

`Abdu'l-Bahá takes up the theme with his call for language that should be "moderate, tempered and infinitely courteous" (#7), wherein "conclusive and brilliant proofs" should be adduced (#8). Elsewhere, the Universal House of Justice has written that "Content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, timeliness" will lead to the birth of an "etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race." [5]

Shoghi Effendi's guidance contained here is directed to the specific questions put by writers. One correspondent displays extraordinary literal-mindedness — do shorthand or typing constitute "sciences that begin and end in words" (#13)? Another seeks advice on whether writing fiction may be regarded as an appropriate means of spreading the Bahá'í Faith (#15). Some correspondents are clearly seeking the Guardian's approval for a piece of work they have submitted to him (#14), or asking whether following a career as a writer or journalist is appropriate (#16,18,19). It is, of course, important to weigh up these responses in the light of the context of the question asked, and the specific needs of the Faith at the time of answering. At the beginning of this new century when the cultural expression of Bahá'í ideas and values is likely to diversify enormously, one can certainly anticipate the important contribution of Bahá'í writers, cultivating their unique vision, maintaining their personal integrity, producing works which can stand alongside the best of contemporary writing, and as a result, introduce thousands of readers to Bahá'í thought. Many examples from the last thirty years attest to the impact of excellent writing within the Faith, such as the descriptions of `Abdu'l-Bahá in Roger White's *A Sudden Music and The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, [6] and the brilliant artistry of Marzieh Gail's memoir in the final three chapters of *Arches of the Years* [7] which create for the reader an emotional bond with Shoghi Effendi, unattainable by conventional, factual descriptions.

The challenge for Bahá'í communities is to value and recognise the contribution of writers, in common with other artists and scholars, who may not necessarily conform to expectations. The African American poet Robert Hayden found becoming a Bahá'í extremely difficult because "he was not a group person." [8] Insult was added when the chairperson of a poetry recital that Hayden was giving, asked the award-winning poet, "But what have you done in the way of Bahá'í service?" [9]

This compilation may not only help writers discover their voice but Bahá'í communities to discover their writers. Poet Roger White, addressing a group of youth at the Bahá'í world centre, expressed his "conviction that in the future, increasingly, one important measure of the spiritual maturity and health of the Bahá'í world community will be its capacity to attract and win the allegiance of artists of all kinds, and its sensitivity and imaginativeness in making creative use of them...To the degree the Bahá'í community views its artists as a gift rather than a problem will it witness the spread of the Faith `like wildfire' as promised by Shoghi Effendi, through their talents being harnessed to the dissemination of the spirit of the Cause." [10] Disseminating

the spirit through the pen returns us once more to the promise voiced in the Black Pit of all things being made new through the regenerative power of words.

Go to Compilation.

End Notes

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