



Hanna Rochlitz

Sea-changes:
Melville – Forster – Britten

The story of Billy Budd
and its operatic adaptation



Universitätsverlag Göttingen

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To my parents

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List of abbreviations

- AE Forster, E. M. 1971. *Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings*.
- AH Forster, E. M. 1996. *Abinger Harvest and England's Pleasant Land* (Abinger Edition).
- AN Forster, E. M. 1974. *Aspects of the Novel* (Abinger Edition).
- AS Forster, E. M. 1980. *Arctic Summer and Other Fiction* (Abinger Edition).
- BB Melville, Herman. 1946. *Billy Budd* (ed. by William Plomer).
- BBC Forster, E. M. 2008. *The BBC Talks of E. M. Forster 1929-1960*.
- BBC1960 Britten, Benjamin, Eric Crozier, and E. M. Forster. 2003. "Discussion on *Billy Budd*" [1960], in: Kildea, ed.: *Britten on Music*.
- BBL Britten, Benjamin. 2004. *Letters from a Life: the Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*, Vol. 3.
- BK Dostoevsky, Fyodor. 1912. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Translated by Constance Garnett.
- BPL Britten-Pears Library. The Britten-Pears Foundation Archive, Aldeburgh (United Kingdom).
- BPL A61,
BPL A62 Forster, E. M., Eric Crozier, and Benjamin Britten. Libretto drafts for *Billy Budd*. Material held by the Britten-Pears Foundation Archive. Archived on Microfilms A61 and A62. The respective frame numbers are given after the colon, thus: BPL A61:1.
- BPL AD-EMF Forster, E. M., Eric Crozier, and Benjamin Britten. Libretto drafts for *Billy Budd*. Forster's copy of the typed four-act libretto draft of August 1949 (GB-Alb 2-9100356). Material held by the Britten-Pears Foundation Archive. The siglum is followed by a folio reference that follows the archivists' foliation (e.g. BPL AD-EMF:7r or BPL AD-EMF:7v, where r = recto and v = verso).
- BPL X3 Britten, Benjamin. Holograph draft of *Billy Budd*. Material held by the Britten-Pears Foundation Archive (GB-Alb 2-9300664). Archived on Microfilm X3. The respective frame numbers are given after the colon, thus: BPL X3:1.
- CPB Forster, E. M. 1987. *Commonplace Book*.
- EMFL I,
EMFL II Forster, E. M. 1985. *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster* (Vol. I and Vol. II).
- EOG English Opera Group.
- GG Reid, Forrest. 2007. *The Garden God*.

- Griffin* Forster, E. M. 1951. "Letter from E. M. Forster", published in *The Griffin*.
- HE Forster, E. M. 1973. *Howards End* (Abinger Edition).
- H/S Melville, Herman. 1962. *Billy Budd, Sailor (an inside narrative)* by Herman Melville (ed. by Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts).
- KCC: EMF The Papers of Edward Morgan Forster. Collection held by King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge (GBR/0272/PP/EMF). References to items in this collection are marked "KCC: EMF", followed by the Archive's respective numeric siglum.
- LD Forster, E. M. 2011. Forster's "Locked Diary" = Vol. 2 of *The Journals and Diaries of E. M. Forster*.
- LIB Forster, Edward Morgan, and Eric Crozier. 1961. *Billy Budd: Opera in Two Acts. Revised version 1961*. (Libretto, Boosey & Hawkes).
- LIB1951 Forster, Edward Morgan, and Eric Crozier. 1951. *Billy Budd: Opera in Four Acts*. (Libretto, Boosey & Hawkes).
- LJ Forster, E. M. 1984a. *The Longest Journey* (Abinger Edition).
- LN Forster, E. M. 1977b. *The Lucy Novels: Early Sketches for A Room with a View* (Abinger Edition).
- LtC Forster, E. M. 1972a. *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (Abinger Edition).
- M Forster, E. M. 1999a. *Maurice* (Abinger Edition).
- MF Hawthorne, Nathaniel. 1995. *The Marble Faun*.
- MJ Trilling, Lionel. 1981. *The Middle of the Journey*.
- MSSPtI Forster, E. M. 1978c. *The Manuscripts of A Passage to India* (Abinger Edition).
- PtI Forster, E. M. 1978a. *A Passage to India* (Abinger Edition).
- RV Forster, E. M. 1977a. *A Room with a View* (Abinger Edition).
- TCD Forster, E. M. 1972b. *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Abinger Edition).
- TPT Forster, E. M. 1998. *The Prince's Tale and Other Uncollected Writings* (Abinger Edition).
- TMS Forster, E. M. 1997. *The Machine Stops and Other Stories* (Abinger Edition).
- WA Forster, E. M. 1975. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Abinger Edition).
- WJ Melville, Herman. 1970. *White-Jacket, or The world in a Man-of-War*.

Note on citations and editorial practice

In accordance with the requirements of my publisher, when citing works of other authors I have tacitly changed American spellings to British spellings, and unified all representations of musical keys to written words, so that, for instance, “Bb” in the cited source becomes “B flat” in my text.

References to the orchestral score of *Billy Budd* (Boosey & Hawkes 20733) appear as a figure number in square brackets (preceded by the appropriate Act where necessary), plus or minus the relevant number of bars after or before the given figure number, thus: “Act I, [67]+3”, where “+3” refers to the third bar *after* the one marked by the figure, i.e. the *fourth* bar of figure 67.

Citations from the Bible follow the Authorised King James Version.

When citing draft material published in the Abinger Edition of Forster’s works, I have, for simplicity’s sake, retained the editorial symbols used throughout the Abinger Edition: words between oboli \.../ are Forster’s insertions; words between angle brackets <...> are Forster’s deletions; double angle brackets <<...>> indicate the deletion of a passage in which something else (shown between single angle brackets) had already been deleted.

When citing unpublished archive material from the King’s College and Britten-Pears Foundation archives, I have tried to convey a more immediate impression of the source by reproducing cancellations as struck-through words and letters. The exception are long passages in the libretto drafts which have been summarily cancelled; the extent of these cancellations and insertions is indicated by notes in editorial square brackets. Simple insertions are rendered as text between oboli \.../, more complex insertions are identified and explained by notes in editorial square brackets.

Introduction

It was late in 1948 that Benjamin Britten and Edward Morgan Forster conceived the idea for an opera based on Herman Melville's novella *Billy Budd*. Together with Eric Crozier, who had collaborated with Britten on various earlier projects, Forster subsequently began the task of turning Melville's narrative into a libretto which was to become the basis for a full-length opera of four acts. The opera *Billy Budd* had its first performance at the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden on 1 December 1951. In 1960, the composer and his librettists revised the four-act version to produce the slightly shorter two-act version, which may be regarded as their final decision on this work, and which is commonly performed in opera houses today.

In choosing to adapt Melville's novella for the operatic stage, Britten, Forster and Crozier were, as Forster put it in 1951, "by no means the only Billies on the beach" (*Griffin* 4). A play by Louis O. Coxe and Richard Chapman was staged in New York in 1949. An unpublished dramatisation was made at the same time by Donald Windham, a correspondent and friend of Forster's.¹ Finally, the Italian composer Giorgio Ghedini, whom Britten met around 1949, was at that time working on a one-act *Billy Budd*, adapted by Salvatore Quasimodo from Eugenio Montale's 1942 Italian translation of Melville's novella. This work was first per-

¹ See Windham, ed. 11.

formed in Venice on 8 September 1949 but did not prove successful enough to become established in the repertoire.² The ethical, philosophical and religious questions and problems addressed by Melville's text appear to have appealed to a number of creative artists in post-World War II America and Europe, whose interests in adapting this particular text can be assumed to have ranged from the political to the personal.³ In the case of E. M. Forster and Benjamin Britten, it is possible to link their interpretation, transformation and re-creation of the story of *Billy Budd* with the wider networks of their respective life-long artistic concerns.

The main focus of this study centres on E. M. Forster's involvement with Melville's story, and on the role played by the 'grand old man of English letters' in the collaborative adaptation of this work for the operatic stage. As Linda Hutcheon has noted in her appraisal of adaptation theory, to consider adaptation as a creative process is to accord considerable attention to the adaptors themselves. It is they who first interpret the adapted text "as readers", and then take possession of it "as creators" by "ma[king] it their own"; and, inevitably, "the traces of the adapting interpreter-creator cling to the adaptation". Accordingly, Hutcheon has invited scholars and critics to

reconsider [their] sense of literary critical embarrassment about intention and the more personal and aesthetic dimensions of the creative process. In theoretical-historical terms, our resistance is perfectly understandable, but it has inhibited us from understanding why such a critically denigrated form as adaptation has proved as much of an attraction for artists as for audiences. (111)

Given the richness of the available material which promises information about the "personal and aesthetic dimensions" of Forster's engagement with *Billy Budd* – an engagement which is documented for a time-span of almost forty years – I am happy to follow Hutcheon's invitation. My project aims to situate the story of *Billy Budd*, the Handsome Sailor, in the wider context of Forster's literary oeuvre, his life, and his life writings. Through this, I hope to be able to shed some light on Forster's relationship, as author, reader, interpreter and adaptor, to Melville's text, but also on the relationship of the *Billy Budd* libretto to Forsterian thought and literary imagination. This relationship emerges in the form of a wealth of intertextual "traces" that extend far beyond the primary connection between the novella (itself heavily and self-consciously intertextual) and the opera libretto. These "traces" can be seen to tap into a multi-voiced and multi-layered background of other texts and cultural discourses. My investigations into the genesis of the opera

² See Reed 1993a:57f.

³ Coxé and Chapman state their view of *Billy Budd* as "a morality play", and explain that when they came to engage with the material in January 1947, "Melville's story of good, evil, and the way the world takes such absolutes was material enough for two veterans of a war, a depression, and the moving cold front" (Coxé/Chapman ix).

Billy Budd will thus serve to illustrate in exemplary form that no adaptation can be understood as a one-to-one transposition of a single text, but, rather, that the interpretive process which results in the re-creation will always involve further intertextual and extra-textual elements. While a full reconstruction of the adaptive process is clearly impossible, the examination of this process promises some fascinating insights into the complexities and vicissitudes of creative adaptation.

Hutcheon has observed that the “inevitable [...] change[s]” undergone by an adapted text in the process of adaptation will necessarily be accompanied by “modifications in the political valence and even the meaning of stories” (xvi). In the case of a collaborative adaptation, which most operas are, and in the special case where three collaborators are involved, as in the creation of the opera *Billy Budd*, the finished work as an integral text will furthermore be seen to have been shaped by (among other things) several individually differing interpretations of the source text, and to have reached its final form through a series of negotiations over the overall intended meaning of both the source text and the operatic adaptation. Some traces of the conflicting interests articulated in those negotiations may still be detected as tensions and conflicts in the finished work, questioning and subverting its seemingly closed and integrated form, and thus contributing to the range of interpretive possibilities offered by the opera as text and intertext.

When talking about the adaptation of Melville’s *Billy Budd*, the three opera-makers were wont to point out that they had tried to stay, in Eric Crozier’s words, “as faithful to Melville as possible” (BBC1960:203). Their collaboration “was governed from first to last by respect for Melville and the desire to interpret him faithfully – not an easy task with an author whose rhetorical language sometimes appears to conceal more than it expresses” (Crozier 1979:31). This “faithful” approach, most insistently proclaimed by Crozier and Forster, was coupled with a belief that “we imagined ourselves anyhow to be following [Melville’s] symbolism” (Forster in BBC1960:205). Yet an opera-goer who is familiar with Forster’s writings, both fictional and non-fictional, can hardly avoid the impression that the libretto contains a considerable number of typically Forsterian themes and narrative patterns, to such a degree that the libretto might easily be mistaken for one of Forster’s own independent literary creations. Moreover, for all their insistence on their faithfulness to their textual model, the librettists at the same time admitted to making certain radical changes to the character of Captain Vere, whom they felt Melville had been “disgracing” and who needed to be, as Crozier put it in 1960, “humanised” (BBC1960:206). Forster had at an earlier time gone so far as to refer to this process in his private correspondence as “the rescuing of Vere from his creator”, describing it as “no small problem” (EMFL II:237). In public, however, he declared that he and his co-librettist had merely “ventured to tidy up” a character whose behaviour had struck him as “odious[...]”, explaining that “adaptors have to tidy. Creators needn’t and sometimes shouldn’t” (*Griffin* 5f.).

Forster's self-identification as a "faithful" adaptor, rather than a creator, may be understood to reflect a cultural convention which privileges the composer of an opera as its principal 'author', and which judges a work according to its perceived fidelity to the 'original' adapted text. By contrast, Britten, as the official commissioner of what was to him the verbal basis for a musico-dramatic work which would be received as very much *his* creation,⁴ was more ready to emphasise explicitly his conviction that their adaptation had produced "a new work" of Melville's novella, and that "adapting into a different medium, with all that means", could legitimately result in something of which the parent text's author "would not have approved at all" (BBC1960:207).

His claims to the status of adaptor rather than that of creator notwithstanding, Forster, too, can be seen to have regarded his version of *Billy Budd* as one of his own literary productions, and one which he valued very highly at that. Shortly after the opera had opened at Covent Garden on 1 December 1951, he wrote to Britten: "This opera is my *Nunc Dimittis*, in that it dismisses me peacefully and convinces me I have achieved" (9 December 1951, EMFL II:246). More than ten years later, in a diary entry of 29 February 1964 – having attended the premiere of the revised opera at Covent Garden on 9 January – he lists *Billy Budd* as one of three "good reasons for pleasure" with which he begins the 86th year of his life (LD154).

There is every reason to believe that, as a number of critics have suggested, his collaboration with Britten enabled Forster to give a cautious public expression to some of his central personal and artistic preoccupations, namely, personal relationships, homoerotic desire, and salutary love between men. Given Forster's lifelong habit of trying to protect his public persona from associations with homosexuality, his insistence that the opera-makers saw themselves not as "creators" but as "adaptors" (*Griffin* 6) might partly be explained as an attempt to safeguard against the possibility of being himself held responsible for any homoerotic content which audiences might discover in the finished work. It seems not irrelevant in this context that at the time of his first recorded engagement with *Billy Budd* in 1926, Forster was already firmly convinced of Melville's "suppressed homo[sex]uality" (CPB17). This conviction may, in the late 1940s, have gone a considerable way towards making him feel that, in cautiously strengthening the homoerotic elements he was able to detect and decode in Melville's narrative, he was acting in perfect accordance with the author's most private intentions – for

⁴ I am here arguing on the simplistic basis that most opera-goers may safely be assumed to think of going to see "Britten's opera *Billy Budd*", rather than "Melville's *Billy Budd*, adapted by E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier, and set to music by Benjamin Britten", just as music-lovers will go to see "the Verdi Requiem" rather than "Verdi's setting of the *Missa pro defunctis*", or "Mozart's *Don Giovanni*" rather than "one of the numerous eighteenth-century operas based on Tirso de Molina's play *Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*, adapted by Lorenzo Da Ponte and set to music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart".

Forster himself had, after all, been working covert discourses about homoeroticism into virtually all of his published fiction.

At the same time, Forster's repeated declarations may also reflect a genuine conviction of actually having produced a "faithful" rendering of Melville's model. Asked, for instance, whether "the symbolism or the second meaning behind the action in the work" had been "a part of [his] intention", Forster stated: "I had the general feeling of salvation of course, but I don't think we put in anything in that region which Melville did not give us" (BBC1960:205). The fact that Forster had already identified salvation as one of the themes of Melville's novella in *Aspects of the Novel* certainly suggests that his adaptation to some degree retains the meaning he had originally found in Melville's text.

This inevitably leads up to the question of how Forster might have been reading Melville, and in what ways, if any, the critic's readings in the 1920s and in 1947, when Forster revisited the text in a BBC Book Talk, can be seen to differ from the adaptor's interpretation in 1948-51 and in 1960. While I am well aware that textual analysis can provide no conclusive answer to these questions, I nevertheless believe that it will prove worthwhile to investigate the available material under this aspect. There is also the question of how and why it was possible for Melville's novella to be turned into a libretto which is so recognisably Forsterian in theme and content, and yet at the same time retains an appreciable amount of Melville's original material. In other words, I am interested in the ways in which Forster was able to take possession of Melville's story and characters – to appropriate them in a positive sense of re-creating them and thus making them his own⁵ – and turn them into vehicles for his own artistic concerns.

For my analyses I will naturally be turning to the direct comments which Forster made about Melville's novella and its characters in his critical writings and in his private communications. At least as pertinent, however, are certain characteristic and pervading elements within Forster's own work which bear a surprising resemblance to some of the central elements of Melville's novella. These textual similarities suggest that Melville's story may have lent itself to assimilation into Forster's own creative patterns with remarkable readiness, so that the changes made during the adaptation may indeed have seemed, to Forster, little more than "tidy[ing] up" (*Griffin* 6) in some respects. With these investigations, I hope to

⁵ I am aware that the term "appropriation" carries negative connotations in some branches of cultural studies, adaptation theory and fan studies, where it is variously associated with discourses about exploitation, cultural mainstreaming, notions of ownership, and theft. Yet I would claim that Forster's statements about "rescuing" Vere point to notions of ownership as an essential and positive element of his creative experience, as does his assertion that Claggart's central monologue is "*my* most important piece of writing" in the libretto (letter to Britten of early December 1950, EMFL II:242). For this reason, I shall continue to use the term 'appropriation' in a positive sense throughout this study. The alternative of 'salvaging' (see Hutcheon 8) is unacceptable to me in this context because its linguistic associations with wreckage imply some defective quality in the adapted text.

contribute some new perspectives to our current ways of thinking about Forster's collaboration with Britten and Crozier on the opera *Billy Budd*. As part of this project, I offer readings of a number of Forster's texts through the lens of the opera *Billy Budd*, as well as readings of the novella's characters and their operatic counterparts through the lens of Forsterian writing.

It is of fundamental importance to remember that a great part of Forster's own fictional work had already been completed before the publication of Melville's novella in 1924. For all of Forster's novels – leaving aside the special case of *Maurice* which Forster continued to revise for over four decades – as well as for many of the short stories discussed in this study, there can therefore be no question of their having been influenced by Melville's *Billy Budd*. I will also show that all of the parallels to *Billy Budd* which can be discovered in Forster's writings, such as the typically Forsterian constellation of a 'dark' character in need of salvation and a 'light' saviour figure, or the association of attractive young men with figures of Greek mythology, had already clearly established themselves as essential presences in the Forsterian creative imagination in these early fictional works, so that their continuing reappearance in the short fiction written *after* 1924 could not be attributed to the influence of Melville's novella, either. Yet one of Forster's short stories, "Arthur Snatchfold" (1928), shows an engagement with a problem of responsibility which exhibits some striking parallels to the problems surrounding the figure of Melville's Vere. I shall discuss some ways in which Forster's story could be read as a creative response to Melville's text. Finally, two of the short stories I examine, "The Other Boat" (1957/58) and "Little Imber" (1961), were composed after the essential completion of the opera *Billy Budd*, and I will explore some of the effects which Forster's librettistic engagement with Melville's novella may have had upon his subsequent work.

Part One of this study is devoted to a close textual comparison of Melville's novella and the Britten/Forster/Crozier opera *Billy Budd*, and thus provides the basis for all my subsequent enquiries. I preface my investigations with a brief overview of key concerns in the theory of operatic adaptation of literary prose works (section I.1). I then introduce Melville's novella in section I.2., where I discuss its status as an unfinished text, its complex publication history, and its critical reception, yet always with a view to the relevance or irrelevance of these issues to Britten's, Forster's and Crozier's engagement with the text. A short chapter of this section traces Forster's and Britten's connections to the multi-generational network of early British Melville enthusiasts.

In section I.3, I analyse Melville's text as the raw material which the collaborators had to interpret and transform in the process of creating their operatic adaptation. This investigation will concentrate on the three main characters, Billy, Claggart, and Vere; yet the voice of the narrator will inevitably form an integral part of my analyses.

Section I.4. contains a similar analysis of the opera's main characters as they appear in the libretto. It is opened by a brief overview of the transformative choices and structural changes made by the adaptors, and of the original Melville material retained in the libretto. In the course of my enquiries, I pay special attention to the ways in which the libretto's characters differ from those in the novella, and to the impact these differences have on the interpretive possibilities offered by the libretto, particularly with regard to the theme of salvation.

In section I.5. I discuss some aspects of the opera's musical structure. The musical discourse of *Billy Budd* is characterised by the use of leitmotifs linking certain concepts and figures, and therefore plays an essential part in the construction of meaning within the work as a whole; it can even be read as the structural equivalent of a narrative voice. I present an exemplary discussion of the so-called Mutiny motif, which will later become relevant again in section II.6. I also give a brief overview of the three main characters' musical presences. A final chapter is devoted to the ways in which the opera's musical discourse endorses and supports, but also questions and destabilises the theme of salvation which is so prominent a force in the libretto. The section concludes with a brief summary.

Part Two of this study presents an exploration of the story of Billy Budd in relation to E. M. Forster and his work from a variety of different angles. In the course of my enquiries, I conduct extensive analyses of Forster's fictional and non-fictional writings, in which I regularly turn to the novella and the opera *Billy Budd* to investigate their parallels and affinities with Forster's lifelong personal and artistic preoccupations. Forster's creative engagement with male/male erotic longing in contexts of socially institutionalised homophobia occupies a central position among those preoccupations.

Section II.1. investigates Forster's earliest engagement with Melville's text as documented in his Commonplace Book. The source evidence establishes that Forster was reading the novella as a text by a homosexual author, and I provide an extensive discussion of the intertextual associations with encoded discourses about homosexuality evoked by Forster as he strives to define the concept of evil, as rendered in literary and cultural discourses which can be read as coded references to homoerotic desire.

Section II.2. contains an extensive overview of pervading themes, narrative patterns, and recurring character types in Forster's fictional and non-fictional writings, with a special focus on those features which can be regarded as significant for his adaptation of Melville's *Billy Budd*. Central among these is the Forsterian salvation narrative, a structure which can be seen to provide the basis for a large part of Forster's short fiction, but which also features in all of his novels to a greater or lesser extent. The Forsterian salvation narrative typically involves what I have termed a 'dark' English middle class character and a 'light' saviour character who is often a social or cultural Other; and my discussion here provides the basis

for my four case studies of Forster's fiction in section II.4., as well as for my discussion of Vere, Claggart and Billy as representatives of these character types in section II.5.

In section II.3., I provide a selective inventory of pan-Forsterian textual leitmotifs which also figure in the *Billy Budd* libretto. Tracing the patterns of recurring key words, phrases and images through Forster's fictional and non-fictional writings, I am able to present readings of various aspects of the opera *Billy Budd* and its characters on a basis of Forsterian textual symbolism.

Section II.4. comprises four case studies in which I present detailed discussions of "Ralph and Tony" (1903), *The Longest Journey* (1907), "Arthur Snatchfold" (1928) and "The Other Boat" (1957/58). All of these works show similarities to both Melville's novella and the opera *Billy Budd* on more than one structural level, exhibiting narrative patterns and character relationships through which Forster's own texts as well as his reading(s) and his adaptation of Melville's text can be fruitfully explored.

Section II.5. re-examines the three main characters of the novella and the opera *Billy Budd* from a Forsterian perspective as extrapolated from Forster's fictional and non-fictional writings, including his comments on *Billy Budd* and its characters. Finally, in section II.6, I explore the interpretive potential of the discursive slippage between mutiny and homosexuality, which can be detected in the opera as well as in the novella.

The investigations conducted in this second part of my study enable me to present readings of the novella and the opera *Billy Budd* which are modulated by the imaginative forces at work in Forster's own texts. These readings reveal a complex background of Forsterian thought and recurring narrative patterns which can be assumed to have influenced the transformation of *Billy Budd* from novella to libretto in a decisive way, for this background will have provided the framework for Forster's interpretation and creative appropriation of Melville's three main characters.

Part Three of this study is devoted to the genesis of the opera as the product of a unique and fascinating collaboration between the composer and his two librettists. Section III.1 provides an overview of key issues in this collaboration, which include Britten's and Forster's differing approaches to music and opera, and Britten's, Forster's and Crozier's diverging views of *Billy Budd* as a text about relationships between men. I also consider the historical research done by the librettists, and the impact it had on their view of Melville's text and the opera they were going to produce. The section is concluded by a brief chronological account of the opera's development.

The operatic adaptation of *Billy Budd* is documented by a wealth of source material, in which the complete series of libretto drafts preserved at the Britten-Pears Library at Aldeburgh occupies a central position. My reconstruction of the evolu-

tion of the libretto and its characters in section III.2. is the first in *Billy Budd* scholarship to give extensive consideration to all of the currently available material. Particular attention is paid to Forster's copy of the August 1949 libretto draft, acquired shortly after Clifford Hindley had essentially completed his pioneering examination of the Aldeburgh material, and subsequently never consulted again. The evidence provided by this document can be seen to qualify a widely established view in *Billy Budd* scholarship, which credits Britten with a number of changes to the character of Vere that are responsible for the development of the libretto into a characteristically Forsterian narrative about salvation. My investigations, by contrast, indicate that Forster was equally deeply involved in the making of those changes. I am thus able to resolve the seeming paradox pervasive in recent scholarly narratives which have Britten supposedly producing a text that is more true to Forster's personal and artistic creed than the text envisioned by Forster himself.

Section III.3. turns to Claggart's central Act I monologue, which famously caused a serious disturbance in the relationship between Britten and Forster because Forster criticised the composer's setting of this text. I provide a detailed comparison between Britten's early and late revised versions of the aria, in the course of which I engage with some popular misapprehensions about Forster's criticism.

My analyses and readings throughout this study do not attempt to impose any single theoretical model onto the examined material. The theoretical approach they are perhaps most perceptibly influenced by on occasion can be loosely defined as a queer constructivist one. When talking about relationships between men, I shall be using terms like "homosexual" and "homoerotic longing" where they apply to concrete same-sex sexual or (to use a term fallen into sad disregard) love relationships or desires; in other words, to a homosexual object-choice. By contrast, the term "queer" is used in a specifically Queer theoretical sense as formulated by David Halperin: "Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. [...] [It] demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (62). Where E. M. Forster is involved, this positionality may be perceived to include aspects of homosexual experience and of dissenting sexual, social and racial politics, but also of an artistic sensibility often articulated in terms of deviant gender behaviour.

I shall also occasionally be making use of Eve Sedgwick's model of power relations in patriarchal society as negotiated through a web of "homosocial" relationships between men, relationships that cover a continuum ranging from the social to the sexual, and are structured by an "affective or social force", a "glue", which Sedgwick identifies as "desire". This "desire", however, need not necessarily be either sexual or positive, but can equally take the form of "hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged" (1985:2).

The Britten/Forster/Crozier opera was written more than ten years before the publication of the Hayford/Sealts 'definitive' text of *Billy Budd* in 1962. For a comparative study of Melville's text and the opera, it therefore seems the logical solution to use the edition of *Billy Budd* which the librettists themselves were using, namely, the 1946 edition by William Plomer. All of my textual analyses of Melville's *Billy Budd* will therefore be based upon that edition, for, though flawed in many ways, this was the text of *Billy Budd* as the collaborators encountered it when they first decided to turn it into an opera late in 1948.

My analyses of the opera's libretto and score will for the greatest part be conducted on the textual basis of the revised 1960 two-act version. Given that the principal change effected by the opera-makers at this time consisted in the omission of a Captain's Muster at the end of Act I, Sc. 1, a scene with which none of the three collaborators had ever been entirely at ease, the 1960 version ought reasonably to be regarded as representing not just Britten's, but also Forster's and Crozier's final decision on their work.⁶

⁶ See also Reed 1993b:84.

Part one: *Billy Budd*: novella and opera

I.1. Transforming prose works into opera: some key concerns

The operatic adaptation of literary works is a far from uncommon phenomenon in music history. It was the nineteenth century, however, which saw a rising number of opera libretti based on novels and shorter prose works rather than on drama (see Halliwell 2005:23-34). Prominent examples include numerous operas based on novels by Sir Walter Scott, of which Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), which Salvatore Cammarano adapted from *The Bride of Lammermoor*, is probably the most widely-known. Other popular works are Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), which was adapted from Prosper Mérimée's novella of that name by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, and Massenet's *Werther* (1892), adapted from Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* by Edouard Blau, Paul Milliet and Georges Hartmann.⁷ The adaptation of novels and short stories continues to be popular among contempo-

⁷ Further instances of well-known nineteenth and twentieth century operas adapted from literary prose works include Massenet's *Manon* (1884) with a libretto by Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille, and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893) with a libretto by Ruggiero Leoncavallo, Marco Praga, Domenico Oliva, Luigi Illica, Giuseppe Giacosa, Giulio Ricordi and Giuseppe Adami – both adapted from Abbé Prévost's novel *L'histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*; Hindemith's *Cardillac* (1926; revised version 1952), adapted from E. T. A. Hoffmann's tale *Das Fräulein von Scudéri* by Ferdinand Lion, Prokofiev's *Igrok* [The Gambler] (1929) which he himself adapted from Dostoevsky's novel of the same name, and Prokofiev's *Voyna i mir* [War and Peace] (1944-1959), which the composer and Mira Mendelson adapted from Leo N. Tolstoy's novel.

rary composers of opera.⁸ Benjamin Britten, too, turned to short fiction or other literary prose as the basis for a number of his most celebrated works. In addition to *Billy Budd*, his oeuvre includes five more operas adapted from prose works: *Albert Herring* (1947), which Eric Crozier adapted from Guy de Maupassant's short story *Le rosier de Madame Housson* (translated into English by Marjorie Laurie as "Madame Housson's Rose King"); *Gloriana* (1953), which William Plomer adapted from Lytton Strachey's literary biography *Elizabeth and Essex*; *The Turn of the Screw* (1954) and *Owen Wingrave* (1971), both of which Myfanwy Piper adapted from Henry James's short fiction; and *Death in Venice* (1973), which Piper adapted from Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (translated into English by Helen Lowe-Porter).

On the technical level, the transition from novel to opera can be said to occur most commonly in two distinct steps, the first being the condensation and transformation of the longer literary form into the more confined and dramatic form of a libretto; in the second step, the libretto is then used as a basis from which the composer develops his or her music. As Halliwell has noted, "the term 'dramatisation'", though often applied to opera adaptations of literary prose works, does not adequately reflect the stylistic and formal differences between "musical drama" and "spoken drama" (Halliwell 2005:35). Although Forster had tried his hand at playwriting early in his literary career, and would, as a lover of opera, have been aware of the technical differences between the different forms of drama, he nevertheless somewhat indiscriminately referred to his librettistic activity as "quarry[ing] a play out of [Melville]" in 1951 (*Griffin* 5). By contrast, Britten placed great importance on acknowledging the specific properties of a libretto as different from those of a play. This becomes evident in a letter to Eric Crozier, who, though well-versed in the technicalities of libretto writing, appears to have been somewhat lax in his terminology. Commenting on Crozier's draft for an article on the writing of opera, Britten took issue with his representations:

I don't think it's right to suggest that the first stages of libretto writing resemble writing a play. The libretto initially may look like a play (especially Billy because of the special case of E. M. F. not being a poet) – but I think with all our operas we consider it from musical angles right from the beginning. We don't, for instance, consider subjects or actions or characters which could be anti-musical, do we? [...] I think it's a little misleading to bring in the play idea. I know the composer takes a back seat at the beginning – but the librettist is always planning an opera not a play. (15 May 1950, BBLL594)

As Britten's admonitions indicate, writing a libretto (even if, as that of *Billy Budd*, it is largely in prose rather than verse) means providing a text to suit the special

⁸ See Halliwell 2005:30-34. Halliwell lists over thirty post-World War II operatic adaptations of literary prose works.

requirements of the musico-dramatic genre, whose conventions (embraced or rejected by the composer) may demand the creation of formal units like arias, ensembles, and full-cast set pieces. At the same time, Britten's comment on avoiding "anti-musical" features can be taken to point to a basic requirement for operatic creation: as Halliwell reminds us, "the term 'operatic' has connotations of intensity, excess, and conflict". When composers and librettists turn to literature in their search of material for an opera, therefore, their choice tends to fall on "fictional texts containing situations where these elements are relatively clear-cut": the source texts chosen "generally have some intrinsic elements which give rise to moments of increasing intensity or heightening of emotion which can find further amplification in music" (Halliwell 2005:45f).

Regarding the function of the libretto in general, there is a persistent opinion that it is "addressed in the first place to the composer" (Trowell 1194 and 1217) – an opinion also held by a number of Britten's collaborators, friends and contemporaries.⁹ This view would seem to be symptomatic of the predominant position which music (and composers) have come to assume in the operatic genre over the centuries. The popular view of opera as a primarily musical art form whose musical components dominate over the textual components may well reflect a perceived higher status for the specialised musical skills that are required of composers and performers;¹⁰ yet, as will be shown below, such a view can be and has been differentiated in the general movement towards the systematic theorisation of opera, multimedia art forms, and adaptation.

The process of librettistic adaptation, most theorists agree, inevitably involves a reduction in complexity through the necessary operations of compression. It is this reduction which has long been responsible for a stereotypical view of the libretto as a work of supposedly low literary merit,¹¹ and of a corresponding view of the librettist as a writer of low literary status. Yet Irene Morra's recent study of the role of the "literary librettist" in twentieth-century British opera has revealed a

⁹ See Crozier 1966:3, Crozier in Wadsworth 12, and P. Porter 282. In "Some Reflections on Opera as a Medium" (*Tempo*, 20 [1951]), which was later reprinted as "Notes on Music and Opera" in *The Dyer's Hand*, W. H. Auden declared in his characteristically radical manner that "the verses which a librettist writes are not addressed to the public but are really a private letter to the composer. They have their moment of glory, the moment in which they suggest to him a certain melody; once that is over, they are as expendable as infantry to a Chinese general: they must efface themselves and cease to care what happens to them" (1963:473). Britten appears to have disagreed with much of Auden's article; in a letter to Eric Walter White, he commented that it contained "some quite memorably inane remarks!" (22 August 1951, BBL674).

¹⁰ See Corse 12f.

¹¹ See Trowell 1193f. A linguistic model of the libretto as a text "at the edge of literature" has been proposed by Sandra Corse, who writes that "librettos, in the process of becoming librettos, are stripped of many of the elements that make them seem literary": the "aesthetic [...] functions of language" are "considerably reduced", while the "communicative", "more functional aspects of language [...] are reduced to a lesser degree" (14).

development in which composers “actively encouraged an unprecedented contribution from recognised British literary figures”. Morra rightly observes that

This involvement invites a reconsideration of the traditional role of the opera libretto, as providing a narrative framework that allows music a certain transcendence over words. If the literary structure and devices of the libretto gain a greater distinction within the opera, they can challenge music’s dominance. [...] Such literary involvement in British operatic creation points to the possible validation of the libretto as a literary and dramatic form.

With regard to issues of authorship in opera as a multimedia and multi-authored genre, Morra’s findings furthermore provide a basis for “question[ing] conventional assumptions that it is primarily the composer who determines an opera’s dramaturgical effect”, for “one must ask why literary figures would agree to write a libretto unless they were able to perceive a literary, musical, or creative authorship to their participation which as yet remains unacknowledged” (Morra 2007:7f.).

Morra’s point receives support from a letter which Forster wrote to the *Times* in January 1964 to complain about the fact that the music critic who had reviewed the Covent Garden premiere of the revised *Billy Budd* had omitted to mention either Crozier’s or his name: “We did the libretto. We worked on it in Britten’s house for several weeks. We might reasonably be credited with having helped to interpret his intentions and his conception of Melville’s intentions” (quoted in Crozier 1986:26). As I shall demonstrate in Part Three of this study, Forster’s rebuke significantly downplays the extent of his own influence not just on the librettistic interpretation of the composer’s “intentions”, but on the opera’s music itself.

Following contemporary theories of adaptation, as reviewed in Linda Hutcheon’s comprehensive examination of the field, it can be taken as axiomatic that both the literary adaptation (i.e. the libretto) and the music with its structure and its idiom are the products of a process of interpretation which inevitably distances both the libretto and the completed opera from the parent text.¹² As Michael Halliwell has summarised for the medium of opera, “even a ‘hallowed’ text is ‘re-composed’ in the adaptive process, regardless of any professed fidelity to the original literary source”. The libretto is inevitably an “interpretation of the original source”, and “when music is added, further and far-reaching modifications of the original work and the libretto take place as well as inevitable character transformations” (1999:148f.). Any operatic adaptation of a literary prose work will therefore need to be acknowledged as the product of a transformative process, and as an

¹² See, for instance, Hutcheon xvi.

autonomous work in its own right,¹³ possessing its own structure of narrative and aesthetic patterns, but also shaped to a greater or lesser extent by the aesthetics, conventions and means of expression associated with the operatic art form. (In a staged performance, the choreography, lighting, stage design and costumes of the particular production all participate in the construction of meaning as well, and constitute a further, if more transient, level of interpretation.)

A declared aim of adaptation theory is to move away from conservative evaluations which, building on outmoded notions of originality,¹⁴ have traditionally pronounced the literary source the 'primary' and therefore 'more valuable' work of art. Similarly, critics have long been in the habit of judging the quality of an operatic adaptation purely on the basis of its supposed fidelity to the adapted work – a judgement which in the past has, for various reasons, often looked no further than the words of the libretto.¹⁵ Again, however, the multivalent category of 'fidelity', recognised by theorists as accompanied by a "morally loaded discourse [...] based on the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text" (Hutcheon 7), has by this time ceased to lie at the focus of adaptation theory.¹⁶ Summarising the theoretical trend, Hutcheon has formulated a view of adaptation as "repetition without replication" (7): "Despite being temporally second, it is both an interpretive and a creative act; it is storytelling as both rereading and rereading" (111).

Adaptation theory is rightly wary of essentialist generalisations about the supposed specific properties of various different media, which in the past have often been used to support an existing bias against adaptations of literary prose into other media.¹⁷ Yet theorists of opera have covered an extensive analytic territory in mapping the expressive possibilities offered by opera as a multimedia art form when it comes to creating complex interlinked networks of meaning – possibilities which are not available in literary prose forms. Thus, for instance, opera, like film, allows the simultaneous presentation of independent discourses – verbal, musical, visual – which can be used to create multivalent narrative structures offering rich possibilities for interpretation.

¹³ With regard to the medium of film, this point was made in 1957 by George Bluestone in his seminal work on the cinematic adaptation of novels, where he declared that "in the fullest sense of the word, the filmist becomes not a translator for an established author, but a new author in his own right" (62). This view has by this time acquired the status of a basic axiom of adaptation theory (see Hutcheon 6).

¹⁴ See Hutcheon 111.

¹⁵ See Trowell 1193f.

¹⁶ As Thomas Leitch has pointed out with regard to film adaptations of literature, "fidelity to its source text – whether it is conceived as success in re-creating specific textual details or the effect of the whole – is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense" (161).

¹⁷ See Leitch 150 and Hutcheon 33-38.

In the 1970s, Edward T. Cone, Peter Conrad and other theorists investigated the affinities between opera and the novel. Their work on the structural analogies between narrative prose and opera was taken up (and critiqued) by Carolyn Abbate in 1991. These various applications of the theories of literary narratology to the medium of opera have resulted in various narratological models of opera. Common to most of these is the basic realisation that the ‘voice’ of the opera orchestra can be viewed as the operatic equivalent of the narrator’s voice in fiction. An extensive overview of theoretical work on the similarities and differences to models of literary narration has recently been provided by Michael Halliwell (2005:45-83). I return to the subject of operatic narrative in section I.5.1.

The theoretical debate about the relationship between words and music has accompanied the operatic genre ever since its emergence as an autonomous art form around the turn of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ Music and language, so most theorists of opera appear to agree, are two separate, even incompatible sign systems that do not automatically assimilate one another or necessarily reflect each other in their interaction which spans the whole continuum between convergence and contradiction. Moreover, as Nicholas Cook reminds us, music, a “structured semantic space, a privileged site for the negotiation of meaning”, is without inherent meaning of its own (23); it only acquires meaning through “construct[ion] or negotiat[ion] [...] within a given context” of language or other media (8f.).

There have been – and there continue to be – numerous theorists of opera who argue for a primary status of the music on the simplistic basis that the sung words, particularly of foreign-language opera, cannot be understood in any case.¹⁹ Such claims evidently presuppose linguistic as well as acoustic barriers which prevent the understanding of an opera’s verbal content in a listening situation. Yet it would seem more than obvious that in any scholarly approach to opera (as in any branch of textual scholarship), a thorough textual familiarity with the work, i.e. with both libretto *and* music, ought to constitute the most basic of requirements. Particularly when examining any opera which employs leitmotif technique, it is important to consider the complex and dynamic cognitive processes which occur as an auditor becomes increasingly familiar with an opera through repeated exposure and active study of both words and music. Any enquiry into leitmotif technique will not only expose a strong interdependence of words and music as one of its fundamental operating principles, but will also have to acknowledge the ongoing cognitive processes which an auditor performs *after* the event of first being exposed to a work, in order to be able to unravel and interpret the structure of

¹⁸ The historical development of the general debate on the supremacy of words over music (or vice versa) is summarised in condensed form by Peter F. Stacey (esp. 9-16).

¹⁹ A brief selective overview of such theories is presented by Cook (112f.).

motivic occurrence.²⁰ As Cook has pointed out, “if the two media” of music and words are perceived as being “so closely fused that it can be hard to tell them apart, that reflects not the overwhelming of one medium by the other, but rather the reciprocal interweaving of signification that characterises complementation” (113).²¹

In his brilliant study *Britten’s Musical Language*, Philip Rupprecht has examined the details of this “interweaving of signification” in a selection of Britten’s works. His analytical approach to Britten’s “composite musical utterance – a bringing forth of words and music meaningfully and vividly, as one” likewise treats the “fusion” of music and words as a complex process. In Rupprecht’s view, far from being a “language” merely in a metaphorical sense which refers to the structuring of musical material, Britten’s “setting’ of words *to* music” transforms his music into a “language” whose “powers of communication depend on the material presence of words” – words which are, in their turn, “tied, in their musical setting, to a precisely coordinated role in a composite utterance” (1). Following these models of interdependence and reciprocity, I shall be treating the words of the libretto as the crucial key that provides an audience with access to the complex interplay of textual content and musical structure which is essential to the construction of meaning in the musico-dramatic entity that is opera.

