

THE NEW GARDEN

BAHÁ'Í POEMS

JULIO SAVI



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*A kindly tongue is the lode-
stone of the hearts of men. It is
the bread of the spirit...*

Bahá'u'lláh

The Board of the Association for Bahá'í Studies "Alessandro Bausani" has the pleasure of presenting this anthology of poems by Julio Savi on the occasion of the centenary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a publication that, together with the deeds of service performed in the name of such an extraordinary Figure of our time, will enrich the creative and intellectual production of the whole Bahá'í world.

One might wonder why the Association for Bahá'í Studies promotes an anthology of poems for this particular commemoration. The answer is found in the following words by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself, Who, besides having exemplified the Bahá'í teachings throughout His life, has penned countless writings including a number of poems:

Endeavor your utmost to compose *beautiful* poems to be chanted with heavenly music; thus may their *beauty* affect the minds and impress the hearts of those who listen. (*Tablets* 1:59, italics added)

This invitation recalls the attention of a distracted and superficial world to the profound and constructive value of beauty, not only in the private life of all people, whatever their social and cultural background may be, but also, and above all, in the collective life of humankind. What role do beauty and the inspiration that derives from it play in our society-building efforts?

In the opinion of this Board, the contribution of beauty is vital for strengthening the spiritual bond between human beings and a creation that is deeply imbued with *pure beauty*, and for nourishing a society capable of contemplating, understanding, elaborating, and recreating reality, through the inspiration it draws from such spiritual principles, as harmony, refinement, diversity, and uniqueness. Art, into which this *beauty* often flows, bestows liberty upon our souls, nourishes our imagination, and encourages people to push forward, by celebrating humanity.¹ As Shoghi Effendi² said, art grows as an “expression of the people” (in “Importance” 31, no. 63).

As to poetry, it has the special capacity to condense, within a few words, universes of meanings, inner depths, universal images, and cultural archetypes that link contemporaneity to ancient roots. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who used poetic language, as Bahá’u’lláh³ had previously done, left on the theme of poetry various indications and key concepts to be taken into account in poetic production: inspiration, beauty, eloquence, versified language, novelty, expressivity, as well as depth and loftiness of meanings.

It is precisely on these foundations that the work of Julio Savi is based. A prolific poet and author—who is now publishing his fourth anthology of poems—he has placed the vast body of teachings and “truths” offered by the Bahá’í Faith at the center of his search for *beauty*. Both through his way of being and the exposition of his inner world, he tries to give expression to the sincere effort that each soul makes *to perfect itself and offer to others the essence of the good fruits it has reaped*. As Milly Graffi—1940–2020, poetess, translator, art critic – writes,⁴ Savi’s style blends East and

¹ See Keith Haring, 1958–1990, an American painter and artist.

² Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), great-grandson of Bahá’u’lláh (see note 3), appointed by His grandfather ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as His successor to lead the Bahá’í Faith and as the interpreter of the Bahá’í Writings.

³ Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí-i-Núrí, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith.

⁴ “L’insolita ricerca di Julio Savi,” in Savi, *Chiaroscuro* 119–22.

West, tracing trajectories from various cultures. Rhett Diessner, a well-known international expert on the psychology of beauty, perceives in his poems an empirical search for beauty in everything.⁵ The poetess and art critic Maria Organtini observes that "in the dialectic of the Spirit he rises to higher thoughts where the metaphysical image of the Supreme Being seems more concrete and closer than we can imagine and, while so doing, he builds with wisdom on the poetic canons with an adequate use of his own solitude."

In His "Tablet to a Poet" Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Blessed the poet who hath been filled with the spirit of the Day of God and from whose words hath wafted the sweet-smelling savour of the love of his Lord, the All-Merciful, over all created things. Such a one is, in truth, among the blissful. . . . Keep in mind the grace of God in causing your tongues to unlock treasures and to reveal wisdom and mysteries.⁶

‘Abdu’l-Bahá encourages all poets to write poems that will be "the cause of the gladness of their hearers" ("Recent Tablets" 318), so that whosoever will read them may "find rest and joy and become in tune with the love of God" (*Tablets* I, 59), and their breasts "may be refreshed and dilated with joy" (*Tablets* III, 669).

It is with this wish, for both poets and readers, that the Board of the Association for Bahá'í Studies "Alessandro Bausani" pays its tribute to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, through the poetic work of Julio Savi, in the year of the centenary of His death, a tribute that may hopefully inspire our souls and nourish our hearts through its gift of *beauty*.

⁵ See Diessner *Understanding the Beauty Appreciation Trait* (Palgrave Mac Millan, 2019) 133-5, 170-2.

⁶ Quoted in Ra‘fatí, *Yádnámih* 296, provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami. For a deeper analysis of this issue see Savi, "Bahá'u'lláh's Persian Poems" 317-61.

I call thee a Sweet-Singing-Bird so that in the Rose Garden of Significance's thou mayest raise the harmony and melody of Truth. That the birds of the Kingdom may soar upward and become the means of kindness and union between different communities and nations. The attraction that thou has in thy heart is through the power of the Magnet of the Love of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, "Letters" 6, no. 8)

The Board of the Association for Bahá'í Studies
"Alessandro Bausani"
16 September 2021

A Note from the Author

I've been writing poetry for over sixty years, but only twenty years ago I decided to make them public outside the circle of my closest friends. Today, in my eighties, I can look at my poetic work with a certain detachment and see my verses neither as "an impassioned effusion / of emotions and words" (*Remoteness* 42), nor as mere "self-indulgence" (ibid. 125), as I had for long years feared. They are sincere tokens of my personal encounter with the Spirit. They were modest experiences, for sure, but they always aroused such an unrestrainable feeling of truth and beauty that I could not "be silent . . . about the stirrings" they kindled in my heart (ibid. 170).

It is true, whenever

...I venture
to reverberate the echo
of... [its] words into more
concrete dimensions,
suddenly I hear cawing
crows, hooting
owls. (ibid. 210)

And yet I always cherish the hope to be even as "in the love embrace of springtime / the May linden-tree" that "bedecks itself / in thousands of cream-coloured sweet- / scenting blooms" (ibid. 246).

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! (ibid.)

Yes, my beloved readers, the highest hope of the man who is offering you these verses is that you may not perceive therefrom “mermaids songs, but the reviving / echo of His sweet invite” (*Lontananza [2001-2016]* 88).

