

Autobiographical Poetry 1996: Pioneering Over Four Epochs

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Pioneering Over Four Epochs: This tapestry of 42 links endows Bahá'í themes and a wide range of social science and humanities subjects with many layers of meaning and evokes a complex range of responses. The author has evolved a style which is highly individual yet, by fusing together so much from the humanities and the social and physical sciences, from his own life and his religion, appeals to both the novice, the veteran believer and others on a multitude of paths. There are some 1500 pages of autobiographical narrative, poetry, essays and interviews which can be seen as one long diary or journal. They can also be seen as a backdrop, a contemporary artistic expression, to the building of the Arc on Mt. Carmel.

This poetry, from the earliest stage of my writing, the first twenty years: 1980-1999, links autobiography, Bahá'í history and secular history into one total picture.

DROPPING PEARLS ON FOREIGN SHORES

This poem is essentially a meditation on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Bahá'ís of the Northeastern States in the Tablets of the Divine Plan and my own role as an overseas pioneer. It is also, as Barthes says below, an attempt to integrate, unify, synthesize my own life into some coherent whole. -Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, 19 June 1996.

Narrative does not show, nor imitate, nor represent. Its purpose is to produce a spectacle. At the very least: language is produced. There is an adventure in language. To put it another way: stories are not lived but told. Their function is integrative.

-Roland Barthes in Narrative and the Self, Anthony Paul Kerby, Indiana UP, Bloomington, 1991, pp.93-94.

One spring, while Hattie Dixon was
bringing hot soup and rose hip tea,
surrounded by superficial propriety
in those seemingly halcyon years
when deepest needs and wants
remained unexpressed: the fifties
and the Canadian Bahá'í community
was launching the opening chapter
in its glorious Mission overseas,
my mother started going to firesides.

I enjoyed the hot coffee and apple-pie
on cold Canadian winter evenings
becoming, unobtrusively, insinuatingly
part of that overseas mission,

little did I know, then.

So it is that I now measure the origins
of my pioneering identity:

generation no. 2--1962-1987.

So easy it is to spell out these years

dropping pearls on foreign shores

from the great sea of His Name.

How difficult to quantify, to judge

the quickening, the variegation,

the radiant effulgences,

the portion and the share,

the blessing of the seed.

I don't think I ever can,

but I try to fix my gaze

upon the favors and bounties of God.²

And I do, I shall, I will, I forget,

I despair and I do not understand.

I seem to need reminding

again and again and again.

Ron Price

19 June 1996

1 Messages To Canada, Shoghi Effendi, NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 1965,
p.69.

2'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, USA, 1977, p.7.

1959

A man must live in the service of a great idea.

-Leon Trotsky in Intellectuals, Paul Johnson, Harper and Rowe, NY, 1993, p.177.

There is no single other creature in all history like yourself.

-ibid., p.291.

The sonnet goes back to the twelfth century.

-From notes taken in reading 27/10/96.

I became a Bahá'í

the year of Ben Hur

and Charlton Heston,

Fidel Castro in Cuba,

Charles Mason Remey

in his voluntary exile

and the Frisbee.

I got the highest marks

in my school life that year

and my dad finished

his working life.

The Beatles were getting
their act together
and I said "I believe"
as naturally and simply
as breathing air.

Ron Price
27 October 1996

IN TACT

...the only important thing that ever happened to me: the description I made of part of my life...it was the most important because I fixed it in words. And now what am I? Not he who lived but he who described. -Italo Svevo in *The Complex Image: Faith and Method in American Autobiography*, Joseph Fichtelberg, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, Preface.

The following poem is one simple way of describing, summarizing, my experience of the 1960s. I was 15 when the sixties started. I wrote this poem after seeing a 1990 movie *Flashback*. About the only external thing still left that stands out easily from this period of time is the fact I still say "Man".
-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, 4 February 1996.

I was too busy at high school
and university and teaching kids
to really become part of the sixties.
Manic-depression, schizo-affective
state kept me on heat, nose-down,
although I had time for a beard,
a demonstration, a little sex,
but nowhere near as much as
I would have liked
and that some guys got.

My dad died; I grew up;
taught Eskimos, country,
small town kids; got married.
It was a busy decade for me,
back then and when it ended
I got ready to go to Australia.
Sex, drugs and rock-and-roll
always stayed on the edge
of my life, periferal to the core.
And my religion remained intact,
Surprisingly, protecting me.

