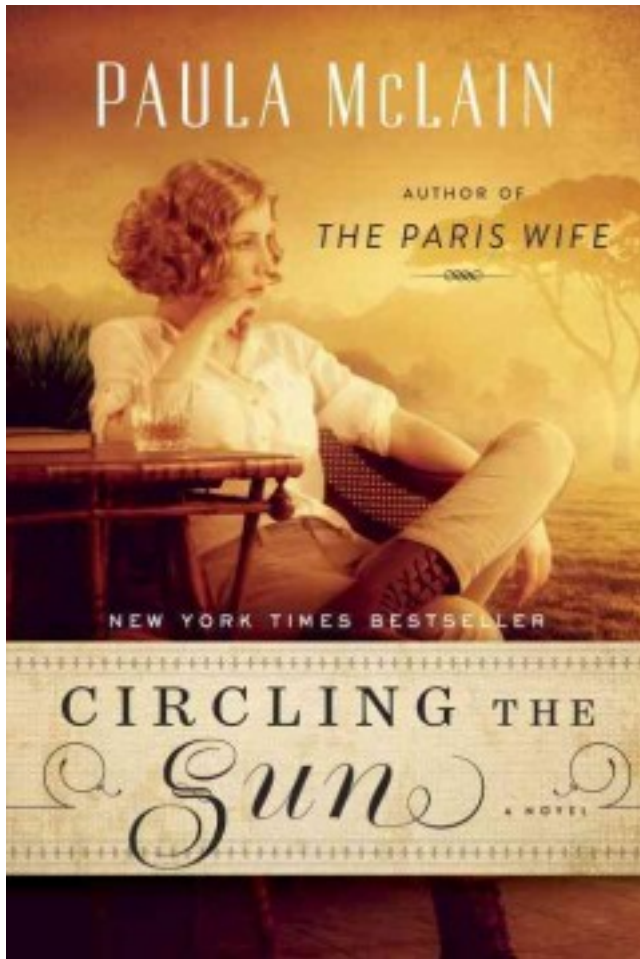


[Circling the Sun](#)



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Miwanzo is the Swahili word for “beginnings.” In this fascinating fictional biography, this word could stand for so many things: Beryl Clutterbuck’s family arriving in Africa from England when she was a child of four; the young girl establishing a close emotional bond with the local native families, known as Kipsigis; the first time she trained a thoroughbred on her own; and the first time she piloted a plane.

What an exciting life Beryl led. Beryl was one of those women who pushed against the boundaries of convention to fully partake in life.

She became the first female licensed racehorse trainer in Africa and the horses under her care won many races. She became an early bush pilot in Africa and the first woman aviator to fly across the Atlantic from east to west.

The novel is particularly expressive about Beryl’s childhood. It documents Beryl’s sense of abandonment when her mother and older brother returned to England when she was only five. The author gave this much emotional relevance perhaps because she understood it so well, her mother left her at the same age.

Not only did Beryl’s father give her free rein of their farm and the surrounding countryside, but the Kipsigis adopted her as almost one of their own. Because she came from the ruling class, they deferred to her, teaching her their traditions and way of life, but also allowing her to play with the young warriors. This toughened Beryl and contributed to her fearless spirit.

She had few limits despite the dangers of wild animals and a wild, not very populated countryside. In fact, when she was still a young child, she nearly died from a lion attack. Luckily, one of her father’s farmhands followed her after she rode a horse into the distance alone. Because he rescued her, she could later share this story with new friends.

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Unfortunately, drought came to the area when she was in her mid-teens forcing her father to sell their farm. He basically gave her two choices to leave the country and join him and his mistress near Cape Town or marry a local veteran who was starting a farm of his own.

The marriage was a major mistake. Beryl was only sixteen and her first husband did not want a woman who worked or made her own decisions. Likewise, Beryl's marriage to the English gentry man, Mansfield Markham, failed for the same reasons.

But the aviator and big-game hunter Denys Finch Hatton stole her heart. This complicated her life because he also was in love with Karen Blixen, another writer, and Beryl's good friend.

This book is packed with adventure. It also realistically depicts a young woman in the 1920s and 30s trying to make an independent life of her own. It captures the beauty of Afrida, the wildness of the land, and the culture of the natives.

If you like this book, and have not yet tried them, read Dinesen's [Out of Africa](#) and Beryl Markham's [West with the Night](#), her own story of her life.

Posted by Dory L. on July 16, 2015 [Think Library](#)

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