

**Alice McDermott**

**The Ninth Hour**

**2017**

Alice McDermott is an American writer whose works explore the Irish-American experience. An earlier novel, **Charming Billy** (1997) won the National Book Award. Other of her novels have been shortlisted for Pulitzer and other national awards. She is a professor of humanities at Johns Hopkins University.

**The Ninth Hour** is her eighth novel and was listed by many publications as one of the top novels of 2017.

Unlike the other titles we have read, the only connection to Ireland is that some of the characters were emigrants from Ireland. The novel deals exclusively with the Irish-American experience.

If you are Irish-American, did the novel resonate with you? Keep in mind the time frame of the action: early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

If you are not of Irish-American descent, did the novel erase any stereotypes or reinforce those associated with that ethnic group?

Religion, specifically Catholicism, plays an important role in **The Ninth Hour**. McDermott has said that she uses Catholicism “simply to give my characters a vocabulary that they might not otherwise have...My sense of all religions is that all we’re doing is giving language to our common experience of uncertainty, of yearning.” (Interview with Paul J. Consentine in **Image**, Issue 52 September 2017.) Many of the main characters are nuns and priests are not present at all. Was McDermott successful in erasing the stereotypes that we often see of them?

After reading this novel by McDermott, would you read others by her? Why? Why not?