

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Novelist and poet Paulette Jiles became nationally recognized in 2002 with the publication of her historical novel *Enemy Women*. Although many reviewers cited *Enemy Women* as her first novel, Jiles is in fact an accomplished writer with many other books to her credit, including another novel. Well before *Enemy Women* hit the stands, Jiles had become well known in her adopted country of Canada. Among her works are the memoir *Cousins* and the poetry collections *Blackwater* and *Celestial Navigation*, the latter the winner of Canada's prestigious Governor General's Award in 1985.

Jiles's first volume of poetry, *Waterloo Express*, met with an enthusiastic reception. It was over a decade before Jiles's second book, *Celestial Navigation*, was published. Containing twenty-one poems from *Waterloo Express*, the volume also includes many newer poems, comprising a

"collection that derives its dynamic energy from Jiles's skill with language," wrote *Books in Canada* reviewer Judith Fitzgerald. Jiles's 1988 verse collection, *Blackwater*, was her first volume to be published in the United States, where she was born and raised.

It was the novel *Enemy Women* that became Jiles's first best seller. The Civil War-era story is based upon Jiles's own family history and on research she did on women prisoners in Missouri during the Civil War. Set in the Ozark region of Missouri, the novel recounts the wartime experiences of Adair Randolph Colley, an eighteen-year-old woman thrown into desperate circumstances with little more than her wits to guide her. After Adair's father is beaten and taken away by the Union militia, she follows the troops in hopes of finding his whereabouts. Instead she is arrested as a Confederate spy and consigned to a women's penitentiary in St. Louis. Amidst the horrifying conditions of the jail, Adair falls in love with the Union officer in charge of the facility, and he helps her to escape even as he leaves the post himself for active duty in the front lines.

*Enemy Women* became a best seller after it was chosen as the second "Read This!" selection by the television show *Good Morning America*. The book's success was also propelled by reviews and by the popularity of Civil War titles in general. Like *Cold Mountain* before it, *Enemy Women* reveals another side of the famous conflict, that of civilian suffering and the unjust incarceration of innocent people who were merely under suspicion of collaboration with the enemy.

Jiles's next novel, *Stormy Weather*, is a tale of survival set during the Great Depression. Jack Stoddard, a roustabout who liked his gambling and drinking, tried to support his family by working in the Texas oil fields, but he is exposed to a gas leak that sickens him, and he dies in a jail cell. His wife, Elizabeth, and their three daughters

move to the abandoned Tolliver farmhouse that belongs to Elizabeth's family, where they struggle to pay the back taxes and survive on cornmeal and beans.

*The Color of Lightning* was published in 2009. Like *Enemy Women*, this novel also is based during the Civil War. The hero of the story is freed slave Britt Johnson, whose character was based on a historical figure. As the Civil War comes to a close, Johnson moves his wife and three children to Young County, Texas. He has dreams of starting a freight business, and his wife wants to teach school. Their dreams come to an end after the Comanche and Kiowa Indians decide to raid their neighborhood. Johnson is not there to defend his family, and his oldest son is killed, while the rest of his family and neighbors are taken captive.

In 2013 Jiles published the novel *Lighthouse Island*. Set in a dystopian America, where the city has grown into a single megalopolis and water is harshly rationed, the story centers on Nadia Stepan, who grew up in the orphanage system after her parents abandoned her. Fearing retribution after having an affair with her boss's husband, Nadia aims to seek refuge at a mythical place called Lighthouse Island. Along her journey, she meets and falls in love with the treasonous cartographer James Orotov, who helps her along the way.

When asked in an interview on the *Southern Literary Review* Web site why she switched from writing poetry to novels, Jiles responded: "My poems just kept getting longer and longer." Jiles went on to say: "I tried to write a novel twice and threw both away. Didn't understand anything about plot. Finally understood I was interested in writing an adventure novel rather than a novel of psychological exploration. Adventure novels have a whole different set of tools, different aims, etc. I always admired Hemingway but thought girls weren't supposed to write like that. The idea for *Enemy Women* came after I found that a large number of women in Missouri were imprisoned during the Civil War."

- *Literature Resource Center,*  
go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GLS&sw=w&u=gene43801&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CH1000050422&asid=69a5ee5856d064bd71d25cea77  
b171ab. Accessed 30 Aug. 2017.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd's work as a newspaper reader. What does he bring to his audience, and what does he gain from his work besides financial compensation?
2. Why does Kidd accept the difficult job of returning Johanna home? What drives him to complete the job despite the danger and obstacles?
3. Why do you think Johanna wants to stay with her Kiowa family? What do you think she remembers of her life before she was taken?
4. What connects Kidd to Johanna? Why does she seem to trust him so easily?
5. What does Kidd worry may become of Johanna once she's returned to her family? What does he know of the fate of other "returned captives"?

