

## A POET'S INNER DIARY

Portraying—with sincerity and in a melodious language—feelings deeply felt but not fully understood and therefore always kept silent, not only to unburden the heart but also to better grasp their truth and, sometimes, their beauty, is the declared poetic program of *Remoteness* (Poesy 2.22), comprising almost all the poems I wrote between 1955 and 2023. Many of them have already been published in anthologies and magazines, mainly in Italian, but also in English and French, as indicated in the Notes reported at the end of each of the fourteen collections that make up this work.

Like the verses of the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), these too were written “[t]o see . . . [oneself]” and “to set the darkness echoing” (Heaney 82). But unlike the verses of other poets, mine are pervaded by an irrepressible “yearning for beauty / harmony perfection” (Yearning for Beauty 1.4) and aim above all to “portray in a / mirror of words / sincere images / of generous affections” and to convey the echoes of “the spell of a yearning / transcending the ephemeral” (Poesy 2.24). And thus, they do not indulge in the dark aspects of life. You will instead perceive from them the “astonishment” aroused by the “dark vertigo of the self / and the “awareness of its empty / abyss of impotence and void / and together the impelling / need to break its chains” (The Neutron of the Spirit 6.80).

Only initially does persistent attention toward those dark aspects seem to enhance this darkness in an endless “ring-around-a-rosy” from which there is no exit (Slow Wandering 2.10). However, the “love of reality” (PUP49, para.3) and of “transcendence” (SAQ217, sec.48, para.8) that characterizes every human being—and which in *Remoteness* is expressed as a constant and growing yearning for the Infinite—day after day opens the way to an increasing balance between the love of the self and the love of God. Thus, the poetic effusions appear in their best form, a search for the deepest self, the quest for the Infinite wherever its traces may be perceived (You Come Back, O Poetry 5.14).

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

*I'll Be Free Once Again* (1955-1958)

From the very first poems, two feelings are present, constantly recurring in *Remoteness* and, in the most varied forms, typical of human beings: the yearning for the Infinite,<sup>1</sup> on the one hand, and the awareness of the limits of the human self (*Dazzled* 1.18) and the desire to overcome them, sublimating the self into that same Infinity for which it yearns (*The Silence of the Infinite* 1.6), on the other. But those very first poems lack a mature spiritual awareness. Therefore, the yearning for the sublimation of the self into the Infinite is confused, as often happens in the novice, with the disquietude and anxieties that sometimes arise from the travails of daily living and with the consequent desire to escape it by taking refuge in a fancied world where every anguish can be forgotten (*Yearning*. I 1.10).

The poems in this first collection describe the feelings of a young man who, having barely crossed the threshold of life, feels that the models offered by school and society are too narrow for him, that his way of acting towards others does not satisfy him, that there must exist in some corner of the world an Ideal that is worth living and fighting for and that may bestow true freedom (*To Life* 1.14). His life is punctuated by surges (*I'll Be Free Once Again* 1.38) and

<sup>1</sup> *Yearning for Beauty* 1.4, *Eternity* 1.26.

abandonments;<sup>2</sup> yearnings (Blind in Darkness 1.50) and hopes;<sup>3</sup> but also by “melancholy” (1.50) and disappointment (Rain. II 1.24); discouragement (The Weary Hand 1.58) and a sense of impotence;<sup>4</sup> anguish<sup>5</sup> and sometimes despair.<sup>6</sup> It is also immediately run through with a mystic feeling of nature<sup>7</sup> and a nostalgic vein that involves the transfiguration of the world of memories,<sup>8</sup> which will also recur in the other collections in more complex forms.

The last ten poems of *I'll Be Free Once Again* record my first encounter with the Bahá'í Faith. They describe the initial disbelief in front of its promises,<sup>9</sup> the relief of the freedom from long-standing, unrewarding bonds conferred by it (Pure Water Flows 1.70), the gradual recognition of its merits (I Join My Handsto Thine1.72), and finally the consecration to the newly-found Ideal (Upon My Heart For Ever 1.76).

If the world of reality were the same as that of yearning, that yearning that sometimes deludes us that it is enough to know a spiritual truth to be transformed by it, the subsequent poems would have had a different shade, in the disappearance of every feeling of remoteness. And actually, between 1958 and 1961, the diary is silent, as if there was nothing left to say in the contentment with the new vision of life achieved. On the contrary, reality almost always involves a succession of inner and outer struggles to be faced and won so that we may translate into lived experience whatever our spirit has only perceived. And so the diary proceeds with the description of a long journey whereby that long-awaited and now finally found Ideal from an Object found, yes, but still external, gradually becomes the Form to which the soul laboriously adapts. It describes the struggle fought by the self in its yearning to resemble as much as possible that “perfect exemplar /

<sup>2</sup> That Breath 1.24, The Sublimity of Silence 1.34.

