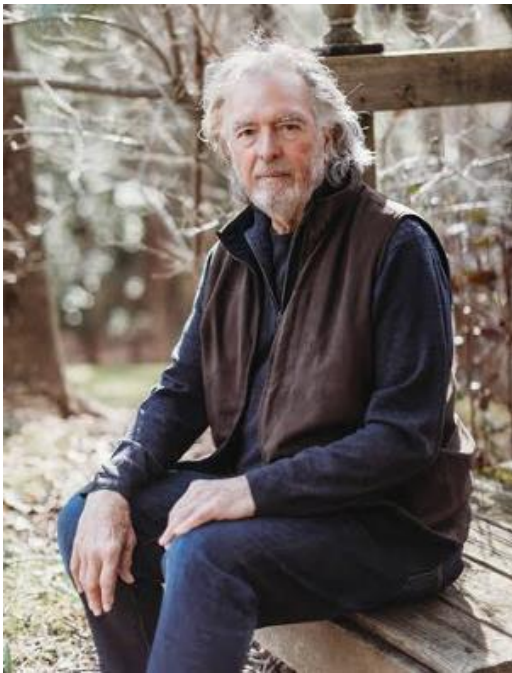


AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Charles Frazier grew up in the mountains of Western North Carolina. He has been writing critically-acclaimed, best-selling literary fiction for more than 25 years, and his work has been translated into over two dozen languages.

Cold Mountain (1997), his highly acclaimed first novel, was an international bestseller, won the National Book Award, the ABBY Award, the Heartland Award, the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction, and was an American Library Association Notable Book. In 2003, *Cold Mountain* was adapted into an Academy Award-winning film by screenwriter and director Anthony Minghella. Later, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon and librettist Gene Scheer adapted *Cold Mountain* into an opera, which premiered at Santa Fe Opera in 2015.

Thirteen Moons (2006), was a *New York Times* bestseller, won the 2007 SIBA Book Award and the 2007 Pat Conroy Southern Book Prize, and was named a best book of the year by the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Nightwoods (2011), also a *New York Times* bestseller, is a critically acclaimed literary thriller set in a fictional Western North Carolina town in the early 1960s.

Varina (2018), a critically acclaimed instant *New York Times* bestseller, is a fictional reimagining of the life of Varina Howell Davis before, during, and after the American Civil War.

Charles's forthcoming fifth novel, *The Trackers* (April 2023), is set in Depression-era Wyoming, Washington, Florida, and California and conjures up the lives of everyday people during an extraordinary period of history that bears uncanny resemblance to our own.

[Author's website.](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group?

2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?
5. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
6. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
7. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
8. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one?
10. Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well?

11. Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
12. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it? Is anything left unresolved or ambiguous? How do you picture the characters' lives after the end of the story?
13. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
14. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?
15. What changes/decisions would you hope for if the book were turned into a movie? Which sections would you cut? Who would you cast to play the main characters?
If the book is already a movie, are you happy with the representation? Do you prefer the book or the movie?
16. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Following Varina (2018), Frazier is in top form for his fifth novel, which traverses America in its portrait of contrasting Depression-era lives. "The Trackers" is the name that New Deal artist Valentine "Val" Welch gives the mural he's commissioned to paint in the post office of Dawes, Wyoming. He aims to inspire small-town pride by showcasing regional highlights. While lodging at the expansive ranch of aspiring politician John Long and his younger wife, Eve, Val gets pulled into their drama. Not long after a stressful dinner party, Eve takes off with a small Renoir from Long's collection in hand and doesn't return. Long asks Val to find her. Events turn more dangerous and puzzling than expected. From an exhausting trip to wild rural Florida to the newly constructed, cinnabar-hued Golden Gate Bridge, the locales feel period-authentic, and the writing hums with spectacular word-images. While Val narrates, using a light folksy style that Frazier's fans will recognize, the novel's primary hero is Eve. An inscrutably captivating woman from impoverished origins who became a teenage hobo and sang in cowboy bands, she has reasons for fleeing wealthy married life, and the mystery ignites the plot. The Old West still lingers in this propulsive tale of individualistic characters striving to beat the odds.

