



Encountering Sophia in the Classroom: Gender Inclusion in the Waldorf Curriculum

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Over 200 years ago Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, John, asking him to “remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors.” Since Abigail’s time, the necessity of “remembering the ladies” in various educational canons has been argued persuasively by a number of scholars in a variety of contexts. However, very little on women has been written in the Waldorf curriculum and how the issue of gender inclusion might unfold, both in theory and in practice, in the Waldorf high school classroom.

This article will attempt to take some first steps towards rectifying this overlooked area of Waldorf pedagogy. First, I’ll address the more theoretical aspects of the question, focusing especially on Rudolf Steiner’s insights about gender and offering practical suggestions for Waldorf teachers based on his work. Then I will very briefly take a peek at a few major female figures who should find their way into every Waldorf high school curriculum—not only because they are fascinating and important historical figures in and of themselves, but more critically, because they played pivotal roles in the development of human consciousness as outlined by Rudolf Steiner. Looking ever so quickly at these women will give you a taste for just how rich our curriculum could be if we were to incorporate even just a few of the women who have contributed greatly to the evolution of consciousness.

Let’s start with a fundamental question: Our curriculum is already very rich (some would say, already over-filled with content). Why, given all the many valuable elements

already present in our Waldorf curriculum, should we make a special effort to teach about women?

What Non-Waldorf Educators Say

Before we jump into Steiner’s thoughts on the subject, it will be helpful to briefly review some of the most popular arguments made by the non-Waldorf educational community for gender inclusion in the classroom. Most non-Waldorf discussions of gender in the classroom are based on concerns about the ways in which curriculum content affects male and female students’ self-image and -development. Since

Waldorf education is based on a fundamental desire to help each student evolve his or her highest capacities, it seems critical to familiarize ourselves with these arguments and to look at how our teaching might affect the personal development of both male and female students.¹ Also

pertinent to the Waldorf classroom is the claim, made by mainstream educators, that non-inclusive teaching is simply historically inaccurate; this question of specificity and accuracy was raised by Steiner himself in a lecture on gender parity, so we would be wise to pay attention to the work of our non-Waldorf colleagues.

In general, non-anthroposophical arguments for gender inclusion in the classroom can be grouped under several broad themes:

Girls are damaged by the lack of positive role models in traditional curricula, which have tended to portray women as passive and dependent on men (or at best, an inspiration to them—

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e.g., Beatrice to Dante, or Pocahontas to John Smith); to limit their inclusion to a few token major historical figures (such as Sappho, Queen Elizabeth I); or to ignore them altogether. This latter attitude of benign neglect is especially prevalent in political histories, which by their very nature focus narrowly on one area of human interaction from which women have, for the most part, been excluded. The lack of women in traditional literature and history curricula, so the argument goes, makes girls feel invisible and, therefore, holds them back in their own self-development (which, in turn, reinforces the overall aims and social structures of our patriarchal culture).

The second argument is a positive corollary to the negative one outlined above: **Girls need to be inspired by powerful female characters and historical figures to whom they can relate and on whom they can model their behavior.** Many commentators also argue that boys benefit from exposure to inspirational and/or powerful female characters, since it fosters an attitude that women as well as men are worthy of respect and emulation. This argument moves beyond tokenism (the inclusion of a few notable women as a sidebar to the main lesson) when the curriculum includes a broad spectrum of women as a matter of course, aiming to make visible the lives of women in general.

This can be achieved, for instance, by discussing the economic role that women's (often unpaid) labor plays in various cultures, by consciously examining the roles and expectations placed on women across different cultures and times, or even by something as simple as saying, "We don't know much about the lives of women in pre-Vedic India, but the evidence we do have suggests...." Both types of inclusion—heroic female characters and a broad-based look at the roles of women in a given time, culture, or text—are necessary for fostering healthy self-development in girls and boys. Put simply, we need both to be inspired by the heroic actions of the few and to know that the humble lives of the many are valued.

The third argument is perhaps the simplest: **Women have been active contributors to the social, economic, and political arenas since the beginnings of time, so representing them is simply a matter of accurate, thorough scholarship.** In this view, introducing women and women's accomplishments into our curricula is simply a corrective to what has historically been a sometimes unconscious, sometimes willful blindness on the part of scholars. For example, an accurate understanding of Ancient Egyptian society must try to recreate (to the best of our ability) the lives of half its population, as well as the contributions of individual women, ranging from the great female pharaohs to the women named in specific court documents and papyri. The fact that reconstructing the lives and perceptions of women is often a difficult challenge does not excuse us from the attempt to do so. And advances in historiography, which has come to include a greater reliance on evidence such as court records and archaeological excavations rather than purely textual and/or political data, have often made it possible to construct at least a broad picture of what women's lives entailed (as in the case of Ancient Egypt, for instance), even if we are left with relatively few personalities that emerge from the somewhat impressionistic canvas.

