

Narrative Strategies in *Bleak House* and “Bartleby the Scrivener”: On the Significant Affinity between Dickens and Melville

*An-Chi Wang**

Abstract

The affinity between Dickens’ *Bleak House* and Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” is significant in that it gives a direction in interpreting more relevantly an American literary work and in re-evaluating the British-American literary correlation. There are identifiable similarities in many aspects, in characterization, plot, and narrative modes: characters of lawyers, law-stationers, law-copyists or scriveners; plot of the mysterious death of a deplorable law-copyist; and narrative modes abundant in brilliant wit and intriguing humor. Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” was composed and published immediately after *Bleak House* finished its serialization, thus suggestive of close connection. “Bartleby the Scrivener” looks very much like an elaborate magnified version of a single scene taken deliberately from Dickens’ panorama in *Bleak House*.

This paper employs theories of influence study in comparative literature to interpret the significant affinity between Dickens and Melville. Melville never intends to write “Bartleby the Scrivener” out of the anxiety of influence or rivalry. He is more likely to be inspired by Dickens to tell the story of a miserable law-copyist he also

* Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, Feng Chia University

knows, especially motivated out of admiration for a great master specializing in story-telling skills and intriguing humor. Both Dickens and Melville endeavor to make breakthroughs in narrative strategies. Dickens in *Bleak House* experiments with an innovated technique of the dual or double narrative, in which the first and the third points-of-view alternate to tell the story, to complement each other so as to achieve a multiplying effect. The story of Nemo is told as usual in Dickens' sophisticated cynical tone of the third-person, yet in a rather disinterested way as to be undeserved for his position in *Bleak House* as the heroine's father who died unknown and unrecognized. Melville in "Bartleby the Scrivener" concentrates on telling the story of the deplorable Bartleby from the lawyer's single first-person perspective. No matter how earnest the lawyer tries to help Bartleby and how sincere his humanitarian concern is, he is still unable to save Bartleby's wretched soul from collapse and self-destruction. Yet, neither the third-person of Dickens' narrator, nor the first-person of Melville's lawyer, is capable of telling us a true story. Both works reveal a difficulty in portraying reality, because any point of view on reality is subjective. The problem of human mystery remains an unsolved enigma. Both works question their own methods of representation, emphasizing their incapacity to shape materials and to bestow a truthful meaning on human experiences. Melville's Bartleby is a focused revision of Dickens' Nemo; he is "No One," no body, a black-humored and gloomy protagonist who "prefers not to" live in this world. He is an un-representable reality in human life.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," narrative strategy

The affinity between Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853) and Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853) has produced several interesting studies, but has not earned enough credit deserving of its significance. This affinity has been neglected or dismissed as trivial for over a century, whereas it might be highly functional in interpreting or justifying ("re-contextualizing" or "re-historicizing") more relevantly an American literary work and in re-evaluating the British-American literary correlation. In the field of comparative literature, this topic should be a typical case of influence study worthy of profound speculation and further investigation, especially when it is such a big event between two leading literary masters of the time, and especially when American writers of the time were alleged to be living in the shadow of British influence.

Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" has amazed readers and critics, and has generated a great variety of interpretations so diverse that would even amaze Melville himself. There are as many "readings" as one can imagine. Bartleby has been interpreted as a grotesque, an absurd hero, a nihilist, a melancholiac, an autistic, a schizoid, a compulsion neurotic, a self-exile, a transcendentalist, a Socratic, a Christ, a Buddhist, etc., in terms of biographical, historical, mythological, psychological, existentialist, naturalistic, deconstructive, hermeneutical, psychoanalytical, feminist, Marxist, entropy theories, and others.¹ Critics have been "proving" that the real-life model of Bartleby is Melville himself, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry David Thoreau, even Jesus Christ, whereas the lawyer is Melville's father-in-law, Charles Dickens, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or Washington Irving.² Others have probed into the symbolic meanings of the Wall Street, the office, the last paragraph, dead letters, the corpse, and so on.³ As Dan McCall pungently observes, "Bartleby the Scrivener" has become "a fantasia of literary gossip" and there has even been constituted a "Bartleby Industry" (14-15).

This phenomenon of wild imagination also vindicates the overwhelming power of the New Criticism that has once dominated the twentieth-century critical arena, which allows any points to be elaborated so long as critics can argue. Some of the elaborate arguments are self-evidently the kind of "over-interpretation" Umberto Eco has termed in his *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992). In a recent essay

¹ See Abrams, Ayo, Barber, Beja, Boies, Bulger, Doloff, Fiene, Furlani, Maurice Friedman, Jennings, Kuebrich, Marcus, Mollinger, Oates, O'Connor, Perry, Pops, Smith, Sullivan, Widmer, Wright, Zelnick, etc.

² See Fleissner, Gale, Parker, Sten, etc.

³ See Barbara Foley, Gerald Hoag, Ronald Hoag, Marx, Lewis Miller, Mitchell, Parker, Weisbuch, Wilson, etc.

“Doing Justice to Bartleby,” Jeffrey Andres Weinstock also claims, “The inherent possibility of misinterpretation leads to an even more unsettling conclusion” (Note 1). The extreme interpretative diversity therefore necessitates a closer look at the story’s correlation with Dickens’ *Bleak House*, which may reveal a hope of clarifying the critical controversy, as well as narrowing down the scope of arguments, so as to get closer to the central theme of Melville’s Bartleby story.

In *Bleak House* and “Bartleby the Scrivener” there are identifiable similarities in many aspects, in characterization, plot, and narrative modes: characters of lawyers, law-stationers, law-copyists or scriveners; plot of the mysterious death of a deplorable law-copyist; and narrative modes abundant in brilliant wit and intriguing humor. Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” was composed and published immediately after *Bleak House* finished its serialization, thus suggestive of close connection. The 67 chapters of *Bleak House* started its 19-month serialization from April 1852 to October 1853 in the *Harper’s New Monthly* magazine, a popular American magazine to which Melville subscribed. Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” appeared immediately after, in the 1853 November and December issues of the *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine*. The comparable part is mostly in the earlier chapters of *Bleak House*, and it is often claimed that Melville probably has “borrowed” ideas from the magazine chapters rather than from the book published in September 1853. Yet, it does not lead to the conclusion that *Bleak House* is directly the very source for “Bartleby the Scrivener,” despite that there are similarities in too many aspects to be ignored.

