

Silver Sound

Romeo and Juliet, Act 4, sc. 5

First Quarto (1597)

Servingman:

*When griping griefe the heart doth wound,
And dolefull dumps the mind oppresse:
Then musique with her siluer sound,*

Why “siluer sound”? Why “siluer sound”?

1. I thinke because musicke hath a sweet sound.

Ser. Pretie, what say you Mathew Minikine?

2. I thinke because Musitions sound for siluer.

Ser. Prettie too: come what say you?

3. I say nothing.

Ser. I thinke so.

I’le speake for you because you are the Singer.
I saye “Siluer sound,” because
such Fellowes as you haue sildome Golde for sounding.

Farewell Fidlers, farewell.

Exit.

1. Farewell and be hangd: come lets goe.

Exeunt.

First Folio (1623)

Pet.

*When griping griefes the heart doth wound,
then Musicke with her siluer sound.*

Why “siluer sound”? Why ”Musicke with her siluer sound”?
What say you *Simon Catling*?

Mu. Mary sir, because siluer hath a sweet sound.

Pet. Pratest, what say you *Hugh Rebicke*?

2. *M.* I say “siluer sound,” because Musitions sound for siluer

Pet. Pratest to, what say you *Iames Sound-Post*?

3. *Mu.* Faith I know not what to say.

Pet. O I cry you mercy,
you are the Singer. I will say for you;
It is “Musicke with her siluer sound,” because
Musitions haue no gold for sounding:

*Then Musicke with her siluer sound,
with speedy helpe doth lend redresse.*

Exit.

Mu. What a pestilent knaue is this same?

M.2. Hang him Iacke, come wee in here, tarrie for
the Mourners, and stay dinner.

Exit.

Harmony and Friendship

One of the most significant musical concepts in Shakespeare is that of *harmony*. It is usually invoked with the metaphor of strings, their tuning and temperament, and their pitch relationships. The image was conventionally applied to, amongst others, ● the governance of the state, ● the motions of the planetary spheres, ● love and marriage, ● the human constitution and, according to long tradition, ● the human soul. Expect lots of musical metaphors to allude to this idea: *in tune/out of tune, in concord/discord, to jar, to be falsely tuned, to be without strings altogether, ordered/disordered tuning, order, degree, proportion*

Harmony is not the same thing as unity. Harmony presupposes difference. There can be no harmony unless there are differences to be reconciled. When, on the other hand, things are in unity, they are almost literally *one*, and there is nothing to harmonize. This distinction, between *harmony* and *unity*, is critical to the idea of friendship. (Shakespeare plays upon it in Sonnet 8, see Handout 26). Many human relationships can be harmonious—like, say, between husband and wife, siblings, parents and children, colleagues, or acquaintances. But only friendship is a kind of unity.

The ideal of male friendship underlies *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Examples are Handout 4, lines 14–18, and Handout 11, lines 95–116. Yet the ideal is abandoned by Proteus in Act II (*ibid.*), and does not return until the very end of play—in the most bizarre and incomprehensible manner.

Contemporary literature on the subject of friendship includes:

B., M. *The triall of true friendship or perfit mirror, wherby to discerne a trustie friend from a flattering parasite* (London: Valentine Simmes, 1596).

BREME, Thomas. *The mirroure of friendship: both howv to knowve a perfect friend, and how to choose him* (London: Abel Ieffes, 1584).

MONTAIGNE, Michel de. *The essayes; or: Morall, politike and millitarie discourses*, trans. John Florio (London: Valentine Sims for Edward Blount, 1603), “Of Friendship,” pp. 89–96.

[M. B.:] in this world is not found so great a treasure that may be compared to a true and perfect friend, considering that to a true and assured friend, a man may discover the secrets of his heart, and recounte to him all his griefes, trust him with things touching his honour, and deliuer him to keep his goods and treasures, which will succour vs, in our paines and trauels, counsell vs in all perilles and daungers, reioyce with vs in our prosperities, and will be sorrowfull with vs in our aduersities, and disgraces of fortune.

[Breme:] true friendship can bee onely in the duall number, namely an vnfaigned consent of two mens willes and affections, & a transportation of two hearts into one body: and therefore a friend is called *alter idem*, another moiety, or another selfe.

[Breme:] neuer was good fellowship long seene ere yet betweene a vertuous husband and a vicious wife, but the deuils for their likenes do easily agree, and good men with good men do liue together in vnitie

[Montaigne:] In the amitie I speake of, [friends] entermixe and confound themselves one in the other, with so universall a commixture, that they weare out and can no more finde the seame that hath conjoined them together. If a man urge me to tell wherefore I loved him, I feele it cannot be expressed, but by answering; Because it was he, because it was my selfe.

[Montaigne:] Our mindes have jumped so unitedly together, they have with so fervent an affection considered of each other, and with like affection so discovered and sounded, even to the very bottome of each others heart and entrails, that I did not only know his, as well as mine owne, but I would (verily) rather have trusted him concerning any matter of mine, than my selfe.