

Billy Budd, Sailor

Author
Herman Melville

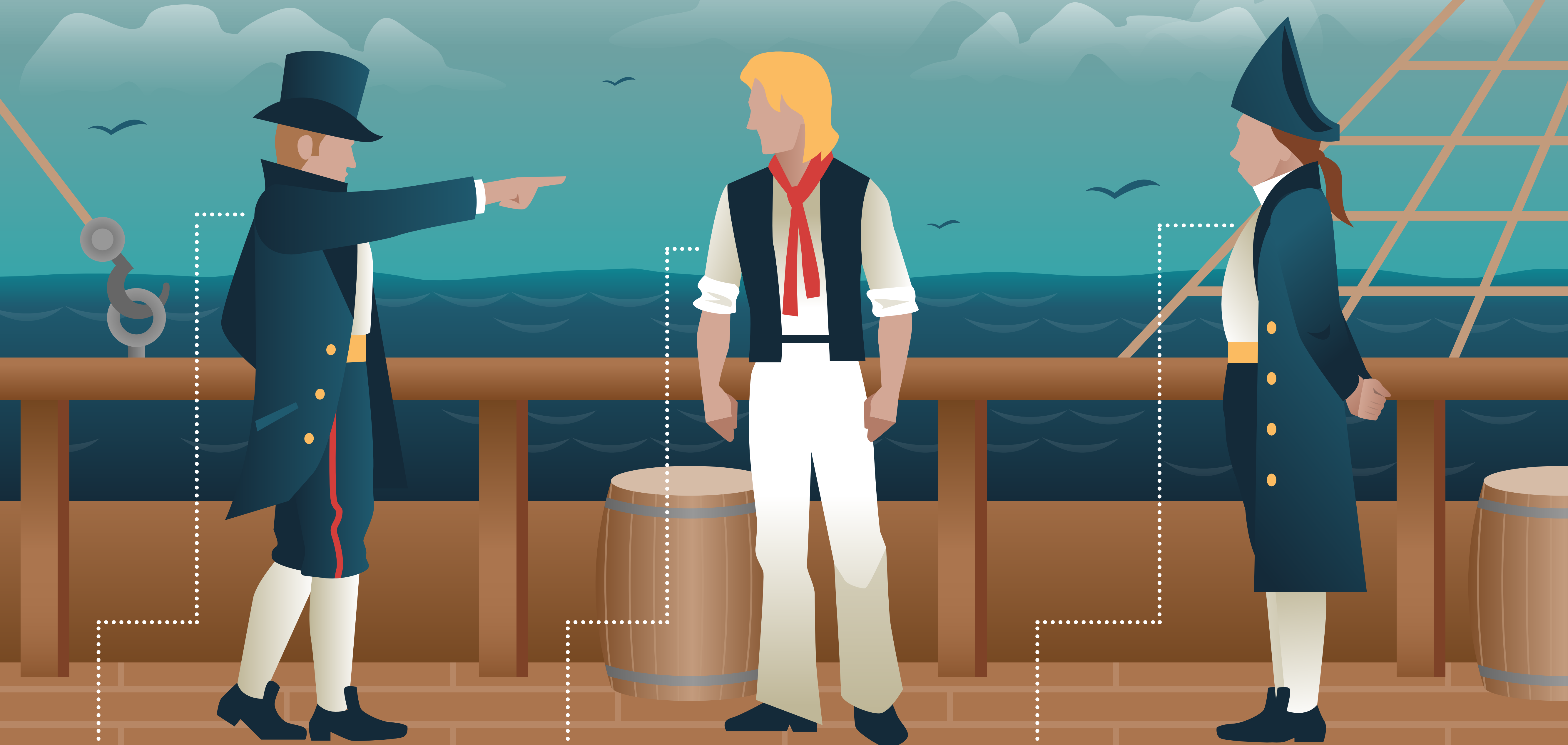
Year Published
1924

Original Language
English

THEMES

Innocence, Malice & Justice at Sea

Billy Budd is a pure and innocent man impressed into service on an 18th-century British warship. Implicated in a conspiracy hatched by the ship's hateful and envious master-at-arms, John Claggart, Budd is hanged for murder. But he lives on as a venerated icon among British sailors.



Innocence & Malice

Claggart's malice leads him to falsely accuse Billy Budd of plotting mutiny.

Loyalty & Justice

Loyalty and duty undermine justice as Budd, the victim, is found guilty.

Law & Conscience

Captain Vere's duty is to uphold the law, even if his conscience bothers him.

Author



HERMAN MELVILLE
1819–91

Melville spent many years at sea, working on merchant vessels or whaling ships. As in *Billy Budd, Sailor*, his maritime experiences often informed his writing. His major works are stories of adventure, but they also often deal with profound issues of the human experience.

