

<p>Charming Billy (1997)</p> <p>By</p> <p>Alice McDermott</p>	<p>Book Discussion Irish Cultural Center</p> <p>May 23, 2026</p> <p>10:30 am to 12:30 pm</p> <p>Norton Library</p>
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Alice McDermott is a leading Irish-American writer, the author of nine novels and a collection of essays. She was born in Brooklyn and attended schools on Long Island and in New York. Her works give readers insight into the Irish American experience. Among her novels are **A Bigamist's Daughter** (1982), **At Weddings and Wakes** (1992), **The Ninth Hour: A Novel** (2017) and **Absolution: A Novel** (2023). Our selection, **Charming Billy**, won the National Book Award for 1998.

Discussion questions to consider:

1. First considerations: Did you like this book? Why/ why not? Have you read other works by Alice McDermott? Which ones? Ideas raised by the title of this novel?
2. How would you describe the point of view in this novel? Who is the narrator?
3. What did you learn about the Irish American experience in the United States?
4. Consider the relationships between Billy and others (for example, Dennis, Mr. Holtzman, and Eve)
5. In addition to your findings in Question 3, what serious themes does the novel develop? Consider the last line of one review: "McDermott's compassionate candor about the demands of faith and the realities of living brings an emotional resonance to her seamlessly told, exquisitely nuanced tale." Among these serious themes, consider those associated with love and loss, and the dangers of telling lies.

Looking ahead→→ Mary and I will be meeting soon to plan for next season's readings. Please suggest themes to pursue or individual works that you would like to read. Don't hesitate to suggest a rereading of a favorite from past seasons. Good novels deserve a second reading, and we have many new members who might be reading it for the first time.