

**Naming It: Adolescent Desire and the Construction of
Identity in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet***

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Abstract

One of the most famous lines in *Romeo and Juliet* is Juliet's contemplative question, "What's in a name?" (2.1.86), a question central to the entire play since so many aspects of the lovers' lives in Verona revolve around the issue of identity. This paper will focus on the essential role that names and naming play in the fatal desire that drives these "star-crossed lovers" to such a tragic end. In the first part of the paper, the manner in which other characters define and characterize Romeo and Juliet individually will be analyzed, paying particular attention to Capulet's view of his daughter and to Benvolio and Mercutio's view of Romeo. It is worth noting that the two main characters, do not make their appearance on stage right away. In both cases, the parents of each of them provide the grounds for the discussion of their children, a clear sign that Romeo and Juliet are still attached to their families, and consequently, their family names. In the second part of the paper I will deal with how Romeo and Juliet define themselves and each other through their mutual desire. Passages such as their nocturnal encounter under Juliet's window on Act 2 will be paid especial attention to, as well as Romeo's lamentations at his banishment on Act 3, a short speech that mirrors Juliet's on Act 3, linking not just the two characters, but their feelings and their identities with inevitable doom.

Key Words: identity, naming, *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare, adolescence, desire

1. Introduction

There is a reason the story of Romeo and Juliet and their transgressive romance has remained such an iconic narrative for such a long time. Whether they are considered foolish or admirable for the lengths to which they go in the name of love, their story, woeful as it is, remains a remarkable one. Its appeal has not diminished over time, in fact, Romeo and Juliet are still perceived as compelling and relatable characters. The play been adapted for film, a much more contemporary medium to consume drama, starring actors such as Leonardo DiCaprio in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version, or Hailee Steinfeld in the most recent version, directed by Carlo Carlei. The presence of such young and popular actors in these productions is doubtlessly a statement to the relevance of the story in our society. Furthermore, it is not just new adaptations of the play that have made it to our times. Romeo and Juliet are still referenced in a variety of other artistic formats, inspiring the unforgettable 1957 musical *West Side Story*, which was later adapted to film, for instance; or appearing in the lyrics of Taylor

Swift's *Love Story*. In a culture increasingly concerned with labelling, in which multiple minority groups keep pushing for acceptance and equality and breaking down boundaries; a society in which issues of gender and race challenge the notion of labels themselves, in short, in which identity has become problematic, yet at the center of a variety of discourses, it is not surprising that Romeo and Juliet's boldness and insubordination continue to be appreciated. Such passion and defiance would probably not have been possible if the protagonists of the play were not adolescents. Granted, the term adolescence is quite a modern one, and it probably is not applicable to Shakespeare's plays in the same way we think of the concept nowadays, but the fact remains that both Romeo and Juliet are entering, or have entered, the time of their lives in which the transition from child to adult takes place. Their age is an important factor in the narrative, and a factor that solidifies their relatability in our culture. In the age of Instagram and Millennials, adolescence has become curiously prevalent, extending its reach to both younger and older individuals, impregnating them of the rebellious quality of a generation that is searching to stand apart from the past, a phenomenon all on its own. Adolescence in our world, just like in Verona, might just be the key to redefining the future.

2. The Lovers and Verona

The play does not open with either one of the protagonists in the scene. On the contrary, this love story starts violently, putting on display (quite literally) the bad blood between the houses of Capulet and Montague. Romeo is first mentioned by his father a bit later on in that same first scene. Montague discusses Romeo's melancholy state with Benvolio. A concerned parent, Montague relegates the task of discovering the reason for Romeo's preoccupation to Benvolio nonetheless, believing that he will open up to his friend a whole lot easier than he would to his father. Romeo, then, is defined for the audience through the words of his father and his best friend. Through them, we can ascertain a few things about our tragic hero. We

know he is lovesick. We know he is an adolescent. He exhibits all the signs: moodiness, a reluctance to spend time with his parents, and of course, the fact that he is infatuated with Rosaline.

