



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

Vol. 2, No. 35, SPECIAL ISSUE

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From the Editor

This week we have a special guest with us at Pages of the Past, New York Times bestseller, Christina Baker Kline! She's here this week to talk about her newest release, *The Exiles*.

I'd like to give a shout out to my friend, Cindy Nappa McCabe, who's responsible for this week's visit from Christina. She initiated the contact that resulted in this interview. Cindy is a voracious reader and a huge supporter of the authors featured at Pages of the Past. One (of many) things that Cindy and I have in common is our awe of Christina Baker Kline's writing. I'm not sure which of Christina's book was the first one that Cindy read, but mine was *Orphan Train*. I read that book and have been a fan ever since.

This week, we're foregoing our usual weekly article about writing historical fiction, and the Reading Roundup where we feature a book from a revolving series of eras. We're devoting the entire issue to Christina Baker Kline's works. I can already hear a few of you piping in – but they're not all historical fiction.

No, not all of her books are historical fiction, some are written in contemporary times. But, as writers of historical fiction – is that the only genre we write in? (Some answer yes, others no.) As readers, is historical fiction the only genre we read? Most likely not. So, all of Christina Baker Kline's books are featured in this week's newsletter. Look and see if any sound interesting. Go take a peek and enjoy some reading from a top-notch and well-respected author.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Ruth Kozak, Renata Stankova, Tiffani Angus, Edith Maxwell, Riana Everly, Heather Osborne, Rachel Bodner, and a lot more!

Trisha

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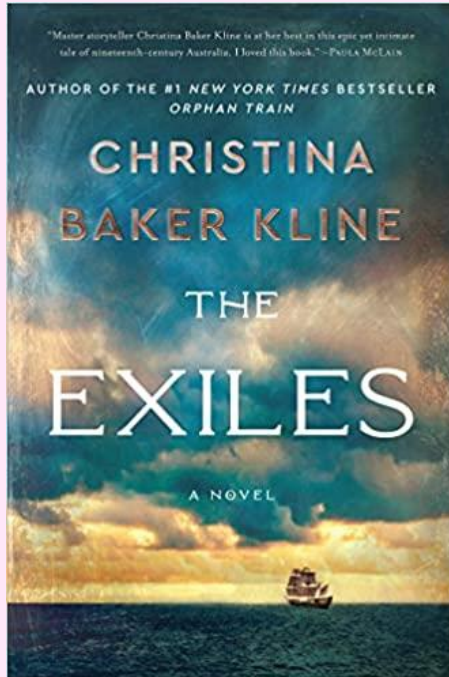
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New Releases

[The Exiles](#)

Christina Baker Kline



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 in Australia. 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 Lowrenne 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.

Author Spotlight: Christina Baker Kline

This week we caught up with New York Times best selling author, Christina Baker Kline, to chat about her book that just released last week, *The Exiles*. Well, barely caught up with. This lady has been a mass of motion over the past few weeks as *The Exiles* launched.

She's had virtual tours, events, and book signings almost every day or evening. She's been hanging out with names like Jean Kwok, Jodi Picoult, Claire Messud, Amore Towles, Lily King, and more. She's paired up with Kristin Hannah and Meg Waite Clayton for giveaways. (Go ahead, go check your bookshelves. I'll wait. I daresay many of you have a few of those authors tucked in there too.)

Despite the frenzied schedule, Kline has taken the time to sit down and chat with Pages of the Past about her book and her writing journey. I appreciate her fitting us into her currently frantic life. Grab a cup of coffee or tea and join us as we find out more about *The Exiles* and Kline's writing.



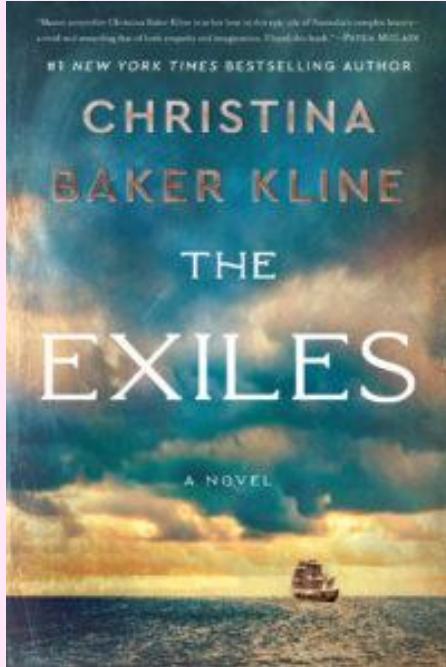
I'm excited this week to welcome our guest, New York Times bestselling author Christina Baker Kline. I fell in love with her writing in her bestselling book, *Orphan Train*. She's also written *A Piece of the World*, *The Way Life Should Be*, *Bird in Hand*, *Desire Lines*, *Sweet Water*, and *Orphan Train Girl*. Kline has garnered many awards and is published in 40 countries, along with many essays and articles. Two of her books, *Orphan Train* and *A Piece of the World* have been optioned for film.

