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Kaitlin Eckert

Salve Regina University, kaitlin.eckert@salve.edu

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Kaitlin Eckert

ENG490-Senior Thesis Seminar

Dr. Svogun

Melville and Women in Specific Relation to “Bartleby the Scrivener”

Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” written in 1853, clearly creates a man’s world on Wall Street, but there is no way to fully eradicate the female presence, even from the masculine world Melville has constructed. Feminine qualities are to be found throughout the short story, breaking through the barriers Melville has created, revealing just how much of an impact women had in society despite being thought of as subservient during Melville’s time. The only reference to an actual woman in the story is in a passing remark about “a woman residing in the attic, which person weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments” (*Billy Budd* 21). The personification of nature as feminine is also mentioned briefly, but this is just a poetic device commonly used in reference to nature. Despite these brief mentions of femininity there is a clear message to women that although there may be a physical exclusion, their emotional and psychological presence will always resonate in a man’s mind destroying the notion of a purely masculine world.

There are a number of factors in Melville’s life that may help explain why there are no women in “Bartleby”: a poor relationship with his mother, an allegedly abusive relationship with his wife, and the possibility of his being homosexual may all be contributors to the masculine world Melville creates in “Bartleby.” However, despite the physical absence of women there are clearly female characteristics throughout the story, from symbolism to the feminine characteristics of Bartleby. These attributes could be subconsciously interwoven as result of his

suggested homosexuality, the woman's suffrage movement that was gaining strength during the time, or even as release of Melville's own feminine side; either way there is a clear presence of the Woman even without her being physically present in the story, establishing that there is no such thing as a purely masculine world.

The absence of the female in Melville's "Bartleby" may start with the poor relationship he apparently had with his mother Maria. It has been claimed by one of Melville's many biographers Newton Arvin that

...so long as one speaks of the earliest years, there is no reason to doubt that Maria Melville was warmly maternal, simple, robust, and affectionately devoted to her husband and her brood...[to] Herman himself on the verge of going to sea for the first time, she wrote that she had put together everything she could afford that would make him comfortable...(Arvin 18)

But after the death of her husband and its accompanying poverty, her affection waned. After Allan Melville died when his younger son, Herman, was only thirteen years old the family was left in a state of emotional distress with only one another to fall back on, and

...[it was to Herman's older brother] Gansevoort...Maria had turned as the favored son and almost as a kind of husband, and Herman, as a result, was doubly deprived. His mother could not or would not shower upon him the affection he craved, and the sense of orphanhood began to grow upon him. (29)

The insufficient amount of love his own mother gave him could be a reason behind Melville's small appreciation for women. "To his niece, Mrs. Morewood, he once remarked in

his old age that his mother ‘hated him’” (30). Melville was clearly ambivalent towards his mother; while he hated her for her treatment and scant affection she showed to him, he also loved her. In his novel *Pierre*, Pierre’s relationship with his mother, while disturbing to the point of implied incest, showed Melville’s wish for a close, loving relationship with his own mother (30). For example:

...Pierre now had into the character of his mother, for not even the vivid recalling of her lavish love for him could suffice to gainsay his sudden persuasion. Love me she doth, though Pierre, but how? Loveth she me with the love past all understanding? (*Pierre* 121)

This passage shows the clear love Pierre has for his mother as well as the love she has for him, yet the love he shows go beyond the traditional mother/son relationship. Melville’s poor relationship with his wife and possible homosexuality might be associated with the treatment suffered by his mother. If his own mother refused to love him what reason was there for him to love another woman, including a wife?

Melville’s relationship with his wife was just as poor, if not worse than the relationship he held with his mother. His granddaughter Eleanor has claimed in interviews that the marriage between Melville and his wife Elizabeth “Lizzie” Shaw Melville was not a happy, loving one but rather a marriage full of arguments and abuse. Lizzie was the daughter of Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw who was a close friend to Melville’s father Allan (Arvin 126). It has been suggested that due to Allan’s death when Melville was a young child he was trying to fill a gap by marrying Lizzie. Arvin claims that “Melville’s interest in Elizabeth Shaw may well have been deepened by his need of Judge Shaw’s paternal presence” (126). After their marriage in 1847 Melville wrote

the novel *Mardi*, which “is peppered with protest against the marriage state and praises of bachelorhood” (127).

