

Translator's Introduction

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

I went to Tehran to study Islamic Philosophy, and to teach Contemporary Western Philosophy of Religion at the Islamic Academy of Philosophy of Iran in the fall of 1990, but I was also interested in the poetry of Imam Khomeini, may he rest in peace. Though there had been rumors, it did not become generally known that Imam had written poetry until after he had passed away.

Less than three weeks after Imam's death on June 4, 1989, his son, Hujjat al-Islam Sayyid Ahmad, offered one of his father's poems to the Iranian public through its publication in a Tehran newspaper, Kayhan. In the September 4, 1989 edition of the New Republic magazine, an English rendition of the poem first published in Kayhan appeared by the great scholar and translator, William Chittick. I visited Prof. Chittick in his office at the University of New York at Stony Brook and asked him about Imam's poetry, but he told me that he had only translated that one poem.

The mystical nature of the poem caught many, even among Imam's most ardent devotees, by surprise. In one couplet, Imam wrote, "Open the door of the tavern and let us go there day and night, For I am sick and tired of the mosque and seminary."

The surprise is generated by the contradiction between the literal and symbolic uses of the images. Imam Khomeini was a great supporter of the religious institutions of the mosque and seminary, but in the poetic genre of which his poem is an instance, the mosque and the seminary are symbols for insincerity and pretentiousness. Before going to Iran, when I visited the Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations, Dr. Kamal Kharrazi,¹ he had taken a framed and beautifully decorated piece of calligraphy from the wall and revealed to me that this was a poem composed by Imam, and explained some of what it meant. It seemed to be some sort of love poem in which highly stylized romantic imagery was used to express a mystical devotion to God.

After I settled in Tehran, I started asking people about Imam's poetry. They seemed surprised that I should be interested. I went to a bookstore right outside the gate of the University of Tehran and told a salesman there that I wanted to read the poetry of Imam Khomeini. He smiled and gave me a slender green volume, and asked where I was from. "America," I said. "And you are Muslim?" "Praise Allah!"

The young revolutionaries with their short thin beard grinned in wonder that an American Muslim was in Tehran and wanted to read the poetry of Imam Khomeini. They wished me well and gave me a small photograph of Imam being kissed by his grandson. This was not the image of 'the Ayatullah' with which Americans had become familiar during what was called 'the hostage crisis' in the US, and the 'spy crisis' in Iran, nor was it the image of the revolutionary leader, 'the hope of the oppressed people of the world,' which had been presented by the Iranian media.

The poetry, like that photograph, offered a glimpse into an intensely personal aspect of the life of Imam Khomeini, an aspect which even now, more than two years after Imam's departure, has largely remained veiled from the English speaking world.

The poet and mystic, Ruhullah Musawi Khomeini, was born in 1902 in the town of Khomein, which is about half way between Tehran and the southwestern city of Ahwaz. Ruhullah's father and grandfather were religious scholars in Khomein. His father, Ayatullah Mustafa, is said to have been murdered by bandits when Ruhullah was less than six months old. His mother, Hajar, was the daughter of the religious scholar Aqa Mirza Ahmad Murtazavi Khwansari. The boy was raised by his mother and an aunt, both of whom died of cholera when he was six. His education was then supervised by his older brother, Ayatullah Pasandideh.

At nineteen, Ruhullah traveled northwest from Khomein to the city of Arak, where he became a student of Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim Ha'eri, a leading religious scholar of his day. The following year, Shaykh Ha'eri and his student Ruhullah moved to Qum, where the Shaykh reorganized and revitalized the entire institution of religious education in that city, which was already famous as a center of learning. Ruhullah studied in Qum until the death of Shaykh Ha'eri, in 1936, after which he began teaching theology, ethics, philosophy, and mysticism.

It was during his first fourteen years in Qum that Ayatullah Khomeini became familiar with the intertwined traditions of philosophy and mysticism which flourished during Iran's Safawid period (16th and 17th centuries) and which continue to exert an enormous influence on contemporary Shi'ite thought.

When he arrived in Qum, Imam Khomeini began to receive private instruction in ethics with Haj Mirza Jawad Maleki Tabrizi, the author of a book entitled, *The Secrets of Prayer (Asrar as-Salat)*, Imam Khomeini also wrote a book on this topic, called *The Secret of Prayer: Prayers of the Gnostics or Ascension of the Wayfarers (Sirr as-Salat: Salat al-'Arifin ya Mi'raj as-Salikin)*. His instruction under Mirza Jawad continued until the death of the teacher, in 1925.

