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Of love and longing : a study of Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical poetry and its reception in Iran and abroad

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Ayatollah Khomeini's Inner World: Mysticism and Poetry

2.1 Ayatollah Khomeini's Mysticism

When a poem by Ayatollah Khomeini was published by his youngest son, Ahmad, in the Iranian newspaper *Keyhân* several days after his father's death in 1989, it came as a great surprise both inside and outside Iran. Several years later, in 1993, Ayatollah Khomeini's complete collection of poetry (*Divân*) was published in Iran.¹³¹ Many people were surprised that such poems, filled with mystical concepts, had been composed by Ayatollah Khomeini. Some immediately denied their authenticity, arguing that they had been falsely attributed to him to polish up his image. Others, of a mystical disposition, embraced them. The orthodox clergy, on the whole, strongly condemned the mystical character of the poems, struggling with some of the topics which Ayatollah Khomeini had adopted such as erotic love and wine. Many Iranians living abroad also reacted with surprise, and often negatively, to the publication. Famous Iranian poets in Europe and America such as Hadi Khorsandi and Nader Naderpour wrote parodies or other poems and articles condemning Ayatollah Khomeini's poems.

I have translated and analysed a considerable number of Ayatollah Khomeini's poems, focussing on three poetic forms. I will begin with his *robâ'is*, or quatrains, written during the 1980s, in chapter three. In chapter four I will focus on his *ghazals* (lyrical poems) which were written both before 1936, from 1979 till March 1984 and from April 1985 till his death in 1989. Lastly I will examine his oldest poems, the *qasides* or panegyric poems, which he wrote in his twenties when he was a student in Qom. I will apply a literary-historical approach to the poems to answer questions such as: Why did Ayatollah Khomeini write poems about wine and homo-erotic love? Did he write them for private use or were they meant for publication, and in the latter case, who did he want to reach and why were they never published? Do his poems give us an insight into his character? Was Ayatollah Khomeini for example a different man in a private setting than in public? In all this, I will try to grasp the message of his poetry. Before launching an analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's poetry, it is

¹³¹ R. Khomeini, *Divân-e Emâm: sorudehâ-ye hazrat-e emâm Khomeini*, Tehran: mo'asseseh tanzim o nashar-e âsâr-e emâm Khomeini, 1372 (1993).

necessary to consider his mystical inclinations, an aspect of Ayatollah Khomeini that remains unfamiliar to Western audiences.

2.2 Studies of Ayatollah Khomeini's Mysticism

There have been only a few previous works on Ayatollah Khomeini and his mysticism. In 1981, the well-known American scholar Hamid Algar, who had the chance of interviewing Ayatollah Khomeini during his stay in France, translated several of Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches into English in his *Islam and Revolution*.¹³² The book not only contains Ayatollah Khomeini's famous lectures of 1969 and 1970, in which he presented his theories on Islamic Governance, it also contains translations of Ayatollah Khomeini's TV performances of 1979 and 1980 in which he gives a mystical interpretation of the first *sura* in the Koran. In the book, Hamid Algar refers to Ayatollah Khomeini's mysticism on various occasions. In 1988, Hamid Algar published an article entitled "Imam Khomeini, 1902-1906: The Pre-Revolutionary Years", in which he sheds light on Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical inclinations.¹³³ In 1999, Baqer Moin published his *Ayatollah Khomeini, Life of the Ayatollah*, which has remained a standard work in a Western language on Ayatollah Khomeini's life.¹³⁴ Moin focuses not only on Ayatollah Khomeini's political career, but also on his mystical affiliations and poetic activities. *Creating an Islamic state: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* by Vanessa Martin is very useful if one wants to learn more on Ayatollah Khomeini's mysticism.¹³⁵ Martin gives the reader an insight into Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological thinking and how it was influenced by Platonism and mystical philosophers such as Mollâ Sadrâ and Ibn 'Arabi. Several scholars devoted their attention to Khomeini's mysticism, which I referred to earlier, but I only refer to their names.¹³⁶ Yahya Bonaud,¹³⁷ Roy Mottahedeh,¹³⁸ Alexander Knysh,¹³⁹ Johan ter Haar,¹⁴⁰ Finn Thiesen,¹⁴¹ Benedikt

¹³² R. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution; Writings and Declarations*, ed. by H. Algar, Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981.

¹³³ H. Algar, "Imam Khomeini, 1902-1906: The Pre-Revolutionary Years," in *Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, eds. E. Burke and I.M. Lapidus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 263-288.

¹³⁴ B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1999.

¹³⁵ V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the making of a new Iran*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

¹³⁶ See the part on "Organization and Structure of the Book."

¹³⁷ Y.C. Bonaud, *L'Imam Khomeiny: un Gnostique Méconnu du XXe Siècle*, Beyrouth: al-Bouraq, 1995.

¹³⁸ R.P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000.

¹³⁹ A. Knysh, "Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy," in *Middle East Journal*, 46:4, 1992, pp. 631-653.

Reinert,¹⁴² Asghar Seyed-Gohrab,¹⁴³ and most recently, Lloyd Ridgeon.¹⁴⁴ In Iran itself, numerous articles and books have been published on Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical works and on his poems.¹⁴⁵ These Iranian scholars fall into two groups: some admire Ayatollah Khomeini and attribute a saintly aura to him, while others are critical of him and his political and religious ideas, often dismissing his poetic works. In all these works in Persian, attention is focused on Ayatollah Khomeini's political views rather than his mystical aspiration and even less on his poetic talent.

2.3 The Role of Mysticism in Ayatollah Khomeini's Life

Ruhollah Khomeini was born on September 24th 1902 in the small town Khomein, about hundred kilometres southwest of Tehran. His grandfather, who grew up in India, and his father Ayatollah Mostafâ (d. 1903) were both religious scholars. When Ayatollah Khomeini was only a few months old his father was murdered by bandits, and he was taken into the care of his mother and aunt. They also died young, when he was about sixteen years old. As was common in his family, Ayatollah Khomeini followed a traditional Islamic lower education. In 1921, he started his higher religious education, first in Arâk and later in Qom. There, the *Hawze-ye 'Elmiyyeh* seminary had just been erected by his teacher, the famous Ayatollah 'Abdolkarim Hâ'eri Yazdi (d. 1937). Here Ayatollah Khomeini studied subjects such as philosophy (*falsafe*), ethics (*akhlâq*) and Islamic jurisprudence (*feqh*). Shortly after enrolment, he began attending additional courses that were not part of the prescribed educational

¹⁴⁰ J.G.J. ter Haar, "Heiligheid en Politiek Gezag; Het Begrip Wilâyat in de optiek van Khumayni," in *Mystiek: het andere gezicht van de islam*, eds. M. Buitelaar en J.G.J. ter Haar, Bussum: Coutinho, 1999, pp. 90-102.

