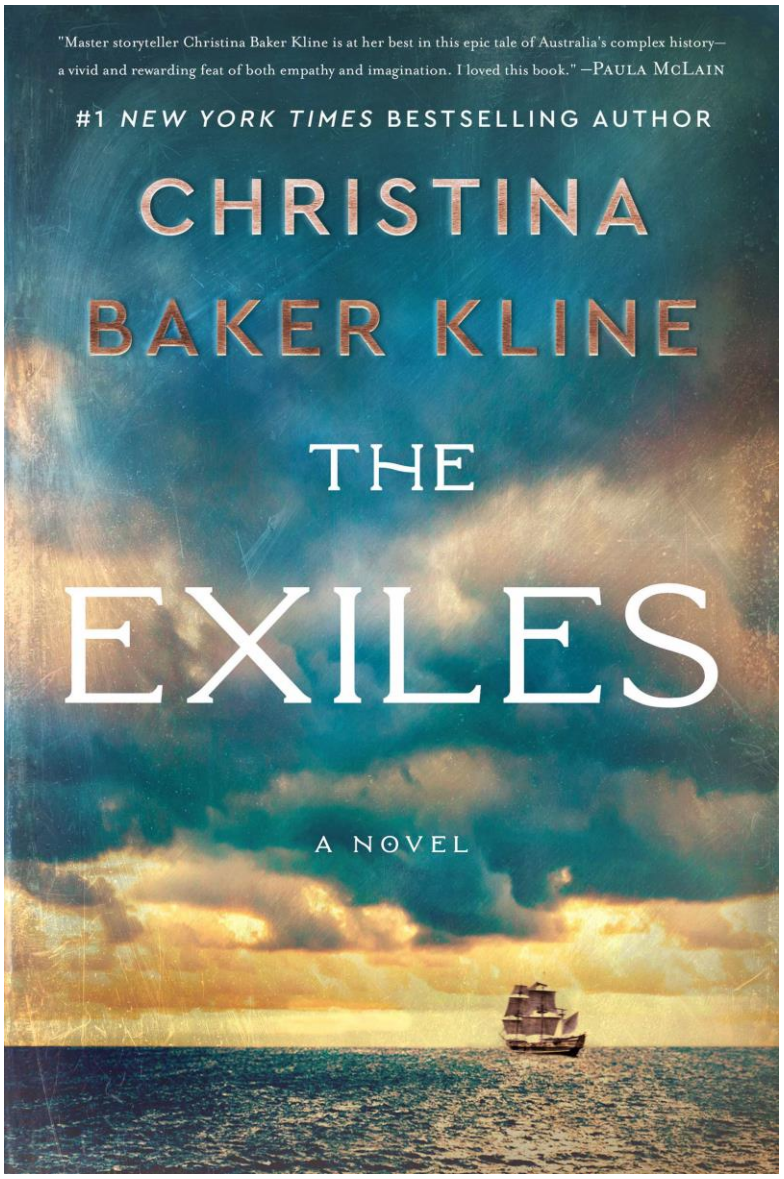

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About Christina Baker Kline

From christinabakerkline.com

A #1 New York Times bestselling author of eight novels, including The Exiles, Orphan Train, and A Piece of the World, Christina Baker Kline is published in 40 countries.

Her novels have received the New England Prize for Fiction, the Maine Literary Award, and a Barnes & Noble Discover Award, among other prizes, and have been chosen by hundreds of communities, universities and schools as "One Book, One Read" selections. Her essays, articles, and reviews have appeared in publications such as the New York Times and the NYT Book Review, The Boston Globe, The San Francisco Chronicle, LitHub, Psychology Today, and Slate.

Christina Baker Kline was born in England and raised in the American South and Maine. She is a graduate of Yale (B.A.), Cambridge (M.A.), and the University of Virginia (M.F.A.), where she was a Hoyns Fellow in Fiction Writing. A resident of New York City and Southwest Harbor, Maine, she is married to David Kline and has three sons: Hayden, Will, and Eli. She serves on the advisory boards of the Center for Fiction (NYC), the Jesup Library (Bar Harbor, ME), the Montclair Literary Festival (NJ), the Kauai Writers Conference (HI), and Roots & Wings (NJ); and on the gala committees of Poets & Writers, The Authors Guild, and Friends of Acadia. She is an Artist-Mentor for StudioDuke at Duke University and the BookEnds program at Stony Brook University and an Author-Advocate for the literacy organization Room to Read.

Kline's latest novel, The Exiles (2020), an instant NYT and Indie Next bestseller, captures the hardship, oppression, opportunity and hope of a trio of women's lives—two English convicts and an orphaned Aboriginal girl — in nineteenth-century Australia. A Piece of the World (2017), also an instant bestseller, explores the real-life relationship between the artist Andrew Wyeth and the subject of his best-known painting, Christina's World. Orphan Train (2013), about a little-known but significant piece of American history, spent more than two years on the NYT bestseller list, including five weeks at #1. Orphan Train and A Piece of the World have been optioned for film; The Exiles has been optioned for television and Kline is executive producing.

Kline has written five other novels — The Way Life Should Be, Bird in Hand, Desire Lines, Sweet Water, and Orphan Train Girl— and written or edited five nonfiction books: The Conversation Begins (with Christina L. Baker), Child of Mine, Room to Grow, About Face (with Anne Burt), and Always too Soon (with Allison Gilbert). She recently contributed to the anthologies Stories from Suffragette City (2020) and Lolita in the Afterlife (2021).

About the book

From christinabakerkline.com

Seduced by her employer's son, Evangeline, a naïve young governess in early nineteenth-century London, is discharged when her pregnancy is discovered and sent to the notorious Newgate Prison. After months in the fetid, overcrowded jail, she learns she is sentenced to "the land beyond the seas," Van Diemen's Land, a penal colony established by Great Britain. Though uncertain of what awaits, Evangeline knows one thing: the child she carries will be born on the months-long voyage to this distant land.

During the journey on a repurposed slave ship, the Medea, Evangeline strikes up a friendship with Hazel, a girl little older than her former pupils who was sentenced to seven years transport for stealing a silver spoon. Canny where Evangeline is guileless, Hazel — a skilled midwife and herbalist – is soon offering home remedies to both prisoners and sailors in return for a variety of favors.

Though Australia has been home to Aboriginal people for more than 50,000 years, the British government in the 1840s considers its fledgling colony uninhabited and unsettled, and views the natives as an unpleasant nuisance. By the time the Medea arrives, many of them have been forcibly relocated, their land seized by white colonists. One of these relocated people is Mathinna, the orphaned daughter of the Chief of the Lowreenne tribe, who has been adopted by the new governor of Van Diemen's Land.

