

Autobiographical Poetry 2000: Pioneering Over Four Epochs

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After 30 years of writing occasional pieces of poetry(1962-1992), I have now written poetry 13 years much more extensively and intensively(1993-2005). The poetry here comes from just one year. It does not represent all the poetry I wrote that year. I hope, in the months and years ahead, to place all the poetry I wrote each year in the respective location at BARL.

THE LAST THIRTEEN YEARS

IN 5000 POEMS

On May 30th, my last day in Canada, after spending half my life there as a child and young man, I visited The Art Gallery of Ontario. There was a special exhibition of the work of Charlotte Salomon, an artist during the Nazi era. She was an artist for whom her painting was her autobiography. The following quotations from books of her work and about her work convey what she was trying to do. They both contrast with and compare to what I am trying to accomplish in my own poetic autobiography. And so these few days in Canada will close with a meditation on autobiography. -Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, 30 May 2000, written at 'The Village on the Grange shopping centre,' 275 Dundas Street West, Toronto, 4 pm.

Wherever she happened to be she pulled out her sketchbook. She had to unburden herself and her language was paint and brush. -Emil Straus, a friend: *Charlotte Salomon: Life? or Theatre?*, Zwolle, 1998, p.6.

She used her lifestory to create a unique work of art.
-ibid.,p.31.

She used colours, people, rooms, environments, texts, music and film to serve one goal: to create for an audience a certain distance between herself as the subject of her own life story: herself as the story-telling artist. At the same time she aimed to provide as much emotional information as the audience needed to feel at one with her, as the artist; to feel close to the story she was creating on each page and in her total pictorial opus.

-Ron Price with thanks to the publishers, Zwolle, as above: idem.

She passed the last year of her life in more than 700 scenes. -Mary Felstiner, *To Paint Her Life: Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era*, U of Cal. Press, Berkeley, 1997, p.ix.

We have here an autobiography without an "I." It is a chronicle with visuals.-ibid.,p.xi.

I passed the last thirteen years of my life
in over five thousand poems,
from the age of 43 to 56
while the Hanging Gardens,
the terraces,

the Mt. Carmel Project
was being constructed.
This was the sustaining pattern
behind the jumble of human existence;
this was the source of the great renewal.
This was what whipped up
the autumn leaves
into dancing forms
and kept at bay the world's sadness.
Ron Price
30 May 2000

THE START

One thing I try to do in many of my poems is to bring together in one clump, one patch, one poem of words: something from society, something from my own personal life and something from my religion. A tripartite division of material coming together under one roof, one system of flowing meaning, one synchronized set of terms gives me a sense of completeness, fulfillment, synthesis. The following poem is an example of such a triangle of poetic content. When I do this in a sonnet pattern it is the closest I get to form, to structure, to any remote resemblance to rigidity of framework, with the sole exception of strongly rhyming poems.

-Ron Price with thanks to ABC TV, Baseball, 16 July 2000; and Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America: 1932-1946, Wilmette, 1947, pp.8-13.

When Joe Dimaggio, Bob Feller
and Lou Gehrig were turning them
on in the Majors and the Yankees
seemed unbeatable, the Bahá'ís
launched their first teaching plan,
the Seven Year Plan: 1937-1944,
on April 21st 1937. The initial stage
in the unfoldment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's
vision of America's spiritual destiny
began and humanity entered the outer
fringes of the most perilous stage
of its existence. My grandfather
had just retired and my mother
and father were about to meet.
Ron Price
16 July 2000

A BAHA'I

IMAGINARY

As an individual in a contemporary capitalist society I see the world through

what I call a Bahá'í imaginary. This is a coherent, specifiable, politically non-partisan imaginary. It is what might be called an ideal type, one of the many 'ideal types', a term that finds its original in Weberian sociology. It is a variety of social and political consciousness, containing deeply held attitudes and beliefs. This consciousness is a social construct, a vision and, in my own case, a far from arbitrary position that I have incorporated into my way of life through my experience and life history. My poetry tells the story of this incorporation, this life history. I live this imaginary, as Jean Baudrillard calls it,¹ as common sense, as the way things are, as the way of the world, as the way things should be.

-Ron Price with thanks to Douglas Kellner, Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond, Stanford UP, Stanford, 1989, pp.186-187.

A BUBBLE BLOWN

Virginia Woolf says that in a poem "there must be a pervading sense of belief,"¹ or much of our emotion, the poem's and the reader's, will be wasted. The strength of the poem, its intense ray, its sharp and lovely light, comes from the combination of several states of mind, from the expression of a more vigorous, more brilliant, more refined, more exact, more sharpened, sensation than we usually experience in the flesh. It is as if all our faculties are on alert. The weakness of the poem, its failure, is due to the poet losing belief. Even then, there is often an indistinctness to poetry which can lead to monotony, to a lulling soporific state. We are sung to sleep. To compensate for this, we are given the continuous consciousness of the poet in his saturated, enclosed world. We are given a bubble blown from the poet's brain.²

-Ron Price with thanks to Virginia Woolf, Collected Essays, Vol.1, Chatto and Windus, London, 1966(1925), 1p.15, 2p.18.

The vast majority of poetic words
die out leaving not a trace and so,
as I disperse my life in this long
and articulate stream; as I surprise
my readers, however mildly,
with some detail selected and stared at
until it is reduced to its uniqueness,
to some momentary intensity,
to some centre in soliloquy, in self-analysis,
at a precise angle of vision,
as I diminish and particularise or generalise;
as I bring my many different desires together
for that unknown audience,
stamped with my own idiosyncrasies,
I give you all a bubble blown from my brain
from this epoch, this age,
a trace from this seminal period,

from these fleeting years.

Ron Price

17 April 2000

A CAMPAIGN

Experience was one of the major sources of Price's poetic capital; but so too were ideas drawn from a multitude of sources. A poet needed to be resourceful in making use of both, if his fertility was to continue unabated. Unlike the fiction writer who could spin yarns artificially especially when he had ceased to have experiences, the poet, at least the kind of poet Price had become, drew on memory, imagination, thought, comprehension and a world of ideas from many disciplines sifted through the alembic of an autobiographical and poetic language, precisely and respectfully used. This was how he came to terms, reached some sort of accommodation, with the world. Modulating, without distorting, his experience; changing the aspect without changing the event: aestheticized, ironized, mythologized, romanticized, sanctified, shaped and reshaped, according to his imagination and the velleities of his inclinations. This was the magic of his poetry; this was the magic Price employed to shape his world, give it form and translate the meaning he had found in life into words on a page.

-Ron Price with thanks to Ian Littlewood, the Writings of Evelyn Waugh, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983.

It wasn't a campaign against boredom,
something he had not known since puberty,
or thereabouts, on the long summer days
in Canada when it was hot and you'd played
Monopoly and Sorry and cards to the nth degree.
He'd made his world habitable
for most of the time except when
pain and sickness intruded their
ugly heads into the ambience he
had created; it seemed he could
not keep some kind of pain away
day after day, year-after-bloody-year.
And it was a campaign
in a very habitable world.
A campaign, yes, indeed!
The war metaphor had insinuated
itself into his being seductively
over several decades,
over these three epochs;
and now his task was
to translate, to describe,
that war among the armies

of the world, the many attacks
on the right and left wings of
the hosts of humankind to the
very centre of the powers of earth.¹
This was at the heart of his poetry.
¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p.48.

