

**“Tis not so sweet now, as it was before”:
Origins and Significance of A Musical Topos
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1602

Text 1. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, I. i. 1–15. After the First Folio, *Mr. VWilliam Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Iaggard and Ed. Blount, 1623), 255.

IF Musicke be the food of Loue, play on,
Giue me excesse of it : that surfetting,
The appetite may sicken, and so dye.
That ttraine 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 fantastical.

1 If music be the food of love, play on!
2 Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
3 The appetite may sicken, and so die.
4 That strain again! It had a dying fall.
5 O, it came o'er my ear, like the sweet sound
6 That breathes upon a bank of violets,
7 Stealing and giving odour. Enough! No more:
8 'Tis not so sweet now, as it was before.
9 O Spirit of Love, how quick and fresh art thou
10 That, notwithstanding thy capacity,
11 Receiveth as the sea. Nought enters there,
12 Of what validity and pitch so e'er,
13 But falls into abatement and low price,
14 Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy
15 That it, alone, is high fantastical.

Text 2. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, IV. 1058–67 and 1086–1102. After Robert D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex: A Commentary on De rerum natura 4. 1030-1287, With Prolegomena, Text, and Translation*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, 15 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 148–53.

This is “Venus” to us; from this furthermore comes the name of “Love,” from this that drop of Venus’ sweetness first trickled into the heart and after rose up chilly care. **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.

For their hope lies in this, that from the same body from which their hot passion arises, the flame can be extinguished. Nature protests that entirely the opposite happens, and **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. As when in a dream a thirsty person seeks to drink and liquid is not given which could extinguish the heat in the limbs, but he goes after images of fluid and toils in vain and thirsts while quaffing in the midst of a rushing river, **so, in love, Venus mocks lovers with images and they cannot satisfy their bodies by gazing on bodies closely**

Haec Venus est nobis; hinc autemst nomen Amoris,
hinc illaec primum Veneris dulcedinis in cor
stillavit gutta et successit frigida cura;
**nam si abest quod ames, praesto simulacra tamen sunt
illius et nomen dulce obversatur ad auris.
sed fugitare decet simulacra et pabula amoris**
absterrere sibi atque alio convertere mentem
et iacere umorem coniectum in corpora quaeque
nec retinere semel conversum unius amore
et servare sibi curam certumque dolorem

Namque in eo spes est, unde est ardoris origo,
restingui quoque posse ab eodem corpore flammam.
quod fieri contra totum natura repugnat;
**unaque res haec est, cuius quam plurima habemus,
tam magis ardescit dira cuppedine pectus.
nam cibus atque umor membris adsumitur intus;
quae quoniam certas possunt obsidere partis,
hoc facile expletur laticum frugumque cupido.**
ex hominis vero facie pulchroque colore
nil datur in corpus praeter simulacra fruendum
tenvia; quae vento spes raptast saepe misella.
ut bibere in somnis sitiens quom quaerit et umor
non datur, ardorem qui membris stinguere possit,
sed laticum simulacra petit frustra laborat
in medioque sitit torrenti flumine potans,
**sic in amore Venus simulacris ludit amantis,
nec satiari queunt spectando corpora coram . . .**

Text 3. Cicero, *De oratore*, III. xxv (97–100). Trans. after *Cicero on Oratory and Orators: With His Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, trans. John Selby Watson (London: George Bell & Sons, 1884), 359–60.

Genus igitur dicendi est eligendum, quod maxime teneat eos, qui audiant, et quod non solum delectet, sed etiam sine satietate delectet . . . 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 colorum pulcritudine et varietate floridiora sunt in picturis novis pleraque quam in veteribus! Quae tamen, etiam si primo aspectu nos ceperunt, diutius non delectant; cum eidem nos in antiquis tabulis illo ipso horrido obsoletoque teneamur. **Quanto molliores sunt et deliciores in cantu flexiones et falsae voculae quam certae et severae!**

Quibus tamen non modo austeri, sed, si saepius fiunt, multitudo ipsa reclamatur. Licet hoc videre in reliquis sensibus unguentis minus diu nos delectari summa et acerrima suavitate conditis quam his moderatis, et magis laudari quod terram quam quod crocum olere videatur; in ipso tactu esse modum et mollitudinis et levitatis. **Quin 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.