Biographical evidence shows that Melville may also find suggestions of his Bartleby story in three other sources. One is a novel *The Lawyer’s Story; Or, The Wrongs of the Orphans* by James A. Maitland that started serialization from February 1853 (Bergmann). Another is Eli James Murdock Fly, a childhood friend of Melville’s, who once had a job of “incessant writing” from morning to evening when he was employed for five years as an apprentice in the law office of Melville’s uncle, who then had “long been an invalid” (Leyda 455). Still another is George J. Alder, another friend of Melville’s, who had been a philologist-translator until he was confined to an asylum because he developed a severe case of agoraphobia (Howard 208). These sources are also valid in providing external evidence for Melville’s characterization of Bartleby.

Since there is no extant evidence to locate the points of contact or interaction between Dickens and Melville, the two literary masters of the time, critics naturally turn to examining internal evidence. Many critical studies on this affinity topic have been devoted to searching or excavating documentary and textual evidence almost

exhaustively, pointing out numerous similarities or resemblances in theme, imagery, characters, setting, and others.

The affinity issue between *Bleak House* and "Bartleby the Scrivener" was first pointed out in a short anonymous review for Boston *Evening Traveller* early in 1856, three years after the publication of both works in 1853. The reviewer praises "Bartleby the Scrivener" for its inventive originality and grotesque humor, which is "equal to anything from the pen of Dickens" and closely resembles Dickens "both as to the character of the sketch and the peculiarity of the style"; readers can see shadows of *Bleak House* all over Melville's Wall Street office (38-39).

So far, there are six representative research studies on this affinity topic: 1) Lauriat Lane, Jr., "Dickens and Melville: Our Mutual Friends" (1971); 2) Charlotte Walker Mendez, "Scriveners Forlorn: Dickens' Nemo and Melville's Bartleby" (1980); 3) David Jaffé, *Bartleby the Scrivener and Bleak House: Melville's Debt to Dickens* (1981); 4) Robert F. Fleissner, "'Ah Humanity!' Dickens and Bartleby Revisited" (1982); 5) Brian Foley, "Dickens Revised: 'Bartleby' and *Bleak House*" (1985); 6) Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (1986). These studies demonstrate solid scholarship and research values in providing readers with meaningful points for much better understanding of the two works. They also describe adequately the interesting phenomenon in literary history and thus enriched mutually the two works' significance.

The superficial source hunting for parallels between the two works should not be the sole aim of comparative study, because mere likeness may sometimes be accidental coincidence. At its best, a sound study should cover not only deductions made from pungent observation, but also further investigations of the compared works' mutual illumination. However, these critical studies hesitate to explain why and how Melville at the time of writing "Bartleby the Scrivener" was under the stimulus, or inspiration, or influence, of Dickens' *Bleak House*.

Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" looks very much like an elaborate magnified version of a single scene taken deliberately from Dickens' panorama in *Bleak House*. Why does Melville want to "re-tell" a story that has already been told by the most popular and prestigious novelist of the time, with such details yet only to find solving no mystery either? Can he be challenging Dickens, thinking he can tell a better story? Or, is he just inspired, echoing Dickens to justify another soul of grotesque humanity? If there is indeed any influence from Dickens on Melville, what does this influence signify? Is Melville "re-creating," "re-presenting" Dickens? Or is he "parodying,"

“travestying” Dickens? Perhaps knowing “how” Melville tells his version of story can lead us to know “why” he tells and “what” he is telling in the story. The key may lie in the narrative strategies employed in both works that reveal authorial intention.

No matter how perceptive and penetrating those critical studies are, not enough attention has been paid to comparing the story-telling mode of the two works, such as the narrative point of view, the tone of the voice, the irony or distance, and the implied attitude of the authors. This paper therefore ventures to inspect, by employing theories of influence study in comparative literature, the narrative strategies of these two works, hoping to see the significance involved in such a close connection between the two leading writers. Part of the purpose of this paper is to follow up what David Jaffé, after having detailed in his essay the nature and extent of Melville’s “borrowings” from Dickens, is calling for those interested in his compositional methods and in the workings of his imagination.

In terms of narrative art, both *Bleak House* and “Bartleby the Scrivener” are distinguished for their originality in creating a distinctive narrative mode of its own. Both works are remarkable for their achievement in trying on new tactics of narrative strategies respectively, attempting to tell stories more effectively in a new creative, original, or experimental manner. In *Bleak House*, Dickens experiments on a dual or double narrative strategy employed only once in his whole writing career, in which a first-person and a third-person narrative are alternated, which is also a strategy pioneering in the history of narrative art. In “Bartleby the Scrivener,” Melville employs a first-person lawyer-narrator who is so authentic that he misleads many readers to take for granted whatever he says without questioning his authority. This lawyer-narrator is perhaps one of the most misunderstood or misinterpreted figures in American literature, because some of the critical attention is focused on the character of Bartleby, some even put the blame of Bartleby’s tragedy on the lawyer,⁴ and many readers would agree with what Walter E. Anderson says: “The story’s interpretation crucially depends upon the attitudes taken towards both the lawyer and Bartleby” (384).

It is obvious that Melville does not write his story of scriveners out of a negative “anxiety of influence,” to challenge the predecessor of an acknowledged master. Instead, he is trying to offer his own version of scrivener story out of a positive “sense of admiration,” driven by an imitative instinct. He is more likely to be “inspired” by Dickens, joining him to investigate story-telling strategies, to represent a theme of the

⁴ See Davis, Dilworth, Doloff, Mitchell, Pribek, Roundy, Sanderlin.

un-representable humanity, to exemplify that certain mysteries in human life can never be solved and remain unsolvable, no matter how much effort has been made to understand them. The totally different narrative strategies of the two works bring about totally different effects, but in essence and in spirit their functions are the same – both can be seen as written in the mode of "the reflexive novel," revealing the authors' conscious awareness of the insolvable conflict between life and art, between fiction and reality, between truth and imagination.

