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Liminal Solitude in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*

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Introduction

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people have remained tethered to their peers with online video calls, yet have been physically removed from their community. As such, many of us exist in a realm of liminality that exists in between constant connectivity and complete isolation. This temporary and ambiguous solitude has marked the lives of many who came before us, which should hopefully offer some comfort in these strange times. Specifically, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), Herman Melville (1819-1891), and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) were all engaged with the topic of solitude in their writings that were published during the 1850s, which was a tumultuous decade defined by various socio-political developments that eventually lead to the outbreak of the American Civil War.

After the War of 1812, the American urban population as well as its economy grew at an astounding rate. Steven Mintz notes that between 1820 and 1840, the urban population of the nation increased by sixty percent each decade, and the construction of canals and railroads greatly decreased the cost of moving freight, stimulating both agriculture and industry. On the one hand, the American people were connected more than ever before by the widespread use of the telegraph, while on the other hand, the North and the South became increasingly divided. By 1860, the North would have fifty percent more people than the South as a result of the urbanization and continuing immigration of Europeans. In contrast, the South had smaller and fewer cities, and a third of its population lived in slavery, which discouraged technological innovation. Regardless, the South was wealthy and largely financed the Industrial Revolution in the United States. The diverging economic developments resulted in growing sectional differences between the North and South. In an attempt to resolve the conflicts, the Compromise of 1850 aimed to admit California as a free state while permitting slavery in the rest of the Southwest. However, the compromise included a fugitive slave law that many Northerners were opposed to, which only further increased civil unrest ("Overview of the Pre-Civil War

Era").

It was in the midst of these nation-wide tensions that Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau would publish *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1856) and *Walden* (1854). The three authors continue a longer thread of solitude that runs through American literature. Other authors who have explored the themes of loneliness and solitude are Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, Henry James, Kate Chopin, and Edith Wharton. Ralph Waldo Emerson published *Self-Reliance* (1841), which will be discussed later as it had a great impact on Thoreau. Furthermore, James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) stand out as great works of nineteenth-century American fiction that explore the topic of solitude. Later, in the twentieth century, F. Scott Fitzgerald would publish *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and John Steinbeck would publish *Of Mice and Men* (1937), which would continue the theme of solitude that marked many of America's most famous works of literature.

Specifically, Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau, each of whom are known for the charged ambiguity in their writing, contemplate on both the positives and the negatives of withdrawing from society without condemning either. In turn, they create a liminal realm in between the cruelty and the enlightenment of isolation which can either be deeply harmful to those who pass through it, or offer respite from nation-wide tensions. Studying these three specific works by these three American writers is relevant for gaining a better understanding of solitude within the current climate created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

To provide the necessary historical context for the three following chapters, this introduction will briefly touch on the lives and times of Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau to illustrate their personal relationship with solitude. The three writers were, each in their own way, deeply appreciative of their time spent away from the busting societies of the 1850s. Furthermore, the documented friendships between these writers indicate a shared understanding of

the desire to withdraw from 1850s society. Specifically, these three writers and their texts, *The Scarlet Letter*, “Bartleby” and *Walden*, were chosen for this thesis because of their shared theme of living at the fringes of society, and because of the recurring ambiguity and liminality in both their narration and in their relationship with solitude. As mentioned in the opening point of this introduction, many of us today find ourselves in a state of liminality as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and by studying authors who have previously explored the liminal realm of isolation, we can conclude that there is room for critical reflection as well as an appreciation for solitude. It is in this ambiguous liminal grey space that Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau’s writing is at its strongest and that we can learn the most from their works.

Firstly, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the oldest of the three antebellum writers, was a deeply private man who deliberately utilized an aesthetic of ambiguity to avoid imposing one single moral perspective on the themes explored in his writing, possibly to the point where his beliefs could easily be interpreted to be more on the conservative side. Hawthorne’s wife Sophia Peabody claimed that her husband was “without theories of any kind” (Valenti 146), which was intended as praise; but when one keeps in mind that Hawthorne described abolitionism as “the mistiness of a philanthropic theory” (Miscellaneous Prose and Verse 292), it becomes clear why he was not particularly close to the well-known circle of transcendentalist writers while he lived in Concord. Larry J. Reynolds observes that in Hawthorne’s time in Concord, he attempted “to create a romantic imaginative space able to counter the theories, the activism, the frantic search for social reform [...] at the other end of town” (13). Hawthorne was happy to play devil’s advocate in an attempt to push back against Emerson’s dominant philosophies of self-reliance, intellectual power and cosmic unity (Goodman, “Ralph Waldo Emerson”), which created a rift between him and his neighbours. Even though Hawthorne was sceptical of the transcendentalist philosophies of Emerson and Margaret Fuller, he ironically

put their ideals of individualism and self-reliance into practice by attempting to distance himself from the popular schools of thought of his peers. However, a side effect of this distance between him and his neighbours would of course be solitude.

It appears that Hawthorne frequently sought out this solitude throughout his life. He described his life during the decade after leaving Bowdoin college as “the long seclusion”; his biographer James R. Mellow explains that Hawthorne reflected on this period as his apprenticeship as a writer, an how living secluded in his family home gave him “the discipline of solitude” (Mellow 36). He would never leave New England life behind to go to sea like Melville did, or hold speeches at antislavery rallies like Thoreau. Rather, he lived a more quiet life that was marked by the death of his father, the weak physical condition of his wife, and later by the sickness of his daughter. After his marriage to Sophia Peabody, in 1842, the newlyweds moved into an old parsonage in Concord called the Old Manse. Mellow describes how “Hawthorne readily appreciated the retired situation of the house” (201), lying along the river with its flourishing apple orchard (202). Not only did their home stand outside of the bustling town, Mellow explains, “[t]hey were living in a world displaced from time. Distant figures and tradesmen in plodding carriages, passing along the main road, reminded them of a world outside” (208). Thus, Hawthorne’s conservative and non-committal socio-political beliefs can be attributed to his feeling for always living on the edge of society. Here, in his solitude, what he believed to be universal truths, such as the hierarchy of races, would remain unchallenged.

Secondly, Melville was a writer who wrote out of necessity: in the 1850s, the magazine offices of New York provided him the money to keep a roof over his head. To ensure a regular salary, writers at the time had to be attentive students of the mid-century world that these magazines reflected. And if anything, Melville was a most attentive writer. His awareness of the question of slavery in the halls of Congress runs through most of his writing, with an accusatory finger being pointed at phrenological race theory in *Moby-Dick* (1851), when

Ishmael compares the shape of the cannibalistic Queequeg's head to a bust of George Washington (66). While Melville is a writer known for his loaded ambiguity, he was also a man who wrote with a "scorching fury" and "a lethal scepticism" (Coviello 10) about the institutionalized violence on which America was built. In his biography of Melville, Newton Arvin even notes that Melville's humanitarian passion, while admirable, "asserted itself overaggressively at the expensive of his inventive and dramatic gift" (112). As such, it will come as no surprise that many of Melville's works explore the themes of estrangement and withdrawal from a society that he deemed to be deeply cruel. For example, in *The Piazza Tales* (1856), the same collection of short stories in which "Bartleby" was published, Melville would publish a sketch called "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow" in which a woman is left on an island in complete isolation when the French captain who promised to come back for her never returns.

After the 1850s, Melville moved from bustling New York City to rural Massachusetts, where he could see Mount Greylock from the window by his writing desk. Here, Melville became acquainted with Hawthorne, and the two of them began a brief friendship that would be studied and scrutinized for decades to come. In an article titled "Herman Melville's Love Letters," Jordan Alexander Stein notes that regardless of the nature of their relationship, "Hawthorne and Melville, separated in life, are posthumously wedded in criticism" (119). The two fast friends explored similar themes of isolation and ostracization in their works. For example, it is difficult to ignore the similarities between Hester Prynne and the lonely widow Hunilla from Melville "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow." Similarly, Melville's "Bartleby" inadvertently serves as an extension of the theme of isolation as punishment in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Both the cadaverous Bartleby and the spectral Hester are excluded from society after being perceived as deviants by their peers. Interestingly, Hawthorne and Melville

both wrote about isolation and withdrawing from society in the 1850s, which could be a reaction to a historical event or movement that took place during those years, or an engagement with a popular theory regarding the topic.

Thirdly, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* provides a possible answer to the origins of this shared theme of isolation, especially since the largely autobiographical nature of the novel offers Thoreau room for direct engagement with the political landscape and theoretical discourse of the time. As Russell Goodman notes, Thoreau was a close friend of fellow Concordian Emerson. Their friendship encouraged Thoreau to begin keeping a journal, which would then lead to efforts to make a name for himself as a published writer. His first publications appeared in the *Dial,* the journal founded by the transcendentalist circle that Emerson was a part of, and Thoreau lived with Emerson's family to help his friend's wife around the house while Emerson was off on lecture tours. Furthermore, Thoreau would build his cabin at Walden on land owned by Emerson. As a result, Thoreau's association with Emerson was one of reverence, and Thoreau's withdrawal from society to Walden Pond would likely have been influenced by Emerson's call for individualism and non-conformity ("Transcendentalism").

