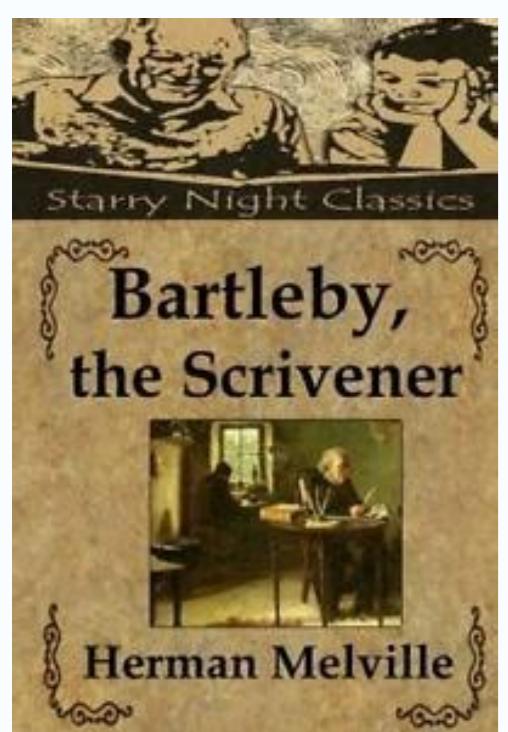


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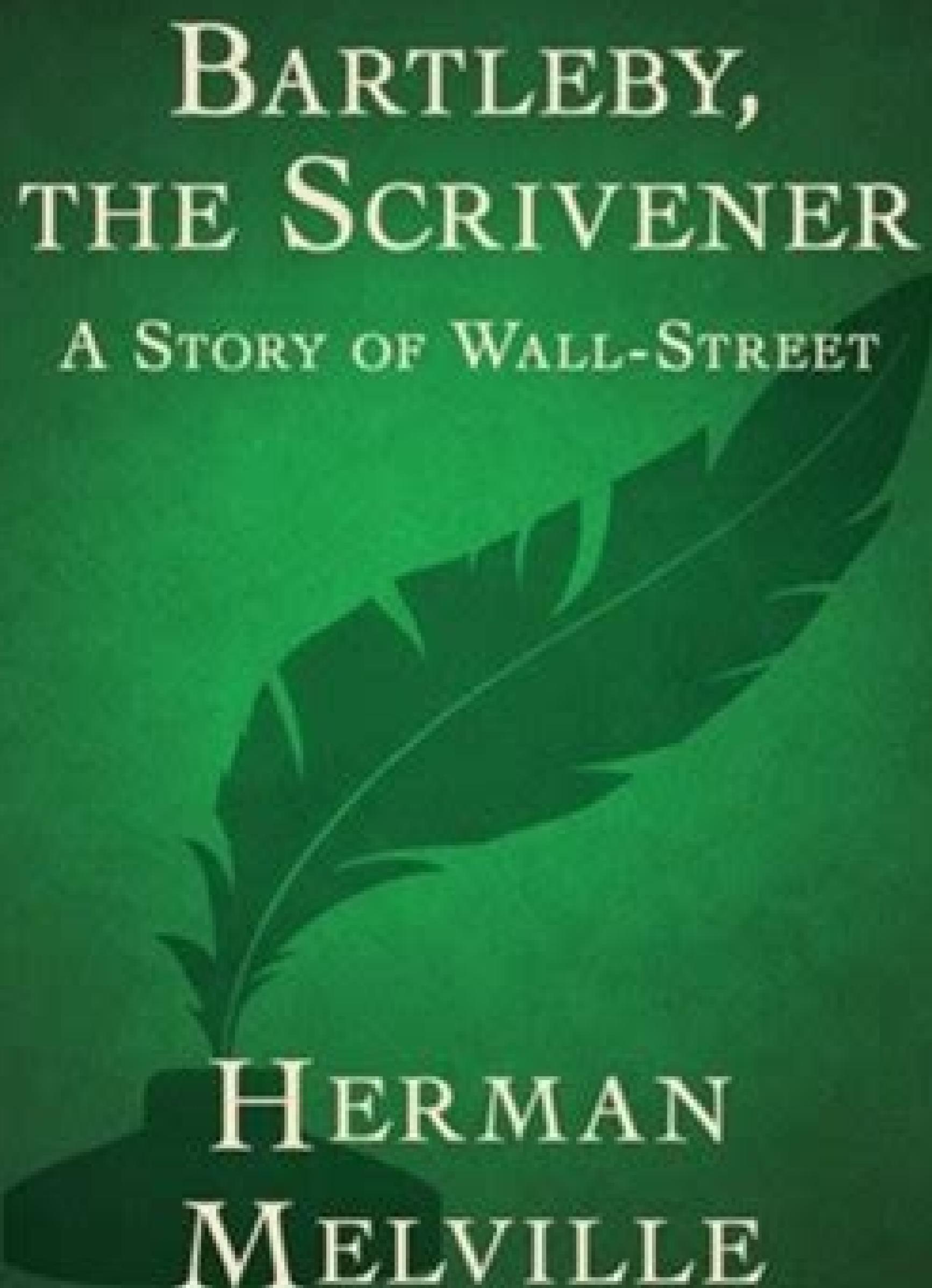
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BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER

HERMAN MELVILLE

Global Grey ebooks



Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener": A case study

FRED A. WHITEHEAD, PhD; BRUCE S. LIESE, PhD; MICHAEL L. O'DELL, MD

Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," first published in 1853,¹ has become one of the most celebrated and widely anthologized pieces of fiction in American literature. In addition, because of certain empirical aspects to the story, there has been an enormous outpouring of scholarship and criticism on it, amounting to hundreds of articles.² In brief, the plot deals with a copyist, or scrivener, who becomes increasingly inert and apathetic in his law firm in the middle of the 19th century. This quiet and withdrawn man, whom we know only by his first name of Bartleby, at the beginning, assiduous in his labor of copying, but after three days, refuses to undertake the correction of a manuscript he has written for his employer, the torney and Bartleby's employer, is shocked, but due to the cool mildness of Bartleby's demeanor, refrains from dismissing him on the spot. The scrivener's interaction with other employees is equally tame. After a period of work, he gradually refuses more and more tasks. Verbal responses usually consist only of the phrase "I would prefer not to." His output steadily slows and becomes negligible. Finally, he becomes inert and apathetic. He reveals no pleasure in any task or event, and his appetite wanes during the course of the narrative. From a medical standpoint, the story is one of progressive mental derangement followed by physical deterioration. In order to maintain his professional reputation, the attorney moves his office away from the vicinity of the recalcitrant scrivener, who is then ordered to prison as a vagrant by the new tenant. There Bartleby refuses food and soon dies.

Part of the "problem" of the story is that we learn everything about Bartleby through the eyes of this attorney-narrator, who is himself sorely vexed and troubled by what has happened to his employee. We learn nothing else whatsoever about his actions, and, indeed, we are given only one item of information about his past, which comes at the very end of the story. Therefore the attorney and his employee move into a situation where their fates are inextricably intertwined and fused. From their predicament, the reader is likewise drawn into maze of perplexity.

HERMAN MELVILLE'S BACKGROUND

With the first biographies of Melville in the 1920s, it was recognized that he had poured much of his personal

Figure 1. Herman Melville (from the Garrison-Loring Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

