

Remoteness

POEMS

Julio Savi



CASA EDITRICE BAHÁ'Í

REMOTENESS

By the same author

Bahíyyih Khánum, Ancella di Bahá

(Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 1983)

Nell'Universo sulle tracce di Dio

(Rome: Editrice Núr, 1988)

The Eternal Quest for God

(Oxford: George Ronald, 1989)

Per un solo Dio

(Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2000)

Lontananza. Poesie

(Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2001)

REMOTENESS

Selected Poems

JULIO SAVI

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1st English Edition 2002

CASA EDITRICE BAHÁ'Í
Via Stoppani, 10 - 00197 Roma
Via Turati, 9 - 00040 Ariccia (Roma)

ISBN 88-7214-063-3

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FOREWORD

Instantaneous grace, prolonged resonance, deferred effects—intensively operating in time—lend refinement and weight to this collection of poems.¹

Beside the deep message and the sentiment of the author himself, refinement and weight contribute to the quality of this work.

Simplicity and conciseness

Stripped of embellishments, ridden of artifices, it is certainly not a decorative poetry, a text to be published in a corner of a magazine, just to look smart and fill the pages reserved for this purpose. This sober, never overburdened, work, reveals a conscious choice: that of a deliberate and laboriously pursued simplicity. Pregnant silences and parsimony of means are the result of a work or of a sustained inspiration.

The chosen words have a familiar flavour and the adopted construction is elementary or minimalist. However, behind this apparent simplicity, a painstaking, accomplished, and experienced poetry is hidden, a poetry that is not susceptible of paraphrase. Its translation is a challenge: right words in the right place, which one dares barely to brush or tries to savour at length, a definitive

¹ Translated from the French by Julio Savi and Leïla Mesbah Sabéran.

and necessary form, whose delicate sensuality finds an echo in our own inner, physical and metaphysical, melody.

The poetical vein does not flow from any emphasis, but from the awareness of, and a preference for, the essential at the expense of the superfluous. This pursuit of conciseness also may be recognized in the choice of the titles of both the single poems and the chapters. To read, in the table of contents, the list of titles, will suffice for us to have an overview of the poetical space of the collection, and to be touched by, and vibrate with, the author.

While combining conciseness and simplicity, Julio Savi avoids the stumbling-block in the way of certain poets, who by continually abbreviating become hermetic and obscure, uncaring of their readers, who still are the recipients of their poems.

Nobility and aesthetic

In poetry, if you want to give an impression of simplicity, you should be endued with taste and an inborn disposition. The author neither accumulates nor superimposes the devices of his art, he simply highlights the precious and precise sentence in an unvarnished context, like a Japanese calligrapher who uses a white sheet to pen his haiku upon it.

Julio Savi does not embellish, he clothes. The opposition between the perceived feeling, which ‘swells, overflows and everywhere floods,’ and the skill of the measured expression contributes to the elegance of this work and produces a subtle pleasure. While the poet unveils himself, opens his heart, while his soul shows herself naked, his poetry remains faultlessly dressed in decency and modesty. Nothing extreme in his language, nothing trivial, blasphemous, vulgar or prosaically banal. With the exception of a few baroque and flowery scenes—a proof of a remarkable descriptive attitude—the dominant feature

of this collection of poems is reserve. Recourse to derision or sneer does not tempt the author, and even in humour he is never ironic. His truth, his sincerity are straightforward, but never brutal; his language is dignified, courteous toward himself, his fellow-beings, and God upon Whom he calls. Straightforward and decent speech are not antithetic. This is how we should speak to God, without frippery or impudence.

Subjectivity and impersonality

To read this collection of poems means to go through a whole life, to walk beside the author, in his quest of eternity. This journey shows the horizons behind and in front of the reader and the author: the stretch of road that has been already covered, the path on which we should persist. To read or to decide to reread these poems means to knock at a door and to enter into the private garden of the poet. Each poem is concluded in itself: a necessary pause, a particular view of the colour of a feeling, of the light of an hour. That moment of the poet, be it inscribed in the unique instant which his pen has perpetuated or a stage of a life from whose course the instant draws its meaning, is what the poet invites his readers to share with him. It is up to them to choose their approach. But whatever door they may disclose, they will meet the same person, whose writings and sensitivity always manifest—whatever his age or the specific circumstances of his life may be—the purity and the intensity which already characterize his earliest poems.

Walking beside the author or entering into his realm does not present the reader with the interest of an indiscretion, but with that of a revelation, that which the particularly attentive eye of the artist once for all unveils to us: seeing what we had but dimly perceived, what we had avoided to dwell upon, for lack of perspective, or of courage, or of a metaphorical key. Like any

inspired artist, Julio Savi has the capacity to let us see things differently. He knows how to photograph, to recognize the proper light, to choose the subject, the appropriate distance, the correct angle for the right perspective; he has the necessary sensitivity to capture the details, to suffer for the essential, to examine himself throughout the folds and the meanders of his thought, about the deceiving certitudes of his heart; he sets his demanding and enquiring eye upon himself, a champion of humankind. Thus he lends us his eye, helping us to observe: the loving eye of the poet and the aesthete upon beauty, the fusing eye upon nature, the different, not certainly indifferent, eye upon the particular and the whole, the awareness of the purpose of existence. Through the depth of his personal sentiment, and his capacity of feeling and showing, the poet unveils our own truth to us, puts us in touch with the essence of beauty and confirms the universality of the feelings of all, heedful or heedless, human beings.

Essence and reminiscence

A poetical work is not as other works, a mere description held as poetic, a more or less successful stylistic exercise.

The poet, an inspired mage or a discontented mortal, who does not decide to fill his existential void with ‘amusements,’² is a blessing for a travailing humankind. By divine grace or because of his sensitivity (which grief has sharpened), he has access to the essence of beauty and the universality of feelings and, through his writings, conveys the one and the other.

It is of the poetical, as of any other artistic, work, be it painting, or sculpture, or music, or cinema, etc., that its future be subject to the test of time. This collection of poems seems destined to endure, not only for its plastic and aesthetic qualities, but also be-

² See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées (Thoughts)*, no. 139.

cause it is built upon the foundational myth of the reminiscence of Paradise, whose ‘primal rays’³ Julio Savi has caught. His inspiration flows from the yearning after that primal morning. It also is a daughter of the capacity of loving and suffering that separation and remoteness have nurtured in him.

Poetry and faith

In his search for the absolute, Julio Savi met the Bahá’í Faith on his way. Since the age of nineteen he has believed in Bahá’u’lláh. It is not because he became a Bahá’í, that he became a poet. And the pain of remoteness did not stop tormenting him, because he had found an answer to his yearning. However, his sensitivity as a poet makes him turn naturally and continually toward the light. His faith has made him identify this light as the light of dawn, rather than one of sunset, a light that puts this collection of poems under the sign of the promise of a new morning.

A mirror of his times, or a vanguard prophet at odds with his times, Julio Savi is a ‘child of the half-light,’ whose poetical vein creates meanings and lets us see things differently.

Leïla Mesbah Sabéran
Chailles, 20 October 2001

³ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil), ‘Bénédiction’ (Benediction), v. 74.

PREFACE

Remoteness is the title of the collection of the ten unpublished books of poems that I wrote since 1956. This volume presents 187 of these poems, followed by some explicatory Notes about quotations, people, places as well as about unusual words and themes, and by an Afterword, which suggests what has appeared to me as their most obvious, albeit not the only, interpretation.

This collection is issued both in Italian and in English. The poems have been originally written in Italian. I began to translate them in 1990, not only because I love English, associated as it is in my mind with the Bahá'í Writings, which I first read and studied in that language, but mainly because in its 1990 Ridván Message the Universal House of Justice had encouraged the Bahá'ís to 'emblazon' the name of Bahá'u'lláh in view of the incoming centenary of His passing. And if my poems could ever hope to add some day a jot to this 'blazon,' I ought to make an attempt to translate them into English, a language that could address much wider audiences than Italian.

This work is now published in the hope that it may encourage all people who bend their efforts toward lofty goals of inner and outer beauty in their personal lives as well as within society.

Bologna, 12 November 2001

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank all those who have read and appreciated my poems, directly or indirectly encouraging me to publish them, in particular: the Reviewing Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy, Adriana Ba, Gianfranca Bertelè, Giovanni Ballerio, Candida Cerri, Franco Ceccherini, Pia Ferrante, Giancarlo Gasponi, Tatiana Goldenweiser, Ezzat Heyrani, Jacqueline Martin and the French *Association Baha'ie des Femmes*, Ghitty Payman Galeotti, Giuseppe Robiati, Elsa Scola Bausani, Pierre Spierckel and the French representatives of the Bahá'í Association for Arts, Emanuele Tinto, Marzio Zambello, as well as my sisters Aurora and Giorgina, and their children. I thank Gabriella Valera and the friends of the Club Zyp of Trieste, who also gave me the opportunity of conceiving the seminal idea of my Afterword. For the English version I thank John Levy, who helped me to refine it, as well as Keith De Folo, Wendi Momen and Melanie Sarachman Smith, for their words of appreciation. I also thank Rhett Diessner, who patiently helped me to revise the English manuscript, despite his many engagements. I thank Leïla Mesbah Sabéran for her irreplaceable encouragement and assistance, and Giancarlo Gasponi for the cover photograph and design of the Italian edition. Last but not least, I remember with gratitude my school teachers, who guided me toward love for beauty, language and poetry, in particular Ginevra Moscucci, Caterina Chiaretta, Carlo Cosetti and Baldo Biagetti.

REMOTENESS

To Paola, Adriano and Elisabetta, Giorgio and Patrizia

The angel is free because of his knowledge,

The beast because of his ignorance.

Between the two remains the son of man to struggle.

Rúmi

I'LL BE FREE ONCE AGAIN

1955-1958

YEARNING FOR BEAUTY

Asmara, 5 July 1955

Fervour of ideas
is seething in the heart
yearning for beauty
harmony perfection.

IN THE SILENCE OF INFINITY

Asmara, 28 September 1955

I wish I could sink
into the silence of infinity
and dive into the pure
and clear waters
of its perennial river
where oblivion reigns
of all worldly things
where any earthly desire
lies still and appeased
where the most burning fires
are quenched at last
where all is lost
to sublime nothingness.

FROM THE BLUE OF THE SKY

Asmara, 28 September 1955

To be effaced from the world
like in daylight the stars
from the blue of the sky.

I YEARN TO BATHE IN LIGHT

Asmara, December 1955

I yearn to bathe in light

with the rays of the sun
to slake my thirst

by divine flames
to be dazzled

from the earthly world
to escape

up top a mountain
to climb

through the bright immensity of
timelessness
to soar

where my eyes may be cheered
by light

my ears gladdened
by perfect harmonies

my nostrils delighted
by eternal scents.

YOUR BROAD HALLS

Asmara, 1 April 1956

Life, are you beautiful?
None of your beauties
have I yet enjoyed.
Life, will you ever change?
Is it illusion and dream
that I fancy in my
languishing mind?
Do others too
glean those few joys
I capture from you?

O bountiful Lord, what other
gifts couldst Thou bestow?
I, foolishly, to other
than what Thou wilt
turn my thoughts and desires.
I know not how to use
Thy bounties, and the things
of the world how to enjoy.

Insane thoughts
surge in my breast
as deadly vapours
and I cannot control
their blind impulse
their undesirable will.

A restless adolescence,
they say,
is a prelude to active
and fruitful days.
For that one reason
I accept you, my life,
for that one reason
I bear your pangs.

Ere long you will open
your broad halls:
let them be spacious,
golden and bright,
as I expect them.

WILT THOU THE CLEMENT

Asmara, 6 June 1956

It rains

And the earth
will be quickened

Wilt Thou the Clement
quicken my heart?

AND WHEN LIGHT SPARKLES

Asmara, 17 June 1956

I am alone
in the dark
that enwraps me,
in the dark
that chills me,
in the dark
that clots
my blood
in my heart
turned to stone.

And when light
sparkles, it is always
too much for my eyes
and I am dazzled
and fall back
into darkness.

TOWARD THE LIGHT

Asmara, 21 June 1956

I feel
a mysterious power
in my heart arising
as a sprouting seed
as a stem struggling
toward the light.

MY VOICE RETURNS

Sembel (Eritrea), 24 June 1956

I grieve for
an unanswered prayer.
In vain I try
to open my heart.
In vain I call
upon His name.
My voice returns
as if repelled
by immovable
mountains of ice.

AND NOW IT RAINS

Asmara, 25 June 1956

And now it rains
upon my hopes
for a sunny day.

SURRENDER TO THAT BREATH

Asmara, 25 June 1956

I wish I could surrender
as a grain of sand
to the dancing waves
or a fallen leaf
to the blowing winds.
I wish I could surrender
to that breath.
It would lead me at last
to the realms of joy.

FROM A RED HOT FIRE

Asmara, 2 July 1956

The black of my
heart stood out
from a red hot fire.
Its flames
surrounded me.
But my heart
was lifeless black
in the red heat
of that passion.

IN THE SUBLIMITY OF SILENCE

Asmara, 5 August 1956

In the sublimity of silence
the soul overflows
as sight into obscurity.

O PEACE OF THE INFINITY

Asmara, 8 August 1956

O peace of the infinity
O peace of him who is not
he who is not suffers not.

I'LL BE FREE ONCE AGAIN

Asmara, 12 August 1956

O blue sky spreading
out its infinity
before my gaze

I'd like to bind you
in my eyes and
hold you forever
I'd like to soar through
your endless spaces
and enjoy in that flight
the inebriation of freedom

O blue sky wait for me
I am in chains now
but I'll be free once again.

THERE IS PEACE ON THE SEA

Massawa, 3 December 1956

For Massawa

There is peace in the sky
bedecked with pearls
and sapphires.

Peace
on the sea
lightly rippling.

There is peace in the green
island among the mangroves
lying down upon the dunes.

Peace
in the gentle breeze
stirring the waters.

Light colours
inspire
peace.

Soft voices
whisper
peace.

Peace murmurs
the earliest star
while glittering above the horizon.

Peace
say even the seagulls
asleep upon the sandbanks.

MELANCHOLY

Massawa, 8 April 1957

O Melancholy
I am cheered
by your return.
It announces
unwelcome passions
draining away
my new fields
greening once more.

AS BLIND IN DARKNESS

Asmara, 19 June 1957

The shudder of my heart
is not allayed, its thirst
is never quenched.

Something
revolves within
and rends me asunder.

Fiery breathes
inflammes my breast
exhausting languors
loosen my limbs.

I am blind in darkness
but I saw the light
and for the light alone
I'm longing.

IMPOTENCE

Asmara, 19 June 1957

Dizzily I fall
into impotence.

Flaring blue lights
flow gliding over
me drowsing
I dive into them
and relax.

Then they escape me
and wound my heart.

I am harassed by *thorns*
and *arrows* of impotence.

SLEEP

Asmara, July 1957

Sleep,
helpless, anxious,
distressing sleep.

In my sleep
I betray myself
with those mad thoughts
I wish I had forgotten.

Afterward
anguish besets me
the usual anguish
of those mad thoughts

I wish I had forgotten

no, I wish I had destroyed.

THE WEARY HAND GIVES OVER

Asmara, 6 July 1957

It's no use
trying to say
the ineffable

The weary hand
gives over

The mind
languishes

The swollen heart
cannot give vent
to its burden.

THE PEACE OF A DREAMLESS SLEEP

Asmara, 19 July 1957

παρθενία, παρθενία, ποῖ με λίποις' ἀ<π>οίχῃ;
οὔκετι ἴξω πρὸς σέ, οὔκετι ἴξω.

Sappho

As a child
I enjoyed the peace
of a dreamless sleep.
I dwelled in a haven,
a safe bulwark
to my innermost heart.

That sweet repose
is now far away.
Spurred by a yearning
to know what
I still don't know,
I relinquished
my guarded haven.

And now blind, I grope
along the roads of the world.

BUT THE HEART LONG MUTED

Asmara, September 1957

Proclaim unto the children of men that within the
realms of holiness, nigh unto the celestial
paradise, a new garden hath appeared.

Bahá'u'lláh

Mind crammed
with ideas rebels

Pride cries
out in the breast

But the heart
long muted
whispers
sweet melodies
and carols of love.

PURE WATER FLOWS

Padua, November 1957

I was as one dead, Thou didst quicken me with
the water of life.

Bahá'u'lláh

Slowly melting
like ice and snow
on the mountains
at the caress
of springtime.

All now melts.

Pure water flows
with heavenly strains
a refreshing balm
on painful wounds
of nonsensical battles.

I JOIN MY HANDS TO THINE

Asmara, January 1958

...and on whomsoever Thou desirest Thou
conferrest the honor of recognizing Thy Most
Ancient Name.

Bahá'u'lláh

In Thee
I see my self

With Thee
existence continues

I join my hands
to Thine

For Thee
I accept my life.

UPON MY HEART FOREVER

Asmara, 14 March 1958

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be
in their foreheads.

Revelation

I am Thine
O my Lord

My naked soul
presents itself
to Thee

Write down Thy Name
upon my snow-white
forehead

Engrave
Thy living Word
upon my heart

Forever.

UNFULFILLED DREAMS

1961-1964

A SWEET, HUMANE LOVING-KINDNESS

Bologna, 31 July 1961

For Keith De Folio

When his eyes rested
on my innermost heart,
when his knowledge arrived
there, where access
was forbidden, I feared
being wounded by a pointed
knife, stung by a devouring
flame, put to shame
because of exposed errors.
No, the knife was
dart of love, the flame
blaze of affection, nothing
the shame, in front of a sweet,
humane loving-kindness.

SLOW WANDERING

Bologna, 25 October 1961

Slow wandering
of unnerving thoughts,
ring-around-a-rosy
around a bottomless pit.
I leave, I go, always
there I return, always
there I fix my gaze
where it gets lost and
to itself again returns.

AND THE WEARINESS OF NEVER-ENDING DAYS

Bologna, 6 November 1961

Within me
the urgency is throbbing
of a lad in his twenties

the impatience is seething
of a diuturnal expectation

the anxieties are crowding
of a long journey and

the weariness is pressing
of never-ending days.

YOU OUGHT TO SMILE

Bologna, 25 November 1961

Smile always smile
although the wind is roaring
although the sky is gloomy
and resounds with thunders.

Smile and again smile
although all is shaken
laid waste destroyed.

You ought to smile
always smile.

AFTER THE BILLOW BROKE

Bologna, 6 December 1961

And afterward,
after the billow broke
after the wind
tore away the leaf
after the thunderbolt
cut off the life,
after that, what's there?

Deep silence
just for a moment.
Then another billow
will surge, another wind
will blow, another thunderbolt
will gather in the air. Then the gale
will come once more.

WINTER DUSK

Castel d'Aiano (Bologna), 1 February 1962

The distant mountain blushes
at the last words of love
whispered by the sun.

The trees grow dark
with gloom 'cause
they won't see the light.

The sky blanches
in panting desire
for the earliest star.

The night falls
as a silent mantle
wiping away shame
sorrows desires.

POESY

Bologna, 18 April 1962

...A drainless shower
Of light is Poesy ...
...a friend
To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.
John Keats

Sweet dreams
throbs of worries
stirs of thoughts
for a long time refrained.

The heart opens up
the soul vibrates
under the spell of a yearning
transcending the ephemeral—
grace of forms harmony
of words depth of vision.

And when it bursts out—
an impassioned effusion
of emotions and words—
it is like a wind that crosses
the mountains like a river
that rises swells overflows
and everywhere floods.

Joy of speaking
true feelings
of weeping tears
shed in the breast
but not on the brow
of portraying
in a mirror of words
sincere images
of generous affections.

It is a blaze of truth
an outlet of sensations
an appearance of the features
of the innermost heart.

WHEN I LOOK INTO MY HEART

Bologna, 18 May 1962

When I look into my heart
my teeth chatter
my limbs shudder.

How do I dare to utter
Thy Word or set
Thine effulgence before
the night flooding within.

Turn away my gaze
from that darkness
show me only Thy light
and in that light
make me rejoice.

It is outside of me,
and Thou flood
my heart with it.

AND IF I SHALL REFUSE THY RANKS

Bologna, 4 June 1962 - 4 September 1965

And if I shall refuse Thy ranks
if I shall give up the joy
of serving Thee my life
will be vain and my journey
will become an uncertain
and aimless roaming
to nothingness I shall be lost.

And when once I shall try
to disclose this night
of my heart to Thy smile
perhaps Thou wilt enlighten
a hard stone barren and grey
without breath of life.

OUT OF THY PATH

Bologna, 9 June 1962

Out of Thy path
my feet rove
in uncertainty
and I am lost
in endless meanders
I know not where I go

And a thousand sinuous
shapes encompass me
stifle my breath petrify
my heart make me blind
to Thy light.

VEILS OF OBLIVION

Bologna, 17 July 1962

Veils
of oblivion cover
the searching eye

peplos
of mist obfuscate
the vigilant mind

mantles
of night enwrap
the thirsty heart.

All moves
wavers
and sways

as corn
fields under
the gusts of the wind

or mirroring
lakes plowed
by sailing boats

or remote
horizons blurred
by heat.

All is confused
uncertain
indistinct.

FAR FROM THEE

Bologna, 18 July 1962

I remember days

when I rejoiced
in a golden sea
of rose petals

when the air
I breathed scented
of flowers

when the forms
I saw were
gentle and sweet

when I throbbed
with love
for Thee alone.

Today
everything
changed

my heart is closed
my eyes are blind
I am far from Thee.

TOILS OF THE HEART

Castel d'Aiano (Bologna), 23 September 1962

Today the fog
covers the valley
and no echo is heard
of sweet songs
and melodies of love.

But the hungry heart
finds no peace in its toils
and champs and struggles
while striving to arrive
where all fog is dispelled.

IN THE SILENT NIGHT

Bologna, 31 May 1963

My heart falls asleep
in the silent night
with no glittering star.

THE GLIMMERING DAWN

Bologna, 8 May 1964

In darkness
staring eyes
are waiting
while the heart
restlessly pounds
and the night rolls
away and the stars—
scarcely lit—
already decline.
Lo! Here is the smile
of the glimmering dawn.

TODAY IN THE TROUGH

Bologna, 4 November 1964

Although the heart
is bleeding the wound
is not mortal. And if
smile deserts the lips
it is not forever.
Yesterday on the crest,
today in the trough.

