

Autobiographical Poetry 2003-4: Pioneering Over Four E

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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.

A FOCAL CENTRE

Sixteen days after 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid a wooden casket containing the sacred remains of the Bab in the vault prepared for it on Mt. Carmel--the North Pole was reached for the first time by Admiral Robert E. Peary. The date was April 6th 1909.-Ron Price with appreciation to Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, Wilmette, 1957, p.276.

It had been transported
amidst risks and perils,
this luminous dust,
from place to place
to this holy mountain
becoming a focal centre
of Divine illumination,
the Spot round which
the Concourse on high
circle in adoration.

And far to the north
six men reached the pole
in the days right after
the light of the Countenance
of God was lifted upon
this celestial Kaaba.

Ron Price
10 December 2003

A GLORIOUS EMERGENCE

1937 was a big year for Dizzy Gillespie. It was a big year for the Bahá'í community. 1937 was the year that the formal and organized teaching Plans of the Bahá'í community began. In 1937 Dizzy went to New York. It was here that he met Charlie Parker who also came to New York three years later in 1940. The Seven Year Plan, 1937-1944, saw a secret musical energy or fire develop in the jazz world, especially toward the end of the Plan when Charlie and Dizzy played together. It was all part of an exceptional moment in jazz and they called that moment--swing. It was full of innovation, experimentation, improvisation, heart and soul, a new artistic emotion. Dizzy represented the

intellectual core of this new music. By 1942 a new phase, a second phase, in the history, the life of jazz, had begun. The first phase had lasted from 1917 to 1942 or so Ken Burns and the producers and directors of this new TV series on jazz argued. The following prose-poem, I should add in conclusion, draws on the words of Shoghi Effendi in the collection of his letters: 1932-1946. -Ron Price with thanks to ABC TV, "Jazz: Swinging With Change-Episode 7," September 21st, 2003, 5:00-6:00 pm.

It was one of the most brilliant
episodes in the history
of the Formative Age.
The structural basis
of the Administrative Order
had been firmly laid
by these champion-builders
in the greatest collective enterprise
and the first half-century had ended.

It had been trumpeted in,
this new phase by a new sound.
It had been swung-in heart and soul,
a secret musical energy or fire which,
by 1942, saw the glorious emergence
of a firmly-welded incorruptible
Bahá'í community, assuming
its rightful place at the forefront
of the world-wide spiritual army
of Bahá'u'lláh.

Ron Price
22 September 2003

A LOST GENERATION

The first talking picture premiered on Broadway in 1926, at the end of the first stage(1922-1926)¹ of the evolution of American National Spiritual Assembly and in the middle of the first phase of Bahá'í Administration.(1922-1929)² Broadway reached an all-time peak in these years. In 1927 there were 268 plays in New York. In the 1970s there were only 50 to 60 plays in any year. During this phase the American Bahá'ís adopted the basic principles of Bahá'í Administration which are still utilized today. F. Scott Fitzgerald, who dramatized the exuberance and many of the excesses of these years in his novels and his short stories, observed of this period that "it was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess and it was an age of satire."²-Ron Price with thanks to 1Loni Bramson-Lerche, "Development of Bahá'í Administration," Studies in Babi & Bahá'í History, Vol.1, Kalimat Press, Los Angeles, 1982, p.260 and 2p.256; and 3F. Scott Fitzgerald in "The Literature of the Jazz Age," Larry Carlson, Internet, September 21st, 2003.

These were the first years of
a conscious following of
Bahá'í laws and teachings,
a national consciousness,
organized connections between
National and Local Assemblies,
sharpening as it does now
our perception of his¹ unequaled
significance and accomplishments.

And during these years
they fixed their gaze upon
the Order of Bahá'u'lláh.²
part of a grand design
that prevented a pandemonium
of factions and allowed
Bahá'í experience to fuse
in that new and unknown
institution of the Guardian,³
offspring of His interpretive mind
and co-sharer in a unique genius
of that divine interpretation.

And all this in an age of miracles
with its new liberation,
its exceptional literary creativity
by a 'Lost Generation.'⁴

1 Shoghi Effendi described by Glenford Mitchell in "The Literature of Interpretation," *World Order*, Winter 1972-3, p.13.

2 The Bab quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, 1955, pp.146-7. 3 G. Mitchell, op.cit., p.15. 4Term coined by Gertrude Stein.

-Ron Price, 21 Sept. 2003.

A MERE CURIOSITY

There is little doubt that the writing of Ron Price is just about exclusively a phenomenon of the Bahá'í community. He has little to no standing outside the Bahá'í community, although from time to time he acquired some standing in school communities where he was a teacher in various towns and cities. You could say he is spiritually idiomatic and is, at best, a mere curiosity for the outside world. With so much for people to consume in today's media-saturated, print-saturated world, the makers and shakers, whoever they may be, are diluted in the great mass-bath of life. Writers like Ron Price must reconcile themselves to seasons of failure insofar as the wider society is concerned. In that wider social milieu, Price had to reconcile himself to producing publications that seemed like infinitesimal fragments among great mountains of print.

