GRUBBS, ELIZABETH MARIE, M.A. Independent Women Rendered Sick, Supple, and Submissive: Charlotte Lennox and Jane Austen Critique the Gendering of Sensibility. (2013)
Directed by Dr. James Evans. 32 pp.

Arabella of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* and Marianne Dashwood of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* are headstrong, independent female characters who are unwilling to submit to the husbands that their families have chosen for them. These women pose a threat to the patriarchal order of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by rejecting their appropriate social roles as physically weak and intellectually inferior females in need of male protection and guidance, gender distinctions propagated by a culture of sensibility through medical, philosophical, and literary discourse. Utilizing reformation narratives common in domestic novels, Lennox and Austen divest Arabella and Marianne of their autonomous lifestyles and quickly place them into marriages authorized by their families. However, the restrained tones of these marital conclusions, in which Arabella and Marianne are objectified and stripped of their vibrant personalities, subvert the convention of reforming insubordinate women and placing them under male control. Therefore, the hurried and disappointing denouements of the novels indicate Austen's and Lennox's critiques of this gendering of sensibility.

GRUBBS, ELIZABETH MARIE, M.A. Melville's Bartleby: A Perfectly-Crafted Anomaly. (2013)
Directed by Dr. María Sánchez. 26 pp.

Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" has puzzled readers for years and provoked hundreds of scholars to explain Bartleby's strange behavior in a multitude of ways using a variety of critical methodologies. An examination of scholars' compulsion and frustration with classifying this odd character along with a close analysis of the narrator's obsession with understanding Bartleby reveals society's determination to reduce humans into known identity types. Thus by creating a personification of ambiguity through the character of Bartleby that resists simplification, Melville critiques the social drive to classify people using these normalized identity roles. In particular, Melville reveals the limitations and paradoxes existing within the appropriate role of the mid-nineteenth-century male through a representation of the problematic aspects of capitalism and Jacksonian freedom in antebellum America.

INDEPENDENT WOMEN RENDERED SICK, SUPPLE, AND SUBMISSIVE: CHARLOTTE LENNOX AND JANE AUSTEN CRITIQUE THE GENDERING OF SENSIBILITY AND MELVILLE'S BARTLEBY: A PERFECTLY-CRAFTED ANOMALY

by

Elizabeth Marie Grubbs

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
2013

Approved by

_____
Committee Co-Chair

_____
Committee Co-Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by ELIZABETH MARIE GRUBBS has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair_____

Committee Co-Chair_____

Committee Member_____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEPENDENT WOMEN RENDERED SICK, SUPPLE, AND SUBMISSIVE: CHARLOTTE LENNOX AND JANE AUSTEN CRITIQUE THE GENDERING OF SENSIBILITY

Many novelists of the long eighteenth century employ the reformation narrative, in which a wayward character changes into a respectable, happy person, and often the comic denouements of these novels include the establishment or restoration of matrimonial harmony. Examples range from Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, in which the thief and bigamist Moll becomes a respectable, land-owning wife, to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, that tells the story of how the kidnapper and attempted rapist Mr. B transforms into an honorable husband. Both Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* also tell stories of rebellious characters transformed and situated into appropriate marriages. However, these authors do not grant their characters happy marital endings; instead, they employ the reformation narrative in order to highlight the problematic and destructive characteristics of the eighteenth-century model of womanhood. The novels' conclusions subdue these autonomous women by forcing them to submit to masculine authority figures through matrimonial ties, ultimately rendering their reformations detrimental rather than beneficial. The hurried and disappointing marital denouements of both novels, then, indicate Austen's and Lennox's critiques of the oppressive representation of women in this patriarchal ideal of the submissive woman.

This eighteenth-century depiction of women as weak and in need of masculine protection was in part a product of what G.J. Barker-Benfield calls the "culture of sensibility" (xix), in which gender distinctions changed and were solidified in a way that both benefited and oppressed women. Medical literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as contemporary conduct books, helped paint this picture of woman as morally stronger, but physically, emotionally, and mentally weaker, a picture that became the cornerstone of the culture of sensibility. Lennox subverts this convention through the story of the powerful though quixotic female character Arabella, who is praised for her masculine-like reasoning skills. When Arabella becomes ill, the weakening of her body brings about not only the cure of her quixotism but also both the annihilation of her autonomy and vibrant, intelligent personality as well as the submission to man's guidance and control. In this conclusion, Lennox describes the upsetting limitations forced on women through the naturalization of feminine weakness. Austen takes a different approach to criticizing this depiction of women, for she allows Marianne Dashwood to recover from her reforming illness in a way that does not deprive her of her autonomy or spirited character. Through this initial reformation narrative, Austen highlights the constructive and beneficial possibilities for a portrayal of women and their physical bodies that does not paint them as weak and in need of masculine protection. In the end, however, Austen forces Marianne into a less than pleasing marriage that subdues her vibrant personality, mutes her voice, and strips her of control over her own life. By submitting Marianne to this realistic yet disappointing fate, Austen reveals her frustration with the pervasive representation of women as the physically,

emotionally, and mentally less competent gender. Through close analysis of Arabella's and Marianne's transformations, I modify the traditional interpretations of these novels to reveal the authors' criticism of this harmful model of femininity.

In *The Female Quixote,* Lennox roots the unconventional behavior of Arabella in quixotic behavior that derives from reading too many bad translations of French romances as a child, while living a secluded life that lacked guidance and worldly influence. When her "wild Imaginations" prevail over a rational approach to understanding the world (371), she believes that romances are representative of real life and, as the narrator explains, confuses "every Tree at a Distance for a Horse and Knight" (95). Unlike other contemporary authors, who would draw female quixotic characters as less capable of reasoning than their male counterparts, Lennox represents Arabella as highly intelligent and even able to outwit other men, in spite of her romantic misconceptions. The narrator's first description of Arabella details her "uncommon Quickness of Apprehension, and an Understanding capable of great Improvements" (6). Later in the novel, her uncle Sir Charles, in "Admiration of [Arabella's] Wit," claims that if she had been a man, "she would have made a great Figure in Parliament, and that her Speeches might have come perhaps to be printed in time" (311). Lennox marks Arabella's reasoning skills as masculine and uncommon in women. However, she paints this particular characteristic as appropriate and attractive in Arabella, unlike the gross and unappealing masculinity exhibited by Arabella's friend Miss Groves, who "affected noisy Mirth, was a great Romp, and delighted in masculine Exercises" (71). By creating a foil in Miss Groves, Lennox draws new gender distinctions that allow more room for women

to exhibit intelligence and mental strength without annihilating all conventional gender difference and thus avoiding her readers' complete rejection of the work.

Arabella also displays a form of masculinity in the level of power she exerts through her quixotic adherence to the romantic code, which establishes a position of great importance and authority for women, that in the eighteenth century was traditionally only given to men. Sir Charles describes Arabella as "quite her own Mistress" concerning the issue of marriage, for her father "had a great opinion of his Daughter's Prudence" and thus did not arrange a marriage, but only stated that his suggested choice for a husband was her cousin Mr. Glanville (65). Arabella, though, adapts a "noble Freedom of Mind" and "heroic Disobedience" in her refusal of her father's suggestion (27). Even when Arabella later chooses to accept Mr. Glanville's courtship, upon her own convictions and not in following the advice of her deceased father, she demands his "Respect and Submission to [her] Commands" (18), and in true form to romances, she will not submit to his advances until he has at least suffered "Ten Years of the most faithful Services, and concealed Torments" (111). She also gives what the narrator calls "dumb Commands" to other men in the novel and even attempts to banish one man from England (36-37).

Lennox often describes Arabella's assumption of power as comically absurd and in need of adjustment. For example, she presents Arabella's presumptuous conversation with the sick Mr. Glanville, in which she tells him "I intreat you to live . . . by all the Power I have over you, I command you to recover" (134), as ridiculous and indicative of her quixotic misunderstandings. But Lennox does not always paint Arabella's authority and lack of male guardianship as inherently wrong or misguided; in fact, the novel often

encourages readers to enjoy and applaud the feminine power Arabella exhibits. These masculine characteristics, however, are considered almost as absurd in the eyes of patriarchal society as her quixotic fixations, especially since most occasions in which Arabella renders her power she does so to preserve her virginity. Margaret Doody describes this power as unnatural since "the proper protector of a woman's chastity in the eighteenth century (as traditionally) is assumed not to be herself but a male" (xxxi). So in order for Arabella to assume the socially appropriate role of female, she must be cured of her delusions of both quixotism and self-governance and ultimately submit to man's control.

In *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne also wields an unconventional level of feminine power before her reformation, though her actions are less comical than Arabella's and more imprudent, petulant, and blameworthy. Throughout the first half of Austen's novel, Marianne's troublesome behavior stems from her unruly display of emotions expressed "without any desire of command over herself" (82). The narrator explains that Marianne is "neither reasonable nor candid" due to the "too great importance placed by her on the delicacies of a strong sensibility" (190-191). When she is abandoned by her beloved suitor John Willoughby, she becomes depressed, suffering from what the narrator calls a "nervous complaint" (214), and this melancholic state causes her to act with impropriety. Helen Small argues that during this nervous complaint Marianne is "far from powerless," for she "indulges, feeds, courts her grief, inflicts it on others," and is "evidently, 'potent' and using her power selfishly" (95). But just as Arabella attempts to control her marital outcome, Marianne exerts authority by

refusing to accept any advances from her suitor Colonel Brandon, who is financially secure and suitable for the family. Although this amount of feminine power, according to Claudia Johnson, appears unnatural because Marianne is "living without the watchful supervision of male protectors" ("A 'Sweet Face'" 168), Austen does not censure Marianne's rejection of Colonel Brandon, like she criticizes her other imprudent actions, but instead treats this powerful stance as socially acceptable.

A woman's refusal to marry, however, is problematic within the cultural world of both Arabella and Marianne, since women of this time had to submit to men through marriage in order to assume their proper social place. George Wright's essay "On the Importance of Marriage," published in 1793, argues that "the most natural state of human society, as well as the primary principle of our nature, is the conjugal connection" (24). Robert Shoemaker explains that in the eighteenth century marriage was especially important for women: "Because women were generally expected to submit to the authority of a man, whether as father, master or husband, single women threatened to undermine the social order" (142). These unmarried women were "distrusted because they were not under the authority of a male household head" (Shoemaker 143). Arabella and Marianne exemplify this. They lack paternal authority, for both of their fathers die before the young women can be betrothed. Moreover, Arabella and Marianne refuse to submit to their suitors and thus reject male guardianship, so they must be transformed in order to be subjected to man. Each character's reformation narrative highlights the characteristic of physical, mental, and emotional weakness inherent in the eighteenth-

century representation of women needing protection. By looking at these narratives within the context of contemporary cultural and medical discourses, I will argue that Lennox and Austen critique this image of the vulnerable woman by manipulating the trope of illness as a catalyst for the favorable reform of independent women.

