

# Who Is Silvia?

## Assignments

*Who is Silvia* is an anomaly. There is no known tune that matches it, and consequently there's no way of telling how it would have been sung in the original performances of *The Two Gentlemen*. It may be that there was once a tune that fit the poetry which no longer survives. Or something else must be going on.

For what is a problem from one perspective could be an opportunity from another. If we can't find a matching tune, in the vast repertory of songs that have survived from Elizabethan England, perhaps the play is trying to tell us something. What if the song is anomalous for a reason?

**Who Is Silvia**

Who is Sil - via? what is she? Ho - ly, fair, and wise is she,  
That all our Swains com - mend her?

The heav'n such grace did lend her, that she might ad - mi - red be.

Who is Silvia? what is she?  
That all our Swains commend her?  
Holy, fair, and wise is she,  
The heaven such grace did lend her,  
that she might admired be.

Is she kind as she is fair?  
For beauty lives with kindness:  
Love doth to her eyes repair,

To help him of his blindness:  
And being help'd, inhabits there.

Then to Silvia, let us sing,  
That Silvia is excelling;  
She excels each mortal thing  
Upon the dull earth dwelling.  
To her let us Garlands bring.

This musical example was taken from Ross W. Duffin, *Shakespeare's Songbook* (New York: Norton, 2004), 459–60.

Although “Who Is Silvia?” survives without a melody, Duffin has found a contemporary song to which the text can be made to fit. There is a recording of this version on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ch1NpADKjY> at 8:03.

To find a direct musical match for a poem, one needs to know the following:

1. How many lines are there per stanza?
2. What is the rhyme scheme – as expressed in A, B, etc.?
3. How many syllables are there to each line?
4. How are the metric stresses distributed?

Note that many words and syllables can be accommodated to either one or two notes, depending on what the context requires. For example: *Sil-via* or *Sil-vi-a*, *heav'n* or *hea-ven*, *ad-mired* or *ad-mi-rèd*.

Stressed and unstressed syllables are notated with the symbols / and x, respectively. So the line “If music be the food of love” could be represented as: x/x/x/x/.

Bearing this in mind, go to the first line of the second stanza, “Is she kind as she is fair?” Notate the syllables in x and /. Find another easy line, and work your way till the whole poem is concluded.

1. How tightly does the tune notated by Ross Duffin (above) match the scansion of the poetry? Note that he has already simplified the original song to make the notes fit better.
2. I've created a little musical setting of “Who is Silvia?” in a style that is meant to approximate that of Elizabethan songs, and has the tight match between music and poetry that we normally expect in this period. Note that lines 1–2 and 3–5 run on without interruption. That is not an accident: can you find the reason?
3. Explain, word by word, line by line, what the character in “Who Is Silvia?” is saying, and what we can tell about him from the lyrics.
4. Of the three stanzas given above in the example by Duffin (above), only the first is underlaid in the setting below. Your assignment is to enter the second and third stanzas.

Who is Sil - via? What is she? That all our swaines com - mend her? Ho - ly, faire, and

wise is she, The heav'n such grace did lend her. That she might ad - mi - red be.

instrumental interlude between stanzas



## The two Gentlemen of Verona.

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1. *Out.* But if thou scorne our curtesie, thou dyest.

2. *Out.* Thou shalt not liue, to brag what we haue of-

*Val.* I take your offer, and will liue with you, (fer'd.  
Prouided that you do no outrages  
On silly women, or poore passengers.

3. *Out.* No, we detest such vile base practises.  
Come, goe with vs, we'll bring thee to our Crewes,  
And show thee all the Treasure we haue got;  
Which, with our selues, all rest at thy dispose. *Exeunt.*

## Scena Secunda.

*Enter Proteus, Thurio, Iulia, Host, Musitian, Silvia.*

*Pro.* Already haue I bin false to *Valentine*,  
And now I must be as vniust to *Thurio*,  
Vnder the colour of commending him,  
I haue access to my owne loue to prefer.  
But *Silvia* is too faire, too true, too holy,  
To be corrupted with my worthless gifts;  
When I protest true loyalty to her,  
She twits me with my falsehood to my friend;  
When to her beauty I commend my vowes,  
She bids me thinke how I haue bin forsworne  
In breaking faith with *Iulia*, whom I lou'd;  
And notwithstanding all her sodaine quips,  
The least whereof would quell a louers hope:  
Yet (Spaniel-like) the more she spurnes my loue,  
The more it growes, and fawneth on her still;  
But here comes *Thurio*; now must we to her window,  
And giue some euening Musique to her eare.

*Th.* How now, sir *Proteus*, are you crept before vs?

