

# An Ecocritical Reading of Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"

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**Abstract.** This research is an ecocritical reading of Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener". Melville's treatment of the environment is described and analyzed with regard to Augé's theory of non-Places. The examples of non-place in Melville's Wall Street story include the compartmentalized office, the urban labyrinth, artificial and natural greeneries and oriental landscapes. The motif of compartmentalization forms the binary of insider and outsider. A close attention to the binaries in this story reveal Melville's critical attitude towards urban culture that threatens the American identity and mocks the American predilection for mobility in open spaces. This story reveals the way social institutions of an urban culture can determine the tragic fate of an out of place individual. Melville, in this story, reveals the consequences of marginalizing nature and indicates his ecological concerns in mid-nineteenth century America. He mourns the fading out of biocentric view of nature and warns against the domination of the anthropocentric worldview which is brought about by modernity, enlightenment and capitalism.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to show how Melville, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost a decade before the civil war, wrote "Bartleby the Scrivener" to indicate the consequences of silencing nature. In order to run this argument home, an ecocritical perspective is adopted and the relation between human and the environment is examined. "Bartleby the Scrivener" has already been analyzed within the theoretical frameworks of biographical criticism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and Historicism. Beja analyses Bartleby's behavior in terms of schizophrenia the main traits of which he defines as "withdrawal, introversion, aloofness, difficulty in recognizing or relating to 'reality' or an acute over sensitivity coupled with an inability to express ordinary hostility or aggressive feelings" [1]. Deleuze describes Bartleby's mission as a "schizophrenic vocation" and identifies him as a Christ figure: "even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America, the Medicine-Man, the new Christ or the brother to us all" [2]. Sullivan's catchphrase is "Bartleby Complex" which he explains as infantile autism [3]. Lorenze has a Marxist reading of this Wall Street story and considers Bartleby's denials as his subversive effort to "define himself by a vocabulary of production" [4]. Foley historicizes the story and analyses it with regard to the class system in mid-nineteenth century New York [5].

Mitchell distinguishes Bartleby from the narrator in that the pallid scrivener embraces death while the attorney endorses life. Mitchell evaluates the dead letter as the symbol of silence that represents Bartleby. As a response to Bartleby's unsettling silence, the narrator takes it upon himself to give voice to the scrivener's tale. Davis focuses on the narrator who owes his awakening to Bartleby's death [6]. In contrast to Davis, Dilworth believes that the narrator feels guilty and his lengthy commentaries on different philosophical issues throughout the story are in fact aborted efforts to hide his guilty conscience [7]. Thomson looks at the story from a new perspective and comments on the notion of euthanasia in "Bartleby" [8]. All these readings have greatly contributed to the literature published about this typical American story, but an environmental approach to Melville's canonized story of Wall Street is rewarding because it sheds light on mid-nineteenth century ecological awareness of New Yorkers.

This article offers an environmental reading of "Bartleby" and reveals the relationship between man and his surrounding world. Places and non-places, and the role they play in establishing the individual identity have been analyzed in this paper in order to show how Melville,

in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, warned against the oppressive urban culture that threatened the American identity. Ecocriticism is significant in that it increases the environmental awareness of the public and criticizes anthropocentric view and "his compulsion to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate, and exploit every natural thing" [9]. An ecocritical study of Melville's *Bartleby* matters because it indicates that Melville in mid-nineteenth century warned against the dehumanizing effects of anthropocentrism as an urban ideology.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Ecocriticism, generally speaking, is aimed at increasing the environmental awareness by focusing on the way humans interact with the nonhuman world, the way nature is framed and constructed by humans who consider themselves the centers of universe and marginalize, otherize and exploit nature. Alan C. Braddock in "Ecocritical Art History," distinguishes ecocriticism from other branches of cultural studies:

