

## The Handsome Sailor and the Man of Sorrows: *Billy Budd* and the Modernism of Benjamin Britten<sup>1</sup>

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Three names seem to dominate discussions of modernism and opera: Richard Strauss, Igor Stravinsky, and Arnold Schoenberg. All produced signature works within the period designated as “the era of High Modernism,” which by some counts lasted a generous half-century (1880-1930). The modernist critique, in Seamus Deane’s words, was anchored in “the belief that the experience of the individual subject in the modern world was one of fragmentation and anxiety,” and that “the coherent unity of the civilized world” had been lost to “a culture of excess, of kaleidoscopic variety offered to an indiscriminating and uneducated, even ineducable, public.”<sup>2</sup> We can easily associate composers as different as Strauss, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg with a modernism so described, but not Benjamin Britten. To establish his relationship to something called “modernism” we must look beyond 1930 and the period between the world wars.

My aim in this essay is to set the modernism of *Billy Budd*, Britten’s grandest opera, into the context of the Festival of Britain of 1951 and then to examine the opera as an exemplar of mid-century modernism. *Billy Budd* was commissioned for the Festival, which took place between 3 May and 30 September 1951 and which sought to fix the idea of “modern Britain” in the public mind. The Arts Council, which oversaw the Festival’s theater and music, proposed “a national display illustrating the British contribution to civilisation past, present, and future, in the Arts, in science and technology and in industrial design.”<sup>3</sup> The Labour government supported the Festival, the origins of which have been described as “left-wing,” and some elements of the Conservative press strongly opposed the event.<sup>4</sup> The Festival itself was commemorated twenty-five years later, in 1976, when observers conscious of Britain’s current financial and social crises suggested a return to the inspiration of the 1951 Festival and to “the goals and visions of that earlier optimistic moment.”<sup>5</sup> But that optimism had been mixed with what Becky E. Conekin calls “a fragility in the national feeling,” a mood mirrored by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who in 1950 spoke of a need “to strengthen and in part to recover our hold on all that is best in our national life.”<sup>6</sup>

The Festival unavoidably underlined anxiety about social change. Performance arts associated with the Festival could hardly ignore such anxiety, which has been seen as characteristic of High Modernism, musical and otherwise. According to Leon Botstein, influential composers at the start of the last century maintained that “[l]egitimate originality in art was inherently progressive, oppositional and critical.” Thus art that was “true to its own time” would have to forge “a leading edge in history” and serve as “a prophetic force for change.”<sup>7</sup> For modernists, “the unique characteristics, transformative power, and ethical character of true musical art” made certain demands on form and mandated that text and sound would “no longer [run] together along parallel descriptive logics.”<sup>8</sup> Responses to operas commissioned for the Festival show that in 1951 the “parallel descriptive logics” of words and music were still the norm. However, as I will show, politically themed opera was valued in elite circles – although not in the circles responsible for getting operas onto the stage.

Britten plays a small role in Botstein’s article, appropriately enough, reflecting Botstein’s view that the composer’s works belong to “[s]o-called conservative 20th-century music.”<sup>9</sup> In Paul Griffiths’ *A Concise History of Modern Music from Debussy to Boulez*, Britten fares slightly better. Griffiths writes that the works of Michael Tippett and Britten avoided “the anti-Romantic reaction.” Instead, their works exhibit “both a positive engagement with tradition and a willingness to deal with social and philosophical issues in the case of Tippett, or with the springs of human personality in the case of Britten.” Britten seems sold short here, if only in terms of the lasting political impact of *War Requiem* (1962) and the bold homosexual argument of *Death in Venice* (1973), both of which transcend statements about “the springs of human personality.” Griffiths finds tonal modernism in diatonic harmony “that is irrevocably corrupted by irony” and that appears “only within quotation marks.” Among works which “admitted the corruption” (i.e., used diatonic harmony ironically) are “the symphonies of Shostakovich and the operas of Britten.”<sup>10</sup> Music in post-war Britain, by this measure, could be considered modernist without manifesting the full agenda of the most celebrated High Modernist composers.

*Billy Budd*, with its erotic content and controversial tonal coloring, fits the profile of mid-century modernism, which I define as transgressive in both tonality and text, yet subtle. Britten and his librettists, E. M. Forster and

Eric Crozier, emphasized the novella's sexual preoccupations, a daring move, but also pursued the reassuring conventions of historicism.<sup>11</sup> The opera's historicism, however, is muted by stylized gestures that reveal Britten's modernist temperament. Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)* has many connections to life on land, the opera's libretto none. In the opera, Captain Vere's ship, the *Indomitable*, becomes a self-contained world, a floating same-sex microcosm of good and evil. In Billy and Claggart, the Master of Arms whom Billy kills, Melville elaborates and purposefully intertwines two tropes, the Handsome Sailor and the Man of Sorrows. The libretto condenses these tropes in a contrast too stark for mimetic realism, and the opera itself goes further, finally embracing an abstract style that verges on expressionism but never quite becomes expressionistic. The agent of this cautious experiment was Britten, operating not as composer but as final reviser of the libretto.

The usual horizon constructed for the analysis of Britten's operas is composed of other operas by Britten. I have chosen the admittedly obscure but more revealing horizon created by operas associated with the 1951 Festival. The Arts Council intended opera to have a specific place within the Festival's self-consciously modernist and modernizing agenda. New English operas were to be produced as part of a project described by Eric Walter White, secretary of the Council's Opera and Ballet Panel, not as "a competition, but a scheme for the commissioning of operas," with "never any suggestion of a prize being awarded to the successful opera composer."<sup>12</sup> Entries were to be made anonymously; each composer selected would receive £300. This "scheme for commissioning operas," announced in late 1948, made no provision for the performance of any of the winners; indeed, the schedule left little time for planning new productions.<sup>13</sup> Consequences for the four composers commissioned were dire. Arthur Benjamin's *A Tale of Two Cities*; Alan Bush's *Watt Tyler*; Berthold Goldschmidt's *Beatrice Cenci*; and Karl Rankl's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* still dwell in obscurity.<sup>14</sup> Alongside the commissioning scheme, the Council invited Britten, Vaughan Williams, and George Lloyd to create new works for the festival, with a fee of £500 and assurances of production in each case. Results on this count were mixed. Williams had just finished *The Pilgrim's Progress*, based on the poem by John Bunyan, and declined to begin another work until this one was produced, which it was on 26 April 1951, on the eve of the festival.<sup>15</sup> Although Britten ultimately accepted the commission leading to *Billy Budd*, he hesitated because the commission was to come from Covent Garden; he had been extremely dissatisfied with the 1948 performances of *Peter Grimes* that he had seen there.<sup>16</sup> There were delays, and *Billy Budd* was not completed in time.<sup>17</sup> Only Lloyd's *John Socman* was performed during the Festival.<sup>18</sup>