So, here are the reasons why, as the first century of the Formative Age is coming to an end, I have collected these eighty poems and felt the need to submit them to the Associazione studi bahá'í [Association for Bahá'í Studies] “Alessandro Bausani” for a possible publication under its auspices. These are my “Bahá'í” poems; “Bahá'í” because they were written by a Bahá'í on Bahá'í subjects (see “Music” 82, no. 1431). My wish is that they will convey, despite all the limitations that characterize their author, the “spirit of the Day of God” and “the sweet-smelling savour of the love of... [the] Lord” and will contribute to “celebrate His praise” (Bahá'u'lláh, in Rafatí, *Yádnámih* 296).

And these are truly days to celebrate the praise of God, Who always mysteriously or overtly helps us, His faithful servants, as we endeavour to transform the inspiring words that He has left us into thoughts, words, feelings, actions, and behaviors capable of promoting the achievement of the final goal towards which all of us are striving: the oneness of humankind.

js

12 August 2021

This Anthology is being also published in its original Italian version as well as in the French translation by Mrs. Leïla Mesbah Sabéran.

Prologue

(1956–1957)

*Waiting I am like the tree that waits
its season and meanwhile seems dead.
Luigi Pirandello*

Your broad halls

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.

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

Asmara, 1 April 1956

Enlighten me with your light

If only I could meet you.
I look for you, but I know
not where you are.
I love you, but I know
not who you are.

If only you could unveil
yourself before my eyes
like a rising sun
and like the rising sun
enlighten me with your light

Asmara, 8 August 1956

Wait

Wait
long wait
eternal wait
in doubt
in uncertainty.

Asmara, September 1957

The New Garden

(1957–2016)

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

Bahá'u'lláh

I saw a Daystar

I saw a Daystar
a Daystar is shining
today for me.

Asmara, September 1957

It is You...

It is You. . .
It is You I was longing for.
Now unveiled You
Shine before my eyes
Are You true?

Asmara, September 1957

But the heart long muted

Mind crammed
with ideas rebels

Pride cries
out in the breast

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

Asmara, September 1957

Like a warm wind

Like a warm wind
Thou enfolded
and quickened me
enthraling
my heart.

Padua, October 1957

Pure water flows

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.

Padua, November 1957

All are Thy children

It is Truth

I see it
as I see the sun

I feel it
as I feel the wind

O Divine Sun! Smile
shine on the world

All are Thy children.

Asmara, December 1957

I join my hands to Thine

In Thee
I see my self

With Thee
existence continues

I join my hands
with Thine

For Thee
I accept my life.

Asmara, January 1958

A beam of Thy light

A beam of Thy light
has come as far as my heart
and here I enshrine it.

It will not escape
a trust of Thy love
an answer to my prayers.

This beam of Thy light
will remain here
forever.

Asmara, February 1958

Upon my heart forever

*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.

Asmara, 14 March 1958

In Thy hands

Today at long last
nothing am I
a rush bent
by the wind
a straw tossed
by the waves
nothing at last
in Thy hands
O my Lord.

Asmara, 15 March 1958

Paved is the way

Arise, O my soul!
Paved is the way,
long is the journey.

Hasten there
whereupon your desire
had always been set.

Fly and throw off
every subtle chain
of jewels and gold.

Bologna, 2 April 1962

Thy chains of love*

Dark is the sky
where Thy light
shines no longer.

Cold is the earth
when clouds of prejudice
cover Thy sun.

Sad is the time
spent without
Thy smile,

empty
the day passed
without Thy remembrance.

Unlock our hearts,
bind our necks
with Thy chains.

How sweet are
the chains
of Thy love.

Bologna, 11 May 1962

* See Savi, "Chains of Love" (20), in *World Order* 37.4 (2006): 13.

Thy strong hand

Thy strong hand
is my only guide
and leads me there
where peace reigns.

Hold me tight
in Thy grasp
bide not me
nor my idle spouting.

I kiss Thy hand
O kind Father
even when
its grasp
is too firm
and my heart
oozes its blood
drop by drop.

Bologna, 11 May 1962

When I see Thy smile

When I see Thy smile
O kind Father
my heart cheers
and I feel strong
and can face
arrayed hosts
of worries and words.
Thou art my strength.

When I see Thy smile
my world grows bright.
I go through storms then
without being wet
and through fire
without being burnt.

I can keep my head high—
as I gaze upon Thy smile—
and rejoice in that
forgetful of self
weakness and error
dark human burden
which Thy smile
with its light dispels.

Bologna, 15 May 1962

When I look into my heart

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 do Thou thereby
flood my heart.

Bologna, 18 May 1962

If my hand slips away

If my hand slips away
hold it in Thy grasp.

And if my eyes turn
toward other than Thee
to Thee draw them back.

And if my tongue
utters a single word
which is not for Thee
make it silent.

And efface within
and without me
all else which
is not for Thee.

Bologna, 9 June 1962

Thy infinite bounties

Strong kindly hand
that guides me
on the roads of the world
sweet voice
that suggests the way
tender love
that protects me
caring eye
that watches
over my sleep
Father
Thou givest me all
but I always forget
Thy infinite bounties.

Bologna, 23 December 1962

Only the Faith endures

Above the vanity
of words and deeds
that vain emotions
and feelings
mix up and modify
only the Faith endures,
radiant in darkness
vibrating with life
a mighty and divine sign
in this ephemeral world.

Bologna, 24 July 1964

But Truth

All tosses and seethes.
Passions sweep away
common sense. Chill
cools the heart. Reason
sees not. But Truth
shines in full light.

Bologna, 24 July 1964

At the melody of Thy word

*Delight our ears with the melody of Thy
Word...*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

At the melody of Thy Word
sweetness seeps through the heart
desire is quenched
and passion becomes silent.

Bologna, 4 November 1964

Without Thee

*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.

Bologna, 21 June 1965

I remember Thy promise

I remember the miracle
of Thy radiant dawn
I remember Thy promise
and I wait, O my Lord.

Bologna, 24 June 1965

Without any shame

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
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.

Bologna, 23 October 1965

Every diamond would be a stone*

Should not Thy light
imbue this clay of ours
every diamond
would be just a hard
and cutting stone.
But upon this swamp
of stagnant waters
Thy reviving breath
is wafting.

Bologna, 12 November 1965

* See Savi, “Every Diamond Would Be a Stone” (33), in *World Order* 35.1 (2003): 47.

Forgetful of the true Friend

*. . . 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.

Bologna, 12 November 1965

The day of Thy promise

*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.