6. Doris Dillion says that Johanna is “carried away on the flood of the world...not real and not not-real.” She describes her as having “been through two creations” and “forever falling.” Do you agree with her assessment? Does Johanna remain this way through the course of the novel?
7. Discuss the various tensions in the novel: Indians and whites; soldiers and civilizations; America’s recent past and its unsure future. In what ways do these tensions underlie the story of Kidd and Johanna?
8. Imagine the perspective of Johanna’s Kiowa family. Why, do you think, they would’ve taken her in and raised her? Why would they give her up? How do you think they felt when they let her go?
9. Discuss the troubling moment when Johanna wanted to scalp her fallen enemy. How did that make you feel about her?
10. Partway through his journey with Johanna, Kidd feels as though he was “drawn back into the stream of being because there was once again life in his hands.” What do you think this means? What does it tell you about Kidd’s emotional life?
11. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the author’s style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
12. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
13. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
14. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

- Publisher’s website

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Publishers Weekly

Reader Gardner proves yet again that he is one of the best voice actors in the audiobook industry today with his reading of Jiles's evocative story of post-Civil War Texas. His deep, warm voice is such a perfect match for the character of the elderly widowed Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd that listeners immediately fall under his spell. Gardner's rich vocal tones and his faultless timing of Jiles's prose rhythms draw listeners quickly and deeply into the premise of the story and the lives of its characters. In 1870, the captain is called upon to escort 10-year-old Joanna--rescued from the Kiowa tribe that abducted and raised her--to distant relatives in northern Texas. As they travel in his rickety wagon on their 400-mile journey they share dangerous adventures and form a bond that leaves them with difficult decisions when they finally reach their destination. A Morrow hardcover. (Oct.)

### Library Journal

Capt. Jefferson Kyle Kidd, an army veteran, makes his living in 1870 as a "reader" who travels around north Texas reading from various newspapers to a dime-a-head audience. A septuagenarian, he undertakes a 400-mile odyssey from Wichita Falls, TX, to San Antonio with a reluctant Johanna Leonberger, who has no memory of her life before she was kidnapped by the Kiowa Indians. Along the way, the ten-year-old warms up to the widowed captain as they face a number of perilous encounters. After venturing away from historical fiction to try her hand at dystopian fiction in *Lighthouse Island*, Canadian American author Jiles returns to mining lush Texas history and resurrecting some of the characters from 2009's *The Color of Lightening* in this tale. VERDICT This Western is not to be missed by Jiles's fans and lovers of Texan historical fiction. The final chapter's solid resolution will satisfy those who like to know what ultimately becomes of beloved characters. [See Prepub Alert, 9/21/15.]—Wendy W. Paige, Shelby Cty. P.L., Morristown.

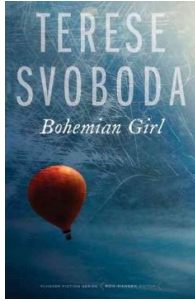
### Kirkus Reviews

In post-Civil War Texas, a 10-year-old girl makes an odyssey back to her aunt and uncle's home after living with the Kiowa warriors who had killed her parents four years earlier. Johanna Leonberger remembers almost nothing of her first 6 years, when she lived with her parents. Instead, her memory extends only as far as her Kiowa family—she speaks no English and by white standards is uncivilized. Tired of being harassed by the cavalry, the Kiowa sell her back to an Indian agent for "fifteen Hudson's Bay four-stripe blankets and a set of silver dinnerware." Enter Capt. Jefferson Kyle Kidd, a 70-year-old veteran of two wars and, in 1870, when the novel takes place, a professional reader—he travels through Texas giving public readings from newspapers to an audience hungry for events of the world. At first reluctant to take her the 400 miles to the town near San Antonio where her aunt and uncle live, he soon realizes his itinerant life makes him the most plausible person for the job—and he also knows it's the right thing to do. He buys a wagon, and they start their journey, much to the reluctance and outrage of the undomesticated Johanna; but a relationship soon begins to develop between the two. Jiles makes the narrative compelling by unsentimentally constructing a bond based at least in part on a mutual need for survival, but slowly and delicately, Johanna and Kidd begin to respect as well as need one another. What cements their alliance is facing many obstacles along the way, including an unmerciful landscape; a lack of weapons; and a vicious cowboy and his companions, who want to kill Kidd and use the girl for their own foul purposes. As one might expect, Kidd and Johanna eventually develop a deep and affectionate relationship; when they arrive at the Leonbergers, the captain must make a difficult choice about whether to leave the girl there or hold onto her himself. Lyrical and affecting, the novel succeeds in skirting clichés through its empathy

and through the depth of its major characters. Copyright Kirkus 2016 Kirkus/BPI Communications. All rights reserved.

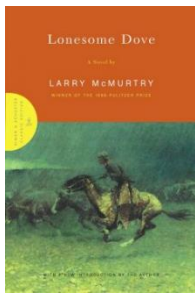
## READALIKES

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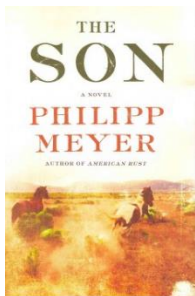
### ***Bohemian Girl* by Terese Svoboda**

After being sold by her father to an eccentric Indian to settle a gambling debt, Harriet escapes her Pawnee captor and begins a trek to find her father, meeting a variety of strange characters and encountering odd situations along the way.



### ***Lonesome Dove* by Larry McMurtry**

Set in the late-nineteenth century, this novel chronicles a cattle drive from Texas to Montana, and follows the lives of Gus and Call, the cowboys heading the drive, Gus's woman, Lorena, and Blue Duck, a sinister Indian renegade.



### ***The Son* by Philipp Meyer**

An epic of the American West and a multigenerational saga of power, blood, land, and oil that follows the rise of one Texas family, from the Comanche raids of the 1800s to the oil booms of the 20th century.