

LETTERS (1993-2023)

“Letters” is a collection of excerpts in which the author speaks of his poetry, general poetry, and the vision of life reflected in his verses. Out of respect for the privacy of the recipients of the letters and the persons mentioned in them, their names are purely fictional. In particular, the two pseudonyms, Lapo and Guido, refer to Dante’s sonnet: “Guido, I wish that Lapo, thou, and I . . .” The titles of some poems have been updated from previous anthologies. The bibliographical notes of the poems refer to this latest edition of *Remoteness*. The bibliographical references and words given in brackets have been added.

23 July 1993

Dear friend,

. . . It is true: my eyes are blue, or maybe grey. . . Behind them is the desire to rise toward heaven, to create order, harmony, and beauty in me and around me. *Jamál-i-Mubarak* [Blessed Beauty] is Bahá’u’lláh’s title I love more. That is why I write: first, to give a logical and rational arrangement to Bahá’í philosophy. Here is the meaning of *The Eternal Quest for God*, which I hope to revisit and complete soon.

For the same reason, I am developing a series of commentaries on Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings. I also write to clarify and understand better the itineraries of man’s spiritual adventure and my own. This effort is the spring of all my poems. They are all unpublished. I wrote them in Italian and then translated them into English (and sometimes, this makes me feel presumptuous, almost unrealistic). Sometimes, I like my poems, and I think I have aired well what I wanted to say, but more often, I feel they are inadequate, far from the truth of the feeling that inspired them. I collected some of them in an anthology entitled *Remoteness*. I intend to publish it, but so far, I have not found a way to do so, and I often tell myself that it is not worth it . . .

I love unspoiled nature, which reminds me of Eritrea; I love art in its most refined forms, and among the arts, I prefer music and painting.

The first brings out all my feelings, even the most hidden ones. I usually prefer the *joie de vivre* of baroque music (Bach, Händel, Vivaldi); I deliberately avoid Romantic or Impressionist music, which, while fascinating me, arouses in my heart feelings of melancholy, sometimes despondence, which I consider spiritually unhealthy for me.¹ Years ago, I dedicated part of my time to studying piano. Playing music allowed me to express emotions I could not say with words. Then, I discovered that it was better to devote the same energies to purposes that were more useful to others. So, I dedicated myself to writing with greater seriousness and commitment. Painting also touches me deeply; it brings me closer to the world of humanity. Often, however, I find it too earthly and, therefore, for my sensitivity, somehow dangerous . . . [Of Italy] I admire the cities and, in particular, Venice. I see it as an emblem of Western culture, which fascinates me, even if I see its decline. Venice could collapse at any moment, but those buildings still standing in the middle of water that was once clear and transparent and today it is murky and sometimes slightly smelly soften and fascinate me. They make me want to preserve them, to restore them . . .

¹ Today the only music I avoid is the dissonant and strident music of more recent times in which I perceive neither harmony nor beauty.

19 July 1994

Dear Julie,

. . . Among the themes of your letter are the poems I sent you. The “bit of embarrassment” I have spoken of is not because I think you have been in the least indiscreet in showing them to your daughter; it is only out of shyness, out of fear that I feel in the face of the judgment of others. Those poems are like children; I am not detached from them, even if I would like to be, and the thought that someone might somehow smile at what I write disturbs me very much . . . On the contrary, I should thank you for making them known to others: poems are not for the few; if they are poems, they are for everyone. They are a cry of the poet’s soul, but that cry also cherishes the hope of making itself heard, of arousing in other hearts the feelings that generated it. If I succeed in this, I will be happy. I would be glad to publish them if I could find a way. I also have to learn to accept criticism without suffering (or almost) because it is impossible for everyone to like them . . . I agree: my book [*The Eternal Quest for God*] may seem cold. While writing it, I have tried to be as rational as possible, to be absent as a person so that I might express the ideas of the Bahá’í Texts with utmost objectivity. This attitude is suitable for one part of the public but is not easy for others. When I gave it to my brother-in-law, a cultured man . . . of great sensitivity, who loved me very much (he passed away last year), he told me that my book had disappointed him, not because of the ideas I conveyed, but because he had found nothing of me in them. I understand that my poems may be of interest to people who privilege the irrational, as Claire seems to do . . .

. . . I think poetry should be light, like a flower upon water. You ask me about the comma between “a stir” and “a wish” [A Windless Morning 2.12]. When I was a boy, I shared Plato’s views. He says that when the poet writes, he does so because a god inspires him. Poetry and art are entirely irrational . . . the artist does not know the reason for specific details, but he feels their opportunity. I wrote that poem in my youth on a day when I felt as if the world had collapsed on me. I remember this very well. I remember everything: the place where I wrote it, particularly the fog among the bare trees I saw from that

window. Nevertheless, it is up to you to explain the reason for that comma. I do not know . . .

As you can see, I am no longer as “platonic” as I was in my early youth; I do not write poems just in one go, as I used to, without modifying them. Now, I write them, reread them, think about them, and then change them. Perhaps too much dust has fallen on my mirror over time [see PUP72, para.2, 24 April 1912] for me to be still able to abandon myself to the wave of inspiration as I did in those days. Or perhaps age means that reasoning goes hand in hand with inspiration.

Since you’re asking . . . allow me . . . to express . . . a few comments . . . [Where Are the Boundaries 6.8]:

if the most ardent
passion is fast
worn out, if the most
vehement yearning
is soon appeased.

. . . in Italian, the word “anelito [here translated as “passion”]” is lovely to my ears. “Anelito” is the panting breath of someone in the grip of intense emotion, but by translation, it also indicates a particularly intense aspiration . . .

And Thou . . . Thou art
always there and waitest,
and lookest in a smile.
Thine eyes are sparkling
like stars in a darksome night.

. . . “Luccicano [sparkle]” in Italian is different from “brillano [shine].” It is reminiscent of the stars twinkling and fireflies on summer evenings. It gives the idea of a mysterious and fleeting glow, intense but brief. Shine is reminiscent of a more manifest and continuous light . . .

Sweet-scented is Thy breath
like Massawa's sea breeze.

. . . In Italian, “respiro [breath]” is different from “respirazione [respiration].” “Respirazione [respiration]” is a technical word for breathing activity. “Respiro [breath]” . . . also means the breath coming out of the mouth when breathing. Also, in this case, the word has a connotation of poetry and intimacy that the word “respirazione [respiration],” in Italian, has not.

Thine raven hair
hangs down and glitters
upon Thy face and shoulders,
hiding Thy black eye-brows
behind a thick veil
of mystery.

. . . “fitto [thick]” in Italian does not indicate the thickness of the veil, but its less transparency. Think of a “tulle” . . . its holes can be of different sizes; tulle is thick when the holes are small . . .

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 . . .

In Italian, “sciabordio [here translated as “roar”]” is a specific word that indicates only the rhythmic sound of the waves . . . “dissolutrice [dissolving]” . . . suggests at the same time the ability to melt (mud) and to dissolve (passions and desires) . . .

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?

This stanza is full of implicit quotations from the Sacred Texts: the “bride” recalls the bride in the Epilogue of the Hidden Words; “a pleased and pleasing / soul” recalls the first of the Four Valleys [Seven Valleys¹⁹⁹¹ 50] and the Koran [see 5.14, “Notes”]; “hindering veils” evokes the numerous quotations in which Bahá’u’lláh mentions the veils that separate human beings from Him . . .

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?

. . . In this case, “insistent self” is a quotation from a Tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [SWAB256, 259, sec.206]. “Cackle” here indicates not so much the noise of the ego’s voice as its triviality, superficiality, and vanity. The crowd in square cackles, sometimes even the chickens in the hen-house cackle . . .

Two-faced Janus: I do not think your request for clarification depends on your lack of knowledge of the pagan god Janus, represented with two faces facing opposite directions, to indicate his ambiguity and his tension between past and present. It seems you have the content of my sentence in mind. I am referring to the tendency to escape reality typical of some people. Some do not fully participate in what is happening around them, taking refuge in dreams and memories or hopes and expectations, just wishful thinking, since they are unreal, excessive, and therefore childish. Those who live in this way live only partially. The past always evokes feelings of nostalgia, in the awareness of not having fully lived life’s experiences but of having only barely touched reality. In addition, unrealistic expectations are almost always frustrating, generating disappointment. Like two-faced Janus, those who live in this way look to the past (dreams and memories) or the future (ambitions); they let the present escape. Do not be alarmed: I do not think I am living like this, but sometimes I do so; in the past, I have certainly done so much more often . . .

14 February 1995

Dear Julie,

. . . Recently, I have read with pleasure a short *Manual of Poetry* written by Giuseppe Conte, where he talks about poetry from the point of view of inspiration and technique. It is very short . . . Nevertheless, I could not help but recognize myself in the first part. Conte speaks of “Voices that drive people to write poetry” coming from who knows where. He writes:

It is difficult to understand if they come from mysterious distances and enter us like arrowheads or if they are asleep in the dark area of our soul, where a jolt is enough to awaken them . . . If we do not believe that things we perceive as inanimate or mute can speak to us, we will hardly undertake the work of poetry. Voices can be . . . those of the stars . . . Voices, those of flowers . . . Voices, those of love . . . Voices those of hatred, corruption, the absence or presence of God or gods. We write driven by these Voices, by Tumults, Questions, States of alteration of the Soul, by Visions that the Voices help to flash in us.

But the alchemical property of poetry is to appease the savage, prehistoric tumult of our souls, not by removing it, nor by curing it, but by transforming it, making gold out of stone, giving it form, beauty, light. [16-7]

Many years ago, when I was still a student, I went to Rothenburg ob der Tauber with Paola. One evening at dusk, we came across a little garden. It was not particularly beautiful nor flourishing, but it was surrounded by ancient walls and adorned with old sculptures. How many Voices I heard speaking in that garden! The Voices of all those who, over time, had been in some way linked to that place, of all the events that had happened there. That feeling, I still remember, disturbed me because I did not understand it, nor did Paola grasp it when I told her about it . . . For many years, I have fled from the sound of the Voices, from which I feared hearing “the self’s alluring whisper” [see *The Remote Heathes* . . . 5.56]. I do not know why a few years ago—it was

1991—I started listening to them again. It was then that I wrote “You Come Back, O Poetry” [5.14] with its bold statement:

I fear you no longer
For the self-indulgence
You once inspired me.

All my poetry written between 1976 and 1983² is, so to say, retro-active. In those years, I kept a kind of diary, a series of sheets of paper on which I sporadically wrote down—almost always undated—feelings and thoughts. When, in 1991, I felt the need to pick up and rearrange my old poems, I also reread the words penned on those sheets. I realized that some of the phrases were particularly meaningful from a poetic point of view. I extrapolated them and, with a few modifications, turned them into a group of poems that I dated 1976–1983. Since the notes did not bear a date, I could not record a precise time for each poem, with a few exceptions. However, even for those verses, I still remember the moment that inspired them. Those were days of deep turmoil, the details of which have fortunately come out of my memory. Before continuing to cultivate poetry—as I have already written to you—about a year ago, I asked the advice of Hermes, a dear friend who is very staunch in the Faith, begging him to judge my poems with utmost severity exclusively from the spiritual point of view. Serious as he is, he did not underestimate my request. He read them carefully, and it took him a long time to answer me. Finally, he told me that the words written in “You Come Back, O Poetry” [5.14] put all shadows to flight. I think his approval was decisive for me. I felt, so to say, free from the fear of being a bad example . . . And that is how I have felt ever since. Maybe I still miss one thing: being able to write my poems only for myself, without aspiring to have an audience or the approval of anyone sooner or later. However, when you speak, you must talk to and for someone and to have “feedback,” as you call it . . .

² See “Despite the Light of Guidance” 4.4–9 (1976–1979) and 4.16–49 (1979–1983).

15 February 1995

Dear Julie,

. . . I feel the need to tell you about two poems I have just written and not yet given to their respective addressees . . .

I will tell you about the first one. Tatiana is a friend of mine, Jewish, of Russian origin (Odessa), born in Berlin, and a pianist, over eighty years old. I have already told you about her. I am pretty fond of her. One morning, on my way to the hospital, I heard a romance by Rachmaninov inspired by a piece written by Chekhov about a peak to which a bird flies. That music, clearly of Russian inspiration, reminded me of Tatiana, who left Bologna a few years ago to move to Pustertal Valley. Among people who speak German, her native language . . . and among the mountains she loves so much, she thought she could spend a more serene old age. We were visiting her when I wrote "Autumn, Autumn" [Toward the Unreached Borders 6.40]: she liked it very much. Tatiana is a true prodigy at the piano. The daughter of a pianist at the Berlin Conservatory and a violinist who has given lessons to well-known artists . . . a relative of Vladimir Horowitz, one of the greatest interpreters of Chopin, she grew up under her mother's grand piano. Tatiana heard Albert Einstein, who frequented her home in Berlin, playing the violin with her mother. The racial laws in Germany forced her to leave her city in the 1930s and come to Italy, where she managed to survive with many sacrifices. She abandoned her musical career at a young age to take care of her mother, who died in her hundredth year of age. Her many hardships did not deprive her of a *joie de vivre* that still emanates from her today as a perceptible warmth. Not long ago, I saw *Schindler's List* beside her. You can imagine the storms that those images, seen as I felt her horrifying next to me, unleashed in my heart. I have written the following poem for her. I am afraid of sending it. Will I disappoint her? Nevertheless, I hope she will like it [On the Wave of a Remote Music 6.50] . . .

I wrote the second poem when two young Bahá'í friends told me that, in my honour, they would name their baby girl Julia, who would be born on 26 January [Waiting for Julia 6.64] . . .

30 June 1995

Dear friend,

. . . Here I am, in a moment of respite, copying your letter dated 2 June on my computer and reading these words of yours: “We Bahá’ís are so imbued with Bahá’í principles that they seem to us elementary and trivial, in short, superficial, whereas philosophical thought, accumulated over centuries and centuries, [seems to us] complex, profound and rich in human genius.” I have a slightly different experience. As the Bahá’í Scriptures imbue my heart, I find other writings dull and less and less attractive, with a few exceptions. Perhaps I am under the influence of the words my father, who had read and studied in-depth sacred texts and philosophical and theological writings of the ancient religions for fifty years, told me many years ago. He said that he had removed everything from his library to make room for the few Bahá’í books in Italian that he had. He told me that all human knowledge was there. I think so, too, although I recently read a Bahá’í scholar saying that not reading the writings of modern intellectuals is tantamount to mental laziness. I share his opinion up to a point. Often, I do not know how to stop yawning when reading modern books. Nevertheless, some authors remain very fascinating to me . . . I feel differently in front of art: I love European culture mainly for its art. From Greece to the most recent past, Europeans have created a world of beauty of words, sounds, shapes, and colours where I sometimes still get lost, as if they vaguely reminded me of the scents of the radiant morning of creation. Thus, I prefer authors who are able to express profound concepts with winged words. The intellectual and scientific rigour of some of the writings chills me. Even the Islamic world, which I have just entered, fascinates me similarly. I feel attracted to concepts expressed in beautiful words and, thus, above all, to poets. And yet, I must admit that the philosopher-poets are much more numerous in that world than in the Western world.

14 November 1995

Dear Julie,

. . . the two photographs you sent me have . . . deeply touched me. They never appeared to me as “trivial postcards.” I perceived them as clear messages from a more and more precious friend. That emotion was the sweet and seductive commotion that beauty can always arouse in me. The pinnacles of the castle illuminated by the rays of the setting sun, almost separated from reality by the grey ramparts on which they stand, and reflected in the placid body of water that stretches out in front of them, make me think of the beauty that shines without veils in the celestial worlds, of the walls of material life that vainly try to separate us from that beauty, and of the sweetness of the “self” that God himself has given us so that it may mirror forth all that splendour. The other photo, on the other hand, with the dark profile of the castle silhouetted against that variegated sky of blue, white, grey, and orange, makes me think of the solemnity of particular moments of our lives, when something of ourselves, which we loved so much, is setting in one of the dimensions of existence to perpetuate itself in the expanses of memory. The solemnity of the sunset and its colours has played a decisive part in my life. Some people see the dawn as the essence of their lives. I—and I do not know why—see my essence in the beauty of the sunset . . . After every sundown, I do not expect dark and frightening nights, populated by terrifying ghosts and shadows. I trust I will enjoy a delicate evening, “absorbed / in a glimmer / of stars and moon” that brushes me “with [its] soft fingers” [Renunciation of Light 3.16], or a new-moon night, the velvet of whose sky is

furrowed by the Milky Way’s
 diaphanous shawl
 while the Southern Cross
 makes eyes at Austral heavens
 and sinuous waters
 enfold the body
 and glisten in a thousand
 phosphorescent lights. [Yearning. III 5.48]

How can such an evening or such a night be frightening?

I also thank you for the encouragement you again expressed for my poems. It seems like an eternity has passed since I sent them to you a year ago, perhaps because your answer . . . helped me to appreciate them more, to discover in them not only my petty subjective experience but also something greater, something that others too can understand. Now, I am more inclined to make them known and publish them. Rereading them through your eyes, I re-appropriated the story of my life. I realized that I had no reason to be ashamed of them. We are all frail creatures, and if my poems lay bare my fragility, they do not do so without decency. If they sing my “remoteness,” perhaps they tell even more of my desire to “privily converse with . . . [my] Beloved” [see SV¹⁹⁹¹ 11]. Unfortunately, I have not found a way to publish them yet. However, life has also taught me that God, when He wills, opens doors. I am knocking for now. Will any of these doors open? . . . If my poems have helped you to understand yourself or others, I have no merit. For me, as you know, writing is a need; there is no generosity when I compose a poem, but only the satisfaction of an inner pressure:

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

It is a blaze of truth
an outlet of sensations
an appearance of the features
of the innermost heart. [Poesy 2.22]

The first to benefit from my poetry is, therefore, myself. It is a source of joy and a privilege for me that you, too, benefit from it. I do not deserve any gratitude for that.

Recently, I have prepared a short anthology of poems about Asmara and Eritrea to give to Elio . . .³ I printed it on beautiful laid paper and added some photos. A good collection came out, which I titled *Not Only from the Shade of Remembrance*, which I hope he will like . . .

³ It was my inadequate way to express my gratitude to him for having presented to me in person, during a long tour of Asmara that we made together at the beginning of February 1992, the devastation of the Eritrean civil war and informed me that in those terrible days, some of our dear Eritrean fellow believers had been killed. The anthology *The Shade of Remembrance* was born from this early collection (2021).

4 March 1996

Dear Julie,

. . . In the last few days, I have been reading a booklet by Vladimir Mayakovsky, *How Are Verses Made?* I never thought I would learn so much from him. This poet of the Russian Revolution is the polar opposite of my poetics. He is so full of his revolutionary communist vision and attraction to the proletariat that I have never appreciated his verses. In his writing, he harshly criticizes those who make others believe “that only eternal poetry is safe from the dialectical process, and the only method of production is the inspired throwing back of the head while one waits for the heavenly soul of poetry to descend on one’s bald patch in the form of a dove, a peacock or an ostrich” [43]. He affirms that “The Revolution . . . has thrown up on to the streets the unpolished speech of the masses, the slang of the suburbs has flowed along the downtown boulevards; the enfeebled sub-language of the intelligentsia, with its emasculated words . . . all these expressions, pronounced in little whispers in restaurants, have been trampled underfoot. There is a new linguistic element” [46]. And he adds that the poet needs “a scream instead of a refrain, the rattle of a drum instead of a cradle song” [47]. Finally, he lists five elements that are fundamental to him for anyone who aspires to write poetry [49–50]: the social command, that is, “a problem in society, the solution of which is conceivable only in poetical terms”; the purpose-oriented approach, i.e., the exact perception of the readers’ position to the problem; the raw material, i.e., words; the equipment, i.e., the practical elements needed for writing; methods, that is, one’s poetic art.

I do not share some of his positions, but I want to treasure his ideas on making poetry so organized and practical. Maybe my poems are not very popular because of that. I have never seen poetry as a work but as a gift. Never as an effort, only as a liberation. Never as a “social task” but as a spontaneous and inevitable outpouring of feelings. I never considered the language of those I was addressing; I know that I have always addressed only myself. In this sense, my poetry is aristocratic, snobbish, or perhaps simply solipsistic. And I would not say I like that. I expect others to come to me. But I do not do anything to

go toward them. I write without thinking about anyone. For years, I even avoided reading contemporary poetry: I did not want to suffer the influence of any poet except the very few I love beyond measure. You, acting as a mirror, taking an interest in what I have written and what I write, have given me, for the first time, a reliable interlocutor with whom to weave a dialogue. So, you prepared me to learn how to write differently. Mayakovsky gives an example of one of his poems [50]:

For example: the social task may be to provide the words for a song for the Red Army men on their way to the Petersburg front. The objective is to defeat Yudenich.⁴ The material is words from the vocabulary of soldiers. The tools of production—a pencil stub. The device—the rhymed *chastushka*.

Do not you see, in these words, the possibility for . . . [me] to do the same? Mayakovsky also says, “Poetry is manufacture. A very difficult, very complex kind, but a manufacture” [57] and, to be able to obtain a good product, he proposes some suggestions: “innovation . . . The work of the verse-maker must be carried on daily to perfect his craft,” a “good notebook,” to “renounce the uneconomical production of poetical trifles,” to “be in the middle of things and events,” to “be in the vanguard,” to choose “the everyday circumstances of poetry” [88-9] and finally to distance oneself from the theme of poetry, gaining “a perspective of time and place” or at least to keep one’s “mental distance” [65] . . . He advises constant work: write verses every day (he says he writes at least 8-9 verses every day [see 55]), do not let the ideas go, but immediately fix them in a notebook and then pursue them tenaciously until something good comes out.

I have always done the opposite. The ideas of my poems emerge from a dark sea that surges inside me, pouring onto its shores in an unconsulted and irrational way. Only later, but almost always at a very short distance from the initial moment, does the elaboration, the reflection, and the effort to understand and clarify begin. Rationality serves me only to interpret and refine ideas that have always emerged

⁴ Nikolaj Nikolaevič Iudenic (1862–1933) a general of the Zarist army.

on the spur of the moment. Inspiration for me is such a tenuous and fleeting event that I must fix it in detail immediately. Otherwise, it vanishes, never to return.

To Mayakovsky's words (his photographic portraits in this book made him seem very familiar to me, almost like a good friend), I immediately responded by writing a poem according to my usual method. I titled it "Psyche and Poetry" [7.44]. I enclose it . . . I also came to conceive two odd ideas on which I want to work, according to the advice of the Russian poet, that is, collecting material, annotating it, thinking about these two odd ideas, and looking for new and captivating ways to express them, taking into account the fact that by doing so I intend to bring readers closer not so much to those two specific ideas, as to a Bahá'í reading of the fundamental symbols which they enshrine, setting forth the views of the tradition on the subject, and bringing out—I do not yet know how—the meanings which the Bahá'í Writings ascribe to these same symbols. Last night, full of sacred fire, I searched for material. Alas, how I hate "Vulcan's smithy"! I found very few significant insights and immediately felt discouraged. I will have to resign myself to start by developing a good bibliography. Will Eros have fertilized Psyche? Is the "flutter of wings" I feel in my bosom the child I conceived of him?

I wonder how a male poet who compares himself to Psyche will impact a male-dominated culture. What strange unconscious Oedipal implications will they read into it? All the more so if they knew that, in this case, Eros took the form of Vladimir Mayakovsky, singer of the Soviet revolution. Instead, the germ of this poetic metaphor comes to me from Adib Taherzadeh,⁵ who writes that in the face of the Manifestation of God, all human beings are female since they are receptive and fecundable elements [*Revelation* 1:74]. The extrapolation is straightforward: I, too, male, am female before the fertilizing energies of the poetic inspiration that comes, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, from the Holy Spirit [see CH167, 182].

⁵ (1921-2000), a prominent Iranian Bahá'í, who between 1988 and 2000 was one of the members of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith; he is widely known as a scholar and writer.

8 March 1996

Dear Julie,

. . . I received a letter from Edith [see 9 October 1996] whom I met in Montreal and later in Wilmette⁶ and whom I have come to appreciate for her spiritual and intellectual gifts . . . I had sent her a photocopy of the . . . translations of my poems published on *Artdialogue* and my English translation. She answered:⁷

. . . I thank you for your gift of poetry, for it . . . speaks to me of ineffable delights and unutterable sorrows . . . I was very moved by your poems. Like your other writings, they are elegant in their simplicity and profound in their content. I am glad that you decided to make them public despite your doubts that “these poems could contribute to the spiritual growth of their possible readers.” Rather than proving useless to the traveller, they make personal the journey thereby becoming a validation of the process . . . a marking of the pathway by a “real person, not a saint,” a tell-all guide to the inexperienced, yet a window into the infinite variations of scenery each soul views along the way. It gives a point of comparison . . . I liked very much the metaphor of Mary and Martha [6.32] dwelling in one heart; the love, yet the need for that love to express itself in action/service . . . I liked reading your poems also because they describe another and in reality, more primal relationship than any other—the relationship of the individual soul to its Lord and Creator. Your images are so beautiful, yet so accessible and familiar. Shivers. Thirst, blindness, fire and light . . .

⁶ Wilmette is a small town just a few miles from Chicago, important to the Bahá'ís because it is home to the Mother Temple of North America. It is also home to the Wilmette Institute, an educational institution based on the principles of the Bahá'í Faith that aims to inspire lasting social change for the common good. Its courses examine personal and collective transformation to develop in its students the required skills to create a more just and peaceful society.

⁷ The original is in English.

Liza [see 16 April 1998], whom I met in Landegg,⁸ also positively judged my poems and their English translations. Therefore, I feel encouraged to refine their translation and try to publish it.

