

APHORISM COUNTERTIME

• “L’aphorisme à contretemps” came into being in 1986 when Derrida was invited to write a piece on *Romeo and Juliet* for a production of the play in Paris by Daniel Mesguich, and its specificity is signaled by the irreducibly personal note with which it ends. Derrida has remarked that although he probably would not have written about *Romeo and Juliet* had he not been asked to do so, he had been aware for a long time that Shakespeare’s play represented something he wanted to discuss (see the Interview above). It is both a text which articulates certain problems that run through the entire history of Western culture, and one of that culture’s most familiar and endlessly recirculated icons. Derrida responds to, and connects, these twin features of the play by means of a focus on *contretemps*, a word which in French can mean both “mishap” and “syncopation,” while the phrase *à contretemps* suggests both “inopportune” and, in a musical sense, “out of time” or “in counter-time.” For many more than have seen or read the play, the story of *Romeo and Juliet* has become a byword for love blighted by mischance and destroyed by unfortunate timing; and it is notable that Derrida focuses his attention on the scene that, more than any other, has become a cultural commonplace. Close attention to the verbal interchange in the balcony scene, and to the question of the *name* in particular, leads to an understanding of the force of *contretemps* both in the play and in the institutional and intellectual context within which, and by means of which, we experience it. Derrida examines the contradictory force of naming (in both literal and more general senses) as a cultural practice: in instituting and enforcing temporal and spatial homogeneity, it brings into being the possibility of the very accidents—including death as we understand it—which it is designed

to prevent. The names of Romeo and Juliet, Montague and Capulet, produce both the desire that drives the events of the play and the tragic mischances that thwart it. In their confounding of homogeneous time and place, therefore, countertime and mishap echo an absolute heterogeneity which is “anterior” to times and happenings, and the various labels by which we try to order them. Love and hate are to be understood neither as arbitrary individual emotions nor as determined cultural products, but as powerful effects of chance built into the network of names and dates that make relations both possible and impossible. (For a further discussion of the date which is closely related to this discussion of the name, see the extract from *Shibboleth* above; “Ulysses Gramophone” is also concerned with networks and accidents.)

The traditional critical essay, too, is an attempt to produce a homogeneous spatiotemporal continuum, and Derrida chooses in its stead an aphoristic form characterized by disjunction and heterogeneity. (The question of the aphorism—which for Derrida is the question of the mark in general—is also raised aphoristically in “Fifty-Two Aphorisms.”) The aphoristic voice is one which asserts and delimits, functioning like the name; and like the name, it is never far from *contretemps* and death. Aphorisms and proper names are characterized by their capacity for surviving the deaths of those who employ them or are designated by them, and are therefore structured by the possibility of death; they thus exhibit in a particularly striking way the working of iterability that makes possible any utterance or recognizable act. So do plays, for they live on in the repetition of dramatic productions, each one affirming in a different way the uniqueness of the text they repeat, and each one repeating differently the play’s staging of theatricality itself. Derrida’s “Aphorism Countertime” is another such singular staging of Shakespeare’s play.

“L’aphorisme à contretemps” was first published in *Roméo et Juliette* (Paris: Papiers) in 1986, and collected in *Psyché: Inventions de l’autre* (519–33). This is its first appearance in English translation. The translator, Nicholas Royle, would like to thank Geoffrey Bennington and James Raeside for all their invaluable criticisms and suggestions made in the course of his work on this translation.

1. Aphorism is the name.
2. As its name indicates, aphorism separates, it marks dissociation (*apo*), it terminates, delimits, arrests (*horizō*). It brings to an end by separating, it separates in order to end—and to define [*finir—et définir*].
3. An aphorism is a name but every name can take on the figure of aphorism.
4. An aphorism is exposure to contretemps.¹ It exposes discourse—hands it over to contretemps. Literally—because it is abandoning a word [*une parole*] to its letter.

(Already this could be read as a series of aphorisms, the alea of an initial anachrony. In the beginning there was contretemps. In the beginning there is speed. Word and deed are *overtaken*. Aphorism outstrips.)