In *Bleak House*, mainly Chapter 10 "The Law Writer" and Chapter 11 "Our Dear Brother," the story of the forlorn law-writer Nemo is delivered in the omniscient third-person narration. The character Nemo is treated in a rather nonchalant or disinterested way as to be undeserved for his position in the novel, considering the fact that his identity is later revealed to be Captain Hawdon, a very important figure. He is the father of Esther Summerson the heroine and the secret lover of Lady Dedlock. This omniscient narrator describes the situation of Nemo's death in a ruthless and unsympathetic tone: the room in which the poor law-writer died is untidy and gloomy, the corpse of Nemo lies there with its eyes wide-open, and the persons around the corpse are indifferent and emotionless, playing jokes on him. The attention Dickens pays to Nemo is obviously not in proportion in scale to his role. The character Nemo is simply underdeveloped. For years this has puzzled Dickens readers, and seldom have critics offered satisfactory explanations. But it is also at this point that is worth pondering, which is perhaps what has motivated Melville to write his story of the mysterious life and death of Bartleby.

In "Bartleby the Scrivener," Melville provides a first-person narrator in an elderly trustworthy and understanding gentleman, a lawyer, whose narrative authority is so successfully established and maintained that even the most discerning readers are too taken in to question his authenticity. He is indeed a "seemingly" reliable narrator. In the very act of allowing the lawyer to tell the story, Melville achieves an aesthetic subtlety that simultaneously expresses and conceals his own attitude. We see clearly how earnest the lawyer is in trying to offer humanitarian help and sincere concern to Bartleby. Yet, the lawyer's generous mind and truthful affection brings no comfort, and fails to penetrate the veil of alienation to reach Bartleby's troubled inner soul.

In both works neither Nemo nor Bartleby is a fully developed human character. Each protagonist remains throughout his story a deplorable soul, a symbol of the grotesque mystery in human life, which neither the first-person nor the third-person narrator is able to see through and solve the complexity.

In terms of narrative art, the originality of *Bleak House* lies in the creation of a

dual narrative, which is a pioneering device of the novel innovator Dickens, combining two alternative narrative stances, one third-person omniscient and the other Esther's first-person. The two points of view complement each other – facts readers learn from Esther's limited narrative are put to the background of the omniscient narrative. In the total 19-month serialization of the novel in the *Harper's* magazine, the dual narrative functions significantly in arousing and tantalizing the general readers' curiosity as they are "bounced," says E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*, back and forth between two perspectives (82). On the other hand, many critics of Dickens complain that Esther as the first-person narrator sometimes violates the very principle of first-person narration she is supposed to respect – she knows and talks too much. Instead, they praise the cynical and humorous omniscient narrator, the typical Dickens narrator, who is quite capable of maintaining a consistent stance. This omniscient narrator fulfills successfully the function of assessing the feelings of the characters, the meaning of their actions, and the very significance of the events presented.

The originality of "Bartleby the Scrivener" is two-fold. First is Melville's creation of an absurd hero in Bartleby, one of the first nihilist characters in American literature, who denies himself and the world by his famous saying of passive non-violent resistance: "I would prefer not to." This absurd hero is the central trait attributed to him by most critics. Second is Melville's creation of a persona in the lawyer, a seemingly reliable narrator, humorous and generous, who beguiles readers to evaluate the situation through his common-sense logic based on reasoning and speculation. On the surface the lawyer speaks directly in his own voice without any authorial intrusion from Melville. In reality he says what Melville wants him to say about what he sees from his perspective only. He is not omniscient, though he participates in many aspects. This type of first-person participant narrator Melville created here and also in his other works, is a narrative voice very different from the conventional "frame story" narrators in popular American stories of the nineteenth-century tradition – which is also remarkable in the history of narrative art as a transition developed from the direct authorial discourses to the simulated speech of characters.

Narrative stance, or point of view, is the relation in which the narrator stands to the story, considered by critics as governing the form and meaning of the work. How the stories can be told in the most possible interesting way is exactly what writers all over the world, from ancient to modern, have been endeavoring to do. It focuses readers' attention deliberately on certain aspects as well as introduces values

accordingly into the story. "Point of view" is a controversial critical term. According to Seymour Chatman, there are at least three senses of meaning: literal (perspective), figurative (ideology, conceptual system), and transferred (characterizing one's general interest) (151-52). According to Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, point of view differs for the creator and for the beholder: for novelists, it is the primary way they control and shape their materials; for readers, it is a mode of perception that forms their impression (275). And when it is generally referred to as the author's narrative point of view, there are further diverse distinctions between internal and external, subjective and objective, direct and indirect, reliable and unreliable, scenic and panoramic, and so on (Percy Lubbock, Wayne C. Booth, B. Thomashevski, Gerald Prince). No matter how divided critical opinions are upon such issues, the most common and traditional way, though not altogether satisfactory, is simply to categorize them into the first-person and the third-person.

The first-person point of view usually gives readers the impression of a more believable "illusion of reality" by inviting them to participate in the actions through close identification with the "I" narrator. If the story is strange, wild, supernatural, or otherwise hard to believe, it is easier to communicate to readers such personally experienced adventure. The shared experience told emotionally and vividly from the heart enhances both immediacy and intimacy. This is the technique Melville employs to tell the story of the eccentric and inscrutable Bartleby. But the lawyer, technically as a first-person narrator, can never understand what is actually going on in the mind of Bartleby, no matter how hard he tries to understand him. And what is most important and most often ignored in the "I" narration is the difficulty of characterizing the "I" narrator. Readers tend to form their opinions about the characters through the actions and thoughts described by the narrator, but they seldom challenge that of the "I" narrator itself. If a simple naïve boy tells a fine sophisticated story, credibility will likely be weakened, as in the case of Huck Finn. But if it is an elderly, generous, and modest gentleman lawyer, readers will certainly take whatever he says for granted, and will seldom question what he understates or does not tell. Yet, the essential meaning of the story is concealed in Melville's untold parts, which imply his attitude toward the lawyer. Between Melville and the lawyer, there are varying distances – intellectual, moral, and psychological. The "I" narrator does not always give an accurate account of the world; the lawyer cautions from beginning to end that his story of Bartleby is only "one vague report" of external observable actions.

