

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Herman Melville
Billy Budd, Sailor

Read by **William Roberts**

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

UNABRIDGED



NA330012D

1	Chapter 1: In the time before steamships...	8:28
2	Now while Billy Budd was down in the forecastle...	6:34
3	The transfer from chest to bag was made.	4:12
4	Chapter 2: Though our new-made foretopman...	9:31
5	Chapter 3: At the time of Billy Budd's...	5:33
6	Chapter 4: In this matter of writing...	5:41
7	Chapter 5: Yes, the outbreak at the Nore...	2:30
8	Chapter 6: But on board the seventy-four...	5:01
9	Chapter 7: In view of the part...	4:10
10	Chapter 8: The lieutenants and other...	10:08
11	Chapter 9: Life in the foretop well agreed...	8:38
12	Chapter 10: The next day...	3:11
13	Chapter 11: What was the matter...	9:03
14	Chapter 12: Lawyers, Experts, Clergy	1:11
15	Chapter 13: That Claggart's figure...	4:12
16	Chapter 14: Passion, and passion...	4:33
17	Chapter 15: Not many days after...	5:50
18	Chapter 16: This incident sorely puzzled...	6:04
19	Chapter 17: Yes, despite the Dansker's...	3:12

20	Chapter 18: But after the little matter...	6:01
21	Chapter 19: After the mysterious interview...	9:49
22	Now the handsome sailor,	6:56
23	Chapter 20: Now when the Foretopman found...	9:22
24	Chapter 21: Full of disquietude and misgiving...	1:45
25	Chapter 22: Who in the rainbow can draw...	7:09
26	All being quickly in readiness,	9:38
27	When speak he did,	7:16
28	Can we not convict and yet mitigate the penalty?	5:17
29	Chapter 23: It was Captain Vere himself...	2:49
30	Chapter 24: Of a series of incidents...	5:26
31	Chapter 25: In a seventy-four of the old order...	9:44
32	Chapter 26: The night, so luminous...	5:01
33	Chapter 27: A Digression.	3:16
34	Chapter 28: The silence at the moment...	6:29
35	Chapter 29: The symmetry of form attainable...	3:07
36	Chapter 30: Some few weeks after...	3:03
37	Chapter 31: Everything is for a term remarkable...	4:25

Total time: 3:34:38

Herman Melville

Billy Budd, Sailor

Billy Budd, Sailor is a study of two characters in direct conflict, as much as in Herman Melville's most celebrated novel *Moby Dick*. There, Captain Ahab is fixated on the goal of tracking and killing the white whale that had taken his leg in a previous encounter. *Moby Dick* is, therefore, not presented as an innocent but a fully conscious opponent with guile, attack and defence.

However, the conflict in *Billy Budd, Sailor* is unequal. 'The Handsome Sailor' Billy Budd is an innocent. John Claggart, the Master-at-Arms, is both intelligent and devious; once fixed on his prey he goes after him with concealed obsession. This adversarial situation is the motor of the plot, and its contemporary power is that we recognise it as an everyday occurrence. In the hands of a master storyteller like Herman Melville, it becomes, for all its apparent simplicity, a story of mythical proportions.

It has a curious place in Melville's work. Born in 1819 in New York, Herman Melville was the son of a merchant. After some time as a schoolteacher, he famously went on

board the whaler *Acushnet* in January 1841, sailing in the Pacific. There followed three remarkable years spent in Tahiti and Honolulu. He returned to Boston in 1844 having enlisted as an ordinary seaman on a US frigate.

Immediately, he turned to writing, quickly establishing a reputation for his sea stories. But by this time, even as he was hard at work on *Moby Dick*, Melville's popularity was dimming, probably because of the increasingly difficult nature of his prose style. He was keen to go beyond the level of popular adventure stories and explore broader themes. By 1866 he was forced to give up the lifestyle of a full-time writer and join the Customs Department as a deputy inspector. He remained working in the department until his death on 29 September 1891.

By the turn of the twentieth century, his reputation was starting to revive, thanks to a renewed interest in *Moby Dick*. It had originally been published in 1851, dedicated to Nathaniel Hawthorne, and was followed by shorter fiction; but from the 1860s

Melville only published a few volumes of poetry. It was only in the twentieth century that he was widely recognised as one of the greatest American writers. After his death, various incomplete prose works were found among his papers yet it was not until 1924 that *Billy Budd, Sailor* was first published. It was regarded as unfinished though it was sufficiently complete to engender more than academic interest.