5. To abandon speech [*la parole*], to entrust the secret to letters—this is the stratagem of the third party, the mediator, the Friar, the matchmaker who, without any other desire but the desire of others, organizes the contretemps. He counts on the letters without taking account of them:

In the meantime, against thou shalt awake,
Shall Romeo by my letters know our drift,
And hither shall he come. (IV, i, 113–15)²

6. Despite appearances, an aphorism never arrives by itself, it doesn't come all alone. It is part of a serial logic. As in Shakespeare's play, in the *trompe-l'oeil* depth of its paradigms, all the *Romeo*

1. TN The word *contretemps* signifies, in English as well as French, "an inopportune occurrence; an untoward accident; an unexpected mishap or hitch" (*OED*), but in French it also refers to being "out of time" or "off-beat" in the musical sense, to a *sense* of "bad or wrong time," "counter-time."

2. TN References to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* are to the Arden text, ed. Brian Gibbons (New York: Methuen, 1980).

and *Juliets* that came before it, there will be several series of aphorisms here.

7. Romeo and Juliet, the heroes of contretemps in our mythology, the positive heroes. They missed each other, how they missed each other! Did they miss each other? But they also survived, *both of them*, survived *one another*, in their name, through a studied effect of contretemps: an unfortunate crossing, by chance, of temporal and aphoristic series.³

8. Aphoristically, one must say that Romeo and Juliet will have lived, and lived on, through aphorism. *Romeo and Juliet* owes everything to aphorism. Aphorism can, of course, turn out to be a device of rhetoric, a sly calculation aiming at the greatest authority, an economy or strategy of mastery which knows very well how to potentialize meaning ("See how I formalize, in so few words I always say more than would appear"). But before letting itself be manipulated in this way, aphorism hands us over, defenseless, to the very experience of contretemps. Before every calculation but also across it, beyond the calculable itself.

9. The aphorism or discourse of dissociation: each sentence, each paragraph dedicates itself to separation, it shuts itself up, whether one likes it or not, in the solitude of its proper duration. Its encounter and its contact with the other are always given over to chance, to whatever may befall, good or ill. Nothing is absolutely assured, neither the linking nor the order. One aphorism in the series can come before or after the other, before *and* after the other, each can survive the other—and in the other series. Romeo and Juliet *are* aphorisms, in the first place in their name, which they are not (Juliet: " 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy" . . . Romeo: "My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, / Because it is an enemy to thee. / Had I it

3. TN Derrida's text works with several senses of the verb *survivre*: "to survive," "to survive beyond" or "survive through," "to live on," and so forth. For a fuller account of "living on" and the related double-notion of "death sentence" and "arrest of death" [*l'arrêt de mort*], see Derrida's "Living On/Borderlines."

written, I would tear the word" [II, ii, 38, 55–57]), for there is no aphorism without language, without nomination, without appellation, without a letter, even to be torn up.

IO. Each aphorism, like Romeo and Juliet, each aphoristic series has its particular duration. Its temporal logic prevents it from sharing all its time with another place of discourse, with another discourse, with the discourse of the other. Impossible synchronization. I am speaking here of the discourse of time, of its marks, of its dates, of the course of time and of the essential digression which dislocates the time of desires and carries the step of those who love one another off course. But that is not sufficient to characterize our aphorism, it is not sufficient that there be language or mark, nor that there be dissociation, dislocation, anachrony, in order for aphorism to take place. It still must have a determined form, a certain mode. Which? The bad aphorism, the *bad* of aphorism is sententious, but every aphorism cuts and delimits by virtue of its sententious character:⁴ it says the truth in the form of the last judgment, and this truth carries [*porte*] death.⁵ The death sentence [*l'arrêt de mort*], for Romeo and Juliet, is a *contretemps* which condemns them to death, both of them, but also a *contretemps* which arrests death, suspends its coming, secures for both of them the delay necessary in order to witness and survive the other's death.

II. Aphorism: that which hands over every rendezvous to chance. But desire does not lay itself open to aphorism by chance. There is no time for desire without aphorism. Desire has no place without aphorism. What Romeo and Juliet experience is the exemplary anachrony, the essential impossibility of any absolute synchronization. But

4. TN The French phrase here is *caractère de sentence*, which can also mean "quality of judgment"; "*sentence*" carries the sense of "moral saying" as well as "judgment."