Recent scholarship of *The Female Quixote* has attributed Arabella's autonomy to Lennox's longing for feminine power, played out through the genre of romance, but eventually suppressed in the domestic novel's realistic ending of a submissive wife. For example, Margaret Doody claims that through reading romances "in which women are of great importance" (xxi), Arabella "conceals from herself the sad truth, that she is a pawn in the game of property" (xxi) until she is finally "brought back to what the world acknowledges as reality" (xxix), and Doody explains that "for a woman, that reality means the end of all story, and a cessation of all power" (xxix). Similarly, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that Lennox's novel "emphasizes [romances'] profound appeal to women, not because of female gullibility but because of the psychic need for alternatives to a socially defined state of meaningless and powerless activity" (533). She concludes that "Arabella's wish to live by the rules of romance criticizes the standards of her society especially as they restrict female possibility" (533), though in the end "this would-be heroine must learn to accept the ordinary, to welcome the fate of domesticity" (534). What they do not assess is the role of illness in the subordination of Arabella to man's control, for it is the physical weakening of Arabella's body and mind, caused by illness, that places her in the appropriate feminine role of needing guidance and protection from men. By creating a heroine who is strong, intelligent, and independent, qualities

admirable in a man but not in a woman, Lennox entertains the fantasy of women not restricted by these oppressive gender distinctions. Furthermore, Lennox's narration of Arabella's transformation, in which Arabella is not only emotionally and mentally but also *physically* submitted to men, criticizes the foundational reasoning behind these restricting gender distinctions inherent in female reformation narratives and in domestic novels in general.

Arabella's illness comes about when in one of her quixotic delusions walking by the Thames, she mistakes oncoming horsemen for kidnappers and attempts an escape by imitating the romantic heroine Clelia and throwing herself into the river. Consequently, she suffers from what the narrator calls a "violent Distemper . . . that reduc'd her so low that there seem'd very little Probability of her Recovery" (366). A clergyman is called to help her prepare for death, but when she begins to recover, he takes on the task of curing her mind. Lennox fashions this "Pious and Learned Doctor" after one of her literary advisors Samuel Johnson, and several scholars have discussed the possibility of Johnson actually writing the chapter in which the doctor cures Arabella.[1] But Lennox gives her doctor the prestige of a clergyman, a minister ordained by the Church of England, unlike the devout Dr. Johnson. Possibly because of Arabella's pride and stubborn refusal to listen to advice, as well as her uncommon intelligence, a clergyman, with his divine

[1] John Mitford first made this claim in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of August, 1843, citing "internal evidence" (132). Miriam Small, a prominent Lennox biographer, supported Mitford's claim in *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters* published in 1935 (79-82). However, Duncan Isles makes the following insightful suggestion: "It would seem best to regard the chapter, with all its faults, as wholly Mrs. Lennox's until definite evidence to the contrary is found" (422).

authority, would have more sway over Arabella than a devout scholar. Nevertheless, the clergyman begins this process of reforming Arabella when, as the narrator states, "the Health of her Body was almost restored" (368). She is still bedridden during her curing conversation with the clergyman, and she remains in a fragile, disabled condition until the last two paragraphs of the novel, which quickly summarize her marriage to Mr. Glanville.

This weakened state proves beneficial to the clergyman's and the Glanvilles' goal of curing her mind and situating her in the patriarchal system. She is somber and submissive because of her near-death experience, telling the divine doctor that at this time, "I would yet rather hear Instructions than Compliments" (370). Sir George, who deceives Arabella in an attempt to seduce her, has a similar reaction when he is wounded in a sword fight. The narrator explains that "the Fear of Death produc'd its usual Effects, and made him extremely concern'd for the Errors of his past Life, and very desirous of atoning for them if possible" (360). But physical weakness does not render Sir George submissive to guidance as it does Arabella, but instead causes him to simply face his misdeeds because of his brush with death. Arabella, however, needs the aid of a male authority figure in order to fix her misunderstandings. She solicits the clergyman's counsel, stating "I conjure you discover me to myself" (370), and her sickness finally strips her of her autonomy and physical strength so that she can become submissive to the divine doctor's teaching. For the first time in the novel, the weakened Arabella relinquishes her power, telling the clergyman, "I expect you will exert the Authority of

your Function, and I promise you on my Part, Sincerity and Submission" (370). Illness is the agent that finally forces Arabella to submit, physically and mentally, to male control.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, however, Austen utilizes the trope of illness as the catalyst for reform in a way that does not comply with the patriarchal goal of subordinating woman to man as it does in Lennox's novel. Several scholars have debated the implications and effects of Marianne's reformation, especially in relation to Austen's positioning of the text within the discourse of gender and patriarchy. However, most interpretations fail to recognize the multiple stages of her transformation and only acknowledge the overall change from a hypersensitive and at times hysterical single female to a more reasonable and reserved woman submitted to a husband. For example, Tony Tanner, whose analysis is often quoted by other scholars, argues that Marianne undergoes only one quick transition, and that change is brought about by sickness, "the cost of her entry into the sedate stabilities of life," which acts as a "punitive" catalyst that helps transform Marianne from an unruly single woman to one who is "tamed" and married (99-100). Although Barbara Seeber focuses on the "scolding, and finally silencing of Marianne Dashwood's voice" (233), she also ignores the nuances of Marianne's conversion, that reveal a more complex, multi-staged transformation. Marianne undergoes two distinct transformations, one instigated by illness that causes her to live more reasonably, and another that occurs off stage, subdues her, and silences her spirited personality. A close analysis of these multiple changes exposes Austen's vision of a woman reformed without being restrained by patriarchal gender roles.

Marianne's initial transformation is a reaction to a brush with death. When Marianne is rejected by her lover Willoughby, her subsequent, untempered melancholy leads her to neglect her own health, and "sitting in her wet shoes and stockings" after sad, lonely walks through the "longest and wettest" grass causes her to become ill with a violent cold (286). As Judy Stove explains, Marianne's "insistence on nurturing and displaying her unhappiness results . . . in her own illness" (6). Austen uses the self-inflicted illness to clearly criticize the power that Marianne wields selfishly and imprudently, to indulge in her feelings without regard for her own safety or for others, but she does not punish Marianne for the power she commands in order to control her own destiny. The unconventional authority Marianne commands by rejecting Colonel Brandon as a husband and remaining a young single woman neither causes her illness nor provides a reason for feeling any remorse. The feverish affliction caused by Marianne's impetuous behavior, however, does enact its reforming purpose by rendering her weak and compliant. In the midst of a recovery, Marianne claims that her near-death experience has given her a pensive outlook, stating, "My Illness has made me think— It has given me leisure and calmness for serious recollection" (322). She has learned the dangers of yielding to an excessive sensibility and makes the following promise: "My feelings shall be governed and my temper improved" (323).

An important aspect of Marianne's recovery lies in the fact that she recognizes her own mistakes, and what counseling she does require, she receives from other females. Marianne's more sensible sister Elinor immediately perceives Marianne's changes at the beginning of her physical recovery from illness, observing "the direction of a mind

awakened to reasonable exertion" (319). Although Elinor, with the help of her mother, Mrs. Dashwood, subsequently encourages and assists Marianne in her attempt to control her emotions, Marianne has already realized the consequences of her imprudent actions. She states, "I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to my grave" (322). She resolves to maintain a more sensible lifestyle without her mother or sister explaining the need for this change. Therefore, Marianne's transformation starkly contrasts with Arabella's, for the latter's conversion is achieved through step-by-step, condescending guidance by a clergyman with an all-male cast of supporters (Mr. Glanville and Sir Charles). With Marianne's initial change, however, Austen does not allow her to be submitted to the patriarchal role of woman who needs to be submissive to the guidance of men in order to learn how to be a reasonable human being.

Furthermore, Marianne does not immediately dedicate herself to a man as the still-bedridden Arabella does. Instead, Marianne devotes herself to Elinor and Mrs. Dashwood, stating, "I shall now live solely for my family" (323). Since her father is deceased, Marianne does not have to submit to a male authority figure, even in her reformed state. Her initial transformation also leaves her with the power of controlling her life path. She tells Elinor, "I shall divide every moment between music and reading. I have formed my plan, and am determined to enter on a course of serious study . . . From you, from my home, I shall never again have the smallest incitement to move" (320-323). Elinor smiles at this "same eager fancy" that had before caused Marianne to be selfishly indulgent in her emotions and was now being used diligently and appropriately (320).

Although Marianne is humbled through her reform, she differs from Arabella in that she remains individualistic, spirited, and free from male supervision, as well as exhibiting reasoning skills and planning a life of intellectual study. Austen makes this transformation an exercise of self-control and tempered sensibility rather than a lesson in the dangers of female autonomy and the need for male guardianship.

In Marianne's transformation, illness temporarily weakens her body so that she can see her mistakes, learn from them, and continue on her life path as a stronger, healthier woman. Arabella's sickness, though, renders her weak and submissive to men in a more permanent way, since she is still weak and in bed while giving herself to Mr. Glanville. Contemporary readers would most likely view her new characterization as appropriately feminine. Discussions of natural and proper gender roles permeate the medical writings, conduct books, and philosophical works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and often novelists joined in these scientific and cultural arguments through their characterization of women and men. For example, in "'Cruel Disorder': Female Bodies, Eighteenth-Century Fever Narratives, and the Sentimental Novel," Candace Ward explains the "reciprocal relationship" between the sentimental novel and medical narratives, arguing that the path of influence was a two-way street between these two genres. The novelists fictionalized the medical discourse of gender difference, while the medical narratives gave scientific infrastructure and authority to the gender delineations created in novels. Ward's argument can be extended to include conduct books and philosophical writings as well, since each of these genres plays a similar role in cultural discourse, rather than work in a hierarchical manner where the overtly

didactic, intellectual, and scientific writings teach the literary authors how to understand the world around them. The conversation arising from these varying branches of learning makes clear just how Lennox and Austen contribute to the discussion of female characterization through their reformation narratives.

According to Thomas Laqueur, philosophers and medical practitioners of the eighteenth century began to write about women and their bodies in a way that diverged from the previous understanding of females. Laqueur makes the following argument:

> Thus the old model, in which men and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, their vital heat, along an axis whose telos was male, gave way by the late eighteenth century to a new model of difference, of biological divergence. An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysic of hierarchy in the representation of women in relation to men. (3)

Rather than viewing woman as simply inferior to man, the new model manipulates gender lines in a way that renders woman more equal to man in rank but very different than man in body, mind, and soul, drastically expanding the traditionally-accepted distinctions between the genders.