To Price himself his was a writing product with a sense of completeness, something robust, all there, far from precarious. He still felt himself a beginner. Perhaps he would always feel like a beginner. But he did not feel remote, far out to sea. He accepted with equanimity and even a wondrous sense of intimacy and of awe the very pervasiveness of existential reality and the staggeringly incomprehensible magnitude and mystery of the universe. He did not feel passive, a spectator of the world around him, alone. He felt part of what was really going on; he felt at the centre, as if he was on the very axis of that great Collectivity he had been associated with now for half a century, a Collectivity with the future in its bones. -Ron Price with thanks to Wyndham Lewis, "Virginia Woolf: Mind and Matter on the Plane of a Literary Controversy," Internet, 28 August 2003.

What sort of future preoccupations
will be read back into the study
of this earliest history of these parts,¹
a history of the first decades
when the seeds, the very means,
first took hold,
extraordinary capacity to hearken
was manifest in a short space of time
in these fields, this habitation
of the souls of men.

1 Philip Rousseau, *The Early Christian Centuries*, Longman Pearson Education, 2002.

2'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, 1977, p.59.

Ron Price
4 September 2003

A MODEST LIBRARY

Forty years ago this month I became confronted, overwhelmed, by the world of print, of ideas, of academic life. Not that it was new, for I had just completed 13 years of primary and secondary schooling and achieved second class honours. But this new world, the world of university, required a new, a different, approach to the ones I had previously used to survive, to do well, in my educational life. I eventually adjusted to what seemed to me at the time, in the autumn of 1963, an impossible onslaught of books that I simply could not cope with. I went on to complete five years of post-secondary education and teach in schools and colleges for over thirty years. Now, in 2003, exactly forty years later, as another autumn approaches, I am entering my fifth year of retirement and my sixtieth year of life. In the last four years I have organized and reorganized my modest retirement library in Australia's oldest town here in Tasmania. This poem is about my small library in my small study in this small town on a small island beside an enormous continent and a vast world where I have now lived for six decades. Would I live to see another fifty years? -Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Four Epochs*, 27 August 2003.

There is nothing here that was
in my place of print in 1963
when the great game of books,
of study, of writing, of reading,
really began in earnest after
a warm-up of thirteen years:
1950 to 1963.

Fifty years down that track
from mid-twentieth century,
I began to prepare this place
for whatever was in store
in the remaining years of
this life: 2000 to whatever.

History and philosophy,
literature and poetry,
the social sciences,
religion and autobiography
just about covered it all
with a hint of psychology,
sociology, biography
and my efforts to publish.

They weaved their way
all these files and books
around this little room
three doors down on the left
from the corner of Reece and South
behind a garden above the stairs,
beside two bedrooms
and two bathrooms.

Ron Price
27 August 2003

A MYSTIC INTERCOURSE

All of us must learn to live with the history we inherit. For a Bahá'í this means, among other things, a coming to terms with a view of history that sees it as a concrete historical reality, variously interpreted, and that accepts the inevitability of remedying most, if not all, of humanity's and civilization's failures. For me, this also implies, that what is happening to me and what has happened goes into my poems. I must also pay attention to what happens to the world and to my religion. For here is found my most profound ideas and ideals. Poetry is a bi-product of life and living, seeing and experiencing, the world's flux and its continuities. My writings, as Pasternak observed, make me a poet. Life provides the raw data, the inspiration and makes me what I am in a deeply personal way. And what compels my poetry into

existence is, in the end, a long and complex story.-Ron Price with thanks to Kevin Stein, *Private Poets, Worldly Acts: Public and Private History in Contemporary American Poetry*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1996.

So much of it impinges,
enlivens, deepens, even
haunts the present,
never truly leaves us,
although much of it
simply can't be retained
by the memory emporium--
just too much has gone on.

But a dialogue goes on
with parts of that long story,
a fusion of now and then,
something laid over history,
defining and shaping both,
like a long and never-ending
conversation, building
and following its own
momentum, veering off
haphazardly like a walk,
in the woods or at the beach,
then coming together by the fire
at home in the evening
with the glow and memory
in some mystic intercourse.