Thoreau and Melville did not move in the same circles, but the two were both engaged with the abolitionist movement in their writing. In fact, the Norton's introduction to Thoreau's work notes that in 1854, the year of *Walden*'s publication, "Thoreau delivered his best known antislavery speech, 'Slavery in Massachusetts,' at a rally in Framingham, Massachusetts, protesting the arrest of the fugitive slave Anthony Burns" (963). Even though this thesis will not explore Thoreau and Melville's reflections on the antislavery movement, one can safely assume that their shared disillusionment with America and its authorities will have fuelled their desire to withdraw from society and govern their own lives.

Finally, Thoreau and Hawthorne's acquaintanceship was indicative of Hawthorne's inability to wholly separate himself from his peers. In his sketch "The Old Manse" (1846),

Hawthorne described Emerson and his disciples as “hobgoblins of flesh and blood,” and admits that he “admired Emerson as a poet of deep beauty and austere tenderness, but sought nothing from him as a philosopher” (30-31). According to Darren Abel, Hawthorne was “a transcendentalist but not a Transcendentalist” (37), as Hawthorne kept his transcendentalist contemporaries at arm’s length while still feeling at home in their language. Thoreau, however, was Hawthorne’s exception. The two of them met at the Old Manse after Hawthorne moved to Concord where they not only continued to go “boating and ice skating on the Concord River, but also took a strong interest in each other’s current literary activities” (Jones 1429). Hawthorne praised Thoreau in his journal, *Passages from the American Notebooks,* in which he professed that Thoreau was “one of the few persons [...] with whom to hold intercourse is like hearing the wind among the boughs of a forest-tree, and with all this wild freedom, there is high and classic cultivation in him too” (332). Even though Hawthorne thought very little of Emerson and his followers, Hawthorne could not completely separate himself from the people of Concord. Hawthorne’s solitude was never absolute, for it was in his friendships with Thoreau and Melville that he found people who appeared to understand his wish to withdraw from society.

As such, the three authors were attentive and wholly aware of the popular political and philosophical discourse of the restless 1850s. The tensions caused by the abolitionist movement hastened the nation’s movement towards the Civil War, and modern technological advances such as the railroad and the nation-wide postal system would create a culture of constant connectivity. Therefore, it makes sense for Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau to explore the topic of solitude in a decade of great political and social unrest. At the same time, it is in this shared wish for solitude that these three writers nonetheless found understanding and companionship. So, instead of dedicating themselves to fully being immersed in either modernity or isolation in their writing, Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau attempted to explore the

grey, liminal area in between the two extremes. The solitude in each these writers' works has a liminal quality to it, for none of their writing that the following chapters will discuss is about total isolation from society, but rather about feeling isolated among one's peers.

To be able to pinpoint where and how these three writers utilize liminality in their respective texts, Victor Turner's theory of "Liminality and Communitas" will be applied to serve as a roadmap. Turner's theory of liminality is one that divides liminality into three distinct phases. The first phase is one of separation that detaches an individual or a group the social structure, from cultural norms, or from both. During the second phase, the "passenger" transitions through liminal realm during which their defining characteristics become ambiguous and malleable. Finally, the third phase of reincorporation offers stability, which means that the subject is expected to adhere to customary norms and expectations once more. Turner applies this theory to rites of passage to see how different cultures strengthen and revive structure in their societies by temporarily letting its people experience the world without structure. "Structure" refers to authority, religion, and cultural norms, and "communitas" is the opposite of structure. Turner concludes his findings by stating that "maximization of communitas provokes maximization of structure, which in turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed communitas" (373). This theory will be applied in the following three chapters as it will aid the hypothesis that *The Scarlet Letter*, "Bartleby," and *Walden* advocate for an equal distribution of solitude and modernity in the daily lives of mid nineteenth-century Americans.

With the necessary context provided, the rest of this thesis will highlight the presence of a liminal space in between solitude and modernity in the aforementioned three texts, and to determine the effect of the passage through this liminal realm on the characters. The first chapter on Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* will explore the liminal state that both Hester and Dimmesdale are forced to inhabit as punishment for non-conformity at the hands of the Puritan authorities. Even though solitude is imposed upon the pair, Hawthorne never commits to

painting this isolation in a wholly negative light. Rather, he finds the liminal space in between the "Puritan" moral categories of good and evil that leaves room for the reader's own opinion on Hester's sin and her ostracization. The second chapter on Melville's "Bartleby" builds on the first chapter's exploration of solitude as punishment for non-conformity. Bartleby, as opposed to Hester who was physically isolated from her peers, enters a liminal space in the midst of the restless New York City of the 1850s where he is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to do his job. Even when he is among his peers, the narrator perceives the scrivener to be a victim of loneliness. This loneliness is a disease that evokes great pity from the narrator, but which ultimately marks Bartleby as a deviant who is beyond help. In "Bartleby," solitude may not necessarily be a sickness, for we never learn how Bartleby himself feels about his condition. But in a society that is sustained by productivity, Bartleby's unproductive solitude is viewed as such. The third and final chapter on *Walden* explores Thoreau's attempt at voluntarily creating a realm of liminality that exists in between complete isolation and modernized connectivity by building a cabin in the woods by Walden Pond. Thoreau never explicitly advises the reader to follow in his footsteps; rather, he urges his readers to find their own path and to foster their own relationship with solitude in whatever way they deem fit. Together, these three chapters will demonstrate that Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Melville employed liminal spaces to highlight both the cruelty of isolation as punishment for non-conformity, and the enlightenment that can be found in voluntary solitude.

1. Isolation as Punishment in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

Hester Prynne becomes the victim of isolation when she is punished for not conforming to Puritan ideals of womanhood.[1] When she is cast out from society, liminality is imposed on Hester and she is forced to inhabit a space that exists in between the two worlds of community and isolation, and in between the two words of the living and the dead. Hester is never completely removed from society, since she is permitted to visit the town, albeit to be treated with mistrust and suspicion. At the same time, Hawthorne is also able to explore solitude that manifests while still living among one's peers through the character of Dimmesdale, which is a topic he previously touched on in his short stories "The Minister's Black Veil" and "Wakefield."[2] Guilt may not physically drive Dimmesdale away from society, but instead he is morally and psychologically separated from his people. Hester and Dimmesdale are then forced to meet in "the dark, inscrutable forest" (494), which becomes an ambiguous gothic liminal space "where identity becomes no more than a specter" (Kilborne 481). On the one hand, Hester makes this space in between two worlds her own, and cultivates it to create a safe haven for other women who feel unfit for Puritan society. On the other hand, Dimmesdale's loyalty to Puritan morality result in an antagonistic relationship between himself and this liminal space in between two worlds, which then leads him to his death. Hawthorne utilizes the concept of liminality to signal the importance of individuality and self-reliance, while exploring the cruelty of forced isolation. Indeed, Hawthorne never commits to arguing that solitude has a wholly positive or negative effects on those that are

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[1] Marilyn J. Westerkamp summarizes the Puritan ideal of womanhood as follows: "New England society was an English society, and, while Puritans planned to construct a biblical nation, at the core of their culture lay a family/household structure grounded within a complex of English common law and custom founded upon assumptions of marital unity and male superiority. The ideal of female subjection was partially realized in the concept of coverture, through which the legal personhood of a woman was completely subsumed under her husband's identity, her property under his ownership" (14).

[2] Ruth Perry explains that in "Wakefield" Hawthorne explores the idea that "there is always the hazard that 'by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever.' Hawthorne warns all those who thirst for cool, private solitude: 'It is perilous to make a chasm in human affections; not that they gape so long and wide-but so quickly close again!'" (617).

shunned from their community. Instead, he approaches both sides with interest and compassion, and rather finds the liminal space in between any clear-cut moral dichotomy of good and evil that leaves room for the reader's own opinion on Hester's sins and the fairness of her punishment.

Hester's first encounter with the liminal in *The Scarlet Letter* is her entry into the world of the unliving through the metaphorical portal of the scaffold. Standing on this historical symbol of tradition that was, "in the old time, to be as effectual as an agent in the promotion of good citizenship," Hester looks down at the crowd, which is described by the narrator as "a mass of imperfectly shaped and spectral images" (481-482). Not only is Hester to be judged by her peers, but also by her ancestors. The world of the living and the dead converge to pass judgement on a woman they have declared sinful, and, in a declaration of ownership, brand her body to enforce their "territorial domination" (Gross 214). Consequently, Hester is forbidden to return to the world of the living; she is denied a true meeting with death since the guillotine on the scaffold no longer functions, and she has to live so that her misery can serve as a demonstration of the importance of obeying Puritan law. Concluding the ceremony on the scaffold, Hester exclaims, "Yes! – these were her realities, - all else had vanished!" (483), which further cements her passage into her newly found world in-between worlds. This ritualistic separation from society is what Turner refers to as "the first phase (of separation) [that] comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both" (359). Indeed, Hester is forced to cross a threshold after which her body is classified as neither living or dead.

