

Autobiographical Poetry 1998: 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.

1926

A decision of the Supreme Religious Court of Egypt, announced on 10 January 1926 in a letter of Shoghi Effendi, may be regarded as an initial step taken by our very opponents in the path of the universal acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith as one of the independent recognised religious systems of the world.

-Ron Price drawing on Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, Wilmette, 1968(1928), pp.100-101.

In 1926 Uum Kulthum began to sing with professional instrumentalists to back her up. Up until this time, from 1919 to 1926, she had male family members on the stage behind her when she sang. Initially, she sang disguised as a boy.

-Kevin Thomas, Los Angeles Times, 17 October 1997; and ABC Radio, 15 October 1998, 11:05-12:00 noon.

Unobtrusive events in Muslim lands,
freeing from the bonds of tradition,
these stars of the east.

At variance with the accepted doctrines
of Islam; the implications of these events
were unknown, then.

Pure, clear voices, as if from on high,
singing during these embryonic days
of a new Order.¹

You have both become models now
for an old world in disarray and your
voices will sing out:
your clarion calls, like sweet, sensitive
birds, traces of gold in centuries to come.

Ron Price

16 October 1998

1 Uum Kulthum sang from 1926 to 1975

2 Bahá'u'lláh's voice and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sang out through the translations of Shoghi Effendi within the nucleus of a future world Order known as Bahá'í administration.

A BALANCING ACT

I believe it is too often forgotten that self-criticism is part of the creative

process. Indeed, it is essential for creative artists who must be painfully honest with themselves. Escaping from self-knowledge, seemingly part of the everyday life of everyman, must be limited for such artists. This is especially true for the autobiographer who is involved in the complex balancing of reticence and immodesty.

-Ron Price with thanks to R.S. Thomas, *Autobiographies*, J.M. Dent and Sons, London, 1997.

In these words I say too much
and too little, performing the
impossible and complex balancing
act of reticence and immodesty
to tell a life, to play out my dreams
with my eyes wide open, defining
ever more precisely, the reality,
the dream, the gap, the something
conceived and composed in the depths
of my being. Perhaps, just perhaps,
what I have here is a work of art,
passing through me like a storm-wind,
flinging open the doors of perception,
pressing upon the architecture of my
beliefs with its transforming power
and enriching my inheritance¹ in this
critical stage of an immense historical
process² with its energy and creativity.

Ron Price

28 June 1998

1 George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoesky*, E. P. Dutton and Co., NY, 1971, pp.3-4.

2 Universal House of Justice, *Ridvan Message* BE 153.

A BALANCING FACTOR

The writing of a poem is, to me, a task of construction following on from an impulse, an inspiration, an idea. It's like an energy source that turns on a light and the poem is an attempt to give that light form, containment, a compartment from which it can continue to shine when it is brought out and read. Sometimes the light that is turned on is faint and the poem a simple narrative conventionalism; sometimes the light shines more strongly after experiencing an intense dialogue with silence; and sometimes the light is so bright I have the opinion it can bring light to the world of its readers.

-Ron Price with thanks to Dylan Thomas in *Dylan Thomas: The Poet and his Critics*, R.B. Kershner, Jr., American Library Association, Chicago, 1976, p.193.

This may be a simple narrative
conventionalism, a story of a day,
a part of a day that occupied my

inner life, my silence, my conversation
with myself in the early hours of this
morning when I am given to endless
chat, down low, sucking the guilt,
the shame, the ugly, the dark, the
twisted, the inadequateness of what
I am, what I live, breath, seek during
the spinning moments of my life: where
I bring myself to account ere I am
summoned to a reckoning. I would
not want to be judged by God in this
mood of darkness for I would always
be found wanting and would descend
to the lowest abyss day after day, perhaps
simply due to a chemical deficiency,
imbalance that sends me into the most
profound state of feeling and thought
amounting to a sickness unto death,
pure physiology, a balancing factor
that keeps my ego from being that veil
which, in the end, will shut out the Light.

Ron Price

10 May 1998

A BALLET OF STILLNESS

So much of our life is passed in a fuzzy, undefined feeling state that an
encounter with the form of that fuzziness-is shocking, thrilling, beautiful.
-J. L. Borges in *The Invention of the Real*, Richard Stern, University of
Georgia Press, Athens, 1982, p.32.

Your red beards deceptively smile
at me from outside the window
and your red pistils or anthers,
the female part, always cocked,
ready for action at the end of
your long green stem, protected
in a pot, on this brick pavement
on this first Saturday in spring.
In the breeze you lift your
white and yellow petals in
the gentlest dance, all stepping
in unison through the air in
coloured choreography,
a professional parade here
in the theatre of this garden,
a ballet of grace and charm,
cool, pure delight, lifting,

swaying and stillness.

Ron Price

5 September 1998

1 orchids

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A BOUNTIFUL DREAM

Writing involves a becoming of the self, a creating of the self, of a life as a work of art. It involves a passage, an entrance, an exit, a dwelling place filled with desire to know, to do and to be, a soaring, a production of thought and an account of life. It involves a reliving of old images and memories, their reverberation and redefinition. Writing is an attempt to create a bracing effect on readers so that they, too, see an image, an idea, as if for the first time.

-Ron Price from *Passionate Sociology*, Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe, Sage Pub., London, 1996.

To brace the reader like a cold wind
on my face as it cuts sharp and dumbing
is too difficult to do most of the time,
unless the reader shares some deep intensity
and I can make of my words some entrance,

some passage, some dwelling place for their
soul where it can crystallize around my flickering
presence and enjoy a profound engagement
with my articulate self as it seems to meet
the insides of another human being and their
private, colloquial world of light amidst their
outer world of darkness. 'Tis a vision pondered
long. Is it plausible I can achieve it? Is it a fiction,
real? Is it real, fictitious? A bountiful dream!1

Ron Price
8 December 1998

1 this poem draws on Emily Dickinson's poem number 646, the last two stanzas.

