MELVILLE'S CELIBATORY MACHINES—*BARTLEBY, PIERRE,* AND "THE PARADISE OF BACHELORS"

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How well in the Apollo is expressed the idea of the perfect man. Who could better it? Can art, not life, make the ideal? Here, in statuary, was the Utopia of the ancients expressed. The Vatican itself is the index of the ancient world, just as the Washington Patent Office is of the modern. But how is it possible to compare the one with the other, when things that are so totally unlike cannot be brought together? What comparison can be instituted between a locomotive and the Apollo?

—Herman Melville, "Statues in Rome"

To live by way of abandonment as Bartleby does would seem to imply living outside the economy of the home. But what does that mean? Is it the commonsense thesis that to live outside the economy of the home means living a nonfamily life, a lonely life in a "bachelor's retreat," for example, or does it rather suggest the life "in" utopia of which Melville spoke in his lectures on "Statues in Rome"? And if the idea of such a life is that living outside of the home can "happen" only in a nonlocalizable, nonexistent place, does it not by the same token suggest the collapse of economy as such? And how would such a collapse be possible? The attorney's account of Bartleby's life does not provide answers to those questions. For we are told not only that Bartleby lives in the office (therefore outside of home), but also that he is "making his home" there, in the office. In that passage the attorney refers to the office as a bachelor hall and adds that Bartleby was "keeping bachelor's hall all by himself" [*Bartleby* 17]. On the one hand Bartleby does not live at home, and yet, on the other, he does so by turning the office into his home. However, both home and office would then answer to the appellation "bachelor hall," something Bartleby keeps all by himself and thus all for himself, excluding everybody else, subverting the very possibility of economy (for there is no economy without another). What is more, by keeping bachelor's hall all by himself Bartleby becomes not just one unmarried man among many, but rather a bachelor who cannot be compared to other such figures (for they are all excluded). And to the extent that his bachelorhood involves the exclusion of other forms of bachelorhood, the "home" that he is making in the office is not just a bachelor's retreat, a space reserved for the promiscuous pleasures of an unmarried body, but rather means the transformation of the economies of both the home and the retreat, of both married and unmarried life, of both office and house. Simply put, it effects a destabilization of economy as such. The question then is: why is Bartleby's bachelorhood so specific? Is that specificity related to the fact that he lives not just in any office but in the office of the law? Does it have something to do with the fact that he is a copyist of the law who does not write? Is his bachelorhood therefore related to writing and if so, how?

The bachelor as figure of the passivity of semen obsesses the nineteenth-century imaginary. From Irving to Mitchell, from Thoreau to Hawthorne, from Prince Myshkin to Musil's *Man without Qualities,* from Rousseau to Nietzsche and all the way to modernity, to contrivances devised by Duchamp, Freud, Proust and Kafka, literature and the visual arts dream of bodies whose life cannot move. As is well known, this dream haunts Melville also, and to such an extent that his literary or "fictional" project is perhaps nothing but a strange attempt at a total reordering of the world, an effort to inhabit it with sailor-clerk-bachelors and with brides stripped bare by their bachelors, even. Already in *Typee* the bachelor-sailor is somebody "who had evidently moved in a different sphere of life" [*Typee* 70]. By extension, to say that a bachelor is one who lives in a different sphere of life is to open up the possibility of a different understanding of life. By developing the thinking of a new life, Melville transcends the sentimental romances that celebrated bachelorhood with such frequency in nineteenth-century English and American literature.[1] This radical enterprise requires an inquiry into what kind of life that new life might be, what kind of a body lives it, what kind of sexuality delights it, and how that sexuality is related to home, marriage and family structured according to the logic of paternal genealogies.

As was clear in *Pierre,* Melville elaborates his idea of a "new bachelor" against the backdrop of Hamlet, who represents there the figure of an endless *activity of failure.* Melville's (or the narrator's) reading of Hamlet is extraordinarily subtle and precise. For Hamlet is called not just a bachelor but a modern bachelor, which is to say, as the narrator puts it, a "*Montaignized*" version of an ancient (Egyptian) tragedy of Memnon's destiny, a tragedy, therefore, of a son who forever remains imprisoned in the memory of his dead father and paralyzed by the grief of a loss that he cannot overcome: "Herein lies an unsummed world of grief. For in this plaintive fable we find embodied the Hamletism of the antique world; the Hamletism of three thousand years ago: 'The flower of virtue crapped by a too rare mischance.' And the English Tragedy is but Egyptian Memnon Montaignized and modernized; for being but a mortal man Shakespeare had his fathers

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1. One should be reminded here of the difference between romance and the romantic text. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy explain, the romance, especially in its "English provenance," became a genre in itself, which they compare to the first appearance of "pop-literature." Romances celebrated the "epic grandeur of the past" while at the same time cultivating a sensibility "capable of responding to this spectacle, and of imagining, or better, recreating—phantasieren—*what it evokes." They ironically refer to this type of "romanticism" as "Romanesque romanticism" and oppose it to "romanticism proper," which, in contrast to the romance, does not dream of the restoration of the past, is not nostalgic, but in the absence of the origin and past manifests itself as a theoretical/poetical effort to produce a new world (new ontology) [see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1–2]. In American literature, the difference they had in mind describes the difference between Hawthorne's and Melville's literary efforts. Hawthorne defines his romances precisely as an attempt to "connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us. It is a Legend prolonging itself" [Hawthorne,* House of the Seven Gables *2]. And not only is a romance nostalgia for bygone times but it is also defined by Hawthorne as a phantasmagorical recreation of the past (*phantasieren*): "the creatures of [the author's] brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without [being exposed] to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives" [Hawthorne,* Blithedale Romance *2]. Unlike Hawthorne, Melville (excepting* Typee *and* Omoo*) is not interested in prolonging the past by binding it to the Present but in "inventing" a radically different present (without the past and without genealogy). For an elegant analysis of the (conservative) politics of Hawthorne's romances see Walter Benn Michaels, "Romance and Real Estate": "The romance, then, is to be imagined as a kind of property, or rather, as a relation to property. Where the novel may be said to touch the real by expropriating it and so violating someone's 'private rights,' the romance asserts a property right that does not threaten and so should not be threatened by the property rights of others. The romance, to put it another way, is the text of clear and unobstructed title" [89].*

too . . . for both Memnon and Hamlet were sons of kings" [*Pierre* 135–36]. This comparison connects (and compares) irreducible differences. A Hamlet who is a modernized or *Montaignized* version of an antique fable refers to the fact that, unlike the ancient hero who *acts* out of grief, Hamlet is trapped in the endless labor of self-mirroring, which is precisely what forecloses the possibility of his judging and therefore of acting. To put it simply, to say that Hamlet is a modern hero because he is "Montaignized" is to say that he is modern because he is doubled, because he is caught in the "logic" of the essay, which his situation for its part reflects. For the essay, according to Montaigne, is not simply a genre (one among many) but, rather, is a practice of living disconnected from itself. It is a writing written by a thought that cannot apprehend and think itself, which cannot solve itself. The writing of it serves as the trace of what it has been but is no longer. The essay thus functions as a mirror that preserves all the images that were ever reflected in it but only in order to reflect back the fact that the "now of the face" is not reflected. By "preserving" the past the essay at the same time disconnects it from the present, yet only such a present can serve as the *terra firma* upon which an action will be based. In that way the essay disconnects the self from itself at the same time as it reflects this disconnection. In other words, the essay has the paradoxical structure of a nonreflecting mirror before which every face becomes the face of a ghost, invisible to itself. It reveals to the self the horrible truth of its facelessness. Or, in Montaigne's words:

> *Now the lines of my painting do not go astray, though they change and vary. The world is but a perennial movement. All things in it are in constant motion—the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt—both with the common motion and with their own. Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion. I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray being: I portray passing. Not the passing from one age to another, or, as people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history needs to be adapted to the moment. I may presently change, not only by chance, but also by intention. This is a record of various and changeable occurrences, and of irresolute and, when it so befalls, contradictory ideas.* [740]

Being a record of "changeable occurrences" the essay reflects precisely what is modern about the modern subject, the fact that it exists without being, or that its being is the endless passing of irresolute ideas, an endless and paradoxical thinking without acting. To say therefore that Hamlet is a "Montaignized" ancient hero is to establish a "substantial" difference between the modern and the ancient hero. Whereas the ancient hero acts in spite of grief and without knowing, Hamlet knows (thinks) without acting. The fundamental difference between an Oedipus and a Hamlet is that whereas Oedipus does not know but acts (marries his mother without knowing that she is his mother), Hamlet knows (who killed his father) but cannot act (cannot kill and cannot marry Ophelia). Once he discovers that he should have known before acting, Oedipus blinds himself and forever remains the figure of the "one," the one who does not see, who therefore does not double himself. Hamlet, on the other hand, cannot stop doubling himself and so remains precisely a figure of the one who is always doubled. Resorting to irony one might say that Hamlet's main problem is that he cannot become Oedipus (cannot marry his mother or Ophelia).

The curiosity of Pierre's reading of Hamlet resides not, of course, in his insistence on the fact that Hamlet postpones his acting, but in the reasons he gives for such a postponement. In that reading what Hamlet postpones is not the act of murdering but the act of marrying, or rather, Hamlet defers the act of murdering only in order to postpone the

act of marrying. For Pierre—who tells others that he is married but cannot get married, cannot say "I do"—the tragedy of Hamlet thus becomes the tragedy of the incapacity to marry another. Accordingly, Hamlet, as prototype of the modern hero, announces the impossibility of marriage or the impossibility of "doing" the speech act that marriage consists in. For Pierre, Hamlet's endless self-doubling turns out to be an endless postponement not of an "ordinary" act but of a speech act. Pierre reads Hamlet as if he were saying "there is nothing I would rather do than marry Ophelia, but I can't because objective obstacles foreclose the possibility" ("I have to kill my uncle" and so on). In other words Hamlet's "formula" is "I would if I could, but I can't." What is at stake is therefore a clear example of what Freud calls "negation": you may think that I think this or that, but I don't (whereas, actually you are right, I do). Hamlet's affirmation (I would marry her [if only I could]) is the affirmation of negation (I am not going to get married). If the story of Hamlet is nothing but an endless preparation for marriage it is because the preparation is the postponement of the final "I do," of the speech act that acts both as judgement and action, thus announcing the end of thinking. For that is what judging and acting do: they put an end to thinking. In Freud's formulation: "Judging is the intellectual action which decides the choice of motor action, which puts an end to the postponement *due to thought* and which leads over from thinking to acting" [440]. The subject of thinking is therefore incapable of judging, choosing, deciding, and acting. He is "structurally" incapable of performing a speech act. To the extent that he is a thinking subject the modern subject has therefore to be a bachelor.

However paradoxical it may sound, to say that the modern subject has to be a bachelor is not to say that modern men will not marry but rather that, married or not, they have to remain "eternal sons". The logic of subjectivation (postponement, displacement, self-doubling) is marked by Hamlet's "symbolic" position, namely by the fact that he is a "prince" or, as the narrator of *Pierre* puts it, "the son of the king," that is to say subjected to the master figure of the father, God, or simply the lordsman. Far from being the figure of the master or the father, as is commonly believed, the modern subject is the subject only on condition that he is not the king. Hamlet's princehood is therefore the necessary position of the subject who subjectivizes himself only in relation to the lordsman, and who is capable of subjectivation only on condition that there is a father's "word," a "sign" that comes from the father and marks him, marking the fact that the son is the subject of a lack (for he lacks precisely the final word, the speech act, which comes from the father). If the subject is necessarily a bachelor it is because he remains "faithful" to the father's "word" that forecloses the son's fullness by reproducing his subjection (his not-wholeness), keeping him alive, endlessly giving birth to him. That is the logic of paternal genesis that gives birth to the bachelor-subject out of the empty signifier.[2] The modern subject is subjected to the speech act of the father (who is always absent). The paternal genealogy can be maintained only on condition that the son remains the bondsman (of the father or, as the narrator of *Pierre* puts it once again, paraphrasing Shakespeare, of the "sign, signifying nothing").

The point here is not, of course, to determine if this or that particular subject has a living or a dead father but to realize that subjectivation comes about through subjection to the empty signifier and by force of it. For anything that occupies that position will function as the father. Hence, married or not the modern hero is not-married, he remains a bachelor-son because he remains subjected to the symbolic force of the "I do," which never belongs to him but to the force of the paternal law. The main point of Pierre's reading of this question is that it seems to suggest that, when it happens, the act of saying or

2. *The father as diagram of the temporality of paternal genealogy turned into a map of space that no longer exists, and which thus literally becomes an empty signifier, is the main problem of* Redburn *[see Melville,* Redburn, *esp. ch. 30–31].*

performing the speech act is always an act of ventriloquism, mouthing the words of the lordsman. The subject remains a bachelor because he repeats the words of the law. It is not he who "vitally means" the law, as Pierre puts it, it is the "I do" of the law that marries the subject precisely to the law (of marriage). To say, therefore, that the subject is a bachelor is not to say that no subject can possibly marry but rather to suggest a paradox according to which even when one gets married one remains a bachelor, a son who marries the paternal law. And as the dialectics of Hamlet's situation make clear, it is only by marrying the father and thus remaining a bachelor that one can be "centered" as a subject. Only the bachelor can strip bare his bride. Paradoxically enough, marriage is thus the bond between a bachelor and a maid who, thanks to the mediation of the law (of the father), center, determine, or appropriate one another while forever remaining bachelor and maid. When Pierre, therefore, asks concerning Hamlet: "Did he or did he not vitally mean to do this thing? Was the immense stuff to do it his, or was it not his?" [*Pierre* 170], he is asking precisely about the possibility of committing a (speech) act that would not be his father's (that would not be bound to the force of the law), but would instead come from the vitality of his own life (not connected to the law of the father), and still be a lawful act. He is asking: "Can I marry Isabel in such a way that while breaking all the laws of the fathers, while fracturing the symbolic field as such, while legalizing incest, I can still commit a lawful act." The almost mad question that he raises (its crazy incongruity) is therefore the following: in causing, by my own act, the disaster of the whole symbolic field, can I institute a lawful act, another signifier, can I be my own father and marry my own sister/daughter and/or my mother in the full knowledge of what I am doing. Can I be neither Oedipus nor Hamlet, neither the figure of the one, nor the figure of the double? It is for that reason that the riddle of the novel is summed up in the words from Dante's *Inferno,* "Ah! How dost thou change, Agnello! See! Thou art not double now, Nor only one!" [*Pierre* 85].[3] By referring to the logic of neither one nor double the narrator formulates the possibility of "two mutually absorbing shapes" which nevertheless remain separated. It is this "riddle" that formulates the logic of "ambiguity" as a logic that is not a simple doubling or mirroring. And it is the difference between this logic and that of Hamlet that sums up Pierre's main question: in performing a marriage can I avoid being centralized, determined or subjected to the law, can I avoid being appropriated or appropriating another? Simply put, can I be subjected to the law without subjection? Formulated in this way the question becomes that of an altogether different subjectivity. And its answer will lead to a quite different idea of the bachelor.

