

ANCILLARIES OF OTHER ANTHOLOGIES

The ancillaries of other anthologies published by the Author have been transcribed here with some orthographical changes and adaptations of the layout of the bibliographical references. The references here refer to the poems published in *Remoteness (1955-2023)*: title, either in whole or abbreviated when it is very long, collection number, and page number. The references have preferably been moved to the text for uniformity of style.

LONTANANZA (2001, 2014)

FOREWORD

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

Besides the profound message and the sentiment of the Author himself, refinement and weight contribute to the quality of this work.

Simplicity and conciseness

Stripped of embellishments, free from artifices, it is undoubtedly not decorative poetry, a text to be published in the 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 result from a work or 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 to paraphrase. Its translation is a challenge: right words in the right place, which one dares barely

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

to brush or tries to savour at length, a definitive 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 may also be recognized in the choice of the titles of both the single poems and the chapters. Reading the list of titles in the table of contents 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” (Poesy 2.22), and the skill of the measured expression contributes to the elegance of this work and produces a subtle pleasure. While the poet unveils himself and 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. Except for a few baroque and flowery scenes—proof of a remarkable descriptive attitude—the dominant feature of this collection of poems is restraint. Recourse to derision or sneer does not tempt the Author; even in humour, he is never ironic. His truth and sincerity are straightforward but never brutal; his language is dignified and courteous toward

himself, his fellow beings, and God upon Whom he calls. Direct 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 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 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—the purity and the intensity that 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 and for all unveils to us: seeing what we had but dimly perceived, what we had avoided dwelling upon, for lack of perspective, or courage, or 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, and the correct angle for the proper 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 capacity for feeling and showing, the poet unveils our 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 poetic work is not like 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 poetic, as of any other artistic work, be it painting, sculpture, music, cinema, etc., that its future will 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 because 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

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

³ Baudelaire, *Fleurs*, ‘Bénédiction’ (Benediction), v.74.

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 poetic vein creates meanings and lets us see things differently.

Leïla Mesbah Sabéran
Chailles, 20 October 2001

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Remoteness is the title of the collection of the ten unpublished books of poems that I have written since 1955. This volume presents 187 of these poems, followed by some explicatory Notes about quotations, people, and places, as well as some 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 initially 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 Riḍván 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 a jot to this “blazon someday,” I ought to 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 and within society.

Bologna, 12 November 2001

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LONTANANZA (2001-2016)
FOREWORD

It doesn't matter to what time the first story of himself left by a man in graffiti on the rocks dates back or whether the naked and primordial beauty of cave painting can be considered poetry. The essence of poetic expression is inherent in the soul of man, and the force that transforms communication into poetry is the indefinable stirring of the soul. The immaterial substance of this artistic expression does not occupy a specific place in physical reality, yet it is perceptible in various forms. Emotions, sensory perceptions, philosophical reflections, mystical illuminations, religious insights, rational elaborations, and, above all, the whispers of angels and demons make the lyrical sense of every lived experience transform the supersensible into the sensible and take shape in words and arts. Perhaps this is why we call every creative and artistic construct "poetic," when we want to define what moves our deepest emotions and, at the same time, is not easily definable. The poetic word is the physical form of an author's intimate perceptions. It is, inevitably, imbued with what invades and orients his spiritual, emotional, and rational reality; therefore, it is the primary source of his inspiration.

The Muse who suggests sounds and syllables to the soul of the Poet of *Remoteness* descends mostly from the spheres of mystical illumination and religious insight but almost immediately reaches the world and its affairs and events. The first ode of the collection, *The Scents of the Beloved* (9.58), defines the central pivot of Julio Savi's writing: the subtle interplay of parts and the indispensable interaction between a capital *Thou / You* and a lowercase *I*, an interaction that determines the co-presence of the two elements and their relationship. The mystical figures such as the Friend or the Beloved are the interlocutors of an intimate dialogue between the Author and the transcendent, shared through metaphors and images, with the reader who participates in the spiritual conversation in progress.

Shadows reach out, obscure,
 among the enlightened stretches of life.
 Is it Thou that playest with our hearts?
 Or are they gloomy cones that our eyes
 project there where they cannot see?

Is it the self that turns into a veil
 of mist, 'cause its wings
 have not yet grown enough
 as to raise it up to light? (Cones of Shadow 11.60)

Nostalgia for the eternal

The thin thread that subtly runs through and marks the songs of *Remoteness* is an intrinsic and perceptible sense of nostalgia. At first glance, it might seem a resonance of mature age and the cumbersome weight of the passing years:

I remember the light
 of friendship
 the scent
 of your words . . . (I Remember 11.4).

The memory of places and times, of loved ones, of experiences of joy and sorrow reveals the melancholic sense of the fleeting time that leaves the images blurred. However, only when we read his entire work does a reflection slowly loom, leading us to the focal point of Savi's poetics: the constant and participatory presence of spiritual reality in earthly life and experiences. The nostalgia hidden in the words recalls the ancestral desire for union with the source of life and the return to Paradise Lost, to the immaterial essence of existence. The title, *Remoteness*, is a clear allusion to separation from this primordial reality. Placed within a specific theological definition or in the context of an ancient human perception, this yearning for union with an all-encompassing Reality and a return to the Paradise of the Spirit is what tinges with nostalgia metaphors that speak of distant times, places, and bonds. As the Persian poet Rûmî (1207-1273) writes in the incipit of his mystical poem *Mathnavi*:

Listen to this reed how it complains:
 it is telling a tale of separations.
 Saying, "Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed,
 man and woman have moaned in (unison with) my lament.
 I want a bosom torn by severance,
 that I may unfold (to such a one) the pain of love-desire.
 Every one who is left far from his source
 wishes back the time when he was united with it".⁴

Despite his predisposition toward mysticism as an experience, specifically toward contemplative poetry, our Author is inclined to tell the world and history and witness his own time. Several of the poems in this collection bear titles, dates, and captions that indicate the emotional attention to the significant events of history, the desire to be part of them, and the bonds of affection accompanying him on his earthly journey. In this case, Julio Savi's poetry moves away from mystical contemplations. It becomes a living testimony and denunciation of the problematic conditions of the world around him. It ends sometimes with the hope of a better future, sometimes with disenchantment and disappointment.

Under
 your dusts and steels and in the anguish
 of such a painful havoc our dream
 slumbers, a dream which was
 born from hearts which preferred
 darkness rather than light. (Twin Towers 11.40)

A Parallel Reality

The mysterious and unfathomable world of dreams leads our Poet to tell the story of a parallel reality, almost a mirror image of unknown spiritual worlds that sometimes seem clear to us in the state of sleep:

At long last the Friend
 appeared in my dream,

⁴ Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson.

the river of His word
 still flowing from
 His honeyed tongue. (Reverie. II 11.62)

The alternation and correlation between the dream world and the waking state, between the “we” and the “He,” between sensory perceptions and metaphysical realities, and, finally, between the narrating “I” and the community that surrounds it, offer the reader a text that induces reflection. The Author describes the power of the poetic word as “fire, electricity, uninterrupted light” (Sleepless Night 12.20), an experience capable of stirring and moving, a communication capable of conveying arcane motions of the soul or fixing heroic moments of a fleeting human existence and then consigning its glares to History.

Where are you, unknown rebel,
 who tried to stop the tank?
 You did not oppose it but aimed
 at the heart that moved it.

Without its acquiescence
 or active participation
 any weapon remains unloaded.

Soon disappeared your youthful form,
 your brave dream remains alive
 in any heart that yearns with yours
 after freedom and justice. (Tienanmen 11.42)

Evocation of landscapes

Descriptions of nature and landscapes and transpositions of the poet’s self into the world of nature and its symbolic forms are among the peculiarities of *Remoteness*’ images. Our Author observes and describes places by evoking experiences he has lived or by making his own experiences of others. A particular alchemy unites him with past and present places and scenarios. Each component of the landscape,

each living existence subject to the changing of time and the passing of the seasons, becomes a reason for personifying the elements of nature and evoking varied landscapes of the human soul.

Cloisters resounding with
rustlings, twitterings,
shufflings, whisperings in
alternating shadows and lights.

Walls and pavements clad with
sculptures, effigies and epitaphs
recalling human transits, as long as
they will last; then, nothing more.

Like the portrait of that babe,
which four hands will look
after but for a short time;
then will be strewn with dust.

