

# Elixir of Love

Category: Poems

written by Howard Stein | February 3, 2012

**Howard Stein**

*(with apologies to Gaetano Donizetti and gratitude to Helen Fisher)*

Oh dopamine! Elixir of love!  
Beloved catecholamine neurotransmitter,  
Child of the hypothalamus—  
To you I owe all passion.  
In you are all the wiles of Venus,  
The drunken orgies of Dionysus.

When I fall in love,  
It is you, phantom brew,  
Whom I truly cherish.  
My beloved in flesh  
Is only a stand-in  
For the biochemistry between us.

Oh dopamine! Sly Trickster!  
You are crueler than Narcissus!  
It is not even my self,  
But my chemicals,  
Whom I most adore.

## **About the poet:**

Howard F. Stein PhD, a medical and psychoanalytic anthropologist, is professor and special assistant to the chair in the department of family and preventive medicine, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where he has taught since 1978. His most recent book is [In the Shadow of Asclepius: Poems from American Medicine](#), with a foreword by Jack Coulehan MD.

## **About the poem:**

The inspiration for this tongue-in-cheek poem comes from Helen Fisher's essay "[The Madness of the Gods](#)," which appeared in the January 2011 issue of *Poetry*. The poem's title is taken from the title of Gaetano Donizetti's opera *L'elisir d'amore*. The poem is something of a gentle protest against reductionist accounts of human love. As philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said, "Seek simplicity, and distrust it."

## **Poetry editors:**

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro