

SPRING 2000

AHA FEMINIST CAUCUS



NEWSLETTER OF THE FEMINIST CAUCUS OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Molly Murphy MacGregor Humanist Heroine 2000

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The Feminist Caucus of the American Humanist Association has named Molly Murphy MacGregor, founder and executive director of the National Women's History project, its Year 2000 "Humanist Heroine."

Ms. MacGregor will accept the award and speak before the annual conference of the American Humanist Association gathering June 1-June 4 at the Hilton Hasbrouck Heights, Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey.

The National Women's History Project (NWHP)—which popularized March as "Women's History Month"—is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

MacGregor will be on the program with such dignitaries as Ann Druyan, who collaborated on the "Cosmos" TV series and co-wrote popular science books with her late husband Carl Sagan; First Amendment litigant Alton Lemon; *Why People Believe Weird Things* author Michael Shermer; representatives of "The Innocence Project," which has overturned many convictions of innocent people based on DNA testing of evidence; and Humanist of the Year William F. Schultz, executive director of Amnesty International.

(Mail or phone your registration to the AHA Amherst Office through May 26 or register at the door. Contact: 1-800-743-



Molly Murphy MacGregor

6646, humanism@juno.com for more details.)

MacGregor earned her B.A. in U.S. History at California State University-Northridge in 1969, received a secondary teaching credential from that university in 1970, and later did graduate studies in American History at Sonoma State University-Rohnert Park.

She was a social studies teacher, directed the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women, Santa Rosa, CA (1977-1980), directed federal educational equity act projects (1980-1986), was an edu-

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AHA Humanist Heroine Recipients

Molly MacGregor 2000
Lorrie Williams 1999
Loretta J. Ross 1998
Dottie Lamm 1997
Annette Van Howe 1996
Rosemary Matson 1995
Kristin Lems 1994
Barbara G. Walker 1993
Sally Roesch Wagner 1992
Sherry Matulis 1991
Carolyn McDade 1990
Ann Simonton 1989
Cleo Kocol 1988
Fran Hosken 1987
Patricia Maginnis 1986
Ben Munson, M.D. 1986
Anne Nicol Gaylor 1985
Tish Sommers 1984
Christine Craft 1983
Sonia Johnson 1982

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*Founded by
Gina Allen 1977*

Coordinators:

Meg Bowman (emerita)
Annie Laurie Gaylor
Trudie Hays

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Feminist Caucus Newsletter

Spring 2000

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cational consultant for the California State Department of Education, Project Sex Equity in Education (1978–1986), and became founder and executive director of the NWHP in 1980.

Molly Murphy MacGregor was taken aback by a teaching colleague's comment in 1972 that a semester-long women's history class that MacGregor was proposing to teach should take about an hour, "because what have women ever done, anyway?" The 40 high school students in her fully enrolled classes the next year left with a very different perspective.

MacGregor enrolled in the graduate program in history at Sonoma State University in 1974. As part of her graduate education, she helped produce a multimedia slide show presentation on the history of women in the U.S. entitled "We, the Women." Presenting the show to audiences across California, she introduced thousands of people to the history of women's contributions in the United States. The enthusiasm and interest demonstrated by audience after audience validated what she had seen in her own classroom. The knowledge of women's history inspired the women and men in her audiences to see themselves as active participants in a democracy.

She originated the plan for the first Women's History Week in Sonoma County in 1978. The goal of the observance was to have communities and schools recognize the important contributions that women of all cultural backgrounds have made to society and history. In 1979, MacGregor became the director of the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women, and took the plan for Women's History Week to a Women's History Institute for national women's organizations' leaders. It became a goal of the Institute participants to get Congress and governors nationwide to declare National Women's History Week for the first time in 1981.

In 1980, MacGregor co-founded the National Women's History Project, an educational nonprofit institution. The NWHP spearheaded the movement for National

Women's History Week (which in 1987 became National Women's History Month).

As executive director of the NWHP for the past 15 years, MacGregor has worked with leaders of national women's organizations to encourage them to celebrate their own organizations' history as well as to build coalitions to develop programs and events that celebrate the vast array of women's lives.

She also works with curriculum and equity specialists in school districts throughout the country to train teachers in ways to integrate a multicultural women's history perspective into the school curriculum.

MacGregor has authored several curriculum units and co-developed several video productions to encourage the easy integration of multicultural women's history into all areas of the curriculum. As validation of the success of these materials, the U.S. Department of Education funded seven grants for the NWHP between 1981 and 1986, totaling \$550,000.

