

ANALYSIS

The Groves of Academe (1952)



Mary McCarthy

(1912-1989)

"The normal way of telling this story would be from the outside or from the point of view of one of the professor's sympathizers. But I found I had no interest in telling it that way; to me, the interest lay in trying to see it from the professor's point of view and mouthing it in the cliches and the hissing jargon of his vocabulary. That is, I wanted to know just how it felt to be raging inside the skin of a Henry Mulcahy and to learn how, among other things, he arrived at a sense of self-justification and triumphant injury that allowed him...to use any means to promote his personal cause.... I had to use any means to promote his personal cause.... I had to use every bit of Mulcahy that was in me, and there was not very much... I wanted to tiptoe into the interior of Mulcahy like a peasant coming into a palace."

Mary McCarthy

"Furness, now that we mention it, is a cow-country version of one salient of yourself, mixed with some people at Sarah Lawrence and elsewhere. He could not have written the James book and must remain a fixture at Jocelyn. He is right, or course, all along about Mulcahy and the other people, and it is not a case of 'right for the wrong reasons,' horrid modern cliché, but right with insufficient aplomb, right with a touch of grievance; here he becomes related to Mulcahy. I hope the book is not too spiritualized, as you hint. The intention was a certain even-handed justice, which of course remains beyond human grasp."

Mary McCarthy
Letter to Fred Dupee
(19 May 1952)

"Mary's new novel, *The Groves of Academe*, is out and she sent me a copy. Alas, me no like. The trouble is she is so damned SUPERIOR to her characters, sneers at some of them and patronizes the rest. Also, usual static quality, even worse than in *Oasis*, acres of intellectual arguments, back and forth, like a tennis match... WHY does she have to be so goddamned snooty, is she god or something? You begin to feel sorry for her poor characters, who are always so absurd or rascally or just inferior and damned--she's always telling them their slip's showing. She doesn't *love* them, that's the trouble, in the sense of not feeling a human solidarity and sympathy with them--can't create real characters without love, or hate which is also a human feeling; she has just contempt and her poor puppets just wither on the page. Is she really like that? She doesn't seem so when I see her. Or is she just kidding *me* along too, and making all sorts of snooty little footnotes in her head as we talk?"

Dwight Macdonald
Letter to Nicola Chiaromonte (14 February 1952)

"We see from the first page that Miss McCarthy is savagely at home in academic life. Without wasting a gesture, she ransacks the desk of the faculty and picks their pockets as they sit unwittingly in department meetings.... Their pretensions and fears, their shabby lust for tenure--she thrusts it all out to us as if at the end of bare, strong fingers.... Putting down the book, so bristling with life, so crammed with talent, and yet so cold, we cannot help thinking how much greater an artist McCarthy might be if she would only take things less hard, if she would sweeten her astringency a little. Her standards of conduct are so high that they are practically out of sight."

Brendan Gill
The New Yorker
(23 February 1952)

"Miss McCarthy's satiric manner is based on a stunning, narrowly aimed accuracy rather than on exaggeration. While she provides her specimens of men and women with few softening extra-curriculum features, neither does she deny them their humanity by making caricatures of them."

Alice Morris
The New York Times
(24 February 1952)

"Miriam has read *The Groves of Academe* and didn't like it. I have read only one chapter (on advise [sic] from Hannah Arendt), the one on the College setup. I found it very clever and confused. If Mary only learnt to stick in some like of consistent development, instead of showing off in all directions. She has a genuine talent for satire, and she is really intelligent. But she should make up her mind about some conclusion--nihilistic satire, or just play. But not both at the same time.... The trouble with so many intelligent Americans, it seems to me, is formlessness, not knowing where to stop, and wanting it both ways.... However, I like Mary's mind very much. There is something really generous and passionate about it, for all her smartness."

Nicola Chiaromonte
Letter to Dwight Macdonald
(24 April 1952)

"Miss McCarthy, as a friend of mine observed, writes intellectual journalism masquerading as fiction and asking to be unmasked. She is, I think, one of the cleverest women around; but there is an ancient and little remembered maxim that to be entirely clever is to be half a fool."

Delmore Schwartz
Partisan Review
(May-June 1952)

"*The Groves of Academe* (1952) Mary McCarthy's first full-length novel, represents the apex of her satirical art. It is an admirable accomplishment. We witness, step by slow step, the relentless destruction of a small, disunited, progressive academic world by a monster. Henry Mulcahy, 'a tall, soft-bellied, lispng man with a tense, mushroom-white face, rimless bifocals, and graying thin red hair,' an apostle of Joyce, Kafka, Proust, and Marx, uxorious, self-pitying, shrill, unscrupulous, perfectly disloyal to the traditions of the past and to the hopes of the future, exuding an atmosphere of domestic confusion, of 'children's runny noses and damp bottoms,' yet withal a bit of a genius, is the terrible nemesis who alights on the confused campus of Jocelyn College. He borrow from his students; he makes them perform his domestic chores; he does not hesitate to flunk them if they rebel; he neglects his courses; he embroils the other members of the faculty with each other in an elaborate maze of lies. When he is fired, he paralyzes the liberal executive arm by claiming, falsely, that he has been a Communist and is now the victim of a witch hunt. In the end it is the unhappy president of the college who resigns his post, uttering in his despair the cry of Cicero: 'How far at length, O Catiline, will you abuse our patience?'"

The advantage that Mulcahy has over the other teachers is that his egotism has no flaws. All the rest in this Tower of Babel, however doctrinaire, however pedantic, however bereft of any vestige of common sense, however, in short, ridiculous, have some minimum of decency, some remnant of idealism, some shadow of hope that at least some student may gain a bit of education at Jocelyn, and so are vulnerable to Mulcahy who regards the world about him as simply a stage for the drama of his self-pity. He can fight

every form of progressivism in its own territory because he knows all the shibboleths and himself believes in nothing. The reader unwillingly begins to take his side, hypnotized by the charm of his very outrageousness. When Alma Fortune resigns from the faculty in protest over his discharge, knowing that she may be forever ditching her academic career, he gleefully rubs his hands at the prospect of such a feather in his martyr's cap and promptly ascribes a selfish motive to her act.

Horrified, fascinated, sincerely troubled in their hearts, the other members of the faculty endlessly analyze him. Is he mad? Perhaps he has chosen, like Thomas a Kempis, argues one, to imitate Christ: '...by becoming man precisely God underwent what could be described as madness: the experience of unrecognition fusing with the knowledge of godhead, the sense of the Message, the Word, the Seed falling on barren ground.' Mulcahy, exulting in his tricks, also analyzes himself, but he finds a simpler answer. 'It was the artist in him, he presumed, that had taken control and fashioned from newspaper stories and the usual disjunct fragments of personal experience a persuasive whole which had a figurative truth more impressive than the data of reality, and hence, he thought, with satisfaction, truer in the final analysis, more universal in Aristotle's sense.' Indeed, this is almost what Miss McCarthy has done herself, for there are wonderful moments in the novel when, with the dazzle of conflicting arguments, Mulcahy seems to be what he claims, when he works his tricks on the reader as well as on his fellow instructors.

Some critics have asked if a novel can really succeed without more 'heart' than Miss McCarthy appears to have put in this one. Can it be sustained by sheer intellectual pyrotechnics? But underneath all the ridiculous aspect of Jocelyn College, its sloppy, faddy students, its affectation, its show-off, its arrogance, its ivory towers, there is still a feeling which comes through to the reader--and which can come, after all, only from its Juvenalian author--that it is still a place that is intellectually alive. One laughs at the involved discussions between the teachers and the intellectual extremes to which they push each other, but one is interested (a rare thing in fiction) in the ideas expressed as well as the light shed on the characters expressing them. One misses the point of *The Groves of Academe* if one forgets what Miss McCarthy could do with a *nonprogressive* college. There is more sympathy on her part than appears at a first reading for the poor souls struggling for a straw of consistency under the relentless badgering of Henry Mulcahy."

Louis Auchincloss
Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of 9 American Women Novelists
(U Minnesota 1961) 176-78

"Of all the groups of modern institutional novels probably the largest is the one composed of novels about academic life. Indeed, the academic novel plays in the contemporary American literary scene a part very similar to that once played by the Hollywood novel. The universities and colleges have taken over from the film-studios as the leading employers of writers, and the typical academic novel is the work of a college professor of an arts subject.... Mary McCarthy, for example, taught for a time both at Sarah Lawrence and at Bard College and presumably drew upon these experiences when writing her novel *The Groves of Academe* (1952). Although this is usually considered the first academic novel in the current procession, in fact it only very slightly preceded a number of other novels about universities which appeared later that year....

The setting is Jocelyn, a co-educational college of the 'progressive' type, and the central character is Henry Mulcahy, 'called Hen by his friends, forty-one years old, the only Ph.D. in the Literature department, contributor to the *Nation* and the *Kenyon Review*, Rhodes scholar, Guggenheim Fellow, father of four, fifteen years' teaching experience, salary and rank of instructor.' At the outset of the book Mulcahy is notified that his appointment is not to be renewed, but Mary McCarthy quickly freezes any incipient compassion which the reader might be experiencing by the description of Mulcahy which follows: 'A tall, soft-bellied, lisping man with a tense, mushroom-white face, rimless bifocals, and greying thin red hair, he was intermittently aware of a quality of personal unattractiveness that emanated from him like a miasma.'

Mary McCarthy relies a little too heavily--as, to be sure, greater satirists have done--on physical ridicule, but in this instance she justifies the disgust she arouses by her portrayal of Mulcahy's behavior. Finding himself cast in the role of victim, Mulcahy proceeds to exploit it to the utmost. He accuses President Hoar of dismissing him for political reasons and his liberal-minded colleagues, drawn variously by political indignation, pity, and guilt at the repugnance they feel for him, rally to his support. Sighing for 'the old

militant simplicities,' the academics explore in discussion and in the consciences the contradictions inherent in the liberal position itself, and Mulcahy is able to play so successfully upon their earnest but muddled idealism, and upon the liberalism of President Hoar, that in the end it is Hoar who is forced to resign.

