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## Midwife, Witch, and Woman-Child: Metaphor for a Matriarchal Profession

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**M**y great-grandmother had a passion for healing. Although she never gave and received pills or injections of any kind, she delivered babies and cured or eased both herself and many others through time-tested herbal recipes meticulously written out in a Swiss-German Amish dialect. When she cut her hand open with a butcher knife, she sewed it back up again with a boiled darning needle. She was still canning and baking her own bread at the age of 94. After her husband of 30 years died, she sat up all night with his body, as was the custom. Sometime toward morning, according to my mother, she left her rocking chair and walked slowly to the coffin. Then she began to probe, from head to toe, each part of the man she had loved so long. She stopped at his abdomen, continued, returned to it, probed again, nodded her head, and returned to her chair. He had died of an abdominal tumor that was undoubtedly cancer, and she wanted to know.

My mother told me that story, and this one, too, about the time she went to break up the huge old house filled from cellar to attic with my grandparents'—and great-grandparents'—things. Desperately she discarded, gave away, auctioned, burned, or saved generations of relics. One artifact in question was my great-grandmother's box of herbal recipes. On the phone with my father, she mentioned her quandary over what to do with these recipes. "Throw them away," said my father, the doctor. "They're worthless." I was reminded of this story in reading an account, in Laurel Ulrich's tour de force *A Midwife's Tale*, of how narrowly eighteenth-century midwife Martha Ballard's diary missed destruction:

When her great-great-granddaughter Mary Hobart inherited it in 1884, it was 'a hopeless pile of loose unconsecutive pages'—but it was all there. The diary had remained in Augusta for more than sixty years, probably in the family of Dolly Lambard, who seems to have assumed custody of her mother's papers along with the rented cow. At Dolly's death in 1861, the diary descended to her

daughters, Sarah Lambard and Hannah Lambard Walcott. . . . Mary Hobart . . . was thirty-three and a recent graduate of medical school when her great-aunts Sarah and Hannah gave her the diary. "As the writer was a practising physician," she later explained, "it seemed only fitting that the Ballard diary, so crowded with medical interest, should descend to her." (346)

Thus the diary was saved by a hair by an heir, one of the first women doctors in the second half of the nineteenth-century, who commissioned her cousin Lucy to bind it in linen and had a mahogany desk built especially to hold it. Ironically, my father's mother had graduated from medical school at about the same time as Martha Ballard's heir. However, this paternal grandmother died before my mother could ask her the strategic question about the value of herbal recipes.

So it came about that, unlike Martha Ballard's private documents, my great-grandmother's were lost because of my professional father's advice. I have only oral fragments passed on as stories from my mother, and I know that boneset tea, whatever that is, may be one of the few known cures for migraine headache. One other note: in slightly earlier times and places, not only would Great-grandmother Eliza's records have been in doubt, but also her life. While obstetrics has not generally been considered a dangerous occupation, midwifery sometimes was. The designations of healer, midwife, and witch overlapped precariously, depending on patriarchal authorities and public mood. French historian Jules Michelet, in a classic nineteenth-century study recently re-published as *Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Superstition*, elaborates on what happened when the midwife-healer was labeled "witch" for applying her skills:

The Sorceress was running a terrible risk. Nobody at that time had a suspicion that, applied externally or taken in very small doses, poisons are remedies. All the plants which were confounded together under the name of *Witches' herbs* were supposed ministers of death. Found in a woman's hands, they would have led to her being adjudged a poisoner or fabricator of accursed spells. A blind mob, as cruel as it was timid, might any morning stone her to death, or force her to undergo the ordeal by water or *noyade*. Or, worst and most dreadful fate of all, they might drag her with ropes to the church square, where the clergy would make a pious festival of it, and edify the people by burning her at the stake. (83)