One example of this protest against marriage found in *Mardi* is when:

...Samoa, the Navigator, had fallen desperately in love with her. And thinking the lady to his mind, being brave like himself, and doubtless well adapted to vicissitudes of matrimony at sea, he meditated suicide—I would have said wedlock—and the twain became one. (*Mardi* 61)

Here the narrator is implying that marriage and suicide are the same. He is essentially saying that getting married means throwing one's life away. The next image of protest is when the narrator depicts the marriage rites of Mardi:

Standing before them, the stranger was given a cord, so bedecked with flowers, as to disguise its stout fibers; and taking the bride's hands, he bound them together to a ritual chant; about her neck, in festoons, disposing the flowery ends of the cord. Then turning to the groom, he was given another, also beflowered; but attached thereto was a great stone, very much carved, and stained indeed so every way disguised, that a person not knowing what it was, and lifting it, would be greatly amazed at its weight. This cord being attached to the waist of the groom, he leaned over toward the bride, by reason of the burden of the drop. (*Mardi* 302)

The phrase “ball and chain” is many times negatively associated with the institution of marriage. This scene represents this phrase literally. The couple being wed is tied together, the chain, and a stone is tied to them, referring to the ball. Bondage is rarely thought of as something positive, so

it is interesting that Melville choose to have vows that include tying each other together. The scene also suggests that the only reason the groom turns to the bride is in order to drop the burden of the stone, rather than his actual desire to turn towards her.

It was obvious that Melville had doubts about the value of marriage based on his reactions to the institution in his works such as *Mardi*. There have even been claims that he was violent towards his wife. Lizzie's niece Josephine Shaw was interviewed by Raymond Weaver about the relationship between her aunt and Melville, and according to his notes on her recollections, "Mrs. Melville planned to leave Herman twice...some crisis possible but not known...Lizzie went back home...Herman violent—Lizzie's life not always safe..." (Delbanco 260-261). According to letters written between Lizzie's brother Samuel S. Shaw and the reverend Henry Whitney Billows, Lizzie was so miserable in her marriage that they were planning to kidnap her in order to get her away from Melville (Kring 140). Samuel states, "If I understand your letter it is proposed to make a sudden interference and carry her off, she protesting that she does not wish to go and that is none of her doing" (140). She did not end up leaving Melville, however, and stayed with him until he died in 1891.

Elizabeth Renker, in her essay entitled "Herman Melville, Wife Beating and the Written Page," refers to Linda Gordon who wrote about wife beating and the battered women's resistance. Gordon claims that "men accused of wife beating countered that their wives were poor housekeepers and neglectful mothers'" (Renker 130). It can be speculated that Melville could have felt this way towards women and is thus the reason behind the brief, and only, mention of the housekeeper living in the attic in "Bartleby." Perhaps Melville believed that the only thing women are good for is to be housekeepers, and should therefore not be heard or seen otherwise. He wishes to keep women out of sight and therefore keeps the one female mentioned

in the story in the attic as if he is storing her away until he needs her, much like he could have treated his own wife.

Melville's troubled marriage may have been a result of his love/hate relationship with his mother, but also of his alleged homosexuality. Perhaps "Melville had 'married in order to combat inclinations that dismayed him'—inclinations, that is, toward his own sex" (Delbanco 199).

Throughout many of his other works, including *Pierre* and *Moby Dick* hints of homosexuality are implied so the idea of it being latent in "Bartleby" is a possibility (Delbanco). In *Moby Dick* the chapter entitled "A Squeeze of the Hand" offers overt images and thoughts of homosexuality. As the men stand around the tub of whale sperm to smooth out the lumps,

I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say...Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other... (*Moby Dick* 393)

It is well known that Melville's mariner stories are semi-autobiographical, based on his adventures at sea. Yet what is less known is the relationships between men that would often develop on board these ships. Another Melville biographer, Andrew Delbanco, claims that

[i]n the maritime world of his youth, the pairing up of older with younger men in a relation known as 'chickenship' was evidently common. When one young sailor, Philip Van Buskirk, asked a veteran seaman in 1853 "Well, White, what's your opinion of those men who have to do with boys?..." White: "...What can a feller do?—three years at sea—and hardly any chance to have a woman. I tell you...a feller must do so..." (200-201)

It cannot be positively stated whether or not Melville took part in such relations but it is not entirely out of the question to suggest that he might have if it were as common as it has been claimed to be. If Melville was in fact homosexual it can be reasonably asserted that he would have no need for women, and has thus created a man's world in the law office of "Bartleby."

While it is unsure if Melville took part in "chickenship" while at sea, it is known that Melville had a significant and complicated relationship with fellow nineteenth century author Nathaniel Hawthorne. The two writers were neighbors in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and became close friends who would spend time at each other's houses to discuss their writing with one another as well as exchange letters. Following the suggestion that Melville may have been homosexual, one would not be wrong to also suggest that the relationship between the two men was not merely platonic. Based solely on the letters sent to Hawthorne and through his lengthy review "Hawthorne and his Mosses," where he claimed that "Hawthorne has dropped germinous seeds into my soul," (Leyda 417) it can be determined that there is a true passion for Hawthorne.

