

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Australian-born Geraldine Brooks is an author and journalist who grew up in the Western suburbs of Sydney, attending Bethlehem College Ashfield and the University of Sydney. She worked as a reporter for *The Sydney Morning Herald* for three years as a feature writer with a special interest in environmental issues.

In 1982 she won the Greg Shackleton Australian News Correspondents scholarship to the journalism master's program at Columbia University in New York City. Later she worked for *The Wall Street Journal*, where she covered crises in the the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans. In 1990, with her husband Tony Horwitz, she won the Overseas Press Club Award for best coverage of the Gulf War. The following year they received a citation for excellence for their series, "War and Peace." In 2006 she was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University. She returned to Harvard as a Visiting Lecturer in 2021.

She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 2006 for her novel *March*. Her novels *People of the Book*, *Caleb's Crossing* and *The Secret Chord* all were New York Times Bestsellers. Her first novel, *Year of Wonders* is an international bestseller, translated into more than 25 languages and currently optioned for a limited series by Olivia Coleman's production company. She is also the author of the nonfiction works *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Foreign Correspondence* and *The Idea of Home*.

Brooks married fellow journalist and author Tony Horwitz in Tourette-sur-Loup France in 1984 and were together until his sudden death in 2019. They have two sons, Nathaniel and Bizu, she now lives with a dog named Bear and a mare named Valentine by an old mill pond on Martha's Vineyard and spends as much time as she can in Australia. In 2016, she was named an Officer in the Order of Australia.

Authors Website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you see similarities and differences to how the horses and the slaves were viewed by the owners? What does this say about their value to those who owned them?
2. What do you think the impact is to a person when their lineage, their family history, is erased?
3. Many characters have different reasons to be angry in this book. How do they use their anger? Who has the right to show it and who feels they need to suppress it?
4. What do you think about the relationship between Jess and Theo? Do you think it would have worked out long term?
5. Did you know much about horse racing before reading this novel? Did you learn anything that surprised you?
6. What do you think about what happened to Theo at the end? What does it say about being Black in the U.S. or in other countries?
7. How has racism and our notion of race in the U.S. changed from Jarret's time to Theo's time?
8. How does art weave into the stories in the book? How does it reflect the times, attitudes, and heritage at the different stages of the novel?
9. What do you think about Jarret and Lexington's relationship? What do you think Jarret's life would have been like without Lexington?
10. Which character did you most connect to? Why?

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BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

With exceptional characterizations, Pulitzer Prize--winner Brooks (*The Secret Chord*, 2015) tells an emotionally impactful tale centering on the life and legacy of Lexington, a bay colt who became a racing champion in mid-nineteenth-century America. Present at the horse's birth is Jarret, an enslaved groom on Dr. Elisha Warfield's vast Kentucky farm, and man and horse develop an enduring bond. Jarret's nuanced conversations with traveling equestrian artist Thomas Scott are mutually enlightening. Through Jarret and his father, a free Black man and expert horse trainer, readers encounter a wide range of racial injustices. This perennially and tragically relevant theme extends into the twenty-first century via Theo, a Nigerian American PhD art student. His path intersects with Jess, an Australian-born scientist at the Smithsonian, after Theo saves an old equestrian portrait discarded by his neighbor. Among the most structurally complex of all Brooks' acclaimed literary historical novels, the narrative adroitly interlaces multiple eras and perspectives, including that of 1950s New York gallery owner Martha Jackson, who

appears midway through. From rural Kentucky to multicultural New Orleans, Brooks' settings are pitch-perfect, and the story brings to life the important roles filled by Black horsemen in America's past. Brooks also showcases the magnificent beauty and competitive spirit of Lexington himself. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Best-selling and highly regarded Brooks is always a draw, but this many-faceted story of a champion racehorse, art, and hidden Black history will attract even greater interest.

Publisher's Weekly

Pulitzer winner Brooks returns after *The Secret Chord* with a fascinating saga based on the true story of a famous 19th-century racehorse. In 2019, Theo Northam, a Black graduate student in Washington, D.C., finds a discarded equestrian painting that he decides to research for a Smithsonian magazine article. Meanwhile, Jess, a bone specialist at the Smithsonian, gets a call about an old horse skeleton that's been stored in the museum's attic. Jess and Theo end up meeting, but first Brooks takes the story to 1850s Lexington, Ky., where Jarret Lewis, an enslaved boy, is the groom for a promising colt that his father, Harry, a freedman, has trained. But then the horse, Lexington, is sold and the new buyer sends him along with Jarret to a Mississippi plantation with ruinous consequences. In 1853, Lexington and Jarret end up in New Orleans, where the horse thrills the racing world, and Jarret hopes to buy his freedom, while back in contemporary D.C., a romance blossoms between Jess and Theo. While Brooks's multiple narratives and strong character development captivate, and she soars with the story of Jarret, a late plot twist in the D.C. thread dampens the ending a bit. Despite a bit of flagging in the home stretch, this wins by a nose. Agent: Kristine Dahl, ICM. (June)