One should recall that in *Pierre* it is the Clerk in the office of the law who advances the main argument against marriage:

> *You said you were married, I think?" says he to Pierre. "Well, I suppose it is wise after all. It settles, centralizes and confirms a man, I have heard. —No, I didn't; it is a random thought of my own, that! —Yes it makes the world definite to him! It removes his morbid* sub*jectivness and makes all things* ob*jective; . . . a fine thing, no doubt, no doubt: —domestic— pretty—nice, all round. But I owe something to the world, my boy! By marriage, I might contribute to the population of men, but not to the census of mind. The great men are all bachelors, you know . . . Pierre, a thought, my boy; —a thought for you! . . . Stump the State on the Kantian Philosophy! A dollar a head, my boy! Pass round your beaver, and you'll get it. I have every confidence in the penetration and magnanimousness*

*3. For this reason I want to suggest that Pierre is not an "American Hamlet." Pierre's "emancipation" from Hamlet is suggested in the narrative by his tearing the "printed pages" of that text: "Torn into a hundred shreds the printed pages of Hell and Hamlet lay at his feet, which trampled them, while their vacant covers mocked him with their idle titles" [*Pierre *170].*

of the people! Pierre, hark in your ear; —it's my opinion the world is all wrong. . . . Society demands an Avatar—a Curtius, my boy! To leap into the fiery gulf, and by perishing himself, save the whole empire of men!" [*Pierre* 281]

If the philosopher-clerk argues against Kantian philosophy precisely by suggesting that the whole world can buy into it, it is because that philosophy defined marriage precisely as the absolute appropriation of the body of another. Kant's famous definition given in *The Metaphysics of Morals,* that marriage is "the union of two persons of different sexes for the purpose of lifelong mutual possession of their sexual organs," hits the mark in spite of its silliness. For the point is that the law of marriage determines one in such a way that one assumes a definitive form (definitive form here also means the definitive form of gender). It thus not only subjectivizes the person but by doing so turns the subjective into an object. Subjectivation thus turns out to be a process of objectivation: the married subject becomes a thing (as only the thing has a definite form). The paradox of marriage is therefore that at the moment it establishes a subject (by centering it), it negates it (by turning it into a thing for another). Marriage is therefore a bond between objects. And the world of an objectified person then has to assume a definitive form, or rather, its current form becomes absolute and unchangeable which is why, as the clerk suggests, it is married men who are the main force of a conservative thinking that would preserve the world in its formedness (frozen into a cozy domesticity). Marriage is here conceived of as a retreat into the known, into obedience to the paternal law and the safety of the habitual. It is a married man and not a bachelor who lives a relaxed life in his retreat. But neither is the bachelorhood that the clerk has in mind that of European modernity. Being himself a philosopher and writer he raises the stakes and redefines the idea. For if thinking and writing necessarily mean thinking against existing forms (against the law of the father), then to be confined within the forms imposed by the law of marriage is to be incapable of either. For that reason great men (philosophers and writers) have to be bachelors but bachelors of a particular kind, namely fatherless. The immanent relation between thinking/writing and bachelorhood thus begins to emerge and to take shape.

Curiously, this bachelor-clerk Charlie—who, like Bartleby, is thin and pale and who, again like Bartleby, occupies a "small, dusty law-office on the third floor of the older building," where he, however, doesn't write (an unopened bottle of ink being in front of him)—is on the one hand a critic of Kant's transcendental philosophy and on the other someone who is said to "pursu[e] some crude, transcendental Philosophy" [*Pierre* 280]. What kind of transcendental philosophy of marriage is here in question? One can safely assume (on the basis of the similarity between arguments employed) that the pertinent transcendental philosophy for (or against) marriage is romantic and more specifically Emersonian. Emerson, as we know, tried to "preserve" the possibility of marriage by radically transforming the idea of it. Claiming (in accord with Kant) that we seek our friends "with an adulterate passion which would appropriate [them] to ourselves" ["Friendship" 345], Emerson (in contrast to Kant) stated that such an appropriation is in vain even when it is mediated by the law. (Kant's definition of marriage remains therefore an empty and formal determination of it, which is precisely why, I want to suggest, Melville in *Pierre,* spells Kant's name phonetically as "can't.") What is more, if marriage is conceived as the legal appropriation of another, if it is conceived the way society defines and imposes it, then it necessarily has to become a series of crises, endless suffering and, finally, a failure: "Looking at these aims with which two persons, a man and a woman, so variously and correlatively gifted, are shut up in one house to spend in the nuptial society forty or fifty years I do not wonder at the emphasis with which the heart prophesies this crisis from early infancy" ["Love" 337]. Representing a life in retreat marriage here does not produce anything *heimlich.* On the contrary, conceived of as endurance of the same, of

the failing appropriation of another, as a frozen form, it is always unhomelike. Emerson is here saying the same thing as Melville's transcendentalist: in spite of the fact that the world changes ("The world rolls; the circumstances vary every hour" ["Love" 336]), it is supposed to maintain its sameness until it finally shows itself to be the pure law or empty form imposed on a reality that does not exist anymore. (Another way to put this would be to say that marriage substitutes illusion for reality.) What holds for the world holds, by the same token, for another. For the I and you change every hour. In order to maintain the form of marriage I keep loving the form that no longer exists or, realizing that it does not exist I suffer the "incongruities, defect, and disproportion in the behavior of the other," his noncorrespondence to the form I love(d). Hence, every time such an "incongruity" arises, there also arises "surprise, expostulation, and pain" ["Love" 336]. Marriage thus becomes the tolerance or suffering of the incongruities of the form (of a person) and (its) reality. It is thus not only the bond of two empty forms, but as the marriage of empty forms it becomes a life lived as a "wounded affection," constant grief and mourning.

The only way to "save" marriage, Emerson believed, was to radically change its nature by changing at the same time the idea of subjectivity (and therefore of objectivity). Marriage can be maintained only if it succeeds in not determining another, in not centering him or, which comes down to the same thing, in not appropriating him. However, if the subject is (by definition) the process of its own appropriation then in order for it not to appropriate another it would have somehow to function without appropriating itself. In other words, in order to escape the horror of the empty form of marriage the I has to treat another as the *open,* formless or, as Emerson also puts it, as a "cloud"; in a word, the I has to treat another in such a way that it loses its finitude, for only what is not finite cannot be appropriated. Both the I and the other have to become formless and faceless, the absence of "organization," in Emerson's terms. For any emotion that attaches itself to a form (of a face or of a gender and/or sex) is in his words "destroyed" ["Love" 332]. That is why marriage, if at all possible, has to become impersonal, nonpartial, and formless. The dialectics of marriage in Emerson, therefore, leads from the personal to the impersonal: "Thus even love, which is the deification of persons, must become more impersonal every day" ["Love" 335]. "Real marriage," which for Emerson means something like "real love" is therefore a process of becoming impersonal, a "training for a love which knows no sex, nor person, nor partiality" ["Love" 337]. That this marriage (yet to come) knows no sex does not mean that married people won't have sex but rather that their sex, together with their faces, can vary "every hour." In order to avoid the centering of persons into frozen forms (of objects) Emerson proposes marriage as the bond of the impersonal.[4]

Yet the radicality of Melville (or his narrators) lies in the realization that such a decentering, which opens up a possibility of the impersonal, is itself impossible as long as it has to take place under the force of the law (of marriage). The radical claim of his intervention resides in his insight that one has to redefine the law itself in order to open up the possibility of an impersonal. Hence his obsession with offices (of the law) and bachelors who live in them and hence why the office of the law as well as the watch-house in *Pierre* is lawless. The paradox of the watch-house (which is the figure of the law and its reinforcement) where, for example, Pierre will leave Isabel, is that it is the only place that escapes the force of the law. Incapable of finding a house for himself and Isabel, Pierre will leave her in the watch-house, thinking that it is the most protected, most lawful and,