In many of his letters to Hawthorne it is clear that Melville holds a certain attachment to his friend. He writes with romantic notions allowing them read like love letters. In one letter from June, 1851, Melville claims that he "mean[s] to continue visiting you until you tell me that my visits are both supererogatory and superfluous" (429). The letter even goes on to raise the possibility of being in paradise with Hawthorne:

If ever, my dear Hawthorne, in the eternal times that are to come, you and I shall sit down in Paradise, in some little shady corner by ourselves; and if we shall by any means be able to smuggle a basket of champagne there...then, O my dear fellow-mortal, how shall we pleasantly discourse of all the things manifold which now so distress us... (431)

This letter alone has romantic notions of paradise and his wish to keep visiting, but his other letters to Hawthorne are just as, if not more romantic than this one. In November, 1851, after the completion of *Moby Dick*, Melville sent another letter to his neighbor and friend. Hawthorne had apparently given praise to the novel and the letter marks his reaction:

But I felt pantheistic then—your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God’s...Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips—lo, they are yours and not mine. (453)

He then adds in the post script “The divine magnet is on you, and my magnet responds. Which is the biggest? A foolish question—they are *One*” (455).

The letters sent to Hawthorne are clearly full of love, although mostly likely this affection is one sided. Ironically, letters sent from Hawthorne to his wife Sophia read much like the letters Melville would send to him. In one letter Hawthorne writes to Sophia:

Oh, my dearest, I yearn for you, and my heart heaves when I think of you...heaves and swells (my heart does) as sometimes you have felt it beneath you...then our two ocean-hearts mingle their flood. (Hawthorne 55)

In contrast to the letters Hawthorne sent to Sophia, which were exceedingly loving and beautiful, the letters that Melville sent to his own wife were quite the opposite. They were dry, boring letters commenting on events with no real emotional attachment to his wife as was shown for Hawthorne. For example, in a letter he wrote Lizzie from Washington on March 24, 1861, Melville merely recounts the events that occurred on a given day: “Had quite a pleasant evening. Several Senators were there with wives, daughters, &c. The Vice President also & wife” (Leyda

598). The nature of the letter seems to be written in short hand, as if it were an obligation to write his wife, leaving out his feelings and emotions which he seemed to have no problem conveying to Hawthorne. Another letter he wrote a day later to his wife consisted of merely four sentences:

Dearest Lizzie: Felt rather overdone this morning—overwalked yesterday. But the trip will do me good. Kisses to the children. Hope to get a letter from you today.

Thine, My Dearest Lizzie,

Herman (599-600)

Clearly, for Melville, writing to Hawthorne was not a chore but rather a passion. It is obvious in reading the two different letters that there is a preference in his correspondence to his friend rather than his wife. In his November, 1851, letter to Hawthorne he states “What a pity, that, for your plain, bluff letter, you should get such gibberish!” (454). While the letters remain short to his wife Melville enjoyed going in to detail to Hawthorne about his feelings and emotions as well as his daily events.

The poor relationships with his wife and his mother as well as the suggestion of homosexuality may all explain the absence of females throughout Melville’s “Bartleby,” yet there is still clearly a feminine spirit within the story. Deliberately excluding women or not, it is impossible to fully eradicate the female presence. Melville imbues the character Bartleby with feminine attributes such as his pale complexion and soft spoken nature. The question is, if Melville is so opposed to women then why does he create an almost-female character? One possibility is that it was created merely subconsciously. Yet, the short story “Bartleby” was written in 1853, just as the women’s suffrage movement was gaining attention, which may

further explain why a feminine character may have found its way into the masculine world of a Wall Street law office.

The first feminist convention brought three hundred people, forty of whom were men, to Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls in 1848 (Scott 9). They all gathered

“to discuss the social, civil and religious rights of women.” This meeting, called by a small group led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, adopted a Declaration of Sentiments modeled on the Declaration of Independence. (9)

The Declaration highlighted the inequalities between women and men and defines the ideal relationships. Their new Declaration states that:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...” (56)

The feminists’ call for change did not go unnoticed. Controversy erupted as most men believed women should remain submissive and “[a] good many people saw emancipated women as a threat to social order...” (9). Traditionally women had no rights in the eyes of the law. “She could not own property, even her own wages. Divorce laws favored men; women were denied the right to education since all colleges were closed against them” (10). Melville could not be deaf to the calls for female equality. Throughout “Bartleby” his response to the movement seems clear, even if it was not consciously or purposefully done.

Feminine traits are found throughout “Bartleby.” From symbolism to archetypes the female essence is present even when the physical Woman is not. These characteristics show just

how much of an impact women truly have on the world, as even the masculine world Melville created is permeated with the womanly spirit showing that there is no such thing as a man's world, even if it is Wall Street. It is not common for critics to admit to femininity in "Bartleby," but in his essay "The Dialogue of Gender in Melville's 'The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids'" David Harley Serlin refers to Bartleby in passing "...[as] a blurry, ethereal, androgynous enigma who refutes categorization precisely because he no longer fits neatly with the paradigms of masculine 'logic' or female 'pain'..." (86).

Readers are first introduced to Bartleby after he arrives at the Wall Street law office on a summer morning. Northrop Frye claims in *Anatomy of Criticism* that summer represents romance, while Michael Ferber states in *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* that morning represents infancy or youth as well as a moment of illumination. Both of these symbolic images foreshadow the events to come within the story.

