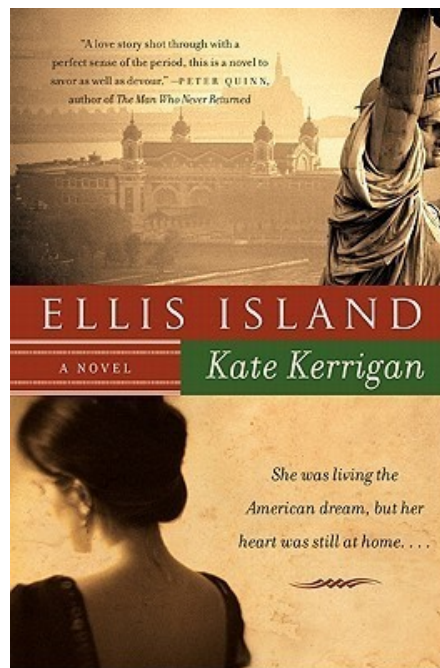




Ellis Island

Kate Kerrigan

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Already a hit in the United Kingdom, *Ellis Island* by Kate Kerrigan is both a poignant love story and a lyrical, evocative depiction of the immigrant experience in early 20th century America. Set in the 1920s, Kerrigan's novel tells of a young Irish woman who must choose between her new life in New York City and her husband back home in Ireland, brilliantly capturing these two vastly different worlds in the process. Readers of historical fiction, as well as fans of the novels of Frank Delany and other Irish themed works, will adore their time spent on *Ellis Island*.

Ellis Island Details

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ISBN : 9780062071538

Author : Kate Kerrigan

Format : Paperback 356 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Cultural, Ireland, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit

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From Reader Review Ellis Island for online ebook

Teresa says

I thoroughly enjoyed Colm Toibin's Brooklyn so I was instantly drawn to this similar tale of emigration from Kate Kerrigan but are they perhaps too alike to be read so close together? Indeed should they be compared at all given that they are most definitely two different genres?

Anyway, back to Ellis Island for a while at least...our lead character, Eileen, known as Ellie, is forced to leave the abject poverty of her rural Irish background to seek employment in 1920s New York. Whilst she is amazed by the modern conveniences of her new home (running water and electricity have yet to hit rural Ireland..), big changes are afoot in her native Ireland with the advent of the Free State prefaced by the brutalities carried out by the Black and Tans. So which "island" will Ellie choose, is Ellie's Island (nice wordplay..) based on glamour or duty?

Maybe I've read so many of these emigration stories that I've become a bit jaded, perhaps there's nothing new to tell. I found the Irish passages describing Ellie's husband's participation in the Republican Army and the stultifying ambiance of Ellie's childhood home much more gripping than the razzmatazz of Jazz Age New York – maybe I'm just awkward! I thought that the storyline seemed to have a mind of its own, meandering around, not sure where it would end up.

All in all, an enjoyable enough story but it lacked something for me – the spark which Toibin provides in his descriptions of the minutiae of everyday life. It would appear that most Amazon reviewers rave about this book so I am once more in the minority...

Kathleen (Kat) Smith says

All of us dream someday to find the perfect person to marry. Sometimes we find that person in our very best friend we have grown up with. Now much older we see them in a different light. Once just someone who we would climb trees with, scour the land for small animals and even walk us home from school, now they have matured into something much more. We shared a friendship and a love that isn't known until you find it in your best friend like John Hogan and Ellie Flaherty.

Ellie's spent her childhood growing up under her father's watchful eye being the priest of the village in which they lived. Living a life that he considers proper he wants only the best ethical life for Ellie, however when Ellie sees fit to fall in love with John and runs away to get married, it will create a dividing line for Ellie between her and her family.

Now living with John struggling to make ends meet in a run down college in the midst of war between the Irish and the British, Ellie worries that John efforts in helping out in the war will be their undoing. When he is wounded and can no longer walk, Ellie fears that now they will wind up poor since John can no longer work.

Receiving hope in the form of a letter from her friend from school, Shelia offers Ellie hope in working in America for a rich lady in need of help. Seeing an opportunity to help John with paying for an expensive

surgery to make him walk again, Ellie sees no choice but to head to America long enough to make John well again.

In the novel Ellis Island by Kate Kerrigan we see the difficult choices that people had to make in living their homelands in hopes of coming to America for a better life. What some find here isn't the land of dreams being fulfilled while others are seeing that and so much more than they ever thought possible. Ellie will be faced to make a choice to return to her life with John with all his letters pleading for her to return, or see the possibilities for them all to come to America and make it in a land of hopes and dreams.

