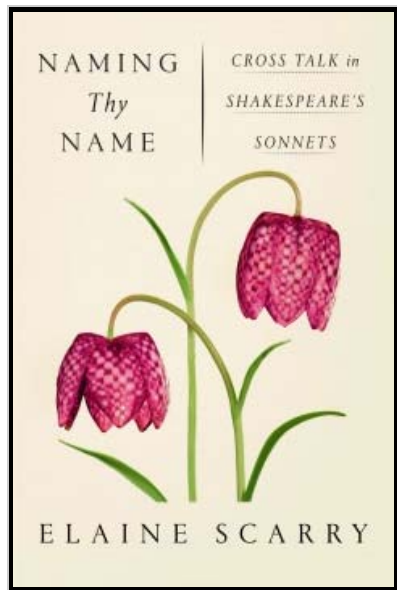


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Naming Thy Name

Cross Talk in Shakespeare's Sonnets
by Elaine Scarry

Price: \$27.00(Hardcover)
Published: November 29, 2016

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From the Publisher: A fascinating case for the identity of Shakespeare's beautiful young man 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. 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 Shakespeare makes a promise -- the promise that the youth will survive in the breath and speech and minds of all those who read these sonnets. "How can such promises be fulfilled if no name is actually given?" Elaine Scarry asks. 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 the microtexture of the sonnets, in their...

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What We Say

Elaine Scarry is a serious scholar; I know this because she has published several acclaimed scholarly books and she is the Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value at Harvard. But I also know she is a serious scholar because her new book is called "Naming Thy Name: Cross Talk In Shakespeare's Sonnets" rather than, say "Shakespeare's Secret Gay Love"! It's perhaps the only time this work shows restraint for it is breathtakingly audacious in its scope. Scarry identifies the beautiful young man Shakespeare famously praises in his series of sonnets -- it is Henry Constable, the poet and courtier and emissary and Catholic proselytizer so beloved by his contemporaries and not one, not two, but three royal personages in three countries. Yet Scarry is just beginning. She also identifies James I as the Rival Poet for Constable's affections,

suggests (less firmly) that Constable is the mysterious lodger who Shakespeare uncharacteristically ensconced in a lavish London home and who was by his side at the Bard's death and signed his will. Oh and she attributes an anonymous poem about Constable to Shakespeare for good measure. The last alone would be mightily bold and make one's career if a scholar succeeded in convincing others. But Scarry does it all, combining a close textual reading of the sonnets as well as poems by Constable (and James I), along with details of their lives, the imagery used in the printing of those poems, the dates they were written or circulated, the biographies of their lives (Constable's is rather better documented), Church records about aliases used by Catholics traveling in secret and much more. Shakespeare spells out Constable's full name in his poems, which is no shock. The letters are so common it might happen once in 50 times by accident. But Shakespeare announces flatly he is naming his beloved right before doing so. And Constable spells out Shakespeare's name and makes plays upon it repeatedly. This is just the beginning of her multi-layered argument. Each piece of evidence on its own ranges from interesting to very interesting to a bit of a reach (which Scarry readily acknowledges). But the evidence is bounteous and each piece reinforces the other until her argument seems awfully sturdy indeed. Taken as a whole, it illuminates and explains a great deal. We see the poets conversing openly with one another through their art. Particular lines that seem odd or jarring suddenly make perfect sense. Mysterious references or contexts for a particular sonnet become obvious, and on and on. Alas, this is not a sexy tale of stolen kisses or gay revelation for a casual reader interested in learning more about Shakespeare and his times. It is indeed a work of serious scholarship. For all that, it is a very accessible work of serious scholarship that this layman with little grounding in even the sonnets felt pulled into and absorbed by. Shakespeare's passion for the beautiful young man is explicitly pronounced for all the world to see and it is this young man he promises to immortalize (not the dark lady that occupies fewer sonnets and with whom the beautiful young man also dallied). And yet, despite his repeated desire in one of the most famous cycles of poetry in all of history, the simple idea that Shakespeare meant what he said, that Shakespeare was in love and it was the love that dare not speak its name (except in code) escaped the minds of scholars. Open to the possibility, Scarry can suddenly connect the dots and they are so numerous and clearly aligned that once they are connected it allows the sonnets to make sense in every way, to reveal their beauty, to resolve their modest confusion and be appreciated all the more. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

"Scarry . . . poses a surprising answer to a question that has puzzled readers of Shakespeare's sonnets for 400 years [about] the 'lovely boy' of the poems. . . .She also makes a fresh suggestion identifying the 'rival poet' of Shakespeare's sonnets . . . Scarry's conclusions . . . invite a close reading of the sonnets and a pure enjoyment of the metaphorical power and linguistic intricacy of each line." *àPublishers Weekly*

àNaming thy Name is a beautiful book. It is a love story: of the love between William Shakespeare and Henry Constable, and of another writer's true love for that love. There has been no book that has so thoroughly explored the practice of poetic conversation among the sonneteers of the English Renaissance. And there has been no book, at least since Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, that has been so passionate in pursuit of a theory, a theory of the love behind all Shakespeare's other loves. Scarry has given us the latest, bravest answer to a question no reader of the sonnets can fail to ask.ââJeff Dolven

âI picked up *Naming thy Name* and, as they say in Dublin, I couldn't leave it down. I expected brilliance, having read...

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