I am sorry; I inadvertently removed some poems from the anthology that were dear to you. If you tell me what they are, I will restore them. My anthology is constantly evolving because I have a complicated relationship with some poems, not because I do not like them but because I am not yet sufficiently detached from the situation that inspired them. Consequently, I add them and later remove them depending on the moment's mood.

In the days of fasting, I read many poems, not only my favourite Ungaretti but also poets of the *Dolce Stil Novo*, other Italians of the twentieth century, Montale and Quasimodo, and their articles on poetry. The latter's statement struck me that a specific poem by Leopardi, "A Silvia" . . . [Quasimodo 270], has less value in his eyes than others because, in his opinion, it is too strictly related to the poet's inner life. He considers it valid as a document, not as a poem. I think many of my poems, seen from this point of view, are also documents. I believe that my difficulty in choosing between them depends precisely on the fact that document poems are the ones to which I am most attached, even if I often obscurely realize their limited poetic value.⁹ I also understood that my anthology has value as a whole precisely because it records, poetically, an inner journey. It is an actual diary in verse . . .

⁸ A hamlet of Wienacht, a Swiss town overlooking Lake Constance, which from 1982 to December 2003 was the center of Bahá'í activities of various kinds, especially learning-oriented. From September 1992 to December 2003 it hosted an independent university, Landegg International University.

⁹ Quasimodo writes: "The 'document' of a spiritual situation is not poetry" (270).

9 March 1996

Dear friend,

. . . As for your comments: “Crescent Moon” [In the Small Crescent 7.6] . . . is . . . a poetic locution of ancient date referring to the moon, and sometimes to stars. Galileo also used it. Famous is the poem “O sickle of moonlight declining” by Gabriele D’Annunzio, published in 1882¹⁰ . . . In Italian, “molecole” is no longer just a technical word and, therefore, is not out of tune with the poem.

Moreover, its “physicality” gives a good idea of weight. To make a comparison, “neutron,” which I used in another poem [The Neutron of the Spirit 6.80], is an exclusively technical term that no one uses with a translated meaning. However, in my poetry, I make use of the harshness and extraneousness of the term to express tension and dynamism . . . [As for] the noun “lightness,” it is a counterpart to the locution “oppressing weight” because it means “levity” and in this case it is intended to suggest the idea that the heart tends to rise upward, like fire, because it is weightless, light (detached?), while the world is “oppressing” or heavy and tends to bring the heart down . . . The meaning of the verse is that darkness/nothingness allows the soul to overcome temporal-spatial limits: the sentence “the narrow / limits . . . / are broadened” wants to suggest the wide presence in the soul of a dimension “without space/without self.” This limit that constrains the soul depends on the “molecules” and their “oppressing weight” that keep the soul anchored to a dimension that restrains and holds it down. But the soul is still weightless and light—a concept suggested by the locution “lightness of heart.” In my poems, the “heart” is almost always the soul, the essence of man. A word on the adjective infrequently used in my poems, “greve [oppressing],” means heavy, annoying, dull, oppressive, vulgar, coarse.

The excerpts from your friend’s letter moved me deeply. She is my first “external” reader. How happy I am that she understood, through my words, that “poetry belongs to the timeless,” that, unlike the novel, it is not “a lie or at least a disguised truth.” Poetry is indeed, as Colette

¹⁰ Very soon published, in an English version, by George Arthur Greene (1853–1921), an expert in Italian literature and a poet (Greene 8).

writes, “the essence of a being.” Alas, how vulnerable I feel as I give of myself in my poems! Tell her that her words make me understand why I was so afraid to have them read, why I kept them for years in the darkness of a desk’s drawer without letting anyone see them. Your friend writes that the poet must “trust in his neighbour, not despair in man, in short, trust to abandon himself.” Thank you for pointing this out to me . . . Maybe when I publish my poems, I will be able to put myself to the test and finally completely tear down those barriers that, over the years, could have wholly isolated me from others.

And thus sometimes
a thousand barriers are raised
and o’er the years the self
becomes a castle, wherein
the heart is held a prisoner,
and remains alone and aloof,
prevented from escaping
the sombre dark of limitation
and flying toward the sunlit
expanses of human life. [Tender Love 4.42]

I am also subtly moved by the postscript. What mysterious ties will exist between our souls in the worlds of the spirit to which they always belong! What utter ignorance of our mutual spiritual entities here on earth! How many chances to overcome these limits through a sincere heart stir! Maybe all three of us were present together on 9 June: your friend on an operating table, you in front of the splendid castle of . . . me, somewhere I do not know. And, when the veil has finally fallen, will our souls remember this story of theirs that now fascinates us so much? In addition to being a “diamond cutter,” you are also an excellent weaver. Between your friend’s heart and mine, there is now a spiritual bond that transcends all words. I love her, and the awareness of the transience of time that comes to me from her story makes our ephemeral moments more precious to my eyes, and—living them through her—I perceive all their value. Suddenly, I feel the urge to express this perception in words: Will I succeed?

30 April 1996

Dear Julie,

It was a rough, sleepless night [on call at the hospital] . . . In the past, it would have been a bad day too. However, I managed to get by without sadness and depression. I bought a CD. Martucci is a not-very well-known Italian author of the late nineteenth century, which I am fond of. His music is nostalgic and makes you think of Crepuscular poets like Gozzano. It is vaguely sad but not desperate, sweet, and tender. How could I not love it? I finally got to say it!

I love the colours
of the dusk . . .

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

I am of the children
of the half-light
and there is no high
noon in my days . . . [I am of the Children of the Half-light 7.38]

Now listening to “The Song of Memories” and his Nocturne and their words:

No . . . dreams are not gone, and I give in,
and I abandon myself to their sorrows;
I close my thoughtful eyes, and I see you again
as in a nimbus of golden sparks!
But . . . you pass through the air,
disappearing . . . in a distant . . .
indefinite horizon! . . .

. . . does not give me sadness, as it would have in the past, but only a great sweetness, which is trust in life, which God has created and which He protects at every moment, to bring it to fulfilment, in a thousand different ways in His infinite diverse creatures. And maybe tomorrow [your loved one] . . .—today “disappearing”—will return serenely . . . [and] even my melancholy can praise God,

[like] . . . the western
skyline that turns
red and yellow,
the light that
quietly vanishes . . .

[or like] . . . the eve
on the beach
when the swallows
in obfuscated sapphire
lightly fly
and its silence punctuated
by swashing waves
and stridulous twitters . . .

[or like] . . . the ancient
ruins that rise
amidst the grassy
sods covered
with fragrant
mosses. [I am of the Children of the Half-light 7.38]

28 May 1996

Dear Julie,

An Italian friend to whom I had read the poems collected under the title “Toward the Unreached Borders” [6] wrote me interesting concepts about poetry in general and a kind appreciation of my poetry in particular. Given your interest in this topic, I think you will like what she wrote to me:

In the title “Toward the Unreached Borders,” under which you present your collection of poems, I immediately grasped a theme that I love very much: that of the metaphorical journey in search of oneself . . .

What means can help us, then, better than that of poetic language, to express the stirs of the soul in its anguished tension toward the Absolute? and the ineffable joys that come from perceiving the reflections of that Shining Beauty from the limited vantage point of our earthly existence? . . .

Some say that poetry is the supreme fruit of verbal language. We know that it is much more; it is a bounty from the spirit because, through it and the “inner sound” of the word on which it subsists, the mysteries and secrets enclosed in the “chest of the heart” are revealed, and we are enabled to grasp the “subtle plane” of events . . .

Dear Julio, while immersing myself in reading your poems, I caught some particular “notes” that struck me to the core. In the emotional intensity and explosive force that emanates from certain metaphorical expressions, I perceive your ardent yearning to recover the authentic essence of life in its most intimately sacred aspect. I would say that the “breath of faith” transpires from each of them, both when you abandon yourself to a more confidential tone and when you surrender to the charm of certain religious re-enactments or mystical-allegorical suggestions such as those inspired by the Gospel [Martha and Mary 6.32] or by the enchanting fable of Eros and Psyche [Psyche and Poetry 7.44].

Souls who do not want to remain enwrapped in “slumber” and “oblivion” and yearn for spirituality and awareness cannot refrain, as you do not, from expressing their inner tension toward burning “the hindering veils of the nothing” [And it is Still So Much 6.46] and allowing the soul to “float upon the murky, stagnant water of the self” [Water of the Self 6.20]. However, at the same time, in your quest after the “scent of the eternal” in the “hearts of human-kind,” in the “beauties of the world,” and in the “mysterious fathoms / of the Mother-Letters,” you recognize all the joy that comes from struggling “so that the heavenly / kingdom’s luminous model / may be copied down here” [And it is Still So Much 6.46].

You also confirm in your poem entitled “In a Happy and Marvellous End” [6.24] that it is precisely through poetic language that we may rediscover the “inner child.”¹¹ An event that I consider of fundamental importance because it is undoubtedly from the hidden individual sources of childhood that our “individual fairy tale” and that attitude of intact amazement with which we should continue to look at life in the course of our journey can find their nourishment: “And today, by now an adult / I find myself still a wanderer / watching the world / through the eyes of a child / and poet . . . / Life is still dream/tale. . . .”

¹¹ I see here a certain resemblance to the concept of the child of the heart typical of the doctrine of the Sufi saint ‘Abdu’l-Qádir al-Jílání who lived in the twelfth century (see Savi, *Towards the Summit of Reality* 70-1 and *Nel fulgore del sole nascente* 167).

12 August 1996

Dear Julie,

. . . I have been away for five weeks: it has not happened to me in years . . . Paola arranged for me to meet a young American poet who read some of my poems in English and commented on five of them word for word. He paid me an unexpected compliment. He told me they seemed to be written by a native English speaker and that I could well submit them to a publisher. I have purchased many books of modern Italian poetry translated into English. I will peruse them carefully and try to refine my translation further. Then I will look for a native English-speaking person here in Italy and read them word for word with her. When I am sure the English is correct, I will send them to a publisher . . .

I spent the last week in Wilmette [see 16.8.20, note 5] . . . about thirty friends, mostly young, all enthusiastic and determined, gathered for a whole month to study the fundamental elements of our Faith. A group of well-prepared “tutors” willing to devote themselves generously to the education of these young people, all in the shadow of the Mother Temple of the West, beautiful in the setting of its green flowery gardens. This time, I did not perceive that feeling of emptiness, which prevented me from sensing its spirituality last time. I felt as if I was in a great mother’s womb, protective, where it was not difficult to collect oneself in prayer [Mashriqu’l-Adhkár 7.76]. In the morning, at seven o’clock, we gathered at the foot of the Temple, reciting the Fire Tablet together. There were many meaningful moments . . . One evening, each student told their story: some told funny stories, others (many, too many) expressed the pain that afflicted them, but each and all showed great sensitivity and a deep desire to realize the Bahá’í ideal in the world. What a thrill to hear them! What a desire to help them overcome loneliness and their feeling of unworthiness! . . . On the last evening, we found ourselves, without having made any arrangements, in front of the Temple. We all prayed together, and then someone proposed a big collective hug. We all took each other by the hand, and then, in a spiral motion, we all went around a friend who stood still in the centre until we formed a large knot, all tight. Human beings are hungry for love, and the Faith can bring it to them . . . [see Children of the Dawn-Breakers 7.72]

Bologna, 9 October 1996

Dear Raffaele,

As I announced last Saturday, I am sending you the text on which I would like your opinion. As you may have seen, you already know some of it: it is my anthology of poems entitled *Remoteness*. First of all, I will tell you my thoughts about it.

My relationship with poetry has been uninterrupted since my early adolescence despite its ups and downs. The poem entitled “Poesy” [2.22] describes its first phase: the outburst of a young man unable to express in any other way the deepest feelings urging in his heart. At a certain point, however, I considered this outburst to be unspiritual: almost as if going to leaf through the hidden—and often obscure—pages of the heart was an attitude of reprehensible self-indulgence [see *You Come Back, O Poetry* 5.14]. This judgment involved a long period in which I wrote poetry secretly, on the sly, almost ashamed of doing so. After many years, I overcame this phase, also thanks to you and a conversation we had on the train, which you may not remember but whose precious memory I preserve. Thus, the poem “*You Come Back, O Poetry*” [5.14] was born, which marks my growing awareness of the importance and significance of my relationship with poetry. My unfortunate attempt to receive guidance on this from . . . gave rise to the poem “*And It Is Still So Much*” [6.46], which further clarifies the meaning I now attach to poetry.

It was Hermes [see 16.8.10] who gave me that “institutional” encouragement I needed to be able to write poetry with joy, and for this, too, I am grateful to God. Since then, I have been poetizing without remorse but with an increasing hope of sharing my verses with others who would appreciate their form and content and be enlivened by them. “*Psyche and Poetry*” [7.44] illustrates my new and more serene relationship with poetry. In recent years, I have had some of them read by Italian and foreign friends: in general, they have been liked and considered helpful for spiritual quest . . . My desire to publish them has, therefore, received a confirmation. The first thing I would want to know from you is whether you approve of my intention or think the anthology’s content is too personal and, therefore, useless to others.

As for me, there are many reasons why I think I should publish it, many of them probably unconscious. The ones I realize—rational or rationalized?—are as follows. I view my anthology as a description of the inner life of a typical child of the West: a person full of doubts and weaknesses, steeped in Western culture and therefore sceptical and hyperrational, attached to material life, very doubtful about the accessibility of the forces of the spirit, unable to rise to the heights to which the Ideal calls. This person, however, is different from many others, for he clings desperately to the Cord of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, knowing that to abandon that Rope would be tantamount to perishing. I hope that my poems can convince other anti-heroes—mediocre like me—that the path of the spirit, although complex and tiring, is the only one worth following to the end, but that to follow it, you need courage, resolve, perseverance, patience, sincerity, willingness to live, without going dramatic, with the darkness that often fills the heart and that these qualities belong to everyone. Not just to the “heroes.” I think that all this can be of particular use to those who . . . are not Bahá’ís and who are sometimes frightened by the loftiness of the standards of the Faith and do not come nearer to it because they feel intimidated. For this reason, I have titled my anthology *Remoteness*: that remoteness from God, from the Ideal, from ourselves that afflicts many of us “children of the half-light” [I Am of the Children of the Half-Light 7.38]. For the same reason, I have symbolically dated it “29 May,” the day on which the “true Friend” [PCP, no.52] physically left this world.¹²

A series of considerations I will spare you have convinced me that the only chance I have of publishing it is to turn to an English Bahá’í publisher, such as George Ronald.¹³ Hence, I shouldered—and almost wholly accomplished—the heavy task of translating it into that language. However, I also believe that no publisher will accept to publish it in its entirety because the work is too long and, therefore, very demanding from an economic point of view. On the other hand, it is not

¹² The first edition of *Remotenes* (2002) is dated 12 November 2001, the Gregorian date of Bahá’u’lláh’s birthday.

¹³ For the record, George Ronald has never dismissed my poems. They just gave me very long waiting times and I did not have the patience to wait.

easy for me to make a further selection (the one I have presented to you is already a selection). Each of those poems seems helpful for my purposes, and therefore, I do not know which one to eliminate to make the whole less voluminous. Thus, if you think it is worth publishing them, this is the second help I ask you: a suggestion on which poems I should eliminate because they are less useful for my purposes. Once this further selection has been made, I intend to perfect the English translation, reading them individually with a sufficiently educated native English speaker. I already have some ideas about it. In this way, I will finally be able to complete this task that—held in abeyance for so many years—creates an inner sense of disappointment and frustration.

. . . As I mentioned, Paola arranged for me to meet a local poet in Seattle. I spent three very intense hours with him, during which I not only corrected the translation of some poems but also assimilated some important concepts about American poetry that allowed me to make other improvements to my translation. Other changes are the addition of two poems, which I wrote during the summer and which you will find on an attached sheet, and the extrapolation from the sixth collection entitled “Towards the Unreached Boundaries” of all the poems written after 30 June 1995 to form a seventh collection entitled “Children of the Half Light.”

I know that you will be sincere and not give me diplomatic answers but true ones, even if you will formulate them with the delicacy of sentiments inherent in you. I thank and hug you, hoping I have not caused you too much trouble.

9 October 1996

Der Edith,¹⁴

. . . being speechless: I know that being speechless may sometimes mean that the doors of the innermost heart are closed. Sometimes, there is such a gap between your potential self that you see so clearly in front of you, as it should and could be, i.e., as the Holy Words describe it, and your actual self, that you prefer to close every door to speech and be silent. Also, sometimes there is such a gap between what you know and what you do that you do not feel like saying anything because you are afraid to be one of those who talk too much but do so little. Nevertheless, I deeply feel the magic of words: the opposite need of saying what is going on inside, of describing the most intimate stirrings of the heart, as if your same words could help to understand what you still do not comprehend in yourself, and those words could shed light on the darkest corner of your heart . . .

My inner life has never been smooth. “Now Thou drawest me to the summit of glory, again Thou casteth me into the lowest abyss” [SV¹⁹⁹¹ 53]. These words by Bahá’u’lláh are a well-known reality to me. And I never understood why sometimes I am on the crest and sometimes in the trough [see Today in the Trough 2.58]. Speaking can be difficult in both conditions. In the “summit of glory,” there is the fear of misconstruing your own experiences and emotions and misguiding others through your descriptions. In “the lowest abyss,” it may be easier to speak. Still, again, you are afraid of being ungrateful since you are describing an unpleasant reality, of being harmful because you are not a good example.

I live every moment with all the contrasts and contradictions typical of human life, yet I love life despite its many imperfections. At the same time, it is so difficult for me to find a bridge between ideal reality and perceived reality. For a long time, I have believed that the Divine Laws are the magic bridge to harmonize the two. However, there should be a mistake in my understanding of reality because I still do not grasp the relation between physical actions and the soul. I perceive the soul as strictly connected to feelings rather than deeds. In other

¹⁴ The original is in English.

words, feelings are more important to me than actions. For instance, love is more familiar to me in the emotions it arouses in my heart than in the actions it moves me to perform. Rationally, I know this does not seem right; emotionally, I live according to my wrong perception. And thus, sometimes, I bear the consequences of this mistake.

So, I told you a few of my ideas (I should say “vain imaginations”) on speech, knowledge, will, and love. These words do not come from the Writings but from an unknown place in my heart. Maybe I wrote them because I was confused by what you wrote in your letter: “Your words are a reflection of the Holy Spirit.” On the contrary, what I perceive of myself is expressed in the following words: read “The Neutron of the Spirit” [6.80] . . .

Bologna, 3 February 1997

Dear Kurt,

. . . I turn to you, as I did when I wrote *The Eternal Quest for God*, although I know you have many other more important things to do, so I am not sure you have the time to listen to me.

I have written an anthology of poems, which I would like to publish as my response to the House of Justice's call to cultivate the arts,¹⁵ but I do not feel like doing so without your opinion. I have always written verses ever since I was a boy. I kept them to myself for many years, almost ashamed of them. Furthermore, I voluntarily stopped to write poems, afraid of feeding my already demanding ego too much. After a few years, I began to poetize again, without fear and often with joy. What I would want to know from you is not only if you like my poems from a literary point of view but, above all, if you consider them spiritually valid. You know me well, and you can sense my meaning.

For this reason, I think you are the only person who can evaluate them for what they are and tell me if and how reading them will help some other soul in pain to walk their way toward the Desire of all hearts, even among the pitfalls that life sometimes spreads with full hands. I wrote my poems in Italian, but later, I patiently and painstakingly translated them into English, and it is in English that I would like to publish them. In any case, I will send you both the Italian and the English texts.

The anthology that I would like to bring to your attention—and that I will send you on diskette or printed, by fax or email, if and when you want—does not contain them all, but only a selection. I think I will also remove others, but I do not know which ones. Also, in this respect, any suggestions you may have will be invaluable to me . . . I trust I can count on your sincerity, and you know that whatever you say to me will be accepted with joy and gratitude . . .

¹⁵ See *The Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of the World*, Ridván 1996, in *Turning Point* 4.32.

24 February 1997

Dear Edith,¹⁶

. . . I have finally found a native English-speaking translator and am revising my poem translations with him. The work is almost finished, and I hope to have the courage to present the anthology to a Bahá'í publisher, perhaps George Ronald. This work has been a source of joy and sorrow for me. Joy, because I feel my poems in the depths of my heart, and every time I read them, I relive what I experienced when I wrote them. Joy, because I hope they can help others, and I can say things that I could never express otherwise through them. Pain, because I am always afraid of deceiving myself; because I fear that they may be a kind of ego trap into which I could easily fall; and because I do not know if my intentions are pure. Pain because I am afraid they might be misunderstood or rejected. And really, I do not understand why I have such a strong desire to publish them . . . I am unsure what title I will give to my anthology in English. In Italian, the title is *Lontananza* [Remoteness], but I think of *From Lands Afar* in English [see 16.8.60].¹⁷ I am also sending you some poems that I wrote at the end of the fifties, at the time of my first meeting with the Beloved. Maybe you can whisper one in one of those Heavens¹⁸ [in Haifa] . . .

¹⁶ The original is in English.

¹⁷ This title, although significant, was later definitively set aside.

¹⁸ Shoghi Effendi wrote that the alabaster sarcophagus in which the remains of the Báb were placed on Mount Carmel is located in the center of “nine concentric circles,” the outermost of which is “the whole planet” (CF95, 29 March 1951, to the Bahá'ís of North America). I could not help but compare these nine circles to the nine heavens of Dante's Paradise.

26 February 1997

Dear Julie,

How many days of silence! Once again, the whirlwind of things overwhelmed me, taking away my desire to write, to speak . . .

I am working hard on the English translation of my poems. Yesterday, I received the correction of “Children of the Half Light.” It is not bad, but some things still do not satisfy me. I think I will complete the work in the next fortnight, and then I will have to decide to send them to a publisher. To whom? . . .

In the meantime, I found an Italian translation of Rûmî’s famous *Fîhi Mâ Fîhi*. Excellent! I discovered many phrases that I could use in my anthology. For example:

Now some men have so followed their intellects that they have become totally angelic and pure light. These are prophets and saints who are free of fear and hope, the persons on whom *no fear shall come, and who shall not be grieved* [Koran 10:62]. There are others whose intellects have been so overcome by their lust that they have become totally bestial. Still others remain in the struggle. They are the group within whom a certain agony or anguish is manifested and who are not content with their lives. They are believers. The saints stand waiting to bring them to their own station and make them like themselves. The devils also lie in wait to pull them down to their level at the lowest depth.

We want them, and others want them
Who will win? Whom shall they prefer? [Signs 82, no.17]

Perhaps I will preface the anthology with this quote because it is the compendium of everything I have written.

4 March 1997

Dear Julie,

I always have something to tell you on my way back from Rome. On Saturday night I went with David to Trajan's Column: do you remember it? . . . We also talked about my poems. He told me he thinks I should publish them with some illustrations. I would not mind either. Many of them can also evoke visual sensations. But I do not know how to realize this idea . . . The revision is almost over, and, in any case, the translation seems acceptable to me. I hope to be able to send it to him tomorrow. I will mail it to you as soon as I finish, and hopefully, it will be very soon. In the meantime, I also contacted Kurt [see 3 February 1997]. I asked him if he would read my poems and give me his opinion. I was worried because I did not receive any answer . . . Then on Sunday, when I arrived home from Rome, Paola told me that Kurt had phoned to ask me to send him what I had invited him to read. I emailed him the anthology right away. By Monday night, I had already received an answer. Among other things, he tells me:

Dear Julio, I received your poems around midnight and began to read them. Tears of joy came to me, letting myself be lulled by the waves of feelings evoked . . . I understand, for many, it will be difficult to enjoy and savour these poems fully, but I hope that the beauty of the sentiments expressed and the language will touch the hearts of those who read them. Therefore, I want to encourage you to publish them, even if only future generations will enjoy them more . . .

I could not wish for more . . . I have heard the most beautiful and encouraging words from you and now from Kurt as well. I hope the anthology can be published. Now I understand that I have this desire because my heart is in those words, and I want to offer it to others so that they may use its experiences to get closer and closer to the Desire of all hearts. If that happens, then my life will have served a purpose .

..

. . . At the beginning of April, Kurt will come to Italy. He asked to set aside a whole day of his time for me. I do not know if you have appreciated the depth of the love I have for him and the importance that his existence has for me. The bond that unites me with him is subtle and elusive but deep and real. It is beyond time and space, reason, and memories. It makes me think of boundless expanses of freedom and joy. My relationship with him is unequal; he is a teacher, and I am a disciple, and it will remain so. Thus, I am glad it is. I am delighted in his presence. I do not need words to tell him my feelings; he understands me. He is the person who knows me best, even in the hidden corners . . . How happy I am when I can remember him and how often I talk to him in my thoughts! The world is a fleeting shadow, a small symbol, a dream that the deluded mistake for reality. However, it is difficult for me to penetrate Reality; I can only perceive a glimmer of it, a sparkle of it, and immediately it flees away. You and Kurt are here to disclose the gates that open the Placeless in front of me! And I am grateful . . .

P.S. Quotes from the *Book of Inner Depths. Fíhi Má Fíhi* . . .