Ron Price
4 February 1996

LAMPS AND CANDLES

The Poets light but lamps-
Themselves-go out-
The Wicks they stimulate-
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Sun-
Each Age a lens
Disseminating their
Circumference-
-Emily Dickinson, Number 883.

In this decade of dazzling prospects:
knowledge is exploding from astro-
physics to microbiology, the micro to
the macro; extraordinary bestowals
in these auspicious years: internet,
three-dimensional computer simulation
where plants are stored on discs
and DNA from 40 million year old
insects is brought to life, the chemistry
of the dream state and schizophrenia
and alot of other states is becoming known,
we're naming stars and viruses and a million
other things in the kingdom of names.
NASA has closed down with the
space race over; global satellite
systems encircle the Earth with
semiconductors and electronics taking
us into a hundred million-billion
other spaces; as geomorphology,
archeology and a million history ants
redefine, recreate history. It may
be that nutrinors have more mass than
all the visible stars and galaxies and
the universe is 80% cold and 20% hot.

While this unending, chaotic, bewildering,
unprecedented, unimaginably glorious sweep
of knowledge invades the remotest regions
of our minds and our Earth a source of
imperturbable serenity, order, law, has
begun its relentless march of beauty and form.
In my hours of solitude, indeed everywhere
I go, I see this loveliness and charm invading
the remote corners of my being, my caverns
and corridors, like a consciousness suspended

on the granitic base of my conviction.

It's like a colour I can see out on the fields;
it waits upon the lawn and in the shelter of the trees;
on that slope, some say on the shores of the eastern
Mediterranean, that slope it almost speaks to me
and all the buildings have one voice: a consciousness
of Thee. In the corner of the cemetery I could be found;
for I have died several times, but some new vitality I found
in this profound experiment, like some dance through immortality
on a street of awe, of minted holiness where I see two Candles entirely for
Thee.

Ron Price

6 January 1996

WAITING WAITING

At the core of the women's poetry movement is the quest for autonomous self-definition. Wandering between two worlds, one dead and the other powerless to be born, she was attempting to give birth to herself. In a gender-polarized culture a creative woman was a divided self. So often in poetry she was invisible, mute and modest, passive, marginal, silenced, identified with house, body and motherhood. There's a creavage between a tameness, a modesty, a whiteness, a purity and the wild, the angry, the black and the ugly. It is often disguised; hence the schizophrenia, the insecurity, the nonexistence, the division of self, the empty identity. In the 1960s this world, this landscape, exploded. -Ron Price with thanks to Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, The Women's Press, 1986.

As yet, even in the 1990s, it is difficult to talk about a core of Bahá'í poetry. So little has been published outside of Roger White's verse, some of John Hatcher's, the small booklets of several other Bahá'í poets like Michael Fitzgerald and a few small anthologies which have appeared in Bahá'í magazines like *World Order* and *Bahá'í Studies*. Bahá'í poets know they are involved in the birth of a new world, a new Order, a new race of human beings. It has become impossible for their poetry to repress a heart-felt enthusiasm, an artistic excitement, the new and wonderful configurations they perceive, the ever-varying splendor they derive from intellect and the power of thought. The late 1990s was the eve of an explosion, a bursting into the world of a Bahá'í consciousness in world poetry. After a prelude of two decades the Bahá'í poetic landscape, like the landscape of the Bahá'í World Centre itself, was gradually transformed. -Ron Price, comment on the development of Bahá'í poetry in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

This small community of a few million
containing a seed which long ago burst,
whose oil was ignited in some black pit
and has been shedding its light all over

this planet in a series of plans for some
60 years, has become more and more
articulate with a truth whose time has come.

Something like this can only stay unobtrusive
for so long. You can only keep such a force
low and down with an obscure profile, hidden,
irrelevant for a certain length of time. And
then it gushes to the surface: a dose of the
good, the true and the beautiful so massive
that it just may fix the world; a myth so
metaphorically complex and subtle that
it defines reality anew; a language of such
sweetness the intellectual taste-buds are renewed;
a story, a sparkling narrative that will remain
forever anew, sophisticated, complex, profound;
a philosophy, a theology of the uttermost simplicity
that will keep its analysts busy forever is about to
burst onto history's dramatic stage after being in
the wings, off-stage, preparing, practicing, purifying,
purging, pondering, pacing up-and-down, waiting,
waiting, waiting.....