The feud is introduced before any of the protagonists makes an appearance. The perfect backdrop for this tragedy, the feud not only introduces the audience to a violent Verona, but connects the story to a specific social background. In this context, the feud can be seen as being more about names than anything else. In the kind of patriarchal society presented here, one's personal honour is inevitably linked to their family name, and a mandatory loyalty to one's kin. How this loyalty comes to be carried out depends largely on the gender of the individual. According to Kahn, "in patriarchal Verona, men bear names and stand to fight for them; women 'the weaker vessels,' bear children and 'fall backward' to conceive them." (190) Men of each house, including the servants, are obliged to fight in the name of their lord, to preserve their identities and ensure the survival of their clan. Women, on the other hand, deemed entirely inadequate to fight, are nevertheless not devoid of their duty to the family name. Women express their loyalty, not by defending their family in the battlefield, but by creating a family and continuing their lineage.

Romeo appears shortly after the first fight and tells Benvolio, "I have lost myself, I am not here; / This is not Romeo, he's some other where." (1.1.193-4) Thus his identity is put into question from the very beginning. In his state of infatuation with Rosaline, Romeo does not have the newfound self-awareness characteristic of Petrarchan lovers for whom falling in love was a way to access deeper knowledge about themselves. Like the prototypical Petrarchan lover, Romeo suffers due to his lady's indifference, but his suffering is not genuine, it is a mere affectation, and as such, it cannot bring any clarity to the lover. The character of Rosaline, then, functions as a prop, both for Romeo and within the play. To the audience, she is nothing but a name, because that is all she is to Romeo. In Kottman's words,

“Rosalind need not take the stage; she is a mere lack, as Romeo says, a ‘not having’. At this juncture, Romeo is nothing other than this desiring ‘emptiness’.” (10) Thus, when Romeo first appears on stage, he is moping around trying to fill this void left by the uncertainty of not knowing who he is. This state, of course, is not unheard of when it comes to adolescents. It is not unusual for them to be at a loss for referents having made the decision to reject the parental models. Romeo, then, when asked to elaborate on what he is feeling, can only describe his state as one of lack. This does not give readers and audiences a lot of information about who Romeo is. He is obsessed with a name that is not his own, a name that cannot make his identity clear because it lacks depth. There is no personality behind the name Rosaline, as there is behind the name Juliet, therefore, her name is just a device, too shallow to be identifying. Romeo’s parents and friends do know him, and therefore know that his behaviour is out of the ordinary, but for us, Romeo appears almost as a blank slate, a character that is poised on the brink of great developmental changes, a character whose growth we will experience throughout the play.

Romeo is perceived differently by his peers than the adults with whom he interacts. Friar Laurence cannot help but feel a bit exasperated at Romeo’s sudden change of heart and consequent overnight recovery from his lovesickness. “If e’er thou wast thyself, and these woes thine, / Thou and these woes were all for Rosaline. / And art thou changed?” (2.2.77-9) Friar Laurence questions the authenticity of Romeo’s enamourment, equating it to a fickle personality. For the Friar, this is a clear sign of Romeo’s unfixed identity. He puts in doubt even the possibility of Romeo ever having truly “been himself” before. As an older man, it is no surprise that Friar Laurence is not impressed with Romeo’s episodic puppy love. Romeo’s friends, Mercutio and Benvolio, do not understand Romeo’s infatuation with Rosaline either, but unlike Friar Laurence, they do not attribute Romeo’s shift in mood to fickleness, but simply welcome the change. “Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo, now art thou what

thou art by art as well as nature;” (2.3.84-5) Mercutio finds Romeo different after the ball. He is presumably back to normal, quibbling and jesting with his friends. This good-humoured Romeo is one that Mercutio recognizes as the real Romeo. His friends, then, operate under the assumption that Romeo does have a defined personality at this point, and there is no reason to believe he does not. At least not from their perspective. Their experience of Romeo is different to the Friar’s or Romeo’s parents’ perception of him. Their encounters are carefree, informal and riddled with humour. It is no wonder, then, that their image of the “real Romeo” is that of a cheerful young man that jokes around with them.