Ron Price
19 April 2000

A CELEBRATION OF FRAGMENTATION

One of the many movements, philosophies, views, of the modern world that emerged in the last half of the twentieth century has been postmodernism. It only began to acquire academic expression and form in the mid-1980s, although some writers I have read take it back to the 1950s or even before. The question of its origins is complex and subject to many interpretations. I find my poetry draws on post-modernism's view of the world as it draws on many other views and sifts their ideas through one great noetic integrator, one great model that is a conceptual construction which interprets large fields of reality, transforms experience into attitude and unifies factual knowledge and belief.¹ -Ron Price with thanks to ¹Daniel C. Jordan and Donald T. Streets, "The Anisa Model: A New Basis for Educational Planning," *Young Children*, Vol.28, No.5, 1973, p.290.

Postmodernism's many tentacles
of thought and expression
insinuate themselves into my poetry
quite seductively,
at least I can put some of my stuff
into this philosophical camp
with some ease;
for example.....
my experience of life
as multiplicity of being
as I try to become one;
An immense skepticism
and an immense affirmation
in the midst of a celebration
of fragmentation and incoherence
with metanarratives completely rejected
by a world I must deal with daily,
requiring of me a reflexivity,
an introspection,¹ an analysis
that takes me down the golden
road of understanding
so that I do not need to forgive

because I am not hurt
in the first place
and, if I am hurt,
hopefully I will learn
while there is yet time.

1 Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Post Modernism*, Sage, London, 1991,
p.64.

Ron Price
26 December 2000

A CERTAIN MADNESS

The Greek philosopher Plato wrote that there "is a third form of possession or madness, of which the Muses are the source. This seizes a tender, virgin soul and stimulates it to rapt passionate expression, especially in lyric poetry."¹

The madness of the Muses must be at the gates of poetry, Plato goes on, or the poetry will be brought to nought. Skill alone will not make him a good poet.

-Ron Price with thanks to ¹Michael Tippett, "Art, Judgement and Belief: Towards the Condition of Music," *The Symbolic Order*, editor Peter Abbs, The Falmer Press, NY, 1989, p.41.

I was not that tender,
getting on in years,
certainly no virgin,
had had my share of tears.

There was a certain madness;
I have no doubt of that.

I was obsessed by gladness,
my heart relieved just where I sat.

I had got to the end of my tether
as I approached my middle age.

I was tired of all that came my way,
and I turned to the printed page.

A whole new world opened
and I sank my teeth right in.

I got everything I'd wanted
when I was young: out to win.¹

I was rewarded with a passion
that took me by the sails
and filled me to overflowing
with infinite poetic tales.

But there's more to life than poems.
And as rich as it has been,
it's just a taste of what's to come:
in the life beyond what I have seen.

1 In my late teens, sixteen to eighteen, I gradually defined what was my central aim in life: to be filled with meaning. Slowly, between eighteen and forty-eight, the process of the acquisition of meaning evolved, and in my late forties and fifties the process got a shot in the arm through poetry, the madness of the Muse.

Ron Price

26 September 2000

A COLD DEDICATION

Ever since I photocopied a copy of Rainer Maria Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet in 1987 I have been attracted to Rilke's ideas about art and poetry. His philosophy of poetry has been a major influence on my writing; indeed, most of my poetry was written after I read his small book. Yesterday on the Internet I came across several more of his ideas: his longing for liberating death, his view of poems as experiences based on a deep and rich inner life and a life story with its loss, sadness, waiting and working; his idea of saving and storing life experiences and then expunging them in poetry with cold dedication, his emphasis on forgetting memories, his notion that real life exists within waiting to become something. I agree with some of Rilke's thoughts, but toward the end of the poem I add some specifically Bahá'í concepts. I'm inclined to think Rilke would agree with these sentiments from The Book of Certitude and Hidden Words that I have drawn on at the end of this poem, this vahid.

-Ron Price with appreciation for the Quotations Found on the Internet, 13 November 2000.

There's probably too much heat here
in these works to suit your sensibility.¹
Once I reach the required temperature,
though, the job is done with cold efficiency,
telling it as straight and cool as I can,
drawing on all those years,
half a life or more,
forgetting a mountain of stuff
that needs to be forgotten
and waiting, always waiting
for something within:
a cleansing of the earthly,
the ears from idle talk,
the mind from vain imaginings,
the heart from worldly affections,
the eyes from that which perishes.²
For life is a cleansing, a purifying:
and what of that sovereignty,
ancient, imperishable, everlasting?

1 Rilke's
2 Bahá'u'lláh, The Book of Certitude, p.3.
3 Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Number 1.
Ron Price
14 November 2000

JUST A COMMENT

I find when I write there is an atmosphere in which I feel most at ease, at my best. It is an atmosphere which disappears if I am hungry or thirsty, if I am sexually aroused or without my books which act as a stimulant to my writing, or if there is any noise or disturbance in the house or outside on the lawns or street. Under these conditions I am not able to swim over the past, present or future and shine the light of thought over the commonest little details. My memories are the best source of the tone and texture of my words. In them my benignity is warmer, my humour richer, my solicitude more exquisite, my recognition of beauty, fineness and humanity more measured, mature, more direct and instant. Books and the products of contemplation are also rich sources of my words.

I come to my task as one charged and laden with precious metals, a lifetime of memories, thoughts, experiences and those of many other writers, but with no idea of just how to divest myself of it all. I have selected the prose-poem as the most appropriate vehicle for this divestment and I approach this vehicle each time with a certain heightening of sensation, a certain pleasure, a readiness for action and a knowing sense of dexterity as I dispose a portion of it upon the page. Then the Bahá'í World unfolds over three epochs and beyond. It is set tenderly and solidly before the eyes of readers as a gift. It is set in a defined, limited and restored form, a form based on my experience, thoughts and feelings. The Bahá'í World was, and is, very dear to me. It has given me friendship, opportunity, meaning, the very *raison d'être* for my life. With all my creative power I have summoned up all that I can, to give as a gift to the world one man's view, one man's experience over three epochs. It is a peculiar joy to 'summon up remembrance of things past' among the riches of the present and the prognostications for the future.

-Ron Price with thanks to Virginia Woolf, "Henry James," *Collected Essays*, Vol.1, Chatto and Windus, London, 1966(1925), pp. 270-276.

I deal more in facts with the aim
to create impressions as factually
based as I can. I haul selected
elements of the whole world,
its history and literature into
my poetic, my mind. Poetry,
as a genre, was ready for this
approach after nine decades
of the 20th century had shaken
its foundations, but it was not
likely that, for the foreseeable

future, my poems would be read
or that the face of these three epochs
as I saw and experienced them
would be viewed by many.
My single ray of penetration,
my sharp, and some might see
as narrow, light and outlook,
my merging of private and
public, personal and meta-
narrative, gives to whoever
persists in reading this work:
not a character, not an incident,
not a history of our time, but a
comment of a thoughtful person
on the first four decades of the
tenth stage in humankind's history.¹

¹ 1959-1999 or 1960-2000: the last several years of the ninth and the first
thirty-seven years of the tenth stages of history.

