

# Autobiographical Poetry 1999: 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.

## NOW A LAUGHTER, LOW

After reading several of Emily Dickinson's poems, strongly suggestive of a breakdown (i.e. 599, 937, 410 and 341), I thought I would try to describe my first intense episode of the bi-polar tendency, as it is now called, or manic-depression as it was then termed, back in late May and early June of 1968. Dickinson brilliantly translates her experience into art. These poems are among her most powerful. She is in some ways the precursor of the many poets of the twentieth century who have tried to describe some of their fearsome, their traumatic, experiences in poetic form; and, sometimes, the mysterious integration of the personality that eventually results.

-Ron Price with thanks to Joyce Carol Oates,

"Soul at the White Heat": The

Romance of Emily Dickinson's Poetry, Critical Inquiry, Summer 1987.

The first day's night had come  
with no idea of what fearsome  
terror was soon to make me numb.

All the next day I tried to sing,  
but my strings had snapped;  
the bow, it had no ring.

And on the second night,  
until the morn  
unrolled in horror from a height,  
I remember, well, that trip to hell.

The second night-and third-  
was utter madness; for to tell

## THIS WAS MY LIFE

Richard Nixon, one of the bad guys of American politics in the half century that this autobiography is concerned with, wrote in his memoirs that politics was not just an alternative occupation for him. Politics had come to occupy his entire life. The Bahá'í Faith became, for me, my entire life insensibly throughout the fifties and into the sixties. It inspired and directed my affairs; it gave me a philosophical base, an overarching framework of meaning. It became the very *raison d'être* for my life.

-Ron Price with thanks to Bob Woodward, *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate*, Simon and Schuster, NY, 1999, Introduction.

Your<sup>1</sup> political life ended  
as my spiritual life  
crashed around my head  
decimating all that I had built  
over 15 years or was it 30?--  
decentering my very breath,  
all that I had been and become  
in those years of insensible  
and sensible, crazy, change.<sup>2</sup>

Then, at the end of the earth  
where my faith, my ambition  
and my youthful sense of adventure  
had brought me, I nearly lost the plot.  
But, somehow, insensibly,  
(was it by the grace of God?)  
I lived to see another day,  
to fight another fight  
in the long path that was  
leading me inexorably  
to that Land of Lights.

Resignation was on people's lips  
in that fateful month of '74,<sup>3</sup>  
but I was part of a different system  
than Tricky Dicky, as he was called.  
I played a different game  
in the backblocks of the Antipodes  
where noone cared  
and the glaring lights  
of public recognition  
had not yet begun to shine  
in the corners of my life,  
exposing who I was for all to see.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Nixon

<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the late 1950s and through the sixties there was a crazy element in society; perhaps this craziness, this absurdity began with the theatre of the absurd in the early 1950s.

<sup>3</sup> In August 1974 Nixon resigned and I contemplated resigning from the Bahá'í Faith, perhaps the only time I contemplated such an action in the more than

forty years I have been a Bahá'í. I felt incapable of living up to its standards and I began to wonder if I even believed in them.

Ron Price

August 24th 2003

the story now, 'tis like some yarn,  
a happening to someone else,  
quite long ago, some mountain tarn.  
But bone by bone I dropped in fear.  
A cleaving of my mind, my brain had split.  
I was alone, noone was near.  
A great abyss had swallowed me.  
A pain so utter, schizoid me  
had left my world a fearsome sea.  
Now, of course, those days long gone,  
a formal feeling covers their tomb,  
a quartz contentment, like a dawn.  
Some new life was born back then  
in those freezing moments, when  
a stupor entered in and after years,  
many years, there was a letting go,  
and, yes, a funny side, a laughter, low.1

Ron Price

25 March 1999

1 some of this humorous side which I now see in all experience is, I have little doubt, due to living in Australia for nearly thirty years. The tragic here is neutralized, to some extent if not always entirely, through the lens of humour; or, as the Australian poet Bruce Dawe put it, the dry landscape has sucked all the tragedy out of the Australian psyche and left him with, at worst, a dessicated soul; but, at best, a soul that sees the lighter side of all of life. Given the difficulty that religion, that other tool for dealing with tragedy, has in providing that soul with some therapeutic, some visionary, form in the late 20th century, this humour may just be part of the package that is the key survival tool downunder.

#### A CERTAIN SORT OF PERSON

Some poets are difficult to narratize. Their biography is elusive; their poetry a formal mask of a personality not a living face vibrant with expression. Such poets make no authorial statements, no poetic analysis or comment, no

expressions of principle, no efforts to give their poetry coherence, beyond their poetry which must speak for itself. In the main they subscribe to the "poetry not the man" school. No interviews explain or expand on their work. They contribute nothing beyond their poems to the accumulation of what might be called their 'industry', their canonical infrastructure, again, except through their poetry, their literature. Their literary correspondence is either non-existent or only about the mundane and superficial, the everyday. It is difficult, if not impossible, to get a clear image of such a poet; no unary central subject emerges, unless their writing can be seen as the

direct personal embodiment of the poet. Often such a poet seems to lack body. Such poetry is simply seen, often, as a separate entity, disembodied from the poet. Biographical and personal speculation on the part of writers, examining such poetry, becomes impossible, if not unwise.

Unfortunately, great art of any kind: intelligible, sane, perceptive, of use to humanity, requires some sensibility, unified or otherwise, to be demonstrated by the artist. To create, to recreate their life, is a beautiful and difficult task. In the end it remains, for all of us, partly mystery, with or without biographical detail. Without the biographical detail one only has the writing, the poetry. That is all some writers want. -Ron Price with thanks to Timothy Morris, *Becoming Canonical in American Poetry*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1995.

My goal is to compress  
into these poems  
something of the  
manifold complexities  
of my time, age and life;  
and I do it in a certain way  
because I am a certain sort  
of person with a certain sort  
of life<sup>1</sup> and I see autobiography  
in terms of culture, meanings,  
narrative and arbitrary  
arrangements of reality,  
endurance and the filter  
and glaze of language:  
with a nostalgia for unity.<sup>2</sup>

Ron Price

28 December 1999

1 A.A. Milne, *It's Too late Now*, 1939.

2 That nostalgia for unity...the essential impulse for the human being.

-Albert Camus in *Albert Camus: Philosopher and Litterateur*, Joseph McBride, NY, 1992, p.6.

## PERSONAE

In describing his public image J. B. Priestley saw himself as "a mannerless blundering idiot." But he also saw himself as: amiable, indulgent,

affectionate, shy and rather timid. Had Price been as splenetic and "bloody rude," he never would have survived in a classroom teaching the wide range of men and women that he did for over a quarter of a century. Priestley tended to dump icy water on what could have been "comfortable personal relationships." Perhaps, if Price had been more of a cold fish with a harsh edge, he would have protected himself from the endless conversations that filled his life for so many years and which, in the end, wore him down. Priestley was touchy, a victim of his own acerbic eruptions, had a capacity for brooding withdrawals and an ability to slay pompous parasites. He also saw himself as a kind, easy-going chap. Privately, as a family man, he endured long-drawn-out tragedy and illness with what he called a life-enhancing pessimism.<sup>1</sup> Behind the various personae which sustained him, behind this rubble of eventually discarded selves, was a loving and compassionate man. Price, too, had his many personae which sustained him through the labyrinthine walks of life he had taken; he had his tragedy, his illness and a 'life-enhancing humour.' His brooding withdrawals, his illnesses, had virtually disappeared, at least in these early years of the evening of his life. He, too, was easy going; some battles remained. Some he would lose and some he would win in the road left to travel. -Ron Price with thanks to Vincent Brome, J.B. Priestly, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, pp.5-6.

Behind the loving and compassionate personae,  
for he had many endearing, loving, selves,  
at the drop of a hat, on the wave length,  
Mr. Chameleon, he often called himself.  
Behind those "selves", for surely they were real,  
was a quiet man, a quiet boy, at home with his family,  
staying by himself, being in solitude's silence,  
writing, reading, struggling with his inner demons,  
the tragic element which strikes us all,  
but content, at rest, well-pleased with his Lord,  
often joyful, working at his craft,  
away from friend and stranger alike,  
sheltered by the All-Merciful,  
confident, dignified and  
blushing to lift up his face  
to his great Redeemer.

Ron Price

18 May 1999

<sup>1</sup> The 'he' here is, in fact, 'myself' as I sit in the quiet of my chamber after retiring from the teaching profession after thirty years of teaching.

MARRIAGE

Frieda loved D.H. Lawrence, even if he drained her emotional reserves or failed to fulfil her needs. The marriage had become her life's work and it's disappointments were inevitable. Frieda believed she had what few women ever have: "a real destiny." The marriage was also Lawrence's life work, although he acted under a different set of assumptions: a belief in the sanctity, worth and permanence of the institution. He also had a belief in the rescuer's responsibility for the rescued (Frieda). Divorce was putrid and out of the question. Separations, though, were frequent. -Ron Price with thanks to Janet Byrne, *A Genius for Living: The Life of Frieda Lawrence*, Harper Collins, NY, 1995, p. 316.

