depression, "The human condition, for Kafka, is well beyond tragic or depressed. It is 'absurd'. He believed that the whole human race was the product of one of 'God's bad days'. There is no 'meaning' to make sense of our lives" (p. 214). Under these definitions and perspectives, the study finds the following key words: *separation* (Camus, 1991), *hopelessness* (Pattarakulvanit, 2005), and *meaninglessness* (Sutherland, 2013). It can be said that these key words play a part in defining the word *absurdity*. Also, the meaning of the word, in general, is the state of becoming stupid and irrational or not being able to think and consider or not having good sense or good judgment. As a result, this study defines the word *absurdity* as the condition that humans are separate from something with which they closely connect as well as believing that circumstances are meaningless. It also means humans' state of becoming stupid, irrational, and hopeless.

Besides Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Camus's *The Outsider*, absurdity is presented in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle*. In *The*

Wapshot Chronicle, a chronicle of the history of the Wapshots living in the United States in the 1950s is illustrated. The Wapshots were a family whose life underwent massive changes after President Herbert Hoover, in the 1930s, pursued a government policy called *laissez-faire*, an economic system which allowed private enterprises to develop without any state control. Under this system, private enterprises which were run for personal benefit rather than common interests resulted in decisive changes in society. The changes within this economic system generated new forms of business as well as resulting in new forms of social organization and society. In other words, these new forms of enterprise were developed within a civilized and modern city. Meanwhile, the younger generation were attracted by civilization in the city while the older generation were abandoned in loneliness in the old world.

In the story, the chronicle of the Wapshot family is displayed under such economic circumstances. The Wapshots are firstly demonstrated as a happy and honorable family, living in St. Botolphs, a small and peaceful fishing village in Massachusetts, for centuries. From the 17th century to the 19th century, the Wapshots had been seen as good people who lived honorably and were well thought of. Ezekiel Wapshot was the first Wapshot who emigrated from England in 1630 and settled in Boston. Not only did he gain high respect as a teacher of music and languages but also he was given a government position, “Ezekiel settled in Boston, where he taught Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and gave lessons on the flute. He was offered a post in the Royal Government” (Cheever, 2010, p. 9). Later on, life in St. Botolphs gradually changes when the modern civilization of American industrialization invades the society. The village which used to be in peaceful and perfect harmony becomes a place that welcomes people from the immense world outside. Moreover, an island, named Nangasakit, situated not far from the village, has risen to the challenge. It is formed into a tourist park.

Like St. Botolphs, the villagers cannot avoid such changes as well. Particularly, as the members of the community, the three Wapshots: Leander and his two sons—Moses and Coverly—face these situations. In the age of industrialization, Leander is portrayed to represent an old American man living in a small fishing village. Also, he is depicted as a direct descendant of the Wapshots who is not capable of holding the prestige the family had in former times. While the Wapshot ancestors are characterized as seafarers who travelled the world for centuries, Leander is reduced to being just a captain of the *Topaze*, an old ferryboat, taking tourists across the bay from the village to the tourist park on the island Nangasakit. With that job, Leander cannot financially support his family members and eventually leaves them living with financial support from his senile cousin, Ms. Honora Wapshot. Furthermore, the *Topaze*, the boat he uses to carry the tourists, belongs to Honora. After Moses and Coverly have left St. Botolphs to find a job in the city, Leander starts writing a journal and keeps on writing it. In the meanwhile, Leander and the boat are separated

forever when the *Topaze* is transformed into a gift shop, or in other words, he is completely divorced from the *Topaze* and the sea—his settings. Later on, he drowns himself in the ocean. Unlike their father, after Moses and Coverly have left the family and the village to live in a modern city, materialism—the belief that wealth is more important than morals—has become their ideal. Moses has affairs with many women before he marries Melissa who seems to be well-off. Coverly has to live apart from his wife—Betsy—because of his job. As the father is divorced from the *Topaze* and the sea (his settings), the two sons are completely divorced from St. Botolphs (their setting). The three main characters—Leander, Moses, and Coverly—never hold onto a traditional family which has existed in St. Botolphs and has been liked and admired for a long time. Even worse, the three characters let the family fall apart when no members of the family live together.