Bologna, 12 November 1965

Great is divine goodness

I wish I knew
whether days
have always slipped
away the same
from every heart's
unappeased anxiety.

Or whether it is just time
measured by the rhythm
of engines and machines
that today draws
man so quickly
away from himself.

And whether the plain
has always been so bitter
where the masses sometimes swarm
believing themselves happy.

Great
is the divine goodness
that still shines forth
upon the follies
of human life.

Bologna, 14 February 1966

In Thy light let me be reborn

*Thou hast endowed every hour of these days
with a special virtue. . .*

Bahá'u'lláh

Trusting in Thee
my soul calls
once more upon Thee.

Turned toward the Carmel
my heart
chants Thy words.

Renew
my soul
O my Lord.

Every night
let me die
and the morning after
in Thy light
let me be reborn.

Bologna, 2–20 March 1966

Always in Thy presence

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.

Bologna, 4 March 1966

Perhaps because it resembles the seed

O kind Lord
Who always guidest me
on the steep paths
of Thy 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?

Bologna, 19 September 1966

In Thy luminous dawn

*Blessed is the one who through the heat
generated by the Fast increaseth his love. . .*

Bahá'u'lláh

Every day
the soul is reborn
in Thy luminous dawn.

Now a past mistake
is discovered, now
a dark corner is brightened
in the innermost heart.

New horizons
unfold then
the gaze strays out
toward the eternal
the extreme reaches
of the placeless
where the sorry self
is lost—a tiny dot
amidst starry worlds.

Bologna, 2–20 March 1975

To the poor, astonished heart

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.

Bologna, 15 October 1978

* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 7, chap. 2, par. 8.

Search is a journey

*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.

San Giovanni in Persiceto, 1979–1983

The power of love

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
Thou didst ordain for us,
whereas we all use it
differently to what Thou willest.

San Giovanni in Persiceto, 1979–1983

The unavowed awareness

The believer is a mirror to 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.

San Giovanni in Persiceto 1979–1983

And a thousand kind hands
For the Italian Bahá'ís

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

San Giovanni in Persiceto (Bologna), 1979–1983

Soon the day will come

*Blessed is the soul which, at the hour of
separation from the body, is sanctified from
the vain imaginings of the peoples of the
world.*

Bahá'u'lláh

Soon the day will come
when Thy kiss
will touch our lips
and Thy honeyed mouth
will inhale all the flavour
of our souls.
Let it be rose,
musk and hyacinth scent,
that enriches the fragrance
of Thy fragrant heaven.
And at that moment
may none of us
turn regretting glances
toward the earthly gardens
bewailing he neither grew
nor picked down there
the flowers and goodly fruits
of the human condition.

San Giovanni in Persiceto, 1979–1983

I hear Thee speaking

I hear Thee speaking

from grief-stricken breasts
whose response Thou showest
to Thy challenging trials

from joyful hearts
that reveal their understanding
of Thine omnipresent signs

from the splendor of Thy creation
that reflects a glimmer
of Thy glorious Beauty

from sorry ugliness
in its ardent yearning
for Thy perfect Harmony

from the hearts of the goodly
wherefrom the sweet savor exhales
of Thy Loving-Kindness

from the hearts of the wicked
wherefrom I learn of
Thy gracious Mercy

Thou speakest to me
in each and every joy,

a faint likeness
of Thy Kingdom of Glory

even in grief, that
makes me think
of my true home

wherefrom alas
I am still far away.

Bologna, 29 April 1992

Mírzá Maqṣúd

O Mírzá Maqṣúd,* 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.

Bologna, 26 May 1992

* — See Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 176.

Where are the boundaries?

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,

* — See “‘the tranquil soul’ of [Koran 89:27] . . . in which evil is silent”
(Bausani 572, note 3).

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?

Bologna, 14 March 1994

* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 256, sec. 206.

† — The words of sacred Scripture.

A happy and marvellous end
For Leo Niederreiter

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 ceryl
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,

* —An ancient legend says that when a ceryl, or 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 *Lyra Graeca* 1:73, fr. 26.

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.

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 3 May 1994

Mary and Martha

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 small 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.

Long Beach, Washington, 22 June 1994

The neutron of the spirit

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.

Bologna, 7 March 1995

Pioneers

For a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh

One day you heard a call:
"Arise, forget everything,
leave the country you love,
go, bring the light
which shines in your heart
to each and all waiting souls,
of their own longing still unaware.

You arose, forgot
everything, abandoned
the country you loved,
departed alone, only light
you carried with you
and that light you gave
to those waiting souls,
of their own longing still unaware.

What a joy
you brought to the hearts!
What a love you bestowed
to whomever you met!
A sincere mirror,
you were, a loving nest.
But all too few enquired
what was the real Fount
wherefrom your love came.

Forty years have gone by
and you are still there, always

smiling, receptive, responsive,
—light, and love, and joy
untouched in your heart.

And at eve, at sunset,
as those long earlier years
are revived in your heart,
sometimes you wonder
why the love you bestowed,
oh yes, was returned,
but all too few recognized
the purpose of your and all lives:
exposing oneself to that Sun
which kindles a great flame
of love in the hearts,
and then spreading that spark
so that it may put the whole
world in flames.

But your heart rests
always assured that,
in a future—how far
you don't know—your smile
will hover on many lips,
your warmth will radiate
from many hearts,
many eyes will be opened
and behold that radiant Sun
which only you see today
together with just a handful of souls.

Acuto, 19 May 1996

Children of the Dawn-breakers

For the students of Wilmette Institute

Young profiles,
whose shadows
of remoteness
make the auroral light
shine even brighter.

The billows of love
surging in your breasts
submerge me in deep oceans
of tenderness and hope.

Anguishes and joys
alternating in human hearts
move the wheels of life.

For them we draw away
from charming spells
of beautiful mermaids,
whose songs allure—
all the more today—
the untaught pilgrim of life.

For them we hasten
to our heart's Beloved,
we respond to His call
and tenaciously fight
the battles of this life.

And if the tenderness
of our hearts is a reason
of pain for us, let us preserve
it nonetheless just there
where it disquiets the most.

Heaps of anguish
are nothing when,
finally on a mountaintop,
our astounded eyes
behold Eternity's
peaceful expanses.

Wilmette (Illinois), 31 July 1996

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*

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

* — In Arabic “Dawning place of the mention of God”, the Bahá’í
Temples.

you engrave on the hearts,
that you endow with life, the sacred

Words which your curved walls
bear ineffaceably enchased.

