



Naming Thy Name: Cross Talk in Shakespeare's Sonnets

Elaine Scarry

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Shakespeare's sonnets are indisputably the most enigmatic and enduring love poems written in English. They also may be the most often argued-over sequence of love poems in any language to date. But what is it that continues to elude us? While it is in part the spellbinding incantations, the hide-and-seek of sound and meaning, it is also the mystery of the noble youth to whom he makes a promise—the promise that he will survive in the breath and speech and minds of all of those who ever read these sonnets. “How can such promises be fulfilled if no name is actually given?” Scarry asks, and this book is the answer.

Naming Thy Name lays bare William Shakespeare's devotion to a beloved whom he not only names but names repeatedly in a love affair immortalized in the microtexture of the sonnets, in their overarching architecture, and in their deep fabric. By naming his name, Scarry enables us to hear clearly a lover's call and the beloved's response for the very first time. Here, over the course of many poems, are two poets in conversation, in love, speaking and listening, writing and writing back.

In a true work of alchemy, Elaine Scarry, one of America's most innovative and passionate thinkers, brilliantly synthesizes textual analysis, literary criticism, and historiography in pursuit of the haunting call and recall of Shakespeare's verse, and that of his (now at last named) beloved friend.

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