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## Waterloo According to Rabbits

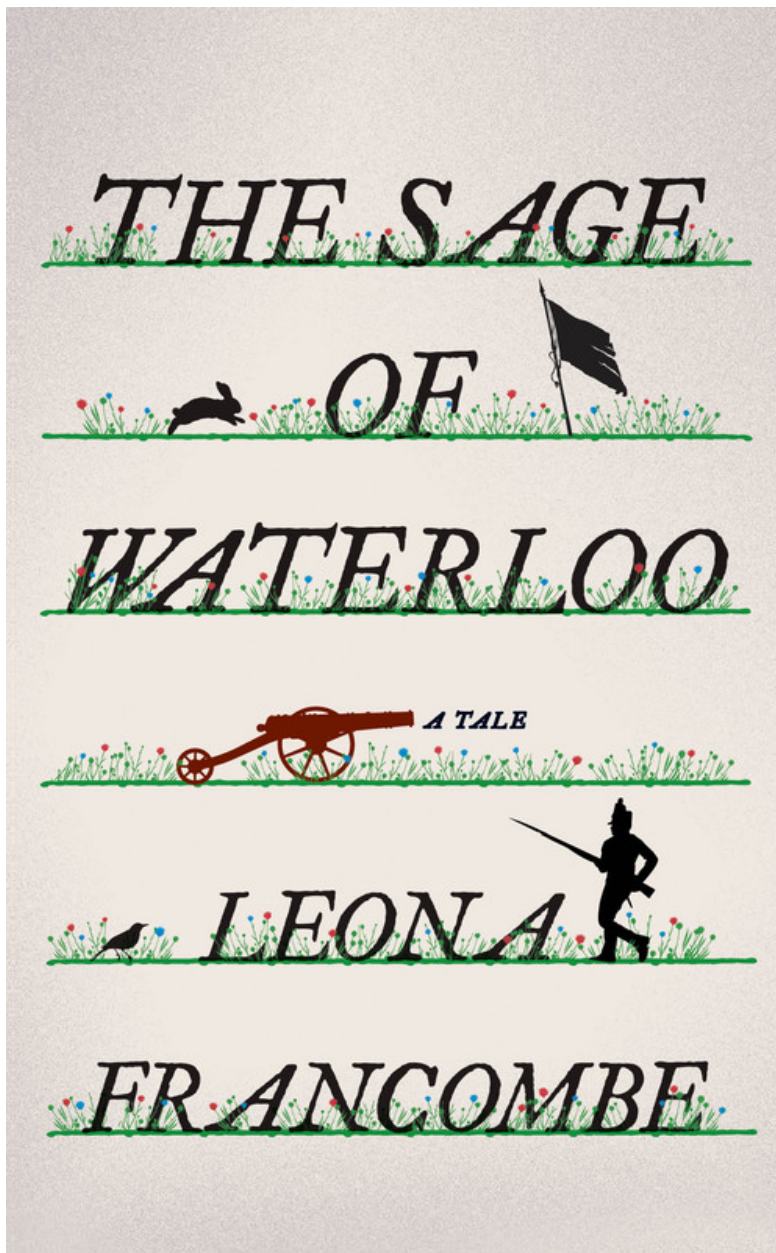
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*The Sage of Waterloo: A Tale*, by Leona Francombe; W.W. Norton & Co., \$22.95, 240 pages.

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"You can always jump higher than you think you can." Good advice for anybody, but especially important for rabbits. That and other of life's aphorisms are offered by a wise grandmother bunny named Old Lavender, a central character in this story and who lives at **Hougoumont**, the historic farm located at the site of the 1815 Battle of Waterloo. Old Lavender explains the history of the place to her grandson, William, and how the past and present are deeply intertwined here.

This debut English-language novel by classically-trained pianist **Leona Francombe** was published on the eve of the two hundred year anniversary of the decisive battle, whose outcome is often cited as paving the way for the rise of modern Europe. Told from William's point of view, it is a decidedly unique examination of the war and its consequences for humans and animals. (Perhaps another apt proverb here might be "When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.") Old Lavender and William discuss historical points as well as philosophical ones, whether war and violence is hell on earth, or the makings of, as a young William puts it, "stirring bedtime stories." There are few, if any, human voices in the book, which may throw off readers who prefer a more straightforward approach to history (i.e. anything by **Geoff Wooten**).

I enjoyed it - these are some thoughtful bunnies, and though very little action occurs in the present, history aficionados will certainly appreciate Francombe's attention to battle detail - from the exacting description of the Hougoumont farmhouse and surrounding property, to the difference in bullet weight (British bullets were seven pounds heavier than French ones). Yes, this is a novel involving Belgian bunnies discussing ghosts and a major turning point in history, but if you're willing to suspend disbelief for 240 pages, then *The Sage of Waterloo* is a refreshingly distinct examination of war and its aftermath.

**Tags:** History, leona francombe, rabbits, w w norton, waterloo

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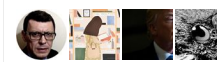
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