

Poetry in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings and Utterances

Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

Abstract

As Shoghi Effendi pointed out, “the Prophets of God do not teach the arts,” which are “an expression of the people.” However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who Himself wrote a few poems in Persian and in Turkish, has left good guidance on the issue of poetry, and any aspiring poet or reader of poetry would benefit from becoming familiar with His words. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions at least seven aspects of poetry: inspiration, beauty, eloquence, a versified language, novelty, expressivity, depth and loftiness of meanings. He moreover sets forth clear concepts on the purposes of poetry. The authors examine ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words in the light of verses from His poems in Persian language.

Introduction

As Shoghi Effendi pointed out in a letter written on his behalf to an individual on 3 February 1952, “the Prophets of God do not teach the arts,” which are “an expression of the people” [qtd. in CC3:31, no.63]. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who

Himself wrote a number of poems in Persian and in Turkish, has left good guidance on the issue of poetry, and any aspiring poet or reader of poetry would benefit from becoming familiar with His words. An early study of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s poems has been published in Persian, under the title of “The poems by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (*Ash‘ár-i-Ḥadrát-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*),” by Behrouz Jabbari, an Iranian Bahá’í scholar residing in Canada, in *Khúshihá’iy-i-az kharman-i-adab va khwanar* 14:281-300. Jabbari quotes nine poems in Persian as well as three in Turkish, while mentioning that the number of Turkish poems ascribed to the Master is a little higher. He writes that a letter from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, whose date and addressee he does not mention, lists only 8 poems by the Master. The present authors also found a tenth poem, which is part of a Tablet, published in *Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb* 13:141-3 and in *Makátíb* 1:414. Jabbari’s paper gives the sources of the poems, except for one of them, but does not mention the circumstances of their composition. For most poems, he gives a short commentary on its formal features. He translates into Persian two of the three Turkish poems and four verses of the third one. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Persian poems that we have found in the available Persian literature are as follows, listed in the order adopted by Jabbari:

1. *Sínáy-i-Ḥaqq pur núr shud* (12 verses), which may be paraphrased as “The Sinai of God was filled with light” [Jabbárá 289-90];
2. *Ay Gul-rukh-i-Abháy-i-man!* (18 verses), which may be paraphrased as “O my Abhá rose-cheek” [Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb 55:340-2; Muntakhabátí az Makatíb 2:17, Jabbarí 290-1];
3. *Ay Khudáy-i-Pur-‘Aṭáy-i-Dhu’l-Manán* (8 verses), which may be paraphrased as “O God of all graces and Lord of all bounties” [SWAB 202, sec. 174] [Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb 13:411-2; Majmú‘iy-i-Munájáthá 135-7; Munájáthá 51-2; Adhkáru’l-Muqarrabín 2:135; Jabbari 291-2]; Jabbari describes this poem as a prayer and a *mathnaví* (see below);

4. *Ín ḥalq-i-Bahá dar ḥalqih fitád* (9 verses), which may be paraphrased as "This flock of Bahá was ensnared" [Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 21:234; Munájáthá 19-20; Rafati, Ma'ákhidh 2:239, Jabbari 292]; this poem is sometimes considered a prayer; Jabbari describes it as a *ghazal* (see below);
5. *Dast-i-karam bi-gushá* (12 verses), which may be paraphrased as "Draw forth the hand of generosity" [Majmú'iy-i-Munáját 18-9, Jabbari 292-3];
6. *Núr-i-hudá tábán shudih* (8 verses), which may be paraphrased as "The light of guidance shines" [Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 13:205-6; Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 88:312; Muntakhabátí az Makátíb 2:18, Jabbari 293];
7. *Sham'-i-shabistán-i-Ḥaqq* (9 verses), which may be paraphrased as "O torch in the Divine chapel" [Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 13:203-4; Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 55:237-9; Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 88:55-6; Majmú'iy-i-Munáját 49-50; Jabbari 293-4]; Jabbari describes it as a *ghazal* (see below);
8. *Anvár-i-Ḥaqq rukhshán shudih* (17 verses), that may be paraphrased as "The lights of God glisten" [Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 13:207-8; Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 55:132-5; Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 88:313; Jabbari 294];
9. *Ay murdiy-i-bí-ján-u dil* (9 verses), which may be paraphrased as "O thou who art lifeless in your heart and soul" [Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 13:206; Muntakhabátí az Makátíb 4:139, Jabbari 295]; Jabbari writes that this poem is not mentioned in the above mentioned letter by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice;
10. *Ín 'Ahd-i-Alast ast ín* (3 verses, in a short Tablet), which may be paraphrased as "This is the Day of the Eternal Covenant" [Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb 13:142-3, Makátíb 1:414; this poem is not recorded in Jabbári's paper].

As far as we know, only the second verse of poem no. 7 has been authoritatively translated into English [see SWAB 270, sec.

218]. In this paper we propose our own paraphrases of a few of the verses authored by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions in His Writings and utterances at least seven aspects of poetry: inspiration, beauty, eloquence, a versified language, novelty, expressivity, depth and loftiness of meanings. He moreover sets forth clear concepts on the purposes of poetry. We will now examine these aspects of poetry in the light of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s poems.

Inspiration

Inspiration has been described as: “A special immediate action or influence of the Spirit of God ... upon the human mind or soul” [OED 7:1036]. It also has been defined as:

A sudden enlightenment of the spirit, which appears as a guidance for one’s behavior emerging from unknown depths of one’s personality and coordinating past and future experience through intuitive ways ... Influence exerted by God upon a person, who is enlightened in his mind, spurred in his will, directed and sustained in his action, for the attainment of a supernatural goal ... an impulsion (considered of divine origin or arising from a mysterious force or an inner wealth) which ... leads a person, in a sort of enrapture or creative ecstasy, to translate circumstances, impressions, feelings, etc. into works of art. [Battaglia 8:593]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that “inspiration” is the “*influx*” [PUP 22] or “*the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart*” [PUP 254]. He added that the human heart may be influenced both by “*satanic*” and “*divine promptings*” [PUP 251] The former ones, which He also calls “*imagination*” [ibid.], come from our lower self. The latter ones are a “*prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance*” [PUP 254]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also says that imagination “*can only picture that which it is able to create*” [PT 11, 5.6], that it is “*accidental (or non-essential)*” [TAB

3:562], limited and often at odds with reality. Therefore He seemingly uses the term “imagination” in these contexts as “a creative power of the mind that conceives dreams, illusions, abstractions, fictitious and bizarre forms, activities of idle thinking, of conjecturing” [Battaglia 7:342]. He wrote that we can differentiate between “*inspiration*” and “*imagination*,” because “*inspiration is in conformity with the Divine Texts, but imaginations do not conform therewith*” [TAB 1:195]. Another difference is that the ideas “*which owe their source to the Light of Truth will be realized in the outward world; while others of a different origin vanish, come and go like waves on the sea of imagination and find no realization in the world of existence*” [TAB 2:301]. In this context, we could say that poems written under the impulse of imagination do not give fruits, that is, they are not able to raise noble feelings and thoughts in the souls of their readers.