Under MacGregor's leadership, the NWHP has been recognized by the National Education Association with its prestigious Mary Hatwood Futrell Award for outstanding contributions to women's and girls' education, the National Association for Multicultural Education, and the Center for Women Policy Studies for scholarship, service, and advocacy on behalf of the "feminist enlightenment."

MacGregor has also been honored by the American Education Research Association with its Women Educator's Curriculum Award, by the Giraffe Foundation for "sticking her neck out," by the Sonoma County NAACP as a Woman of the Year, the California Commission on the Status of Women as one of California's 12 Outstanding Women of 1987, by Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey for contributions in shaping women's political and social landscape, by the California Business and Profession Women as an Outstanding California Leader, and by Sonoma State University as a Distinguished Alumna.

Feminist Caucus Honors Lorrie Williams 1999



1999 Humanist Heroine Lorrie Williams (at left), founder of the charity CHES, receives her AHA Feminist Caucus award plaque from presenter Meg Bowman at last year's AHA national conference in Ohio. For more about CHES, see page 13.

Photo: Margaret Downey

Helping Hands Needed At Caucus Meeting

Trudie Hays, co-chair of the AHA Feminist Caucus, would appreciate "helping hands" at the upcoming AHA national conference and Feminist Caucus annual meeting because co-director Annie Laurie Gaylor

will not be able to attend. Please let Trudie know if you can help with logistics at the annual meeting. Just volunteer in person at the annual meeting or contact Trudie in advance by email at: haysapts@bayou.com

Meg Bowman Honored By Santa Clara County

OWL nominated Feminist Caucus co-chair emerita Meg Bowman to receive an Award of Special Recognition by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors at a dinner Feb. 25, 2000, attended by over 500 people. Below: Pearl Caldwell, Meg Bowman, Superintendent Pete McHugh.

Meg memorably celebrated her birthday last year by treating 70 friends to a "70th Birthday Bash." Pictured: Jean Johnson, Charlotte, Baker, Meg Bowman, Elizabeth Fisher and Betty Ortez. Busy Meg, who combines activism with world travel, also found time to visit Norway last year.



Campaign To Save Gage Birthplace



To those who fancy we are near the end of the battle or that the reformer's path is strewn with roses, we may say them nay. The thick of the fight has just begun

—Matilda Joslyn Gage, 1881

By Sally Roesch Wagner

There is a house . . . a stately Greek revival where Susan B. Anthony carved her name in the upstairs window while working on the *History of Woman Suffrage*, and slaves hid in the basement on their way to freedom in Canada. L. Frank Baum, author of the Oz books, was married in the parlor, and much of the history of the woman's rights movement was made in the house.

On the corner of Walnut and Genesee Streets in Fayetteville, New York, this now run-down dwelling belonged to Matilda Joslyn Gage. The forgotten member of the suffragist triumvirate (ranked with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in her lifetime), Gage gave up her historic reputation by fighting against the religious right. Those conservative Christian suffragists who repudiated Stanton's *Woman's Bible* succeeded in writing Gage completely out of history.

Adopted into the wolf clan of the Mohawk nation, a supporter of native sovereignty and treaty rights, Gage stood on the edge of radical thought in the 19th century and sends us a beacon call today.

We have a dream: to purchase her house and turn it into a headquarters from which to continue the work Gage began—body sovereignty, native sovereignty, religious, economic, and political freedom for everyone.

It will take \$300,000 to do it. If you'd like to join us in making this dream come true, please get in touch.

Who Was Matilda Joslyn Gage?

“Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, linked together in the authorship of *The History of Woman Suffrage*, will ever hold a grateful place in the hearts of posterity,” the *Woman's Tribune* predicted in 1888. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage shared the leadership of the woman's movement; Gage overlapped both Anthony's activism and Stanton's writing. Although considered equally important with the two other women, Gage (1826–1898) has been almost totally ignored.

“I think I was born with a hatred of oppression,” said Gage, whose parents’ home in Cicero, New York, was a station on the Underground Railroad and tradition holds that she made her home (which still stands on the corner of Walnut and Genesee in Fayetteville, New York) into a station as well. More radical than most suffragists, Gage unsuccessfully tried to prevent the conservative take-over of the woman’s movement, and fought the religious right’s attempt to merge church and state by placing God in the constitution and prayer in the public schools.

Her magnum opus, *Woman, Church and State*, a powerful indictment of the church’s role in the oppression of women, is considered a classic of feminism today. The words of her motto, emblazoned on her tombstone in the Fayetteville cemetery, express her strongest belief:

“There is a word sweeter than mother, home or heaven. That word is Liberty!”