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4. Note that Emerson's extraordinary idea of marriage comes very close to what Deleuze and Guattari have more recently referred to as a "complex machine," which in contrast to the celibatory machine and coupled machine (marriage), is made of lines of "musicality, picturality, landscapity, fociality, consciousness, passion" and so on [see Deleuze and Guattari 185].

as the narrator puts it, most decent place. However, upon "re-entering the Watch-house" Pierre will discover that what seemed a decorous and decent space now

> *fairly reeked with all things unseemly. Hardly possible was it to tell what conceivable cause or occasion had, in the comparatively short absence of Pierre, collected such a base congregation. In indescribable disorder, frantic, diseased-looking men and women of all colors, and in all imaginable flaunting, immodest, grotesque, and shattered dresses, were leaping, yelling, and cursing around him. The torn Madras handkerchiefs of negresses, and the red gowns of yellow girls, hanging in tatters from their naked bosoms, mixed with the rent dresses of deep-rouged white women, and the split coats, checkered vest, and protruding shirts of pale, or whiskered, or haggard, or mustached fellows of all nations, some of whom seemed scared from their beds, and others seemingly arrested in the midst of some crazy and wanton dance. On all sides, were heard drunken male and female voices, in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, interlarded now and then, with the foulest of all human lingoes, that dialect of sin and death, known as the Cant language, or the Flash. Running among this combined babel of persons and voices, several of the police were vainly striving to still the tumult.* [*Pierre* 240]

The office of the law is the collapse of the law in the broad sense of the term: the collapse of the symbolic as such, the collapse of languages and persons, the reinstitution of the unformed and unarticulated babble of voices and people, the formless as such: a "different sphere of life."[5] It becomes clear that in contrast to Emerson, who, like Pierre, wanted to turn the law of marriage into an ambiguity (to maintain the law and yet to open up a possibility for the impersonal), Melville's narrator suggests the necessity of breaking down the law itself. No law of marriage (and thus no marriage) will be able to function once centering is preempted, once the impersonal becomes possible. However, to say that the office of the law is Babel, the confusion of languages and thus their disaster, the confluence of all personal forms and thus their catastrophe, is to say that by reviving Babel the office of the law announces the death of the God who destroyed it; it inflicts upon the symbolic a wound and opens a hole or abyss within it. The office of the law functions here precisely as the site of the collapsed forms of the world out of which the transcendentalist-clerk wants to write and in which he will perish. But if the symbolic is turned into an abyssal wound (that swallows languages and persons) then the question is not only how to maintain marriage (or whether one should maintain it) but how, in what words, in what language, in what writing is such a possibility or impossibility to be formulated, how is it to be written, said or thought in the first place?

The transcendentalist-clerk claims that one can write not only on condition of the wound of the symbolic, on condition that the forms of the world have vanished, but also on condition that the I is lost. On another occasion, the narrator will formulate the same thesis by saying that "It is impossible to talk or to write without apparently throwing oneself helplessly open; the Invulnerable Knight wears his visor down" [*Pierre* 259]. To open oneself thus means to throw oneself into the open. Openness is not only the metaphor for a wound but suggests openness for helplessness, a desire for vulnerability. One writes only when the visor of self-protection is up, when the boundaries of the self

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5. It is this understanding of the office of the law as the space of lawlessness embraced by the law that can explain Kafka's remark from his Diaries *(January 24, 1922): "How happy are the married men, young and old both, in the office. Beyond my reach, though if it were within my reach I should find it intolerable, and yet it is the only thing with which I have any inclination to appease my longing" [404–05].*

perish. The condition of possibility for writing (losing oneself) is thus the impossibility of marriage (of the centering of the subject). What makes writing possible is what makes marriage impossible, which is why, as we are told, all great writers were bachelors. Thus, writing and marriage constitute a kind of "celibatory machine" that keeps them separate and prevents their encounter. Writing will never marry marriage.

However, if one writes only after losing oneself, then to write is to let another speak or write instead of oneself. But is not to say that one writes only by letting another write through one structurally the same as saying "I do" by uttering the words of the law, by repeating the words of the father (of another) in the marital ceremony? Is not the "I do" of the law (of the father) the same thing as letting another speak through the annihilated (and fatherless, wordless) self? One may argue that in both cases we are witnessing the act of circumcision by which the law of another inscribes itself upon the body of the speaker/writer. However, whereas in the case of marriage it is the question of the law that inscribes itself upon the body so as to make of it the very body of the law, in the case of writing that Melville has in mind circumcision is the process of decircumcising, a circumcision that de-scribes what was written (or circumcised). To put it differently, whereas in the case of marriage the law functions in a way similar to Kafka's penal colony, being written on the surface of the body, a writing that writes itself only after the self has perished functions as a circumcision that circumcises the circumcision itself. It means removing the inscribed law (removing the father, a form of parricide, therefore), opening circumcision to a sheer selfless listening, talking or writing. The circumcision that writes by de-scribing is therefore similar to what Jeremiah or God had in mind when he explained to the people of Israel that circumcision is not an inscription, a writing, a "closing" of a mark upon itself, but an opening, a cut that opens for another: "Their ears are uncircumcised; they cannot listen." Circumcision is thus a self-negation that occurs as the effect of a cut, and which turns the self into the empty space of the cut itself, into the abyss of the wound which another can come to occupy. Circumcised listening or seeing or writing thus becomes pure listening, without any appropriation, an absolute giving oneself over, or as Melville puts it, throwing oneself over to another.

However, if writing opens a wound and writes itself as the writing of the wound, then, by the same token, it writes its own death. In other words, if writing writes the very break that tears the body apart, if it is the bleeding of the body then the art of writing becomes the art of dying. To write from the break is then nothing other than, as Michel de Certeau formulated it, to let the break "vibrate in the nothing of the work" [158], to turn the work into the "nothing" of the break. By becoming the art of dying writing at the same time writes the impossibility of prolonging life. It writes the disaster of genealogy and genesis, it draws an outline of an "empty" world in which there will be no need for marriage; it writes the world in the slow process of its dying. The price one has to pay for being able to finally "vitally mean something," or to write with one's life without the mediation of the "dead form of the law," or of the dead past of the fathers, is thus pure death. Or, as Eric Sundquist puts it in his reading of *Pierre,* it is a question of a writing that "dramatizes the fact that Pierre's desire to reciprocate himself by becoming 'his own sire' can only exchange parricide for suicide and replace sexual pleasure with an eroticism of death" [163]. Writing itself becomes the eroticism of death. One writes only on condition that one is not married and one necessarily dies in what one writes.

Remaining faithful to the idea that writing is possible only on condition that marriage is impossible, Melville offers two other versions of the relationship between writing and marriage and constructs them both as the "art of dying." He devises two "celibatory machines" in which both the law and the economy of writing are organized in a way different from *Pierre.* In contrast to *Pierre,* where there was a "dialectical" relationship between writing and the law (of marriage), so that the possibility of the one negated the

other only in order in the end to destroy writing itself, the "solutions" he offers in these other two "experiments" are "non-dialectical" and can be summed up in the following way: either the eternal circulation of writing within an economy that transacts everything with itself and from which there is no exit; or the absolute separateness and "fullness" of a writing that no longer needs to write itself—in other words, either "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" or *Bartleby, The Scrivener.* By using the term "celibatory machines" I also want to suggest that it was Melville who gave to literature the first formulation of what would become known as the modern "celibatory machine."[6] If the celibatory machine properly speaking has nothing to do with sentimentalism,[7] if it is rather, as Certeau claims, "on the order of myth" (both antimystical and antirealist), and "challenges the principle of Occidental ambition" [158], then by formulating such a myth and by challenging that principle, Melville opened the door to a different sphere of life; he formulated a new, American myth as myth not only of a new life but of a certain *ethics* of dying.