'Abdu'l-Bahá said that inspiration may be received “during meditation” [PT 187, sec. 54, para. 11]. He also wrote: “*when the heart becometh confident, the imagination of Satan and evil vanisheth away. If the heart becometh absolutely tranquil, suspicion and imagination will entirely pass away*” [TAB 1:104]. He explained this concept in detail:

if thy mind becomes empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forgets all else besides God and comes in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine. [TAB 3:706]

And finally He described the condition of a person who receives inspiration from the Holy Spirit:

A real, spiritual connection between the True One and the servant is a luminous bounty which causeth an ecstatic ... flame, passion and attraction. When this connection is secured ... such an ecstasy and happiness become manifest in the heart that man doth fly away (with joy) and uttereth melody and song. Just as the soul bringeth the body in motion, so that spiritual bounty and real connection likewise moveth (or cheereth) the human soul. [TAB 1:195]

Shoghi Effendi explained, in a letter written on his behalf to two believers on 25 January 1943, that inspiration “can be received through meditation” and that “God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so” [qtd. in CC2:241, no.1771]. He also made clear, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer on 19 November 1945, that “we cannot say that any inspiration which a person, not knowing Bahá’u’lláh, or not believing in God, receives is merely from his own ego” [qtd. in CC2:241, no.1774].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeatedly described art as the fruit of inspiration. Sara Lady Blomfield (1859–1939), one of the earliest Bahá’ís in the British Isles, writes that He said that “All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the Light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvelous pictures” [qtd. in CH 167]. Moreover ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reportedly said: “*when you breathe forth the breath of the Holy Spirit from your hearts into the world ... [a]ll arts and sciences will become revealed and the knowledge of God will be manifested. It is not your work but that of the Holy Spirit which you breathe forth through the Word*” [qtd. in Rabb 103].¹ A key to a better understanding of the guidance given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as to poetical inspiration may be found in the following Tablet addressed by Him to a hesitant poet:

O thou who art uttering the mention of God!

Know, that the pure hearts upon which the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are printed and pictured, are reflections one upon another and thus the one can discover the secrets of the other, because such hearts are only mirrors confronting each other on which the secrets of unity, affinity and concord are printed and reflected. Accordingly, it would be possible that a certain servant of the servants of the Merciful might discover a treasured mystery or a preserved sign, whatever his shortcomings or defects might be; yet we do indeed rely upon God the Forgiver. I supplicate Him to deliver us from the pangs of lust and its dangers and from the destructive conditions of passion.

Verily, I do testify that thine heart is moved by the fragrance of the love of God, that thy memory is a fountain overflowing with the water of the knowledge of God. Therefore, finish the poem which thou art composing and send it here, that through reading it the breast of the believers may be refreshed and dilated with joy. [TAB 3:669]

'Abdu'l-Bahá uses in this Tablet the versatile metaphor of light and mirrors. He describes pure hearts as mirrors capable of reflecting "*the mysteries of the Kingdom of God*" [ibid.]. And thus both poets and readers, if they are pure-hearted, may be described as mirrors, and light may be reflected from the poets to the readers and vice-versa. Abdu'l-Bahá writes that "*it would be possible that a certain servant of the servants of the Merciful might discover a treasured mystery or a preserved sign, whatever his shortcomings or defects might be*" [ibid.]. However, as Bahá'u'lláh writes, the light's "*appearance in every mirror is conditioned by the colour of that mirror*" [qtd. in CC3:19, no.22]. And thus the poet should try to be delivered "*from the pangs of lust and its dangers and from the*

destructive conditions of passion” [TAB 3:669], so that his heart may be purified. Then his heart will be “*moved by the fragrance of the love of God,*” and his “*memory*” will be “*a fountain overflowing with the water of the knowledge of God,*” and he will be able to write poems whereby “*the breast of the believers may be refreshed and dilated with joy*” [ibid.]. In other words, the poet’s earnest struggle toward spiritual perfection is the soundest guarantee that his poems may be inspired and thus capable of inspiring their readers with noble ideas and feelings.

As to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s poems, He has been described by Shoghi Effendi in the following exalted terms:

Bahá’u’lláh’s ... most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, ... the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue ... the Being “round Whom all names revolve,” ... the “Mystery of God” — an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized. [WOB 133]

And thus His poems may also be expected to convey “the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection ... blended and ... completely harmonized” [WOB 133].

Beauty

Guidance as to what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá meant by “*beautiful words*” [TAB 1:58] may be found in several passages of His works. The following words are an example:

Verily, I chanted thy poem. Its significance was beautiful, its composition eloquent and its words excellent....

...thou hast uttered the praise of thy Lord and expressed significant meanings in eulogy of thy Lord, the Merciful, the Clement....

Verily, I read thy poem, which contained new significances and beautiful words. My heart was dilated by its eloquent sense. I prayed God to make thee utter more beautiful compositions than this....

Chant the verses of guidance among the people and commence [the composition of] melodies of great beauty and effect in praise and glorification of the Generous Lord...

Thy little book of poems, which were very sweet, was read. It was a source of joy, for it was a spiritual anthem and a melody of the love of God.

Continue as long as thou canst this melody in the gatherings of the beloved; thus may the minds find rest and joy and become in tune with the love of God. When eloquence of expression, beauty of sense and sweetness of composition unite with new melodies the effect is ever great, especially if it be the anthem of the verses of oneness and the songs of praise to the Lord of Glory.

Endeavor your utmost to compose beautiful poems to be chanted with heavenly music; thus may their beauty affect the minds and impress the hearts of those who listen. (TAB 1:57-9)

He wrote to a poet: “*Endeavor, so far as it is possible for thee, that day by day thou mayest string the pearls of poesy with sweeter rhythm and more eloquent contents, in order that it may become conducive to the perpetuity of thy name in the spiritual meetings*” [TAB 3:546]. He is reported to have said moreover: “*What is poetry? It is a symmetrical collection of*

words,” and “*it is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and perfection*” [qtd. in Lucas 12]. He also referred to the “*elegant ... context*” [TAB 3:546] of a poem. He finally mentioned “*sweetness of composition*” [TAB 1:59] as well as, in His Tablet to Marie Watson,² “*delicacy*” [qtd. in “Tablets to Bahá’ís” 307]. Therefore rhythm, symmetry, harmony, elegance, sweetness, delicacy and perfection are among the prerequisites of the beauty of a poem that have been mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It may be useful transcribing a few definitions of these words from the most renowned English dictionaries and reflect on their meanings.

Rhythm is defined as

The measured flow of words or phrases ... Due correlation and interdependence of parts, producing a harmonious whole ... The measured recurrence of arsis and thesis determined by vowel-quantity or stress, or both combined; kind of metrical movement, as determined by the relation of long and short, or stressed and unstressed, syllables in a foot or a line. [OED 13:874]

Symmetry is defined as

Due or just proportion; harmony of parts with each other and the whole; fitting, regular, or balanced arrangement and relation of parts or elements; the condition or quality of being well-proportioned or well-balanced. [OED 17:456]

Harmony is defined as

Combination or adaptation of parts, elements, or related things, so as to form a consistent and orderly whole; agreement, accord, congruity ... Combination of parts or details in accord with each other, so as to

produce an æsthetically pleasing effect; agreeable aspect arising from apt arrangement of parts ... Pleasing combination or arrangement of sounds, as in poetry or in speaking; sweet or melodious sound. [OED 6:1125]

Elegance is defined as

Tasteful correctness, harmonious simplicity, in the choice and arrangement of words. [OED 5:129]

Whereas rhythm and symmetry are mainly outward connotations, related to the verbal expressions of poetry, harmony and elegance are a kind of inner rhythm and symmetry between ideas, sentences, and words.