Of course, male doctors used some of the same plants; midwifery and the medical profession had much to learn from each other (as did—loath though clergymen might have been to admit it—witchcraft and church doctrine). However, women in creative touch with nature were in danger of being seen as supernatural rather than natural. "Nature makes them sorceresses," quotes Michelet in reflecting the sixteenth-century attitude toward women associated with pantheism (*viii*). Giving birth and delivering life were too powerfully mysterious not to be threatening. Where there's

life, there's death only a fragile breath away; and women who controlled life might also have controlled death. Writes Ulrich about Martha Ballard's patients, "Between 1767 and 1779, Oxford lost 12 percent of its population in one of the worst diphtheria epidemics in New England's history. One hundred forty-four persons died, mostly children ages two to fourteen" (12). And this was not even a plague era. In one year, Martha lost three of her nine children, her uncle and aunt, eight of their eleven children, friends and neighbors, and many more. Fortunately, no finger of suspicion was ever pointed at Martha, as we shall consider later, but in face of uncontrollable, mysterious, threatening forces there often lurked the question: Who more than the life-bringer could be blamed for bringing death?

And what does all this have to do with children's literature? Be patient. Perhaps a storytelling link is already apparent. The midwife/witch/healer turns out to be a common archetype in children's literature, a genre midwived and nurtured by women. From a historical perspective, the parallels between midwives delivering babies, midwives delivering nascent children's literature, and midwives appearing as characters in children's literature may come as no surprise.

Martha Ballard learned some of what she knew from her own Grandmother Learned, still alive in 1777, the year before Martha delivered her first baby (Ulrich 11-12). Wise Child, in Monica Furlong's juvenile novel of that title, learns herbal lore from midwife/witch/healer Juniper, who learned it from midwife/witch/healer Euny. Brat, a.k.a. Alyce in the Newbery Award book *The Midwife's Apprentice*, learns what she knows from midwife/healer Jane Sharp. Kit gathers symbolic knowledge from elderly Hannah in Elizabeth Speare's *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*: "Thee did well, child, to come to the Meadow. There is always a cure here when the heart is troubled" (85). Humpy, a.k.a. Lovel in *The Witch's Brat* by Rosemary Sutcliff, learns herbal lore from his healer/witch grandmother, though he does not have her Second Sight. Rosemary in *Becoming Rosemary* absorbs the gift of healing from her midwife/witch/healer mother. Ugly One in *The Magic Circle* first learns the trade of herbal lore from her healer/witch mother:

She pointed out the herbs. She showed me the medicinal value of the hare's liver. She revealed to me the secrets of the river fish. I know cures from her. And through the years I have added my own. I have experimented, always following my instinct. But until now my cures have been offered only to newborns and their mothers and to my own sweet Asa. My heart is now in my throat. My breath comes hard. "I would heal if I could." "Then we must make you a magic circle," says Bala. "You can stay entirely within the magic circle, and no devil can get you." (Napoli 12)

Like Ugly One, Laura Chant—heroine of Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover*—crosses the line from natural to supernatural in trying to heal

her brother, and she does it, like Wise Child and Euny, under the supervision of two older women who have done it before her. Say Laura's mentors, "We will marry you, if we can, to some sleeping aspect of yourself and you must wake it. Your journey is inward, but it will seem outward" (139). In each of the seven children's books mentioned, we see a knowledge of special power developed within a matriarchal network for passing on that knowledge.

Among the several patterns immediately apparent in children's fiction about midwife, witch, and woman-child, then, is the intimate passage of intimate lore from masters to apprentices. The master is a mature or elderly woman, the apprentice a prepubescent girl (with the exception of one boy marginalized by his crippled body), and both are typically different from others, often community outcasts or at best tenuously accepted if and when the regnant patriarchal society requires their skills. The apprenticeship is difficult, demanding, and ultimately dangerous because the female healer is dealing in the art of life and death. Her observations of nature involve a closeness to nature that is suspect in the eyes of the church and other male-dominated institutions. Women's sexuality is suspect because it is associated with the inevitable but mysterious power of birth and death, with the rhythm of moon and tides so often metaphorical of female cycles as to become a romanticized stereotype. (Less than romantic is the solution of Meghan Collins' "The Green Woman" to hedge her bets on herbal remedy by sending her own virile lover to bed the governor's wife, who has threatened to foment a witch trial unless the Green Woman can guarantee her an infant heir to the governor.)

### THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

The art of healing, as all of these apprentices learn, has to do with mind as well as body. Learning, as implied by the status of apprenticeship itself, has to do—amazingly enough—with education. Mental and spiritual health is crucial to physical health. And what, it turns out, is more crucial to spiritual health than storytelling and, even more specifically in each of these books, reading? "Juniper told me some amazing stories," says Wise Child in detailing her education in Celtic lore and later in literature. "I wanted to learn, too, to lose myself in the pleasure of books, of stories and thoughts . . ." (Furlong 178). Kit, who teaches children to read through storytelling in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, passes on her old silver filigree hornbook to a child as isolated as herself (Speare 105). The shy orphan Alyce learns to read from a scholar who pretends to be teaching the cat: "Once Alyce knew all the letters and a number of combinations, Magister Reese began teaching the cat words, reading aloud bits of wisdom from his great encyclopaedia" (Cushman 79). Ugly One has learned to read from the father of her illegitimate child and uses a local burgermeister's books to study the skills and sorcery of healing. Lovel

learns to read at the monastery from an illustrated book of physic herbs, "And all the while, though he was not properly aware of it, the old wisdom and the old skills that were in him from his grandmother were waking more and more; the green fingers that could coax a plant to flourish and give its best; the queer power of the hands on sick or hurt bodies (Sutcliffe 38). . . . He seemed to be seeing with his hands as well as feeling" (40).

Not only are storytelling and reading crucial in all of these books, but there is also a persistent association of storytelling and reading with magic. Indeed, Rosemary's strangely powerful older sister Con reads her mother Althea's books from a distance; the family knows because they see the pages turning by themselves while Con is minding pigs in the forest.

Althea owned three books, books that Rosemary's grandmother had owned, and her great-grandmother before that. . . . Sometimes Rosemary would be alone in the house, and she would walk by the table to see that one of the books had been pulled away from the others and opened. Slowly, very slowly, the pages would turn, as if blown by a breath from far away. . . . Sometimes, when Rosemary saw those pages turning, she would run into the forest so that she could find Con and sit and listen. (Wood 49-50)

Magic associated with storytelling and reading may symbolize the more mysterious, intuitive, associative, or subconscious aspects of learning. We are to some extent moved and transformed by stories in inexplicable ways that seem to involve a metaphorical process important to understanding the human condition. Inherent in the work of healing is passing on knowledge not only of the ingredients, but of how and in what circumstances they are effective, how people respond to them in unexpected ways, how people react to life and death. This kind of knowledge is wisdom—not information. It has to do with instinct, experience, observation, and values, as well as facts. What each apprentice learns from her mentor comprises much more than plant names and applications. Despite our scientific era, we still speak of the "art" of healing. Each of the apprentices must learn to honor her creative self, nurture her full identity, and pass on her knowledge in an oral or printed tradition before becoming a master of her art.

Like the Fates who determine life and death on spindle or loom, these women often practice—in addition to the art of healing—the art of spinning and weaving. It's a domestic art, of course, but with a mythological resonance that's closely associated with the art of spinning a yarn, the art of storytelling. And the stories of these women, when they reach us, make gripping literature as well as historical lore. Here is a dramatic example linking the long, tedious birth attendances in the almost-lost diary of Martha Ballard, a weaver of flax, by the way, and a spinner of wool (we'll come back again later to women's proclivity for applied arts, generally underrated in comparison to "fine arts"). This entry is from April 24, 1789:

A sever Storm of rain. I was Calld at 1 hour pm from Mrs Husseys by Ebenzer Hewin. Crosst the river in their Boat. A great sea A going. We got save over then sett out for Mr Hewins. I Crost a stream on the way on fleeting Loggs & got safe over. Wonder full is the Goodness of providence. I then proseeded on my journey. Went beyond Mr Hainses & a Larg tree blew up by the roots before me which Caused my hors to spring back & my life was spared. Great & marvillous are thy sparing mercies O God. I was assisted over the fallen tree by Mr Hains. Went on. Soon Came to a stream. The Bridg was gone. Mr Hewin took the rains waded thro & led the horse. Asisted by the same allmighty power I got safe thro & arivd unhurt. Mrs Hewins safe delivd at 10 h Evn of a Daughter. (Ulrich 6)

Ulrich astutely points out the rhythm, repetition, and pattern of alternating "action sentences with formulaic religious phrases" here (7). It seems clear that in another age, Ballard might have been a noted writer as well as a noted physician. We must ask ourselves if what she was, a great midwife and storyteller, is any less for having been unnoted.

