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Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life

In 1982, a British sociologist wrote of his amazement to discover that a Lebanese Sufi shaykh's mystical insight often had to do with knowledge of his followers' sexual conduct (Gilsenan 116–120). In my own research among the Sufis of Egypt,¹ I found that a true shaykh's inner knowledge included not only this, but the spiritual meaning of the sexual act itself, a secret that is guarded by the shaykh from all but a few of his followers who are spiritually mature enough to accept it. Revelation of the secret to those who are not spiritually ready renders a person susceptible to divine wrath in this world and in the world to come. Far from being a separate dimension of life, sexuality is linked to mystical experience in a number of ways in the philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabi, which has exerted considerable influence on the perspective of contemporary Egyptian Sufis, and Sufi attitudes toward sexuality are distinct from those of other Muslims in some important aspects. This paper will explore the development of Sufi attitudes toward sexuality and its relationship with the spiritual life.

In the earliest phase of Sufism, that of the ascetics, celibacy was favored by many who believed marriage, family, and other social relationships would distract them from absolute devotion to God alone. The early Sufis denied themselves all physical comforts, reduced their worldly possessions to an absolute minimum, and deprived themselves of sleep in order to pray and recite the Qur'an at night. Credit for transforming Sufism into an ecstatic love mysticism is usually given to a woman, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, who lived in Iraq and died in 801. For her, God was the Beloved who so filled her heart that she had room for no other, not even the Prophet. She closed her shutters in springtime, lest the beauty of the flowers distract her from the beauty of her Beloved. She refused all offers of marriage, preferring to devote herself exclusively to God. In words that indicate the sublimation of sexual desire, she addresses her Lord: "Oh my Lord, the stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed, and kings have shut their doors, and every lover is alone with his beloved, and here I am alone with Thee" (Smith 1928, 22). In Sufi thought after Rabi'a, the theme of God as Beloved became standard.

Rabi'a is only one of a large number of women who participated in early Sufism. The majority of them were celibates and practiced extreme forms of

asceticism. By maintaining a celibate lifestyle, they rejected the guardianship of men and the requirement of obedience to men, as well as the burdens and responsibilities of being a wife and mother. Extreme abstinence from food also inhibits menstruation, and, under Islamic law, women are banned from prayer during menstruation. Fasting, then, becomes a tool for ensuring their constant access to the presence of God on a par with men (Elias 210–211).

But the archetypal Sufi was a man. Sufi ethics came to be known as *futuwwa*, “young manliness,” based on the word *fata*, meaning “young man,” literally a code of chivalry that demanded courage, self-denial, and heroic generosity. It is significant that the Sufi biographer, Fariduddin ‘Attar (d. 1220), listed Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya among the men, rather than among the women. He explains that it is not the outward form that counts, but the intention of the heart, and said, “When a woman becomes a ‘man’ in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman” (‘Attar 40). Although this “compliment” paid to Rabi’a implies the degradation of the female sex as a whole and suggests that true spirituality is normally found only among men, it also indicates that the sex of the body is not a barrier to the inspiration and grace of God.

Although celibacy was preferred by many early Sufis, men as well as women, this preference raised some undesirable comparisons with Christian monks and nuns, and implied a rejection of the Prophet’s *Sunna*, or exemplary model, as a married man. The Qur’an itself rejects monasticism as an invention of the Christians (57:27), and according to a *hadith*,² the Prophet declared that there is no monasticism in Islam. In one anecdote, on hearing that one of his followers had taken a vow of celibacy, the Prophet rebukes him: “So you have made up your mind to be one of the brethren of Satan! If you want to be a Christian monk, join them openly. If you are one of us, you must follow our *Sunna* (example); and our *Sunna* is married life” (Goldziher 122). And in another *hadith*: “Marriage is my *Sunna*, and whoever dislikes my *Sunna* dislikes me” (Ghazali 4:97). Marriage came to be regarded by many Muslims as a religious duty. Sufis were not unanimous on this issue, and we have two very interesting discussions on the topic in the literature that give us an idea of the debates on the subject that took place in Sufi circles. The first is by al-Hujwiri, who died about 1071, and whose treatise on Sufism, *Unveiling the Veiled*, is the earliest written in the Persian language. The second is by al-Ghazali (d. 1111), whose magnum opus, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, is part of the standard Sufi library in the Arab world.