“There is a word sweeter than mother, home or heaven. That word is Liberty!”



Sally Roesch Wagner, 1992 Humanist Heroine

She knew that the struggle for liberty would not be easy and, warning that “the hottest part of the warfare is yet to come, and those who enter it must be willing to give up father, mother and comforts for its sake,” she predicted her own eradication from history.

What Is The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation?

The Gage Foundation began nearly thirty years ago as an informal nationwide network of enthusiasts working to bring this important suffragist back into her rightful place in history. The purpose of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation is to resurrect the life story and continue the work of Matilda Joslyn Gage, one of the leading woman’s rights thinkers, authors, and activists. While restoring knowledge of her contributions (which have great relevance in today’s world), we will act upon contemporary issues of social justice that perpetuate the vision of Gage. The Foundation is becoming a nonprofit corporation under New York law.

How Can I Find Out More About Matilda Joslyn Gage?

Woman, Church and State (New edition of Gage’s 1893 classic) \$20.00

She Who Holds the Sky: Matilda Joslyn Gage by Sally Roesch Wagner \$12.95 Shipping and handling \$4.95

Book orders, donations, and inquiries about the Gage Foundation may be sent to:

**Sally Roesch Wagner, Director
Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation
PO Box 442 Fayetteville, NY 13066
Phone: (315) 637-9511
Email: swagner711@aol.com**

Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner was featured in Ken Burns’s recent documentary on Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

On Humanism

Clara, a Feminist Caucus nonagenarian, was recently invited into a public high school class to give this presentation about Humanism.

By Clara Carlson

I have been asked to speak to you about Humanism. Some of you may know what Humanism is, some may have an idea, based on what you have heard, and some may have erroneous ideas.

Followers of conventional or traditional religions have said that Humanism is a religion, but the dictionary refers to Humanism as a mode or attitude of thought or action centering upon distinctively human interests or ideals. Religion, on the other hand, is defined by the dictionary as the service and adoration of a God as expressed in forms of worship; an awareness or conviction of the existence of a supreme being, arousing reverence, love, gratitude, the will to obey, etc.

Some, who subscribe to orthodox religions, feel threatened by those who prefer other belief systems, and the results can be hostile or violent. It is a sad fact that these differences cause divisions between peoples, even to the point of wars between nations.

Out of the distant past comes this wisdom: Beware the person who says, "I have the only truth."

Dr. Konrad Lorenz was a German ethologist who developed the systematic study of animal behavior, a method which caused some dispute as to whether its findings explain social and antisocial behavior. Dr. Lorenz had this to say about groups with a tendency to set themselves apart:

"If you observe closely allied but slightly different subcultures, you find that each assumes certain norms of behavior, certain attitudes and even certain ways of dressing which intentionally make them different, a competing group."

It was Erik Erikson, a psychoanalyst, who first drew attention to the amazing par-



Clara Carlson of Washington state, who received an award from the Atheist Alliance convention in April for her activism and promotion of humanism and freethought in the schools.

allels between this process and the divergent evolution of species. Erikson called this pseudospeciation, which is a very dangerous process.

It makes you believe that your pseudospecies alone is the human species. In what are called primitive languages, the name for the tribe is usually synonymous with "man." "Zulu" means simply "man." So this subspeciation upsets the balance between the inhibitions which we have for killing "man" and our ability to kill a man. It gives us, in a manner of speaking, a shooting license for everybody who is not a Zulu.

Dr. Lorenz said that in order to take social norms from another generation, or culture, one of the prerequisites is that you love and respect at least one person who represents that culture.

Primitive people, before there was language, were unable to reason and were very

Beware the person who says, "I have the only truth."

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superstitious. Natural events, such as volcanos, tornadoes, thunder, and lightning, were very frightening. Out of these fears grew the belief that these events were caused by a supernatural being, or beings. Some cultures came to worship multiple gods, with a god for every element—water, earth, fire and even for emotions, such as love.

As the tribes grew in experience and knowledge, it was not long before priests and leaders, sometimes the same person, discovered they could control their people by playing on their fears. As language and writing developed, these ideas were written down, and because they had become part of the cultural religion they came to be considered sacred writings.

The word “belief” plays a part here, as it represents what is in an individual’s head. That is the only place it exists. It may consist of what you have been told all your life, what you have reasoned for yourself, or what you have learned from books or other sources. In any case, it amounts to what you are willing to accept and it can be changed as other ideas are encountered.