Imam Khomeini also studied the mystic traditions from Haj Mirza Abu'l-Hasan Rafi'i Qazvini, who was in Qum from 1923 to 1927. Qazvini is known for his commentary on a supplication which is recited daily in the pre-dawn hours during the month of Ramadhan. Later, Imam Khomeini would also write a commentary on this prayer. Finally, and perhaps most importantly among his spiritual guides, there was Aqa Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Shahabadi, the author of *Spray from the Seas (Rashahat al-Bahar)*, who was in Qum from 1928 to 1935.

In the mystic tradition of which Shahabadi was a part, the phrase ‘spray from the sea’ may be taken as a symbol for inspiration from God. It was with Shahabadi that Imam Khomeini is reported to have studied the *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom) of Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 1240) and the important commentary on that work by Qaysari (d. 1350).²

In 1929, Imam Khomeini married, and a year later his first son, Mustafa, was born. Over the course of the years, two other sons and four daughters were born. Mustafa would grow up to be killed in Iraq by agents of the Shah. The youngest son, Sayyid Ahmad, would become a secretary to his father, and afterward, a political leader in his own right.

Recalling his years as a student in Qum, Imam Khomeini himself has publicly commented on the hostility toward mysticism and philosophy which was to be found in certain quarters in Qum, feelings which are still harbored by some members of the clergy.³ The story is often repeated that when Imam had begun teaching philosophy in Qum and his first son was a small child, some seminarians felt it necessary to perform a ritual cleansing of a cup from which the child had drunk water because of his impurity as the son of a teacher of philosophy! Imam reports that his teacher, Shahabadi, sought to oppose this hostility by making people familiar with the doctrines of the mystics so they could see for themselves that there was nothing inimical to Islam in the teachings of the gnostics:

Once a group of merchants came to see the late Shahabadi (may God have mercy on him), and he began to speak to them on the same mystical topics that he taught to everyone. I asked him whether it was appropriate to speak to them of such matters and he replied: “Let them be exposed just once to these heretical teachings! I too now find it incorrect to divide people into categories and pronounce some incapable of understanding these matters.”⁴

One of the most dramatic efforts of Imam Khomeini to bring mysticism to the people occurred after the Islamic Revolution with his Lectures on Surah al-*Fatihah* from which the above report has been quoted. After the Revolution, there were televised lessons on the interpretation of the Qur’an by Ayatullah Taleqani. When Ayatullah Taleqani died on September 10, 1979, about a half year after the victory of the revolution, the televised commentary on the Qur’an was taken up by a younger scholar. Imam Khomeini suggested that a more senior authority might be sought for the program.

After consulting among themselves, those responsible for the broadcast decided to request that Imam himself provide the commentary. Imam responded that if the cameras could be brought to his residence he would comply with the request. The result was the Lectures on *Surah al-Fatihah*, a stunning mystical interpretation of the opening verses of the Qur’an, in which one of the dominant themes was the claim that the whole world is a name of God.

In these lectures Imam also contends that the philosophers of Islam, the mystics and the poets have used different terminologies to express the same insights, and he urges his viewers not to reject what is taught by members of these groups until they understand what is being expressed, even if the language

used raises suspicions of heterodoxy. Thus, Imam's preaching in this area was very much a plea for tolerance.

Imam Khomeini's emphasis on tolerance was not limited to mysticism and poetry. Imam Khomeini's teacher in Islamic jurisprudence, Shaykh Ha'eri, was succeeded in Qum by Ayatullah Burujerdi, who came to be recognized as the supreme authority on the subject. After the death of Ayatullah Burujerdi, in 1961, Imam Khomeini came to be recognized as one of several supreme experts in Islamic jurisprudence, a *marja'-e taqlid*. In this role, Imam Khomeini issued a number of decrees which were looked upon with suspicion by more conservative clerics.

Many of the religious scholars in both Sunni and Shi'ite legal schools have ruled that music and chess are forbidden activities. Imam Khomeini ruled that some forms of music are permissible and that playing chess is not contrary to Islamic law. As a result, interest in traditional Iranian music has thrived since the Revolution. Imam Khomeini has also encouraged women to play an expanded role in society, to the chagrin of more conservative interpreters of Islamic law.

To Western observers it may seem paradoxical that the very same man who preached tolerance with respect to the perceived challenges to orthodoxy posed by philosophy, mysticism, poetry, and music, should also have been so intolerant toward the proponents of Westernization, toward the form of Marxism propagated in the name of Islam by the Mujahiden Khalq Organization (MKO), and toward those who, like Salman Rushdie, would insult the Prophet of Islam or his family.

The apparent contradiction is removed once it is recognized that Imam Khomeini did not value tolerance for its own sake, but for the sake of Islam. Central to Imam Khomeini's understanding of Islam is gnosis, *'irfan*. In Sunni Islam, the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religion have been kept largely distinct, with the esoteric mostly confined to the Sufi orders. In Shi'ite Islam, there has been a long tradition in which many of the practices and teachings of the Sufis have been integrated into the religious life and thought of an important segment of the official clergy.