The novel combines a study of political paranoia in the presentation of Mulcahy himself--a 'damnable demagogue' as Hoar comes finally and bitterly to realize--with a set of satirical variations on the liberal theme. In fact, it is in many ways less an academic than a political novel. At the same time, the characters are very recognizably 'academic': indeed, this is the essence of that mingled intelligence and naivety which most of them display. There is also, in this somewhat episodic book, long sections describing Jocelyn itself, its ideals, organization, and activities. In these sections the satire seems softened, the writing, always brilliant in its effects, more purely comic.

The poetry conference, for example, is one of the funniest episodes in modern fiction, while the chapter entitled 'Ancient History' contains an extremely effective critique of 'progressive' college education: it demonstrates vividly the inevitable conflict between Jocelyn's announced aims for its students ('they were simply to be free, spontaneous, and co-educational') and the inescapable fact of Jocelyn's institutional identity. Thus each student has to choose a topic for special study, and the 'average entrant' is soon convinced 'that he was not only going to be encouraged to express his individual bent, but that if he did not already have some personality-defining interest he had better work one up fast.' In fact most of them find themselves steered into similar and familiar paths:

"...the faculty, in practice, had arrived at a quiet gentlemen's agreement whereby each teacher offered two or three specialties, a limited choice, or else let the student roam, unsupervised, to some salt-lick of his own choosing. A student who did the latter was likely to get a high mark in Spontaneity but to rank low in Effort, Ability to Use the Tools of the Discipline, and Lack of Prejudice. The better students, in general, adjusted themselves without repining to what the faculty had to offer, pointing out to their juniors that it was better to allow Mr. Van Tour to teach you what he knew than what he didn't patently."

The success of *The Groves of Academe* is such that we can discern a line of satirical academic novels stemming from it. Chief among these is Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution* (1954), an extremely clever book, marred by occasional over-writing, an indulgence in wit for its own and not the novel's sake. Where Mary McCarthy's book sometimes leaves an unpleasant taste Jarrell's tends to fray the nerves. This is perhaps a more humane book than *The Groves of Academe*, and it is often as funny, but it remains in the earlier book's shadow.... Few American academic novels of recent years have not portrayed at least one character accused of Communism, and several books have taken as their subject the situation which arises when such external issues intrude into university life. That is the central theme of *The Groves of Academe* and the almost exclusive subject-matter of May Sarton's *Faithful Are the Wounds* (1955)..."

Michael Millgate
American Social Fiction: James to Cozzens
(Barnes & Noble 1964) 166-68, 176

"*The Groves of Academe* is a satirical treatment of another kind of utopia--an experimental college. Like the oasis, the closed and structured society of the college offers Miss McCarthy a 'world within a world.' And, like the utopians, the Jocelyn faculty, by acting in accord with the values appropriate to its milieu, behaves oddly when judged against external standards.

Critics have tried to find echoes of Bard and Sarah Lawrence in the fictional Jocelyn, and Miss McCarthy admits that the college she invented, although not at all like Sarah Lawrence or Bennington, is quite a bit like Bard. But, she explains, 'I really wanted to make a weird imaginary college of my own.' She succeeds well.... Satirizing Jocelyn College was undoubtedly child's play to Mary McCarthy. All she had to do was stop, look, listen, remember...and exaggerate.... In 'The Contagion of Ideas' (Summer, 1952), Miss McCarthy discusses the issue of Communism and 'the right to teach'; and mentions the curious advantages of party membership in certain academic circles. In *The Groves of Academe*, she dramatizes this concept by making

Mulcahy base his 'campaign for justice' on the vulnerability of Maynard Hoar. Mulcahy feigns prior party membership, knowing that Hoar, as president of Jocelyn cannot risk being exposed as an anti-liberal and a hypocrite for having fired one of his faculty on the grounds of Communist Party affiliation....

An added incentive to this game of make-believe was her conviction that if she could understand Mulcahy she would have a key to such demagogic figures as Hitler.... The distortion in *The Groves of Academe* is...threefold. First, the reader must see the world largely in terms of Mulcahy's warped vision and believe in that projection. Second, he must recognize that Jocelyn and environs have already been distorted by Miss McCarthy's satiric intent. And third, he must look at a world that in actuality is somewhat distorted. The atypical tutorial system of Jocelyn allows the faculty members a closeness to their students that is unusual in an American college. Likewise, in the liberal atmosphere fostered by the ideology of the experimental college, Mulcahy's alleged Communist Party membership works in his favor instead of against him...

A Joycean scholar, he identifies himself with the martyrs of modern literary history--Joyce, Kafka, and Proust; with Joyce's protagonists, Bloom and Earwicker; and, of course, with Jesus Christ. Not surprisingly, when he devises his plan for reinstatement he chooses to parade in the clothes of a political martyr--a victim of the House Un-American Activities Committee witch hunts....[No, they were not "witch hunts." Liberals hide behind this metaphor whenever their treason is caught naked. Dozens of Communists hired by liberals were exposed working in sensitive positions in the government of the United States, spying for the Soviet Union. 323 workers in Hollywood confessed to being members of the International Communist Party based in Moscow working to overthrow our democratic government.]

Mulcahy, it must be noted, after a brief moment of recognizing that he is inventing, *believes* his own fantasies.... His firm conviction of superiority to other men lies at the root of his paranoia. For he believes himself envied, maligned, and persecuted by his intellectual inferiors.... Hoar assumes immediately that Mulcahy's confession of Communist ties is true.... Keogh admits to having tried to interest Mulcahy in the party but states that his attempts had been unsuccessful. Mulcahy, he explains, is 'one of those birds that are more Communist than the Communists in theory, but you'll never meet them on the picket-line.... Later, believing that he has talked out of turn to the president, Keogh tells Mulcahy about the meeting and the questions that Hoar had asked. This information puts Mulcahy in a position to confront Hoar and accuse him of snooping, which he does. White-faced and malevolent, he threatens to expose Hoar to the American Association of University Professors and 'to every liberal magazine and newspaper in the country' as a meddler and hypocrite. Although Mulcahy's accusations are grossly distorted, they contain enough truth, as Hoar sadly realizes, to discredit him and to provide Mulcahy with a club to use not merely to assure his retention at Jocelyn but to advance his position.

A short time later, Hoar telephones Bentkoop and announces that he has resigned, acknowledging that as long as he remained president, Jocelyn could never rid itself of Mulcahy.... And so the search for truth in the groves of academe ends on a note of decided impersonality and ambiguity. That Mary McCarthy concludes her novel by having Maynard Hoar telephone Bentkoop and repeat his earlier interview with Mulcahy introduces an unexpected distancing, a moving away from the closeness of private conversations and departmental meetings toward an impersonality suggested by the mechanicalness of the telephone. Also, having Bentkoop be the recipient of the president's call instead of Domna Rejnev diverts attention from a character who has been treated with far greater subjectivity than has Bentkoop and one, as well, who would be expected to react to Hoar's explanation.

In addition, Miss McCarthy does not make clear whether Maynard Hoar's affirmation of classicism is meaningful or simply histrionic. If all along he has represented a good force (the clear and deep waters of classicism) opposed to a bad force (the muddy and snag-filled shallows of progressivism), Miss McCarthy has described her 'dark horse' in an odd way. Compared with Domna, Alma Fortune, John Bentkoop, or even Mulcahy, the president appears simple and without sufficient depth and subtlety. If progressivism has fared badly (being left in the hands of persons like Mulcahy), classicism as a means of saving humanity appears inadequate also. But Miss McCarthy offers no judgment. Her impersonation of Mulcahy, as she has explained in 'Characters in Fiction,' makes it impossible for her to step in and straighten up this confusion.

But more than the ambiguity of the ending mars *The Groves of Academe* as satire. Although in bits and pieces (particularly the chapter, 'Ancient History,' in which Miss McCarthy summarizes the twelve-year history of Jocelyn) the satire against the experimental college is brilliantly caustic, this high level of satiric attack is not sustained. Indeed, by the conclusion, irony has replaced satire as the dominant mode, as the reader sees a professed liberal trapped by the professional liberalism of one of his faculty. But by the time Miss McCarthy has got to the conclusion, the emphasis (despite the witty treatment of the poets during the conference) has been deflected from satire to character and in particular to the bizarre person of Mulcahy.

Interest in Mulcahy weakens this novel as a satire against the progressive college in a number of ways. Obviously, the peculiarities of Mulcahy's disposition make him a liability to *any* college faculty. Neither the fault of nor the result of progressivism, he exists outside the issue of doctrine. To show the workings of the liberal college through his eyes is not only to negate some of the validity of what is revealed but to take attention away from the satire. Jocelyn becomes less interesting than the unappealing yet compelling figure of the paranoid scholar. Miss McCarthy understood that she had touched something very deep in human nature when she created Mulcahy. As noted earlier, she has acknowledged that she believed that if she were able to understand Mulcahy by being Mulcahy, she would have some grasp of the mystery of a Hitler or similar demagogic figures of modern society [such as, in her mind, Sen. Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon]. The grotesque workings of Mulcahy's mind do reveal something of the mystery of the demagogue, but such a revelation lies far beyond the purpose of satire."

Barbara McKenzie
Mary McCarthy
(Twayne 1966) 112-20

"Leslie Fiedler has noted that the sparsity of good college novels...is perhaps due to 'the incestuous nature of the academic novel.' It usually is a book about the writer himself in his role as college professor, and as such has failure as the subject. The author is 'too motivated by frustration and impotence originating in the doomed battle between the writer and the Establishment.' The impetus to write the book may have been the result of her short and often frustrating teaching experience at Bard and Sarah Lawrence....