A

CERTAIN DILETTANTISM

Robert Dessaix has been involved in public broadcasting in Australia for many years. He is a writer, an intellectual, who was interviewed this afternoon on ABC TV. I have always enjoyed listening to his provocative questioning on Books and Writing a program on ABC Radio. I have also enjoyed his seriousness. I was slightly surprised when I heard him speak of "looking for a sacred vision" when he was interviewed by Andrea Stretton.

-Ron Price with thanks to ABC TV, "Sunday Afternoon", 2:55-3:05 pm.

You always seemed like someone who did not belong
here in this Antipodean mileux of wit and witticism.
I don't know you really. How can one know a voice
on a radio, year after year, even with this interview?
Dilettantism, bliss and joy first, with happiness second,
from some kaleidoscope of spontaneity: to take this
through life, being here, being there, in language. Well
I have, Robert. I have. It may go somewhere. It may lead
to some ultima Thule. But, for now, it leads to such pleasure
that bliss is the only word, far exceeding happiness, as you say,
but I hesitate to blow the trumpet on this private treasure. It is
an effusive entity rooted in, wellspring of, a solemn consciousness.

Ron Price
18 October 1998

A COMPLEX FATE

I find the imagery that Roger White uses very penetrating, especially in his last published work Occasions of Grace: More Poems and Portrayals with George Ronald. I have borrowed here quite heavily from White in part two of that book and tried to draw the imagery into one perspective in the process making God

feminine.

-Ron Price

You have brought me a sea of names,
of heros, of saints, history, what history!
And language, what beauty of phrase,
of word, wondrous, for poets like me.
You brought me lounge rooms, everywhere
I've been, shelves of books, God, plates of
food and drink, a complex fate spread over
two hemispheres and a universe for my head.
But what have I given You, Woman of Delight:
Whose breasts have poured forth all I need of
milk and honey? Who embraces me and moves
me into the danger? Dark Darling Whose black
hair fans and falls entrancingly?
Strange the journey in Your burning stream.
You pin on my lips Your burning kiss, while
passing lights cast fleeting green tints that
struggle in Your hair like trapped starlight.
Oh this hot alliance forged in bed and in my head,
long ago! Could be sundered in a breath and some
chilly inner self I would regain with some stranger
speeding to my door. What sweet wisdom this
coupling brings! With hair disarranged, this panting
boy, fully aroused; and She truly naked, oh what lust!
The greatest lust: to speak and be listened to somewhere
in the soul, as a crazed hot wind mutters apocalyptically
and my perceptions endlessly shift and shimmer in this
parched and grainy land with its sandy convolutions.

Ron Price

22 November 1998

A COOL DISTANT CLIME

The poet tries to render the essence of experiences, to pronounce words that lie
at the bottom of an experience like stones in a stream, to express his most
private feelings which turn out to be the feelings of everyone else as well.

-Howard Nelson discussing Galway Kinnell, *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell: The
Wages of Dying*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1987, pp.8-10.

Sometimes I feel as if the world
is spinning by and somehow I got
left off the spin; even want to be
left off the spin; an emptiness sits
down low with a gladness I have
come to know that saves me heat,
words that glow, safe from intensity's

seed which grows. Instead a cool and distant clime fills my soul, slides down my spine. I feel alone, out on a limb, so I people my aloneness with His silent words, with my own sweet melody and kindle mine own soul, listening, always listening quietly for the hearts of all men.

Ron Price
20 February 1998

A

DIFFERENT SOPHISTICATION

I came across J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* in 1962, just before stepping into the pioneering arena.. It had little impact on me at the time. Recently I read several analyses of the book, Salinger's sophisticated writing and a biography of the man. After reading these commentaries I felt there was an interesting comparison and contrast with Bahá'í experience in the last half of the twentieth century; and a relevant lesson to any writer who becomes popular and wants desperately to preserve his privacy.

-Ron Price

The year you¹ set off in search of a retreat we went to one hundred new countries, the biggest spread in any one year in our history.

We were in retreat from corrupt America just like you, but we played it differently with our ever onward and outward Plans than you and your Zen which was just beginning to make its mark on men, then.²

Space, solitude, silence and self-sufficiency seemed to be the core of your dream, all your life after *Catcher in the Rye* made you famous and you withdrew into anonymity.

The teenage revolution began about the same time and millions saw their problems, endless sensitivities, spiritual aloneness, silent suffering, withdrawal, the drying of their hope and wonder in your skilful words. You spoke a language that resonated throughout America in the ninth and early tenth states of history³, my teenage and adult years.

The voice that I had found, had heard, had resonating in my inward being as I walked through silent streets alone, or at night as I read in my bed, or at meetings in my home was far removed from your's. It was a

nightingale's that sang on the twigs of the
Tree of Eternity with holy and sweet melodies,
subtle, silent and of the rarest sophistication,⁴
plummeting my soul outward across the planet.

And now, I seek that same solitude and silence,
after three dozen years of endless outreach.
I have learned from your sad days and ways, as
I make my own way through the minefield that
publicity offers up. I enjoy the freedom from the
great publicity and media machines that our world
has thrown up on the detritus of a dieing age and yours:
how long, how long? Will this poetry remain forever in
Obscurity?

Ron Price

29 January 1998

1 J. D. Salinger published *Catcher in the Rye* in 1951 and set off for a winter retreat in late 1952. In some ways this marks the beginning of his search for solitude and anonymity that characterized the rest of his life. See *In Search of J.D. Salinger: A Biography*, Ian Hamilton, Random House, NY, 1988, p. 132.

2 Suzuki's Zen texts were first published in the USA in 1949, but it was not until 1953 that they began to make their mark. That was the year of the opening of the Bahá'í temple in Chicago and the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth as the Guardian characterized this event in *God Passes By*.