Ron Price
20 June 2003

A NOTE FOR FREEDOM--and Joy

In 1953, at the outset of the Kingdom of God on earth, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá informs us in *God Passes by*,¹ Ray Bradbury published his book *Fahrenheit 451*. It is Bradbury's compelling and classic novel of censorship and defiance. The book was a timely warning against the anti-Communist hysteria and the fear of totalitarianism that then gripped the USA. In 1966 the book was made into a movie which was not considered successful. From time to time a criticism of the Bahá'í Faith is made accusing this new world Faith of totalitarian leanings. Anyone who has worked in this Cause for a significant length of time knows that such a criticism is difficult to believe and understand, impossible to countenance.-Ron Price with appreciation to Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes by*, p.351.

This is the religion of the inner-life,¹
the religion of the book par excellence.
It is here that we are born and die.

It is here where the passionate will
to understand is found
and a deep tempering process
takes place--called life.

It is natural to sometimes feel
defeated by the chaos of names
that floats around inside us
and is part of our daily diet.²

Now, though, that I have
tasted liberally of despair
from its empty-boned-bleached
skull with its large and hollowed-eyes.....

the time has come for life's
symphony of joy,
its myriad notes,
its exquisite celebratory joy,
born of solemn consciousness,
deep reflection and contemplation,
awe and a thankful gladness.
For the exceptional and glorious
stage of humanity's spiritual
evolution³ has become
so very very plain.

1 Robert Hughes, in his analysis of German art in the thirties pointed out how totalitarian regimes do not allow for an inner life. There is no inwardness in that world. (Robert Hughes, "Degenerate Art," ABC TV, 11:15-12:10 am, 24/2/03.

2 Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World, Yale UP, London, 1982, p. 196. 3 The Universal House of Justice, Letter April 3 1991.

Ron Price 27 February 2003

A PLUNGE

Since I kept some of Richard Needham's Saturday columns from the Toronto Globe and Mail in about 1965 it is possible to examine representative materials that reveal my thoughts and tendencies as far back as my twenty-first year. It seems to me that, given the existence now of some one hundred and fifty Notebooks readers and analysts are given an unusual acquaintance with the inner life of a writer who was a Bahá'í, a fascinating glimpse of his literary workshop and the creative process that transformed his experience into poetry. Readers will find here a plunge into Price's psyche. He does not reveal every possible confessional nook and cranny, but he does provide an encyclopedic assembly of literary phenomena. We are shown how a Bahá'í and a writer, a poet, equipped himself to execute his craft and cope with the problems of his time and his religion as it emerged from obscurity in the years toward and in

the fin de siècle and early twenty-first century. Price belonged to his religion as an arm belongs to its socket. Any separation, permanent or otherwise, he saw as an amputation. His was a search for definition, intellectual and experiential clarification and a universe of language and thought. His goal was to capture in words the multiplicity and diversity of it all and give it a place, a relevant perspective, in his writing, his poetry and his life. -Ron Price with thanks to R.S. Kennedy, editor, *The Notebooks of Thomas Wolfe*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1970, pp.xv-xx.

I've tried to probe to the bottom
of it all, of our dark and twisted age
with the new Light blazing,
with hopes
of a high and glorious fulfillment,
with a seemingly infinitesimal progress
here and there
one hundred years-and more-
after the summons of the Lord of Hosts.

I've asked for confirmation
for my efforts to advance His purpose
for the redemption and healing
of humankind--
and me!
But am I deserving, am I worthy?
I shall never know here--
only there.

1 Universal House of Justice Message, 24 May 2001.

Ron Price
20 January 2003

A SENSE OF DESTINY

Catherine Anne Porter in her *Notes on a Criticism* published in 1940¹ writing about Thomas Hardy said that he believed that "neither act, nor will, nor intention will serve to deflect a man's destiny from him, once he has taken the step which decides it." In attempting to apply this thought of Hardy's to my own life, it seems to me there have been many steps which, collectively, have decided my destiny: joining the Bahá'í Faith(1959); moving away from my home town and my mother(1966); coming to Australia(1971); marrying first Judy and then Chris(1967 and 1975, respectively); teaching in various places(1967 to 1999); and starting to write poetry seriously in 1992. These are certainly highlights, but there are also other factors, other steps, involved in determining this 'destiny.' The poem below tries to deal with what seems to me to be a complex issue with so much that is provisional, uncertain and dependent on those Brides of inner meaning.² -Ron Price with thanks to 1"Notes on Thomas Hardy," Internet, 4 January 2002; and 2 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*,

p.175.

This sense of destiny
did not begin to materialize
in my mind with any force
until the end of my young adulthood,
at least two decades into pioneering
and, having begun, it has been slowly
evolving in these my middle years¹
connected as it is with the mystic world
at the very centre and ground of my being,
where archaic mysteries
have been restored before my eyes
with a revitalizing spiritual energy
released and wafted over all creation.²

I certainly see myself, now,
after nearly six decades of life,
as the inheritor, potential bearer
and promoter of historical forces
struggling for emergence,
consciousness, fulfilment
and communication, part of:
the greatest drama
in the world's spiritual history
in which I arise
resolutely and unreservedly
to play my part;³
yes, indeed,
in this strange eventful history
which seems, so often,
like a vapour in the desert.⁴

1 young adulthood: 20-40; middle adulthood: 40-60.

2 This idea comes from (i) the opening lines of the Tablet of Carmel and (ii)
an article in World Order(Summer 1983) on the poetry of Robert Hayden.

3 Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p.26.

4 Shakespeare, As You Like It; and Bahá'u'lláh, Writings.

Ron Price

5 January 2002

A FOCUS ON BEGINNINGS

In the second volume of his Democracy in America Alexis de Tocqueville focuses upon just who the Americans are and what they are like. Like my own focus, among my many foci, on the Baha'is and their community, deTocqueville's analysis is not especially original. Some might say of my work what some have

said of de Tocqueville's that it is "strikingly uninspired" and a mere reiteration of opinions expressed by others, by my informants, by fellow travellers along the path and many others on whom I have personally had little to no lasting effect on their lives. Among the many things I have done in my autobiography is to collect and distribute a set of concepts about the emerging character of a part of the international Baha'i community, a part I lived in over four epochs of the community's Formative Age. De Toqueville did the same regarding the emerging character of the American nation, as it was emerging by the 1830s. His work was written in the first half century after the birth of the American nation in the 1780s; my work has been written, for the most part, about my experience in Baha'i communities in the first half century of their experience. -Ron Price, Pioneering Over Four Epochs, 23 August 2003.

I have no predictable allegiance
to some part of this whole,
although memory and imagination
take me so much more often
to Canada's snow and the wonder
of my ordinary life, flawed and
so very very plausible;
to Australia's hot, dry land
where tragedy seems
to have been sucked out
of the earth and replaced,
at least in the places I've lived,
unbeknownst, by humour,
its softening, life-giving edge
and its often sharp cut, a cut
which has become part
of my hearth and home.

I'd like to think my observations
are clairvoyant, isolating as I do
many of the qualities
of this community of mine,
qualities that will persevere
and become integral parts
of that distinguishes
"us" from "them."

But community building
has really just begun here
and this, my work, is partly
a story of beginnings.

-Ron Price 23 August 2003

A FORMATIVE AGE

The highly varied social, intellectual, psychological, partisanly apolitical and artistic atmosphere of the Bahá'í community deeply influenced Price and thousands of other Bahá'ís of artistic sensibility in the four epochs during which his pioneering story had its origins and development. Price's poetry was not as conscientiously and systematically topographical as, say, the topography in Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. In *Ulysses* Joyce recreates the Dublin of 1904 drawing on his own lively memory of that city where he was born, grew up and spent his youth.

There are evocations of many of the places, many of the Bahá'í communities and many of the experiences in those places which possess a vividness and particularity. From Price's perspective these evocations were simply more diverse, covered more territory than one city, more people than those in the one locale, the one landscape and possessed a wider framework of history and geography than that in Joyce's work. Then, too, Price's work was not part of a heroic age of literature, as some argue Joyce's work was, as far as Ireland and especially Dublin was concerned; rather it was part, as Price saw it anyway, of a formative age. As the four epochs, which were the background for much of Price's work, went on Price was drawn more and more to a comparison of his age with the formative age of Greek institutions down to, say, 800 BC, far back in another heroic and formative period of history.-Ron Price with thanks to David Daiches and John Flower, *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles: A Narrative Atlas*, Paddington Press Ltd., NY, 1979, pp. 214-234.

Anthony Andrewes argues that it was the very "instability and incoherence of Greek political institutions that led to a political evolution which was denied to other cultures."¹ A common culture spread through Greece from 1600 to 1400 BC. There was what Bury and Meiggs called a "cultural quickening;"² there was a fusion of Greek and pre-Greek culture. Much of the heroic period was warlike and unstable. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain many echoes of this warlike age. In the years 1200 to 800 BC there was a veritable "inner explosion"³ on Greek soil. -Ron Price with thanks to 1A. Andrewes, *Greek Society*, Penguin: Melbourne, 1987, p.xxiii; 2J.B. Bury and R. Meiggs, *A History of Greece*, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1986, p.7; and 3Ted Hughes, *Myth and Education: The Symbolic Order*, editor, Peter Abbs, The Falmer Press, NY, 1989, p.162.

Methinks I have been part
of another inner explosion,
a cultural quickening,
with echoes from a heroic age,
with instability and incoherence
the order of the bloody day,
and bloody it has been,
millions dead, dead, dead,
all over the place right
from the birth of those
Tablets of the Divine Plan.
Did He know that this Order

would be born in yet more
blood, sweat and tears?

-----Ron Price 22 June 2003

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History and philosophy,
literature and poetry,
the social sciences,
religion and autobiography
just about covered it all
with a hint of psychology,
sociology, biography
and my efforts to publish.

