Bartleby the Scrivener:
A Critical Analysis

by

© Susan Tannenbaum Glouberman

A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Department of English
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec

February 14, 1980

Bartleby the Scrivener:
A Critical Analysis

by

Susan Tannenbaum Glouberman

Abstract

This thesis examines the main trends in criticism of "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" by Herman Melville. It argues that critical approaches which stress the biographical, psychological, political, or other aspects of the story fail to provide an adequate interpretation of the story. It then considers a major theme in Melville of the contrast between the ambiguities and uncertainties in the world, and an individual who seeks unsuccessfully to find absolute ideals in it. This follows with a detailed textual analysis in which it becomes apparent that the role of the narrator is critical in the story's development. This character is used by Melville to manipulate ambiguities and to create a growing sense of uncertainty in the reader. Ultimately the thesis stresses inconsistencies in narrative diction, tone, attitude and substance, and demonstrates their influence on any proper analysis.

Resumé

La thèse examine les tendances principales de la critique de "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" par Herman Melville. Elle propose que les approches critiques qui insistent sur les aspects biographiques, psychologiques ou autres (tels que sociologiques ou politiques), ne donnent pas une interprétation adéquate de l'histoire. Elle étudie ensuite un des thèmes majeurs dans l'oeuvre de Melville--le contraste entre les ambiguités et les incertitudes du monde d'une part, et l'individu qui cherche vainement les idéaux absolus d'autre part. Quand le conte est soumis à l'analyse textuelle on découvre que l'avocat-narrateur est essentiel au développement de l'histoire. Ce personnage est utilisé par Melville afin de faire naître chez le lecteur un sentiment croissant d'incertitude. Finalement, la thèse met en relief les inconsistances dans la diction narrative, le ton, l'attitude, et la substance; elle démontre en plus leur influence sur n'importe quelle analyse utile.

Acknowledgements

I extend special thanks and love to Sholem and Misha, and am exceedingly grateful to R.A.P.

The thesis is

dedicated to my mother

and father.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Bartleby the Scrivener": A Story of Wall-Street" begs for if not indeed demands some kind of interpretation. Just as the Wall-Street Lawyer who narrates the story has difficulty in trying to come to terms with Bartleby, so the reader cannot come to terms with the story. The effect that the story leaves on the reader is often different than the one left on the Lawyer. Perhaps this is why Melville's brief story has evoked great interest from a large variety of readers. Many critics have attempted to give definitive interpretations of the story and much criticism of it has continuously appeared; three films (two British and one American) have been made of it; at least one teleplay has been produced, and there has been an opera of "Bartleby". In 1965 an entire symposium was devoted to it at Kent State University in Ohio.

What I propose to do in the following chapters is to briefly present and comment on various critical approaches to the story. I will examine biographical, psychological, political, moral and other points of view. A brief analysis of these approaches shows that they are inadequate to explain this particular story.

While each approach may elucidate an important aspect of "Bartleby the Scrivener", the imposition of a particular critical emphasis (for example, looking at the story's meaning as primarily biographical, or as mainly conveying a Marxist vision) does not succeed because of the high level of ambiguity and uncertainty that permeates the story. I will therefore argue that a proper critical analysis of "Bartleby the Scrivener" requires extreme flexibility in approach.

In Melville's writing, ambiguities and uncertainties are frequently contrasted with the unsuccessful quest for absolutes. This is also the case in "Bartleby the Scrivener". The thesis thus continues with a section on the role of the questor in the search for absolute ideals in Melville's writing in general. I will look at Billy Budd, Pierre, or the Ambiguities, and Moby Dick.

This is followed by a detailed analysis of the story in which I examine the role of the narrator and the ways in which Melville manipulates ambiguities through the narrator in order to elicit a sense of uncertainty in the reader. These rhetorical observations are used to explain the inadequacy of existing criticisms.

Ultimately, the thesis will stress inconsistencies in narrative diction, tone, attitude and substance, and show what their influence must be on any proper analysis. In order to do this, focus on the Lawyer-narrator seems to work best since it stresses ambiguity and uncertainty, rather than insisting upon a definitive interpretation.

CHAPTER I

i. A Review of Critical Material

ii. A More General Critical Discussion on Melville and Absolutes

i. A Review of Critical Material

BIOGRAPHICAL

One of the ways of analyzing the story is by viewing it as an allegory of Melville's life. According to this analysis, Melville is autobiographical in his description of Bartleby and his surroundings.[2] Indeed while writing "Bartleby the Scrivener: A story of Wall-Street" Melville had much difficulty: the story received little acknowledgment and was not easily sold. Melville was, metaphorically speaking, 'up against his own wall', personally and professionally.

"Bartleby" was written after Moby Dick, and Pierre or the Ambiguities had been publicly unsuccessful. It has been said that a revengeful Melville deliberately condescended in writing "Bartleby", setting out to make the story 'readable' for the general public--that is, short, clear and seemingly easily accessible for interpretation. The story was published in a magazine, Putnam's Monthly, which did make it more available and supposedly less academic than his previous lengthy novels were.

At the time "Bartleby the Scrivener" was written, Melville was at odds with his brother Allen, a liberal Wall-Street lawyer, whom he disliked. The biographical critics thus believe that the Wall-Street Lawyer is modelled after him.

Also a close friend of Melville's, George Adler, had been institutionalized--diagnosed as a paranoid-schizophrenic. Consequently, Bartleby is frequently described as representing Adler, and Melville as representing the lawyer. Melville is taken to be desperate in trying to reach out to help his friend, and in deep anguish concerning the situation.

Melville is, of course, also seen as Bartleby himself--for example, because his eyesight was failing. In the story the Lawyer assumes Bartleby won't copy because his eyes are poor (an assumption entirely his own).

Since Melville himself was often quiet, withdrawn, morose, perhaps feeling that he was making very little contact with people around him, this may serve as another basis for a comparison with Bartleby. Indeed, Melville does sound like Bartleby, who 'prefers' not to live, when he writes to Samuel Shaw that "I once, like other spoonies, cherished a loose sort of notion that I did not care to live very long."[3]

Furthermore, Melville's fragile mental state, which his mother attributed to 'constant indoor confinement', like Bartleby's, is confirmed by Jay Leyda in The Melville Log.

These biographical similarities indicate that Melville did in fact at times seem to be like Bartleby, 'a bit of a wreck in the mid Atlantic', (p. 39). Yet the power of the story and its strong impact on the reader can hardly be explained by them. When we look further we shall see that the inclusion of

this mass of biographical detail may be Melville's way of tantalizing the reader in false directions. The basic concerns of the story go beyond any single man's life, and concern the human condition in general. That is to say, that the story derives much of its power from its universality, not its specific biographical source.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Some critics study Bartleby's behaviour and the story itself from a psychological point of view. They view Bartleby as a psychologically sick man. Basically, what is of interest to such interpretors, are Bartleby's isolation and self-destruction, as well as the effect Bartleby has on so called 'normal' people. The question is asked whether 'normal' people can help Bartleby, and if so, how. Psychological critics also explore whether or not Bartleby's condition is partially the result of the society in which he lives and they even go so far as to examine the ways by which Bartleby would be medically treated today.

"I think he is a little deranged," the Lawyer says to himself. (p. 52) Newton Arvin in Herman Melville and Richard Chase in Herman Melville: A Critical Study agree that Bartleby is suffering from schizophrenia. Arvin writes:

> There is a level on which Bartleby can be described as a wonderfully intuitive study of what would now be called schizophrenia, and in Melville himself there were certainly the germs of schizophrenic detachment. (p. 243)

One critic even shows a relationship between Bartleby and the 'fetal' Melville.[4] Though this is done in jest, it can be seen as a psychological interpretation taken a step too far. Melville's mother, Maria, during her pregnancy, leaned towards melancholia. She and her husband had just moved to New York, where she found herself isolated and lonely. In a letter to her brother she wrote:

...I am in a fair way becoming a misanthrope.
...I am worse than forgotten, shuned [sic]. [5]

Surely, if she felt so alone, her then to-be-born child would too. This is taken as evidence for understanding the very nature of the subsequently 'born' and grown Melville, and for providing insight into the Melville/Bartleby identification.

Much of this kind of psychologically oriented interpretation tends to deal with the story as if it were a psychiatric case history, thus reducing "Bartleby the Scrivener" to material better suited for a medical journal. To explain the story as a clinical case history is to explain it away. This doesn't work. We still feel a tension in our contact with Bartleby that is not simply the embarrassment due to an encounter with a madman.

POLITICAL

Other critics deal with Bartleby on a political level. The events of the story lend themselves to a Marxist approach, for the story may be seen as an example of the inevitable breakdown in the employer/employee relationship that exists in a capitalist system.[6] Such critics are concerned with issues such as why Bartleby should in fact do menial work, have to answer to a boss and contribute to a routine in which his profits are significantly different from the employer's; that is, Bartleby is merely a salaried worker contributing to profits, not exclusively monetary, in which he has no share. He is expected to do dehumanizing work in a dehumanized atmosphere.

Although we know almost as little about the Lawyer as we do about Bartleby, unlike Bartleby the Lawyer is not meant to be available, at our will for our investigation. In a sense the Lawyer is 'the boss' and in control of the information he offers. As the narrator he has the control in any case, but he teases us. He promises information only to withold it. It seems as if it is both his and our right to probe into Bartleby's being, but not into his. Not only does the narrator invade Bartleby's personal privacy on an emotional level, but as if to symbolize his privileged position he thinks nothing, for example, of going through Bartleby's office drawers and personal belongings. The Lawyer does at times tell us what he considers appropriate and important for us to know about himself, but any information concerning himself comes to us only through him.

