

Autobiographical Poetry 2001: 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.

15 JUNE TO 7 JULY(CA)

This piece was written for my retrospective Journal Vol.1.1 section A.5.5 1968-1969. After six years, 1995-2001, of working at this retrospective diary, only very occasionally, I have some coverage in each of the sub-sections. But this is mostly from the initial Life Story(written between 1983-1986: see section 3.A.5.2). Little 'retrospectivity' has actually enriched the original story.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Four Epochs, 12 August 2001.

I remember the grass as being greener
than green, but that was when my body
was cool and not filled with the burning-up
I felt when they put on that special ointment.

It was a big place but most of it I can hardly
recall now thirty-three years after the event.
They kept me there in the Verdun Psychiatric
Hospital for about three weeks, but even that
is only a guess. It could have been two or four
but by July I was in Scarborough on the top floor
of that General Hospital and Montreal was a thing
of the past. I don't think I ever saw Montreal again.

Dr. Ghadirian was a kind man. He took me to a
Bahá'í fireside, remember him saying it was the
best therapy I could get. But imagine that having
the only Bahá'í psychiatrist in Canada at the time
right there to help me recuperate. For some reason
they took me to Toronto; I suppose they felt I would
be better off closer to home. I'm not sure now.
It was all too long ago.

Ron Price
12 August 2001

A BEGINNING

I was born during the invasion of Normandy by the Americans, the British and
Canadians which began on 6 June 1944. By 23 July, the day I was born, the land

battles had produced over 125,000 allied casualties. General Montgomery, the commander of the forces, was regarded by many as the finest tactical general since Wellington, but his relationships with the Americans and Eisenhower, the American commander-in-chief in particular, were a disaster. 1944 marked, for the North American Bahá'ís, the completion of fifty years of valiant service, closing a memorable chapter in the history of the Cause on that continent. That year, September 1st as Horne argues, also marked the transition of power from the British to the Americans, a climacteric of Western history. New tasks, Shoghi Effendi informed the North American Bahá'ís, were looming on the horizon ere the next stage, the second stage(1946-1953) in a great teaching crusade, was to be ushered in.

-Ron Price with thanks to Alister Horne, *The Lonely Leader: Monty 1944-1945*, Pan Books, 1995, p.225; and Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America: 1932-1946*, Wilmette, 1947, p.83.

Let there be no mistake; there has been no mistake; and there shall be no mistake.

-Ron Price with thanks to Shoghi Effendi and the Duke of Wellington.

Only a generation had come and gone,¹
a slowly emerging administrative Order
had been created and perfected enough
for that first stage of the Plan
to also come and go²
in those dark and pregnant times.
A tempest, a battle, so different
than yours, Monte, but still
there was a need for courage
and there was always spending.

No appalling blood-bath there,
no fear or reserve, no hesitation,
he always said, urging us on.
A Plan of matchless design,
planetary in scale,
a glorious adventure,
a glittering prize,
ideal forces and lordly confirmations,
rushing in, rushing in, He said,
against the armies of the world,
singly and alone, Monte,
lonely leaders, Monte, some.

Power passed to the Americans
on that climacteric of history,
1 September 1944,³ Monte,
quite clearly over your body
and one day it would pass
again under those mysterious

dispensations of Providence,
as it had already⁴ in a world
that had, as yet, no idea
where the power really lied.

11919-1944

2 1937-1944

3 Horne, op.cit., p.272.

4Administrative leadership of the Bahá'í community evolved quite distinctly into the hands of the American Bahá'ís, perhaps beginning in 1919 with the declaration of New York as 'the city of the covenant.'

Ron Price

23 January 2001

A BRIEF REMINISCENCE

Today I had an hour in the Launceston library while I waited to attend a luncheon at the RSL, Anzac House, at 313 Wellington Street. The sidewalk was wet as I walked a half hour to the RSL. The mid-day meal was with lecturers, teachers and administrators who had worked in the education department/section of the University of Tasmania, the C.A.E. and the then Teachers' College, going as far back as 1959. I did not feel like reading at the library so I indexed some of a booklet of my poetry and wrote two poems. This was one of them. I have no idea what it was that gave rise to this poem; perhaps it was the reminiscence associated with the occasion of meeting with colleagues I worked with twenty-seven years ago.. -Ron Price, Pioneering Over Four Epochs, 18 April 2001.

There are so many ways
of dividing a life. Below
I outline the burn-out, spin-out,
drained-out, paper-thin stage
one gets to from time to time.¹

1968:

when I found out what it was like
to be completely at the end of one's tether,
after seeing the rope get pretty thin
several times over the previous five years.

1980:

when I could go no more
and so went into a hospital
for the final time, not so much
from over work or anxiety as
from a chemical imbalance,
the chemistry of the brain.

1999:

This time it was not chemistry,
but life--enough talking and
listening to dry out my very soul
while the new life of poetry
stirred in me, a new being, a new
life that yearned to be found----
and it would out--the truth would out.

1 beginning with my first year of school in 1949, the first burn-out occurred
19 years later in 1968; the second 12 years later in 1980 and the third 19
years later again in 1999. It was this pattern and the context of this pattern
that was the subject of my contemplations. ---Ron Price

18 April 2001

A

COMPELLING AUTHORITY

According to Ian Douglas the use of the term 'globalization' intensified in the
early to mid-1960s, at the same time my pioneering life began. Globalization
was accompanied by the rise of a transnational technocracy, global governance
institutions, a shift from production and trade to finance and private capital
in a new system of international finance in the central world political
economy, an economy connecting the planet with telecommunications and
computers, among a range of other shifts and changes according to Douglas.
Douglas also quotes Foucault to describe the human being living during this
time at the end of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first as one who
tries to invent himself, as one who is transformed by the technologies he
employs, as the person at the centre of his own life-world, at the centre of
his own biography where the self is continually monitored by examining the
environment.

In this context "true myth presents its images and its imaginary actors with a
compelling authority." It is "an overt aestheticising and ordering of the
world." Douglas quotes Cassirer to say that "language, poetry, art,
religion...are in their origin bound up with mythical elements." Myth is a
means of acting on the present and It is the myth in its entirety which is
alone important. -Ron Price with thanks to Ian Douglas, The Myth of
Globalization, Online Filename: mg.pdf, 1997.