Love was not a word that either Price or his wife liked to use to characterise their emotional attachment to each other. They both found it too abstract. They both had had their disappointments, disappointments largely ironed out in the first two decades of their marriage. Price believed he had what few people ever have: "a sense of destiny." Price believed he had done a rescue job on his wife, on Chris, the rescued. They both acted under the assumption that marriage was a challenge, something worth working at and, hopefully, permanent, although divorce was an option which, by the beginning of the third decade of their relationship, was rarely contemplated. A sharing of solitude, "an exchange of two solitudes", as the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset put it, was certainly a philosophical view that underpinned his marriage, as Price saw it. -Ron Price with thanks to Ortega y Gasset, *Man and People*, p.50.

Marriage in the third and fourth epochs  
of the Formative Age was an unstable  
affair in and out of the Bahá'í community,  
but, however unstable, I found it  
that fortress-for-well-being especially  
when pioneering and travelling  
from pillar to post, producing  
he who will remember His Lord  
and thus acquiring the means  
of attracting perpetual grace.  
And that barrier, there was always  
that barrier, a solitude  
in the heart and soul of man  
and woman, a mystery  
that is the Source of their light and life.

Ron Price  
24 May 1999

## ESPERANCE

This poem was written while my wife and I had breakfast in Esperance, a small town about eight hours by car from Perth. There had been at least one Bahá'í

in Esperance since the late 1980s. Two Bahá'ís had come here in the last twelve months but they were leaving soon. -Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

Sitting here in this town centre  
of a beautiful seaside resort  
where the first settlers had come  
back in 1863: the beginning time  
of another community half a world away.  
Here in this warm, dry, restaurant,  
off-white with time, at the corner  
of Demster and Andrew Streets  
on this cold, wet morning  
leaving you with a feeling  
of dampness under your skin  
into your brain,  
a week before your 55th birthday,  
travelling east to Tasmania.

Having finished your pancakes and coffee,  
you pondered at what seemed  
the immense difficulty,  
the psycho-spiritual battle of the age:  
the spreading of the fragrances of mercy  
over all created things  
in a visible form here in this town,  
as in so many other towns  
where we have passed through  
in the thousand kilometres  
we have travelled.

How will the Countenance  
of the Ancient of Days  
come to be known here  
down near the Great Southern Ocean?

Came the answer from the Kingdom  
plain as plain could be: slowly, slowly,  
as slowly as this fine town  
has evolved, in its long years,  
after I am gone,  
like the great Karri trees: silent,  
majestic, with breathtaking grandeur,  
unrivaled in these parts.

Ron Price 17 July 1999

## OUR STORY HAS JUST BEGUN

My son Daniel, who is now twenty-two, is visiting my wife and I for ten days in Tasmania. It is his first visit home since he and we parted company in Perth in July 1999. After two days home, on our return from a Boxing Day family gathering, I began to think about my son and my general relationship with him. This poem, written at 1 a.m., was the result of this thinking and the feeling that had been developing for several hours, built of course on those twenty-two years, on my own relationship with my father, on my religious beliefs, among other factors.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

They<sup>1</sup> are a part of you  
and, it would seem,  
you worry about them  
until you die.

They come from you  
and through you  
and after you  
and you feel  
as if they are taking  
your story  
down the road  
to the next few chapters,  
at the end of your pages,  
but  
the book is co-authored,  
indeed, authored by  
many men and women  
down a line than one  
can not know in this life.

For our story, he and I,  
has just started  
Methinks it will go on in some  
fair and shining place,  
some mysterious Realm  
which the pen can not tell  
nor the tongue recount.  
There, we will fill reunion's cup  
of that crystalline camphor  
and be refreshed by fragrance  
of apple, of jasmine, of musk,  
in the spirit's endless sky.

1 your children

Ron Price

27 December 1999

#### TRANSCENDING TRIVIALITY

The secret of the poet is his capacity to overcome the limitations of his own personality in an act of promotion. Promotion is the capacity to forget oneself in an act of identifying a higher self. It can be achieved by role-playing; the ideal self becomes the real self. The poet feels himself evoked by a greater force than the ordinary in life, something fuller, more alive, more real. There is an element of self-absorption, of the egotistical, of a wakening of the senses, where the inner and outer world face one directly, where the distorting glass of personality is gone, at least for the time the poem is being written. There's a sudden significance, importance and inspiration in writing poetry that partly takes the breath away in a gulp of certainty and happiness. At this time, the poet transcends the triviality of everydayness and connects himself with a universal reality that gives meaning to life. -Ron Price with thanks to Colin Wilson, *Poetry and Mysticism*, Hutchinson, London, 1970, pp.110-111.

The pressure of, and on, our consciousness  
needs to be kept high:  
we need to live at high pressure,  
to be psychologically nourished  
and thus avoid spiritual laziness.

As I approach my 55th birthday,  
I can see myself as source of pressure,  
some motivational matrix,  
internal drive, imaginative function,  
without the usual constraints of job  
to fill my days with significance,  
importance and inspiration  
that tire me out with its endless  
words, words, endless words.

Ron Price

28 June 1999

A CONSTANLY  
RECURRING PATTERN

In 1986 Sir Edward(Weary) Dunlop, a lieutenant-colonel in the Australian army in WWII, published his diaries. Weary represented the finest in the Australian character and tradition: unflinching sense of humour, light use of irony as a means of defeating self-pity and reducing the intrusions of fate, great-heartedness, immense persistence. Yet life to Dunlop, as he put it himself in his introduction, was best expressed by Shakespeare in MacBeth:

It is a tale  
Told by an idiot

Full of sound and fury

Signifying nothing.

In my blackest moments  
when frustration and exhaustion  
have sucked all of life's juices  
from the very marrow of my bones,  
life becomes something  
I would prefer to leave behind  
and let death become,  
that messenger of joy,  
allowing me, as it does,  
to enter  
the garden of happiness.

I see myself as part of  
a contemporary version  
of that same immemorial  
and constantly recurring pattern<sup>2</sup>  
and in a line of succession  
of all men  
who have ever left their homes  
to fight for a cause  
greater than themselves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, Nelson Publishers, Melbourne, 1986, p.xi.

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Ulysses*.

5 October 1999

## HEARING

### THE NOTE AND THE MUSIC

This poetry does not reveal the secrets of my life and times: the secrets are openly manifest, as Bahá'u'lláh says, "in the holy presence." What it does provide is a basis for the examination of a life and the thinking that went on in quite considerable detail. It does not attempt to provide a political, economic and sociological analysis of the times; this is done elsewhere in books of various genres, in immense proportions, filling libraries across the land.

I have lived, thusfar, over half a century, through a period of growth in the Bahá'í community from perhaps two-hundred thousand to some six million members. This period is described elsewhere by other writers in extensive and intensive detail. Having taught and worked at the teaching and consolidation process across two continents for over forty years in the position of a simple believer without any particular status or special institutional role, I bring to my self-imposed task of poet-describer, the uniqueness, the refreshing perspective, the position, the place of the ordinary believer. I think one day what I write in this corpus could be a useful addition to an evolving history of what is the tragic, yet enchanting, story of the emerging world religion. This is no dry assemblage of facts and dates, but rather an assiduous recreation of a life in the light of what I feel drawn to put on paper, with synergy and serendipity, the two features of poetry that are also shared with other art forms including the city.<sup>1</sup> -Ron Price with thanks to David Sweetman, Paul Gaugin: A Complete Life, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1995, pp.3-5; Herman Khan, Interview on Monday Conference, ABC TV, 1973(ca).

And what will I write tonight  
as the winter cold sets in and  
I reflect on the last Feast I have  
taken part in here in Belmont  
after eleven years in the West  
corner of this antipodean world?

I am unable to draw on any of my books  
for the little quotes I like to play with  
as I write my poetic mixture,  
packed away as they are for yet another move,  
to complete the circuit of this vast continent  
at the end of the Great Axis  
described during my puberty

by the then king of the world.<sup>1</sup>

But if I could get at my books,  
I'd get that message from the  
House on 'the Feast' back in about '89,  
where sociability was highlighted  
as the foundation for this most democratic  
of democratic institutions,  
this sacred, yet simple meeting  
which I enjoyed for the last time,  
coming back as I was from a  
personal ware and tare,  
one of those periodic crashes  
over forty years, reintegrating,  
yet again, yet again, in this loose,  
but dynamic and deep structure of life:  
my life and their lives which will go on  
Forever and Ever.

I should say something in this last stanza  
about a light-as-air chat I had,  
one of many over many years,  
with a charming, delightful young woman:  
Miss Huda Ali:

We all strike different notes and chords,  
as we play life's game on the stage,  
in the theatre of life, the great dramaturgy.  
Always combined,  
the light and the serious  
make a rare, rich, mix  
which Huda will take with her,  
I trust, into many places  
on this wondrous stage,  
(for there is only one stage)  
and so bring this precious Truth  
with that lightness  
without which,  
so often,  
noone hears  
the Note,  
the Music,  
at all.

<sup>1</sup> A term used by believers I knew back in the 1950s and 1960s to apply to Shoghi Effendi. He gave birth to the term 'spiritual axis' in 1957.

Ron Price  
23 June 1999

11:05 pm.