Significantly, Bartleby is set aside behind a partition where the Lawyer can hear, but not see him. As a worker he must do as he is told. By not doing what he is told, Bartleby does, in a sense, show a breakdown in a capitalist work system.

Marxist interpreters tend to ignore Bartleby's refusal to work, and they perceive him as a victim—exploited or reprimanded. Bartleby is left isolated; he is an unfortunate, but not atypical example of what can become of a worker within a capitalist society. Surprisingly, he is given little sympathy.

(Ironically, though the above holds true, we can look at the situation between the Lawyer as boss and Bartleby as worker in another way. Though the Lawyer <u>is</u> the boss, it is Bartleby who rules his life, and not as expected, <u>vice versa</u>. The paradoxical ending of their relationship is enforced by Bartleby. Though the Lawyer has been trying continuously to reject Bartleby, Bartleby, at the Tombs, in no uncertain manner, completely rejects the Lawyer. "I know you" he said without looking round--"and I want nothing to say to you." (p. 51).)

SOCIAL

Social criticism commonly disapproves of Bartleby's individualism. This kind of criticism is largely concerned with the effect that Bartleby or someone like him might have on society. It often tends to be conservative in upholding the currently accepted mores, and deviation from them is often unacceptable to the social critics.

For example, Egbert S. Oliver in "A Second Look at Bartleby," College English says:

> Try as you will, you cannot
> cut yourself off from society,
> and to persist in such a direction
> can only destroy the individual.
> (p. 439)

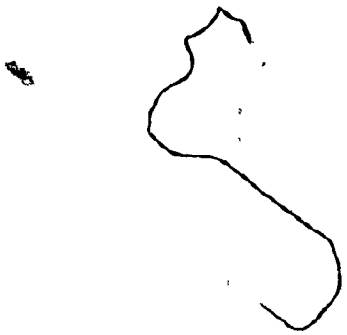
Most social critics accept some kind of individualism so long as it is maintained within certain boundaries--albeit those boundaries are difficult to define. It is important for them that eccentricity does not get in the way of the general flow of things, that it is not threatening to uniformity and conventionality, or have the potential to become contagious and spread --like a cold. For example, Turkey and Nippers, though eccentric, would not be considered to interrupt matters; on the contrary "Their fits relieved each other, like guards. When Nippers's was on, Turkey's was off; and vice versa." (p. 22)

They complement each other, almost functioning as one total human being. When they are out of sorts they do very little harm, and their ineffectuality is reinforced by the comic dimension they

offer. It is only when they themselves begin, unconsciously, to use the word 'prefer' that their presence becomes serious.

> Oh, prefer? oh yes - queer word. I (Turkey) never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer.
> (p. 37)

To judge Bartleby's behaviour by conventional standards is to misread the story entirely. By such standards, the Lawyer's behaviour can also be shown to be suspect. A conventional response to Bartleby would be to fire him and evict him upon his first refusal to perform his duties.



ROMANTIC

Some critics may loosely be called 'romantic' because they ennoble or romanticize rather than condemn (like the social critics) Bartleby's unorthodox behaviour.

The Lawyer, seen as a middle-of-the-road man, is dismissed by these critics for his ordinary and compromising nature. Bartleby, on the other hand, is seen as fearless in his insanity, for he has no reasons (unlike the Lawyer's endless ones) to account for his behaviour. This is judged to be admirable, even noble, by Robert C. Mason, a representative 'romantic' critic.

In The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville, he writes:

> In Bartleby, the stoic conclusion was faced, in a compressed and haunting prose piece containing as much of pity as of horror. That the courageous way out of the fated dilemma was independence and the independence led to death. Yet somehow Bartleby emerges from his own tragedy as the victor; he creates, but does participate in the spiritual disturbance which has quickened the imagination of the mediocrities he encounters. He becomes the still point around which their unstable world turns. The paradox of Bartleby is that although his principles destroy him, it is the preservation of those principles alone which can save the world which rejects him. The figure of Bartleby is paralleled inside Melville's works by Plinlimmon in Pierre. Bartleby is the bleakly logical conclusion of all the nobility and independence impliciting; a criticism of society which distrusts those attributes as well as of their individual possessor who will attempt

> no compromise with it. It is in fact the most devastating criticism of society that could conceivably be made. Bartleby's death damns society, not himself. (p. 191-192)

In this view Bartleby's insanity, even if it leads to his ultimate destruction, is admired. The pain which he may or may not suffer as a result of it is ignored—and the fact that he does deliberately and consciously starve himself to death is almost overlooked. It seems a serious misreading of Melville to even consider such an interpretation as adequate.

RATIONAL: PLEA TO REASON

Some readers of Bartleby are especially concerned with the plea to reason the story communicates. It is that plea which the Lawyer repeats--to himself, to Bartleby, to the reader. It is a plea, an urgent request, that is not just addressed to various people but becomes part of the structure of the story.

Throughout the story the Lawyer begs Bartleby to supply him with reasons for his actions: "In a word, will you do anything at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?". (p. 42) However, Bartleby will not, and probably cannot give any reasons.

Melville was writing at a time in American history which had messianic elements in its outlook. There was great confidence in the view that, if one went about it in the correct way, attaining complete answers, explanations and reasons would be possible. This view, which Emerson summarized as "Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test will explain all phenomena", was clearly abhorrent to Melville. For him there was never, as he shows in Pierre, a 'China Wall' for possible unknowns in life. By defying reason and explanation, "Bartleby the Scrivener" paradoxically inspires us to search for them.

Thus within this interpretation many questions arise: Why is Bartleby doing what he is? How much sympathy and support should we feel for him? Is the Lawyer doing as much as anyone can? Is he a good man, a reasonable man? How important is it that he

remains reasonable? In which areas of his life has he made compromises in order to maintain that reasonableness? And most important, how can an approach based primarily on reason uncover what the story means?

Criticism that relies on 'reason' in this way fails partly because it implies that the story would be more accessible to the reader, and Bartleby more accessible to the Lawyer, if Melville were to have allowed Bartleby to give reasons for his position. These critics like the Lawyer believe that knowing why, by itself, would alter the essence and meaning of the story. It is they who take the ending, the sudden knowledge of Bartleby's past work at the Dead Letter Office, to be so significant. It is as if at last they have been given some important clue, and they seize on it as an explanation much wished for.

MORAL

Critics with a moral approach see Melville as primarily concerned with right and wrong, good and evil.[7] Generally they are not concerned with the way in which Melville uses moral issues to play with the reader, for by appealing to our own sense of morality, Melville fools us into believing that by grasping moral issues we can grasp the story. Melville is perhaps not only mocking our own sense of heightened morality, achieved by morally judging his characters, but is showing that he is more concerned with other issues which are not simply definable in moral terms.

However, because moral issues figure so strongly in Melville. there is a strong temptation to interpret the story in moral terms. For instance, it seems appropriate that the Lawyer in "Bartleby" is judged morally. Yet to say that the Lawyer has not done enough or tried adequately to plead with Bartleby; to say that if only the Lawyer were a "better" person the reader would then be able to better understand the story appears inadequate to Melville's complex moral vision. It appears that Melville uses moral issues both for a larger literary effect and significantly, to challenge the reader's conventional moral responses.

An example from Billy Budd might clarify this point. Like "Bartleby" Billy Budd contains situations that seem to demand moral interpretation. Billy Budd, who may be symbolic of goodness,

upon great provocation and certainly by accident murders Claggart, a figurative symbol of evil. Budd is judged, found guilty and hung. Captain Vere (Vere, we know, means truth), representing a synthesis of reason and emotion, passes the verdict though other options are open to him. Again, while this theme surely seems open to moral interpretation (and I do not wish to deny its importance in either Billy Budd or in "Bartleby"), I do wish to point out that Melville may be using issues of morality as a device to provoke the reader to look for a different kind of meaning in the stories. Even in a tale, then, in which the issues of good and evil, and right and wrong seem so ripe for interpretation, they may not be the essence of the work. Clearly Melville frequently employs moral issues in his writing not as an end in order to render moral judgment, but as a means to a more complex literary end.

ii

A More General Critical Discussion on Melville and Absolutes

To look at the questor and the search for absolutes is a common concern in literary analysis.[8] This approach is highly appropriate since Melville's protagonists embark on quests and seek their ideals in absolute ways.

The purpose of the following discussion is to elucidate the ways in which Melville uses the quest motif in order to explore values--both absolute and relative. It is tempting when one is confronted with a quest for absolutes in the story to respond in an absolute manner--that is, to seek certainty.

"Bartleby the Scrivener" is a story of extremes. Bartleby himself is a character who has managed to transform a relative position of preference (rather than an absolute position of 'yes' or 'no') into an absolute one. The repetition of and action upon the phrase 'I would prefer not to', is at least as unyielding as a very firm 'no' would be.[9]

Bartleby seems to act in a single-minded way that bears resemblance to some of Melville's other single-minded and blinded characters, Pierre or Ahab for example. But Pierre and Ahab are more accessible to the reader, and their positions and absolute actions are less difficult to understand, for the motives behind them are somewhat explained. Melville tells us that Ahab must capture the whale and seek revenge at any cost. Pierre is shown to

us in an even more elaborate way. We see him go from innocence and complacency to desperation and madness in his quest.