Ron Price

28 April 2000

A COMPELLING RUBRIC

Autobiographical poetry is a compelling rubric. For so much of what I write, perhaps all of it, is a story of one kind and another, a story that defines, in part, who I am and explains the process that exists, that runs, under and through the surface expression that is myself and my selves that are presented to the world. There are sides of light, of learning, of adventure, of pleasure and of privilege in this multifaceted self. There are also dark sides, of bewilderment, of vulnerability, of weakness. The communities of which I am a part are inextricably engaged in my speech, my dialogue, my experience, in what makes me who I am. What I write about myself is a part of my role in the creation of community, especially the communities I have invested so much of my time, my energy, my convictions, my body and soul.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, 8 September 2000.

I found that realist narrative
not so much distorting, as
inadequate, devoid of depth,
a somewhat arbitrary construction,
a coherence achieved only
through assiduous editing,
a sense of the whole
deprived of life by monotony,
by a tedium in the telling
and compression of life into text.
But this poetic helps me

go gently into the good night
where old age slows the candle's
waxen taper turn and I burn, burn,
quietly into that blazing light.²

1 My narrative autobiography completed in 1993 with many editing marks and additions to the manuscript during the years that followed.

2 A variation of a poem by W.B. Yeats.

Ron Price

8 September 2000

A CONTEXT FOR MY SOUL TO SPIN

Several nights ago a TV program gave a breathtaking view of the universe and what we have learned since the early 1920s. The viewer could not help but be dumbfounded by the awesomeness of the view of the universe presented therein. It made me think, on more mature reflection, of the poem Emily Dickinson wrote when confronted with what she saw as the nothingness of the universe and its insubstantial scaffold of meaning.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2000; with thanks to Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, Number 280; "The Universe," SBS TV, Wednesday, 9 February 2000, 9:30-10:30 pm.

I felt a symphony in my brain
when the universe was revealed.
Kept spinning, spinning
'round and 'round
as I drank in the endless stream.
An unveiled splendour
poured right through.
It seemed as if some wisdom
was at last shown to me.
Great hyacinths of knowledge
sprang up fresh and green.
They beat and beat across my brain
and in the holy city of my heart,
simply beyond comprehension,
a box of fifty billion trillion stars.
I thought of what Muhammed said
No vision taketh in Him.¹
A hundred billion galaxies,
a context for my sin.
A context for my soul to spin
forever and a day
down widening fields of light
and space, so rich in every way.

1 Qur'an 6: 103.

Ron Price
12 February 2000

A CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Socrates once complained, in his Apology, of the inability of poets to talk analytically about their work. According to the significance of its Greek root, the word 'poetry' can cover all forms of art or human productivity. In the tradition of the great books, novelists like Cervantes, Fielding or Melville called themselves poets. Poetry with these writers was regarded as narrative, the invention of good stories. A poet was a teller of tales. Aristotle in his Poetics emphasizes subject matter in poetry not language; plot was the most important thing made by the poet in narrative poetry, not the verses, not the rhyme or metre, according to Aristotle. So, the historian and the poet differed not. "Epics," wrote Cervantes, "may be as well written in prose as in verse." So it is in this epic, this series of thousands of poems written in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age, that I continue a form of poetry, a poetic tradition, going back to the Greeks. -Ron Price

with thanks to The Great ideas: A Synopticon of Great Books of the Western World, Vol. 2, William Benton, Toronto, 1952, p.400.

This is no imaginary construction,
no fable or fantasy of words,
no warble for some made-up tale.
This is a contribution to knowledge
and would pass Kant's muster¹
of serious business for understanding,
imagination and a certain play.
I hold the mirror up to nature,
to life and to the world
and have it speak as it lives
and moves before my eyes
over this half century or more.
I strive to be clear, but not ordinary
and use words as simply as possible.
Bacon associated poetry with history;
Aristotle put philosophy in its camp.
My emotions communicate to my intellect
with the power to sap and upheave my world
resulting from some inflamement,
some being carried away with thought
and I heed only one dream: this poetry.²
These many years now I have been drawn
unto Him in prayer and He did answer me
so slowly I was not sure it was Him;
now I am unsure whether I hear with His ear.
Is this the spring whereof the near ones drink?

It is hidden under the veillings of sense.

Have the wrappings of illusion been stripped?3

1 This is how Kant judges poetry: its contribution to knowledge.

2 Emerson's essay "The Poet."

3 Bahá'u'lláh, Seven Valleys, p.24.

Ron Price

15 November 2000

A DATA BASE

Beginning in 1937 in the U.K. a project known as Mass Observation has continued to provide a data base, an archive, information about the opinions and experiences of the average Briton. Hundreds of people, mostly women, kept diaries of their observations on subjects initially required by the government for the war effort. The project was discontinued in the early 1950s and started again in 1981 at the University of Sussex. There now exists at this university an archive of hundreds, thousands, of pages of detailed observations by alert, intelligent people telling some of the story of the daily experiences of ordinary people in Britain in the twentieth century.

-Ron Price with thanks to LNL Radio, 10:40-11:00 pm, 21 September 2000.

Beginning in 1937 in the Bahá'í community a project known as the Seven Year Plan, based on the initial outline in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, has continued under many different names. Hundreds of people, many thousands now, moved to different parts of the world to establish, to extend, to teach, the Bahá'í Faith. Many hundreds of these people kept diaries and collections of letters, wrote autobiographies and poetry to convey the stories, the experiences of their lives. An archive now exists, spread out over dozens of places around the globe, which will one day provide a useful base, resource, for future historians wanting to write a history of the first four epochs of the Formative Age.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, 21 September 2000.

A DIFFERENT CAMPAIGN

After watching a special Anzac Day documentary commemorating the events at Gallipoli, part of the Allied expedition known as the Dardanelles Campaign which began on this weekend eighty-five years ago, I was moved to contemplate a different campaign. This 'different campaign' could be said to have begun eighty-four years ago, although it was not formally launched until 21 April 1937, sixty-three years ago. I have been part of what became an international campaign, or crusade, in 1953 for forty-one years. I wondered how the events of these years, the years I have been associated with this crusade: 1959-2000, would be portrayed in some future documentary. This poem tries to tell some of the story. I take on the persona of 'an old veteran' interviewed from time to time during the course of the documentary. By the time such a documentary is made I shall be long gone into the immortal realm.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 2000.