Ecocriticism borrows from existing interpretative modes and expands on them. It may adapt aspects of phenomenology or postcolonial theory, for example, but give them an environmental focus. What distinguishes ecocriticism is an effort to reorient and widen the scope of cultural studies by emphasizing the ways in which human creativity—regardless of form (visual, verbal, aural) or time period (ancient, modern, contemporary)—unfolds within a specific environment or set of environments, whether urban, rural, or suburban. Far from confining its purview to "landscape" or other received aesthetic categories of environmental perception, ecocriticism knows no such limiting frames of reference. [10]

Buell refers to the shortcomings that ecocriticism might have. The problems of this theory, notes Buell, arise when the urban environment in which ecocriticism is practiced, turns out to be "cloistral and urbanized" itself:

when an author undertakes to imagine someone else's imagination of a tree, while sitting, *Bartleby* like, in a cubicle with no view, small wonder if the tree seems to be nothing more than a textual function and one comes to doubt that the author could have fancied otherwise. [11, p. 5]

Buell seems to be concerned about the degree of subjective interpretation involved in ecocriticism. If subjective interpretation be a threat to ecocriticism, it is indeed an indispensable part of almost any critical and intellectual activity across humanities. In addition, in the analysis of "*Bartleby the scrivener*," being *Bartleby*-like does not cause serious logical contradictions because the environment in Melville's story of Wall Street is not a forest full of trees, nor is it the wilderness, the frontier or the wild west, but a world of interlocking walls, not unlike the world in which we live today. Ecocriticism, Estok notes, "at its best seeks understandings about the ways that dynamics of subjugation, persecution, and tyranny are mutually reinforcing, the ways that racism, sexism, homophobia, speciesism, and so on work together"[12]. Therefore, by looking at the way human relations get defined in terms of hierarchy, it is possible to explain the way the obliteration of nature can run parallel with the subjugation of individuals.

Marc Augé in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), distinguishes supermodernity from modernity and notes that while in the latter, "everything is combined, everything holds together" and the old and the new are interwoven, supermodernity changes "the old(history) into a specific spectacle, as it does with all exoticism and all local particularity." The past and the present only coexist and no synthesis occurs. Supermodernity, therefore, deals "only with individuals (customers, passengers, users, listeners), but they are identified (name, occupation, place of birth, address) only by entering or leaving." The non-place, Augé explains, "is the opposite of utopia: it exists, and it does not contain any organic society." Augé considers non-place as the measure of supermodernity. He distinguishes place which is "relational, historical, and concerned with identity" from non-places of supermodernity that are public places, neither relational nor historical and nor concerned with identity. He goes on to

characterize the person who enters the non-place as one "relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer, or driver." Augé argues that such a space does not lead to the formation of identity or meaningful relations with others, it only creates "solitude and similitude." Within the non-place, identity can only be retrieved at "Customs, at the tollbooth, at the check-out counter"[13]. There are rules that must be obeyed by everybody in the non-place, certain things must be done and certain things must be avoided, therefore no one can stand out as an individual, subjectivity is erased in such spaces.

Melville has a critical attitude towards "non-places" that are dominating the cityscape and reducing the life of individuals to a temporary residence in the course of which identity does not get a chance to be formulated. In order to apply Augé's theory of non-places to Melville's Wall Street story, the researcher traces binary oppositions between self and other, insider and outsider, material and spiritual, and western and oriental and indicates which side of the binary is deprived of the American identity. An analysis of such binary oppositions would reveal the oppressive and suffocating effect of the urban hierarchy at work in Mid-nineteenth century New York.

