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A Perpetual Sentry In the Corner: Affect and Trauma and "Bartleby, the Scrivener"

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Abstract

Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" follows Bartleby, an affectively unsound figure that seems to disrupt larger narrative functions, developing these characteristics in response to prior trauma. However, the lawyer narrator is not privy to the extent of Bartleby's feelings because of his idealistic attachments to him. This paper examines Bartleby as a disruptive character using affect theory, as well as how his disruptions illuminate the effects of repressed trauma in an increasingly capital-driven society.

Herman Melville's novella "Bartleby, the Scrivener" has largely been treated as an enigmatic story despite its seemingly ordinary subject matter by both readers and critics alike. What seems like a basic account of an unnamed narrator's strange employee and the circumstances surrounding his eventual death has inspired a dearth of scholarship, mainly hypothesizing the reasons behind Bartleby's refusals to continue working. These critiques have ranged from connecting the story to modern protest movements on economic inequality to its critique of charitable behaviors and failed civic endeavors. However, there has been little inquiry into how Melville's novella introduces issues of trauma within modernity. "Bartleby, the Scrivener" follows a compelling main character who causes disruptions for the stories' narrators' understanding of human nature, exceptionalism, and subjectivity, as each story forces a confrontation with the lingering effects of trauma. In particular, Melville is interested in exploring the impact of a capital-driven society both on those experiencing trauma and those interacting with them. "Bartleby, the Scrivener" is not all that different at its core, as Melville incorporates jarring affectual qualities within a "disruptive" character like Bartleby in contrast with an otherwise bleak, ordinary story to highlight the dangers of negating trauma, as well as to consider how exceptionalism and subjectivity work to further dehumanize the traumatized individual in modernity.

The concepts of "cruel optimism" and subjectivity are important when discussing the disruptive affect and how it indicates trauma within "Bartleby, the Scrivener." Affect goes beyond individual human feelings and "saturates the corporeal, intimate, and political performances of adjustment that make a shared atmosphere something palpable" (Berlant 16). Affect ultimately "communicate[s] the conditions under which a historical moment appears as a visceral moment, assessing the way a thing that is happening finds its genre, which is the same as finding its event" (Berlant 16). Cruel optimism is an affectual theory developed by Lauren Berlant to explain how problematic attachments are made to either a person, thing, or ideal, even when having foresight that these attachments will be broken or that these attachments might be harmful to the subject's well-being. These attachments are considered "cruel" rather than melancholic because the "continuity of form [of the attachment] provides something

of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and look forward to being in the world" (Berlant 24). Attachments can be minor and trivial, but they can also be larger facets of living, such as being at work or even having an obsession (Berlant 24-5). Regardless of the degree of attachment, there is still a potential for cruelty to occur within the optimism of the attachment, which Berlant argues requires consistent "affective bargains about the costliness of one's attachments, usually unconscious ones, most of which keep one in proximity to the scene of desire or attrition" (25). Attachments must be retained at any cost so that existence remains meaningful for the subject, even when these attachments have no benefit or result in some level of harm. Cruelly optimistic attachments also result in a "splitting off of the story… from the activity of the emotional habitus… constructed," forming a distinction between hypothetical desired happenings and the literal events that might occur in a narrative, with the attachment becoming "an enabling object that is also disabling" (Berlant 25). All the cruelly optimistic conditions surrounding an attachment might seem like intersubjectivity, particularly using apostrophe, but Berlant argues that these attachments are merely an illusion of intersubjectivity (25). Intersubjectivity is a "paradox" that "require[s] a double negation: of the speaker's boundaries so she or he can become bigger in rhetorical proximity to the object of desire; and of the spoken of, who is more or less a powerful mute placeholder providing an opportunity for the speaker's imagination of her, his, or their flourishing" (Berlant 26). Such optimistic attachments do not come from the desire to feel connected to others; rather, they come from the longing to disrupt the cruel routines that prevent people from truly living "the good life" (Berlant 27-8).