There are, of course, many more subtleties to the argument in favor of including women in the canon, but, to my mind, they all fall under one of the three arguments presented above. Waldorf educators, like any others, should be mindful of these very persuasive arguments in favor of inclusion when considering how to structure their lessons. However, there are even further reasons for making efforts to be inclusive—reasons based on Rudolf Steiner's own teachings.

Steiner on "Woman and Society"

It should come as no surprise to any Waldorf teacher, given the nearly infinite list of subjects Steiner addressed, that he had also thoroughly thought through the issue of

gender. Perhaps the place where he addressed the topic most comprehensively is in his lecture “Woman and Society” (*Die Frauenfrage*), given in November of 1906.² It’s worth taking a moment to review the main arguments he puts forth there. For what may at first appear to be a rather academic discussion of women’s role in society has direct, practical applications for our pedagogical practice. With that in mind, let’s delve into Steiner’s insights on gender so that we can better appreciate both the “how” and “why” of gender inclusion in the classroom.

In “Woman and Society” Steiner takes up the questions raised by the nascent feminist movement, especially as it was expressed in suffragist literature and demonstrations. Acknowledging the growing importance of this movement, Steiner stated point blank that the question of women’s inclusion into hitherto un-integrated portions of society “is one of the greatest present questions of our culture,” and he observed that the issue involved much more than simply the admission of women into higher education and the professions, or even the question of universal suffrage. Rather, he noted, “the issue concerning women embraces an economic, a social, and a psychological side, and many other aspects as well.” These two statements alone should be incentive for Waldorf teachers to be diligent about the inclusion of women in the canon!

After laying out what was at stake in the first part of the lecture, Steiner went on to consider a number of the prevailing theories concerning women, correctly observing that in most cases they directly contradicted each other. Moreover, he continued, if we were to look at the scientists’ and psychologists’ conclusions about women (which, at the time Steiner was lecturing, were that men were active and creative, and women were natural

followers), we would find that these “experts” were severely limited by the narrow data they collected.

Investigation of other times and cultures, he stated, would reveal women who participated in what we define as “masculine” work. This observation about the cultural and temporal context of gender roles might seem commonplace to the 21st century reader, but at the time, it was incredibly provocative. It’s hard to imagine Havelock Ellis or any of the other contemporary intellectuals he mentions accepting that their theories might be culturally limited. Furthermore, Steiner points out (and this is especially important for historians) that the concept of “Woman,” even within a given culture, is itself “an unacceptable generalization.” Which women? Where? In what contexts? Are they from the lower or upper class? Steiner insists we be specific.

Even further, he argues: if we investigate “influential” women and conclude there are very few of them out there, aren’t we being confined by our own cultural assumptions of what constitutes “influence”? We need to examine our own biases—towards privileging public spheres over private and political power/voting over other ways of exercising influence.

If we have confronted the issue of women’s inclusion only in these last hundred years or so, that is because our culture is itself both the creator and product of conditions in which it is possible to think about arenas such as “the political” or “the academic” as abstract entities, within which the equally abstract notion of “human rights” (applicable to both male and female) can be applied.

I find it exhilarating to think that, in 1906, Steiner was already anticipating a much later post-structuralist understanding of power as a dynamic, culturally constructed *relationship*,

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not a *thing* to be wielded or held. He would be right at home, for example, with Michel Foucault's description of power as "relations . . . interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play at once a conditioning and a conditioned role."³ For Steiner, as for Foucault, power or influence in a culture is not a weapon that the dominant class (men) uses to oppress its inferiors (women), but a network of relationships *between* men and women that includes spheres normally thought of as outside the realm of "the powerful": the home, the intellectual salon, and the everyday marketplace, to name a few.

Gender and the Human Being

Steiner does not stop with his presciently, post-structuralist redefinition of power that takes into account the ways in which women might exercise cultural influence. Towards the end of the lecture, he moves from considering the various culturally and materially determined aspects of the "woman question" (class, time period, societal context, and so forth) into what he considers the heart of the matter—the essential nature of the human being.