Sweetness is defined as “the quality of being sweet,” and the word *sweet* has many connotations, such as:

Marked by or arising from graciousness, kindness or sympathy ... not intemperate or extreme ... pleasing to the mind or the feeling; arousing agreeable or delightful emotions ... pleasing to the ear: gently armonious: not ... disturbing ... much loved. [Webster 2309]

The idea of an identity between beauty and sweetness in regard to poetry is at odds with the ideas of a number of Western modern poets and literary critics. And yet it was perfectly normal in the past. *Dolce stil novo* (sweet new style) was the name of the poetical School which flourished in Florence in the second half of the twelfth century, and which marks the beginning of Italian literature. And Dante Alighieri, who was among the poets of that School, wrote in one of his most famous sonnets describing Beatrice as his inspiring muse: “her sweetness through the eyes reaches the heart” (*Vita Nuova* 57), which perhaps may be better rendered as “and through your eyes she gives such a sweetness to your heart.”

Delicacy is defined as

Exquisite fineness of texture, substance, finish, etc.; graceful slighthness, slenderness, or softness; soft or tender beauty ... Exquisite fineness of feeling, observation, etc.; nicety of perception; sensitiveness of appreciation ... Exquisite fineness or nicety of skill, expression, touch, etc ... A refined sense of what is becoming, modest or proper; sensitiveness to the feelings of modesty, shame, etc.; delicate regard for the feelings of others. [Webster 596]

This connotation of beauty as sweetness and delicacy is reminiscent of other qualities recommended by the Bahá'í teachings, that is, "refinement," "reverence," "respect for that which is sacred," "purity" and "good taste."

As to *refinement*, it is prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas [36, para.46]: "*Hold ye fast unto refinement under all conditions.*" The Arabic word *liṭáfāt*, here translated as "refinement," "has a wide range of meanings with both spiritual and physical implications, such as elegance, gracefulness, cleanliness, civility, politeness, gentleness, delicacy and graciousness, as well as being subtle, refined, sanctified and pure" ["Notes" 199].

As to *reverence*, it is listed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá among the "*inward ... perfections*" that should characterize "*the spiritually learned*" [SDC 34]. He moreover recommended it when visiting the holy places. He wrote in this regard in a Tablet addressed to Ethel Rosenberg: "*You have asked about visiting holy places and the observance of marked reverence toward these resplendent spots. Holy places are undoubtedly centers of the outpouring of Divine grace, because on entering the illumined sites associated with martyrs and holy souls, and by observing reverence, both physical and spiritual, one's heart is moved with great tenderness*" [qtd. in Synopsis 61, no.26].

As to *respect for that which is sacred*, it is mentioned in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual on 24 September 1987 [qtd. in CC3:40, no.82] as “one of the distinctive virtues given emphasis in the Bahá’í Writings” and as a consequence of the Bahá’í “view of the world” whereby “we perceive creation to encompass spiritual as well as physical entities, and we regard the purpose of the world in which we now find ourselves to be a vehicle for our spiritual progress.”

As to *purity*, it is described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a famous Tablet, in which He explained:

To be pure and holy in all things is an attribute of the consecrated soul and a necessary characteristic of the unenslaved mind. The best of perfections is immaculacy and the freeing of oneself from every defect. Once the individual is, in every respect, cleansed and purified, then will he become a focal centre reflecting the Manifest Light. [SWAB 146, no.129]

As to *good taste*, it is mentioned in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual on 23 February 1987 [qtd. in CC3:39, no.81]. The letter says: “the House of Justice feels artists should not be inhibited by Bahá’í institutions from creating a variety of calligraphic renderings of the Holy Writings or of the Greatest Name. However, such efforts should be in good taste and not assume forms that lend themselves to ridicule.” These words may be easily extrapolated into the context of poetry.

Beauty as sweetness and delicacy is also an important bridge between the mainly physical and intellectual prerequisites of rhythm, symmetry, harmony, and elegance and the declared spiritual purpose of poetry of inspiring the heart with lofty ideas and feelings, which will be mentioned later on.

Perfection is defined as

The condition, state, or quality of being perfect or free from all defect; supreme excellence; flawlessness, faultlessness. [OED 11:538]

And also:

... correspondence with or approximation to an ideal concept ... an unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence ... complete mastery of technique ... [Websters' 1677]

“Excellence in all things” is such an important goal for the Bahá’ís that the Universal House of Justice issued on 23 November 1981 a specific compilation under the same title [see CC1:367-84], exhorting the Bahá’ís to “follow Bahá’u’lláh’s exhortation to distinguish themselves from others through deeds” [MUHJ 510, no.303.1]. But in the arts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggests nothing less than perfection. As He is reported to have said to Mary L. Lucas: “*It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and **perfection** ...*” [12, bold added].

All these prerequisites of beauty — rhythm, symmetry, harmony, elegance, sweetness, delicacy, and perfection — are evident in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s poems. Unfortunately no translation can convey the qualities of the rhythm, symmetry, harmony, and elegance of the original, especially the rhythm, strictly associated as it is to the sound of the original words.

As to *symmetry*, it is especially evident in the following three-couplets poem, which is part of a short Tablet in prose, on the issue of “the banquet of the eternal Covenant (*bazm-i-alast*)” [Majmú’iy-i-Makátib 13:142]. This short poem is introduced by the following words: “The divine Minstrel took up his lute and begun to intone Persian melodies, giving voice to his harmonious song (*Muṭrib-i-iláhí awtár-i-mathálish va mathání*

bi-dast girift va bi-ahang-i-parsí naghmih va sáz numúd va bi-shahnáz ín taránih ágház kard)” [ibid. 142]. The poem says:

- 1.1. *Ín ‘Ahd-i-Alast ast ín / Paymáníh bi-dast ast ín*
Bázar shikast ast ín / Az Yúsuf-i-rahmání.

This is the Day of the Eternal Covenant. The Cup is at hand.

This is a market crash, because of the Divine Joseph.

- 1.2. *Mítháq-i-vifáq ast ín / Paymán-i-ṭaláq ast ín*
Áfát-i-nu‘áq ast ín / Az raḥmat-i-Yazdání.

This is the Covenant of concord. This is the Covenant of repudiation.

This is a calamity for the foreboders of evil, because of the mercy of God.

- 1.3. *Ín ‘Ahd-i-qadím ast ín / Ín Sírr-i-qavím ast ín*
Ín Ramz-i-‘azím ast ín / Az Ṭal‘at-i-Abhá‘í.

This is the Ancient Covenant. This is the irrefutable Secret [GPB 39].

This is the great Mystery, because of the Most Glorious Countenance. [Provisional translation by the authors]

The symmetry of these three verses is evident in the Persian text, in the repetition of the locution “*ast ín*,” which means “this is.” In the English translation we see the symmetry of three short consecutive sentences in each verse, very similar to one another, preceding a final locution, introduced by the preposition “because of.”