¹⁴¹ F. Thiesen, "A Draught of Love: A translation of Rūhollāh Xomeini's sabū ye 'ešq," in *Corolla Iranica*, eds. R.E. Emmerick and D. Weber, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp. 211-227.

¹⁴² B. Reinert, "Ḥumainī im Spiegel seiner Gedichte," in *Islamische Grenzen und Grenzübergänge*, Vol. 4, Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007, pp. 191-293.

¹⁴³ See A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Khomeini the Poet Mystic," in *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 51, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 438-458.

¹⁴⁴ L. Ridgeon, "Hidden Khomeini: Mysticism and Poetry," in *A Critical Introduction to Ayatollah Khomeini*, ed. A. Adib-Moghaddam, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 193-210.

¹⁴⁵ *Farhang-e divân-e ash'âr-e emâm Khomeini*, 1372/1993; P. Beygi Habibâbâdi in *Guzide-yi ahs'âr: She'r-e jang va defâ'-e moqaddas*, ed. H. Hoseyni, Tehran: Sura, 1381/2002; R. Khomeini, *Reunion with the Beloved: Imam Khomeini's Letters to Hujjat al-Islâm wal-Muslimin Hâj Sayyid Ahmad Khomeini*, Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 1995; R. Khomeini, *The Wine of Love: Mystical Poetry of Imam Khomeini*, transl. and introd. by M. Legenhausen, Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 2003.

program. These optional courses, that were only given to a select group of students, all had to do with Islamic mysticism (*'erfân*). Under the supervision of teachers such as 'Abdolkarim Hâ'eri Yazdi, Mirzâ 'Ali Akbar Hakim Yazdi (d. 1924), Sayyed Abd al-Hasan Rafi'i Qazvini (d. 1976), Mirzâ Javâd Âqâ Maleki Tabrizi (d. 1924) and Mirzâ Mohammad 'Ali Shâhâbâdi (d. 1950), Ayatollah Khomeini would learn the principles of mysticism.¹⁴⁶ Ayatollah Khomeini was an excellent student and chose to specialize in *'erfân* and ethics. At the early age of 33, he received permission (*ejâze*) to become a *mojtahed*, which meant that he was thereafter allowed to use his own judgement in interpreting the religious law.¹⁴⁷ Having made himself an expert in philosophy, mysticism and ethics, Ayatollah Khomeini spent the first ten years of his career as a teacher in Qom, while leading an otherwise withdrawn life with his wife Khadija Thaqafi and his eight children.¹⁴⁸

It is known that Ayatollah Khomeini had shown a special interest in mysticism from the beginning of his education. This is evident from his early literary works, in which the influence of mystical philosophers such as Mollâ Sadrâ, Ibn 'Arabi and Shehâb al-Din Yahyâ Sohravardi (executed 1191) is evident. Alexander Knysh has pointed out that two books on mystical philosophy belonging to Ayatollah Khomeini came to light at a religious institute in Hamadan in 1983. The books had Ayatollah Khomeini's signature inside, and also his commentaries in the margins. One was a commentary by Sharaf al-Din Dâvud al-Qeysari (d. 1350) on the mystical work *Fusus al-Hekam* (Bezels of Wisdom) by the Andalusian Islamic mystic Ibn 'Arabi. The other was *Mesbâh al-Ons* (Lamp of Intimacy) by the Ottoman scholar Mohammad b. Hamza al-Fanari (d. 1431). This is a commentary on *Meftâh al-Gheyb* (Key to the Unseen) by Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 1274). With the permission of Ayatollah Khomeini, and after some small changes, both books and commentaries were published.¹⁴⁹ In 1928, Ayatollah Khomeini wrote a commentary on the *Du'â-ye Sahar*, one of the most often recited Islamic prayers during Ramadan, and this commentary also exhibits heavy mystical influences.¹⁵⁰ In 1929, at the age of twenty-seven, Ayatollah Khomeini wrote *Mesbâh al-Hedâya 'ila al-Khelâfat va al-Velâyat* (Lamp Showing the Right Way to Viceregency and

¹⁴⁶ See B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009, pp. 42-43.

¹⁴⁷ For an elaborate discussion on the position of *mojtahed* I refer to chapter 1.3 in this study.

¹⁴⁸ V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic state*, p. 29; B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, pp. 1-21.

¹⁴⁹ A. Knysh, "Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy," pp. 635-651.

¹⁵⁰ J.G.J. ter Haar, "Heiligheid en Politiek Gezag; Het Begrip Wilâyat in de Optiek van Khumayni," p. 93.

Sainthood).¹⁵¹ This treats various subjects from the field of mystical philosophy. Ayatollah Khomeini describes how creation has emanated from the world of God and why, therefore, no distinction can be made between God and creation. Ayatollah Khomeini also pays much attention to the spiritual path the mystic must travel before he can reach his final goal, which is union with God. He also focusses on the role of humankind and particularly on that of the prophets, saints and mystics within his worldview. By supporting these ideas in his books, Ayatollah Khomeini places himself in the tradition of classical mysticism.

The *Mesbâh* (Lamp) and other mystical works by Ayatollah Khomeini show that he adheres to a type of mysticism that originates with Ibn 'Arabi. This thirteenth-century mystical philosopher wrote numerous works on mystical concepts. He became in particular famous for theories on the 'oneness of being' (*vahdat al-vojud*) and the 'perfect man' (*ensân-e kâmel*) and became a source of inspiration for many philosophers. The essential thought behind the concept of the 'oneness of being' is that everything that exists in the world is a reflection or manifestation of God. Such ideas pre-dated Ibn 'Arabi, and several Persian mystical poets had referred to them, but Ibn 'Arabi's theories on this concept permeated Persian mystic literature from the thirteenth century. The whole of creation has the same origin, which is God's essence. The idea is very similar to pantheism, which identifies God with the universe. However, it differs in that, God is still greater than His creation, because without Him there would not have been any creation.¹⁵² Mystics often explain the concept of the 'oneness of being' with the metaphor of the sea-wave that disappears into the ocean. At first it looks different from the ocean but in reality it is made of the same substance: water.¹⁵³ Each individual or entity in this world is thus like a wave in the immeasurable sea.¹⁵⁴ In his

¹⁵¹ The work has the same title as a mystical 'manual' by Mahmud Kâshânî (d. 1334/5) in which he elaborates on mystical practices. This book is on its turn an adjustment of the book *Awarif al Ma'arif* ["Gifts of Mystical Knowledge"] by Sohrawardi (d. 1234). Although Ayatollah Khomeini's and Kâshânî's work have the same title, they do not seem to have any connection, despite the fact that they both deal with mystical topics. For consultation see A. Knysh, "*Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy*," p. 637.