The celibatory machine is based on the exposure of a wound. In other words, it does not come after the wound but as the wound. What will become explicit in Duchamp's *Large Glass,* considered to be one of the most elaborate formulations of the celibatory machine, holds for any such machine: "A wound, no longer hidden behind the painting, but inscribed at its center, breaks the text into two fragments held together with safety pins. A fable torn in two. Theoretical fiction points to the site of writing. Which is what brought up the problem addressed by Duchamp: 'The Preconditions of a Language'" [Certeau 158]. Duchamp's "preconditions of language" are located precisely in the wound (the bar, the cut), which turns the empty space that separates two sections of a story (of a fable or of the glass) into a gap that cannot be overcome. It is this language before language (the linguistic preconditions of language) that cannot be stepped over, for it is nothing other than the emptiness or the abyss of an origin that cannot originate anything. What in Duchamp's *Glass* separates the bachelors from the bride is the blankness or the bar that separates and cuts horizontally, where the genitals are. What is thus cut off is the origin of life as the origin of language. What is cut off, in other words, is desire itself; both the desire for language and the language of desire. And it is precisely such a cut (of language and desire) that separates the Paradise of Bachelors from the Tartarus of Maids. The end of the Paradise of Bachelors is separated from the beginning of the Tartarus of Maids by a blank space that keeps them forever apart. In contrast to *Pierre,* where everything was moved by desire, here it is desire that is absent, turned into blankness. And it is this blank-

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*6. Even though my reading owes much to and relies greatly on Certeau's complex analyses of celibatory machines, my suggestion that Melville developed the first modern celibatory machine departs from Certeau's thesis that the invention of celibatory machines is owed to the European modernism. Thus he claims that they were first "represented by the fantastic machines whose images emerge around 1910-1914 in the works of Alfred Jarry (*Le Surmâle, *1902;* Le Docteur Faustroll, *1911), Raymond Roussel (*Impressions d'Afrique, *1910;* Locus Solus, *1914), Marcel Duchamp (*Le Grand Verre: La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même, *1911–1925), Franz Kafka (*Die Strafkolonie, *1914), etc. These are the myths of an incarceration within the operations of a writing that constantly makes a machine of itself and never encounters anything but itself" [Certeau,* Practice of Everyday Life *150].*

7. For a fine analysis of the problem of "American sentimentalism of the 1850s" see Otter, esp. ch. 5, "Inscribed Hearts in Pierre." *Otter suggests that "as in British sentimentalism, in the United States there were two archetypal figures, the suffering woman and the sensitive man," the sensitive man being a figure who "recoils from the assault of a sordid and materialistic world." Even though the most prominent formulations of the "sensitive man" are to be found in "Washington Irving, the father of American male sentimentalism and in Mitchell's* Reveries of a Bachelor, *the context for the "male sentimentalists' responses that is lacking in the sketches of Mitchell and Curtis" can be located, according to Otter, in Hawthorne's* Blithedale Romance" *[213–17].*

ness that displays the broken continuity, the display of a wound, a fable torn into two.[8]

If the bachelors in Paradise can form a "brethren of the Order of Celibacy," if they can live not only among themselves but "on" themselves without mixing themselves with brides, it is precisely because the other side, the side of the brides, cannot be reached. Or rather, if it cannot be reached it is because there is no desire to reach it. By the same token, if the bachelors can live in a "perfect decorum", if they neither touch nor enjoy each other's bodies, if even after drinking quantities of wine their behavior remains "remarkably decorous" ["Paradise" 323], it is because the origin of desire itself is withdrawn. Celibacy is thus neither about heterosexuality nor about homosexuality but about a life without desire, period. Celibacy is a matter of a lifeless life.

The life of the lifeless explains why bachelors have to live as so many clerks in the offices of the law, and why the Paradise itself is conceived of as a network of law offices: "Indeed, the place is all a honeycomb of offices and domiciles. Like any cheese, it is quite perforated through and through in all directions, with the snug cells of bachelors" ["Paradise" 319]. Another difference from *Pierre.* Whereas there only an unbounded and selfless life of desire could write, here the life that has lost desire (or the body) can live but only on condition that it manages to leave the trace of its lifelessness and thereby give itself a life. Lifeless life can live only on condition that it can write itself. But such an empty life can write only an empty and unchangeable text, that is to say, only by writing itself as the text of the law (for the text of the law is by definition without desire, without origin or history). The text of the law, needless to say, is always eternal, the law cannot be changed. Paradoxically, therefore, life confirms itself only by writing an unchangeable text (the text that is the sepulcher of life) that cannot be married to any other writing. The writing of the law thus itself becomes celibatory writing.

It is here, in this idea of life born out of the text of the law, that one can realize the full importance of the difference between medieval or mystical and modern celibatory machines. Melville carefully outlines that difference. Even though one can reach the Paradise of Bachelors only after making a turn to a "mystical corner" and then by taking a "monastic way," even though the bachelors are compared to the mark-knights, to the Templars (and more specifically to Brian de Bois Guilbert), the comparison nevertheless functions as a mark of difference (which can serve to support the thesis that it was Melville who invented the first modern celibatory machine): "But for all this, quite unprepared were we to learn that Knights-Templars (if at all in being) were so entirely secularized as to be reduced from carving out immortal fame in glorious battling for the Holy Land to the carving out of roast-mutton at a dinner-board" ["Paradise" 317]. The medieval celibatory machine was triggered by the loss of the Holy Land (as Melville suggests), which is to say (now according to Certeau) by a "fading away of the 'land' that guarantees language" [161]. If the knights were warriors and if the medieval celibatory machine functioned as a war machine, it was because the loss of the Land (of the maternal body and the mother tongue) triggered a desire to restore that loss.[9] The medieval celibatory war machine was

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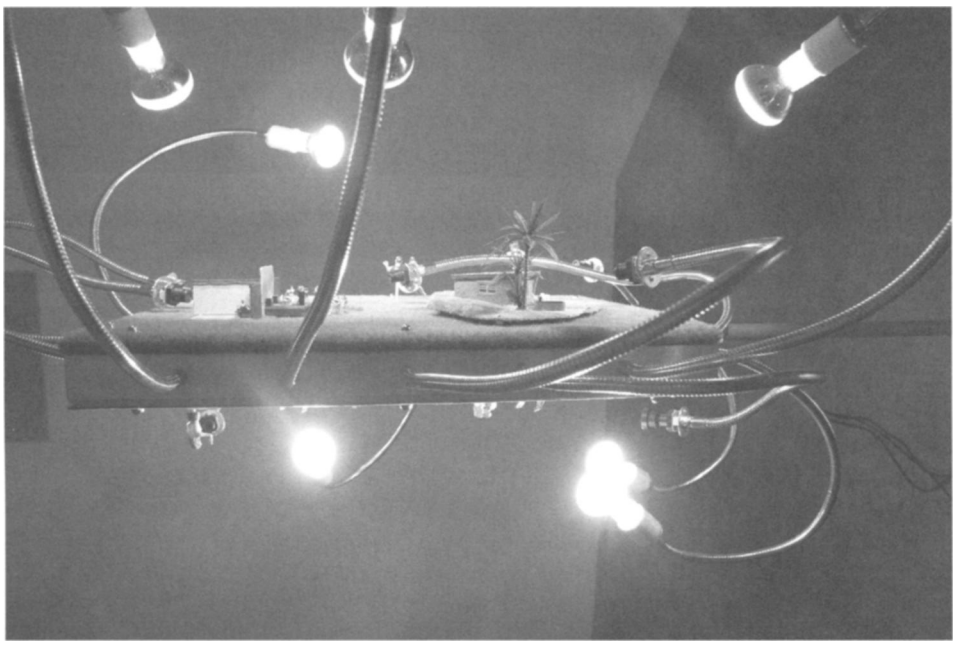
8. Thus the logic of the fable is contrary to that advanced in Moby-Dick. *Far from being a figure of "castration" and so on, Moby-Dick is the figure, as Melville puts it, of a "surplus of vitality." It is the figure of pure, indifferent and nondifferentiated life, which because it is formless cannot be analyzed.*