As to *harmony*, a translation cannot convey the harmony of the original Persian words. But it can convey the harmony of the images used by the Poet. An example are the following successive hemistiches:

Vajh-i-hudá tábán shudih.

The Divine guidance shines brightly.

Khuffásh-há pinhán shudih.

Bats hide themselves in their holes. (*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátib* 55:132;
provisional translation by the authors)

In the first hemistich the lights of guidance shine brightly; in the second one, the bats, creatures of the night, hide themselves in their holes.

As to *elegance*, a notable poem is the above mentioned *‘In ‘Ahd-i-Alast ast ín* [*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátib* 13:142]. The elegance of this poem is especially due to its recurrent use of the word Covenant and of a number of related images: “the cup (*paymáníh*)” [verse 1], the Day of Judgment, “A calamity for the foreboders of evil (*áfát-i-nu‘áq*)” [verse 2], “the irrefutable Secret (*Sirr-i-qavím*)” and “the great Mystery (*Ramz-i-‘azím*),” and their appearance as the “Most Glorious Countenance (*Tal‘at-i-Abhá‘í*)” [verse 3]. In this poem the English word Covenant corresponds to three Persian words, *Mítháq*, *Paymán*, and *Ahd*. According to the ancient Sufis these three words have slightly different connotations. The word *Mítháq* is the preeternal covenant mentioned in the so called verse of the Covenant in the Koran: “*And when thy Lord brought forth their descendants from the reins of the sons of Adam and took them to witness against themselves, ‘Am I not,’ said He, ‘your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we witness it’*” [7:172, Rodwell]. *Khawajih Shamsu‘d-Dín Háfiz* (1315-1390) writes about this Covenant:

From the dawn of the morn of eternity without beginning to
the end of the evening of eternity without end,

In respect to one covenant and to one agreement (*mítháq*),
friendship with love was. [Divan 343, no. 178, v. 6]

As to the word *Paymán*, the Italian orientalist Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988) writes: “A number of times ... the

concepts of Cup and Pact are linked (and this is something more than a pun between *paymân* and *paymâneh!*): a sip from the cup seals a Primeval Pact between man and God” [*Religion in Iran* 262-3]. Ḥáfiz uses the two words *Paymán* and *Paymánih* in the following verses:

Last night, to the wine-house (the Ārif, the comprehender of truths), Ḥáfiz, sitting in *khilwat*, went:

From the head of his covenant (*Paymán*), he departed; and to the head of the cup (*paymánih*), went. [*Divan* 460, no. 257, v. 1]

In this poem ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions “the Covenant of repudiation (*Paymán-i-ṭaláq*).” This may allude to the distinction between the good and the evil ones that will be made on the Day of Judgment as described in the Koran: “*Then the people of the right hand – Oh! how happy shall be the people of the right hand! And the people of the left hand – Oh! how wretched shall be the people of the left hand!*” [56:8-9, Rodwell]. As to the meaning of the Day of Judgment, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote: “*This period of time is the Promised Age, the assembling of the human race to the ‘Resurrection Day’ and now is the great ‘Day of Judgment’*” [TAB 2:318]. As to the word *Ahd*, the Sufís considered it as a station of the sincere. Ḥáfiz writes about this Covenant:

Although grief for Thee gave to the wind the harvest of my life,

(Falling) in the dust of Thy precious foot, (I displayed fidelity); for the covenant (*ahd*) (that I had made), I broke not. (*Divan* 645, no. 373, v. 2)

However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemingly uses this word as a synonym of *Mítháq*, since He writes “*This is the ancient Covenant (Īn Ahd-i-qadím ast ín)*,” and the word *qadím* means in the Sufi usage “without beginning or end” [Steingass 959].

As to *sweetness*, a significant strophe composed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reads as follows:

Áfáq ‘anbar bár shud.

Mushk-i-Khuṭá íthár shud.

Chún nukhat-i-gulzár shud.

Yik shimmih’í az búy-i-Tú.

The universe smells with amber.

Perfumes of musk exhale from Cathay.

Sweet aromas blow from the rose-gardens.

A breath of Thy fragrance. [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 55:341;
provisional translation by the authors]

The sweetness of this strophe stems from the delicate scents that caress our inner senses.

As to *delicacy*, in His poem *Anvár-i-Haqq rukhshán shudih* [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 55:132-5], He describes Bahá’u’lláh with a very delicate and refined expression: “the rose-queen of the green expanses (*sultán-i-gul dar sahn-i-chaman*)” [verse 13]. Moreover, the Master’s poems are hymns to Bahá’u’lláh. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laments His “remoteness (*hijrán*)” from Him [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 55:131, verses 15 and 17]; “is thirsty (*lab-tishnih*)” [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 21:234, verse 7] for Him; and proclaims His love for Him. However, He never mentions the fact that He is His son. Rather He declares Himself “an humble servant (*sag*, literally, dog)” on His “way (*kúy*)” [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 21:234, verse 9], “dust (*kháq*)” on His “threshold (*dargáh*)” [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 55:342, verse 17]. The delicacy of these words is the result of the deep humility of a wholly self-effaced Man, Who has been defined by His Father the “Mystery of God” [qtd. in WOB 133], and yet does not show towards His Father a human love, but the love tinged with awe, reverence and respect due to the Manifestation of God.

As to *perfection*, an example are the following verses by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Án jilviy-i-Rabbu’l-junúd
Rukh dar kuh-i-Şahyún numúd
Karmil nidá-há mí-numúd.

This revealed Lord of Hosts
 Turned His face toward Sion
 And the Carmel resounded

Bá chang-u tár-u náy-u ‘úd
Núr az rukh-i-aḥbáb bín.

With harps and flutes, rebecs and lutes.

Which light from the lovers’ faces! (Jabbari 290, verses 7, 8;
 provisional translation by the authors)

It is the sound of “harps and flutes, rebecs and lutes” rising from Mount Carmel that touches our hearts, as we remember a special time we may have had on that blessed Mount, when our faces too may have glowed with inner light.

Eloquence is defined as

The action, practice, or art of expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness, so as to appeal to the reason or move the feelings. [OED 5:148]

The prerequisite of eloquence requires for poets to be able to say fluently, forcibly, and properly the things they want to say, while at the same time being able to respect the above mentioned prerequisites of beauty.

As to eloquence the following words reported as uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have been recorded by Isabel Fraser Chamberlain:

I hope that you will all become eloquent. The greatest gifts of man are reason and eloquence of expression. The perfect man is both intelligent and eloquent. He has knowledge and knows how to express it. Unless man express himself in this day he will remain like a closed casket and one cannot know whether it contains jewels or glass. I desire that all of you may speak on the material and divine sciences with clear and convincing words. [ADP 98]

These words are reminiscent of an explanation of the importance of words given by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, which any poet should assimilate so as to make them a part of his own being. He wrote in His Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd that

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 as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets ... It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station. [TB 172-3]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's eloquence stems from His capacity of exalting this most exalted Day of God through words which are at the same time lofty and plain, refined and simple. A fascinating example is the first part of the poem *Anvár-i-Ḥaqq rukhshán shudih* [*Majmú'iy-i-Makátib* 55:132-3], which describes the Day of God, in uncomplicated but enticing words:

1. *Anvár-i-Ḥaqq rukhshán shudih.*
Daryáy-i-Ḥaqq júshán shudih.
Vajh-i-hudá tábán shudih.