At that point, Steiner introduces a surprising twist to the discussion. Anticipating Carl Jung's theory of the anima/animus by about ten years, he claims that, if considered in totality, each human being encompasses two poles, male and female. According to Steiner, the physical body expresses only one or the other of these poles.⁴ In the emotional life, however, he claims that we can clearly see that both stereotypically feminine and masculine qualities can, in fact, belong to human beings of either physical gender.

In this description of the human being as two-poled, Steiner looks not only forward to

Jung, but also backwards to Aristophanes (or, at least, to Aristophanes as described by Plato in his *Symposium*). In what we might call the ur-myth of the bi-gendered human being, Aristophanes' tale proposes that the original humans were composed of two gendered parts that made up a complete whole (though unlike Steiner, Aristophanes held that these two halves could be male-female, male-male, or female-female, thus explaining the varieties of human love as we each search among our prospective lovers for our severed half).

Steiner was less interested than Aristophanes (at least, in this context) in the effect of this double gender on human sexual behavior than he was in the way in which we can harness this dual energy to best develop our full potential as human beings. In this emphasis, he once again anticipated Jung's work on individuation. We must consider in every human being, Steiner urges, the totality of that person's nature, both the revealed and the hidden parts—the male and the female. Moreover, we must strive to integrate

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within ourselves whichever characteristics we are missing. In other words, a complete human being combines so-called male and female characteristics so that our external gender is complemented by an internal tendency towards the traits of the opposite.

Not content to simply scoop Jung, Steiner goes on to insist that gender discrimination is inherently tied to a culture's means of production.⁵ He argues that, if we find ourselves in an entrenched patriarchy, it is because materialism "impels itself towards an external culture." In other words, the same impulses (or discourses, if one prefers a post-structuralist term) give rise to both patriarchal attitudes, that place a premium on male bodies and experiences, and to our materialist/positivist culture. The two—patriarchy and

materialism—are coeval, birthed by the same forces.

To support his startlingly contemporary assertion about the interdependence of patriarchy and materialism, Steiner turned to a somewhat counterintuitive source: the language of mystics. Mystics, he claims, on some level understand that our material age is a reification of masculine forces at work in our bodies and our world. In other words, mystics see the world of things as a sort of calcification or hardening of fundamentally spiritual impulses. Steiner argues that therefore mystics often use feminine imagery to describe their journeys in the non-material world of Spirit. And it is true that many female, as well as male, mystics frame their union with the divine using female imagery.⁶ The prime example, for Steiner, of this feminine spirituality is Goethe, whose “Eternal-feminine” leads Faust (and us) from the illusory world of material to the immaterial “event” of Presence. Or Dante, who is guided to Paradise through the intervention of Beatrice.

If, however, one is not an accomplished mystic and the prospect of a deeply entrenched patriarchal materialism is dispiriting, Steiner reminds us not to indulge in apathy or despair. Cultures change, and it is our job, as human beings, to change our surroundings by developing ourselves to our highest capacity. To this end, he urges:

Men and women must look on their physical body as an instrument which enables them, in one direction or another, to be active as a totality in the physical world. The more human beings are aware of the spiritual within them, the more does the body become an instrument, and the more do they learn to understand people by looking into the depths of the soul.⁷

It’s a gendered version of “think global, act local.” If we want to change the world, we need to change the self—become the doubly-gendered human being we are meant to be. In so doing, we will change the culture around us. Patriarchy, by definition, requires men and women to adhere to strictly defined gender roles; if we bring those roles into balance within ourselves, cultural renewal will be the inevitable outcome.

“What does all this have to do with pedagogy?” you may ask. Quite simply, it is one of our main tasks as Waldorf educators

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to help young people experience and develop both sides of their human nature. We can do this in many ways—by encouraging, as Steiner did in some of his lectures to the first Waldorf teachers, both genders to participate in stereotypically male and female crafts (woodworking, knitting, and so forth), and by nurturing

through skillful pedagogy certain behaviors that we notice are dormant in our students (e.g., encouraging retiring students to become braver about speaking, encouraging aggressive students to become more compassionate).