Barker-Benfield develops Laqueur's work to discuss one of the key factors of this new model of gender, arising within the "culture of sensibility," the idea that the nerves of women were more sensitive than the nerves of men. He posits that the development of this concept throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries helped lay the "groundwork for bourgeois and scientized evaluation of delicate nerves" (23) which led to a "gendering of sensibility" (xxvii). By the eighteenth century, then, this configuration of gender difference that draws a direct correlation between a woman's socially-accepted

traits and her natural constitution was becoming a basic foundation of medical and philosophical thought, and this correlation resulted in the belief that females had a more heightened level of sensibility than males. An example can be found in the medical writings of the famous Bath physician George Cheyne. In his 1733 publication *The English Malady*, Cheyne discusses nervous disorders in both men and women, admitting that men can have delicate nerves as well, but his specific case studies reveal an evaluation of women as physically weaker than men because of their more sensitive nerves. Furthermore, Cheyne's description of the nervous system reveals his understanding that the soul, brain, and body are constantly in tune with each other: "That the Intelligent Principle, or *Soul*, resides somewhere in the Brain, where all the Nerves, or Instruments of Sensation terminate, like a *Musician* in a finely fram'd and well-tun'd Organ-Café; that these Nerves are like *Keys*, which, being struck on or touch'd convey the Sound and Harmony to this sentient Principle, or *Musician*" (4). This anatomical explanation, then, maintains that a stronger sensibility means a weaker composition in general by drawing a direct connection between the nerves and the "Intelligent Principle." A delicate composition renders a patient weaker and more vulnerable physically, mentally and emotionally, and thus woman, the more delicate sex, is represented as needing protection and guidance from the more reasonable and stronger gender, man. Cheyne was not the first medical practitioner to explore the effects of delicate nerves and gender sensibility, and his work was not even pioneering in the development of this medical thought. However, his fame among the socialites of Bath,

his well-known clients, and his inclusive writing style (with its how-to advice that was helpful not only to medical practitioners but to all people that suffered from nervous disorders) secured the popularity and pervasiveness of his ideas in eighteenth-century culture.

Barker-Benfield explains that this "gendering of sensibility and its claim to moral superiority promised obvious advantages, including the reform of men on women's terms, but it also carried some dangerous, self-destructive consequences . . . of which many cultivators of sensibility were well aware" (xxvii). This new model viewed women as having a "moral authority" and thus a greater capability of teaching manners but simultaneously painted women as physically, emotionally, and intellectually weaker (xxvii). One of the harmful consequences, which Barker-Benfield highlights, is "women's temptation to identify themselves as 'virtue in distress'" (xxvii). By positioning women into a vulnerable state, the rhetoric of these documents implies that women inherently need the physical protection and emotional and mental guidance of men. Both Lennox and Austen consider this representation of femininity through the characterizations of their reformed female characters, and they both ultimately criticize the limitations it places on women through the novels' conclusions. Lennox not only writes a fantasy of female power that criticizes overt patriarchy, as Doody and Spacks, along with other scholars, have argued. She also indicts the less obvious consequences of the gendering of sensibility through writing an unhappy ending for Arabella, who is ultimately subjected to the patriarchal model of femininity through the physical weakening of her body and spirit. Austen also rejects this particular model of

womanhood in the writing of Marianne's initial transformation in order to counteract the popular idea of woman as weak and in need of guardianship. By exposing the possibilities and opportunities of womanhood existing outside of this limiting female model through the promising characterization of Marianne after her initial transformation, Austen renders the novel's unhappy conclusion, which entails a second transformation that strips Marianne of her vibrant character and subjugates her to a man, even more disheartening and indicative of Austen's criticism of this insidious model of femininity.

The "virtue in distress" or vulnerable model of femininity frequently appears in eighteenth-century literature, and Samuel Richardson's famous novel *Clarissa* published in 1748 illustrates it perfectly. Clarissa Harlowe, described as virtuous, but also "poor, weak, and defenceless" (169), reforms several male characters by the novel's conclusion with her sensibility and moral fortitude, among them John Belford, the libertine friend of her captor and rapist Robert Lovelace. Her story is a tragedy, however, because she is unable to save herself, in spite of her virtuous character and her multiple attempts to run away from Lovelace, and because the men in her life fail to be appropriate guardians. Clarissa exemplifies the ideal female with her weak body and delicate nerves, her need for man's protection (from other men such as Lovelace), and her moral superiority and ability to reform men. Although this role provides women with advantageous positions of power in the reformation of rakish men, as Barker-Benfield explains, this construction of femininity limits women by necessitating masculine guardianship over the physically and emotionally delicate females.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, the example of the weak female had become not only an ideal but the *appropriate* model of what a woman should be. Dr. John Gregory, in his popular conduct book *A Father's Legacy To His Daughters*, first published in 1774, summarizes this feminine ideal in the following quotation: "But though good health be one of the greatest blessings of life, never make a boast of it, but enjoy it in grateful silence . . . We so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength . . . her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at the description" (23). Gregory employs rhetoric arising from the culture of sensibility throughout this book, constantly addressing the different levels of sensibility between the sexes and thus teaching his daughters the socially-accepted behavior for women that is appropriate to their weaker constitution. The value of his work in interpreting Austen's and Lennox's heroines lies in the fact that it is not a treatise or a medical document that attempts to use reason or science to prove these gender distinctions, but rather a cultural snapshot of how eighteenth-century society inculcated the rhetoric of gendered sensibility, along with all of its limitations placed on women. The gender distinction reflected in this quotation entails the cultural expectation for women to exhibit delicacy and vulnerability in order to be socially successful.

In *The Female Quixote* illness finally forces Arabella into this model of the weak woman dependent on men. Arabella, with her impressive ability to reason, her control of men, and her power to make decisions and even move around without much guidance, exhibits qualities that were culturally and medically deemed as masculine, but she is

made appropriately feminine again through the weakening of her body. However, the novel's contrived and quick conclusion reveals Lennox's criticism of this insidiously oppressive representation of women. After the conversation with the clergyman, Arabella realizes she has been wrong in her adherence to romantic conventions, and she continues "for near two Hours afterwards wholly absorb'd in the most disagreeable Reflections on the Absurdity of her past Behavior" (383). Although this humiliation seems reasonable to the reader, because Arabella has exposed herself to "Contempt and Ridicule" through her delusional behavior (383), the abrupt conclusion also leaves the reader unsatisfied. Immediately after these two hours of remorse, Arabella tells Mr. Glanville the following: "To give you myself . . . with all my remaining Imperfections, is making you but a poor Present" (383). Arabella quickly submits herself to the appropriate, safe role, predetermined by her father, as a wife to Mr. Glanville, and then the story suddenly ends. Earlier in the novel, Arabella is praised for the "Strength of her Understanding" and "her lively Wit" (116-117), but these personality traits, more appropriate to a man rather than a woman, disappear after her reformation. This loss of personality and stifling of character resists the happy-ending convention typical to comic domestic novels that so often end with marriage.

This seemingly hurried conclusion was not Lennox's original plan for the novel. Richardson, in a letter dated just months before the publication of *The Female Quixote*, advised Lennox to "finish [her] Heroine's cure in [her] present volumes" rather than in the "proposed 3d Volume" (Letter 424). Of course, scholars have speculated what kind of conclusion Lennox had initially intended to write, and one popular guess entails the

gradual curing of Arabella by the Countess, an admirable woman "who among her own Sex had no Superior in Wit, Elegance, and Ease [and] was inferior to very few of the other in Sense, Learning, and Judgment" (322). Because the Countess "herself had when very young, been deep read in Romances" (323), she is able to begin a conversation with Arabella about her quixotic delusions that "rais'd a Kind of Tumult in [Arabella's] Thoughts" (540) but did so in a natural, gradual way, with the two intelligent women discussing the topic of Romances in a rational but congenial manner. However, the Countess is quickly removed from the scene before she is able to complete her task of curing Arabella. As Duncan Isles explains in his appendix to the Oxford edition of the novel, the Countess' attempt to cure Arabella "begins so promisingly and yet is abandoned so abruptly and oddly," leaving the published conclusion with the divine doctor's quick curing of Arabella "stilted and unconvincing" (425-426). Debra Malina responds to Isle's oft-quoted interpretation with the following question: "If the Countess's cure was to be replaced by the clergyman's, why retain the Countess half-episode at all?" (290). She then makes the insightful argument that Lennox utilizes the abandoned Countess story in order to criticize the doctor's method of curing:

> [It] would seem to suggest that she had left traces of the almost-absent mother for a reason. They mark Arabella's deprivation of maternal influence, as the doctor leads her into the man's world of rationalism. Like Richardson's and Johnson's advice in the man's world of serious literature, the clergyman's reasons may have a great deal of validity for the 'realistic' thinker, but that both imply a requisite repression of the mother suggests that both rely not on value-neutral intelligence or 'sanity' but on coercion. (290-291)

Not only a mother figure, the Countess represents the possibility of an intelligent female counselor and model that could guide Arabella into a reasonable lifestyle without submitting her to the culture of sensibility's weak womanhood that requires masculine supervision and instruction. This promising "half-episode" draws attention to the disagreeable aspect of the published conclusion that the doctor's curing, or "coercion," yields. Furthermore, the fact that Arabella is still bedridden and not fully recovered from her illness when she changes her ways and submits to marrying Mr. Glanville renders the quick conclusion even more disappointing. Completely and quickly "cured," she is left humiliated, objectified, and stripped of her once vibrant character in order to be made submissive to man and thus properly feminine.

Scholars have agreed that through this reformation Arabella seems to be transformed from a beautiful, proud, mostly intelligent (albeit confused) woman into a degenerate, undeserving object, a "poor Present" as Arabella calls herself (383). For instance, George Haggerty maintains that Arabella "undergoes a transformation that renders her . . . alien from her earlier self," and he concludes that the novel's abrupt, "all-too-pat conclusion" leaves the reader unsatisfied (135). Instead, the transformed Arabella embodies Lennox's criticism of the cultural values that forced females into the limiting gender role of the weak woman who needs protection and subjugated them to man's control. Lennox highlights the dangers of accepting the notion of "incommensurable" gender differences promulgated in the eighteenth century, for although these newer gender lines seem progressive in giving women a moral superiority that can help reform men's manners, they ultimately stifle women's ability to express themselves. The abrupt

ending suppresses Arabella's personality when she is forced into the patriarchal ideal of a woman in need of man's guidance and makes the novel's marital conclusion lacking and disappointing. Lennox highlights and confronts this adverse consequence of accepting the appropriate model of woman promulgated by the culture of sensibility.

The denouement of Marianne's story is also disappointing, but, unlike Arabella's plot, it follows a reformation narrative that combats the model of the subservient woman. Through Marianne's penitent but assertive response to her illness, Austen gives a brief representation of what a female character's reformation could look like without painting the feminine ideal as physically, mentally, and emotionally weak. One aspect of the model female that Austen particularly contradicts with her characterization of a reformed Marianne is the idea that women were less capable of intense reasoning and strenuous study than men. This overtly degrading characteristic of woman was of course not a new concept developed entirely within the culture of sensibility during the eighteenth century. As Laqueur explains, man held an overall higher position than woman in dealings with the body, mind, and soul in the "hierarchical" classification of gender that preceded the "incommensurable" structure of gender based on sensibility. What changed in the eighteenth century, then, was the particular way in which women were described as less capable of rigorous mental activity. Medical practitioners, philosophers, and authors employed the doctrine of delicate nerves to give scientific proof to the biological difference between the mental capacities of men and women. This new gender classification masqueraded as a system in which women were represented as drastically

different from men rather than inferior to men, appearing to be beneficial to women and feministic movements; however, the development of this gendering based on sensibility aided in the subjection of woman to man by insidiously representing women as mentally inferior to men.