<sup>3</sup> Rain. I 1.18, The Seed. I 1.20.

<sup>4</sup> Indifferent 1.30, Impotence 1.52.

<sup>5</sup> Dazzled 1.18, Sleep 1.56.

<sup>6</sup> Rejected 1.22, As a Flimsy Cobweb 1.28, O Peace of the Infinite 1.36.

<sup>7</sup> I Alone Have No Peace 1.4, Seascape. II 1.44.

<sup>8</sup> Confused Memory 1.54, Soon Vanished 1.54, No Way Back 1.60.

<sup>9</sup> It Is You 1.66, The Heart Long Muted 1.68.

flashing at times / from the depths of the heart” (Yearning. III 5.48). It is a description of the first stage of spiritual progress, which Christian mystics call the “purgative way,” Sufis “the law (*shari’ah*),” or the stage of the self-accusing soul (*nafs al-lawwáma*), and Bahá’u’lláh mentions in the “Valley of Search” and the “Valley of Love” (SV 15-21, paras. 2.7-22).

### *Unfulfilled Dreams* (1961-1964)

The first awareness that emerges while travelling this stretch of road is that of the gap between the self and the Ideal. So, previous experiences, as exhilarating as they may have been, cannot yet be savoured in their fruits but are primarily perceived in their limits of *Unfulfilled Dreams*, the title of the second collection. One thing is to yearn for an unattainable perfection, and another is to struggle to move toward it by discharging multiple daily tasks. From this struggle, the awareness soon emerges that it is worthwhile to shed light upon the dark corners of the self, but only as long as this effort leads to a more profound self-knowledge and closer nearness to the Ideal. In these cases, a good friend is precious when, through his “sweet, / humane loving-kindness” (2.4), he helps us see even the most challenging aspects of our nature with greater serenity. That struggle soon teaches that insisting on exploring the muddy depths of the self means stirring up the mud. The waters become turbid, and in those “dark meanders” (2.58), we will not see anything but their darkness (When I Look Into My Heart 2.32).

As the struggle to overcome the limits of the self and get closer to the goals that the Ideal puts forward continues, life still appears as a series of painful trials (After the Billow Broke 2.16), a succession of doubts and uncertainties (Veil of Oblivion 2.38), anxieties<sup>10</sup> and disquietude (Another Disquieting Morning 2.65), which only escape into the darkness of unconsciousness<sup>11</sup> seems to be able to remedy. But as long as the heart preserves intact the yearning for the Infinite (Thy Infinite Bounties 2.42) and keeps alive the memory of its encounter with the Ideal (Far from Thee 2.40), life is also a tension toward a light

<sup>10</sup> Impatience 2.10, Anxiety 2.64.

<sup>11</sup> Winter Dusk 2.18, In the Silent Night 2.44.

that illuminates the way (The Glimmering Dawn. I 2.54); awareness of the possibility of emerging from the bitterest pain (Today in the Trough 2.58); understanding and acceptance of the need not to deviate from the marked paths of God's way (Out of Thy Path 2.34) and to respond courageously to the challenges of life;<sup>12</sup> the certainty that, despite our unworthiness, a benevolent Creator is always ready to answer to any sincere cry for help (The Flavour of Thy Dew 2.60). In this context, the nostalgia for the distant homeland begins to be transfigured into the nostalgia for the heavenly homeland.<sup>13</sup> The first poems dedicated to family affection appear.<sup>14</sup>

*The Heaven of the Heart* (1965-1972)

The soul is always ready to struggle so that grief may be replaced by joy. Perhaps this is why our Creator has endowed us with the ability to suffer and rejoice, which leads us to reject what makes us suffer and move toward what makes us rejoice. But in this struggle, we still risk transforming life's experiences into a snare in which we can end up entangled instead of making them an opportunity to learn to realize the inner conditions that dispose the heart to happiness, clearing it of the clouds that may obscure it. This situation is the leitmotiv of the third collection, *The Heaven of the Heart*.

A subtle *mal de vivre* permeates its poems. It looms as intolerance toward the useless renunciations that Western civilization imposes through the frenzy of its life<sup>15</sup> or as dismay in the face of the moral decay of society,<sup>16</sup> but much more often as a feeling of loneliness. It is the loneliness of the immigrant, an Italian born in Eritrea and coming for the first time to his country, whose language and culture he learned at school and not from everyday life, who cannot communicate with nature and humans.<sup>17</sup> The cold of the Po Valley

<sup>12</sup> Smile 2.14, If I shall Refuse Thy Ranks 2.34.