Wilmette, Illinois, 2 August 1996

The swans of Bodensee

For students and teachers of the Bahá'í Landegg Academy

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?
Love and Beauty.

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 the Blessed Beauty.*

Rome–Beijing, 14 November 1998

* — One of the titles ascribed to Bahá'u'lláh.

The scents of the Beloved*

For the participants of the first Beijing International Symposium on Religious Culture and Ethics

*Be kind, be brave, be pure, be as
radiant as the sunlight*—the Lord
of the Dawning warns his Guaymi
worshipper. Wisdoms of ancient masters
echo from the odors of untamed lands.

Let your hearts be as one heart—
the Supreme Brahman breathes
in the holy rishi, enraptured
on the banks of the river Ganges.
A scent of soma wafts from Benares.

*Thou shalt love thy neighbour
as thyself*—HaShem speaks unto Moses
secluded in the tent of meeting.
Whiffs of hyssop spread from
the slopes of the Temple Mount.

*Assist Ārmaiti, the good dwelling
rich in pastures*—Ahura Mazda enjoins
to his ecstatic bard Zarathusta.
Balsams of noble cypress exhale
from the land of Kaśhmár.

An all-embracing love for all the universe—
the *Unborn* inspires the enlightened
Gautama on the banks of the Nairañjana.
Aromas of sandalwood float
from the pipal tree of Bodhgāya.

* — For the notes see below 72-3.

All within the Four Seas are brothers—
K'ung Fu-tzu teaches to his reverent
disciples gathered around him. Flavors
of eastern spices waft from the sacred
precincts of the Temple of Heaven.

All ye are brethren and one
is your Father—the Son of God
announces among the old olive trees
of the Mount. Spirals of incense
ascend from the hills of Jerusalem.

Treat the people with ease...
Love each other and don't differ—
Gabriel reveals to Muḥammad.
Muskiness of eastern breeze
blows from the sands of Ḥijáz.

Drink the wine of love from the cup of
The beloved One, become ablaze with
The light of love—Bahá'u'lláh exhorts
from Bahjí. Mount Carmel emanates
quintessence of cedar and rose.

Similarity of words, meeting
of intents; a blend of perfumes,
a symphony of beauty—the eternal
law of love: *unity in religion,*
the greatest oneness under the sky.

Beijing, 15–19 November 1998

The Scents of the Beloved: Notes

See Savi. “The Scents of the Beloved” (71), in *World Order* 38.1 (2006) 44-5.

Be kind...: adapted from see “Rough translation of a Gwami dawn song,” in Brown, *Voices* 13.

Guaymi: an indigenous population of Central America.

Let your hearts...: in Fozdar, *The God of Buddha* 57.

Rishis or *ṛṣis*: legendary seers who authored the Vedic hymns.

Soma: inebriating drink used in the rites of Vedic religion.

Thou shalt love...: Leviticus (Vayikra) 19:18, in *Holy Scriptures* 143.

Ha-Shem: “(Heb., ‘the name’). Way in Judaism of referring to the name of God without pronouncing it” (*Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* 412).

the tent of meeting: Exodus (Shemot) 33:7, in *Holy Scriptures* 106.

Ārmaiti: the term *ārmaiti*, “Universal Love and Tranquility” (Mehr, *Zoroastrian Tradition* 27), one of the six beneficent divinities brought into being by Ahura Mazda to help him to protect life in the world.

the good dwelling rich in pastures: Yazna 48:11, in *Hymns* 39.

Kashmār: a locality in the Iranian province of *Khurāsān*, where a legend says that Zarathustra planted a “noble cypress,” see Bausani, *Religion in Iran* 282-4.

An all-embracing love...: “The Sutta Nipata,” in *Sacred Books* 149-50.

Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed: Udāna VIII, 3, in Minor Anthologies 98.

All within the Four Seas are brothers: Confucius, Analects 113, 12:5.

All ye are brethren...: Matthew 23:8, 9 (King James Bible).

Treat the people with ease...: (al-Bukhārī, al-Jāmi‘al-saḥīḥ 4.52: 275, in Saḥih Bukhari 698.

eastern breeze: a Muslim tradition says that the eastern breeze, called *naḥās ar-raḥmān* (the breath of the Merciful), brought the scent of the pious Uwaysu’l-Qarānī’s devotion from Yemen to Muḥammad.

It is not his to boast...: Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets 87–8.

Bahjí: a locality nearby ‘Akká in the Holy Land, where Bahá’u’lláh spent the final years of His life and His remains are now buried and the *qiblih* towards which the Bahá’ís turn for their daily obligatory prayer.

unity in religion: see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32, sec. 15.

the greatest oneness under the sky: the slogan of the first “Beijing International Symposium on Religious Culture and Ethics,” sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing, 16–19 November 1998); see *The great oneness under the sky*.

Love song of the insane lover

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 "Thou and I," 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 the lymph 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.

Bentivoglio (Bologna), 25 November 1998

Drowned*

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.

* — See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials* 32–6.

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.”

Bologna, 25 December 1998

The Night of Şidq-‘Alí*

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.

* — See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 36–8.

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."

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Jináb-i-Muníb*

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.

* — See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials*, pp. 145–7.

‡ — Master, a title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

† — A litter carried by a camel, mule, horse, or elephant for travelling purposes.

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.

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání*

Do not grieve that you lacked
both meter and rhyme.
Your eyes beheld the face
of the Best-Beloved.

Other hearts were granted
a poetical vein and denied
attaining the presence
of the Best-Beloved.

In centuries to come others
like you will look after meter
and rhyme in their praise
of the Best-Beloved.

From your world of love
and light will you help them
to give wings to their verses
for the Best-Beloved?

Bologna, 6 January 1999

* — See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 104–5.

Shaykh Salmán*

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.

Bologna, 1 February 1999

* — See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials* 13–6.

Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí*

Shaykh Şádiq
your Beloved
did not want
you to die on
an easy bed.
He wanted you
to follow Him
to Mosul. And
then, shoeless,
hatless, alone, on
that barren plain,
He came toward
you, His cup filled
with crystal water,
tempered at the
Camphor fountain.†
And you quaffed
it with joy.

Bologna, 1 February 1999

† — See “But a wine cup tempered at the camphor fountain the just shall quaff” (Koran 76:5).

* — See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 43–4.

Zaynu'l-‘Ábidín*

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.

Bologna, 1 February 1999

* — See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 83–4.

† — The prison city of ‘Akká.

