

REVIEW QUESTIONS AND ESSAY TOPICS

1. Is *Billy Budd* a unified novel? If so, where does the unity lie—in the characters, the plot, the theme, the style?
2. Why in the beginning does the narrator introduce the black Handsome Sailor whom he had seen on the docks of Liverpool half a century before?
3. Describe the plot structure of the novel.
4. Explain the different uses of irony in the novel.
5. What is the climax of the novel? Where does it occur?
6. How does the setting, particularly the time of the story, influence the outcome of the novel?
7. Are the names of the ships significant? What do they imply?
8. What qualities does Billy possess that make most people take an instant liking to him?
9. Explain why Billy quietly accepts his impressment.
10. What part does Billy's vocal impediment play in the story?
11. What is Billy's attitude toward Captain Vere, who tells him of his death sentence?
12. If the court believes in Billy's innate innocence, why does it sentence him to be hanged?
13. Why does the chaplain go away and leave Billy alone the night before his death?
14. What is the reaction of the sailors on the *Indomitable* to Billy's death?
15. What is meant by the ballad at the end of the novel?
16. What is Captain Vere's nickname and how did he acquire it? Do the names of the other characters have any special significance?
17. Do you think Captain Vere's actions throughout the story are in keeping with his character? Explain.
18. What is Captain Vere's reaction when Claggart approaches him on the subject of Billy's involvement in a mutiny?
19. What does the captain see as Billy's real crime?
20. What is significant about Captain Vere's death?
21. What is Claggart's position on board ship and how does he utilize this position?
22. What motivates Claggart in his attempt to destroy Billy?
23. What is the Dansker's attitude toward life?
24. What use does Melville make of biblical and mythological allusions in the novel?
25. What commentary on civilization does Melville make in *Billy Budd*?