Library Journal

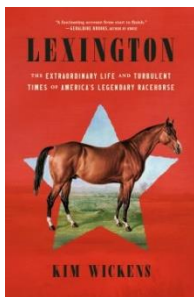
The latest historical novel from Brooks (*The Secret Chord*) centers around horse racing in the Civil War era. The first part of the story is set in the present, where a Nigerian American art historian and a scientist working at the Smithsonian are drawn together by a horse's skeleton and a painting discovered in the trash. Then the narrative goes back in time to the 1800s, where an enslaved groom named Jarret works as a trainer of race horses. The tension builds slowly, then ends with a surprising and memorable tragedy. The characters are believable and appealing; listeners will see how racism impacts the lives of people in different ways and in different time periods. The five separate voice actors--Graham Halstead, Lisa Flanagan, James Fouhey, Michael Obiora, and Katherine Cittrell--are skilled at using accents and dialect to add life and excitement to the narrative. VERDICT This title will appeal to fans of Margaret Atwood and Kathleen Kent and would be a good for any library looking to add to its representation of the African American experience.--Susan Cox

Kirkus Reviews

A long-lost painting sets in motion a plot intertwining the odyssey of a famed 19th-century thoroughbred and his trainer with the 21st-century rediscovery of the horse's portrait. In 2019, Nigerian American Georgetown graduate student Theo plucks a dingy canvas from a neighbor's trash and gets an assignment from Smithsonian magazine to write about it. That puts him in touch with Jess, the Smithsonian's "expert in skulls and bones," who happens to be examining the same horse's skeleton, which is in the museum's collection. (Theo and Jess first meet when she sees him unlocking an expensive bike identical to hers and implies he's trying to steal it--before he points hers out further down the same rack.) The horse is Lexington, "the greatest racing stallion in American turf history," nurtured and trained from birth by Jarret, an enslaved man who negotiates with this extraordinary horse the treacherous political and racial landscape of Kentucky before and during the Civil War. Brooks, a White writer, risks criticism for appropriation by telling portions of these alternating storylines from Jarret's and Theo's points of view in addition to those of Jess and several other White characters. She demonstrates imaginative empathy with both men and provides some sardonic correctives to White cluelessness, as when Theo takes Jess' clumsy apology--"I was

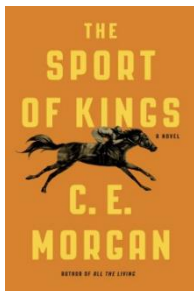
traumatized by my appalling behavior"--and thinks, "Typical....He'd been accused, yet she was traumatized." Jarret is similarly but much more covertly irked by well-meaning White people patronizing him; Brooks skillfully uses their paired stories to demonstrate how the poison of racism lingers. Contemporary parallels are unmistakable when a Union officer angrily describes his Confederate prisoners as "lost to a narrative untethered to anything he recognized as true....Their fabulous notions of what evils the Federal government intended for them should their cause fail...was ingrained so deep, beyond the reach of reasonable dialogue or evidence." The 21st-century chapters' shocking denouement drives home Brooks' point that too much remains the same for Black people in America, a grim conclusion only slightly mitigated by a happier ending for Jarret. Strong storytelling in service of a stinging moral message. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

SOLITO READALIKES - FOOTNOTES



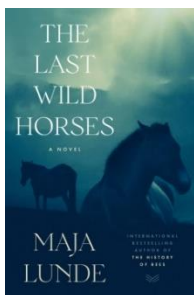
***Lexington: the extraordinary life and turbulent times of America's legendary racehorse* by Kim Wickens**

Traces the story of Lexington, a champion Thoroughbred stallion from Kentucky who broke the world speed record for a four-mile race during the Civil War and whose descendants include thirteen Triple Crown winners.



***The Sport of Kings* by C. E. Morgan**

The trailblazing patriarch of a proud Kentucky clan, his daughter, and a black ex-prisoner embark on an effort to reclaim the family's near-mythic legacy by breeding champion horses, an endeavor that is challenged by divided ambitions, the farm's ugly past, and a willful thoroughbred filly.



***The last wild horses* by Maja Lunde**

Mikhail lives in Russia in 1881. When a skeleton of a rare wild horse is brought to him, the zoologist plans an expedition to Mongolia to find the fabled Przewalski horse, a journey that tests not only his physicality, but his heart. In 1992, Karin, alongside her troubled son Mathias and several Przewalski horses, travels to Mongolia to re-introduce the magnificent horses to their native land. The veterinarian has dedicated her life to saving the breed from extinction, prioritizing the wild horses, even over her own son. Europe's future is uncertain in 2064, but Eva is willing to sacrifice nearly everything to hold onto her family's farm. Her teenage daughter implores Eva to leave the farm and Norway, but a pregnant wild mare Eva is tending is about to foal. Then, a young woman named Louise unexpectedly arrives on the farm, with mysterious intentions that will either bring them all together, or devastate them one by one.