

The entertainment of the senses

W. H. Auden & Ch. Kallman

CHAMBERLAIN

Ladies and gents,
Our troupe now presents:
The Entertainment of the Senses

FIRST APE

I'm Touch.
Touch me, touch me
If you'd smoothly learn much
How I've gone roughly free.
First of all, don't be touchy and take my advice:
Be intimate but not too nice.
Fidelity and all that
Has become old hat;
Today it's not done
To sleep with only one
And chastity's non-U.
Merely grab what is your due
And stroke it enough
With no prattle of love;
For Cupid, as Eros, you surely must know
If you're not old and silly,
Now presides over the Touch-and-Go
Of busy Piccadilly.
When you see a fair form, chase it
And if possible embrace it,
Be it a girl or a boy.
Don't be bashful: be brush, be fresh.
Life is short, so enjoy
Whatever contact your flesh
May at the moment crave:
There's no sex-life in the grave.
But when your hands make their sex tours
They may run into peculiar textures
Nature never quite thought of,
Wrought of
Coal-tar and spit
By brilliant hags
For keeping one fit
Without bumps, concavities, bulges or sags,
Much plastic, elastic and chilly
What-hots about willy-nilly;
And reaching for loot with a thief's
Dactyl dexterity you may steal upon briefs
Of genuine simulated seal-skin
And be flummoxed when chancing on real skin.
But if you're not sure
If they're meant to allure
Or only divert and protect,
For heaven's sake, do not object,
Since the Mode may be such,
And you mustn't lose touch:
No one cares what you think, but how you behave:
Lack of feeling is nothing, lack of touch very grave.
And there are many more new

Tactile sensations
Available to you
In developed nations,
And unknown to the peasant,
Not all of them pleasant:
If you handle a faulty switch
Your fingers may violently twitch
At the unexpected shock;
But we can't put back the clock.
One the whole we should clap
At the way things are going:
For comfort there's no competing
With Central Heating
And the joy of knowing
There's always hot water on tap.
Then on warm days now
You can cool your brow
With the breeze from an Electric fan.
On Cupid's face there's a sensual grin
Because foam-baths have come in;
No cake of soap can ever hope
To provide so soft a lave:
It's a shame there'll be none in the grave.

ALL FIVE

Mild und leise
You'd be weiser
Not to be defenceless:
Nor walls nor fences
Can guard your senses -
Why not just be senseless?

SECOND APE

I'm Taste.
Taste me, taste me
In nutritional haste
For my new A.B.C.
Realize, since there is no disputing with Taste
That though oft violated, I always am chaste.
Nowadays you may carp that I'm not what I should be:
I am what I am when I am what I would be:
e.g. If I were a Herb I'd be evenly branched,
Born crispy and gold, I'd be powdered and blanched,
As a wine I'd be water and wolf's blood,
And if I were tropical fish I'd arrive frozen stiff,
If I were a chick I'd be battery-fed,
And if I were a sponge I'd be sliced up as bread.
If I were a meal that was meant to seduce
A male into marriage, I'd moan "What's the use?"
Feed the Beast, I have heard, but what slips to his belly
Doesn't matter too much when he's glued to the Telly;
And if I had intentions more directly erotic,
I'd remember that Cupid's gone macrobiotic;
Though his too-divine packaging rouse appetite,
It won't show that his palate has gone with his sight.

But were I just myself, I'd meet woe in this Hall,
For how could I sing being nothing at all?
So I'll be a burnt roast, and if my guests are meanies
Who dote one their food, they'll get six Dry Martinis;
And I'll don heavy clogs and dance several jigs on
Dear Elizabeth David and darling Jane Grigson:
Oh they're wonderful ladies, but will make a fuss
About opening tins, not at all, girls, like us.
The poor cranks may complain I'm a nerveless dull bitch:
They're just jealous because I'm so vitamin-rich.
And if you think me insipid, unnatural and coy,
You can dowse me in ketchup or souse me with soy.
As for her, hungry Nature, that well-seasoned tart
Who arrives uninvited and consumes A-La-Carte,
Let her bring her own Glutamate with if she's smart:
After all she's just there to corrupt and deprave
When she dines upon gamey old you in the grave.