Those form of mysticism, or gnosis, draws upon the Sufi theory of Ibn al-'Arabi,⁵ the philosophical mysticism of Sadr ad-Din Shirazi⁶ (d. 1640) and Hadi Sabzewari⁷ (d. 1878), both of whom were Shi'ite clerics, and the poetic expression of mysticism by Mawlawi Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi⁸ (d. 1273) and Hafiz.⁹ (d. 1391). The poetry is often set to music. Because of political and religious repression, those involved in *'irfan* often had to keep their teachings underground. Imam Khomeini, in line with sentiments his reports having been expressed by his teacher Shahabadi, sought to initiate a process through which *'irfan* could become public. This process was not to be a sudden revolution. His own works on *'irfan* were not very widely distributed during his lifetime, but a persistent emphasis on the mystical elements of Shi'ite thought were interspersed among the more popular political declaration, and may be found in *The Greatest Jihad*,¹⁰ as well.

The revolutionary Islamic movement led by Imam Khomeini may even be viewed as the exoteric

dimension of the impetus to reveal Islamic mysticism to the public. The Islamic revolution was a means to bring Islam into public life, from which it was being marginalized during the reign of the Shah. The process of making Islam central to public life was also resisted by conservative religious groups, who saw in this movement a departure from tradition.

Imam Khomeini argued that the guardian jurist of Islamic law had the authority to modify the traditional understanding of the law in order to protect the Islamic order. Conservatives would argue that any break from tradition could only bring deviation from Islamic order. The kind of judgment required by Imam Khomeini's vision of Islamic government is one which goes beyond what is provided for in traditional discussions of Islamic jurisprudence. It is a kind of wisdom, however, which can be expected of the 'perfect man', the *insan kamil*, the goal of personal development in the mystic tradition.

An example of the way in which his political awareness demanded a tolerance not found among more conservative clerics may be found in his attitudes toward Sunni Islam. In traditional Shi'ite circles it would not be considered permissible for a Shi'ite to stand behind a Sunni prayer leader. Imam Khomeini ruled that such prayer was valid, and even himself publicly participated in ritual prayer behind a Sunni cleric.

Thus, the flexibility and tolerance which characterized Imam Khomeini's thought do not stem from the libertarian element in Islamic thought, but from a commitment to a movement from the esoteric to exoteric dimensions of Islamic life, a movement which demanded the implementation of Islamic law as well as the propagation of mystical ideas.

Imam Khomeini's attitudes toward mysticism and politics are especially well illustrated by his invitation to President Gorbachev to embrace Islam. On January 7, 1989, Imam Khomeini sent a delegation to Moscow led by Ayatullah Jawad Amuli who presented Imam's letter of invitation to President Gorbachev.^{[11](#)}

In the letter, Imam congratulated him for his admission of the failures of communism, and he suggested that the Soviet leader consider the alternative to communist ideology posed by Islam. In order to acquaint the Russian leader with Islam, Imam Khomeini recommended the works of the philosophers Farabi^{[12](#)} and Ibn Sina (Avicenna),^{[13](#)} and the mystic, Ibn al-'Arabi. Conservative clerics were incensed that Imam should choose to represent Islamic thought through the works of philosophers and a Sufi, instead of works of jurisprudence and traditional devotional literature. President Gorbachev politely declined the invitation to convert, although he said that he would consider the importance of spiritual values in society.

Imam Khomeini appears to have been genuinely disappointed that the response was not affirmative, and when a Soviet delegate read Gorbachev's reply to Imam Khomeini in Tehran, Imam repeatedly interrupted with criticism of the views expressed in the letter. Such unconventional diplomacy demonstrates Imam's propagation, despite criticism from the clergy which he championed. It also provides an indication of the unusual way in which mysticism and politics were combined in the thinking

of Imam Khomeini.