Despite not being capable of identifying the cause of Romeo’s sudden good mood, Mercutio and Benvolio do note the change. Tybalt, on the other hand, blinded by his bloodlust, cannot identify Romeo as an ally and not an enemy after his marriage to Juliet. “I see thou knowest me not.” (3.1.64) Romeo tries to avoid the quarrel with his new relative in law, when Tybalt comes looking for a fight. Tybalt, of course, does not recognize him as Juliet’s husband since he does not know they are married. To all intents and purposes, Romeo has not ceased to be a Montague at this point, Tybalt’s enemy, nor has Juliet ceased to be a Capulet. Since Romeo and Juliet’s love, and consequent wedding, are kept a secret, the only thing Tybalt has to go by in order to assign an identity to Romeo is his family’s name. Therefore, Tybalt is incapable of understanding Romeo’s attempts to keep the peace. “And so good Capulet, which name I tender / As dearly as mine own, be satisfied.” (3.1.70-1) Romeo sees Capulets as family now, their name, Juliet’s name, is as dear to him as his own. The ensuing fight between Tybalt and Mercutio, and finally Tybalt and Romeo, however, is proof that Romeo’s feelings towards his own name and the name of Capulet are inconsequential unless they become part of the public sphere as opposed to his private world. The feud is an intrinsic part of Veronese society. Sooner or later, despite the Prince’s prohibition, all men of each house must confront the violence. “The feud is the deadly *rite-de-passage* which

promotes masculinity at the price of life.” (Kahn, 182) Thus, Romeo could not have avoided it eternally, sooner or later he would have been expected to prove himself by fighting the enemy. Inevitably, cementing his identity as a Montague, would have required him to participate in the feud. Romeo’s despair, then, is not caused by the sheer wanton violence, but by the fact that he is torn. He knows that killing Tybalt secures his position within his household, in a way. He acted in defense of his kinsman’s honour. Yet, Romeo cannot be a Montague anymore in opposition to the Capulets. He exists in a multiplicity of in-between states at this point. Not a child yet not fully a man. Married, though in secret, and the marriage has not been consummated yet. A son of the Montague patriarch and a husband to the Capulet heiress. Romeo is conflicted because it is in the nature of the feud to force participants to choose sides, yet Romeo does not fully belong in any one place. His loyalty does not lie with either house exclusively, he cannot pick black or white because he is a grey area himself. Romeo exists in no-man’s land.

Juliet is introduced to us in a similar way to Romeo, even though she is not tormented by unrequited love and is probably a few years younger. She is first mentioned when Capulet and his wife discuss their daughter’s future with Paris. Capulet describes her as “the hopeful lady of [his] earth” (1.2.15). From the very beginning, then, Juliet's identity is tightly bound to her father's. She is a Capulet, and even though her name does not raise as many questions in the lovers’ encounters as Romeo’s, we must not forget that it is as critical for her character as for Romeo. Juliet owes her loyalty to her house much as Romeo does to the Montague. She has a duty to fulfill, as Kahn claims: “*Fille de terre* is the French term for heiress, and Capulet wants to make sure that his daughter will not only survive motherhood, but produce healthy heirs for him as well.” (190) Capulet’s “lady of his earth” bears the burden of perpetuating her father’s name. She cannot fight for it like men are expected to, but she must act as a channel through which the name of Capulet can pass on to the next generation.

Juliet's honour then, is tightly tied to her ability to marry a suitable partner and produce healthy offspring.