## GOING HOME

This poem was written on the first day of Ridvan, the election night in Belmont for the incoming local spiritual assembly. As the outgoing chairman I should have been present but, after eleven years in Perth and the same number of years on Assemblies; after thirty-seven years pioneering and nearly thirty as a teacher in classrooms, I seemed to be peopled-out. On reading some of Australian poet Bruce Dawe's poems about war during that evening, I thought there were some parallels between the secular wars he wrote about and the spiritual one I've been fighting since, perhaps, 1959. This is a theme I have returned to many times in my poetry with the initial seed for the idea, perhaps, from Roger White and his 'Lines From a Battlefield.'

-Ron

Price with thanks to Bruce Dawe, *Sometimes Gladness: Bruce Dawe Collected Poems 1954-1978*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1978, pp. 79-91.

I've been off-duty for sometime now,  
a gun-shot wound from a sniper,  
saved from an amputation by a hair,  
going home, but not yet in a box.

Day after day, I've been waving the flag,  
town after town, town after town,  
planting the seeds, planting the seeds,  
spreading the word, spreading the word,  
word after word, meeting after meeting,  
in-coming item of correspondence after  
in-coming item of correspondence, agenda  
after agenda, room after room, cup of tea  
after cup of tea: in Arctic snows, semi-desert  
spinifex, urban jungles, little dots on the land  
from Armadale to Zeehan. Day after day,  
year after year, decade after decade, quarter  
century after quarter century, waving the flag,  
waving the flag, the quiet revolution, they call it,  
just about silent, no guns, no swords, no uniforms,  
but endless talking, forty years of it, yes, and laughter,  
excitement, adventure, and a great weariness.

So much so that:

I've been off-duty for sometime now,  
a gun-shot wound from a sniper,  
saved from amputation by a hair,  
going home, but not yet in a box.

Ron Price

21 April 1999

BLISS WAS IT IN THAT DAWN TO BE ALIVE: young, middle aged or old.

As I head out of the teaching profession and out of Bahá'í community activity in Belmont in 1999; as I head to Tasmania and what I anticipate will be a far less active social self I plan to create in its place a personality much more devoted to writing. This literary persona, or poetica personalita, to use Croce's phrase, must contend with other factors than those in Perth. The pattern for my social self in Tasmania I anticipate will involve my wife's family, a degree of interaction with the Bahá'í community and the necessary activity with the wider Tasmanian public. One thing that the last sixteen years in the north and west of Australia has taught me has been a way to balance the private self and the public self. One probably never learns that totally. But I have a sound base, I trust, for the balance I hope to achieve in Tasmania.

-Ron Price with thanks to

Martin Walser, "On Kafka's Novels", *The World of Franz Kafka*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1980, p.87.

I will also spend much more time  
with my wife and I will have to  
ensure this symbiosis is a nurturing  
one for both of us. Perhaps, then,  
two hundred years from now<sup>1</sup>, when  
my spiritual descendents come across  
this poetic opus, I will circle around  
them in their collective memory as one  
of the earliest international pioneers  
(a trial to his widowed mother,  
escaping her clutches into  
the Bahá'í pioneering circuit  
embracing the world over three epochs<sup>2</sup>)

For bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
young, middle aged or old, they might add,  
to have served in this seminal period of the  
20th century & to have left a mark, some  
enduring traces perceived by the Master.<sup>3</sup>  
And in that coffin's space, what?  
Just a trace of gold--  
just a trace of gold.

Ron Price

8 January 1999

1 The life of George Bass circles around the collective memory of Australians says Sally Blakeney in her article about Bass' love letters to his wife in *The Australian's Review of Books*, November 1998.

2 I have lived through most of the first two epochs of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine

Plan: 1937-1963; 1963-1999; I have lived through three epochs of the Formative Age: 1944-1963; 1963-1986 and 1986-1999(i.e. epochs two to four). The traces left behind from these epochs are difficult for the pen to recount at this early stage of analysis.

3 This poem, in its first draft, had 18 lines. My intention recently has been to call such poems: Letters of the Living, or 'A Letter' for short, for convenience of expression and definition. This is due to: (i) the first 18 Letters of the Living and (ii) the letters of George Bass: 1795-1803 which were the inspirational source of this poem.

## MY DEAR OLD

### FRIENDS

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. The idea of my parents as my friends, long lost friends to that Undiscovered Country, was such a flash. I have tried to capture this idea in the poem below.  
-Emerson, "Essay on Self-Reliance," Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Crowell Co., 1961(1926), pp.31-66.

You went away a while ago,  
now its a long time with the years.  
You've grown quite close,  
the heart in peace,  
I draw an easeful breath,  
oh so soft down the road of time.  
Where are you now,  
my dear old friends?

Have you slipped into sweet-scented streams?  
Are you walking within the meadows  
of His nearness before His presence?  
Are the fragrant breezes of His joy passing over you?  
Are you in the garden of His immortality  
before His countenance  
where you will abide forever?

I nearly remember your feet  
those years ago,  
your faces lined with age;  
your voices have faded  
long before yesterday:  
you touched my soul forever.

Ron Price  
3 August 1999.

### BWs AND HIS CHARISMA

Biological weapons(BWs) have led in recent years to an increasing threat from biological terrorism, especially since 1995 and events in Japan associated with a religious cult and their use of biological weapons. -ABC Radio, 31 August 1999, Symposium of the International Union of the Micro-Biological Society.

By the end of the first phase of the Plan: 1937-1944,  
biological weapons, associated terrorism  
had become a threat,  
a threat which did not go away,  
kept breaking out again and again;  
and now programs are being put in place  
for the first respondents, the front liners,  
in case this new terrorism becomes a reality  
and not just a remote threat.

As the Universal House of Justice  
approaches the fortieth year  
of its trusteeship  
of that global undertaking  
begun over a century before,  
of the institutionalization  
of His charisma,  
the heat seems to be going up  
and up.

Ron Price  
31 August 1999

### AN EARLY LANDSCAPE

The earliest moments, events, in the landscape of my memory seem to have an unusual clarity, as if they are scenes engraved on stone. It is not so much that these memories are soothing or particularly interesting, although I do find them so; rather, it is the place in memory where things start, the place of origins, or indelibly etched beginnings, domestic ritual's mysterious and precious beginnings. One describes and defines oneself in memory, in ritual's labyrinth of time. Identity is born, in part at least, in places like this: impressible, impressionable, fixed for life but changing with time's journey, changing right from the word go and yet curiously fixed. These memories become a part of life's grand ritual, repeated, gone over in the mind, a thousand times, and then some. -Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished

Manuscript of Poetry, 1999.

Perhaps it is obsession  
that gives these earliest memories  
their haunting elaboration  
and effortless detail,  
that gives that mud pie  
its tidy, straight sides  
on the edge of spring  
with the snow melting\*  
beside the house on  
Bellvenia Road in RR#1  
Burlington Canada where  
I lived as a four year old.

Memory is nostalgia;  
it is ritual aesthetic,  
intense and accurate  
and my life's start  
inseparable from fancy,  
the landscape of my imagination.

Ron Price  
10 September 1999

\* this was my first memory

#### A TASTE OF ETERNITY

Emerson wrote that every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature, in this physical world, corresponds to some state in the mind. That state in the mind can only be described by presenting that natural fact, that physical world, its appearance, as a picture in the mind. The "correspondence" between mind and world is a sort of circuitry which we associate with art and creativity, with reception and projection, with memory and imagination.

-Ron Price with thanks to Emerson in American fiction 1940-1980, Harper and Row, NY, 1983, p.17.

That garden in my heart  
where you both<sup>1</sup> did live  
the sweet-scented stream  
that ran past the willow  
and the spruce;  
that great blue lake<sup>2</sup>  
where we swam together  
in the summer;

the green fields and parks  
where we<sup>3</sup> played baseball;  
the beautiful young girls  
who will remain clear as glass  
in my mind's eye carved  
from beauty's rose;  
those uncles, aunts and cousins  
who defined what family was  
then and now: you<sup>4</sup> help me feel  
a lowly evanescence  
and fill my heart  
through the vitalizing fragrance  
of His Day  
in these spaces of existence  
where I strive to possess  
a spiritual conscience,  
where memory melts my spirit  
in a warm light that tastes  
even of the fruits of eternity.

Ron Price

18 January 1999

1 my mother and father in our garden: 1950-1962

2 Lake Ontario

3 my friends and fellow baseball team members

4 all of existence, but especially the memories

## SEX

The sexual impulse is the most vehement of cravings, the desire of desires, the concentration of our willing. -Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*.

That's certainly true for some, Arthur,  
but others are endowed  
with desires of a different willing,  
cravings with different filling,  
appetites aimed at a different tilling  
on the adventure of the road to death.

Personally, I've found it an annoying itch,  
certainly has absorbed my concentration  
far more than I have liked, wished, desired,  
caused me a lot more trouble than I ever  
imagined and I will be glad to rid myself,  
eventually, of the concupiscible appetite's  
never ending pull, its insistent urge.

I often wondered why Bahá'u'lláh  
spoke so little about this thing  
which has plagued me and stopped  
me often from being able to sing.

1 November 1999

### 1953: A TURNING POINT IN HISTORY

The closing chapters of Thomas Hardy's autobiography *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*, published in 1930, were left to Hardy's second wife, Florence, to write.

