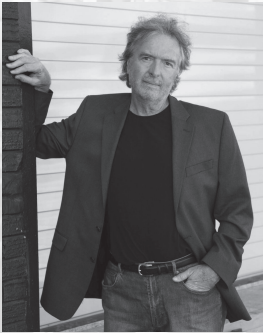


The HOPE of “dark-night songs”: Music and Healing in Charles Frazier’s *Nightwoods*

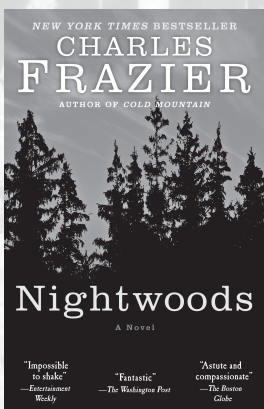
by Paula Rawlins

with photography by Susanna Euston

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COURTESY OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE



PAULA RAWLINS grew up in Concord, NC. After earning a Master’s in English at UNC Charlotte, she completed a PhD focusing on Southern Literature at the University of Georgia. She currently serves as the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Writing and Tutoring at Yale University’s Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning.

In Charles Frazier’s 2011 novel *Nightwoods*, descriptions of radios and the sounds they emit are almost as common as images of western North Carolina’s landscape and the lush life it nurtures. Set in the 1960s, *Nightwoods* features Luce, a self-made hermit of a woman suddenly tasked with the care of her deceased sister’s young twins, Dolores and Frank. The three form a trio of survivors, all having experienced devastating trauma. The twins stopped speaking after witnessing their mother’s murder at the hands of their stepfather, Bud. Luce chose an isolated life in the aging mountain lodge she calls home after surviving a rape, which her own father, the town sheriff, refused to investigate. Through it all, music figures prominently in the novel, which is no surprise given Frazier’s admission that inspiration for the work came from recalling his youth spent in a mountain town where only two radio stations could be heard during the day. Frazier tells *North Carolina Literary Review* editor Margaret Bauer, “Both of them were AM radio stations, and their licenses ran till sundown. So, at sundown, they went off the air, and then after dark, all of those stations from Chicago and all over the eastern half of the United States became available. And just what magic that was to try and connect with the rest of the world after dark.”¹ In *Nightwoods*, Frazier repeatedly captures the “magic” of the electrified acoustics so endemic to mid-twentieth-century life. Luce feels drawn to the lodge’s “huge floor-standing radio with a tuning ring like the steering wheel to a Packard.”² Stubblefield, Luce’s recently rekindled old flame, remembers watching her at a jukebox filled with “shiny 45s rotating” (105). And as the despicable Bud lies dying, his thoughts go back to a night punctuated by a “radio glowing on the dash” of a car, “a whole sequence of songs on the radio” still fresh in his mind so many years later (252). Amid the buzzing and crooning of electrical sound sources, another seemingly

¹ Margaret D. Bauer, “Genre Conventions with a Half-Twist: An Interview with Charles Frazier,” *North Carolina Literary Review* 22 (2013): 25–26; subsequently cited parenthetically.

² Charles Frazier, *Nightwoods* (Random House, 2011) 6; subsequently cited parenthetically.