3 *Catcher in the Rye* started to really sell and be reviewed in 1956.(*ibid.*,p.155) It was one of the most popular books in the last years of the Ten Year Plan and in the first quarter-century of the tenth stage of history.(1963-1988)

4 one of the meanings of sophisticated is "to deprive of simplicity". I do not find the Bahá'í writings 'simple', or characterized by 'simplicity.' Indeed they are, as a body, quite complex. They "can be read over and over without understanding." (John Hatcher, *The Ocean of His Words*, Wilmette, 1997, p.7.)

A DIVINE SPARK

In the years after the birth of Shaykh Ahmad in 1753, the years of the birth of three revolutions in the West in the last half of the eighteenth century, the key word came to be 'delight' and the key concept 'liberation' with a sense of fun as a human right. And today, we are still in the middle of the effects these revolutions spawned. The spiritual revolution that came from Shaykh Ahmad has only stuck its head above the ground.

The Renaissance established the dignity of man. The Industrial Revolution established the unity of nature. Each was a step, a stride in the ascent of man. The spiritual revolution associated with the precursors of the Bab, Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim(1753-1844), was one whose implications the world has yet to even dimly appreciate.

Ron Price with thanks to Jacob Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*, BBC, London, 1973, p.286.

While you were growing, hatching
and dreaming your dreams, sweeter
than honey was His venom on your
lips, the world was changing through
revolutionary forces, unknown to you,
to anyone: a great sense of oneness of
nature, all in all, power, gushing, flowing,
growing, new passions for knowledge,
as if the world was impregnated, not just
in your hinterland of Bahrain, fertilized by
your sublime detachment, not just in England
in its aristocracy of working talent where the
working class had always been in poverty and
darkness, not just in France where new men
were knocking at the door. A heroic age had
been born: a liberation from hunger, dirt and
disease. Private decency at last, man a carrier
of a divine spark capable of delight, capable of fun.

Ron Price
8 February 1998

1 Shaykh Ahmad was born in 1753 in the hinterland of Bahrain in what is now
Saudi Arabia.

A DREAM OF STONE

Another poem Baudelaire wrote was called Beauty which begins with the opening
line:

Conceive me as a dream of stone. In my poem below, taking the lead of this line
from Baudelaire, I imagine myself as a 'dream of stone' in the Bahá'í gardens
in Haifa.

-Ron Price, See Reverse Side for Baudelaire's Poem.

Conceive me as a dream of stone,
my breast with mortals, quite alone,
who find they prompt this poet's love,
part of this holy place, its peace, above.

You'll find me near a terraced curve,
a marble pillar, blood and nerve.
I never laugh; I never weep.
Peace at last, eternal sleep.

In studious awe others brood,
before this monumental good,
now enshrined in timeless light,

frozen in words of might and right.

At last I've come to sit on high,
looking down from far off sky.
I see these sacred precincts, dust,
terraced gardens, holiness. It must
endure forever down time's lane,
producing worlds quite free of pain.
This place where angels dance and sing,
unknown to men who daily bring
devotion, love and prayers like rain.

Ron Price
23 May 1998

A

FLICKERING PRESENCE

Randall Jarrell says that he "learned all there is to know about one woman" in the three volumes of Emily Dickinson's poetry published in 1955. He found there an "almost intolerable intimacy" in which experience was expressed "at its most nearly absolute." Dickinson, he said, was daemonic, ridiculously human, entirely immortal. Her poems are worth more than anyone is ever likely to pay for them. If one is interested in the essentially mystic quality of religion, one could do no better than study this poetic, mystic genius. This is what poems written by such a genius should be like.

-Ron Price with thanks to Randall Jarrell, "The Year in Poetry", Harper's, October 1955.

She's a flickering presence
on whom I attempt again
my profound engagement,
my imaginative reconstruction,
to crystallize my attitudes to
her investment in this single
reader, her unfinished poems,
her linguistic enactments,
her love of the soul's
endurance, her love of
reading—its bodily, highly
affective sensations, emptying
out of the articulate self for
the sake of the Other.

Ron Price
21 June 1998

Whatever the believer's local conditions the celebration of a Feast is an experience of collectivity, even if he is alone. Imagination's light brings to that believer an energy and creativity associated with a century long process of beautification and spiritualization on Mt. Carmel. He is conscious of a century-long, virtually uninterrupted, period of divine guidance and an acceptance from this sacred spot; he has access to a fascinating, global and historic experience. He is not alone. He is part of a glorious convergence, an arena of democracy, a gift-giving of thought.

-Ron Price with thanks to Horace Holley, *Religion for Mankind*, George Ronald, 1956, p. 108; and *The Universal House of Justice*, 27 August 1989.

The women start to get ready earlier than the men. They always seem to have more to do to themselves, perhaps because they see themselves more in terms of their adornments. I'd got the agenda finished in the late afternoon, so all the paperwork was ready. Forty years on, the Feasts had become part of my bio-rhythm, life's sequence and pattern for me and the few, always the few, in some one's house, their lounge room and spreading into the kitchen and home by 10:30, three hours, holy days were very much the same; for the individual is limited as to his social usefulness, his responsibility, his temperament. And the prophet only exists in the consciousness of men as: personality, human life, character, destiny, inner activity, where conscience is the emerging policy of the group, where my feelings are socialized and my imagination brings a descent of holy guidance from a sacred spot now embellished so magnificently.

Ron Price
3 May 1998

A FRESH CONFIGURATION

I like to see history, at least in part, as the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment.¹ The small part that I play, my contribution to this end, I do through my creations, my poems, through overcoming, as far as I am able, 'the inherent consecutiveness of language' and 'the reader's normal expectation of sequence.'² I try, too, to rescue things from mere objectness so that they might be seen as if for the first time. To do this requires the creation of a fresh, a unique context, one that delights the intellect and refreshes the spirit. To do this in each poem is a challenge, one that can be met fully only on occasion.

