

# HERMAN MELVILLE



1819-1891

# **TWO REMINDERS:**

**1. FOR KAFKA, JUST “THE METAMORPHOSIS” (ENCOURAGED, NOT REQUIRED TO READ THE OTHERS)**

**2. WE’RE APPROACHING THE END:  
DON’T PLAGIARIZE!**

**HOW MANY LANGUAGES  
DOES PETE BUTTIGIEG  
SPEAK?**

- 1. ENGLISH**
- 2. NORWEGIAN**
- 3. FRENCH**
- 4. ITALIAN**
- 5. SPANISH**
- 6. MALTESE**
- 7. ARABIC**
- 8. DARI (PERSIAN)**

- 1. LITERATURE MAJOR AT HARVARD**
- 2. RHODES SCHOLAR AT OXFORD**
- 3. GUEST PIANIST WITH SOUTH BEND  
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**
- 4. JOINT SERVICE COMMENDATION MEDAL FOR  
SERVICE IN AFGHANISTAN**

Pete credits reading and studying the humanities with helping to provide him with the critical thinking skills he uses every day as mayor. “About a year ago, I realized I was so busy I wasn’t reading much. And reading got me everything good in life. So we have a new rule in my office: my staff has to help me protect four or five hours a week to hole up and read. And not necessarily about policy. Maybe just read about the Greeks, or history, or poetry.”

# CHARLES DICKENS

A black and white portrait of Charles Dickens. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt and a dark cravat. He has a full, dark beard and mustache. His right hand is resting on his chin, and his left hand is resting on his lap. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a thoughtful expression.

1812-1870



# CHARLES DICKENS

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- ▶ One of the most popular literary English writers
- ▶ Largely self-educated, came from extreme poverty
- ▶ Known for novels that are:
  - ▶ serious literature
  - ▶ politically activist
  - ▶ sentimental and popular
- ▶ Serial publication



# DICKENS AS REALIST

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- Socio-economic class as main element
- Detailed examination of economic life (exact payments, precise details about residence, spending, status)
- Emphasis on poverty, its many sufferings
- Ironic (but sentimental) view of life

# DICKENS AS A MODERNIST?

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- Realistic social world (social class, poverty, complex society, ironic view of human nature) still exists...
- ...only now deformed by the *consciousness* that perceives it
- De-personalized, de-familiarized (“somebody”); Russian *остранение* (*ostronienie*)
- Deformation of language
- Stream-of-consciousness
- Progressive tense

# CONSCIOUSNESS AND LANGUAGE

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¶ I went on, by passing the wine faster and faster yet, and continually starting up with a corkscrew to open more wine, long before any was needed. I proposed Steerforth's health. I said he was my dearest friend, the protector of my boyhood, and the companion of my prime. I said I was delighted to propose his health. I said I owed him more obligations than I could ever repay, and held him in a higher admiration than I could ever express. I finished by saying, 'I'll give you Steerforth! God bless him! Hurrah!' We gave him three times three, and another, and a good one to finish with. I broke my glass in going round the table to shake hands with him, and I said (in two words):

'Steerforth—you're the guiding star of my existence.'

I went on, by finding suddenly that somebody was in the middle of a song. Markham was the singer. (8)

# CONSCIOUSNESS AND LANGUAGE

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¶ Somebody was smoking. We were all smoking. I was smoking. (8)

¶ Somebody was leaning out of my bedroom window, refreshing his forehead against the cool stone of the parapet, and feeling the air upon his face. It was myself. I was addressing myself as ‘Copperfield’, and saying, ‘Why did you try to smoke? You might have known you couldn’t do it.’ Now, somebody was unsteadily contemplating his features in the looking-glass. That was I too. I was very pale in the looking-glass; my eyes had a vacant appearance; and my hair—only my hair, nothing else—looked drunk. (9)

# CONSCIOUSNESS AND LANGUAGE

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¶ Owing to some confusion in the dark, the door was gone. I was feeling for it in the window-curtains, when Steerforth, laughing, took me by the arm and led me out. We went downstairs, one behind another. Near the bottom, somebody fell, and rolled down. Somebody else said it was Copperfield. (9)

¶ How somebody, lying in my bed, lay saying and doing all this over again, at cross purposes, in a feverish dream all night—the bed a rocking sea that was never still! How, as that somebody slowly settled down into myself, did I begin to parch, and feel as if my outer covering of skin were a hard board; my tongue the bottom of an empty kettle... (12)

# HERMAN MELVILLE



1819-1891



## LIFE

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- Family of merchants; 1830 bankruptcy; autodidact
- Schoolteacher, sailor, novelist
- After wide initial popularity (for all of his books that are now *not* much appreciated, adventure and travel novels), died mostly unknown—literary reputation came later

# Herman Melville

Bartleby,  
el escribiente



R E L A T O S

## WRITING

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- ▶ Initial novels are autobiographical, realistic, adventurous
- ▶ *Moby-Dick* (1851) marks downturn in fortune
- ▶ The shift is from autobiographical realism to allegorical, symbolic, philosophical novels. “Bartleby” is 1853
- ▶ Later work (*Pierre, or, the Ambiguities*; *The Confidence-Man*) is increasingly dense and difficult—often absurd.