*Pro.* I gentle *Thurio*, for you know that loue  
Will creepe in seruice, where it cannot goe.

*Th.* I, but I hope, Sir, that you loue not here.

*Pro.* Sir, but I doe: or else I would be hence.

*Th.* Who, *Silvia*?

*Pro.* I, *Silvia*, for your sake.

*Th.* I thanke you for your owne: Now Gentlemen  
Let's tune: and to oit lustily a while.

*Ho.* Now, my yong guest; me thinks your' allycholly;  
I pray you why is it?

*Iu.* Marry (mine *Host*) because I cannot be merry.

*Ho.* Come, we'll haue you merry: ile bring you where  
you shall heare Musique, and see the Gentleman that  
you ask'd for.

*Iu.* But shall I heare him speake.

*Ho.* I that you shall.

*Iu.* That will be Musique.

*Ho.* Harke, harke.

*Iu.* Is he among these?

*Ho.* I: but peace, let's heare'm.

*Song.* Who is *Silvia*? what is she?

That all our Swaines commend her?

Holy, faire, and wise is she,

The heauen such grace did lend her,

that she might admired be.

Is she kinde as she is faire?

For beauty liues with kindnesse:

Loue doth to her eyes repaire,

To helpe him of his blindnesse:

*And being help'd, inhabits there.*

*Then to Silvia, let vs sing,*

*That Silvia is excelling;*

*She excels each mortall thing*

*Vpon the dull earth dwelling.*

*To her let vs Garlands bring.*

*Ho.* How now? are you sadder then you were before;  
How doe you, man? the Musicke likes you not.

*Iu.* You mistake: the Musitian likes me not.

*Ho.* Why, my pretty youth?

*Iu.* He plaies false (father.)

*Ho.* How, out of tune on the strings.

*Iu.* Not so: but yet

So false that he grieues my very heart-strings.

*Ho.* You haue a quicke eare. (heart.

*Iu.* I, I would I were deafe: it makes me haue a slow

*Ho.* I perceiue you delight not in Musique.

*Iu.* Not a whit, when it iars so.

*Ho.* Harke, what fine change is in the Musique.

*Iu.* I: that change is the spight.

*Ho.* You would haue them alwaies play but one thing.

*Iu.* I would alwaies haue one play but one thing.

But *Host*, doth this Sir *Proteus*, that we talke on,

Often resort vnto this Gentlewoman?

*Ho.* I tell you what *Launce* his man told me,

He lou'd her out of all nicke.

*Iu.* Where is *Launce*?

*Ho.* Gone to seeke his dog, which to morrow, by his  
Masters command, hee must carry for a present to his  
Lady.

*Iu.* Peace, stand aside, the company parts.

*Pro.* Sir *Thurio*, feare not you, I will so pleade,  
That you shall say, my cunning drift excels.

*Th.* Where meete we?

*Pro.* At Saint *Gregories* well.

*Th.* Farewell.

*Pro.* Madam: good eu'n to your Ladiship.

*Sil.* I thanke you for your Musique (Gentlemen)  
Who is that that spake?

*Pro.* One (Lady) if you knew his pure hearts truth,  
You would quickly learne to know him by his voice.

*Sil.* Sir *Proteus*, as I take it.

*Pro.* Sir *Proteus* (gentle Lady) and your Seruant.

*Sil.* What's your will?

*Pro.* That I may compasse yours.

*Sil.* You haue your wish: my will is euen this,

That presently you hie you home to bed:

Thou subtil, periur'd, false, disloyall man:

Think't thou I am so shallow, so conceitlesse,

To be seduced by thy flattery,

That has't deceiu'd so many with thy vowes?

Returne, returne, and make thy loue amends:

For me (by this pale queene of night I sweare)

I am so farre from granting thy request,

That I despise thee, for thy wrongfull suite;

And by and by intend to chide my selfe,

Euen for this time I spend in talking to thee.

*Pro.* I grant (sweet loue) that I did loue a Lady,

But she is dead.

*Iu.* 'T were false, if I should speake it;

For I am sure she is not buried.

*Sil.* Say that she be: yet *Valentine* thy friend

Survives; to whom (thy selfe art witnesse)

I am betroth'd; and art thou not asham'd

To wrong him, with thy importunacy?

*Pro.*

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Act IV sc. 2.

Who is singing the song here? Is it apparent from the context that it must be Proteus? One might argue yes: he was at least planning to commend Thurio, and perhaps the song is his way of doing it. Otherwise he is talking only on his own behalf. Is the song meant to be a token of Thurio's love or Proteus's? Does Silvia believe Proteus was the singer? Can we infer anything about these questions from Act. III, sc. 2, in which the plan for this serenade was hatched?