<sup>13</sup> Between Houses and Stony Lanes 2.64, It Is Only a Memory 2.68.

<sup>14</sup> Unfulfilled Dreams 2.52, A Job Suspended Midway 2.52.

<sup>15</sup> Renunciation of Light 3.16, Your Life Comes to an End 3.16.

<sup>16</sup> Portraits 3.60, Voiceless Days 3.72, Wasted Life 3.82, Our Sorry Voices 3.84.

<sup>17</sup> Loneliness. I 3.6, The Speechless Tongue 3.18.

winter thus becomes the metaphor for the spiritual chill that seems to stiffen the hearts (The First Snow 3.4); a sunny winter morning appears like an unreal dream (Deceit 3.10); the mists of autumn recall human indifference to God's recent summons;<sup>18</sup> whereas the distant homeland looks as the ideal place of nearness to the Bahá'í Faith discovered there and never forgotten, but still very far from the reality of everyday life.<sup>19</sup>

In those days of utmost remoteness, the memory of the instants of truth that the heart has intensely experienced is a precious lifeline. It sometimes presents itself in the form of the primal remembrance of the metaphorical "radiant morn" of creation, almost a reminiscence of the divine worlds from which the soul was born (Our Sorry Voices 3.84), which Bahá'u'lláh mentions in His Persian Hidden Words (no.19). Sometimes it is the nostalgia of a moment of nearness to God (Celestial Dew 3.86). Other times, it is the re-enactment of the encounter with the Faith, which appears so far away.<sup>20</sup> Finally, it is the longing for "the true Friend" who seems to have been forgotten (Forgetful of the True Friend 3.36). From those memories comes the required strength to escape the pitfalls of everyday life with the allurements of its fallacious myths (Allurement 3.54) or the more subtle deceptions of the self with its tendency to withdraw into a mythical "elsewhere" (O Sweet Distant Years 3.28), dangerous traps into which it is easy to fall and sometimes one does fall indeed.

Remembrance lived in this way teaches that, in every circumstance, there always remains the freedom to live that life that we have partly chosen and God Himself has partly selected for us, conforming the feelings of the heart to His will. Our feelings are the only thing we have some control over, provided we make the necessary effort (Cherish That Light 3.32). We can rebel against God's will or surrender. We are rebels if we take refuge in dreams and deceptions and refuse to struggle to improve ourselves and society (I Know Not 3.18). We are submissive if we wholeheartedly face that inner struggle by living the present instant

<sup>18</sup> Above the Mists 3.8, Perhaps the Sky Is Smiling 3.12.

<sup>19</sup> In the Kiss of Life-giving Water 3.50, The Shade of Remembrance 3.58.

<sup>20</sup> Without Thee 3.24, Deserted Heart 3.86.

to the fullest, without regrets, without recriminations, without false justifications, and face up to life, happy to live it, whatever it may be, within the boundaries of His Law.<sup>21</sup>

While struggling to get closer to God, we learn many vital lessons. First, the idea that we always need His help and must invoke Him to obtain—hopefully—His answer is confirmed (The Day of Thy Promise 3.34). We also realize that the struggle can be softened by the solace of shared human experiences, such as friendship (The Sown Seed 3.42) and love (Your Hand in My Hand 3.88), only when we transfigure them through our striving toward the Ideal. We finally begin to understand that the self can find its fulfilment only in service (Serving Thee Once More 3.64), which helps it shift its attention from itself toward others.

Thus, a greater hope looms in our spiritual growth, the true ultimate purpose of human life: manifesting in the form of thoughts, feelings, words, and primarily actions, the qualities of the divine world, love, friendship, understanding, solidarity, tolerance, wisdom, knowledge, justice, awareness, balance, moderation, resourcefulness, courage, etc. (Without Any Shame 3.30). Isn't this condition being in the presence of God? Isn't it paradise (In Thy Presence 3.66)? However, such a high goal cannot be an easy achievement. Spiritual growth is slow and sometimes painful, and we must be ready to wait for our prayers' answers without ceasing to act to carry out His Will (It Resembles the Seed 3.74). While the urgency of action becomes more and more involving, a growing awareness of the constructive power of pain begins to soften past and present agonies of the heart (The Sigh Still Lingers 3.94), and the tendency to dwell on them becomes less frequent. Between 1973 and 1975, the diary is silent for the second time.