Hájí Ja'far and his brothers*

You were three brothers of Tabriz
young soaring eagles of the Faith
pulsing lights of the love of God.

Hájí Hasan, by which insanity
of love were you distracted?
Why did you dance and sing
Shahnáz† melodies in Azerbaijan?
Brought to that lonely garden,
you were tortured, killed and
your body hidden underground.
But your soul soared to Heaven
well-pleased with her Lord
and well-pleasing unto Him.‡

Hájí Ja'far, by which insanity
of love were you distracted?
Attempting suicide
that you might follow an Exile
in His exile. Love healed your
wound, your yearning for exile
was finally fulfilled. Where was
your heart that night on
the roof of the caravanserai?
In the morning your lifeless
body was discovered lying
on the ground. Your exile was past.

* — See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials* 122–5.

† — A classical mode of traditional Arabic music.

‡ — See above 53n.

Hájí Taqí, silence
personified, now that your
brothers, companions
of former days, left you
alone, always sitting
lonely in your room. Now,
you fled away, you too, as
your brother, from that roof
toward his embrace and the
embrace of your Beloved.

Bologna, 3 February 1999

‘Abdu’Iláh Baghdádí*

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.

Bologna, 12 February 1999

* — See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 129–31.

Return on the wrist of your King

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.

Piacenza, 1 April 1999

* — As to the legend of the falcon and the king, see Rûmî, *Mathnawî* 2:
238–40, vv. 323–49: 4: 417–9, vv. 2628–56.

By the Rienz

I wish I was

one of those stones
unceasingly washed
by the soft-flowing waters
of the Word of God.

a rustling grass
at the caress
of the musky breezes
of the Robe of God.

a tender wildflower
that blooms at the rays
of the flashing sun
of the Love of God.

a towering larch
at long last strengthened
by the bracing winds
of the trials of God.

I wish I was

here and now as I am
and gaze, through the veil
of all things, the transparent [translucent%]
shapes of the Beauty of God.

Niederdorf, 2 July 1999

A summer school midnight dream
For 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.

Höör (Sweden), 15 July 1999, midnight

From nights to dawns

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.

Bologna, 31 May 2000

Yielding submissive

Yielding submissive
to His loving will that
watches over our most
unexpected roads, surrendering
to the undertow of life,
carried by the softly rocking
ocean of His love, free from
encumbering gulf-weeds of
passion and desire, untouched
by any whirling stream of fate,
always upheld by the uplifting
support of our trust in His
ancient Covenant, day
after day renewed.

Bologna, 3 June 2000

Where?

*Abiding in the court of rapture, the dwellers
of this mansion wield with utmost joy and
gladness the sceptres of divinity and lordship*

...

Bahá'u'lláh

Where do eyes converge?

There where Their roads are leading.

Where do rivers flow?

There where Their seas overflow.

Where do prayers arise?

There where Their words resound.

Where do hearts calm down?

There where Their Spirits rejoice.

Where do tears stop flowing?

There where Their smiles are beaming.

Where do laments vanish?

There where Their joy arises.

Where do shadows end?

There where Their lights begin.

Where do minds keep silent?

There where Their Voices speak out.

Where do people dance?
There where Their Thrones are set.

San Giovanni in Persicelo (Bologna), 15 October 2001

Beneath the Shadows of the Orange-Trees
(With Leo Niederreiter)

*When (by shewing Thyself) me, intoxicated
Thou hast made,—veiled, sit not:
When me, the sweet draught Thou hast
given,—me, poison cause not to drink.*
Hafiz

Beneath the shadow
of the Queen of Carmel,*
hand in hand with my friend,
I tread the red paths
of her flowering gardens.

A man appears from nowhere
among the shadows of the orange-
trees. His tender eyes
wipe away his toothless
mouth, the deep wrinkles
of his face, weathered
by sun and work.

He smiles and offers
two small golden fruits.
“Eat,” the man invites me.
“Eat,” my friend incites me.

* —The Shrine of the Báb, as described by Shoghi Effendi.

I eat. They are bitter,
distasteful, and sour.
“Eat,” my friend
repeats. I hesitantly
swallow. “Do you
understand?” he
lovingly asks me.

The memory remains
of those sour and bitter
fruits reluctantly
ingested.

But more than that
the memory remains
of the mystery of that meeting,
of the sweetness of that invite
and my friend’s encouragement,
of the lesson of those acid
fruits, offered and accepted
in that sacred Spot.

Rome, 17 November 2001

Desecration

*The gravesite of Quddús, a prominent figure
in early Bahá'í history, has been razed to the
ground [in Iran], despite protests from
Bahá'ís at the local, national, and
international levels.*

One Country

Barbarian hands have scattered
thy sacred dusts. No more
will we stand enthralled
in front of thy resting place.

No more will our hearts quiver
in the presence of thy remains,
laid down by loving hands
after their slaughter by the wicked.

O young hero, for both youth
and elderly an example,
may thy remembrance
assist us to break the chains
of the world and of deference
to the ghosts of our minds.

Our rescued hearts will arise
at last to meet thine eyes,
which as soon as they set
on the Beloved, hidden
in a merchant's guise, there
and then recognized His mien.

In thy glance, we will discover
glares of love and wisdom
that will prompt us to overcome
those few trials with which
God deigned to entrust us
according to our weak forces.

Perchance we too, as unworthy
of this noble task as we may be,
will nourish that *Divine Tree which
is neither of the east nor of the west*,*
that your youthful blood
was among the first to water.

We too, powerless masses,
as frail as we may be,
will be finally sheltered
under its leafy branches
and receive all good therefrom.

Bologna, 3 May 2004

* — See “a blessed tree... an olive neither of the East nor of the West”
(Koran 24:35), a well-known metaphor that in the Bahá’í Writings is a
symbol of the Cause of God.

Western Magdalen

*And, behold, a woman in the city, which
was a sinner...*

Luke

On the roads of the world
I did not distill
essence of spikenard
to fill the vial
You gave me.

And the hair wherewith
You adorned my head
I cut a thousand times
on the altars of the world.

Even my tears
dried up while
I was wandering through
the deserts of the world.

Now You invite me
to Your table and arrive
with Your feet wounded
by our knives.

With what will I wash them?
How will I wipe them?
With which essence
will I anoint them?

But You stretch out Your hand
and say: "Wash them
with the water I offer you.

Wipe them with the hems
of my vesture. Anoint them
with the essence of love
that, if but you will, you
may distill from your heart."