²⁰ It was obvious to Carl Dahlhaus, for instance, that a leitmotif does not achieve its full effect at “the first impact of immediacy, but at the second stage, when immediacy has combined with reflection” (61).

²¹ “Complementation” as used here by Cook refers to one of his three models of multimedia, in which “the difference between the constituent media [...] is recognised”, but in which “conflict between them [...] is avoided because each is assigned a separate role” (103f).

I.2. Melville's *Billy Budd*: the text and its readers

I.2.1. Textual history and textual problems

When Herman Melville retired from his work as a New York customs officer in 1885, he had a considerable amount of unfinished literary work on his hands, to which he now began to devote his newly-gained leisure. By the early months of 1886, he was working on “the short poem of three or four leaves [...] that ultimately became the ballad ‘Billy in the Darbies’” (Hayford/Sealts 1962a:1) – the earliest germ of *Billy Budd*, the text which was to occupy him throughout the following years until his death in 1891.

The studies of the manuscript made by Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. for their 1962 Chicago edition of *Billy Budd, Sailor* show that *Billy Budd* evolved from the ballad “Billy in the Darbies”, which today appears at the end of the story, and from “a brief prose headnote setting the scene and introducing the speaker of this poem” (1962a:1). This headnote was similar to those for “John Marr” and “Tom Deadlight” in *John Marr and Other Sailors*, a collection of poems Melville published privately in 1888.²² The headnote began to grow and develop, passing through three major phases, during each of which one of the main characters was introduced or, respectively, elaborated. In each of these phases, which in their turn comprised numerous stages and sub-stages, the focus of the story was

²² See Hayford/Sealts 1962a:3f.

changed radically: the tale of an initially older Billy Budd, “condemned for fomenting mutiny and apparently guilty as charged” (Hayford/Sealts 1962a:2) was transformed, with the introduction of John Claggart, the master-at-arms, into a story about the conflict between good and evil, in which the evil Claggart falsely accuses, and is killed by, a now innocent Billy.²³ The expansion and elaboration of the character of Captain Vere eventually resulted in a text full of ambiguities and uncertainties which continue to occupy literary critics up to the present day.²⁴

The novella was left in what Hayford and Sealts term a “semi-final draft, not a fair copy ready for publication” (1962a:1). The state of the manuscript is such that in many details, Melville’s intention as to its definitive form cannot be ascertained; and when it was published for the first time in Volume XIII of the London Constable edition of Melville’s *Complete Works* in 1924, its editor, Raymond Weaver, produced a reading text which owed rather a large part of its appearance to his ideas of what Melville had been intending to do. Apart from numerous outright misreadings, major confusion resulted from Weaver’s failure to recognise some of the handwriting in the manuscript as that of Melville’s wife Elizabeth.²⁵ As a consequence, several grave textual problems were introduced; they persisted in Weaver’s revised edition of 1928 (*Shorter Novels of Herman Melville*, New York: Liveright).

These textual problems were for the most part reproduced in the first separate publication of the novella in 1946 (London: Lehmann), edited by William Plomer, and based on both the 1924 and 1928 editions, from which it differs only in a few details (for the most part, substitutions or corrections of single words).²⁶ The textual problems introduced by Weaver also found their way into the first attempt at producing a scholarly text, made by F. Barron Freeman in 1948 – an edition which, despite the fact that it is based on a fresh consultation of the manuscript, nevertheless “depends on Weaver’s 1928 text in an unfortunate way” (Hayford/Sealts 1962a:12).

It was not until the publication of the 1962 Chicago edition by Hayford and Sealts, which was based on an independent study and analysis of Melville’s manuscript, that the problems introduced by Weaver and transmitted further by Freeman, and by all following editions based on either Weaver’s or Freeman’s texts, were identified and amended. However, the resulting substantial changes to a popular and controversially discussed text were initially acknowledged only slowly and with great reluctance by teachers and scholars who had long been accustomed

²³ See Hayford/Sealts 1962a:5f.

²⁴ See Hayford/Sealts 1962a:10f. For detailed discussion of the development of Vere, see also Parker 1990:133-142 and Wenke 1999.

²⁵ See Hayford/Sealts 1962a:18.

²⁶ Thus, for example, Weaver reads: “*It* was strength and beauty” (Melville 1924:6); Plomer reads: “*He* was strength and beauty” (BB16). Weaver reads: “What *bast* Thee, Fabian, to the city brought” (Melville 1924:24); Plomer reads: “What *bas* Thee, Fabian, to the city brought” (BB27; my emphases). Some of Weaver’s footnotes which give alternative readings of Melville’s manuscript are omitted or altered. Plomer touches upon the sources for his edition and his methods of editing in the introduction to his edition (1946:7).

to base their readings on certain features of the text now identified as superseded material erroneously included by its earlier editors.²⁷

The major textual problems of the Weaver and Freeman editions consist in their inclusion of material discarded by Melville: the supposed "Preface" and a section of text entitled, in the manuscript, "Lawyers, Experts, Clergy", which Weaver inserted at the end of his Ch. X, and which Freeman printed, complete with its original heading, as Ch. XII. Hayford and Sealts omit this material from their Reading Text. Their analysis of Melville's manuscripts furthermore led them to opt for the title *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)* rather than *Billy Budd, Foretopman*, and to unify the name of Captain Vere's ship to *Bellipotent* throughout the text: even though in Melville's manuscript, the name predominantly appears as *Indomitable*, and was rendered thus in the earlier editions of the text,²⁸ Melville appears to have decided on the name *Bellipotent* at a comparatively late stage of revision and composition.²⁹

The most important point addressed by Hayford and Sealts – one which had, to all intents and purposes, been left unaddressed by their predecessors – is the unfinished status of the work as a whole.³⁰ The extent of the work's incompleteness can be assessed by a study of the Genetic Text, a transcription of Melville's manuscripts which was also published by Hayford and Sealts in 1962. Yet while the Genetic Text is able to throw a fascinating light on the process of Melville's composition, it cannot be used as a reading text.

I.2.2. Early critical reception and post-1950 criticism

The critical debate on Melville's *Billy Budd*, as Robert Milder has observed,

comprises an unusually manifest record of English studies from the waning of literary/biographical humanism in the late 1940s through the rise and triumph of New Criticism to the battles between varieties of traditionalism and poststructuralism of the 1980s and beyond. (1)

When the novella was published in Volume XIII of the London Constable edition of *The Works of Herman Melville* in 1924, it encountered in Britain an environment

²⁷ The changes which appear in the 1962 Chicago edition are detailed in Hayford/Sealts 1962a:12-23.

For an assessment of the critical reception of the Hayford/Sealts edition, see Parker 1990:85-95.

²⁸ Only F. Barron Freeman's editorial footnotes to his 1948 Harvard edition refer to the appearance of the name *Bellipotent* (Melville 1948:212, n.4 and 274, n.3), but the ship's name is given as *Indomitable* throughout the main text. Modern critics of the opera, familiar only with the Hayford/Sealts reading text and not with the novella's publication history, sometimes fail to appreciate this fact, see note 619 and section III.2.5.

²⁹ See Hayford/Sealts 1962a:18-21.

³⁰ Transmitting Weaver's earlier representations in his preface to the 1924 edition, Plomer's 1946 edition had contained a publisher's note which stated that "Billy Budd was begun in 1888 and finished in 1891" (BBiii). F. Barron Freeman describes the confused state of Melville's manuscript, but he, too, claims that a final round of revisions resulted in the completion of the text "on April 19, 1891" (ix).

of readers already well-primed with knowledge of Melville's other works and disposed to be appreciative of this newly-discovered text, to the extent that the novella was, according to Hershel Parker, "perceived at once in London as a wonderful bonus bestowed upon those enthusiasts of *Moby-Dick* who had in the previous few years revived Melville's fame in a most astonishing way" (1990:57).³¹ Upon its publication, the novella was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* by one of the chief Melville enthusiasts, John Middleton Murry, whose (anonymous) article, entitled "Herman Melville's Silence", expressed the feeling prevalent among early readers – as among later generations of scholars – that Melville's 'deathbed manuscript' constituted a testament of some sort: "With the mere fact of the long silence in our minds we could not help regarding *Billy Budd* as the last will and spiritual testament of a man of genius". Diagnosing a close kinship between *Billy Budd* and *Pierre* (1852), the work which Murry saw "at the beginning" of what he represents as Melville's "thirty-five years of silence" before his death, Murry sums up the essence of *Billy Budd* as an attempt to re-state the "mystery" treated in *Pierre*, namely, the mystery of "the inevitable and utter disaster of the good", which comprises, however, a "necessity" of the "ought to be so". This mystery is equated by Murry with the "central mystery of the Christian religion".³² Murry incorporates an extensive quotation from the hanging scene into his essay, commenting on the "strange combination of naïve and majestic serenity" with which the story is told and the mystery revealed (1924a:433).

An unquestioning acceptance of the author's genuine intention of conveying a "mystery" seems to have been the characteristic response of most *Billy Budd* readers of the 1920s. Murry himself, for one, had already played a major role in promoting the reputation of *Moby-Dick* as a literary masterpiece; it would have been surprising had he not, in his treatment of *Billy Budd*, continued in the same vein, reading the text in the light of his admiration for Melville's other writings, especially *Moby-Dick*, which he felt contained a "profound depth of knowledge [...] of the same order that is in *Lear* and *Macbeth*" (1924b:193).³³ Murry's highly personal and passionate article "Quo Warranto", published in the London *Adelphi* in Au-

³¹ The history of British Melville-reception, and the singular role played in this process by *Moby-Dick*, is described in great detail by Hayford, Parker and Tanselle in sections VIII and XI of their "Historical Note" in the editorial appendix of the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Moby-Dick* (Hayford/Parker/Tanselle 732-756). The reception and subsequent canonisation of *Billy Budd* in England has been chronicled by Parker (1990:53-71).

³² Hershel Parker (1990:57) points out that Murry had in fact read both *Battle-Pieces* (1866) and *Clarel* (1876). The repeated references to Melville's "long silence" after *Pierre* should therefore probably be taken as Murry's deliberate (myth-making?) representation, not as an oversight.

³³ The comparison of Melville with other established authors of the literary canon is a frequent one in those times; Murry himself elsewhere links the "vision" of *Moby-Dick* with Shakespeare's tragedies (1924a:433). John Freeman, in his 1926 biography of Melville, compares *Moby Dick* to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and *Billy Budd* to *Paradise Regained* (131); he links this last work of Melville's with Milton's late masterpiece *Samson Agonistes* (135), and furthermore compares the author of *Moby-Dick* to Shakespeare, Milton, Blake and Wordsworth (120 and 127).

gust 1924, helped canonise *Billy Budd* in England and in the USA as Melville's "spiritual testament" (1924b:194).

The early responses of the 1920s certainly reflect the spirit of their authors' enthusiasm, "writing as they were" – thus Parker represents the scenario – "in the ecstatic glow of the rediscovery of Melville" (1990:64). This enthusiastic spirit, however, seems to have blinded them to some extent to what exactly it was they were reading. Leaving aside the question of whether a pre-World War II critic could have been expected to be reading "as closely as a modern literary critic is expected to read" (Parker 1990:64), it is interesting to see how little attention early readers were apparently paying to the details of the flawed text before them; or, to look at it from a different perspective, how determined they were, consciously or unconsciously, to reconcile any incongruous details with their idea of the work as a whole.

The most striking example is the use made in various interpretations of a cancelled "note" of Melville's which was erroneously included by Weaver at the end of Ch. XXV in the Constable edition of 1924, and transcribed by him thus: "Here ends a story not unwarranted by what happens in this incongruous world of ours – innocence and infirmity, spiritual depravity and fair respite" (Melville 1924:112).³⁴ Yet Weaver's transcription was incorrect, and should in fact have included the opposition of "innocence and infamy, spiritual depravity and fair repute" (Hayford/Sealts 1962a:8).³⁵ Curiously, however, the reading which appeared in the 1924 Constable edition apparently struck none of the reviewers as questionable in sense; on the contrary, this somewhat bizarre sentence is regularly quoted as Melville's "note" containing, in a nutshell as it were, the very essence of the text.

Thus, John Freeman, discussing *Billy Budd* in his 1926 biography of Melville, proposes that in the hanging of Billy, death effects a more conspicuous vindication of innocence than could ever be achieved in life. He follows this statement by quoting the "note", and concludes: "The ultimate opposition is shown clearly here in this public vindication of the law, and the superior assertion at the very moment of death of the nobility of a pure human spirit. [...] *Billy Budd* ends in a brightness of escape" (135). It might be questioned whether and how this interpretation can be deduced from, or reconciled with, Weaver's transcription of Melville's "note",

³⁴ According to Hayford and Sealts (1962a:8), a closer study of the manuscript reveals that this sentence belongs to an intermediate stage of the text, which predates the development of the character of Vere.

³⁵ The latter part of Melville's "note" was transcribed correctly by F. Barron Freeman in his 1948 edition of the text, and identified as "added and cancelled" (Melville 1948:277, n.18). Freeman's reading substitutes "incomprehensible" for Weaver's "incongruous", but while Freeman's reading of what Hayford and Sealts classify as an "undeciphered word" (1962a:8) seems the more probable, it may still not be the correct one (see reproduction of Melville's manuscript leaf 344 in Hayford/Sealts 1962a, plate VIII). In preparing his 1946 edition of the story from Weaver's earlier editions, William Plomer had, as Eric Crozier put it, "boggle[d] at 'infirmity'" ("Writing an Opera", typescript [BPL], p.3) and substituted the word "infirmity" (see BB122), but retained the other two erroneous readings, since his edition was not based on a consultation of the manuscript itself.

specifically with regard to the word “infirmary”.³⁶ Lewis Mumford, in his 1929 biography of Melville, also invokes the famous “note”. Again, it is unclear how this author can find reflected a “meaning [...] so obvious that one shrinks from underlining it” (356) in the sentence he chooses to quote (now reading “infirmity” instead of “infirmary”, a change made by Weaver in the revised 1928 Liveright edition).

The failure, in these instances, to see anything incongruous in the details of the wording may serve as an extreme illustration of a wider tendency in *Billy Budd* criticism at that time to exhibit the signs of an intuitive and impressionistic response, rather than a close analytic approach, to the text. However, even in cases of more careful reading, there never arises any doubt as to the basic sincerity and reliability of the story’s narrator; and by regular conflation of narrator and author (no doubt furthered by the practices of early Melville biography which relied heavily on Melville’s fiction for its information about Melville the man),³⁷ Melville’s own sincere intention to convey a mystery in this, his last work, is never called into question. Thus, even the earliest reviews of the 1920s do not differ very much in their overall interpretations of the novella from those readings produced by pre-New Critical literary criticism into the early 1950s. In 1933, E. L. Grant Watson declared *Billy Budd* “Melville’s Testament of Acceptance”, thereby creating a label for an interpretation which remained fundamentally uncontested until the end of the next decade.

In 1929, Lewis Mumford (355f.) had briefly discussed the conflict-ridden position of Captain Vere. Over the next seventeen years, critical attention began to focus increasingly on Vere as the central character of the text, so that in 1946, Raymond Short could introduce the captain to prospective readers of *Billy Budd* as “the true hero of the novel” (xxii). Meanwhile, Melville’s not unambiguous depiction of the captain’s character had not escaped some more careful readers’ notice. As early (or late) as 1943, T. T. E., an anonymous reviewer in the *Explicator*, drew attention to a phenomenon much discussed by later critics – namely, the fact that Vere’s commendable rational disinterestedness stands in conflict with his effectively forcing the officers’ verdict of “guilty” by appealing to their fears of insubordination – and wondered whether this “disparity” in representation was “an oversight” of Melville’s or “one of the essential ambiguities in the story”. This reader suggested that the novella might be “rather more concerned with social repercussions and less concerned with personal ethics” than it was commonly believed to be (item Q14).³⁸

³⁶ The correct reading, as advanced by Hayford and Sealts, actually stands in direct opposition to Freeman’s interpretation, since it alludes to the reversal of guilt/innocence as perceived by society through the garbled misrepresentation of the newspaper account. See also Parker 1990:61ff.

³⁷ The use of Melville’s fiction as source material for his early biographies is described by James Barbour (especially 14ff.). The tendency to treat Melville’s travel fiction as autobiographical persists in criticism such as Noel Bradley’s 1980 psychoanalytical examination of E. M. Forster’s response to *Billy Budd*.

³⁸ Among the later critics who discuss this aspect of Vere’s behaviour are Phil Withim (270), Merlin Bowen (esp. 216-233), and Joyce Sparer Adler (161).

A response to T. T. E.'s review appeared in the *Explicator* in 1945. Its author, Tyrus Hillway, maintained that "the social questions discussed, though Melville was clearly aware of their importance, form only a vivid backdrop against which the spiritual drama is played". He reconciled the apparent conflict in the description of Vere in an interpretation which can be taken as exemplary for the humanist reading predominant at the time: Vere's "disinterestedness", Hillway explains, "is discussed [...] chiefly in relation to the social and political reforms of his day, which he opposed simply 'because they seemed to him incapable of embodiment in lasting institutions, but at war with the peace of the world and the good of mankind'". The "main problem of the story", however, in which Vere "is anything but disinterested", is "the conflict between the World, or necessity, and the human heart": Vere recognises the "evil" which lies in that "necessity [...] to which he is nevertheless constrained to submit", since delaying the "inevitable" death judgement would be too dangerous. According to Hillway, both Vere's "suffering" and Billy's death are brought about by "man's iniquity", and by the "tragic law" (item 12).

Although views like Hillway's still predominated, scholars were beginning to read the text more closely, and to enquire further into its ambiguities. Following the lead of an article by Joseph Schiffmann, published in 1950, there appeared a series of what became known as 'Ironist' readings which questioned the 'Testament of Acceptance' theory, and instead argued for a complete reversal of the 'straightforward' interpretation of the text – a trend programmatically exemplified in the title of Phil Withim's 1959 essay "*Billy Budd*: Testament of Resistance". From 1950 until 1965 the critical debate raged between the Acceptance and Resistance factions, both of which refused to concede that Melville's text might contain possibilities for both readings but not for either of them exclusively, thereby presenting, in Milder's words, the "disheartening spectacle of two parties almost constitutionally unable to appreciate each other's hold on the truth and thereby rise to the fullness of Melville's" (7). The main argument revolves around the question whether Vere is the hero or the villain of the story – whether he is forced by tragic circumstance to destroy Billy, or whether he himself wilfully and despotically brings about the young sailor's destruction. Ironist and Resistance readings tend to be somewhat eclectic in their choices of textual evidence, and somewhat careless in their focus on specific aspects of content, often failing to take into consideration aspects of style and tone, and declining to investigate whatever evidence could be gleaned from a consultation of Melville's other works.³⁹ Acceptance theorists, on the other hand, while they often succeed effectively in dismantling the Ironists' interpretations, show a tendency to deny all possibility of any criticism of political and social structures which may be implicit in the figure of Vere.

Criticism in the 1970s and 80s produced a group of readings ranging from conservative to Marxist and deconstructivist interpretations⁴⁰. Important queer

³⁹ Examples for such readings can be found in the articles by Schiffman, Withim, and Kingsley Widmer.

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of pre-1990s *Billy Budd* criticism, see Milder.

readings were offered by Robert Martin in 1986, and Eve Sedgwick in 1990. Recent scholarship has tended to move away from the factionalism of earlier criticism, which has itself become the subject of critical interest.⁴¹ Various scholars have turned to historical, literary and biographical research, as well as to manuscript studies, to shed more light on the various contexts that informed and shaped Melville's late writings and the genesis of *Billy Budd* in particular.

I.2.3. E. M. Forster and Benjamin Britten in the tradition of British Melville reception

Melville's *Billy Budd* was received with enthusiasm upon its first publication in Britain in 1924. In the context of Britten's subsequent collaboration with E. M. Forster as his librettist for the opera *Billy Budd*, it seems significant that Forster possessed some personal associations with the circles that had been admiring Melville's works, specifically *Moby-Dick*, in the years preceding the more widespread Melville revival which was ushered in by the publication of the 1920 Oxford World Classics edition of that novel. The much younger Britten, too, was to acquire ties to these networks fairly early in his career.⁴²

An extensive overview of the unique phenomenon of the British Melville reception has been conducted by Hayford, Parker and Tanselle, who have mapped out the reception of Melville's writings by a network of artists and social idealists in late nineteenth-century England, and have traced the following generations of English readers of Melville through the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴³ A fair proportion of these early Melville enthusiasts led lives that challenged the boundaries of social and sexual convention; some of them were homosexual, bisexual, or of otherwise dissenting sexual orientation. For many of them, the appeal of *Moby-Dick* in particular lay in the fact that "by style and subject-matter it could nurture a class-bridging philanthropic idealism not without an element of seductive eroticism" (Hayford/Parker/Tanselle 742). This early generation of Melville-admirers included members or connections of the Pre-Raphaelite school of artists, as well as Fabian Socialists and members of the working-men's movement – prominent among these were Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and the Fabian Socialist Henry S. Salt – but also individual travellers and other "outdoor literary men", especially nautical writers (Hayford/Parker/Tanselle 744). Melville's early travel novels, *Typee* and *Omoo*, had made their way into the far reaches of the British Empire as standard works in Murray's *Home and Colonial Library* series,⁴⁴ but in the decades before 1920, their fame and status

⁴¹ See, for instance, Wenke 2002:115f.

⁴² See also Rochlitz 44-47.

⁴³ The network of Melville-enthusiasts is traced by Hayford, Parker and Tanselle in section VIII of their "Historical Note" to the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Moby-Dick* (732-754).

⁴⁴ *Typee* had been published as Vol. 30 and 31 of Murray's *Home and Colonial Library* series (London: John Murray, 1846), where it was entitled *Narrative of a Four Months' Residence among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands*. *Omoo* was also published by John Murray in 1847.

appears to have been unremarkable compared to that of *Moby-Dick*: the passionate response to this text at times even came to be treated as a “self-identifying and other-identifying token”, a symbol of belonging to an in-group of people sharing the same type of literary appreciation (Hayford/Parker/Tanselle 745f).

Among the more prominent Melvilleans connected with E. M. Forster was the author and homosexual activist Edward Carpenter, a friend and admirer of Walt Whitman, who in his publications propagated an idealised view of homosexuality, as well as a non-revolutionary, democratic socialism. In his *Ioläus – An Anthology of Friendship* (1902) and in *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), a study in defence of homosexuality, Carpenter cites Melville's *Omoo* and *Typee* (which he, like the early Melville biographers, treats as factual accounts) to illustrate male friendship customs in the Polynesian societies.⁴⁵ Carpenter was an important influence on Forster, whose philosophical and political creed was in many ways similar to Carpenter's.⁴⁶ It was Forster's friendship with Carpenter and his younger working-class partner George Merrill which famously provided the creative impulse that prompted Forster to begin to write his homosexual novel of development, *Maurice*, in 1913.⁴⁷

Another ardent admirer of Melville among Forster's connections was D. H. Lawrence, who was himself deeply influenced by Carpenter. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) contains two chapters devoted to Melville's work. Lawrence and Forster, who first became acquainted in 1914,⁴⁸ initially got on well with one another personally, but there was some estrangement between them around 1915, when Forster visited the Lawrences in a Sussex cottage owned by the novelist Viola Meynell, who was to write the introduction to the 1920 Oxford World Classics edition of *Moby-Dick*.⁴⁹ Yet his uneven personal relationship with Lawrence did not prevent Forster from praising him in *Aspects of the Novel* as “the only prophetic novelist writing today”, and from commending the insightfulness of his readings of that earlier prophet, Melville (AN99).

D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda were in their turn closely connected with John Middleton Murry, who in his capacity as a writer for the *Nation and Athenaeum* became a prominent spokesman of British Melville enthusiasm, and who was to play such an important part in the early reception of *Billy Budd*. Forster himself had published an article in the *Athenaeum* in 1919,⁵⁰ and in 1924, he served as special correspondent to the Empire Exhibition at Wembley for what had by that time become *The Nation and Athenaeum*⁵¹ – the literary organ through which much of the process of promoting Melville and especially *Moby-Dick*, but also *Billy Budd*, took place. Other admirers of Melville with whom Forster was connected

⁴⁵ The references to Melville occur in *Ioläus*, Ch. I, and *The Intermediate Sex*, Ch. III.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Martin 1983.

⁴⁷ See Forster, “Notes on Maurice” 215.

⁴⁸ See EMFL I:217 and 218 n.1.

⁴⁹ See King 59 and Hayford/Parker/Tanselle 750.

⁵⁰ “A Flood in the Office”, AH275-279.

⁵¹ See King 86 and Stape 86.

include T. E. Lawrence “of Arabia”, who, in 1922, named *Moby-Dick* among a selection of “Titanic” books “distinguished by greatness of spirit” (quoted in Hayford/Parker/Tanselle 751, n.64), and to whom Forster dedicated his collection of short stories, *The Eternal Moment* (1928). At one point, Forster was to have become joint editor of T. E. Lawrence’s book *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), together with George Bernard Shaw and Edward Garnett (the latter had corresponded with Melville). Melville’s work was also popular with several members of the Bloomsbury circle, among them Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, who remained a close lifelong friend of Forster’s, and Lytton Strachey.

Forster’s friends among the Melvilleans of the younger generation included the author and editor William Plomer, who taught *Moby-Dick* at an English language school in Tokyo in 1927 (Plomer 1943:222), and who was to collaborate with Britten as the librettist of *Gloriana* (1953) and of the three Church Parables, *Curlw River* (1964), *The Burning Fiery Furnace* (1966), and *The Prodigal Son* (1968). W. H. Auden, who wrote a poem on “Herman Melville” in 1939 and analysed “the Passion of Billy Budd” in *The Enchafed Flood* (1950), was a close friend not only of Forster’s but also of Britten’s, upon whose early political and aesthetical development he had considerable influence. It was at a rehearsal of Auden’s and Christopher Isherwood’s play *The Ascent of F6* in 1937 that Britten and Forster first met in person.⁵² Auden was also joint editor, with the teacher and critic Lionel Trilling, of the New York *Griffin* magazine, where, in 1951, Forster published his “Letter from E. M. Forster”, in which he talks about his librettistic work on *Billy Budd*. Trilling produced an early study of Forster’s literary work in 1943, and a certain amount of correspondence continued to be exchanged between them. Trilling’s other publications also include a novel entitled *The Middle of the Journey* (1947), in which a character writes an article on Melville’s *Billy Budd*; Forster knew Trilling’s novel, and was re-reading it while he was working on the libretto for Britten’s opera.⁵³

I.2.4. The editions used by Britten and his librettists

Forster’s first recorded encounter with *Billy Budd* took place in 1926, when he was preparing for his 1927 Cambridge Clark Lectures (published in the same year as *Aspects of the Novel*)⁵⁴. The only available reading text at that time was Weaver’s

⁵² See section III.1.1.

⁵³ In a letter to Trilling of 16 April 1949, Forster alludes to the fictional article, stating that he “disagree[s], and no doubt was meant to disagree, with much of [it]” (EMFL II:236f). For further discussion see note 537.

⁵⁴ The notes Forster made in his Commonplace Book in preparation for his discussion of *Billy Budd* date from 1926 (CPB17f). In a footnote to his discussion of Melville’s novella, Forster states that “for knowledge of [*Billy Budd*], and for much else, I am indebted to Mr John Freeman’s admirable monograph on Melville” (AN97). Since Freeman’s *Herman Melville* was published in 1926, it may be deduced from Forster’s footnote that he had not read *Billy Budd* before that year.

1924 edition; in 1947, Forster recalled “first reading it in a library where I wasn’t allowed to take it away for fear of breaking the set” (BBC385).⁵⁵

There exists sufficiently substantial source evidence to indicate that in 1948–1949, the opera-makers were using William Plomer’s 1946 edition of *Billy Budd* as the textual basis for their adaptation. Eric Crozier, recollecting the genesis of the idea for the opera almost forty years later, writes that when he was first summoned to Aldeburgh to discuss the idea of *Billy Budd*, Britten and Forster “handed me a small black-jacketed volume – Plomer’s 1946 edition of *Billy Budd* – and left me alone with it” (1986:12).⁵⁶ While Crozier’s recollections might not always be entirely reliable in every detail,⁵⁷ further evidence corroborates his identification of the edition.

As a close personal friend of Plomer’s, Forster was naturally aware that Plomer had edited *Billy Budd*; in fact, he had reviewed this new edition in a BBC Book Talk broadcast on 12 February 1947 (“Some Books” [*Billy Budd*], BBC384–388; see section II.5.1.1.), and had apparently received a copy of the 1946 edition from Plomer the same month.⁵⁸ On 3 March 1949, Forster wrote to Plomer from Aldeburgh: “We make a start this morning on Billy Budd. I am nerving myself to annotate that copy you gave me – I do so hate my own hand-writing” (KCC: EMF/18/435/3). It seems that Forster did successfully “nerv[e]” himself, but found a way to avoid the anticipated messiness of handwritten annotations: his copy of *Billy Budd*, preserved at the archives of King’s College, Cambridge, only shows a quantity of neat vertical lines drawn into the margins in black ink, very precisely to the height of the lines they are intended to mark. Forster’s letter to Plomer would seem to confirm that these annotations date from March 1949. Furthermore, a synopsis of scenes which belongs to the early draft material kept at the Britten-Pears Library features a number of page references to “Melville” that correspond to the page numbers of Plomer’s edition.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ “Some Books” (*Billy Budd*), BBC384–388.

⁵⁶ In his 1979 account of his first encounter with Melville’s text at Britten’s house, Crozier only mentions that he was handed “a copy of *Billy Budd*”, without specifying the edition (Crozier 1979:32). A copy of the 1947 reprint of Plomer’s edition is part of the Eric Crozier Collection held by the Britten-Pears Library at Aldeburgh; this volume does not contain annotations of any kind.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of Crozier’s several contradictory versions of the chronology of the collaborators’ earliest *Billy Budd* meetings, see section III.1.3.

⁵⁸ Forster’s copy of Plomer’s 1946 edition of *Billy Budd* is inscribed: “Dear Morgan / with love from William / at Cambridge, with snow. / Feb : 1947”.

⁵⁹ The draft material in question (BPL A61:34f.) contains Crozier’s clean transcription, dating from a later point, of an original synopsis of what is now Act I, Sc. 3, in his minute and rather illegible hand (BPL A61:32f.). At the later date, Crozier added the information that the page numbers refer to the “1947 edition”; however, the page numbers themselves already appear in the original document. None of the other contemporary editions of *Billy Budd* shows a corresponding pagination.

The source evidence just cited was not yet available in 1975, when James Fougousse came to the conclusion that the collaborators must have been using F. Barron Freeman's 1948 Harvard edition of Melville's text.⁶⁰ Fougousse's claim is founded on "internal evidence": specifically, on the observation that "the libretto follows the wording of various alternative readings and discarded fragments which were not published until the Freeman edition of 1948" (161). However, Fougousse does not specify these textual correspondences, apart from one particular case, namely, the fact that Freeman's edition contains, in a fragment of an earlier version of the ballad "Billy in the Darbies", the lines

And good his story –
Of the good boy hung and gone to glory,
Hung for the likes of me.⁶¹

These lines do not feature in Plomer's edition, nor in Weaver's two 1920s editions, but they do, as Fougousse (64) realised, appear in exactly the same form in the operatic Billy's account of the Chaplain's visit in Act II, Sc. 3 (LIB60). This identical phrasing cannot be coincidental, and Forster did indeed obtain Freeman's edition of *Billy Budd* "just before [his] departure for the United States" (Reed 1993a:55) – he left England on 19 May 1949 (Stape 149). On 13 May, he wrote to Eric Crozier: "I have now got the 'Harvard' edition of Billy. Some of the variants are most exciting: e.g. 'Dansker' substituted for 'Donald' in the Darbies poem" (KCC: EMF/18/135).⁶² However, by May 1949, the libretto had to a large extent already been established in structure and content: having passed through the first stage of handwritten drafts, it had at this point attained the form of the typed three-act March Draft. The additional lines from the ballad appear as handwritten

⁶⁰ The same conclusion was reached by Robert Martin (1986b:49).

⁶¹ In Freeman's edition, this fragment appears directly after the end of the story, but still within the confines of what Freeman designates "The Novel", under the heading "Fragment written on p.4v., black, of the Daniel Orme MS." (Melville 1948:282).

⁶² The recollections of Robert Giroux suggest that Forster may not consistently have thought of *Billy Budd* as a text which had been published posthumously. Giroux, who was working as an editor for Harcourt, Brace & Co., recalls a conversation he had with Forster during his 1949 visit to New York about his collaboration with Britten and Crozier, in the course of which Forster expressed his surprise at learning that Raymond Weaver had produced the first edition of *Billy Budd* from Melville's manuscript: he had been under the impression that "Constable published the book during Melville's lifetime". Giroux pointed out that "Constable *had* published the first edition, but it came out in 1924"; they subsequently paid a visit to the site where Melville's house had once stood (Giroux 95). Giroux's recollection presents something of a puzzle, since it is evident from the script of Forster's BBC Book Talk on *Billy Budd* of February 1947 that he was at this time aware of the text's publication history, if not of its unfinished nature: Forster states that the story "never got printed in [Melville's] life time; but only appeared in the collected edition of his works" (BBC385); he cut the addition "about thirty years after his death" (BBC388, n.6). Plomer's new edition of Melville's novella, which Forster was discussing, is prefaced by the following note: "Billy Budd was begun in 1888 and finished in 1891, but was not published until 1924, in England, by Messrs. Constable & Co" (BB3).

insertions in all three librettists' copies of the March Draft, partially replacing the typed version of the text:

BILLY: (*holding up his wrists*) Can't shake hands. Chaplain's been here before you, kind, ~~but what can he do when I ain't truly sorry?~~ \and good his story, of the good boy hung and gone to glory. Hung for the likes of me/. I had to strike down that Jemmy Legs, it's fate. (BPL A61:169f.)⁶³

The new lines are incorporated into the typescript of the four-act August Draft.

Among the *Billy Budd* material held by the Britten-Pears Library, there exist two pieces of notepaper on which Forster noted down, among other things, "Phrases for Billy" (BPL A62:158) and "Claggart" (BPL A62:162). These two pages each contain phrases which are unique to the Freeman edition,⁶⁴ making them dateable to Forster's 1949 encounter with that version of Melville's text. Among the "Phrases for Billy" Forster copied is the sentence: "such a flower of masculine beauty and strength, a flower scarce fully released from the bud" (BPL A62:158). In Freeman's edition, the phrase actually runs "such a flower of masculine *strength and beauty*, a flower scarce yet fully released from the bud" (Melville 1948:219, n.88, my emphasis). While Forster's transcription is not quite accurate, its changed word order can be seen to anticipate the wording of the finished libretto. Again, this phrase does not figure in the typed March Draft; it first appears in Forster's manuscript redraft of the conversation between Vere and Claggart (BPL A61:339), and is incorporated in the typed August Draft (BPL A62:52).

Apart from the section of the ballad quoted above, and from "the flower of masculine beauty and strength", a correlation of the libretto with the Freeman and Plomer editions shows no further distinctive phrases which could only have entered into the libretto from the Freeman edition. It would appear that only the new phrases which do not appear in any of the older editions were gleaned from the Freeman edition to be incorporated into the libretto.⁶⁵

Although Plomer's edition of *Billy Budd* is superseded, I shall nevertheless be using it as the basis for my analysis of Melville's novella, because this was the text which the collaborators encountered at the beginning of their task, and which would therefore have determined their perception of the novella and its characters. In quoting from Plomer's edition, I shall not be recording the numerous

⁶³ Britten's copy. Crozier's and Forster's copies show identical insertions and cancellations, as well as an added "But" before "I had to strike" (BPL A61:240 and 369).

⁶⁴ On the page for "Claggart", Forster noted the phrase "no wine bibber" (BPL A62:162), which appears in Freeman's edition in a footnote citing a discarded fragment: "hardly ever is he a wine bibber" (Melville 1948:186, n.45).

⁶⁵ Crozier drew on Freeman's account of the genesis of Melville's *Billy Budd* when he wrote his 1951 BBC broadcast on "Writing an Opera"; specifically, Crozier transmits Freeman's claim that the novella evolved from a short story entitled "Baby Budd, Sailor" (typescript [BPL], p.2; compare F. B. Freeman vii). Freeman's interpretation of Melville's manuscripts and his account of the novella's evolution were subsequently shown to be erroneous by Hayford and Sealts (1962a:16-18).

minor variations from the Hayford/Sealts edition which has by this time become the standard reading text of *Billy Budd*, except to confirm the variant reading where it significantly affects the meaning of a sentence or a characterisation.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Plomer's edition features over a hundred variations from the Hayford/Sealts edition; punctuation aside, these include deviating words and changed, repositioned, omitted or newly included sentences or phrases. While many of these deviations involve a change of sense or emphasis, only in an estimated ten per cent of cases can these changes be seen substantially to affect the characterisation of one of the main three characters, or the meaning of the text as a whole.

I.3. “To quarry a play out of [Melville]”: the three main characters as raw material

I.3.1. Methodological reflections and general observations

Melville's *Billy Budd* has elicited a broad spectrum of controversial critical response, involving correspondingly controversial readings of the story's main characters. As Robert Martin has rightly pointed out, when the literary work which provides the basis for an adaptation into a different medium “is at the centre of a critical controversy as great as that surrounding *Billy Budd*”, it becomes “impossible” to base an analysis of the adaptation on any fixed “assumption” about “the nature of the original work”. Martin consequently holds that “if we are to discuss what uses Benjamin Britten and his librettists Eric Crozier and E. M. Forster made of Melville's *Billy Budd*, we must begin by asking what the story may have meant to them” (1986b:49). Regrettably, however, Martin largely fails to pursue his declared intention of finding out “what the story may have meant” to its adaptors, and mainly succeeds in demonstrating that his reading of the opera (as represented by the libretto) is not consistent with his own reading of Melville's novella.⁶⁷ In other

⁶⁷ The reading of Melville's *Billy Budd* which Martin presents in this article is essentially that which he presents in *Hero, Captain and Stranger* which appeared in the same year. Published in 1986, Martin's article on the operatic adaptation of *Billy Budd* just failed to benefit from the advent of readings by Britten scholars who begin to question the operatic Vere's psychology and the straight-

words, Martin's disappointingly negative evaluation of the operatic transformation of *Billy Budd* is defined by his own "assumption[s]" about the meaning of Melville's text, which can in their turn be assumed to be influenced by the thirty years' worth of *Billy Budd* criticism that separates Martin as a reader from Britten, Forster and Crozier.

More than one critic has fallen into the trap of the "assumption[s]" he or she is tacitly making about "the nature" of Melville's novella, often exhibiting an apparent lack of recognition of the text's irresolvable ambiguities and contradictions.⁶⁸ In an attempt to avoid taking the same path, I shall in the following chapters be presenting a fairly minimalist analysis of the story, which will take the shape of a detailed examination of its three main characters. The focus of this section lies mainly on the information which the opera-makers could and did glean from Melville's text about the characters they were going to create for the operatic stage. I shall therefore be working quite closely to the text, but without as yet entering too much into the details of what Forster and his collaborators may have made of it. My analysis of the characters as they appear in the libretto will take a similarly minimalist approach; the opera-makers' and particularly Forster's engagement with the text will receive extensive treatment in the second and third parts of this study.

As I am interested in the opera-makers' interpretation of Melville's text, it would hardly serve my purpose to move too far into an interpretation of my own. For this reason, I shall avoid engaging with the text's numerous symbolisms and intertextual allusions in this section in any greater depth: while such an engagement might open interesting interpretational possibilities, and throw some light on the novella's position within an intertextual continuum, there is no telling whether the opera-makers would have been struck by the same textual features, or would have arrived at similar conclusions. For the same reason I shall rely as little as possible on additional information external to the text itself, whether it concern the finer points of naval legislation,⁶⁹ the representation of historical personages and events, or the intertextual material incorporated in the text.

It seems important at this point to touch upon a distinctive feature of Melville's narrative technique, namely, his often highly eclectic, strictly localised use of

forwardness of the opera's seemingly unequivocal harmonic resolution (see, for instance, Whittall 1990). Christopher Palmer's (85f.) insightful comments on Vere's suppressed desire for Billy, though published in 1983, and cited by Donald Mitchell (1993:129) as the first move towards assembling the "jigsaw" of the operatic Vere's psychology, appeared in an article on *Gloriana*.

⁶⁸ Perhaps due to the fact that the literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s tended to focus on Vere as a negative figure and a representative of repressive authority, modern critics of the opera often seem curiously unaware of the extent to which Vere can be read as depicted in a sympathetic and even positive light.

⁶⁹ A number of Ironist readings of Melville's novella hinge on the externally researched insight that, historically, the Articles of War did not, in fact, place Vere under the constraints he claims to be acting under.

imagery drawn from intertextual allusion. Instances of this in *Billy Budd* are, for example, to be found after Claggart has accused Billy to Vere, where the “look, curious of the operation of his tactics” with which Claggart “steadily regarded Captain Vere” is compared to that of “the spokesman of the envious children of Jacob” (BB79) in the act of claiming that Joseph had been killed by wild beasts. The analogy here, however, must be recognised as limited, focusing as it does on the facial expression of the deceitful and “envious” son (or, in Claggart’s case, subordinate): structurally, the rest of the Joseph legend does not really correspond to the situation in the story, since Claggart has accused Billy of harbouring criminal intentions, whereas an important component of the Joseph legend is that his brothers make no false accusation against him (Genesis 37:31-35). If, for the sake of experiment, we were to incorporate all the information we have about Joseph and his brothers into the analogy, we would soon arrive at an interpretive dead end.⁷⁰

Another instance of Melville’s eclectic and localised use of imagery is the likening of the accused and speechless Billy’s facial expression to “that of a condemned vestal priestess in the moment of being buried alive, and in the first struggle against suffocation” (BB83). Here the background information evoked in the mind of the reader familiar with the customs of ancient Rome, namely, that such a punishment would have been administered to those virgin priestesses of the goddess Vesta who had been found guilty of breaking their vow of chastity, has no obvious structural analogue in the story; and it is only through a more complicated interpretive process that it can be made to apply (see discussion in note 81 below). Any effort to make the literary/historical allusion fit, however, should not let us forget the immediate object of the image, namely, to describe the expression on Billy’s face as he struggles for breath, an expression which is visually linked with his “intent head and entire form, straining forward in an agony of ineffectual eagerness to obey the injunction to speak and defend himself” (BB83). The similarity to the “vestal priestess in the moment of being buried alive” may in fact be visual rather than structural, and may rest to a great extent on the additional clause “and in the first struggle against suffocation”.

