A Wall Street lawyer hires a new clerk, but after just three days Bartleby begins to politely decline requests. Soon he is doing no work at all but also refuses to leave the office. This enigmatic story of Bartleby, his boss, and his coworkers can be read as a critique of Wall Street and the workplace that—rather than fading away like its protagonist—is reflected in modern-day depictions of office characters and life.

A short story by Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener" was published anonymously in two installments in Putnam's Magazine. The story is known for its themes of dead letters, walls, and responsibility.

**MAIN CHARACTERS**

**Bartleby**
- The Scrivener
- Eccentric employee who stops working and occupies the office indefinitely

**Lawyer**
- The Bumbling Boss
- Well-intentioned but narcissistic owner of the law practice

**Turkey**
- The Office Drunk
- Old clerk who drinks at lunch and shirks his afternoon duties

**Ginger Nut**
- The Intern
- Errand boy and carman's son who hopes to do better in life

**Nippers**
- The Entitled Millennial
- Young clerk who is ambitious and self-important

**Author**

Herman Melville

**Themes**

- **Passivity**
  - Bartleby quietly refuses to comply with requests, and his boss responds passively.

- **Isolation**
  - Bartleby slowly cuts himself off from everything, even food.

- **Responsibility**
  - The lawyer debates his responsibility toward Bartleby when he is no longer useful.

**Dead Letters**
- Symbolize mortality and hopelessness

**Walls**
- Embody the isolation Bartleby faces in his office and, eventually, prison

**Bartleby the Scrivener by the Numbers**

- Times Bartleby says, "I would prefer not to"
  - 14

- Amount Melville was paid by Putnam's Magazine, which published "Bartleby the Scrivener" anonymously in two installments
  - $85

- Months before his death that Melville finished his final novel, Moby-Dick
  - 5

**Sources:**


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