Imam wrote several works which treated mystical topics, or which treated topics in a way characteristic of the mystical tradition. Their titles are suggestive: *Commentary on the Supplication before Dawn* (*Sharh ad-Du'a as-Sahar*), *The Lamp of Guidance to Vicegerency and Guardianship* (*Misbah al-Hidayat ala'l-Khilafat wal-Wilayah*), *The Countenance of Allah* (*Liqat' Allah*), *The Secret of Prayer: Prayers of the Gnostics or Ascension of the Wayfarers* (*Sirr as-Salat: Salat al-'Arifin ya Mi'raj as-Salikin*), *Annotation to the Commentary on 'The Bezels of Wisdom'* (*Ta'liqatala Sharh al-Fusus al-Hikam*), *Annotation to the Commentary on 'The Lamp of Intimacy'* (*Ta'liqatala Sharh al-Misbah al-Uns*), two books of commentaries and annotations to another commentary on a collection of reports regarding the Prophet and Imams called *Ras al-Jalut*, *Lectures on Surah al-Fatihah*, *Marginalia to 'The Journeys'* (*Hashiyeh ala'l-Asfar*), *The Disciplines of the Prayer* (*Adab as-Salat*), [14](#) *Commentary on Forty Sayings of the Prophet and Imams* (*Chehel Hadith*). [15](#)

After he became a *marja'-e taqlid*, political events dominated the life of Imam Khomeini. In 1963, the Shah's forces massacred thousands who protested against the dictatorship. Imam Khomeini was arrested for his inflammatory speeches and was taken to Tehran. Later he was released with the announcement that he had agreed to refrain from further political activity. He denied that he had made any such agreement and was picked up again. He was taken to an unknown destination by car. When the car turned off the main highway, it is reported that Imam imagined that he would be assassinated in a remote quarter of the desert. He felt his heart to see if it was racing, but found out that it was calm. He narrated that he was never afraid. He was taken to a small airstrip where a plane waited to take him to exile in Turkey.

The following year his place of exile was changed to the shrine city of Najaf in southern Iraq. Imam Khomeini remained in Najaf for fourteen years, and it was during these years that the lectures collected under the title, *Jihad al-Akbar* were delivered. In 1978, the Shah put pressure on the Ba'athist government in Iraq to expel Ayatullah Khomeini. After being refused asylum at the airport in Kuwait, Imam commented that he would spend his life traveling from one airport to another, but that he would not keep silence. Finally, he was admitted to France, where he resided at Neauphle-le-Châteaux, outside Paris. In February 1979, he returned triumphantly to Iran and the Islamic Republic was launched.

A brief chronology of the political events subsequent to the victory of the Revolution is provided below, with special emphasis on the events which took place during the period in which the poetry included in this volume was written.

September 22, 1980 – Iraqi forces invaded the territory of the newly created Islamic Republic of Iran, initiating the Iran–Iraq War which would last eight years and claim hundreds of thousands of victims on both sides.

October 23, 1984 – 241 American marines were killed by a car bomb in Beirut.

March 1, 1984 – The tanker war started in the Persian Gulf. Iraqi forces were driven from the Majnun marshes and oil field.

March 4, 1985 – The War of the Cities began when Iraq launched a missile attack to Ahwaz.

July 14, 1985 – Iran announced that ships would be subject to search if they entered the Persian Gulf in order to reduce weapons supplies to Iraq.

February 10, 1986 – Iran captured Fav peninsula.

November 3, 1986 – The Iran–Contra scandal was first reported.

May 17, 1987 – 37 Americans on board the Stark were killed by an Iraqi Exocet missile.

May 19, 1987 – The US government announced that it would reflag Kuwaiti tankers.

July 31, 1987 – More than 400 pilgrims, mostly from Iran, were brutally gunned down in Mecca by Saudi security forces.

March 28, 1988 – Iraq used chemical weapons to massacre the residents of the Kurdish town in Halabja.

April 18, 1988 – Iranian forces withdrew from Fav peninsula.

June 25, 1988 – Iraq captured the Majnun marshes.

July 3, 1988 – *The Vincennes* shot down an Iranian airbus killing all 290 on board.

July 18, 1988 – Iran accepts UN resolution 598 calling for a cease–fire. Imam Khomeini commented that accepting the resolution was like taking poison, but that it was done for the good of the country.

February 14, 1989 – Imam Khomeini issued a decree calling for the execution of Salman Rushdie.

June 4, 1989 – Imam Khomeini passed away, may he rest in peace.

Of course, there were many other important events, tragedies of the war, diplomatic initiatives, etc. The chronology given above is merely a reminder of the turbulence of the events which were taking place as Imam Khomeini composed his mystical poetry. The poetry was written in a notebook given to Imam by his daughter–in–law, and on odd scraps of paper, even bits of newspaper. At one point, members of Imam’s family contacted those responsible for the protection of Iran’s cultural heritage to discuss how the poems could best be preserved.

It was explained that due to the acid in the scraps of paper on which Imam was writing, those papers would turn to dust in several decades. It was suggested that some special paper be purchased which could be placed where Imam could conveniently use it for his poems. Members of Imam’s family suggested that something would have to be already printed on that paper because Imam did not consider his poetry fit material for a blank page, and would only write on scrap paper!