## BARTLEBY: THEMES

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- Money
- Letters
- Circulation
- Consumption
- The Wall
- The Thing

# MONEY

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## ¶ A Tale of Wall-Street

¶ Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a savings' bank.

(24)

¶ “Bartleby,” said I, “I owe you twelve dollars on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours. —Will you take it?” and I handed the bills towards him.

But he made no motion. (32)

# LETTERS

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¶ At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,” was his mildly cadaverous reply.

Just then the folding-doors opened, and Nippers approached. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

“*Prefer not, eh?*” gritted Nippers—“I’d *prefer* him, if I were you, sir,” addressing me—“I’d *prefer* him; I’d give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he *prefers* not to do now?”

Bartleby moved not a limb.

“Mr. Nippers,” said I, “I’d prefer that you would withdraw for the present.”

Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word “prefer” upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. (28)

# LETTERS

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¶ “With submission, sir,” said he, “yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him.”

“So you have got the word too,” said I, slightly excited.

“With submission, what word, sir?” asked Turkey.

“I would prefer to be left alone here,” said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy.

“*That’s* the word, Turkey,” said I—“that’s it.”

“Oh, *prefer?* oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer—”

“Turkey,” interrupted I, “you will please withdraw.”

“Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should.” (29)

# LETTERS

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¶ “How then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation,—how would that suit you?”

“Not at all. It does not strike me that there is any thing definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular.”

“Stationary you shall be then,” I cried, now losing all patience, and for the first time in all my exasperating connection with him fairly flying into a passion. (44)

# LETTERS

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¶ The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring:—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death. (50-51)

# CIRCULATION

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¶ “Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?”

“There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship; but I am not particular.”

“Too much confinement,” I cried, “why you keep yourself confined all the time!”

¶ “How then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation,—how would that suit you?”

“Not at all. It does not strike me that there is any thing definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular.”

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# CONSUMPTION

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¶ Also, they sent Ginger Nut very frequently for that peculiar cake—small, flat, round, and very spicy—after which he had been named by them. Of a cold morning when business was but dull, Turkey would gobble up scores of these cakes, as if they were mere wafers—indeed they sell them at the rate of six or eight for a penny—the scrape of his pen blending with the crunching of the crisp particles in his mouth. Of all the fiery afternoon blunders and flurried rashnesses of Turkey, was his once moistening a ginger-cake between his lips, and clapping it on to a mortgage for a seal. I came within an ace of dismissing him then. But he mollified me by making an oriental bow, and saying—“With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account.” (9-10)

# CONSUMPTION

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¶ At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically. (11)

# THE WALL

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¶ I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. 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. (10-11)

# PERSONS AS THINGS

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¶ I looked at him steadfastly. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. (13)

¶ “Stationary you shall be then,” I cried, now losing all patience. (44)



## BARTLEBY: MARX

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- Capitalism has internal contradictions:
  - infinite expansion vs. finite resources
  - infinite exploitation vs. workers, environment, etc.
  - production vs. consumption
- Bartleby is the perfect worker, a machine, a thing
- But *things can't buy things*



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## OFFICE SPACE

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- People become things (“Corporate accounts payable...”)
- Work is fake. We produce pointless papers that do not circulate in a meaningful way (TPS reports, copy of memo).
- Consumption is also fake (*Flingers*, *Tchachkis*, “pizza shooters or extreme fajitas!”)
- Even the money is fake—fractions of a penny that don’t circulate, aren’t productive, no one uses



Is This Good for the *COMPANY*?