For both men, the Sufi is assumed to be male, and the question at hand is whether marriage enhances the Sufi’s ability to devote himself to God or

constitutes an undesirable distraction. While admitting that marriage is permissible for all men and women, and even obligatory for those who are otherwise unable to abstain from illicit intercourse, al-Hujwiri favors celibacy, provided the Sufi is able to quell his sexual desires. He advocates hunger as an effective tool toward this end. In his discussion, sexual intercourse appears as a somewhat shameful though necessary means toward the goal of procreation. Although the Prophet married, says Hujwiri, the desire to emulate him should not lead the Sufi to seek worldly wealth or unlawful gain in order to please his wife, and he must not allow pleasures to preoccupy him. And, he comments, "In our time it is impossible for anyone to have a suitable wife, whose wants are not excessive and whose demands are not unreasonable. Therefore many persons have adopted celibacy and observe the prophetic *hadith*, 'the best of men in latter days will be those who are light of back,' that is, who have neither wife nor child. It is the unanimous opinion of the shaykhs of this sect that the best and most excellent Sufis are the celibates, if their hearts are uncontaminated and if their natures are not inclined to sins and lusts" (363). From the time of creation to the present day, he claims, all mischiefs, worldly and religious, have been caused by women (364). He himself is grateful to have been enabled to live a celibate life, and says, "Sufism was founded on celibacy; the introduction of marriage brought about a change. There is no flame of lust that cannot be extinguished by strenuous effort, because, whatever vice proceeds from yourself, you possess the instrument that will remove it: another is not necessary for that purpose" (364).

On the other hand, Ghazali, himself a married man, states that marriage is approved in the Qur'an, and is a characteristic of the prophets. He finds a preponderance of *hadiths* in favor of marriage. Whereas Hujwiri felt that marriage was not necessary to quell lust, Ghazali regards human sexuality as an overwhelming and potentially destructive force that must be contained within marriage. The Prophet encouraged Muslims to marry, for it averts the eyes from temptation and encourages chastity, and said, "whoever cannot, let him fast, for fasting is a form of castration" (4:98). But, says Ghazali, even fasting will not cause temptation to cease for most men, unless it is combined with bodily weakness and a deterioration of health (4:108). Such is the value given to chastity and the difficulty of maintaining it outside marriage that "he who marries preserves half his religion" (4:99). The Prophet is quoted as saying, "If someone comes to you with whose religion and trustworthiness you are pleased, get him married. If you do not, there will be discord and great corruption in the earth" (4:98). Ghazali quotes al-Junayd (d. 910), the celebrated mystic of Baghdad, as saying, "I need sex just as I need food" (4:109). Muhammad's cousin, Ibn 'Abbas, is quoted as saying, "The

asceticism of the ascetic is incomplete until he marries," because only in marriage will he be able to overcome his passion and devote himself to God. Therefore it is said that a single prostration in prayer from a married man is better than seventy prostrations from a bachelor. A saying of another Companion implies that the single state is shameful: "If I had only ten more days to live I would want to marry, so as not to meet God as a bachelor" (4:99, 101). The pleasure that comes from sexual intercourse is a foretaste of the pleasures of Paradise, where, according to the Qur'an, chaste virgins will be at the service of the believers; sexual pleasure here on earth induces men to serve God more in order to obtain those pleasures (4:108). Although marriage has its pitfalls, it also has a number of benefits, including procreation, a legitimate release for sexual passions, the revival of the soul after engaging in the rigors of the spiritual life, having someone to manage the household, and exercising the soul by having the care of a family, fulfilling one's obligations toward one's wives, having patience with their morals, putting up with their abuse, hastening to correct them, guiding them in the way of religion, striving to earn legitimate wages on their behalf, and undertaking the education and discipline of children (4:103–114). To endure suffering from wives and children is equal to fighting the jihad in the path of God (4:116). In all cases, for Ghazali the traveler on the path of God is inevitably a man, and women constitute either a help or a hindrance to the spiritual life of men.