She did some editing of the early chapters. She deleted Hardy's frequent vicious attacks on the reviewers who had been vicious in their attacks on him. She also cut out some descriptions of society people Hardy had met in London. She also used her red pencil in some of Hardy's references to Emma, his first wife. Jealousy seems to have played a part here. We now have, though, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Michael Millgate who makes a convincing attempt to restore Hardy's original text. (James Gibson, *Thomas Hardy: A Literary Life*, MacMillan Press, London, 1996, p. 176)

As Harold H. Cornfield, my uncle, explains in his Foreward to my grandfather's account, *A.J. Cornfield's Story*, written about 1921-3, the content of the existing typed copy "is correct." <sup>1</sup> The kind of problem referred to above in relation to Hardy's autobiography is not present in the only completed autobiography (my grandfather's: 1872-1901) in my family.

This autobiography of my grandfather  
goes back a long way,  
sort of fleshes things out in our family  
back to, what, 1872, or thereabouts?  
This kind man's work,  
at the outset of the Formative Age,  
with his seal of good-housekeeping  
in a Foreward in 1953,  
the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth,  
serves as a foundation for my work:  
*Pioneering Over Three Epochs*.

It starts in 1953 when a new Age began  
for my family at what was a turning point  
in American Bahá'í history.<sup>2</sup>  
I was, then, nine.

1 Harold H. Cornfield, *A. J. Cornfield's Story*, pp.i-ii.

2 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America: 1947-1957*, Wilmette, 1965, a letter 18 July 1953, pp.110-122.

Ron Price

13 May 1999

## A THOUGHT

Much of this poetry is stimulated by thoughts about and feelings for the immense developments on Mt. Carmel in the buildings and the terraced gardens. This poem tries to summarize the experience, the thoughts, the emotions I have had in relation to these developments. -Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

A thought played with my mind today,  
one I'd played with lots before.  
It's a thought I shall not finish with  
until I go through life's final door.

From whence it came and where it goes  
I'm only too aware.  
Somewhere in my soul I know  
Of this beauty oh so rare.

Ron Price  
4 August 1999

## A THOUSAND SIGNS

Poetry is a way of seeing things, not a way of saying things.  
-Karl Shapiro in *The Poet's Work*, 1979, p.100.

This poem was written while sitting in the passenger seat of a Ford-Courier while travelling along the Great Ocean Drive near Esperance. Spectacular beach and coastal scenery inspired this poem. Most of the poems in the time period 13 July to 26 August were written in a similar position, in a town or between towns driving across Australia. -Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript.

A place of beauty  
one hundred and eighty million years in the making,  
soft smooth rock,  
wind swept

for uncountable hours,  
waves crashing in  
since before man  
looked like man.

Eternity could be defined here  
beside this tree  
that has been blown in the wind,  
enduring far more  
than I have ever endured.  
Here are a thousand signs  
of a spiritual reality  
which I am only beginning  
to taste, to breath,  
to see, to feel,  
as if I was  
a hair's breadth away  
from this slightly unreal world  
with its ever-changing mix  
of melanchology and joy.

Ron Price  
18 July 1999

#### A TOUCH OF GLORY

By the time Shaykh Ahmad was born in 1753, religion in England had virtually collapsed according to Kenneth Clark in his book *Civilization*. The novel, by that mid-century date, was coming to occupy some of the space left by this spiritual vacuum, as was the divinity of nature. Spiritual solitude, reflection carried out in the privacy of one's home or indeed climbing a mountain, sometimes became expressed in autobiography. Often novels became a type of autobiography. Individualism and personality, existing in isolation, had become the creation of two centuries of Protestantism(1517-1717). They were turned increasingly toward the senses, feeling or reason outside of a religious framework for vast numbers of people, for perhaps the first time since the decline of the Roman Empire in the West. And writing allowed the individual to withdraw from society, obtain emotional release and concentrate the whole meditative self after the endless, ceaseless, flow of thought, feeling and sensation that daily life involved. It was like a new religion for some.

-Ron Price

with thanks to Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1960; and Kenneth Clark, *Civilization*, Penguin, 1969.

In the tortured and complex route  
of the autobiographical experience  
in our modern age the glory of events,  
of individuals, indeed of experience  
itself has got lost. History once lived  
under the sign of glory.<sup>1</sup> We used to  
lose ourselves, in those long lost days,  
in some prodigious dimension, a vision  
of divine order and heavenly beauty.<sup>2</sup>

Now, we seek identity, an accumulation  
of evidence, a testimony to our existence,  
in the simple story of our days.  
Glory does not touch our ways,  
except in some media constructed,  
secondary reality.<sup>3</sup>

But here in this holy seat  
this haste thee, O Carmel,<sup>4</sup>  
glory seems to tint us  
because He:

fixed His gaze upon us;  
bestowed upon us His bounty;  
directed toward us His steps;  
when I:

harkened to  
His call;

was  
honoured with His footsteps;  
was quickened through  
the vitalizing fragrances of His Day;  
and the thrilling voice of His Pen,

His trumpet-call amidst mankind.<sup>4</sup>

1 Jean Baudrillard, originally published as part of Jean Baudrillard,  
*L'Illusion de la fin: ou La greve des evenements*, Galilee: Paris, 1992.

2 Dante is said to be the supreme dramatist of human life in all its diversity  
and a vision of heavenly radiance. (Clarke, *op.cit.*, p. 73)

3 Martin Pawley, *The Private Future*, 1973.

4 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tablet of Carmel*.

-----Ron Price 15 January 1999.

#### A UNIQUE WORK

This *Pioneering Over Three Epochs* is a unique work: thousands of poems, hundreds of essays, a one hundred and fifty page narrative, several histories from one thousand to fifteen thousand words, several volumes of journal-diary entries, several efforts of varying length in the sci-fi genre, an extensive collection of many hundreds of letters, many volumes of photographs and notes, contributions to local spiritual assembly archives from 1965 to 1999, one slim cassette tape and an additional archive of gathering and complex and increasing proportions.

-Ron Price

This vast mass of material  
could be of use some day.  
It's impossible to calculate  
at this early date, stage, of  
history: the ninth stage and  
the first decades of the tenth  
stage of history, as the Guardian  
outlined them back in 1953.

Here is one story that begins  
at the beginning of the ninth  
stage of history with an ad  
in the local paper, a lady who  
was not quite fifty and a little  
boy of nine who played softball  
in the summer and was in love  
with a little girl across the street.

Ron Price  
18 April 1999

#### A VAPOUR IN THE DESERT

The intensity of which Ibsen was capable in a face-to-face conversation comes through clearly in Helene Raff's diary.

-Robert Ferguson, Henrik

Ibsen: A New Biography, Richard Cohen Books, London, 1996, p.346.

In February 1972, in Eyre High School in Whyalla, Price began to experience an intensity in face-to-face conversation which made him liked, popular and successful in classroom teaching first among adolescents and then among adults, an energetic and winning seed-sower in the nine, the five, the seven, the six and the four year Plans; and an example of that 'fundamentally assured and happy way of life' that the House of Justice had encouraged the Bahá'ís to try to show to the world as far back as October 1963 in the letter announcing the launching of the Nine Year Plan.

-Ron Price

Was it that plea for assistance?

Was it a fear of failure, yet again?  
What was it that finally brought  
success into my life like a great  
river flowing to the sea across  
those hot semi-desert and mallee,  
prairie grasses? Was it simply the  
change from grief and loss to success  
and joy which is the periodic shift we  
all experience from time to time in life?  
Was it a win while, unbeknownst,  
underneath, quietly, my marriage slipped  
away seductively into the land of divorce?  
Was it a vapour in the desert which the  
thirsty dream as water but which, in  
retrospect, appears to be mere illusion?

Ron Price  
7 May 1999

#### A COALESCING

I have always found commentaries on, essays about and references to Mark Tobey's art helpful in defining my own poetic. Today I came across Harold Rosenberg's *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Influence* (2nd edition, 1966).

In it, in the first part of the book, Rosenberg discusses Tobey's art for one page, some four hundred words. I have always found Tobey's emphasis on individual experience as the basis for art of any kind, the fact that he was forty-five before 'diverse elements began to coalesce'<sup>1</sup> and the bridging of the divisions in the various subjects of study, found echoes in my own philosophy of poetry. Rosenberg stresses the porous nature of Tobey's work, porous to all kinds of time phenomena; the derivative nature of his work and yet its uniqueness and how his work originates beyond the self. All this is true of my work, except that much of my poetry originates in my own self, my own life.

-Ron Price with thanks to William C. Seitz in *Mark Tobey/Art and Belief*, editor, Arthur Dahl, George Ronald, Oxford, 1984; and <sup>1</sup>Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object*, Horizon Press, NY, 1964, pp.34-5.

Yes, Mark, diverse elements  
began to coalesce, requiring  
me to reach out beyond the  
familiar roads, paths, routines,  
the familiar places that normally  
gave me relief, joy, hope, pleasure.  
It was a demarcation period  
between glories and triumphs  
of the past and lustrous prizes,  
yet-to-be-garnered.