9. Melville's reading clearly recognizes medieval celibacy as a war-machine: "I dare say those old warrior-priests were but gruff and grouty at the best. Their proud, ambitious, monkish souls clasped shut, like horn-book missals; their very faces clapped in bomb-shells" ["Paradise"*318]. If modern bachelors not only secularize medieval bachelors but also effect their degeneration, it is first because they have lost neither God nor the Holy Land, and second because they do not want to go to war: "Like Anacreon, do these degenerate Templars now think it sweeter far to fall in banquet than in war?" [317]. The modern celibatory machine is thus an antiwar machine.*



Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, *Double Fantasy 2 (Sex)*
"Directed Dreaming," detail
March–April 2006 at Postmasters Gallery, New York

moved by a desire to restore desire and, finally, achieve marriage. Thus the mystic hoped only to face and marry his mystical bride at the moment of his death (if not before), the body of the mother coming and conceding to him as the body of his bride. In this way the medieval celibatory war machine turns out to be a marriage machine.

"Modern Templars," as Melville calls them, are modern precisely because they are always secularized, they never had a Holy Land and so never lost it. They lost neither the holiness (of God or the father) nor the land (the body of the mother, the mother tongue). They are always desireless orphans, their desire not being lost but remaining forever swallowed up by the gap that frames their world but without coming to haunt it from within. To put it differently, desire is lost *to* them but not *for* them, as they never had it and therefore never lost it. The modern celibatory machine thus comes before loss. Modern bachelors are not warriors, they don't want to restore anything, they don't fight for the lost body of the mother, or for the Holy Land. They simply write, and their celibatory machine is a pure and simple writing of the law. The text of the law neither comes to block desire nor functions as the effect of desire's loss. It writes itself without any reference to desire. The modern bachelor does not dream of a mystical bride whom he will strip bare.

Our very simple, almost naïve and yet crucial question then is this: if the gap is unbridgeable and if the only thing the bachelors do is to write, where and how do they find their paper? Where does the body of the law come from? Paper, we find, is produced in the Tartarus of Maids, not by the maids but instead by a huge machine that unlike the surplus of vitality of Moby-Dick is an artificial life again moved not by desire but by the "first repetition." In this myth chora is transformed into a system of cylinders, pulps and rollers that in nine minutes (resembling the nine months of pregnancy) gives birth to the paper. The "first beginnings of the paper" ["Paradise" 331], the origins of life, are thus only an "inflexible iron animal" capable of producing blank paper, nonwriting. Life in its origin is therefore still born. And it is because of this eternal death of life that the maids have only a spectral (bodiless) existence. They are pale, blank, faceless, silent, sheet-white; they themselves were never born: they simply and eternally are.

However, and this is my point, the machine gives birth to paper through a curious process of recycling or, even more precisely, through a process of erasing the written: "'Now, mark that with any word you please, and let me dab it on here,'" said the Cupid (one of the "managers" in the Tartarus) to the narrator.

> *"Well, let me see," said I, taking out my pencil; "come, I'll mark it with your name." Bidding me take out my watch, Cupid adroitly dropped the inscribed slip on an exposed part of the incipient mass. . . . Slowly I followed the slip, inch by inch . . . as it disappeared beneath inscrutable groups of the lower cylinders, but only gradually to emerge again; and so, on, and on, and on . . . when suddenly, I saw a sort of paper-fall, not wholly unlike a water-fall . . . and down dropped on unfolded sheet of perfect foolscap, with my "Cupid" half faded out of it, and still moist and warm.* ["Paradise" 332]

Giving birth is thus a process of taking life; it is a giving birth to the erasure of all marks. The machine works regressively from written marks to blankness in such a way that in the process the inscription of "Cupid," the very signifier and trace of desire itself, also perishes. If the brides are stripped bare it is thus because every inscription is doomed to be erased. The whiteness of the bride's wedding dresses becomes the whiteness that marks the impossibility of wedding. The brides are stripped bare by the machinic transcendence that removes meaning. We are witnessing the disaster of all traces, the catastrophe of language, which is why the maids are silent ("The human voice was banished from the spot"

["Paradise" 328]). While in the Paradise of Bachelors the writing of the law is possible because marriage is not, in the Tartarus of Maids marriage is impossible because writing is impossible. The economy of the two sides is therefore without symmetry.

But, of course, neither of those economies is possible, because each of them is imagined as a circular motion within itself, a motion that cannot attain its other side. To put it simply, those two economies would be possible in their dissymmetry on condition that they transacted or "traded" with another type of economy, with the economy of the other side, on condition that there was desire. But in this mythological version of the world, the condition of possibility for any economy or desire is precisely what is absent. The narrator describes the asymmetry of the circular motion of both sides in the following way: "And when Black, my horse, went darting through the Notch, perilously grazing its rocky wall, I remembered being in a runaway London omnibus, which in much the same sort of style, though by no means at an equal rate, dashed through the ancient arch of Wren. Though the two objects did by no means correspond, yet this partial inadequacy but served to tinge the similitude not less with the vividness than the disorder of a dream" ["Paradise" 336]. Anticipating another famous celibatory machine, that of Freud's psychic apparatus, the narrator here refers to the backward motion of dreams, to their "retrogressive route." As in Freud's tale in which the apparatus functions by progressive and regressive movements but only on condition that they never encounter each other, in this tale the pen of the bachelor-clerks will never find paper.[10] The paper will remain forever blank, the body forever unmarked and the law never written. Everything is finally frozen into the absolute passivity of an arrest. There are neither bodies nor laws. There remains only a dispersed world without meanings, the vanishing of all forms.

And precisely because the encounter is impossible, because there is no exit from either of those sides (which is to say that there is no entrance either), the reference point for the "celibatory machine" has to remain an impossible locus that can only be that of writing. In Eric Sundquist's terms, "the text *is* the sarcophagus of the body" [184], which is to say that the celibatory machine is possible only as pure writing, whose referent is buried in it, pure fiction or even an *idée fixe.* Death in the modern celibatory machine, as formulated by Certeau,

> *does not herald the real. It is its collapse. A fall into nothingness. Therefore death, that ecstatic torture, functions only in a* literary *mode, in a game with the other that causes it—that is with the* life *of the author: a meaningful but unavowable life in interaction with a meaning-less but published text. As long as an individual (the subject) keeps on writing, he is not dead; in fact, he is in fine shape, only unrepresentable. He authorizes nothing. He lends credibility to no system of verisimilitude. He is just there, as the condition of possibility for his other, the text. Since the certitude of an end with* no exit *leaves nothing to prepare for,* there is only the text. *The machine ceases to evangelize an alterity*

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10. For Freud's celibatory machine see Certeau, Heterologies*: "Freud, in the* Interpretation of Dreams, *constructs (*bauen*) a celibatory machine. . . . By its nature and date it certainly belongs in the series. It is an 'apparatus' (*Apparat*) that is built around an internal difference and is composed of interconnected "systems" (*Système*) functioning in such a way that* it is inscribed *and accumulates within (mnemic traces), in such a way that it circulates—forward during the day and backward at night . . . and in such a way that it transforms energy. Freud calls it a 'theoretical fiction' (*theoretische Fiktion*)" [157]. See also Freud,* Interpretation of Dreams*: "If we call the direction in which psychical processes move from the unconscious when we are awake the* progressive *direction, then we may say of dreams that they have a* regressive character. . . . *Intentional remembering, too, and other processes that are part of our normal thinking correspond to a backward direction taken in the psychical apparatus" [354].*

whose witness it claims to be. Its only end is an end in itself. It is a game. A fable: without power. [*Heterologies* 163] [11]

