

WHO WAS JOHN CHEEVER?

A HOUSEHOLD NAME IN LITERATURE: By the time he wrote the great *Falconer* (1977), which hit #1 on the *NY Times* bestseller list, he had appeared already on the cover of *Time* (March 27, 1964 issue), and then appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* as well (March 14, 1977).

MASTER OF THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY: *The Stories of John Cheever* (1978), one of the most successful collections of literary short fiction ever published, remained on the bestseller list for six months and has never gone out of print.

A HIGH-SCHOOL DROP-OUT, who nonetheless read all of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* at the age of 14; he wrote "Expelled," his first story, at 17, and published it in *The New Republic* at 18.

PENNILESS IN NEW YORK at 19, where he immediately met e.e. cummings, Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos and James Agee and began to write fiction for *The New Yorker*.

A FORERUNNER AND EXAMPLE to John Updike, whose first published story in *The New Yorker*, "Friends from Philadelphia," was written as a riposte to Cheever's "O Youth and Beauty!"

SAUL BELLOW'S FAVORITE LIVING WRITER and dear friend. ("I loved him," said Bellow. "A marvelous man.")

A WESTCHESTER SQUIRE, who mixed cocktails and bred retrievers; as *Time* reported, "[Cheever] wears Brooks Brothers shirts with their conspicuously missing pockets and would never consider having a mongrel dog."

A FAMOUS ALCOHOLIC who did finally get sober, and had a stunning work ethic through it all: he was at his desk every morning, drinking or not.

A DIVIDED SOUL, whose shame and feelings of otherness fed his art; Cheever was a secret bisexual who remained married to the same woman for 41 years.

IN THE MOVIES: *The Swimmer*, based on Cheever's classic story, was made into a movie starring Burt Lancaster in 1968. Cheever has a cameo at a poolside cocktail party: "I'm John Estabrook," he murmurs, while "buss[ing]" (as he put it) "this terrific 18-year-old dish," the actress Janet Landgard.

A PRIZE WINNER: Cheever won the National Book Award for *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), the William Dean Howells Medal for *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964), the Pulitzer, the National Book Critics Circle, and the American Book Award for *The Stories*, and the National Medal for Literature in 1982.

A GROUND BREAKER: "Long before Donald Barthelme, John Barth and Thomas Pynchon began tinkering with narrative conventions, Cheever had unobtrusively disrupted the expected shapes of fiction," wrote Walter Clemons in *Newsweek*.

A POP CULTURE ICON: Matthew Weiner, creator of the AMC series *Mad Men*, names John Cheever as one of his main influences. The show's protagonist, Don Draper, lives on a street called Bullet Park in Ossining—allusions to the title of Cheever's fourth novel and to his adopted hometown.