Delving too deeply into the stories of the mythological and historical figures which Melville’s narrator uses as foils for his characters, in search of background master narratives or deliberately hidden ironies, may turn out to be unproductive

⁷⁰ In her very informative essay on “Religion, myth and meaning in the art of *Billy Budd, Sailor*”, Gail Coffler correctly points out that all the Greek heroes associated with Billy in the narrative were “involved in violent and controversial acts”, but that these aspects of their legends are “omit[ted]” in the comparison (55). To Coffler, these “omissions” amount to what she terms “a whitewash” (52); she concludes that they are to be regarded as intentional “irony” on Melville’s part and that, therefore, “in interpreting Melville’s iconography, the reader must supply the missing links” (54f.). Coffler’s conclusion goes much further than I think is warranted by the textual evidence, because it fails to take into account Melville’s occasionally eclectic or quite selective use of imagery.

in the end.⁷¹ Rather, it seems important to pay attention to the images he evokes in their capacity *as* images, i.e. as visual reference points. Thus, for example, the primary effect produced by the image of “Apollo with his portmanteau” (BB21) is arguably an intensely comic one because of its incongruousness. For all that Gail Coffler insists that the “portmanteau” of “the archer god” who “killed not only the python but also all men [...] holds deadly arrows” (55), Apollo’s main association with light and beauty will in this instance probably assume precedence over his association with archery. Similarly, the comparison of Billy to “the Greek sculptor[s] [...] heroic strong man, Hercules” (BB25), occurring as it does in an appreciative discussion of Billy’s physical perfection, would first and foremost seem to express an aesthetic appreciation of male beauty, similar to that expressed by Melville in “Statues in Rome”, where he provides a poetic and enthusiastic description of the Hellenistic *Apollo Belvedere*.⁷²

Finally, it is necessary to give a brief consideration to the authorial narrator of the story of Billy Budd. This narrator is very much in evidence as the controlling agency of the narrative and its characters. He frequently draws attention to the controlled, constructed, and literary nature of his story by addressing issues of literary composition. Furthermore, he embeds his characters into a web of intertextual threads by linking them with numerous historical and literary characters. His descriptions of events and characters are regularly augmented with moral and philosophical reflections. The narrator’s habit of commenting on his story generates the impression that we are being confronted with the world-picture and philosophy of a highly idiosyncratic mind; in this way, the narrator himself attains a distinctive presence within the text. We are constantly reminded of the fact that all events and characters are mediated through his reminiscing, analysing and interpreting consciousness. Thus the “scrubbed gun-deck” which serves as a “stage” where “profound passion is enacted” (BB59f.) may be precisely that – a stage for the narrator’s interpretations, projected onto the acts of sailors and officers.

Even though the narrator’s intrusive and prominent presence suggests omniscience, there are crucial points at which he appears to be only partially omniscient. At these points, he shows a tendency to mysterious allusion and speculation. Thus, the portrait of Claggart given in Ch. X might be felt to raise at least as many questions concerning the master-at-arms’s “depravity” as it supposedly strives to answer. With reference to the final private meeting between Billy and Vere, the narrator states that “what took place at this interview was never known”, but then proceeds to offer “some conjectures”. Yet it might be felt that the narrator either regards his own speculations as lying very near the truth, or that he is being deliberately mysterious; for he makes it quite clear that if, as he surmises, there is in-

⁷¹ The fact that the erudite reader may *detect* certain ironies, and incorporate them into an individual reading, is an entirely different matter; I would merely like to point out the dangers inherent in claiming that our ability to detect them is a clear proof of Melville’s intention to be ironic.

⁷² See *Piazza Tales* 408.

deed a “sacrament” which passes between Billy and Vere, it could not be comprehended by “average minds, however much cultivated”, and that such things are only “seldom if in any case revealed to the gadding world” (BB101f.). His categorical pronouncements, like his “indirection” (BB54) in the description of Claggart, might be taken to imply that he has some further knowledge of the matter, but that he chooses not to disclose this to the common reader, deliberately withholding the innermost secrets of his “inside Narrative” (BB15) – an idea which would have appealed to Forster, whose texts often revolve around a withheld private experience of revelation. On the other hand, the absence of definitive content in the “closeted interview” (BB102) might be and has been taken to embody a gap of epistemological and/or narrative uncertainty, delineated by the “ragged edges” of “truth uncompromisingly told” (BB119).

In my analyses of the three main characters, I shall, like Melville’s early readers, be working on the assumption that the narrator, though occasionally given to indirection and what borders on deliberate obscuring tactics, is, on the whole, reliable. Some modern critics, invoking the notorious inconsistencies in the characterisation of Vere in particular, have declared the narrator’s discourse to be ironic in its entirety, and consequently treat every detail of his descriptions of the captain’s character as scathing sarcasm. In declining such a reading, I believe myself to be following the approach of the opera-makers, who may, as their various comments on Melville’s novella testify, have disapproved of the narrative representation of the characters in places, but who did not think to question the narrator’s basic reliability. As pre-New Critical readers who were taking a workmanlike approach to Melville’s text, what inconsistencies they noticed there they were inclined to ascribe to the author himself: as Forster famously put it when discussing the uneven depiction of Vere, “I [...] think that Melville got muddled and that, particularly in the trial scene[,] his respect for authority and discipline deflected him” (*Griffin* 5). Leaving aside the question of whether Forster’s interpretation is plausible, his diagnosis displays remarkable intuitive accuracy, given what is known today about the distinct developmental phases in Melville’s process of composition, and about the “muddled” state of the manuscript itself.⁷³

I.3.2. Billy

Billy Budd is a young man of “twenty-one” (BB17) whose chief outward characteristic is his perfect physical form. He has blue eyes (BB82) which are associated with the sky (“welkin-eyed”, BB17, BB49, BB59), blond hair (“yellow curls”, BB59) and an “as yet smooth face, all but feminine in purity of natural complexion” which would, but for the suntan acquired through his seafaring life, show “the lily” and “the rose” (BB24) of white skin and red, “dimple[d]” cheeks (BB59; compare “the rose-tan of his complexion”, BB106). Billy’s beauty is associated

⁷³ See Hayford/Sealts 1962a:3-12 and Wenke 1999.

with “the earlier British converts to Christianity” whose “clear, ruddy complexions and curled flaxen locks” supposedly prompted Pope Gregory the Great to make the notorious pun about Angles and Angels; he is also likened to “Fra Angelico’s seraphs” whose “faint rosebud complexion” resembles that “of the more beautiful English girls” (BB107f.). To the narrator, Billy’s fine features and limbs suggest a noble lineage – “the ear, small and shapely, the arch of the foot, the curve in mouth and nostril”, the shape of his work-roughened hands, and “something in the mobile expression, and every chance attitude and movement”. The fact that the infant Billy was left “in a pretty silk-lined basket” at “a good man’s door in Bristol” leads the narrator to the conclusion that this “foundling” was “a presumable by-blow, and evidently, no ignoble one”. Uneducated, Billy is “illiterate; he could not read, but he could sing, and like the illiterate nightingale was sometimes the composer of his own song” (BB25f.).

Billy’s face shows “a lingering adolescent expression” which makes him appear “even younger” (BB24), and which matches the nickname “Baby Budd” he acquires from the Dansker (BB17, BB49, BB67), while his other shipmates also refer to him as “Beauty” (BB21, BB52, BB64). Even though Billy’s “significant” and “rare personal beauty” (BB58, BB112) is at times associated with femininity (see above), the narrator places much emphasis on the “masculine beauty” (BB27) of Billy’s “heroic” physical “form” (BB58). Billy’s one imperfection is “an occasional liability to a vocal defect”, namely, “a stutter or even worse” which will manifest itself “under sudden provocation of strong heart-feeling” and impede “his voice” (BB27f.).

In aspect as well as – to a certain extent – in nature, Billy is a specimen of the type of the Handsome Sailor described at the beginning of Ch. I, and the narrator frequently refers to him by that title (e.g. BB27, BB53). Like the Handsome Sailor, Billy is “strength and beauty” (BB16). Like him, he possesses a “genial happy-go-lucky air” (BB22) and an “irresistible good-nature” (BB71); he is “happily endowed with the gaiety of high health, youth, and a free heart” (BB22), exuding an air of “cheery health, and frank enjoyment of young life” (BB59). The narrator suggests that his enforced transition from the *Rights-of-Man* to the *Indomitable* may seem to Billy an agreeably “adventurous turn in his affairs[,] which promised an opening into novel scenes and martial excitements” (BB22). Meanwhile, the youth’s “unpretentious good looks” (BB22, BB59) are coupled with a total lack of “conceit or vanity” (BB24), or any “mental superiority tending to excite an invidious feeling” (BB71), corresponding to the absence of anything “vainglorious” which is characteristic of the Handsome Sailor’s “offhand unaffectedness of natural regality” (BB15). These qualities, together with his “manly forwardness upon occasion”, combine to ensure Billy’s “general popularity” with “most of his shipmates” (BB71).

The text contains numerous references to Billy’s popularity; thus, Captain Graveling of the *Rights-of-Man* reports that his crew “took to him like hornets to treacle” and “all love him”; they certainly all look “sorrowfully” upon his departure. Captain Graveling considers Billy his “best man”, and calls him “the jewel of ‘em”

because he is a “peacemaker” among the unruly crew (BB19-21). On board the *Indomitable*, too, Billy is “not at all disliked” (BB22) and is “well received in the top and on the gun-decks” (BB24); even the Dansker, an old sailor who is not exactly sociable, “in his ascetic way rather took to Billy” (BB48). His excellent character is noted among the higher ranks as well: when, later in the story, the officers learn of Claggart’s accusation and of Billy’s part in Claggart’s demise, they react with “surprise”, Billy being “the last man they would have suspected, either of mutinous design [...] or of the undeniable deed he himself had done” (BB91).

The ideal Handsome Sailor is “invariably a proficient” in his profession, and “also more or less of a mighty boxer or wrestler” (BB16). The same can be said of Billy, who is “rated as an able seaman” upon his arrival on board the *Indomitable* and “assigned to [...] the foretop” (BB22); both rating and assignment speak of his proficiency as an active sailor (all the topmen being “picked out for youth and activity”, BB46). His “qualities as a sailor-man” are duly acknowledged by Captain Vere, who thinks of him as “a ‘King’s Bargain’” (BB78). Billy is “punctilious[...] in duty”, “always alert”, and never gives any “cause of offence to anybody”, all the more so because he is anxious to avoid incurring, “through remissness”, any “verbal reproof” or, even worse, the brutal corporeal punishment of a flogging (BB46).

Billy’s physical prowess is firmly established: when insulted and provoked by the Red Whiskers on board the *Rights-of-Man*, he “let[s] fly his arm” and gives the bully a short but “terrible drubbing”, even though Captain Graveling who tells the story believes that “he never meant to do quite as much harm as he did”, being otherwise of a peaceful nature (BB20). Nevertheless, Billy is powerful enough as a fighter and not to be trifled with; certainly the afterguardsman takes seriously enough Billy’s threat to “t-t-t-oss [him] back over the r-rail” if he does not leave him alone (BB64). The fatal blow to Claggart’s forehead, too, is delivered “quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night” by the strong “right arm” of the “young athlete” (BB83).

Billy possesses “little or no sharpness of faculty” and no “trace of the wisdom of the serpent” (BB26); “deal[ing] in double meaning and insinuations” is “quite foreign to his nature”, since he possesses neither “the will to it” nor “the sinister dexterity” (BB22). His valediction to the *Rights-of-Man*, misconstrued by the *Indomitable*’s lieutenant and by Captain Vere as a “covert” (BB22), “satiric sally” (BB78), an oblique denouncement of his forcible impressment, is in fact nothing more than it purports to be, namely, a farewell to his old ship (BB22). Billy is described as “a child-man”: though his “intelligence, such as it was, had advanced, [...] yet his simple-mindedness remained for the most part unaffected” (BB68). To all intents and purposes, he moves through life in a state of “inexperienced nonage” (BB83); as Claggart recognises, Billy is “nothing more than innocent” (BB59). His lack of experience is explained by the narrator as being not merely due to his youth, but also due to his having lived most of his life among sailors, themselves “a juvenile race”, inclined to “frankness”. To the sailor, the narrator reflects, “Life

is not a game” of “indirection”, though it is such as a matter of routine to the worldly “landsman”, whom the narrator tends to contrast unfavourably with sailors “as a class”. On the other hand, the narrator notes that all sailors are “accustomed to obey orders without debating them”, and to having their “life afloat [...] externally ruled for [them]”, circumstances which may “more pointedly operate” on young, inexperienced seamen like Billy (BB68f.).

What brief adventures Billy may have had ashore on the “fiddler’s green” are counted by the narrator, like those of all sailors in general, as mere “exuberance of vitality after long restraint, frank manifestations in accordance with natural law” rather than acts of “vice”;⁷⁴ such exploits have not altered Billy’s fundamental state of innocence (BB26). He remains entirely oblivious, too, of the interest “provoked” by his personal beauty among some of the *Indomitable*’s crewmembers: he notices neither the “ambiguous smile[s]” of certain “harder faces among the blue-jackets”, nor the “peculiar favourable effect his person and demeanour had upon the more intelligent gentlemen of the quarter-deck” (BB24f.). The signal words “ambiguous” and “peculiar” suggest that this male interest in a strikingly handsome young male may be read as sexual.

It is, so the text repeatedly insists, the very goodness of Billy’s “immature nature, essentially honest and humane” (BB82) which proves to be the weakness that makes him most vulnerable. We are told that “like [Billy’s] sense of fear, his apprehension as to aught outside of the honest and natural was seldom very quick” (BB63). By nature wholly incapable of “will[ing] malice”, and never having “experienced the reactionary⁷⁵ bite of that serpent” (BB59), Billy is entirely “without any touch of defensive ugliness” which might protect him in “a world not without some mantraps” (BB48). Unfortunately for him, he lacks any “intuitive knowledge of the bad” (BB68) which might warn him about the “proximity of the malign” (BB71) embodied by Claggart.

When reflecting on the nocturnal encounter with the afterguardsman who has sought to tempt him to mutiny with the offer of money, Billy is “sorely puzzled”, realising “instinctively” that the man’s “overture”, from which he has “recoil[ed] in “disgust[...] [.] must involve evil of some sort”. Unable to deal with the “equivocal[...]” situation, he tries to “smother” his “disturbingly alien” and “ineffectual speculations” about the meaning of what has happened to him (BB65f.). Neither at this point, nor later during the trial, does he report what has befallen him; although “as a loyal blue-jacket”, it would have been “his duty” to do so (BB66, BB92). His silence is due to his “innate repugnance” to become anything

⁷⁴ The indulgent view which the narrator of this text takes of the exploits of sailors in general is certainly a long way from the views expressed by the narrator of *White-Jacket*, who holds far bleaker opinions on sailors’ sexual *mores*: “What too many seamen are when ashore is very well known; but what some of them become when completely cut off from shore indulgences can hardly be imagined by landsmen” (WJ375).

⁷⁵ Melville’s use of the word “reactionary” in the sense of “reacting” is discussed by Hayford/Sealts 1962b:165.

like “an informer against [his] own shipmates” – a feeling betraying his “erring sense of uninstructed honour” (BB92) and “novice-magnanimity” (BB66). Both these terms imply that he is not initiated into the structures of naval discipline which govern the warship world in which he moves, much as the “rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces” is ignorant of the social conventions that govern the life “of the court” (BB24; see discussion below).

Such is Billy’s innocence that he utterly fails to see even the possibility of truth in the Dansker’s suspicion that Claggart is the instigator of any malicious action against his person. He takes Claggart’s equivocal expressions of goodwill at face-value: “the occasional frank air and pleasant word went for what they purported to be” (BB71). He tells the Dansker that Claggart has been heard to call him “that sweet and pleasant young fellow” (BB49) – ironically, the very designation applied to him in mockingly derogatory fashion by the Red Whiskers, his erstwhile enemy upon the *Rights-of-Man* (BB19) – and assures him that “I seldom pass him but there comes a pleasant word” (BB49). The most famous of these “pleasant words” is the remark Claggart addresses to him *à propos* of the soup he accidentally spills in the master-at-arms’s path: “Handsomely done, my lad! And handsome is as handsome did it, too!” Not realising that the laughter of his messmates at a “remark” they take “as meant for humorous” is only a strategic expression of “counterfeited glee”, Billy “merrily join[s] in” and defies anyone to tell him “that Jemmy Legs is down on me” (BB51f.), as the Dansker persists in claiming (BB49, BB67). Nothing in Billy’s short life has prepared him for an encounter with a “too fair-spoken man” (BB71) possessed of equivocating skills like Claggart’s, and he is unable to construe his secret enemy’s true nature and intentions. Accordingly, when asked during his trial why Claggart “should [...] have so lied, so maliciously lied” about Billy’s supposed involvement in a mutiny, Billy is “nonplussed” and “confus[ed]”, and cannot provide any answer (BB92).

Billy’s “singularly musical” voice suggests “the harmony within” (BB27), and the narrator repeatedly emphasises that his moral and spiritual qualities are harmonious indeed. There is a “bonfire in his heart” which “made luminous the rosetan in his cheek” (BB58). His truly heavenly, “welkin” eyes (BB17), “windows” for “the spirit lodged within [...] looking out” (BB59) are consistently associated with innocence and freedom from the suspiciousness brought by world-knowledge (BB49). Allusions to Billy’s complete goodness abound, and his person is associated with Christian imagery: he is likened to “young Adam before the Fall” (BB78; see also BB27), and associated with angels by the narrator (BB108) and by Vere, whose comment on Claggart’s death is, famously, “Struck dead by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang!” (BB85). The description of his execution serves to link his death with that of Christ: at the moment of his hanging, “it chanced that the vapoury fleece hanging low in the east was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God seen in mystical vision”, and his “ascending” body “took the full rose of the dawn” (BB113). While the religious associations

serve to invest him with a quality of divine goodness, he is decidedly not divinely perfect, his stammer being the evidence that life on earth is imperfection, and that the Devil, “the arch-interpreter,⁷⁶ the envious marplot of Eden, still has more or less to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth” (BB28).

Billy is also frequently likened to figures of Classical mythology. His face has the “humane look of reposeful good-nature which the Greek sculptor in some instances gave to his heroic strong man, Hercules” (BB25). Lieutenant Ratcliffe mockingly designates him “Apollo with his portmanteau” (BB21); he is a “cheerful sea-Hyperion” (BB70);⁷⁷ and “young Achilles” being “instructed” by “the old sea-Chiron”, the Dansker (BB49). By association with the Handsome Sailor, he too can be imagined “close-reefing topsails [...] in very much the attitude of young Alexander curbing the fiery Bucephalus” (BB16). Billy is thus represented as a heroic, demi-god-like or even god-like figure whose exceptional nature sets him apart from the average human beings surrounding him. At the same time, the association with the gods and heroes of Greek mythology will, to some readers, suggest an element of homoerotic desire in these appreciative descriptions of his perfect form.

The Noble Savage topos is another element which features in the descriptions of Billy. Thus, the narrator repeatedly declares that “in many respects”, Billy is “little more than a sort of upright barbarian [...] such perhaps as Adam presumably might have been” before the Fall (BB26f.) – i.e. living in a state of sinless natural innocence. “A barbarian Billy radically was” (BB107), and the term “barbarian” can be seen to carry a positive connotation throughout the text.⁷⁸ As a “young barbarian” (BB109), Billy lives “nearer to unadulterated nature” (BB107) and shares in “virtues pristine and unadulterated” which are “out of keeping” with “custom or convention” that shape the denizen of “Cain’s city”, “cityfied man” (BB27), who dwells in “highly civilised communities” (BB107) – hence his freedom from any “irrational fear” of death. This “superior savage”, condemned to be executed, meets the “efforts” of the ship’s chaplain “to bring home to him the thought of salvation and a Saviour” with indifferent “politeness” and incomprehension: “Out of natural courtesy he received but did not appreciate. It was like a

⁷⁶ “Arch-interpreter”, Forster noted appreciatively in his 1947 BBC Book Talk on *Billy Budd*, “is an odd expression to use of the devil. Why not Arch-fiend? But no: arch-interpreter. Melville’s mind is full of such oddness” (BBC385). The oddness is not, in fact, Melville’s, but that of his first editor, Raymond Weaver. The corrected reading is “arch-interferer” (H/S 53).

⁷⁷ As “Hyperion”, Billy is most likely to be connected with the Greek sun-god Helios (who was also known by that name), rather than the Titan Hyperion who fathered him. Noel Bradley’s insistence that the reference to Hyperion can *only* be a deliberate intertextual allusion to the comparison of “Hyperion to a satyr” which appears in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Act I, Sc. 2, l.138; Bradley 236) stands revealed as obviously (and improbably) contrived to fit his argument.

⁷⁸ Compare also Melville’s earlier “Noble Savage” figures such as Marnoo in *Typee* and Queequeg in *Moby-Dick*; in his poem “John Marr” (1888), he idealises sailors as “barbarians of man’s simpler nature” (l.36), a phrase which Forster was to associate with Billy Budd (*Griffin* 5; see section II.5.3.2.).

gift placed in the palm of an outstretched hand upon which the fingers do not close” (BB109). Despite the Christian imagery with which he is (rather unsystematically) associated, it would therefore seem that Billy himself, and the goodness and magnanimity embodied in him, are of a “natural”, pre-lapsarian and pre-Christian kind.

Billy’s barbarianism is only a small step away from making him an animal altogether: his “fatalist” attitude to life is that of “the animals” (BB22). Billy, the “illiterate” songster, is likened to “the illiterate nightingale”, “sometimes the composer of [its] own song”; he possesses as little “self-consciousness” as “a dog of St. Bernard’s breed” (BB26). Significantly, most of the animal imagery links Billy with domesticated rather than wild animals, evoking associations with the power structures and control mechanisms of human society – a fact which might be felt to compromise the glorification of his “barbarian” independence from these “civilised” social structures. Thus, it is stated that he “made no demur” at his impressment, and that in any case “any demur would have been as idle as the protest of a goldfinch popped into a cage” (BB17). Billy is likened to “a blood horse” with which he shares the “evident” signs of “noble descent” (BB26); the imagery of breeding extends to the pure “Saxon strain”, free from “any Norman or other admixture” which the narrator sees in him (BB25). Vere, we are told, has “congratulated Lieutenant Ratcliffe” for finding “such a fine specimen of the *genus homo*” (BB78). Billy’s supposed expression of antipathy in the soup accident is likened by the narrator (rendering Claggart’s thoughts) to “the futile kick of a heifer, which yet, were the heifer a shod stallion, would not be so harmless” (BB60). After the incident with the afterguardsman, Billy’s “disgustful recoil” from the sinister “overture” is likened to that of “a young horse fresh from the pasture suddenly inhaling a vile whiff from some chemical factory, and by repeated snortings trying to get it out of his nostrils and lungs” (BB65). During his trial, his demeanour is likened to that of “a dog of generous breed” who regards Vere, “his master”, with a “wistful, interrogative look” of “dumb expressiveness”, hoping to gather from “his face some elucidation of a previous gesture ambiguous to the canine intelligence” (BB93). His final blessing of Vere is “delivered in the clear melody of a singing-bird on the point of launching from the twig” (BB112).

The narrator furthermore shows a tendency to treat Billy like a piece of sculpture: his features are “cast in a mould”, and are endowed with their expression as a statue is endowed with its expression by “the Greek sculptor” (BB25). Captain Vere feels that “in the nude”, Billy “might have passed⁷⁹ for a statue of young Adam before the Fall” (BB78). As immobile work of art or symbolically elevated mythological hero, he invites the appreciative contemplation of others, but remains oblivious of their gaze: neither the aesthetic symbol nor the homosexual icon is conceived to interact with its admirers. Whether as inarticulate animal or

⁷⁹ The correct reading should be “posed” (H/S 94).

“upright barbarian”, Billy is irredeemably barred from comprehending the more circuitous workings of the “civilised” minds of his more experienced fellow men. In the “straightforward simplicity” of his “simple nature” (BB25f.) that borders on the naïve, he markedly differs from the type of the Handsome Sailor, of whom we are told: “Ashore he was the champion, afloat the spokesman; on every suitable occasion always foremost” (BB16). Here, surely, are some of the “important variations” (BB17) which the narrator hints at as he introduces his particular Handsome Sailor: if there is one thing Billy eminently is not, it is a *spokesman*, neither for the crew of the *Indomitable*, nor for any unjustly impressed sailors or potential mutineers – not even for himself alone, in the fatal confrontation with Claggart. In fact, Billy’s whole being appears characterised by passiveness and, despite his popularity, cognitive isolation.

His initial success as a “peacemaker” aboard the *Rights-of-Man* is not due to any active, directed effort. According to Captain Graveling, it was “not that he preached to them or said or did anything in particular; but a virtue *went out of him*, sugaring the sour ones” (BB19, my emphasis). His mere presence suffices instantly to turn most of the quarrelsome crew into a “happy family”, “like a catholic priest striking peace in an Irish shindy” – the respect accorded to a priest being not least due to his special position apart from his congregation. This passive process is not the work of a “fighting peacemaker”; contrary to Lieutenant Ratcliffe’s interpretation, the conversion of the Red Whiskers from bully to admirer is not an action effected with a view to promoting peace but merely a physical reaction to a physical provocation. The Red Whiskers is no Claggart: his “envy” of, and contempt for, “the newcomer” are turned into respect by the beating he receives from Billy, even, if we believe Captain Graveling, into “love” (BB19f.). However, the end result of Billy’s sojourn on board the *Rights-of-Man* is not so much his integration into the crew; rather, he continues to hold a special position as a “cynosure” (BB24), the object of their admiration, and the recipient of special services and gifts (BB20).

Billy’s transition onto the *Indomitable* is another passive process. His immediate acceptance of his impressment is recognised as unusual by his shipmates on board the *Rights-of-Man*: they are “surprised” by his “uncomplaining acquiescence” and even “turned a glance of silent reproach” on him (BB17). It seems his reaction does not conform with what they expect from their Handsome Sailor. The narrator emphasises that the “fatalis[m]” with which Billy accepts any changes in his circumstances is not that of a “philosopher” but rather like that of “the animals” (BB22).

The transition from the *Rights-of-Man* to the “ampler and more knowing world of a great warship”, the *Indomitable*, places Billy into a new and more complex social environment. His situation is compared by the narrator “to that of a rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces and brought into competition with the high-born dames of the court”: “hardly here was he that cynosure he had previ-

ously been among those minor ships’ companies of the merchant marine”. The inherent, natural power he holds in the “simpler sphere” of the *Rights-of-Man* does not function to anything like the same extent within the larger and more complicated, “factitious” social system of the warship world (BB24). A key metaphor for human society, the warship world is a world of strictly regulated power structures, controlled by a hierarchy of police-officers and their spies (BB47, BB60f.), who may operate secretly to private ends of their own. Some of its inhabitants are “sullen[ly]” resentful at having been impressed (BB22f.), and the “discontent” that prompted the Spithead and Nore mutinies “lurkingly survive[s]” in the fleet, matched by a corresponding “vigilance” on the part of those in authority, even though the tension in the atmosphere may not be readily detectable: “very little of the manner of the men and nothing obvious in the demeanour of the officers would have suggested to an ordinary observer that the Great Mutiny was a recent event” (BB35f.). Nevertheless, even Billy is brought into contact with the equivocal movements of conspiracy through the afterguardsman’s advances, whether they are genuine or contrived by Claggart’s machinations (BB62-64, BB66).

The “change” in his social “circumstances” is “scarce noted” (BB24) by Billy, however – and accordingly, he does not adjust to his new social, *unnatural* environs. As has been shown above, he is unable to deal with Claggart’s equivocal demeanour because in his innocence, he cannot detect or even conceive of it. In remaining silent instead of reporting the afterguardsman’s “overture” (BB65), he is following his natural sense of “uninstructed honour” (BB92) instead of the naval code which governs his warship environment, having “never been instructed” in “naval decorum” (BB22). It is telling that in the confrontation with Claggart, Billy should be unable to defend himself with words, i.e. in the language of “civilised” (BB107) society required in the “factitious life” on board the warship *Indomitable*. Hampered by his speech impediment, he instinctively resorts once again to the physical violence which had proved so successful among the equally simple men on board the *Rights-of-Man*.

Only when he is about to be executed does Billy once again become “a cynosure” (BB17), a focal figure set apart from the rest. For a moment, he regains his capability of inspiring a unanimous and impulsive response to his goodness from the whole crew, who repeat his blessing of Captain Vere “without volition”, as if animated by “some vocal current-electric”; while, even as they “echo” his words, it is “Billy alone” who “must have been in their hearts”, not Vere, whom they are blessing (BB112). Again, Billy apparently has no intention of evoking this response; it is almost certainly not an active attempt to reconcile the crew to the captain’s judgement.

Billy’s passiveness is underscored by a number of references to victimhood or sacrifice. Thus, Lieutenant Ratcliffe tells Captain Graveling that “his Majesty [...] will be delighted to learn that *one* shipmaster at least cheerfully surrenders to the

King the flower of his flock” (BB21).⁸⁰ Billy is placed into structural analogy with Joseph, the victim of his brothers’ envy and hatred, when Claggart, watching for Vere’s reaction to his accusation, is likened to “the spokesman of the envious children of Jacob” (BB79). By logical extension, Billy becomes Joseph to Vere’s Jacob, with Claggart’s slander functioning as the parallel to the torn and bloodied coat presented as ‘evidence’ for the favourite’s supposed death (Genesis 37:32-34).

When, in the confrontation with Claggart, Billy understands what he is being accused of, he stands “like one impaled and gagged” (BB82); he is “transfixed” by Claggart’s “mesmeric”, “hungry”, predatory gaze (BB83). His emotional shock brings on his “convulsed tongue-tie”; his “ineffectual eagerness to obey the injunction to speak and defend himself” causes him “agony”; his “efforts at utterance” are “violent” but only “confirm[...] the paralysis” (BB83). His facial “expression” is likened to “a crucifixion”, and to that of “a condemned vestal priestess in the moment of being buried alive, and in the first struggle against suffocation” (BB83).⁸¹ Billy furthermore assumes the position of Isaac who must be sacrificed by Abraham (Vere) “in obedience to the exacting behest” (BB102).

The narrator’s “inside Narrative” (BB15) has the reader convinced of Billy’s spiritual innocence, to such an extent that it is easy to forget that Billy is, in fact, guilty of manslaughter, if nothing else.⁸² As a result, he is most easily (and very commonly) read as an unjustly condemned victim of the inhuman Articles of War, a “martyr to martial discipline” (BB110). The execution itself is referred to as a “consummation” (BB112), whereby the death penalty is linguistically linked to both sacrifice and (ritual) marriage; Billy’s “ascending” figure is at the last seen “pinioned” and motionless in an elated position, accompanied by imagery which links him to Christ, the “Lamb of God” (BB113). In terms of visual aesthetics, Billy in the moment of his death has already become an image or icon of the sacrificed innocence he embodies.

⁸⁰ The phrase “the flower of his flock”, while it does not actually occur in the Bible itself, sounds biblical and is reminiscent of the sacrifice of “the firstlings of the flock” (Genesis 4:4; Nehemiah 10:37; Deuteronomy 12:6, 14:23, 15:19).

⁸¹ Being buried alive was the punishment for a virgin priestess of the Roman goddess Vesta who had broken her vow of chastity. If Billy is likened to “a condemned vestal priestess”, this might be taken to imply that he has actively and guiltily forfeited his innocence at this point already (*before* he strikes Claggart), but what, then, would be the structural analogue to such an active breaking of his vow? It seems more likely to me that the loss of innocence and the broken vow of chastity implied here are achieved by an act of violation, with Claggart’s accusation the structural equivalent either of rape or of a false and unjust accusation. This view of the vestal priestess as victim would be in accordance with the imagery of Billy as victim which pervades the entire scene. However, as discussed in section I.3.1. above, it is quite possible that the visual aspect of Billy’s struggle is the central element in this analogy.

⁸² Not even Billy himself feels guilty about the killing of Claggart: we are informed that his initial “agony”, allayed by “the something healing in the closeted interview with Captain Vere”, has “proceed[ed]” not from any feelings of guilt, but mainly from Billy’s “virgin experience of the diabolical incarnate and effective in some men”(BB106).

In summary, the character of Billy is constructed in such a way as to show that total innocence and goodness, as embodied by him, will inevitably come to grief in the post-lapsarian, imperfect world of “civilised” human society, because innocence and goodness alone are defenceless against an evil that is expert in navigating and manipulating the structures of social control. As an iconic figure, the canvas for the narrator’s philosophical reflections and, possibly, homoerotic longings, Billy does not change or develop over the course of the story. Even though he *appears* “spiritualised” by his “experiences so poignantly profound” (BB112), it would seem that his understanding remains unaffected by them. He essentially retains his passive fatalism, never thinking of revolting against his situation. It could be argued that he never comes to resolve his own “agony” (BB106) privately and on his own terms; it, too, is “externally ruled” (BB69) and terminated for him: “it survived not the something healing in the closeted interview with Vere”. Billy thus remains, to the end, the “slumbering child in the cradle” (BB106).

I.3.3. Claggart

Whereas Billy Budd represents goodness and innocence, John Claggart, the master-at-arms on board the *Indomitable*, is conceived as his hostile counterpart who represents evil and depravity – a “peculiar human creature the direct reverse of a saint” (BB54). He is not as young as Billy, but, at “about five-and-thirty”, no old man either. His appearance, reminiscent of that of a villain-hero of Gothic Romance, is not unattractive: he is “spare and tall, yet of no ill figure upon the whole”, with pale skin and “silken jet curls” (BB41f.), and eyes “approaching a deeper violet, the softest of shades” (BB70). Being “not insensible” of his own “favourable” appearance, “he was not only neat but careful in his dress” (BB58). However, while his “pallor” is “in part the result of his official seclusion from the sunlight”, there is something about it which “seemed to hint of something defective or abnormal in the constitution and blood” (BB42). His “notable” (BB41) face is “well moulded” (BB58) with “features [...] cleanly-cut as those on a Greek medallion” (BB41), including a “shapely mouth” (BB51), yet falling short of the ideal because of a “strange protuberant heaviness” in his “beardless” chin. The narrator compares the latter to that “of the Rev. Dr. Titus Oates”, “the fraud of the alleged Popish Plot” (BB41), thereby associating Claggart with fraudulence, denunciation and deviousness.⁸³

It is repeatedly stated that Claggart possesses a “more than average intellect” (BB41; see also BB58 and BB84); in fact, he is of a type “dominated by intellectuality” (BB55). He is a man of many “accomplishments” (BB42), characterised by a “constitutional sobriety” (BB45); his “demeanour” is usually “self-contained and

⁸³ Oates, as Hayford and Sealts explain, “concocted in 1678 the story of a supposed Catholic plot to massacre English protestants and to burn London” (1962b:154).

rational” (BB72); and, as a petty officer on board the *Indomitable*, he has been displaying “considerable tact in his function” (BB76). His “general aspect and manner” (BB42), his elegant physique – like Billy’s, his “hand” is “small and shapely” (BB41) – and his “language”, which is “that of no uneducated man” (BB75), are “suggestive of an education and career incongruous with his naval function”, so that, “when not actively engaged in it, he looked like a man of high quality, social and moral, who for reasons of his own was keeping incognito” (BB42).

He is but a recent arrival on board the *Indomitable* (BB74); “nothing was known about his former life” or his origins, but a faint “accent” suggests that he is no Englishman “by birth” (BB42). Unsubstantiated rumour coursing among the sailors would have him “a chevalier”, i.e. an adventurer (see Hayford/Sealts 1962b:155), who has entered the navy to escape from legal persecution “for some mysterious swindle” of his own concoction (BB42). The fact that, being “without prior nautical experience” (BB42), Claggart implicitly qualifies as a “landsman” clearly marks him as a figure of less trustworthiness than the ‘true’ seamen within the narrator’s system of values (see BB68f.).

The narrator follows his account of the crew’s speculations about Claggart with a digression on the recruiting practices of the British Navy at that time. These included drafting “directly from the jails”, impressment by force and abduction, and a general policy of not asking too many questions of volunteers, thus effectively turning the Navy into a “sanctuary” for petty criminals and “the promiscuous lame ducks of morality” (BB43f.). It is on the basis of this “narrow[...],” “limited” experience of “human wickedness”, the narrator explains, that the popular rumours about Claggart’s past have developed, the “rude uncultivated” sailors being unable to conceive of moral depravity or evil beyond “vulgar rascality” (BB44f.). However, the narrator also stresses that Claggart’s unpopular status is part and parcel of the office he holds upon the *Indomitable* – no “chief of police” (BB41) on a warship “can ever hope to be popular with the crew”, especially since his position invests him with a great deal of “underground influence” which is open to much abuse (BB44f.). Unsurprisingly, Claggart himself is well aware of his unpopular status, just as he is in the habit of employing his subordinates for his own ends (BB60f.).

It is made clear that something in Claggart’s nature more than suits the ignominious office he has so “abruptly” risen to (having originally started his naval career in the “least honourable section of a man-of-war’s crew, embracing the drudges”): his “superior capacity”, his “ingratiating deference to superiors” and “a certain austere patriotism” he exhibits are combined with “a peculiar ferreting genius manifested on a singular occasion” (BB45). His astuteness is not infallible, however: the “antipathy” he conceives against Billy effectively blinds him to the fact that he is receiving fake reports about Billy’s doings and sayings from his “faithful” but over-zealous “understrapper”, Squeak (BB60).

The narrator establishes that Claggart’s hatred for Billy partakes of a metaphysical dimension, deriving from a mysterious evil which is only obliquely hinted at. Claggart famously embodies Plato’s “Natural Depravity: a depravity according to nature”; this apparently tautological definition implies that the “mania of an evil nature” was “born with him and innate”, and is not the result of any “corrupting” influences. It is emphasised that this “depravity” contains “no vulgar alloy of the brute”, nor any “vices or small sins”, and that it “partakes nothing of the sordid or sensual” (BB55f.). Rather, because “it folds itself in the mantle of respectability”, a depravity like his can pass undetected in “Civilisation, especially if of the austerer sort”, possessing as it does “certain negative virtues” (BB55): its “phenomenal pride” (BB56) will prevent it from exhibiting any of the more common vices that would send any less “exceptional mortals” (BB53) to “the gallows” or “jail” (BB55). The “monomania” (BB72) or “lunacy” of Claggart’s “evil nature” is “not continuous, but occasional”, and only “evoked by some special object”. It is never revealed to his surroundings, since all his acts will seem to be governed by “the law of reason”: his “cool judgement sagacious and sound” will be employed “as an ambidexter implement for effecting the irrational”, while “the method and the outward proceeding is always perfectly rational” (BB56).

Following the discussion of “Natural Depravity” according to Plato, which he concludes with the thought that natures like Claggart’s may well be connected with what the Bible terms “mysteries of iniquity” (BB57),⁸⁴ the narrator then turns to a discussion of the envious nature of Claggart’s hatred of Billy. The chapter is headed by a motto from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, through which Claggart is linked with the Miltonic Devil. “Pale ire⁸⁵, envy and despair” (BB58) is taken from Book 4 (l.115), where it describes Satan’s jealous reaction as he contemplates his own downfall and Adam and Eve’s favoured state. Besides “an antipathy spontaneous and profound” (BB53), “envy” is the second motivating force for Claggart’s hatred of Billy. It is first provoked by Billy’s “significant personal beauty”, then deepens as Claggart understands “the moral phenomenon” of Billy’s “innocence”: “in an aesthetic way he saw the charm of it, the courageous free-and-easy temper of it, and fain would have shared it, but he despaired of it” (BB58f.).

We are told that Claggart bears an “elemental evil in himself” which he cannot “annul”, and that, while he can “apprehend[...] the good” in Billy, he is “power-

⁸⁴ The paragraph beginning “Dark sayings are these” shows some notable variations in the different editions: where readers of the Hayford/Sealts text find narratorial uncertainty and indirection in the form of a question (“But why? Is it because they somewhat savour of Holy Writ in its phrase “mystery of iniquity?””, H/S76), the earlier editions offer a blunt certainty: “But why? It is because they somewhat savour of Holy Writ in its phrase “mysteries of iniquity”” (BB57; compare Weaver’s editions, Melville 1924:47 and Melville 1928:267); the paragraph ends here, without the conciliatory sentence that follows in the Hayford/Sealts text.

⁸⁵ Hayford and Sealts note that by omitting the comma which stands between the first two words, “pale” and “ire”, in *Paradise Lost*, Melville turned the archaic noun “pale” into an adjective (1962b:165).

less to be it" (BB59). Billy's aspect is capable of bringing "tears" to Claggart's eyes, and of imbuing his "melancholy expression" with "a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban"; in these "unobserved", unguarded moments, he "looked like the man of sorrows". However, this "yearning", whenever he feels it, is "quickly repented of, as it were, by an immitigable look" of face-"pinching" returning hatred (BB70), expressing his envious "disdain" and "contempt" (BB59f.). It is made clear that the "passion" by which he is "magnetically" drawn to Billy's innocence, even if the attraction is a negative one,⁸⁶ is like a natural law that cannot be resisted. For it is Claggart's very "nature" which forces him "to recoil upon [him]self, and, like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible, act out to the end [his] allotted part" (BB59)⁸⁷ – i.e. the destruction of innocence and goodness, as embodied by Billy. Neither Claggart nor Billy are conceived as characters who have a conscious choice of how they are going to act; their actions are represented as wholly determined by their natures. Viewed in this light, the "fate and ban" which debar Claggart from loving Billy (BB70) appear as Divine ordinance, and the story of their antagonism becomes a re-creation of, or variation on, Adam's Fall, enacted exclusively between males – Satan and Adam, to whom Billy is so explicitly likened.

