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The Narrator's Self-Justifying Rhetoric in Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*

Abstract

This study explores "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" by Herman Melville (1853), employing the lens of defamiliarization to accentuate the narrator's self-justifying rhetoric aimed at shaping the reader's perception of events and deflecting blame in Bartleby's tragic tale. By focusing on the rhetorical devices in the narrative, this research aims to elaborate on their manipulative function in diminishing the emotional impact of Bartleby's eccentric attitude, ultimately leading to his tragic demise in prison. Despite the narrator's apparent internal conflict between conscience and prudence, a close examination of specific instances where he disrupts the standard syntax, constructs a modest image of himself with litotes, and fosters disdain for the scrivener through epithets, reveals the narrator's underlying anxiety about how the reader perceives his image. Through defamiliarization, Melville crafts a narrative where the familiar—such as the narrator's supposed sincerity—is rendered strange, prompting readers to question the motives and reliability of the storyteller in portraying the tragedy of Bartleby.

Keywords: Bartleby, stylistics, discourse, hyperbatons, litotes, epithets

Introduction

Style is distinctive and, in essence, the sum or the set of linguistic features that embody certain characteristics, such as genre, period, or register. Burke (2014) divides style into three main categories:

the high, the middle, and the low[1]. The high style is related to literature, one that influences thinking patterns, whereas the low is mainly used for more mundane uses of discourse. The middle, as can be guessed, is an invariable mix of both to be used in intermediate cases. Gibbons and Whiteley (2018) take style to be "fundamentally concerned with the relationship between linguistic form and literary meaning and interpretation" (Gibbons, Whiteley 2018: 3). This relationship has come into existence as stylistics today. Stylistics, also called "literary stylistics" by many, is "the study and analysis of texts; it is in particular, although not exclusively, the study and analysis of literary texts" (Burke 2014: 1). Nørgaard *et al.* (2010) define stylistics as "the study of the ways in which meaning is created through language in literature as well as in other types of text" (Norgaard *et al.* 2010: 1). Therefore, using many analytical tools, such as theories and language models, stylistics can, for that matter, be regarded as the study of *style* in a literary work. While analyzing a text in question, an analyst might prefer not only qualitative but also quantitative research with the assistance of many fields like phonology, lexicology, semantics, grammar or other technical features of the text. Reed (1949) defines qualitative analysis as "the nature and variety of a given phenomena" and a quantitative one as "the magnitude and frequency of such phenomena" (Reed 1949: 235). Therefore, while doing stylistic analysis, the qualitative argument is supported by quantitative data. Chatman (1967) writes, "the computer is not going to tell us, at this stage at least, what the interesting questions are" (Chatman 1967: 29). Therefore, it depends on the analyst's competence to throw the right questions at a literary text to conduct a stylistic analysis. As the exploration of style and stylistics delves into the intricate relationship between linguistic form and literary meaning, it becomes evident that this field employs a myriad of analytical tools. Analyzing texts involves qualitative scrutiny and integrates quantitative research methods, drawing from diverse linguistic disciplines. This multifaceted approach is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the nuances embedded in literary works. Beyond the methodologies, the evolution of stylistics has been influenced by historical and intellectual developments.

Originating from the structuralist tradition, particularly shaped by Saussurean principles, stylistics found its early champion in Charles Bally. A student of the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure, Bally published a two-volume treatise on French *stylistique* in 1909, and more attention followed across Europe. However, it wasn't until the 1960s that stylistics gained substantial attention, with significant contributions from Russian Formalism, particularly the principles of defamiliarization elucidated by figures like Shklovsky. This concept of defamiliarization, as we shall explore, plays a pivotal role in understanding the aesthetic impact of literary texts on readers' perceptions. At the heart of Formalism is the notion that "all art was to defamiliarize the familiar to generate for the viewer or reader a new perspective on the topic of the piece of work under consideration" (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010: 2). This is Sklovksy's principle of defamiliarization. He argues that the more things become familiar, the less attention we pay them. We even stop noticing entirely. This is usually the case in everyday language; it somehow gets automatized. Therefore, it is the power of literary texts to enable people to perceive the world from a different perspective in a way to "de-automize". This deautomatization process directs one reader to have a distinct reading experience, and one might focus on or notice certain elements that come to the fore. "The purpose of defamiliarization is the desire to increase both the effort and the duration of a perceiver's experience of a text" (Emmott and Alexander, 2016: 290). In so doing, a text in question has

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1   In addition to Burke's classification, such types of style as biblical, the baroque, the Ciceronian (high, grand, ornate), the Attic, the Rhodian, the Asiatic, the Euphuistic, the Gorgianic, the Senecan, the Elizabethan, the Restoration, the modifying, nominal, passive and verbal have also been concocted by scholars.

an aesthetic effect on the reader as the defamiliarization process is often entwined with a literary work as a form of art.