Perhaps just as important for the Waldorf humanities teacher, we can also accomplish this by encouraging our students to live into the experiences of both genders by offering them opportunities to do so in literature, story, song, film, and so on. We all know how a work of literature can get us “inside the head” of characters far removed from our own lives: Odysseus, Dante, and Parzifal are examples from our own curriculum. If we harness this power of imagination (something which, incidentally, Steiner describes as “female”) so that students can live with and inhabit the perspectives, feelings, and bodily experiences of women as well as men, then we will have gone a long way towards accomplishing two goals: countering the prevailing patriarchal/materialist world-view and encouraging the

students' inner growth along the lines Steiner is advocating.⁸

Recommendations for Gender Inclusion in Waldorf Classrooms

So what is the “take-home” of the foregoing re-cap of Steiner’s consideration of “Woman and Society”? I’ve boiled it down to six goals to strive for in our classrooms:

1. Given the importance Steiner placed on gender issues, it is imperative that we make an active effort to include women’s voices and perspectives in all aspects of our curriculum, from literature and history to math, science, physical culture, and the arts. One simple first step is using gender-neutral language such as “human” or “humanity” instead of “man” or “mankind.” This is standard practice in public schools but has been painfully slow to catch on in Waldorf circles, perhaps because of a somewhat misplaced wish to remain faithful to Steiner’s German.⁹ However, if we are going to move towards a more balanced experience of gender, we need to be intentional in our use of gender-inclusive language, inside and outside the classroom. This means using “human” and “humankind” whenever we are speaking of both genders, reserving “man” and “mankind” for situations in which we are specifically referring to the male gender.¹⁰

2. We need to embed women’s voices and perspectives in their specific socio-economic, political, geographic, and temporal locations.

3. We should expand our notions of “influence,” “power,” and “contributions” beyond those valued by our own culture and look towards ways in which women have historically exercised their personhood, power, and influence. This will vary by geography and culture. Be alert to ways in which women, through their domestic, religious, and economic endeavors, might be participating in networks of power that we, with our contemporary Western lenses, might not immediately see.

4. Tokenism is insufficient to do justice to women’s voices and experiences. We need

examples of both heroic/outstanding women and everyday women. On a practical level, this means that in addition to covering famous queens, female authors, and other notables, we also need social history. When discussing cities, teachers can describe what the homes looked like and what activities might have taken place in them. Who provided the childcare? Who made the food? Who did the farming? Who made the clothes? Good social and economic history will address the role of women.¹¹

5. As Waldorf teachers, we must nurture those gendered aspects of our own personality that are less well-developed. Although these “hidden sides” are often qualities associated with the opposite sex, they vary tremendously from person to person. As with all things anthroposophical, there is no single answer to fit all men or all women; each of us must make an honest appraisal of the gendered qualities we most need to develop in ourselves—not only once, but again and again over the course of our spiritual and professional development. Bringing this question of gender into our ongoing meditative practice can be extremely useful in helping identify and address areas of weakness.

6. We need to be intentional about the importance of the moral/spiritual work we are doing when we engage in questions of gender in the classroom. It’s all too easy to feel like gender inclusion is something we “add on” to our usual lesson, or that we simply don’t have time to be as inclusive as we would like to be. But Steiner has assured us that the question of inclusion is of vital importance and is not a matter of trends. In fact, in seeming anticipation of the accusation that he’s just espousing some sort of newfangled feminist claptrap, he emphatically declared that we “cannot solve the Woman’s question with trends and ideals!”¹² Rather, as he painstakingly shows, he is arguing for the centrality of gender inclusion as a spiritual practice. He sums up: “In reality you can only solve it [the “Woman’s question”] by creating

that concept, that disposition of soul which enables men and women to understand each other out of the *totality* of human nature.”¹³

A Quick Introduction to a Few Notable Women

I hope the foregoing overview of the “woman’s question” has convinced you to take up for yourself the study of how gender plays out in your own classroom and particularly how you might strive to be more inclusive in your pedagogy. Being inclusive can be a lot of work—finding new resources and adjusting tried and true lesson plans take time. For that reason, I maintain a website, www.notablewomen.wordpress.com, designed to help Waldorf schools and teachers include more women in their curricula by providing relatively short, easy-to-read articles on a number of women from history (and a few more current figures), along with suggestions for lesson plans.

To demonstrate briefly the type of luminary I profile on the site, I will “introduce” you here to one of the women I believe to be among the most important for the evolution of consciousness, the Ancient Sumerian priestess Enheduanna. Though she is only one among many women who were game changers for human consciousness, her example should be enough to indicate both the quality of the individualities I’m interested in unearthing, and the degree to which our curriculum is impoverished if we do not make every effort to include them.

