

Billy in the Darbies

by Herman Melville

Good of the Chaplain to enter Lone Bay
And down on his marrow-bones here and pray
For the likes just o' me, Billy Budd. -- But look:
Through the port comes the moon-shine astray!
5 It tips the guard's cutlas and silvers this nook;
But 'twill die in the dawning of Billy's last day.
A jewel-block they'll make of me to-morrow,
Pendant pearl from the yard-arm-end
Like the ear-drop I gave to Bristol Molly --
10 O, 'tis me, not the sentence they'll suspend.
Ay, Ay, Ay, all is up; and I must up to
Early in the morning, aloft from alow.
On an empty stomach, now, never it would do.
They'll give me a nibble -- bit o' biscuit ere I go.
15 Sure, a messmate will reach me the last parting cup;
But, turning heads away from the hoist and the belay,
Heaven knows who will have the running of me up!
No pipe to those halyards. -- But aren't it all sham?
A blur's in my eyes; it is dreaming that I am.
20 A hatchet to my hawser? all adrift to go?
The drum roll to grog, and Billy never know?
But Donald he has promised to stand by the plank;
So I'll shake a friendly hand ere I sink.
But -- no! It is dead then I'll be, come to think.
25 I remember Taff the Welshman when he sank.
And his cheek it was like the budding pink.
But me they'll lash me in hammock, drop me deep.
Fathoms down, fathoms down, how I'll dream fast asleep.
I feel it stealing now. Sentry, are you there?
30 Just ease this darbies at the wrist, and roll me over fair,
I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me twist.

Understanding “Billy in the Darbies”

Step 1. SOAPStone: first assessment of the “tarry hand’s” ballad

Speaker: _____

Occasion: _____

Audience: _____

Purpose: _____

Subject: _____

Tone: _____

Step 2. DIDLS: A strategy for closely reading the ballad

Diction: denotation, connotation, *2-3 specific examples*

Images: appeals to which senses? vivid or typical examples?

Details: facts, events that are included and those that are omitted—
implications for meaning, purpose, tone (i.e., *SO WHAT?*)

Language: overall characteristics—level, type; implications of?

Structure: division of content into parts, arrangement of the parts?
implications thereof?

Step 3. TP-CASTT: A strategy for summing up significance

Title: Ponder the effects of the title *before reading the poem*.

Paraphrase: "Translate" the poem into your own words, at least in a summary way, if not line by line.

Connotation: Look beyond the literal for implied meanings.

Attitude: Assess the speaker's and the poet's *tone*.

Shifts: Note shifts in speakers, attitudes, aspects of content.

Title: This time, examine the title's effect(s) on an interpretive level.

Theme: In a single sentence, state the poem's central message.