The Three Bartlebys of Melville’s Tale

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THE THREE BARTLEBYS OF MELVILLE’S TALE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Gail M. Kienitz
September 1981
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THE THREE BARTLEBYS OF MELVILLE'S TALE

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A study of any one of Herman Melville's works is bound to be a fascinating and informative venture. Within the products of his prolific writing career are keen, precise, enlightening observations about nineteenth-century America. Religion, politics, business, literature, and philosophy are all within the realm of Melville's careful consideration. Melville was a man who reacted to his world with intense curiosity and passion. Melville was also extremely introspective—searching, questioning, and examining himself with equal intensity.

"Bartleby the Scrivener" offers an interesting synthesis of Melville's double vision. Within the confines of this tale are Melville's reaction to his world and his reaction to himself. The purpose of this study is to examine the kaleidoscopic perspective of Melville, the complexity of his world and mind. Examining Bartleby as a simple man, a superman, and the artist in society acknowledges the complexity of Melville's mind and art and furthers understanding of this particular story, Melville's others works, and Melville himself. Most scholarly considerations of
"Bartleby" have centered on one perspective to the exclusion of all others; to do so is a violation of Melville's purpose, plan, and message.

Bartleby is, first of all, considered as a simple man, a fictitious character in a story in relation to other fictitious characters. At this level it is possible to understand how Melville used the basic elements of fiction in his story to show the broad literary motifs with which he was concerned. Within the second level of consideration Bartleby is seen as one of Melville's supermen, a man who by virtue of his tragic vision, isolated existence, and nonmaterialistic mindset rises above the superficiality, pettiness, and mundane nature of the common man. At the third and final level Bartleby is considered as the artist in society. The autobiographical element in this consideration is extensive. Melville depicts the plight of himself and all creative individuals in modern capitalistic societies, contending that the artist is partially responsible for the intellectual salvation of the common man. The artist's purpose or quest is to enlighten the understanding of simple men, to help them see the complexity and darkness of reality. Such enlightenment makes supermen out of simple men.

An examination of "Bartleby" at these three levels
provides an extensive but not exhaustive analysis of Melville's story. There are finer shades of meaning and more intricate nuances of thought within the story. The purpose of considering Bartleby as simple man, superman, and artist is to understand the processes of Melville's mind, the essentials of his thought, and the recurrent patterns of imagery and allusions in his literature. It is to identify the most essential specific themes and ideas in the story and to minimize its complexity and obscurity without sacrificing the richness and depth of Melville's thought. The study is an attempt to understand and meet Melville as far as possible on his own terms.
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Introduction

The year 1853 was certainly not a promising one for Herman Melville. Health problems, lack of creative energy, and the unfavorable reception of two major novels, *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, disheartened the man and the artist. Unwilling to completely abandon a writing career, he turned to short stories and attempted makeshift reconciliations between himself, his art, and his world. One of the most revealing tales concerning the spiritual, personal, and moral crises Melville suffered is "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street." In this story Melville seems to question himself, the society of which he was a part, the function and role of an artist, and the problem of varying human perspectives. The story receives the nearly unanimous praise of critics and readers, but the unanimity ends with the statement of "general approval." The primary fascination of "Bartleby" lies in the multitude of varying critical interpretations gleaned from it. The story seems to have as many interpretations as it has readers. The elements of character, symbol, setting, and theme are subject to regenerative transformations. Each time a new meaning for the story is found all of the elements
are carefully reshaped and re-viewed to fit the meaning. The result is an extensive and bizarre range of singular interpretations in which Melville's tale is "fitted" to the predisposition of a critic or reader. Bartleby is seen as representing everyone from Melville or Thoreau to Christ, and the lawyer (narrator) of the story is seen as anyone from Karl Marx to God. Thematic possibilities cover everything from capitalism to Calvinism and existentialism to transcendentalism. It would be an awesome task simply to count the various interpretations and consider the varying points of departure for such interpretations.

The purpose of this study is not to identify or promote any one interpretation of the story "Bartleby" but to consider prominent ideas in the range of interpretations and determine which are most feasible, valid, or meaningful, and which can fit comfortably into what might have been Melville's perspective. It is granted that Melville left open the range of thematic possibilities for the story, and it is also obvious that diverse influences colored and contributed to his creation of it. Nonetheless, there can be unity within diversity. A synthesis of interpretations is possible when considerations of meaning, theme, and symbol are found to have a strong foundation within the framework of Melville's thought. There is a
profuse richness within this tale. By studying the story of Bartleby the scrivener, we learn about Melville, the man and his time, and we learn about ourselves. As Lewis Leary says, hardly anyone can resist the "fascination" of Bartleby; he may be made to seem at once each of us and everyone else besides. Bartleby's tale, says Leary, contains "too little and too much." Melville's story is limited only in so far as we separate what Melville actually suggests from what we are tempted to fill in. As Newton Arvin says, "'Bartleby' has the quality, small though its scale is, of suggesting a whole group of meanings, no one of which exhausts its connotativeness." To examine its range without pushing it beyond its natural bounds is the key to understanding.

The search for understanding "Bartleby," or any of Melville's works, is certainly not limited by a scarcity of available material. Melville's own works in the form of novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and letters abounds. A university library's modest collection of Melville well may fill three shelves, while scholarship on Melville may easily fill another six shelves. Walter Bezanson has made the following insightful observation about graduate research which contains sage advice to anyone researching Melville's fiction:
The young graduate student just handed a bibliography of Melville scholarship runs a considerable risk. Once inside the huge corncrib of available commentary he is likely to get such a bellyful that he cannot get out by the knothole through which he entered, and go back home to Melville.4

Unless a close eye is kept on that which is actually in Melville's writing and that which has been read into it, there is the danger of overfeeding on Melville's fiction. For this reason, it is essential to separate Melville from Melville scholarship. Such a restriction is hardly confining, for one soon finds Melville himself was a scholar, an anxious and eager, though oftentimes critical, connoisseur of current thought. As Tyrus Hillway says, in all of Melville's mature work there is a "miraculous blending of its author's remembered experience, his vast reading, and the leaven of his metaphorical philosophizing."5

Reading and understanding Melville's work necessitates a knowledge and understanding of many other people, subjects, and philosophy. To "know" Melville, one must also know something about such things as Calvinism, Transcendentalism, nineteenth-century America, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Shadows and fragments of each of these influences emerge, submerge, and re-emerge in "Bartleby." However, to
do justice to Melville's tale as a work of art and truly to understand the nature and extent of various influences, it is necessary, first of all, to understand the story as a simple story. Bartleby is, above all else, a fictitious character interacting with other fictitious characters. Considering the most basic, elemental level of the story is the necessary precursor to understanding the more complex analogical and symbolic interpretations of the story. Important broad literary motifs permeate such a consideration of Melville's story and honor his fundamental artistic skills. Bartleby as a simple man, a fictitious character within a story, is instrumental in Melville's treatment of such topics as the strained fellowship of mankind, the problem of human communication, the disparity between the real and ideal, the difficulties of sustaining a Christian ethic, and modern society's pressure on the individual toward conformity and productivity. Few critics deal with Bartleby in such a "simple" manner, yet it seems obvious that a straight-line analysis of the story focusing on Bartleby as a simple man should be first and foremost in any consideration of the story.

A study of "Bartleby" cannot, however, be restricted to a consideration of the title character as a simple man and still do justice to Melville's
message and point of view, for there is no such thing as a simple man in Melville's mind. Melville's complex, kaleidoscopic point of view is capable of seeing man as a many-faceted being. Individuals are sometimes simple men and sometimes supermen. Depth and profundity of thought, or enlightened awareness, lend heroic stature to an otherwise simple man. Awareness in Melville's characters is usually in the form of tragic vision. Men are granted superhuman status through their ability to see the dark side of life of which Melville himself was so acutely aware. Thus, Bartleby is also a superhuman. As a tragic figure he represents the suffering and sorrow which come from having greater insight than common man. His forlorn, desolate existence and pitiful defeat constitute Melville's peculiar tribute to a man whose differences damn him. Bartleby is a superhuman not in the traditional heroic sense but from the atypical Melvillian point of view.

Stanley Geist contends that Melville saw himself as a giant of heroic stature, unrecognized and defeated by the world.6 Obviously there is a kinship between Bartleby and his creator. Both are writers and defeated individuals in a Wall Street world. The autobiographical element is certainly present in "Bartleby." Many feel the story is totally autobio-
graphical and intensely personal. Bartleby is seen as Melville and the lawyer-narrator is made to represent either Lemuel Shaw (Melville's father-in-law), Nathaniel Hawthorne, Melville's uncle, or even God. Bartleby's experiences in the dead letter office and on Wall Street are seen as a veiled statement about Melville's own literary career. Most of these conjectures are certainly legitimate, but Melville's message and intentions go beyond a simple personal lamenting narrative. The story of Bartleby makes important statements about the plight of all artists or any creative individual in modern capitalistic society. Melville questions the values of contemporary society, criticizing, condemning, and yet sincerely sympathizing with the masses of common men. Melville believes that hope for all mankind is to be found in the creative insight and perception of the artist, yet he also acknowledges the special limitations of the artistic temperament and the public's less than avid desire for the artist's leadership. A consideration of Bartleby as the artist is virtually a consideration of society, and, thus, a consideration of all men. According to Leo Marx, "The apparently meaningless if not mad behavior of Bartleby is a message of utmost significance to all men."? Put in careful perspective, Melville's obscure tale of a
poor, stange scrivener is comprehensible. Carefully examined, with the mindset of his creator as the foremost consideration, Bartleby can be accepted and understood as a simple man or superman, the artist in society, Melville himself, and a type of everyman. The range is still broad. As Ronald Mason says, Melville "courted misunderstanding by his refusal, or even his inability, to limit his context," but his "courageous" and "comprehensive" attack upon themes allowed him to speak for "the universal condition of man" as no other writer of his time could. Reading Melville's tale is like viewing the world through a kaleidoscope. By slowly turning the wheel and carefully viewing the separate fragmented images in Melville's mind and art, it is possible to see, understand, and appreciate the resulting many-faceted, multicolored perspective and message in the amazingly simple yet complex story of Bartleby.
Chapter I
Simple Man

Because "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" is virtually an interpretive playground for critics, it often happens that amidst the fun and games of finding various meanings, parallels, and analogues for the story, the story itself is lost. "Bartleby" is, however, above all else a good story. The elements of character, theme, plot, and setting are carefully and artistically developed to give the story intrinsic worth. Failure to acknowledge Melville's artistic achievement is failure to appreciate what Edward Rosenberry has called Melville's "only finished work of art."¹ Only in "Bartleby," according to Rosenberry, is there the "perfect balance of tragedy and comedy" and "ambiguous equilibrium" which is the "principal cause of greatness."² A similar evaluation is echoed in Kingsley Widmer's statement that "Bartleby" is the "best of Melville's fiction"; he stresses the necessity to "acknowledge the story's own dialectic" rather than search for meaning outside the story.³ Though the majority of critics and readers prefer to engage in speculative sidetracking with the ever-fascinating scrivener's
story, it is obvious that an understanding of the story at a literal level is a necessary precursor to any sound interpretation of its subtle meanings. If the story is to be used as a springboard for interpretation, the facts of the story must be carefully considered. Thus, the first consideration is of Bartleby as a simple man, a fictitious character within the story interacting with other fictitious characters. Without particularizing and personalizing Melville's messages and themes, it is possible to see broad literary motifs and stylistic devices that make "Bartleby" a good story.

An age-old but ever-popular theme in literature is contrasting by juxtaposition the real and ideal. In "Bartleby" Melville successfully develops this theme but adds a slightly different twist. The character of Bartleby is used as a foil to the narrator's confused perception of an ideal. Melville seems to question man's ability to know exactly what it is that he wants. When Bartleby first appears, he seems to be the answer to the narrator's need; he seems to be the perfect clerk. The narrator says that he is immediately pleased to have among his "corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect." Bartleby represents what the narrator admires in himself and wishes for in others. As an "eminently
safe man" and "unambitious lawyer" doing a "snug business" in the "cool tranquility of a snug retreat" (p. 93), he finds the "pallidly neat, pitifully respectable, and incurably forlorn" Bartleby a wonderful nonthreatening prospective employee (p. 99). Furthermore, the lawyer hates to have anything invade his peace; Bartleby is virtually silent and motionless, ideal attributes in the eye of the narrator. Initially, there is no question in the narrator's mind that Bartleby is what he wants.