Enheduanna: The World’s First Named Author

To the best we can tell, Enheduanna lived around 2300 BCE. The daughter of the famous Assyrian king Sargon, she was high priestess of the moon god Nanna in the city of Ur and author of more than 4500 extant lines of

poetry—most in the form of temple hymns and other longer works in praise of the gods. Aside from archaeologists and ancient historians, few people today have ever heard of her, but she has the distinction of being the very first named author in human history. That’s right—the very first author who thought to put his or her name to paper (or in this case, clay tablets) was a woman. And, just to give you a sense of how revolutionary Enheduanna was, she was writing about 800 years before *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a much more famous work (attributed to a man) that is commonly cited as the beginning of literature.

You can go to my website to find out much more detail about Enheduanna’s biography and literary output, but for now, I’ll point out briefly: As far as we can tell, before Enheduanna, no one anywhere (not China, not Ancient America, not Egypt) had ever thought to either name him- or herself as an author.¹⁴ Moreover, no one had ever thought to write about his or her inner feelings and experience. We have writing from before Enheduanna’s time—all sorts of data lists involving accounting and some praises of gods and goddesses (though even there, Enheduanna’s are among the first). However, no one had ever used the word “I” in writing, and certainly no one had ever gone on to use that “I” as a way to explore his or her inner landscape.

In contrast, Enheduanna not only named herself as author, but wrote in vivid detail about her feelings towards the goddess Inanna, and the way in which her biography and her spiritual experience of Inanna intersected. It’s literally a world-changing moment in human consciousness: the first sign that humans had entered Steiner’s “Egypto-Chaldean Epoch” (2900–750 BCE), the era he describes as being that in which humanity comes into awareness of its inner emotional

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life.¹⁵ Enheduanna herself apparently knew that she was doing something entirely new. In one of her temple hymns, she wrote,

The person who bound this tablet together is Enheduanna. / My king, something never before created, did not this one give birth to it?¹⁶

This passage (among others in her work) is breathtaking in its novelty and in its self-awareness of that novelty. The fact that the hymns themselves are masterworks of poetry adds to their splendor. So gifted was Enheduanna, in fact, that her works were copied down as models for hundreds of years afterward—first by Sumerian scribes and later by Babylonians. The early 20th century Assyriologist William Hallo termed her “the Sumerian Shakespeare.” To which I would counter: Given that she preceded Shakespeare by about 3800 years, it might be more apt to dub the bard “the English Enheduanna.” Her work is just as earth-shattering, if not more so. How can we profess to teach a curriculum that works with Steiner’s indications about the evolution of consciousness if we are missing such a critical figure?

A Few Other Female Luminaries

Enheduanna is just one such luminary female missing from our rolls; others include Perpetua, a Roman woman who wrote the world’s first diary while imprisoned waiting to be thrown to the beasts; Marie de France, who single-handedly invented the genre of courtly romance by combining into a single genre the two extant strands of Celtic fairytales and courtly poetry from Aquitaine (and not coincidentally, stands at the beginning of a direct line of transmission from herself to Chretien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzifal*); Hildegard von Bingen, whose theology and cosmology encapsulate many of the same ideas later unpacked by Rudolf Steiner, and many, many more. These

are not women to be ignored, nor are they mere add-ons to the important male figures we already privilege in our curriculum. Rather, discovering more about these women and integrating them into our lesson plans at all levels will constitute a giant step forward in the project that Steiner challenged us so eloquently to undertake: to bring balance to ourselves, our students’ lives, and the world as a whole by fully developing both sides of our human nature.

Final Thoughts: Building a “City of Ladies”

To do justice to Steiner’s vision, it seems appropriate to end by taking a turn toward the metaphysical. I began this article with a reference to an 18th century American first lady’s plea to her husband to “remember the ladies” as he governed what was then a relatively new country founded on democratic ideals. I’d like to end with another image from a female author, this one from the 14th century scholar and advocate, Christine de Pizan. Pizan is a remarkable figure—perhaps the world’s first self-conscious “feminist,” in that she intentionally set about not only to persuade her male peers (and the world at large) to respect women and their work, but she went on to contribute materially to these efforts by founding an all-female scriptorium that churned out copies of her own considerable *oeuvre*, which was much in demand by her contemporaries.