The history of the origin of religions has been well researched from anthropological findings and detailed in two excellent books. One is *The Chalice and the Blade* by Riane Eisler, and the other is *When God Was A Woman* by Merlin Stone. These books show that in the prehistoric era of the Middle East, governments were matriarchal, peaceful, economically sound, and with cultures in which all citizens were equal. They had no weapons of aggression, such as spears. All this changed when bands of horsemen rode in from the north, bringing their male gods with them. All women leaders were put to death and all gods and signs of matriarchy destroyed. The governments became patriarchal, the women were no longer equal citizens, and the gods were fierce and warlike.

In the years between then and now, religions have grown and flourished, many times by coercive methods. A professor of ethics at a college in Cambridge, England, talks of what he calls the Boo-Hurrah theory of morality (boo-hurrah as in jeering and

cheering). The basic premise is that moral statements or beliefs are not based on provable facts, but are expressions of emotion. You and I might agree on the facts of a particular situation, i.e., euthanasia, but disagree on “feelings.” No matter what facts someone might present on pain, brain death, etc., someone else would say, “I just feel it’s wrong.” Boo-Hurrah leaves no room for argument because it is a dialogue based on the manipulation of emotions.

In 1973, a group of about thirty-three men met and drew up what they called The Humanist Manifesto, outlining their combined ideas on Humanism. Summed up, this is what they concluded:

“We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction.”

They said, “Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that [hu]mankind possesses. We reject all religious, ideological or moral codes that denigrate the individual, suppress freedom, dull intellect and dehumanize personality. A civilized society should be a tolerant one.”

And this was the foundation upon which the American Humanist Association was founded.

Feminist Caucus Opposes Regent

The AHA Feminist Caucus wrote letters of complaint last fall after Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson nominated a 3-time drunken driver accused of sexual harassment to the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. Ironically, Thompson’s nomination of Gregory Gracz, most recently convicted of drunk driving in 1996, coincided with a national ad campaign against binge drinking on college campuses.

Gracz, president of the Milwaukee Professional Fire Fighters Association, was also accused of exposing himself to a woman firefighter after soliciting sex from her at a 1990 convention. Unfortunately, the nomination was successful.

20-Year Reprise

How Your Daughter Grows Up To Be A Man

This article by the late Gina Allen, founder of the Feminist Caucus of the American Humanist Association, originally was published in the March/April 1980 Humanist. It is being reprinted in homage to Gina at the suggestion of Meg Bowman, who would like to remind 21st century humanists of the perils of once again falling prey to “Manglish.”

By Gina Allen

It seems impossible, doesn't it? That the baby girl in the pink booties should grow up to be a man? But it happens to every little girl in the English-speaking world, courtesy of the English language—labeled *Manglish* by California critic Varda One.

Little girls, learning to speak, learning who they are, identify with *me-she-her-hers*. And they know that little boys are *he* and *him*. Also most animals are *he's* except, perhaps, kittens and ladybugs. In life and in picture books children are introduced to the puppy—“Isn't *he* cute?” And the elephant at the circus—“Isn't *he* big?” And the monkey in the zoo—“Isn't *he* funny?”

Being surrounded by a world of male animals doesn't interfere with a little girl's sense of identity. However, becoming a *he*—sometimes, and sometimes not, in the interests of grammar—can do just that. What is she to think when the instructions say that if a child wants to go on the field trip he should bring written permission from his parents? Is she a *he* in this instance, or is the field trip, like many other privileges, for boys only?

Expanding their language to include *she's* isn't hard for little boys. They never have to change gender. They are never excluded. They only have to enlarge their word world in general situations, knowing that the inclusion of females sometimes doesn't

apply in the real world, where the sexes are often carefully segregated. For little girls, the lesson is much more difficult. Little girls have to switch back and forth, now accepting a new identity as *he*, for reasons they don't understand, and then becoming *she* again, no longer welcome in the masculine world.

Lexicographer Alma Graham, who, with Peter Davies, deleted *Manglish* from the American Heritage Dictionary, explains it this way: “If you have a group, half of whose members are A's and half of whose members are B's and if you call the group C, then A's and B's may be equal members of group C. But if you call the group A, there is no way that B's can be equal to A's within it. The A's will always be the rule and the B's will always be the exception—the subgroup, the subspecies, the outsiders.”

She might have added *invisible*, which women become with use of the masculine singular pronoun and with the generic terms *man* and *men*. Girls, growing up, learn about the accomplishments of man, man's needs, man's ideals. They learn about “Prehistoric Man,” “Primitive Man,” “Civilized Man,” “Man in Space,” “The Future of Man.”