Notably, this passage between worlds is marked by the presence of "Nature" (477), which Hawthorne has chosen grant a capital letter. In more than one occasion, the narrator describes Nature as a sympathetic force, which is a theme that will later return in the chapter

on Thoreau, that watches over Hester: the rosebush outside of the prison watches over passing prisoners with "pity" (477), Hester is described as "a lonely woman, backed by the sympathies of nature" (505), and Hester and Dimmesdale are granted sanctuary from Puritan law in the forest, where the narrator stresses the "sympathy of Nature – that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law, nor illumined by higher truth" (561). The forest is also the location where witches supposedly gather in the novel, which further establishes Nature as a safe haven for the non-conformant. Indeed, when Hester steps out of the prison, the narrator says the following in regards to the presence of the rose-bush: "It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (477). In *The Scarlet Letter,* and later in Thoreau's *Walden*, which will be discussed in the third chapter, nature and solitude appear to be intrinsically linked, and nature is able to offer comfort and hope to the lonely.

However, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Hawthorne is interested in exploring both the good and the bad, as well as the grey area in between the two extremes, and nature is no exception to this. As previously established, Hawthorne portrays nature as sympathetic, but he does not shy away from exploring a different side to nature. Where nature is mostly sympathetic to Hester, it appears to have a more complicated relationship with Pearl: "The pine-trees, aged, black, and solemn, and flinging groans and other melancholy utterances on the breeze, needed little transformation to figure as Puritan elders; the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted, unmercifully" (502). Furthermore, when Pearl first encounters a rose-bush, she cries out until she is handed a rose (509), while at the same time being referred to as being "Red Rose" (510) herself by Reverend Wilson, who also says that Pearl was "plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door" (512). Pearl is also repeatedly referred to as

an "airy sprite," an "elf," and "one of those naughty elds of fairies" (501, 510). As such, throughout the novel, Pearl is referred to as a child of nature, while also showing her to treat nature with disdain. She is a trickster who appears to have no clear allegiance. Thus, Hester is able to find comfort in nature, whereas Pearl is a product of Nature, which is where her wild and unruly behaviour stems from. If nature is then linked to solitude, it means that Hester finds hope and strength in her loneliness, while her child's anger and other peculiarities are a result of her isolation. At the same time, Pearl's identity as a fantastic creature illustrates how marginality and solitude allow for freedom of expression and freedom from restrictive customs and traditions, but simultaneously, these freedoms rely on being marginalised and alone. To be free means to be alone, and thus, in typical Hawthorne-fashion, nature and solitude are neither good nor evil, and instead offers a liminal space in which both or neither can exist in unison.

In the liminal gothic space of the forest, the identities of the characters, as well as Puritan morality are in flux and are constantly called into question. Hester's forced isolation gives Hawthorne the opportunity to explore the grey area in between good and evil, from which a critical stance towards the strict Puritan morality emerges. Without laws and without religion, sin would not exist. Instead of being governed by Puritan laws, Hester is able to find freedom and comfort under the sympathetic eyes of the trees. In the forest, Hester feels comfortable enough to shed the embroidered letter and to free herself of the cap that "confined" (561) her hair when she is alone in the forest with Dimmesdale. Xiaohan Mei applies spatial theory to *The Scarlet Letter* to argue that when Hawthorne constructs a space, "whether it is material, spiritual, or social, it should be regarded as both real and imaginary, both concrete and abstract, both existential and metaphorical" (21). In the case of the forest, Hawthorne creates such a realm in which contrasting concepts such as freedom and captivity intermingle. As such, the forest – where Hester is able to briefly redefine herself as a free

woman and where Chillingworth, the “Black Man” and “the Devil” (553, 556), is rumoured to reside – is a liminal plane of contradictions.

Another set of contradictions is offered in the portrayal of Hester’s loneliness. It is never quite clear whether the narrator condemns Hester for her actions that led to her ostracization, or whether the narrator is sympathetic to her cause. The same applies to whether the narrator believes that Hester’s solitude is a cruel punishment or a beneficiary teacher. To illustrate this contradiction, the narrator says that “women in solitude, and with troubled hearts, are pestered with unaccountable delusions” (503). Furthermore, the narrator often refers to Hester as a “ghost” (554). Not unlike the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg, she is continuously watched by her spectral audience of her Puritan ancestors. Hester is a troubled woman, haunted by ghosts who are living – in the form of her husband – and dead. However, the narrator also stresses the teachings that isolation offers Hester when he says, “Standing alone in the world, – alone, as to any dependence on society, and with little Pearl to be guided and protected, – alone, and hopeless of retrieving her position, even had she not scorned to consider it desirable, – she cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The World’s law was no law for her mind.” (540). In this passage, the narrator uses the word “alone” three times, almost as if encircling her with her shackles, refusing to let her or the reader forget about her punishment. However, she is able to cast off the “broken chain” (540) and redefine herself in an isolated, liminal state where the man-made concept of sin holds no power.

Finally, the narrator exclaims, “Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers, – stern and wild ones, – and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss” (559). Hawthorne’s use of the word “teachers” is particularly interesting for it implies that one can be a student of shame, despair, and solitude, and that these states of being are possibly privy to knowledge that Hester is not. In his chapter titled “The Uses of Solitude,” psychoanalyst Anthony Storr writes, “In a culture in which interpersonal relationships are

generally considered to provide the answer to every form of distress, it is sometimes difficult to persuade well-meaning helpers that solitude can be as therapeutic as emotional support" (29). Storr's interpretation of solitude as a possible remedy for distress is reminiscent of Hawthorne's descriptions of solitude as a strong teacher. Thus, while the narrator recognizes that isolation is a deeply harmful punishment that can easily lead to psychological instability, they also see the potential for growth.

Amidst these contradictions, the only quality that gives Hawthorne's cast of characters the option to thrive and solidify their state of being after being reduced to a spectre is to form bonds with their peers. While Hawthorne's ambiguity leaves many parts of *The Scarlet Letter* open to the interpretation of the reader, it is impossible to ignore the continued and relatively happy state of existence of both Hester and Pearl at the very end of the novel as opposed to the deaths of both Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. In many ways, Chillingworth is the most lonely as he has isolated himself from society by his thirst for vengeance. He too occupies a liminal position when it comes to his allegiance to the Puritan "utopia" by aligning himself with the Native Americans. Dimmesdale, however, is able to confide in Hester, and Pearl takes a great liking to him as she instinctively appears to recognize that she is bound to him. Richard H. Millington judges that "Dimmesdale exemplifies, in his combination of ambition, narcissism and hunger for the endorsement of the authority structure that names him as its own, the tendency of human character to shape itself unthinkingly to the configuration its culture supplies" (85). Conversely, it is Hester's "capacity to love outside the self, to build her life upon her bonds to others that crucially distinguishes [her] from Dimmesdale" (85). Indeed, for the first half of the novel, it would appear that the narrator praises Hester for her self-reliance and individualism as she attempts to find strength in her isolation to atone for her sin, but it is ultimately her clear mission to do well for the suffering of her fellow women in her community that raises her from perdition.

Dimmesdale finds no such connection with his peers. However, Dimmesdale's inability to connect with his peers is not an indication of failure or impotency. Instead, the solitude he experiences even when he is surrounded by his peers serves more as a comment on the isolating effects of guilt, which is a direct effect of the Puritan theology that has deemed him sinful.[3] Patricia Dunlavy Valenti debases Dimmesdale in an attempt to lift up the character of Hester: Valenti praises Hester and refers to her as "one of the most enduring, iconic figures in American Literature" (33), whereas Dimmesdale is a man whose "impotencies—sexual, emotional, moral, and verbal—infiltrate every area of his life" (24). This comparison sounds rather Freudian and feels unfair, especially when this argument debases Hester as much as it debases Dimmesdale. If Dimmesdale truly was an impotent man, Hester's loyalty to the minister even after her ostracization and his subsequent death would then appear misguided.

The other characters do not appear to see Dimmesdale as a weak, incompetent man; instead, they praise his kind and good-hearted nature. In spite of the narrator and other scholars' deprecation of Dimmesdale's character, there is little textual evidence for Dimmesdale's hypocrisy. Even Chillingworth, who harbours ill will towards Dimmesdale, finds in his patient "high aspirations for the welfare of his race, warm love of souls, pure sentiments, and natural piety, strengthened by thought and study, and illuminated by revelation" (521-522). Both Dimmesdale's own congregation as well as Hester fell in love with this pious and loving man who is also a victim of the same shame and guilt that are projected onto Hester by her peers to uphold the Puritan ideologies. However, David B. Diamond argues that the narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* is, much like the narrator of "The Custom-House": "a complex character [...] whose stance toward the minister vacillates

[3] G. Harrison Orians discusses Hawthorne's interest in "that subtler but more enduring punishment which came from the searing thrusts of remorse and self-accusation" within Puritan culture, "or from a brooding sense of guilt which gripped its victim with a deadly and unrelenting hold" (424).

unpredictably between irony and empathy" (654). The narrator does not share Hester's loyalty to Dimmesdale, and actively "keeps his finger pointed at the minister's hypocrisy [...] and in doing so turns his sympathy, and potentially his reader's, away from his character's profound misery" (Diamond 659). Ultimately, "Arthur Dimmesdale is a man alone in his agony" (659) as the narrator appears to create a rift between the guilt-ridden minister and the reader.