-Ron Price with thanks to 1 Richard Jackson, *The Dismantling of Time in Contemporary Poetry*, University of Alabama Press, London, 1988, p.272; and

Charles Simic, *ibid.*, p.267.

If I could re-orient your world here,
take the web of time and make it strong,
tough as steel but gentler than rain;

If I could show you there is no one "I",
but many, that you are some organizing
principle, some composite of the transient
and the eternal; the contingent and the absolute;

If I could show you that here was a starting
place for your inquiry into being, a device to
recover a state of pure expectancy, of mind;

If I could show you that these words could
bring back more, could let language's secrets
speak to you, summon you, fleetingly and
distantly touch you with their unique voice;

something in you might emerge into time,
like some fresh configuration of radiation
after the Big Bang, some evidence that you
existed, a feeling for your own existence.

Ron Price

7 March 1998

A JUDICIOUS BALANCE

Stephen Spender suggests that the qualities of profound understanding, courage and genius, morality and humanity in the novelist Henry James were not acquired from observation but from: remoteness, from journeys far into himself and from being immersed in a sense of beauty amounting to a flood of poetry. He was a man whose life had drawn far into himself. He was ultimately lonely, but with strong feelings regarding the events of his life and what he came in touch with. He was, therefore, acutely part of his world and his times, although this world became less and less enticing for him. He saw it as a mere mad panorama, a phantasmagoria, a museum, but still an organic unity. His job was to describe this unity, to create it through his writing. To do this he retired more and more into the inventions of his own mind.

-Ron Price with thanks to Stephen Spender, *The Destructive Element: A Study of Modern Writers and Beliefs*, Folcroft Literary Editions, 1977, pp.47-66.

I strive to live and watch and judge
to the utmost and relate my microcosm
to the macro and to all that is history
and the future in this grand immensity.

I do not see poetry as some simple
rhyme-scheme, but a taking of all
that is and all that might be and
turning it to my ends, to my words.

And so I try to come to grips with
what is my world by plunging into
it and remaining a spectator in
judicious balance, prudent resolution.

The so-called artistic temperament
and its intense sensations making
now a new world, which we have seen
coming in these wilderness days.¹

Yes, there is tragedy, immense
quantities of tears and death,
but there is light, an apotheosis
on that mountain, that holy spot.

Ron Price
13 November 1998

1 the first half century of the 'Kingdom of God on earth'(1953-2003: God Passes
By) has been a period, a wilderness period, in a dark heart of an age of
transition; but light, pure and glorious light, has also been part of the
experience of those years. This light has its apotheosis now on Mt. Carmel.

A LOT OF HEAT

Robert Frost said that humans must live by craft and courage to keep the world
from hurrying and crowding them too much. Then, if they're poets, while they're
lying low, poems will emerge from an inner land and there will be no need to
ask if the poems are good ones. The poem can begin in a lump in the throat, a
sense of wrong, homesickness, a tantalizing vagueness, necessity, that inner
world like some dusky dwelling and the outcome is always quite unforeseen.
-Ron Price with thanks to Natalie Bober, *A Restless Spirit: The Story of Robert
Frost*, Atheneum, NY, 1981, pp.179-180; and R.M. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*,
W.W. Norton, NY, p.20.

This religion generates a lot of heat:
martyrs, fasting, a rich literary corpus
and endless talk. You wonder how you
ever could have lasted all those years—
forty now—through all those towns
where noone believed but you and some
little band. There was always a great
mass, a significant other, who helped
you Define yourself, although you didn't
even know it at the time in all those places

from the tundra to the semi-desert, the savanna to the temperate rainforest. And even now in this vast city, a heterogeneity helps you define your solitude, your aloneness and your seriousness. People in community, the greatest show on earth, mystery everywhere generating lots of heat and the mind's memories swiftly tracing their paths through your days and years.

Ron Price
5 January 1998

A MOMENT

After getting my customary books and videos from the libraries in Perth, as was my custom on Friday afternoons, with the sun beginning to set low in the sky, I was just about to get into my sun-faded grey Holden Camira, recently damaged in a car accident, when my eye caught a young woman's hair dancing gold in the sun. For two or three seconds my eye, too, danced and then I, and she, were gone.

-Ron Price, 4:50 pm, Friday, 15 May 1998: Curtin University carpark.

I caught her golden hair,
red-blend against the car
door, bitumin-dull black,
pure blue everywhere,
exquisitely crafted by the
gods, curvature designed
by immortal beings, always
a token of some glorious
handiwork that remains for-
ever beyond my grasp, veiled,
an immemorial being, an ancient
eternity formed for my eye, my
love, to engrave on her my sense
of wondrous beauty, a moment,
a small spot of fragrance, of
melodious sweetness, of
transcendent delight to my vision.

Ron Price
15 May 1998

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Ron Price
15 May 1998

A MORE ENTICING BREW

There are many forms and shapes in the phenomenal world in which beauty can be found. The female body, associated as it is with beauty, motherhood, the feminine, with the erotic, with lust, with love, is for millions of human beings a form of such exquisite attractiveness that it attracts the eye and the mind more than any other form in creation, especially is this true for men.

-Ron Price

Something soft and gentle attracts the eye,
a series of perfect forms everywhere and
surfaces endowed with unexcelled and
exquisite beauty, the world's cynosure,
centre, of endless attractions, God's
finest hour, multiplied a billion times
and a billion and then some, again and
again, curves folding in and down, that
take the eye up-and-up, down-and-down
into darkness, swellings, indentations of
indescribable intimacy and satisfaction
to the eye, the hand, the mind, the touch---

But they are not mine; they are not for me,

for my touch. Laws and customs, mores and folkways, a choice wine now unsealed with the fingers of might and power, a richer, smoother, finer wine than all the sparkling, enticing brews, countenances and forms, curves, gentle liftings and dark moist places. An ocean for these fish, did they but know it, if they fish are ever to swim in this earthly ocean: vast, encompassing, pervasive. And we must drink this richer wine, this Mystic Wine, or we will drown in that exquisite and unexcelled beauty.