Ron Price
9 April 1996

ALOT CAN BE SAID
IN A SHORT SPACE AT 200 DEGREES F.

The consideration of ulterior ends, the ultimate values or worth of a poem,
tends to lower poetic value. For the nature of a poem is to be a world unto
itself, independent, complete, autonomous. The reader must try and enter that
world, conform to its laws and try to ignore his or her own values and beliefs.
-A.C. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, 1909.

For many, Bradley's advice is impossible to attain and the poem ultimately
becomes part of the world, the real world and the world of the reader. Ultimate
ends, ulterior values, cannot be ignored. Ends and means become inextricably
interwoven. The poem is one thing to the writer, another to the reader,
meaningless to one and richly endowed with significance to another. The poem is
a social construct, a socio-historical entity than can not exist in isolation
from the community, society, others.
-Ron Price, Rivervale Notes on Poetry(unpublished), 1996.

He was 43 and she was 31
and I'd never met them before,
quite possibly never again. She'd
lived in Bombay until her late
twenties before marrying this

Aussi and coming to this sauna
bath in Perth Western Australia.
Hot and dry: 200 degrees F. Says
he knows a little Arabic; so I says
I know a little about Bahá'í written,
as it is, in Arabic. And we talk, back
and forth for, what, two or three minutes?
A lot can be said in a short space of time.

We'd already talked about temper, Penta-
costal, sauna baths, sleeping problems:
nearly naked, souls moving close in this
vulnerable place where a person can get move in
quick and plant enough seeds to harvest a field.
I've dropped the word a thousand times this way:
bit of a professional, the en passant style, effective
in its own way--non-chalant, easy going, organic,
natural, fits-right-in, indirect-like-direct. You can
only go so far at 200 degrees F when the cold shower
and pool await and you know you'll be gone in a few
minutes and probably never see each other again. But
a lot can be said in a short space of time.

Ron Price
24 April 1996

1844: TWO VISIONS

I would give all the wealth of the world, and all the deeds of all the heroes,
for one true vision. But how can I communicate with the gods....As the light
in the east steadily increased, it revealed to me more clearly the new world
into which I had risen in the night, the new terra-firma perchance of my future
life...It was such a country as we might see in our dreams, with all the
delights of paradise...It was a favour for which to be forever silent to be
shown this vision.

-Henry David Thoreau in Reimagining Thoreau, Robert Milder, Cambridge
UP, NY, 1995, p. 36.

Just several weeks after the dawning
of that Light¹ in the east you had this vision,
not the vision you were seeking, it would seem,
but one that drove you into silence as you tried
to find a true meeting point of west and east,
of wildness and contemplation, some essential
core to the universe and history, some fount of
psychic wholeness, some inward certainty, some
point, some ground, for rightness, for a harmonious
relation between self and other that dissolves boundaries.

He gave you epiphanic moments, aesthetic perceptions,
cherished minutes of joy, but perplexing in their etherealizing
distance, in their rhapsodic vein, no legacy of that wholeness,
precursor to a tragic fortune, far, far, from the attainment of
your spiritual quest which seems to have been in vain: no
penetration to the core, to history's reality, to uncover the real,
just a simple dwelling on the channel in which life flows,
pressing on to yet another crux of insolvability, identity,
vocation and relationship to experience, inevitably, it would
seem, disappointing, but wearing a mask of some satisfaction:
justifying, justifying, justifying, idealizing, idealizing, idealizing
the life of the inner man, but not really knowing who, or why, or what.

And slowly, half a world away, that other vision grew from a short
and meteoric career that flashed across the firmament of Persia, got
lost in an abyssal gloom before arising pheonix-like from ashes and
casting its first lights on a sombre, subterranean wall, emerging
finally in a Qiblih for all the world to call.

