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**Editor:** Dr. Saikat Banerjee  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
St. Theresa International College, Thailand.



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## ***Twelfth Night and the Masks of Love***

**Rupesh Singh**

Research Scholar  
Department of English &  
Modern European Languages  
University of Allahabad  
Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh

**Abstract:** *Twelfth Night* is a complex play on the various forms that love can acquire. It has marked similarities and dissimilarities with *As You Like It*, the play with which it is often compared. Though it is definitely one of Shakespeare's major love comedies, it also has a sub-plot (that of Malvolio) which has a satirical dimension. In the opening lines of *Twelfth Night* Duke Orsino wants a continuous flow of music to be played as that could be "the food of love" for him. He has gone into a state where he seems to want to escape into an amorous setting where the ugly world of rejection will finally give way to the more pleasant state of acceptance. He can easily switch over to a situation in which nothing short of excess will satisfy. Orsino is not the only one desiring excess; Sir Toby and his drunkard friends and their revelries are equally excessive. On the other hand, there are the overweening and neurotic sentimental states of Orsino and Olivia. As the Duke is overwhelmed by his unreciprocated love for Olivia; while she is engrossed in the grieving for her dead brother and pledge to wear a veil for seven years.

**Keywords:** masks of love, overabundance of music, varied conceptions of love, and unrequited love.

In the beginning of the play *Twelfth Night*, Duke Orsino is demonstrated as avid lover of music who wants excess of it like Cleopatra. As Cleopatra is an ardent lover of music and she speaks about the music the: "moody food/ of us that trade in love" (2.5. 1-2). Like Cleopatra, Orsino too desires more music in the play. His opening lines are the opening of the play. In this context David Schalkwyk asserts: "Orsino may thus be referring to music as a kind of food in a more than merely figurative sense" (81). The opening lines reveal love as an "essentially interior



state which nevertheless maintains a peculiar economy of consumption and waste in its relation to the external world” (82). Here, Orsino renders these lines in the opening of the play:

If music be the food of love, play on,  
Give me excess of it that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken and so die.  
That strain again, it had a dying fall.  
(1.2. 11-14)

Orsino is the victim of Olivia’s love and also the victim of his own emotions. The Duke’s starting words delineate both the action of feasting and his own fanatic, choleric and amorous disposition. Schalkwyk writes that, “He desires a surfeit of music precisely in order to overcome his desire” (82). Further he affirms his idea and states that Orsino is suffering from: “erotic bulimia” (82) and longs to procure overabundance of it, “food of love” so that, “sickened”, “he will purge himself of love and consequently of the burning void that Petrarch characterised as erotic desire” (82). Orsino’s romantic temperament and unrequited love for Olivia can be seen in the following lines: “O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou, / That, notwithstanding thy capacity / Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,” (1.1.8-11).

Schalkwyk points out that Orsino hankers more food of love, he firstly luxuriates in its melancholy plaint, “calling for an interpretation in its natural progression to savour the “dying fall” twice over, but then he turns away in disgust, now sated-but not satisfied” (82). Orsino continues to love; or perhaps, more correctly, he remains influenced or sickened by longing. He returns us to the beginning conditional, “If music be the food of love”. Here, Schalkwyk says, “Perhaps music is not the food of love after all” (82-83). Music does not function like normal food, and love’s craving does not pursue the ordinary eddy and tide of appetite and gratification. The Duke acknowledges this different logic in his assertion, “spirit of love”, and “how markedly different from the material nature of food, appetite and vomiting” (83). Orsino moving away from love’s assumed food in revulsion; he now asserts that its surfeit is in fact incompetent of nausea. Schalkwyk indicates, “Its oceanic capacity not only encompasses everything without “cloyment” but it is also able to negate



everything that feeds it” (83). The Duke’s perspective of love’s vigour to abate denies its dissolute predilection to impinge or demonstrate value onto the meanest objects. Orsino enjoys the creative and notional kinds of love “that were anxiously denigrated by the moralising Psychologists of Shakespeare’s time” (83).

Schalkwyk suggests that the idea of love and its affiliation to desire have practised philosophers from Plato onwards. Contemporary and classical authors offer no joined front on the topic, but rather a cluster of confusions, differences and equivocations. Nicholas Coffeteau is one of the few authors who differentiate between love and longing. In Plato’s Symposium, Socrates defines love by its inherent association to desire and lack or want: “everyone who desires, desires that which he has not already, and which is future and not present, and which he has not, and is not, and of which he is in want;--these are the sort of things which love and desire seek” (Coffeteau 1621, 41).

Again Schalkwyk points out that in their connotative: “dying fall” and Orsino’s immediate transformation with the enjoying, “enough, no more” *Twelfth Night’s* beginning lines seem to validate the “Platonic identification of love with desire” (84). The Duke’s temperamental wavering “embody desire’s cyclical process of longing and satiety, especially in his rhythmical allusion to the dynamics of sexual orgasm in the procession of “surfeit, cloyment, and revolt” that marks the mixture of dissatisfaction and satiety of post-coital depression” (84). As Schalkwyk notices that Orsino is trapped between his ungratified nausea at being jammed with “the food of love threatens the idealizing indulgence of his “high fantastical” desire for the unattainable Olivia” (84).