### *Despite the Light of Guidance* (1975-1983)

Most of the poems in the fourth collection, entitled *Despite the Light of Guidance*, do not bear a precise date. They are fragments of an actual secret diary, almost a confession, written in moments of high emotional tension, as the errors of daily living, made “despite the light of guidance” (4.40) conferred by the Faith, emerge into consciousness

<sup>21</sup> Vain Human Thoughts 3.48, The Heaven of the Heart 3.52.

(In the Dark That Remains 4.32). They mark the beginning of the ascent of the “Seven Storey Mountain”—in the metaphor of the Trappist monk writer Thomas Merton (1915-1968)<sup>22</sup>—and tell about the gradual acquisition of some fundamental certainties, which allow the most authentic qualities of the self to start becoming manifest.

First, these poems confirm that intellectual or ascetic effort in the traditional sense is not enough to satisfy the yearning for Infinity. The daily militancy of life in the service of the Faith is necessary. Without that, everything remains theoretical and wholly useless, even counter-productive. For it generates a form of monstrous egocentrism, the egocentrism of someone who, feeling like he has the truth, deludes himself into thinking he is better than others. For this reason, he ends up looking at everyone with unconscious haughtiness (Unburied Wealth 4.34). On the contrary, active commitment to practical life, besides allowing a healthy awareness of one’s mistakes (Misleading Ways 4.28), also increases the need to free oneself from error (Those Infinite Worlds 4.8).

They also confirm that this liberation is not something that can be obtained cheaply (The Walls of the Self 4.6) or in a short time (Search Is a Journey 4.38) and that the struggle to conquer it always implies many ups and downs (Wavering 4.10). But that price, that time, and those alternating events are only “drifting shadows” (SWAB 177, sec. 150). Reality is the aspiration to acquire divine qualities for oneself (The Song of the Heart 4.8) and for others;<sup>23</sup> it is the enchantment of the precious instant (To the Poor, Astonished Heart 4.14); it is the joy of a goal even partially achieved (Unburied Wealth 4.34).

Finally, if we want to overcome the battles required for spiritual liberation victoriously, we should achieve that detachment that allows us to learn how to make good use of our ability to love (Power of Love 4.46), overcoming the likes and dislikes to which our humanity

<sup>22</sup> See “I was about to set foot on the shore at the foot of the high, seven circled mountain of a Purgatory steeper and more arduous than I was able to imagine, and I was not at all aware of the climbing I was about to have to do. The essential thing was to begin the climb” (Merton 221).

<sup>23</sup> As the Rush of the Lakes 4.12; Unburied Wealth 4.34.

exposes us (The Unavowed Awareness 4.48). We should also keep certain feelings in check, however seductive they may be, without falling into the chill and aridity of indifference (Tender Love 4.42). Then a trusted friend turns into a revealing mirror (The Hour We Lived Together 4.26); the memory of a loved one who has recently passed away becomes the spur to resume the journey after a further fall (The Scent of That Springtime 4.22); the relationship with a thousand unknown spiritual companions exalts the comforting flavour of solidarity (A Thousand Kind Hands 4.48); the indignation aroused by the umpteenth violence perpetrated in the name of one of the fallacious ideologies that have conquered the hearts of people in the twentieth century finds vent in the effort to trace “the threads of [God’s] *Major / Plan*, as they become unraveled” and to support their best development (Poland 4.54).

*An Unexpected Stream* (1983-1992)

Between 1983 and 1990, while the “purgative way” continues and the ascent of the “mountain” begins—it will never come to an end—the diary is silent for the third time. A poem explains the reasons for that stillness. The Muse’s prevailing attention to intimistic discourses seemed incompatible with a sincere, active commitment and conducive to an undesirable narcissistic attitude. These were years of intense studies of the Bahá’í Writings, which culminated in 1988 with the publication of *Nell’universo sulle tracce di Dio: un’introduzione alla filosofia divina di ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (An Introduction to the Divine Philosophy of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá), published the following year in English under the title *The Eternal Quest for God*.

In the light of the knowledge acquired from the study of the Writings and the experiences accrued, the Muse’s calls to introspection now seem purified by the luminous personal and collective goals that she had always suggested and which now emerge with greater clarity (You Come Back, O Poetry 5.14). In 1990, when the poetic discourse resumed its usual rhythm, the pain seemed softened, and the anguish allayed as if after a reviving bath “in the fresh waves / of an unexpected stream” (5.4). Despite the weaknesses and imperfections that transpire

from them, the poems in this fifth collection seem to suggest a slight step forward toward the second stage of spiritual progress, which Christian mystics call the “illuminative way,” Sufis “the way (*ta-riqah*),” and Bahá’u’lláh “the Path of Positive Knowledge” (KI 195, para.215), or “Realm of knowledge” and “First Station of Unity” (SV 27-39, paras.2.27-60).