Dimmesdale is made out to be a hypocrite by the narrator, which is a rather loaded portrayal of the devout minister considering he never rejects the Puritan doctrine that he so strongly believes in, even if it is detrimental to his well-being. Regardless of the narrator's veiled attempts to condemn the minister, Hester remains loyal to her former lover. Not only does she attempt to flee the country with him while he still lives, but she also returns to the town at the very end of the novel where she once again "[takes] up her long-forsaken shame" (592) after presumably living a life of comfort and freedom in England for multiple years. Hester is not only loyal to her shame, but also to the crime of passion that placed the scarlet letter on her breast and to the man with whom she shared her passion. In the forest, "the world beyond the grave," the narrator refers to the pair as "two spirits who had been intimately connected in their former life" (554). The two ghosts are spiritually intertwined, and both placed in a gothic liminal state as a result of the socio-political beliefs of their society.

Had Hawthorne created Dimmesdale to be completely indifferent towards Hester's punishment and his own sins, Valenti's characterization of the impotent Dimmesdale would have been accurate. Instead, Dimmesdale suffers just as Hester does in the claustrophobic Puritan town, although his guilt is of a more private nature compared to Hester. While the legacy of the shared crime of passion manifests outwards for Hester in the forms of both Pearl and the scarlet letter on her chest, Dimmesdale is physically burdened by guilt which manifests itself inwards in the form of a spiritual as well as a physical disease. Dimmesdale is first introduced by the narrator as "a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the

pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own" (487), which sets up Dimmesdale's solitude as an inherent part of his nature. Over time, Chillingworth, who effectively serves as the personification of Dimmesdale's guilt and sin, exacerbates the inherent solitude present in the young clergyman by haunting his every waking moment. Chillingworth's constant voyeuristic surveillance of Dimmesdale's pain would put Dimmesdale in a gothic liminal state that is akin to Jonathan Harker's captivity under the watchful eye of Count Dracula. Dimmesdale's physical strength wanes until he is "careworn and emaciated" (513), after which he is diagnosed by Chillingworth with a "disorder," a "sickness," a "bodily disease," or possibly an illness that is "a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part" (525, 528). Thus, religious guilt without repentance manifests itself as a physical illness that ravages the body and isolates its victim from their peers because they are not able to speak of their pain without inviting scrutiny, shame, and ostracization into their lives. As such, Dimmesdale is not a cowardly man, but rather another victim of the same Puritan ancestors that haunt Hester.

Hester is able to escape the gaze of her Puritan ancestors when she leaves for England with her daughter, which marks her exit of what Turner refers to as the second liminal phase in which "the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous" as they pass "through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (359). As she enters the third phase, her "passage is consummated" after which she enters a "relatively stable state once more" (359). Up until Dimmesdale's death, Hester's face is described to look "like a mask or rather, like the frozen calmness of a dead woman's features; owing this dreary resemblance to the fact that Hester was actually dead, in respect to any claim or sympathy, and had departed out of the world with which she still seemed to mingle" (574). As such, Hester's identity remains in flux even outside of the forest until she is able to take her daughter by her hand and lead her away from the community that shunned

her. Dimmesdale, however, is only able to complete the passage out of liminality by dying. At the end of the novel, he is completely out of options, for his untreated illness will soon kill him and Chillingworth has signed up to accompany Dimmesdale and Hester on the ship to England. All he can do is accept his death, and in the religious context of his Puritan worldview, Dimmesdale's final confession is a heroic one. In one final act of both repentance and love, he confesses his sin without naming Hester as a co-conspirator in his crime of passion. Finally, in regards to Dimmesdale's death, Diamond says, "In seeing deeply into his own flawed nature, in facing the inevitability of his fate, and, within the narrowest constraints of time and opportunity, courageously taking the difficult path toward redemption, Dimmesdale achieves the status of tragic hero" (678). Thus, Dimmesdale is only able to become a tragic hero when he is able to step out of the liminal realm by sharing his sin as well as his connection to Hester with the public.

Turner's three phases of liminality can be applied to *The Scarlet Letter* to highlight Hawthorne's conflicting stance on the importance of individuality and self-reliance as well as the cruelty of forced isolation as imposed by their Puritan society. Turner's first phase of liminality, the phase of separation, starts at the scaffold, where Hester enters the liminal realm by becoming unliving without truly dying. The second transitional phase marks Hester as a passenger through the liminal realm during which her defining characteristics become ambiguous, and she is temporarily free from social customs and expectations. Specifically, the forest where she meets with Dimmesdale is where this liminal realm is most tangible, for it is in nature where she finds the freedom to take the scarlet letter off her chest and briefly experience relief from her great burden, which is impossible for her to experience among her peers. Finally, Hester is only able to enter the third phase of reincorporation and consummate her passage by physically leaving the community that shunned her, only to later return with a sense of self that is then so defined that she is able to help other women make the same

transition through the liminal realm. Isolation turns the beautiful Hester into a spectre of the woman she once was, while also allowing her to grow and find purpose in life. For Hawthorne, nothing is black and white, which makes the setting of Puritan America and its strict ideas of morality the perfect place and time to explore the liminal grey world of the in-between. In *The Scarlet Letter*, when one is ostracized from their community by their peers and their ancestors, they have the option of fully succumbing to their new identity of a ghost-like figure, or they can reach outwards and find strength in charity and connections with their loved ones.

2. The Liminal Workplace in Melville's "Bartleby"

Whereas Hester's isolation in *The Scarlet Letter* leads to communal aspirations in the bond she forges with the women of Boston, Bartleby's solitude in Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wallstreet" stagnates his physical body so drastically that it ultimately makes it difficult to distinguish the living Bartleby, who is described as "motionless" (24), from the dead Bartleby. Since Bartleby suffers from solitude while he is surrounded by other people, his character arc is more akin to Dimmesdale's physical deterioration. However, unlike Dimmesdale's story, neither the narrator nor the audience ever learn the possible cause for Bartleby's condition. Instead, the audience is given a subjective retelling of a certain time in Bartleby's life through the "astonished eyes" (17) of his employer. Despite the narrator's description of Bartleby in the opening paragraph as "one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable" (17), Bartleby has been interpreted differently by multiple scholars over the years; he has been referred to as Bartleby the Melancholic by Wright in 1970, Christlike Bartleby by Fiene in 1970, Bartleby the Pessimist by Stempel and Stillians in 1972, Bartleby the Autistic by Sullivan in 1976, and finally as Bartleby the Socratic by Furlani in 1997. Caleb Smith argues that "Bartleby is among the most difficult ambiguities in Herman Melville's fiction, pale and inscrutable as the white whale" (256), and Armin Beverungen and Stephen Dunne note that "[Bartleby's] strangeness is surpassed only by the strangeness of the manner in which he has been interpreted" (173). In this endless subjectivity, it is Bartleby who ultimately holds all the power, for it is Bartleby who "[tests] the assumption that all men are created equally to stand forth their own inexorable selves" (Norman 23). Finally, Gilles Deleuze erases all aforementioned interpretations by arguing that "Bartleby is neither a metaphor for the writer nor the symbol of any thing whatsoever" (68). However, considering that Melville's work as a writer in New York's magazine offices required him to be a highly attentive writer, Deleuze's argument feels rather dismissive of Bartleby's fate. The fact that

Melville never explicitly reveals Bartleby's motivations for his actions does not mean that Bartleby's story is void of any meaning, especially when considering that "Bartleby" is set in New York City where Melville was born, worked for many years, and later passed away. Even Though Bartleby keeps both his employer and the audience at arm's length, we can still perceive that Bartleby is a living being who is likened to a corpse, which, not unlike Hester, forces him in a state of liminality. Bartleby's liminality is then identified by the narrator, who represents authority, as loneliness, which is contagious mental affliction that becomes a source of fear and distrust that justifies the ostracization of the non-conformant. Through Bartleby, Melville is able find the line between the mental solitude that is a necessary component of productivity in the workplace, and the discouragement, scorn, and pity of loneliness that helps uphold an individualistic society. This chapter will demonstrate that Bartleby's workplace actively cultivates solitude, and that Bartleby's liminal state is a direct result of his private life and his work life blending together in the workplace in the name of productivity.