### 3. Discussion

Herman Melville published "Bartleby the Scrivener" in 1853 in New York, when the burgeoning metropolis was densely punctuated by banks, financial institutions, law offices and brokerage houses almost a decade before the civil war. At a time when many American men of letters were trying to establish a national identity, free from the European impositions, and produce a different literature distinct for its Americanness, Herman Melville, seems to be alarmed at the "deAmericanizing" social phenomenon at work during the mid-19th century in America. Melville's treatment of the modern American landscape reveals his acute awareness of the expanding urban setting and the inevitable consequences of the office culture and blue collar jobs, the institutionalized concept of law and bureaucratic processes of establishing justice. The short story with its acute sense of urban culture was published after a series of novels the plots of which Melville set in faraway islands or hunting and sailing ships, such as *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (1847), *Mardi, and a Voyage Thither* (1849), *Redburn: His First Voyage* (1849) and *Moby-Dick; or, The White Whale* (1851). The themes of adventure, quest and mobility one finds in his sea novels give way to the paradoxical combination of the hustle and paralysis of urban life, office culture, and blue collar jobs. Life eating cannibals of *Typee* give way to an office-bound anorexic scrivener. The death defying Ahab gives way to a life negating Bartleby, the geography of sea novels spreading from horizon to horizon is shrunk into limited walled spaces. When the zest for mobility and quest shrinks into a sedentary temperament and paralysis, thematic shifts occur in Melville's fictional world.

Is Bartleby the American Adam genetically mutated into a passive life-negating individual in the industrialized and urbanized habitat of mid-nineteenth century America? Or is he the frustrated spirit of the pre-lapsarian American Adam that has come to haunt the post-lapsarian American Eden? To answer these questions, the mythic American Adam as well as the environment in which he was bred must be delineated and pitted against the world in which Bartleby dwells.

Richard Warrington Baldwin Lewis in "Melville: The Apotheosis of Adam," the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955), defines the American Adam and describes how he acted upon the world and was acted upon by the world in which he lived:

The matter of Adam: the ritualistic trials of the young innocent, liberated from family and social history or bereft of them; advancing hopefully into a complex world he knows not off; radically affecting that world and radically affected by it; defeated, perhaps even destroyed in various versions of the recurring anecdote hanged, beaten, shot, betrayed, abandoned, but leaving his mark upon the world, and a sign in which conquest may later become possible for the survivors. [14, pp.127-128]

According to this definition, American Adam, "liberated from family," is actively involved with his surrounding world, which is usually kept at a distance from the female-dominated and domesticated urban settings. The involvement therefore, is redolent of adventure and dynamicity and at the same time a retreat from the responsibilities and commitments of the urban culture that could otherwise mature him. Although the American Adam is seldom the winner of the conflicts in which he is involved, he keeps haunting the memory of those who mythologize him. The world in which the American Adam prefers to take shelter is the natural landscape rather than the urban setting. Lewis justifies the representation of wild nature as Eden in 19<sup>th</sup> century American fiction in terms of the "American habit of resistance to maturity"[11, p.129]. Lawrence Buell notes that the natural settings within the American fiction have to do with the national DNA of Americans:

Nature has long been reckoned a crucial ingredient of the American national ego. Ever since an American literary canon began to crystallize, American literature has been considered preoccupied with country and wilderness as setting, theme, and value in contradistinction to society and the urban, notwithstanding the sociological facts of urbanization and industrialization.[11, p.33]

In Melville's short story, this manifestation of American national ego is completely obliterated by the urban architecture of Wall Street, the financial center of the metropolis. Nature is silenced in "Bartleby the Scrivener" but her absence speaks louder than her presence. The anonymous narrator's obsessive reference to the vertical walls standing perpendicular to the horizontal lines of the frontier, the country or the wilderness indicates the bold presence of the man-made culture and architecture as silencing characters that not only subordinate nature, but also alienate those who have created them. In order to elucidate the sense of urban alienation, different treatments of the environment will be analyzed and their status within the continuum of place and non-place will be discussed.