Just like the name Montague corresponds to no "part belonging to a man,"(2.1.85) the name of Capulet is not a physical component of Juliet's being, yet it is not any more negligible for that. In the scene where Paris and the Capulets are negotiating the terms of a possible future engagement between Paris and Juliet, the use of language gives us clues as to where each character fits in the hierarchy of the Capulet household, after all "there is a close connection between language and identity." (Carpi, 39) Despite deeming Juliet's consent as essential to proceed with the betrothal, Capulet is discussing the matter without having consulted it with Juliet first. In this scene, she is not treated as an individual with capacity to make her own decisions. The biggest objection to her marrying Paris is due to her young age, and even that is questioned. During the whole exchange, the possibility of Juliet refusing to marry Paris is not seriously considered, and in fact, when she is informed of the negotiations and the possibility of meeting Paris at the night's festivities, she is entreated to "look to like" (1.3.99).

Given that Paris is presented as an excellent suitor, it seems only natural that Juliet should not have any objections to marrying him. That, however, is only what Juliet's family expects of her, because at the moment they can only see her as their daughter, a daughter who is obliged to them and bound by name to respect their authority. Both her and Romeo's identities are in the hands of their families. Both are defined by their families and friends before they have a chance to define themselves. To assert themselves, they must take matters into their own hands.

Thus, Juliet's refusal to marry Paris comes as a shock for Old Capulet. Capulet reacts furiously to what he considers Juliet's stubbornness and pulls rank, making use of his authority and power over her to bend her to his will. This is actually the first time Juliet and

her father have a conversation on stage, and it is a brutal argument. Capulet has talked about Juliet, of course, with other characters, but has not actually talked to her until now. This seems very significant, since Capulet is actually quite absent from her life, except to manage it to his convenience. He only addresses Juliet to assert himself as the ruler of her life and prevent her from disobeying him. Juliet, on the other hand, is only seen interacting with her father to defy him. The reason she is able to do so is the fact that she is in love with (and secretly married to) Romeo. If Juliet had never met Romeo, or at the very least, never felt attracted to him, she might not have had any objections to marrying the man his parents chose for her. Paris is always presented in a very good light, and in fact, there is no particular reason for Juliet or the audience to dislike him, other than the fact that Juliet loves Romeo and not him. It is clear here that if Juliet was not in love, she would have no reason to stand up to her father. As jarring as this episode is, a demonstration of “the force of tradition weighing on the heroine,” (Kahn, 192) it represents a small triumph for Juliet, who has the opportunity to demonstrate her self-assurance. Juliet has had a chance to discover herself as a unique individual, she has found transcendence in love. “The lovers’ free choice of each other seems to dissolve the power relation between them and to absolve them of the necessity to defer to any authority other than their own.” (Callaghan, 81) Perceiving that, Capulet launches an attack on her identity, and threatens to strip her of her status as a Capulet. Fathers like Capulet usually reject their daughters when their female sexuality manifests itself as a way of preventing them from loving a man that is not their father or their father’s choice. (Novy, 17) Juliet’s rebellion is spurred by desire for a man whom her father has not approved of.

Capulet, determined not to let his will be challenged, threatens Juliet with erasure:

But an you will not wed, I'll pardon you!
Graze where you will, you shall not house with me.
(...) An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets!
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall ever do thee good. (3.5.187-94)

Juliet has two options, surrender her identity to her father, “be his” and so his to give away to whomever he pleases; or be herself apart from her family, and so renounce her name, her house, her honour, her lineage, her inheritance and everything that being a Capulet entails. Either way, part of Juliet’s newfound identity would become obliterated in the process. It must be remembered, that Juliet is the only child and sole heir of the Capulets, so the continuance of their line depends wholly on her. The magnitude of Capulet’s threats, then, and their implications for both himself and Juliet cannot be ignored.

