

Where There's a Will

What's In A Name?

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other
word would smell as sweet,

[R&J 2:2, 43 – Juliet]

...so says Juliet, in her play with...that boy.

Our Will takes the naming of his characters very seriously. He packs appellations with a plethora of insight to help you unravel the character of the character.

Our journal today takes a stab at answering that question. What is in a name? Specifically, what is in the name of our hero, William 'Arden' Shakespeare.

An example of this is the name of 'that boy', crouching twenty feet below Juliet's balcony, hiding in the dark of the orchard, Romeo Montague.

With no more information than his name, what can we ascertain about this young man? What's in Romeo's name?

For starters, he's a Montague. What do we learn from that? The answer lies in 13th Century Italy. For when we return to the Lombardy of the 1200's, we find that Montague, in its native Italian Montecchi, is not a single family but a group of families. Montecchi, in fact, refers to a castle, found outside Verona, located upon a small mountain.

This castle - 'monticulus,' in Latin - is the location where the Ghibelline - supporter of the Holy Roman Emperor - Ezzelino II da Romana instructs his loyal followers to rendezvous upon receiving the news that Ezzelino's loathed rival the Guelph - supporter of the Pope - Azzo VI, Marquis

de Este has been appointed the Podesta - chief judge - of Verona, over Ezzalino.

Upon becoming riled and roused, by the pissed off Ezzelino, these 'Castle Montecchi,' supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor, as they become known, proceed to gallop their stallions back across the drawbridge of the castle straight into a rebellion against the Pope-supporting Azzo VI faction of Verona.

Et voila, here lies the very core of the political backdrop we find in Will's Romeo and Juliet. It all lies in our hero's surname. And thus explains Juliet's desire for her gallant to change his name as her family - the Capulets - are of the Pope-supporting faction.

The meaning of Romeo is far simpler, and way more romantic. It means pilgrim. Specifically, a pilgrim to Rome, with the sense of being 'a wanderer.' How perfect is that?

Ergo, if we apply the same 'what's in a name' principles to our Will what do we find?

What's in William 'Arden' Shakespeare?

Starting with the appellation William, we discover William is Germanic. It comes from 'wil' and 'helm.' The 'wil' means desire and the 'helm' means helmet, as in the sense of protection. So, the meaning of William is a 'desire to protect,' a guardian as 'twere.

The first known William in history is William of Gellone, cousin to Charlemagne the Great, no less. He's also known as William Short Nose. What's in a name? Now, it turns out, our short-nosed William of Orange is famous. He has a *chason de geste* - a song of heroic deeds - written about him. William's *chason* is quite the 'song' with 3,554 verses. It is with the popular spread of this epic *chason* that the name William becomes ubiquitous in Europe.

Now, it is Sly, in the Induction of the *Taming of the Shrew*, who indignantly cries out to the Lord, "the Slys are

no rogues. Look in the chronicles; we came in with Richard Conqueror." Sly - to the audience's delight - has gotten the name wrong. It is William Conqueror whom he means. And sure enough, the name William did 'come in' to England with the Conqueror. Shortly thereafter, William became the most common name in Britain, along with other Norman names like Robert, Richard, Roger, Henry, Hugh and Norman.

The name Shakespeare, as you might expect, has a rather more complex etymology than Wilhelm. However, like Wilhelm it may very well have 'come in' to England with William Conqueror. It thus comes as no surprise to find in the Great Rolls of Normandy, for the city of Bayeux, for the year 1195, that one William Sakeespee makes a down payment of five shillings as surety on a fine, which three years subsequent he still has not paid off.

The first bearer of the surname in the official records of England, in 1248, is another William, William Saksper, from the village of Clopton, a hamlet located seven miles south of our Will's town, Stratford-upon-Avon. William Saksper it turns out is a thief, who, upon being convicted of his robberies is hanged for his light fingers.

Come the year 1310, there is an abundance of Sakespeies, Sakespeys, Saxpeys, and Shakespeies dwelling all over Warwickshire.

As to what the name Shakespeare, in all its various connotations, truly means, becomes a fascinating study in how words are adopted by a culture. In its original French, the name is 'Saquespee,' which derives from the words 'saquer' and 'espee.' In French, these words mean 'to pull out vigorously,' and 'sword.' So, in French, the name 'Saquespee' means to 'swiftly draw your sword.' And, interestingly, in some early English census registers we find the name 'Drawsword,' the true translation of Saquespee.

When the Normans cross the Channel, their Norman word 'sak' in old English translates as 'to shake.' In addition, with the Warwickshire patois, the 'espee' picks up an 'r' and a

sword morphs into a 'spear.' Hence, the French 'swiftly drawing your sword,' evolves into the English 'shaking your spear.' Shakespeare.