This artistic effect is achieved through the textual and linguistic content, which is often translated as the concept of *foregrounding*. First used by Jan Mukarovsky in 1964, the term highlights "the poetic function of language, in particular, its ability to deviate from the linguistic norm and to create textual patterns based on either parallelism, repetition or deviation from a norm" (Burke 2014: 41). In our daily routine, foregrounding something is to focus particular attention to it or to highlight it, whereas in stylistics, it "refers to the ways in which certain aspects of a text can be made to stand out or appear prominent through forms of textual patterning" (Gibbons and Whiteley 2018: 15). For example, if a narrator in a story or a character has a peculiar way of using language, that peculiarity, whatever its content may be, can give hints about such things as his/her characteristics, mind style, psychological traits, interests, intellectual capacity. The defamiliarization process then allows foregrounded patterns to surface, which enables readers to make versatile interpretations of the material rather than just understanding its context.

Written by Herman Melville in 1853, *Bartleby the Scrivener* is a text in point because of the distinctive linguistic patterns it includes, specifically its narrator's use of language. It is about the strange case of Bartleby and the narrator's difficulty in handling his employee's peculiar nature of passive resistance. One day, Bartleby tells his employer (also the narrator) that he "would prefer not to" (Melville [1853] 1996: 32). Therefore, the story continues with Bartleby's reluctancy to reveal the reason for his rebellious act of non-conformity and the narrator's inability to understand this resistance. The story has been viewed by many as an example of social criticism that deals with the effects of capitalism as it was during the 1850s. It provides insight into universal matters of humanity, such as passivity, alienation, and even psychological imprisonment. It is a highly appraised work for its ability to embody multiple interpretations. However, apart from its thematic content and possible lessons for humanity in terms of literary economics or marketplace realities accommodated in it, the story has certain stylistic features that allow for a more comprehensive interpretation of the narrative style of the narrator-employer. The narrator, as argued in this study, manipulates the reader and diminishes the emotional effect of Bartleby's case and eventually death and keeps himself as the focal point, in a way, to justify his guilty responsibility for the tragic end of the scrivener's, whom he calls "Poor fellow!" (Melville [1853] 1996: 36). This study aims to focus on the selected rhetorical devices, such as hyperbaton, litotes, and epithets that the narrator adopts in his acquitting himself of his guilty conscience in the story of Bartleby.

Literature Review

Throughout the story, the narrator, upon Bartleby's passive resistance, is waiving between his conscience and his prudence, and we are provided with a very detailed insight into the narrator's feelings about the goings-on. He is yet consistent and tries to remain intact in his handling of Bartleby and persists in pushing Bartleby into compliance. However, the narrator cannot neglect or leave Bartleby behind because of his guilty conscience. Even after resorting to changing offices with his inability to remove Bartleby from his premises, or when he ends up in the Tombs (the prison), the narrator feels responsible for Bartleby because he is the only character in the story that Bartleby "haunts" for real. As McCall (1989) writes, "ghosts do not waste their time on people who cannot see them; ghosts haunt only the people who deserve them"

(McCall 1989: 152). Bartlely's passive resistance is provocative for the other two scriveners in the office, and he manages to pull the two into fury, yet the narrator, though frustrated at Bartleby's non-conformity, cannot help but get engrossed in Bartleby. Miller (1975) holds that it is about the "familial bond between them" and "the antagonism of father and son" (Miller 1975: 264), and Matsumoto (2010) even implies "a true blood relationship between the two" (Matsumoto 2010: 145). Zlogar (1999) argues that Bartleby is schizophrenic; Kuebrich (1996) sees Bartleby's unwillingness to obey and work as his response to the inequality in the capitalist world and exploitation of workers; Foley (2000) explains Bartleby as a picture of the alienation of labor in the capitalist economy that is rationalized in its way and Fiene (1970) sees Bartleby as an "incarnation of Christ" (Fiene 1970: 21).