They weaved their way
all these files and books
around this little room
three doors down on the left
from the corner of Reece and South
behind a garden above the stairs,
beside two bedrooms
and two bathrooms.

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just too much has gone on.

But a dialogue goes on
with parts of that long story,
a fusion of now and then,
something laid over history,
defining and shaping both,
like a long and never-ending
conversation, building
and following its own
momentum, veering off
haphazardly like a walk,
in the woods or at the beach,
then coming together by the fire
at home in the evening
with the glow and memory
in some mystic intercourse.

Ron Price
20 June 2003

A NOTE FOR FREEDOM--and Joy

In 1953, at the outset of the Kingdom of God on earth, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá informs us in *God Passes by*,¹ Ray Bradbury published his book *Fahrenheit 451*. It is

Bradbury's compelling and classic novel of censorship and defiance. The book was a timely warning against the anti-Communist hysteria and the fear of totalitarianism that then gripped the USA. In 1966 the book was made into a movie which was not considered successful. From time to time a criticism of the Bahá'í Faith is made accusing this new world Faith of totalitarian leanings. Anyone who has worked in this Cause for a significant length of time knows that such a criticism is difficult to believe and understand, impossible to countenance.-Ron Price with appreciation to Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes by*, p.351.

This is the religion of the inner-life,¹
the religion of the book par excellence.
It is here that we are born and die.
It is here where the passionate will
to understand is found
and a deep tempering process
takes place--called life.

It is natural to sometimes feel
defeated by the chaos of names
that floats around inside us
and is part of our daily diet.²

Now, though, that I have
tasted liberally of despair
from its empty-boned-bleached
skull with its large and hollowed-eyes.....

the time has come for life's
symphony of joy,
its myriad notes,
its exquisite celebratory joy,
born of solemn consciousness,
deep reflection and contemplation,
awe and a thankful gladness.
For the exceptional and glorious
stage of humanity's spiritual
evolution³ has become
so very very plain.

¹ Robert Hughes, in his analysis of German art in the thirties pointed out how totalitarian regimes do not allow for an inner life. There is no inwardness in that world.(Robert Hughes, "Degenerate Art," ABC TV, 11:15-12:10 am, 24/2/03.

² Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt:For Love of the World, Yale UP, London, 1982, p. 196. ³ The Universal House of Justice, Letter April 3 1991.

Ron Price 27 February 2003

A SENSE OF DESTINY

Catherine Anne Porter in her Notes on a Criticism published in 1940¹ writing about Thomas Hardy said that he believed that "neither act, nor will, nor intention will serve to deflect a man's destiny from him, once he has taken the step which decides it." In attempting to apply this thought of Hardy's to my own life, it seems to me there have been many steps which, collectively, have decided my destiny: joining the Bahá'í Faith(1959); moving away from my home town and my mother(1966); coming to Australia(1971); marrying first Judy and then Chris(1967 and 1975, respectively); teaching in various places(1967 to 1999); and starting to write poetry seriously in 1992. These are certainly highlights, but there are also other factors, other steps, involved in determining this 'destiny.' The poem below tries to deal with what seems to me to be a complex issue with so much that is provisional, uncertain and dependent on those Brides of inner meaning.² -Ron Price with thanks to 1 "Notes on Thomas Hardy," Internet, 4 January 2002; and 2 Bahá'u'lláh, The Book of Certitude, p.175.

This sense of destiny
did not begin to materialize
in my mind with any force
until the end of my young adulthood,
at least two decades into pioneering
and, having begun, it has been slowly
evolving in these my middle years¹
connected as it is with the mystic world
at the very centre and ground of my being,
where archaic mysteries
have been restored before my eyes
with a revitalizing spiritual energy
released and wafted over all creation.²

I certainly see myself, now,
after nearly six decades of life,
as the inheritor, potential bearer
and promoter of historical forces
struggling for emergence,
consciousness, fulfilment
and communication, part of:
the greatest drama
in the world's spiritual history
in which I arise
resolutely and unreservedly
to play my part;³
yes, indeed,
in this strange eventful history
which seems, so often,
like a vapour in the desert.⁴

¹ young adulthood: 20-40; middle adulthood: 40-60.

2 This idea comes from (i) the opening lines of the Tablet of Carmel and (ii) an article in World Order(Summer 1983) on the poetry of Robert Hayden.

3 Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p.26.

