



passionate hearts

THE POETRY OF SEXUAL LOVE

edited by WENDY MALTZ

preface by MOLLY PEACOCK

foreword by BARRY MCCARTHY

**I**n her search for positive, healthy sexual images to help her in educating couples, renowned therapist and author Wendy Maltz sought out “poems that inspire and celebrate healthy sexual intimacy; poems in which heart connection is at the core of the sexual experience.”

The result is a remarkable anthology of intimate, sensually explicit poems, representing new voices as well as revered contemporary poets. Culled from classic works of poetry, literary and erotica journals, and unpublished poetry, *Passionate Hearts* celebrates the joys of sexual connections and expression throughout the life of a relationship, from early courtship to mature love. These poems awaken desire and reveal the mysterious power and beauty of sexual sharing.

# **PASSIONATE HEARTS**

---

# PASSIONATE HEARTS

---

*the poetry of  
sexual love*

AN ANTHOLOGY  
COMPILED AND EDITED BY  
WENDY MALTZ



NEW WORLD LIBRARY  
NOVATO, CALIFORNIA



New World Library  
14 Pamaron Way  
Novato, CA 94949

Copyright © 1996 Wendy Maltz

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review; nor may any part of this book be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or other, without written permission from the publisher.

Cover and text design: Aaron Kenedi  
Cover photograph: Paul Dahlquist  
Editorial: Becky Benenate

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Passionate hearts : the poetry of sexual love : an anthology / compiled and edited by Wendy Maltz. — 10th anniversary ed.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-57731-567-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-57731-567-7

1. Erotic poetry. 2. Love poetry. I. Maltz, Wendy.

PN6110.E65P37 2007

808.81'93538—dc22

20060337

ISBN-10: 1-57731-567-7

ISBN-13: 978-1-57731-567-4

First printing, December 1996

First printing of tenth-anniversary edition, January 2007

Printed in Canada on acid-free partially recycled paper



New World Library is a proud member of the Green Press Initiative.