5. TN "Aphorism Countertime" contains—or carries—a certain play on the verb *porter*, corresponding in some ways to the English verb "to bear" ("to carry" as well as "to wear [clothes]"). *Porter* is the verb used to designate, for example, being called by, having, or bearing a name [*porter le nom*], as well as being in mourning [*porter le deuil*]. Derrida treats the idea of the name as bearing death within it—and as being structurally conditioned to survive its bearer—in several of his works: among others, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, "Otobiographies," and *Mémoires*.

at the same time they live—as we do—this disorder of the series. Disjunction, dislocation, separation of places, deployment or spacing of a story because of aphorism—would there be any theater without that? The survival of a theatrical work implies that, theatrically, it is saying something about theater itself, about its essential possibility. And that it does so, theatrically, then, through the play of uniqueness and repetition, by giving rise every time to the chance of an absolutely singular event as it does to the untranslatable idiom of a proper name, to its fatality (the "enemy" that "I hate"), to the fatality of a date and of a rendezvous. Dates, timetables, property registers, place-names, all the codes that we cast like nets over time and space—in order to reduce or master differences, to arrest them, determine them—these are also *contretemps*-traps. Intended to avoid *contretemps*, to be in harmony with our rhythms by bending them to objective measurement, they produce misunderstanding, they accumulate the opportunities for false steps or wrong moves, revealing and simultaneously increasing this anachrony of desires: *in the same time*. What is this time? There is no place for a question in aphorism.

12. Romeo and Juliet, the conjunction of two desires which are aphoristic but held together, maintained in the dislocated now of a love or a promise. A promise in their name, but across and beyond their given name, the promise of *another name*, its request rather: "O be some other name . . ." (II, ii, 42). The *and* of this conjunction, the theater of this "and," has often been presented, represented as the scene of fortuitous *contretemps*, of aleatory anachrony: the failed rendezvous, the unfortunate accident, the letter which does not arrive at its destination, the time of the detour prolonged for a *purloined letter*,⁶ the remedy which transforms itself into poison when the stratagem of a third party, a brother, Friar Laurence, proposes simultaneously the remedy and the letter ("And if thou dar'st, I'll give thee remedy. . . . In

6. TN English in original. This is an allusion to Derrida's "Le facteur de la vérité," a text concerned with Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter," and Jacques Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (the latter partly translated in *Yale French Studies* 48 [1973]: 38–72). "Aphorism Countertime" follows Shakespeare's text in focusing on the (tragic, comic, ironic, and above all *necessary*) possibility that a letter can always *not* reach its destination.

the meantime, against thou shalt awake, / Shall Romeo by my letters know our drift, / And hither shall he come . . ." [IV, i, 76, 113–15]). This representation is not false. But if this drama has thus been imprinted, superimprinted on the memory of Europe, text upon text, this is because the anachronous accident comes to illustrate an essential possibility. It confounds a philosophical logic which would like accidents to remain what they are, accidental. This logic, at the same time, throws out into the unthinkable an anachrony of structure, the absolute interruption of history as deployment of a temporality, of a single and organized temporality. What happens to Romeo and Juliet, and which remains in effect an accident whose aleatory and unforeseeable appearance cannot be effaced, at the crossing of several series and beyond common sense, can only be what it is, accidental, insofar as it has *already* happened, in essence, before it happens. The desire of Romeo and Juliet did not encounter the poison, the *contretemps* or the detour of the letter by chance. In order for this encounter to take place, there must *already* have been instituted a system of marks (names, hours, maps of places, dates and supposedly "objective" place-names) to thwart, as it were, the dispersion of interior and heterogeneous durations, to frame, organize, put in order, render possible a rendezvous: in other words to deny, while taking note of it, non-coincidence, the separation of monads, infinite distance, the disconnection of experiences, the multiplicity of worlds, everything that renders possible a *contretemps* or the irremediable detour of a letter. But the desire of Romeo and Juliet is born in the heart of this possibility. There would have been no love, the pledge would not have taken place, nor time, nor its theater, without discordance. The accidental *contretemps* comes to *remark* the essential *contretemps*. Which is as much as to say it is not accidental. It does not, for all that, have the signification of an essence or of a formal structure. This is not the abstract condition of possibility, a universal form of the relation to the other in general, a dialectic of desire or consciousnesses. Rather the singularity of an imminence whose "cutting point" spurs desire at its birth—the very birth of desire. I love because the other is the other, because its time will never be mine. The living duration, the very presence of its love remains infinitely distant from mine, distant from itself in that which