If cruelly optimistic narrative structures prioritize subjectivity and eliminate the possibility of intersubjectivity, then the disruptions brought on by trauma complicate these opposing forces through "crisis ordinariness," which Berlant offers as an alternative mode for thinking about trauma and its limited depictions, because "traumatic events do not always induce traumatic responses" (81). Instead, trauma becomes part of a routine, rather than an encapsulated singular, life-altering event. Crisis ordinaries challenge the traditional understandings of trauma theory in that traumas are no longer reduced to a singular moment, but what Berlant describes as "the spreading of symbolizations and other inexpressive but life-extending actions throughout the ordinary and its situations of living on" (81). Certain events might have happened in a semi-distant past, but "the intensities of a situation that [spread] into modes, habits, or genres of being" persist and affect the present (Berlant 82). While these pressures from the past seem like they should be distant, those who live in crisis ordinaries live in a consistent yet normal state of trauma that extends far past the traumatic events that they experience, their crisis ordinaries forcing them to continually reevaluate their states of being to make sense of the world, often to the point of fragmentation. Berlant argues that even though some protagonists might not be living in the actual moment of trauma, even the implication of crisis at a distance results in people "develop[ing] worlds for their new intuitions, habits of ordinariness, and genres of affect management in recognition of the unfinished business they are living on in, where they live the rhythm of the habit called personality that can never quite settle into a shape" (Berlant 93). What is ordinary living to one person is disruptive to those who interact with them because their often-inconsistent characterizations force an awareness of trauma and refuse objectification to serve the routine, cruelly optimistic wishes of those around them. The shifts in their personality that make them unsettling and strange are really negotiations of living with their crisis ordinaries. Trauma becomes a fact of protagonists' existences, but those traumas do not make them any more accessible to the narrators that continue their attachments because of their inherent instability as cruelly optimistic objects and trau-

matized individuals. Rather than devising an affectively disruptive character solely for the sake of bolstering conflict, Melville uses Bartleby to show the dehumanizing effects of excessive subjectivity and repressed trauma that cruel optimism propagates in its objectifying attachments and problematic promises.

"Bartleby, the Scrivener" has been read in terms of affect theory, but little attention has been given to how they contribute to Melville's exploration of trauma and the individual. "Bartleby" is one of Melville's purest examinations of what happens when cruelly optimistic attachments and their dangers are never fully realized. The dynamic between cruel optimism and crisis ordinaries is demonstrated in the tenuous relationship between the lawyer narrator and Bartleby. The lawyer makes a cruelly optimistic attachment to Bartleby as the ideal employee who will pick up the slack for his other employees, but when the lawyer realizes that Bartleby does not adhere to this ideal, he continues bargaining Bartleby's stranger affectual qualities against those he finds favorable so that he can retain this attachment, even at the detriment of his business. Meanwhile, the strange behaviors in the office that make Bartleby seem like a phantom to the narrator are also the ones that demonstrate his crisis ordinary, going back to the time he spent in the dead letter office. Bartleby's crisis ordinary, however, never gets recognized as such until the novella's end, leaving the narrator with the false promises of his attachment unrealized and having received a grim lesson in the dangers of unrecognized trauma.