The summer romance most likely refers to the lawyer's attachment, if not love, for Bartleby. Summer romances, however, are generally regarded as being merely flings, relationships that will not last long, if at all, after the summer is over. This is evident as the lawyer is first infatuated with Bartleby but then later feels the need to distance himself from him by such extreme measures as moving his office to another location, resembling a break up or even a divorce in the romantic sense. Frye frames a specific plot in terms of a summer romance story in three steps: the struggle, ritual death, and recognition (Frye 186- 206).

During the struggle phase the hero, or Bartleby in this case, undergoes a journey and adventures. In relation to "Bartleby" the struggle, although slight, is against his work in the law office. Bartleby resists working, sending a message to readers, and therefore results in

consequences or the adventures. Such adventures include the abandonment by the lawyer as well as Bartleby's transportation to the Tombs following his continued protest to doing anything at all. Bartleby had gotten used being able to do as he pleased in the Wall Street office, but after a while the lawyer had enough of Bartleby's peculiarities and abandoned him. The lawyer would take care of Bartleby, looking out for his wellbeing and shielding him from the world, but when he moved to his new offices, Bartleby was forced to look after himself as the new lawyer wanted nothing to do with him. This would be just as much of an adventure to women as it would be for Bartleby. Women were used to being cared for by a male figure, and while they protest their need for support it would be an adventure for them once they became no longer dependent on their previous caretakers. Because the new lawyer, who took over the old offices, refused to care for Bartleby and after the narrating lawyer was unable to move Bartleby the police were called and Bartleby was sent away to the Tombs. This is yet another adventure for Bartleby. He must shift from the masculine world of the law office to the masculine world of the city prison. Unlike the law office, however, there was nobody to care for Bartleby and he therefore dies in the prison yard, curled up in a fetal position. Bartleby had protested against doing what male superiors had told him, much like the female suffragists, yet Bartleby could not seem to handle the independence and therefore died as if he were a neglected child. After the lawyer finds him dead he recognizes Bartleby for who he really was, finally seeing past his oddities and exclaims "Ah Humanity! Ah Bartleby!" (*Billy Budd* 46). This exclamation represents the recognition stage and the completion of Frye's romantic plot.

The symbol of the morning can first be explained in *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* when Ferber claims "From the equation of a lifespan to a day, dawn or morning is infancy or youth" (53). In the case of Bartleby this idea of infancy can be related to the beginning of the

story. It can also be in relation to Bartleby himself. Readers can look at Bartleby as if he is a dependent, just as a child is dependent on a parent or even how a female during that time period was dependent on a man. Ferber further goes on to explain that “Dawn may [also] stand for the moment of illumination, as when we say ‘it dawned on me’” (53). Bartleby starts out as the lawyer’s best worker, but after three days he suddenly began to stop working altogether. It’s as if he had that said moment of illumination and therefore stopped working. He no longer wished to be the dependent of another person and therefore refuses to be submissive to anyone, taking control of his own life by doing nothing, refusing to work, much in the same fashion of the women. They began to protest being a mere dependent and the thought that they were only good for doing housework.

While this sense of youth and romance still remains prevalent at the start of the story readers are able to notice that the lawyer treats Bartleby special in comparison to everyone else in the office. The lawyer’s office is divided by a glass wall; on one side his copyists Turkey and Nippers work, while he works on the other side. This glass divider clearly represents a sense of superiority. He remains on his side and they on theirs, yet he is able to watch them, to make sure they are doing what they should be doing and ironically they are able to watch him as well. This imagery can be applied to the treatment of women during this time period. Women were traditionally under the control of men as if Man was boss in relation to the work world. They were told what was expected of them and were always kept an eye on by a male family member whether it was a father, husband or brother. Due to Melville’s treatment and hostility towards women, he clearly believed women to be subordinate.

When Bartleby starts at the law office the lawyer arranges for his desk to be on the lawyer’s own side of the glass divider in order to keep him close; he even sets up a green

partition around Bartleby's desk, green again signifying immaturity (89), in order to give Bartleby privacy yet still being capable of hearing the lawyer when he gives orders. None of the other scriveners were given such privacy. Perhaps this treatment of Bartleby, his hiding him away behind the solid green screen, is an insight to how Melville thought women should be treated. While society believed women needed to be controlled by men, it's possible that Melville believed that women should also be kept out of sight but still in close proximity to do his bidding. Melville apparently wanted nothing to do with them, emotionally or sexually, yet he had no problem using them to do the domestic chores, or in Bartleby's case, office work.

For the first three days of work Bartleby was the prime copyist, he worked from morning until night continuously, unlike Turkey and Nippers who both worked opposite times during the day; while Turkey worked well before noon and Nippers after, Bartleby worked well the whole day. Bartleby represents the women's need to work all day, as caring for a family can be a full time job and they cannot be available for only half the day. It is interesting that Turkey and Nippers work opposite each other and are also opposite in age. Turkey is said to be close to the lawyer's age, near sixty, while Nippers is twenty five. The two copyists are extensions of each other just as Bartleby is an extension of the lawyer. The only time the lawyer is close to being named is when then the new owner of his office comes to him and refers to him as "Mr B—" (*Billy Budd* 39). A small, maybe seemingly insignificant detail, yet both the lawyer and Bartleby share the same initial. More significant to the relation and extension of the two characters can be seen when the lawyer claims:

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...I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause... (3-4)

While the lawyer holds these beliefs it is Bartleby who exaggerates them to the point of doing absolutely nothing, simply staring at the wall.

