

For my Collegium Colleagues

In our previous 2 gatherings in Cambridge, May and December 2005, the Hedge Club Redivivus had a dialogue about our living Transcendentalist Roots and celebrated the 200th Birthday of a catalytic founder of that movement, Frederic Henry Hedge, minister and prime theologian, a President of the American Unitarian Association .

Since many of us have remarked over the past several years about the lack of printed journals circulating important contributions to current Unitarian Universalist thought and praxis, some of us believe it is time to put flesh on these dry UU bones..

We in past years have had a dynamic array of Universalist Unitarian publications: Kairos, Liberal Context, Critical Mass, Universalist Leader, Unitarian Register, UU Advance, Unitarian Universalist Essays, Collegium Proceedings, the Unitarian Universalist Christian, Journal of the Liberal Ministry, yearly issues of the UU World. (I know I leave out some)

We had book publishing by Skinner and Beacon Press, a decade or so ago, that had a reputation for publishing quality controversial works. Now that has dwindled leaving some cutting-edge UU books to be printed by a theological school.

Now the once slick, much less-read UU World is relegated to a seasonal schedule and the past UUMA Essays are stacked on the shelf and now will only be available in print if asked for, awaiting downloading so as not to strain our bleary computerized eyes. .

The situation is simply scandalous that our Unitarian Universalist religious movement, known world-wide for its remarkable contributions to religious literature is providing so little of worth in print. Especially this is so when such vital interchange is going on in the religious world and at a time when so much is at stake. Is it possible that we Unitarian Universalists have little creativity left in us? Or are we making such use of the new media of video, movies and blogs that we do not need to use the old Gutenberg media. I very much doubt it.

The dynamic Transcendentalists of the Hedge Club in 1837 ( 170 years ago) were faced with a similar situation. Due to the bustling controversy of their emerging community ( exemplified by Bronson Alcott's Temple School being shut down for admitting a black girl student and Emerson's stunning Divinity School Address at Harvard) main-line Unitarian institutions and its leading journal, The Christian Examiner, which had been their home to their new ideas, were closed to them. Ripley and William Ellery Channing first brought up the idea of a new journal in 1835, but it wasn't until the September 1837 meeting that Hedge brought it up in earnest. Now they were completely shut-out of any journal for their ideas to be printed. Before many months, one of their members Orestes Brownson took over the small circulation Boston Quarterly Review. Still no one else was prepared to take on a brand new publishing project. That situation was only rectified three years later when Margaret Fuller agreed to take on the editorship of a new magazine under Alcott's suggested name of The Dial. George Ripley agreed to take on the publishing role, and Elizabeth Peabody managed to get it printed by way of her West Street Book Store. Thus after 5 years and with great difficulty, this Transcendentalist journal, The Dial, which was to become one of the most famous religious literary magazine in

United States history, came into existence, and then only for a short four years and four months. Yet it set such a vital direction and standard that the Transcendentalist movement it represented became catalytic for the whole newly emergent U.S. culture. Our Unitarian Universalist movement gained great influence and several other magazines up into the Twentieth Century borrowed its illustrious name.

Do not we ourselves have some such task before us? Who and how will we do it? Is this worthy as a place to start our dialogue for our Hedge Club Redivus gathering this coming first week in June on the 5th in Cambridge? Let me know!

This meeting was held & we will have a follow up meeting on November 1st Thursday at 1:30PM at CraigvilleMass. for a preliminary gathering before dinner and the opening session of Collegium with Dan Berrigan that evening

In addition to a remarkable evaluation of the Dial by David Parke, I presented the following which I will follow up on at Collegium as part of the History section.

*The Transcendentalist Origins of the Dial and the Power of Source Media*

1.

170 years ago 5/29/1837 , the Hedge Club (The Transcendental Club) met at George Ripley's house to discuss "What is the source of religion as distinct from morality and what are the features of the present time to religion?"

It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who nicknamed it the "Hedge Club" because they met whenever the Reverend Frederic Henry Hedge came to town from his outpost Bangor , Maine pastorate. Others present were Bronson Alcott, Cyrus Bartol, Orestes Brownson, John Sullivan Dwight, Convers Francis, Samuel Osgood, George Putnam, and Caleb Sutton---besides Ripley, Emerson and Hedge.