Smith (1988), on the other hand, considers Bartleby "as a victim to the law of entropy" (Smith 1988: 155) and asserts that the character uses his life and death to show the inevitability of entropy and to make the narrator aware of "the pointlessness of the activities with which we delude ourselves into believing that our lives have purpose or meaning" (Smith 1988: 156). After all, all Bartleby does is the dull, repetitive task of copying legal documents. As we learn from the story, the character was once a dead letter clerk, and in his new job as a scrivener, he only perpetuates the legal system that is itself futile. In the Dead Letter Office, he was processing letters that were not meant to be communicated. Similarly, copying legal documents that do not even serve human needs or proofreading them with another person is a useless and painful parody of the obstruction and the futility of human communication.

As for Bartleby's physical surroundings, the Master in Chancery (the narrator) gives him a spot in the corner and places a screen to provide him with some privacy. The narrator is of the belief that "privacy and society were conjoined" (Melville [1853] 1996: 31). Yet, all the "society" Bartleby receives from the narrator is asking for extra labor of proofreading, which is always rejected. By depriving Bartleby of contact with other scriveners, the narrator believes he does Bartlely a favor by leaving him in his "hermitage" surrounded by walls and a window that looks at a "dead" brick wall ten feet away. No light is admitted into the room, which indicates there is no reality but the microcosm of that office. Springer (1965) observes that such wall images dominate the story, so Bartleby becomes "wall-like," just like the inanimate articles around him. He thinks that the "wall-likeness touches all those things which have the characteristics of solids, the inanimate, the immobile, the death-like, and these things become representations of what it is that drives Bartleby" (Springer 1965: 414). Bartleby is not exposed to any human activity but his dull copying, thus seeing no meaning in human activity. This, in return, triggers a self-imprisoning impulse in him, and he not only refuses to copy but also never leaves the confines of the office. Not surprisingly, when he is forcibly taken to prison at the end, turning his back to the other prisoners, he "prefers" to stand "all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall" (Melville: 64).

Newman (1986) points out that "formalists of all kind, whether their concerns are structural, linguistic, or stylistic, have found much to say about 'Bartleby'" (Newman 1986: 61). Fogle (1960) is the first to express an opinion in Melville's "blending meaning with structure" (Fogle 1960: 26). Bigelow (1970) and Bickley (1975) commented on the forms in the story, elaborating on the author's manipulation of perspective in narration, with the narrator being "a sentimental anecdotist" and "the ironic protagonist" (26). From a structuralist point of view, both Marx (1953) and Felheim (1962) make a triadic division of the story with their analyses. At the same time, Marx (1953) sets up "three consecutive movements," which follow Bartleby's resistance to the routine, the narrator's attempts to force Bartleby to conformity, and finally, "society's punishment of the recalcitrant writer" (Marx 1953: 608). Felheim (1962) focuses

on the office and the narrator, happenings at the office, and the entering of society with the narrator's lawyer friends (Felheim 1962: 117–120).

Formalists, on the other hand, have categorized the story as a comedy. Stone (1949) finds Meville's comic style fundamental to the story (215). Rosenberry (1955) holds that the story includes the "full range of Melville's comic genius" (Rosenberry 1955: 6) and that "a substantial comic frame for his [Melville's] weird nihilistic drama" is constructed (Rosenberry 1955: 145). Guido (1957) assesses Bartleby as a stereotypical tragic clown who is exhausted when introduced to the story; even the scrivener's white face could be compared to a traditional clown (Guido1957: 101). Melville's story has its share of deconstruction as well. Joswick (1978), for example, equates Bartleby's strange case with how a deconstructionist might reject the established values that are historically constructed. He believes the scrivener's bleak attitude is a direct answer to "the empty masquerade of Western metaphysics that would assure us of origin, purpose, and end for our history" (Joswick 1978: 80). Rowe (1982) introduces a poststructuralist examination of Melville's Bartleby. He asserts that Derrida's *differance* is embodied in the character, that is, "the uncanny and vagrant property in language that motivates expression" (Rowe 1982: 112). Rowe indicates that Bartleby is a "defamiliarizing" agent, playing a similar role to the literary language that destroys historically implanted meanings and establishes a feasible present (Rowe 1982: 128).