Marjorie Garber writes that Duke’s dejection in love is a kind of unrequited love. It also exhibits his passion for music as well as unattainable love. He proclaims his love for Olivia but he does not have real love for her. Garber hints that, “Orsino’s initial passion, although he claims it is for Olivia, is rather for the spectacle of himself in love” (510). Further she states that Duke is flaccid rather than lively, sagging in the excessive. Garber points out, “He does not even go himself to Olivia to tell her of his love, but instead sends a go-between” (511). According to her, Orsino is the apotheosis of refined lassitude and sulkiness, the contrary of Viola’s liveliness and activity—



“just as his constant rhetorical insistence upon expressing his thwarted love is the contrary her resolve not to speak the love she feels, not to reveal herself” (511). But Harold Bloom asserts that He is in love with language, and music, “Orsino, for more in love with language, music, love, and himself” (230). Further, he says, he loves music, language, and himself, “than he is with Olivia, or will be with Viola” (230). Orsino reveals his inner passion to disguised Viola/ Cesario and touches the apogee of “male fatuity” (230). He expresses his untold love before his page Viola/Cesario:

There is no woman's sides  
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion  
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart  
So big, to hold so much: they lack retention  
(2.4.94-98)

According to Bloom the high romantic temperament of Orsino confirms him as a lunatic and erotic lover. His pleasant erotic insanity ascertains the tone of the play. Despite his astounding self-engrossment, he authentically turns the viewers. He states, “His high Romanticism is so quixotic, but also because his sentimentalism is too universal to be rejected” (230). Orsino is the brilliance of his place. He the only persona the high-spirited psychosis of the play acclimatizes. But Harold C. Goddard writes that Orsino and Olivia both prisoners of their sentiments and feelings. He states that: “The Duke is ne plus ultra of the melancholy characters we have met in Shakespeare. His love is the sentimentalism that idleness is sure to breed in potentially fine natures if it does not turn to something worse” (Gaddord, 300). His love is the third category of love as much plunged in it as Toby is in beverage and a point that makes his liking for the sea as metaphor noteworthy. He does not keep it poised. He keeps nothing consistent; his mind oscillates between love and desire. As the jester observes, is “a very appal”. He says at one juncture that his love is “as hungry as the sea, and can digest as much”. But unluckily he has accepted in his starting assertion that “Whatever enters this sea-like love within a minute to lose its value” (300).

Joseph H. Summers writes in his seminal article entitled: “The Masks of *Twelfth Night*” about Orsino as a sloth lover. He points out that Orsino is a kind of sluggish and lethargic lover. He can



be categorised into the category of moody lovers. In the opening of the play Orsino wishes the music to be play on so that the appetence of love may supply overabundance and excessiveness. The music which is soothing and appealing for Orsino now it becomes pensive and no longer sweet. He writes, “The spirit of love is so ‘quick and fresh’ that like the sea (hardly a model of freshness)” (Summers 88). Orsino hints the viewers, the soul of love is so unsteady and slippery that transforms at the moment. He is the victim of his madness to which the most admirable protagonists are sometimes its subject. Further, Summers writes, “Its usual causes are boredom, lack of physical love, and excessive imagination” (88) that makes him a type of strange and narcissistic and self-engrossed, and victim is unconscious that he is in love with love rather than with an individual.

Porter Williams, Jr. hints that Orsino’s love and desire can be associated to Romeo, because he behaves like that at the very initial stage of the play. As Romeo starts loving an imaginary Rosaline in Romeo and Juliet, and later changes his object from Rosaline to Juliet. First, he is engaged to Olivia and at the end of the play, he finds that he is actually in love with disguised Viola/Cesario. Porter suggests, “Orsino and Olivia who have deceived themselves into believing that they have been overwhelmed with love or with grief” (171). Orsino’s gloominess is indicative of the despondency that elongated Romeo’s hours while he is separated from his indifferent Rosaline. In *Twelfth Night* every character has certain mistakes and because of that mistake they get into entangled complexities. Viola cannot attain Orsino’s love as she is erroneous for Cesario and as long as Orsino errors the object of his love. Porter points out that Orsino, a more sophisticated lover, displays the same type of complexities as Olivia does. Like Olivia he too has a soul capable of being awakened, but like her made the errors of presuming a fake mask. He (Orsino) enjoys his “self-centred melancholy” (177), because he does not have Olivia’s love. Further, affirms his assertion, “delighting in the luxurious inactivity of unrequited love” (177). Orsino’s good nature is so bewitched by self-indulgence that he almost forgets to know the object of his love except in the dream realm of affluent music. Porter indicates:



In the very first scene of *Twelfth Night* we are presented with the two great mistakes of Orsino's lovesickness and Olivia's unnatural effort to "keep flesh/ And lasting in her sad remembrance" all the wealth of a "brother's dead love" (1.1.31-32). Orsino unwittingly touches upon Olivia's mistake when he comments upon this "debt of love but to a brother" and anticipates the wealth of love in her nature which she is trying to deny. (179)

Here, Orsino speaks about his unattainable love of Olivia: "How will she love when the rich golden shaft/ Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else/ That lived in her..." (1.1.35-7).

In his seminal article, "The Role of Music in *Twelfth Night*" (1957), John Hollander indicates that the importance of music is so apparently pivotal to the soul of the play, and it makes us to ruminate and speculate about love and desire that is veiled in the play. He states: "The materials are to be music, food and drink, and love" (104). The opening speech of Orsino in the opening of the play is an implication of his own romantic assumption and frenzy of unrequited love. His love for music can be compared to Shakespeare's other play *Richard 2*, where Richard delivers speech in Pomfret Castle. He compares his prison to the world and to his own body (5.5.41-48). According to Hollander, Duke Orsino and *Richard 2* are akin in tone and spirit. He and Richard both of them are an emblem of disordered string. It also suggests that both of them discover their surfeiting appetite in music. *Twelfth Night* is rather different type of play; it begins and ends with music. Orsino thirst at the beginning of the play is supposedly for Olivia. But later it changes and becomes his own act of yearning, and for his own exclamation of feeling.



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