Distributed by Publishers Group West

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# CONTENTS

---

FOREWORD *by barry mccarthy, phd*

PREFACE *by molly peacock*

INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER ONE

### *tender awakenings*

THE TREES THAT CHANGE OUR LIVES *gary soto*

SHARING *alan yount*

SPRING STORM *johanna rayl*

THE RIVER *patti tana*

PURPLE IS THE COLOR OF THE LONGING *david steinberg*

TANGO'D LOVE *j. b. bernstein*

"WITH YOU I BEGIN . . ." *david steinberg*

SHE TEACHES HIM TO REACH OUT *martha elizabeth*

I HAVE TOUCHED *patti tana*

DESIRE *connemara wadsworth*

FIRST NIGHT *julia h. ackerman*

REMEMBERING *stephen j. lyons*

## CHAPTER TWO

### *passionate pleasures*

POEM FOR R. *kim ly bui-burton*

SNOW CLIMBERS *steve wiesinger*

TRANSFORMATION *adria klinger*

"I LIKE MY BODY WHEN IT IS WITH YOUR . . ." *e. e. cummings*

LATE AFTERNOON *molly fisk*

"HALF-SLEEPING . . ." *jane hirshfield*

MOONBURN *laura h. kennedy*

MORNING LOVE SONG *marge piercy*

"FORTUNATELY THE SKINS . . ." *judy grahn*

MARVELOUS BEAST *patti tana*

UNTITLED I *laura h. kennedy*

LOVERS' DUET *wendy lee*

LEARNING TO LAUGH *allison joseph*

AUBADE *kate c. richardson*

"GOOD GOD, WHAT A NIGHT THAT WAS . . ." *petronius arbiter*

THE MORNING AFTER *johari m. rashad*

LOVE POEM *e. k. caldwell*

AN AUBADE *timothy steele*

ALONE IN YOUR HOUSE *kim addonizio*

WOMAN BATHING *raymond carver*

LAST GODS *galway kinnell*

THE IMAGE WAS OF ME FLOWING THROUGH YOU *david steinberg*

LOOK AT ME *kim ly bui-burton*

MY GOD, WHY ARE YOU CRYING? *molly peacock*

MIDNIGHT *alison kolodinsky*

SEX HAS A WAY *wendy lee*

DESIRE *kim ports*

ALL DAY AT WORK *deborah abbott*

GIVING THANKS *anne k. smith*

WANTING YOU *terra hunter*

CHAPTER THREE

*varied dances*

IMPLICATIONS OF ONE PLUS ONE *marge piercy*  
WITH THANKS TO EDDIE SHAW *janet lowe*  
FLIGHT FROM THE MARRIAGE BED *lisa m. carbone*  
HER BACK TO ME *ed stever*  
THE PURR *molly peacock*  
MUSIC *natasha josefowitz*  
WET BODIES *franz douskey*  
IN BED THIS MORNING *teresa blagg*  
TOUCHING YOU UNDER WATER *stephen j. lyons*  
“DRUNK AS DRUNK ON TURPENTINE . . .” *pablo neruda*  
LOVING ALONG WESTERN RIVERS *stephen j. lyons*  
COMPLICATED SHADOWS *stephen corey*  
THE MUSIC LIKE WATER *jane hirshfield*  
MY LOVE IS LIKE A LILY *kim ly bui-burton*  
LULLABY *molly peacock*  
THE BLOSSOM *thomas r. smith*  
NEW MOTHER *sharon olds*  
MILKFLOWERS *robert wrigley*  
BALANCE *james harris*  
AFTER MAKING LOVE WE HEAR FOOTSTEPS *galway kinnell*  
ANNIVERSARY *gary metras*  
DESCANT *jane mayes*  
DOG DAYS AND DELTA NIGHTS *franz douskey*  
IT ARRIVES SUDDENLY AND CARRIES US OFF AS USUAL *marge piercy*  
THE THIEF *dorianne laux*  
DOLCE *kennette wilkes*  
NO *patti tana*  
“SLOWLY, SLOWLY . . .” *davidsteinberg*  
THUNDER STORM *george keithley*  
LITTLE INVITATION IN A HUSHED VOICE *tess gallagher*

CHAPTER FOUR

*deeper intimacies*

THE MYSTERY *sara teasdale*  
TO DRINK *jane hirshfield*  
RED RIVER *molly fisk*  
THE RETURN *molly peacock*  
KEYS *barbara j. garshman*  
A NEED FOR ARMOR *eileen stratidakis*  
“HE KNEELS ON THE RUMPLED BED . . .” *gail morse*  
WAKING UP TWICE *james clark anderson*  
THE SURGE *molly peacock*  
THE PLEASURE OF FEELING INSIDE YOUR BODY *rochelle lynn holt*  
SEA INSIDE THE SEA *tess gallagher*  
PALMS *june sylvester*  
PLEASURE *allison joseph*  
FAR IN *rachel loden*  
ENVOI: WAKING AFTER SNOW *david baker*  
OLD MOON WITH HER YOUTH IN HER ARMS *gale swiontkowski*  
DEAD STILL *andrei voznesensky*

YOU TOUCH ME *andrena zawinski*

MANON REASSURES HER LOVER *martha elizabeth*

---

YOU BRING ME BACK *patti tana*

ENCOUNTER *rick fournier*

BEDSIDE *clive matson*

THE KNOWING *sharon olds*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *graceful transformations*

WATERING THE NEW LAWN *michael s. smith*

MARRIED LOVE *kuan tao-shêng*

PRAISE *anne k. smith*

FOREPLAY *natasha josefowitz*

ORCHESTRATION *jane mayes*

THE VERY FLOOR OF OUR EXISTENCE *june billings safford*

YOUR BODY GLISTENS FROM THE BATH *charles rossiter*

MIDDLE AGE *arlene l. mandell*

AND THIS IS SO *joseph h. ball*

OF GRAVITY & ANGELS *jane hirshfield*

WE TAKE THE NEW YOUNG COUPLE OUT TO DINNER *carol tufts*

SPRINGTIME AT TWILIGHT *michael s. smith*

TWIN FLAMES *james broughton*

OUR LOVE *jo nelson*

PLACE SETTING *johari m. rashad*

ADAGIO AT TWILIGHT *john carter*

NOSTALGIA *charles rossiter*

DECADE *amy lowell*

RETURN *c. p. cavafy*

VANISHING POINT *gary metras*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PERMISSION ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT THE EDITOR

