

this reciprocal loving can one truly feel what submission means, but also what divine might means. The Sufi quest of annihilation of the human self in the divine self is thus conceived by Rabi'a as the annihilation of human love in the perfect divine love.

I have loved you with two loves
a selfish love and love that is
worthy of You.

As for the selfish love, I occupy
myself
therein with remembrance of
You to the exclusion of all
others

As for that which is worthy of
You

therein You raise the veil that I
may see You

Yet there is no praise to me in
this or that

Because all praise is with You.
(Nurbaksh 74)

Thus, unlike another major Sufi of the time, al-Hallaj, who, in the moment of self-annihilation with God's essence, exclaimed: "I am with Truth!" a phrase that horrified ordinary Muslims and led to his punishment by death for espousing *shirk* (idolatry), Rabi'a, aware of the power of spiritual submission, humbly created a distance between her self and the divine self. So even though the self-annihilation was the final goal, Rabi'a and her followers consciously fell short of achieving it, preferring instead a continuous yearning that could never come to an end. A late ninth-century Sufi woman, Umm Ayman, explains:

Since my ultimate return is to
You, how should I not always
aspire to be with You? As I never
saw any good from other than
You, how should I not love You?
Since it is you who have set year-
ning with me, How should I not
yearn for You. (Nurbaksh 90)

The process, then, is never to be completed, even though its aim is clearly defined. But achieving the aim in explicit terms would mean repeat-

ing al-Hallaj's trap of self-glorification and overcoming the necessary submission. Without spiritual submission there is no spiritual strength. Without spiritual strength, there is no awareness of God's glory. Thus, Rabi'a and her followers consciously created a meditative paradox, so as to insure that the tension between power and weakness, between submission and excellence, never subside and so did not cause self-destruction before the deserved self-annihilation. So whether wives, mothers, or ascetics, Sufi women opted to nurture spiritual strength with submissiveness, and submissiveness with strength. A Sufi woman of the late nine century aptly illustrated the reasons for keeping the tension alive:

Do not wonder at those [men]
slain

In the dust at the Beloved's door
Marvel rather at those [women]
who can survive
with their soul intact when open-
ing the door.

(Nurbaksh 116)

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LYN LIFSHIN

When I Still Rode Horses

I couldn't see I
was fat and wouldn't
be asked to dance.
By the time leaves
went blood, before
frost bloomed in
the grey barnwood,
doors, and the horses'
breath on skin
warmed like breath
of another body
too close not to be
part of my own. I
felt blood pulse
before I felt my
own juice spilling
onto pale cotton,
or could imagine
straddling a shape
like and not like
my own. It was as
if something in
me was pressed so
into me I could
feel the Morse
code warning,
"escape," was
sucked into some
thing bigger than
I was by flesh that
like my mother's
belly was a scout
sent out ahead,
letting me know

Lyn Lifshin's poetry appears earlier in this volume.