¹⁵² For consultation on Ibn 'Arabi's theories see W.C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

¹⁵³ Mystics also compare the spiritual path to a wave in the sea. At the end of its path, the wave will disappear into the greater ocean, just as the spiritual traveller will annihilate his Ego in God's Essence. See J. Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005, p. 176.

¹⁵⁴ Other popular metaphors used in mystical poems to express the 'oneness of being' are chess figures that all look different but in reality are all made of wood, or different coloured pieces of glass that do not look alike but

Mesbâh, Ayatollah Khomeini frequently uses Ibn ‘Arabi’s theories on cosmology and metaphysics. Like Ibn ‘Arabi, Ayatollah Khomeini supports the view that the perfect man has a guiding role in the Islamic community.

Ayatollah Khomeini was also greatly inspired by Mollâ Sadrâ, the famous seventeenth-century theologian and philosopher who was also an adherent of Ibn ‘Arabi and who became known especially for his book *al-Hekma al-Mota‘aliyya fi-l-Asfâr al-‘Aqliyya al-Arba‘a* (Transcendent Wisdom of the Four Journeys of the Intellect), which is usually referred to as the *al-Asfâr al-Arba‘a*, or the “Four Journeys.” In this book Mollâ Sadrâ elaborates on the spiritual path of the mystic towards perfection. He divides this path into four intellectual journeys. The first journey leads the mystic from the earthly world towards God. In this stage, the mystic learns about metaphysics and philosophy. He learns that the whole creation is actually one, despite its diversity. During his second journey the mystic travels with God in God. During this journey the mystic realizes the nature of God and sees the divine attributes reflected in himself. After he has realized this, the mystic’s Self will be annihilated and he will become one with God’s essence. In the third stage, the mystic travels from God back to creation. During the last journey, the mystic travels through creation while remaining in constant contact with God. The mystic realizes that everything around him is a reflection of God. He no longer sees multiplicity and diversity, but instead sees unity.¹⁵⁵ At this stage the mystic has reached perfection and the level of viceregency (*velâyat*). Now it is his task to share his divine knowledge and guide the Islamic community.¹⁵⁶ In his *Mesbâh*, Ayatollah Khomeini is rather vague about who may reach this final stage. On several occasions, Ayatollah Khomeini says that only the twelve Imams and prophets can attain this final level, while on one occasion he gives the impression that this level can also be reached by the ordinary man.¹⁵⁷

have all been created from the same substance. See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pp. 284-285.

¹⁵⁵ For an elaboration on the ‘four journeys’ of Mollâ Sadrâ see S.H. Rizvî, *Mullâ Şadrâ and Metaphysics; Modulation of Being*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 30-33 and S.H. Rizvi, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, under Mulla Sadra.

¹⁵⁶ For consultation on Mollâ Sadrâ see V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic state*, p. 29; B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, pp. 31, 33, 35, 38, 40, 44, 46, 76, 153, 207; S.H. Rizvi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Mollâ Sadrâ Şirâzi; H. Corbin, “La Place de Mollâ şadrâ Şirâzî dans la Philosophie Iranienne,” in *Studia Islamica*, No. 18, 1963, pp. 81-113.

¹⁵⁷ See V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic state*, p. 29; B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, p. 39.

Ayatollah Khomeini and Mollâ Sadrâ shared many ideas. Both believed that a true comprehension of God could only be attained by first studying the Islamic sources such as the Koran, *hadith* ('traditions') and Islamic law and then developing intuitive knowledge.¹⁵⁸ Like Mollâ Sadrâ, Ayatollah Khomeini strongly believed in humans' ability to reach a higher spiritual state, up to the level of perfection. Mollâ Sadrâ presented existence as a hierarchical system, with lower and higher being or beings of various intensities and with God at the top. According to Mollâ Sadrâ, within this system, existence could modulate (*tashkik*). By presenting being or reality in this way, Mollâ Sadrâ explained both the unity of existence and its multiplicity.¹⁵⁹

Ayatollah Khomeini was a great supporter of Mollâ Sadrâ's version of mysticism. Both Ayatollah Khomeini and Mollâ Sadrâ promoted the idea that the duty of the perfect man lay not merely in withdrawal and private devotion, but also in the community where he served as a guide and leader. Both saw '*erfân*' not only as a private matter but as woven into all aspects of life, up to the final stage in which the perfect man could also fulfil a leading function in the community.¹⁶⁰

The impact of mystical philosophers such as Mollâ Sadrâ and Ibn 'Arabi on Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview is evident not only in the various mystical books he wrote, but also in the private lessons he gave to students of Islamic mysticism, and in his lectures and speeches. Among these are the lectures he gave to some religious students in 1972, later published as *Jehâd-e Akbar yâ Mobâraza bâ Nafs* (The greater jihad: the struggle with the Self).¹⁶¹ In these lectures Ayatollah Khomeini highlights the need for every Muslim to develop himself on a spiritual level. He advises his students to read the works of great mystical philosophers such as Ibn 'Arabi and Mollâ Sadrâ. He also stresses the importance of acquiring both scholarly knowledge and mystical knowledge, because both are needed to form a complete picture of divine reality.¹⁶² In 1979 and 1980, after Ayatollah Khomeini had returned from exile and had become the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he was asked to give lectures on national

¹⁵⁸ V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic state*, p. 29; B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, p. 41.

¹⁵⁹ For an elaboration on the 'modulation of being' see chapter 2 by S.H. Rizvi, *Mollâ Sadrâ and Metaphysics; Modulation of Being*, pp. 38-53; See also S.H. Rizvi, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, under Mulla Sadra.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.; H. Corbin, "La Place de Mollâ şadrâ Şîrâzî dans la Philosophie Iranienne," pp. 81-113.

¹⁶¹ The book was published in 1972 by Payam-e Azadi Publications and later translated into English by M. Legenhausen and Azim Sardalir. For this English translation see *The Greatest Jihad: Combat with the Self*, Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 1989.

