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**HERMAN
MELVILLE**

BILLY BUDD



AND
The Encantadas



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Introduction by Neil H. Fisher

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

BILLY BUDD

AND

The Encantadas,

HERMAN MELVILLE

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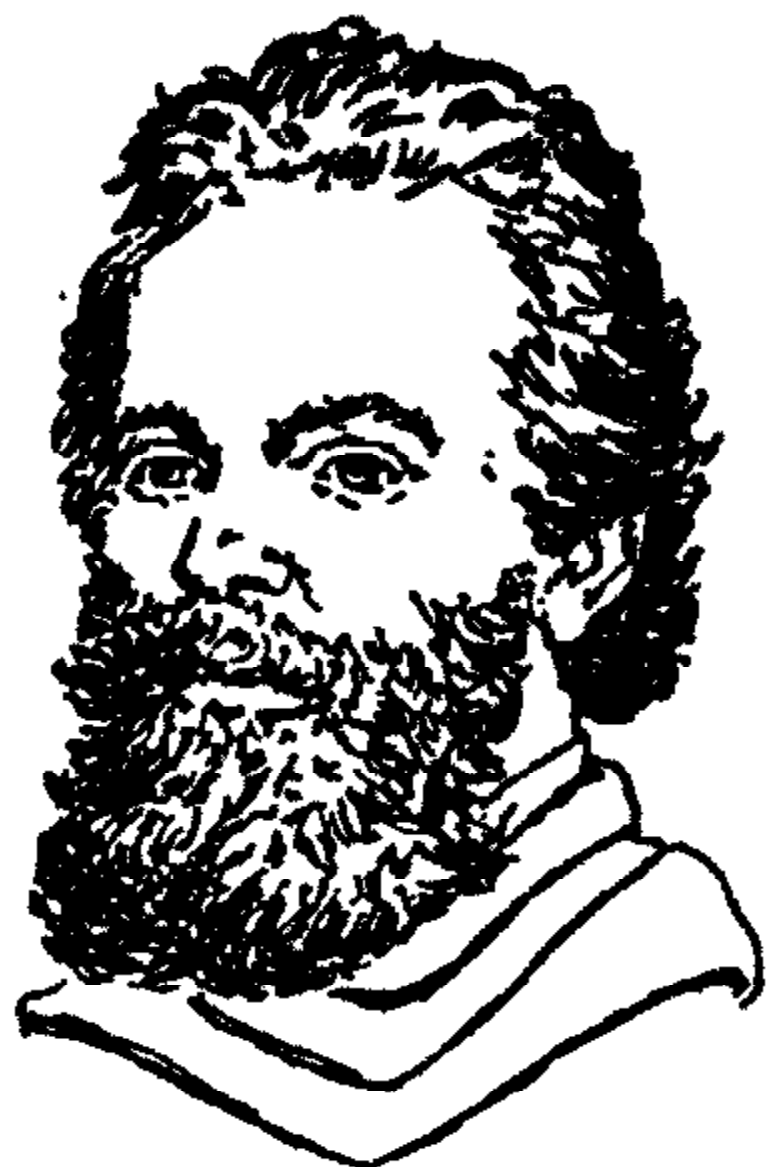
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ISBN: 0-8049-0116-3 BILLY BUDD AND THE ENCANTADAS

BUDD

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The Encantadas



HERMAN MELVILLE

INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHOR

Herman Melville was born on August 1, 1819. His father, Allan Melville, was a prosperous importer. The man's bankruptcy in 1830, followed by his death in 1832, left Herman and seven other children to be cared for by their mother. The young Herman gave up formal schooling two years later and during the next five years tried teaching, clerking, and farming.

In 1839, the youth abandoned teaching in favor of the sea. He shipped on a Liverpool trader—a voyage which he was to romanticize ten years later in *Redburn, His First Voyage*.

On January 3, 1841, Melville joined the crew of the whaler *Acushnet*. He was away for nearly four years and the adventures experienced formed the basis of five books. After eighteen months, Melville and a friend deserted ship in the Marquesas Islands. Melville's four-week stay among the hospitable, though cannibalistic, Taipis became his famous four-month captivity in *Typee*.

(1846). Melville escaped on an Australian whaler to Tahiti, where he took part in the rather humorous mutiny and various beachcombing escapades recorded in *Omoo* (1847). Another whaler brought him to Honolulu. There, on August 17, 1843, he joined the American navy, signing on the frigate *United States*, the ship which brought him home on October 14, 1844, and the ship which became the *Neversink* of his book *White-Jacket*.