Although Sufi literature is directed toward a male audience in a context where the superiority of men over women is assumed to be the natural order, some women nonetheless did participate in the Sufi orders in medieval Islam. There were Sufi teachers in Mamluke and Ottoman times that catered to women, and some shaykhs admitted women into their orders, although this admittance and the participation of women in *dhikr*, the distinctive Sufi ritual of chanting the names of God, with special breath control and movement, were denounced by other Sufis (Winter 131; 'Abd al-Raziq 28–32). Rarely, a woman might even become a shaykha herself, such as Zaynab Fatima bint 'Abbas, shaykha of the women's retreat house of the Baghdadi Sufi order in Cairo, who was described by the historian Maqrizi as "a religious scholar of great knowledge, an ascetic content with little, a worshipper and a preacher, earnest in good works and exhortation" ('Abd al-Raziq 28). According to Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, there were women shaykhas and scholars of the Law, most of them widows or divorcees, who lived in extreme abstinence and worship in Sufi hospices ('Abd al-Raziq 31). It is significant that at this later period only women who had already completed their duty of marriage were free to devote themselves to the mystical life. The Maghribi writer Ibn al-Hajj, who opposed popular religion in general, criticized the Sufi women for raising their voices during the *dhikr*, for part

of the expected modesty of women was that no one should hear their voices ('Abd al-Raziq 32).

But if women were intended to be neither seen nor heard, they were nonetheless at least implicitly the subject of a great deal of Sufi poetry which employed romantic love and sexual metaphor to express the ineffable mystical experience. Among the Sufis poetry is part of normal discourse, and it is impossible to read Sufi texts or sit among the Sufis even today without encountering a good deal of poetry, whether classical, colloquial or spontaneously composed under inspiration. However, the use of metaphors of romantic love and sexuality in Sufi poetry aroused some controversy. Many religious scholars inveighed against the use of explicit romantic descriptions that were alleged metaphors for the mystical experience, and said that listening to a description of a beautiful object that is the source of evil is as forbidden as looking at it or touching it (Hujwiri 398).

Early Sufis were wary of excessive indulgence in sexual intercourse even within marriage, and emphasized that modesty is part of faith. Annemarie Schimmel points out that disgust with the world leads naturally to hatred for women, since through woman this world is renewed and continued. The *nafs*, the lower self which must be subdued in order to free the spirit to worship God, is feminine in the Arabic, as is *dunya*, the lower world. These become personified in images of an ugly old crone or a prostitute who entices man and then leaves him in his misery (Schimmel 124). Women are regarded as impure, for menstrual blood and postpartum blood prevent both prayer and sexual union, and sexual intercourse requires major ablution, an entire bath, for purification.

Sexual intercourse in most Islamic discourse is simply the satisfaction of a physical drive and a means to produce offspring. The Qur'an tells Muslim men that women are their fields, and they may go in to their fields whenever they please (2:223). The sexual rights of husbands are emphasized in Islamic literature: if a woman refuses her husband's advances, the angels curse her until morning. She must yield to his desires, even if on the back of a camel (Bukhari, Book 67, Ch. 85). Wives are simply functional objects of the untamed lust of men. As one *hadith* says rather crudely: "If a woman approaches you, she comes in the form of Satan. If any one of you sees a woman that pleases him, let him go to his wife; with her it will be as with the other" (Ghazali 4:110).

The great mystical philosopher Ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240), however, goes beyond this merely functional view of sexuality to discover mystical significance in the sexual act itself. In his philosophy, the Father Heaven–Mother Earth dualism, which some believe to be absent in the monotheistic religions (Parrinder 151), is revived. Although scholars have been aware of

at least some of Ibn al-'Arabi's statements affirming sexuality and women and employing "para-sexual imagery" (Schimmel 129–30, Elias 217, Rahman 146), a full exposition of his doctrines regarding sexuality has not been undertaken. Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophy holds to the essential unity of all being; all existing things emerged from the "marriage" of the divine spirit, which is male, with Nature, which is female—or, in other passages, from the combination of the divine names with the elemental forms. Human marriage reflects this cosmic marriage, and it is by virtue of this correspondence that human sexuality derives its sacredness. In fact, says Ibn al-'Arabi, Islamic Law is the best law in marriage because it alone has set the number of wives a man may marry at four, which perfectly reflects the marriage of the divine Spirit with the four elements to produce its "children," all the material existents (1966a, 1:138). Therefore, far from being the mere satisfaction of physical appetites, sexual union offers the gnostic the possibility of true mystical insight.