Words are but “shadows” of reality . . . just pretexts [7, no.2]

It is a pity to reach the sea and be satisfied with only a cupful of water.
When pearls and hundreds of thousands of beneficial things can be extracted from the sea, what is the use of taking water [10, no.2]

“The believer is a mirror to the believer” [Hadīth 25, no.6]

When hearts communicate directly one with another, what need is there for words or tongues? [44, no.11]

In talking there is only enough to produce a hint of stimulation [“an echo,” in the Italian translation]. [59, no.12]

In a human being is such a love, a pain, an itch, a desire that, even if he were to possess a hundred thousand worlds, he would not rest or find peace. [66, no.15]

“Man is greedy for what he is denied” [Ḥadīth 92, no.20]

When you reach the king, submit yourself to him. You will have nothing more to do with whys and wherefores. [117, no.26]

. . . the world is like a mountain. Everything you say, good or evil, is echoed off that mountain. [158, no.40]

8 April 1997

Dear Julie,

. . . I am glad you met Abbas. Did you see the light in his eyes? Have you heard his voice? He often does not understand me; I am too complicated for him, linear and simple as he is. However, he loves me very much and is particularly dear to me. He did not tell me much about your meeting; there was no time. Now you describe it to me: how lucky I was to have been there with you, without realizing it . . . Your thought [of reciting one of my poems to Abbas] moved me. It responds to a profound need that I feel: entrusting my words to a voice worthier than mine so that it may make them resonate

beyond
 the impervious walls
 of the self, up to
 the furthest reaches
 of immensity
 where Truth dwells [The Walls of the Self 4.6].

And perhaps my yearning for the infinite can finally be, if not satisfied, at least soothed. By a “strange” coincidence, on Friday, 7 March, in Haifa, a friend, to whom I had asked to do so, whispered some of my poems (the very ones I wrote when I met the Faith in Asmara, one of which you mention in your letter) in the Shrine of the Báb and then informed me . . . Once again, my heart is lost in a sea of wonder: what strange ties unite the souls of some human beings in this world almost without their awareness? Without knowing it, Edith—this is her name—is now united to you through me, as Colette was to me through you, by a small but meaningful gift of love. And I am here always torn in two: the heart, enthusiastic and blissful, is looking forward to discovering the reality of all this in the only real dimension, and the sly mind stands there to watch and impose “reins and restraints” [The Walls of the Ego 4.6] . . .

Tonight, we went out on the terrace to take one last look at the comet [Hyakutake’s Comet 7.64] before it escaped into space. The

mere thought of her disappearing into dark interstellar spaces breaks my heart, as if the comet were an old friend I could never see again. The more time passes, the more I fear it. Sometimes, I wish I had finished all my time by now to escape its tyranny forever. These are the things that Abbas does not understand, and I sometimes tell him about them out of an excess of confidence in him and a lack of inner wisdom. Going up to the Pincio on Sunday morning, I told him about it, receiving a loving scolding in return . . . What a difference between his unyielding faith and my thousand doubts and uncertainties . . .

I found a poem by Amír-i-Khusraw, an Indo-Persian poet of the thirteenth century:

I hope sometime to have sight of Thee to the full
How long with my eyes at Thy door
I have to be waiting and waiting. (*Memorial Volume 77*)

Do not you think that after seven centuries and in a very different atmosphere, one can draw the same feelings from my poems? The pain of being away from the Beloved and the yearning to see Him “to the full.”

. . .

1 July 1997

Dear Lella,

. . . How lucky you are to be part of a cénacle of poets and have a circle of friends with whom to share your verses! Today, few people understand the need that drives a person to write poetry: to express in metaphorical and universal form feelings one does not otherwise feel capable of voicing. Some say that today, those who write poetry outnumber those who read it. I do not find it hard to believe. Today, feelings are so little considered in everyday life that only in a poetic context do the most sensitive souls feel like airing them. That is, in an environment that makes them feel safe from the insensitivity of others. I will be delighted to come to . . . for a consultation on the issues of comparative religion and, if you like, on my poems. It is all about finding the time: the availability and the desire are there. Interesting themes could be: Is ecumenism possible between religions that consider themselves absolute and eternal? Or even: There is still a place for mysticism in the modern world of science and technology. In the literary field, a topic could be: What is the future of poetry?

I found your poetry fresh and delicate. After reading it, I remembered a collection of poems—dear to my mother—in my home’s library that I used to read with great pleasure. Since then, I had not read anything by that poet, so I immediately went to Feltrinelli’s bookstore to buy an anthology of her. To my surprise, I found only a modest publication . . . The review made me realize that contemporary critics have deliberately and unjustly neglected this poet . . . However, in life, she had been very famous. It is Ada Negri . . .¹⁹ Like the poems by Ada Negri that I remember, your verses, dear Lella, are delicate, veiled in melancholy, but not sad. It is a melancholy that arises from memory and regret for what is no more. I am susceptible to the poetry of memory. That is why I feel so close to them. Your . . . [poems] speak to me and thus let me enter into your world, where everything seems soft, where the sounds and lights seem weakened, not the feelings . . .

¹⁹ (1870-1945), an Italian poet and writer, initially known as “the obscure proletarian schoolteacher,” the first and only woman to be admitted to the Italian Academy.

14 October 1997

Dear Lella,

I am fascinated that you are looking for “the possibility that there are, in the given cultural spaces, the elements for overcoming individualism, without relapsing into the snares of belongingness or metaphysics.” I would need more elements of your reasoning to adequately expose what the years of research have led me to discover in this sense. I hope, therefore, that you will forgive me if I only pose the terms of the problem without suggesting solutions and if my words describe sensations of the heart rather than rational paths of the mind. My personal story has led me several times to an awareness that I cannot explain in any other words than those of one of my poems: “the dark vertigo of the self, \ the awareness of its empty abyss \ of impotence and void.” This awareness, when faced without pretence, can only lead to the “impelling / need to break its chains” [The Neutron of the Spirit 6.80], the chains of the “self,” I mean. Some contemporary psychologists have imagined that this specific anguish humans sometimes feel when alone with themselves arises from the muddy depths of what analysts call unconscious and subconscious. They have also deluded themselves into believing that they can help humans overcome this anguish—expressed in various ways and circumstances according to different personal experiences—through careful exploration to shed the light of conscience . . . into the darkest corners. And sometimes, some sensitive and self-generous therapists have even managed to help someone feel better and live with increased balance and serenity.²⁰

I think human anguish is a human’s intrinsic quality: everyone knows, loves, and wants the best possible. The tension toward perfection is as inherent in them as their anguish, of which that tension is in some way the mother. How can we resign ourselves to the imperfection that is rampant outside and within us when, in some way, we see and hear glimmers of perfection—as fleeting as they may be? Where will a human being find in herself something that will help her apart from herself? In other words, is it possible for an imperfect being to

²⁰ I greatly appreciate modern psychologists and the great assistance many of them often give, in other circumstances, to neurotic people and disrupted couples.

find within herself the way to overcome her imperfection, which is identical to individualism, that is, the concentration of thoughts on oneself? We can say the same of human collectivity, which, being the sum of many imperfections, cannot be anything but imperfect. Thus, my torn heart cannot find in the cultural spaces given to it by other imperfect beings a medicine to heal the painful illness of its individualism. Is this what you suggest when you write: “And sometimes it seems that between the great factory of the world and the ‘ideal feelings’ . . . there is an impassable gap”? At this point, I cannot fail to tell you that, at times, this “impassable gap” has seemed to me to have already been crossed by others in their lives and that I have drawn from this awareness a great strength in the required struggle to follow and express “ideal sentiments” in my daily life.

Your poems always bring me a breath of fresh air . . . They give me the sense of freedom of heart that we can only perceive when we feel we are an essential part of the Universe. The silence of your—our—night when . . . everything is silent before beauty reminds me of a passage from a prayer that is particularly dear to me:

Make firm our steps, O Lord, in Thy path and strengthen Thou our hearts in Thine obedience. Turn our faces toward the beauty of Thy oneness, and gladden our bosoms with the signs of Thy divine unity. Adorn our bodies with the robe of Thy bounty, and remove from our eyes the veil of sinfulness, and give us the chalice of Thy grace; that the essence of all beings may sing Thy praise before the vision of Thy grandeur. Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by Thy merciful utterance and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls—a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds—that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendour. [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in BP69]

Your—our— “clouds” speak to me of humility, a rare and precious gift in human beings. Your dedication is as welcome as your wish that I may “pass through the great serene, meek, innocent beauty before its

enveloping light.” I could not have described in more beautiful words a desire that I sometimes perceive when I feel as if I were in the presence of the Eternal. Thank you.

You write that you do not keep your poems in order. Maybe you should. It is not that hard. Put all those pieces of paper one after the other in chronological order and gradually make a list of them so that you can find them again and—later—in moments of grace and inspiration and without dangerous indulgences to the insidious flattery of the mind, try to polish the minor defects that verses written in one go inevitably have. For years, I, too, did as you do. On the one hand, I was afraid of touching what I had written in special moments of my life and that, as such, was very dear to me; on the other hand, I was afraid of overestimating the value of my words and thus of giving an excessive place to the “self” in my life. Later, I realized the importance of art (when the poet consciously polishes her words) alongside that of inspiration. I also understood that if you have received the gift of writing, it is good to share it with others who know how to appreciate it. A poem is always a “limpid sheet of water” for some Narcissus in search of his image, a “transforming mountain” for some Echo in need of feeling the reverberation of her feelings [Psyche and Poetry 7.44].

Thus, the poet offers herself as a holocaust to others, allowing strangers an intimacy that is unthinkable even with friends. Yes, having one of my poems read was for me at the beginning, like showing myself naked . . . Try to transcribe some of them on your computer so that you can also rework them, of course keeping the original version as well. In this way, your poems will be more objectified, perhaps less personal, but no less sincere, and for this very reason, more accessible to others. If you want, you can offer others a handwritten copy of the computer-processed version (lucky you that you can do so; I, as I told you, have almost illegible handwriting). I have a friend in . . . that from time to time presents me a gift . . . of one of my poems, sending it to me in manuscript in the manner of the ancient scribes: a precious donation that over time is becoming a refined collection. I hope you do not mind if I take the liberty of writing these words . . .

9 November 1997

Dear friend,

. . . I never thought I would mourn the death of someone I had never seen. The thought of Colette arouses great tenderness in me. I knew I would hardly meet her, but I was happy to know she was on earth. I want to delude myself that our bond will transcend death and that it will enable us to recognize one another in the afterlife. Thank you for sending me her photos. The grace of her body corresponds to the image I had unconsciously formed of her. I do not know if the poem I wrote in Maremma . . . [The Seagull 8:26] has something to do with her: maybe yes. I dedicated it to those I met and immediately lost. However, I did not even see her. Thank you for what you did for her on my behalf: the rose you offered her and my poem you read to commemorate her in front of those who knew her. Even though I am far away, you have allowed me to be there with you. I know precisely the date of her death, not that of her birth. Do you know it?

2 December 1997

Dear friend,

Your letter arrived on Wednesday. Soon after, a patient called me to announce the birth of her baby and asked me to visit her in the hospital. Yesterday, after finishing work in my clinic, I complied with her wish. What a beautiful baby girl, placidly asleep in her cradle! They named her Colette. That those two young farmers from the Po Valley . . . chose such a refined name for their daughter, whose growth I followed throughout her mother's pregnancy, strongly impressed me. It seemed to me like a nod of greeting from our unforgettable friend from that unknown dimension in which her bright comet is now travelling. Does she mean that even now, having she transcended the limits of time and space, our hearts are close to one another? . . . Does she mean that those of us who are physically present in that spiritual Centre of the world [the Bahá'í World Centre] will be able to take our hearts with them and that it will be as if we were present there, even better, because our voice, our cry for help at that Threshold will resound even louder, offered as it will be by a heart that loves us?²¹ I know that Colette and I will be beside you and that you will not forget to invoke upon us those blessings that we so badly need to walk our paths with courage: I, still down here, and she, there in the infinite heavens. Once again, our diverging skies will meet in a blaze of light.

. . . Now I know for sure that there is no pain so great that time does not heal it. It is enough for the heart to learn how to draw a little more joy from daily life, not to shy away from life, and after a while, the smile returns. And while I still talk to you, I fear life will not teach me lessons other than these. Late last night, I watched a television show about Frank Sinatra. You know that music has an extraordinary meaning to me. If I have ever known moments of ecstasy in my life, most have been induced by music. Sinatra is part of my childhood and

²¹ Rúmi describes in his Mathnavi a dialogue between God and Moses that goes something like this: "O Moses, beseech Me for protection with a mouth that hast not sinned withal." He answered: "O God, where do I find such a mouth." God answered: "Do something so that others will pray for you. Thou hast not sinned with their tongues. And therefore those tongues are pure and free from sin" (See Mathnavi III, 180-5).

early adolescence. His vibrant voice, great sense of rhythm (they call it swing), romanticism (an acceptable way to express youth sensuality), and image of a good boy—an image with which I have often identified myself—have always touched me. Yesterday evening, watching in about an hour the pictures of his entire life, now very close to the end, pass before my eyes, hearing voices and seeing events of days so far away reopened a wound that has never fully healed in my heart. I have not yet accepted the transience of what is beautiful and what I would like to immortalize. “Time / why even here do you fly?” [The Voices of Time 5.18]. This question remains unanswered. And it cannot have one. It is not reason that can answer, but only the heart. And my heart seems deaf to the calls of daily eternity; it seems blind to its presence in the everyday world, except for fleeting moments, immediately vanished and therefore always regretted. The present is still opaque to me: I cannot see in it that “translucence of eternity” of which Bausani writes [see *Saggi* 152-3]. Only when facts and things move away I better perceive their beauty.

I have never seen . . . [your city]. It is, therefore, difficult for me to follow you on your daily movements. However, if I ever come there, I will want to know those places: your Piazza Navona, your Via del Corso, your Via della Fontanella.²² Also, in Rome, in Piazza del Campidoglio, they have put a countdown on the days that separate us from the end of the millennium. Sometimes Paola and I joke about our way of thinking and behaving so anachronistic at the end of the twentieth century. We say to one another: the twentieth century is over, and we still belong to the nineteenth. It is not a joke. Our families educated us according to nineteenth-century criteria for different reasons and circumstances. As for me, because my family, being a family of “colonials,” had lost contact with the motherland and with the evolution of its culture. Thus, the models they taught me come from my great-grandparents, all four born between 1870 and 1880. As for Paola, because her father, her most influential educator, was born in 1910 but was trained by a grandfather, born around 1860 . . . I am pretty convinced

²² In those years, the Italian Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly, the governing body of the Bahá'ís of Italy, met in an apartment at No. 4 of that street.

that the only thing that deserves to be taken into account of what has happened since the nineteenth century is what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: reformation and renewal are the first and fundamental requirements of modernity (see PUP191-2, par. 2, 22 May 1912). Everything else is worth very little . . . A distressing thought accompanies me nowadays. . Permissiveness is rampant, and customs are decaying . . . Older people are ignored, even when they should be listened to . . . What can we do to stem this decline? . . . How can we take into our own hands the precious legacy of past centuries and pass it on, purified from the pollution of materialism, to future generations? Will human civilization have to start again from a year zero? Will the developing new civilization . . . be required to pay the price of the Dark Ages that preceded the flourishing of other civilizations? If I look at myself objectively, I feel like those ancient Romans who watched in dismay and helplessness as their world crumbled: Petronius Arbiter and his *Satyricon*, Marcus Aurelius and his *Memories*, Emperor Hadrian and his *Stoicism*. You see to what extent the passing of time is problematic for me . . .

I will also leave for Christmas . . . and travel to Sicily with Paola, Giorgio, and Patrizia. I will tell you about our experiences. Tomorrow I will go to . . . I will speak in a private club on “Mysticism and Poetry.” At their request, I will base my talk on my personal experience and, therefore, on my poems. On Sunday, I will move to Vicenza, where I will hold an in-depth course on the “Sacred Word,” lasting from morning to afternoon. On Wednesday evening, I was in Mantua to speak about the “Sense of the Sacred in Our Faith” . . .

16 December 1997

Dear Julie,

Here I am back from . . . The experience in . . . was enjoyable. I met a group of people . . . who privilege the warmth of feelings over the relative coldness of mind . . . They followed my discourse on the mysticism of my poetry with attention, participation, and emotion. They asked me to read again some poems. After the official meeting, one of the members of the Club who was celebrating that evening to inaugurate his new home invited me. At the end of dinner, still at the table, some of those present read their works . . . The commonality of interests and feelings that bound that group of people struck and moved me, and I felt part of it. When they finished reading, they asked me to re-read some of the poems I had already read and some of the ones I had not read. It was an act of great kindness, which I greatly appreciated . . . In the morning, when I left, the gulf of . . . was illuminated by the dawning sun, and in the background, the . . . [mountains] all covered with snow stood out in their rosy light against the blue-grey of the still sea. I thanked God for the gift of light and joy that He had just given me and that now appeared to me in an earthly form in that dreamy landscape . . .

19-26 January 1998

Dear Lella,

For me, there is no difference between perfection and happiness. Yes, because that perfection in which I see the destiny of man is, as you also say, fulfilment, completion, or an expression in one's deeds of what has potentially always remained hidden in the self. Any discovery of a previously ignored potential implies waves of joy. It is the delight of the baby who discovers the bliss of freedom in his first steps, even if they are uncertain and clumsy. It is the gladness of discovering oneself capable of doing something previously unknown. No, I do not think that a human being "alone, shut up in his hollow [did I read that right?] interiority and in the place of his contemplation" can attain this kind of perfection. The ego is the seat of oxymorons: sometimes it is the thickest darkness, other times the brightest light. It is the thickest darkness when one is pleased with it, thinks it can bestow satisfaction and wants to bend every other component of daily life to its service. It becomes a prison, then, a place of torture, where worries and anxieties magnify hour after hour because the desire and passion in the ego are unlimited. In a few moments, they reduce to ashes like a furnace, whatever nourishment one can give them to satiate them. And let us not delude ourselves that solitary asceticism can appease desire and passion. It can only freeze and dry them up. That is not what will bring joy. On the contrary, joy will come only from turning one's desire and passion toward the purpose for which every human being exists: to serve.

It is a word that is not much loved today. It is almost despised. However, everything that exists "serves," and if a thing is of no service, existence provides for its liberation. Think of the boundless world of life, plants, animals, and humans. In living beings' bodies, if an organ is not used for its function, it atrophies and unravels. How can a human being not "serve"? I believe that only in service will the darkness of the self finally become light, and desire and passion find something that will satiate them. The commitment to service appeases and satisfies them, and in the joy of even a small result, the new Faust can finally say: "Stop, moment, you are beautiful!" Isn't that happiness? Is it not that fulfilment, completion, and perfection? Not that I

despise solitude, meditation, or prayer, quite the contrary. However, they cannot be an end in themselves; they are only a nourishment that helps the spirit express itself better and realize itself better in daily life.

As for contemplation, it is a gift that every human being receives, even if sometimes he does not know how to recognize it as such. Because his contemplation is different from that of others . . . Contemplation has made me see in the clouds the story of my life until maturity, and with it the story of all my fellow travellers on this restless planet [Clouds 7.50]. It made me hear and understand the voice of Degghera Libe's sycamore tree [5.30] or Kaldidalur's swan [5.12]. I have never experienced the visions or auditions some mystics describe, nor do I care. It is enough for me to be aware of my contemplation or what I recognize as such. I cannot see transcendence as a separate, stand-alone entity, intellectually conceivable, like the theorems of Pythagoras or Euclid . . . For me, transcendence is all manifest, as far as I can tell, in immanence. It is in the transparency of infinity that I grasp it, that I identify my transcendence. Thus, beauty is one of its most evident signs and, therefore, one of the highest objects of my love. However, I do not mean outward beauty, as people commonly conceive, but harmony, order, integration, symmetry, kindness, and friendship. Perhaps now you understand that I, too, would be irritated if someone called me religious in the traditional sense, that is, loyal to dogmatic and ritual patterns transmitted by any tradition. Like you, I never bowed my head before those gods and let them steal my soul.

No. Religiosity, for me, is something very different. You know, sometimes I too think that the word "god" can deserve a lowercase letter if that god is nothing but an idol, a fiction of the mind, and the place to worship him is an enclosure within whose narrow limits life becomes renunciation, fiction, conformism, loss of identity. For me, religiosity is a feeling that arises from my relationship with the universe, with humanity, and with myself. It is the sentiment that makes me feel, at times, in tune with the alternation of day and night or with the slower and more solemn rotation of the seasons, in tune with the motion of the stars; that makes me feel at peace with humanity, but not with that abstract entity that people often criticize, but with the concrete and real one of the humans who pass by me; that makes me

feel at peace with myself, in the awareness that I have done my best, that I have tried to do what I think is right. However, the same feeling sometimes makes me suffer if I do not feel in tune with the world, at peace with humans, at peace with myself in the exact circumstances I find myself in. Thus, I look within myself for the reasons for that disharmony and conflict, and until I have discovered them, I know I cannot rest. When, on the other hand, I find those reasons, I try to solve them. Only then does peace bloom again in the heart, like almond trees in springtime. For me, this is religiosity in its innermost forms. (Could this be one of the possible explanations for human pain and suffering? A stimulus to struggle to emerge from that anguish and regain a happy harmony with the universe?)

I do not think I have discovered anything new in you compared to what I had perceived since the first letter, besides a few details, perhaps significant for those who live them and feel them—as we are almost all prone to doing—as an essential component of their lives, but accessory instead for those who look at humans in their essence. My essence and that of others is a mysterious *quid* that transcends sensory or rational perception, showing only a few of its signs—faint clues from which one can perceive its existence and characteristics. Like smoke rising into the sky behind a high wall, that *quid* allows me to envisage the fire that produces it beyond the wall and some of its characteristics. I do not identify this essence with my body or mind, not even with that uninterrupted flow of thoughts, sensations, and feelings with which I am accustomed to living since the most remote day whose memory I have—in a coexistence so close that sometimes I identify with that flow and the memory that I keep of it and in which I recognize myself and find myself every morning as soon as I open my eyes. I am neither that memory, that remembrance, that awareness. Instead, I am their author, neither their spectator nor their actor. And that author is shrouded in a luminous darkness. Think. These are not just incomprehensible words. They are a metaphor with which we try to describe the ineffable.

It should not be difficult for a poet to abandon the quiet shores of reason for a moment to venture into the perilous sea of intuition. Of

intuition, not of fantasy, that intuition which Arab philosophers, such as the Andalusian Ibn ‘Arabí, called “creative imagination,” capable of seeing the external appearance of things as a “symbol” of an inner dimension closely linked to the outer one, and gleaming through it.²³ So your outward symbol, in the eyes of my creative imagination, reveals much more than the details of your life, even though they are significant as signs of their author. It is to the author that I try to direct my thoughts and attention, and in you, I perceive enthusiasm, curiosity, desire for purity and freedom, love of truth, and yearning for infinite joy. Yes, I know that one day, all this will be yours; indeed, it is already now. The process of perfection or fulfilment appears to me as a slow upward spiral motion, as a continuous turning around the issues that are the pivot and leitmotif of our life and that are being developed more and more toward an unreachable bright point, which is our common unattainable Goal, to which someone rightly fears even to give a name. If this is the process of our perfection, you already have enough perfection and are happy about it. When, on the other hand, the author is ready to take another step forward toward the Goal, desire and passions stir in the heart, and disharmony is born, from which one ought to get out. And to get out of it, one takes the appropriate action, and with this, almost without knowing it, one takes that step forward for which one is ready. I sometimes ask myself: what will be the next step? Where will the loving hand of life lead me?

Since it has become a habit to show each other the hidden folds of the heart through some poetry, I am sending you one that may be a challenge but does not involve a struggle, no winners, no losers. It is just a joyful run or chase of two seagulls that, having left the shore, fly freely toward an island that looms far away on the horizon. One of them has already been on that island, and with his flight, he invites his partner to follow him on an adventure that has always been thrilling for him [Martha and Mary 6:32].

²³ See Savi, *Towards the Summit of Reality* 151–2.

5 February 1998

Dear Julie,

. . . I hope with all my heart that God will open the doors to the publication of my poems. Then I will know that even confined to the walls of a home [or a hospital] as I often am, my voice resounds in other hearts to glorify His Word with my great joy. However, will this intention of mine be pure? The meeting with the anthropologist took place at the home of the wife of a colleague of mine, who was also born in Asmara. I had the opportunity to converse about Asmara and my complex relationship with my distant homeland. The person was intelligent and knowledgeable. I have found that many have mythologized this place, each projecting the anxieties and desires of their hearts into this earthly place. So I bought a book by Del Boca entitled *Italiani in Africa Orientale* [Italians in East Africa] about the period 1940–1984 . . . I realized I have always lived in a bubble in Eritrea and, later, in Italy. Social and political life facts have passed before my eyes without my seeing them. This fact annoys me: how can my words reach others if I place myself outside of history? . . . It is one thing to know the Faith and its teachings on the processes of contemporary history in theory, another to identify the reality of daily life, to read its signs, and to use one’s insights . . .

A dear friend with whom I keep correspondence in the United States wrote me about my poem “The Seagull” [8.26]:²⁴

I was very moved by your poem about the seagull. Your attempt to be one with this creature is such a powerful metaphor—one that works in many directions: the seagull as those whom you have lost after a brief attempt to connect, to merge yourself into another beingness; the speaker as God and the seagull as man, resisting the contact, the lock of the eyes and flying off to food: companions? To something trivial . . . Either way, there is the terrible aloneness that comes from realizing your own separateness.

²⁴ The original is in English.

25 February 1998

Dear Sybil,

What a pleasant surprise to find your letter in the inbox a few nights ago. It is not an absurd claim for you to be recognized. I certainly have not forgotten you, neither as a writer nor a person. As a writer, I assure you that you have fascinated me. Your words of appreciation make me very happy, but even beyond the words, from your non-verbal signs, I had perceived empathy and participation. What more could a poet want?