IN DARK MEANDERS

Bologna, 4 November 1964

When I withdraw unto
myself I stray in dark
meanders in blind alleys.
I search and search
and thus I am lost
in the greyness
of a mediocre day.

THE FLAVOUR OF THY DEW

Bologna, 4 November 1964

Nothing I have
that I can give Thee
but this drained heart
a withered flower
an unworthy offer.
But I know the flavour
of Thy dew which if Thou
willest will make it reflourish
radiant with Thy beauty.

ANXIETY

Bologna, 30 November 1964

Anxiety worm that gnaws
at the wood of the heart
ashes that cover the embers
of a fire that once was flame
subtle disease inhaled in deep breaths
with the misty smoke of the roads
roaring noise of motors and machines.

ANOTHER DISQUIETING MORNING

Bologna, 30 November 1964

Vague disquietude
flutters in the heart
a silvery moth
about the light.

A padded torpor
muffles any feeling
the heavy brow
bows down
the hand is weary.

Then sleep overcomes
with disquieting
dreams.

Disquietude grows
into shapes towering
collapsing stairs beneath
uncertain footsteps dizzy
heights and it behoves
to climb more while
everything totters and
anguish chills the heart.

Then even dreams
disappear and I am
reborn into the uncertainty
of another disquieting morning.

BETWEEN HOUSES AND STONY LANES

Bologna, 30 November 1964

For Eritrea

Tight between houses and stony lanes
the poisoned soul staggers. It looks
for the expanses of that blue sky
where its eyes were lost
when—clinging to a rock—
it embraced the earth in a glance
to the farthest horizon.

IT'S ONLY A MEMORY

Bologna, 11 December 1964

For Asmara

Asmara,

your name
fades away
your low houses
your roads dissolve
into the haze like
early in the morning
when I would go to school.

It's only a memory
and I wish it were not!

The loneliness
of adolescent days
in the infinite vastness
of your blue
cloudless skies
the distant voices
of the yearning heart
in the rustling
eucalyptus leaves
the lost innocence
in the virgin beauty
of your crimson sunsets.

It's only a memory
and I wish it were not!

THE HEAVEN OF THE HEART

1965-1974

THE EARLIEST SNOW

Bologna, Winter 1964-1965

Why dream of blue
skies when a snowy
blanket covers
the barren fields?

The first snow
the first cold
the chilled heart
cannot even weep
as it recalls the sun.

LONELINESS

Bologna, 12 January 1965

Loneliness.

Thick darkness
of a formless
cave barrier
of suffocating
walls outside
dim shadows
icy winds.

Words have
no meaning
and feelings
break
against a cliff.

Tears only
evoke a slight
shaking soon
after subsided.

Loneliness.

ABOVE THE MISTS

Bologna, 12 January 1965

On a grey morning
down in the street
people rush by
hastily following
already disappointed
dreams. And lads
boisterously shout
but there is no joy
in their silver
tarnished
by adult thoughts.
From the grey sky
the dimmed eye
of the sun looks
upon us and above
the mists over
a snowy ocean
of clouds shines
always bright.

A DECEIT WOVEN BY THE HEART

Bologna, 12 January 1965

In this wintry morning
it seems as if a scent
of springtime wafts
through the air. But perhaps
it is just a deceit woven
by the heart. It wishes
every brother heart
would now unfold
to the warmth of the sun
after its long winter sleep.

PERHAPS THE SKY IS SMILING

Bologna, 31 January 1965

Perhaps the sky is smiling
in the morning blue
under the panoply of the sun
at these childish games
played by adults who know
neither who they are nor by whom
they were created nor why.

YOUR RENUNCIATION OF LIGHT

Bologna, 20 April 1965

Animula, vagula, blandula,
Hospes comesque corporis...

P. Aelius Hadrianus, Imp.

And when absorbed
in a glimmer
of stars and moon
the night brushes me
with soft fingers,
I mourn not your death,
O sweet soul, but your
renunciation of light
for a handful of thorns.

YOUR LIFE COMES TO AN END

Bologna, 20 April 1965

O sweet soul
do you really live
these fleeting hours
in all their promises?

As time rolls
away lucid
stream of flowing
waters your life
comes to an end.

THE SPEECHLESS TONGUE

Bologna, 8 May 1965

When love
that burns within
presses with exceeding
urgency the soul
languishes the heart
pales the speechless
tongue stays silent.

I KNOW NOT WHO I AM

Bologna, 8 May 1965

‘O Brother, I dare not advance. I must needs go
back again.’

Bahá'u'lláh

In my anxious roaming
I know not whether I follow
the truth or but the figments
of a deceptive mind.

I know not whether believing
to love Good is enough.

I know not whether
my soul is such a subtle liar
as to deceive herself.

I have lost the mirror
where to behold myself.

I know not who I am.

WITHOUT THEE

Bologna, 21 June 1965

There is none other God but Him, the Creator, the
Raiser from the dead, the Quickener, the Slayer.

Bahá'u'lláh

Sometimes Thou seemest
to have no mercy on Thy
lovers and to leave unsatisfied
their longing for Thee
and not to mind their pain
without Thee.

O SWEET DISTANT YEARS

Bologna, 18 September 1965

O sweet distant years
of innocence and love

when hate
is powerless
in such white purity

when smile
brightens the brow
after every suffered
and soon forgotten
offence

when memory
holds no grudge
burning embers
in tender flesh

O sweet distant years
of innocence and love.

WITHOUT ANY SHAME

Bologna, 23 October 1965

I wish Thou wouldst guide me
step by step
moment by moment.

I wish my weakness
could grow upon the root
of Thy might

my ignorance
overflow into the waters
of Thy wisdom

my abjection
sink into the ocean
of Thy grandeur.

Make me blind
and dumb and deaf
in this vanity of things

and let me live forever
in Thy heaven
before Thy presence

where everything
is radiant
with Thy light

where the heart may be lost
and show itself
without any shame

where the soul
may breathe in freedom
a thrall of Thine alone.

AND YOU, CHERISH THAT LIGHT

Bologna, 12 November 1965

And if you turn
wishful eyes
toward the past
or cherish too much
that which is present
(and will soon be gone)
joy will desert your heart.
And you will be lonely
within yourself
regret your only
friend. But in every
thing there shines
a ray of light. And you,
look at that ray,
cherish that light.
It will shine wherever
you repose your love.

THE DAY OF THY PROMISE

Bologna, 12 November 1965

Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and
a new one spread out in its stead.

Bahá'u'lláh

I anticipate the day
of Thy promise
when Thy banner
will overshadow
this world of ours
when Thy sun
will melt the ice
that now surrounds us
when each heart will be
to each heart a brother.

FORGETFUL OF THE TRUE FRIEND

Bologna, 12 November 1965

...the true Friend hath loved and doth love you for
your own sakes...

Bahá'u'lláh

At dusk when all is silent
the breast is burdened
by weighty stones.
Silence is a heavy pall
darkness is thick.
The waft of a feeling
is sought after the throb
of a friendly heart
is longed for. Forgetful
of the *true Friend* Who
in darkness smiles
in silence softens
all wounds bestows
peace upon whosoever
seeks to behold His light
to love His Word.

THE SOWN SEED WILL SPROUT

Bologna, 11 December 1965

When you love a member of your family or a
compatriot, let it be with a ray of the Infinite
Love! Let it be in God and for God!

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

I shall remember
you my brother
for your own essence.

I shall remember you
because with you
it was easy to lose
sight of the *wall of shadow*
which now divides us.

I shall remember you
not so much for what
was said and heard
but for the stirrings of our souls
for the light of spirit.

Words and facts
will fall into nothingness
but the sown seed
will sprout.

After those hours
you left me a sign
I offered you a sign.

Perhaps tomorrow
or later everything
will change.

But today the fleeting
moment stopped.

An act of love
lasts a lifetime.

HUMAN THOUGHTS

Bologna, 25 January 1966

Pass beyond the baser stages of doubt and rise to
the exalted heights of certainty.

Bahá'u'lláh

When the hazy mists
rising from the rotting
marshes where human
thoughts vainly hover
bedim the eternal radiance
of the immortal breath
that guides the hearts'
pulsations, a distressing
anguish wrings the breast.

Unloose yourself,
O breast, above
those fogs the sun
triumphs. And if you
were to love its light
as much as a ship-
wrecked sailor
submerged by surging
billows loves the air
light would never
remain hidden
from your sight.

And yet your eyes
see other things
your ears hearken
to other sounds.

IN THE KISS OF LIFE-GIVING WATER

Bologna, 3 February 1966

For Eritrea

Perhaps your blue skies
crystalline in the freedom
of the sun I love 'cause
in them I transfigure
purity of thought
kindliness of heart
radiance of spirit.

Breath is never failing
when in that alabaster
the majesty of the sun
triumphs and breasts swell
and hearts leap in joy
and anguishes and greyness
of smoke and wintry mists
are an unknown burden.

And when the condensed
vapour of your sky pours
down in water it is not
a drizzling and uninterrupted
weep of bitter tears it is
a sound of pearls a cascade
of joyous notes. And your
never drenched soil rots
not but reflowers in the kiss
of life-giving water.

THE HEAVEN OF THE HEART

Bologna, 12 February 1966

Should the heaven of the heart
grow bright the meaning
of things would change
and the thousand acts of life
would blaze with light.

ALLUREMENT

Bologna, 12 February 1966

In the shout of the sky
all voices of protest
fall silent

All grow still
in weariness

Sweetly
subtly
allurement
drips.

THE SHADE OF REMEMBRANCE

Bologna, 14 February 1966

For Eritrea

And when the weeping
greyness of these sunless
skies drenches my thoughts
with weariness and gloom
the yearning for your blue skies
intoxicating in the sensuous
delight of the sun wrings
all the more my heart.
And my pupils widen
while seeking in the past
your almost forgotten light.

Your beauty arises not just
from the shade of remembrance:
it is the very longing for Infinite
Reality and unsullied purity,
it is a conscious humanity
that sacrifices itself hour after hour
upon the altar of the spirit
and rejoices in its renunciation
because the light of faith
overcomes each of its faults.

SERVING THEE ONCE MORE

Bologna, 3 March 1966

And if Thou wilt rain
anew Thy light
upon this night
that encompasses me
in my joy of
serving Thee once more
I shall be reborn to life.

ALWAYS IN THY PRESENCE

Bologna, 4 March 1966

And when the water
of Thy Word
and the fire of Thy love
have removed
the self's last veil
then shall I always be
in Thy presence.

And my words
will be holy
and my dreams
heavenly visions
and whatever I shall do
it will be for Thee
alone.

VOICELESS DAYS

Bologna, 19 September 1966

In this grey corruption of the sky
only silence remains.

The meaning of things
has been lost.

Slowly vainly
every thought is ceasing.

The blazing sun
has set.

The blue of the sky
has dissolved.

Even remembrance
of life has vanished.

The heart is no longer capable
of generous outbursts.

Weariness burnt-out ashes
covers all things.

The word
falls mute.

All things
are inert.

Long voiceless days
lie in store.

IT RESEMBLES THE SEED

Bologna, 19 September 1966

When a person becomes a Bahá'í actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul.

Shoghi Effendi

O kind Lord Who always
guides me on the steep
paths of His love,
I wish I knew
why such a lull
is in my heart today.

Is it perhaps because
it resembles the seed
when still covered
by the heavy soil
knows neither
the joy of light
nor the perfume of the air?

SO MUCH LIFE IS WASTED

Bologna, 21 November 1968

Even as the swiftness of lightening ye have
passed by the Beloved One, and have set your
hearts on satanic fancies.

Bahá'u'lláh

When I discover upon a face
the faint blanching
of the anguish of becoming,
a painful consciousness
of both living and dying
pierces the heart of hearts,
and revolves therein
and hurts as it sinks
into the tender limbs
and so much life is wasted.

OUR SORRY VOICES

Bologna, 21 November 1968

Have ye forgotten that true and radiant morn,
when... ye were all gathered in My presence
beneath the shade of the tree of life which is
planted in the all-glorious paradise?

Bahá'u'lláh

There in the infinite being
there where time is not
He hearkened to our sorry
voices and granted us
the fleeting moment
the trial of the bitter choice.

And now, now
so much distress
so much loneliness
in icy remoteness
or in velvet jails
of oblivion where even
regret seems of no use.

The memory of *that true*
and radiant morn—
a lukewarm nostalgia—
could not yet tear asunder
the heavy veil of molecules
thickened into curtains of stone.

THE CELESTIAL DEW

Bologna, 30 September 1969

In a morning
suffused with light
the celestial dew
moistened my heart.

TODAY MY HEART IS DESERTED

Bologna, 30 September 1969

At many a dawn I have turned from the realms of
the Placeless unto thine abode, and found thee on
the bed of ease busied with other than Myself.

Bahá'u'lláh

In those forgotten days
Thou visited my heart.
But I was not aware
that Thou wert with me.
And I turned my thoughts
elsewhere. Today
my heart is deserted
and I seek Thee in vain.

YOUR HAND IN MY HAND

Castel San Pietro (Bologna), 28 November 1972

To Paola

God has created such union and harmony
between man and wife that no one can conceive
in this world a greater plane of union.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

And when you suffer
'cause you believe
you are alone
look at me join
your loneliness to mine
hold my hand we shall
go together there
where life will lead us.

And in those sometimes
steep sometimes
gentle paths we shall
walk together. Your hand
in my hand darkness
will be less thick. The fire
of love will burn for us
and soften the chilling
trials of life.

THE SIGH STILL LINGERS

Bologna, December 1972

Within my heart the sigh still lingers
of those long voiceless days
when I did not feel like even crying.

DESPITE THE LIGHT OF GUIDANCE

1975-1983

OF THOSE INFINITE WORLDS

Bologna, 1976-1979

Today the self is a hell to me
'cause one day I tasted
an infinitesimal droplet
of those infinite worlds
whereto it's our fate
that once we shall attain.

TO BE A PART, I TOO

Bologna, 1976-1979

From the torn heart
the only song is raised
which may comfort it:
the voicing of the contrast
between the gehenna of the self
and the heaven of creation.

Only mine are hell
and prison, outside
the sun is ever shining.

And to Him Who such
omnipresent beauty
willed to create
I eagerly ask
of that perfection
to be a part, I too.

THE WALLS OF THE SELF

Bologna, 1976-1979

Mine is not a prayer,
sometimes, but a cry,
that from the clay
of the heart echoes
the need beyond
the impervious walls
of the self, up to
the furthest reaches
of immensity
where Truth dwells.

And peace is
but a fleeting blaze,
while the sly self
is always watching,
imposing reins
and restraints.

MY HEART IS WAVERING

Bologna, 1976-1979

Now is he lifted up to heaven, now is he cast into
the depths.

Bahá'u'lláh

My heart is wavering
'tween yearnings for grandeur
and disquieting fears.
And when the yearnings
are more deeply felt
I know I can say wonders
and dive into the murky
fathoms of the self
and let gush out from them
subtle feelings never
voiced before. But when
fear overcomes,
I see myself a prisoner
of dreary memories
and doubts. The tongue
is silent then, and pines
away the heart.

AS THE RUSH OF THE LAKES

Haifa, 22-30 November 1976 - 16-25 February 1981

To Adriano and Giorgio

Make them, O Lord,
as pure as the earliest
glimmer of the sun
that kissed the earth,
as clear as spring
water that flows
from the mountains,
as meek as the rush
of the lakes that winds
bend and shake but
never offend.

TO THE POOR, ASTONISHED HEART

Bologna, 15 October 1978

...a prayer that shall rise above words and letters
and transcend the murmur of syllables and
sounds—that all things may be merged into
nothingness before the revelation of Thy
splendor.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

In the silent day
remote harmonies
of celestial spheres echo;
low whispers hover
of angelic voices;
distant scents are wafted
of roses, hyacinths,
vervains—ancient
remembrance musk-
laden heavenly breeze.

But the unruly flesh
is sunk in darkness
and the mind raves
while treading dark paths.

Only at times
the eyes can perceive,
in the dazzling charm
of creation, the divine
breath, the sole
foundation and reason
of all existing beauty.

A flying bird, then,
enraptures the soul.
A blue sky thrusts
the thought beyond
its reaches. Rustling
leaves in the wind
make the breast shiver.

It is the hidden
omnipresent mystery
that—no longer a remote
remembrance—is at last
unhidden vibration.
It is the *indwelling Spirit*
now finally revealed
to the poor, astonished heart.

THE SMELL OF THAT SPRINGTIME

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

For Maud Waterworth Bosio (1899-1968)

The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause
of God... provideth... the pure leaven that
leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the
power through which the arts and wonders of the
world are made manifest.

Bahá'u'lláh

When the *veil* has dropped
by which we are here divided,
I shall know whether it was
your prayer the fragrance
I inhaled in that springtime.

I shall know whether
the presence I felt
constant, attentive, tender
was only my memory of you
who had just flown away
or your very spirit
eager to assist me.

The regret for lost days the words
of overflowing affection I whispered
to you in my heart the prayers
I offered for you were my companions.
And when I passed through your town
I was inebriated with memories
and tears brimmed in my eyes.

Your caring sweetest
thought was beside me
for days and days and
brought a new springtime
to my heart.

There was nothing manifest.
My weary acquiescence
seemingly continued.
Much deeper are the miracles
of the heart and the paths
of the Lord are trodden in ways
we often cannot understand.

But by then my journey
had started anew. Step
by step still am I advancing
and in each step forward
there is the honeyed nectar
of all the flowers of the world,
and in each pause the bitterest gall.

And today you are
again for me a sweet
remembrance and I like
to dream of your soul
intent on guiding others
as it did me on the ways
toward the Beloved of all hearts.

THE HOUR WE LIVED TOGETHER

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

To Augusto Robiati (1912-2000)

O friend of the spirit
who gave me comfort
that mournful day!
From that hour
we lived together—
our faces wet with
tears—you expected
a miracle as I did.
But I knew not that day
how long is the road
to one's true self.

And what is this pride
which now makes me hope
that some day I shall be
as clear as crystal, sincere
as spring water, fair
in every word and deed,
at long last released from
the cage of passion and desire.

And what is this folly
that unnerves me—
while I anticipate that day
of remote perfection—
inducing me to flee
the fires of tests!

MISLEADING ROADS

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

Wings have I bestowed upon thee, that thou
mayest fly to the realms of mystic holiness and
not the regions of satanic fancy.

Bahá'u'lláh

Of my youthful days
today I remember
intensity of feelings,
depth of emotions
lived not only within
the heart, a sense
of ancientness,
not just of old age.

I too tried misleading
roads, that I might
conquer the lands
of the world. I too
lived experiences,
as if I were the first
one to have done so.

The awareness
of participating
for the first time
in eternal games,
wherein the whole
universe participates,
drew me into
a dark sea—a heaven
to my eyes—where
I fancied that the self
was finally lost.

But that paradise
was carved in glass
and when it shattered
a thousand glistening blades
pierced my weak flesh.
Only the hand of God
healed those wounds.

THE INCAUTIOUS YOUTH

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

The incautious youth
drove me down precipitous
paths, until it led me
in front of barren crags,
while the self was burning
in its desire to enjoy
the inebriation of a senseless
flight. Only the hand
of God held me back
and, when I fell,
raised me up again.

IN THE DARK THAT REMAINS

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved
other than Me?

Bahá'u'lláh

Sometimes I am
like him who believes
having recovered himself
in his errors, and fancies
a renewed inner strength.
But all too soon it has vanished.
And in the dark that remains
he discovers the eternal was lost.

I SHALL HARDLY UNDERSTAND

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

Today I thank Thee
for having tolerated
my straying from
Thy golden path
toward the torrid
lands of life for,
by acting, loving
and thinking like
so much sorry, dearly-
loved humanity,
companions of my
earthly journey,
I unlocked the first
door leading to the secrets
hidden in the hearts
and to the love of them.

And as that pain
is still burning
the weak flesh,
I ask Thee to grant
that this anguish
may teach me never
to keep that door
closed again.

And now such infinite
tenderness and deep
compassion grow within,
that I ask Thee why.

And I know I shall
hardly understand
why so much wealth
is unburied, so much
love is unspoken, so much
warmth is dissipated.

And Thou guide us
toward Thee, assist us
while treading this path,
cleanse our hearts of all
foulness gathered along
the way and let the beauteous
rose flourish even in the mire.

SEARCH IS A JOURNEY

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

...if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet
fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should
not falter.

Bahá'u'lláh

Search is a journey
which the yearning
heart would like
to cover in a flash
whereas it's long
and wearying.

And yet there is no time
there where the goal
knows no time,
a ghost existing
only in the traveller's
deceptive mind.

And no stop exists
along that journey
which is moved by love,
though sometimes its progress
may seem so slow
as to be felt as standstill—
nay as regression—
by the longing lover.

O TENDER LOVE THRIVING IN THE BREAST

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

...set not your affections on this mortal world of dust.

Bahá'u'lláh

O sweet feelings for a long
time unuttered, guided only
by the impulse of the heart!
O tender love, thriving
in the breast! Why from such
a charming seed can a misshapen
plant grow? Why is sometimes
the scent of its flowers bemusing
and baneful the taste of its fruits?

I wish I could give it
fairy hands, so that
its touch might create
wonders and perform
miraculous deeds,
for the happiness of all
those who partake of it.

Whereas sometimes a subtle
deceit seems from it dripping
drop by drop, and any good
intention looks therein soon
withered. And thus sometimes
a thousand barriers are raised
and o'er the years the self
becomes a castle, wherein
the heart is held a prisoner,
and remains alone and aloof,
prevented from escaping
the sombre dark of limitation
and flying toward the sunlit
expanses of human life.

THE POWER OF LOVE

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

The power of love
held within our hearts
resembles the strength
of springtime which, when
winter is over, empowers
the seed to sprout, new buds
to blossom from ancient wood,
and changes the tiny sapling
into a thriving tree, that first
flourishes and then bears
delicious fruits. O Lord,
grant that this love
may drive us along
the ways which Thou
ordained for us, whereas
we all use it differently
to what Thou wilt.

THE UNAVOWED AWARENESS

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna) 1979-1983

The heart of the believer is the mirror of the heart
of the believer.

Ḥadīth

Sometimes
the unavowed awareness
of the imperfect limitation
which inhabits our hearts
forbids us to love Thy servants,
who strive to serve Thee
despite their weakness,
because we are blinded
to their light and see
reflected in them only those flaws
which in ourselves we love the least.