Main Characters



Billy Budd

Pure, innocent, Christlike figure; can't detect evil in others; liked by fellow sailors but hated by Claggart



Captain Vere

Warship captain anxious to maintain order; tries to be fair but is compromised by his strict sense of duty



John Claggart

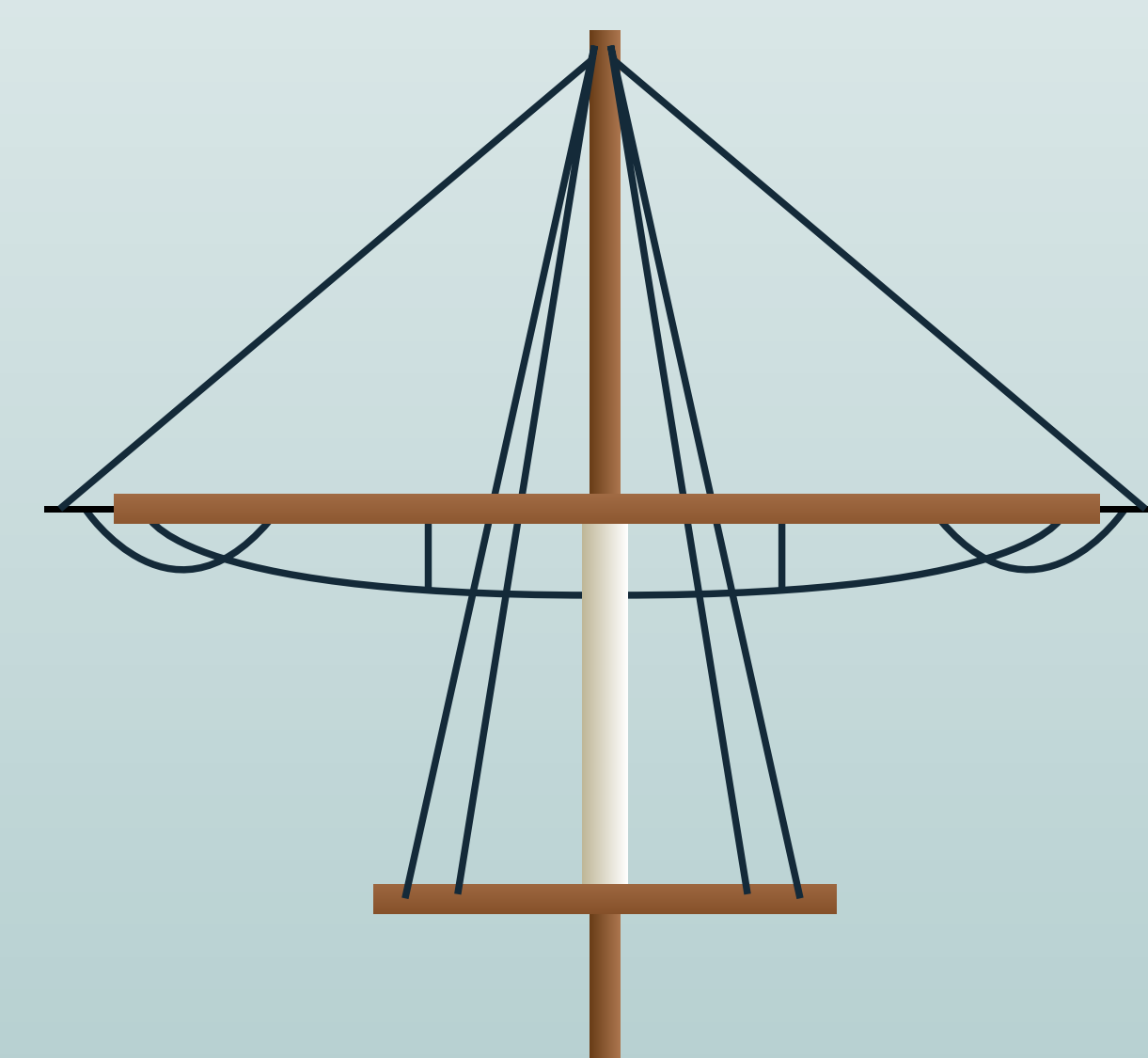
Evil master-at-arms in charge of enforcing rules; full of ill will and envy that lead him to destroy Budd

Symbols



Stammer

Symbolizes Budd's defenselessness and Christlike nature



Spar

Stands for the cross on which Christ was crucified



Knowledge

Represents the bigotry and pride present in Western civilization

Not that he preached to them or said or did anything in particular; but a virtue went out of him, sugaring the sour ones.

Captain Graveling, Chapter 1