# FOREWORD

---

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this ten-year anniversary edition of Wendy Maltz's award-winning anthology *Passionate Hearts: The Poetry of Sexual Love*. This book provides a creative, unique window into the intimate nature and pleasures of healthy sexuality. Over the past ten years *Passionate Hearts* has proven itself as a poetry classic as well as a valued resource in the field of sexuality education and counseling. It speaks to a diverse audience — people who are single, dating, in committed relationships, or married.

The popularity of *Passionate Hearts* has grown with the word-of-mouth reviews of professionals and readers alike. In a world inundated by commercially driven, non-relationship-oriented eroticism, this book presents an integrated image of intimacy, pleasuring, and eroticism. In reading *Passionate Hearts*, I am extremely moved and impressed with the emphasis on healthy intimate sexuality described in a variety of poetic and personally meaningful ways. Wendy Maltz encourages couples to explore a wide variety of roles, experiences, and meanings of healthy sexuality. These poems identify what allows sexuality to be loving, caring, beautiful, inviting, and even spiritual. The sequencing of the poetry is truly creative — from the “tender meanings” of initial en-counters to the “graceful transformations” that occur when two people have been together sexually for a long time.

As a psychologist and sex therapist I know that one of the most difficult challenges couples face is finding ways to integrate emotional intimacy with intensely pleasurable eroticism. Sex counseling and therapy can help by offering concepts and interventions. But they often focus too much on addressing sexual problems and not enough on enhancing sexual intimacy. This wonderful, loving book with its message of accepting healthy, intimate sexuality is a special resource for individuals and couples. It provides the inspiration and direction we all genuinely need. The challenge to you the reader is to develop a clear, affirmative sexual voice, and together as a couple, to discover your own unique way of celebrating intimacy, pleasure, and eroticism.

Barry McCarthy, PhD, CS  
coauthor, with his wife Emily, of *Rekindling Desire*

# PREFACE

---

This is a book of passion. Take it to bed with you. Curl up with it alone — or with another passionate heart. This is a book of poems that put the ancient wisdom of the body into words. It is full of the little miracles of understanding that only poets know how to make.

As we perceive through our tongues, noses, skin, ears, and eyes, we learn to delight in the world. But sometimes our deepest physical responses are so strong and connected with our emotions, we hardly know how to convey them in words. That is where poetry comes in, and where Wendy Maltz, the editor of this collection, has worked her wizardry.

As a healer, she appreciates how poetry can universalize our experience simply by being so intimate, and she has searched beyond the predictable choices for *Passionate Hearts: The Poetry of Sexual Love*. Discovering gems of poetry by emerging writers as well as established ones, she has grouped them to show us how to feel our way through sensual experience within an intimate relationship.

Of all the freedoms of the late 20th century, my favorite is how explicit poets can be. They can take timeless themes and deliver them to us with the images and associations of right now. In this way, poets are the truth tellers of the cultural body. Here, in this collection, they uncover erotic truths and supply us with metaphors that heal as well as reveal: bold, positive, direct language for sexual sharing.

Each of us is capable of passion, but the poems gathered here *kindle* passion. As they touch us, they deepen our capacities for touch.

Molly Peacock

# INTRODUCTION

---

“What sex is, we don’t know, but it must be some sort of fire. For it always communicates a sense of warmth, of glow. And when the glow becomes a pure shine, then we feel the sense of beauty.”

—D. H. LAWRENCE

This book of poetry has come about through my quest to unlock the mystery of sexual love. This is not a new quest for me. It’s a search I’ve been on, in some fashion, for most of my life. As a sex therapist, I’ve made a profession of understanding and explaining sex.