In contrast, the third-person point of view is supposedly omniscient and omnipresent. In *Bleak House*, both the first-person and the third-person are employed;

thus the book turns out to be a perfect occasion for comparing the two types of narrative voice. The familiar third-person voice of an authoritative and intrusive narrator supplies the Dickensian humorous touches, and also gives sharp ironic comments on the political and moral evils of the society. But such a point of view loses intimacy and vividness. To overcome this disadvantage, Dickens experiments on adding a limited perspective, telling the story through one of the characters while still retaining partial omniscient vision. The third-person narrator's sternness and cynicism is therefore relieved by introducing a first-person narrator, the central heroine Esther Summerson.

This dual narrative method of *Bleak House* is unique in Dickens' works. It combines two distinctive narrative modes of his previous novels: the autobiographical narrative of *David Copperfield*, and the omniscient narrative of *Dombey and Son*. On this dual method, critical opinions are diverse. W. J. Harvey calls it a "double narrative" – an experimental style in Dickens – in which one of Esther's functions is that of "a brake," to control the run-away tendency of Dickens' imagination (226). As Roy Pascal observes, Esther's first-person narration is written in the normal past tense, while the omniscient in the present tense, the "historic present"; each has its own territory, readers do not need to bother too much which narration is closest to the truth because one complements the other (68). In general, most critics favor the familiar satiric stance of Dickens, and dismiss the role of Esther as merely serving the functions of the observer, the moral touchstone, and the image of Dickens' ideal woman. Judging from the fact that she occupies the narrative proportion equal to that of the omniscient narrator and that Dickens gives her highly perceptive and intellectual capabilities, it is not hard to see that Dickens is trying to develop a new method that can incorporate the advantages as well as diminish the disadvantages of both first-person and third-person narrative points of view. He is attempting to make a breakthrough in narrative method.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens produces a broad panoramic vision of a society inhabited by all kinds of people and all walks of life. From this panorama, Melville chooses deliberately to focus on a scenic view that concerns the story of lawyers and law-copyists, and the deplorable death of a poor law-copyist. Melville is known to be quite familiar with lawyers' circle, because his elder brother was a lawyer and Melville has lived with his family for some years. It is easy to find parallels in the plotlines and characterization in the two works. The lawyer in "Bartleby the Scrivener" is a combination of Dickens' three characters in *Bleak House*: the attorney Tulkinghorn, the law-stationer Snagsby, and the respectable Mr. Wholes. The three

clerks in “Bartleby the Scrivener” resemble the minor characters of law-copyists in *Bleak House*. The office on Wall Street reminds readers of Vholes. Most important of all, the protagonist Bartleby echoes Nemo (Latin for “no one”) and the crossing sweeper Jo.

The part of Nemo’s story in *Bleak House* begins early in Chapter 2 with Tulkinghorn’s curiosity stirred by Lady Dedlock’s reaction to the handwriting on a legal document. Tulkinghorn tracks the clue down to one of Snagsby’s law-copyists, Nemo. He visits him, but finds him dead, presumably from an overdose of opium. The plot then develops into a series of mysteries that lead to the final disclosure of truth through interwoven connections among a great cast of characters. “Bartleby the Scrivener” is the story of a lawyer who hires an excellent law-copyist but gradually has trouble with his nonconformity. After having done all that a decent gentleman can do for Bartleby, the lawyer cannot help but watching Bartleby stepping gradually toward forlorn death.

The primary connection between Nemo’s and Bartleby’s stories is the mysterious death of both protagonists – the death growing out of alienation, isolation, futility of human communication, and lack of mutual understanding. Thematically, both stories are concerned with mysteries and their solutions, which is undoubtedly a popular subject and story pattern of the time. In *Bleak House*, the mystery of Nemo’s death is easily solved and quickly by-passed, for it is only a small constituent of a larger set of mysteries related to Esther’s parentage and Lady Dedlock’s secret love. But in Melville’s story, Bartleby’s mystery is suspended throughout the story and ends in unsolved ambiguity – only a “rumor” lingers at the end, the rumor that Bartleby used to work in the Dead Letter Office. An ending of unsolved mystery like this is unusual in mystery stories of the time. Those by such writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe always bring full relief to readers’ tension by revealing truth at the end no matter how intricate the mysteries might be. This unsolved mystery in Bartleby gives the story an added dimension of absurdity, and that is why Bartleby was treated as an existential hero during the time when Existentialism dominated critical fashion in the twentieth century.

Yet in both stories, neither the omniscient nor the first-person point of view can tell us anything essential to the life and death of the protagonists. This also illustrates why Wayne C. Booth in his landmark book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* complains that the distinction of narration by “person” is overworked; he claims that the most important differences in narrative effect should depend on whether the narrator is “dramatized” in his own right, and whether “his beliefs and characteristics are shared by the author”

(151). Indeed, the term “omniscient” is not always appropriate; many so-called omniscient narrators prove frequently that they do not know all things. In *Bleak House*, the omniscient narrative voice dramatizes the death of Nemo, yet it deliberately represses from telling much about him, so that readers know almost nothing about his personality. The narrator prefers to keep it a mystery, a mystery that should have functioned as a subplot. Nor is the first-person point of view in “Bartleby the Scrivener” more effective in presenting reality. Bartleby remains a mystery throughout the story. The lawyer’s desire to help Bartleby is undoubtedly out of a sincere act of true concern, but it is also more out of a spirit of mingled charity and self-gratification.

Here a preliminary assumption can be reached on the basis of the narrative strategies of both authors. Dickens seems to be concerned with developing a style of narrative that is more effective than in his previous novels, by experimenting with *Bleak House* on a dual narrative. Melville also seems to be concerned with creating the illusion of reality through a dramatic persona of the lawyer. The lawyer, a totally involved human narrator, is to counterpoint the totally detached impersonal voice that describes Nemo’s death. It seems that Melville assembles some of the fragments he “borrowed” from Dickens’ repertoire, and departs from such materials to construct his version of another mystery story of the law-copyists.

In the history of literary composition, it is a quite common and universal phenomenon for a later writer to draw inspiration from his precursors, either out of a positive motive to revise (as exhibited in works of imitation), or out of a negative desire to compete (as exhibited in works of parody). In this sense, both “positive influence” and “negative influence” have their contributive values to the “evolution” or “revolution” of literary progress. Claudio Guillén holds that studies of influences are indispensable to the understanding of literature itself, and argues that to ascertain an influence is to evaluate “the function or the scope of the effects of A on the making of B” through a series of concepts and terms that account for the effects (186-87).