Melville then turned to writing. His works were a product of his experiences, his imagination, and his research. In 1846, *Typee, a Peep at Polonesian Life* was published jointly in London and New York. The well-told adventures and the fine descriptions of life among the cannibals brought Melville considerable popularity. He continued his success with *Omoo*, further South-Sea adventures told with considerable humor.

On the success of these two works, Herman Melville married Elizabeth Shaw, daughter of the chief justice of Massachusetts, in August, 1847. The couple settled in New York where Melville became a part of an active literary circle, read widely, and expanded his intellectual horizons.

As a result, Melville's next work, *Mardi*, while still set in the South Seas, was satirical and allegorical. It served as a release for Melville but it was not well received.

Melville returned to what the public wanted with *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850). The latter gained considerable sympathy for the common seaman in protest against brutal and unreasonable discipline.

In 1850, after a three-month visit to England, the Melvilles moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts. There, while immersed in the creation of *Moby Dick*, Melville came under the direct influence of an author he admired greatly, Nathaniel Hawthorne. The symbolic treatment of the problem of evil in *Moby Dick* shows indebtedness to Hawthorne.

Moby Dick is a masterpiece. The unforgettable Captain Ahab, the awesome white whale, the symbolic and symphonic style, and the powerful narrative have earned for it a unique place in American literature. Yet *Moby Dick* was not well received in 1851. The author's concern with the presence of evil was not akin to the general optimism of the day, and his symbolic style alienated an audience acquiring a taste for realism.

The separation between Melville and his audience began with *Moby Dick*; the divorce was completed with *Pierre* (1852). Although the work is now seen by some critics as a primitive effort in the direction of the modern psychological novel and may arouse some interest because of this, *Pierre* must be considered unsatisfying and unsuccessful.

The public lost by *Pierre* was never regained. Melville continued to write: two novels, a dozen or more tales, the best collected in *The Piazza Tales*, and several volumes of poetry, but only in his short novel *Billy Budd* did he recapture the narrative power of his earlier work.

The period of literary decline made the last half of Melville's life difficult. He did some lecturing but received little for it. He failed in an attempt to get a consulship but did obtain a customs post from 1866 to 1885. Herman Melville died obscure on September 28, 1891.

BILLY BUDD

In 1911, twenty years after Herman Melville's obscure death, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* allotted the American novelist a mere thirty-three lines and did not distinguish *Moby Dick* from his other works. Today, the *Britannica* has increased its coverage nine times and *Moby Dick* is seen as one of the greatest works of American literature.

The critical resurrection of Herman Melville is pri-

marily the result of changing times. The work spoke to the people of the twentieth century. Critics began to re-examine and acclaim the greatness of Melville's prose. Both playing a part in this revival and gaining from it was *Billy Budd*. Completed a few months before his death, this carefully constructed tragedy was found among Melville's papers, but it was not published until 1924. Probably begun as a short story, the work grew until it became the author's final testament on life.

Billy Budd is a narrative which ends tragically. The young sailor Budd is impressed aboard the *Indomitable*, where his unassuming nature wins many friends but incurs the hostility of the Master-at-Arms, John Claggart. Claggart's malice smolders until it drives him to accuse Budd of mutinous plotting. The seaman, unable to speak in retaliation, expresses his anger with a death-dealing blow. The drumhead court which is quickly summoned believes in the moral innocence of Budd, but it succumbs to the necessity of rigidly maintaining discipline during the war and sentences the prisoner to be hanged. Budd accepts his martyrdom and his last words, "God bless Captain Vere," suggest that "the condemned one suffered less than he who mainly had effected the condemnation."

The novel, as superb tragedy must, ends on a calm and satisfying note. The tragic hero is a superior being whose martyrdom elevates him even further. He is not perfect; he possesses the flaw which contributes to his fate. (At times of intense emotion, he is unable to speak; therefore, he retorts to Claggart with his fist.) But Budd is also a victim of circumstances beyond his control: England is at war and the young sailor must be tried under the Articles of War. Captain Vere is convinced that the Highest Court will find Budd innocent, that the courts of the land would show clemency, but that a military court must sentence him. In making such a decision, the philo-

sophical captain assumes the anguish of the tragedy while Budd remains calm in the face of death.

Melville's reserved style is most suitable for tragedy. The digressions prolong the inevitable tragic blow; yet they throw light upon it. The narrator-author's presence is felt, and the deliberate pace with its learned allusions, both contemporary and classical, historical and literary, befits a temperament not unlike that of Captain Vere. Herman Melville delays the outcome only to understate it with great effect when it comes. Thus Melville, like Vere, does not dramatize the action but broods over it. So must we.