¹⁶² A. Knysh, "Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy," pp. 635-651.

television in which he would comment on verses from the Koran. Ayatollah Tâleqâni (d. 1979) had been giving these lectures, and Ayatollah Khomeini was asked to take his place. To the displeasure of many orthodox clerics, Ayatollah Khomeini's commentaries on Koranic verses in these lectures were filled with mystical concepts and were published by several publishers.¹⁶³ One of the things that Ayatollah Khomeini emphasized in these lectures was that every person has the ability to develop his human potential to perfection on a personal level. In the vein of mystical philosophers such as 'Abdolkarim ibn Ebrâhim al-Jili (d. 1406-1417), Ayatollah Khomeini elaborated on the mystical path towards perfection. In his book on the perfect man, al-Jili described his personal experiences on his spiritual journey. In this process of becoming one with God, the mystic aims at becoming a perfect reflection of God. The mystic wishes to return to his initial state in which he was one with God and thus perfect. This return to a perfect state should be seen as a process of self-realization of the individual's divine essence. It is a process of letting go of the Self to a point where only the divine essence remains. This journey should thus be seen as a process of consciousness or self-realization. Al-Jili divided this journey of the self-manifestation (*tajalli*) of God in the mystic's heart into four stages. In the first phase 'The Illumination of the Divine Actions,' the mystic realizes that God is the sole agent in the world. In the second stage, 'The Illumination of the Divine Names,' a divine manifestation of God's Names takes place in the heart of the mystic after his Self has been annihilated (*fanâ*). In the third phase, 'The Illumination of the Divine Attributes,' the attributes of God manifest themselves in the heart of the mystic. However, the intensity of illumination depends on the capacities of the mystic. In the fourth and final stage, 'The Illumination of the Divine Essence,' the Self of the mystic is replaced by the Essence of God, thus the total of all Divine Names and Attributes, and he may henceforth be called a Perfect Man.¹⁶⁴

Iran's orthodox Shiite hierarchy did not favour mystical worldviews such as those promoted by al-Jili and Ayatollah Khomeini. They felt that this personal approach to obtaining divine knowledge could undermine the collective power structures of the well-established religious institutions of Iran, and the authority of the state. Most orthodox clerics also had a problem with the claims of some mystics to have attained to a certain state of spiritual perfection through 'direct insight,' although they had not followed the typical

¹⁶³ For example by the Islamic Republic Part in Teheran, by Azadi in Qom, by Islamic Publications Office in Qom, by The Message of Freedom in Tehran and by Tabatabai Publications in Qom.

¹⁶⁴ See R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921, pp. 125-130.

curriculum for religious students. In their eyes, *'erfân* was uncontrollable and deviated from the collective religious norms. Mystics' detachment was seen as indifference to life, and their willingness to give up everything, including life, for their convictions made them appear unpredictable, and suspect.¹⁶⁵

This widespread aversion to mysticism among the orthodox may have been the reason why the television program, in which Ayatollah Khomeini spoke of mysticism, was taken off the air in 1980 after only five broadcasts, although his readings had become immensely popular amongst Iranians. In the last of these five lectures on national television, Ayatollah Khomeini spoke of his personal experience with the orthodox clergy and their negative attitude towards mysticism. Another interpretation holds that the program was stopped because of Ayatollah Khomeini's heart problems: there are few sources to draw on and the question as to why the tv-program was taken off the air remains unresolved.¹⁶⁶

Whatever the reason for the ending of Ayatollah Khomeini's 'mystical' lectures on national television, it is obvious in Ayatollah Khomeini's work and public appearances that mysticism played a central role in his life. There is ample proof that both his worldview and his ideas on religious scholarship and political authority were permeated by mystical thoughts. Indeed, Ayatollah Khomeini had always approached the private and the public sphere from a mystical point of view. He never made a secret of his mystical aspirations, despite the objections they engendered amongst the orthodox clergy. Baqer Moin describes the frequent instances of harassment that Ayatollah Khomeini and his family suffered from seminary students during his years in Qom, simply because he was teaching *'erfân*. Even the great Ayatollah Borujerdi (d. 1961) objected to his interest in mysticism and philosophy, yet Ayatollah Khomeini never stopped teaching and writing on these subjects, even when he lived in exile or when he had become the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁶⁷ In 1972, for example, he was lecturing on the greater jihad against the soul.¹⁶⁸ His mystical interpretations

¹⁶⁵ See R.P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, ed. 2009, pp. 135-148; V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, ed. 2003, p. 33.

¹⁶⁶ B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, pp. 273-274; J.G.J. ter Haar, "Heiligheid en Politiek Gezag; Het Begrip Wilāyat in de Optiek van Khumayni," pp. 93, 94.

¹⁶⁷ It is important to notice that not all clerics were against his interest in mysticism. The later Ayatollah Motahheri (d. 1979) and Montazeri (d. 2009), for example, had both been students in his classes on *'erfân*.

¹⁶⁸ For an English translation of these lectures I refer to the book *Islam and Revolution*, by R. Khomeini, pp. 349-362, in which H. Algar has translated these lectures into English.

of the Koran in 1980 have just been mentioned, and in 1989 he wrote an open letter to President Gorbachev, part of which reads:

Mr. Gorbachev, reality must be faced. The main problem confronting your country is not one of private ownership, freedom and economy; your problem is the absence of true faith in God, the very problem that has dragged, or will drag, the West to vulgarism and an impasse. Your main problem is the prolonged and futile war you have waged against God, the source of existence and creation.¹⁶⁹

Ayatollah Khomeini feared that Gorbachev, who had fought Marxism in his country, would be persuaded by Western capitalism. He therefore highlighted the fact that this would not solve the misery of the country. Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the lack of religiosity and spiritually was at the root of all problems in the Soviet Union. Ayatollah Khomeini then explains to Gorbachev why there must be a God:

It is self-evident that matter, whatever its nature, has no awareness of self. Consider a stone statue: each side is ignorant of the other side, whereas human beings and animals, we clearly observe, are aware of their surroundings. They know where they are, and have some idea of what goes on around them. There must be, then, an element in men and animals that transcends matter and is separate from it, living beyond the life of matter. Intrinsically, man seeks to attain absolute perfection. He strives, as you well know, for absolute power over the world; he is not attached to any power that is defective. If he has the entire world at his command, he naturally feels inclined to have command of another world once he is informed of its existence. No matter how learned a person may be, if he learns of some other branch of knowledge, he naturally feels inclined to attain mastery of that branch of knowledge also. Therefore, there must be some Absolute Power and Absolute Knowledge to which man is attached. It is God we all seek, although we may not be aware of it. Man strives to attain Absolute Truth, so that he may be annihilated in God. Basically, the desire for eternal life that is inherent in every individual is proof of the existence of an Eternal World to which destruction cannot find its way.¹⁷⁰