I've been telling you for years,
we need new forms of the social,
common myths, common stories,
new myths, for myths are dialogue,
technologies of the self,
historical necessities,
defining moments in time
to tell us something has ended
in these years, these months,
these days, when we crossed
a bridge to which we shall never return.1

I've been telling you
I've got a myth here:
intact, total, detailed,
an overt aestheticizer,
an orderer of my world,
bound up as it is with
language, science, art,
poetry-the whole thing-
putting me at the centre,
biographically right-on,
monitoring each day's
invention with images
and actors of a compelling
authority from another world.

1 Universal House of Justice, Ridvan BE 157.

.....Ron Price 27 April 2001

A CONGLOMERATE

John Ruskin writes about the theory and the condition of the artist. He says that "those who have the keenest sympathy are those who look closest and pierce deepest." Those who "are filled with the most intense passion and gentleness of sympathy," those that possess the greatest intensity and genuineness, produce the highest art. Isolation and alienation, though, are, for Ruskin, the natural conditions for the great artist.. He writes about the artist Turner who felt no one understood or saw the meaning of his work. and, like all great spirits of the nineteenth century--Scott, Keats, Byron and Shelley--he died without hope. Great artists, Ruskin continues, have to work at their art all their life and perhaps they will become 'a vehicle for truth.'

-Ron Price with thanks to John Ruskin in Ruskin's Theories of the Sister Arts, George Landow, Internet, 4 November 2001.

I shall not die without hope,
but I write with whatever
passion, tenderness,
genuineness and intensity
I have been endowed,
tarnished as it all is
by life's walls of self and passion.1

The rock of my days
has a deep moss upon it
and great fissures,
some conglomerate,
great chunks from everywhere
over the long haul of time.

Receiving feelings within
a wondrous centre of reflection

where I stand serene
watching from afar off
in a world of isolation,
where sometimes
the barking of dogs is loud
on every side and sometimes
the Sun of Oneness shone.²

1 Bahá'u'lláh, Seven Valleys, p.19.

2 Bahá'u'lláh, "Fire Tablet."

--8/11/01

THE CONSPIRACY

The opposition to the Bahá'í Faith has been, for the most part, in Iran and the Middle East. Occasionally the churches in the West write about the Cause or incite some type of opposition expressing their concerns and criticizing the Bahá'í Faith in one way or another. Today I read a statement written by a Mary Ann Budnik for the Catholic Resource Network, a statement which expressed the view that the Bahá'ís and the United Nations were involved in a conspiracy to establish the Bahá'í Faith as the world religion. It was the first time in my experience that I recall reading any document that indicated, however generally and however inaccurately, what the 'overall game' was that the Bahá'ís were involved in. For the most part and in most places in my more than forty years as a Bahá'í the Cause was not taken seriously by either significant or insignificant individuals.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Four Epochs, 10 August 2001.

You knew this was serious stuff
right from the start
back when you heard about
the birds flying over Akka.

Later you read about
those time-honoured and powerful
strongholds of orthodoxy
coming to realize the power here.

And, of course, all those martyrs
didn't die for nothing.
There'd been something
important going on
for one hundred and fifty years.

But it wasn't until today
that you actually read something
in a western source
that stated
in a very general sense
what the game was-----

to put it in the vernacular.

A conspiracy, they said,
little did they know
that the conspiracy,¹
the ultimate Conspirator,
Deviser, Plotter, Designer,
is and has been that Unknown
and Mysterious One.

¹ The root word for conspiracy is 'conspire.' Among the several definitions is:
'to plot or devise.'

.....Ron Price 10 August 2001

A CREATIVE CONSTRUCTION

Some writers are admired for their range, the great quantity of what they write. Joyce Carol Oates in contemporary American novels; Isaac Asimov in science fiction; Arnold Toynbee in world history; Freud in classical psychology; John Maynard Keynes in economics; Max Weber in sociology, the list goes on. I have an immense range of topics in my poetry, but I see my poetry more in terms of depth in several themes. Of course six thousand prose-poems and two million words puts me in some poetic-literary league: double-A? My take on the Bahá'í experience, on my society and culture and my own life I like to think as perceptive, probing, thought-provoking and providing a multitude of perspectives. It certainly covers a great deal of territory. Time will tell if a popular audience or even a coterie will ever be found that enjoys my poetic landscape, its architecture and its inhabitants. In the meantime, like those mentioned above, I write and write with "the drive of the truly obsessed."¹

-Ron Price with thanks to Murray Waldren, "A Life of Loving Subjects: A Review of Joyce Carol Oates' Middle Age: A Romance, in The West Australian Review, November 17-18, 2001.

She continually writes
and is in love with it.
Me, too, putting down
those shared values
that Ernst Gombrich
talked about as servant
of culture¹....for I, too,
have the shared values
of this new community.

And really you can't write
what you think, not quite,
because perception, thought,
is a creative construction
of an inner reality.

The visible world is chimerical,
a vapour in the desert, illusion
and, so, all is interpretation,
all is a weaving and changing
of one immense story,
a celebration of one great chain
that goes back to a beginning
that is as mysterious as God.

1 E. H. Gombrich, who died two weeks ago, was one of the world's great authorities on the classical tradition of western art.

Ron Price
20 November 2001

A DANCE TO A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

By the mid and late 1930s jazz had become the defining music of the generation, the generation that was then coming into its teens. Jazz seemed to unleash forces and energies like rock 'n roll did twenty years later. Like rock 'n roll, too, it seemed to possess a physicality; it released pent-up emotions; it was pure pleasure; it was a form of escape and it was entertainment. As jazz emerged so, too, did Bahá'í Administration. In 1937 Bahá'í Administration had developed sufficiently to take on a teaching Seven Year Plan. Between Benny Goodman becoming the generation's icon of popular music by playing at Times Square to a packed house of teenagers in the Paramount Theatre in March of 1937 and his band's contest with Chick Webb's band at the Savoy Ballroom in May of 1937, this Seven Year Plan began. -Ron Price with thanks to "Episode Five: Jazz: Pure Pleasure," ABC TV, 9:30-10:30 pm, 27/10/2001.

