



THE NEWSLETTER OF

The HUMANIST ASSOCIATION of CENTRAL CONNECTICUT

August 1999



“Seeing Shelley Plain”

Percy Bysshe Shelley was one of the most conspicuous of the 19th century Romantic forerunners of modern Humanism. Our own Walter Wells, who lived much of his adult life as a US diplomat in Italy, recently spent some time near the region of Italy where Shelley lost his life by drowning. This experience among others has moved him to reflect on Shelley and his significance for our times, in the following words:

Landor wrote, “Shelley, whom envy never touched...,” and T.S. Eliot, writing (as he often did) with eyebrow raised, thought “Dante’s view was truer than Shelley’s”; the egocentric Byron believed him “the only completely generous man [he had] ever met.” His epitaph in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* declared, “We ought as justly to regret the decease of the Devil.” In reply to Browning’s “Ah, did you once see Shelley plain?”, after our meeting August 16, will the real Shelley please stand up?

Humanist Conversations

The topic of the next Humanist Conversations meeting will be “Humanism and Spirituality — Oil and Vinegar or Peanut Butter and Jelly?” Bring supporting documentation.

Please e-mail reference material to mickey.koth@yale.edu. If you need a mailing address, please call Mickey Koth at (203) 498-8333, or Bill Lyon at (203) 268-5672.

Calendar of Events

AUGUST

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| Mon., 16 | Monthly meeting at USNH, 700 Hartford Turnpike.
Coffee and conversation. | 7:30 p.m. |
| | Main program: Walter Wells, “Seeing Shelley Plain” | 8:00 p.m. |
| Fri., 27 | Humanist Conversations at 700 Hartford Turnpike.
Program: “Humanism and Spirituality — Oil and Vinegar or Peanut Butter and Jelly?” | 7:30 p.m. |
| Sun., 29 | Board meeting at USNH, 700 Hartford Turnpike. | 1:30 p.m. |

SEPTEMBER

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| Mon., 20 | Monthly meeting at USNH, 700 Hartford Turnpike.
Coffee and conversation. | 7:30 p.m. |
| | Main program: David Schafer on “Science and the Humanist” | 8:00 p.m. |
| Sun., 26 | Board meeting at USNH, 700 Hartford Turnpike. | 1:30 p.m. |

OCTOBER

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| Fri., 1 | Humanist Conversations at 700 Hartford Turnpike.
Program to be announced. | 7:30 p.m. |
| Mon., 18 | Monthly meeting at USNH, 700 Hartford Turnpike.
Coffee and conversation
Main program: TBD | 7:30 p.m.
8:00 p.m. |

New Humanist Institute Class

We have received an announcement that applications are now being accepted for the tenth class of the Humanist Institute. The first of nine sessions will be held in Washington, D.C., December 3-5, 1999. The mentors for this class are Harvey Sarles, Prof. of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, the University of Minnesota; and Jone Johnson, Leader, Northern Virginia Ethical Society, Unitarian Universalist Minister, and graduate of the Humanist Institute. Applications are available from The Humanist Institute, 2 West 64th Street, New York, N.Y. 10023, or from David Schafer. Scholarship aid is available.

David says, “I urge everyone seriously interested in learning more about Humanism to consider the Humanist Institute. Please ask me — I’ll be happy to answer your questions.” Nash Boutros will also be an Institute graduate in another two weeks.

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MEMBERSHIP DUES

Adult \$35
 Family \$50
 In cases of financial hardship, the association may waive the membership fee. The membership year runs from 1/1 to 12/31.

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The deadline for each issue is three weeks prior to the monthly meeting.

The editor would like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue.

Coming Soon...

A humanist group in the New London area. Call David Schafer for time and location of the organizational meeting.

“Science and the Humanist”

At our September 20th meeting David Schafer will speak on “Science and the Humanist.” This is a version of the talk he gave at the AHA meeting at Columbus, Ohio, in June. He says:

“Contemporary Humanism has replaced the worldviews of traditional religions and other supernaturalisms with the continually emerging worldview of something called ‘science.’ This substitution creates an enormous practical problem for Humanism and its adherents because, first, we live in a world that is highly illiterate scientifically, and second, even people with extensive scientific knowledge cannot possibly know all of science. Then how can we avoid the twin pitfalls of blind trust in a scientific priesthood, at one extreme, and cynical rejection of science, at the other? Is there a satisfactory attainable public level of useful real knowledge about the methods and results of science?”

P. B. Shelley, The Social Critic

Shelley was not only critical of religion. His note on the line “And statesmen boast of wealth!” from his philosophical poem *Queen Mab*, illustrates his wrath at economic injustice in the world:

“There is no real wealth but the labor of man. Were the mountains of gold and the valleys of silver, the world would not be one grain of corn the richer; no one comfort would be added to the human race. In consequence of our consideration for the precious metals, one man is enabled to heap to himself luxuries at the expense of the necessities of his neighbor; a system admirably fitted to produce all the varieties of disease and crime, which never fail to characterize the two extremes of opulence and penury. A speculator takes pride to himself as the promoter of his country's prosperity, who employs a number of hands in the manufacture of articles avowedly destitute of use, or subservient only to the unhallowed cravings of luxury and ostentation. The poor are set to labor,—for what? Not the food for which they famish: not the blankets for want of which their babes are frozen by the cold of their miserable hovels: not those comforts of civilization without which civilized man is far more miserable than the meanest savage; oppressed as he is by all its insidious evils, within the daily and taunting prospect of its innumerable benefits assiduously exhibited before him:—no; for the pride of power, for the miserable isolation of pride, for the false pleasures of the hundredth part of society. No greater evidence is afforded of the wide extended and radical mistakes of civilized man than this fact: those arts which are essential to his very being are held in the greatest contempt; employments are lucrative in an inverse ratio to their usefulness: the jeweler, the toyman, the actor gains fame and wealth by the exercise of his useless and ridiculous art; whilst the cultivator of the earth, he without whom society must cease to subsist, struggles through contempt and penury, and perishes by that famine which but for his unceasing exertions would annihilate the rest of mankind.”