stretches it toward mine and even in what one might want to describe as amorous euphoria, ecstatic communion, mystical intuition. I can love the other only in the passion of this aphorism. Which does not happen, does not come about like misfortune, bad luck, or negativity. It has the form of the most loving affirmation—it is the chance of desire. And it not only cuts into the fabric of durations, it spaces. *Contretemps* says something about topology or the visible; it opens theater.

13. Conversely, no *contretemps*, no aphorism without the promise of a now in common, without the pledge, the vow of synchrony, the desired sharing of a living present. In order that the sharing may be desired, must it not first be given, glimpsed, apprehended? But this sharing is just another name for aphorism.⁷

14. This aphoristic series crosses over another one. Because it traces, aphorism *lives on*, it lives much longer than its present and it lives longer than life. Death sentence [*arrêt de mort*]. It gives and carries death, but in order to make a decision thus on a sentence [*arrêt*] of death, it suspends death, it stops it once more [*il l'arrête encore*].

15. There would not be any *contretemps*, nor any anachrony, if the separation between monads only disjoined interiorities. *Contretemps* is produced at the intersection between interior experience (the "phenomenology of internal time-consciousness"⁸ or space-consciousness) and its chronological or topographical marks, those which are said to be "objective," "in the world." There would not be any series otherwise, without the possibility of this marked spacing, with its social conventions and the history of its codes, with its fictions and its simulacra, with its dates. With so-called proper names.

7. EN *Partage*, the usual word for "sharing," also signifies "division"; see the extract from *Shibboleth* above, note 8.

8. TN The reference is to Husserl. See, for example, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964). See also Derrida's *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*, 57, and chapter 5 ("Signs and the Blink of an Eye") of his *Speech and Phenomena*.

16. The simulacrum raises the curtain, it reveals, thanks to the dissociation of series, the theater of the impossible: two people each outlive the other. The absolute certainty which rules over the *duel* (*Romeo and Juliet* is the *mise-en-scène* of all duels) is that one must die before the other. One of them must see the other die. To no matter whom, I must be able to say: since we are two, we know in an absolutely ineluctable way that one of us will die before the other. One of us will see the other die, one of us will live on, even if only for an instant. One of us, only one of us, will carry the death of the other—and the mourning. It is impossible that we should each survive the other. That's the duel, the axiomatic of every duel, the scene which is the most common and the least spoken of—or the most prohibited—concerning our relation to the other. Yet *the impossible happens*—not in “objective reality,” which has no say here, but in the experience of Romeo and Juliet. And under the law of the pledge, which commands every given word. They live *in turn* the death of the other, for a time, the contretemps of their death. Both are in mourning—and both watch over the death of the other, attend to the death of the other. Double death sentence. Romeo dies before Juliet, whom he has seen dead. They both live, outlive the death of the other.

17. The impossible—this theater of double survival—also tells, like every aphorism, the truth. Right from the pledge which binds together two desires, each is already in mourning for the other, entrusts death to the other as well: if you die before me, I will keep you, if I die before you, you will carry me in yourself, one will keep the other, will already have kept the other from the first declaration. This double interiorization would be possible neither in monadic interiority nor in the logic of “objective” time and space. It takes places nevertheless every time I love. Everything then begins with this survival. Each time that I love or each time that I hate, each time that a law *engages* me to the death of the other. And it is the same law, the same double law. A pledge which keeps (off) death can always invert itself.⁹

9. TN The French text reads: *Un gage peut toujours s'inverser qui garde de la mort.* This double bind of what keeps off death and at the same time keeps it might be further elucidated by way of Derrida's *Mémoires*, where for example he explores the notion that

