

*How oft when thou, my music, music play'st  
 Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds  
 With thy sweet fingers when thou gently sway'st  
 The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,  
 Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap  
 To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,  
 Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,  
 At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand.  
 To be so tickled they would change their state  
 And situation with those dancing chips,  
 O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,  
 Making dead wood more blest than living lips.  
     Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,  
     Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.*

**T**his sonnet, and the next, are decidedly different from Sonnet 127, which was an amusing introduction to the last section. Instead of a clever meditation on changing fashions of beauty, we have a pretty – and rather suggestive – compliment to a keyboard musician of unspecified sex.

Because it constitutes an elegant plea for physical intimacy, its language seems completely different from that used to address the friend. It is much more what a modern reader would expect when opening up a book of “love sonnets.” The sweetness begins in the first line, when the person addressed is called “my music.” Both the motion of the musician and the harmony of pleasant sounds are made palpable. The jacks which leap nimbly towards the player’s hands are the devices that pluck the strings, and the speaker envies them for their boldness, while he stands by – blushing. So far, all seems innocent.

However, the jacks so vividly personified desire to be “tickled” (l. 9) and wish to change places with the keys, “those dancing chips” (l. 10) over which the player’s fingers walk so gently. (Shakespeare, as most commentators agree, is not wholly accurate in his keyboard terminology. Is that a problem or an asset here?) The player’s touches make the keys’ “dead wood more blest than living lips.” (l. 12) The sanctifying effect of the kiss combines the physical and the spiritual, as does the sonnet embedded in *Romeo and Juliet* (I.v.93-

110) in a way very different from the earlier sonnets in the sequence.

The couplet carries the undercurrent of sex even further. The “jacks,” which in Elizabethan slang can mean both men and penises, are happy with the touch of fingers. The speaker asks for lips instead. The sonnet need not be read this way, but the double entendre is almost inevitable. When the plurality of men involved with the mistress becomes clear later, this reading becomes even more plausible.