As it is generally understood, the factors that may influence the creation of a literary work are complicated and comprehensive; they may include cultural environments, artistic traditions, literary movements, philosophical ideas, political and social structures, and many other things. As Goran Hermerén analyzes, there are different kinds of influence: artistic and non-artistic, direct and indirect, positive and negative; there are further distinctions in extent and types: parallels, sketches, copies, paraphrases, allusions, borrowings, models, and sources (321). Hermerén thus argues that studies of influence will be worthwhile only when the studies a) combine with

analyses to the genesis of the works involved, giving valuable insights into creative processes and show how artistic imagination works; b) combine with psychological and sociological investigations, showing how cultural contacts are made and how new ideas are spread from person to person or tradition to tradition; c) show the artists' originality, focusing on where they are or are not influenced by works of art known to have been familiar to him; and d) shed interesting light both on the artists and the taste of the period (321).

A general survey of the extant studies concerning the interrelationships between Dickens and Melville shows that most studies have more or less met some of the criteria of influence study that Hermerén has required above. The most scholarly and up-to-date study of the affinity between *Bleak House* and "Bartleby the Scrivener" is by Robert Weisbuch in a chapter "Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Dead Letter of Charles Dickens" from his book *Atlantic Double-Cross*, a book devoted to studying British-American literary relations in the nineteenth century (36-54). Weisbuch's study is insightful and comprehensive as it aims ambitiously at settling the controversy over the topic. He bases his argument on the theories of Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* and Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, believing that American writers of the time struggled for an independence to get rid of the burden of English literature. Weisbuch traces a line of mutual reactions from Hawthorne to Dickens and from Dickens to Melville. He claims that Dickens borrowed materials from Hawthorne's romances *The House of Seven Gables* and *The Scarlet Letter*: Esther from Hawthorne's Phoebe; Tulkinghorn from Chillingsworth; and Lady Dedlock combines Hester and Dimmesdale. And Melville exchanged materials with Dickens, the literary master who monopolized the then-contemporary fictional taste more in America than Melville did in Britain. Weisbuch then surmises that Melville would have been surprised and delighted to find Dickens imitating Hawthorne, the writer whom Melville had nominated as the American Shakespeare. But in contemplating what motivated Melville to write "Bartleby," Weisbuch reverts to a casual comment Dickens made after reading *The Scarlet Letter* that the psychological part of the book was overdone. In a defensive position, Melville wrote "Bartleby the Scrivener" entirely from the lawyer's single perspective, who has the reasonable motive to understand Bartleby. He may have intended to parody Dickens' Tulkinghorn, who has no reasonable motive except curiosity to trace Lady Dedlock's secret. Moreover, there is personal ire that Melville "could hardly not have reacted to." Dickens borrowed the idea of spontaneous combustion from Melville's earlier novel *Redburn*, and in *Bleak House* had the odor of combustion detected by Mr.

Swills and Miss M. Melvilleson, “a lady of some pretensions to musical ability.” Weisbuch therefore concludes that Melville’s lawyer is a compendium of the Dickensian villains who adopted the pompous and rationalizing voice of Dickens himself and the self-satisfying tone of Esther at her least forgivable. The story’s action ends inside a Dickensian prison, while its rhetoric ends with a Dickensian exclamation: “Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!”

Weisbuch even proclaims boldly that the lawyer, “the eminently safe man,” is Charles Dickens himself, who is “an eminently safe writer who never delves beneath the social construct to question the abyss of existence” (43). Referring to the lawyer as “unnatural,” “anti-natural,” “lifeless,” “self-satisfied,” “pompous,” and “rationalizing,” Weisbuch contends that the lawyer “investigates Bartleby but refuses authentic commitment in so doing,” therefore Bartleby refuses to “credit the lawyer’s false commitment” (44-47).

Brian Foley, Weisbuch’s former student, echoes him in an essay “Dickens Revised: ‘Bartleby’ and *Bleak House*,” saying that Melville’s goal is simply to show that “not just an American can write a Dickensian story as well as Dickens can, but that he can write one better.” Foley also argues that Melville was motivated by a “professional jealousy” because at that time Dickens’ fame in America “was surely a bitter pill for Melville to swallow” (247). Both Weisbuch and Foley claim that Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” is totally parody in tone and reactive in purpose, and that his attitude toward Dickens is hostile. Their critical studies are typical examples that echo the revisionist theories of Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*. Their approach is remarkable as a paradigm that applies the revisionist theories of influence study.

But to regard reaction, revolt, or even revenge, as the sole explanation of Melville’s connection with Dickens seems to disregard the more positive view of seeing the entire trend of world literature as a mutual-inspiring progress of human minds. In the history of world literature, there are many cases in which evidence is not enough to decide an influence act. Modern critics have inclined to substitute the term “influence study” with “affinity study”; and when the chances of influence are high, they would say “implications of influence” or “indebtedness” rather than using abusively the term “influence.” The trouble is with the word “influence,” which can be very general in its broadest sense meaning even the slightest resemblance between any two things. But when it is applied to refer to an approach of critical study, “influence” becomes a strict methodological discipline.

Critics who are interested in the literary relationship between Dickens and

Melville find in "Bartleby the Scrivener" some links not only to *Bleak House* but also to Dickens' other works: *Pickwick Papers*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Hard Times*. Besides, Melville's other works also have obvious Dickensian characteristics. In fact, Dickens and Melville share to a great extent the common ground of the poetic imagination, copious use of metaphors and similes, symbolic use of actuality, vivid city scenes, attacks on oppressive systems, and most of all, "the use of the grotesque as a vehicle for psychological and metaphysical meaning" (Lane 318).