But all of the acclaim and attention doesn't stop a prolific writer from writing. Her newest book, *The Exiles*, just released. *The Exiles* is a historical novel telling the tale of three quite different women in nineteenth-century Australia.

Christina, can we ask what inspired the seed for this story that germinated into another great story from you?



Novels percolate inside me for years; my subconscious mind is always working, making connections between unrelated things and developing stories that take a long time to surface. It wasn't until I finished writing *The Exiles* that I began to piece together the sources of its inspiration. When I was in my twenties, I read Robert Hughes' masterful nonfiction account of Australia's early years, *The Fatal Shore*. This inspired me to apply for a six-week fellowship to Australia. Soon thereafter, I wrote a book on feminism with my mother, which taught me some interesting lessons about the power of women telling the truth about their lives. I also taught memoir writing in a women's prison and learned a great deal about the psychology of incarceration. When I stumbled on an article in the *New York Times* about British convict women and children exiled to Australia in the 1800s, I was fascinated. My interest in, and knowledge of, Australia, women's issues, and the criminal justice system came together in that moment. I knew I'd found the subject of my next novel.



The three characters in *The Exiles*, two English convicts - Evangeline and Hazel, and an orphaned daughter of an Aboriginal Chief – Mathinna, are all very different women with different backgrounds and desires. You told their tales so well; it was as if I were reading their own private diaries. How is that you were able to keep the three women so different and distinct in your writing?

One of the most pleasurable things about writing *The Exiles* was that the three central characters were equally compelling to me, but vastly different from each other. I thought of Evangeline, the bookish governess who finds herself falsely accused of a crime and sentenced to “the land beyond the seas” (as the British courts called Australia), as a stand-in for the reader. She has no experience with the criminal justice system; everything that happens to her is a fresh shock. In contrast, Hazel is accustomed to life on the lowest rung of the social ladder and has developed canny ways to survive and even thrive. Mathinna, only eight years old when the story begins, is a bright, inquisitive child who sees

very clearly the hypocrisy and injustice that swirl around her.

I know that an author can't produce the high-quality books as you do without a lot of research, even though the research rarely shows up as such in the telling of the tale. What kind of research did you have to do in order to write *The Exiles*?

All novels involve some research, but my recent novels that take place in the past – *Orphan Train*, *A Piece of the World*, and *The Exiles* – require a different kind of submersion: I have to go very deep. I travel to the places I write about more than once, read everything I can get my hands on (including history books, novels, poetry, travel guides, and even cookbooks), watch films and television, listen to music, interview experts. I become immersed in the world of the book and see everything through that scrim. But ultimately all the research in the world won't salvage an uninteresting, uninspired narrative. The research has to be in service to the story; otherwise it's tedious. Revision is largely a process of paring back all but the most essential historical details.

For the other writers here in the group, can you share a little bit about what a typical writing day is like for you?

When I'm working on a novel, I set a goal for myself of 20 (handwritten) pages a week, which should – but doesn't always – equal four pages a day. I find I have to create space around my writing time in order to settle into the right frame of mind. I can't always access that easily. It takes work. I read bits and pieces from favorite books and poems; I give myself writing exercises. Whatever tricks I can employ to make a creative place in my head.

I marked so many favorite passages and excerpts from *The Exiles* that it would be impossible to ask you about so many of them. But there is one excerpt, early on in the book, that evokes such a vivid picture in my mind. I'd like to share it here, then ask you – Did you live this scene in an early life? It is as real as if you're recalling an actual event. How is it that you can transport your readers back in time like this?

When the prisoners were discharged, the guards led the shuffling procession down the stairs, moving slowly so they wouldn't tumble like dominoes. As she stood outside the tall black gates, Evangeline felt like a bear emerging from a cave, blinking into the early morning light.

The sky overhead was the warm white of fresh muslin, the leaves of the elms lining the street lily-pad green. A spray of birds rose, confetti-like, from a tree. It was an ordinary day in the city: a flower monger setting up his stall, horses and buggies clattering down Bailey Street, men in black waistcoats and top hats striding along the sidewalk, a boy calling in a high, thin voice, "Pork pies! Hot cross buns!"