Martha Ballard, without her 27-year diary, would have been recorded in public documents no more than the three times a woman was supposed to be for birth, marriage, and death (Tucker 8). Says Ulrich,

The American Advocate for June 9, 1812, summed up her life in one sentence: "Died in Augusta, Mrs. Martha, consort of Mr. Ephraim Ballard, aged 77 years." Without the diary we would know nothing of her life after the last of her children was born, nothing of the 816 deliveries she performed between 1785 and 1812. We would not even be certain she had been a midwife. (5)

The only testimony we have of Ballard's service and talents is a private record, which Ulrich has proven accurate through painstaking cross-checks with public records, available from the same time period, of environmental disasters such as flooding or of religious/political upheavals to which Ballard refers tangentially. Knowledge in the form of history, literature, arts, and sciences has traditionally been divided into public and private domains, the public belonging to men and the private to women, the former considered, until recently, to be of greater significance than the latter (Welter).

### MOVING BEYOND THE HOUSEHOLD STAGE

More specifically, Western (and many non-Western) cultures have divided storytelling into public and private domains, with men in charge of the public and women of the private. Audiences for men tended to be other men in context of religious rituals or political arenas while audiences for women tended to be children and other women, on a household stage. Extreme examples of this division, in current or recent practice but rooted in ancient rites, are the exclusion of women from the Hassidic storytelling tradition and, indeed, the exclusion of all Orthodox

Jewish women from the synagogue room where readings of the Torah take place during Sabbath services; the prohibition against women's performing publicly in fundamentalist Islam; the prevention of women from administering priestly rites and sermons in the Catholic church; and the definition of pre-World War II East European coffee houses as a platform for male epic singers (see Lord's *The Singer of Tales*). All the cultures involved here have a strong female storytelling tradition, but it is confined to the private domain. Parallels can be seen in the history of art, in which men have been more commonly acknowledged for painting and other "formal" graphic media, while women have only recently been counted artists for their work on quilts, knitting, sewing, embroidery, rugs, pottery, etc., all family-centered activities with practical applications. An interesting philosophical question might revolve around whether a lullaby sung through thousands of nights is of equal value to a symphony written by one whom the lullaby shaped.

In the folkloristic realm, Charles Perrault, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, Andrew Lang, and Walt Disney all took stories collected primarily from women in domestic situations and translated them onto a public academic and/or commercial stage. This translation legitimized what had earlier been held in low esteem as old wives' tales. Even the fairy tales published by women such as Charlotte-Rose de Caumont De La Force, Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier, and Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy never achieved the status of work by intellectuals such as Perrault, the Grimms, and Lang, who had broader literary or nationalistic agendas.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in Britain and the United States, women began to make a transition from storytelling in the private domain to storytelling in the public arena. With increasing access to education, they started to publish fiction—cf. Nathaniel Hawthorne's letter to his publisher: "America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash and should be ashamed if I did succeed" (Wagenknecht 150)—but much of their work took the form of short stories in magazines for women and children, as opposed to "serious fiction," an area still dominated by men at that time (Shaker 6-7). Similarly, the rise of professionalism among women saw them going primarily into service professions that represented an extension of domestic duties: nursing (taking care of children's bodies) and social work, teaching, or librarianship (taking care of children's minds and spirits). As women pushed into the world of publishing, they were most frequently allowed footholds in a relatively new business: translating an old literature for children, often folklore passed on by women, into a new literature for children, also cultivated by women (Hearne, "Margaret K. McElderry" 755-775).