I received this book compliments of TLC Book Tours and Harper Collins publishers for my honest review. I LOVED how open and honest this story is of the struggle of leaving home for the possibility of something better like so many emigrants did back in the 1900's. While the work is hard at first many find their efforts worth it when little by little they see the prosperity just waiting for those willing to work hard for it. This book rates a 4.5 out of 5 stars. It does contain some profanity that may offend readers but since my goal is to provide an honest review, I must disclose this.

Diane says

Ellie Hogan, the protagonist in Ellis Island is an unforgettable, timeless character. Though set in the 1920s, her struggle between independence and family loyalty, between a modern life in New York and a traditional life back in Ireland, is one that many women today will relate to.

Two key scenes take place on Ellis Island, in the huge building where immigrants were ushered through interviews and health inspections before being allowed into the United States. Anyone who has visited the building, which is now a museum, will recognize these scenes that Kerrigan brings vividly to life as Ellie first comes to America.

There is a scene where one immigrant has to undergo an eye exam with a hook that lifts the eyelid. This hook is memorably on display in the museum, and if you do there, make sure to take the audio or docent tour to get the most out of your visit.

In a later scene, Ellie is waiting on the balcony looking down on the crowd to find her husband, and after standing there myself, I felt this scene was so well written. I remember wondering what it would feel like to be waiting for someone, and Kerrigan crystalizes that feeling through Ellie.

Another great scene is the one where Ellie has gotten off of Ellis Island, and is walking up Broadway to her new job. Kerrigan paints such a sensual picture of the streets of New York, all of your senses are aroused by her description, and you feel that you are walking this trip along with Ellie.

Ellie adjusts to life in New York, and betters herself by going to school and learning how to type. Although she misses her husband and faithfully sends him money, their letters become less frequent. Ellie likes her independence, and likes the niceties of New York (electricity, beautiful clothes, appliances and convenient foods).

When a tragedy forces Ellie to go back to Ireland, she is torn. She loves her family, but she has gotten used to the finer things, and now finds the poverty of Ireland nearly unbearable. Ellie's sense of identity is confused.

The end of the story is surprising to me, and I can't wait to read the next two books in the trilogy, which

Kerrigan said take place in New York in the 1930s and Los Angeles in the 1940s. If you liked Colm Toibin's Brooklyn, put Ellis Island on your list.

Karen Kay says

Kate immigrates from impoverished Ireland to New York City to earn money for surgery for her disabled husband John. She stays for 3 years and returns to Ireland to convince John to move back to America but instead decides to stay in Ireland, foregoing her American life, giving up her chance at freedom and making something of herself.

Although the book is titled 'Ellis Island', the island had a very small role in the story.

2.5 stars rounded up to 3

Michelle says

Most immigration stories discuss the reasons one leaves a homeland for a foreign country, the hardships endured along the way and eventually some form of resolution of life in the new country. Everything about Ellis Island breaks the mold of immigration novels and forges its own path. Ultimately, the story is much richer for it.

The first half of the novel follows the traditional story-telling format. Girl meets boy, girl marries boy. The happily-ever-after, however, does not come, as both John and Ellie are swept up in the Irish revolution. Hardship follows, as one knows it must. Interestingly, Ellie's move to New York from Ireland is never meant to be permanent, and this is where the traditional story shifts into something unique. For, she is going to earn money for her husband, rather than being the one left behind waiting to be sent for later. She is the one to blaze the pioneer trail for her family, leaving all that is familiar for the unknown all because of the love she holds for John and the belief she has in their marriage. Her growing self-awareness and strength are predictable, as she lands in New York harbor during the roaring Twenties - that golden era when women were grabbing new freedoms and rights, when the spirit was one of adventure, and everyone just wanted to have fun. Ellie truly does come into her own in New York, blossoming and embracing the new culture as any modern woman is wont to do.

What gives Ellis Island its power is the continuing fidelity and love Ellie has towards her husband, even after years of separation. When forced to make a decision between her new-found freedoms and luxuries and her husband, Ellie's decision is as surprising as it is rare. Love and sticking by that love for richer and for poorer tends to be the vows spoken but not necessarily reality. One reads about all of the immigrants who came to America for a better life but very rarely do we get a glimpse of those who opted to go back across the ocean. How does the hustle and bustle of the United States, especially during the 1920s change a person? Can one ever truly go back?