In his major work, *The Meccan Revelations*, Ibn al-'Arabi states, "I used to hate women and sex at the start of my entry into this path." He continued this way for eighteen years, until he came to contemplate the *hadith* in which Muhammad says, "Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours: women, perfume, and prayer." He noted that Muhammad's love for women did not spring from his own nature, but from God who had made them beloved to him. Ibn al-'Arabi writes, "I feared God's wrath, for I hated what God had made beloved to his Prophet." He asked God to remove this hatred from his heart, and his prayer was answered. Indeed, he says, God "made me the most compassionate of men with them, and the most earnest to maintain their rights, because I do this out of inner vision, from God making them beloved to me, not a natural love." He states, "Whoever loves women as Muhammad did, loves God" (1966a, 4:84). In his later work, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, he contemplates a particular wisdom contained in the divine "word" expressed in each of the prophets. His chapter on the Muhammadan word is a reflection on this *hadith* concerning the Prophet's love for women, perfume, and prayer (1966b, 1:214–226; 1980, 71–81).

In Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophy, God's Names are manifested in creation, which then functions as a mirror in which God sees himself. While all of creation manifests the Names of God, the Perfect Man, identified with the eternal Muhammadan reality, a spiritual essence that is the source of all prophethood, contains the totality of these names. All other things in creation contain only certain of the divine Names, but taken together, the cosmos, like the Perfect Man, reflects their totality. The Perfect Man is therefore the microcosm—or, one could say, the cosmos is a "macrohomo." The Qur'an states that God molded Adam out of clay and breathed into him

of his spirit (32:9). God's longing for man is none other than a longing for his own self, this spirit that is in man, for man is created in his external aspect and is divine in his internal aspect. Therefore *hadith* says that God made man in his own image. Just as man was made in the image of God, woman was made in the image of man (for Qur'an exegetes learned from the Jews the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib). Woman is from man as man is from God, and just as God longs for man because the whole is drawn toward its part, so does man long for woman, "as something yearns for itself, while she feels longing for him as one longs for that place to which one belongs" (1980, 274). Furthermore, "love arises only for that from which one has one's being," which for man is God. That is why Muhammad said that God made women beloved to him. "His love is for his Lord in Whose image he is, this being so even as regards his love for his wife, since he loves her through God's love for him, after the divine manner." When a man loves a woman, he desires sexual union with her, because there is "no greater union than that between the sexes" (1980, 274). The goal of the Sufi is to be annihilated in God, in order to achieve union with him. In sexual intercourse, the man is annihilated in the woman, says Ibn al-'Arabi, but this is in fact a type of annihilation in God. The ritual washing that is required after intercourse is a total purification of his desire, for God is jealous that man should desire any but him. This purification by ritual ablution enables man once again to behold God in the woman (1980, 274). Yet, he says in *The Meccan Revelations*, if a gnostic's passion is divine and not carnal—that is, if his attachment is to God and not to a temporal being—then no purification is needed (1966a, 1:365). It is not the act which is polluting, but carnal desire, or "seeing oneself" instead of God.

Since the divine essence is transcendent and inaccessible, man can only see God as he is reflected in creation, and for man there is no better way to contemplate God than in woman:

When man contemplates God in woman he witnesses him in a receptive mode [because woman was created from man], while when he contemplates [God] in himself, from the perspective that woman appeared from him, he beholds him in an active mode. When, however, he contemplates God in himself, without any regard to what has come from him, his witness is in the receptive mode, without any intermediary. So his contemplation of God in woman is the most complete and perfect, because in this way he contemplates God in both the active and receptive modes, whereas by contemplating God only in himself, he beholds him particularly in a receptive mode. Because of this the Prophet loved women, because of the perfection of his witness of God in them (1966b, 1:217).