Such a kind of eloquence, therefore, is to be chosen, as is most adapted to interest the audience, such as may not only delight, but delight without satiety . . . 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 more florid, in the gaiety and variety of the colouring, are most objects in modern pictures than in ancient ones; which, however, though they captivate us at first sight, do not afford any lasting pleasure; whereas we are strongly attracted by rough and faded colouring in the paintings of antiquity. **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.** We may perceive, too, in regard to the other senses, that we take a less permanent delight in perfumes composed of the sweetest and most powerful odours, than in those of a more moderate scent; that that is more commended which appears to smell like wax, than that which is as strong as saffron; and that, in the sense of feeling itself, there is a limit required both to softness and smoothness. **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.

Text 4. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, X. xxxi (43–44). Trans. after Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 204–5.

Reficimus enim cotidianas ruinas corporis edendo et bibendo, priusquam escas et ventrem destruas, cum occideris indigentiam satietate mirifica, et corruptibile hoc indueris incorruptione sempiterna. Nunc autem suavis est mihi necessitas, et adversus istam suavitatem pugno, ne capiar . . . Hoc me docuisti, ut quemadmodum medicamenta sic alimenta sumpturus accedam. Sed dum ad quietem satietatis ex indigentiae molesta transeo, in ipso transitu mihi insidiatur laqueus concupiscentiae. Ipse enim transitus voluptas est. Et non est alius, qua transeat, quo transire cogit necessitas. **Et cum salus sit causa edendi ac bibendi, adiungit se tamquam pedisequa periculosa iucunditas** et plerumque praeire conatur, ut eius causa fiat, quod salutis causa me facere vel dico vel volo. **Nec idem modus utriusque est: nam quod saluti satis est, delectatione parum est.**

We restore the daily decay of the body by eating and drinking, until in time you destroy both food and stomach, when you will kill need with a wonderful satiety and when you clothe this corruptible body with everlasting incorruption. But at the present time the necessity of food is sweet to me, and against that sweetness I fight lest I become a captive. . . . You have taught me that I should come to take food in the way I take medicines. But while I pass from the discomfort of need to the tranquillity of satisfaction, the very transition contains for me an insidious trap of uncontrolled desire. The transition itself is a pleasure, and there is no other way of making that transition, which is forced upon us by necessity. **Although health is the reason for eating and drinking, a dangerous pleasantness joins itself to the process like a companion.** Many a time it tries to take first place, so that I am doing for pleasure what I profess or wish to do only for health's sake. **They do not have the same measure: for what is enough for health is too little for pleasure.**

1472

Text 5. Letter of the composer Antonio Le Basque to Lorenzo de' Medici, written at Urbino on 16 Sept. 1472. After Frank A. D'Accone, "Lorenzo il Magnifico e la musica," *La musica a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Piero Gargiulo (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1993), 219–48, at 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, seguitando le vestigie del vostro laudabile genitore, la farma del quale sempre viverà, et degli altri vostri antecessori, disposime mandarvi queste canzonette ridicole 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

Since you enjoy public fame for being adorned with every virtue, for being the intimate friend of every faculty, especially of music, without which, according to Isidore, no art can be perfect, thus following in the footsteps of your praiseworthy father whose fame will always live, 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 without comparison, I do not hold back from sending them to you, for different appetites look for different foods. And as your Brother Mariano already said in the Nunciata: "When the Florentine citizens are

cittadini fiorentini sonno stufi d'audire eccellenti et doctissimi predicatori, pure in fine tornano a me come coloro che stufi sonno di delicati cibi et vien lor voglia di carne insalata. Cossi 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.

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.**

1477

Text 6. Johannes Tinctoris, *Liber de arte contrapuncti* (1477), II. xxx. After Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols., Corpus scriptorum de musica, 22 ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1975–78), 2: 139–40.