In this part of the letter, Ayatollah Khomeini explains the relationship each person has with God. In the vein of Mollâ Sadrâ, he clarifies this matter in terms of a worldview in which the whole of creation is in a continuous state of progress. In this case Ayatollah Khomeini refers to the progress of *ma'refat*, knowledge from and of the divine, which each element in

¹⁶⁹ For this translated letter see www.ghadeer.org/english/imam/letter%20Imam/callto/callto2.html, accessed on June 12 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

the universe wishes to obtain. The more access the mystic obtains to this knowledge, the more he progresses on his path, to the point at which he has become one with this ‘Absolute Power.’ The mystical interpretation of evolution that Ayatollah Khomeini gives in the letter is strongly influenced by Platonic and Neo-Platonic thinking. According to this theory, the universe is a chain of evolution that starts with the four basic elements and yields the diversity of minerals, plants and animals, and then human beings, and finally the perfect man. Mowlânâ Jalâl al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) elaborates on this mystical interpretation of evolution.¹⁷¹ In one of his most famous poems, Rumi refers to this ‘road of evolution’ in the following way:

I died as a mineral and became a plant,	از جمادی مُردم و نامی شدم
I died as plant and elevated to animal,	وز نما مُردم، به حیوان بر زدم
I died as an animal and became man.	مُردم از حیوانی، و آدم شدم
Then what to fear? When did I become less from dying?	پس چه ترسم؟ کی ز مُردن کم شدم؟
Once again I will die as man,	حمله دیگر، بمیرم از بشر
To draw out my angelwings and head.	تا بر آرم از ملائک پرّ و سر
But also from angelhood I must move forward,	وز ملک هم بایدم جستن ز جو
Everything perishes but God.	کلّ شیء هالک الا وجهه
Then again, after I sacrificed my angelhood,	بار دیگر از ملک قربان شوم
I will become what nobody ever imagined.	آنچه اندر وهم ناید، آن شوم
So reduce me to nothingness, to nothingness because all organs	پس عدم گردم، عدم چون ارغنون
Tell me: ‘To Him we shall return.’ ¹⁷²	گویدم که: إنا الیه راجعون

The interpretation of evolution that Rumi presents in this poem differs from Darwinian evolution: both Rumi and Charles Darwin (d. 1882) perceive the universe in terms of chains of evolution in which lower organisms develop into higher beings. But while Darwin believed that the universe had a purely natural cause and each specimen evolves to a new form, mystics such as Rumi believe that God is at the basis of existence and has created the world and everything in it so that he could see himself reflected in it.¹⁷³ According to the mystics, mankind’s purpose is to return to God by making a journey of progress. During his life, the

¹⁷¹ See article by A. Zarrīnkūb, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Evolution.

¹⁷² My translation is based on A.J. Arberry’s rendition in *Classical Persian Literature*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1994, p. 241. (Jalâl al-Din Rumi, *Mathnavi*, vol. 3, ed. M. Este’lâmi, Tehran: Zawwâr, 1372, p. 180, ll. 3903-3908).

¹⁷³ For the differences between Darwin’s and Rumi’s concept of evolution see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Soefisme: een levende traditie*, Amsterdam: Prometheus / Bert Bakker, 2015, pp. 144-45.

soul of the mystic has to travel from one realm to the other, until he has reached the highest realm possible, which is the realm of God.¹⁷⁴

In his letter to Gorbachev, Ayatollah Khomeini also uses this mystical evolutionary scheme, according to which humankind must make a journey of many stages to return to God. The ability of the individual to reach the highest spiritual level is central to Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview. This idea is also evident in his letter to Gorbachev in which he refers to the intrinsic urge to look for the highest spiritual point, for God, although some may not realize that it is God they are looking for. Then, after a person has found God "he may be annihilated in God."¹⁷⁵ The way Ayatollah Khomeini explains evolution in terms of knowledge and annihilation clearly fits into this mystical tradition. In the following part of the letter, he advises Gorbachev to read the works of mystical masters such as Ibn 'Arabi, Sohrevardi and Mollâ Sadrâ to learn the truth of Islam. This is further evidence that Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview was strongly intertwined with mystical ideas. He ends his letter by inviting some Russian scholars to come to Qom to "glimpse the depth of the delicate stages of gnosis which will be impossible for them to acquire without making such a journey."¹⁷⁶ The letter shows that Ayatollah Khomeini did not consider a study of Islamic sources such as the Koran, the *hadith* or Sharia texts sufficient. In his eyes, spiritual enlightenment was an additional requisite for forming a complete picture of God.

The orthodox clergy in Iran were outraged when they heard that Ayatollah Khomeini had advised the president of the Soviet Union to read the books of Sohrevardi and Mollâ Sadrâ to learn more on Islam. Shortly after his letter to Gorbachev, Ayatollah Khomeini received an open letter from a group called 'The Protectors of Jerusalem' which said:

Your Holiness...you have not referred Mr Gorbachev to the truth of the holy Qor'an, but have asked him to read [the works of] the condemned heretic Avicenna, the Sunni pantheist and arch-mystic Ibn al-Arabi, the works of Sohrevardi who was executed by the Muslims for his ideological deviations, and the writing of Mollah Sadra, who was exiled to the village of Kahak near Qom because of his intellectual deviations....Your Holiness's lectures at the Feiziye School of theology were cancelled for exactly the same reason. ...In view of all this, we fail to understand why you refer the gentleman to deviant philosophers and mystics for the study of Islam. Are there not sufficient

¹⁷⁴ See A. Zarrînkûb, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Evolution.

