



Birds of America

A NOVEL BY

Mary McCarthy

For Jim and Gloria,
with much affection,
Mary McArthur

Mary
McCarthy

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York

Birds
of
America



"... to attempt to embody the Idea in an example, as one might embody the wise man in a novel, is unseemly . . . for our natural limitations, which persistently interfere with the perfection of the Idea, forbid all illusion about such an attempt. . . ."

To Hannah

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A B C D E

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Birds of America is the story of Peter Levi, an innocent abroad, who is Miss McCarthy's Candide. In the fall of 1964, he arrives in France to do his junior year at the Sorbonne after spending a bizarre holiday in New England with his enchanting mother. In Paris he is shocked by the decapitated statues around the city, survivors of the Jacobins' assault on the symbols of the old régime. Yet Peter is an egalitarian and in principle therefore a leveler.

Peter also has a stubborn attachment to his other mother, Nature, and to the old America, which once thought itself the New World. He tries to live his daily student life according to Kant's dicta, hoping that his will may have the force of a natural law. The result is comedy, mild disaster, frustrated clashes with the police and other forces of order. Continually thwarted, he is persistent, like a weed.

Birds of America is a witty and tender *Bildungsroman*. The reader will like Peter and his family and the other migratory birds he meets along his flyway, some of them his friends. They are seen by Mary McCarthy with a warm, though hardly moist, eye.

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Jacket design by Paul Bacon

Other books by Mary McCarthy

The Company She Keeps

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A Charmed Life

Memories of a Catholic Girlhood

Venice Observed

The Stones of Florence

On the Contrary

The Group

Mary McCarthy's Theatre Chronicles

Vietnam

Hanoi

The Writing on the Wall

Photograph of Mary McCarthy by Jack Nisberg



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