When it comes to our Will's direct family, in 1389, we find an Adam Shakespeare. Due to his military service, Adam is a tenant farmer, living in Baddesley Clinton, 8 miles north west of Warwick. Adam has a great-grandson, Richard of Wroxhall with land close to the Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth

In the records we also find a Richard Shakespeare living as a farmer in the village of Snitterfield, four miles north of Stratford, 17 miles from Lady Godiva's city of Coventry.

We are now presented with our first conundrum. Is the Richard of Wroxhall and the Richard of Snitterfield the same person?

The Richard of Snitterfield we know is our Will's paternal grandfather. In 1550, we know he is renting land from a local landowner, Robert Arden, and when he dies, in 1560, we know Richard of Snitterfield leaves his property - deemed to be worth £37 17s - to his three sons; John, Henry, and Thomas.

Eldest son John, our Will's father, goes on to marry Mary, our Will's mother, the youngest daughter of Robert Arden, the landowner for whom Richard of Snitterfield, John's dad, is the tenant.

Truth be known, our Will's mum, Mary of the Arden, has a far more adventurous line of descent than Will's dad. The Arden are one of the great families of Britain. They are only one of three families - the other two being the Berkeley and the Swinton - who can trace their name all the way back to the pre-William Conqueror age of the Anglo-Saxon rulers, starting, during the eleventh century, with Alwin, the nephew of Leofric, Earl of Mercia.

Leofric is a mighty, landowning lord of the Midlands, who founds the monasteries at Coventry and Much Wenlock. His

greatest claim to fame, however, is that he is the husband of Lady Godiva.

As the story goes, Lady Godiva, Countess of Mercer – a mother of nine children, no less, rides naked, covered solely by her long hair, through the streets of Coventry. She does this on a promise from her husband that, if she makes the ride, he will ease the excessive tax burden he has imposed on the good people of his lands. All Coventrians are told to stay in their houses, with their windows shuttered, as Lady Godiva bare-backs her way through the town.

Everyone does it, except for one person – there's always one. Thomas the tailor wants to see the Countess in all her glory, and so he sneaks a peak as she goes by on her steed. It is said that Thomas is blinded for his terrible deed. And, ever since that day, any perpetrator caught in an act of voyeurism, is now known as... a Peeping Tom.

On a more serious note, Godiva's husband, the good Earl Leofric, is a loyal supporter of King Edward the Confessor – the English king we find as a character in Will's Macbeth – especially during the Confessor's strife with Earl Godwin of Wessex. Leofric, in cahoots with Earl Siward of Northumberland – he, also, a character of Macbeth fame – raises an army against Godwin leading to the banishment of Earl Godwin. Leofric then goes off and dies at his estate of King's Bromley, north of Birmingham, fifty miles from Stratford.

A decade later, Leofric's nephew, Alwin, is now the Sheriff of Warwickshire. In old England, a shire is an area of land under a governor. The governor of a shire, a royal appointee responsible for keeping the peace, is known as a 'shire reeve' – reeve meaning a magistrate. During the realms of the Anglo-Saxon monarchs there are 37 shire-reeves in Britain.

When William Conqueror 'comes in' he changes the shires into counties. He does this because in Normandy 'a county' is the area of land under the jurisdiction of a count. The

way Conqueror William's, ever practical, Norman civil servants blend shire and county together as they take the name of the major town, in the newly designated county, and they add 'shire' to the end. For example, Warwick + shire becomes Warwickshire, our Will's county of birth.

When Alwin the Nephew dies, his son, Thorkell becomes the new Sheriff of Warwickshire. As sheriff, Thorkell adopts the French habit of taking a surname – an 'in addition to' name as the French call it. Up to this point Brits, like Hollywood superstars, go by their first names alone. Thus, Thorkell becomes Thorkell de Arden, and, voila, the Arden family is born.

Thorkell takes the surname Arden – Celtic for 'highland' – from the immense forest, located in the very heart of England, which he manages, as tenant-in-chief, for the king. And even though he is demoted to a mesne vassal with the 'coming in' of Conqueror William, Thorkell manages to keep hold of his land holdings in Warwickshire. Thus, the Arden get to keep their forest for many generations to come.

When Thorkell dies, his son, Siward de Arden, adds weight to the legacy of the Arden by marrying Cecilia of Mercia, the granddaughter of Queen Aldgyth.

Queen Aldgyth [Edith], a renowned noblewoman of extreme beauty, is the niece of our good Earl Leofric and his naked-riding wife, Lady Godiva. Her first husband is the great Welsh ruler King Gruffydd ap Llewellyn, with whom Aldgyth gives birth to a daughter, Nesta ferch Gruffydd.

According to Holinshed's Chronicles – the big book our Will uses as inspiration to write fourteen of his thirty-nine plays; Macbeth, King Lear, Cymbeline, and all the histories – Nesta ferch Gruffydd marries Fleance, the son of Banquo – yep, the Scottish play again. As the story goes, Fleance and Nesta have a son, Walter FitzAlan, who upon becoming High Steward of Scotland, to King David I, starts the Stuart line that will go on to rule Scotland, starting with

Robert II, and then England, starting with James I, our Will's king.