There is much that the narrator admires about himself. His first "grand point," he says, is "prudence"; his second is "method" (p. 93). His avid desire for an easy life causes him to limit himself professionally and socially, carefully avoiding conflict or strain of any sort. Risk and involvement have been minimized as elements of his existence; thus, he is a bachelor and apparently has no outside friends or interests. To an "eminently safe man" emotional ties and personal relationships are threatening. Safety and security lie in being a careful and conscientious lawyer and in letting his business life on Wall Street be the center of his existence. His passivity under all circumstances is the safeguard of his condition. He prides himself on the fact that even at work he "seldom" loses his temper and "much
more seldom" engages in "dangerous indignations at wrongs and outrages" (p. 93). Filled with the "profound conviction" that the "easiest way" is "the best" (p. 92), he considers safety and security essentials of the good life. He has confined his lifestyle, limited interpersonal relationships, and maintained a passive temperament.

Obviously, Bartleby represents the extreme form of some of these same attributes that the narrator is so anxious to encourage in himself and others.

Bartleby is unobtrusive and passive as a person, yet useful and industrious as a clerk. He is a direct contrast to the other two clerks whose intemperate dispositions are often an annoyance to the narrator. The contrast makes Bartleby seem all the more ideal. Bartleby also flatters the narrator’s self-concept and his idea of what is good and right by being passive, complacent, and reserved. Bartleby, like the narrator, is a "safe man"; he avoids personal interchanges and emotional involvement with others; prudence and method are likewise his virtues, and he has limited himself socially and professionally. Though he is a good writer, he is not necessarily ambitious; he is not seeking praise or a promotion.

These characteristics manifested in an extreme form, however, cause a change in the narrator's
attitude. The narrator is forced to question his own ideals, for those very same characteristics in Bartleby that were an initial cause of attraction are a later cause of frustration. William Dillingham says that Bartleby is planted in the story to pose the "threat of self-revelation" to the narrator; through Bartleby, the narrator faces the danger of seeing himself, as well as his values and assumptions, "honestly and clearly." The passive, complacent lawyer's supposed ideals are mirrored starkly and perversely in Bartleby. As the lawyer reacts in a typical way to the absurdities of Bartleby, the plot of the story is set in motion. Bartleby becomes more than a symbolic representation of an ideal; he becomes an impetus to plot.

Before Bartleby's full role in plot development can be understood, however, he must be considered in relationship to the minor characters. He is as much a foil to Turkey and Nippers as he is to the narrator and his image of an ideal. Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut are comic characters in the Dickens' tradition. Richard Fogle goes so far as to say they were specifically created humors characters; Turkey is the "sanguine, plethoric" character while Nippers is "between the hot and dry of the choleric and the cold and dry of melancholy." Whatever their specific
designation, they are undoubtedly remarkably human, humorous creations. Their "off and on" productivity at the office provides an effective contrast to the consistent, mechanical performance of Bartleby. Turkey is industrious and dependable until noon when his "business capacities" become "seriously disturbed" for the remainder of the day (p. 94). It is not that he became "absolutely idle" or "averse to business" at the time; rather, he became "altogether too energetic," "reckless" and "noisy" (p. 94). With Nippers "irritability and nervousness" are "mainly observable in the morning," while in the afternoon he is "comparatively mild" (p. 98). Bartleby is perfectly, and unnaturally, consistent.

The personal habits and appearance of the clerks are also subject to critical scrutiny under the narrator's eye; thus, another effective contrast between Bartleby and his co-workers is established. The "self-indulgent" habits of Turkey offend the narrator; "his clothes were apt to look oily, and smell of eating houses" (p. 97). "His coats were execrable," according to the narrator, and "his hat not to be handled" (p. 97). Nipper's dress is acceptable, but he is somewhat of an annoyance to the narrator because of his acquaintances who sometimes visit the office. They are "certain ambiguous-
looking fellows" who wear "seedy coats" (p. 96). Bartleby can hardly be admonished for his appearance or associations, for he is, as the narrator says, "pallidly neat" and "pitiably respectable" (p. 99). He has no outside acquaintances.

Bartleby seemingly exhibits all the virtues of both clerks but none of their flaws. Bartleby is, in the words of Marvin Fisher, the "model of neatness, servility, dependence, obedience, gratitude, and contentment," exactly what the narrator wants in his scriveners. Yet an interesting irony underlies the narrator's criticism of Turkey and Nippers--their faults will later be evidenced in the supposedly perfect Bartleby. They foreshadow to a degree the later actions, preferences, and peculiarities of the strange scrivener. Consider the following statements made by the narrator concerning Turkey and Nippers. Turkey cannot be persuaded to leave work in the afternoon; he approaches the narrator with an appeal to his "fellow feeling" and can "hardly be resisted" (p. 96). "At all events," says the narrator, "go he would not" (p. 96). Bartleby will later refuse to quit the lawyer, and feelings of "fellowship" will prompt the lawyer to let him stay. Nippers at times evidences a certain "impatience of the duties of a mere copyist" (p. 96). Bartleby will later refuse
to verify copy, and the lawyer will admit that it is a "dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair" that would be "intolerable" to some though it is "an indispensable part of the scrivener's business" (p. 100). Finally, Nipper's dissatisfaction with the position of his table leads the narrator to the conclusion that he "knew not what he wanted" or "if he wanted anything" (p. 96). Bartleby will later exhibit the same inconsolable dissatisfaction when he is offered and refuses various jobs and claims not to be "particular" but is not happy with any of the suggestions (p. 124). Bartleby is an extreme of the real as well as the ideal. Any virtue or flaw he possesses is manifest to an absolute degree.

The other characters within the story are oblivious to the humorous light Bartleby sheds on them. The lawyer who has confined and limited himself, "preferring not" to extend himself, be outspoken, or become involved with others does not see his own reflection in Bartleby. Similarly, he does not see how his image of the ideal is both met and defeated by Bartleby. From the narrator's utilitarian, pragmatic point of view, Bartleby's machine-like capabilities make him the perfect scrivener. He can do "an extraordinary amount of writing," running "day and night" without "pause for digestion" (p. 100).
Though the narrator comments that there was "nothing ordinarily human" about Bartleby (p. 101), he does not realize the flaw in his ideal--its inhumaneness. Bartleby will work like a machine and wear out like a machine. When he can no longer perform his job, there will be nothing left for him. In the long run, the eccentricities and faults of Turkey and Nippers seem far preferable to the virtues of Bartleby. Turkey and Nippers are likewise unaware of Bartleby's negative influence on them. According to Kingsley Widmer, readers can see the "dehumanizing" effect Bartleby has on Turkey and Nippers; in contrast to Bartleby's passiveness and consistent temperament, they "reveal a startlingly, and often violently arrogant self-regard in petty matters quite at odds with their menial roles." All the clerks suffer a dehumanization within the story; with Turkey and Nippers it is comic; with Bartleby it is tragic. In either instance the inhumanity of an imagined ideal becomes obvious.

Having examined Bartleby's role as a character foil and symbolic representation of an ideal, it is now possible to see how this simple, urassuming scrivener provides the impetus to and basis for the plot. Bartleby's relationship with the narrator is the primary substance of the story. Some, including Marvin Feldheim, William Dillingham, and Kingsley
Widmer, see "Bartleby" as the narrator's story. In a sense it obviously is. Bartleby does not change except that he reacts with increasing frequency according to his own unique disposition. The narrator is upset, unravelled, and drastically changed by Bartleby's influence. It is the narrator's rising indignation and increasingly dramatic reactions to Bartleby that give the plot substance. Bartleby is silent and motionless, yet he is a great catalytic force. As Ronald Mason says, he is "The still point" about which "an unstable world turns."9 Nowhere is the instability more evident than in the narrator. The unusually tolerant, detached, unemotional lawyer is forced by Bartleby's passivity to become forward, outspoken, and aggressive. In his earnest attempts to avoid a conflict or confrontation of any sort the lawyer, William Dillingham says, puts up with his "odd and only partly effective scriveners" (Turkey and Nippers) because he is afraid to face them; his attempts to "correct or scold them in any but the mildest fashion" are laughable.10 The narrator justifies himself by saying he is a "man of peace," unwilling "by admonition to call forth unseemly retorts" (p. 95). His initial response to the provocations of Bartleby is characteristic; he says, "I determined again to postpone the consideration of
his dilemma to my future leisure" (p. 103). Like Hamlet, he faces the problem of delay.

If he must deal with Bartleby, the lawyer wants to do so calmly and coolly, using his prudence and method to minimize the risk of a scene. In actuality he would "prefer not" to deal with Bartleby at all. His passive resistance is ironically similar to Bartleby's. The lawyer can tolerate Bartleby's refusal to verify copy and can excuse his unwillingness to run the smallest errands because he fears a disruption of his emotional equilibrium, but he is finally faced with an inescapable, overwhelming personal emotion when he discovers that Bartleby has been living in the office. The self-confession he makes is startling; "for the first time in my life," he says, "a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me" (p. 110). He can no longer control his emotions nor can he prevent the chain of emotional responses that ensues. For the noncommittal lawyer it is virtually emotional chaos that follows:

My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew in my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. (p. 111)

The subtitle to "Bartleby the Scrivener" is "A
Story of Wall Street." It both suggests and calls attention to the importance of the wall imagery. William Dillingham believes that an understanding of the wall imagery is necessary to an understanding of the relationship between Bartleby and the narrator and their emotional ties. The walls, he says, represent the lawyer's attempt to protect and isolate himself:

The lawyer must have walls; they are necessary for his fragile security. Psychologically his walls are made of "method." External, literal walls give him comfort because they seal off the threats of life. Consequently he selects a Wall Street office from which only walls can be seen. . . . Life--its risks and dangers--is what this eminently safe man wants to wall out, to retreat from.

Bartleby threatened his whole "security system" by showing him the ultimate destructiveness of walls, their potential for ill. The narrator does not know how to deal with someone so like himself, Bartleby, the epitome of a walled, isolated existence. It is because Bartleby is so like the narrator, however, that he is capable of effecting a change in him. The typical pattern of the lawyer's approach to Bartleby is summarized by Dillingham: "first comes the challenge, then the fear, then the indecisiveness, then the retreat, and finally his rationalization for
his behavior." A gradually awakening awareness is fostered each time the narrator has to repeat this pattern. Eventually, walls are broken down; the lawyer is forced to attempt communication or take action. When his rationalizations fail to explain Bartleby's eccentricities and his own ineffectiveness, the lawyer is unable to reconstruct a wall between them. He becomes increasingly more aware of and bothered by the odd scrivener.

Mordecai Marcus also sees the wall imagery as a metaphoric link between Bartleby and the narrator. In support of his belief that Bartleby is the narrator's psychological double, Marcus says "the lawyer puts up a screen that isolates him Bartleby from his sight but not from his voice." According to Marcus this symbolizes the lawyer's "compartmentalization of the unconscious forces which Bartleby represents." Bartleby is like an alter ego, an inner sounding board. The narrator says of the screen that "in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined" (p. 100). In other words, Bartleby is a presence but not an intrusion. The lawyer's treatment of Bartleby, his use of walls to screen him out, illustrates what Marcus calls "the sterility, impersonality, and mechanical adjustments of the world which the lawyer inhabits." Bartleby is
dangerous because he is seemingly so safe. His walls are internal and stronger than the narrator's; thus, the lawyer unsuspectingly lets the scrivener get "close" to him and is eventually faced with the danger of self-exposure. As danger and fear increase, changes in the lawyer's attitudes and actions occur.

The immediate effect of Bartleby's influence is humorous. The narrator, as well as Turkey and Nippers, inadvertently pick up Bartleby's characteristic phrase. Marvin Fisher describes the process:

Nippers and Turkey, as well as the narrator, come to use the word prefer with increasing frequency (while unaware that they are using it at all) and thereby show the subtle impact of Bartleby, who also remains unaware of his power to make involuntary converts even among those who oppose him or make him the target of their separate hostilities.

The lawyer undergoes more than a verbal transformation. As his reactions become less controllable and his emotions are more erratic, he changes into an eminently unsafe man. He fears that he might be tempted to deal violently with Bartleby. And when he realizes that his friends' and associates' "relentless remarks" about the "strange apparition" (Bartleby) are threatening to his "professional reputation," he decides radical action must be taken (p. 122). He no longer has a snug business and can no longer be a passive
tolerant employer. He decides since Bartleby will not quit him, he must quit Bartleby, and he moves from the office.

Amidst all the turmoil and chaos, Bartleby remains silent and seemingly indifferent. Dillingham sees most of the narrator's actions as inactions or avoidance procedures. His inability to act and Bartleby's inability to be acted upon create "inescapable irony" in the story. What the lawyer interprets as his virtues of prudence or "perfect quietness" in his dealings with Bartleby, Dillingham sees as an inadequacy which eventually becomes obvious; when the lawyer does finally respond with action, it is by fleeing. Bartleby has had a silent and subtle, yet active, effect upon the narrator. Prudence and method are ineffective with Bartleby who resists both suggestion and force. The narrator's business and psyche are disturbed by contact with the strange scrivener.