### 3.1. Office as(non)place

The setting described by the unnamed narrator in "Bartleby" is rent in two opposing poles, as if the writer wishes to warn his readers against a strife-ridden world or against a disintegrating force threatening the mid-nineteenth century American society because "separation, compartmentalization and the dissociation of internal elements" can be considered "signs of the coming destruction of urbanism" [15]. Not only do we have spatial compartmentalization of the office, but also temporal compartmentalization of human behavior: the course of a day is mechanically divided into morning and afternoon as the decisive factors determining the moods of the employees. The clockwise and anticlockwise metabolisms of Turkey and Nippers define their identities in the workplace. The white wall stands face to face with the black wall at the two sides of the attorney's office. Bartleby's lack of *written history* contrasts with the discourse of law and *documentation* dominant in the attorney's world. The binarized world depicted at the beginning of the story helps the reader to understand the out-of-placeness of Bartleby who defies black and white definitions.

The strong local color, place names and addresses used in the story establish an acute sense of place and a picture of American society at the time of the story's publication. Bartleby is described as a phantom and the bewildered ghost of an unwritten past that has come to haunt the labyrinthine Wall Street offices and the walled landscape of the mid-nineteenth century America, fading reticently at the sight of the non-place that America has become. The coexistence of the present moment and the past is echoed once more at the end of the story when the fade out of the emaciated Bartleby takes place at a setting described in terms of oriental imagery. The reality of the moment, therefore, stands besides the exotic past to reduce the out of place Bartleby to a vanishing spectacle. Melville in mid-nineteenth century is consciously or unconsciously warning against the institutionalized organizations that are "reducing" the American landscape into oriental ruin. Melville, through his Wall Street story, criticizes the modern form of urban normalcy threatening the American identity.

The wall is an essential architectural metaphor that highlights the binary of insider/outsider within the story and finds its reflection in the sense of polarity that abounds the lawyers' language. In order to elucidate the significance of the urban architecture we can take a look at the description of setting in Melville's story to see where the attorney prefers to live:

My chambers were up stairs at No. -- Wall-street. At one end they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call "life." But if so, the view from the other end of my chambers offered, at least, a contrast, if nothing more. In that direction my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade. [16, p. 9]

The attorney is embedded in a binarized discourse of law where the polarity is manifested in the architectural build up of his chambers: "a spacious sky-light shaft" [16, p. 3] at one end and everlasting shade on the other, the white wall of the sky light shaft and the view of a brick black wall on the other side. The penetration of the sky light shaft into the building, the verticality of the white wall and the black wall, frames the space into a place of law where cultural disciplines are imposed on human and non-human nature. The attorney gives a lengthy description of himself, his career, and his employees, taking pains to establish his own anonymity. What marks the contrast between the attorney and Bartleby is that the attorney has comfortably surrendered to his simplified version of life made of blacks and whites, and paradoxically has found his "identity" in the "place" that turns out to be a "non-place" in the course of the story; while Bartleby negates the simplified and simplifying concepts of the attorney's world, and never yields to be defined. Bartleby's adherence to (non)place is complicated: for a time he worked in a dead letter office but it turned out to be a place of transience for him, that is, a non-place; for some time he worked as a scrivener in the attorney's non-place trying to change the none-place into a place by rejecting the "similitude" of the office culture and by negating the rules and by blurring the line between private and public zone, the opportunity, however, was denied him once the attorney evacuated the chamber and moved into a new office. The second work-place too, turns out to be transitory and thus, a non-place. The attorney is the representative of the law and social "order" that strip individuals from their individuality by providing them transitory public non-places rather than a place in which they can practice their individuality. It is interesting to note that the verbose narrator is anonymous and bereft of identity himself. Not only himself, but his employees are nameless and merely nicknamed. The articulate, oratorical, name-dropping narrator who never mentions a word about his private life voices social discourses and does his best to homogenize the world he frequents.