Emerson stated that "religion was the emotion of shuddering delight and awe from the perception of the infinite." This pleased many of them, but not all. Putnam left not to return because of the social reform tone the group took. Brownson, who was felt to be abrasive anyways, didn't return because their philosophy sounded like pantheism that he feared would lead to infidelity. Alcott felt the meeting was really the first one with important consequences. Earlier ones had been too general for him, but this time "matters that deeply involved us all were taken up." Alcott spoke with appreciation to those in the group who had publicly supported him for he had been forced to close down his Temple School and been chased and heckled in the streets of Boston by folks-- this because of the freedom of expression in the school and having admitted a black girl as a student.

Emerson who had befriended and defended Alcott was to come under similar public scorn when he gave his Phi Beta Kappa and Divinity School Addresses over the next year's time (August 31, 1837 and July 15th 1838) after this May 29<sup>th</sup> 1837 meeting, Emerson enthused, "rivers of encouragement flow from this meeting."

The Club members were already talking about the need for a Journal for this new religious movement where "the Spiritualists have taken the field," according to Convers Francis, a Harvard professor of languages. Three years before, William Ellery Channing, George Ripley and Frederic Hedge had spoken of the need for one that would reflect the new thought and break beyond the orthodox Unitarian restraints. The Christian Examiner, edited by James Walker, the future President of Harvard, had provided space for Hedge and Ripley to share the new German philosophers and their translation by Coleridge, challenging the supernaturalism of rational Unitarianism a la Joseph Priestley and Locke. Now however with the growing controversy about the Young Turk Transcendentalists, all printed platforms were closed to them and soon the pulpits and platforms of Harvard College would be closed as well.

A journal for their movement was much in the air. Orestes Brownson even offered to combine his Boston Quarterly with a new magazine for the Transcendentalist movement, yet Emerson and the others thought that given his determined views that it would not be workable. Still there was no editor to do the hard work yet at hand. Eureka ! It was Emerson's befriending of Hedges' close childhood friend Margaret Fuller and his inviting her, and her indefatigable friend Elizabeth Peabody to the celebratory picnic of the Hedge Club held at

Emerson's home the day after his clarion Phi Beta Kappa Oration, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1837., that proved decisive.

The idea of the Journal truly came onto the table again at a subsequent Hedge Club meeting two years later on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1839 when the discussion turned once again to the subject of Property and a Journal. The catalytic meeting however occurred that fall September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1839 . After that meeting, at which Margaret Fuller, Ripley, and Theodore Parker were present, the magazine itself was again a topic and the reality of it was now so clear that Parker wrote afterwards:

“There will be a new journal. I doubt not. Emerson, Miss Fuller and Hedge alike are confident in its birth. And Alcott even proposed a title for the magazine, “The Dial.”

In November 1839, Margaret Fuller agreed to be editor, if Emerson, Ripley and Peabody would help.

And it was ready to be born.

2.

I am holding in my hand the first issue of the Dial edited by Margaret Fuller, published by Weekes and Jordan, Boston, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1840 .

It is coming apart at the seams –unglued—the paper covers heavy in place---in segments now.

In the hand the freckled paper with dark print jumps off the page.

“The Editors to the Reader” signed at the end with the letter E.

It is by Ralph Waldo Emerson, the by now renowned young Transcendentalist philosopher, already shaking up his elders, yet only one of several noted young Turk religious radicals shaking up the Unitarian, seemingly liberal world.

“Remember how often in many private circles the work was projected, how eagerly desired, and only postponed because no individual to combine and concentrate the freewill offerings of many cooperators. The spirit of the time in all this (movement) and goes on existing like an oak or a river because it must... Let it be one cheerful rational voice amidst the din of murmurs and polemics.”

The next essay is “On Criticism,” with the letter F at the end, written by the brilliant challenging young woman who has taken on the editorship of this new magazine—much heralded and long-awaited.

Margaret Fuller writes:

“To have new thought awakened in our own. We do not want stores of information only but to be aroused to digest our knowledge.

We wish that they should do full justice to their own view, but also that they should be frank with us..

All good writing must be spontaneous.”

Holding this first issue of The Dial in my hand –there is a power in the written word of this magazine others have read before me—

the original printing that  
broke forth freshly

into the world.

No reprint—no internet screen or download (if it is possible to download the magazine and not some redacted, rearranged version) no download can touch the way this first issue of this groundbreaking magazine energizes the spirit.

I remember Charles Olson, the great Gloucester poet, holding up an original archeological journal—from which he read Gutebock's translation of the original Hittite myth of Ullikummiss, the giant God, born from a Rock.

As he read the translation from the Hittite, he expostulated,  
“There is nothing like the original text in the source where it's  
first published—  
that's the real power!”

All new media have their strengths—  
the ability to give us new possibilities.

Yet the old media have a power too--.

To read the Humanist Manifesto in David Parke's Epic of Unitarianism makes it widely available to us—yet to read the original publication of the Manifesto, the manuscript of it or the Declaration of Independence or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in his own handwriting Servetus' original **Restitutio Christianismi** Tyndale's New **Testament** Gutenberg's printed Vulgate Bible—in the library case at Huntington or Widiner Libraries.

Printing expanded the distribution of books beyond the elite who could read the old manuscripts

So too the mechanical type setting and offset printing and Xerox copy machines expanded the availability of print and picture media.

The telephone, phonograph, radio and television expanded the availability of audio and visual communication. And internet speeded up and made all of this even more accessible—A veritable miracle of possibility and potentiality if it can be made accessible and freely delivered “with liberty and justice for all.”

However the question raised by Thoreau about the telegraph is still apropos:

--what good is the speed if we do not have something worth saying

All the past forms and relics of communication are important to preserve for each of them in their turn has value:

The old '78' jazz records or Arthur Schnabel playing Beethoven's last Piano Sonata Op.

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The reputed superiority of vinyl '33' rpm with the mechanical needle sound played over old tube amplifiers and large speakers compared to the thinner, even scratch less digital sound.

The multiplicity of 78, 331/3, recordings never to be translated to CD or even vinyl recordings: Furtwangler, Caruso, Chaliapin, or Bessie Smith.

3.

And then there is McLuhan's salient classic analysis of the psychic effect of different media:  
the way the TV screen which is also the internet screen  
demands an energy to help shape the image  
how looking at that screen  
can drain the spirit energy  
like the native people believed  
the camera sucked up some of the soul.

In the cost-effectiveness and modernity of the internet mania---we UU's especially have been caught up in it as has academia---our journals, books, and pamphlet publishing has begun to be sucked up and depleted. Even the **UU World**, one of our last magazines—is now a quarterly being pushed toward a Website existence—as are the **UU Essays**, and **Collegium Papers**. (Only **Quest** from the Church of the larger Fellowship, **The Journal of Liberal Religion** from Meadville/Lombard, and the **Religious Leader** from the Dept. of the Ministry seem to be holding the fort) Even our Monte Vista UU Congregation had to be pressured by me their interim to send out a printed hard copy of their newsletter, rather than have it available electronically on internet. What a difference to have a magazine or a newsletter, let alone a book, in hand to read (even the UU World, which has been far too lean to read)

Sophia Fahs **Today's Children and Yesterday's Heritage**, Beacon

Press

Victor Carpenter's Long Challenge: The Empowerment Controversy

Meadville/Lombard Press

Sermons in **The Quest**

George Huntston Williams **American Universalism**, Skinner Press

**The Dial**

**Unitarian Universalist Essays** for over 20 years or so

The Collegium Proceedings,

Back issues of the **Unitarian Register** and the **Universalist Leader**

**UU Advance** pamphlets

**Kairos**

And others mainly out of print.

We need, more than ever, lively ideas and inspiring words and sounds in our ears, before our eyes, and particularly in our hands—ideas and sounds shared among us as a religious movement so that we all can have the possibility of sharing them and entering into dialogue with each other in regard to them.

Enough of this: you can download it if you try

more alienation, solipsism, and auto-eroticism

Are we to be in relationship?

Are we to take each other seriously?

Are we willing to animate Spirit?

What about an alive journal?

Can we learn from our Transcendentalist forebears of the Hedge Club?