It saw a quickening wind  
ventilating my life and  
amplifying my perspectives,  
a special time for a rendezvous  
of my soul with its Source.<sup>1</sup>

Ron Price

28 December 1999

<sup>1</sup> See Ridvan Message, 1992.

### FUGITA

Mr. Jason Jannu, whom memory informs me I first met in December 1973, had an exhibition of wood carvings at the 18th Annual Bahá'í Studies Conference in Melbourne in September of 1999. One of his pieces was an exquisite carving of a face, the face of Fugita. Mr. Jannu's interpretation of that face and that man was nothing less than astonishing in its profundity and certainly a study in itself. This poem attempts such a study, brief and in appreciation to Mr. Jannu for his work and a life which could lead to such an outstanding piece of art.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

Fugita is buried there,  
rather fitting,  
don't you think,  
in an old sleeper,  
he sleeps,  
the old sleeper,  
at last, now,  
in perpetuity  
for us to see,  
recreated,  
ex nihilo,  
well not exactly,  
from iron-bark wood.

Can your loneliness  
now instruct me,  
you who knew  
how to make Him laugh?  
With your pain gone now,  
your twisted sorrow  
and your quiet,

unattended joy,  
as silent as the mountain  
where you once lived,  
can you make us laugh?

We who now live  
in our own loneliness and pain  
must laugh  
to defeat self-pity,  
to reduce the intrusions of fate,  
and to help us maintain  
that immense persistence  
for the road ahead.

From from your retreats  
of nearness and splendour,  
come to us now in our laughter  
and our light irony---to keep us sane.

----Ron Price 25 September 1999

#### SOMEWHAT FANCIFUL

Angels of fire and snow was a gauche and watercolour on paper done by Diane Ardjamond of Springwood NSW Australia. The work consisted of three separate pieces of art and was exhibited at the 18th Annual Bahá'í Studies Conference in Melbourne from the 21st to the 26th of September 1999. The following poem was inspired by Mrs. Ardjamond's moving evocation of a phrase, a concept, an image, from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, His Angels of fire and snow.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three  
Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

Where did they come from  
these angels of fire and snow?  
Were they picked out  
from the Kingdom,  
serendipitously?

Oh yes! The Kingdom of Names  
in the first half century  
of the establishment  
of His earthly Kingdom<sup>1</sup>,  
from His unearthly Kingdom.

This may be the closest I'll get  
to the real thing, there:<sup>2</sup>

mystic,  
ethereal,  
intercourse,  
fascination.

Can they really help, there?  
And what of these,  
you who are created  
and on the wall, here?

Will I see you again, there,<sup>3</sup>  
in all your brightness and colour,  
your enigmatic and serene depths,  
your ice-cool labyrinths  
and history's touch,  
here and there.

Is this a taste of what is to come?  
Will I be worthy of your immense  
charm and beauty,  
the flood of your presence,  
your radiance  
and its fire and snow.

Who are you? -----Ron Price 24 September 1999

1 The Kingdom of God on earth began, according to Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*, in 1953. 2 Holy souls in the next life act as a leaven that leavens the world of being. Perhaps these angels of fire and snow are part of that leavening influence.

3 I like to think that some artistic works are more than just an influx of the heart or the workings of a finite and simple mind, but that they may be forms, of strong indications of forms, that in some cases befit the immortality of some souls. Indeed, that I may meet the creations of an artist, as well as the artist, in another world seems to me a delightful, if somewhat fanciful, thought.

1953

By the 1950s it was clear that the British Empire, long the world centre of power, was a thing of the past. Russia and the USA had become the centres of a bi-polar world. These two countries were at the centre of the secular world as it was defined in 1953 when the Kingdom of God on earth made its unobtrusive debut. Oscar Wilde noted that "the only excuse for making a useless theory is that one admires it intensely." I find that over the years I have come to

admire, to be immensely drawn toward, this association of 1953 with the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth. This date has a number of personal and historical meanings for me.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

Quite a year that coronation year:  
Stalin's death,  
Churchhill's unsuccessful  
quest for peace,  
the completion of the  
Mother-temple of the West  
and the inception of  
the Kingdom of God on earth,  
an old world dieing and  
a new one being born.

Ron Price  
15 July 1999

#### A BACKGROUND TO FIND OURSELVES

The poet Muriel Rukeyser said "we need a background that will let us find ourselves and our poems, let us move in discovery."<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs will arrive when we go beyond the present political forms and set up an organic political structure which we in conscience claim as our own and use it in our moral and ethical lives. This "background" that will let us "find ourselves" will arrive, in this age of disbelief, when the poet can supply the satisfaction of belief and of experience without being held back by the structure of taboos generated by public opinion and the fear of displeasing. When people can find, through the poet among other artists and art forms, a new eye, a new ear and more life, they will find themselves. But, as Rukeyser says, "we need a background." I think that background is the Bahá'í Faith, its teachings and its administration. For without this background, I'm somewhat suspicious about our capacity to find our true selves.

-Ron Price with thanks to <sup>1</sup>The American Poetry Review, Special Supplement, September/October 1999, "How Poetry Helps People To Live Their Lives."

You can find your place here  
in the flow of time and society,  
your completeness  
in being at one with humanity,  
in the vibrancy of this Revelation,  
your judicious etiquette of expression,

your words that bring new fresh, green, life,  
your right to self-expression,  
the social utility of your thought  
and nobler, ampler, signs  
of achievement—your own  
transformation—your place  
in that structure of freedom—  
the Administrative Order.<sup>1</sup>

Ron Price  
7 December 1999

<sup>1</sup> See the Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988 Letter.

### A BEAUTY BORN OF GRIEF

Although I have no special expertise in music, except to play the guitar for sing-alongs for the last twenty-five years, I have been listening to various forms of music since the first pieces of classical music my mother and father played on the piano half a century ago in my home. I became a Bahá'í in the late fifties and, since then, have often found a curious juxtaposition between musical composition and the historical and spiritual experience of my religion, associated as I have now been with it for over forty years. Last night my wife and I went to hear and see the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. The following poem is an expression of yet another of these curious juxtapositions, a personal hermeneutic that, in all likelihood, was not experienced in quite the same way by anyone else in the audience.

-Ron Price, *Pioneering Over Three Epochs*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

Dvorak, Strauss and Hindemith  
took me all the way through  
this Revelation, its successors  
and precursors, all the way  
through its grief and sorrow  
and an emergent beauty born  
and reborn for all to see on this  
mountain side and by my own side  
for at least me to see, daily, mystery.

A century and a half--and more--  
of beauty, born of grief and  
sorrow and consecrated joy,  
I heard this evening, for two hours:  
Dvorak's<sup>1</sup> proud opening,  
its yearning subject,  
its passionate climax,  
its solemnities,  
its tenderness,

its spiritual calm  
from his fin de siecle  
concerto, looking back  
over half a century and more.

And then Richard Strauss's  
statement<sup>2</sup> of painful experiences  
could tell the story of 1895 to 1944,  
all the tears of sadness  
and the beauty in the lives of  
'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi,  
describing ideas and sadnesses  
that had long occupied him and  
them, in a musical form,  
with an aching beauty,  
and that had occupied me  
about their lives and that period,  
as if it just escaped from my pen, too,  
and as if it was my life,  
for it is all one, in the end.

Hindemith's work which sang of the  
natural exuberance and the extroverted  
radiance of America, the leading horse  
of the world Order, harkening back as  
it did to 1818-1819 and back again to  
the teenage years of Shaykh Ahmad<sup>3</sup>;  
and ahead to the future in all its promise,  
its energy, its excitement and beauty.

1 Cello Concerto in B minor, Op.104: completed in 1896.

2 Metamorphosen: completed in 1945.

3 Hindemith's piece is based on music first mentioned in 1768 when Shaykh Ahmad was 14 years of age.

Ron Price  
27 June 1999

## MY SOUL'S YEARNING

One thing one does in writing poetic autobiography is to take up the child and the adolescent in one's life, both long given up for lost in the depths of an unrecalled past, and endow them with an adult awareness, a new existence on

sheets of paper, an existence which focuses as sharply as possible on the memory, the emotions, the imagination. Life has already given me what I wanted, as defined in an initial formulation of such things in my late teens. There is a sense of fulfillment and a certain natural and accompanying fatigue and I am not even into late adulthood. I had wanted a sense of fullness, of meaning, of having filled my soul, of having a big bite of the apple, so to speak, a sense of receiving richness, texture, amplitude. I have got all of this to a fullness beyond my dreams; my future can now only give me more of what I already have received to the full; so I feel a certain quiescence, a certain peace. The search goes on, but it is within a context of fulfillment.

This poetry does not tell it all; for that would result in excessive embarrassment, or a sense of indiscreteness. In fact I feel, in retrospect, that I have been indiscrete enough in my first seven years of writing poetry and I do not want to taint these pages with spiteful gossip about myself or my friends, or even milder confessions. This is not a "tell it all" tale. I have never had the instincts of a scandalmonger; much is better left to obscurity. I like to think that the truth of my life is both interesting and useful and that it is not heavily laden with moral purpose, with an overt and never ending didacticism. Certain facts of my life have been suppressed, but I have had no intention of writing falsehoods. There is a general veracity to this poetic narrative, although minor errors may be observed.