The few critical studies of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" have remained consistent in their conclusions about the nature of trauma within the conditions of modern capitalism; this is despite the varied focuses on which aspects of the novella illustrate that critique. Most recent critical analysis has been devoted to either the story's form or the story's reevaluation of the relationship between worker and workplace, mirroring the protests of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Other "Bartleby" scholarship is devoted to analyzing the lawyer's questionable character, focusing on his ideas of charity, but all nonetheless reaching the same conclusion—the narrator reenforces the tenets of modern capitalism that simultaneously deny and recognize Bartleby's trauma, either through the narrator's supposed charity or managerial scheming. Nancy Goldfarb argues that the novella was a response to emerging wealthy philanthropic figures whose work "masqueraded as civic-minded responses to needs in the community or support of key social institutions," all while "losing touch with the democratic and civic ideals on which the nation had been founded" (239). Daniel Couch argues that the story's silences and pauses allow for Bartleby's existence to take a central role in the narrative, disrupting the lawyer's established office hierarchy, while exposing the miscommunications present in these pauses (2-4). However, none of these approaches to "Bartleby" fully considers the internal forces of trauma that truly motivate Bartleby. "Bartleby" refuses the illusion of intersubjectivity and recognizes it as a cruelly optimistic force that justifies dehumanizing attachments. While the lawyer and Bartleby maintain the same dynamic overall in that the lawyer has a cruel attachment to his employee that Bartleby blatantly refuses, the lawyer never fully realizes the damages of this attachment; nor does he fully allow Bartleby narrative agency once he realizes the problems with his attachment. Instead, the lawyer is left at the end of the narrative to ponder the error of his cruelly optimistic ways along with the important revelation about Bartleby's time at the dead letter office. This insight into many of his strange behaviors, which contributes to his beginning to understand Bartleby's crisis ordinary, comes far too late. Though the outcome differs despite the dynamic being largely the same, "Bartleby" illustrates Melville's stance against the illusion of intersubjectivity, which only encourages cruelly optimistic forms of attachment and the negation of trauma that is brought on by postcapitalist modern

living conditions.

Though the novella is obviously about Bartleby, the lawyer spends a significant portion of the narrative outlining his own general character, how the office looks, and the character of his other employees as justifications for why he makes a cruelly optimistic attachment to Bartleby as his ideal employee. The lawyer's idea of a good and efficient workspace is contingent on "the advent of Bartleby," who he believes will alter the existing environment in his office, as well as bolster employee morale (Melville 19). The lawyer begins the story vouching for his own credibility as a "safe" man who is not interested in taking risks like other lawyers, citing the work he does in his office dealing with mortgages, along with his relationship to the elite John Jacob Astor to further substantiate his credibility (Melville 18). For the narrator, Bartleby provides a welcome break from the routines of his office and the mediocrity of his other employees, who never work quite as efficiently. The lawyer describes all three of his employees in detail, weighing the traits in each that he finds favorable and unfavorable. He applauds that Turkey is not "absolutely idle, or averse to business," but finds him "too energetic" and prone to making mistakes on his copies (Melville 19). The lawyer similarly praises Nippers for having a "neat, swift hand," but finds his "ambition" to be something other than a copyist disagreeable, citing Nippers' dealings with "ambiguous-looking fellows" as reasons for his distrust (Melville 21). The lawyer also describes Ginger Nut briefly, and his role "as cake and apple purveyor for Turkey and Nippers," due to his young age (Melville 23). The lawyer describes Turkey's and Nipper's work dynamic in the office as somewhat reciprocal given their struggles with paroxysms and indigestion, respectively. The lawyer "never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers' was on, Turkey's was off; and vice versa. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances" (Melville 23). Though nothing seems to be wholly wrong with the work functions of the office, the lawyer begins to latch onto the idea of a better employee because he finds the quirks in his own imperfect. When the lawyer puts out the advertisement that will lead him to meet Bartleby, it is not solely because he needs more scriveners, but because he wishes to find the object that will fuel his cruelly optimistic ideal.