Human feelings crushed
by the hammer-mill of time. (The Charterhouse 12.8)

The Eternal Dilemma of the End

The enigma of death, the pain of the loss of loved ones, and the challenge of reason that claims to probe the eternal dilemma of the end and what happens *next* are themes that have always haunted the minds of men. Julio Savi looks at the close of earthly life as a passage toward an ethereal and imperceptible existence:

Shall I know, at last,
that such intimate union,
always sought for and now
finally achieved, will have
no end in those eternal
worlds wherefrom our souls

were born and whereto all
will be one day called back? (That Day. II 11.64)

The image of what will come after death becomes more transparent and more explicit when he reflects on the passing of loved ones. Memories, emotions, and thoughts accompanying moments of *separation* give life to songs dedicated to those who shared with the Poet an intimate portion of love and friendship during their earthly lives. Affective, spiritual, and material experiences lived with people no longer here on earth, evoked in private conversations, make these poems an occasion for reflections on death. Each dialogue leads us to the conviction that absences continue to remain *presences* due to an indissoluble bond:

Your tender life,
so early struck down,
still blossoms today
down here, in the deer
quaffing the waters
of the fount, in the carefree
kids flirting under the arbor
and in the children playing
among the trees of the promenade . . . (Louis-Ariel 12.60)

Words are the snapshot of a lasting image that exorcises *absence*, erodes distance, fills emptiness, masks pain, and becomes a gift of tenderness and lightness. Sweet farewell songs accompany the image of the dead friend until they dissolve, leaving a soothing but still consuming acceptance. These farewells are the last opportunity to say what had long remained unsaid, that last word that poetry, the language of the soul, can now utter. The Poet thus conveys the promise of a new union in a different dimension of existence.

I was silent about
your imminent departure. Too great,
was your desire for healing, for going back home,
to your family and the Alps, to your committed

readings and deep reflections, to your many
 remembrances of far off lands, to which
 you have offered a small part of your heart.
 There was no way of mentioning that.
 Did I increase the labors of your passing?
 But sure, when the wall of shadows which here
 divides us from light will fall down,
 you will know that I lied only out of my
 fraternal love.

...

In a morning
 when only God knows, I will join you. And the joy
 of that encounter will finally wipe out the pain
 of that hot noon when a cruel steamer roughly
 pulled you away from my infant heart,
 which at this remembrance still bleeds. (Departures. I 12.72)

Speaking in the first person to those who have left this world, Julio Savi probes the enigma of the *end*, scrutinizes the mystery of *abandonment*, the gist of *departure*, and, at the same time, the meaning of this brief earthly passing.

His Language

The poems in *Remoteness* follow a chronological order and are divided into three chapters [*sic*]: “Routes and Landscapes,” “Transits,” and “Once More Tomorrow.” The language is direct, and the Poet speaks in the first person, communicating soberly, unrestrained from rhetorical ornaments. Often familiar and close to our feelings, the images are still full of theological, mystical, and philosophical considerations and allusions. The epigraphs and dedications inserted at the beginning of some lyrics denote the desire to guide the reader to a whole emotional perception and a total intellectual understanding of the poetic word. He adopts a formal structure that does not pursue a precise lexical construction, subject to metrical requirements. He lets the words follow the thread of the narrative thanks to their intrinsic ability to adapt. Building a solid

communication bridge with the reader is the primary stylistic objective of our Poet. This precise linguistic choice seems to urge him to borrow prosaic and conversational aspects of writing in favor of communicability without renouncing the occasional recourse to refined and learned words. He thus enters our lives on tiptoe, fully respectful of our feelings, and manages to convey to us with lightness and beauty high aspirations, always keeping away from any rhetoric. The stream of words flows without the constraint of a defined syllabic rhythm, while the internal musicality of the language adapts to the semantic needs of each lyric. The metaphors and similes employed in the description of nature, landscape, and places give life to short stories, capable of transmitting to the reader sensory perceptions and motions of the soul felt as an intimate experience.

Vapors of golden
lights, bluish
transparencies, remote
reflections. The moon
winked, overhanging
the ramparts.

And the way out
was not the draw-
bridge, pointed
towards the starry sky,
but the small, hidden,
slantwise side-door,
leading, beyond
the thick darkness,
to the ocean. (The Small Side-Door 11.54)

Conclusion

Julio Savi's poetics is a combination of *Ideal* and *inspiring Muse*, divided by a thin line of demarcation with blurred boundaries, an interweaving between the *Sacred* and the *Profane* that interacts in the

Poet's soul, filling his writing with dreamlike perceptions, restless sensations, poignant memories, unanswered questions, unsolved mysteries, intensely lived tenderness . . . The passionate search for *inner knowledge* and the suggestions of the Muse let the poems of *Remoteness* escape the logic of theology and allow the Author's personal experiences, now mystical and spiritual, now sensory and earthly, to lead the reader to *noble reflections*. Man, a precious receptacle of spiritual realities, with his affective sphere, his cognitive abilities, and his constant search for the Infinite, remains the main protagonist of Julio Savi's poetic universe.

Faezeh Mardani
Teheran, May 2016

CHIAROSCURO

JULIO SAVI'S UNUSUAL SEARCH

An unremitting, passionate, troubled need, constantly felt as an inner challenge, a continuous personal grappling with the other than oneself and the self: we could say that for Julio Savi, poetry is what was once called spiritual exercise.

This book is a choice made from the vast amount of material collected throughout a lifetime—a selection based on quality, indifferent to historicity, occasions, possible routes, and contexts.

The Author accepted the selection and then found the “themes” (eleven), which trace the movements, concatenations, and links flowing one into the other, initiating a direction, opening or broadening a perspective. These are not divisive but strongly subjunctive themes.

This drive to establish correlations within the texts and, as we shall see, externally to them is an essential prerogative of Savi. In his long inner research, he fundamentally works on the Western literary model, constantly invoked and maintained as a primary platform of solid security. Yet, in constructing his figures, the influence of the Eastern model is forceful, which derives from the Persian poetry he has approached through the Bahá'í religion. He often uses unusual images and accompanies them with brief explanatory notes at the bottom of the page, strictly essential, just enough to provide the minimum of information that allows the reader to elaborate on his own the very particular structure of the original system.

The poetic text exists as an activity of the Author who entrusts to writing the verification and control of his intellectual and pathemic life, and it also exists in the personal reconstruction that the reader must make to agglomerate traces of an almost unknown culture in the figurations of not immediate comprehension that Savi introduces into the usual Italian fabric.

Let's take the most sensational of these figures: the indispensable interaction between a capital case *Thou* and a lowercase *I*, where *Friend* or *Beloved* are appellations of the *Thou* reserved for the transcendent; the total overlap between the desire for love and divine love (the one we find in the West only in some great mystics); the *Thou* has a capital letter for devotion, but it rests on entirely solidly human vibrations; the *Thou* of prayer can convey the impression of coinciding with the "you" of earthly love. In the preface to his famous *Mathnawîy-e Ma'navî*, the Persian poet Rumi (1207-1273) defines the particular relationship between the human and the divine as follows: "I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold (to such a one) the pain of love-desire" and in recalling that the origin of man lies in the divine, he explains well the thread stretched between man's passion and his nostalgia for the happiness of the origin: "Everyone who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he was united with it."

Savi elaborates on his Italian version of the celebrated theory:

from the human
 Temple of the Beloved One,
 to the human hearts
 of His beloved ones. (Shaykh Salmán 10.26)

He gives us an excellent example of its possible realization in the poem on page 40 [see Savi, *Chiaroscuro*], which bears the name of the young *Jenâb-e Monîb* in its title (*Jinâb-i-Munîb* 10.8):

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 . . .

Even the torment of premature death is consumed and dissolved in the impetuous, irrepressible exaltation of the young man's love for the divine and friendship toward man. That torment—the text says—“adds beauty to the radiant form,” as it actually happens: these movements of thought are not easy for us Westerners to approach.

As to Savi's ability to skillfully mix materials of the most diverse origins, let us see *I am of the Children of the Half Light* (7.38). If the image of the “generation of the half-light” (as it straddles the collapse of the imperialist order and the advance of modernity) is attributed to H.G. Wells, an Englishman, in reality, the whole sum of the figurations of the first part of the poem (sunrises and sunsets) leads upright to the funny complacent formula that is self-diagnosis and conclusive finding which reads: “the uncertain Orient / of my heart” (with the multiple meanings we can give to the term “Orient”). The encounter between the two sensibilities provokes curious disturbances in the lyrical self. In *The Stone* (11.74), the subject is an object, a thing we can touch, that fits in a hand, that we can throw, but if it is assigned anthropomorphic attributes (“enjoys the light . . . fancies . . .”) we can identify it with the subject of the poet, who sees himself as a helpless object, a common thing, condemned to total immobility, except . . . rekindle immediately in the encounter with another eventuality.

