Changes In The Narrator Of Bartleby Essay, Research Paper

I believe the Narrator of Bartleby changed and grew tremendously throughout the story. The simple fact that the Narrator chose to tell of Bartleby and no one else shows us how significant Bartleby must have been to the Narrator s life. The vast spectrum of strong emotions the Narrator experiences during the short time he knows Bartleby undoubtedly color his thoughts and feelings for the rest of his life. One can see through the course of the story how these emotions affect the character of the Narrator.

At the start of the Narrator s tale, he is a secure man, seemingly content in his predictable modern world of legal documents and Wall Street. He describes himself as an “unambitious lawyer”(4) and goes on to say “All who know me, consider me an eminently safe man”(4). His monotonous life changes rather quickly, however when Bartleby arrives.

Bartleby s strange behavior quickly arouses curiosity in the Narrator. After Bartleby s first usage of the line “I would prefer not to”(13), The Narrator s reaction to this comment after he calms down is this: “This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do?”(13). When Bartleby s irrational behavior persists, the Narrator, who has always been of man of reason, has to rationalize why he should allow this man to remain: ” his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me”(17). The Narrator s true motivations are that he feels sorry for Bartleby, and wants to know and understand him. His continuous analyzing of Bartleby s behavior reveals his desire to find out what makes him tick .

When the Narrator discovers that Bartleby is living in the office, he thinks: “His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible!”(22). He also writes: “For the first time in my life a feeling of over-powering stinging melancholy seized me”(23). It is statements like these that show how the Narrator is deeply affected by his encounters with Bartleby. Only moments later, after attempting to digest everything he knows about Bartleby he writes: ” that melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion”(24) and ” the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder”(25). Now, insatiably curious, the Narrator begins to feel insecure about his inability to comprehend Bartleby s world .

After repeated attempts to communicate with Bartleby fail (25,26), the Narrator becomes so uncomfortable and insecure by Bartleby s continuous weirdness that he decides he must be rid of him. When Bartleby serenely refuses to quit the Narrator, frustration sets in(33).

After the Narrator realizes that he cannot reason with Bartleby, he leaves him to his corner of the room stay, coming to believe that Bartleby had come ” for some mysterious purpose, not for a mere mortal like me to fathom”(35). Clearly this is nothing The Narrator could have even imagined thinking before his encounters with Bartleby occurred. The Narrator does not leave behind his old world for his new and enlightened view of things, however, and fear of social unacceptance drives him to separate himself from Bartleby. Unable to force himself to remove Bartleby, The Narrator resolves to move his entire place of business(37). This is hardly the act of an average man. Bartleby must have very much altered The Narrator for him to make such a peculiar decision.

When moved into his new location, The Narrator becomes paranoid and fears that Bartleby will come back to haunt him: ” I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall ” (38). When confronted by the landlord and new tenant about Bartleby, The Narrator tries to deny any association with him, but fear of social chastisement prompts him go and attempt to convince Bartleby to leave the building or, at least, come home with him(41). This shows that The Narrator still wishes to remain a part of his old world and fears becoming a community outcast. When The Narrator discovers that Bartleby is in jail and that he must go to the judge and make a statement, he states: “At first I was indignant; but at last, almost approved”(42). I believe this is because initially he feels he will never be rid entirely of Bartleby, and then admits he does not yet want to fully be rid of him. This thought is supported after he goes to the jail and states: “I then begged for an interview [with Bartleby]“(43)- he will forever desire to know Bartleby.

Bartleby then dies leaving The Narrator forever curious, questioning the nature of the world in general, and what it holds for each of us. I hope to have shown some of the many widely varied thoughts and emotions that shaped The Narrator during the very short time in which he knew Bartleby, the Scrivener