As a young child, I remember repeatedly harassing my parents with question after question about sex. Their answers changed over time, becoming more specific and elaborate as I grew more mature and inquisitive. By the time I was eleven, budding with my own sexual feelings, curious about true love, and frustrated with technical sounding sperm and egg explanations, I pressed them for more information about the act itself. “The woman lies on her back with her legs in the air and arms open and the man lies on top of her. . . .” Although my parents continued talking, I heard only an occasional word after this opening line. I was stunned. The image that formed in my mind was of dead bugs on the sidewalk — lying with their feet in the air, tangled together, and parched by the sun. My first explicit sexual image was a major disappointment. Why would anyone want to share an experience like that with someone they love?

For each of us, our concept of sexual love has been shaped over many years by the sexual images permitted and promoted in our culture. Today, it’s hard not to find images of sex in our society. Since the dawn of the sexual revolution in the 1960s, we have stripped away the old, puritanical restrictions that once made sex a taboo subject. Erotic images are woven so extensively into every aspect of our culture that they leap out at us when we open a magazine, turn on the television set, settle back in a movie theater, or pass a billboard on the freeway. It is sad and ironic that while our sexually obsessed culture feeds us a steady stream of arousing sexual images, many of us feel starved when it comes to understanding or sharing sexual love.

Very few of the unabashedly graphic images we see daily depict adults engaged in what we would describe as *healthy sexual intimacy*. Though many of us desire meaningful, intimate connection with our lover, most of the sexual images we are exposed to condition us to be aroused to sex *without* love. Like someone who has eaten only junk food, we wind up feeling malnourished. No amount of bingeing on “junk sex” can satisfy our hunger for real connection. In our enthusiasm to overcome puritanical constraints, perhaps we overlooked the importance of promoting certain kinds of sex over others.

Sexual interaction based on mutual caring and respect is very different from sex in which people are objectified or exploited. Loving, intimate sex can be far more enjoyable and satisfying than impersonal sex. But to enjoy these pleasures of sexual love we need to know more.

Although we are naturally wired with a strong sexual drive, we are not born knowing all the information we need to fully understand it. Most of us have questions about sex. But in our culture the answers are not always accessible or complete. To explore our potential as sexual beings, we need to understand not only the mechanics of sex, but also the interpersonal context for enjoying sexual love. We need more images that give us models for healthy relating. With exposure to these images

we can learn that healthy intimacy is arousing and intensely pleasurable. Instead of a cultural diet “junk sex” that leaves us titillated, but starved, we need lasting, nourishing ways to satisfy our hunger for sexual connection.

My quest for understanding sexual intimacy took a more serious turn when I began treating adult survivors of sexual abuse. Many of these people suffered from crippling sexual fears and dangerous sexual compulsions. For them, sex was often unpleasant at best. Their sexual relations left them feeling emotionally isolated, or out of control. *Healthy sexual intimacy* was an oxymoron. They could not conceptualize it, even when I explained that it was defined by concrete conditions: Consent. Equality. Respect. Trust. Safety.

About five years ago, my long quest for understanding sexual love became more focused. I began an ardent search to find positive sexual images. I wanted healthy alternatives to the negative images that surround us in our culture, so that I could show those who have felt confused about or hurt by sex that it can be very different, that it can even inspire moments of beauty.

This is a message all of us need to hear, throughout our lives. As a parent, I want my children to have healthy sexual models to learn from as they grow older. All of our children deserve to know about the importance of sexual health and the possibilities for joy and pleasure that sex affords. As an intimate partner, I want to be reminded of the infinite dimensions my husband and I can explore in heart-connected sex. All of us who are in long-term relationships need more resources to draw inspiration from, whether we are just setting out as a young couple or growing older with a partner.

To begin, I scoured films, video selections, popular books, and magazines for images that portrayed sex as mutually enjoyable, socially responsible, and physically safe. I was shocked at how few sexually explicit examples of healthy sex I could find. The images I found — perfume advertisements, greeting cards, and modern love stories — were pretty weak stuff compared to the latest issue of *Penthouse* magazine. Although there were some passages in erotica and romance novels that conveyed healthy sex dynamics, many of the themes in these stories still centered on impersonal, irresponsible, or secretive sex.

