

“THE FRAGILE WEB”: THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST IN *A MIDWIFE’S TALE*

By Holly Kent

*The pastness of history briefly dissolves – or rather, re-forms as the succession of present moments it was (and is). The scholar feels the bygone present simultaneously with his own...the snowy street of a shattered village, the genteel appointments of a modern library: juxtaposed – no, joined – by the document, at once theirs and ours.*¹

*Martha Ballard’s diary rests safe in a vault at the Maine State Library, a monument to a remarkable life and a testimony to the fragile web that connects one generation with another.*²

A Midwife’s Tale (1997) is a film which at once seeks to recreate the past and to detail meticulously the process behind that recreation. Though the film is on one level a straightforward representation of the life and times of Martha Ballard, a midwife in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Maine, it is also a meditation on the process of creating history, and on the impossibility of ever completely recapturing an essentially elusive past. Though the filmmakers are clearly fascinated by the potential which film has to represent the past in vivid and memorable visual form, they are also keenly aware of their inability to replicate a past in its entirety which is truly accurate and authentic. By making historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (author of the 1990 book on which *A Midwife’s Tale* is based) a significant screen presence, stressing the role which conjecture and imagination inevitably play in the creation of historical narratives, and emphasizing the biased and fragmentary nature of primary sources, the first half of the film consistently draws the viewer’s attention to the impossibility of ever objectively recapturing the vanished past. The film’s latter half, by contrast, provides the viewer with a seamless, visually compelling recreation of Ballard’s life and era, in which Ulrich appears as a disembodied voice providing historical information, rather than as an on-screen presence raising doubts about the objectivity and accuracy of the historical process. In *A Midwife’s Tale*, an uneasy tension exists between the filmmakers’ desire to represent the disjointed, subjective process by which history is created, and to produce a powerfully appealing, seemingly authentic visual reconstruction of the past.

Although theorists have long maintained that film has tremendous potential to enrich viewers’ understanding of history, many historians remain dubious about the ability of film (particularly fictional film) to capture the complexity of historical events, and illuminate the complicated process of creating historical narratives. Although both documentary and fictional films are widely used in high school and college classrooms, a feeling nonetheless lingers within some segments of the historical community that, to quote Hayden White, no film could ever “adequately convey the complex, qualified, and critical dimensions of historical thinking about events.”³ As Robert Rosenstone notes, unlike a monograph, a film is assumed to be unable to “provide the all-important, critical elements of historical discourse: evaluation of sources,

¹ John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 23.

² Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 352.

³ Hayden White, “Historiography and Historiophoty,” *The American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988): 1193.

logical argument, or systematic weighing of the evidence."⁴ The remarkable visual and emotional power of film, which enables the viewer to seemingly *see* the past, some historians believe, undermines the viewer's ability to coolly deconstruct the biases and inaccuracies of the past which have been so vividly reconstructed on screen. In the first half of *A Midwife's Tale*, the filmmakers directly address this "presumed incapacity of film to represent the true essence of historiography," simultaneously presenting a visually compelling vision of Ballard's world and representing the painstaking process through which Ulrich pieced together her narrative of Ballard's life and times.⁵

The filmmakers' desire to give their audience a sense of how historians create history is rooted in Ulrich's monograph. In her introduction to *A Midwife's Tale*, Ulrich explains that she chose to include lengthy excerpts from Ballard's diary at the beginning of each chapter in order to "remind readers of the complexity and subjectivity of historical reconstruction, to give them some sense of both the affinity and the distance between history and source."⁶ By "[j]uxtaposing the raw diary and the interpretative essay" throughout the book, Ulrich demonstrates the central role which interpretation, and even educated speculation, played in her reconstruction of Ballard's life and world.⁷ Throughout *A Midwife's Tale*, Ulrich is careful to "display her reasoning process, sharing with readers her observations and showing how she drew conclusions from her evidence."⁸ The first section of the film version of *A Midwife's Tale* is similarly concerned with examining how Ulrich created a linear historical narrative out of the seeming chaos of Ballard's diary. The beginning of the film, as historian Patricia Cline Cohen has recognized, "focuses on Ulrich's description of the historian's craft, reenacting aspects of the painstaking process by which she created order out of the apparent trivia of the diary."⁹ The viewer sees Ulrich in the Maine State Library, discussing the difficulties involved in extracting historical insights from Ballard's terse and cryptic diary, pouring over maps, examining town records, and looking through her own copious notes. By consistently having Ulrich on screen amidst her scholarly apparatus, the filmmakers are able to show the viewer something of the process by which historians make history, and to underline the fact that it is indeed a creative undertaking.