We find a similar identification of the lyrical self with a thing in *As an Oversharpened Blade* (8.18), where first he speaks of a “[taut] string / of an armed bow / in the hands of an archer” and, secondly, of the “blade” mentioned in the title “growing thinner and thinner / without having ever cut.” The two things are intensely involved with the perspective of doing that would bring them out of the unbearable immobility of being objects and tools. This state of stillness is reported as a disorder of poetic making (“what shall I say / that may be true”). But if we introduce the theme of truth into the alternative immobility / movement, in that case, the troubles are serious: doubting the truth of writing is the lesser of evils, but doubting the truth of one's heart, “if I myself don't know / what in my heart is true,” opens up questions that have no answer.

This time, his poetic quest led him to see a danger.

For Savi, poetry is like a lantern that he holds high in front of him, an aid to see and understand the beloved “half-lights” or to sense what is hidden behind the dim lights of the ancient cities (I Envision in Heaven [11.20]), “sunset lights, / playing among / the columns,” beneficial places for a serene life or villages still immersed in the harshness of ancient struggles (The Small Side-door 11.54),

Precipitous walls,
massive pillars,
twisted stairways,
pinnacles, stained-
glass windows,
slender colonnades,

where the detail of the small

slantwise side-door,
leading, beyond
the thick darkness,
to the ocean

suddenly reveals all the quality of life lived there in the past and now relived in the powerful charm exerted on the Poet.

Milli Graffi

THE SHADE OF REMEMBRANCE

ACADEMY'S NOTE

By aramis, pines, and lauro

But the reason of the great eagerness to see where the plain of truth is, lies in the fact that the fitting pasturage for the best part of the soul is in the meadow there, and the wing on which the soul is raised up is nourished by this.

Plato

It was 1954. Five teenagers from the Italian community of Asmara, Armando Buffoli (Armes), Enzo Mattaliano, Julio Savi (Aramis), Lauro Lambertucci, and Pino Forte (Pines)—Julio, Lauro, and Pino high school students at the beginning of their studies of the history of philosophy—are fascinated by the Platonic Academy of Athens: a group of lovers of knowledge who come together to discuss scholarly issues under the guidance of their teacher. On Pino's initiative, they decided to found an academy of their own. Shortly after, a sixth youth joins them, Enrico Levi (Chicco), and thus Pino gets the idea of calling their Academy “hexandria,” in his etymological intentions “the six men”. They are especially fascinated by three issues of the ancient Academy: knowledge / beauty / friendship. This could be their motto. They choose literature in general and poetry in particular as the central theme of their dialogues. Some of them write verses. What better situation than to recite them in front of a peer and familiar audience and listen to their judgment with great trepidation? Aramis is passionate, Armes is a modern realist, Chicco is a dreamer, Enzo is fiery, Lauro is sentimental, Pines is romantic . . .

The six friends meet about once a week at Pino's house on 37 Campania Street. If any of them has a composition ready to be submitted, the meeting can be anticipated, but otherwise, it can also be postponed. Sometimes, they get together even if no one has anything new to present. In this case, they read again a poem or some prose that had already

been read and discuss it again. No statutes, no rules. Everything takes place unofficially and informally. Neither minutes nor acts of meetings are recorded. It is their private training ground for their intellects, where they meet in free spontaneity and full mutual trust.

At the end of the Fifties, the Italian population of Asmara was a rapidly declining community. The youth, one after the other, leave for Italy. The first, in 1960, is this poet. Life presses with the pressing demands of early youth. The six get separated. Years pass, but the memory of those hours so dense with thoughts and emotions survives intact.

In late autumn 2013, Lauro managed to reconnect with Pino and Julio. The idyll is renewed, initially only through written messages, then on 19 June 2014, the three men meet again in Bologna. The Academy is reborn as quietly as it was born sixty years earlier. They resume their conversations on topics of common interest and their exchanges of poems and experiences by email this time.

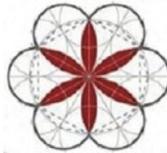
Today, now octogenarian, they intend to publish three short anthologies of their poems⁵ in celebration of their Academy, which the three of them have finally named “Asmarino Hexandric Academy.” They also have chosen a logo inspired by the number six, that is, the hexapetalous flower, the flower of life . . . (see 15.23)

None of the three aspire to any recognition. They are satisfied with talking to each other, as they used to do in their youth. They are now widening their circle to include their families and closest friends. Will they appreciate their verse? Being afraid that they will not, they apologize to their “four readers” borrowing from Puck, the mischievous sprite of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the witty words whereby for centuries he has taken leave of much wider audiences:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,

⁵ Pino Forte, *Briciole di nuvole: Poesie*; Lauro Lambertucci, *Un menestrello afro-italico: Poesie e scritti vari*; Julio Savi, *Il colore del ricordo: Poesie d’Africa*.

No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon, we will mend:
...
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.⁶



The hexapetalous flower, or the flower of life,
the Asmarino Hexandric Academy's logo.

⁶ <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/midsummer/full.html> (retrieved on 31 December 2020).

INTRODUCTION

By Pino Forte

Whoever reads these poems, I believe, will appreciate them because they awaken in him or her that universal mood called nostalgia, which we all feel from time to time when our thought dwells on people, things, places, or situations belonging to our past. Each of us can recognize oneself in the images recorded in this book, by transmuting the poet's memories into one's own. This transmutation is much easier, and mostly unnecessary, whenever the reader is an Italian from Eritrea, that is, a person who has been for a long time a resident in that country. In this case, one discovers, in those verses, the places where one has lived and their pervading atmospheres. And if one has spent one's first twenty years or an important part of one's life in Eritrea, one inevitably bears its legacy and therefore one's identification with these Poems of Africa is even deeper.

Like so many others, I, too, belong to the latter group of readers. But I also have a unique advantage: I have known the poet since the days when we both wore shorts in Asmara, as was the custom for boys at the time. We sat next to each other in the classical high school we attended and were close friends. Both were born in Asmara, less than two months apart; there was a perfect understanding between us; we loved each other; we shared each other's small secrets; we exchanged views on ideas and feelings. And so I was lucky enough to follow him in his early experimental attempts at poetry writing.

After decades spent far from each other, we finally met again a few years ago in Bologna, through the initiative of another dear high school classmate, Lauro Lambertucci: three grey-haired elders, now aging grandparents, who joyfully realized how many memories they shared and to which extent, after so many years, their friendship had remained as it was at that time, untouched by the ravages of time. Julio's blue eyes are still as bright and expressive as I remembered them; his smile is always sweet; his speech is elegant and serenely

persuasive as it used to be in those remote days. In our old age, we have renewed the same connection as in our adolescent years. That's why Julio Savi asked me to present *The Shade of Remembrance*, an anthology of his poems of Africa, written in different epochs and circumstances, some when he still lived in Asmara as a medical student, others later on while visiting Eritrea and others in Italy.

As a physician, his natural opening could only be towards Obstetrics and Gynecology, the discipline that cares for women and assists them while giving birth to the fruits of conception. But Julio is, above all, a spiritualist, in the noblest sense of the word, an eminent theologian, and a profound scholar of religions, an internationally well-known writer in the Bahá'í community, whose Faith he had embraced as a student. His poetical vein, though, has remained as it was at that time, whereas his style has become more and more refined, enriched as it has been by his mysticism, which over time triumphed in him because of that Faith. That attitude, however, brooded in his heart as early as in his adolescence. This fact is evident in a poem he wrote as an eighteen-year-old boy inspired by the sea of Massawa (Seascape. II 1.42). In that lyric, the form given to each short stanza, as well as its repetitions, illustrates the rhythmic succession of wavelets and tells us how refined and effective the poetic art of Julio Savi has always been.

At the same time, it is a simple and complex poetic art, both in form and content. At first glance, the form is simple, always in free verse, with occasional or incidental use of classic metric and hidden or overt rhymes and assonances. It is neat, indeed, even when born in one go, because it is always related to the thought that the poet wants to express in a given context, with a careful choice of rhythm, words, and composition in elegant and musical sentences, in a well-chosen blending between inspiration and creative flair, in a harmonious balance between form and content, without ever falling into hermeticism or the syntagms of "poeticism."

When expressing thoughts, sensations, and emotions that everyone feels or has felt, the contents are often intentionally simple. But the poet's refined language enhances them and leads his readers to meditate on the reminiscences aroused by his verses. In other cases,

the contents are more intimate, resulting from a deep introspection. Remarkable examples may be found on pages 34, 52, 58, and 86,⁷ as well as in other compositions that will be later commented upon in these notes. In those lyrics, the poet opens up to his reader and confides, with little reticence, emotions he experienced in the past, which have left an indelible mark on his heart, and reveals the feelings stirring today inside the folds of his soul, while thinking back to Eritrea, to its territories and to the people who live there (the unheeded brothers of the lyric *Their tears quicken a country* [Quickening Tears 2.48]), to past situations projected into the present.

