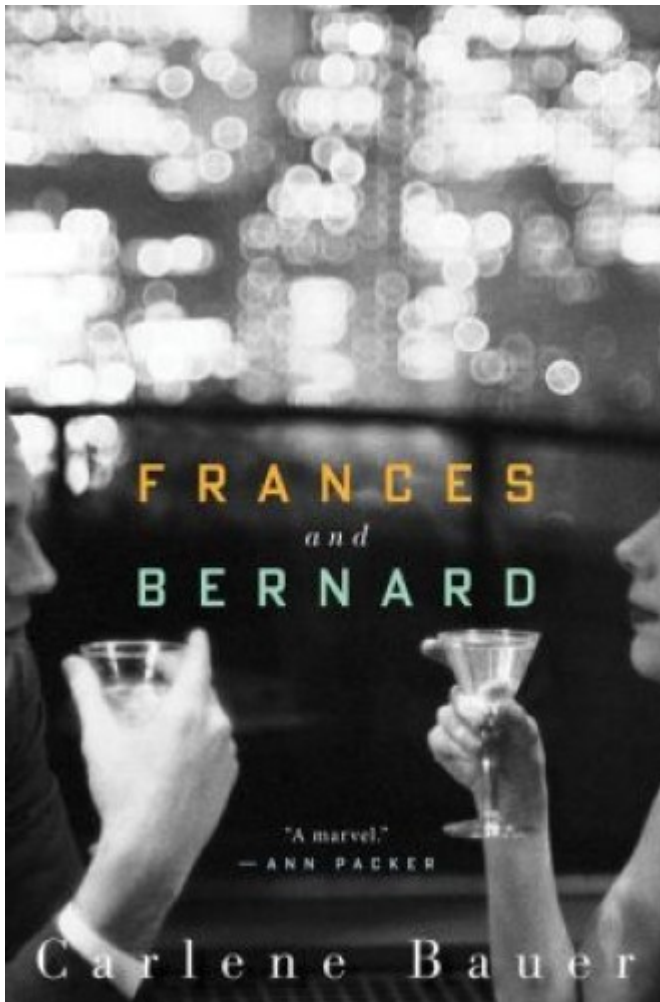


Frances and Bernard, by Carlene Bauer

Books in the [April 17, 2013](#) issue

In Review



Frances and Bernard

By Carlene Bauer
Houghton Mifflin

This is that rare novel in which the main characters are theologically literate. Frances, writing about Simone Weil, throws off this zinger: “There are times that I think her theology might have sprung fully formed from her migraines.” Based on

the exchanges of letters between Robert Lowell and Flannery O'Connor in the 1950s, the novel tells how Bernard and Frances—two writers who met at a writers' colony—share their lives mostly through long-distance letter writing. An occasional exchange of letters with friends discloses to the reader what each is thinking about the other. Bernard, who struggles with mental illness for which he's hospitalized, would love to marry Frances. Frances is reluctant to let a relationship that dances on the edge of romance to go any further. Bauer is also the author of a memoir, *Not That Kind of Girl*, about growing up as an evangelical.