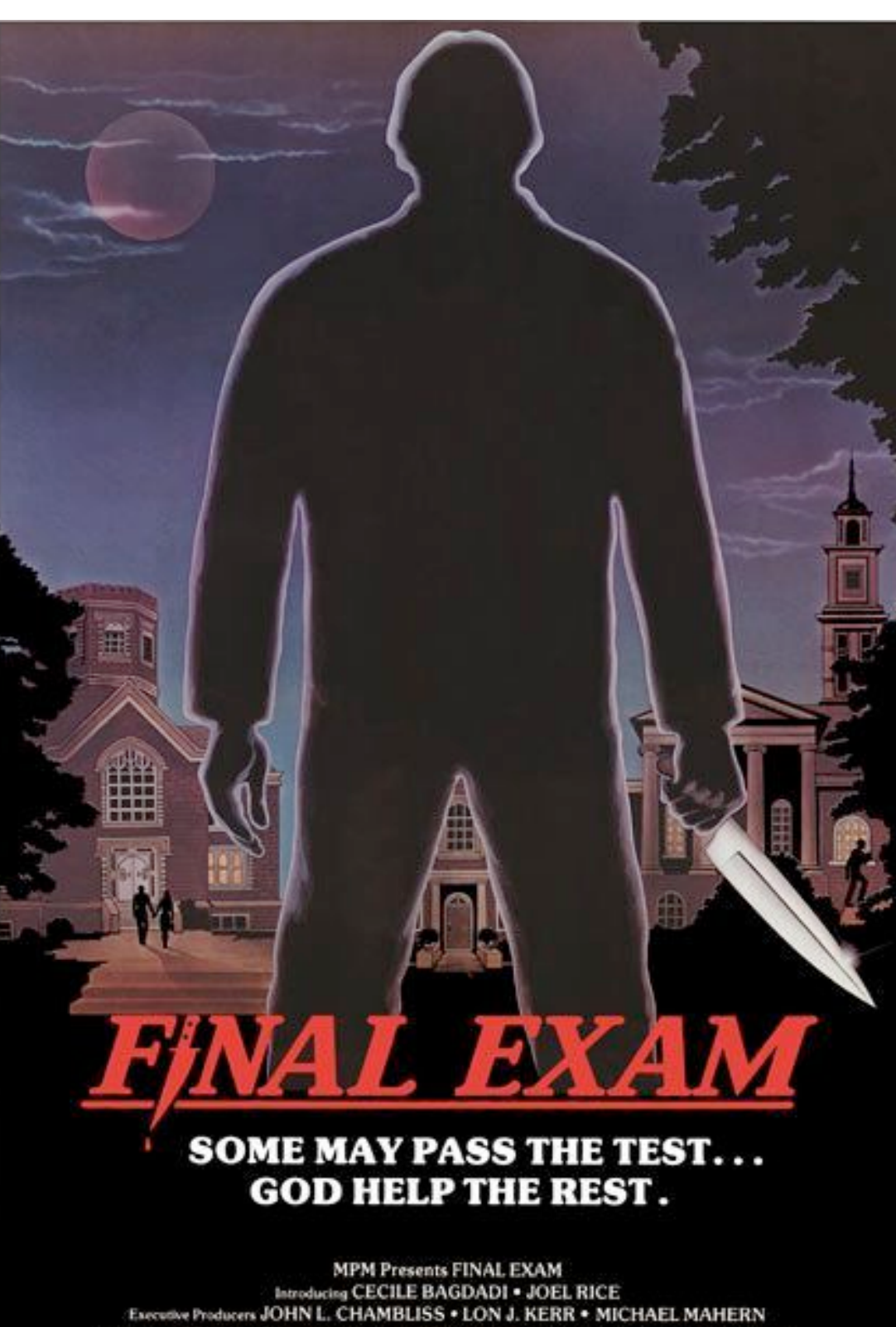




## OFFICE SPACE

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- Milton is Bartleby
- He doesn't work (although to be fair, neither does anyone else), but won't leave work
- He becomes a fixture, an object
- "I used to be over by the window, and I could see the squirrels, and the squirrels were married"
- Ends up in the basement, looking not out a window, but at a wall
- Eventually destroys himself because he will not leave his desk



# FINAL EXAM

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- Monday, May 6
- 7-10 PM
- Right in this room!
- 3 sections
  - Short answers to big questions
  - Short answers to small(er) questions
  - Identifications (sounds hard, but they are not)
- All material will be drawn from the readings (of course) and the PowerPoints that are on the course website

*Section I:* Answer with 4-5 sentences (refer to several important ideas, authors and texts). Answer all 4 questions (6 pts. each; 24 pts. total).

1. What vision of society does the “Enlightenment Project” promote?

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*Section II:* Answer with 4-5 sentences. Answer all 10 questions (5 pts. each; 50 pts. total).

1. Briefly describe some of Whitman's principal poetic themes and techniques.

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*Section III: Identifications.* Give author and title, if any. What features are typical of the author's style? Comment briefly on importance of passage. Answer 5 out of the 8 possible questions (5 pts. each; 25 pts. total).

1. I lost a world the other day.  
Has anybody found?  
You'll know it by the row of stars  
Around its forehead bound.

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*Final question:* A completely trivial question drawn from the lectures, possibly not from the PowerPoints (1 pt. each; 1 pt. total).

1. What tie did Prof. Rushing wear on the day of the second Frankenstein lecture, the one about Frankenstein movies?

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