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Monica McInerney. *Odd One Out*. (Penguin, 2006).

Review by Gillian Dooley for Writers Radio, Radio Adelaide, Recorded 6 October 2006.

Monica McInerney's latest novel is a wry little Cinderella romance. It doesn't ask to be taken too seriously, but it's well written and thoughtful without pretending to profundity.

The novel starts with the wedding of Sylvie's sister Vanessa, a lavish society event where everything is dictated by fashion. Sylvie is a member of the Devereaux family, famous and brilliant celebrities who move in Sydney's flashiest social circles. Her mother is an artist, her sisters fashion and jewellery designers, and her brother is in theatrical lighting. Sylvie is a more retiring type, and the only female in the family one would actually like to know: the others are all entirely self-absorbed. She is consigned to the position of family dogsbody: she has run herself ragged organising the wedding with little thanks, and to add to her discomfiture, her eccentric great-aunt Millicent offers her a job as her companion – 'we can be two old maids together', she announces loudly during a sudden silence.

Appalled by this prospect, and at her exploitation by the rest of the family, her brother Sebastian insists on removing her from her mother's sphere of influence and bringing her to live in his flat in Melbourne. A reunion with her long-estranged father doesn't go well, however, and the promising man she meets starts an affair with someone else. Moving back to Sydney, she outrages her mother and the ugly sisters by moving in with the eccentric aunt after all and opening a guesthouse for young musicians, discovering in the process the pleasures of independence and pride in her own abilities, less dazzling than her sisters, perhaps, but just as worthwhile.

And the romance? Just in time for the end of the novel, the man she'd regretfully left behind resurfaces, so a happy ending is not out of the question.

*Odd One Out* is an engaging book, easy to read in one sitting, and despite its clear fairytale allusions and the odd extravagant caricature, it doesn't overdo the melodrama and never loses touch with life's realities.