Children's book publishing became a women's world that continued the old domestic gender patterns in a public arena, though it was a public arena significantly less valued than that of adult literature. With very few exceptions, women produced the books, edited the books, purchased the books, and inducted younger women in the ongoing cycle. As authors, editors, publishers, and librarians, women formed a flexible network with much role-switching between creative and administrative functions, just as women's creations have often blended art and application. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that studies show girls as more avid readers, especially of fiction. They are part of a gender-shaped storytelling tradition that is even now extending the oral/print transition into electronic media. In their role as tradition bearers in both oral and print modes, women have midwived children's literature, and children's literature about midwife/witches—all by women—reflects a reverence for tradition so pronounced that it's open to parody by scholars such as Diane Purkiss, who questions contemporary revisions:

Although we no longer fear the witch, we still have not owned those dark feelings. Rather, we have sanitised the witch, so that she can become acceptable, transforming her into another one of our better selves. Now she is clean, pretty, an herbalist with a promising career in midwifery, a feminist, as good a mother as anybody if not rather better than most, sexually liberated (without being too kinky). (282)

It is important to stress that the old girls' network, as idealized as it may be in the old girls' literature—see, for example, quotes in Vandergrift (706) and Bush (732)—is no more ideal than the old boys' network. Where there are issues of power, there are always related issues of control that can be exaggerated, in fact, if the power is seen as scarce or limited within a broader social context. Children's literature—attended by matriarchal midwives who are neither perfect nor perfectly compassionate, but powerful in their own sphere (as we see in Cushman's portrayal of Jane Sharp and Mahy's of Miryam and Winter Carlisle)—recreates the stereotype of good and evil witches by idealizing the former while the latter, only by implication, lurk unacknowledged somewhere in the shadows. Ironically, today's literary witch believes, as did some seventeenth-century witches, in her own magical powers despite the intervening period when educated feminists saw witches as victims innocent of anything more powerful than superstitious and homicidal public opinion. The midwife/witch's magic currently represented in children's fiction is, like the seventeenth-century witch's magic, both powerful and threatened, both devoted to traditional female values and subversive of patriarchal values.

Midwife/witches and their apprentices in juvenile fiction are a paradox of tradition and subversion. They follow the hero-journey cycle: cast out from society; summoned by destiny to travel through temptations and tests, often in the company of an animal helper; surviving the rite of pas-

sage to return to society or create a new one based on newly acquired knowledge. How old can this story pattern be? The knowledge of these women, and their stories, is subversive in viewpoint only; the narrative structure is as conservative as possible. It's what they do and tell, not how they do or tell it, that breaks boundaries. Folklore is often subversive in content, rarely in form, and these women are traditional storytellers, tradition bearers.

### THE TRADITIONAL BECOMES SUBVERSIVE

Children's literature is, in fact, often radical in subject but conservative in style. I have dealt at length with this idea elsewhere in examining both formally conservative children's fiction such as Penelope Lively's (Hearne, "Across the Ages") and folkloric form in popular picture books (Hearne, "Perennial Picture Books"), but the point has a place here in relation to the academy that today privileges us to evaluate storytelling and criticize children's literature. Having touched on parallels of midwife/witch in history and midwife/witch in children's literature, I want to touch on midwife/witch in the library profession and its academic training grounds where, to some extent, the traditional has again become subversive.

Like midwives, weavers, and storytellers, the women who delivered children's literature and librarianship did not separate theory from practice or art from application. Moreover, the scholarship of Jane Anne Hannigan, Kay Vandergrift, Christine Jenkins, and Anne Lundin, among others, shows over and over again how deeply this women's field has depended on longterm anonymous service, flexible role changing, cooperative networking, mentoring relationships, nonconfrontational resistance, and low-profile leadership. These are not characteristics highly rewarded in contemporary academia despite lip service to several of them. As the Dean of the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago said recently, in closing down the School of Education (five years after the closure of the university's Graduate Library School), "we can't let a sentimental concern for children get in the way of hard scrutiny about whether we are producing quality work" (Bronner A27).

Just as children's literature was the female domain of a male-dominated publishing world, the critical evaluation of children's literature was fostered by female-dominated children's specialists in libraries and library education for nearly a century before entering the minds or departments of male-dominated English Literature and Education departments in the 1970s. That entry, signaled by the involvement of male critics, has changed the critical evaluation of children's literature, and we need to think about how and why in determining a new balance of scholarship. Escalating attempts to make children's literature competitively prestigious with adult literature have resulted in some prose as impenetrable as the briars

surrounding *Sleeping Beauty*, an apt comparison considering that only a select prince could find his way through. In a recent *Horn Book Magazine* article, "How to Get Your Ph.D. in Children's Literature," Brian Alderson points to the absurdity of a critical stance and language that feeds on itself instead of on literature. Perpetrating a classic hoax, he submitted a proposal to analyze *The English Boy's Magazine* to conference organizers who described it as excellent and enthusiastically invited him to present the paper.