Jocelyn College, Pennsylvania, is a progressive school... The novel's 'monstrous' hero, Henry ...Mulcahy, a repulsive moral child who comes to Jocelyn mainly on the strength of his rumored radical past, and [President] Hoar's reputation as a liberal. 'A modern witness to the ordeal by slander,' he now stands in the wonderfully ironic position of being safe in a progressive college with a reputation of liberalism to maintain *because* he was once said to be a Communist. He has been at Jocelyn two years when the novel begins, with the arrival on his desk of his letter of dismissal from President Hoar. In sly, clever and fascinatingly dishonest fashion, Mulcahy gathers together arguments to compel his being retained on the faculty. He recognizes that the President cannot afford the suspicion that he is being dropped for political reasons, that Hoar could not have it known that he had got rid of an inconvenient critic, and so he compounds the confusion of motives and lies by suggesting to the faculty that his wife is dangerously ill and that word of his dismissal might well kill her....

Impressed by faculty support, the President reappoints him. But by this time, disillusion has set in among his more fervent followers, who have discovered that in a number of matters crucial to his case he has lied.... It becomes clear that Mulcahy never was a Communist and has no real 'heretical past'.... He in turn threatens to expose Hoar's anti-liberalist, Joe McCarthy-like act, and thus to ruin his liberal reputation. So the novel comes to its wickedly paradoxical conclusion. The President, who had fired Mulcahy for legitimate reasons and then rehired him against his better judgment, *himself* resigns... 'I saw that I was too much incriminated. The college would never get rid of him as long as I was at the tiller'.... As James Yaffe has said: 'It is a neat and clever inversion of the situation in the usual liberal novel of college life in which the highly successful liberal teacher is dismissed for leftist ideas.'

The novel is a virtuoso attack on a number of shibboleths. The major one is, of course, the progressive educational system. The old poet asks: 'Is this the fabled college where everything is run backwards?'... The element of fantasy is strong at Jocelyn, 'the freakish character of its tides of opinion, the anomalies of its personnel, the madness of its methodology, which had produced here a world like a child's idea of China, with everything upside down.'

A second, and by now well-known, target is liberalism. Of Domna Rejnev, twenty-three-year-old Russian instructor from Radcliffe and would-be revolutionary, it is said, 'at bottom she was conventional, believing in a conventional moral order and shocked by deviations from it into a sense of helpless guilt toward the deviator. In other words she was a true liberal.' A third point of attack is the faculty, in particular and as a class. Of one of them, Van Tour, she says, 'Like many teachers of English he was not able to think clearly.' The intellectual faculty holds tight to the usual progressive-college field period for students, not in any sense for the students' edification, but to preserve their own vacations. They are the ones to benefit most from the foolish freedom given their students who are 'too disorderly or lazy or ill-trained to carry anything very far without the spur of discipline.' Another, equally vulnerable target is the student: the cataloguing of their types and the easy predictability of their futures provide some of the best reading in the novel.

Women, as is usual in Mary McCarthy's books, come out somewhat better than the men, but they too do not go unscathed.... Characteristically, when Mary McCarthy attacks, it is in the familiar form of the hardly defensible generalization: 'Like most European women when they argue, she was both angry and zestful'....

Here Mary McCarthy's penchant for religious imagery is most apparent. More than one amateur student of the novel has attempted an identification between Mulcahy and Christ, an identification Mulcahy himself tends to make [He is a *mock*-Christ, intensifying the outrage of his lies and devilish conduct--actually a Satan figure]... 'Christ's experience is the great paradigm for the persecution psychosis'.... Asked if [her religious allusions] are *only* literary and therefore blasphemous, [McCarthy] says: 'They are secret jokes, they *are* blasphemies. But I think that religion offers to Americans very often the only history and philosophy they ever get. A reference to it somehow opens up that historical vista. In that sense it is a device for deepening the passage.' It is safe to say that Mary McCarthy has been incapable of writing at any length without resorting to such imagery. Only in *The Group* does it finally disappear as a stylistic characteristic.

Walking consciously in the footsteps of literary models [James Joyce] is one trouble with Henry; another, as John Lyons has suggested, is that he has been corrupted 'by the vagaries of modern liberal causes.' His is an academic mind, liberal in cast, which does not know how to handle freedom. Like the others, he is an opportunist thriving because the atmosphere allows him the freedom to be false. The gap between his illusions and pretensions about himself, between his motives and his real character, is vast.... [McCarthy] has managed, for the most part, this difficult physical ventriloquism of putting herself behind the skin of an offensive male anti-hero. When Henry is not present, the Voices become those of other faculty members, or of the President. Their speech is in the main about Henry and his problems, his situation, so that in this sense it is an overtone of his own voice, or a reaction to it, like a reversed echo. Only occasionally...is the McCarthy voice heard....

The old debate about the nature and the value of her satire is carried on in the reviews of *The Groves of Academe* as in those of her first two books. Robert Halsband in *Saturday Review* said that her understanding of her characters was so successful 'that her compassion for them is implicit.' In another place he speaks of her 'pitiless humility.' Robert E. Fitch, on the other hand, finds no compassion; instead he accuses her of pride, of being a traitor to her intellectual class. 'She turns her ridicule against the rituals, the tabus, and the credulities of the intelligentsia.' Her satire, he says, has the 'cerebro-genital emphasis,' is 'relentless, predatory, imperialistic, and without compassion.' He is indignant about the absence in her work of 'a profound moral passion' which must be present, he insists, in great satire... He implies that...Mary McCarthy 'lovingly impaled a moral weakness and squeezed it like a pimple.' On the other hand Alice Morris found that the reader regarded Mulcahy with 'a sneaking if ill-founded compassion.' Joseph Wood Krutch admires her avant-gardism in attacking intellectual orthodoxies when no one else at the moment was doing it.... And Richard Hughes is sure that compassion would *spoil* her work. 'To ask for sweetness, for compassion, is to misread her fundamental intention. No wash of comfortable sentiment will ever blur her incorruptible vision because for her, commitment would ultimately involve compromise.'

Once again her satire is attacked because it is directed against her friends. Isaac Rosenfeld in *The New Republic*...says 'it cannot be successful satire--it is too dependent on the object of its own ridicule, it derives from and always returns to the institutions it would like to destroy. And what satire fails in its attempts to destroy, it tends to strengthen and preserve.' His claim is that Mary McCarthy satirizes in order 'to break her

dependence' on 'a world of ridiculous objects' to which she herself belongs. This runs parallel to Brendan Gill's theory that 'her standards of conduct are so high that...we despair of matching them, and we sense her despair of matching them'....

It is a novel of ideas with a number of amusing characters to promulgate them. They come together in the by-now familiar McCarthy community, an intellectual gathering from which 'she dispatches her characters out on perilous voyages, weighing them down with the accumulated intellectual baggage of the overburdened contemporary liberal,' as Riley Hughes has put it. Whole sections of the novel are pure exposition, of the college's philosophy, of its curriculum, of the intricate and almost symbolic relationships among the faculty and between faculty and students, the economics of higher education, etc. What Riley Hughes labeled 'the brilliant movement of ideas in action' is in truth a kind of essay with fictional trimmings on the illiberalities of liberalism, the vagaries and misuses of academic freedom by the academic, the contradictions involved in orthodoxies which once were heresies, and so forth. From *The Groves of Academe* we remember one major comic portrait, Mulcahy."

Doris Grumbach
The Company She Kept
(Coward-McCann 1967) 160-172

"The search for truth, and the human defects that hinder it, we have seen to be her permanent subject. Now again the private concern becomes a way of understanding the large public matters that her life has brought before her: this time the political liberalism of the 'witch-hunting' era of Joseph McCarthy (the 1950's), when the reactionary right [the disparaging term "reactionary" indicates that this liberal critic is sympathetic with "progressive" Communism rather than with the democratic government of the United States that was under attack by the International Communist Party], not the Communist left, frightened or confused intellectuals into self-betrayal....

The Groves of Academe (1952) is her first real or completely successful novel because now, for the first time, she has found a setting, characters and a plot that dramatize both her private and her public subjects in one lively story. With this novel, moreover, her resemblance to Jane Austen, already evident in the irony, sanity, and grace of her prose, and the combination of moral concern and tough intelligence in her approach to people, grows even more striking. She gives us now, in that same prose, a group of characters vividly and comically idiosyncratic, with a wonderful comic villain in the center. She gives us a plot which evolves with perfect illuminating logic from the moral qualities of the characters. And she gives us the peculiarly Austenish pleasure of watching good, intelligent, and articulate people work their way through much painful error to the relief of shared understanding.

The plot is a most ingenious stroke of wit. Its humor is based on the fact that where in the outside, non-intellectual world it had become dangerous in this period to have once been a Communist, in the world of liberal intellectuals a man persecuted for a Communist past has become almost a holy martyr and entitled to defense. Miss McCarthy's joke is that when the incompetent, irresponsible (though learned and brilliant) Henry Mulcahy is about to be let go by the liberal president of Jocelyn College, he is able to win the support of his colleagues by pretending to have *been* a Communist. The joke reaches its climax when an old anarchist acquaintance of Mulcahy's is interrogated by President Hoar and a faculty committee about whether their colleague really had this claim on their respect and protection, and the anarchist, who 'sings,' betrays the shocking secret that Mulcahy's Communist past had been a lie. Upon which, in an explosion of topsy-turvyness, Mulcahy comes raging to Hoar like the righteous victim of a witch-hunt, and using the secret investigation as evidence that the president has betrayed his liberal principles, forces *him* to resign.

It is a pity to tell the punch line of such a story, but the fault is less grave than it might be because the fun here lies in the characters and in the fine detail by which they and their world are kept always very much alive. Most of all the story belongs to the magnificently repulsive Henry Mulcahy, in whom the kind of intellectual dishonor which we have already begun to recognize as Miss McCarthy's chief target is carried to breathtaking extremes. It is moreover a special triumph of the book that she has shown us this comic monster from the inside (she calls the technique 'ventriloquism'), mimicking his mode of thought so fully and felicitously that it is impossible, for all his excesses, not to recognize him as real....