18. A given series of aphorisms crosses over into another one, the same under different names, under the name of the name. Romeo and Juliet love each other across their name, despite their name, they die on account of their name, they live on in their name. Since there is neither desire nor pledge nor sacred bond (*sacramentum*) without aphoristic separation, the greatest love springs from the greatest force of dissociation, here what opposes and divides the two families in their name. Romeo and Juliet bear these names. They bear them, support them even if they do not wish to assume them. From this name which separates them but which will at the same time have tightened their desire with all its aphoristic force, they would like to separate themselves. But the most vibrant declaration of their love still calls for the name that it denounces. One might be tempted to distinguish here, another aphorism, between the proper forename and the family name which would only be a proper name in a general way or according to genealogical classification. One might be tempted to distinguish Romeo from Montague and Juliet from Capulet. Perhaps they are, both of them, tempted to do it. But they don't do it, and one should notice that in the denunciation of the name (Act II, scene ii), they also attack their forenames, or at least that of Romeo, which seems to form part of the family name. The forename still bears the name of the father, it recalls the law of genealogy. Romeo *himself*, the bearer of the name is not the name, it is *Romeo*, the name which he bears. And is it necessary to call the bearer by the name which he bears? She calls him by it in order to tell him: I love you, free us from your name, Romeo, don't bear it any longer, Romeo, the name of Romeo:

JULIET.

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. (II, ii, 33–36)

She is speaking, here, in the night, and there is nothing to assure her that she is addressing Romeo himself, present in person. In order to

“already you are in memory of your own death; and your friends as well, and all the others, both of your own death and already of their own through yours” (87n2).

ask Romeo to refuse his name, she can only, in his absence, address his name or his shadow. Romeo—himself—is in the shadow and he wonders if it is time to take her at her word or if he should wait a little. Taking her at her word will mean committing himself to disowning his name, a little later on. For the moment, he decides to wait and to carry on listening:

ROMEO [*aside*].
Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET.
'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 word 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 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 baptis'd:
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

JULIET.
What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

ROMEO.
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.

JULIET.
My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words
Of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound,
Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?

ROMEO.
Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike.
(II, ii, 37-61)

19. When she addresses Romeo in the night, when she asks him "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? / Deny thy father and refuse thy name," she seems to be addressing *him*, *himself*, Romeo bearer of the name Romeo, the one who is not Romeo since he has been asked to disown his father and his name. She seems, then, to call him beyond his name. He is not present, she is not certain that he is there, *himself*, beyond his name, it is night and this night screens the lack of distinction between the name and the bearer of the name. It is in his name that she continues to call him, and that she calls on him not to call himself Romeo any longer, and that she asks him, Romeo, to renounce his name. But it is, whatever she may say or deny, he whom she loves. Who, him? Romeo. The one who calls himself Romeo, the bearer of the name, who calls himself Romeo although he is not only the one who bears this name and although he exists, without being visible or present in the night, outside his name.

20. Night. Everything that happens at night, for Romeo and Juliet, is decided rather in the penumbra, between night and day. The indecision between Romeo and the bearer of this name, between "Romeo," the name of Romeo and Romeo himself. Theater, we say, is visibility, the stage [*la scène*]. This drama belongs to the night because it stages what is not seen, the name; it stages what one calls because one cannot see or because one is not certain of seeing what one calls. Theater of the name, theater of night. The name calls beyond presence, phenomenon, light, beyond the day, beyond the theater. It keeps—whence the mourning and survival—what is no longer present, the invisible: what from now on will no longer see the light of day.

21. She wants the death of Romeo. She will have it. The death of his name ("Tis but thy name that is my enemy"), certainly, the death of "Romeo," but they will not be able to get free from their name, they know this without knowing it [*sans le savoir*]. She declares war on "Romeo," on his name, in his name, she will win this war only on the death of Romeo himself. Himself? Who? Romeo. But "Romeo" is not Romeo. Precisely. She wants the death of "Romeo." Romeo dies, "Romeo" lives on. She keeps him dead in his name. Who? Juliet, Romeo.