Such was the character which won the hearts of his followers. Imam Khomeini was revered for the simplicity of his lifestyle and for his rigorous attention to even supererogatory details of Islamic ritual. He is said to have always faced Mecca when he performed ablutions. He preferred to purchase the less expensive shoes. If he drank half a glass of water, he would put a piece of paper over it to keep the dust out and save the rest for later.

Some claim that he had a special relation with the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, peace be upon him, the awaited one who will defeat injustice prior to the final judgment. Such claims are also part of the mystical tradition of Shi'ite Islam.

As soon as I started translating the poems, I realized that I had come across an invaluable resource for anyone who wanted to understand Iran, the Islamic Revolution, contemporary Islamic mysticism, or Imam Khomeini. The union between poetry and mysticism in Iranian culture is illustrious. Hafiz, Rumi and others are still recited by those who participated in the mystical tradition of Islam in Iran. Often the recitation is melodious and passionate. The themes are repeated, again and again, of the quest of the lover for the beloved, intoxication with mystical experience, the dissolution of the self through union. Almost every Iranian home contains a copy of the Qur'an and the Divan of Hafiz.

Even among the nonreligious intellectuals, poetry is a controversial topic in a way which has ceased to provoke public debate in America. New poetry, as contemporary free verse is called, has proponents and detractors. The advocates of new poetry find Hafiz stale. They don't want to hear any more poems with images of the nightingale and the cup-bearer. Imam Khomeini's poetry is expressly not modern. It is written with the imagery and cadences of Hafiz. Some dismiss this poetry as amateurish, simply an imitation of Hafiz. However, even those who would prefer new poetry will admit to the success of at least some of these poems.

If they imitate Hafiz, they do so deliberately, and in such a manner that the similarities and differences add another dimension of nuance to the poems. Scholars may puzzle over the shades of difference between the relation of the lover to the beloved as expressed in Hafiz and as depicted in the poetry of Imam Khomeini. There is also a paradoxically essential modernity in the very rejection of the modern. Of course, a great portion of the interest Imam's poetry generates is due to the window it opens on the character of Imam himself. His poetry has led to a small scale revival of the writing of poetry in the old style. It is as if the sonnet should come back into poetic fashion in contemporary England.

This aspect of Imam's poetry, the interplay between cliché, the variation on tradition, and the complexity of the mystical sentiment, is mostly lost in translation. Maybe the mere reminder of its presence in the Persian will allow readers to sense some of it in the English. It would help to be familiar with Hafiz, and the entire mystical tradition of the Shi'ite Islam. Perhaps these poems, by a man so hated by his enemies and so loved by his supporters, in Iran and abroad, can serve as an introduction to the tradition in which he participates.

The role Imam plays in his tradition is ambiguous. He has been criticized by conservatives for his departures from tradition, while Western detractors have deplored the rigidity of his 'fundamentalism.' The question of the role of women in Islamic society provides a good example of this. Imam enjoined a dress code according to which women may not appear in public without a head scarf. To Westernized women, this seems a repressive measure, but for most religious women, especially among the lower classes, the scarf was already their habit; the requirement posed no inconvenience for them.

Conservative traditionalists, on the other hand, bristled when Imam encouraged women to demand marriage contracts in which it would be explicitly stated that the woman would have the right to obtain a divorce if her husband misbehaved. [16](#) Westernized women would find nothing remarkable in the suggestion, because Western family law automatically provides women with the right to initiate divorce proceedings. For religious Muslim women, however, the suggestion is significant because it shows women how to obtain the right available to them within Islamic law in a tradition in which the availability of this right had been too often ignored. In this way, Imam emerges as a defender of orthodoxy against excessive liberalism, and at the same time, as a reformer.

Likewise, Imam's poetry seems anachronistic from the viewpoint of the enthusiasts of non-religious new poetry. But from the perspective of the religious tradition of the clergy, Imam's use of the imagery of wine drinking and love making is shocking. The imagery itself is not so appalling, for it is the familiar language of Hafiz. What is astonishing is the use of this imagery by an Ayatullah. As one studies the life and thought of Imam Khomeini, the ambiguity of his position is reflected again and again in the mirrors of Islamic and modern culture, shards of which shine prominently in contemporary Iranian society.

