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"'Tis not so sweet now, as it was before": Origins and Significance of a Musical Topos*

Enter Orsino, Duke of Illyria, Curio, and other Lords [*with musicians*].

Duke.

If Musicke be the food of Loue, play on,
Giue me excesse of it: that surfetting,
The appetite may sicken, and so dye.
That straine agen, it had a dying fall:
O, it came ore my eare, like the sweet sound
That breathes vpon a banke of Violets;
Stealing, and giuing Odour. Enough, no more,
'Tis not so sweet now, as it was before.
O spirit of Loue, how quicke and fresh art thou,
That notwithstanding thy capacitie,
Receiueth as the Sea. Nought enters there,
Of what validity, and pitch so ere,
But falles into abatement, and low price
Euen in a minute; so full of shapes is fancie,
That it alone, is high fantasticall.

1.

The curtain rises. Duke Orsino of Illyria is in his palace, in what we may imagine are his private chambers. Court musicians are nearby. They have just finished playing an instrumental air, and are awaiting their lord's pleasure. Yet the duke does not seem to be aware of them, and an awkward moment of silence follows. When at last Orsino wakes from his thoughts, he calls, abstractedly, for more mu-

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sic. Yet his words are phrased in oddly conditional terms, and carry within them a rhetorical question that is surely not meant for his servants to ponder: "If music be the food of love, play on."

It is in the next few lines that we learn what appears to be on the duke's mind. If music is what feeds love, he reasons, if music sustains and nourishes love, if, indeed, music is the f o o d of love[1], then love itself must be some sort of appetite[2]. And if that is true, then it must be possible for that appetite to be made sick, even to kill it altogether – not by depriving it of the food of love, but rather the opposite: by overfeeding it, by giving it more music than it can possibly crave. That is what Orsino wants: "Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, the appetite may sicken, and so die."

The musicians obey with a strain of music so rich that it will hopefully accomplish what the duke commanded. But no: they fail in their endeavor, not because they are not playing well enough, but because the piece ends too quickly. When the sounds die away with the last cadence, Orsino is forced to repeat his command: "That strain again! It had a dying fall."

The strain may have been brief and ephemeral, yet the memory of it continues to haunt the duke. The sounds – while they lasted – overwhelmed his ear, and the recollection of that experience triggers a chain of such densely-woven and richly evocative imagery as to seem quite overwhelming in itself: "O, [that strain] came o'er my ear, like the sweet sound that breathes upon a bank of violets, stealing and giving odour."[3]

[1] Editors of *Twelfth Night* often point out the parallel image in Cleopatra's command "Give me some music; music, moody food / Of us that trade in love" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, II. v. 1). I know of hardly any other writer in this period who speaks of music metaphorically as food, especially in the context of love and courtship. The significant exception is Baldesar Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier*, lib. I, cap. xlvii, ll. 1–2: "Therefore no marvaile that in the olde times and nowe a dayes [women] have alwayes bene enclined to musitiens, and counted [music] a moste acceptable foode of the mynde [*cibo d'animo*]", and lib. IV, cap. lxii, l. 3: "with hearinge the sweetenesse of her voice, the tunablenesse of her woordes, the melodie of her singinge and playinge on instrumentes (in case the woman beloved be a musitien) and so shall he with most deintie foode feede the soule [*pascerà di dolcissimo cibo l'anima*]." See *Il libro del cortegiano del conte Baldesar Castiglione*, Venice 1528, translated by Thomas Hoby, *The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio*, London 1561.

[2] This is indeed the dominant metaphor in Sonnet 56, where the poet urges Love (or his beloved) to be more like the physical appetite for food, which, although it may be dulled to satiety today, will be whetted again tomorrow, and in this manner renews itself daily: "Sweet loue renew they force, be it not said / Thy edge should blunter be then apetite, / Which but too daie by feeding is alaied, / To morrow sharpned in his former might." Interestingly, the sonnet hints at the very possibility raised by Orsino in his monologue, namely, that the Spirit of Love might be killed by being dulled forever: "and doe not kill / The spirit of Loue, with a perpetual dulnesse."

[3] Many editors of *Twelfth Night* have proposed emendations for "the sweet sound" in lines 5–6, the preferred alternatives for "sound" being "south" and "wind." For a discussion of these proposals, see Horace Howard Furness (ed.), *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, 27 vols., Philadelphia 1871–1955, vol. 13, pp. 9–13. The metaphorical association between sound and

The musicians play the strain once more, but again Duke Orsino's wishes are frustrated. This time it is not because the music ends too quickly, but rather because it has somehow lost its sweetness for him. Impatient, the duke interrupts the performance and dismisses his musicians: "Enough! No more: 'tis not so sweet now as it was before."[4]

How quickly music has lost its price for Orsino: only moments ago he extolled it as the food of love, and likened its immediate, if short-lived, effect to the sweet sound that breathes upon a bank of violets. Now it is nothing more, it seems, than a useless commodity, a plaything to be tossed aside like other empty diversions at court.

Yet the appetite itself – Love – remains as all-consuming as it was before. Far from having been overpowered by a surfeit of music, its capacity to take in the food of love remains limitless. And so, having dismissed his musicians, and marveling still at what has happened, Orsino turns to Love, the boy-god Cupid himself[5]. "O Spirit of love!" he exclaims, "how quick and fresh art thou: [thou] that, notwithstanding thy capacity, receiveth as the sea." How swift, how eager are you, he says, you who can take in as much as the sea, and yet have the capacity of a mere boy. Like the ocean, the Spirit of Love swallows up everything that is fed to it, nothing can exhaust its appetite, on the contrary: it is the other things that become exhausted. Just as music lost its sweetness, so everything else on which Love feeds must become cheap and debased. "Nought enters there," Orsino continues, "of what validity and pitch soe'er, but falls into abatement and low price, even in a minute."

breathing in lines 5–6 may not have been as incongruous or as unworthy of Shakespeare as it now appears, however: see Gretchen Ludke Finney, *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature: 1580–1650*, New Brunswick, N. J. 1962, pp. 119–123.

[4] Conceivably, the loss of perceived sweetness could be taken to signal the onset of satiety in Orsino, in the sense that he has heard too much music, and that, consequently, it begins to lose its sweetness for him. Yet this is not how he himself explains the experience, as we can tell from the duke's reflections in lines 9–14. Here, Orsino concludes that Love has a cheapening and debasing effect on everything on which it feeds, not because it ever reaches satiety, but precisely because it is insatiable. Besides, satiety was not traditionally thought to make things appear less sweet, but rather to make their sweetness disgusting. The analogy with food may help to clarify the difference. A rich and flavorsome dish is bound to seem commonplace and unremarkable after it has been served day after day for weeks on end. Even if we were ravenously hungry, the dish might still not seem as tasty and as appetizing as it had once been – and in that sense it would indeed have fallen into abatement and low price. Yet this is really a matter of habituation, and the response is one of indifference. Satiety, on the other hand, is almost the exact opposite: the more one eats to excess, the more vehement will be the aversion to the dish, to the point where its very flavor may turn the stomach. Orsino, in lines 1–3, had called for terminal satiety of the latter kind, but what he ended up experiencing, in lines 7–8, was habituation of the former kind – a habituation in which the appetite remained as keen as before, yet the music no longer appealed to it.

[5] For this and what follows, see the arguments put forward by Barry B. Adams, "Orsino and the Spirit of Love: Text, Syntax, and Sense in 'Twelfth Night', I. i. 1–15", in: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978), pp. 52–59, especially p. 57, note 10.

The duke sums it all up with an odd *non sequitur* whose precise meaning is not easy to construe: "So full of shapes is fancy, that it alone is high fantastical."[6]

2.

This, in a nutshell, is what seems to transpire in that famous opening monologue of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601/02): it is a tightly compressed story of disappointment and apparent resignation[7]. And yet, with this imaginative retelling of the opening scene we have only touched the surface of what is, in truth, an uncommonly dense and elusive text. The poetry of Orsino's words may be exquisite, yet its surface sense is fragile, and quickly breaks apart upon closer scrutiny.

Consider just the most obvious question: Why does the duke want his appetite to die? The answer, on the surface, is that he is in love, indeed sick with love, and wants to be cured of that ailment. As Orsino complains only moments later, he feels harried and pursued by his desires, like a hart chased by fell and cruel hounds (I. i. 20–22). Fair enough: he is certainly not the first Shakespearean hero to suffer the pains of love, nor the first to look for a remedy.