In this gorgeous novel, Christina Baker Kline brilliantly recreates the beginnings of a new society in a beautiful and challenging land, telling the story of Australia from a fresh perspective, through the experiences of Evangeline, Hazel, and Mathinna. While life in Australia is punishing and often brutally unfair, it is also, for some, an opportunity: for redemption, for a new way of life, for unimagined freedom. Told in exquisite detail and incisive prose, The Exiles is a story of grace born from hardship, the unbreakable bonds of female friendships, and the unfettering of legacy.

Tell It Slant: An Interview with Christina Baker Kline

by JENNIFER SOLHEIM | Sep. 23, 2020 | fictionwritersreview.com

"In ways large and small, the task of a novelist who writes about the past is to make it come to life, to find singular details that make the story breathe": Christina Baker Kline talks with Jennifer Solheim about her new novel, The Exiles.

The story goes that when Émile Zola began research for Germinal, his masterpiece about the nineteenth-century French miners' revolution, he toured the working mines firsthand. He noticed a broad, muscled Percheron pulling a sled through a tunnel. The foreman explained that they brought the horses down as foals. Yet when Zola asked him how they got them in and out of the mines each day, the foreman responded that they didn't: "He hauls coal down here until he can't anymore, and then he dies down here, and his bones are buried down here." This was the seed for Zola. His descriptions of the mine horses in Germinal shed light on the harsh treatment of all workers, whether human or animal, and lend a concretized pathos to the majestic narrative rail against worker exploitation.

It's a similar case in Christina Baker Kline's new novel, The Exiles (HarperCollins), which might be understood as literary historical fiction with a feminist slant: within a depiction of the history of British convicts sent to Australia (marginalized people already), Baker Kline represents women's experience, and within women's experience those who left few traces: an indigenous girl, an orphaned young woman with neither financial means nor practical skills, and the fatherless teenage daughter of a drunken midwife. The three protagonists are of the margins within the margins—people whose stories were unrecorded, and so have gone untold.

Baker Kline's storytelling reads so effortlessly and true that it's easy to overlook the painstaking research that went into this novel, and the careful balance between vivid detail and larger questions about these women's human experience. But let's be clear: The Exiles is a masterful high-wire act. As both writer and reader, it's thrilling to read.

The Exiles is Christina's eighth novel. Her work has been published in over forty countries, and her novels have received the New England Prize for Fiction, the Maine Literary Award, and a Barnes & Noble Discover Award, among other prizes, and have been chosen by hundreds of communities, universities, and schools as "One Book, One Read" selections. Her essays, articles, and reviews have appeared in publications such as the New York Times and the NYT Book Review, The Boston Globe, The San Francisco Chronicle, LitHub, Psychology Today, and Salon. She is a graduate of Yale, Cambridge, and the University of Virginia M.F.A. program, where she was a Hoyns Fellow in Fiction Writing. She is an Artist-Mentor for StudioDuke at Duke University and the BookEnds program at Stony Brook University, where, as a Fellow, I was so lucky to work with her.

Interview:

Jennifer Solheim: In discussing the fictionalization of historical events in my novel, you quoted Emily Dickinson: "tell all the truth but tell it slant." But as an edict, the Dickinson line isn't only about recuperation or new perspectives: it's also about character and the particularities of individual experience. So how did you work with the idea of telling truth at a slant in The Exiles?

Christina Baker Kline: You're right; it's about both things. The next line of the Dickinson poem is "Success in circuit lies." I kept thinking about this as I wrote The Exiles: how could I approach the story in roundabout ways to make it more intimate, more engaging, less like a rote history lesson? There's a danger, when you write novels that involve large amounts of research, of sounding didactic, or worse, dry. In ways large and small, the task of a novelist who writes about the past is to make it come to life, to find singular details that make the story breathe.

In The Exiles, I use a secondary character, bawdy, irreverent Olive, to recount the British plan to transport poor women to Australia as breeders. Her wry humor is a useful delivery system for this kind of exposition.

In general, my version of 1840s Australia is a blend of then and now. While I worked hard to avoid blatantly anachronistic language in dialogue, I didn't try to approximate the speech of the time. I wanted the book to feel contemporary. I wanted readers to feel as if they were immersed in that world.

You traveled to England, Scotland, and Australia to research The Exiles. How did research and character development work in this novel? Did one inspire the other?

Some novelists don't travel for research; they believe that imagination is all you need, and maybe they're right. But I find standing on the soil where my novel takes place incredibly inspiring. If I hadn't gone to Tasmania I wouldn't have known about the fluorescent orange lichen on the rocks of Mount Wellington, for example, or that wallabies gather by the hundreds on the outskirts of the city of Hobart at dusk. I wouldn't have known what the four-mile trek from the harbor to the Cascades Female Factory was like, or what it felt like to be inside the walls of that prison. I was in Scotland for a week and Glasgow for only a few days, but several months later, as I was describing Hazel's miserable life there, I could easily envision her making her way along the wynds and pilfering a silver spoon from a shop; I knew what the cobbles felt like under my shoes. Her flinty character was forged during that visit.

Your three main characters meet by chance and fate, in some ways—but they also encounter one another as a result of the cruelty of systems and individuals to which they are subject. How did you develop these three characters and bring them together in the story?

The constantly changing relationships among these women are at the heart of this novel. Without them, the book would be little more than a treatise on the systematic oppression of women and Aboriginal people by the British government.

I think of Evangeline–the book-smart but naïve daughter of a village vicar who finds herself accused of murder and sent on a repurposed slaving ship to Australia–as a stand-in for the reader. She is catapulted from a comfortable middle-class existence into a world she'd never imagined; each experience is a fresh shock. Hazel and Olive, the convict women she befriends on the ship, are accustomed to this kind of life, more tolerant of its indignities and outrages. Mathinna, an Aboriginal girl, is torn from her home and family and must figure out how to navigate life in a household filled with uncaring British aristocrats. Hazel, working as a maid in the governor's house where Mathinna lives, is the only person who shows her genuine affection.

An Aboriginal girl dependent upon a British aristocrat's wife and amateur anthropologist, Mathinna is ultimately granted even fewer rights than the convicts. How did you approach writing Mathinna and her story? What inspired you to include her as part of the story of the convicts?