A reader accustomed to picking up encoded discourses about homosexuality might light on the phrase "Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban", and on various other passages describing the master-at-arms, as suggestive of a more worldly "yearning" (BB70) for Billy's youth and beauty. Discourses about his "depravity", insanity, and strategic camouflage beneath "the mantle of respectability" (BB55) may be felt to resonate with late nineteenth-century discourses about homosexuality.⁸⁸ In such a reading, what potential Claggart may possess for "lov[ing]" Billy appears stifled by what may be interpreted as Claggart's internalised homophobia – which leads him to project his homophobic self-hatred onto the eminently desirable Billy – as well as by "fate and ban", i.e. the social and legal interdict against male/male erotic desire.

It needs to be noted here that although the story's narrator appears to acknowledge that Billy's beauty is capable of evincing from some of the men on board the *Indomitable* a sort of appreciation that could be identified as homosexual

⁸⁶ Claggart's "passion" can be regarded as identical with the "desire" which Sedgwick uses to designate "the affective or social force, the glue, that shapes an important relationship", a force which can take negative shapes like "hostility or hatred" (1985:2).

⁸⁷ If Claggart's nature is said to "recoil upon itself", this may be yet another Miltonic reference: the formulation occurs in *Paradise Lost*, where it describes Satan, who "like a devilish engine back recoils / Upon himself" (Book 4, ll.17ff.). This passage, comprising about 90 lines, also deals with Satan's envy of Adam and Eve, and depicts him as trapped in an existence which is ultimately determined by God. See also note 124 below.

⁸⁸ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, homosexual identity "was defined in terms of new sanctions: of madness, moral insanity, sickness and disease", giving rise to a "medical model" of the homosexual" (Weeks 23); see also Sedgwick 1990:94-97.

desire (BB24f.; see p.60 above), he nevertheless makes a point of declaring that all of the suggestive details of Claggart’s “passion” are to be understood as part of a mysterious *moral* phenomenon, namely, “natural depravity” linked to an intellectual and yet fundamentally irrational “mania of an evil nature” which, so the narrator insists, “partakes nothing of the sordid or sensual” (BB56). This latter statement seems intended to pre-empt an all-too-superficial interpretation of Claggart’s “depravity” as mere (homo)sexual desire. The homoerotic subtext which seems so tantalisingly to surround the figure of the master-at-arms is thus ‘officially’ denied in the text itself, since sexual desire is eliminated as a valid explanation for Claggart’s behaviour.⁸⁹

Claggart’s evil is emphasised throughout the text with imagery which suggests associations with the Devil and Hell. His paleness, we learn, is “the result of his official seclusion from the sunlight” (BB42) in the “cavernous sphere” below decks, from whence he is said to “ascend[...].” (BB74). Whenever he unexpectedly meets Billy, “a red light would flash from his eye, like a spark from an anvil in a dusky smithy” (BB70) – there is a hint of hellfire in the colours evoked here. Claggart’s sinister behavioural quirks are described as “caprices of the pit”, and his secret “monomania” of hatred is compared to “a subterranean fire” (BB71f.). When he speaks to Vere on the quarter-deck, his voice, “silvery and low” (BB80), evokes associations of temptation and false enticement. In the confrontation with Billy, Claggart becomes a fear-inspiring, non-human denizen of a watery underworld: his eyes turn “a muddy purple”, “gelidly protruding like the alien eyes of certain uncatalogued creatures of the deep”; his “mesmeric glance” is likened to “the hungry lurch of the torpedo-fish”; and when he lies lifeless, his body is compared to that of “a dead snake” (BB82ff.).

Claggart is adept at disguising his evil nature, so that Billy and most of the other sailors except the Dansker fail to interpret the true meaning of what he says and does. In the incident of the spilled soup, “Claggart’s equivocal words” are taken “as meant for humorous”; only for a short while does he lose control over his face: his “involuntary smile, or rather grimace” turns “momentarily” into “some expression less guarded”, even “distorting”, “usurping the face from the heart”, so that the drummer boy who collides with him is “strangely disconcerted by his aspect” (BB51f.). Claggart’s “impulsive[...].” violent reaction to the collision – he gives the boy “a sharp cut with the rattan” – and his “vehement[...].” reproof, “Look where you go” (BB52), are indicators of his inner tension, and obliquely hint at the destructive nature of his feelings for Billy.

⁸⁹ It could be (and has been) argued that the narrative treatment of the soup-spilling incident (Ch. IX) contains sexual imagery which seems to qualify this insistence somewhat, to wit, “the greasy liquid” (BB51) or “fluid streaming” before Claggart’s feet (BB60), and his “playfully tapp[ing]” Billy “from behind with his rattan” (BB51). On the textual surface, however, the narrator declares that Claggart takes the incident as an expression of “antipathy” on Billy’s part (BB60), certainly not as a sexual overture or challenge. Numerous critics have nevertheless named a homosexual desire for Billy as “a chief foundation of Claggart’s hatred for Budd” (Cooke 1993b:25; see also Auden 1951:121ff., Martin 1986a:111-113 and Sedgwick 1990:95).

Claggart's powers of dissembling are exhibited quite clearly in his conversation with Vere: he speaks "*with the air* of a subordinate grieved at the necessity of being a messenger of ill-tidings" (BB74f., my emphasis); the formulation arguably serves to alert the reader to the fact that Claggart is acting a false part. The use of reported speech for Claggart's circuitous address noticeably contrasts with the use of direct speech for Vere's short interjections (BB75-79), which furthermore strengthens the impression of a nebulous fabrication being brought forward here. In response to Vere's severe warning that "there is a yard-arm-end for the false witness", Claggart "mildly shak[es]" his head "*as in* sad deprecation of such unmerited severity of tone", then "bridling, erect[s] himself *as in* virtuous self-assertion" (my emphases); again, the formulation suggests that this is an act. Finally, unobserved by Vere, he watches the captain with "a look curious of the operation of his tactics", which is compared to that of "the spokesman" of Jacob's "envious" sons "deceptively imposing" upon his father the fake evidence of his favourite son Joseph's supposed death (BB79).

Yet Claggart's hatred-filled soul can only judge its surroundings from its own limited perspective. Thus, Claggart is taken in by Squeak's fabrications, which "confirm[...]" his somewhat "wilful[...]" belief that the spilling of the soup was a "sly", if "foolish" and "futile", demonstration of Billy's "antipathy" (BB60f.). It also appears to have escaped his notice that "the patriotic zeal" displayed by him "upon a prior occasion" had struck the perceptive Captain Vere as "rather supersensitive and strained" at the time (BB77), something which now contributes to Vere's doubts about Claggart's sincerity. In the interview with Vere, Claggart fails to realise that his tactless "allusion" to the Nore mutiny and his "self-possessed and somewhat ostentatious manner in making his specifications" (BB76f.) only serve to make the captain suspect his sincerity all the more. Claggart even goes so far as to suggest that the Captain's favourable impression of Billy has been biased by the young man's good looks: "You have but noted his fair cheek. A mantrap may be under his ruddy-tipped daisies" (BB77). This potentially insulting, even threatening challenge – for Claggart may obliquely be trying to imply that Vere's approval of Billy is tinged with prohibited homoerotic longing – makes Vere feel even "less reliance" in Claggart's "good faith". His invocation of the "yard-arm-end" could even be read as a sign of anger at Claggart's "suggestion" (BB79).

It seems that at this point, the urgency of Claggart's wish to harm Billy leads him to touch upon the very aspect which secretly torments him the most, namely, the attraction of Billy's beauty. It is here that his hidden "passion", the "monomania" of hatred and envy, finally makes him overreach himself in such a manner as to turn the captain's misgivings to "strong suspicion clogged by strange dubieties". It is explicitly stated that Claggart's interpretation of Vere's lapse into silent "ruminati[on]" at this point is wrong. Vere's "perplexity" is not due to any doubts about Billy's honesty, "as Claggart doubtless opined", but to "considerations how best to act in regard to the informer", i.e. Claggart himself (BB79f.). The narrative

thus exposes Claggart’s over-large confidence in his own artfulness, a confidence which ultimately proves to be his downfall in the confrontation with Billy: his presence and his “mesmeric glance” may have an overwhelmingly powerful effect on the hapless young sailor, but it appears that Claggart fails to foresee his “tongue-tie[d]” (BB83) victim’s sudden defensive outbreak of deadly violence.⁹⁰

I.3.4. Vere

Captain the Honourable Edward Fairfax Vere is “a bachelor of forty or thereabouts” (BB36), “old enough to have been Billy’s father” (BB101). There is little information given about his physical appearance other than the fact that he has “grey eyes” (BB79); all the more importance is placed on describing his intellectual make-up. There is no mystery about this man’s lineage or past. He is “allied to the higher nobility”, yet the narrator makes a point of stating that it is not social influence alone which has advanced his career in the Navy: he is “a sailor of distinction”, “thoroughly versed in the science of his profession”, who has “seen much service” and has “been in various engagements; to this “long and arduous service” he has shown “signal devotion”. He has played a “gallant [...] part” as “flag-lieutenant under Rodney” in a British campaign against the French in the West Indies, for which he has been “made a post-captain” (BB36-39).⁹¹

Captain Vere is “not conspicuous by his stature” and does not wear any “pronounced insignia”. “Grave in his bearing” (BB37) and “earnest” of mind (BB40), he “evinces little appreciation of mere humour” (BB37); his “discourse never fall[s] into the jocosely familiar” (BB40). Although he may not be free from “the most secret of all passions, ambition”, his “spirit” is characterised by “philosophical austerity” (BB120). Vere “never garnished unprofessional talk with nautical terms”, being “the most undemonstrative of men” “at all times not calling for pronounced action” (BB36f.). During such periods of inactivity, an uninformed “landsman” upon the ship might easily mistake him for “a civilian”, “some highly honourable discreet envoy on his way to an important post”. His “unobtrusiveness of demeanour”, the narrator intimates, “may have proceeded from a certain unaffected modesty of manhood”, the sign of “a virtue aristocratic in kind” (BB37).

Like Billy and Claggart, Vere, too, is thus “an exceptional character” (BB39) as far as his moral and intellectual make-up is concerned: there is “something exceptional in the moral quality of Captain Vere” (BB79), and it is almost certainly he

⁹⁰ Robert Martin (1986a:112) has in fact presented a very useful alternative reading in which Billy’s violent attack represents the fulfilment of Claggart’s secret masochistic desire; see my discussion in section II.5.2.3.

⁹¹ In April 1782, the British fleet, commanded by Admiral Rodney, gained a victory over the French fleet, commanded by Admiral De Grasse, off Dominica (Hayford/Sealts 1962b:152). Vere’s distinguished reputation has thus already been established for 15 years at the time of the narrative, 1797.

who is the other “person” on board the *Indomitable* who is “intellectually capable of adequately appreciating the moral phenomenon presented in *Billy Budd*” (BB59). As far as the practical sphere of his naval profession is concerned, however, we are informed that “whatever his sturdy qualities” may be, he is “without any brilliant ones”. Vere is “practical enough upon occasion”, possesses a “resolute nature”, and can be “intrepid to the verge of temerity, though never injudiciously so” (BB36f.).⁹² He is “in general a man of rigid decision”, as well as a “conscientious disciplinarian” (BB88f.), yet although he is considered “a martinet” by “some” (BB117), he is “no lover of authority for mere authority’s sake” (BB89): while “never tolerating an infraction of discipline”, he has “always acquit[ed] himself as an officer mindful of the welfare of his men” (BB36).⁹³

In the Navy, Vere is “popularly known by the appellation – *Starry Vere*”. The narrator traces the origin of this nickname to “a favourite kinsman” who had in an “exuberant[...]

“mood greeted his relative, newly returned “from Rodney’s victory” in the West Indies, with that “novel prefix”. The latter, the narrator explains, was taken from one of Andrew Marvell’s poems, “Upon Appleton House”, which mentions “a domestic heaven” presided over by “the discipline severe / Of Fairfax and the starry Vere” (BB37f.). This intertextual link can be taken to support the characterisation of Vere as paternal yet strict; the existence of both these qualities in him becomes evident as he changes from “father” to “military disciplinarian” immediately after the killing of Claggart (BB84), and might also be felt to surface when he is likened to Abraham (BB102). It is also worth noting that Vere’s nickname originates in a text both belonging to and describing a cultural sphere far removed from the all-male world of naval campaigns and the laws which govern shipboard life. It could thus be taken to point at an essential conflict between his private identity as a human being and his profession as a naval officer.⁹⁴

⁹² Some Ironist critics have felt that the description “intrepid to the verge of temerity, though never injudiciously so” is a deliberate contradiction which lets Vere appear in an ironic light. I would interpret it to mean that Vere possesses audacity as well as a good sense of judgement as to when to be audacious.

⁹³ Ironist critics have insisted on reading this statement, too, as irreconcilable irony. I take this description as meant to convey the impression that Vere is a hard but fair commander who does not expose his men to unnecessary danger in battle situations and ensures that they enjoy fair treatment in everyday shipboard life.

⁹⁴ Vere’s nickname opens some further interpretive possibilities: not only does it originate in the non-naval sphere of poetry, but in Marvell’s poem, it is attached to a woman (see Hayford/Sealts 1962b:152). This might make for some interesting readings of the text under the aspect of gender identity and gendered behaviour, especially since Vere, who acknowledges the existence of a morality different from naval statutes, declares during the trial that in “rul[ing] out” his private emotions, he is suppressing “the feminine in man” (BB97). However, all such interpretations depend on a detailed background knowledge of Marvell’s poem, i.e. on external information not given in the text itself. Even though Britten, Forster and Crozier were highly literate by profession and inclination, there is no source evidence to suggest they ever engaged with the literary background of Vere’s nickname.

It is made clear that Vere is almost as isolated from his fellow officers as he is from the ordinary seamen of the ship's crew, and that this is due to his “marked leaning toward everything intellectual”. Vere “loved books”, specifically “books treating of actual men and events, [...] history, biography, and unconventional writers who, free from cant and convention, like Montaigne, honestly, and in the spirit of common sense, philosophise upon realities”. It is his “reading”, not “social converse”, which has provided him with “confirmation of his own more reserved thoughts”, helping him to establish “some positive convictions” which serve him “as a dyke against those invading waters of novel opinion, social, political, and otherwise, which carried away as in a torrent no few minds in those days”. Vere is “disinterestedly opposed” to these “innovators” – meaning the thinkers associated with and influenced by the French Revolutionary movement. He rejects “their theories [...] because they seemed to him incapable of embodiment in lasting institutions, but at war with the world and the peace of mankind”. It is important to note that the narrator apparently seeks to link Vere's position with an attitude of common sense, political “disinterested[ness]” and a selfless humanitarian concern for “the peace of mankind”, while explicitly disassociating his views from the “incensed” reaction and the merely self-serving conservatism of “other members of the aristocracy” (BB39f).

Certain of Vere's character traits moreover associate him with ideals of human nobility, competent leadership, and attention to duty: his modest nature speaks of a “virtue aristocratic in kind”; he shares his occasional “dreaminess of mood” with “others engaged in various departments of the world's more heroic activities” (BB37); he is drawn to the sort of books “to which every serious mind of superior order, occupying any active post of authority in the world, naturally inclines” (BB39); and, as “a true military officer”, he maintains his “vows of allegiance to martial duty” with the same “self-abnegation” with which “a true monk” will “keep his vows of monastic obedience” (BB89). While these ideals may strike a sceptical reader as elitist, authoritarian, and dated, they nevertheless seem intended to establish Vere's qualities both as a human being and as a naval commander; there is no immediate evidence which suggests that the narrator is being obviously ironic or deliberately naïve here. It should be noted that the narrator never uses his direct authority to question Vere's qualities, the way he does with Billy Budd, whom he introduces as “a cynosure [...] with important variations” (BB17), and upon whose shortcomings he seldom fails to comment.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ When the narrator explains the difficulties Vere has to face in making his decisions on how to proceed after Claggart's death, he only states that “he may or may not have erred” (BB88); he refuses to pronounce any judgement over “the responsibilities of the sleepless man on the bridge” (BB100), leaving such questions for the reader to “determine for himself” (BB87). It is the surgeon who throws doubt on Vere's sanity (BB86f.), and the “officers” in the “gun-rooms and cabins” who “criticise[...]” his insistence on secrecy in the events following the killing (BB88f.). However, the majority of naval officers are described as possessing “minds less stored than [Vere's] and less earnest”, their “reading” being largely limited to “the journals” (BB40) – compared to Vere,

Throughout his years of service in the Navy, Vere has maintained an intellectual and spiritual independence unusual in his fellow professionals: his nautical career “had not resulted in absorbing and *salting* the entire man” (BB39). His literary interests serve to set him apart from his fellow officers, “men whose reading was mainly confined to the journals”; to them, the historical or literary “allusions” that pervade his discourse are incomprehensibly “alien”. This “bluff company” find him “a dry and bookish gentleman”, “lacking in the companionable quality”, and possessing “a queer streak of the pedantic”. At the same time, they are ready to acknowledge that he may well be Nelson’s equal as a “seaman” and “fighter” (BB40); even those “naval men of wholly practical cast” who object to his “pedantry [...] would frankly concede that His Majesty’s Navy mustered no more efficient officers of their grade than *Starry Vere*” (BB95).

Vere, however, does not seem to mind his isolation, which is partly due to his own idiosyncrasies, nor to heed it much – an indifference which the narrator links to the straightforward “honesty” of his nature, which “prescribes to [him] directness, sometimes far-reaching like that of a migratory fowl that in its flight never heeds when it crosses a frontier” (BB40).⁹⁶ This image could be taken to illustrate Vere’s detached relationship with his everyday surroundings, which comprises a habitual tendency to ignore both social conventions and the limitations of his fellow men. At the same time, his “honesty” and “directness” make him “impatient and distrustful” (BB79) of circumlocution such as Claggart’s: growing “restive[...]” as his speech unfolds, he exhorts the master-at-arms to “be direct” (BB75).

Vere is wont “at times [to] betray a certain dreaminess of mood”, during which he will “absently gaze off at the black sea”; if roused from his abstraction he may “show more or less irascibility, but instantly he would control it” (BB37). He can be seen pacing the deck alone, “absorbed in his reflections” (BB74); at Billy’s trial, there is a moment where he sits “apparently in one of his absent fits, gazing out [...] upon the monotonous blank of the twilight sea” (BB94). On the other hand, however, we are assured that he is “long-versed in everything pertaining to the complicated gun-deck life, which [...] has its secret mines and dubious side” (BB76). It is thereby established that despite his tendency to mental abstraction, Vere is anything but out of touch with the world surrounding him. On the contrary, he is generally held in high professional esteem: his ship is sent not only on scouting missions but also “on detached service of more important kind”, and it is made clear that this is because Vere possesses “knowledge and ability” beyond

they are arguably set up as lacking in ‘true’ insight. The surgeon, for his part, is shown to hold an aversion to all things “imaginative and metaphysical” (BB114); he, too, displays a materialistic attitude, which might be seen to undermine his authority in a text so focused on the spiritual dimension of human existence.

⁹⁶ According to the narrator, it is likely that Vere would “have frankly disclosed” to Billy his own role in the proceedings of the trial, as well as “his actuated motives” (BB101).

mere “good seamanship”, “qualities” which enable him to take the “prompt initiative” demanded by “unforeseen difficulties” (BB73). His officers are seen to treat him with “deference” (BB37), and they consider him “an earnest man, [...] not less their superior in mind than in naval rank” (BB99).

There is a passage in Ch. X, moreover, which expounds the moral and spiritual advantages of a position of detachment from the rest of society, and which can be read as an indirect endorsement of Vere’s somewhat seclusive habits: “constant rubbing”, i.e. the habits of everyday contact with “the world”, so the “honest scholar” of the narrator’s acquaintance holds, “blunts that fine spiritual insight indispensable to the understanding of the essential in certain exceptional characters, whether evil ones or good” (BB55).⁹⁷ This would imply that Vere’s special position enables him to perceive the true moral qualities of Billy and Claggart, and positively reinforces the “something exceptional” in his own “moral quality” which makes him “a veritable touchstone of [any] man’s essential nature” (BB79).

Vere’s instincts do not fail him with regard to Claggart, for whom he feels “a vaguely repellent distaste”. Even though he is able to disguise this with “much of his wonted official manner”, there remains a certain “impatience” in his deportment (BB74f.) and “peremptory” manner (BB77). It is made clear that Claggart’s “allusion” to the Nore mutiny is quite justly perceived by Vere as “a most immodest presumption”, since even “the commissioned officers themselves were on all occasions very heedful of how they referred to the recent event”. Vere already has doubts about the authenticity of Claggart’s “patriotic zeal”, and as Claggart unfolds his tale, Vere intuitively associates his “self-possessed and somewhat ostentatious manner in making his specifications” with the behaviour of “a perjured witness” he once examined (BB76f.). Similarly, when Billy is later struck dumb by Claggart’s accusation, Vere “immediately divine[s]” his vocal impediment, again intuitively associating it with the memory of a personal encounter with a similar phenomenon (BB83). Since we as readers know that Vere’s intuitive connections are valid, our faith in the reliability of Vere’s judgement is strengthened by these details, and we are arguably all the more prepared to accept that Vere is able to divine the true moral natures of Claggart and Billy as expounded to us by the narrator.

Vere already thinks favourably of Billy, whose handsome appearance, good conduct and professional seamanship “had naturally enough attracted [his] atten-

⁹⁷ I believe it is just permissible to use this passage in a characterisation of Vere; I would normally hesitate to connect remote passages discussing different characters in this text, since Melville often appears not only to be somewhat eclectic in his use of imagery (see section I.3.1. above), but seems sometimes to apply his values in a very localised manner according to context. Thus, for instance, both Claggart and Vere appear to be other than what they are: Claggart looks like “a man of high quality, social and moral, who for reasons of his own [is] keeping incognito” (BB42), and Vere could easily be mistaken for “a civilian” on board his own ship (BB37); but in Claggart’s case his appearance is a disguise for his depravity, whereas in Vere’s case the false impression arises from his modesty of character and would seem to reflect positively on his character.

tion from the first”, to a point where he has been considering him “for promotion to a place that would more frequently bring him under his own observation, namely, the captancy of the mizzen-top”. He has received the report of Billy’s farewell to the *Rights-of-Man*, but “had but thought so much the better of the impressed man for it [...], admiring the spirit that could take an arbitrary enlistment so merrily and sensibly”. Like his lieutenant, Vere has “mistakenly understood” Billy’s utterance “as a satiric sally”, but thinks of it “more as a good story than aught else” (BB78). While Vere’s assessment of Billy credits the young sailor with intellectual capacities he does not possess, the captain’s impression of his innocence and harmless good nature is fundamentally correct.

Up to the moment of Claggart’s death, Vere is convinced he can trust Billy and must distrust Claggart. It is apparently only when the fatal outcome of the accident has been confirmed by the surgeon that, “absorbed in thought”, Vere begins to dwell on the metaphysical implications of the conflict between Billy and Claggart. His new view of the drama finds only fragmentary utterance in Vere’s two sudden exclamations which so “profoundly discomfort[...]” the attending surgeon. To Vere, Claggart’s death becomes “the divine judgement of Ananias” (BB85): charged by Peter with having “not lied unto men, but unto God”, the deceitful Ananias “fell down, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 5:4-5:5). Also, contemplating the violent nature of Claggart’s demise, and Billy as the perpetrator of that violence, Vere thinks of Claggart as “struck dead by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang” (BB85). During the trial that follows, it becomes clear that Vere differentiates between the metaphysical dimension of the incident, which is linked with the spiritual natures of Billy and Claggart, and those acts which are relevant in the eyes of martial law (BB94, BB96ff.).

It is stated explicitly at the beginning of Ch. XVIII that “in the legal view, the apparent victim of the tragedy was he who had sought to victimise a man blameless; and the indisputable deed of the latter, navally regarded, constituted the most heinous of military crimes”. It is also stated that because the “essential right and wrong involved in the matter” is so clear, Vere is placed in a difficult position with regard to his “responsibility” as “a loyal sea-commander”, since he is only “authorised to determine the matter on that primitive legal basis” (BB88). Whatever the doubts thrown on Vere’s sanity, whatever the ambiguities in the narrator’s depiction of the commander’s actions, it would seem that these statements are intended to establish quite clearly that Billy is indisputably guilty in the eyes of martial law, and thus inescapably doomed to die. It follows that Vere is caught in a crux of conflicting value systems, since “the essential right and wrong” – Billy’s moral innocence and Claggart’s evil – are directly opposed to “the legal view” of the situation. Since Billy’s case must perforce be judged on a “primitive legal basis”, any trial can only lead to one outcome, namely, Billy’s execution. This reading would account for Vere’s instant conviction that “the angel must hang” (BB85).

Vere’s speeches to the court and his behaviour during the trial (BB95-99), if analysed in isolation from the rest of the text, would seem to present in an exemplary manner the conflict between “natural justice” and “martial law” (BB96). It is chiefly by relating the reactions of the surgeon and the officers that the narrator manages to let Vere appear in an ambiguous light. The main problematic responses are the surgeon’s and the officers’ feeling that the case should be “transfer[red]” or at least “reported to the admiral”, and the surgeon’s opinion that Billy should be “place[d] [...] in confinement” until that time, “and in a way dictated by usage” (BB86). Their views seem to imply a criticism of the captain’s “maintenance of secrecy in the matter”, a strategy which is also reported to have later been “criticised” by other naval officers, and which the narrator links with “the policy” of hushing up any “tragedies of the palace” adopted by the Russian Czar Peter the Great, or “Peter the Barbarian,⁹⁸ great chiefly for his crimes” (BB89). There is also the fact that, once the surgeon has introduced the idea that Vere might be “unhinged”, the narrator embarks upon a discussion of whether it is actually possible to differentiate between “sanity and insanity”, which he concludes by stating that the reader “must determine” the question of Vere’s mental state “for himself” (BB86f).⁹⁹ Since the readers have by this point become used to taking their cues from the narrator’s reflections, the very existence of this passage, like the comparison of Vere’s behaviour to that of the tyrannical Russian Czar, carries a certain suggestive weight. The same can be said of the three subordinate officers’ reaction to Vere’s exhortation that “a martial court must needs in the present case confine its attention to the blow’s consequence, which consequence is to be deemed not otherwise than as the striker’s deed”: they perceive in it “a meaning unanticipated, involving a prejudgement on the speaker’s part”, a discovery which “serve[s] to augment” their “mental disturbance” (BB93). Their reaction appears to suggest that they do not feel the dictate of the martial code to be as compelling as Vere does.

At the same time, however, the narrator is careful to explain Vere’s motives for his actions. In his “desire for secrecy” (BB85) in the proceedings following Claggart’s death, Vere “may or may not have erred”: Vere “felt that circumspectness

⁹⁸ Hayford and Sealts point out that “in previous passages [...] the term ‘barbarian’ has been applied – with favourable connotations – to Billy”. To them, “the association of Vere with ‘Peter the Barbarian’ [...] appears to constitute another reversal of values within the story” (1962b:177f.). It seems evident, however, that this association is merely another instance of Melville’s eclectic and, in this case, highly localised use of imagery, since the word “barbarian”, a by-name bestowed on a brutal ruler, carries a recognisably different sense here than it does in the images of the “upright barbarian” (BB26), which are connected with the Noble Savage topos (see p.62 above). These different connotations of the term “barbarian” would have been immediately obvious to a competent reader like Forster, who, in *Maurice*, succeeds in assigning two recognisably distinct functions to the imagery of darkness, which is deployed both as a symbol for ignorance and self-repression, and to designate the symbolic site of homosexual fulfilment and self-expression, hidden from the gaze of society and its laws (see, for instance, Martin 1983:41f.)

⁹⁹ For a Forsterian reading of this passage see my discussion in section II.5.1.4.

not less than promptitude was necessary”; and “he deemed it advisable, in view of all the circumstances, to guard as much as possible against publicity” – “until the concluding measure was on the point of being enacted”, “the concluding measure” being, presumably, the inevitable (see above) execution of the hapless Billy. We are informed that Vere himself would have preferred to place Billy in confinement “till the ship rejoined the squadron, and then [to] submit[...] the matter to the judgement of his admiral”. It is only his almost religious “allegiance to martial duty” which makes him take “quick action”, “the urgency of the case overrul[ing] [...] every other consideration”; for he fears that otherwise, “the deed of the foretopman, as soon as it should be known on the gun-decks, would tend to awaken any slumbering embers of the Nore among the crew” (BB88f.). Vere’s apprehensions might be considered justified in view of the still precarious situation in the Navy following the Spithead and Nore mutinies, in “an after-time very critical to naval authority”, which calls for “prudence and rigour” from those in command (BB88), and at which “it was not unreasonable to apprehend some return of trouble sporadic or general” (BB35).

This section of the story features several passages which may be considered ambiguous. A good example is the rendering of Vere’s motives for calling “a summary court of his own officers” in Ch. XVIII: “Very far was he from embracing opportunities for monopolising to himself the perils of moral responsibility, none at least that could properly be referred to an official superior, or shared with him by his official equals, or even subordinates” (BB89). This could be read as irony, characterising Vere as a man afraid to accept responsibility for his own judgements and seeking for partners in crime as it were; or it could be read as describing a genuine desire to share responsibility, one that arises from Vere’s earlier established modesty of character. On the other hand, however, his subsequent behaviour at the trial, specifically his speech to the officers, in which he practically forces the officers to pronounce the verdict of ‘guilty’, indicates quite clearly that if he wishes to “share[...]” responsibility, he is willing to do so only on his own terms.

Similarly, it is not easy to determine the tone of the introductory paragraphs to Vere’s address to his officers (“After scanning their faces”, etc., BB95). It is clear that Vere considers himself more “intellectually mature” than the members of his chosen court – is this still to be classed as frank self-confidence, or is this Vere crossing the border into overweening arrogance? The narrator’s elaborate introduction of Vere’s style of speaking and of his “phraseology” (BB95) is reminiscent of his equally elaborate description of Claggart’s false accusations (BB75; see section I.3.3. above), a similarity which has struck numerous readers as suspicious. It is also mentioned that his discourse “showed the influence of unshared studies modifying and tempering the practical training of an active career”, and points to “the grounds whereon rested the imputation of a certain pedantry socially alleged against him” (BB95). While these statements may be intended to establish Vere’s intellectual detachment, they remain open to interpretation depending on what

values are assigned to such a detached position. Have not Vere’s “unshared studies” perhaps made him too preoccupied with strict principles – in other words, too pedantic? He certainly has the rhetorical advantage of his officers, “loyal lieges plain and practical”, who have neither “the faculty” nor “the inclination to gain-say” their captain, “whom they felt to be an earnest man”, “their superior in mind” as well as “in naval rank”. Or have the officers become blinded by their feelings of pity to the danger of insurrection, and to the fact that it would not actually be “clearly lawful” to “convict and yet mitigate the penalty”? In that case, however, what is the narrator’s reason for rendering Vere’s philosophical argument in full detail, if the officers are, in the end, to be convinced by the captain’s “appeal to their instinct as sea-officers”, namely, by his “forecast[ing]” of the negative “practical consequences to discipline” that a “clement sentence” would bring (BB98f.)? Is Vere, as Joyce Sparer Adler (161) and others have suggested, deliberately playing on the officers’ fear of mutiny in order to see his own “pre-judgement” (BB93) fulfilled? Questions like these present interpretive challenges not only for literary critics, but also for anyone attempting a dramatic adaptation of Melville’s novella.

The presence of these ambiguities creates a serious rift in the text, as well as in the character of Vere. Yet critics who have decided to read the character of Vere in an exclusively ironic way do not, in my opinion, do justice to the atmosphere of spiritual mysticism evoked by the narrator’s speculations on what may have occurred during Vere’s “closeted interview” (BB102) with the condemned Billy. His presentation of this imagined encounter as a meeting of symbolic significance recalls the metaphysical speculations which pervade his descriptions of Billy and Claggart; to reject the former while accepting the latter would require some convincing explanations.

The narrator emphasises that the “closeted interview” unites two extraordinary beings, “each radically sharing in the rarer qualities of one nature – so rare, indeed, as to be all but incredible to average minds” (BB101). A “frank[...]” exchange of facts may have been followed by a final “embrace”, and yet

there is no telling the sacrament – seldom if in any case revealed to the gadding world wherever [...] two of great Nature’s nobler order embrace. There is privacy at the time, inviolable to the survivor, and holy oblivion, the sequel to each diviner magnanimity, providentially covers all at last. (BB102)

Hinting at sacred mystery and transcendence, this passage appears as a bright counterpart to the narrator’s “dark sayings” and speculations on the “mysteries of iniquity” (BB57) that surround the figure of Claggart. Like those earlier speculations, it appears deliberately to exclude the reader from its “mysteries” to some extent, while yet suggesting that what takes place really is a “sacrament” of “diviner magnanimity” (BB102).

Although what appears to be a major spiritual climax in the story is thus suggested only through conjecture, we can gather from a later comment that “something healing” takes place during the meeting, something which is capable of alleviating Billy’s “agony” caused by his “virgin experience of the diabolical incarnate and effective in some men” (BB106). It is suggested that Vere “may have developed the passion sometimes latent under an exterior stoical or indifferent” and “let[...] himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalised humanity” (BB101); in other words, Vere may have freed his “heart, the feminine in man” (BB97), from the constraints imposed on it by his allegiance to martial law, and finally acknowledged his deepest feelings of compassion. It is important to note that, while Billy evidently undergoes a process of “healing” during their communion (BB106), there is no obvious suggestion here that Vere undergoes any transforming process of which Billy is the cause, other than allowing himself to feel compassion. There is no indication that Vere considers himself to stand in need of any kind of absolution before the “closeted interview” takes place. Moreover, while Vere, as the one “who had mainly effected the condemnation”, is seen to “suffer[...] more than “the condemned” Billy himself (BB102), this suffering, so the text emphasises, is not connected with any feelings of “remorse” (BB120), or with any sense of having done the wrong thing.

The comparison of Vere embracing Billy like Abraham embracing Isaac before “resolutely offering him up in obedience to the exacting behest” (BB102) can remain unproblematic if treated as one of Melville’s localised images which describes only the captain’s momentary emotion. The image is Melville’s; Abraham does not in fact embrace Isaac in Genesis 22. If we were to venture beyond the localised associations, we might find some ambiguities in the image; after all, it is Vere himself who has ensured Billy’s “condemnation” (BB102), albeit at the implicit “behest” of the Mutiny Act, “War’s child” (BB98). The godhead involved here is not the Judaeo-Christian Father-God who commands the sacrifice but relents after he has satisfied himself of Abraham’s obedience, but rather “the God of War – Mars” (BB110) who does not grant merciful respite to those who obey his rules to the letter, and who does not even actively claim that obedience, leaving Man in the modern world with the ultimate responsibility for all his actions. It is evident that this line of interpretation, which might even lead into a kind of proto-existentialism, would let Vere appear in a very dubious light, thereby creating some conflict with the passage’s discourse about spiritual mystery. The latter was undoubtedly of great importance for Forster in particular, but at the same time, the problematic implications of the Abraham-Isaac image may not have gone unnoticed by the opera-makers.¹⁰⁰

After the interview with Billy, we encounter the captain as a calm and controlled strategist who shows nothing but his usual formal manner, and who is

¹⁰⁰ See p.250 and note 714.

determined to prevent any unruly conduct among the crew (BB103f.). We are given only three very indirect suggestions of Vere's emotional involvement in the situation: he has seen to it that “a lieutenant” should “apprise[...]” the chaplain “of pretty much everything as to Billy”, possibly including his spiritual “innocence” (BB109); Billy is to be hanged not from the fore-yard but from the main-yard, “for special reasons” which are not explained, but the main-yard certainly lies closer to Vere's position on the poop-deck; and finally, after the crew has echoed Billy's benediction, the captain is famously seen standing “erectly rigid as a musket in the ship-armourer's rack”, “either”, as the narrator surmises, “through stoic self-control or [...] emotional shock” (BB112). The changed location of Billy's execution and Vere's “rigid” posture especially are open to a wide range of possible interpretations which could support positive as well as negative readings of Vere's character.

While Vere has swayed the officers of the drumhead court with the suggestion that the crew of the *Indomitable* might take the irregularity of a “clement sentence” as a sign of their superiors' weakness and “revert to the recent outbreak at the Nore” (BB99), he can also be seen to have anticipated some unrest following Billy's execution, and to have devoted some thought to ensuring the preservation of order and discipline. Indeed, the crew's resentment begins to find expression in an “inarticulate” noise of “murmurous indistinctness”, like “the first muffled murmur” of a rain-swelled torrent, and in some “uncertain movement”. However, any larger upheaval is forestalled by the instruments of naval discipline: various “strategic command[s]” are issued, “authorised” by Vere, to divert the men's anger and discontent through the routine formalities of “martial discipline” which they are accustomed to obeying as if by “instinct” (BB115ff.).

Vere consciously deploys the mechanisms of shipboard routine and naval discipline to trigger the “impulse of docility” with which he knows the men, “long moulded by arbitrary discipline” (BB98), will react to “the official tone of command”. “With mankind”, Vere holds, “forms, measured forms, are everything” – a view which the narrator tells us he also “once applied to the disruption of forms” in the course of the French Revolution, “and the consequences thereof” (BB117). Vere's view may be taken to express his conviction of having had to act as he has done to preserve order and discipline on board his ship.

The “divergence” on Nelson in Ch. IV has been treated by many critics as a foil against which Vere's character can be further interpreted.¹⁰¹ The most important differences between the two sailors appear to be Nelson's lack of “personal prudence” and his “excessive love of glory”, qualities which the narrator names as “special virtue[s] in a military man” (BB34). Exhibiting the former and lacking the latter, Vere could thus be seen to emerge in an unfavourable light when compared with the great naval hero of his time. E. M. Forster, for his part, held that

¹⁰¹ See Parker 1990:110-115 and 144f.

“Hero-worship is a dangerous vice” (TCD69);¹⁰² Nelson, he found, had been “twisted from his true bearings” (AH141)¹⁰³ by the myth-making of popular history. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Forster would have felt the urge to measure Vere against Nelson’s ‘heroism’. Rather, it seems probable that the opera-makers would have accepted the narrator’s statement that the Nelson chapter is “a literary sin”, merely “a by-path” on which he has been enticed “by the genius of Nelson” (BB32); they may well have read it simply as one more among the numerous “divergence[s]” with which others of Melville’s works, central among them *Moby-Dick*, so richly abound.

¹⁰² “What I Believe”, TCD65-73.

¹⁰³ “T. E. Lawrence”, AH136-141.

I.4. *Billy Budd* transposed and transformed: the libretto

I.4.1. Adapting Melville's plot

In their adaptation of Melville's novella, the librettists made various modifications to, and omissions from, the original plot as part of the process of compression which is common to all operatic adaptations of prose fiction. At the same time, they also introduced whole scenes which have little or no source in Melville but which serve to convey, in the shape of dramatic action, material which is contained in the narrator's comments and reflections. These modifications and omissions can partly be accounted for by the need for technical simplification in the stage realisation; an obvious example would be the omission of the scenes on board the *Rights-of-Man*, which would have required additional set changes as well as more singing roles. An example for the elaboration of minor scenes from Melville would be the frigate chase which opens Act II, Sc. 1, designed as a full-cast set-piece scene. Some entirely new material was created for Act I, Sc. 3, where Claggart is actually seen to be the instigator of Billy's temptation: what is a mere hint in Melville's novella thus becomes enacted fact in the opera.

All of these changes can be regarded as largely motivated by the need for a stronger delineation of both action and characters, which better enables the audience to follow the plot that unfolds continuously before their eyes and ears. How-

ever, there are several instances where the changes go beyond the process of ‘mere’ tightening or expanding for dramatic presentation, developing rather an autonomous existence which significantly affects the structure and the meaning of the opera as a whole. The single most consequential change is the introduction of the opera’s frame of Prologue and Epilogue, delivered by the aged Vere who contemplates the events contained in the opera proper, and who could therefore be found to assume the structural position of the narrator of the opera proper.

The loss of the narrative voice is commonly regarded as the most distinctive feature in the operatic adaptation of prose texts. As has already been indicated, theorists of opera have ascribed an analogous function to the music, specifically to the orchestra, whose ‘discourse’ can be read as the structural equivalent of a narrative voice (see also section I.5.1. below). Quasimodo’s libretto for Ghedini’s *Billy Budd* solves the problem of transposing the prose work’s narrative voice to the operatic medium through the creation of a Corifeo, a reciting narrator who tells or describes most of the story, using many original phrases from Eugenio Montale’s 1942 Italian translation of Melville’s novella. Narrator figures were not alien to Britten’s creative imagination, either: *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946) had, following André Obey’s play *Le Viol de Lucrece*, featured a Male and Female Chorus whose voices comment on the action, and *The Turn of the Screw* (1954) would follow James’s short story in featuring an open frame narrative, delivered by a Prologue. Yet none of these narrators or commentators appear as characters in the narrated story; they are strictly choric figures. A frame narrative enclosing what effectively becomes a retrospective account, though by no means unknown to literary prose, already constitutes an unusual phenomenon in the operatic repertoire, where the action tends to be represented directly, unmediated by narrator figures. It is made even more unusual by the fact that the aged Vere’s younger self appears as an active character within the opera proper.

Britten’s, Forster’s and Crozier’s decision to place Vere in the structural position of a narrator can be seen to have far-reaching consequences for the interpretive possibilities offered by the opera, since it introduces the question of narratorial reliability (see section I.4.5. below). Numerous critics have observed that the introduction of the narrative frame turns the opera proper into Vere’s subjective account of the past; and some, Irene Morra among them, have drawn attention to the fact that, viewed in this light, the opera “mirrors the narrative effect of the original tale, as the subjectivity of the narrator is translated into the declared subjectivity of Vere’s prologue and epilogue” (2002:16). Yet the extent to which the librettists and the composer were consciously aiming to achieve this translation, or were at all aware of the full interpretive implications their changes would have on the totality of the opera, is not easily determined, and may indeed have varied for each of them.