It was not about heroism, not
down under; it was about adventure,
a certain excitement, mateship,
relief from boredom,
the channelling of youthful energy.
And it did all that; it was a buzz,
but only for a while, until you
had to settle down for the long haul.
After twenty years, say, '62-'82,
you knew that faith had to strain
feebly against the unbelieving night
and it has these past eighteen years.¹
My pitiable trophies have been trivialized
to the core, never mention them any more,
embarrassed by their irrelevance. I think,
for awhile, I felt like a hero, but that halo
got tarnished and then it simply disappeared
like a puff of smoke into oblivion's world.
My long-nurtured imperfections
have lost their epically egregious tone;
my shame has been with me for so long.
It is not so much a taking pride in death,
waited for so many years now, it is
a fatigue, a weariness at this old-born war.
I would evacuate the field, if I could,
withdraw to the beaches, the boats
and get the hell out of here.
The enemy's intransigence, implacability,
no longer enchants me, hasn't for years.
By '92, I'd had enough. I think that is why
I write, transferred the battlefield to my study.
I speak from a weariness of battle far prolonged.
The anabasis will go on while I fashion this poetry
and in the light of day resume the engagement,
not mowed down, as we once were in war, but
always living to see another day, part of a legion
stretching to horizon's end,
champions of the Peerless,
darlings of the Friend?

1 1982-2000

2 Roger White, "Lines from a Battlefield," Another Song, Another Season, George
Ronald, Oxford, 1979, pp.111-112.

Ron Price

25 April 2000

A DINNER FOR MYSELF*

About nine months before he died in April 1993 Roger White sent me a copy of Emily Dickinson: The Complete Poems. At the time I was just completing my thirtieth year of pioneering: I had worked for twenty-five years as a lecturer-teacher, although for five of these years I had done other things and my energies were starting to thin out; I had come to find aspects of Bahá'í community life more demanding than I had ever anticipated to the point of psychological exhaustion; my health had taken me to the edge of that same psychological stamina several times; two marriages had tested my sensibilities and those of my partners to the limit. Indeed I was just beginning to feel talked and listened out. Little did I know, when I opened this rather hefty pocket-book of poetry during my winter break from teaching, in mid-July 1992, barely seven weeks after the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, that Roger was giving me a manual that would assist me down the track of the last half of my life, the evening of my days.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 2000; Emily Dickinson, Number 612.

I was heading toward a privacy
that would record my heart,
free from endless talking
and the oppression of that part;
free to tell my deeper and
less accessible script: the tone,
the temper, inner life where I
knew that I must, at last, start.
There were so many emotions
and desires locked away,
a void was created by their absence
and I had to fly so that I may
find the man in the mire,
who seemed to have lost his fire
in some internal war with sense,
some amorphous discontent.
Free from what I could not express
in those places where people talk,
I now could write with clarity
about life's privations and its joy.
About the great and Gold direction,
the flaming beacon and the hope,
amidst the gloom despairing,
His Wondrous Vision and perfection,
brightest emanation of His Mind,
fairest fruit of civilization
the world had ever seen,
one it would some day find.1

14/2/2000

...1 Shoghi Effendi, World Order Letter, 28 November 1931.

A DOCUMENT, A RECORD

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is holding a retrospective this month, in April 2000, on the photographic work of Walker Evans. I know nothing about Mr. Evans, but his photography was an interesting document on his times, a record of his days and years, the sentiments and styles in the first half century of American history and a personal autobiography. The brief summary I saw, perhaps ten minutes, on The News Hour with Tim Lehrer went by so quickly I did not catch it all. But it had something to say, indirectly, about my own autobiographical work.

-Ron Price with thanks to The News Hour with Tim Lehrer, 5:00-6:00 pm, 7 April 2000.

Showing my world as I see it:

a poet warrior, heavily armed
with the stuff of my life, my
world, my religion—
a document over three epochs,
a record of my days,
not so plain and simple,
clear and visually straight from the shoulder
as Evan's work. But, with Keats,
an almost instant transmutation of impressions,
thoughts, reading and ideas into poetry,
well, what some might call poetry, what
I might see as a study for poetry.¹

¹ See Robert Gittings, Selected Poems and Letters of Keats, Heinemann Books Ltd., London, 1981(1966), pp.8-11.

Ron Price

7 April 2000

A DREAM BORN FROM THE FOUNTAIN

There is something about remoteness that produces a literature of place, that induces the kind of meditation from which real writing springs. Literature in general belongs in essential ways to place. It invokes place to speak in its fullest voice. This assumption lies deep in the bones, hardly needs stating, belongs to the privacies of writing. This is particularly true for some homefront and international pioneers. For some, they must write. They are born readers, diary keepers, letter exchangers and savers, history tracers, great talkers—when you give them a chance, when the time is right. Some writers in this pioneering tradition produce highly self-conscious work because an underlying theme in this work is so often what it means to be that mysterious thing, a pioneer for the Bahá'í Faith. This mystery is also checked against the shaping dream, the ideal conception, the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Some writers, some pioneers, draw on the rich, substantial, historic past

because it is a measuring rod with which to judge the present. For some the theme of that complex fate, being a Bahá'í, appears again and again. For Price defines his sense of being a Bahá'í over and over again from a multitude of perspectives. These definitions and their rich context follows him like his shadow, everywhere dependent on the place of the sun, how fast he is going and the contour of the land. Price has been a shape-shifter for years, decades.

-Ron Price with thanks to Allan Angoff, editor, *American Writing Today: Its Independence and Vigor*, Libraries Press, NY, 1957.

The sense of space,
of a territory ahead,
of spiritual, material
possibility: these are
the constants of the
Bahá'í dream, a dream
born from the fountain
of a profound literature,
a dream achieved not
inherited, each generation
beginning again and again
with history's rich and
defining saga spread out
before them waiting to be
discovered and understood
in new, wonderful configurations.

Ron Price
4 February 2000

A FAINT REFLECTION

There is no doubt that we who enjoy the benefits of a technological society have been purposefully deluged by a sea of representations which, in some ways, have drowned reality. Our experiences now involve, to varying extents, the images we see on TV. We are adrift, says Baudrillard, in a world of simulacra, pure images, floating free. This world of the visual spectacle, the endless ribbon of entertainment, news and information, has brought, for some, essential aspects of a new unity, the oneness of mankind. For others it has contributed to an emptying out of their inner life, a loss of its fullness and a feeling of futility deranging that life.¹ But whether the effects are positive or negative, or both, the place of the poet and his poetry is often a paralysed one. If the world is indifferent, suspicious and bored with the poet's offerings; if it is largely disinterested, cynical, acquisitive and distant, then the poet must deal with this tough, solid, resistant, ambivalent, disaffected and harsh reality, where the meaning of his words has virtually died.

-Ron Price with appreciation to ¹The Universal House of Justice, Letter, 26

November 1992; and Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2000.

While these images and these events
rain down during these fate-laden years
of historic significance,
other images and other events
which have impregnated the earth,
when a new creation was born,
which we link with our days,
a faint reflection,
in no way commensurate
with the sacrifice
so gloriously evinced
by our spiritual forbears,¹
but certainly: tough, resistant,
harsh, tortuous, long, stoney.

1 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, USA, 1965, pp.100-102.

