

Read The Excerpt From Twelfth Night, By William Shakespeare. If Music Be The Food Of Love, Play On; Give

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Introduction to Twelfth Night and Its Significance

William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is one of his most celebrated comedies, renowned for its wit, complex characters, and exploration of themes such as love, identity, and disguise. The play was likely written in 1601–1602 to celebrate Twelfth Night, a festive occasion marking the end of Christmas celebrations in England. Its enduring popularity lies in its humorous depiction of love's follies and the intricate interplay between appearance and reality.

A pivotal aspect of *Twelfth Night* is its rich use of music and song, which Shakespeare employs to deepen the emotional resonance of the narrative. The opening line, "If music be the food of love, play on," encapsulates the play's central theme: the powerful influence of music and love on human passions. This article explores this famous excerpt, its context within the play, and how Shakespeare uses musical imagery to enhance the story's themes.

The Context of the Opening Line

Understanding the Line: "If music be the food of love, play on"

The opening lines from *Twelfth Night* are spoken by Duke Orsino, the play's romantic lead. He is immersed in an obsessive love for Lady Olivia, yet his feelings are unrequited. In this monologue, Orsino seeks to indulge his love-sickness through music, hoping that an excess of it might either cure or intensify his passions.

The full excerpt:

- > If music be the food of love, play on,
- > Give me excess of it; that surfeiting,
- > The appetite may sicken, and so die.

This reflects Orsino's desire to drown his love in music—an act of self-indulgence that he hopes will

either cure his longing or, paradoxically, deepen it.

Literary Significance of the Line

Shakespeare's opening line has become iconic because it captures the intoxicating power of music and love. It suggests that love can be as nourishing and overwhelming as food, and that music is a potent instrument to manipulate and reflect emotional states. The line also hints at the play's exploration of excess—how passions can become overwhelming, leading to both suffering and comedy.

Musical Imagery in Twelfth Night

The Role of Music and Song in the Play

Music plays a vital role throughout Twelfth Night. It is used to:

- Express characters' feelings
- Create atmosphere
- Advance plot developments
- Provide comic relief

Some notable musical moments include:

- Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew's drinking songs
- The melancholy ballads sung by characters
- The comic scenes involving musicians like Feste, the clown, who is also a talented singer and performer
- The final wedding celebration featuring lively music and dancing

Feste: The Play's Musical Persona

Feste, the fool, is perhaps the most musically gifted character. His songs often carry layered meanings, offering insight into the themes of love, folly, and disguise. Feste's music acts as a mirror to the play's emotional landscape, often providing commentary that is both humorous and profound.

Thematic Analysis of the Excerpt

Love as an All-Consuming Force

Orsino's desire to "play on" music to indulge his love reflects how love can be an all-consuming passion. Shakespeare portrays love as a powerful, sometimes irrational emotion that can be both uplifting and destructive.

The Idea of Excess and Surfeit

The desire to "give excess" of music underscores the theme of excess in Twelfth Night. Shakespeare explores how overindulgence—whether in love, music, or pleasure—can lead to a kind of saturation, possibly resulting in clarity or suffering.

Music as a Metaphor for Love

Music is used metaphorically to depict love's effects:

- As nourishment ("food of love")
- As a stimulant or sedative
- As a reflection of emotional states

This metaphor emphasizes the intimate connection between love and music, suggesting that love, like music, can be harmonious or discordant.

Character Analysis Related to the Excerpt

Orsino: The Romantic Dreamer

Orsino's monologue reveals his idealized, somewhat self-indulgent view of love. His obsession with love and music reflects a tendency to romanticize his feelings rather than confront reality.

Olivia: The Object of Love

While Olivia is the play's love interest, her initial rejection of Orsino's advances showcases the theme of unrequited love, which fuels the play's comedic and tragic elements.

Feste and the Other Musicians

Feste's role as the wise fool who uses music and song to comment on love and human folly aligns with the play's overarching themes, making music a voice of insight and critique.

Symbolism and Literary Devices in the Excerpt

Metaphor

The phrase "food of love" is a metaphor for love itself—something nourishing yet potentially overwhelming.

Repetition and Hyperbole

Orsino's desire to "play on" and "give excess" uses hyperbole to emphasize his obsessive longing.

Imagery

The imagery of surfeiting (overindulgence) evokes a sense of excess, hinting at the dangers of unmoderated passions.

Impact of the Opening Line on the Play's Structure and Themes

The opening line sets the tone for the entire play, emphasizing themes such as:

- The intoxicating nature of love
- The use of music and art as a reflection of human passions
- The idea of excess leading to self-awareness or folly

It also introduces the motif of disguise and performance, as characters often use music and song as part of their social masks.