To give a summary overview of the changes undergone by the story of *Billy Budd* during the process of adaptation, I shall here briefly list the libretto's chief divergences from Melville's plot in chronological order, and give short comments as to the librettists' possible reasons for introducing them. The changes which affect the main characters and which have a major impact on the interpretation of the work as a whole will be discussed in greater detail in the appropriate sections below.

- Creation of a narrative frame of Prologue and Epilogue, delivered by the aged Vere. Vere does not die, and possibly experiences a sense of salvation in the telling of the story. Technically, Vere assumes the narrator's task of setting the scene in the Prologue ("1797", "French Wars", etc.).
- Ship's crew is assigned vocal presence as opera chorus. The existence of the ship's crew in Melville's novella provided Britten and his librettists with the obvious opportunity for incorporating a large chorus, a staple feature of grand opera, into their conception of the work. As in the novella, there are a few individual sailors who stand out from the rest of the crew as they interact with Billy personally; these are two other impressed men (see below), a sailor called Donald (compare BB52), the Novice, and the Dansker.
- Deck-scrubbing and manoeuvres (Act I, Sc. 1). This scene introduces the sailors' hard life and illustrates the harshness and brutality of martial discipline, thus introducing the topics of oppression and resistance. Mervyn Cooke has noted that "the librettists were careful to show some disaffection amongst the sailors well before Billy's tragedy" (1993c:31); it might be objected, however, that the discontent shown by the crew hardly qualifies as "disaffection" in the sense of any actively mutinous sentiment.¹⁰⁴
- Omission of scenes on board the *Rights-of-Man*. As stated above, these were probably cut for the sake of technical simplification. As a result, Billy's farewell to the *Rights-of-Man* takes place on board the *Indomitable*, i.e. is heard and (mis)interpreted by her crew and officers (see section I.5.2. below).
- Two extra men (Joseph Higgins, later known as Red Whiskers, and Arthur Jones) are impressed along with Billy; it is Claggart who interviews them. This scene dramatises the topics of impressment, discontent (Red Whiskers), and the desperate state of the Navy, expected to fight a war while short of men and supplementing its crews with "sweepings of the stews and jails" (LIB12; compare BB43f.). It also confronts Claggart and Billy in

¹⁰⁴ It is true that in the novella, only peaceful crew interactions are depicted before the tragedy, and the references to the possibility of mutiny are limited to observations on the situation of the fleet in general (e.g. BB88). Nevertheless, Cooke's claim that "the novella makes no reference to possible mutiny amongst the crew until *after* Billy's execution" can hardly be considered accurate (see sections I.3.2. and I.3.4. above). On the other hand, the novella might indeed allow an interpretation in which "Vere's actions are directly responsible for" the crew's unrest after Billy's execution (Cooke 1993c:31).

their very first appearance and shows Claggart's brutality (which is accepted as normal by the other officers).

- Flogging takes place off-stage; creation of the Novice's Dirge set piece. The flogging of a novice, which is witnessed by Billy, is described only briefly by Melville (BB46). While it was decided early on not to show the flogging itself (see section III.2.5.), the so-called Novice's Dirge addresses the topic of hardship at sea and illustrates the men's spiritual forlornness.
- Creation of a new scene: the Captain's Muster. A full-scale Captain's Muster was introduced to conclude Act I of the 1951 four-act version (now Act I, Sc. 1), but was cut again in the 1960 revisions.¹⁰⁵
- Act I, Sc. 2 (formerly Act II, Sc. 1): conversation between Vere and his officers. It can be assumed that this scene was created to help characterise Vere and to illustrate his relationship with his officers, as well as to establish the historical situation at the time and to address the threat of mutiny.
- Soup-spilling incident replaced by fight with Squeak. It was apparently decided at an early stage to omit the soup incident. Its structural substitute is a fight between Billy and Squeak, embedded into a scene showing the sailors singing shanties below decks, and concluding with Claggart striking a boy with his rattan, as happens in the novella (BB52).¹⁰⁶ The new scene thus unites the novella's plot elements of Squeak interfering with Billy's possessions on Claggart's orders (BB60) and of Claggart's encounters with Billy; it also illustrates Billy's physical prowess as a fighter, the idea being probably suggested by the fight with Melville's Red Whiskers on board the *Rights-of-Man*. The scene also provided the opportunity for creating a large musical set piece.
- Claggart is *shown* to organise Billy's supposed temptation to mutiny; the novella merely suggests that the afterguardsman may have been his "deputy" (BB72). Claggart later also produces the guineas as evidence for Vere, whereas in the novella, this physical proof never materialises (BB79). As has been stated above, this has the effect of clarifying the plot and reducing ambiguity.
- The Novice. This figure is an amalgamation of Melville's flogged novice (BB46) and his "cracked afterguardsman" (BB67). Following the flogging, Claggart poses as the Novice's protector, only to use him as a tool later; thus, the operatic Novice's motives for tempting Billy are much clearer than those of the novella's afterguardsman, which remain ambiguous.
- Billy's temptation takes place between decks; the Dansker witnesses its conclusion. This scene combines and considerably condenses the material of the novella's Ch. XII, VIII and XIII. By eliminating superfluous changes of setting and avoiding the appearance of too many additional characters,

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed discussion see section III.2.6.

¹⁰⁶ Whereas Britten's earliest list of scenes still includes "Soup spilling" (BPL A61:14), the incident has disappeared from the typed First Rough Synopsis, which features "a fight between Billy and Squeak" (BPL A61:21f.).

the librettists were able to create a continuous flow of action from the encounter with Claggart after the fight with Squeak to the Dansker warning Billy that the master-at-arms is “down” on him.

- Claggart goes to see Vere twice; his first attempt at denouncing Billy is interrupted by the frigate-chase sequence.¹⁰⁷ The interpolation of this extensive, full-cast set-piece scene heightens the dramatic effect of Claggart’s first near-revelation; the frigate-chase itself is an autonomous creation of the librettists’ which dramatises a comparatively short descriptive passage in Melville (BB73), providing Britten with material for a large musical ensemble, and introducing the mist symbolism which has no direct source in Melville (see sections I.4.5. and II.3.3.).
- Creation of a conversation between Vere and Billy before the entrance of Claggart. It seems clear that this scene was introduced to strengthen the relationship between Billy and Vere.
- No surgeon. The omission of this figure, which only appeared in the earliest draft materials (see note 480) may have been motivated in part by the need to reduce the number of characters, but another important reason for leaving out this figure was very probably that his main function in the novella is to call Vere’s sanity into question, and thus to contribute to the ambiguity surrounding the captain – an ambiguity the opera-makers apparently wished to reduce as far as possible.
- The problematic issue of secrecy in the trial proceedings is not raised. Again, this can be regarded as a measure taken to simplify the plot and to depict Vere in a less ambiguous light.
- Major alterations in the roles played in the trial by Vere and his officers respectively. This radical divergence from Melville is discussed in detail in sections I.4.5. and III.2.3.2., and reviewed in a Forsterian context in sections II.5.1.5. and II.5.3.6.
- No attempt was made to provide a dramatic rendition of the “closeted interview” (BB102).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ This ordering of events already appears in the typed First Rough Synopsis (BPL A61:22).

¹⁰⁸ Shannon McKellar (270-275) has provided an interesting juxtaposition of the closeted interview’s non-representative realisation in the Britten/Forster/Crozier opera with its dramatisation as a fully-realised dialogue in the Coxe/Chapman play. It ought to be noted, though, that the comment, supposedly made by Forster, which provides the point of departure for McKellar’s reflections is an unfortunate misattribution: taken from Anthony Gishford’s short announcement about the *Billy Budd*-related material in the pre-premiere issue of *Tempo*, Forster’s statement, as quoted by Gishford, runs “It is difficult for even a librettist to be explanatory. A libretto, like higher forms of art, either explains itself or fails” (Gishford 5). The Forster quotation in fact ends here. The next sentence, which McKellar focuses on, would naturally be of great interest if it did indeed come from Forster: “There can be no quarrel with that, least of all in the present case, where the libretto explains itself so completely” (McKellar 270). However, this comment is not Forster’s at all but Gishford’s (Gishford 5).

- Billy sings the ballad “Billy in the Darbies” himself. In the novella, it is written after his death by “another foretopman [...] of his own watch” (BB123). The decision to allocate this text to Billy may have arisen – among other considerations such as fitness for insertion and musical treatment at this particular point – from the wish to augment his part as the opera’s principal character.
- No chaplain; instead, the Dansker comes to visit Billy. The chaplain still appears in the typed First Rough Synopsis (BPL A61:23) but does not figure in the typed March Draft anymore (BPL A61:169); Billy merely tells the Dansker that the chaplain has visited and talked to him about “the good boy hung and gone to glory, hung for the likes of me” (LIB60). A motivation for this omission, besides character economy and stringency of plot, may have been a desire to avoid the topic of institutionalised Christianity. Leaving aside Forster’s personal attitude to this subject,¹⁰⁹ the position of the chaplain is in any case depicted as problematic in the novella, and this view may well have been shared by the collaborators: the main functions of this figure appear to be to illustrate the equivocal role of organised religion as subsidiary to the politics of war (BB110), and to serve as a contrasting foil to Billy’s positively connoted barbarianism (BB107-109). Any attempt at dramatising this material would almost certainly have introduced unnecessary complications in the plot structure.¹¹⁰ The Dansker has structurally replaced the chaplain as Billy’s last nocturnal visitor; writing to Lionel Trilling on 16 April 1949, Forster refers to “old Dansker bringing in not too obtrusively the eucharist of grog and biscuits” (EMFL II:237). The symbolism of this “eucharist” is probably best understood in the Forsterian sense as a token of connection, with the Christian imagery not necessarily transporting a Christian symbolism.
- No scene in which Vere informs the crew of Billy’s scheduled hanging; instead, the Articles of War and the verdict are read out immediately before the execution. This conflation of two separate scenes from the novella (Ch. XIX and Ch. XXII) simplifies the plot structure and helps accelerate the action.
- No mention of the absence of spasmodic movement in the hanged Billy. Many critics, including Forster, have taken this absence of movement to signify an “absence of sexual convulsion” (*Griffin* 5). The omission of Melville’s “digression” in which this “phenomen[on]” is discussed (BB113f.) could certainly be attributed to a wish to keep the plot reasonably simple, and to

¹⁰⁹ Forster expressed his dissatisfaction with, and rejection of, institutionalised Christianity in a letter to Britten of 30 September 1948 (EMFL 233). He had also discussed this subject in “What I Believe” (1938; see especially TCD72) and was to sum up his attitude some years later in “How I Lost My Faith – A Presidential Address to the Cambridge Humanists – Summer 1959” (IPT310-319).

¹¹⁰ As it is, the mere fact that Billy mentions the chaplain’s visit has prompted at least one critic to propose that Billy converts to Christianity during the meeting with the chaplain (Allen 64ff.). Allen bases his entire Christian reading of the opera on this claim; however, he fails to present a convincingly coherent text-based argument to make his interpretation viable.

avoid censorship for raising a potentially indecent subject. Moreover, this ambiguous passage appears to function to a large extent as a treatment of the topic of interpretation, while it simultaneously characterises the surgeon as a materialist who is not prepared to think outside his scientific terminology (BB114). The symbolism it conveys of Billy as saint-like or superhuman would furthermore appear to contradict Forster's declared intention of showing him as a human being¹¹¹ who brings salvation through his human qualities of forgiveness and fellowship.

- No attempt was made to render Melville's calming of the crew through the use of "music and religious rites subserving the discipline and purpose of war" (BB117f.). The inclusion of such a scene, apart from the possible technical and structural complications that would have arisen from creating an onstage musical event, would have encumbered the quick dramatic denouement after the hanging. It would, moreover, have placed far too much emphasis on the religious element in general, and the relation of religion to martial discipline in particular, when otherwise all allusions to organised religion are minimised in the libretto.
- Omission of the news report (Ch. XXV) which inverts the narrator's representation of the story, and of the account of Billy's 'canonisation' among the sailors (Ch. XXVI). This was almost certainly done on practical grounds; once the dramatic concept of showing the events on board the *Indomitable* through dramatic action had been decided upon, there would have been little opportunity for introducing further external material, except perhaps in the Epilogue.¹¹² The decision to omit all of the further 'public' ramifications of the story of Billy and Claggart has the effect of turning the opera's events into a purely personal drama confined to the ship and its crew, or, indeed, through the framing narrative of Prologue and Epilogue, to Vere's reminiscing mind.

I.4.2. Original Melville Material in the Libretto

The librettists retained a number of Melville's original phrases, although some were allocated to different characters. Notable appearances of original material include the greatest part of the poem "Billy in the Darbies", sung by Billy himself in the night before his execution (LIB59; compare BB123f.), Vere's statement, in the Prologue, that "the Devil still has something to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth" (LIB7; compare BB28), his threat of the "yard-arm for a false witness" (LIB49; compare BB79), and his famous exclamation "Struck by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang" (LIB54; compare BB85).

¹¹¹ *Griffin* 5; see section II.5.3.2.

¹¹² The opera-makers' first list of scenes (in Britten's hand, BPL A61:14f.) shows that their focus lay exclusively on the action on board the ship; there is nothing to suggest that there ever existed a plan to incorporate the more speculative chapters or the narrator's additional material into the work.

Claggart calls Billy “a King’s bargain” (LIB16; this is originally Vere’s phrase, BB78); his ironic comment “Handsomely done, my lad. And handsome is as handsome did it, too” (LIB31f.) is a direct quotation (BB51), as is his allusion to the “man-trap” under the “ruddy-tipped daisies” of Billy’s beauty (LIB49; compare BB77), and the Dansker’s warning that “Jemmy Legs is down on you” (LIB37; compare BB67). Special mention should be made of Billy’s account of the chaplain’s visit in Act II, Sc. 3, which contains the phrase “and good his story, of the good boy hung and gone to glory, hung for the likes of me” (LIB60). This phrase does not appear in Plomer’s edition of *Billy Budd* but was added from Freeman’s 1948 Harvard edition of Melville’s text (see p.50 above).

The nickname “Red Whiskers” has been reassigned from the bullying ex-butcher on board the *Rights-of-Man* (BB20) to Billy’s fellow impressed man, Joseph Higgins, also a butcher by trade (LIB14). The Dansker’s nickname, “Board-her-in-the-smoke” (BB48), has been ingeniously integrated into the dialogue about boarding the enemy ship during the frigate chase in Act II, Sc. 1 (LIB42f.). The name of the *Indomitable*’s first lieutenant, Mr Redburn, appears to be borrowed from the title character of Melville’s novel *Redburn* (1849).

To Mervyn Cooke, the fact that “it is Captain Vere who is given most lines taken directly from Melville” appears “ironical[...]”, given that the changes made to the character constitute “such a radical departure from the original source” (1993c:40) that Cooke is led to question the “respect” which the librettists, Crozier in particular, so emphatically professed for their source text (see Crozier 1979:31 and BBC1960:203). It ought to be remembered, however, that on the whole there is very little dialogue in the novella, and that Vere’s memorable exclamations are among the few direct speech utterances rendered there. A close examination of the dialogues which do have a direct source in the novella shows that the librettists endeavoured to preserve Melville’s words and phrases where they could (compare, for instance, Billy’s conversation with the Novice, LIB35f., and with the afterguardsman, BB63).

I.4.3. Billy

Billy Budd is an able seaman (LIB15), young, strong, and beautiful. His shipmates nickname him “Baby” and “Beauty” (LIB20f.); they find him “a catch on the eye” (LIB29). Claggart sees in him the embodiment of “beauty, [...] handsomeness [and] goodness” (LIB32) and speaks of his “pleasant looks, good temper” and his “masculine beauty and strength” (LIB49). Billy is “sound in wind and limb” and a “fine recruit” (LIB15f.), a regular “King’s bargain” (LIB16, 57). He is illiterate, but he “can sing”; his only “flaw” is his “stammer[...]” which he accepts with resigned good humour: “Ay, it comes and it goes... or so the chaps tell me. Don’t you worry” (LIB15f.). He remains “a foundling” (LIB16), but all references to a possibly noble lineage have been discarded.

Billy arrives on the *Indomitable* as an impressed recruit from “the British merchantman *Rights o’ Man*, homeward-bound to Bristol” (LIB13). In contrast to the

other two impressed men (Red Whiskers in particular), however, he does not resent the sudden change in his situation. Cheerfully cooperative, he is quick to answer Claggart's questions, while always addressing him as "sir" (LIB15, LIB21); and when he is assigned to the foretop, he is "exultant" (LIB17): having thanked the officers for his placement, he vents his joy at the prospect of his new, exciting life "aloft in the foretop", "up among the sea-hawks, up against the storms", declaring that he does not want his "old life" any more (LIB17; compare BB22, where the narrator suggests that Billy may be pleased by the prospect of "novel scenes and martial excitements"). His exuberant "Farewell" to his old ship, the *Rights o' Man*, is promptly mistaken by the officers for an allusion to revolutionary ideas: they decide that he needs to be closely observed as a potentially dangerous man, and accordingly tell Claggart to "instruct your police" (LIB17). However, Vere (who does not himself witness the incident) later insists that Billy's outburst was harmless: "Nothing – just youthful high spirits" (LIB27), and in the trial scene it becomes clear that at least Ratcliffe and the first lieutenant do not, after all, think of Billy as a dangerous mutineer (LIB53-57).

Billy takes joy in "helping, working and sharing" (LIB17),¹¹³ and he is generous and friendly towards his shipmates. He has no objections to being called "Baby" or "Beauty", unlike Red Whiskers who protests against his nickname (LIB20f.). He offers the Dansker tobacco (LIB29 and LIB36), and he is anxious that the Dansker might "get into trouble" for "coming to see" him before the execution (LIB59). His shipmates in their turn all approve of him: the shanty singing in Act I, Sc. 3 – which, like Act I, Sc. 2, takes place a week after his impressment (LIB24) – shows Billy already fully integrated into the crew and its social life. Donald calls him "a good cuss" (LIB30), and when Billy fights with Squeak, his watch cheer for him (LIB31). According to the Novice, he is "the one we all love" (LIB34), and this has come to the notice of the officers, too: prematurely but tellingly falling into the past tense as they discuss the verdict, the first lieutenant remarks "Baby Budd the men called him. They loved him" (LIB57). It is their love of Billy, rather than revolutionary ideology, which prompts some of the sailors to mutinous plotting shortly before the execution (an impulse of active revolt which does not occur in the novella at all): the Dansker reports that "some reckon to rescue you, Billy Boy. How they hated that Jemmy Legs! They swear you shan't swing. They love you". Billy, however, orders the Dansker to "stop them" (LIB60; see discussion below).

Billy feels much compassion for the beaten Novice (LIB20: "Christ! The poor chap", etc.), but he unquestioningly accepts the regiment of naval discipline (with which, like his counterpart in the novella, he is evidently not completely familiar, as demonstrated by his questions "What's that? What's those whistles?", LIB21). Billy trusts that he will "get no punishment" as long as he "give[s] no offence"

¹¹³ The possible implications of the appearance of the word "sharing" at this point are discussed in note 291.

(LIB20), an optimism not shared by his more experienced shipmates. He makes no demur at being told by Claggart to “take off that fancy neckerchief” (LIB21). The conclusion of Act I, Sc. 3 shows him satisfied and happy with his lot (“This life suits me”, etc.; “Oh, I’m content, I’m content”, LIB37); when Vere later tells him “I do not want to see you about promotion”, he “good-humoured[ly]” replies: “That’s all right, sir. I’m content” (LIB51).

Billy’s unquestioning and fundamentally optimistic acceptance of his lot can also be detected in his admission to the Novice that he has “never [given] [...] a thought” to the idea that his impressment might have been “unfair”. It seems that he is at that moment considering the Novice’s situation, rather than his own (LIB35: “Doesn’t seem fair – and *you’re only a boy*”, my emphasis). For, after all, he himself “wouldn’t go back where I was for nothing”, because the *Indomitable* has become his “life” and his “own world” (LIB37). What amounts to an attitude of fatalism in Billy also seems to some extent to motivate his telling the Dansker to prevent the crew from rescuing him in Act II, Sc. 3, in that he has no wish to change what he has already accepted must happen: he states that he is glad of having been “stopped [...] from thinking on what’s no use and dreaming what needn’t be dreamt, and woken [...] to face what must be” (LIB60). Even without the encouragement of the vision of “the far-shining sail” – which means that his own death “don’t matter” to Billy any more (LIB61) – it seems fairly sure that Billy would in no case condone an uprising among the crew for his own sake, but would abide by the court’s decision, since the only man who might conceivably be in a position to “save” him (LIB56) has declined to do so. It is made clear that to Billy, mutiny and disloyalty are “foul things” which he could never take part in or condone; significantly, during his trial, his only protest while Vere is making his testimony comes when Vere mentions Claggart’s accusation of “mutiny” (LIB55).

When Billy appeals to Vere, rather than to the court, to save him, it seems that he is emphasising a personal connection between the captain and himself as fellow humans. Since he also states that he “[woul]d have died for” Vere (LIB56), his appeal, which has no direct source in the novella, seems to go beyond a cry for mercy from one merely afraid to die. Billy does not fear death, he only regrets the end of life in “this grand rough world” (LIB60f.), and the ballad he sings in Act II, Sc. 3 shows him preoccupied with the technical details of his “last day” – food, “the last parting cup”, “the hoist and the belay”, and the presence of his friends “by the plank”. The prospect of his death seems dream-like to him (“it is dreaming that I am”), just as being dead will seem like a dream too: “Fathoms down, fathoms – how I’ll dream fast asleep” (LIB59). Like his Noble Savage counterpart in the novella, Billy does not appear particularly strongly affected by the Christian religion. Although he evidently appreciates the chaplain’s coming to see him (“kind”), he refers to the

message of salvation symbolised by the crucifixion of Christ as a “good [...] story, of the good boy hung and gone to glory, hung for the likes of me” (LIB60).¹¹⁴

Billy’s nature is one of simple goodness. He has had no experience of arbitrary cruelty, and has “never seen [blood] shed for no reason” (LIB20). While he is personally outraged by the Novice’s offer of a bribe to make him mutiny, he not only seems to think that the affair is closed with him sending the Novice “back where he belonged”, but the Novice’s propositions even seem unreal to him, a supernatural vision or part of a dream, rather than a sign of a possible conspiracy in an alarming reality: Billy “thought he might be a sperrit the queer things he said” (LIB36). However, Billy is eager enough to become active and to fight in more straightforward conflicts: he volunteers to board the French ship (LIB43), he tells Vere he longs to try his strength in “a fight” with the French (LIB51), and he readily enters into the fight with Squeak, whom he tells in no uncertain terms what he thinks of him: “Yer stinking little vermin” (LIB30).

Yet it is because of his straightforward simplicity that he is unable to detect the ill-will which Claggart disguises with his ironic remarks (LIB21: “Look after your dress”, etc.; LIB31f.: “Handsomely done”, etc.). Although Donald tells him that Claggart is “the one to study” if one wishes “to dodge punishment”, thus hinting at Claggart’s power and possibly also at his cruel nature, and although the Dansker warns him to “keep clear of him” (LIB21f.), Billy cannot see beyond the master-at-arms’s surface friendliness. “He seems all right” to him (LIB22); later, he assures the Dansker that “Jemmy Legs likes me. He calls me that sweet pleasant fellow. He gives me the smile and easy order”, etc. (LIB37). He is therefore taken entirely unawares by Claggart’s accusations, and the shock of the confrontation makes him stammer – a reaction we have been prepared for by the two preceding confrontations with Squeak and the Novice, each of which constitutes an unexpected attack on, respectively, Billy’s personal belongings and his moral integrity.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Before the librettists so fortuitously lighted on Melville’s discarded lines (see p.50 above), the March Draft had shown what amounts to a downright laconic indifference in Billy’s account of the chaplain’s visit: “Chaplain’s been here before you, kind, but what can he do when I ain’t truly sorry? I had to strike down that Jemmy Legs, it’s fate” (BPL A61:169).

¹¹⁵ Arnold Whittall has taken issue with the opera-makers’ decision to introduce Billy’s stammer in his very first appearance in the impressment scene: “In the novella the stammer is associated only with those moments when Billy is under real pressure, and it is a weakness in the opera to suggest that it can apparently emerge independently of an inner conflict, of any need to suppress strong aggression” (1982:127). However, as Mervyn Cooke has pointed out, Billy’s stammer is not consistently associated with aggression in Melville’s novella, either: Cooke correctly notes its “absence [...] from Graveling’s narration” about the fight with the Red Whiskers on board the *Rights-of-Man*. In Cooke’s view, “Billy’s temper becomes always associated with his stammer” in the opera (1993c:37); in support of this view, it could be argued that even though Billy appears cheerful enough during his impressment, at the moment at which a brutally intimidating officer like Claggart asks him to identify himself beyond his own knowledge (as a foundling, Billy has no “home”, LIB15f.), he does find himself “under real pressure” (Whittall 1982:127), turning incoherent just as many other Forsterian ‘light’ characters do in similar situations (see section II.5.3.4. and section II.4.2.2.1., p.275).

Allen Frantzen has claimed that the “references to Billy’s deadly strength” which are to be found in the conversation between Captain Graveling and the lieutenant (see BB20) are “suppresse[d]” in the libretto, which “confines mention of Billy’s strength to Claggart’s warning that Billy will kill Squeak if he catches him messing with his kit”, and to the fight scene between decks in Act I, Sc. 3 (61). I would contend, however, that in the absence of the scenes aboard the *Rights-of-Man*, Claggart’s warning and the fight with Squeak can be read as effective substitutes for the novella’s reference to Billy’s physical prowess (which is not, in fact, a reference to a “deadly” act of violence), and that, on the contrary, it is Claggart’s warning which introduces into the opera the first forebodings that Billy’s good-natured strength may be “deadly” in the end.

To both Claggart and Vere, Billy is the living embodiment of “beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness” (Claggart LIB32f.; Vere LIB53 and 58). Their symbolic heightening of Billy’s figure reflects what Melville’s narrator tells us not only about Billy himself, but also about Claggart’s evil nature which recognises and persecutes goodness as its natural opposite, and about Vere, who is the only other person “capable of adequately appreciating the moral phenomenon presented in Billy Budd” (BB59). Like his counterpart in the novella, Billy remains unaware of the metaphysical significance which is projected onto him by Claggart and especially by Vere (see Vere’s “I accept” monologue, LIB58). It is true that when Billy strikes Claggart on the forehead, he overcomes his tongue-tie, and exclaims “Devil!” (LIB53) – a deviation from Melville’s original, where no shout accompanies the blow. However, I believe it would be going too far to interpret this as a sign that at that moment, Claggart’s whole nature, complete with its metaphysical implications, has been revealed to him. Neither of the two further comments Billy subsequently makes on the incident suggests that he is in any way concerned with the metaphysical aspects of Claggart’s hatred: during his defence at the trial, he states that he does not know why Claggart should have “accuse[d] [him] wrongfully” (LIB56: “Don’t know, don’t know such things”), and in Act II, Sc. 3, he merely tells the Dansker that “I had to strike down that Jemmy Legs – it’s fate” (LIB60). From Billy’s own limited perspective, the exclamation of “Devil” would appear to be a straightforward response to Claggart’s accusations, similar to the phrase “stinking little vermin” he applies to Squeak when he finds him rooting around in his belongings (LIB30). And yet to the audience, who have witnessed Claggart’s secret ponderings and plottings Billy’s exclamation may appear ironically apt.

Unconscious though he may be of any metaphysical subtleties, Billy is nevertheless quickly attracted by goodness in others. The sailors’ enthusiastic description of their captain, Starry Vere, who, as Donald tells Billy, is “brave” and “good”, is enough to call forth Billy’s sincere admiration, loyal allegiance and even, it is strongly suggested, love: “Starry I’ll follow you... Follow thro’ darkness, never you fear... I’d die to save you, ask for to die...”, etc. (LIB22f.). Billy is thrilled by the thought that his rumoured “promotion” to the captaincy of the mizzen top

would entail working “near Captain Vere himself, God bless him!” (LIB37), and during their brief encounter in Act II, Sc. 2, he frankly tells Vere he would “like” to be his coxswain, “to be near you”, assuring the captain that “I’d look after you” and that Vere would “be safe with me”: “You could trust your boat to me”. He also tells Vere “I’d die for you – so would they all” (LIB51); the latter addition might be felt to express a wish on Billy’s part to include the rest of the crew in his loyal devotion, rather than an attempt to downplay his own feelings.

It is in Billy’s interactions with Vere, and in his thoughts about the captain, that the major differences between Melville’s Handsome Sailor and the libretto’s Billy Budd can be observed. The relationship between Billy and Vere develops over a very short time: they evidently meet for the first time in the brief private interview before the fatal confrontation with Claggart at the beginning of Act II, Sc. 2, an interview which does not even take place in the novella.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, as Clifford Hindley has argued, the intensity of their mutual appreciation would seem to suggest “the idea of a relationship deeper than that between officer and subordinate” (1989:378).

Instead of the inarticulate and dog-like submission depicted in the novella (BB93), the operatic Billy expresses a proud and actively protective devotion to the captain, not only in the finale of Act I, Sc. 1 and in the short meeting with Vere at the beginning of Act II, Sc. 2, but also in his final monologue as he awaits his execution. Billy’s increased articulateness, as well as his deepened intellectual and spiritual understanding, are most prominent in the latter scene. Not only does he sing the ballad of “Billy in the Darbies” himself, but he also reflects on Vere’s and his own situation in a manner which suggests that he thinks of himself and of the captain as equals sharing each other’s help and support: “We are both in sore trouble, him and me, with great need for strength, and my trouble’s soon ending, so I can’t help him longer with his. Starry Vere, God bless him – and the clouds darker than night for us both” (LIB60).

There is reason to believe that Billy’s increased consciousness and maturity arise from the experience of the closeted interview with Vere, during which Billy’s positive fatalism has arguably been transmuted to a more meaningful vision of transcendence. While he still accepts that “I had to strike down that Jemmy Legs – it’s fate. And Captain Vere has had to strike me down – Fate”, he has discovered a source of “content[ment]” which means that “being hanged, or being forgotten and caught in the weeds” are prospects that “don’t matter now”. This mysterious source is “the far-shining sail that’s not Fate” which he has “sighted [...] in the storm”: “I’ve seen where she’s bound for. She has a land of her own where she’ll anchor for ever. Oh, I’m contented” (LIB61). The fact that Vere echoes these words in the Epilogue suggests that both he and Billy have attained this comforting vision through a personal connection during the closeted interview; and it is arguably this connection, be it called love, or simply comradeship between human

¹¹⁶ In Melville’s novella, the germ for this scene can be found in Billy’s musings, as he finds himself called to the captain’s cabin, about whether he might be promoted to captain’s coxswain or to the captaincy of the mizzen top (BB82; see discussion in section III.2.4.).

beings, which makes Billy realise that he is “strong, and I know it, and I’ll stay strong, and that’s all, and that’s enough”.¹¹⁷ If Vere later claims to have been “saved” by Billy (LIB63), it might be felt that Billy’s experience during the closeted interview – whether Billy himself perceives it as salutary or not – has been the discovery of this confident strength and contentment. Clifford Hindley has insightfully commented that “Salvation” in the opera *Billy Budd* “does not relate to sin or guilt, but is seen as a way of getting the better of fate – courageously asserting oneself in the face of a hostile universe (in a manner akin to Stoicism), through the support afforded by love” (1999:150). Billy’s final farewell speech to the world constitutes, as Arnold Whittall has noted, “a display of self-knowledge that transforms Melville’s character out of all recognition”. However, the impact of this transformation on the Billy/Vere relationship suggests that Billy’s increased articulacy does not merely, as Whittall opines, reflect a technical “need to give Billy a sizeable solo” (1990:160), but is the result of a deliberate decision to alter the character itself.

Hindley has furthermore suggested that if the connection between Billy and Vere is to be thought of as love, then “‘Love’ in this context [...] moves far beyond the realm of purely physical desire”, representing “a spiritual and emotional bond which, while it transcends the physical, may still be described as homosexual”¹¹⁸ – a

¹¹⁷ In his “Librettist’s Note on Dirge Libretto”, Forster comments that “the far-shining sail” is in fact “the sail of love which is not Fate”, and that this is “what Billy’s shown” Vere during the closeted interview (BPL A61:50); see section III.2.3.4. For a detailed discussion of Billy’s and Vere’s shared vision of “the far-shining sail”, see section II.3.8.; for a discussion of salvation in Forster’s work, see section II.2.3.

¹¹⁸ Noel Bradley has advanced the opinion that Billy’s shanty verse about “Anna Susannah” proves that Forster intended to show that “Billy’s sexual interests are normal” (243). Responding to his claim, Hindley has argued that this need not necessarily be the case since shanties are “communal activities, not expressions of personal taste”; he furthermore points out that “Billy’s words ‘Oh, [Anna] Susannah! I’ll find you a bed by and by’ occur only as an unaccented phrase at the end of a cadence” (1989:370f.). On the subject of audibility, Britten noted “we must be careful *not* to have important points in the last line because they get lost occasionally” (letter to Forster of 11 February 1951, quoted in Reed 1993a:64); that risk was obviously taken in the setting of Billy’s last shanty line (Act I, [85]-2). Hindley also notes the opera-makers’ difficulties over the shanties, and points out that the original rough version of the present verses was in fact provided by Kenneth Harrison, a friend of Forster’s at King’s College, Cambridge (1989:370, n.24; for details see Reed 1993:64ff.). Hindley furthermore draws attention to the sexual innuendo in the verse about “Auntie” who will “cut up her Billy for pie” – “words which, in the mouths of an all-male chorus, carry scarcely concealed homosexual overtones” (1989:371); according to Baker and Stanley, “an *auntie* is usually a gay man who is older and/or unattractive” (84). Helen Schlegel applies the nickname “Auntie” to her effeminate brother Tibby in *Howards End* (HE40), and in an imaginary dialogue Forster recorded in his *Commonplace Book* in 1929, “Civis” addresses “Savage” in an “aggrieved and auntish tone” (CPB50; see also section II.2.2.5.). Hindley holds that the excision of all references to Bristol Molly, a possible heterosexual interest of Billy’s, which still featured in the March Draft but are absent from the August Draft, is far more representative of the opera makers’ views on Billy’s sexuality (1989:370f.). I do not think that, as far as the question of Billy’s ‘true’ sexual preferences is concerned, anything need be decided to the exclusion of all other possibilities. Billy’s thoughts about the captain before and after the trial speak sufficiently clearly of his devotion to him, and of the closeness of their relationship.

type of relationship between males which Hindley sees as akin to Walt Whitman's "dear love of comrades", as celebrated in *Calamus* (Hindley 1989:364).¹¹⁹ The possibility for such an intensified relationship between Billy and Vere is in its essence pre-figured in Melville's image of "two of great Nature's nobler order" embracing one another in an act of "diviner magnanimity" (BB102).¹²⁰ Billy's last cry, too, takes on a far more personal tone than in Melville: the novella's impersonal "God bless Captain Vere" (BB112) is here replaced by a direct address in the second person, and the formal title is replaced by the familiar nickname: "Starry Vere, God bless you!" (LIB62).

The libretto shows Billy to be actively concerned for the welfare of Vere as well as for that of the *Indomitable's* crew. When the Dansker comes to visit Billy before his execution in Act II, Sc. 3, he tells the young prisoner that some of the crew "reckon to rescue you" because "they love you" (LIB60). The love they bear Billy can thus be seen to assume a power that has the potential to disrupt the ordered structures of naval discipline and the very system of authority that governs the warship world.¹²¹ Billy, however, will not countenance any such revolt on his behalf (see above). Given that he regards both his accidental killing of Claggart and the fact that "Captain Vere has had to strike me down" as brought about by "Fate" (LIB60), his reaction would seem to reflect his sense that it would be both futile and unnecessary to rise up against the "fate" he has already accepted as his lot. It seems unlikely that his terse prediction of the probable outcome of a violent rescue operation, which would incidentally constitute a mutinous undertaking of the sort he so clearly abhors as "foul" (LIB55), could be a conscious and deliberate indictment of the harsh, oppressive and inhuman rule of naval law. Rather, it might be felt that, resigned as he is to his lot, Billy wishes to save his shipmates from punishment, at the same time as he wishes to spare Vere an uprising among his otherwise loyal and devoted crew. Significantly, Billy's last words to the Dansker are an exhortation to "help [Vere] all of you"; he can thus be seen to be actively promoting the preservation of peace and order on board the *Indomitable* as a last parting gift to the "sore[ly] trouble[d]" Vere (LIB60).

¹¹⁹ Forster, meanwhile, appears by the late 1940s to have distanced himself to some extent from the writings of both Whitman and his disciple Edward Carpenter: as early as December 1929, he had noted in his Commonplace Book that Carpenter was "drain[ing] away", his writings now seeming to him "thin whistling rhetoric". He furthermore records Gerald Heard "summ[ing] up" Carpenter "at my request, and most devastatingly: 'An echo. Walt Whitman was the first who blew through that hollow reed. Morris, J. A. Symonds – there you have the whole. He knew nothing, he couldn't think'" (CPB52f). For a discussion of the related subject of Forster's views on the topic of salvation at the time of the libretto's genesis, see section II.2.3.6.

¹²⁰ This idea can be seen to resonate surprisingly well with Forster's concept, expressed in his 1938 essay "What I Believe", of "an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky", whose "temple" is "the holiness of the Heart's affections" and whose existence means that "the experiment of earthly life cannot be dismissed as a failure" (TCD70f). See discussion in sections II.3.8. and II.5.1.1.

¹²¹ See discussion in section II.6., particularly II.6.4.

With the absence, in the libretto, of any references to Billy as a figure of Greek mythology or a statue, Billy has arguably become a more human figure who appears, moreover, to be better integrated into his social surroundings than in the novella (an impression for which the strengthened presence of the crew who interact with Billy is doubtlessly also responsible). The animal imagery which Melville's narrator uses to describe him has virtually disappeared from the libretto as well. Only Billy himself now claims kinship with the free, undomesticated wild birds of the sea, with whom he is connected because of his elevated position in the foretop: "Billy Budd, king of the birds! [...] Up among the sea-hawks" (LIB17; see also LIB43: "I'll come down from the birds").

Comparing Melville's *Billy Budd* and the libretto for Britten's *Billy Budd* in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook*, Mervyn Cooke has come to the conclusion that

in every important respect [...], Billy's function in the opera is identical to that he fulfilled in the novella: an innocent transplanted into, and threatening the status quo of, an alien world and meeting an evil force in mutual annihilation. His rôle is fundamentally static and – apart from the blow – passive. (1993c:32f.)

Cooke is by no means the only critic who has come to this conclusion (see, for instance, Fougousse 141). A detailed comparison of the libretto's Billy and the novella's Billy shows, however, that while Cooke's summary of "Billy's function" is not incorrect, it does not reflect the changes in Billy's character, which raise his relationship with Captain Vere, and the topic of salvation that is so closely linked with it, to a position of prominence they do not occupy in the novella. A major part of these changes consists in a development in which Billy is moved away from an original passive fatalism that remains unconscious to the last, towards an acceptance which may still be fatalistic, but which also shows Billy actively seeking contact with Vere, and trying to ensure the crew's continuing support and peaceful behaviour. Through this development, a space has arguably been made for an experience of connection that leads Billy to recognise a new source of strength, confidence, and meaning that transcends the inevitable reality of his death.

I.4.4. Claggart

John Claggart, the *Indomitable's* master-at-arms, is a man who is feared and disliked or even hated by most of the ship's crew, including its officers: "Claggart I never liked", "No-one liked Claggart", "Claggart was hard on them all. How they hated him" (LIB57; see also Dansker LIB60: "How they hated that Jemmy Legs"). Billy, the new arrival on board, is "warned" by the Dansker to "keep clear of him", and Donald tells him that Claggart is "the one to study if you want to dodge punishment" (LIB21f.). At the same time, Claggart is considered by the officers to be good at his job as the ship's chief police officer: the first lieutenant regards him as "an able one" (LIB26) who does "his duty" (LIB57). Vere informs Claggart that

he considers his “work [...] satisfactory” (LIB39). In having Vere describe Claggart as “a veritable Argus” (LIB26), the librettists chose a particularly apt image which can be seen to reflect the numerous references to Claggart’s eyes in the novella.¹²²

Claggart claims to have been in the King’s service for “many years” and to have “sailed many seas” (LIB16; LIB39: “I have served my country long”); there are no references here to suggest the dubious background which is hinted at in Melville’s novella. At the same time, Claggart appears to be well educated and to possess an intellectual, even poetic mind, as indicated by his frequent use of metaphor, by the rich imagery of his central monologue (LIB32f.), and by the fact that when he accuses Billy to Captain Vere, he speaks in blank verse (LIB48).

Claggart possesses a great deal of arrogance; he is contemptuous of his superior officers, and on the whole disgusted with the world and his own situation:

I heard, your honour! Yes, I heard. Do they think I’m deaf? Was I born yesterday? [...] Have I not apprenticed myself to this hateful world, to this accursed ship? And oh, the fools! These officers! – they are naught but dust in the wind. [...] Oh, what a ship! One piece of dirt after another. (LIB18f.)

Accordingly, his behaviour towards his subordinates is brutal and “bullying”. He “round[s] on” Squeak, whose obsequious haste has led him to a wrong interpretation of Claggart’s ambiguous instruction to “keep an eye on that man”, and he freely abuses the corporal: “You hadn’t thought, you wouldn’t think, you can’t think”. Claggart can be seen to play a cruel game with Squeak by first instructing him to trouble Billy, setting the prospect of loot before him, but then “malevolent[ly]” warning the cowardly Squeak that Billy will “kill you if he catches you” (LIB18f.). Claggart threatens the uncooperative and protesting Red Whiskers with physical violence during the impressment scene (LIB13f.), and when he is told that the young Novice “cannot walk” after his flogging, he unmovedly replies “Let him crawl”, and leaves (LIB19).