Capitulum XXX. Confutatio quorundam 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. 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 quamquam deformitatem admississe, quo caeterae membra formosiora appareant? Quid verbis moror? Si Tullio credimus, quemadmodum in omnem vitam, ita in actiones nullam discrepantiam conferre debemus. Namque, ut idem in primo suorum *Officiorum* librorum, “in fidibus aut tibiis, quamvis paululum discrepent, tamen id a sciente animadverti solet.” Unde fit quod praeter intentionem musicae quam Aristoteles naturalem in se delectationem continere affirmat, animus eruditi auditoris in dolorem collabatur.

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 [Aristotle, *Sophistici Elenchi* xv: 174b5–7]. 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 [*De officiis*, I. xxxi]. For according to the same, in the first book of his *De officiis* [I. xli], “although lyres and tibia may diverge ever so slightly, it will nevertheless be noticed by the knowledgeable [listener].” And that 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 [*Politics*, VIII].

c.1492

Text 7. Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato 23*; after Emanuel Winternitz, *Leonardo da Vinci as a Musician* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 207.

. . . se tu rappresenterai all'occhio una bellezza humana composta di proportionalità di belle membra, esse bellezze non sono si mortali nè si presto si struggono, come fa la musica, anzi, ha lunga permanentia e ti si lascia vedere e considerare, e non rinasce, come fa la musica nel molto sonare, né t'induce fastidio, anzi, t'innamora ed è causa, che tutti li sensi insieme con l'occhio la uorrebbon possedere.

. . . for if you [as a painter] represent to the eye a human beauty, composed by the proportions of its beautiful limbs, **all this beauty is not as mortal and swiftly destructible as music; on the contrary, it has permanence** and permits you to see and study it. It is **not reborn like music is when played over and over again up to the point of wearing you out**; on the contrary, it enthralls you and is the reason that all the senses, together with the eye, want to possess it, so that it seems as if they wanted to compete with the eye.

1510

Text 8. Paolo Cortesi, *De cardinalatu libri tres* (Castro Cortesio: Symeon Nicolai Nardi alias Rufus Calchographus, 1510), fols. 72r–74v. After Nino Pirrotta, “Music and Cultural Tendencies in 15th-Century Italy,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 19 (1966): 127–161, at 147–55.

Atque in hunc quoque numerum illa genera referuntur, quae quasi lemborum quorundam similia uideri possunt, quaeque maxime iucunda aurium mensione iudicantur: nam illi certi digitorum cursus, tum iteratio, tum conclusio, tum uocum extenuatio & quasi interductio **facile in hominum mentes irrepere exquisita suauitate solent**: quod quidem genus scientius est, a nostris artis terminatione renouatum, cognitumque primum quomodo structam & nexum posset sonandi celebrari genus, idque primum Balthasar & Ioannem Mariam Germanos instituisse ferunt, quo simplex antiquorum per hyperboleon iteratio ab hypate singulorum coagmentatione iungeretur, ex eaque effloresceret symphonia sociata ditior: antea enim Petrus Bonus Ferrariensis & hi qui ab eo manarunt, frequenter, per hyperboleon iteratione utebantur, nec dum erat cognitus hic singulorum colligandorum modus, **quo maxime aurium expleri sensus cumulata suauitate potest**: quod idem fere esset de hispana lyra dicendum, nisi **eius aequalis lentaque suauitas soleret aurium satietate sperni, longiorque similitudo uideretur, quam expectari aurium terminatione possit**:

Also in the same group are placed those genres which can be considered as resembling certain fast-sailing boats, and are judged to have the most delightful impact on the ear; for those sure-fingered proceedings, now repetition, now stopping, now lessening and almost interlacing of sounds, **are in the habit of creeping easily into the minds of men with their exquisite sweetness**. Which genre, indeed, has been more knowingly revived into artistic perfection by our generation, and is acknowledged as the first genre of playing that can be praised for the way in which it is built and tied together. They say that it was first established by Balthasar and Joannes Maria Germanus, so that the simple repetition in the high region used by the ancients would be joined by a connection of all single sounds from the lower region, and from the latter a combined symphony would flourish more richly. Before them, in fact, Petrus Bonus Ferrariensis, and those who derived from him, often availed themselves of the repetition in the high region; nor was this [present] mode of harmonizing all the individual [sounds] yet known, **by which the sense of the ear can best be filled with perfect sweetness**. Almost the same could be said of the Spanish lyre, were it not **that its equal and soft sweetness is usually rejected by the satiety of the ear, and its uniformity is longer than it could be desired by the limits imposed by the ear**.