Bartleby's arrival and conduct do not exactly live up to the lawyer's cruelly optimistic expectations of the ideal employee, as Bartleby figuratively and literally disrupts the lawyer's expectations in his differences from the other employees, as well as his eventual verbal refusals to work. Bartleby's appearance holds considerable sway over the lawyer's memories of him, being "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, and incurably forlorn" in contrast to the lawyer's other office workers (Melville 24). Bartleby's strangeness has nothing to do with his appearance alone, according to the lawyer, but rather with his solitude. The lawyer admires Bartleby for his "singularly sedate aspect" in contrast to his existing staff, but he is also unsettled that Bartleby is not "cheerfully industrious," soon looking to other aspects of Bartleby that he finds questionable (Melville 24). The lawyer notes that Bartleby "never went to dinner; indeed that he never went any where," along with the fact the lawyer "had never. . . known [Bartleby] to be outside of my office" (Melville 28). Though the lawyer finds Bartleby's "passive" disposition unsettling and incompatible with the cruelly optimistic hope he has of Bartleby's being the ideal office worker, he insists on keeping this attachment because of Bartleby's productivity, finding him "useful" despite being "a perpetual sentry in the corner" (Melville 28-9). The lawyer dismisses Bartleby's "eccentricities" as "involuntary" and not wholly disagreeable, as keeping Bartleby around will "prove a sweet morsel for [his] conscience" (Melville 29). However, all these esoteric issues with Bartleby conflict with the main source of the lawyer's ire—Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" in response to being asked

to work (Melville 25). The lawyer has no intention of giving up his attachment to Bartleby at the expense of his business, even when this relationship is increasingly problematic and disruptive to the office functions that he wants Bartleby to rectify. Bartleby's refusals to work force the lawyer to bargain Bartleby's affectual qualities against his cruelly optimistic attachment to the ideal employee. As a result of his bargaining, the lawyer finds that he can retain his attachment to Bartleby as an ideal charity case rather than an employee, but Bartleby disrupts his cruelly optimistic notions even further, as he refuses to conform to any of the lawyer's ideals by halting the functions of the office altogether.

As Bartleby becomes even more of a disruption to the lawyer's ideal, the lawyer imposes both his religious obligations and ghostly affectual qualities onto Bartleby so that he can retain his attachment through pity and self-serving charity. Each descriptor moves Bartleby further toward abstraction, making it plausible to assume that he must be some other type of being and thus worthy of the lawyer's pity as he slowly renegotiates his attachment despite his distaste for Bartleby's behavior. Indeed, Bartleby is posited as something other than human from the very start, even when he is ostensibly quite mundane, the lawyer describing him as a "motionless young man" who "wrote on silently, palely, mechanically" (Melville 24). The lawyer's habit of referring to Bartleby as a ghost becomes more frequent and blatant as he becomes more uncomfortable with Bartleby's peculiarities, demonstrated in their Sunday encounter in the office. When the lawyer deduces that Bartleby has taken up residence in the office, he refers to Bartleby as an "apparition" possessing a "cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance" (Melville 32). Discovering Bartleby in the office disturbs the lawyer on two levels in that Bartleby being there on the weekend "unmanned" his authority as a boss and that he now regards Bartleby as "immoral" for deviating from religious duties (Melville 32-3). Both assumptions come into conflict with his cruelly optimistic ideal, as well as the possibility of disrupting his attachment to Bartleby in ways that could harm his reputation—the thing the lawyer values most. To resolve the discomfort of potentially losing his attachment to Bartleby, the lawyer tries to justify his continued attachment through the lens of religious obligation, defining Bartleby as a lost soul rather than a fellow man. The lawyer sets aside his anger over Bartleby's various affronts to his expectations, but only due to a religious obligation to charity, as he attributes his sympathy for Bartleby as part of a "fraternal melancholy," being fellow "sons of Adam" (Melville 34). Beyond religious obligation, though, the lawyer cannot extend his pity any further, admitting that his "first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity," but "that same melancholy merge[d] into fear, that pity into repulsion" the longer he considers Bartleby's condition (Melville 35). The lawyer's charity is only extended to preserve himself rather than Bartleby, explaining that when "pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul rid of it" (Melville 35). Bartleby's decision to live in the office is demonstrative of something "innate and incurable" within him, according to the lawyer, further attributing his discomfort to the fact he cannot reach Bartleby on a spiritual level (Melville 35). All the religious defenses that the lawyer creates to rationalize his attachment to Bartleby are not only weak but also obfuscate the true reason why the lawyer must keep him around. Regarding Bartleby as both a ghostly figure and a charity case makes it easier for the lawyer to cope with the fact that he is not fulfilling his cruelly optimistic ideal of the perfect employee, consolidating his strangeness as part of his affective bargaining to retain his attachment at any cost, even when Bartleby makes it increasingly difficult for the lawyer to rationalize his presence.