¹⁷⁵ A translation of this letter can be found on

www.ghadeer.org/english/imam/letter%20Imam/callto/callto2.html, accessed on June 12 2012.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

reasons in the Qor'an to prove the existence of God and to explain the principles and precepts of religion? Does it mean that the leaders of Islam are unable to explain the truth of the Qor'an without resorting to philosophy and mysticism? You know that both Greek philosophy and Indian mysticism existed long before the advent of either the Prophet Mohammad or Moses and Jesus. If philosophy and mysticism were sufficient to guide mankind, then was there any need for the Almighty to grace us with the mission of the prophets?¹⁷⁷

The disapproval of Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical affiliations is obvious in this letter. The main objection of the 'Protectors of Jerusalem', whom Baqer Moin defines as "Qom members of a fringe organisation", is that Ayatollah Khomeini supported persons who deviated from normative Islamic thought.¹⁷⁸ In their response, they use terms such as 'heretic' for Avicenna, 'Sunni pantheist' and 'arch-mystic' for Ibn 'Arabi and speak of the 'intellectual deviations' of Mollâ Sadrâ. As in the case of Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical readings on national television, they objected to Ayatollah Khomeini promoting unorthodox mystical ideas. For ages, the relationship between the orthodox and the mystics has been strained, because mystics' preference for personal and direct contact with God through experience, without any need for a traditional religious education or consulting Islamic theologians, was seen as a great threat to the power structures of the Islamic community. In addition, many mystics espoused the unity of existence (*towhid*) and therefore believed that each person was able to reach a spiritual state of perfection, a position that was severely condemned by the orthodox. The belief in the unity of existence was also seen as a threat to power structures, since it led mystics consider themselves superior, and even above the laws of God and man. In addition to these fears, there were numerous stories associating mystics with homosexual practices. The very close and personal bond between the mystic and his spiritual master, which often played out behind closed doors, had for ages led to suspicion of homosexual activity. Moreover many mystics did not marry. In general one can say that mysticism was long regarded as something mysterious and incontrollable that could threaten the power structure within the religious institutions and the country at large.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ This letter was written by a group called "The Protectors of Jerusalem" and was translated by B. Moin in *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, p. 275.

¹⁷⁸ See *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ R.P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, ed. 2009, pp. 135, 144-149, 179-183.

This orthodox aversion to mysticism is also clear in the letter the ‘Protectors of Jerusalem’ addressed to Ayatollah Khomeini. But the letter did not silence Ayatollah Khomeini: he responded a few weeks later, saying:

This old father of yours has suffered more from stupid reactionary mollahs than anyone else. When theology meant no interference in politics, stupidity became a virtue. If a clergyman was able, and aware of what was going on [in the world around him], they searched for a plot behind it. You were considered more pious if you walked in a clumsy way. Learning foreign languages was blasphemy; philosophy and mysticism were considered to be sin and infidelity. In the Feiziyyeh my young son Mostafa drank water from a jar. Since I was teaching philosophy, my son was considered to be religiously impure, so they washed the jar to purify it afterwards. Had this trend continued, I have no doubt the clergy and seminaries would have trodden the same path as the Christian Church did in the Middle Ages.¹⁸⁰

The correspondence above shows that Ayatollah Khomeini’s relations with the orthodox, including his colleagues in Qom, was bad from the beginning of his career because of his interest in philosophy and sufism. However Ayatollah Khomeini continued to impart his mystical doctrines. Traces of his spiritual convictions are evident in most of his books and lectures, and in the last years of his life he condemned the orthodox clergy more openly for their criticism of Islamic mysticism. His private letters to his son Ahmad, published by his grandson Hoseyn after his death in 1989, confirm the role mysticism and the search for spiritual perfection played in Ayatollah Khomeini’s life and reveal his strong aversion to hypocritical orthodox clerics.¹⁸¹ Let us now examine the extent to which Ayatollah Khomeini’s mystical leanings are reflected in his poetry.

¹⁸⁰ The letter was composed on February 22nd 1989 and published in *Resalat* on February 25 1989; translated by B. Moin in *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, ed. 2009, p. 276.

¹⁸¹ Some of these letters have been published by Ayatollah Khomeini’s grandson Hoseyn in 1995 under the title *Reunion with the Beloved: Imam Ayatollah Khomeini’s Letters to Hujjat al-Islām wal-Muslimin Hāj Sayyid Ahmad Ayatollah Khomeini* by the Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imām Khomeini’s Works, in Tehran.

2.4 Ayatollah Khomeini's Poetical Work

From the beginning of his *Divân* (collected works), it is obvious that Ayatollah Khomeini imitated classical Persian poems that were famous for their mystical content. Although there are few studies of his poems in western languages, a few articles and translations can be mentioned. The first English translation I know of is by Finn Thiesen, who translated eight of Ayatollah Khomeini's poems.¹⁸² William Hanaway gave a translation and interpretation of five mystical *ghazals* by Ayatollah Khomeini.¹⁸³ In 2005, and again in 2011, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab translated and analysed one of Ayatollah Khomeini's poems.¹⁸⁴ In 2007, Benedikt Reinert wrote a long article entitled "Ḥumainī im Spiegel seiner Gedichte", in which he analysed a large number of Ayatollah Khomeini's poems with the intention of placing him in the Persian intellectual and mystical tradition.¹⁸⁵

2.5 The Role of Poets and Poetry in Persian Society

It is not surprising that Ayatollah Khomeini composed poetry, considering the importance of poetry in Persian culture. But does writing poetry make him a poet? As Baqer Moin says, Ayatollah Khomeini called himself a *mâ'er*, a 'non-poet' on several occasions, and this is also the opinion of several Iranian intellectuals in the West.¹⁸⁶ One must however distinguish the long-standing Persianate definition of a poet from a Western one, and a contemporary Iranian one. Being a poet in Iran was a profession, and a role that was initially connected to the court and the aristocracy. In his famous *Qâbus-nâme* (1082/3) Key Kâvus defined the profession of poet as 'a branch of learning.' He made a sharp distinction between real poets and would-be poets, calling the former those who possessed 'technical skills and knowledge,' which the latter lacked. Nezâmi 'Aruzi (d. 1209), another classical literary theoretician, emphasized the social function of the poet as the establisher of a good reputation, not only for his patron but also for himself. Nezâmi stressed that a poet needed a good general education and under the guidance of a master had to learn both modern and classical poetical works by heart. Improvisation was seen as the greatest possible skill of a poet. To use J.T.P. de Bruijn's

¹⁸²F. Thiesen, "A Draught of Love...", pp. 211-227.

¹⁸³ W.L. Hanaway, "Five Mystical Ghazals," in *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 30, No ¾, pp. 273-276.

¹⁸⁴ A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Khomeini en de Wijnschenker," pp. 115-130; idem, "Khomeini the Poet Mystic," pp. 438-458.

¹⁸⁵ B. Reinert, "Ḥumainī im Spiegel seiner Gedichte," pp. 191-293.