Ron Price
22 November 1998

A MYSTERIOUS FORCE

One of the things we may find out with definitiveness during the first decade that the Centre for the Study of the Texts is open is the beginning of life on earth. It is still an open question with the latest theory of origins associated with hydrothermal vents at the bottom of the ocean.

-Ron Price with thanks to The Science Show, ABC Radio, 24 October 1998, 12:40-1:30 pm.

We've got DNA going back to 3.8 billion years ago. Life, that catalyst which makes things react, may just have begun with superhot mineral water producing the first living molecules near underwater volcanoes—the origins of this life are still mysterious as we forge another mysterious lifeform, an Order, a System, based on the crystal gems, the immense flowering of a new force, a new Revelation and its interpretation over the last century and a half.

Ron Price
24 October 1998

A NEW AGENDA

Samuel Taylor Coleridge published his revised edition of "The Ancient Mariner" in 1817. Originally written in 1798 shortly after that ancient mariner, traveller, religious reformer/mystic named Shaykh Ahmad had arrived and was travelling through Persia, this poem and recent events on Mt. Carmel inspired the writing of the poem below.

-Ron Price

But tell me, tell me! Speak again!
Why do you drive on and on so fast
carving up the mountain side, making
a ship in such a scheme so vast?

'Tis a place secure in stormy blast,
safety in great measure.
It must be built whate'er the cost.
'Tis destined unearthly treasure.

But tell me, tell me! Speak again!
What is this ship to do
when all the pieces are in place,
and blood and violence, all anew?

Do you think that global peace
will bring the end of night?
It may just be that this ship
of state will sail into the light--

across a pang, a curse of death,
a stoney road and twisted,
with fear and dread far, far from gone,
clenched jaws and knuckles fisted.

The game has really just begun.
Traces left of light just done.
They lit my hair and fanned my cheek,
kept me on an endless run.

They mingled strangely with my fears,
seemed so often unobtrusive,
as the ship flew swiftly in,
on endless notes effusive.

Now that this ship, this arc, is ready,
this dream of joy up there,
let me be awake, my God
for this trip so rare.

A little distance from the prow,
crimson shadows do impart;
a seraph-band it waves while
silence sinks like music on my heart.

A dash of oars I soon do hear.

I hear the Captain call;
the crew does cheer, the boat does sail:
civilization's dark night does fall.

While the darkest dark does fall
a light spreads in greater splendour
to every corner of the globe
outlining quite a new agenda.

Ron Price
25 July 1998

OUR EPOCHAL DIALOGUE

This place of supernal wisdom which intoxicates, which restores the marvellous teachers of humanity, the many defenders of the Faith, the soldiers of divine learning: from thee light goes forth to all peoples, the resonance of a new word is heard, poetry and philosophy meet in a reciprocal and mystic tongue, in an inimitable idiom that has scarcely touched the world. What we have here over more than a century and a half, is a new centre being born. Clearly the old centre has not held; only its shell remains.

-Ron Price with thanks to Kevin D.S. Murray, *The Judgement of Paris: Recent French Theory in a Local Context*, Allen and Unwin, 1992, Introduction.

This Centre is emerging, still unobtrusively,
in country after country,
centre after centre,
chrysalis-like,
so quietly as to pose no threat,
yet,
amidst such chaos and confusion
as to keep people's minds in a
state of frenetic passivity,
endless activity,
contradictory complexity,
multi-facedness,
in an epochal dialogue
of a million voices.

Ron Price
3 December 1998

A NEW ENIGMA

Roger White wrote a perceptive poem "Ask in Persepolis" in *Another Song Another Season* (George Ronald, 1979, pp.114-115) in which he asked and answered a rhetorical question 'why should we honour these martyrs?' In this poem below I borrow some of White's poetic form to discuss a new martyr. In this Formative Age there is a new martyr: the international pioneer, the homefront pioneer,

indeed a wide range of types and roles in the Bahá'í community. In many ways this 'new age', this Formative Age, martyr is even more unknown than many thousands of the twenty thousand martyrs who gave their very lives in a single act of sacrifice. This new martyr is enigmatic in quite a different way from the martyr of the Heroic Age. And there may be hundreds of thousands of them spread out over the several epochs of the Divine Plan.

Why should we honour those who:
went to endless meetings year after year
even when their senses and reason often
told them it was an utter waste of time?

Why should we honour those who:
went to the ends of the earth as
what we call pioneers to teach a
Faith all their life when no one was
interested in it at all at the time?

Why should we honour those who:
remained unknown soldiers marching
quietly to an Unknown Drummer in a
world that had had enough of noisy
marchers for a thousand different causes?

Why should we honour those who:
were often sick, afraid, lonely, confused,
embittered, depressed, in short, just
ordinarily ordinary, just humanly human?

Why should we honour those who:
learned to people their solitude and be
alone in a crowd, but still suffered the
slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
while shuffling about this mortal coil?

Why should we honour those who:
followed a vapoury image believing
it to be real, died unflamboyant deaths,
leaving little of the story of their days?

Historian, pray judge it well:
Why you honour those who took
The path to heaven, or to hell.

Ron Price
27 January 1998

A NEW OBSESSION

Charles Baudelaire wrote the poem *Obsession* in a tone and mood that reflected the sadness of so much of his life especially after 1844 until his death in 1867. This period was also a sad and tragic one at the start of the heroic age of the Bahá'í Era. The great redemptive forces in this new Faith and the gradual and legitimate institutionalization of the charisma that initiated this new revelation is responsible for this poem below which strikes a different tone and mood than Baudelaire's.