And yet, is not this a strange way to go about it? Music had been prescribed as a remedy against lovesickness since Antiquity[8]. Yet the way in which musical sounds were thought to restore health was by re-tuning the bodily humors, by bringing them to a balanced and well-proportioned inner harmony. Duke Orsino, on the other hand, is not thinking of harmony or a balanced temperament at all. He calls for excess, a surfeit of music, seeking to force-feed his amorous appetite until it dies.

By Elizabethan standards, his reasoning is not just illogical but absurd. According to every medical textbook of the time, excess was what caused illness, not what cured it. To indulge in a surfeit of music would have been to abuse it; potentially such indulgence could even be quite dangerous. From this alone we can tell that Duke Orsino of Illyria is not a lord living prudently, not a ruler who

[6] As if still reflecting on this experience, Duke Orsino boasts in II. iv. 90–99 that his love for Olivia is "as hungry as the sea, and can digest as much", whereas the love of women "may be called appetite" and hence involves "no motion from the liver [the seat of true love], / But the palate", for which reason women "suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt".

[7] For another recent interpretation of this monologue, see Yu Jin Ko, "The Comic Close of Twelfth Night and Viola's 'Noli me Tangere'", in: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997), pp. 391–405, on pp. 396–398.

[8] Cf. Friedrich Kümmel, *Musik und Medizin: Ihre Wechselbeziehung in Theorie und Praxis von 800 bis 1800*, Freiburg and Munich 1977 (Freiburger Beiträge zur Wissenschafts- und Universitätsgeschichte 2), pp. 306–309; Mary F. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The 'Viaticum' and Its Commentaries*, Philadelphia 1990. Cf. Orsino's remark in II. iv. 3–6: "Give me some music […] / […] but that piece of song, / That old and antique song we heard last night; / Me thought it did relieve my passion much […]".

follows Aristotle's precepts on the good life as a virtuous man ought to [9]. He is a sick man, incapable of treating himself, and in fact making matters worse by self-medicating his condition with a reckless over-indulgence in music. Had he called in a physician, Orsino would certainly have been put on a very different regime, as we can tell from contemporary medical treatises: a change of scenery, fresh air, exercise, a balanced diet, and sundry diversions including music. For those afflicted by lovesickness, the one thing to avoid, more than anything else, was excess of every kind [10]:

> It will bee good for him, to lodge in the fields, or in some pleasant house; to cause him to walke often; to keep him occupied euery houre with one or other pleasant pastime; to bring into his minde a hundred and a hundred sundrie things, to the end he may haue no leisure to think of his loue; to carrie him out a hunting; to the fenceschoole; to holde him vp sometimes with fine and graue stories; sometime with pleasant tales; and therewith to haue merrie musicke: you must not feede him too full or daintily, least the blood beginning to waxe hot, should rouse up the flesh and thereby renew the olde fire.

This is not the only apparent contradiction in the text before us. A little while later in the play, Duke Orsino assures the boy Cesario (who, unbeknownst to him at that point, is Viola in disguise) that "such as I am, all true lovers are: unstaid and skittish in all motions else save in the constant image of the creature that is beloved" (II. iv. 15–18). Yet the opening monologue does not seem to bear this out at all [11]. Rather than contemplating the image of his beloved – a lady whom we will shortly learn is called Olivia – we find him reflecting abstractly upon Love itself, objectified at first as an appetite, and then personified as the Spirit of Love, that is, Cupid. His immediate and most urgent thought is not to love Olivia, to devote himself and his life to her, but rather to be cured of the pains of love, to kill his amorous appetite with a surfeit of music. Olivia herself, it seems, is little more to him than a name, an image, a memory of the instant when he first laid eyes upon her and was stricken by love (I. i. 18–19).

[9] See, for example, Sir Thomas Elyot's recommendation for those trained to serve in high office, in *The Boke Named the Gouernour*, London 1531, fols. 21^{v}–24^{r}: "But in this commendation of musike, I wold nat be thought to allure noble men to haue so moche delectation ther in, that in playinge and singynge only, they shulde put their holle studie and felicitie. […] It were therfore better that no musike were taughte to a noble man, than by the exacte knowlege therof he shuld haue ther in inordinate delite: & by that be illected to wantonnesse, abandonyng grauitie and the necessary cure & office in the publike weale to him committed."

[10] Andreas Laurentius [André du Laurens], *A Discourse of the Preseruation of the Sight of Melancholike Diseases, of Rheumes, and of Old Age*, translated by Richard Surphlet, London 1599, pp. 117–124 (lib. II, cap. 10–11), on p. 123.

[11] And it is expressly contradicted by what Orsino says in II. iv. 30–33, only twelve lines after assuring Cesario of his exemplary constancy as a lover: "For, boy, however we [men] do praise ourselves, / Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm, / More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn, / Than women's are."

As far as Olivia is concerned, moreover, Duke Orsino's words carry a disturbing deeper implication. Love, he says, is like the sea in that it swallows up everything. And like the sea, his love for Olivia turns everything into wreckage, into mere jetsam: "Nought enters there, of what validity and pitch so e'er, but falls into abatement and low price, even in a minute." This was true of the music he heard, whose sweetness faded upon repetition. Yet by implication it must also be true of everything else – "of what validity and pitch so e'er" – including his beloved, Olivia herself. After the desired union with her, one wonders, would not she fall into abatement and low price, even in a minute? One can almost imagine Orsino dismissing her as he had dismissed his musicians: "Enough, no more: 'tis not so sweet now as it was before."[12]

The parallel may not be altogether farfetched. Consider lines 5–7: "[The strain] came o'er my ear, like the sweet sound that breathes upon a bank of violets, stealing and giving odour." On the surface these lines are about musical experience, yet they also hint unmistakably at sexual union. "To breathe upon" means to inspire or inspirit, and thus, indirectly, to endow with life. The "odour" of a flower, distilled in perfume, could be a metaphor for its vital spirit, its life force, which would last when the flower itself had withered and died[13]. And sexual union was seen to culminate in the exchange of spirit – stealing and giving odour[14]. None of this is terribly new, of course: the analogy between musical experience and sexual union was well-established in Elizabethan England[15]. It was also deeply controversial. In fact there were few commentators in this period for whom the

[12] Compare the warning of Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet*, II. vi. 9–15, expressed, significantly, in metaphors of taste, appetite, sweetness, and satiety: "These violent delights [of love] have violent ends / And in their triumph die, like fire and powder, / Which as they kiss consume: the sweetest honey / Is loathsome in his own deliciousness / And in the taste confounds the appetite: / Therefore love moderately; long love doth so; / Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow."

[13] As in Sonnet 54, lines 3–4 and 11–12: "The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem / For that sweet odor which doth in it live […] Sweet roses do not so [i.e. fade and die]; / Of their sweet death are sweetest odors made." For the proverbial sweet scent of violets, cf. Sonnet 99, lines 1–3 ("The forward violet thus did I chide: / Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells / If not from my love's breath?"); *King John*, IV. ii. ("To gild refined gold, to paint the lily, / To throw a perfume on the violet […] / Is wasteful and ridiculous excess"), *Venus & Adonis*, Stanza 154 ("what dost thou [Death] mean / To stifle beauty and to steal his [Adonis's] breath, / Who when he lived, his breath and beauty set / Gloss on the rose, smell to the violet?").

[14] Cf. the well-known opening line of Sonnet 129, which reflects on the loss of youth and vigor that were supposed to be attendant upon ejaculation, on the assumption that there is only a limited quantity of spirit to be expended in one lifetime: "Th'expence of Spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action […]" The Galenic theory, as understood in Elizabethan England, is summarized and explained in Stephen J. Greenblatt's famous essay "Fiction and Friction", chapter 3 of *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Berkeley 1988, pp. 66–93.

[15] Finney, *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature* (see note 3), pp. 102–125; John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry, 1500–1700*, Princeton, N. J. 1961, pp. 199–201; Linda Phyllis Austern, "'Sing Againe Syren': The Female Musician and Sexual Enchantment in Elizabethan Life and Literature", in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 42 (1989), pp. 420–448.

analogy seemed more self-evident (and more clearly indicative of the pernicious evils of music) than Shakespeare's Puritan contemporaries. To them, a man who hears music as Orsino does, who relishes the experience as a kind of physical consummation, one that he immediately longs to savor again, would have provided the clearest possible proof of what they had been insisting all along – that music provokes lascivious desire. Yet the analogy would have been equally obvious to non-Puritans, even though it probably troubled them far less.

Either way, it signals what appears to be the fundamental problem for Orsino. His love is an appetite that he is neither attempting to master through self-control, nor able to kill through excessive over-indulgence. No matter what he might declare to be the food of love, whether music or sex or anything else, it leaves his love hungering and he will need more of it, only to find it debased and devalued upon repetition.

