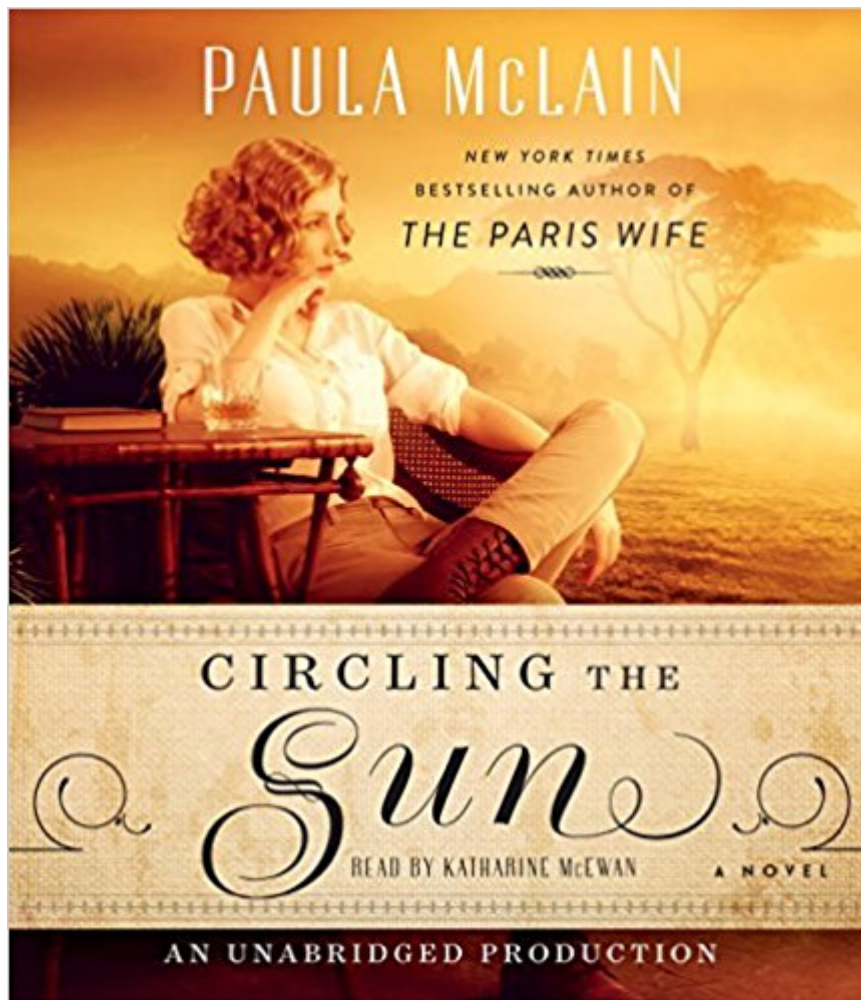


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# Circling The Sun: A Novel



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER — NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY NPR, BOOKPAGE, AND SHELF AWARENESS — “Paula McLain is considered the new star of historical fiction, and for good reason. Fans of *The Paris Wife* will be captivated by *Circling the Sun*, which . . . is both beautifully written and utterly engrossing.” —Ann Patchett, *Country Living* Paula McLain, author of the phenomenal bestseller *The Paris Wife*, now returns with her keenly anticipated new novel, transporting readers to colonial Kenya in the 1920s. *Circling the Sun* brings to life a fearless and captivating woman — Beryl Markham, a record-setting aviator caught up in a passionate love triangle with safari hunter Denys Finch Hatton and Karen Blixen, who as Isak Dinesen wrote the classic memoir *Out of Africa*. Brought to Kenya from England as a child and then abandoned by her mother, Beryl is raised by both her father and the native Kipsigis tribe who share his estate. Her unconventional upbringing transforms Beryl into a bold young woman with a fierce love of all things wild and an inherent understanding of nature’s delicate balance. But even the wild child must grow up, and when everything Beryl knows and trusts dissolves, she is catapulted into a string of disastrous relationships. Beryl forges her own path as a horse trainer, and her uncommon style attracts the eye of the Happy Valley set, a decadent, bohemian community of European expats who also live and love by their own set of rules. But it’s the ruggedly charismatic Denys Finch Hatton who ultimately helps Beryl navigate the uncharted territory of her own heart. The intensity of their love reveals Beryl’s truest self and her fate: to fly. Set against the majestic landscape of early-twentieth-century Africa, McLain’s powerful tale reveals the extraordinary adventures of a woman before her time, the exhilaration of freedom and its cost, and the tenacity of the human spirit. Praise for *Circling the Sun* — “In McLain’s confident hands, Beryl Markham crackles to life, and we readers truly understand what made a woman so far ahead of her time believe she had the power to soar.” —Jodi Picoult, author of *Leaving Time* — “Enchanting . . . a worthy heir to [Isak] Dinesen . . . Like Africa as it’s so gorgeously depicted here, this novel will never let you go.” —The Boston Globe — “Famed aviator Beryl Markham is a novelist’s dream. . . . [A] wonderful portrait of a complex woman who lived — defiantly — on her own terms.” —People (Book of the Week) — “*Circling the Sun* soars.” —Newsday — “Captivating . . . [an] irresistible novel.” —The Seattle Times — “Like its high-flying subject, *Circling the Sun* is audacious and glamorous and hard not to be drawn in by. Beryl Markham may have married more than once, but she was