Ireland and New York in the 1920s are revealed in great detail, making the contrasts between the two worlds more transparent. The reader can feel the tension as ancient antagonisms against the British rule sparks the revolution and call for home rule. S/he can sense the pulse of energy that radiates from New York City, the clicking and clacking of heels on the sidewalks, the noise of the crowd. Ms. Kerrigan presents the attitudes, opinions, customs, and other minutiae of the day with no fuss or embellishments. Ellis Island truly is a

glimpse back into the past towards a long-ago decade where everything was ripe with possibilities.

My only fault with the novel is its title. Ellis Island is so misleading. Only two brief scenes actually take place on Ellis Island, as this is not a novel about an immigrant but about a woman and her journey who just happens to go through Ellis Island on one of her stops along the way. Other than that, Ellis Island is an engaging glimpse of the past. Ellie is a character who quickly generates sympathy with the reader, and her journey of self-discovery is as pleasurable as it is fascinating from a historical perspective. An Irish village and New York City in the 1920s really were two different worlds, and her ability to maneuver through the two makes for a great story and excellent history lesson.

Thank you to Mary Sasso from Harper Perennial for my review copy!

Jade Keller says

This book was an enjoyable read, with a nicely-constructed, fast-moving plot. I love the place in history into which it delves and it's another one opening my eyes to the wide world of historical fiction which, until recently, I had thought was too obsessed with European royalty or heavy, depressing tomes.

This, thankfully is neither, but there are a few quibbles I have that prevent me from giving it the full 5 stars. First, the beginning of the book is a bit spare in the luscious detail of setting that give color and texture to the pages. While I enjoy a fast plot and never was one to enjoy wading through long passages of pure description, I felt the beginning of this one could use more for the simple reason that it would help with the pacing. The plot moves so quickly it left me a bit breathless and a few extra sentences here and there to give the reader a chance to rest between plot moments would be helpful. But, by about a quarter or so of the way into the novel, the author really hits her stride and starts developing the setting and characters in far more detail and her world really begins to come alive, full of dimension and peopled with characters one really cares about. The main character is lively and interesting, even/especially as she sometimes makes me wonder if she's completely taken leave of her senses.

The second quibble I have is with Ellie's husband, John. I won't go into too much detail here, but he was such a lovely, engaging character at the beginning. He, quite understandably, falls into bitterness later, but with it became more of a cardboard character. It would have been nice if the author had spent a little more time developing the complexity of his emotions, treating him with as much care at the end of the book as she had in the beginning.

SPOILER ALERT Another quibble I have is with the epilogue. The epilogue concludes with what Ellie is purported to learn: what she gained from her life in America and was eventually able to look past it. Except I didn't really see any evidence of her looking past it. We're told, rather than shown this. In the last chapter of the book in particular, in a scene involving perfume, it seemed to me that she was still trapped by it, remembering her love for John at the very end. She keeps her secrets and her regrets and it's her lover for him and what joy she has found in the new life that seems to sustain her. But the lessons she claimed to learn in the epilogue? I just have trouble seeing it. I'm not convinced.

And the final, tiny quibble I have is that I kept expecting something to happen with Ellie's American stocks, given the story takes place just a little before the great stock market crash and that she decided not to cash them in when she withdrew her other money. It seemed like this detail would lead to something later, but it never did, and so felt like an unfinished detail.

But other than that, it was a lovely read. One of those that I stayed up late to continue, and woke up early to

finish.

Aoibhínn says

[While I was reading the last few chapters I

Jane says

Where I got the book: ARC from LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program. Its publication date is 6/28/11 according to Amazon.

In 1920s Ireland, Ellie's husband has been injured fighting for his country's freedom. Ellie makes the tough decision to take a job in New York in order to send back enough money for his operation. The new life she makes for herself in the US changes her, and puts her future life in Ireland in doubt.

I'm trying very hard here not to put in any spoilers, as I think it's pretty unfair to do that for an as-yet-to-be-published novel, so you'll excuse the brief description. The cover suggests that Kate Kerrigan is a new author on the American scene, and she was also new to me.

Ellis Island was a most enjoyable read. Kerrigan is very skilled at describing place and time with a light touch that hides her research, and there are several lyrical moments in this novel that definitely place it a cut above the average.