By July 1949 a total of 117 entries had been received by the Arts Council, far more than had been anticipated; the number was quickly reduced to 61 and then to 12.<sup>19</sup> The results were not quite what "a national display illustrating the British contribution to civilisation past, present, and future" might be expected to elicit, either in terms of composers or themes. Two Germans were among the first three winners (Rankl and Goldschmidt), and the third was Australian (Benjamin, who had taught Britten at the Royal College). The "Englishness" that the Festival set out to commemorate was somewhat undermined by a mixed and (perhaps to some) disturbing image of post-war Britain.<sup>20</sup> White wrote to Steuart Wilson, one of the judges and Head of Music at the BBC, to say, "if there is to be a fourth commissioned opera and its composer happens to have an English name, it may be preferable to hold up press publicity until we can include him as well as the three composers mentioned above."<sup>21</sup> Bush was chosen from three remaining entrants, all of them English.<sup>22</sup> It has been assumed that the judges were surprised to find no English composers among the top three choices, but Lewis Foreman believes that the Council knew the identities of the entrants.<sup>23</sup> On 12 September 1949 Wilson sent White a list of operas that the jury had already vetted. Two operas by English composers appeared in Category B, which meant that they were still circulating among the jury: *Watt Tyler* and Lennox Berkeley's *Nelson*.<sup>24</sup> Less than two weeks later, the *Times* lauded a surge in the creation of new English operas, attributing the phenomenon to the success of Britten's *Peter Grimes* in 1945. The *Times* found more British operas "on the stocks than ever before in our musical history." Vaughan Williams' *The Pilgrim's Progress* was completed; Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage* at the half-way point; William Walton was about to start *Troilus and Cressida*, and Arthur Bliss's *The Olympians* was about to open.<sup>25</sup> "Nearing completion" were Bush's and Berkeley's operas, and others to be commissioned by the Festival were yet to come.

Chief among these anticipated works, of course, was *Billy Budd*, which would make its own comment on "the British contribution to civilisation past, present, and future." Like other operas associated with the Festival, *Billy Budd* concerns discontent and unrest. Benjamin's *A Tale of Two Cities*, equipped with the best-known of the

source texts, concerns the horrors of revolution and the fear of French politics infecting England, a theme that also appears *Billy Budd*. Bush, who later became a communist, and his librettist, Nancy Bush, took as their subject the so-called "Peasants' Revolt" of 1381 – a more sympathetic but no more encouraging look at social change. They omitted certain disagreeable details that reflect badly on the peasants – for example, the murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>26</sup> Goldschmidt's work was based on the poem *Beatrice Cenci* by Shelley, with a libretto by Martin Esslin. Set in Italy of 1599, the opera "features murder, torture, incest and execution." The beautiful Beatrice is desired by her old and debauched father; with Lucrezia, her mother-in-law, she murders him, and the two women are put to death for their crime, the Pope refusing them the kind of pardon he had often – and for good money – issued to the old man.<sup>27</sup> Rankl's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* also occupies rarified territory, even for opera.<sup>28</sup> John M. Synge's play of the same name is about an Irish woman destined to marry King Conchubor. Instead she marries a man she loves, leading to his and his brothers' deaths and finally hers as well.<sup>29</sup> Lloyd's *John Socman* describes a conflict between two men who fought in France in 1415, a moment apt for the Festival's proximity to World War II. John Socman is a justice of the peace who loves the woman loved by an archer who is also a veteran of Agincourt.<sup>30</sup>

Bush, Benjamin, and Lloyd's works had direct connections to war and social upheaval in English history, and the operas by Rankl and Goldschmidt highlight social and religious conflict in Ireland and Italy, cultures with obviously contentious connections to England. The winners seem a particularly dour lot, especially when compared to Berkeley's *Nelson*. Berkeley paired the theme of Nelson's triumphs with the story of his love affair with Lady Hamilton, seemingly a good choice for a Festival opera as a reflection of English tradition and history. But according to Foreman, *Nelson* was rejected, found guilty of "excessive modernism" and presumably considered unfriendly fare for the broad audience the Arts Council hoped the new operas would reach.<sup>31</sup> Pages of criticism of both the libretto and the music fill the Arts Council's files.<sup>32</sup>

Berkeley enjoyed sweet revenge, since *Nelson* was given its premiere at Sadlers Wells in 1954.<sup>33</sup> The winners fared less well. Bush's and Goldschmidt's operas were given run-throughs in the fall of 1951.<sup>34</sup> Bush's opera was then given a radio performance in Berlin in 1952 and was staged in Leipzig in 1954; it did not have a London premiere until 1974.<sup>35</sup> Benjamin's *A Tale of Two Cities* was given a broadcast performance by the BBC in 1953 and a stage premiere in 1957.<sup>36</sup> *Beatrice Cenci* was given in concert in 1988 and had its stage premiere in Germany in 1994.<sup>37</sup> Rankl fared the worst, having declined the opportunity for a radio broadcast performance of *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. In 1980 Foreman rescued the work from oblivion, taking a single printed copy from a pile of scores being sent out by Oxford University Press for pulping.<sup>38</sup>

Four years after the Festival ended, *The Musical Times* asked, "If the [commissioned] operas, or even one or two of them, are good enough to produce, why are they not produced? And if they are not good enough, why were the given prizes?"<sup>39</sup> White faithfully contacted Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden to say that the works were ready. But the responses were negative, with both houses saying that the works were beyond their means – a claim that might have been advanced much more plausibly in the case of Britten's immense, all-male *Billy Budd*.<sup>40</sup> There were protests to the Arts Council over the commission to Bush.<sup>41</sup> It is easy to believe that the political themes of the operas, so pointed in the case of *Wat Tyler* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, caused the opera houses to look the other way, and there are some signs of political tensions between conservative opera management and composers interested in uprising, resistance, and rebellion.<sup>42</sup> Yet these themes make good operatic material, as do war stories that play out on the home front or that catch up civilians in the ethics of war. These operas, for all their differences, might collectively have formed, with *Billy Budd*, a surprising and provocative image of British opera quite suitable to the Festival's twin goals of reflection and renewal.