When I conceived of this novel, I planned to write about the British convict women exiled to Australia. But the more I read about the period, the more convinced I became that it would be irresponsible not to address the history of the Aboriginal people who lived on the island of Tasmania for thousands of years before being exiled by the British. I read the real-life story of Mathinna, the orphaned daughter of a chieftain who was taken on a whim and later abandoned by the British governor and his wife, and knew that she needed to be part of this story. It's complicated to write about real people whose lives ended long ago, their fates solidified. As I did in my previous novel, A Piece of the World, I chose to end Mathinna's story with a moment of connection, of recognition. Like Mathinna's, the final years of Christina Olson, the real-life person who inspired that novel, were bleak. I wanted to end the stories from Mathinna's and Christina's perspectives by highlighting their resilience as well as their vulnerability while they contended with forces beyond their control.

I've always admired the way your characters inhabit their bodies. I think of the bitter cold in the harrowing scene in Orphan Train when preteen heroine Dorothy traverses four miles through a snowy winter night in Minnesota, or of Christina's pleasure in bathing before meeting her paramour in A Piece of the World. Now, in The Exiles, there are vivid descriptions throughout of the female body's survival against horrifying conditions—the convicts are granted only slightly better conditions than the enslaved Africans who crossed the ocean in the very same ship hold, before the abolition of slavery. How do you approach embodying your characters as you write?

When I'm writing a book set in the past, I get completely obsessed with contemporaneous first-person narratives. While writing Orphan Train, I found a slim memoir at the Heartland Museum in Fargo, North Dakota, titled Rachel Calof's Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains. It's filled with hard-to-believe details about what it was like to live through Midwestern winters in the 1900s. For The Exiles, I read ship surgeons' logs, letters from female convicts, and newspaper articles from the 1800s about conditions on the ships.

But I understand that your question is larger than that. I work hard to convey the physical details of my characters' lives, because I know that in order for a book to sing it needs to be fully felt in the body. Physical trials teach us what we can endure, what our limits are. We remember them vividly. Evangeline's journey to the (literal) underworld of Newgate Prison and the bowels of the ship is horrifying, yes, but it is filled with self-discovery.

Newgate no longer exists, but I visited the prison site in London and similar historic sites in England and Australia. I also drew on my own life experiences; years ago I taught at a jail in Maine and a women's prison in New Jersey.

I'd like to conclude with a question for fiction writers about the research and writing of historical fiction that portray brutal realities, as you have done so movingly in The Exiles: how do we stay true to the tales we tell while also giving them life beyond the margins?

The lives of the convict women in the early-to-mid eighteenth century were indeed brutal and unfair. It was even worse for the Aboriginal people. I didn't want to minimize the hardship, but I was determined to celebrate the women's victories, large and small. Though only one of the three main characters ultimately thrives, many of the minor characters–including Olive!–find ways to forge a life in this strange new land. They are the foremothers of the Australia we know today.

A Different Settler Story in "The Exiles"

BY GREER MACALLISTER | AUGUST 31, 2020 | chireviewofbooks.com

With starred reviews from Library Journal and Kirkus, a TV deal with Bruna Papandrea's Made Up Stories already inked, and places on a half-dozen lists of the year's most anticipated books, Christina Baker Kline's new novel The Exiles is poised to make a splash. It is in some ways a quiet book, focusing on the innermost thoughts and feelings of its main characters—but it's also epic in scope, addressing matters of life and death, choices and consequences, and the founding of a new nation. These disparate elements combine to make it her best work yet. I talked with Christina about inspiration decades in the making, the responsibility she felt toward those who lived the history she fictionalizes, and the upsides of swapping a virtual book tour for the traditional traveling version.

The Exiles is a very different kind of "settler story," isn't it? So often, history focuses on simplified stories of "brave" men who forge into what they consider a frontier to build a new country. But you're casting a more critical eye on Australian history, looking not just at the role of women in this founding, but also the mistreatment of the Aboriginal people who were removed to make way for those settlers. What was the first spark that kindled your inspiration for this book?

When I was a grad student in my twenties, I read Robert Hughes' epic history of Australia, The Fatal Shore. The stories that interested me most—those of the convict women essentially transported from Britain as breeders and the Aboriginal people whose way of life was destroyed when colonists landed on their shores—were relegated to only one chapter of that 688-page book, "Bunters, Mollies and Sable Brethren." Several months later I was awarded a six-week Rotary Foundation fellowship to Australia, where I asked lots of questions about the country's fraught and complicated past—questions that weren't particularly welcome. The truth is, as you say, what we call "history" is almost always told from the perspective of the conquerors, a group that has typically excluded women, the poor, indigenous people, and any combination thereof. When I returned to the U.S. I wrote a nonfiction book with my mother, The Conversation Begins: Mothers and Daughters Talk about Living Feminism, and taught memoir writing in a women's prison; both of these experiences shaped my interests as a novelist. One day, about four years ago, I read a short article in the New York Times about convict women and children transported to Australia. All of a sudden, the bits and pieces of my own experience, predilections, and obsessions fell into place and I knew I'd found the subject of my next novel.

How did the research process for The Exiles compare to that of your previous books? Was it harder to dive deep into Australian history than American history, and did the time period of the 1840s present any particular challenges?

Each novel I write is the hardest book I've ever written, which is exasperating. I trick myself into a new book project by assuring myself that this one will write itself, but so far that hasn't happened. I keep setting myself steeper challenges. My early novels were mostly set in the

present, but when I learned that I had a family (in-law) connection to the orphan trains, I held my breath and leapt into the very deep waters of research-heavy fiction. Orphan Train tells the story of destitute immigrant children in East Coast cities who were sent thousands of miles away to be farm labor in the early 20th century; A Piece of the World is about a real-life disabled woman who lived in rural Maine during that same time period and achieved immortality in a painting. In The Exiles, desperate women on the lowest rungs of Britain's social ladder are exiled to "the land beyond the seas," as the British courts called Australia, for what was essentially a life sentence; very few returned to their homeland.

While researching The Exiles I visited the People's Palace and Winter Gardens in Glasgow, Newgate Prison in London, and the English village of Tunbridge Wells; I went to Australia twice and explored the Cascades Female Factory in Tasmania (now a museum), the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, a manor house called Runnymede, the Hobart Convict Penitentiary, the Richmond Gaol Historic Site, the Maritime Museum of Tasmania, and many other convict sites, museums, and libraries in Sydney and Melbourne. I read dozens of books, articles, and essays about convict life and Tasmanian Aboriginal history. To get a sense of the vocabulary and attitudes of the time, I read novels, nonfiction books, newspapers, and journals written in the mid-19th century. (Many of these are listed on my website, if you want to learn more.) I became obsessed with arcane details, some of which I discovered after finishing a draft or two. For example, after I'd handed in the manuscript I read about the inexpensive tallow made of animal fat used for candles in prisons and the homes of the poor. It smelled terrible and dripped copiously. I went back and wove that detail in.