3.

If this is indeed Orsino's predicament, then his affliction is a much graver one than lovesickness as traditionally understood, which was agreed to be eminently treatable. Throughout the medieval and early modern literature on the subject, the first and most obvious remedy against the malady was to enjoy the thing beloved, that is, in his case, to consummate his love with Olivia. Yet this is precisely the remedy that cannot work for him[16]:

> There are two waies to cure this amourous melancholie: the one is the injoying of the thing beloued: the other resteth in the skill and paines of a good Phisition. As concerning the first, it is certaine that the principal cause of the disease, which is this burning desire, being taken away, the diseased partie will finde himselfe marueilously relieued, though notwithstanding there may remaine behinde some certaine prints and skarres in the bodie. […]
>
> But this course of cure being such as neither ought nor can alwaies be put in practise, as being contrary vnto the lawes of God and men, we must haue recourse vnto the other which dependeth vpon the industrie of the good Phisition.

For Ovid, that greatest authority in all matters of the heart and of the flesh, it had been no more than self-evident that love will die when enjoyed to satiety, just as surely as a surfeit of food will kill the appetite. As he famously put it in *Amores*: "Fatted love, too freely available, becomes loathsome to us, and as noxious as sweet things to the stomach."[17]

[16] Laurentius, *A Discourse of the Preseruation* (see note 10), p. 121 f. See also Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages* (see note 8), pp. 66–70.

[17] "Pinguis amor nimiumque patens in taedia nobis / vertitur et, stomacho dulcis ut esca, nocet" (*Amores*, lib. II, cap. xix, ll. 25–26).

In his *Remedia Amoris*, Ovid had taken this axiom to its logical conclusion. He exhorted unhappy lovers to indulge the food of love without any restraint or inhibition, to carry its physical enjoyment to such excess as to kill the appetite once and for all. His advice seems to have left an audible echo in *Twelfth Night*. "Give me excess of it," Duke Orsino demanded, "that, surfeiting, the appetite may sicken, and so die." Ovid had captured the same premise in a pithy aphorism that might well have served as the duke's motto: *copia tollat amorem* – let excess destroy love [18].

> Let thy winds drive thy ship as they doe please.
> I would have thee quench the thirst of thy desire,
> And with some common water quench thy fire.
> And thou maist drinke far more than will suffice,
> Till full of water thou dost it despise.
> With thy Sweet-heart take thy fill of delight,
> And in her company spend both day and night:
> For thy Love will end with such satiety,
> And thou shalt be able to want her company,
> And tarry from her: hungry Love is tyr'd
> With plenty, and doth loath what he desir'd.

Still, the upshot of *Twelfth Night*'s opening monologue is precisely that unbridled indulgence cannot work, at least not for Duke Orsino. As if responding directly to Ovid's *copia tollat amorem*, he concludes in lines 9–14 that there is *no excess* that could ever destroy the passion of his love. His torments are incurable and untreatable.

This, as far as I know, is a novel idea, for which there is no clear antecedent in the contemporary literature on lovesickness. The nearest I can find to a possible source (assuming, for the moment, that Shakespeare would have needed a source) is a text that had come to light only relatively recently, in the fifteenth century, and that was still not widely read in Elizabethan England. This is the Epicurean treatise *De rerum natura* of Titus Lucretius Carus, which has a long and now famous section on love and sexuality.

Lucretius' treatise is known to have been of particular interest to Michel de Montaigne, who quoted frequently from it in his *Essais*, and whose heavily annotated copy of *De rerum natura* has been well studied [19]. Unfortunately it remains a matter of debate whether Shakespeare, too, had ready access to the treatise,

[18] Ovid, *Remedia Amoris*, ll. 534–542. Quoted after *Ovids Remedy of Love, Directing Lovers how They May by Reason Suppresse the Passion of Love*, transl. by J. Carpenter, London 1636, p. 25.

[19] Michael Andrew Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius: A Transcription and Study of the Manuscript, Notes and Pen-Marks*, Geneva 1998 (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 325).

though there are plenty of apparent echoes resounding in his work [20]. The opening monologue of *Twelfth Night* is one of several passages that make the possibility an intriguing one.

For Lucretius, in Book 4 of *De rerum natura*, lovesickness is essentially a mental disturbance, a delusional obsession – not with the beloved herself (who could not possibly merit such idolisation), but rather with false and deceptive images of her, with mere simulacra. It is this delusional nature that allows the malady to take on a life of its own. The diseased lover may not have direct access to the object of his affections, in fact he may not have seen her more than once in his life. Yet once the passion has been ignited, all it takes for it to become all-consuming is continued indulgence in images of his beloved and, more generally, in what Lucretius describes as "the food of love" (*pabula amoris*) [21]. This is the state in which we find Duke Orsino, being, as he himself claimed, "unstaid and skittish in all motions else save in the constant image of the creature that is beloved," and pursuing to excess whatever he proclaims to be the food of love.

According to Lucretius, the images may feed the lover's passion, but they provide no nourishment. On the contrary, they not only inflict the torments of love, but add insult to injury by feeding the false hope of a woman who might make those torments go away [22]:

> For if the object of your love is absent, yet images of it are present and its sweet name haunts your ears. But it is proper to shun the images and banish from oneself the food of love, and also to turn the mind elsewhere and cast the gathered liquid into any bodies whatsoever, not to hold it back, having once been turned by the love of one, and store up care for oneself and certain pain [...].

[20] L. C. Martin, "Shakespeare, Lucretius, and the Commonplaces," in: *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945), pp. 174–182.

[21] Lucretius's expression "pabula amoris" is included among the citations in Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus linguae Romanae & Britannicae*, London 1578, sig. H 1^{v}, a manual which Shakespeare is widely thought to have used as a poetic resource; cf. Thomas Whitfield Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols., Urbana 1944. The English expression "food of love" can be found in Achilles Tatius, *The Most Delectable and Pleasaunt History of Clitiphon and Leucippe*, translated by William Burton, London 1597, p. 22: "for Loue and Bacchus are two violent gods, which boysterously assailing the heart, doth so heat it with an vnaccustomed fire, that they do constrain one to forget all modestie, whilest the one doeth yield his accustomed fire, y^{e} other doth minister matter for this fire, *for wine is the food of loue*."

[22] For this and what follows, see Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, lib. IV, ll. 1058–1067 and 1086–1102; translated after Robert D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex: A Commentary on 'De rerum natura' 4. 1030–1287, With Prolegomena, Text, and Translation*, Leiden 1987 (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 15), pp. 148–153. These texts could conceivably have been known to Shakespeare by way of the extended quotations in Giordano Bruno Nolano, *De gl'heroici furori*, Paris [i. e. London] 1585, sig. H 6$^{r–v}$ (Dialogo V, xiii). Shorter quotations can be found in the context of later discussions of lovesickness, for example, in Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, London 1640, p. 105, and Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy: What it is, with all the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, & Severall Cures of it*, 6th edition, London 1652, p. 550.

The very nature of this ailment precludes a cure or even momentary relief. Unlike physical appetite, which can be stilled by the nourishing substances supplied through food and drink, the lover's hunger is a craving for something imaginary, something that does not exist, that cannot enter his body and sustain him as genuine food would:

> […] this is the one thing of which however much we have, the more the breast grows inflamed with dreadful desire. For food and liquid are taken inside within the limbs, and since they can occupy definite parts, the desire for fluids and bread is thereby easily fulfilled. But from the face and beautiful complexion of a human being nothing is passed into the body to be made use of except fine images, which pitiful hope often snatches […].

It is for this reason that physical consummation, even with the beloved herself, cannot bring any cure either. The more desperately the lover clings to her body, tries to merge with her, to become one with his beloved, the more painfully he is reminded that there can be no fulfilment – at least none that could be more than brief and illusory. As Orsino discovered in *Twelfth Night*, even the stealing and giving of sweet odour must end in a dying fall:

> At last, when with limbs united they enjoy the flower of youth, when finally the body has a presentiment of delight and Venus is on the point of sowing the woman's fields, they greedily attach the body and join the mouth's salivas and draw deep breath while pressing the mouth with teeth – in vain, since they cannot scrape off anything from there or enter in and merge into the other body with their whole body; for sometimes they seem to want and struggle to do so […]. At length, when the gathered desire has burst from the groin, a small cessation of the raging heat occurs for a while. Then the same frenzy returns and back comes that derangement, when they seek for what it is they really desire to attain for themselves, and cannot discover what contrivance will conquer the ill: in such uncertainty do they waste away with an unseen wound.