Clearly modernist in theme, the works are less modernist as scores, although this is difficult to determine, given how rarely they are heard. To judge from reviewers' comments, it seems that Botstein's "parallel descriptive logics" of words and music remained in fashion. An early reviewer described the music of *Wat Tyler* as having a "forthright not-too-modernist idiom."<sup>43</sup> Colin Mason and Hugo Cole have commented that Bush used a method "in which every note must be thematically significant" and that he used "consonances in unusual relation." They regard these consonances as "typically English" and add that "except in Britten they are nowhere used with more telling expression."<sup>44</sup> The reviewer of Bush's work found Goldschmidt's *Beatrice Cenci* "harmonically 'advanced' while preserving a clear, expressive, and singable vocal line." The *New Grove* reinforces the impression of conservative standard, noting that in the opera the composer retreated from the earlier Expressionist style of *Der*

*gewaltige Hahnrei* (1932).<sup>45</sup> Reviewing *A Tale of Two Cities*, Ernest Newman criticized Benjamin's "off-the-pitch intonations" and his "verismo" tendency to try to match words to the inflections "of ordinary speech," since it resulted in neither natural speech nor good music.<sup>46</sup> These comments suggest that British opera in 1951 was neither entirely traditional nor modernist in the styles of Strauss, Stravinsky, or Schoenberg.

*Billy Budd* maintains a similar balance. The opera benefits from comparison with Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, which also premiered in 1951 and which, like *Billy Budd*, had at one point been associated with the Festival.<sup>47</sup> Although *The Rake's Progress* is no barometer of the Russian composer's modernism, we can link the work to Botstein's description of the modernist rejection of the "descriptive logics" that parallel text to sound. Daniel Albright writes that Stravinsky uses Baba the Turk to "enforce dissonance among the component media of a stage work," with the soprano "enclosing herself in music, instead of using music as a vehicle for expressing a text."<sup>48</sup> Britten did not like *The Rake's Progress* for just this reason. During the summer of 1951, when he was finishing *Billy Budd*, Britten had seen the libretto and some pages of Stravinsky's score. He wrote to the Harewoods to say, "I feel miserably disappointed . . . that easily the greatest composer alive should have such an irresponsible & perverse view of opera, (of the voice & of the setting of words & of characterisation in particular)." W. H. Auden, Stravinsky's librettist, ungraciously told the composer that "Britten admired the opera very much, 'everything but the music'."<sup>49</sup>

Britten's own vocal works are models of an expressive integration of words and music, and *Billy Budd* is about political stability. Tonal stability is a preoccupation of music criticism of this work, much of which concerns Britten's use of musical language either to disambiguate textual meaning that his librettists, in their reworking of Melville's novella, had obscured, or to blur textual meaning that the writers had pushed to the point of uncomfortable clarity.<sup>50</sup> For example, critics debate the meaning of the "interval chords" that seem to describe an otherwise mute exchange in which Vere informs Billy that he must hang. Some have suggested that Britten's use of "semitonal tensions" (e.g., between B minor and B-flat major) represents indecision.<sup>51</sup> Arnold Whittall observes the elimination of dissonance but suggests that "the final resolution onto a pure B flat major" is "a distinctly hollow triumph." Clifford Hindley sees it as Vere's vindication: "Vere at last achieves acceptance." Responding to Hindley, Whittall rejects the idea of "redemption through love" in favor of "Britten's positive, creative indecision."<sup>52</sup> In either case, the music is said to make a clear statement about resolution or about indecision.

Barry Emslie is among those who have focused on the related problem of resolution in the libretto. "The sexual, the spiritual and the social here so intermingle that each is compromised," he writes, "not out of a respect for the complexity of 'real life', but because a true working out of either the social or the sexual would have taken the opera in a radical direction impossible for its creators."<sup>53</sup> Although few other scholars of the opera seem to think that the text lacks a settled meaning, unresolved tensions have long been a mainstay of criticism of Melville's novella.<sup>54</sup> John Wenke notes that Melville left the work in an unfinished state that ultimately frustrates attempts to construct coherent and closed readings.<sup>55</sup> The book first appeared as part of a collection of Melville's unfinished works in 1924.<sup>56</sup> It was published in English as a separate work for the first time in 1946, entitled *Billy Budd, Foretopman*, edited with an introduction by William Plomer, a poet who later was the librettist for Britten's *Gloriana*.<sup>57</sup> Plomer's edition isolated *Billy Budd* from its context in Melville's opus and embodied the work as a finished object ready for reinterpretation. For Plomer and his readers, the novella's tensions, which were not yet widely debated in criticism, might have seemed to be as resolved in Melville's mind as they appeared to be on the page.

Rather than pursue the question of mid-century modernism either in terms of tonality or textual analysis, I wish to focus on the form of the work – its structure – and to highlight similarities between *Billy Budd* and the Noh tradition that Britten used in *Curlew River* (1964). In his experimentation with Noh, Albright writes, Britten abandoned mimetic form for a "detemporalized, de-mimeticized theatre" that works as "a sort of treatise on religion carried out by ambulatory pictograms, pointing to truths beyond our world."<sup>58</sup> Britten came to Noh long after he wrote *Billy Budd*, but the opera shares two important similarities with the Noh tradition: flattened character types pointing "to truths beyond our world" and the framing narrative created by the prologue and epilogue. Britten and Plomer framed *Curlew River* with an abbot-narrator, just as Britten, Forster, and Crozier had used Vere in *Billy Budd*.<sup>59</sup> Flattened characters and the textual frame stabilized Melville's fluid narrative and enabled Britten to mix expressionist and historical modes. Flattening of this kind in opera sometimes, as in Bush's *Wat Tyler*, results from failed dramatic imagination and surplus ideology, not dramatic design.<sup>60</sup> Britten, Forster,

and Crozier had something more complex – more modern – in mind, and this was the chiasmus involving the Handsome Sailor and the Man of Sorrows.