Ron Price
26 January 2000

A FINE EXCESS

Insensibly there developed in my late teens and twenties, in the first decade of my pioneering experience(1962-1972), the habit, the pleasure, the occupation, whether sleeping or waking, of thinking about the Bahá'í Faith and its relationship with learning and the cultural attainments of the mind. It came to be kneaded into the very stuff of my brain. My fingers became died in its wool. Whatever I touched seemed to become stained with its many colours. My mind filled up involuntarily with some aspect of its multitude of absorbing questions. So it was, that when poetry began to gush out of the rock of my life in my late forties it surprised, even me, by its "fine excess," as John Keats said it was the purpose of poetry to surprise and in this way, through 'excess.' I like to think my poetry would come to strike the reader of my work, again in Keat's words, "as a wording of his own highest thoughts and appear almost a remembrance." But whether it did or did not,(and it certain had not as I write these words) the writing of it brought me an excitement, an adventure, a pleasing toil, a creative turmoil that satisfied what has been, over several decades, a highly adventurous temperament.

-Ron Price with thanks to Virginia Woolf, "Walter Raleigh," *Collected Essays*, Vol.1, Chatto and Windus, London, 1966(1925), pp. 314-316.

I did not much like books either
when I was young but, gradually,
insensibly as my late teens became
my late twenties I got caught in their
"fine excess". So, it was after twenty

years of such fine excess, pouring over
more books than I can count that
I transferred it all onto the page:
the finest thoughts I could find,
the best I could think and mixed
them with the finest and the best
that I could find in the vast
literature and culture of humanity
and called it my prose-poetry.

Ron Price
29 April 2000

A FINISHED FEELING

Although this poetry is principally concerned with self-knowledge and the continuum of human experience for the most part over three epochs, but also including greater reaches of time, which is really one experience and one story, it is poetry written as part of, in the context of, an emerging social order in historical time. It is not poetry written in vacuo, or ex nihilo. It is poetry which is partly sustained by a faith in the power of language to make sense of the world, however imperfectly; which draws on vocabularies of certainty and uncertainty; which exposes and explores my life, my society, my religion, on journeys into places where I confront or take pleasure in existence, in myself; which provides details and circumstances of a narrative in which I discover and define, describe and explain, the signs and symbols which make my life, my experience, intelligible. As I survey my days I recognize my potential and actual weaknesses, my actualities and strengths, a process that seems part of the achievement, the perception of a moral life. I describe enhanced perceptual moments, the historical context for the emergence of this new Faith; my frustration, sadness and anxiety in the process of living. I also describe my joy in the present, in the actual, living moment with an enhanced perception of life's value attained (a) from the generative locus of death which, although defying my perception, is a strong and important part of my belief; (b) through the continuity of divine guidance in that charismatic institution known to Bahá'ís as the Universal House of Justice and (c) my own poetic exploration which is synonymous with the form, the content, the process of living and a way of existing.

-Ron Price with thanks to Ross Murfin, editor, Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism, St. Martin's Press, NY, 1989, pp. 97-113; and Greg Johnson, Emily Dickinson: Perception and the Poet's Quest, University of Alabama Press, 1985, pp.156-168.

There is so much we cannot see
as we emerge from our obscurity;
it defies our perception now, but
death and time will set some things
significant, profound, which now we

hurry by. Your drifting sights,
unfocused, quite limited they be,
will be made so different, then,
when death has come to thee—and me.

The smallest things unnoticed, overlooked before,
by that great light upon our minds will heighten
worlds and lives galore. And one day these
institutions wherein we labour now, it often seems
in vain, while we seem so jostled on this narrow road
so plain, will be the subject of an awful leisure and a
belief to regulate. We will have a finished feeling which
one experiences at graves, but giving sharp precision to
who we are.

And so as experience fleets on by on this journey without end,
paradise is but another name for the arduous within. It often
seems quite patternless and complex beyond measure,
this profound experiment we're in, adventure for the soul
to find, perhaps, to attend, hounded by our own identity.
To this end I cross mountains and seas beyond the shores.
Then deserts come before my view with sand that blows
until it burns. The goal, the quest, so long in view seems
to need that wilderness through which I blaze my lone
and only trail, even in collective, in group, in that synergy,
the battle lies in the individual, the soul, the will, until the end.

Ron Price
29 April 2000

TRANSFORMATION

In the 1950s and the early 1960s, in the last years of the Guardian's life and just before the election of the Universal House of Justice, a new school of ideas began to develop called postmodernism and a new form of art known as minimalism. It is my contention that there is a pattern, a framework, within which the Bahá'í can perceive these new intellectual and artistic phenomena which had their origins just before I went pioneering in 1962. The word I would focus on is transformation: the Guardian's exegesis, the extension of the Bahá'í community to many new countries, the "rise of the World Administrative Centre"¹ beginning in 1951, among other reasons. The following poem attempts a brief description of that framework and that transformation.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 2000; and 1 Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith, p.91.(March, 1951)

They¹ were defining the world
as it raced through the ninth
into the tenth stages of history,
defining it with a new aesthetic,

a new whole, a new sensibility,
with the progressive integration
of art and everyday life, attacking
autonomous institutionalized art
as they went along, starting, it
looked like, from and with nothing.²
For art was now everywhere;
religion was everywhere
in a disciplinary cross-fertilization,
in a bewildering variety of positions.
Metanarratives were seen with a skeptical eye.
The entire fabric of society and the moral order
was disintegrating in a proliferation of perspectives,
in a constantly shifting process of signification:
transformation was the watchword in this wide world
and a small community, unknown to the world,
was undergoing yet another of its many transformations.

1 The first postmodernist thinkers and minimalist artists: 1950-1963.

2 SBS TV, "Modern Art", 16 March 2000, 9:30-10:30 pm. Many minimalist artists
were concerned conceptually with nothingness.24/3/2000

A

FREIGHT OF COMPLICATED THOUGHT

The American poet, Donald Hall, retired before the age of 55 so that he could get away from the pressure of work as a Professor of English, live in the present, enjoy the comfort of his own home, the bliss of simple daily life and appreciate the pleasures of life for as many years as possible before his demise. I was pleased to read this in an interview with Hall because I did the same a little later in life than Hall, at the age of 55, for similar reasons. The interviewer referred to some of Hall's delightful poetry written since his retirement. I trust some of my work is as delightful. Some of my poetry is about the ordinary person in an age of incredible change. Some of it is part of my engagement with the entire world experience. Some of it is an immersion in the pastness of the past. For writing poetry is not a career but, rather, a daily lived experience, a search for that liquid voice that can wear through stone. Here in the quiet of my own home, I calmly chase poems until they catch me. For I am playing my part in what is, has been and will be the long haul, to use a phrase of Adrienne Rich. It is both a personal haul and a global haul for the community I am part of, the Bahá'í community.
-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, 7 August 2000.

I am a man with a mission,
not to win prizes, but to prepare
the way for the great flowering,
the great burgeoning of my religion
in the years, the decades ahead.

I am a man who has consciously
fused religion and poetry as part
of this communal art form,
this community building,
this enhancing exercise.

In my poems you will find
visions of the Bahá'í struggle,
hammer and nails, basic tools
for defining and understanding
our experience and carrying
a freight of complicated thought.

For I have a strong sense of
a very rich tradition created
in some two-hundred-and-fifty years
and a sense, too, of my poems
like little machines for recreating energy
and attention in LOVE.