They read and hear about “Courageous Men,” “Frontiersmen,” “Men of Science,” “Famous Men,” “Statesmen.” They learn about their “forefathers,” those wise, intrepid architects of civilization. But what do they learn about their foremothers? Not much, and little that is positive. Eve, the first woman according to the Hebrews, was also the first sinner, who caused “mankind” to be banished from a paradise on earth into a harsh world of toil and pain. Pandora, the first woman according to the Greeks, opened her dowry box and unleashed among “men” the evils that plague them

What do girls learn about their foremothers? Little that is positive.

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still.

From then until today women have been remembered and recorded more often as treacherous temptresses than as accomplishing humans worthy of respect. Helen of Troy was blamed for the ten-year Trojan War and the deaths of many Greek heroes. The Greek Island of Lesbos is known, not as the home of Sappho the great poet, but as the home of the seductress of young women, Sappho the Lesbian. Aspasia, teacher of Socrates, is remembered, not as a wise philosopher, but as the courtesan who destroyed Pericles.

According to the records, the Romans were beset by female treachery, from Cleopatra and Zenobia without to the likes of Fulvia, Livia, Agrippina, and Messalina within. To have their works judged on merit, rather than disparaged, women have had to disguise themselves as men and perform deeds of masculine valor. Even then, as in the case of Joan of Arc, brilliant military victories could be attributed to the devil who possessed her and she could be burned at the stake to exorcise him.

In order to have their writings published and accepted by readers, many women, including the Bronte sisters and some modern mystery writers, have used male pseudonyms (George Eliot, George Sand). Paintings and musical compositions of women have been attributed to teachers, husbands, fathers, and brothers. And scores of creative women are known to us only as “Anonymous.” Female scholars are now bringing these forgotten women to our attention, something male historians, writing the story of “mankind,” have never done. They thought they were writing the history of generic “man.” They were, in fact, writing *his* story. *Her* story is only now being told.

In “Words and Women,” authors Casey Miller and Kate Swift observed: “Man in the sense of male so overshadows man in the sense of human being as to make the latter use inaccurate and misleading for the purposes both of conceptualizing and communicating.”

Consider the confusion:

- Abraham Maslow, writing about empathetic man, admits that man can’t really know what it’s like to be a different sort of animal. “He can’t even know what it’s like to be a woman.”

- After an hour-long program on BBC, Jacob Bronowski’s “The Ascent of Man,” the host and a guest chat casually about what women might have been doing while man ascended from the apes.

- Erich Fromm: “Man’s vital interests are life, food, and access to females.”

- Sign on a New York subway: “Give a kid a job and mold a man.”

- Television commentator: “People won’t give up power. They’ll give up anything else first—money, home, wife, children.”

- Sociologist: “Americans of higher status have more years of higher education ... and less chance of a fat wife.”

- History text: “This ancient civilization allowed women to inherit property.”

Benjamin Lee Whorf once said: “The limits of my language are the limits of my thought.” We have been proving him right before and since. From the primary grades through college, students asked to illustrate concepts such as “Primitive Man,” “Industrial Man,” “Economic Man,” have done so by drawing men. They add women only when the instructions are changed so that they are illustrating “Primitive Men and Women” or “Primitive Society,” and so forth. There are never as many women as men. But at least when the term *man* or *men* isn’t guarding the door women are allowed to appear in small numbers. Never enough, however, to make it seem that they had anything to do with human progress or are an important part of civilization.

The confusion between generic *man* and *man* as male is constant in English and sometimes troublesome in other languages. Frenchmen were outraged at women demonstrators and had the women arrested, for carrying signs that stated: “One Frenchman in two is a woman.” The men thought that half of them were being accused of homosexuality.

**Mark Twain
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bitterly, and
comically,
about
German
because it
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turnip
feminine
while a
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And then there's the Loch Ness monster, who has never been seen and therefore, gender unknown, is called "he." One group, wanting to draw him close enough for observation, got caught up in their semantics and created a synthetic female to lure the generic "he" into the open.

If we as adults can be so contradictory in our attempts to deal with a masculine gender that denotes both "male" and "male and female," how can we teach it intelligently to our children? The fact is that we can't, and don't.

Alma Graham, who has put children's texts through a computer, tells us that children learn their lessons from books in which there are twice as many boys as girls and seven times as many men as women. So much for the generic male gender's impartiality.