Of Bartleby's quest we know nothing, and any assumptions that we make are as presumptuous as the Lawyer's. In contrast to the image of Bartleby as questor is the image of Pierre, for example.[10]

We can look at Pierre as an obvious example of a 'Melvillean' questor, crudely outlining some characteristics that qualify him as one. First is the fact that he is trying to find an ideal, in this case a sense of justice, but in a way in which he is unwilling and unable to modify. The ideal which might have been and usually was originally legitimate, noble and virtuous becomes distorted and lost. Milton Stern writes "Ideals in any form are shadows cast by a nothing, and the champion of the ideal becomes the fool of the ideal."[11]

Such was Pierre's fate, who fails in trying to undo and see through the lies with which he was brought up. And because he sees those lies in absolute terms only, he replaces them with other absolutes, which must because they are absolute (in terms of their ideals) become lies as well.

Pierre as a questor hopes to discover justice, but not a relative justice or part of a justice; he wants justice to be an absolute.

There is an inevitable irony inherent in the search for such absolutes. Melville seems to be saying:

A. that the search itself is essential

B. one must know, or find out along the way, that there is no absolute answer to the search

C. yet one must never (like Plinlimmon, for example) give up searching.

Melville then takes that position a step further to say that although an absolute answer is not attainable, a relative one is. Indeed Melville implies that a relative answer must satisfy as such. Yet in the face of this acceptance the process itself of searching for absolute ideals is imperative and without end, for there are many relative answers. Though the Lawyer/Narrator in "Bartleby the Scrivener" claims to be a man for whom absolutes and certainty exist, when we look at him more closely we discover (in the argument of the thesis) that he is quite self-deceived with regard to that position.

Melville is interested in both the relation of the individual to his past experience, and in the effect of an absolute position on his history. Melville perceives that the attempt to write history, including personal history, is one which involves a choice of a particular set of circumstances and the imposition of a particular point of view. To regard these descriptions as a truth or an absolute is for Melville a misperception of the nature of history--a disregarding of context and particulars. Moreover, in having to be one-sided or singular (as absolutes), the historical descriptions become distortions of truth, if not lies.

It is significant that Bartleby has no history and the fact that we know nothing of his past may suggest his position as absolutist. Dillingham writes:

> Bartleby is a dead letter, for in the world he has erased the return address of his past and written his future in words that the world cannot understand.[12]

The concern that Melville has for context in "Bartleby the Scrivener" (or, more precisely, lack of context) may be clarified by very briefly looking at Pierre, Moby Dick and Billy Budd. Although Melville describes Pierre's background in great detail, when Pierre leaves his background to search for 'answers to life's meaning' he rejects his own history to such an extent that it is almost as if he never had one.

It thereby becomes almost impossible for Pierre to learn from his personal history or from facts in the context in which they normally exist. Melville seems to be saying that if we assume that phenomena are not one-sided, then we must ask different kinds of questions than the ones that have been asked; ones that will help us come closer to the truth, relative as it may be. The kinds of questions that have been asked are within the context of absolutes and the answers must therefore be incomplete or distorted.

The chapter in Moby Dick on Cetology is an example of a description that can exist only in a particular context: where questions which leave room for uncertainty are not asked, and more importantly, where absolutes are taken for granted. Through that

kind of description of a whale Melville is parodying all kinds of knowledge, (especially scientific knowledge) of the day. What seems like an accurate and possible description at first glance is soon recognized as being something quite different. It is 'almost' true, yet seriously distorted, like most absolute knowledge and scientific explanation are.

Melville deliberately plays with the literary and scientific modes. He will "divide the whales into three primary BOOKS (subdivisible into CHAPTERS), and these shall comprehend them all, both small and large.

I. THE FOLIO WHALE:

II. THE OCTAVO WHALE:

III. THE DUODECIMO WHALE." (p. 140)

The scientific format becomes a satire which emphasizes the limitations of the scientific method.

Science may convey but a small part of what a whale is, and is indeed valuable in this sense. But it is not a complete description of a whale, nor can it be. It does not in its description convey any sense of the whale as a whale in the sea--a monstrous creature upon which, for example, Ahab's very life depends.

Similarly, Ahab's knowledge of the whale is limited, for he sees it only as the monstrous creature in the sea. Ahab's first appearance upon the deck conveys what the whale's powers imply to him. Because he is blinded by only that perspective, the power of the whale can and does completely control his life. The absolute scientific

description ignores the 'real life' whale, while the 'real life' whale omits the scientific one. The two combined come closer to defining what a whale is.

In "Bartleby the Scrivener" Melville too juggles opposed perspectives--more subtly, more humorously, and more playfully; for example, the contrast and similarities drawn between the two main characters, Bartleby and the Lawyer, and the absurd complementary relationship between Turkey and Nippers.

Now that we have sketched the nature of the quest, we can examine the character in search for an absolute. Like the object of their quest, Melville's questors are not obviously transparent.

In Billy Budd it would be difficult to even judge who would be the more significant questor, Budd or Vere. Captain Vere must make a judgement as to whether or not to condemn Budd to death. Were Vere to acquit him, he could be confirming the possibility of absolute goodness (in Budd), absolute evil (in Claggart), and absolute justice (in himself). Budd, though seemingly perfect, strikes me as a deliberately undeveloped character. He is flawed by a stutter, lacks a sense of history, and his goodness and innocence work to make him appear naive and childlike.

In "Bartleby", Melville presents a less obvious questor; it may even be presumptuous to consider Bartleby as a questor, considering the fact that we know nothing of his quest, yet he does seem to want something; and even if it is just to be left alone and

do as he pleases (as little as it may be) he wants it absolutely.

In this sense he is no different from Melville's other questors. But in the case of Bartleby we simply do not understand the ideal that he is after, since it appears to be devoid of anything positive, passionate or compelling, and becomes increasingly negative and self-destructive and abusive as the story progresses.

Since his quest is defined in negative terms, it is difficult to judge Bartleby as a questor: he does not prefer, he prefers not to. And since he wants to do simply whatever pleases him and is initially not harmful to anyone, perhaps we ought to consider the possibility that Bartleby should be respected and left alone. Yet this possibility is usually shunned by critics who tend to attribute specific motives to Bartleby's behaviour. Neither response appears adequate to Bartleby's quest.

It is easy to mistake his passive refusals for something far milder and more flexible than they are. Moreover, because he never firmly states his position, we have some expectation of compromise from him: or, more specifically, we think we might even understand him.

Yet thinking that we understand Bartleby is illusory. Bartleby's quest, albeit perverse, involves the whole-hearted and total denial and subsequent destruction of the view of existence which holds that understanding can be complete or absolute. Similarly, the reader is denied an absolute understanding of Bartleby. Moreover, because Bartleby is not to be understood <u>at all</u> by the characters in

the story, he may be perceived as a challenge to the idea that people are knowable. Perhaps we may take this a bit further and suggest that Melville is dealing with the problem of knowledge, a problem intimately connected to Melville's concern with absolutes.

If we look at how Melville embodies his philosophical concerns within the story, we see that the narrator plays the most significant role. It is important that Melville has created his Lawyer as a middle-of-the-road man in every sense. He is not even a particularly successful Lawyer. Ironically, it is this very unimpressive, manipulable, self-deceptive and uncertain man who wants an absolute from Bartleby, and thereby becomes a questor. And ironically the Lawyer fails to recognize that what Bartleby presents him with is precisely that—an absolute, but significantly of a different order.

Melville has deliberately chosen to tell his story through a fairly decent, but dense and obtuse narrator when he could, of course, have created a wise and perceptive one in his place. Why has he created such a narrator? And what relationship does that create between the narrator, Melville and the reader? In the next chapter, I will address these questions.

CHAPTER II

i. A Textual Analysis Through the Narrator

ii. The Epilogue

i. A Textual Analysis Through The Narrator

The following quote from Moby Dick may be taken as a warning against definitive interpretation and may serve as a helpful reminder to all readers who yearn for an absolute interpretation.

> In good time, Flask's saying proved true. As before, the Pequod steeply leaned over towards the sperm whale's head, now, by the counterpoise of both heads, she regained her even keel; though sorely strained, you may well believe- So, when on one side you hoist in Locke's head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant's and you come back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds for ever keep trimming boat. Oh, ye foolish: throw all these thunderheads overboard, and then you will float light and right. (italics mine) [13]

The spirit of the quote seems to indicate that an approach to a text without a set formula or theory works best, for the reader must look at the text and respond to it. Thus, the narrative voice in "Bartleby the Scrivener" becomes a primary means for interpreting the story. The response presupposes a relation between the text and the reader, and in "Bartleby the Scrivener" the narrator forms the crucial link.

Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction stresses that the narrative voice is created to have an impact on the reader, perhaps

even the most profound effect. Booth also presupposes that the reader does not approach the text with a fixed theory. Both critic and author encourage a disciplined analysis of the text, and an attitude flexible enough to permit uncertainty.

While to examine the text from the point of view of the narrator is a literary technique, it does not have a 'studied' basis; it does not impose or state a formula into which the work itself must fit. This technique seems especially suitable to "Bartleby" because it is the narrative voice which is pre-eminent and manipulates our response. The reader is expected to ask questions from the text, not to supply presupposed theories, which by definition tend to be certain.

Melville has chosen a first person narrator, significantly nameless, to tell his tale. The reader is thus always limited to the narrator's vision of the story, or his personal point of view.

What we as the reader want to know is whether or not the narrator is consistent and reliable. To what extent does Melville share his view? The reader has to deal with inconsistencies in the Lawyer's narration, and also with inconsistencies in Melville's attitude towards the Lawyer. Sometimes he criticizes the Lawyer and sometimes he is sympathetic towards him. At times Melville traps the reader into judging the narrator; and just when we feel self-satisfied and justified in condemning him, the narrator slyly shifts his position. Thus the reader remains in the same position as the Lawyer, whose self-satisfaction is time and again shaken by

Bartleby.

