

The Mother's Tongue

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Popular Parenting

—in five poems—

Yet our entrenched modern belief that mothering maketh the baby persists against all evidence to the contrary—bolstered largely by the expert advice of childcare authors who, were they to discard the assumption that nurture will necessarily triumph over nature, would find they had a lot less to write about.

— SUSAN MAUSHART, *The Mask of Motherhood*

POPULAR PARENTING: PEOPLE TO HATE AT 3 A.M.

Best-selling Dr. Ears.
And that simpering woman rocking
on the cover of *What to Expect* . . .
Your mother, every mother
you've ever met.
Dr. Ears,
some more.
Who was it rang the bell at nap?
Hate the postal carrier.
No, she is good.
She brings the world to your door.
She steps right up to the mouth of the volcano,
drops in offerings, small effigies:
bunnies that rattle at sacrifice
and wet-eyed ducklings
who give themselves up
with solemn, wheezing squeaks.

POPULAR PARENTING: QUESTIONS TO ASK AT 3 A.M.

Which is the volcano:
the baby's mouth, or the breast?

What makes men quest after God?

What woman who has birthed has not seen God?
The small, vengeful God
with the huge God voice.

What woman who has mothered has not known God?
God swaddled, hushed, fleeing the edict . . .

When can we go back to hating Dr. Ears?

POPULAR PARENTING: AGAIN, PEOPLE TO HATE AT 3 A.M.

Dr. Ears.

Good and hard this time.

And the singed outline of that simpering woman
who *once* rocked on the cover of *What to Expect* . . .

Your mother, every mother
you've ever met. *Prevaricators*.

And fathers too, for being a part of this,
for being able to stand apart from it.
Especially that eight-time dad,

Dr. Ears—

whose own lobes stick out
like a goblin goody-goody
as he sneers from his books
that suggest women should
wholly sink themselves,
douse themselves in the milk
of motherhood and light
the match or baby will
never become attached.

POPULAR PARENTING: WORRIES FOR 3 A.M.

Worry that your baby will never learn to latch,
will bulldoze a puppy farm at seventeen, because you read
instead of maintaining "the maternal gaze."

Worry that your child will recover memories
of alien abduction like the ones we've all heard:
gray-faced figures who loom over you in the night,
who bring you to bright lights
where they do something mysterious, studious,
to your unmentionable area, to area 51, the diaper area . . .

POPULAR PARENTING: LAST FEW PEOPLE TO HATE
AT 3 A.M.

Dog walkers. Where the hell are they?
Wind-up toy makers. Can't they invent auto-repeat?
Classical station DJs who decide now's the time to chat.
And though it's grown less satisfying, try to muster
some firm resentment for Dr. Sanctimonious Ears.

Try not to forget, though the baby's lids finally do float shut,
how Ears dubs mother and babe "the nursing couple."
You who have forgotten what it's like to be a couple,
or who never were one. And how generous of the doctor
to suggest that Dad could use some rest. Or that a baby
might be content on Pop's hairy, milk-ductless chest.

Try to maintain the vigor of your disdain for such
oppressive rhetoric, because it's the best you're gonna get
and a jolt of indignation just might warm you through to dawn.