Next, my search took me to the library. Perhaps the joys of mutually satisfying sexual love have been celebrated by writers years ago. I began sifting through classic works of literature and poetry. But these works, by and large, let me down. I found an occasional gem, but more often I was reminded of the long history of sexual inequality between men and women from which we are still evolving. Older poems too often lacked the mutually intimate love that a healthy, mature relationship demands.

Until quite recently, male poets have dominated this genre. Too many of the erotic poems I found in the classic texts tended to repeat themes of objectifying, adoring, or controlling females. *The Kama Sutra*, one of the classic Eastern love texts, speaks repeatedly of intimate relations between “the girl” and “the man.” In a chapter entitled “Creating Confidence in the Girl,” the text advises the man whose young lover is reluctant:

*If she would not yield to him he should frighten her by saying ‘I shall impress marks of my teeth and nails on your lips and breasts . . .’<sup>1</sup>*

Classic Western love poems are generally less graphically direct, but often just as offensive to the ethic of healthy intimacy. They perpetuated the cultural norms of their day, especially the belief that a woman’s personal sexual experience was irrelevant; her pleasure would come in being a submissive vehicle for satisfying a man’s sexual desires. In “The Jewels,” the French poet Charles Baudelaire writes:

~~*My well-beloved was stripped. Knowing my whim She wore her tinkling gems, but naught besides; And showed such pride as, while her luck betides, A sultan's favoured slave may show to him.*~~<sup>2</sup>

In classic poetry, true consent, based on a right to refuse sex at any time, seemed nonexistent. William Butler Yeats describes a man asserting power over his lover in “Down by the Salley Gardens”:

*She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on  
the tree  
But I, being young and foolish, with her would  
not agree.*<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes I found a poem that seemed to honor the importance of mutuality in intimacy. But then I would hear something in it that echoed back to an imbalance of power. In “Invitation to a Voyage,” Baudelaire begins to weave more appropriate imagery about making time to savor sexual pleasure:

*Imagine the magic  
of living together  
there, with all the time in the world  
for loving each other, . . .*<sup>4</sup>

But within a few lines, he refers to his lover as “my sister, my child.” I shuddered to think how survivors of incest and rape would respond to the specific images I was finding, and how all of us would hear the wrong message reinforced, if I were to return to these poets for inspiration. I feel disillusioned that the traditional “love” poets whose works I had enjoyed twenty-five years ago, who I studied poetry in college, were reinforcing relationship dynamics that prevent mutually rewarding sexual love and intimacy. However lyrical or sensuous the language sounds, love poetry of the past lacks a foundation of equality between two partners. Without this framework, even the most beautiful poem fails to evoke relationships built on mutual caring, with both partners active participants in loving.

Even though my initial efforts to find sex-positive imagery uncovered only a handful of appropriate works, this step in my search was important. It got me reading and appreciating poetry.

Poetry speaks a universal language. Unlike longer prose, which tends to relate more specifically to a character, poems evoke images that resonate for each of us, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. With a few spare lines of text, they capture a world of experience. We don't need an advanced degree in literature to appreciate the meaning of a well-written poem. The words speak right to our heart. The poet's metaphors connect our actions as humans with the larger life forces in nature. And they focus on the momentary glimpses we gain through experience. Because sex itself is a momentary but profound experience, poetry is a perfect medium for exploring the meaning, mystery, and beauty of sex.

Out of the disappointment of my initial search came my strong conviction to create a resource full of positive images of sexual love. I would locate the elusive images myself. And I would do it with

quality, readable poetry. Accessible to anyone.

I launched a campaign to locate the works of contemporary poets writing about sexual love. I thought perhaps they, writing in today's more egalitarian era, would be a better source for works. I sought "heartcore" poems; poems that inspire and celebrate healthy sexual intimacy; poems in which heart connection is at the core of the sexual experience. I advertised in national poetry journals, sent flyers to creative writing centers and writing programs at universities, and began making personal contacts with some influential contemporary poets.