The power of the pale, silent scrivener is awesome. Ronald Mason makes the following observation:

The plain figure of Bartleby, considered dispassionately, is absurd enough, but in his context he is so disruptive of all normally accepted conventions that the emotional power and sanction of such a steady refusal as his must be regarded as
one of Melville's most original discoveries. His influence crescendoes until the final death scene where, as Maurita Willet points out, Bartleby's "dead body says more than his living body could have." Marvin Feldheim contends that through Bartleby's death a most dramatic change in awareness is effected in the narrator; the difference between the highly personal opening of the story and the universal ending attests to this change. Through a simple man, a fictitious character, Melville moves the narrator and the reader from a highly self-centered, complacent consciousness to a highly empathetic, other-centered consciousness. The narrator's final haunting lines, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (p. 131) attest to the power of the change.

The dramatic change in the narrator's reaction to Bartleby as evidenced in the final lines indicates another concern of Melville--the religious speculations and Christian motifs that are an undercurrent to all of Melville's thought and writing. They are essential Melville. To understand the story of Bartleby requires understanding Melville's biblical mindset. His thorough familiarity with the Bible is documented in many sources, for many have taken painstaking steps to understand Melville's approach and response to
biblical literature. Nathalia Wright is among those whose research provides an interesting as well as informative background to an understanding of Melville. In her book, *Melville's Use of the Bible*, the following is presented as a summary of Melville's intimate experience with the Bible:

It was of all his sources, of course, the earliest and the best-known, the only one with which he was acquainted before his late twenties, though through no determination of his own. But it was also the one to which he deliberately turned and returned with the years. When a boy, he heard its words as an inescapable part of his heritage; when a man, he read it, as he read Shakespeare and Plato, for its message as well as its music. Its effect upon him was correspondingly deepened and prolonged. 22

The Bible, according to Wright, was internalized in Melville's thought; its language and literature were subconscious involuntary forces affecting his writing:

Melville's mind seems to have been saturated with its stories, its ideas, and its language. The allusions he made to it were not studied but involuntary; they came to him spontaneously as idioms in his vocabulary, as patterns in his thought. 23

Such stories as "Bartleby" provide obvious reflections of Melville's biblical mindset. A critical analysis of such stories can likewise provide interesting insights into his responses to Christianity.
Care must be taken, however, to distinguish between planned parallels to the Bible and simple stylistic similarities or common themes. Of the many references that may be found in "Bartleby," there is one indirect allusion that seems especially pertinent. In Christ's injunction from Matthew 25, Christ promises that even as men are ministering unto the "least" of his "brethren" they are ministering unto Him. Bartleby, appearing as a simple man, a poor forlorn scrivener, and stranger, fits the description given by Christ of the least of His brethren. Furthermore, the narrator's response and outreach to Bartleby bear even more direct reference to the task of charity as given in the injunction. Christ (identifying himself with the lowliest among men) gives the following account of charity:

For I was hungry and ye gave me food;
I was thirsty and ye gave me drink;
I was a stranger and ye took me in;
Naked, and ye clothed me;
I was sick and ye visited me;
I was in prison and ye came unto me. 24

In *The Wake of the Gods* Bruce Franklin shows how the narrator technically fulfills the letter of Christ's injunction in his dealing with Bartleby.

He offers money to the stranger so that he might eat and drink, he takes him in, finally offering him not only his office but his home; when he sees that he is sick, he attempts to minister to him; he alone of
all mankind, visits and befriends the stranger in prison. 25

But, Franklin says, it is initially the letter and not the spirit of the law that the narrator obeys. 26 Personal safety and security are the priorities in the narrator's mind. He tends to risk little, offering charity only as long as it does not interfere with his business and personal life. Charity confined and limited by the personal comfort of the giver hardly approximates an ideal. Furthermore, at first the narrator extends charity only in the anticipation of reward. He says, "to befriend Bartleby, to humor him" would cost "little or nothing," yet by doing so he can "cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval," a sweet morsel" for his conscience (p. 105). The narrator is quite obviously "counting the cost" of Christianity. There will be no investment made without the promise of a return. The hedonistic and materialistic terms with which he considers his opportunity to profit show how far short he falls from the spiritual ideal. His verbal appraisal of the virtues of charity further condemns his initial actions. He says, "Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy" (p. 120). Obviously, the narrator has a difficult time finding a "better
motive." His charity is initially based on self-interest, limited by his personal concerns for safety and security, and given without truly empathetic regard for the recipient.

The narrator’s hypocritical and selfish concept of charity is obviously a fault. The degree to which he possesses and exhibits this fault is an individual characteristic, but the tendency for any human virtue to be less than ideal is a shared characteristic with mankind. The narrator is simply human. He is not capable of living up to the ideal of Christianity, for his capacities are limited. He cannot see beyond his self-centered, erroneous sense of righteousness. To his credit, however, the steps he has taken to befriend Bartleby must be considered and his changing awareness acknowledged. Though it is a slow and ultimately inadequate change, it is, nonetheless, an important change, and the significance of Bartleby’s role as a simple man and one of the least among men is dependent upon his influence on the narrator.

The opening of the narrator’s consciousness and the deepening of his empathy can be traced through his various “charitable” responses to Bartleby. Initially, the narrator simply tolerates Bartleby’s eccentricities. His refusing to verify copy or run errands is not too much of a problem since there are others around who can
do these jobs. The narrator, priding himself on his prudence and method, his tolerant disposition, simply ignores Bartleby's insubordinate responses and avoids a confrontation with him. Eventually, however, the narrator loses his patience, and in a moment of atypical near-rage almost "violently" dismisses Bartleby from the premises for his refusal to examine some important copy (p. 101). His compulsion toward outrage and violence is quieted though when the narrator looks at Bartleby and sees that there is "nothing ordinarily human" about the strange scrivener (p. 101). Not knowing how to respond in view of this perception, he decides to "forget the matter for the present," reserving consideration of the dilemma for "future leisure" (p. 101). At the same time, Bartleby's persistent refusals to comply with the narrator's requests and his silent, mysterious nature are beginning to shake the narrator's self-confidence; he is beginning to question the reliability and effectiveness of his prudence and method. Concerning Bartleby, he says, "It is not seldom the case when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith" (p. 103). Bartleby is shaking the very foundations of the "eminently safe" man's security.

The narrator feels he must make some difficult
decisions and take some definite action, but he is generally incompetent when faced with the prospect of his being forced and aggressive. Thus, he rationalizes, once again, reasons for keeping Bartleby. He decides Bartleby's "eccentricities are involuntary," and he is "useful" (p. 105); therefore, he will let Bartleby stay and pride himself on his own neighborly, charitable kindness. He convinces himself that he is acting upon the divine injunction of Christ to love one another as He has loved us. Again a Christian virtue is misconstrued, the product of an afterthought, part of a rationalized response to a situation, a way to accommodate and feel self-righteous.

There does come a time, however, when the narrator is prompted by true sympathy to help Bartleby. When he discovers that the poor scrivener has been sleeping in the office and making it his home, he is overwhelmed with pity: "Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, what miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed. His poverty is great; but his solitude how horrible!" (p. 109). Empathy makes its first appearance, and the narrator is capable of his first act of true Christian charity. He lets Bartleby occupy the office. It is not long though before his humanness gets the better of his
Christian virtue, and another self-centered, rationalized response becomes the basis for his action. He returns to the egocentric conviction that charity operates as a "vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor" (p. 120). The selfish desire for safety and security abort his opportunity to live in the true accordance with the practice of Christian charity and brotherly love. Empathy and sympathy are replaced by self-centered concerns.

The narrator's attempts at charity are continually checked by prudence and self-interest, but the rather precise observations he makes about his and Bartleby's situation indicate the change in his awareness. It is true that Bartleby is unreachable, the victim of an "innate and incurable disorder" (pp. 111-112). The narrator realizes this when he says, "I might give alms to his [Bartleby's] body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach" (p. 112). The Christian's ability to minister to the least among men is limited, as is the least of men's ability to be ministered unto. There are real limits to a man's ability to give and receive. Bartleby is virtually inconsolable. Even if the narrator were capable of enacting the ideal of Christian charity, it is unlikely that Bartleby would
truly be comforted or consoled. Thus, when the narrator expresses his concern that Bartleby may have been "billeted" upon him for some "mysterious purpose of an allwise Providence" (p. 121), it may seem an unfair task or testing. Human limits to giving and receiving cannot be overcome through sheer will or desire.

The narrator, despite his efforts, does not seem to help Bartleby in any way. But Bartleby, despite his passive reserve, does seem to help the narrator. Bartleby has awakened an awareness in the narrator and caused him to think in terms of a larger obligation to his fellow man. Inadvertently, Bartleby instills in the narrator a sense of fraternal melanchoy; he joins in what Hawthorne calls the "magnetic chain of humanity." According to Martin Pops, the narrator awakens and realizes temporary feelings of kinship, but his actions are doomed to be ineffective; he demonstrates a failure of "nerve and intellect" as well as "failure to love." 27 Institutionalized religion, in which the lawyer might have found guidance, also fails to provide the lawyer with an adequate or effective response. As William Dillingham says, the narrator's religion was never really "genuine"; it was simply another "aspect of his game of prudence and method." 28 He misses an
opportunity for the true practice of Christian charity because of his modern mindset, a typical, self-centered, pragmatic response to the world. Walton Patrick says, "the purpose of Bartleby's apparently senseless and futile struggle was to create virtue in the attorney, to arouse him from a smug self-complacency to a painful and profound sense of compassion and sympathy for all mankind." 29 This he does, but, as Hershel Parker adds, what happens is that in the process the narrator exposes his own "terrestrial not celestial values." 30 He is only sporadically capable of feeling true sympathy and showing true charity. He cannot sustain an ideal Christian attitude or perspective.

The shortcomings of the narrator's attitude and action is not, however, the main focus of the story. The change is his awareness and the deepening of his consciousness are meant to be the main concerns. Bartleby as a simple man has been able to disrupt radically the mindset and emotional equilibrium of a supposedly "eminently safe man." He has effected a real change in the narrator. When the narrator finally offers to take Bartleby into his own home, the evidence is undeniable. The narrator is taking a risk without thought of personal reward; he has truly, if only temporarily, escaped from his own self-centered consciousness. Hoping to help Bartleby
begin again, he sincerely says, "Come, let us start now, right away" (p. 127). Bartleby, however, prefers not to make any changes, and the narrator desperately feels he has done all he can. His actions and words have been ineffective, and it is very likely that he will go back to his old games of prudence and method, never again taking such risks. But though his actions may revert to routine, he is left with an awareness that can never be retracted. As he leaves Bartleby he says, "I now strove to be carefree and quiescent; and my conscience justified me in the attempt; though, indeed, it was not so successful as I could have wished" (p. 127). The eminently safe man having been made vulnerable can never be entirely free again. He is left with an awareness of and sympathy for his fellow man. He has experienced the essence of Christian suffering.

Those who read "Bartleby" can, by virtue of their own human nature, identify, at least to a degree, with the temporal, self-centered values of the narrator. Part of Melville's intention is to carry the reader through the metamorphosis. The final lines of the story, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (p. 131), express a relationship between the reader, the narrator, Bartleby and everyone. Each is like the other in some way and shares the same problems of
existence within an oftentimes cold, cruel universe. To recognize the disparity between the real and ideal, to discover the limits of comforting and being comforted, and to struggle with personal perspectives while fostering awareness of others' perspectives are difficult tasks, sources of eternal frustration for simple men. To understand man's dilemma and to continue to act and respond in charitable, humane ways despite the likelihood of failure is to continue to fight what seems a losing battle, to feel sorrow and frustration. Not to act, react, or fight, however, leads to stagnation and death, the less desirable end Bartleby faced.
Chapter II
Superman

There are no simple perspectives in a study of Melville. The complex working of his mind is evidenced by his vision and portrayal of a grey, rather than a black and white, world. Though he desperately tried to see in black and white and understand his world in terms of good and evil, he was ultimately unable to separate opposites. Thus, in the character of Bartleby, it is possible to find an intricate and confusing blend of attributes. He is both simple and complex, good and bad, the least among men and the greatest among men. To understand and see Bartleby as a superman requires a special understanding of the Melvillean hero. It also requires a special understanding of Melville's use of Christ imagery. For some, the themes in "Bartleby" are seen as more than simple analogues to themes in Matthew. Many make a verbatim, literal interpretation of scripture to support a conviction that Bartleby is a Christ figure. They see Bartleby as a modern incarnation of Christ in the form of a stranger. To support this conviction and take endless pains to prove it seems, however, to miss the point, the true thrust of
Melville's intentions. In creating a heroic figure, a superman in a sense, Melville gives Bartleby some of the attributes of Christ which is far different from making him a Christ figure. Melville creates heroes by using a composite of characteristics he respects in superior men, including pre-eminently the Christ of the New Testament, and imagery derived from the Christ event is simply the most natural and effective way for Melville to convey the superhuman status of a hero. Once again some of the imagery and parallels are probably not planned. As Richard Chase says, Christ was such a "massive and moving image in Melville's mind" that implicit and explicit references to him appear as a part of the subconscious working of the author's imagination. By examining Melville's concept of good and evil, his Calvinistic background, his personal response to worldly concerns, and his reaction to transcendentalist philosophy, it is possible to discover the shaping influences in the making of a Melvillean hero. He creates supermen who are not only Christ-like but Melville-like, heroes like Bartleby, forlorn, sorrowful and virtually alone in a world that fails to accept, understand, or appreciate them.