To add to the erasure of little girls as legitimate persons, most of the women in the books they read are mothers who have given birth to sons, not daughters. And, in these books, the sons are referred to as the sons of their fathers—not of their mothers. Little girls not only have no existence in their storybooks—they have no future.

A lot of linguists and ordinary citizens think this isn't important. An increasing number of educators and pediatricians, including Benjamin Spock and Lee Salk, think it is.

When he was president of Mills College, then for women only, Lynn T. White said: "The grammar of English dictates that when a referent is either of indeterminate sex or both sexes, it shall be considered masculine. The penetration of this habit of language into the minds of little girls as they grow up to be women is more profound than most people, including most women, have recognized: for it implies that personality is really a male attribute, and that women are a human subspecies It would be a miracle if a girl baby, learning to use the symbols of our tongue, could escape some wound to her self-respect: whereas a boy baby's ego is bolstered by the pattern of our language."

How did our English language get so

mixed up that women have to tread carefully through it, learning, only with practice, when they are men and when they aren't? Other Indo-European languages of the Teutonic branch, of which ours is one, don't have this problem. German, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish still have a word that represents "human," with separate words that denote men as males and women as females. When languages have masculine, feminine, and neuter gender they don't put down one sex in favor of the other. Gender is usually quite random. Mark Twain complained bitterly, and comically, about German because it makes a turnip feminine while a young woman is neuter—"it."

English, too, once had a word for human beings of both genders. It was *mann*, derived from the Indo-European root meaning "earthling." In Early English *mann* meant a human being. *Wif* meant an adult female. And *wer* meant an adult male. In the ninth century, when Alfred the Great encouraged the use of English instead of Latin, women came and went as men did. They worked at the same trades and had equal rights.

Then in six centuries, under English common law, women's rights declined, and so did their position in the language. *Wer*, for man, all but disappeared (though retained in werewolf), and men, male, appropriated *man* and *men*, dropping the second n. *Wif* became *wife*, she who belongs to a man. *Wifman* became *woman*. And English lost its word for a human being. *Man* was expected to do double duty.

Up to that time it was possible to say that "his mother was a goodly man" or "the Lord had but one pair of men in Paradise." Can you imagine a child, now, making either statement (or making sense out of either one)? If it were to happen, parents, teachers, doctors would give up all allegiance to generic *man* and have the child treated for a severe identity crisis.

No one has measured, or done anything about, the identity crisis little girls experience as they learn that they are "he" and half of "mankind." For most it happens at

Words define women as something to eat, as parts of the body, as people who never grow up, or as nonhuman.

too early an age for remembering. But there are things, along the way from girlhood to womanhood, that many women remember and wish they could forget.

Since women are defined not only as men, but by men, in the language, men go on defining, says social scientist Arthur Berger of San Francisco State University. And they define women as less than human:

- as a different species: chicks, pussies, bitches, cows, pigs.
- as something to eat: cookie, tart, tomato.
- as mindless sex objects or parts of the body: piece, tease, sex pot, or worse.
- as lesser or nonpeople: hags, broads, dolls.
- as people who never grow up: babies, gals, girls.

When a woman marries, the couple is pronounced “man (the human being) and wife (the possession of the man).” And this is supposed to be the bride’s day! When a woman goes to work she is part of “man-power.” If she is injured on the job she is entitled to “workmen’s compensation.” If she is physically abused she is “manhandled.” If she falls off a ship she is “man overboard”! If she is killed by another, the crime is “manslaughter.”

Daily, women open letters addressed to “Dear Sir.” They are called “gals” or “girls” by their employers and others until they are in their eighties. In nightclubs and on television they are ridiculed by stand-up comics as wives and mothers-in-law. If they aren’t wives they are ridiculed as spinsters, too unattractive to catch a man. If they do something dumb, they are told they behaved “just like a woman.” If they say something intelligent, they are told they “think just like a man.”

Looking up a word in the dictionary (the final authority on the use of language) can be a traumatic experience for a woman. H. Lee Gershuny, of the Department of English, Manhattan Community College, City University of New York, hoped for improvement in the Random House Dictionary, which was the first new unabridged dictionary to be published after

the resurgence of the women’s movement in this country in 1966. It was widely distributed, inexpensively, by a major book club and thus became the first and only unabridged dictionary to be used in many households throughout the country.

In a preface to the dictionary, written in Manglish, Editor-in-Chief Jess Stein states: “The Random House Dictionary of the English Language . . . is an entirely new dictionary, written in midcentury for twentieth-century users. Because it is fully up to date and thoroughly reliable, the RHD will provide the user with all the information he is likely to need about . . . language matters.”

