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Professor says literature distorts women's images

By Julie Jordan Hendricks
Night News Editor

Contradicting images of women and their roles pervade contemporary children's literature, said Dr. Dee Storey, professor of curriculum and instruction.

Storey, who spoke Thursday at the Nebraska Union about "The Image of Women in Children's Literature," said that conflicting images of women exist everywhere in our society, "reflecting a 1980s society that isn't responsive to women's concerns."

Storey does not dispute the way women are portrayed in many old traditional children's tales because they represent women's role in past society. However, she said, much of today's literature is full of negative stereotypes and there are "...very few books that give a straight-lined image of a woman that can survive."

"A lot of feminist approaches have gone overboard," Storey said. She said women have to be "1,000 times better" than men to survive in society.

"I would rather see women as equal

instead of better," she said.

Storey cited a book of "feminist" folktales, compiled by women. She said throughout the book women are portrayed as passive, helpless or manipulative. One story is about a woman who literally sold her daughter into marriage.

Storey cited the contradiction of a nonfeminist book being compiled by women and compared it with another, a feminist book written by men. "The Paper Princess" is about a princess whose castle and belongings are burned by a mean dragon who also has kidnapped her handsome prince. After cladding herself in a paper bag, the princess sets out to find the dragon and rescue the prince. She finds the dragon and tricks him into showing off and wearing himself out, flame and all. After being rescued, the prince takes a look at the princess and scoffs at her appearance, telling her that it is no way for a princess to appear.

In this story the princess lives happily ever after, but not with the superficial plastic prince.

Such tales are far from common and most of children's literature is ridden with conflicting images of women, Storey said.

"We see one thing and are told something else," she said.

Contemporary children's literature is lacking in its treatment of questions surrounding women's roles and sexuality, she said.

New life...

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Helen said she was surprised at what she learned in women's studies classes.

"I didn't know the roots were there — in women's literature. I didn't know my problems were old problems. I felt I was always trying to conquer something that nobody else had."

Things began "falling into place" for Helen. She decided she wanted to help women who have been in the same situation as herself.

"I'm concerned because a lot of women put a lot of emotional dependency on other people," she said. "In many cases it's a male. The answer is in taking women's studies classes and being involved in feminist programs to learn about themselves. Learning their roots and their history is absolutely essential."

Helen said today's women have something she didn't have 30 years ago.

"I thought everybody was supposed to get married," she said. "That's kind of what we were led to believe — marriage was the end result of our girlhood. Whether we were mature, capable or not, that's what we did." Women are beginning to make choices now and see different paths. I'm really happy for them. We've still got a long way to go but we have come a long way since I was married in 1954."

Helen said with the help of friends and classes at UNL, she has "discovered herself."

"I'm more free and more whole as a human being," she said. "People that knew me when I first came here say it was just a complete miracle. They've seen a complete change in my personality. They say I've freed myself. I know it. I feel that."

Helen plans to graduate in May with a bachelor's degree in university studies. She has been accepted into graduate school and hopes to be a counselor or educator. She will speak today at 3:30 p.m. in the Nebraska Union as part of UNL's Women's Week.

Police Report

The following incidents were reported to UNL police between 3:55 a.m. and 10:55 p.m. Wednesday:

3:55 a.m. — Stereo equipment reported stolen from a car parked at the Selleck Quadrangle loading dock.

8:55 a.m. — Person allegedly attempted to break into a car in Parking Area 2 near 21st and Vine streets.

9:26 a.m. — Storm gutters reported stolen from the ROTC Army Annex on East Campus.

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