Since Imam passed away, many of those who had been critical of him during his life have developed a deeper respect for him. He is revered as the father of the Revolution, and as a reformer who helped to show the relevance of Islam to the problem of modern society. His poetry also won new affection for Imam because his continued personal involvement in the mystical tradition, a tradition which continues to excite the Iranian imagination, as well as tradition which has influenced Western culture through the likes of Goethe and Emerson, and whose influence continues to unfold in work by such diverse figures as the scholar, Henri Corbin and the poet, Coleman Barks. [17](#)

What follows this introduction is a translation of *Badeh-ye 'Ishq*, (The Wine of Love). This is the first volume of Imam's poetry which was compiled by the Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, and released in February 1990, during the eleventh anniversary of the Islamic Revolution celebrations. Two hundred thousand copies were printed. Since then, two other volumes of poems have been published as well as a volume of letters in which gnostic themes are elucidated. There are other poems and letters which remain unpublished. The nature and quantity of this material is a secret. [18](#)

I translated a couple of poems with the help of friends. I translated them into free verse, into rhyme, and even into song. I tried various rhyme schemes. Some versions were far from what Imam wrote both in form and substance, but they were meditations on the phenomenon of this poetry itself. I showed some of this work to the head of the Iranian Academy of Philosophy, Dr. Ghulam-Rida A'wani, and he agreed to help me to translate the entire volume of *Badeh-ye 'Ishq*. Even this title was not a straightforward matter to translate. *Badeh* can mean wine, or it can be used for other alcoholic beverages as well, like the English 'spirits,' although sometimes it is used to mean a chalice, rather than, or along with, its contents.

In English, the word chalice has strong ecclesiastic connotation which are foreign to the Islamic tradition, and the ambiguity of 'spirit' would force a pun foreign to the original. At each point of the translation, I was faced with decisions about which connotations to preserve and which to abandon. The metaphor of wine for love is a standard among Muslim mystics, and the phrase *badeh-ye 'ishq* immediately calls this metaphor to the Persian speaker's mind: The Wine of Love. This title is not Imam's. He didn't prepare his poetry for publication. This was the task of the foundation for the preservation and publication of his works. Nevertheless, problems with the title may serve as a reminder of the infamous impossibility of translating poetry. The problem is difficult enough when translating from one European language to another, where there is shared store of symbols, but the difficulty is compounded by the cultural differences between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the USA. The clichés of one culture may be novelties in another.

Badeh-ye 'Ishq comprises three sections. First, there are two letters: one by his daughter-in-law, Fatimah Tabataba'i to Imam, written as an introduction to this collection of poems a few months after Imam passed away, followed by a letter of Imam written to his daughter-in-law. Second, there are thirty-one¹⁹ poems in *ghazal* form. Finally, there are forty-one quatrains (*ruba'iyat*), many of which were composed by Imam as acrostics on the diminutive form of his daughter-in-law's name, Fati.²⁰

The process of translation was drawn out over a period of several months, during which I would come to Dr. A'wani's office, usually more than once a week with a tape recorder. Dr. A'wani would read a poem in Farsi and then explain the meanings of almost every other word. He also pointed out allusions to *hadith* and to the poetry of Hafiz, or made more general observations prompted by a line or the use of idiom. Afterward, I would listen to the cassette, interrupted by consultation with various dictionaries, and I then jotted down as close to a literal translation as I could approximate.

Then I would play with the poem, versifying it, trying different meters and styles. I often showed the work in progress to other friends, and I made more alterations. In the end, I decided to abandon all hope of capturing any of the music of Imam's poetry, much of which is quite lyrical, and to replace it by whatever seemed most natural in a free verse which would keep as close as I could manage to the literal content of Imam's poems.

My work with Dr. A'wani was completed the day before the second anniversary of the death of Imam, June 4, 1991. By the end of the following month, the American-English versions were completed, although I never have ceased to find room for improvement, and the process of revisions continued throughout the summer of 1991, during which I annotated the poems at my parents' home in New York.

The annotations, the translations, and other comments represent merely one perspective on the poet and his work. It is perspective which remains limited by ignorance and by idiosyncrasy despite the patient help I have received from Dr. A'wani, and despite the suggestions and moral support of Mahdi Hujjat, Farhad Imam, Farshad Malik-Ahmadi, Dr. Zia Muwahhid, Shahrum Pazuki, Mahdi Shaykhzadeh, and to Dr. Kamal Kharrazi and the staff of the permanent mission of Iran to the United Nations. I am

grateful to them all.

It is my pleasure to offer special words of thanks to Dr. Burujerdi, the director of the Institute for Research and Study of Culture of Iran under whose auspices the Iranian Academy of Philosophy operates, who graciously invited me to become a fellow at the Academy and who has continued to be a source of encouragement. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for their support and sympathy.

I apologize to Imam, to his family, and especially to Lady Fatimah Tabataba'i, and to all the devotees of Imam for the shortcomings of these American renditions of Imam's poetry.

