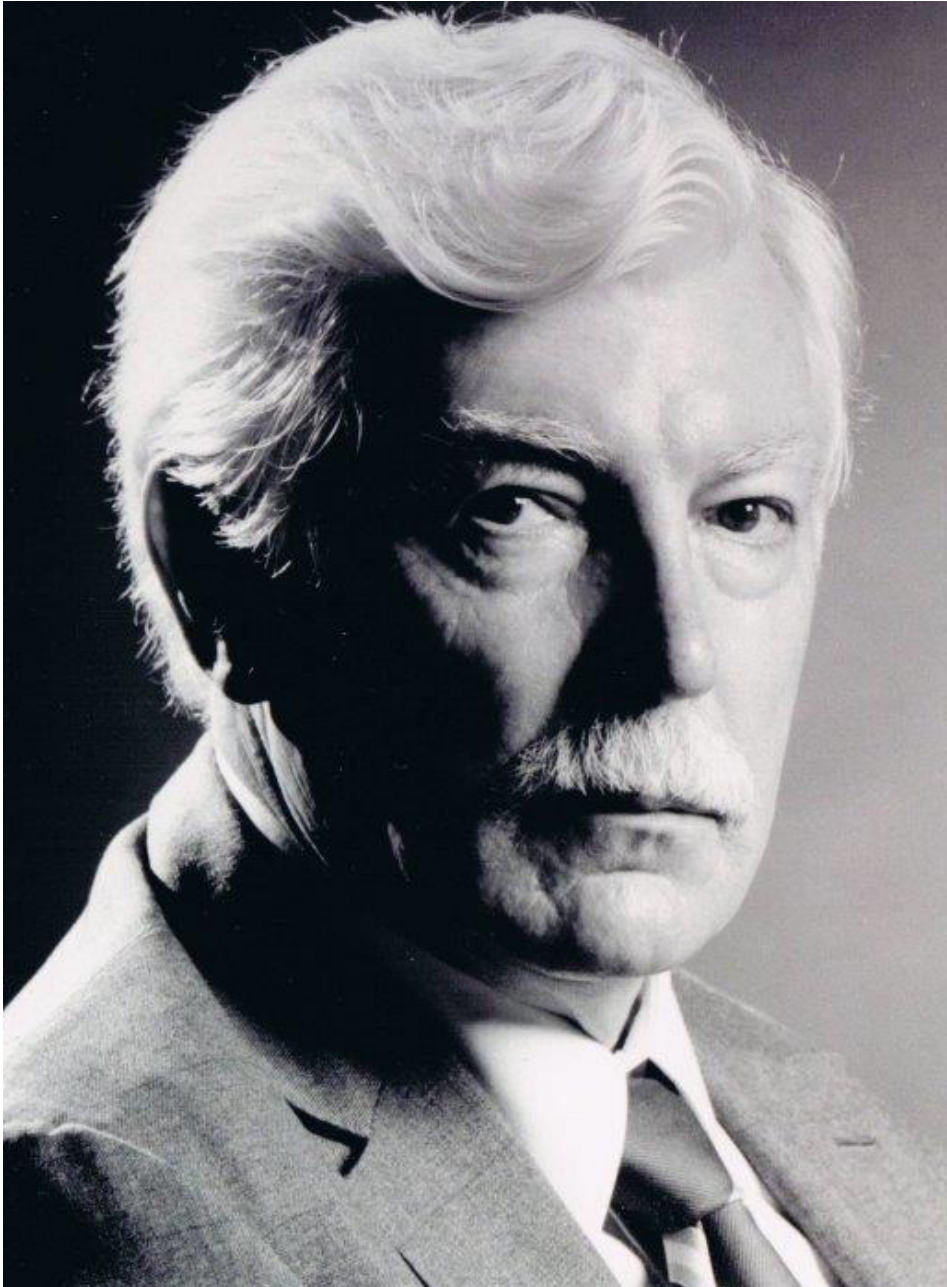


In Memorium: David Price

David Price died on 18 January 2021 in Victoria, BC.

This tribute is by John Lucas, who chaired the Dawson English Department for many years.



David Price, one of the original members of the Dawson English Department, was beloved by his students. He taught Modern British Literature, Russian Literature in translation, and a course called The Saint As Fool—The Fool As Saint, with *Don Quixote* at its centre. It was wildly popular, and during my long tenure as Department Chairperson

I broke many a student's heart when I said I could not squeeze one more student into the course.

With ninety-plus languages spoken at the college, everyone had to teach at least one course of Composition or English as a Second Language. David loved teaching the Canadian and foreign students whose first language was not English. Fifteen or sixteen years before he retired, he stopped teaching literature altogether and taught only Second Language courses, particularly engaging with, and fostering, the students from the Asian community. He cared profoundly for them and they in turn adored him. Eventually they saw him as the great Father, and to this past Christmas, twenty-one years after his retirement, he received cards addressed to "Dear Father."

Many of our Asian students were refugees who had spent time in refugee camps and prisons before making their way to Canada as immigrants. Some rose out of poverty because their parents worked eighteen hours a day to send them to school. Others had only themselves to depend on. David encouraged them all, lavishing time and energy on each individual. During his first bout of leukaemia in 1976, the teacher who replaced him was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love for him in his students' essays.

Once, when I was on sabbatical in England he replaced me. My actor students, admiring his good looks, his mind, his charm, and his generosity, called him "God in a turtleneck." David's many friends also knew him as a superb pianist.

In 1964, when David was teaching in Spain and on holiday in Granada, he was invited to a private party in a nightclub by Spanish friends which turned into something of a bacchanal. There was entertainment by dancers and singers and an excellent band. There were a number of prominent and notable guests, most especially notable the film star Ava Gardner. Other guests reported that she spotted David from across the room and wanted to know who that "divine man" was. Was he an actor? She was told he was a teacher, not a show business guy. The story goes that she heaved a sigh of relief and said "Thank God!" She sauntered over to him and said hello to the awestruck David, who often said he thought he was dreaming. She took his hand and said "Come on, Sweetie, dance with me". The band was playing flamenco to his horror, and he had to admit he did not know how to dance to it. She said, "Who cares? Neither do I." They were both as drunk as skunks. She undulated in front of him and he did well for a few minutes but the terrazzo floor was wet with spilled drinks and Gardner bumped into him, sending him spinning none too gracefully. He lost his footing and hit the floor with a thud, and could not get up without help. Eventually Gardner drifted away and he limped back to his hotel in great pain.

The local doctor said he had just bruised his hip and eventually, three weeks later, he was in England and still in awful pain. X-rays showed that he had a bad break in his left hip and needed surgery. He had a metal pin in the hip for the rest of his life and spent a month in hospital.

Whenever he was asked if the drunken episode was worth all the pain he invariably answered, "Having Ava Gardner wrapped around me? You damn well bet it was!"

Toward the end of his career he was honoured by an evening of actors reading his students' essays, called *Giving Voice*. Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau wrote a tribute to him which was read during the evening. The turnout was so great that a second evening had to be scheduled. Indeed he gave voice to so many. I was Master of Ceremonies and it is one of my proudest moments. David also won a Master Teacher Award.

Many of his students were refugees. Some had not seen their families in Cambodia or Viet Nam in years. When, finally, they were able to visit their homelands, some could not afford to do so. David took the money from his own pocket to pay their air fares. He danced with Ava Gardner, yes, but he also danced with the angels.