¹⁸⁶ B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, ed. 2009, p. 272; it might be that Ayatollah Khomeini referred to various Koranic verses in which mention is made of the 'non-poetics of prophet Muhammad. See Koranic verses 21:5; 36:69; 37:36-37:37; 52:30;69:41.

words, the poet's main task was "to provide food for thought through wisdom formulated in poetry."¹⁸⁷ The poet had a strong political role as the adviser of his royal or aristocratic patron. He belonged to his inner circle and lived a similar high-standard life. Ayatollah Khomeini was not a poet, and did not have the role of a poet, according to this classical Persian definition, but fits more closely with the redefinition of the poet's role and education that emerged in the twentieth century.

To understand why a mystic, scholar, political activist and national leader – and one who did not consider himself "a poet" – would write poetry, and what the writing implies about his role in society, we will have to consider the evolving role of poetry in Persian-speaking societies.

Poetry has and does play a very important role in Persian society, at all levels from politicians and royalty to mystics and students. As Benedikt Reinert says, all educated young Iranians write poetry and Ayatollah Khomeini was not an exception.¹⁸⁸ Anyone who travels in Iran or knows about its culture will acknowledge the essential role of poetry in everyday life. It is one of the most popular art forms in Persian culture. Yarshater calls it "...the most significant artistic achievement of Persia".¹⁸⁹ Jan Rypka says that "love of poetry, be it active or passive, is evident and alive in Iran today as scarcely anywhere else in Europe"¹⁹⁰ Beginning from a young age, Iranian children in school must learn the poetry of great Persian poets such as Sa'di or Hâfez by heart.

Thanks to Western scholarship we have documents from the pre-Islamic period indicating that Iran had a strong poetic tradition that centred around the court.¹⁹¹ At that time poetry was not written but sung, by minstrels (*motreb*) who, in exchange for a reward or protection, sang lyrics for their patrons and the other members of the royal family.¹⁹² Poetry

¹⁸⁷ J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under *Shi'r* ii. In Persian.

¹⁸⁸ B. Reinert, "Hûmainî im Spiegel seiner Gedichte," p. 223.

¹⁸⁹ E. Yarshater, "Some Characteristics of Persian Poetry and Art," in *Studia Islamica*, No. 16, 1962, pp. 61-71.

¹⁹⁰ J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1968, p.80.

¹⁹¹ The oldest evidence of Iranian poetry that has been found are the Gathas documents. These religious poetic lines are said to have been written by Zarathustra, the prophet of the Zoroastrian faith. See J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Iran.

¹⁹² For an elaboration on Persian court poetry see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poetry; See also M. Boyce, "The Parthian Gōsān and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. ½, 1957, pp. 10-45. See also J.T.P. de Bruijn, "Het Lot van de Perzische Hofdichter," in *Dichter en Hof: Verkenningen in Veertien Culturen*, Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1986, pp. 149-166.

was a means for the ruling elite to promote and legitimize their rule. Poetry was thus inextricably linked to leadership. After the invasions of Iranian territories by the Muslim Arabs in the seventh century, Arabic became the language of science and politics. Many Persian authors and poets wrote in Arabic. Although Arabic dominated the literary scene for about three centuries, the works of many figures, such as Abu Nuvâs (d. 814) and Mohammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), were imbued with Persian culture.¹⁹³

Now that poetry was written down, a clear distinction was made between the minstrel and the poet. The first served as a sort of entertainer by composing music and singing songs, the latter, or at least the most high-ranking of the poets, was appointed for his thorough knowledge of diverse branches of knowledge. Years of study fitted him to advise his patron, in poetry, on diverse matters, and so the poet, with the patron's personal physician, was part of the inner circle at court.¹⁹⁴

The first written poetry in Persian appeared in the ninth century.¹⁹⁵ One of the reasons for the return to writing in Persian was that local Persian rulers, who governed under Abbasid suzerainty, could not understand Arabic.¹⁹⁶ These semi-independent rulers also used literature to legitimize their power and to connect their genealogy to the great pre-Islamic kings of the Sassanian dynasty (r. 224-651). This trend of promoting their pre-Islamic 'Iranian' identity, according to which all Iranian rulers descended from the 'king of kings,' was even applied by non-Persian dynasties who had Sassanian genealogies created for them.¹⁹⁷ The Ghaznavids (r. 975-1187), who were of Turkic origin but who cherished Persian culture, are an example.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ For poetry by Abu Nuvâs see *Abu Nuwas: A Genius of Poetry*, ed. Ph. F. Kennedy, Oxford: Oneworld, 2005. For Tabari's work see C.E. Bosworth in *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol. V (1999), Vol. XXXIII (1991), Vol. XXX., Albany: State University of New York Press.

¹⁹⁴ For the difference between the minstrel and the court poet see J.T.P. de Bruijn, "Het Lot van de Perzische Hofdichter," pp. 151-152; M. Boyce, "The Parthian Gōsān and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," pp. 10-45. See also J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poetry.

¹⁹⁵ This poem was written by the secretary Mohammad-e Vâsef at the order of his ruler Yaqob b. Leyth, who could not understand Arabic poems. See J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Iran.

¹⁹⁶ The Abbasid Dynasty was an Islamic caliphate that ruled large parts of the Middle-East and Spain from 750 till 1258. See J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poetry; See also G. Lazard, "The Rise of the New Persian Language," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 595-632.

¹⁹⁷ For an elaboration on the king tradition I refer to the book by J.T.P. de Bruijn, "Het Lot van de Perzische Hofdichter," pp. 151-152.

¹⁹⁸ For consultation see A. Ashraf, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Iranian Identity iii. Medieval Islamic Period.