Dr. Muhammad G. Legenhausen

September 16, 1991

Shahrivar 25, 1370 AHS

Rabi' al-Awwal 6, 1412 AH

- [1.](#) Dr. Kamal Kharrazi is presently the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Eds.)
- [2.](#) The *Fusus al-Hikam* has been translated by R.W.J. Austin as *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York: The Paulist Press, 1980).
- [3.](#) See Imam's lectures on Surah al-Fatihah in *Islam and Revolution*, tr. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 424.
- [4.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 425.
- [5.](#) Muhyi ad-Din ibn al-'Arabi, the celebrated Muslim mystic whose influence came to permeate the intellectual and spiritual life of virtually the entire Muslim world, was born at Murcia in Southern Spain in 1165. Much of his youth was spent in Seville, where he devoted himself to literary, theological and mystical studies. After visiting Granada and other Spanish towns, as well as Tunis, Fez, and Morocco, he set out in 1202 for the East by way of Egypt, whence he made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He did not return to Spain. Many of the remaining years of his life were passed in the neighborhood of Mecca, but he also traveled extensively to Babylonia, Asia Minor, and Syria, everywhere gaining disciples and spreading his doctrines through dialogues with scientists and scholars.
Whether we regard the extent of his theological writings or their influence on the subsequent development of Islamic mysticism, Ibn al-'Arabi can justly claim the supreme position among Sufi authors which posterity has accorded him, and which is attested by the title, *Ash-Shaykh al-Akbar*, conferred on him by the almost unanimous voice of those who are best qualified to judge. The list of his works drawn up by himself contains 289 titles, and some of them are of enormous length. The most famous and important is the *Futuh al-Makkiyah*. In this, as in many of his works, Ibn al-'Arabi professes to communicate mysteries revealed to him in ecstatic vision by prophets, angels, and even God Himself. (Pub.)
- [6.](#) Sadr ad-Din Shirazi (d. 1050 AH/1640), better known as Mulla Sadra, was a philosopher who led the Iranian cultural renaissance in the 17th century. The foremost representative of Ishraqi (Illuminationist) School of philosopher-mystics, he is commonly regarded by Iranians as the greatest philosopher of Iran. A scion of a notable Shirazi family, Mulla Sadra completed his education in Isfahan, then the leading cultural and intellectual center of Iran. After his studies with scholars there, he produced several works, the most famous of which was his *Asfar* (Journeys). *Asfar* contains the bulk of his philosophy, which was influenced by a personal mysticism bordering on the asceticism that he experienced during a 15-year retreat at Kahak, a village near Qum in Iran.
Toward the end of his life, Mulla Sadra returned to Shiraz to teach. His teachings, however, were considered heretical by the orthodox Shi'ite theologians, who persecuted him, though his powerful family connections permitted him to continue to write. He died on a pilgrimage to Mecca. (Pub.)
- [7.](#) Hajji Hadi Sabzewari (1797-1878) was the philosopher and poet noted for disseminating and clarifying the doctrines of Mulla Sadra. The Qajar Shah Nasir ad-Din ordered a mausoleum to be built for him at Mashhad. (Pub.)

[8.](#) Mawlawi Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi (1207–1273) was the greatest mystic poet in the Farsi language and founder of the Mawlawiyyah order of dervishes (“The Whirling Dervishes”). He is famous for his lyrics and for his didactic epic, *Spiritual Couplets*. (Pub.)

[9.](#) Khwajah Shams ad-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi (ca. 1325–1391) was the fourteenth century Persian lyric bard and panegyrist, and commonly considered as the preeminent master of the ghazal form. (Pub.)

[10.](#) Imam Khomeini, *The Greatest Jihad: Combat with the Self*, 2nd ed., tr. Muhammad Legenhausen (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, 2003). (Eds.)

[11.](#) The English rendition of the said letter of Imam Khomeini to Mikhail Gorbachev along with explanatory notes is published by this Institute under the title, *A Call to Divine Unity*. Its second edition is forthcoming. The same is also available in other languages. (Eds.)

[12.](#) One of Islam’s leading philosophers, al-Farabi was born at Farab, situated on the Jaxartes (Syr Darya), the modern Otrar. Coming to Baghdad, he studied under the Christian doctor Johanna, son of Hilan. Another of his teachers was Abu Bishr, Matta, known as a translator of Greek works. He next proceeded to Aleppo, to the court of Sayf ad-Dawlah, son of Hamdan, and led a somewhat retired life under his protection, assuming the garb of a Sufi. When this prince captured Damascus, he took the philosopher with him, and there Farabi died in 339 AH/950.

Farabi’s literary production was considerable, but a great number of his works was lost very early. They were chiefly commentaries or explanations of the Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle. He wrote *An Introduction to Logic*, *A Concise Logic*, a series of commentaries on the *Isagoge* of Porphyry, the *Categories*, the *Hermenias*, the *First and Second Analytics*, the *Topics*, *Sophistic*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*. The whole formed an *Organon* divided into nine parts. In the sphere of Moral Philosophy he wrote a commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*; in that of political philosophy, he made a summary of Plato’s *Laws*, and composed a short treatise on the *Ideal City*.