The importance of being acknowledged is also made very clear here. Identity exists in relation to others as much as oneself. Not being acknowledged, therefore, means having an incomplete identity. “By depriving Juliet of her family name Capulet is threatening her of revoking her citizenship: he is almost exiling her from her own town. This also brings Romeo’s situation to the fore: he too is momentarily deprived of citizenship and sent on exile.” (Carpi, 43) Once again, both lovers find themselves in a similar situation in relation to their families. It should not be surprising then that ultimately, they choose similar solutions to the problem as well. “If all else fail, myself have power to die” (3.5.242) Ironically, in death, Juliet can reclaim power over her life. She might not be able to choose her spouse, but the choice of death over life is hers and hers alone.

“[Old Capulet] becomes one of the most peremptory of Shakespeare’s fathers, transgressing social norms as well as disregarding Juliet’s reluctance.” (Hopkins, 134) It’s all well for him to wait to marry Juliet off at the beginning, because he does not have any particular reason why she should be married, but that does not mean he truly regards her as an individual capable of making her own decisions, as evidenced by his reaction to Juliet’s refusal to marry Paris. He is completely intolerant of her disobedience. He is entitled to rule over her as a father and believes she owes him deference as a daughter. She is bound to him in family and name, and he will not allow her to act otherwise. She must behave in

accordance with her position in the family. Callaghan states that “Capulet is woefully unaware of what is required to get his daughter’s heart, or of the power differential that constitutes the distance between his will and the troublesome issue of female consent.” (81)

Capulet uses an extremely dirty trick to force his daughter to conform to his will. After all, what would Juliet's life be like if her father fulfilled his threats and repudiated her?

Challenging his authority is a dangerous gamble for Juliet when the stakes are that high, and Capulet knows it. “[Romeo and Juliet] are close in rank, years and status, and are members of the same community, which would indeed benefit from their marriage, if their parents would only sanction it. Despite their youth, they behave in a way that is, arguably more mature than their own parents’ conduct.” (Hopkins, 135) Their marriage does indeed prove beneficial for the community, ending the feud once and for all, but that cannot happen while their marriage is secret, and their marriage cannot cease to be secret while their families are fighting. Juliet ultimately devises a way to bypass her father’s authority. She knows what her father expects from her: “Henceforward I am ever ruled by you.” (4.2.21) Juliet, then, pretends to go along with her father's plans of her marrying Paris. She is submitting to his rule, but falsely, since she has contrived a plan with Friar Laurence to avoid marrying Paris. Thus, Capulet believes himself victorious, since Juliet is acting exactly how he wants again. “My heart is wondrous light, / Since this same wayward girl is so reclaimed.” (4.2.45-6) Capulet believes he is in control of his daughter's life again, whereas, unbeknownst to him, she is labouring to undermine his authority over her in favour of her own sovereignty. With only so many options available to her after being cornered so effectively by her father, she chooses a fake death to dilute her ties to him, thus freeing her to be reunited with Romeo.

“O child, O child, my soul and not my child!” / Dead art thou, alack, my child is dead; / And with my child my joys are buried.” (4.4.88-90) When Capulet laments his daughter's (fake) death, it becomes clear that death is the only way to effectively remove Juliet from his

possession. In death, she is not “[his] child” anymore, she is out of his grasp. Ceasing to exist is the only way to shed Capulet’s influence over her. Yet, her family may still lay a claim on her body, as they do through the funeral, by burying Juliet in the family tomb, thus marking her as one of their own, and effectively separating her from Romeo. Hence, the family name becomes an actual physical barrier separating the lovers. Nevertheless, Romeo will find a way around that obstacle, and finally, the two will be reunited in death.