Walls represent the barrier between people both physically and mentally as if to close ones self off from the world. With this said the location of the story being “Wall” Street must be taken into consideration. Generally speaking Wall Street, even today, is considered to be a man’s world. Wall Street sets up a barrier between men and women with its name alone, much like a physical wall separates people in other rooms. So, when Bartleby enters this male centered world of Wall Street with his feminine oddities, and therefore breaking through this masculine blockade, the lawyer takes it upon himself to become protective of him, partially because he feels that Bartleby is a part of himself. Melville, with his suggested homosexuality, may in fact be stating that femininity is a part of who he is by making the feminine Bartleby an extension of the seemingly masculine lawyer. On the outside Melville was pure man, however in his mind he may have held feminine qualities such as Bartleby’s that would go against societal norms.

The lawyer may also be so protective of Bartleby because of these feminine qualities that Bartleby possesses. He has pale skin, which was traditionally a sign of beauty, and a delicate womanly voice which is at one point described as a “flutelike tone” (15). The lawyer even states that “[t]he passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me” and that he is “harmless and noiseless” (17 and 35). Yet despite his mild manner he stood firm in his position of not doing anything when he repeatedly says “I would prefer not to” (13, 14, 15...). This is reminiscent of the female suffragists who with their “flutelike” womanly voices still remained firm that they would “prefer” to have independent rights such as the right to vote. When asked why the lawyer does not simply ask Bartleby what he actually prefers to do the obvious answer presented itself. If we are to assume that Bartleby is in fact representing the women’s protest then we must be

aware that women were not asked what they wanted but rather told, so the lawyer perhaps understood this on an unconscious level and therefore would not even think to ask Bartleby what he prefers to do. Delbanco states that the word “‘Prefer’ is neither a street word nor an office word; it belongs in a formal dining room, with the ring of silver tinkling against crystal” (Delbanco 216). The word belongs in such a feminine, domestic setting yet Bartleby is using the word to assert his rights in the refusal to do any work in a masculine environment, just as the feminists are declaring their right to refuse to be merely dependents, housewives living in a man centered society. When the lawyer decides to move to a new office and to no longer support Bartleby in his protest Bartleby is described as “...the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room” (*Billy Budd* 30). Although Bartleby is being deserted he remains firmly standing just where he is left, he asserts his protest both with his words of “I prefer not to,” but also with his actions, his refusal to do any work or change position.

The working world consists of a boss and his or her employees. Men during the nineteenth century can be seen as the bosses of a household, either a husband, father, or brother, while the women were their employees. In the work force the workers are meant to listen to their boss and are not supposed to defy them. In Melville’s day women were meant to listen to the men they were dependent on and they were not supposed to challenge them; however, the suffragist movement caused controversy when women began demanding equal rights to men. Many men still believed that women’s rightful place was in the home and that by

demanding the right to vote, it offered a ringing protest against the entire body of legal, moral, social and economic conditions in which women lived, and demanded change in virtually the whole range of relations between men and women. (Scott 10)

Melville displays this sense of controversy through his feelings towards Bartleby first supporting him and his feminist oddities, but after societal pressures his affections faded:

My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. (*Billy Budd* 24)

At first Melville may have been intrigued by the women's call for equality, despite his aversion to them, yet it seems the more he thought about it the more he hated the idea of it, and perhaps that is why the lawyer seemed to change emotions towards Bartleby as he stood for the plea of women.

Louise K. Barnett's essay "Bartleby as an Alienated Worker" written in 1974 discusses the story in Marxist terms, yet the arguments made in the essay may also be applied to the female cause. She states that Bartleby,

...realizing that his work is meaningless and without a future, can only protest his humanity by a negative assertion. Defined only by his job, and becoming increasingly dissociated from it, Bartleby sums up the worker's plight... (323)

Women, while their work was not meaningless (as motherhood should never be thought of as meaningless because they are responsible for raising the future of humanity), are little appreciated and must also "protest [their] humanity." They must fight for their own humanity with their "negative assertion," their refusal to be quiet and subservient any longer. Women were defined by their jobs as mother and housekeepers, just as Bartleby is being defined by his job as a scrivener and they finally had enough and together Bartleby and the women refuse to do what

they are simply told to do. However, if a woman were to refuse her position, she would most likely have been thought of as useless, just as the lawyer felt about Bartleby. “He would do nothing in the office; why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear” (*Billy Budd* 29). Here is not only an implied sense of feminine uselessness, but there is also a direct relation to women when the lawyer refers to a necklace, jewelry worn in most cases by women. In this respect we may view this necklace as another representation of women, which he admits to being useless.

