

---

## Isolation, Capitalism And Dehumanization In American Workplaces In Bartleby The Scrivener

Herman Melville was born New York City in 1819 and died in 1891. At the beginning of his life, he was living in a wealthy family, but after his father's death, his life started to change when he was 20. He became a sailor in a whaling ship and he experienced the life of a sailor. He travelled across the world, especially the tropical areas he sailed. After his sea voyages, based on his experiences, he wrote Moby-Dick which is counted as his masterpiece. Moby-Dick did not get the interest that Melville expected from the readers in that time period. But he is rediscovered by literature critics in 20th century after 30 years from his death. He wrote Bartleby the Scrivener in 1856, it can be seen that, the rising American capitalism affected his works. Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener suggests that capitalism can dehumanize workers and that its stability relies upon the illusion that it is an expected, merciless system.

In Bartleby the Scrivener, Melville uses themes of isolation, capitalism and dehumanization in American workplaces through the lawyer's employees' desolations both mentally and physically. At the beginning of the story, the narrator begins with long describes of his characters. He is putting nicknames to his employees and explains their in-office-manners. This narrations helps the narrator to dehumanize them, because the lawyer only regards their capability of working, like working tools. Nicknames that he put them also shows how he sees his workers as inhuman beings, removing a part of their human side with not calling them with proper names. Ginger Nut is the important character here, because he is only used as a delivery boy. He does not write like others. He is described by the lawyer as "cake and apple purveyor" (Melville, 5). It means that he has no other uses in the narrator's point of view. This instance supports the Melville's argument about the dehumanizing effect of capitalism on workmen. It is interesting that, even he describes all of his workers, the narrator is having a hard time –literally tells a long story when he tries to tell about Bartleby– when he tries to explain about Bartleby. Because Bartleby is the only one who rejects the demands of the system. Eventually, he ends up with his death. Because of his resistance to the system, he finds himself dead. The lawyer is the symbol of the system.

During midst of 19th century, capitalism with slavery was on the rise. From a different angle, it is obvious that, Melville addresses the story of slavery in his work. The lawyer's workers are not working in farms or plantations just as Americans made black people to, but in a more modern place. Their salaries which makes them survive are not dissimilar from chains. No doubt, they are working under a wealthy man, as their owner. Their plantation can be considered as their office. And if we connect the capitalism theme with dehumanizing and slavery, they would complete a whole new perspective for the story, considering the year it has been written. Slavery was a common thing to get hard workers with ridiculous costs or for free, as mentioned in the story: "To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience" (Melville, 10). The lawyer does a lot of charity only to salve his conscience. He does not want to fire him because that situation would bother his conscience.