“O, the people in the street cry ‘Romeo’, / Some ‘Juliet’, and some ‘Paris’; and all run / With open outcry toward our monument.”(5.3.191-3) Capulet’s wife says this right before she and her husband find out Juliet stabbed herself next to the corpses of Romeo and Paris. The people in the street do not make any reference to death, or at least, Capulet’s wife only hears the names of the young lovers and Paris. Their names alone function as sufficient distress signal to alert the families to the gravity of the situation. Before they arrive at the tomb to find the bodies of Romeo, Juliet and Paris, the names alone have provided a powerful foreshadowing. The tragic demise, however, does not come without a silver lining, not only did Romeo and Juliet manage to take control of their own lives, even if it was by taking them away, but “the marriage of Romeo and Juliet will ultimately benefit their community by procuring the end of the feud.” (Hopkins, 136)

3. If a Montague Doffs His Name

Love and self-assertion are all part of growing up, and in *Romeo and Juliet*, the connection between the two is made apparent. Kottman claims that *Romeo and Juliet* “is the story of two individuals who actively claim their separate individuality, their own freedom, in the only way they can -- through one another.” (6) According to Estrin, for Mercutio “love marks a retreat from the art of forming, and so becoming fully what man was destined to be.” (31)

Romeo and Juliet, however, are proof of the contrary. They need to define themselves as individuals, but in order to do so, they must be recognized as such by another.

When Romeo and Juliet first meet at the Capulet ball, they are drawn to each other without knowing who the other is. Their initial attraction, “[befitting] the spirit of the masque, (...) is still an anonymous, replaceable desire.” (Kottman, 12). This would be the kind of desire that characters like Mercutio and Benvolio might welcome. They are not inclined to take love seriously and mock the misfortunes intense infatuation brings upon the miserable lovers. Preferring to approach sex in a light-hearted and detached manner, they would welcome the anonymity of an encounter in a masquerade ball. However, “Romeo and Juliet are not satisfied with the “satisfaction” offered by the masque and its anonymity. (...) Romeo and Juliet do not want to remain unknown to one another.” (Kottman, 12-3) The encounter at Juliet’s balcony, therefore, is hardly accidental. Both of them desired to see the other again and to find out more. Even the discovery of the other’s identity as a member of the rival family cannot discourage the pursuit of the other. “Too early seen unknown and known too late.” (1.4.252) Juliet’s remarks upon discovering who Romeo is denote the importance of knowing and being known in the play. It is the first instance of her and Romeo’s identity as a source of conflict. Not knowing who the other was, they got into trouble by allowing themselves to be attracted to each other, and by continuing to get to know each other, they will deepen the rift between themselves and their families. Nevertheless, their encounters will also serve to foster their sense of self. “[T]here is more to Romeo’s turnaround and Juliet’s soliloquy on the balcony than sexual urges; at the minimum, both want to know whom it is they desire. (...) This is the decisive turning point; if Romeo and Juliet now want to “know,” to single out, whom they desire, then they must be singled out.” (Kottman, 13) Their exchanges in the balcony scene serve to “stimulate each other by coming to life, simultaneously as they guarantee each other by surfacing as art, in an abiding vehicle

for love.” (Estrin, 36) Their impulse to find out more about the other’s identity also compels them to challenge the idea as determined solely by one’s name. This is only natural, since their rival names seem to be the major obstacle standing in the way of the realization of their desire.

JULIET What's a 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 called,
 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 I take thee at thy word.
 Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized:
 Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

(2.1.83-94)

Their back-and-forth reassures them, making their identity more defined by contrast with the other’s identity. Juliet questions the power of Romeo’s name to construct his identity, and so his response is to “be new baptized.” Still, that is not an ideal solution, since deciding to be called by another name creates confusion. “This generates a new problem: how are they to recognize one another?” (Kottman, 13) They are treating identity as something with plasticity, through which one can move fluidly, but something that remains unchanged at its core at the same time. Romeo and Juliet explore identity, viewing it as a multi-layered thing. On the surface, there is the name of an entity, a name that is in principle completely arbitrary and does not change the composition of matters beneath that surface. Underneath that, there is the true essence of the identity, that which would smell sweet no matter what it was called. Yet, this playful pondering undermines itself somehow. Juliet is only questioning the nature of names because the identity of her beloved made this relevant. Romeo’s identity would be

inconsequential if he were not a Montague, or if the feud did not exist. However, because Romeo *is* a Montague and an enemy to the house of Capulet, his name has great importance in Juliet's eyes. If names are as arbitrary as she claims, perhaps Romeo being called something else would not solve the problem anyway, because, in order to be Romeo, he needs to have "that dear perfection" as much as he needs to be a member of his family, to grow up in his particular circumstances, and maybe even to fall in love with the enemy.