These situations draw researchers' and reviewers' attention to some points of John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle*. In 1957, the year it was published, Maxwell Geismar wrote an article entitled "End of the Line" to review both the novel and Cheever. Geismar criticized the work with the words such as loneliness, melancholy, burlesque, and tragicomedy, "This is also a central theme in Mr. Cheever's work: The power of human loneliness and melancholy—along with a note of broad farce, or of downright burlesque at times, which accompanies the tragicomedy of sex" (p. 1). Also, Walton Beacham (2005) reports that, in *The Wapshot Chronicle*, Cheever demonstrates the absurdities of life while revealing the decay of that life in the modern world, "Cheever turned a disparaging eye on the 'forceful absurdities of life' and began to assess the damage of a heightened sense of loss, perplexity, and disillusionment. In essence, *The Wapshot Chronicle* serves as a warning for the future. At a time in history when 'something went terribly wrong,' Cheever is predicting the degree of difficulty" (p. 1). Similarly, Kerstin Dell (2005) describes St. Botolphs (the old small fishing village where the Wapshots live) as a place that was good just in the past, but not now. Moreover, while the past is being described, the essence of decay appears in the description of the past, "But this 'aroma of the past' is not solely something pleasant; it is accompanied by the odor of decay. St. Botolphs invites nostalgia—but we are also reminded of the uselessness of nostalgic feelings" (p. 81). When Dell illustrates St. Botolphs with the words *decay* and *nostalgia*, the illustration connotes the feeling of depression in the same place with the demands for harmony which has already been destroyed. According to the criticisms of Geismar (1957), Beacham (2005), and Dell (2005), some senses such as loneliness, loss, and decay can lead to the presence of the characteristics of absurdity. As a result, this study tries to prove that absurdity is displayed in this story.

Not only the story and its settings but also the main characters draw reviewers' and researchers' attention to John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle*.

Of the three main characters, Leander Wapshot is the one who portrays the characteristics of absurdity visibly. Maxwell Geismar notices that Leander tries to maintain his own identity as a sailor. However, he just sails a boat, but not a ship in the open sea. Geismar also reports that, despite doing so, he fails to support his own family members and leaves them to depend on Ms. Honora's financial help, "The father, Leander, commands a venerable excursion boat, in order to feel useful to himself, but exists through the courtesy (and cash) of his relative, Honora" (1957). Likewise, Walton Beacham finds that Leander cannot keep on being a seafarer like his ancestors, "Clearly the hero of *The Wapshot Chronicle* is Leander Wapshot, patriarch of the family and unfaltering proponent of tradition. Descended from generations of God-fearing Wapshot men drawn to the sea, Leander is unceremoniously reduced to ferrying passengers across the bay from St. Botolphs to Nangasakit" (2005, p. 2). Also, Kerstin Dell compares the existence of Leander with the existence of St. Botolphs after Moses and Coverly (Leander's sons) and the young leave the village to find a job in the city. Dell points out that Leander loses the capacity of enjoying life and feels lonely after he has been left behind in the village by his two sons. Like Leander, St. Botolphs is left by the young, too, "As with St. Botolphs, the glory days of Leander are over. Despite his endless capacity for enjoying life, the departure of his sons leaves Leander a lonely man. He suffers the same fate as St. Botolphs—namely that of being left by the young. The traditional way of life in the old seaport town is inextricably linked with Leander" (2005, p. 81). In addition, in the research article entitled "Knowledge: A Sufficiency Economy Condition in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle*," Khomduen Phothisuwon and Sutassi Smuthkochorn (2016) report Leander's lack of the capacity of a father when he does not prepare his sons to live in the big new world outside the homeland St. Botolphs, "As a result, it can be interpreted that Leander lacks the capacity to prepare his two sons to live in the new and modern world in which everything is different from living within St. Botolphs" (p. 29). The article also suggests that although he presents some kind of knowledge, the knowledge does not help Leander to stay alive, "Leander's loneliness and death from drowning can be assumed that he is not aware of the real benefits of knowledge and cannot apply it to bring him happiness. Even his life, knowledge does not help him to save it [sic]" (p. 29). The inability to maintain the identity of a traditional Wapshot member which, later on, results in death as well as the carelessness, the loneliness, and the hopelessness reported by these critical works lead this study to prove that the absurdity really exists in *The Wapshot Chronicle*, especially in Leander's portrayals.