Claggart uses subordinates to further his own plans (Squeak to trouble Billy, the Novice to tempt him), binding them to himself by obligations of gratitude: he tells Squeak that “if you see anything of [Billy’s] you fancy – I’ll make no trouble” (LIB18). It appears that Claggart has deliberately undertaken to make the Novice loyal to himself by speaking to him in a “fatherly” way when he “found [him] crying”, and by promising to “protect” him, but when the Novice wavers, he threatens him with violence: “You’ve had twenty strokes. Do you want worse?” (LIB33f.). Yet Claggart is capable of deserting his tools without scruple when they do not perform satisfactorily: when Squeak is caught interfering with Billy’s kitbag, Claggart has him seized and “put [...] in irons”; when Squeak tries to protest that he has been promised immunity from punishment as Claggart’s agent, Claggart has him gagged (LIB31). Claggart warns the Novice that he will “protect” him only if he does not “fail”, as Squeak has done (LIB33).

¹²² Some of the interpretive implications of the Argus image are discussed in sections II.6.7. and II.6.8.

As soon as Claggart encounters Billy, he recognises the young sailor as unique and precious: “A find in a thousand [...]. A beauty. A jewel. The pearl of great price [...], there are no more like him [...]. He is a King’s bargain” (LIB16). To those members of the audience who recognise the phrase “the pearl of great price” as a biblical metaphor denoting “the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:45-46), Claggart’s image may introduce a metaphysical dimension into his characterisation of Billy.¹²³ It is also made clear that Billy has an antagonising effect on Claggart: he not only orders Squeak to “keep an eye on” Billy in accordance with the first lieutenant’s order, but also tells him to persecute the new recruit with “little tricks”. Ironically, it is Claggart who first mentions Billy’s “temper” and his “fists” as a warning to Squeak – in plotting against Billy on a larger scale, he too can be seen to be “playing with fire” (LIB18).

Since we as audience are aware of Claggart’s invidious plans, we cannot but interpret his banter with Billy in Act I, Sc. 1 and Act I, Sc. 3 as equivocal (LIB21: “Look after your dress”, etc.; LIB31f: “Handsomely done”, etc.). In both of these encounters (which, appropriately, are musically parallel), Claggart’s seemingly friendly address of Billy is followed immediately by a more or less violent re-establishment of Claggart’s authority: in Act I, Sc. 1, he issues a gruff order to the Mate to “get those men aloft” (LIB21); in Act I, Sc. 3, Claggart “lashes savagely [...] with his rattan” at a boy who “stumbles against him”, and “furious[ly]” tells him to “look where you go” (LIB32). The violence of the latter scene in particular could be taken as a sign that Claggart’s feelings towards Billy are themselves not unambiguous: his display of aggressive and brutal behaviour after he has spoken to Billy with ostensible kindness suggests that these encounters put him under considerable emotional strain.

We are shown the workings of Claggart’s inner conflict in his central monologue in Act I, Sc. 3. Claggart, we learn, was born to an unspecified “depravity” that condemns him to a solitary existence “in my own world”, where he has “found peace of a sort” under a self-imposed “order such as reigns in Hell”. Confined to a lightless, loveless, hopeless world, he is nevertheless capable of perceiving “beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness” and wistfully imagining a “love” which “lives [...] where I cannot enter”, a thought which brings “torment too keen” to bear (LIB32f).

While at least one critic has noted that the phrase “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and suffers” is a “deliberate biblical allusion” (Cooke 1993c:39), it is important to note that there is a significant difference from its original occurrence in John 1:5, where it reads: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not”. The wording in the libretto may be biblical, but the content can be seen to retain the Miltonic element present in Melville’s novella, where Claggart is described as “apprehending the good, but powerless to be it” (BB59): “the light” that is Billy “shines” in Claggart’s “darkness”, and although he cannot leave that darkness, he nevertheless “comprehends” and desires the essence of

¹²³ For a discussion of Forster’s habit of using biblical imagery, see section II.2.4.2.

the light, which makes him “suffer[...].”¹²⁴ In this latter point, Claggart’s darkness differs significantly from the biblical darkness which remains uncomprehending, and therefore untouched, because the light is utterly alien to it.¹²⁵ “Having seen” and “comprehend[ed]” Billy’s “light”, he has no “choice”: he is “doomed to annihilate” Billy (LIB32). Although he is thus represented as “act[ing] out to the end [his] allotted part” (BB59), the libretto, perhaps following the novella’s hint that “Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban” (BB70), also suggests that Claggart’s decision to “destroy” Billy is connected with his “torment” at the thought from being excluded from “love”, condemned to a lonely existence without “hope” in his “own dark world” (LIB33).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Book 4 of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* not only contains the motto of Melville’s Ch. XI (1.115: “pale, ire, envy and despair”), but an earlier passage, which introduces Satan’s reflections upon his situation, also shows interesting parallels to the operatic Claggart’s predicament as expounded in his central monologue: “And like a devilish engine back recoils (this image is closely linked with Upon himself; horror and doubt distract Melville’s description of Claggart’s His troubl’d thoughts, and from the bottom stir nature which has “no recourse” The Hell within him, for *witbin him Hell* but to “recoil upon itself”, BB59) *He brings*, and round about him, *nor from Hell* *One step no more than from himself can fly* By change of place: Now *conscience wakes despair* *That slumber’d, wakes the bitter memory* *Of what he was, what is, and what must be* Worse; *of worse deeds worse suffering must ensue*” (Book 4, ll.17ff., my emphases).

¹²⁵ Although the word “comprehend” as it appears in John 1:5 might be construed in the archaic sense of “encompass” or “seize”, this sense cannot be applied to Claggart’s predicament: it is precisely his ability to understand, coupled with his inability to “encompass” or “seize” Billy’s “light” of “love”, that causes his suffering. The appearance of the image of the light shining in the darkness in the *Billy Budd* libretto opens a connection with Forsterian philosophy which, rejecting the teachings of institutionalised Christianity, equates the light with love and friendship in personal relationships. See my discussion of the Forsterian cross-narrative leitmotif cluster of lights shining in the darkness in section II.3.8.

¹²⁶ I cannot agree with Allen Frantzen’s claim that the libretto’s Claggart “is deprived of his *identity* as the ‘Man of Sorrows’” (61, my emphasis). While it is true that the biblical phrase, applied to the master-at-arms in the novella (BB59), itself no longer appears in the libretto, Claggart’s central monologue would certainly appear to retain the idea that the speaker who laments his sufferings under a self-imposed “order such as reigns in hell” (LIB32) is “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”. The theme of the sufferer as abject, which is also associated with the biblical reference, clearly involves the view which others hold of him: “He is despised and rejected of men [...] and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3). This theme is arguably just as present in the libretto as in the novella, since both texts make it quite explicit that Claggart is universally hated as well as feared. Its impact on the “man of sorrows” himself can furthermore be seen to be implied in Claggart’s description of himself as living alone and isolated in his “own world” of the “depravity to which I was born” (LIB32). Nor can I agree, on the textual basis of Claggart’s aria, with Frantzen’s claim that Claggart’s “melancholy is omitted”, and with his conclusion that “Forster and Crozier flattened Melville’s characters by eliminating contradictions – the inner chiasmus” which Frantzen detects in the figures of Melville’s Claggart and Billy: “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” (63). The same structure can easily be shown to exist in the opera as well.

It is an easy step to interpret Claggart's "dark world" of "depravity" under a self-imposed regime of hellish "order" as the experience of a closeted – probably self-hating or even homophobic – homosexual's constant self-suppression and self-denial which he has to exert in an all-male and institutionally homophobic warship environment, and, by analogy, in the world in general.¹²⁷ Billy's appearance has disrupted the stability and comparative safety of this self-imposed emotional confinement. Claggart must destroy Billy, who embodies the possibility of a "love" he feels he cannot attain, and whose presence shows him his own wretchedness, in order to prevent his own inability to express his prohibited longings from torturing him: "If love still lives and grows strong where I cannot enter, what hope is there in my own dark world for me? [...] That were torment too keen" (LIB33)¹²⁸. As has been demonstrated in section I.3.3. above, the novella places great importance on the metaphysical dimension of Claggart's hatred of Billy, in what might be construed as a deliberate effort at suppressing any discourses about homoerotic desire which might surround the figure of Claggart. Claggart's monologue, by contrast, can be seen to dwell extensively on the idea that Claggart's hatred of Billy is kindled because Claggart is unable to love Billy. The libretto may thus be felt to reclaim the homoerotic subtext which the novella's narrator had attempted to suppress.¹²⁹

The use of blank verse for the speech in which Claggart delivers his accusation of Billy to Vere in Act II, Sc. 1 (LIB38f. and 48) could be regarded as structurally analogous to the use of over-elaborate indirect speech which marks Claggart's circumlocution and equivocation in the novella; among the prose of all the opera's other major speeches – Billy's ballad excepted – it certainly stands out as stylistically unique. As soon as Claggart's 'rehearsed' denunciation is completed, however, and he has to contend against the captain's disbelief, his speech returns to prose. The argument Claggart deploys in his attempt to convince the captain of Billy's "dangerous" (LIB48) nature may appear suggestively ambiguous to the audience who have paid close attention to his monologue in Act I, Sc. 3. On the one hand, Claggart insinuates that Vere may be harbouring a prohibited homosexual desire for Billy, thus transferring his own suppressed feelings to the captain: "You do but note his outwards, the flower of masculine beauty and strength. A man-trap lurks under those ruddy-tipped daisies" (LIB49). While a certain element of innuendo can be seen to be present in the novella, too, it might be argued that

¹²⁷ Such an interpretation of Claggart's monologue can be seen to match the queer readings of Melville's Claggart offered by Sedgwick (1990) and Martin (1986a and 1998): according to Martin, "Claggart acts out the homophobia of self-hatred" (1998:198). As Jeffrey Weeks reminds us, "the 'medical model' of homosexuality" which emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century resulted in many homosexuals' perception of their 'condition' as "a disability, a sickness, a personal disaster" (32). See also my discussion in sections II.1.3., II.5.2.1., II.5.2.2., and II.6.3.

¹²⁸ Robert Martin has observed that "Forster's Claggart speaks as a Lucifer of thwarted love" (1986b:53).

¹²⁹ Forster himself seems to have been very anxious to emphasise Claggart's inner conflict, rather than to present him as Billy's villainous antagonist who is merely evil; see section III.3.

because the idea of a homosexual motivation on Claggart's part has attained a much stronger presence in the libretto, his innuendo becomes that much more sexually suggestive. At the same time, however, Claggart can also be seen to be describing the effect which Billy's "masculine beauty and strength" have *upon himself*. If we assume that he is suppressing his own desire for Billy because of social restrictions, or because he is filled with homophobic self-hatred, Billy's gift of evoking that desire is the "mantrap" which Claggart himself is subconsciously striving to avoid at all costs by trying to destroy Billy. His lack of deference towards the captain could therefore also be interpreted as a sign of his growing desperation.¹³⁰

Finally, when Claggart accuses Billy to his face in Act II, Sc. 2, he begins each sentence with the persistent, almost hypnotic repetition of Billy's full name, "William Budd" (LIB52). This may well constitute the librettists' attempt to represent verbally the "mesmeric" (BB83) effect which Claggart's stare has upon Billy, and to render dramatically Melville's description of Claggart's "deliberate[...] advance[...]"], performed "with the measured step and calm collected air of an asylum physician approaching [...] some patient beginning to show indications of a coming paroxysm" (BB82).

I.4.5. Vere

Captain Edward Fairfax Vere is presented in the opera on two different time levels. In the Prologue and the Epilogue which frame the action, he appears as "an old man" (LIB7 and 63). The main drama evidently takes place considerably earlier, although it is not stated how many years exactly lie between "that far-away summer of seventeen hundred and ninety-seven" (LIB63) and the time of Vere's recollecting it. That the older Vere is in fact ruminating on the events of the inner drama seems clear enough; after all, in the Epilogue, he takes up the story to narrate the aftermath of Billy's execution ("We committed his body to the deep", etc.). What is by no means clear, however, is whether Vere must therefore necessarily be the narrator of the story of Billy Budd, as numerous critics have suggested.¹³¹ The

¹³⁰ For further discussion of Claggart's innuendo see sections II.6.5. and II.6.8.; for the gradual development of this scene through the libretto drafts see section III.2.4.

¹³¹ The producer and the designer of the original performance, Basil Coleman and John Piper, stated their conviction that "the whole thing is taking place in Vere's mind, and is being recalled by him" as early as 1951 (Coleman/Piper 21). Similar views were voiced in the early 1950s by Andrew Porter (112) and Erwin Stein (206). Joe Law takes it for granted that the "framing device [...] represents Vere as calling up the action of the opera; thus Vere is its narrator, and all the audience sees and hears is shaped and coloured by his consciousness" (301); Allen (43) holds a comparable view. Fougousse (71), McKellar (261) and Seymour (136) also identify Vere as the narrator. More complicated views, which also incorporate theories of music as narrative, are presented by Halliwell and by Rupprecht (see section I.5. below). The question of Vere's reliability as a narrator has preoccupied these critics to a greater or lesser extent, with a number of critics regarding the resulting ambiguities as bringing "the opera [...] closer to the original with all its 'ragged edges' than the composer and his librettists apparently intended it to be" (Farwell 34); similar conclusions are reached by Law (310), Cooke (1993c:40), and McKellar (279).

audience witnesses numerous scenes during which Vere is absent, and not all of these are of immediate importance to the main drama: the deck-scrubbing and the communal shanty-singing might be the products of Vere's imagination, but it is just as likely that they are part of a larger narrative in which Vere is merely another character.

There emerge, then, at least two possible answers to the question of narrative perspective in the opera: one, that Vere is in fact the narrator, and that what we see is Vere's imaginative reconstruction of the events surrounding the figure of Billy Budd; and, two, that these events are presented to us by an unspecified omniscient narrating agency such as could theoretically be presupposed for any opera which operates without the device of a specified narrator. For the sake of simplicity, I shall initially be conducting the characterisation of Vere on the basis of the second alternative. I will also, however, investigate the textual evidence which supports the first alternative; and I shall briefly return to the possibilities of the first alternative as a potential line of interpretation in conjunction with the musical structure of the opera in section I.5.3. below.

In the Prologue and the Epilogue, Vere has been allocated some of the material which, in the novella, is presented by the narrator. He provides a (fragmentary) sketch of the historical background in the Prologue ("In the summer of seventeen hundred and ninety-seven", etc., LIB7), and, in the Epilogue, gives a brief account of Billy's sea burial which is attended by "the sea-fowl" (LIB63), a scene that stands at the conclusion of the story of Billy Budd (BB116) but which it was evidently decided should not be enacted on stage. Vere's ponderings on "good" and "evil" which dominate the first half of the Prologue furthermore serve to introduce the metaphysical dimension which Melville's narrator establishes at the end of Ch. II (esp. BB27f), and which he constantly invokes in his comments throughout the novella.

The older Vere and the younger Vere are essentially similar in character; what the older Vere says about himself in the Prologue is implicit in what we learn about the younger Vere as the action upon the *Indomitable* unfolds. Vere is shown to be "a man of action" who is fighting "for my King and country at sea" (LIB7). The frigate chase in Act II, Sc. 1 establishes him as an able commander: whilst the sailing master and the first lieutenant quibble over the *Indomitable's* distance from the French frigate, Vere "seizes a telescope from the sailing master and sights it"; he is then able to tell the officers the correct distance, as well as the fact that the ship is "new rigged" (LIB40). Like the entire ship's crew, he is eager to come "to action" (LIB39), but he keeps his head during the frigate chase, telling his lieutenant that the guns must "wait yet! We're out of range", and reminding the officers that they "must be patient"; yet he is willing to "try a shot" at the enemy even when success is not certain. When the wind drops and the mist gets too thick, he judges that "our chase is foolish" and gives orders to abandon it (LIB44ff.).

Vere is clearly presented as a commander "mindful of the welfare of his men" (BB36). He acknowledges that "we owe so much to them – some torn from their homes" (LIB27), and when the first lieutenant tells him that "the men are getting

impatient with this long waiting”, Vere expresses his sympathy: “That I well understand” (LIB38). Although he considers that there is “great danger” of mutiny, and affirms that “we must be vigilant. We must be on our guard” (LIB26) lest the spirit of the French Revolution should gain hold in the British Navy, he appears to put much trust in his own crew, and shows confidence in their loyalty and goodness: “listen to them singing below decks. Where there is happiness there cannot be harm”. His dismissal of Billy’s valediction to the *Rights-o’-Man* as “just youthful high spirits. [...] No danger there” (LIB27) serves to confirm his abilities of instinctively judging men’s characters correctly. The crew in their turn respect and admire him: their enthusiastic praise at the end of Act I, Sc. 1 confirms his abilities as a commander (Donald: “He’s a triumph, and a giant in battle”, “Ay, he’ll destroy them. He knows all their tricks. He’s brave and he’s *good*”), as well as his human, even fatherly qualities (chorus: “He cares for us, he wishes us well, he cares for us like we are his sons”, etc.), and they fondly refer to him by the nickname of “Starry Vere” (LIB22).

We hear in the Prologue that Vere has “also read books and studied and pondered and tried to fathom eternal truth” (LIB7). When he appears for the first time in his cabin in Act I, Sc. 2, he is reading Plutarch. It appears that Vere turns to the Classics to sustain his morale, and that he likes to link the conflicts of the present with those of the past: “Plutarch – the Greeks and the Romans – their troubles and ours are the same. May their virtues be ours, and their courage” (LIB24); “At the battle of Salamis the Athenians, with vastly inferior numbers against the power of Xerxes ... the Athenians...” (LIB27).¹³² Evidence of Vere’s “bookish[ness]” (BB40) which isolates him from his officers is presented when he describes Claggart as “a veritable Argus” (LIB26), an image which the officers fail to understand. This depiction of Vere illustrates Melville’s characterisation of him as “seem[ingly] unmindful of the circumstance that to his bluff company such allusions [...] were altogether alien” (BB40).¹³³

¹³² The battle of Salamis (480 B.C.), in which the Greeks defeated the Persians, was a decisive naval victory which prepared the ground for the ultimate withdrawal of the Persian invaders from Greece after 479 B.C. The passage read out by Vere does not appear in Plutarch. Forster was aware of this, and evidently troubled by it: on 4 April 1950, he wrote to his friend, the poet and translator Robert Trevelyan, asking him whether he knew a suitable passage from Herodotus or Thucydides which would express “the general sentiment” of Vere’s attitude towards the French (see section II.5.1.2, p.336). At that point, Vere’s words were already almost exactly what they are today, and Forster states that they “suit us”, but seems concerned that “they can’t well stand” ascribed erroneously to Plutarch. In a postscript, he writes that he would “fix or fake something” if Trevelyan could not “solve our problem” (EMFL II:239); and indeed the quotation today remains as “fake” as it was then.

¹³³ While Mervyn Cooke sees Vere’s reference to Classical mythology as “clearly inspired by an idiosyncrasy of Vere’s described by Melville [...] as part of his characteristic pedantry and intellectualism” (1993c:35), namely, his habit of “cit[ing] some historical character or incident of antiquity with the same easy air that he would cite from the moderns” (BB40), the librettists’ choice to have Vere apply the Argus image to the master-at-arms may be significant in its own right, since it opens some highly suggestive interpretive possibilities (see discussion in section II.6.8).

At the same time, the libretto's Vere shows a genial manner towards his officers: he generally addresses them as "gentlemen", but in the comparatively peaceful atmosphere of Act I, Sc. 2, he also addresses them as "my friends" (LIB24 and 27), an address which, given the scantiness of dialogue in the novella, is only heard there as an appeal during Vere's speech at Billy's trial (BB99).

Vere is wont to turn to God, or at any rate to a higher power, when he feels in need of spiritual support, as he does in Act I, Sc. 2: "O God, grant me light to guide us, to guide us all" (LIB24). Sorely confused by Claggart's accusations at the end of Act II, Sc. 1, he longs "for the light, the light of clear Heaven, to separate evil from good" (LIB50); when Claggart lies dead, he exclaims "God o' mercy!" and "God help us, help us all" (LIB53). It becomes clear from the beginning that his thinking is very much concerned with the metaphysical categories of good and evil, which he associates, respectively, with "God" or "Heaven", "beauty, handsomeness" and "the mystery of goodness" (LIB58), and with "the Devil", or "iniquity" (see, for example, the Prologue, LIB7, and the central Act II monologues, LIB51, 53, and 58). From his speech in Act I, Sc. 2, in which he condemns the uprising of the British sailors at the Nore as motivated by "the infamous spirit of France", it becomes clear that Vere is applying related moral categories to England's war against the French: "France who has killed her king and denied her God [...], France who pretends to love mankind and is at war with the world, France the eternal enemy of righteousness" (LIB26). It seems evident that his conviction that "there'll be victory in the end" stems not only from a feeling of nationalist superiority – he is confident that any French ship will "fly from us", and he shares the officers' patriotic and anti-French prejudices ("I feel as you do", LIB25) – but also from a feeling that the English are fighting for the cause of moral righteousness which is bound to prevail.

Vere's terse and unfavourable reactions to Claggart's accusations at the end of Act II, Sc. 1 can, as in Melville's novella, be seen to be provoked by the master-at-arms's circumlocution, epitomised in his weighty repetition of the word "dangerous" and his affected delicacy over the word "mutiny" (LIB48; compare Ch. XVI and esp. BB76). In the libretto, Vere's threat of the yard-arm appears as a direct response to Claggart's innuendo, coming as it does immediately after his offensive comment about the "man-trap" under Billy's "ruddy-tipped daisies". Vere is evidently sufficiently outraged to become impolite: whereas he had up to that point been addressing Claggart as "Master-at-arms", he now uses his name but omits the "Mr" (LIB49). As can be observed, both the manner of his response and the apparent immediate cause for his threat differ from the parallel scene in the novella, where Vere not only appears to remain more controlled – an impression conveyed by the use of longer and more complicated sentences, and by the continuing use of Claggart's official title – but where the threat of the yard-arm is preceded by the demand to produce evidence for Billy's disloyalty (see BB77-79). Since, in the libretto's version of the events, Claggart has taken care to be in a

position to show Vere this evidence in the shape of the guineas *before* he discloses the name of the alleged mutineer, Vere's threat gains weight as an expression of anger at the subordinate's insolence which has grown all too personal, and loses much of its function as a warning against perjury, which may be felt to predominate in the novella.

Vere's interview with Claggart briefly plunges him into an inner turmoil of uncertainty: his exclamation "Oh, this cursèd mist" and his complaints about "disappointment, vexation everywhere" and "confusion without and within" (LIB50) can be applied equally to his ship becalmed in the mist and to his state of mind as he considers Claggart's accusations against Billy. However, Vere's conviction that goodness and truth will prevail regains the upper hand at the beginning of Act II, Sc. 2. His appeal to the "light of clear Heaven" which closes the previous scene has evidently helped him to think more clearly; "the mists are vanishing" and he is now able to determine the respective positions of "good" and "evil" once again, having had recourse to his knowledge of "men and their ways" (LIB51). The mist as Vere's symbol for mental and spiritual disorientation, which so neatly parallels the situation of the *Indomitable* during the frigate chase in Act II, Sc. 1 (a scene that was almost entirely invented by the librettists), has no direct source in Melville, unless it was suggested by the narrator's reflections on "the responsibilities of the sleepless man on the bridge": "The greater the fog the more it imperils the steamer, and speed is put on though at the hazard of running somebody down" (BB100).

Having recovered his moral bearings once more during the "few minutes" which pass between Act II, Sc. 1 and Sc. 2, Vere is certain that the "evil" Claggart "shall fail" since he, Vere, as a just arbiter, will see to it that goodness shall vindicate itself. What he encounters in Billy, however, is not only goodness, but a devotion which could even be interpreted as love. While Vere's aside ("And this is the man", etc.) shows his gratification at having judged Billy's character correctly, the line "this is the trap concealed in the daisies" (LIB51) could also suggest that Billy's avowals of devotion are suddenly meaningful to Vere as more than mere declarations of loyalty. It might even be speculated whether at that moment he realises that Claggart's accusations arise from the master-at-arms's secret jealousy of Billy's ability to inspire love in his fellow humans, or whether he thinks, more profanely, that Claggart himself has fallen for what he calls the "man-trap" and now wants to revenge himself on Billy.

Vere's own feelings for the young sailor need not necessarily exceed a deep liking and sympathy; on the other hand, it is perfectly possible to interpret the relationship between Billy and Vere as (homosexual) love in the wider sense (see discussion on pp.97ff. above). Vere's demeanour at any rate remains kindly but formal throughout the short interview with Billy. During the confrontation between Billy and Claggart, Vere continues at first in this formal manner; however, when Billy is prevented from speaking by his stammer, the captain reacts with sympathy,

encouraging him first to “speak, man, speak”, and then laying his hand on Billy’s shoulder and telling him to “take your time, my boy, take your time” (LIB52), a move which is followed by the notoriously disastrous end of Billy’s paralysis¹³⁴.

In attempting to assess Vere’s behaviour during the ensuing trial scene, it is important to note that the legal constraints are assigned a much greater and far more unambiguous power in the libretto than they seem to possess in the novella, simply because their applicability is never questioned. Moreover, the positions of the officers have been altered; it is they who now repeatedly invoke the law and its demands. Vere’s role, which is already subjected to a substantial change through the excision of the address to the court (BB95-99), is further affected by all of these developments, so that even where Melville’s original words or order of events are kept intact, their overall import is changed to a greater or lesser degree.

It is made indisputably clear that although the officers may believe that Claggart’s death was an accident, and although Billy has protested his innocence of any mutinous design (LIB55), legally the court has “no choice” but to condemn Billy under the Mutiny Act, the Articles of War and the King’s Regulations (LIB56f.). The first lieutenant and Ratcliffe feel compassion for him, but all of the officers know that they cannot lawfully “save him”; the sailing master is certain that “he must swing”, and Ratcliffe concurs: “Ay, there’s naught to discuss”. In their bafflement, the officers appeal to Vere’s “knowledge and wisdom” for “guidance” – like Billy’s appeal, their active solicitation for help has no direct source in the novella – but Vere refuses to become involved: “No. Do not ask me. I cannot.” (LIB56f.).

Vere, it seems, foresees the consequences of Billy’s act virtually immediately after it has been committed. His monologue expresses the realisation that his attempt to steer a clear and just course through the confusion caused by Claggart’s allegations has manoeuvred him into “the straits of Hell”, where “Scylla and Charybdis” loom on either side: it is emotionally impossible for Vere as a human being to “condemn” Billy, since he knows the young sailor to be innocent at heart, yet it is equally impossible for Vere as a dutiful officer of the King’s navy to “save him” without breaking the laws which he is bound to obey. It seems, however, that his allegiance to the law gains the upper hand in his inner conflict almost at once. His question, “How can I save him”, is immediately followed by an expression of agony: “My heart’s broken, my life’s broken. It is not his trial, it is mine, mine. It is I whom the devil awaits” (LIB53). The clear sense of doom expressed in these lines, by the reference to the waiting “devil” in particular, appears to indicate that the option of saving Billy, presented as the second and therefore greater of two impossibilities, has already been dismissed; and that Vere accepts that, in his own “trial” as a human being, he will fail for allowing “beauty, handsomeness, goodness” to be destroyed through the proceedings of earthly law which he will not undertake to disrupt. If Vere declares that his “heart” and his “life” are “bro-

¹³⁴ For a discussion of this scene in the light of Forster’s work, with a particular focus on the significance of Vere’s touch, see section II.3.10.3.

ken”, this can furthermore be taken to indicate that the captain is also suffering because he is fond of Billy personally.¹³⁵

The line “Struck by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang” (LIB54) not only shows that Vere is privately interpreting what has taken place in terms of a spiritual conflict between good and evil – in contrast to his officers who are considering only the practicalities of the situation – but it also emphasises his view of the incident and its consequences as final and unalterable. Accordingly, Vere summons a drumhead court which does not include himself as a member, but before which he appears only as witness, although evidently he is ultimately required, as commander of the ship, to accept or reject the verdict. There is nothing in the libretto to indicate that this proceeding diverges from naval usage, nor is there any doubt that since “the enemy is near [,] the prisoner must be tried at once” (LIB54). There is no reference, either, to the necessity of delivering a quick, exemplary sentence lest the crew should mistake mercifulness for weakness (see BB98f.): the threat of mutiny no longer functions as an argument in the trial. It is rather the authority of naval law which has become the chief force that demands Billy’s conviction and subsequent execution. The decision to condemn or save Billy is thus clearly depicted as a choice between two conflicting value systems, one being the laws of society, the other the private emotions and ethical values of the individual. At the same time, the responsibility for the choice is placed even more exclusively than in the novella on Vere alone, since his decision can no longer be seen as influenced by any external pressure, such as the putative threat of mutiny.

Vere has evidently decided to contribute no more to the trial than is relevant to the investigation within the bounds of martial law which governs the warship world. He keeps his thoughts about the nature of the conflict between Claggart and Billy to himself at the moment when he is asked for an explanation, limiting his statements to material observations rather than metaphysical speculation: “I have told you all I have *seen*. I have no more to say” (LIB56, my emphasis). He does not respond to Billy’s repeated appeals to “save” him, nor to the officers’ appeals for “help” and “guidance” (LIB56f.). In effect, Vere leaves the officers to determine the verdict which he, however, knows they must necessarily arrive at. He has decided to let the law take its course, but it seems that his personal feelings do not allow him to take any further active part in the proceedings; this somewhat paradoxical and contradictory situation could be seen to reflect Vere’s internal conflict which remains insoluble.

Similarly (to take a quick look ahead), during the incipient rebellion which follows Billy’s execution, Vere remains “motionless” and does not intervene (LIB62). Again, the task of maintaining order through naval discipline is thus relegated to the officers, with Vere tacitly endorsing their efforts but not actively taking part in them. It is to be wondered, though, whether this inaction is deliberate or whether

¹³⁵ See also Hindley 1989:374f.

Vere is merely overcome with emotion which paralyses him. To understand it as deliberate would be to imply a complete reversal of his attitude, contrary to the earlier evidence which suggests Vere's firm allegiance to "the laws of earth" (LIB58) – of which naval discipline forms a part – and the absolute nature of his rejection of mutiny. While such an interpretation is not altogether impossible, it seems more likely that Vere's non-participation in the mechanisms of naval discipline will remain temporary.

After the verdict has been pronounced, Vere fulfils the requirements of naval procedure by giving directions for Claggart's funeral, and then prepares the ground for fulfilling his personal responsibility and his emotional need by declaring that he will personally impart the sentence to the prisoner. His "I accept" monologue reiterates in more detail the conflict between law and justice. Vere states quite clearly that he feels himself bound to act according to "the laws of earth", since he is "king" of his "floating monarchy" which is a "fragment" of that "earth" (LIB58). The term "floating monarchy" could be read as a deliberate opposition to "the floating republic" of the Spithead and Nore mutinies (LIB26) that are linked with the spirit of the French Revolution in which a king was killed and the legal system he represented was abolished. In this case, a resulting reading might be that Vere, who is firmly opposed to revolutionary upheaval and anarchy (see his monologue in Act I, Sc. 2, LIB26), must adhere to the King's law even in defiance of his own emotions, because to abandon rationality and save Billy would be to strike at the system which guarantees stability, and with which Vere has aligned himself so completely as to identify his own position with that of the king.

Yet Vere also realises that the events upon the *Indomitable* are being judged before another "tribunal", where Billy's assault upon Claggart becomes a vehicle for "the divine judgment of Heaven" through which "iniquity" is "overthrown" and "the mystery of goodness" is revealed (LIB58). Evidently, in the libretto, as in the novella, Vere is convinced that "at the Last Assizes", Billy's innocence "shall acquit" (BB97), but, unlike in the novella, Vere is also "afraid" of the consequences which await him, Vere, for "destroy[ing] goodness" (LIB58) – as he predicts immediately after the fatal accident, it is he himself "whom the devil awaits" (LIB53). The apparent lack of guilt or "remorse" (BB120) which Melville's Vere exhibits about sacrificing Billy to martial law has been converted, in the libretto, into Vere's painful consciousness of having made a legally correct choice which, however, leaves him with the responsibility for the death of a morally innocent man who is moreover dear to him. If Vere is to be regarded as a tragic figure, it is this evidence of his conscious suffering over his dilemma which makes him tragic.

Vere knows that he has failed Billy in refusing to save him; and as he prepares to impart the sentence to the young sailor, he wonders how Billy can "pardon" or even "receive" him, who is "the messenger of death" (LIB58). Thus the distribution of power inherent in the roles of condemned man and representative of legal authority becomes reversed, and Vere enters Billy's prison cell as a supplicant

rather than as an executioner. This depiction of Vere can be seen to move far beyond that presented in the novella, where Vere is seen to be suffering more than “the condemned one” (BB102), but where there appears no indication that the captain feels the need to be pardoned by the man he is about to sacrifice.¹³⁶ By contrast, the operatic Vere’s questions (“How can he pardon? How receive me?”) seem to speak of acute personal despair, as does his preceding statement that he is “lost with all hands on the infinite sea” (LIB58). The latter phrase recalls the Novice’s Dirge, in which the crew lament their forlornness and their helplessness against the brutal regime of naval discipline which they find themselves subjected to by an arbitrary and cruel fate: “They’ve caught us, they’ve caught all of us. We’re all of us lost, lost for ever on the endless sea” (LIB19). It is possible, therefore, to interpret Vere’s wish to be “receive[d]” and “pardon[ed]” by Billy as the wish, which still forms a central theme in the Prologue and Epilogue, to be “saved” from being “lost on the infinite sea” (LIB7) through the personal connection with the human being he finds himself forced to sacrifice under “the laws of earth” which govern the warship world.

The textual evidence of Billy’s final speech in Act II, Sc. 3 and of the Epilogue suggests that during the closeted interview, Vere manages to communicate his predicament to Billy, who acknowledges that the captain is, like himself, “in sore trouble” and stands in “need” of his, Billy’s, “help” and supporting “strength” (LIB60). Billy invokes a blessing on the captain, once in private (“Starry Vere, God bless him – and the clouds darker than night for us both”, LIB60) and once in public, where his final benediction is echoed by the ship’s crew (LIB62). Yet the Epilogue makes it clear that Vere feels he has been “saved” and “blessed” not by God, but by Billy’s acceptance of his decision (“But he has saved me”, etc.), an acceptance granted despite that fact that Billy “knew” that Vere “could have saved him”. In what is effectively his account of the unseen interview, Vere casts Billy as a saviour; through their communion, “the love that passes understanding has come to me” (LIB63).¹³⁷

¹³⁶ The image of Abraham and Isaac which Melville employs at this point (BB102) might indicate that, in the novella, Vere does not feel the need to be pardoned by Billy because he is acting according to the directions of a higher authority (see discussion in section I.3.4. above). The librettists, however, did not retain this image; and since their Vere is depicted as personally and consciously responsible for the choice he makes, it seems quite logical that his role should suddenly change from a figure of authority into that of a human being in need of absolution.

¹³⁷ The latter phrase sounds biblical, although again it is not an exact quotation. Most closely related are Philippians 4:7: “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”, and Ephesians 3:19: “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (see also Mitchell 1952:400, footnote). To Whittall, the phrase “recall[s] [...] the familiar Anglican blessing” (1990:151); presumably that which is given after Holy Communion: “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and the love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (Book of Common Prayer). See also section II.2.4.2 for a discussion of Forster’s use of biblical language.

Vere's invocation, in the Epilogue, of the "sail in the storm, the far-shining sail", which makes Vere "content" because he has seen that the sail is "bound for" the "land where she'll anchor forever" (LIB63) is almost identical to the corresponding passage in Billy's monologue (LIB61). This textual parallel is suggestive of a parallel and very probably shared experience of emotional and spiritual significance. As has been observed before, the exact nature of the relationship between Billy and Vere remains open to interpretation; it can, however, be noted that through their communion, their different social positions have become meaningless, and that Vere considers himself the beneficiary of Billy's magnanimity.

In my preceding reflections, I have been ignoring the time shift between the main story and the Epilogue. While there can be little doubt that as we hear the Epilogue, Vere's statements do convey his recollection and interpretation of the events upon the *Indomitable*, and that at that moment, he is sure of having experienced at least a temporary salvation, there is evidence which suggests that this certainty may be new to him, and may only have arisen from a re-consideration of the story we have been shown. In the Prologue, Vere may be felt to express grief and remorse for some deed of the past ("O what have I done?"), yet he appears uncertain of what exactly the meaning of what he has "done" might be: "Confusion, so much is confusion" should probably be read as an expression of baffled helplessness, rather than as an attempt to exonerate himself. His sense of failure encompasses his (spiritual) leadership – he has "tried to guide others rightly", yet he has himself "been lost on the infinite sea" – as well as the state of his soul as an individual: "Who has blessed me? Who saved me?" (LIB7). It is only after the whole story has passed on the stage – and, it must be supposed, through Vere's mind – that the questions asked in the Prologue can be answered in the Epilogue. The question "O what have I done?" opens a partial recapitulation of the Prologue, but with important changes.¹³⁸ The "confusion" seems to have cleared since the word does not reoccur, which suggests that Vere is now able to realise what he has "done", and can grieve over it; at the same time, he is consoled by the knowledge that he has indeed been "saved" and "blessed" by Billy. He has been redeemed by the "love that passes understanding" from being "lost on the infinite sea", and his thoughts "can go back in peace" to the events upon the *Indomitable* because the salutary experience of Billy's love and understanding has shown him a spiritual meaningfulness in their personal connection – the "far-shining sail" (LIB63) which transcends the stormy sea of "Fate" (LIB61). It is highly probable, in fact, that, as Irene Morra has suggested, "Vere [...] does not achieve peace until after recalling the tale of Billy; it is not Billy's action which brings him the vision of the 'far-shining sail', but his own contemplation of past events" (2002:19).

At this point, it seems appropriate to return to the question of narrative perspective. There is some textual evidence which could be taken to imply that the

¹³⁸ The musical setting of the phrase "O what have I done?" itself is also minimally but significantly different in the Prologue and the Epilogue; see discussion in section II.6.8., p.448.

narrative presented to us is generated by a single controlling consciousness. This evidence is to be found in the shape of certain phrases which occur repeatedly in the libretto as a whole, but are spoken by different characters.¹³⁹ The most obvious example for this is Vere's echoing of Billy's words in the Epilogue (see above). Other important instances include Vere's complaint that there is "always some flaw in [the good], some defect [...], some stammer in the divine speech" (LIB7), elements of which reappear in the muster scene when Billy's stammer becomes evident: the sailing master comments that "he stammers. [...] There is always some flaw in them" (LIB16), and after Billy's farewell to the *Rights o' Man*, he observes that there is "always some defect" in the men they recruit (LIB17).

At the muster, Claggart declares that Billy is unique, and reinforces this statement with a reference to his own experience: "I have seen many men [...], sailed many seas" (LIB16). In the short monologue that follows this episode, he asks: "Have I never studied man and men's weaknesses?" (LIB18). Both these phrases are not only echoed by Vere, but even reappear in parallel speaking situations: when Vere contradicts the master-at-arms's accusation, he invokes his own long experience: "I have seen many men in my time" (LIB49). His declaration that he has "studied men and their ways" (LIB51) also occurs in a monologue. The textual link between Claggart and Vere is strengthened yet further through their repeated invocations of "beauty, handsomeness, goodness" (Claggart: Lib32f.; Vere: LIB53 and 58), as well as through the parallel structure of their identification of themselves and their situations as they prepare to proceed, each in their own way, with the destruction of Billy: "I, John Claggart, Master-at-Arms upon the *Indomitable*, have you in my power, and I will destroy you" (LIB33) and "I, Edward Fairfax Vere, captain of the *Indomitable*, lost with all hands on the infinite sea. I am the messenger of death!" (LIB58).

Vere is furthermore textually linked with the Novice and the crew through his use of the phrase "lost on the infinite sea" (LIB7, 58 and 63). This image can be seen to correspond with the Novice's and the crew's description of themselves as "lost for ever on the endless sea" of life governed by a cruel and arbitrary fate. Just as they refer to themselves as "broken" and "heart-broken" by the cruelty of the warship world (LIB19), Vere feels that his "heart" and his "life" are "broken" (LIB53) by the tragic consequences of Billy's act of violence. The Novice who is forced to tempt Billy prefigures the officers' acceptance of the necessity to destroy Billy: he resigns himself to his helplessness against the power of "fate", and, breaking down, accepts that he has "no choice" but to comply with Claggart's malignant designs (LIB34); the unhappy consciousness of having "no choice" but to condemn Billy forms the burden of the officers' thoughts during the trial scene (LIB56f.).

¹³⁹ This textual phenomenon of recurring phrases is also discussed by Law (esp. 301-305).

This pattern of word repetition strings could of course be regarded as a unifying and/or aesthetic device which operates on the highest level of textual organisation that governs both the opera's narrative frame (Prologue and Epilogue) and the opera's story itself. Similar to musical leitmotif technique, this phenomenon of verbal motivic return could be seen to reflect and clarify, but also to complicate, the structure of the text and the interplay of relations between the characters.¹⁴⁰ Yet if the narrative were regarded as proceeding from the aged Vere of the Prologue and Epilogue, another possible interpretation of this phenomenon would be that it betrays the shaping intelligence of Vere as narrator, who not only recounts the events as he believes them to have taken place, but who is interpreting and evaluating them at the same time in an attempt to bring some order into the "confusion" of the past. Moreover, as I have pointed out at the beginning of this section, if Vere is indeed the narrator of the story of *Billy Budd*, some of the scenes we have witnessed must necessarily be Vere's imagined version of the events, since he was not personally present at the time they took place.

Once it is agreed, however, that in the main part of the opera, it is Vere who is reconstructing the past and interpreting the story of *Billy Budd*, we are faced with a wide range of possible meanings for what we are shown, because Vere's version of the events which are passing before his inner eye will be coloured to a greater or lesser degree by his personal bias. The continuum of potential readings might thus reach from a conscious attempt at presenting a faithful, 'objective' account right across to the – possibly subconscious – creation of a meaningful pattern designed to appease his own persisting feelings of uncertainty and guilt about the decision he made.¹⁴¹ The latter scenario could, by another turn of the screw, be made to question, for instance, the validity of the representation of Billy on the eve of his execution as blithely content with his fate, and might, if taken to the extremes of interpretation, even turn the entire opera into a fantasy of reconciliation and forgiveness invented by an insane old Vere to free himself from the continuing torment of his guilty conscience.¹⁴²

While such a radical interpretation is not impossible to justify on the basis of the textual and musical evidence (see section I.5.3.3. below), it would result in a

¹⁴⁰ It should be remembered that Forster's fictional work shows extensive use of this kind of verbal leitmotif technique, and that some of the most important pan-Forsterian textual leitmotifs also appear in the *Billy Budd* libretto. See section II.3.

