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A Flight Through Generations

John Kenny

Lindbergh's Legacy

By Katy Hayes

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 230pp, £12.99hb

The psychology of book-packaging, particularly of the mass-market paperback, has become shamelessly blatant. Regarding what continues to be referred to as “women’s fiction” it seems largely a matter of what might be called the Smarties principle. Covers are splashed with arresting neon-effect colours (baby blue, lemon yellow and pinks dominate) that background images of stylish young women who will frequently be either smoking, holding a bubbly glass or coffee cup, or talking on a (usually mobile-) phone. These clichéd sugar-coated visuals do not expedite the relative assessment of the genre involved: the substance within the covers is not always as sweet or as monochromatically feminine as advertised.

Whatever the authorial say in Katy Hayes’s case, the current editions of her three books of fiction to date are all thusly packaged. While her new novel persists with her generally good-humoured style, a new seriousness of approach seems implicit in the quieter hues on the covers of even the impending paperback. Hayes has generally focused on the upwardly-mobile concerns and foibles of the contemporary Irish middle classes, but with *Lindbergh’s Legacy* she establishes intimate connections between plots set in the early 2000s and the late 1920s.

In 2001, imminent parents Alison and Charlie have just moved to a “grossly overpriced Wendy house” in Blackrock from where they operate, respectively, as a stylist and specialist in BMW and Volkswagen sales. Their world contains bitchy social circles, extra-marital affairs and abortions, and, eventually, disaster in business. In alternate chapters, we are taken back to Kerry in and around 1926 where Marie Rose marries Cormac, a new Garda recruit. These two also become parents amidst the local excitement about Lindbergh’s transatlantic flight. Cormac is the first to sight the plane as it traverses southern Ireland and Marie Rose is inspired towards romantic flights of fancy by the event.

The separate stories are brought together in the mutual name of the couples’s respective babies. Alison and Charlie name their son Michael for Charlie’s father who has long since disappeared; when grandfather Michael is eventually located it turns out that he is the son of Marie Rose and Cormac and that he named Charlie specifically because of the impact on the family of Charles Lindbergh’s achievement.

This family romance is delivered in singularly unexciting prose: the coverage of early twentieth-century Irish history is stilted and Hayes’s occasional shot at idiom, both old and new, misses completely. The mundane style nevertheless achieves a reasonable sense of everyday character behaviour, and Charlie, especially, is a creditably sympathetic creation. Overall, *Lindbergh’s Legacy* favours surface storyline over any serious philosophizing on the potential meaning of events. What will be merely a lightweight novel for some readers will be attractively light for others.

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