The relation with life that these poems describe has changed. The yearning for the Infinite is not a mere dream but also an experience. Nature allows more expansive spaces of the celestial worlds to shine through (Kaldidalur’s Swan 5.12). The past takes on constructive connotations, and an outer voyage to the places of childhood and adolescence changes into a liberating inner journey (The Voices of Time 5.18). Answers expected for long years come from those places that seem untouched by time. Now it is the voice of a never-forgotten friend (The Old Asphalted Road 5.22); now that of an ancient “sycamore” (5.30) met and immediately loved in very distant days and now found again. Many other voices speak, all agreeing to a single goal: universality, the only one that belongs to the Ideal, the only one worth living and fighting for. Thus, in those remote places alongside the usual voices of humankind—greatness and meanness (Remote Calls 5.66), dreams and hopes (Unexpected Rain 5.62), as well as experiences lived through the memories of a sweet companion who was far away in those days (On the Roads of Her Childhood 5.36)—the ancient yearning for the Infinite which is here expressed with the accents of natural mysticism is also once more heard (The Remote Heathes 5.56).

Nothing remains but to thank God for the gift received from such beauty and renew the promise, accepted as a precious legacy, to make good use of His bestowal wherever one may be in the world (In the Dawn Changing Sun 5.78). Yes, perfection is undoubtedly an unattainable goal. However, it is still worth fighting to get closer to it, even at the cost of living “as if” (5.40) one had already reached goals of awareness that are still distant, as long as the desire to please God be the animating motive of every action. The poetry of remembrance has yielded its first fruit of maturity: the present instant is the heir of times gone by (Remnants of Days Forever Gone 5.72). The uncertainty

persists that these verses, although written with a heart turned toward the Friend and offered with the utmost purity of motives, can meet with His good pleasure (Mírzá Maqşúd 5.46).

*Toward the Unreached Borders* (1994-1995)

In the sixth collection, *Toward the Unreached Borders*, the awareness of human imperfection and the need to overcome while living one's daily life is illuminated by a more serene acceptance of the inevitable limits that life imposes and by an attitude of deeper trust in divine assistance to one's efforts "toward the unreached borders" (6.40) of the Ideal. The ongoing dialogue between the subject—forever condemned to say "I" and Thou" and thus forced to exclude himself from the Object of his love—and the "Thou," the unattainable Object of his love, has no other solution but a reconfirmed distrust in the self and trust in God and His Word (Were Are the Boundaries 6.8). The self can only be an instrument, never the purpose of life (Water of the Self 6.20). However, this instrument can recognize the beauty of creation and acquire sufficient wings to rise towards the Infinite.<sup>24</sup> To a friend who would prefer to read more joyful and encouraging verses and who, perhaps also for this reason, says she does not perceive the spirit of the Faith in them and advises against their dissemination, a poem replies that the human heart may exhale the scent of Eternity only when it is finally appeased "in the joys of the efforts / bent so that the heavenly Kindom's / luminous model / may be copied down here" (And It Is Still So Much 6.46).

The human self has been better understood and, to some extent, transcended; its narrow limits have been partially accepted and, thus, partly overcome.<sup>25</sup> Time has become less hostile (The Secret of Your of Your Bitter Pangs 6.62). The future appears as the fruit of the qualities acquired through the present commitment in daily life (Waiting for Giulia 6.64). The past can, therefore, be looked at with heightened serenity (Snow-white Hand of the Night 6.70). Once abhorred in its prelude winter, autumn becomes welcome for its gifts, finally

<sup>24</sup> Ordainer Nature 6.58, That Morning's Spell 6.76.

<sup>25</sup> A Happy and Marvellous End 6.24, Mary and Martha 6.32.

recognized today (Toward the Unreached Borders 6.40). The joys of friendship increasingly embody the beatitudes of the celestial realms (On the Wave of a Remote Music 6.50).

*Children of the Half-Light* (1995-1996)

With these feelings of greater acceptance of the limits of the self, in their transcendence through the divine qualities acquired through service, the increasing spiritual decay of contemporary culture and society ceases to be only a cause of dismay. The fact of being one of the *Children of the Half-Light* (I Am of the Children of the Half-Light 7.38) is serenely accepted. Despite the inevitable persistence of the inner struggle resulting from the dual nature of the soul (Two Hearts 7.22), whose remote origins are partially understood (Travel Companions 7.18), earthly expanses more and more gleam with sparkles of the heavenly realms (In the Small Crescent 7.6). Despite the experience of divine rejection of sometimes infantile cries for help (Against Each Nay 7.14), prayer is still recognized as a powerful means of spiritual elevation (Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár 7.76).