-Ron Price with thanks to Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, Penguin Books, London, 1962(1960), pp.7-9.

Of course, I could have had more sex,  
more money, more and more of more  
and more, for there is always more.  
I could have climbed higher on the  
corporate ladder, published at least  
one book if not more, been famous  
or rich or both, more handsome, more  
healthy, less impulsive-one could go on  
and on, but I got what my dried out soul  
determined as its greatest need, back then,  
when the time came, emerging as it was from  
the chrysalis of youth and its larva, its pupa,  
of endless, comfortable, but tiresome, familial  
domesticity, to define what sort of apple, what  
sort of bite I wanted to satisfy my soul's yearning.

Ron Price  
28 May 1999

The Guardian initiated a Five Year Plan in 1948, a plan that was part of a 'world-encompassing mission'. The Guardian pointed to the 'future greatness and glory' of the Canadian Bahá'í Community in the same letter announcing this Five Year Plan. The wider Canadian community was one that shied away from experimentation of any kind. This new religious movement could not be, then, or now, judged by its 'local strength', but rather by its international context.

-Ron Price; see Messages to Canada, 1965, pp.7-8; and The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948, Will C. van den Hoonaard, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996. pp. 295-296.

1948 was a very big year:

Babe Ruth died,  
the Yankees celebrated  
25 years at their stadium,  
it looked like Jackie Robinson  
was in the majors to stay  
and the Bahá'ís of Canada  
formed their first  
National Spiritual Assembly.

A largely invisible,  
anonymous community,  
in a society increasingly  
fragmented and conservative,  
had completed its first half-century.<sup>2</sup>

Ron Price  
11 February 1999

1 the first American negro to play baseball in the major leagues.

2 In the years 1898 to 1948 555 people had been Bahá'ís: *ibid.*, p.310.

## A CAPTURED LANDSCAPE<sup>1</sup>

Eliade has pointed out that all traditional myths of a sacred garden describe a place set apart, a place where heaven and earth are most closely aligned, and a place with some power of centrality: geographic, a spiritual focus of human striving, or administrative/political activity. All these criteria are powerfully true for the Bahá'í gardens in Haifa. It is a physical location associated something extraordinary, other worldly, holy, with holy Beings Who walked on the earth. Boundedness, sacredness, centrality, different levels of meaning and consciousness, these are the features, the defining qualities, of this garden, which is itself a symbol of an emergent, shared, power. We have here a plot of land, a cultural statement, a place of horticultural activity, a design on paper. This garden marries, as gardens do, two modes of thought: intuitive/logical, right brain/left brain, feminine/masculine and in the process we resolve some of our inner conflicts, both individual and group. We

also connect that mythic Garden of Eden with a new myth that has emerged in our time and is contextualized in the movement of history "towards one great goal, the manifestation of God.:2

-Ron Price with thanks to 2James Joyce in Ulysses, quoted in Joseph Campbell, Creative Mythology: The Masks of God, Penguin Books, 1968, p.661; and 1The Meaning of Gardens, editor Mark Francis and Randolph Hester, Jr., MIT Press, London,1990, p.38.

Reliance,  
source of action,  
counsel  
in delicate relationships,  
act of deference,  
defiance,  
resistance  
to a prevailing way,  
order, style, culture,  
rooting oneself  
in a volatile world,  
development of personal  
power for a new community,  
sense of control and identity  
in a complex and heated world.  
uncovering healthy, sustaining  
world views, strengthening  
our connections at this verdant  
starting point, this Eden....now....  
four thousand years in the making.

To shelter, to protect, to save,  
to create privacy, intimacy and  
a separation from the world:  
this is the Hanging Gardens.

Ron Price  
6 December 1999

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sense of control and identity  
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world views, strengthening  
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starting point, this Eden....now....  
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to create privacy, intimacy and  
a separation from the world:  
this is the Hanging Gardens.

Ron Price  
6 December 1999

A

COALESCING

I have always found commentaries on, essays about and references to Mark Tobey's art helpful in defining my own poetic. Today I came across Harold Rosenberg's *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Influence* (2nd edition, 1966).

In it, in the first part of the book, Rosenberg discusses Tobey's art for one page, some four hundred words. I have always found Tobey's emphasis on individual experience as the basis for art of any kind, the fact that he was forty-five before 'diverse elements began to coalesce'<sup>1</sup> and the bridging of the divisions in the various subjects of study, found echoes in my own philosophy of poetry. Rosenberg stresses the porous nature of Tobey's work, porous to all kinds of time phenomena; the derivative nature of his work and yet its uniqueness and how his work originates beyond the self. All this is true of my work, except that much of my poetry originates in my own self, my own life.

-Ron Price with thanks to William C. Seitz in *Mark Tobey/Art and Belief*, editor, Arthur Dahl, George Ronald, Oxford, 1984; and <sup>1</sup>Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object*, Horizon Press, NY, 1964, pp.34-5.

Yes, Mark, diverse elements  
began to coalesce, requiring  
me to reach out beyond the  
familiar roads, paths, routines,  
the familiar places that normally  
gave me relief, joy, hope, pleasure.

It was a demarcation period  
between glories and triumphs  
of the past and lustrous prizes,  
yet-to-be-garnered.

It saw a quickening wind  
ventilating my life and  
amplifying my perspectives,  
a special time for a rendezvous  
of my soul with its Source.<sup>1</sup>

Ron Price  
28 December 1999

<sup>1</sup> See *Ridvan Message*, 1992.

## PERSONAE

In describing his public image J. B. Priestley saw himself as "a mannerless blundering idiot." But he also saw himself as: amiable, indulgent, affectionate, shy and rather timid. Had Price been as splenetic and "bloody rude," he never would have survived in a classroom teaching the wide range of men and women that he did for over a quarter of a century. Priestley tended to dump icy water on what could have been "comfortable personal relationships."

Perhaps, if Price had been more of a cold fish with a harsh edge, he would have protected himself from the endless conversations that filled his life for so many years and which, in the end, wore him down. Priestley was touchy, a victim of his own acerbic eruptions, had a capacity for brooding withdrawals and an ability to slay pompous parasites. He also saw himself as a kind, easy-going chap. Privately, as a family man, he endured long-drawn-out tragedy and illness with what he called a 'life-enhancing pessimism.' Behind the various personae which sustained him, behind this rubble of eventually discarded selves, was a loving and compassionate man. Price, too, had his many personae which sustained him through the labyrinthine walks of life he had taken; he had his tragedy, his illness and a 'life-enhancing humour.' His brooding withdrawals, his illnesses, had virtually disappeared, at least in these early years of the evening of his life. He, too, was easy going; some battles remained. Some he would lose and some he would win in the road left to travel. -Ron Price with thanks to Vincent Brome, J.B. Priestly, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, pp.5-6.

Behind the loving and compassionate personae,  
for he1 had many endearing, loving, selves,  
at the drop of a hat, on the wave length,  
Mr. Chameleon, he often called himself.  
Behind those "selves", for surely they were real,  
was a quiet man, a quiet boy, at home with his family,  
staying by himself, being in solitude's silence,  
writing, reading, struggling with his inner demons,  
the tragic element which strikes us all,  
but content, at rest, well-pleased with his Lord,  
often joyful, working at his craft,  
away from friend and stranger alike,  
sheltered by the All-Merciful,  
confident, dignified and  
blushing to lift up his face  
to his great Redeemer.

Ron Price  
18 May 1999

1 The 'he' here is, in fact, 'myself' as I sit in the quiet of my chamber after retiring from the teaching profession after thirty years of teaching.

A CONSTANLY RECURRING PATTERN

In 1986 Sir Edward(Weary) Dunlop, a lieutenant-colonel in the Australian army in WWII, published his diaries. Weary represented the finest in the Australian character and tradition: unfailing sense of humour, light use of irony as a means of defeating self-pity and reducing the intrusions of fate, great-heartedness, immense persistence. Yet life to Dunlop, as he put it himself in his introduction, was best expressed by Shakespeare in MacBeth:

It is a tale

Told by an idiot

Full of

sound and fury

Signifying

nothing.

In my blackest moments  
when frustration and exhaustion  
have sucked all of life's juices  
from the very marrow of my bones,  
life becomes something  
I would prefer to leave behind  
and let death become,  
that messenger of joy,  
allowing me, as it does,  
to enter  
the garden of happiness.

I see myself as part of  
a contemporary version  
of that same immemorial  
and constantly recurring pattern<sup>2</sup>  
and in a line of succession  
of all men  
who have ever left their homes  
to fight for a cause  
greater than themselves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, Nelson Publishers, Melbourne, 1986, p.xi.

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Ulysses*.

Ron Price

5 October 1999

## A

### CRAVING OF THE MIND

I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move. I am always longing to be in another place. It is a way of getting fun out of life, a relief from writing, a change to the daily pattern of life. As I get older I am aware that there is less and less choice. Comes over one an absolute necessity to move. -D.H. Lawrence in D.H. Lawrence: A Biography, A.A. Knopf, NY, 1990, pp.268-282.

