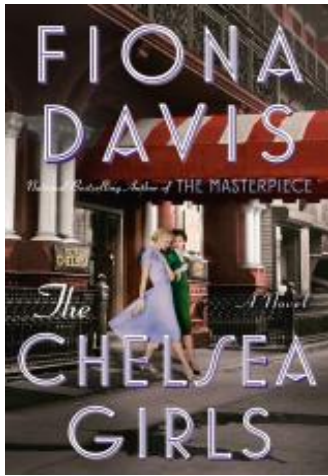


# The Chelsea Girls

by Fiona Davis

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## About the Book

**The bright lights of the theater district, the glamour and danger of 1950s New York, and the wild scene at the iconic Chelsea Hotel come together in a dazzling new novel about a 20-year friendship that will irrevocably change two women's lives --- from the national bestselling author of *THE DOLLHOUSE* and *THE ADDRESS*.**

From the dramatic redbrick facade to the sweeping staircase dripping with art, the Chelsea Hotel has long been New York City's creative oasis for the many artists, writers, musicians, actors, filmmakers and poets who have called it home --- a scene playwright Hazel Riley and actress Maxine Mead are determined to use to their advantage. Yet they soon discover that the greatest obstacle to putting up a show on Broadway has nothing to do with their art, and everything to do with politics.

A Red scare is sweeping across America, and Senator Joseph McCarthy has started a witch hunt for Communists, with those in the entertainment industry in the crosshairs. As the pressure builds to name names, it is more than Hazel and Maxine's Broadway dreams that may suffer as they grapple with the terrible consequences, but also their livelihood, their friendship and even their freedom.

Spanning from the 1940s to the 1960s, *THE CHELSEA GIRLS* deftly pulls back the curtain on the desperate political pressures of McCarthyism, the complicated bonds of female friendship, and the siren call of the uninhibited Chelsea Hotel.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** The Chelsea Hotel is one of the main characters in and of it-self. What does it represent? What is its personality, and how does it change and evolve? How does it affect the lives of the other characters?

2. How do Hazel and Maxine use writing to make sense of the world around them? Where do you think their motivation to write comes from? Do you use writing in a similar way?
3. Do you think the political pressures of McCarthyism are still relevant today? Why or why not?
4. What did you think of Charlie and his desire to join the FBI? How do you think his relationship with his father shaped his ambitions? Were you rooting for him and Hazel? Why or why not?
5. When Maxine flubs her lines on opening night, her career doesn't suffer, but Hazel's does. Why do you think that is? How would you have reacted in Hazel's situation? Do you think she has a right to be bitter about the success of *Wartime Sonata's* revival, or should she be grateful?
6. If Maxine had not made the tragic choice she did, do you think she and Hazel would have renewed their friendship? If you were in Hazel's shoes, would you forgive Maxine? Why or why not?
7. How do Hazel and Maxine subvert or conform to 1950s expectations and gender roles?
8. Do you think McCarthyism made romantic and friendly relationships difficult? Why or why not? If so, what were the complications and the consequences of having a relationship?
9. Maxine's bravery in the square, as well as now, with the major, astonished Hazel. She wished she were that brash. But she wouldn't dare question an authority figure. Always the understudy, in life as well as in art.? How does Hazel transform throughout the novel, and does the word "understudy," which she considers to have negative connotations, change in meaning as well?
10. What do you think influenced Maxine's best and worst decisions in the book? Would you have made different ones? If so, in what instances and why?
11. The theater district was such a vibrant scene in the 1950s. Did you have a favorite setting in the book? If you could go back in time to any of the places mentioned, which would you choose?
12. How is theater represented not only on Broadway in the book, but also in the political arena today? Does the House Un-American Activities Committee reflect any views held today?

## Author Bio

Fiona Davis is the *New York Times* bestselling author of eight historical novels set in iconic New York City buildings: *THE STOLEN QUEEN*, *THE SPECTACULAR*, *THE MAGNOLIA PALACE*, *THE DOLLHOUSE*, *THE ADDRESS*, *THE MASTERPIECE*, *THE CHELSEA GIRLS* and *THE LIONS OF FIFTH AVENUE*, which was a "Good Morning America" Book Club pick. Her articles have appeared in publications like *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Oprah* magazine.

She first came to New York as an actress, but fell in love with writing after getting a master's degree at Columbia Journalism School. Her books have been translated into over 20 languages, and she's based in New York City.

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