This pattern, which Melville himself comments on, has been seen before. Barbara Johnson notes that Melville “sets up his plot in the form of a chiasmus” by creating “an opposition between good and evil only to make each term take on the properties of each other.”<sup>61</sup> Melville could hardly be more explicit in his treatment of the man of sorrows and the handsome sailor. In chapter 21, when Claggart has been killed, Melville writes: “In the jugglery of circumstances preceding and attending the event on board . . . innocence and guilt personified in Claggart and Budd in effect changed places. In a legal view the apparent victim of the tragedy was he who had sought to victimize a man blameless; and the indisputable deed of the latter, navally regarded, constituted the most heinous of military crimes.”<sup>62</sup> However, if victim and victimizer change places or “take on the properties of each other,” as Johnson says, we should assume that they were utterly distinct to begin with. Melville is careful to show that this is not the case.

The Handsome Sailor appears in the novella’s opening chapter, an emblem of masculine power and elegance, and a “cynosure” for the admiration of lesser figures who form his coterie. George Dekker notes that the “handsome sailor” is not a white Anglo-Saxon but rather a black man described as of “the blood of Ham” and wearing a Scotch Highland bonnet and gold ear ring.<sup>63</sup> But there is no question that when he appears in the very next chapter, Billy represents a different version of the stereotype:

As the Handsome Sailor, Billy Budd’s position aboard the seventy-four was something analogous to that of a rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces and brought into competition with the highborn dames of the court. But this change of circumstances he scarce noted. As little did he observe that something about him provoked an ambiguous smile in one or two harder faces among the blue-jackets. Nor less unaware was he of the peculiar favorable effect his person and demeanor had upon the more intelligent gentlemen of the quarter-deck. Nor could this well have been otherwise. Cast in a mold peculiar to the finest physical examples of those Englishmen in whom the Saxon strain would seem not at all to partake of any Norman or other admixture, he showed in face that humane look of reposeful good nature which the Greek sculptor in some instances gave to his heroic strong man, Hercules. (50-51)

Melville’s Billy, although pointedly sexualized, belongs to the nineteenth-century’s racial Anglo-Saxonism.<sup>64</sup>

The libretto suppresses the feminizing elements of this portrait, which attach to Billy only when Claggart reports his supposed mutiny to Vere. Melville’s Vere asks Claggart if he means to denounce “Billy, the Handsome Sailor, as they call him?” and Claggart replies: “The same, your honor; but for all his youth and good looks, a deep one. Not for nothing does he insinuate himself into the good will of his shipmates . . . You have but noted his fair cheek. A mantrap may be under the ruddy-tipped daisies” (94).<sup>65</sup> In the libretto, Claggart says, “You do but note his outwards, the flower of masculine beauty and strength. He is deep, deep. A man-trap lurks under those ruddy-tipped daisies” (169). The *OED* defines “mantrap” as “a woman who seeks to entrap a man into marriage” and “a woman who habitually seduces and exploits men” as well as “a person or thing which ensnares people” (q.v.). Forster and Crozier replace “fair cheek” with bolder and clearer “flower of masculine beauty and strength.” Not for nothing do these implications push the usually restrained captain to exclaim, “Claggart! Take heed what you say! There’s a yard-arm for a false witness” (libretto, 169). The libretto also suppresses references to Billy’s deadly strength. In the novella, Billy’s brawn is acknowledged in the conversation between the captain of “The Rights of Man” and the impressment officer (46-47). The libretto confines mention of Billy’s strength to Claggart’s warning that Billy will kill Squeak if he catches him messing with his kit (89); Billy “flooded” Squeak, which was enough (123).

Billy remains the Handsome Sailor in the libretto but is shorn of his dangerous aura, while Claggart, who remains the villain, is deprived of his identity as the “Man of Sorrows.” However, the novella’s chiasmic motif is actually a function of Claggart’s character. The Man of Sorrows refers to Isaiah 53:3: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.” In art perhaps the best-known example of this figure is Albrecht Dürer’s *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* (c. 1493, oil on panel), which shows Christ staring at the viewer and resting his head in his hands, crowned with thorns. The figure resembles Dürer’s *Melancholia I* (1514, engraving), also dejected and seated,

head in hands.<sup>66</sup> Melancholy is a humor one might easily associate with Claggart, whose role as Man of Sorrows emerges only in Billy's presence:

When Claggart's unobserved glance happened to light on belted Billy rolling along the upper gun deck in the leisure of the second dogwatch, exchanging passing broadsides of fun with other young promenaders in the crowd, that glance would follow the cheerful sea Hyperion with a settled meditative and melancholy expression, his eyes strangely suffused with incipient feverish tears. Then would Claggart look like the man of sorrows. Yes, and sometimes the melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban. But this was an evanescence, and quickly repented of, as it were, by an immitigable look, pinching and shriveling the visage into the momentary semblance of a wrinkled walnut. But sometimes catching sight in advance of the foretopman coming in his direction, he would, upon their nearing, step aside a little to let him pass, dwelling upon Billy for the moment with the glittering dental satire of a Guise. But upon any abrupt unforeseen encounter a red light would flash forth from his eye like a spark from an anvil in a dusk smithy. That quick, fierce light was a strange one, darted from orbs which in repose were of a color nearest approaching a deeper violet, the softest of shades. (87-88)

The three sentence-initial "buts" suggest the narrator's struggle to capture the instability of the evil man's character. Claggart becomes the Man of Sorrows when he sees Billy as the Handsome Sailor who floats in a circle of masculine pride and comradeship very similar to the one that surrounds the black exemplar of this stereotype earlier (43). Claggart is excluded from that charmed circle; hence his twice-mentioned melancholy. The face of the Man of Sorrows gives way to "an immitigable look" as Claggart's face shrivels and comes to resemble "a wrinkled walnut." When Claggart sees Billy approaching, he steps aside and looks at him with "the glittering dental satire of a Guise" – a false manner designed to mislead. When he sees Billy unexpectedly, red light flashes forth from the dark, and Claggart's eyes, normally "the softest of shades," come to resemble "a dusk smithy" that is appropriately satanic for one who, as the libretto says, has "established an order such as reigns in Hell" (127). The responses of the Man of Sorrows is "unobserved" and so too are his tears and the "meditative and melancholy expression" suited to the natural condition of this unnatural figure. In his vision of himself as Billy's lover (albeit in a Platonic sense), the Man of Sorrows is already a victim as well as a scheming victimizer.