Barnett goes on in her essay to say that

The lawyer’s possessive attitude towards the entire world of his law office exemplifies still another Marxian contention: that a factor contributing to the alienated character of work is its belonging not to the worker, but to another person. (324)

From this viewpoint the lawyer seems to act like the man of the house while the scriveners are the mere women doing the dull women’s work such as the housekeeping. However, they are in fact men and rather than housekeeping, these are men on Wall Street doing the dry, monotonous business of copying boring law documents. The work that women did around the house, much like the work the scriveners did in the law office, is for the benefit of one man. Women did the work for the comfort of their husbands, yet they were expected to do so without any thought of just what a job being a woman really was. The copyists also did the work for the lawyer with little idea of how difficult it could be at times, and with no recognition for their work at all.

Not only are women deprived of recognition for their work but they are given very little mention in “Bartleby.” On the whole there are no bodily women set within the story, yet it is important to note that there is one woman mentioned only in a passing remark, a housekeeper

who is given no credit for her work or her humanity. Her presence in the story, however, is vital to “Bartleby.” The lawyer says:

...there were several keys to my [office] door. One was kept by a woman residing in the attic, which person weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments. Another was kept by Turkey for convenience sake. The third I sometimes carried in my own pocket. The fourth I knew not who had. (*Billy Budd* 21)

Melville gives no details about who this woman is, whether she is young or old or what she looks like. These details are not important, however. What is important is that Melville not only mentioned her at all, but also that he gave her a key to the office, and not just any key, he has given her the first key. Keys literally give the holder the power to open and close locked doors yet they also go beyond this simple notion to represent the power to let certain things, such as people or ideas, in and out of the masculine world of Wall Street. In the matter of the housekeeper Melville has given her a clear sense of power. She has the power to let herself in and out of the masculine world of the law office and into his life. It is within her power to decide whether or not the office should be a man's world or not, but just giving her a key demonstrates that there is no such thing as a purely masculine world. The lawyer gave the housekeeper this key without even realizing how significant the act was, that by giving her a key to his office, his own man's world, he is giving her authority. Women have the power of presence; they have the ability to let themselves be known.

The symbolism of the keys can go even further in relation to Bartleby. The lawyer states that he does not know who had the fourth key, yet he soon finds out that it is in fact Bartleby who is the keeper of this final key. He has the physical power to lock out the lawyer, the man of

the house one could say. Yet by holding this key it reveals just how much power Bartleby, like the female housekeeper, holds over the lawyer. When he finds out that Bartleby has made the office his own home he is in a complete state of shock, so when

[i]n a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk around the block two or three times...[he] had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired. (21)

He is able to tell the lawyer what to do, he is able to refuse to work without fear of harm, and he is still able to draw the affection of another man.

When the lawyer moves to the new office the symbol locks and keys continues. “Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages...But these fears were needless. Bartleby never came nigh me” (38). The lawyer is physically locking Bartleby out, as if in fear of him. Again, when looking at Bartleby as a female entity we see that the lawyer is actually locking out femininity. He is attempting to create a masculine world by keeping out the feminine Bartleby. Bartleby’s power over the lawyer, how he fears Bartleby’s approach in his new office, represents how much of an influence women truly have over, not only the lawyer, but Melville himself, despite his obvious hostility towards them. This masculine world that the lawyer attempts to create is penetrated just as Melville’s masculine world of Wall Street has been shattered, both times by Bartleby. Once the lawyer is in his new office word of Bartleby breaks the sanctity of his male world. The lawyer who has taken over the previous office space has come to our lawyer stating “you are responsible for the man you left there” (38). Even though he has quit the relationship Bartleby

still has a power over the lawyer and women still have an influence over the masculine world that Melville has attempted to create in “Bartleby.”

Despite the power women have in the world, as is shown throughout the story, during the nineteenth century they were considered to be not fully human; they were above slaves, but they were still below men, interesting considering “Bartleby” is a Pre-Civil War story. They weren’t allowed to even own property or get a decent education much like the slaves. This fact is addressed when the lawyer discovers Bartleby has made the office his home. The lawyer asks him “What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?” (33). Women were merely ghosts among society. Bartleby is even referred to as an “apparition” or a “ghost” representing this idea of women in the midst of a masculine society. When the suffragists began to speak out for equality men did not react violently towards the women as they probably would have if it was another class, such as African Americans, who protested years later with violent responses. “...[H]ad there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises” (13). The lawyer could not react towards Bartleby as he would if he were just another man, for if he were another man he would have immediately fired him and let Turkey give him the black eye he so desperately felt like giving him. But Bartleby is such a delicate character that the idea of treating him as a normal man in that society is out of the question. He treated him much like he would have probably treated a woman, carefully, as if trying not to hurt his sensitive feelings or damaging his pallid skin with the hideousness of a black eye.