Ron Price
15 June
1996

A BIG MAC STICK UP

The great writers of our age were all engaged in a heroic struggle against the
banality, aridity and emptiness of the prosaic nature of bourgeois life. A
dramatic, dynamic world of profound, rich and many-hued poetry often emerges
from an insipid, cold, harsh, ordinary, protective chrysalis of everyday life.
A world where sport, materialism, middle-class courtesies, a dull pain at the
heart of life which is rarely discussed and a certain asphyxia of soul, hold
their hegemony. This world is replaced by a world where a soul struggles with
history's entanglements, with a precision of the imagination, with a certain
extravagance, with new powers called into being, with a continuous curiosity
and a frequent solitude, one that does not deny this pain.

-Ron Price, A comment that tries to summarize a whole tradition of political
and religious condemnation of bourgeois complacencies and values which are an
offence against life itself. See Geoffrey Nash, "The Heroic Soul and the
Ordinary Self", Bahá'í Studies Vol.10, p.25.

You can only suck so much
from life on that etherised table,
those half-deserted streets,
those cheap hotels, sawdust restaurants.
Those big-macs and grey fish shops,
those dark, unlit urinals, those pool-halls
where all the Asians look the same
and there aren't any pretty girls,
make me feel as if I'm clawing,

scuttling my way across the floors
of silent seas, mysterious, terribly alone
but cocooned in a world that is so grey
that even the primary colours are grey.

The imagination does not struggle here
as I gaze at an evening news.

There is an assault, a big-mac stick up,
a urinal that effaces one's mind
leaving your head on a platter,
emptied of meaning, unable to roll
toward some overwhelming question:
public and private space
in frightening contrast.
So far away from any mermaids.
I will never see them on the waves.

Human voices will not wake me here
and I will drown in the chambered spaces of the sea
where I just hear His voice
calling faintly on the waters
calling me to that tranquil conscience,
to some spirit of power
that will confirm me to a confession,
reveal unto me a path
that is the most manifest of the manifest
and the most hidden of the hidden.

Ron Price
6 July 1996

AN INNER CONTINUUM

In order to understand people better some human beings take a great interest in themselves. In order to portray others convincingly, some writers constantly examine themselves. It is this penetrating intrapersonal interest that is the source of many great novels, essays and autobiographical pieces. A good example is the Confessions of St. Augustine, written in 397 AD, just as Christianity was finally capturing the soul of Roman society, after four centuries of slow growth.-Andre Deutsche, Thomas Mann: Diaries 1918-1939, London, 1983, p.vi.

That rapid and gentle fall of paganism
back then when you wrote those Confessions¹,
amidst smiles of contempt for the last struggles
of superstition and despair, you witnessed
as you told of your yearning, your wandering,
your groaning, your inner life,
the note of urgency, of poignancy,
of tension, of unexpected emotions,
of intense personal involvement

with ideas, with an inner continuum,
of light and shadow,
of one long battle with the self,
with an inner depth of infinite complexity,
an inner self-portrait
and its myriad involvements
where light crept back
over rain-soaked landscapes
and darkness often spread
over the limitless room of your heart.

Ron Price
30 September 1996

1 St. Augustine wrote his book Confessions in 397, in the midst of the great conversion process to Christianity during the late Roman Empire. One of the first writers in history to make an attempt to discuss his inner life.

A COMIC OPERA

As far as I could see there was no relationship between my pioneering in 1962 and the production and filming, that same year, of Richard Strauss' opera *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Salzburg Festival with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Herbert von Karajan.

Strauss' opera was first performed in Dresden while 'Abdul Baha was in Egypt getting ready for His western tour. This opera is full of plots and intrigue; the story moves quickly, possesses the liveliest action and the stage is full of an amusing profusion of characters. It could have been about 'Abdu'l-Bahá if you just turned the mise en scene in time and space.

In retrospect, my own story after 1962 was full of the liveliest action, an amusing profusion of characters and a host of plots and sub-plots in a modern-medieval-morality-stage play that was my own life. Herbert von Karajan could have been conducting the romantic comic opera of my own life which would play itself out across two continents: a lover, whose tree of longing yielded the fruit

of despair, disguised as a teacher, but eventually beheld the mysteries of the Friend, sought neither name, nor fame, nor rank, found that secrets were many and strangers myriad and found, too, himself, lost and as nothing beside others and His holy ones.¹

Ron Price

22 December 1996

¹Bahá'u'lláh, Seven Valleys, USA, 1952, p.26.

A COMPLEX JOURNEY

We make these observations...to encourage a re-examination of the bases of modern society, and to....lay the ground for a contrasting observation of the origin and nature of the characteristics and philosophy underlying that Order.

-Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988.

The quest for a rational ethic¹ was what launched the social sciences into orbit. Their mission was to define modernity in all its labyrinthine forms.

The ground for the contrasting observation of this new Order has one or two features which this poem would like to underline.

First, is the sacred nature of this Order as opposed to one that drew on Greece and Rome as the source, the model, for today.

We can no longer look to them; nor can the long and tortured history of the great religions be of any value as we search.

But to understand where we have been and how we got there is a useful matrix to describe why we are where we are today.

To gain this understanding you can spend your whole lifetime, for the journey is the most complicated you can take.

Ron Price

6 October 1996

¹ Donald N. Levine, Visions of the Sociological Tradition, University of

Chicago Press, 1995, p.317. In this interesting account of the position of sociology today, Levine argues that this search for a rational ethic was what got the social sciences going in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This ethic is essentially a secular one, like the ethic that was the underpinning of Greece and Rome.

Levine describes the fracturing of the social science disciplines since the late 1960s and early 1970s. The very maps for describing them seem to be in question. We seem to need not only new maps, but new principles for mapping. Answering questions like those raised by the House of Justice in this 1988 letter will keep Bahá'í social scientists busy for decades to come for they are fundamental and extremely complex.

A CRY

He shall be empowered to...array those trees which are the lives of men with the fresh leaves, the blossoms and fruits of consecrated joy.
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization, the last lines.

When will this weight fall away?
When will a feeling rise, with the
pressure unknowingly intense, in
my quiet house, patch of self, this
quiet street with the wind blowing
cool in a late spring evening, with
the escarpment dark against a black
sky studded with diamonds—bringing
a cry, at long last a cry, taking the
strain, releasing me to my Lord, at
last, unmasking deep-rooted processes
defined and analysed, but never tasting
as sweet as the voice in this cry that
somehow measures a commitment with
a precision that is quite undefinable,
within a structure of feelings and processes
connected mysteriously to my faith and days.

Ron Price
2 November 1996

A LIFE OF CONTEMPLATIVE SENSATION

We are uncommitted to anything but our struggle to deal in our own way with the blessedness and damnableness of this particular dimension of mysterious matter, with a magic humility, with an inner life of worry and enjoyment, with the art of giving pleasure to others, with a sense of the dramaturgical at the heart of life, with a continuously cultivated sense of the comic and the tragic, the absurd and the grotesque.

-John Cowper Powys, *In Spite Of: A Philosophy for Everyman*, Village Press, London, 1974(1953), pp.73-87.

We are busy at face-saving, as we must be, at pushing away what hurts us and we can't change, as far away, to the country of the dead. We hypersensitive weaklings in time and space, categories of thought, learning the beginning of wisdom in humility, keeping ourselves light by laughter in an exaggeration of comic humiliations, ridiculous lapses and enjoying doing things we don't like.

This life of contemplative sensation I could not exchange for the trappings of success; indeed, enough has come my way to balance what some might call this personal self-indulgence where the opinion of others matters not a twit and conceit, vanity and pride cease their hold, their urgent demonic trinity.

Ron Price
15 December 1996

A

NEW AESTHETIC WORLD

Ordinary people are here with their weaknesses and strengths. He is one of these ordinary people and in documenting himself, he feels he documents others.

There is a flame here, an aflameness with the mystery of life and a recognition of struggle. A quiet understatement seems to say that in writing about the struggle he transcends it. He also helps to define and shape his necessary community, necessary to him and to us. This community is part of his celebration of life and part of his obsession, his religion. Like all obsessions it has great personal meaning to him and he wants to document it. Like history, he does not want it to pass over him or us; he wants to write about it.

-Ron Price with thanks to *The Tragic Vision of Joyce* Carol Oates, Mary K. Grant, Duke UP, Durham, NC, 1978.

In the quest for a new communal consciousness one encounters saintliness and sin, boredom and choulder, people on the threshold of the mystic or on the frontiers of nihilism. One sees a fabulous reality that creates history and meaning; and vacuous lives that fly to sensation's frenzy and the hit tune.

It seems we have been experiencing something ferocious and tragic since He1 left us, like the walls of Jericho tumbling down, some hellfire and crucible with its attendant agony and grief, to take us beyond this chaos of frenetic passivity, smug cows at the trough,

to a new aesthetic world, the absolute dream and the present.