This re-enactment reawakens the poet to a relationship with nature that had faded. With clearly bucolic accents (as Goethe's Arcadia mentioned in the book's epigraph), he depicts lands, rivers, lakes, the sea, the animal world, and plant world of that remote country, which is though always close to him in his thoughts and heart; he looks back to the hard work of the farmer and the shepherd, to the anxious wait for rain, and its miraculous effects on things and human beings.

The theme of rain, one of the most cherished by Julio Savi, recurs several times in these poems. One example among many is *Unexpected Rain* (5.62), a regenerating phenomenon for plants, animals, and men in the lowland, and so intoxicating for the poet as to induce him to dream of a life with no need of hard work and at the same time to feel a renewed energy and an inner urge to be even more active.

Again, we find the rain in *In the Kiss of Life-Giving Water* (3.50), one of this collection's most beautiful and intense poems. In a few verses, the poet describes the triumph of a radiant sun in the unbound and clear blue skies of Eritrea, never infested with impurities nor darkened by wintry greyness, which evokes *purity of thought, kindness of heart, radiance of Spirit* in his mystical imagination. When rain falls on those places, it is never a trauma: it is an always welcome event of joy, a long-longed-for bounty, it is a *purifying shower* raining down in

⁷ The number of pages refers to *The Shade of Remembrance* (2021). The four poems are The Voices of Time 5.18, The Remote of Heaths 5.56, Unexpected Rain 5.62, and Two Hearts 7.22.

heavenly sounds (Rain. IV 1.60), it is a life-giving water that pours down on those lands quickening them, with its kiss.

Fundamental is the lyric *The Shade of Remembrance* (3.58), from which the title chosen by the Author for this book is taken; it is like an introduction the poet himself wrote for the poems of this anthology. In just two stanzas, he explains that the primary themes in this collection of Poems of Africa are just two: the sensations he is experiencing while being touched by these memories and the deeper feelings pouring down upon him from his remembrances or renewed view of the places of his past; nostalgia and regret on the one hand, contemplation and mysticism on the other. In his descriptions, Julio's color palette is rich and abounds in shades: the *blue* or the *turquoise* of an uncontaminated sky; the *ivory* clouds; the *ashes gray* of rain-announcing nimbus; the *rosy* waters in the rising sun; the *silvery* waves beneath the moon; the *purple* twilight; the *green* of the island off Massawa coasts; and the mingled colors of *crimson* sunsets. His memory almost always has a color. And when the poet is saddened by the *weeping greyness* covering our skies in certain seasons, his thoughts go back to the past, to the *almost forgotten light* of the Eritrean sky, and he feels appeased. But beyond the shade of remembrance, in the poet's mystical vision, that light becomes the *light of faith*, compensating for every sacrifice in the uphill journey of a *conscious humanity* towards spirituality.

In the short poem *You too will be a memory* (Confused Memory 1.54), written when the Author still lived in Asmara, we find a kind of starting point for this collection, a sort of melancholic premonition of a feeling that will later appear to a reluctant poet and will make him suffer (*It's Only a Memory* 2.68). But *Some Day I'll Come Back Forever*, declares the poet (5.82) and announces to his *Eritrean friends* that he intends to rejoin them permanently, to return to Eritrea forever, to give himself back to his native land, and be buried there. And he dreams of this as a happy event, when he will be welcomed with celebrations, in a blaze of plants, flowers, and animals, all happy to have him back with them, a dream described in a vast multicoloured fresco with mountains, plains, and rivers of the Eritrean plateau in its background. This definitive return will mark Julio's final victory in his fight

against nostalgia and regret. But its accompanying dream may conceal another more immaterial one and be seen as a metaphor for a spiritual yearning, consistent with his belief and mysticism: the return of his soul into the arms of the supreme source of life, close to his loved ones, as testified in the finale of the moving poem dedicated to his father (a superb declaration of respect, love, and gratitude, p. 78 [In the Dawn Changing Sun 5.78]).

These notes are not intended as an exhaustive critical analysis of this beautiful work by Julio Savi but only as a brief presentation of the peculiar traits of his poetic art for readers who are not yet familiar with it. There is much more to say about the poems collected in this book. Still, I don't think it is necessary to go further because Julio nourishes us with memories and sensations experienced by many of us, which he, a refined poet as he is, knows how to green up with delicacy, elegance, and balance, and with no pining. Whoever reads these verses can easily find memories and feelings that belong to him and perhaps help him rediscover a part of himself. His words are easy; at times, they seem barely whispered; they do not overwhelm you: they make you gently slide into the places and landscapes where you lived and into the atmospheres that surrounded you, and often get a sigh out of you, sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet, almost a smile. As you read these verses, you feel a gentle hand laying on your shoulder and leading you on a backward journey: a consolation for the nostalgic, a delightful awakening for the forgetful.

September 2020

THE NEW GARDEN

THE NEW GARDEN BY JULIO SAVI

*A kindly tongue is the lodestone 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 commemoration. We can find the answer 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 some 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. (TAB1:59, *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 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 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.⁸ As Shoghi Effendi said, art grows as an “expression of the people.”⁹

Poetry has the unique 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’lláh had previously done, left on the theme of poetry various indications and critical concepts to take 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 Julio Savi’s work 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*. Through his way of being and the exposition of his inner world, he tries to express the sincere effort that each soul makes *to perfect itself and offer to others the essence of the good fruits it has reaped*. As Milli Graffi—(1940–2020), poet, translator, and art critic—writes,¹⁰ Savi’s style blends East and West, tracing trajectories from various cultures. In his poems, Rhett Diessner, a well-known international expert on the psychology of beauty, perceives an empirical search for beauty in everything.¹¹ The poet and art critic Maria Organini 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

⁸ See Keith Haring, 1958–1990, an American painter and artist.

⁹ 3 February 1952, to an individual, in CC3:31, no.63.

¹⁰ “Julio Savi’s Unusual Search,” see above 15.17–20.

¹¹ See Diessner *Understanding* 133-5, 170-2.

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.¹²

‘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” (TAB1:59) and their breasts “may be refreshed and dilated with joy” (TAB3.669).

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 passing a tribute that may hopefully inspire our souls and nourish our hearts through its gift of *beauty*.

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.¹³

The Board of the Association for Bahá’í Studies
“Alessandro Bausani”

16 September 2021

¹² 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.

¹³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Letters” 6, no.8.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I've been writing poetry for over sixty years, but only twenty years ago did I decide to make it 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" (Poesy 2.22) nor as mere "self-indulgence" (You Come Back, O Poetry 5.14), as I had for long years feared. They are sincere tokens of my 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 (And It Is Still so Much 6.46).

It is true, whenever

. . . I venture
to reverberate the echo
of . . . [its] words into more
concrete dimensions,
suddenly I hear cawing
crows, hooting
owls. (Psyche and Poetry 7.44)

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" (The Linden-Tree 9.62).

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” (Silences. II 13.10).

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 a Bahá'í wrote them on Bahá'í subjects.¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵

And these are 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

¹⁴ See on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 21 September 1957, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, in CC2:82, no.1431.

¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, in Rafatí, *Yádnámih* 296, provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami.

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 centennial 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 this turning point, a personal booklet to take with oneself, a pocket anthology, and 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 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.”¹⁶

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

¹⁶ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 October 1954, to an individual believer, in CC2:24, no.1334.

from Him whether the signs
of the *light of reunion*
and *fire of separation*
urging in their hearts
may be seen shining out. (Mírzá Maqşúd 5.46)

Entitled “The New Garden,” it comprises 80 poems selected from many others. Its subtitle, “Bahá’í Poems,” says that a Bahá’í wrote them on Bahá’í subjects.¹⁷ The choice was not insignificant. In 2021, the people of Bahá will go through “a prelude to a nine-year effort.”¹⁸ 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” (All Are Thy Children 1.72).

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

For Thee
I accept my life. (I Join My Hands to Thine 1.72)

¹⁷ See on behalf Shoghi Effendi, 21 September 1957, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of United States, in CC2:82, no.1431.

¹⁸ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2021, to the Bahá’ís of the World, para.1.

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 unique year and 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, giving “wings to their verses / for the Well-Beloved” (Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar 10.14). It is, therefore, its goal to show and poetically kindle the light of the Faith in the hearts of those who love it.