The story outline was clear, the characters and the conflicts as powerful in many ways as in his other major works. But a number of key issues were unresolved: for example, the English frigate was called HMS *Indomitable* in most of the manuscript, but changed to the *Bellipotent* towards the end. Names were important symbols for Melville: 'Budd' was clearly intended to express Billy's bright potential. While some editions have chosen to use *Bellipotent*, we have, on this recording, decided to retain Melville's original idea as it appears some twenty-five times against six occurrences of *Bellipotent* in the original.

There are other signs of an unfinished manuscript. Some chapters appear incomplete and the ending, with Captain Vere's deathbed statement, is quite abrupt. But the power of the story and the writing

is undeniable. It was E.M. Forster who introduced the subject to the English composer Benjamin Britten. The result was one of the most striking English operas, a two-act work, based on a libretto by Forster and Eric Crozier.

The setting of *Billy Budd, Sailor* is British naval life during the Napoleonic Wars. The press gang was still very much in use – it only ceased after the final end of Napoleon in 1815 and wasn't actually abolished until 1853.

Straightforward, honourable, with an open charisma, Billy Budd is the most capable figure on the merchantman, *Rights-of-Man*. Impressed to a 74-gun frigate, he goes fairly willingly, accepting it as part of the weave of fate, and immediately impresses his shipmates as a foretopman with a welcoming personality.

For no apparent reason – to him – he incurs the wrath of the Master-at-Arms John Claggart and, despite the warning from the archetypal figure of 'the old Dansker', falls prey to Claggart's machinations. A combination of circumstances, carefully prepared earlier in the tale – the stutter, the powerful punch, the tensions of the recent Mutiny at Nore – leads to an inevitable conclusion. Yet this

apparently simple tale, so powerfully evoked by Melville, leaves us with questions which, curiously, only our instincts can answer. Why does Claggart develop this antagonism towards Billy Budd? Why does Billy not realise the danger? Why does Captain Vere decide upon the immediate resolution of the drumhead court when the circumstances and his awareness of Budd's innocence, have given him sufficient grounds to hold Billy Budd in chains until a later trial?

And yet it all rings so true – for Melville is unerring in his creation of characters that live. Some follow the positive force of nature; others 'a depravity according to nature', as he quotes Plato; and then there is the arbitration of Captain Vere. However book-learned he may be, *his* instinct is to go by the book.

The homosexual element is implicit. From Melville's own experience on the sea he would have been more than aware of it. And so is the suggestion of Budd as a kind of Christ figure, a Saviour sacrificed for the benefit of others with a sense of later redemption.

It is a remarkable story that rings on in the imagination long after the last line has sounded.

**The music on this recording was taken from
the NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

CIURLIONIS THE SEA

8.223323

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra / Jouzas Domarkas

GLAZUNOV SYMPHONY NO. 6

8.554293

Moscow Symphony Orchestra / Alexander Anissimov

Music programmed by Nicolas Soames

Cover picture courtesy of AKG London –
“Chase ships in view on the bearing pointed out by compass signal”.

Herman Melville

Billy Budd, Sailor

Read by **William Roberts**

A sea classic from the master pen of Herman Melville. Billy Budd, a sailor on a merchantman, is 'pressed' into service on HMS Indomitable during the Napoleonic Wars. He is popular among the crew, but is victimised by a brutal master-at-arms and tragedy becomes inevitable. Published posthumously, *Billy Budd, Sailor* was championed by E.M. Forster and has since been recognised as a major work in Melville's oeuvre.



William Roberts has appeared extensively in TV, film and theatre, varying from *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* and *Navy Seals* to *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *A View to Kill*. He is also a familiar voice on radio and audiobooks, with numerous dramas and books to his credit. He has also read *The Fall of the House of Usher & Other Tales* for Naxos AudioBooks.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-300-5

View our catalogue online at
www.naxosaudiobooks.com



Produced by Nicolas Soames
Recorded by Ross Burman
RNIB Talking Book Studios
Edited by Dan King and Sarah Butcher

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE,
BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THESE COMPACT DISCS PROHIBITED.
© 2003 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd. © 2003 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd.
Made in Germany.

Total time
3:34:38