Ron Price

30 November 1996

1 'Abdu'l-Bahá left the West in 1912 and the world in 1921.

A NEW BOAZ AND NAOMI

Familiar failures fingered like a rosary
invite stale resolutions
I dare not rush out to chalk again
in alien alphabet
on the wet slick walk.

-Roger White, "The Citizen", Occasions of Grace: More Poems and Portrayals,
George Ronald, 1992, p.101.

You¹ came in some old golden age that
needed the unifying influences of some
other Temple and married an old man
who died the night of its consummation,
some princess of Moab in that land of Judah.

You, some radical other, some Moabite,
some enemy, became a matriarch of
Jewish royalty: mother of Obed, Jesse's
grandfather, source of a story about
generosity in beautiful and poetic prose.²

Did you, I wonder drowsily, know in
Boaz's³ fields and Naomi's⁴ foreign
embrace, the glorious future, the
wondrous vision that lay within the will
of God as you lay that night with Boaz?

Do we know, even with the words we have,
even with our irrepressible cheerfulness, too,
the heights of grandeur that we will achieve
in this foreign land where a new Boaz and a
new Naomi have mothered a Glorious Infant?

Ron Price

22 September 1996

1 Ruth came to live among the Jewish people and married Boaz in 968 BC ; in
the same way, the Bahá'ís came to live among the Jewish people who nurtured
their growth and development

2 The Book of Ruth in the Old Testament.

3 Boaz died at the age of eighty on his wedding night

4 Naomi nurtured the child which was born from that union. She was Boaz's

mother.

A NEW CREATION

Keats died in Rome in 1821 of tuberculosis. Shelley drowned at sea in 1822 and Byron bled to death in Greece in 1823. A brief incandescent epoch in English literature came to an end while the candle of Wordsworth burned on for more than two decades. There was an underside to this intellectual flame, an underside with scars; the flame burned fiercely and often people got scorched.

-Ron Price with thanks to Paul Johnson, "Shelley, or the Heartlessness of Ideas", *Intellectuals*, Harper and Rowe, 1988, pp. 28-51.

Some great burning, flames higher,
caught the light from a distant fire.
Half a world away in a decadent
Qajar state the heat was turned up
and the whole creation was stirred,
revolutionized, to its depths, shaken,
divided, separated, scattered, combined
and reunited...disclosing....entities of a
new creation.¹ Astonishing single-minded-
ness, genuine self-revelation-a rare gift-
great bliss and lives filled with pain,
suffering and confusion gave to their
poetry and metaphor, steeped in the activity
of living, a force as powerful as religion.

Ron Price
12 October 1996

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, USA, 1938, p.295.

A NEW LAND, BRIGHT WITH PROMISE

In writing autobiography Price enjoyed seeing himself in the way Hannah Arendt liked to write about others: "thou shalt like an airy spirit go." Like Arendt with her biographies, Price preferred to keep his autobiography free of moral grossness, as far as possible. He grappled with melancholy by thinking things through and waiting, patiently waiting in his private, inaccessible, thinking place.

-Ron Price with thanks to Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of This World*, Yale UP, London, 1982, pp.xv-xvii.

This is no Virgilian nostalgia
for a lost arcadia, no patch-work
job for a Rome and an emperor
slowly acquiring divine afflatus.

This is a poetry of praise for an

institutional charisma, fully legitimate,
this time no artificial flavouring or
colour, heading out into the galaxies.

This time, this day, in which the fragrances
of mercy have been wafted over all created
things, this day which past ages and
centuries can never hope to rival.¹

This is no recrudescence of the ancient
to get us all by, by the skin of our teeth.
This is that which hath descended from the
realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of
power and might and revealed unto the
Prophets of old² with a new voice.

With transports of joy, with an ocean of
some presence, surging through all the
atoms of existence and the essence of all
created things, comes this Great Announcement.

This is no guru who thinks he might be,
some miracle worker, one of hundreds of
might be's, a false Messiah, a saviour-in-a-
hurry. This is the thrilling voice of a Pen,
a trumpet-call, all of creation shaking to
its very foundations, a tempest blowing
away the detritus and creating the roots
of faith in world-reverberating institutions
for this age of unific influences.