Because God contains the totality of all the meanings of the universe, and indeed is the place where opposites are conjoined, he is both active/male and receptive/female. Therefore it is insufficient for man to contemplate himself by himself to understand God; the best and most perfect kind of contemplation of God is in woman. Sexual union imitates God's relationship with man, "the man yearning for his Lord Who is his origin, as woman yearns for man. His Lord made women dear to him, just as God loves that which is in His own image" (1980, 274). What distinguishes the sexual act of the gnostic from that of ordinary men is that the gnostic perceives the spirit of God in woman, and by joining himself to her becomes aware of his own oneness with God and of God in his active and receptive aspects. Indeed, if one engages in sexual intercourse in the realization of God in woman, the act itself is a means for the mystic's perfection. This is exactly the opposite of the intercourse of the lustful man for whom woman is merely a body without a spirit. Elsewhere Ibn al-'Arabi explicitly states that the *quthb*, the Axis, the highest in the hierarchy of saints, engages often in sexual intercourse and loves women:

He knows from the divine manifestations in sexual union what drives him to seek it and embrace it, for his worship cannot achieve for him or for any other gnostic more than can be attained by sexual union. . . . He desires sexual union not for the sake of procreation, but only for pleasure. The consummation of sexual intercourse is itself commended in the Law . . . , and the sexual act of the one in this spiritual station is like the sexual union of the people of Paradise, only for the sake of pleasure, for it is the greatest manifestation which has been hidden from men and jinn, except for those servants whom God has specially chosen for it. Likewise, the intercourse of animals is purely for pleasure. Many gnostics have failed to grasp this truth, for it is one of the secrets of which only a few of the "people of providence" (*ahl al-'inaya*) understand. If it did not have complete nobility indicating the weakness appropriate to servanthood, it would not have such an overwhelming pleasure which causes a person to pass away from his own strength and pretensions.³ It is a pleasurable subjugation, although subjugation precludes pleasure in the one who is subjugated, because the pleasure in subjugation belongs to the one who is subjugating, not the one who is subjugated, except in this act in particular. This nobility has escaped people, who have made it an animalistic passion from which they refrain—although they have called it by the most noble of names when they say it is animalistic, that is, a characteristic of animals/living beings, and what is more noble than life? So what they have deemed ugly with regard to themselves is the very thing that is praiseworthy for the perfect gnostic (1966a, 2:573–574).

It is not surprising to see that another characteristic of the *quthb*, according to Ibn al-'Arabi, is love of beauty in all its forms, for they all express the absolute beauty of the divine. It is this very idea that has led some Sufis to seek

out the company which best reflects the divine beauty, a beautiful girl or a handsome youth. Any discussion of sexuality in Islam would have to take into account the prevalence of homosexual tendencies, whether in poetic description or actual practice. Such was the danger of temptation from the sight of "the beardless" that some scholars said that the rules that guarantee the segregation of women from men should also be applied to handsome youths: they should not be allowed to sit with men at the public bath or dance with them, because the logic of seclusion and segregation has to do with sexual temptation, not gender (Ibn Taymiyya 42; Hujwiri 416). Sufi love of the beardless youth is reflected in a *hadith* which says, "I saw my Lord as a young man, with his cap awry" (Schimmel 131).

According to Ibn al-'Arabi, a man's greatest pleasure will be in that whose form corresponds to him, just as God reserves his greatest love and pleasure for man, who was created in his image. The greatest pleasure is to be found in love of a girl or a youth, because they correspond to him entirely, being in his image. Only in something that corresponds to him in this precise way can he experience annihilation. The benefit of keeping company with beardless youths is that they are newer, of more recent origin in their Lord, than the older man, "and whatever is closer to its creation is a better indication, more sacred, and more abundantly the occasion of mercy than the older man. . . . In keeping their company one remembers their newness as distinct from God's existence which is from the beginning." He unconvincingly argues that keeping company with the young is justified by the Qur'an when it blames those who do not accept a new (*muhdath*) reminder from God (21:2, 26:5). Since the gnostic looks at youths this way, as a reminder of God, keeping their company does no harm to him, although for the disciples and ordinary Sufis, it is prohibited (1966a, 2:189-190).