In other words, the paradox of the celibatory machine that turns bodies and marks into nothingness is that it is itself a pure writing. The celibatory machine is thus possible only as writing machine in an empty world. It gives birth to a world, to be sure, but because that world or that writing remains absorbed into itself it refers only to itself. In other words it is not even a speech act for a speech act needs something to act upon. Here however, there is only the impotence and utter passivity of what is written: "there are no gaps and tears but written ones" [156]. It is a writing that witnesses nothing, a writing without another, exposed to its absolute feebleness: passive writing. And because that writing does not even bear witness to itself or "evangelize any alterity," because there is no exit from it, it demolishes the truth. To quote again Sundquist's reading of the Tartarus of Maids: "[Melville's] efforts have commerce with a Truth which is represented at once as an enticing virgin and as frightening Gorgon, a truth that is, as Melville would put it in *The Confidence-Man,* a 'trashing machine'" [177]. The idea advanced by the transcendentalist-clerks of *Pierre,* of a writing born out of the world without laws and forms, of a written world produced after the disaster of the world, is here transformed into that of an impotent, celibatory writing that does not necessarily bring about the demise of the author but only because it does not bring about anything whatsoever.

Yet if the celibatory machine is a writing that cannot enact its own performative force then not only will the law in paradise not be written but also (to come back to the other side of the fable) the paper dropping from the machine in the Tartarus of Maids—which the narrator saw as potential letters—will never have its intactness breached: "Looking at that blank paper continually dropping, dropping, dropping, my mind ran on in wonderings of those strange uses to which those thousands of sheets eventually would be put. All sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things—sermons, lawyer's briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death-warrants" ["Paradise" 333]. All the writing that constitutes the world (the accounts of deaths, births, marriages, and divorces) will remain divorced from the world, and the world divorced from itself. And even if we imagine the possibility of inscribing an account of life onto the blankness of the newborn paper (a possibility that, according to the circular logic of each side of the fable, should not exist), those inscriptions would end up in the recycling machine that erases them. For the world is here designed as John Locke's world in reverse. In contrast to Locke's theory that, according the narrator's interpretation of it, "the human mind at birth" is a "sheet of blank paper; something destined to be scribbled on," in this version of the world the human mind arrives at the blank paper, it ends at the end of all scribbling. Every potential letter will thus end up as a dead letter and the Tartarus of Maids nothing other than a form of Dead Letter Office. It is this reading of the Tartarus as a version of the Dead Letter Office that introduces the possibility of reading *Bartleby, The Scrivener* as a celibatory machine of a different order, and Bartleby himself as the bachelor of all bachelors.

For it seems as if Bartleby finds himself in the office of the law by making a phantasmatic leap over the gap that separates the two sides of the mythological fable, as if he steps over the wound itself. But, as I will suggest, he does so only in order to reproduce that wound or rupture on one side of it. We are told by the attorney that rumor has it that

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11. Certeau continues: "Duration is thus repressed by celibatory machines, every bit as much as the subject or intuition. Of this stalled ('broken') clock that is the text, the caption of the Machine à Peindre *(Painting Machine) declares that 'the end of the World will not stop its activities.' The game of the solitary is unaffected by that which kills. It is already 'dead'. . . . It is something immobile. Not a speech-act, but a statement, a sentence without a referent, and with no need of one."*

Bartleby came to his office from the Dead Letter Office in Washington, which according to the attorney's description was not just the place in which letters lived their adestined life but the space of their absolute destruction. Thus, not only the Washington Patent Office but also the DLO can be called a "utopia," a place without space that announces the end of the modern world at its very beginning. The DLO is also a kind of erasing machine, but one very different from the paper machine in the Tartarus. For whereas the latter gives birth to blank paper by erasing the written, the DLO erases the written by at the same time destroying the paper. The DLO is the space in which letters, we are told, are "annually burned." It is thus a regular, annual destruction of the archive, a disaster of the world and a repetition of that disaster. The paradox of this machine is that it is a perennial (temporal) annihilation of temporality (of the written), the temporal negation of history, the impossible and yet comprehensible divorce of time and history. Described by the attorney as the place where life speeds to death ("On errands of life, these letters speed to death"), the DLO is thus in a sense the absolute celibatory machine of death, except that contrary to the Tartarus, where ruined life continues to "circulate," this death is not married to life; it negates life absolutely and there is no exit (for life) from it. Nothing and nobody (no life) survives the DLO or manages to leave it. For the attorney's comparison of dead letters to dead people ("Dead letters! Does it not sound like dead men?") holds by extension for the men who serve in the office. Like the maids serving the iron animal in the Tartarus, those serving the flames in the DLO are like dead letters: they are dead men. They are the figure of life stripped bare by death, even. It is as if the DLO cannot even function as the figure of a grave for a grave is on this side of the grave, as it were, it is a symbolic mark of death in the world of the living, the sign that marries life and death while separating them. But the DLO is the deathbed of the symbolic (of the written) happily married to the body of the paper, and the death of the possibility of marking death (the impossibility of the grave). If it is the absolute celibatory machine it is because it is a death that does not leave any trace of itself.

Bartleby's sudden appearance on the office threshold thus effects his impossible leap from the space without exit to the space whose door is usually open; from the closed to the open. It is thus an "impossible exodus" into the law, which turns the law into the home. In other words, since the law office is the place of the appearance or birth of a dead man, it is at the same time a paradoxical exile-home. That is precisely why Bartleby builds his home in the office. One may thus argue that Bartleby's impossible leap from the DLO to the office of the law shuts down the celibatory machine by happily marrying paper and law, home and exile, life and death. He would then appear or begin as a body that performs that "marriage" by writing, mechanically inscribing the letter upon the paper, marrying the body and the law and multiplying the law by copying it. And by the same token, not only does he inscribe the letter on the paper but his very body serves as the paper for the inscription of the law, since by copying the law his body is obeying it (the law of copying). The body that writes the law is the body written by the law, born out of it, a writing that writes in order for another text to be written, a oneness of body and law: a letter. In order to write he has to be written and so become at the same time both maid and bachelor, clerk and bride. A happy marriage of two into one body, their coupling. However, the ruse of this marriage is that this reduction of the two to one now turns the marriage machine into yet another celibatory machine. Only this time the celibatory *machine* (which functioned as the eternal separation of the two) is transformed into the Celibate, the *stasis* of celibacy, where two become isolated as one. The Celibate is the embodiment of the fullness of the one. It is this separate fullness that explains why Bartleby not only turns the office/home into the bachelor hall but then keeps the bachelor hall all to himself. The office becomes Bartleby's home, but, as the attorney explains, it has nothing domestic about it, which also means nothing human about it (deprived of any