I felt a particular responsibility, while writing The Exiles, to be as accurate as possible. Like the convict women, I am British-born and raised (and have dual citizenship), but I have never lived in Australia and am not an indigenous person. I worked hard to get the details right and convey the nuance of my characters' disparate experiences. Life was undoubtedly arduous for the convict women, but with luck and perseverance many of them ultimately earned their freedom. This was not the case for the Aboriginal people who were persecuted by the British. While writing the book I consulted and shared my manuscript with experts on these topics, including Alison Alexander, a retired professor who has written or edited 33 books on Australian history and is herself descended from convicts, and Dr. Gregory Lehman, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Aboriginal Leadership at the University of Tasmania and a descendant of the Trawulwuy people.

When you were on tour for A Piece of the World, I distinctly remember the amazing slideshow you presented on Christina Olson, the subject of Andrew Wyeth's classic painting "Christina's World." For The Exiles, you've got an impressive virtual tour coming up, appearing in conversation with everyone from Amor Towles to Ann Patchett. Do you feel more constrained or less constrained by touring virtually instead of physically?

I will miss meeting people on the road and hearing their reactions to a novel I've spent years writing in solitude. Those interactions are the best part of being on tour. (Snarfing cold breakfast sandwiches in airports, not so much!) This new virtual format presents all kinds of challenges; it's never been done before on this scale, there can be technical snafus, lighting and sound can be wonky. But anyone in the world can now attend my events and I don't have

to bounce around on trains, planes, and automobiles for weeks on end. I can wear flip flops and shorts in the comfort of my own home without worrying about time zones and jet lag and delayed or cancelled flights. Best of all, writers I admire from across the United States, from an island in Seattle to a horse farm in Virginia, can join me in conversation. I'm really looking forward to it.

I created a slideshow for The Exiles and plan to present it in person someday. It tells the story behind the book: how I came to the topic, where the research led me, and what surprises I encountered as I went along. (In addition to historical photographs, paintings, and maps, I included a few embarrassing photos from my days as a Rotary Fellow touring frozen food factories and timber preserves. Good times!)

Definitely sounds like a slideshow worth seeing! Your earlier work was contemporary, but your most recent books—Orphan Train, A Piece of the World, and The Exiles—have all drawn inspiration from real-life people and events in history. When I talked to Therese Anne Fowler, who made a similar move from contemporary to historical, about her future writing plans, she said, "I have wide-ranging interests, and while I might be said to return to a handful of favorite themes in my novels, I'm choosing to write stories that grab me irrespective of their time settings." Do you also have plans to return to contemporary settings if the spirit moves you, or does historical fiction feel like the right place for you for the foreseeable future?

I, too, prefer not to be pigeonholed. I don't even like to be called a "historical novelist" (which is largely a female ghetto, I believe—I've written about that here). After finishing each of my recent novels set in the past I was determined to write a contemporary novel, but I kept stumbling on nuggets of history too interesting to ignore.

While I was writing The Exiles, a cousin interested in genealogy reminded me of a family story that took place in rural North Carolina at the time of the Civil War. Alas, I knew instantly that this story was too good to pass up.

I can't resist asking about the recently announced TV adaptation of The Exiles, on which you'll be working with Bruna Papandrea's Made Up Stories. It seems like a perfect match, given the Australian subject matter and the company's focus on telling women's stories with women in front of and behind the camera. Why does TV feel like the right fit for this story in particular? Is this your first time overseeing the adaptation of one of your books as Executive Producer?

Congratulations to you, too, Greer: it's wonderful that Made Up Stories is producing your novel Woman 99! This female-run company seems like the perfect place for both of us. Though I'm not interested in adapting my books myself—screenwriting is such a different beast—I do have lots of opinions and look forward to being involved. With Orphan Train and A Piece of the World (both of which have been optioned for film and are in various stages of development, though you never know, with Hollywood, how things will pan out), I edited the scripts and offered suggestions, but this is the first time I'll be overseeing the adaptation of one of my

books. The Exiles is a pretty dramatic saga and I think it will make a compelling television series, but more importantly, it'll reach a wider audience than my book, introducing people to a significant piece of history that many know little about. I can't wait to get going.

Additional Interviews

VIDEO: The Book Report Network: Book Reporter Talks to….Christina Baker Kline

https://tbrnetwork.com/podcasts/bookreporter-talks-to/bookreporter-talks-to-christina-baker-kline/

VIDEO: The Center for Fiction: Christina Baker Kline Presents The Exiles with Amor Towles (Feb. 8, 2021)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuqSLSh9AaM

PODCAST: Pop Fiction Women Podcast: Christina Baker Kline & 'The Exiles': Complicated Conversations Series

https://lnns.co/qRQANZwUJ7I

PODCAST: Ep 8: Talking with Christina Baker Kline + a dive into the week's new releases

https://bibliohappyhour.com/s5-ep8/

‘The Exiles’ paints vivid portrait of 19th century English prisoners

By Lincoln Millstein | August 3, 2020 | preview.houstonchronicle.com

Christina Baker Kline leverages rich description and research to tell the stories of three women imprisoned in Australia.

SOMESVILLE, Maine — The historian Jill Lepore wrote, “Fiction can do what history doesn’t but should. It can tell the story of ordinary people.”

I came upon this in an article linked to Christina Baker Kline’s website. In her latest novel, “The Exiles,” Kline steers us through the Anglophilic diaspora of the 19th century in a journey to Australia through the lens of three women — all forcibly taken from their places of origin to shape lives under the most challenging of circumstances.

Kline takes full advantage of fiction — its freedom to create compelling characters who fully illuminate monumental events to make history accessible and forever etched in our minds.

She uses her characters to tell the story of England’s treatment of Australia as one giant hoosegow by shipping its “incorrigibles” there from 1788 to 1868. A total of 32,000 of the 160,000 English prisoners were women.

One principal is a naïve English governess who’s seduced by her employer’s son, discharged when her pregnancy is discovered and sent to the notorious Newgate English prison on phony charges, where she’s tagged as a candidate for transport to Australia.

Then there is Hazel, a Scottish teenager sentenced to seven years for stealing a silver spoon. The estranged daughter of a midwife, she creates her own barter business by trading her learned apothecarial skills for services and tools from other prisoners and sailors.

The third major character is not a transported prisoner but the aboriginal daughter of a chieftain who, left to her own fledgling devices, manages to survive in the bush with her wherewithal and cunning instincts only to become the pet of the ruling English overlord and wife, and turned into a domestication experiment.