For example, Bernard de Mandeville's *Treatise of Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions*, first published in 1711, anticipates Cheyne's correlation between the nerves and rest of the human composition to include an explicit connection between women's weak nerves and their weak constitution in general, including a weak mind. Within his explanation of how nerves work, Mandeville explains the characteristics that apply to women because of their delicate nerves:

> This Delicacy as well as Imbecility of the Spirits in Women is conspicuous in all their Actions, those of the Brain not excepted: They are unfit both for abstruse and elaborate Thoughts, all Studies of Depth, Coherence and Solidity, that fatigue the Spirits, and require a Steadiness and Assiduity of thinking; but where the Advantages of Education and Knowledge are equal, they exceed the Men in Sprightliness of Fancy, Quickness of Thought and off-hand Wit; as much as they out-do them in Sweetness of Voice, and Volubility of Tongue. (247)

The rhetoric of this argument exemplifies the attempt to express gender in terms of difference rather than hierarchy, for although Mandeville is attacking women's reasoning skills he immediately discusses their mental strengths, such as their active imagination and quick wit. This seemingly beneficial but actually detrimental gendering of sensibility produces the ideal woman that Austen and Lennox criticize through their characterizations of Arabella and Marianne.

Similarly, Gregory's conduct book reveals how eighteenth-century society normalized this particular representation of the ideal woman. In his chapter entitled "Religion," Gregory teaches the specific approach to spiritual life that is appropriate to women. He begins with the following assessment of women: "The natural softness and sensibility of your dispositions particularly fit you for the practice of those duties where the heart is chiefly concerned" (15). His premise leads to instruction about proper studies for women, in which he encourages them to read religious texts that are "addressed to the heart . . . not such [that] entangle you in an endless maze of opinions and systems" (19-20). He advises his daughters to "not meddle with controversy," meaning complex, scholarly works, since they may cause women to "plunge into a chaos from which you will never be able to extricate yourselves" (18). Arabella's reasoning skills fit for a "figure in Parliament" and the reformed Marianne's admirable goal of a life dedicated to "serious study" contradict the cultural paradigm of the female in Gregory's conduct book in a way that causes readers to question the validity of this gender distinction.

Although Lennox and Austen criticize these detrimental characteristics applied to women through the culture of sensibility, they both ultimately submit their female characters to the socially proper role of woman in their novels' disheartening outcomes. Austen's ending for Marianne seems even more disheartening than Arabella's conclusion. Through the characterization of Marianne after her first transformation, respectable and gracious but also independent and studious, Austen indulges in the fantasy of women thriving and expressing themselves in a world that does not subjugate them to the restrictive cultural depiction of females. Ultimately, though, the fantasy

comes to an end in the realistic conclusion of the domestic novel. Austen may rewrite the female reformation narrative at first, by not allowing illness to subjugate woman to man, but in the end she submits Marianne to the conventional, patriarchal denouement by rejecting her self-made plan of secluded study and placing her into a disappointing marriage with an ill-matched suitor.

A more traditional interpretation of Marianne's conclusion, however, finds her marriage to be a respectable and even fortunate outcome for a woman in her situation, and this argument is most eloquently explained in Claudia Johnson's works. Johnson maintains that Austen writes a happy conclusion for Marianne because she does not include the typical ending for love-hurt women: death. She explains that "women abused in love are expected to die . . . This is what 'conventionally' happens in sentimental novels, and this is what everyone, with untroubled matter-of-factness, expects from Marianne" ("A 'Sweet Face'" 165). Since second attachments are not readily accepted by society, these injured women are considered useless and become a "financial burden on family" ("A 'Sweet Face'" 165):

> From the standpoint of sensibility and the social structure it serves, a woman's readiness to form second attachments always appears gross and improper . . . because it gives her an unladylike parity in the conduct of her sentimental and erotic life, a parity that challenges the primacy of male choice and thus unsettles the economy governing what anthropologists call the "traffic in women." ("A 'Sweet Face'" 167)

Thus, the death of a female character who has been abandoned by her first love "spares us the mess of lasting conflict and the necessity of social change" ("A 'Sweet Face'" 166). This narrative practice of killing off injured female characters is epitomized by

Samuel Richardson's novel Clarissa, in which the female protagonist dies from suffering the emotional injuries caused by the mistreatment of Robert Lovelace. Johnson explains that Austen undermines this misogynistic tradition, promulgated by the culture of sensibility's "virtue in distress" model, by allowing the love-hurt Marianne to live and form a second attachment.

However, Johnson misreads Marianne's reformation. She summarizes the conclusion of the novel as Marianne being "yanked back [from death] into a happy second attachment and a happy marriage" ("A 'Sweet Face'" 173, Johnson's emphasis), and argues elsewhere that although "Marianne changes her opinions about second attachments . . . she is never obliged to surrender to the 'commonplace,' 'gross,' and 'illiberal'" (*Jane Austen* 72). Johnson concludes her interpretation with the following commonly-accepted argument: "Sense and Sensibility grants [Marianne] the highest happiness it can imagine" (*Jane Austen* 72). I argue that Marianne is subjected to the "commonplace" and "gross," and though her ending is not a tragedy, in no way does Austen offer her the "highest happiness."

A close analysis of the novel's ending reveals that Austen's description of this marital conclusion does not comply with the typical happy endings of domestic novels. Colonel Brandon is chosen for Marianne by her half brother for fiscal reasons and by her mother and sister for sympathy towards him, and through this betrothal she becomes objectified, muted, and subordinated into the appropriate patriarchal role for the reformed woman. Unlike Arabella who has developed a friendly yet intimate relationship with and an obvious affection for Mr. Glanville throughout the novel and whose marriage is

described as exhibiting "every Virtue and laudable Affection of the Mind" (383), Marianne vehemently dislikes Colonel Brandon for most of the novel. Early in Volume I, Marianne describes the proposition of desiring Colonel Brandon as "ridiculous" and an "absurdity" (39), claiming that he is old enough to be her father and "has neither genius, taste, nor spirit . . . his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression" (53). In the final volume, even Elinor, who is one of the novel's most sensible voices, doubts the appropriateness of the union, for she cannot argue for compatibility between the two based on "their age, characters, or feelings" even after Mrs. Dashwood has revealed, albeit with her added "natural embellishments," that Colonel Brandon does in fact love Marianne (314). Austen writes the final description for the couple with as pleasant a tone as most domestic novel marital conclusions are given, stating that Colonel Brandon was as happy as he deserved to be and that because "Marianne could never love by halves . . . her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby" (352). But the overall description of their relationship and marriage prevents the scrutinizing reader from delighting in the ill-suited match.

Moreover, the extermination of Marianne's agency and spirited character through this marriage also spoils any attempt to read it as a happy ending. The narrator describes Marianne's consent to marriage in the following passage:

> With such a confederacy against her . . . what could she do? . . . instead of remaining even for ever with her mother, and finding her only pleasures in retirement and study, as afterwards in her more calm and sober judgment she had

> determined on,—she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, a mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (351-352)

With the exception of Marianne "voluntarily" giving her hand to Colonel Brandon (352), the language of this conclusion suppresses her power, abolishes her independence, and annihilates her voice, since Marianne does not speak at all in the conclusion, and this repressive language contrasts the language of agency used to describe the decision to live a secluded life of study that "she had determined" using "calm and sober judgment." The plot objectifies and transforms Marianne from a reasoning, independent woman to a prize for the deserving Colonel Brandon. Elinor concludes that "the reward of her sister was due" to Colonel Brandon for "his sufferings and his constancy" (313). In fact, the entire Dashwood family, along with Elinor's new husband Edward, "felt [Colonel Brandon's] sorrows, and their own obligations," thus "Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of all" (351). Although Austen allows the love-hurt Marianne to escape death, her vibrant, individualistic character does not survive, giving this novel a more realistic rather than comic conclusion since female subjugation to a less-than-compatible husband, often arranged by the families, happened too often.

Johnson's understanding of Marianne's marriage as a relatively happy ending represents a more traditional analysis of this character's outcome, but other examples of Austen scholarship explore more nuanced interpretations of this character's problematic conclusion. A. Walton Litz recognizes the disappointing aspects of the marriage between Colonel Brandon and Marianne but attributes this perplexing ending "to the fact that Jane Austen was working against her inclinations and talents [and] was the victim of

conventions," arguing that only later in her novel-writing did she develop good characterization skills that counteracted the standards of "moralistic fiction" (82-83). While some scholars, including Tanner and Seeber, analyze Marianne's marriage and overall conclusion in a similar vein and find the ending purposefully disappointing, they fail to recognize her multi-staged reformation that leads to a clearer understanding of what Austen represents through this character and the novel as a whole. Austen highlights the possibilities of a non-restrictive, non-patriarchal reform by not submitting the female character weakened by illness to the vulnerable model of femininity in which she requires masculine guidance and protection, and this promising initial transformation makes the conclusion even more unnatural and unsatisfying. Thus, Austen undermines these suppressive gender distinctions by writing a disappointing marital conclusion. She attacks the cultural idea that women were physically, emotionally, and mentally weaker, in need of man's guardianship, and therefore unsuitable for a solitary, autonomous life of study.

The Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his important treatise *Émile, ou de l'éducation* published in 1762 and translated to English the following year, attempted to give validity to this subjugated role of woman by first distinguishing woman from man using rhetoric that had evolved from the gendering of sensibility: "The man should be strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive; the one must have both the power and the will; it is enough that the other should offer little resistance" (384). This assumption of gender distinctions then leads Rousseau to make the following argument for women's appropriate role in society: "It follows that woman is specifically

made for man's delight . . . A woman's education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time" (384, 388). Rousseau's argument is a perfect example of the consequences detrimental to women and gender equality that could and did arise from accepting the model of woman based on gendered sensibility, and Austen reveals this dangerous effect by rendering Marianne's conclusion, which tells the story of a happy, reasonable, and studious woman subjugated to the role of pleasing a man, a sad and disappointing one.

Through this critique of Rousseau's ideal woman, Austen aligns herself with several radical female authors of the long eighteenth century. Mary Astell, in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*, published in 1694, encouraged females in their choice of a secluded lifestyle of study, arguing that a woman who is "not content to be wife and good her self alone . . . endeavors to propagate Wisdom and Piety to all within her Sphere" (104). Austen's plot parallels Astell's proposition for women to be single and live outside of public society through Marianne's initial reformation, and although Austen is writing her novel over a century after Astell's treatise, society was still very wary of women living outside of the realm of men. Marianne's story also parallels some concepts from Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In this famous manifesto, published in 1792, Wollstonecraft responds directly to Rousseau and his description of the ideal woman through overt criticism of this limiting gender discrimination.