To be superhuman and rise above the various influences that thwart mankind requires an under-
standing of various forces affecting man. Melville struggled his whole life to identify and comprehend these forces and create a philosophical framework for his thought. As Nathalia Wright says, Melville was forever interested in the "old insoluble problems of what is good and evil, what is right and wrong." He could not, Wright says, accept certain tenets of faith that were in vogue, "such as the belief that virtue is rewarded by prosperity." The world, as Melville saw it, was characterized by injustice, and man always had more questions than answers. The complex workings of a divine providence were an endless source of frustration to anyone who tried to understand his predicament and no amount of simple observation of the temporal and terrestrial could produce any final, reliable answers. While Melville witnessed the frequent prosperity of evil in a materialistic world, he struggled to find an ultimate equity. His heroes do the same. Bartleby's "dead wall reveries" suggest the difficulty of the task, the impossibility of understanding the human situation and of having contemplation lead to revelation.

Despite all of the current philosophy that Melville questioned or rejected, its influence on him remained profound. He borrowed heavily from Calvinistic concepts, and though his eventual personal
philosophy is unique and often in contrast with Calvinism, it is indebted to Calvinism for its foundation. As William Dillingham says, Melville's "tragic vision of man in the howling infinite" owes a great deal to the teachings of Calvin, probably more than Melville would have cared to admit. In *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin outlines and defines a concept of true liberty that sheds an interesting light on some of Bartleby's characteristics. Dillingham identifies the most basic and important similarities between Melville's hero, Bartleby, and Calvin's liberated man. The following three characteristics, Dillingham says, "follow precisely" the three parts of the true liberty which John Calvin discussed and analyzed:

The state of independence which Melville's hero finally reaches produces three closely related attitudes in him: (1) He pays little attention to the laws and dogmas of the world which ordinary people follow; they are generally beneath his consideration. . . . (2) He has developed a singleness of purpose which frees his conscience of pangs which an ordinary man might feel. . . . (3) Consequently such heroes feel free to make use of the world around them in any way that will help them to be about their appointed task.

Bartleby figuratively rises above law and social convention; he is totally unconcerned with either. Furthermore, his "dead wall reveries" occupy all of
his time; he is singularly devoted to contemplation. Finally, he feels free to occupy the office without working for his keep. Guilt does not bother him; he is indifferent to externals and immune to the criticisms or admonitions of those around him. He is very much a parallel to Calvin's liberated man.

Melville is also indebted to Calvin for another concept that becomes a subconscious influence in his thought and an element in his writing. The theory of election was imbedded in Melville's mind and whether he chose to accept or reject it is inconsequential in terms of its ability to surface within Melville's writing. As Newton Arvin says, Melville need not have mastered Calvin's "rigorous formulations of doctrine in order to be deeply affected by the teaching and preaching that flowed from them"; his sense of man and the universe was destined to be "profoundly, however individually, molded by them." Dillingham finds in Melville's later heroes a "fundamental decency"; they are individuals as "innately incorruptible as Calvin's elect." Thus, despite the general condition of original depravity in man, in Calvin's elect an innate goodness indicates those favored by God and predestined to be saved. Though it is difficult to verify essential goodness in Bartleby, it is obvious that Bartleby is predestined
to be different from other men and that he is not susceptible to corruption by the materialistic, worldly interests and concerns of those around him. He is an isolate in a society that tries to make him less God-like and more human by trying to make him more concerned with the petty, mundane aspects of the human situation.

Innocence and worldly isolation quite clearly suggest parallels to Christ. Like Christ, Bruce Franklin says, Bartleby's life is a story of "the advent, the betrayal, and the torment of a mysterious being." Both Bartleby and Christ are men of sorrow, forlorn and frustrated in a world of greed, selfishness, and sin. In one sense they are supermen simply because they recognize the world as it is. Estranged from the rest of the world by their larger vision and awareness, they are doomed to be misunderstood and despised. The narrator says Bartleby seemed "absolutely alone in the universe" (p. 116); Ginger Nut finds him a "little luny" (p. 103), and Nippers at one time shows obvious distaste for "the stubborn mule" (p. 112). All are reactions similar to those Christ faced in his own time. Furthermore, Bartleby's "wonderful mildness" (p. 109) disarms the narrator; he realizes that the "demented" scrivener "has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads" of
himself and others (p. 114). Like Christ, Bartleby exerts a mysterious yet mild, wondrous ascendancy over the others in an atypical manner, subtly influencing the lives of other individuals.

Like Christ, like one of Calvin's elect, and like other Melvillean heroes, Bartleby evinces the characteristic Newton Arvin labels "emotional absolutism." As noted earlier, William Dillingham observes a "singleness of purpose" characteristic of Bartleby. Bartleby prefers not to work, prefers not to socialize, and prefers not to abide by any normal human conventions. According to Dillingham's interpretation, Bartleby is indifferent to and ignorant of such routine because he is entirely consumed with the "pursuit of truth," the desire to know what is essential; in Calvinistic terms he is "about his Father's business." Dillingham's interpretation is based mostly on conjecture in an attempt to link Bartleby with Ahab and Pierre, Melville's other heroes who struggle to understand themselves and their world. Nathalia Wright emphasizes Melville's own preoccupation with trying to understand God by pointing to the heavily bracketed passage from Job in Melville's Bible asking if any man by "searching" can "find out God." Melville seems to know that the answer is negative but does
not let the answer deter the search. There is inherent value in the quest despite inevitable failure.

To see Bartleby as a quester in pursuit of truth may seem forced, but some find evidence which suggests that Bartleby is such a quester, at least to a certain degree. Ray Browne says careful attention must be paid to the symbolism and subtle clues within the story; Browne sees the light that comes "from a very small opening in a dome" (p. 100) as the "light of heaven" which the narrator fails to notice but which Bartleby begins to view with "monomania." While others are concerned with worldly pursuits and self-centered perspectives, Bartleby, according to some, is contemplating and attempting to fathom much more important universal essences. He has abandoned self and is estranged from men in his contemplative pursuit of an ultimate truth or understanding of the ways of providence. Less than a god and greater than a man, the quest leaves him in a frustrating middle position, horribly estranged. Bartleby may seem less than heroic in his approach. His passive, dull reserve may be offensive, but the reasons for his withdrawal are meant to be honored.

Estrangement is not the worst of the consequences for Melville's unconventional hero. As Alan Lebowitz
says, in Melville "heroic dedication" to truth or an attempt to comprehend universal law often becomes a "self-destructive monomania." 14 In an all-consuming attempt to find out or understand the world, indifference to externals becomes life-threatening. The tendency is present in Melville's heroes in different ways. With Ahab the tendency is obvious because it is violent. Frequently enraged, he risks the lives of himself and his crew to pursue the white whale. Bartleby's self-destructive tendency is far less obvious or dramatic. He simply withdraws from life with an increasing number of "preferring not to's." His final "preference" not to eat is the cause of his death. However different their styles, according to Tyrus Hillway, both Ahab and Bartleby "assert themselves as sovereign individuals" by fighting fate and taking their own lives in their hands. 15 Each hero is an antagonist to fate, seeking to assert an individual will. Each fails and causes his own destruction, yet it is the willingness to fight and an ability to see from a larger perspective that ennobles the hero. Ahab, Bartleby, and other Melvillean heroes bear what Newton Arvin calls "the full and anguished burden of consciousness." 16 It, alone, grants the individual special recognition in the eyes of Melville. Stanley Brodwin claims it
moves each hero from "microcosmic self" to the "frontiers of eternity." The "frontiers of eternity" obviously implies a confrontation with death; thus, the self-destructive tendencies of the hero are really lack of awareness of self in lieu of a larger vision. Self becomes lost in the hero's search, for he realizes the insubstantiality of himself or any man in the larger scheme of the universe.

In the creation of such heroes as Bartleby, Pierre, or Anab, Melville used a very important model—himself. Stanley Geist explains Melville's glorified yet tragic self-inclusive concept of a hero by pointing to "Melville's firm conviction that man became a hero of gigantic stature by attaining the vision of tragedy and his equally firm conviction that he was himself among the giants." Like Bartleby, Melville had a tragic vision and often felt forlorn or estranged; "dead wall reveries" often characterized Melville's contemplation. In fact, one might say of Melville what the narrator says of Bartleby: "It was his soul that suffered" (p. 112). Melville and Bartleby both felt the pain of their vision, and, like Bartleby, Melville often felt the tendency simply to withdraw.

Melville not only withdrew but also felt the
self-destructive tendencies of Bartleby and his other heroes. The following excerpt comes from Hawthorne's journal written after Hawthorne had taken a walk with Melville; it signifies Melville's surrender to fate.

Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated." 19

Melville's tragic complacency is not ultimately so cynical as it might seem at first, for it must be remembered that Melville considered men of tragic vision as supermen. Tragic vision is an awareness that exalts and elevates the hero though it leads him to find as Ahab did that "topmost greatness" lies in "topmost grief." 20 Awareness, vision, pain, isolation, and despair are all part of the heroic quest. Even death becomes a means to an end. Stanley Brodwin says, there is a "spiritual drive that lies behind Melville's quester heroes," and it often involves "the need to find that faith which would make death the vestibule to immortality." 21 The death of the hero is not necessarily a tragic ending but, perhaps, a glorified beginning. Bartleby's death at least seems a relief for the long-suffering scrivener, and a better existence in immortality may await him.

The similarities between Bartleby and Melville,
or Bartleby and any of Melville's heroes, are partially dependent upon Bartleby's position in the evolutionary scheme of Melville's heroes. Bartleby is related to Melville's earlier heroes like Ahab and Pierre because of his spiritual isolation, his estrangement from the rest of mankind, his tragic vision, and his self-destructive tendencies. Bartleby, like the others, is a superman because he sees and suffers. There are basic differences, however, between Bartleby and the earlier heroes. As Richard Chase says, the story of Bartleby is relieved of the "clashing commotion and weight of Moby-Dick and Pierre" in which the heroes' "compulsively violent assertions of will" build to an "apocalyptic crescendo." The story of Bartleby, Chase says, "proceeds in reverse, toward a gradually encroaching silence." Thus, Bartleby represents a divergent response; as a hero, he is less aggressive, less violent, and less obtrusive. Bartleby, however, does not make a sudden, unexpected appearance in the line of Melville's characters, for many see Bartleby as a direct descendant of Plinlimmon in Melville's Pierre. The connection is also important because many see Bartleby and Plinlimmon as characters created from Melville's personal response to real people. Though each exhibits similarities to the other to only a limited degree, the origins of their attributes
are interesting and informative. Furthermore, some of the characteristics which initially emerge in Plinlimmon and Bartleby become important, prominent aspects of later heroes. Ronald Mason says, Bartleby represents a "deliberate extension of Plinlimmon's withdrawal; a bleakly logical conclusion of all the nobility and independence implicit in Plinlimmon." Other noble and independent characters will come to similar "bleakly logical conclusions" in Melville's later heroes.

Bruce Bickley provides an interesting commentary on the character of Bartleby by comparing him to Melville's other heroes and showing the possible influence of Hawthorne in the creations.

Plinlimmon's characteristic 'aloof' and 'analytical' stare, pale 'mystic mild' face, and 'passive countenance' suggest Hawthorne, and Bartleby's portrait, a year later, is a mirror image of Plinlimmon: his preferences keep him aloof, and he is pallid, 'passive' and of a mild yet mysterious manner.

Melville's admiration and respect for Hawthorne are unquestionable. It seems reasonable to Bickley and many others to assume that Melville used some of Hawthorne's physical characteristics to portray his concept of a superman. Melville saw Hawthorne as one granted the tragic vision, given a larger, deeper
awareness of life than most men.

Leo Levy follows Bickley's line of reasoning and sees the representation of Hawthorne in Bartleby, but believes the more direct source for the creation of Bartleby is one of Hawthorne's characters whom Hawthorne had modeled after himself. Referring to the character of the vendor in Hawthorne's sketch "The Old Apple Dealer," Levy presents a convincing argument for the more than coincidental similarities between Bartleby, the vendor, and Hawthorne: all three he says are "subdued and nerveless," a "part of, yet apart from the rest of the world," enigmas in modern society. Their vision and insight separate them from other men, and the tragic nature of their awareness makes them forlorn. By looking at Hawthorne, Melville partially saw how one of his created characters might function in the real world.