After your letter, I went to re-read your poems published in the *Raccolta di poesia contemporanea di autori . . .* [Collection of Contemporary Poetry by . . . Authors]. And I recognized in them the disorder of my feelings and my need to air what urges in my heart. Still, I also found in your poems wings of clouds, distant freshness, the song of water, fragments of summer before which I became, together with you, speechless in wonder, in peace. It is good to hear another's words resonate in one's heart. It is like understanding and feeling understood at the same time. This is one of the many beauties of poetry.

. . . Separation from loved ones is a sad experience. However, death can also be a messenger of joy if the life that awaits the soul is indeed better than this. Sometimes, I imagine I am a fetus in my mother's womb, safe but in the dark and solitude, and I imagine life beyond as this world of light and spaces when compared to the womb. Or I think I am a seedling in a vase, and I expect that when I am sufficiently grown, a loving Gardener will take me out of this pot and transplant me into the vast expanses of the world to come, where perhaps I may still grow and develop. In this way, I console myself for the loss of loved ones. I imagine they are well; this lessens my pain for missing them. I also think then that time is like a dream. Soon, it will be over, and in the world beyond, we will all meet one another in an unknown dimension where there is neither time nor space but only an extraordinary eternity and co-presence. Will our loneliness finally end in that world? Will we all, at long last, be united, we humans, as one big family? I am a poet, and I also like to dream. Yes, because for us poets, this Western civilization of the twentieth century, with its

haste and fluster, makes us feel lonely and disoriented and often creates a feeling of rejection that prevents us from fully understanding others and making ourselves understood by them. That is why the afternoon and evening spent with you in . . . have become part of my most cherished memories: an encounter with sensitive people who have shown that they understand me in my poems, that is, in my most authentic part, the same that in many other people, as worthy as they may be, arouses surprise and often even embarrassment.

Since you liked my poems, I will send you some, hoping to please you. Hopefully, we will read others together in . . .

With friendship and esteem

7 April 1998

Dear Julie,

. . . I will call my latest collection of poems “Divergent Skies,” from the poem on the seagull. I did not write anything since that day on the Tyrrhenian Sea at Talamone [8.26]. I wrote a few verses again last Sunday on Mantua Lake behind the Gonzaga castle. Mantegna painted his best frescoes in this city, Monteverdi represented his melodramas and performed his madrigals [As One Day the Drop 8.28]. I had just had the good fortune to enter the Bibbiena Theatre alone: a friend knows the caretaker and asked him for this unusual privilege for me. It has been a long time since I have felt such an intense aesthetic emotion. In front of that spectacle of architectural harmony, my heart leapt into my chest. Maybe it was that experience that allowed me, after a few hours on the lake, to write again. Or maybe it was the colour of the water, a shaded blue-grey, typical of that lake with its many supple rushes . . .

These days, the answer has arrived from. . . [a publisher]. They tell me that my anthology is impressive in size and that the poems are moving and inspiring. However, they write that . . . in the world at large, there is not enough interest in poetry. Thus, for purely economic reasons, they do not feel like facing the expense necessary to publish it . . . This umpteenth obstacle disturbs me more than it should; I still do not know how to get the required detachment. I identify too much with those poems. I think they are the most authentic and sincere work I have produced.

16 April 1998

My dearest Liza,²⁵

If your Naw-Rúz letter with your precious gift has been a great joy, this second letter is—if possible—an even greater joy. It contains two priceless gifts.

The first is the inner experience you describe. You let me enter into a personal and delicate universe: that of your artistic/mystical experience. You write that I had the privilege “of planting the seed of spiritual education” in your soul. I am so happy that I could—albeit indirectly—encourage you to have such an experience. However, I am sure your artistic gift is the first responsible for that joy. I feel all art is a gift of the Holy Spirit [see CH167, 182]. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit uncloses “the gates that open on the Placeless” [see PHW, no.17] to the artist, and if the artist’s heart is pure, she will perceive “the indwelling Spirit” [SAQ7, para.2.8] wherever her eyes fall. Furthermore, if her art is polished, the artist can infuse the sweetness she has perceived into a piece of art, and all those who listen to, read or see that piece of art will perceive a droplet of her feelings. So I hope you will more and more often be given such elating and fleeting moments by the Holy Spirit. I know you will share them with others through your moving songs.

The second gift is your request that I send you my poetry “to set some of it to music.” I will undoubtedly be delighted if one or more of my poems can arouse in your sensitive heart the same spiritual feelings that prompted me to write those words. If this happens, I will experience those feelings as your heart perceives them, which is the most precious gift for a poet.

I began to write poetry as a child. Therefore, my poems are many. I collected most of them as an anthology, hoping it may be published someday. The Italian title is *Lontananza*, which should be translated as “Remoteness.” I am not sure that “remoteness” may evoke the same echoes in the hearts as the Italian word. Therefore, I titled the English collection *From Lands Afar* [see 16.7.33]. Those “Lands Afar” are my spiritual homeland, from which I sometimes feel so “remote,” and my

²⁵ The original is in English.

African homeland, which I was obliged to forsake long ago. I think that the leitmotiv of my poetry is a kind of nostalgia, which I also perceive in your songs. As you can see, I sent you many poems. Catch a glimpse of them; maybe they will inspire you. Those written between September 1857 and March 1958 describe my feelings when I enrolled under the banners of Bahá'u'lláh.

My best Riqvân greetings

5 April 1998

Dear Sybil,

I had already received some time ago and greatly appreciated your precious gifts: the copy of the story . . . the poem on . . . and the little book . . . presented by you and enriched with your beautiful love poems. However, the other day, a childhood friend of my wife who met you and admired you in . . . made me—if possible—appreciate those gifts of yours even more. I was happy to learn that you are recognized as a poet in the city where you live because I know that poem-writers, at the bottom of their hearts, want to share with others the feeling of the precious moments that inspired them. It is almost like repeating that experience as if every reader could give voice to the heart of the poet who spoke because the moment's feeling was too urgent and pressing to be checked [see *The Fleeting Moment* 9.76]. Now I know that your words resonate in many hearts, and I hope that this will help keep the need and desire to write alive in you. . .

I also thank you for the other gift you gave me, which is intangible but no less precious: the expression of the desire to meet me again, a sign of friendship, almost affection. I hope to have more opportunities to see you and the friends from the Club . . . For an afternoon, you have granted me the joy of reading my poems, utterly unknown because they are all still unpublished, to an attentive audience and the hope that those feelings so urgent for me could also resonate in your hearts.

This latter gift of yours encourages me to tell you briefly about myself. These days, I do not write much: a thousand thoughts take away my freedom to listen to the voices of the spirit that, to me, reveal their mystery only when I find silence. I am going through a period of transformation, and, therefore, I am often bewildered because I feel like I no longer recognize myself. It is not the first time this has happened to me. So I look forward to knowing where I will be when, at last, a great light will shine again in my heart. Some of these sentiments are at the core of two poems, which I enclose [*Wayfarer* 8.20; *The Seagull* 8:26]. I am comforted knowing they will resound in your heart at least once.

27 April 1998

Dear Lella,

I understand you. Our correspondence is not a formal thing. It feeds on reflections that we are both stimulated to make by each other. Only when these bloom spontaneously does the letter truly express what it ought to, even if it is only a thank you. What I told you does not deserve appreciation. That is what your person has moved me to think and say . . .

I like to imagine you in New York, especially now that spring is more advanced and Central Park's trees will have already begun to cover themselves with foliage. Did you take the disk with all your poems with you? Maybe you will have a few free hours left to re-read them occasionally. And I hope this action can be a reason for your growth. First of all, spiritual growth: perhaps you can trace unknown paths among those words that come out of your heart on impulse. But also growth in art. Yes, because poetry is not only inspiration, impulse, and truth, it is also the search for perfection and, therefore, art. By reading them all together, you may discover through which path the words flow best and achieve their purpose. Little by little, you will make your poetic art and refine your poetry, which will become more and more understandable to others. It will no longer be just a historical document of your life, valid only in your universe. Perhaps your verses will expand to interpenetrate other universes and become a document of humanity, not just individuality. Maybe the universal that every artist yearns for will appear through words that sometimes you write only to "console" yourself in a few moments in which the soul—having lost the small rational references that make it so sure of itself—feels lost and alone, far as it is from its true homeland. Speaking of the love for God that—even if unconsciously and without identifying it as such—every human feels stirring within if only she listens to herself for a moment in silence, a great Sage wrote: "Love hath bound a myriad victims in its fetters and pierced a myriad wise men with its arrow. Know that every redness thou seest in the world is from his wrath, and every paleness in men's cheeks is from his poison" [SV 20, para.2.21]

. . .

1–2 June 1998

Dear Julie,

I just got back from a mega gathering of Asmarinos. Paola had been invited to meet a group of high school friends and asked me to accompany her . . . There were about 900 people, mostly over 60 years old. My peers were not many . . . I met many people I had not seen in forty years. An elderly matron recognized me in a photograph taken in 1952 or 1953 that another person was showing, and so I discovered that she was a lady—in those days young and lovely—of whom I was very fond. Behind those eyes now clouded, for her as for others, women and men, behind those features weighed down by years and years of life, for her as for others, behind that hair now thinning, fragile and grey, behind those signs of old age, I saw all the beauty of the young people of former times again: sparkling eyes, green as boundless meadows, or blue like our Eritrean skies, or black and deep like our nights, framed by shiny and flowing hair, blond or red or brown, delicate and seductive features. It was a bath of emotions . . . The love for Asmara and the memory of a shared past generates a feeling of unity and solidarity similar to spirituality among the Asmarinos. Even strangers soon become friends [The Bridge of Friendship 10.88].

As usual, emotions tossed me around. In the depths of my heart, there is always something unfulfilled, a sweet yearning, a nostalgia, an absence, a voice that says to me, “Give me some more!” without ever granting me peace. I wonder what all this is about. Sometimes, I think it is my wrong relationship with time. I see an old face, and I think of its youth and mine and the time and space that have always divided us, other old faces, and the time and space that have still and always divided us. Thus, I tell myself that perhaps all this is nothing more than a deep nostalgia for “the others,” all the other humans I have known on earth and those I have not known, to whom my essence links me as a human being. And I understand that no friendship on this earth can satisfy me because no matter how close it is, there will always remain an “I,” a “you,” and a “they.” However, I would like only and always an all-inclusive “we,” where everyone’s feelings are fused, in the double sense of subject and object of those feelings altogether, no

one excluded. I know that in that “we,” joys and sorrows, desires and satiety, needs and satisfactions would compensate each other, and perhaps I could find peace. You know, if the afterlife is like that—and I hope it is—there can be no hell for anyone because the hell of just one of us would be the hell of all. There can only be differences, and those who have erred the most here will perhaps be different only because of the gratitude they will feel toward those who have done less wrong and from whom they will freely receive so much wealth . . . In the light of all this, also my resentment for . . . no longer makes any sense. I am not resentful of her, but my “self” that through her has hurt itself because she is also me, and I am her. Therefore, being resentful of her is more painful for me than for her. My resentment stays with me every moment I live; it only resurfaces in her when she sees me or thinks of me. Sometimes, I would like to hold her tightly without piercing my heart with her blades. Is it possible to love without suffering? . . .

2 June

It is early in the morning, and I cannot sleep. It seems like something wants to keep me awake, and I do not even know what. It almost always comes in memories, mostly not beautiful, that harass me with a thousand thoughts. Better to get up, then, and complete tasks that the day’s commitments have prevented me from finishing. Like your letter, which is now almost ready to be sent.²⁶ Yesterday afternoon, I met many, too many, broken hearts. A lady in her early forties has recently lost her peer husband, who died in front of her of a heart attack and is now struggling with a twenty-year-old son broken by the sudden death of his father. An older woman who lost a son-in-law six months ago to an accident has now lost her son to another accident: now there is no longer this affectionate older man who visits her every day to bring her a word of affection. A patient of mine whom I have been following for thirty years is about to lose her husband, struck by a kidney tumour. So she regressed into a whole series of neuroses and phobias that, as a young woman—I remember very well—made her and her family

²⁶ I have sent letters to some friends that I have written on different days, in order to establish a more intimate and personal bond with them.

suffer a lot . . . Another patient, fortunately very religious, told me with disconcerting candour that her daughter is suffering from congenital atrophy of a cerebral lobe, with consequent motor difficulties and delayed physical development, and she blamed herself in apparent carelessness. A dear friend of ours passed away after long years of struggle with cancer while her husband was in a coma in the hospital for a stroke and fifteen days before the long-awaited wedding of the only one among her children, all over thirty, who had decided to get married. I believe that no human mind can understand why a Creator, Who is by definition Merciful, chose to build creation as He built it, without sparing suffering to any sentient being, whether human or animal. It makes us think of a universe born by chance, as modern agnostics say, in which it is worth living only by waiting for, remembering, or enjoying those few moments of peace or joy that chance confers on us at its sole discretion. Fortunately for us, the Creator has given us the greatest gift in His Messengers, Who utter words of consolation and peace in which we choose to believe, even if we do not wholly understand them. Then we find a little comfort “while the wind, as it does, is silent” [Dante, *Hell* 5:96].

28 June 1998

Dearest Liza,²⁷

I have been so happy to receive your kind letter and that you have read my poems all through . . . My poems are so many, and you have been so patient as to read them all. I am also happy you found that much poetic thought has gone into my work. I am sure the original Italian is more fluent and melodic than its English translation. A friend of French mother tongue did the French translation. I did the English version myself, which is why you found that some of its grammar and syntax do not read well. However, I did not send my poems to you and other English mother-tongue friends without having them all checked by a native English-speaking translator. You have my permission to change their English rendition to make their words more appropriate for your music. Of course, I will be happy to see the results. The poem you have “almost” chosen is one of my favourites. It tries to describe my relation with poetry, which went through several stages that I described in other poems, such as “Po-esy” [2.22], “You Come Back, O Poetry” [5.14], “Mírzá Maqsúd” [5.46], “Flowers” [7.8], “I am of the Children of Half-Light” [7.38], and “Psyche and Poetry” [7.44]. Initially, my poetry was an intimate colloquium between myself and my “self.” Slowly, however, one of those two selves took on more spiritual qualities, and thus poetry changed into a dialogue of my self with Spirit. However, the self remains so weak that although Spirit often shines forth in great glory in front of it, still the self is not able to translate its perceptions of those moments of joyous love into human words, much less to eternalize them into a persisting experience of spiritual strength and joy. This powerlessness is why the melancholy pervades most of my poems. It is the sadness of remoteness from a much-loved Friend who remains so far away because the self is so weak that it does not accept following the ways that could lead it closer to Him. Thus, my feelings resemble those of those people—and there are so many—who still did not enjoy the vision of His light.²⁸

²⁷ The original is in English.

²⁸ These concepts were later elaborated in the article “Necklaces of Corals and Pearls” (17.3).

Landegg, 1 October 1998

Cara Julie,

How many days have passed since I sent you my last letter? I do not count them anymore. They were days full of joys and experiences. I regret that I did not immediately give word form to the subtle sentiments that gladdened the heart to share them with you: it is difficult now to reconstruct the atmospheres and renew those thoughts and reflections. That is why I am writing to you, from Landegg [see 16.8.20, note 6], in my room at ten o'clock in the evening, while the hall is unusually resounding with the inviting laughter of girls and boys. And it is not easy to resist the temptation to join those cheerful hearts . . . Landegg appears to me as one of those great Schools that flourished in the golden age of Athens (like Plato's School) and makes me feel like I am in heaven. For this, I thank God, who has granted me, at least once in my life, this precious experience . . .

I am writing to tell you about the precious treasure that Bahá'u'lláh has given me: a new friend . . . I do not realize how it happened, but he managed to get all my poems, which I have on my laptop, from me in a few hours. The next day, he asked me to accompany him for a walk. He invited me to sit with him on a bench under the trees with a beautiful view of the lake, and then he read me one of my poems in English [Where Are the Boundaries 6.8]. He wanted me to hear how my words read by another person resonate. So, and I do not know why, I asked him to peruse, at his leisure, "As If" [5.40] and to tell me what he thought of it. The next day, at the dinner table, he said my poem was "nasty." I was disappointed because "nasty" means "bad." However, later, he took me to another place with a beautiful lake view. He asked me to recite that poem in Italian. Soon after, he declaimed it in English and told me he loved it. The subtle problem that this poem poses had been and was a cause of suffering for him (just as for me, who would like it not to be "as if"); therefore, the poem touched him directly in the heart. That is why he told me it was cruel: I had hit the mark . . .

Of course, I have also had other lessons in love this month. Especially from Paola, who pampered me in every possible and imaginable

way . . . There have been so many days whose beauty I would like to describe in detail that it is impossible to convey their meaning in a chronicle. I should have written a few poems immediately. I was so caught up in the moment's intensity that even the distraction of writing a note on a paper sheet seemed inconceivable. I thought I would do so in Landegg, but even here, I do not have the time . . .

For the rest, they were days in which God continually showed me the attributes of His Beauty: the Hawaiian tropical forest, with its colours and scents, the immense Pacific with its giant waves and its unfathomable abysses, the golden magic of the Yellowstone waterfall (a unique place in the world), the sweet placidity of its trumpeter swans that floated carelessly on the transparent waters of one of its rivers, the strange hues and shapes of the many geysers, the meadows and streams, the antelopes and even the bison. Everything spoke of beauty. Thus, I often felt such joy in my heart that I could not help but pray wherever I was. A strange prayer, a prayer I had never known. I asked God to continue to pour out His mercy on His creation, to persist in blessing everyone as He has always done, indeed even more, to the point of eliminating every trace of pain from any creature and making the attributes of His luminous Beauty shine ever brighter in the world. These moments, even now that I remember them, give me a strange intoxication, as if I could concentrate and appease my whole life with its frantic searches, torments, and thoughts in those fleeting instants . . . By talking to you, I hope in some way to make their scent reach you, to take you away (just for a moment) from the tiredness of a tiring day, or to add the joy of a joyful moment to your joys. It is almost midnight, and I would better rest, or I will put my students to sleep tomorrow morning . . .

Bologna, 2 March 1999

Dear Sybil,

It was a great joy to receive your letter from Antholz's snowy gardens. I hope those days in the serenity that the sunlit snow inspires have strengthened your spirit, preparing you for a fruitful commitment to the activities you set out to do this year. I also thank you for the encouraging words you wrote to me about my poem. You, a well-known poet, may have forgotten those days—if there ever were—when you wrote, and your poems remained yours alone, with no one to share them with, to hear the reverberation of the feelings you generously and courageously poured into your verses.

. . . I believe that the contemporary world is thorny because interpersonal relationships have become much more complex and elusive than they used to be. Getting along with everyone, as you would like, is not that easy. Different, and very strong, personalities come into conflict quickly . . . The solution to the problem is a better understanding and practice of love. Sometimes, people are fond of love itself rather than of those who should receive their love. They prefer to be objects rather than subjects of love. In my opinion, this situation has to do with the emphasis on personal fulfilment that our society has placed in an increasingly pressing way in the last fifty years: the purpose of life, they say, is to impose oneself in one way or another. I think the opposite is true: the purpose of life is to know our inner self, our soul, which is pure spirit, and to master our human personality so that the soul can use it to make the qualities of heaven appear here in the world. The consequence of this particular spiritual development is the attenuation of conflicts arising from the most limited part of ourselves. Souls do not come into conflict; personalities do.

Another aspect of modern life that creates conflict is that of loneliness. The kind of life society forces us to lead, willingly or unwillingly, involves an enormous waste of energy. There are always a thousand things to do, and the time is short. We often dedicate ourselves to socializing in the hours of tiredness, precisely those in which we are most fragile and less perfect. In addition, the excess of commitments sometimes leads us to neglect our loved ones, aggravating the

situation. I think it is wise to recognize that we live today in a spring that has just begun. It is still cold; the buds are still half closed. However, better days will surely come. Let us do our best to eliminate disagreements, at least from our hearts: we can do that. Let others keep them, and if we meet with some challenging person, let us be patient. In the end, we will be happier ourselves.

Today is a special day for me. My Faith teaches that the 19 days from 2 to 21 March, the vernal equinox, are days when God bestows more generous blessings on those who strive to follow His laws of love for His sake. May you receive these blessings in abundance these days and throughout the year.

With love

P.S. Two poems, so as not to lose the habit: “Reciprocity” [9.86] and “On the Altar of Friendship” [Black Pearl 10.12].

Bologna, 2 March 1999

Dearest Liza,²⁹

You write, “After 23 years as a Bahá’í, I have barely brushed the dust on the surface of Understanding.” I feel the same: my longing to know God remains unfulfilled after more than 40 years in the Bahá’í fold. However, how will a poor creature know his Creator? You find it amazing that I “still have the sensitivity and energy” to go after the mystery of God. Your words made me think. Why do I often express my feelings of remoteness from God and seldom those of nearness to Him? I have more than one answer. The following is one of those many answers. I consider human life on the earth as a continuous struggle toward the unreachable goal of Perfection, and Perfection is God. My words describe my feelings of uneasiness with my “insistent self” [SWAB256, 259, sec.206], an uneasiness which, however, spurs me to struggle to discover my “deeper Self.” Thus, in reality, I am not unfulfilled in my longing for God but only in my inner need for perfection. My longing for God finds fulfillment in my desire to go away from imperfection and move toward Him. Service to the Cause of God—which is also the Cause of humankind—is the most remarkable arena where we may advance in this struggle. Without the Cause, I would feel hopeless, deprived of my “chart,” which guides me in my journey through the ocean of life. There is such wisdom in His words. There is such beauty in His words. There is such Love in His words. My inner journey has taken a new course these last years under His guiding light. I tried in the past to deepen my intellectual understanding of things. However, a time came when He guided me toward discovering the meadows of love. In these last few years, I went through several paradoxes, the paradoxes of life and death as experienced in one’s willingness to sacrifice oneself, and thus in a way to die, for other human beings. So, my longing for love is both fulfilled and unfulfilled. It is unfulfilled in its perfect and total dimension because I am a limited human. It is fulfilled in its everyday dimension when I perceive all its sweetness. The Valley of Love and the Valley of Wonderment of the Seven Valleys describe this condition.

²⁹ In English the original.

Today, my dearest friend, I finally understood that I have no certainty but one: He is the Sun of my Life, the Life-Giver, the Light-Giver. My understanding of His words and my capacity to translate His guidance into everyday life are imperfect and doubtful. The joy of my life is to struggle so that His enthralling words may become a daily reality in human life.

I pray you may find your answers in your desire to know and love Him and that His light may always illuminate your pathway.

With my love

P.S. This poem expresses some of the feelings I tried to explain in my letter [As If 5.40]

Bologna, 7 July 1999

Dearest Lella,

It is impossible to tell you how much I appreciated your letter that I received last Friday just before leaving for a mountain weekend in Pustertal. The sweetness of your thoughts accompanied me through the beautiful days I spent in the cool climate of the Dolomites . . . Your letter, your description of the thoughts that move in your mind, but mainly in your heart these days, and especially your latest poems have struck me deeply. Something I have always felt in you is moving in your heart's soil and beginning to emerge, like a long-guarded seed that must wait for spring to germinate.

Your poems demonstrate a new level of maturity, a more profound ability to look, perceive, and express what only the innermost self knows and that the mind must slowly discover and understand. No: mind and reason are a small thing in the greatness of the reality of a human being, whoever he may be. Otherwise, what would be the simple, the people who are wholly devoid of mental and intellectual knowledge? Are we, the Westerners, really the most evolved representatives of the human race on earth today? I am grateful to God for making me understand this since I was a teenager and a friend, a Viennese intellectual of the highest level . . . helped me to climb over the walls of intellectual pride behind which the best minds in our culture often want to remain confined. While we travelled together in remote areas of Eritrea, he helped me to love and appreciate the beauty of the hearts of those "ignorant" and "savage" friends who have nothing intellectual at all, so much so that they almost seem not to use their rational faculties. Yes, our heart is the most precious part, the one that vibrates with love for people, things, and ideals and does not know why. Love has no explanation: it just lights up. However, woe to the lover who loves that which destroys him! Should we defend ourselves from the fire of love, lest it consume us? I believe there is only one possibility granted to the lover: to turn all his love toward the One who will never disappoint him, the One who speaks in the depths of his breast, regardless of any rational thought, any demonstration. What

need do I have to prove that the sun is shining when I see it, and if I do not behold it, I feel the warmth of its caress on my skin?

I perceive something in your words that I know well: an inseparable binomial, which has constantly tormented and cheered me up. It is called love-pain. Now, I understand that I cannot love and reject pain, and I accept it. I also know that pain is often so sweet. Yes, it becomes so when, as you advise . . . “I am enchanted to look at the beauty of other people’s wounds.” Then my grief becomes a prayer for myself and others, “a prayer that rises above words and letters, that transcends the murmur of syllables and sounds—and that all unites in nothingness before the revelation of . . . [His] splendour” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in BP70]. Yes, I hear and agree with everything you say . . . I read and transcribe this prayer for you [PM226, sec.168]:

O my Lord!
 Make Thy beauty to be my food,
 and Thy presence my drink,
 and Thy pleasure my hope,
 and praise of Thee my action,
 and remembrance of Thee my companion,
 and the power of Thy sovereignty my succourer,
 and Thy habitation my home,
 and my dwelling-place
 the seat Thou hast sanctified from the limitations imposed upon them
 who are shut out as by a veil from Thee.
 Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.
 . . .

21 February 2000

Julie, my dearest friend,

The sum of your latest messages is equivalent to an actual letter, yes, a letter full of thoughts and feelings, which enriches the flourishing garden of our friendship. Once again, the heart becomes a mirror of the heart. You blame yourself for . . . [your] silence, I criticize myself. It is only a moment of dryness of heart, one of those many imperious corners of the endless valley of love that His lovers must repeatedly traverse in their lives. When the heart keeps silent (mine does, too, and so often), it is because the fire is burning it so much as to hush all voices. But soon, it will be free once again. You have to know how to wait . . .