As for the stylistic perspective, Kemp (2001) writes that "while the lawyer-narrator dominates the speech acts in the story, Bartleby offers linguistic minimalism" (Kemp 2001: 68). Yet, despite this distinction, the lawyer is chained to Bartleby because they are, even though they appear to be two distinct characters on the surface, very closely linked. Kissane (1961), for instance, takes the grammatical ambiguity into consideration and holds that it connects the narrator to Bartleby (Kissane 1961: 199). She summarizes the emotional adventure of the narrator as "ignoring, adjudging, insane, questioning, escaping from and returning to, caring for, and finally identifying himself with" Bartleby (200). Her argument is based on "the speciousness of the rationalizing, [...] out of place in a legal practitioner," of the narrator, who is "frantically dashing about excuses to justify putting up with his charge" (Kissane 1961: 198). However, as argued in this study, the narrator structures his narration rhetorically such that we, as the readers, are summoned to sympathize less with the story of "the wasted Bartleby" (Malville [1853] 1996: 6). The rhetoric shifts the reader's interpretation of what happened and deflects responsibility in Bartleby's tragic story. This study aims to dissect the rhetorical devices used in the story to understand their manipulative role in lessening the emotional impact of Bartleby's eccentric behavior and ultimately contributing to his tragic demise in prison.

Findings and Discussion

Despite the narrator's ostensible internal conflict between morality and conscience, the study argues that an in-depth examination of particular instances in which the standard syntax is broken, a modest self-image is constructed through litotes, and contempt for the scrivener is nurtured through epithets, reveals an underlying anxiety in the narrator. His primary source of worry is how the reader will perceive his image. Melville creates a story in which seemingly familiar elements – like the narrator's professed sincerity – are made strange using defamiliarization. As he narrates the tragedy of Bartleby, the storyteller's intentions

and dependability are called into question by this purposeful estrangement. Therefore, the study seeks to highlight the nuanced details of the narrative structure, encouraging readers to interact critically with the narrator's persuasive devices and reconsider how they perceive the characters and events in this timeless work.

First, the narrator does not have a general habit of inverting his sentences throughout the story. Strangely enough, only when he contemplates Bartleby does the narrator resort to inversion, which he does with only the verb *think.* As a rhetorical device, hyperbaton is "a figure of speech in which "normal" word order is transposed by inversion or fronting" (Wales 2011: 202). George Puttenham calls hyperbaton "the trespasser" (Whigham and Rebhorn 2007: 252). That a narrator or a speaker deliberately changes word order could be a common observation in many literary texts, yet in Melville's story, the narrator frequently inverts the sentence structure with the verb *thought* and the subject *I*, which seems to create a sense of unintentionality, and thus unaccountability in the fate of his employee, Bartleby. It could be a way for Melville to convey a sense of introspection or contemplation on the narrator's part. By deviating from the usual word order, the author draws attention to these moments and suggests a more nuanced or reflective state of mind. It might indicate moments of uncertainty, introspection, or a deeper engagement with the character's thoughts and feelings.

The word *thought* appears thirty times in the story, yet the strange case is that when the verb is related to another employee like Turkey, or when he is in an attempt to justify his doings, the narrator tends to use it in the regular word order. When he says, for instance, "I thought Turkey would appreciate the favor" (Melville [1853] 1996: 28), or "[…] which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey" (Melville [1853] 1996: 30), the reader does not feel any suspense in the stream of thoughts. However, after Bartleby utters "I would prefer not to" (Melville [1853] 1996: 32) for the first time upon the narrator's request from him on the very following page, the narrator says, "This is very strange, thought I" (*ibidem*). Another example is when the narrator contemplates what Bartleby feeds on; he says, "He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I" (Melville [1853] 1996: 36). When he seems to show sympathy for Bartleby and his eccentricities, the narrator goes, "Poor fellow! Thought I" (*ibidem*). While speaking his emotions about Bartleby, it is as if the narrator seems to create a daydreaming effect and alienate himself from the responsibility of whom he later calls "the strange creature I kept in my office" (Melville [1853] 1996: 57).

After that section in the story, the narrator has eight more uses of the verb *thought*. It is almost as if the usages were mathematically planned and placed to create a specific effect. This is because the first two uses are in regular word order. Strangely, the next two include hyperbatons. The following two are again in regular word order, yet finally, the last two are hyperbatons. The narrator tends to adhere to the conventional word order when he is more self-centered and has a decided attitude. In contrast, when the thought is directly about Bartleby, *I thought* becomes *thought I* such that the function is a perception that the idea in his mind is created inadvertently.