The distinct natures of the three dominant characters imply that they have allegorical significance. The allegory, however, may be considered on either a political or religious level.

The political overtones are laid in the Preface, which comments generally on the infectious revolutionary spirit prevalent in 1797 and specifically on the naval mutiny at Nore. The shadow of the latter falls significantly on the drum-head court and its decision. Billy Budd is taken from the *Rights-of-Man*, a merchant ship, and impressed on the *Indomitable*, a man-of-war. These names underline the change of conditions. Budd has lost his natural rights, for he now exists under martial law. The necessity of law in time of war is the weight that swings the scales of justice against the prisoner. The court's deliberations and Vere's admonitions to it emphasize the diversity of political and moral law. There are allusions to the political philosophers Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine, but the outcome of *Billy Budd* shows Melville's support of the former in urging the necessity of law.

Billy Budd may be interpreted as a religious allegory. Budd is not unlike Adam, "one to whom not yet has been proffered the questionable apple of knowledge." His un-

affected, natural purity and his unsophisticated, simple nature suggest that "Baby" Budd is a "sort of upright barbarian, much such perhaps as Adam presumably might have been ere the urbane Serpent wriggled himself in his company." Budd is also Christlike: a "peacemaker" whose virtue "sugared" the entire crew of the *Rights-of-Man*; one to whom double meanings and insinuations are of foreign nature; a handsome lad whose moral nature and physical make-up are in harmony; and an innocent who dies a sacrificial death. Budd is above all else innocence, an innocence which is forced to leave its natural state and which cannot exist under martial conditions. This Christlike innocence awakens the "natural depravity" within the Satanic Claggart, who brings about Budd's martyrdom.

Billy Budd is a narrative, a tragedy, and an allegory. It is also an old man's testament on life. The manuscript, found among Melville's papers on his death, suggests the predominance of evil in the world. But unlike *Moby Dick*, *Billy Budd* indicates that the author, like his hero, has learned to accept such a law.

THE ENCANTADAS

The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles, consists of ten sketches by Melville about the desolate Galápagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean off Ecuador. They were first published in *Putnam's Magazine* (1854) under the pseudonym Salvator R. Tarnmoor* and later reprinted in *The Piazza Tales* (1856).

Seven of the sketches are descriptive. These depict the topography and location of the islands, emphasizing their desolation and uninhabitableness. Perhaps the most interesting is the third which describes the encircling

* Hart, James D., *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, (New York: Oxford, 1956), p. 225.

shelves of aquatic birds which inhabit Rock Rodondo. Typical of the mixture of detail and commentary is the portrait of the penguin:

Erect as men, but hardly as symmetrical, they stand all round the rock like sculptured caryatides, supporting the next range of eaves above. Their bodies are grotesquely misshapen; their bills short; their feet seemingly legless; while the members at their sides are neither fin, wing, nor arm. And truly neither fish, flesh, nor fowl is the penguin; as an edible, pertaining neither to Carnival nor Lent; without exception the most ambiguous and least lovely creature yet discovered by man. Though dabbling in all three elements, and indeed possessing some rudimental claims to all, the penguin is at home in none. On land it stumps; afloat it sculls; in the air it flops. As if ashamed of her failure, nature keeps this ungainly child hidden away at the ends of the earth, in the Straits of Magellan, and on the abased sea-story of Rodondo.

Three of the sketches (Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth) are narratives concerning three desperate creatures who lived for a short time on the barren islands. The first is told with considerable wit; the second, with compassion; the third, with disgust. Sketch Sixth relates the experiences of a Creole adventurer who received Charles's Isle as payment for military service. He brought eighty colonists to his kingdom and ruled them by means of a regiment of dogs. To increase his colony and to replace those rebellious subjects which had been liquidated, he lured sailors from whaling ships. Eventually his subjects rebelled and the ex-king fled to Peru. The eighth sketch reveals the plight of the Chola widow who was deserted on Norfolk Island. Sketch Ninth concerns the domestic hermit Oberlus, whose bent and beastlike appearance is matched by his "capacity of degradation."

The three figures are solitary beings brought under the

spell of the Enchanted Isles. The capacity of the two men for power and ruthlessness increases as they singly try to rule their isolated kingdoms. The woman is a victim of betrayal and tragedy as she is overpowered by the forces of the islands. Thus, these sketches present Melville's two major themes—the power of evil and man in isolation.