Apart from these reviewers and researchers, John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* is popular among readers. Furthermore, it can be classified as one of the major works of literature in the middle of the 20th century because of these following reasons. First, although a book series of the novel was first published

in 1957, the 1958 prize for National Book Award for Fiction in the U.S. went to John Cheever, its author. Second, the novel contains all the attributes of a great story such as historical and political events as well as fun, difficulties, and tragedy which reveal the skill of Cheever. Third, as the century drew to an end, the Modern Library, in 1998, categorized the novel into a list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. These prove that *The Wapshot Chronicle* has been admired among readers for decades. Today, a survey shows that in December 23, 2010, a digital form of *The Wapshot Chronicle* was marketed in Amazon Kindle by Vintage Digital. Also, in 2011, the latest edition in the form of a printed book was published by *Harper Perennial*.

According to the review of the related literature, this study aims at demonstrating the absurdity defined as the condition that humans are separate from something they closely connect with as well as thinking that circumstances around them are meaningless. Also, absurdity refers to humans' state of being stupid, hopeless, and irrational. The study initially focuses on two main aspects: 1) the absurdity portrayed by Leander, the main character, in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* and 2) the final result of such absurdity. Eventually, the study shows some benefits of analyzing the story as follows. First, the findings lead readers to become well aware that absurdity and its characteristics exist in the globalized world moving under the capitalist ideal. The readers also realize that such an ideal causes life to be intoxicated with the tireless demands for progress, development, and competition. Then, when the study points out the tragic result of the absurdity, the readers may create their own ways to escape the absurdity. In addition, the study itself encourages readers to appreciate the value of serious situations made up in literature. The study also confirms that analyzing literary works is an intellectual activity that should be practiced. The two objectives of this study are 1) to reveal the absurdity portrayed by Leander, the main character, in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* and 2) to point out the final result of such absurdity.

This analysis uses the main data found in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* published by Vintage Books in London on December 23, 2010. The data is collected from the dialogues between Leander and other characters and the descriptions of the events involving him from the beginning of the story until he is found dead. Also, other studies and reviews which are relevant to the objectives of this study are considered as useful sources of data.

To analyze the absurdity of Leander, one of the main characters, in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle*, this study uses a qualitative method. The research methodology includes examining appraisals of documentary sources about the novel, the main characters (especially Leander), and the idea of absurdity. First, the appraisals are gathered from books, research reports, research articles, and critical articles. In this step, the study collects the background information from those and searches for what is found among

previous studies. Second, in the novel, the dialogues between Leander and other characters and the descriptions of the events involving him are gathered. Then, the analysis is done in the third step. According to the meaning defined in this study, absurdity—portrayed by Leander—is analyzed. Meanwhile, the result of it is revealed. In this step, the extracts containing what the study is searching for are shown, and the analysis is presented in the form of descriptive analysis. Finally, the discussion and the conclusion of the analysis are drawn.

Leander, one of the three main characters, in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* displays absurdity throughout the story. The word *absurdity* is defined in this study as the physical and mental condition that humans are separate from something with which they closely connect and believe that all circumstances are meaningless. This word is also defined as humans' state of becoming hopeless, stupid, and irrational.

Leander portrays absurdity when he is losing the *Topaze*. The *Topaze* is a boat he uses to carry the tourists from St. Botolphs (the fishing village located in the mainland) to Nangasakit (a leisure island). It is this boat that is arranged for him by Honora—his eccentric female cousin who is the boat's real owner. The portrayal of absurdity is seen after Leander realizes that Honora has made arrangements to sell the *Topaze*, "THIS YACHT FOR SALE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION SEE HONORA WAPSHOT 27 BOAT STREET. For a second his heart sank; his spirit seemed to wither. Then he was angry" (Cheever, 2010, p. 78). The first clue presenting the absurdity is the separation coming up of Leander and the boat *Topaze*. The boat is closely connected with him because being the captain of the *Topaze* is the only job he has. A job means duty or work or responsibility, so having a job is important. Also, a job is important because it is regular work which brings in money. In addition, people believe that a man and, especially, a father has to have a job. Without the boat, Leander has no job. This means that he doesn't earn anymore. This also means that Leander cannot maintain his own existence as a man and a father without that boat. These factors cause the *Topaze* to be connected with and to become very important for Leander. That is to say, what Honora is doing with the *Topaze* leads to the separation of Leander and the boat which is closely connected with him. It will result in his fading existence which, at that moment, is completely separate from him, too. Therefore, that separation which is going to happen reflects the essence of absurdity.