The advice of Lucretius, as we saw in the first quotation from *De rerum natura*, is for lovers "to shun the images and to banish from oneself the food of love (*simulacra et pabula amoris*)."[23] So if music be the food of love, as Orsino had posited, then the Epicurean philosopher's counsel would have been unequivocal: do *not* play on, and stop listening at once. Yet the duke, following Ovid's principle of *copia tollat amorem*, had done exactly the opposite. All he thereby managed to demonstrate was the truth of Lucretius's analysis, which he himself summed up in the final lines of the monologue.

[23] More generally, the remedy Lucretius proposes in *De rerum natura*, lib. IV, ll. 1149–1184, is to expose the images for the illusions they are, by recognizing how thoroughly unappetizing and off-putting is the actual physical reality of the beloved.

Of course, none of these apparent parallels necessarily prove that Shakespeare was familiar with *De rerum natura*, or that it was this treatise from which he borrowed the expression "the food of love" and the peculiar syndrome that haunts Orsino. Not every idea in Elizabethan literature must necessarily have its origin in an older text. At the same time, it would not be surprising if Shakespeare had meant Orsino to be viewed as a quintessentially Epicurean lover. For the duke's attitude to music, as we will shortly see, could be described as quintessentially Epicurean as well.

Perhaps Lucretius could shed light even on those inscrutable final lines of Orsino's monologue: "So full of shapes is fancy that it alone is high fantastical." The images in the faculty of imagination were indeed thought of as forms (in Aristotelian terms) or ideas (in Platonic terms). Orsino's "shapes of fancy" may well be compared with what Lucretius describes as the cause of all trouble: the images of the beloved, the simulacra that mercilessly feed the unquenchable appetite. Such constant feeding will make the imagination frenzied, filled with feverish cravings, or, as Orsino puts it, "high fantastical."[24] It sounds plausible enough, though of course this would be to credit Orsino with far more self-knowledge than he seems capable of possessing.

4.

Although the opening scene of *Twelfth Night* is a fascinating text for those interested in the history of musical ideas, there is also something disappointing about it. Orsino's monologue begins like a veritable encomium of music, and contains some of the most beautiful words about the art ever written in the English language. The first line alone has often been quoted to suggest that *Twelfth Night* is one of Shakespeare's most "musical" plays[25]. Yet the monologue does not, in the end, turn out to be a tribute to the art. Barely eight lines into the text, the duke's mind wanders off to other matters, and nothing he says about music in the remainder of the play can match the breathtaking poetry he summoned in those first few moments. It is as if the second part of the monologue directly undercuts and contradicts the first, leaving us with only one possible conclusion to draw about music: as the food of love – at least in Orsino's experience – it must necessarily and always fall into abatement and low price.

[24] It is only characteristic of his unbridled self-indulgence that at the end of the first scene, instead of going hunting, Orsino decides to go out into the flower gardens and to devote all his time there thinking more love-thoughts: "Away before me, to sweet beds of Flowres, / Loue-thoughts lye rich, when canopy'd with bowres."

[25] Cf. Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky* (see note 15), pp. 153–161; Robin Headlam Wells, *Elizabethan Mythologies: Studies in Poetry, Drama, and Music*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 208–224.

And yet, it is possible to arrive at a different reading of the same monologue, one in which it does turn out to be considered statement about music after all. To explore that possibility it will be helpful to consider a late seventeenth-century response to Orsino's monologue: the poem "If Music Be the Food of Love" (c. 1690) by Henry Heveningham, famously set to music in three compositions by Henry Purcell. Heveningham borrowed the first seven words of Orsino's monologue, yet his poem parts company with Shakespeare almost immediately thereafter[26]:

If musick be the food of Love,
Sing on till I am fill'd with joy;
For then my listning Soul you move,
To pleasures that can never cloy:
Your Eyes, your Meen, your Tongue declare,
That you are Musick ev'ry where.

Pleasures invade both Eye and Ear;
So fierce the transports are, they wound;
And all my Senses feasted are;
Tho' yet the Treat is only Sound;
Sure I must perish by your Charms,
Unless you save me in your Armes.

Heveningham cast his reworking of Orsino's monologue as a decorous love song, apparently in the woman's voice, and at the same time as a moralizing reflection upon music and musical experience. As such it does suffer somewhat from a lack of coherence. The two stanzas both end with couplets that are declarations of love addressed directly to the beloved, yet these couplets do not connect logically with the lines that precede them, and in fact they seem quite trivial as poetry. How, for example, can it be meaningfully said of the beloved that he is "Musick ev'ry where" (l. 6), even figuratively speaking, and how could his eyes, mien, and tongue be taken to declare that? And how grievous a death could the speaker be about to die (l. 11), even figuratively speaking, if a simple embrace would be enough to avert that fate?

The lines about music, on the other hand, do seem to offer a coherent poetic statement about music. Heveningham suggests that there are, in effect, two kinds of musical experience. In so far as the sounds invade only the ear, in so far as they merely feast the senses, "the treat is only Sound" (l. 9–10)[27]. Yet music may

[26] After Henry Purcell, *Orpheus Britannicus, A Collection of All the Choicest Songs for One, Two, and Three Voices Compos'd by Mr. Henry Purcell*, London 1698, pp. 6–8.

[27] For the origins and early history of this expression, see Rob C. Wegman, "Musical Understanding in the Fifteenth Century," in: *Early Music* 30 (2002), pp. 46–66, and id., *The Crisis*

also penetrate more deeply and move the listening soul. It then fills the listener with joy, a pleasure that, unlike mere sound, can never cloy (l. 2–4). The message, in other words, is that one must aspire beyond sound – which is "only" sound and which will quickly sate – and relish musical joy of a higher order, one that is beyond the crude palate of the ear alone.

This is a statement about music, yet it is also, implicitly, a statement about Duke Orsino. In fact one could plausibly argue that Heveningham, in writing his poetic response, made explicit what Shakespeare had said only in so many words. The obvious problem about Orsino, as a listener, is that he was a slave to his appetite, a glutton for sensuous musical pleasure, a musical Epicurean. The duke himself had admitted as much: the strain overwhelmed his ear, and the experience, though brief, had been suggestive of sexual climax, the stealing and giving of spirit. Yet did it move his listening soul as well? To judge from how swiftly the duke lost interest in the strain, one can only doubt it. If the sweetness of the music eluded him upon repeated hearing, then it can only be, at least in Heveningham's interpretation, because he feasted his ears on a treat that was only sound, and never experienced the spiritual joy that music can offer besides.

Although Heveningham's reworking may not be particularly memorable as poetry, then, it does suggest an answer to the problem signalled a moment ago. The key point to emerge from his response is this: If Orsino's experience was one of disappointment, it is not the music that is to blame, nor does the art necessarily fall into abatement and low price because of this. The problem, rather, lies in the duke's own tendency to abuse all "food of love" that promises to kill his appetite when taken to excess. Orsino, in other words, is a music abuser, a man who loves music for all the wrong reasons, and who is quick to blame the art when it fails to give him what he craves. His words, even in the first lines of the play, had never amounted to genuine praise for the art at all – they were contingent, all along, on the expectation that music would medicate away his pains.

As a literary topos, the Music Abuser was well known to educated readers in Elizabethan England: It was a character type that had been invented and developed, in early sixteenth-century Italy, as a scapegoat on whom to deflect the increasingly hysterical criticisms of music that were being voiced by contemporary detractors of the art[28]. In Elizabethan England it was mostly the Puritans (such men as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*) who were known to condemn music for being useless and wasteful, immoral and effeminizing[29]. Music's defenders, in response, adopted a strategy of shifting the blame, away from the art itself to those who

of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530, New York 2005, pp. 34 f., 38 f., 64, 148, 161, 198, note 26, and 202, note 59.

[28] For the history of this topos, and for the debates that gave rise to its invention, see Wegman, *The Crisis of Music* (see note 27), pp. 61 f., 64, 70 f., 99, and 103.

[29] See ibid., pp. 105–108, and the relevant literature, cited on p. 211.

abused it – those decadent, soft, and womanish music abusers who, like Orsino, had so grievously harmed the art by indulging in music to excess. It is this strategy that had called the stereotypical Music Abuser into being. To Elizabethan readers the argument would have been best known for its formulation in the treatise *The Praise of Musicke* (1587), formerly ascribed to John Case[30]:

For what if many men be more caried away with the pleasure of the sound then with the thing and ditty, is this Musickes fault? or is it not rather the fault of them, which by that which is good, take occasion of euill? If some intemperate person, take surfeit of pleasant and holsome meates, are the meates to be reprehended, or the man?