With this attitude of enhanced trust in God, the succeeding ages of life appear in a different light (Children 7.26), and the bright future that awaits humanity according to the divine promise becomes clearer (Clouds 7.50). The initial intimistic poetical program is moving away. Poetry goes beyond the confines of the private. It presents itself as a divine gift (Flowers 7.8), which conveys not only the joy of moments of beauty (Psyche and Poetry 7.44) but also the wisdom of a bright and encouraging vision to any well-disposed reader (Comet Hyakutake 7.64).

*Diverging Skies* (1996-1998)

The eighth collection, *Diverging Skies*, marks a time of respite to weigh the past<sup>26</sup> and its ephemeral aspects (The Seagull 8.26) and anticipate the future, personal (As One Day the Drop 8.28) and collective (New Trees Will Rise in Flower 8.32). One of the most important lessons learned from past experiences is confirmed: the need for courage,

<sup>26</sup> Epitaph 8.6, The Steinbock 8.24.

constancy, and firmness in the unremitting battles fought to transform the utopia of the Ideal into the reality of daily life (Wayfarer 8.20). A poem conveys the hope that the echoes of poetry, reverberated by a friendly heart, may reach the threshold of the Friend's court (Yesterday a Kindly Friend 8.14). But above all, there is a more profound rampant need for truth and renewal (As an Oversharpened Blade 8.18).

*The Gift of the Friend* (1998)

The renewal now seems to be facilitated by rediscovering the value of friendship, a great bounty from God. The boundaries between friendship and love appear blurred, and love for an earthly friend grows into Love for the divine Friend.<sup>27</sup> This ninth collection, *The Gift of the Friend*, adopts the Sufi language completely renewed by Bahá'u'lláh and, for this reason, bears the subtitle "In the footsteps of Háfiz." This novelty is particularly evident in "Let Us Explore Together" (9.6), "The Song of the Unveiled Lover" (9.26), and "From *Shams* to Companion" (9.46). These poems depict love as the attraction toward beauty (The Swans of Bodensee 9.52), self-annihilation (My Lover Asked Me 9.48), a transformation of human traits into divine qualities (The Song of the Insane Lover 9.68), a daze conducive to greater wisdom (Is It Joy or Pain? 9.34). They transfigure small gestures of friendship into vehicles of ever-regenerating and encouraging feelings.<sup>28</sup>

The perception of the uncertainties of life (The Torrent 9.64), the transience of human things (The Night of the Shooting Stars 9.56), and the spiritual decadence of Western civilization<sup>29</sup> is still present. However, it is tempered by a clearer vision of a better future (To the Throne of Supreme Harmony 9.54). The feeling of diversity remains (The Tawny Candle 9.74). However, it finds a counterbalance in the hope that it may help to leave traces of the inner joys enlightening the heart so that they may also reverberate in other souls.<sup>30</sup> A religious study

<sup>27</sup> Give Me Your Cup 9.4, Is Mine or His This Song Today? 9.22.

<sup>28</sup> Black Cachemire 9.12, Gentle Fragrance 9.14.

<sup>29</sup> The Well in the *Campiello* 9.72, *Acqua alta* 9.72.

<sup>30</sup> The Linden-Tree 9.62, The Fleeting Moment 9.76.

meeting in China exhales a mixture of exotic perfumes to recall the unity of the world's many religions (The Scents of the Beloved 9.58).

*Faithful of Love* (1998-2000)

In the tenth collection, *Faithful of Love*, Bahá'í motifs come to the fore as never before in *Remoteness*. They have pervaded the inner universe to such an extent that heroes of Bahá'í history become the occasion for an excursion among the best qualities of life;<sup>31</sup> people of daily life<sup>32</sup> and common episodes of Bahá'í life (A Summer School Midnight Dream 10.80) are transfigured by the spiritual light transpiring from them. Friendship, already described in a previous collection as "reciprocity" (9.86) and renewal (Blooming Anew 9.84), here is always projected onto the scenarios of the Eternal (The Two Eagles 10.68). It is self-giving<sup>33</sup> and unity (A Greater Love 10.56) but also bears the very human traits of anxiety (In the Incoming Twilight 10.54) and impatience (Seventeen Hours 10.84).