Melville hints at the difference between Claggart's nature and that of ordinary people. "To pass from a normal nature to his nature one must cross 'the deadly space between.' And this is best done by indirection." The narrator develops this mysterious claim and uses it as an emblem:

Long ago an honest scholar, my senior, said to me in reference to one who like himself is now no more, a man so unimpeachably respectable that against him nothing was ever openly said though among the few something was whispered, "Yes, X – is a nut not to be cracked by the tap of a lady's fan. You are aware that I am the adherent of no organized religion, much less of any philosophy built into a system. Well, for all that, I think that to try and get into X – , enter his labyrinth and get out again, without clue derived from some source other than what is known as 'knowledge of the world' – that were hardly possible, at least for me." (74)

The narrator replies, "Why, I said, X – , however singular a study to some, is yet human, and knowledge of the world assuredly implies the knowledge of human nature, and in most of its varieties" (75). X in this conversation is both the conventional marker of the unknown and an emblem, the mark of crossing over and intersection. X is the sign for *chi* and, in part, for *chi-rho* (meaning *Christ*, abbreviated as both X and XP, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*). We see such crossing from one guise to another in the novella's key paragraph about the Claggart. If X represents what is unknown about him (a much greater factor in the libretto than in the novella, which supplies a history for the villain, (64-67)), it also stands for the chiasmus *within* his character, a set of oppositions encompassing elements belonging both to Satan (the red light and the dusk smithy) and to Christ (the melancholy Man of Sorrows).

The resolution to these suspended and opposed traits within the two men comes in the novella's climactic

scene. Claggart's death appropriately introduces another chiasmus, a crossing over appropriately involving Christ. Once accused, Billy falls into a stammering fit. Vere seeks to relieve him and with a touch sets off the fatal blow:

Going close up to the young sailor, and laying a soothing hand on his shoulder, he said, "There is no hurry, my boy. Take your time, take your time." Contrary to the effect intended, these words so fatherly in tone, doubtless touching Billy's heart to the quick, prompted yet more violent efforts at utterance – efforts soon ending for the time in confirming the paralysis, and bringing to his face an expression which was as a crucifixion to behold. The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck. (99)

Just before he kills Claggart, Billy manifests a torment that is "as a crucifixion to behold." Billy is imagined as crucified when he is about to kill Claggart, the moment when Billy crosses over. Just as Claggart is both Man of Sorrows and the satanic engineer of the victim's death, Billy is both a cross-bound Man of Sorrows and an executioner.

It was from the first Forster's intention to disambiguate Melville's characters in the service of an allegory that would redeem homosexual love between men. Forster greatly admired Melville's book, seeing it as a work that "reaches straight back into the universal, to a blackness and sadness so transcending our own that they are indistinguishable from glory."<sup>67</sup> Forster claimed that Melville had also considered a "mystic" Billy but had failed to realize him—surely an overdetermined reading of a novella better described as sardonic than mystical. Late in 1948, Forster wrote to Britten about changes in the libretto, noting that "Our original realism certainly wouldn't have worked." He describes a plan to cross over from realism to mysticism:

My idea was to start realistically, and then alter the ship and crew until they were what we wanted, and good and evil and eternal matters could shine through them . . . I seem to have the fear of a lot of symbolic and inexpensive scenery, whereas I want grand opera mounted clearly and grandly; and I fear this mystic Billy would not support more than two acts. Melville I believe, was often trying to do what I've tried to do. It is a difficult [~~thing~~] attempt, and even he has failed; the ordinary lovable (and hateable) human beings connected with immensities through the tricks of art. Billy *is* our Saviour, yet he is Billy, not Christ or Orion. I believe that your music may effect the connection better than our words.<sup>68</sup>

Forster and Crozier flattened Melville's characters by eliminating contradictions – the inner chiasmus – within Billy, whose strength is minimized, and within Claggart, whose melancholy is omitted. Both Forster and Crozier were disappointed at Britten's failure to plumb the depths of Claggart, whom they felt had, in the composer's hands, become "a boring, black-masked villain, not a tormented individual who is driven into evil by some kind of inadequacy in his nature."<sup>69</sup> Writing to Britten in December 1950, Forster expressed unhappiness with the music for Claggart's soliloquy. "Returning to it, I want passion – love constricted, perverted, poisoned, but nevertheless flowing down its agonising channel; a sexual discharge gone evil. Not soggy depression or growling remorse."<sup>70</sup> One of the first to comment on *Billy Budd* after it was published in 1924, Forster described Claggart as "a real villain" and Billy as one who has "goodness of the glowing sort which cannot exist unless it has evil to consume." This strange quotation suggests that the goodness of the working class homosexual figure feeds off of and ultimately destroys the evil that stands as its opposite.<sup>71</sup> Britten rejected this view and turned the focus from Claggart and Billy to Vere, making the captain the moral center of the chiasmus. In both the novella and the libretto, the victim (Billy) and his victimizer (Claggart) change places through Vere in a physical sense, since he touches Billy at the moment Billy touches Claggart.

Their characters much simplified, Billy and Claggart stand as good and evil on either side of the man whose dilemma their opposition has become. To judge from his editing of the final text of the libretto, Britten must have wanted this stark pattern. In the epilogue, Vere claims that although he failed to save Billy, he has been saved by him: "For I could have saved him. He knew it, even his shipmates knew it, though earthly laws silenced them. But he has saved me, and the love that passes understanding has come to me" (libretto, 203). As Hindley shows, Britten edited the sixth (and the last) revision of the libretto. "God has blessed and admonished me. For I could have saved him," Vere says in the sixth version. Britten removed the first sentence. The libretto continued: "By the

heavenly laws I have erred, and if heaven never passes into action, what meaning remains in our lives, how do we escape from fate? I have erred, but pardon has come to me, and the wisdom that passes understanding has come to me." Britten removed all but the last phrase. Forster's version makes God the agent of the blessing, while Britten makes the agent Billy ("he has saved me"). Britten also changed "the wisdom that passes understanding" to "the love that passes understanding," a better rendering of Forster's intention than Forster himself seems to have achieved.<sup>72</sup>

Britten's aggrandizement of Vere's role might have had something to do with Peter Pears, who first performed it.<sup>73</sup> But Britten also seems to have been thinking about himself as the final arbiter and the authorial equivalent of the captain. The novella has been seen to take the side of reformers; its supposed theme of "resistance" is a powerful strain in early criticism. Alternately, it is said to espouse the politics of accommodation to state-centered domination.<sup>74</sup> The former theme, so far as I know, has not been attached to the opera, but at least one critic has claimed that Forster and Crozier "grotesquely" misread the novella and that "Britten's musical politics are reactionary."<sup>75</sup> The opera's politics are, however, ambiguous rather than reactionary; uprising is portrayed as fully justified, but so too is its suppression through the sacrifice of an innocent victim whom the work memorializes in sentimental ways.<sup>76</sup> However, most operas associated with the Festival of Britain take the part those who suffer wrongly in authoritarian hands, and none justifies authoritarian rule as the opera seems to do.