The lovers are enacting that old philosophical thought experiment, "if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" In the play, the question could be posited differently: if a Montague doffs his name, and no one acknowledges it, is he still a Montague? Juliet has no other means of identifying Romeo as Romeo than by using the very same name she claimed was her enemy, and so she asks "Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?"(2.1.103). Belsey suggests that "the signifier, however arbitrary, is not at the disposal of the subject. Romeo's name precedes him, makes him a subject, locates him in the community of Verona. It is not optional. (...) Unlike hand or foot, Romeo's name is not something that he can lose and retain his identity, continuing to be the specific, differentiated Romeo that Juliet loves." (133-4) In order to stay differentiated, Romeo and Juliet must exist in conflict. "By a name / I know not how to tell thee who I am. / My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, / Because it is an enemy to thee. / Had I it written, I would tear the word." (2.1.96-100) Their names are a necessary hurdle, since they must construct their identity as a Montague and a Capulet who love a member of the enemy clan. This is the only path to self-realization, because it is the only one in which they can stand apart from their families and grow into their own singular selves. This means, however, that their names not only become equated to the idea of "lover" or "beloved" to one another, but "enemy" and even "death" at the same time. "The place death, considering who thou art, / If any of my kinsmen find thee here." (2.1.107-8) Romeo's name is enough to endanger his life just by being in Capulet

territory. Still, that does not deter either of them from longing to experience “the urgency and joy of claiming one’s own life to be “infinite” through another, not as private transcendence, but as a worldly realization of freedom through another.” (Kottman, 24)

No one but Romeo and Juliet perceive each other and themselves as unique individuals, despite the fact that their identities are developing as adolescents. Their respective families will not acknowledge their latent singularity. They cannot see them as beings separate from the unit of the family. “Within their respective households, Romeo and Juliet are neither faceless citizens nor nameless masquers, in the bosom of their families, they are deemed individuals. Family life is the means by which their singularity is acknowledged.” (Kottman, 13) Outside of the family, however, their distinctiveness vanishes. “Shakespeare’s play shows how Romeo and Juliet are formed as subjects through acts of mutual self-recognition” (Kottman, 5) In the balcony scene, the lovers negotiate each other’s identity by testing the boundaries of their names. It is as if they were playing a game, completing the puzzle of the other’s character, seeing how many pieces they could leave out or add and still maintain the essence of their being. “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.” (2.1.76-9) Romeo and Juliet, however, cannot stop being Romeo and Juliet and become simply “love” to one another, because it is precisely being Romeo and Juliet that makes them love each other. Nevertheless, their game establishes that there is a certain freedom in naming. As much as Juliet may insist that her beloved’s name does not influence his nature, removing his name does make him unrecognizable, as we have seen. Being stripped from one’s identity may feel freeing as it may open up some possibilities, but existing without an identity is no less limiting than being constricted by the connotations of one’s name. The dependency that naming may generate has already been explored in the context of Capulet’s threats to disown his daughter.

