



Perfumes, the scents of love

Translated by Claire King

Introduction

Without an appetite for seduction or the indescribable feeling of falling in love, there would be no such thing as perfume. Since the ancient past, every era has had a recipe for its own love potion. Over the years, it has become an ever-increasing market, with its highlight being Valentine's Day.

Paragraph 1

"Whoever masters the nose, masters the heart of mankind." declared Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, hero of Patrick Süskind's novel, 'Perfume'. Rightly observed. Since the dawn of time, stories of perfume-scented romances and passions have abounded. The affair of King Salomon and Queen Sheba became the stuff of legend ten centuries before our era. The Song of Songs echoes with passionate perfumed images, each one more scented than the last. Wafting through the verses are balms, resins, wood and flowers: in the fifth song, we read the lines: *"His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume/His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh."* A thousand years later, it was Cleopatra's turn to make headlines by using ointments and other perfumed balsams to enchant first Julius Cesar, then Marc Antony. So perfumed were the sails of Cleopatra's barge 'that the winds were love-sick of them' wrote William Shakespeare in 'Antony and Cleopatra'.

Paragraph 2

Every epoque, every culture, has had its recipes for olfactory love potions. But in this regard the west lagged far behind the east. This was because over several centuries, the use of perfume was reserved principally for religious, medical and social sectors. It was an outer sign of power: the stronger you were, the stronger you smelt. Nothing was more seductive

than the natural pheromone of the person you loved. For Henry IV, this was the smell of his mistress Gabrielle d'Estrées' armpits. The riper the smell, the greater the throes of his ecstasy. So much so that he asked her not to wash before they were due to meet. Much later, Napoleon I made the same request of his wife Josephine; *'Don't wash, I'm on my way, I'll be there in eight days!'* he wrote to her.

Paragraph 3

With the age of Enlightenment, perfume came onto the flirtatious scene as a part of wooing. Courtly love became a major theme within perfumery, which thus saw a great boom. From vials drifted the scents of white flowers such as jasmine, sometimes tuberose, rose and sweet violet. As for the libertines of this age, they certainly had a penchant for perfume. They used it as an aphrodisiac, piquant with animal notes. In erotic role play, it was often ambergris, or better, Tonkin musk, a secretion from a 2-inch gland found on the belly of the male roe deer, which was used if someone was really sulphurous. On the subject of musk, the historian Elisabeth de Feydeau relates an anecdote about the frisky Duke of Richelieu who was obsessed with it. The scent of musk emphasised the odours of his body so well that he had his breeches made with Spanish leather, a soft hide, so that the musky smell would be further accentuated. This pungent detail inspired a notorious saying about him: "You must, when Richelieu enters a bedroom, harden your heart and hold your nose!"

Paragraph 4

TASTES GET TOUGHER

Were we quite as odorous throughout the following century? Yes, but in alcoves, wrapped in the arms of mistresses and courtesans, for whom one of the preferred perfumes was

patchouli. There were also supposedly soporific and intoxicating flowers, like tuberose and lily... but when the perfume industry speaks overtly rather than covertly about love, it refers to it in female form and in a chaste manner because it is addressing fiancées and mothers. These are delicate florals with names such as “Voilà pourquoi J'aimais Rosine” meaning ‘That is why I loved Rosine’, by Guerlain in 1863, or “Chère Amie Inconnue” meaning ‘Dear Unknown Friend’, created by Boissard around 1910. Another explanation for this romanticism is the advent of Valentine’s Day, when strong emotions take a somewhat commercial turn.

Paragraph 5

After the First World War, things change. The sentimental, rose-tinted language steadily peters out, just as surely as the emancipation of women advances. Headed by figures such as Gabrielle Chanel, Jeanne Lanvin and Elsa Schiaparelli, women intend to take their destiny into their own hands. They no longer want to be confined by the image of a housewife patiently waiting for her husband to return from his little bedroom indiscretions. These women cut their hair, shorten their skirts and loosen up, trailing wakes of perfume with daring names such as “Tabu” by Dana, “Scandal” by Lanvin, or “Shocking” from Schiaparelli. Even “Jouir”, meaning ‘Orgasm’! That’s not made up...Tastes get tougher thanks to the leather-based fragrances popular with flappers, like Chanel’s iconic Cuir de Russie. Others, the oriental fragrances, wreak havoc with their opulent sensuality. Examples of these are Shalimar by Guerlain, or Habanita by Molinard.

Paragraph 6

VALENTINE’S DAY SUMMED UP

In 2016, the 'day of love' accounted for 4.5% of the perfume market, while Mother's Day took 5%. Christmas led the way at 25%.

