

ANALYSIS

"The Appalachian Mountain Revolution" (1981)

Mary McCarthy

(1912-1989)

"It is well to notice the resemblance of the instruments that bring self-knowledge in *The Oasis* to those in two later stories, 'The Appalachian Revolution' (1954) and 'The Hounds of Summer' (1963). Both stories contain a threat to an idyllic state. In the first a lake, belonging by rights of usage to the 'old' summer people, is invaded by 'foreign intruders,' later revealed to the inhabitants as 'psychiatrists' who arrive in 'big black cars.' One of them is distinguished by a 'mop of gray hair,' and they all speak in 'authoritative foreign' voices; their wives are 'mountains of white flesh and bulging veins spilling out of tight new bathing suits... All of them speak loudly, in heavily stressed voices...."

Mary McCarthy has said that *The Oasis*, 'The Hounds of Summer,' and 'The Appalachian Revolution' are her favorites among her work. This is added evidence that her tendency in fiction is the essayist's, closer to the dealer in ideas, and her affection is for her work that resembles this genre. It testifies as well to her fondness for the idea of 'community,' the warm in-ness of it, the Group whose exclusiveness is endangered by encroachment. The groups she herself has been part of are intellectually highly selective and close, and *The Oasis* and the stories that follow its pattern suggest some of her doubts about the permanence of these groups, whether threatened from within (as by the realists in *The Oasis*) or from without. This affection for the fictional form of the 'community' novel is to influence future work, notably *The Group*."

Doris Grumbach
The Company She Keeps
(Coward-McCann 1967) 140

"In 'The Appalachian Revolution,' which is set in...Vermont...outsiders--refugee psychiatrists...gradually take over the "'old" summer people's' swimming hole. No more than a moment's anguish accompanies the exclusionism to which the incumbents resort. Gone are the days when McCarthy's protagonists debate the prospect of a turf fight with the natives, as they do in *The Oasis* before the strawberry pickers are chased out of camp at gunpoint. In 'The Appalachian Revolution,' Pickman ('Pickles') Callaway, a 'get things done' type and a Republican, buys an old beaver pond to assure a private beach for the vacationing mothers and children who have been drive away by the newcomers at Poor Farm Pond, where they themselves have long been squatters. Callaway, one of those Babbitt-like men for whom McCarthy nurtures a furtive affection, then traps and transports the beavers back to the original pond in revenge, not against the psychiatrists, who have disappeared, but 'for those others,' the reluctant mothers, 'who couldn't take the obvious bourgeois step of securing pleasure through ownership.' The story is an acerbic look at the personal politics of a counter cultural middle-class in the mid-1950s."

Carol Brightman
Writing Dangerously: Mary McCarthy and Her World
(Clarkson Potter 1992) 466

"McCarthy's struggle against psychoanalysis takes its most literal form in 'The Appalachian Mountain Revolution' (*Hounds*). The arrival of psychiatrists marks the disturbance and ultimately the destruction of a secluded summer spot. The psychiatrists arrive, as their black and orange license plates reveal, from New York City, and the conflict is staged between these loud, vulgar psychiatrists and the tasteful, reserved young matrons. The story has a clear allegorical dimension: the psychiatrists have altered the scenery, particularly the significantly named 'Mirror Lake.' McCarthy scatters hints of the larger cultural plot throughout the story: 'The young mothers could not help but feel forlornly that they were witnessing the end of an epoch.' They were right to feel this way, as the story reveals. The psychiatrists have imposed themselves and there is no escape. It is the end of an epoch for these matrons, for their pond will be destroyed by beavers, the magical counterparts of the psychiatrists.

When the psychiatrists arrive at the beautiful lake one of them notes with satisfaction, 'It's like a picture,' a telling comment that reveals how indirect his access to nature really is. They come back laden with rubber tires and radios, sun tan oil and the *New York Times*, unable just to enjoy the beach without the mediation of civilization. As one of the young matrons complains later to her husband, 'They're against Nature.'

The psychiatrists have changed the rules. While the young matrons communicate with subtle looks and gestures, the psychiatrists shout through 'the megaphone of their hands' and speak in 'blaring, self-commendatory tones.' They are impossible to ignore. Before the psychiatrists came the lines were invisible and understood. And it is their crude demand for explicitness that threatens the peace of the community. McCarthy explains that 'their profession had made them overbearing...they methodically pulped every experience like an orange juice extractor.' With their arrival Mirror Lake has been violated. The private beach is no longer private."

Katie Roiphe
"Damn My Stream of Consciousness"
Twenty-Four Ways of Looking at Mary McCarthy
(Greenwood 1996) 132-33

Michael Hollister (2020)