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Romeo and Juliet: Communication Through Song
by Melissa Barnett, '96

How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!

(*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.166-67)

Shakespeare's eternal, poetic lines resonate in the memories of people still today. His quotations' fame has not died. Yet there have been hundreds of other popular playwrights since his time, so why do Shakespeare's words remain alive after so many centuries? Charyn believes, "The meaning of a text is its music. And when the music fails, a text begins to die" (120). However, Shakespeare's words are not dead; therefore, could these words possibly be patterned after a musical structure? Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), the highly esteemed composer of the dramatic symphony *Romeo et Juliette*, proclaimed, "Shakespeare alone is the good God to the soul of the artist" (468). Several other composers have found inspiration in Shakespeare also, and have set his plays to music in one form or another. Shakespeare's plays remain alive because of his universal themes; however, the themes could not have been created without the sounds of the English language. There is no better place to examine Shakespeare's generative grammar forming a structure, musical in nature, than in the communication between Romeo and Juliet.

Berlioz, a Frenchman, spoke little English; however, upon hearing English actors perform, he was overcome with, "the tones of voice [that] penetrated me with the Shakespearian (sic) ideas and passions as the poor, pale translation [of *Romeo and Juliet*] never could have done" (69). Berlioz heard a "truncated version of Garrick" (Garrick was one of the several revisers of Shakespeare's plays after his death.), and Garrick's version excluded "rhymes, puns and bawdy jokes" (Kemp 39). However, these areas did not specifically alter the beautiful language between Romeo and Juliet. Their language is one of honest passion and not sexual jokes. Yet for Berlioz even to begin to understand Shakespeare's language, there had to be a common form of communication between the two masters. They both held a language in common--a language based on sounds. To one the sounds sounded like poetry, and to the other they sounded like music.

The relationship of language to music and whether or not their origins lie in a common source has been a long-debated issue. The basic concept uniting language and music is their use of a "common frequency component" (Levman 153). Both language and music form their communication from the

most simplistic sounds (e.g., a single vowel sound or a single musical note). These basic sounds grouped with other basic sounds create more complex sounds leading to their own individual messages (Levman 154). These individual messages conveyed by language and music that "manipulate sound" are still closely linked according to Levman through five specific areas:

(1) pitch, or highness and lowness; (2) duration of individual sounds and speed of overall vocalization; (3) dynamics, including softness, loudness, and accent; (4) timbre or distinctive vocal quality; and (5) articulation (151).

In each of these areas, parallel examples can be displayed from language and music. For instance, the pitch of a male or female voice compared to a flute or bass create the effective highness and lowness (this example holds true for timbre, also). Dynamics and articulation are demonstrated depending on the skill of the performer. However, the duration of sound remains dependent on the basic components of the word itself or the indicated length of the musical note.

Several languages are mainly accentual (e.g., Greek) while others are quantitative, English being one (Monelle 263). By being a quantitative language, English sounds are prolonged. Therefore, its quantitative origins led the way for English to be more closely related in its sound capabilities of duration to music than, say, Greek. English is also an accentual language which works well with music since music is a language of duration and accent.

Another interesting relationship that comes into play between language and music is the variance between accentual verse (e.g., iambic pentameter) and quantitative verse. In essence, Shakespeare took a quantitative language, English, and shaped it to fit the form of accentual verse. By contrasting two opposite forms in this manner, dissonance should be heard by the listener; however, melodious lyrics roll off the tongues of Romeo and Juliet.

For example, consider that in Juliet's famous line "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?" (2.2.33), the downbeats fall on the word "Romeo" three times out of the five possibilities of this pentameter rhythm. Romeo is the stressed word on the first, second, and fifth beats ("wherefore" is stressed on the third beat and "art" on the fourth). Monelle, who writes on the fact that poets have often referred to the conventions of musical meter in writing their poetry, states, "recurrent stressed syllables in verse resemble the first beats of [musical] measures" (254). In a musical composition written on common time (four beats to a measure), the first and third beats are felt the strongest and anticipated by the listener. However, this is a five beat line. Shakespeare, by placing "Romeo" on the first beat emphasizes the name and then on the fifth beat (the next odd beat after three) repeats it again. Thus,

Shakespeare allows the line to begin and end with its stress on "Romeo."