Likewise, says Ibn al-'Arabi, the gnostic's desire for women is the desire of the whole for its part as well as the desire and love of the older for the younger. Furthermore, the gnostic is motivated by compassion to keep the company of women, just as the Prophet Muhammad was motivated by compassion to marry many women, since he had seen that they constitute the greater part of the inhabitants of hellfire (see Smith and Haddad). Ibn al-'Arabi does not explain how this company benefits women, but it is commonly believed, following the teaching of a *hadith* from the authoritative collection of "sound" *hadiths* by Muslim, that in the afterlife a person will be with the one he loves. By securing a woman's love, the Prophet or gnostic actually guarantees her salvation, for her love for him will be counted as love for God and will save her; she will be with him in Paradise. In this way, keeping the company of women serves them as well as the man. Ibn al-'Arabi does not deny that men are superior to women, and devotes an entire section

to an analysis of the “rank” that the Qur’an says men have over women (1966a, 3:87–88). Nonetheless, he says, “whoever knows the value and secret of women does not abstain from loving them. Rather, loving them is part of the perfection of the gnostics, and it is a prophetic inheritance and a divine love (1966a, 2:190).”

One should keep company with beardless youths or women only for the sake of God. If it is done without this goal, the person suffers. In fact, he says:

The disciple should not take up the company of women until he himself becomes a woman. If he becomes female and attaches to the lower world and sees how the higher world loves it, and sees himself in every spiritual condition and moment in perpetual sexual union as a female (*mankuhan da’iman*, i.e., assuming the receptive role in an unceasing act of coition) and does not see himself in his spiritual insight as male first, but purely female, and he becomes pregnant from that marriage and gives birth—then he may keep company with women and incline toward them, and love for them will not harm him. As for the gnostics’ keeping company with women, [permission to do so] is absolute, because they see the absolute, holy, divine hand in their giving and taking. Everyone knows his own spiritual condition (1966a, 2:191–192).

It is only after achieving perfect receptivity in relation to God that one is able properly to assume the role of activity/masculinity implied in a right relationship to women. Ibn al-‘Arabi also describes the disciples as “brides of the Absolute Reality,” and for their shaykh they are “like the one who combs the bride’s hair and adorns her (1966a, 2:365).” The Sufi is female in his relation to God, but he is active, like God, in his relation to woman, for man is to woman as God is to man.

As we have seen, the philosophy of Ibn al-‘Arabi allows that the very things that must be prohibited to the masses may be of the greatest benefit to the perfected gnostic. Ibn al-‘Arabi even states that there are some who have been annihilated from their sins and are under God’s protection, even if they appear to do something that is contrary to Islamic Law. God has said to them, “Do what you please, I have forgiven you.” For them, nothing is prohibited (1966a, 2:512).⁴

Indeed, mystical insight sometimes constitutes a reversal of things as they apparently are. Conventional wisdom is that modesty or shame (*hiya*) is part of faith. But the famous Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273) retorted, “Shame hinders you from true faith,” because it inhibits people from willingly sacrificing reputation and worldly interests in the way of God (Schimmel 122). Among some Sufis, it became the highest virtue to be seen doing reprehensible things, for in this way men would be repulsed, and one’s service to God would be for the sake of God alone. Many Sufi sayings are para-

doxes, even on the moral plane, and in mysticism symbols turn logic inside out. Zulaykha, the woman who tried to seduce Joseph, becomes a symbol not of wanton woman but a model of extravagant love, the love of the Sufi, just as wine becomes a symbol not of sinful indulgence but of the intoxicating presence of God. The Sufis are by definition those who hold to the superiority of hidden truths and hidden virtues over external meanings, status, and religious ostentation. Thus for the ordinary Muslim, when a man and a woman are alone together, Satan is the third party, and the mixing of men and women brings corruption. For the spiritual man, the bringing together of men and women may yield spiritual fruits unobtainable even through acts of worship.

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Notes

1. In 1987–88 I did research under the auspices of a Fulbright grant. I continued my research a second year on my own resources. The results of my research will be published in a book under preparation, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*.
2. A *hadith* is a narrative concerning the sayings or deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.
3. The word “causing him to pass away” is identical to causing him to become annihilated, to attain *fana*, the Sufi goal. The overwhelming pleasure to be found in sexual intercourse in which the gnostic perceives the divine in woman is a type of actual annihilation in God, for both remove him from any awareness of his own self.
4. This point of view is very reminiscent of viewpoints attributed by Irenaeus to the Gnostic Valentinians, (*Adv. haer.* 1.6.2. and 3). This insight was provided by my colleague in the Program for the Study of Religion at the University of Illinois, William Schoedel.

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