Apart from that separation, there are two other signs of the absurdity which are visibly seen when the boat *Topaze* is going to be sold. The study finds these signs from the description of Leander's heart and spirit, "THIS YACHT FOR SALE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION SEE HONORA WAPSHOT 27 BOAT STREET. For a second his heart sank; his spirit seemed to wither. Then he was angry" (Cheever, 2010, p. 78). First, Leander's heart which sinks can be interpreted as his loss of hope. In his case, losing the boat *Topaze* is a situation

which is so bad that there is no chance of continuing his job and even maintaining his own existence as a man and a father. This also implies that this situation causes Leander to feel no hope to move on or even live. According to the meaning of absurdity, hopelessness is the basic part of becoming absurd. As a result, Leander's hopelessness can lead to full absurdity from this moment onwards. Second, Leander's spirit that withers refers to his life that is going to fade away. When people are going to die, they have no reason whatsoever to do what they used to. From these it can be inferred that there is nothing Leander needs to have or needs to do anymore. Even more, he loses all his abilities to make both life and work seem to have a purpose or value. In other words, he feels his life has lost its meaning. Meaninglessness of life reflects absurdity.

There is the evidence showing why Leander attaches great importance to the boat *Topaze*. The study finds that before becoming the *Topaze* captain, Leander did a lot of jobs, but those never suited him. It is just the *Topaze* that is really suitable for him, "He had been many things in his life; he had been a partner in the table-silver company and had legacies from relations, but nothing much had stuck to his fingers and three years ago Cousin Honora had arranged for him to have the captaincy of the *Topaze* to keep him out of mischief. The work suited him" (Cheever, 2010, p. 172). This extract shows that not only does the captain of the *Topaze* mean Leander's only job but also it is the first job he can do in his life. This is why the boat is so important that he performs the absurd behavior when he is going to lose it. In short, the separation of Leander and the boat with which he very closely connects which results in the death of all his hopes and the meaninglessness of his life portrays absurdity.

Leander's absurdity is visibly noticed when he goes to a doctor, too. This situation happens after Leander has realized that he cannot be the captain of the boat *Topaze* anymore. Without any medical advice, he asks the doctor to operate on him, "I've decided that's what I want to do. I'll sign anything. I won't tell anyone. Operate on me. Do anything you want. Just give me a little money" (Cheever, 2010, p. 82). Thereupon, Leander repeats the sentence 'Just give me a little money' to show his real need, "I don't care what you do with me. Just give me a little money" (Cheever, 2010, p. 83). It is obvious that Leander needs to have an operation in order to have a little money. In general, people have an operation for the purpose of repairing or removing a part of their body which is damaged. Additionally, they have to give money for the operation. However, Leander needs the doctor to cut into his body without the purpose of curing a medical condition or removing physical damage. Moreover, he needs the doctor to pay him because of doing so. Instead of working to gain money, Leander chooses to sell a part of his body for it. This also implies that the operation on his body is the only idea Leander comes up with when he needs money. This whole idea sounds not only stupid and ridiculous but absolutely insane. As a

result, the practice of it reveals some major characteristics of absurdity such as stupidity and irrationality as well as meaninglessness of life.

Notwithstanding the ‘for sale’ sign on the boat *Topaze*, Honora loses a sale. Later on, there is a new arrangement for the boat, “She had signs painted: VISIT THE S.S. TOPAZE, THE ONLY FLOATING GIFT SHOPPE IN NEW ENGLAND” (Cheever, 2010, p. 197). It is this new arrangement that causes Leander to perform absurdity for the second time. The study finds that the arrangement has completely changed the appearance of the *Topaze* from a boat into a floating gift shop. For the *Topaze*, this can be interpreted that it cannot maintain the status of a boat whose duty is carrying passengers. When it is changed, the new duty is just standing still and waiting, but not travelling across the sea. The only thing the *Topaze* can be is becoming a place in which a shopkeeper sells small things which are somewhat suitable for giving as presents. For Leander, at this moment he, again, loses his hope for the position of captaincy of the boat, and this time he loses it forever. Even worse, there is no hope of seeing the *Topaze* as a boat anymore. This also means that Leander has no job and no hope for the future.