His lust for supremacy and his preference for flattering ideas over mere facts--undergo a marvelous efflorescence. He not only identifies himself with Joyce, Kafka, and other 'sacred untouchables of the modern martyrology'; he comes to regard disloyalty to himself as 'apostasy,' and the dismayed Domna Rejnev discovers that 'behind Joyce...is the identification with Christ.' At the same time his great lie is to him the work of an artist, who creates out of life's raw material 'a figurative truth more true than the data of reality.' (Remembering vaguely that he had once heard the phrase 'heart murmur' used of someone in his family, he is soon exclaiming to himself--sincerely!--that he holds Hoar 'personally responsible for the life of his wife and/or son.') And when the defeated president finally asks him, 'Are you a conscious liar or a self-deluded hypocrite?' Mulcahy replies, 'A Cretan says, all Cretans are liars.' Having thus put in question the very possibility of finding truth, he frankly declares, 'I'm not concerned with truth.... I'm concerned with justice.'

The faculty for whom Mulcahy has thus set a special problem in truth-seeking are all sharply realized, but those who share the center of the stage with Mulcahy are two teachers who are most different from him, and who bring what Miss McCarthy honors as effectively to life as he re-creates what she despises. Domna Rejnev and John Bentkoop are also intellectuals but to them the truth matters more than their own success and comfort. In Miss Rejnev...this intellectual passion is endearingly childlike in its ardor and even in its vanity. The ardor we see when she hears of Mulcahy's 'persecution': ...'I shall...set an example.'

And we see the vanity when she warmly praises Mulcahy's learning to silent colleagues out of her pleasure in honoring excellence.... But this pride is so far from the smug confidence of the self-worshippers that a colleague lets her pour out a passionate argument without interrupting 'because he knew her to be honest and presumed that therefore, before she had finished, a doubt would suddenly dart out of her like a mouse from its hole.' Sure enough, it is her agonizing recognition not only that she had been wrong about Mulcahy, but that she had been seduced into pretending not to know defects in him which she did know, into a sort of lying, that is to be her climactic experience in the book.

The deep, the metaphysical opposition between Mulcahy's kind and hers emerges during a painful dinner at the Mulcahy home when Domna suddenly learns she has been defending a liar. Uneasy, he tries to recoup by suggesting that, being handsome, she is a 'monist,' but that unattractive people like himself 'know that appearances are fickle. We look to somebody else to discover our imperishable essence' [like Meg Sargent, oddly enough].... She says...'People whose inside contradicts their outside...have neither essence nor existence.' Mulcahy, in short, can feel virtuous when he does evil and entitled to loyalty even by those whom he betrays because he believes instinctively in a sort of dualism according to which the concrete world, where actions have consequences and entail responsibilities, can be regarded as mere 'appearance'--of secondary importance beside those abstractions...which his ego can manipulate. The others are like Domna--or like Virginia Bentkoop... They are people who notice and respect the actualities of the world.

This, however, is a progressive college, and these are liberals of the fifties, and the combination has guaranteed Mulcahy's triumph. For, as the novel has also been suggesting, and as one teacher puts it at the end, progressive education means a concern with 'faith and individual salvation'--that is, the student's inner quality is considered to be more important than his demonstrated mastery, through hard work, of real subject matter. This has a sinister resemblance to Mulcahy's self-defense that 'appearance'--the mere concrete facts of what one is and does--is somehow less important than one's invisible 'essence.' And it is a view that is plainly akin to the tendency of many liberals of the era to separate 'justice,' in the words of Mulcahy again, from 'truth,' to consider scruples that interfered with work for a 'good cause' [such as Communism] mere ivory tower pedantry. Not that Miss McCarthy fails to make clear that the progressive college and its liberal faculty are right and attractive in many ways, and create a world in which good things can grow as well as bad. But her story makes it even clearer that there is not safety in good intentions when their pursuit requires us to ignore the truth."

Irvin Stock
Mary McCarthy
(U Minnesota 1968) 24-29

"McCarthy, herself liberal, often criticizes liberals. *The Groves of Academe* is about the consequences of an ill-considered liberal gesture by a college president. And extremely well structured novel, *The Groves of*

Academe moves directly to a conclusion that is stunning yet so consistent with all that has gone before as to seem inevitable.

The action takes place within a four-month period, beginning in January with Henry Mulcahy's 'amazed, really amazed' reaction to a letter from President Maynard Hoar informing him that he will not be reappointed as literature instructor for the coming academic year and ending with Hoar's announcement to a member of his faculty that he has resigned from his job. The thirteen chapters detail the relentlessly logical sequence of events by which Mulcahy ousts Hoar.

The central character is Mulcahy, but the moral center is Domna Rejnev. At twenty-three, she is the youngest member of Jocelyn's Literature Department. She is intelligent, aristocratic, and scrupulously conscientious; 'her very beauty had the quality, not of radiance or softness, but of incorruptibility; it was the beauty of an absolute or a political theorem.' She is vulnerable, however, because of her loyalty, and for that reason Mulcahy seeks her out when he is in *ex-tremis*.

She is 'conventional,' he thinks cynically, 'believing in a conventional moral order and shocked by deviations from it into a sense of helpless guilt toward the deviator. In other words...a true liberal.' Mulcahy has no conventional conscience, and he uses Domna's strengths and weaknesses impartially. He is a dreadful man....

Mulcahy...can 'see' now that Hoar is using the dissident Mulcahy 'as a scapegoat to satisfy the reactionary trustees and fundraisers.' It crosses Mulcahy's mind that he could 'ruin the man forever, at least in liberal circles,' by exposing him, an idea that he will put into service at the novel's end, by which time it is unfortunately true.

Mulcahy came to Jocelyn as a 'refugee'; there were accusations of 'Communitic, atheistic tendencies' when he was dismissed from his previous position, and he has had to disavow Party membership before a state legislature. Hired by Hoar--'author of a pamphlet, "The Witch Hunt in Our Universities"...photogenic, curly-haired evangelist of the right to teach, leader of torch parades against the loyalty oath, vigorous foe of 'thought control'--Mulcahy was welcomed to Jocelyn as 'an exemplar, a modern witness to the ordeal by slander.' Hen, as his friends call him, has been a trouble-maker during his year and a half at Jocelyn, inclined to incite tempests in teapots and disinclined to meet classes, keep appointments, maintain records, and return student papers. He is not, however, being fired. His appointment was a temporary one intended to tide him over while he sought a more suitable position....

He regards himself as a victim of the 'ferocious envy of mediocrity for excellence' in his failure to hold jobs in a 'series of halfway-good colleges.... Mulcahy has a student following, however, among the 'traditional' students.... In order to keep his job, Mulcahy will need the support of his colleagues. The women probably will be won to his side by the threat to Cathy's health, but the men may more readily defend him on grounds of academic freedom. Mulcahy seeks out Domna as his first ally and tells her a whole story that will cover both bases: of the dismissal, of an unwritten promise that his appointment would be made permanent when he came to Jocelyn, of Hoar's knowledge of Cathy's grave condition and therefore his culpability in jeopardizing her life by firing Mulcahy, and, finally and carefully, of his membership in the Communist Party as 'one of those unfortunate prisoners' of the Party, persecuted alike by Communists, who know that he is their enemy, and by anti-Communists, who do not know that. Hoar has, Mulcahy tells Domna, obviously found out about the old affiliation and is firing him for it. 'That he had never, as it happened, chanced to join the Communist Party organizationally did not diminish the truth of this revelation,' he reflects.

Here is the irony at the center of the book. Mulcahy prides himself on being the first, 'so far as he knew, in all history, to expose the existence of a frame-up by framing himself first.' Surely a liberal president will retain a Communist....

By traditional standards, Mulcahy has the best credentials on the literature faculty. He has its only Ph.D. and is the only member whose publications have won recognition outside of Jocelyn. Jocelyn is, however, not a traditional college, and advanced degrees and publications are not requirements imposed on the faculty. Mulcahy's colleagues are also impressed by his intelligence, by the 'preternatural activity' of his

brain, but he is without other redeeming qualities.... Mulcahy, who disapproves of the methods at Jocelyn, whose professional abilities fill no needs at Jocelyn, and who is troublesome and unreliable.... Hired as a martyr and retained as an object of charity, he prevails....

Domna has dinner...with the Mulcahys, and Cathy, after having too much to drink, lets it slip that she has known all along about the struggle for her husband's job. Since Mulcahy has assured Domna that this information could be fatal to Cathy and had to be kept from her at any cost, Domna is shocked by the revelation and flees the Mulcahys as soon as she gracefully can. The renewal of Mulcahy's contract coincides therefore with his estrangement from the chief engineer of his salvation.... [Furthermore] Keogh is able to tell them authoritatively that Mulcahy never joined the Party....

His identification with Joyce is part of a 'delusional system' in which, Domna tells Bentkoop, 'Henry Mulcahy is Christ in the disguise of Bloom and Earwicker, the family man, the fathers eternal and consubstantial with the son.' Bentkoop adds that Christ's experience patterns classical paranoia, shown by a 'belief in divine origin, special calling...the cult of exclusive disciples, betrayal, justification.' The words that come to Mulcahy's mind express the constancy and depth of his self-reverence... Hoar's hands are as 'clean as Pilate's,' he thinks. While he licks his little wooden spoon, his ice cream melts in a paper-and-plastic 'chalice.' Friends who have any reservations 'betray' or 'lose faith in' him, which is 'apostasy.' He requires absolute loyalty and uncritical devotion....

Although Mulcahy may be of the devil's party, Bentkoop philosophically grants that 'the devil is a theist, too.' It is an interesting argument which imbues Bentkoop's advocacy of Mulcahy with a validity lacking in Domna's. She is a formalist and an atheist.... Mulcahy...'looks at truth with the eyes of a literary critic,' Bentkoop explains, 'and measures a statement by its persuasiveness. If he himself can be persuaded he accepts the moot statement as established.... 'Is it true?' you want to know, but the question's irrelevant and footless'....

