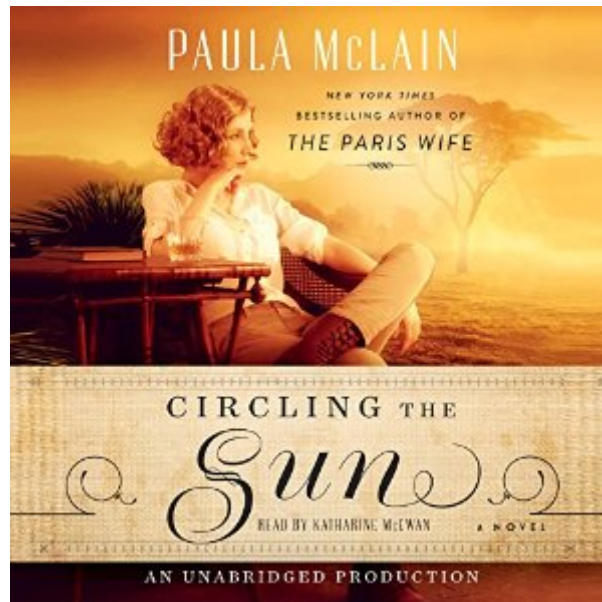


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# Circling The Sun: A Novel



## Synopsis

Paula McLain, author of the phenomenal best seller *The Paris Wife*, now returns with her keenly anticipated new novel, transporting listeners 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, author of 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 20th-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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How do you evaluate a novel which is well-written, which convincingly portrays a remarkable real life

heroine and her milieu, with believable dialogue, yet at the same time presents that heroine as unlikeable, and callous in personal relationships? And what if the other characters in the novel are one-dimensional? Such is my dilemma reviewing *CIRCLING THE SUN*. For the above reasons, my reaction to Paula McLain's latest novel is mixed. A few years earlier, I had read *THE PARIS WIFE* and believed McLain to be a talented writer. The subject of *CIRCLING THE SUN* overlapped the story told in *Out of Africa*, one of my favorite movies. I also was captivated by the beauty of *CIRCLING THE SUN*'s book jacket â " a 1920s woman on a rich, warm, golden background. So I decided to read the novel, and open myself to Beryl Markham's perspective. Admittedly, I was ambivalent from the start, because Beryl Markham was a rival to Karen Blixen in regard to Karen's love affair with Denys Finch Hatton. Karen Blixen, under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen, had described her life in Africa in her book *OUT OF AFRICA*, but in the book, the focus was more on Africa itself, rather than her affair with Denys. Likewise, Beryl Markham focused more on her accomplishments as a horse trainer and pilot in her own book, *WEST WITH THE NIGHT*, rather than her love for Denys. *CIRCLING THE SUN*, however, emphasizes personal relationships rather than accomplishments, although it does cover Beryl's development as a horse trainer. Although Beryl became famous as the first woman to fly east to west across the Atlantic, her experience as a pilot receives only cursory attention in the novel.

(no spoilers) This first thing to remember about this book is that it is classified by its author as "historical fiction." I tried to keep this in mind while reading, but found it hard and distracting to try to figure out what was factual and what was not. Maybe not a great way to read this. I'm a big fan of Isak Dinesen's (Karen Blixen) writing and her story. I have read several books by her about her life and also Denys's. So I was naturally intrigued by this book since part of Beryl's life was intertwined with theirs. Beryl and Karen shared many personality traits and life experiences, with some glaring differences. In the movie portrayal of Karen's book, *Out of Africa*, Beryl makes a vague appearance in the character Felicity. Beryl Markham, was of course, a real, fascinating person and many of the events described in the book are true, just where that line gets blurred is hard to tell. Putting that aside, which I had to, I sincerely loved this book. It took a couple short reading sessions for it to get its hooks in me, but once it did, I stayed up all night to finish it. I am in awe of both of these women for they were true pioneers in many ways. Although Beryl didn't have a choice of where she grew up, it's clear she wouldn't have chosen any place else. This novel focuses more on her personal life and less on her public persona. It begins with her as a young child and follows her to early adulthood. "Growing up wild" as she did, she didn't see boundaries where so many people,

especially women, saw in early 1900's. She only saw challenges to be overcome with hard work and determination. I admire her spirit and her courage. Her love life was confused and often painful.

Paula McLain has written another smash hit! "Circling the Sun" is an exquisite foray into historical fiction, engrossing the reader from the first sentence. Between the covers is the life story of Beryl Markham, a woman of remarkable and numerous accomplishments in the early 20th Century, which include being a female landowner (rare) and horse trainer of champion racers in Kenya (also unique), and author. She later becomes the first woman to fly cross the Atlantic from east to west, (Great Britain to N. America). This is certain to be a book that makes the New York Times Bestseller List for 2015 and undoubtedly, a feature movie in the future. Initially, the story starts at Beryl's abandonment by her mother and elder brother to return their native England, leaving Beryl in the hands of her father, who starting with little manages to gain notoriety within white society of Kenya. Beryl learns from a tender age, the theory and practical aspects of breeding and training racehorses and goes on to become famous in her own right. The story of how she starts with little to achieve great respect and admiration is a very involved tale. Soon she becomes friends with Karen Blixen, a coffee plantation owner nearby and eventually Karen's lover, Denys Finch Hatton. Their complicated triangle of friendship and love has far reaching implications, particularly for Beryl. I promise I have not spoiled the story, that is why it is essential that you read it! McLain provides a thoroughly insightful look into the colony life and its struggles and secrets which are many. She writes a smooth story in linear fashion that is strong and powerfully gripping. If you like horses, this will be a close second to "Secretariat" as a favorite.

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