1 1753-2003

Ron Price
7 August 2000

A FRESH GRACE

Most writers, according to Doris Lessing, are mildly depressed. When asked what her most joyous moments were she said "at the beginning of each book." I agree that a certain melancholia, a certain pensiveness, a certain level of emotion recollected in tranquillity, are present during the writing process. But there is also: intensity, pleasure, a celebratory joy, on rare occasions tears born in a commingling of sadness and joy, a solemn consciousness, a thankful gladness. I know what depression is like from years of suffering from a bi-polar disorder. I know all the gradations of depression from the death wish with blackness to the death wish in a quiet grey, to the mild depression that Lessing tells of. I know despair, a frenetic hypomania, immobilizing fear, mental chaos and, when I write, none of this is present. There is a culture of feeling which I am in quest of and which I find before I write or during the writing process. There is a freshness of the emotions, a connecting of this freshness with life, with my own heart and with the world around me. It does not always occur with the same degree of intensity, but it must occur to some extent, or writing for me is impossible. When I try, without these oils present, it is like dry, thin, black, soil out in the hot sun: no life, no vitality, no freshness, no heart, a meagre mind.

-Ron Price with thanks to Doris Lessing, "Books and Writing", ABC Radio National, 16 January 2000; for his Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 2000.

No, Doris, 'mildly depressed'
does not really describe it for me.
There's a fusion of life and death
instincts, now, after dieing so many
times in this life and praying for
friends and loved ones in the
kingdom of immortality over so
many years. This is at the heart
of my creativity and Eros, too,
with its culture-building capacities,
its attraction passionee,¹ its flowing
in love, friendship and sociability,
making reason more sensuous and
happiness a bi-product of a fresh
grace infusing the power of thought.

This, Doris, comes a little closer
to telling how I tell it, what goes
on in my inner life where these
new and wonderful configurations
seem cast upon the mirror of creation.²

Ron Price
17 January 2000

1 For a discussion of the interrelationship between the life and death wish,
instinct, I draw on Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality,
Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993, Chapter
9.

2 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, Wilmette, 1971, p.1.

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No, Doris, 'mildly depressed' does not really describe it for me. There's a fusion of life and death instincts, now, after dieing so many times in this life and praying for friends and loved ones in the kingdom of immortality over so many years. This is at the heart of my creativity and Eros, too, with its culture-building capacities, its attraction passionee,¹ its flowing in love, friendship and sociability, making reason more sensuous and happiness a bi-product of a fresh grace infusing the power of thought.

This, Doris, comes a little closer to telling how I tell it, what goes on in my inner life where these new and wonderful configurations seem cast upon the mirror of creation.²

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A HEURISTIC HERMENEUTIC

George Whalley, Professor of English at Queens University in Ontario, gave a talk entitled Teaching Poetry back in 1978. He said that poetry must be grasped by the senses; and readers must function in the perceptual mode, if a poem is to be 'experienced.' Once the senses are engaged much else is possible. Without it, little happens. Reading poetry, he goes on, must become a heuristic activity; readers must experience the quality of sustained reflection, have confidence in their perceptions and judgements and, only then, slowly advance toward that disciplined adjustment, the mental exercise, that is the inexhaustible business of getting to know.¹ The desire to understand and

to unify ourselves and our world is a hazardous process; there are risks. I would argue that, if "the two most luminous lights in either world," intellect and wisdom, are to bring to our lives that "fresh grace" and that "ever-varying splendour" now adorning "the temple of existence,"² poets must become a source of social good, a source of happiness and peace, well-being and advantage to their fellow-men.

-Ron Price with thanks to 1 George Whalley, "Teaching Poetry," *The Symbolic Order: A Contemporary Reader on the Arts Debate*, Peter Abbs, editor, The Falmer Press, NY, 1989, pp.225-236; and 2 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, Wilmette, 1970, pp.1-2.

To fill up your senses
with this poetry
may be beyond
my poetic capacity,
but I guarantee you
a heuristic hermeneutic.
You have to work it out
where meaning arises
as you interpret
these forty years
that I have laid out for you
in these verses,
years since the passing
of the Sign of God on earth
with events of unique character
and untold significance¹
in this history and in my own days
which lie behind me like a dream,
an illusion, a syllable of recorded time,²
a walking shadow and yet with sweet
melodies which, sooner or later,
exercise their influence on my soul.³

1 The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p.4

2 Shakespeare

3 Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*.

Ron Price 26 September 2000

A KINDRED SPIRIT

On reading some of the works of Bertrand Russell while at university, I think it was, I knew I had found in him a kindred spirit. As a lecturer in philosophy and the history of ideas over the years I always drew on his *A History of Western Philosophy*. I also enjoyed his *Why I am Not a Christian* and his *Conquest of Happiness* and recommended them to friends and relations. Much of what he wrote, especially in mathematics, of course, I did not have the

knowledge to appreciate. On reading Michael Holroyd's brief essay¹ on Russell in Launceston's City Park on a delightful autumn day I was moved to write the following.

-Ron Price with thanks to Michael Holroyd, *Unreceived Opinions*, Penguin, 1973, pp.210-214.

You were always trying to escape
from that intrinsic temperament of
loneliness mixed, as it was, with the
aggravation of those dark years of
transition. You never did eradicate
the despair in your soul as you
wandered like a ghost alone,
a thousand miles from the herd
which might as well have lived
on another planet. And still you
searched for oneness in large
groups of human beings.

I, too, struggled with my demons;
tried to vanquish them with marriage
in my own dark heart of an age of
transition. Found my oneness while
young and held it all my life: a religion
of western civilization.¹ Here the sweetness
of my melody kindled my own soul and
arenewed a tranquil conscience within me
and I learned to work with the herd, to
become one with it. In the darksome night
of despair my eye turned expectant and full
of hope to the morn of Thy boundless favour²
and so this autobiography could and did emerge
in the late afternoon and early evening of my life.³

1 Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*.

2 Bahá'í Prayers

3 Holroyd wrote that Russell's autobiography was a "wonderful essay struggling to emerge."(p.214)

Ron Price

14 April 2000

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Ron Price

14 April 2000

A LONG WAY TO GO YET

The value of creative work of any kind is in the whole of it. 'Til that is seen no judgement is possible....technique....has importance only when the Conception of the whole has a significance of its own apart from the details that go to make it up.

-Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol.2: 1898-1902,

Cambridge UP, 1986, p.332.

With respect to my own oeuvre, I believe, although I can not be sure, I am far from what Joseph Conrad calls "the Conception of the whole" with "a significance of its own apart from the details that go to make it up." I think it is safe to say, though, that my multi-perspectival view of the world has not degenerated into a relativism and its moral vacuum, a solipsism or a triviality. In the act of telling my story I constantly reassess my relation to society as both a social and an aesthetic act. I find that my own experience as a poet in history is so tied to the social fabric of the Bahá'í community as a whole that the flexibility and precariousness of this relationship is the very basis on which representation and evaluation are integrated through point of view.

-Ron Price with thanks to Robert Weiman in Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment, Jeremy Hawthorn, Edward Arnold Publishers, London, 1990, p.xi.