Kline tells their stories with relentless detail and tests our capacity to endure the most wretched of human conditions. We taste the inedible slop served to prisoners, smell every ounce of human waste excreted, feel the pain of whips on our flesh and, most of all, rebel at the de-humanizing condescension of one people to another.

A few of the early reviewers with advance copies of "The Exiles" bristled at the degree of detail in Kline's depiction of cruelty and suffering, particularly inside Newgate. I don't know how you prettify rat-infested dungeons with prisoners sharing the same space, or rapes, or the fevered condition of typhoid and other diseases rampant at the time.

Kline is a serious researcher and a vivid storyteller. She had a Rotarian fellowship in Australia as a young graduate student and returned, as a best-selling author, to dig deeper. An English-born, well-traveled American, Kline is the best exemplar of the adage, "Write what you know."

Her No. 1 New York Times bestseller, 2013's "Orphan Train," borrowed copiously from Maine's colloquialisms through authentic characters of the region, as did her next bestseller, "A Piece of the World," about the woman depicted in Andrew Wyeth's mysterious painting — his most famous one, "Christina's World." Kline's father was a professor at University of Maine, so she's no stranger to the Pine Tree State.

Kline's prose is purposeful and urgent: "The constant contact with other women, cheek to cheek, their sour breath on her face as she tried to sleep, their snoring in her ears. She learned to dim the noise: the clanging door at the end of the hall, the tapping of spoons and wailing babies."

But there is also hope and optimism in "The Exiles" and redemption, as well as many unexpected side characters — the sea captain hired to transport the newly adopted orphan to her new home, the reluctant surgeon aboard the transport ship, the wily female prisoner whose own pregnancy becomes a major turn in the story.

The Australia backdrop provides a big canvas. Kline takes us from the claustrophobic and astringent hellhole of Newgate prison in the early 1800s to the land of the "free settlers," those who traveled to Australia of their own accord to build a new life — mostly agricultural. The free settlers needed laborers, and the prisons provided them.

There are good surprises and turns in the plot which I will not spoil. I developed a keen interest in all the characters and was sorry to leave them.

So thorough is Kline's research, she sent me googling throughout the book: "Angel's Trumpet," "Scotch Reel," "orlop deck," which this lifelong sailor had never heard of. She sprinkles the expository text with deft use of dialog to move the story forward effortlessly.

"The Exiles" comes out in September 2020 at a time of great global upheaval. The world is engaged in timely introspection about the oppression of one tribe of humans by another in history. I grew up in Third World Asia and witnessed the Han Chinese disenfranchising minority peoples, and other Asians, and experienced the broad reach of the U.S. Seventh fleet as America brought tremor to every corner of Asia.

Christina Baker Kline and Jill Lepore are bright beacons in a new incandescent wave of writers and historians unraveling the cankered alchemy of human events. They do it through women who heretofore did not have champions, and thus telling these stories for the first time. Lepore's "These Truths," her one-volume history of the United States, was published last year and leans heavily into the nation's original sin of slavery. That helped set me up for Kline's "The Exiles," a tour de force of original thought, imagination and promise.

New York Journal of Books: The Exiles

by Kathryn Brown Ramsperger | Sep. 15, 2020 | nyjournalofbooks.com

“You’ll open this novel because of history, read on because of story, and close it knowing more about your own life, right here, right now.”

Christina Baker Kline is at her best when she takes her reader on a journey. In The Exiles, she takes us to the era of British colonization, convict deportation, and the takeover of indigenous land in Australia and Tasmania. Along the way, we meet three main female characters: an indigenous girl, kidnapped from the family and home she loves; a naive English governess, impregnated by the man who proposes to then abandons her; and a midwife’s daughter labeled a thief for a crime she committed for her mother.

The writing is vivid, visual, real. And gut-wrenching. The plot twists will shock you.

Told through alternating points of view and locales, the novel moves from an upper class British household, to a dank prison cell, to a former slave (now convict) ship, to the shores of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), and another prison. The journey allows the unlikely meeting and friendship of many different groups of women, first thrown together in a dungeon, then on a vessel called Madea bound for a penal colony, then as servants in the home where a kidnapped Aboriginal girl is held captive as a fanciful, cruel experiment.

This novel would be a page-turner if not filled with dark despair at almost every turn, if not its graphic depiction of the raping of land and women. The faint of heart or empathic may need breaks from the pain etched on nearly every page.

All the female characters are molested, raped, beaten, or tortured. What they hold dearest is stolen or killed. Mathinna, a native of the area, is torn from her homeland and "civilized," then abandoned on a whim. Evangeline is seduced, then accused of theft and murder, also abandoned by the man she thought loved her. Hazel’s mother is desperate perhaps but puts her daughter in danger’s way instead of herself, asking her to steal a silver spoon.

The novel begs the question: Have we women not all been imprisoned, even if we went willingly, or succumbed to the promise of a gilded cage in the name of love?

But Baker is saying love is key. Evangeline is a late pastor's daughter turned governess who falls in love with the wrong man. Hazel steals for her mother. Perhaps the most tragic character is Mathinna, who continues to love her family while trying to care about her captors. Yet all three of these women experience fleeting moments of beauty and wonder despite their plight. They continue to love even though love has betrayed them. The three find their redemption in love of a daughter, Ruby, who touches all their lives in some way.

"The bare canvas crawled with fleas. The floor was sticky. The room smelled of urine and blood and feces. When the door clanked shut, the women were in total darkness. Sitting on a moldy

hammock, listening to the moans and coughs and sobs around her, Hazel thought only of Ruby, alone in the nursery. Was she wet? Was she crying? Hungry?"

Because these (and other secondary female) characters care, Ruby lives on.

Christina Baker Kline's acknowledgements prove this novel may be her most well-researched, historically true publication to date. She's also a great storyteller who engages you with a character and place fully, making you love them, making it very difficult to lose them.

The author's quest for complete authenticity will be evident to all readers of historical fiction. It's amazing these characters are based on real women from this era who bequeathed today's women freedom by their lives well lived at all costs.

Most women of the 1800s did not have any assurance of safety. Many died. The indigenous women of the South Pacific were all but wiped out by genocide. The Australian Aboriginals comprise only 3.3% of the population there today.

Baker's women meet their destiny with courage and forbearance. Step by step on their life journeys, they leave tenuous breadcrumbs at first, then lay down a strong foundation for the women who follow them.

This is a novel for our times, and a novel that will stay with you. It's a perfect book club read. Save it for a time when you feel grounded, safe, but do read it.