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 Isachus Gallus, maxime est appositus ad eiusmodi praecentoria construenda iudicatus: 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**:

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 similar inclination Herricus Isachus 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**.

1528

Text 9. Baldesar Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano del conte Baldesar Castiglione* (Venice: Aldo Romano and Andrea d'Asola, 1528); trans. Thomas Hoby, *The courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio* (London: Wyllyam Seres, 1561).

[I. xlvii 1–2]

Rise quivi ognuno; e ricominciando il Conte, Signori, disse, avete a sapere ch'io non mi contento del cortegiano e s'egli non è ancor musico e se, oltre allo intendere ed esser sicuro a libro, non sa di varii instrumenti; perché, se ben pensiamo, niuno riposo de fatiche e medicina d'animi infermi ritrovar si po piú onesta e laudevole nell'ocio, che questa; e massimamente nelle corti, dove, oltre al refrigerio de' fastidi che ad ognuno la musica presta, molte cose si fanno per satisfar alle donne, gli animi delle quali, teneri e molli, facilmente sono dall'armonia penetrati e di dolcezza ripieni. Però non è maraviglia se nei tempi antichi e nei presenti sempre esse state sono a' musici inclinate ed hanno avuto questo per gratissimo cibo d'animo.

At this they all laughed. And the Counte beginning a freshe: My Lordes (quoth he) you must thinke I am not pleased with the Courtier if he be not also a musicien, and beside his understanding and cousing upon the booke, have skill in lyke maner on sudrye instruments. For yf we waie it well, there is no ease of the labours and medicines of feeble mindes to be founde more honeste and more praise worthy in time of leyser then it. And princypally in Courtes, where (beside the refreshing of vexacyons that musike bringeth unto eche man) many thynges are taken in hande to please women withal, whose tender and softe breastes are soone perced with melody and fylled with swetenesse. Therefore no marvaile that in the olde times and nowe a **dayes they have alwayes bene enclined to musitiens, and counted this a moste acceptable foode of the mynde**.

[IV. lxii. 3]

Rimovasi adunque dal cieco giudicio del senso e godasi con gli occhi quel splendore, quella grazia, quelle faville amoroze, i risi, i modi e tutti gli altri piacevoli ornamenti bellezza; medesimamente con **l'audito la suavità della voce, il concento delle parole, l'armonia della musica (se musica è la donna amata); e così pascerà di dolcissimo cibo l'anima per la via di questi dui sensi**, i quali tengon poco del corporeo e son ministri della ragione, senza passar col desiderio verso il corpo ad appetito alcuno men che onesto.

[I. xxviii. 1]

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 dilettañsi talor di quella dissonanzia della seconda o settima, come di cosa sprezzata**.

Let him laye aside therefore the blinde judgemente of the sense, and injoye wyth his eyes the bryghtnesse, the comelynesse, the lovyng sparkle, laughters, gestures and all other pleasant fournitours of beauty: especially with hearinge **the sweetnesse of her voice, the tunableness of her woordes, the melodie of her singinge and playinge on instrumentes (in case the woman beloved be a musitian) and so shall he with most deintie foode feede the soule through the meanes of these two senses**, which have litle bodelye substance in them, and be the ministers of reason, without entringe farther towarde the bodye with covetinge unto anye longinge otherwise then honest.

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 perfite 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 disagreement of the seconde or seven, as it were with a thing lytle regarded**.

Text 10. Col. Henry Heveningham (1651–1700), “If Music Be the Food of Love” (1692); set to music by Henry Purcell.

If music be the food of love,
sing on till I am fill'd with joy;
for then my list'ning soul you move
with pleasures that can never cloy,
your eyes, your mien, your tongue declare
that you are music ev'rywhere.

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 arms.