The lights of God glisten.
 The sea of God surges.
 His guidance shines brightly.

2. *Khuffásh-há pinhán shudih.*
Abr-i-Karam giryán shudih.
Barq-i-Qidam Khándán shudih.

Bats hide themselves in their holes.
 Clouds rain down their mercy. (SWAB 192, sec. 160; Muntakh
 187)

The Eternal's lightening flashes.

3. *Gulshan faḍáy-i-ján shudih.*
Pur az gul-u rayhán shudih.
Bulbul bi-ṣad alhán shudih.

A paradise for spirits, gardens
 Are covered with flowers and shrubs.
 Dazzled by the face of the rose.

4. *Bar rúy-i-gul ḥayrán shudih.*
Madhúsh-u sar-gardán shudih,
Mast-i-rukh-i-jánán shudih.

The nightingale sings a hundred songs.
 Astonished and confounded,
 It gets drunk with the cheek of the Beloved.

5. *Makhmúr-u ham sakrán shudih,*
Pur áh-u pur afghán shudih.
Súy-i-Khudá nálán shudih.

Seized by its giddiness,
 It raises groans and moans,
 Lifting this plea unto God. [Provisional translation by the
 authors]

These verses eloquently describe the Day of God as a springtime, with its clouds, its rains, its lightnings, its flowers and a nightingale which, drunken with the beauty of the rose, raises its prayer unto God. The verses are short, the words are few, there are few learned references, but the description is graphic and lively.

A versified language

‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in His Tablet to Mr. and Mrs. Deuth that “*eloquent and significant words are compared to pearls. But these pearls are of two kinds, one is the versified language and that is called poetry and the other is the ordinary language called prose*” [“Tablets to Bahá’is” 259]. Of course, since as Shoghi Effendi explained in a letter written on his behalf to an individual on 3 February 1952, “the Prophets of God do not teach the arts; but the tremendous cultural impetus which religion gives to society gradually produces new and wonderful forms of art” [qtd. in CC3:31, no.63], the Bahá’ís cannot think that by verses only the ancient form of verses, based on rhyme or on other rhetorical devices, should be intended. As a matter of fact, the Modern age introduced the so called “free verse” into practically all languages, including Fársí. Free verse, a “loan translation of French Vers Libre,” may be defined as “unmetered and often irregularly lined out unrhymed verse that depends upon extensive variation in rhythm, balanced phrasing, syntactical repetition, and typographical and grammatical oddness to achieve its effects” [Myers and Simms 123]. And thus Bahá’í poets may feel certainly free to use it. In this vein the Bahá’í Canadian poet and writer Jack A. McLean writes:

I've always wanted to write
 a poem in plain speaking,
 without artifice,
 before a critic tells me
 I belong more to the nineteenth
 than to the twentieth century. [54]

'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote His poems more or less in the years when the modern Iranian literature was born, that is, the years of the constitutionalist movement preceding the bourgeois revolution of 1905–1911. Those poets produced a “neoclassic poetry” that “without breaking the old forms,” became “filled with moralistic and social contents” [Bausani, “Letteratura neopersiana” 540]. He sometimes follows the ancient rules of Persian metrics, which had remained unchanged for several centuries. In this vein He authored a traditional *mathnaví*, defined by Edward G. Browne (1862–1926), the renowned British Orientalist, as a “poem in ‘doublets,’ which is generally narrative, and where the rhyme changes in each couplet” [1:473], *Ay Khudáy-i-Pur-‘Aṭáy-i-Dhu’l-Manán* [*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb* 13:208]. He also wrote three unconventional *ghazals*, the typical Persian, refined “elegy of love” [Blachère, “Ghazal”], *Ín ḥalq-i-Bahá dar ḥalqih fitád* (*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb* 21:234), the only poem that He signs in the last line, *Sham‘-i-shabistán-i-ḥaqq* [*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb* 13:203-4] and *Núr-i-hudá tábán shudih* [*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb* 13:205-6]. He did not write any *qaṣídih*, defined by Brown “purpose-poem” [2:22]. Many of His poetical works are characterized by short verses, a number of them are not monorhymed, as the classical Persian metrics prescribe. And when He uses the classical *radíf*, that is “a word or a whole phrase that follows the rhyme letter (*rawiyy*) and recurs in every line of the poem” [Heinrichs, “Radíf”], He sometimes uses it in a very loose way. For example, in His above mentioned 17 verses poem *Anvár-i-Ḥaqq rukhshán shudih* [*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátíb* 55:132], He uses the rhyme in *-án* and the *radíf shudih* only in the first five verses. Then He changes both the rhyme and the *radíf*. His poetical style is so original

that sometimes it is difficult to write down His poems in a specific classical graphic form.

Novelty

‘Abdu’l-Bahá adds a further quality of poetry: “*new significances*” [TAB 1:58]. In this regard, a Bahá’í poet should consider a number of important points. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said about the twentieth century that “*this is a century of life and renewal*” [PUP 140]. However, not every renewal introduced during that century either conforms with the Bahá’í teachings or may be considered as contributing to the advancement of human civilization. The Universal House of Justice wrote, in its message addressed to the Iranian Bahá’ís throughout the world on 10 February 1980:

Even music, art, and literature, which are to represent and inspire the noblest sentiments and highest aspirations and should be a source of comfort and tranquillity for troubled souls, have strayed from the straight path and are now the mirrors of the soiled hearts of this confused, unprincipled, and disordered age. [MUHJ 435, no.246.4]

In these circumstances Bahá’í poets should remember ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s invitation to “*leave imitation and seek reality*” [PUP 169] and His statement on 17 November 1912 that

reformation and renewal of the fundamental reality of religion constitute the true and outworking spirit of modernism, the unmistakable light of the world, the manifest effulgence of the Word of God, the divine remedy for all human ailment and the bounty of eternal life to all mankind. [PUP 439]

Thus they will more likely feel free from the worst “new” aspects of some contemporary poetical Western trends, and

closer to the true modernism, that is the “*renewal of the fundamental reality of religion*” [ibid.].

The idea of novelty and renewal is often explained in the Bahá'í writings through the metaphor of springtime, a metaphor which also perfectly suits poetry. On 19 May 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá said in this vein: “*though the calendar changes and the years move forward, each springtime that comes is the return of the springtime that has gone; this spring is the renewal of the former spring. Springtime is springtime, no matter when or how often it comes*” [PUP 126-7]. This is not a stale repetition of the ancient pessimistic formula: “*Nullum est iam dictum quod non sit dictum prius* (There is nothing said which has not been said before)” [Terence, *Eunuchus* 41]. Each spring has its novel and its repetitious aspects. The novelty comes from the eternal change characterizing the physical world: ‘All things move and nothing remains still’ [Heraclitus, qtd. in Plato, ‘Cratylus’ 401, section d, line 5]. The repetition comes, in the vegetable world, from the roots of the trees. We may then assume that if a poet wants to be innovative, he needs to be free from imitations either of past or present poets, and understand the above mentioned real great novelty of this age, the renewal of the reality of religion. He will thus be able to be innovative, while at the same time preserving the roots of his civilization, like a tree in the newly arrived springtime. He will contribute to “guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvellous, indispensable achievements of the past” as the Universal House of Justice recommended the Bahá'í youth of the world in a message addressed to them on 8 May 1985 [MUH] 637, no.428.8].