Regardless of the source or resemblance of Melville's heroes, it is quite obvious that Melville's heroes are taking new forms in the fiction of the mid 1850's. Violent natures like Ahab's are being replaced by calm, contemplative temperaments like Bartleby's. Heroes fight fate less; they begin to resign themselves to it. Bartleby, as a Melvillean hero, looks back to Pierre and Ahab. He shares their tragic vision, worldly discontent, and partial
estrangement from the rest of mankind. But Bartleby as a hero also looks ahead to the later Melvillian heroes. He shares important characteristics with Billy Budd and the lamb-like man of The Confidence-Man. Beginning with Bartleby, innocence, a silent nature, and the tendency to be victimized become characteristic of Melville's supermen. These later heroes are other-worldly creatures, generally mistreated by the world.

Bruce Franklin in his book The Wake of the Gods provides an excellent synoptic analysis of the important similarities between Bartleby, Billy Budd, and the lamb-like man; he notes that all are inarticulate, meek, peaceful, Christ-like, have unknown origins, and are victimized by those around them. The narrator in "Bartleby" says that Bartleby is "quite serene and harmless in all his ways" (p. 128), as "harmless and noiseless" as any of the "old chairs" (p. 121). The description is appropriate for any of the three later heroic figures. Bartleby's child-like innocence becomes more and more obvious despite his ever-increasing tendency to be a source of frustration or annoyance. He reminds one of a child who is inadvertently a bother. Throughout the story, Bartleby becomes more and more child-like in his seeming refusal to comply with the narrator's demands,
but he is not the deliberately vindictive or evil type. Images suggesting the innocence of the scrivener crescendo in the story until the death scene where Bartleby is found "strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side" (p. 130). In the fetal position he looks like a child "profoundly sleeping" (p. 130). Like Billy Budd, Bartleby seems a child in an adult body.

The narrator's statement that Bartleby is asleep with "kings and counselors" (p. 131) is a reference to Job 3, suggesting a lament for Bartleby's ever having been born.

After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spoke and said, Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night in which it was said, there is a male child conceived. . . . Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not expire when I came out of my mother's body? Why did the knees receive me? Or the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept; then had I been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth, who built desolate places for themselves. 29

His death in the fetal position may signify a symbolic retreat to the womb. The reference to Job may also suggest that Bartleby's life had been a trial and a test. Bartleby was innocent and naive, born to suffer and question the reason for his existence in
a world hostile to him. Ray Browne points out that 
he dies with his "dim eyes" (p. 130) open, in much 
the same position as Mortmain of Melville's poem 
Clarel: "undisturbed, supine, inert/ The filmed 
orbs fixed upon the Tree." Child-like and innocent, 

yet divine, each hero seems to have been predestined 
to struggle; death seems welcomed.

Bartleby fails to live in accord with the con-
ventions of modern society and fails to be a part of 
the superficial world; thus, he offends and upsets 
his fellow men and finally, finding he can't live 
with them, withdraws to the point where he helps 
cause his own death. Billy Budd is less responsible 
for his own death and is more obviously a sacrificial 
victim. But though the two face death in far different 
ways, with both death confirms a certain divinity. 
Through both, mankind sees the inequity of the world's 
systems and the cruelty of man to man. Billy Budd 
and Bartleby are sacrifices meant to make their fellow 
men see the error of their ways. It is not until the 
very end of "Bartleby" that the narrator finally 
recognizes a superiority in his forlorn scrivener; 
a "wondrous ascendancy" (p. 118) which he felt 
Bartleby exercised over him at various times is 
climaxed in Bartleby's death. With Billy Budd the 
suggestion and symbolism are explicit; Melville simply
says, "Billy ascended; and ascending, took the full rose of the dawn." Thus, later heroes, beginning with Bartleby, follow a pattern—through their deaths they become instruments of Providence. They do not act but are acted upon.

It is interesting to note the progression of characteristics in Melville's later heroes. Bartleby "prefers not" to talk; Billy Budd stutters and in moments of extreme emotional frustration can not speak at all; the lamb-like man is completely mute. It can be supposed that Bartleby is innocent (there is no evidence to convict him of any wrong-doing), while Billy Budd and the lamb-like man are undoubtedly innocent. Little is known of Bartleby's past; Billy Budd's past is completely enshrouded in mystery and conjecture; nothing is even mentioned of the lamb-like man's past, if, indeed, he has a past. Bartleby has some childish aspects; Billy Budd is consistently described as a young man more like a child than an adult; and the lamb-like man appears in all the suggestive imagery of a young, innocent lamb, child or babe. In "Bartleby," Melville was planting ideas and images that would reach fruition in later characters. The qualities he was just beginning to attribute to his supermen appear with their first full force in Bartleby. Thus, Bartleby is a foreshadowing
of future characters as well as a reflection of past characters. He is an important intermediary hero.

As an intermediary, a reflection of past heroes, and a foreshadowing of future ones, the most important characteristic of Bartleby and the link between him and all of Melville's heroes is his ability as an individual to transcend self. In Melville's early supermen, tragic vision, insight, or awareness convinces one of man's ultimate insubstantiality. The hero may fight for self-worth, like Ahab, or withdraw, like Bartleby; in either case the struggle brings the hero to a confrontation with God or fate. In the later characters, like Billy Budd and the lamb-like man, the confrontation results in sacrifice or victimization. Obviously, Melville's supermen are not typical; they are not world conquerers, social reformers, handsome heartbreakers, or even winners. The early heroes fight fate; the later heroes passively accept it. In either case, the concerns of the individual transcend self. Heroes are not troubled by petty, mundane, or worldly concerns. They typically care little for their own welfare or reputation; they seek and struggle without worldly victory or consolation; thus, they become supermen by rising above the triviality and sim-sightenedness of common man. Stanley Geist, perhaps, best summarizes the uniqueness
of Melville's nontraditional hero.

The greatness of Melville's supermen had nothing in common with the greatness of the Machiavellian superman: he rose to eminence not on the ruins of others but upon the ruins of his own less profound self. He did not conquer other men; he superseded himself. Indeed, Melville scorned the Tamburlaine variety of supermen, who had power in the realm of men rather than greatness in the realm of his own soul.

Obviously, then, the death of a Melvillean hero does not necessarily bring public praise, worldly recognition, or a cataclysmic response. Ultimately, heroes like Bartleby die alone, without tribute or honor.

Melville's heroes are either considered queer, eccentric, mad, simple, naive, or, at the very least, strange by most of mankind. Most of mankind, with limited vision, are unable to recognize the simple superiority of a Bartleby or Pierre. It takes another superman to recognize fully the divine essence in Melville's characters, for usually such supermen appear as the most downtrodden, forlorn, and defeated of mankind. Despite the world's oppression of and lack of recognition for the hero, however, Melville makes clear his response toward the seemingly defeated hero. In "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow" Melville makes, perhaps, the most explicit statement concerning his feelings. He addresses a tribute to the widow
Hunilla that is applicable to all of Melville's heroes: "Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this the vanquished one." Heroes die like Bartleby, defeated and destroyed. The tragic vision which permeates the hero's existence denies him contentment in this world; devastation is a logical consequence of such vision. To be a superman is to be like Bartleby--damned by semi-divinity.

Once again, the disparity between the real and ideal shows the dramatic force of Melville's writing. Ideally, supermen would be lauded and applauded by their fellow man; Melville shows them being defeated and destroyed. Ideally, supermen would share vision and insight for the benefit of all; Melville's heroes cannot or will not communicate. All too often, communication is like Bartleby's experience at the dead letter office--which seems to suggest that to send a message is no guarantee that the message will be received. Furthermore, supermen often die young, just like the letters that "speed to death" (p. 131). From Ahab to Pierre, and Bartleby to Billy Budd, ideal qualities (vision and insight or goodness and innocence) become the causes of death or persecution. The real world cannot conform to supermen, nor can supermen conform to the real world.
Another of Melville's paradoxical responses to his world helps explain the rather ambiguous status of Bartleby as a hero. It has often been said that the world's greatest cynics are, at heart, the world's greatest idealists. Melville is no exception. In his ceaseless, frustrating, philosophical searching, he followed the lure of various ideas, schemes, and philosophies, desperately hoping each one might provide some satisfaction, some consolation, or some insight. He pursued ideals. As he came closer conceptually to an ideal, the disparity between the real and ideal became all the more obvious, and Melville became all the more intolerant of real circumstances and situations in life. Thus, his bitterness and scorn are often the result of his having conceived, believed, and sought after an ideal. Seeing Bartleby as a superman and yet an object of satire illustrates Melville's ambivalence. Melville read and considered the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and other transcendentalists, formulating both praise and ridicule for their philosophies. He admired their beliefs, yet also chided what he felt was their naive simplicity. Through a consideration of Bartleby as Emerson's hypothetical transcendentalist Melville's attraction to and repulsion from transcendentalism can be seen. At one level Bartleby
is still a superman, a tool of satire, aimed effectively against society, showing the shallowness of the world's ways and the superiority of Emerson and Thoreau's views. On a second level, Bartleby is the target of satire showing the naivete and impracticability of the transcendentalists' proposals. Melville seemingly creates a drama to show both society at large and the transcendentalists their respective faults and weaknesses. Bartleby, thus, becomes simultaneously an agent for and a target of satire.

Yet Bartleby is still a superman. He represents the epitome of the ideas expressed by Emerson in his essay "The Transcendentalist." His self-sufficient, independent, strong-willed, nonmaterialistic attributes are, to a degree, admirable. Elizabeth Foster says, the marginalia in Melville's copies of Emerson's works "reiterate his tribute to the nobility of Emerson's aim and of much of what Emerson had to say." Melville was not hostile to the lofty ideals of Emerson; he was hostile to the apparent lack of sympathy for a flawed and suffering humanity which frequently emerged in Emerson's exposition of those ideals. Again the limits of the real world pose a problem for the enactment of any ideal. It would be wonderful if every man could be truly self-reliant,
could live without concern for financial security, could transcend self and partake of divinity, and could relate perfectly to others without the use of words. Melville saw, however, that it could not be so. The ideals of the transcendentalists put unreal, inhuman expectations upon mankind. Furthermore, they operated in direct contrast to Christian ideals. In a commentary on *The Confidence-Man* Elizabeth Foster cites Melville's concern for the antinomy between "Christian brotherly love, that suffereth long and is kind" and "Emersonian individualism, which is, after all, only a rare form of enlightened self-interest." The practice of Christian charity is most severely tested through the obstinacy of the Emersonian transcendentalist. By creating in Bartleby an extreme representation of particular Emersonian ideals, Melville questions their desirability. Yet, at the same time he exposes the virtues of transcendentalism. Bartleby is effectively contrasted with the narrator to show that there is at least a supremacy in the premises of the transcendentalists' beliefs, though his character is faulted by his carrying his beliefs to an extreme.

The narrator and Bartleby may be seen as functioning symbolically as the materialist and transcendentalist of Melville's story. Christopher Sten in an excellent article entitled "Bartleby the Trans-
cendentalist: Melville's Dead Letter to Emerson," applies Emerson's definition of the materialist to the lawyer and finds it fitting; the lawyer is ultimately concerned with "professional success, financial security, and material ease." Moreover, the narrator conforms to Emerson's belief that the materialist looks at the external world and values man as a product of it. People are as important as their positions in a materialistic hierarchy. The lawyer is obviously a product of Wall Street. He sees and values his employees in terms of their usefulness and conformity to society's standards. As a realist and materialist, the lawyer is also a man of the senses; thus, his descriptions are filled with references to sight and he often makes simple, physical cause-effect observations as evidenced by his belief that Nipper's "irritability and consequent nervousness" are due to "indigestion" (p. 98).

Similarly, Bartleby conforms to the image of a transcendentalist. As Sten says, he is self-reliant, does not respect labor or the products of labor, declines material reward for labor, fails to respect the lawyer's position and his property, rejects churches and charities, does not conform to society's "bankrupt standards," and calmly but firmly resists any intrusions upon his selfhood. Like Bartleby's
experience in the Dead Letter Office, Sten finds "'correspondence' between the ideal and material worlds is at best only an occasional phenomenon." Bartleby refuses to discuss or expose his position and dilemma. It is Bartleby's passivity and speechlessness that most clearly identify him as the theoretical transcendentalist. Sten offers the following explication from a passage in Emerson:

"If you do not need to hear my thought," Emerson says, speaking for the radical transcendentalist, "because you can read it in my face and behavior, then I will tell it to you from sunrise to sunset. If you cannot divine it, you would not understand what I say. I will not molest myself for you." Bartleby suggests a similar line of reasoning throughout the narrative but especially at the point when, following his refusal first to verify copies and then even to copy any more documents, he finally loses patience with the lawyer's insistent demands for an explanation.