Modern Interpretations and Relevance

Why the Line Remains Iconic

This line resonates with audiences today because it captures the universal experience of love's power and the desire to lose oneself in it. Its poetic quality and rich metaphor have made it a favorite quote among literature lovers.

Contemporary Applications

Modern adaptations of *Twelfth Night* often highlight the musical elements, emphasizing how music can manipulate emotion and deepen understanding of characters' inner lives.

Some ways this excerpt is relevant today include:

- Understanding the role of music in emotional regulation
- Recognizing the universality of love's excesses
- Appreciating the poetic depiction of passion

Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of Shakespeare's Opening Lines

William Shakespeare's opening words in *Twelfth Night*—"If music be the food of love, play on"—continue to inspire and resonate centuries after they were penned. They encapsulate the intoxicating and sometimes overwhelming nature of love, as well as the profound connection between music and human emotion. Through this line, Shakespeare invites us to reflect on our own passions and the ways in which art can serve as both a mirror and a balm for the soul.

Whether as a poetic device, a thematic cornerstone, or a cultural touchstone, this excerpt exemplifies Shakespeare's mastery in blending language, metaphor, and emotion. It remains a testament to the enduring power of love, music, and the human experience.

Keywords: *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare, If music be the food of love, love, music, Shakespeare quotes, literary analysis, themes of love, musical imagery, character analysis, symbolism in literature, classic Shakespeare plays, love and excess, Feste, Orsino, theatrical history

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the significance of the opening line 'If music be the food of love, play on' in Twelfth Night?

This line expresses Orsino's desire to indulge in music as a means to satisfy and perhaps cure his unrequited love for Olivia, setting the tone for themes of love and obsession in the play.

How does the phrase 'play on' relate to the theme of love in Twelfth Night?

'Play on' suggests a wish for continuous music to soothe or perhaps overwhelm love's pains, illustrating the play's exploration of love's intensity and the desire to either indulge in or escape from it.

What literary devices are used in the phrase 'If music be the food of love, play on'?

The phrase employs metaphor, comparing music to food that nourishes love, and employs a conditional statement to emphasize the idea that music fuels the feelings of love.

How does this excerpt reflect the comedic or tragic elements of Twelfth Night?

While the line is poetic and romantic, it also hints at obsession and excess, which are central to the play's comedic tone, highlighting the characters' exaggerated passions and the potential for humorous misunderstandings.

In what ways does the excerpt reveal Shakespeare's use of language to explore human emotions?

Shakespeare uses lyrical and evocative language to depict love as a powerful, almost tangible force, illustrating his ability to capture complex human emotions through poetic expression.

How is the theme of music as a metaphor for love relevant to modern audiences?

The metaphor remains relevant today as music continues to evoke emotions, influence feelings of love and longing, and serve as a universal language for expressing affection and desire.

Can this excerpt be connected to the broader context of Elizabethan attitudes toward love and music?

Yes, during the Elizabethan era, music was highly valued both as an art form and as a means of emotional expression, making the line reflective of contemporary beliefs about music's power to

influence love.

What role does this excerpt play in establishing the mood of Twelfth Night?

It sets a romantic and somewhat whimsical mood, emphasizing themes of love, longing, and the intoxicating power of music, which permeate the play.

How might this famous line influence the interpretation of the play's characters and their motivations?

It suggests that characters' actions are driven by intense feelings of love and desire, often fueled or complicated by music and art, highlighting the emotional depth and theatricality of their motivations.

Additional Resources

Read The Excerpt From Twelfth Night, By William Shakespeare. If Music Be The Food Of Love, Play On; Give

William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night remains one of the most beloved comedies in English literature, celebrated for its wit, intricate characters, and exploration of love and identity. Among its many iconic lines, the opening phrase, "If music be the food of love, play on; Give", immediately captures the essence of the play's thematic core—love as a consuming, almost primal force that is both nourishing and destructive. This excerpt, often quoted and analyzed, offers a compelling entry point into Shakespeare's craftsmanship, his use of language, and the enduring relevance of the play's themes.

In this review-oriented article, we will delve into the significance of this famous opening, explore its poetic and thematic richness, analyze its place within the broader context of Twelfth Night, and discuss how modern readers and audiences can appreciate its layered meanings.

Understanding the Opening Line: "If music be the food of love, play on"

Context and Literary Significance

The opening line of Twelfth Night—"If music be the food of love, play on"—sets the tone for the entire play. Spoken by Duke Orsino, the line is an expression of his obsessive desire and the overpowering nature of love. Shakespeare's use of metaphor here is masterful: love is likened to a sustenance that can be fed or starved through the power of music, which is historically associated with emotional expression and passion.