Throughout her on-screen commentary in the first half of *A Midwife's Tale*, Ulrich stresses the ambiguity, uncertainty, and subjectivity involved in researching and writing historical works. In her discussions of reconstructing Ballard's life, Ulrich emphasizes the difficulties of gaining a holistic perspective about the past from the unavoidably fragmentary traces individuals left behind. History, she states, is "about documents, it's about sources, it's about clues, it's about the leavings, the shards, the remnants of people who once lived and don't live anymore."¹⁰ Recreating the life of a woman such as Ballard is thus particularly difficult, since so few sources exist about the experiences of eighteenth-century women. Ulrich

⁴ Robert A. Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflection on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film," *The American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988): 1177.

⁵ White, 1195.

⁶ Ulrich, 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Patricia Cline Cohen, "Dialogue," *Journal of Women's History* 14, 3 (2002): 140.

⁹ Sarah F. McMahon, "A *Midwife's Tale*," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, 3 (July 1998): 470.

¹⁰ Laurie Kahn-Leavitt, "A *Midwife's Tale*," *American Experience*, PBS, 1997, transcript. <www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/midwife/filmmore/pt.html>.

recalls that “when I started to do women’s history the response I would get from nearly everyone, when I would go into an archive or a library, and tell them I was interested in women in the eighteenth-century ... would be – ‘You won’t find much!’ And it’s really true.”¹¹ Ulrich notes that this dearth of sources has made the reconstruction of women’s lives very difficult for historians, as “[w]ithout documents there is no history.... [a]nd women left very few documents behind.”¹² Even the documents which do focus on women’s lives such as Ballard’s diary, Ulrich observes, commonly raise as many questions as they answer. Though she learned a great deal about Ballard’s life and times from the diary, Ulrich emphasizes that there are nonetheless many “questions that the diary can’t answer.”¹³ This lack of information about Ballard’s life specifically (and eighteenth-century women’s lives more generally) meant that Ulrich had to make some educated guesses and imaginative leaps in her reconstruction of Ballard’s world. In the film, she stresses the numerous gaps in existing knowledge about Ballard’s society by frequently using qualifying words and phrases such as “I think,” “I’m not sure,” “I don’t know,” “perhaps,” and “seems.” In Ulrich’s on-screen comments, she indicates that there are virtually no absolute, definitively known truths about the past, particularly the past of traditionally silenced groups such as women.

In her commentary, Ulrich also emphasizes the speculative and fictional elements involved in creating historical narratives out of fragmentary primary sources. She asserts that as she began to work with Ballard’s diary, “[m]y first task was to try to find some way to create order out of just a succession of facts.”¹⁴ Throughout the first half of the film, Ulrich stresses the quasi-novelistic process of making a linear narrative out of a disjointed primary source like Ballard’s diary. Although historians’ connection to the past is not, like a novelist’s, “an imaginative connection,” Ulrich notes that “imagination is part of it.”¹⁵ While carefully differentiating the work of the historian from the work of the novelist, she nonetheless stresses the creative, storytelling aspects of the historical process. Of her work with the diary, Ulrich states that “[w]hen I finally was able to connect Martha’s work to her world, I could begin to create stories.”¹⁶ By using the word “create,” she indicates to the viewer that the stories in *A Midwife’s Tale* were not simply found in Ballard’s diary, but were carefully reconstructed and fashioned into their current form by Ulrich the historian, rather than Ballard the diarist.