The lawyer's affective bargaining with Bartleby becomes even more detrimental as his cruelly optimistic desire to keep him around

as a charity case starts to disrupt his business functions—the whole reason he hired Bartleby in the first place. What should be an easy decision becomes impossible for the lawyer to execute, as he consistently weighs the traits that he finds unfavorable in Bartleby against his conditional sympathy for him. However, Bartleby performs the lawyer's impossible task for him by quitting copying altogether, to the lawyer's dismay, even though the lawyer feels he "must get rid of a demented man" (Melville 38). The lawyer's sympathy for Bartleby truly ends when it is an obvious threat to his convenience and business. When Bartleby first expresses that he does not want to write anymore, the lawyer attributes this excuse to a vision impairment, stating that he "said something in condolence with [Bartleby]" and recommended that he take a break from copying (Melville 38). However, the lawyer's mercy toward Bartleby's behavior stops when he finds himself busy, with no other copyists in the office, and Bartleby refusing to do any work despite "having nothing else earthly to do" (Melville 38-9). Despite the lawyer's questionably charitable sentiments towards Bartleby, he cannot envision any relationship between them outside of labor—both commercial and spiritual—as the lawyer questions Bartleby's "earthliness" shortly before he fires Bartleby. When Bartleby refuses to leave the premises, the lawyer questions his "earthly right" to stay in the office, based on Bartleby's lack of tax contributions to the property (Melville 43). The lawyer's questioning is already dehumanizing on the grounds of demanding capital as a justification for existence, but also in his implication that Bartleby is somehow unearthly, cementing his status as a ghost rather than a human. Before it seems like the lawyer will give Bartleby up as an attachment for good, though, he returns to his religious justifications to keep him around. The lawyer cites one of the Ten Commandments that bids that people "love one another" as the reason he restrains himself from violence against Bartleby, along with his obligations to charity, that "mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy" (Melville 43-4). The lawyer becomes resigned to Bartleby's presence and gives up his attempts to get him to leave, insisting 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" (Melville 44). Any hope that Bartleby might fulfill the role of the lawyer's ideal office worker is destroyed once Bartleby is fired, but the lawyer increasingly finds more religious justifications to keep him around, as the prospect of losing his attachment is more unbearable than keeping him. At the same time, though, the lawyer's problematic attachment to Bartleby leads to him further objectifying his existence to a misunderstood and fatal degree.

Bartleby disrupts the lawyer's reputation the longer he stays in the office, with the lawyer realizing the threat his cruelly optimistic attachment and subsequent bargaining presents to his livelihood. However, the lawyer still feels the attachment should be retained despite this threat to himself, neglecting the obvious toll his attachment takes on Bartleby, as he further dehumanizes him under the guise of sympathy. Even though the lawyer does not initially mind keeping Bartleby around in the office after his firing, he becomes increasingly insecure about "the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms" (Melville 44). Along with the social consequences, the lawyer is mostly embarrassed by Bartleby's refusal to work when he is bid by the lawyer's clients to do so, with Bartleby declining in the same way he had done with the lawyer (Melville 45). As the rumors about Bartleby being kept in the office begin to spread, the lawyer drops all pretense of his attachment in a paranoid rant, listing all the injuries Bartleby has committed against him: "occupying [his] chambers," "denying [his] author-

ity," "perplexing [his] visitors," and "scandalizing [his] professional reputation" (Melville 45). The lawyer also finds the prospect of Bartleby outliving him threatening, predicting he would "claim possession of [the] office by right of his perpetual occupancy" (Melville 45). Though the lawyer regards Bartleby as a "ghost" and an "intolerable incubus," he still cannot find it in him to fully ignore Bartleby or place him in prison, falling back on his pity (Melville 45-6).