Two ladies were strolling arm in arm, one in walnut brocaded satin, the other in a watery blue silk, both tightly corseted, with puffed upper sleeves that tapered fashionably to the wrist. Their parasols were ornamental, their bonnets tied with velvet bows. The one in blue caught sight of the manacled female prisoners and stopped in her tracks. Lifting a gloved hand to her mouth, she whispered in the other lady's ear. The two of them turned abruptly in the opposite direction.

I was born in England and lived there for about nine years, including several summers as an adult, teaching at a university in London. It's quite easy, in London, to imagine what it was like in the 1840s – it's such an ancient city. The cobblestones and many of the buildings still exist. Newgate Prison no longer stands, but that part of the city, near St. Paul's Cathedral, is incredibly atmospheric. When I was researching the book I stood in the square and imagined what it would've been like for Evangeline to emerge from the prison, manacled and dirty, en route to the convict ship, encountering women who only a few months earlier would've smiled and nodded to her on the street. It would've been hard to bear. All I had to do was close my eyes, breathe deeply, and imagine it.

Another of my favorite ear-marked sections focuses on Hazel, who turned out to be my favorite character of the book. (Shhhh! Don't tell Evangeline or Mathinna, I don't want them to get their feelings hurt!) Of course, having an herb and garden store many years ago, and still loving herbs in the garden and in my medicine chest, this herbal bond may have influenced my preference for her. But aside from our herbal connection, I think I enjoyed seeing her growth and flourishing throughout the rest of the book. How did Hazel's character come about being such a wise herbal woman?

Word of Hazel's miracle cure had spread. Convicts who didn't want to see the surgeon or who were sent away untreated began lining up to see her. She scrounged herbs from the cook and planted some of the seeds she'd smuggled onboard with her in a box of manure: arnica for pains and bruises, mandrake for sleeplessness, and pennyroyal, a flowering mint, for unwanted pregnancy. For dysentery, egg whites and boiled milk. For fainting spells, a tablespoon of vinegar. She created a paste from lard, honey, oats, and eggs as a salve for chapped hands and feet.

I grew up in Maine in the 1970s and '80s; my parents were professors and had many friends who grew their own food and herbs and lived off the grid. Their role models were Helen and Scott Nearing, who owned a farm that we visited several times. The Nearing's wrote a bestselling book called *Living the Good Life* that detailed their self-sufficient ways. Inspired by this, my parents built a camp on an island in northern Maine that measured 50 feet by 500 feet, in the midst of a vast lake. We had to canoe a mile to get there, and the house had no running water, electricity, or plumbing. So, I drew on my experience of people I knew who were interested in medicinal herbs, but I also discovered a whole group of people in Tasmania who use specifically Australian herbs and flowers for healing. I loved learning about that world.

I'd love to ask question after question, but I know that you're swamped right now in the last-minute details of releasing *The Exiles*. I'll close with a huge thank you as a reader, for another wonderful book. I'd also like to congratulate you. I saw that *The Exiles* has already been optioned for television. How did

you feel when you heard the news that Bruna Papandrea, the producer of HBO's *Big Little Lies*, picked up the option for television?

I'm thrilled. The production company, Made Up Stories, run by a great group of women, seems to be moving quickly and enthusiastically. Though my novels *Orphan Train* and *A Piece of the World* have also been optioned, this is the first time I'll be an Executive Producer. I look forward to helping out in any way I can. I really do think this novel has the potential to become a vividly entertaining, moving, and informative series!

Thank you for joining us today, Christina! We appreciate the time you've taken to share a little bit of your writing journey and your newest book with us. Please leave a few links where our readers can find you and your books, and we'll go follow and friend you.



You can find Christina Baker Kline here:

[Website](#)

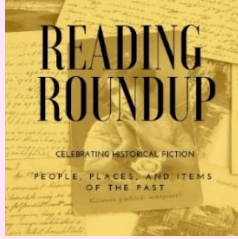
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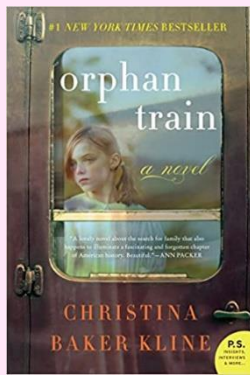
Bio: A #1 New York Times bestselling author of eight novels, including *The Exiles*, *Orphan Train*, and *A Piece of the World*, Christina Baker Kline is published in 40 countries. Her novels have received the New England Prize for Fiction, the Maine Literary Award, and a Barnes & Noble Discover Award, 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 *Salon*.