Melville draws a comparison between Vere and Abraham and between Billy and Isaac that the opera exploits at Billy's expense. Billy acquiesces in his own sacrifice: just as Billy had to strike Claggart, "Captain Vere has had to strike me down," Billy says to Dansker (libretto, 197). This passage relieves Vere of a burden just as Abraham was relieved of his burden by Isaac's obedience. Vere was "old enough to have been Billy's father" (Melville 115); Billy is no child, and the ever-obedient Isaac, in one medieval play, is himself a man of thirty.<sup>77</sup> Britten's Vere is redeemed not by God, as we have seen, but by Billy, whose act of love the captain does not return. Vere admits to no wrong-doing; he needs no pardon, yet he has been saved. It is not clear what he has been saved from, unless it is regret that his expediency cost the Handsome Sailor his life; even though his officers were reluctant to agree, the captain had insisted on a drum-head court. When, at the end of Melville's novella, Vere dies of war wounds, he murmurs "Billy Budd, Billy Budd," although not "in accents of remorse" (Melville 129). Britten's captain gazes on Forster's "far-shining sail" (the sail of love), the same sail that Billy imagines (most implausibly, given his literalism; libretto, 199).<sup>78</sup> The captain sings, "Now my mind can go back in peace" (to the events of 1797; libretto, 203). Billy dies accepting the necessity of his death, and the man who caused it likewise prepares to die reconciled to his actions.

Eager to diminish the impression of excessive neatness, Melville's narrator observes, very near the conclusion, that "[t]he symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot so readily be achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact. Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges; hence the conclusion of such a narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial" (128). The libretto is much more finished than the novella, for the libretto reduces Melville's double chiasmus to a single X, the spot – finally occupied by Vere alone – at which the victim becomes a victimizer at the very moment the victimizer becomes a victim.

Melville's editors claim that the author's revisions dramatize what had previously been reported and thereby render the text more ambiguous.<sup>79</sup> Britten's librettists reversed this process, clarifying the moral chiasmus opposing Billy and Claggart and all but spelling out the theme of love. Forster wrongly thought that Melville "was often trying to do what I've tried to do," to move from muddy realism to luminous mysticism. In the end, it was Britten, not Forster, who approximated the novelist's touch. Perhaps, like Melville, Britten believed that resolution could be the enemy of art. Rather than lecture, hector, or mock in the manner of a High Modernist, Britten sidestepped explication of motive. He created a genuine mystery by redeeming Vere through the child-like understanding of the man the captain doomed and using Billy's triumphant final music to make the point. However shocking, this conclusion is as well-formed as Melville's "architectural finial." Yet it manages to express a "ragged truth" about the love that binds the righteous, rigid captain to his cheerful, shallow victim, for it is, as an ending, not quite satisfying, not quite clear, not quite just – but quite modern. In both the novella and the libretto it is Vere who stands at the center and who takes the narrative's mystery – its X – into eternity. Forster and Crozier concluded Billy's trial with an aside in which the captain vows, "I must not too closely consider these mysteries. As mysteries let them remain." Britten struck the passage but retained the imperative, and later he stepped into



Vere's position so that the mystery would endure.<sup>80</sup>

## Notes

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1. Thanks to Steve Thorngate for comments on an early draft of this essay and to Stephanie Lundeen for her assistance with research. I also thank Helen Cox of the Arts Council, Monica Argenton of the Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, and Nicholas Clark of the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh, for their kind assistance.

2. Seamus Deane, "Imperialism / Nationalism," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 358.

3. Speech of the Lord President of the Council to the House of Commons, 5 December 1947, quoted with permission from the files of the Arts Council in the Victoria and Albert Museum Archives (hereafter VAMA), File EL6/71.

4. Sarah Easen, "Film and the Festival of Britain 1951," <http://bufvc.ac.uk> (British Universities Film and Video Council, seen December 10, 2006), 1. On the opposition of the Beaverbrook press, see Becky E. Conekin, "The Background: History and Historiography," in Conekin, ed., *"The Autobiography of a Nation": The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester University Press, 2003), 15.

5. Conekin, "The Background," 4.

6. Quoted by Conekin, "The Background," 16-17, from a speech given 17 July 1950 and included in the official Festival program book.

7. Leon Botstein, "Modernism," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie, 29 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2001), XVI: 868-75; 868.

8. Ibid., "Modernism," 869.

9. Ibid., "Modernism," 873.

10. Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Modern Music from Debussy to Boulez* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 78-84 and 182.

11. Forster and Crozier researched naval history, as did John Piper, who designed the first production. See Basil Coleman, "Staging First Productions 2," in David Herbert, ed., *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 35-36. Coleman produced the first performances.

12. White asked that the score of *Billy Budd* indicate that the opera had been "commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain in connection with the Festival of Britain 1951 for production by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden." He also wrote Michael Wood, who was in charge of public relations at Covent Garden, to ask that the program specify that "*Billy Budd* was commissioned by the Arts Council from Benjamin Britten for the Festival of Britain 1951, but it did not prove possible to present it during the Festival period." VAMA EL6/72.

13. The Council asked for outlines of proposed operas by mid-1949, piano scores or parts of the operas by the end of that year, and completed scores by September 1950. See Lewis Foreman, "Alan Bush, Arthur Benjamin, Berthold Goldschmidt, Karl Rankl, Lennox Berkeley & the Arts Council's 1951 Opera Competition," *British Music Society News*, 100 (December 2003), 75-78. (Privately published to members of the British Music Society, quoted here from [http://www.musicweb.uk.net/classRev/2004/Feb04/Foreman\\_opera.htm](http://www.musicweb.uk.net/classRev/2004/Feb04/Foreman_opera.htm). My thanks to Rob

Barnett and Roger Carpenter for this reference.)

14. Correspondence related to these commissions is to be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive files, in the EL6/69-75 series: EL6/69 (Benjamin); EL6/70 and 75 (Bush); EL6/71 (Britten); EL6/73 (Goldschmidt); EL6/74 (Rankl).