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “Bahá'u'lláh's ... most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue” [WOB 133], has given an incomparable example of what is suggested by these words. His poems have deep roots in the glorious lyrical past of Iran, but they also present, as has

been said, many innovative elements in prosody, contents and especially in spirit. Besides, in conformity with His idea that the true modernism is the “*renewal of the fundamental reality of religion*” [PUP 439], most of His poems are a joyous announcement of the new spiritual springtime which dawned over the whole world in 1844.

Expressivity

‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised poems which “*expressed significant meanings in eulogy of ... [the] Lord, the Merciful, the Clement*” [TAB 1:58]. Expressivity has been defined in a celebrated dictionary of the Italian language as the capacity

to communicate ... through words orally or in a written form ... a thought, an idea, a feeling, a mood, an emotion, a sensation ... to represent ... in an artistic form, through a given matter or language and in a definite and particular form (feelings, emotions, ideas, conceptions, etc., or one’s spirituality, one’s way of perceiving and conceiving reality). [Battaglia 5:403]

This is a very important aspect of poetry. Whereas a piece of prose may describe an object in a rational way, poetry is supposed to directly convey its meaning. For instance, prose may accurately describe the qualities of a flower, but poetry should be able to create the idea of its beauty and flavour in its readers. And usually poetry fulfils this task through a metaphoric language. In this respect poetry resembles Scripture, which usually explain spiritual truth through images. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often associated the idea of expressivity with the expression of “*the beauty of ... characters and the merit of ... virtues*” [TAB 2:400] and “*of all the bounties of life to mankind*” [PUP 16]. These words may well be also referred to poetry.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s poems perfectly express the joy raised in the hearts of the sincere seekers by the advent of the new Day of

God. One of the most expressive among 'Abdu'l-Bahá's poems is *Núr-i-hudá tábán shudih* [*Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb* 13:205-6]:

- 8.1. *Núr-i-hudá tábán shudih. Túr-i-tuqá rakhshán shudih.
Músá bi-ján púyán shudih. Kuhsár Síná ámadih.*

The light of guidance shineth. The mountain of virtue
gloweth.

Moses hasteneth with heart and soul. Each mount
becometh a Sinai.

2. *Şubḥ-i-jabín, núr-i-mubín ván 'áriḍ-i-gulgún bín.
Bá la'l-i-rangíní chun-ín án gharrih gharrá' ámadih.*

Look at the gleaming forehead, at the manifest light, at
the rosy cheek.

With vermillion lips, that snow-white moon hath come.

3. *Hardam nasímí mí-vazad búy-i-'abíri mí-risad.
Şubḥ-i-umídí mí-damad, ghabrá' núra ámadih.*

An uninterrupted breeze bloweth, an amber scent wafteth.

The morn of hope ariseth and the world is enlightened.

4. *Daryáy-i-Ḥaqq pur-mawj shud. Har mawj az án yik fawj
shud.*

Ván fawj-há bar awj shud: har past bálá ámadih.

The Ocean of Truth swelleth. Its waves grow into billows.

The billows surge. Whatever's below riseth above.

5. *Şawt-i-ana'l-Ḥaqq har zamán áyad zi-awj-i-ásmán.
Mí-na-shnavad juz gúsh-i-ján ádhán şammá ámadih.*

The call "I am God" resoundeth from on high.

Only the inner ear heareth, the outer one is deaf.

6. *Abr-i-gawhar-bár ast ín, fayḍ-i-durar-bár ast ín.
Núr-i-sharar-bár ast ín, anvár bahrá' ámadih.*

It is a cloud raining pearls. It is a grace spreading jewels.

It is a light emanating sparks, a dazzling splendor.

7. *Áfáq 'anbar bár shud. Imkán pur az anvár shud.
Bas khuftih-há bídár shud. Ta'bír-i-ruyá' ámadih.*

Covered with amber, the world. Illumined by lights, the universe.

Sleepers wake up. The vision is fulfilled.

8. *'Ishq-i-Khudá khúnríz shud. 'Álam sharar angíz shud.
Jám-i-'aṭá labríz shud, chún dawr-i-ṣahbá ámadih.*

It is the season of wine: the love of God sheddeth blood,

The world sprayeth sparks, the cup of favor
overfloweth. (*Provisional translation by the authors*)

The metrics of this eight couplet poem is classical, almost a *ghazal*. Its rhyme is -á, its *radíf* is *ámadih*, which means “has come.” Its expressivity is the result of a number of classical topoi: Moses and the Sinai, and His glowing forehead; the beautiful face of the Beloved; the blowing breeze which wafts a scent of amber; the billowing Ocean of Truth; the call “I am God,” which only the inner ear perceives; the bountiful cloud; the glowing light; the waking up sleepers; the season of wine; the cruelty of love.

Depth and loftiness of meanings

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says very clearly what He means as depth and loftiness of meanings. When He praises a poem for its meaning, it is because that poem is “*like the melody of the birds of holiness in the paradise of El-Abha*” [TAB 1:57], “*a spiritual anthem and a melody of the love of God*” [TAB 1:59], because it

utters “*the praise of ... [the] Lord and ... [expresses] significant meanings in eulogy of ... [the] Lord, the Merciful, the Clement*” [TAB 1:58], and because its “*theme, [is] the Manifest Light*” [TAB 3:546].

Beside exalting the Day of God, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses His verses to call on the lovers to rise above their human limitations; to be willing to sacrifice their lives; to announce the glad-tiding; to serve their fellow-men. In His poem *Ay murdiy-i-bi-ján-u-dil* [*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátib* 13:206] He repeats three urgent calls to His readers: “rise, rise (*jándár shú, jándár shú*)” [verse 1], “wake up, wake up (*bídar shú, bídar shú*)” [verse 2], and “bestir thyself, bestir thyself (*húshyár shú, húshyár shú*)” [verse 3]. In His poem *Dast-i-karam bi-gushá* [*Majmú‘iy-i-Munáját* 18-9] He repeats six times, “Wake up, wake up (*bídar shú, bídar shú*)”, almost a modern *radíf*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s call is especially evident in the following poem [*Majmú‘iy-i-Makátib* 13:203-4], written “one year after the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh” [SWAB 270, sec. 218]:

1. *Sham ‘-i-shabistán-i-ḥaqq, núr bi-áfáq bakhsh.*

Muqtabis az shams shú, shu‘lih-u ishráq bakhsh.

O torch in the divine chapel, illumine the world.

Take light from the sun and spread out luster and flames.

2. *Sharq munavvar numá gharb mu‘aṭṭar numá,*

Rúḥ bi-ṣiqláb dih núr bi-afláq bakhsh.

In the Orient scatter perfumes, and shed splendours on the West.

Carry light unto the Bulgar, and the Slav with life invest. [SWAB 270, sec. 218]

3. *Jism-i-‘alíl-jahán khastih shudih ná-tuván*

Marham-i-har zakhm shú. Dárúy-i-diryáq bakhsh.

