

The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Newsletter

The Gilman Society was founded by Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Elaine Hedges in 1990.

Spring 2008

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University of New England

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Jean Lee Cole
Loyola College in Maryland

From the President

Greetings to all of you! I extend a special welcome to our new members and a thank you to our continuing members for your ongoing support and interest.

I am pleased to announce that the Gilman Society will be hosting two panels at the upcoming American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco in late May. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Public Sphere," chaired by Sari Edelstein, will be held Thursday, May 22; and "Gilman's Use of Genre," chaired by Gamze Sabanci, is scheduled for Saturday, May 24. Thanks go to Sari and Gamze for their great work putting these two panels together.

If you will be attending the ALA conference, I urge you to attend the Gilman Society Business Meeting, which will take place Thursday, May 22, at 10:30 a.m. I would like especially to encourage graduate students and emerging scholars to get involved in the Society, and attending the meeting is a great way to begin.

Finally, I'd like to thank Society officers Robin Cadwallader, Sari Edelstein, and Jean Lee Cole for their excellent work keeping the organization running smoothly and helping it to grow.

As always, I welcome your feedback, questions, and suggestions for strengthening the Gilman Society. Please feel free to contact me at jtuttle@une.edu.

Jennifer S. Tuttle, University of New England
President, Gilman Society

From the Executive Director

Greetings Gilman Society Members—

I hope to see many of you at the annual business meeting in May at the ALA, where I will provide a more detailed membership report.

Briefly, I am happy to report here that our finances are sound, and our membership continues to be stable. While we haven't gained many new members in the past year, several of our continuing members have decided to convert from yearly to lifetime memberships, and I would like to thank them for their generous support of the society and its activities. Please remember that our membership year runs from September 1 through August 31. And, since our organization is entirely dependent on membership fees to maintain our solvency, I urge you to check the date on the address label attached to this newsletter. If the date says 2008, then you need to pay dues immediately to be counted as a paid member. Additionally, dues for this year (2008-2009) will need to be paid by September 1 to keep your membership active. So, at this point, you may want to consider paying for two years.

I would like to thank all of you for your continued support of the Gilman Society. I hope to see all of you at the two Gilman panels and our annual business meeting in San Francisco.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin L. Cadwallader

Conference News

Don't miss the two **Gilman Society sponsored panels** at this year's **American Literature Association Conference, May 22-25, 2008, San Francisco, CA:**

I. Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Public Sphere Thursday, May 22, 9:00-10:30am

Chair: Sari Edelstein, Brandeis University

1. "Moving on by Turning Back: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Intervention into 21st Century Feminist Theory," Jen McDanel, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
2. "Books vs. Babies: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the Public Sphere, and Postbellum American Women's Writing," Cynthia Davis, University of South Carolina
3. "Redefining Categories of Home and World in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Forerunner*," Mariela Mendez, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
4. "'The Tyranny of Bric-a-Brac: 'The Yellow Wall-paper' as Decorative Arts Reform,'" Lauren Kroiz, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

II. Gilman's Use of Genre Saturday, May 24, 3:30-4:50pm

Chair: Gamze Sabanci, Halic University

1. "An' or 'The'?: A Comparison of Gilman's 'An/The Unnatural Mother' and Elizabeth Stuart

Phelp's 'The Chief Operator,'" Jill Rudd, University of Liverpool

2. "Literary Designs: Genre, Politics, and Pattern in Gilman's Decorative Fiction," Peter Betjemann, Oregon State University

3. "From *Herland* to *Ourland* and Back: Utopias as Protest in Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman," Iva Balic, Palm Beach Community College

4. "'I taste your letter all the way down': Gilman and Epistolarity," Jennifer S. Tuttle, University of New England

There will also be a Gilman Society business meeting at the ALA on Thursday, May 22 at 10:30. Check the online conference program for the correct location.

A Short Essay on Gilman's "Benigna Machiavelli"

**Maiko Kato
Aoyama Gakuin University**

Originally published in the *Forerunner* between 1914 and 1915, "Benigna Machiavelli" highlights women's struggle for independence. Benigna, the heroine, skillfully plays the role of the loving daughter, sister, friend, and at the same time, she assumes leadership positions inside and outside of her home. She is a liberated, accomplished girl that chooses her own fate. Though she calls herself "an ordinary girl," she wishes to be "a good villain," a desire that runs counter to the traditional image of women in the 19th century

In the beginning of the story, Benigna explains why she aspires to be a villain. Unlike conventional heroines, who practice patience and modesty, she wants to work with her intellect. She believes that a good villain is a character that will bring luck to everyone and will break the conventional boundaries that limit women's lives.