nobody's wife. •Entertainment Weekly• "[An] eloquent evocation of Beryl's daring life. •O: The Oprah Magazine• "Markham's life is the stuff of legend. . . . McLain has created a voice that is lush and intricate to evoke a character who is enviably brave and independent. •NPR• "Bold, absorbing fiction. •New York Daily News• "Paula McLain has such a gift for bringing characters to life. I loved discovering the singular Beryl Markham, with all her strengths and passions and complexities. •Jojo Moyes, author of Me Before You• From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of July 2015: Sometimes a reader craves a good, old-fashioned yarn. This much anticipated novel from the author of *The Paris Wife* is exactly that: an engrossing story of love and adventure in colonial Africa, complete with gorgeous landscape, dissolute British ex-pats, and lots of derring-do with horses, motorcars and airplanes. That it is also the best kind of contemporary historical novel is the kind that teaches you something about the real people and events of the time is a bonus. At the center of the novel is Beryl Markham (born you gotta love it Clutterbuck), the headstrong daughter of a British colonial who grew up more comfortable among the people and animals of her adopted Kenya than in the homes of its landed gentry. When Beryl's mother leaves the family and her father gives up the farm, she marries (at 16) a gentleman farmer, a drunk too louche to be much of a husband. Like privileged but love-hungry teenage girls past and future, Beryl seeks companionship from her horses, becoming

the first and greatest female horse trainer in the region. Along the way, she hobnobs with Kenyan high society, including, but not limited to, Karen Blixen (who authored her own epic story, *Out of Africa*, under the pen name Isak Dinesen) and her lover Denys Finch Hatten (who will always be Robert Redford to those of us who watched him play the role in the movie version of Dinesen's book.) Much bed-hopping and relationship-boundary-pushing ensue, with all the teeth-gnashing and yearning that goes along with it, no matter the era. Those who knew about Markham before reading this book may be surprised by how little there is about her as a pilot. She is, after all, the first woman to fly across the Atlantic from east to west, and she wrote her own memoir, *1942 West with the Night*; here, it is only in the book's frame prologue and its final chapter that we get a glimpse of the way that Beryl will, literally, soar. But McLain doesn't seem interested in portraying her as a trailblazing feminist with an idea about changing the world; the Beryl Markham here is noteworthy precisely because she is NOT those things so much as a girl who grew up pushing back against conventions that got in her way. "But you've never been afraid of anything, have you?" Finch Hatten says to her in their last meeting. "I have, though," she replies. "I've been terrified. . . I just haven't let that stop me." -- Sara Nelson -- This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Paula McLain is considered the new star of historical fiction, and for good reason. Fans of *The Paris Wife* will be captivated by *Circling the Sun*, which . . . is both beautifully written and utterly engrossing." Ann Patchett, *Country Living* "Paula McLain cements herself as the writer of historical fictional memoir with *Circling the Sun*, giving vivid voice to Beryl Markham, a singular, extraordinary woman. In McLain's confident hands, Markham crackles to life, and we readers truly understand what made a woman so far ahead of her time believe she had the power to soar." Jodi Picoult, author of *Leaving Time* "Enchanting . . . A worthy heir to [Isak] Dinesen, McLain will keep you from eating, sleeping, or checking your e-mail though you might put these pages down just long enough to order airplane tickets to Nairobi. . . . What's certain is that the reluctantly earthbound armchair reader will cherish this gift for the hidden adventurer in all of us. Like Africa as it's so gorgeously depicted here, this novel will never let you go." The Boston Globe "Famed aviator Beryl Markham is a novelist's dream. . . . [A] wonderful portrait of a complex woman who lived defiantly on her own terms." People (Book of the Week) "Circling the Sun

soars. *Newsday* “Captivating . . . [an] irresistible novel. *The Seattle Times* “Like its high-flying subject, *Circling the Sun* is audacious and glamorous and hard not to be drawn in by. Beryl Markham may have married more than once, but she was nobody’s wife. *Entertainment Weekly* “[An] eloquent evocation of Beryl’s daring life. *O: The Oprah Magazine* “Richly textured . . . Markham’s life is the stuff of legend. . . . McLain has created a voice that is lush and intricate to evoke a character who is enviably brave and independent. *NPR* “Bold, absorbing fiction. *New York Daily News* “Paula McLain has such a gift for bringing characters to life. I loved discovering the singular Beryl Markham, with all her strengths and passions and complexities, a woman who persistently broke the rules, despite the personal cost. She’s a rebel in her own time, and a heroine for ours. *Jojo Moyes*, author of *Me Before You* “By the last pages, readers will hate to say goodbye to such an irresistible narrator. *Miami Herald* “Paula McLain brings Beryl to glorious life, portraying a woman with a great many flaws that seem to result from her zest for life and inability to follow the roles expected of women in the 1920s and ‘30s. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* “Amelia Earhart gets all the airtime, but this pilot had the juicier past. . . . McLain crafts a story readers won’t soon forget. *Good Housekeeping* “With a sharp eye for detail and style to spare, Paula McLain captures the nuances of complex relationships, the rigidity of social conventions, and the wide skies and breathtaking vistas of Africa. *Christina Baker Kline*, author of *Orphan Train* “Set in 1920s Kenya, this fictionalized history of the beautiful, high-flying aviator Beryl Markham is as luminous as its headstrong heroine. An exhilarating ride. *Family Circle* “Paula McLain is yet another twenty-first-century woman who can write rings around the hyper-masculine men who dominate so much of American fiction. *Liz Smith* “McLain’s skill at blending fact and fiction, which dazzled readers in *The Paris Wife*, is on full display. . . . *Circling the Sun* is a masterful story of hardship, courage and love. *Shelf Awareness* From the Hardcover edition.