The first section of the film is not dedicated solely to Ulrich’s research, however. The filmmakers intersperse Ulrich’s discussions of the historical process with reenactments of Ballard’s life, consistently stressing that these recreations have their roots in historical research. One of the film’s early scenes firmly establishes this dual focus on the process of historical research and the recreation of history on screen. The scene begins with reenactments of Ballard (Kaiulani Sewall Lee) treating members of her community who have been struck down by an epidemic. As the reenactments unfold, Ballard reads from her diary in a voiceover, describing her activities while they are acted out on screen. This voiceover ends with Ballard stating, almost as an afterthought, that it is her daughter Hannah’s eighteenth birthday. As soon as this line has been read, the film cuts back to Ulrich, who describes her confusion at the seeming arbitrariness

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

of this statement. She notes that the line "seemed out of place to me until I began to put together the rest of [Ballard's] experiences of that week."¹⁷ The film then cuts back to reenactments, with Ulrich explaining, in a voiceover, why the events being shown lead Ballard to think about the anniversary of her daughter's birth. By frequently interrupting their recreations of Ballard's life with Ulrich's on-screen reflections about her research, the filmmakers emphasize that all the scenes being reenacted represent, not some mythic objective past, but rather a historian's reconstruction of that past.

The first section of *A Midwife's Tale* also highlights the essential unknowability of the past and unreliability of the historical process by having Ulrich express her reservations about the accuracy of the scenes being recreated on screen. In one of the film's earliest scenes, Ulrich notes, during a close-up of Ballard, that "I don't know what Martha Ballard looked like."¹⁸ By playing this statement over the tight shot of (the actress who portrays) Ballard's face, the filmmakers make it clear that *A Midwife's Tale* is not based solely on knowledge, but also on speculation and theatrical license. During a long sequence which shows the Ballard family waking and preparing themselves for the day, the filmmakers insert a voiceover from Ulrich, describing how little is actually known about how the Ballards functioned as a family unit. "What we don't know are some of the things we'd really like to know, that is, who slept where, and was this a playful household or was it a house where the father ruled," which asks "[w]hat about privacy? How did they behave with one another?"¹⁹ The scene necessarily speculates about all of these things: it shows where all members of the household slept, how family members interacted with one another, and how they dealt with issues of privacy as they washed and dressed. Having Ulrich discuss the essentially speculative nature of the scene as it unfolds highlights the impossibility of ever recreating a truly accurate past. In an interview about *A Midwife's Tale*, Ulrich states that she felt the film's emphasis on what is *not* known about the past was very valuable: "I think that was an important part of the message of the film - that history is a reconstruction and that we can have areas of things we don't know."²⁰

The impossibility of recreating people's emotional lives and subjective experiences from historical documents is also emphasized in the first section of *A Midwife's Tale*. One of the film's scenes vividly demonstrates the disparity which exists between the past as it is captured in documents, and the past as it was actually lived. The scene begins with a reenactment: Ballard's son Jonathan, her daughter Hannah, and her niece Parthenia are working in the yard outside of the Ballards' home. A young woman from the town, Sally Pierce, walks by, and exchanges a flirtatious glance with Jonathan. The film quickly moves over the faces of all of the characters, showing Sally Pierce's calm self-assurance, Jonathan's flirtatious smile, and Hannah and Parthenia's sharp-eyed interest in the scene playing out before them. The scene ends with a lingering shot of Jonathan as he watches Sally Pierce walk away, a self-satisfied (and somewhat predatory) smile spreading across his face. The film then cuts abruptly to a man in an archives, carefully pulling a document out of a drawer. The contrast between these two shots - a fleeting moment of flirtation and a dim, quiet archives - is a distinctly jarring one. The film's editing suggests the unlikelihood of ever finding a fleeting moment of human emotion preserved in a meticulously-organized, anti-