As Romeo and Juliet experience the “struggle for freedom and self-realization as lovers,” (Kottman, 5) they begin to realize the implications of forging one’s own identity. “[S]elf-realization requires staking one’s life through another.” (Kottman, 26) As the events of the play unfold, the challenges of staying true to oneself and the love they share become apparent. “I am not I if there be such an ‘I’, / Or those eyes shut that makes thee answer ‘Ay’.” (3.2.48-9) Juliet feels her identity slipping away at the mere idea that some harm may have come to Romeo while she was waiting for him on their wedding night. If the Nurse says that Romeo is dead, Juliet will be so grief-stricken she’ll lose herself, her ‘I’. Romeo’s death, however, is not the only thing that can threaten her self. When she receives the news of Tybalt’s death at the hands of her beloved she cannot help but feel torn. On the one hand, she is expected to hate Romeo, a member of the rival house who has now killed her kinsman, but she is now bound to Romeo as much as she is bound to the Capulets, and owes him loyalty as well. “Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband? / Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name / When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?” (3.2.97-9) Her choice of words is not arbitrary. Once again, Romeo’s name proves problematic. Now, he does not just bear the name of the enemy, but through his actions, he has managed to tarnish that name in the eyes of the law. He has indeed “lost his good name”. Bound as they are, such a loss proves as painful to Juliet as Romeo himself. Because of his damaged reputation, he will be banished from Verona and sent far away from his lover.

“Then ‘banishèd’ / Is death mistermed.” (3.3.20-1) Romeo mirrors Juliet’s “what’s in a name?” speech when he learns of the Prince’s judgement, except, now, the lovers’ situation has become even more dire. Romeo’s terms, then, when dissecting the nature of names again, become much more gloomy than those used by Juliet. “As if that name, / Shot from the deadly level of a gun, / Did murder her, as that name’s cursèd hand / Murdered her kinsman. O tell me, Friar, tell me, / In what vile part of this anatomy / Doth my name lodge? Tell me,

that I may sack / The hateful mansion.” (3.3.101-7) Echoing “what's in a name”, Romeo disassociates himself from his name, to the point that he blames the name itself, as if names were capable of volition, of Tybalt’s murder. He then contradicts Juliet, likening his name to a part of his body, which, if he had the means to locate, he would extirpate without hesitation. In his speech, his name has become permeated with negative connotations, and contrary to Juliet’s speech in the balcony, there do not seem to be any redeeming qualities in Romeo’s character to mitigate the atrocity his name has become.

As circumstances drive the two main characters farther apart they come to realize what it will take to truly become fully themselves, as whole individuals, disassociated from the limits imposed on them, completely their own selves. “[O]nly by staking one’s life can one come to know what is worth dying for: to know the measure of one’s own life, that which one loves absolutely, as the core of one’s very being.” (Kottman, 8) Their love, a love they are willing to die for, will be what frees them indeed, but in order for this love to do its labour, they must die first. Romeo and Juliet can only become the sole owners of their lives when they choose death over a life dictated by others.

4. Conclusion

Without an audience who sees them and recognizes them on their own, Romeo and Juliet cannot exist. Romeo and Juliet then, seek each other out, and act as the audience the other needs, recognizing their respective selves to confirm their independence. “Romeo and Juliet exult in the strength they impress upon each other.” (Estrin, 33). For them, their desire means freedom because it infringes their families’ expectations for them, but most importantly, because it becomes the perfect opportunity for them to “create, in the moments they share, an art of love.” (Estrin, 33) Despite the many obstacles to their romance, their desire allows them to come into their own. In the end, they die because choosing death is a way of taking

control over their lives. The fact that they committed suicide is relevant because it was entirely their choice, and therefore, cemented their individuality. Death was their last stand against the impositions of living in a society centered around names. It was the last step to becoming fully independent, choosing death over a life determined by their names. Yet, despite their attempt to sever all ties not only with the living world, but with the names that haunt it, backfires to some extent. Romeo and Juliet are given a funeral by their families, they are properly mourned and, even in death, their families claim them as members of their house. Even the statues erected in their honour will be a permanent link to Romeo and Juliet, their names, and their story. In the end everything that lead them to their deaths (being born in their respective families, rebelling against their parent's wishes, questioning their loyalty to their respective families, falling in love with a member of the rival house, defying the feud and getting sucked into it) contributed to the psychological makeup of the two characters. If their journey had been any different, they would not have been the same Romeo and Juliet we know and love.

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