Solitude, as it manifests in Bartleby, is described by the narrator to be more akin to a contagious illness rather than a state of mind. Not only does this portrayal of solitude as a sickness emphasize the struggles of everyman living under the yoke of commercial values, but by portraying solitude as contagious, it also becomes a source of fear and distrust that justifies the ostracization of the non-conformant that ultimately helps to uphold an individualistic society. To illustrate the concept of solitude as an illness, one only has to look at the narrator's plentiful macabre descriptions of Bartleby: "pallidly neat," "incurably forlorn," "sedate," and most notably, "cadaverous" (24, 31). Furthermore, Bartleby's condition is feared to be contagious when the narrator and his employees slowly start to adopt Bartleby's speech pattern:

> "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 [Bartleby] had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? (Melville 37)

This realisation of the narrator having "caught" Bartleby's transmittable language exposes an anxiety in relation to the use of one's vocabulary in the workplace in regards to compliance and productivity. The narrator even shares his anxiety of contamination with his other employers when he says, "So you have got the word too" (37). A moment later, the following exchange takes place:

> "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 would." (...)
> It was plain that it involuntarily rolled from his tongue. I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks. (Melville 38)

So, if an employee's strange unproductive behaviour is popularly believed to be contagious, the employer will feel justified and encouraged to replace the employee in order to ensure that the workplace is healthy and sanitary, which ultimately works to uphold the individualistic society of nineteenth-century America.

However, it is not Bartleby's silence or his specific choice of words that instil dread in

the narrator. Instead, it is Bartleby's complacency in the face of authority that causes great anxiety. Specifically, the narrator airs his grievances and says, "Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance" (28-29). Deleuze notes that in grammatical terms, "the formula, I prefer not to, is neither an affirmation nor a negation," and that Bartleby "simply posits its impossibility" (69). Rather than declining his employer's orders, Bartleby instead embraces nothingness and passivity. In this negative space that exists between refusal and acceptance, the narrator is unable to find fault with Bartleby's words as his employer is not verbally refusing to do his job. If Bartleby said no, it would be easy for his employer to judge him as useless, and, as Deleuze says, Bartleby "would not survive" (70). The "vacuum" (Deleuze 70) that Bartleby creates in his language ensures that he is not seen as either a rebel or a freeloader. Instead, Bartleby's continued survival is a result of the liminality that exists in the "I would prefer not to" phrase that allows him to keep his employer at a distance by not committing to absolutes.

As a result of Bartleby's apparent sickness, the narrator takes on the role of the healer, which is where his narration becomes unreliable. By taking the role of a healer, the narrator consequently forces the role of the patient, and thus the role of the victim, onto Bartleby. Indeed, the narrator explicitly says that his compassion towards Bartleby stems "from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill," and that Bartleby is "the victim of [an] innate and incurable disorder" (35). In his description of Bartleby's sickness, the narrator invokes the language of the sentimental fiction that was so popular in the nineteenth-century. With this sentimental language, the narrator portrays himself as a bastion of innate moral goodness and benevolence that makes him want to help the poor suffering Bartleby despite his refusal to work. However, since the audience nor the narrator are ever given any concrete facts that could be the cause of Bartleby's disposition, it is important to keep in mind that the narrator's portrayal of Bartleby is wholly subjective. Possibly, Bartleby might well be

a perpetrator of a terrible crime, and his apathy could originate from a repression of guilt. As such, when the narrator says, "I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered," (35), the reader receives insight into the narrator's stance on solitude and loneliness rather than a diagnosis of Bartleby's condition. Solitude, then, is seen by the narrator, who is a self-proclaimed earnest man, as an incurable disorder of the soul that hinders productivity in the workplace.

However, in spite of the narrator's diagnosis of Bartleby's condition, his treatment of Bartleby is never unreasonable. The narrator is not a man possessing either an exceptionally empathetic heart or an unjust and cruel mindset. Instead, the narrator is "a representative for commonality" (Norman 25). The narrator is, in his own words, a "safe man" who is known for his "prudence" as well as his "method" (18). In his introduction, the narrator mentions that John Jacob Astor has "a name which, I admit, I love to repeat; for it hath a rounded orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion" (18). Norman notes that the invocation of Astor, a notable nineteenth-century business pioneer and individualist, shows that Melville is not afraid of gently mocking the narrator for having strong commercial values (25). The narrator's own introduction establishes him as a man who is practical, and not particularly gifted with strong morals. Thus, his commercial values and his position as a figure of authority distinctly colours both his perception and his description of Bartleby.

The authoritative and commercial lens through which the narrator views Bartleby also changes the narrator's behaviour towards Bartleby, which is where Turner's concept of liminality comes into play. Since Bartleby ends up both sleeping and working in the office, the narrator assumes he has the right to rifle through Bartleby's private belongings when Bartleby is not present. In the workplace, Bartleby's belongings are his employers belongings. Similarly, the workplace, where he also spends his nights, becomes a liminal space where the concept of home and the self lose all meaning. The concept of the private self is reconstructed

and is lost in the identity of that of an employee, and vice versa. For Bartleby, work and home become one, and when the distinction dissolves he is neither at home or at work in the workplace.

Specifically, Turner's theory on the structured separation from society through the three stages of liminality can be applied to Bartleby's integration into the narrator's Wall Street office. The first phase of symbolic separation is Bartleby's job interview, during which the narrator considers him to be the perfect man for the job because he is "a man of so singularly sedate an aspect" (24). Bartleby's carries himself with a placid and quiet air even before he accepts the job, and thus, Bartleby's slow decline and eventual demise can be attributed to the unending liminality of his life as a scrivener strengthening the solitude that was already present within him.

Following the first phase of symbolic separation, the second intervening phase of ambiguity is enforced by the narrator when Bartleby physically moves into the office. In the office, Bartleby's workstation is located in the same room as the narrator's. Then, the narrator continues to explain, "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" (24). The identity of the self enters a state of flux when the boundaries between Bartleby's private life and his life at work are blurred to stimulate productivity.

The narrator's description of the office and by extension, the workplace as a broader concept, add to the transitional and near-gothic of Bartleby's work conditions. For example, the window by Bartleby's desk "[affords] 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" (24). The room by the narrator's desk offers a view of "the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft," which is described by the narrator as "a

view [that] might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (18). Apparently, the lifeless and unimaginative views from both the windows of his own and his employees' offices do not bother the narrator. The descriptions of the brick wall and the blankness of a skylight shaft highlight the lack of a connection to nature in "Bartleby" as opposed to the forest that serves as a liminal space in *The Scarlet Letter*. The narrator's disregard for a connection with "what landscape painters call *life*" is made more apparent when he contrasts Bartleby's work with the work of a Romantic poet: "I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet Byron would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say five hundred pages, closely written in a crimpy hand" (25). Clearly, art and nature have no place in the work environment, which only serves to strengthen the liminality by removing the workplace from "life."

Finally, in what Turner refers to as the third phase of reincorporation, the rite of passage is consummated and the individual returns to a stable state. However, Bartleby is unable to reach this third phase since there is no 'old life' to return to. Bartleby is completely out of options; his private life is consumed by his work, and his constant refusal or inability to complete the work that he was hired to do would get him fired at every other subsequent job. The narrator even offers to help Bartleby find a new place to live, but Bartleby does not accept this helping hand. Much like Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, Bartleby is unwilling or perhaps unable to escape his liminality by forging personal relationships that anchor him to the stable world. Even in his death, he never reaches Turner's third phase of liminality. Bartleby was already depicted as a corpse before he passed away, which means there is no distinct finishing line to cross that would mark the end of his life and offer him a stable identity in death. Ultimately, this means that Bartleby is unable discard his liminal quality for he was already dead in life.

Added to the Bartleby's liminal quality are his peculiar colleagues whose energetic

and theatrical behaviours are contrasted with Bartleby's passivity. Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut are eclectic character named after their frequent odd behaviours. However, the narrator, in spite of his judgemental tendencies, ultimately does not mind the eccentric behaviours of his employees. Their behaviours follow a schedule; the narrator knows when to expect the ebb and flow of their energetic eccentricities: "In the morning, one might say, [Turkey's] face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o'clock, meridian – his dinner hour – it blazed like a grate full of Christmas coals; and continued blazing – but, as it were, with a gradual wane – till 6 o'clock, [...] after which I saw no more of the proprietor of the face, which gaining at its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory" (19). Later, when describing Nippers, the narrator says, "It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause – indigestion – the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards" (23). This emphasized regularity adds to the liminal state of the workplace; even the absurd behaviours of Bartleby's colleagues follow a set daily pattern that blends the workdays together into an uneventful, expected, and mind-numbing routine. In spite of their "eccentricities," Bartleby's colleagues conform to the routine of the office and live up to the expectations of the narrator that dovetail with what Thomas Carlyle lamented about modern working life: "Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand" ("Sign of the Times").