15. Ralph Vaughan Williams refused the offer of a commission in March 1949, according to a letter from White to Wilson dated 31 December 1949 (VAMA EL6/71). *The Pilgrim's Progress* is incorrectly described as a Festival commission by Christopher Paul Aspaas, who quotes the work of Nathaniel Geoffrey Lew, "A New and Glorious Age: Construction of National Opera in Britain, 1945-1951 (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 2001). See Aspaas, "A History of the Oregon Bach Festival" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 2004).

16. Britten had been offered a production at Covent Garden before his new opera had either a subject or a title according to a letter from David Webster to Britten: "I think it is high time we wrote to you officially to say that whatever steps the 1951 Exhibition take about operas, and they made decide of course not to act at all, we here would welcome a new opera from your pen as soon as you have it ready" (7 October 1948; quoted with the permission of the Britten-Pears Library). See also Eric Crozier, "Staging First Productions 1," in Herbert, ed., *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*.

17. White specified that the score of *Billy Budd* was to note that the opera had been "commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain in connection with the Festival of Britain 1951 for production by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden." He also wrote Michael Wood, in charge of public relations at Covent Garden, to ask that the program specify that "*Billy Budd* was commissioned by the Arts Council from Benjamin Britten for the Festival of Britain 1951, but it did not prove possible to present it during the Festival period" (VAMA EL6/72).

18. It was first performed in Bristol in 1951 by the Carl Rosa Company; there were seven performances in all, evidently badly financed. See Richard RePass, "The Carl Rosa Opera Company Today," *Musical Times* 93, 1312 (1952), 256-58.

19. See White's summary for Sir Steuart Wilson, 12 July 1949, VAMA EL6/71.

20. However, neither German composer was new to the United Kingdom. Goldschmidt emigrated in 1935 and took British citizenship the same year, and Rankl, Music Director at Covent Garden since 1946, had been a British citizen since 1938.

21. Quoted from Foreman, "Alan Bush."

22. The others were Wilfred Mellers, *The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe*, and Lennox Berkeley, *Nelson*; see Foreman, "Alan Bush."

23. See Richard Witts, "Composers and the Arts Council: Buying Time," *Musical Times* 140, 1867 (1999):11-17, who seems to assume that the Council was surprised by the results.

24. So stated in a letter from Wilson to White, 12 September 1949, VAMA EL6/71.

25. "Several British Operas on the Stocks," quoted from the *Times* of 25 September 1949, file copy, VAMA EL6/71.

26. See Winton Dean's review of *Wat Tyler* in *The Musical Times* 115, 1578 (August 1974): 677.

27. Christopher Shaw downplays the sensationalism and says the composer was, like Shelley, more concerned with the moral than with dramatic implications of the work. See Shaw's review of *Beatrice Cenci* in *Tempo*, n.s. 165 (1988): 42-44.
28. A copy of the libretto can be found in VAMA EL6/74.
29. Synge "attempts to adopt his peasant dialect to the heroic people of the sagas," making the tale even less probable as a reflection on the glories of England. See David H. Greene, "Synge's Unfinished Deirdre," *PMLA* 63 (1948): 1314-21; 1321.
30. Details from Eric Walter White to Ross Parmenter of the New York *Times*, 3 November 1950. VAMA, EL/6 72.
31. During this time Constance Lambert, Berkeley's champion on the jury, suddenly died, taking Berkeley's chances with him; see Foreman, "Alan Bush." Wilson also favored Berkeley's work as of 8 March 1952 (VAMA EL/6 72).
32. VAMA EL6/72.
33. According to Witts, Berkeley was "then a member of the Council's music panel," so "assistance was quietly solicited from Sadler's Wells to stage in 1954 his unsuccessful *Nelson*," "Composers and the Arts Council," 12. Other rejected operas performed in 1951 include Peter Tranchell's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Incognita*, by Egon Wellesz. On Tranchell, see *Music and Letters* 56.2 (1975): 147-49. On Igon Wellesz, see Jeffrey L. Buller's review, "Die Bakchantinnen," *The Opera Quarterly* 19.2 (2003): 306-9.
34. Performances of *Wat Tyler* and *Beatrice Cenci* were reviewed in *The Musical Times* 92, no. 1295 (1951): 36-37.
35. For details of the performance history of "Watt Tyler," see the Alan Bush file, VAMA EL6/70 and the entry on Bush by Colin Mason et al. in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Sadie, 4: 656-58. The complete performance history is included in Stewart R. Craggs, ed., *Alan Bush: A Sourcebook* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 72-74.
36. On performances of *A Tale of Two Cities*, see the Benjamin file, VAMA EL6/69. See also D. Arundell, "Benjamin's Operas," *Tempo* 15 (1950-51), 15; H. Keller: "Arthur Benjamin and the Problem of Popularity," *Tempo* 15 (1950-51): 4; and the article on Benjamin by Peter J. Pirie and Robert Barnett in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Sadie, 3: 271-72.
37. For an account of performances of *Beatrice Cenci*, see the Goldschmidt file, VAMA EL6/73. See also the article on Goldschmidt by Michael Struck, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Sadie, 10: 104-6; see also Christopher Shaw, "Émigrés and 'Internal Exiles,'" *Tempo*, n.s. 165 (1988): 42-44.
38. Foreman, "Alan Bush," does not explain for what occasion the scores had been printed, but obviously at some point a performance was planned.
39. "Paying the Piper," *The Musical Times* 94, 1321 (1953): 107-8
40. On 5 April 1951 White wrote Norman Tucker to say that both *Cenci* and *Deirdre* were ready. Tucker replied 6 April that he had understood that Rankl's work was "orchestrally at least, outside our resources here" but that he would look at the vocal score. At the same time, David Webster, General administrator of Covent wrote to W. E.

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Williams, Arts Council, to say that he had heard that *Deirdre* was completed and “ready for production.” VAMA EL6/71.

41. Minutes of the meeting of Opera Commission Panel on 22 November 1950 refer to “correspondence and telephone calls arising out of the acceptance of ‘Wat Tyler’ (Alan Bush) and the political prejudices created. Agreed that the Chairman’s action had been correct in refusing to accept any responsibility for political implications in a libretto.” VAMA, EL6/72.