My starting point will be an attempt to rescue the concept of *parole* from that of *langue*, perceiving a need for saussurian theoretics to give way in the analysis of socially designed texts to the more flexible critical potential residing in the insights of Bakhtin and Althusser. I will develop this through an examination of the dialogic qualities in the Empire-building serials by H.P. Anelay, discussing not merely the nature of the intentionality of these essentially propagandist works but also the nexus of authorial discourse and readerly expectation. . . . I would assess the connotative semiotics of the printed image. This may lead me towards the unexplored territory of pictorial content as subliminal discourse in this instance on the hegemony of the imperial ethic. (439)

Alas, confesses Alderson, "there was no such thing as an *English Boy's Magazine* published from 1886 to 1902, nor any such person writing serials under the name of H.P. Anelay, nor any illustrator of those serials signing *W.B.*," as a check of any "shelf of mundane reference books on children's literature" (440) would have shown. What Alderson's hoax shows up is a concern more for academic status than for children's literature.

In its struggle for validation in a male-dominated hierarchy, is the literary criticism of children's books "growing up" to fit male-defined requirements? (Obviously, critics of both genders vary individually. I am looking not at individuals but at gender patterns—as in noting, for example, that not all men have been U.S. presidents but all U.S. presidents have been men.) At a recent international conference on children's literature, all four plenary session speakers were men, this despite the overwhelming majority of female presenters and attendees, not to mention the singular domination of women in the history of children's literature.

### WOMEN'S QUIET SUSTENANCE

To some extent, the same pattern exists in the field of fairy tales, folk tales, and storytelling. Perhaps the most famous men to put fairy tales on the modern academic map have been Bruno Bettelheim, who championed them upon a towering theoretical superstructure of Freudian interpretation, and Jack Zipes who challenged him with a Marxist reading. Relatively unnoticed has been the quiet, consistent women's work, especially in the field of librarianship, that sustained the study and practice of

folk and fairy tales in children's culture for a hundred years prior to Bettelheim's recommendations in *The Uses of Enchantment*.

Marie Shedlock, Ruth Sawyer, Sara Cone Bryant, Gudrun Thorne-Thompson, Anna Cogswell Tyler, Mary Gould Davis, Eileen Colwell, Ruth Tooze, Augusta Baker, and many others spent their professional and intellectual lives advocating—and acting on—the delivery of folk and fairy tales to children. In his book *Creative Storytelling*, Zipes describes storytellers who visit schools and libraries. More often, however, school and public librarians *are* storytellers dedicated to just the kind of community-building he advocates, and an integral part of that community, as well. If their work has not been theoretically subversive, the very act of their sustaining storytelling programs decade after decade in the face of budget cuts and skeptical authorities *has* been subversive, not to mention the fact that Molly Whuppie and other active folktale heroines were mainstays of such programs from the turn of the century, long before politically corrected anthologies began to surface in the 1970s. Zipes himself is a strong feminist, but many folklorists, perhaps politically sensitive to their own insecure academic status, have consistently distanced themselves from the female- and child-associated areas of storytelling in librarianship and children's literature (Hearne, *Beauty* 148-154). Where is the story of the storytellers, the women who turned school boiler rooms and store fronts into houses of story in both oral and print traditions?

School and public librarians share stories with children on a weekly basis without seeking either stardom or fancy fees. They have been doing it for a hundred years. Yet one male scholar at the aforementioned international conference publicly praised another male scholar for the singular feat of going into schools and working with children himself. The parallel might be Columbus discovering America. Could such disregard for indigenous inhabitants be due to an undervaluing of female librarians' and library educators' traditional treatment of literature as an applied art? Has their work been at once discounted and coopted? Or has it simply been unnoted?