Pizan is a particularly interesting figure for anthroposophists, because her concept of the way in which humans work in and on the spiritual world parallels some of Steiner’s views. In her *Book of the City of Ladies*, for instance, she wrote of a vision in which she was visited by three spiritual beings she called “daughters of God”: Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice.¹⁷ These Ladies, whose illuminated countenances and melodious speech overwhelmed Christine’s senses, tasked her with what became her life’s work—founding a “city of ladies” that would

exist in both the spiritual and earthly realms. In her vision, Christine worked alongside the ladies to dig and excavate the foundations of the city, lay down the walls, and otherwise construct a strong, impregnable fortress wherein unjustly treated women could find refuge. However, this foundation, these walls were formed not out of material clay and stone, but out of the scholarly discourse between herself and the three Ladies on the subjects of the origins of inequality, women's rights, and virtuous women's biographies. Her words, then, were the foundation of the city. In effect, Christine built up an edifice in the spiritual realm that was able to then nourish and sustain women here on earth.

I find it remarkable that a 14th century Venetian-born Frenchwoman described nearly exactly the type of concrete spiritual work Steiner envisioned when he enjoined his followers to actively nourish and build up the spiritual being "Anthroposophia." Like Steiner, Pizan saw her work here on earth—her writing, her scholarly activity, her ethical and spiritual practices—as contributing in a concrete way to the evolution not just of human consciousness, but of the spiritual world itself. At the risk of sounding overly grandiose, I would suggest that, like Steiner and Pizan, we should see our own efforts at gender inclusion on the same large scale.

Specifically, I would encourage the anthroposophical community at large, and especially those involved in education, to consider that our efforts at gender inclusion actually go way beyond simply validating the experiences of girls in today's classrooms, or even helping all students develop their full, bi-gendered selves. Rather, like Christine de Pizan, our teaching, done with right intention, builds a spiritual edifice that fortifies *the entire spiritual realm*. The question

of gender inclusion, I would posit, is a matter not just of pedagogy, but of theology and cosmology as well.

Practical Steps Forward

Reflecting on Steiner's and Pizan's insights is pretty heady stuff, and I hope you will find their indications on gender, as I have, worth contemplating and taking into your meditative life. However, as anthroposophists and teachers, we also need to take some on-the-ground, concrete steps. I've sketched out below two imaginations for the future: first, for the Waldorf curriculum, and second, for anthroposophical/spiritual work on gender.

For the Classroom

In my perfect world, I would take a walk through the grades in a Waldorf school in which, upon entering the second grade classrooms, I'd hear some of Marie de France's animal fables being retold. Then, moving up to fifth grade, I'd hear about Enheduanna when the class studied Ancient Mesopotamia. Perhaps (a slightly toned-down version of) Perpetua or Hypatia would make an appearance in sixth grade during the Roman block. In high school, I'd hear about Marie de France once again during the *Parzival* block, this time for her courtly tales. Enheduanna might reappear in 10th grade Ancient Cultures (where the teens would read some of her poetry and contemplate what it says about human consciousness that Enheduanna chose to name herself in it). Hildegard von Bingen would be taught not only in music and art history, but also during science blocks as a representative (alongside Dante) of the archetypal medieval cosmology or as a counterpoint to later Enlightenment views of Reason. The model here would be to teach game-changers like Enheduanna and Hildegard

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just as we teach Shakespeare and Plato—more than once, in a variety of settings, in both upper and lower school.

Just as (or even more) importantly in my ideal scenario, when I would step into faculty meetings, I would overhear conversations in which teachers (male and female) were taking the lead in being consciously inclusive in their lesson plans, their work being founded in a deep consideration of the spiritual labor that Steiner has called us to undertake. They would be paying attention to how their course material might affect girls and boys differently, how to create gender parity among students in class and the means by which we might encourage, within each student, the development of his/her “other half.” When designing courses, the question of gender inclusion wouldn’t be an afterthought or an “it would be nice if . . .”—it would be thought through and integrated from the get-go. But even more importantly, I would see faculties looking at how they might strive spiritually to bring a balance between male and female modes of relating to and being in the world, both as individuals and as a teaching body.