¹⁴¹ Focussing on Vere's "Scylla and Charybdis" and "I accept" monologues and on the Epilogue, Joe Law detects in Vere's speeches an "acute sense of responsibility" which seems to him to suggest "an involvement greater than that shown in the present version of the events"; this has led him to ask whether it is "possible that, for whatever reason, Vere is suppressing information" (309). Similarly, Arnold Whittall has remarked that "the epilogue of *Billy Budd* makes good sense if we regard the aged Vere as remembering only what he wants to remember" (1982:146).

¹⁴² While they do not go to that extreme, both Donald Mitchell and Arnold Whittall have advanced the idea of a circularity that could make the opera appear as Vere's "interminable self-interlocution" (Mitchell 1993:117): "No sooner has Vere finished telling the story and justifying his actions than, like some Ancient Mariner, he must begin again" (Whittall 1982:125f.).

subversion or even a total nullification of the final message of salvation as presented in the Epilogue. The theme of salvation, after all, can be seen to occupy a position of high structural importance within the opera: as Donald Mitchell remarked soon after the work's premiere, "the opera's frame [...] introduces and solves the tragedy from the spiritualising level which is the action's artistic *raison d'être*", the Epilogue especially being of "climactic importance" (1952:402f.)¹⁴³. It certainly seems extremely unlikely that the opera-makers themselves ever intended to produce a possibility for subverting the opera's theme of salvation to such an extreme degree. As Harold Farwell has noted, "all the evidence suggests that they were all either unaware or unconcerned with that final irony – the problem presented by the question of narrative credibility in the Epilogue" (34).¹⁴⁴

I.4.6. Further observations and conclusion

It has already been mentioned briefly in section I.4.1. above that the material which is contained in Ch. XXIV-XXVI of the novella, with the exception of the ballad "Billy in the Darbies", does not appear in the libretto. No further comments need be made on Ch. XXIV which contains the account of Vere's injury and subsequent demise, since the collaborators decided to change this course of events and let Vere appear as an old man in the narrative frame of Prologue and Epilogue. By making no attempt to incorporate the inverted as well as exaggerated representation of events given in the newspaper report (Ch. XXV), the librettists excluded any outside perspective which might go beyond that of Vere who closes the narrative frame. Leaving aside the question of whether it would have been at all possible to integrate this material into the plot structure, the omission suggests that the librettists had little interest in retaining the original text's implicit comments on the ambiguous nature of truth and the representation of truth, but wished to concentrate on those events which could be rendered dramatically. Even though Vere could, in the Epilogue, have been made to convey the information that Billy continued to be revered in a Christ-like fashion among the sailors (Ch. XXVI), it was evidently not the opera-makers' intention to foreground Christian symbolism to such a degree.

Owing to the large set-piece scenes and the additional dialogue, the *Indomitable's* crew have gained a far stronger presence in the libretto than they command in the novella. The opera arguably also contains more concrete evidence of the

¹⁴³ As Mitchell notes with characteristic acuteness, "That *Budd's* Prologue and Epilogue bear the titles they do is, in a sense, misleading: 'Epilogue', especially, severely underrates the piece's climactic importance" (1952:402).

¹⁴⁴ While some of Forster's short stories involve, or are deliberately constructed around, hidden meanings and undisclosed private experiences (e.g. "The Story of a Panic", "Other Kingdom", "The Curate's Friend", "The Life to Come" and "The Obelisk"), these are generally either resolved at the end, or the polarisation between those who share in a hidden meaning and those who do not is very clearly delineated.

crew's dissatisfaction with their situation than the novella. It should be noted, however, that discontent is not, as some critics appear to think, equivalent with "disaffection" (Cooke 1993b:36): there is no clear indication of any specifically mutinous sentiment or activity among the crew *before* the eve of Billy's execution, where "some reckon to rescue" Billy (LIB60), an impulse which Billy, however, rejects, and which is subsequently heard of no more (see section I.4.3. above). The opening of Act I, Sc. 1 establishes the oppressive brutality the men are subjected to on a daily basis. The crew apparently join in with Billy's valediction to the *Rights o' Man* as "the Chorus echoes Billy off stage" (LIB17, but see the discussion of musical perspective in section I.5.2. below), and a small chorus accompanies the Novice's Dirge which laments the hardship and suffering of life at sea and the men's spiritual forlornness (Act I, [42]+10). When the chase of the French frigate is abandoned, the crew voice a dejected frustration as they go "back to waiting" (LIB47). None of these utterances suggest a particularly mutinous disposition, however. After Billy's execution, a mutter begins among the crew and rises to an uproar, while "the whole wedged mass of faces turns in rebellion to the quarter-deck". Yet as in the novella, the officers order them "down", and the angry men "slowly obey the commands from force of habit and [...] disperse" (LIB62; compare BB115). It can be observed, then, that although the crew are presented in more detail than in the novella, their fundamental disposition of passively resigned fatalism and obedience ultimately remains unchanged.

It is obvious that the rich web of imagery, allegory and metaphor which is unfolded by the novella's narrator to describe Billy – and also Claggart, Vere and the rest of the crew – has been much reduced with the disappearance of the narrator's voice. However, this does not mean that all traces of poetic structures which are open to interpretation – and thus capable of producing ambiguity – are entirely absent from the text. At the end of section I.4.5., I have discussed the re-appearance of certain key phrases, spoken by different characters, throughout the libretto, and the possibilities this phenomenon opens for different interpretations of the libretto as a whole.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore (to give just one other example), the meeting of Billy and Vere in the closeted interview, arguably the major spiritual and structural climax at the centre of the opera, is not itself rendered dramatically – a treatment which parallels its purely speculative presentation in the novella (see section I.5.4. below). Its precise content can therefore only be inferred retrospectively from Billy's and Vere's utterances which hint at its effect. Yet the language of these monologues is allusive and inconclusive enough to leave the question of the precise nature of their communion open to interpretation.

¹⁴⁵ The *Billy Budd* libretto can thus be seen to resist Sandra Corse's model of the libretto as a text "stripped of many of the elements that make them seem literary": in her model, which is derived from linguistic theory, "poetic or literary language [...] produces patterns of repetition, symmetry" and "ambiguity" which "invite[...] interpretation" (14). The leitmotivic structures in the *Billy Budd* libretto can be seen to extend precisely this kind of invitation.

It has furthermore become clear that the figures of Billy, Claggart and Vere have been changed in small but significant points which make them differ to a certain extent from Melville's original characters: the main alterations being Billy's increased articulateness and intellectual insight, Claggart's hatred which is now seen to arise from his inability to love Billy, and Vere's inner conflict and feelings of remorse which serve to turn him into a tragic figure. My reading of the opera's three main characters and my examination of the libretto drafts in Part Three of this study can be seen to challenge Irene Morra's rather curious claim that "assertions of Billy's homosexual appeal or of Claggart and Vere's erotic desire for Billy [...] are not immediately supported by the opera itself" but "can be derived only from studying manuscripts of earlier libretti which were eventually discarded" (2002:19).¹⁴⁶

The libretto analyses I have conducted in this section demonstrate that assessments like that made by James Fougousse in 1975 are not tenable: to Fougousse, "all of the modifications" made to Melville's story by the librettists "amount to nothing more than a radical simplification of the original so that it could be assimilated into a dramatic musical form" (141). Neither can the figure of Billy be said to have remained essentially unchanged "in every important respect" (Cooke 1993c:32f.). Rather, I have been able to show that some of the modifications introduced by the collaborators do significantly affect and even complicate the interpretation of the story as a whole. The adaptive process has clearly resulted in a transformation of the original text, and must therefore, as most other critics have variously observed, be regarded as more than a mere simplification of plot and characters.

¹⁴⁶ To Morra, "the libretto as it stands is far from specific in its promotion of a consistently identifiable homosexual theme" (2007:109), but as I have demonstrated, it is just as possible to perform a reading of the opera that focuses on the homoerotic potential which colours the relations between the characters as it is possible to perform such a reading on Melville's novella.

I.5. Musical structures: yet another inside narrative

I.5.1. Leitmotifs, narrative voice, and narrative perspective

My analyses in section I.4. have shown that the libretto of *Billy Budd* can justly be described as a challenge for the composer. Apart from the fact that the story's spiritual and structural climax in the hidden interview between Billy and Vere – a climax upon which the discourse about salvation can be seen to pivot – remains dramatically unrealised, there are undercurrents of meaning created by recurring verbal utterances that can be seen to function as a network of textual leitmotifs linking certain characters and situations. It only seems fitting, therefore, that Britten's response to such material should have produced an equally complex musical structure of tonal, thematic and motivic relationships. The following enquiries into the music of *Billy Budd* will necessarily have to be far from exhaustive, and will be restricted to the presentation of a few exemplary features.

Musical leitmotifs are generally understood to acquire their special status as meaningful referential gestures through alliance with a specific verbal utterance from which they receive a semantic charge. To mark this alliance, they can appear either as the sung melodic line that carries the word(s) in question, or as a recurring accompaniment for a specific word or phrase. However, as Philip Rupprecht points out, it is “return” which “is central to motivic identity, no matter how forceful the semantic trappings of an initial appearance”. Motivic return in different dramatic contexts may lead to any one musical motif acquiring a whole net-

work of different associations which may become “mutually explanatory” in the integrated consideration of the work as a whole (Rupprecht 85f.). Thanks to their semantic charge, leitmotifs can comment, confirm or contradict the action, and they can create non-linear associations of events or ideas which are not contained in the textual dimension of the drama. Once a musical motif is thus established, moreover, it may well begin to acquire an autonomous life as part of the non-verbal, musical discourse unfolded by the narrative ‘voice’ of the orchestra, which, so most theorists of opera agree, fulfils a role not dissimilar to that of a literary narrator.

Building on the theoretical work done on music as narrative by Edward T. Cone, Carolyn Abbate and others, Michael Halliwell comes to the conclusion that “opera is a diegetic rather than a mimetic art form” (1999:152), with “the synthesis of all the elements on the stage (visual, musical, verbal)” figuring as “the product of the operatic equivalent of the implied author in fiction”. Analogously to fictional characters, who “are the direct result of a narrative act performed by a narrator”, the operatic characters can be viewed as “the result of an act of narration by the orchestra-narrator” (142). To Halliwell, therefore, the fact that Claggart’s distinctive music also appears in Vere’s musical utterances is symptomatic of “the agency of the [orchestra-]narrator which provides this link between them, an illustration of Cone’s argument¹⁴⁷ that operatic characters ‘quote’ their utterances within the narratorial ‘diegesis’, rather than being ‘free agents’” (150).

Philip Rupprecht takes these reflections a step further in his investigations of a narrative point of view that is capable of shifting (106-137). “Transposed” from literary prose “to the operatic stage, narrative point of view might find an obvious manifestation in the orchestral music accompanying the staged action”, but within that manifestation, Rupprecht suggests, there is room for further manoeuvring: “The key to an operatic point of view would appear to lie in the ‘distance’ – if any – perceptible to an audience between a singing character who is verbally articulate and a wordless orchestral utterance more or less freighted with leitmotivic references pertaining to actions on the stage” (110). While Rupprecht’s investigations are focused mainly on the trial scene, the issue of “distance” also becomes of interest in the interpretation of, for instance, Vere’s reaction to Claggart’s denunciation of Billy in Act II, Sc. 1 (see discussion in section II.6.8.).

Halliwell, like numerous other critics, takes the opera’s framing device of Prologue and Epilogue to indicate that “the action of the opera” is to be viewed “through [Vere’s] eyes”. Yet he complicates this view by pointing out that “opera differs fundamentally here from both drama and the novel in being able to portray a character both dramatically reliving a past moment and having the narrator (the orchestra) comment on that character’s emotions as he relives them” (1999:138). Rupprecht’s analyses similarly lead him to consider that “the orchestra may be

¹⁴⁷ See Cone 13.

understood as providing access to Vere's consciousness" during his testimony at the trial (Rupprecht 105). Yet at the same time the "orchestral voice" which fills the trial scene with "a breathless concatenation" of leitmotifs all pointing to past events involving Claggart "could signal the speaking presence of an orchestral narrator *recounting* the dead man's exploits", thus "connot[ing] an ordering agency beyond the viewpoint of any one character on stage". Accordingly, Rupprecht sees the closeted interview as "the apotheosis of that narrative orchestral viewpoint that governs ritornelli throughout the trial scene" (129f.).

The orchestral narrative voice can be seen to provide an additional, and occasionally independent, level of non-verbal but meaningful discourse that can have a considerable impact on the interpretation of the musico-dramatic entity. Thus, the Mist interlude which follows Vere's confrontation with Claggart in Act II, Sc. 1 ([50]-[57]) could be interpreted as a – mediated or unmediated – glimpse into Vere's thought processes, or it could, following Rupprecht, again be regarded as a narrative proceeding from a superior "ordering agency" (129):

The interlude [...] is less directly a depiction of a mental process than a consideration, by an *independent* orchestral voice, of the forces in play. Its sounding narrative is focalised 'around' Vere, but this is not that [*sic*] same thing as offering a direct revelation of his state. Reporting the crisis he faces in the form of a struggle among referential themes, the interlude exploits to the full an orchestra's potential for contrapuntal simultaneity [...]. The Mist interlude – an utterance of metaphysical significance – speaks of Vere's situation, but in a manner clearly separate from his own on-stage singing. (113)

It is at moments like these, Rupprecht contends, that "the opera orchestra intervenes with the authority and distinctive voice of a narrator" (115).

I.5.2. "A family of motivic shapes": the Mutiny "cluster"

Many of the musical themes and motifs of *Billy Budd* do not show a fixed, unambiguous relationship between melodic shape and semantic content, so that, rather than try to determine a single meaning for each of the numerous shapes in which a theme may appear, one is practically forced to identify clusters of ideas with the multiple variants of each theme. The most prominent instance of this phenomenon is probably the motif of a rising fifth followed by a rising semitone or tone, identified by scholars and critics from the earliest days onward as designating "mutiny, suspected or real" (Stein 210; see also A. Porter 115). This shorthand designation can be widened to embrace "repression, rebellion and mutiny" (Cooke 1993a:1), the so-called Mutiny motif appearing as it does as the work song of the crew, as the dreaded memory of "Spithead, the Nore, the floating republic" (Act I, [67]+1), and during the Novice's attempt to bribe Billy into mutiny. However, the Mutiny motif also occurs in a number of more ambiguous contexts, and can be

assigned to words which are not immediately connected with the concept of mutiny *per se*. Thus, for example, it carries Vere's agonised questions of "O what have I done" in the Prologue and Epilogue (Act I, [3]+2 and Act II, [142]). The motif and its different appearances are shown in Appendix A, Figures 1 and 2. In section II.6.8., I examine the interpretive implications of some of its more ambiguous and less-noted appearances.

In his discussion of "motive and narrative in *Billy Budd*", Philip Rupprecht, investigating the interactive processes and functions among such "famil[ies] of motivic shapes" (75), demonstrates that in certain cases, such as that of the Mutiny "cluster", a "core" of "relatively simple meanings" becomes, through "mutually explanatory" motivic return, the centre of a whole network of other meanings as the opera progresses (85f.). Furthermore, Rupprecht proposes that the "events" which are "'tagged' by a Mutiny motif" can be viewed as "a distinctive configuration – a plot – rather than a mere sequence of actions". He concludes from this that leitmotifs are "crucial to the possibility of narrative in opera" (86ff.).

The components and/or stages of this musically delineated "plot", which can be seen to match the "main plot events" (Rupprecht 88) of the story as told in the libretto, are worth examining in greater detail. The Mutiny motif is prefigured in the Prologue in Vere's self-interrogation "O what have I done" and in his "confusion", which can be regarded as a slightly expanded melodic variant of the same motif ([3]+2). It reappears in Act I, Sc. 1 as the work song of the crew ([5]) and as Billy's "farewell" to his old ship, the *Rights o' Man* ([33]; see discussion below). It receives its name-defining semantic charge in Act I, Sc. 2, where it appears sung by the officers, representing the idea of "the floating republic" associated with the Spithead and Nore mutinies ([67]+1), and the political creed of "the 'rights o' man'" ([71]-4). After this, the motif links the Novice's attempted bribery,¹⁴⁸ Claggart's accusation to Vere in Act II, Sc. 1, and Vere's refusal to believe him,¹⁴⁹ and Claggart's accusation of Billy in Act II, Sc. 2.¹⁵⁰ As early as 1952, Erwin Stein (214) pointed out that the very theme which characterises Claggart's line "William Budd, I accuse you" ([66] and parallel textual occurrences in this passage), and which first appears as Claggart enters the captain's cabin to accuse Billy (strings at [64]), can be understood as a variant of the mutiny theme disguised by coloration.¹⁵¹ An expanded version of the same melodic line later becomes the ritornello which opens ([80]), repeatedly punctuates, and, in its inverted form, closes the trial

¹⁴⁸ Act I, Ob. and C.A. at [117].

¹⁴⁹ Tr. 1 and 2 at [40]; C.A. and Bass Cl. at [41]; retrograde in Vere's vocal line: "Strange story", [43]-7; Tuba, Vc. and Db. at [43], and Claggart's vocal line at [44]-1: "Pleasant looks, good temper!" See also section II.6.8.

¹⁵⁰ Vla. and Vc. at [66]+7; Claggart: "rights of man" at [66]+8; another variant appears in Claggart's vocal line "to bribe your comrades", supported by Alto Sax. and Hn., at [67].

¹⁵¹ See also Rupprecht 86f. and Appendix A, Figure 1. The characteristic features of a rising fifth and further rising semitone (occupied by crotchets, the longest note values of the phrase) form the resting points of this melodic line.

scene ([88]); it also reappears in the brief orchestral interlude or recapitulation that precedes Vere's aria "I accept their verdict" (harp at [96]). Billy is sentenced to death, which arouses mutinous sentiments among the crew. When he comes to see Billy in the night, the Dansker announces the atmosphere of unrest among some of the men with the Mutiny motif: "They swear you shan't swing" ([110]-6). The fugato which begins after the hanging ([133]), and which symbolises the rising anger of the crew, appropriately takes the Mutiny motif as its theme, but is transformed back into its old shape, the crew's work song from Act I, Sc. 1, as the uprising is suppressed ([138]).

A variant of the Mutiny motif also appears, as an intervallic constellation of fifth plus tone, in the signal of trumpets, flutes and violins which consistently represents the power of authority and naval discipline (first occurrence at Act I, [10]; see Appendix A, Figure 1).¹⁵² Although Rupprecht does not include the Naval Discipline variant in the Mutiny "cluster" of motivic shapes, it can nevertheless be integrated into the "Mutiny"-tagged plot" (88) he delineates. The Naval Discipline motif is, of course, primarily noticeable in its straightforward onstage function of ordering the movements of the crew. Thus, it punctuates the manoeuvres in Act I, Sc. 1, and signals the changing of the watch (Act I, [52]) and the call to action at the sighting of the French frigate (Act II, [7]). Yet on a more abstract level, the motif can also be shown to mark the manifestations of the repressive force of naval authority which recognises and seeks to control the threat of mutiny, and strives to maintain its dominance over the men who are subject to its power. This function is revealed most clearly in the Epilogue, where the motif is heard as Vere refers to the fact that "earthly laws silenced" the men who knew that he "could have saved" Billy ([142]-1). The motif also figures in its repressive function when the officers give orders to "clear the decks" after Billy's farewell to the "*Rights o' Man*" (Act I, [34]); it is heard at Claggart's and the corporals' interruption of the fight between Billy and Squeak (Act I, [98]); and it is employed when the officers restore order and discipline after the near-mutiny in Act II, Sc. 4 ([136]+4 and [137]).¹⁵³

¹⁵² Andrew Porter identified this motif as the "wind in the rigging" theme" in 1952 (115); however, its appearance, not only below decks in Act I, Sc. 3, but at all moments at which naval discipline is enforced (with one exception at the end of Act I, Sc. 1, but see note 153 below) leaves no doubt as to its structural function, and subsequent authors invariably identify it with naval discipline (see, for instance, Cooke 1993d:91).

¹⁵³ The motif of repressive naval discipline does *not* appear at the end of Act I, Sc. 1, where it might logically be expected to appear as the Bosun interrupts an unauthorised (and therefore potentially threatening) gathering and orders the men to "get below decks" ([60]+4ff.). A possible explanation for this non-appearance may lie in the fact that this section of the scene is the product of the cuts made during the 1960 revisions. Instead of the present discussion and praise of Captain Vere (starting at [56]-5), the passage originally used to contain a Captain's Muster in which Vere addresses the crew (see section III.2.6). This "grand opera set piece" (Reed 1993b:79), which formed the triumphant conclusion of what was at that time Act I, ends in repeated *tutti* shouts of "Starry Vere" ([67]-3ff. of the four-act score). Britten reworked this passage – which was not

If the “central abstract concept” (Rupprecht 88) denoted by the Mutiny motif is viewed as a threat of social destabilisation or disintegration (“mutiny”), it seems only logical that the sign which represents the attempt to control and prevent this disintegration, i.e. the Naval Discipline motif, should itself contain the intervallic seed, as it were, of the dreaded event.¹⁵⁴ In my examination of the opera’s discourses about “mutiny” as encoded discourses about destabilising homoerotic desire (section II.6.8.), I return to this discussion of destabilisation, disintegration, and the mechanisms of repression as made traceable by the Mutiny motif, arguing that these phenomena can be observed at work on the ‘private’ level of the characters’ individual psychology as well as on the ‘public’ level of naval discipline and social control.

Using a Peircean semiotic model to analyse the functioning of leitmotif technique, Rupprecht examines the question of whose “consciousness” might be “apprehending” the musical and/or verbal signifier and associating it with a specific signified. He shows that it is possible to differentiate between cases in which the leitmotif is apprehended by the audience while the character on the stage remains “deaf to themes presented by the orchestra”, and cases of “phenomenological on-stage ‘hearing’”, in which “an audience’s reception of a given motif may be mediated by a character’s on-stage relation to musical ideas”, i.e. in which the motif may be perceived ‘through’ a character’s mediating consciousness (89f.).

Rupprecht’s “Peircean view of leitmotivic semiosis” (89) is able to account for the otherwise puzzling fact that Billy’s exuberant valediction to his old ship, the “*Rights o’ Man*”, is delivered to the tune of the crew’s work song – a tune shaped by the Mutiny motif – even though in the on-stage course of events, Billy cannot have heard the crew’s song since it vanishes from the aural scene before the

originally interrupted by the Bosun – in 1960. Rather than introduce the Naval Discipline motif, he seems to have thought it more important at the time to retain the quaver and semiquaver figures alternating between C and D (strings at [60]+5) which accompany the rising pentatonic figures that characterise “*Starry Vere*” throughout the passage (starting from [60]+2 but also prefigured in the strings at [55] as Claggart orders the men to get aloft), and which are also used in the final bars of the scene to lead up to the music of Sc. 2. The Naval Discipline motif, with its piercing timbre and its root of B flat, would have interrupted the tonal and melodic environment of the scene, and disturbed the gradual calming of the atmosphere which now prevails there, far more violently than the present solution (note, for instance, the deployment of the flute parts at [60]+5, which in the present arrangement move in a region more than two octaves below that of the Naval Discipline motif and thus blend into the prevalent low range of the other instruments). This explanation would be in accordance with Reed’s suggestion that the Captain’s Muster was omitted from the two-act version to avoid “too great a musical climax rather early in the opera” (1993b:79).

¹⁵⁴ Viewed in this light, the frequent appearances of the Naval Discipline motif might be read as a parallel to Melville’s narrator’s reminder that, although upon the *Indomitable*, “an ordinary observer” (BB36) might notice no signs of tension, the officers still had good reason “to apprehend some return of trouble sporadic or general” (BB35), since the period following “the suppressed insurrections” was “very critical to naval authority” (BB88): “in view of recent events prompt action should be taken at the first palpable sign of recurring insubordination” (BB76).

boarding party reaches the ship.¹⁵⁵ Using Rupprecht's concept of a mediated musical perspective, it could be concluded that if Billy's "Farewell" ([33]-3ff.) appears in the shape of the Mutiny motif, what the audience hear is mediated through the perception of Billy's onstage 'audience', to wit, the *Indomitable's* officers and, possibly, her crew. For, to the officers' ears, the words "rights o' man" (Act I, [71]-4) suggest, not the name of Billy's old ship, but the Spithead and Nore mutineers' subversive political ideas of "the floating republic" (Act I, [67]+1) – in a word, mutiny. What the audience hear is in fact the officers' *interpretation* of Billy's words; the music can here be seen to give an immediate, audible rendition of the misunderstanding that is explained by the novella's narrator (BB22), thus suggesting "the presence of a narrative viewpoint within the opera's thematic discourse, distinct from the utterances of those on stage" (Rupprecht 90).

While Rupprecht provides a similar interpretation of the officers' recollection of this event in Act I, Sc. 2, he does not account for the shape of "the cry they *heard* for themselves" as it occurs in Sc. 1, commenting only that "Billy's use" of the Mutiny motif "cannot [...] be understood as proof that he himself heard the chorus's worksong" (89f.). Instead, he points out that

Billy's adoption of the Mutiny motive for his 'Rights o' Man' cry [...] may not reflect his own hearing of the chorus, but their wordless imitation at this point does suggest that *they*, at least, *hear him*, and it is this musical affinity between Billy and the chorus that immediately draws the officers' attention to Billy as a mutiny threat. (312, n.26)

The score could indeed be seen to support the notion that Billy's cry is 'heard' by the chorus, and, possibly, heard and (mis)interpreted by the ship's crew, whom the chorus might be felt to represent at this point. It should be noted, however, that Billy's cry, and with it, the appearance of the Mutiny motif, *precedes* the entry of the chorus by a complete phrase ([33]), while the entry of the off-stage chorus only minimally precedes that of the officers ([33]+2). Not only does this sequential ordering suggest that it is Billy's words which the officers react to, but it might even be argued that the chorus of men wordlessly echoing the Mutiny motif *from off-stage* is not actually 'heard' by anyone on-stage, but merely represents the officers' fear that the crew might be incited to mutiny by the dangerous new recruit. If this were the case, the "narrative viewpoint within the opera's thematic discourse" (Rupprecht 99) could at this moment be seen to approximate the thoughts of the officers. At the same time, the diverse interpretive possibilities offered by this short passage alone demonstrate that any musical "narrative viewpoint", located as it is in non-verbal leitmotivic structures, will always remain indefinite and ambiguous.

¹⁵⁵Act I, [15] marks the approach of the returning cutter, by which time even the orchestral residue of the work song that starts at [14] has faded away (see also Rupprecht 90).

The reflections in this section have demonstrated that through the autonomous use of leitmotifs, the orchestra may at times take on a function similar to that of an affirming or undercutting narrative voice. In its use of multivalent leitmotif structures full of semantically uncertain allusions, the effect produced by this orchestral ‘voice’ could be regarded as a structural analogy to that generated by Melville’s narrator: both narrative voices may be felt to convey a sense of uncertainty and mystery, with hidden meanings hinted at but never made definite. It seems only fitting that it should be this purely orchestral narrative voice which is employed to hint at “the sacrament” of Billy’s and Vere’s communion in the closeted interview, which, being a mystery of a sort only “seldom if in any case revealed to the gadding world” (BB102), can neither be told nor, so the opera-makers’ decisions imply, depicted on the stage. I shall return to a discussion of this singular scene in section I.5.4. below.

I.5.3. Musical presences of the main characters: a brief overview

I.5.3.1. Billy

Billy’s musical presence is associated with lively wind arpeggios, often featuring two neighbouring major chords a tone apart, as in the flutes’ foreshadowing of Billy’s arrival in Act I, Sc. 1 ([15]), or in the piccolo interjections in the opening bars of Act II, Sc. 3. Philip Brett has remarked that “this series of rising arpeggios” suggests the “slightly aggressive side of Billy’s goodness” (1984:139f).¹⁵⁶ Brett furthermore points out that the opening theme of Act II, which later, during the frigate chase, becomes the crew’s hopeful battle song (“This is our moment”, [26]), consists of the same “arpeggios on triads a tone apart” which are associated with Billy’s liveliness and energy. To Brett, this “suggest[s] psychologically that this moment of unity is a product as much of Billy’s influence as of the excitement of the chase” (140), an “influence” which he sees as harking back to the idea of Billy as the “fighting peacemaker” (BB20) that features in Melville’s novella. However, since the crew’s battle song later appears in a distorted version as their hopes are disappointed by the mist (a development which is arguably unrelated with Billy), I would be inclined to regard Billy’s arpeggios and the ‘battle’ theme in the Rupprechtian sense as the varied manifestations of another “central abstract concept” (88), a governing idea of lively, possibly even aggressive, energetic activity. Such a view could be seen to account both for Billy’s personal association with this motif and for its domination of the frigate chase sequence.

Britten’s realisation of Billy’s fatal stammer in the confrontation with Claggart contains what can be regarded as a characteristically ingenious yet simple musical manifestation of the Devil’s “little card” (BB28) in the shape of the tritone interval,

¹⁵⁶ Brett’s opinion corresponds with Forster’s view of Billy as expressed in *Aspects of the Novel*; see section II.5.3.3.

traditionally known as the *'diabolus in musica'*. The vocalised onset of Billy's stammer is C sharp (Act II, [69]-1), a note prefigured in the *ppp* trills of the wind instruments' 'musical stammering' which represents his total speechlessness from the end of Claggart's accusation onwards ([68]). The strings and trumpets provide the main harmonic accompaniment for this passage, moving from a brilliant D Major ("William Budd, answer!", [68]+1) through a more muted B minor ("Defend yourself!", [68]+3f.) to an ambiguous thirdless G with a major seventh. The downward sequence of the strings' root notes (D – B – G) and the descent from clearness to ambiguity seem to convey a sense of something – possibly Vere's confident expectations – going awry; by its final note, G, which forms the lower note of the tritone, the C sharp stammer, re-emphasised by Billy's entry, at last stands revealed as the diabolic imperfection that makes Billy vulnerable.

I.5.3.2. Claggart

The highly distinctive musical presence of John Claggart is characterised by a composite configuration of leitmotifs, orchestral timbre and specific keys; the elements of this configuration may, however, appear independently from one another, and it can be seen that each of these constituent parts of Claggart's musical personality may emphasise a slightly different aspect of his nature, or the more abstract phenomenon of the power of evil he embodies. The heavy low wind chords which announce Claggart's presence on the stage are easily recognised by any listener.¹⁵⁷ His entries and utterances are moreover often marked by a slowing down of the prevailing tempo.¹⁵⁸ Orchestral timbre and tempo leave no doubt that this is the villain of the piece, and indeed this musical portrayal of him as "slow and fierce" (Act I, [20]) might be felt to hark back to "the measured step and calm collected air" and the "mesmeric glance" of Melville's Claggart, the terrifying "uncatalogued creature[...] of the deep" (BB82f.), with his "low musical voice" (BB51).

Philip Rupprecht has observed that

the elusiveness of the literary Claggart [...] finds expression in the shifting harmonic and tonal manoeuvres that animate the Master-at-Arms's operatic presence. Britten's Claggart, like Melville's, is a figure of deceit, one who traps the innocent Billy by concealing his true 'nature' (90f.).

Rupprecht provides a detailed analysis of Claggart's musical "deceit", achieved in the shape of a musical "mask" (96) of "euphonious triadic consonance" (94) which stands in audible contrast to "the more chromatic brand of triadicism set-

¹⁵⁷ Most typically, Claggart's chords are played by bassoon and double bassoon, trombones, and tuba, reinforced by the double basses; other instruments, such as trumpets, may be employed to, for instance, sharpen the timbre into an aggressive outbreak as that which precedes Claggart's comment "Let him crawl!" (Act I, [42]-4).

¹⁵⁸ See, for instance, Act I, [20]-5; Act II, [4] and parallel situation at [38]; entry at [64]; and [66]-2.

ting his private thoughts” (96). Claggart’s “mask”, suggesting a musical version of Melville’s “glittering satire of a guise¹⁵⁹” (BB70), can be heard as Claggart, talking to the officers in Act I, Sc. 1, praises Billy as “a find in a thousand” (Tbne. and Tuba at [29]+4 through [30]). The “mask” also recurs in Claggart’s two direct encounters with Billy (“Look after your dress”, [55]-4, and “Handsomely done”, [101]), which are in fact musical echoes of Claggart’s first comment; and its chords can also be heard as Claggart denounces Billy to Vere in Act II, Sc. 1.

Claggart’s melodic lines often feature a motif of two falling fourths plus rising tone or semitone (see Appendix A, Figure 3). This motif, also encountered in its inverted form, appears to express the master-at-arms’s generally evil, proud, cynical and sadistic nature which is full of hatred for his environment and of which others must beware. A poignant example is his response to the news that the flogged Novice “cannot walk”: “Let him crawl” (Act I, [42]-2).¹⁶⁰ Others are also heard using Claggart’s falling fourths when speaking of him: thus, for instance, at the end of Act I, Sc. 3, the Dansker warns Billy that “Jemmy Legs is down on you” ([123]+9); this portentous variant of Claggart’s motif continues as an orchestral *ostinato* throughout the rest of the scene.¹⁶¹ Claggart’s fourths-plus-semitone-or-tone motif, as many critics have noted, continues to be heard even after Claggart’s demise, especially in Vere’s vocal utterances (see my discussion of Vere’s musical convergence with Claggart in section I.5.3.3. below).

There is another characteristic musical feature associated mainly with Claggart, namely, a widely-spaced F minor chord with a characteristic timbre, which, as Clifford Hindley has correctly observed, is heard at moments “when Claggart’s venom is embroiling, or about to embroil, others in senseless suffering” (1994:103ff.). It occurs most prominently at the end of Claggart’s central aria as he vows to “destroy” Billy (Act I, [111]-7); earlier, it accompanies his merciless comment on the suffering Novice: “Let him crawl” ([42]-1). It also features as he lashes at the stumbling boy in Act I, Sc. 3 (“Look where you go”, [102]+1), and as he strikes the resisting Novice, exclaiming “Good! What is goodness to you? Good – Good –”, etc. ([113]+8). I fully agree with Hindley’s proposal that in *Billy*

¹⁵⁹ The word “guise” is in fact capitalised in Weaver’s 1928 edition (Melville 1928:279), but not in the 1924 edition (Melville 1924:60); it presumably alludes to Henri de Guise, a “conspiratorial” member “of the French ducal family” (Hayford/Sealts 1962b:172). Plomer’s lower-case rendition may have suggested a *disguise* to Britten and his librettists.

¹⁶⁰ A first orchestral statement of this motif appears in the opening bars of the Prologue (Tr. and Tbne. at [1]-4). Claggart uses the motif in his first sung utterance when he tells the officers “I am at your disposal” ([20]-1); it also occurs, sometimes in inverted form, in his brief aria “I heard, your honour”, in which he demands “Do they think I’m deaf?” ([36]-2). Further appearances in Act I include [38]-14: “Let me finish”, [55]+1: “Get those men aloft”, [102]+1: “Look where you go!”, and [113]+8: “What is goodness to you?”

¹⁶¹ In Act I, Sc. 1, Donald and the Dansker use Claggart’s motif when warning Billy against the master-at-arms: “That’s the one to study” ([55]+7), “Billy, be warned, keep clear of him” ([55]+13). When Claggart strikes the Novice, the latter pleads with him: “don’t hurt me again” ([113]+10).

Budd, the key of F minor generally symbolises “malign fate”, and that “the spaced F-minor chord in particular serves to underline actions that are instrumental in bringing such fated suffering into the lives of others” (1994:105). At the same time, the appearance of the chord as Claggart reacts with almost incoherent rage to the Novice’s refusal to betray the “good” Billy might be taken to indicate that Claggart himself is also subject to this “fated suffering”.¹⁶² For if F minor stands for “the rule of malign fate” (Hindley 1994:105), we should remember that according to the novella, it is, after all, by “fate and ban” (BB70) that Claggart, “apprehending the good, but powerless to be it” (BB59), is prevented from loving Billy, and that the libretto can be seen to have elevated the idea of Claggart’s painful exclusion from love, as evoked by “beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness”, to a position of central importance.

I.5.3.3. Vere

Vere’s musical presence also comprises a number of distinctive musical features, but it is complicated by numerous instances of musical material ‘shared’ with other characters – a phenomenon which is commonly taken to establish a web of relationships between Vere and those characters, and which offers some quite momentous interpretive possibilities (see below). The bitonality which is a characteristic feature of the whole opera is very much linked with the Vere of the Prologue and Epilogue, just as a certain tonal ambiguity appears to be associated with his personality as we first encounter him at the opening of Act I, Sc. 2: the music which describes the evening atmosphere in the captain’s cabin is calm and contemplative, but full of unresolved suspensions.¹⁶³ Its bitonal texture is foreshadowed at a significant moment in the crew’s talk about Vere at the end of Act I, Sc. 1: “He cares for us like we are his sons” ([58]+6). If bitonality were to be associated with ambivalence, this passage might point to feelings of uncertainty among the crew; yet in view of their enthusiasm for their captain it seems more likely that

¹⁶² Hindley deliberately does not include the first occurrence of the spaced F-minor chord among his examples; it appears as Claggart voices his contempt of the officers (Act I, [36]-1: “Do they think I’m deaf?”). This is indeed no very clear instance of “Claggart’s venom [...] about to embroil [...] others in senseless suffering” (Hindley 1994:103ff.); at best, the fact that Claggart will employ his corporals to have Billy watched (and otherwise persecuted) might be counted as an indirect threat to Billy. If, on the other hand, Claggart can be subject to the “fated suffering” (Hindley 1994:105) symbolised by the spaced F minor chord, it is arguably his pain and resentment at feeling himself unappreciated by the officers that might cause this chord to be heard at this point.

¹⁶³ Thus, for instance, the scene’s opening string chord could either be interpreted as two minor triads a tone apart, D-F-A and E-G-H, or as the dominant G major, with suspended sixth, seventh and ninth, to the harp’s suggestion of a resolution to C in the second bar; yet the orchestral chord remains unresolved all the while and progresses independently to another, even more ambiguous constellation in the fourth bar.

the music's narrative voice is hinting at some equivocal quality in the military commander Vere's paternal affection for his subordinates.¹⁶⁴

When the crew praise Vere at the end of Act I, Sc. 1, they do this in rising pentatonic figures (first heard at [56]-3). The same rising major pentatonic scale features in Vere's prayers for "light", "to guide us all" in Act I, Sc. 2 ([63]-5), and "to separate evil from good" in Act II, Sc. 1 ([50]-2). It also appears, however, in Claggart's central aria as he plans the destruction of "beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness": "Having seen you, what choice remains to me". In what seems like an illustration of the distorting influence of evil, his question turns awry at the top, the melodic line dipping to add a tritone to the intervallic content of the pentatonic scale that has been accumulating as a chord among the accompanying brass instruments (Act I, [107]-4). This shared pentatonic scale, just like the numerous other instances of melodic material shared by Claggart and Vere, presents an interpretive puzzle. "Why", as Peter Evans and many others have wondered, "should Claggart, in wrestling with his love-hatred for Billy, introduce Vere's formula at the words 'Having seen you, what choice remains to me?'" (167). Given the other contexts in which the rising pentatonic scale appears, it might be possible to view its various appearances as, again, the manifestations of a single "central abstract concept" (Rupprecht 88), one which involves a basic desire for goodness. This view could account for the fact that this motif carries the crew's adoration of "Starry Vere", as well as Vere's prayers, and Claggart's contemplation of the consequences he must draw, "having seen", and in some way desired, "the light" of "beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness".

A descending hemitonic pentatonic scale poignantly characterises the lyrical tune of the Novice's Dirge (Act I, alto sax. at [42]). In section I.4.5. above I have discussed the textual link between Vere and the Novice, who are both "lost" at "sea"; the music, too, emphasises a connection between them. However, the relationship between these two characters, as articulated musically in the pentatonic scales respectively associated with them, would seem to be one of alternatives, embodied by a clearly marked difference in key and mode (C Major/ F minor), as well as scale type, rather than one of exactly inverted mirroring.¹⁶⁵ This musical

¹⁶⁴ I discuss the problematic implications of Vere's paternalism, viewed in the light of Forsterian narrative patterns, in sections II.3.10.3. through II.3.10.5.

¹⁶⁵ There has been a trend in recent criticism of the opera to base readings of Vere on the claim that the saxophone theme of the Novice's Dirge *is* just such an exactly inverted mirroring. This claim can be traced back to Carpenter's biography of Britten (290), which, in turn, cites from a 1952 article by Erwin Stein, who wrote that "Vere's motif [...] is the exact inversion of the motif of the lament" (211). Stein's much-quoted (but apparently seldom verified) diagnosis is inaccurate, insofar as the alto saxophone's descending pentatonic scale is hemitonic, i.e. features minor seconds, while the ascending major pentatonic of "Starry Vere" is an anhemitonic scale. I would insist that whatever the fine points of scale theory, the *audible* effect of this difference in intervallic content is one of transformative relatedness, rather than of "exact inversion". Peter Evans more accurately describes this musical relationship as "roughly an inversion" (167).

evidence can be seen to agree with my reading of Vere and the Novice as Forsterian ‘dark’ characters: in section II.4.2.3.1., I argue that Vere is able to recognise the salutary potential of connection, whereas the Novice, similarly to Rickie Elliot from *The Longest Journey*, is unable to put his faith in personal relationships, and remains unsaved, “lost for ever on the endless sea” (LIB19).

