

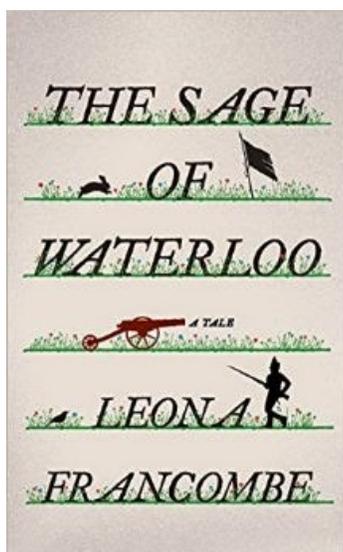
Books You Can Die in the Middle of



P.J. O'Rourke advises "Always read something that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it." Let **Galesburg Public Library** staff and friends guide you in finding those books.

Wednesday, April 29, 2015

The Sage of Waterloo: A Tale by Leona Francombe



Posted for reader Norm:

This year is the two hundredth anniversary of the 1815 Battle of Waterloo, where the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, thought defeated but now returned from exile with his armies about him once again, was defeated a second and final time by armies under the command of the Duke of Wellington, with eventual help from Blucher's Prussian force, in one of history's bloodiest battles. This book is not, however, filled with the roar of cannons, but with their echo from far off. It is set in contemporary times, and its major characters live at Hougoumont, a Belgian farm where the French attacked some of Wellington's troops, and about 6,000 men were killed. These major characters, by the way, are rabbits.

The rabbits are a mix of real rabbits and, at least on this farm, something like very intellectual human historians with incredible memories and the ability to understand human languages. Their local history is a passion for these rabbits; they want to know all about the rabbits who were there two hundred years ago, but they have just as much interest in the people, both the famous and, understandably, the not-at-all famous who were present at the farm, their little corner of the battle, while it went on. The "sage" of the title is the matriarch, Old Lavender, and the first person narrator is one of the uncommon white rabbits, William, named after the important British commander (Dutch royalty by birth) the Prince of Orange.

Despite William's brushes with predators and the mystery of his birth, the tone of this book is gentle, almost serene. The small details of the battle, the human (or lapine) interest stories, little bits and pieces, are highlighted here. The nature of a rabbit's perceptions, more smell than sight based, rabbit character, and the extrasensory perception some of them

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possess are featured and make enjoyable reading. The rabbit take on humans and their disasters is of course present. Another element running through the story is the presence of something like ghosts, and the sometimes startling ways in which the past can interact with the present.

It does have a plot, William does have adventures, including losing his home, and a mystery is solved in the end, but the strength of the book is the character of the rabbits and the gentle, reflective substance of the book, like a rabbit looking at a distant shadow of the battlefield and twitching its nose in curiosity and wonder.

- Submitted by Norm Burdick

Posted by Jane (GPL staff) at 1:31 PM

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Labels: animal narrator, Belgium, history, rabbits, Waterloo

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