AND A THOUSAND KIND HANDS

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979-1983

To the Bahá'ís of the Italian community

And a thousand kind hands
took hold of mine
and with respectful love
lead me toward
the Desire of all hearts.

POLONIA 1981

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), December 1981

The problem is the education of human beings in
the ultimate and most important purpose of life
and in how to weld the differences of opinion and
outlook into a united constructive effort.

The Universal House of Justice

Fifty seven dead in Danzig,
forty miners killed by police,
fifty thousand citizens detained
outdoors at twenty degrees
below zero, freedoms brutally
denied, human rights violated.

And a weeping people
lights up millions of candles,
a present grief manifested
through an ancient act of mourning,
a rampant rebellion before now
repressed in the depth of hearts.

O you, unwary observers
of history and the world,
your idle fancies have produced
dreadful monsters. How will
human compassion
absolve your errors?

The standard whereby you should
be judged cannot be as mild
as if you were a supporting father
who ekes out his salary by a black work,
or an abdicating mother, overwhelmed
by the modern thirst of having.

The standard should be sterner,
for them, who groping in the dark,
lay claim to leadership, the best
of them following false ideals,
the most of them driven by thirst
of power. And all the others, there,
indifferent, in their skepticism,
or cynicism, or hedonism.

How could one be silent
in front of such a havoc?
How could we repress
our burning indignation
against these false banners
laying out black shrouds of death
and red palls of violence
over a sorry, unaware mankind?

Let us see, O my God, the tender
twig of Thy new World Order.
Let us see the threads of Thy *Major
Plan*, as they become unraveled.
This is the only way for us
to behold, behind these still waving
red and black funereal banners,
the dawning light of Thy Greatest Name.

AN UNEXPECTED STREAM

1983-1992

For Eritrea

AN UNEXPECTED STREAM

Bologna, 1983-1985

Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew

'Abdu'l-Baha

Sometimes

I am hardened clay
that the bounty of the rain
softens and causes
to bear plentiful fruits.

I am a withered shrub
that the blessing
of a sudden shower
makes bloom again.

I am a wild animal
that the rainwater delivers
from the obscure
presentiment of death
which thirst had
for a long time nourished
in its lightless heart.

I am a pilgrim worn away
with heat and drought
who quaffs at last his fill
from the fresh waves
of an unexpected stream.

KALDIDALUR'S SWAN

Reykjavik, 15 August 1990

Blue jewel in bezel
of impervious mountains
chains of impregnable glaciers
garlands of cotton-grass
heaths and blueberries,
carols of winds softened
by a pale sun and you,
snow-white swan, alone,
move assured on the waters
unsullied grace
undisturbed regality.

What did ever lead you up here?

You sing as an answer:
'I forsook whatever I had,
food shelter companions,
in my longing for these
lacustral waves, for this
solemn vault of heaven
redolent with ancient scents
of lichens and mosses,
where at last the eyes can enjoy
the bliss of heavenly light.
Happy is the heart 'cause it's closer
to the majestic beauty of God.'

YOU COME BACK, O POETRY

Bologna, 19 September 1991

After long silences
you come back, O poetry.
I fear you no longer
for the self-indulgence
you once inspired me.

Today you suggest
new roads of light
and mists and hazes
are left behind.

The self is still longed for
but it is the self
that returns to the Lord
pleased and pleasing Him.

And though on my scroll
barbarian scripts
are written still,
today the effort suffices me
of changing those letters
into divine words.

THE VOICES OF TIME

Asmara, 4 February 1992

I am here to seek
a thread of time
which seems as lost,
to discover reasons
for repressed feelings,
and renew ties
now covered
with veils of sand.

And you, O wind,
retain your voice
of old and stir
the eucalyptus leaves
in a sound as though
of flowing waters.
Whereas everything here
longs for rain
and from the parched fields
unceasing anthems
of prayer are raised.

Only when the zenithal sun
distills warmer vapours
from the salty expanses
of the Erythrean Sea,
will there be exultation
of waters and colours.

But even now
I love to stay here
where the inner voice
is no longer silent
no longer stifled
by other noises.

The harps of the heart
resound in the blowing
wind. The soul renders
its praise unto God.
The arid soil then becomes
verdant, woods cover
with buds, a scent
of eternity wafts
through the air. Time,
why even here do you fly?

THE OLD ASPHALTED ROAD

Asmara, 4 February 1992

For Rosa Palmucci Savi (1905-1994)

Liza,
from the old asphalted road
there where in former days
I saw your blond hair
and heard your resonant
voice today I hear
but sounds of the wind.
Your house disappeared.
Felled your trees,
only stumps now remain.
Even the brook dried up
that once watered your fields.
And you, where have you gone?

Liza,
among those aged stumps
from the old asphalted road
I already see tender eucalypti
sprouting. And the blue sky
is here and there whitened
with dewy clouds. You'll see,
soon it will rain and all will reflower.
In your place a new owner's
silvery voice will be heard.
Who knows, that future woman
may bestow even more joys,
even sweeter remembrances
may she leave behind!

I climb the steep banks
of that arid brook and enter
your untilled fields. The past
remains outside on the old,
now broken, asphalted road.
Among those tender eucalypti
everything speaks of prime
and bloom.

Yes, Liza,
now I hear again your voice,
It comes from your new fields
and I have no more regrets.
Now you call me from a Kingdom
I know I belong to, whereof I catch
but fleeting glimpses. And you
also tell me to rest assured

that time does not go by in vain,
that a thousand friendly hands
are always ready to give help,
that any little good we do
bears much more conspicuous fruits.

Liza,
I go no further,
I heard your answer.
I now return to my old
asphalted road. At home
Rose, your friend of former
days now grown old, awaits me.
Today, she needs the strength
and warmth of younger arms
that, in spite of age and toil,
she may rise at last to her feet again.

THE SYCAMORE

Saganeiti (Eritrea), 10 February 1992

Yesterday,
near to Saganeiti
I met a lapwing,
hopping round
on her thin legs;
tuft in the wind,
she flew 'midst
stones and shrubs,
while pecking up
such scraps
as she could find.
'Stop,' I bade,
'tell me what happened
to the greenery which once
the Hebo valley mellowed?'

The lapwing
looked at me surprised.
'The Hebo valley
has for many a long year
been parched and dry.
Go reach the plain
of Degghera Libe.
There, ask the majestic
sycamore, for centuries
witness of the world's events.'

So on I went and found
the ancient sycamore,
gnarled trunk, rough
bark, and far
outstretching branches,
and sat me down
below his shady leaves,
stirred by the wind—
a cool and resonant sound.

And when the mind
fell silent that sound
became a voice
and the old sycamore told me
a recent story of pillages,
wars and ingravescient drought.
He recalled extinguished friends,
expressed the anguish
of younger saplings.
But there were no tears
in his words.

From a distant Land, he said,
that, once a desert,
had blossomed again
into a sacred garden,
voices of joy had come.
In his wisdom
the sycamore knew
already a rain had fallen
to quicken his valley anew;
and that life-giving water

would soon be there as well.
What flowers then
of euphorbias and acacias,
what soft fruits
of prickly pears,
what bloom of younger
sycamore trees,
how many *eleltas*
of festal joy!

I left the sycamore-fig
as he was still describing
a more luminous future.
And from those parched places
I carried off no gloomy thoughts
but rather the certitude
of forthcoming harvests.

AS IF

Bologna, 22 April 1992

My days go by as if,
as if I believed
in God, as if I knew
His glorious signs,
as if I were conscious
of His trust enshrined
within my heart, as if
I were able to reflect
the light of His names.

And what else shall I say?
Perchance that I know
what faith doth mean?
Or that my knowledge
of His signs is the same
as the knowledge
which He ordains?
Or that the glimmering light
I sometimes think I see
dawning amidst the night
which obscures my heart
is an, albeit faint, reflection
of the sunny splendour
of His glowing Face?

Therefore no other
thing is left for me to do
but go on and live as if,
of but one thing assured:
I did not learn as yet
how to live as if
He were pleased with me.

MÍRZÁ MAQŞÚD

Bologna, 26 May 1992

O Mírzá Maqşud, the Beloved
was pleased with your poems.
His heart was touched by the light
reflected through your words.
Other poets will dare
time and again to offer
the distillate of their art
to such an exalted Threshold,
but they will never know
from Him whether the signs
of the *light of reunion*
and *fire of separation*
urging in their hearts
may be seen shining out.

YEARNING

Parma, 1 June 1992

Life is an eternal yearning
which mounts toward
the unbounded heaven.

It is a never-ending comparison
between the little self—
an imperfect matter—
and the perfect exemplar
flashing at times
from the depths of the heart.

Sometimes its bite is pain—
it is as an ardent flame
burning the tender limbs—
but the heat it gives off
moves the whole of life.

And the world kindly offers
a thousand remedies whereby
those burns might be soothed.

It is a velvet sky
in a night of new moon

furrowed by the Milky Way's
diaphanous shawl
while the Southern Cross
makes eyes at Austral heavens
and sinuous waters
enfold the body
and glisten in a thousand
phosphorescent lights.

It is the colour of a lake
in an October dawn
while in that native temple
rosy vapours rise up
to the luminous threshold of God.

It is the sun
that caresses the skin
in its enveloping warmth
while the sea-scented wind
blows in the hair
on the ancient seacliff
shaped by the waves.

It is a sunset
in December scarlets
of translucent skies
while the cold stings deep
nature sleeps
and human life pulsates.

Let the heart's
yearning bite:
while it bites, I live.

THE REMOTE HEATHS OF A FORMER DAY

Adi Nefas (Eritrea), 14 September 1992

Why in this land
the swashing waves of the lake
under the crystalline sky
the rustling leaves
at the caress of the wind
the humming insects
in the heat of the sun
the distant echoes
from the silent expanses—
why do these voices
tell me of the Infinite here
more than anywhere else
in the world? Are His
Footsteps in this wilderness
here perhaps closer?

No, the voice I hear
is the self's alluring whisper
that renews ancient memories
lost in the heart's recesses:
the doors of time forever
locked up seem to reopen
on the remote heaths
of a former day,
under the illusion that the immutable
roads of a completed journey
may be trod again
in a different way.

I still hear ringing

voices I see fair hair
dishevelled by the wind
I hear calls of joy
I breathe adolescent
perfumes. The spell
is renewed of a feeling
never recaptured
elsewhere in the world.

Here I am the rock
that basks in the sun
I am the frond that sings
in the blowing wind
I am the wave that caresses
the grassy shore I am the one
who speaks from the waves
of this lake I am the bee
that collects the pollen
from the *maskal* flower
I am the flower that unfolds
its yellow corolla to the green
warmth of the meadow.
Here still and forever I am
a part of the whole.
Far from here, what am I?

O to be the wind
instead that unruffled
blows upon all the lands
of the world or the sun
that shines everywhere
and never withholds
its gift of heat and light.

THE UNEXPECTED RAIN

Akordat (Eritrea), 19 September 1992

The unexpected rain
clothed hillocks and plains
in golden and green
changing velvets.

It freshened the shrubs
in the lowlands
and renewed the leaves
on the ancient trees.

The umbrellas of thorny acacias
are thicker, the sycamores'
leafage is greener
and from their swollen barks
latex exudes more abundant.

The *ghindas*' leaves
open broader
to the rays of the sun
and their turgid fruits
seem ready to burst.

The baobabs display
unusual foliage and here
and there fragrant jasmines
are in bloom.

The doom palms'
uneven procession
uninterruptedly winds
along the distant shores
of the sandy Barka's expanses.

Herds of baboons
wade glittering streams
under the rays of the sun.

Dromedaries water
while the cameleer sleeps
under the palm-grove's shadow.

Perhaps his dream
is not unlike mine:
running away
from a toilsome hour
toward placid days
free from the cares of time,
forgetful of the fruits
of an industrious zeal
which yet the gifts
of beauty and joy
of that unexpected rain
encourage to renew.

REMOTE CALLS

Adi Kashi (Eritrea), 20 September 1992

Upon candelabra
of Abyssinian euphorbias
new green sprouts
of tender buds.

From grassy slopes
spikes of aloes
raise orange

and red chalices
toward the sky,
yellow *maskals* corollas
red drupes of lentiscus
sway in the gusts of the wind.

Among huge pebbles
warmed by the rays of the sun
lizards and chameleons bask
dragonflies and hornets drone.

Around flower-stems of agaves
hummingbirds soar.
Under the clouds
hawks slowly glide.

In the sunlit silence
of the highlands remote
calls of wayfarers
and shepherds echo.

Effaced by primeval rhythms
the ephemeral disappears
the essential remains.

Greatness and meanness
grow even here
in human hearts
like in the megalopolitan
quarters and magnificent
mansions of a frantic
world that here seems
so far away.

REMNANTS OF DAYS FOREVER GONE

Massawa, 27 September 1992

White palaces
of coraline stone
arabesqued walls
solid pillars slender
columns eastern
and western arches
shadows of arcades
inlays of windows
sculptures of gates
traceries of wooden

balconies Turkish
pointed domes lofty
and small minarets
of ancient shrines
and more recent mosques.
Gaily coloured shops
yellow red and green
of fruits and vegetables
fantasies of boldly-
patterned fabrics

intoxicating flavours
of oriental spices
smokes of incense
in shady lanes
redolent with saltiness
Arab market voices
and solemn muezzins'
calls in echoes
of lapping waves

on the beaches green
of mangroves yellow
of sands games
of hermit crabs drawings
of cowries slenderness
of flamencos ibises
and herons indigo
of waves breaking
against the rocks
emeralds turquoises
aquamarines of crystal
clear sheets of water

naked ebony
of lithesome bodies
polished by the sea
in the scorching
heat of the sun

across the sky
flights of seagulls
under snowy wreathes
of vanishing clouds
on the horizon
cerulean shades
of the remote plateau's
mountain ranges.

The mind filters off,
in remembrance,
wrecks dilapidated
walls stinks filth
turbidities ruins
emaciated bodies
tattered garments
voices of sadness.

But you who didn't live
that ended day
tell me you recognize
like me that ancient
beauty albeit
now disguised.

The inexorable hand
of a time I will not

feign an enemy
has gone on to derange
remnants of days
forever passed.

Will ever the men of today
preserve those stones,
reminders of former
splendours to me
for them of bitter days?

O lad handsome
in your ambered skin
and eyes as bright
as live coals,
on your blazing
kulkwal torch

I renew the *Maskal*
fire rite. In my heart
my wish wills to be
the same as yours.
But what pain for me
white African exile
to ignore my desire
to preserve those
beauties, for you
encumbering rubble
of a past you want
to forget on the roads
toward a future
that belongs to you,
not to me.

IN THE DAWN CHANGING SUN

Bet Maka (Eritrea), 28 September 1992

For Umberto Savi (1901-1970)

A real son is such an one as hath branched from
the spiritual part of a man.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

From the rustling cypresses
in the blowing wind
warmed by the sun
voices of remote days
resound.

I breathe the flavour
of a fatherly love
I feel the warmth
of strong arms
I am enfolded in the sweetness
of a winning voice.

My hand in your hand
I go back among
tall eucalyptus trees.

I hear you once more
telling of remote worlds
of luminous holiness.

The path you suggest
is always clear to my sight.
To that Covenant
I try to be faithful
which you made
on my behalf e'er since
in a youthful surge
of love and joy
you bestowed upon me
the gift of life.

But in this journey
still I need
your admonishment
your albeit demanding
example your ardour
of seeker and lover.

Perhaps some day
even mine inner eyes
will be opened
and in the dawn
changing sun
together with you
I shall see those infinite
luminous worlds
that lie in wait for us all.

TOWARD THE UNREACHED BORDERS

1994-1995

WHERE ARE THE BOUNDARIES?

Bologna, 14 March 1994

I Thou Thou I
where are the boundaries?
Where is the fixed point
where I may pause,
where I may silence
that unappeased yearning
which more and more
within my heart is urging?
If the self is value
if reality is the self
all is yearning and passion.

Yes, sometimes I seek
the inebriation of a breakneck
race on those fiery
chargers through the sunny
wilderness of life.
But what is left then,
if all is devoured
by inexorable time,
if the most ardent
passion is fast
worn out, if the most
vehement yearning
is soon appeased.

And Thou... Thou art
always there and waitest,
and lookest in a smile.
Thine eyes are sparkling
like stars in a darksome night.
Sweet-scented is Thy breath
like Massawa's sea breeze.

Thine raven hair
hangs down and glitters
upon Thy face and shoulders,
hiding Thy black eye-brows
behind a thick veil
of mystery. Thy smile
bestows the warmth
of springtime. If only
I return Thy loving
glances mine are soon
Thy myriad bounties.

Mine. I. But do
I know Thee?
Is it really Thou
Whom I see
in the magic
mirror of creation?
Whom I feel stirring
in the chambers
of my inmost heart?

Or is it always I,
such an inexorable

presence that in the end
nothing of Thee remains
but a distorted image,
an idol, Thou
as a reflection of my self
not I of Thy Self.

And then again I ride
those chargers, I tread
again the sunny
wilderness of life,
again I search that ocean,
where I may sink,
pause, stand still, and rest;
where such will be the roar
of its splashing waves
that no longer will I hear
the deaf grumble of my self
but just the ocean's voice
which is Thy voice;
where the freshness of its deep
dark waters will be such
that the scorching heat
of passions and desires
will little by little fade away;
'cause there is no mire
of self—though hardened
by the passing time—
that may withstand
the quiet, sweet dissolving
power of those waters.
Will then Thy bride
at long last be unveiled ?

Will the self have become
a *pleased and pleasing*
soul? Will her eyes,
cleared of hindering veils,
stop searching after Thee
in the self's deceptive,
enticing mirror? Will
they at last behold Thee
in every small and
great thing of life?

When will this
forlorn remoteness
come to an end?

Or is this same cry
a din of the *insistent self*,
a pretentious clamour
that drowns Thy peaceful
voice which—undeterred
by our most audacious
faithlessness—persists
in sending messages
of love from the eternal
Mother Letters of Thy
Most Holy Book?

WATER OF THE SELF

Wilmette, Illinois, 26 March 1994

And when Peter was come down out of the water,
he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

Matthew

Murky, stagnant
water of the self.

On this water
you shall walk.

Like a rose laid
upon the water
you shall float.

Like a lotus flower—
though sinking its roots
in slime—on the water
white and pure
you shall sway.

And your soul
shall soar upon
the murky, stagnant
water of the self.

This is true faith:

that the person
that lives within you
shrouding the features
of your true self
may not be foe
but instrument
and that you may look
at the mysterious countenance
of that enigmatic Mona Lisa
without losing yourself
in the enticing,
insidious meanders
of its mystery.

Yes, you shall walk
upon the water.

This is true faith.

A HAPPY AND MARVELLOUS END

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 3 May 1994

For Leo Niederreiter (1920-1999)

When I was a child
Guinevere used to lead me
on the grass-covered paths
of a charmed world
where turquoise fairies
bestowed toys
good-hearted giants
cradled innocent children
elves and sprites
pointed the way
to those who were lost.

Then a fair Titania
unlocked the gates
of a world of gods
and demigods and let me
wander through green
expanses of Arcadian
meadows; country life
was not a toil there,
but play and fun
and languishing nymphs
together with jesting
satyrs removed
the veils from the earliest
thoughts of love.

At last a teacher
leading me through
Alcman's sleeping
plains, guiding me
on the bucolic roads
of the Augustan poets,
proffering red wine
from Anacreon's goblet,
and raising me in flight
as the old kingfisher
upon halcyon's wings.

Sorrow and toil
remain always concealed.
The world glitters
with myth, a spider
is a brave maid,
a rainbow a bridge
toward heaven, the wind
Aeolus's breath, a thunder
Jupiter's wrath.

But one fine day
the spell is lifted.
On the broken
roads of the world
my carriage jolts
and swings. I see
no fairies here,
nor friendly giants,
no gods nor demigods,
no nymphs nor jesting

satyrs, but only
outstretched shadows
that suddenly in dark
fade away. And dream,
where did it go?

But here a loving elf—
ears pointed, eyes
roguish and blue,
voice ironic and pungent—
with his kind and firm
hand, from that limbo
of dreams ushers me now
into a new and different
world. There is no
myth here, no fancy.
An unusual light
dissociates the hardest
fibres, levitates
the heaviest bodies, dispels
shadows, enlightens
skies in a fervour
of facts and ideas.
It is not flight from the world,
but a prospect, a vision
of future, transparency
of eternity, which gives
meaning to things.

And today, by now an adult,
I find myself still a wanderer,
watching the world
through the eyes of a child

and poet undeterred
by the swings and jolts
which life still gives
to my chariot as it swiftly
probes its thousand
different roads.
Life is still a dream
tale; the world glitters
with myth; the end
is ever happy.
For that elfin sprite
showed me at last
the ultimate luminous Point
toward which all is directed
in a happy and marvellous end.

MARY AND MARTHA

Long Beach, Washington, 22 June 1994

For Paola

In one of the villages he entered during his journey, a woman called Martha entertained him in her house. She had a sister called Mary; and Mary took her place at the Lord's feet, and listened to his words.

Luke

One day Mary
and Martha met Jesus
the Nazarene. Mary,
sky-blue eyes, pearly
carnation, beauties
of dawns and sunsets,
freedom of boundless
spaces of thought,
purest joys of the heart.

Martha, small, penetrating
and curious dark eyes—
her face made thin by toils
of thoughts of well-being,
not just for herself, but
for those whom she loved—
stayed by herself
intent on carrying out
small and practical things.

Mary listened
to Jesus's voice
and, while pining away
in her passion for Him,
her heart was inflamed
with a thousand reflections
of joy. Martha felt other
joys, not smaller—indeed
even greater—attending
to her many things
done not just for herself,
but for those whom she loved.

And she did not complain
to Him because her sister
had left her alone.
Without speaking a word
she went on with her work
so that Mary's cherished
desire could be satisfied.
For her to serve was enough.

To this Martha
Jesus did not say:
*'Mary has chosen
the best part of all
that which shall never
be taken away.'*

He said instead: 'Martha,
Martha, there is more beauty
in your caring for the small

things of the world
than in hundreds of sermons
and prayers: the harmony
that makes them so beautiful
is that you do them not just
for yourself but for the others,
whom you love.'