¹⁷ Kahn-Leavitt transcript.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Behind the Scenes: Interview with Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich," *American Experience: A Midwife's Tale, 1999-2000* <www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/midwife/sfeature/sf_historian.html>.

septic-looking archive. By making the cut between the scene of flirtation and the rows of document-filled cabinets so jarring and abrupt, the filmmakers illustrate the gulf between lived experience and existing historical documentation. Throughout the first section of *A Midwife's Tale*, the filmmakers consistently stress the problematic, subjective, and speculative nature of history, and the impossibility of ever recreating a truly accurate and objective past.

Over the course of *A Midwife's Tale*, reenactments of Ballard's life become longer in length, increasingly uninterrupted by cuts to Ulrich working in the library. Ulrich ceases to be a vivid on-screen presence who draws the viewer's attention to the complexities of the historical process, becoming instead an authoritative disembodied voice, who provides the viewer with historical background about the scenes being reenacted. When a woman in labor chooses to have a doctor, and not Ballard, assist in the birth of her child, Ulrich notes that during this era, doctors were beginning to become involved in the (formerly all female, midwife-centered) process of childbirth. As the scene of labor plays out on screen, Ulrich states that during this era, young physicians increasingly wanted "[n]ot to come [to a birth] in an emergency, as an older physician might have done, but really to be a part of normal deliveries."²¹ When Ballard's servants behave disrespectfully towards her, Ulrich informs the viewer that this lack of deference reflects a nationwide breakdown in traditional social hierarchies. As the film shows maids disregarding Ballard's orders, Ulrich notes in a voiceover that "the axis of the world was changing.... [a] new political order was creating a new social order – less deference to authority, more concern about rights."²² Ulrich's voiceovers ground scenes in their historical context, providing the viewer with information, and underlining the film's status as a work of history. Without Ulrich's commentary, the latter half of *A Midwife's Tale* might easily be mistaken for a fictionalized historical film: nothing more or less than an interesting collection of stories about people from the past. Ulrich's persistent presence - the constant inclusion of her voice and her frequent explanations of events' significance - ensures that viewers do not forget that what they are seeing is a work of history, painstakingly reconstructed by Ulrich and the filmmakers.

Yet though the persistent inclusion of Ulrich's voice draws the viewer's attention to the film's status as a work of created history, the shift in her commentaries' tone, from tentative and qualified to assured and factual, is nonetheless problematic. Over the course of *A Midwife's Tale*, Ulrich moves from stressing the impossibility of ever achieving true historical accuracy to supplementing the filmmaker's rich visual recreations with (seemingly indisputable) facts about Ballard's era. While the filmmakers never lose sight of their desire to visually represent the complexities and ambiguities involved in historical research, these uncertainties become muted in the film's latter half, as the film's emphasis shifts away from Ulrich's discussions of research to their meticulously detailed, persuasively accurate visual reconstruction of Ballard's life and world.

In *A Midwife's Tale*, the filmmakers create a remarkably powerful and compelling visual representation of Ballard's era. The film succeeds admirably in giving the viewer a profound sense of the kind of life that Ballard led, and the kind of world that she lived in. In an interview about the making of the film, producer and scriptwriter Laurie Kahn-Leavitt notes that the filmmakers consulted numerous experts about (amongst other subjects) "medical history, set design, daily life activities, and social etiquette."²³ This

²¹ Kahn-Leavitt transcript.

²² Ibid.

²³ Karen Everhart Bedford, "How Best to Tell The Midwife's Tale," *Current Online*, September 12, 1995. <www.current.org/hi/hi508.html>.

attention to detail is evident throughout the film. Nothing in *A Midwife's Tale* jars on the viewer; it contains no detectable inaccuracies or anachronisms. The landscape the characters inhabit, the houses they live in, the tools they use, the clothing they wear, the songs they sing, and the way they speak and behave all flow together seamlessly, giving the viewer a powerful sense of the "pastness" of the world which they are watching on screen.