This careful attitude towards Bartleby shows the affection the lawyer at first felt for Bartleby, bordering on the romantic; however, the lawyer’s attitude towards Bartleby changes—as we have previously noted the lawyer’s feelings change from “pity into repulsion” (24). The

lawyer no longer holds the same amount of affection for the young copyist whom he at first went out of his way to protect. This is the turning point of their relationship and resembles the thought process of someone debating breaking up with their significant other. The lawyer's plan to end their relationship was "to give him a twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required..." (25). This conversion may also represent Melville's own abhorrence of women, especially as a result of his relationship with his mother.

Before his father's death when Melville was young it's possible he loved his mother, but after her affections changed towards him his notions towards women most likely changed as well. Because of his mother's cold countenance towards him his heart turned off to women. However, when the lawyer believes that he was successful in sending off Bartleby, that he was finally rid of him, the lawyer "was almost sorry for my brilliant success" (31). Many times following a breakup there are doubts about whether it was the right decision or not. This moment is the lawyer's rethinking his decision to "breakup" with Bartleby. This reconsideration may be a result of Melville's indecision of how he feels towards his mother. We then see that the relationship is not over, Bartleby is still in the office. For the first time the lawyer asks Bartleby what he would like to do:

"Will you, or will you not, quit me?" I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

"I would prefer *not* to quit you," he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*. (33)

Questioning what Bartleby resembles asking a woman what she wants, something that was rarely done during the time period. But here the lawyer, or even Melville, is finally beginning to submit

to the equality of women by merely asking Bartleby what he plans to do rather than simply telling him.

Despite Melville's resentment of women, and therefore excluding them from the story, there are a number of archetypes that both the lawyer and Bartleby represent which make up for the missing women. The lawyer clearly represents the lawyer, the father, and the lover archetypes, while Bartleby represents the rebel and the scribe.

Simply by referring to the lawyer by the title he introduces himself as, readers are able to assume without much of a doubt that he is portraying the lawyer archetype. The lawyer archetype is, in general, an advocate for social changes for certain groups through an act of writing or artwork ("A Gallery"). The lawyer is the narrator in "Bartleby," essentially the writer as he is telling the story, and acts as an advocate for Bartleby who goes against the norms of manhood in his society. His feminine qualities and peculiarities seem to draw the lawyer to him. Women traditionally made home their work, taking care of the house and the children, yet Bartleby did the opposite, he made work his home. The lawyer also made work his home, although not in the same sense as Bartleby. The lawyer is the man of the house overseeing everyone else, giving orders and expecting others to follow. The women's movement was attempting to gain more independence, thus replacing the need for a boss, much like Bartleby and his refusal to do what he is asked, as well as making the office his home, and refusing to let the lawyer into their shared home when he was not ready. The obscurity of the situation is meant to get the reader's attention and forces him or her to think about the meaning behind it. It is almost as if he is supporting the feminine movement through a male entity, giving Bartleby the power to overcome the traditional male and female roles set in place by society. Bartleby, the

female in this situation, is gaining control over the house which belongs to the lawyer, his pseudo-husband in the idea of domesticity within the office setting.

The idea of the lawyer goes further in the humorous scene between Bartleby and the lawyer which takes place on the stairs. In this scene Bartleby speaks more than he has previously done in the story and it almost seems like negotiations between two parties. The lawyer gives suggestions, however, he is still unable to give in and ask what Bartleby truly wants to do. Because the lawyer merely give suggestions and does not ask, Bartleby still refuses all of his offers, while maintaining “I am not particular” (*Billy Budd* 40).

The lawyer also acts as a father figure for Bartleby. He cares for him and shields him from the world as he does not want anyone to judge him. “If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less-indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve” (17). He wishes to keep Bartleby safe and away from the cruel treatment from the world, much like he was his child or a woman who obviously needs taking care of merely because she is a woman. When Turkey wants to punch Bartleby in the eye he protects him like any father would try to protect his child against a bully on the playground.

Despite the lawyer initially ignoring society by humoring and protecting Bartleby as a father figure, eventually societal pressures got to him:

At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. (36)

Society could not get past Bartleby’s uniqueness and they had no wish to foster him as the lawyer did. Although the lawyer started out wishing to protect Bartleby he soon abandoned the

cause as he moved offices and physically abandoned Bartleby. Although the lawyer was originally a caring father figure he soon shifts into a bad father, abandoning his dependent. When the lawyer goes to see Bartleby in the Tombs he finds him “Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby” (45). He is in a fetal position, dead in the position of birth, as if he is the miscarried child of the lawyer who abandoned him and therefore feminizing the lawyer as well.