And to Mary He said:
'What a joy I take in you,
in your kindly love
in your sweet words.
But perfected will be
My joy when your love
for Me is manifested
in your caring
for the things of the world
that you will do
not just for yourself
but for the others,
whom you love.'

Today in our hearts
Mary and Martha
meet once more
before their Lord
Who has just returned
with a new Name.
Blessed are those
who listen each time
to Mary or Martha
as needed: to Mary
when thirsty hearts

need to receive love—
from reading the holy
words, meditating
upon spiritual truth,
or contemplating
the face of God;
to Martha when the heart
is called upon to be ready
to accomplish the task
for which it was created
serving for the common weal.

TOWARD THE UNREACHED BORDERS

Niederdorf (Bozen), 14 September 1994

For all them with whom I served
in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy

Autumn, autumn,
I had always feared you,
an harbinger as you were
to me of an abhorrent
winter with its blurring
mists, wearing, never-ending
greyness, cold, beating rains,
short days with neither
mirth of sunshine, nor blue
beaming skies.

Now you are here with me.
I recognize you in the silver
of my hair and of my life-
companion's, in the complexion
that has lost the freshness
of springtime, in the alabaster
of the eyes which is now
beclouded, in the fervour
of sensations by now abated.

But you give me also
the bounty of your fruits:
red and yellow apples,
warm and juicy grapes,
sweet orange-hued kakis,
bright colours of the sunset.

It is the joy of our children
by now grown up,
who are advancing steadfast
on their chosen pathways.
It is the peace of mind
coming to me from my life-
companion who shares
with me joys and pains.

It is the awareness of work
conscientiously and laboriously
attended to, that by now
is drawing to a close.

And there is no thought
of icy winters, nor fear
of illness and old age.
If such will be my lot
a swiftly passing time
by now has taught me
that after joy pain comes
but after pain there is new joy.

And there at the finish line of life
I know that new fields are in store.

I imagine them, as the ascetic
Christian of a former time,
the joyous metaphysical triumphs
of Angels and Archangels,
Cherubims and Seraphims;

or as the old Muslim merchant
the heaven's flowered bowers
with their *large-eyed maidens*
and youths *beautiful as embedded*
pearls passing around *vessels*
of silver and goblets like flagons
brimful of crimson, exhilarating wine;

or as the old redskin warrior,
joyful rides with my life companions,
upon untamed steeds,
during an endless summer,
toward the unreached borders
of the Celestial Prairie.

AND IT IS STILL SO MUCH

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 11 October 1994

You tell me, O my friend,
you don't perceive
any scent of the eternal
wafting from these words.
And how could you,
if their writer is what still remains
of an ephemeral nothing—
and it is still so much.

But I feel a flame in my heart
which you for sure cannot see
a flame which burns and consumes
the hindering veils of that nothing.
And as long as this flame is burning,
I cannot be silent about the stirrings
it kindles in my heart.

O my friend, when all
has been consumed by this flame,
no words will remain for me
to say, and I shall be silent
like the sycamore's leaves
at the dropping of the wind.

If then you will tell me
that in that silence you perceived
the scent of the eternal,
I shall know that you found it,
as I did, where it had always wafted:
in the hearts of humankind
in the beauties of the world
in the mysterious fathoms
of the Mother-Letters
in the joys of the efforts
bent so that the heavenly
Kingdom's luminous model
may be copied down here.

ON THE WAVE OF A REMOTE MUSIC

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 13 December 1994

To Tatiana Goldenweiser

...out of the thought that was like a rose bower I
plucked roses and jasmine.

Rúmi

On the wave of a remote music
once again your heart
comes close to mine
bringing the cherished
boon of your presence.
Among the many opened roads
through which may flow
the waters of remembrance
I choose the main one.

It crosses a country
that the peoples of the world
regard as holy. The quintessence
of your heart stems from that land.
Is it an ancient common ancestor
that makes me proud with you
of a history which is not mine?
Or is it that it tells me of the story
of my heart which could never
adjust to the Egypt
of remoteness from his Lord?

When I am with you
David sings
his psalms of glory;
his harp's sound
echoes all around;
his dance vaults
before us, as the Holy
Tabernacle moves
toward the Holy Mountain.

So sweet is the harp's sound,
so joyful David's dance,
that those foul fumes
and thick darkness
are dissipated, wherein
in a not too distant day
a hostile hand chose
to constrain his children.
It is as if those camps
had been blotted out,
as if that anguish
which your own blood
was forced to endure
had not been endured in vain.

The love of life which emanates
from you, the sounds that your
skilful hands evoke from a simple
instrument made of hammers
and stretched strings, redeem
those days: over any cruelty,
hate, abjection or pain,
your capacity of reaching

to my heart's inmost recesses
with sweetness or passion,
irony or tenderness, wistfulness
or gaiety, always triumphs—

an irrefutable witness
of the many potentialities
God bestowed upon human
souls, that are ever able,
despite any torture wherewith
others may afflict them,
to manifest in this world
all the harmony and beauty
of which they are capable.

Will ever arise a morning
when, if I will, I shall not
find you? No: I know that
if I shall over-climb as first
this *wall of shadow*, by which
we are all divided,
in that unknown world
to Him Who is the Answerer
of prayers I shall ask
that the tiny ray of light
I've always cherished
may sometimes alight
upon the many mirrors
with which your home is decked
and be joyously reflected
from one another, assuming
such intensity of light
as will befit your home.

And if you will go away as first,
I know that even as today
you answered to my heart's
appeal and, though far away
among your snowy mounts,
you came to me amidst
the morning mists of this shady
plain, with that serenity
with which you always inspire me,

so whenever I will,
you will be with me,
not only in my memory,
but in the essence of a life
that in these fleeting days
we have been granted to share
with such a happy poignancy.

ORDAINER NATURE

Rome, 16 December 1994

I discovered at last the roots
of this disease that sometimes
constrains the breast, and takes
the breath away, bedimming
our hope in this, the *century of light*.

I discovered them
in an orderly flight
of migrating birds,
in a sheet of water
peacefully reflecting
the beauty of its fellow sky.

I discovered them
in the rustling
twigs in the wind,
in the warmth of the rocks
kissed by the sun.

Yes, I am clay myself.
I am a tree, though rooted
in untilled land. I am a wild
animal, roaming the sandy
lands of life. I am unfledged
bird, that from its shady
wood tries sometimes to fly
toward lofty and sunlit heights.

Far from your embrace, ordainer
Nature, languishes my heart. I need
your kisses of impassioned lover,
your whispers of friend and confidant,
your caresses of kindly mother,
your strength of protecting father.

Without your harmony whatever
I have been given—and it is
so much—tarries in my mind.
Your fruitful help is needed
for the innermost chambers
of my heart to be enlightened.

An embrace of yours, as fleeting
as it may be, transforms me,
I feel then ready for new battles
on the fields of life at the service
of His Word, shining forth today
upon the world's horizons.

THE SECRET OF YOUR BITTER PANGS

Bologna, 12 January 1995

Time perhaps you told me
today the secret of your bitter
pangs. The fleeting moment
always present to the atom
of the self is the matrix
of your torment. Whereas
the self unceasingly remembers
eternity's fulfilling joy wholly,
though fleetingly, perceived
in those precious moments—
always and all too soon removed—
when time came to a stop
and the soul joyfully lived
such a contented nothingness.

WAITING FOR GIULIA

Bologna, 23 January 1995

For Giulia Ahdieh

In that infinite heaven from which
we all come and whereto some day
all of us will be recalled a new star
is being kindled. Already her Lord
has endowed her with light, shape
and colour and here, in our little
world, He has guided her to mould
a small dwelling, to be later
enlarged, little by little,
and brightened by her light.
Already He has arranged for her
two fountains of gleaming milk,
eyes to watch over her, and hearts
to love her, that for nine months
have been anxiously waiting
to behold her dawning above
the horizons of their lives.

O sweet new little star,
today you are still unaware
you know nothing today.
But soon these fast fleeting
years will teach you joy

and pain, error and truth.
Always remember, although,
that your Lord is expecting
that, born as a little star,
you will aspire to be a shining
sun; created as a drop of water,
you will wish to become a surging
ocean, so that no cloud of prejudice
may defy the meridian heat
of those brilliant rays, no mire
of self and passion, though hardened
by the passing years, may persist
undissolved by the kindly touch
of those lustral waters.

And if ever some day you will come
across these words, by then, I know,
your ways will be enlightened, penetrating
your mind, steadfast your will,
lovable your heart, and you will have
certainly guided many fellows
to the path of their Lord.
Perchance, you will then recall
this old friend of yours, who
may have been described, I hope,
as a kindly person, and, God
willing, from the other world—
or even from this one, who knows—
will be ever smiling at you with tender
approval, related to you as he is
by a small earthly name, but even more
by the love for the One
Who bears the Greatest Name.

SNOW-WHITE HAND OF THE NIGHT

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 30 January 1995

This is the hour... which Thou hast caused to excel every other hour, and hast related it to the choicest among Thy creatures.

Bahá'u'lláh

O Dawn, snow-white
hand of the night
that lifts up the veil
on the day's early clearings.

Before the yearning soul
you raise the curtains
of the wedding chamber
where the Beloved waits
for His bride in love
who now shyly
moves toward Him.

And while the day-
star's radiant orb
slowly emerges
from the nocturnal ocean
of occultation
the bride, won
by His beauty,
sheds her veils
and surrenders
to His sweet embrace.

In those arms anguishes,
fears and anxieties
which the darkness
of her journey
had aggravated
dissolve as mist
in the sun's earliest rays.

And the soul, at last
enlightened, inhales
eternity's exhilarating
fragrance. A new life
begins now for her.

Before now uncertain
in her disconsolate remoteness
she finds certitude at last
in the presence of her Best-
Beloved. She flowers then
in rose-pink as a peach
in a vernal day and quivers
of joy shake her heart
even as a breeze
stirring her leaves.

And while the rays of that sun
warm her and the waters
of those rains of love
renew her branches' sap,
she sets about producing
fruits to offer to wayfarers
who may stop in the shade
of her leafage.

Her blooming
will never end
because her roots
are now implanted
in eternity's fruitful ground.

For someone this dawn
looms here on earth,
others do not receive
this bounty. To them,
who always lived—
only God knows why—
in the uncertainty of night,
perhaps death will be a dawn
which, with its snow-white
hand, will lift up the veil at last
on the day's early clearings.

THAT MORNING'S SPELL

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 20 February 1995

Tra un fiore colto e l'altro donato
l'inesprimibile nulla.

Giuseppe Ungaretti

The white wintry morning
enrobed all things. The lake's
frozen sheet reflected the metal
of the sky. On that diaphanous
silvery plate the black arabesque
of the branches drew mysterious
words. *The inexpressible null*,
a silent pause in the uninterrupted
stream of life.

It was not the astonishment
of that morning's spell
that raised within the breast
the wave of gratitude and joy
but the awareness of being there
to see it and thus of being a part of it.

And soon that feeling
was an anthem of praise to God
for the crack onto the boundless
space of His existence
He had left open in the heart's
distressing boundaries.

Thence the chrysalis of the self,
now endowed with butterfly wings
by the magic of that instant,
winged a brief but intense flight
toward the unusual freedom
of that white world of light.

THE NEUTRON OF THE SPIRIT

Bologna, 7 March 1995

Upon others hast Thou bestowed,
O mysterious unknown Power,
the gift of astonishment
in the wonderment of innocence,
in the contemplation
of the beauty of creation,
in the discovery of the ways
of Thy decree.

Another astonishment
hast Thou reserved for me:
the dark vertigo of the self,
the awareness of its empty
abyss of impotence and void
and together the impelling
need to break its chains.

Already have I met, though,
the neutron of the spirit
which, striking the nucleus
of the self, triggered
its fission, a chain
reaction that will release
the enormous forces keeping
tenaciously bound together
its elemental particles.

CHILDREN OF THE HALF-LIGHT

1995-1997

IN THE SMALL CRESCENT

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 30 June 1995

After a last blaze
from the western sky
the sun disappears
and all recedes
into obscurity.

But no longer do I fear
nocturnal gloom.
Nor does the soul resist
that slow vanishing
into an unfathomed
nothingness.

In the dark the narrow
limits imposed upon
the lightness of the heart
by the molecules'
oppressing weight
are broadened.

And in the small crescent
beaming in my sky
I meet again at last
with my Daena's glance,
now looking, in her starlit
world at this, my crescent
that also beams from her sky.

FLOWERS

Bologna, 6 December 1995

All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

A rain of flowers
was poured onto my lap
by the fertile passing time.
Each flower a thought
of happiness, an idea
of beauty, a gift
of love to be offered
today with joy to them
who so many gifts
bestowed upon me.

To you, *man of pain*,
who only yesterday withdrew
from the *balustrade of breeze*
whereon you'd lean
your melancholy,

I offer sweetly scented
jasmines from your
African country, as fragrant
as your youthful days,
bearers of *unrestrained surges*
to whosoever may yearn
to be transfigured with you
into a flight of clouds
and straightaway cross
the threshold of the placeless
so that he may find there
ecstatic abandonments.

To you, inimical
to your *arrogant age*,
in love with tittle-tattle
and *loathing virtue*,
to you who, having leapt
over the hedgerow of your *lonely hill*
through new eyes are scanning
ever expanding horizons,
I offer flowers of *sweetly*
scented broom, assured as I am
that you are today enlightened
by that sun, which here on earth—
and I don't know why, indeed—
you were not enabled to behold,
and thus with unusual joy
you now devote the stirrings
of your comforted heart
to the promotion of the *impressive*
destiny and fated progress
of the human race.

To you, *sweet Calliope's tongue*,
that we, who have not as *gentle*
a *habit* as you had,
often read obfuscated
by every low thought,
I offer *white and yellow*
flowers, as the flowers
of *the first day* when you saw
freed to the air her golden
hair from which you so quickly
caught fire. And Laura
whom you loved was not
just an earthly woman,
but *the divine incredible beauty*
that you, and many others still,
already here among us saw.
And *such and so many sweetnesses*
you found that we too are, along
with you, all full of love for her.

And as I offer you these flowers,
from that same Beauty, after which
I too eagerly yearn—as you all did—
I implore for you more and more
lively blazes of light, brighter
and brighter reflections of love,
more and more joyous exhalations
of fragrances, which through other
magical pens might descend
into the world to enlighten, warm
and perfume the hearts.

AGAINST EACH NAY

Perugia, 9 December 1995

Grief and sorrow... are sent to us by the Divine
Mercy for our own perfecting.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Against each nay
mighty and firm
which I get from Thee
for each foolish wish of mine—
and there have been so many
that by now I cannot count
them—I shall always set
my albeit feeble ‘yes indeed.’

But I'd rather do
as the infidel, sometimes,
who understandeth not
Thy nays as I and proudly
opposes his refute
and seeks elsewhere
that relief in Thee
he cannot yet discover.

Alas, that for just one instant
I beheld the Beauty of Thy face
and never shall be able to forget it.

That is why I always seek Thee
while I'm roaming the pathways
of Thy world, although I feel
as if Thou always shunnest me.

I search for beauty
but don't find Thee
in that beauty
I can love.

I love joy and in all
that makes me happy
still Thou art not.

Nature Thou
Thyself created
I do love, but there
where I can set my love
still I don't find Thee.

It is in the thickest darkness
of the aching wound
opened in my heart and still
unhealed that sometimes
I believe I hear a faint
echo of Thy distant voice.

And thus I'll never
be able to deny Thee,
although my feeble 'yes'
may sound sometimes as 'nay'
among the ringing voices
of those—and they are so many—
who in their self-effacing love
and in the bliss of service
every moment find the abiding
joy of Thy quickening embrace.

TRAVEL MATES

Perugia, 9 December 1995

She was dark-haired
black-eyed
burning with passion
strong and curious.
She intended to walk
the roads of the world
and at the end of her journey
come upon a hill
whence she might watch
the passing days
in peace and security
seated on a throne
holding a sceptre
dispensing the fruits
she had gathered from life
to those whom she loved.

He was fair-haired
golden-eyed
burning with passion
strong and curious.
He intended to walk
the roads of the heaven
and at the end of his journey
come upon a hill

whence he might watch
the passing days
in peace and security
seated on a throne
holding a sceptre
dispensing the fruits
he had gathered from life
to those whom he loved.

They vowed eternal
reciprocal love, each
of them promised
to follow the same
road as the other.
But then—and they
never knew how
it happened—they found
they were walking alone.
And even now in death
they rest in a different place.

Shall a land ever be
in some farthest celestial world
that may house them together?
where he may learn how to see
heavenly hues in the world?
where she may learn how to love
those heavenly hues
he was yearning for on earth?

When they reach that land,
there will be peace for them,
there will be peace for me.

TWO HEARTS

Lake Trasimeno, 9 December 1995

...to none hath God given more than one heart.

Bahá'u'lláh

I am two hearts
and I do not remember the day
when I was not:
one for the heaven
one for the earth
one for my homeland afar
one for that nearby
one for you one for them.

Whenever shall I manage
to make them beat in unison
or even just to have them
sing harmonious songs?

And yet I cannot remember
the day when those hearts did not
let out dissonant sounds
in perturbing dodecaphony
or disquieting polytonality.

But perhaps there is no heart today
capable of harmonious songs
and it is as yet too early
for a heart that may be fit
to sing the praise of oneness.

CHILDREN

Bologna, 24 January 1996

For Paola, Adriano and Giorgio

1

Small hand
trusting wholly
in me, winning
smiles addressed
to me alone,
never-ending, keen
whys—intoxicating
coils of fragrant
incense—consuming
tenderness hardly
restrained lest the tender
shoot be bent
to the whims of life.

2

Earliest buds
of a maturity
but dimly perceived:
with which tender
flower will it bloom
tomorrow? which fragrant
fruit will it bear
on the roads of the world?
What gladness
to ascend with you
who are swiftly
clambering the paths
of reason, to follow
your routes, to discover
with you new horizons.
Will you see, as I do,
that Sun that has been
always shining there?

At the earliest skirmish
of adolescence,
to vanish from your
childhood's thoughts:
no longer a perfection
real only for you
a parental omnipotence
evident to you alone.
Your image of the father
is now transformed.
Will that which is now
indelibly engraved in you
be of any help?
Did my love for you,
well-nigh unexplored
so profound were
its fathoms, make up
for its inevitable limitation?
It is now time to fight
off any delusion,
it is now time for a more
mature affection.
How short the ford
from your fleeting
adolescence to the shore
of my old age!
To my eyes alone
did its sacrificial
rites of passage
appear as easy?

4

Earliest quivers
of love budding
in your body
as in the country
verdant corn fields:
will their spikes
be healthy?
will the bread
you draw from them
be for you
fruitful food?

5

You are now
about to reach
a port of maturity
always expected
which could however
well have been precluded.

In gratefulness
and wonder I look
at your leafy tree,
beneath your shadow
I take refreshment.

Your roots
are firm, hardy
your trunk, robust
your boughs,
your leaves
are harmoniously
rustling in the blowing
wind, the sweet odour
of your snowy blooms
is spreading all around.
Soon you will advance
on the roads of the world
soon you will bear
your fragrant fruits.

6

As the thread
of memories of days
scarcely spent
and soon so remote
slowly unwinds,
I recognise in you
the fruit of the unique
sign God impressed
on your spirit
and body, but also
of the firm and kindly
hand which day
after day saw
to your well-being,
moved by that unfailing
fervour with which
from the very first
meeting she sowed—
and then always nursed
for us—the fruitful
seedling of love.

I AM OF THE CHILDREN OF THE HALF-LIGHT

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1 February 1996

To us, the 'generation of the half-light,' ... has
been assigned a task whose high privilege we can
never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness
of which we can as yet but dimly recognize.

Shoghi Effendi

I love the colours
of the dusk, the sun
that sinks into the grey
billows of a limpid
ocean, the western
skyline that turns
red and yellow,
the light that
quietly vanishes.

I love the shadows
that fade away
in the waning
glow of sunset.

I love the eve
on the beach
when the swallows
in obfuscated sapphire
lightly fly
and its silence punctuated
by swashing waves
and stridulous twitters.

I love dreams
with their blurred
outlines, I love
remembrances
that memory
rekindles but never
wholly enlightens.

I love youth
in its declining to itself
always hidden
behind impalpable
veils of mystery.

I love the short life
which does not give
beauty time to wither.

I love the ancient
ruins that rise
amidst the grassy
sods covered
with fragrant
mosses.

I am of the children
of the half-light
and there is no high
noon in my days.

My Sun
has just arisen
amidst the gloom

of a night which is
not yet concluded.

Thick clouds
of smoke darkened
His first rays;
as soon as He appeared,
the sky was stained
with blood;
the outlines of things
are still indistinct,
and still concealed
are the tokens
of His morning.

And although I caught
an astonished glimpse
of His radiant dawn
above my heart's
uncertain orient,
sometimes I myself know not
whether this, my penumbra
is just the dusk of a day
declining toward night,
or the early glimmer
of a fast approaching
morning.

PSYCHE AND POETRY

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 29 February 1996

... there came
Thought after thought to nourish up the flame
Within my breast; so that the morning light
Surprised me even from a sleepless night;
And up I rose refresh'd, and glad, and gay...

John Keats

You are not nymph to me,
nor am I satyr lusting
after you. I am not
Zulaykhá nor you
Joseph, but I am
Jacob blinded
by too many tears
shed for his son's
long and abhorrent absence.
I am Majnún, indeed, and you
his unreachable Laylá.
Shall I always sing
unappeased longings?

I never frequented
Vulcan's smithy.
I flee from its busy
sounds and shabby
tools, its shaggy
stenchy, perspiring
muscles. I am not
Arachne, then, and you
her magnificent web.
I am Narcissus, instead,
and you limpid sheet of water;
I am Echo, and you
transforming mountain
with grassy recesses.

I want you as light
as veil of trembling bride,
as subtle as frail
stem of a meadow flower,
as delicate as white nymphaea
laying upon the waters.
You are not to me solemn
hawk's flight, but whirring wing
of iridescent humming-bird,
not enamelled sunset palette,
but ethereal rainbow's lightness.

