

## Good VS Evil - Outline

- I. Billy Budd
  - A. Heart is pure, innocent, naïve
  - B. At times, ignorant, unaware of the dangers around him
  - C. Lovable character, peacemaker
  - D. Doesn't start conflicts, but doesn't back away either
  - E. Perfect transcendentalist form, follow one's heart, even to death
  - F. "God Bless Captain Vere!"
  - G. Not trying to be perfect, trying to blend in, but is just naïve
  
- II. Claggart
  - A. mysterious origins, hate in his heart, demon-haunted person, resembles Devil
  - B. Hates Billy because he's so "perfect", jealous
  - C. Despised Billy for his innocence
  - D. Opposite to Transcendentalist, Melville Character
  - E. When he saw Billy, set out to destroy him
  - F. Ultimately kills himself in his cruel plot to setup Billy
  - G. Probably not a very confident person, can't stand others being "better"
  - H. Thinks Billy is trying to be innocent, drives him crazy
  - I. His intelligence brought him madness
  
- III. Vere
  - A. Doesn't really listen his heart, but has a good heart
  - B. Sympathizes Billy for his innocence, but under laws as a Captain, must kill him
  - C. The perfect Captain, fair, calm, brave, etc
  - D. Pretty much in the middle, but still a little more towards Transcendentalism.
  - E. Very caring Captain, perhaps over confident
  - F. Killed Billy in the sense of duty and to protect the ship and it's people
  - G. Muttering Billy when he died, knows he made a mistake, but can't do anything about it

## Good VS Evil

Since the beginning of civilization, the conflict between good and evil has been the focus of legends, songs, writings, and other cultural works. While these stories usually depict the triumph of good over evil, the opposite may be just as likely in the real world. The presumed outcome of this conflict depends on people's perception of the nature of man. However, the question of whether humans are fundamentally good or evil has had many different answers. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau believed in transcendentalism, a principle in which man is good by nature and should therefore follow his heart to discover a higher reality. In contrast, Herman Melville believed that humans are evil by nature, and that everyone possesses traits such as greed, hatred, and jealousy. In Billy Budd, Melville portrayed the familiar conflict between good and evil in an unconventional light, showing that even if most would like to believe otherwise, evil ultimately prevails.

Melville created the character Billy Budd to represent the transcendentalist ideal of human nature. Impressed into the British navy by Lieutenant Ratcliffe of the *HMS Indomitable*, he had a very pure and innocent mind. He was unaware of the dangers of the world, and had no idea that anyone would try to harm him. Aboard the *Rights of Man*, Billy acted as the peacemaker, for everyone on board respected him. However, although he never instigated conflicts, he never backed away from them either. In fact, he "struck an astonishing blow" to Red Whiskers, a fellow crewmate who bullied him. Transcendentalism also focused on individuality or non-conformity, and Billy could be considered the ultimate non-conformist. Just before the *Indomitable* departed from the *Rights of Man*, Billy jumped up and waved goodbye to his shipmates. If he were aware of the consequences of his action, he would never have had the courage to do so. Yet, unlike many, Billy never tried to be innocent. He was innately blessed

with a kind heart and a pure mind. However, his blessing would eventually cause his death. Even as Claggart's vicious plan unfolded, Billy continued to follow his heart, for he never realized how cruel the world could be. Claggart had succeeded in destroying his body, but failed to destroy his heart. His spirit was captured in his cry "God bless Captain Vere!" (Page 82).

In direct contrast to Billy's kind heart and pure mind, Claggart was a demon-haunted man whose mind was filled with hatred, evil intentions, and most importantly, jealousy. He was jealous of Billy for his appearance, heart, and attitude. Soon after Billy arrived on the *Indomitable*, Claggart began to despise him because Billy not only represented the type of person that was "perfect", but the person that Claggart could never be. As jealousy began to take control, Claggart devised a devious plot to destroy Billy. Knowing that he was naïve, Claggart tried to be friendly in Billy's presence, but behind his back, his plot quickly unfolded. After the soup incident, Claggart asked one of his men to try to bribe Billy into mutiny. After the plan failed, he directly accused him of mutiny in the presence of Captain Vere. Billy, notorious for stuttering, could say for himself. However, under much pressure from both men, he lost control and struck Claggart in the head, killing him.

Between the extremes of Billy and Claggart lied the honorable Captain Vere. Although he was a kind-hearted person, he had a devoted sense of duty, and would uphold the orders of his superiors at all cost. After the ship's medic pronounced Claggart dead, Captain Vere had already decided Billy's fate. Although Vere recognized that Claggart was "Struck dead by an angel of God", his sense of duty and fear of mutiny led to the decision that "the angel must hang!" for his crime (Page 62). Even though his conscience bothered him greatly, he was forced to execute Billy under the Mutiny Laws in fear of another Nore Incident. "That is thoughtfully put...I see your drift. Aye, there is a mystery...but what has a military court to do with it? The prisoner's

deed – with that alone we have to do.” However, just before his death, he muttered the words “Billy Budd,” proving that he still believed that Billy did not deserve to die. His actions showed that Vere was between a Melville character and a transcendentalist, yet if he had to be classified as one or the other, he would be closer to the transcendentalist. Although he did not follow his heart, his conscience still affected him, and if it were not for his great sense of duty, he would have let Billy live.