The weekend was serene . . . The purpose of the trip was to accompany an old friend to the mountains, who, after her widowhood, had not dared to return to those places where she had gone for many years with her husband. Making this woman happy was a great joy, so Paola and I felt great. There was snow, but it was not that cold. The sky was only partially cloudy, showing charming patterns and colours.

The Beloved continues to pour out waves of warmth and tenderness upon me. My imagination flies. The inner voice sings words of love that I listen to in ecstasy. I cannot write them down on paper for fear that they will become ugly, for fear that it is not He who speaks to me but only the vain fantasy that resounds from the treacherous recesses of the self. Yesterday, while I was waiting for Paola and Teresa, who had gone to Mass, sitting on the bench of a snow-white square in front of Toblach mountains, the voice spoke loudly. But I do not know how to repeat those gentle words. My thoughts were close to Gianni Ballerio, to the memory of our challenging and sweet moments. It was as if I could talk to him while our bodies were so far away. I thought of people we both loved here on earth, who are now in the other world and whom I felt close to both of us and radiant. The sky was grey at the time. The eye of the sun, fogged behind a small, thinner patch in the dense layer of clouds, stared at me. That patch allowed me to look at its radiant globe without fear and to feel in my heart all the warmth it emanated in the bright blue above the clouds. A great bird flew to

the right as if toward a sweet destiny. I felt enveloped in a strange warmth. My heart longed to be a mirror of that light and beauty. The need for expression had become so great that I felt exalted but also crushed. As often happens to me in moments like this, tears began to flow abundantly from my eyes, and a prayer came from my heart. May God protect us from the idle fancy and vain imaginings of the self. [The Two Eagles 10.68]

I have replied to a letter with a letter. Did you come with me to the square of Toblach, and did I go with you to . . . after the hailstorm?

Bologna, 1 August 2000

Dear Lella,

. . . The days are always so dense that I can no longer listen to the voice of poetry. Thus, I do not have any new poems to send you, except for an “occasional” one, perhaps not significant outside of the circumstances that inspired it. I will tell you about them. At the beginning of June, I was expecting a visit from a friend from . . . who would stay here for a week. Of course, I had planned many short tours to show him our country’s artistic beauties he is fond of. I noticed a sad face when he arrived at the airport at noon. I thought he was tired (almost 24 hours of air travel). Instead, he told me in dismay that he had received the news on the flight that one of his brothers had suddenly died and that he had to return home immediately to assist his distraught mother. We spent most of the afternoon at a travel agency to arrange his back flight, and the next morning at dawn, he took another plane to . . . He would then return to Europe after a week . . . but not to Italy. You can imagine the sorrow and disappointment of both of us. The result was an occasional poem, which does not seem bad [Seventeen Hours 10.84].

For the rest, I devote all my time to research (medical work does not occupy me more than twenty hours a week); I work up to 12-13 hours daily. As I told you, I wrote a short essay for an Indian publisher on the theme of “human success, prosperity, and happiness,” a topic that allowed me to expose what I think of contemporary materialism (not rationalism, which I appreciate and share), with its excessive trust in sense perception and its distrust in the spirit, for the sole reason that it is not perceptible through the senses.³⁰ I am convinced that this ultimately “irrational” attitude, which unfortunately predominates in Western culture, is the cause of our undeniable decline and most of the ills produced in the world by our civilization. This short essay allowed me to say all this in words that I hope are “rational” and, above all, soft-spoken. Which, as you know, I often cannot do when I speak. This kind of activity gratifies my “yearning for infinity,” which is the main Muse of my poetry. I perceive the infinity in any effort to achieve the

³⁰ *A Nest on the Highest Branch.*

collective goal of humankind's oneness, which I see looming more and more clearly among the clouds that obscure the horizons of history. I think that only by drawing from the best part of ourselves (our spiritual nature, indeed not our material qualities) will we be able to contribute to hastening the day of our oneness and spare severe physical pain to the most (the hungry masses) and moral pain to the least (the Westerners). The thought of struggling to contribute toward this goal appeases me. Despite the many misadventures that surround me (I do not list them; they are very sad and sadden me because they concern people I love deeply), I perceive a feeling I cannot define other than "joy." I delude myself that this is love for God, feeling united in our intention and action to an Unknowable Essence—rational, loving, and kind—that moves the infinite universe and each of our trifling hearts, attracting us all to Himself if only we surrender to His attraction.

Attachments: "From Nights to Dawns" [10.82]; "Yielding Submissive" [10.86].

Bologna, 20 February 2001

Dearest Lella,

. . . Your poem about death is very sweet and inspiring. The words are melodious, the images seductive, and the spirit conveyed is positive, even if veiled by a subtle melancholy. I am grateful you sent it to me. I have all your letters and poems collected in an envelope, which I keep with tenderness. I hope that the Poets' Club will continue its beautiful meetings and that exchanging your verses with each other will enrich, stimulate, and gratify your Muse. Mine sulks with me: I do not listen to her. My focus is on writing down a few thoughts on issues that—in my opinion—are very important for the future of the whole world. Who knows, maybe my four readers will benefit from it . . . I have just finished revising an article on poetry that I had sent to a Canadian magazine. They returned it to me with a very positive comment and a request to make changes to render it more attractive and complete if I agreed. I worked on this project passionately and satisfactorily, rewriting it in Italian and English. I mailed it yesterday morning, and I hope it goes well. In any case, if necessary, I will revise it again. As you know, I am a self-made man, and the scholarly environment is demanding. I hope I have fulfilled their expectations.³¹ As for the article on pluralism, the editing went on for many months. In the end, a concise and rational text came out.³² Maybe this one about poetry is less rational, but we are talking about poetry and need a pinch of beauty. I enclose a copy in Italian just in case you want to read it if you have a free moment. I know you would have preferred some poetry, but the few I have written need to mature a little more.

³¹ "Shedding Light in the Hearts: Reflections on Poetry," see 17.2

³² "Religious Pluralism: A Bahá'í Perspective."

28 June 2001

Dear Lella,

I have just received your very welcome letter with the two beautiful poems . . . I believe that we both share a great enthusiasm for the things we do and, above all, the desire to do them because we have the certainty that we are planning the truth. What a great word! However, it is just appearance; our truth does not have a capital T. You do not believe it exists; I think it is too far away from us to be understood. Our truth is that of small everyday things, which become great because they concern a reality as essential and precious as the human heart. Each of us plays our part with such passionate intensity only so that there may be more light in those hearts . . .

Thank you for the news you gave me . . . Competition is, in my opinion, one of the worst diseases afflicting the modern Western world. It is the cause of countless ailments and pains. I am glad you have made the courageous decision to avoid it, even at the cost of personal sacrifice. I fully share your thoughts and strive to keep at bay that annoying little voice that sometimes pushes humans to promote themselves excessively, and I try instead to express my best in the service of others. Of course, as you may not know, because it is almost a congenital attitude in you, it is not always easy to keep the “insistent self” [SWAB256, 259, sec.206] at bay and to stand aside when necessary . . .

As usual, I liked your two poems very much. I will start with the sad one . . . It is a feeling I share: the awareness of the ephemeral. Many claim this sentiment moves humans to invent a god and eternal life for their advantage. In my case, if I did so, it did not work. What I consider my certainty of the existence of a loving Father God and of an eternal life of the soul with which I identify myself and others does not protect me from the nostalgia that I feel so vividly whenever I think of the things I love more on earth. Even your description . . . of the Association, together with the memory of the first meeting with that group of dear friends and its joys, gives me a pang in my heart. My nostalgia only subsides when I commit my universe to a purpose that I believe is right and good. That is why I liked your second poem so

much . . . Yes, my friend, it is poetry: it has created something in me. It made me better understand the reasons and the foundation of our friendship.

Yes, [let us go toward utopia]. For me, this utopia has a name: the oneness of humankind, and the best are all those who are consciously struggling against a thousand inner and outer difficulties to push themselves and others toward that inevitable goal. In light of this dream, I can accept the definition of the twentieth century as a “century of light” [SWAB32, sec.15] because this century, in addition to having given us the horrors of two world wars and the Cold War, beyond having brought us the infections of black and red ideologies that have slaughtered bodies and minds, besides having spread the disease of materialism in all its forms, it has also put an end to many misconceptions inherited from the past: dogmas and superstitions . . . Today, the idea of the oneness of humankind, although still very far away in practice, has a place in many people’s thoughts, and is it not from human thought that things are born?

I am also sending you some poems [Metropolitan Meetings 11.26; The Adventure Goes On 11.30; Loneliness. II 11.24; Alcyon Days 11.32]. I wrote very few verses but many essays. Soon, an American magazine will publish my response to Ratzinger’s Document, which, according to many, curbs the ecumenical movement that seemed to have made much progress.³³ Once again, I wanted to show a path toward unity, even with those who strongly believe that they are superior . . .

³³ See “The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*.”

10 December 2001

Dear Julie,

An event like this deserves a letter written thoroughly and thoughtfully, like in the old pre-email days, which you liked so much. Yes, because among the various supports I have had in the publication of my poetry, yours has undoubtedly been the deepest, the most encouraging, the most constant, the most enduring. So much so that I sometimes had doubts about it: your consideration of my poetry was too high in the eyes of a person who had long considered his poetry a private matter to share at most with a few intimate friends. However, the Beloved sent you to me in the same days I had begun to conceive the hope that my verses might contribute to “emblazoning” His Name, as requested by the House of Justice in its Ridván 1990 message.³⁴ For this reason, I had begun to translate them into English.

Well, now we have reached the finish line. By the end of this week, the text should be ready in Italian and English. I have lived days so busy that I have developed a backache that has immobilized me since yesterday, and I have felt such intense emotions as I have felt only in the central moments of life: the high school diploma, the love for Paola, the graduation, the birth of my children. I am often seized by waves of gratitude to God so intense that they overwhelm me, even if only for a few moments.

. . . From when the Italian National Assembly Commission wrote its encouraging judgment, the road has been downhill. Besides, what can I say about the solicitous, fraternal collaboration of Giancarlo Gasponi, a skilful and well-known artist of Italian photography, and T.M. [he did not want to have his name in the book] and Vittorio Robiati, at the World Center, for the elaboration of the cover. Two magnificent covers! I chose the Italian text after a consultation process that involved many friends, all equally involved. As for the one in the English text, I decided by myself even against many negative opinions. I like both. Both are very dear to me. Now I count the hours, the minutes. I cannot wait to have the two books, leaf through them, and share them with the people I love. I am happy.

³⁴ See The Universal House of Justice, *Messages*²⁰⁰⁹ 164, para.90.11.

Of course, two volumes are for you, my staunch supporter. Along with the two volumes, I also want to send you a home-printed copy of the last two chapters, “The Gift of the Friend” and “Faithful of Love,” so that you can also read those poems that are not part of the volume that has just come out . . . I want you to have them all, even those that, for the moment, seem too intimate and personal to be shared with anyone: I need to be more detached.

Vittorio Robiati, a generous and efficient friend, suggested that I send a volume to the newspapers and non-Bahá’í and Bahá’í literary magazines. I will do so, even if I dislike promoting myself. I know my intention is pure: fame is of little interest to me; I only want to help sensitive souls find the way to their true being and, therefore, to the Beloved . . .

19 January 2002

Dear Lella,

. . . I am waiting to receive your book of poems, which I ordered through the email you kindly sent me. You know that I admire your poems, so I am looking forward to receiving them. I do not think we can expect much today in poetry. We have to settle for a very limited “we.” When you propose a poem, sometimes even to very close friends, you are looked at with an indefinable smile, which always implies a certain irony. Ungaretti denounced this strange attitude over fifty years ago:

The artist, if he is a true artist, suffers more than anyone else the punishment that his word may prove unintelligible to most people as if his art were an extraordinary, monstrous work for his kind: his art itself bears the bleeding wound of such an unjust powerlessness (*Vita*¹⁹⁹³ 735–36)

The situation today, if possible, has gotten even worse . . . However, are you not already happy to have the gift of poetry? You, just you! I am thrilled by this gift, and no disappointment has ever kept me away from my Muse, a tender, affectionate, and very faithful companion.

I, too, have finally had the pleasure of publishing a volume of my poems. The Bahá'í Publishing Trust has published 187 of them together [*Lontananza*²⁰⁰¹], and I am very proud of it. A French friend, who has translated almost a hundred into her language, wrote a concise and pertinent preface. It was a great satisfaction for me to see my “poetic philosophy” exactly described as I feel it alive in my heart by a person who has drawn it directly from my poems. So, I hope I have not failed in my commitment. At the end of the collection, I added an afterword of my own. It is a bit like the speech I gave in . . . when my poems were received with such consideration. A personal journey described with words that try to grasp its essence and therefore propose it as a valid path for others as well . . . Yes, I think that some poets are just like those brown candles that smell but crackle while in the church, everything else is silent . . . [see *The Tawny Candle* 9.74]

Now, let us get to the topic that is closest to your heart . . . I liked [your first poem] very much. It took me with you, step by step, to the seashore. Who knows to which shores the . . . heart will want to fly soon! However, wherever it decides or is forced to go, the shore it touches will not be void because the land of that shore will reflect the efforts made to savour and eternalize the fruits of love, to learn well the lesson of painful pauses, to deepen the roots in the fertile soil of memories, to create a better world for itself and others. [The second poem] admitted me, without fear of being indiscreet, into the intimacy of your life and, at the same time, reminded me of the sweetness of forty years of awakenings similar to those you describe: awakenings on days all aimed at eternalizing the mystery. Has it really been eternalized? It was eternalized in the memories deeply engraved in me: I am what I am for what I have seen, said, and done and whose indelible trace I carry. It was also eternalized in the memory I left of myself: will that memory be sweet and fruitful enough? Have I been honest enough in my desire to do good? Was the good I thought I saw good?

Your words are poems because they open the heart's doors. With a nod to simple everyday experiences, they pose questions to which their author . . . sometimes escapes because she imagines that they are too big: they are not, at least as I see you (you on the one hand and the eternal human queries on the other). The only humility we are required is to be content with an utterly incommunicable certainty. You can only transmit its scent. In this, we are always alone with ourselves. However, the mind is always there slyly, imposing categories, definitions, boundaries, and phobias, all fruits of its fertile imagination but absolutely and wholly unreal. It is a pity that some people shut themselves up within those fences, making them unsurmountable walls to delimit unreal prisons of pain and anguish. However, the seagull of the heart wants to have the freedom to fly from shore to shore.

24 February 2003

My dearest Lella,

. . . The topic I am studying involves reasoning and reflections of a legal and philosophical nature that are not very poetic.³⁵ Therefore, my Muse has been silent in recent months. The situation was quite different when I was writing the last book on the themes of literary language and the mystical teachings of the Bahá'í Holy Scriptures [*Towards the Summit of Reality*]. At that time, I often felt “inspired” to write something. Significantly, the only poems I have written during the year I penned them on the road. At the end of August, I went with Paola to France, and there, I achieved a state of mind that allowed me to listen to my heart. The first poem was born from the charm of Mont-Saint-Michel, particularly from a nocturnal experience: in the dark, we could no longer find the door to leave the medieval village and return to the car park. No wonder. It was a hidden side door that we would never have discovered if it had not happened—it was pretty late—that two local people passed by [The Small Side-Door 11.54]. The second was born from most contemporary poets' and critics' preference for sloppy language and themes. I am afraid I have to disagree with that because I think that poetry must have an inner perfection that justifies it and makes it suitable to bring the reader toward dimensions of harmony and beauty, which prose can very well ignore. [Reality's High Peaks 11.58] . . .

³⁵ *Unsheathing the Sword of Wisdom*.

5 April 2003

Dear Giorgina,

Last night, I received a magnificent gift. Anna Maria and Maria Grazia Robiati organized the presentation of my anthology of poems at the Cenacolo dei poeti e artisti [Cenacle of Poets and Artists] in Monza and Brianza, under the patronage of the Culture Department of the city of Monza, in an eighteenth-century chapel now deconsecrated, with sober and elegant lines. The kind President of the Cenacle, Maria Organtini, opened the meeting with a speech presenting my poems, entitled "Julio Savi's Poetry in the Dialectic of the Spirit." I doubt I deserve the title of "great poet," with which the lady concluded her interesting speech (she promised me the text). Then the harpist Sara Bertuccelli played Claude Debussy's first Arabesque, which by a strange coincidence was the very music I hoped would be played on that occasion. Immediately afterwards, Mrs Organtini and Mr Mario Bramati, a theatre actor, read about twenty poems with a harp background specially chosen for each group. That expressive yet sober reading shattered my heart. I felt those poems were too beautiful for me to have written them. After reciting the poems, they asked me to say a few words to the audience. I was so excited that I do not remember what I said, but David assured me that I touched everyone's heart by bringing them closer to God. Finally, the harpist played Claude Debussy's "Claire de Lune" and Carlo Salsedo's beautiful "Chanson Dans la Nuit." She played them so well that the public asked for an encore. In the end, the audience gathered around the table where they purchased copies of the book and then around me to ask for my autograph. Tonight, I slept like a rock, like after the great emotions, and today, I feel like a student after success in one of the crucial exams of medical school. I would have loved you and Aurora to have been there. Paola could not come either, because she had to take care of Irene until eight o'clock in the evening and the meeting was in Monza at nine o'clock.

4 July 2004

Dear Julie,

Today, Paola finally found the time to accompany me to the cemetery to show me the place of Ned's³⁶ mother's grave. She had taken care of it many years ago. So I had the opportunity to see the cemetery (here they call it "Certosa") of Bologna, which I had never visited. I discovered one of the most beautiful places in the city [The Charterhouse 12.8].

I could not stop startling at the lights and shadows of the arcades, admiring the tall solemn trees, listening to the mysterious sounds of that place—footsteps, soft voices, rustling of leaves, birdsongs—observing the statues and bas-reliefs of the oldest tombs, from the end of the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, authentic pieces of art, reading the epigraphs with their references to the cases of the lives of people who have passed through the world, leaving behind only that faint memory, as long as it lasts. And then . . . nothing more. Near Ned's mother's grave are the tombs of many children who died at the age of two or three years in the 1960s. As we stopped to photograph the tombstone and pray in memory of Mrs. Mildred, two older couples passed us by. When I saw them heading toward the place of the children's graves, I felt a pang in my heart. Forty years later, they still keep the memory of their lost son alive by visiting his resting place.

How strange this life is! We are given the capacity to understand but not the capacity to comprehend everything. We are given the capacity to love but not the capacity to reap all the fruits of love. We are given the capacity to will but not the capacity to attain the highest goals of the will. Like the ancient Sufis, I would pray: Lord, strip me of the scandal of existence.

I left with a heavy heart. However, that walk in a place many consider a site of death made me feel alive because it brought back to my heart the sweet awareness of that inseparable bond of love that binds me to all other humans, past, present, and future, whereby whatever good and beautiful I desire or ask for myself, I can only hope and ask for them, too.

³⁶ David Ned Blackmer (1915–2007), a Bahá'í pioneer in Bologna when I arrived there from Asmara.

Bologna, 31 August 2004

My dearest Matilde,

I am finally free to write to you as promised by phone. I had two guests here for the weekend, Julie and her husband . . . It was a very intense weekend . . . On Monday morning, after taking them to the railway station, I found myself with a poignant sense of emptiness that I thought I would fill by searching for something beautiful to see around Bologna. Unfortunately, all the museums were closed, and San Petronio Basilica, where I felt I could take refuge, was disturbed by a series of scaffolding for restorations, by a distracted coming and going of people, and above all by the religious formulas pronounced by the plaintive voice of an officiant spread through the naves by a microphone of poor quality. All I had to do was go home, my tail between my legs and my sense of emptiness heightened by disappointment. I will never learn to live on earth, dear friend. My heart always cries, "Is there yet any more?" [SV20, para.2.20], like the hell of the Koran. The feeling of "remoteness" and loneliness always remains dominant there. I remember reading an unpublished poem of mine, [Loneliness. II 11.24], to you in Niederdorf. You exclaimed: "Again!?" and I tried to justify myself, uncomfortable to have been caught red-handed by a friend like you, explaining: "But here loneliness is not desperate. God's voice tells me He is always ready to welcome me into His arms." However, dear friend, I feel as if I were inwardly crystallized and cannot detach from infantile dreams and nightmares. Is this the child of whom many speak and who would sometimes be able to inspire poetry?

Even when you left Niederdorf, I perceived the same feeling of emptiness, but then it was easier to heal it, given the presence of such beautiful things all around. I think I enjoyed so much this latest holiday in Pustertal because it was a continuous alternation of routines and pleasant surprises, such as your visit, a spiritual conversation with Teddy [see *On the Wave of a Remote Music* 6.50], a concert of early music in the little church of Moos [Western Magdalene 12.14], an intense moment of rapture-bewilderment in front of the mountain curtains visible from Ratsberg [12.40], or even more simply the voice of

the waters of the Rienz [10.64], the bells of Niederdorf at sunset, Elisabetta's face more and more relaxed with the passing of the days, Irene's naïve joys, Paola's selfless outbursts . . . I think the most important thing was to have lived all these events in a familiar environment where every inner experience, renewing the memory of past moments of sublimity, made me relive them with increased intensity. I feel truly alive and fulfilled only in moments of sublimity (whether they are related to the beauty of nature, art, or a human soul). It is only by contrast with the feeling experienced in these rare moments that everything else seems to be anguish and remoteness.

I have always wondered, "When is this going to end? When will I find fulfilment and peace in all things?" I do not have the answer. I imagine that life beyond, where the relentless constraint of time and space will finally lose its hold on our hearts, might be my answer. Thus, I imagine a dimension in which the steed to overcome the valley of love will no longer be a pain because love will no longer be an aspiration to an impossible reunion but a strong bond that will give meaning to the existence of all of us, small sentient subatomic particles of consciousness, here in this world disaggregated in the universe of earthly life and therefore insignificant. On the contrary, in the spirit dimension, we will be inseparable parts of growing units—atoms, molecules, tissues, organs, systems—of that magnificent organism that is humankind, which is unknown to us in this world. If this were not the case, what would be the point of human life on earth? . . .

3 November 2004

My dearest Gaspara,

So here I am; I want to be close to you, at least in thought, at this moment, which I imagine is significant for you. I think that the journey of the soul, which we all make on this earth, has a meaning only if it leads us to discover the inner side of things, which is identical to the spirituality of nature. Bausani said that if we do so, things become “transparent of eternity” [see *Saggi* 152–3]. I understand this means finding God in everything that exists because everything else is absolutely nothing outside of Him . . . [You speak of nostalgia] a feeling that I know well because, in Europe, I have always considered myself an exile. I have always deemed Africa my homeland. I believe that this feeling is not related—perhaps not even for you—to the nostalgia of a physical place, but rather to the nostalgia of Rúmi’s “reed flute” [Mathnaví 1:1] or the “radiant morning” of the Hidden Words (from the Persian, no.19).

I am not an art critic and, although I like painting, I cannot tell you much about your paintings. Its dark tones, interrupted by white spots, upset me. Perhaps they remind me of the hidden recesses of my heart, so dark and interrupted only now and then by rays of light, just like the white spots of your paintings. For me, an artist grasps the eternity of things without ever knowing how or why and feels the need to express this infinite feeling through a material instrument, colours, sounds, forms, or words. Art is born when the artist manages to arouse in others the same feeling he felt when he fashioned his work. In the past, art was more difficult from a technical point of view but easier from an understanding point of view. Today, techniques are more refined, and more people dispose of the proper technical tools to express themselves. However, the language has fragmented, and we often talk to one another without understanding each other. That is why sometimes artists are cryptic; you cannot enter their world or comprehend their language, which is highly personal and requires a great effort to be understood.

I strongly feel this inner drama. It is a two-way drama. On the one hand, it precludes me from understanding contemporary artists who

probably have their greatness, but I do not know how to grasp it . . . On the other hand, this fact makes me feel misunderstood in my poetry, which I consider very simple and plain in its continuous yearning for the infinite, but I often feel completely misunderstood. I will never forget the words of a lady who was also very devoted to pursuing the goals of the spirit, who, after reading what I think are my most beautiful poems, asked me: “And where is the Faith?” I sensed a tremendous feeling of frustration and melancholy. Not that I write for recognition; I do so because I cannot help it. However, her observation compelled me to look more deeply within myself, explore the sincerity of my intentions and research, and lose some of that certainty that perhaps until then had made me too bold. It was a great lesson in humility, which I never want to forget [see *And It Is Still So Much* 6.46].

Dear Gaspara, artists always end up talking about themselves. After all, what is artistic expression if not a journey within oneself in search of the reflection of what one has just perceived? Even your paintings want to tell what you feel. Looking at them, remembering you in this moment, I realize that I see something in your paintings because my eyes are attracted to their shadows. But looking at them with greater attention, it is not difficult to discover the lights of your smiles and words, always full of serene and joyful curiosity . . .

14 June 2005

Dear Clara,

It is difficult to answer such an intense and rich letter without giving in to the wave of emotions and feelings it has raised. To avoid this yielding as much as possible, with the consequent risks of going beyond the proper limits of moderation, I waited a few days before doing so. However, I want to tell you immediately that your words touched me deeply.³⁷

That my book seemed to you to be “Universal,” that it captivated you, that you discovered in it that “sacred aura of enchantment and amazement,” that “lyrical . . . purity,” that “absolute poetry,” that “flight of eagles,” that “nature . . . Tabernacle,” that “rapture,” that “rigour,” that “voice always aiming and turning upward,” which I have always felt within me and tried to transfuse into my verses, has given me great joy, also because except for a restricted number of friends, very few people have recognized these merits to my poems.