Furthermore, Bartleby has no nickname compared to his colleagues, whose real names are never disclosed. Not even the narrator shares his own name with the reader. However, Bartleby is simply referred to as Bartleby. Having Bartleby as the only character with a real name instead of a nickname strengthens the liminal quality of the workplace since it means

that Bartleby is the outcast. He is surrounded by nameless characters who are theatrically eccentric to the point where critics have thought them too absurd and too much like caricatures (Norman 27), which gives the impression that Bartleby is on a stage surrounded by actors while he is the only one who was not assigned a role. While his colleagues and his employer embrace the theatrics of everyday life, Bartleby either refuses to or is unable to be a part of the play. The only "nickname" given to Bartleby can be found in the title of this work: "Bartleby, the Scrivener," which further drives home the notion that all that Bartleby is, is a scrivener, and that the rest of his identity has been lost in his acclimatisation into the workplace. Bartleby is his function in the workplace, like a mechanic in a garage. Thus, the nicknames and absurd behaviours of his colleagues work to offset Bartleby, whose only nickname is his job description, against the colourful canvas of life that is humanity. Bartleby as a scrivener is unliving.

We learn at the end of the short story that Bartleby worked in a dead letter office. Dead letters, which are letters that for whatever reason cannot be delivered, represent failed communication. In these letters, a feeling of liminality exists. When a message, whether written or spoken, is uttered but not delivered, it dies. Whereas an unheard spoken word disappears completely, a written word's "corpse" continues to exist. The narrator even remarks, "Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?" (54). Thus, Bartleby effectively served as the funeral director of failed human communications. A fast-paced society generates piles of such literary corpses, and it is not surprising that Bartleby's mental state could have been affected by the never-ending piles of dead letters. Of course, this is speculation, since we have no idea what the true cause for Bartleby's behaviour was, but Melville's inclusion of this insight into Bartleby's past at the closing of his short story and of Bartleby's life is not a coincidence. Bartleby's past work in a dead letter office tells us is that missed connections are a tragic by-product of a fast-paced modernized society, and that there are men tasked with the

burden of disposing of the corpses of relationships that were never realised.

Both Bartleby's previous work at the dead letter office and his death in the Tombs of New York City death create a stark contrast with the idealised image of the nineteenth-century American business pioneers in the east like the Astor, Roosevelt, Forbes, and Rockefeller families. Bartleby dies in a place referred to as "the Tombs," which the narrator refers to as "the Halls of Justice" (50). Caleb Smith notes that in New York City's Tombs, the solitary cells were home to one small chink located high on one of the walls. He goes on to explain that in Pennsylvania's Eastern State Penitentiary, which was designed by John Haviland, the same architect who designed the Tombs, the small high window found in every solitary cell was referred to as an "eye of God" (258). In the story, Bartleby's office space is home to one window, which is referred to as a "light [coming] down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome" (24). As such, there is a link between the Tombs and the workplace. Then, considering that Bartleby's private life and work life have melded together, it is at his metaphorical workplace where he finally passes away.

The subtitle, "A Story of Wall-Street," implies that this narrative is not about Bartleby as much as it is about a location. This location is one great liminal space that is the working environment. To close out the short story, the narrator exclaims, "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (54), which once again diverts the reader's attention to the greater picture instead of the single entity that was Bartleby. This diversion from the individual to humanity at large also frees the narrator from guilt, for it implies that there is nothing he could possibly have done to save his employee. Through Bartleby, Melville tests the strength and durability of the mercantile individualism that was pioneered by men like John Jacob Astor. Melville does not exert pressure on this individualism with sheer physical force, but with the weight of a passive, motionless body. People pass Bartleby's cadaver and are not sure how to interact

with him since he makes it apparent, in the most polite of tones, that he prefers not to move. Bartleby is not claimed by humanity, and instead he is locked away and forgotten with the exception of a lawyer with an inexplicable longing to understand the mystery surrounding his respective white whale. Bartleby's solitude and loneliness evoke pity from humanity, yet humanity is not willing to claim those concepts as its own.

3. Respite from the Railroad in Thoreau's *Walden*

Walden is Thoreau's critical response to what he refers to as the "restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century" (1153) and its upcoming technological advances. Famously, Thoreau writes, "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate" (1008). The construction of the country-spanning railroad and the modern mail system are of great concern to Thoreau, especially when he sees these technological advances being worshipped as if they are a new modern god of productivity. *Walden* was published before "Bartleby," and yet it inadvertently feels like Thoreau was already trying to find a possible solution to Bartleby's future unliving condition. Solitude appears to be Thoreau's answer to modernity, but his relationship with solitude is a complicated one. During Thoreau's residence at Walden Pond between 1845 and 1847, he admits to feeling "a slight insanity" (1050) in his mood whenever he spent too much time away from his peers. To counteract this feeling, he still read the newspaper, borrowed tools and building materials, welcomed visitors, and would visit Concord on a regular basis to have dinner with friends (1002). As such, Thoreau never experiences the same isolation as Hester, Dimmesdale, and Bartleby that keeps them suspended in a spectral state of liminality. Instead, Thoreau creates a more positive space of liminality that exists in between complete isolation and modernized connectivity in which there is room for spirituality and introspection that he would otherwise be unable to engage with.

The aforementioned railroad serves as *Walden*'s antagonist as well as the object of Thoreau's fascination, which helps to blur the line between Thoreau's isolation and connection to the town of Concord. Even in his cabin in Walden, Thoreau cannot escape the sound of the railroad thundering by, which enforces the feeling of inevitability of modern technology slowly creeping its way into American life. When Thoreau speaks about the sound

of the railroad penetrating through the forest, which foreshadows the current-day problem of noise pollution, he writes, “So is your pastoral life whirled past and away. [...] I will not have my eyes put out and my ears spoiled by its smoke and steam hissing” (1045). The railroad is a threatening presence that looms over Walden Pond and regularly disrupts Thoreau’s immersion in nature. However, in the chapter titled “Sounds,” Thoreau likens to the whistle of the locomotive to “the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer’s yard” and the “rattle of the railroad cars” to “the beat of a partridge” (1041). Both the hawk and the partridge are Walden’s natural residents and have lived in the forest long before Thoreau was born. By likening the sound of the railroad to the inhabitants of the forest, Thoreau blurs the lines between nature and modernity. Conversely, the railroad, which is “the epitome of modern technology” (Furui 334), is one of the reasons that makes Thoreau retreat into the woods in search for solitude. Thus, Thoreau’s relationship with modernity is complex. While he seeks temporary refuge from modernity, he also realises that its encroachment into his life is inevitable, which is a process that fascinates him.

This slightly grim fascination with the railroad helps Thoreau to drive home the idea that his peers revere the acquisition of material goods and technological advances as if they are a new modern religion.[4] As Thoreau discusses the railroad, he says, “when I hear the iron horse make the hills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils, (what kind of winged horse or fiery dragon they

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[4] Here Thoreau can be said to follow Thomas Carlyle’s critique of nineteenth-century technological progress: “On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. The sailor furls his sail, and lays … down his oar; and bids a strong, unwearied servant, on vaporous wings, bear him through the waters. Men have crossed oceans by steam; the Birmingham Fire-king has visited the fabulous East; and the genius of the Cape were there any Camoens now to sing it, has again been alarmed, and with far stranger thunders than Gamas. There is no end to machinery. Even the horse is stripped of his harness, and finds a fleet fire-horse invoked in his stead. Nay, we have an artist that hatches chickens by steam; the very brood-hen is to be superseded! For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highways; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils” (“Sign of the Times”).

will put into the new Mythology I don't know,) it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it" (1042). Furthermore, Thoreau notes, "We worship not the Graces, nor the Parcae, but Fashion. She spins and weaves and cuts with full authority" (993), and finally, he writes, "We now no longer camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven. We have adopted Christianity merely as an improved method of agri-culture" (1000). According to Thoreau, the railroad, garments, and the cultivation of the land have all become modern substitutes for Christianity. In a society that worships material possessions, physical labour for the sake of profit, and the technological advances, Thoreau attempts to find a religious experience in nature.

Walden becomes a Romantic piece of writing when Thoreau describes Walden Pond as a place of worship that is located in between heaven and earth, which once again helps him to create a liminal dimension. After his previously mentioned statement about Fashion being an object of worship, Thoreau says, "Adam and Eve, according to a fable, wore the bower before other clothes" (994). This bower can only have been located within Eden, which is then alluded to be similar to Walden, for Thoreau is attempting to live a simpler life outside the jurisdiction of the new modern gods of Fashion and the locomotive. Thoreau even notes that "on that spring morning when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden Walden Pond was already in existence" (1075). As such, Walden Pond becomes a paradise on earth where he is able to live a simple life without the incessant voice of modernity ushering him to keep up with his peers. This simplicity in nature offers Thoreau a cleansing purity:

> Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. (Thoreau 1027)

In Walden Pond, every early morning starts with a Baptism and a spiritual rebirth, and every new day offers a new beginning instead of a continuation of the endless Sisyphean journey down the track of the railroad. In one of the poems included in *Walden*, Thoreau writes, “I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven / Than I live to Walden even” (1082). So, while Thoreau is not committed to Christianity, his use of Christian imagery elevates Walden Pond above earthly troubles so that it creates a liminal realm in between earth and heaven.