Forest, you sooth me and my tired heart!
Your roaring awakens me and stills the
agony within, as prayer creates that quiet
centre and from the depths I hear neither
weariness nor trouble.

Ocean, I hear you! I recognize the tears
and sorrows of my own despair, the bitter-
salt of vanity and its repetitions, a man who
must return as endless waves to the battle.

Night, you please me! Always with your stars
which speak a language of silence I know well.
I long for darkness, silence and that nothingness
when the moon slices cool in ice so clear yellow.

There are hordes now of vanished souls
whose eyes acknowledge mine from their
home within His precincts, from a heavenly
river, from a banquet of grace and trust,
of gifts and bestowals in a garden of happiness.

Ron Price
1998

A NEW RELIGION BREAKS OVER THE ARBITRARY

“I”

The central question “Why am I me?” comes after Rabbit awakes with the excited conviction that he must find a new religion. Updike was puzzled by the arbitrariness of the omnivorous and somehow preexistent “I” specifically situated as it was amidst the billions of other specks in the universe.

-John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, 1960, discussed in *Desperate Faith*, Howard Harper, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1967, p. 168.

You were a clever dude, John,
looking as you were for the
thing behind everything and
seeing, as you did, the death
of God again in your generation
--and this, all this in your smooth
poetic statement¹ describing the
suburban wasteland, as a new

religion was breaking on the scene,
just seen, as unobtrusive as a summer
breeze, while you watched the English
muddle through, patching things up
with responsibility rippling out over
the water and slowly, slowly, vanishing.

Ron Price
12 April 1998

1 John Updike broke out into the literary world in the middle years of the Ten Year Crusade, while I was investigating the Baha'i Faith. His first works The Poorhouse Fair(1958), The Same Door(1959), Rabbit, Run(1960) and The Centaur(1963), among others, were written while the Baha'i community was still significantly less than half a million in number globally, but thinly and widely spread.

A PARADISE BEDECKED WITH ROSES

The world I have grown up in and matured as an adult, in these first several epochs of the Formative Age, at least since my first contact with the Cause in 1953, has been one in which the perspicuous verses of Bahá'u'lláh majestically apply: Paradise is decked with mystic roses, and hell hath been made to blaze with the fire of the impious. This world has indeed become both a paradise and hell and the pioneer is caught, with everyone else, in a rapid cross-fire of the forces of integration and destruction, of seeming heaven and hell.

-Ron Price with appreciation to Bahá'u'lláh's words above from Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 133.

I try to bring alive an age,
the first century of the Formative,
with new feelings, thoughts, a
composition on a time, an epoch,
the start of an era, as I adjust,
define, the texture of this new
Kingdom,¹ its source and origins,
to describe the continuities over
these years and their awesome
complexity and wonder.

As I head for retirement² and
unravel the special sense of these
hours that bedeck paradise with
roses,³ I can taste that invisible
world, as my psyche withdraws
and I slip to the edge, the periphery,
to an abyss of nothingness where
crystal waters flow and my soul is

cultivated in a poetic melange, in
caverns where voices lead and melodies
from His immense and beneficent tranquillity.

Ron Price

22 November 1998

- 1 Kingdom of God on Earth began in 1953 when the first contact of my family with the Cause began.
- 2 I hope to retire at the age of 55 to some part of Tasmania. I am now 54.
- 3 Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Wilmette, 1962(1941), p.131. Paradise is realized in this world within this sacred Cause. See Robert McLaughlin, These Perspicuous Verses, George Ronald, Oxford, 1982, p. 80.

A POETIC JOURNEY

Price's mind teemed with phrases, images and ideas from literature, history, sociology, literary analysis, psychology, media studies, philosophy and religion and from his own experiences. These fields of study, among others, and his personal experiences provided fixed points of reference and energizers of his associational and improvisational processes. Such processes were always at work in his writing. The pressure on him was not constant but, since 1992, there was a steady stream of poetry that resulted from what seemed like an endless stream of stimulation. This poetry allowed him to canalize the stimulation that poured in from his reading, his thinking and his experiences into neat packages. It allowed him to express an emotional and visionary balance; to mobilize a sequence of thought-images; and to define his poetic journey. -Ron Price with thanks to M.L. Rosenthal, *Sailing into the Unknown: Yeats, Pound and Eliot*, Oxford UP, NY, 1978, p. 115.

There is an aliveness here,
some rich interplay of life
providing a vital modern
poetry, some spin-off from
those two Holy Years and
a forty year hiatus,¹ hardly
known, unknown, growing
like a seed before and during
this dark heart of an age of
transition. Found, born, in
this tenth stage of history,
forming in a Formative Age
of epochal shifts also unknown
to a world out of kilter's joint.

Ron Price

10 October 1998

- 1 I started writing seriously in 1992, forty years after the first Holy Year in

1952/3. I like to see my poetry as a spin-off from the energies released by this two significant years.

A POETRY LIKE RAIN

All my journeying from place to place across two continents and into innumerable towns and cities, my endless emotional and sexual choices, my religious faith, the thousands of books read and skimmed involved self-transformation, the work of Israfil and the laying down of endless tracks of poetry. This self-transformation is a process of development and self-surrender; this Israfil is a breathing of life into my world; this poetry brings order, rhythm and pattern into this ordinary life.

-Ron Price with thanks to Richard Davenport-Hines, Auden, Heinemann, London, 1995, p.3.

Striving for integration,
struggling to unify experience,
synthesizing all that comes my way,
to organize my scattered thoughts
into a living whole: everything
related to everything within a
new tradition, born the other day,
before Freud, Weber, Marx, Darwin—
shall I say shortly after the French
Revolution—now richly tapestried
with heroes, saints, myths, an incredible
array of the most beautiful buildings in
the world and a poetry descended like
a rain from heaven: mystic, sweet, profound.