Duke Orsino could indeed be regarded as the direct counterpart to that "intemperate person" who ate more meat than was good for him, and whose over-indulgence could not justifiably be invoked to blame the meat itself. As he appears to us in the opening scene of *Twelfth Night*, Orsino is the living proof that if you indulge in music to excess, you will only end up cheapening and debasing the art, yet will have no-one to blame but yourself. In this sense, the opening monologue could be read as a morality tale in miniature, one whose lesson would have been more immediately recognizable to contemporary audiences than it may be to us now.

5.

As the quotation from *The Praise of Musicke* suggests, the idea of musical satiety, and the underlying analogy between music and food, seems to have been well-established in Elizabethan England. We also find it in other late sixteenth-century texts, including, for example, the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne[31]:

Pensons nous que les enfans de coeur prennent grand plaisir à la musique? La sacieté la leur rend plustost ennuyeuse. Les festins, les danses, les masquarades, les tournois reiouyssent ceux qui ne les voyent pas souuent, & qui ont desiré de les voir: mais à qui en faict ordinaire, le goust en deuient fade & mal plaisant …

Thinke we, that high-minded men take great pleasure in musicke? The satietie thereof makes it rather tedious vnto them. Feasts, banquets, revells, dancings, maskes and turneys rejoyce them that but seldome see them, and that have much desired to see them: the taste of which becommeth cloysome and vnpleasing to those that dayly see, and ordinarily have them …

Still, although the idea of musical satiety must have been a virtual commonplace by the late sixteenth century, it cannot have been very old. No medieval

30 An., *The Praise of Musicke*, Oxford 1586, repr. Hildesheim and New York 1980, p. 145.

31 Michel de Montaigne, *Essays de messire Michel seignevr de Montaigne, chevalier de l'Ordre du roy, & gentil-homme ordinaire de sa chambre*, Bordeaux 1580, p. 403; *The Essayes*

writer ever suggests that musical appreciation and the physical appetite for food have anything in common, let alone that music may lose its appeal upon repeated hearing. On the contrary: medieval writers on music, if anything, were concerned with scientific truth, with objective musical qualities such as number, proportion, and harmony whose value and truth was not contingent upon the fleeting disposition of this or that listener. For them, the sweetness of consonance was much more than merely a pleasurable sensation. As every university student knew from Boethius' *De musica*, consonant sound is the expression of a simple mathematical proportion, and is in that sense revealing of a higher, metaphysical truth. And of truth, musical or otherwise, there can never be surfeit or excess: it transcends all question of quantity or measure.

As it turns out, the idea of musical satiety does not actually go back much further than the 1470s. To my knowledge, the earliest surviving text to document it is a letter by an obscure composer named Antonio Le Basque. In September 1472 he sent some of his own compositions with a covering letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, Lord of Florence. Le Basque professed modesty about his creative efforts, however, and in fact he felt unable to recommend his songs at all except, interestingly, as possible antidotes to musical satiety. Here is how he reasoned. Le Basque admitted that his songs were merely laughable compared to those of others, yet he nevertheless ventured that the ruler of Florence might see fit to listen to them. Even the discerning ears of a great lord, after all, may occasionally be turned off by a surfeit of sweet and smooth sounds. And when that happens, such a lord might well choose to hear something disagreeable if only to appreciate how good the better-composed songs were [32]. For precisely that eventuality, Le Basque was happy to supply the much-needed repertory [33].

or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne, translated by John Florio, London 1603, p. 143.

[32] This recalls the anecdote about the Greek aulos player Antigenidas, reported in Plutarch's Life of Demetrius: Antigenidas used to think that young men would listen more gladly to good aulos players if they also had experience of bad ones. Plutarch used no alimentary imagery in his text, but when Montaigne alluded to the story in his *Essays*, the way he phrased it was that listeners had "drunk their fill" (*abbreuvé*) of bad musicians before hearing the good ones: "[le] musicien Antinonydes, qui quand il auoit à faire la musique, mettoit ordre que deuant ou apres luy, son auditoire fust abbreuué de quelques autres mauuais chantres." See Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais de Michel seigneur de Montaigne: edition nouuelle prise sur l'exemplaire trouué apres le deceds de l'autheur*, Paris 1602, p. 902. John Florio, in his English translation, pushed the imagery even further in the direction of satiety: "*Antinonydes* the Musicions inuention; who when he was to play any musicke, gaue order that before or after him, some other bad muisicions should cloy and surfet his auditory." After Montaigne, *The Essayes*, translated by Florio (see note 31), p. 525.

[33] Letter of the composer Antonio Le Basque to Lorenzo de' Medici, written at Urbino on 16 September 1472. After Frank A. D'Accone, "Lorenzo il Magnifico e la musica," in: *La musica a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. by Piero Gargiulo, Florence 1993, pp. 219–248, on p. 238.

Essendo di voi publica fama che d'ogni virtù ornato sete, et d'ogni facultà intimo amico, et precipue di musica *sine qua nulla disciplina potest esse perfecta, teste Ysidoro* [*Etymologiae* lib. III, cap. xvii], seguitando le vestigie del vostro laudabile genitore, la farma del quale sempre viverà, et degli altri vostri antecessori, disposime mandarvi queste canzonette ridicule da me novamente composte.

Et benché le degne opere de diversi miei maestri queste senza comparatione offuschino, non lassarò di mandarvile, perché diversi appetiti diverse vivande cercano. Et como già vostro fra Mariano in la Nunciata disse, "quando li cittadini fiorentini sonno stufi d'audire excellenti et doctissimi predicatori, pure in fine tornano a me come coloro che stufi sonno di delicati cibi et vien lor voglia di carne insalata."

Cossì farete di questi miei canti, havendo l'orechie satie di dolce et suave melodie, tornarete a questi canti, non perché vi dilectino mha [*sic*] sol per meglio gustar gl'altri, perché meglio se comprehende el dolce quando se gusta l'amaro.

Since you enjoy the public fame that you are adorned with every virtue and are the intimate friend of every faculty – especially of music, without which, according to Isidore, no art can be perfect, following [in this regard] the footsteps of your praiseworthy father whose fame may always live on, as well as of your other ancestors – I am moved to send you these laughable little songs that I have lately composed.

And although the esteemed works of my various masters overshadow these [songs] without comparison, I do not hold back from sending them to you, for *different appetites look for different foods*. And as your Fra Mariano [da Genazzano] already said in the Nunciata: "When the Florentine citizens are tired of hearing excellent and most learned preachers, they end up turning to me just like those who are tired of delicate foods and feel like having some salted meat."

Likewise you must do with these songs of mine: *when your ears are filled up with sweet and smooth sounds, turn to these songs, not because they would delight you, but simply in order to have a better taste of the others. For sweetness can be taken in better after one has tasted something bitter.*

After a diet of delicate foods, as Fra Mariano had remarked in one of his sermons, even salted meat may seem worth a try. It is not hard to suspect where these alimentary metaphors might have come from: as a preacher, Mariano must have been steeped in the art of rhetoric, and was no doubt familiar with Cicero's influential precepts on satiety and variety. In *De oratore*, Cicero had argued that a speaker who keeps using the same rhetorical devices over and over again will not only wear out his audience, but provoke disgust. That response, he had suggested, is very much like the satiety we feel when we have eaten too much of the same dish.

Satiety, for Cicero, was more than merely a feeling of indifference, however: he described it as a violent response, a powerful aversion. In his view, pleasure can turn into disgust almost instantaneously, and the aversion felt at that point is sure to be equally vehement as the pleasure experienced only moments before.

The more intense a flavor is, the more quickly our enjoyment of it will turn into loathing [34].

Etiam gustatus, qui est sensus ex omnibus maxime voluptarius quique dulcitudine praeter ceteros sensus commovetur, quam cito id, quod valde dulce est, aspernatur ac respuit! Quis potione uti aut cibo dulci diutius potest? Cum utroque in genere ea, quae leviter sensum voluptate moveant, facillime fugiant satietatem. Sic omnibus in rebus voluptatibus maximis fastidium finitimum est […] sensus in nimia voluptate natura, non mente satiantur; in scriptis et in dictis non aurium solum, sed animi iudicio etiam magis infucata vitia noscuntur.

How soon does even the taste, which of all our senses is the most desirous of gratification, and is delighted with sweetness beyond the others, nauseate and reject that which is too luscious! Who can take sweet drinks and meats long together? While, in both kinds of nutriment, such things as affect the sense with but a slight pleasure are the furthest removed from that satiating quality; and so, in all other things, loathing still borders upon the most exquisite delights […] the senses, when affected with too much pleasure, are satiated, not from reason, but constitutionally; in writings and in speeches these disguised blemishes are even more readily noticed, not only from the judgment of the ear, but from that of the understanding.