By creating contradictions between the Lawyer's statements and actions, Melville deliberately complicates the reader's response. The confusion arising out of the ironic disparity between what the narrator says and does contributes to much of the tension of the story which derives, in part, from the reader's lack of trust in the narrative voice.

For instance, while the Lawyer has a conservative 'safe' attitude towards himself (of which he is questionably proud), it is clear from his various responses to Bartleby that he engages in not altogether conservative actions. In all fairness to the Lawyer, he does as much, if not more, in his attempt to help Bartleby than would be expected from one who professed opposite views--one who did not value safety and moderation in human relations.

It is important that Melville and the alert reader share a knowledge about the Lawyer/Narrator of which he himself is unaware. The Lawyer tells of his virtues: that he is prudent, methodical, consistent. Yet by looking more closely at the kinds of things he does and says, Melville communicates that the Lawyer is not the kind of person that he claims to be. His description of himself does not coincide with the reader's perception of him. He emerges as a confused and inconsistent individual.

The following is a close analysis of the Lawyer, emphasizing Melville's methods in creating ambiguity in his narrator's

character and perceptions--an ambiguity that is essential in creating the mystery of Bartleby and the impact of the story.

The character of the Lawyer emerges through his description of himself and his contact with other people. Knowledge of his behaviour with people modifies his description of himself. When the Lawyer meets Bartleby he is faced with something ultimately alien to him.

The story intensifies parallel to the Lawyer's bewilderment by Bartleby. Accordingly the following discussion, based for the most part on the Lawyer's interactions with Bartleby, is arranged in chronological order, which reflects the narrator's growing frustration and confusion as well as the story's intensification.

The Lawyer's relation to Bartleby is determined both by his own character and very largely by what Bartleby is. Bartleby is obviously unbending, absolute and consistent in his 'preference.' Not so obviously, however, is the Lawyer's consistency: were he the kind of person or Wall-Street Lawyer which he describes himself as, he surely would have fired Bartleby after his first, or perhaps second, 'I would prefer not to'.

Even by the time the Lawyer has hired Bartleby, we vaguely sense that he is not the kind of man that he has claimed to be--and that the possibility of his firing Bartleby is small. In introducing the story, the Lawyer says:

> Ere introducing the scrivener
> as he first appeared to me,

> it is fit I make some mention of myself, my employés, my business, my chambers and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented. (p. 16)

Bartleby, however, is not the chief character; the Lawyer is. It is here where we see one of the first of the Lawyer's misconceptions about himself, and Melville's sly way of presenting the Lawyer. Though the Lawyer says that this information is to help us understand Bartleby, this information also serves to reveal the Lawyer.

Even in as neutral a subject as his office "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (p. 17), the Lawyer reveals himself. The persons he employs, Turkey and Nippers, are decidedly eccentric. The Lawyer tells us that Turkey:

> ...was apt to be altogether too energetic. There was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness about him...Indeed, not only would he be reckless and sadly given to making blots...but some days he went further and was rather noisy.... He made an unpleasant racket with his chair; spilled his sandbox; in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion; stood up and leaned over his table, boxing his papers... (p. 18)

All this he did in the afternoon only. His morning behaviour was calm and acceptable. Nippers, on the other hand was outlandish

mostly in the morning. He is described as follows:

> [the Lawyer] always deemed him a victim of two evil powers--ambition and indigestion.... The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing his teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying; unnecessary maledictions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business; and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked.... Nippers would sometimes impatiently rise from his seat, and, ...seize the whole desk... for Nippers, Brandy-and-water were altogether superfluous. (p. 20)

Indeed, the Lawyer must be eccentric himself in order to employ them. He tells us that he has them under control, but instead they seem to control him. The Lawyer tries to show that he has created an order, prides himself on it, and says:

> It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause --indigestion--the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that, Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other, like guards. When Nippers's was on, Turkey's was off; and vice versa. This was a good natural arrangement, under the circumstances. (p. 22)

Even Nippers' desk, part of the architecture of the office, is not described as an object, but as a natural obstacle to be overcome. Through Nippers' enormous frustration in trying to get the desk straight we sense the Lawyer's frustration. Nature itself seems as an obstacle to him.

When the Lawyer does describe himself, we begin to sense that he is deceived. He tells us:

> I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. (p. 16)

It is only in retrospect that we know that he has done what is most difficult regarding Bartleby, but he is telling the story in retrospect and still does not know (or pretends not to know) that what he is saying is false. He tells us:

> I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but, in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages,and title-deeds. All who know me consider me an eminently safe man. (p. 16)

Yet, he shows that he is ambitious, for he is hurt and angry that his title, the Master in Chancery has been taken away. He says:

> I seldom lose my temper, much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages, but,I must be permitted to be rash here, and

> declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a--premature act; (p. 17)

Ironically, a man who prides himself on safety chooses to respect John Jacob Astor, his former employer, an unusually ambitious, 'unsafe' man.[14] The Lawyer is indeed proud to have worked for him and to have received Astor's respect for prudence and method. He does value those attributes, but he himself proves, as we shall see, to be neither prudent nor methodical.

We have seen that in his description of himself and his relation with Turkey and Nippers the Lawyer wants to convey the impression that he is a normal man of unshakeable normalcy. Yet his relations with Turkey and Nippers imply above-normal tolerance for eccentricity. As much as the narrator tries to domesticate the eccentricity, the arrangement in the office remains bizarre (The narrator's tone is sufficiently convincing to fool the reader--but not on second reading.)

Thus while the Lawyer speaks of his circumstances as if they were normal the reader is given a different impression. We know that the narrator is not deliberately lying. It is just part of an image that the Lawyer wants to present. Yet from the very beginning of the story, Melville goes beyond this to convey that the narrator is more complex than is his image.

Ironically the Lawyer perceives 'normalcy' in Bartleby and hires him for that quality.

> After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers. (p. 23)

The Lawyer tells us what he ultimately wants when he places Bartleby is his office:

> I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined. (p. 23)

This last sentence is enormously important: it is a good example of Melville's skill in sounding a theme early and later orchestrating it. From the beginning of the story privacy and society are the elements that the Lawyer tries to combine in his own life and in Bartleby's, and never understands that they are incompatible. The attempt to conjoin these two elements fails completely with Bartleby's death. Nevertheless, the Lawyer still harbours the desire and expresses it poignantly and in different terms at the end of the story--"Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (p. 54).

The reader who has, with the narrator, experienced Bartleby understands the connection between privacy and society, and Bartleby and humanity--and we share the narrator's desire. However, while we appreciate his desire to unite the two, we also despair of it. The force of those two words, 'privacy' and 'society', which appear early in the story, gain in significance as we read on.

The Lawyer spends an unusually large amount of time trying to explain the situation concerning Bartleby. It is important to him that we and he fully understand what happened. Because he needs to understand in a way which is absolute and complete, any partial explanation becomes impossible for him to accept on the ground that it leaves room for uncertainty.

The first time Bartleby refuses the Lawyer's request, he (the Lawyer) responds in a way that is perplexing for us. Bartleby replied in "a singularly mild, firm voice...'I would prefer not to.'" This reply has a stronger impact on the Lawyer than the far from mild replies and actions of Turkey and Nippers. The Lawyer said:

> I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me. ...I should have violently dismissed him. (p. 25)

He does not, however, dismiss Bartleby, which would have been the 'prudent' and conventional thing for the Lawyer to do, considering the view which he claims to have of himself. Instead, he is emotionally perturbed in a way that is even unmerited in proportion to Bartleby's response. This warns us that his relationship to Bartleby will have serious consequences for him. Yet, the Lawyer's first response is to immediately try to ignore his feelings, and he avoids deciding what to do regarding Bartleby with the excuse:

> But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. (p. 25)

The Lawyer's attempt to escape from emotional disturbance --a form of self-deception--undermines our trust in him, and we realize that the reliability of the Lawyer's account is questionable. Because the narrator is no longer reliable, the reader is both confused and suspicious of the narrator's responses.

The second time the Lawyer asks Bartleby to work, he again gently answers, "I would prefer not to." The reaction of the Lawyer to this 'gentle' response is extraordinary in its evocation of a biblical curse. "I was turned into a pillar of salt." (p. 26)

While the Lawyer's thoughts are extreme, even violent, his behaviour remains moderate. The Lawyer is uncomfortable with his lack of action, and deals with his discomfort by thinking that:

> With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him [Bartleby] ignominiously from my presence. (p. 26)

Thus, while the Lawyer feels that Bartleby's behaviour deserves a conventionally indignant response, he also expresses contrary feelings:

> But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. (p. 26)

This pattern of emotional contradiction intensifies with each confrontation between Bartleby and the Lawyer. Bartleby's third "I would prefer not to" is characterized as being "flute-like" in tone. The flute is tender, and the fact that Bartleby is compared to a musical instrument may show that he is not offensive to the Lawyer at this point, but even nice to hear. The Lawyer is moved by Bartleby and is perhaps attracted to him. Melville doesn't specifically tell us why, but the narrator's emotional reaction convinces us. However, immediately after this third confrontation with Bartleby, we sense the Lawyer's gross inability to cope with the situation. The passage conveys disturbance: he speaks in the third person and generalizes, as he often does when he is desperate and needs some distance.