It is true; I have always written to myself and for myself, out of an inner need, irrepressible since I was a teenager, and I read my verses at a small Academy founded together with adolescent classmates, in love with Plato, Homer, the Greek lyricists, Catullus, Dante, the *Stil novo*, Petrarch, Leopardi, Ungaretti, Lorca [see 15.21-3] . . . As I told you, I closed myself off to the contemporary for years to be faithful to my “lapidary choices” as a boy. Perhaps this isolated me and prevented me from a dialogue with my contemporaries that possibly could have been mutually beneficial. But frankly, I cannot imagine my poetry any other way. That is how I feel it. The only regret remains to know that contemporary literary circuits have ignored it, that few readers may revive its enchantment in their hearts or may draw inspiration and joy from the intimate confession it offers.

Your words about my anthology exactly reflect what I think about poetry. When I reread my poems, I, too, “find myself in the tangle of

³⁷ Her letter began with these words: “For days and nights I have been red-hot in these powerful pages [*Lontananza* (2001)] . . . Read, reread, opened and leafed through, I always find myself in the tangle of the spider’s web without being able to free myself or stop: the book nails me.”

the spider's web without being able to free myself or stop." For a while, I feared that this was a sign of my immaturity, of my inability to get rid of emotions and feelings, deeply and often painfully felt, still alive within me. A dear childhood friend . . . contradicts me, attributing my feelings to my nature as a "poet."

I always feel that I am striving for the Ideal. I met it on earth and consecrated my life to it, but I find it difficult to recognize its beauty in the many imperfections whose limitations I feel within me. Maybe I am a romantic, the last romantic? My life is a yearning for the infinite, uninterrupted, irrepressible. Perhaps that is why my poems tend to ignore everyday existence. Each of them stems from a particular episode. However, I strive to transcend that event, which seems trivial to me, to emphasize the light of the transparencies of eternity that shine through it. I want my eyes to turn upward because only there can I find all the Beauty I need, that we all need, to escape the burden of the ephemeral and the vain that this life often places on our shoulders. Life in itself would be nothing if it were not illuminated by that Light, very vivid, dazzling, which takes away cumbersome weights, which gives a transcendent meaning to the small fleeting individual self to the point of encompassing humankind in its organic oneness, which guides all human lives to a very distant Point in which everything converges. "For that one reason / I accept you, my life" [To Life 1.14]. In the pages of his "spiritual testament," of which you kindly sent me an excerpt, Paul VI expresses the concept differently, but the substance is unchanged: the world is "initiation . . . an invitation to the vision of the invisible Sun, *quem nemo vidit unquam; unigenitus Filius, qui est in sinu Patris, Ipse enarravit* [that none saw; and just the only begotten Son, who is in the Father's bosom, described]." To that vision, I aspire and invite all my fellow humans to whom His love binds me.

Thank you. I will keep your words as a precious gift: their memory in my heart, the letter among the dearest scripts I collect in an album, trying to learn from them. In the meantime, I hope our conversation, which has just begun, can continue toward further common goals of beauty and ideals.

Bologna, 12 November 2005

Dear Clara,

. . . my day also reserved another enjoyable experience: the train journey granted me the privilege of six hours all to myself, so I could finally enjoy the Song of Songs and the enlightening commentary by Gianfranco Ravasi undisturbed. This reading, in a way, made me feel your presence: a very loving and inspiring presence.

What a beautiful poem! What a vivid and personal description of the most described feeling in the world! The translation of Ravasi, whose Psalms I already have, has given me a new image of that book, fresher, more up-to-date in language, but not for this stripped of the charm of archaism. I particularly like erotic-mystical poetry. I have read and appreciated it in Islamic literature. However, it is rare to find translators who can preserve its refined sensuality without falling into prosaicism or coldness. Thank you for this gift, which I was finally able to enjoy.

I believe that human love is the most sublime and, for me, the most immediate metaphor for divine love. In my heart, that feeling, whether directed toward the partner of my life, my children, or friends, is always inextricably linked to Love with a capital A. I will say more: the love of beauty, in its infinite configurations, is, for me, the main bridge to Him.

“Yearning for beauty/harmony perfection” [Yearning for Beauty 1.4], here is the essence of my life. This feeling, which moves all my thoughts, is also the core of my poetry. When a poem is born in my heart, the poignant feeling I perceive—challenging to describe in its infinite nuances and beauty—is the most beguiling expression of this yearning I have experienced. A similar sentiment arises in my heart before all the expressions of the Sacred, whatever their origin. Religious-themed movies turn me inside out. I recently thought of you while watching an original television about Peter’s life. I am not in a position to judge its value as a movie. But . . . I have been fascinated because it brought me back to the ancient days when the Son of God moved on the earth and to the early development of His Church. I have felt deep gratitude to God, Who bountifully guides us through the

millennia, sending to us such majestic Personages, on whom all our true life and that of the spirit and civilization ultimately depends . . .

. . . A dear friend of mine went to Cordoba in May and also visited the Mezquita. She wrote that she could not explain her feelings there, so she used a poem by Baudelaire. Here it is:

Echoes

In Nature's temple, living columns rise,
 Which oftentimes give tongue to words subdued,
 And Man traverses this symbolic wood,
 Which looks at him with half familiar eyes,
 Like lingering echoes, which afar confound
 Themselves in deep and sombre unity,
 As vast as Night, and like transplendency,
 The scents and colours to each other respond.
 And scents there are, like infant's flesh as chaste,
 As sweet as oboes, and as meadows fair,
 And others, proud, corrupted, rich and vast,
 Which have the expansion of infinity,
 Like amber, musk and frankincense and myrrh,
 That sing the soul's and senses' ecstasy. (Baudelaire 10)

The words of my friend, the affection that binds me to her, and Baudelaire's verses have brought me back to the mystical twilight of that place, and a poem was born which, although it is only descriptive, I do not dislike: "La Mezquita" [12.46].

Dearest friend, I realize that I am sometimes like a volcano and submerge the people, the gates of whose hearts I find opened, with the lava of my feelings and thoughts; my hope, however, would be to be like a May linden tree and to be able to cover myself with flowers to offer to the wandering bees in search of nourishing nectar [see The Linden Tree 9.62].

18 May 2006

Dearest Clara,

. . . I did not just work. These days, I had the pleasure of meeting old childhood friends. First, I had dinner in the Euganean Hills with Paola's high school companions. The widow of Riccardo, a very dear childhood friend who recently passed away [see 16.8.110, 115], gave me the joy of joining the company to meet me. We had not seen each other since the late 1950s. How sweet that encounter was! She came above all to tell me that my poems consoled my ailing friend, who read them in the last days of his earthly life. You can imagine the longing this thought stirred up in my heart. A few weeks later, I met the brother of my deceased friend in Rome, who made me meet again, after more than forty years, another friend of the heart of adolescence. We met again last Saturday, and for the occasion, we went to see a Modigliani exhibition in Rome together. The mixture of the innovative beauty of Modigliani's paintings and the nostalgic feelings of that encounter filled the morning that flew away with the lightness of adolescence. My thoughts turn with gratitude to our Beloved, Whose all-encompassing Wisdom supplies our lives with all the ingredients we need so that our soul does not forget the true value of time: to spend it in His remembrance through the events of everyday life.

P.S.

To avoid losing the habit, I have attached two poems that an American magazine will soon publish in English [Chains of Love 2.26; That Day. I 4.50]. The magazine will also publish "The Scents of the Beloved" [9.58], which I have already sent you.

7 January 2014

My dearest Guido,

Among my arguments in support of free verse is that almost all the modern poets who have received international recognition, both Italian and foreign, have adopted it. Somehow, the ancient metric has become obsolete. Also, in music, the classical harmonic rules have had their day. The best melodies of the twentieth century would have seemed unacceptable to older ears. And I am not talking about strictly dodecaphonic, atonal, polytonal, or even experimental music (I have not learned to enjoy it yet). I am speaking about authors like Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Bartok, and Poulenc, to name just a few. Those who have overcome the ancient languages have not done so out of laziness but because art is a faithful mirror of the times. Languages change, as do cultures and mentalities, so we understand each other better using contemporary languages.

My models have always been Dante as a Stilnovist, Petrarch, and Leopardi, magnificently filtered from the late nineteenth-century bombast into Ungaretti's purifying modernity. Here is an example of poetic sublimity wholly free from rhythms and rhyme: "O Night" by Ungaretti [*Ungaretti, Vita*¹⁹⁹² 103, in Bastianutti 141]:

The tree unshrouded
 By the embrace of dawn's élan.
 Painful wakings.
 Leaves, sister leaves,
 I hear your plaint.
 Autumns,
 Dying pleasures.
 O youth,
 Barely gone the hour of parting.
 Youth's soaring heights,
 Unfettered rush.
 And I am already barren.
 Lost in this enfolding melancholy.
 But night dispels all distances.

Oceans of silence,
Celestial nests of illusion,
O night.

Try reading the best modern poets in some anthology of Italian poetry of the twentieth century, and you will see. Forgive the passion of my words: after all, it is only the modest opinion of a very modest amateur.

. . . The issue of Africa is very complex and largely unresolved. The problem is different in different regions. Hopefully, the inevitable steady (though slow) progress of human civilization will lead us to a gradual improvement in various situations. All that remains for us to do is struggle daily to conform our actions, feelings, and thoughts to the loftiest standards of behaviour and contribute our tiny mite to human progress. I firmly believe in the “single banner” of the good Zanella,³⁸ whose optimism I admire and a little less his . . . cadences:

Then, when descended
On the redeemed seas,
The long-expected Spirit
Will cleanse the people,
And the free men’s
single banner will shine
On the quiet world . . . [“On a fossil shell”]

Do you still remember “On a Fossil Shell” from our . . . primary school? What a wonderful thing it is to be able to find at will all these dear verses, which memory could not remember word for word but which the Internet generously makes available to us!

With the hope of not having tired you with my subjective ruminations, I embrace you, waiting for a meeting (in spring with good weather, perhaps?)

³⁸ Giacomo Zanella (1820–1888), an Italian priest, poet, and translator, who attempted a poetic-philosophical reconciliation between science and faith. He is known in Italy for his limpid verses, sometimes of classical purity.

16 February 2014

Dear Guido,

I agree with all of your words, absolutely all of them. I share your dislike of excesses, especially in modernity. I like moderation. I am not too fond of intellectual and elitist art. I believe, however, that to reach the artist who—if he is such—speaks from Olympus's high peaks, we poor mortals should make some effort to climb. Did not you struggle to understand Dante? His Paradise? So why not make an effort to reach Ungaretti, too, in his melancholy at the beginning of the twentieth century, this century so bright in some respects and so dark in others? Our Giuseppe suffered from being far from Alexandria in Egypt, Paris, and the world of art while he shared the horrors of the Italian trenches with his unfortunate comrades. This bleakness is where some of his early verses come from. Thus, his poem "Christmas" is not a stale repetition of feelings already said—and, for him then, very remote: it is a writing full of pain and loneliness. I transcribe for you two paraphrases taken from the Internet because I am sorry that you have to deprive yourself of such beauty:

A paraphrase of "O Night" [see in Bastianutti 141].

From the ample anxiety of the early morning, I begin to glimpse the trees—painful awakenings. Leaves, sisters leaves, I listen to you as you lament. Autumns, moribund sweetness. Youth, the hour of detachment has just passed. The soaring heights of youth are an unfettered rush. And I have already become a desert. I am lost in a declining melancholy.³⁹

A paraphrase of "Christmas" [see in Bastianutti 97].

I do not want to leave my house and get into that Christmas atmosphere that brightens up the streets of Naples. There is so much anguish within me that it prevents me from living. Do not insist; leave me alone, like a forgotten thing. The warmth of the fireplace envelops me, gives me protection, and consoles me. I am fine like this: I hear the fire crackling and see the flames' colour. Leave me

³⁹ Skuola.net. "Ungaretti, Giuseppe – O notte" .

alone with the hearth's smoke games that keep me away from obsessions and dangers.⁴⁰

Moreover, to enjoy Ungaretti, you have to keep Impressionism in mind, especially the musical one of Debussy and Ravel: brushstrokes of light, short phrases following one another, connected by very fragile but essential and transparent inner bonds. His poems do not require rationality, only abandonment to feeling, like Ravel's *Pavana* or Debussy's *Six épigraphes antiques*. The ear and the heart must abandon all expectations to open themselves to the novelty of listening.

Now I will also tell you that I do not like the extravagances of the so-called *Novissimi* [most recent and new] either . . . or excessive pictorial abstraction, such as that of the paintings you mention . . . I apologize for using a word that was too strong for Zanella. I respect him. I like some of his concepts but am not particularly fond of his cadences and rhythms. I would have appreciated him better if he had used more sober language. With these words, I certainly do not want to despise him. I love Ungaretti because he has cleansed our language of all the bombastic excesses that many characters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been pleased with, especially in Italy. I immediately and instinctively loved, when I was still a boy, even hermeticism because allusion and mystery make art more attractive to my eyes . . .

A concept must, therefore, be added. Sometimes, it is also a matter of personal taste. You are right. The best art is indeed universal. However, humans are so different from one another, in essence and in the individual stories that often characterize them. I find it hard to enjoy the recognized beauty of Picasso's *Guernica* or Munch's *The Scream* (I am fond of the refined Gustav Klimt). And I know why. From obligatory attendance, I have a living experience of the angst of the twentieth century that bursts from those images. That is why I avoid them; that anguish is painful and despairing. I prefer melancholy instead; at least, that is sweeter and seems to have an imminent resolution.

⁴⁰ Written in 1916 during a brief leave, while Ungaretti was at the front fighting; see Skuola.net. "Natale – Ungaretti."

Because, and with this, I close this all too-long discourse, I prefer art for life's sake and in art, I seek the upliftment of my spirit, which needs it so badly.

12 March 2014

Dear Guido,

You are right. I have dragged you into complex concepts. The topic of poetry is very close to my heart. So, for me, it is not just about cultural curiosity. My reflections are mainly based on my individual experience and are limited. My opinion is that poetry cannot be anything other than personal. It is born as a feeling in a human heart and finds expression in words. Even the title is part of the poem. Thus, as such, it is affected by the feeling of the poet and the angle from which its author sees human life. If we want to read a poem well, I think getting in tune with the poet is very useful. This attunement depends not only on the reader but also on the writer.

Great poetry should facilitate this sintonia. The ancients, idealists, said true poetry conveys the universal through the particular. Since we moderns are disenchanted—sometimes too much—we believe the universal is inaccessible. According to the moderns, this is why readers are more likely to connect with poets with whom they feel congenial. Thus, I am particularly in tune with our Giuseppe [Ungaretti] and his “celestial nests of illusions” [“O notte,” in *Bastianutti* 141], which I find punctually in my life. Practical conclusion: if you like to write poetry, I think you can start from your experience when it arouses a feeling close to your heart. If this feeling becomes overbearing and demands to be said, say it according to your vein. When you reread those words later, if you find yourself and you discover that feeling again, well, you will have gotten what you wanted. You will have prolonged in your poetry a moment of your life that is important to you . . .

Dear Guido, you have gotten into trouble wanting to converse with me. However, feel free to propose other topics: even if I love challenging dialogue, I like to talk about anything with a friend like you.

21 March 2014

Guido, dear friend,

So, you accept the challenge! Magnificent!

I have known for a long time that my ideas seem utopian: I have been hearing this since 1958. Only recently has someone also described me as an anarchist: now you do so, too!

As for the universality of poetry, I agree. However, I must clarify. In the past, we have been so engrossed in our culture, which has flourished from ancient Greece and Rome, that we have passed over other coexisting cultures. Today, we are slowly getting used to pluralism. Therefore, the universality of poetry, linked as its language is to specific cultural models, is necessarily seen as mainly limited to one's own reference culture. I have read magnificent Persian poems. They are universal, but their universality is linked to the universe of Islam, with its imaginative spiritual views, which are unfortunately unknown to the West. Thus, Dante and Shakespeare remain universal poets, even if they may not seem so to a learned Persian. Ḥāfīz and Rūmī are also universal poets, even if they may not seem so to some Westerners. Rūmī is appreciated today in the West, although his poems's translations are often rigged. A future is looming on a not-so-distant horizon in which the universes of the world's many cultures will become mutually permeable. Then, a more remarkable universality will undoubtedly be possible, even in the poetic expression of feelings.

The ethical issue is more challenging because it is burning and, at this time, undoubtedly unclear . . . The oneness of religions, still poorly understood, becomes visible only when one devotes oneself to a thorough and objective study of the Scriptures. One of the most significant obstacles is tradition, which has crystallized us into a vision of religions that accentuates their differences while ignoring their considerable similarities. The issue is too complex and articulated to be addressed here. Who knows, maybe one day we can talk about it face to face if the topic is of interest to you . . .

27 March 2014

My dearest Lapo,

Your welcome message brought tears to my eyes. I tell you this without shame because I know my affection is returned and my memories are shared. We were lucky, Lapo. God has given us the gift of constructive friendship, which has left essential traces in our hearts. We exchanged many experiences, even the understandable and pleasant frivolities of teenagers. However, in that adolescence, we had a maturity that allowed us to assimilate the best from each other and our teachers, things that fed our growth throughout our lives . . .

It is true: the constant search for spiritual goals I have always pursued has allowed me to add a few good friends to the short list of those of the green years. These beautiful friendships are rooted in the shared effort to pursue the betterment of ourselves and society. In this joint effort, friends cement a bond that transcends temporal-spatial limits. Our friendship, dear Lapo, also has these deep roots. Even though we were kids, we both strived for excellence . . .

As for my poems . . . there has not been a day in my life when I have not felt within me the power of Divinity, either in His aspect of “mysterium fascinans [fascinating mystery]” or in His trait of “mysterium tremens [terrible mystery]” . . .

I also agree with your remark about our attitude toward music: the yearning for the infinite was our shared feeling, the search for the universal in the particular. Plato had conquered and influenced both of us . . .

As for your reference to our joint “long journey—of which we are . . . in the last stages,” I would like to add a remark. Yes, physical life is nearing its end, but we are about to begin the most beautiful part of life, the one that will see us, detached from the particular, climb over the temporal-spatial barriers that are insurmountable here on earth—do you remember the “wall of shadow” of Ungaretti’s “Mother”? I will also answer you with a poem that I will transcribe at the bottom of the attached document [Toward the Unreached Borders 6.40]. I wrote that poem for my closest friends at the time. When I penned it, I was unaware that my poem addressed you, too. However, now I

know because I sense that in the new dimension of life that awaits us in the not-too-distant future, the two of us will still be together, as we were at the beginning of the spring of this life and as we are starting to do again in this late autumn . . .

15 July 2014

Dear Lapo,

I am glad you liked my poem “Western Magdalene” [12.14]. The mystical vein is a fundamental aspect of my poetry. However, it is not easy to pursue. It needs deep silence and utter sincerity. You ask me if I plan to post a sequel to *Remoteness*. Unfortunately, I did not write many poems after 2000. The circumstances of life have led me to tackle very demanding practical tasks, which have occupied my mind and heart, denying me in their noisy prosaic inner silence necessary to hear and understand the whispers of the Muse. As for the few poems I wrote, I still lack the distance to distinguish gold from tinsel. It has already happened—read “You Come Back, O Poetry” of 19 September 1991 [5.14]. I have to wait. God willing, sooner or later, the inner voice accompanying me day and night will again whisper words that deserve to be recorded, to offer them to others—read “The Fleeting Moment” of 11 December 1998 [9.76]. The inner yearning that precedes the birth of a poem is always present in me, but there are no favourable circumstances for that birth to take place . . .

. . . I am sorry to hear that you, too, learned of Riccardo’s death too late. I met him in Riccione in May 1999. He was skinny. There were many people, and the circumstances did not allow me to converse satisfactorily with him. A thin wall divided us. Our discourse—interrupted for decades—did not start to flow again. My desire to converse with him remained unfulfilled. Two weeks later, I wrote to him and sent him . . . a few poems, and I advocated a meeting of the three of us, him, you and I. But he never answered. Just a few years later . . . [his wife] told me he had received the photo and my poems and was very happy. I guess he was already too sick to be able to take care of other things. I want to think that he, too, will one day join us in those

joyful rides with my life companions,
upon untamed steeds,
during an endless summer,
toward the unreached borders
of the Celestial Prairie. (Toward the Unreached Borders 6.38)

29 September 2014

Dear Lapo,

. . . The words I wrote in the messages I sent you so far can become more apparent if you place them in a broader context: the relationship between God, the Fashioner, and us humans. It seems that you are among those lucky ones who do not doubt the existence of a Creator, do not believe that creation is the result of chance, or that human life is exhausted in physical or intellectual existence. For those who start from these premises, some very urgent and fundamental questions arise about being able to live a serene life without being unaware of the noble demands of the human condition. In other words, what are we doing here on earth? Are all our feelings and thoughts destined to come to nothing without leaving a trace? Are they an end in themselves? Or do they enter into a great game, of which we are a fundamental part? And what is this great game? What is its purpose? What are the rules of the game we are, albeit unconsciously, playing? Who dictated these rules? And when? And why? And by what authority? Does our Heavenly Father, who cannot be anything other than kindly—because love seems to be the creative and sustaining force of life—create us as sentient and thinking beings and then abandon us in the uninterrupted solitude of this speck of dust that is our world? Is it possible to live our life to its full potential without finding an answer to all these questions? If we do not find valid answers to these questions, do we not risk losing unthinkable depths of our souls, leaving them to wither and vanish into nothingness? I do not know if these questions resonate in your heart like mine. The reasons for my human “compassion” are outlined in this poem I wrote many years ago—but I could rewrite it today—“Wasted Life” [3.82].

Thus, we come to poetry . . . I wrote poems out of necessity, without any hope or ambition, except to leave a trace of the fleeting moment so that, God willing, it could renew itself in other hearts . . . I also remarked that there was always this difference between the poems you proposed and mine. You tried to stick to prosodic and metrical rules that, in your feeling, were fundamental elements of poetry. On the other hand, I have always shamelessly ignored those rules that I

felt were of secondary importance compared to my need for freedom of expression. I described this position in my poem “Psyche and Poetry” [7.44]:

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

Perhaps these verses of mine may seem too bold. But that is the way it is: I have always felt that I was living in a century of rupture, of reform, in a certain sense of rebellion. In that context, I instinctively, unconsciously, out of an inner necessity, embraced free verse. At that time, I did not even know that this was the form adopted by the twentieth-century poets, as opposed to the regular metrical forms typical of poetry until the nineteenth century. When I associate my poor verses with the great artistic expressions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I associate them with pictorial and musical Impressionism, a true revolution against tradition, albeit the one renewed by Romanticism. After the publication of my poems, the Cenacle of Poets and Artists of Monza and Brianza organized a presentation of my anthology, *Remoteness*, in Monza. To my great joy, those in charge of the event had invited a young harpist who played some of Debussy’s pieces that are very dear to me. Now do not laugh at me, please, for the presumption of the juxtaposition: when I reread my poem “The

Remote Heathes of a Former Day” [5.56], the nostalgic notes of two preludes by Debussy, “The Girl with Linen Hair” and “Bruyeres,” resound in my heart.

We are now in the year 2000. In the meantime, poets—and artists in general—have turned the page. Social and political engagement has taken a central position. Maybe that is where my artistic crisis comes from. I do not know if my language is suitable for talking about the significant issues of the twentieth century, which are no longer intimate but political in the noble sense of the word. I tried, but I am still too close chronologically to those poems to be able to assess their value. Here are some titles: “Sorapis 1917” [11.34], for World War I; “Twin Towers” [11.40], for the New York terroristic attack; “Tiananmen” [11.42], for the Chinese lads’ yearning for freedom; “Desaparecidos” [11.44], for the young Argentine idealists; “The Berlin Wall” [11.38], for the fall of the absurd East-West opposition; “Delayed Dreams” [11.70], for the decadence of the West in opposition to my yearnings for beauty and justice in freedom. In the past, I had already written “Poland 1981” [4.54]. Maybe I need to polish them down, or I need to understand them better. Or perhaps those fleeting impressions of mine—typical of my language that an American journalist friend defined many years ago as “fragile, like a rose that can lose its petals at the blows of a strong wind”—are not deep enough, and such at this moment they appear to my eyes . . .

15 February 2015

Dear Lapo,

How grateful I am to you for sending your two poems! A long span of 60 years divides them: a lifetime. The date of 1955 gave me a shiver; it took me back to Riccardo's house, to that photo of ours . . . that I preserve with so much care. I am pleased that the poet's sensibility has remained intact after so many years. The heart is clear and reverberates in the form of words what the Spirit dictates. As you know, I do not share your technical requirements: the correspondence to a poetic model dictated by others. I hope I do not disappoint you if I tell you that I do not feel this effort in your poetry. It seems that you, too, put the need to give your words the form that best suits the inspiration of the heart before the need to conform to the dictates of metric. And this form comes from within, not from outside standards. It seems that you have succeeded very well in translating your feelings into the form of words. I have read them many times and will continue rereading them. While rereading them, I will meet with you again every time. Together with you, I also perceive lessons learned at school: Pascoli? Zanella? Palazzeschi? What sweet memories do you evoke! . . .

As for me . . . My life is a struggle; it is my fate. I will struggle until my last breath; therefore, I will welcome it with joy, the final (hard?) rush toward Peace. I am still a bubbling torrent as it passes through steep ravines [Struggle 13.22]. Your life seems like the quiet flow of a river on the plain. The rivers inevitably produce some whirls—after all, life in its most profound sense remains a great mystery to us—but the water flows serenely by and large. And the serenity I perceive from your verses gives me great joy for you. I miss the path you had to take to descend from the steep mountains of adolescence to the peaceful plains of maturity. However, I see its precious fruit, which is enough for me.