It exploded, completely unknown,
overnight, or so it seemed,
to the generation who began
that Plan in '37. In reality,
it had been slowly developing
in theory and form for nearly
a century, well, if you go back
to that magic year of 1844.
Jazz was becoming popular
the way we would have liked
to be popular, but our Plan
was a slow release model,
an experimental disposition,
a dance to a different drummer,
with the light and lyrical,
exquisite touch of an Eddy Wilson,
the often sad, slow pace
of a Billy Holliday or a Glen Miller
popular romantic-swing.

Men and women working
together, composing on-the-spot,
everyone in harmony,
moving toward elegance and joy:
that was one way of defining
what our aim was too
in those early Bahá'í Groups
and Assemblies beginning
in those first-days-of-form,
days of Administrative vision,
when we started our dreaming.¹

¹ When Duke Ellington was asked what he was doing when he was playing jazz on the piano, he said "I'm dreaming."

-----Ron Price 27 December 2001

A DIFFERENT SMOKE AND NIGHT

Michael Montaigne says in his essay *On Friendship*(ca 1580) that he passed his time in life quite pleasantly and at ease, "in great tranquillity of mind." But after a special close friend died, he found his remaining days as "nothing but smoke, an obscure and tedious night." My experience was quite different to that of Montaigne. The depressions and hypomanic episodes which I experienced periodically from the age of 18 to 36 coloured my life so darkly, so intensely, so confusedly, from time to time in early adulthood that tranquillity of mind resulted when this bi-polar tendency was treated. In addition, as a teacher for thirty years in the humanities and social sciences, I came to experience so many quite intimate and lengthy conversations, that I also came to associate friendship with the sense of appreciation that many students had for my teaching efforts. I liked many of my students: beautiful young women and open and receptive people from so many walks of life that, by the time I retired at 55, I felt as if I had had hundreds of friends and felt no need for additional friendships, beyond those I would get from the small Bahá'í communities I was part of in my late middle adulthood, say, 55 to 60.

-Ron Price with thanks to Michael Montaigne, *Essays and Pioneering Over Four Epochs*, 29 September 2001.

We all have such different stories
that make up our long life-days
and friendship wanders into
our lives with its sweetened ways.
For years I wandered in search
of a friend, always wondering
just what the term meant.
Insensibly, with the years,
I found more than I had imagined.
Friendship was not remote,
not a rarity; I did not despair
of finding ardent affections.
I did not feel stuck, set

in long preliminary conversations
with the inevitable precautions,
with just acquaintances and the familiar.
I found some universal mixture,
some inexplicable and fated power
that brought each of us together,
in such infinitely varied ways,
secret appointments of heaven.
Such varying intensities, degrees,
intimacies, for, in fact, everyone
had become in their own way--friend.

Ron Price

29 September 2001

A DOZEN YOUNG GIRLS

Sometimes an event in one's daily life is deserving of a poem, at least the feeling arises that "I should write a poem about this." Perhaps the feeling that arises is part of something Wittgenstein's once wrote about poetry and philosophy, namely, that "philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry."¹ Perhaps the inspiration to write a poem arises from the feeling that, as Hume once wrote, it is the business of poetry to bring every affection near to us by lively images and representation; or, perhaps, as Proust once wrote, it is to express something that has struck the heart or the imagination;² perhaps it is a simple taking pleasure in one's own sensibility;³ or, finally, like Seamus Heaney, it's a simple part of putting the practice of poetry more deliberately at the centre of my life.⁴

-Ron Price with thanks to ¹Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* and ² Marcel Proust, *Selected Letters: 1880-1903*, Doubleday and Co., Garden City, NY, 1983, p.xxii; ³ idem and ⁴ ibid., p.13.

A GRANITIC BASE

It has been over ten years since I first discovered the poetry of Emily Dickinson and nearly nine years since I received a copy of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* from Roger White. Within a year Roger passed away at the age of 63. From time to time I go back to read Dickinson, arguably the poet who has influenced me more than any other. The following poem arose out of this rereading and an article on Dickinson's work by Clifton Snider called *Emily Dickinson and Shamanism*.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Four Epochs*, 18 March 2001.

The first day's night came long ago;
it seemed to come in parts.
I spread it over many years
and slowly blacked my hearts.
I'm grateful now that I endured
such terrifying days.
They seemed to teach my soul to sing

and enjoy gaiety's happy ways.
But after time, a decade past,
my strings were snapped again.
My bow was blown to smithereens
and music sounded darkest pain.
That horror in my face now gone,
gone many a yesterday
and in its place this person is
new self by this small blue bay.¹
No lever can pry
or wedge divide
this base of granite stone.
Conviction long and wide is here
deep down in frozen bone.
Though it is, mostly, done alone
and few be by my side,
there is Assembly not far off
from furthest spirit God: abide.
1 I live on a small bay on the Tamar River. The bay is called Pipe Clay Bay.
Ron Price
18 March 2001

A GREAT DESTINY

John Wayne was a leading actor of the first, second and third epochs of the Formative Age. After nearly ten years in B grade movies, he began to come into prominence at the outset of the teaching Plans. In 1938 he appeared in the film Stage Coach. In the first year I was a Bahá'í, Wayne appeared in a film called The Alamo. He died seven weeks into the Seven Year Plan, on June 11th 1979. He symbolized the conservative virtues of America and made a virtue of being sober, industrious and responsible. In some ways he symbolized America itself and what it meant to be a man in all its macho, rugged masculinity, at least up until the 1960s when he began to be out of touch with society and its values. Wayne had a strong sense of his destiny and the destiny of America; so, too, did the Guardian. 'Destiny' is a word used frequently by Shoghi Effendi.
-Ron Price with thanks to "John Wayne: The Unique American," ABC TV, 3:00-4:00 pm, 30 September 2001.