When I speak to you
in the solitudes of my heart,
I hear the answer
of your gentle voice.
But if I venture

to reverberate the echo
of your words into more
concrete dimensions,
suddenly I hear cawing
crows, hooting
owls. Alas, poor
Psyche, your candle's
drop awakens Eros.
He smiles and bestows
upon you his warm
and soft embrace, but then
he flies away. And you,
Psyche, find yourself
alone, empty
your alcove, still panting
your breast, as yet unappeased
your exhausting desire.

But perhaps some day
after that meeting
you will feel in your bosom
like a flutter of wings.
Perhaps that fleeting embrace
will have born you a child.

CLOUDS

Bologna, 16 March 1996

1

Clouds of childhood

highest
aerial cirri
in limpid
blue skies

clouds of light
snowy dreams
evanescent thoughts
beauties
added to brightness
of primeval mornings

astonished discoveries
of hidden
meanings
in mysterious forms

angel's wings
peploses of sanctified souls
protecting veils
upon tender shoots

unsullied
the sun
shines
in torrid
splendour

2

Clouds of adolescence

cumuli
of vapours
drawn
from salty waters
by glowing
zenith suns

smoke of fancies
passions
and desires amassing
in the heart and dimming
the light of a still
refulgent sun

(will only storms
or also quickening
showers
come from them?)

and if suddenly stratified
nimbi of heaven-
sent tests unleash
thunder claps
and lightening bolts
still the thirsty soil
avidly drinks
of lustral waters

3

Clouds of youth

low on the horizon
vernal dews
or ashen cover
of impending cold weather

and that obscured sun
marks pauses,
fertile waits
as well as anguish
of death and impotence

but beneath the hard
wood life vibrates
and while the leaves
are rotting
the roots
suck
vital lymphs

Clouds of adulthood

obfuscating strati
 of prejudices
 and vain imaginations
 in misty days,
 recrudescences
 of impuberal gales
 inclemencies
 of winter frosts
 buds rot
 budding blooms
 soon wither tomorrow
 there will be
 no fruits
 upon those black branches

And more
 clouds of adulthood

clouds of His decrees
 downpours of mercy
 rains warmed
 by white-hot rays
 humidity and heat
 exuberance
 of early green
 blooming
 of buds and flowers
 (which fruits
 will their autumn
 bear?)

5

Clouds of our life

I behold you
above the horizon
I quaff
your whiteness
in turquoise
goblets
evanescent cirri
still make me
dream
unrestrained surges

levitating cumuli
remind me
of depths
of impervious valleys
mellowed by greenery
sprouted under your
impalpable vapours

leaden
stratocumuli
bring me back
the joy
of imminent
rains

in the waters
of those dewy nimbi
my naked body
I bathe

Clouds of our life!

does the taste
of your fruits
grow sweet
within me alone?

will the quickening
waters accumulated
in capacious reservoirs
of adult hearts
remain
withheld therein
till barren winds
of unmet tests
have dried them out?
or till cruel gusts
of winter gales
have brought to them
foul putrefactions?

No
they will come out
and irrigate
the lands of life
and give
nourishment

to luxuriant seeds
as yet buried
in fertile soils

It is time by now
to climb over the walls
it is time by now
to release
the ideal feelings
too long repressed
for a misunderstood
modernity

The yellow vapours
of deadly factories
are now clearing away
fresh
silvery dews
are glistening
the cleansed fields
of life
are now turning green.

COMET HYAKUTAKE

Bologna-Rome, 24 March - 30 March 1996

For Nicole Lemaître (1951-1997)

And when in the night season
Eros, with darkness veiled,
invites Psyche into his enwinding
embrace, to his seductive call
the trustful lover soon responds.

But if a faint candlelight allows
a glimpse of Eros's face, is it he
who denies himself to Psyche
or she who, suddenly demure,
to his unveiled beauty
dare no more to yield?

You are Eros to me,
O unknown soul who is reading me,
and to your heart's unexplored mystery
I easily proffer my little beauty.

But now that your face
is known, shall the words
which in my heart are singing
still resound in yours?

The ephemerality of our days
always endured
but never wholly lived
is today to me—to you? –
initial experience.

No, it is not impending darkness,
nor renunciation of cherished dreams.
It is dim and distant light of lucid
comet-white vapour slowly
approaching in a gloomy sky.

My time no longer follows
the immutable pulsation of the earth
with its alternating days and nights
and succeeding seasons.

It is the never-ending rout of a comet
that wanders through boundless spaces
and bestows bounties of unusual lights
to unexplored and furthest worlds,
where the ephemeral becomes eternal,
as it binds in ever new and suitable hyperbolae
worlds still unknown to one another.

And once the amazed ephemeral has caught
a glimpse of the beauty of those unsuspected
worlds, what else for him to do
but imprint that glimpse in his heart
and soon recount it to others,
so that they also may enjoy it!

But will ever insignificant atom
signify radiant sun? Listen, I made
myself a shell for you today:
raise it to your ear, you will catch
the ocean's sound.

MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR

Wilmette, Illinois, 2 August 1996

In the shade of the Mother Temple of the West
with Mrs. Melanie Sarachman Smith

Mother

glittering gem in profiles
of blue skies

arms raised to invoke
infinite blessings

hands outstretched
to almost touch the eternal

bridge between
nothingness and life

snowy laces to veil
mysterious wisdoms

transparencies in faint
reflections of soft light

caring bosom ready to take in fruitful
seeds, to nourish the fruits of love

you engrave on the hearts,
that you endow with life, the sacred
Words which your curved walls
bear ineffaceably enchased.

DIVERGING SKIES

1996-1998

EPITAPH

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 16 November 1996

O lonely, improbable wanderer
who is reading now my words!
I believed I aimed
at the silent nothingness.
And yet, this my addressing you
alive in death tells you
what great love for life
I cherished in my breast.

Was then that weariness
which drove me to avoid
the healthy trials, which Heaven
sent me day by day,
only an escape? And was
that gnawing feeling
which ate out my heart,
that doubt about all things
and men, first of all myself,
only fear of facing up
to the shining light
of the Lord Truth?

And yet I always saw
all things about me
as if dissolving into shadow.
Was the unicolor mantle

of dust what beat all things
down to meanness?
Or was it only in contrast
with His resplendent light—
which only at times and all
too little flashed in my heart—
that I abhorred so much
this monotonous routine
which I dragged out for all my life?
And now, as you are reading,
will this unappeased yearning
which was ever mine in life
have been allayed? Will there
be peace in the centre of my heart?

May your day be clear
and the sky beam at you
in its blue light,
may a mild vernal
wind caress you
and the sun warm you
with its limpid rays,
may you be delighted
by that love for the hearts'
Desire which rules over
and dominates all things.

YESTERDAY A KINDLY FRIEND

San Giovanni in Persicelo (Bologna), 8 March 1997

O Poesy! For thee I hold my pen
That am not yet a glorious denizen
Of thy wide heaven...

John Keats

O benevolent Beauty
that once more emerges
from the thousand and one nights
darkening my heart. If it were
not for you, which fruit
could we taste of the world?

You infuse sweetness into my words,
you make them garlands
of meadow flowers, necklaces
of corals and pearls, bracelets
of turquoise and jasper.

But which neck will accept
their embrace? Which wrist
their adornment? Which voice
will ever intone them?
Which heart will beat
together with mine at their sound?

Yesterday a kindly friend
whispered in my name some
of mine earlier verses of love
in a place which is dearer to God
than anywhere else in the world.

But while my soul was receiving
from her this unusual gift, where
had that unconscious one gone?
And was one of the thousand
angels triumphantly circling
around that place moved
by her voice? Did he bring
her whisper of love to that Throne
of which I dare not even think?

And did that great Ruler
from Whom each beauty radiates
hear an echo of those songs,
although from afar?

But even if I shall never know,
the joy still remains
of that friendly heart
which brought me to such
a high place within itself,
which gave a resonant voice
to my heart, unaware and far off.

AS AN OVERSHARPENED BLADE

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 29 April 1997

Sometimes I am taut
as the string
of an armed bow
in the hands of an archer
who does not yet know
in which direction
he will shoot his arrow.

I am exhausted,
as an oversharpened blade,
growing thinner and thinner,
without having never cut.
I am a fugitive hunted
by a thousand hounds.

And what shall I say
that may be true
to all those who inquire,
if I myself don't know
what in my heart is true?

AND I SHALL SOON RESUME MY JOURNEY

Bologna, 17 May 1997

And if some day my heart
will be flooded
by a nightly darkness,
in its skies I shall seek
the face of the moon
and in her dim light
still I shall walk.

And if that night
will be a moonless one,
in that waxing darkness
I shall seek the stars
and let my steps be guided
by the Pole Star shining
forth above its horizon.

And if a veil of clouds
will darken the heaven
of my night, still
I shall seek a chink
among those clouds,
through which I may see
a star; and I'll draw its name
from the ocean of remembrance,
and, following its guide,
I shall find again my way.

But if the strata of clouds
will become so thick
that no space will remain
where even one star may shine,
blind I shall seek a passage
in that dark wood and perhaps
come closer to my goal.

And when at long last,
the dim glimmers of the dawn
will begin to filter through
those thousand clouds,
I shall know, oh yes,
whether my nightly efforts
brought me closer to my goal.

And if I should discover
that my goal is still far off,
I shall stop for just a moment,
so that I may retrieve my strength,
and soon resume my journey.

THE STEINBOCK

Rotwandwiesen (Bozen), 16 July 1997

My life has gone by
as that of the steinbock
who cannot adjust
to even expanses
but sometimes, drunken
with freedom and love,
bounds up and down
precipitous rocks,
in a Dionysian dance
that such beauty inspires.

And when at last he comes
exhausted upon a bench,
he drops still panting
and happy on the ground
and admires all around
other peaks and rocks,
where some day he might again
enjoy that untamed exaltation.

THE SEAGULL

Talamone (Grosseto). 8 October 1997

To them whom I met and lost

You vanished into nothingness
as in mine autumnal sky
that seagull in Talamone.

He soared in the air, his white
wings opened to the light breathes
of the wind, in the inborn freedom
of his glides.

I strove in my thoughts
to be one with him. I tried
to call him back, I wished
a minor gesture from him
could suggest an albeit fleeting
affection between him and me.

But, all absorbed in other pursuits
(food? companions?), he flew
away toward the greening mountain
beyond the bay on the far horizon.

And I remained alone here
on the ground. Between him
and me the boundless stretches
of our diverging skies.

AS ONE DAY THE DROP

Mantua, 5 April 1998

A drop of rain dripped from a cloud

Sa'di

The diverging horizons
of my sky were closed.
The shimmering smile
of the sea has died
into autumn fogs.
The sunned planes
where one day I wandered
toward further goals
have turned now
into overhanging chains
of impassable mountains.
But my heart, aged in years,
not in feelings, bites and stirs.
Soon it shall face another
journey. Soon it will have
to discover a pass
among those heights.
Perhaps behind them,
the sea will once more
open in a smile. And when

this worn-out heart will reach
its shores, it will fling
into its waves. Perchance
the sea, will take it in,
as one day the drop,
which from a lofty cloud
dripped toward it and, while
dripping, it was amazed
at the sea's immensity
and its own nothingness.
And as it got there, it became,
out of His grace, a pearl.

AND NEW TREES WILL RISE IN FLOWER

Bologna, 21 June 1998

Heavens turned into hells
vertiginous stops
in places where
no sound is heard.

Endless breaks
as time goes by
and the present collapses
into senselessness.

But once again tomorrow
our heartbeats will follow
the pace of ages
and will fill any delay.

And new trees will rise
in flower there where today
there is but a desert
whose borders we do not see.

And on those leaves
a new light will shine
and dispel captious dusks
of sluggish neglects.

THE GIFT OF THE FRIEND

1998-1999

For Lily and Rhett

GIVE ME YOUR CUP

Wienacht (Switzerland), 2 October 1998

No fear comes from the novelty
of this love, no risk from the beloved,
but only from those mysterious chambers
of my heart, where still no sun has dawned.

Will the freshness of your cherished
gift uncloset at last the doors which open
into those forgotten regions?

Will you guide me out of this wilderness
where I am still roaming while searching
for the Beloved in His beloved ones?

How great is my fear that my Self
may in his drunkenness once more
be lost, whereas the *insistent self*
may more insistent grow. From me,
not from you, these fears arise.

Therefore, yes, o cup-bearer,
give me your cup, I am ready
to quaff it to the dregs.

LET'S GO, LET US EXPLORE TOGETHER

Wienacht (Switzerland), 3 October 1998

The golden, spacious and bright
chambers where once was heard
the inborn voice of *Love, that denial takes*
from none belov'd had been locked
in former years with chains of ridicule
and scorn. Of that refreshing melody
but a faint echo could be heard.

'Am I not your friend?' your
voice resounded, loud and clear.
It was a camphor-scented water
you proffered in your goblet.
I drank it from your hands
and, lo, those rusty chains
were suddenly removed.
'You are, indeed,' I answered.

Here am I, beside you, now.
Let's go, let us explore together
this mysterious ocean of your\
my deeper and unknown self.
Here we are, together, heart in hand,
that you\I may finally discover
the white and precious pearls
which those deep and murky waters
have been feeding all these years.

IS MINE OR HIS THIS SONG, TODAY?

Barbisano (Treviso), 25 October 1998

I heard the Lover calling
in pre-eternal strains
from the verdant
shores of friendship.

I soon answered
and soon wanted
to be known.

That meeting
was not a clash
body against body
in pain or pleasure.

It was perfume
exhaling upon
perfume breath
wafting upon breath.

Is mine or His
this song, today?

IS IT JOY OR PAIN?

Bologna, 3 November 1998

Is it mine or yours this scent
which brings back your remembrance
to my distracted mind?

Is it joy or pain that I feel
stirring in the innermost
precincts of my heart?

Am I there with you
or am I still wandering
in the remote lands of loneliness?

Is the warmth of your embrace
which I feel still surrounding my limbs
or the heat of the blazing coals of separation?

I stand now at the highest peak
of my *dhawq* and at the lowest
point of a declining ebb.

I know and I ignore,
I see and I am blind
I feel alive and dead.

I want to live and to die
to cry and to rejoice
to care and to disregard.

I want to love all humankind
and to forget all my companions
I want to serve and to be idle.

Such is my plight today
that I do not see any refuge
beside the valley of annihilation.

And still I would not exchange
one atom of this pain with all
the delights of all the worlds.

For in due time this pain
will give me life, and this anguish
will be turned into celestial joy.

MY LOVER ASKED ME

Bologna, Mozart Hall, 12 November 1998

My Lover asked me
to give Him my heart.
I said, 'It is full of rubbish,
dirty, neglected.
It is not a gift
worthy of You.'
'It will be cleansed
and filled with beauty,'
He said and kindly
accepted my heart
as my gift to Him.

My Lover asked me
to give Him my mind.
I said, 'It is awry,
distracted, and dark.
It is not a gift
worthy of You.'
'It will be amended
and filled with light,'
He said and kindly
accepted my mind
as my gift to Him.

My Lover asked me
to give Him my will.
I said, 'It is weary,
harassed, and tired.
It is not a gift
worthy of You.'
'It will be refreshed
and filled with strength,'
He said and kindly
accepted my will
as my gift to Him.

Heart, mind and will
I gave to my Lover
which He kindly accepted
as my gifts to Him.
And then He graciously
shared them with me.

What beauty, what light
and what strength
I recovered from them.
'They are Yours, not mine,
my Beloved, therefore,
now, I am You.'

THE SWANS OF BODENSEE

Rome-Beijing, 14 November 1998

In aura of snow-white beauty they glide
together, unruffled, on the lake.

They look ahead
wreathed in smiles.

They keep silence, and in their silence,
they say a thousand and one words.

What do they say?
Maḥabbat wa Jamál.

Whence do they come?
From the meadows of love.

Where is their home?
In a nest of rapture.

Where are they going?
In search of lovers
of *Jamál-i-Mubáarak*.

TO THE THRONE OF SUPREME HARMONY

Beijing, the Forbidden City, 15 November 1998

A silent gloom has fallen
upon the Forbidden City.
No steps of subservient
courtiers, no laughs
of wives and concubines,
only dusty gusts of wind
from the northern—most
wastelands. The moon
waned unobserved
by their Imperial Majesties
from the Pavilion of the Ninth
Day of the Lunar Month.

But still wide opened
stands the purple Gate
of Supreme Harmony.
Shall we enter it? Clear
is the white path beyond
the Golden Water Bridge
which leads to its Hall.
Shall we tread it?
And its Golden Throne
is still shining in all
its majestic splendour.
Shall we approach
its holy Threshold?

THE NIGHT OF THE SHOOTING STARS

Beijing, 18 November 1998

In the black
sky of oblivion
shooting stars draw
their vanishing trails.
The ephemerality
of human passions?
The dark appeal
of joyous but fleeting
emotions? And yet
there are times in our
lives when their fading
lights seem dearer to us
than a lasting sunshine.

THE LINDEN-TREE

Bologna, 22 November 1998, before dawn

In the love embrace of springtime
the May linden-tree bedecks itself
in thousands of cream-coloured sweet-
scenting blooms. Perchance a swarm
of industrious bees may perceive
their perfume and soon follow its trail
and reach them and eagerly quaff
their feeding nectar. What sweet
honey, then, will they produce!

THE TORRENT

Bologna, 25 November 1998

Will ever this torrent
of rushing waters
meet the embrace
of the Greatest Ocean?

Will ever its cloudy
waves find their rest
in the calm depth
of that limpid Sea?

Its rushing waters
run among impassable
rocks and shrubs
dried up by frost.

They drag in their rush
brushwood and drifts
in a roar
which never abates.

No cold will ever
stop them, but where
is that gracious Ocean
which will accept them?

Is this remote sound
the cheering murmur
of its billows or but
the rustling leaves

of this boundless forest
where its waters strive
to find their way
toward their peace?

LOVE SONG OF THE INSANE LOVER

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 25 November 1998

Such is my love for Thee
that there is no nearness
which may quench its ardour.
I yearn for a union with Thee
which does not leave a place
to 'I and Thou,' but to 'Thou' alone.

It's not enough for me to be a pearl,
be it even on Thy forehead,
or a sword in Thy strong hand,
or a gem on Thy skilful finger.
I will take on for Thee a thousand
different shapes, and I'll always make
myself a part of Thyself wherever
I will meet Thy smiling face.

If Thou wilt be a gem, I will be
the light of Thy crystal; if Thou
wilt be snow, I will be the whiteness
of Thy flakes; if Thou wilt be
a flute, I will be the sweetness
of Thy sound; if Thou wilt be
a plant, I will be life which makes
Thine twigs to sprout; if Thou
wilt be a butterfly, I will be
the beauty of Thy wings; if Thou
wilt be a dragonfly, I will be
their transparency.

I will be smiles on Thy face,
or love tears in Thine eyes.
I will be Thy steady heartbeat.
Haply, there in the centre
of life and love, this endless
yearning of my heart
may find its final
appeasing purpose.

ACQUA ALTA

Venezia, Ca' Dolfin, 4 December 1998

Surging waters
emerald surface
where our entranced
eyes are lost,
they slowly raise,
submerging ancient
sunken foundations.
Like us, today, heirs
of ancient wisdoms,
enthralled by surging
waters of human
knowledge, sunken
into slimes of 'I don't know,'
'I don't believe,'
unwilling to raise
our heads toward
the musk-scented breezes
of the wisdom of God.

THE TAWNY CANDLE

Trieste, St Spiridione, 5 December 1998

For the friends of the 'Club Zyp' in Trieste

Snow-white silent
they burn, tear
after tear they melt
into hazy light
beneath the icon.

But she, the tawny
candle, sodden with sandal
and incense, cannot keep
quiet, as she burns,
in the astonished silence
of her snow-white companions.

As she burns, she crackles,
and gives off her sweet fragrance.

AND THEN GIVE IT AT ONCE TO OTHERS

Bologna-Milano, 11 December 1998

Such is your beauty, O fleeting
moment, that I cannot allow
the night of oblivion to eclipse
you with its darksome wings.
I pause, then, that I may listen
to your voice, and, lo, I hear it
and soon put it in the form
of words. Perchance tomorrow,
when this insignificant mote
of knowledge will be extinguished
to this life, someone will read
these verses and your unique
beauty will be renewed
at her measure in the hidden
recesses of her heart.
Accept, o unknown reader,
the gift of my heart to yours.
Let you throb with me
at the beauty which I offer
and then, as you can,
give it at once to others.

THE FAITHFUL OF LOVE

1999-2001

For Beppe, Lily, Marzio and Rhett

Gentile pensiero che parla di vui
sen vene a dimorar meco sovente,
e ragiona d'amor sì dolcemente,
che face consentir lo core in lui.

Dante

THE DOUBTS OF THE WANDERER

Bologna, 1 November 1998

I wandered all the roads
of the world, I knocked at each
of its doors, I gazed at each face
which I met, that I may behold
the Friend's smile. I quaffed out
every cup, that I may taste
the fragrance of His wine.

But behind every door a bed
of thorns was concealed.
Each smile was defaced
into a sneer, each wine
decomposed into gall.

Today a new door
was disclosed, a kindly face
looked at me in a smile,
I drank wine at his goblet.

Will I find rest behind
his door? Will his smile
always shine from his face?
Will the taste of his wine
be always sweet?

BLOOMING ANEW

Bologna, 17 December 1998

O companion on the way
met in the green pastures
of beauty and love! Drops

of refreshing dew
sprinkle from heavenly
clouds of friendship

and these withered flowers
in their barren deserts
are once more in bloom.

RECIPROCITY

Bologna, 17 December 1998

‘I am your servant,’ I told you,
and you called me, ‘prince.’
‘I am your pupil,’ I told you,
and you called me, ‘teacher.’
‘I am your lover,’ I told you,
and you called me, ‘beloved.’
‘I am your child,’ I told you,
and you called me, ‘father.’
‘Who are we, then?’ I asked you,
and you answered, ‘friends.’

DROWNED

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Toward the meadows
of His nearness, heaven
of ecstasy, toward the sea
of nothingness, the ocean

of His love, the poet
laureate of Bahá'u'lláh
advanced that morning
when he was drowned.

From the meadows
of Zarand to the ocean
of the abiding reunion
with the Friend, he went his way.

His feet on the ground,
sometimes pierced,
his heart, by bitter
stings of remoteness,

always alive, his spirit,
to the signs of beauty
lavished near and far
by his Best-Beloved.

