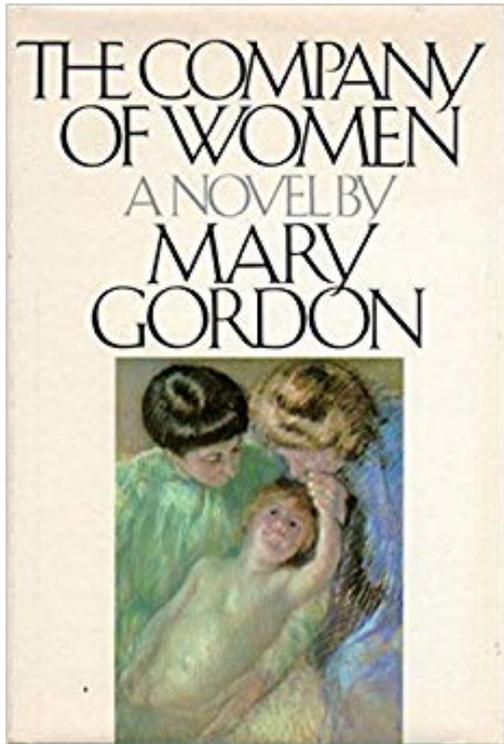


## The Company of Women *by* Mary Gordon



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**ISBN:** 0394505085

**ISBN13:** 978-0394505084

**Author:** Mary Gordon

**Book title:** The Company of Women

**Pages:** 291

**Publisher:** Random House; 1st edition (February 12, 1981)

**Language:** English

**Category:** Genre Fiction

**Size PDF version:** 1791 kb

**Size ePUB version:** 1899 kb

**Size FB2 version:** 1579 kb

**Other formats:** mbr lrf doc lrf

Five Catholic, working women and a charismatic priest, Father Cyprian, find their values, expectations, and relationships threatened and transformed by the charming, intelligent, rebellious, and independent daughter of one of the women



## Reviews of the *The Company of Women* *by* Mary Gordon

Ieregr

Dear Friends:

Like the stories in the Bible about great women; Ruth, Rachael and many more. It is important that women have mentors that they have alive today to look up to and emulate to help us live our lives more like Jesus.

## **Hanelynai**

This is a coming of age story, one that begins in childhood, and ends when Felicitas is twenty-eight, with the most focus on her college year at age around twenty. The "company of women" includes her mother and her mother's friends, all currently single, united in their faith and attachment to a priest. The priest and Felicitas' relationship to him as a child are very important to the novel, but the college year is the section of the novel I found interesting: it is cliched as one reviewer pointed out, but rich in some of its details, and in Felicitas' introspections. Her love interest is too shallow, self-centered and actually boring from my perspective.

Gordon writes well, one has to only read the personal statements of the different characters at novel's end. Felicitas, the 3rd person narrator, is the one character who does not make a statement. The statements are meant to be something of an epilogue, but they sum up the characters well, in fact too well: given the amount of space devoted to the secondary characters, they are just not very interesting or sufficiently further illuminated by the novel. In fact the priest, in his own words at the end, first becomes a character it is easy to appreciate.

Felicitas evolves as a character, and while her personality at book's end may be realistic, it reminds me of too many other novels where a satisfyingly "happy" ending is desired.