22. Aphorism: separation in language and, in it, through the name which closes the horizon. Aphorism is at once necessary and impossible. Romeo is radically separated from his name. He, his living self, living and singular desire, he is not "Romeo," but the separation, the aphorism of the name remains impossible. He dies without his name but he dies also because he has not been able to set himself free from his name, or from his father, even less to renounce him, to respond to Juliet's request ("Deny thy father and refuse thy name").

23. When she says to him: my enemy is only your name, she does not think "my" enemy. Juliet, herself, has nothing against the name of Romeo. It is the name which she bears (Juliet and Capulet) that finds itself at war with the name of Romeo. The war takes place between the names. And when she says it, she is not sure, in the night, that she is making contact with Romeo himself. She speaks to him, she supposes him to be distinct from his name since she addresses him in order to say to him: "You are yourself, not a Montague." But he is not there. At least she cannot be sure of his presence. It is within herself, deep down inside, that she is addressing him in the night, but still him in his name, and in the most exclamatory form of apostrophe: "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" She does not say to him: why are you called Romeo, why do you bear this name (like an article of clothing, an ornament, a detachable sign)? She says to him: why *are you* Romeo? She knows it: detachable and dissociable, aphoristic though it be, his name is his essence. Inseparable from his being. And in asking him to abandon his name,

she is no doubt asking him to live at last, and to live his love (for in order to live oneself truly, it is necessary to elude the law of the name, the familial law made for survival and constantly recalling me to death), but she is *just as much* asking him to die, since his life is his name. He exists in his name: "wherefore art thou Romeo?" "O Romeo, Romeo." Romeo is Romeo, and Romeo is not Romeo. He is himself only in abandoning his name, he is himself only in his name. Romeo can (be) call(ed) himself only if he abandons his name, he calls himself only *from* his name. Sentence of death and of survival: twice rather than once.

24. Speaking to the one she loves within herself and outside herself, in the half-light, Juliet murmurs the most implacable analysis of the name. Of the name and the proper name. Implacable: she expresses the judgment, the death sentence [*l'arrêt de mort*], the fatal truth of the name. Pitilessly she analyzes, element by element. What's Montague? Nothing of yourself, you are yourself and not Montague, she tells him. Not only does this name say nothing about you as a totality but it doesn't say anything, it doesn't even name a part of you, neither your hand, nor your foot, neither your arm, nor your face, nothing that is human! This analysis is implacable for it announces or denounces the inhumanity or the ahumanity of the name. A proper name does not name anything which is human, which belongs to a human body, a human spirit, an essence of man. And yet this relation to the inhuman only befalls man, for him, to him, in the name of man. He alone gives himself this inhuman name. And Romeo would not be what he is, a stranger to his name, without this name. Juliet, then, pursues her analysis: the names of things do not belong to the things any more than the names of men belong to men, and yet they are quite differently separable. The example of the rose, once more. A rose remains what it is without its name, Romeo is no longer what he is without his name. But, for a while, Juliet makes out as if Romeo would lose nothing in losing his name: like the rose. But like a rose, she says to him in short, and without genealogy, "without why." (Supposing that the rose, all the roses of thought, of literature, of mysticism, this "formidable anthology," absent from every bouquet...)

25. She does not tell him to lose all names, rather just to change names: "O be some other name." But that can mean two things: take another proper name (a human name, this inhuman thing which belongs only to man); or: take another kind of name, a name which is not that of a man, take the name of a thing then, a common name which, like the name of the rose, does not have that inhumanity which consists in affecting the very being of the one who bears it even though it names nothing of himself. And, after the colon, there is the question:

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 call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title.¹⁰

26. The name would only be a "title," and the title is not the thing which it names, any more than a title of nobility participates in the very thing, the family, the work, to which it is said to belong. *Romeo and Juliet* also remains the—surviving—title of an entire family of plays. We must apply what goes on in these plays also to the plays themselves, to their genealogy, their idiom, their singularity, their survival.