> It is not seldom the case that, when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the justice and all the reason is on the other side. Accordingly, if any disinterested persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind. (p. 26)

The Lawyer's diction appears more violent than warranted: "browbeaten" is a rather strong image in reaction to Bartleby's "flutelike" quiet response, as is "some violently unreasonable way." "Stagger" could imply that the narrator is left almost drunk with confusion. He tells us that he believes "vaguely" that "all justice

and all the reason is on the other side," yet it is hardly in a vague way, judging from the Lawyer's response, that he believes that. The "disinterested persons" he refers to, Turkey and Nippers, could not be more interested. It is to them that he turns for some reinforcement for his own "faltering mind". The fear for his own sanity shows the powerful impact Bartleby has on him.

Although the Lawyer still does not recognize the extent of that impact, the reader, at this stage is forced to. As if to remind us of the insanity of the whole situation, Melville has the Lawyer turn for support to the outlandish Turkey and Nippers.

As in previous instances following emotional upheaval, the Lawyer, after his third confrontation with Bartleby, tries to compose himself. "I pondered a moment in sore perplexity." (p. 27) As usual, he avoids confronting both his strong feelings and Bartleby by turning to questionably urgent business demands:

> But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. (p. 27)

We begin to feel for the Lawyer's desire for the ordinary, and tend to pity him as we see how much he wants to be the kind of detached, prudent, unmoved man who could be hurried by such everyday, normal matters as business or dinner--and how very much unlike that he in fact is. This irony is intensified as the more the Lawyer is attracted and frightened by Bartleby, the more Melville creates a bond between them in which their identity is confused.

For example, in the following paragraph it is the Lawyer who better fits the description of sentry, and Melville ironically describes the Lawyer as the one who 'regards', 'observes', and 'notices' Bartleby.

> Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner; indeed, that he never went anywhere. As yet I had never, of my personal knowledge, known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o'clock, though, in the morning, I noticed... (p. 27)

The Lawyer consistently confuses himself with Bartleby in other instances as well. Because of his total lack of rationality, Bartleby is the person who the Lawyer wants least to be like. By identifying with Bartleby to such a degree so as to unintentionally confuse one with the other, the Lawyer weakens his description and perception of himself as self-controlled. This adds to the force of tension which the Lawyer is struggling with—his desire to be rational, and his strong feelings and fears of being irrational.

The Lawyer's fear of Bartleby and of anything that represents 'the Bartleby' in himself is indeed great. The Lawyer attributes enormous power to Bartleby. The seemingly innocent, albeit strange discovery that Bartleby lives on ginger nuts frightens the Lawyer so much that he is forced, in the last sentence, to be flippant:

> He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian, then; but no, he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger-nuts are so called, because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents, and the final flavoring one. Now, what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none. (p. 28)

The Lawyer's tone, a mixture of flippancy and fear, belies his suspicion that Bartleby can indeed perform a miracle--can even neutralize the spice.

As the relationship between Bartleby and the Lawyer becomes more intense, the language becomes at times more convoluted, and the Lawyer's thoughts become more opaque. In the following passage, Melville makes it difficult for the reader to discern who is resisting whom.

> If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity, then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment. (p. 28)

The dense linguistic quality of the sentence conveys the Lawyer's psychological state; the sentence is long and contorted.

Its double negative (not inhumane) and unclear referents defy immediate comprehension.

The Lawyer's psychological upheaval is reflected in another linguistic mode. As the situation intensifies and becomes more and more difficult for the Lawyer, he attempts to make it appear ordinary and matter of fact. Thus, when the Lawyer is especially perturbed, he tends to put his difficulty with Bartleby into legal jargon--straightforward clear and accurate prose.

> Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale young scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, had a desk there; that he copied for me at the usual rate of four cents a folio (one hundred words); but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him, that duty being transferred to Turkey and Nippers, out of compliment, doubtless, to their superior acuteness; moreover, said Bartleby was never, on any account, to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort; and that even if entreated to take upon him such a matter, it was generally understood that he would refuse point-blank. (p. 30)

We have seen the Lawyer's attempts to domesticate the extraordinary--to normalize situations. He has convinced himself that he has done the reasonable in his employment of Turkey and Nippers, and tries to do the same with Bartleby. "He is useful to me," he says, and adds what he hopes is true, "I can get along with him." (p. 28)

By this point in the story, however, the reader is certain that the Lawyer cannot, indeed, get along with him. This is borne out in the next confrontation between the Lawyer and his scrivener. When confronted with yet another "I would prefer not to," (this time to a request to copy papers), the Lawyer is reduced to talking to himself and pleading to everyone for reassurance:

> "Sit down, Turkey said I "and hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it, Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?" (p. 29)

The questions are directed to his employees, but are asked of himself and of the reader as well.

Bartleby's refusal (this time to go to the post office) forces the Lawyer to attribute magical and unearthly powers to Bartleby, who by now, magically 'appears' and 'disappears':

> 'Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.' (p. 30)

While we have become accustomed to the Lawyer's being tamed by Bartleby, Bartleby's actual occupation of the Lawyer's chambers is startling. Now by occupying the Lawyer's chambers, Bartleby has physically and symbolically almost completely taken him over.

> (Bartleby) preferred not admitting me at present. In a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk around the block two or three times, and by that time he would probably have concluded his affairs. (p. 32)

"...I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired."
(p. 32)

The admission of defeat in this very simple language is powerful--especially because it follows contorted rhetoric of evasion. While the Lawyer feels dehumanized at this displacement--even his masculinity is threatened--he typically attempts to minimize Bartleby's outrageous behaviour.

Melville makes the reader feel the Lawyer's desperation, and at the same time to feel the Lawyer's denial that there is anything amiss going on. The images the narrator uses in the following paragraph convey that complex emotional effect.

> Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises. Furthermore, I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning. Was anything amiss going on? Nay, that was out of the question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person. But what could he be doing there?--copying? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. (p. 32) (italics mine)

The Lawyer alternates between feeling close to Bartleby and identifying with him, and distancing himself from Bartleby by referring to him in a clinical manner. Significantly, the Lawyer's attempts at distance from Bartleby break down, and are followed by a strong, emotional reaction. The Lawyer is never reconciled to his own response and the reader cannot know what it will be. Nevertheless at some point the reader feels that the Lawyer articulates the truth;

> I might give alms to his body;
> but his body did not pain him;
> --it was his soul that suffered,
> and his soul I could not reach.
> (p. 35)

We may perhaps consider this thought as one of self-recognition. If only for the moment, the Lawyer is painfully accurate in his perception that in failing to reach Bartleby's soul, he is unable to reach his own.

Following the Lawyer's emotional upheaval and his recognition that he could not reach Bartleby's soul , Melville makes us believe that the Lawyer will somehow work things out. The following passage of straight and unconfused prose reflects the Lawyer's insightful and clear state of mind.

> I walked homeward, thinking
> what I would do with Bartle-
> by. Finally, I resolved
> upon this--I would put cer-
> tain calm questions to him
> the next morning, touching
> his history, etc., and if
> he declined to answer them
> openly and unreservedly (and

> I supposed he would prefer not), then to give him a twenty-dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required; but that if in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if he desired to return to his native place, wherever that might be. I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Moreover, if, after reaching home, he found himself at any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply. (p. 35)

And the next confrontation between the Lawyer and Bartleby reinforces this calm atmosphere, for it is one of the few occasions when the Lawyer talks to Bartleby as a person.

> "Bartleby", said I gently calling to him behind his screen.
> No reply.
> "Bartleby", said I, in a still gentler tone, "come here; I am not going to ask you to do anything you would prefer not to do--I simply wish to speak to you."...
> "Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?" (p. 35)

Yet Melville does not permit this sense of confidence in the Lawyer to remain for long. He slyly forewarns us of the transience of the situation by having Bartleby begin to talk not to the Lawyer, but to the bust of Cicero instead.

> He [Bartleby] did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust

> of Cicero, which, as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head. (p. 36)

In this manner, both Bartleby and the Lawyer are again without contact, and the reader and narrator are once more unsettled.

Soon the Lawyer's former dread of Bartleby emerges in a more vivid and intense manner.

> Somehow, of late, I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word "prefer" upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? (p. 37)

The enormity of this fear reveals itself by a dizzying use of the word "prefer", which occurs twelve times in but a few sentences. Moreover, the deliberate and non-deliberate use of the word "prefer" by the Lawyer, Turkey, and Nippers, makes it clear that everyone has been influenced by Bartleby. Great fear prompts the Lawyer to say:

> ...surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks. But I thought it prudent not to break the dismission at once. (p. 38)

By now we can clearly perceive that whatever compels the Lawyer to keep Bartleby on, it is <u>not</u> prudence. Similarly, the Lawyer's attempt to excuse Bartleby from his refusal to work

appears rational on the surface, but we can perceive the Lawyer's irrational motive.

Significantly, Melville plays with the possibility of reason as inadequate--with the whole notion of reason as inadequate --as an explanation for motive. When the Lawyer asks Bartleby why he no longer writes, Bartleby replies:

> "No more."
> "And what is the reason?"
> "Do you not see the reason for yourself?..." (p. 38)

In an attempt to appeal to reason, to make the response seem normal, the Lawyer fabricates a possible explanation for Bartleby's behaviour. He postulates illness,

> ...unexampled dilligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me (him) might have temporarily impared his vision. (p. 38)

Ironically, the Lawyer's worry about Bartleby's vision is unfounded. We have no reason to believe that Bartleby's eyesight is failing. While the Lawyer's use of vision is a literal one, and a restrictive one, through this word Melville indicates "vision's" broader meaning. Clearly, it is both the Lawyer's and Bartleby's inner visions that are impaired. The Lawyer does not see the reason for Bartleby's not working, nor does he know how to look for it. At this point, neither does the reader.