## **Fenrikasa**

**SPOILER ALERT:** This 1980 novel tells the story of Felicitas Taylor, whose widowed mother is among a group of New York City five women in the thrall of a conservative Roman Catholic priest named Father Cyprian. The women, all single or widowed, form the company of women who raise the young girl. Overseeing them is Cyprian, who left his order following the Vatican II liberalization and eventually retreats to the rural town in upstate New York where he was born and raised. The story opens in 1963, when Felicitas is fourteen, and depicts her importance to the women and man who surround: She is their last best hope, Cyprian tells them. Felicitas is smart, perhaps even gifted, but socially isolated from people her own age and the mainstream of American life. She spends her summers at the priest's compound, and although she knows the kids at her school in the outer borough where she lives, they don't interact, and she has no friends. The story then shifts to 1969, and Felicitas is attending a small Catholic college, majoring in classics and reading Latin and Greek. Her relationship with Cyprian is tense because she speaks her mind and has turned against the Vietnam war, which he supports. She is so anti-war that she secretly attends a march on the Pentagon. However, not long after the classics program at her college is curtailed, and she decides -- against the wishes of all of the adults involved in her life -- to transfer to Columbia. At Columbia, Felicitas falls under the spell of a political science professor named Robert, a shallow man who spouts all the radical bullshit of the day, and quickly becomes his lover and soon after moves into the apartment he shares with two women who were also once his lovers. The love affair soon falters because of Felicitas' obsession with her lover, who espouses free love and urges her to sleep with one of the louts who lives downstairs. Felicitas complies and not long after discovers she's pregnant. After scraping together the money for an abortion -- which was illegal at the time -- she runs out of the clinic at the last moment and goes home to her mother. The story then shifts to 1977. Felicitas and her daughter are living in a house her mother built in Cyprian's compound in upstate New York. All the other women have also moved upstate, and they've now formed a new company of women to raise Felicitas' daughter, Linda. Cyprian is dying of heart failure, and Felicitas is about to marry a nice local man -- silent and wise but not smart, she says -- who can be a father to her child.

This is a dreary book, despite the pot-boiling plot. Felicitas is an unbelievable and unsatisfying character. As a devout Roman Catholic woman in 1969, she should have some misgivings -- some

thought, at minimum -- about going to bed with the divorced Robert. Not a word. As a devout Roman Catholic woman in 1969, she should have severe misgivings about seeking an abortion. Not a word. As a highly-intelligent woman in 1969, she should notice that she's left a patriarchal circle she found tyrannical and immediately joined another, albeit one that was not celibate. No notice mentioned. As an anti-war young American in 1969, she should have continued to at least note, and perhaps even protest, the continuing war. Not a word. As an American woman living through the upheaval of the second wave of feminism, she should make some connections. Not even mentioned. While I can believe that there were women who were as sheltered as Felicitas is supposed to have been -- even women growing up in New York City among single and widowed women who have worked for their livings for decades -- I find it not believable that a highly intelligent woman attending one of the finest universities on the planet, one that was in turmoil -- on strike! takeovers of administration offices! -- would have failed to notice. For all of those reasons, I found Felicitas unbelievable as a character. And after reading this book, I have serious doubts that this author's work actually deserves her reputation as a thoughtful and accomplished writer. In fact, I find myself very turned off by her and am unlikely to ever read anything else by her. Mary Gordon is well-known as Roman Catholic writer, and it is an insult to Roman Catholic women who struggled with sexuality and choice in those times to pretend that those conflicts didn't exist.

### **sobolica**

Hmm. What can I say about this one. First off, I am not a catholic, so some of this was kind of lost on me. I found this book unusual. There is Father Cyprian with out a congregation. This makes him somewhat of a failure in my book, but he has a following of women who come to see him once a year. Seems weird to me. One of the women has a daughter, Felicitas. Felicitas goes away to college and begins doing all kinds of unspeakable things and loses her way. She gets pregnant, comes home and then her and her mother leave and go to live near the priest and raise the baby. In the end Felicitas gets married to an average kind of guy from the hardware store. He is a "simple" but a good person. There is also Muriel who lives next door to Father Cyprian and she is in love with him. The book is a portrayal of life in the 1960s and 70s.

I found this book a little too weird and dysfunctional for my taste. I am not sure what the writer was trying to get across to the reader? I found no one in the story that I could connect with. If you read this and like it let me know maybe you can explain it to me? I give this book 2/5 stars.

### **Mr.Champions**

Felicitas, a young girl, was brought up by her mother, and her mothers friends. This close knit group of unmarried, elderly women, and a priest, tried their hardest to bring her up the way they thought she should be, she was to be the chosen one, the one who would carry on their memories, and traditions. In trying to make her so perfect, what will she have to forfeit?? Follow Felicitas on her way through college and motherhood.

### **Ndyardin**

There is little relevance to modern day society vis a vis the role of women. We have been emancipated far too long to pay any attention to this drivel. Perhaps Felicitas should get a life of her own and stop running home to Mommy, when life delivers lemons.

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