



# The EROTIC SPIRIT

A Poetic Celebration of  
Sensuality, Love, and Longing

COMPILED BY CARRIE GROSSMAN

The sacred erotic spirit is celebrated in every culture. From the Tantric Buddhist texts of India to Taoist love manuals to the Gnostic Gospels, the erotic spirit has been expressed in inventiveness, in constant discovery, and in the play of ceremonial devotion. In honor of the sensual, *Common Ground* is pleased to share this small selection of amorous poetry to ignite your desire and open your heart.

Her perfect naked breast  
upon my breast  
her lips between my lips,

I lay in perfect bliss  
with lovely Antigone,  
nothing caught between us.

I will not tell the rest.  
Only the lamp bore witness.

—MARCUS ARGENTARIUS (CA. 60 BCE)

Xanthippe, singing at her lyre,  
with whispering eyes  
sets my soul on fire.

But when? Where? How?  
Everything's uncertain.  
Except that my soul is burning.

—PHILODEMOS (FL. 75–35 BCE)

### **“Song”**

Winter skies are cold and low,  
with harsh winds and freezing sleet.

But when we make love beneath our quilt,  
We make three summer months of heat.

—TZU YEH (4TH CENTURY)

My black hair tangled  
as my own tangled thoughts,  
I lie here alone,  
dreaming of one who has gone,  
who stroked my hair till it shone.

—IZUMI SHIKIBU (970–1030)

### **“Blue Water”**

He drifts on blue water  
under a clear moon,  
picking white lilies on South Lake.

Every lotus blossom  
speaks of love  
until his heart will break.

—LI PO (701–762)

Sometimes, everywhere I look,  
O my love, I see your radiant face.  
With you ever present,  
how could I close my eyes to anything?

—KABIR (1398–1448)

### **“Song of the Dream Garden”**

Pillowed on your thighs in a dream garden,  
little flower with its perfumed stamen,  
singing, sipping from the stream of you—  
sunset, moonlight—our song continues.

—IKKYU SOJUN (1394–1481)

Late evening finally comes:  
I unlatch the door  
and quietly await  
the one  
who greets me in my dreams.

—OTOMO NO YAKAMOCHI (718–785)

Having wet me with love,  
why did you leave?  
You abandoned your unwavering consort,  
having ignited her lamp wick;  
she's like a pleasure boat  
set out to drift on an ocean of craving.  
Either way Mira's dead—  
unless you return.

—MIRABAI (1498–1550)  
TRANS. BY ANDREW SCHELLING

***“Busy in the Spring”***

Bright moonlight shines through the trees.  
In a rich brocade, the flowers bloom.

How can I not think of you—  
alone, lonely, working at my loom.

—TZU YEH (4TH CENTURY)

Late evening finally comes:  
I unlatch the door  
and quietly await  
the one  
who greets me in my dreams.

—OTOMO NO YAKAMOCHI (718–785)

Is that the same moon?  
Is this the same old springtime,  
the same ancient spring?  
And is this not my body,  
the same body you once knew?

—ARIWARA NO NARIHIRA (825–880)

***“I Am He That Aches with Love”***

I am he that aches with amorous love;  
Does the earth gravitate? does not all  
matter, aching, attract  
all matter?  
So the body of me to all I meet or know.

—WALT WHITMAN (1819–1892)

I long for him most  
during those long moonless nights.  
I lie awake, hot,  
the growing fires of passion  
bursting, blazing in my heart.

—ONO NO KOMACHI  
(FL. MID-9TH CENTURY)

***“She”***

Give me all the kisses of your mouth.  
Your love is better than wine.

Your body oils are fragrant,  
your name pours from my tongue.  
That is why I adore you.

—THE SONG OF SONGS  
(CA. 3RD CENTURY BCE)



Give up erotic games, Kabir,  
let longing flood your heart.  
Only through tears of longing  
can you glimpse the face of the  
beloved.

—KABIR (1398–1448)

As if to lift my babe-in-arms,  
my brazen lover touched my breast  
with just a fingertip.

—BIHARI (1595–1664)

Eros seizes and shakes my very soul  
like the wind on the mountain  
shaking ancient oaks.

—SAPPHO (6TH CENTURY BCE)

I long for him most  
during those long moonless nights.  
I lie awake, hot,  
the growing fires of passion  
bursting, blazing in my heart.

—ONO NO KOMACHI  
(FL. MID-9TH CENTURY)

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