Bartleby, in effect, asks his employer if he is incapable of reading his face: "'Do you not see the reason for yourself,' he indifferently replied" (p. 115).

Though Melville presents and contrasts the materialist and idealist, he fails to sympathize entirely with either. Sten contends he uses models that are extreme in order to show the fault of each:

Emerson's formula for the materialist, like his formula for the Transcendentalist, is
followed to a fault by the lawyer and his scrivener respectively, thus providing the central clue to the tragic failure of each man’s life and to the failure of their relationship.40

Bartleby is, once again, a symbol of the inhumanity of the ideal. He errs, says Sten, in his “determination to avoid the imperfect fellowship of the lawyer, in addition to the imperfect offerings of the material world at large”; thus, he is forced into a “frightfully lonely” and “inconceivably empty existence.”41

Bartleby’s imprisonment and death represent an increasingly greater withdrawal from the real world, a failure to reconcile a theory with its practical and realizable application. Self-reliance becomes a type of self-centered childishness, a senseless denial. Bartleby wastes away and dies in the fetal position: “Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side” (p. 130). The radical Transcendentalist faces two dangers: failure to accommodate to and appreciate the actual world constitutes a living death, and persistent adherence to an uncompromising philosophy may cause a premature actual death.

The narrator is perhaps less guilty in Melville’s view, for he has made changes and accommodations that
have bettered him. The materialist, according to Sten, is indebted to the transcendentalist for a positive, spiritual influence.

In a sense not intended by Emerson, Melville nevertheless agreed with his opinion that "Every materialist will be an idealist; but an idealist can never go backward to be a materialist." The former is free to step in the direction of love, the latter only in the direction of death—because the radical Transcendentalist would patiently wait for the miracle which would unite permanently these two sides of man.\(^4\)

In the end, the lawyer is cognizant of his spiritual deficiencies and selfish materialistic pursuits. He is no longer to be condemned as a simple materialist, for he at least partially recognizes the faults in himself and the society of which is a part. Yet, Sten says, he is also aware of the dangers of the opposite extreme as represented by Bartleby. "He recognizes the world's disappointment for the scrivener, the disappointment of man for man. Now he sees that he has disappointed Bartleby; but, just as important, now he sees that Bartleby has disappointed him."\(^4\)

The narrator's last lines "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (p. 131) help establish the relationship Sten describes. All men are to be pitied in one way or another—the materialist for his short-sightedness, the idealist for his far-sightedness. Melville hoped
the vision of idealists like Emerson could in some degree fashion, form, and fit the real world, but he realized the futility of pursuing absolute ideals. Bartleby represents a superman as an Emersonian transcendentalist, but he is doomed to failure because there is nothing "ordinarily human about him" (p. 101). No concessions are made for Bartleby's humanness, his vulnerability to sickness, sorrow and loneliness, just as Emerson made no concessions for the impracticality of perfect ideals. Melville most likely expressed his own reactions to the transcendentalists in the narrator's ambiguous reactions to Bartleby. He admires elements of their idealism but fails to see how they can bring profit to themselves or anyone else through their self and life-denying philosophies. They are supermen but doomed to frustrating, isolated existences. At best they help the rest of mankind by changing others' awarenesses. To realize the despair of another individual and to continue to offer help and friendship despite the passive resistance of that individual is to open one's consciousness to Melville's tragic vision of the human dilemma, his view of reality. Supermen, saints, sinners, and simple men all share a frustrating existence in a world where the real and ideal are more likely to clash than collaborate.
Chapter III
The Artist

Those prone to making hard and fast singular interpretations of "Bartleby" generally have one of two favorites. Tied for popularity are the interpretations of "Bartleby" as a satire on transcendentalism and "Bartleby" as an autobiographical parable of the artist in society. The interpretation of "Bartleby" as a parable of the artist in society offers an especially promising viewpoint, for a consideration of American society naturally includes a consideration of the transcendentalist movement. Thus, through a consideration of his own situation, Melville as artist is able to make subtle satirical commentary about the transcendentalists as an element of society. He is not, however, entirely hostile toward the transcendentalists, for he sees that both he and the transcendentalists have a common enemy--capitalistic, materialistic Wall Street society. Both the artist and the transcendentalists are idealists trying to function in a world that is coldly and cruelly pragmatic and utilitarian. Their philosophical, creative, and spiritual offerings are generally lost; the world they wish to enlighten does
not wish to be enlightened. Thus, it is society in general which receives the most bitter condemnation in Melville's story. Through his own particular perspective as an artist viewing carefully the world around him, Melville is able to tell his own story as well as the story of America in the 1850's. Like Bartleby, Melville can be seen as both a superman and a simple man, a forlorn estranged individual in the world of Wall Street. The complexity of Melville's perspective comes from his recognition of his double association; he is an individual and he is a part of society. He is both supportive of the idealist, individualist, artist, or transcendentalist and a part of the force that suppresses each. He is a superman granted a larger vision of the world and simple man unable to effect a truly significant change in the world.

There are important similarities between the artist and transcendentalist. Both are idealists attempting to function and survive in a materialistic society. Society is able to benefit somewhat from the single, painful, seemingly senseless existence of these individuals; the idealists, however, are doomed to frustration and possible devastation by society's only partial and superficial acceptance of their beliefs. Both the transcendentalist and artist attempt
to enlighten mankind and to broaden the awareness of the individual. Unfortunately, both clash with pragmatic, materialistic society. Thus, the artist and transcendentalist are unable to conform to society, and society is unable to conform to them. Persistent attempts to bridge understanding are destined to suffer defeat. The individual idealist becomes aware of the differences that will separate and "damn" him.

Within the context of this predicament, it is possible to see how Melville was able both to satirize and identify with the transcendentalist. He, like the transcendentalist, was an individual at odds with society. Unlike the transcendentalist, however, Melville was unable to sustain simple, child-like confidence in his own abilities. He was a troubled, deep-thinking individual.

Melville's image of himself, or his image of the artist in modern society, is partially mirrored in the passive, defeatist image of Bartleby. The artist has characteristics typical of the Melvillian superman; he is an isolated and forlorn individual forever frustrated in earthly quests and an idealist suffering in the real world with the burden of a tragic vision. As Melville tells Bartleby's story, he partially tells his own. It must be remembered, however, that Melville
also identified with society. His sympathies are not entirely on any one side. Leo Marx has said that it may be because "'Bartleby' reveals so much of his [Melville's] situation that Melville took such extraordinary pains to mask its meaning." The autobiographical essence of the story is purposely diffused and obscured. Melville sides with society as well as himself.

The symbols in the story are an appropriate first consideration for an interpretation of "Bartleby" as a parable of the artist in society. Leo Marx's article entitled "Melville's Parable of the Walls" established the first exhaustive analysis of the story in terms of symbols. His important researching and cross-referencing with Melville's other works provided important, enlightening perspectives on the story. Marx's thesis is that "the walls are the controlling symbols of the story"; in fact, it may be said that the story is a "parable of walls." The walls, says Marx, "hem in the meditative artist and for that matter every reflective man."

In a world controlled by realists and idealists, people are figuratively walled in or out. Bartleby as a sensitive man (like the artist, or Melville) is preoccupied with this condition. He sees the utter impossibility of true, unconditional love and friend-
ship, and sees the futility of attempting to communicate in a world where one man is not truly interested in sharing the wisdom, insight, awareness or perspective of another. Each individual, for better or worse, becomes absorbed in his own world and neither attempts nor desires to truly understand the perspective and situation of others around him. One chooses friends and acquaintances for basically selfish reasons—because they are useful or enjoyable. The narrator "tolerates" Bartleby because he is useful to him. He carefully limits intimacy, interaction, and association with Bartleby and the other scriveners, however, by procuring a folding screen. The screen "isolates" Bartleby from his sight but not from his voice; thus, says the narrator, "in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined" (p. 100). As a typical modern man and pragmatic American, the narrator carefully manipulates and attempts to control his relationship with others. He is ultimately protecting himself.

As Marx indicates, the outside walls are equally important to a consideration of the story; through each of the office windows the only "view" is of a wall which characterizes the microcosmic as well as macrocosmic experience of each individual. Contemplation of the walls characterizes Bartleby's exis-
from his "dead-wall revery" (p. 114) in the office to his life-denying experience within the walls of the prison, we see Bartleby contemplating his condition. Marx contends that Bartleby as a sensitive man (like the artist or Melville himself) is peculiarly able to understand his particular plight.

Bartleby sees no distinction between the lawyer's chambers and the world outside; his problem was not to be solved by leaving the office or by leaving Wall Street; indeed, from Bartleby's point of view, Wall Street was America. The difference between Wall Street and the Tombs was an illusion of the lawyer's, not Bartleby's.

Like the forehead of Moby Dick, the walls are not exclusively good or bad, benevolent or malevolent; nonetheless, they exist and their existence is a seemingly endless source of curiosity and consideration. Marx says Bartleby, like Ishmael and Melville, faces a "dead-wall which has always impinged upon his consciousness, and upon the mind of man since the beginning of time."7 The archaic, Egyptian appearance of the prison wall symbolizes the problem transcending time. What others can face with indifference, or fail to perceive at all, perplexes and plagues the philosophical man or artist. The "dead-wall reveries" of Bartleby at times infuriate his employer because they mean his clerk is unproductive, useless in material-
istic terms. Similarly, the artist in society is often subject to Ginger Nut's evaluation of Bartleby's actions when he says, "I think, sir, he's a little luny" (p. 103). Society indulges the artist as long as it can discount his oddities and eccentricities with a grin.

The silence, suffering, and solitude of Bartleby as the artist in a Wall Street society are, perhaps, best expressed by Merlin Bowen:

His lot is only the more tragic by the fact that his suffering is so wholly inward, private, and incommunicable. It springs, as his easy-going employer, the story's narrator, fails to guess, from no "innate and incurable" disorder of the mind but from long contemplation of a pointless existence in a meaningless universe. 

Leon Seltzer adds that the artist faces "the predicament of living reasonably in a world perceived as reasonless" and that "consciousness of one's dilemma almost invariably leads to some form of suicide." Bartleby's final "prefer not to" relates to life itself. Well aware of his circumstances and steadfast in his defiance, he refuses companionship and even food.

Bartleby as the artist has much to say specifically about Melville the artist. The physical and circumstantial similarities, according to Richard
Fogle, are numerous and obvious: both are writers, suffer from poor eyesight, fail to conform to Wall Street society's standards, are seen by others as odd and obstinate, and, most importantly, engage in "dead-wall reveries." Melville was in poor financial and physical condition at the time he wrote the story, yet, like Bartleby, he seemed unconcerned with taking proper care of himself. Bartleby lives on ginger-cakes, works so diligently that he neglects physical exercise, and refuses any charity from his employer. As Newton Arvin points out, Melville's "intangible miseries" were far worse than his physical strains; he, like Bartleby, suffered from the sense of "utter desertion, desolation, and forlornness."

The symbolic connotations of the story provide an equally interesting commentary. Bartleby's experience in the Dead Letter Office suggests a parallel to the unsuccessful reception of Melville's two novels, Pierre and Moby-Dick. Melville must have felt as if he, too, were handling dead letters. The tremendous amount of creative time and emotional energy spent on them were met by an unresponsive audience. His novels were like the "cartloads" of letters that were "annually burned," whose messages were never received (p. 131). Melville felt he had something specific, important, and insightful to say to the
world, but like dead letters, his messages "sped to death" (p. 131). Leon Howard says Melville had put "too much serious thought" into books "designed for popular consumption." Richard Chase agrees with Howard and offers a specific connection between the rumor of Bartleby's experience in the dead letter office and Melville's career; he says that Bartleby at that earlier period in his life is suggestive of Melville while he was "still writing salable adventure stories and before his own intransigence began." "Melville," says Chase, had been "a minor practitioner in the moribund profession of letters," but had "lost his audience" and found his early writing as "dead as modern literature as a whole seemed to be." 

Also like Bartleby, Melville changed his occupation. He went from being a novelist to being a short-story writer. To survive as a writer, he had to give the Wall Street society what it wanted. Leo Marx perhaps best summarizes the relationship between Bartleby's first days at the office and Melville's first attempts at a new career.

Bartleby likes his job, and in fact at first seems the exemplar of the writer wanted by Wall Street. Like Melville himself in the years between Typee and Pierre, he is an ardent and indefatigable worker; Bartleby impresses the lawyer with probably having "been long famished for something to copy."
copies by sun-light and candle-light, and his employer, although he does detest a curiously silent and mechanical quality in Bartleby's behaviour, is well satisfied."