He is drowned now
at last in that surging
unbounded Ocean.
From there he offers

now his hand and says,
‘Drown yourself,
you too, in the Ocean
of His Love.’

THE NIGHT OF ŞIDQ-‘ALÍ

Bologna, 25 December 1998

O cool night of scents and roses,
which Thou, the truest Friend
of human hearts, hast dedicated
to Thy lover Şidq-‘Alí and to all
them who tread with him
the ways of mystery and beauty,
and never stray from the straight
path of Thy laws! How will
the nightingales of their hearts
fail to sing, when face to face
with the beauty Thou Thyself
hast willed to bestow
upon their night! In its scented
dark the gates of mysteries
are opened. Each sign of Thine
is relieved of all weight of sense
and intellect and glows
with boundless beauty. Thou thus
allayest the anguish of their hearts,
harassed by Thy veiling signs,
by any other beauty that yet
defaces Thee. Let others scorn
their unappeased pain of love.
Thou alone well knowest
whence it comes and where
it leads. They can only
ask Thee: ‘Make Thou this pain
of ours to lead us but to Thee.’

JINÁB-I-MUNÍB

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Winsome, charming, refined,
delicate, sensitive, a poet
and singer, once a lover
of worldly pleasures, a companion

of the young Áqá, beside Him
an escort of the Beloved's *howdah*,
a wise messenger of His love,
an attendant at His Threshold.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
your mind never lost the memory
of the last touch of His hands
as He laid your head on that pillow.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
your body never lost the warmth
of the last loving embrace
of your youthful Companion.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
your heart never lost the odour
of His last kisses of love,
as he was forced away from you.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
when, in loneliness, your soul winged
its flight, the last glance of love
of the Beloved escorted you to Heaven.

Jináb-i-Muníb, a whole life
Is not worth the love of the Beloved
and the youthful friendship
of that Companion of nocturnal rides.

Every tear of love shed
by His celestial eyes,
as He would recall
His last separation from you,

adds beauty to the radiant form
the Beloved gave you in Heaven,
even more beauteous than that
which He gave you on earth.

ON THE ALTAR OF YOUR FRIENDSHIP

Bologna, 6 January 1999

On the altar
of your friendship
I place the black
pearl of my heart.

It is black,
I know, and dark,
but it is a pearl
and you a swan.

O LIFE, PLACID WATERS

on the Loire, late October 1998

Bologna, 8 January 1999

O life, placid
waters, in steady
unpredictable
and systematic

twofold motion within
my heart, uninterrupted,
unknown, mysterious
everyday life,

thoughts and deeds
slowly flowing
toward a place
I do not know

you find me sometimes
seated on your banks
in the uncertain dusk
of dawn or sunset

sometimes entangled
in your slow whirlpools
inexperienced swimmer
in your deep waters.

Haply one day I will
rest in peace with you
in that Sea where even
now your waters subside.

GABRIELLE DE SACY

Chârtres, 23 December 1998

Bologna 8 January 1999

For Gabrielle De Sacy (1903-1998)

Gabrielle De Sacy
tender leaf
of a tree all too
soon uprooted.

For a whole life
your eyes have been
looking for the face
of that departed father.

Your human *veil* now
loosed, the Anthem
of the Beloved
resounds before you.

Did its mighty sound fling
wide before you the gates
that open on the Placeless
which stood ajar on earth?

Did that unknown
man whom you always
loved in your life come
there and welcome you?

Did he escort you
hand in hand
to the altar
of the Highest?

Did he leave you
there alone, to the bliss
of the embrace
of your true Beloved?

AND THEIR SINAI REMAINS UNTOUCHED

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 27 January 1999

In their dreamless nights
Thy lovers look for Thee.
But how will they find Thee,
when their hearts are dark.

Where is the beauty of Thy
Face when still their souls
are *accusing* souls, *accusing*
themselves and others.

‘We want to see Thee,’
they cry in lonely prayers.
But Thy denial always resounds,
‘*You shall not see Me.*’

And their Sinai remains
untouched, its barren
peaks towering high
over their deafened hearts.

SHAYKH SALMÁN

Bologna, 1 February 1999

Shaykh Salmán,
Gabriel of the Bahá'ís,
how many lands
did you cross,
how many cold
nights, or sunned
days on dusty
roads did you spend.
A precious knapsack
on your cane,
a load of love
within your breast.
Smell of onions
on your lips,
musky perfume
in your heart.
Departures
and arrivals
but one joy:
from the human
Temple of the Beloved One,
to the human hearts
of His beloved ones.

ZAYNU'L-‘ÁBIDÍN

Bologna, 1 February 1999

You did not reach
your journey's goal
on earth. You did not reach
that sea which roars
beneath the walls
of the *crimson City*.
Your body did not endure
that journey's toils.
But when you closed
your eyes for ever
to this life, your Best-
Beloved came toward you
from behind His veils
and the light of reunion
dawned upon
your loving heart.
You never came away
from that shining
Presence. There,
you live now in joy,
devoted and true,
stainless and faithful.

‘ABDU’LLÁH BAGHDÁDÍ

Bologna, 12 February 1999

O friend of joy
your thirst for bliss
is today appeased
the wine you drink
today does not make
you lose your mind
to make you wise
it closes your eyes
to this world
and opens them
to the Veilless Beauty.
Today your feasts
are celestial agapes.
The gazelle-eyed
maids you invite
today are the virtues
of your Lord. Broken
your rusty fetters,
your heart is bound
today by the golden
chains of faithfulness.

RETURN ON THE WRIST OF YOUR KING

Piacenza, 1 April 1999

Fly away, o soul-bird
from the barren moors
of space and time.

If you are a little sparrow,
live in perfect humbleness
the mediocrity of your days

And at the end of your dejected
nights perhaps the Beauty
of the Beloved will cast down His veils.

If you are a dove, live in the dear
nest which your Spouse prepared
on the verdant hill of faithfulness.

If you are a nightingale, look
for the Rose and in the cool
night of May warble your song.

If you are a falcon, fly out
from the golden cage where the old
hag of life has confined you and return

on the wrist of your beloved King.

THOMAS AND THE LIGHT

Bologna-Alessandria, 30 May 1999

St. Michael Langau. He thought he could save all, and when he saw the flames, he quickly jumped off the cabin of his lorry, he rushed toward the emergency phone... there was fire, there was smoke, there was an awful smell, but he was a strong boy. However, Thomas, 27 years, a lorry's driver, did not do it. He is the first, and by now the only, ascertained victim killed by this new tragedy in a tunnel.

Cinzia Sasso

No, that gesture did not
cost you your life. Your
sense of duty prevailed
upon those flames. Your
fear of that smoke having
been conquered, yours
was an act of loyalty
to the trust you were
assigned. Your young
life was cut short
here on earth and at once
your astonished spirit

was in full light. You
did not believe
there was something else
after this life. You
only knew about
your work, and fresh
instincts which were
all pressing on the earth.
Your heart was sound asleep
which you felt aroused
in front of the modern
gladiators, the heroes
of your fast fleeting
days, or under
the ambiguous flashes
of your noisy discothèques.

Now at last you taste
the flavour of true love.
You see it there, before you.
It is all light and welcomes
you in much more tender
arms than those which knew
the early throbs of your
adolescent body. Still you
cannot believe it to be true.
Yes, you were born
in the *century of light*,
but always lived
in the dark. And now
you feel attracted
to that glow of mercy,
and there is no chance

for you to turn away.
You feel understood even
in your silent acquiescence.
You feel forgiven, as you
often forgave those pals
who wronged you. And those
spontaneous acts of human
solidarity and your sense
of duty and justice prove
sufficient, at your great
surprise, to make you go
beyond that curtain of flames
and smoke falling upon
your frightened body
and the *wall of shadow*
which had always closed
your sight. And by now
for you there is but light.

FIRE-FLIES

Casalecchio (Bologna), Parco della Chiusa, 6 June 1999

Tender
glowing
in the night
they make eyes
among the trees
an intense throb
of yearning love
while the dark
is pressing all
around they fly
here and there
in silent
agreement.

A simile
of my throbbing
heart,
a brief
but intense
glow
to tell you:
here am I
beside you.

IN THE INCOMING TWILIGHT

San Marino-Bologna, 23 June 1999

In the incoming pink
and orange twilight,
a cloud, the colour
of the black pearl
of my heart, stretched
at north-east its soft
arms. O the tenderness
of that embrace. Sweetness
in the heart, sadness
in the breast, when another
meeting? To the imploring
heart an answer came,
'Bow down your head
in submission to His Will.'

A BLOND GUITAR IN THE TOWN AFAR

Bologna, 24 June 1999

If your heart is heavy now
fill it with my love. It will
become lighter. Listen,
a blond guitar is playing
in the town afar.

A GREATER LOVE

Bologna, 24 June 1999

I yearn for a love above
any earthly and human
limitation, a love which may
unite the two of us to each
and all of our fellows
in a wide embrace
of love. In the meantime
I will not elude the constricting
anguish of remoteness. It is
the most precious gift
from the Beloved, and I am
willing to accept it, that He may
receive each painful yearning
of love in our vibrant hearts
as our offer at His threshold
and as a prayer imploring
for His transforming grace
to be poured upon
our burning souls.

THE TWO EAGLES

Toblach (Bozen), 3 July 1999

For Gianni Ballerio

...dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness.

Bahá'u'lláh

Spiralling up the two eagles
soar high above the peaks
of the mounts of Faithfulness.
They glide side by side, now
moving away now coming
closer to one another,
in their happy agreement.
Shall we two ever soar together
in the heavens of the Love
of God? Shall we too enjoy
the bliss of that perfect freedom?

One day the time shall come
when the call of the Beloved
shall become pressing. Be sure
in that hour I shall implore
the Loved One that I may waft
His scent toward you, while
awaiting for that season
when we too shall soar together
in a majestic heaven
round the high peaks
of the mounts of Faithfulness.

WHO AM I?

Niederdorf (Bozen), 4 July 1999

Noi siàn le triste penne isbigottite...

Guido Cavalcanti

I am one as many others who has been given
an *astonished* pen, that he could write words
of light and beauty upon the tablet of his heart;

one who has been given a passionate
breast, that his impassioned love
could teach him to love the Beloved One;

one who has been given a faltering
heart, that his pains of love
could teach him to be steadfast;

one who has been given a lonsome
nature, that his love could teach him
to feel united with all his fellows;

one who has been given an impatient
temper, that his love frustrations
could teach him to be patient;

one who has been given a heedless
mind, that his yearning for love
could teach him to be active;

one who has been given a fearful
soul, that his passion of love
could teach him to be gallant.

Then, which is the greatest
gift that I have been given?

Such a great need of love that,
if it must be appeased, I should
have fought and won a thousand battles.

MEMORY

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 9 July 1999

Golden rays fall upon blonde
fields of mowed wheat
lights of memory upon facts
and thoughts of former days.

The sky, a limp wad of pearls,
the heart, a soft alcove of memories,
the fields, ready crops for our bread,
life, now far advanced into its fruits.

O Memory, a thread that binds
past and present days!

Should you leave us, what would ever
be of the charm of the fleeting instant?
It is you that makes it precious
and binds it to the passing time.

We wish we would grasp you all,
here and now, O fleeting instants,
whereby the arabesqued cloth
of our lives is interwoven.

And yet should we deliver
you forever to oblivion
perchance the present
would become eternal.

A SUMMER SCHOOL MIDNIGHT DREAM

Höör (Sweden), 15 July 1999, midnight

To the Bahá'ís of Sweden

I don't know what it was.
Perhaps that nocturnal walk
through Stenskogen wood
station after station, following
the small lighted lamps
in the friend's hands and hearts.
Or the peaceful warmth
of that valley mysteriously
enlightened by a hundred lit
candles, after the chill
of that Scandinavian summer
night. Or those angelic voices
singing at the sound of a guitar
against that piece of grey dimly
illuminated sky amidst the tall
dark firs in the white scent
of the honeysuckle flowers.
No, it was not only this
that made my heart to throb.
'Twas all of them with their
soundless smiles. 'Twas their hands
which took firm hold of mine
that brought me there where
all souls always yearn to stay.

FROM NIGHTS TO DAWNS

Bologna, 31 May 2000

Every day of my life
is a night, a darksome
night, just before dawn.
And every day after
is a shining midday,
too soon overcome
by another night,
a darksome night,
just before dawn.
And from nights
to dawns, from dawns
to nights, each night
is darker and shorter,
brighter and longer
each day. Nights
of my self, days of my
soul, growing and growing
awake to His calls.

SEVENTEEN HOURS

Bologna, 3 June 2000

Seventeen hours were all that time
could give us for now. At the airport,
one hour for us to meet, one hour
for you to explain, one hour
for me to understand, one hour
to share our grief, one hour
for both to accept, one hour
to imagine all things we could
have done together, one hour
to do them, one hour to remember
happy past hours, one hour
to plan for happier ones in the future,
one hour to talk about a year
of crisis and victories, one hour
to give and receive assurance, one hour
to understand the meaning
of fate, one hour to listen
to the silences of Pärt, one hour
to eat, one hour to sleep, one hour
to say good-by, at the airport.

Seventeen hours were
all that time could give us
for now. Two hours were left
to complete one *vāḥid*. One hour
for me to write these lines for you,
for you to become detached
from me, one hour for both to go
back to life that is waiting for us
with its manifold pressing demands.

NO PROMISE

Bologna, 17 February 2001

Love
is freedom
to give
to render
to offer
to deny
freedom
from any sign
freedom
from any weight
freedom
from any chain

Love
in freedom
surrenders
flourishes
reflourishes
in freedom
is happy
in chains
withers
grieves
pines away
fights
for freedom.

LONELINESS

Bologna-Wienacht (Switzerland),

25 March 1997-6 April 2001

And when in loneliness
the heart resounds
with voices of silence,
from its gloomiest gorges
I hear in melodious echoes
Thy reassuring voice
saying once more: 'Come back,
come back, a thousand times again.'

METROPOLITAN MEETINGS

Bologna, 22 February 2001

He's waiting there
jeans, wind-jacket,
reebocks, young
thin body, long

hair down his
shoulders, carved
face by precocious
toils and troubles.

A drugster—I think
—a pilferer... or may
be not! He stands
beside an old invalid,

an objector, perhaps,
in social service,
the kid seems to help
the old guy on the bus.

I feel guilty for my
hasty judgment,
but the young hand now
explores the old jacket

and a ragged wallet
stealthily slips out
of those pockets
into the jeans.

I look hard at the kid,
waiting to catch his eyes,
he looks at me,
I simply nod at him.

He looks surprised scared.
I nod again, he stands up,
the wallet goes back
into the old pockets.

The bus stops
I get off, the kid
follows me. 'Thanks,'
he whispers passing by.

'You're welcome,' I answer
and he disappears.

THE ADVENTURE GOES ON

Florence, 23 February 2001

To the young friendship between Ungaretti and Apollinaire

The adventure goes on
at the conquest of citadels
of human hearts revolutions
toward well ordered innovations
independent quests for truth
and justice dislocations
of disorders newly
acquired to the iniquities
of the old order.

Youth goes on
in succeeding waves
of independent quests
initial maturities
of well pondered choices
of words used
not certainly to abuse
but to honour the citadels
of human hearts.

HALCYON DAYS

Bologna 13 June 2001

Fetificant [halcyones] bruma, qui dies halcyonides vocantur, placido mari per eos et navigabili.

Caius Plinius Secundus

Boundless blue
oceans and skies,
opened horizons,
small flowering atolls
in crowns of foam,
spread wings
nimble follow
ascending currents.
No enemy in those
spaces, no unexpected
hurricane, always
at hand the haven
of a sheltered rock.
All life, intense
and short, is a smile,
while together they glide
in the warmth
of a friendly sun.
Death itself is softened
by subtle veils of clouds,
as the old halcyon
is lovingly lifted up
in flight on young
halcyons' wings.

NOTES

- 1 Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí, *Kullíyyát-i-Shams, yá Diván-i-kabír*, ed. Badí'u'z-Zamán Furúzánfár (Teheran: Dánishgáh, 1336-46 A.H.), vol. 2, ghazal 918, v. 9669; English translation: in Jalaluddin Rumi, *Signs of the Unseen. The Discourse of Jalaluddin Rumi*, trans. Wheeler McIntosh Thackston (Putney, Vt.: Threshold Books, 1994), p. 82.

I'LL BE FREE ONCE AGAIN

- 21 There Is Peace on the Sea
Less than one mile south of Massawa there is a madreporic islet, covered with lush mangrove vegetation, called Sheik Said island and known as the Green Island.
- 28 The Peace of a Dreamless Sleep
“‘[Childhood, childhood], whither art thou gone from me?’” / ‘Never, O, never again shall I return to thee’” (Sappho, in *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, ed. Ernestus Diehl [Leipzig: Editio Altera, 1936], fr. 131; English translation: in *The Poems of Sappho*, ed. and trans. Edwin Marion Cox [London: Williams and Norgate, 1924]). The Greek word *παρθενία* has been interpreted here as ‘childhood,’ that is, ‘fanciullezza,’ as translated into Italian by Salvatore Quasimodo, the Nobel Prize

winner poet, and not as ‘maidenhood,’ as rendered by Edwin Marion Cox.

- 29 But the Heart Long Muted
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1954), from the Persian, no. 18, p. 27.
- 30 Pure Water Flows
Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers. A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, The Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 11.
- 31 I Join My Hands to Thine
Ibid. p. 57.
- 32 Upon My Heart Forever
Revelation 22:4 (King James Version).

UNFULFILLED DREAMS

- 41 Poesy
John Keats, *Poems*, ‘Sleep and Poetry,’ vv. 235-6, 246-7.

THE HEAVEN OF THE HEART

- 66 Your Renunciation of Light
‘O blithe little soul, thou, flitting away, / Guest and comrade of this my clay...’ (Publius Aelius Hadrianus, in Aelius Spartianus, *Vita Hadriani* [Life of Hadrian], chap. 25, which may be found at <hometown.aol.com/antoninus1/piety/hadrian>).
- 69 I Know Not Who I Am
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 51.

- 70 Without Thee
 Bahá'u'lláh, 'Súriy-i-Mulúk,' in Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956), p. 228.
- 75 The Day of Thy Promise
 Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid.* p. 7.
- 76 Forgetful of the True Friend
 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 40, p. 52.
- 77 The Sown Seed Will Sprout
 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1961), p. 38.
- wall of shadow*: Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Sentimento del Tempo* (Feeling of Time), 'La madre' (The Mother), v. 2; English translation: in Joseph Cary, *Three Modern Italian Poets. Saba, Ungaretti, Montale*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 191.
- 79 Human Thoughts
 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 9, p. 25.
- 80 In the Kiss of Life-Giving Water
 See 'O Son of the Spirit! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting' (*ibid.* from the Arabic, no. 1, p. 3).
- 88 It Resembles the Seed
 On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 October 1954, to an individual believer, in *Compilation of Compilations Prepared by The Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*

(Maryborough, Victoria: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), 'Living the Life,' vol. 2, p. 24, no. 1334.

- 89 So Much Life Is Wasted
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 45,
p. 38.

- 90 Our Sorry Voices
Ibid. no. 19, pp. 27-8.

An allusion to the Islamic *rúz-i-alast*, the day of the primordial Covenant (Koran 7:171, trans. Rodwell). This Covenant, 'when God addressed future humanity with the words: *alastu bi-rabbikum*, "Am I not your Lord?", to which they answered: "Yes, we testify to that", implies that they, acknowledging God as the eternal Lord, accepted, logically, their role as God's servants until they are asked on the Day of Judgment whether they had remained aware of God's being the one and only Lord whom they had to obey' (Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God. A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* [Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994], p. 179).

- 92 Today My Heart Is Deserted
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 28,
pp. 31-2.

- 93 Your Hand in My Hand
"Before choosing a wife a man must think soberly".
Talk by Abdul-Baha to Mirza Ahmad Sohrab on December 22nd, 1918, the day before his departure from the Holy Land,' in *Star of the West* (Baha'i News Service, Chicago), vol. 11, no. 1 (21 mar. 1920), p. 20.

DESPITE THE LIGHT OF GUIDANCE

- 100 My Heart Is Wavering
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 50.
- 102 To the Poor, Astonished Heart
'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 93.
indwelling spirit: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. Laura Clifford-Barney, 3rd ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1954), p. 7.
- 104 The Smell of That Springtime
Maud Waterworth Bosio (1899-1968), see 'In Memoriam,' *The Bahá'í World 1968-1973. An International Record*, vol. 15 (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976), pp. 443-4.
Bahá'u'lláh, in *Gleanings*, p. 161.
veil: Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, no. IX, v. 55; English translation: in Giacomo Leopardi, *The Canti: With a Selection of His Prose*, trans. John Gordon Nichols (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1994), 'Sappho's Last Song,' p. 42.
- 106 The Hour We Lived Together
Augusto Robiati (1912-2000), see 'Le stagioni della vita,' (The seasons of life) in *Note Bahá'í* (a monthly news letter of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy), vol. 18, no. 10 (Oct. 2000), pp. 1, 12.
- 107 Misleading Roads
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 79, p. 50.
- 110 In the Dark That Remains
Ibid. from the Arabic, no. 19, p. 8.

- 113 Search Is a Journey
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 5.
- 114 O Tender Love Thriving in the Breast
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 14, p. 26.
- 117 The Unavowed Awareness
Ḥadīth (traditional saying) ascribed to Muḥammad.
- 119 Poland 1981
On 13 December 1981, in front of the success of *Solidarność* (Solidarity) trade union under the leadership of Lech Walesa, and the sustained strikes supported by that movement, the first secretary of the Polish communist party and the minister of defence, general Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski, declared martial law. His move was accompanied by mass arrests of Solidarity leaders and political dissidents and soon after the trade union was declared illegal. The martial law was lifted only in July 1983.
- The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982, to an individual believer, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986, the Third Epoch of the Formative Age*, comp. Geoffrey W. Marks (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), 308.11.
- Major Plan*: Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*, 1st repr. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 140.