To ward off the danger of satiety in the art of oratory, Cicero had recommended that speakers apply the principle of *variety,* delighting their audience by tastefully alternating different rhetorical devices. That, at bottom, is the remedy proposed by Le Basque (and Fra Mariano before him) as well. The only difference is that our composer applied the principle of variety not so much to his own songs but rather recommended it for Lorenzo de' Medici's musical diet as a whole.

Still, although Le Basque's reasoning is recognizeably Ciceronian, and does seem to anticipate Orsino's monologue in this regard, it is necessary to be careful about the precise claims that can be made for his letter as a historical document. For one thing, apart from this one epistle we do not know anything about the composer, and so it is difficult to say how much, if any, exposure he may have had to Cicero's writings [35]. More importantly, even if Le Basque had borrowed the idea of satiety directly from *De oratore*, one wonders why he would have been the first to apply it to the appreciation of polyphony. Cicero's treatise alone cannot explain

[34] For this and the next quotation, see Cicero, *De oratore*, lib. III, xxv (97–100). Translation after *Cicero on Oratory and Orators: With His Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, translated by John Selby Watson, London 1884, p. 359 f. See also Elaine Fantham, "'Varietas' and 'Satietas': 'De oratore' 3.96–103 and the Limits of 'Ornatus'", in: *Rhetorica* 6 (1988), pp. 275–290.

[35] Le Basque does intend to make it clear to Lorenzo that he is a man of education, by deftly weaving a quotation from Isidore's *Etymologiae* into his letter.

the borrowing, for it had been widely known throughout the Middle Ages, and yet there is no previous writer who speaks of musical satiety as Le Basque does. This is indeed remarkable, for Cicero himself had already extended the idea of satiety to the realm of musical experience: in an earlier passage of *De oratore*, he had argued that even the softest and most delicate modulations and notes may become unpalatable when repeated too often. For centuries, then, the idea of musical satiety had been waiting, ready-made, to be picked up by medieval writers – and yet, puzzlingly, they never did:

Difficile enim dictu est, quaenam causa sit, cur ea, quae maxime sensus nostros impellunt voluptate et specie prima acerrime commovent, ab eis celerrime fastidio quodam et satietate abalienemur. […] Quanto molliores sunt et delicatiores in cantu flexiones et falsae voculae quam certae et severae! Quibus tamen non modo austeri, sed, si saepius fiunt, multitudo ipsa reclamat.

For it is difficult to tell what the cause is why, from those objects which most strongly strike our senses with pleasure, and occasion the most violent emotions at their first appearance, we should soonest turn away with a certain loathing and satiety. […] How much softer and more delicate are fanciful modulations and notes in music, than those which are strict and grave; and yet if the former are often repeated, not only persons of an austere character, but even the multitude, raise an outcry against them.

Why would Cicero's argument have failed to leave any mark in medieval writings on music? The reason is not difficult to guess: No writer will borrow an idea merely because Cicero wrote it. Every idea, no matter how authoritative its source, has to make *sense* if it is to become worthy of quotation or allusion. And the problem about Cicero's idea of satiety, at least as applied to music, was that it had never made any obvious sense. In fact it makes very little sense even in Orsino's monologue.

Music, after all, is not like food in one obvious respect: there is no physical appetite for it to quench, there is no known medical harm in "consuming" it without moderation, and, for that very reason, it is hard to know what, exactly, would constitute "excess" on the part of listeners and performers. At what precise point is "too much" too much? Is it when a particular piece of music gives us little pleasure, or when it seems tedious and commonplace? It is certainly true that we would then want to hear no more of it. On the other hand, could this not equally well be a sign of the opposite, that we have not been listening long enough, that our ears require more training and experience?

Besides, if in Duke Orsino's experience, the same piece of music has a "sweet sound" at one moment, yet is "not so sweet" the very next, then what was actually praiseworthy about it the first time he heard it, and how trustworthy was his perception of its sweetness then? To rephrase this point in more general terms, if

the things we appreciate most in music are contingent on who is listening, and how much he or she has heard already, how can we maintain that the art of music is founded in true principles? What *is* musical truth? What are the foundations of the art? The idea of musical satiety, in other words, raises a multitude of questions, all of which pose a direct threat to the foundations of music theory as set forth by Boethius. If those foundations were to be upheld as certain and true, then it necessarily followed that the idea of musical satiety had to be nonsensical.

We can recognize some of these problems in the text by Antonio Le Basque. Although his letter was obviously written in a playful spirit (in sofar as anyone could afford to be playful in correspondence with Lorenzo de' Medici), his reasoning did problematize the question of musical truth, precisely in that it blurred the distinction between good music and bad music. It was one thing for our composer to claim that good music may sometimes be too much of a good thing – though that was already problematic enough in itself. It was quite another to conclude that, *ergo*, it may sometimes be useful and appropriate to listen to bad music. This is the inevitable problem when criteria of appetite and taste are admitted to the realm of musical appreciation: They will not only dilute otherwise secure distinctions, but will in fact introduce an element of perversity in musical value-judgement. That is how Fra Mariano could end up suggesting that even salted meat may be positively tasty. It is true that Le Basque himself stopped short of suggesting that his "laughable little songs" might offer musical delight. Yet once the argument was in place, with all the problems it entailed, it is not hard to predict that others might do just that. Barely sixty years after Le Basque, as we will see, one of the most influential writers of the Renaissance would claim that in certain circumstances the human ear may take a perverse pleasure even in dissonance.

One music theorist who was keenly aware of these dangers was Johannes Tinctoris. He was quite ready to accept that there is a subjective element to the appreciation of consonant sweetness, that a given sonority may sound more or less sweet depending on the context in which we hear it[36]. And yet, although it may be useful to make these qualifications, he felt, it does not mean that we can then continue to do the same all the way to sounds that are disagreeable and offensive to the ear. There is no sliding scale between consonance and dissonance,

[36] See the pathbreaking article by Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, "Boethius and the Judgement of the Ears: A Hidden Challenge in Medieval and Renaissance Music," in: *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgement from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by Charles Burnett, Michael Fend, and Penelope Gouk, London 1991, pp. 169–198. I have explored the implications of Sachs's essay in two recent articles, "Johannes Tinctoris and the 'New Art'", in: *Music & Letters* 84 (2003), pp. 171–188, and "Johannes Tinctoris and the Art of Listening", in: *"Recevez ce mien petit labeur": Studies in Renaissance Music in Honour of Ignace Bossuyt*, ed. by Pieter Bergé and Marc Delaere, Leuven 2008, pp. 279–296.

no basis on which to compare or relate them: The ugliness of dissonance admits of no qualification – it is absolute. So the kind of reasoning we find in Antonio Le Basque's letter, that bad music may serve a purpose in that it makes good music sound better, would have been unacceptable to him. According to Tinctoris it would be a grave error to justify dissonances on the grounds that they make the consonances around them sound better. Here is how he put it in his *Liber de arte contrapuncti* of 1477[37]:

Capitulum XXX. Confutatio quorumdam dicentium hanc ob causam discordantias integras admitti ut concordantia sequens dulcior appareat.

Et nonnulli sunt qui talis integrae discordantiae admissionem probant, eo quod concordantia immediate sequens suavior appareat, ut enim natura est, opposita iuxta se posita magis elucescunt [Aristotle, *Sophistici Elenchi* xv, 174 b 5–7].

O firmissima ratio! Num quid vitium aliquod ab homine praedicto virtute committendum est, quo virtus eius clarius enitescat? Num quid orationi distincte et ornate aliqua ineptia est inserenda, ut caeterae partes eius elegantiores esse videantur? Et quid obsecro eruditorum pictorum visum delectare nitentium viderit umquam alicui pulchrae formae quampiam deformitatem admisisse, quo caeterae membra formosiora appareant?

Quid verbis moror? Si Tullio credimus [*De officiis*, lib. I, cap. xxxi], quemadmodum in omnem vitam, ita in actiones nullam discrepantiam conferre debemus. Namque, ut idem in primo suorum Officialium librorum [lib. I, cap. xli], "in fidibus aut tibiis, quamvis paululum discrepent, tamen id a sciente animadverti solet." Unde fit

Chapter 30. Refutation of certain people who say that integral dissonances [i. e. those that last the equivalent of a whole beat] are to be admitted for this reason that the following consonance may appear the more sweet.

And there are some who approve the admission of such integral dissonances for the reason that the consonance immediately following will appear the more sweet, for it is natural for contrary things to shine forth better when placed next to one another.