Life appears like the slow flow of a river toward the ocean, as the development of an essentially benevolent plan (O Life, Placid Waters 10.16). Its difficulties depend on our limitations (Sinai 10.24). Still, we can always overcome them by following the path of the "faithful of love,"<sup>34</sup> people who love God and are faithful to the pledge that He has entrusted them (Return on the Wrist of Your King 10.44). Remembrance lights up with hope (Memory. II 10.76). Awareness of human limitations is a reason for gratitude to God (Who am I? 10.70). The quest for and commitment to achieving bright personal and collective

<sup>31</sup> Drowned 10.4, The Night of Šidq-'Alí 10.6, Jináb-i-Muníb 10.8, Šhaykh 'Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání 10.14, Šhaykh Salmán 10.26, Šhaykh Šádiq 10.28, Zaynu'l-'Abidin 10.30, Hájí Ja'far and His Brothers 10.32, 'Abdu'lláh Baghdádi 10.38.

<sup>32</sup> Gabrielle De Sacy 10.18, Thomas and the Light 10.46.

<sup>33</sup> Black Pearl 10.11, Fireflies 10.52.

<sup>34</sup> The name taken by some poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as Dante (see *Vita Nuova* [New Life], p.554, sec. VII [rossetti]), Guido Cavalcanti, Guido Guinizzelli, Lapo Gianni, Cino da Pistoia, and others, who sang mystical love. In the same period, among Muslims, other "faithful of love" (kháṣṣán-i-maḥabbat), such as Muḥammad Rúzbiḥán-i-Baqlí (1128-1209), author of the *Kitáb-i-'abharu'l-'áshiqín*, *The Jasmine of the Faithful of Love*, wrote in the same vein.

goals continue uninterrupted on His path (From Nights to Dawns 10.82). *Faithful of Love* ends on the edge of memory, no longer painful nostalgia, but the richness of a constructive memory (The Bridge of Friendship 10.88).

*Routes and Landscapes* (2000-2004)

The diary continues (The Adventure Goes On 11.30): the landscapes are more serene (Halcyon Days 11.32), the desire for freedom is still intense,<sup>35</sup> the hope of being welcomed back after having moved away tempers any feeling of loneliness (Loneliness. II 11.24), and even the least happy occasions turn into occasions to act for the best (Metropolitan Meetings 11.26). But now, having reached the threshold of old age, this incontrovertible chronological fact cannot fail to influence the views on the events of the world and responses to the unfolding events. These poems do not exorcize advanced age, as many today prefer to do. They savour it in its most authentic aspects and describe it accordingly.<sup>36</sup>

The ambition is to be more attentive to the naked reality of people (I Remember 11.4) and events (Metropolitan Meetings 11.26). The yearning for truth is even more alive (No Promise 11.10). The will to escape illusions is stronger than ever.<sup>37</sup> Equally strong is the awareness that the Ideal—pursued since the days of adolescence—cannot disappoint in itself, given its perfect correspondence to the “reality of things as they are” (SAQ 255, sec.59, para.7; Upon the Throne of Thy Beauty 11.50). If anything, some disappointment may arise from the awareness of our inadequacy (Cones of Shadow 11.60). However, even this feeling is immediately mitigated by the never-disavowed willingness to “bow down . . . [one’s] head in submission and put . . . [one’s] trust in the All-Merciful Lord”, in the certainty confirmed by life that “with a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from

<sup>35</sup> No Promise 11.10, Free 11.12.

<sup>36</sup> I Just Want 11.14, Contentment 11.16.

<sup>37</sup> Waters 11.6, I Wait 11.8.

the shackles of grief” (SWAB51, sec.22). This attitude could not fail to influence the language, which aims to be essential, disenchanting, realistic, and concrete, without ever giving up the Ideal<sup>38</sup> both in outlining the routes and in describing the places in which they unfold (I Envision in Heaven 11.20).

### *Transits* (2004-2014)

The twelfth collection, *Transits*, finally seems to indicate a reconciliation with the transience of time. The destruction of the tomb of a hero of the Faith turns into an opportunity to foreshadow a spiritual encounter with him in a different dimension where hostile worldly powers will be devoid of any meaning (Desecration 12.4). The visit to a monumental cemetery with its dusty epigraphs and effigies is an opportunity to reflect on the immortal soul (The Charterhouse 12.8). The passing of two friends<sup>39</sup> and a beloved sibling<sup>40</sup> consolidates and confirms the omnipresence of the Infinite, which also shines from various places visited, be they natural landscapes<sup>41</sup> or art sites.<sup>42</sup> The bitter feeling of remoteness becomes sweeter in the intimate experience of the meaning of life, which takes the form of comments on a phrase from a Chinese sage (Sense 12.10) or reflections on the beauty of nature<sup>43</sup> and the lessons we may draw from it.<sup>44</sup>

The desire remains for a more constant presence of the Muse, an irreplaceable companion (Sleepless Night 12.20), whose voice has often remained unheard since 2006. Other pressing commitments (institutional services, research, and scholarship<sup>45</sup>) have diverted the author’s attention, forcing him to draw, through a transparency of the absolute

<sup>38</sup> Upon the Throne of Thy Beauty 11.50, The Stone 11.74.

