

June 12-26

Conversation with the Author

## ***The Other Einstein***

by Marie Benedict

**Albert Einstein is such a well-known historical figure. Were you intimidated or afraid to humanize him? What struggles did you have turning him into a round character, not just an “idea” of a person most people have?**

I almost didn't write *The Other Einstein* because I found the notion of fictionalizing the iconic Albert Einstein incredibly daunting! Because Albert factors so prominently in Mileva's life, I had to muster my courage to share a side of Albert's personality that wasn't always flattering and that very likely contradicted the more widely held understanding of him, even though my depiction is fictional. Still, I had to remind myself periodically that I was telling an important story about Mileva's life, not Albert's, to reaffirm my commitment to the task.

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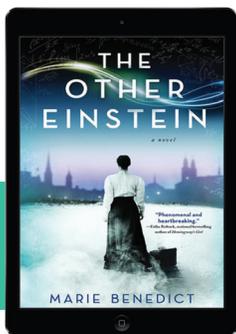
***The Other Einstein* relies on a great deal of research. What was that process like?**

Researching *The Other Einstein* was both exhilarating and frustrating, especially since I'm an exhaustive researcher who prefers to use original source material. Of course, there is a vast amount of information—both original and secondary—about Albert Einstein, but the research material available about Mileva is more scant, making the process a bit more challenging. I was fortunate, however, that some letters between Albert and Mileva still exist, as well as some letters between Mileva and Helene. They were invaluable in conjuring up Mileva's voice.

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**Mitza is a young woman in a man's world, both confident and uncomfortable at the same time. Did you draw on any personal experiences to write those scenes?**

I definitely channeled my early years as a very young lawyer at an enormous law firm in New York City when I wrote about Mitza's time at the Polytechnic. When I first started practicing as a commercial litigator in the 1990s, women lawyers were not as prevalent as they are today, and very often, I found myself as the only woman—and the youngest person—in a conference room or courtroom full of men. I remember well summoning my courage to speak or present in those situations, even when I knew that I was the only one with the correct answer. I drew upon those memories and experiences when I wrote about Mitza's own struggles to share her knowledge and insights in similar contexts.



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### **What drew you to the character of Mitza? Why not write the book from Albert's point of view?**

I have always been fascinated by the untold tales of history, and Mileva's story had long been hidden from view. Initially, I was drawn to her story because I was interested in viewing this critical period of Albert's life—when most of his revolutionary theories were formed—from a different perspective, one never before explored. But once I learned about Mileva's astounding rise from the relative hinterland of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the forwardthinking physics classrooms of fin de siècle Switzerland, I felt honorbound to write about her own compelling life. As for point of view, the idea of drafting the story from Albert's perspective never really occurred to me; my interest is in unearthing the unknown, and Albert's past has been examined exhaustively. I felt like it was time for a new voice.

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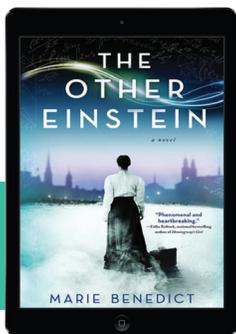
### **While *The Other Einstein* is about a relationship, it is not a love story in the traditional sense. You do a fantastic job of capturing the idealism one feels at the dawn of a relationship, and the sometimes painful truth of what that relationship actually is. Was that what you were after when you began the novel, to write the evolution of a relationship?**

At the outset, I did have a certain amount of interest in tracking the course of the relationship between Albert and Mileva. Theirs was a passionate affair and magnificent meeting of the minds that devolved rather dramatically over time. But I was also interested in exploring the process of scientific creativity that happened between them—that very moment of insight—and the attribution that happened afterward.

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### **Which character, if any, from the book did you relate to the most?**

More than any other character in the book, I probably connect with Mileva, particularly in two areas. First, as I mentioned before, I really relate to Mileva's experiences as a young woman navigating a man's world. Second, like Mileva, I have struggled with balancing the all-consuming aspects of life as a mother with the demands of life as a professional person. In *The Other Einstein*, Mileva feels torn between these two realms, and I know that there are many women like me who wrestle with this same issue today. In that way, Mileva's story is a very relevant, modern one.



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### **Have you always enjoyed science yourself, or was writing about physics and theory a whole new world for you?**

The irony about writing *The Other Einstein* is that I haven't always been a lover of science. In fact, I almost didn't write it because I found the science overwhelming. That said, once I dug into exciting scientific developments of this historical time period, I developed a new appreciation for mathematics and science—physics in particular. Viewed through Mileva's eyes, math and science become a way of discovering divine, universal patterns in our world, a notion I found very intriguing.

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### **Who are some of your favorite authors, and why?**

That is a tremendously hard question because I adore so many authors, particularly writers of fiction. Certainly, I have perennial favorites like Jane Austen, A. S. Byatt, and Agatha Christie. But I admit to having some new favorites as well. I've really been enjoying recent releases by David Mitchell, Lily King, Ann Patchett, and Lev Grossman. New or old, I am drawn to authors who attempt to unravel the larger mysteries of time.