### 3.2. Nature as non-place

Sanford Pinsker refers to the significance of the "high green folding screen" that partitions the space of the workplace:

Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined. [16, p. 11]

Pinsker interprets the green screen as an "ironic garden" and Bartleby as a "green world [...] made from barriers of convenience." He goes on to compare this ironic garden with the Biblical garden where the lawyer, like Adam, has the power of nomenclature, and is hence dominant over those who don't [17, p. 20]. Adam is the one with the power to name and is then in power and those who are named are othered by him. Greenness, though it occurs in the form of an artificial screen at this point, works to dishevel the convenience of the lawyer. If we agree with Pinsker's interpretation, then again the lawyer's claim to Adamic language is derided because Bartleby is the only one who has already a name of his own, rejecting to be named and othered. The green world, although absent or merely partially and indexically present, maintains its voice through Bartleby.

There is something in Bartleby's reticence that "not only strangely disarmed me [the lawyer], but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me [the lawyer]" [16, p. 14]. If we consider the lawyer as the representative of the logocentric world of Law, the reticent Bartleby creates and expresses the pre-verbal logic, having access, through his ghostliness, to a world that lies beyond the lawyer's understanding.

Similarly, other occurrences of greenness in this story sound like discordant songs:

Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and especially in the inclosed grass-platted yard thereof. And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves. [16, p. 45]

Not only is the "grass platted yard" enclosed, but also platted, meaning that the green space, --even though natural, unlike the green screen -- is in fact under the control of legal institutions. Ironically enough, the only location where a trace of natural green can be found, is the yard of a municipal jail, called "The Tomb." Greenness is therefore an index of non-place which is the prison. In the urbanized world of the mid-nineteenth century America where the location of self is defined in terms of verticality and black and white walls, green pieces of land can only exist in non-places such as prison and are allocated to the other; and Bartleby who does not yield to the black and white world of the lawyer, is swept into the non-place of prison. Another reference to greenness occurs before Bartleby's corpse is sketched:

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 birds, had sprung. [16, p. 48]

It is not surprising that the "inclosed [sic] grass-platted yard" reappears at this point as "soft imprisoned turf" that is interpreted by the lawyer as the beating heart of The Tomb. However, the beating heart is suffocated by the incessant pauses: "The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung". The incessant commas that break the sentence into short phrases are reminiscent of the gradual stopping of the heart. The punctuational pauses suffocate the beating of the heart/turf, furthermore, the existence of life at the heart of the "pyramid" --The Tomb--is attributed not to divine providence or moral philosophy, but to accidental bird droppings. The cyclic workings of nature--grass growing from bird droppings-- are used by the narrator to derogatorily describe the stealthy and magical intrusions of life into the wall-ridden environment of the masonry. The soft turf is out of place in the stony structure of the masonry, in the same way that Bartleby is out of place in Wall-street.

### 3.3. Labyrinth as non-place

The network of walls shapes the urban structure into a labyrinthine form. Walter Benjamin notes that "the city is the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth"[18]. The mythic functions of labyrinth sheds more light on the significance of this architectural structure in the story. According to the ancient Cretan myth, Deadalus made the labyrinth to imprison the man eating monster Minotaur. Therefore, labyrinth's primary function in mythology was exorcism and removal of monstrosity. Labyrinthine walls block the view of the navigator and therefore the partial vision, the absence of horizon and lack of insight prove essential in experiencing the urban setting:

in the tradition of visual arts the labyrinth is a more concrete architectural artifice, which can be viewed from a privileged perspective and thus seen as an artistically assembled structure, whereas the literary metaphorical use of the labyrinth motif is related to the

fictional-mythical tradition of the concept and emphasizes the confusion and feeling of entrapment that is felt by those inside the labyrinth. [19]

If we use the tradition of visual arts and take a look at the Wall Street office from above, we see within the walls that surround the attorney's office, other walls that have partitioned the already limited space:

I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scribes, the other by myself. According to my humor I threw open these doors, or closed them. I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done. [16, p. 10]