4 Shakespeare, As You Like It; and Bahá'u'lláh, Writings.

Ron Price

5 January 2002

A THIRD WAY

During these four epochs the name C.P. Snow has become synonymous with the two cultures. In 1959, the year I became a Bahá'í, Snow published his famous book The Two Cultures. Four years later, just as I was beginning my pioneer life, he published a second edition and included a new essay The Two Cultures: A Second Look. In that second edition Snow suggested that a new culture, a third culture, would emerge and close the gap between these two cultures, scientists and literary intellectuals. In the last forty years third culture thinkers, and I see myself as one, try to express their deepest thoughts in a manner accessible to an intelligent reading public if it wants to access my work. But whether my work is read or not read, it avoids the indecipherability of most of the work at both ends of the culture spectrum that Snow described so well at the start of my Bahá'í life. -Ron Price, Pioneering Over Four Epochs, June 16, 2003.

He said United States
was the greatest poem¹
and I'd like to apply
that appellation
to this Bridge
which is sharper
than the sword
and finer than a hair.²

The genius here
is not in the people
as that poet saw it,
but in the effulgence
of that "peerless,
His most sacred
and exalted Countenance."³

1 Walleat Whitman, "Introduction: e-text facsimile," Leaves of Grass, 1855.

2 The Bab, Selections, p.96.

3 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, 1957, p.151.

Ron Price

June 18 2003

AWEFUL NECESSITY

Readers will find in my poetry the living present and the persistent themes of daily life. Seamus Heaney refers to writing poetry as a gift and its "the awful necessity" to keep going. Keeping it going, maintaining the writing of poetry as an activity, is a "lovely wonder" he continues. He says the writing of poetry that does keep going, that does continue over the years, is an art, an art that is "tutored by an instinctive cheer and courage."-Ron Price with thanks to Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY, 1995, p.78.

I, too, ground my convictions
upon the sensation of rightness
experienced as indelible
first impression, growing,
surviving in my mind
as pleasure and delight,
as potency and principle.

It survives only for a time,
occasionally is reborn,
if often entirely forgotten
and then exists as a pull
in the mind of readers
as a kind of undermusic
that readers sing with me.

Ron Price
4 September 2003

BIG BANDS

In the first Seven Year Plan, 1937-1944, the big bands had their hey-day. Born in that hiatus period before the teaching Plans and the vision of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan could be implemented in an organized campaign, the big bands had their greatest years from 1935 to 1946.¹ By the second Plan, 1946-1953, the tide had begun to change. Musical tastes and attitudes to life were, in the late forties and early fifties, less naive, less romantic, more aggressive, more self-centered. The sentimentality reflected in the ballads of the big bands seemed silly to a new generation. TV affected their popularity. New bands, of course, appeared. Thousands of new bands appeared from the fifties through to the seventies. At the start of the Seven Year Plan in 1979 there were hundreds of thousands of musicians playing big band music.² -Ron Price with thanks to George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*: 4th Edition, Schirmer Books, NY, 1981, 1p.xvii and 2p. 559.

BLOOD TYPES AND THE PLAN

At the start of the Seven Year Plan on April 21st 1937, Dr. Norman Bethune, whom Canada remembers as a medical genius and China reveres as a saint, was in Spain helping in the fight against the fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Bethune had been in Spain for just six months. While there he did pioneering

work with blood transfusions and developed the first sophisticated mobile medical unit. Bethune experienced problems with some blood transfusions and his patients died. But, as the Plan opened in April, a Dr. Landsteiner discovered blood types and Bethune's blood transfusion problems were solved. Seven weeks after the start of the Plan Bethune returned to Canada.-Ron Price with thanks to several Internet Sites on "Dr. Norman Bethune, 24 July 2003.

BOOKENDS

I would call these decades, 1917 to 1937, bookends if you like because between these marking years, these demarkation points, the student will find so much that defines the Bahá'í community as an international group, a people, a philosophy and a faith. A great sense of expectation, of millenarianism, types of mild and extreme apocalypticism, Bahá'í beliefs for the most part ignored, unacceptable or just arousing indifference within western sensibilities, a strong encouragement to teach, people with stories of long searches and finding this new faith, tensions in the community from varied sources; a non-sectarian, non-denominational, inclusive movement centered around the teachings of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, a predominant image of liberalism with an absolute authority structure requiring obedience and, hence, generating some of that tension and, finally among a long list of features, an emphasis on good deeds, good works and a strong sense of morality and, in the outside, the wider, community, a pessimistic hedonism and a growing despair, an inclination to extremes of democracy, liberal and conservative and, inevitably, total disillusionment and indifference.-Ron Price with thanks to Peter Smith, "American Bahá'í Community," Studies in Babi & Bahá'í History: Vol.1, Moojan Momen, editor, Kalimat Press, Los Angeles, 1982, pp. 135-194.

The magnitude of the ruin had just begun
as that first bookend was put in place,
a catalogue of horrors
darker than the darkest of ages past:
the most turbulent tempest
had begun to blow.