You were there for fifty years,
the first fifty of those Plans,
riding a horse, shooting a gun,
drinking your grog, womanizing.
You lived in a world of stereotypes,
reinvented yourself as you went along,
as quickly as drawing your gun.
You were a paradigm of patriotism
for all those long years
when we were taking this Cause

to the uttermost ends of the earth.
We needed your touchness, then,
your sober, industrious sense
of responsibility, your blunt honesty,
your easy sociability,
your grace and your charm.
We needed it then and now.
We, too, need to be students
of ourselves and battle on
despite our insecurities.
For we, like you,
have a role to play
in the great American destiny.

Ron Price
30 September 2001.

A HARVEST OF SORROW AND DELIGHT

When I listen to Rachmaninov's compositions written during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and enjoy the wonderful melodies for which Rachmaninov is famous, I can't help but ponder the possible influence of Bahá'u'lláh's soul which, after 1892, could "energize the whole world to a degree unapproached"¹ during His life on this planet. For it was in 1892 that Rachmaninov's great output of compositions began to appear. His Prelude in C Sharp Minor which made him world famous came into his being with great force.² He could not shake it away, although he is said to have tried to do so. Rachmaninov was then nineteen; Bahá'u'lláh passed away the same year that Prelude was composed.
-Ron Price with thanks to Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p.244; and ABC TV, "The Harvest of Sorrow: The Memories of Sergei Rachmaninov," 10:40-11:40 pm, 26 August 2001.

There are many ways of telling the story,
the story that the Sun of Baha had set,
for already He had wanted to ascend
by the autumn of 1891.
When that Prelude in C Sharp Minor
was being composed,
its melody came to him with such force
he could not shake it off.
Perhaps this was because
the most precious Being ever to walk
on the face of this earth had just passed away.
Released from a life crowded
with toils and tribulations,
He had winged His flight
to His other dominions,
dominions no one has ever seen.
The Luminous Maid, clad in white,
had bidden Him hasten

to Her undiscovered country.
The Message proclaimed by the Bab
had yielded its golden fruit
and a harvest of melody,
a harvest of sorrow
and sheer delight
flowed out to humankind,
a harvest that will last forever.

Ron Price

27 August 2001

A HUNDRED
AND FIFTY YEARS ON A PAGE

Novelist, Kathy Keneally,¹ discussed how she put together her latest novel Room Temperature. She said she had wanted it to reflect life, her experience of it and its fragmentary, broken-up, nature. Her novel, then, she described as a knitting together of bits of letters, conversation, close-up details of the day-to-day all over the place and stories into one whole, but the whole did not possess a sequential, a logical narrative structure. Keneally said that women tend to write this way because they live their lives this way: in bits and pieces, doing many things at once over many years. Men, on the other hand, driven by a goal and a direction, write a straight line narrative from A to Z. At least this was one tendency, one contrast, she noted between the writing of men and women.

I found this comment on the writing of a novel relevant to the way I go about the writing of my poetry. My poetry reflects the way Keneally, the way women, write. Each poem is a discrete entity, a bit-and-a-piece. Each day I write, on average, two poems. That's fourteen a week and that's fourteen different topics, although these topics are imbued with some of that male unidirectionality, some commonality of theme and content as well. Here is a 19 line poem, a vahid, that tells a little of what I try to do in my poetry.

-Ron Price with thanks to 1Kathy Keneally on "Books and Writing," ABC Radio National, 14 October 2001, 7:25-8:15 pm.

Before listening to you, Kathy,
Andrew O'Hagan, the Scottish
novelist,¹ was telling us about
the importance of living
in your subject imaginatively,
about 'making that subject new,'
as Ezra Pound once put it.
You have to provide, he said,
some living detail, aspect,
feature for those who will be
the special recipients of the poem,
those whom the poem belongs to,
who one day may read it
to themselves or in public,

one of my thousands of
the new stories of this Cause,
slowed down and put on a page,
a hundred and fifty years on a page.²
150,000 or 150 million years on a page.

1 discussing his latest novel "Our Fathers."

2 David Malouf, "Interview with Helen Daniel," Internet, 14 August 2001.

Ron Price

15 October 2001

A KIND OF IDIOCY

Little did I know that when I arrived in Australia from Canada in July 1971 a golden era of Australian rock, especially heavy, loud 'Pub Rock,' was just beginning with the help of groups like 'Billy Thorpe and the Aztex.' The centre piece, along with the coarse, crude, loud music, was beer. By 1972 rock music had become mainstream in the Australian music scene. The launching pad, in many ways, for this new era, was the Sunbury Music Festival in January 1972, just outside Melbourne. My first wife, Judy, and I hitch-hiked to Sydney that summer, saw the Sydney temple for the first time and arrived back in Whyalla when the Festival was being held. -Ron Price with thanks to "Long Way to the Top," ABC TV, 8:30-9:30 pm, 22 August 2001.

We had a real turn-on to the Cause
back in '72: love, peace and this new
religion was quite the craze, for a while,
out in this semi-desert town
where we had just arrived from Canada.
Perhaps it was the positive end
of a new mood, a crazy loosening up,
a musical sensation that had gripped
the youth of this old, dry continent.
It was a wild time that year of '72
when I look back on it
from tomorrow and tomorrow
which has crept on for thirty years.
Yes there was a certain peace,
a certain feeling of liberation.
But the whole thing had a shallowness
I can see now as I look back
on those halcyon days
in that hot, dry, endlessly sunny town
in the northern part of South Australia.
The wife-swappers, the dozens of kids
on a Friday night: it was all heat,
sound and fury signifying nothing.
A brief candle, a walking shadow,
a poor player, fretting and running
on the stage for an evening,

perhaps several firesides,
looking back, a kind of idiocy.¹
1 William Shakespeare, Hamlet.
Ron Price
22 August 2001.