Wollstonecraft states that woman "was not created merely to be the solace of man, and the sexual should not destroy the human character" (142). The latter statement illustrates well the problematic endings of Austen's as well as Lennox's novels, for the complex personalities of Marianne and Arabella are both destroyed when they must succumb to this restricting role of woman as weak, passive, and subjected to man.

Pairing the radical early feminist Wollstonecraft with the socially-accepted novelists Lennox and Austen, who conclude almost every lead female character's story with a betrothal to a man, may seem bizarre, but as Deborah Ross explains, "Women novelists [of this time] persisted in presenting the real universe, showing its unfairness without advocating rebellion" (470). The conventional plot lines of *The Female Quixote* and *Sense and Sensibility* do not cry out for a revolution, as Wollstonecraft's writing does, but they are also *not* conservative domestic novels that support the patriarchal norm by rewarding all of the female characters with happy endings for submitting to men in marriage. Instead, these novels paint Arabella's and Marianne's conclusions as particularly disappointing in order to criticize the social consequences of accepting the gendering of sensibility and the disturbing constraints it places on women. Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* stirred up controversy to the point that it became infamous in many households; among some other outraged contemporaries, the famous polemicist Hannah More claimed that she was "invincibly resolved not to [read] it" (427). Meanwhile, the novels of Austen and Lennox, subversive in a quieter and more subtle way, slipped easily into the mainstream of female

authorship and widespread readership of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, leaving insightful readers questioning the social constructions of gender roles that restricted their freedom.

REFERENCES

Astell, Mary. *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*. 1694. *InternetArchive*. Web.

Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. Ed. Ros Ballaster. 1811. London: Penguin Group, 2003.

Barker-Benfield, G.J. *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Cheyne, George. *English Malady: Or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds*. London, 1734. ECCO. Web.

Doody, Margaret Anne. Introduction. Lennox, Charlotte. *The Female Quixote*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xi-xxxii.

Gregory, John. "A Father's Legacy To His Daughters." 1761. 6th Ed. Dublin, Ireland, 1774. *ECCO*. Web.

Haggerty, George. *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998. *NetLibrary*. Web.

Isles, Duncan. "Johnson, Richardson, and *The Female Quixote*." Appendix. *The Female Quixote*. By Charlotte Lennox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 419-428.

Johnson, Claudia L. "A 'Sweet Face as White as Death': Jane Austen and the Politics of Female Sensibility." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 22.2 (1989): 159-174. *JSTOR*. Web.

---. *Jane Austen*: *Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Laqueur, Thomas. "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology." *Representations* No. 14 (Spring 1986): 1-41. *JSTOR*. Web.

Lennox, Charlotte. *The Female Quixote*. Ed. Margaret Dalziel. 1752. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Litz, A. Walton. *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Malina, Debra. "Rereading the Patriarchal Text: *The Female Quixote*, *Northanger Abbey*, and the Trace of the Absent Mother." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 8.2 (1996): 271-292. *Project Muse*. Web.

Mandeville, Bernard. *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions*. 1711. London, 1730. *Google Books*. Web.

Mitford, John. "Dr. Johnson's Literary Intercourse with Mrs. Lennox." *Gentleman's Magazine* XX (August 1843): 132. *HathiTrust Digital Library*. Web.

More, Hannah. Letter to the Earl of Orford. 1793. *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*. Vol. 1. By William Roberts. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1834. 426-427. *Google Books*. Web.

Richardson, Samuel. *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady*. London, 1748. *Google Books*. 2013. Web.

Richardson, Samuel. Letter to Mrs. Charlotte Lennox. 13 Jan. 1752. "Johnson, Richardson, and *The Female Quixote*." Appendix. By Duncan Isles. 419-428. *The*

Female Quixote. By Charlotte Lennox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 424.

Ross, Deborah. "Mirror, Mirror: The Didactic Dilemma of *The Female Quixote*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 27.3 (1987): 455-473. *JSTOR*. Web.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile, ou De l'éducation*. 1762. Trans. Barbara Foxley. London: J. M. Dent, 2001.

Seeber, Barbara. "'I See Everything As You Desire Me to Do': The Scolding and Schooling of Marianne Dashwood." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11.2 (1999): 223-234. *Project Muse*. Web.

Shoemaker, Robert B. *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres*. London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998.

Small, Helen. *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity 1800-1865*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Small, Miriam. *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. "The Subtle Sophistry of Desire: Dr. Johnson and 'The Female Quixote.'" *Modern Philology* 85.4 (1988): 532-542. *JSTOR*. Web.

Stove, Judy. "Instruction With Amusement: Jane Austen's Women of Sense." *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 60.1 (2007): 3-16. *ProQuest*. Web.

Tanner, Tony. *Jane Austen*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Ward, Candace. "'Cruel Disorder': Female Bodies, Eighteenth-Century Fever Narratives, and the Sentimental Novel." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 32.1 (2003): 93-121. *ProjectMuse*. Web.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 1792. Ed. Miriam Brody Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1975.

Wright, George. "On the Importance of Marriage." *The Lady's Miscellany, Or Pleasing Essays, Poems, Stories, and Examples, For the Instruction and Entertainment of the Female Sex in General, in Every Station of Life*. 1793: 23-25. *ECCO*. Web.

MELVILLE'S BARTLEBY: A PERFECTLY-CRAFTED ANOMALY

Writing to his brother-in-law John C. Hoadley in 1877, Herman Melville concludes a letter, or what he calls his "queer sort of an absurd scribbling," with the following statement: "Life is so short, and so ridiculous and irrational (from a certain point of view) that one knows not what to make of it unless—well, finish the sentence for yourself" (454). And after proclaiming in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne dated November, 1851, that in spite of doubting his own sanity at times he is in fact "not mad," Melville calmly admits, "But truth is ever incoherent" (213). These quotations, along with others from Melville's letters and published works, exhibit the overall tone of his short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street," first published in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* in 1853 and then included in a collection of Melville's short stories entitled *The Piazza Tales* three years later. In the eyes of the story's narrator, Bartleby is "ridiculous and irrational" and "ever incoherent." The narrator's obsession with fully understanding Bartleby and his ultimate failure to do so not only exists within the fictional boundaries of Melville's short story but also extends into the reality of the "Bartleby Industry" (x), the term Dan McCall gives to the large group of scholars who have written about this complicated character. And though many excellent members of the "Bartleby Industry" (x) have composed eloquent interpretations that describe Bartleby as resisting capitalistic control, symbolizing Melville's literary frustrations, suffering from clinical depression or autism, or participating in some other

discourse arising from that particular scholar's critical methodology, overall Bartleby has remained what the narrator dubbed him, "the inscrutable scrivener" (50). As a whole, his actions seem illogical, his motives unknowable, and his character unclassifiable.

Instead of making another attempt to clearly identify what or who Bartleby represents, I examine the critical responses to this complex and problematic character, analyze the obsession with understanding and interpreting Bartleby, and explain the social criticism Melville implies through writing such an unsolvable riddle of a story whose main character obstinately resists simplification. Through a personification of reality's ambiguity and irrationality in the character of Bartleby, Melville exposes and denounces society's compulsion to read people as normalized identity types. Furthermore, I argue that through this characterization of life filled with contradictions and complexities that are simply unacceptable to the narrator and readers, Melville ultimately critiques the limiting understandings of humanity, masculinity, and individual freedom emerging in antebellum America.

The narrator, a "rather elderly" lawyer, begins his story with meticulously detailed descriptions of each person, including himself, that worked in his office on Wall Street prior to the arrival of his newest hire, Bartleby, claiming that "some mention of myself, my *employees*, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings . . . [are] indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented" (19). The only names of the three employees given are their "nicknames," which the narrator explains were "mutually conferred upon each other by my three clerks, and were deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters" (21). In fact, the only

character within the story's plot line who is given a name other than a job title or nickname describing their character traits is the lead character Bartleby, and this is expressive of his complex personality's resistance to simplification. The temperaments and habits of the two copyists Turkey and Nippers and the office-boy Ginger-Nut are described as easily knowable and interpreted in a simple, causal manner. For example, the "eccentricities" of Turkey and Nippers are methodically attributed to the former's "self-indulgent habits" and subsequent embodiment of "a man whom prosperity harmed" and to the latter's victimization by "two evil powers—ambition and indigestion" (24-26). By rationalizing the neuroses of each character, the narrator reveals his understanding of people as easily comprehensible and thus classifiable.

Bartleby, however, trumps this simplistic worldview, for the narrator immediately describes this scrivener as "the strangest I ever saw . . . of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and, in his case, those are very small" (19). Nevertheless, the narrator spends most of the story attempting to ascertain this unascertainable character, but with no true avail. He tries to reason with Bartleby in order to understand why the scrivener responds to customary work requests with the following statement of "passive resistance" (33-34): "I would prefer not to" (29). The narrator's constant assumptions as to why the scrivener would exhibit such "extraordinary conduct" reveals his desperate need for some kind of understanding of this odd character (31). According to the narrator's assessment, Bartleby is a "perfectly honest man" (61), "means no mischief . . . intends no insolence" (34), and "of such a gentlemanly organization" (51) but is also "inflexible" (46), "unaccountably eccentric"

(61), and possibly "a little deranged" (63). When the narrator first realizes that Bartleby is living alone in the office, he exclaims, "What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed!" (39), followed by a proposition to readers to imagine how this lifestyle would cause a man to become forlorn like Bartleby. And after snooping through Bartleby's desk, the narrator makes the following diagnosis: "What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was a victim of innate and incurable disorder" (42). Despite this admission that Bartleby was "incurable," the narrator continues to struggle with his fixation on understanding and fixing the eccentric Bartleby until the very end of the story. Removing Bartleby from the office, which the narrator does when the scrivener has entirely stopped doing work, in no way removes him from the narrator's mind.

Bartleby has also not spent a day outside of the mind of literary scholarship since the revival of interest in Melville's works in the early twentieth century. Dan McCall's *The Silence of Bartleby* explains this literary phenomenon eloquently: "By itself, the story warrants—may even require—elaborate analysis. But going through the voluminous criticism and scholarship devoted to 'Bartleby,' I felt more than once that I had lost the story" (x). McCall focuses his two-fold criticism of Bartleby scholarship on "readers' desires to identify and secure Melville within their own rather than his contexts" (Milton 19)[2] and the subsequent loss of an appreciation for the emotions

[2] McCall quotes Stern Milton here, a critic who McCall assumes to be "one of the best writers on the tale," in order to explain his difficulties with the analysis of Bartleby by the "various critical schools" (x).

Melville's story evokes because "such efforts to enrich the story may actually impoverish it, diverting us from the sense of wonder and pain that it provides" (98). In a similar vein, I argue that at times these meticulous methodological approaches distract us from looking at the story from a "big picture" point of view, but instead of focusing my analysis on the "sense of wonder and pain" that the story arouses, I look at the frustration and desperation for understanding that the story invokes in its readers and the ideological perspective that arises from an analysis of this particular effect. With the typical interpretations produced by these scholars, using critical lenses ranging from New Historicism to psychoanalysis, that attempt to define Bartleby in the most complete way possible, the story loses its profound sense of the inability to completely understand the mindset of other human beings due to the contradictions and ambiguities within a person's character rendering him or her resistant to simplification.