And so my internal dialogue urges out
onto this page for selected others, over-
coming solitariness as I drift into the twenty-
first century, on the coast of a new land,
bright with promise.

Ron Price
23 October 1996

1 and 2 Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Carmel.

A PURE IDEA, A PURE PASSION

The most deeply known human community is language itself. The greatness of the Bahá'í Writings lies in their community of speech, of language. Here, new structures of language enable us to see things differently. The process of communication and its language, its speech, is in fact the process of community. During the 1840s, Raymond Williams maintains, the whole concept of community, in terms of the way people experienced it, defined it and related to

it, became increasingly uncertain. The novel became the major form in English literature in this decade.

-Ron Price with thanks to John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge, Raymond Williams: Making Connections, Routledge, NY, 1994, pp.131-132.

You certainly timed it right, then,
appearing as you did on the edge
of it all, way out on the periphery,
with major shifts going on all
over the place from 'what hath God
wrought' to Marx's first writings,
to communication and community.
Your words, so many of them, of
such beauty: man's glory lieth in
his knowledge¹ and the Bridge which
is sharper than the sword and finer
than a hair.²

Again, a maiden appeared in a dream
in that pestilential pit to him, after you
were gone, and whole new processes,
structures of feeling, were deepened
and widened, in a pressure for renewal,
always moving, inexorably to a future
that was hard to grasp, hard to find in
a rhythm, a movement, a necessary shape
of a quite different life, a pure idea, a pure
passion for a different world where nothing
would be seen more fitting than the observance
of silence.³

1 The Bab, Selections from the Writings of the Bab, Haifa, 1976, p. 118.

2 *ibid.*, p.96.

3 *ibid.*,p.164.

Ron Price 2/11/96.

A SIMPLE COMMINGLING

Acquitted of triviality by a pain and loneliness
that might instruct us,
rescued a halo's-breadth from isolating sainthood

-Roger White, "Fujita With Pilgrims" Another Song Another Season, George
Ronald, Oxford, 1979, p.17.

Their anguish does not hold me.
I elude their slender and insistent
claim, although it has taken me
years to find the right coordinates.

Now I have my quiet concerns close
to sweet silent thought and death's
restful gulf beyond the pillow's edge.

I have shed my hail fellow, well met,
the friendly Canadian, the nice guy,
left it in so many places, across two
hemispheres and here again in this
peopleland, beyond their view. And
I wait and churn the air with my words,
my endless words, weightless, beyond
friendship, just a simple commingling,
intimacy, a treasured edge, gold, not
yet known, living, daily fellowship,
sweet melody, kindled soul in some
private chamber, scattered across all
the world and causing righteous hearts
to move in the most subtle ways imaginable.

Ron Price
30 December 1006

ABSORBTION

Both Tolstoy and Lawrence seek in their art to arrive at some definition of fulfillment in life. They both see life as a quest for spiritual illumination which must be made anew by each individual in his own way according to his generation and his circumstances. They both believe that any illumination which is attained can only be made perfect when a man and a woman have come together in their lives. They both seek the absolute. While it would appear that they did not attain the absolute, they did attain some fulfillment in their art.

-Ron Price with thanks to Logan Speirs, Tolstoy and Chekhov, Cambridge UP, 1971, p.237.

Some inborn, natural, equilibrium,
seems to be lost and illumination
is not achieved, for the fruitage
is in the world beyond and the
absolute is never found here, only
the mirage, only the place to perservere,
only possible absorption in the emanations
of the spirit and, hence, beyond distraction.
We must disengage, therefore, our inner
selves to reflect the splendours of that
eternal garden, the world within this world.
Even then, comfort is not to be found here,
only dust, despondency and despair and a
mysterious attraction to His Kingdom.

Ron Price
15 April 1996

SOME
BREATHING CONCENTRATION OF HOLINESS

What is that-it cannot be imagination-what is that breathing from Mount Carmel?

It is too strong for me. It is unbearable.

-Juliet Thompson, 28 June 1909.

They could see the blue dice
down below the mountain
while the light of the moon
spread its fine texture over
their faces on the road to the
Blessed Spot as the waves
laughed and lapped down
by the sea. They could hear
a breathing, as if the mountain
was alive, some inner cataclysm
of the soul, sensitive leaves bowing
in His wind, His aura, His rejuvenating
spirit in this Spot of white simplicity
where His luminous body was laid.