In addition to that, there are some situations showing that the change of the *Topaze* is an unexpected, serious, and even major event in Leander’s life, and it results in Leander’s absurdity. While the *Topaze* is being renovated and redecorated to become a floating gift shop, Leander is becoming different. The study finds his disorderly behavior exhibited through being an awful nuisance that is such as breaking wind and urinating in public, “Leander made a nuisance of himself. He broke wind in the parlor and urinated against an apple tree in full view of the boats on the river and the salesmen of Italian pottery” (Cheever, 2010, p. 197). Then, the more the unusual behavior is performed, the more the sign of his distress is seen. Some of it comes with tears, “Tears streamed capriciously from his eyes whenever he heard a horse race on the radio” (Cheever, 2010, p. 197). Not stopping at tears and the strange behavior, death is something Leander tries to connect with. It appears that he talks about his death when he meets Honora—his cousin and the owner of the *Topaze*—on the day the boat opens as a gift shop, “‘When I die I want Prospero’s speech said over my grave. ‘What speech is that?’ Honora asked. ‘Our revels now are ended,’ Leander said, rising from his chair. ‘These our actors, as I foretold you, were all spirits and are melted into air’” (Cheever, 2010, p. 199). When people revel in something, they enjoy it very much. Happy feelings or enjoyable acts can be also inferred from the word *revels*. That is, if revels were ended, people would generally have nothing to enjoy. As the word *spirits* means supernatural beings, the spirits imply magical powers. When Prospero, a magician in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, stops all spirits who are the actors under his control, certain magical powers are being stopped. This brings about the idea that Prospero makes this speech as a farewell to stop his own supernatural powers at the same

time. Like the word *revels*, the word *spirits* also reflects a profound sense of excitement and happiness. Therefore, when the spirits under Prospero's control are dismissed, an animated and lively sense is ended as well. In the story, while Leander asks for Prospero's speech said over his grave, the speech depicts his declamation against the existence of his own life.

In terms of absurdity, the solid evidence of it is the complete separation of Leander and the boat *Topaze*. Such separation is presented both in Leander's regular work and in his relationship with the boat. As the *Topaze* refers to his only job, Leander is separate both from his job and from the boat he is closely connected with. Meanwhile, certain characteristics considered key signs of absurdity: stupidity, ridiculousness, and irrationality as well as meaninglessness and hopelessness can be seen when Leander exhibits some behavior like breaking wind, urinating, crying, and talking about his death. These actions are generally performed when people are being unreasonable or feeling very upset or becoming hopeless. These feelings actually are expressed when people accept that there is no possibility of something being revived or successful. In Leander's case, breaking wind and urinating outside a toilet can be classified as stupid and ridiculous acts because they are unpleasant and reflect his unusual sense and bad judgment. Although the renovation of the *Topaze* is the reason for Leander to cry, crying shows Leander's hopelessness or no hope of bringing the *Topaze* back. Talking about his death embraces a sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness. It is because when he loses all purpose to live, he feels that life is so meaningless that he cannot do anything about it, but to die. That is to say, Leander reacts to the complete separation of him, his work, and the boat *Topaze* with portrayals of absurdity.

The disappearance of the boat *Topaze* initially causes Leander to portray the characteristics of absurdity, but eventually it results in death—his death. It is a death that he chooses to commit by himself. Before committing suicide, Leander shows the deep sense of loss and grief in the scene of the party held to open the *Topaze* floating gift shop, "It was late then and from his window he could see the *Topaze*—the twinkling of candles—and hear the voices of ladies drinking tea. The sight made him feel that he was being made ridiculous; that a public spectacle was being made of his mistakes and his misfortunes" (Cheever, 2010, p. 203). It is obvious that Leander gets deeply embarrassed when he sees the *Topaze* as well as hearing the voices of ladies in the party held in it. While he feels that overwhelming sense of embarrassment, he judges that what he sees—the gift shop filling with the ladies with the laughs—happens because of his mistakes and his misfortunes. Furthermore, in Leander's thoughts, he is regarded as completely stupid and deserves to be just laughed at by these ladies. From this moment onwards, he is not just the one who loses a job and the boat *Topaze*. Also, he is not just the one who loses the status of a man. This

embarrassment significantly contributes to his downfall and deprives Leander of the possibility of maintaining a normal life in his own place.

