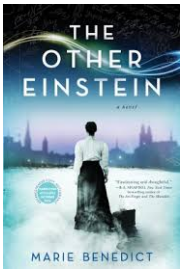
The other Einstein by *Marie Benedict*, Sourcebooks Landmark, 2017 (304 p.)




Marie Benedict

Marie Benedict is an alias for Heather Benedict Terrell, an American author married to Jim Terrell. She writes also under the name Heather Terrell. Several of her novels have an historical background with a woman as the main character. In this book the women is Mileva Marić, Einstein's first wife.

These are the facts. Mileva is born in Titel (now in Serbia) in a wealthy family. She was good in mathematics and physics and so she joined the ETH in Zürich. As students, Einstein and Mileva shared their love for science and gradually it turns into a relationship. Mileva gets pregnant of a girl Lieserl, born in 1902. They marry in 1903 when Albert, now graduated, had a job at the patent office. Mileva however failed her final exam. In 1905 Einstein published his papers on relativity theory and was offered several professorships. Mileva gave birth to two more boys: Hans Albert and Eduard. Einstein starts an affair with his cousin Elsa Löwenthal, and divorced from Mileva in 1916. Einstein gave the money of his 1921 Nobel Prize to Mileva who got the custody of the two boys – Lieserl's faith is uncertain but she possibly died from scarlet fever as a baby. Speculation is that Mileva may have contributed, at least to some extent, to the papers that were published under Einstein's name. This should have entitled her to half of the Prize.

Benedict has constructed this novel based on this idea. So, the 'other Einstein' of the title may refer to Mileva being the other author (she even claims the main author) of Einstein's papers. She was as smart as Einstein and even better in mathematics. It may also refer to another, unknown dark side of Eintein as a selfish, heartless husband with little or no empathy or respect for his wife. Benedict depicts the young Mileva as a shy girl with a club foot who falls head over heels in love with Einstein who initially is interested in her as as a bright fellow science student and being the only female in the class. Given her handicap, Meleva's father has prepared her for a future as a scientist, assuming she would never find a husband. About half the book reads like a young adult love story. But when she is pregnant of Lieserl Einstein gradually looses interest in her and she becomes a burden, except to scientific collaboration as a couple 'Bohemian scientists'. Because of her pregnancy sickness she fails her exam and she returns to her parents to give birth. Her father eventually convinces her to return to Albert who warns her not to bring Lieserl with her. They works together on the 1905 papers. When she is informed that Lieserl caught scarlet fever she travels back to her parents, but the girl dies. Einstein never shows any compassion. He only thinks about physics. After Mileva returns to Albert, they decide to marry. When the reprints arrive of what she thinks to be their joint paper, she is devastated to see only his name as the sole author. Even though she first tries to keep up with scientific literature she has to give up all hope to find some satisfaction in doing mathematics or physics. She is reduced to being 'the wife of' taking care of the children, the household, to clean up Albert's mess, and to serve and entertain the many visitors. She is miserable in unhealthy Prague where Einstein had accepted a position.

She accidentally finds a confidential correspondence between Einstein and his cousin Elsa from Berlin, just widowed. But she forgives him yet once more. The classical 'for the children's sake' still keeps them together, but when they move to Berlin where Einstein accepts a position, he makes a contract that enumerates all her duties and tasks, reducing her to an employed housekeeper. The divorce is now unavoidable.

Benedic sketches here Einstein as a really detestable male exploiter of women. So, the love story aspect of the first part turns into a feminist pamphlet. There is no mathematics or physics explained. Even though it is the only thing Mileva and Einstein seemed to have had in common. There are at most some vague references, so you should not read this for the scientific aspects, and I doubt that the reality is as it is told in this book. It only relies of circumstantial evidence and invented events manipulated to obtain a enforced dramatic effect.

Adhemar Bultheel