The prologue speaks of the dissatisfaction and expectation of them, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called “waiting souls” (CH259):

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. (Yearning 1.36)

Then, “In a Happy Wonderful End” (6.24) 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 suggest¹⁹

how to respond to the summon of the Faith:

“engrave on the hearts . . . the sacred / Words” (Mashriqu’l-Adhkár 7.76); “Drown yourself / you too, in the Ocean / of His Love” (Drowned 10.4);

Fly away, o soul-bird
from the barren moors
of space and time . . .
and return
on the wrist of your beloved King (Return . . . 10.44);

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. (Thy Strong Hand 2.28)

“nothing at last / [am I] in Thy hands” (1.78);

how to be trustful:

When I see Thy smile
O kind Father
my heart cheers

¹⁹. From now on, the paragraphs have been modified to make the text easier to read.

and I feel strong
 and can face
 arrayed hosts
 of worries and words. (Thy Smile 2.30)

“whatever I shall do / it will be / for Thee alone” (In Thy presence 3.66);

how to become a better person and make progress:

“Turned toward the Carmel / my heart / chants Thy words” (Let Me Reborn 3.64);

Pure water flows
 with heavenly strains
 a refreshing balm
 on painful wounds
 of nonsensical battles (Pure Water Flows 1.70);

how to believe in brotherhood:

“when each heart will be / to each heart a brother” (The Day of Thy Promise 3.34);

how to persevere:

“Search is a journey . . . And no stop exists along that journey / which is moved by love” (4.38), “His / ancient Covenant, day / after day renewed” (Yielding Submissive 10.86), “For Thee / I accept my life” (I Join . . . 1.72);

how to overcome the tests of life: “the chains / of Thy love” (2.26),

to overcome
 those few trials with which
 God deigned to entrust us
 according to our weak forces” (Desecration 12.4).

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 (When I look Into My Heart 2.32);

to become aware of our "flaws / which in ourselves we love the least"
 (The Unavowed Awareness 4.48);

of His gifts: "but I always forget / Thy infinite bounties" (Thy infinite bounties 2.42);

of the power of love: "Like a warm wind / Thou enfolded / . . . me"
 (1.68), "All now melts" (Pure Water Flows. 1.70), "All are Thy children" (1.72), "sweetness seeps through the heart" (The Melody . . . 2.60), "The power of love . . . / resembles / the strength of springtime" (Power of Love 4.46);

of the power of the Faith: "only the Faith endures . . . in this ephemeral world," (Only the Faith Endures 2.56), and "Truth / shines in full light" (But Truth 2.56);

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 (Pioneers 7.68);

"interacting with my travel companions / to create harmony and peace" (The Wager 14.6).

They assist us in discovering 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” (Luminous Dawn 4.4).

From the poem “Mary and Martha” (6.32), the characteristics of “service” equated with prayer emerge very clearly:

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 we can reap, 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” (Desecration 12.4)

and “Inspired by their example / I will try and make / my humble mark” (Whose Son Am I 14.24).

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 of 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. (From Nights to Dawns 10.82)

If a reader considers these eighty poems as a whole, she will find a path of life poetically described, whereas if she dwells 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. Suppose, finally, she will read the first and the last poems one after the other. In that case, 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 “To Life” (1.14), dated 1 April 1956, to an “Ode to Life” (14.36) dated 31 December 2017.

Leïla Mesbah Sabéran
Chailles, 20 August 2021

From One Language to Another

French is my mother tongue, strictly maternal, learned in the cradle, passed directly and without external contamination from my mother's Franco-Basque mouth to the ears of a child who opened her eyes in Kabul, Afghanistan, our land of pioneering. Then, in Tehran, this language continued to be administered to me from six months until kindergarten age, under the exclusive care of my mother, not only in the essential vernacular communication of everyday life but especially during the goodnight ceremony and evening prayers.

The bedside lamp and my mother next to the bed, me lying down, the blankets tucked in, my whole being hanging on *maman's* lips and books, while she reads, whispers, sings, acts, tells . . . a sweet and spontaneous voice when narrating; enveloping and harmonious when describing; mischievous when playing a character; magical when singing a lullaby or Alfred de Vigny's verses that evoke the epic of the *Chanson de Roland* (*The Horn*, in Currey 246):

I love the sound of the horn at the end of day
 As it sings in the depths of the woods; of hounds at bay,
 Or the faint farewells of huntsmen, echoing brief
 And blown by the cold north wind from leaf to leaf.

I crouch, return to her lap, snuggle, vibrate with happiness, doze off, and fall asleep. The sounds, the rhythms, the words, the phrases, and the language come to me from Alphonse Daudet's *Letters from My Mill*: "Ah ! Gringoire, she was pretty, that little goat of M. Seguin's" (*Letters* 19), from La Fontaine's *Fables*: The Wolf and the Lamb, The Cicada and the Ant, The Heron:

One day,—no matter when or where,—
 A long-legg'd heron chanced to fare
 By a certain river's brink,

With his long, sharp beak
 Helved on his slender neck.²⁰

The evening prayers recited in French arouse mental images, sounds that turn into representations: *l'Omnipotent* and *l'hippopotame* [the Omnipotent and the hippopotamus] turn in the mouth before pressing the lips and taking shape, a curious and French shape.

With that repeated ritual, that sacred evening event, a three-year-old girl's simple everyday spoken language flows—soon in her life—into the learned, ancestral, and francophone language of culture thanks to the special intentions of an attentive mother. The homely and vernacular language of the child I was became a means of communication only when I entered the bilingual nursery school of the French-Persian *Jeanne d'Arc Institute*, then in the Mademoiselle *Marika* elementary school where in addition to my mother, my father, my brother and me, others also spoke French.

Persian is my father's language. Unlike French, which I have cultivated with passion all my life, whose literature and structure I have deepened by obtaining a degree in literature and a master's degree in linguistics, unlike French, which I have had the pleasure of teaching in middle and high schools and the Teacher Training Institute of Blois and Orléans, I speak Persian—the language of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation—in an elementary and clumsy way. My Persian (except for the flower names learned from my botanist father) is the language of a nine-year-old girl who left Iran forever at that tender age when she had barely learned to read and write Persian and to decipher the complex spelling withh Arabic letters. Of the language spoken in Tehran, the place where I spent the first nine years of my life, I speak, in short, only the domestic language of everyday life.

Yet I can still hear my father's cadenced voice declaiming his poems, those of his father, my grandfather Azizollah Mesbah, or others from the rich heritage of Persian poetry during family walks. From my early childhood until the end of 1982, when his life ended, my father would sit me down in front of him and say, "Listen." Then he would

²⁰ La Fontaine. *Fables* 2: 16 (Book VII, Fable IV, p.16).

read me the latest poems he had just composed, which I asked him to translate into French because they were too complex for my limited understanding of his language.

My love for French is matched only by my tender attachment to Italian. This melodious language, linked to the Eritrean adventure of our pioneer lives, introduced me to another dimension. On 9 November 1954, when I turned ten years old in Asmara, I already possessed sufficient language to open the doors of independence to me. In Asmara, I could read, write, and speak a new Mediterranean and sunny language I loved passionately in just three months. In Asmara, I was the only family member who mastered its essential gears. Until I was fourteen years old, in Asmara, I attended class after class at the regular Italian schools at *Sant'Anna*, where I also learned the first Latin rudiments.

I continued my studies in French at the *Chawki* French girls' high school in Casablanca, Morocco, from the fourth gymnasium until the high school diploma. One might think that, since my life had become French-speaking again, this change made me forget my passion as a teenager. But that brief interlude of my life in Asmara is unforgettable, the most beautiful of my existence: five years of spiritual awakening. So I did everything I could to ensure that the Italian "did not leave me" and to remain faithful to it, at least on my part. It would not be difficult for me to list the many proofs of this fidelity: ever since I turned fifteen, I have been reciting my daily prayer in Italian; in the fourth year of high school, when I had to choose a second language, I refused Spanish for fear of confusing it with Italian and I preferred German; I continued to read Italian novels and newspapers every day; at university, I took a course in comparative literature for my bachelor's degree, choosing French, Italian, and English as languages and texts to compare.

From one world to another

This long disquisition on my modest person as a daring interpreter of many of the poems written by the poet and essayist Julio Savi justifies me in front of any skeptical censors who may ask me for a license or blame me for having dared to take on such a delicate and specialized

task. In translating, I wanted and tried to be faithful to the original texts' meanings, rhythms, and beauty. I wanted to make poetry, too.

I know. To translate a poem, you must be a poet. I know. Julio Savi is a scholar of some stature among the scholars of the Bahá'í Faith. I know. His poetry is full of cultural references to a double Western and Eastern identity, as Milli Graffi says on the back cover of the collection *Chiaroscuro* published by Il Verri:

This anthology hosts a rigorous selection of the most intense and representative poems of a long journey to poetry. Savi is a poet who can amaze the Italian reader with his adherence and participation in Italian literature and *Farsi*-language literature from distant Iran and the Middle East.