Kirche St. Magdalena in Moos (Niederdorf, Bozen), 6 August 2004

Five Days in India

For the Indian Bahá'í Publishing Trust in its golden jubilee

Harmony of thoughts and feelings,
smiles of an ancient, and noble kindness
under the shadows of tamarinds,
casuarines and fig-trees, cassias
and gulmohars. Warmth of just known
persons and of friendships renewed
after long years of separation. Serenity
born of just blossomed young lives, and
so soon bearers of realized promises.
Satisfaction with a jointly undertaken
work for the promotion of the culture
of learning. And above all that,
the light of a nocturnal comet,
the beauty of a flower on the water,
the Lotus-Temple—shades of turquoise
and mother of pearl, gates opening to each
invocation, petals raising to convey each prayer,
while the golden eye of the Greatest Name
looks with forbearing leniency upon each
human, beseeching at His Threshold.

New Delhi, 26 February–2 March 2006

O Gentle Voice of Youth

For Luisa Taorino

You're still beside me
O gentle voice of youth
today revived
by the peaceful farewell
to the friend of former days
who has just departed.

When you whisper
the heart reaches out
toward boundless horizons
which fade away
into nothingness.
But not a nothingness
of darkness and dismay.

Rather a warm light
which floods the heart,
no more a lonely
small and sentient
mote in an unfriendly
and unknown world.

In that light the heart
does finally partake
of a sweetness
whose name is Love.

It is the divine Mercy,
which always comes before

His wrath and justice,
which moves and sustains
all of us, lowly mortals,
fragments of light, rays
of a fading rainbow.

In these seven colours
you are all with me,
O sweet brothers, at times
bristling with thorns.
Let all of us keep
close to this Love,
let all of us keep
attached to this Light.

May it always keep
us with itself,
may it always be
with each one of us.

Colognola ai Colli (Verona), 3 August 2007

Love of Reality

I hear voices from a world
to which I know that I belong,
but which I cannot even fancy,
whereas this world entraps me.
It is here and now. I perceive it.
It enwraps me. "Is it but delusion
and deceit?" I ask. "No, the indwelling
mystery is just waiting
to be unveiled," is the answer.
"How shall I unveil it? How
shall I recognize it?" "It is here
beside you. If you want to see it,
use the lens of love, love
of the others, first of all,
humane understanding,
that will deter you from
hurting any heart, that will
lead you to lend a friendly hand
to him who badly needs it,
to say kind and heartening
words to your fellows who,
like you, labor on this steep
rise. But first of all love
of Reality, that will assist you
to perceive the thousand
transparencies of Infinite
whereby, if you see them,
you will be finally appeased!"

Trevi (Perugia), 4 August 2015

Response

To U.Z., a staunch atheist who wants to convince me too with the arguments of reason

My routes follow the roads
of a common existence. My work,
yesterday, today my family,
my neighbor, and my friends.
These are the places where I look
for the few hints that are offered
to me of a craved Truth.
It's not an abstract or mental fact.
It is the practice of a daily life:
interacting with my travel companions
to create harmony and peace.
My itinerary is not always plain.
Sometimes it is hard and steep.
But on top I am often rewarded
by acceding to the heart
of a neighbor, which ends up
gratifying me just as it is.
What's the use of speculating?
Certitude comes from a life
spent together with all people
in all the emotions it implies.
Only thus this now affirmed,
now denied, exalted Name
won't be an annoying presence,
or a false idol of the mind,
but light, warmth, a magnetic force,
perceived regardless of rational proofs.
His power will be a sufficient

demonstration. Surrendering
to His attraction towards a calm peace
will be an appropriate confirmation.
And should I discover at the end,
as you maintain, that I followed
but a dream, in any case
I will have won my bet,
in the sweet fruits of a life
spent in satisfaction and goodwill.

Bologna, 20 December 2015

An endless ocean His Word
For Iskander

*Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My
words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and
discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid
in its depths.*

Bahá'u'lláh

An endless ocean
His Word. And we
tiny fishes swimming
on the surface
of a blue, almost
unexplored, water.
Let's go down,
here is the ocean floor:
pearls, shells,
variegated corals,
here and there a pointed
cliff tears apart
the heedless flesh.
But the shining beauty
of its far-flung sea
removes that pain,
which soon vanishes
into a fruitful reminiscence.
Tomorrow, a forgotten
wound. And the beauty?
That will forever remain
unchanged within

the breast. And then
what else? Other clefts?
Other reefs? Other wounds?
Yes, but other beauties
will once more elate
the heart, more charming
because hard-won.
And this way, until the end.
And then? . . . Who knows. . .

Bologna, 18 march 2016

The heart doesn't grow old
For a friend whom life has tested

Difficult years of grief,
long days of patience,
heavy hours of anguish.
But the heart doesn't grow old.

Always young is the heart,
in its longing to assume
its most perfect form,
its predestined goal.

It is thus that the essence of so
many accomplished deeds,
of so many conceived and soon
realized intentions is distilled.

One day the butterfly shall take flight.
Its wings, only today hampered,
will be finally spread out
to the warmth of a new springtime.

Bologna, 27 March 2016

Do I know you, O my soul?
For my young atheist friend

Do I know you, O my soul?
Is it you, that light
which lovingly shines
when the heart communes
with its kindly Lord, when
it meditates upon His Word?

Is it you, that silky glow
which tinges the darkest
nights with tender love,
which fills up the empty vertigo
of self, that obscure abyss
of misery and shame?

Anguish of remoteness,
agonies of blame,
refusals of one's vanity,
useless feelings of guilt,
fears of a just imagined
hell.

And yet you are
leniency, absolution,
confident acceptance.
Small creatures of dust,
a paradise of certitude
and light is our destiny.

And there, all walls
will finally collapse:
heart with heart,
peace upon peace,
fragrant silences,
collective fulfillments.

But even here, fleeting intimations,
flashes of soon vanished
lights, the peaceful quietness
of a crescent in the sky,
mysterious lads passing by
down in the street at night.

Bologna, 14 April 2016

Choral and counterpoint

For a young friend who escapes feelings

*Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless
power the mysteries latent in the universe.*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

O Thou, the Infinite, the Absolute, the Eternal,
secretly enshrined in our hearts! While chasing
Thee I was lost in a thousand misleading
meanders, and yet I should. . .

divest myself of this skin,
thickened by unending frictions
with disquieting sensations,
and go back to *simplicity*. . .

forget whatever form—
any deceiving illusion
which is not essential—
and find once more the *substance*. . .

throw away any heavy ballast,
which may bring down the heart
binding it to idle arguments,
and advance towards *freedom*. . .

arise, in easeful peace,
towards the alabaster of the sky
enlightened by the sun,
in undisturbed *serenity*.