Some wondrous majesty was here,
some concentration of holiness
suffused from that wooden casket,
that marble sarcophagus, that dazzled
the inner sense, that led to spasms of
feeling and convulsive tears. Amidst this
structure: massive, simple, imposing,
here in the Vineyard of God the latent
potentialities will be manifest forever.

Ron Price
10 March 1996

ALL THINGS MADE NEW

The volcanic eruption beginning 5 June and lasting for several weeks in 1912 in the Katmai Valley of Alaska was the greatest eruption of this century in the world.

-“Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes”, National Geographic Society, Channel 10, 11:00 am, 13 July 1996.

In the weeks surrounding the
naming, by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of
the City of the Covenant—19th
June 1912-Mt. Katmai erupted

in paroxysmal explosions, drifting
acid gases for thousands of miles
and laying ash hundreds of miles.

He made an emphatic public statement,
in a mood of expectant martyrdom and a
desire to sacrifice himself. Then he had a
rest in Montclair New Jersey and spoke of
bearing the cross and the realm of Divine
Tragedy as he snapped his fingers and beat
with his foot with a smile of exaltation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá had exploded on the West
and it would not be the same again; the
ground shook and the sky darkened; the
fish stopped going up-stream, the Grizzly
Bear, the deer, the fox, the insect all left.
For a time a small world was like the moon,
a wasteland, a sign of things to come.

Slowly it all regenerated, as our world is
slowly regenerating in this century of light,
this world begemmed and brightened like the
infinite of immensity with the stars of the
most great guidance.¹ The fish went back to
their homes to spawn and die; the bear played
again and got fat and all things were made new.
The soil was white and dry--ash--and the rains came,
quickenning the soil with luxuriance and variegation.

Ron Price
13 July 1996

¹'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, USA, 1977, p.5.

ALPHA POINTS

When you¹ wrote of the next Augustan age
you had no idea in the slightest
that a fully institutionalized charisma,
a different glory,
leading from its strength and pride,
Of young ambition eager to be tried

.....

A golden age of poetry and power
of which that noonday was the beginning hour
and about to dawn in the celebration
of the Most Great Jubilee.

This was no King Arthur

presiding over a Camelot,
but a new order of the ages.
There would be no assassination here,
no glamorous fatality,
just the slow growth of a prophetic message,
unobtrusive, unbeknownst to humankind.

Yes, as Mailer said,
these were boundary-making times
of epochal significance,
not in Los Angeles² ,
but in London and Haifa,
as the ninth stage of history,
a grand design³ unfolded.

Mailer's words were already sounding hollow
as paeans of joy and gratitude
were raised to the throne of Bahá'u'lláh
for those who kept the ship on its course
and brought it safe to port⁴
as the tenth and final stage of history
opened its doors to the mighty task ahead
and a dream which was never written
in shorthand, never truncated, always vast
as if we were asked to reach for the stars,
a renaissance always in the making,
always it is morning
and back, then, the beginning hour,
the alpha⁵ point of postmodern history
joining the past with the future
in one continuous garment of light,
corridor of brightness, now,
concentric circles irradiating the globe
from the holiest spot on earth
in an alabaster sarcophagus.

1 Robert Frost wrote a panegyric poem at President John Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. These italicized lines are from that poem and are quoted in *The American Poet at the Movies: A Critical History*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1995, p.228.

2 The Democratic Convention of 1960 was held in Los Angeles at the Sports Arena and Norman Mailer, a popular American writer of the time, saw this Convention as “the most important...in America's history.” The essay in which he expressed this idea was published in 1963 in *The Presidential Papers*. -*ibid.* p.229.

3 The Universal House of Justice used this term to express Shoghi Effendi's unfolding of the meaning of history and of the Cause in his thirty-six year ministry. -*Wellspring of Guidance*, p.1.

4 The Hands of the Cause in: *ibid.*, p.2.

5 there are a wide range of 'alpha points' the poet could draw on in playing with this concept of beginnings. April 1963 is just one such point.

Ron Price

7 December 1996

— Autobiographical Poetry 1996: Pioneering Over Four Epochs, Section VIII: Booklets 17-23 (Used by permission of the curator)