Besides the shared thematic frameworks, there is another feature worthy of discussion in the affinity issue between *Bleak House* and "Bartleby the Scrivener," that is, the humor in the tone of the narrators. Both Dickens and Melville are extremely fond of playing with words. The exuberant humor of Dickens, known as the master of mockery, helps formulate part of the humor of Melville's lawyer, especially in his tone of self-awareness and self-parody. On account of his profession, the lawyer is supposed to be an expert of logical argument. Naturally he assumes everything to proceed in the mode of his "doctrine of assumptions," and expects to see things respond in the conventionally rational way. But his logic fails to work on the unfathomable Bartleby; he is disappointed to find that his entire understanding of how Bartleby would respond under certain circumstances all depends on his own assumption. Part of the humor is derived from the lawyer's conscious word-play on the words "assume" or "assumption":

Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart – as an inferior genius might have done – I **assumed** the ground that depart he must; and upon that **assumption** built all I had to say. [. . .] How it would prove in practice – there was the rub. It was truly a beautiful thought to have **assumed** Bartleby's departure; but, after all, that **assumption** was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's. The great point was, not whether I had **assumed** that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than **assumptions**. (48-49)

What was to be done? Or, if nothing could be done, was there anything further that I could **assume** in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively **assumed** that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively **assume** that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of his **assumption**, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the

appearance of a home-thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of **assumptions**. But upon second thoughts the success of the play seemed rather dubious. I resolved to argue the matter over with him again. (50, emphasis added)

Repeatedly the “man of assumptions” (the lawyer) is embarrassed and frustrated by the “man of preferences” (Bartleby). The lawyer comes to realize that his mode of reasoning is insufficient to convince Bartleby. He then takes generosity as an alternative, and offers to take Bartleby home. Again, generosity fails. Finally he confesses that Bartleby’s existence “was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. [. . .] At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content” (53). Thomas Pribek points out that, between his experience with Bartleby and his telling of the story, the lawyer has reached wisdom: he has changed from a man satisfied with his “doctrine of assumptions” to a man aware of his limitations and capable of self-irony (141).

With a tone of self-parody, the lawyer tells in retrospect how he fails to understand Bartleby, acknowledging that he has been misguided by his own conventional logical sense. Also with a tone of self-defense, he contends that what he has done to help understand Bartleby is all a normal human being can do. He admits that the biggest mistake he has ever made is to measure another human being with his own criteria. The opening passage of the lawyer’s narration attempts to establish his narrative authority and authenticity, and explains his qualifications for telling the story:

I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations, for the last thirty years, has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom, as yet, nothing, that I know of, has ever been written – I mean, the law-copyists, or scribes. I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and, if I pleased, could relate diverse histories, at which good natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. (19)

This passage seems to deny any linkage to *Bleak House*. The lawyer claims that he knows a lot about the law-copyists and can write good stories that make people smile or weep. However, it does not prove that Melville started working on “Bartleby the Scrivener” without knowing the existence of *Bleak House*. All the principal

characters have prototypes in *Bleak House*, and many incidents are reminiscent of those in Dickens' novels.

Of other scriveners, the lawyer could write their complete life, but for Bartleby, no material exists for a full and satisfactory biography. Yet, not to write about him is "an irreparable loss to literature." This inner conflict of writing about Bartleby with the extreme scarcity of extant materials is also a modern writer's dilemma. The lawyer is fully aware of the fact that what he sees of Bartleby is nothing but "one vague report." In this "one vague report," the lawyer tells in detail the story of an eccentric and inscrutable scrivener Bartleby. Throughout the story, the lawyer is never affirmative that the story he is telling about Bartleby is absolutely true to reality; he tries his best to find various reasons for Bartleby, but they are always his own "assumed" reason, not Bartleby's. All the possible effort he has made to help Bartleby fails, and the lawyer can do nothing but lament on the futility of human communication – the best reason he can find. The lawyer tries very hard to bring out a truthful story of Bartleby, but all he has ever achieved is merely "a vague report" of the wretched soul whose inner self he can never reach. Yet, who else can bring out a scrivener's story better than the lawyer since the lawyer has been associated with scriveners professionally and privately for so many years? The lawyer's awareness of human limitations is symbolic of Melville's (and perhaps also of many other novelists') discomfort with fiction as an adequate medium to bring out reality. One function of *Bartleby* is not only to dramatize but also to embody those limitations. The overall story of "Bartleby the Scrivener" dramatizes successfully the effect of Bartleby's fate on other humanity. It dramatizes even more the process of self-realization of the lawyer-narrator himself. This is why Gerald Hoag sees "Bartleby the Scrivener" as a revealing story about a failure of revelation: "Humanity remains, to all appearances, singularly untouched, unharmed, and undiminished" (155).

Having told the story laboriously with every possible detail and assumption, the lawyer confesses at the end: "There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meagre recital of poor Bartleby's interment" (64). He adds a tag to the story of his personal experiences – the rumor that Bartleby has been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington. How true the rumor is he cannot tell. "But, inasmuch as this vague report has not been without a certain suggestive interest to me, however sad, it may prove the same with some others." The lawyer contemplates sympathetically the significance of dead letters to Bartleby's personality, but again it is only the lawyer's own "assumption,"

not reality:

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? (65)

According to J. Hillis Miller, “Bartleby the Scrivener” is a story of the failure of the narrator to tell the complete story, it is “also a story of the corollary of this failure,” the failure to fulfill “ethical responsibility” toward Bartleby (142). Miller then claims that this inability to fulfill ethical responsibility is “analogous to our inability to read this text in the sense of providing a satisfactory interpretation based on what the text says” (175).

Some critics have implied that the lawyer is not altogether trustworthy, even rather hypocritical or self-interested, quoting frequently the passage of the lawyer’s confession: “Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in this strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience” (35). Allan Emery declares that the lawyer can never fully understand or truly befriend Bartleby because the lawyer is simply “too complacent, both philosophically and morally, to sympathize with human dissatisfaction and despair.” Emery argues that the lawyer is the sort of people in high places: the snug man whose worldly success has convinced him that this is the “best of all possible worlds,” and whose virtues cluster around a “prudential” concern for maintaining his own situation (186-87). Dan McCall, in his recent book-length study *The Silence of Bartleby*, treats “Bartleby the Scrivener” not as a story but as a “lie” with “inconsistencies and contradictions” (102-03), as a “tale” of “agonizing reappraisal” of the lawyer himself (108), told by a narrator who appears to be intelligent, humorously ironic, generous, self-aware, passionate, and thoroughly competent.