I should perforce hunt for *Love*:
an infinite walk towards the Absolute,
which is simplicity and substance,
freedom and serenity of the heart. . .

Bologna, 28 November 2016

Epilogue

*. . . let the sweetness of His presence
dissolve the bitterness of your
remoteness from His court.*

Bahá'u'lláh

Whose son am I?

*If the value of time, the heart establish not;
and a work do not,
Great the shame that, from this produce of
times, we take.*

Hafiz

Not yet a son am I
of the moment who
here and now finds
contentment and joy.

Of the half-light
I am the child. My still
blurred eyes thus far
have always been looking
towards the past:

Hellenic and Hellenistic
perfections; Roman accomplishments;
Medieval metaphysical visions;
humanistic Renaissance harmonies;
Enlightened intellectual triumphs;

as well as, Impressionist evanescence,
Futuristic boldness, mixed up with
patriarchal ideals, Romantic
yearnings, rational experiments.

Like morning fogs
dispersed by the early rays
of the rising sun,
their cherished forms
fade away from my sight
and I, in anguish, still
nostalgic for their joys.

I take my eyes off them
and try to probe the still
mysterious chambers
of the future that lies ahead.

Brought together in light
of oneness and justice
the yearning souls?

Educated the minds
by enlightened teachers?

Balanced faith and reason
in every thirsty heart,
craving for peace and love?

Religion and science
hand in hand advancing towards
more and more fruitful goals?

The shadows of prejudice
dispelled by the brilliant
light of a restored wisdom?

Men and women equal
actors on the stages of life?

Morality and politics jointly
steering the courses of human life?

Human brotherhood strengthened
by noble shared ideals
easily expounded in a common
universal auxiliary language?

And I, here, in agony, from their delay—
perhaps real just because of my haste—
continuously probing remote horizons
which seem moving
further and further away.

But no! I have already
glimpsed new paths of glory,
and marvelous instruments
whereby their opening
may be quickly hastened:

placing all our trust
in the living Impulse
that perpetually guides
us, human beings,
on the road to our destiny:
the oneness of humankind;
firmly resolving to draw
from the infinite supplies
of virtues whereby the soul
has been endowed,
and to oppose that subtle
whisper which, unopposed,
always draws us on the way
of selfishness, conflict, and war.

I won't be held back
by my misplaced
anxieties and anguishes.
I will join the army of light.*

I too will ride
the wave of history.
Inspired by their example
I will try and make
my humble mark.

I will try to exert
my sincere effort.
May He bless it
with His indispensable
Divine confirmations.

Bologna, 28 July 2017

* – Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel* 26

Ode to Life

To them whom I have, though differently, loved

*Saki! 'tis the morn; full of wine, a goblet make:
The sky's revolution delayeth not; haste make.
Hafiz*

Now that I see you through the eyes of memory,
loud and clear resounds your answer
to the ancient question that I posed you
in a distant day of adolescent years.

Spacious, golden, and bright
have been your halls.
But there where I fancied
that light was not.

It was not in any attained goal,
as many as they were;
or in received expressions of respect;
or in any possession I obtained.

Did I meet it in my service?
Yes, but only in selflessness.
In my family? Yes, but only
in the love I gave them.

In my work? Yes, but only
and each time when I offered
my earnest commitment
to the relevant person.

In friendship? Yes, indeed,
but only when—all veils
having been torn asunder—
naked the souls finally met.

In these settings alone, that
Ancient Beauty I glimpsed
which always ravishes
and enthralls my heart.

Many other unearned bounties
I have been given for free:
pure and unexpected moments
of pensive enjoyment.

Repeated surges of love shared
in the intimacy of a growing bliss
within the *fortress of salvation and wellbeing**
you benignly built for me to abide in.

Meanings of discourses and relations
between concepts and ideas in revered
Scriptures and learned essays, discovered
by means of recurring thoughtful reflections.

Absorbed silences in the Twin
Holy Shrines; adoring processions
in the adjoining Gardens; shared prayers
in sacred Folds† and nonagon Temples.

* — “the law of marriage,” Bahá’u’lláh, in *Bahá’í Prayers* 104.

† — *Ḥazíratu’l-Quds*, the official title designating the headquarters of Bahá’í administrative activity in a particular country or region.

Adorned cathedral profiles;
harmonious contours of sculptures;
colored lights and shades in ancient paintings;
sounds and words listened to in rapture.

Tender pinky dawns; solemn
fiery sunsets; glimmering Pleiades
in glowing perigean full moons;
silent marine or alpine expanses.

Perceptions of distant voices
dictating words whereby my remembrance
of those moments may be bequeathed
to nameless and far-off readers. . .

Yes, I found that golden light
in all those hours that you gave me
for free, and that I—why and how
I know not—have fully enjoyed,

raising each time this earnest prayer:
“Beautiful moment, do not pass away.”
And now you also disclose their deepest
meaning to my astonished eyes.

Their inherent beauty
was in the unison between
my heart and the ever-changing
ceaseless pulsations of life,

each moment an opportunity
for the heart to abide by a Primal
Will, which unceasingly steers it
towards Unity and Love.

Bologna, 31 December 2017

Postface

In the Bahá'í world, the year 1992 was proclaimed a “holy year” to commemorate the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. The present year 2021 marks the centenary of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as well as the end of the first century of the Formative Age, an age of practical work, of construction.

This collection of poems is published as a gift to the Italian Bahá'í community on the occasion of this turning point, a personal booklet to take with oneself, a pocket anthology, a practical handbook. It presents its readers with a personal itinerary, common to many men and women who, after a more or less long search, have joined the Bahá'í Faith, then have followed a personal path of meditation and action, and finally in their advanced age have reaped their own fruit of serenity. As Shoghi Effendi said: “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” (in “Living the Life” 24, no. 1334).

Its author, Julio Savi, an elderly member of the Italian Bahá'í community, known as a speaker, essayist, and poet, is scarcely present in these verses. He fades away behind his poetic vein. He disappears to best commemorate the date of this year 2021, wholly dedicated to the tender figure of the Master and now open towards a new epoch.