I have found, looking back over a period of thirty-seven pioneering years, that moving was for the most part an absolute necessity dictated by: a new job, the loss of a job, a new school, the impossibility of continuing in the same social/employment setting, illness, etc. Travel for me was moving or, to put it another way, moving was my travel. It was not so much a longing to be in another town, state or country. But rather, a desire not to be where I was. I did not really care where the new place would be as long as I could extricate myself from where I was. Every time I moved it was to serve the Cause, but getting a job first became a priority by the 1980s.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

For many years I could have  
just kept right on going,  
town after town,  
country after country  
from Tibet to Kamchatka,  
but now I want to stop,  
I know not how long.  
I need to map out an itinerary,  
a place, an inner journey, from  
a fixed abode, a spot of intense  
enjoyment, even war,  
humorous kindness,  
affection and resolute persistence  
where I can satisfy the craving of  
my mind to react adequately to life.<sup>1</sup>

Ron Price  
19 June 1999

<sup>1</sup> J.C. Powys, In Spite Of: A Philosophy for Everyman, Village Press, 1974(1953).

CAN I?

With language, Price's intention is to transform the actual Bahá'í community into a centrepiece of gleaming conception, an object of grandeur, of grand design, with more realized human value, a more real sense of immortality, more than the community itself. When Price takes us into a scene: a study class, a Feast, a LSA meeting, a social occasion, a relationship of some kind or the inner land of one soul, words humm like a craftsman deep in his work. Price tries to fold his words in on one another like beaten eggs, like lovers mingling in their sleep; his words are intended to slide into sentences that were never before imagined or discovered, that evolve with the community they are describing.

Price's aim is to carry his readers to the very edge of every word. He tries, through his words, to compel his readers to react as though to Truth. He tries to turn these readers to the clear and brilliant world of concept, to the realm of order, proportion and dazzling construction, where people and events, unlike ourselves, are freed from existence and can shine like essences and purely Be.

And all of this vision, this idealism, this exegesis of action, is sharply juxtaposed with quotidian reality in all its frustration, boredom, anxiety and engagement, in the miracle of clarity and reality which he aims at again and again in poem after poem. Price breaks the skin on the body of himself, defines his stance towards life, towards his own self, discovers ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the silent, the inarticulate with a dynamic alertness, marking his essential patterns of perception, voice and thought with the touch and texture of his lines and the meaning of his experience. Taking accident and incoherence, everydayness and the fish and chips of life he transforms them all into things intended, sharp, defined and as complete as he can possibly make them.

-Ron Price with thanks to William Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life and The World Within the Word*, as well as Seamus Heaney, *Selected Prose: 1968-1978*.

Can I produce some drama here  
that captivates and impels the reader,  
is a tool of instruction,  
heightens the horizon,  
intensifies the vision,  
possesses some  
power of definition,  
precise calculation,  
meticulous arrangements,  
reconciles  
conciseness and amplitude,  
force and elegance?

Ron Price  
3 April 1999

## I DON'T FEEL I MISSED YOU, CARL

About a month after I became a Bahá'í, Carl Jung was interviewed on the BBC Face to Face programme: 12 November 1959. When asked by the interviewer John Freeman if he believed in God, Jung replied forthrightly: "I don't believe; I know" by which he meant the 'God-image'. Jung was 84 at the time; within two years he was dead.

-Ron Price with thanks to Frank McLynn, *A Biography: Carl Gustav Jung*, Bantam Press, NY, 1996, p.526.

I missed you, Carl, getting ready  
for the hockey season and doing  
my Latin and French homework,  
perhaps; or maybe I was at that  
holy day celebration, one hundred  
and forty two years after the event.

I missed you, Carl, 'cause my mother  
sold our TV back in about '56 and  
we didn't get the BBC in Canada,  
anyway, back then. But I saw you  
years later, about 1990 was it? I've  
forgotten now, but I saw you many  
times on video and I read a lot so...

I don't feel I've missed you any more.  
Forty years on, I keep discovering bits  
of you and bits of me in books  
and poems far beyond our looks,  
far beyond the crannies and nooks,  
way out on the plains and beaches  
under open skies' golden reaches.

Ron Price  
9 May 1999

## CATCHING A SPRAY OF PEARLS

By the time I became a Bahá'í in 1959 Anne Sexton was remaking herself, turning her life, into something self-created in the first-person voice of her poetry. By 1962, when I went pioneering at the age of eighteen, Sexton had the social role of contemporary American woman poet with an identity that had a life of its own, shaped for her by the very reception of her work. Poetry for her was an attempt to master the unmastered in life. Robert Lowell said of Sexton's 1962 book of poetry *All My Pretty Ones* that she had "a way of writing that sometimes seem(ed) to let everything in too easily." It also had "bald spots" and "uninspired moments that roll(ed) off disguised by the same certainty of voice" as her genuinely inspired poems. I quote Lowell here

because I have often felt the same way about my own poetry.

For me 'inspiration' has something to do with 'breathing life into' with 'animating the mind/emotions'. I mention Anne Sexton in this preamble because a new confessional mood, style, idiom, inhabited the poetry world when I joined the Cause and when the Cause was going through its interregnum, as Peter Smith called the period from 1957 to 1963.<sup>2</sup> It was a poetry that rose from self-knowledge, real situations, and, in Sexton's case, a single-minded intensity that was always on the point of drowning.<sup>3</sup>

-Ron Price with thanks to 1Diane Wood Middlebrook, *Anne Sexton: A Biography*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1991, p.186 and 3p.109; and 2Peter Smith, *The Babi and Bahá'í Religions*, George Ronald, Oxford, 1987, p.132.

One tries to dive down with poetry  
into the ocean, dive down deep, a  
deep immersion and bring up pearls  
that one could leave, strung out for  
beauty, anywhere, pearls of great price,  
as if caught from plunging into the  
fathomless deeps, onto the ocean  
floor, or on the billowing seas, cast  
off in some storm, streaming into the air.

For me, it's not about drowning;  
it's about catching that spray of pearls,  
magically cast up from some crystal waters,  
catching the delight, the gladness, the blissful  
joy of simple words and complex thoughts and  
feelings. This is what I'm on about. Autobiography.  
A Cause. A world. Interacting in an amazing  
ambience, words arranging themselves after a  
lifetime of living, moving and having my being.  
It's finally my turn after forty years and I'll do  
it my way, with my own more reticent exposure.<sup>1</sup>

Ron Price  
15 May 1999

<sup>1</sup> The confessional idiom was for each confessional poet a matter of degree. I have always found the Bahá'í attitude to confession a wise and flexible one and it is this philosophy of confession that inhabits my poetry.

## CERTAIN STRAINS OF DISCOMFITURE

The inability to bridle his temper, a trait of character that he shared with his father, was to plague Dosoevsky all his life and to place a very heavy burden of tolerance on a few of his friends who had to deal with his disagreeable vehemence, his extraordinary irascibility, his nervous disorders

of various kinds, the affects of his bouts of insomnia, his quarrelsomeness and his several discomfitures. But in the circle of most of his friends he always seemed lively, untroubled and self-content.

Price experienced a certain strain of discomfitures: episodes of manic depression, an occasional and periodic insomnia, a disagreeable vehemence, an excessive flattulence, a certain obsessiveness in respect to reading, writing and his religion spread over his many years of pioneering. Although these experiences were not frequent they were upsetting, disturbing and life-altering for himself and those he lived with, certainly for a time and to a certain extent for life. As far as the circle of his friends and students were concerned, though, Price was nearly always seen as lively, laid-back, untroubled, contented and happy.

-Ron Price with thanks to Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt: 1821-1849, Princeton UP, 1976, p.114.

They were like a volcano,  
an eruption,  
like some other person  
coming out  
and inhabiting my being.  
They were very disturbing  
these demons:  
ruinous, traumatic,  
taking me seemingly endless time  
to recover,  
exhausting,  
debilitating,  
enervating,  
sometimes crippling,  
destroying,  
frightening,  
absolutely transforming,  
taking me down to life's bottom.

Ron Price  
28 September 1999

## CHAP

Tonight on a radio program called Books and Writing I listened to a poem by a British poet, Robert Crawford. The poem was called 'Chaps'. Since 'chaps' is the affectionate term, or name, I have given to my son for many years this poem had a particular meaning. It was a mnemonic that rang many silent bells in my brain and the following poem is the result of hearing Robert Crawford's delightful poem.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

Chaps, chaps, chaps, chaps.  
I found he filled in so many gaps.  
He gave me many many laughs  
and then, of a sudden, it all collapsed.  
It all collapsed when I left him there  
in the West; I left that chap, that chap.  
Chaps, chaps, chaps, chaps: oh where  
are you now? Oh just perhaps, just perhaps  
I'll see you here in the East, in these traps,  
not quite the same as those western maps.  
Chaps, chaps, chaps, chaps: see you soon;  
it's just a while that he'll be in the West, perhaps  
he'll be home by noon, home by noon, home by noon.

Say chaps, you might get a career if you stay there.  
If you come here your story will take a different slant.  
You may find yourself sitting on a bus where you can't  
help Perth with its water supply, while you pay a daily fare.  
Chaps, chaps, chaps, chaps: this is no decision you can snap  
your finger at. You have to hold two opposite views in your care  
for a long time---a definition of genius I heard once. Chap, chap.