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BILLY BUDD, FORETOPMAN
What Befell Him in the Year of
the Great Mutiny

Begun—Friday, November 16, 1888.

Revision begun—March 2, 1889.

Finished—April 19, 1891.

Dedicated to JACK CHASE Englishman

Wherever that great heart may now be here on earth or
harboured in paradise. Captain of the Maintop in the
year 1843 in the U.S. frigate "United States"

PREFACE

The year 1797, the year of this narrative, belongs to a period which, as every thinker now feels, involved a crisis for Christendom not exceeded in its undetermined momentousness at the time by any other era whereof there is record. The opening proposition made by the Spirit of that Age* involved rectification of the Old World's hereditary wrongs. In France, to some extent, this was bloodily effected. But what then? Straightway the Revolution itself became a wrongdoer, one more oppressive than the kings. Under Napoleon it enthroned upstart kings, and initiated that prolonged agony of continual war whose final throe was Waterloo. During those years not the wisest could have foreseen that the outcome of all would be what to some thinkers apparently it has since turned out to be—a political advance along nearly the whole line for Europeans.

Now, as elsewhere hinted, it was something caught from the Revolutionary Spirit that at Spithead emboldened the man-of-war's men to rise against real abuses, long-standing ones, and afterwards at the Nore to make inordinate and aggressive demands—successful resistance to which was confirmed only when the ringleaders were hung for an admonitory spectacle to the anchored fleet. Yet in a way analogous to the operation of the Revolution at large—the Great Mutiny, though by Englishmen naturally deemed monstrous at the time, doubtless gave the first latent prompting to most important reforms in the British navy.

* Crossed out; was one hailed by the noblest men of it. Even the dry tinder of a Wordsworth took fire.

CHAPTER 1

(An inside Narrative)

In the time before steamships, or then more frequently than now, a stroller along the docks of any considerable seaport would occasionally have his attention arrested by a group of bronzed marines, man-of-war's men or merchant-sailors in holiday attire ashore on liberty. In certain instances they would flank, or, like a bodyguard, quite surround some superior figure of their own class, moving along with them like Aldebaran among the lesser lights of his constellation. That signal object was the "Handsome Sailor" of the less prosaic time, alike of the military and merchant navies. With no perceptible trace of the vainglorious about him, rather with the off-hand unaffectedness of natural regality, he seemed to accept the spontaneous homage of his shipmates. A somewhat remarkable instance recurs to me. In Liverpool, now half a century ago I saw under the shadow of the great dingy street-wall of Prince's Dock (an obstruction long since removed) a common sailor, so intensely black that he must needs have been a native African of the unadulterated blood of Ham. A symmetric figure, much above the average in height. The two ends of a gay silk handkerchief thrown loose about the neck danced upon the displayed ebony of his chest; in his ears were big hoops of gold, and a Scotch Highland bonnet with a tartan band set off his shapely head.

It was a hot noon in July, and his face, lustrous with perspiration, beamed with barbaric good-humour. In jovial sallies right and left, his white teeth flashing into view, he rollicked along, the centre of a company of his shipmates. These were made up of such an assortment of tribes and complexions as

would have well fitted them to be marched up by Anacharsis Cloots before the bar of the first French Assembly as Representatives of the Human Race. At each spontaneous tribute rendered by the wayfarers to this black pagod of a fellow—the tribute of a pause and stare, and less frequent an exclamation—the motley retinue showed that they took that sort of pride in the evoker of it which the Assyrian priests doubtless showed for their grand sculptured Bull when the faithful prostrated themselves. To return—

If in some cases a bit of a nautical Murat in setting forth his person ashore, the Handsome Sailor of the period in question evinced nothing of the dandified Billy-be-Damn—an amusing character all but extinct now, but occasionally to be encountered, and in a form yet more amusing than the original, at the tiller of the boats on the tempestuous Erie Canal or, more likely, vapouring in the grogeries along the tow-path. Invariably a proficient in his perilous calling, he was also more or less of a mighty boxer or wrestler. It was strength and beauty. Tales of his prowess were recited. Ashore he was the champion; afloat the spokesman; on every suitable occasion always foremost. Close-reefing topsails in a gale, there he was—astride the weather yard-arm-end, foot in “stirrup,” both hands tugging at the “ear-ring” as at a bridle, in very much the attitude of the young Alexander curbing the fiery Bucephalus. A superb figure, tossed up as by the horns of Taurus against the thunderous sky, cheerily ballooning to the strenuous file along the spar.