Though Holinshed's Chronicles is a 'history book' it also contains healthy chunks of myth. Like life, the true story of Nesta ferch Gruffydd is far less romantic. In the real world, Nesta marries Osbern FitzRichard, the son of a Norman knight, who had 'come in' with William Conqueror. Nesta and Osbern have a son, Henry, and a daughter, Nesta Agnes.

Now, when the sons of the banished Earl Godwin, Harold and Tostig, arise to avenge their father, they invade Wales. At Gwynedd, home of Mount Snowden, in northwest Wales, Gruffydd's own soldiers behead their king to get Harold and Tostig off their back.

The victorious Harold then marries the now widowed Queen Aldgyth. She becomes the only woman ever to go from being the Queen of Wales to Queen of England. She is, however, soon made a widow again when the now king of England Harold, taking that arrow in the eye, loses to William Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings. Following the battle, Queen Aldgyth is whisked away to Chester for shelter, and it is here we lose her to history.

Queen Aldgyth's granddaughter, Cecily of Mercia, and Siward de Arden, with their seven children, go on to form the foundation of the Arden family that many generations later will lead to Mary Arden and our Will. In fact, ten generations after Siward and Cecily, Walter Arden.

Walter's father, Robert Arden, esquire, was executed in the pre-War of the Roses years. He had taken part in an uprising, at Ludlow, intended to depose the very weak Lancastrian king, Henry VI, and put Richard Plantagenet, 3rd Duke of York on the throne. When this failed and York was forced to swear an oath of allegiance to Henry VI at St. Paul's Cathedral, Robert Arden was taken prisoner and held at Kenilworth Castle until he was escorted to Ludlow to be tried by James Butler, the 1st Earl of Wiltshire. Being found guilty, the story goes that Robert was made to stand

naked, a noose around his neck, in the freezing snow and ice, and beg for forgiveness from Henry VI. Whether this is true or not, Robert was executed at Ludlow for his crimes.

Walter, only a teenager when his father was executed, did finally come into his father's estate at Park Hall. He had two two sons, John and Thomas. Son John becomes an esquire of the body of King Henry VIII. Son Thomas - it used to be assumed - becomes Will's great-grandfather.

Or does he? Here is where the story, once again, gets real-world muddy. There are two Thomases of Arden at this point in our story. There is Thomas, the son of Walter Arden of Park Hall, and there is Thomas of Wilmcote. The question is, like the Richard's, are they the same Thomas, or are they their own Thomas?

Can we find the answer by applying our 'what's in a name.' game? We can try.

Wilmcote is a village located three miles north of Stratford. A fascinating tidbit to our story is that, in the Domesday book of 1086, we discover Wilmcote used to be owned by Osbert FitzRichard, yep the man that Nesta fielch Gruffydd of Wales really married, over the imaginary Fleance.

Wilmcote is also the childhood home village of our Will's mum, Mary Arden. So, we might expect that the young Mary is familiar with Thomas of Wilmcote, especially if he is her grandpa. But maybe not. Because, no one is familiar with Thomas of Wilmcote. We know almost nothing about him; we have no idea who his parents, his siblings, or his wife are. All we do know is - through a document representing a real estate transaction. where one John Mayou handed over a message, all its perturbances, and eighty acres, [a house, with barns and land, etc.] to six men - Thomas Arden of Wilmcote and his son, Robert Arden - Will's grandpa - were two of the six men in that deal. That's it.

The other Thomas Arden, the one from Park Hall we know, for sure, was the son of Walter and Eleanor, nee Hampden,

Arden. We know this because Sir Walter mentions his son Thomas in his will. Also, Thomas is mentioned in his brother John's will.

Also, and this is what made scholars like Charlotte Scopes believe that the Thomases are one and the same person, John appointed one of the men given that land by John Mayou, Sir Robert Throckmorton, to be the trustee for his children. This then suggests John and Thomas of Wilmecote, both familiar with Sir Robert Throckmorton, are brothers.

This then makes the two Thomases the same Thomas, which through Will's mum, Mary, makes both Thomases Will's great grandfather.

But, if perchance the Thomas of Wilmcote is not Thomas of Park Hall where did he come from? Well there was a Robert Arden who was a bailiff of a manor in Snitterfield in the mid-1400's. And he was the son of a Henry who was the great-great-grandson of Siward and Cecily. It all goes back to those two in the end.

If the two Thomas of Arden are not the same guy, they do in the end go back to the ten generations back grandfather Siward Arden of Wilmcote and Cecily of Mercer. So, it all comes out in the wash. For, as Juliet adds, after her roses smelling good line, "So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, retain that dear perfection which he owes without that title."

There you go. See you all anon. Anon, we'll take a gander at our Will's grandparents.