

# PREFACE

by Charles Heaney (1897 - 1981)

(written in 1974)

It was my privilege to be a friend of Clayton Price, this gentle, quiet, unassuming man, from the year 1930 until 1950, the year of his death. He was not a recluse as claimed by some, but he had a mystic, spiritual quality which attracted thoughtful people to him in a bond of mutual affection and respect.

A considerable body of biographical material has been gathered and printed about Price since his death, and his comings and goings have been pretty fully documented. His works have been evaluated and commented on in many magazine articles, catalogs and books. These are chiefly about the outward man, the man of the cattle ranges, the producer of bold, vigorous paintings with the flavor of the West. This side of Price has been covered pretty thoroughly, his outward activities, his struggle to keep on painting when the going was rough, how recognition came to him only during the last years of his life, and so on.

This active, outward side of him is in contrast with his inner, spiritual side, the philosophical side of him which, in discussions, he revealed to his closest friends. What he was as a person, what his inner life was, what was the faith he lived by - these things, so far as I know, have never been sufficiently explored.

Now just what was the motivating power which kept him going during all those lean years? To my mind it was a deep, abiding faith that man has a spiritual affinity with God, and that by living as closely as humanly possible to the spiritual ideal, man works out his destiny which he was put on earth to fulfill.

In his serious discussions with his intimate friends he often spoke of 'The Great Reality' behind things. This was the spirit which underlay and was the cause of all things, the God-generated motivating force in the Universe. His conviction was that to the extent that he could

keep in spiritual touch with this part of him, and in the main living in the life of the Spirit, and striving to do what was right, all would be well. Death is not the end of things, for the spirit lives forever.

He had his times of spiritual ups and downs when this vision escaped him, but for the most part this mystical side of his nature dominated his life, not as a vague abstraction, but as an abiding presence uppermost in his mind. In spite of the fact that for most of his life he was painting in a

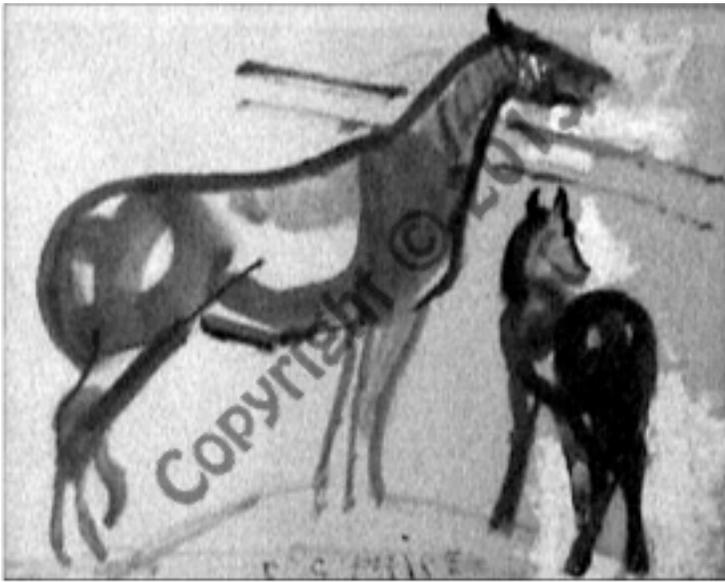


Photograph of Charles Heaney, 1979, Pacific Northwest Artists Archive, Archives and Special Collections, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon, Photograph by Robert Shotola

time when public response was at a minimum, he didn't require any outside encouragement to keep him going. His needs were simple and his wants were few.

So long as he had a room to live and work in, enough money to buy food and painting materials, he asked no more of life.

While appreciating that fact that occasionally someone would buy a painting, he cared little for public acclaim and devoted most of his efforts to learning how to better express himself in paint.



*Mare and Colt*, 1949, Black and white wash,  
8 x 11 in., private collection

He lived the life of the spirit and loved his neighbor as himself, and had less ego than any painter I ever knew.

It seemed to me that he was as pleased when good fortune came to an acquaintance as when it came to himself. In his quiet, retiring way he was an inspiration to many young painters, and they left his presence with a feeling that perhaps the struggle was worth while after all.

There is a descriptive passage in one of Price's catalogs which sums up very well, I think, what his character was. It is a quote from a Chinese philosopher and goes like this:

'Therefore the sage embraces Unity, and is a model for all under Heaven. He is free of self display, therefore he shines forth; from self-assertion, therefore he is distinguished; from self glorification, therefore he has merit; from self exaltation, therefore he rises superior to all. Inasmuch as he does not strive, there is no one in the world who can strive with him.'

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*The Rider*, 1908, Ink on cardboard, Portland Art  
Museum, Oregon, Gift of Mr. George W. Roberts,  
PAM 50.127