A LIFE FOR THE FUTURE

By 1992 I came to realize several things quite clearly, although I had not accepted them or fully understood their reality; namely, that suffering and loss were going to be enduring parts of my life; that the religion, or was it life, which had brought me so much happiness and joy was destined to bring me sorrow and despondency as well; that the Central Figures of my Faith also faced trials and tribulations which were the lief motifs of their lives; that my youthful vitality was gone and life was, perhaps, more than half over and only middle age and old age remained; that there were many limitations that faced me squarely. I turned to poetry, at first insensibly, for it had taken a dozen years of occasional writing, and then with enthusiasm, so that I could tell my story, my society's story and the story of my religion, spontaneously from the ideas that whelled up in my brain. This autobiographical poetry was a messy business, an imperfect science, but it offered unparalleled access to the character source, my personal identity, so that I could slowly produce a huge, sprawling and definitive history. There is an element of the voyeur, the critic, the analyst, the historian, the biographer, the player, the maker, et cetera, in being an autobiographer. These elements I mix in proportions suited to my taste, my poetic situation, my purpose.

-Ron Price, "Books and Writing," Radio National, ABC, 7:10-8:00 pm., 2 February 2001.

There is no terror here.
I define the story
and who wants to hear
of all the detritus,
the sordid details,
the hagiography of self,
the endlessly reverential tones?
Even a minor life can have its interest.
Here is more than a glimpse.
This is no archive between two covers,¹
not just a grand picture, a broad canvas,
not just a person and no place,
the world is more than mere backdrop
to the service rendered.
The character is rounded,
but rarely are the hind-quarters
contemplated, only the essence
of a life for the future,
if it's ever wanted.

1 some Bahá'í biography is more like hagiography, an archive of information about a great life. But the book is not a great book. (See S. Edward Morrison, "When the Saints Come Marching In: The Art of Bahá'í Biography," Dialogue, Vol.1, No.1, 1986, p. 33)

Ron Price

2 February 2001

A MANIFESTATION OF BARBARISM?

In December 1989 The Simpsons aired for the first time on television. In the last 12 years, 1989 to 2001, this program and its characters have become an institution, a mass phenomenon. I was first introduced to the program by a class of 18 year old boys in a Tafe College in Perth about 1990. In the dozen years since its inception, I have met people who love The Simpsons and people who hate it, appalled by its moral tone. It was with interest that I came across an article yesterday "Simpsons at the Gates: Intimations of the Coming Barbarism" located at The Simpsons Website. The author, Keith Gessen, makes many points about The Simpsons in his article. He talks about stories we tell in order to live. We order, he says, the anarchy of our experience into useful narratives. Gessen refers to Allan Bloom's book The Closing of the American Mind and Bloom's concern at the collapse, the irrelevance, of the referenceable reality of the classical canon of western literature, the once critical provider of our stories. Gessen sees The Simpsons, among a host of other programs, as devouring western culture with their idiocy and videocy, their humour and their delight. A plethora of cultural material has entered society since the beginning of 'the Kingdom of God on earth' in 1953, since the unveiling of the Tablets of the Divine Plan in 1919. One thread among the millions of threads of the many garments in the current cultural melange is the Bahá'í Faith and its story.

-Ron Price with thanks to Keith Gessen, "Simpsons at the Gates: Intimations of the Coming Barbarism," Internet, 13 October 2001.

We were just experiencing
some of that longed for
entry-by-troops,
signs of an acceleration
yet to come....

We were just experiencing
our first heightened expectations
from the architectural design
just adopted for the Terraces
and the realization
of the Guardian's vision
along the path of the kings.....

We were just experiencing
those changes in attitude

in the early stages of
the fourth epoch
and thought, perhaps,
peace was breaking out.....

We were also experiencing
the verve, vision and versatility
of the International Teaching Centre
with warm admiration.....

As we entered the second half
of the then Six Year Plan
what some thought to be
a manifestation of barbarism
entered our culture.
It insinuated itself
into the hearts of millions
with a laugh and a chuckle.

The barbarians had finally arrived.
Were their names The Simpsons?

1 The Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 1989.

Ron Price
15 October 2001.

A MANIFESTATION OF BARBARISM?

In December 1989 The Simpsons aired for the first time on television. In the last 12 years, 1989 to 2001, this program and its characters have become an institution, a mass phenomenon. I was first introduced to the program by a class of 18 year old boys in a Tafe College in Perth about 1990. In the dozen years since its inception, I have met people who love The Simpsons and people who hate it, appalled by its moral tone. It was with interest that I came across an article yesterday "Simpsons at the Gates: Intimations of the Coming Barbarism" located at The Simpsons Website. The author, Keith Gessen, makes many points about The Simpsons in his article. He talks about stories we tell in order to live. We order, he says, the anarchy of our experience into useful narratives. Glessen refers to Allan Bloom's book The Closing of the American Mind and Bloom's concern at the collapse, the irrelevance, of the referenceable reality of the classical canon of western literature, the once critical provider of our stories. Glessen sees The Simpsons, among a host of other programs, as devouring western culture with their idiocy and videocy, their humour and their delight. A plethora of cultural material has entered society since WW1. One thread among the millions of threads of the many garments in the current cultural melange is this poem. -Ron Price with thanks to Keith Glessen,"Simpsons at the Gates: Intimations of the Coming Barbarism," Internet, 13 October 2001.

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Ron Price
15 October 2001.

A MANY-SIZED MOLD

I have collected eleven two ring binders and six arch-lever files of letters from the years 1967 to 2001. This collection of letters possesses an artistic validity of its own and can be enjoyed in its own right, in itself, even by those who are not acquainted with my poetry or my essays. The letters are psychologically revealing, contain many of the characteristic themes found in

other genres of my writing and, in their continuity and diversity, help to widen the spiritual autobiography that already exists in the other genres of my writing. Teaching the Bahá'í Faith, studying it and trying to live the life that it inculcates provides the basis for the inner restlessness and the flow of creativity and energy that weaves the strands of my experience into patterns of my art, one pattern of which is the letter.

-Ron Price with thanks to J.B. Greene and M.D. Norton(trans.), Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke: 1892-1910, W.W. Norton, NY, 1945, pp.9-10.

I mingle souls here,¹
control life's tedium,
avoid the exhaustion
of contact, of responsiveness.
'Tis a defining monument
to my capacity and incapacity
for friendship, love and life
and imparting what is within.

I pour my experience
iron, silver and gold
into a many-sized mold,
ease the pressure
of hours and days
tell the drama of my ways
in all their inner complexities,
their tangled roots and tranquil flowers.
A tool, a handicraft, is here to keep
me prepared for poetry's lot²
which comes to me before I sleep.