In the following and preceding lines, Shakespeare did not stick to the same meter and in turn changed the rhythm. In music, the meter changes at unpredictable moments. Berlioz, as Shakespeare, changed time signatures (therefore placing the stress on a different beat) throughout his *Scene d'amour* (Berlioz, second section). Lightfoot solidifies this comparison in saying, "Music and verse rhythm are essentially alike in terms of employing downbeat in a divisive time pattern of expectation" (255).

Along with these stresses comes the phrasing of the line. Shakespeare wrote his lines with punctuation. If he did not write with punctuation, the long "o" sounds in "Romeo" would have run into one another. And even if Juliet's line was written without punctuation, it would still liken itself to musical sounds, for Charyn believes, "Word against word sounds like music" (120). However, with the commas and exclamation marks, Shakespeare asked the performer to take a breath, a minute silence. These sounds and silences shape the line's musical rhythm, for sound and silence are the basic fundamentals that shape rhythm.

The rhythm is also kept alive by the repetition of words and sounds that occur frequently throughout the conversation of Romeo and Juliet in the well-known balcony scene. Again, returning to Juliet's previous quoted line, the long sound of the vowel "o" can be heard eight times in a line of only seven words. Being a long vowel, its duration is longer than a short sound and the combination of eight long "o" sounds make Juliet's line linger in the listener's ears. Undoubtedly, this line's musical structural quality contributes to its fame and commitment to memory over time.

Romeo's name itself holds a melodic quality. Monelle calls dactylic and trochaic meters "prose-song[s]" (257). Romeo's name is a dactyl in nature (one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables) allowing the beats of the line to fall on his name and emphasizing the duration of the sound "o." Also, the listener is hearing this line from the same speaker, Juliet, thus establishing the pitch in the higher register. Combining these two aspects of the duration of sound and the regulated voice-pitch (taken into consideration without the fluctuations produced by the other vowel sounds) along with the constant rhythmic beat of the line, a correlation between pitch and time is formed. With this identification, the listener has presented to his or her ears "Pitch-time events . . . the basic psychological building blocks of tonal music" (Raffman 27).

Another unique function of Romeo's and Juliet's names deals with the emotive effect the listener feels upon hearing a certain number of syllables that make up a word. Hugo states that multisyllabic words "have a way of softening the impact of language . . . [by generating feelings of] compassion, tenderness, and tranquility" (8). It is this overwhelming emotion of passion thrust upon the listener

while hearing Romeo and Juliet voice their lover's name in a declaration of love.

However, the names of Romeo and Juliet contrast also. Romeo's name is a dactyl and Juliet's name is a trochee (one stressed syllable and one unstressed). Romeo's name ends on an open vowel and Juliet's ends on "t" closing the word (Gass 17). Yet the two names together, when heard in the title *Romeo and Juliet*, create a sound pleasing to the ear, thus yielding harmony.

Berlioz combined Shakespeare's balcony scene (2.2) with the love scene (3.5) to create his climactic section, *Scene d'amour*. This combination resulted in his interpretation of the drama he saw and the sounds of harmony he heard. Berlioz even labeled a section *Allegro agitato* (quickly agitated). Berlioz was most likely describing the emotion he heard through the intonation of the performers' voices, concerning the discrepancy which English speakers know of as the scene where Romeo swears by the moon.

Berlioz himself was aware of the power of sound. Of course he was a composer of music and was partial when he stated, "Music is the sole art that has this retroactive power; no other, not even that of Shakespeare, can thus poetise the past it recalls" (443). Here it appears that Berlioz addressed the message words can convey in meaning and not sound. Raffman agrees with Berlioz concerning this point, saying, "the tie between music and feelings is considerably tighter than the tie between a sentence and its meaning" (55). Therefore, Berlioz left the goal of communicating individual messages up to the sounds created by language and music. Therefore, is it any coincidence, though voices are heard frequently entering and exiting throughout Berlioz's masterpiece, that the *Scene d'amour* section was dedicated to entirely instrumental sounds after the initial chorus leaves singing their good nights after the Capulet ball?

The aspect of silence must also be considered here because it is the other half constituting rhythm. Shakespeare used the device of the rhetorical question. Looking still at Juliet's previous quoted line, it is a rhetorical question. This one Juliet herself does not even answer. The inflection of the voice ends on a higher pitch (or note) when asking a question. Berlioz heard these raised inflections at the end of the questions, but heard no other voice answer it. He only heard Juliet continue to speak. Where was the other voice? It remained in silence. Raffman proposes, "we can assume that perception originates with the transduction of acoustic properties of the sound signal" (26). The question mark serves as a signal to the eye of the reader. However, the sound of the raised pitch of the voice serves as a signal to the listener.

