



***Circling the Sun*, by Paula McLain**  
***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, April 2016***

A few years ago, writer Paula McLain won critical acclaim with her popular historical novel, *The Paris Wife*, based on the life of Hadley, Ernest Hemingway's first wife. Now with *Circling the Sun*, Ms. McLain writes about another intriguing early 20<sup>th</sup> century woman. *Circling the Sun* fictionalizes the story of Beryl Markham, aviator and adventurer.

Abandoned by her mother as a child, Beryl is raised in Kenya by her English father and the native Kipsigis tribe. As she grows up in colonial Kenya, Beryl comes to love the natural world passionately. She cherishes the wild landscape, teeming with exotic animals. Beryl is fearless; she learns how to train thoroughbred horses as a teenager.

But when her father's farm begins to fail, Beryl is forced into an early marriage with a wealthy, older man. The unhappy young woman seeks solace in nature and in the company of new friends. As her marriage collapses, Beryl becomes part of the Happy Valley set, a bohemian group of European expats. There, she meets the famed hunter and flyer Denys Finch Hatton, the lover of writer Karen Blixen. (Both made famous in *Out of Africa*.) When Beryl begins an affair with Hatton, scandal forces her to return to England.

The adventurous Beryl is just beginning to come into her own. Returning to Africa, Beryl becomes a world-famous record-setting aviator. Her 1936 solo flight in a two-seat across the Atlantic secured her legend as a pioneer in aviation.

Clearly, Ms. McLain brings Beryl Markham to life in *Circling the Sun*. She infuses her novel with wide-swept vistas and passionate characters. A more thrilling read, however, is Beryl's 1942 memoir *West in the Night*. There, we read first-hand accounts of her incredible escapades.