Following the creation of this liminal space in between earth and heaven, Thoreau enforces this analogy of Walden Pond being similar to the garden of Eden to awaken the reader to the beauty of nature. However, to witness this beauty, the reader must awaken from the perpetual state of restlessness, anxiety, and sleep-depravation in which the busy Nineteenth-century man floats adrift. In what almost feels like a scolding of his peers, Thoreau says the following:

> Nature has no human inhabitant who appreciates her. The birds with their plumage and their notes are in harmony with the flowers, but what youth or maiden conspires with the wild luxuriant beauty of Nature? She flourishes most alone, far from the towns where they reside. Talk of heaven! ye disgrace earth. (1085)

Similarly, Thoreau says that “Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads” (1127). While not actively advocating for his readers to adhere to the Christian doctrine, Thoreau does try “to wake [his] neighbours up” (981) from a slumber that numbs them to the heavenly qualities of the very ground beneath their feet. Today, two hundred years after Thoreau was born, individuals who are critical of the modern global free-market such as Jonathan Crary diagnose a permanent state of sleep-deprivation as induced by modern-day technology as a symptom of late-stage capitalism (15). It appears that Thoreau was conscious of technology’s negative effects on sleep, especially when he speaks of the sound of the railroad thundering through his secluded earthly paradise. Benjamin Reiss argues that

> while Thoreau idealizes a higher form of wakefulness in terms that reject the incursions of modernity into consciousness, his attitude toward unconsciousness bespeaks a faith in the human ability to control the relationships among the environment, the body, and the mind—a faith that made sleep, like madness and sexuality, the target of medical and moral control. (Reiss 7)

Reiss' argument supports this thesis' overall point that Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau believed that privacy and solitude are regulated by the state in the name of uniformity and productivity.

As discussed in the first chapter, Bartleby is also a victim of these incursions of modernity into the consciousness and a victim of the moral control of sleep that Reiss speaks of. Bartleby ends up sleeping in his own office, where the identity of an employer erases his identity outside of work. As such, Thoreau urges the reader to wake up and become conscious of the many ways in which modernity disrupts our rest and of the heavenly quality of the earth that is already beneath our feet; if one lives to work, they can no longer live outside of work.

At the beginning of the first chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau addresses the reader, who he refers to as those "who are said to live in New England" (981). With this specific choice of words, "said to live," Thoreau appears to call into question the wakefulness of his readers. His readers may reside in new England, but if they live in the same country as he does, enduring the same effects of modernization he does, they, according to Thoreau, might not be considered to be truly living. To avoid this same fate, the only option appears to be taking in both modernity and isolation in moderation. Shannon Lee Mariotti refers to Thoreau "as an itinerant border dweller" who "took on a voluntary status of displacement; he tried to make himself a traveler within the territory of his own hometown" (147-148). The contradictory liminality in Mariotti's description establishes Thoreau to be an outcast who did not truly belong in either his hometown or the world surrounding it. Rather, he is a wanderer, or a

pilgrim who does not want to be confined in one location.

This image of Thoreau as a wanderer is enforced when he notes that when people build “a family mansion,” they also build “a family tomb,” and when he says that “taste for the beautiful is most cultivated out of doors, where there is no house and no housekeeper” (1000). Furthermore, he notes that any property, both mansions and farms, are an encumbrance that “sometimes outweigh the value of the farm, so that the farm itself becomes one great encumbrance” (997). As such, Thoreau wishes to escape the sins of the forefathers that are placed upon the children in the form of ownership of physical locations. He says it is better to “live free and uncommitted,” for “it makes but little difference whether you are committed to a farm or the county jail” (1025). Emerson, who was a friend of Thoreau’s as well as the owner of the land that Thoreau lived on in his solitude, said that “the reliance on Property, including the reliance on the governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance” (285), and Thoreau puts this idea into practice. Isolation and homelessness are not the solution to the onset of modern technological developments that intrude upon our lives, but being fully conscious of the power that property and modernity have over our lives, combined with a deep respect and admiration for nature, is what Thoreau believes will awaken his reader.

As a result of freeing himself from the inherited burden of homeownership by building a new home with his own hands, Thoreau becomes more conscious of the effects of the seasons on the human psyche. By continuously making the reader aware of the effect that the endless cycle of the seasons had on his stay in Walden, or rather, by letting time be overshadowed by the passing of the seasons and the rising and setting of the sun, Thoreau is able to stress the deep pattern in human life of continuous rebirth and reawakening that is lost on people who embrace modernity. Thoreau first ventures into the woods by Walden Pond in March, and the penultimate chapter of Walden is called “Spring.” Thus, he lives through a full

cycle of the seasons, and notably returns to civilized life again in the season that is associated with rebirth. Ecstatic to see nature in bloom again after having lived through the winter in his cabin, Thoreau cries out, “The first sparrow of spring! The year beginning with younger hope than ever!” (1142). A little later, he notices “the contrast between winter and spring” and observes, “Walden was dead and is alive again” (1143). This sentiment further extends to humanity when Thoreau reflects on the persevering strength of human life: “So our human life but dies down to its roots, and still puts forth its green blade to eternity” (1143). Much like nature, humans possess the ability to rise again after a cold night.

While living in the bustling streets of New York City, Bartleby would have been unable to witness the effects of the cyclical transformation from winter to spring on nature. In a city, the weather merely changes, and to Bartleby, the difference between a snowy or a sunny day would only have been apparent in the thickness of the coats of his fellow pedestrians on his way to work. While Bartleby spends his nights at his workplace, the effects of the seasons are completely unfelt and thus eliminated as long as he remains in that building and out of touch with nature. Paradoxically, Mark Ford argues that by fully immersing himself in nature, the course of Thoreau’s life is fully at the mercy of the seasons, which is remarkably similar to living at the mercy of the railroad:

> American myth that stipulates one can only achieve selfhood by immersion in the wilderness, he continually blurs both this narrative and its familiar implications. By allowing the book’s structure to be determined by the seasons, Thoreau seems to abdicate responsibility to forces beyond him, eliding the active into the passive. (208)

Thus, according to Ford, if Thoreau should fully devote himself to live under the reign of the seasons in his isolation, he would find the course of his life governed by a powerful force that is similar to the tracks of the railroad that propel its passengers forward towards its predetermined destination. When discussing the railroad, Thoreau notes, “The air is full of

invisible bolts. Every path but your own is the path of fate. Keep on your own track, then" (1043). So, to walk his own path on his own volition without guidance from forces beyond him, Thoreau comes to the conclusion that he should not live a life that completely removes the presence of the seasons from his life. To illustrate this, Thoreau says, "While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me" (1049-50). It is not the full commitment to living in tune with the nature's cyclical rebirth, which Ford says to be a passive approach rather than an active one, but rather the friendship of the seasons that Thoreau is convinced will awaken his fellow Americans to partake in "the everlasting vigor and fertility of the world" (1027).

Thoreau recognizes that in order to forge a friendship with the seasons, he must welcome solitude in his life. However, he also recognizes that solitude is ingrained in his society, and that a prolonged feeling of solitude can lead to loneliness if the positive aspects of solitude are not recognized. Clearly, Thoreau believes in the freedom of solitude, for he, in a rather humorous passage, reveals that he first took up his abode in the woods "on Independence day, or the fourth of July, 1845" (1025). However, he also believes that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (984), and that "we are for the most part more lonely than when we go abroad among men that when we stay in our chambers" (1052). Thus, he escapes the solitude of modernity only to be submerged in the solitude of nature. Thoreau professes he has "never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (1052), while at the same time admitting to the loneliness that is inherent to the human experience. Christopher R. Long and James R. Averill observe the following in regards to Thoreau's sojourn in Walden:

> That is, highlighting the essentially social character of positive solitude, loneliness can be kept at bay as long as we are aware in some way that we have meaningful connections to other people. If we become so habitually withdrawn into solitude that

> our relationships become severed or strained, then we must confront anxiety and alienation. (28)

Long and Averill's argument highlights Thoreau's conflicted feelings towards solitude. In Thoreau's eyes, habitual overindulgence of solitude appears to be just as dangerous as a complete lack of solitude. Ultimately, Thoreau is hesitant to commit to one theory or ideal because he is aware that an overindulgence in solitude is a dangerous practice that can result in catching "a well nigh incurable form of disease" (985). Notably, depictions of solitude as a disease have been discussed in the previous chapters and hint at a wide-spread belief in the 1850s that loneliness would physically decay the body and the mind.

Turner's theory of liminality is easily applied to *Walden*, for Thoreau plans out his journey through the liminal realm with great care. As such, the three phases of liminality are easily identified. For Thoreau, the first phase of separation symbolically starts on Independence day, which marks his detachment and most importantly his freedom from social norms and customs. During the second phase, Thoreau is not so much a passenger through the liminal realm as much as he is a wanderer, taking in the sounds and the sights on his voluntary trip into the liminal world of solitude. He finally reaches the third phase when he returns to Concord, where he fully reincorporates into his community. Where Hester and Bartleby are forced to take on a more passive role while traversing the liminal realm since other parties force them into their spectral state, Thoreau actively creates his own world in between worlds. Since isolation was not forced upon him, his identity and his physical health remained largely stable, which further helped him to highlight the positives and to objectively judge the negatives of partially removing himself from society.