Our belief that the Lawyer can come to terms with Bartleby diminishes even more when he sees Bartleby as an object--objects do

not have souls. He is referred to as "a fixture in my chamber", "a millstone", "a necklace", "like the last column of some ruined temple." (p. 39)

Finally, when the Lawyer congratulates himself for how well he has managed the situation--we perceive the exact opposite of what he says to be true.

> As I walked home in a pensive mood, my vanity got the better of my pity. I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby. Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker. The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness. (p. 40) (italics mine)

By this time in the story we are prepared to immediately recognize that the Lawyer's "masterly plan" and appeal to "any dispassionate thinker" are said not out of confidence, but out of fear. Not for a moment can we consider his description at face value.

Thus it is no surprise when the Lawyer reverts to a state of hysteria, reminiscent of the state in which he frantically repeated the word "prefer". Now he clings to the word "assumption": he presents six "assumptions" in eight sentences.

> "--I assumed the ground that depart he must;..."
>
> "...upon that assumption built all I had to say."

"It was truly a beautiful
thought to have assumed
Bartleby's departure;..."

"...that assumption was
simply my own,..."

"...I had assumed that he
would quit me,..."

"He was more a man of pre-
ferences than assumptions."
(p. 40)

Yet, no matter how many assumptions the Lawyer presents, Bartleby's preferences cut down all assumptions: for while Melville grants the Lawyer his moments of insights, ("He Bartleby was more a man of preferences than assumptions." p. 40), and his moments of poise ("One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has is just after he awakes in the morning." p. 40), we are always alert to the precariousness of the Lawyer's position. For instance, the "coolness" and "wisdom" of the hour are quickly dispelled. When the Lawyer walks downtown he feels that all of Broadway is sharing in his very personal excitement. And when the Lawyer hears someone bet he assumes, wrongly again, that this bet refers to Bartleby's removal.

"I'll take odds he doesn't"
said a voice as I passed.
"Doesn't go?--done!" said I,
"put up your money." (p. 41)

Nor is the Lawyer aware of his highly wrought state, which he diminishes into "absent-mindedness".

In my intent frame of mind,
I had, as it were, imagined
that all Broadway shared in

> my excitement, and were debating
> the same question with me. I
> passed on, very thankful that
> the uproar of the street screened
> my momentary absent-mindedness.
> (p. 41)

Melville has created a relationship between the reader and the narrator, where the reader is distanced from the narrator. While the Lawyer's self-deceptions are gradually revealed to us, we are at the same time forced to face Bartleby with him. Consequently while we distrust and are amused by the Lawyer's self-congratulatory moments, we are nevertheless involved in his plight. Like the Lawyer we may anticipate Bartleby's "preferences", and yet this anticipation does not prevent us from the shock of his denial. Such a shock occurs, for example, when Bartleby does not let the Lawyer into his own office, telling him,

> "Not yet; I am occupied." (p. 41)

The Lawyer's response is almost as if he were put under a spell in a fairy tale. One cannot talk one's way out of an enchantment, and the Lawyer is cornered again.

Again, there occurs a dizzying use of "assumed" which is used five times in five sentences.

> "...was there anything further
> I could assume?"
>
> "...I had...assumed..."
>
> "...assume that departed he was."
>
> "...carrying out of this assumption,..."
>
> "...doctrine of assumptions..." (p. 42)

While the Lawyer's earlier set of "assumptions" anticipate Bartleby's preference, the second set emerges out of defeat by this preference. When the Lawyer assumes for the second time, his assumptions are more desperate, less grounded in the real situation.

> Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. (p. 42)

This kind of reasoning expresses unbalance. Similarly, it is the defeat of the Lawyer's assumptions that impels him to elevate his unrealistic, even childish plan to ignore Bartleby into "a doctrine of assumptions." (p. 42)

Thus the repetition of "assumptions" by the Lawyer serves to confirm the opposite of what the Lawyer intends. The Lawyer's reliance upon assumptions is but an attempt to gain control of a situation—yet we see his lack of control as he moves from the fantasy of his own death to the fantasy of Bartleby's disappearance. Typically, the Lawyer in his description of being "thunderstruck " avoids any horrors of death. The passage is conspicuously peaceful.

> I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virgina, by summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till someone touched him, when he fell. (p. 41)

Similarly, the Lawyer's attempts to get rid of Bartleby go

no further than to fantasize that he is not there.

> ...I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home-thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. (p. 42)

Ironically it is the narrator, not Bartleby, who cannot withstand that "doctrine of assumptions". Were he but able to do that—that is to treat Bartleby "as if he were air", his efforts might succeed. He cannot do it, and this is clear to us by now.

The latent violence in the Lawyer's tranquil comparison of himself to the man who was struck by lightning, and in his wishful cancelling of Bartleby, becomes explicit in the Colt/Adams incident, which involves murder.[15] We recognize the extremity of the Lawyer's state as he compares himself with Colt, the murderer.

He is not blind to the real similarity between situations: the Lawyer fears the isolation of Bartleby and himself. He too, like Colt, is in a "state of irritable desperation." Most significantly, he fears his own anger—an anger that might lead to murder.

> Bartleby and I were alone.... It was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, up stairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpeted office, doubtless, of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance—this it must have been, which greatly helped

> to enhance the irritable desperation of the hapless Colt. (p. 43)

The Lawyer describes himself as "tempted", and as battling this temptation:

> But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. (p. 43)

The Lawyer typically refuses to make much of his strong uncontrollable feelings, and attributes the defeat of the "old Adam of resentment" to

> ...simply...recalling the divine injunction: 'A ... commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.' (p. 43)

Had the Lawyer remained with this commandment, we could perhaps believe his ease in rejecting the temptation. However, the fact that he turns to other explanations undermines all of them.

The important fact remains that the Lawyer did resist the temptation, and in order to strengthen himself against the temptation, that is Bartleby, he turns ironically to puritan philosophical texts, Edwards on the Will and Priestley on Necessity.[16] These texts afford the Lawyer a larger perspective which permits him to think of his relationship with Bartleby as "predestined from eternity" (p. 44), and as providential.

> Some days now passed, during which, at leisure intervals, I looked a little into "Edwards on

> the Will," and "Priestley on Necessity." Under the circumstances, those books induced a salutary feeling. Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine, touching the scrivener had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. (p. 44)

Consequently the Lawyer's temptation to evil is turned, albeit temporarily, into a good.

> Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen...; I shall prosecute you no more; you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs; in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here. At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact, but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office room for such period as you may see fit to remain. (p. 44)

Yet this larger perspective--religious, philosophical, providential--quickly disappears in the face of the Lawyer's prosaic reality. While the Lawyer seeks solace, he can only find temporary comfort, a comfort insufficient to Bartleby's presence in his life. Thus finally Bartleby makes the Lawyer desperate.

> What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? What ought I to do? What does conscience say I should do with this man, or, rather, ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? (p. 45)

He asks himself questions and answers them himself.

Again in desperation and in need to distance himself from Bartleby the Lawyer resorts to second person usage.

> You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal--you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? You will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that. Rather would I let him live and die here, and then mason up his remains in the wall. What, then, will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribes he leaves under your own paper-weight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you. (p. 46)

The use of "you" here, is somewhat ambiguous. The Lawyer is referring to himself, but the questions are asked of the reader too. However, by now, the narrator's "I" and the reader's "you" are strongly imprisoned by the same problem. The use of "you" is especially interesting: for no matter how involved the reader has been with the problem of Bartleby, that problem has until now been the Lawyer's. This no longer seems to be the case.

Our concern, which was primarily with the Lawyer, kept us from responding directly to Bartleby. Through the use of "you", Melville forces us at this point to be directly concerned with Bartleby. Melville confronts us with a consciousness of our involvement with Bartleby, the force of which we have not, until now, fully recognized. In this sense, our situation is similar to the Lawyer's.

When the Lawyer finally rids himself physically from Bartleby by moving to a new office, he is no less physically distanced from him. The mere anticipation of Bartleby's return makes the Lawyer feel like a prisoner in his new office.

> Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages. When I returned to my rooms, after any little absence, I would pause at the threshold for an instant, and attentively listen, ere applying my key. (p. 47)

The Lawyer cannot easily let go of Bartleby: it seems that Bartleby has become almost physically a part of him. The Lawyer recognizes the perversity of his intimacy with Bartleby --an intimacy which he both shunned and sought.

> ...strange to say--I tore myself from him whom I have so longed to be rid of. (p. 47)

The ambiguity of the Lawyer's relation to Bartleby is brought out when he is held responsible for Bartleby's being a nuisance. He replies,

"I am very sorry, sir,"... "but, really, the man you allude to is nothing to me --he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him." (p. 47)

Yet the Lawyer seems to feel very responsible for Bartleby. He offers him various alternatives, (even humours him, suggesting that he might rely on his "conversation" for employment).

"Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for someone?"...

"Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?"...

"How would a bar-tender's business suit you? There is no trying of the eye-sight in that."...

"Well, then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for the merchants? That would improve your health."...

"How, then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation --how would that suit you?" (p. 48)

But "stationary" Bartleby rejects all offers: and the Lawyer, in desperation, even invites him to his own home.