I authorize myself to translate these poems. The legitimacy of my work depends, on the one hand, on my love for French and Italian and my ear sensitized from the cradle to French poetry and its musicality and, on the other hand, on my familiarity with the oriental subtleties of a father who was the son of a poet-philosopher and poet himself. It is possible that, consciously or unconsciously, I have chosen my academic path for this purpose. My relationship with languages and their translations, French, Persian, and Italian on the one hand, English and Arabic on the other (my mother's English—so British—and the Arabic sung and spoken by my beloved spouse), is a love relationship.

The first poems by Julio Savi that I translated were quite long. I received them, one by one, from the Author in the letters we exchanged in those days. At first, I translated them for my private use to understand them better and grasp their finesse and sophistication. Only later did I obtain an overview of his poetic work, which was still unpublished but especially printed for me. I translated first for myself and later to convey my feelings to French-speaking readers. I relied on my sensitivity to poetry and my aesthetic sense. Although the Author knew little French, he followed my attempts with patience and kindness and was very thorough, a cooperation that is reassuring for me and the readers.

The first poems I translated with the sole intention of better understanding were “As if” (5.40) and “Where Are the Boundaries?” (6.8), which I transcribe below. Not only did I translate them with great care, but I also memorized them in Italian, reciting them aloud in the morning as I drove through La Sologne to go to work. How can I explain my passion for these two poems? Over time, I discovered their beauty, but the first thing that struck me was their refinement. The theme is God and the Author; in other words, as Faezeh Mardani suggests, “a capital *Thou / You* and a lowercase *I*” (15.7).

In their lives, Bahá’ís follow one rule: they turn to their Creator at least once a day, reciting texts of varying lengths, of which the following is the shortest:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

True, no matter how hard we try, no one can “know” the almighty Creator, but each of us is here on earth to approach this knowledge, to recognize that there is only “One,” Whom we are to “love and worship.” This is how the human “quest” is defined: once he has declared his act of faith (“I bear witness, I testify,” I declare, I recognize “my powerlessness, my poverty” in respect of Thy might, Thy wealth”), the human affirms the injunction of the One Who created him (to love and adore Him) and tends towards transcendence by recognizing that the One he seeks to know surpasses him.

However, in the poem below, the contrast between the depth and grandeur of this ideal quest and the weak human capacity is disquieting:

As If (5.40)
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.

In the second poem, research—“the unappeased yearning / which more and more / within . . . (one’s) heart is urging”—is the central theme:

Where Are the Boundaries? (6.8)

Bologna, 14 mars 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
presence that in the end
in the chambers
of my inmost heart?

Or is it always I,
such an inexorable
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 cackle 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?

Both poems speak of God and the self while it moves towards Him. Reciting them on the way to my day's work, I fed "the glimmering light / I sometimes think I see / dawning amidst the night / which obscures my heart." These two poems speak to us of the fragile and destitute human condition and confirm the goal we should reach. That the Poet's art teaches me that my helplessness is part of my human nature, comforts me in my efforts, and encourages me to continue on my sometimes uncertain path.

At the same time, I received a poem from the Author in which he celebrates and defines "Faith." This poem was entitled "Water of the Self" (6.20) and was dated March 1994 as "Where Are the Boundaries?" Like the other two, I learned it by heart. I consider it part of a dynamic triptych, together with the two poems mentioned above: "... Water of the self / On this water / I shall walk.../ And my soul / shall soar upon / the murky, stagnant / water of the self."

So, I immediately began randomly translating and reading some of Julio Savi's poems, jumping here and there but with constant assiduity. He immediately won me over with his themes and art ever since

he decided to send me some, so I translated them to live them more intensely. But, as I have just said, it was only later that, thanks to a copy printed especially for me, I could have an overview of his poetic work, which was still unpublished in those years. The first was dated 5 July 1955, and the last September 1994. Reading them, I have lived thirty-nine years of his life. In August 1955, Julio Savi was seventeen years old; in August 1994, he was fifty-six. These poems, composed over thirty-nine years, opened up the diary of a lifetime for me. They revealed the feelings that inspired them and an ordinary human journey that became sublime through its form and substance.

The Author had translated them into English long before they were published. For my part, after having access to that panoramic view, the poems I translated were the ones that had touched my heart the most. Short and concise poems, like the very first one delicately placed by a seventeen-year-old on a blank white page to open and intone the whole work, to set the tone to the collection with three words: beauty, harmony, perfection:

Yearning for Beauty (1.4)
Asmara, 5 July 1955

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

Others long and triumphant in ideas or overwhelming in their fervour, all dedicated to “beauty,” “harmony,” “perfection.” Little by little, I understood very precisely that each of these poems is a “stage of life from whose course . . . [it] draws its meaning” (Mesbah Sabéran 15.3).

At the beginning of this century, the project of publishing a selection of his poems in Italian and English prompted the Author to take the necessary steps at the Casa Editrice Bahá’í. On that occasion, I was asked to write a preface. This is how the first publication of one of his

anthologies, translated and printed, was published in Italian (1st edition 2001) and English (1st edition 2002). It was for me an opportunity to reflect and write down my certainty that Julio Savi is a true poet of our time. His art will be recognized, perhaps during his lifetime or, indeed, by future generations. The following is what I wrote in my preface more than twenty-three years ago:

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 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 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—the purity and the intensity that 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 and for all unveils to us: seeing what we had but dimly perceived, what we had avoided dwelling upon, for lack of perspective, or courage, or a metaphorical key. (Mesbah Sabéran 15.2.3)

And here is what the Author himself says about it today in his “A Poet’s Inner Diary” (16.1):

The constant effort to rise from the plane of the prosaic and limited nature of everyday experiences to that of the poeticalness and

universality of spiritual meanings that characterize the entire collection makes *Remoteness* an inner diary. It rarely records factual details of life experiences. It aims to grasp profound meanings. Therefore, while reading it, you follow a spiritual path that is both personal and universal. Personal, because it proceeds through personal stages and therefore differs in detail from others. Universal, because it transmits the inner meanings of those very personal stages, which recur in the stages of any spiritual search. You can thus compare them with your own experiences, carried out during your quest, in your inner universe, with its specific temporospatial modalities. In this way, you can receive encouragement and inspiration.

In my first preface, I noted the beauty of the “pregnant silences” and the “parsimony of means” that characterize our Poet’s writing. I also noticed that his poetic inspiration can produce meanings and make us see things differently. His conciseness, far from decaying into incomprehensible hermetic writing, highlights “the essential at the expense of the superfluous” (Mesbah Sabéran 15.1, 2). But, as a translator, I had to render—with the same skill as the inspired Poet—the equivalent of French, choosing French words, sounds, and rhythms without being glued to Italian. I had to search for the right word, sound, and location corresponding to my language’s forms; I had to love the beauty of both tongues: the Italian that sings and snaps, the French that caresses and murmurs. I had to discover the charm of both idioms without wanting to copy from one to the other, with the risk of creating a clone. Of course, it is necessary to respect the constraints the Poet has imposed on himself: the verses should be in the same number and short or long in French as in Italian; you must not betray the meaning nor lose the nuances. Italian and French are similar, but the common Latin origin does not always mean that the words are identical or have the same meaning. One of my great surprises was discovering that the word “yearning” (essential in Savi’s vocabulary) does not exist in French: there is no specific word for a “burning desire” or “an insatiable thirst” (terms used by Baudelaire); note that the word “mind” does not exist in French, it has no equivalent except

“esprit,” while in French there are “mental” and “mentalité”; that the famous adage *mens sana in corpore sano* is translated into Italian *mente sana in un corpo sano* [healthy mind in a healthy body] but in French *un esprit sain dans un corps sain* [healthy spirit in a healthy body]. Another difficulty that the Author and I encountered was translating the title, *Lontananza* in Italian, *Remoteness* in English, *Farāgh* in Persian. The exact French translation would be “éloignement.” The adjective “lointain,” with its muted sounds, gives the idea of a “poet who always feels far from the Ideal to which he aspires”²¹ and evokes this idea illustrated by the photo on the cover of the first Italian edition taken by the photographer Giancarlo Gasponi. However, the noun “éloignement” distances us from all these nuances. The word “loingtaineté” that we finally chose for the title of this collection in French, *Loingtaineté (1955-2023)*, is not a neologism but an archaic word, and its spelling with the “g” places it precisely in the sixteenth century.

Translating into French poetry the sober and polished Italian of Julio Savi in which, as I wrote in my preface of 2001, each word occupies its own “place” behind whose apparent simplicity “a painstaking, accomplished, and experienced poetry is hidden, a poetry that is not susceptible to paraphrase,” is a real challenge: “right words in the right place, which one dares barely to brush or tries to savour at length, a definitive and necessary form” (Mesbah Sabéran 15.1-2).