Marx goes on to explain how Bartleby's refusal to verify copy relates to Melville's refusal to abide by the modern, literary standards of realism. The narrator makes an interesting comment when he says, "I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet, Byron, would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document" (p. 100). The act of verifying copy, comparing notes, or adhering to strict realistic standards is, in Melville's terms, offensive to artistic temperament and creativity.

As Bartleby's refusal to perform certain tasks became more firm, adamant, and frequent so did Melville's refusal to comply with the wishes and desires of his friends and associates. He felt restricted in the writing of short stories; his own "dead-wall reveries" (philosophical musings) compelled him to write longer, more serious, philosophical novels. Yet, the public did not respond to his desires and so friends and family pushed Melville in another direction that he might survive in the Wall Street world. Lewis Mumford says, "People would admit him to their circles and give him bread and employment only if he would abandon his inner purpose; to this his answer was--I would
prefer not to." Friends and relatives who might have given him aid became impatient with Melville for his spiritual persistence just as the lawyer becomes impatient with Bartleby. After questioning Bartleby about the possibility of various other jobs as clerk, bartender, bill collector, or business associate and receiving the bland, indifferent response of "I prefer not to," the narrator gives up, "losing all patience, and for the first time" in all the "exasperating connections" with Bartleby flies into a passion not knowing "what possible threat would startle his immobility into compliance" (p. 126). Melville's father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, who, interestingly, was also a lawyer, probably felt a similar exasperation after his frequent practical attempts to help his struggling son-in-law. Newton Arvin sees "Bartleby" as Melville's statement to "those who could understand him" that he would no longer "willingly be misemployed."17

Finally, the tragic and almost pathetic fate of Bartleby illustrates Melville's own painful self-awareness and insight. He saw his dilemma, knew he was a misfit, and yet felt unable to abandon his purpose or successfully compromise his ways. When Bartleby says, "I know where I am" (p. 129), he reflects Melville's realistic awareness of his own
personal predicament. The world may not be such a terrible place for most people with the blue sky and green grass, but Bartleby, like Melville, is preoccupied with the wall. As Marx says, Bartleby and Melville become "prisoners of their own consciousness"; "Bartleby the Scrivener" is an "imaginative projection of that premonition of exhaustion and death which Melville had described to Hawthorne." For both Bartleby and Melville, according to Marx, writing is the "only conceivable kind of action"; when they cease to write they face "utter passivity" and "begin to die." They cannot turn away from the wall though they are vexed by it. Melville's insinuation is that the wall, "whatever its symbolic significance for Bartleby, actually served as an impediment to (or substitute for) the writer's vision of the world around him," and this, according to Marx "is perhaps the most awesome moment in Melville's cold self-examination." Society is partially responsible for the problem of the artist, but the artist himself is apt to make a tragic mistake. It may be that the preoccupation with the problems of metaphysics is an error in judgement, a perverted perspective.

Most critics agree that there is, indeed, an autobiographical element to the story of Bartleby the scrivener. However, Melville, like Bartleby, actually
prefers not to reveal his past or expose his own personal and self. Marx believes Melville took "extraordinary pains to mask" the story's meaning. Searching for the more subtle autobiographical associations within the story becomes the delight of many critics. The important relationship between Bartleby and the narrator leads those who believe Bartleby is Melville to make interesting speculations about the source for the character of the narrator. He is seen as representing everyone from God or Christ, to Melville's double or Daniel Webster.

Because the narrator represents society in general (and Wall Street society in particular), it is unlikely that Melville had any one person in mind when he created his "prudent" lawyer. There is evidence to suggest, however, that he did draw some particular characteristics from certain individuals. Consciously or unconsciously Melville drew from his own experience and was best able to create realistic characters from his actual acquaintances. Two of the more interesting, enlightening, and valid conjectures find Melville's father-in-law Lemuel Shaw and Melville's friend Nathaniel Hawthorne as possible sources for the character of Melville's narrator. Shaw and Hawthorne were two of the most influential men in Melville's life, men he was likely to observe
and consider carefully. It is entirely plausible to consider them as influences in Melville's writing. It is also entirely likely that they could be a composite source for the creation of one character, for they occupied similar positions in relationship with Melville. Shaw as a part of Wall Street society and Hawthorne as a part of literary society were concerned over the fate of their struggling, forlorn friend Melville. They offered what assistance they could and sought to understand their strange acquaintance but were only partially, if at all, successful. Melville's relationship with Hawthorne, Shaw, or society in general is, perhaps, all too painfully mirrored in the relationship between the narrator and Bartleby.

John Stark in his article, "Melville, Lemuel Shaw, and 'Bartleby,'" offers, perhaps, the best exposition of Shaw's probable influence on the story of Bartleby. Though many have made educated surmises about Shaw's influence, few have done the painstaking research and analysis that Stark has. The obvious parallel between the narrator and Shaw is that both are Wall Street lawyers doing a safe and secure business. Shaw, however, is not a bachelor and is far more prestigious than the reclusive, "eminently safe" lawyer of the story. Stark,
after carefully considering the life situation of both Melville and Shaw at the time "Bartleby" was written, finds two key words which establish an appropriate connection between the real and the fictitious characters; Stark says Shaw and the narrator are identified by their "prudence," Melville and Bartleby by their "preferences." Lemuel Shaw was one of the best and most influential of the legal minds in nineteenth-century America. He won important cases for big business and helped provide impetus for the expansion of various corporations. Though Melville frequently disagreed with the methods, ethics, or perspectives of his father-in-law's practice, he was continually intrigued by Shaw's power and genius. Within this complex, ambivalent framework of feelings, Melville often displayed mixed reactions toward Shaw's affairs. Stark contends that it is Shaw's case, Brown Versus Kendall, 1850-1852, which most clearly illustrates Melville's feelings and which surfaces in the story of Bartleby.24

The case of Brown Versus Kendall established the rule for negligence cases and made it difficult for individuals to win suits against businesses. Stark points out the particular wording of Shaw which absolves businesses from any fault unless they can be charged with "carelessness, negligence, or want of
Prudence is the key word in an interpretation of the rule. The narrator, according to Stark, espouses Shaw's philosophy and prudential ethic when he says to Bartleby "you are decided then not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense" (p. 103); in this sentence, says Stark, the lawyer speaks "as if he were protecting himself from legal liability."^26

Repeated references to prudential feelings and actions verify the importance of prudence as a theme in "Bartleby." The narrator's belief that "charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor" (p. 120) indicates the priority in his ethics. He justifies charity in terms of prudence, and as he offers prudential charity to Bartleby, he expects the strange scrivener to react reasonably and appropriately.

Typically, Bartleby does not respond appropriately. Bartleby's response is anything but prudent. He even says he would prefer not to be a little reasonable. According to Stark, Melville probably wanted to "test" Shaw's prudential ethic, to "expose its flaws and limits" by creating a difficult situation for the advocacy of prudence.^27 Bartleby's passive resistance and imprudent responses push the narrator beyond his limits. Eventually, he is unable to act reasonably,
logically, or prudently. He simply flees from the scrivener. Melville realized that he pushed friends and family to similar extremes. Lewis Mumford summarizes Melville's situation.

By his [Melville's] persistence in minding his own spiritual affairs, those who might have helped him on their own terms, like Allen or his father-in-law or his Uncle Peter, inevitably became a little impatient; for in the end, they foresaw they would be obliged to throw him off, and he would find himself in prison, not in the visible prison for restraining criminals but in the pervasive prison of dull routine and meaningless activity.

Bartleby literally as well as figuratively represents Melville's choices.

Melville wanted to be loved, indulged, and understood, and even if he could not be understood, he still expected and hoped to be loved and tolerated. He preferred not to change jobs and preferred to keep writing in his own fashion. Ironically, he hoped for the kind of idealistic love and perfect acceptance described by Emerson.

What is love, and why is it the chief good, but because it is an overpowering enthusiasm. Never self-possessed or prudent is all abandonment.

Like the transcendentalist, Melville, as an artist and idealist, yearned for the interpersonal communion
engendered by love. As a realist, he realized the impossibility of man's sustaining such complete abandonment and perfect love.

Melville's disappointment in familial love, however, was minimal when compared to his disappointment in the platonic love of friendship. He could dismiss his father-in-law's inability to be truly sensitive, supportive, and loving by considering him a product of Wall Street society, doomed by his chosen profession to be materialistic, pragmatic, and spiritually dwarfed. Melville did not expect the world of a Wall Street lawyer to be enough like the world of a creative artist so that the lawyer could see into the artist's world though the artist was capable of at least partially perceiving the essence of the lawyer's existence. Hawthorned, however, was not allowed any excuse in Melville's mind. Melville looked to Hawthorne for all the vision, insight, awareness, sensitivity and perception possible in man. Newton Arvin explains the desperate hope and expectation with which Melville looked to Hawthorne.

What mattered most was that, at least as Melville believed, there was a mind, a creative mind in America to which he could feel at once inherently akin; he had not hitherto had that good luck.30

Melville established a singular, earnest, vehement
attachment to Hawthorne and expected an equally eager response. According to Arvin, Hawthorne's "offense" in his relationship with Melville was that "he could not play the superhuman role of father, friend, elder brother, and all but God." Melville, says Arvin, in his "misery and egoism" nearly demanded that Hawthorne fulfill these roles.

Like Shaw, Hawthorne offered Melville some of the same charities that the narrator offers Bartleby. He, too, sought to find Melville employment that might be satisfactory to his critical and obstinate, yet seemingly indifferent and apathetic friend. Hawthorne once tried desperately to get Melville a consular appointment. At other times, he suggested various ways by which Melville might earn a living by writing. Melville "preferred not to" take any advice, receive any help, or abandon his own literary inclinations despite the care and concern of his friend. Hawthorne, no doubt, felt the same "pure melancholy" and "sincerest pity" that the narrator felt (p. 111). He also, no doubt, felt the same sense of futility in attempting to remedy the situation that the narrator expresses in the following passage:

So true it is, and so terrible, too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but in certain special cases, beyond that point
it does not. They err who would assert
that invariably this owing to the inherent
selfishness of the human heart. It rather
proceeds from a certain hopelessness of
remedying an excessive and organic ill. (p.111)

Melville recognized and accepted his own in-
herent difficulties and realized the possibly devas-
tating effect of his tragic vision. Melville was
aware, says Arvin, of the differences between his own
mind and other geniuses of his day; he felt the same
basic frustrations that Bartleby felt.

Essentially, he felt himself, and no doubt
increasingly, a spiritual alien in the midst
not only of the Duyckincks and the Willises
but of the Emersons and the Thoreaus, their
superiors, the best minds. Where among them
was there any recognition of the fact of
tragedy, any awareness of the dark half of
the globe that more and more seemed to
Melville an immitigable reality?33

Bartleby, described as "the forlornest of mankind"
(p. 113) and "absolutely alone in the universe" (p. 116),
embodies the pain and frustration of the sensitive,
suffering artist--Melville. He could not accommodate
himself, as Hawthorne did, to the rest of the literary
and nonliterary world nor was he welcomed into the
elitist intellectual circles. And like the narrator,
Hawthorne, no doubt, also knew the questioning and
pressuring concern of friends who wondered why he put
up with his odd eccentric friend Melville.
The story of Bartleby also offers some interesting symbolic elements that are enlightened by an examination of Melville's relationships with Hawthorne and Shaw. Many, including Marvin Fisher, Ray Browne, and Leo Marx, stress the importance of the narrator's pitifully optimistic statement to Bartleby in prison: "It is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass" (p. 128). Bartleby responds indifferently by saying "I know where I am" (p. 129). Browne cites Melville's letter to Hawthorne in which he talks about the "silent grass-growing mood in which a man ought to compose" as a key to understanding this passage. The atmosphere of the prison is startlingly revealing when compared with Melville's letter. The narrator describes the confines of Bartleby's imprisonment as follows:

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by the birds had sprung. (p. 130)

Melville says the following in a letter to Hawthorne written about the same time as the story of Bartleby.
I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness and then fell to the mould.\textsuperscript{35}

Melville as a writer and artist knew what he wanted and needed but could never completely have. He knew where he was, what could and could not be, and what others could and could not do for him. Marvin Fisher believes that Melville more than any of his contemporaries felt and confronted the "dismal prospects of the aspiring American artist or writer."\textsuperscript{36} Stanley Geist claims that Melville knew about life mostly as a "thing of sorrowness and bitterness and frustration," and knew mostly about men as individuals who "staggered on, drunkenly indifferent" to their own or anyone else's plight.\textsuperscript{37} Melville, as the artist, was aware of the many walls that forbade vital fellowship between men and of the hectic Wall Street world which denied the artist a "silent, grass-growing mood" for his creative ventures. Like the idealist Emerson, Melville knew the value of peace, tranquility, and life-affirming experiences with nature; but as a realist, Melville felt more keenly the impossibility of sustaining a blissful, child-like confidence in the world and his situation.

