

Internal Conflicts

Herman Melville, author of Billy Budd, brings out the inner conflicts of a few sailors and describes their private needs, but there need to follow authority. Billy Budd is set in a time period where discipline is enforced to where the slightest disobedience is met with a whipping, and where complete loyalty to the king is a must. In the ship *Indomitable*, is a group of sailors where some have problems arising throughout the voyage. William "Billy" Budd, is the innocent, naive type of person who obeys authority, good or bad. John Claggart is the complete opposite of Budd. As the master-at-arm's, he uses all his authority to corrupt Budd so that he can be assuaged by knowing that he is not lower than Budd in virtues and innocence. Captain Vere is the middle man who is the judge. He is wise but gives his mind into duty, thus making him a mechanical judge without a heart. From the beginning, the author foreshadows Budd's death: "In this Billy was a striking instance, that the arch interfeerer, the envious marplot of Eden, still has more of less to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth...but also that the story in which he is the main figure is no romance." (p. 19)

Budd is the individual who follows authority without questioning. Even if the order is based on pure evil, Budd will still follow it; which leads to his conflict of not being able to tell evil. Budd's personality is, "...a virtue went out of him, sugaring the sour one...and thinking such a 'sweet and pleasant fellow'..." (p. 13) Since Budd is so innocent, naturally, evil is out to corrupt him. Budd is unable to link the people disordering his gear is trying to get him in trouble. Even when talking to Dansker, an old seaman who is Budd's confidant, Budd is incredulous that Claggart is "down" on him. Budd believes that Claggart praises him by saying, "the sweet and pleasant young fellow," (p.35) but in reality, Claggart despises Budd. When Budd recognizes evil, his physical impediment, stuttering, and sudden fits of violence, leads to his fall. "The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck." (p.61) This act of violence got Budd into court and his resulting verdict, to hang. His next conflict is carrying out the verdict. Though Budd has never been considering mutiny (because he did not follow a higher rank officer) or murder, he will have to die. Budd is not afraid of death, he accepts it and sees nothing to lose and a chance to see his creator. Though many sailors would have tried to reverse their verdict, Budd follows the order without a grudge and yell's right to all the sailors before he dies, "God bless Captain Vere!" (p.83) This kind quote saves Captain Vere from mutiny, and eases his conscience for sentencing an "angel."

Captain Vere, a person, "...always acquitting himself as an officer mindful of the welfare of his men..." (p.25), is the authority of the ship who follows the law very closely. Vere is always calm, unbiased, and smart, which is why his nickname is "Starry Vere." Vere has all the characteristics to be a good leader, and a good influence to the crew. Vere has one problem, duty always come first, which makes the readers think of him as a cold person. Though Vere may seem calm, he has struggles on deciding what to do with Budd. One is if hanging Budd is the right choice. After saying, "Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!," (p.62) Vere believes that Budd must die.

Vere's next struggle is whether to postpone the trial until they meet the admiral, which Vere decides not to. Vere believes that since Budd has such a good camaraderie with the crew, with Budd in imprisonment so long, the crew might start to wonder and mutiny might break out. At the end of Budd's court hearings, Vere delivers a speech, "But your scruples: do they move as in a dusk? Challenge them...That however pitilessly that law may operate, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it." (p.70-71) This quote from Vere's speech implies that since Budd is so innocent and friendly, it may seem that Budd should not die. But then it's fine to kill a person with a higher authority than you. Since killing a person is not correct, Budd must die. Claggart, during his time with Budd, is always dreaming of seeing Budd on trial. But death unexpectedly claims Claggart and he misses the outcome of his plan.

John Claggart is an evil man who uses his authority to generate harm towards innocent people. His roots of evil are: "Now something such as one was Claggart, in whom was the mania of an evil nature, not engendered by vicious training or corrupting books or licentious living but born with him and innate, in short, 'a depravity according to nature.'" (p.40) Throughout Claggart's life, his soul is composed of evil, hate, and jealousy, especially at Budd for having a soul so pure. Ever since Budd got aboard the *Indomitable*, for Claggart, "...the sight of an aggravating object one must needs give it Jonah's toss or jump overboard himself. Imagine how all this might eventually operate on some peculiar human creature the direct reverse of a saint," (p.38) which is why Claggart hates Budd. Claggart uses all his authority and spends every minute to corrupt Budd. Not able to succeed, Claggart accuses Budd of mutiny, but only meets death with a blow to his head from the angry Budd. For Claggart, there are no feuds inside of him because what he does on his authoritative side is the same as his private needs. Claggart causes many problems and disagreements in the ship thus, indirectly hurting the ship.

Billy Budd is a tragic story of three characters that had personal dilemmas that they were not able to solve. Claggart's obsession to harm Budd is the cause of his death. If he could have held that anger in check, he might have been alive. If Budd were able to acknowledge evil, he would have known whom to stay away from. In Vere knew when to use personal judgement instead of institutional conscience, Budd might have been there to help the crew beat the French and could save Vere's life. All three had a tragic death, especially William Budd. Budd's prestige is forever scratched because the newspapers that wrote about him got all the wrong information. They put him as a murderer and a person inside of a mutinous plot, which in reality was never true. Even though Budd dies as a murderer, Budd still had a profound impact on the crew. Vere was always appreciative of Budd's kindness, and his last dying words were, "Billy Budd, Billy Budd," after he got shot by a musket ball and died a few days later.