From one glance to another

In 2001, when I wrote my preface to the first edition of *Lontananza* in Italian and *Remoteness* in English, I tried to highlight the plastic and aesthetic qualities of the style. The peculiarity of Savi’s poetic art is that it consists of minimalist, spare, refined, sober, and light writing, and his conscious and weighted choices increase the effect of refined spontaneity. This deliberate simplicity empowers the enhancement of the “essential at the expense of the superfluous.” What follows is how the Author explains his art in an article entitled “Necklaces of Corals and Pearls. Reflections on Poetry” (16.3):

²¹ Voir Savi in Tinto, “Afternoon” xviii”.

My poems disdain the lessons of prosody and prefer the plain ways of natural spontaneity. They do not express pretentious passions but frail human feelings. They preserve that trepidation that arises from a persistent feeling of remoteness from the Ideal, always accompanied by the hope of receiving a coveted inspiration and being able to bring its fruits into the world. These thoughts are the essence of “Psyche and Poetry” (7.44), written in 1996 . . .

Before translating “Psyche and Poetry,” written on 29 February 1996, I learned it by heart because I was fascinated by its rhythm, imagery, and precision. The Author addresses a “you,” which is poetry. He tries to connect with it. He is Psyche, and poetry is Cupid. He is Jacob, who has become blind because of his prolonged mourning of Joseph’s abhorred absence. He is Majnún in front of the unreachable Laylá. He is Narcissus, and poetry is a “limpid sheet of water.” He is Echo, and poetry is a mountain that transfigures him. Will he always have to “sing / unappeased longings,” absences that exhaust him? Julio Savi wants his poetry to be “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.” He does not want poetry to be “solemn / hawk’s flight, but whirring wing / of iridescent hummingbird.” He does not want it to be “enameled sunset palette / but ethereal rainbow lightness.” The poem ends with an episode in the poignant story of Psyche. Bending over her sleeping lover, she holds a candle in her hand to finally see the features of the man whose face she has never seen but who fills her with love. A drop of the candle falls on her lover’s chest as he wakes up. She is dazzled by his beauty, but after one last embrace, he runs away, never returning. She loses him. Will she one day have a child with him, the fruit of their love?

In 2001, when I wrote the preface to the first Italian and English editions, I had translated seventy-three poems into French. As a result, when that first edition came out, I sent friends and colleagues my foreword, the collection published in English, and the few poems I had translated into French.

The positive reception from my intellectual French-speaking friends and acquaintances encouraged me to consider a French edition. I started looking for a publisher for a bilingual edition. A filmmaker, the French-Swiss Patricia Moraz,²² suggested producing a deluxe edition. This Franco-Italian edition of his poems translated into French with the original text opposite, printed on a prestigious parchment, would have pleased bibliophiles. To put the finishing touches on the project, on 8 December 2003, she met Julio Savi at her home in Paris, not far from the Centre Pompidou.

Together with the Poet, she decided to illustrate this prestigious edition with contemporary works. The Author was thinking of Kandinsky's watercolours, Moraz of Morandi's still lifes, which she had discovered thanks to Fellini, who, in *La Dolce Vita*, makes his character Steiner, played by Alain Cluny, say in front of a painting by Morandi:

You have a very beautiful Morandi. I like it a lot. The objects bathe in the dream . . . and however they are painted with a matter that returns them . . . nearly tangible. It is an art where nothing has not been let at random. (See *La Dolce Vita script*)

This aesthetic and artistic project of Patricia Moraz was born from her enthusiasm for the beauty she found in Savi's poems. Quoting Fellini's film, she wrote to me:

A poet recites her verses, and Mastroianni, a failed writer, says, in essence—I think he was in front of the painting (ibid.): “I am sure that poetry is the expression of the future. Its rigor and melody make it the wealthiest art because it is simple and will stand the test of time.”

Her passionate enthusiasm made me believe in this tempting project. I accompanied the Poet on a project that did not come to fruition. But this story, which describes my work as a translator, the difficulties, the successes, and the failures, would not be complete if I did not

²² See “Décès” and “Patricia Moraz.”

mention some significant exchanges of letters with the Author. These exchanges saw us working together for a short time to realize it:

Maybe I am deluding myself, but I have always seen my poems as Kandinsky's paintings (mainly watercolors). Likewise, I see similarities between my poems, specific passages by Debussy, and even more by Eric Satie.

The project to combine Morandi with my poems is surprising, to say the least: Morandi lived a stone's throw from the house where I lived for all my university years. Even if I am not particularly fond of modern painting, his paintings have always attracted me because of their simplicity and melancholy. Here in Bologna, we have a permanent exhibition, which I will revisit. I will gather more information about him and send it to you.

I thought that Morandi's four or five images could represent (without saying it explicitly) in shapes and colours the four elements: water (greys and blues), air (whites and wavy lines), earth (ochre and brown), and fire (reds and ochre). And I have already found various images to that effect.

I collected fifty-seven poems (twenty-two of which you have already translated) for our art edition, which I enclose. I have marked with an asterisk those that you have translated. Of course, since you are the translator, your advice will be precious.

However, this unfinished project contributed to the translation of thirty-five other poems chosen not only according to my preferences but following a composition selected together with the patron, Patricia Moraz, and for specific recipients intended by the Author, a particular audience, sensitive to the beauty of the container and content of the work. For me, the "commissioned" translation of this list of poems chosen by the Poet was a challenge and a great joy: I was not only translating what attracted and spoke to me, but now I was learning to

love what Savi made me discover by accompanying me with his explanations and illuminating me with the lamp he held high in front of my attempts. I remember days of magical communion between him, the Author, and me, the interpreter. My translation was carefully followed and nuanced by the meticulous remarks of the Author who, while writing to me in a message that we had to “resign ourselves to the fact that our translations may be very close to the original, but can never express all its nuances,” also reassured me with encouraging approvals such as these:

That’s right: faithful translations, not literal ones. That is, to reproduce the spirit, not the letter: that’s what you tend to do instinctively and (I think) intentionally.

By now, you have wholly entered into the style of my poems, and it seems that you can also reproduce their musicality.

Despite the difficulties, you translated very well.

Your last three translations are excellent.

Your translations are getting more beautiful and more mature.

In the meantime, the Italian publishers Ibiskos and Il Verri published two anthologies of our Author, *Lontananza (2001-2016)* and *Chiaroscuro*, in 2016 and 2019, collecting 70 and 58 poems, respectively. Savi’s poetry thus emerged from the most intimate and neutral environment of a Bahá’í audience and opened up to an audience that publishers felt should be interested. These anthologies respected the chronology of the dates of the writing of the poems. Still, the Author and the publishers have made a choice based on various themes illustrated by poems that refer to them. Here is how the Author presents and explains to the editorial staff of Il Verri his proposals for the first three thematic subdivisions:

Here, we have a poetic journey which, moving from doubts and uncertainties, sometimes heart-rending, attains, through an Ideal steadfastly pursued, ancient promises and hopes, as well as an unexpected serenity born from discovering anticipated transparencies of the infinite in daily life . . . “Yearnings” speaks of tension toward the absolute, the dominating impulse of this anthology; “Chiaroscuro” follows the poet’s doubts and uncertainties throughout his itinerary; “The New Garden” highlights the spiritual encounter that has steered his course . . . ²³

Once published by these two publishers and after having lived the experience of opening up to his fellow Italians, in 2021, the Author intentionally addressed an Italian, English, and French Bahá’í audience with an anthology entitled *The New Garden*, published under the aegis of the Association for Bahá’í Studies “Alessandro Bausani.” The title of this work is that of the third part of *Chiaroscuro*, which in this collection “hints at the spiritual encounter that steered the whole poet’s itinerary.” The subtitle is *Bahá’í Poems*. Of the five anthologies that Julio Savi has published, it is only in this trilingual collection, *The New Garden*, that his audience is explicitly identified. This book is not the answer to “Why and for whom Julio Savi writes,” but it answers the question, “Why and for whom he chose these poems?”

The “why” is that in the Bahá’í world, the year 2021 “marks the centennial 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.” The recipients, “for whom,” are those who are sensitive to the Bahá’í message: “It is, therefore, its goal to show and poetically kindle the light of the Faith in the hearts of those who love it”:

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 unique year and during the nine years that will follow. While so doing, it touches its

²³ Savi in Tinto, “Afternoon” xxvii.

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 . . . (Mesbah Sabéran 15.36)

...

If a reader considers these eighty poems as a whole, she will find a path of life poetically described, whereas if she dwells 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. (Mesbah Sabéran 15.41)

In 2001, the date of the first collection published by the Casa Editrice Bahá'í, not having a specific audience, I addressed in my preface to an imaginary reader whom I invited to go through the entire anthology to grasp its overall meaning or to pause on a specific poem to savor its beauty.

Now that more than twenty years have passed and there have been other publications with an open and diverse audience, I would like to complete the passage of my preface with this question: is it the recipient who chooses the poet, or is it the poet who addresses a possible audience of his choice?