Why? Because The Exiles teaches about the real women transported and deported on ships, the real Australian natives and settlers. Yet story wins over fact, adventure over grief. The author's ability to weave fact with fiction, tragedy with moments of hope, and the everyday with the universal will leave you immersed, wanting more. You'll open this novel because of history, read on because of story, and close it knowing more about your own life, right here, right now. Realizing that moments of facing fear head-on lead to moments of the greatest ecstasy and empowerment, that our courage today means more than we could ever predict—to our daughters, and their daughters, to the future of the world.

Discussion Questions

from litlovers.com

1. Talk about the reasons Evangeline is first sent to prison and then to the penal colony of Australia. How does her treatment reflect the stature of women in the 1840s—in what was then (along with France) the most civilized country in the world?

2. (Follow-up to Question 1) For fun, consider the disparity between the worlds of The Exiles and, say, Jane Austen's novels, which took place a couple of decades decades before the setting of this novel. Consider, also, that Austen, like Evangeline, was herself the daughter of a clergyman. Would her life have been as precarious as Evangeline's?

3. Describe the conditions—the hardships—Evangelina experienced both in Newgate Prison and on the months-long journey to Australia.

4. In light of the questions above, apply the same topics to Hazel, whom Evangeline meets on the ship. What is Hazel's background and the reason she is sent to Australia?

5. In an outward show of grace and charity, Lady Franklin has adopted Mathinna, a young Aboriginal girl. What is Lady Franklin's actual purpose in bringing Mathinna into her household? What are her true feelings toward Australia's indigenous peoples?

6. Considering the cruelty, hardships, and death in this novel, did you find sections difficult to read at times? If you made it through to the end, why did you persist? What drove you to overcome those painful parts to reach the novel's conclusion? And if you reached the end, was it satisfying?

7. All good historical fiction engages us with real history: it brings the past alive and puts it in the context of living (albeit fictional) human beings—and so we learn. What did you learn about the settlement of Australia that you hadn't known previously?

Discussion Questions

from readinggroupguides.com

1. Were you familiar with this part of Australia's history before reading? Was there anything new you learned that particularly surprised you?

2. Mathinna and Evangeline are both orphans, and Hazel has a difficult relationship with her mother. What impact does this have on their characters, and how do you think their stories would have been different if their families were still alive?

3. Compare the different treatments of male and female convicts aboard the Medea. Though the male convicts are also being punished, they are still in a position of authority over the female prisoners. What does this say about British society in the 1800s?

4. The Franklins make Mathinna feel like she doesn't belong in Hobart Town, yet Mrs. Wilson tells Mathinna that they are the ones who don't belong. What does it mean to belong to a place? Who decides who does and does not belong?

5. Were you surprised by Evangeline's fate? Why or why not?

6. What is the significance of Mathinna losing her language? Of all the ways she changes after leaving Flinders, why does this loss feel the most important to her, and mark such a clear divide from her old life?

7. Throughout the book, multiple characters reference and find comfort in Shakespeare's THE TEMPEST. If you've read THE TEMPEST, why do you think the author chose this play in particular? What connections and common themes does it share with THE EXILES?

8. At one point, Mathinna thinks to herself, "She was tired of feeling as if she lived between worlds. This was the world she lived in now." In what way does Van Diemen's Land act as a "between world" for the different characters? How do they each struggle with leaving behind their old lives and adapting to new ones?

9. Do you think Hazel really could have forgiven Buck if he had let her? Would you have been able to forgive him after everything he did?

10. Ruby thinks about her "many mothers," and how each played a key role in taking care of her and making her the person she became. What role do found families, and found mothers in particular, play throughout the story?

11. Dr. Garrett reflects on the privileges granted the residents of Van Diemen's Land, saying, "It is my sense that, despite its hardships and limitations, living in a new world accords one certain freedoms. Social hierarchies are not as rigidly enforced." In what ways is this both true and not true for each of the characters in THE EXILES? What are the limitations of these freedoms --- which characters are allowed them, and why are others excluded?

12. What connections do you see between the historical world of THE EXILES and today?

BEHIND THE BOOK

I didn't realize until I'd finished writing *The Exiles* that I'd twined together three disparate strands of my own life history to tell the story: a transformative six weeks in Australia in my mid-twenties; the months I spent interviewing mothers and daughters for a book about feminism; and my experience teaching women in prison.

Christina (third from the right) during her time as a Rotary Ambassador in Australia.

As a grad student living in Virginia many years ago, I learned that the local Rotary Club was sponsoring fellowships to Australia. I'd been obsessed with the place since my father, a historian, gave me his marked-up copy of Robert Hughes' 1986 book *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding*. As one of four Rotary "ambassadors," I fell in love with the wide-open vistas, the vividly colored birds and flowers, and the offhanded friendliness that seemed to be a hallmark of the culture. Several years later, in the mid-1990s, I wrote a book with my mother, a women's studies professor, called *The Conversation Begins: Mothers and Daughters Talk About Living Feminism*. The interviews we did taught me a powerful lesson about the value of women telling the truth about their lives. Building on that experience, I later created a proposal to teach memoir writing at a women's prison in New Jersey. My class of 12 maximum-security inmates wrote poems, essays, songs, and stories; it was the first time many of them had shared the most painful and intimate aspects of their experience.

When I began to research the experience of convict women in nineteenth-century Australia for *The Exiles*, I recalled how, on my long-ago visit, the Aussies I met had been happy to talk about their national parks, their pioneering spirit, and their barbecued shrimp, but seemed reluctant to discuss some of the more complicated aspects of their history. When I did press them to talk about race and class, I was gently, subtly, rebuked. Returning to Hughes' 600-page book, I discovered that only one chapter, "Bunters, Mollies and Sable Brethren," specifically addressed the experiences of convict women and Aboriginal people. I thought of the prisoners I'd taught in New Jersey who'd been both terrified and relieved to tell their stories – and how searingly honest they'd been.

Australia's beautiful flora as seen by Christina on her recent research trip.

All of this led me to write a novel that showcased a variety of perspectives, from a naïve London governess, to a streetwise hustler, to a young Scottish midwife, to an Aboriginal girl caught between cultures. My characters face hardship and repression; as in the real-life accounts I studied, some stories end tragically. But for many convict women from socially stratified Britain and Ireland, Australia eventually became a place of reinvention. Survival and perseverance are an important part of my story.