The lawyer finally devises a plan to divest himself of Bartleby by moving offices, a decision that makes him feel confident at first, certain that he broke free "from him whom I had so longed to be rid of" (Melville 47). The lawyer's commitment falters, though, when Bartleby is later arrested for trespassing. Bartleby essentially becomes a ghost by remaining in the office and attached to the lawyer, "haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night" (Melville 48). Though it is becoming evident that the effects of the lawyer's attachments are taking a toll on Bartleby, the lawyer refuses to recognize his humanity at the expense of his reputation, a far cry from his charitable justifications. When the lawyer proposes that Bartleby find another job so that he can stop loitering in the old office, he runs through a whole slew of other careers that Bartleby continues to insist he would "prefer" not to do at all (Melville 48-9). After Bartleby's refusal, the lawyer runs away from his responsibility, "care-free and quiescent," but soon forgets his commitment again so that he can visit Bartleby in prison (Melville 50). While the lawyer is fully interested in retaining his attachment, Bartleby seems disillusioned by and resentful of the lawyer's treatment, refusing conversation. The lawyer attempts to fall back on his charitable disposition, insisting that prison is "not so sad a place as one might think" and introducing him to the prison cook, but Bartleby does not entertain his persuasions, eventually dying of starvation in prison (Melville 51-2). Despite all the lawyer's efforts to retain his attachment to Bartleby and his good reputation, his affective bargaining to keep both results in tragically losing Bartleby out of protest to his charity. While Bartleby's death means the end of the lawyer's attachment to him, it does not fully end his cruelly optimistic outlook.

The lawyer's final revelation of what he knows about Bartleby is as disruptive as he perceives Bartleby to be throughout the story. This should force the lawyer to evaluate the loss of his attachment, but he never does, as doing so would mean recognizing Bartleby's crisis ordinary, which threatened his entire being as a working man. Though the lawyer construes Bartleby's refusals to work as maliciously lazy and highly detrimental to his reputation, he never fully realizes the meaning of Bartleby's behavior and protests, even when he finds out about Bartleby's stint at the dead letter office. Working in a dead letter office might not lead to trauma per se, but the realization Bartleby most likely had in his time working there resulted in a crisis ordinary that the lawyer cannot fathom: the bleak, isolating, and terminal nature of labor in modernity. Because the lawyer has so heavily imbued Bartleby with the ghostly affect, though, he cannot envision that labor itself could plague Bartleby with despair rather than a specific job. Daniel Couch argues that the lawyer believes that he can fully interpret Bartleby's strangeness with his narrative style, adding more pauses and silences in his narration to process his confusion (Couch 7-8). Though Couch is correct that the lawyer is confused about Bartleby, there are many instances where the lawyer astutely recognizes Bartleby's "miserable friendlessness and loneliness" but never fully interrogates the reasons behind this solitude (Melville 33). The lawyer's narrative style has less to do with processing information than it does with his lack of understanding and curiosity, especially because this new information he receives is the only information he receives about Bartleby before he knew him, and even he is "wholly unable to gratify it" (Melville