Julio Savi says:²⁴ “In making poetry, I always feel the need to convey a message to my potential readers, a message that may help them to pursue their own path of spiritual progress, to contribute to the collective progress of our civilization.”

The French poet Baudelaire (1821–1967) felt that his reader was like him (“To the Reader,” in Aggeler), “Hypocritical reader,—my fellow,—my brother!” (see Appendix II). But if the former highlights “evil,” decline, and decadence, the latter takes the path of spiritual and collective progress and, contradicting Savi’s generous poetry addressed to his interlocutors and to the civilization to be built, Baudelaire said in 1857, in the *New Notes on Edgar Poe* that poetry “ought never to have in view anything but itself.”

²⁴ Savi, in Tinto, “Afternoon” xxix.

Poetry, if only one is willing to seek within himself, to question his heart, to recall his memories of enthusiasm, has no other goal than itself; it cannot have any other, and no poem will be so great, so noble, so truly worthy of the name of poetry as that which will have been written solely for the pleasure of writing a poem.

I do not mean that poetry does not ennoble manners—let there be no mistake about it—that its final result is not to raise man above the level of vulgar interests; that would obviously be an absurdity. I say that, if the poet has pursued a moral aim, he has diminished his poetic force; and it is not rash to wager that his work will be bad. Poetry cannot, under penalty of death or failure, be assimilated to science or morality; it does not have Truth as its object, it has only Itself. The means for demonstrating truth are other and are elsewhere . . .

It is that admirable, that immortal instinct for the beautiful which makes us consider the earth and its spectacles as a revelation, as something in correspondence with Heaven. The insatiable thirst for everything that lies beyond, and that life reveals, is the most living proof of our immortality.

It is at the same time by poetry and *through* poetry, by and *through* music that the soul glimpses the splendors beyond the tomb; and when an exquisite poem brings us to the verge of tears, those tears are not the proof of excessive pleasure; they are rather evidence of an aroused melancholy, of a condition of nerves, of a nature which has been exiled amid the imperfect and which would like to take possession immediately, on this very earth, of a revealed paradise.

Thus, the principle of poetry is precisely and simply human aspiration toward a superior beauty . . .

. . .

Cold, calm, impassive, the demonstrative mood rejects the diamonds and the flowers of the Muse; it is then absolutely the inverse of the poetic mood. (In *Baudelaire*¹⁹⁶⁴ 131-3, 132)

Baudelaire and Savi both admit that poetry is at the service of “human aspiration toward a superior beauty” and rests on “that admirable, that immortal instinct for the beautiful,” which must “raise man above the level of vulgar interests.” For both, poetry is not moralistic, but while Baudelaire believes that only that which has been written “solely for the pleasure of writing a poem” is “truly worthy of the name of poetry,” in the collection *The New Garden*, Savi addresses his Bahá’í reader with a selfless purpose: to offer the reader a gift from his heart. And in general, this precious gift, whoever he is talking to, expresses a bond of love for his neighbour: “Accept, then, unknown reader, / the gift of my heart to yours” (The Fleeting Moment 9.76). It is an outstretched hand, a pact with the reader, a pact the Poet defines as an “inseparable bond of love that binds me to all other humans, past, present, and future. And whatever good and beautiful I desire or ask for myself, I can only hope and ask for them, too” (in “Letters” 16.4.86). *The New Garden* is a collection of poems intended to accompany anonymous heroes in their search for the Absolute during the “crises and victories” that these people of good will go through as they dedicate themselves to the betterment of the world. A “handbook” that the Author entrusts to his chosen readers, like an aid, a magic wand that may be helpful during the adventures of that “story” that is our life.

In addition to being a poet, Julio Savi is a prolific writer, researcher, and international scholar who has made a valuable intellectual contribution to present and future Bahá’í studies. Here is how Iscander Tinto of the Association for Bahá’í Studies “Alessandro Bausani” presents him:

He is best known in the Bahá’í community for his scholarship. A connoisseur of the Bahá’í writings, Islamic mysticism, and Western thought in general, he has published several books and many papers in Italian and English on topics ranging from interreligious dialogue to human rights, from the philosophical and social teachings of the Bahá’í Faith to its mystical aspects.²⁵

²⁵ “Afternoon” xvii.

Although the Bahá'í community knows him mainly for his commitment to studies, Julio Savi tells his friends that he feels like a poet before feeling like a scholar.

A look at posterity

Now that at the age of 86, he has reached the winter of life, now that Bahá'í and mainstream publishers have published his poems as he wished, Savi wants to better explain and define his mission as a poet. He feels that his poems can have some value for present and future generations and, therefore, intends to give them the broadest possible distribution. To ensure that his intentions are identifiable and his path understood for the present and the future, he has considered it worthwhile to present them by adopting characteristic research methods. That is, he supplements them with notes and paratexts. He, therefore, enthusiastically devoted himself to the very demanding task of arranging for the electronic publication of his complete poetic work initially only under the aegis of the Association for Bahá'í Studies "Alessandro Bausani" and subsequently also with the encouragement of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Italy. His overall trilingual project, the French version of which is entitled *Loingtaineté* (1955-2024), is to present a finished and orderly work that brings together all his published or unpublished poems arranged in chronological order, accompanied by notes, paratexts, commentaries conveying his "reflections on poetry,"—which include some ideas of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—and various indexes.

The French version was born in the wake of the the Anglo-Italian version *Lontananza: poesie, saggi e lettere sulla poesia (1955-2024)* ~ *Remoteness: Poems, Essays, and Letters on Poetry (1955-2024)*. It does not collect all the poems, but only those I have translated to date, more than two hundred, arranged chronologically. Some of them have already been published: nine in issues 33 (January 1996) and 34 (April 1996) of *Le bulletin*, the French version of *Arts Dialogue*, the quarterly publication of the Bahá'í Association for the Arts (BAFA),²⁶ and

²⁶ The nine poems published in *Le Bulletin* are Eternity (1.26), I'll Be Free Again Once (1.38), Blind in Darkness (1.50), Poesy (2.22), Unfulfilled Dreams (2.52),

eighty in the book *Le nouveau jardin. Poèmes bahá'ís*, published in 2022 by the Casa Editrice Bahá'í.

I translated the other unpublished poems, especially for this French version, *Loingtaineré*. To these two hundred poems and my present introduction, entitled “From One Language to Another,” I have thought it necessary to add “A Poet’s Inner Diary,” written by the Poet, which I have translated and entitled *Journal d’un poète*.”

Except for the Author’s connection to Eritrea, particularly Asmara, where he was born, and his fundamental encounter with the Bahá’í Faith in 1957, this diary reveals hardly private or biographical details about Julio Savi. This life path “rarely records factual details of life experiences. It aims to grasp profound meanings” (16.1.2). Rhett Diessner, a scholar of the psychology of natural, artistic, moral, and ideational beauty,²⁷ defines this diary that covers almost seventy years of the writer’s life from 1955 to the present day as “the most uplifting and amazing autobiography I’ve ever read—a life interpreted through poetry; and a life of seeking the Beloved. Such a beautiful and uplifting combination.”

A literary critic friend told Savi, “You worry too much about the reader.” Yes, it is true: Savi takes into account the reader he loves and respects, but this love is never too much; this is the peculiarity and charm of our Poet. His reader is the reason he writes. He does not seek fame or posterity homage. He stretches out his hands to offer a gift. Rich in his sensitive soul as a poet, aware of the impact of poetry and his poetic vein, he offers the reader the treasure he has within himself so that the reader too can overcome “doubts and uncertainties” (liii) while searching for the Ideal. The Poet leads his readers towards “serenity” and “discovering anticipated transparencies of the infinite in daily life.”

And so, reading his poems (Savi 16.1.2),

Between Houses and Stony Lanes (2.64), The Walls of the Self (4.6), Those Infinite Worlds (4.8) and To the Poor, Astonished Heart (4.14).

²⁷ See <https://www.upworthy.com/expert-reimagines-beauty-influencers> (retrieved on 28 March 2024).

you follow a spiritual path that is both personal and universal. Personal, because it proceeds through personal stages and therefore differs in detail from others. Universal, because it transmits the inner meanings of those very personal stages, which recur in the stages of any spiritual search.

Here is a possible answer to my question about why and for whom Julio Savi writes. While this inspired, tireless, hardworking person — steeped in culture and full of desire to do, able to feel things with intensity and describe their essence—pursues the Ideal he uses for us, his neighbours, his gifts, his Muse, and his poetic vein.

In this regard, one could argue that all of this is *sharing*, a way of conceiving, living, and sharing the message of Bahá'u'lláh. It is also a way to leave an avant-garde artistic legacy.

Leïla Mesbah Sabéran