

Unmasking feminine pedagogical perspectives: An inclusive investigation of India Edghill's biblical women in historical fiction

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Abstract: This research paper explores into an insightful conversation with India Edghill, an American writer of biblical historical fiction. She is a distinguished modern author known for her historical fiction novels that intimately investigate the lives of women from the Hebrew Bible. Her works include, *Queenmaker*, *Wisdom's Daughter*, *Game of Queens*, *Delilah*, and *File M for Murder*. The conversation delves into Edghill's inspirations, difficulties, and thought processes when telling the tales of oversized female characters, illuminating her distinct style and its significant influence on historical fiction. The three most well-known Indian works—*Queenmaker*, *Wisdom's Daughter*, and *Game of Queens*—are the foundation for this interview. Edghill's journey into crafting novels centered around biblical women is explored in-depth. The interview reveals her inspiration rooted in the quest for the “other side of the mirror” and the desire to unveil the female perspective often overshadowed by traditional historical narratives.

Keywords: biblical historical fiction, feminism, India Edghill

Introduction

Biblical historical fiction is a literary genre that combines biblical events, places, and characters with aspects of historical fiction. Biblical historical fiction has its roots in a number of movements and elements. The literary tradition is the first. One of the most well-known subgenres in this category is the biblical epic. Throughout history, epic literature has been a feature of many societies, and the Bible itself contains epic tales. These stories have served as an inspiration for writers, who have expanded upon them to provide fictionalised accounts that offer a more in-depth and creative examination of the individuals and events. The process of interpretation and modification that led to the creation of biblical historical fiction is the second factor.

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A literary genre known as biblical historical fiction combines historical fiction elements with biblical characters, settings, and narratives. The literary tradition is the first of several tendencies and conditions that led to the formation of biblical historical fiction. Within this category, one of the most well-known subgenres is “biblical epics”. Many historical cultures have produced epic literature, and the Bible itself includes epic tales. Inspired by these stories, writers have gone on to develop their own fictionalised versions that offer a more in-depth and creative examination of the characters and events. Biblical historical fiction’s evolution can be attributed to two factors: interpretation and adaption.

The Bible is interpreted differently by different people, and writers frequently investigate different viewpoints or use imaginative storytelling to fill in any gaps in the biblical story. This gives fiction authors a wide range of options for reinterpreting and reimagining biblical events. The shifts in culture and society come next. Stories based on biblical characters and events are made for fresh reading perspectives in large part because of the shifts in society. There is a growing interest in examining biblical and religious themes in literature from both secular and religious viewpoints as society attitudes towards religion change. Biblical tales can serve as a backdrop for writers to examine universal themes and human experiences.

Another significant factor in the evolution of biblical historical fiction is historical realism. Biblical stories may captivate readers and writers alike due to their historical elements. Authors may create a more immersive experience and firmly establish their fiction in a credible historical reality by integrating historical information and context. The study of many historical eras, including biblical ones, has been made possible by the success of historical fiction as a genre. Biblical historical fiction piques readers’ interest since it takes them to other eras, which is a common interest of readers. Stories that let writers use their imaginations are what captivate them as writers. With its diverse cast of people and events, the Bible offers writers a blank canvas on which to create inventive and thought-provoking stories.

Biblical historical fiction is a relatively new genre that is part of a larger literary movement in which writers are exploring and reimagining classic tales to produce fresh takes on beloved classics. This genre invites readers to interact with well-known stories in novel and creative ways by allowing for a distinctive blending of history,

culture, and spirituality. Biblical historical fiction is experiencing a renaissance, with modern authors such as India Edghill creating stories that shed light on the sometimes-neglected experiences of women in the Hebrew Bible. Biblical historical fiction reimagines biblical characters from the metanarrative from fresh angles. Biblical historical fiction has a fascinating historicity that is unique to this still-evolving genre, even if it revises documented history.

When tracing the origins of biblical historical fiction, one must go back a long way to the inception of English literature. The majority of the works in Old English literature were composed in the early mediaeval era, which is about the 7th through the 11th century. Because of the Christianization of England during this period, religious themes and aspects can be found in certain Old English works of literature. But the current idea of “biblical historical fiction” might not be entirely compatible with the topics and literary forms found in Old English literature. Rather than being historical fiction, religious narratives and biblical stories were frequently portrayed as moral and religious lessons.