No, it cannot simply be assumed Berlioz detected each and every sound he heard, for only Berlioz himself can answer that question. However, an Irishman during that time seemed to believe

Berlioz did understand when he said to him, "I beg your permission to grasp the hand that wrote the symphony of Romeo. You understand Shakespeare!" (Berlioz 377).

Imagine if Shakespeare's sound and silence were taken away. Something else, quite different, would be formed. For example, if Berlioz had heard Shakespeare in French instead of English, Shakespeare's sound would be drastically different. The flowing, melodic discourses between Romeo and Juliet would be lost if Shakespeare's love poetry was translated directly word for word into Japanese, for example. In fact, Kennedy (in reference to foreign translations of Shakespeare) explains that "audiences in linguistically foreign environments have to find a desire for him [Shakespeare]" (3). However, it is Shakespeare's message and driving tales of human passion that come across in translation and not his beautiful sound, unless heard in its native tongue. Kennedy speaks earlier on the idea of Anglophone critics who do not really consider Shakespeare in translation; therefore, implying "the superiority of English as the medium for Shakespearean cognition" (2). It is Shakespeare's musical language that keeps him alive today and did in the mind of Berlioz. Without the musical language of Shakespeare's English, Berlioz's perception of *Romeo and Juliet* would have been quite different.

Berlioz's emotive interpretation was therefore left to sound and silence, not to words, that convey his own personal emotional message. The same holds true with the lingual sounds created by Shakespeare. Each sound defines the emotional meaning of his words. For Kemp believes, "Berlioz's structure is . . . dramatic, [and] Shakespeare is musical, and that both derive from the same archetypal source" (68).

Language and music, being both built on this foundation of sound, form a given structure. Once this structure is in place and the listeners obtain a level of experience where they are comfortable in the workings of their language, then understanding what they hear is natural. Thus, Raffman explains the structures the listener hears in this way, "the meaning of a musical work consists in the feelings that result (or would result) from the experienced listener's unconscious recovery of structures constitutive of the work, *whatever those structures may be*" (53).

Shakespeare set up the departing love scene (3.5) in the structure of an aubade (interchangeable idea of a song or poem of departing lovers at dawn). The beauty lies in Shakespeare's use of couplets. Throughout the play communication is usually silenced between the parents and their children or between families because of the feuding. However, Romeo and Juliet do communicate to one another (Deats 77). They share their communication in the form of a duet as seen from their back and forth use of the rhyming couplets. For example, the lines alternate their solo voices and then come back together on their rhyming couplets stressing words otherwise looked over (the intention of accents). However,

Shakespeare played with the rhythm and rhyme and created a melody of sonorous sound. Romeo's begins the first rhyming couplet of the series with (all underlining by the author):

Romeo I must be gone and live, or stay and die.
Juliet Yond light not daylight: I know it, I (3.5.11-12).

Romeo How is't, my soul? Let's talk; it is not day.
Juliet It is, it is! Hie hence, be gone, away (25-26).

Juliet O, now be gone More light and light it grows.
Romeo More light and light--more dark and dark our woes (35-36).

Romeo Farewell, farewell! One kiss, and I'll descend.
Juliet Art thou gone so, love lord, ay husband-friend (42-43).

And Shakespeare gave Romeo the last couplet with:

Romeo And trust me, love, in my eye so do you.
Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu, adieu! (58-59).

These specific words Shakespeare chose to rhyme all happen to be single syllable. Hugo states that single syllable words "show rigidity, honesty, toughness, relentless, the world of harm unvarnished" (9). Romeo and Juliet live within a world that does not accept them as a couple, and they know this undeniable fact. It is this melodious structure combined with this harshness created by the single syllables that shape the harmony and dissonance within their discourse.