Books by Christina Baker Kline

Orphan Train

Christina Baker Kline



Between 1854 and 1929, so-called orphan trains ran regularly from the cities of the East Coast to the farmlands of the Midwest, carrying thousands of abandoned children whose fates would be determined by pure luck. Would they be adopted by a kind and loving family, or would they face a childhood and adolescence of hard labor and servitude?

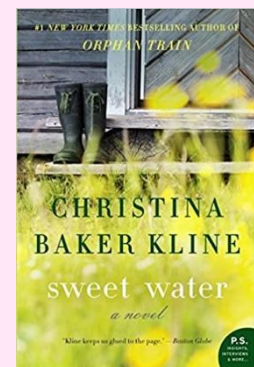
As a young Irish immigrant, Vivian Daly was one such child, sent by rail from New York City to an uncertain future a world away. Returning east later in life, Vivian leads a quiet, peaceful existence on the coast of Maine, the memories of her upbringing rendered a hazy blur. But in her attic, hidden in trunks, are vestiges of a turbulent past.

Seventeen-year-old Molly Ayer knows that a community service position helping an elderly woman clean out her home is the only thing keeping her out of juvenile hall. But as Molly helps Vivian sort through her keepsakes and possessions, she discovers that she and Vivian aren't as different as they appear. A Penobscot Indian who has spent her youth in and out of foster homes, Molly is also an outsider being raised by strangers, and she, too, has unanswered questions about the past.

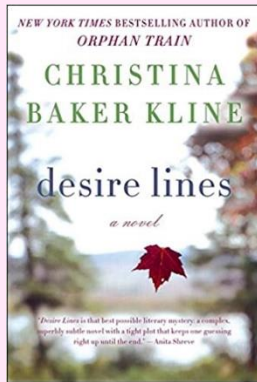
Sweet Water

Cassie Simon is a struggling artist living in New York City. When she receives a call from a magistrate in Sweetwater, TN, telling her she has inherited sixty acres of land from her grandfather, whom she never knew, she takes it as a sign: it's time for a change. She moves into the house where her mother, Ellen, was born—and where she died tragically when Cassie was three.

From the moment she arrives in Sweetwater, Cassie is overwhelmed by the indelible mark her mother's memory had left behind. As she delves into the thicket of mystery that surrounds her mother's death, Cassie begins to understand the desperate measures the human heart is capable of.



Desire Lines



On the night of her high school graduation, Kathryn Campbell sits around a bonfire with her four closest friends, including the beautiful but erratic Jennifer. “I’ll be fine,” Jennifer says, as she walks away from the dying embers and towards the darkness of the woods. She never came back.

Ten years after Jennifer’s unexplained disappearance, Kathryn is a grad-school dropout living in Virginia, stuck in a dead-end writing job and marriage. She has few close friends; most people have learned not to depend on her. When she decides to leave her husband, she ships her boxes to her mother’s house in Bangor, Maine. She has nowhere else to go.

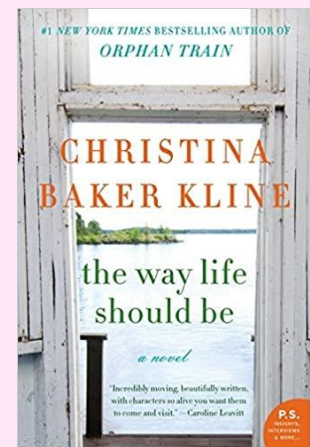
When Kathryn returns home, her former classmates are preparing for their ten-year reunion. Old questions about graduation night surface. Jennifer begins to dominate Kathryn’s life, just as she did in high school. Enigmatic and troubled, Jennifer had always depended on Kathryn’s devotion and asked for sacrifices. A decade after Jennifer walked into the woods alone, Kathryn decides that she must follow her friend’s lead, one last time.

Involving herself in the daily rhythms of small-town life, Kathryn begins an investigation into her past. She renews contacts with old friends and teachers, using her skills as a journalist to reconstruct the life that she and Jennifer shared. Kathryn knows that she must examine what she knew about her friend, and what she didn’t. She must decide what she is willing to risk to know the truth. She must decide what her own future is worth. With nothing left to lose, she is determined to answer one simple question: What ever happened to Jennifer Pelletier?