It seems that the lawyer is trying to hide or imprison Bartleby but what threat is offered by Bartleby that the lawyer is trying to hide him from the others? Marcus claims that pigeonholing Bartleby "symbolizes the lawyer's compartmentalization of the unconscious forces which Bartleby represents." but what unconscious forces does Bartleby represent? Bartleby has come to haunt the narrator and is often seen as a phantom, as when the narrator summons him several times and Bartleby comes out of his partition wordlessly: "like a very *ghost*, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage" [16, p. 19]. Bartleby, unlike other copyists, cannot be defined in terms of physicality and food imagery: "holding the door ajar, the *apparition* of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly that he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged just then" [16, p. 21]. The lawyer refers to the undeniable presence of Bartleby when he reveals both his determination and hesitation to get rid of him: "I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were *air*" [16, p.34]. For the lawyer, one solution to the problem of Bartleby is to assume that he has left while he has not. Here we can trace the psychological mechanism of repression in the way the lawyer tries to figure out the problem of Bartleby. Thus, the narrator is trying to repress the evil spirit of non-conformity by placing Bartleby within a trap-like labyrinth. Labyrinth, like prison, is a non-place in which the identity of the individual is taken away from him: being likened to air, apparition and ghost by the narrator can be taken as the proceedings of social forces that strip the individual from his materiality by subjugating him to such non-places as labyrinth.

### 3.4. The Orient as Non-place

Melville uses oriental imagery in order to warn his contemporaries against the ruin threatening the American society. The seemingly kind-hearted narrator describes Bartleby and his life style in terms of ruin, wasteland and abandonment:

His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall-street is deserted as Petra; and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn. And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous—a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage! [16, p. 23]

The narrator refers to two ancient places redolent of ruin and extinction, retelling the serial story of empire and ruin. Petra, located in modern-day Jordan, was approximately founded as early as 312 BC as the capital of Nabataeans. The Arab Nabataeans enjoyed much prosperity due to Petra's proximity to regional trade routes. Similarly, the ancient city of Carthage, located in modern-day Tunis, was not only a major trade center but also developed from a Phoenician colony into the center of an empire dominant throughout the first millennium BC across the western Mediterranean. The city was ruined by Romans in 146 BC. Jacob Rama Berman in *American*

*Arabesque* explains the symbolic significance of Petra for mid-nineteenth century Americans. Not only did it symbolize "empire and ruin," but also was taken as an ancient example of transition from tribal into urban life. Berman draws an analogy between the transition of Petra from nomadism to urbanism in almost 312 BC, and the "debates in the United States about the fitness of putatively nomadic Indians for inclusion in the civilized, capitalist state". When Petra was rediscovered in 1812 by Burekhardt, the once, urban center of culture and trade, was re-peopled by nomadic Bedouins, therefore, Petra had a double-edged message for mid-nineteenth century Americans who were "confronting national debates about continental expansion, Indian removal, and industrialization" [20].

The narrator otherizes Bartleby and likens his habitat to oriental landscapes simultaneously, reducing them to emptiness, vacancy and forlornness. In the world drawn by the narrator, past and present do not form a synthesis, Petra and Carthage are verbal pictures referred to as spectacles. What the narrator sees, however, is different from what Melville tells us. The narrator, with his reductive tone, prefers to see in the orient only the moment of ruin and vacancy, but Melville wants us to consider with a historical insight, the fluctuating history of the two ancient places once wealthy and prosperous, and now reduced to emptiness, desolation and ruin. The narrator therefore, by disrupting the continuity between past and present and by presenting a post-card vision of the past, dematerializes Bartleby's identity and reduces him to emptiness in order to distract mid-nineteenth century Americans from the social inequality brought about by capitalist ethics. Melville, on the other hand, reminds the reader of what might become of prosperous sites such as Wall Street: the site for trade might turn into a sight in the future; the place might turn into a non-place. If the narrator considers Bartleby's resistance to Wall Street ethics as ruination, Melville considered Wall Street ethics as ruinous.