The afflicted body of the world is exhausted and spent.

Be a balm for each wound. Offer the infallible remedy.

4. *Fitniy-i-‘alam ma-jú. Dar rah-i-‘adam ma-pú.*

Khálí az ín guftgú. Núr bi-akhláq bakhsh.

Don't follow the mischiefs of the world. Don't tread the ways of the humans.

Get rid of any dispute. Have a luminous temper.

5. *Gáh chú barq-i-siháb, gáh chú abr-i-bahár,*

Khándih bi-lab-há bi-dih, giryih bi-áfáq bakhsh.

As a flashing thunderbolt, bring smiles to the lips.

Like a vernal cloud, give tears of joy to the world.

6. *Yúsif-i-Kan‘án-i-man, Mişr-i-maláhat khush ast.*

Jilvih bi-bázár kun. Bahrih bi-aḥdáq bakhsh.

O my Canaanean Joseph, the Egypt of beauty is sweet.

Show up in the bazars. Bring mirth to the eyes.

7. *Fayḍ-i-Bahá'í siráj. ‘Awn-i-Bahá'í zujáj.*

Khák-i-dar-ash bar tú táj. Muzhdih bi mushtáq bakhsh.

The grace of Bahá is a beacon. The aid of Bahá is a globe.

Let your crown be the dust on His threshold. To the yearning hearts announce the god-spell.

8. *Ján bi-chunín Dil-barí áfat-i-ins-u parí,*

Gar bi-dahí. Bar parí. Furşat-i-‘ushsháq bakhsh.

To this handsome Sweetheart, a calamity for angels and men,

Offer your soul. Take your flight. To each lover proffer a chance.

9. *Bul-bul-i-gúyá byá! Naghmih bi-gulshan sará!*
Šíhíh bi-zan yá Bahá! Rajfih bi-aṭbáq bakhsh!

O ye chirping nightingale! Come! Sing to the rose-bush!
 Raise the cry, “O Bahá!” Shake the depths of the world!
 [Provisional translation by the authors]

The purposes of poetry

As to the purposes of poetry, Bahá’u’lláh Himself wrote a ‘Tablet to a Poet’ from which we may infer some of them:

Blessed the poet who hath been filled with the spirit of the Day of God and from whose words hath wafted the sweet-smelling savour of the love of his Lord, the All-Merciful, over all created things. Such a one is, in truth, among the blissful. Woe betide the poet who hath drawn spears of sarcasm toward people and turned away from this wondrous Remembrance. Keep in mind the grace of God for having made your tongues the keys to His treasures and the revealers of His wisdom and mysteries. Walk ye in the fear of God and be not of the heedless. This is the day to celebrate His praise, the day in which the Creator of the heavens hath appeared with the kingdom of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised.

[qtd. in Rafati, *Yādnāmih* 296, personal translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami]³

Four main objectives are specified in this short Tablet: being “filled with the spirit of the Day of God”; wafting “the sweet-smelling savour of the love of ... (one’s) Lord, the All-Merciful, over all created things”; unlocking “treasures” and revealing “wisdom and mysteries”; and celebrating “His praise.” No “spears of sarcasm” seem in this day acceptable from poets.

Similar objectives of poetry can also be inferred from words written or uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. As has been said, ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá encouraged a number of poets to write poems so that they may be “*like the melody of the birds of holiness in the paradise of El-Abha*” [TAB 1:57], “*the cause of the gladness of their hearers*” [Tablet to Mr. Edgar Waite, “Recent Tablets” 318], and of the delight of “*the ears of the children of the Kingdom*” [Tablet to Mrs. Sháhnaz Waite, “Tablets to Baháís” 276], or so that their beauty may “affect the minds and impress the hearts of those who listen,” and their listeners may “*find rest and joy and become in tune with the love of God*” [TAB 1:59], and “*through reading it the breast of the believers may be refreshed and dilated with joy*” [TAB 3:669]. Commotion, a feeling of rest and sweetness, the “*tune with the love of God*” and the joy aroused by its beauty are thus some of the feelings which poetry should raise in the hearts of its readers. And, it is well known, “*Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness*” [PT 110, sec. 35, para. 2]. This is one of the reasons why, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reportedly said, “*poetry is much more effective and complete than prose. It stirs more deeply, for it is of a finer composition!*” [qtd. in Lucas 12], and, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out in a letter written on his behalf to an individual on 10 October 1932, “art [comprising poetry] can better awaken ... nobler sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people” [qtd. in CC3:28, no.52]. If these vital prerequisites are met, then a poem will accomplish its purpose, that is a specific aspect of the general purpose of words described by Bahá’u’lláh in His Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat, exerting an “*influence*” [TB 143]. In this specific case the purpose is to inspire love for God and, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in His Tablet to Mr. James Simpson, “*to render a distinguished service to the divine Kingdom and to be the cause of the promulgation of the oneness of mankind*” [“Tablets received” 166]. And thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to confirm the following words by the Latin poet Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65 BC–8 BC), known in the English-speaking world as Horace: “*Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo*” (*Ars*

Poetica 343-344), the one who mixes the useful with the pleasing carries every vote, both teaching and delighting his readers.

'Abdu'l-Bahá does not exclude however that poetry may aim at material goals and be equally excellent. But to this kind of poetry He ascribes a lesser importance. He wrote in this regard to Louise R. Waite:

How many poets have come to this world who have written elegies and eulogies in the utmost of eloquence and excellence, but because the meanings were the realities of the world of nature, the effect was produced in the material world and the material world is limited, hence the effects of those meanings are limited. But thou art a composer of poetry which touches Divine Realities and Significances, therefore they are of the mysteries of the Kingdom and the meanings of the Kingdom are unlimited. The poetry of the renowned is perused in the material meetings, but thy poetry will forever be read in the Spiritual Meetings. [qtd. in Hatch 662]

As to the purpose of 'Abdu'l-Bahá poems, the authors feel that they are quite different in this regard from those of Bahá'u'lláh. We could suppose that Bahá'u'lláh also wrote His poems because He intended to leave to posterity a small window opened on the depth of His human emotions. His intimist verses, that is, His verses that deal "chiefly with intimate and private especially psychological experiences" [Webster 1184], are many indeed. Some of His verses reinforce in us the impression that He really wanted to show glimmers of His hidden human thoughts. This feature makes those compositions especially precious for all people who are eager to become more familiar with the Figure of Bahá'u'lláh and with the human aspects of a Personage Who is known especially through Works that He wrote with the majesty and the authority of the "divine teacher" [SAQ 12, sec.3, para.15].⁴ This

aspect seems totally absent in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s poem. The poet is mostly absent in these verses, except for proclaiming His love for the Beloved, His submission to Him, His utter dependence on Him. It seems that His main purposes are glorifying Bahá’u’lláh, announcing His Revelation, calling people to surrender to and to abide by His will. In this vein He describes Himself as a “nightingale (*bul-bul*)” [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 55:132, verse 3], “astonished and confounded (*madhúsh-u sar-gardán*)” [ibid. verse 4], drunken “with the cheek of the Beloved (*rukḥ-i-Jánán*)” [ibid.], uttering “groans and moans (*Pur áh-u pur afghán shudih*)” [ibid. 5], and raising a plea unto God. But this prayer is offered in the name of all human beings, that He may assist them to find their life in Him [see ibid. verse 12]. Intimist verses may be found in *Ay Khudáy-i-Pur-‘Aṭáy-i-Dhu’l-Manán* [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 13:208] and *Ay Gul-rukḥ-i-Abháy-i-man!* [*Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb* 55:340-2]. But in these poems as well, the narrating subject that comes on the forefront in the first verses becomes merged into the selves of all human beings, as early as after verse 2 and verse 3, respectively.