While he loses the precious sense of self-respect, the scene of celebration in the *Topaze* new gift shop leads Leander to try to find a way in order to escape forever. It is found later in the story that the only way he can find is committing suicide. Then, when he does it, he succeeds. The study also finds that Leander drowns himself in the sea. He even prepares himself well to swim, “He waded out to his knees and wetted his wrists and forehead to prepare his circulation for the shock of cold water and thus avoid a heart attack. At a distance he seemed to be crossing himself. Then he began to swim—a sidestroke with his face half in the water, throwing his right arm up like the spar of a windmill—and he was never seen again” (Cheever, 2010, p. 302). It is obvious that Leander prepares himself well by avoiding a heart attack from the shock of cold water. From this it can be inferred that he tries to swim as far as the eye could see in order to reach a faraway island of the sea somewhere, or to avoid being laughed at, or in fact, to hide his body from being found after death.

Apart from that swimming, there are some reasons why Leander chooses the sea as a place to drown himself. First, the sea is the only place with which he is familiar. In the first scene Leander appears, he is described with the boat *Topaze* being taken down by him to the sea, “Mr. Wapshot—Captain Leander—was not around. He was at the helm of the S.S. Topaze, taking her down the river to the bay” (Cheever, 2010, p. 5). It is clear that his first appearance is not on land, but on a boat going to the sea. Second, it is the sea which is the area he used to sail the boat *Topaze* to which he is related so closely that he becomes stupid, ridiculous, irrational, and hopeless as well as feeling that life is meaninglessness when he loses it. Third, as the sea and the boat mean something to him, the only job he can do is a job in the sea. In addition, throughout his life, water is portrayed as the specific sphere provided for the appearance of Leander, “He was impulsive and difficult to follow—there was no telling when he would decide that it was time for the boys to swim the river or carve the roast. He went trout fishing each spring at a camp in the wilderness near the Canadian border and decided one spring that the time had come for Moses to accompany him” (Cheever, 2010, p. 54). This setting is a river instead of the sea. However, this portrayal indicates that water is not only the place of Leander’s work but also a place for his leisure time and for the emotional bond between him and Moses as father and son. Within these circumstances, the sea makes perfect sense for Leander to escape, or in fact, to die.

According to the definition, absurdity is the physical and mental condition with which humans react to circumstances when they are separated from something with which they closely connect. The portrayal of absurdity can be seen under the key characteristics: meaninglessness, hopelessness, stupidity, ridiculousness, and irrationality. In *The Wapshot Chronicle*, Leander’s absurdity

can be captured through the situations arising from losing his position in the boat *Topaze*. The findings are consistent with the results reported by researchers and with the views of the reviewers. Some characteristics of absurdity such as irrationality and ridiculousness are consistent with the review of Maxwell Geismar (1957) who thought that loneliness, melancholy, burlesque, farce, and tragicomedy appeared as part of the central theme of *The Wapshot Chronicle*. The findings also support the idea of "forceful absurdities of life", described in the analysis of Walton Beacham (2005). While Kerstin Dell (2005) focused on the nostalgia for the old days, the study finds its essence when Leander wishes that the boat *Topaze* is not changed. As Leander is portraying stupid behavior such as breaking wind, urinating, and viewing the celebration of the *Topaze* gift shop with a feeling of extreme embarrassment, there is no one with him. These actions reflect a sense of loneliness which seems to match with the findings reported by Phothisuwan (2016).

Despite the similarities, the study reports something different from those findings. Geismar (1957), Beacham (2005), Dell (2005), and Phothisuwan (2016) viewed Leander as a member of the Wapshots who cannot maintain the status of his ancestors as seafarers. Those studies also focused on other key points such as the family relationship and the effects of an economic theory and practices depicted in the story. However, this study focuses on the absurdity portrayed by Leander. The study finds the main reason causing such absurdity which is the loss of the boat *Topaze*. For the first time, the *Topaze* is going to be sold, so Leander performs the absurd behavior. For the second time, after the *Topaze* cannot be sold, it is changed into be a gift shop. It is this time that causes Leander to become extremely embarrassed and to feel that all are his mistakes.

