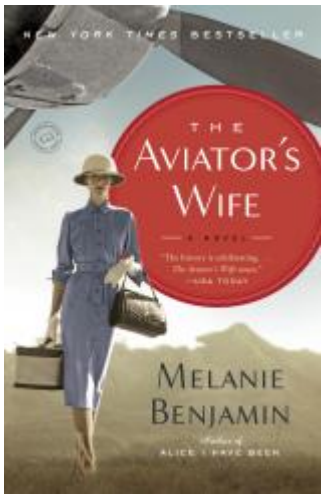
bookreporter

The Aviator's Wife

by Melanie Benjamin



About the Book

In the spirit of LOVING FRANK and THE PARIS WIFE, acclaimed novelist Melanie Benjamin pulls back the curtain on the marriage of one of America's most extraordinary couples: Charles Lindbergh and Anne Morrow Lindbergh.

"The history [is] exhilarating. . . . *The Aviator's Wife* soars."—*USA Today*

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

When Anne Morrow, a shy college senior with hidden literary aspirations, travels to Mexico City to spend Christmas with her family, she meets Colonel Charles Lindbergh, fresh off his celebrated 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic. Enthralled by Charles's assurance and fame, Anne is certain the aviator has scarcely noticed her. But she is wrong. Charles sees in Anne a kindred spirit, a fellow adventurer, and her world will be changed forever. The two marry in a headline-making wedding. In the years that follow, Anne becomes the first licensed female glider pilot in the United States. But despite this and other major achievements, she is viewed merely as the aviator's wife. The fairy-tale life she once longed for will bring heartbreak and hardships, ultimately pushing her to reconcile her need for love and her desire for independence, and to embrace, at last, life's infinite possibilities for change and happiness.

Discussion Guide

1. The epigraph for this novel is from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry who, like Anne Morrow Lindbergh, was both a celebrated author and a noted aviator. Do you agree with his statement, "One must look with the heart"? What do you think that means? And do you think it means something different to an artist (author) as opposed to a scientist (aviator)?

2. One of the recurring themes is how Anne will choose to remember Charles. How do you think she concludes she'll remember him by the end? How does it change?

3. Anne's father says, "And there's Anne. Reliable Anne. You never change, my daughter." (page 11) How does Anne change over the course of this novel? Or does she?

4. How does Anne 's nomadic lifestyle as the daughter of an ambassador later influence her concept of "home" with Charles? What do you think defines home?

5. Anne seems to think of herself as an outsider—someone too shy and insular to make a big impression. Do you agree, or do you think Anne misevaluates herself? Do you think this insularity made Anne appealing to

Charles, or do you think he was drawn to her because he saw past it? Is Charles an insular character himself, whether by nature or because he was forced into a “celebrity bubble”?

6. “Had there ever been a hero like him, in all of history?” (page 16) Anne starts her description of Charles with hero worship, comparing him to Columbus and Marco Polo. How does her opinion evolve as she comes to know him better? How did your opinion of Charles Lindbergh evolve throughout Anne’s story?

7. The title of this book is, of course, **The Aviator’s Wife**. Do you think that’s how Anne views herself upon marrying Charles? Do you think she sees that as a role she ’s playing, or as a defining characteristic of who she is? Does it change over the course of the book?

8. Have you ever been up in a biplane? Do you think you would ever go, even with an expert aviator at the controls?

9. Compare the relationships Anne has with the men in her life: her brother, Dwight; her father; and Charles.

10. What right to privacy do you think a public figure should have? Can a public figure decide what parts of his or her life stay private?

11. Have you ever met someone famous? Did he/she live up to your expectations?

12. Do you think Charles and Anne were in love? Why or why not? Did that change over time?

13. Do you think you could keep the secrets that Anne keeps from her children? Why or why not?

14. What do you think flying represents to Anne? How does it compare with writing? Which do you think is more important to Anne?

15. Do you think Charles Lindbergh was a good husband in any ways? What do you think makes for a good partner?

16. Is Anne a hero? Why or why not?

17. If you could ask Anne one question, what would it be?

18. How does Anne ’s relationship with her family change after she marries Charles?

19. How would you react to the scrutiny by the press that Anne and Charles endured? Would you want to be famous if it meant being constantly under the microscope? Would you answer differently if there weren’t social media outlets but the same type of newspapers and newsreels from Anne and Charles’s lifetime?

Author Bio

Melanie Benjamin is a pseudonym for Melanie Hauser, who has written two contemporary novels. She is the author of the nationally bestselling ALICE I HAVE BEEN and THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MRS. TOM THUMB. Benjamin lives in Chicago, where she is at work on her next historical novel.

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