

1 of 2 3/26/15, 2:06 PM

taken in adultery and who are now shopping for a present to carry home to their youngest

child"; shape the poetic -"The light was like a blow, and the air smelled as if many wonderful girls had just wandered across the lawn"; and conjure the surreal - "Then it is dark; it is night where kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains."

"He can take a watch chain," Ralph Ellison once said, "and tell you the whole man." Many of Mr. Cheever's descriptions had to do with a certain class of upper-middle-class people who lived in places such as the Upper East Side, certain New England hamlets and the suburbs of Connecticut and Westchester.

These characters talked a lot about lawn parties and boarding schools, commuter schedules and country-club socials. Their children went to dancing schools and horseback-riding lessons, and on the surface, everyone, as Mr. Cheever wrote in one of his stories, "seemed so very, very happy and so temperate in all their habits and so pleased with everything."

Focusing on his decorous style and his characters' privileged lives, critics tended at first to regard Mr. Cheever as an urbane, graceful "New Yorker writer" - perhaps the quintessential New Yorker writer, but a social realist somewhat like John O'Hara, nonetheless. His tableau, they said, was limited by place and social class; his range confined to what he knew from direct experience.

"The imaginative identification with the upper-middle class which allows him to depict their mores and dilemmas with such vivacity," wrote Robert Towers in The New York Review of Books, "entails a narrowness of social range and a sentimental snobbery which can get the best of him when his guard is down." Supernatural Events

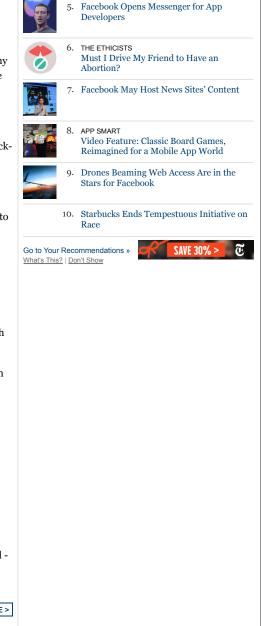
As his novels "Bullet Park" and "Falconer" later made clear, though, Mr. Cheever's vision had always been considerably darker and deeper.

Cheever Country was defined not so much by how his characters lived as by what they remembered. Raised on "the boarding school virtues: courage, good sportsmanship, chastity, and honor," they usually tried to be decent, but more often than not, ended up succumbing to such suburban sins as alcoholism or adultery.

There was some kind of terrible missing link between what they had been brought up to expect and what they found in Shady Hill or Bullet Park, and they were afflicted by nostalgia, failures of will and a kind of spiritual fatigue.

In the short story titled "The Death of Justina," for instance, a man looks out his train window and wonders "Why, in this most prosperous, equitable, and accomplished world where even the cleaning women practice Chopin preludes in their spare time - everyone should seem to be so disappointed."





2 of 2 3/26/15, 2:06 PM

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