

Uncollecting Cheever: The Family of John Cheever vs Academy Chicago Publishers

Anita Miller

(October 1998)

\$30.95 (384pp)

978-0-8476-9076-3

Miller, who along with her husband Jordan Miller founded Academy Chicago Publishers, a small independent publisher, presents her side of a protracted 1998 lawsuit between their publishing house and the Cheever family over Academy Chicago plans to publish 68 of John Cheever's uncollected early stories. She describes how the original idea for the proposed book came about, the contractual agreement between the Academy and Mary Cheever, widow of John Cheever, the four years of litigation that followed and the effect of the Illinois Supreme Court decision against them.

It is a fascinating, well-written, sometimes humorous, though often chilling exploration of the legal storm in which Academy Chicago found itself. Even though much of this book contains copies of original contracts and letters plus liberal quotes from court transcripts, it is much more than a legal discussion of contracts and copyrights—it is a good story that touches upon an author's right to control his/her own work, including the right to publish or not to publish. As one would expect, the book doesn't attempt to be an evenhanded treatment of the litigation. Readers will quickly root for the good guys (the Academy Press) and find it hard to believe what the bad guys (the Cheever family, their lawyers and several of the judges who hear the case) will actually say and do next. The author doesn't hesitate to point out discrepancies in testimony or oversights on the part of the judges.

Although not a lawyer or a book publisher, I was hooked on this story almost immediately and found it difficult to put the book down.

DAVID REID (January / February 1999)

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