

A study into protecting and preserving the ignored and forgotten women's historical narratives (herstories) through creative writing.

Background (and why it is important to preserve 'Herstories'?)

There has been an increasing number of groups throughout society that appear to be moving towards boycotting or ignoring public figures, literature and language that they deem incompatible with their beliefs or cause offence to the status quo.

The recent attempt to rewrite classic pieces of literature by the likes of Roald Dahl and Ian Fleming while attributing 'trigger warnings' to works of Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and even Jane Austin, are all causing further confusion and outrage within the millennials and Generation X population.

Along with the increasing debates about gender and dynamics of gender identity, with particular attempts to redefine the definition of 'Woman/Females', is adding more fuel to the fire to this 'neutralising gender' ideology and it being seen as a neo-patriarchal move that is to the detriment of biological women/females in an attempt to erase awareness of their achievements, contributions to society and their history.

Given this current competing cultural climate, can historical fiction be used as a trustworthy tool to assist in protecting and preserving our past, and in particular those regularly ignored 'Herstories' of historically significant women?

RESEARCH how an original historical novel can help retain, sustain and reinvigorate female history / herstories?

EXPLORE this through these sub-questions:

1. How might an author configure the historical fiction genre as a vessel for safeguarding the loss of 'herstories' and revitalise the definition of being a Woman/Women/Female?
2. How can the reworking of historical fiction help to recalibrate debates on gender and gender identity, in terms of the genre's historically male-centred narratives and contemporary culture's fraught conversations around gender.
3. How does the creative writer successfully revitalise 'herstories' and create narratives that balance the twin problems of creating exciting relatable works for modern-day audiences whilst retaining the pattern of authenticity of the era?



Why Historical Fiction/ Why Aethelflaed / Why now ?



1. Aethelflaed, Lady of Mercia, is a little-known local heroine with an incredible story. Like many strong heroic females, she seems to have been lost in the depths of history, despite being the mother of English national identity.
2. Historical fiction is a great method to bring her story to life. Accessible to wider audience & while having historical facts, will allow the reader to use their imagination to relate, empathise, empower & generate aspiration.
3. Telling her story would be an opportunity to learn from her example, successfully building trust & relationships, uniting kingdoms, overcoming cultural taboos and being a female leader in a male-dominated world.
4. Telling her story now is also timely: there is an increased interest in this era & Norse mythology thanks to tv series and books such as Game of Thrones, Vikings, and The Last Kingdom (Aethelflaed is mentioned), but her story skewed and diluted.
5. Following Brexit and the growing likelihood of Scottish and Welsh independence, we can learn from her example, learn lessons as to why uniting under one ruler is beneficial for smaller nations.

Methodology

"My research rationale was to establish the biographical facts, which have survived and to examine the ways in which he (Shakespeare) has been presented by other writers over time..."
(Sally O'Reilly, *Inventing Shakespeare: re-imagining a national icon*, 2014 <https://www.nawe.co.uk>)



"If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them."
(Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 1932)

Italo Calvino's - *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*
a) Should all prose writing follow a specific formula
b) Should contain each of six principles (lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, multiplicity & consistency)



Eventual Result The start of preserving Herstories