Melville blamed and condemned society for much
of his predicament and railed against the inequities of the world's ways. He was not, however, entirely selfish and self-centered in his concern. Melville firmly believed in and had hoped for the potential of a few gifted, heroic, creative individuals to, in a sense, save the world. His greatest frustration was Wall Street society's unwillingness to listen to, acknowledge, and follow the leadership of the artistic genius. Melville feared the common man would never be awakened to the more astute awareness of the artist. Richard Chase offers the following forceful analysis of Melville's perspective, problem, and hypothesis concerning the fate of American society if it followed the precepts and ethics of a Wall Street mentality.

Melville's most decisive criticism of American society was that on the left and on the right, among the abolitionists and transcendentalists and among the capitalists, it was in danger of destroying itself. . . . He feared that Americans were abandoning the Promethean spirit of adventure and creativity which would see it [America] through the arduous transits between the extremes of human experience.38

Ronald Mason, supporting the idea that "Bartleby" is a story of the defeated artist in society, says that the story is the most "devastating criticism of society that could conceivably be made"; Bartleby's death, he says, "damns society, not himself."39 Mason
says the paradox of Bartleby is "that although his principles destroy him, it is the preservation of those principles alone which can save the world that rejects him." Marvin Fisher contends that Bartleby's "pathetic end is a compound of his personality (ideals, expectations, delusions, and compulsions) and the pressures of a pragmatic, profit-oriented, and apparently unsympathetic society." Melville certainly criticizes and condemns the Wall Street world and holds it at least partially responsible for the physical death of Bartleby and his own artistic suffocation, but he does not hold it entirely responsible as some would like to believe. As Leo Marx says, it is, perhaps, the "detachment" with which Melville views Bartleby's situation which is the most "striking thing about the fable." He gives us a powerful and unequivocal case against Wall Street society for its treatment of the writer, yet he avoids the temptation of finding in social evil a sentimental sanction for everything his hero thinks and does. . . . Certainly society shares the responsibility for Bartleby's fate. But Melville does not go all the way with those who find in the guilt of society an excuse for the writer's every hallucination.

The hallucinations, according to Marx, are the artist's sometimes credible and sometimes bizarre portrayals of the world as it is or as it might be.
Marvin Fisher expresses Melville's view of the artist's task in terms of illusion and delusion; he believes Melville saw the "unique role of the artist to create the one sort of illusion, which, when understood properly, can help others to face life and the world with fewer illusions."45 Through the "lies of the artist," says Fisher, "the artist could express the truth that unmasked the lies of the world."46 The artist must bend or partially accommodate if he wishes to share his vision and have mankind gain from it. He cannot, like Bartleby, sit back and passively prefer not to communicate. Though Melville had every reason to be disheartened by his own dead-letter attempts at communication with the world, he could not, like Bartleby, entirely abandon his quest. According to Fisher's analysis, Bartleby is "incapacitated by having internalized the schism that frustrates authentic community, intellectual and emotional communication, spiritual communion."47 Though Melville virtually withdrew in many of the same ways as Bartleby and became preoccupied with many of the same walls, he does not give in to the same life-denying desperation. Despite Melville's feelings of futility and frustration, he continued to write, and, thus, in the creation of the story itself and in the final lines of the story, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"
(p. 131), an optimism breaks through the pessimism. Melville criticizes but also sympathizes with both the artist and society. As Marx says, "the eery story of Bartleby is a compassionate rebuke to the self-absorption of the artist" and "a plea that he devote himself to keeping strong his bonds with the rest of mankind." It is important to remember there is a change in the narrator's actions and perceptions. As the simple man, Bartleby was able to disrupt the complacency of the narrator. Against the narrator's wishes, Bartleby made the "eminently safe man" aware of suffering mankind. Bartleby aroused in him a sense of sympathy and compassion. The narrator, as a result, actually reaches out to help Bartleby. Thus, there is a purpose to Bartleby's struggle. Similarly, there is a purpose to the artist's struggle. He can and must, according to Melville, communicate with society and, however, insignificant it may seem at the moment, attempt to effect whatever changes he can. There is reason for hope though the situation seems bleak.
Conclusion

An interesting warning appears in the first pages of Thomas Inge's collection of critical commentary on Melville's "Bartleby"; the following is given as a buffer to overanxious readers hoping to find final answers to the mystery of "Bartleby":

By no means is this book meant to conclude anything about the story, aside from its inscrutability. My guess is that there will be no last word on the minor masterpiece because Bartleby will continue to affirm his negative preference for another 125 years in the face of all efforts to fix him in a formulated phrase.¹

Kingsley Widmer voices a similar warning when he says that "exasperated readers may be tempted to give too solid flesh to the reverberating gestures and metaphysical metaphors with which Melville both defines and confines the figure of Bartleby."² More often than not, Bartleby is an ever elusive source of frustration for Melville's readers.

Despite all attempts to prove otherwise, Bartleby may be categorized only generally, understood only partially, and analyzed only hypothetically. Bartleby and his story are products of a complex mind observing, reacting to, and interpreting a complex world.
Richard Fogle offers, perhaps, the best summary of this problematic situation.

The world of Melville is immeasurable and mysterious. It is one world, but of a complex unity beyond the mind of man to fathom. All things are interrelated, yet in so vast and intricate a labyrinth that monism and pluralism are in their consequences almost alike, meeting in common complexity.

Nearly every mode, form, and fashion of current thought passed through the mind of Herman Melville. The astute, perceptive, critical, realistic, and idealistic author reacted passionately to his world. Such important influences as Calvinism and Transcendentalism helped shape the impressionable Melville who sometimes reacted in favor of their assumptions and sometimes against them. Likewise, they sometimes appeared as a conscious part of Melville's thought while at other times they operated as a subconscious influence.

It is not, therefore, difficult or inappropriate to assume that within the complex maze of Melville's mind a character can be created who is both a simple man and a superman, an individual who, as a product of his creator's ever-changing, active, complex point of view, is meant to be an object of praise, condemnation, envy, scorn, sympathy, and hate. Bartleby,
like his creator, is both good and bad, right and wrong, simple and complex, an embodiment of antithetical virtues and vices. As Richard Chase says, Bartleby is paradoxically "madman and saint, clown and savior."4

Bartleby is also more than a fictitious individual or an allegorical type. He has his beginnings in Melville himself, in everyone Melville ever knew, and in those Melville never knew. He is an everyman. Melville uses Bartleby to discover and expose truths which are revelant to his own situation, to the situation of an artist in modern society, to the situation of an idealist in a harshly realistic world, and to the situation of every individual who tries to understand his world.

The difficulty of Melville's task is evidenced in the ambiguity of the tale. To write a story based on a personal perspective containing a message that is applicable to all mankind, which accuses many yet sympathizes with their plight, is a tremendous undertaking. Though "Bartleby" may have begun as a type of personal lament, Melville's bitter message to those around him, the story eventually took on larger perspectives as it became typical Melville. As Richard Fogle says, the purpose of all Melville's fiction is to "penetrate as deeply as possible" into
the "metaphysical, theological, moral, psychological, and social truths" of this world. There is no such thing as a simple personal perspective in Melville. The form of any of Melville's tales, says Fogle, is determined by "the direction and quality of his thought," but even within a single tale the direction and quality of Melville's thought changes. Melville, says Fogle, attempts to capture and transmit a type of universality in point of view and finds that each man sees reality "differently" and only "partially." Reality, point of view, and Melville's tales, thus, are necessarily ambiguous.

In a letter to Hawthorne, Melville defends his position on the perception of truth as something "ever coherent" and contends there has not been a man since Adam who has been able to "get to the meaning of this great allegory--the world." Melville says writers like himself and Hawthorne are "pygmies" attempting to fathom and portray a truth that even if it were to be captured and properly transmitted through literature would be "ill comprehended" by the majority of mankind. Ambiguity and a degree of incoherence are inherent in the writing of Melville. Melville is a man who finds that "divine magnanimities are spontaneous and instantaneous"; a person, says Melville, must catch a truth while he can, for "the world goes
round" and soon "the other side comes up."10

In "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" Melville attempts to capture some of these evasive truths as he tells his own and everyone else's story. The individual is pictured in the complexity of the modern world where one can be both superman and simple man, where one is by nature "incredibly forlorn" and "horribly estranged" from his fellow man. The creative individual--the artist, poet, writer, musician, philosopher, or spiritual leader--has an obligation to lend his vision and guidance to the masses despite their unwillingness to receive such messages. Simple men become supermen through their attempts to understand the human predicament.

The final line of the story--"Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"--suggests the all-inclusive sympathy of Melville. The line implies that Melville understands his own or Bartleby's problem, the problem of an Emerson or Thoreau, the problem of a modern artist or Wall Street lawyer, or the problem of anyone attempting to understand himself or his world and trying to live in fellowship and communicate with those around him. Each individual lives in a world where other people are very much alike and yet very different from him. Wisdom is, perhaps, a final acquiescence to the impossibility of ever truly understanding the
riddle of the universe; courage is a commitment to keep trying. It is the artist's particular task to encourage understanding, to enlighten awareness, and to help make supermen out of simple men, but he is not entirely responsible for the success of his efforts. Melville's particular contribution as an artist may be his kaleidoscopic point of view. Awareness of Melville's kaleidoscopic perspective is, perhaps, all one can glean from the story of Bartleby and is, perhaps, all Melville asks. The story of Bartleby makes us consider the differing realities within this one world. To understand the story is to understand the many complex, varying perspectives of man. To "wall out" other perspectives or "wall in" a singular understanding is to initiate a spiritual death and violate the community of man, it is to make a dead letter out of a living individual.
Notes

Introduction


2 Leary, p. 15.


Chapter One


2 Rosenberry, p. 145.

4 Herman Melville, Herman Melville: Selected Tales and Poems, ed. Richard Chase (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1950), p. 99. All further references to this work will appear in the text.


8 Widmer, p. 109.

9 Mason, p. 192.

10 Dillingham, p. 23.

11 Dillingham, p. 23.

12 Dillingham, p. 30.


14 Marcus, p. 365.

15 Marcus, p. 366.


17 Dillingham, p. 35.

18 Dillingham, p. 35.

19 Mason, p. 191.


22 Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible

23 Wright, pp. 7-8.


26 Franklin, p. 128.


28 Dillingham, p. 29.


Chapter Two


2 Wright, p. 6.

3 Wright, p. 6.


6 Arvin, pp. 31-31.

7 Dillingham, p. 141.

8 Franklin, p. 128.
9 Arvin, p. 203.
10 Dillingham, p. 138.
11 Dillingham, p. 142.
12 Wright, p. 108.
15 Hillway, p. 116.
16 Arvin, p. 88.
18 Geist, p. 48.
21 Brodwin, p. 176.
23 Chase, p. 79.
24 Mason, p. 192.
26 Leo Levy, "Hawthorne and the Idea of

27 Levy, p. 66.

28 Franklin, pp. 189-190.


30 Browne, p. 166.


32 Geist, p. 27.


35 Foster, p. lxxxvi.


37 Sten, p. 37.

38 Sten, p. 33.

39 Sten, p. 36.

40 Sten, p. 34.

41 Sten, p. 39.

42 Sten, p. 42.

43 Sten, p. 42.
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1 Marx, p. 603.
2 Marx, p. 602.
3 Marx, p. 604.
4 Marx, p. 606.
5 Marx, p. 618.
6 Marx, p. 618.
7 Marx, p. 618.
10 Poge, p. 23.
11 Arvin, pp. 210-211.
12 Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 29.
14 Chase, p. 81.
15 Marx, p. 608.
16 Marx, pp. 608-609.
17 Arvin, p. 211.
18 Marx, p. 613.
19 Marx, p. 613.
20 Marx, p. 619.
21 Marx, p. 603.
22 John Stark, "Melville, Lemuel Shaw, and

23 Stark, p. 169.
24 Stark, p. 168.
25 Stark, p. 169.
26 Stark, p. 169.
27 Stark, p. 170.
30 Arvin, p. 137.
32 Arvin, p. 137.
33 Arvin, p. 137.
34 Browne, p. 157.
35 Browne, pp. 157-158.
36 Fisher, p. 179.
37 Geist, p. 19.
39 Mason, p. 192.
40 Mason, p. 192.
42 Marx, p. 622.
43 Marx, p. 623.
44 Marx, p. 623.
45 Fisher, p. 178.
Conclusion


2 Widmer, pp. 95-96.

3 Fogle, p. 3.

4 Chase, p. 146.

5 Fogle, p. 4.

6 Fogle, pp. 4-5.

7 Fogle, p. 5.


9 The Letters of Herman Melville, p. 142.

10 The Letters of Herman Melville, p. 142.
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