For the Spiritual World:

Unfolding the Sophianic Impulse

But there is still another vision that I think supersedes the strictly pedagogical imagination I’ve outlined above. It refers to Christine de Pizan’s spiritual edifice: the continued spiritual work on the part of dedicated anthroposophists to further unfold the Sophianic impulse that Steiner has said characterizes our age. I do not think it is a coincidence that Sophia (and Anthroposophia) are linguistically *feminine*. That is to say, the work of our era involves a raising up of a specifically feminine type of wisdom or insight. Steiner stated that in the 19th century the Christ Impulse became overly materialized due to the growth of a certain type

of biblical criticism that prioritized the historical Jesus; in order to reinvigorate the Wisdom in Christ, he called upon the anthroposophical community to search for Mary/Isis as a manifestation of Sophianic presence.¹⁸ Of course, rediscovering the presence of Mary/Isis in myth, story, and ritual is one important way to pursue this search. However, I would argue there might be other (even potentially more fruitful) ways to engage with Divine Wisdom.

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The first of these other methods would be to work and study more closely those individualities who have grappled with, reflected on, and (in some cases) had ecstatic experiences of Divine Sophia Herself. I’m thinking here specifically of Hildegard von Bingen, but there are others (male and female) as well: Theresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Mechtild of Magdeburg (among the female medieval mystics), Solovyev and Bulgakov (among the Eastern Orthodox), Jane Leade and Jakob Böhme (among early Protestants), Matthew Fox, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Reuther, and others (among modern-day feminist theologians). Some of these figures are already relatively well-studied within anthroposophy; others are less so. Making efforts to uncover and study the life and works of each of them (plus the many more not listed here) can further our understanding of Sophia’s work in the world, even if we don’t adopt every precept of each person’s theology.

A second method would be to study various luminary women to see if there are any underlying similarities between them that might help us understand the particularly feminine qualities of the spiritual world as it is manifest in and interpreted through female bodies. I hope that the very brief presentation in this article of Enheduanna’s biography and work is enough to convince you that these notable women are worth spending some time getting to know. Comparing the narratives of

several of these female luminaries might lead us to interesting insights about how gender plays a role in the evolution of consciousness.

Finally, there's the very real work of meditating on and contemplating the figure of Sophia herself. To that end, I offer you this image of Divine Sophia enthroned, taken from a Russian icon found in the church of St. George in Novgorod. Sophia is the figure at the center, with the Virgin on her right, Christ and the archangels above her head, and John the Baptist on her left. What you may not be able to tell from a black and white reproduction is that Sophia is entirely red—her clothes, wings, skin are all a muted scarlet. This coloring is important: in iconography, red is the color of the incarnation.

What I take from this image, which is famous as being the prototypical icon of Divine Sophia, is the fact that, for all her divinity, Sophia is very much involved in the work of incarnation. In other words, Sophia (and, by extension, the Sophianic impulse Steiner described) cannot be seen as some far-away, esoteric idea that we look forward to welcoming one day. On the contrary, Sophia is involved in how we incarnate, and if we wish to further her work in the world, we are called to embody her impulse in our own lives. For us as teachers, this means working with the feminine in an active way in our curricula and in our classrooms. It is important, vital work—not just a matter of tipping the scales a bit in favor of women and girls, but a matter of furthering the evolution of human consciousness. Steiner himself has explicitly enjoined us to take up this call, both exoterically, in our social and work lives, and esoterically, in our spiritual work. I invite you and your school community to join me in that journey.

Finally, there is the very real work of meditating on and contemplating the figure of Sophia herself.

Endnotes

- 1 The following website contains a good recap of the evidence from mainstream educational sources in favor of inclusion. Holt, Evelyn R. "Remember the Ladies—Women in the Curriculum." ERIC Digest. <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9215/ladies.htm>, March 1990. Accessed July 28, 2014.
- 2 Rudolf Steiner, "Woman and Society" [*Die Frauenfrage*] (lecture given in Hamburg, Germany, November 17, 1906). <http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19061117p01.html>. Steiner also spent much of Chapter 14 in his *Philosophy of Freedom* considering the question of gender. Though I make more explicit reference to *Die Frauenfrage* here, his thought as outlined in *Philosophy of Freedom* also informs my considerations. It's also important to note that Steiner insisted that Waldorf education be co-educational in an era when students were educated in gender-separated classrooms. This surely is a powerful model not only for our own classrooms (which are, of course, already co-ed), but also of the larger sense of intentionality in actively working for gender parity that Steiner was modeling for us.
- 3 Michel Foucault, "Power and Strategies" in *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Vintage Press, 1980), 142.
- 4 We might wonder, here, about transgendered people, including hermaphrodites. Steiner was writing at a time when such questions were not as present for the public as they are these days. My strong suspicion is that he would not have been terribly satisfied with descriptions of transgendered people, for instance, as "gender dysphoric" or struggling with "gender identity disorder." Rather, I believe he probably would have seen the discrepancy between the person's biological (physical) body and his/her subjective (emotional/spiritual) experience as a person of the opposite gender as an indication that these two poles of gender experience were beginning to express themselves in new ways. He clearly states that our future development as a species is on a trajectory towards unisexuality. What role intersex (hermaphrodites) and transgendered individuals might play in this evolution is, to my mind, an intriguing question raised by Steiner's indications, and would be a fascinating research project in its own right.
- 5 Here is an interesting point of overlap with Marxist feminists. While Steiner is not himself a Marxist (indeed, his economic theory could be understood