We see the story from Ellie's point of view, and what struck me was that her voice is Irish, but not overly so. None of the Frank McCourt street Irish here: we're talking about a girl from a good family with a superior education, and I thought Kerrigan got this exactly right in Ellie's voice. The American parts of the story were pretty convincing too, although the idea that Ellie would fall so quickly into such high society strained my imagination just a little. But--again, trying to avoid spoilers here--the resolution of the story was credibly underplayed. I really wasn't too sure which decision Ellie would take, which is unusual as I generally see plot twists coming a mile off.

I would recommend this novel to anyone who enjoys historical fiction with a dose of romance but a good grounding in reality. Kerrigan is a fine writer, and I'll be looking out for subsequent books.

Tara Chevrestit says

This is not really about Ellis Island.. It is about the American Dream though, and Ellis Island was at one time, the first stepping stone to achieving that.

The first quarter of the novel takes place in Ireland, early 1900s. A very young Ellie, age 8, falls in love with her future husband, John, age 10. They grow up together despite their different families. Ellie even starves herself for five days to make her extremely religious parents realize how much she needs John. John is sweeter than all get out. I found myself wanting to marry him myself... in the beginning anyway.

They do get married, but bad stuff happens... John gets hurt in the revolution. Ellie is given an opportunity to go to the United States and send money home. She boards a ship and arrives at Ellis Island, lost, alone, scared, confused... and awed.

For full review, please click the link: <http://wwwbookbabe.blogspot.com/2011/...>

DubaiReader says

Rural life in Ireland vs high life in New York.

My main problem with this book is not the book itself but the excess of information we are given on the back cover. I would have preferred to have been left wondering what decision Ellie would make - whether to embrace her newfound life in New York or return to her childhood sweetheart and the hardships of her native Ireland. If you feel the same way then read no further and don't read the back of the book!

Unfortunately, we knew from the start that Ellie is drawn back to "the power of home and blood and old love", and for me, that was the wrong decision - I wanted her to stay in New York. Perhaps I am influenced by my own past - having left UK for a new life in Dubai I could relate to the excitement of New York and was frustrated by John's refusal to give it a go and at least make an informed decision.

Of course, the money she'd made in US did help alleviate many of the hardships they had suffered in the early days, so she wasn't entirely returning to the old life.

The characterisations were good but sometimes a little shallow; Ellie's mother, in particular, frustrated me. Having said that, the descriptions of the hardships of Ireland, contrasted to the bright life of NY, were excellent - and perhaps contributed to my feeling that she should have stayed. The book is worth the read for these images alone.

I was also fascinated by the lack of class distinction in 20's New York, the fact that an intelligent, hard working young girl could raise herself from servitude to wealthy, independent living with such apparent ease - and I think it will be that image that stays with me from this book.

Maren says

Maybe it is a little harsh to only give it one star, but the last half (third?) of the book was so ANNOYING that I completely gave up on it. I have so little patience for whiny women who have a wonderful marriage but they just happen to meet an eligible (rich) bachelor who through no fault of hers, I mean it was just innocent flirting, falls in love with her, but she stands her ground and says she is happily married, so they are just best buddies, completely platonic, nothing wrong with that, not even when they go spend a weekend somewhere together because really they are just friends really I promise and then she is soooooo conflicted what to do when he proposes because she loves her husband but what about this wonderful guy who is wooing her and come on it can't be wrong when it feels so right, right? But she finally under duress returns to her husband and then I'm supposed to feel like she is a heroine because what a sacrifice for her to give up her rich boyfriend to go back to her humble husband who she never stopped loving of course because she is a good girl like that. I don't know why I can't just read it like an entertaining story (I mean I watched soaps in college fhs) but it just grates on me and I can't stand it.

But the first half of the book had a completely different conflict and if I overlooked the fact that the main character was flat and distant it was a somewhat pleasant and interesting story of an Irish immigrant finding her way. But then the end just killed it dead for me.

Rachel says

Reviewed for www.compassbookratings.com

Overall Review: 4 1/2 stars

I fell in love with Ellis Island after finishing just the first chapter. In fact, I often had to remind myself that I was reading historical fiction and not a true account. Author Kate Kerrigan's rich narration, as well as vibrant descriptions, brought this tale to life. Ellie proved to be a brave and realistic heroine and her love story with husband John was tender and beautiful. Readers will enjoy the quiet beauty of the Irish countryside and feel the hustle and bustle of New York City in the 1920's. Reading Ellis Island is an adventure worth taking!

Ellis Island would make an excellent book club read as the plot easily lends itself to discussion. A Reading Group Guide is also included.