Today, about 20% of Australians – a total of nearly five million people – are descended from transported British convicts. But only recently have many Australians begun embracing their convict heritage and coming to terms with the legacy of colonization. I was lucky to research this book when I did; a number of historic sites and museum exhibits are new. Though descendants of convicts now make up three quarters of Tasmania's white population, when I first visited the island several years ago the convict museum at The Cascades Female Factory was only three years old. The permanent exhibitions showcasing Aboriginal history, art, and culture at the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery had opened two weeks earlier. In addition to these places, I visited Runnymede, a National Trust site preserved as an 1840s whaling captain's house, in New Town, Tasmania, the Hobart Convict Penitentiary, the Richmond Gaol Historic Site, the Maritime Museum of Tasmania, and convict sites and museums in Sydney and Melbourne.

Dr. Alison Alexander

As I began to delve into the topic, I found the website of Dr. Alison Alexander, a retired professor at the University of Tasmania who has written or edited 33 books, including *The Companion to Tasmanian History; Tasmania's Convicts: How Felons Built a Free Society; Repression, Reform & Resilience: A History of the Cascades Female Factory; Convict Lives at the Cascades Female Factory*; and *The Ambitions of Jane Franklin* (for which she won the Australian National Biography Award). These books became primary sources for this novel. Dr. Alexander, who is herself descended from convicts, became an invaluable resource and a dear friend. She gave me a massive reading list and I devoured it all, from information about the prison system in England in the 1800s to essays about the daily tasks of convict maids to contemporaneous novels and nonfiction accounts. On my research trips to Tasmania, she introduced me to experts, took me to historic sites, and even fed me in her home. Most of all, she read my manuscript with a keen and expert eye. I am grateful for her rigor, her encyclopedic knowledge, and her kindness.

Notable among the contemporary books I read on the subject of convict women are *Abandoned Women: Scottish Convicts Exiled Beyond the Seas*, by Lucy Frost; *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia*, by Joy Damousi; *A Cargo of Women: Susannah Watson and the Convicts of the Princess Royal*, by Babette Smith; *Footsteps and Voices: A historical look into the Cascades Female Factory*, by Lucy Frost and Christopher Downes; *Notorious Strumpets and Dangerous Girls*, by Philip Tardif; *The Floating Brothel: The Extraordinary True Story of Female Convicts Bound for Botany Bay*, by Sian Rees; *The Tin Ticket: The Heroic Journey of Australia's Convict Women*, by Deborah Swiss; *Convict Places: A Guide to Tasmanian Sites*, by Michael Nash; *To Hell or to Hobart: The Story of an Irish Convict Couple Transported to Tasmania in the 1840s*, by Patrick Howard; and *Bridget Crack*, by Rachel Leary. Books I read about Australian history and culture include, among others, *In Tasmania: Adventures at the End of the World*, by Nicholas Shakespeare; *Thirty Days in Sydney: A Wildly Distorted Account* and *True History of the Kelly Gang*, by Peter Carey; *The Songlines*, by Bruce Chatwin; and *The Men that God Forgot*, by Richard Butler.

Christina with Dr. Alison Alexander during a research trip to Tasmania.

.C. Goodhart, 'A story in stone, Women's Penitentiary, Hobart' print, (1927). Used with permission from the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts.

A number of articles and essays were useful, especially "Disrupting the Boundaries: Resistance and Convict Women," by Joy Damousi; "Women Transported: Myth and Reality," by Gay Hendriksen; "Whores, Damned Whores, and Female Convicts: Why Our History Does Early Australian Colonial Women a Grave Injustice," by Riaz Hassan; "British Humanitarians and Female Convict Transportation: The Voyage Out," by Lucy Frost; and "Convicts, Thieves, Domestics, and Wives in Colonial Australia: The Rebellious Live of Ellen Murphy and Jane New," by Caroline Forell. I found a wealth of information online at sites such as Project Gutenberg, Academia.edu, the Female Convicts Research Centre (femaleconvicts.org.au), the Cascades Female Factory (femalefactory.org.au), and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (tacinc.com.au).

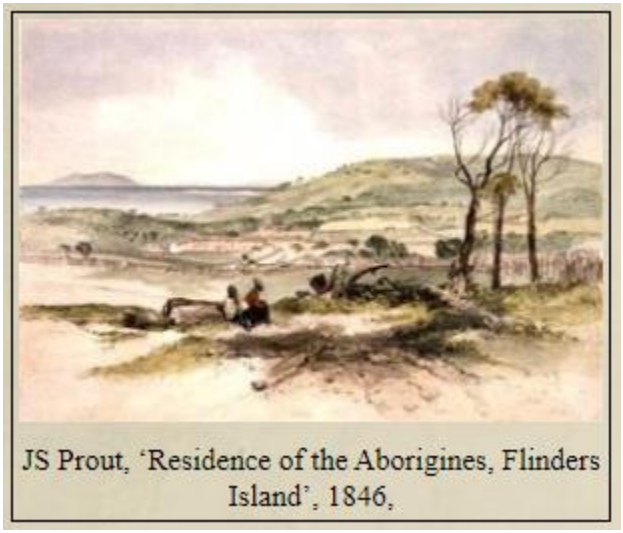
Nineteenth-century novels and nonfiction accounts I read include *The Life of Elizabeth Fry: Compiled from Her Journal* (1855), by Susanna Corder; *Elizabeth Fry* (1884), by Mrs. E.R. Pitman; *The Broad Arrow: Being Passages from the History of Maida Gwynnham, a Lifer* (1859), by Oline Keese (a pseudonym for Caroline Leakey); *For the Term of his Natural Life* (1874), by Marcus Andrew and Hislop Clarke; *Christine: Or, Woman's Trials and Triumphs* (1856), by Laura

Curtis Bullard; and *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume 2* (1840-1841).

Christina taking notes during her research trip to Tasmania.

AUTHOR'S NOTE ABOUT MATHINNA

The genesis of The Exiles was the story of British convict women exiled to Australia in the early-to-mid 19th century. But the more I learned about this time period, the more I saw that it would be irresponsible not to address the contemporaneous history of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people exiled from their own land by the British. In the course of my research I learned about a girl named Mathinna, the orphaned daughter of a chieftain who was taken on a whim and later abandoned by the British governor and his wife. Mathinna's tragic story is in many ways representative of what the British did to the Aboriginal people in Australia in the 19th century. First objectified, then ignored, and finally cast aside, Mathinna was never accorded the dignity or respect of full personhood.



JS Prout, 'Residence of the Aborigines, Flinders Island', 1846,

Each character in The Exiles has a storyline that ends on a precipice — some literal, some figurative. The story from Mathinna's perspective ends when she is about to be exiled from the governor's house and sent to an orphanage. When we see her again through the eyes of another character, several years later, it is clear that her life has been, and will continue to be, unrelentingly hard.