As I reviewed the more than 1,500 submissions, I kept in mind that each poem had to meet the conditions that I consider necessary for healthy sexual intimacy. I asked: Does this poem represent mutual caring and desire? Do the partners relate as equals, respecting each other as separate individuals? Is there a sense of emotional trust and honesty? Are the sexual interactions assumed to be safe from emotional and physical harm? Does the poem celebrate sensual pleasures?

When these conditions are met in life, as in poetry, we are free to enjoy and explore sexual love. Honoring healthy sex conditions allows us to safely embrace sex, enjoy it, without fear of any negative outcomes. Only good will result. Adopting these guidelines does not restrict intimate sexual pleasure, but rather permits it to grow and flourish.

My search into contemporary poetry brought personal satisfaction and rich rewards. I began to discover that today's poets are very interested in helping to explain and explore sexual love. For the general reader, the words are understandable. For the reader with a deeper background in literature, the poems bring together some well-known contemporary poets, and some newer voices. Together their combined perspectives deeply penetrate the mystery of sex.

Listen to Molly Peacock in "The Purr," searching for new words to describe the same mystery that D. H. Lawrence could not solve:

*. . . The mysterious thrum  
that science can't yet explain awakes a hum  
in me, the sound something numb come alive makes.*

And poet Sharon Olds gives new meaning to familiar words as she describes "making love" in her poem "The Knowing":

*. . . For an hour  
we wake and doze, and slowly I know  
that though we are sated, though we are hardly  
touching, this is the coming the other  
brought us to the edge of — we are entering,  
deeper and deeper, gaze by gaze,  
this place beyond the other places,  
beyond the body itself, we are making  
love.*

When I read Stephen Corey's "Complicated Shadows," in which he recalls a sexual experience outdoors on a hot day, I couldn't help but smile remembering my childhood image of insect sex. In Corey's very different view, the image came wonderfully alive with new consciousness about the

*To hawks we're a woodland insect,  
four legs above and four below, twitching  
on the ground . . . .  
We are weaving and folding, we  
know this soil is a great compost heap,  
we are making and unmaking  
light — forcing the aging hot sun to run.*

The poems I have selected for this volume celebrate the positive aspects of sex, built on a platform of healthy relating. As these poets illustrate so well, we have no need to feel shame about sex. It's as natural to us as laughter. When the conditions are right — when we're feeling safe and not humiliated — laughter bubbles up as a wonderful energy between two people. It feels good. And it's the same with sex. Appropriately, many of the poems are light-hearted and playful. Allison Joseph, in "Learning to Laugh," describes how lovemaking can bring forth laughter so rich "that I couldn't believe such a sound/could come from my naked body." Yet, she goes on to tell of:

*the laughs that just keep  
coming, rising out of me  
to stop traffic on the boulevard,  
drivers slowing to listen  
to the most joy they've ever heard.*

The organization for this book grew naturally out of the poems themselves. By an almost organic process, it seemed that they fit together into chapters about the stages of human sexual relating.

As I organized the poems, I realized that the shape of the book was a metaphor in itself. In sex, we begin with desire and excitement, build to a plateau, experience the release of orgasm, then move on to a state of resolution. This is the physical description we understand as the sexual response cycle. In many ways, this act of sexual expression recapitulates all the stages of healthy sexual relating.

In a relationship, we experience the building excitement of getting to know a potential partner. The opening chapter, "Tender Awakenings," contains poems that explore that first spark of initial attraction. These poets write about the fears and hesitations that sometimes get in the way of our desire for love. They describe the importance of waiting until both partners are ready. They help us understand the foundation of trust and safety we need for awakening to shared sexual pleasure.

Once both partners feel ready, they can move forward to share the playfulness and sensuality of physical love. The second chapter, "Passionate Pleasures," explores some of the infinite ways that two bodies, two hearts, might intertwine as one. These poems celebrate the intensity and ecstasy that come from physical sharing. This is frightening, at times, to the people in these poems, just as it can be overwhelming in real life. Sexual arousal brings with it the experience of abandon. Surrendering to sexual pleasure challenges our basic human instinct to be alert and in control of ourselves. In the third chapter, couples work through their fears to savor sexual sharing and the lasting connection it brings.

them.

