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"Wherefore" Doesn't Mean "Why," Either

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"Fore"

"Fore" is at the end of "wherefore" and it means "before," as shown by words like "forearm" and "forewarned." At a wedding, a priest might say "do you swear before all your family and friends..." And it should be noted that given that Shakespeare wrote "Romeo and Juliet" hundreds of years ago,[1] English was closer to German that it is now and that the German word for "with what" is "womit," which literally translates into "where with." There is also a line in "Romeo and Juliet" that ends with "for thou hast need." (Shakespeare, *Rome and Julie*, 1597, Act 4, Scene 3)[2].

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That Passage in Romeo and Juliet

In the rest of that soliloquy, Juliet says that she wants Romeo to deny his father and doff his name, essentially saying that she wants him to engage in some sort of reverse oath, fitting the imagery of someone swearing something before God. (Shakespeare, Act 2, Scene 2) And those two things have *nothing* to do with “why.” And the rest of the soliloquy is about Romeo not needing to have that name, that he's not bound to it. That's shown by “it is nor hand nor foot.” (*same*) Given this and the already mentioned translation of wherefore, it becomes clear that Juliet was actually saying “before where art thou Romeo?” to Romeo.

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.
‘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 name 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 [in return] for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself. (*same*)

“Whereafter” and Revisiting “Fore”

Defining “wherefore” as “before where” explains why we have words like “whereafter.” And “fore” existed in Old English, with one definition of it being “before” (Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary online, https://bosworthtoller.com/search?q=fore).

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[1] Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Romeo-and-Juliet
[2] Folger Shakespeare Library, https://www.folger.edu/explore/shake speares-works/romeo-and-juliet/read/, full text

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