Stein also says: “We have been guided by the premise that a dictionary editor must not only record, he must also teach. . . . We have often added illustrative examples after definitions in order to give the reader as much help in understanding the meaning and use of the word as possible.”

In her study of the Random House Dictionary, Gershuny examined the illustrative sentences, two thousand of them, which accompanied nine hundred entry words, randomly selected. She found that “masculine-gender sentences appear almost three times as often as feminine-gender sentences in RHD,” and that “where feminine-gender words occur, the reader will find ‘her’ stereotyped in nearly seven out of ten sentences.”

The stereotypes are negative and unnecessary for illustrating the entry words. True, they teach—one of the purposes of the dictionary in Editor Stein’s opinion. But what they teach is scarcely “fully up to date” or “reliable” for “twentieth-century users,” more than half of whom are women and all of whom are living in a world in which sexual stereotypes and assumptions are being questioned and revised or else discarded entirely.

Let’s look at illustrative sentences for the words *bargain*, *tremble*, *shrill*, *hypnotize*.

His mother-in-law was no bargain.

She trembled at his voice.

Women with shrill voices get on his nerves.

*Shakespeare,
Lord
Chesterfield,
George
Bernard
Shaw, F.
Scott
Fitzgerald,
and John F.
Kennedy, all
at times
substituted
the plural for
the singular
without
apology.*

He really hypnotizes the women.

They believe anything he tells them.

The lessons taught in such descriptive sentences are clear. They reinforce the injustices of the tongue we speak. Says social scientist Berger: "Women are subjected to an insidious, almost invisible domination in the very language they use to think about themselves and argue for their rights . . . Women are a subordinate sex and it shows in our everyday language as well as in our social life, and the language probably helps determine the social structure."

Indeed it does, and has. Asks Dan Lacy, senior vice-president of McGraw-Hill, Inc.: "Would the Declaration of Independence have meant the same thing if it said ' . . . all men and women are created equal'? Indeed, would the signers have signed it? . . . *Man* and its compounds when used generically have an ambiguity useful to writers who want to be slippery with their meanings. They can decide for themselves when it will be offered as a noble universality and when and by how much its meaning will be restricted."

The slippery universal man and the grammatically-imposed masculine singular pronoun in our language serve nobody well. They turn women into invisible and/or lesser men. They reinforce men's low opinion of women and women's low opinion of themselves. They turn men and women into adversaries instead of partners. And they start their insidious work in the early years of childhood when children are gulping down uncritically the knowledge that we give them as if it were life-sustaining and enriching, which it should be.

The problems posed by our male-dominated language are not insoluble, given determination and imagination. It takes only awareness to substitute *person* or *human* or *people* for generic *man* and *men*. And certainly *humanity* and *humankind* are more descriptive of all people than *mankind*. Miller and Swift have suggested another choice—*gen* and *genkind*, as in *genesis* and *generic*.

As far back as 1859, the American composer Charles Converse proposed *thon*, a

contraction of *that one* as a substitute for the enveloping masculine singular pronoun. The suggestion found its way into two dictionaries. More recently, Mary Orován's *co*, which she used in a 1973 book published by Harper and Row, has been adopted by several communes and the magazine *Community* which is addressed to communes.

It is possible that a new pronoun isn't needed. Once upon a time *you* was plural, used in the singular only to address a superior person one wished to honor. As the ideas of democracy made everyone worthy of honor, *you* was universally used and the singular *thee* and *thou* dropped from the language. Today an increasing number of teachers of English are allowing students to use *they* and *them* instead of *he* and *him*, placing equality of the sexes above arbitrary rules of grammar.

Writers, speakers, and once strict grammarians are also training themselves to use and accept *they* and *them* as more realistic than *he*, *him*, *she*, and *her*; even when the referent is singular. In that, they are in the best company, including Shakespeare, Lord Chesterfield, George Bernard Shaw, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John F. Kennedy, all of whom, at times, substituted the plural for the singular pronoun without apology.

There is another solution, proposed by columnist Gena Corea: "From now on, let's use *she* to refer to the standard human being. The word *she* includes *he* so that would be fair. Anyway, we've used *he* for the past several thousand years and we'll use *she* for the next few thousand; we're just taking turns."

It's one way to keep your daughter from growing up to be a man.