As a relationship progresses, partners build a platform on which different dances and expressions occur. In the third chapter, "Varied Dances," we see sex explored in all sorts of settings. The poets show us how to tackle the challenges of a long-term relationship. How do we remain sexual when beset by boredom, stress, disappointments, children at the door? How do we rekindle the spark that attracted us in the first place? How shall we seduce the partner we know so well?

In "Deeper Intimacies," the fourth chapter, we see the possibilities for what might happen when a couple remains together and remains sexual for a long time. The poets show us how vulnerable we are when we truly open ourselves to another, yet how vast the opportunities are when we take that risk. The depth of emotional intimacy builds, generating peak experiences. These poems describe moments of conscious loving, in which the self and the partner are revealed.

For those who have nurtured a healthy relationship for a long time, the final phase can transform a sexual relationship into something almost spiritual. If we are lucky enough to enjoy a long, healthy relationship with the same partner, the natural aging process kicks in. Yet, even in our youth-conscious culture, some couples are wise enough to see beyond the wrinkles and graying hair, and savor the sexual energy that remains.

Even as these energies decline with age, these couples celebrate the moments they have lived together. The memories of all that has passed between them take on a substance that counterbalances time's physical losses. In "Orchestration," Jane Mayes describes an aging but no less ardent pair:

*Your hip replacement mended,  
my back pain abated,  
our bed that seemed too small  
has re-expanded.*

Still another couple in "Watering the New Lawn," by Michael S. Smith, turns gardening into sensual, erotic pleasure:

*. . . This could be our last lawn, we knew,  
and aged expertise had taught us to take our sweet time.*

The overall message contained in the book's last chapter, "Graceful Transformations," was something the poets helped me to understand. I didn't appreciate this concept completely when I began looking for images that celebrate healthy sex. But in their wisdom, in their art, these poets have helped me to see sex as something evolutionary. What higher consciousness are we moving toward with this sexual energy? As our bodies change with age, how do our sexual expressions mature? As we evolve as a couple, what lasting pleasures might we create together?

Sex is momentary, and sex is transcendent. That's the paradox. The most intense physical sharing we experience with another person is gone in a matter of minutes. And yet, it connects us with a large energy, a life force. Real, authentic intimacy leaves behind an inner glow that warms every aspect of our lives. Sex reminds us of our limitations and our expansiveness as humans. We are alone, and we are together.

*How is it that our two bodies  
made only of flesh and bone  
ignite with this fire  
yet do not burn?*

*How is it that this cannot last  
will disappear into the ether  
as our bones will turn to dust  
and disappear into the earth?*

Sexual love is connection, not only with one’s partner, but with the elemental beauty of life on earth. Often, when the poets in this collection describe the sensual and transcendental aspects of sex, they use metaphors from nature. A lover’s touch becomes the summer heat moving through a canyon. A climax becomes the deepening red colors in a sunset. An embrace becomes the soft inside petals of a flower. The poets reminded me that some of the best images to represent the experience of sexual love are to be found in the natural world. Healthy sexual expression is a natural aspect of life. Tuning into life’s natural beauty can stimulate our senses and enhance sexual awareness and enjoyment.

Just as this collection celebrates the natural beauty of every stage of sexual relating, so it can be used to inspire you at all stages of your life. Some poems will sound different to you when you are young, and perhaps just beginning a relationship, than when you are older, and more settled with a partner.

Perhaps you will take time to read these poems together. Love is like a duet, a song you create with your partner. At different times you’ll each have passages to sing alone, and passages to sing in harmony with each other. Reading these poems to each other may bring you new inspiration for the unique love song you are creating together. The poets have offered you their gift of words. You and your partner can breathe your own meaning from them.