Sales are steadily rising, with an increase of 5% over the last five years, and an increase of 6% in 2013.

At the end of August 2016, female scents for Millennials represented a revenue of 390 million euros; an increase of 4% in a global market with a decrease of 2%.

Source: NPD Group, French selective market.

Paragraph 7

HAPPY, BUBBLY NOTES

What about today? Over some decades, style and substance have changed considerably. Thirty years ago, Trésor by Lancôme, Amarige by Givenchy – an anagram of the French for marriage, embodied the close, tight-knit, romantic love affair to which one would swear eternal fidelity. Along the same lines, Romance, by Ralph Lauren, or Beautiful, by Estée Lauder, for whom Paulina Porizkova posed in a wedding gown...for everyone, these perfumes live up to the promise of their names, and are strong, powerful, with many florals in their heady sillage. Every one also lives up to a new commercial demand towards the end of the 80s: Valentine's Day promotion. Perfume had previously been given mostly for Christmas or Mother's Day.

Paragraph 8

Since then, perfumery has followed its natural evolution, and in 2017, it no longer chases after love as it did in the 80s and 90s. Today, it targets the Millennials, who account for two thirds of the revenue for women's perfumes. The highest number is bought around

Valentine's Day. For its most recent perfume, 'Mon Paris', Yves Saint Laurent looked at the aspirations of this generation of 25 -35 year-olds. What do they dream of? Of love, and of being part of a couple too, because 32% would like to share their life with someone. But they know that it's difficult to find their soul mate, and know that an affair can be short-lived. Another thing, they are totally uninhibited when it comes to sexuality. "This generation is a lot more carefree, they run from the banality of everyday life to experience something extraordinary. They love by making the most of the present moment, intensely", explains Juliette Ferret, international marketing director for the brand. On an olfactory level, this translates as scents just as powerful as those of yesteryear, but including contrasting happy, bubbly, fruity notes. For Mon Paris, Yves Saint Laurent has modernised a classic perfume family, chypre, renowned for its citrusy top notes and mossy base notes, using red fruits and Datura blossoms.

Paragraph 9

GOURMAND SCENTS AND ADDICTION

Rest assured, those beyond the age of a Millennial can still buy themselves a love potion! Notably from brands and niche collections which have stayed with this love theme for several years. In no particular order: Quel Amour or Grand Amour (Great Love) by Annick Goutal), French Lover, Dans tes Bras (In Your Arms) by Frederick Malle, or Un Chant d'Amour (Love Song) and Tainted Love (Prada Olfactories). Recently, some of these have even focussed their brand discourse on love. Like Jean-Michel Duriez' perfume house, with a line of seven beautiful fragrances all with evocative names such as Seine Amoureuse (meaning the Loving or Lovers' Seine, in French containing a neat pun on 'scène' amoureuse: 'love scene'.) Others contemplate the subject in a downright quirky manner,

like Penhaligon's Portraits Collection: each perfume corresponds with a member of an English aristocratic family about whom there is suspicion of perhaps adultery, an illegitimate son...a complete success.

Paragraph 10

But whatever the positioning may be, niche or mainstream, the target, a perfume which "smells of love", is today nothing other than a liquid aphrodisiac which is no longer the prerogative of female perfumery and is also directed towards the male population. Done with, therefore, are the scents evoking bridal bouquets and floral posies presented to one's fiancée. Henceforth, they must arouse desire, must be addictive. Consequently, the brand *Sous le Manteau* (meaning *under the cloak, clandestinely*) took its inspiration from antique recipes for love potions, while Lancôme presents *La Nuit Trésor*, its new version of *Trésor*, as the 'first gourmand aphrodisiac'.

Paragraph 11

Gourmandise and addiction, the most frequently used words by the perfume business when it needs to get the goose bumps rising. "Gourmand fragrances have existed for years, but they have evolved, become less regressive, less saccharine, more sophisticated. Hence the importance of orientals and perfumes with vanilla accents", notes Christophe Raynaud, perfumer at Firmenich, who created, along with Amandine Clerc-Marie, this new feminine perfume for Lancôme— a rose gourmand. Likewise, at Dior, there is talk of a "sensual appeal" via the "sweet caress" of vanilla for the new eau de toilette *Poison Girl*.

Paragraph 12

An amusing fact: this idea of 'gourmand aphrodisiac' is not new. It even goes back to the origins of modern perfume, in the 18th century. At that time, there was already a market for

mouth-watering fragrances. And the star ingredient featured, along the same line as vanilla, was chocolate, which Louis XV couldn't get enough of, and which the Comtesse du Barry had her lovers drink to increase their ardour. Not by chance then if perfumes created now are those such as Noir Aphrodisiaque (with dark chocolate base notes) by Killian, Veilleur de Nuit (Night Watchman) by Serge Lutens, and Amour de Cacao (Love for Cacao) at Comptoir Sud Pacifique. The house Il Profumo even dedicated three fragrances to it: Chocolat, Chocolat Bàmbola and Chocolat Frais.

