



NANCY: A serious read portraying a somewhat bleak side of Irish Catholic life in Brooklyn in the early 20th century. The author's quite good at painting dark scenes with occasional glimpses of light. With strong characterization, we're transported in the lives of a widow, her daughter and the nuns who employ the young mother. Although slow moving through the first half, the book becomes remarkably complex in the second half, as the nuns and characters struggle within various perspectives of redemption and salvation. A commentary on how mental health issues were handled in the past and how that is changing into the future. The book raises questions about the church, redemption and sin that I found quite compelling.



PRISCILLA: Not being Catholic, I never quite get the nun thing. This seemed like a very sad story to me, but the nuns were doing a lot of serving. Their lives were broken, too, but they tried to help. It's just a strange way to live, I think.



ABIGAIL: I identified with Annie, as a widow. But I didn't have to go through the trauma she did as a young mother, knowing her husband committed suicide. I could understand her relationship with the milkman, wanting some joy and taking it. That seemed like a bright spot in the novel. Frustrating how the church stigmatizes so much pain.



MOLLY: I thought the author did a particularly good job of showing the less fortunate people in society, those who are struggling as single mothers, injured, old and infirm. You certainly have to respect the nuns who tried to help them. It's a hard life for so many. Before social security, people had very little help when bad things happened. The church stepped in and that was a good thing.



KATHARINE: A beautifully written literary novel, taking in the life in the back streets of Brooklyn in an earlier time. I especially appreciated the religious themes, and the ways these characters tried to atone for others' sins.



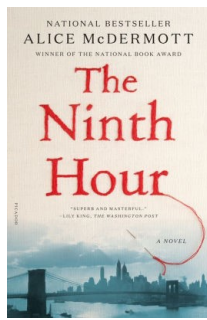
JANE: The Catholic church at its best and its worst. The nuns can be quite a strange lot. The author did a good job portraying realistic ones, I think. Wasn't it interesting the way she explained why the different nuns joined the convent? Clearly, they had issues which caused them to join up. A hard-working bunch, weren't they? Did a lot of good back then, the main way for women to get a job.



SALLIE: I found the relationship between Sally and the nuns quite interesting. They kept surprising me. The stodgy laundry lady let her be herself. The nun who was good with the children, seemed to want her to go to the convent. And then they also liked to order her around. It did seem like Sally wasn't quite meant for a nunnery. I liked the fact that they let her have fun as a child.



Discussion Guide



About the Book

Book Title: The Ninth Hour

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Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. This book deals with Irish Catholics in the early 20th century in New York. What do you know of Irish Catholics and are they part of your family tree?
3. What did you think of the ways the nuns were portrayed in this novel? Have you known people like this?
4. This book includes people suffering from mental illnesses of depression, suicide and dysfunction of some kind. How did the church view these issues? How did the other characters deal with these struggles?
5. What did you make of Sally's life journey? Did you expect her to become a nun? Why or why not?
6. What did you make of the possibilities for redemption according to the views of the characters? Where did these ideas come from?
7. What do you think were the author's goals in writing this book?
8. Would you recommend this book to others to read? Why or why not?
9. Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?
10. In what ways, if any, will this change your life or perspective?

On YouTube: Aspen Words Presents: National Book Award Winner Alice McDermott (7:05) (re Ninth Hour)

With Scott Simon on NPR on Suicide theme: <https://www.npr.org/2017/09/23/553115121/a-suicide-reverberates-in-the-ninth-hour>