Escape from the 'academic maze' costs Maynard Hoar a high price. Blackmailed by the outraged, outrageous Mulcahy, Hoar actually considers bribing the man to leave Jocelyn; he also thinks of Samson--bringing the temple down. But he chooses the more moderate course of resignation, a gesture that he tells Bentkoop is, in a way, his farewell to progressivism.... He has experienced a kind of epiphany during the [poetry] symposium, through the classical content of the lectures so alien to Jocelyn students awash in the unformed present, through his astonishment at the sigh of *nuns* on the Jocelyn campus: "I thought I had gone mad'....

Lest we reach any facile conclusions about the novel's endorsement of the traditional over the progressive, it is well to point out that everybody thinks the villainous Mulcahy is equipped to do well in a traditional college. It is not because of Jocelyn's progressive methods, either, that so much of what goes on in faculty meetings is sophisticated niggling or that student uprisings threaten over Lilliputian issues (whether plates in the dining hall should be passed clockwise or counterclockwise). The homely details of small-college life everywhere are magnified by the microscope through which Jocelyn is viewed: the waste of energy on trivia, the all-too-human motives often underlying the high rhetoric and sharp wit, the endless agonizing over minute questions, the jealousy with which intellectual territories are guarded and better students coveted. As for the end result, the oldtimers among the teachers know that the student body has always a 'large percentage of trouble-makers and a handful of gifted creatures who would redeem the whole.' It is the theory rather than the practice of progressive education that comes under attack.

The Groves of Academe is probably McCarthy's best novel, perhaps the best academic novel American literature has produced. Its satire is amiable, the 'norm' of right reason and morality clearly implied, the dilemma--what to do about a man like Mulcahy--acknowledged as a true, not a false, dilemma. The characters are well realized, save Bentkoop, who, being a realist and a theist, is a little hard to pin down. Ideas, which are the very fabric of the novel, are the properties of the characters; one rarely feels that a character is conjured up to serve merely as a mouthpiece. The essence and voice of Mulcahy are so perfectly rendered that, repelled as we are, we nonetheless respond to him in human terms, are swept along by his arguments--for he *is* intelligent--or are moved to pity--for he *does* need his job. Finally, *The Groves of*

Academe is an extremely well made novel, with all its parts relevant to the advancement of its simple but exquisite plot."

Willene Schaefer Hardy
Mary McCarthy
(Frederick Ungar 1981) 103-15, 119-121

"Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952) was written as an academic *1984*: the way the world ends at what should be a citadel of learning. McCarthy takes her epigraph from Horace's *Epistles*: One seeks truth among the groves of academe. But truth in her tale is hopelessly confused, becoming entangled in McCarthyite politics in the time of the Rosenbergs, Hiss, the Un-American Activities Committee, Nixon, and all the rest of the 'wild bunch.' Since truth has become suspect, the greatest truth becomes the biggest lie. To protect oneself, one must lie; the groves of academe are, very possibly, the best place for such lies.

When Dr. Henry Mulcahy (the sole Ph.D. in Jocelyn College's literature department) finds a letter from the president informing him that his appointment has been terminated, he desperately needs some strategy to forestall the event. The truth is he took the appointment knowing it might be for only a year, and he served at the pleasure of the president, Maynard Hoar (a name too broad even for satirical purposes). Like most of the students and faculty at 'experimental' Jocelyn, in Pennsylvania, Mulcahy is unappetizing, though supposedly distinguished: Guggenheim fellow, Rhodes scholar, contributor to *The Nation* and *Kenyon Review*. Married, the father of four small children, he is, at forty-one, at the crossroads of a very checkered career. McCarthy, however, never makes clear why a former Rhodes scholar would find himself in such a backwater college. Mulcahy is apparently a loser, but even mediocrities in the academy are recognized for achievements such as his.

Mulcahy decides to use the political atmosphere as his weapon. Since Hoar poses as a liberal, has in fact written a pamphlet called 'The Witch Hunt in Our Universities,' Mulcahy decides to trap the president in his own rhetoric. By posing as a Communist Party member and claiming, further, that Hoar knows Mrs. Mulcahy is a dying woman, Mulcahy will gain sympathy and political support. The liberal college community will rally round anyone whose rights are being traduced. Mulcahy plans to create an atmosphere at Jocelyn that will make Hoar retreat, or else appear to be part of the very witch hunt he has condemned in his pamphlet. Like many of her *Partisan Review* colleagues in the 1950s, McCarthy directs her scorn at liberals, who, she assumes, pursue their politics unthinkingly. Mulcahy has taken into his confidence a young teacher of Russian, Domna Rejnev, suspecting that beneath her hauteur she is a conventional liberal whose sense of guilt can be played upon. '...she was a true liberal...who could not tolerate in her well-modulated heart that others should be wickeder than she, any more than she could bear that she should be richer, better born, better looking than some statistical median. Mulcahy has, of course, guessed correctly.

There is the potential here of a first-rate satirical comment, but McCarthy gets in her own way. Her depiction of faculty is undifferentiated, and her presentation of students as a swarmy bunch has all the condescension of a Vassar graduate. Vitiating the satire at every stage is McCarthy's own assumption of superiority, and that connected to the fact she is attacking liberals, *her own kind of people*. Of course, a novelist can choose her own materials, her own pressure points, but satire--unlike burlesque--presupposes balance, an awareness of several countering elements. And in contemporary satire, as against its eighteenth-century versions, the author is part of the process and needs greater sensitivity to contexts. McCarthy indulges herself and expects us to acquiesce.

Part of the problem with overkill is that we come to sympathize haphazardly with the wrong character at the wrong time. In terms of what college presidents are capable of, Hoar is not a whore. Also, we begin to feel sorry for Mulcahy, since his talents do seem more extensive than those of his colleagues. Even Domna, who should be pivotal, becomes murky. She's a lovely young woman who becomes Mulcahy's fool, a political foil, someone who, feeling used, should be resentful. But she fades from sight, and turns up only to remind us she was once important. The lack of coherent elements results from that constant need for overkill. No one can survive McCarthy, and after thirty years the novel catches almost nothing of our memories of the time. The academy in the 1950s was a far more complex, compelling, and, indeed, savage place."

Frederick R. Karl

"The two and a half years she spent writing the novel coincided with the 'witchhunting' period brought on by Joseph McCarthy, a United States Senator from Wisconsin, whose anti-Communist campaign created an atmosphere of fear in the country. [No, Communism created the fear in the country: the threat of nuclear annihilation by the Soviet Union, whose spies in the U.S. government, hired by liberals, were exposed by Senator McCarthy. They were not "witches," they were traitors working to overthrow the democratic government of the United States. Communists are estimated to have murdered over 110 million people during the 20th century.] He charged, *usually* with little evidence [This liberal critic does not *deny* the evidence and implicitly *admits* that in some cases there was more than a "little."], that Communists had infiltrated the United States Department of State and other areas of government. His accusations and subsequent investigations affected thousands of people. College professors, entertainers, journalists, clergymen, and government workers came under suspicion. McCarthyism, as this red-hunting state of mind came to be called, is the axis on which *The Groves of Academe* turns. [italics added]

The plot is based on the recognition that while in the outside world it was dangerous to have once been a Communist, in the academic world, a former Communist had to be defended [because many academics were Marxists sympathetic to Communism then, and are even more so today, as their political party has become openly Socialist]. Thus, when the protagonist, the incompetent, irresponsible, self-pitying, but brilliant Henry Mulcahy, an instructor at the progressive Jocelyn College, is informed that his contract will not be renewed, he pretends to have been a Communist so that he can claim to be the victim of a witch-hunt. Mulcahy knows that to have been an ex-Communist will make him the automatic beneficiary of the code of academic freedom [for Leftists]. He also knows that no self-respecting college president would dare fire even the most incompetent former Communist, for fear of losing caste as a liberal. But when the president and a faculty committee question an old anarchist acquaintance of Mulcahy's, who is at Jocelyn for a poetry conference, they discover that Mulcahy has never been a member of the party. The ever-inventive Mulcahy, who has been told about the interrogation, improvises a new course; he confronts the president and, using the secret investigation as evidence that the president has betrayed his liberal principles, forces *him* to resign.

The Groves of Academe is a satire not only of 'kneejerk' liberalism [political correctness] but of progressive educational systems and the craven behavior of the academic community that nourishes Professor Mulcahy. Reviewers, for a change, praised McCarthy for satirizing avant-garde intellectual orthodoxies, for 'a rare talent for corrosive satire,' for 'a stunning narrowly aimed accuracy,' and for her affinity with Moliere and Congreve.... Dwight Macdonald was among those who disliked *The Groves of Academe*. He found two principal flaws. There was too much discussion, he thought, the 'usual static quality, even worse than in *Oasis*--acres of intellectual arguments, back and forth, like a tennis match.' Several critics shared this complaint. One wrote that 'through their constant self-analysis her characters come near to reducing her novels to groves of thought.' 'Motives are unearthed under motives unearthed under other motives.... Scrupulousness becomes obsessive.... She wants justice done, and to be seen to be done' and it is a little fatiguing to watch justice being done at such length.' Macdonald also complained about what he saw as the unlikable characters....

The reviewers of *The Groves of Academe* were split...some sensing a real sympathy for the characters, others agreeing with Macdonald [see above]. The reviewer for *The Atlantic Monthly*, for example, wrote that 'she appears to revel in making every character contemptible or ludicrous,' and John Chamberlain wrote that 'no professional enemy of the egghead could be more severe on a group of double domes than is Mary McCarthy in her collective portrait of the Jocelyn faculty.' But Louis Auchincloss, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Robert Halsband disagreed. Auchincloss saw 'more sympathy on her part than appears at first reading for the poor souls'; Rosenfeld thought 'the characters come off rather well'; and Halsband felt that 'her compassion for them is implicit.'