The first example in the standard word order is when the narrator cannot receive any response from Bartleby upon his request. He says, "I thought it best to put on my hat and walk home for the day" (Melville [1853] 1996: 39). The narrator responds to the situation and prefers to leave. This is when the narrator has already been exposed to Bartleby's infamous "I would prefer not to" expression one after the other about seven times. "As the days passed on, [the narrator] became considerably reconciled to Bartleby. His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry, [...] his great stillness,

his unalterableness of demeanor, [...] made him a valuable acqusition" (Melville [1853] 1996: 40). The narrator is surprised and trying to make sense of the situation, yet does not challenge Bartleby in any manner. Following this section, the second use of *thought* in regular word order is after visiting Church on a Sunday morning: "I thought I would walk to my chambers for a while" (*ibidem*). However, on that Sunday morning, upon finding out that Bartleby has been sleeping in his chambers all this time, he goes, with a hyperbaton, "Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here" (Melville [1853] 1996: 42). The narrator pities Bartleby, and in solid feelings of surprise and sadness, yet within seconds, he admits, "These sad fancyings – chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain – led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby" (Melville [1853] 1996: 43). This is like a breaking point when he decides to go to Bartleby's desk to find information about him. The narrator says, "I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I; besides, the desk is mine" (*ibidem*). This final utterance makes it clear that the narrator is now in an intentional state of justification before the readers. However, the use of *thought I* is intended to create the effect of inadvertence; that is, he gives in to an uncontrolled feeling of curiosity.

On the other hand, the following two uses of *thought* are in regular word order. Therefore, the narrator's use of the verb *thought* has a dangling bivalency; that is, when there is a hyperbaton, the narrator is not entirely in control of his thoughts, therefore, not accountable, and the other is, when the narrator uses the regular word order, he is the focalized point. He seems to consolidate himself as a man who can make wise decisions with sanity; yet again, he is not accountable in his attempt to send Bartleby away. As he admits, Bartleby "not only disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me" (Melville [1853] 1996: 34). "Disarmed" and "disconcerted;" there is no other way he could keep the scrivener in his business, but he has to do it "as decently as I could" (Melville [1853] 1996: 49). As a result, the hyperbatons make us think the narrator is doing what he must without harming the scrivener. With this, Bartleby's tragic condition is deflected, and the narrator's rhetorical employment of hyperbatons is meant to diminish the readers' sympathy for the scrivener. As Post-Lauria (1993) also writes, "by extracting sentimental rhetoric," the narrator "maintains narrative control and superiority over his subject" Post-Lauria (1993: 201). Hence, it is not only Bartleby but also the readers of his accounts of events that the narrator intends to keep his superiority over. With that, the readers of his narration turn into the narrator's controlled "subjects" together with Bartleby. He intends to reshape Bartleby's way of thinking, the readers' overall interpretation of the story, and how they see him as a character.

On the other hand, the narrator seems especially concerned about crafting a persona starting from the beginning of the story. The rhetorical device of litotes appears to be strategically employed to shape and delicately present a modest self-image throughout the narrative. Litotes, a figure of speech rooted in understatement, allows the narrator to utilize negative expressions to emphasize positive qualities. Through subtle linguistic nuances, the narrator navigates the delicate balance between self-deprecation and assertion, developing an image that is both unassuming and quietly self-assured. The placing of litotes in his speech contributes to the complexity of the narrator's character, revealing a strategic manipulation of language to influence the reader's perception of events and characters within the tragic tale of Bartleby. From the beginning of the story, starting with "I am a rather elderly man" (Melville [1853] 1996: 21), the narrator creates an image that he is a man of age, and by fortifying the meaning with the adverb "rather," he seems to be asking for some sympathy. It is almost as if the narrator wants the reader to side with him from the beginning, thus not leaving so much space for an alternative interpretation of him. Aiding this

perception, the rhetorical device litotes, "ironical understatement; denial of the contrary often using *no* and *not*" are at work (Zimmerman, 2003: 56).

One example is when the narrator is talking about his former employer, saying, "but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor [...]" and that "I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion" (Melville [1853] 1996: 22). Zimmerman thinks the narrator uses these litotes to suggest "modesty" (Zimmerman, 2003: 56), a relatively positive impression of him. The narrator uses litotes at the story's beginning while giving background information about himself, reinforcing his image as a humble man before the readers. It further contributes to the narrator's image when he speaks highly of his employees, such as Nippers. The narrator says Nippers "was not unknown on the steps of the Tombs" and that "when he [Nippers] chose, he was not deficient in gentlemanly sort of deportment" (Melville [1853] 1996: 27). Notably, such an introduction of an employee before readers by the narrator is significant as we are made to believe he is the sort of man who gives credit to his employees. Therefore, litotes function as a catalyst for an image of the narrator as a man of modesty, which creates a more positive image of him from the beginning.