This was a great book! The narrator is fiercely independent but sometimes I had trouble relating to her due to her extreme white privilege (such as thinking of native tribes as squatters on a white person’s land.) I also wish the book had focused more on her accomplishments and less on her continuously failing relationships with men. I felt like I was reading the same story over and over;

man meets woman, 2-3 pages of dialogue for readers to learn all of the man's character traits, then she enters into a relationship with the man, and it turns out he's awful to her in a multitude of ways. I saw every single one of her relationships start out as sweet and quickly descend into something she spends 20-50 pages trying to escape from, especially her first disaster of a marriage. It is simply improbable that every relationship a woman enters into starts out so cute and then he turns into a monster a few pages later. It quickly grew exhausting. By the end, all I wanted to hear about were the accomplishments that the book describes; racehorse and airplane records set. Instead the entire thing is a melodrama based around men. That being said, the author's voice in the book had me coming back for more. It is undeniable that the narrator is a woman who wants to be free but continuously tethers herself to the next man to survive the harsh life a woman faced in colonial Africa. My problem is that the book seemed to ONLY focus on the men and not on the amazing things she did. I gave the book 4/5 stars because this is a really good author and a good book when framed as what it is; a historical fiction that focuses on a woman's failed romantic relationships.

Paula McLain's story revisits the scene of *Out of Africa* with a fictional biography of the life of Beryl Markham, a record-setting female aviator who was the first person to fly solo from east to west across the Atlantic from Europe to America. Beryl was born in England but brought to Kenya by her parents as a child. Abandoned by her mother who returns to England, Beryl grows up in a wild environment of Kenya, playing with the local natives. As she matures her unconventional upbringing and love of horses sets her on a path to become the first woman in Kenya to qualify as a horse trainer. Financial and personal problems thrust Beryl into a loveless marriage and she only discovers herself when she is able to break out of that arrangement. This is all set amid the background of the frequently decadent life of English ex patriots living in Kenya in the 1920's. She meets with Karen Blixen (who as Isak Dinesen wrote the classic tale *Out of Africa*) and is attracted to Karen's lover, safari hunter Denys Finch Hatton. She not only discovers the personal love of her eventful life but also her long-term love for flying. The book is set against the magnificent wild country of 1920's Africa, and the growth of Nairobi into a major city. It is a powerful and frequently emotional tale of historical fiction about an amazing independent woman who was really ahead of her time. This is an extraordinary story that I would strongly recommend to the most discerning reader of historical fiction.

It was beryl light--a good light story, but it didn't bring to life the real story that beryl markham herself wrote, *West with the Night*.

I had previously read 4 books by and about Beryl Markham finding her life completely captivating from growing up walking the paths of Kenya with the natives to earning the first woman to earn a professional horse training license to being the first female licensed pilot in Kenya to being intimate with the Crown Prince(s) of Britain to being the first to fly the Atlantic west-to-east to living in Hollywood with her third husband a screen writer. From there it appears to be all down hill to living in poverty and alone and training horses back in Kenya. The earnings from re-discovery of her book, "West with the Night" is all that kept bread on the table in her last years. I add that while I find her life captivating, I find her lifestyle highly amoral. but that's set aside and the story becomes the focus. The previous books are non-fiction and I hung on every word. This book is fiction knitting together story of her life up until she flies the Atlantic with fabricated dialog. If that helps tell the story for you, go for it. Me, I'd stick to the prior books.

This vaguely racy piece of pap owes more to Mills & Boon than it does to reality. It is tolerable (but not exactly gripping) as a spinoff from the whole colonial Kenya genre; light reading for those who already have read the heavyweights of the happy valley set. Waxwings do not occur in Africa. Its unlikely a teenage girl would fit down a warthog burrow, let alone for three days. Owls do not have striped claws. These and other tiny slipups, while unimportant, do reveal a writer who has not had any in-depth involvement in Africa. In her favour, however, the writing gets more real towards the end, and her treatment of the infamous Idina Hay and her sordid dinner parties is quite masterful. Its not bad.. but it is more cheap romance than detailed historical memoir.

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