"Like much of her daily existence at Bard, the homely illustration of Kierkegaardian freedom would be plowed into *The Groves of Academe* in 1952. Domna Rejnev, a White Russian emigre in the literature department, [is] the novel's Mary McCarthy character... The 'tall, soft-bellied, lisping' Professor Henry ('Hen') Mulcahy, whose profile is largely drawn from an actual professor at Bard in the late 1940s, Lincoln Reis, owes his paranoid psyche to the vividness of McCarthy's own imagination."

Carol Brightman
Writing Dangerously: Mary McCarthy and Her World
(Clarkson Potter 1992) 285, 348

"McCarthy's literary politics in this era are thus not... 'conservative,' but are instead the product of leftist self-critique.... *The Groves of Academe* seems uniquely designed to demonstrate McCarthy's position of being both against and within the growing Cold War consensus. The novel's setting is Jocelyn College, a small, experimental liberal arts college--not unlike Bard or Sarah Lawrence, where McCarthy taught in the late 1940s.

When an unsuccessful English instructor named Henry Mulcahy learns that his contract will not be renewed, he concocts for himself a history of Communist Party membership. By spreading this falsehood, he hopes to make it politically unwise for Maynard Hoar, his liberal college president already on record against the Red Scare, to dismiss him. To prosper in this ruse, Mulcahy must win the support of his English department colleagues, which he does by manipulating the confidence of young, idealistic Domna Rejnev. Mulcahy preys on Domna's sympathy by inventing for his wife Cathy a life-threatening illness, and telling Domna he is protecting Cathy from worry by withholding from her the knowledge of her own illness. To complete his bogus drama of politically correct injustice, 1950s-style, Mulcahy ties the false secret of Cathy's illness to the false secret of his Communist Party membership by fabricating the college president's silent, knowing complicity regarding both secrets.

This silent complicity is the genius of Mulcahy's scheme, and a coup on McCarthy's part as well. Domna's silence, necessary to protect Mulcahy's web of lies, is ensured by his insistence that Maynard Hoar already knows all while Cathy knows, and must know, nothing. By the same token, McCarthy invites her readers to know all: to assume that those at the helm of the 'real' Red Scare are silently, knowingly complicit in their anticommunist fictions, deliberately withholding systematic falsehoods from the citizens they purportedly represent. Cathy and the body politic are really healthy, but it does not suit Mulcahy and his scheming analogues to acknowledge that fact.

Having knowledge and acting on it are two different things, as McCarthy's fiction always demonstrates (an important reason why her fiction is often short on plot and long on talk). McCarthy's characters--in her autobiographical prose as well as her fiction--frequently know who their enemies are, but find themselves inextricably linked to these enemies. This is Domna's dilemma, because she discovers Mulcahy's duplicity barely halfway through the novel. Interestingly, her eyes are opened by Cathy Mulcahy, who reveals that she knows too much about her husband's machinations to be the untroubled, sick, passive housewife of his fiction. The male paradigm that dominates the action for the first half of the book is broken by the bond between two women, as Mulcahy himself observes while raging at his wife: "I'll tell you why you did it [why you revealed your knowledge to Domna]. You hate to be left out of anything..."

Mulcahy's class critique of Cathy's friendship is specious, because his manipulations are aimed at preserving a position in the bourgeois institution of Jocelyn College. What rings through much more honestly is Cathy's rejection of the passive, stupid role devised for her. In fact, that role is not even stereotypically feminine, as Mulcahy must acknowledge that his fiction does not grant her the 'mother-wit' to divine his masculine protectiveness. Cathy's willful slip of the lip, her knowing too much for the male paradigm, allows Domna to see through Mulcahy's patriarchal fictions.

From this point in the novel, Domna is clearly the center of Mulcahy's attention. Focusing on Mulcahy as protagonist, as the con artist trying to pull off a heist, turns the novel into a generic crime story, where right and wrong are clearly delineated, and the only suspense is whether the robber will elude the cops. Such a reading is also politically centrist: by figuring Mulcahy as an aberrant individual operating outside

the system, the system is implicitly approved. If he succeeds, then Mulcahy becomes the rugged individual, the heroic exception that proves the rule by outstripping it in an isolated case; if he fails, then justice will have been served and order preserved. Thus, it is important instead to see Domna as protagonist, the figure against the ground of Mulcahy as system--Mulcahy as the rule of corruption and coercion, not the exception. By the time Domna takes center stage, Mulcahy's manipulations have firmly established his agency and compel the thoughts and actions of all characters great and small. At this point, the 'very narrow range of choice' [Albert] Guerard complacently laments in his review becomes a more insistent dilemma, as Domna must ponder how to act on her new political understanding of Henry Mulcahy.

Domna's ally in her struggle is Alma Fortune, a more experienced colleague in the department. As they meet in Alma's room to plot strategy, McCarthy inserts a description, almost circular and at least partially sardonic, of their difficulties as liberal intellectuals in search of a strategy to resist Mulcahy's power play: 'They were conscious of owing a duty to the students to protect them from the eccentricities of a teacher whom they themselves had sponsored, but they could not be sure how far this duty extended and where it conflicted with their duty to Mulcahy as a fellow-being with certain gifts and certain handicaps, for which due allowance must be made'....

McCarthy sharply contrasts this liberal muddle, this paralysis of ethical analysis, with Mulcahy's less inhibited *Realpolitik*, by a conjecture Domna offers Alma: "I sometimes think Henry knows us better than we know ourselves. He forces us to choose whenever we see him. He asks only one question, 'Are you with me or against me?' While the women wring their hands over moral principles, Mulcahy proceeds by the loyalty oath's aggressive binarism.

Unfortunately, Domna and Alma do not proceed at all. They find themselves thwarted, more by their own tangle of duties and obligations than by Mulcahy's unscrupulous initiatives. And, perhaps, by a couple of McCarthy's novelistic trademarks that ultimately contain the resistances her texts identify. Domna and Alma's dilemma is abruptly set aside to present the satiric trivialities of an academic conference on poetry. McCarthy's shift of scene presents the trademark outside observer to comment objectively upon the fray, a scruffy proletarian poet named Keogh, who gives himself advice authorized by its placement so close to the end of the novel: '*Keogh, keep out of this, or they will get you...* Within twenty hours, he perceived, they had succeeded in leading him up the garden path into one of their academic mazes, where a man could wander for eternity, meeting himself in mirrors' (249).

Keogh's insistence on remaining apart, or differentiating himself, from the struggle against Mulcahy removes the hope of an effective challenge to Mulcahy's paradigm. With Keogh's condemnation of academia as labyrinth--which, after all, was originally designed for containment of the Other--McCarthy effectively concedes victory to Mulcahy. She provides no Theseus, nor are Domna and Alma able to act as more independent Ariadnes. McCarthy's retreat indicates the limits of differentiation within the ideological conflicts set in motion on the Jocelyn campus. This shortfall is another McCarthy trademark: her fiction is peopled with smart, brassy women who find themselves overmatched by their conditions.

Perhaps, however, McCarthy had other options she might have exercised. Alma Fortune is a character marked with signs of possibility, a path of greater resistance down which McCarthy could have traveled farther. To do so, one would start with the overbrief description of Alma's sexual history, which blurs gender and challenges the assumed hierarchy and permanence inherent in marriage... Alma's niche at Jocelyn also appears to be one she has consciously and somewhat independently contrived, an alternative arrangement of privacy and affiliation, with an authority Alma does not hesitate to employ: 'She was both extremely outspoken and extremely reserved...'

Early in the novel, when the English department is still naively gathering support for Mulcahy, Domna is shocked, both admiring and a bit jealous, to learn that Alma's zeal exceeds her own: Alma has already prepared a letter of resignation. Even Mulcahy is surprised by her action, and prefers that her resignation be provisional, a negotiation with authority. Alma's response is intriguing: '[M]y feminine instinct tells me that he [college president Maynard Hoar] responds only to the irrevocable, to a *fait accompli*'.... Alma's reply provides a thumbnail sketch of an ideological continuum: on one level, she and Mulcahy, as radical

and reactionary extremists, respectively, stand against Maynard's centrist lack of imagination. On another level, Alma positions herself as bellwether for Domna and other women to reap the benefits of her opposition to patriarchy. To radical Alma, tomorrow is present today when she thinks of her sisters. It is a shame that *The Groves of Academe* does not offer more of Alma's story, but her presence nevertheless complicates the 'narrow range of choice' the novel supposedly reflects. Alma's ready defiance, and Mulcahy's anger at his wife Cathy's bond with Domna ('Everything has changed here since you met her,') are the text's most promising, most radical moments.

However, it is Domna's character that offers the best perspective on McCarthy's own sense of political agency in the Cold War. Domna's true colors are revealed in her first conversation with Mulcahy, as we share his sense of her reaction to his fabrications: 'This new admission, he saw with relief and a certain misanthropy, had put her altogether in his hands; his malfeasance would make her submit to his better judgment... In other words, she was a true liberal, as he had always suspected.' This definition of the 'true liberal' in Chapter 3 explains Domna's immobility in Chapter 11. When Domna, a liberal like Jocelyn president Maynard Hoar, finally sees the fait accompli of Mulcahy's entrenched power, she lacks the imagination to find alternative strategies of resistance. Domna's strongest reaction is an immobilizing, blanket self-condemnation: 'You know what Tolstoy would have said?... He would have said we are all fools.'