The moral nature was seldom out of keeping with the physical make. Indeed, except as toned by the former, the comeliness and power, always attractive in masculine perfection, hardly could have drawn the sort of homage the Handsome Sailor, in some examples, received from his less gifted associates.

Such a cynosure, at least in aspect, and something such too in nature, though with important variations made apparent as the story proceeds, was welkin-eyed Billy Budd, or Baby Budd—as more familiarly, under circumstances hereafter to be given, he at last came to be called—aged twenty-one, a foretopman of the fleet towards the close of the last decade of the eighteenth century. It was not very long prior to the time of the narration that follows, that he had entered

the King's Service, having been impressed on the Narrow Seas from a homeward-bound English merchantman into a seventy-four outward-bound, H.M.S. *Indomitable*; which ship, as was not unusual in those hurried days, had been obliged to put to sea short of her proper complement of men. Plump upon Billy at first sight in the gangway the boarding officer, Lieutenant Ratchiffe, pounced, even before the merchantman's crew formally was mustered on the quarter-deck for his deliberate inspection. And him only he elected. For whether it was because the other men when ranged before him showed to ill advantage after Billy, or whether he had some scruples in view of the merchantman being rather short-handed; however it might be, the officer contented himself with his first spontaneous choice. To the surprise of the ship's company, though much to the Lieutenant's satisfaction, Billy made no demur. But indeed any demur would have been as idle as the protest of a goldfinch popped into a cage.

Noting this uncomplaining acquiescence, all but cheerful one might say, the shipmates turned a surprised glance of silent reproach at the sailor. The shipmaster was one of those worthy mortals found in every vocation,—even the humbler ones,—the sort of person whom everybody agrees in calling "a respectable man." And—nor so strange to report as it may appear to be—though a ploughman of the troubled waters, life-long contending with the intractable elements, there was nothing this honest soul at heart loved better than simple peace and quiet. For the rest, he was fifty or thereabouts, a little inclined to corpulence, a prepossessing face, unwhiskered, and of an agreeable colour—a rather full face, humanely intelligent in expression. On a fair day with a fair wind and all going well, a certain musical chime in his voice seemed to be the veritable unobstructed outcome of the innermost man. He had much prudence, much conscientiousness, and there were occasions when these virtues were the cause of overmuch disquietude in him. On a passage, so long as his craft was in any proximity to land, there was no sleep for Captain Graveling. He took to heart those serious responsibilities not so heavily borne by some shipmasters.

Now, while Billy Budd was down in the forecastle, getting his kit together, the *Indomitable's* Lieutenant—burly and bluff, nowise disconcerted by Captain Graveling's omitting

to profer the customary hospitalities on an occasion so unwelcome to him; an omission simply caused by preoccupation of thought—unceremoniously invited himself into the cabin, and also to a flask from the spirit locker, a receptacle which his experienced eye instantly discovered. In fact, he was one of those sea-dogs in whom all the hardship and peril of naval life in the great prolonged wars of his time never impaired the natural instinct for sensuous enjoyment. His duty he always faithfully did; but duty is sometimes a dry obligation, and he was for irrigating its aridity whensoever possible with a fertilizing decoction of strong waters. For the cabin's proprietor there was nothing left but to play the part of the enforced host with whatever grace and alacrity were practicable. As necessary adjuncts to the flask he silently placed tumbler and water-jug before the irrepressible guest. But excusing himself from partaking just then, he dismally watched the unembarrassed officer deliberately diluting his grog a little, then tossing it off in three swallows, pushing the empty tumbler away, yet not so far as to be beyond easy reach, at the same time settling himself in his seat and smacking his lips with high satisfaction, looking straight at the host.

These proceedings over the Master broke the silence; and there lurked a rueful reproach in the tone of his voice: "Lieutenant, you are going to take my best man from me, the jewel of 'em."

"Yes, I know," rejoined the other, immediately drawing back the tumbler preliminary to a replenishing; "Yes, I know. Sorry."

"Beg pardon, but you don't understand, Lieutenant. See here now. Before I shipped that young fellow, my forecastle was a rat-pit of quarrels. It was black times, I tell you, aboard the '*Rights*' here. I was worried to that degree my pipe had no comfort for me. But Billy came; and it was like a Catholic priest striking peace in an Irish shindy. Not that he preached to them or said or did anything in particular; but a virtue went out of him, sugaring the sour ones. They took to him like hornets to treacle; all but the bluffer of the gang, the big shaggy chap with the fire-red whiskers. He, indeed, out of envy perhaps of the newcomer, and thinking such a 'sweet and pleasant fellow,' as he mockingly designated him