53). The lawyer attributes Bartleby's former position at the dead letter office as the source of Bartleby's misery, conflating the affect he imposed on Bartleby with the hypothetical miseries of the office in his questioning: "Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames?" (Melville 54). The lawyer spends less time ruminating over Bartleby's potential feelings in this position and instead imagines his own, drawing up examples of letters that he might come by, like a ring and "the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulder[ing] in the grave" or "a bank-note sent in swiftest charity" that fails to spare a starving person (Melville 54). Though the lawyer's examples are not wholly impossible to envision, he does not understand that the reason they might inspire such dreadful feelings is because all the labor to write these letters is futile, ending in death. The lawyer truly never learns from his mistake with Bartleby, as he reverts to charity to soothe himself, bidding a "pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities" (Melville 54). The crisis ordinaries that the lawyer lists, in addition to Bartleby's, will never be acknowledged as such because the lawyer will not let go of cruel optimism in the form of charity. Bartleby, even in death, cannot speak for himself and remains at the complete behest of the lawyer, as further solidified by the lawyer's last apostrophe: "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (Melville 54). Through the lawyer's disruptive addendum, Melville demonstrates how problematic attachments and objectifying, idealistic forces like charity may never be fully recognized as such, because the revelations they provide threaten the illusion of sympathy and intersubjectivity as a source of good.

Both cruel optimism and crisis ordinaries are essential to defining the disruptive affect within "Bartleby, the Scrivener," as they explain the dynamics that occur between the lawyer narrator and Bartleby, the objects of the lawyer's attachment, along with further informing oddities of characterization and narrative form. There are several individual features that make up the disruptive affect: delayed introductions of the cruelly optimistic object, the object's connections to otherworldliness, and stylistic interruptions to the narrative imposed by the object. Characters that have the disruptive affect are typically those that have had attachments wrought on them by the narrators of the stories in which they are contained, thus making them the cruelly optimistic objects in accordance with Berlant's theory. Narrators must also maintain these attachments to the cruelly optimistic objects to maintain their closeness to the objects' imagined promises of breaking routine, usually through the veneer of intersubjectivity. However, the objects—either deliberately or coincidentally—refuse these attachments because they live in crisis ordinaries governed by past trauma that the narrators of these stories are not privy to fully understanding. Behaviors governed by the crisis ordinaries are written off as odd quirks by the narrators, even when these quirks devolve into either being harmful or deeply disruptive to the narrators' lives. Additionally, the disruptive behaviors that accompany crisis ordinaries are not acknowledged for what they truly are—negotiations of trauma outside of the traumatic event itself—which leads to a deep and often fatal misunderstanding of the disruptive figures and their overall motivations. These problematic attachments must be reckoned with before each story's end, but each reckoning with cruelly optimistic attachments yields a different result. In "Bartleby, the Scrivener," though, the lawyer engages in continued affective bargaining to maintain his problematic attachment to Bartleby and his supposedly promising office work. However, the lawyer's bargains do not lead to any insights about his negation of trauma until long after Bartleby's death. Cruel optimism and crisis

ordinaries converge to create the disruptive affect found in Bartleby, as well as the dynamic they have with their narrators, further highlighting the negative effects of modern capitalistic structures on the individual and the subtle dehumanization that follows cruelly optimistic attachments.

While most critics have opted to diminish the role that trauma and affective confusion have in Bartleby's characterization, doing so has unintentionally neglected an important part of understanding his puzzling actions and the role he plays in Melville's overall interrogation of American idealism. By subtly positioning Bartleby beyond his strangeness, Melville uses trauma as a foundation to reveal the desensitizing potential of cruelly optimistic forms of attachment, as well as how these ideals do not truly combat the grueling continuity of routine that underpins modern trauma—instead, these ideals conceal it. Though Melville could not have anticipated the legacies that Bartleby's perplexing natures would have for both readers and critics, his affectual qualities attest to a crucial, yet modern realization—that hardly any individual is special enough to drastically disrupt ordinary routines. Melville maintains that the illusion of intersubjectivity is an obstacle to understanding humanity and the common bond of human experience. Solitude is not invincibility, nor is singularity; they are only illusions that invite cruelly optimistic notions like intersubjectivity as a possibility when it only results in dehumanization. Bartleby shows that supposedly individualistic ideals are merely affectual rather than innate—the stuff of gods and ghosts that they disprove in their enigmatically imperfect humanity.

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