The line might as well be McCarthy's, whose oft remarked-upon 'cold eye' and bitter irony are sharpest when they are cast upon herself. As critic Paula Rabinowitz says about an earlier McCarthy persona, Margaret Sargent of *The Company She Keeps*, 'Even when "she" is the focus of a vignette, she is observed from without by an intimate, knowing narrator...whose ironic tone distances her story from its teller.' Rabinowitz's observation allows us to see that what Wald reads as a post-World War II 'phase of erratic and personalized dissidence' is at the same time vintage McCarthy. Although so much of her fiction features an intimate, insular setting, from Utopia in *The Oasis* to New Leeds in *A Charmed Life* to the circle of women who form *The Group* to Jocelyn College in *The Groves of Academe*, these small spaces rarely provide the sort of haven an Alma Fortune might fashion. They become instead microcosms, in which the power of a consensus can be portrayed in all its ugliness, an ugliness that ultimately, despite the scattered glimmerings of hope and resistance, condemns the victims almost as harshly as the victors.

NOTE: In a letter to Hannah Arendt a few months after the publication of *Groves of Academe*, McCarthy connects Richard Nixon, then campaigning for vice president, with Mulcahy..."

Timothy F. Waples
"A Very Narrow Range of Choice': Political Dilemma in *The Groves of Academe*"
Twenty-Four Ways (1996) 79-85

"The novel's narrative voice quivers with Mulcahy's own awareness on the border of the lies he is telling, which grow quickly in his mind from convenient and even amusing strategies to furious challenges thrown out at the world which so notably fails to give him his due. He sets out to convince Domna Rejnev of 'the imminent danger to Cathy, a danger which, only a few moments before, he had been so fuzzy-minded as to regard as merely hypothetical but which, now that he had faced up to it, should make everything else secondary' (*Grove* 41). This awareness, with the text and therefore within Mulcahy, that he has gone in a matter of a few moments from hypothetical to imminent, is couched in the self-serving mental phrasings of Mulcahy's very vocal consciousness; he has 'faced up to it' rather than invented the danger, he was previously 'fuzzy-minded' rather than realistic.

Mulcahy himself, then, as he invents the story, comes immediately to believe as well. Not necessarily to believe that it actually *is* true, but to believe that the world owes him deference and special consideration because it *could be* true, just as it could be true that he had once been a communist. He makes the jump immediately from seizing on the strategic promise of his wife's illness to feeling outrage and indignation at the callous way in which the college president is willing to put her life at risk. 'And yet there were many, he thought vindictively, on this 'liberal' campus who would suppose that Cathy's condition was something cooked up by himself to ward off being dismissed without so much as a thank-you, many...who would want a thorough medical report signed by an 'impartial' physician, in fact a

coroner's inquest certifying the cause of death, before they would believe the simple clinical truth, just as, he presumed, they would have to see a Communist Party membership-card (produced by an F.B.I. agent) made out to Henry Mulcahy, before they would be willing to admit that his dismissal was a part of a campaign of organized terror in the universities against men of independent mind.' In fact, of course, he would be no more able to produce that thorough medical report than he would be to show a Communist Party membership card, but he has transformed his complete lack of evidence, his own outright fabrications, into a sense of withering scorn directed at anyone so cynical as to refuse to believe those fabrications.

The parallel political and medical perils that Mulcahy conjures in order to impel his colleagues' support and sympathy are very much the stuff of which McCarthy believes novels should be made. In Communist Party membership, Mulcahy is claiming involvement with the great historical currents of his time (and McCarthy's); in his wife's potentially mortal illness, he is invoking the tragedy of the body's frailty and the biological boundaries of life. *A man with a communist past, a woman whose health has been destroyed by childbearing.* But...neither politics nor illness will actually serve as a source of suspense or even as a turn in the plot, because both are invented by the central character. The untangling of the plot rests on his attempts to get other characters to believe his stories, or to act as if they do; the stories are invented to direct the plot of his own story."

Perri Klass

"The Stink of Father Zossima: The Medical Fact in Mary McCarthy's Fiction"
Twenty-Four Ways (1996) 111-12

"The question of whether a member of the Communist Party has the right to teach--a question very much in the air during the two-week period when she was being called a Communist turncoat--had become the linchpin of the ingenious plot for a novel she had begun working on full-time.... The novel was called *The Groves of Academe*. With an ironic nod to Horace, whose second epistle provides the epigraph for the novel...'And go seek for truth in the groves of academe'...she set out to show that truth was a very rare commodity among the denizens of academia.

During the early spring of 1951, the first chapter came out in *The New Yorker*, setting the scene for the amusing contretemps that would give the novel both its zest and its plot. In the very first paragraph Henry Mulcahy, a Joyce scholar and well-known campus radical, receives the news that his one-year contract at Jocelyn College has not been renewed by Maynard Hoar, the college president. The chapter reaches its climax with Mulcahy's choosing a weapon that will leave Jocelyn's president with no defense. Mulcahy will let it be known that his wife is desperately ill, that he has been hired with the promise of tenure, and that the president, an avowed liberal and champion of political freedom, has fired him solely because of his left-wing politics....

The Groves of Academe came out to generally positive reviews. As a novelist she had grown more skillful and she had chosen a target that a fairly wide audience could appreciate. Her talent was never in question. But some reviewers had reservations about the way she treated some of her characters.... In 1952, depending on your perspective, *The Groves of Academe* was wonderfully droll or terribly mean-spirited, her best book or a falling off. If you 'd had your fill of loyalty oaths and witch-hunts [if you were a Communist or a fellow-traveler], you could only admire the novel's audacity--the way Henry Mulcahy saves himself by pretending to be a Communist. If you had a passing acquaintance with Harold Taylor, you immediately recognized him as the model for Maynard Hoar, the good-looking college president who makes the mistake of granting Henry Mulcahy an extra year without believing for a minute that he was ever a Communist and then fatally compromises his own integrity by getting caught questioning a visiting poet about Mulcahy's purported Party membership.

If you had spent some time at [Bard College], you spotted Lincoln Reis, the bane of Bard's philosophy department, as the inspiration for Henry Mulcahy. You spotted Fred Dupee as Howard Furness, the chairman of the literature department who is a little sweet on Domna Rejnev, the Russian bluestocking and deluded Mulcahy supporter. You recognized Irma Brandeis in Alma Fortune, the lover of Goethe and Jane Austen who tenders her resignation in support of Mulcahy. You recognized Fritz Shafer in John Bentkoop, the wholesome and upright teacher of Philosophy who joins Domna and Alma in Mulcahy's

support. And you spotted Artine Artinian as the model for Aristide Poncey, the temporizing chairman of the literature and languages division who has a 'taste for colonial or, as it were, secondary sources of a language' in the teachers he hires and little taste for chaperoning the students he takes abroad.

At the end of his life, Harold Taylor, who believed that not only Jocelyn's president but Jocelyn itself owed as much to McCarthy's teaching stint at Sarah Lawrence as it did to Bard, had the grace to credit her with a job well done:

Harold Taylor: 'I was looking at *The Groves of Academe* last summer because I'm doing my autobiography. I was redoing the chapter on Randall and Mary. I read the book again and it's very good. It's packed with authentic detail. She's caught the attitude of the softhearted liberal. Randall Jarrell's book doesn't have the intricacy of Mary's observations about the liberal faculty members in a progressive environment. I don't think there's anybody who has better caught the flavor of an intellectual community where everything is permitted.'

Looking back, it was possible for Harold Taylor to see that some of her observations about her characters had actually been quite accurate. When the book came out, he naturally lacked that sort of perspective. But you didn't have to see yourself in the book to object to the way that she treated her characters. What she saw as 'even-handed justice,' Dwight Macdonald saw as condescension. While his not liking the book reflected, to some degree, the state of his relations with its author, that did not make his critical assessment any less valid."

Frances Kiernan
Seeing Mary Plain: A Life of Mary McCarthy
(Norton 2000) 332-36

"Antifa or antifa--lower case is, if you prefer--may have gotten its start in Germany, but it's flourishing here in the United States as never before. This growth occurred even though truly achieving the movement's stated goal--anarchy--would create chaos, leading to civilizational destruction of a likely unparalleled extent in human history in our industrialized and high-tech nation of almost 330 million.

The deepest causes of their violent and more than slightly deranged behavior are undoubtedly personal and psychoanalytic in nature. The story of the Seattle grandmother who identified her bomb-throwing grandson from video of a protective vest she bought him--he said he was 'peaceful'--is a novel crying out to be written. But whatever the psychological profiles of the individual Antifa members, almost all of them share one thing in common: They went to American schools.

And those schools, with only a few notable exceptions, talked down and continue to talk down the United States of America to one degree or another from kindergarten through doctorate. It is, to my knowledge, unique in history that the public and private educational systems of a country so thoroughly and consistently criticize the country itself. (The Chinese Cultural Revolution did it briefly, but Mao's immediate central government was always supported.

For decades, our schools have been self-replicating machines, preaching to college students, directly or indirectly, the left-wing gospel according to Howard Zinn (and the Frankfurt School and so forth) and sending them out in turn to preach this junior varsity, critical theory Marxism themselves as teachers at whatever level at all manner of institutions throughout the country. The youngest of those levels is perhaps the most dangerous because it's the most impressionable. Antifa members are therefore only doing what they have been taught all along, getting rid of a cancer called the United States.

This connection between Antifa and the teaching profession is so profound that some insist the majority of those hidden behind the black masks are indeed teacher. Others, needless to say including the liberal media, have denied this. It's impossible to know for certain. Antifa, like some Islamic terror groups, doesn't have a formal leadership structure, why would they need it? They also don't keep records. This, however, is probably a case where the cliché about smoke and fire applies. Whether Antifa is 50 percent teachers or 20 percent teachers, it's a lot of teachers.

Any reader of websites such as The College Fix or Campus Reform can see the extent to which almost all our schools have their tentacles buried deeply into the supposed social justice causes espoused more militantly in the streets by Antifa. The governors and mayors of the localities where the riots are taking place are themselves the products of the same educational institutions. This may account in part for their reluctance to crack down. Some part of them is identifying with the rioters. They want to burn it down, no matter if the violent protests lead to the renaming of this country as New Venezuela, figuratively and literally.

