

COUNTERING MARRIAGE:
AN ENTRÉE INTO LORD SUNDER'S
"UNCHAINED LITURGY"¹

"All forms of eroticism are possible in marriage."

—*Georges Bataille*

These brief comments offer a point of entry into a text that is all exits.

"Why marriage?" ask the editors of *Carceral Notebooks*. Because all forms of eroticism are possible in marriage—or rather counter-marriage, that union without unity realized in a phantasmagoric underworld of intimate desires.

The fearful truth of *Unchained Liturgy*, which everywhere assaults the very notion of stable, univocal truth, is that a marriage made in hell makes for one hell of a marriage.

The title *Unchained Liturgy* gestures toward ritual. A ritual of marital binding? A ritual of unbinding? The answer—if there is one—is far from obvious. The ritual depicted in the narrative is structured in the three-part liturgy that both binds and unbinds, liberating its participants in the very gesture of conjoining them in sundry erotic couplings. The text thus provides an image of a counter-marriage: a constant re-commitment to endless forms of strange intimacy, a continuous exit into new configurations of erotic possibility.

The sub-textual commentary on the narrative, as well as the visual interventions by Mariano Chavez, are no less per-

plexing than the narrative itself, and are animated by the same libidinal intensity as the narrative. This resolutely unstable commentary does not, therefore, settle the “meaning” of the narrative, but rather seems to enact a disruptive phantasmatic desire by the commentator on par with that of the narrator.

And who is this commentator? Who is this narrator? Is “Lord Sunder” one or many?

Whatever the identity of the commentator(s), his/her/their primary interlocutors appear to be psychoanalytic writers. To be sure, the specter of Freud haunts this text, as indicated by the disconcerting cover image of the father of psychoanalysis with his eyes sealed shut, suggesting that one enters the text as a dream—or nightmare.

Alongside him is the heterodox thinker Georges Bataille, whose writings on eroticism, religious experience, and ritual sacrifice would seem to inspire aspects of the narrative, even as they disseminate themselves throughout the commentary. He and the thinkers with whom he is coupled in *Unchained Liturgy* provide a theoretical foundation for the relentlessly transgressive, perverse nature of genuine erotic intimacy.

Perhaps the counter-marriage imagined in this text is captured most poignantly in the image of the headless but many-faced hermaphroditic god whose sacrifice is, paradoxically, the culmination of a ritual without end.² Perhaps this text proposes an answer to the question “Why marriage?” through its repeated injunction to exit, exit, exit....

NOTES

- 1 *Unchained Liturgy* is a book consisting of text by an individual or collective working under the name Lord Sunder, and artwork by Mariano Chavez. Copies of the book were on display as part of the “Why Marriage?” exhibition.
- 2 Does the depiction of Hermaphroditos in Lord Sunder’s text allude to the acéphalic (headless) god conjured by Bataille—the impassioned, self-sacrificial, and sovereign figure of escape from the prison of logic, calculation, and instrumental reason?