An integrative vision,
a whole world,
a detective story,
making connections
in the framework of
a System that links
together the lives and
consciousness of those
whose existence they and
the Power they serve impinge.

Price's achievement is based upon
a set of ideological perceptions
which are artistically interlocked
and constitute an understanding
of this Order as participating System,
as a set of connections,
influences and determinations.
This is my work, the work;
no mere adventurer;
no glamorous romantic,
but a steady and simple fidelity
to what is nearest to hand and heart
in the short moment of each human effort—
part of those artistically interlocked
perceptions and integrative vision.

Ron Price 22 April 2000

A LOSS FOR WORDS

After our second visit to Bahji and a special visit to the room 'Abdu'l-Bahá

rented when he came to Bahji during His ministry, I wrote the following poem while seated in a cool, air-conditioned bus which was travelling from Bahji to the house of 'Abdu'llah Pasha. At the time I was sitting beside an attractive, single, blond, Russian lady in her late twenties who lived in Malta as a pioneer. I sensed that she did not want to chat and so, during the approximately twenty minutes we had on the bus, I wrote part of a poem reflecting on the Bahji experience, where the Qiblih of the Bahá'í World is located. We had just completed five days of our nine day pilgrimage.
-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, 10 June 2000.

His shoes! One can never fill those shoes!
Little brown shoes in a box beside His bed.
My son and I said the Tablet of Visitation
four times together facing that bed
in that little room of the Pilgrim House,
after walking around the mansion of Bahji:
simple, full of memories, memorabilia,
beautifully designed gardens and paintings
of Lua Getsinger and John E. Esslemont.

.....the above poem was discontinued. We then visited the House of Abdu'llah Pasha and the Ridvan Gardens. The poem was completed on the bus returning to Mt. Carmel and the House where 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived in Haifa.....

More shoes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
Shoghi Effendi's room,
the dust of the Bab in that room,
the two windows of the prison cell
from Ali Pasha's house,
and the Ridvan Garden,
the centre of the Verdant Isle.
What can one say about all this?

Ron Price
10 June 2000

A MIND LIVELY AND AT EASE

It is said that an artist's work is the sum total of his experience. The artist does not create from a tabula rasa, but from a rich menu of specific and unspecific experience, grey and vague and highly and variously coloured. The artist drafts his own destiny as he drafts his music, his art, his sculpture or his poetry. And he is never sure, as Stephen Spender puts it, however confident he may be, whether he has misdirected his energy, or whether his poetry is insignificant, irrelevant or great and important.
-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, 8 August 2000.

A mind lively and at ease
is a gift of fortune
and gives meaning and value

to perceived experience,¹
to the deep and rich
satisfaction of my own writing
and to the slow charting of the
progress toward our destiny.
The unperturbed mind
is quickest and can deal
with the vanity of vanities, life,
which we must both accept and
reject, which pierces us with its
nonsense and its strange relations.

¹ Jane Austen, Emma.
Ron Price
8 August 2000

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A MOUTHED GRAVE

Discovery of the true meaning of a text, of this poetry, this art form, will never be finished. The process of interpretation is infinite and can really only take place when the poems are read with dialogic engagement, with a fusion of horizons, between reader and writer. Meaning emerges from this process of engagement. Language here is a reservoir of tradition and a medium through which writer and reader coexist. Dilthey, the historian, wrote that we can only really know our own life. The past, for us, is a permanently enduring, though changing, present form. It is part of the condition of our human existence and it is, ultimately, undecidable and inconclusive insofar as its meaning, its interpretation, is concerned.¹ This meaning will go on in extended forms in perpetuity, infinitely, stealthily and secretly toward our eternity. Hopefully, these thoughts of mine, delivered from my brain, from that reservoir of tradition, nursed by time, will take a new acquaintance of thy mind.²

-Ron Price with thanks to Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 125-133 on 'hermeneutical sociology'; and 2 Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, Number 77.

This glass will show you something
of the precious moments of my days
and its leaves, my mind's imprint,
which I let fall so you could taste
their wherewithall. This glass will
only show part of my memory, like
a mouthed grave that only will spew
some of its worms. For some of it is
vile and I will take it with me to the
grave and beyond to soil the fair
bowers of eternity. I do not want
to deliver all this detritus to words.
I have said what I can not expunge
from memory as it makes bitter-sweet
my taste: I spurn this mortal world.¹

Ron Price

18 January 2000

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p.239.

A MYSTIC TONGUE

Charles MacIntosh, architect and artist who died in 1928, transmuted life's sadness into love for his wife and his environment. His wife, Margaret, died four years later and, as far as we know, did not talk about her husband in those years when she was alone. This poem is addressed to Margaret in those years after Charles died. I have selected a date within the period of Shoghi Effendi's writing his *World Order Letters*,
March 21, 1930.

-Ron Price with thanks to the 1996 BBC program, replayed on ABC Arts Sunday, 16 July 2000.

21 March 1930.

Dear Margaret

Can you, too, transmute
your sadness into love? Where do
you go with your sadness, now?
How do you live with your aloneness?
And all that love of beauty: can you
still give it form? Why was it you
were destined not to hear that Word?
Whomsoever Thou willest Thou
causest to draw nigh unto the
Most Great Ocean¹ He has said.
Surely, you will soon be gathered
together in that Undiscovered Country
beneath the shade of the Tree of Life
in that all-glorious Paradise
and you will talk again
in the mystic tongue of heaven.²

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Prayers, p.120.

² Charles MacIntosh had his tongue cut out in his last years due to cancer.

Ron Price

16 July 2000

A NARRATIVE VOICE AND ITS

COHERENCE

Although Price felt himself to be quite self-contained, especially after his temporary retirement at the age of fifty-five, he did enjoy meeting, every four to eight weeks, a small group of between fifteen and thirty Bahá'ís spread across the rest of Tasmania, two other Bahá'ís in George Town where he lived every ten days or so, his wife's family located at several points along the Tamar River, a small handful of neighbours whom he met while on his evening walks, and one or two dozen 'seniors', as they were now called, at the School for Seniors where he came to teach creative writing in the first year of his stay in this latest of pioneer locations.

In telling his own story, his autobiography, he was not recklessly candid, but he was honest to an extent which would be seen by some as startling and by others as not frank enough. He certainly did not go into the kind of detail in relation to his private life which many contemporary and conventional autobiographies were wont to do, about self and others. But he did cover the range of human emotions and attitudes from the melancholy, solemn end of things to the place where joy and even ecstasy did enter.

Price felt he had given a considered account of his experience, had extracted whatever value he could from his disappointments, gathering in, sometimes complacently, sometimes with thought and ingenuity, all their compensations. This tall man, just a shade under six feet, over two hundred pounds in weight, some forty more than he started with at the outset of his pioneering life in 1962, gazing as he did, imperturbably at his life as a pioneer and the rise and development of the religion he had joined more than forty years before, could

be trusted to continue his massive poetic after the insensible evolution of eight foundation years of writing, if only for the intense pleasure it gave him to provide sense, balance and judiciousness for future generations when the Cause he had devoted his life to had, in fact, revolutionized its fortunes-as inevitably it would-a thousandfold.