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rother in this examination, one reading of the ³ and the other holding the original. One was held by a woman who lived in ³, who the person rubbed weekly and daily swept and dusted my apartments. For a sensible being, the penalty does not rarely pain. Bartleby was one of those beings from whom nothing is determinable except from the original sources, and in his case, these are very small. It did not seem to conceal in him a certain calm since ^{©m}, but his wickedness seemed ungrateful, considering the inevitable good use and indulgence he had received from me. The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist of its perfect tranquility. I noticed that he never went to dinner; in fact, he never went anywhere. On the contrary, it proves a certain desperation to remedy an excessive and organic illness. " time passes and Bartleby's strange refusals The lawyer is increasingly perplexed and Bartleby's apathy increases to O lanif od ,amrof amugla eD .etneserp olep essariter es ^äÄcov euq oriferp uE " →â çÄ i essid "→â çÄ sreppiN" →â çÄ aicn^aÄtrevdani ad ofÄ§Äiteper ahnim ad edadilibaborp a riunimid a aidnet sanepa ibecer euq opit essed odatnecserca asluper adac ,otnatne oN .etneinevnoc oriter mugla arap aicn^cÄtsid ed oriehnampoc erbop ues o maridep e ,airevercse etnemaenatnatsni ue ,ogima uo ovitalerelgnis mu odaemon ret sam ,essof ele eS .ybeltraB ed sarvalap samitl⁹A sasse uivuo elE .satsoc san adirolod rod amu aivah ofÄtne ,otircse rop uonilcni es e ,sarutnic sa arap asem a uoxiaba ele aroga eS .aram^cÄc ahnim an ofÄ§Äaxif amu ,erpmes omoc uecenamrep ele "→â çÄ ?rohnes ,arvalap euQ" →â çÄ .sodaromuh-lam me ednopser sreppintub ,soliuqnart e sodacude somret me dehcuoc ©Ä aiuqrut ad atsopser a ,fÄhnam ed reS euq ;Ärebecrep iuqa siagel seüÄ§Äpecrep ed rotiel O(.oir³Ätircse od arof arap o-ratuhc aireved euq ohcA" →â Ä ?knihtuoyoD euq O "→â çÄ euq essid" →â çÄ →â çÄ sreppiNÄ →â çÄ →â çÄ etnemetneuquesnoC .recerucse arap etnemlevitsiserr uiarta em aroga mumoc edadinamuh amu ed olucnÄV O .sohlasing solebac artnoc odatsni etnemareves res eved ofÄn etneuq edrat amu ed saud uo tolb mu ,rohnes ,etnematreC .lanoicida aduja ret oved sam ,ogimoc ;Äj satsinoclab so rarrupme oved ,srenevircs so arap ohlabart omit³Ä mu aroga aivaH ?odnecetnoca avatse asioc amuglA .latnem arienam amu ed uetefed oir©Äs e ahnit ;Äj renevircs o moc otatnac uem euq rasnep ed imert ue E .rotsA ebocaj nhoJ odicelaf oa levÄsnesni are ofÄn euq ,etnemervil ratnecserca uov uE .osirros mu moc erbigneg ed acrop uednopser "→â çÄ ynuelttiL ©Ä ele ,rohnes ,euq ohcA" →â Ä ?ossid ahca ^äÄcoV euq o" →â çÄ emon uem me oig;Ärfus ronem o ratsila a otsopsid euq essid "→â çÄ e acrop oN" →â Ä).arof ;Ätse aiuqrut a e ofÄtnalp ed are sreppin sod oief romuh o ,roiretna esarf amu riteper arap ,uO .mim arap ofÄ§Äavorper amu ajes ele euq rative arap ODA otium evit ,aiuqrut Ä otiepser zid euq on euq odnaredisnoC .ofÄ§Äavorpa-otua asoiciled amu rarp moc ossop ,miS had entered the path of involuntarily using the word Ä à € ≠ å "preferred o e ,aiuqrut ad rodaov otnemarepmet o erbos ocif@Äneb rarepo airedop euq iesnep ue euq ,otcepsa mu rades etnemralugnis ofÄt ed memoh mu satsipoc ed oproc uem ertne ret rop zilef ,iejagne o ue ,seüÄ§Äacifilaq saus odnacot sarvalap samugla ed siopeD ofÄNÄ Ä Ä Ä Ä Ä Å oföÄNÄÄçÄ .)4102(.samrof saus sa sadot me aruti a odnarbelec e skoobe ed ofÄ§Äudorp an seüÄrdap sotla siam so odnednefed ,latigid otamrof me arutaretil ed sarbo sednarg a adiv ;Äd snilloCrepraH .erbigneg emoc ³Äs ele ,siategev men emoc acnun ele ;ofÄn sam ;ofÄtne onairategev res eved ele ;odnalaf etnemairporp ,ratnaj mu emoc acnun ;ue iesnep ,stun-erbigneg ed ,ofÄtne ,eviv elE .ra§Änacla edup ofÄn ue amla aus e ,uerfos euq amla aus iof ;rertos zef ofÄn oproc ues o sam ;oproc ues o arap salomse rad airedop uE .oirp³Ärp mim a e aiuqrut Ä otiepser zid euq on ,otsujni ©Äta e ,otil³Äsn etnatsab ©Ä otnematripmoc ues o euq osneP .aicn^aÄuqes an ;Ärecerapa euq ogav oir³Ätaler mu ,otaf ed ,otecxe ,eled ies ue euq o odut ©Ä ossi ,ybeltraB ed mariv sotin 'Äta soirp³Ärp suem euq O .H ellivleMofÄ§ÄatiC 6 APA.redaeRe ogelreP od sianoicida solitse 02 ed siam rasseca arap atiutarg ofÄ§Äailava amu ra§Äemoc edop ^äÄcov ,atsil an ;Ätse ofÄn olitse ues eS .ahlemrev atnit a arap etnemlapicnirp iof aiuqrut Ä Ä oriehnid o ,zev amu uovresbo sreppiN omoC .es-merbmel ,edrat arE ÄÄçÄ?aiuqrut ,ossid ahca ^äÄcov euq O .XX e XIX HarperCollins Canada, 2014. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, Bartleby, and fare you well.→â ÄÄBut he answered not a word; like the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room. Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it isfit I make some mention of myself, myemploy©Äes, my business, my chambers, and general sur-roundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented. Bartleby is quiet, efficient and he doesn't display any of the loud eccentricities of the firm's other two copyists, Nippers and Turkey. I passed on, very thankful that the ?odnaipocÄ Ä;Ätse ?odnaipocÄ Ä;Äl odnezaf ratse airedop ele euq o saM .ofÄrev are siop ,atreba avatse uem od arielos an es-uotied ,fÄhnam amun lev³Ämi mevoj mu ,adnagapor ahnim Ä atsopser mE .adacnart avatse atrop A .etneuq asioc amU .aen^cÄtnemom edadilatnem a uortsom em aur aD