But hope sprang eternal
as it always does,
some fortuitous conjunction
of circumstances, it was thought,
would make it possible
to bend the conditions
of human life into conformity
with prevailing human desires
at this great turning point,
this climacteric of history.¹

1 Century of Light, Universal House of Justice, Forward.

Ron Price

21 September 2003

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1 Century of Light, Universal House of Justice, Forward.

Ron Price
21 September 2003

BRINK OF DISASTER

In 1962 Katherine Anne Porter published her only novel Ship of Fools. She was 72. It made her rich and famous. Porter tried in this book to recreate the atmosphere of a world on the brink of disaster. In October 1962 in the Cuban Missile Crisis the world certainly was. In April 1957 the Guardian indeed did say that the world was "hovering on the brink of self-destruction." In September 1962 I began my pioneering life in this world which Porter saw in very harsh, bleak, terms. A world which could have the daemonic event of WW2 was, to Porter, weak and evil. Porter disliked the human species and she saw

the established order as disintegrating. -Ron Price with thanks to Alfred Kazim, Bright Book of Life, Little, Brown and co., Boston, 1971, p. 169.

It was a difficult time to begin
this journey, just at the edge
of the final stage of history.
But I had no idea of
just where we were at.
I was too busy getting
in and through university,
dealing with the first stage
of manic-depression and
feeling the insistent surge
of hormones mixing the pot
during world crises which,
for the most part, only existed
in my world on TV, the radio,
in those newspapers on the couch.

My world had a different darkness
kept me on the edge fighting demons:
no calm, coolness or silent grass-growing
mood in which I could compose.
The laborious uphill work had begun;
I had not found my line, my art,
basis for constant toil and labour,
ceaseless comprehension of difficulties.

Ron Price
30 October 2003

CAUSE AND EFFECT

The age of electricity was inaugurated in 1879 and in 1877 the first phonograph brought a new era of sound to humanity thanks to Thomas Edison. I think it was more than simple coincidence that Baha'u'llah's confinement in prison ended in 1877 and His residence in Bahji began in September 1879. The Beloved and the King of Martyrs were decapitated that same year, annis mirabilis, mirabile dictu, and Baha'u'llah's sister Sarih Khanum also died. And, in the process, the lights were turned on. Edison's endless patience and his emphasis on science as convenience not solely theory, as help to humankind were, arguably, "effect" and "cause" was, just as arguably, the cup of tribulation which Baha'u'llah filled to overflowing before the tide of His misery began to ebb in those same years 1877 to 1879. -Ron Price with thanks to Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, USA, 1957, p.191.

It's not just a lot of stuff,
not just a lot of accumulation
from the dead weight

of history's immense treasure.¹

It's a question of marshalling
the gems, the pearls, the detritus
so that it all lives again
in some vital juxtaposition.

It's a question of seeing some
coherent, rational, progressive
entity, moving towards a goal.²

It's a question of seeing the
crucial need of the human race
to find a unifying vision
of the nature of man and society.³

It's a question of finding
a common conviction
about the course and direction
of human history in the midst
of climactic change
and the phenomenon
of a prophetic figure who
is unique in our age.

¹ Theodore Roosevelt put the idea something like this in his address to the American Historical Association in 1912.

² Francis Fukuyama in a review "After the End of History," Access: History, Vol 3:1, Michael D. Barr of his works published in the 1990s.

³ Baha'u'llah, Baha'i International Community, Office of Public Information, NY, 1992, p.1.

Ron Price 25 August 2003

CENTRES OF INTEREST

To the romantic poets of the British Isles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there were four centres of interest when they turned their attention outside their homeland: France, Switzerland, Italy and Greece. For the Bahá'í who lives in Australia or indeed in any one of many of the countries of the world and who writes a great deal of poetry as I do, there are four places or centres of interest to which I and they can and do turn: Iran, Israel, America and a disparate array of sites across the surface of the earth.

Collectively, it seems to me, these various sites amount to a fourth place or centre which is the globe itself.-Ron Price with thanks to David Daiches and John Flower, *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles: A Narrative Atlas*, Paddington Press Ltd., NY, 1979, p.126.

There's a core, of course,
which gives us all a common

thread, a shared line
on our modern world.

In Iran where it all began,
in America where they put
the order together in its
first form before the Plan
spread it around the world.

And now, in Israel, where
there is a call out to Zion,
where my life feels as if
it possesses a sacrifice
to some embodiment of
all that my life stands for.

It embellishes my life
with special reverence
and gives me, subtly,
a shield, with this poetry,
from the slings and arrows
of outrageous fortune.