1 My Letters 1967-2001.

2 Greene and Norton, op.cit., pp.11-13.

Ron Price
8 May 2001

A MINUTE DISSECTION

In the year that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teaching Plan was put into operation, 1937, the now famous poet W.H. Auden wrote: The day of a self-contained national culture is over. In May, a few weeks after the inception of the Plan, Auden wrote 'a call to arms,' for the Spanish Civil War. In October he was preparing his eclectic The Oxford Book of Light Verse. He was moved by political faith, but not yet to religious faith which both he and Price believed a person must live. Like Auden, Price felt no crude need for fame; like Auden he did feel a need for visionary experience to fertilize his poetry; to illuminate what was good in the world while not excluding the bad; like Auden, Price felt the primary function of poetry was to make us more aware of ourselves and our world; like Auden, Price's one subject was personal responsibility. He worries

about his own and he leaves others alone, to work out their own sense of responsibility, for the most part; like Auden, Price felt a passionate concern for what he wrote about and an absolute confidence in the success of the commitment that his poetic enterprise represented.

-Ron Price with thanks to Patrick Davenport-Hines, "The Cold Controlled Ferocity of the Human Species," Auden, Minerva, NY, 1996, pp.146-181.

There's a most minute dissection
of the spiritual illness of our time;
there is both hushed reverence
before the artistic mystery and
my own cause, again and again.

While you and I gaze, slowly,
in the same direction and
at each other's mystery
we come to define love
and the direction
in which we are moving.(1)

And I, for I speak for myself,
put the pieces of direction,
together, insensibly,
over the last two decades,
hastening
to my most exalted home.

(1) Auden said he had no sense of direction at the age of 37

Ron Price
10 October 2001

A MOLD

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control life's tedium,
avoid the exhaustion

of contact, of responsiveness
'Tis a defining monument
to my capacity for friendship
and imparting the life within.

I pour my experience into a mold,
ease the pressure of life

A NEW LIBERTARIANISM

A new libertarian optimism entered western society in the early to mid sixties, if not before. It had its origin, among other sources, in the belief in a wonderfully Edenic innocence and energy waiting to burst forth from a repressed underworld, a repressed self, that needed to be freed from the confines of an authoritarian society. But what did burst forth was the contents of a Pandora's box which some came to call 'the tyranny of structurelessness' and its anathematizing of institutions and boundaries, limits and legitimate containment. My pioneering life began in this new climate of libertarianism in the 1960s. One of my many struggles was the struggle to obey Bahá'í law in the sexual domain. My behaviour could be explained at a deeper level and was, at least in part, by Herbert Marcuse in his *One Dimensional Man: The Ideology of Industrial Society*(1964).¹ But such a book offered me little as a personal guide even when I read it in the early 1970s in Australia. The potential chaos, alienation, depression, confusion which I experienced in those early pioneering years, 1962-1968, was overcome by psychopharmacology and the Bahá'í Faith. -Ron Price with thanks to Robert M.Young, "Guilt and the Veneer of Civilization," Internet, 25 April 2001.

They were hot and cold days,
days of confusion, crazy, heady,
oppressive, testing, enough to
bottom-out-up the dead,
right-to-the-edge and over,
died more times than I could count,
did not know it was death,
knew sadness, despondency, despair,
just part of the long-haul I thought,
the lower end of normalcy
and it came back ten years later
and again, but softer, easy-on-the-brain.
Maybe this time I can go the distance.

Ron Price
27 April 2001

A NEW METAPHYSICAL

Helen Vendler, in her analysis of the poetry of George Herbert(1593-1633), points out that Herbert "thrust his mind into whatever nourished it to find out the ingredients of the nourishment."¹ I found this description of Herhert's

intellectual appetite to be a very apt one to describe my own mental processes and predilections. I would like to think I possess Herbert's felicity in describing his most tenuous feelings; possess the suggestiveness which acts like an aura around a bright clear centre, his unparalleled intellectual elegance, his fidelity to the experience which he sets out to describe, his ability to constantly reinvent and revise in the process of writing a poem, his ability to renounce and surrender the claims of the ego, his ability to delight the reader at least in some places with a poetry which was a mechanism for devouring experience.

-Ron Price with thanks to Helen Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert*, Harvard UP, London, 1975, p.6.

I want to bring so many things to life,
squeezing drops of their essence
to fall upon the page
from my fevered brain
or in its coolest moments
while I dwell in this small town
by the sea, the tides up-and-down.

I want to indulge in nice speculation,
but not tax my readers with close-pack,
dense with meaning, requiring an axe.

I do not expect to be read by all and sundry
just to be understood by the small audience
for whom I write in my most personal style.

This is a variant of the metaphysicals
four-hundred years after their start
and I provide deep thoughts in common
language for yet another warlike, various
and tragic age and its essential practical realism.

1 A school of poetry begun in the 1590s.

Ron Price
16 September 2001

A NEW PASTORAL

Many Australian writers in the nineteenth and twentieth century, before the arrival of the Dunns to its shores in 1921, write of the monotony, the hardship, the hopelessness, the desolation of its wilderness, its land, its existence, the barren spiritual and emotional aridity of the bush and the likelihood of its defeating those who live there. Some writers, on the other hand, took a brighter, more optimistic stance and described the land's timelessness, the fascination of its beauty or its richness and kindness, as Henry Handle Richardson referred to it in the last line of her *Ultima Thule*. By the 1930s, the second decade of Bahá'í experience in Australia, the harsh

melancholy and rural isolation of pastoral themes among Australian writers began to be replaced by city themes, a city ethos. Some poets, though, continued to celebrate the pastoral landscape, but it was not the pastoral of 'fulfillment and ease.'¹

The isolated, the rural, community came slowly to be influenced by an age of technology as the twentieth century advanced and technology spread its physical comforts wherever it went. This was the situation that was developing by 1948 when the Australian Bahá'í community launched its first organized teaching Plan, after a hiatus of more than a quarter of a century. By 1998, fifty years later, the Bahá'í community in Australia had developed its first generation of poets. If there had been poets in the Bahá'í community of Australia in the years 1921 to 1991, nearly three-quarters of a century, they were mostly unknown to this new crop. By the 1990s and, for some, by the 1980s Australian poets who were also Bahá'ís began to be influenced by writers and poets in the Bahá'í community outside Australia. Some were influenced by the land, a land that had significantly softened its bleak intensity, thanks to that technology.