O reason most valid! Surely a man of commendable virtue ought not commit some vice in order that his virtue will shine more clearly? Surely one ought not insert something silly into a distinguished and richly-adorned oration in order that the other parts may seem more elegant? And among experienced painters seeking to delight the sense of vision, I ask, which one has considered to admit some sort of deformity in a beautiful shape in order that the other members would appear more shapely?

But why waste more words? Just as in our whole life, so in our actions ought we not to bring any discordance, if we are to believe Cicero. For according to the same, in the first book of his *De officiis*, "although lyres and tibia may diverge ever so slightly, it will nevertheless be noticed by the knowledgeable [listener]." And that

[37] Johannes Tinctoris, *Liber de arte contrapuncti* (1477), lib. II, cap. xxx. After Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. by Albert Seay, 2 vols., [Rome] 1975 and 1978 (CSM 22), vol. 2, p. 139 f.

quod praeter intentionem musicae quam Aristoteles naturalem in se delectationem continere affirmat [*Politics*, VIII], animus eruditi auditoris in dolorem collabatur.

is why the soul of the experienced listener falls into grief, contrary to the intention of [the art of] music, which Aristotle stated to contain within itself a natural delight.

For Tinctoris, then, consonance and dissonance are fundamentally distinct species of sound, as absolute in their distinction as virtue and vice. Virtues are relative only in the sense that greater virtues outshine smaller ones, just as one consonance may sound sweeter than another. But no virtue is good simply because it constrasts with some horrible vice – the very comparison would have been inappropriate.

Ironically, Tinctoris is much better known today for the other side of the same coin: his own recommendation that composers and singers of counterpoint must diligently apply the principle of variety. His eighth general rule of counterpoint, in the third book of the *Liber de arte contrapuncti*, famously decrees that variety must be "most keenly sought after in all counterpoint." What is equally well known is the Ciceronian inspiration for this rule. "For just as variety in the art of public speaking, according to Cicero, brings great pleasure to the listener," or so the theorist declared, "so, in music, does the diversity of harmonious sound provoke the most vehement delight in the souls of listeners." [38]

Tinctoris's recommendation has invited much scholarly commentary [39], yet perhaps it is noteworthy not just for what it says, but also for what it avoids saying. Tinctoris is quite happy to invoke Cicero when it comes to the principle of variety, yet he is reluctant to dwell upon the equally Ciceronian basis for that principle, namely, the danger of satiety. Nor is it hard to understand why. This, after all, would have forced him to admit a problematic implication: that musical devices which are in themselves commendable may provoke aversion and disgust when used to excess.

For all that he advocated variety in music, Tinctoris was not ready to accept that implication. He could countenance an adverse response to dissonance, or to simple lack of compositional skill, because reason and authority agreed that such things have no place in the art of music. Yet it was much harder for him

[38] Tinctoris, *Liber de arte contrapuncti*, lib. III, cap. viii; Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica* (see note 37), vol. 2, p. 155: "Quemadmodum enim in arte dicendi varietas, secundum Tullii sententiam, auditorem maxime delectat, ita et in musica concentuum diversitas animos auditorum vehementer in oblectamentum provocat." For Cicero's influence in the writings of Johannes Tinctoris, see Ronald Woodley, "Renaissance Music Theory as Literature: On Reading the 'Proportionale musices' of Iohannes Tinctoris", in: *Renaissance Studies* 1 (1987), pp. 209–220, and Wegman, "Tinctoris and the 'New Art'" (see note 36).

[39] See especially Sean Gallagher, "Models of 'Varietas': Studies in Style and Attribution in the Motets of Johannes Regis and his Contemporaries", Diss. Harvard University 1998, and Alexis Luko, "Tinctoris on 'Varietas'", in: *Early Music History* 27 (2008), pp. 99–136.

to acknowledge the same sort of response to practices that are in themselves praiseworthy, since that would raise the question why reason and authority had approved them in the first place. To apply a metaphor he had introduced elsewhere, it would be like suggesting that faithful believers must practice a variety of virtues lest the surfeit of one and the same virtue will provoke disgust. If a virtuous act can become disgusting in certain circumstances, then how can it be a virtuous act? By the same token, if a praiseworthy musical device can become disgusting in certain circumstances, in what sense can it be said to be intrinsically praiseworthy?

From its very inception, then, the idea of musical satiety seems to have been something of a Pandora's box. Antonio Le Basque had raised the lid just a little (though he was probably not the first to do so), and Tinctoris sought to keep it shut as much as he could. Both musicians, I suspect, were responding to ideas that were already circulating in Italy in the 1470s: the box must have been open already. Yet if it was, the question must be: why? Why would anyone in this period who cared about music toy with the exceedingly dangerous notion of musical satiety, which was bound to raise so many intractable problems?

6.

The answer, I suggest, is that the problems had not originated with the idea of musical satiety, but were already out there in the open, even before its introduction. Somehow, the contemporary understanding of musical sound must have been changing already, from its lofty Boethian heights in the Medieval universities down to something that might indeed invite comparison with food – no matter how counter-intuitive, not to say laughable, that comparison would have seemed from an earlier perspective.

It is not hard to conjecture by what conceptual steps such a change would have taken place. The key step would have been the premise that musical sound, like food, is merely a material phenomenon, and hence cannot gratify anything but the body. The second would have been the necessary implication that music has nothing to offer but sensuous appeal, that its sweetness is like a flavor, relished by the sense of hearing but of no lasting benefit to the mind or to the soul. The third would have been the closely related point that music, like food, is corruptible in that it vanishes with its own consumption: not only does it have no substance, but it has no permanence either. The fourth would have been the general warning against gluttony, the sin of pursuing sensuous pleasure to excess: combined with the three previous points, this latter warning would have made it perfectly self-evident that music, even good music, may easily become too much of a good thing.

The scenario outlined here is not hypothetical. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, these very claims did in fact begin to circulate in Italy in the 1470s. This is not because Cicero had anything to do with them, but rather because music became implicated in contemporary debates about church reform. It is precisely in the 1470s that reformist preachers, chiefly Dominicans, began to identify polyphony as one of many abuses in the Catholic church that were in urgent need of correction – which for most of them meant outright prohibition[40]. Initially their argument against the practice was simple: There had been no polyphony in the early Christian church, and the Church Fathers had never expressly endorsed music of this kind. This argument by itself would probably not have sufficed to overthrow the practice – which had after all been sanctioned and endorsed by the Church for centuries. Yet as we see only too often in our own times, once a well-established practice has been proclaimed an abuse, the case against it will offer easy legitimacy even to the most spurious of allegations. By the late 1470s, all four points outlined above had begun to be rehearsed as self-evident truths by reformist preachers bent upon abolishing elaborate church music.

It is these preachers – enemies, not friends, of music – who had prepared the way for the idea that music is in some respects like food, that its sweetness amounts to little more than an aural flavor, and that it is sinful to enjoy music to excess. The only thing they stopped short of arguing is that excessive indulgence in music may induce satiety – which was not an argument that suited their purpose in any case. There is, after all, no point in warning against the evils of music if the onset of satiety alone will prevent most listeners from experiencing those evils. It is only in the context of the defense of music that Cicero's remarks acquired the sense and relevance they had previously lacked. Although it was far from attractive to have to admit that music could provoke satiety, as the example of Tinctoris shows, the important point was not to condemn the art for this reason but rather to protect it from abuse. Music was too refined, too precious, an art to be cast like the proverbial pearls before swine. None of its alleged dangers were likely to materialize if composers and listeners exercised taste and discretion, if their guiding principles were moderation and judicious variety, rather than copious quantity.

When it came to just this recommendation, defenders of music could boast the support of no less an authority than Cicero himself. He had recognized the danger of satiety in oratory, yet had wisely refrained from condemning the art of rhetoric for that reason. On the contrary, the danger served only to confirm that there was more to the art than the indiscriminate stringing-together of figures of speech. The crafting and delivery of a good oration required taste, judgement, art, and reason. And the same could be said about the composition and appreciation

[40] For this and what follows, see Wegman, *The Crisis of Music* (see note 27), passim.

of good music: the point was not to overwhelm the ear with an abundance of consonant sweetness – which was in any case sure to diminish musical delight – but to dispense this precious commodity with restraint.

Partly as a consequence of this argument, the 1470s witnessed the birth of what might be called an "art of listening." Tinctoris, for example, is well known to have set great store by "the judgement of the ear." But what he meant by this was not the crude, inexperienced ear with which we are born, but rather the musically trained ear (his preferred expression was *aures eruditae*, another Ciceronian notion) of those who are able to discriminate between subtle shades of consonant sweetness[41]. This idea, that the proper appreciation of polyphony is an acquired taste, a sensibility possessed only by expert listeners, was immeasurably strengthened by Cicero's argument about satiety – if indeed it had not originated with that argument.