Conclusion

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings and utterance, as well as His few poems, can be an important source of inspiration for anyone who wants either to write poems or to obtain a deeper understanding of the poetic language. Hopefully in a not distant future talented pens will come out, who will offer skillful translations of these writings, utterances, and especially poems by the blessed Pen of the Master.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Majmú’iy-i-Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 13. The Iran National Bahá’í Archives (INBA), 132 BE. <http://www.h-net.org/bahai/diglib/INBA/INBA013.pdf> (accessed on 26 November 2015).

- . *Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 21. The Iran National Bahá'í Archives (INBA), 133 BE (<http://www.h-net.org/bahai/diglib/INBA/INBA021.pdf> (accessed on 26 November 2015)).
- . *Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 55. The Iran National Bahá'í Archives (INBA), 133 BE (<http://www.h-net.org/bahai/diglib/INBA/INBA055.pdf> (accessed on 26 November 2015)).
- . *Majmú'iy-i-Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 88. The Iran National Bahá'í Archives (INBA), 133 BE (<http://www.h-net.org/bahai/diglib/INBA/INBA088.pdf> (accessed on 26 November 2015)).
- . *Majmú'iy-i-Munáját-háy-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1992.
- . *Makátíb-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1. Cairo: Maṭba'a Kurdistán al 'Ilmíyya, 1328 (1910).
- . *Munájátháy-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Adbu'l-Bahá – cháp-i-Hind*. rpt. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma, 1946.
- . *Muntakhabátí az Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Adbu'l-Bahá*. Vol. 2, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1984; vol. 4, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, nd.
- . "Tablets received by American Bahais in 1919," *Star of the West* 11.10 (8 September 1920): 159, 163-8.
- . "Tablets to Bahá'ís in America received in 1919 and 1920," *Star of the West* 11.18 (7 February 1921): 306-8.
- Adhkáru'l-Muqarrabín*. Teheran: Mu'assisíy-i-Maṭbu'at-i-Amrí, 116 EB, 1947.
- Alighieri, Dante. *Vita nuova*; English translation: *Vita Nuova*. Trans. Mark Musa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- The Bahá'í World 1938-1940: An International Record*. Volume 8. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1942, reprint 1981.
- Battaglia, Salvatore. *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*. Vol. 5. Turin: UTET, 1968.
- . *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*. Vol. 7. Turin: UTET, 1972.
- . *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*. Vol. 8. Turin: UTET, 1973.

- Bausani, Alessandro. "La letteratura neopersiana," in Pagliaro and Bausani: *La letteratura Persiana*, pp.133-563.
- . *Religion in Iran*. Translated by J.M. Marchesi. New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000.
- Blachère, Régis. "Ghazal. i. The Ghazal in Arabic poetry." *Encyclopedia of Islam*.
- Blomfield, Lady. *The Chosen Highway*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950.
- Browne, Edward G. *A Literary History of Persia*. 4 vols. Bethesda, Maryland: Iranbooks, 1997.
- Compilation of Compilations*: Prepared by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice. Vol. 3. Ingleside, NSW Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2000.
- Encyclopaedia of Islam*. CD-ROM edition v. 1.0. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999.
- Háfiz, Shams ad-Dín. *The Dīvān-i-Hāfiz*. Translated by H. Wilberforce Clarke. Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 1997. Available at http://archive.org/stream/thedivan02hafiuoft/thedivan02hafiuoft_djvu.txt (accessed 19 August 2011).
- Hatch, Willard P. 'Sháhnaz Khánum (Mrs. Louise R. Waite)', *The Bahá'í World 1938-1940* 661-4.
- Heinrichs, Wolfhart P. "Radīf." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.
- Horace (Q. Horatius Flaccus). *Ars Poetica*. Available at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml> (accessed 31 December 2010).
- Jabbari, Behrouz. "The poems by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*Ash'ár-i-Hadrát-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*)."
Khúshihá'í 14:281-300.
- Khúshihá'í-y-i-az kharman-i-adab va hwanar: Proceedings of a Seminar on Mitháq*. Vol. 14. Darmstadt: 'Aṣr-i-Jadíd Publisher, 2003 (160 BE). A publication of the Society for Persian Arts and Letters.
- Lucas, Mary L. *A Brief Account of My Visit to Acca*. Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1905.
- McLean, Jack A. "A Poem in Plain Speaking," *World Order* 26.3 (Spring 1995): 54.
- Myers, Jack and Michael Simms. *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms*. New York: Longman 1989.
- "Notes to The Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Most Holy Book. By Bahá'u'lláh." Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992.

- The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition Prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Pagliariò, Antonino and Alessandro Bausani. *La letteratura persiana*. Florence: Sansoni Accademia, 1968.
- Plato. *Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet. Oxford University Press, 1903. Available at perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus%3Acorpus%3Aperseus%2Cauthor%2CPlato (accessed 6 February 2011).
- Rabb, Mary M. "The Divine Art of Living. A Compilation," *Star of the West* 8.8 (1 August 1917): 86-8, 96-104.
- Rafati, Vahid. *Mákhed-i-Ashár dar Ásár-i-Bahá'í (Má'akhiz-i-ash'ár dar Áthár-i-Bahá'í)*. Dundas, Ontario: Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 1990.
- — —. (ed.) *Yádnámiy-i-Baydá'-i-Núrá'* [Remembrance of a Shining Light. Selections from the Works of Abu'l-Qásim Baydá']. Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 163 BE – 2011.
- Savi, Julio. "Bahá'u'lláh's Persian Poems Written Before 1863," in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Vol. 13 (2012), pp. 317-61.
- Star of the West*. The first Bahá'í magazine in the Western world, published from 1910 to 1935. Issues 1910 to 1924, RP 8 vols. Oxford: George Ronald, 1978.
- Steingass, Francis Joseph. *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to be Met with in Persian Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Center, 1973.
- Terence (P. Terentius Afer). *Eunuchus*. Ed. Edward St. John Parry. Available at perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0088 (accessed 18 August 2011).
- The Universal House of Justice. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*. Comp. Geoffrey W. Marks. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996.
- Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*. Ed. Philip Bábcock Gove, Ph.D. and the Merriam-Webster Editorial Staff. 3d ed. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1986.

World Order (new series). A Bahá'í magazine published quarterly by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1966-2008.

NOTES

¹ These words appear in “Waite-Harrison Notes; Acca, October 12, 1909.”

² An early American Bahá'í, author of the book entitled *The Two Paths* (Chicago: A.C. Clark, 1897).

³ We thank professor Omid Ghaemmaghami for having given his permission to the publication of this translation.

⁴ For a deeper analysis of this issue see Julio Savi, “Bahá'u'lláh's Persian Poems Written Before 1863,” in *Lights of 'Irfán* 13 (2012), pp. 317-361.