Her leadership is solid and unyielding, but it is exercised in a girlish manner. Following a calculated plan, she manages to save both her sister, Peggy, and her mother from her father's tyrannical regime. First, she helps Peggy break up with her boyfriend Ned, a womanizer, and then, she guides her own father to take an interest in his homeland of Scotland. This newfound interest in his ancestors prevents him from continually interfering in the affairs of his nuclear family. While he is in Scotland, Benigna helps her mother take a much needed rest to cure the depression caused by his violent behavior. She also invites Peggy, the family housekeeper, Alison, and her neighbors to open up a boarding house in her home.

But the women are not the only victims in this story. As Gilman makes clear, the father is also a victim of a patriarchal system. It becomes evident that he directs abusive language towards his family because he is frustrated with his role as the head of a family, and the fact that he is not particularly successful in his job makes him feel like a failure. By going to Scotland he comes to see himself as an individual, not merely a patriarch. He recognizes his interests and ambitions, and after going back to the States he becomes satisfied with his new life. He spends his time in his own study, even though he continues to have some trouble accepting the idea of women earning an income, living together and cooperating at the boarding house.

Benigna is proud of her paternal grandmother's family name Machiavelli. Like the Italian political thinker Machiavelli, she seizes power over her surroundings. For her, this means cultivating a world run by women, a utopia where women cooperate to earn their living. She skillfully relies on her father for knowledge about Scotland, just as Gilman asked her father, a librarian, for information about books, according to Gilman's autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. However, in spite of their rapport, Benigna's leadership

The *Charlotte Perkins Gilman Newsletter* is published yearly each spring by the Gilman Society and distributed to all dues-paying members. The newsletter welcomes short articles (500-800 words), book reviews, reports on teaching Gilman, descriptions of archival items, calls for papers, and conference and publication announcements. For information concerning future submissions, contact Sari Edelstein at sari@brandeis.edu.

has nothing to do with Scottish consciousness or ideology. Her story exemplifies Gilman's commitment to encouraging women to realize their own worth by making full use of their skills and abilities in society.

Benigna lives for other people's happiness, but she does not question the evils of patriarchy. She is often troubled by her girlish love for boys, as she admits she is "an ordinary girl." Her effort and struggles are meaningful for herself and for other women, and even for her father, whose well-being and self-esteem become restored. *Benigna Machiavelli* is "a morality play" in which a good villain serves as a model for other women. It suggests a new path for women – to break the old patterns and earn their living with skills that they have acquired in their own lives.

Recent Publications on Gilman

Bendixen, Alfred. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'Toolbox': The Value of Satiric Poetry and Social Reform." *Teaching Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*. Eds. Bennett, Paula Bernat and Kilcup, Karen L. New York, NY: MLA, 2007

Edelstein, Sari, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Yellow Newspaper," *Legacy*. June 2007 (24.1).

Golden, Catherine, "Marking Her Territory: Feline Behavior in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper.'" *American Literary Realism*. Fall 2007 (40.1).

Remember to check the Gilman Society website for conference news, calls for papers, online resources, and more!

<http://web.cortland.edu/gilman>

Membership in the Charlotte Perkins Gilman Society

The aim of the Charlotte Perkins Gilman Society is to encourage interest in Gilman and the issues that she explored. Membership includes an annual issue of the Newsletter, notices of Gilman-sponsored sessions at conferences, and an invitation to participate in the annual business meeting, which usually takes place at the American Literature Association Conference. Dues are **\$5.00/year** or **\$75.00 for lifetime membership**. Overseas members should contact Executive Director Robin Cadwallader regarding membership fees and payment. To join, please fill out this form and send it with a check (in U.S. dollars) made out to the Charlotte Perkins Gilman Society to this address: **Robin Cadwallader, Department of English, Saint Francis University, Loretto, PA 15940.**

Name _____

Academic Affiliation (if any) _____

Address

Current members: is this a new address? _____

Phone _____ Email _____

I enclose _____ \$5.00 for one year of membership
_____ \$75.00 for a lifetime membership

plus an additional contribution of \$ _____.

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____. Check one: ___ new member ___ renewal



Charlotte Perkins Gilman Society Executive Director Election Ballot

Election is for a two-year term; results will be announced at the Gilman Society business meeting at the ALA conference. Please check the box to indicate your vote for the unopposed nominee:

Robin Cadwallader

Robin has served as the Society's Executive Director for the last two years and would like to continue her work in this position. She is an Assistant Professor of English at St. Francis University of Pennsylvania and also serves as Managing Editor of *Legacy*.

Please mail this form by 5/10 to:

**Jennifer Tuttle
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Biddeford, Maine 04005**

In This Issue:

**A Short Essay on Gilman's "Benigna Machiavelli"
by Maiko Kato**

Publications and Conference Panel News

Ballot for Election of Society Executive Director

The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Society
Sari Edelstein, Newsletter Editor
Brandeis University
Department of English & American Literature
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