Melville scholar M. Thomas Inge recognizes this salient aspect of the text; in fact, the story's puzzling factor is what inspired his book *Bartleby the Inscrutable,* a collection of literary analyses of Bartleby from a variety of critical methods, "contradictory and in some instances openly hostile to the others" in order to "demonstrate some of the variety of opinions" (10). In the book's short preface, Inge makes the following astute assessment of "Bartleby": "It is one of those few stories in English, or any other language, which will continue to defy any definitive or generally satisfactory explication, and this may finally be its theme, of course—that the inscrutable does not yield one iota to the rational categories of existence" (9). Inge makes no attempt to explore this theme, though, asserting that "by no means is this book meant to conclude anything about the

story, aside from its inscrutability" (10). I, however, explore some of the implications that emanate from such a perfectly inscrutable story and attempt to reveal the ideological stance behind the narrator's as well as scholars' vehement attempts to, as Inge explains, "fix [Bartleby] in a formulated phrase" (10).

Many critics quickly mention this issue of inscrutability in their analyses of Bartleby but do not fully explore it. Instead, they reveal how Bartleby *can* be rendered comprehensible using a particular methodological approach. Although several of the scholarly works that I examine in the following pages are excellent and necessary in understanding Melville's works, "Bartleby the Scrivener," along with other complex stories, entices scholars to sometimes explain the unexplainable and to do so with emotional responses or political agendas that are not always warranted in the text. For example, David Kuebrich attempts to prove that Bartleby is looking for salvation by closely analyzing two of the moments when Bartleby ever so slightly modifies his famous "I prefer not to" phrase. He argues that in these two specific moments Bartleby "considers the possibility of relaxing his resistance" (402), and these episodes reveal that "meaningful communication is possible, and Bartleby is open to change but prudently awaits further evidence of a genuine transformation on the part of the lawyer" (403). The only evidence given for this argument is that Bartleby adds "at present" to his phrase "I prefer not to" after two moments in which the narrator attempts a "friendly and even quasi-familial relationship" with Bartleby, and Kuebrich states that through these particular modifications "Bartleby implies that he may become more cooperative in the future" (402). However, Kuebrich fails to mention that the narrator attempts to make

"friendly and even quasi-familial" connections with Bartleby several other times in the story, and Bartleby does not react to these other gestures in a way that implies he feels hopeful. Although parts of Kuebrich's argument are sound and helpful, he seems to be concocting this particular aspect of Bartleby in order to prove his overall argument that Bartleby is seeking help, producing an interpretation that strays too far from the text to be considered accurate. These sloppy interpretations, though, reveal how this story provokes scholar's compulsion to either explain the unexplainable or manipulate the ambiguous parts of the text in order to fit them into a larger argument or political agenda that does not truly exist within the text. I find both the approaches that are less than thorough as well as the explanations that remain more faithful to the text helpful in my examination of responses to this story because they both represent an overall critical choice not to fully and unabashedly explore the inscrutability of Bartleby.

Psychoanalytical explanations have been especially popular among the attempts to define the indefinable character of Bartleby. Scholars in this field have interpreted his eccentric behavior as expressive of a variety of mental disorders delineated in the American Psychiatric Association's *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*). Morris Beja's "Bartleby and Schizophrenia" explains that for the scrivener, "schizophrenia becomes a refuge—the awful result of a desperate attempt to avoid insanity" (560). Whitehead, Liese, and O'Dell, in "Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener': A Case Study," make the following claim: "Using DSM-III-R criteria, it can be concluded that Bartleby's Axis I diagnosis was major depression," though they admit that interpreting Bartleby's behavior is a "considerable challenge" due to Melville's "rich

and problematic narrative" (21). And more recently, Stuart Murray, in *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination,* describes Melville's story as "*the* great literary text of autistic presence" (50). Although often-quoted by other scholars, these analyses have had their fair share of criticism; for example, Kuebrich argues that several of these psychoanalytical arguments, including Beja's article, "divest the story of its social significance" (402, note 26). However, what has not yet been assessed about this type of analysis is its eradication of the *actual* character of Bartleby that is riddled with contradictions and ambiguities. I argue that Bartleby's eccentric behavior does not easily lend itself to the limiting classifications of the *DSM* definitions. Of course Bartleby *could* be depressed, but Melville significantly refuses to give us any insight into Bartleby's thoughts and motives that would allow us to make a confident diagnosis. Furthermore, this diagnosis of depression conflicts with what Maurice Blanchot calls Bartleby's "radical form of passivity" (17) or for what the narrator dubs Bartleby's "passive resistance" (33-34) exhibited in the scrivener's determined one-liner "I would prefer not to" (29) that he rarely utters in a way that suggests melancholy. Both descriptions of Bartleby, that he is depressed and that he is radically and rebelliously passive, are valid and helpful in trying to understand this character but do not succeed in identifying Bartleby in a concrete manner. Although I am not dismissing these case studies in any way, Bartleby's complicated character cannot be grasped in its entirety within this type of definitive analysis. The complete Bartleby, the text's Bartleby with all of his ambiguities, is lost when placed under the psychoanalyst's diagnostic gaze.

William Sullivan's "Bartleby and Infantile Autism: A Naturalistic Explanation" illustrates what is lost in psychoanalytical criticism of Bartleby's inscrutable character. Although speaking of autism within the context of mid-nineteenth-century literature may seem anachronistic and a little ridiculous, scholars such as Stuart Murray, Amit Pinchevski, Ashley Kern Koegel, and Oliver Steinert-Lieschied have written works relating Bartleby's behavior to autism, and Sullivan's essay, an intelligent and respectable analysis, is often quoted by other critics, especially those interested in psychoanalysis. What I find problematic in Sullivan's analysis, and in other critical works that diagnose Bartleby with mental disorders, is the identification of Bartleby as "a man with incurable organic illness" who desperately needs help (Sullivan 57), not unlike the narrator's understanding of Bartleby as "the victim of innate and incurable disorder" suffering from "excessive and organic ill" (Melville "Bartleby" 42). Sullivan states that "those familiar with infantile autism should readily recognize that Bartleby is a high-functioning autistic adult" (46), supporting this diagnosis with evidence revealing that "Bartleby has the leading characteristics of infantile autism, extreme aloneness, preservation of sameness, and difficulty with communication" (50). Although I respect this recognition, I argue that this analysis victimizes Bartleby in a way that the text does not support. Sullivan explains that "Bartleby in every way fits the pattern of a reasonably successful, coping, autistic adult, whose tragedy is that he almost succeeded in finding the structured environment and understanding personal supervisor he needed" (44). He explains Bartleby's eccentricities as simply the effects of autism: "When too much pressure was put on him, his autistic symptoms were aggravated and he withdrew

completely and resolutely, eventually dying of inanition" (49). According to Sullivan, Bartleby only "prefers not to" because he is mentally ill and unaided by people who understand his mental disorder. Describing the scrivener as helpless and in need of a caretaker, however, strips the character of any intelligence or self-awareness to choose the way he acts, which ultimately eliminates the possibility for other important insights into the story, such as the credible historicist interpretation of Melville's story that reveals a criticism of Wall Street and the injustices of wage labor in Bartleby's actions. Although the narrator views Bartleby as someone in need of help, Bartleby resists this identification not only by refusing help but doing so often with a resolute and sound mind. I am not contending that Bartleby is in no way exemplifying autism. However, Sullivan's naturalistic argument that Bartleby is a copy of a real-life autistic adult not only ignores Melville's representation of Bartleby as a complicated character with ambiguous and often unknowable motives but also forces the scrivener into a character role that is not justified by the text, the role of a victim suffering from a medical disorder who needs psychological aid in order to survive and live a life that is "reasonably successful" (Sullivan 44), or in other words, socially acceptable and normal.

Literary critics outside of the realm of psychoanalysis also tend to forego exploring Bartleby as a nearly perfect example of inscrutability and instead produce definitive interpretations of the character. Barbara Foley, in "From Wall Street to Astor Place: Historicizing Melville's 'Bartleby,'" explains the actions of Bartleby by analyzing the character within the contexts of both "contemporaneous discourse about class polarization" (91) as well as "contemporaneous struggles and discourses over property

rights" (96). Foley claims that a relatively clear, coherent reading of this complicated character can be achieved by simply providing the details of these mid-nineteenth-century political movements in order to historically situate him within it. I chose Foley's article in particular because it represents a common understanding of Bartleby. Although Foley breaks some ground with her analysis of exactly how Bartleby positions himself within the discourses of land monopoly and wage labor (as well as her biographical argument about Melville and guilt in the latter half of the essay), she is not writing anything new when she describes Bartleby as the icon of the alienated proletariat. In fact, she references Michael T. Gilmore, Louise K. Barnett, James C. Wilson, and David Kuebrich for their development of this popular interpretation. Of course this political analysis of Bartleby is crucial to the understanding of Melville's story, but interpretations such as these disregard a key aspect of the story that I argue demands exploration: the frustratingly unexplainable character and actions of Bartleby that the story consistently exhibits. And when this aspect is *consistently* neglected by scholars, the full character of Bartleby is lost.

For instance, Foley claims that by exploring the story's few but crucial historical clues, such as the reference to the multi-millionaire real estate investor John Jacob Astor, "Bartleby's conduct becomes less freakish and idiosyncratic, more plausible and historically significant" (96). In a similar vein as Sullivan in his explanation that autism is blatantly apparent in the text to those who are familiar with the condition, Foley argues that "any reader knowledgeable about the dual campaign against land monopoly and wage slavery in the strategy and discourse of contemporaneous radicalism would

recognize the appropriateness of Bartleby's chosen mode of rebellion" (96). Foley consents that Bartleby "hardly exudes proletarian class consciousness or 'leaps forth' Whitman-style against his employer" (91). Instead, she explains Bartleby's rebellion as "withhold[ing] his labor power and assert[ing] his right to terrain" in order to affirm "a prior and unconditional doctrine of human rights" (96). However, this interpretation of Bartleby, based on assumptions of why Bartleby acts in such a peculiar way, does not account for some of his strange remarks. For example, when the narrator attempts to persuade Bartleby to look into other occupations, Bartleby responds in ways that are not congruent with language marked as resistant to the capitalist machine. Bartleby refuses job options proposed by the narrator with the following explanatory remarks: "There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship; but I am not particular . . . It does not strike me that there is anything definite about [going as a companion to Europe]. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular" (58-59). These comments are more in line with the psychoanalytical arguments that he is autistic or depressed than with Foley's political analysis. Another example is Bartleby's response to the Tombs' grub-man in which he states, "I prefer not to dine today . . . It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinner" (63). These examples of Bartleby's bizarre character in no way prove Foley's argument wrong. However, because these particular eccentricities cannot fit into Foley's outline of what Bartleby represents and thus cannot be made "less freakish . . . more plausible" by her historical explanation (Foley 96), they reveal that Bartleby is more than just a symbolic character of resistance against the injustices of mid-nineteenth-

century wage labor and land monopoly in America, just as he is more than a victim of a *DSM* mental disorder. He is a perfectly-crafted anomaly.