AN UNEXPECTED STREAM

- 123 An Unexpected Stream
 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Compilation of Compilations*, ‘The Importance of Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude: A Compilation,’ vol. 2, p. 232, no. 1745.
- 125 You Come Back, O Poetry
 pleased and pleasing Him: ‘Oh, thou soul which art at rest, Return to thy Lord, pleased, and pleasing him: Enter thou among my servants, And enter thou my Paradise’ (Koran, 89:27-30, trans. Rodwell). Muslim theologians identify in the Koran three stages of the soul: the soul which is ‘prone to evil’ of Koran 12:53, “‘the self-accusing soul” of 75:2, a superior stage wherein conscience accuses and blames, and finally... the soul “at rest” of 89:27, which has attained the goal of perfection, wherein evil is silent’ (Alessandro Bausani, ‘Commento,’ in *Il Corano. Introduzione, traduzione e commento di Alessandro Bausani* [Florence: Sansoni, 1961], p. 572).
 scroll: see ‘Every man’s fate we have fastened on his own neck: on the Day of Judgment we shall bring out for him a scroll which he will see spread open. (It will be said to him:) “Read thine (own) record: sufficient is thy soul this day to make out an account against thee”’ (Koran 17:13-4, trans. Yusuf Ali).
- 128 The Old Asphalted Road
 Liza, German and Christian, married to Zion, Jew, in her fifties, about 1950 followed her husband with their Catholic adopted son to the new State of Israel, and settled near Haifa, not far from the spiritual and administrative centre of the Bahá’í Faith.

131 The Sycamore

At about 40 miles southeast of Asmara, on the road toward Addis Ababa, there is a flat valley, known as the plain of Deghera Libe, where a number of ancient, enormous sycamores (*Sycomorus* or *Ficus vasta*) grow, the last remnants of an ancient forest.

The *elelta* is the typical cry of joy of Eritrean women.

136 Mírzá Maqşúd

Mírzá Maqşud was one of the earliest Persian Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh read one of his poems and wrote: 'Every word of thy poetry is indeed like a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love thou cherishest for God and His chosen ones are reflected... Its perusal hath truly proved highly impressive, for it was indicative of both the light of reunion and the fire of separation' (Bahá'u'lláh, 'Lawḥ-i-Maqşúd,' in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978], pp. 175-6).

139 The Remote Heaths of a Former Day

footsteps in this wilderness: see 'I entreat Thee by Thy footsteps in this wilderness, and by the words "Here am I, Here am I," which Thy Chosen Ones have uttered in this immensity, and by the breaths of Thy Revelation, and the gentle winds of the Dawn of Thy Manifestation, to ordain that I may gaze on Thy beauty and observe whatsoever is in Thy Book' (Bahá'u'lláh, 'Long Obligatory Prayer to be recited once in twenty-four hours,' in *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 126).

The yellow *Maskal* daisy (*Coreopsis boraniana*) flourishes in the Eritrean highlands in September, during the period of the civil and religious *Maskal* festivities (27

September), celebrating the end of the heavy rains and commemorating the Invention of the Cross by the empress Helen, Constantine's mother.

141 The Unexpected Rain

The *ghinda* (*Calotropis procera*) is a typical shrub of the Eritrean lowlands, characterized by broad leaves and green rounded fruits, filled with a silky down, wherefore the shrub is sometimes called 'vegetable silk.'

The Barka is the major torrent flowing from the southern province of Seraye, east of Asmara, toward the village of Akordat and the Red Sea, through The Sudan.

The doom palm (*Hyphaene thebaica*) is a palm that flourishes in the hot sandy plains of the eastern lowlands. From its fruits a vegetable ivory is produced.

143 Remote Calls

Eritrean lentisk (*Pistacia lentiscus*) is very similar to the shrub which flourishes in the Mediterranean maquis. Its drupes are initially red, but when they have grown ripe they become black.

145 Remnants of Days Forever Gone

In the night of *Maskal*, Eritrean lads stroll around branding lit *kulkwal* (*Euphorbia abyssinica*) torches. It augurs well to jump three times over one of these lit torches placed on the ground, while expressing a wish, and then to offer a small amount of money to the lad.

The magnificent Turkish and colonial architecture of Mas-sawa, the 'Red Sea pearl,' was seriously damaged when the town was bombed in 1977 and then, more heavily for a whole year, between 1990 and April 1991.

- 149 In the Dawn Changing Sun
Bet Maka is the site of Asmara's Bahá'í cemetery.
'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 140.

TOWARD THE UNREACHED BORDERS

- 153 Where Are the Boundaries?
Mystical poetry very often adopts human love metaphors as symbols of divine love. The beauty of the beloved is thus a symbol of the divine beauty: her face is the face of God; her hair is a symbol of phenomenal reality through which only a glimpse of God's beauty can be caught.

pleased and pleasing: Koran 89:28. Cf. note to 'You Come Back, O Poetry,' p. 303.

insistent self: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Selections*, p. 259.

Mother Letters: see 'Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet' (Bahá'u'lláh, 'Lawḥ-i-Naṣír,' in *Gleanings*, p. 142). The words of the holy Writings are here seen as bearers of a spiritual impulse capable of transforming human individuals and society.

- 157 Water of the Self
After having listened to 'Entombed in a Dead Language: the Saints Raising out of their Graves,' presented by Mr. Thomas C. May at the second 'Irfan Colloquium, Wilmette, Ill., 25-27 March 1994.

Matthew 14:29 (King James Version).

- 159 A Happy and Marvellous End
Leo Niederreiter (1920-1999), see 'Obituaries,' *The Bahá'í World 1999-2000. An International Record* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2001), p. 309.

An ancient legend says that when a male halcyon is close to his death, his younger female companions raise him on their wings for a last flight in the freedom of the sky. See Alcman, in *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, fr. 94.

- 163 Mary and Martha
Luke 10:38-42 (Knox Version, 1959).

Mary has chosen [...] the best part of all, that which shall never be taken away [...]: Luke 10:42 (Knox).

- 167 Toward the Unreached Borders
In the Koran, huris are 'large-eyed ones with modest refraining glances, fair like the sheltered egg,' or like 'jacinths and pearls,' given as brides to the believers in the delightful Gardens of heaven. Beside them, youths are described 'beautiful as embedded pearls,' passing around 'vessels of silver and goblets like flagons' (37:48-9, 44:54, 55:58, 52:24, 76:16, trans. Rodwell). The huris and the youths have been interpreted sometimes literally and sometimes as symbols. In view of the lofty spiritual tone of the Koran, it seems more likely that they are spiritual symbols.

- 172 On the Wave of a Remote Music
Mystical Poems of Rūmī 2. Second Selection, Poems 201-400, trans. Arthur John Arberry, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 1.

wall of shadow: cf. note to 'The Sown Seed Will Sprout,' p. 299.

- 176 Ordainer Nature
century of light: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections*, p. 32.
- 179 Waiting for Giulia
Two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over [her], and hearts to love [her]: see Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 29, p. 32.
- 181 Snow-White Hand of the Night
 Bahá’u’lláh, in *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 172.
- 184 That Morning’s Spell
 From an idea of Mrs. Leïla Mesbah Sabéran.
 ‘Between a flower gathered and the other given / the inexpressible null’ (Giuseppe Ungaretti, *L’Allegria* [The Joy], ‘Eterno’ [Eternal]; English translation: in Cary, *Three Modern Italian Poets*, p. 149).

CHILDREN OF THE HALF-LIGHT

- 189 In the Small Crescent
 In Zoroastrian mythology, ‘*Daena* is man’s self... When man dies... his *Daena* awaits him at the dividing line of the two worlds... In the case of a virtuous person, it appears in the form of a beautiful maiden, and in the case of a wicked person in the shape of an ugly fiend’ (Farhang Mehr, *The Zoroastrian Tradition. An Introduction to the Ancient Wisdom of Zarathustra* [Rockport, Mass.: Element Books, 1991], p. 85).
- 190 Flowers
 Words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as recorded in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Tust, n.d.), p. 167.

man of pain: Ungaretti, *L'Allegria*, 'Pellegrinaggio' (Pilgrimage), v. 12; English translation: in Cary, *Three Modern Italian Poets*, p. 156.

balustrade of breeze: ibid. 'Stasera' (This Evening), v. 1; English translation: ibid. p. 155.

jasmines... African country: ibid. 'Giugno' (June), vv. 54, 53 (my translation).

unrestrained surges: see ibid. *Sentimento del Tempo* (Feeling of Time), 'O notte' (O Night), v. 11 (my translation).

into a flight of clouds: ibid. *L'Allegria*, 'Annientamento' (Obliteration), v. 29 (my translation).

Arrogant age... in love with tittle-tattle and loathing virtue: Leopardi, *Canti*, no. XXVI, vv. 59, 61; English translation: in Leopardi, *The Canti*, 'The Dominant Thought,' p. 109.

lonely hill: ibid. no. XII, v. 1; English translation: ibid. 'The Infinite,' p. 53.

sweetly scented broom: ibid. no. XXXIV, v. 6; English translation: ibid. 'The Broom,' p. 141.

impressive destiny and fated progress of the human race: ibid. no. XXXIV, vv. 50-1; English translation: ibid. p. 142.

Petrarch was defined by the Italian poet Ugo Foscolo in his *Sepolcri* (Sepulchres) 'quel dolce di Calliope labbro' (v. 176) (that sweet Calliope's tongue [my translation]).

gentle habit... low thought: Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, no. 71, vv. 11-3; English translation: in Petrarch, *Petrarch's Lyr-*

ics Poems: the Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 154.

white and yellow flowers... first day... freed to the air her golden hair: *ibid.* no. 127, vv. 82, 84-5; English translation: *ibid.* p. 252.

divine incredible beauty: *ibid.* no. 71, v. 62; English translation: *ibid.* p. 158.

such and so many sweetnesses: *ibid.* no. 194, v. 9; English translation: *ibid.* p. 340.

- 193 Against Each Nay
'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 50.

See 'And when thy Lord brought forth their descendants from the reins of the sons of Adam and took them to witness against themselves, "Am I not," said He, "your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we witness it." This we did, lest ye should say on the day of Resurrection, "Truly, of this were we heedless, because uninformed"' (Koran 7:171, trans. Rodwell).

- 198 Two Hearts
Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 237.

- 205 I am of the Children of the Half-Light
Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955), p. 168.

- 208 Psyche and Poetry
After having read Vladimir Mayakovsky, *How are verses made?* [*Kak delat' stikhi?*], trans. George M. Hyde, London: J. Cape [1970].

Keats, *Poems*, 'Sleep and Poetry,' vv. 397-400.

Zulaykhá is, in the Islamic tradition, Potiphar's wife who, madly in love with Joseph, repeatedly tries to seduce him and, to the resolute resistance opposed by the chaste youth, reacts by accusing him of having attempted to violate her purity. Because of this calumny Joseph ends up in the Pharaoh's jails.

Islamic tradition describes Jacob as blind because of the many tears he shed after he lost his beloved son, Joseph, who had been sold as a slave by his jealous brothers, without their father's knowledge. Joseph is described by mystics as the symbol of divine beauty.

Majnún and Laylá are two well-known lovers of Islamic literature. Like Romeo and Juliet, they belong to two antagonistic groups and therefore their love is a hopeless dream and draws Majnún crazy.

- 215 Clouds
unrestrained surges: see Ungaretti, *Sentimento del Tempo* (Feeling of Time), 'O notte' (O Night), v. 11 (my translation).
- 218 Comet Hyakutake
Discovered by the Japanese amateur astronomer Yuji Hyakutake on 30 January 1996, the great Comet Hyakutake 1996 b2 shone in the sky from March to May 1996.
- 220 Mashriqu'l-Adhkár
Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Arabic 'The Dawning-place of the Praise of God,' a title designating a Bahá'í House of Worship. The Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, dedicated on 1-2 May 1953, has been defined by Shoghi Effendi as the 'Mother-Temple of the West.'

DIVERGING SKIES

- 225 Yesterday a Kindly Friend
Keats, *Poems*, 'Sleep and Poetry,' vv. 47-9.
- 232 As One Day the Drop
Sa'dí, *Bústán*, whose English translation may be found at
<itsa.ucsf.edu/~ico/poetry/sadi/bustan>.

THE GIFT OF THE FRIEND

- 237 Give Me Your Cup
insistent self: cf. note to 'Where Are the Boundaries?', p. 306.
- 238 Let's Go, Let Us Explore Together
Love, that denial takes from none belov'd: The divine comedy [sic] of Dante Alighieri; Hell, Purgatory, Paradise, trans. Henry F. Cary (New York: P. F. Collier & son [c1909]), 'Hell,' canto V, v. 103.
- 240 Is It Joy or Pain?
Dhawq, in Arabic 'taste, enjoyment,' in the Sufi language denotes the mystical experience of truth.
The valley of annihilation: see 'the valley of the shadow,' Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 11.
- 244 The Swans of Bodensee
Maḥabbat wa Jamál, in Arabic 'love and beauty.'
Jamál-i-Mubárak, in Arabic 'Blessed Beauty,' one of the titles of Bahá'u'lláh.
- 246 The Night of the Shooting Stars
During the night between 17 and 18 November 1998 a Leonid meteors shower was seen, the meteors associated with comet Temple-Tuttle, which were named Leonids

because they have their radiant, that is, the point in the sky at which they seem to originate, in the zodiacal constellation of Leo.

252 *Acqua Alta*

Venetians call *acqua alta* the high tides which periodically flood their town in late autumn and wintertime.

THE FAITHFUL OF LOVE

- 255 ‘Gentle thought that speaks of you / often comes to live with me, / and reasons about love so sweetly, / that it makes the heart agree with it’ (Dante, *Vita nuova*, chap. 38, par. 8; English translation: Anthony S. Kline, *La Vita Nuova* [The New Life], which may be found at <[tonyk-line.free-online.co.uk/The New Life.html](http://tonyk-line.free-online.co.uk/The%20New%20Life.html)>).

260 Drowned

See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971), pp. 32-6.

262 The Night of Şidq-‘Alí

See ‘While in the barracks, Bahá’u’lláh set apart a special night and He dedicated it to Darvish Şidq-‘Alí. He wrote that every year on that night the dervishes should bedeck a meeting place, which should be in a flower garden, and gather there to make mention of God’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials*, p. 38).

263 Jináb-i-Muníb

See *ibid.* pp. 145-7.

Áqá, in Persian ‘master, sir,’ one of the titles given by Bahá’u’lláh to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Howdah, a litter carried on camel, used in the Middle east for travelling at the times of Bahá’u’lláh.

- 265 On the Altar of Your Friendship
According to folk tales and poems of the Indian Muslim tradition, the swan ‘is able to live on pearls. Diving deep, he dislikes the shallow, muddy water—like the perfect saint who avoids the dirty, brackish water of this world.’ (Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God*, p. 27).
- 267 Gabrielle De Sacy
The posthumous daughter of Gabriel De Sacy, the distinguished early Bahá’í of Egypt (d. 1903). See Edward G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), pp. 185-6.
Veil: cf. note to ‘The Smell of That Springtime,’ p. 301.
- 269 And Their Sinai Remains Untouched
accusing: see Koran 75:2 (trans. Rodwell); cf. note to ‘You Come Back, O Poetry,’ p. 303.
You shall not see Me: see ‘And when Moses came at the appointed time and his Lord communed with him, he said, “Lord, reveal Yourself to me, that I may look upon You.” He replied, “You shall not see Me. But look upon the Mountain; if it remain firm upon its base, then only shall you see Me.” And when his Lord revealed Himself to the Mountain, He levelled it into dust. Moses fell down senseless, and, when he came to, said, “Glory be to You! Accept my repentance. I am the first of the believers”’ (Koran 7:143-5, trans. Dawood).
- 270 Shaykh Salmán
See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials*, pp. 13-6.
- 271 Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín
See *ibid.* pp. 83-4.

- ‘the crimson City of God’ (Bahá’u’lláh, in *Tablets*, p. 260) is ‘Akká.
- 272 ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí
See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials*, p. 129-31.
- 273 Return on the Wrist of Your King
As to the legend of the falcon and the king, see *The Mathnawí of Jalálu’Ddín Rúmí*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Warminster, Wiltshire: The Trustees of the ‘E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series,’ 1926), vol. 2, pp. 238-40, bk. 2, vv. 323-49, vol. 4, pp. 417-9, bk. 4, vv. 2628-56.
- 274 Thomas and the Light
Cinzia Sasso, ‘L’inferno in fotocopia. Due mesi dopo il Bianco, in Austria brucia il Tauerntunnel (Hell in photocopy. Two months after Mont Blanc, in Austria the Tauern-tunnel catches fire),’ *La Repubblica*, Sunday, 30 May 1999.
century of light: cf. note to ‘Ordainer Nature,’ p. 308.
wall of shadow: cf. note to ‘The Sown Seed Will Sprout,’ p. 299.
- 279 A Blond Guitar in the Town Afar
Listening to the guitarist Leszek Rojsza playing Isaac Albeniz, *Suite Española*, ‘Asturias, leyenda.’
- 281 The Two Eagles
Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 1, p. 22.
- 282 Who Am I?
‘We are the hapless, astonished pens...’ (Guido Cavalcanti, ‘Noi siàn le triste penne isbigottite,’ in *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960), vol. 2, p. 511, no. XVIII [xxxiv], v. 1 [my translation]).

- 287 Seventeen Hours
 Listening to Arvo Pärt, *Fratres*, for violin, string orchestra and percussion.
 Váhid, in Arabic ‘oneness, one, single,’ in the Bahá’í calendar is a nineteen years time unit.
- 290 Loneliness
 On Rúmi’s mausoleum at Konya these famous verses by Abú Sa’íd Abú’l-Khayr are written: ‘Come back, come back, even if you have broken / Your repentance a thousand times.’
- 294 Halcyon Days
 Caius Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historiae*, ed. Karl Mayhoff, p. 246, bk. 10, par. 90 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909); English translation: ‘They [the halcyons] breed at midwinter, on what are called ‘the kingfisher [halcyon] days,’ during which the sea is calm and navigable...’ (Pliny, the Elder, *Natural history*, trans. Harris Rackham, vol. 3, repr. [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956], p. 349).
 As to the legend of the halcyon and its companions, cf. note to ‘In a Happy and Marvellous End,’ p. 307.

AFTERWORD BY THE AUTHOR

Portraying—with sincerity and in a melodious language—deep, but not wholly understood and therefore always repressed, feelings, so that the heart may be unburdened therefrom and their meanings, and sometimes their beauty, may be grasped, is the declared poetical program of *Remoteness* (41-2),¹ an unpublished collection of poems, written between 1955 and 2001, 187 of which are printed in this volume.

Like the verses of the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, these verses were also written ‘To see... [oneself], to set the darkness echoing.’² But unlike them, they also intend to portray ‘in a mirror of words / sincere images / of generous affections’ and to convey the echoes of ‘the spell of a yearning / transcending the ephemeral’ (41-2). And thus they do not indulge in the dark sides of life. You will rather perceive from them the ‘astonishment’ aroused by ‘the dark vertigo of the self’ and ‘the awareness of its empty / abyss of impotence and void,’ and, at the same time, ‘the impelling / need to break its [the self’s] chains’ (186). Only in the earlier poems a persistent attention focussed

¹ From now on the numbers in brackets () are the numbers of the pages of this collection where the poems to which the mentioned concept is referred may be found.

² Seamus Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist*, ‘Personal Helicon’ (London: Faber, 1966).

on that dark side seems to exalt their obscurity in an endless ring-around-a-rosy wherefrom no escape is foreseen (36). However, the ‘love of reality’³ and ‘of exaltation’⁴—typical of human beings and expressed in *Remoteness* as a constant and increasing yearning for the Infinite—slowly but surely opens the way for a growing balance between the love of self and the love of God. And thus the poetical vents assume their best form, a quest for the deepest self, a quest for the Infinite wherever its traces may be perceived (125).

A sustained effort to rise from the plane of prosaic and limited everyday experiences to that of poetical and universal meanings characterizes the whole collection and makes it an inner diary. *Remoteness* seldom depicts factual details of life experiences. It aims at recording meanings. While reading it, you will follow a spiritual journey, which is personal and universal at the same time. It is personal, because its stages are personal, and therefore different in their details from those of any other journey. It is universal, because those personal stages are described in their inner meanings, meanings that may be found in the stages of any spiritual quest. And as you compare them with the personal experiences you went through in the process of your own quest, within your own inner universe, with its specific time and place conditions, then you may receive encouragement and inspiration.

I'll Be Free Once Again

The earliest poems already portray two feelings, which are typically human and recur throughout the collection under various

³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 2nd ed. (Willmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 49.

⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 188.

forms: the yearning for the Infinite (5), on the one hand, and the awareness of the limitations of the human self and the need to overcome them through the self's elevation to that same Infinite after which it yearns (7), on the other. But since those earliest poems are not supported by a mature spiritual awareness, the yearning for the sublimation of the self into the Infinite is often mixed up, as it is often the case with the novice, with the disquietude and agony, which may arise from the trials of every day life and tempt one to flee into a fancied world of dreams, wherein every anguish is supposedly appeased (6, 8).

The poems of the first section, *I'll Be Free Once Again* (1955-1958), describe the feelings of a youth who, in the prime of his life, feels that the standards suggested by school and society are too narrow, that his attitude toward the others does not satisfy him, that an Ideal for which it is worth living and struggling and which may bestow true freedom must exist somewhere in the world (9-10). His existence is dotted with surges (20) and abandonment (16, 18), yearnings (24) and hopes (11, 13), as well as with melancholy (23) and disappointment (15), discouragement (27) and feelings of impotence (17, 25), anguish (12, 26) and sometimes despair (14, 19). It is also run through by an astonished sense of fusion with nature (21-2) and a nostalgic vein, which implies for the world of remembrances to be transfigured (28), an astonishment and a nostalgia that will later re-emerge under various forms.

The last poems of *I'll Be Free Once Again* record the first encounter with the Bahá'í Faith. They tell of an initial incredulity in front of its promises (29), of a relief for having been rescued thereby from long-standing, unrewarding ties (30), of a gradual recognition of its prizes (31), and finally of a consecration to that newly-found Ideal (32).

