



## Bartleby the Scrivener

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On his third day as scrivener for a lawyer on Wall Street, Bartleby tells his employer that he “prefers not to” copy any more legal documents. This enigmatic response becomes the scrivener’s constant reply to further requests for copy work.

While Bartleby’s passive resistance toward work angers the lawyer, it also arouses his pity. The scrivener is given six days to leave his job, but he prefers not to leave. Distraught with emotion for this “wreck in the mid Atlantic,” the lawyer asks Bartleby to move in with him. This request does not meet the scrivener’s preference.

The lawyer finally decides to rid himself of Bartleby. He moves his business to an address unknown to the scrivener. The lawyer later learns that Bartleby, refusing to leave his previous “home,” has been declared a vagrant and sent to prison. Here, Bartleby is further surrounded by walls. He responds by choosing not to eat his rations.

Bartleby represents Melville’s concept of man’s existence. Placed in a world with societal expectations, the man who prefers not to conform may retreat into his own “Walden Pond.” However, Bartleby, the former dead-letter office clerk, chooses not to protect himself from those who label him a threat to their materially oriented world.

Similar to Thoreau, who does not escape the tax collector at Walden, Bartleby pays a dear price for his individual preference.

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