I conclude these few but intense thoughts with a feeling of gratitude to God, who has allowed me to find you again and to increase here on earth the light of remembrance that, even in the distance, has always united me to you.

26 June 2015

Lapo, my dear friend,

How much joy it gives me to receive one of your writings. So much food for thought! How many doors open to precious intimacies! For some years now, I have felt the desire to write poetry. Sometimes, I even have some thoughts in my mind, but immediately, the rapid passage of time distracts me from them, and those tender thoughts vanish into nothingness. I remember what an old friend wrote about my poem many years ago: “Fragile, like a rose that can lose its petals at the blows of a strong wind,” which is how I have been perceiving it lately. Maybe there is an explanation for this kind of blockage. It happened to me before. It happened whenever I spent more time on the piano. The few hours a week I devote to studying the piano seem to satisfy my need for beauty, and this satiety distracts me from poetry. When I realized this many years ago, I stopped playing, and the poetic vein immediately reopened. However, now I do not have the courage. I like too much to read the pages of my favourite authors, first of all, Johan Sebastian Bach . . .

As for the different facets of my personality, they are all equally authentic and respond to my intimate needs. Just as I need poetry and mysticism, things that often fade into each other, I also need rationality. I hope that my “theology” will not be an arid and sterile mental exercise but will transmit my sincere effort to understand things, even the most difficult ones, to create utmost harmony between the rational and affective components of the soul. What I am looking for is the unity of the various aspects of the soul, the harmonization of all its capacities—all pressing because they all want to find their proper expression in life. Thus, the mysteries of Divinity and transcendence, whether objective or subjective, urge me to try to unveil their presence in the world, in myself, in the Scriptures, the three marvellous Books God has placed at our disposal. I know very well that we humans are limited. Still, I feel like Ulysses, restless; I want to cross the Pillars of Hercules in search of explanations that can satisfy my thirst, even though I am aware of the significant limits that our humanity entails .

. . .

As for your thoughts . . . I can only agree with that. Mysteries often have different explanations depending on the perspective we view them. You also find me consenting to Francis. Assisi is one of my favourite goals because I breathe his and Chiara's presence there. What emotions in front of those churches, those relics, those places that remember their lives! Also—and I do not know why—when I am in that town, I remember another place of the heart, Jerusalem. Maybe the same rosy colours?

You ask me about Hawaii. I have visited them many times. After the first trip, a few decades away, I was hooked. Maui is my favourite island. Developed throughout the ages with one of the highest volcanoes in the world—Haleakala—in the sixties and seventies, that island was a much-loved destination for flower children. It is still very popular with surfers all over the world. However, it is less touristy than Oahu, with its famous Honolulu and Waikiki Beach. Although it is small, it has seven different climate zones. Its landscapes are, therefore, very diverse. I prefer the rainforest—extraordinary flowers, towering green trees, intricate undergrowth, streams and waterfalls everywhere, and endless silences. I have always lived in Kaanapali, a comfortable tourist village less fake than the various Club Méditerranée, refined, uncrowded, a short distance from Lahaina, an old whalers's town full of memorabilia. I like to walk along its main street that begins in a large square, entirely occupied by a colossal ficus banyan, one of the largest in the world, and flanked by a procession of old colonial-style houses. In this environment, I never felt bored or tired. Even in moments of pause, the view of the ocean and its steady voice are an assuaging company. I will stop here, so you do not get bored. But I already want to go back there . . . [see *Homage to Maui* 13.12]

18 November 2015

Dear Lapo,

Thank you for this beautiful message: Pessoa's poem [transcribed below] is magnificent. Thanks also for the suggestions on the article.⁴¹ I have edited it, making it less personal . . .

I am currently working on the English translation of the poems I wrote in 2000. I realize that I have significantly changed my style. While it was not difficult for me to translate the ones I wrote before 2000, I am in great trouble with them. Their terse language is challenging to render in poetic form in English. English is less nuanced than Italian, so the translation sometimes seems prosaic. I will work on it again, and then, when I realize I have reached the top, I may ask a native English-speaking translator for some advice. While I do not know how to publish them in Italian, I have some connections in English. I have already published several poems.

Autopsychography

The poet is a faker
 Who's so good at his act
 He even fakes the pain
 Of pain he feels in fact.
 And those who read his words
 Will feel in his writing
 Neither of the pains he has
 But just the one they're missing.
 And so around its track
 This thing called the heart winds,
 A little clockwork train
 To entertain our minds. (Pessoa 314)

⁴¹ The first draft of "Necklaces of Corals and Pearl" (16.5).

3 December 2015

Guido, my dearest,

. . . thank you for appreciating my poem [Once More Tomorrow 13.32] . . . Freeform has always been my favourite. I think it has a lot to do with my idea of poetry as a vehicle of truth and my persuasion that truth and reality must coincide, and our reality as men of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries seems very far from rhymes and metric rules. So, I would feel uncomfortable writing verses related to forms that I consider beautiful but today far from our modern reality . . . This freedom, however, must be subject to the rule of moderation, like everything else. Our Scriptures say, “In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil. Consider the civilization of the West, how it hath agitated and alarmed the peoples of the world.” [TB 68]. I hope my verses will respect this moderation in preserving a subtle musicality—independent of the metre—to follow the intimate motions of the inspired (or perhaps, more modestly, moved) heart. Here, the only constraints my heart perceives are smoothness and musicality. All under an important aegis: poetry must expose the Infinity that always underlies reality.

This explanation is just an attempt at rationalization in retrospect. In reality, my poems blossom spontaneously without me having to reflect. If anything, they need a few minor touch-ups here and there to make up for some failure of inspiration.

. . . As for the poem about the Paris attacks [Once More Tomorrow 13.32]: my immediate horizons are dark, like those of many of us, but beyond, I see a bright future, and these tribulations we have to face will not only bring pain, they will also usher in an undreamt progress. Think of World War II and the Declaration of Human Rights that flourished from it. If anything, we can ask ourselves why we are all so hard that we must suffer so much to take a small step forward. However, that would bring us too far . . .

4 December 2015

Thank you, dear Lapo,

Your observations, those of Guido, the remarks of my workmate—the lady with whom I translate poems from Persian—the French translation of a friend from Paris, and the difficulties I encountered in translating it into English persuaded me to change the language, which—I must admit it—was too discursive, almost journalistic. So, I changed something without going too much toward the lyrical, which seems unsuitable for a “political” or “civic” poem as this one would like to be. If anything, I have tried to be more concise. So, thank you for your comments.

. . . [You ask]: “And what do we do in the meantime?”

I believe that the facts show the way: unity of peoples; unity of nations; openness to other cultures; emergence from all provincialism, from all exclusivism; outlining “all together” a strategy to rebuild the entire world; escaping hatred, conflict, and quarrels; and learning collaboration and solidarity. With this, I cannot deny that a compact and massive military intervention may be necessary to stop the fanatics. How can we forget the lesson of Nazism? Today, however, the situation is much more complicated.

In some respects, the attacks in Paris have shown that many want, albeit somewhat vaguely, peace with freedom and justice. The free hugs in Paris are a poignant example of the need for friendship intrinsic in our hearts. The unity of the world will become a reality. The sooner it happens, the less we will all suffer. We will talk about it face to face in . . . Thank you for being so willing to dialogue.

P.S. Here is the new poem. It is smoother than before but hopefully equally meaningful: “Once More Tomorrow” [13.32].

28 June 2016

Dear Lapo,

. . . As for nostalgia, I understand your position. I cannot say the same. The friend with whom I translated *Prison Poems* from Persian says this feeling is essential to my poetry [see 15.8-9]. I assure you, however, that I have always fought against some of its unpleasant consequences, first and foremost, the inability to seize the opportunities that life constantly offers in the present moment. Thus, nostalgia, yes, but I do not renounce the beauty of the fleeting moment, and my nostalgia springs from the memory of a moment that at that time was fleeting and comes back without preventing me from enjoying the blisses of the day . . .

12 July 2016

My dear [Lapo and Guido],

. . . Nostalgia: . . . how wonderful it is to remember the past, take joy in it when possible, and learn when necessary! The most precious time is the fleeting moment. You, who are my companions . . . , hopefully, will accept that I remind you of these two poems of mine on the subject: “Your Life Comes to an End” [3.16] and “Cherish That Light” [3.32]. It is a *sui generis* view of *carpe diem*, adopted by Persian poets such as Omar Khayyam and almost always misunderstood as hedonism. No: the Sufi wants to grasp the essence of the fleeting moment, rich in spiritual potentialities that, if not grasped, impoverish life. I also hinted at this concept in this recent poem: “Love of Reality” [13.20].

Prison Poems: the book has been published. Not bad. I have saved two copies, one for each of you . . . Maybe I would better wait for Lapo to come back to . . . to send him his copy.

16 December 2016

My dear [Lapo and Guido],

In Asmara, I used the bicycle a lot. It was beautiful to go out of town on a trip to that barren, desolate, and lonesome countryside . . . Unfortunately, since I came to Italy, I have hardly touched it anymore; now it is too late. I hope that my words are more than consoling.

The idea of eternity is implicit in that of transience. If we have an idea of the transient, we must also have an idea of the eternal, and this idea will come from something. Furthermore, what would be the point of the evolution of the cosmos if it culminated in a creature as fragile as the human body? No: the human body is only a temporary temple, but a perpetual light shines in it destined to proceed from perfection to perfection toward the last unattainable goal of the Eternal . . . The infinite is engraved in us, but the finite continually distracts us, and sometimes, in pursuing it, we get lost in a thousand meaningless meanders [see *In Dark Meanders* 2.58]. It seems so logical, so clear . . .

And now a job for . . . [you]. I enclose one of my poems . . . [Choral and Counterpoint 14.22]. At the end is the judgment of a [critic] . . . I want to hear your enlightened opinion so that I can learn and advance if possible. However, if you do not feel like it, I will be satisfied if you will read it once thinking about me . . . Thank you, dearest friends.

Thank you for submitting “Choral and Counterpoint.”

. . . the poem uses too many abstractions (I stopped counting at fifteen) to be effective.

I would be interested in considering other poems, including a revision of this one, if you can fashion your thoughts and feelings in a more concrete way.

17 January 2017

My dearest friends [Lapo and Guido],

What beautiful words Lapo wrote. I cannot help but agree with them and do not feel they oppose my thinking. Poetry is, at least as far as I am concerned, a monologue that aspires to become a broad conversation. Allow me now to convey to you some of my considerations, which can only be personal. Forgive me if they are disjointed . . .

Sometimes, a poet can have a vision so different from the one most shared that it is difficult for his contemporaries to understand him. No one will consider his poetry “universal” in this situation because most people do not comprehend it. Now, not all great poets have been able to gain the consent of their readers immediately. Some were understood in their misunderstood “universality” only later. Emily Dickinson, Franz Kafka, and Edgar Allan Poe are examples. In music, a striking example is Johan Sebastian Bach. The opposite is also true: Dante, a successful poet in his times, fell into oblivion between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Romanticism rediscovered him. Should we condemn all those centuries because they did not understand Dante? Or should we underestimate the well-deserved fame of our Bard? The matter is very complex. Without prejudice to what Lapo says, a poetic work’s validity cannot depend only on a success that would sanction its universality. Success depends not only on the poetry itself but also on the general public’s tastes.

Here, another question arises: to what extent is it acceptable for a poet to sacrifice his flair to adopt a language that appeals to his contemporaries? The success of a poet depends on many circumstances. The literary critic Stefano Giovanardi (1949-2012), commenting on the situation of poetry in the second half of the twentieth century in Italy, mentions “a silence of renunciation rather than expectation” [“Introduction” LVIII]. His words imply that no great poets existed in the second half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, how can someone who writes poetry today be recognized as a poet when there are no promoters? Publishers worldwide say that poetry does not make money, so they rarely publish it, and even then, they are not willing to spend money to spread it. Critics have always appreciated poets who

reflect their own time. So, let us go back to the beginning of the discussion. Can we speak of universality for a poet loved in one century and not in another?

We need to reappraise the meaning of “universality.” In my opinion, there cannot be an absolute universality. Humans live in a socio-cultural context that conditions their sensitivity. It is the issue of the writer/reader relationship. A poem can theoretically be “universal,” but who will determine it? The reader, the critics? I sent you a professional critic’s comment on one of my poems a few days ago. He decided my poem was not publishable because he felt it could not reach readers [see 16 December 2016]. However, on what basis did he express his judgment? Based on his idea of poetry and, therefore, of universality? Other competent people who have read that same poem have discovered things in this poem he has denied. This anecdote is an example of the relativity of judging works of art.

I am not too fond of contemporary abstract painting. Years ago, I was a guest of a renowned art critic in Holland. This type of painting was beautiful and “universal” to him, and he defended his idea with great passion: the painter must be free to discover new languages. Today, the issue of universality is more complex because most deny the value of tradition and look for something new. In reality, the problem is not in the form: the problem is that in this terrible void of values that surrounds us, the artist often lacks content. In other words, few have anything important to say, and if they say something valid—but not shared—they speak to deaf ears.

These are just a few impressions of someone who loves poetry and art but hardly finds a correspondence of loving senses with the modern world. As a lover of poetry, I cannot help but listen to the voice that speaks within, strive to respond, and translate what I feel into human words. I cannot judge the value of what I create. My relationship with my poetry goes through ups and downs. Sometimes, I consider all my poems horrible; sometimes, I consider them divine. Only one thing remains for me: the enchantment of the moment of inspiration:

When I hear your voice
I forget weights
of awkward thoughts,
whirls of clashing
sensations, remembrances
of embarrassing errors,
even the exhausting
inquietude of desire
deserts my limbs.
You alone remain, fire,
electricity, uninterrupted light. [Sleepless Night 12.20]

God willing—and it is not certain that He wills—it will happen that my poems will touch some heart . . . Yes, because

Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom . . . [TB 172-3]

On the contrary, it may well be that all that fire leaves behind nothing but extinguished ashes.

It is nice to walk beside you on this ascent to Parnassus.

5 January 2017

My dear [Lapo and Guido],

Yes, “After the mode which he dictates within.”⁴² I find it hard to understand how one can create art on commission, although this has happened many times. While I appreciate this for the visual arts and music, in my opinion, writing a poem well on commission is challenging. I am not too fond of encomiastic writings, no matter the theme. As for the *consensus gentium* to sanction the value of a work of art, I have to accept it, but I have to make an effort to do so. I have to think that a transversal cross-section of humanity is so representative of human diversity that it becomes almost universal. Nevertheless, today . . . is it possible that majorities of people who vote, as has recently happened in so-called democratic countries, are truly representative of the best modern human thought? Is it not likely that this is one of those decadent centuries in which the best is expressed precisely by minorities who, because they are excellent, are silent precisely for this reason, or—even worse—silenced or overwhelmed by noisy and mostly headless majorities? As for today, I am pessimistic. I am consoled by the certainty of a much better tomorrow.

Thus, I conclude on a pleasant note: last Sunday, I spoke for the Bahá’í Faith at an interfaith meeting sponsored by the Mayor of Valsamoggia⁴³ and Religions for Peace to celebrate World Religion Day, the third Sunday in January. Buddhist, Jew, Catholic, Muslim, and Bahá’í representatives were present. I first attended such a meeting (organized by Bahá’ís alone) in the mid-1960s. Well, last Sunday, I could say that after fifty years, the situation among religions began to seem to have changed. The meeting was like a beautiful symphony: all the speakers expounded uplifting concepts, and everything was in total harmony. These things give me hope, but they are only the beginning for now. I cannot wait for the morning of the new age.

⁴² See “I am one who hearkens when / Love prompteth, and I put thought into word / After the mode which he dictates within” (Dante, *Divina Commedia*, “Purgatory” 2.24:52–4) and 16.4.6.

⁴³ A municipality located southwest of Bologna, to whose metropolitan area it belongs.

10 November 2019

Thank you, Dear Erasmo, for your quick answer.

I am glad the first impression was good. I am also delighted that my poems⁴⁴ have not given you an impression of religious fanaticism, even though the Bahá'í Faith is the centre of my life. However, I have always tried to prevent this firm bond from turning into a kind of partisanship. There are so many amazing people that I love to talk to. However, to keep the avenues of communication open, I have to try to see things from their point of view, respecting them. In my opinion, being a Bahá'í is not like being a party or church member. I have always had little pleasure in flaunting my convictions—which could also be a caricature of the Faith I would like to support—defending them with a drawn sword. For me, to be a Bahá'í means to learn, day by day, to translate into feelings, thoughts, actions, and behaviours a pattern of life inspired by the Bahá'í Scriptures that expresses feelings of harmony, peace, and unity . . . even love

Well, dear friend, I hope that my poems convey this. Many speak of my inner struggles while I struggle to overcome my limitations and strive upward. I hope this will encourage others to take the path of peace, essentially an eternal search for the best. I try to do so with the utmost humility and “com–passion,” which means facing daily life’s small or large difficulties shoulder to shoulder with others without losing the opportunity to share the joys . . .

⁴⁴. I sent him a copy of *Chiaroscuro*, the anthology of my poems published by Edizioni del Verri in 2019.

2 December 2019

Dear Julie,

I corresponded with a . . . literary critic [Erasmus, see 16.4.121]. To my request for advice on finding a new language to express new things that are swirling around my head and that I cannot express, he first tells me that I am “thinking of poetry as ‘content’ or what . . . [I want] to transmit. However, the poet is not a journalist or scholar but a language guardian. You have to think long and hard about that.” And then he goes on to say that I am too attached to the past . . . And when I remark, “That is a significant answer. But I perceive it like someone who says that either you are on the right or you are on the left. I am looking for a nobler modernity than the one commonly understood,” he answers:

Now, do not be arrogant (I am just kidding). You need a great author to do a job of that kind—a nobler modernity than the one circulating: a new bard, a sort of poet/prophet, a Whitman of our time, bringing together the best of the past and the horizons of the future, keeping in mind all the lessons of today . . . Maybe in the future it will happen that a person of that type will see the light, we are content to make a good poem, that is enough.

He would like me to go to . . . next spring to present *Chiaroscuro* . . . He wrote to me about it:

I have read and reread . . . *Chiaroscuro*, and I must say that I found many stimulating elements in it. Honestly, I did not expect your “density” in the poetry field. I have always seen—and read—you as an essayist, and scholars rarely even know how to be poets. Rationality clashes with that sort of “abandonment” typical of poetry. Nevertheless, for the most part, your book convinces me. Not totally: sometimes—and here one can feel your dimension as a scholar—the prose dimension takes over . . . You worry too much about the reader. This attention to the reader is fine in prose—especially the scholarly one—but not poetry, where—more than

what one says—“how” it is said” is essential. Sometimes, in short, to mean everything, you become cerebral and prosaic. Another thing: why do you use truncated words? No one employed them for many years; they pertain to poets of the late nineteenth century . . . No one speaks like this today, not even classical scholars. I notice, however, that you know how to “play” with spaces and that there is a wealth of readings behind it—I perceive Baudelaire and Prévert, especially in the iterations. I like short poems like “The Blue of the Sky” [1.6]. In short, it is a good book, even though you have no “training” as a poet or have kept it aside.

. . . I will try to follow his helpful reading suggestions. Let us see what comes out of it.

2 December 2019

Dear Erasmo,

I am sorry for giving you false impressions of arrogance or wanting to preserve ancient languages . . . In some ways, I recognize in myself a certain madness, a form of enthusiasm that is perhaps unrealistic. Muslims relate a magnificent story of ‘Alí⁴⁵ and his son Husayn. They say that one day ‘Alí asked his son how he wanted to be when he grew up, and he answered, “Like you.” ‘Alí scolded him indignantly. “You are wrong, my dear. When I was your age, I wanted to become Muḥammad, and I have just become who I am. You must want to become God, then perhaps you will achieve greater goals than I have.” I believe that we must always aim as high as possible; if one fails, he must start over to correct his mistakes. And so on. The goal is excellence. I also remember Krishna and his suggestion to Arjuna, “Love action, but not its results.”⁴⁶ If we do not try to overcome ourselves and our petty miseries, how do we know if we could have done more? It is my philosophy. It has nothing to do with pride but the desire to always do one’s best [see Wyfarer 8.20].

You write: “And so, I repeat: today—for two centuries now—the ‘centre’ is language, in the sense that we arrive at results—including spiritual ones—through words, not manifestos and projects (contents).” That is where my problem lies. I know what I want to say. However, I still have not found the proper language to express it. I believe that this happened because, in one way or another, I have been able to develop my language for what I had to say so far in the light of my limited culture. Today, I do not know of any well-trodden path that will lead me to where I want to go. By the way, I will reread Whitman, which I know very little about. Who knows . . .

⁴⁵ ‘Alí was a cousin of the Prophet and was his first believer and fourth successor. Husayn, his second son, is the prototype of the martyr for the Faith in the Shiite world.

⁴⁶ See “. . . he who performs a prescribed duty as a thing that ought to be done, renouncing all attachment and also the fruit his relinquishment is regarded as one of ‘goodness.’” (Bhagavad Gita, chapter 18 verse 9).

4 December 2019

Dear Julie

As for your reaction to the remarks of . . . [see 16 December 2016], I found them very useful. I, too, perceive these occasional lapses into the prosaic. I feel them, sometimes, even as I write. It is as if an inner weight prevents me from keeping myself in flight. Mario Donadoni⁴⁷ also pointed this out in the very first poems I sent him. I think Erasmo is right [see 10 November 2019]. Even as a poet, I am still a scholar. To appreciate my poetry, I believe you have to accept this combination. As for the “bard,” this is my idea of a poet. As for being a “bard,” here is what I wrote on 9 December 1995:

But perhaps there is no heart today
capable of harmonious songs
and it is as yet too early
for a heart that may be fit
to sing the praise of oneness. [Two Hearts 7.22]

My current problem is that I feel reborn inwardly and cannot find the right words to tell about this new dimension of my existence without falling into triumphalism or banality. The other night, I had a sublime moment but did not perceive the proper voice to tell others about it. I just talked about it with Paola. For many years, the idea of an inner autobiography, like Dante’s *Vita Nova* or Augustine of Hippo’s *Confessions*, has been running through my head. Until now, commitments that seemed to me to be priorities have distracted me. God willing, He will give me the opportunity to do so: I entrust myself to His hands . . .

⁴⁷ See “An Afternoon with the Author” xxi, xxxii, xxxiii.

9 January 2020

Dear Julie

How can I thank you for your further attempt to get my poems published . . . It is best not to delude yourself. Today, poetry no longer exerts the fascination it once did, at least in Italy . . .

A few days ago, an Asmarino friend . . . told me that people do not know me for who I am. Everyone thinks I am an earnest scholar or even a staid one, but I am, first and foremost, a poet. It is bizarre, he added. People generally believe that the two cannot coexist in the same person. Then he said: “Ah, yes! Leopardi was also a great scholar!” Another confidence: I am transcribing the comment on *Chiaroscuro* that a friend sent me today:

Finally, I had a moment of silence to dedicate to *Chiaroscuro*. You asked me for an honest opinion. You write poetry; you write about musical notes that resonate differently depending on your mood. Each of your poems speaks. They talk to the stranger who meets you for the first time or someone who knows a little about you, as happened to me. My sincerity lies in this: every poem is a hand stretched out from your heart to those who listen to you; it is all about listening.

This morning, I picked one up again, and it told me new things I had overlooked in the first reading. That’s it: *Chiaroscuro* is like that. It is a travel companion, having you close even when you are far away. Surely you understand me, and you know how to probe my soul. You will not be surprised if I tell you that among them, I love the roughness of Eritrea’s stones and suns accompanying the harshness of research and recognition. I am also fascinated by the rhythms and scansions of “Seventeen Hours” [10.84]. You will forgive me if I call those verses “modern”; I do not want to offend anyone, but they bring me back to certain existentialist atmospheres dear to me.

Congratulations on the short introduction on the back cover. Those who know you grasp for themselves what that introduction explained, but the general public may miss it. *Chiaroscuro* is

around the house, among the readings that you must have next to you, at your fingertips . . . and near to your heart.

I know you will be pleased with all of this. In a very subtle way, it pleases me too. Who knows, maybe some of my verses will miraculously escape the pitfalls of the quicksand that abound in today's swamp and bloom again in distant days!

20 January 2020

My dearest . . .

I thank you for the beautiful words you wrote to me. Still, above all, I am pleased that those verses have “contributed to kindling or awakening an albeit feeble tension toward ‘transcendence’ that . . . [you] thought was lost forever.” Although I do not think a person can write poetry thinking he will get a result—poetry is pure spontaneity—I still believe that if poetry does not help lift hearts, it is very little. Leopardi’s statement has always struck me: “Now I have little esteem for that poetry which, read and meditated upon, does not leave the reader with such a noble sentiment that, for half an hour, prevents him from admitting a vile thought and doing an unworthy action” [*Operette* 251]. And so I could not receive a more pleasing encouragement than that expressed by your words. Who knows, maybe one day the “ideal” encounter may also take place on the level of everyday reality!

With sympathy . . .

14 June 2020

Dear Julie,

Thank you, once again, for helping me clarify things for myself.

An Asmarinos' website⁴⁸ asked me to publish one of my African poems every Thursday. I did so for about two months without almost anyone in that small circle noticing, not out of ill will but simply because they were dizzy because of the deluges of words and messages bombarding them every day. This week, they published one of my poems that I consider to be among the best, "The Remote Heathes of a Former Day" [5.56]. They also presented it very well. However, only three people left a brief comment. For the rest, dead silence . . .