If the real world were the same as that of human fancy, a fancy whereby we assume that knowing a spiritual truth is tantamount to living up to it, the collection would stop here in the end of any feeling of *Remoteness*. And as a matter of fact, the diary keeps silent from 1958 to 1961, as if there were nothing more to say in the contentment of that new vision. However true life very often implies a sequence of inner and outer battles we must fight and win so that we may translate whatever our spirit has perceived into practical experience. And thus the diary proceeds with the description of a journey, whereby that long expected—and now at long last found—Ideal slowly turns from a found Object, i.e. an outer object to be conquered, into the Form to which the soul is laboriously conforming itself. It is a description of the struggle fought by the self in its yearning to become as similar as possible to that ‘perfect exemplar / flashing at times / from the depths of the heart’ (137). It is a description of the first stage of spiritual progress, which Christian mystics call the ‘purgative way,’ Sufis ‘the law (*shari’ah*),’ or the stage of the self-accusing soul (*nafs al-lawwáma*), and Bahá’u’lláh the ‘Valley of Search’ and the ‘Valley of Love.’⁵

Unfulfilled Dreams

The poems of the second section of *Remoteness* convey the awareness of the gulf that separates the self and the Ideal. Previous experiences, as exalting as they may have been, are not yet seen in their fruits, but in their limitations as *Unfulfilled Dreams* (1961-1964). It’s one thing to dream an unattainable perfection, and another to struggle toward that perfection while discharging one’s manifold duties in daily life. That struggle soon teaches that it is advisable for us to shed light upon the dark corners of our selves, but only as long as that effort may entail for us to gain a

⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, pp. 5-11.

deeper self-knowledge and thus to come closer to the Ideal. Under those circumstances, a good friend is precious, when through his 'sweet, / humane loving-kindness' he encourages us to look more serenely at the most difficult aspects of our nature (35). But the struggle also teaches that it is not desirable that we delve over and over into the murky depths of our selves. We do nothing but stir up the mud. Waters become turbid and in those dark meanders (51) we will see nothing else but their obscurity (43).

And as our struggle to overcome the limitations of the self and attain the goals set by the Ideal goes on, life still appears as a sequence of painful tests (39), as a succession of doubts and hesitations (46-7), anxieties (37, 55) and disquietudes (56), whose only remedy seems escaping into the darkness of unconsciousness (40, 50). But as long as our hearts preserve intact their yearning for the Infinite (49), and alive their memory of the encounter with the Ideal (48), life also is waiting for a light that will illumine the way (51); life also is acknowledging and accepting the fact that we may always emerge from the bitterest pain (52), that we must not stray from the path of God (45) and ought to meet with courage its challenges (38, 44); life also is becoming assured that a loving Creator is always ready to answer any sincere cry for help, unworthy as the suppliant may be (54). Against that background, homesickness becomes tinged with mystical hues, and the earthly motherland begins to be transfigured into the heavenly homeland (57, 58).

The Heaven of the Heart

The soul is always ready to struggle so that grief may be changed into joy. Perhaps one of the reasons why we have been endowed with the capacity of feeling joy and pain is that this capacity spurs us to flee whatever may be conducive to pain and to tend toward joy. And yet, while so doing, we run the risk of

transforming the experiences of our lives into snares wherein we may become entangled, rather than using them as opportunities wherefrom we may learn how to realize the inner attitudes that will dispose our hearts to joy, clearing their clouds away. This is the condition described in the third section of *Remoteness, The Heaven of the Heart* (1965-1972).

In those poems grief seems omnipresent. It looms sometimes as intolerance of the useless renunciations imposed by the frenzied Western life style (66, 67), sometimes as dismay in front of the steady moral decay of society (86, 89, 90), and more often as the loneliness of the immigrant, an Italian born in Eritrea and come for the first time in his life to his own country. He knows well Italian language and culture. But he learnt them at school, and not through daily life experience. Therefore his relations both with nature and people are difficult (62, 68). The cold Bologna's winter becomes thus the metaphor of the spiritual chill of the hearts (61), a sunned winter morning appears as wishful thinking (64), the autumn greyness is reminiscent of human indifference to the recent Divine call (63, 65), whereas the remote motherland is perceived as the ideal place of nearness to Bahá'u'lláh, whose Faith was there discovered and never forgotten, although in those years its ideals were perceived as so far from the reality of daily life (80, 83).

In those times of greatest remoteness, the memory of the instants of truth that the heart had experienced with great intensity is a precious mainstay. That memory is sometimes depicted as a primal remembrance of the metaphorical 'radiant morn' of creation, almost a reminiscence of the divine worlds wherefrom the soul was born (90), to which Bahá'u'lláh alludes in His *Hidden Words*.⁶ Sometimes it is just the recall of an hour of nearness to

⁶ See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, no. 19, pp. 27-8.

God (91). Sometimes it is the recollection of the encounter with the Faith, which now appears so far (70, 92). Or finally it is the nostalgia for the 'true Friend,' Who seems to have been forgotten (76). Those memories bestow the strength required so that the traps of daily life may be avoided: the allurements of false myths (82) and the subtler deceptions of the self, with its tendency to withdraw into a fancied 'elsewhere' (71)—cunning snares, wherein we may easily fall, and sometimes do fall indeed. Those memories also teach that, whatever our circumstances may be, one freedom always remains for us: to live that life, which partly we have chosen, partly God Himself has chosen for us, with our innermost feelings conformed to His will. Our feelings are the only thing over which we may have control, if we really do our best (74). We can rebel against the Will of God or we can surrender to it. We rebel, if we seek refuge in our dreams and deceits, if we refuse to struggle so that we may pursue the refinement of our selves and the betterment of society (69). We surrender, if we wholeheartedly face our struggle while living our present instant in its fullness, with no regret, no recrimination, no false excuses, and face up to life, happy to live it, however it may turn out to be, obedient to His Law (79, 81).

This struggle is conducive to some vital experiences. First of all, it confirms that we always need the divine assistance and that we must pray for that, in the hope to be heard (75). Then, it proves that the burdens of our struggle may be relieved by the consolations of such common human experiences, as friendship (77-8) and love (93), provided they are transfigured through the Ideal. Last but not least, it grants an incipient awareness of the fact that the self may be transcended only through service (84). There it will find its real fulfilment. All these lessons renew the hope for spiritual growth, the true ultimate goal of human life: manifesting in the form of thoughts, feelings, words, and first of

all deeds and behaviours such qualities of the divine world, as love, friendliness, understanding, solidarity, tolerance, wisdom, justice, consciousness, balance, moderation, courage etc. (72-3). Is not this condition tantamount to being in the presence of God? Is it not paradise (85)? However this goal cannot be easily attained. Spiritual growth is a slow and sometimes painful process, and an answer to prayers should be expected, but, in the meantime, we should never stop acting so that His will may be done (88). And while the inner need for action becomes greater and more pressing, a growing awareness of the spiritual meaning of suffering begins to soften the past and present anguish of the heart (94) and to abate the need to dwell on it. Thus between 1973 and 1975 the diary keeps silent for the second time.

Despite the Light of Guidance

Most poems of the fourth section of *Remoteness*, entitled *Despite the Light of Guidance* (1975-1983), are not as precisely dated as all the others. They are fragments of a real inner diary, written in hours of great emotional distress, as the errors of every day life, perpetrated 'despite the light of guidance' bestowed by the Faith, were emerging into the consciousness (110). They mark the inception of the ascent of the 'sacred mountain.' And are characterized by the gradual acquisition of a number of vital certainties whereby the true merits of the self may be more easily manifested.

First of all, the concept is confirmed that no intellectual or traditional ascetic effort is sufficient. A daily and active militancy is needed in one's service at His threshold. If there is no militancy, everything remains on the plane of theory, and therefore one's efforts may prove useless, even harmful, because they will be conducive to the monstrous self-centredness of one who, feeling like having the truth, presumes to be a little better than

others, and thus looks at them with haughtiness (111-2). An active commitment to the Ideal, on the contrary, is conducive to both a deeper awareness of one's errors (107-8) and a greater need to get rid of them (97).

Moreover, the fact is confirmed that freedom of spirit cannot be conquered at a low price (99) or in a short time, and the struggle required to achieve it is certainly characterized by many ups and downs (100). However that price, that time and those uncertainties are but a personal feeling. Reality is the yearning after spiritual qualities for oneself and for the others (98, 101), reality is the spell of the precious instant (102-3), reality is the joy of the winning post (113).

Finally, if the battles for spiritual freedom must be won, a detachment is required that may enable one to make a good use of one's capacity of loving (116), to learn how to overcome likings and dislikings, to which our human nature exposes us (117), as well as to check certain feelings, as enticing as they may be, without however falling into the chilliness or bareness of indifference (114-5). Then a faithful comrade may turn into a revealing mirror (106), the memory of a deceased friend may become an encouragement to set out again after the hundredth defeat (104-5), the relation with a thousand unknown spiritual travel mates may exhale the cheering flavour of solidarity (118), and the indignation raised by the hundredth violence perpetrated in the name of one of the various fallacious ideologies which have conquered the hearts of people in the twentieth century finds an outlet in the effort to recognize 'the threads of... [the] *Major / Plan* [of God], as they become unraveled' in the events of history, and comply with their best unfoldment (119-20).

An Unexpected Stream

Between '83 and '90, while the 'purgative way' goes on—it has no end—the diary keeps silent for the third time. A poem explains the reasons of this silence. A predominant attention of the Muse focussed on intimist talks had been considered as incompatible with a sincere active commitment. But in the light of later experiences her calls to introspection prove purified by the personal and collective luminous goals she had always indicated, which however take now a greater prominence in her discourse (125). And when in 1990 the poetical conversation with the Muse resumes, previous grief appears as having been softened, present anguishes seem to have been allayed, as after a reviving bath in 'the fresh waves of an unexpected stream' (123). Therefore the poems of the fifth section of *Remoteness* (1983-1992), despite all imperfection and weakness which still transpire from them, may possibly denote a slight step forward, toward the entrance into the second stage of spiritual progress, which Christian mystics call the 'illuminative way,' Sufis 'the way' (*ṭarīqa*), and Bahá'u'lláh the 'the Path of Positive Knowledge,'⁷ or the 'Valley of Knowledge' and the 'Valley of Unity.'⁸

The relation with life which these poems describe is now different. The yearning for the Infinite is not only a wish, it is also experience. Nature shows wider portions of the expanses of the celestial worlds (124). The past takes on a more positive hue. And an outer voyage through the places of childhood and adolescence changes into a redeeming inner journey (126-7). As much as those places may have been transformed by the passing time, they seem to provide answers which had been expected for

⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán. The Book of Certitude Revealed by Bah'u'lláh*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 195.

⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, pp. 11-29.

long years. Now it is the voice of a never forgotten old friend (128-30), now that of an ancient majestic sycamore, met and loved in former days (131-3). Thousands of voices speak, and all of them agree on a single goal: universality, the only goal which belongs to the Ideal, the only goal for which it is worthwhile living and struggling. And thus in those remote surroundings beside the familiar voices of human greatness and meanness (143-4), dreams and hopes (141-2), the initial yearning for the Infinite is once more heard (138-9). And we can only thank God for the bounty of such beauty and renew the solemn promise—accepted as a precious legacy—that we will make good use of His bestowals wherever we may be in the world (149). Yes, perfection is certainly an unattainable goal. And yet it well deserves our struggle so that we may approach to it, even at the price of living ‘as if,’ provided His well-pleasure is the real motive of all our deeds (134-5). The poetry of remembrance has yielded its first mature fruit: each instant is the heir of past times (145-8). A doubt remains, whether these verses, albeit they were written with the heart turned toward the Friend and offered with purity of motives, may meet with His good-pleasure (136).

Toward the Unreached Borders

In the sixth section of *Remoteness, Toward the Unreached Borders* (1994-1995), the awareness of human imperfection and of the need to overcome it in our daily lives is enlightened through a more complete acceptance of the unavoidable limitations which life itself poses and an attitude of greater trust in the divine assistance to our constant efforts toward the ‘unreached borders’ of the Ideal. The ongoing dialogue between the subject—condemned to say ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ and thus to be forever cut off from the Object of his own love—and the ‘Thou,’ Who is the unattainable Object of his love, does not and cannot find a solu-

tion, if not a reconfirmed doubt about the self and trust in God and His Word (153-6). The self should not be taken as our mirror or the goal of our lives (157-8). It is rather a tool, that can recognize the true beauty of creation and thus provide our souls with wings whereby they may soar toward the Infinite (176-7, 184-5). To a friend who would prefer to read easier and more cheering verses and who, also for this reason, says that she does not perceive the spirit of the Faith in *Remoteness*, a poem answers that a human heart may exhale savours of eternity only when the self will be finally appeased, 'in the joys of the efforts / bent so that the heavenly Kingdom's / luminous model / may be copied down here' (170-1). The human self has been better understood and to some extent transcended, its narrow limits have been accepted and thus partially overcome (158-62, 163-5). Time has turned into a friend (178). The future appears as the fruit of the qualities acquired through the present struggle (179-80), the past can be thus remembered with greater ease (181-83). Autumn, formerly abhorred, now is loved for its gifts, which are finally recognized (167-9). The joys of friendship increasingly resemble the beatitudes of the celestial worlds (172-5).

Children of the Half-Light

In this condition, whereby the limits of the self are accepted in their transcendence through the divine qualities acquired through service, the increasing decadence that invades contemporary culture and society stops being a reason of exceeding dismay. The fact is accepted of being one of the *Children of the Half-Light* (1995-1996) (205-7). And while the inner struggle resulting from the dual nature of the soul (198), whose ancient origins are partly understood (196-7), goes on, earthly expanses increasingly gleam with sparkles of the heavenly realms (189). Although God seems to often ignore our cries for help (193-5),

still prayer is recognized as a powerful instrument for spiritual elevation (220). With this attitude of greater trust in God, the succeeding ages of life are seen in a different perspective (199-204) and a deeper insight of the greater future promised by Bahá'u'lláh to humankind is gained (211-17). The initial intimist poetical program seems very far now. Poetry rises above the limitations of a personal confession and appears as a divine gift (190-2), which may convey not only the joy of moments of beauty (208-10) but also the wisdom of a luminous and encouraging vision, to any well-disposed reader (218-9).

Diverging Skies

The eighth section of *Remoteness, Diverging Skies* (1996-1998), marks a time of respite, so that the past (223-4, 230) and its ephemeral sides (231) may be weighed and the personal (232-3) and collective (234) future may be envisioned. The importance is confirmed of courage, constancy, steadfastness, throughout the endless battles of daily life, in order to transform the utopia of the Ideal into the reality of daily life (228-9). Hope is nourished that the echoes of poetry, reverberated from a friendly heart, may finally attain the presence of the Friend (225-6). But most of all the earliest need of truth and renewal is strengthened (227).

The Gift of the Friend

And the renewal seems to occur as a rediscovery of the worth of friendship, a great gift of God. The boundaries between friendship and love appear indistinct and the love of the human friend is soon changed into the love of the divine Friend (237, 239). In this respect *The Gift of the Friend* (1998-1999) conveys echoes of a Sufi poetical world completely renewed by Bahá'u'lláh (238). Love is lived as love of beauty (244), self-annihilation (242-3), transformation of human traits into divine qualities (250-1), a be-

wilderment conducive to a great wisdom (240-1). The perception of the incertitude of life (248-9), of the ephemerality of human things (246), of decline (252), is still present, however it is tempered with a clearer vision of a better future (245). A feeling of diversity persists (253), but it is balanced by the hope that it may help to leave a sign of the inner joys enlightening the heart so that they may be reflected into other hearts (247, 254).

Faithful of Love

In *Faithful of Love* (1999-2001) Bahá'í motifs come to the forefront as never before in *Remoteness*. They have pervaded the inner universe to such an extent that heroes of Bahá'í history become motives for excursions into the best qualities of everyday life (260-1, 262, 263, 270, 271, 272), people of everyday life (267-8), and common episodes of Bahá'í life (285) are transfigured through the spiritual light that transpires from them. Friendship, experienced as reciprocity (259) and sacrifice (265, 277), unity (280) and renewal (258), but also as anxiety (257, 279), impatience (278, 287-8) and freedom (289), is always projected against the sceneries of the Eternal (281). Life appears as the slow flowing of a river toward the Ocean, as the development of a substantially good plan (266). Its difficulties depend on our limitations (269). But we will be able to overcome them, if we will tread the path of the 'faithful of love,'⁹ who love God

⁹ 'Faithful of love' is the name whereby some Italian poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, like Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Guido Guinizzelli, Lapo Gianni, Cino da Pistoia and others, who sang mystic love, designated themselves (see for instance Dante, *Vita nuova* [The New Life], chapter XIV, par. 14). Almost in the same time, in the Muslim world other 'faithful of love' (*khaṣṣán-i-muḥabbat*) were writing in the same vein, like Muḥammad Rúzbihán-i-Baqlí (1128-1209), the author of *Kitáb-i-'Abharu'l-'Áshiqín*, a title that has been translated by the French Islamist Henri Corbin as *Le Jasmin des Fidèles d'amour* (The Jasmine of the Faithful of Love).

(273) and are faithful to His trust (274-6). Its more challenging circumstances may be used for the best (291-2). Loneliness becomes tinged with hope (284, 290). The awareness of human limitations turns into a reason for gratitude to God (282-3). Search goes on, uninterrupted, through a sustained effort on His path for the attainment of luminous, personal and collective, goals (286, 293).



The collections of poems ends with the peaceful vision of ‘halcyon days’ (294), but the diary is not concluded, not so much because the poet is still alive and active, as because it is so difficult to see a human life as a concluded exertion, from a beginning to an end.

ALPHABETIC LISTING OF POEMS

272	‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí
279	A Blond Guitar in the Town Afar
63	Above the Mists
252	<i>Acqua Alta</i>
64	A Deceit Woven by the Heart
39	After the Billow Broke
193	Against Each Nay
280	A Greater Love
159	A Happy and Marvellous End
82	Allurement
85	Always in Thy Presence
118	And a Thousand Kind Hands
44	And If I Shall Refuse Thy Ranks
228	And I Shall Soon Resume My Journey
170	And It Is Still So Much
234	And New Trees Will Rise in Flower
15	And Now It Rains
269	And Their Sinai Remains Untouched
254	And Then Give It at Once to Others
37	And the Weariness of Never-Ending Days
12	And When Light Sparkles
74	And You, Cherish That Light
56	Another Disquieting Morning
123	An Unexpected Stream

55	Anxiety
227	As an Oversharpened Blade
24	As Blind in Darkness
134	As If
232	As One Day the Drop
101	As the Rush of the Lakes
204	<i>As the Thread</i>
285	A Summer School Midnight Dream
35	A Sweet, Humane Loving-Kindness
201	<i>At the Earliest Skirmish</i>
57	Between Houses and Stony Lanes
258	Blooming Anew
29	But the Heart Long Muted
199	Children
211	Clouds
212	<i>Clouds of Adolescence</i>
214	<i>Clouds of Adulthood</i>
211	<i>Clouds of Childhood</i>
215	<i>Clouds of Our Life</i>
213	<i>Clouds of Youth</i>
218	Comet Hyakutake
260	Drowned
200	<i>Earliest Buds</i>
202	<i>Earliest Quivers of Love</i>
223	Epitaph
48	Far from Thee
277	Fire-Flies
190	Flowers
76	Forgetful of the True Friend
17	From a Red Hot Fire
286	From Nights to Dawns
7	From the Blue of the Sky
267	Gabrielle De Sacy

237	Give Me Your Cup
294	Halcyon Days
79	Human Thoughts
205	I Am of the Children of the Half-Light
31	I Join My Hands to Thine
69	I Know Not Who I Am
20	I'll Be Free Once Again
25	Impotence
53	In Dark Meanders
110	In the Dark That Remains
149	In the Dawn Changing Sun
278	In the Incoming Twilight
80	In the Kiss of Life-Giving Water
6	In the Silence of Infinity
50	In the Silent Night
189	In the Small Crescent
18	In the Sublimity of Silence
111	I Shall Hardly Understand
240	Is It Joy or Pain?
239	Is Mine or His This Song, Today?
88	It Resembles the Seed
58	It's Only a Memory
8	I Yearn to Bathe in Light
263	Jináb-i-Muníb
124	Kaldidalur's Swan
238	Let's Go, Let Us Explore Together
62	Loneliness
290	Loneliness
250	Love Song of the Insane Lover
163	Mary and Martha
220	Mashriqu'l-Adhkár
23	Melancholy
284	Memory

291	Metropolitan Meetings
136	Mirzá Maqṣúd
107	Misleading Ways
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242	My Lover Asked Me
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266	O Life, Placid Waters
265	On the Altar of Your Friendship
172	On the Wave of a Remote Music
19	O Peace of the Infinity
176	Ordainer Nature
71	O Sweet Distant Years
114	O Tender Love Thriving in the Breast
90	Our Sorry Voices
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208	Psyche and Poetry
30	Pure Water Flows
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145	Remnants of Days Forever Gone
143	Remote Calls
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113	Search Is a Journey
84	Serving Thee Once More
287	Seventeen Hours
270	<u>Shaykh</u> Salmán
26	Sleep
36	Slow Wandering
199	<i>Small Hand</i>

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89	So Much Life Is Wasted
16	Surrender to That Breath
184	That Morning's Spell
293	The Adventure Goes On
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75	The Day of Thy Promise
257	The Doubts of the Wanderer
61	The Earliest Snow
54	The Flavour of Thy Dew
51	The Glimmering Dawn
81	The Heaven of the Heart
106	The Hour We Lived Together
109	The Incautious Youth
247	The Linden-Tree
186	The Neutron of the Spirit
262	The Night of Ṣidq-ʿAlī
246	The Night of the Shooting Stars
128	The Old Asphalted Road
28	The Peace of a Dreamless Sleep
116	The Power of Love
21	There is Peace on the Sea
139	The Remote Heaths of a Former Day
231	The Seagull
178	The Secret of Your Bitter Pangs
83	The Shade of Remembrance
94	The Sigh Still Lingers
104	The Smell of That Springtime
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68	The Speechless Tongue
230	The Steinbock
244	The Swans of Bodensee
131	The Sycamore

253	The Tawny Candle
248	The Torrent
281	The Two Eagles
117	The Unavowed Awareness
141	The Unexpected Rain
126	The Voices of Time
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167	Toward the Unreached Borders
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179	Waiting for Giulia
157	Water of the Self
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153	Where Are the Boundaries?
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70	Without Thee
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38	You Ought to Smile
9	Your Broad Halls
93	Your Hand in My Hand
67	Your Life Comes to an End
66	Your Renunciation of Light
271	Zaynu'l-‘Ábidín

Printed and bound in Italy
in January 2002
for Casa Editrice Bahá'í
by ESSEDIUNO S.r.l.
Via San Romano in Garfagnana, 27/29
00148 Rome, Italy