Ron Price
22 June 2003

COMING OF AGE

The lesson of the Baha'i Faith for the creative artist was a simple one, at least that was how I saw it in the opening years of the new millennium. Get on the one world train! The writing of Baha'is had slowly been coming of age, for perhaps several generations, perhaps as far back as the opening of the first epoch of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Divine Plan in 1937. There was an increasing receptivity to the work of the artistic community all over the Baha'i world. This receptivity, this favourable climate to the emergence of artists, was not always to their comfort. Some were never comfortable, for example, with the requirement of the process of review. But the minds of Baha'is who were writers were characteristically progressive in temper and tolerated, even they did not like, the literary experiments, the innovations, of their generation. Insensibly there had developed, especially since the 1980s, completely fresh opportunities for the living of the intellectual life in the general Baha'i community. The arts and artists in the Baha'i community were increasingly being pushed on all the continents of the globe in the direction of a moderate, tempered and courteous language.¹ This kind of language was not easy to achieve, given the general tendencies in society toward dissent, the increasingly adversarial nature of culture, the disenchantment of those spokesmen and analysts of culture with culture itself and the fact that so much of the whole way of life was based on criticism.²

-Ron Price with thanks to 'Abdu'l-Baha, "Extracts from the Baha'i Writings on the Subject of Writers and Writing," Baha'i Canada, August

2000, p.17; and Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans: Masters and Victims of Modernist Culture*, Oxford UP, NY, '78

A cohesion had been developing,
a generation, an ambiguity,
a beginning, a concentration,
different literary impulses,
cosmopolitan and native inheritance;
a temper was changing,
but so complex, reaching back
all over the place
and into new technicalities,
new tonalities
and a million subjects abounding.
Is this the locality,
the place of prophecy,
of the forces of things to come?

Were those twenty years wasted
at the start of this tenth stage of history?¹
It just took so long to put down
the real thing, the motion and the fact.²

¹ T.S. Eliot wrote about his wasted years: 1919-1939 in *American Literature Since 1900*, editor, Marcus Cunliffe, Sphere Books, London, 1975, p.48. Mine: 1962-1982.

² Ernest Hemmingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 1932.

Ron Price
8 May 2003

CONVERSATION

One of the main functions of my poetry is its capacity to initiate and develop a conversation with history, both the victorious and the vanquished, those remembered and those forgotten. I try, as far as I am able, to "live with what was here"¹ and speak of it in my poetry, as that arguably first confessional poet Robert Lowell would have put it. In our living, we constantly remake, make, our history, our historical sense and poetry simply helps in this remaking, helps to shape, define and give expression to history's subtleties, its myriad concrete manifestations, its "bits and pieces cobbled together,"² as Roland Barthes puts it. Much of my poetry operates at the intersection of public and private history. Consequently, readers will find much of both in these poems, both me and the multitudinous aspects of 'the other.'¹-Ron Price with thanks to 1&2 Kevin Stein, *Private Poets, Worldly Acts*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1996, Introduction.

I've been bringing the past

into the present for years,
decades, half a century of more.

Makes my present live
with my memories
and the infinite world
around me, vivified.

And now and now
I do it with this idiom,
with my eyes trained
on the past---
not just my own.

But there's a reaching
back through epochs and ages
intersecting my life
with all that is in this
mysterious universe
as far back as that DNA
up there in the Pilbara.

Ron Price
19 June 2003

CONVICTION'S GRANITE BASE

The present-day poet, it seems to me, undertakes to help those in his community define the self in relation to the world that surrounds and, sometimes, threatens to overwhelm it. This search for self-definition proceeds by sensibility, by the choice of a personal style or stance that will differentiate the self from and within its undifferentiated social context and by the poet's capacity to integrate self and community. It is partly the goal of this poet to define the texture, the weight, the complexity, the heterogeneity of his society in all its grossness and finery, its horror and its subtlety. This view expressed, in part, by Diana Trilling in 1963 in her article about Norman Mailer's 1959 book *Advertisements for Myself* at the outset of my Bahá'í life and my pioneering life still defines, forty years later in 2003, much of my writing goal.-Ron Price with thanks to Diana Trilling in *The Creative Present: Notes on Contemporary American Fiction*, editors N. Balakian and C. Simmons, Doubleday & Co., Inc. NY, 1963, pp. 145-147.

Yes, Diana, this work proceeds
by sensibility, inch-by-inch
over the long and busy years,
insensibly, as a style develops
first in a wet-cold place,
then a wet-dry hot place,
then in the most isolated city

on this earth as I dried out
and came to poetry like
a saviour, like an at-last
some fresh water on the desert.

It helped to take me to the end
of years of working life
and now a wealth does visit me
in the company of my wife.
With conviction's granite base,
though all alone we be,
not far off, His Assembly,¹
a spirit, oneness, free.

1 Emily Dickinson, Poem Number 789.

Ron Price

October 28th, 2003

— Autobiographical Poetry 2003-4: Pioneering Over Four Epochs, Section VIII: Booklets 51-53 (Used by permission of the curator)