Yet Romeo and Juliet's word sounds fit their discussion. They are disagreeing over the bird they have heard outside the window. Romeo thinks it is the lark, and Juliet thinks it the nightingale. Shakespeare chose two birds known for their music (a coincidence?). Whether it be either the lark or the nightingale, the bird is trying to tell the lovers a message through beautiful song for which he is known. Yet Romeo and Juliet disagree and their words not only produce a sound of harshness, but the meanings do also. Grouping their couplets together produces a sad message: "day away!" "grows woes." "descend friend?" "you adieu!" Undoubtedly, Berlioz understood the final word "adieu," only adding to his understanding of the emotion of the scene.

Romeo and Juliet sing a duet in this scene, and it is to each other. It is in a form of an epithalamium (a lyric song or poem to a bride or bridegroom). However, these rhyming couplets connect them with one another. Berlioz, in his *Scene d'amour*, set a duet between the flute and the viola. One sounds while the other "listens" and then it "responds" to answer its duet partner instrument. These

instruments also bring out the musical theme and bring it back several times to the listener's ears. By far, it is one of Berlioz's most beautiful and most emotionally driven compositions. Romeo and Juliet sound the theme through the use of the single syllable words they use.

They also echo one another's phrases. Now the same sounds are heard but on differing pitches. Thus, adding another variation to their duet (all underlining by the author):

Juliet O, now be gone! More light and light it grows.
Romeo More light and light--more dark and dark our woes (3.5.35-36).

Shakespeare even created the word "husband-friend" to rhyme with "descend." Shakespeare invented words continuously in order to fit his plays the way he saw fit (Garner 40). Shakespeare also invented the word "silver-sweet" that is within the quote that opened this paper.

Romeo How silver-sweet sound lover's tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears! (2.2.166-167).

The alliterated "s" sound is really never stopped by punctuation. Yes, there is a comma after "night"; however, that is a natural break because the closing "t" sound already finishes that line. It moves and pushes one word in the next making that word-next-to-word-music that Charyn was quoted stating earlier. Its melodious sounds stay in the ear and is even echoed later in the play by Peter (4.5.120-123), a servant to the Capulets (Andrews 322). Romeo declares, through his words' meaning, what Berlioz discovered through experiencing Shakespeare's sounds and placing his interpretation to the sounds of instrumental music.

Kennedy asks a pertinent question in the end of his introduction. He concerns himself with the idea of the day when the English speaking population will no longer understand the meaning of Shakespeare's words. He asks, "What is it that endures when he [Shakespeare] is deprived of his tongue?" (17). Shakespeare's sounds already have endured through Berlioz's dramatic symphony and the hundreds of other musical compositions written upon hearing his pure melodic sounds.

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Ambivalent Family in *Angels in America*: A Redefinition of Family
by Amy Ard, '96

Sociologists are still trying to figure out what happened in the 1980s. For the most part, the 80s seem to be a decade in which the individual raised his or her fists to the "system"--whether that be government, religion, education, whatever--and said, "I can do this better without your help." From the political and social trends of the decade, it appears these systems listened to the rallying cry of the people. Reagan's years in office were marked by an attitude of *laissez faire*, and religion in the 80s became increasingly secularized. Due in part to these separations, the rich and poor classes in America were pushed even further to the polar extremes; the middle class, an ever growing percent of the population, was defined as the political, economic, and moral norm. One significant impact the middle class made on America was the romanticization of the American family. Stephanie Coontz in, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, discusses family politics of the 1980s in conjunction with the national ethos of the time. Just as religion and politics were forced into their specific realms, family and family morals became a very private issue:

Middle class Americans elevated family values and private rectitude into the defining features of the Gilded Age morality [late nineteenth century]. Aside from attempts to convince rich and poor to adopt virtuous family values, they largely abstained from social reform, asserting that private morality and family life represented a higher and purer duty than did political or social activism (107).

Middle class families in the 1980s enjoyed widespread economic success and repeated a trend first demonstrated in the 1950s; they moved away from the cities and into suburbs where families were sheltered from the dangers of city life. Families during the 1980s had more expendable income than in earlier decades and were often able to afford larger houses and spend more money for the purpose of family entertainment. Although the political conscious of the nation was decidedly conservative, women and homosexuals slowly began to gain political voices. Sodomy laws in many states were overturned and while gay and lesbian marriages were not legal, homosexuals did not have to fear, in most states, that the "morality police" would barge in on them in the privacy of their own home. While the family became the moral center of the nation during the 80s, the definition of family became more obscure. In a poll taken in 1989, only 22 percent of those polled defined a family strictly in terms of blood marriage or