<sup>39</sup> Gentle Voice of Youth 12.56, The Storm Will Abate 12.64.

<sup>40</sup> Departures. I 12.72, Farewell 12.76.

<sup>41</sup> Ratsberg 12.40, Antholz 12.42.

<sup>42</sup> Villa Gregoriana 12.36, The Mezquita 12.46, Trevi Fountain 12.54.

<sup>43</sup> From May to May 12.22, Linden and Lilacs at Eve 12.24.

<sup>44</sup> In the Arena of Life 12.26, The Seven Lights of Iridescence 12.32.

<sup>45</sup> The responsibility as the Italian Bahá’í National Secretary from 2006 to 2012 and the publication of *Towards the Apex of Reality. An Introduction to the Study of Bahá’u’lláh’s Seven Valleys and Four Valleys* in 2008.

constantly pursued, even in the most prosaic situations, the joy that beauty has always bestowed upon him. The bud of love, which in the meantime has put down deeper roots, finds various expressions in homages to loved ones, near (*With Soft Steps* 12.38) or far away, known (*Five Days in India* 12.48), or unknown (*May an Echo Resound* 12.18).

### *Once More Tomorrow* (2014-2015)

“My life is a struggle,” repeats a poem (*Struggle* 13.22). Ancient conflicts reappear here, with their sense of loneliness and vanity of the self (*The Ark* 13.6). At the same time, the perception of the omnipresent celestial grace (*Return* 13.8) and constructive forces still active in the world (*Once More Tomorrow* 13.32) casts a rosy light of hope on the horizon. Indeed, the Muse has often remained unheard (*Silences. II* 13.10), but “once more tomorrow” will inspire new essential, significant, stirring verses in complete harmony with the pressing demands of life (*Make Yourself Heard* 13.18). And in the meantime, it already gives meaning to various places visited.<sup>46</sup>

### *Correspondences* (2015-2023)

From the lyricism of the first pages in this collection, the diary comes to an intense dialogue on the most profound aspects of life: the “love of reality” (*PUP49*, para.3) and “transcendence” (*SAQ217*, sec.48, para.8). From giving in to this love comes the strength to overcome the travails of life (*A Letter to a Despondent Friend* 14.4). If we want to obtain it, it is best not to linger unduly in the territories of the mind; it is necessary instead to follow the “sometimes . . . hard and steep” itineraries of human coexistence (*The Wager* 14.6) and explore the “endless ocean” of “His Word” (*The Ocean of His Word* 14.10), an indispensable driving light. Thus, we may get closer to His Omnipresence’s “mysteries” (14.12) and self-knowledge.<sup>47</sup> The time now seems to have arrived for a more mature reading of the past and the present, to draw from them a harmony that up to that moment was completely unknown.<sup>48</sup> Even

<sup>46</sup> *Homage to Maui* 13.12, *Jing’an Si* 13.24.

<sup>47</sup> *O My Soul?* 14.18, *Choral and Counterpoint* 14.22.

<sup>48</sup> *Whose Son Am I?* 14.24, *Ode to Life* 14.36.

memories are now a valid support,<sup>49</sup> and the family proves to be a “fortress of well-being and salvation” (Bahá’u’lláh, in BP104).<sup>50</sup>

Poetry is often a conversation with friends to whom one feels the need to extend a helping hand in a greater awareness of the saying quoted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “Of all pilgrimages the greatest is to relieve the sorrow-laden heart” (SWAB93, sec. 52). Many poems of this collection are real *Correspondences*, a title that recalls the famous verses by Foscolo: “It is divine, this dialogue [lit. correspondence] of love, / a divine gift in human beings” (I Sepolcri, vv 29-31, in Bianchi 6), a “correspondence” that would not want to exclude anyone, in this and the other world (Ode to a Mother Too Soon Passed Away 14.48). Poetry remains a precious polestar (Invigorating Memory 14.34), even if the doubt remains of having been able to respond to his pressing and heartfelt summons.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Shared Memories 14.32, Birthday 14.54.

<sup>50</sup> Apogee 14.40, Ode to a Mother Too Soon Passed Away 14.48.

<sup>51</sup> Has That Day Come? 14.44, O, Pray, Tell Me 14.58.