Yes, you can see it as six of one, 'arf dozen of another,  
at one level. At another level, it looks like we'll be here  
for a while in the East. So you could simply wait until  
(a) the job is absolutely, clearly (as clearly as it can possibly  
be given the reality that very little is crystal clear any more)  
not for you, (b) it is equally obvious you don 't want to apply  
for other jobs in the West and (c) you want to be here in the  
East with us. What do you think of this chap? A much simpler  
picture than last week's lengthy letter, eh chap? So just stick  
this in your pipe and smoke it, chap. Cause it's midnight and  
I wanted to get all this chap stuff out of my head. See ya, chap,  
chap, chap, chap, chap, chap, chap, chap, chap, chap.....(fade)....

Dad (1/11/99)

### CHILLINUP

Outside of Albany on the way to Esperance my wife and I got lost on some back roads but, after we passed the 'town' of Chillinup which consisted of only a farm, we were back on the main highway again.

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

To say what you want to say, you must create another language and nourish it for years and years with what you have loved, what you have lost and with what you will never find again. -George Sefcus in *The Poet's Work*, Reginald Gibbons, editor, Houghton and Mufflin Co., Boston, 1979, p.71.

You create a way of saying  
what you must say,  
for it is your story  
of your day  
and your time  
and your way:

the time you got lost  
outside Chillinup,  
that one farm town  
near Rams Head Corner  
in mid-winter  
down near Albany in '99  
and your wife  
picked that deep purple flower,  
a Hardenbergia,  
after a quiet lunch in the bush,  
with a cold wind blowing  
and you stopped together  
to look at those soft green bushes  
only to discover the sharpest spikes  
imaginable....

.....like your days  
with their piercing sadness  
and their tragedy  
buried in the tangle  
of your apparently soft and simple  
hours and days.  
But, oh, those multi-scented fragrances of mercy  
wafted over all creation  
and this holy seat  
and the hours and days  
of blissful joy assuredly in store for you.

Ron Price  
17 July 1999

#### COCA-COLA AND THE END

#### OF HISTORY

Andy Warhol was one of the most popular artists in the second half of the twentieth century. I have tried in the poem below to relate my life, his life and the Bahá'í Faith in one coherent, integrated, synthesized whole. I draw on an article on the Internet entitled "Andy Warhol: Creating Art for the Masses." I found it particularly interesting that there was a synchronicity

between my pioneering life and Warhol's public life as an artist which began in those months just before the period that Bahá'ís refer to as "the tenth stage of history." This was the fact that served as the embryo of this poem.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

You had your first public exhibition  
the year I went pioneering.<sup>1</sup>  
You brought art to the masses  
by codifying my familiar world:  
the Campbell Soup Cans series,  
the Coca-Cola Bottles series,  
Marilyn(Monroe)---they were  
all there at the start of what we  
called the tenth stage, the end,  
of history. When I moved to Dundas  
I had simply no idea that my pioneering  
life of service and your life with beautiful  
people, your chaotic privacy and your  
endless artistic pop-repetitions had just begun.

Ron Price

5 December 1999

<sup>1</sup> 1962: the year of all the Andy Warhol works mentioned in this poem, the last year before the Universal House of Justice was elected and the tenth stage of history began: 21 April 1963.

### COMFORTING

Somehow I find the analysis of the half a dozen major extinctions of life forms in the evolutionary process on this planet comforting, especially after listening to discussions about the extinction of human beings for the last forty years. I also found comforting the fact that an extinction process could take half a million years and be one of the slower of these processes. This language about extinctions somehow throws into perspective the Bahá'í Era which is to last half a million years.

-Ron Price with thanks to The Science Show, ABC Radio, 5 June 1999.

Did you know about the Permian extinction  
of 251 million years ago  
when ninety percent of all life died  
over a period of 500,000 years.  
This extinction was very fast,  
as extinctions go:  
the dinosaurs took  
six million years  
to die out.  
And what will be our story  
after this great burgeoning  
of human life  
in the last several centuries?

Is this the beginning of the end?  
Or the end of the beginning  
of a 500,000 year era?  
Ron Price  
5 June 1999

#### CONCLUDED DAYS

Another Emily Dickinson poem, number 735, lies behind this composition. She examines in her poem what she calls her(and our) "concluded days". She was in her early thirties when she wrote her poem. I examine below my(and our) "concluded days" from the vantage point of my mid-fifties. I have been impressed, at the many funerals I have attended in the last decade, by the sense of joyfulness, cheer, happy spirits evidenced, almost like a good-bye party. This was also the case as far back as the first funeral I attended in the Bahá'í community, my father's in 1965. In other funerals I have attended, the balance went toward sadness and somberness, an atmosphere of gloom. Getting the balance right is difficult. So, too, in life there should be the right balance, in one's contemplations of one's days, between the sweet and the sour memories. The 'quiet centre' contains, it seems to me, a balance of this light and shade, gain and loss, victory and defeat, honey and poison. For everyone the mix is different.

-Ron Price

As our days grow to their ends,  
flavours and temperatures  
emerge from our contemplations:  
some tastes are sweet and warm  
and some are cool and sour,  
some weigh heavy on our hearts,  
a burden carried,  
a lacerated throat;  
some make for garlands-  
a coronal-  
and, then, at the funeral,  
on that dying side  
we are saluted:  
hail and farewell!

Ron Price  
24 March 1999

1 And so we should be saluted for having survived these difficult days with all their piercing ambiguities and, perhaps, in this case anyway, told of the tale.

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Ron Price

24 March 1999

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#### A DELICATE CONCOCTION

A poet ultimately constructs a world, a quite autonomous universe, in his work.

I have done this in my body of poetry. This world is at once: personal, historical, futuristic, intimately connected with a body of religious beliefs, philosophy, literature and poetry as true to reality as I can make it. The construction is not unlike the coming of spring. Something fresh and new is seen, heard, tasted or felt. There is a ferment, a heat, an awakening; and the urge to write, a creative fever, is felt. I can't make it come. It is not orderly or coherent but, in the writing, in going into the mind's deep well, coherence and order is established, at least to some extent. For life's truths are multilayered, many-sided and complex and have an elusive aspect. The Apollonian aspect of poetry can only be partly attained; for there is a certain Dionysian element present when one writes poetry.

-Ron Price

There is an energy, longing, generated  
by striving after an ideal. My poetry is  
a giving of form to this energy, this striving,

an expression of an entire way of life,  
an interpretation of the universe, a  
perception, as penetrating as possible,  
of some of the issues in existence.

The poet needs  
serenity and gloom,  
joy and melancholy,  
quiet happiness and a smouldering anger  
in a delicate concoction. Like the Greeks  
we have an image of a world order  
shared by all people in our community.

Ron Price

14 April 1999

### CONFESSION AND DEATH

Donald Kuspit states that there is in many of the objects and figures of Modern art the expression of a death wish—all the stronger because of the loss of belief in immortality which is an expression of the life force. There is in Modern art, he goes on, a disintegrated, unstructured, disorganized, messy, almost chaotic look. There is a great effort to inhibit awareness of, to constrain, death in Modern art. Death usually comes in indirectly in the style of art; for to many artists death is unbearable, repressed, the concept of an afterlife a fantasy, an absurdity, a nothingness. They believe we are faced with annihilation, a merciless end-game, non-redemptiveness, no protective emotional security, imminent self-destruction, death's haunting bluntness. And so, behind the often lively, vibrant and restless styles of Modern art there lurks a sense of emptiness, depression and a modern living death. Like the characters in Hemmingway or Conrad there is no triumph over death or life. There is wounding but no resolution.

-Ron Price with thanks to Donald Kuspit, "The Only Immortal," Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post-Modern Art, Cambridge UP, NY, 1993, pp.163-166.

Traditional painting, sculpture and poetry were reinforced by a belief in immortality. And so is this poetry. I have replaced an old centre of faith with a new one. An ideal of transendence, of the sacred, of the numinous, of the idea that life is more than the sum of its material moments is behind all my poetry. Although I could go on writing poetry ad infinitum and although there is a surface appearance of fragmentation in the immense diversity of material I write about, and as readers will come across as they go from poem to poem, I feel a sense of wholeness, of completeness, of a fully realized mental construct in what I have created. I have a sense of the timeless, the true, the authentic lasting, enduring beyond the contingent and incompleteness of human life, a sense of a destination to be reached, a project which will be completed only with my own death or an incapacitating illness.

-Ron Price, Pioneering Over Three Epochs, Unpublished Manuscript, 1999.

Death lurks here, too, in my work,  
but for different reasons,  
not the sense of incompleteness  
and dissatisfaction,  
not wanting to return to my origins,  
not a part of its intense and  
pervasive presence in our world,  
not as part of a living death.  
But, rather, part of that  
touchstone, that measure:  
wish for death, if ye are men of truth.<sup>1</sup>  
For I am scattered across two continents,  
in several hospitals  
where they electrified my brain,  
with little pretension to purity left,  
1 Qur'an 2:94.  
Ron Price  
2 December 1999

— Autobiographical Poetry 1999: Pioneering Over Four Epochs: 1999: Booklets 33-40 (Used by permission of the curator)