"Bartleby," said I, in the kindest tone I could assume under such exciting circumstances, "will you go home with me now--not to my office, but my dwelling--and remain

there till we can conclude
upon some convenient arrange-
ment for you at our leisure?
Come, let us start now,
right away." (p. 49)

The reader recognizes and endorses the Lawyer's generosity--his imprudence and charity. We feel he has at this point in the story done whatever was in his power, and we feel that we are as foolish as the Lawyer in expecting a positive response from Bartleby. The Lawyer answers nothing to Bartleby's negation,

"No; at present I would
prefer not to make any
change at all" (p. 50)

because there is nothing more to say. His worry over Bartleby's fate, however, continues with the same intensity.

Interestingly Bartleby, within his distorted vision of life, does know what he does and does not want. He is certain that he wants to make no changes, and certain of whatever he says. The Lawyer who claims to be a man of certainty is not certain about these things. While the Lawyer's insights are often profound, accurate, intuitive and sensitive, he usually seems unaware of this. For instance, he tends to pride himself on certain characteristics which the reader soon realizes are absent: conversely, the Lawyer tends not to be aware of virtues that are present for the alert reader.

In this self-professed, practical man, Melville has created a fine intuition and sensitivity; for example, the Lawyer seems to sense that Bartleby will die. His description in the

following paragraph is like that of a funeral procession:

> Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon. (p. 51)

The Lawyer seems to be haunted by Bartleby's possible death, and there are many images of death in the story even though as we have shown previously the Lawyer will try as much as possible to deny any disturbing emotions and situations.

The following passage shows his effort to maintain an emotional poise and his failure to do so.

> The same day I received the note, I went to the Tombs, or, to speak more properly, the Halls of Justice. Seeking the right officer, I stated the purpose of my call, and was informed that the individual I described was, indeed, within. I then assured the functionary that Bartleby was a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionated, however unaccountably eccentric. I narrated all I knew, and closed by suggesting the idea of letting him remain in as indulgent confinement as possible, till something less harsh might be done—

> though, indeed, I hardly knew what. At all events, if nothing else could be decided upon, the almshouse must receive him. I then begged to have an interview. (p. 51)

This flat, unemotional paragraph ends with the Lawyer's urgent request for another contact with Bartleby.

To the very end the Lawyer tries to explain Bartleby. The Lawyer explains himself to Bartleby--always, and explains himself to the reader--always. At the Tombs the Lawyer pleads with Bartleby for his understanding.[17] Still explaining, he says:

> "It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby," said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion. "And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass." (p. 51)

This pattern of explanation was set up at the beginning, as was Bartleby's absolute stance. Bartleby's last denial, "I know you"...--"and I want nothing to say to you" (p. 51) is the strongest of all. It seems to be born out of knowledge--a knowledge of which both the reader and the Lawyer can have no access to.

It is both ironic and fitting that the Lawyer has tried so hard to rid himself of Bartleby, but Bartleby rids himself of the Lawyer. Bartleby, the absolute, dies a shocking death of starvation. Nevertheless, Melville, through his narrator, has accustomed the reader to Bartleby's absolutism. Thus, we accept Bartleby's death as inevitable, and we do not reject the Lawyer's attempt to dignify it. Bartleby, he says, sleeps "with kings and counselors."[18] (p. 53)

ii. THE EPILOGUE

The technique Melville uses throughout the story is encapsulated in the epilogue. The contradiction between the Lawyer's attempt at composure and the emotions conveyed is strong. Thus the entire epilogue is unsettling, for throughout it the Lawyer tries to be distanced from his experience with Bartleby, but shows that he has remained very much shaken.

The Lawyer tries to undermine the importance of his experience by referring to it as a "little narrative" (p. 53), which is an echo of a "little history" in the introduction. In the introduction the Lawyer stresses caution, safety, moderation, while the epilogue is permeated by a very different emotional tone, created by the strong and extreme images used --"dead men", "assorting...for the flames", "by the cart-load they are annually burned", "a ring--the finger it was meant for, molders in the grave;", "nor eats nor hungers", "died despairing", "died unhoping", "unrelieved calamities", "speed to death". (p. 54)

The rhetoric is grandiose. It is the attempt of a man searching for an absolute and attempting to make his experience meaningful. The epilogue is not to be taken at face value, yet neither is it to be dismissed as inadequate to the Bartleby experience. The Lawyer is desperate still for anything that will 'explain' Bartleby. He tells of a rumour which describes Bartleby's former position as an employee at the Dead Letter Office. For such a 'safe' man to rely upon 'rumour' works to intensify his desperation.

However, this very pedestrian Lawyer has the ability to, and does, set up symbols concerning the dead letters. This 'prudent', conservative man tries (within the context of his own admittedly limited personality) to turn his experience into a general one for humanity. Particularly disturbing is the ambiguity of the final exclamation "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" What connection could there possibly be between Bartleby and humanity? Bartleby is most inhuman: he represents an absolute; humanity is relative.

Still, I do not think that the Lawyer's attempt to unite Bartleby with humanity is to be undermined: it is an attempt to find meaning--an attempt which the reader feels Melville, through his narrator, has encouraged. Thus, author, narrator and reader are brought close together in their search for meaning--for an explanation which would allow for the existence of "a Bartleby" within our notion of humanity.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that while other critical approaches have indeed illustrated certain aspects of "Bartleby the Scrivener", because they tend to approach the story with particular theories, they are less sensitive to its paradoxes and ambiguities. The theoretical bias of each critical approach may distort the story and reduce its complexities. For instance, both biographical and psychological approaches tend to blur the distinction between an artist's work and his life, and thus reduce an imaginary work such as "Bartleby the Scrivener" to events in Melville's life. Literary ironies such as exist in the Lawyer's image of himself (his self-deception for example), may be ignored for less subtle phenomena--Bartleby's pathology, for instance.

Similarly the political and social approaches to the story are interesting in their focus of the impact of society on the individual, yet are felt to be limiting in their stressing of social values at the cost of recognizing the unique eccentricities of the story. Of these approaches, the Marxist one is especially illuminating in its analysis of the worker/boss relationship in a capitalist society; but ultimately it cannot account for the fascination of this particular worker, Bartleby, and this particular boss, the Lawyer. Nor is it able to view their relationship ironically--by the end of the story these two roles are reversed.

In contrast to the social and political approaches, the romantic one heroicizes an anti-social stance, and thus elevates

Bartleby's madness into what can be considered admirable. The interpretation ignores the role of the Lawyer, and ultimately, Bartleby's pain.

Perhaps the two most appealing approaches (significantly, neither had a theoretical basis) are what we have termed the "rational/plea to reason" approach, and the "moral" approach. Both perspectives derive from what is present in the text itself. The "rational/plea to reason" approach is a response to the story's insistent questioning--to the questions the reader is persistently confronted with. The temptation, however, of this approach is to seek final and absolute explanations, and this violates the essence of the story.

Similarly, the moral approach is tempting, because moral issues are so prominent in Melville. While the moral element is very strong, it is also extraordinarily complex. In "Bartleby the Scrivener" Melville plays with moral judgment, and challenges the readers' simplistic moral responses.

The section on general criticism deals with problems of values which emerge out of a recurrent pattern of quest and questor in Melville's work. Problems such as the nature of the quest, its process and end; the assumptions of the questor and assumptions determined by context and character; all demand attention in Melville.

There is much to learn from the approaches I have just discussed, and there is also much to learn from the following quote

from Moby Dick.

> Oh, ye foolish: throw all these thunderheads overboard, and then you will float light and right.
> (p. 277)

In order to "float light and right", I have confined myself to the literary text itself and I have focused on the narrative voice which, because of its rich ambiguities in tone and substance emerges as perhaps the most crucial element for analyzing the story.

We have seen that the story is filtered through a narrator for whom we have contradictory feelings. Melville has achieved this by creating him a complex and inconsistent character. As shown in the thesis, our main response to the Lawyer is determined through his relationship with Bartleby. What we have seen is that the main contradiction in the narrator is between what he tells us and how he behaves; how he responds to Bartleby, and how he would like to respond to Bartleby. Much of the Lawyer's energies are spent in distancing himself from Bartleby, yet at other times this distance fails, and it is almost as if he identifies with Bartleby.

The narrator is not unreliable. He does not lie concerning Bartleby. Certainly, we do not question whether what he says about Bartleby is true or false. In that sense we trust him. We do, however, question what he says about himself--for here he does lie, unintentionally. The Lawyer wants an "explanation" and some tranquility. His tone is consistent with this, but the content of what he says is not.

Even though the Lawyer elicits our trust we do not especially like him. He professes no endearing virtues. He wants to be a super-solid citizen. We do not, nor are we meant to, share his values. Neither does the author seem to. It is important that the Lawyer emerges as a relatively decent man and as one who does not, despite himself, know all the answers. Much as he would want it to be absolute, his rationally based knowledge is relative. Bartleby's irrationality is absolute.

In this sense the story may be seen as an allegory about absolute and relative positions. Ironically, in the introduction, the Lawyer seems to know all the answers in an "absolute" way. His perception of himself is in absolute terms--as the rational man. What emerges from the story, as the Lawyer inadvertently shows himself to us in greater depth, is that through his actions vis-à-vis Bartleby, despite himself he reveals a position which denies himself (and us) complete or absolute answers and reason. He is in fact looking for meaning in life. He talks and rationalizes continuously. Moreover, because Bartleby is virtually silent the Lawyer feels he must talk for both.

At the end of the story the reader feels closer to the narrator than at the beginning. The narrator has revealed virtues which he claimed not to have, especially the capacity for emotional response. We have experienced the ordeal of Bartleby with him--an ordeal which takes us close to the abyss of "absolute" inhumanity.

