



# Conversations With John Cheever (Literary Conversations Series)

*John Cheever, Scott Donaldson*

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In this collection of thirty interviews compiled by John Cheever's biographer Cheever moves from gentlemanly reticence in the early pieces to forthright commentary upon a variety of subjects in the later ones. This admirably articulate author of *The Wapshot Scandal*, *Bullet Park*, *Falconer*, and many *New Yorker* stories gives answers that are satisfying to the curious, though the expression of his views is very much under his control. Cheever, the conversationalist, like his fiction, is always casually in good form, always respected for his expression and his art.

For most of his fifty-year career Cheever was unusually reticent about himself. He used to say he had no public image and no wish to cultivate one. When curious reporters invaded his suburban bailiwick in Westchester, he evaded their questions by taking them on hikes in their best clothes or trying to get them drunk.

A remarkable change occurred in Cheever in the spring of 1975 when he stopped drinking. With his release from alcohol came renewed energy and a revived sense of the importance of his work and of the audience he was addressing. Now Cheever became almost shockingly open in talking with fellow writers, with professional interviewers of magazines, newspapers, radio, and television, and with just about anyone who asked for an hour of his time. Now he spoke enthusiastically about the process and purpose of his writing and about the details of his private life.

In these later interviews Cheever shucked of his Yankee reserve and spoke with candor about his alcoholism, his marriage and even his sexual orientation. Reporters drew him out on virtually every subject under the sun, including religion ("I go to church because prayer seems to contain certain levels of gratitude and aspiration that I know no other way of expressing") and politics. He defended the suburbs, his literary milieu, against the usual charges of conformity and boredom.

By the standards of sheer variety and scope of subject matter, it is hard to conceive of more interesting interviews than those Cheever gave in the back, he had something to say, and he said it with the grace and wit of the born storyteller.

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