- as a rebuttal to the Marxist theories that were so popular among intellectuals of his day), his understanding of gender does share with Marxist feminism the linking of economic and gender injustice to a single underlying materialistic force of oppression. Where they differ is in Steiner's insistence that this materialism can ultimately be countered only by a *spiritual* resistance to the forces of materialism itself, rather than in the replacement of one form of materialism (capitalism) by another (communism).
- 6 Though there are exceptions on both sides as well—men and women who envision themselves as “marrying” or otherwise communing with a male deity or spirit. Consider, for example, John of the Cross's somewhat homoerotic mystical imagery or Catherine of Siena's mystical marriage to Christ.
 - 7 Op. cit., Rudolf Steiner, “Woman and Society” [*Die Frauenfrage*].
 - 8 The question of whether other minority perspectives might open up similar “breaches” in the patriarchal/materialist discourse is a fascinating one and, though beyond the scope of this paper, deserves consideration. To what degree would post-colonial narratives (which disrupt the dominant discourses of imperialism and capitalism) have a similar effect on spiritual growth?
 - 9 I say “misplaced” because Steiner nearly always uses *Mensch* and *Menschen* when speaking of humans in general, a word that most modern German translators translate as “human,” “human being,” or “person” to distinguish it from the narrower *Mann*, a word that specifically denotes males.
 - 10 Teachers of English might also seriously consider accepting “they” as a substitute for the old universal “he.” In many academic environments (including top universities), professors now encourage students to either use “he/she” in their academic writing, or even “they” as a singular (as in the sentence “everyone take out their pencil”). What in earlier days would have been seen as an unforgivable breach of subject/number agreement is now seen as the lesser of two evils—better to have a disagreement in number (the argument goes) than exclude half the human race by insisting on “he” as the singular. As Steiner and Owen Barfield have so amply demonstrated, languages evolve along with consciousness, and it is becoming increasingly acceptable in academic circles to insist on gender inclusive language, even at the expense of agreement in number. In my opinion, we should welcome this change as evidence of an increasing consciousness about the importance of “remembering the ladies.”
 - 11 It's interesting that if we simply follow the template of Steiner's threefold social organism when planning our history lessons (making sure to always cover the political, economic, and cultural spheres), it's hard to completely exclude women.
 - 12 Op. cit., Rudolf Steiner, “Woman and Society” [*Die Frauenfrage*].
 - 13 Ibid.
 - 14 The first named Chinese authors (many of whom are quasi-historical) appear in the 8th c. BCE; Indian Vedic texts (the earliest of which are believed to have been compiled c. 1500 BCE) were not ascribed to individuals, and the earliest pre-Vedic Indic writing (from the Harappan civilization, which flourished in Enheduanna's time) has not been deciphered.
 - 15 It's almost certain that Steiner didn't know of Enheduanna's writings, since Leonard Woolley, the archeologist who first rediscovered her work, did not even begin excavating in Ur until 1922. I have been unable to pinpoint the date that he revealed the disk of Enheduanna to the world, but it appears that his earliest publications (for the Trustees of the British and University of Pennsylvania Museums) were in the late 1920s and early 1930s, after Steiner's death. It's even more amazing, then, that Enheduanna's work fits so nicely with the Egypto-Chaldean period as outlined by Steiner, given that the earliest literature Steiner would have had access to was the Gilgamesh epic, which post-dates Enheduanna by about 700 years.
 - 16 From an online translation by Betty de Shong Meador of Enheduanna's hymns: http://www.atanet.org/publications/beacons_10_pages/page_15.pdf.
 - 17 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982).
 - 18 He did this perhaps most clearly in his Christmas address of 1920: “The Quest for the New Isis, the Divine Sophia: The Quest for the Divine Sophia.” Available online at <http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19201224p01.html>.

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