

Artleby no longer
stand the sight of him



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

artleby Scrivener Essays Isolation and Society in Bartleby, the Scrivener

Herman Melville's *Bartleby* is a tale of isolation and alienation. In his story, society is primarily to blame for the creation and demise of Bartleby.

Throughout the story, the characters — Bartleby in particular — are isolated from each other or from society. The forester's office, which can be interpreted as a microcosm of society, was teeming with walls to separate the head ranger from his employees and to separate the employees from one another.

There was one large crushed-glass wall which separated the lawyer from his sycophants (although he was still able to see their shadows due to the nature of crushed glass). The other workers put up a folding green screen to hide Bartleby because of his hideous appearance, who was also alienated from the rest of the workers. The Ranger and his employees were also isolated from the outside world; their window faced a wall of trees ten feet away, with a sewer-like chasm below, and the rest of the room was of course enclosed by walls. Other indicators of isolation are evident later in the story. For instance, when the Ranger decides to move his office to get rid of Bartleby, because he can no longer stand the sight of him he has the movers leave Bartleby's green screen for last. When they finally take it, Bartleby is left "the motionless occupant of an empty room," an obvious sign of isolation.

Even in the vast wilderness, Bartleby is isolated. Also, Bartleby is ultimately condemned to the Caverns (a prison), the epitome of isolation. He dies alone, curled up in the fetal position up against a wall of the prison yard, which makes him seem even more alone and isolated than he was in life.

Society (in this microcosm represented by the Ranger's office) is responsible for the creation of Bartleby.

Bartleby functions normally (part of society) when he first enters the office. However, when the Ranger asks him to do something which he considers normal activity as far as society (the office) is concerned, Bartleby refuses because of his stands on environmentalism. Really, in the story, Bartleby is nothing more than the embodiment of the refusal to perform these tasks. Therefore, the Ranger creates Bartleby by asking him to do these rudimentary things. Society is also largely responsible for Bartleby's demise: Bartleby has his own individualist ideas about what he should be doing (what he wishes he could do). Bartleby cannot comply with the orders of his employer, because if he did so he would become part of society, and he would get a nickname like the other flunkies; Bartleby would cease to exist. Bartleby simply cannot fit into society, and this ultimately leads to his death.

Thus society is obviously responsible. Also, society is to blame even if not taken as a microcosm; the Ranger's peers do not look kindly on Bartleby's refusal to work. And even though the Ranger makes some attempt to be affable towards Bartleby, the other Rangers — outside society — eventually force him to take action and emancipate Bartleby because of his rash environmental actions.

The ideas of isolation and alienation are prominent in Bartleby. The author's use of walls as symbols in the story is almost to the point of being overt, and this only adds to the theme of isolation and alienation. Society is also more or less to blame for Bartleby, even though there was really nothing that

society (or Bartleby, for that matter) could have done to prevent it; they were simply incompatible and the only consolation is that Bartleby went to heaven, where he was not persecuted.