Much like his friend Hawthorne, Thoreau is ambiguous and non-committal when discussing the benefits as well as the downsides of the effects of solitude on the human mind. Clearly, the life of a hermit would not have suited Thoreau, for he admits to feeling his

loneliness setting him on the path of insanity. However, he also believes that same road to insanity can be paved by total immersion in modernity. When living under the regime of either the natural progression of the seasons or the railroad, Thoreau believes that there is the possibility to become an unliving machine stuck in the same routine and controlled by forces beyond him. In his experiment at Walden, Thoreau creates a space of liminality that exists in between complete isolation and modernized connectivity in which there is room for spirituality and introspection that he would otherwise be unable to engage with. However, Thoreau does not offer a clear-cut solution to this problem of modern solitude, for he says, "I would not have any one adopt *my* mode of living on any account" (1018). To thrive in the solitude that has become such an integral part of an increasingly modernized society, Thoreau advises the reader to lay down their own railroad tracks instead of walking in the footsteps of their fellow man or their ancestors who burdened them with the inheritance of a family tomb.

Conclusion

Three previous chapters examined Hawthorne's, Melville's and Thoreau's philosophical explorations and the psychological and social ramifications of solitude through the critical lens of Victor Turner's theory of liminality. Turner divides the process of traversing through a liminal realm into three phases. The first phase is one of separation that detaches an individual or a group the social structure, from cultural norms, or from both. The second, transitional phase has the passenger travel through liminal realm during which their defining characteristics become ambiguous and malleable. Finally, during the third phase of reincorporation, the passenger's identity becomes stable once more, which means that the subject is once again expected to adhere to customary norms and expectations.

The first chapter examined the liminality that is forcefully imposed on both Hester and Dimmesdale in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. On the one hand, their liminal realm is one that grants temporary shelter from Puritan ideologies, while on the other hand, their spectral ancestors gaze down on them with accusatory eyes. Indeed, the liminal realm of *The Scarlet Letter* is one where the past and the present blend together, and where both freedom and captivity coexist. Even though Hester is forced to inhabit this contradictory space in between the world of nature and society, it also offers her sanctuary from her great sin of passion. Thus, for Hester, solitude is a double-edged sword. Her isolation nurtures her just as much as it confines her. Ultimately, it is not through sheer self-reliance, but by forging connections with women who share her experience that she is able to finally complete her passage through the liminal realm. Dimmesdale, on the other hand, is unable to leave that same liminal realm alive. Unlike Hester, his solitude and his liminality manifest when he is surrounded by people, which forces him to wear a metaphorical mask among his peers to hide his pain. Only Chillingworth, the gothic villain, is able to treat Dimmesdale's sickness of the soul because the doctor is familiar with the liminal; he has stepped out of society and aligned himself with

the Native Americans, thereby also embracing liminality. Chillingworth never manages to complete his passage through the world in between worlds because he does not forge meaningful personal relationships with the people around him that could anchor him to the stable world. Dimmesdale, however, confesses to his community that he has committed a grave sin, which once more ties him to the world of the living and allows him to step out of the liminal realm. Even if he is met with death shortly after, this earnest connection with his peers saves him from becoming a vengeful spectre of the past. While Dimmesdale's death offers him the stability that marks his passage into Turner's third phase of liminality, it is still a tragic loss of a human life. In *The Scarlet Letter*, only genuine charitable intentions and an earnest connection with the community will allow the passenger to complete their journey through the realm of liminality and let them come to terms with their solitude.

In the second chapter, Bartleby's liminal space is revealed to be the workplace. During his nights spent at work, his private identity and his identity as an employer meld together until ultimately both selves seize to exist. For Bartleby, solitude is not so much a direct punishment, but more so the result of his lack of productivity in a society in which he has to be productive to survive. So, Bartleby is not truly punished for his non-conformity; instead, he is left behind. The narrator judges Bartleby to be a person suffering from a disease named loneliness that decays his body to the point where he is constantly referred to as a walking corpse. In the end, the people around Bartleby are not able to carry the weight of his motionless body because their hands are occupied with keeping themselves afloat in an individualistic society that values productivity more than it values human life. Thus, in Melville's story, Bartleby's cadaverous state is perceived the be a result of loneliness, and the revelation of his previous job at a dead letter office suggests that this loneliness is a by-product of technological advances such as the nation-wide postal system.

The third chapter discussed Thoreau's complicated relationship with modernity in

Walden. Thoreau voluntarily enters a state of liminality with the purpose of seeking respite from the onset of a capitalistic society and its technological advances. Thoreau's liminal realm is located in the woods by Walden Pond where he is not completely removed from society, but rather in between the two worlds of nature and civilization. In this grey area at the fringes of society, Thoreau portrays solitude as a companion rather than a disease. However, he is aware of the harmful effects that an overabundance of solitude can have on his mind. Similarly, Thoreau believes that an overabundance of material goods and a desire to make profit that goes above self-sufficiency will also be detrimental to the human mind. So, in an attempt to balance the two opposing forces that push and pull at humanity, he urges the reader to walk their own path instead of following the tracks of the railroad. In *Walden,* Thoreau's passage through his self-made temporal liminal realm is more akin to a pilgrimage than it is to a search for the exit in a labyrinth. Indeed, he knows his stay in Walden is temporary, and he enters the liminal realm in search of an expanded meaning of the self, nature, and religion. By voluntarily engaging with the liminal realm that was conversely imposed upon Hester and Bartleby, Thoreau is able to welcome solitude into his life at his own terms and conclude that it is a necessary component for survival in nineteenth-century America.

The three writers each conclude that solitude is an undeniable component of what makes up the America of the 1850s for which the groundwork was laid by the first generations of Puritan settlers. The first Europeans to cross the sea and set foot on the shores of their Promised Land attempted to escape reign of the Church of England. As such, the passengers of the Mayflower were non-conforming themselves, and differed from their contemporaries. Ironically, after arriving on a new land that promised freedom, the first settlers were quick to build penitentiaries. Hawthorne point this out in *The Scarlet Letter* as well as Hester stands on the old scaffold that was, and in Hester's case still is, used to uphold the Puritan utopia. Even though Hester's ancestors were non-conforming themselves and left

their own country to find freedom on new land, they punish their own non-conforming children by excluding them from society. Thus, the story of Hester's isolation implies that enforcing isolation on the non-conforming as a punishment appears to be an inherent cruelty of mankind.

This theme of isolation as a fundamental building block of America continues in "Bartleby," where the workplace actively stimulates the cultivation of solitude in its employees to stimulate productivity. The ideology of domesticity comes into play here, as the narrator clearly subscribes to this ideology, keeping work and home rigidly separated. But for most "workers" in this period work at home. Cottages were built to house factory workers, and office clerks lived in rooms in tenement buildings in the city. Only the business owners, and those higher up the ladder, could afford to live in the suburbs away from the workplace. Even though "Bartleby" is set in nineteenth-century New York City and *The Scarlet Letter* in Puritan Boston, the theme of isolation as a foundation for American society is present in both texts.

Hawthorne and Melville are more literary in their creations of symbolic expressions of isolation, whereas Thoreau is more sociological in the sense that he is conducting an experiment and physically isolating himself instead of creating a literary narrative to convey his ideas. Compared to the other two antebellum writers, Thoreau is also more engaged with mankind's connection with nature as a nourishment for the soul. He calls for a companionable relationship with nature, which functions as the onset of the philosophy of ecological stewardship that would become popular years after Thoreau's death.

To conclude, this thesis illustrated that Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau neither condemned isolation and solitude nor praised it. The liminal realms they created in their respective writings are spaces in which they are able to comment on the societal conditions that enforce isolation on the non-conformant, while at the same time illustrating that time

spent on the fringes of civilization can be enlightening. These ambiguous and contradictory spaces function as a prison while at the same time offering shelter from civilization.

If we as modern-day readers can learn anything from these three texts then it is the fact nineteenth-century Americans also struggled with isolation before any of us were born, especially in the face of nation-wide changes as a result of rapid economic and technological growth, and growing racial tensions that led to great civil unrest. Whether this is comforting or upsetting depends on the reader, which is an ambiguity that the three discussed writers would have appreciated. As we deal with the effects of isolation during a global pandemic, Hester would advise us to be charitable to the members of our community who need it most. Bartleby would probably tell us to politely decline invitations to online meetings, while Thoreau, perhaps most importantly, would have asked us to spend time in our backyards to become more aware of the cyclical nature of life on earth. “To be awake is to be alive,” (1028) Thoreau concludes in *Walden*, and as long as we remember that every day offers a new dawn, we will continue to live.

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