"humanizing associations"): "it was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, upstairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpeted office, doubtless of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance" [*Bartleby* 25]. Thus the home which is the office is in fact neither of those, lacking association with anything human(izing), domestic or not. Simply put, it is not associated at all. It is thus an isolated fullness that remains unconnected to anything else. It is outside of the economy of both homelike and unhomelike, neither canny nor uncanny, for something can be *unheimlich* (as Freud made clear) only on condition that it emerges out of the homelike. The unhomelike is still caught in the economy of home or in the economy of exteriority/interiority whereas this space is "unhallowed and uncarpeted," nonreadable, disconnected, and closed for another. That is why the space in which Bartleby lives is neither home nor office but a bachelor hall, a space that absorbs its openness into itself or that keeps its openness all for itself and so closes it. In this way the figure of a Bartleby keeping a bachelor hall all to himself turns the Paradise of Bachelors, the space of many separated ones, into the space occupied by One, the Bachelor. There are no other bachelors in Bartleby's bachelor hall, which is why he is described by the attorney as being "absolutely alone in the universe" [*Bartleby* 22]. He is the Celibate. Melville ends the story of Bartleby in a similar yet more radical way than he had ended the myth of "The Paradise of Bachelors." The final exclamation of the latter—"Oh! Paradise of Bachelors! and oh! Tartarus of Maids!"—kept the two sides separate through the conjunctive yet disjunctive "and". But in *Bartleby* even the conjunction vanishes: "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" announces Bartleby's absolute isolation, unable to be mediated even by the simplest conjunction. It announces the absolute isolation of the Celibate. However, if his universe is the universe of the one then, paradoxically, the absoluteness of that loneliness has also to be read as its absolution: for the absolutely complete, being complete, are not alone. Yet one more thing reinforces the paradox, for an absolute that requires or calls forth absolution cannot possibly be absolute. Such is the tragedy of the Celibate.

Although the Celibate is the strangest machine of all, a machine designed not to work (as it is the embodiment of fulfilled work), its nonworking produces certain effects and thus, in the final analysis, does work, but necessarily in the direction of resolving or destroying itself. For the Celibate not only embodies the fullness of life (the body become the law) but by doing so also shows life to be death. In *Bartleby* we see how the Celibate, being without lack (without father, law, genealogy or desire), is also one for whom nocturnal life (of touch and desire, of lawless body) is impossible. The attorney says that Bartleby's bachelor hall "every night of every day is emptiness" [*Bartleby* 17], but this hall, which at "nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn," extends its echo all the way to the daylight of industrious life and turns its industry into the space of a "deserted Petra," bringing life to a standstill. Not only, therefore, is life frozen and petrified solely at nightfall, but because it is frozen at night, because the time of desire is dead, it has to be frozen all the time. What is hardened into Petra is thus a type of fullness but the ruse of petrification is that it works by deteriorating and turns what is petrified into a ruin. If Bartleby is compared to John Vanderlyn's *Caius Marius amidst the Ruins of Carthage,* it is in order to point to a difference between them. For in contrast to Marius, whose strong, sexed, and therefore alive body is placed amidst the ruins in order to outline the difference between the ruined world and the vibrancy of the living body, between death and life, which makes it a body of sadness, a body that mourns the loss of the other and still desires the encounter with it, Bartleby's body is innocent, the body of the Celibate who has never experienced that of another and does not know desire, whose body is not a figure of sex among the ruins but is instead a ruin amidst the ruins. Hence, for the attorney, Bartleby seems to be the "last column of some ruined temple" [*Bartleby* 23]; not just "a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of

Carthage" [*Bartleby* 17] but, I am arguing, a transformed (ruined) one, transformed because he is innocent. For innocence is not the celibacy of abstinence, it is not endurance of lack in full knowledge of it. On the contrary, innocence is defined as ignorance of lack and desire; it is a fullness that, being full, does not even know itself, has not experienced itself. The Celibate as innocent one is thus petrified in his innocence but his frozenness produces the effect of its own negation; it ruins life and turns the absolute into its own absolution, become a resolution into pure lack. Paradoxically, the Celibate thus becomes its own "blade" that cuts or divides itself, slicing itself into a pure, selfless wound.

What in this logic holds for the body, holds also for writing. The phantasmatic encounter between pen and paper, body and law had to be mechanical because it was machinic, because it was a machine that finally produced writing. But a machine that produces writing is a contrivance devised not to work, for as we have seen the machine works either in order to incinerate the written (the DLO) or is triggered by the repetitive absence of writing (the Tartarus). To put it simply, the machine can write only if there is another to write with it. The machine that writes itself is enclosed upon itself. For that reason Bartleby must become the closeness and fullness of a cipher, which is to say not only that Bartleby stops writing, but also that he stops being written, that he escapes the inscription of the law upon his body and thus the possibility of being read by it. He is neither written nor readable. He is the sole spectator of what he sees but what he sees is his own solitude; he is thus the endless circulation of a text within itself with no escape from itself. In other words, to return to Certeau, Bartleby is the Celibate or "an excess enclosed": "The Celibate—like Borges' television viewer (*Esse est percipii*) who watches a story he does not author, but which is actually fabricated on the picture screen—makes love with the glass behind which his altered body appears" [165]. The law that finally happens upon its written body thus encloses itself upon itself and becomes a detached or unbound, unreadable cipher. The ruin of the law. Heterology turned into absolute henology.[12] Thus, the one whose body is born into the law turns both the body and the law (in their oneness, in their happy marriage) into the separateness of the Celibate and dies in itself, without the other. A marriage of two without the other. And it is here, in this dialectics of the absolute Separate that absolves itself into lack and in death, into its own other, that one can find the key to the strange formula that Pierre borrows from Dante: "Thou art not double now, Nor only one!" For the Celibate is precisely that: one divided in itself remaining enclosed within itself and therefore neither one nor double. The Celibate is thus the impossibility of marriage as coupling and/or writing because he is the one that is not one; he is the one cut in himself, a wound enclosed upon itself and thus a speechless and unwritten wound. Bartleby thus becomes the final truth of Pierre. Whereas Pierre, without becoming either one or double, was kept in life by the desiring force of ambiguity, Bartleby is frozen in the interval between the one and the double, caught in the interval that separates them, without becoming either of them.

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A couple of years after publishing his celibatory machines, Melville embarked on a trip to Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jerusalem. Some of the things he saw there seduced him, some appalled and disturb him. In any case, he refrained from "romanticizing" what he saw. That gives more "credit" to his vision of Constantinople. Istanbul looked to him like the veiled body of a woman where life lives together with death, where cemeteries are

12. For analysis of "heterological" spaces in Melville see Casarino, especially the first chapter, "Of Monads and Fragments; or, Heterotopologies of the Ship" [19–43].

turned into forests, thanks to the custom of planting a cypress at each grave. "Forrests of cemeteries. Intricacy of the streets. Started alone for Constantinople and after a terrible long walk, found myself back where I started. Just like getting lost in a wood. No plan to streets. Perfect labyrinth. No names to the streets no more than to natural allies among the groves. No numbers. Came out. To the Bazarr. A wilderness of traffic. Furniture, arms, silks, confectionery, shoes, saddles—everything. Covered overhead with stone arches, with side openings. Immense crowds." And the next day's entry reads: "Overtopping houses & trees &c. —Recrossed the 2d bridge to Pera. Went towards the cemeteries of Pera. Great resort in summer evenings." The editors of the *Journals* explain that the Cemeteries of Pera are the "great Moslem and Armenian cemeteries on the heights above the Bosporus; Eliot Warburton called the views 'one of the finest in the world; here all the gay people of the Frank [European] city assemble in the evening, and wander among the tombs with merry chat and laughter; or sit beneath the cypress-trees, eating ice and smoking their chibouques'" [*Journals* 402n]. Gay people married in merry chat and laughter and Melville wandering among the tombs and cypress, finding there a great resort. The next day: "Cedar & Cyprus the only trees about the capital. —The Cyprus a green minaret, & blends with the stone ones. Minaret perhaps derived from Cyprus shape. The intermingling of the dark tree with the bright spire expressive of the intermingling of life & death" [*Journals* 58–62]. A happy marriage of life and death, the death of celibatory machines.

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