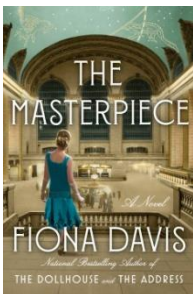
Publisher's Weekly

The diverting if muddled latest from Frazier (*Cold Mountain*) blends a Depression-era travelogue with a noirish star-crossed love story involving an artist and a Wyoming rancher's wife. In 1937, earnest young artist Val Welch arrives in remote Dawes, Wyo., on the WPA payroll, to paint a mural on the wall of the local post office. He's taken in by wealthy rancher John Long and his wife, Eve, who has recently settled down after years roaming the country as a hobo and later as a nightclub singer, and whose beauty captures Val's heart. But Eve, feeling trapped by her cosseted new life, soon takes off, and John sends lovelorn Val on a cross-country journey to find her, trailed by another man who may or may not be Eve's first husband. Frazier is a gifted stylist, and his gritty portrait of America in the depths of the Depression rings true, as do the character details--a razor-wielding villain adds to the danger around femme fatale Eve. Unfortunately, the *mélange* of genres and a curious lack of romantic chemistry between Val and Eve (Frazier never establishes what Val sees in Eve besides her looks) drains the emotional power. There's fun to be had, but it's not Frazier's best. (Apr.)

Kirkus Reviews

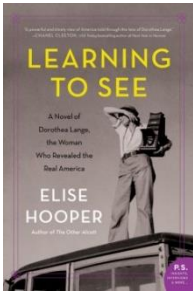
Frazier goes in search of the American dream amid the seemingly endless nightmare of the Great Depression. The ambitions here are as lofty as one of those murals commissioned by the Works Progress Administration to lift the nation's spirits and provide some income for indigent artists. One such (fictional) artwork has the same title as this novel, as young painter Valentine "Val" Welch travels west to the small town of Dawes, Wyoming, to create a mural in their post office that will capture the spirit of the country. His former art professor got him the job and has also connected him with the wealthy art patron John Long, who has extensive property there and a glamorous young wife named Eve. As first-person narrator, Val struggles to figure out what the deal is between the married couple. Then there's the mysterious Faro, a cowboy relic of the Western past whose association with Long predates his marriage and whose relationship with Eve has a furtive element to it. (He may well provide the moral compass here.) Long has political aspirations, and Eve adds some dazzle. She also has a past that includes bumming around the country and singing in a country dancehall band, where her husband (and so many others) first became attracted to her. She also may or may not have had a previous husband, who may or may not be dead. Once she takes off, Long sends Val to find her. It's a big country, and he's no detective, but he doesn't have as much difficulty as you'd think. In the process, he complicates the plot in a couple of different ways, and he, as the tracker, soon has other trackers in his pursuit. For a novel that traverses the country from Seattle to back-swamp Florida, the writing is curiously static, filled with meticulous descriptions and philosophical soliloquies, with all sorts of stilted conjecture about fate, art, and America (and no quotation marks). By the end, not even the characters seem to care much about who finds whom. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

READALIKES



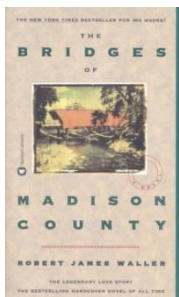
***The Masterpiece* by Fiona Davis**

The building is Grand Central Terminal. The terminal once housed the Grand Central School of Art (founded by John Singer Sargent, among others), and Clara Darden is an instructor there in 1928. She finds success as an illustrator, but her hopes to make a mark as a truly modern artist are thwarted by the Depression. In the 1970s, Virginia Clay, struggling after a recent divorce, lands a job at the information booth of the no-longer-so-grand terminal, which is threatened with demolition. She stumbles across the now-shuttered art school and discovers a mysterious watercolor, which starts her on a quest to identify the artist.



Learning to see: a novel of Dorothea Lange, the woman who revealed the real America by Elise Hooper

In 1918, a fearless twenty-two-year old arrives in bohemian San Francisco from the Northeast, determined to make her own way as an independent woman. Renaming herself Dorothea Lange she is soon the celebrated owner of the city's most prestigious and stylish portrait studio and wife of the talented but volatile painter, Maynard Dixon. By the early 1930s, as America's economy collapses, her marriage founders and Dorothea must find ways to support her two young sons single-handedly. Determined to expose the horrific conditions of the nation's poor, she takes to the road with her camera, creating images that inspire, reform, and define the era.



The Bridges of Madison County by Robert James Waller

Francesca is forty-five, married with two teenaged children; Robert Kincaid is fifty-two, divorced, an artist, a traveling loner, calling himself "the last of the cowboys." Meeting at the right time and place, they cautiously accept their love at first sight, and within the four days they are able to spend together, they fulfill each other spiritually and physically. They then sacrifice their physical intimacy, to preserve her family and, probably, their sanity, never meeting again. But what they have made together lives on, defining and directing their lives.