The filmmakers also create their remarkably compelling, plausible vision of the past through their carefully crafted, scrupulously accurate script. Most of the film's script consists of extracts taken directly from Ballard's diary. When dialogue is invented for the film's characters, the exchanges are kept very simple, and are grounded in facts known from the diary. One example of this very simple, fact-based dialogue comes in an exchange between Ballard and her daughter-in-law. Ballard's diary makes clear that she and her daughter-in-law had a rather antagonistic relationship, and the film's dialogue reflects the tension which existed between the two women. In one scene, Ballard says to her daughter-in-law, "[y]ou are rude."²⁴ Her daughter-in-law replies, "I'm tired of your complaints."²⁵ Immediately after this exchange, a selection from Ballard's diary is read in a voiceover, in which Ballard states that her daughter-in-law "is an inconsiderate or a very impudent woman. I wish her to Show more maners [sic] and discretion or hold her peace in the future."²⁶ By placing a diary entry which describes Ballard's relationship with her daughter-in-law immediately after their invented exchange, and keeping that exchange very simple and plausible, the filmmakers contribute to the film's sense of reality and accuracy.

Another example of the film's invented dialogue being firmly grounded in facts from the diary comes in a conversation between Ballard and Rebecca Foster. In this scene, Foster confides in Ballard that she has been raped, telling Ballard that her attackers "could do nothing worse than they have unless they killed me."²⁷ This statement is taken virtually verbatim from Ballard's diary, in which she records that Foster said that her attackers, "could do nothing wors [sic] than they had unless they had killed her."²⁸ This link between the film's dialogue and the diary is made explicit later in the same scene. Foster begins a sentence, and her voice is then replaced by a voiceover from Ballard, reading from her diary. In the film, Foster says "I believe it best that I..."²⁹ Her voice then fades, and is replaced by a voiceover from Ballard's diary, in which she notes that Foster "believed that it was best for her to keep her troubles to her Selfe."³⁰ By keeping the invented dialogue very simple, and grounding it in information known from Ballard's diary entries, the filmmakers give *A Midwife's Tale* a strong sense of reality and accuracy.

Although this realism gives the viewer a rich and valuable sense of what it would have been like to live Ballard's world, it also works to dispel the doubts about historians' ability to create a truly accurate and authentic past which the first section of the film so carefully raised. The editing in the first half of *A Midwife's Tale* is jumpy and abrupt; the film moves quickly and frequently between scenes of Ulrich's research and recreations of Ballard's life, never allowing the viewer to become too immersed in the film's

²⁴ Kahn-Leavitt transcript.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. The film's transcript of the diary retains Ballard's original spelling.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ulrich, 115-6.

²⁹ Kahn-Leavitt transcript.

³⁰ Ibid.

beautifully filmed, meticulously detailed reenactments. Ulrich is consistently present, both on-screen and through voiceovers, to discuss the complex and problematic process through which historians create history. In the film's latter half, by contrast, seamless reenactments of Ballard's life unfold without interruption, allowing the viewer to become deeply absorbed in the scenes being recreated, without interjections about the subjectivity of historians or the unknowability of the past. When Ulrich's voice is included, it does not pull the viewer out of the film's mesmerizing visual world, but rather supports its seeming reality by providing unquestioned authority on background, context, and information about the events being recreated on screen.