What I wrote may seem like bitter reflections. However, in reality, all this does not affect my serenity. I am just trying to figure out the best way to spend the little energy I still have left to live well in the days God still wants to give me.

⁴⁸ *Mai Tacli*, the Journal of the Italians from Asmara. To tell the truth, and to my great satisfaction, over the following months, the accesses to my African poems were quite numerous and encouraging.

1 August 2020

Dear Tiziano,

. . . You are right; these inner struggles seem never-ending. I do not think I can teach anyone anything; I can only talk about my journey and only with those who want to listen to me. Maybe someone can benefit from what little I have understood about life. That's it. For this reason, I am transcribing some points about my struggle that may be useful to you: "Against Each Nay" [7.14], "Wayfarer" [8.20], "Who am I? II" [10.70], and "Struggle" [13.22].

One fine day, and I do not know when . . . in the morning, I stopped waking up with my heart gripped by anguish as it happened every day, except for the rare times when some thought, good or bad, distracted me. Finally, my heart understood that many of us have their pain. Generally, God Himself has given it to each of us as a gymnastic tool against which to fight to build spiritual muscles. Thus, the effort is ours; it is up to Him to confirm it. There is no merit in my serenity: it is His gift, as His past anguish was His grant. Will it come back? I do not know and do not want to think about it. For you, perhaps it will come when you bow your head before what you call the injustice you have suffered . . . and you will finally see it as a blessing in disguise because pain—and I do not know why—teaches much more than joy, which is also our birthright.⁴⁹

In this new situation, I wanted to reorganize my poems, prefacing the words transcribed below. Who knows if other souls in various ways in pain like us may not benefit from it?

Could someone conquer that heavy sensation that some authors define as "cosmic anguish"? Here, we have a poetic journey which, moving from severe doubts and uncertainties, 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.

I hope I did not bore you. Have a lovely weekend.

⁴⁹ See "Happiness is our birthright" (Townshend, *Mission* 88).

1 September 2020

Dear Guido,

I am sure you will enjoy reading the following words . . . of the dear Mrs. . . . [a reader of *Mai Tacli*⁵⁰].

29 August 2020

What am I thinking? I am thinking of Julio Savi's poems. I wish I could collect them in a . . . "notebook" . . . so that I may go and reread them from time to time. They came to us in a dark moment of mine, yes, dark: suddenly—quite recently—all the memories disappeared in me; Asmara is far away, I no longer hear whiffs of spices, I no longer see Ghezzabanda's fountain, everything has disappeared, suddenly and out of the blue, leaving me dry and alone without that "our" African feeling that did so much good for the soul. However, Savi's poems touched me, and, who knows, maybe, if I go to reread them, something could be reborn in me . . . and I could feel better! Heaven knows! I am watching. Warm greetings to all, and thank you. Dr. Savi.

This lady's words . . . touched my heart. Maybe I should publish a booklet with all my African poems,⁵¹ if only out of affection and respect for all our dear Asmarino friends . . .

⁵⁰ The Journal of the Italians from Asmara, see 16.8.134, note 39.

⁵¹ See *Te Sdhade of Remembrance* (January 2021).

5 September 2020

Dear Julie,

You moved me. What else can I say? Only women have the necessary qualities to be Martha and Mary simultaneously. In response to your gift, I will try to offer you some thoughts.

A third figure, the Muse, must be added to Martha and Mary. Here, too, the function is twofold: physical and spiritual. Out of modesty, I have never dared to write poetry on this trait of life, so miraculous, yet so fleeting, an aspect with which only the long journey travelled on the paths of Faith has reconciled me: Love and love united in the blessed fortress of wellbeing and salvation⁵² that our Beloved has generously given us. Maybe there is a hint in my hymn to life:

Repeated surges of love shared
 In the intimacy of a growing bliss
 Within the *fortress of salvation and wellbeing*
 You benignly built for me to abide in. [Ode to Life 14.36]

It is subtly significant of a side of my nature that I wrote these words first among the gifts I received. The family born of a couple, a reality that shines like a sun in your account . . .

⁵² “*Fortress for well-being and salvation*”: in the Bahá’í Writings, “the law of marriage” [see Bahá’u’lláh, in BP159].

5 September 2020

Guido, my dear,

. . . When you are ready, I would like to consult with you about the only poem [Quickenings Tears 2.48], which very understandably has not received comments from the friends of *Mai Tacli*⁵³ and in which I have never been able to resolve the choice of a word . . . I would love to decide with you on the last line, “they did not understand” or “they could not understand.” This choice continues to be a dilemma in my heart . . . If I am serene, I feel like writing “could not”; if I have some remorse, I write “did not.” That dilemma is related to me alone, but if I offer these poems to our fellow citizens, I no longer want to write “did not,” which implies a judgment I have no right to make. I should have thought about it earlier and come out of my shell to look into the hearts of others as well . . .

7 September 2020

Dear Guido,

. . . Thank you for the keen analysis of the poem and the suggestions. You helped me go inside myself, understand my true motivations, and perhaps widen my view. My current solution is: “They did not/could not understand.” The two associated verbs indicate my inner dilemma and also describe the different attitudes of various people. The last word alone highlights the drama of the colonial age, in which some were openly and ostentatiously racist—they did not understand—while others were hindered in their sincere feeling of solidarity by the enormous social and cultural differences that separated them from the colonized population and by the strongly predominant Eurocentrism—they could not understand.

The speech is very long and painful for me.

To complete my father’s biography, I read many pages of the history of those first colonial days . . . It was not easy.

⁵³ The Journal of the Italians from Asmara, see 16.8.134, note 39.

23 September 2020

Dear Tiziano,

Magnificent . . . I was sure you could have this kind of “aesthetic ecstasy.” It is our way of glimpsing the Divine that surrounds us, of trying to do what Bahá’u’lláh describes in these words: “With the ear of God he hears, and with the eye of God beholdeth the mysteries of the divine creation” [SV29, para.2.35]. It is a precious gift that God does not bestow so often. You ought to care for, cultivate, and get the most out of it.

Alas, that for just one instant
I beheld the Beauty of Thy face
and never shall be able to forget it. (Against Each Nay 7.12)

At that time, you understood very well what was happening to you, and you put it in writing . . .

You understood it as a reward for something you had done. And maybe that is true. However, for the most part, ecstasy is a gratuitous gift that God gives to those in need, and it is hard to find ways to renew those exhilarating experiences. However, you can cherish the memory of it, you can understand its meaning, you can squeeze its honey. Shoghi Effendi helps us with this, and I always thank him for writing some letters that have been very precious to me to understand and move forward. If you have time, look at this article of mine: “The Bahá’í Faith and the Perennial Mystical Quest.” Anyway, I will try here to give you the gist you are interested in. God bestows these joyful experiences on those who need them at His sole discretion. They are inevitably brief and fleeting, and it is counterproductive to try to reproduce them. However, it is essential to understand your privilege, a small sample of what we will one day have forever. Here, it is only a question of winning our “holy war” against the “insistent self” [SWAB256, 259, sec.206] that metaphorically wants to prevent us from achieving so much joy. I needed to understand the self, look it in the face, and tame it like a wild horse. Ultimately, the self is also good and can learn to carry out the orders we give. Occasionally, he throws a tantrum, and

we must understand how to calm it down, like a good knight with a bizarre horse.

Dear friend, this is the gist of our lives. In my personal history, I think I only began to move forward in 1988 when I wrote *The Eternal Quest for God*. I needed that theoretical basis to start my “holy war” and proceed in small, plodding steps toward conquering the self. It is the Valley of Search with its seesaw of enthusiasm and disappointment. Soon after, when you come out of it, you enter the Valley of Love, and here comes the fun part because “The steed of this valley is pain, and if there be no pain this journey will never end” [SV18, para.2.16]. Here, my dear, we must get used to licking our wounds, ignoring the pain that makes you scream at night, and savouring to the dregs those few moments in which we seem to have gone out for a moment to “behold the stars again.”⁵⁴

And although I caught
an astonished glimpse
of His radiant dawn
above my heart’s
uncertain orient,
sometimes I myself know not
whether this, my penumbra
is just the dusk of a day
declining toward night,
or the early glimmer
of a fast approaching
morning. (I Asm of the Children of Halh-light 7.36)

Enough . . . I will stop here for now. I rewrite to you what I wrote to another restless “seeker.”

I wish I could ride
my horse beside yours
and move together

⁵⁴ Dante, *Hell* 34:139.

through flowery plains.

Close your eyes.

Let's go to those places.

Let's discover together

the secrets of love. (Letter to a Despondent Friend 14.2)

P.S. I enclose the description of a mystical aesthetic experience that has always fascinated me, and perhaps you will like to read it.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Richard Jefferies (1848-1887), *The Story of My Heart*, Chapter I, quoted in Hap-pold, *Mysticism* 384.

25 September 2020

Dear Tiziano,

Do you mean these words?

*Animula vagula blandula,
Hospes comesque corporis
Quae nunc abibis in loca
Pallidula, rigida, nudula,
Nec, ut soles, dabis iocos . . .*

Ah! gentle, fleeting, wav'ring sprite,
Friend and associate of this clay!
To what unknown region borne,
Wilt thou, now, wing thy distant flight?
No more, with wonted humour gay,
But pallid, cheerless, and forlorn. (Byron 1:22)

Latin scholars ascribed it to Emperor Hadrian. I remember them since secondary school—we had learned them by heart. With great pleasure, I read Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian*. I do not know why; I have always sympathised with this cultured and refined emperor. I have visited his villa several times—it deserves better care than now. In the Vatican Museums, I also admired the beauty of Antinous, his young ephebe who killed himself so as not to grow old and, therefore, look ugly to his beloved. Perhaps this account is a legend, and the young lad may have been killed by courtiers fearful and jealous of his ascendancy over the great emperor.

When I was a boy, Greek mythology had wholly conquered me. I had a small group of friends—we had founded an academy of poets inspired by Plato [see 15.2.21-3] and wrote Arcadian poems—and sometimes, on our frequent tours in the wilds of Eritrea, we would recite those poems aloud, invoking those ancient gods and dreaming of nymphs and satyrs as soon as we found a little water! Teenage follies . . .

31 October 2020

Dearest Tiziano,

. . . In this respect, I would divide the article⁵⁶ into two parts. The first, up to p.26, describes our destiny . . . [Those concepts] explained to me the origin of my “temptations.” The second, after the words “Referring these concepts to our personal lives, we can carry out the decrees of God, or try to modify them, roughly in two ways . . . ,” describes what we can do to make the best use of the opportunities that God always gives us. I am not telling you that my attitude dramatically changed after I wrote that article. Actually, I wrote it because of the need to clarify to myself an attitude I had already assumed for some time. I can only say that the Writings I reread on that occasion gave me wings and that afterwards, I faced the trials of life with less “maceration.” I will tell you that these words of Rúmi also helped me a lot (Mathnaví I):

We are as pieces of chess engaged in victory and defeat: our victory and defeat is from thee, O thou whose qualities are comely! [598]

Do you bear (His burden)? He will cause you to be borne (aloft).
Do you receive (His commands)? He will cause you to be received (into His favour).

If you accept His command, you will become the spokesman (thereof); if you seek union (with Him), thereafter you will become united. [936–7]

But as for him who broke his foot in the path of exertion, Buráq came up to him, and he mounted (and rode). 1073

Until now, he was receiving commands from the King; henceforth he delivers the (King’s) commands to the people. [1075]

Sometimes, I think about this fantastic man and the help he gave me with his words. Thank you for your best wishes to our reborn Asmarino Hexandric Academy [see 15. 21-3] . . .

⁵⁶ “Destiny and Freedom in the Bahá’í Writings.”

16 January 2021

Dear Antonio,

Thank you so much for your kind words. As for your realistic and practical training, I try to show you how to harmonize it with the mystical aspects of my father's life.

My father was a pure mystic who experienced a certain imbalance between spirit and matter for years. However, his encounter with the Bahá'í Faith, which is very "practical," finally made him realize something fundamental. We, humans, are spirit and body, and the One who created us did so in such a way that we had to find a balance here on earth between these two inseparable aspects of earthly life. The ideal thing is for the spirit to guide and enlighten the body and for the body to express the virtues of the spirit, including justice, in the form of feelings, thoughts, words, actions, and behaviours. In this way, we can gradually realize the dream of many humans, a dream that mystics have called "heavenly Jerusalem" or "Kingdom of God on earth." In other words, We will learn to live in the world by drawing ever closer to justice and ultimately achieving peace. This call is the essence of the Bahá'í message. At this stage of its existence, the Bahá'í world is putting in place in many cities, towns, and villages across the globe a vast educational system extending from cradle to late senility, which aims to empower the individual, that is, to accompany every person who wishes to cultivate spiritual, intellectual, and practical capacities that will serve precisely to build together a new, united and peaceful civilization. This work will take a very long time, but as it proceeds uninterrupted and spreads like wildfire as it is doing, in the end, it will gradually bring us all closer and closer to that coveted goal.

This endeavour is undoubtedly a "spiritual" enterprise. Still, its realization requires the commitment of people with realistic and practical training that does not disregard the "conscious knowledge" of the complex human reality we sometimes call "faith." Otherwise, it will remain a beautiful dream and nothing more.

See you soon, I hope either in person or . . . through the Internet.

21 February 2021

My dearest friends,

Unlike regular mail, communication via email has a disadvantage: sometimes, it may give way to misunderstanding. It happened to me when I sent you that poem [No Promise 11.10], whose sole purpose was to make you feel free on the question of the online meeting I suggested . . . Only later did I think that my writing might make you believe that I support free love like 1968 protesters.

Quite the opposite, dear ones; I think that monogamy is the ideal condition for the expression of man/woman love . . . My poem assumes that my reader knows that I consider premarital chastity and fidelity in marriage a crown on the heads of both men and women. It must be read in the light of these assumptions.

This poem praises the unconditional love that gives everything and asks for nothing in return, a challenging goal for both the “lover” and the “beloved.” The speaking self in this poem is ambiguous: does the lover speak, or does the beloved speak? A poetic artifice that I unconsciously borrowed from Persian mystical lyrics. I suggest you read this poem with “Reciprocity” [9.86], which is its complement. In essence, it recommends that love should not be possessive and self-centred.

No, marriage is not a chain; it is a “fortress of wellbeing and salvation” [see 16.8.125, note 38], a divine institution, a gift that God has given us so that we may perfect our capacity to love day by day, albeit in the context of moderation and justice and many other virtues that befit us, humans. Here is another assumption to keep in mind when reading this poem. All these assumptions are not familiar in our society today, so it is easy to misunderstand my words . . .

Bahá’í marriage? I transcribe a passage that illustrates it very well:

. . . The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of

divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds. (SWAB, paras. 92.1–92.3)

As for divorce, it is permissible because of the inevitable human imperfections. Here is how divorce is understood:

. . . My heart was saddened to learn that those two respected persons, who were even as one soul, should now be separated and their affection turned into estrangement.

Although divorce is permissible, yet it is strongly abhorred and condemned in the sight of God. Divorce may only take place when no alternative is left, when the two parties feel aversion for each other and are in torment. Now, if such is the case, perform the divorce. However, after divorce is decided upon, ye must wait for one year for it to be effected. Should affection be renewed during this year of separation, it would be highly pleasing.

. . .

If divorce taketh place, the spiritual love and affection between you should increase, and ye should become like a brother and sister.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “O ye two honourable souls”, in *Additional Tablets*.

22 June 2021

Dear Julie,

. . . When I think of falcons, I think of the great brown birds of Asmara . . . Beautiful images. My archetype for nature-related images is fundamentally related to Eritrea. I do not think I have ever felt emotions as intense as those in that corner of the world, including the ones I experienced when I last went there in 1992 [see 5.15-36 and 5.53-82]. For this reason, I am happy that *The Shade of Remembrance* was my first published thematic anthology: it was my debt to that land. I am just as happy to publish *The New Garden* because the Bahá'í Faith has allowed me to give a proper place to my many experiences.

Here is the list of other thematic anthologies that I hope to publish before my departure. After publishing the latter, I would like to go back to “Yearnings” and then publish all the others every three months or so, at least online. Some of the poems may appear several times.

“Yearnings,” the tension toward transcendence, the dominant impulse of the anthology;

“Chiaroscuro,” the poet’s doubts and uncertainties throughout his itinerary;

“The New Garden,” the spiritual encounter that has steered the poet’s course [published in 2021];

“Transparencies,” instants of inner clarity;

“Ordainer nature,” meaningful transparencies in the beauties of nature;

“The Shade of Remembrance,” the memory of Eritrea and the friends the poet met there [self-published in 2021];

“Psyche and Poetry,” the author’s poetics in its evolution;

“Daily Chronicles,” this world, news stories, and more or less recent historical events;

“Family Album,” the intimacy of domestic walls;

“Reciprocity,” the merits of friendship;

“Glimpses,” transfigured urban and natural landscapes;

“Valediction,” wishes and expectations, initially only hoped for, and at long last realized.

21 July 2021

Dear Brad,⁵⁸

I never thought of my poems as possible historical documents. Who knows how those future people will look at our early attempts? Besides, will my poems survive, and if they will, will they arouse the interest of those future human beings? In any case, at least for me, they have been and still are a source of inspiration. Sometimes, I see them as the best part of my writings . . .

25 July 2021

Dear Brad,

Thank you for your encouraging words. My friend Kurt told me I should not expect much from my poems today and that only future generations will understand and appreciate them. *Insh'Allah* . . .

Yesterday I saw an involving German movie, *Never Look Away*. I heard fascinating ideas about art. Ultimately, its description of the protagonist's process of producing his real art touched me very deeply. I could identify with him in many ways: art as truth and sincerity, an expression of the artist's self, and his detachment from himself.⁵⁹ The following poem is still alive in my heart: "Yearning for Beauty" [1.4].

. . .

⁵⁸ In English in the original.

⁵⁹ See De Marco: "True art . . . never allows itself to be tamed by conformism if the artist maintains the freedom of his gaze."

19 October 2021

Dear Tiziano,

. . . The Discobolus: I was impressed by the acuteness of your spirit of observation. I saw the first photo of that statue when I was 14 or 15 years old and attending the first degree of the Italian classical high school. Greek sculpture, as well as the poetry of Greek lyrics, fascinated me immediately. Now that I am 83 years old, the shade of remembrance makes that statue seem more beautiful, even if those fingers are unnatural. I had never noticed them before. If you look at them closely, they disturb the perfect harmony of that magnificent sculpture. Can we compare them to the legendary hammer blow that Michelangelo would have given on the leg of one of his creations to emphasize the impossibility for the artist to reproduce perfectly, with relatively imperfect tools, the beauty that he perceives?

When I speak to you
in the solitudes of my heart,
I hear the answer
of your gentle voice.
But if I venture
to reverberate the echo
of your words into more
concrete dimensions,
suddenly I hear cawing
crows, hooting
owls. [Psyche and Poetry 7.44]

I believe that my idea and vision of art were deeply influenced initially by the second version of Plato, a “universal” imprisoned in a “particular,” and two years later—in the third degree of the Italian classical secondary school—by the romantic vision that proliferated in its wake. As Plato writes: “The poet [or we might say the artist] is a light, winged, and sacred thing, and incapable of poetry, unless he is first inspired by the god and out of his mind, and if the mind is not entirely enraptured. As long as he remains in possession of his faculties, no man can write poetry or prophesy” (“Ion” 534A-B) . . .

31 January 2022

My dearest Tessy,

Your kind words about my poems [*The New Garden*] greatly pleased me. Poets write poems primarily for themselves to air urgent feelings. However, when the words that have come from the heart reach another and arouse the same emotions in it, then the poet can think that those words have achieved the only purpose that makes them worthy of attention: to create noble feelings, to give joy, to bring people closer to beauty. In this case, this effect is mainly due to the sensitivity of your heart and your personal history, which makes you understand them better and feel closer. For that, I am most grateful.

Enjoy the sun for me, too.

2 September 2022

Dear Julie,

Your message came at the right time. I am working on Tahereh's poems and immersed myself in Persian and Arabic words. Ungaretti's poem ["Phase"] is not one of my favourites, but I liked the path you guided me on. Above all, because it ends with this magnificent phrase: "I have turned my face unto Thee, O my Lord! Illumine it with the light of Thy countenance. Protect it, then, from turning to anyone but Thee" [PM314, sec.182, para.4] whose beauty I would like to grasp, at least in part.

. . . I am almost finishing another revision of [Tahereh's] poetry notes. After that, I will have to fix the nine appendixes. I am attaching the second appendix draft to give you an idea of what I am doing. I love this work and do not care if only three people will read it. However, I ask myself: Will Paola's loneliness while I am working ever help anyone? Or is mine just an escape from the world, old-fashioned mysticism? . . . Is this gentle feeling that warms me while I work real?

10 January 2023

Dear Julie,

Thank you also for this remembrance [Villa Gregoriana 12.36]: a fantastic tour with a dear friend . . . It sounds lovely to me . . . It is the rural environment and the link with life, unexpected pains, and equally unforeseen pacifications. My life, perhaps . . .

Another astonishment
 hast Thou reserved for me:
 the dark vertigo of the self,
 the awareness of its empty
 abyss of impotence and void
 and together the impelling
 need to break its chains. [The Neutron of the Spirit 6.80]

14 November 2022

Dear Julie,

Last Friday, the Ballerio Association, a Bahá'í-inspired APS, and the Italian Bahá'í Publishing Trust, in collaboration with the Verona Literary Society, presented *The New Garden*. The meeting was scheduled for 5 p.m., but ten minutes before, over a hundred people crowded the hall. The Literary Society is an ancient and prestigious association in Verona, founded in 1808 to make Italian and foreign newspapers, magazines, and books available to citizens interested in keeping abreast of the political and cultural evolution of the world. The moderator was Guariente Guarienti, a well-known lawyer and respected citizen of Verona. There were important political and religious figures. The crowd was definitely for him. The meeting opened with the president of the Association, who is also the director of the University library and the Verona Conservatory, thanking the Ballerio Association for the initiative. Guarienti immediately introduced the book, taking inspiration from the . . . afterword:

. . . 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 neighbours. [15.41]

He then briefly presented the Faith, its history, and its connections with other religions, particularly Catholicism, and said it inspired all those poems. He continued speaking of the universality of religious and mystical sentiments expressed in my verses. Then, the first in a troop of young pianists performed the Prelude Op.1, No.1 by Karol Szymanovsky, immediately followed by reading a first group of poems. The actor was outstanding: he highlighted the slightest nuances of the verses he read. As he recited, I felt like I was rewriting those verses word for word. Other readings by the same actor and piano performances by other young pianists followed . . . all very good . . . Between one reading and another, participants asked me a few questions

about the Faith and my spiritual journey. In this way, I could urge the attendants to take care of their spiritual development to contribute to civilization's advancement. The audience was very attentive and participatory. During the readings, I saw many eyes glistening with tears. The moderator also wanted to read two poems: "Martha and Mary" [6.32] and "The Scents of the Beloved" [9.58]. He concluded by briefly referring to some of the concepts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentioned in the foreword by the Bausani Association. He said more or less what 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote about poetry: that the poems had been "a cause of the gladness of their hearers" [see «Recent Tablets» 318], that "their beauty" had impressed "the minds and . . . the hearts of those who listen", putting them "in tune with the love of God" [see TAB I, 59].

..

. . . It was an exhilarating adventure for me . . . I thought that, finally, my poems served to uplift the hearts of those present . . . My emotion was almost equal to that I felt in Vancouver over ten years ago.⁶⁰ Add the presence of Paola, my son Giorgio, my sister Giorgina with her daughter-in-law, and some dear friends, and you have the complete picture.

I can only thank God for this beautiful gift that He has freely offered me.

⁶⁰ On 14 August 2010 in Vancouver, I had the honour of speaking on the theme "Destiny and Freedom in the Bahá'í Writings" at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Association for Bahá'í Studies; see 16.8.144, note 43.

22 January 2023

Thank you, my dear friends [Guido and Lapo], for your closeness and understanding. Our friendship appears to me as an indisputable demonstration of some of Bergson's ideas about time, duration, and memory . . .

It is true: my words [Shared Memories 14.32; Birthday 14.54] can evoke feelings of nostalgia, but I believe we can also perceive them more broadly and constructively. Those memories are part of our self-awareness. By remembering them, we remember what we are today, which is also the result of those distant experiences. Every moment of our lives has borne fruit. When I think back to Cioffi's stilt house in Massawa and the music we listened to . . . or the break times in Ferdinando Martini's [Lyceum].gravel courtyard . . . I find myself here and there at the same time.

In the first poem—and the first part of the second—I suggest that our adolescent romanticism today may have become the need to share feelings with our closest friends, as I am doing with you, drawing constant strength and inspiration from them. In the second part of the second poem, I suggest that the uneasiness I sometimes felt in that courtyard—"boisterous dissonant voices"—has now become harmony as I confidently lean on your renewed friendship: from estrangement to reunion.

A dear friend helped me constructively see the two faces of that two-faced Janus that is time. In remembering the past, we should try to trace its fruits; in looking to the future, we should endeavour to make the best use of past experiences . . . Beyond the cold reasoning, I am sure that the warmth of the memories that unite us will help you to understand the inner meaning of what I am inadequately trying to convey to you. Your words brought a few tears to my eyes, which I carefully hid from Paola . . .

What infinite sweetness you have given me: you have understood me, and thus, somehow, on the magical flying carpet of words, I have managed to reach you and spend a few precious moments with you. Actually, on second thought, some of my inner panoramas today may seem so beautiful to me because you, too, are part of them.