The persistent ambiguity of this story, habitually driven to the corner of Bartleby scholarship, composes one of the more prominent impressions provoked by this text and thus demands an analysis that embraces contradictions and unexplainable eccentricities. Melville keeps Bartleby's motives not only hidden but also too complex and ridiculous to be rationally analyzed in a conclusive way, and through drawing such an unclassifiable character he highlights the irrational quality of and the contradictions existing within identity and reality. Moreover, a close look at this unclassifiable character, with all of his unintelligible motives, reveals the story's implication that human behavior in particular can be complicated, sometimes irrational, and unfit for society's determined efforts to constantly explain and identify. In a letter written to his friend Evert Duyckinck in February of 1851, just two years before the publication of "Bartleby," Melville declines an offer to contribute a piece of writing to the *Holden's Dollar Magazine,* and he chooses not to reveal his reasons for doing so, stating, "You must be content to believe that I have reasons, or else I would not refuse so small a thing" (180). This quotation draws attention to the symbolic connection between Bartleby the scrivener, or writer, and Melville the author who "prefers not to" cater to certain publications and their particular stylistic demands and, in this particular instance, refuses any blatant explanation for his actions. But the broad statement that follows Melville's refusal is what really gives insight into his liberal understanding of fellow humans: "We are all queer customers, Mr. Duyckinck, you, I, and every body else in the world. So if I here seem queer to you, be

sure, I am not alone in my queerness, tho' it present itself at a different port, perhaps, from other people, since every one has his own distinct peculiarity" (180). And what makes Melville's story such a captivating tale is that Bartleby is an extremely peculiar and queer character, so odd that hundreds of scholars have argued over the best way to explain and define him, yet he is still a *believable* character. Just after Melville published *The Piazza Tales* in 1856, one review in the *Berkshire County Eagle* called Bartleby "a portrait from life" (Fiene 151), and another published in *Criterion* discerned that "Bartleby must be based upon living characters" (Fiene 152). Melville created a character that is both realistic and yet so eccentric that he pushes the limits of our understanding of what it is to be human. What is fascinating about the effects of this story is that often readers push back in an effort to understand Bartleby *within* the social types that have already been deemed appropriate or normal.

The narrator's frustration in his attempt to understand and define Bartleby, replicated and reinforced by the efforts of the "Bartleby Industry," highlights this compulsion to categorize other humans into artificially-constructed identity types. As with Bartleby, the narrator has been discussed in excess using varying schools of thought, and one of the most popular avenues for understanding him leads to an evaluation of his true motives in trying to help Bartleby or an exploration of why he is incapable of doing so. Several scholars criticize the narrator for simply lacking what Steven Doloff explains as genuine "compassionate initiative" and "spontaneously active and unqualified expression of love for his 'neighbor'" (359). Others claim that the reason for the narrator's inability to help Bartleby exists in a failure of communication between the

revolutionary scrivener and the authoritarian lawyer. For example, John Durham Peters describes a common view of Bartleby as "a rebellious integrity" with whom "there can be no communication" because of his "heroic escape from the officious paper power of the lawyer's world" (159). And many scholars indict society, which they argue is represented by the narrator, for Bartleby's demise. David Kuebrich takes this particular stance and criticizes the narrator and thus society for the overall ignored and dismissed "discrepancy between the nation's economic practices and its purported democratic and Christian ideals" (381) in which the former's "dedicated pursuit of self-interest, even when it involves the exploitation of others" (396), conflicts with the latter's devotion to the "commandment to love one's neighbor" (394) and sacrifice individual desires for the whole. Although Kuebrich concludes that the "central issue" of this story is "what it is that makes the lawyer unable to understand Bartleby and to respond with compassion" and that Melville "wanted his audience . . . to experience [the narrator's] sense of exasperation and puzzlement" (403-404), he still focuses his argument on the unsound assumption that Bartleby is looking for salvation, as I explained earlier in my analysis of his argument, and that the narrator is incapable of truly helping. Instead, I fully examine this "sense of exasperation and puzzlement" by looking at the narrator's *obsession* with comprehending Bartleby's strange behavior outside of and beyond the contexts of charity, ability to communicate, or competence in helping others.

The final paragraph of this story, which the narrator describes as the "sequel," reveals the importance of examining this story without looking at the narrator's actions in relation to whether or not he wants to or is able to help Bartleby. At this point, Bartleby

has died, and the narrator's emotional investments in trying to help him have been in vain. However, the narrator's frustration and obsession with this character still lives, and thus the story cannot yet end. The death of Bartleby brings about the death of the narrator's desire to save him (whether genuine or not), but the desire to *understand* him adamantly remains. The narrator can only rest his troubled mind when he has some insight into "who Bartleby was," and he gets that from what he calls "one little item of rumor, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease" (64). This "vague report" as the narrator calls it is completely unverifiable, and the narrator hesitates to even mention it. In fact, this concluding paragraph begins with such a subdued tone that the reader may at first assume it has no relevant or interesting material:

> There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history . . . But ere, parting with the reader, let me say, that if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, and what manner of life he led prior to the present narrator's making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify it. (64)

The narrator, however, immediately proceeds to gratify this curiosity when he convinces himself to "briefly mention" the rumor to the reader since it had "not been without a certain suggestive interest" to him (65).

What follows this decision to "divulge" this "one little item of rumor" that the narrator admits is dubious at best, stating, "Upon what basis it rested I could never ascertain . . . how true it is I cannot now tell" (64), is a comprehensive explanation for Bartleby's eccentricities. The report, in its entirety, stated that "Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been

suddenly removed by a change in the administration" (65). The narrator is then overwhelmed by the melancholy implications of this story:

> When I think over this rumor, hardly can I express the emotions which seize me. 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? . . . On errands of life, these letters speed to death. (65)

This emotional outburst is followed by the famous last words of the narrator: "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (65). Now that the narrator *feels* that he understands Bartleby's strange behavior, even though his explanation is based entirely on gossip and conjecture, he can finally rest his mind and pen. Thus by looking at what actually resolves the narrator's struggles with Bartleby, which the sequel reveals to be simply understanding and classifying him, the prominent reason for his frustration becomes clear. In spite of his distraught exclamations about the "hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" (42), the narrator is not preoccupied with Bartleby solely because of his powerlessness to help the scrivener; instead, he is obsessed with diagnosing and thus classifying Bartleby into a social type that he can comprehend.

Furthermore, the narrator's final emotional exclamation is the climax of the narrator's pity for Bartleby, for not until he believes that he completely understands *why* Bartleby was acting so strangely can he fully relate to and thus sympathize with the scrivener. And by explaining the why, the narrator is finally able to see Bartleby as an unfortunate member of the human family. Throughout the story, the narrator describes Bartleby in non-human terms since he cannot place him within any socially-accepted

category such as criminal or madman. He calls him an "intolerable incubus" (54) and a "helpless creature" (55), exclaiming, "what does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or, rather, ghost" (55). He differentiates his own reasonable self as human from Bartleby's irrational, inhuman self: "How could a human creature, with the common infirmities of our nature, refrain from bitterly exclaiming upon such perverseness—such unreasonableness" (37). Although the narrator has a lucid moment in which he sympathizes with Bartleby as a fellow human, stating, "A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam" (40), this scene only serves as a temporary reminder to the narrator that in fact Bartleby is a human, in spite of his differences. Not long after this exclamation, the narrator returns to describing Bartleby in inhuman terms such as "fixture in my chamber" (46) and "apparition in my room" (54). But when the narrator hears the rumor of the Dead Letters Office job and makes assumptions about its effects on Bartleby in order to explain the scrivener's actions, he can relate to Bartleby as an actual human being and have true pity on this familiar model of the lonely, despondent man.

Melville's most prominent biographer Hershel Parker interprets this sequel through an analysis of power play, revealing that the narrator's final lines do not represent brotherly love but instead reveal the narrator's transformed understanding of Bartleby:

> What is important about the rumor is not what it tells about Bartleby, since it may be false, but what it tells about the narrator . . . When he sighs, 'Ah, Bartleby! Ah humanity!' he is not consciously evoking the sense of 'common humanity' which once plunged him very near a tragic sense of life. Instead, the concluding words

> reduce his experience with the strange scrivener to manageable, not-unpleasing terms: they show he is at last in control. (162, 164)

Although Parker argues that the narrator's "comfortable, self-indulgent variety of melancholy" and superior feeling towards Bartleby is what prevents him from truly relating to the "inferior" scrivener (163), his analysis is key to understanding why the narrator and society in general become so frustrated with people that do not fit into normalized identity categories. When people cannot be simplified and classified, they cannot be controlled, and Bartleby resists all authority and regulation by not succumbing to social norms.

The rumor, then, allows the narrator to place Bartleby into the same classification system that he easily places Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger-Nut, and that system is a manageable world free of ambiguities and contradictions. Just as the narrator explains the oddities of these three simpler characters at the beginning of the story, in the end he can finally rationalize the eccentric behavior of Bartleby, and the fact that this rationalization is drawn from assumptions based on an unverifiable rumor reveals his desperation to understand and identify the inscrutable scrivener. The story, then, highlights the problem with the narrator's and subsequently society's inability to accept the inexplicably weird characters that don't fit known identity types, the "ridiculous and irrational" quality of life, that Melville wrote about in his letters. Because the sequel is only based on conjecture and fails to give a sound conclusion, the insightful reader is left unsatisfied. Although the narrator has fooled himself into accepting the rumor as truth in order to resolve his internal struggle with this oddity of a man and conclude his story, the

keen reader remains wrapped up in the puzzling and mysterious aura that Bartleby evokes. This seems to be one of Melville's purposes in writing such a complicated character. He reveals that human beings are too complex to be easily explained and classified into simplistic identity roles, and the proof is in the narrator's distraught attempts to understand Bartleby and in the scholars' obsession with interpreting him.

Within this revelation, then, Melville specifically critiques the limiting identity role of the mid-nineteenth-century American man. Bartleby resists the core elements that comprise the ideal male during this time, and thus the story prompts the reader to question the social standards of manhood. The narrator simply cannot imagine a man who "would prefer not to" live the typical, monotonous life of an American scrivener on Wall Street, and his stab at a resolution in the sequel is a weak attempt to resituate Bartleby within the realm of what he considers appropriate manhood. Thomas Augst in *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* explores the ways in which male office clerks understood social status and identity in antebellum America:

> The moral identity of manhood was something to be acquired within the marketplace . . . Writing by the prosaic rules of daily life, young men applied economic metaphors to the management of character . . . [assuming] that one can readily calculate the value of experience at regular intervals in the way that one measures the profit and loss of an enterprise (5, 50).