On the eve of this important anniversary, this anthology, a distillate of poetic art, is presented to its readers as if it were offered to the sacred Threshold:

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. (50)¹

Entitled “The New Garden,” it consists of 80 poems selected from many others. Its subtitle, “Bahá’í Poems,” says that they were written by a Bahá’í on Bahá’í subjects (see *Music*, no. 24). The choice was not insignificant. In the course of 2021, the people of Bahá will go through “a prelude to a nine-year effort.”² For the believers engaged in this enterprise during these years, *the light of reunion* and *the fire of separation* that these poems voice can be, a source of beauty, faith, and energy. Their laborious adventure of presenting this new garden on which the sun of Baha’u’lláh already shines on humankind, will be brightened by this divine Sun: “O Divine Sun! Smile / shine on the world” (14).

In each poem in this collection one may find, concentrated or developed, a trace of powerful feelings that many Bahá’ís have felt during their spiritual adventure, even as for example this certainty:

In Thee
 I see my self

With Thee
 existence continues

I join my hands
 with Thine

¹ The number in bracket is that of the page in this anthology.

² The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2021, to the Bahá’ís of the World, para.1.

For Thee
I accept my life. (15)

A poetic expression of the inmost feelings of the soul is the gift that this anthology offers to its readers, who will experience similar moods while exerting their efforts during this special year, as well as during the nine years that will follow. While so doing, it touches its addressees with its art and emphasizes the beauty of an active commitment and service emerging therefrom as one of the highest mystical and religious expressions. Poetic contemplation gives one wings and makes one active, gives “wings to their verses / for the Well-Beloved” (82). Showing and poetically kindling the light of the Faith in the hearts of those who love it, is therefore its goal.

The prologue speaks of the dissatisfaction and expectation of them whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called “waiting souls” (Blomfield 259):

If only I could meet you.
I look for you, but I know
not where you are.
I love you, but I know
not who you are. (5)

Then, “In a Happy Wonderful End” (55–8) recounts an encounter with the Bahá’í Faith: a precious friend “ushers me now / into a new and different / world,” “enlightens / skies in a fervour / of facts and ideas. / It is . . . a prospect, a vision / of future, transparency / of eternity, which gives / meaning to things.” That precious friend “showed me at last / the ultimate luminous Point / toward which all is directed / in a happy and marvellous end.”

Other poems suggest how to respond to the summon of the Faith: “engrave on the hearts . . . the sacred / Words” (69), “Fly away, o soul-bird / from the barren moors / of space and time . . . and return / on the wrist of your beloved King” (89); *how to be submissive and accept tests and difficulties*:

I kiss Thy hand
 O kind Father
 even when
 its grasp
 is too firm
 and my heart
 oozes its blood
 drop by drop. (21)

“nothing at last / [am I] in Thy hands” (18); *how to be trustful*:

When I see Thy smile
 O kind Father
 my heart cheers
 and I feel strong
 and can face
 arrayed hosts
 of worries and words. (22)

“. . . whatever I shall do / it will be / for Thee alone” (38); *how to become a better person and make progress*: “Turned toward the Carmel / my heart / chants Thy words” (37), “Pure water flows / with heavenly strains / a refreshing balm / on painful wounds / of nonsensical battles” (13); *how to believe in brotherhood*: “when each heart will be / to each heart a brother” (35); *how to persevere*: “Search is a journey . . . And no stop exists along that journey / which is moved by love, (43), “His / ancient Covenant, day / after day renewed” (93), “For Thee / I accept my life” (15); *how to overcome the tests of life*: “the chains / of Thy love” (20), “to overcome / those few trials with which / God deigned to entrust us / according to our weak forces” (98).

These poems help us *to become aware of our unworthiness without letting ourselves be hindered*: “How do I dare to utter / Thy Word or set / Thine effulgence before / the night flooding within”

(23); *to become aware of our “flaws / which in ourselves we love the least »* (45); *of His gifts*: “but I always forget / Thy infinite bounties” (25); *of the power of love*: “Like a warm wind / Thou enfolded / . . . me” (12), “All now melts” (13), “All are Thy children” (14), “sweetness seeps through the heart” (28), “The power of love . . . / resembles / the strength of springtime” (44); *of the power of the Faith*: “only the Faith endures . . . in this ephemeral world” (26) and “Truth / shines in full light” (27); *of the example of pioneers*: “go, bring the light / which shines in your heart / to each and all waiting souls, / of their own longing still unaware” (64), “interacting with my travel companions / to create harmony and peace” (105). They assist us *to discover the words suitable to speak of the blessings and gifts of fasting*: “Every day / the soul is reborn / in Thy luminous dawn . . . New horizons / unfold then / the gaze strays out / toward the eternal . . . where the sorry self / is lost—a tiny dot / amidst starry worlds” (40).

From the poem “Martha and Mary” (59–62) the characteristics of “service” equated with prayer emerge very clear: “attending / to her many small things / done not just for herself, / but for those whom she loved . . . / she went on with her work / so that Mary’s cherished / desire could be satisfied.”

The Epilogue describes some of the fruits that can be reaped, inviting us to look at the heroes and take them as a model and an encouragement: “Perchance we too, as unworthy / of this noble task as we may be, / will nourish that *Divine Tree which / is neither of the east nor of the west*, / that your youthful blood / was among the first to water” (98) and “Inspired by their example / I will try and make / my humble mark” (120).

The desire pervading this anthology to invite, through art, its readers to leave their “humble mark” on this Earth, where Bahá’u’lláh was born and passed away, and to summon them, through poetic contemplation, to be active, makes it a very precious and original gift. Far from being a life manual, a conduct guideline, or a catechism, it is a collection of poems written and inspired by

the life of every believer who struggles with sincerity to perfect herself and to offer the essence of the good fruits she has reaped to her neighbors. It is an experience of darkness and light and a gradual transition from night to 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. (92).

If a reader will consider these eighty poems as a whole, she will find a path of life poetically described, whereas if she will dwell on some of them in particular, she will uncover a stage in that path. Either way, she will discover a meaning in her own life. If finally, she will read the first and the last poems one after the other, she will make a long flight from the pains of adolescence to the serenity of old age, covering sixty years of a journey from the eager expectation of “Your broad halls” (3–4), dated 1 April 1956, to an “Ode to life” (121–3), dated 31 December 2017.

Leïla Mesbah Sabéran
Chailles, 20 August 2021

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UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES
"ALESSANDRO BAUSANI" ON THE OCCASION
OF THE CENTENARY OF THE PASSING OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ
AND THE COMPLETION OF THE FIRST CENTURY
OF THE FORMATIVE AGE OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