Content Analysis:

Profanity/Language: 5 religious exclamations; 7 mild obscenities; 6 derogatory names; 2 anatomical terms; 2 F-Word derivatives

Violence/Gore: A secondhand account reports a man dying and another man being beaten to death. Soldiers harass several citizens and hit them with rifles; a character is shot during battle and receives a life-threatening injury.

Sex/Nudity: Characters kiss many times; a man caresses a woman's breast; a character has to undress her incapacitated boss, giving a non-sexual depiction of nudity; a character makes jokes/references having an affair; sexual activity occurs without explicit detail between adults a few times.

Mature Subject Matter:

Death of a family member, social and socioeconomic conflict, religion, poverty, war, serious illness and injury, love, relationships.

Alcohol / Drug Use:

Most characters smoke or engage in social drinking. Speakeasys are visited.

Mary Gramlich says

ELLIS ISLAND by Kate Kerrigan

06/11 - HarperCollins Publishers - Paperback, 368 pages

Will your heart always find its way home?

Poverty and despair will drive you to make decisions that otherwise you thought impossible. Ellie had to get money so her husband John could have an operation to repair the damage done during an Irish insurrection.

The last place Ellie wanted to leave was Ireland and the worst place to go to would be America. But America had the promise of a well-paying job and the opportunity to get the money Ellie needed, which was always the root of every problem. Ellie loved John beyond measure and had since childhood so this sacrifice was one she is willing to make if only for a year.

Once she reaches New York and begins her new yet temporary life the strangest of things happen – she begins to like life in America. It is busy yes, too many people true, but there are movies to see, electricity and friends surrounding you. Ellie is questioning ever going back to Ireland and instead tries to have John join her in this land of opportunity. She has been unable to convince him of this wonderful place called New York. There is so much temptation for Ellie to resist and trying to stay grounded gets harder every day.

All decisions about staying or going ended when Ellie's father dies and she has to return home. Her intention is to handle his affairs and convince John to come back with her to New York. Once home Ellie has difficulty adjusting to living without necessities. John is steadfast in his conviction to stay so she is forced to decide if she stays with the love of her life, or leaves him to chase another life with a different man.

This story is compelling and draws you in because it is written so that you feel the emotional pain and stress these people are going through. The times were difficult, living conditions were horrendous and yet there was always a dream of something better, the hope of a different life and drive to make love last. We also must always remember each of us came from somewhere else to make a life in America. This is everyone's history and we should never forget what our ancestors did to make the life we live today so bearable.

Roz says

We always seem to think about people coming to America seeking a new and better life. Never going back to their country of origin. But this couldn't be completely true. Surely people came for other reasons just as they do today. Of course many came to escape poverty, persecution, politics and the like. But they also came just as Ellie Hogan did, to work and make money to send home to those left behind, to ease their loved ones' lives, in her case to pay for needed health care.

Not every one stayed in America. It was a means to an end but not necessarily the end in itself.

Ellie needed to leave Ireland to find out that Ireland was her home. Things are nice but they are not what is important in one's life.

In America she had access to the luxuries and conspicuous consumption that is America, electricity, toasters, light switches, restaurants, speakeasies and the like. She saw the romance of America and was seduced by it. When she was forced to return to Ireland she resented it, and only saw what she felt was lacking in her life back home. She needed to see that what she missed and craved were only things, trinkets. Was it worth sacrificing family, roots, love of country, loyalty, simple joys? These were what she would have to give up if she returned to America.

Her husband, John knew all of this. He knew what was truly valuable and never had to leave home to find out. By the end of the story, Ellie came to realize the simple truth of who she was.

This was a wonderful book to read. It shed a different light on the immigrant population that flooded America in the early part of the 20th century. Not everyone wanted to leave their homes, not everyone who did, remained. I hoped that Ellie would never return to America. She belonged in Ireland.

Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says

Terrible. Whiny, insipid, stupid heroine and an equally unimpressive husband with whom I can't believe she's in love. Equally unbelievable is how she threw away a future to be with a douchebag who does little to support her or her future. She has to go against his wishes to make anything of herself, and clings onto him no matter what opportunities present itself to her. He ruins her future so many times I've lost count. The only redeeming qualities of the book that bumped it up to 2 stars instead of the original 1 are the great descriptions of the time and place. I felt I needed to finish the book because I was hoping the ending would make the book redeem itself in my eyes. I was wrong, and I wasted 3 hours of my life.