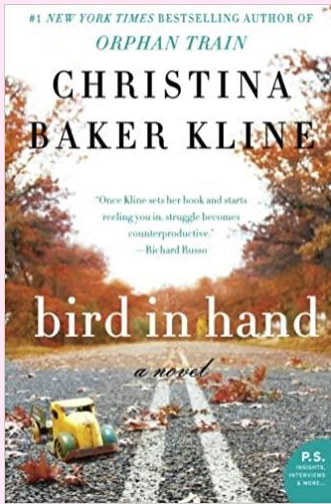
The Way Life Should Be

Angela can feel the clock ticking. She is single in New York City, stuck in a job she doesn’t want and a life that seems to have, somehow, just happened. She inherited a flair for Italian cooking from her grandmother, but she never seems to have the time for it—these days, her oven holds only sweaters. Tacked to her office bulletin board is a photo from a magazine of a tidy cottage on the coast of Maine—a charming reminder of a life that could be hers, if she could only muster the courage to go after it.

On a hope and a chance, Angela decides to pack it all up and move to Maine, finding the nudge she needs in the dating profile of a handsome sailor who loves dogs and Italian food. But her new home isn’t quite matching up with the fantasy. Far from everything familiar, Angela begins to rebuild her life from the ground up. Working at a local coffeehouse, she begins to discover the pleasures and secrets of her new small-town community and, in the process, realizes there’s really no such thing as the way life *should* be.



Bird in Hand



Four people, two marriages, one lifelong friendship: Everything is about to change.

It was dark. It was raining. It was just an accident. On the drive home from a rare evening out, Alison collides with another car running a stop sign, and—just like that—her life turns upside down.

When she calls her husband from the police station, his accusatory tone reveals cracks in their relationship she'd never noticed were there. Now she notices everything. And she begins to realize that the life she carefully constructed for herself is as tenuous as a house of cards.

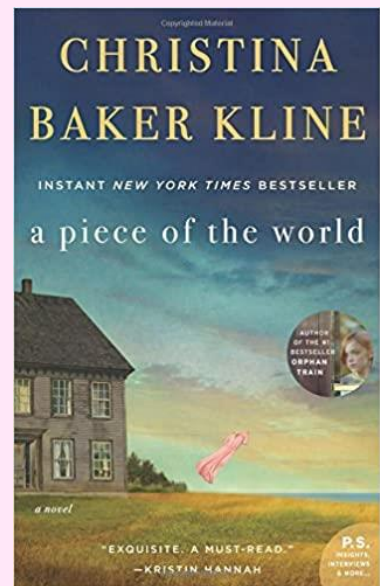
Exquisitely written, powerful, and thrilling, *Bird in Hand* is a novel about love and friendship and betrayal, and about the secrets we tell ourselves and each other.

A Piece of the World

"Later he told me that he'd been afraid to show me the painting. He thought I wouldn't like the way he portrayed me: dragging myself across the field, fingers clutching dirt, my legs twisted behind. The arid moonscape of wheatgrass and timothy. That dilapidated house in the distance, looming up like a secret that won't stay hidden."

To Christina Olson, the entire world is her family farm in the small coastal town of Cushing, Maine. The only daughter in a family of sons, Christina is tied to her home by health and circumstance, and seems destined for a small life. Instead, she becomes Andrew Wyeth's first great inspiration, and the subject of one of the best-known paintings of the twentieth century, *Christina's World*.

As she did in her beloved bestseller *Orphan Train*, Christina Baker Kline interweaves fact and fiction to vividly reimagine a real moment in history. *A Piece of the World* is a powerful story of the flesh-and-blood woman behind the portrait, her complicated relationship to her family and inheritance, and how artist and muse can come together to forge a new and timeless legacy.



Orphan Train Girl



Molly Ayer has been in foster care since she was eight years old. Most of the time, Molly knows it's her attitude that's the problem, but after being shipped from one family to another, she's had her fair share of adults treating her like an inconvenience. So when Molly's forced to help a wealthy elderly woman clean out her attic for community service, Molly is wary.

But from the moment they meet, Molly realizes that Vivian isn't like any of the adults she's encountered before. Vivian asks Molly questions about her life and actually listens to the answers.

Soon Molly sees they have more in common than she thought. Vivian was an orphan, too—an Irish immigrant to New York City who was put on a so-called "orphan train" to the Midwest with hundreds of other children—and she can understand, better than anyone else, the emotional binds that have been making Molly's life so hard.

Together, they not only clear boxes of past mementos from Vivian's attic, but forge a path of friendship, forgiveness, and new beginnings.

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