Ron Price
4 September 1998

A QUIET PLACE

Much, if not all, of my poetry is either indiscipherable to those who do not have the intellectual route-maps to chart its meaning and significance, or of no interest at all to those who do not share my disinterested, non-utilitarian investment in metaphorical and autobiographical literary form. A certain aesthetic attitude is required to enjoy this poetry. Pierre Bourdieu sees this aesthetic attitude in terms of what he calls “cultural capital”. This cultural capital requires a certain degree of leisure time, material security and freedom from manual activities; also a cultural inheritance, knowledge and belief in a specific tradition of religious experience. -Ron Price with thanks to Bridget Fowler, *The Alienated Reader: Women and Popular Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, NY, 1991, pp. 116-117.

The reception of my poems is socially

structured, dependent on the interpretive framework in which it is seen: nothing glittering, no vivid forms, here, no familiar ritual from the electric aesthetic of electronic media and their soporific entertainments. This busy world with endless running and burgeoning quantities of print and people will one day find a quiet place, an even pace, and then these words I now write on this page may tell a story worth reading, convey a texture worth remembering.

Ron Price
13 March 1998

A

QUIVERING SENSIBILITY

Our lives continually pass through periods of crisis, stages of transition, in which the balance achieved up to then must be destroyed and another one created. Each new relationship, each new job, is a death and a birth at the same time. The new is part of a fascination with the imaginary, with fantasies, an answer to an inner call from an external world that impregnates and obsesses us in terms of inner images, meanings, realities. The crises we pass through are enmeshed in these inner images.

-Ron Price with thanks to Aldo Carotenuto, *The Call of the Daimon*, Chiron Publications, Wilmette, Illinois, 1989, p. 126.

There are many selves that write here, a multiplicity of inner voices that are always changing in multilayered focal points and plural universes, daemons who invite the angels, tensions which accept a 'lostness', an 'emptiness' within an inner place of refuge in this quiet room where books line the walls, soft music plays low, hardly audible, and one feeds one's soul in some new dimension beyond this narrow confine, a place where I can redesign my life, beyond these rooms and halls where the air has become stale and dry and the call from my inner life had ceased: for always the road is long, stoney, thorny, narrow with a little bit of death lingering on the pavement, with glimmerings of light and a touch, a bit-of-a-grip, an anchorage, as emotion plays in different ways than once it did a music in such a different key which I have grown to love, feel its strength, its quivering sensibility and its sad refrain.

Ron Price
20 May 1998

A ROAD TO POETRY

LOVE'S RENEWAL

"What sort of an education should a poet have?" There are probably as many answers as poets, or individuals with thoughts on the matter. I don't think I'd be in any way prescriptive in defining a poet's education. There were many roads that led to my writing poetry as extensively as I do and, as I have, in the last seven years. A certain exhaustion and emotional weariness with the experiences of the everyday: job and career, Bahá'í activities and their associated formal and informal interactions, familial and marital life and its attendant frustrations, a range of dead ends in a sequence of towns going back perhaps as far as the beginning of my pioneering days in 1962, the loss of any pretensions to youthfulness and the beginning of life's physical decline. I had to recreate, redefine, renew the meaning centres in my life. They were drying up by the early 1990s. Writing poetry seemed to be a natural evolution, like some root feeding insatiably, as Roger White puts it, on the heart's thin soil. Love renewed "itself under the cool metallic stars."¹

-Ron Price with thanks to Lee Bartlett for the question in *Talking Poetry: Conversations in the Workshop with Contemporary Poets*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987, p.95; and 1 Roger White, *The Witness of Pebbles*, George Ronald, Oxford, 1981, p.71.

Books were too big
and essays too long
a way to go about
saying what you
wanted to say. And
poems seemed to be
a natural way to try
to get at it, short and
to the point; and there
were so many points,
if you were tired of
talking and didn't like
gardening, meetings
or TV much any more.

Ron Price
30 October 1998

A ROW OF WIND-BLOWN POPLARS

I'm sure that my Mother is perfectly indifferent whether her name is remembered by most of the human race whom she never came to know. If one of

her thoughts could be of benefit to someone, however, I am confident that would please her. I have many fond memories of my Mother; I like to think this pleases her. That I would write a poem about a “row of wind-blown poplars,” which she so often spoke of, would also bring her some measure of delight.
-Ron Price, “In Memory of My Mother”.

Soft and green, warms in my palm.
I got it from a tree.
It could have been a tree she saw
years before I’d been.

A row of wind-blown poplars
she wrote of on that page.
When I was small she read it,
though I know she was no sage.

She was very near the age I am
when those poplars caught her eye;
then she went on to her final years
as I will tomorrow before I, too, will die.

Ron Price
14 March 1998

A SENSE OF UNITY

Poetry is the great stimulation of life. Poetry leads past possession of self to transfiguration beyond gender. Poetry is redemption from pessimism. It has required, for me anyway, peace, familiar surroundings, sheltered isolation, protection for privacy, enough financial security to make money no worry, enough tranquillity in employment to reinforce the peacefulness.-Ron Price with thanks to Susan Howe, My Emily Dickinson, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, Cal., 1985, p. 138.

There is a silent loading here,
as if a gun keeps still.
I walk with Him but never know
if what I say could kill.

These words are softer than the down
of all the birds at sea
and with them I define my world’s
desire and the core of me.

This is as close as I can come
to my identity.
This is what I would simply
call a sense of unity.

Ron Price
14 March 1998

A SHAPING POWER

I write this autobiography, these short and self-contained units called poems, as a self-appointed representative of the Bahá'í community, to embody in this record of my time and my deeds on this earth my vision of the nature and aspirations of this emerging world religion, its grand design and promise. I also want to embody the odors, shapes, colours, sounds and the feel of things with as great a precision as I am able from the turbulent stream of my experience and that of my community.