The Persian poetical scene of the ninth century was thus strongly connected to politics and cultural identity.¹⁹⁹

Persian poets' role of glorifying the pre-Islamic past has survived in Iran in modern times. From the nineteenth century onwards, when nationalist ideas filtered into the country from the West, many Iranians concentrated on their country's pre-Islamic glories, blaming Islam and Arabs for Iran's backwardness.²⁰⁰ This nationalistic trend was also visible in literature. A group of intellectuals were very active in spreading Persian nationalism and emphasizing that all Iranian nationals, despite their diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds, shared a common Iranian identity that predated Islam. Among the best known of these intellectuals are Mirzâ Fath 'Alî Âkhunzâdeh (d. 1878), Mirzâ Âqâ Khân Kermânî (d. 1896), Jalâl al-Din Mirzâ (d. 1871), and later Ahmad Kasravi (d. 1946). In their view, the Persian language had to be 'purified' from foreign elements to be true to its pre-Islamic Iranian origin. Thus up until recent times, Persian poets were strongly connected to politics and cultural identity, even as poets and poetry became disconnected from the courts of royal patrons.²⁰¹

The new concept of the social position of the poet can be connected to the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and the crumbling and eventual end of the autocracy of the Qajar dynasty (r. 1785-1925), and with it the tradition of court patronage. Poets had to rely on other sources of income and began taking a stand in the political struggles of the day, and to write poetry that related much more closely to daily life outside the court. Many poets who had previously favoured the Qajar rulers now began to openly condemn their former patrons. They became advocates of the people's rights and critics of social injustice. Poets also became highly personal.²⁰² This emphasis on the personal, social, and politically-involved stance of the poet has continued to be the general image of the modern Iranian poet.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ For consultation see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Iran.

²⁰⁰ A. Ashraf, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Iranian Identity iv. 19th-20th Centuries.

²⁰¹ M. Kia, "Persian Nationalism and the Campaign for Language Purification," in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1998, pp. 9-36; M. A. Jazayeri, "Western Influence In Contemporary Persian: A General View," in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 29, 1966, pp. 79-96.

²⁰² J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under *Shā'ir* ii. In Persian; idem, *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J.T.P. de Bruijn, London: I.B. Tauris, 2009, chapter one, pp. 1-42

²⁰³ J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under *Shi'r* ii. In Persian.

Another field in which poetry has played an indispensable role is mysticism. From the tenth century, mystics have used poetry to communicate mystical doctrines or to express their personal mystical experiences. Poetry proved to be an effective way to explain complicated spiritual concepts such as union and separation or the various stages on the mystical path to initiates.²⁰⁴ Poets such as Amir Khosrow in India, Hakim Sanâ'i in Afghanistan, Farid al-Din 'Attâr in Iran and Rumi in present day Turkey wrote heavy volumes of poetry, explaining various aspects of Islamic mysticism. Poetry was also used in mystical rituals. As Leonard Lewisohn says in his article on *samâ'* practices among mystics, listening to mystical poetry accompanied by music and/or dance has become one of the obligatory (*wâjeb*) steps on the spiritual path towards God. The *samâ'* practice is a sort of meditation that the mystic uses to realize a certain spiritual state (*hâl*) in which he loses all consciousness of the self (*bi-khodi*). It brings the mystic closer to God and might eventually result in a state of ecstasy (*wajd*). Finally, in some cases the poem can also evoke visions. According to Lewisohn, a mystical poem can only be understood effectively in a *samâ'* setting, which means it is accompanied by music and possibly dance, because the metres of the poem and the rhythm of the music are designed to lead the practitioner to this state of ecstasy.²⁰⁵

In conclusion, one can agree that the role which poetry has played in the history of Iran has been of inimitable value throughout the course of Iranian history. It not only functioned as a form of identity that has been capable of connecting the people of Iran for ages, but in recent times it has also been an effective means to convey social and political messages. Lastly, poetry played and still plays an important role in the life of mystics as a means of spiritual communication.

2.6 Ayatollah Khomeini's Poetry

Not long after Ahmad Khomeini introduced one of his father's poems to the public by publishing one of his poems in the Iranian newspaper *Keyhân* of June 14th 1989, many other poems apparently came to light that were attributed to Ayatollah Khomeini.²⁰⁶ As the editor of Ayatollah Khomeini's poetry collection indicates, most of them were handed over by family or friends after his death, resulting in the publication of his complete collection of poetry

²⁰⁴ Ibid. See also A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Khomeini the Poet Mystic," p. 442.

²⁰⁵ Except for some branches of the Naqhsbandiyya order, almost all mystical orders know the practice of *samâ'*. See L. Lewisohn, "The Sacred Music of Islam: Sama' in the Persian Sufi Tradition," in *The British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 6, 1997, pp. 1-22.

²⁰⁶ The poem was published on page 16 of the editorial of *Keyhân* of June 14th 1989.

(*Divân*), under the title *Divân-e Emâm*. Ayatollah Khomeini's *Divân* contains a total of 1535 couplets, composed in two periods: before 1936, during his studies in Qom; and after 1979, when he returned to Iran from exile. His older poems are almost all dated, while the most recent work often lacks any date. His oeuvre embraces the main poetic forms to be found in the medieval Persian poetic tradition. Lyrical poems (*ghazals*) make up the major part of Ayatollah Khomeini's *Divân*, a total of 149 poems. The longest *ghazal* has ten couplets and the shortest four couplets.²⁰⁷ He has also composed 117 quatrains (*robâ'is*), two stanzaic poems (*mosammats*), 31 poetical 'fragments' (*qet'es*), one strophe poem (*tarji-band*) and three panegyric poems (*qasides*).²⁰⁸ Ayatollah Khomeini was deeply inspired by poets such as Hâfez (d. 1389) and Sanâ'i (d. 1131).

Many of the later poems were written for his daughter-in-law Fâteme Tabâtabâ'i, who was married to his son Ahmad and who lived in the same house as Ayatollah Khomeini, together with their children. Fâteme was a philosophy student, and often discussed her studies with Ayatollah Khomeini, who was an expert in this field. The discussions impelled Ayatollah Khomeini to write numerous pages on various mystical and philosophical subjects, which would later be published under the title *Râh-e 'Eshq* ('The Path of Love').²⁰⁹ Later, Fâteme also inspired Ayatollah Khomeini to write poems again. While his earlier poems deal more with religious matters, his later poems show strong mystical influences. They deal with subjects such as wine, eroticism, antinomianism, love and reason, spiritual poverty, veiling and death or union with the Beloved. Other themes, such as the war between Iran and Iraq, religious concepts, and politics, occur repeatedly in Ayatollah Khomeini's poems.²¹⁰ In what follows, I will analyse Ayatollah Khomeini's *qasides*, *robâ'is* and *ghazals* systematically in separate chapters.

²⁰⁷ The shortest *ghazal* can be found on page 84 of Ayatollah Khomeini's *Divân* and the longest one on page 190.

²⁰⁸ B. Reinert, "Ḥumainī im Spiegel seiner Gedichte," pp. 191-196.

²⁰⁹ The Persian book was published in Teheran by Tahiyah va mo'asseseh tanzim o nashar-e âsâr-e emâm Khomeini emâm Khomeini in 1989.

²¹⁰ B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, pp. 270-273.