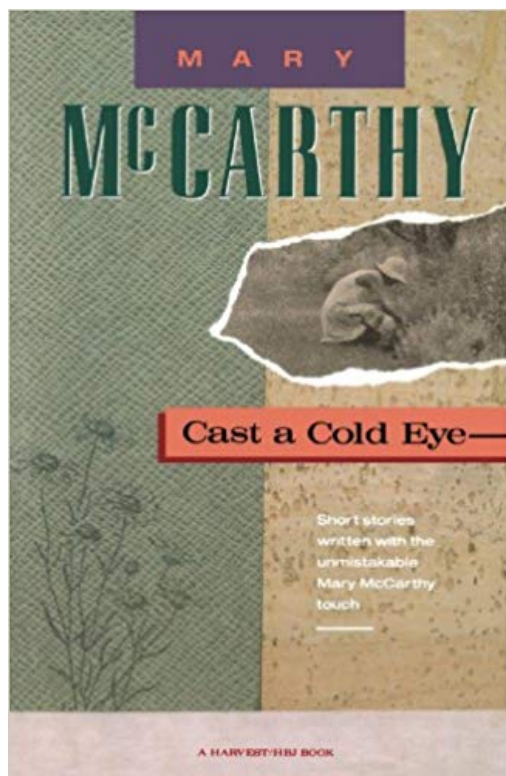


Cast A Cold Eye *by* Mary Mccarthy



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The seven stories collected here showcase McCarthy's formidable powers of observation, her deliciously witty writing style, and her celebrated talent for dissecting characters with biting acuity. A young woman looks for subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways to escape her unsatisfying marriage; an innocuous single man's friends realize his companionship has an enormous price; and an Italian guide puzzles a traveling pair of Americans.



Reviews of the *Cast A Cold Eye* *by* Mary Mccarthy

Innadril

Mary McCarthy less heralded collection of short stories - compared to "The Company She Keeps" - is a rewarding, rollicking, sharp-witted, entertaining read. As always she engages the reader in a fast paced exposition of social mores and their correlative states of consciousness that with an impulsive whimsical irradiation gush into the poetical and drag us into the realm of cultural artifacts whose staging reveals the imposition of codes of conduct and the internal wrangle they propagate. These stories don't have the same subtle shading of her novels, but they offer themselves to the reader so effortlessly, and with the garrulous tenor of a gossiping intellectual, that they succeed at creating vignettes of lives abused by the determinism of fate and unwittingly in defiance of its prescriptions. There are some phrases which are vintage McCarthy, which is to say astute and poignant, revealing and literary, wondrous and blithely attuned to the concentrated composition. The first story specifically (The Weeds) is probably one of the best written ever in terms of its undertow of allusive currents; whereas the latter two, autobiographical reminiscences, sparkle with the strength of mind of a woman who makes art of memories and does it with the commitment of a social historian mining the prejudices of the times yet never sacrificing nor compromising the joy that she invariably dotes upon the reader. It is a collection of stories of exceptional quality and verve.

Nnulam

Well, would someone leave her husband after the petunias bloomed? Possibly. Murder is more civilized than divorce. The first story of the collection describes the calculated withdrawal of love from a household. The story that follows is of an unpleasant cast, too. Francis Cleary is inane, and as such is the perfect guest for his married friends. Sadly, though, he produces a melancholy effect. He is innocent since he has abandoned the idea of marriage.

Mary McCarthy really does carry on like a latter-day Ben Jonson. In both instances the writers were good students of classical literature. Words such as *bounder*, titles such as "Cicerone", signal this characteristic.

In "The Old Men" a graduate student in history has broken his elbow and is bothered in the hospital by the old man across the hall calling to the nurse. A hospital is a place of no attachments. One is no longer a point on a social graph. Perhaps to even exist is a matter of impersonation the young man thinks. He converts the noise, the pseudo sobbing of some of the old men in the ward, into musical notation, a sort of chant. His sense of contentment is punctured when he hears a dying woman screaming in the night. On the way to the operating room to have his elbow reset he asks to see into the room across the hall. It is vacant. He dies during the procedure.

The narrator's grandmother wars against the Protestants. The family has no friends and entertaining is held to be foolish. The four children have had a happy existence until their parents are lost in an influenza epidemic. The children are separated from each other and sent to live with relatives. They are not well-treated. Visits to the grandmother become enjoyable. Five years later the Protestant grandfather arrives on the scene and is affronted on the children's behalf.

When Mary, at her Catholic school, is compared to the poet Byron, the grandfather protests. The grandfather and the school head had each said previously the other person was a fine man or woman. Two girls at the convent have marked out their own roles as class clowns. The narrator is nicknamed by them clever young egg, (in initials), since they had sensed her guileless ambition. It is predicted that she will grow up to be a novelist.

The wit and excellence of the writing in this collection cannot be described adequately.

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