



O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

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Juliet:

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

Romeo:

[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

Juliet:

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy:
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand nor foot,
Nor arm nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
and for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

[Romeo And Juliet Act 2, scene 2, 33–49](#)

In the most famous scene of the play, Romeo stands unnoticed beneath Juliet's balcony as she engages in a fantasized debate. She questions the purpose of Romeo's being Romeo—something he's probably taken for granted all these years. That Romeo is Romeo creates a few rather touchy problems for the new lovebirds. To be Romeo is to be a Montague while to be Juliet is to be a Capulet, and the Montagues and Capulets have a nasty history of killing off one another. Juliet fancies that family identity can be changed along with one's name, and family feuds thus nullified.

O ROMEO, ROMEO, WHEREFORE ART THOU ROMEO?

Although we use "wherefore," if at all, as a synonym for "why," Juliet uses the word in a more limited sense. By "wherefore?" Juliet means "for what purpose?" If she had merely asked "Why art thou Romeo?" she wouldn't be distinguishing the two major meanings of "why"—"from what cause" (in the past) and "for what purpose" (in the future). "Wherefore" clearly emphasizes the latter sense, which is why "whys and wherefores" are different things.

"Wherefore" and its partner "therefore" reflect the basic tendency of English to use spatial ideas—"where?" "there"—to represent logical ideas, such as cause and effect.

Shakespeare Quotes: O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

WHAT'S IN A NAME? THAT WHICH WE CALL A ROSE BY ANY OTHER WORD WOULD SMELL AS SWEET

If there's such a thing as generic Shakespeare today, this is it. Both "What's in a name?" and "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" are Instant Bard, although the latter is, as many forget, merely a paraphrase. From the romantic declamation to the crass advertisement, these phrases have served generations with complete flexibility.

"What's in a name?" is the less specific of the two phrases, and also the less common. Juliet here merely rehearses in a different form the point of "What's a Montague," moving, like a good Renaissance student, from the particular to the general. Names in general, she insists, ought to be separable from the things they name. Romeo never does change his name, and it wouldn't have done much good anyway. Whether or not he's essentially a Montague, and Juliet essentially a Capulet, their families will continue to act that way.

"That which we call a rose/ By any other word would smell as sweet" seems bloated to the modern ear. But we're accustomed to the paraphrase, which never occurred to the playwright or his audience. It's a little futile to second-guess Shakespeare now, but he did have to fill out a line and a half of blank verse. Regarding Juliet's use of "word" instead of "name," we can perhaps be grateful; she already uses "name" six times in fifteen and a half lines.

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