The narrator's manipulative tone is observed in his use of epithets for the scrivener. The narrator's shift from what Zimmerman calls "dyslogistic" (negative) to "eulogistic" (positive) epithets (2005: 208) is significant as it signals a transition from an attacking attitude to a more compassionate one towards Bartleby. When Bartleby starts with his non-conformist passive-resistant attitude, the narrator shouts out such epithets like "lean, penniless wight" (Melville [1853] 1996: 38), "pale young scrivener" (Melville [1853] 1996: 39), "inscrutable scrivener" (Melville [1853] 1996: 53), "strange creature" (Melville [1853] 1996: 57), "intolerable incubus" (*ibidem*), and even "a vagrant, is he?" (Melville [1853] 1996: 58). This bombardment of dyslogistic epithets is meant to create a lessening, degrading effect, which seems to celebrate disdain and scorn for the scrivener and his eccentric nature. However, when Bartleby ends up in prison, the narrator, probably attempting to regain his reputation before the reader, compensates with a switch to eulogistic epithets and calls Bartleby "a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionated" (Melville [1853] 1996: 64). In the final passage, when the narrator sees Bartleby's dead body on the prison ground, he says, "I saw the wasted Bartleby" (Melville [1853] 1996: 67), which is the climax of his endeavor to keep his reputation and credibility. The preference of the adjective "wasted" instead of a blunt "dead" suggests that he perceives the scrivener's passing as a loss for the world and acknowledges it before the reader. Even further, when the grub-man thinks the dead Bartleby is asleep lying on the ground and asks, "He's asleep, aint he?" the passage follows with the narrator saying, "With kings and councellors, murmured I" (*ibidem*), suggesting that he places Bartleby on a royal platform, perhaps charitably acknowledging his ultimate nobility. It is worth noticing that the narrator's reference to kings and councellors is followed by yet another hyperbaton.

Finally, the narrator keeps the actual past of Bartleby till the very last paragraph of the story, which creates an even stronger manipulative image of him while he could easily have given this crucial information about Bartleby's past to the reader at the beginning of the story. Instead, the narrator prefers to give a lengthy account of himself in the introductory part. However, at the end of the story, we sadly find out that Bartleby "had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington" (Melville [1853] 1996: 68). Holding such critical information about the scrivener and revealing it to the reader only after Bartleby is tragically dead at the end can be considered intentional and meant to affect the reader's interpretation and perception. The narrator closes the story with the exclamation, "Ah Bartleby!

Ah humanity!" which lays the blame on everybody cumulatively, which, in effect, includes the readers having our own share in Bartleby's tragedy. This could be an instance of apodixis; it is not the narrator's fault but the common fate of all the people, thus lessening the narrator's role even further.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this exploration of Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" has delved into the intricate dynamics of the narrator's self-justifying rhetoric through the lens of defamiliarization. The examination of rhetorical devices employed in the narrative has unveiled a subtle manipulation aimed at shaping the reader's perception of events and deflecting blame in Bartleby's tragic tale. The focus on disruptions in syntax, the construction of a modest self-image through litotes, and the fostering of disdain for Bartleby through epithets reveal the narrator's deep-seated anxiety concerning the audience's interpretation of his character.

Despite the apparent internal conflict between conscience and prudence, the defamiliarization process orchestrated by Melville serves to render the familiar aspects of the narrator's sincerity and moral struggle strange, prompting a critical reevaluation by the readers. The narrative's emotional impact is strategically diminished through these manipulative devices, contributing to Bartleby's tragic demise in prison. Melville's masterful use of defamiliarization invites readers to question not only the story's events but also the storyteller's motives and reliability. In essence, "Bartleby the Scrivener" is a profound exploration of the intricate relationship between narrative manipulation and reader perception. Melville's strategic use of defamiliarization transcends the confines of the story, challenging readers to scrutinize the layers of meaning beneath the surface and reinforcing the enduring power of literature to provoke critical reflection on human nature and societal norms.

Future studies could delve deeper into various layers of defamiliarization in Melville's works, exploring how these techniques resonate with contemporary literary theory. In addition, a comparative analysis with other literary works of the same period or a focus on the reception of "Bartleby the Scrivener" in different cultural contexts could offer valuable insights into the universality of defamiliarization as a literary device. Exploring the influence of Melville's defamiliarization on subsequent literary movements or its echoes in modern literature could open new avenues for scholarship, emphasizing the enduring impact of this seminal work on the evolution of literary techniques and narrative strategies.

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