AHA Feminist Caucus News

Warning: Our Address Changed

The post office box used by the AHA Feminist Caucus was forcibly changed by fiat of the postmistress in Madison, Wisconsin, despite the valiant efforts of the Feminist Caucus and other Post Office victims to save our box numbers. (We enlisted the help of our Congresswoman, even wrote President Clinton, and inspired several local newspaper articles in our vain attempt to protest this unfair treatment at the time of a post office remodeling.)

Our beloved old address has been changed to **PO Box 448, Madison WI 53701**. The Post Office agreed to forward mail for longer than a year so long as the Feminist Caucus makes an effort to notify members of the address change. However, it will be some time before our envelopes and letterhead are used up, so we are sorry for the confusion. Please make a note of our new address in your records.

New Changes Adopted

- **Dues Raised.** At the June 4, 1999 AHA Feminist Caucus annual meeting, Feminist Caucus membership dues were raised from \$10 to \$15. Thank you so much for your support which pays for our annual newsletter and the expenses we bear for the annual Humanist Heroine in airfare, plaque and related expenses.

- **AHA Board Openings.** The AHA board has agreed to notify and consult the Feminist Caucus over AHA Board openings. We want to hear from you if you would be interested in serving in the future. If interested, please contact co-chair Trudie Hays, 1605 Valley Dr., Ruston LA 71270-2333, haysapts@bayou.com

- **CEDAW Support.** The annual conference adopted a resolution urging all local Humanist Chapters to make CEDAW, the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, an action

item. Chapters are urged to get their state/local governments to pass resolutions in support of CEDAW if they have yet to do so. Sen. Jesse Helms has bottled up the UN resolution so that, to our nation's great embarrassment, the United States joins such countries as the United Arab Emirate in not ratifying CEDAW. Contact the National Committee on UN/CEDAW, (310) 271-8087, fax (310) 271-2056, Billie Heller, Chair, BilliCEDAW@aol.com

- **CHES Support.** At the behest of Feminist Caucus co-chair emerita Meg Bowman, the Humanist Society of Friends will act as a conduit to collect funds for CHES, the Canadian-based charity to help educate young African women. CHES was founded by 1999 Humanist Heroine Lorrie Williams. You can phone Lorrie Williams at (604)521-3416 or fax her at (604)525-6959 for further information. To make your U.S. contribution tax-deductible, send your check earmarked CHES to the AHA Center.

Choose Choice—Skip Florida

The AHA Feminist Caucus advised Florida Gov. Jeb Bush that his antiabortion crusade may come with a price tag: feminists will wage a "Don't Choose Florida" campaign in response to the State of Florida's decision to "take license with women's constitutional liberties."

In late November, the State of Florida approved an official state license bearing the antiabortion message "Choose Life," with proceeds to be funneled to antiabortion groups. The law was immediately challenged by the National Organization for Women.

"We who 'adopt choice' as our slogan will choose to reaffirm *Roe v Wade* by skipping Florida," advised Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-chair of the AHA Feminist Caucus. Gov. Bush may be written at The Capitol, Tallahassee FL 32399.

**This article
features Cleo
Kocol, a longtime
former chair of
the Feminist
Caucus and its
1988 Humanist
Heroine.**

Be A Humanist Heroine (or Hero)!

Send in your 2000 AHA Feminist Caucus Membership today!

Only \$15.00



The world has seemingly awaited the advent of heroic souls who once again should dare all things for the truth. The woman who possesses love for her sex, for the world, for truth, justice and right, will not hesitate to place herself upon record as opposed to falsehood, no matter under what guise of age or holiness it appears.

— Matilda Joslyn Gage

Time To Pay Your Dues!

Please take a moment to fill in the handy enclosed renewal slip (or the form below) and write out a \$15 check (or more!) now for your 2000 membership in the AHA Feminist Caucus.

Please look for and use the enclosed envelope pre-addressed to

the AHA Feminist Caucus.

Feminist Caucus membership comes due every year at the time of the annual conference of the AHA (this year it's June 1-4, 2000). Your support is what makes it possible to continue the annual "Humanist Heroine" award and publication of

the annual newsletter.

Prompt renewals are much appreciated!

You will be sent your annual membership card showing that you are a Feminist Caucus member in good standing. Renew today through the mail! Thank you!

Thanks For Supporting The Feminist Caucus!

Your Year 2000 Membership Is Due NOW!

AHA Feminist Caucus memberships are due at the time of the annual national AHA conference (June 2000). Your renewal now saves us time & postage. You will be sent your 2000 membership card.

Dues: **\$15** individual; **\$20** chapter. Enclosed is _____ Enclosed is an extra donation of _____

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