This line is not merely a poetic flourish; it encapsulates Orsino's romantic idealism, his longing to indulge in love's pleasures and, perhaps, his desire to feed his unrequited love for Olivia. The phrase "play on" suggests a wish to continue immersing himself in love's intoxicating effects, even as he remains uncertain whether love's nourishment is beneficial or destructive.

Key features:

- The metaphor of music as food emphasizes love's dual nature—both sustaining and overwhelming.
- The line invites the reader to consider how art and emotion intertwine.
- It introduces the play's exploration of love's complexities—its delights and torments.

Poetic Devices and Language

Shakespeare's choice of phraseology employs several poetic devices:

- Metaphor: Love as food, and music as the means to consume or indulge in it.
- Repetition of "play": Reinforces the theme of music as a catalyst and a form of emotional expression.
- Imagery: Vividly conjures the sensory experience of music and desire.

The lyrical quality of the line exemplifies Shakespeare's mastery of language, blending poetic elegance with emotional depth. Its rhythmic flow and balanced structure make it memorable and evocative.

Thematic Analysis of the Excerpt

Love as an Obsessive Force

The excerpt reflects the play's overarching theme: love as a powerful, sometimes overwhelming, human experience. Orsino's desire to "play on" suggests a willingness to indulge in love's pleasures, even if it leads to pain or madness. His poetic longing echoes the idea that love, like music, can be both nourishing and addictive.

Pros:

- Captures the intensity of romantic longing.
- Highlights love's dual nature—pleasurable yet potentially destructive.

Cons:

- Simplifies complex emotions into a singular metaphor, which may overlook nuanced feelings of love.

Art and Emotion

By equating love with music, Shakespeare emphasizes the connection between art and human emotion. Music, as a universal language, becomes a symbol of the emotional landscape that characters navigate. The line suggests that art can both express and influence feelings of love.

Features:

- The metaphor invites reflection on how art influences human experience.
- Reinforces the play's focus on emotional expression through music, poetry, and disguise.

Desire for Control and Catharsis

Orsino's desire to "play on" can also be interpreted as a desire to prolong his emotional state or to control his feelings. The act of "playing" becomes a metaphor for indulging in or releasing pent-up emotions, seeking catharsis through music.

Analysis:

- Shows human tendency to seek comfort or escape through art.
- Highlights the role of music as a therapeutic or escapist device.

Placement Within Twelfth Night

Introduction to Character and Plot

This opening line introduces Duke Orsino, one of the central characters, and his obsession with love. It sets the scene for the comedic and romantic entanglements that follow—unrequited love, mistaken identities, and humorous disguises.

Features:

- Establishes Orsino's character as a romantic idealist.
- Foreshadows the play's exploration of love's illusions and realities.

Contrast with Other Characters and Themes

While Orsino's love is portrayed as intense and poetic, other characters, such as Sir Toby Belch or Maria, provide comic relief and contrast with the romantic seriousness. The excerpt underscores the play's thematic tension between genuine emotion and superficiality, a recurring motif throughout

Twelfth Night.

Modern Perspectives and Relevance

Relevance of the Metaphor Today

The metaphor of love as food and music remains resonant in contemporary culture. It underscores how art and emotion continue to be intertwined in human experience.

Pros:

- Universally relatable metaphor.
- Inspires artistic expression and emotional understanding.

Cons:

- Might romanticize love as solely pleasurable, ignoring its complexities.

Adaptations and Cultural Impact

Numerous adaptations of Twelfth Night have used this opening line or its themes to explore modern love stories, illustrating the play's timeless appeal. The line has been referenced in music, theater, and literature, emphasizing its cultural significance.

Conclusion: The Enduring Power of Shakespeare's Opening Line

The excerpt "If music be the food of love, play on" from Twelfth Night exemplifies Shakespeare's poetic genius and his profound understanding of human emotion. It encapsulates the play's exploration of love's passionate, consuming nature and highlights the enduring connection between art and emotion. Its rich metaphor and lyrical rhythm continue to inspire readers and audiences, inviting them to reflect on their own experiences of love's joys and pains.

Whether viewed as a romantic idealization or a commentary on the complexities of desire, this line remains a powerful testament to Shakespeare's ability to articulate the universal human condition. Its relevance spans centuries, making it a timeless opening that beckons us to consider how art, love, and life intertwine—an invitation to "play on" in pursuit of understanding and passion.

In summary:

- The line is a masterful metaphor that captures love's intensity.
- It introduces key themes of Twelfth Night—romance, disguise, and emotional complexity.
- Its poetic devices deepen its emotional impact.
- It remains relevant today, reflecting universal human feelings.
- Its cultural influence endures through adaptations and references.

By appreciating this excerpt, readers gain insight into Shakespeare's artistry and the timeless nature of love's mysteries. It reminds us that, like music, love is an art—sometimes nourishing, sometimes overwhelming—and that, perhaps, the best we can do is "play on."

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