At the very end of *A Midwife's Tale*, the screen suddenly goes black, and over this blackness, Lee reads the last entry in Ballard's diary. This transition, from the carefully (re)-constructed, artistically filmed visual world of the rest of the film to a stark black screen is a very startling one. The filmmakers abruptly take away their own meticulous visual recreations and Ulrich's careful interpretations of the diary entries, leaving only Ballard's voice behind. By ending the film, not with the director's images or Ulrich's thoughts, but with Ballard's words coming to the viewer out of the darkness, the filmmakers indicate that even stripped of all historical context and visual interpretation, Ballard's voice is still meaningful and important. Like Ulrich's book, the film version of *A Midwife's Tale* successfully and respectfully brings Ballard's "plain, matter-of-fact, and in the end unforgettable voice" before the public, reconstructing Ballard's remarkable life and elucidating the broader historical significance of her experiences.³¹ Although the film succeeds admirably in representing the process of historical research and raising questions about the complexities of creating history, the film's wonderfully vivid and real visual world undermines the very doubts it raises about whether an accurate and authentic past can ever really be recreated from the tantalizing scraps and enigmatic fragments left behind by the people of the past.

³¹ Ulrich, 9.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bedford, Karen Everhart. "How Best to Tell The Midwife's Tale." Current Online. September 12, 1995. <www.current.org/hi/hi508.html>.
- "Behind the Scenes: Interview with Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich," American Experience: A Midwife's Tale, 1999-2000. <www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/midwife/sfeature/sf_historian.html>.
- Borst, Charlotte G. "A *Midwife's Tale*," review. *Journal of American History* 86, 3 (1999): 1413-1415.
- Cohen, Patricia Cline. "Dialogue," *Journal of Women's History* 14, 3 (2002): 140-147.
- Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Degler, Carl. "The Hidden Life of New England,," *The New York Times*, March 4, 1990.
- Demos, John. *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Dunn, Mary Maples. "Paradigm Shift Books: *A Midwife's Tale* by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich," *Journal of Women's History* 14, 3 (2002): 133-139.
- Gaines, Jane, and Michael Renov, eds., *Collecting Visible Evidence*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Greven, Phillip. "A *Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*," review, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48, 2 (April 1991): 325-327.
- Kahn-Leavitt, Laurie. "A Midwife's Tale," American Experience, PBS, 1997, transcript. <www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/midwife/filmmore/pt.html>.
- Leffler, Phyllis K., and Joseph Brant. *Public and Academic History: A Philosophy and a Paradigm*. Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990.
- . *Public History Readings*. Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1992.
- Litoff, Judy Barrett. "A *Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*," review, *The American Historical Review* 96, 3 (June 1991): 950-951.
- McMahon, Sarah F. "A *Midwife's Tale*," review, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, 3 (July 1998): 470-472.
- Miller, Marla R. "Dialogue," *Journal of Women's History* 14, 3 (2002): 148-157.
- Novick, Peter. *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- O'Connor, John. *Teaching History with Film and Television*. Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1987.

- Plane, Ann Marie. "Historians Behind the Camera," *The Public Historian* 25, 3 (Summer 2003): 5-6.
- Rose, Vivien Ellen, and Julie Corley. "A Trademark Approach to the Past: Ken Burns, the Historical Profession, and Assessing Popular Presentations of the Past," *The Public Historian* 25, 3 (Summer 2003): 49-59.
- Rosenstone, Robert A. "History in Images/History in Words: Reflection on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film." *The American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988): 1173-1185.
- . "The Reel Joan of Arc: Reflections on the Theory and Practice of the Historical Film." *The Public Historian* 25, 3 (Summer 2003): 61-77.
- . *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Schama, Simon. "Fine-Cutting Clio." *The Public Historian* 25: 3 (Summer 2003): 15-25.
- Smith, Daniel Blake. "The (Un)Making of a Historical Drama: A Historian/Screenwriter Confronts Hollywood." *The Public Historian* 25, 3 (Summer 2003): 27-44.
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life and Times of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- White, Hayden. "Historiography and Historiophoty." *The American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988): 1193-1199.
- . *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
- . *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Wolfe, Thomas J. "A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812," review. *Isis* 84, 2 (June 1993): 390-391.