### 3.5. Significance of the findings

In all the examples of non-place discussed above, the logic of exclusivity is at work: the office is partitioned both spatially and temporally. Biological determinism works comically in the office when the clockwise and anticlockwise bodily responses of the employees are described. But in the case of Bartleby, social determinism gives a tragic hue to the scrivener's fate: non-conformity is doomed. Nature cannot exist in the working office unless it is reduced to an artificial green screen functioning as an exclusionary boundary separating Bartleby from others. Green grasses as the symbol of hope and life can be paradoxically found only in the prison yard where Bartleby expires. Green Nature and urban culture do not reconcile with each other. Bartleby, the ghostlike, airy individual who does not have any resemblance to the biologically bound characters like Turkey and Nippers, and the only one with a name, is separated from others and put into the labyrinthine space of the office and later into the prison, so that others would be protected from such an "undesirable" as he is. He turns into an "undesirable" because according to enlightenment code of reason, he has freely chosen to stand against rational institutions of society, and thence, must be relegated to confinement. Melville seems to be entangled in the discourse of orientalism when he describes the masonry's "Egyptian character" [16, p. 47] and mentions the grass growing underfoot as "the heart of the eternal pyramids" [16, p. 48]. The reference to Egyptian prehistorical architecture with the patch of green at its center brings to mind the prehistorical religions that considered various phenomena of nature as divine forces per se. That prehistorical biocentric view of nature—that "decenters humanity's importance [... and] explores the complex interrelationships between the human and the nonhuman" [21, p. 218] -- is on the verge of extinction because an anthropocentric view—that "assumes the primacy of humans, who either sentimentalize or dominate the environment" [21, pp. 217-218] -- has been rewritten on it with the advent of Abrahamic religions, modernity, enlightenment and capitalism. The narrator, more than once, refers to oriental ruin and desolation to make a statement about mid-nineteenth century Wall Street. The anachronistic juxtaposition of Wall Street and Petra lays bare the undercurrent of anxiety and insecurity in the discourse of the conservative attorney who fears recourse to earlier periods of cultural development. A significant ecological metaphor in *Bartleby* is the white paper. The pallid scrivener, after some

time, refuses to copy legal texts, and thus evades putting ink on the white paper. The pallidness and airy existence of Bartleby, who defies materiality, can be taken as a metaphor for the whiteness of the paper as an index of nature. In the same way that Bartleby himself does not yield to definitions and remains an enigma for the narrator and reader alike, Bartleby's white papers are devoid of inscriptions, meanings and definitions. Writing on white paper with black and red ink metaphors the processes of "civilization", "colonization" and "acculturation;" and Bartleby's refusal to write can be taken as a rejection of cultural self-righteousness dominant in mid-nineteenth century capitalist America. The identification between Bartleby and the white paper can be taken as an endorsement of the biocentric view of nature that decenters humanity's importance in the large scheme of nature. The death of Bartleby at the end reflects the tragic removal of the biocentric in favor of the anthropocentric.

#### 4. Conclusions

The representation of place and the role it plays in constructing the identity of urban settlers in "Bartleby the Scrivener" indicates that the elimination of the pastoral in the industrialized urban setting of the mid-nineteenth century America is tightly fastened to the dehumanizing mechanism of the capitalist ethics at work in places and non-places. Melville tries to warn his readers against such threats as dehumanization within the non-place of a disintegrated social arena. The walls function as oppressive forces denying the individual the vision of a world beyond Wall Street.

Greenness as an index of nature in "Bartleby" appears in unlikely places such as green artificial screens, and prisons; when the turf is referred to, it is described in terms of an intruder. Death, desolation and ruin are the very threats to Wall Street ethics, invisible to the narrator, but vividly visible to the writer. In this story, the line between place and non-place is hard to draw because they have flickering identities; the writer wants us to problematize our definitions and be aware of the social forces at work in constructing the world in which we live: social organizations are reluctant to offer citizens a place in which individual identity can be fermented. Privacy is minimized at best and eliminated at worst, and "solitude and similitude" turn out to be the utmost achievement that an individual can aspire to.

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