THIRD APE

I'm Smell.
Smell me, smell me
To be sure you can tell
What a chic smell should be.
Let's say you're a woman, going out for your best:
First of all, I suggest
That Pro-Lib or Anti, you should and you can
Start with your arm-pits and shave like a man.
Then douche, dab and diddle because, dear, you know
That Bachelor's-Offer isn't short for B.O. Body Odour,
And the gent who awaits you, never mind what it costs,
Will have taken precaution against fumes and exhausts;
Though he forgets the aroma of wine would
Be drowned by his smokes, that is not your affair:
He will reek like an acre of pine-wood
To show you and Cupid how much he could care.
Well,
Swell -
But what now of you, and should you smell?
There's fragrance of course in the blooms of the wood,
But for Nature to give you the aroma she should
For you to get on and get off in,
You'll need more bouquets than they put on a coffin:
So be well-advised
Now you're de-odorised
And reach for a scent that you chose
Because, though worn out by assault, your own nose
Twitched at it because it was well-synthesised.
And with the vernal voice of the turtle I sing
When I pray
You - now spray
Yourself as though you were fertilising
The passive eggs of a fish;
And the creature you hatch
Can now swish
To make a fine catch
Safely downstream,
The exotic,
Narcotic
Whiff of a dream,
A for-the-few, not-the-many thing,
A pound, not a penny thing,
Oh!
So
If you want power, affection and pelf,
Sweet, smell like anything
Except yourself.
But if you're mad to be natural and personal, save
Your money and be Mother Nature's unspoilable slave:
She'll see that you stink like us all in the grave.

ALL FIVE

Mind und leise
You'd be weiser
Not to be defenceless:
Nor walls nor fences
Can guard your senses -
Why not just be senseless?

FOURTH APE

I'm hearing.
Hear me, hear me
Prove you pure noise endearing
As it now is to me.
When Life seems dreary, Oh
Switch on your Stereo
And turn the volume to high:
Soft music makes us cry.
The songs of birds may be seraphic
But, however sweet, they can't compete
With the roar of city traffic
Or the stentorian sound
Of a Jet-plane leaving the ground.
So when you motor-bike
Down the M.T. or its like,
Imagine you're late -
Accelerate, accelerate,
Show your decibel power
At a hundred an hour.
It's no longer a sin
To make a din
Since that, until lately
Unknown, unstately
God, Cacophony
Made his Theophany;
And Cupid, bored by peace and quiet,
Only aims to cause a riot.
So, lovers, fill your lungs
And let go with your tongues
To talk, talk, talk, talk
With your Transistors on as you walk.
For the prissy minority
Who prefer a low sonority
There's only one thing to be done:
Become a Trappist or a Nun.
Let them. Come, girls and boys,
More noise, more noise!
Yell while you can and save
Your silence for the grave.

FIFTH APE

I'm Sight.
See me, see me
Make the scene a delight
In a life optically lived.
A mountain, we must confess,
Is no longer a surprise;
What really impresses
Contemporary eyes
Are the vertical escarpments
Of High-rise Apartements:
Each rectangular block
Makes Gothic or Baroque
Look over-complicated,
Their cathedrals out-dated.
Then already the printed word
Is beginning to seem absurd;
It's so easy to misconstrue,
And far too many do.
Now only a snob
Would take on the job

Of scanning a book,
When he could look
At life up close and so real on
Telly from San Francisco to Ceylon
But, if his fancy leans
To Fiction, Movies tell
The tallest stories well,
And there are Fashion Ads
In glossy magazines -
Long-haired lassies and lads
All shot in shocking color -
Black and white was so much duller.
It's a new world, so make sure
Should you go on tour
To Greece or New York or the Fens,
To be in the swing:
Never look at a thing
Except through a camera lens.
Yes, we're lucky: whereas
As soon as the sun withdrew
Our forebears had to make do
With candles or with gas,
We have the felicity
To possess electricity,
Can lighten our rooms
And dispel the Glooms
With lots and lots
Of bulbs of a least a hundred watts.
And Cupid, called blind,
You will find
Is only short-sighted
And likes life well-lighted,
Preferring to know
At just whom he is aiming his bow:
Candles that splutter
And very soon gutter
Remind him of Plato's cave
And the blindness of the grave.

ALL FIVE

Though our views be reprehensible
To you and indefensible,
Please admit they're comprehensible
And, naturally, sensible.
Good-bye!
When you get a little older
You'll discover like Isolde:
"We must love one another and die!"
(Enter Death from behind, unseen by the others.
He folds his arms and looks on)

CHAMBERLAIN

Dear listeners, you have heard tonight
What my five apes have had to say
About our senses five,
Through which we know we are alive:
Touch and Taste and Smell
As well as Hearing and Sight,
And the different roles they play
Now as compared with yesterday.
Cupid, the god, would certainly nod,
And you'll all agree, I'm sure, with me
That they are perfectly right.
The moral is, as they have said:
Be with-it, with-it, with-it till you're dead.

THE ENTERTAINMENT OF THE SENSES

Cabaret musicale per voce e strumenti
testo di W.H. Auden e Ch. Kallman
musica Matteo D'Amico

Interpretato da:

Luisa Castellani - voce
Roberto Cominati - pianoforte

e dal Quintetto Bibiena

Giampaolo Pretto - flauto
Alessandro Carbonare - clarinetto
Paolo Grazia - oboe
Roberto Giaccaglia - fagotto
Stefano Pignatelli - corno

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