The epic poem “Beowulf,” however it’s vital to remember that it’s a secular work that incorporates both pagan and Christian elements, is one notable Old English work with biblical themes. The poem represents the meeting point of the Anglo-Saxon pagan past and the Christian present by incorporating Christian viewpoints and biblical story references. As an example, consider “The Dream of the Rood”: In this poem, the Cross is personified as an active participant in Christ’s crucifixion. It is among the first written works of Old English Christian poetry. One further significant work from the Old English era is “Genesis A and B”. These poetic interpretations of biblical tales are based on selected chapters from the Book of Genesis configurations.

An interview with India Edghill

This study paper delves into an in-depth interview with Edghill, revealing the creative decisions, obstacles, and sources of inspiration that define her distinct storytelling style.

Q1. What inspired you to delve into crafting novels focused around biblical women? Could you elaborate on the factors that led you to choose them as your subjects within the realm of historical fiction?

Edghill: I’ve always been interested in the “other side of the mirror” – history and historical fiction are usually told from the male perspective. I want to know the other half of the story! And since the

Bible is one of the great resources of story and is told entirely from the male gaze, I found retelling those stories from the female point of view very satisfying.

Q2. As a contemporary writer navigating the intricate landscape of women from the Hebrew Bible, what are the primary challenges you encounter, particularly considering their historical, socio-political backgrounds?

Edghill: The primary challenges are those that any writer of historical fiction faces – that of translating an ancient and very different world into something that makes sense to the modern reader. This involves a great deal of research, using every resource possible.

Q3. What is the profound impact of extracting biblical women from an ancient epoch and reconstructing their narratives through a ‘her-story’ lens in your novels?

Edghill: The impact of reconstructing the stories of Biblical women through a lens of “her-story” is indeed profound. It opens up the ancient world to us as a fully-rounded creation, reminding us that without the women’s viewpoint we have only half of the story.

Q4. Your biblical retellings often revolve around women of royal lineage, exemplified in works like *Queenmaker*, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, and *Game of Queens*. What motivated your specific focus on this category of women in your literary creations?

Edghill: Of the few women mentioned in the Bible, most are queens or princesses. They’re the ones who have enough of a story to make it easier to flesh a history for them. That’s what made me focus on royal women: they were there in the story.

Q5. In *Queenmaker*, you opted to narrate David’s story from the perspective of Michal. What prompted the selection of Michal as the narrative voice for this particular storyline?

Edghill: David’s story has been told and retold many, many times. I’m interested in the story from the women’s viewpoint, so weaving a novel from Michal’s perspective was an easy choice for me.

Q6. The friendship between Bethsheba and Michal takes center stage in *Queenmaker*. Why did you choose to place Bethsheba alongside Michal rather than alongside David?

Edghill: I placed Bathsheba beside Michal rather than beside David for a couple of reasons: 1) David loses interest in Bathsheba, so she doesn’t interact with him after Solomon is born and 2) I’m very much interested in relationships between and among women. It’s a strong

motif in my novels and short stories. Hence Michal – who is rather lonely in David’s palace – finds a friend in Bathsheba.

Q7. Queenmaker intricately weaves a narrative subverting traditional characters and power dynamics of patriarchy. What inspired this approach, and how did you channel the force that transformed patriarchal representations into a feminist narrative?

Edghill: Subverting traditional characters and the power dynamics of patriarchy: Again, I’m interested in “the other side of the mirror”. When you change who’s looking at events – for example, not through David’s eyes but through Michal’s eyes, it changes the entire way we consider history. With each writing choice, an author can lead a reader farther away from a traditional narrative and open their eyes to new vistas.

Q8. When allowing Biblical women to articulate their stories, what expectations do you harbor? Have you encountered challenges in subverting patriarchal power roles through your narrative approach?

Edghill: My expectations when allowing biblical women to articulate their own stories are that flipping the tale on its head, gender-wise, will give us a story that provides a three dimensional world-view. I haven’t had any particular challenges in doing this.

Q9. *Wisdom’s Daughter* presents a powerful feminist perspective on the Queen of Sheba, using an omniscient narrator, Abhishag. What motivated the choice of this narrative style and character perspective?

Edghill: Abishag’s narrative was a deliberate choice. I needed to be able to convey information to the reader that none of the main characters would know. The dead are traditionally omniscient, and Abishag was a pivotal character in the David and Solomon stories, so I chose her to convey information to the reader.

Q10. Solomon’s Daughter emerges as a formidable fictional character in *Wisdom’s Daughter*. How did you conceive and develop this character?

Edghill: Solomon’s daughter Baalit was conceived as a sort of “anti-princess” – she’s the sort of character who everyone around her feels should have been a boy. I used a lot of the young Queen Elizabeth the First in creating the Baalit character. Her story arc takes her from worrying about who she’s going to have to marry to heir to the Sheban throne.

Q11. *Game of Queens* intriguingly highlights the resilient Vashti over Esther, providing a powerful subversion of historical power and

patriarchy. What led to your decision to emphasize Vashti's courage in the narrative?

Edghill: Vashti over Esther – well, there are dozens and dozens possibly hundreds – of novels focusing on Esther. I love an Esther novel myself, but I wanted to highlight Vashti, who could have been putting her head on the block by refusing her drunken husband's command that she appear at a men's banquet. A woman who could do that is a role model at least as good as that of Esther.

Q12. *Game of Queens* introduces animals and pets, a rarity in Biblical stories. Is this inclusion reflective of your affinity for animals? Edghill: Yes, it certainly is. My family has always had pets – and while I was researching *Game of Queens*, I discovered that the ancient Persians adored dogs! This makes Haman drowning puppies and Esther rescuing them a deeply meaningful interaction, highlighting Haman's evilness and Esther's goodness. On the other hand, the Persians regarded wolves as belonging to the dark side, so Vashti's willingness to rescue wolf cubs indicates her willingness to subvert the established order.

Q13. Considering the trajectory of biblical historical fiction from Anita's Red Tent to the present, have you contemplated transitioning this genre into popular fiction? What notable changes have you observed, and what advice would you offer to writers in this niche?

Edghill: I think the "women's biblical fiction" trend has pretty much run its course. You still find it in the Christian booksellers genre, but you don't see it much in mainstream fiction any more. Advice to writers in this niche: if you love the story, writ it anyway. These days it's easy to self-publish.

Q14. Can you share any ongoing projects centered around other Biblical women?

Edghill: Since the subgenre seems to be dead – but you never know; someone may suddenly produce another biblical women book that gets picked up – I haven't got any more projects centered around biblical women. My most recent project is an epic historical romance set in 1878 India.

As a modern author, Edghill clarifies the main difficulties encountered when negotiating the complex world of women in the Hebrew Bible. The conversation explores the nuances that result from these women's historical and sociopolitical origins. We look at the significant influence of Edghill's narrative technique, which involves taking biblical women out of an ancient era and telling their

experiences again from a ‘her-story’ perspective. This section delves into how this methodology creates a completely realised ancient world. Edghill’s decision to focus her biblical retellings on women descended from royal families is closely examined.

The interview offers a detailed examination of Edghill’s choice of characters and narrative points of view, with a particular emphasis on *Queenmaker*. The author discusses the significance of Bathsheba being positioned next to Michal rather than David and the rationale behind selecting Michal as the narrative voice. *Queenmaker* deftly crafts a story that challenges conventional characters and patriarchal power structures. The interview delves into Edghill’s inspiration for this strategy as well as the techniques she uses to turn patriarchal depictions into feminist stories. Edghill talks about her expectations for biblical women telling their own stories and whether or not she has had any difficulties using her narrative style to confront patriarchal power structures.

The conversation dives deeply into *Wisdom’s Daughter*, emphasising the strong feminist interpretation of the Queen of Sheba. Edghill discusses the significance of this narrative form and character perspective, as well as the reasoning behind selecting Abhishag as the omniscient narrator. In *Wisdom’s Daughter*, Solomon’s daughter is revealed as a strong fictional figure. In addition to providing insights into her conception and development of this persona, Edghill offers a distinctive viewpoint on the difficulties and creative process involved. Intriguingly, the resilient Vashti is emphasised above Esther in *Game of Queens*. Edghill provides a nuanced view on the character choices by explaining why she chose to highlight Vashti’s bravery in the story. The introduction of pets and animals in *Game of Queens* is discussed in the interview. Edghill talks about if this decision reflects her love of animals.

Edghill examines the development of biblical historical fiction from Anita Diamant’s *Red Tent* to the present by taking a look at its trajectory. In the interview, she discusses whether she has thought about making this genre into mainstream fiction and provides details on the significant shifts that have been noticed. Edghill shares her thoughts on her ongoing initiatives as the interview comes to a close. The author offers a peek at her most recent book, an epic historical romance set in 1878 India, despite the fact that the biblical women subgenre may have changed over time.

Conclusion

This research paper provides a thorough examination of India Edghill's viewpoints, inspirations, and methods of creation when writing historical fiction books that highlight biblical women. The knowledge gained from the conversation enhances our comprehension of the writer's distinct style and how it has affected the development of biblical historical fiction.

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