Part of the role of these Bahá'í poets was to soften that spiritual and emotional aridity. Indeed, this was part of the intended contribution of the Bahá'í community, not just poets, to society all over Australia. This was especially true in the Northern Territory where, in 1948, the Bahá'í community had just begun and where remoteness, bleakness and aridity continued to play dominant roles for Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike. This poem tries to describe the great poetic shifts that have taken place in the twentieth century in Australia as poets tried to tell of their experience, their landscape and their inner lives as well as the inner lives of others.

-Ron Price with thanks to Suzanne Falkiner, *The Writers' Landscape: Wilderness*, Simon and Schuster, NSW, 1992; and Ron Price, *The History of the Bahá'í Faith in the Northern Territory and the Northwest of Australia: 1948-1998*.

1 this is but one definition of pastoral.

I, like them, was seeking
a new sustenance,
something beyond my garden
and the steak or was it
chicken-salad sandwich
with an afternoon movie?

For this was a new desolation,
aridity as dry as dead-man's-gulch,
dessication to the marrow of your bone,
something beyond
the hell of frenetic passivity
and a monotony more deadly
than five days of cricket.

This was a new pastoral

with some action that
tasted of fulfillment.
But who would join me
to drink from its streams
and to taste of its fruits,
especially those
of consecrated joy?

Ron Price
10 January 2001

A NEW POETIC INFLUENCE

The Japanese philosophy of Wabi Sabi, which the West comes closest to in the writings of Henry David Thoreau, places the accent in artistic expression, in its aesthetic philosophy, on the rustic, the raw, the rough, on the imperfect, the impermanent, the incomplete, on nothingness, emptiness, detachment. Since much of my poetry contains accents similar to the tone and texture, meaning and feeling, conveyed by these words; since I have long felt a certain identity with the writings of Henry David Thoreau, that pioneer of yesteryear who also wrote extensively about his everyday experience in the bush, in the rustic places where he lived by himself; since the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith, and of Bahá'u'lláh in particular, also dwell on that same mystical quality of nothingness and emptiness, of detachment and the wilderness of remoteness: this particular Japanese philosophy of Wabi Sabi has a peculiar relevance to my own writings. -Ron Price with thanks to "The Comfort Zone," ABC Radio National, 3 March 2001, 9:00-10:00 am.

Only recently has it been confirmed
that this galaxy has a billion planets,¹
only just the other day while
the Arc Project was being completed,
filling out our world with light,
with fragrances of mercy wafted
as they are over all created things,
over that myriad of planets.
And here, in these words,
I shed a unique light on the lives
of men and women of four epochs,
these protean beings who strike
a thousand postures in their lives
and change their spots swifter
than the twinkling of an eye.²

¹ Interview with an astronomer at the American Association for the Advancement of Science(AAAS) on "The Science Show," ABC Radio National, 12:10-1:00 pm, 3 March 2001.

² Robert Louis Stevenson, "Modern History Sourcebook: Samuel Pepys," 1886. He discusses the chameleon nature of human beings in his introduction.

Ron Price
3 March 2001

A NEW SENSIBILITY

During the fifties when the Cause was spreading in what the Guardian called the ninth stage of history; during the sixties when the Nine Year Plan, the first Plan of the Universal House of Justice, was being implemented by the Bahá'í community, Robert Rauschenberg was developing a new form of art in contrast to the dominant abstract impressionism of the time. Rauschenberg saw himself increasingly as a global artist working in a space he saw as divine with self-imposed limits. He worked with an incredible array of diverse and ordinary materials. Like so much of modern poetry his artistic accent was on the everyday, the ordinary, in life. Much of his work was initially seen as a joke, as an affront to people's artistic sensibility. He was and is an artist over four epochs. Although he had no consciousness of the Bahá'í time frame of epochs, ages and cycles, he did have a sense of spirituality from a Bahá'í perspective.

-Ron Price with thanks to Arts Sunday, ABC TV, 18 March 2001.

He was churning it out
right from the start of my days
when the Kingdom of God
had its inception: little did he know
with all that Pop Art
and so many things
from my popular culture.

And one epoch became another
and another and yet another
and he was just as busy as a beaver.

And I go writing poem after poem
because one poem is not enough.
It's all really one poem anyway:
like felling a huge tree,
infinite alertness to a flash vision,
resonance of the spirit,
surging into utterance
again and again and again.¹

¹Critical Essays on Ted Hughes, Leonard M. Scigaj and G.K. Hall, editors, NY, 1992, p.85.

Ron Price
18 March 2001
A NEW SERIOUSNESS

Australian poets, Peter Porter and Clive James, were discussing poetry in the last half of the twentieth century on ABC Radio National today. Among the many

themes and topics they pursued in their discussion, was the ambition of American poets, their sense that what they were writing mattered, their seriousness and their spirit of hagiography. This was the character of the preponderating influence that was American poetry in our post-WW2 world. It was part, too, of the confessionalism and the seriousness that led so many poets to go to extreme ends; for example, Randall Jarell and Sylvia Plath both committed suicide.

As part of this poetic experience toward the end of the century, in its fin de siècle, I see my own work as possessing that same seriousness and that sense of its importance. But I do not expect my fellow human beings to take my poetry as seriously. In fact, I am always surprised when they do. For I am so used to my fellow human beings not taking the Bahá'í Faith seriously. Hence, it seems to me, it would not be logical to take this poetry seriously being, as it is, an extension of this Cause into the private realm, my private realm. Of course, some of the Bahá'ís who are part of the community I am also a part of, do find what I write of value. That is a bonus to the pleasure I get in the act of writing the poetry.

-Ron Price with thanks to "Book Talk," ABC Radio National, 3:00-3:30 pm, 19 May 2001.