27. Juliet offers Romeo an infinite deal, what is apparently the most dissymmetrical of contracts: you can gain all without losing anything, it is just a matter of a name. In renouncing your name, you renounce nothing, nothing of you, of yourself, nor anything human. In exchange, and without losing anything, you gain me, and not just a part of me, but the whole of myself: "Romeo, doff thy name, / And for thy name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself." He will have

10. TN I have followed the text of Derrida's quotation here, thus preserving the colon at the end of the first line. The Arden version, already cited, gives a full stop. As Brian Gibbons points out (Arden, 129), there have been several variants and varying hypotheses regarding these lines of the play. Confusingly perhaps, Q2-4 and F in fact give: "O be some other name / Belonging to a man."

gained everything, he will have lost everything: name and life, and Juliet.

28. The circle of all these names in *o: words, Romeo, rose, love*. He has accepted the deal, he *takes her at her word* ("I take thee at thy word") at the moment where she proposes that he *take* her in her entirety ("Take all myself"). Play of idiom: in taking you at your word, in taking up the challenge, in agreeing to this incredible, priceless exchange, I take the whole of you. And in exchange for nothing, for a word, my name, which is nothing, nothing human, nothing of myself, or else nothing for myself. I give nothing in taking you at your word, I abandon nothing and take absolutely all of you. In truth, and they both know the truth of aphorism, he will lose everything. They will lose everything in this aporia, this double aporia of the proper name. And for having agreed to exchange the proper name of Romeo for a common name: not that of *rose*, but of *love*. For Romeo does not renounce all of his name, only the name of his father, that is to say his proper name, if one can still say that: "I take thee at thy word. / Call me but love, and I'll be new baptis'd: / Henceforth I never will be Romeo." He simultaneously gains himself and loses himself not only in the common name, but also in the common law of love: *Call me love*. Call me your love.

29. The dissymmetry remains infinite. It also hangs on this: Romeo does not make the same demand of her. He does not request that this woman who is secretly to be his wife renounce her name or disown her father. As if that were obvious and there was no call for any such rift [*déchirement*] (he will speak in a moment of tearing [*déchirer*] his name, the writing or the letter of his name, that is if he had written it himself, which is just what is in principle and originally excluded). Paradox, irony, reversal of the common law? Or a repetition which on the contrary confirms the truth of this law? Usually, in our cultures, the husband keeps his name, that of his father, and the wife renounces hers. When the husband gives his name to his wife, it is not, as here, in order to lose it, or to change it, but to impose it by keeping it. Here it is she who asks him to renounce his father and to change

his name. But this inversion confirms the law: the name of the father should be kept by the son, it is from him that there is some sense in tearing it away, and not at all from the daughter who has never been put in charge of it. The terrible lucidity of Juliet. She knows the two bonds of the law, the *double bind*, which ties a son to the name of his father. He can only live if he asserts himself in a singular fashion, without his inherited name. But the writing of this name, which he has not written himself ("Had I it written, I would tear the word"), constitutes him in his very being, without naming anything of him, and by denying it he can only wipe himself out. In sum, at the very most he can deny it, renounce it, he can neither efface it nor tear it up. He is therefore lost in any case and she knows it. And she knows it because she loves him and she loves him because she knows it. And she demands his death from him by demanding that he hold onto his life because she loves him, because she knows, and because she knows that death will not come to him by accident. He is doomed [*voué*] to death, and she with him, by the double law of the name.

30. There would be no *contretemps* without the double law of the name. The *contretemps* presupposes this inhuman, too human, inadequation which always dislocates a proper name. The secret marriage, the pledge (*sacramentum*), the double survival which it involves, its constitutive anachrony, all of this obeys the same law. This law, the law of *contretemps*, is double since it is divided; it carries aphorism within itself, as its truth. Aphorism is the law.

31. Even if he wanted to, Romeo could not renounce his name and his father of *his own accord*. He cannot want to do so of his own accord, even though this emancipation is nevertheless being presented to him as the chance of at last being himself, beyond the name—the chance of at last living, for he carries the name as his death. He could not want it himself, in himself, because *he is not without* his name. He can only desire it from the call of the other, in the name of the other. Moreover he only hates his name starting from the moment Juliet, as it were, demands it from him:

My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself
Because it is an enemy to thee.
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