To psychology and metaphysics he contributed numerous works, with such titles as *Intelligence and the Intelligible*, *The Soul*, *The Faculties of the Soul*, *The One and Unity*, *Substance*, *Time*, *The Void*, and *Space and Measure*. He also commented on Alexander of Aphrodisias’ book, *de Anima*. Believing that Greek philosophy was a unity, he labored to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, and with this idea wrote treatises on *The Aims of Plato and Aristotle* and *The Agreement between Plato and Aristotle*. He also discussed certain interpretations of Aristotle proposed by Galen and John Philoponus, and composed *An Intervention between Aristotle and Galen*.

In the sphere of science, Farabi wrote commentaries on Aristotle’s *Physics*, *Meteorology*, *The Heavens*, and *The Universe*, besides commenting on the *Almagest* of Ptolemy. To him also is due an essay explaining some difficult propositions from the *Elements* of Euclid. The occult sciences interested him, and he left writings on alchemy, geomancy, genii, and dreams. This great philosopher was also a talented musician, a somewhat exceptional combination. In this sphere he was at the same time composer, virtuoso, and theorist. (Pub.)

[13.](#) Abu ‘Ali al-Husayn ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Sina, or Avicenna, entitled al-Shaykh al-Ra’is, or Hujjat al-Haqq by his compatriots, simply Shaykh by his disciples, and the Prince of Physicians in the occidental world, was born near Bukhara in the year 370 AH/980. When Ibn Sina was five years old he and his family moved to the city of Bukhara, where the young boy had a greater opportunity to study. At the age of ten he already knew grammar, literature, and theology as well as the whole of the Qur’an.

When the famous mathematician, Abu ‘Abdullah al-Natili, came to Bukhara, he was invited to stay at the house of Ibn Sina in order to teach him mathematics. Under his tutelage Ibn Sina mastered the *Almagest*, the *Elements* of Euclid and some logic, all of which he soon knew better than his teacher. Having mastered mathematics, he then turned his attention to physics, metaphysics, and medicine. By the time he was sixteen Ibn Sina had mastered all the sciences of his day and was well known as a physician. In another two years, thanks to the commentary of al-Farabi, he was also to complete his understanding of Aristotle’s metaphysics which at first had presented considerable difficulty for him.

Despite the loss in part or in toto of several of his major works, such as the twenty-volume *Kitab al-Insaf* on the arbitration

of Eastern and Western philosophy and the Lisan al-‘Arab in ten volumes, over two-hundred and fifty books, treatises, and letters of Ibn Sina have survived. They range from the voluminous Kitab ash-Shifa and al-Qanunfi’t-Tibb to treatises of only a few pages like Risalat al-Fi’lwal-Infi’al and Risalahfi’s-Sirr al-Qadar.

His books can be roughly divided into four separate groups: the philosophical, religious, cosmological and physical, and finally the symbolical and metaphysical narratives.

Kitab ash-Shifa, a vast philosophical and scientific encyclopedia, is probably the largest work of its kind ever written by one man. Al-Qanunfi’t-Tibb is the most famous single book in the history of medicine in both the East and West. In the West, this book became the only medical authority for several centuries and Ibn Sina enjoyed an undisputed place of honor. In the East his dominating influence in medicine, philosophy and theology has lasted over the ages and is still alive within the circles of Islamic thought. (Pub.)

[14.](#) Imam Khomeini, Adab as-Salat: The Disciplines of the Prayer, 2nd ed. (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, 2002). (Eds.)

[15.](#) Imam Khomeini, Forty Hadiths: An Exposition of Ethical and Gnostic Traditions, tr. ‘Ali Quli Qara’i (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, 2003). (Eds.)

[16.](#) Cf. Imam’s ‘Address to a Group of Women in Qum’ (March 6, 1979) in Islam and Revolution, p. 264.

[17.](#) Henri Cobin was Professor of Islamic Religion at the Sorbonne and the editor, translator and interpreter of numerous works in mystical tradition of Iran. Coleman Barks, a poet and Associate Professor of English at the University of Georgia in Athens, has produced several remarkable volumes of American spiritual free-verse renditions of the poetry of Mawlawi Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi.

[18.](#) So far, a compendium of Imam Khomeini’s poems has already been published. See Divan-e Imam (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works). (Eds.)

[19.](#) That is, originally twenty-three poems plus eight from the Sabu-ye ‘Ishq (The Jug of Love). (Eds.)

[20.](#) Fati is the nickname of his daughter-in-law, Fatimah Tabataba’i. (Eds.)

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