Habit is a part of me
and my sedentary world,
defining who I am, giving
an ontological security
and the rigour of a clearly defined
set of routines, tasks and duties
that answer the question
'what should I do?'

There is always something
to be done every waking minute
and it is a world reinforced
by a rich and vigorous mental life:
The whole thing has a kind of poetry,
a ritual, a sensory-motor aesthetic,
a mind-field that crystallizes charm,
and merges past, present and future.
I am removed from time, in time
and yet in touch with eternity,
with death's winged chariot
drawing near just outside my door,
to float and soar in the spirit's sky.

Ron Price
19 May 2001

A NEW SOLITUDE

I'm not sure what brought me to the end of my tether as the early 1990s insensibly advanced from year to year. It was a different 'end-of-tether' experience than the ones I had had earlier in my life, associated as these earlier times were with my bi-polar disorder. Some of my need was to "give up aiming to please"¹ as Andre Malraux put it, or at least limit that aim severely. I wanted to confine my struggle as much as possible to myself and my writing. The world of writing was the one I wanted to conquer. I had just begun my spiritual, my poetic, autobiography. I had begun to suffer deeply from the need to be alone and to confront ultimate realities on paper and in silence, instead of the serious and the trivial in the context of wall-to-wall people. I had begun to turn my attention inward, toward a quiet space, where I could enjoy a dialogue with existence, with life, with death.² I had checkered my life, as de Quincey once wrote, with spots of solitude, but always there had been emotional barriers to fight making those solitudes very far removed from tranquillity. This time there would be peace, as much peace as one could humanly expect in day-to-day life.

-Ron Price with thanks to Anthony Storr, *The School of Genius*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1988, p.53 and p.61.

I think I wanted to make
a coherent narrative of my life,
communing with self,
in a tranquil ecstasy,
part of a lucidity,
affirm my identity,
my uniqueness,
my idiosyncrasy,
restore a lost unity,
find a new one,
go out into the deeps,
find them, make them real,
using poetry as anchor,
narcotic, to find myself,
having given my all,
chameleon-like,
lost in a world of others,
having embraced life to the full.

Ron Price
14 February 2001

A NEW VITALITY

There was a new energy and vitality that came from the American theatre and its stage in the first two epochs of the Formative Age(1921-1963). Playrights like Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neil and musical like Showboat, Oklahoma and West Side Story brought a new spirit to the American public and its theatre audiences. It was

this same vitality, this same energy, this same spirit that helped the Guardian lay the foundation for Bahá'í Administration in the U.S.A. by 1936 and that led to the successful completion of the two Seven Year Plans and the Ten Year Crusade in the U.S.A. by 1963.

-Ron Price with thanks to ABC TV, 18 May 2001, "Changing Stages: Part 3-America," 9:30-10:20 pm.

You gave new life to the old,
spread it around the world,¹
ignited the sixties in your way,
set me alight, sent me north
and as far from home as I could go.²

It had been there in the beginning
in the Tablets
and in Bound East for Cardiff
in 1916.³

1 American theatre gave new life to British theatre in the 1950s and 1960s; American Bahá'ís pioneered all around the world during the Ten Year Crusade, bringing new life.

2 Australia was as far away as one could go from Canada.

3 The 'Tablets of the Divine Plan' were begun in 1916 and Eugene O'Neil's first one act play, 'Bound East for Cardiff,' was produced in that same year.

Ron Price
18 May 2001

A PECULIAR CHARM

The beginning of romanticism in European culture is usually associated with the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth. A new spirit was beginning to inhabit Islam, as well, in the shape of Shaykh Ahmad in the 1790s and the early nineteenth century. One of the poems of early romanticism by William Wordsworth, which I read yesterday for the first time, is Resolution and Independence, written in 1802. As a Bahá'í reading this poem, a poem which attempts to integrate nature with the rhythms of Wordsworth's consciousness, I attempt to integrate nature and my own consciousness imbued as it is with this new religious ethos. I strive, as Wordsworth did, to see into the life of things, to see the one life in all things. Wordsworth's work was a prelude to a secular age; my work is a prelude to a new religious age. Whereas Wordsworth felt, by 1798, that the problems of society could not be solved by action, I take, and have taken, a more optimistic view. Whereas he was haunted and paralysed by a sense of guilt at the suffering of others and moved increasingly into the quagmire of resignation, I felt something could be done, was being done and would be done and I had played, did play and would play a small part in contributing to the construction of the solutions. Inevitably, though, there was also some sense of resignation in my own life.

-Ron Price with thanks to V.G. Kiernan, Poets, Politics and the People, Verso,

London, p.100.

There was a freshness in the air this morning.
The trees blew coolness onto my face
as I walked through the bush near my home.
The wallabies all rested after their busy roam.

I am a traveller, here, with my long-recited prayers.
My vain and melancholy thoughts went from me.
My fears and fancies can not be kept forever at bay,
but on these walks they mostly do not see the light of day.

Far from the world I walk, and from all care,
but I know one day, again, pain of heart,
distress and life's burden will occupy my soul
and send my emotions scurrying into a black hole.

My whole life has been one of good and bad,
pleasure and pain and much of both I've had,
but not as much strife as many I have known;
I think, on balance, a summer mood I've sown.

I did begin in gladness long ago
when I was young and life was fresh,
but along the road there was despondency
and madness until a grace, a peculiar charm,
did lead me, as if from above, far from harm.

I heard a new voice; it was like a stream.
It was like some entity floating in a dream,
like a thing from some far region sent
to give me new strength and apt admonishment.

God had helped me along the way
when I'd got worn thin day-to-day.
The journey, of course, is not over yet.
The soul's position in the end, far from set.

1 See Resolution and Independence for some of the above pattern.

Ron Price

21 March 2001

and tell the drama of my days
in all its inner complexity,
its tangled root and tranquil flower,
a tool, a handicraft to keep
me prepared for poetry's lot.¹

1 *ibid.*, pp.11-13.

Ron Price

8 May 2001

— Autobiographical Poetry 2001: Pioneering Over Four Epochs: Poetry Booklets 44 to 47 (Used by permission of the curator)