In Billy Budd, Billy represented the good and the pure, Claggart represented the evil, while Vere represented those caught in between. Unfortunately, as the man in between, Vere felt the most pain, for it was him who had to live with his own conscience. Although he was killed in the process, Claggart was successful in destroying Billy, and in doing so, had accomplished his goal. Although some may argue that Claggart received retribution for his evil deeds when he was killed, one must remember that Billy paid the ultimate price to give Claggart what he deserved. No matter what became of Claggart, Billy still died, and could never live again. The incident aboard the HMS *Indomitable* proved that when good and evil clash, the good would feel more pain, and therefore evil would prevail.

## Good VS Evil – Rough Draft

Since the beginning of time, good and evil have clashed in every means possible. While Hollywood usually depicts good over evil, reality functions in a very different manner. In life, good and evil have an equal chance to prevail, and the question of whether humans are good or evil has had many different answers. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau believed in transcendentalism, a principle that man is good by nature and that one should follow his heart to discover a higher reality. In contrast, Herman Melville believed that humans are evil by nature, and that everyone possessed traits such as greed, hatred, and jealousy. In his novel, Billy Budd, he portrayed the familiar conflict between good and evil, and even though most would like to think otherwise, when these two forces clash, evil typically prevails.

Billy Budd represented the ideal example of transcendentalism. Impressed into the British navy by Lieutenant Ratcliffe of the *HMS Indomitable*, he had a very pure and innocent mind. He was unaware of the dangers of the world, and had no idea that anyone would try to harm him. Aboard the *Rights of Man*, Billy acted as the peacemaker, for everyone on board respected him. However, even though he did not instigate conflicts, he did not back away from them either. In fact, he struck an astonishing blow to Red Whiskers, a fellow crewmate who was bullying him. Transcendentalism also focused on individuality, or in other words, not conforming to society, and Billy could be considered the ultimate non-conformist. Just before the *Indomitable* departed from the *Rights of Man*, Billy jumped up and waved goodbye to his shipmates. If he were aware of the consequences of his action, he would never have had the courage to do so. Yet, unlike many, Billy never tried to be innocent. He was innately blessed with a kind heart and a pure mind. However, his blessing would eventually cause his death. As Claggart's vicious plan unfolded, he continued to follow his heart, for even just before his death,

he still had not realized how cruel the world could be. Claggart had succeeded in destroying his body, but failed to destroy his heart. “God bless Captain Vere!” (Page 82)

In direct contrast to Billy’s kind heart and pure mind, Claggart was a demon-haunted man whose mind was filled with hatred, evil intentions, and most importantly, jealousy. He was jealous of Billy for his appearance, heart, and attitude. Soon after Billy arrived on the *Indomitable*, he began to despise him, perhaps because Billy not only represented the type of person that was “perfect,” but the person that he could never be. As jealousy began to take control, Claggart devised a devious plot to destroy Billy. Knowing that he was naïve, Claggart tried to be friendly in Billy’s presence, but behind his back, his plot quickly unfolded. After the soup incident, Claggart asked one of his men to try to bribe Billy into mutiny. After the plan failed, he directly accused him of mutiny in the presence of Captain Vere. Billy, notorious for stuttering, had nothing to say for himself. However, under much pressure from both men, he lost control and struck Claggart in the head, killing him. After the ship’s medic pronounced Claggart dead, Captain Vere had already decided Billy’s fate. “ Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!” (Page 62)

Between the extremes of Billy and Claggart lied the honorable Captain Vere. Although he was a kind-hearted person, he had a devoted sense of duty, and would uphold the orders of his superiors at all costs. Even though his conscience bothered him greatly, he was forced to execute Billy under the Mutiny Laws in fear of another Nore Incident. “That is thoughtfully put...I see your drift. Aye, there is a mystery...but what has a military court to do with it? The prisoner’s deed – with that alone we have to do.” However, just before his death, he muttered the words “Billy Budd,” proving that he still believed that Billy did not deserve to die. His actions showed that Vere lied between a Melville character and a transcendentalist, yet if he had to be classified

as one or the other, he would still be closer to a transcendentalist. Although he did not follow his heart, his conscience still bothered him, and if it were not for his great sense of duty, would have let Billy live.

In Billy Budd, Billy represented the good and the pure, Claggart represented the evil, while Vere represented those caught in between. Unfortunately, as the man in between, he felt the most pain, for it was him who had to live with own conscience. Although he was killed in the process, Claggart was successful in destroying Billy, and in doing so, had accomplished his goal. Although some may argue that Claggart got what he deserved, one must remember that Billy was an innocent victim of a man that closely resembled the Devil. No matter what became of Claggart, Billy still died, and could never live again. The incident aboard the HMS *Indomitable* proved that when good and evil clash, the good would feel more pain, and evil would prevail.