On the other hand, Dickens is altogether different in his attitude toward law-copyists. He sounds unsympathetic, and even cynical, toward his protagonist Nemo. Nemo is described in a frivolous tone by Krook the landlord to Tulkinghorn:

They say he has sold himself to the Enemy; but you and I know better – he don’t buy. I’ll tell you what, though; my lodger is so black-humoured

and gloomy, that I believe he'd as soon make that bargain as any other.
Don't put him out, sir. That's my advice! (104)

The omniscient narrator calls Nemo “our dear brother” and describes the dead Nemo as the law-writer “who has established his pretensions to his name by becoming indeed No One” (106). The young surgeon, later known to be Woodcourt and Esther's fiancé, examines the corpse, and announces that he has died from an over-dose of opium. He then speaks jokingly to Krook that Nemo will no longer be able to pay his rent. “It is beyond doubt that he is indeed as dead as Pharaoh; and to judge from his appearance and condition, I should think it a happy release. Yet he must have been a good figure when a youth, and I dare say, good-looking.” The surgeon says this, not unfeelingly: “I recollect once thinking there was something in his manner, uncouth as it was, that denoted a fall in life. Was that so?” (106).

Woodcourt will never know at the moment that this dead man will later turn out to be his father-in-law. Here Dickens seems to concern less with plot arrangement than with his persistent humor and irony. His humor is consistent with his whole satiric vision – the world is so corrupted that the sooner one quits his existence in it the better he is blessed.

Dickens delights in word-playing far more than Melville. Bearing in mind how Melville indulges in playing with the words “assume” and “assumption” in “Bartleby the Scrivener,” readers can affirm that Melville indeed has drawn much inspiration from Dickens' delight in describing the “respectable” and complacent Mr. Wholes and his “respectability”:

Mr. Wholes is a very respectable man. He has not a large business, but he is a very respectable man. He is allowed by the greater attorneys who have made good fortunes, or are making them, to be a most respectable man. He never misses a chance in his practice; which is a mark of respectability. He never takes any pleasure; which is another mark of respectability. He is reserved and serious; which is another mark of respectability. His digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable. (415, emphasis added)

Shifting points of view between the first-person and the omniscient, *Bleak House* illustrates Dickens' increased awareness of a basic problem of “representation.” If Dickens is satisfied and successful with the humorous and cynical

omniscient narrators that he has been highly acknowledged in his previous novels, why should he invent in *Bleak House* another first-person narrator Esther as an idealistic counterpoint? What is the function of these two distinctive modes of narration? What is the effect he achieves, or intends to achieve, through this new experimental narrative strategy? Critics have been pondering on this, offering their observations and explanations. Harvey Peter Sucksmith, for instance, argues that “sympathy” and “irony” invariably coexist as separate rhetoric in Dickens’ narrative art: the rhetoric of “sympathy” – calm, wise, and moral – aims at enhancing emotional involvement; the rhetoric of “irony” – cool, objective, and critical – sets up detachment (166). Dickens’ good characters are sometimes too sympathetic and too good to be true. But this is how they have to be; they are to offer a contrast to the dehumanizing society that the omniscient narrator describes in cynical tone. The ideal fictional world of Esther is thus set strikingly against the corrupted reality world. Dickens and George Eliot are the nineteenth-century novelists who frequently contemplate on how their own novels are set in relation to life and society, whether their novels are able to convey social reality. The concern with the distinction between “order in fiction” and “disorder in life” seems to make *Bleak House* a novel of “the reflexive mode,” a mode characterized by its practice of exposing the conflicts between life and art, between fiction and reality, which is also a major characteristic of contemporary fiction.

Likewise, in “Bartleby the Scrivener,” Melville presents the narrator as an uncommonly practical man who tries his conventional approach on all matters. However perceptive he is in observing Bartleby, the lawyer understands that “it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.” Susan Weiner’s essay “‘Bartleby’: Representation, Reproduction and the Law” shows that, by the time Melville completed his novel *Pierre*, he had become “profoundly skeptical about the ability of language to penetrate beneath the surface of appearances and reveal something about the mystery underlying reality” (65). The story of Bartleby is told from the lawyer’s single and limited perspective. It is an attempt to reconstruct into a concrete story the unfathomable complex personality of a suffering rebel – the attempt to reproduce a life in a work of art. Life is indeed complex and cannot be processed within a simple piece of fictional writing. In the words of Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, the story of Bartleby “intimates that there are some secrets that never can be revealed, [. . .] raises the important question of how one can act and react in the face of incomplete knowledge, [. . .] structures a desire for meaning that never can be fulfilled” (23). For the lawyer, the attempt is futile; for Melville, the gap is

unbridgeable. The lawyer's final realization of human limitations symbolizes in Melville an implicit awareness of the problematic relationship between art and life, fiction and reality.

In this sense, "Bartleby the Scrivener" also partakes of the characteristics of the modern "reflexive novel," which raises questions especially about what is an appropriate style for fiction to convey the sense of reality. Moreover, when the lawyer concludes his story of Bartleby with the remark that "Imagination will readily supply the meagre recital of poor Bartleby's interment" (65), Melville seems to imply that the explication of the story also depends on readers' participation in reading for a meaning of their own. Liane Norman asserts that readers should be both participant and judge in a story like this that insists on the readers' "implication in a puzzling, disturbing, and even accusing experience" (22). It is this un-decidable, reflexive quality, this attempt to un-riddle an eternal enigma that elicits diverse interpretations of the Bartleby story.

Responding to Leo Marx's complaint that the only defect of "Bartleby the Scrivener" is its lack of an autonomous and self-sustaining meaning, Todd F. Davis is perfectly right in saying that because of the narrator's dilemma, all critics "impose meaning or meaninglessness upon Bartleby":

All actions, all dialogue, all statements, all interpretations come to the reader through the report of the lawyer. Therefore, if we contend we know anything of Bartleby, it is only what the narrator knows of Bartleby, and if we are to have any insight into the narrator, it must be through the examination of his own words. (183)

Both Dickens and Melville are novelists who are particularly concerned with the writing process of artistic creation and the relationship between art and life. Although they do not express their ideas about this directly in their works, they reveal through the language of their art an anxiety to show the complexity of life in relation to reality, so as to structure that complexity into fictional writings. Dickens creates in *Bleak House* a double narrative to accommodate the first-person and the third-person narratives, so as to dramatize the conflict between "order in fiction" and "disorder in life" represented in the two narratives. Melville, in the voice of the lawyer in "Bartleby the Scrivener," expresses his difficulty with bringing out a real story of complex humanity, and with breaking through the limitation of human understanding. Both Dickens and Melville do not reject the conventions of formal realism, but they

seem to recognize the inherent problems of the relationship between reality and its fictional representation.