The absurdity confronts not only Leander in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* but Meursault, the main character, in Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. Chusak Pattarakulvanit's "Absurdity, Lying, and an Arabian Man in *The Outsider*" (2005) views the absurd as the key concept of Camus's *The Outsider*. The story depicts Meursault—a French man living and working in Algeria which, at that time, was a colony under French rule. Throughout the story, Meursault portrays the absurd in many situations, and one of the absurd actions happens while he is walking on a beach. That is, he kills an Arab man on the beach for no reason.

From Camus's Meursault to Cheever's Leander, death is inextricably connected with absurdity. With the absurd, Meursault becomes so irrational and violent that he can kill a man without a reason. Then, he is arrested. Unlike Meursault, Leander kills himself. It can be inferred that death is portrayed to stop both Meursault and Leander from existing in a public sphere. In Leander's case, death is the way he chooses to confess that life is too much for him. Without the boat *Topaze* in St.Botolphs, a small fishing village in which the Wapshots have lived for centuries, Leander cannot live normally. Even worse,

the transformation of the *Topaze* from a boat to a gift shop has drained him of all hope and given him an overwhelming sense of guilt and embarrassment. After he performs certain features of absurdity, he cannot stand all thought of the *Topaze* which, at that moment, is unable to preserve its dignity. Leander's committing suicide is apparently consistent with Camus's perspective on death. Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* (1991) views death as a confession of life, "In a sense, and as in melodrama, killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it" (p. 5). As a result, it can be said that death is the genuine offspring of absurdity.

In conclusion, Leander portrays absurdity through the loss of the *Topaze*, the boat of which he is the captain. Losing the *Topaze* means that Leander loses his only job and even his existence as a man. The absurdity is firstly presented through the scene when he realizes that Honora, his female cousin, has managed to sell the *Topaze*. Also, the absurdity is clearly observed when he goes to a doctor and asks the doctor to operate on him although he does not have a body part that is damaged. Moreover, he asks the doctor to give him a little money for that operation. Another event presenting Leander's absurdity is when the *Topaze* is renovated to be a gift shop after it could not be sold. Through these situations, the characteristics of absurdity are depicted, and all are based on the separation of Leander, together with his job as a captain, and the boat *Topaze*. Such separation causes Leander to perform not only stupidity, ridiculousness, and hopelessness but also the meaninglessness of life.

Although Leander starts to portray several features of absurdity when the boat *Topaze* is put up for sale, the serious situation arises as a result of the second arrangement for the *Topaze*—turning it into a gift shop. Not only does Leander lose his job and the boat forever, but the *Topaze* itself loses its existence as a boat whose real duty is sailing across the sea. The picture of the new opening of the *Topaze* gift shop in which ladies are having a celebration party mainly brings about Leander's extreme embarrassment. Later on, he becomes much different, and the final result is the decision to commit suicide in the sea. There is one obvious reason that causes him to choose the sea as a specific sphere to die. It is because the sea is the only area with which he and the boat *Topaze* are familiar. From seafarers, as the *Wapshot* ancestors were, to the captain of the boat *Topaze*, Leander reduces himself to be just a swimmer swimming in the sea until he dies.

This study has proved that certain characteristics: loneliness, hopelessness, irrationality, and meaninglessness are portrayed through Leander, the main character, in John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle*. This is consistent with the findings of Geismar (1957), Beacham (2005), Dell (2005), and Phothisuwan (2016). Despite the similarities, the study reports something different. The separation of the main character and something he is closely

related with brings about absurdity. Eventually, desperately frustrated from the extreme embarrassment and alone, Leander could see no way out except to take his own life. That is, in *The Wapshot Chronicle*, death appears as a final result of the absurd.

The researcher recommends for those who are interested in studying John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* that there should be further research focusing on the absurdity of Coverly, another main character. Also, there should be research reporting a comparison of the characters portrayed with the absurd behavior in other stories such as Albert Camus's *The Outsider* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

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