Paragraph 13

NO LONGER DESIGNED TO PLEASE EVERYONE

Another ingredient in the recipe of the contemporary fragrance of love is its new carnal dimension. "Everywhere, people want much more sensual fragrances. They need to evoke the smell of a partner's skin, or know how to amplify it. Today, perfumers have at their disposal a wide array of new ingredients. They have the palettes of all the synthetic musks, and of all the amber and woody notes." explains Arnaud Guggenbuhl, Fine Fragrance Marketing Director at Givaudan. Not to mention also the many leather notes now created like a second skin, like Hermès' Galop and the appropriately-named Dans La Peau (Under My Skin) by Louis Vuitton. The same approach is taken with florals, which are taking on a more sensual dimension, like rose with an amber-woody sillage in Izia, Sisley's most recent fragrance for women.

Paragraph 14

And what of the animal scents, the ones which were formerly used almost pure: civet, ambergris, Tonkin musk? They still have their place - but in a homeopathic measure – and are now formed synthetically. With the exception of some fragrances like La Panthère, by Cartier, or Dior's Ambre Nuit, they remain the prerogative of niche brands because, in blind tests, these notes have difficulty filtering through to consumers, especially younger ones. The bestial scents, some evoking fur (Renard Constrictor by Serge Lutens), or truly unidentifiable ones, mid-way between animal and woody like the captivating masculine scent Attaquer le Soleil - Marquis de Sade (Attack the Sun, a tribute to the Marquis de Sade), by Etat libre d'Orange...none of these radically biased fragrances are designed to please everyone, especially since they come up against that well-known difficulty to perfumery: the diversity of tastes, through country and culture.

Paragraph 15

A PERFUME **FOR EVERYONE?**

So, are there indeed smells capable of uniting humanity? Pheromones, for example? "They have great success among moths, which can detect a female from kilometres away. But what works with insects, or some mammals like mice, doesn't have the same effect with humans," says Rolande Salesse, researcher into neurobiological olfaction at Inra (The French National Institute for Agricultural Research). "Pheromone-based perfumes are merely a con."

There exists however a similar odorous substance secreted by males, which is androsterone. Swedish researchers have already studied the effect of this steroidal hormone on females, by putting the scent on some of the chairs in a waiting room. The result was convincing: more than 60% subconsciously chose the 'perfumed' seats. At the same time, formulation

laboratories like Firmenich, IFF or Givaudan, were analysing the potential 'aphrodisiac' action of certain molecules. One of them, aldron, a musky scent, was close to androsterone. Gidauvan introduced it into Fleuve Tendre (Tender River), the newest scent from Liquides Imaginaires. It's now ready for testing. In the knowledge that the smell of love remains a story of chemistry combined with culture, education and the history of each of these. A beautiful alchemy that cannot be measured by an MRI scan.

Paragraph 16

A SOCIOLOGIST'S ANALYSIS

It is one of the most celebrated festivals in the world and every country interprets it in a way particular to its own culture. On February 14th in Japan, there is a tradition of the women giving chocolates to the men, whereas in India, the date is more synonymous with a Mother-in-Law's Day, all of them receiving flowers. The sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann analyses the story and the global implications of a Valentine's Day which is surely nothing superficial: behind its confections and bouquets of roses, it illustrates major societal trends and great ideological battles.

'St Valentine, my love!' by Jean-Claude Kaufmann. Published by Les Liens qui Libèrent.

Paragraph 17

THE NEW ICONS OF LOVE

No 5 L'eau, Chanel

The essence of the new generation of femininity according to Chanel. Light, and represented by the young face of Lily-Rose Depp.

La Femme Prada, L'Homme Prada

The icons of this new vision of love: together, as a duo, but completely interchangeable. The fluidity of genres within a perfume.

L'homme idéal, Guerlain

He doesn't exist, but he has a perfume. The perfect (smelling) male according to Guerlain smells, inevitably, of warm vanilla, virile leather and powerful woods.

Contre moi, Louis Vuitton

Gourmand and addiction in their most carnal dimension. Vanilla working as a second skin, juxtaposed with regressive notes of the smell of the pâtisserie.

Miss Dior Absolutely Blooming, Dior

"Make me a perfume which smells of love!" asked Christian Dior. This became Miss Dior, the couturier's essential fragrance, today re-invented with flowers and fruits.