-Ron Price with thanks to V.S. Pritchett, *The Complete Essays*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1991, pp.1-5; and Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p.117.

Can I convey the immensity and wonder

of these epochal shifts,

of this great existential horror,

violence and chaos

that I have witnessed

since I entered the scene

on the edge of destruction?

What observations and images

can impregnate my poetic and

thus explain a life, a time, a day?

Can this narrative voice and its coherence

take me and my world

beyond some encumbering theory, some epithet,

into the glaring light of an immense complexity,

the fullness of human contradiction

and inconsistency,

with its twistings and turnings,

beyond simplifying and narrow experience

into imagination's enlarging circle

and reason's rigour?

Ron Price

4 March 2000

1 David Womersley, *The Transformation of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1988, p.101.

A NEW LITERATURE

The material which any Bahá'í with an interest in some form of literature: poetry, novel, play, short story or essay, has to draw on is massive. For, as Shoghi Effendi informed us, the process whereby the unsuspected benefits of this new religion have been manifested to the eyes of men has been slow, painfully slow, and has been "characterized...by a number of crises which at times threatened to arrest its unfoldment and blast all the hopes which its progress had engendered." It has always been a very complex fate being a Bahá'í. In the last stages of history, in the three epochs that this poetic opus is named after, the major responsibility of being a Bahá'í has entailed fighting against a perception of religion which inclines the observer to be completely disinterested in anything that goes by the name of religion; or, should that inquirer already possess a religious commitment, inclines him or her to having a mind-set that is locked water-tight against anything new.

-Ron Price with thanks to Henry James in American Writing today: Its Independence and Vigor, editor, Allan Angoff, Libraries Press, NY, 1957, p.159; and God Passes by, Shoghi Effendi, 1957, p.111.

Of course, it is not as bad as that,
it's worse!

One becomes,
as one knows one should,
out of a necessity defined
by the Central Figures
of this Faith,
a seed-planter,
a farmer!

But, as any farmer
will tell you:
farming is hard work,
especially farming
with the harvest always
down the road somewhere,
sometime. Of course:
the station of the farmer
will be raised
in the estimation
of the lord of the village.¹

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Tablets of the Divine Plan, p.12.

...Ron Price 4 February 2000

A NEW MUSIC

Three weeks before Ridvan in 1951 Shoghi Effendi announced the "rise of the World Administrative Centre" of the Faith, "a process that had been kept in abeyance for well nigh thirty years." That same year the world's first computer music was put together in Sydney on a Sirac computer, the fifth in the world.

-Ron Price with thanks to Paul Dornbush on "Arts Today," ABC Radio National, 10:30-10:45 am, 29 November 2000.

Yes, a new music was in the air,
a new machinery, of a new Order,
the implications of which were
not widely appreciated, but which
were being erected and perfected.

Painstaking effort had been,
and would be, required
for such an unappreciated,
virtually unknown, unrecognized
addition to the planet's resources.

The torchbearers of a new age
that was just breaking onto the world:
silently, unbeknownst,

with a poignant heroism
on the long road which had been trodden,
on the onward march toward the goals
of peace and unity,
to further embellish the annals of this Faith
and take its music to the uttermost ends of the earth.1

1

Ron Price
29 November 2000

A

NEW PHASE OF EXPLORATION

In the world of explorers we find many models, metaphors and myths that can inform, illumine and enlighten the Bahá'í experience of pioneering. Sir Richard Burton(1821-1890) is one example. He began his explorations in the 1840s and is famous for his journeys in the Middle East and Africa. Burton is one of the more intellectual of the explorers; he had immense courage and was half in love with easeful death, as Keats put it. During the last twenty-six years of his life he seemed to have lost his exploratory zest. Perhaps this was due to his marriage. He was an adventurer and a writer. Few explorers were both. By the time the Tablets of the Divine Plan were implemented in 1937 the world of exploration was ready for another phase. My own life was but one example of pioneering, of this new phase of exploration.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 2000.

It was all a drama to him1
and he wrote it in his books
in that Victorian detail that
could have half of it edited out
and we would not miss a thing.
It was about travelling to him
and travelling alone, not arriving;
it was about a courage, barriers,
the self-indulgence in his age.
And so is it for us,
a travelling, often alone,
a courage, barriers and,
I must confess, a self-indulgence,
half in love with easeful death.

1 Sir Richard Burton

Ron Price
26 March 2000

A NEW SERIOUSNESS

What poetry needs is a new seriousness. I would define this seriousness simply as the poet's ability and willingness to face the full range of his experience with his full intelligence. Such a response integrates both the sense of

emptiness in many of life's conventionalities and the sense of being overwhelmed with the feeling of life's confusion and incoherence. This new poetic seriousness does not deny the fears and desires of life, however obscurely they cross our path and however much we try to elude them. The poet's task is to make sense of them. In the process the poet aims his imagination at the world and himself, point blank. He does so with a creative vitality, a concentration and a sense of purpose. He applies these talents and faculties to his rich internal resources, resources which are more variable, substantial and self-renewing than the ordinary, the common, non-writer insofar as ideas and words are concerned. Working from this base the poet creates his own style, identity and language, seemingly from scratch.

Such a poet requires readers with the ability to learn the unique language of his poetry; such readers need the ability to reinterpret language afresh, the language of each poet. Such readers also require concentration and interest, if they are ever to enjoy poetry.

-Ron Price with thanks to A. Alvarez, *Beyond All this Fiddle: Essays 1955-1967*, Allen Lane, London, 1968, p.40.

Yes, this has been a new seriousness,
a new one for me in my days in mid-life.

Looking at it all, five decades of stuff:

point blank, sifting through,
such a jumble and tumble
of hours and years,
of desires and fears,
of conventionalities,
of incoherencies,
putting it all, now, in perspective,
creating my own identity,
language and style.

Yes, Mr. Alvarez, from scratch,
well partly, seemingly, seriously.

Ron Price

23 July 2000

A NICHE

MARKET

This poem was written after reading Jack McLean's book *Under the Divine Lote Tree* while I was travelling on a train from Chicago to Toronto en route to my home town and, eventually, to Haifa and my pilgrimage.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, 25 May 2000.

A niche market: following
in a fine tradition. I think
the first essays I read were
Esslemont's. "Good on yer,
Jack," as they say in Australia.
Here is some dancing, Jack,
a dancing with angels,

a symphony of joy,
a kind of grace,
a picture from the galley,
a transformation of the
clot of life, a plunge into
a mystery, a swallow of life,
a sharper focus, an unveiling.²
But, I can't tell it all in a poem,
Jack. Can't eliminate all the
incessant chatter. But I send you
this, Jack, with thanks for those essays.
Keep it up, Jack, old fellow from yesteryear.
1 the market of publishers for essays.
2 words used by McLean to describe the writing of poetry.
Ron Price
25 May 2000

— Autobiographical Poetry 2000: Pioneering Over Four Epochs: Poetry Booklets 40-43 (Used by permission of the curator)