32. When she thinks she recognizes him in the shadow, by moonlight, the drama of the name is consummated (Juliet: "My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words / Of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound. / Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?" Romeo: "Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike"). She recognizes him and calls him by his name (Are you not Romeo and a Montague?), she *identifies* him on the one hand by the timbre of his voice, that is to say by the words she hears without being able to see, and on the other hand at the moment when he has, obeying the injunction, renounced his name and his father. Survival and death are at work, in other words the moon. But this power of death which appears by moonlight is called Juliet, and the sun which she comes to figure all of a sudden carries life and death *in the name of the father*. She kills the moon. What does Romeo say at the opening of the scene (which is not a scene since the name destines it to invisibility, but which is a theater since its light is artificial and figurative)? "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun! / Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon, / Who is already sick and pale with grief . . ." (II, ii, 2–5).

33. The lunar face of this shadow play, a certain coldness of *Romeo and Juliet*. Not all is of ice or glass, but the ice on it does not come only from death, from the marble to which everything seems doomed (*the tomb, the monument, the grave, the flowers on the lady's grave*), in this sepulchrally statuesque fate which entwines and separates these two lovers, starting from the fact of their names. No, the coldness which little by little takes over the body of the play and, as if in advance, cadaverizes it, is perhaps irony, the figure or rhetoric of irony, the *contretemps* of ironic consciousness. It always places itself disproportionately between finitude and infinitude, it makes use of inadequation, of aphorism, it analyzes and analyzes, it analyzes the law of misidentification, the implacable necessity, the machine of the

proper name that obliges me to live through precisely that, in other words my name, of which I am dying.

34. Irony of the proper name, as analyzed by Juliet. Sentence of truth which carries death, aphorism separates, and in the first place separates me from my name. I am not my name. One might as well say that I should be able to survive it. But firstly it is destined to survive me. In this way it announces my death. Non-coincidence and contretemps between my name and me, between the experience according to which I am named or hear myself named and my "living present." Rendezvous with my name. *Untimely*, bad timing, at the wrong moment.

35. Changing names: the dance, the substitution, the masks, the simulacrum, the rendezvous with death. *Untimely. Never on time.*

36. Speaking ironically, that is to say in the rhetorical sense of the figure of irony: conveying the opposite of what one says. Here, the *impossible* then: 1) two lovers both outlive each other, each seeing the other die; 2) the name constitutes them but without being anything of themselves, condemning them to be what, beneath the mask, they are not, to being merged with the mask; 3) the two are united by that which separates them, etc. And they state this clearly, they formalize it as even a philosopher would not have dared to do. A vein, through the sharp tip of this analysis, receives the distilled potion. It does not wait, it does not allow any time, not even that of the drama, it comes at once to turn to ice the heart of their pledges. This potion would be the true poison, the poisoned truth of this drama.

37. Irony of the aphorism. In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel pokes fun at those who, quick to heap praises on ironists, show themselves not even capable of analyzing the analytical irony of *Romeo and Juliet*. He has a go at Tieck: "But when one thinks one has found the perfect

opportunity to show what irony is, for example in *Romeo and Juliet*, one is disappointed, for it is no longer a question of irony."¹¹

38. Another series, which cuts across all the others: the name, the law, the genealogy, the double survival, the contretemps, in short the aphorism of *Romeo and Juliet*. Not of Romeo and of Juliet but of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's play of that title. It belongs to a series, to the still-living palimpsest, to the open theater of narratives which bear this name. It survives them, but they also survive thanks to it. Would such a double survival have been possible "without that title," as Juliet put it? And would the names of Matteo Bandello or Luigi da Porto survive without that of Shakespeare, who survived them?¹² And without the innumerable repetitions, each staked in its particular way, under the same name? Without the grafting of names? And of other plays? "O be some other name . . ."

39. The absolute aphorism: a proper name. Without genealogy, without the least copula. End of drama. Curtain. Tableau (*The Two Lovers United in Death* by Angelo dall'Oca Bianca). Tourism, December sun in Verona ("Verona by that name is known" [V, iii, 299]). A true sun, the other ("The sun for sorrow will not show his head" [V, iii, 305]).

11. TN See G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 69.

12. EN Bandello and da Porto were the authors of two of the many earlier versions of the *Romeo and Juliet* story.