But I am only one representative. There are thousands, millions, who could be more adequate representatives of this community than I. This is the record of my struggle and others, a community. This is simply part of a great epic, the special shapes and tensions of the epic that is Bahá'í history. This epic fixes our imagination on the whole, society, the external as well as on the individual human being. Here in my autobiographical poetry is a hunger to define the essence of a way of life and comprehend its history in all its grand complexity and simplicity. -Ron Price with thanks to C. Hugh Holman, *The Loneliness at the Core*, Louisiana State UP, NY, 1975, pp. 164-167.

There is a shaping power here:

to help me define that ordered
cosmos out of a seemingly teeming
and fecund chaos where my imagination
voyages, touching clarity in its quest and
lending glory to my dry and troubled dust.

to help me bring all this meaning
in my experience, all this hunger,
literal, this discovery, coming from
a sense of loss now, a sense of ransom,
freeing a precious jewel-gem, honey
nectar from history's prison cell.

to help my obsessive intensity,
my gargantuan effort to encompass
an exhaustion of faith¹, an immense
chasm in society, the permeation
of this new Revelation and an
intensified search for understanding.

to help me wreak out my vision
of this new way, this new world,
this Bahá'í community, to the best
of my ability, with an unswerving
devotion, integrity and purity of
purpose that shall not be menaced,
altered or weakened by anyone.

Ron Price
4 October 1998

1 Bahá'í International Community, Bahá'u'lláh, NY, 1991, p.15.

A SHIP OF MASSIVE PROPORTIONS

The Guardian's vision of the ten stages of history, described in his Ridvan message of 1953, delivered in Chicago, provides a seminal statement, a foundation perspective on the global view of history that is part of what I could call *la longue duree* to borrow a term from the *annale* school of modern historians, part of the teleological, providential paradigm of Baha'i history. The Baha'i view is centred in a belief in progress through providential control.

-Ron Price

Just as the Queen Mary was establishing herself in the North Atlantic¹ we launched a different ship of absolutely massive proportions. She would be the greatest vessel to ever sail on the seas of this earth. It would involve the greatest drama in the world's spiritual history: an international teaching campaign. These were the days of the great ocean liners: the sixth, seventh and eighth stages of history, before the jet took over in the ninth stage.² And twenty-five years after this campaign began I went pioneering on the homefront,³ eight months before the onset of the tenth stage of history. By then, if you wanted to get somewhere fast you went by air not water. I write this poem this way to define as precisely as I can where I fit in to history's complex scheme and where I am in a world of many theories and paradigms.

Ron Price
29 January 1998

1 The Queen Mary was the fastest liner in the world in April 1937 when the international campaign of teaching was begun. This ship and the Elizabeth, built as passenger liners, were crucial in the speeding up of WW2. Churchill said these two great vessels took two years off the war due to their troop carrying capacity.

2 6th stage: 1852-1892; 7th stage: 1892-1921; 8th stage: 1921-1953; 9th stage: 1953-1963.

3 My pioneering life began on 1 September 1962.

A SPIRITUAL CORE?

A constituency of individuals willing to be won over to a new communal identity is the essential prerequisite for the evolution of that identity. -Ron Price with thanks to a Professor of History, whose name I missed, and his talk given at the Cheltenham Literary Festival in 1997, on ABC Radio National, 4 January 1998, 1:00-1:45 pm.

It has taken two or three centuries¹
to develop a British identity—Britishness—
say the theoreticians of collective identity.
Significant others: Islam, Russia, USA
helped the UK define itself
relative to an enemy.
Now the European Union
is forging yet another level of unity
through an identification with
a high cultural heritage,
an ancient culture, a mass culture
of sport and pop culture,
a normative vision of
what Europe should become
and a new European legal system.
Pan-Europeanism spreads its wings
across an old world
for L'Europe C'Est Nous
as Napoleon said to the Czar in 1807.
And now a new global ethic
is forging a universal community
of mankind, the end and object
of the highest moral endeavour—
an Enlightenment legacy.²

1 --This prose-poem was originally written in the form of a vahid, a new poetic form of 19 lines. This term was coined by the author in the booklet in which this poem first appeared. This poem of 19 lines was revised and is no longer a vahid.

--There seems to be some debate as to just how many centuries it took to forge that
identity.

2 Modernity and its Futures, editor, Stuart Hall, et al., Polity Press, Open University, 1992, p.62.

Ron Price
4 January 1998

A STATE OF MIND

William Golding seems to be telling us that an honest mind which is not foolish or simplistic, unless it pins its faith and hope on another life in another

world, has very little to build on in its struggle against utter pessimism. Dim is the solitary light, says this author of the famous *Lord of the Flies*, that shines over the bleak landscape of the modern world. Yet, however dim, it is enough to save man from utter hopelessness and the endlessly and ineradicably disappointing nature of his fellow man; and to impart meaning and purpose to artistic creation.

-Ron Price with thanks to Sylvere Monod, "William Golding's View of the Human Condition in *Free Will*", *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, editors D. Jefferson and G. Martin, Open UP, Milton Keynes, 1982, pp.258-9.

The light often feels dim and
the landscape bleak, but utter
hopelessness must be kept at
bay, away. For life must be
lived with hope, with purpose
and so overcome the ineradicable
disappointments, the inevitable
fears, moments of loneliness and
despair when you can feel the beast
within and yet live to see another
day of beauty's radiance and a
distant, warm and supernal fragrance,
with a State of Mind, peace of mind.¹

Ron Price
19 June 1998

¹ Mark Tobey, in *Mark Tobey: Art and Belief*, George Ronald, Oxford, 1984, p.36.