While some fairy tale scholars—a few female, but more often male—have become academic supernovas, the women who kept folklore, fairy tales, and juvenile literature alive in libraries and library education for a century have faded from graduate school curricula (see Lundin's survey results in "The Pedagogical Context of Women in Children's Services and Literature Scholarship"). An escalating academic struggle for resources, time, and attention endangers awareness of the kind of invisible presence and quiet voice on which service-oriented women in children's literature and librarianship have typically relied to get their work done. The words "web" and "webbing" appeared frequently (even before *web-masters* commandeered the World Wide Web) in describing women who led the field

of children's literature/librarianship—and spiders, though effective, are notably silent. It is time to project our voices beyond the professional web, to define ourselves to a broader public community as women have done in other disciplines.

Psychologist Carol Gilligan talks about the way females characteristically develop a sense of justice as compromise rather than contest, an "ethic of care" (171-74). Anthropologist Nancy Chodorow describes women's blurred sense of ego boundaries as a basis for empathy. Philosopher Elizabeth Minnich asks us to create gender-inclusive curricula "recovering women's stories within the complex intellectual traditions of higher education" (Lundin 841). Sociologist Harriet Presser explains how, for many academic women, the personal is political *and* professional in *Gender and the Academic Experience* (141-156). What are the implications, for specialists in children's literature and librarianship, of these and many other voices examining intellectual midwives past and present?

As a public-domain institution the university is still close to patriarchal conventions. Remember that only in the past 50 years have women worked their way toward becoming a substantial percentage of faculty and heads of universities (the latter still deeply under-represented). And only in the last 25 years have women worked their way toward becoming subjects of history, literature, and science curricula in mainstream institutions. Women's stories, women's studies, women's development, it's still relatively new stuff—new enough to be considered trendy and token rather than deeply imbedded and distributed. It's subversive stuff, and few claim to know exactly what it is or where it belongs. Often women's studies units run the risk of becoming marginalized. Isolated midwives, as we know from the history of witch-hunting, were in a dangerous position. Alas, Wise Child and Juniper had to be rescued by Juniper's ex-true-love playing deus ex machina with his sailing vessel anchored just out of reach of a pursuing mob—a 1987 resolution remarkably parallel with that of the 1958 book, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, 30 years earlier.

The most successful midwives—in terms of not getting burned at the stake—were those imbedded deeply within the community rather than marginalized on its fringes. Nobody bothered historical midwife Martha Ballard in the 27 years of her midwifery, and nobody bothered literary midwives Althea in *Becoming Rosemary* or Jane Sharpton in *The Midwife's Apprentice*. These three characters, one actual and two fictional, were careful to remain encompassed in community. Indeed, community was the strength of successful midwifery. Historically, as many as four to six women, with tasks requiring varied levels of skill, attended a birth under the direction of a midwife.

By the same token, children's literature and librarianship cannot afford to be isolated from mainstream academia, including the information science component of LIS, the theory-driven bastions of postmodern En-

glish departments, and the education schools that are pushed to embrace quantifiable test-score approaches to learning. And yet children's literature/librarianship must also work to define, maintain, and assert its valuably distinctive—and distinctively female—balance between the creative and analytic, practical and theoretical, private and public, personal and objective, artistic and scientific, traditional and innovative.

As a survivor of conflicts between these forces, which are so often divided in educational institutions—the “higher” the education the more polar the division—I nurture stories. My job is to tell stories about stories, to help deliver other people's stories, to examine stories, to keep the process healthy. Relevant to my understanding of this process is having birthed stories myself. Ulrich quotes an eighteenth-century midwifery manual to the same effect, that having babies was part of the preparation for delivering them (12). (This, needless to say, might not have proved popular with male doctors as a standard requirement.)

The story, its procreation; the literature, its practice: these are integrated, interactive processes. Let's not throw away the box of recipes. Although still suspect (for example, see Ritter's newspaper reports, “Midwives Battle State Crackdown” and “A Tough State for Midwives”), midwifery is in many circles increasingly valued as an integrated, interactive way to deliver babies. And it is no accident that metaphors of midwifery fit smoothly in a matriarchal profession that has delivered the private domain of storytelling into the public domain of children's literature.

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