Antifa is an excruciatingly public manifestation of a very deep infection that has metastasized throughout our society from the schools. It will only get worse if we don't change our educational system--pronto. Ironically, the beginnings of this change are one of the few, perhaps the only, good things to emanate from the pandemic. With schools shut or online, many are evaluating whether the system serves our young people, practically (in terms of careers) or ideologically. What kind of education is it when 95 percent of college professors vote Democratic, and mostly left Democratic at that?

Viewpoint diversity, anyone? Shall I homeschool my child? Shall I send him or her to college, so they can come back at Thanksgiving in an Antifa T-shirt and accuse me of being a capitalist pig when I just spent 50 grand for their tuition? Something is wrong with this picture. Change is undoubtedly coming. As a wise man once said, 'Faster, please.' I don't know about you, but I'm sick of mushbrains throwing firebombs at police stations."

Roger Simon
"Antifa is the Natural Product of Our Educational System"
Opinion, *The Epoch Times*
(August 5-11, 2020)

The Groves of Academe (1952) is a Communist novel: (1) the primary social evil in the novel is anti-Communism; (2) as an atheist and a Marxist throughout her career, McCarthy believed in the basic tenets of Communism and supported Trotsky against Stalin. "She never joined the Communist Party, but she had friends who did." "The outburst at Pflaumen's party ["Meg was a violent Trotskyist"] was an attempt to attract the attention of, and claim kinship with, the Marxist Erdman." (Hardy 3, 45) (3) McCarthy believed Communists did not have a "right" but should be allowed to teach in higher education; (4) Mulcahy's rule that you're either with me or against me is the same as the loyalty oath being applied in higher education and Hollywood in 1952 to force Communists to reveal whether they supported the overthrow of the U.S. government to become a colony of the Communist Soviet Union at a time when that nation was threatening Americans with nuclear annihilation. McCarthy acknowledges the seriousness of the situation, but the Jocelyn faculty discusses whether Communists should be allowed to teach as if that ideology was no more dangerous than veganism. To them, Communists are simply "dissidents" like other ideologies--and proof of their academic freedom. None dissent when one faculty member parallels the absolutism of Communism to Catholicism, as if both were movements to overthrow the government.

(5) Critics have identified the model for Mulcahy as a professor at Bard, but according to a letter from McCarthy to Hannah Arendt, though disguised by differences the inner Mulcahy was also modeled on Richard Nixon (Waples, *Twenty-Four Ways* 85); the future president and Senator Joe McCarthy were the most prominent and influential anti-Communists on the national scene; (6) here and elsewhere Mary McCarthy sees Nixon and Joe McCarthy as "right-wingers" who used anti-Communism to their own political advantage, like Mulcahy. Although he is a leftist, ironically, in desperation Mulcahy uses the same political weapon used by Nixon. Mulcahy is amoral like a Communist, but serves himself rather than a party. Since they are represented in the novel only by Mulcahy, all anti-Communists are implicitly evil: They are liars, reactionary conspirators, and sexists capable of murder--to some degree mad. Mulcahy is the incarnation of evils in the leftwing world of Mary McCarthy, her equivalent of Moriarty in Sherlock Holmes. Of course, Richard Nixon is not even slightly visible in Mulcahy, because he was not the monster McCarthy fabricated. (7) Ironically, this Communist novel exposes liberals as what Communists called "useful idiots"--gullible dupes unable to recognize evil, hence enabling it: "They had felt that reluctance to intervene that characterized them as true liberals."

(8) Early in the 20th century Communists called themselves "progressives." They proceeded to murder an estimated 110 million people in the course of the century. Four years before *The Groves of Academe* was published in 1952, "the Progressives had recently been cited for ties to the Communist party." (Brightman 310) Jocelyn was founded as a Christian institution, but is now a "progressive" college. Hoar is "the first of Jocelyn's presidents who was a political progressive." He says of the school, "We're all liberals, believe me." Visiting poets note "the resemblance to the Promised Land." One poet says that there are people in this Pennsylvania town who "still imagine that they are living in the Bible." Professor Furness adds, "And up here on the hill, we still imagine it, *in our own fashion...*[italics added]. Our progressive methodology...with its emphasis on faith and individual salvation, is a Protestant return to the Old Testament... [rejecting Christ] And our presidents, poor fellows...live the dishonored life of prophets, a life of exposure and contumely, for trying to put into practice literally the precepts of a primitive liberalism" [as in the romantic Rousseau and Margaret Mead]. On campus there are "missionaries carrying the progressive doctrine from Bennington, Bard, or Reed."

This progressive doctrine is Atheist. The altar has been replaced by a podium for liberals. More precisely, the doctrine is essentially Marxist, as is suggested by Professor Furness when he asks, "Is Marx responsible for Stalin or Christ for the history of the Church? Very likely so." This parallel equates Marx with Christ in stature as a prophet, implies that for liberals Marx has replaced Christ, and absolves Communists of their crimes as if--being saviors themselves--they are no more guilty than Christ. President Hoar, "Jocelyn's 'liberal' spokesman had tuned his guitar more than once to the Russian balalaika." And Domna the "White Russian" equates liberal "*noblesses oblige*" with "the Christian ethic." McCarthy disagrees by having Mulcahy call the college "our latter-day Sodom" and by criticizing progressive education, its formless lack of discipline and rejection of history: "The courses ran normally from the immediate past to the present." McCarthy recoils from the "madness of its methodology which had produced here a world like a child's idea of China." And "we're turning out classes of sophisticated literary hollow men, without general ideas, without the philosophy or theology that's formed in adolescence, without the habit or the discipline of systematic thought." Yet McCarthy herself has rejected belief in God, the most important general idea, with a theology that induces the habit and the discipline of systematic thought. She promulgates the sophisticated hollowness she deplores in others.

(9) Atheism is expressed throughout the novel: At Jocelyn "There was a whiff of paganism in the air." The "alleged use of a course in myth to proselytize for religion" is considered a scandal. When President Hoar sees *nuns* on the campus, going into the chapel, "I thought I had gone mad." The cautious professor of comparative religion is John Bentkoop: his belief in God is implicitly a "coop," as for a *chicken*, and he is "bent"--unable to think straight, as when he supports Mulcahy--called "*Hen*"--because he would like to see at least one theist in the Literature Department. All the other literature professors are atheists. The faculty member concerned with being "like Christ" is a villain suspected of being insane. Mulcahy even considers murdering his family: "For a moment his soul clearly countenanced the idea of killing wife and child, or, rather, of letting wife and child perish for the sake of an illimitable freedom. He knew himself capable of it." McCarthy hints that he is more like Satan than like Christ when he is called a "poor devil" and when Bentkoop says Mulcahy may belong to "the devil's party"--"the devil is a theist too." President Hoar cautions Bentkoop that he had better keep his support for theism a secret at progressive Jocelyn College. Domna Rejnev says of President Hoar that "his hands were as clean as Pilate's," casting Mulcahy as a *mock-Christ*. And other liberal faculty: "Like so many gingerly Thomases, they contented themselves with fingering the wounds held out to them." Casting the devil Mulcahy as a *mock-Christ* turns the novel into a moral allegory in which Satan prevails--contributing to the pessimistic tradition of Melville's *The Confidence-Man* and Twain's "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg."

As an atheist McCarthy feels safe in passing judgment on God when she calls the creation of human beings "God's sin, which Christ perhaps redeemed." Though he is supposedly a Christian, Mulcahy is also a liberal who defends homosexual rights when he criticizes "those feminine wraths of Jehovah that wanted to wipe out a whole city in return for a sin." And did so. But it was not for just one sin, Sodom was corrupt in many ways. John Bentkoop of all people reduces Jesus Christ to a psychological disorder: "Christ's experience...is the great paradigm for the persecution psychosis." Bentkoop even suggests that Jesus was homosexual: "for it's noteworthy that He not only eschewed women, but that His betrayer was a man. The betrayer for the paranoid is always of his own sex, the loved and feared sex." And "by becoming man

precisely God underwent what could be described as madness... And like the mad, who use symbolic language, He spoke in parables." Domna replies that to her "all religious people seem a little mad.... But there is no God. God is man." Mary McCarthy is no intellectual when it comes to theology, she merely asserts her atheism without any reference to the classical arguments for the existence of God nor to testimonials from saints. As a true liberal herself, she could not win the argument and so she simply dismisses all evidence contrary to her prejudice.

To her credit, Mary McCarthy foresaw the folly of trying to correct unfair discrimination by imposing more unfair discrimination. Domna the "true liberal" parallels discrimination against Communists with discrimination against women as if morally equating the two victim groups: "If there are two candidates for a job, say, in a women's college, and both applicants are of equal or near-equal merit, we take the woman, since she lacks the man's chance of being hired by a men's college....Where discrimination exists, protection of the out-group is mandatory, even where such a policy runs the risk of creating a new set of special privileges." Furness, head of the Literature Department, points out where this policy will lead: "To vying groups of separatist minorities organized for self-protection." Consequently, "a college will become a mere dispensary for cripples of the social order." Rather than behave like cripples, however, the separatist minorities have proved to be aggressive "social justice warriors."

It would be liberals, Feminists in particular--not "right-wingers"--who with the advent of Women's Studies programs beginning in 1970 would take over American higher education, using the front group methods of the Communist Party. They legislated "affirmative action," privileging themselves and other select groups--discriminating against conservatives, white males, Christians and God. They replaced merit with identity as the highest priority in the evaluation of students and faculty, eliminated free speech, denied males due process when accused of a sexual offense, rejected the canon of traditional American literature, destroyed literary study, and established the cultural police state called "political correctness." The inevitable backlash contributed to a common view of American higher education as harmful to the country, to declining enrollments and to the bankruptcy of many colleges like Jocelyn.

The plot of this novel is outdated, since today, most higher education administrators and faculty in the liberal arts, especially in English departments, are Marxists. Their political party's platform is by now essentially the same as the program of the Communist Party.

Michael Hollister (2020)