Fatherly love is not the only love the lawyer conveys towards Bartleby. He also seems to show a romantic love for Bartleby making him fit the lover archetype. He devotes a sort of passion to him by the way he treats Bartleby in relation to the other men in the office. The lawyer treats him differently, having his desk on his side of the divider, not becoming aggressive when he refused to do his work or leave the office, and he even at one point says:

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. (14-15)

This statement sounds a lot like something a person would say after they have fallen in love. He has been touched by Bartleby and now feels a bond with him which most often forces the lawyer to think with his heart rather than his head when it comes to the treatment of Bartleby. The lawyer even at times becomes consumed in thought about Bartleby. When walking down Broadway he over hears men taking bets on something and the lawyer, so deep in his own thought, thinks that the men are taking bets that Bartleby has left the office:

The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby...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. (31)

When someone is in love many of their thoughts are consumed by one person. They cannot help but think of the one they love, or to talk about them. The lawyer is clearly displaying this idea of love's consumption in the scene on Broadway. The idea of Melville's possible homosexuality may be manifested by the relationship between the two men, therefore the exclusion of the female love interest. The lawyer is near sixty but never once mentions having a wife, perhaps because of Melville's derision towards marriage which is so plain in *Mardi*.

After the break up the lawyer still feels a sense of responsibility towards Bartleby and takes it upon himself to find him a new situation. Again we refer to the scene on the staircase. It's as if the lawyer is attempting to find a new man for our feminine Bartleby to be dependent on. He even says "'How, then, would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation—how would that suit you?'" (40). Clearly this is a joke as Bartleby is anything but talkative, yet the message is clear that the lawyer is attempting to set him up with a new masculine superior. When that fails to impress Bartleby the lawyer then offers to take him home with him. "...will you come home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure?" (41). It is interesting that the lawyer has to verify which home he meant, for the two seem to consider the work office their home. Bartleby still won't budge, though. He has been abandoned by the lawyer and has asserted his independence by his refusal to do work in the home.

The relationship between the two men is clearly a subversive notion during the time period in which the story was written, segueing in to the idea that Bartleby fits the rebel archetype. The rebel in general rejects authority simply because what is being asked is uninteresting (“A Gallery”). Bartleby clearly fits this mold as he continuously responds with “I prefer not to” whenever the lawyer asks him to do anything, even the smallest of tasks, such as moving. This exaggerated rebellion of not doing anything at all brings the attention of the readers that there is something more behind his refusal whether it be his reasoning or Melville’s own thoughts. In this case we will look at Melville’s rationale behind Bartleby’s continuous refusal to do anything, although it may be unconsciously done. Delbanco mentions in his own analysis of the story that

“Bartleby” touches a nerve with every reader who has ever tried to manage an unmanageable relationship with a parent, child, lover, spouse—anyone who compels our better self to try and try again but pushes us toward cruelty and a final “Enough!”
(Delbanco 219)

Bartleby’s rebellion may be looked at in parallel to the women’s rebellion against masculine authority in their fight to gain independent rights. Bartleby’s refusal to do his work in the office, which he has made his home, stems closely to women’s refusal to be merely domestic workers, they are finally saying “enough.”

It is important to note the prison scene in relation to the protest. Bartleby refused to quit his protest. He remained strong even after the lawyer abandoned him. Bartleby had to be physically removed from the office only to be transported to the prison known as the Tombs “as a vagrant” (*Billy Budd* 42). It is almost reminiscent of those who had to be carried off to prison in

protest to a war or some such matter. In this case Bartleby is in protest to work, or in protest to domestic work. The prison also has a deeper meaning. Many of the women must have felt as if they were trapped in a life of domesticity, no opportunity to own property, vote, or just live their own lives. Their lives in their homes were like living in a prison. Bartleby literally goes from his home in the office to the prison. In the office he had power, he could choose to leave if he wished, after all in the reality of the story Bartleby is a man, but in prison he did not have this choice. He had the freedom to walk around the prison as he pleased, just as women were allowed to wander, yet he is still locked up as women were locked in their roles of domesticity. Bartleby finds himself once again isolated among men. He goes to the courtyard which "...was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them" (45). Again, Bartleby is the feminine entity in the masculine world of the Tombs, even referred to as not being a "common prisoner." The Tombs was in fact so masculine that the traditionally feminine role of cooking was taken on by a man and yet he is capable of remaining masculine.

Not only does Bartleby fit into the rebel archetype, but he also fits the role of the scribe, as that is his job title in the law office. The job of the scribe is to copy what is already known, to preserve it, in Bartleby's case he is preserving knowledge in a law office ("The Gallery"). The idea of the rebel is introduced when the scribe, Bartleby, after three days of copying, refuses to copy anymore documents, or in fact to have anything to do with them at all. It's as if he rejects the law that is already set in place by society. Women during this time were also fighting the laws set in place which made them invisible, refusing them property or a vote. They rejected the law much like Bartleby did by simply refusing to preserve it.

There are a number of factors in Herman Melville's life that would persuade him to exclude women from many of his works, in particular his short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener." An unloving mother, a supposedly violent relationship with his wife, as well as rumors of homosexuality with a special interest in Nathaniel Hawthorne are just to name a few of the more obvious reasons behind Melville's disregard for women in his works. However, despite his clear hostility towards women, whether in response to the feminist movement gaining strength or in response to his own confused feminine nature, Melville was unable to fully eliminate a female essence with in "Bartleby;" throughout the story hints of femininity seep through the "walls" of the masculine world of "Wall" Street and the masculine world is no more.

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