We can tell this, for example, from the example of Paolo Cortesi, an Italian humanist who was nothing if not a self-conscious, even ostentatious, Ciceronian. Few Renaissance writers have carried the idea of satiety in music as far as Cortesi did in his treatise *De cardinalatu libri tres* of 1510. The ear emerges from his discussion as an extremely delicate instrument, an aural palate attuned to the most exquisite of sonorous flavors, and easily turned off by even the merest hint of excess. Indeed the one thing that can be said about the musical ear, for Cortesi, is that it is so uncommonly sensitive, that it is filled so quickly to capacity. Consider, for example, his assessment of Jacob Obrecht and Heinrich Isaac, two composers who, in his view, were unable to exercise sufficient restraint[42]:

quo in genere Iacobus Obrechius habitus est uaria subtilitate grandis, sed toto struendi genere horridior, & is a quo plus sit in musicis acerrimae suauitatis artificiosa concinnitate satum, quam esset aurium uoluptati satis, ut qui in gustatu ea magis laudare solent, quae omphacium, quam quae saccarum sapere uideantur: ex eodemque studio Herricus Isachius Gallus, maxime est appositus ad eiusmodi praecentoria construenda iudicatus:

In this genre Iacobus Obrechius is considered great for varied subtlety, but more crude in the whole style of composition, and also [he is considered to be] the one by whom more of the sharpest sweetness has been sowed among the musicians than would have been enough for the pleasure of the ear – like, in the field of taste, those people who seem to appreciate better things that taste of the oil of unripe olives than of sugar. For a simi-

[41] For an overview of the concrete sorts of judgements Tinctoris had in mind, see my "Sense and Sensibility in Late-Medieval Music: Reflections on Aesthetics and 'Authenticity'", in: *Early Music* 23 (1995), pp. 298–312. See also Wegman, "Johannes Tinctoris and the Art of Listening" (see note 36).

[42] Paolo Cortesi, *De cardinalatu libri tres*, Castro Cortesio 1510, fol. 72^{r}–74^{v}. After Nino Pirrotta, "Music and Cultural Tendencies in 15th-Century Italy," in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 19 (1966), pp. 127–161, on pp. 147–155.

nam preterquam quod multo est caeteris in hoc genere fundendo celerior, tum ualde eius illuminat cantum florentior in struendo modus, qui maxime satus communi aurium naturae sit: sed quamquam hic unus excellet, e multis uitio tamen ei solere scimus, quod in hoc genere licentius catachresi, modorumque iteratione utatur, quam maxime aures fastidii similitudine in audiendo notent:

lar inclination Herricus Isachius Gallus is judged to be most apt to compose such precentorial songs; for, in addition to being much quicker than all the others in pouring forth this genre, then also his style of composition brightens the singing so floridly that it more than satiates the ordinary capacity of the ear. But, although he is the one who excels among many, nevertheless we know that it happens to be blamed on him that he uses in this genre *catachresis* [literally, improper use of words] and repetition of modes more liberally than the most the ear can take without sensing annoyance because of uniformity in what it listens.

The recurring theme in Cortesi's remarks is that there is a limit to what the ear can appreciate: "more of the sharpest sweetness […] than would have been enough for the pleasure of the ear", "more than satiating the ordinary capacity of the ear", "more […] than the most the ear can take in without sensing annoyance." All this is pure Cicero. Yet it also shows how self-consciously refined the art of listening had become by the early years of the sixteenth century: it was a matter not just of hearing music properly, but also of being able to pass judgement on the work of this or that composer, in terms of his ability to exercise moderation. The clear implication of Cortesi's argument is that the art of composition is subservient to the art of listening, that even such gifted composers as Obrecht and Isaac are in the end only as successful as the expert ear will judge them. And that implication opens the way for a new discursive practice among listeners, a new way of writing and conversing about music that is closely analogous to music criticism in the modern period.

The art of listening was virtually immune to contemporary criticisms of music. After all, the four new claims about musical sound, outlined at the beginning of this section, were conceded without quarrel, which had the immediate effect of defusing those criticisms. Insofar as critics nevertheless insisted on the evils of music, it was obvious that they were either blind fanatics or had to be speaking of something very different from the art of listening – which was quickly becoming the hallmark of courtly elegance in the sixteenth century. The music abuser had been invented to explain just this: only a glutton who perverted the true aim of music could have merited the criticisms of those who attacked the art. No true lover of music could have said something so vulgar and inappropriate as Duke Orsino did in his monologue: "give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, the appetite may sicken, and so die." This, emphatically, was not the way to appreciate music.

No writer may have done more to bring the concept of musical satiety into general currency than Baldesar Castiglione in his *Libro del cortegiano*, first printed at Venice in 1528. One of the interlocutors in the four courtly conversations that make up his book, Magnifico Giuliano, makes a claim that would have horrified Tinctoris: that the human ear may sometimes take delight even in dissonances such as the second or seventh. The reason for this, he says, is the limited capacity of the human ear to take in consonant sweetness. In counterpoint, two successive octaves or fifths produce more consonant sweetness than the ear can handle in so short a time, and hence such parallels are bound to provoke almost immediate satiety. That, he claims, is the ultimate rationale for the prohibition of parallel perfect intervals: it is absolutely necessary to insert imperfect consonances between them, so as to make the sweetness more palatable. And that is why even dissonances may sometimes be enjoyable. Here is Castiglione in the translation by Thomas Hoby, printed in 1561, three years before Shakespeare's birth[43]:

Allora il signor Magnifico, Questo ancor, disse, si verifica nella musica, nella quale è vicio grandissimo far due consonanzie perfette l'una dopo l'altra; tal che il medesimo sentimento dell'audito nostro l'aborrisce e spesso ama una seconda o settima, che in sé è dissonanzia aspera ed intollerabile; e ciò procede che quel continuare nelle perfette genera sazietà e dimostra una troppo affettata armonia; il che mescolando le imperfette si fugge, col far quasi un paragone, donde piú le orecchie nostre stanno suspese e piú avidamente attendono e gustano le perfette, e dilettansi talor di quella dissonanzia della seconda o settima, come di cosa sprezzata.

Then said the L. Julian: This in like maner is verified in musicke: where it is a verye greate vice to make two perfecte cordes, the one after the other, so that the verye sence of our hearing abhorreth it, and often times deliteth in a seconde or in a seven, which in it selfe is an unpleasaunt discord and not tollerable: and this proceadeth because the continuance in the perfit tunes engendreth urksomenesse and betokeneth a to curious harmonye the whyche in mynglyng therwythall the unperfect is avoyded wyth makynge (as it were) a comparason, whereby oure eares stande to listen and gredely attend and tast the perfecte, and are otherwhyle delyted wyth the disagement of the seconde or seven, as it were with a thing lytle regarded.

In all of this we can recognize a direct historical background for Orsino's monologue in *Twelfth Night*. When Shakespeare has the duke call for an excess of music, he immediately and provocatively situates the text in the context of a debate that had been going on for well over a century. At a time when Pu-

[43] Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, lib. I, cap. xxviii, ll. 1 ff.; translated by Hoby, *The Courtyer* (see note 1).

ritans were insistently warning against music's power to induce lasciviousness and effeminacy, and defenders of music were urging moderation and restraint, this lovesick ruler heedlessly called for excess and surfeit. Orsino was a man given to indulging his desires without inhibition, yearning for a satisfaction that no "food of love" could possibly have given him. Yet Shakespeare also has him walk the fine line between pleasure and disgust, and suggests, in true Ciceronian fashion, that the sweetness of music will fade almost immediately for someone unable to exercise moderation. The point, evidently, is that genuine music lovers should not take their example from the Duke of Illyria, and that music haters should not seize on this example to condemn the art.

Orsino himself, as we have seen, blamed the loss of sweetness on the bottomless capacity of the Spirit of Love. Yet this capacity is bottomless only for someone as sick with love as he is, only when love has become an incurable disease of the kind described by Lucretius. Otherwise, surely, the Spirit of Love would have promised a fulfilling and satisfying relationship, at least if *Twelfth Night* was to have its conventional happy ending.

So perhaps it is not surprising that Orsino does not get his Olivia in the end, and that his affections will eventually settle on somebody else – such is his constancy as a lover. We can only hope, for his sake and that of his new love Viola, that the Spirit of Love is not quite the bottomless sea he experienced it to be in the first scene. And for the sake of his enjoyment of music, we can only hope that he will learn to consume this food with more moderation and discernment in future.