In being confronted with the Lawyer facing Bartleby, we

are faced with Bartleby as well, and with our own inadequacy to deal with him as an absolute. Although our first impulse might have been to judge the narrator as inadequate our final response is to realize the impossibility of adequacy in such an "absolute" situation, and to recognize the "relative" virtue in the Lawyer's response.

From the thesis it may then be concluded that "Bartleby the Scrivener" is largely about a narrator whose shifting and ambiguous voice is used throughout the story to manipulate the reader and create a growing sense of uncertainty in him. Thus any critical reader must take into account not only the ostensible facts of the story, but also its narrative voice.

Notes

[1]In the thesis I will refer to the story as "Bartleby", "Bartleby the Scrivener", and "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street." The original story first appeared in Putnam's Monthly Magazine in November and December, 1853, as "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," and was later published in other places using all three titles.

A reproduction of the original story may be found in The Melville Annual 1965: A Symposium.

I have chosen to use the Hendricks House edition, edited by Egbert S. Oliver, for the purpose of this thesis. All quotes are taken from it, and it is almost identical to the original version—spelling errors have been corrected in it, and some punctuation is altered.

[2]Leo Marx draws similarities between Bartleby as the artist in society and as Melville himself in "Melville's Parable of the Walls", Sewanee Review, 61, 1953.

[3]Henry A. Murray, "Bartleby and I", The Melville Annual 1965: A Symposium, ed. Howard P. Vincent, Kent State University Press, Ohio, 1966. p. 14.

[4]Ibid., p. 11.

[5]Ibid., p. 11.

[6]Louise K. Barrett in "Bartleby as Alienated Worker", Studies in Short Fiction II, approaches the story from that point of view. She sees Bartleby as a "victim of and protest against the numbing world of capitalist profit and alienated labour." p. 385.

[7]Issues of morality are frequently dealt with. For instance Maurice A. Friedman in "Ishmael, Bartleby, and the Confidence-Man," Problematic Rebel, writes concerning the Lawyer, that "his shadow is existential guilt...the guilt every man feels when he recognizes an unlimited responsibility for another person without the resources to handle it."

[8]and can be considered an archetypal approach to Melville's work.

[9]Richard Hunter Fogle, in Melville's Shorter Tales refers to Bartleby as "the absolutist...the all-or-nothing man."

[10]An extended debate of this is demonstrated in F.O. Matthiesson, American Renaissance.

[11]Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville, New York, 1968, p. 26.

[12]W.B. Dillingham, Melville's Short Fiction 1853-56, New York, 1977, p. 53.

[13]Herman Melville, Moby Dick, Norton, New York, 1967, p. 277.

[14]John Jacob Astor was an enormously wealthy and ambitious real estate magnate and fur merchant, who was active in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries. He was famous during his day because of his attempts to organize the fur trade and to found the city of Astoria (described by Washington Irving in Astoria and mentioned in "Bartleby"). He was also a well-known resident of New York City in which "Bartleby" takes place.

[15]This reference is to the Colt-Adams affair. In January of 1842 John C. Colt murdered Samuel Adams in New York City. Colt was sentenced to death. After all appeals had been exhausted, he was allowed to be married on the day of his scheduled execution. Immediately after the ceremony Colt was left alone with his bride, and at that time she apparently gave him a knife. Later, before the execution could be carried out, Colt killed himself. His death was of some interest to Melville. The affair is mentioned in Bartleby, and some suggest that it might have been used in the ending of Pierre.

[16]Jonathan Edwards, (1703-1758) was an American Puritan theologian and philosopher. Freedom of the Will which appeared in 1754 defined and defended his Calvinist doctrine of human freedom. Joseph Priestley, (1733-1804) was the famous scientist and philosopher who published his case against free will in The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated in 1777.

[17]In the original Putnam's magazine article there was an additional minor character in the story: the grub-man at the Tombs, who is mentioned in other editions, also has a wife. Furthermore, they are named "Cutlet". This name lends even more merit to the claim that food (and drink) imagery pervade the story. Turkey, Nippers, Ginger-nut are examples of this as is, for instance, the Lawyer's statement that:

> "To befriend Bartleby...
> will eventually prove a
> sweet morsel for my con-
> science."

It is important to point out that in the midst of all this food imagery, Bartleby dies of starvation.

[18]Kingsley Widmer in "The Negative Affirmation: Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener,'" Modern Fiction Studies, suggests that this phrase, taken from Job's curses (3:14), is suggestive "of a futile and inexplicable cosmos."

> Why died I not from the womb?
> ...
> For now should I have laid
> still and be quiet. I
> should have slept; then
> had I been at rest,
> With kings and counselors of
> the earth, which built
> desolate places for them-
> selves.

Works by Herman Melville referred to in the thesis

Melville, Herman. "Bartleby"; in Piazza Tales, ed. Egbert S. Oliver, Hendricks House, New York, 1962.

Melville, Herman. Pierre; or, the Ambiguities, ed. H. Hayford, H. Parker, G.T. Tanselle, Northwestern University Press, 1971.

Melville, Herman. Moby Dick, ed. H. Hayford, H. Parker, Norton, New York, 1967.

Melville, Herman. Billy Budd, Sailor (an inside narrative), ed. H. Hayford and M. Sealts Jr., Chicago University Press, 1962.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arvin, Newton. Herman Melville, New York, 1950.

Ayo, Nicholas. "Bartleby's Lawyer on Trial", Arizona Quarterly, 28, 1972.

Barrett, Louise. "Bartleby as Alienated Worker", Studies in Short Fiction, II, 1974.

Bergman, Johaness. "Bartleby and the Lawyer's Story", American Literature, 47, 1975.

Bigelow, G.E. "The Problem of Symbolist Form in Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener'", Modern Language Quarterly, 31, Washington, 1970.

Booth, Wayne C. The Rhetoric of Fiction, Chicago, 1967.

Chase, Richard. Herman Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays, New Jersey, 1965.

Davidson, F. "Bartleby the Scrivener":A Few Observations", The Emerson Society Quarterly, 27.

Dillingham, W.B. Melville's Short Fiction 1853-56, Georgia, 1977.

Dryden, Edgar. Melville's Thematics of Form, Baltimore, 1969.

Felheim, Marvin. "Meaning and Structure in 'Bartleby'", College English XXIII, 1962.

Fogle, Richard,Hunter. "Melville's 'Bartleby': Absolutism, Predestination and Free Will," Tulane Studies in English, IV, 1954.

Franklin, H. Bruce. "Bartleby: The Ascetic's Advent", The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology; Stanford, California, 1963.

Freidman, Maurice. "Ishmael, Bartleby, and the Confidence-Man", Problematic Rebel: An Image of Modern Man, New York, 1963.

Hoffman, Charles G. "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville", South Atlantic Quarterly, 1953.

Kissane, Leedice. "Dangling Constructions in Herman Melville's 'Bartleby'", American Speech XXXVI, 1961.

Kornfeld, Milton. "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", Arizona Quarterly 31, Arizona, 1975.

Levin, Harry. The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, New York, 1958.

Lewis, R.W.B. Trials of the Word, Conn., 1965.

Lewis, R.W.B. The American Adam, Chicago, 1958.

Leyda, Jay. The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, Random House, 1949.

Leyda, Jay. The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1951.

Lubbock, Percy. The Craft of Fiction, New York, 1964.

Ludwig, Jack Berry & Poirier, W. Richard. Instructors Manual to Accompany "Stories British and American", Boston, 1953.

Marcus, Mordecai. "Melville's Bartleby as a Psychological Double" College English XXIII, 1962.

Matthiesson, F.O. American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman, Oxford, 1968.

Marx, Leo. "Melville's Parable of the Walls", Sewanee Review 61, 1953.

Mason, Ronald. *The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville*, New York, 1951.

McNamara, Leo. "Subject, Style and Narrative Technique in Bartleby and Wakefield, *Michigan Academician* III, 1971.

Norman, Liane. "Bartleby and the Reader", *The New England Quarterly* 44, 1971.

Oakland, J. "Romanticism in 'Bartleby' and 'Pierre'", *Medieval Studies*, 1976.

Oliver, Egbert. "A Second Look at Bartleby", *College English* VI, 1945.

Raff, Heather. "Structure and Imagery in Melville's Short Stories of the 1850's" M.A. Thesis, McGill, 1968.

Rosenberg, Edward H. *Melville and the Comic Spirit*, Cambridge, 1965.

Scholes R. & Kellogg, R. *The Nature of Narrative*, Oxford, 1966.

Sedgwick, William E. *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind*, New York, 1962.

Seelye, John. *Herman Melville: The Ironic Diagram*, Evanston, 1960.

Shusterman, David. "The Reader Fallacy and Bartleby the Scrivener", *New England Quarterly*, 1941.

Spector, Robert D. "Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Absurd", *Nineteenth Century Fiction XVI*, 1961.

Stein, Allen. "The Motif of Voracity in Bartleby the Scrivener", *Emerson Society Quarterly* 21, 1975.

Stern, Milton. *The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville*, Chicago, 1968.

Ted, Billy. "Eros and Thenatos in 'Bartleby'", Arizona Quarterly 31, Arizonia, 1975.

Thompson, Lawrence. Melville's Quarrel With God, Princeton, 1952.

Vincent, H.P. ed. Melville Annual 1965: A Symposium: Bartleby the Scrivener, Ohio, 1966.

West, Ray B. Jr. "Primitivism in Melville", Prairie Schooner XXX, 1956.

West, Ray B. ed. American Short Stories, New York, 1959.

Widmer, Kingsely. "The Negative Affirmation: Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener", Modern Fiction Studies 8, 1952.

Widmer, Kingsely. The Ways of Nihilism, California, 1970.