Augst's research reveals Melville's criticism of this limiting way to define men. Bartleby does not submit to this capitalistic model of self-identification. He is not failing at success; he simply "prefers not to" participate in the system. By writing Bartleby as

someone who *chooses* not to engage in the "profit/loss" scheme of character evaluation, Melville exposes the flaws of this type of identification and reveals the need for a more liberal understanding of manhood within the emerging market culture. The ideal working man of the nineteenth century is expected to earnestly strive to increase his wealth and financial status, and his ability to do so determines his worth as a man. Bartleby can't be appropriately understood within this capitalist system of identification, though the narrator desperately tries, just as he can't be simplistically classified as a victim of a *DSM* disorder or even interpreted as only a symbol of the estranged wage-laborer.

In a similar vein as Augst's work, Scott Sandage's *Born Losers* explains how this capitalistic configuration of character evaluation transformed the definition of freedom in early and mid-nineteenth-century America, and Sandage's work is helpful to discerning Melville's frustration with the effects of this socially-accepted identity role for men. He states that during this "era of self-made men and manifest destiny" (3) in which "the only identity deemed legitimate in America is a capitalist identity" (5), "nineteenth-century Americans swapped liberty for ambition, adopting the striver's ethic as the best of all possible freedoms" (14). Melville's Bartleby with his lived-out preferences embodies true individual freedom, in opposition to the emerging definition of personal liberty as "freedom to profit or to succeed," and Sandage explains this in his short discussion of "Bartleby": "Pushing the scrivener's rebellion unto absurdity, Melville showed that the theoretical free agent was not meant to make real choices" (64). Although the "free market" offered hope of success and the possibility for financial and personal growth, encompassed in the popular phrase "the American dream," Melville's short story shows

how the acceptance of this new conceptualization of manhood and individual freedom, grounded in monetary and capitalist rhetoric, prohibits men from actually expressing, in Melville's words, their "queerness," their "own distinct peculiarity."

Furthermore, the market culture of mid-nineteenth-century America fostered a more rigid social system that restrained interaction and communication between men, as seen in the relationship between Bartleby and the narrator. Michael T. Gilmore explains this stifling of social relations in *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*:

> The rationalization and growth of capitalist enterprise in the middle decades of the century turned many of these once independent workmen into wage-earning proletarians and established cash payment as the sole nexus between employer and employee. Obligations, generally between strangers, were now purely contractual, and traditional habits of sociability yielded to a new emphasis on regularity and discipline. (134)

This "emphasis on regularity and discipline" limits self-expression and prohibits real communication between men in the business setting, hence the inability for the narrator to understand the scrivener who prefers not to abide by these social tenets. Bartleby continues to live out his "queerness," even though the market culture in which he lives does not support it. Although I am aligning my argument here with the many critics, including Barbara Foley, who interpret Bartleby as representing Melville's criticism of the market culture's effects on society, I am in no way trying to explain away Bartleby's strange behavior by claiming that he is only a symbol of these effects, a victim of society, a simple representation of the problems with capitalism. Bartleby's inscrutability remains in-tact, even through and within my interpretation of Melville's anxieties of the expanding market. Historicizing Melville's frustration with society's restrictive

stipulations on identity and individual freedom does not clarify and thus eradicate Bartleby's eccentric behavior. Instead, it demonstrates the particular historical atmosphere that supported such narrow-mindedness exemplified by the narrator's obsession with simplifying Bartleby in order to understand him.

Another aspect of Melville's cultural environment that fostered a limiting understanding of identity and personal liberty concerns America's pervasive efforts to cultivate nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century. America was anxious, even desperate, to establish itself as its own united cultural entity in spite of its youth as a nation and its hodgepodge ethnic composition, and nationalists considered the cultivation of a particularly American style of literature a priority in this process. The introduction to the first issue of *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, a popular, mid-nineteenth-century journal promulgated by a small group of New York-based literary nationalists called Young Americans, exemplifies this idea of the literary arts playing a key role in the establishment of America as a nation: "It is only by its literature that one nation can utter itself and make itself known to the rest of the world" (quoted in Wald 113). Duyckinck, who kept a close correspondence with Melville for years, acted as literary editor for this journal from 1844 to 1846, and his essay "Nationality in Literature" expresses a similar sentiment about the importance of literature in a burgeoning nation: "We would set no limits to the subjects on which our authors should write. We would leave them the whole range of nature and humanity. We would wish them to strike every key in the grand scale of human passion. But we would have them true to their country" (77). As Priscilla Wald explains in *Constituting Americans*, "the

authors free to write as they please must nonetheless continually (re)constitute 'America' and 'Americans'" (121), and critics of this type of nationalism and of Young America in general "contend[ed] that the movement would circumscribe the very independence and originality for which it called" due to its "prescriptiveness" (120). Albert Weinberg in his book *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* explains that this tension between individualism and national unity comprises the essence of the American government: "This ideal, conceived as 'the last best revelation of human thought' was democracy—a theory of mass sovereignty but in a more important aspect a complex of individualistic values which . . . Americans most frequently summarized by the inspiring word 'freedom'" (100). Melville struggled personally with this tension in his writing career, for he wanted to write in his own style while simultaneously making money and living up to the Young Americans' and other nationalists' hope that he would be, as Perry Miller states in *The Raven and The Whale*, the "Master Genius of American Literature" that the young nation so desperately desired (116).

However, Melville's relationship to this nationalistic movement changed drastically throughout his lifetime. During the early years of his literary career he "enjoyed an intimate relationship with Young America" but by the publication of *Pierre: or, The Ambiguities* in 1852 had almost completely parted ways with the movement (Wald 122). In fact, Miller claims that the group at one point "accused [Melville] of betraying his country" by not producing an appropriately American work (273). In an oft-quoted letter to Hawthorne from June, 1851, Melville reveals his anxiety over whether to write what his nation desires of him (and thus what will pay) or to write the

truth: “Dollars damn me . . . What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, — it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot” (191). Bartleby with his socially-unacceptable eccentricities and his resistance to social norms signifies this dilemma that frustrated and eventually destroyed Melville’s chances at living out his life as a financially successful author. Furthermore, Bartleby’s fatal conclusion relates to the demise of Melville’s career. Bartleby is free to live out his individualistic ways, just as Melville is free to write whatever he pleases, but the repercussions for these actions are harsh. In an analysis of *Moby-Dick*’s Ahab, Wai Chee Dimock explains Melville’s awareness and struggle with the flip-side of self-reliance: self-victimization, stating that the two “are kindred, the freedom of the one making up the fate of the other, the penalty for one being the other’s reward” (208). Had Bartleby sacrificed his selfhood or character and succumb to the normalized identity role of an American man, his story may not have been a tragedy. And if Melville had submitted to the desires of the nation and to the demands of the market, he probably would not have ended up telling Hawthorne later in life that he had “pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated” (quoted in Miller, 337).

This story’s resistance to a simplification of character is a marvelous representation of Melville’s stubborn efforts to write what he considered true and real, no matter how strange or unconventional. The narrator of Melville’s unfinished novella *Billy Budd* claims that “Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges” (109). Despite the narrator’s attempt to explain Bartleby’s eccentricities with the Dead Letters rumor and scholars’ endeavors to clarify the scrivener’s ambiguities, Bartleby

persists as his true self, with all the "ragged edges," defying nineteenth-century ideals of manhood and individual freedom that still persist in our society today. In June of 1851, just two years before the publication of "Bartleby," Melville wrote to Hawthorne explaining society's refusal to accept reality, or what he calls "truth," with all of its strange and incomprehensible qualities: "Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth—and go to the Soup Societies. Heavens! Let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit banister" (191). He concludes his rant with the statement "Truth is ridiculous to men" (191), and because society sees the true Bartleby as "ridiculous" and unacceptable, scholars constantly change him, manipulate him, control him so that he fits into our understanding of the world around us. Yet, in the text of Melville's magnificently strange story, Bartleby still lives, weird and inscrutable, continuing to frustrate and baffle readers and scholars alike.

REFERENCES

Augst, Thomas. *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Beja, Morris. "Bartleby and Schizophrenia." *The Massachusetts Review* 19.3 (1978): 555-568. *JSTOR*. Web.

Blanchot, Maurice. *The Unavowable Community*. New York: Station Hill Press, 1988.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Ahab's Manifest Destiny." Eds. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo. *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991. 184-212.

Doloff, Steven. "The Prudent Samaritan: Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener' as Parody to Christ's Parable of the Lawyer." *Studies in Short Fiction* 34.3 (1997): 357-361. EBSCO. Web.

Duyckinck, Evert. "Nationality in Literature." *Literature in America: An Anthology of Literary Criticism*. Eds. Philip Rahv and Randall Jarrell. New York: Meridian Books, 1957. 73-77.

Fiene, Donald M. "Chronological Development, in Summary, of Criticism of 'Bartleby.'" *Melville Annual* (1965): 151-152.

Foley, Barbara. "From Wall Street to Astor Place: Historicizing Melville's 'Bartleby.'" *American Literature* 72.1 (2000): 87-116. Academic Search Complete. Web.

Gilmore, Michael T. *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Inge, M. Thomas. Preface. *Bartleby the Inscrutable*. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979.

Kuebrich, David. "Melville's Doctrine of Assumptions: The Hidden Ideology of Capitalist Production in 'Bartleby.'" *The New England Quarterly* 69.3 (1996): 381-406.

McCall, Dan. *The Silence of Bartleby*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Melville, Herman. "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street." 1853. *Piazza Tales*. 1856. New York: Russell and Russell Inc, 1963. 19-65.

---. *Billy Budd*. 1924. London: Macmillan, 1992.

---. "To Evert A. Duyckinck." 12 February 1851. Horth 178-182.

---. "To John C. Hoadley." 31 March 1877. Horth 451-455.

---. "To Nathaniel Hawthorne." 1 June 1851. Horth 190-191.

---. "To Nathaniel Hawthorne." November 1851. Horth 210-214.

---. *The Writings of Herman Melville: Correspondence*. Ed. Lynn Horth. Vol. 14. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993.

Miller, Perry. *The Raven and the Whale*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956.

Murray, Stuart. *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008. *Google Books*. Web.

Parker, Hershel. “The ‘Sequel’ in ‘Bartleby.’” *Bartleby the Inscrutable*. Ed. Thomas M. Inge. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979. 159-165.

Peters, John Durham. *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Sandage, Scott. *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Sullivan, William P. “Bartleby and Infantile Autism: A Naturalistic Explanation.” *Bulletin of the West Virginia Association of College English Teachers* 3.2 (1976): 43-60.

Wald, Priscilla. *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*. Durham:Duke University Press, 1995.

Weinberg, Albert. *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American\History*. Gloucester, Massachusetts: P. Smith, 1958.

Whitehead, F.A., B.S. Liese, M. L. O’Dell. “Melville’s ‘Bartleby the Scrivener’: A Case Study.” *New York State Journal of Medicine* 90.1 (1990): 17-22.