Healthy sexual relating is a lifelong journey. It’s a mystery we unlock through our own experiences. In creating *Passionate Hearts*, I have found some new signposts that help guide the way to a world of healthy sexual loving. As these words dance across the pages and into your lives, may you share the joy that I have found in searching for them.

—W. M.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sir Richard Burton, *The Illustrated Kama Sutra* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1991), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Stallworthy, ed., *A Book of Love Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Washington, ed., *Erotic Poems* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994), p. 26.

# CHAPTER ONE

---

*tender awakenings*

When I was twenty I walked past  
The lady I would marry —  
Cross-legged on the porch.  
She was cracking walnuts  
With a hammer, a jar  
At her side. I had come  
From the store, swinging  
A carton of cold beers,  
And when I looked she smiled.  
And that was all, until  
I came back, flushed,  
Glowing like a lantern  
Against a backdrop  
Of silly one-liners —  
Cute-face, peaches, baby-lips.

We talked rain, cats,  
About rain on cats,  
And later went inside  
For a sandwich, a glass  
Of milk, sweets.  
Still later, a month later,  
We were going at one  
Another on the couch, bed,  
In the bathtub  
And its backwash of bubbles,  
Snapping. So it went,  
And how strangely: the walnut  
Tree had dropped its hard  
Fruit, and they, in turn,  
Were dropped into a paper  
Bag, a jar, then into  
The dough that was twisted  
Into bread for the love  
Of my mouth, so  
It might keep talking.

*gary soto*



# SPRING STORM

---

I stood in the doorway  
for the longest time  
after you left  
looking at the night  
    listening to the night  
feeling the cold  
    against the warmth of my body  
feeling your touch  
    ripening on my body

It would have been too easy  
    to welcome you inside me  
succumb to the rhythm  
    of waves washing over me

As much as that would be  
    it wouldn't be enough

I would never know  
    who  
    was on the other side  
of your skin

*johanna rayl*

## THE RIVER

---

All the bright day I rode my bike along the river  
gold flashing among the dizzy leaves  
water clear and rushing over stones  
the sound drawing me on.

All day I rode with the wind in my face  
till I lost a shoe when I drank at the river  
and turned to go home.

It was dusk when I entered the old  
house on the hill  
and you were glad to see me.

You showed me strings you had tied to a stick.  
I watched you dip strings in hot tallow  
again and again  
while the long tapered bodies grew thick.

Then you lit two of your candles  
and there in the flickering shadows we stood  
between floors on a landing.  
You reached to embrace me as I turned toward you  
and gently your lips brushed on my lips  
and gently your tongue entered my mouth  
finding the way through the dark.

I stood open — river swelling inside me —  
rising and falling —  
walls breathing for me —

the sound of the river rushed in my ears  
my legs were water (I might have fallen  
if your arms had not held me).

Finally  
you turned with a smile as though it were natural  
and walked down the stairs  
leaving me filled  
with that long trembling.

When I could speak I said, *Let's walk by the river.*  
Then I asked, *Will you be loving?*

and laughed at my words.

I meant to say, "*Will you be leaving?*"

---

and then you laughed too.

*A slip of the tongue*, you said.

Yes, I said, *a slip of the tongue*.

*patti tana*

- [download The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s-1840s \(The Modern World-System, Volume 3\)](#)
- [download online Claudine at St. Clare's \(St Clare's, Book 5\) pdf](#)
- [The Eye of the World \(The Wheel of Time, Book 1\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [Bold As Love pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [Notes on Digital Signal Processing: Practical Recipes for Design, Analysis and Implementation pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
  
- <http://honareavalmusic.com/?books/Hot-Sex.pdf>
- <http://sidenoter.com/?ebooks/Too-Good-to-Be-True--Mostly-Miserable-Life-of-April-Sinclair--Book-2-.pdf>
- <http://tuscalaural.com/library/The-Eye-of-the-World--The-Wheel-of-Time--Book-1-.pdf>
- <http://tuscalaural.com/library/Bold-As-Love.pdf>
- <http://aneventshop.com/ebooks/Living-and-Working-in-Switzerland--A-Survival-Handbook--Living---Working-in-Switzerland-.pdf>