A comparison of the narrative strategies of *Bleak House* and “Bartleby the Scrivener” shows that both authors are more concerned with the effective skills of “telling” of a story rather than with the story itself; each invents his own techniques to solve his narrating problem. What Dickens and Melville have done can be conceived as a preliminary attempt to solve the problem of representing reality through fiction. They are the few of those pioneering nineteenth-century novelists who are conscious of the problematic project of representing an imaginary world and of the essence of art as a suitable medium to represent life. These features are characteristic of the major concerns of a newly categorized fictional genre called “the reflexive novel.” The reflexive novel, as Michael Boyd advocates in his book *The Reflexive Novel: Fiction as Critique*, is a recently discovered mode of novel that is about itself and about the process of making a novel. It turns inward to examine the act of writing itself, and sometimes “allows the process of making a novel out of a given fictive situation to overshadow the situation itself” (15-42). The efforts Dickens and Melville made on narrative strategies can be seen preliminarily as attempts to examining the story-telling process itself – how to tell stories more effectively and truthfully.

A comparative study on the narrative strategies *Bleak House* and “Bartleby the Scrivener” in light of the reflexive mode of novel gives both works some added significance. An analysis of the narrative strategies in both works shows a more problematic relationship between fiction and reality than realist fiction allows readers to acknowledge. It indicates both writers’ conscious awareness of the limitation of art as a medium to represent life, which is especially manifest in writers who have to make a virtue of necessity with the present mode of writing. Melville and Dickens share the discomfort with conventional mode of narration, of which writers all over the world from ancient to modern are trying to make their own distinctive breakthrough in whatever narrative strategies they might employ. This reading also proves that Melville never intends to write “Bartleby the Scrivener” out of the anxiety of influence or rivalry; he is more likely to be inspired by Dickens to tell the story or a miserable law-copyist he also knows, especially motivated out of admiration for a great master specializing in story-telling skills and intriguing humor.

Both Dickens and Melville endeavor to make breakthroughs in narrative strategies. Dickens in *Bleak House* experiments with an innovated technique of the dual or double narrative, in which the first and the third points-of-view alternate to tell the story, to complement each other so as to achieve a multiplying effect. The story of

Nemo is told as usual in Dickens' sophisticated cynical tone of the third-person, yet in a rather disinterested way as to be undeserved for his position in *Bleak House* as the heroine's father who died unknown and unrecognized. Melville in "Bartleby" concentrates on telling the story of the deplorable Bartleby from the lawyer's single first-person perspective. No matter how earnest the lawyer tries to help Bartleby and how sincere his humanitarian concern is, he is still unable to save Bartleby's wretched soul from collapse and self-destruction. Yet, neither the third-person of Dickens' narrator, nor the first-person of Melville's lawyer, is capable of telling us a true story. Both works reveal a difficulty in portraying reality, because any point of view on reality is subjective. The problem of human mystery remains an unsolved enigma. Both works question their own methods of representation, emphasizing their incapacity to shape materials and to bestow a truthful meaning on human experiences. Melville's Bartleby is a focused revision of Dickens' Nemo; he is "No One," no body, a black-humored and gloomy protagonist who "prefers not to" live in this world. He is an un-representable reality in human life.

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《荒屋》與〈巴特比〉的敘事策略—— 狄更斯與梅爾維爾之間饒富意義的密切關連

王安琪*

摘 要

英國狄更斯的長篇鉅著《荒屋》與美國梅爾維爾的短篇小說〈巴特比〉之間有著饒富意義的密切關連，有助於導引學術界更中肯的詮釋一篇眾說紛紜的美國小說，並且重新審視當年英國與美國文學的互動關係。兩部作品在人物塑造、情節、敘事模式等方面有諸多相似之處：都有律師、警察局、法律文件抄寫員等人物；都有一位法律文件抄寫員神秘死亡的悲慘故事；都有豐富的機智與幽默。〈巴特比〉的寫作和刊登時間緊緊跟在《荒屋》連載之後，顯示兩位知名作家之間的密切關連性。抄寫員神秘死亡的故事在《荒屋》只有輕描淡寫一筆帶過，而〈巴特比〉則是全篇都在講一個故事，後者好像是前者超大格局浩瀚人海裡擷取出來片段篇章的小人物加以放大詳述。

本文援用比較文學影響研究理論，藉著分析兩部作品的敘事策略，來詮釋兩位文學大師之間密切關係的涵義。梅爾維爾並未企圖與狄更斯相庭抗禮，也沒有瑜亮情結，而是出自仰慕大師的動機，引發靈感也來暢談他所熟悉無獨有偶的抄寫員故事，主要目的是模擬其精湛的說故事技巧與引人入勝的幽默風趣。為了把故事說得更傳神，兩位小說家都希望突破傳統敘事模式。狄更斯在《荒屋》首度實驗了「雙重敘事觀點」的寫作技巧，第一人稱與第三人稱輪番陳述相輔相成，在陳述抄寫員尼默的苦難故事時，沿用慣常的第三人稱歷盡滄桑的世故語氣，嘲弄命運多違，默默無聞抑鬱以終的抄寫員竟然是女主角的父親。梅爾維爾的〈巴

* 逢甲大學外文系專任副教授

特比〉則專注於敘事者的單一觀點，出自滿腔熱忱人道關懷的律師，煞費苦心也無法拯救巴特比悲愴的靈魂。然而，不論是狄更斯的第三人稱，或〈巴特比〉的第一人稱，兩部作品都難於傳達故事的真相，因為任何觀點都是主觀，都無法圓滿呈現永遠難解的人生之謎，抄寫員之死的神秘依舊深不可測難以捉摸。兩部作品都質疑呈現真相的方式，強調無力重整人間經驗為真實意義。梅爾維爾的巴特比是針對重建狄更斯的尼默而寫，但他也是默默無聞憂鬱寡歡的無名小子，「寧可不」存活於這個世界，他也是人類生命中永遠無法完整呈現的現實。

關鍵詞：狄更斯、《荒屋》、梅爾維爾、〈巴特比〉、敘事策略