It's complicated to write about real people whose lives ended long ago, their fates solidified. I knew from the beginning that I did not want to depict the brutal final years of Mathinna's life. Her story, in my novel, is sad enough. After being abandoned, the real-life Mathinna was sent to an orphanage and then an open-air prison before being shunted off to a grim former convict station. She was abused, starved, and mistreated. According to various reports, she was never able to settle into any community. She descended into destitution and probably alcoholism before drowning in mysterious circumstances at the age of 17. It was never determined whether her death was murder, suicide, or a drunken mistake.

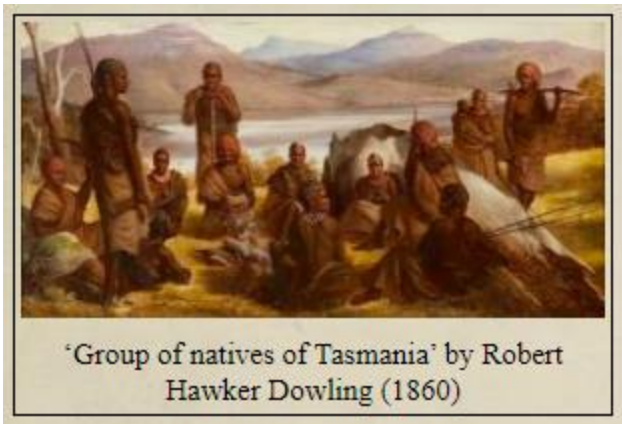
As I did in my previous novel, A Piece of the World, I chose to end Mathinna's story with a moment of connection, of recognition. Like Mathinna's, the final years of Christina Olson, the real-life person who inspired that novel, were bleak. I wanted to end the stories from Mathinna's and Christina's perspectives by highlighting their resilience – to show that even in the midst of suffering, there can be moments of grace.

Watercolor portrait of Mathinna by Thomas Bock (1842)

I encourage readers to learn more about Mathinna's story. I found the following resources especially valuable: The Last of the Tasmanians: Or, The Black War of Van Diemen's Land (1870), by James Bonwick; The Ambitions of Jane Franklin, by Alison Alexander; Wanting, a novel by Richard Flanagan; Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner: The Involvement of Aboriginal People from Tasmania in Key Events of Early Melbourne, by Clare Land; "Tasmanian Gothic: the art of Tasmania's Forgotten War," by Gregory Lehman; "Extermination, Extinction, Genocide: British Colonialism and Tasmanian Aborigines," by Shayne Breen; "In Black and White," by Jared Diamond; and "From Terror to Genocide: Britain's Tasmanian Penal Colony and Australia's History Wars," by Benjamin Madley. I was also inspired by excerpts from the Bangarra Dance Theatre's performance of "Mathinna," choreographed by Stephen Page and available on YouTube and the Bangarra Dance Theatre website (https://www.bangarra.com.au). Scroll down to watch them.

Other useful online resources include the Wikipedia page for Mathinna; Alison Alexander's article "Mathinna" at the National Centre of Biography at the Australian National University; "Mathinna" at the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies; the Mathinna Study Guide/Bangarra; the webpsite on the Uluru movement for representation; and "The hidden story of Mathinna: spirited, gifted, utterly destroyed," by Carol Raabus at ABC Radio Hobart.

I am grateful to Dr. Gregory Lehman, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Aboriginal Leadership at the University of Tasmania and a descendant of the Trawulwuy people of northeast Tasmania, for critiquing the sections about Mathinna and the history of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people.



'Group of natives of Tasmania' by Robert Hawker Dowling (1860)

Below are two excerpts from Mathinna, by Stephen Page, performed by the Bangarra Dance Theatre, whose performers all have Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. This dance premiered at the Arts Centre Melbourne in 2008 and has been been performed widely all over Australia. I found it moving and inspiring as I wrote Mathinna's story in THE EXILES. As Bangarra's website explains, "Inspired by a young girl's journey between two cultures, Mathinna traces the story of a young Aboriginal girl removed from her traditional home and adopted into western colonial society, only to be ultimately returned to the fragments of her original heritage. Mathinna has become the

archetype of the ‘stolen child’ and, in this outstanding work, Bangarra recreates her powerful story of vulnerability and searching in an era of confusion and intolerance.”

Bangarra Dance Theatre: Matthina: A Girl’s Journey Between Two Cultures

2 ½ minute excerpt: https://youtu.be/283-hYJRVUg

7 minute excerpt: https://youtu.be/wgEw4cgcE7o

BOOK CLUB BEVERAGE: THE EXILES DARK AND STORMY

Video from the author here: https://youtu.be/0BSdMgsrGxY

The perfect drink to accompany THE EXILES is a Dark and Stormy – because, let's face it, female prisoners on the convict ships to Australia faced many a dark and stormy night! Here's the story behind the drink:

British naval officers brewed ginger beer as a home remedy to combat seasickness. When a group of them were stationed in Bermuda after World War I, they mixed ginger beer with aged black rum from a local distillery. One sailor, looking at the swirl of ginger beer and rum in his glass, said that it looked like "the color of a cloud only a fool or a dead man would sail under." And hence the Dark and Stormy was born.

Ingredients
2 oz. dark rum
3 oz. ginger beer
1/2 oz. lime juice (optional)

Directions
Fill a tall glass with ice cubes. Add rum.
Pour in ginger beer and lime juice.
Stir with a spoon.
Garnish with a lime wedge. Enjoy!

BOOK CLUB BEVERAGE #2: PAULA MCLAIN'S THE EXILES DARK AND MYSTERIOUS

Enjoy this video of Christina and her dear friend, Paula McLain, preparing a traditional Dark and Stormy and Paula's twist on the famous drink, a Dark and Mysterious. Which will you sip? https://youtu.be/4sjcjAUaFLo

And the perfect video to get you in the mood, with a dark and stormy score by my son, Hayden Kline: https://youtu.be/p-QEfDBC59g

OTHER BEVERAGE & FOOD IDEAS

The right wine? Try 19 Crimes, named for the 19 crimes that would get you sentenced to transportation to Australia in the 18th and 19th centuries.

At the end of THE EXILES, Hazel climbs Mount Wellington with a picnic basket and gazes out at the city of Hobart far below. Some of my favorite recipes for a picnic, wherever you are, include:

Heirloom Tomato Tart
White Bean and Avocado Salad with Garlic Oil
Lemon Kale Salad
The Perfect Chocolate Chip Cookies

Hobart as seen from Mount Wellington