42. “The Royal Opera House hadn’t the slightest intention of raising its curtain on such an effort” as the Council’s new operas, and Covent Garden was reported to be trying to “boot out” Rankl after an unsuccessful performance of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle in 1950. See Witts, “Composers and the Arts Council,” 12.

43. “London Concerts and Opera” (review), *The Musical Times* 92, 1295 (1951): 36-37.

44. See the article on Bush by Mason et al. in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 4: 656-58.

45. “London Concerts and Opera” (review), *The Musical Times* 92, 1295 (1951): 36-37.

See also Michael Struck’s essay on Goldschmidt in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 10: 104-6, and David Matthews’ summary article on Goldschmidt in *Tempo*, n.s. 144 (1983): 2-6.

46. Ernest Newman, “The World of Music: *A Tale of Two Cities*,” *The Sunday Times*, 26 April 1953. See also John W. Klein, “Some Reflections on ‘A Tale of Two Cities,’” *Tempo*, n.s. 45 (1957): 14-15, 20-24.

47. When White learned that *Billy Budd* would not be ready for production “before the autumn of 1951,” he wrote to Britten to say that the delay would “make it particularly difficult to fit it into the Festival of Britain period.” He added that “the first performance of Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress* appears to be earmarked for Edinburgh in September 1951.” *The Rake’s Progress* was given its World Premiere in 11 September 1951 at Teatro la Fenice. Letter from EWW to Britten 23 Feb 1950. VAMA, EL6/72.

48. Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 309-10.

49. Britten’s letter to Lord and Lady Harewood of 2 October 1951, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 297. Britten’s views might have been influenced by external circumstances. Carpenter notes that Britten was offended by Stravinsky’s failure to recognize similarities between *The Rake’s Progress* and Britten’s own *Lucretia*, which Stravinsky claimed to have heard. Carpenter quotes George, Earl of Harewood, *The Tongs and the Bones: The Memoirs of Lord Harwood* (London: Weidenfel and Nicolson, 1981), 132-33.

50. See Arnold Whittall, “‘Twisted Relations’: Method and Meaning In Britten’s “Billy Budd,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2.2 (1990): 145-71.

51. Clifford Hindley, “Britten’s Billy Budd: The ‘Interview Chords’ Again,” *The Musical Quarterly* 78.1 (1994): 99-126, and Hindley, “Love and Salvation in Britten’s ‘Billy Budd,’” *Music and Letters* 70.3 (1989): 363-81. There is a useful discussion linking *Billy Budd*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *Gloriana* in Donald Mitchell, “A Billy Budd Notebook,” in *Benjamin Britten: “Billy Budd,”* ed. Mervyn Cooke and Philip Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 111-34.

52. Whittall, “Twisted Relations,” 168.

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53. Barry Emslie, "Billy Budd and the Fear of Words," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4.1 (1992): 43-59; 50. Emslie proposes that "The opera can be seen as embodying, in its formal structure, the epistemological notion of a 'gap'" (51-52). Producing the gap is the transgressive-ness of the opera's sexual content, which, he believes, the composer and librettists were ultimately unwilling (or unable) to confront. But see Mitchell, "A Billy Budd Notebook," who rejects arguments about self-censorship (114-15).
54. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr., note that the first twenty-five years of criticism debated the novella's "literary merit" but saw "little of the now-familiar debate concerning its intention and tone." See Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, ed. Hayford and Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 25.
55. John Wenke, "Melville's Indirection: Billy Budd, the Genetic Text, and 'the Deadly Space Between,'" in *The American Novel: New Essays on Billy Budd*, ed. Donald Yannella (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114-44.
56. Raymond Weaver, ed., *The Complete Works of Herman Melville*, vol. XIII (London: Constable and Co., 1924); a different version was issued in 1928. See Hayford and Sealts, Jr., *Billy Budd*, 12.
57. William Plomer, ed. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* (London: John Lehmann, 1946). Britten later consulted the Harvard edition by F. Barron Freeman, ed., *Melville's Billy Budd* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1948).
58. Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 73.
59. *Ibid.*, 90.
60. See Dean's review of *Wat Tyler*, *Keynote*, 677: "The characters are pasteboard illustrations of what [the authors] admire and detest."
61. Barbara Johnson, "Melville's Fist: The Execution of *Billy Budd*," in Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 79-109; 83.
62. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, ed. Hayford and Sealts, Jr., (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963), 103; all quotations are taken from this edition and are given in the text.
63. George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 206. Dekker sees the "universal hero" represented by the Handsome Sailor as part of an "environmentalist theory" that is "deeply opposed to the theories of inherited racial characteristics" such as those advocated by apologists for slavery.
64. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). See Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).
65. Benjamin Britten, *Billy Budd* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1951). I quote the original four-act version as reprinted in the recording conducted by Kent Nagano (Erato 3984-21631-2, 1998).
66. See Walter L. Strauss, ed., *The Complete Etchings, Engravings and Drypoints of Albrecht Dürer* (New York: Dover, 1972), 59 (Man of Sorrows with Hands Raised), 173 (Man of Sorrows, Seated).

67. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), 143.
68. Forster to Britten, 20 December 1948, printed in *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), II: 235.
69. Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten*, 288
70. Quoted from Philip Reed, "From First Thoughts to First Night: A *Billy Budd* Chronology," in Cooke and Reed, ed., *Benjamin Britten: "Billy Budd,"* 43-73; 61.
71. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 141.
72. Hindley sees this as a vindication of Forster's vision of the opera, "the earthy and particular experience of love between Billy and Vere. It is a very human love which is 'Billy's solution.'" See Hindley's important analysis of the libretto revisions in "Love and Salvation" (372). Hindley traces Britten's changes to Vere's final words (371, 374). See the last page of Britten's copy of the libretto (45), August 1949; Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh, Microfilm A62, frame 131.
73. Reed, "From First Thoughts to First Night," 48.
74. For a summary of political readings, see Robert Shulman, *Social Criticism and Nine-teenth-Century American Fictions* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 66-68.
75. Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 241.
76. Whittall provides fine comparison of Britten's and Melville's views of the modernisms of their ages, "'Twisted Relations,'" 170-71.
77. The author of the York play of Abraham and Isaac imagined Isaac as an adult; he is sent off, at a late age, to be married. Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), 71-100.
78. Hindley, "Love and Salvation," 380.
79. Hayford and Sealts, Jr., *Billy Budd*, 35.
80. Britten made this change to the fourth draft of the libretto (March 1949), Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh, Microfilm A61, frame 167.