Philip Rupprecht has provided an extensive analysis of “Vere’s convergence with Claggart”, which becomes manifest in Act II as Vere begins to “lose[...] control of good and evil aboard his ‘floating fragment of earth’”; it is here that Vere’s musical presence “splinters and weakens” (Rupprecht 96f.). During his silence at Billy’s trial, it is literally effaced; where it does manifest itself in the monologues, it can be shown to incorporate verbal and musical material originally associated with other characters, namely, Claggart and the Novice. Using Claggart’s motif of falling fourths and ascending tone in various shapes (including inversion), Vere begins to invoke “Beauty, handsomeness, goodness coming to trial” in his “Scylla and Charybdis” monologue (Act II, [74]).¹⁶⁶ The densest musical and textual convergence between Vere, Claggart and the Novice is arguably to be observed in Vere’s “I accept their verdict” aria, which repeatedly features Claggart’s motif of consecutive fourths and tone or semitone, and which “climaxes [...] in a fraught restatement of the dirge theme” (Hindley 1994:106) by the orchestra as Vere declares himself “lost with all hands on the infinite sea”, exclaims “I am the messenger of death”, and wonders “how” Billy can “pardon” or “receive” him ([100]-4 through [102]). If the Dirge theme links Vere with the “lost” Novice and the crew at this moment, the aria’s F minor key can, following Hindley’s reading, be taken to signify “that Vere, along with Claggart, is [...] the instrument of fate” – F minor, as will be remembered, being the key associated, not least via Claggart’s distinctively coloured spaced F minor chord, with “the rule of malign fate” (1994:105f.).

What Donald Mitchell refers to as “the penetration of Vere’s music by Claggart’s” (1993:128) is most commonly read as a musical suggestion of the similarity or identity of the two figures, a phenomenon which has led a number of scholars to the view that by musically identifying Vere with Claggart to a certain extent, Britten managed, as Rupprecht puts it, “to [...] short-circuit the unambiguous interpretative rescue of Vere” (97) which had been Forster’s self-declared objective: “In the opera’s boldest reinterpretation of its literary source, Vere’s culpability as the strict disciplinarian of the trial scene is linked to the uncanny prominence of Claggart’s musical voice” (Rupprecht 119). It will be noted that this perceived connection between Vere and Claggart in the opera parallels the view of Vere and Claggart as representatives of the same oppressive power, namely, “a social order that values control and suppression” (Martin 1986a:107), a view also advanced by Eve Sedgwick and various other scholars in their readings of Melville’s novella.

¹⁶⁶ I discuss Britten’s use of falling fourths in the various musical settings of “Beauty, handsomeness, goodness”, and the chronological development of this idea, in section III.3.

While Vere's oscillating musical identity offers promising possibilities for the interpretation of the figure of Vere and what it may represent, it could at the same time also be viewed as part of a more general phenomenon of motivic diffusion, or rather pervasion, in the opera's musical discourse. This phenomenon could be used to argue the question of narrative perspective in favour of the older Vere as the governing consciousness responsible for the telling of the story: it would be from his reminiscing and contemplating mind that the opera's entire network of interconnected motivic structure could be seen to arise. This would be a rather extreme and, it might be felt, unnecessarily strained interpretation of the musical discourse of *Billy Budd*, and by no means the only one possible. To my mind, the respective arguments advanced by Halliwell and Rupprecht for an anonymous narrating presence which is ultimately responsible for the textual and musical structure of the opera (while at the same time, it may still be able to convey Vere's perspective) constitute far more convincing alternatives.

1.5.4. Tonal symbolism, the closeted interview, and salvation

The tonal organisation of *Billy Budd* has been analysed by Mervyn Cooke (1993d), who, by virtue of comparison with recurring patterns of tonal symbolism in Britten's musical idiom, is able to demonstrate certain parallels and consistencies with the use of key symbolism in the composer's other works. Cooke analyses in great detail the central semitonal conflict of the opera, which is inherent in the tension between B flat and B natural. This conflict figures in a most prominent position in the very opening bars of the Prologue, and, indeed, passages characterised by – as Peter Evans has put it – “this undermining of one key by its semitonal neighbour” (172) can be observed throughout the whole work. The effect of this pervasive tonal tension is to imbue the general atmosphere with a feeling of uneasiness that is only resolved at the very end of the opera into an apparent victory of B flat Major, identified by Cooke as “the key of salvation and reconciliation” in this and in other Britten works (1993d:89f).¹⁶⁷ However, this victory of B flat can be seen to remain ambivalent in numerous ways.

Philip Brett has noted that at the “very epiphanic moment” of the “final, radiant B flat chord” (at [144]+4) which could be seen to signify Vere's sense of salvation, the military “drumbeat motif that underpins the trial and ultimately derives from the sea chase earlier in Act II” is heard again. Indeed, this motif, which also features at Billy's hanging, appears throughout the entire Epilogue; and the drums do not fall silent until the very last bar of the opera. To Brett, the “drumbeat motif” suggests “that Vere is hopelessly contaminated by his role in killing men – as leader in battle as well as naval disciplinarian” (2001:375). To Arnold Whittall, “the ‘discovery’ of the B flat triad” in the Epilogue is suspect because it “takes place in the context of Vere's precarious feeling of self-justification” (1982:125);

¹⁶⁷ A similar identification is made by Brett (1984:139).

he considers the final ascendance of B flat “a great climax of illusion” (148), and concludes: “In *Billy Budd*, controversy centres not on which of the two centres, B or B flat, is ultimately ‘the winner’, but on how hollow is the victory which the resolution on to B flat represents” (174f.) The idea of a “hollow [...] victory” receives considerable support from the far from unambiguous role played by B flat elsewhere in *Billy Budd* and in other Britten works. Thus, the Naval Discipline motif without exception features a root of B flat; it is with the cry “Down all hands!” on B flat that the officers control and subdue the mutinous crew of the *Indomitable*. Claire Seymour has noted “the identification of B flat with the forces of oppression in *Peter Grimes* and *Albert Herring*” (137, n.19); to her, Vere’s claim of having been saved “is undermined musically by the final resolution in B flat, the key of conformity and repression” (159).¹⁶⁸

Such questions of key symbolism are important for the interpretation of the opera as a whole, and I shall be returning to them later on in this discussion; but first it is necessary to introduce the famous sequence of the thirty-four orchestral triads which are heard at the end of Act II, Sc. 2 after Vere has entered the cabin where Billy lies prisoner. Since these chords can be assumed to represent the closed interview, they have become known as the Interview Chords (see Appendix A, Figure 4). As numerous critics have noted, the most striking feature of this sequence is that it is conspicuously and self-consciously blank, devoid of any thematic content. Linda Hutcheon has called this “a supremely un-operatic operatic moment, one in which words and music do *not* interact” (76); at this moment where words fall silent, it is Britten’s music, the semantically ambiguous component of musico-verbal operatic discourse, which becomes the scene’s main ‘language’.

Deliberately conceived to sound on the empty stage, while the lights remain on and the curtain remains up, this musical passage was never intended to accommodate any additional representation of anything. In what may well be considered the climactic scene of the opera’s spiritual plot dimension, the direct rendition of dramatic action is withheld, and what is offered instead is a musical sequence that foregrounds its own opaqueness, thus “embodying”, as Barry Emslie has noted, “the epistemological notion of a ‘gap’” in the opera’s “formal structure” (51). Britten’s realisation of this scene seems an appropriate and consistent response to Melville’s purely speculative account of the interview between Billy and Vere, which can be seen to conceal just such a ‘gap’ beneath the symbolic heightening of their supposedly climactic encounter: as Michael Halliwell observes, “all that the orchestra-narrator can do is ‘speculate’, just as the fictional narrator does. In terms of the operatic narrative, Britten has followed the model of the novel exactly” (1999:147).

Audiences have from the earliest days been attempting to fill these orchestral speculations with meaning. In 1952, Erwin Stein wrote that “the changing colours seem to convey rapid changes of emotions, ranging, one might conjecture, from sur-

¹⁶⁸ On the association of B flat with oppression, see also Cooke 1993d:90f. and Rupprecht 316, n.64.

prise to fright – and from terror to resignation and composure” (214). That same year, Donald Mitchell enquired yet more deeply into the essence of what it is that we hear:

Why, in fact, *common chords*? It seems to me that Melville provides a clue – Vere let himself melt back into ‘what remains primeval’ [...] using primeval in the sense of fundamental, of the world’s first age; primitive, yes, but not elementary; *elemental*, rather. And it is exactly a disclosure of the elemental that we experience in Britten’s succession of slow triads. (1952:408)

Most critics agree that this “elemental” passage does indeed constitute some sort of movement “from terror to resignation and composure”. The chords used are without exception harmonisations of the notes F, A and C, scored in various instrumental constellations of contrasting timbre, register and dynamic. Conspicuous among these are two widely spaced chords in F sharp minor (the fourteenth and twenty-fourth chord) – the key in which the Novice proposes mutiny to Billy in Act I, Sc. 3 ([117]), the key of “Spithead, the Nore, the floating Republic” (Act I, [67]+1), and the key of the crew’s work song in Act I, Sc. 1 ([5]). Scored respectively for brass and flutes and brass only, these two chords also recall the timbre of Claggart’s equally conspicuous spaced F minor chord which can be associated with “malign fate” (Hindley 1994:105); and they twice erupt into a rather more quiet dynamic environment. The sequence’s overall dynamic curve progresses from louder to softer values, and there is a consensus among critics on a governing F-tonality; F major and its dominant C major predominate in the second part of the sequence. Indeed, most critics agree that the Interview Chords constitute a transition from the F minor of Vere’s preceding aria “I accept their verdict” to the calm F major of Billy’s nocturne in Sc. 3.¹⁶⁹ More often than not, F minor is associated with the evil embodied by Claggart, so that the passage is frequently interpreted as symbolising a triumph over evil, which is effected by Vere’s and Billy’s communion.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ A juxtaposition of F minor and F major occurs in what is arguably a partially parallel situation in Act I, Sc. 2, when the Novice, who has become Claggart’s instrument (F minor begins to predominate from the end of Claggart’s aria as he vows to destroy Billy, [111]-7), confronts the sleeping Billy (F major, [116]). The Novice’s reluctant collaboration with Claggart can be viewed as prefiguring Vere’s reluctant adherence to the demands of martial law. Both are met and, in different ways, accepted and forgiven by the magnanimous Billy.

¹⁷⁰ According to Cooke, “Claggart’s seemingly triumphant F minor” is “totally supplanted by F major” as the “moment of understanding between Vere and Billy is reached”. F minor ceases to play any important role after this; “the way is thus prepared for the final attainment of B flat major, the key of salvation and reconciliation” (1993d:101ff). Rupprecht, too, finds the Interview Chords a “carefully managed triumph of F major over an F-minor tonic so closely affiliated to Claggart’s role in the plot” (131). To Hindley (1994:109f), the role of C major in the transition to F major is of great significance because it gives some clues as to the change in Vere’s emotional state over the course of the interview; C major being the key associated with Vere’s tranquil philosophical reflections in Act I, Sc. 2, and with his “qualities as a leader of men” (in the “Starry Vere” sequence at the end of Act I, Sc. 1, esp. [56] and [59]). Challenging a simplistic view of the Interview Chords as essentially articulating an F major tonality, Whittall (1990:156-159) dwells extensively on the question of harmonic equivocation, suggesting that Britten intended this passage “to express a ‘mental state’ that was itself essentially equivocal”,

At the same time, the orchestral narrative of the Interview Chords might be seen to represent a comprehensive view of life in the musical language of key symbolism: good, evil, fate, love, resistance, mutiny, suffering, acceptance, reflection, reconciliation and salvation.

It is the absence of leitmotivic reference which prevents this passage from becoming a mere musical substitute for a scenic representation of what transpires in the closeted interview. However, we are clearly not intended to be left entirely helpless when it comes to interpreting this musical passage. Emslie's claims that "the missing scene in *Billy Budd* is not only without a libretto, it is also without a plot and context", and that the audience "have nothing dramatic or operatic on which to hang the chords" (54) is untenable, as is his view that "each listener is, at this moment in the drama, accorded an exceptional freedom in fitting these thirty-four signifiers to the stage opera in general. He can resolve the thematic material of plot, character and ideas in whatever way suits him" (56). In fact, both the "musical structure overtly related to the rest of the opera" and the "concomitant textual or narrative context" (57) whose absence Emslie deplors can easily be identified even by the casual listener, for certain of the Interview Chords' distinctive features are either already fleetingly familiar to us,¹⁷¹ or reappear later in a semantically more defined context. This is not to say that the mystery of Vere's and Billy's communion itself is revealed in any detail; but we *are* given some clues as to some of the abstract 'ingredients' that may be seen to have a place in it, and we also learn something about the results that proceed from it.

Echoes of the Interview Chords, identifiable as such by the characteristic tonal relations between the single chords, as well as by their distinctive orchestral timbre,¹⁷² subsequently reappear at two highly significant points, in conjunction with textual utterances which thus become associated, in retrospect, with the semantically empty interview episode.¹⁷³ At the end of Billy's farewell aria in Act II, Sc. 3, a selection

and concluding that while the "F major environment obviously survives, [...] its authority is a good deal less absolute than most commentators [...] would have us believe" (158f).

¹⁷¹ Even before the closeted interview, chords of similarly distinctive colouring may be heard at significant moments. They flash up briefly, for example, as Billy descends "down from the birds" to join the boarding volunteers during the frigate chase in Act II, Sc. 1 ([23]: A major and, admittedly not quite a triad, E major with added major seventh). Some of the trumpet chords that accompany Vere's aria "I accept their verdict" also seem to foreshadow the content of the interview that immediately follows it, particularly when Vere declares that "Death is the penalty" for the breaking of earthly laws, and D minor is followed by C major, the top notes of these triads being, respectively, F and C (Act II, [97]+6).

¹⁷² As Peter Evans observed, "tone colour and pitch" often hold a definitive structural function in *Billy Budd* as markers and memory aids: "few Britten scores depend more consistently [...] on the listener's long-term memory for the colour of individual keys. [...] Britten takes care to aid our recognition by often reproducing characteristic sonorities" (Evans 169f.).

¹⁷³ Whittall (esp. 1990:152-169) and Hindley (1994) have provided very detailed analyses and comparisons of the Interview Chords and of the major re-occurrences of their tonal structure at the end of Billy's farewell aria in Act II, Sc. 3, and in the Epilogue. A third reappearance is discussed by Hindley (see note 175 below).

of Interview Chords accompanies Billy's final positive affirmation "I'm strong, and I know it, and I'll stay strong, [...] and that's all, [...] and that's enough" ([119]). A short 'announcement' of three chords can already be detected a few moments earlier as Billy sings that there is "a land" where "the far-shining sail" he has seen "will anchor forever. Oh, I'm contented. Don't matter now being hanged" (wind instruments from [116]+5).¹⁷⁴ Whittall has observed that "although Billy does not refer directly to the interview" when he declares "I'm strong", etc., nevertheless "the music invites us to regard the passage as his own recollection and interpretation of" his unseen encounter with Vere. Whittall also notes that "as a whole" the sequence of chords "is radiant with consonant affirmation" even though it does contain reminders of "unease" (1990:161); specifically, a spaced F sharp minor chord ([118]+6), a faint echo of those that twice disturb the Interview sequence.

In the Epilogue, another series of the characteristically related chords appears as an accompaniment in different groups of wind instruments (starting from [143]+1) as Vere partly repeats Billy's account of the vision he has had, beginning with "but I've sighted a sail in the storm" and ending with "where she'll anchor forever" (compare Billy LIB61 and Vere LIB63).¹⁷⁵ However, as Whittall has pointed out, Vere's "textual and musical allusions are consistently out of alignment" (1990:166) in this passage: rather than echo both words and tune of Billy's utterance, Vere, starting with "I was lost on the infinite sea", uses a variant of the melodic line that appears at the beginning of Billy's aria "And farewell to ye, old *Rights o' Man*", etc. ([115]; compare [143]). This structural incongruence might be felt to express not only Vere's slightly different individual experience of the vision of "the far-shining sail", but also his lingering feelings of doubt and remorse; after all, he recalls a little earlier that he "could have saved" the young sailor (LIB63).¹⁷⁶ The Vere represented in the Epilogue would seem to constitute a clear departure from Melville's dying Vere, who is heard to murmur Billy's name, but decidedly "not" in "the accents of remorse" (BB120).

¹⁷⁴ A major, D flat major, F major; following the pattern of the Interview Chords, the highest notes of each triad are A, F and C respectively.

¹⁷⁵ Hindley (1994:116ff.) has identified the chords that mark Vere's entry in the execution scene (Act II, Sc. 4; [128]) as a further re-occurrence of the characteristically configured Interview material (albeit a semitone lower above the tonic pedal of E). Their appearance at this point may be taken to indicate Vere's recollection of the interview with Billy; according to Hindley, it may even be interpreted to suggest that Vere is comforted and "strengthened", at this difficult moment directly before the execution, "by the conviction of love achieved in the veiled interview" (1994:118).

¹⁷⁶ To Whittall, who holds the view that during the closeted interview, Vere "*persuades* Billy that he must die", the interview itself is "render[ed] [...] equivocal" by the Epilogue's "musical device of varied restatement" that suggests "the different perceptions of [the interview] that remain with the two participants" (1990:159, my emphasis). This view would agree very well with a reading of Vere as the unreliable narrator of his own tale, a possibility which Whittall does not investigate, however.

Mervyn Cooke has pointed out that while the passage in the Epilogue in which Vere, using Billy's words, affirms his salvation to the accompaniment of Interview Chords begins and ultimately also cadences in B flat major which symbolises "salvation", the parallel passage in Act II, Sc. 3 in which Billy declares that he is "contented" and "strong [...] and that's enough" begins in B flat major "but repeatedly cadence[s] in A major", the key which is generally agreed to "represent goodness" in Britten's musical idiom.¹⁷⁷ To Cooke, this evidence of a shared musical texture harking back to the closeted interview, combined with the respectively differing key symbolism, suggests "that the process of salvation applies primarily to Vere and thus confirms his status as the central character of the opera. Billy, beginning with the same musical premise as Vere [...], finds his consolation in A major – the key of his own innocence" (1993d:89f.). If Billy's musical recollection of the closeted interview thus converts the musical characterisation of this recollection to an affirmation of his own most essential quality, then this might be taken to imply that Billy's "consolation" proceeds to a large extent from within himself, or is focused on himself in a way that Vere's salvation is not. Such a view can be seen to fit my reading of Vere's and Billy's experience through the lens of the Forsterian salutary experience, where the 'dark' character can regularly be seen to be very much the recipient of that experience, certainly more so than the 'light' saviour character who can be seen to convey it to him (see sections II.2.2.3. and II.3.8.).

The above examinations of the musico-textual structure of the later part of the opera (starting from Act II, Sc. 2) have demonstrated that the opera offers interpretative possibilities which Melville's novella does not contain. This is largely owing to the fact that in the novella, there is no indication of Vere's feeling remorse, or undergoing any kind of transformation or experience of absolution during the closeted interview. These new possibilities for interpreting Vere's character must accordingly be seen to arise from the changes introduced by the opera-makers into the libretto, which can be regarded as their first transformative interpretation of Melville's original story. Britten's music represents a second layer of transformative interpretation, which sometimes appears to endorse the libretto's patterning, but in some cases appears to qualify or even subvert the surface meaning of the written text. Whether the "elements of ambiguity" which can be detected in the finished opera do indeed constitute proof, as many critics have opined, that the opera adaptation is a more or less "faithful reflection of the literary source" (Cooke 1993c:40), remains debatable. For these ambiguities can be seen to accrete to a transformed text which has undergone some small but significant changes in the characterisation of all of its three main protagonists. Hence, they ought reasonably to be acknowledged as different from the ambiguities which

¹⁷⁷ Billy's A major cadences can be found, for example, at [116]-3, [116]+5, and [117]. Cooke provides a "list of examples" from other Britten works which demonstrate the "established" status of A major as "Britten's Apollonian key" (1993d:165, n.5).

are inherent in the novella; for nowhere in that text, after all, does Vere proclaim his sense of having personally been “saved” by Billy.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ To Harold Farwell, the outcome of the librettists’ ultimate failure “to save Vere from Melville’s ambiguities” is “that the opera is closer to the original with all its ‘ragged edges’ than the composer and his librettists apparently intended it to be” (34) – even if those “ragged edges” (BB119) are, perhaps, no longer congruent with those of the original text. Rupprecht, too, sees the correspondence between parent text and adaptation in the “technical solutions that retain the novella’s much-debated ambiguities of tone” (76), rather than in any ambiguous content itself.

I.6. Part One: summary and outlook

In considering those elements of Melville's novella which have been transposed to the opera, it is particularly interesting to note that two of the novella's most characteristic features, namely, the voice of the narrator and, more specifically, his (speculative) representation of the closeted interview between Billy and Vere, have not been incorporated directly into the text of the libretto. These features can instead be seen to reappear, in the shape of indirect structural parallels, in the musical dimension of the work. Even though the structural position of the narrator can to some extent be seen to be assumed by Vere, who appears in the Prologue and the Epilogue framing the opera, it remains open to what degree the opera's narrative discourse can be seen to proceed from his consciousness. Whether it is seen to arise from Vere or from a superordinate narratorial consciousness, it is the orchestral 'voice', with its meaningful disposition of leitmotivic material and key symbolism, through which an independent web of quasi-narratorial commentary and allusion is generated. Precisely because it does not operate on a clearly-defined verbal level, but via the suggestive application of semantically charged yet ambiguous non-verbal utterances, this orchestral narrative voice can be regarded as structurally similar to that of Melville's narrator, who shows a propensity to retreat into opaqueness and allusion in his commentary of the story and its characters. His purely speculative account of the closeted interview constitutes a particularly striking example for these strategies of indirection,

and the opera-makers' response to this feature of the story was equally striking: the quality of opacity was transferred to the operatic realisation of the interview scene in the shape of the thematically vacant sequence of the so-called Interview Chords, intended to sound upon an empty but fully-lit stage. Although this purely musical moment is subsequently linked with the concepts of reconciliation, hope, love and salvation, the question of what exactly transpires during the hidden interview remains ultimately unresolved.

A considerable amount of reduction and simplification of plot, characters and language can be observed when Melville's novella, with its elaborate style which abounds in imagery and intertextual allusion, is compared to Forster's and Crozier's libretto. However, the text of the finished libretto retains a considerable number of features which are commonly associated with literary as opposed to purely communicative language.¹⁷⁹ These include stylistic phenomena, such as the appearance of Claggart's accusation in Act II, Sc. 1 in blank verse which serves not only to set off this particular utterance from the prevailing tone of the scene, but also, perhaps, to suggest the rehearsed nature of the speech. Furthermore, the libretto relies substantially upon the use of symbols (e.g. the mist image), literary intertextuality (e.g. the numerous biblical allusions), and a verbal leitmotivic network of returning phrases shared by Vere, Claggart and the Novice. All of these textual features provide ambiguities and multivalent relationships of meaning that offer a wealth of possibilities for interpretation.

In 1975, James Fougerousse's comparison of Melville's novella with its operatic adaptation led him to the conclusion that "what the adaptation has done is to make explicit the interpretation of Melville's novel common at the time of its composition" (140). A thorough study of the opera's textual and musical structure shows that such an assessment is unsustainable. It is generally correct that the libretto can on the whole be seen to represent the non-ironic interpretation, prevalent among readers at the time of its genesis, of *Billy Budd* as a parable of salvation. Yet it has become clear that the librettists' adaptation of the novella resulted in some subtle but significant alterations to each of the three main characters, which affect the possibilities for the interpretation of the story as a whole, and which must therefore be differentiated from the process of mere simplification of plot and characters. The main deviations from the adapted text are to be found in Billy's increased articulateness and intellectual insight, in Claggart's hatred which is now seen to arise from his inability to love Billy, and above all in Vere's inner conflict and feelings of remorse, which serve to turn him into a tragic figure; furthermore, the librettists created a more intense and more personal relationship between Billy and Vere.

It has been demonstrated that the new conceptions of the characters are supported further by the musical structure of the opera. However, the investigation of

¹⁷⁹ See Corse 14.

the musical structure has also revealed an independent level of leitmotivic discourse which transcends the textual content of the libretto, to the extent that it may in fact be possible to discern different interpretational perspectives inscribed into the work by E. M. Forster and Benjamin Britten respectively. The libretto of *Billy Budd* avoids most of the philosophical, moral and political discourse which, in the novella, is associated with Vere's ambiguous role in Billy's trial, and which is largely responsible for making this figure appear in its now notoriously problematic light. Yet as critics have increasingly come to agree, the music of *Billy Budd* exhibits a tendency towards a more ambiguous, possibly even critical or ironic view of the character of Vere.

Finally, the opera *Billy Budd* can and should be considered as an adaptation and (re)interpretation of Melville's text by two homosexual artists whose art frequently engages with questions of male identity, social (and to some extent sexual) dissent, and relationships between men. What seems most significant in this context is that the opera not only allows but arguably positively invites readings that view it as a text about male/male relationships in a social system founded on repressive discipline and the suppression of meaningful homosocial ties, up to and including erotic desire. If the musico-dramatic entity that is the finished opera constitutes an (at least twofold) interpretation of its source text, that interpretation can be seen to show patterns not dissimilar to the patterns highlighted by critics like Martin and Sedgwick in their queer readings of Melville's novella. As far as Forster is concerned, this might be taken to suggest that, long versed as he was in the detection and creation of sub-discourses about queer male/male relationships in literary texts, his libretto adaptation reflects a recognition of these elements in the novella, and a conscious transformation and re-creation of these elements according to the paradigms of his own literary imagination.

Part two: E. M. Forster and the story of Billy Budd

II.1. Forster reads Melville: the first encounter

II.1.1. Forster's 1927 *Billy Budd*: good versus evil, a drama for two actors

In his discussion of Melville's *Billy Budd* in the 1927 Clark Lectures (subsequently published as *Aspects of the Novel*), Forster concentrates exclusively on the conflict between Billy and Claggart, to the extent that he does not even mention the existence of a third main character. This omission is remarkable, considering the amount of attention which the novella devotes to the thoughts, words and deeds of Captain Vere, and perhaps all the more remarkable in view of the attention which Forster himself was to devote to this figure twenty years later in his libretto adaptation.¹⁸⁰ In the late 1920s, however, for the purpose of his chapter on 'prophetic' writing, Forster represents the story of *Billy Budd* as a fatal encounter between "goodness of the glowing aggressive sort which cannot exist unless it has evil to consume", and "a real villain" who, despite being indisputably "evil", is yet "not like any other villain" (AN97f).

¹⁸⁰ If Forster's 1927 reading focuses exclusively on the conflict between Claggart and Billy, the same holds true for W. H. Auden's poem "Herman Melville" (1938), in which Billy personifies "goodness" and Claggart makes an anonymised appearance as Evil, but Vere is not mentioned. A decade later, Auden was to concentrate on the same two figures again in *The Enchafed Flood*, where he dissects the "religious paradox" of Billy's simultaneous functions of the innocent, unconscious Adam and the consciously suffering Christ, and the paradox of the "demonic" Claggart who desires Billy but must annihilate him because to acknowledge desire would be an admission of his own weakness (119-123).

To illustrate the latter claim, Forster inserts a quotation from the novella:

Natural depravity ... has its certain negative virtues, serving as silent auxiliaries. ... It is not going too far to say that it is without vices or small sins. There is a phenomenal pride in it that excludes them [*sic*] from anything – never mercenary or avaricious. In short the character here meant partakes nothing of the sordid or sensual. It is serious but free from acerbity (AN98).¹⁸¹

Regrettably, Forster provides no further comment, leaving it to the reader to determine in what way Claggart's "natural depravity" might set him apart from other literary villains. Forster's failure to explain what it is that makes Claggart such an exceptional "real villain" can be seen to have the (probably unintended) effect of reproducing precisely the common novelist's approach to evil which he deplores a few paragraphs earlier. Evil, he complains by way of introducing Melville's novella and its most sinister protagonist, "has been feebly envisaged in fiction, which seldom soars above misconduct or avoids the clouds of mysteriousness. Evil to most novelists is either sexual and social, or something very vague for which a special style with implications of poetry is thought suitable" (AN97). Given the patently "vague" allusions and the indirection with which Melville's narrator seeks to convey the nature of Claggart's mysterious depravity, and the abundant help he enlists, in this process, from other works of literature (including, as it happens, "poetry" – that of John Milton), Forster's claim of an extraordinary status for Melville's villain can hardly be felt to be substantiated by the text itself on a basis of literary technique.

Forster's *Commonplace Book* in fact openly admits to a certain confusion about the precise meaning of the passage he cites; for, following the excerpt about the characteristics of Claggart's "natural depravity", Forster comments: "Don't know what H. M. means, but he knows, and what grand conception of characters are

¹⁸¹ The only existing edition of *Billy Budd* in 1926 was Weaver's 1924 Constable edition; the page number Forster gives in his *Commonplace Book* for the quotation about Billy's goodness and innocence corresponds to that edition. In the quotation about Claggart, the second set of ellipses that appears in the Abinger Edition marks the omission of a sentence which does not actually appear in the 1924 edition; Forster's transcription in the *Commonplace Book* has no ellipses at this point (CPB17). The 'missing' sentence does appear in Weaver's revised 1928 edition; however, Forster cannot have used this text in preparing *Aspects of the Novel* for publication, as its appearance on 20 October 1927 obviously predates that of the 1928 *Billy Budd*. Since the ellipses in question do not appear in, for example, the 1968 Penguin reprint of *Aspects* either, it seems as if their appearance in the Abinger Edition might be a result of over-zealous editing on the basis of a different edition of *Billy Budd* than that used by Forster. Stallybrass explains that it has been his practice as editor "with rare exceptions, to correct" what in most cases probably does turn out to be "Forster's frequent misquotation of other writers" (1974b:149). Excerpting Melville's novella in 1926 in preparation for his lectures, Forster had copied also the following sentence into his *Commonplace Book*: "Civilisation especially if of the austerer sort is auspicious to it [i.e. to Natural Depravity]" (CPB17, Forster's bracketed addition). While he omitted this sentence in *Aspects of the Novel*, it obviously caught his attention. See discussion in section II.5.2.2., pp.383ff.

[sic] consequently possible for him” (CPB17). Concerned as he is with the ‘prophetic’ quality in fiction at this point, Forster is evidently satisfied to note the consistency of Melville’s approach, which to him appears expressed in Melville’s remark that “in certain moods, no man can weigh this world without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance” (AN98).¹⁸² In his notes, Forster goes on to comment that “this is playing the clean game as against the muddled or moral ones which were all that Hawthorne (as a matter of fact) knew” (CPB17) – presumably, “playing the clean game” consists in Melville’s admitting to deliberately employing an element of the unexplained that is intended to remain inexplicable; and hence, not knowing “what H. M. means” does not present a problem for Forster in this respect.

In his lecture, Forster lets Melville’s thought lead him to a somewhat more poetical conclusion: “He threw it in, that undefinable something, the balance righted itself, and he gave us harmony and temporary salvation” (AN98f.). To the reader familiar with Forster’s libretto for the opera *Billy Budd*, and specifically with its framing Prologue and Epilogue which dwell so intensely on the question of Vere’s salvation, this conclusion may seem surprising in view of the fact that Forster, as already stated, does not mention the figure of the captain in his discussion at all. The text of *Aspects of the Novel* does not suggest that it might be anyone but the reader who is uplifted by Melville’s “song not without words” (AN98): as Irene Morra has pointed out, “for Forster, it is the overall effect of Melville’s tale [...] which inspires transcendence, and this transcendence is achieved by the reader in his recognition of an implicitly higher state, rather than by the characters in the tale” (2002:8f.).

The fact that, in 1927, Forster ignored Vere altogether might be taken to imply that Forster may at that time have thought the captain’s role in the story of only secondary importance – a mere extension of the machinery of naval law set in motion by Claggart’s accusation of Billy, much as Adela Quested sets in motion the “machinery” (PtII196) of colonial penal law against Aziz in *A Passage to India*, with the equivocating Vere as the nautical equivalent of the racially prejudiced Police Superintendent McBryde. In any case, Forster’s 1927 representation of Melville’s text can be seen to highlight the magnitude of the changes he made to the figure of Vere in his libretto adaptation, where he altered the character until he should become fit to be both the narrator and the subject of this experience of “harmony and temporary salvation”.

II.1.2. “Other claimants to satanic intimacy”: Forster’s queer decodings

Before I turn to further discussion of the comments which Forster made in his *Commonplace Book à propos* of Claggart’s mysterious “natural depravity”, I should like to consider briefly the nature of this textual source. Forster’s various Com-

¹⁸² Forster is quoting, “not quite correctly”, from Melville’s essay “Hawthorne and his Mosses” of 1850 (Gardner 1987:265).

monplace Book entries made during this period of preparation for the Clark Lectures arguably show him tacking to and fro across an elusive line that apparently demarcates his private and perhaps impulsive commentary from the thoughts he deemed suitable for communication to his intended public audience. The precise course of this line can only be guessed at from the patterns of inclusion and omission of this material as it appears in the finished text.¹⁸³ This is *not* to say, however, that there necessarily exists a simple correlation between the inclusion or omission of any given observation and the extent to which it can be assumed to represent Forster's uncensored thoughts. The fact that some of the sentences he noted in his Commonplace Book reappear *verbatim* in the finished lecture might, in an extreme approach, be taken to suggest that he was already formulating *all* of his thoughts with his potential audience in mind, and that a certain amount of self-shipship had already taken place whenever he set pen to paper at this time.

On one level, Forster, trying to determine the exact characteristics of Melville's "real villain" – which he would at the same time be claiming *should be* indeterminable in order to conform to "the conception of evil" to which "Melville's work owes much of its strength" (AN97) – may indeed have found the roundabout hints given by Melville's narrator as unhelpful as he stated. However, there is another level on which Forster's claim "Don't know what H. M. means" (CPB17) cannot but appear somehow disingenuous. Its familiar tone notwithstanding, it might in fact have been phrased in anticipation of later publication: even though it does not appear in the finished text, one might reasonably surmise that the entire comment, with its celebration of Melville's "grand conception of characters", could originally have been intended for potential inclusion in the discussion. Viewed in this light, Forster's claim of ignorance could be indicative of a deliberately deployed strategy of discursive (self-)camouflage.

A few paragraphs earlier, Forster had diagnosed an impingement of "H. M.'s suppressed homosex:" on the character of Billy (CPB17), a view which seems unlikely ever to have been intended for public dissemination.¹⁸⁴ The line of thought he then apparently goes on to pursue after his engagement with the conflict between good and evil in *Billy Budd* suggests that, even if Melville remains opaque, Forster connects his text – and the "natural depravity" of its principal villain – with a literary tradition that can be seen to encode discourses about

¹⁸³ Even the public communication was to take place on two different levels of outspokenness, with the text of the lecture still differing subtly from that of the published version. It appears, for example, that in preparing his lecture for dissemination in print, Forster for some reason omitted the "subject-matter" of the "advice" dispensed by D. H. Lawrence in his "sermon": while his manuscript describes this as "advice relating to sex", this pertinent detail did not appear in any of the published editions until Oliver Stallybrass restored it in the Abinger Edition. Its omission had the effect of robbing the subsequent reference to a confusion over "whether you ought or ought not to have a body" (AN99) of its principal cause, thus turning it into "a *non sequitur*" (Stallybrass 1974b:154).

¹⁸⁴ I discuss Forster's representation of Billy in *Aspects of the Novel* in section II.5.3.1.

homoerotic longing within Gothic or late Romantic pagan narrative frameworks, producing texts that rely on a similar background paradigm of strongly contrasting forces and moral values.¹⁸⁵ For, having briefly noted down what is probably a deliberately inconclusive conclusion about the conflict between Ahab and the whale in *Moby-Dick*,¹⁸⁶ Forster then turns to reflect on

Other claimants to satanic intimacy: the Pan school, petering out in Hichens and E. F. Benson. Hawthorne's Marble Faun an early specimen of it: and Forrest Reid.

Conrad? – scarcely claims. H. J. in *The Turn of the Screw* is merely declining to think about homosex, and the knowledge that he is declining throws him into the necessary fluster. (CPB18)

It is the telling appearance of the opening word “other” in this context which links the work of these authors to Melville's novella, and thus points to a continuity of some kind in the loose chain of Forster's thoughts as they appear on the page; a continuity which might reasonably be taken to imply that the depravity with which the villainous master-at-arms is afflicted can and should be understood in terms of what is encoded in the texts of those “other claimants to satanic intimacy”.

The Greek goat-god Pan – a favourite figure among late Victorian and Edwardian Nature-worshippers and pantheists – was, as Nicholas Freeman points out, a “multivalent symbol” in nineteenth and early twentieth century art and literature. Although some of the many authors who “invoked his influence or employed him in a symbolic capacity” may have been doing so with the intention of “questioning or subverting prevailing spiritual mores” and “British spiritual and

¹⁸⁵ The fact that Forster was evidently reading Melville's literary productions as those of a homosexually inclined author would seem to make the question of Melville's ‘true’ biographical sexual orientation irrelevant, at least where any enquiry into Forster's reading of Melville is concerned. Mervyn Cooke has felt it necessary to attempt to prove that “*Billy Budd* [...] is emphatically not the work of a homosexual author, and no attempt should be made to consider it as such” (1993b:25) on the basis of a passage from Ch. 89 of Melville's *White-Jacket*, which alludes to “evils in men-of-war, which [...] will neither bear representing, nor reading, and will hardly bear thinking of” (WJ376). In fact, the passage in question is open to various other interpretations, since these “evils” can be seen to be linked with discourses about violence and coercion. Writing on “Melville and Sexuality”, Robert Martin has noted “Melville's repulsion at certain forms of ship-board sex” and proposed that “the adoption of a queer model that proposes contingency instead of certainty seems likely to offer the best future for the study of sexuality in Melville's texts” (1998:200).

¹⁸⁶ Observing that *Moby-Dick* is “also a struggle, and of course a bigger one than *Billy Budd*'s”, Forster then asks, “but Ahab and the whale – what do they stand for?” Adducing a quotation from Book I, Ch. II of Melville's *Pierre* – “Oh what quenchless feud is this, that Time hath with the sons of men” – he concludes, “and perhaps that is all” (CPB17f.). While this quotation does not appear in the finished lecture, Forster comes to a similarly opaque conclusion about *Moby-Dick*: “Nothing can be stated about *Moby Dick* except that it is a contest. The rest is song” (AN97).

sexual convention”, the “votaries” of this pagan god “were by no means united in their aims” (23f.). The three contemporary authors whom Forster mentions as late representatives of what he terms “the Pan school” can be classed among those writers who, like Forster himself, made use of Pan and the pagan mythology of ancient Greece as a vehicle for their own dissident views and prohibited dreams about male/male desire. Besides questioning socially accepted ‘truths’ about the natural and the supernatural world – “the seen” and “the unseen”, as Forster puts it in Whitmanesque allusion in *Howards End* (HE97) – and exploring the notion of Otherness in terms of the gothic, the fantastic or the exotic, the texts produced by these authors often represent male behaviour that is at odds with heteronormative stereotypes of manliness. Such representations, combined with the perceived presence of a homoerotic subtext accessible through the texts’ deployment of Greek mythology, would certainly have attracted Forster’s attention, irrespective of whether such a subtext was intentionally provided by the author or not.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* (1860) combines elements of the gothic and the fantastic and is pervaded by discourses about the nature and function of sin. The story’s four principal characters are two American artists, the pure and innocent Hilda and the sculptor Kenyon; Miriam, an artist of mixed English Jewish and Italian parentage with a mysterious dark and tragic past; and Donatello, a young Italian nobleman whose ancestral origin, so legend has it, can be traced back to the union of “a mortal maiden” and “a being not altogether human”, “a sylvan creature, native among the woods”, whose descendents “were strong, active, genial, cheerful as the sunshine, passionate as the tornado”, and whose “lives were rendered blissful by an unsought harmony with Nature” (MF186f.). Donatello bears an uncanny likeness to the Faun of Praxiteles, a statue associated with qualities that may be felt to be shared not only by Forsterian ‘light’ characters like Stephen Wonham, but also by Melville’s Billy Budd: the Faun

is endowed with no principle of virtue, and would be incapable of comprehending such. But he would be true and honest, by dint of his simplicity. We should expect from him no sacrifice nor effort for an abstract cause; there is not an atom of martyr’s stuff in all that softened marble; but he has a capacity for strong and warm attachment, and might act devotedly through its impulse, and even die for it at need. (MF10)

Donatello shares all these characteristics; moreover, like Billy Budd, he communicates emotions in a body language which emphasises “the idea” of him being “not precisely a man, nor yet a child, but, in a high and beautiful sense, an animal” (MF61) – at times, his “mute” appeal is compared to a faithful dog’s (MF13 and 35; compare BB93). As with Billy, and with Stephen Wonham, there is “an indefinable characteristic about Donatello, that set[s] him outside of rules”; in his innocent state, “he has nothing to do with time, but has a look of eternal youth in

his face" (MF13f.). His association with Bacchus (MF62) is realised in a family tradition of wine-production (MF190).

Donatello loves Miriam, who repeatedly warns him that loving her "will lead [him] to no good", mysteriously "hinting at an intangible confession, such as persons with overburdened hearts often make to children or dumb animals" (MF63f.). By such hints and allusions, the text appears to suggest that Miriam, her innocence long lost to knowledge and experience, is irrevocably tainted and therefore barred from letting "her weary, stifled heart" be "revived" by the "untainted freshness" of Donatello's prelapsarian love: "the very exquisiteness of the enjoyment made her know that it ought to be a forbidden one" (MF64f.). Possessed of "an insatiable instinct that demands friendship, love, and intimate communion", she is nevertheless "forced to pine in empty forms"; her "hunger of the heart [...] finds only shadows to feed upon" (MF90). The "chill remoteness of [her] position" (MF73), "an infinite, shivering solitude, amid which [she] cannot come close enough to human beings to be warmed by them" (MF90) is a symptom of her "moral estrangement" (MF73), "one of the most forlorn results of any accident, misfortune, crime, or peculiarity of character, that puts an individual ajar with the world" (MF90).

The similarity of ideas that links Miriam's mysterious predicament to that of John Claggart, separated from the world by "the deadly space between" (BB54), is striking,¹⁸⁷ but there are also interesting parallels to Forsterian thought here, particularly as regards the "chill remoteness" of "an individual ajar with the world". A similar predicament could be seen to be shared by Forster's 'dark' characters who are 'travelling light' (see section II.2.3.1.), or by those individuals, described in "What I Believe", whose hearts have "g[o]t chilled", making them unfit for salutary personal relationships (TCD66).

The moral paradigm of Hawthorne's text clearly precludes anything like Forsterian salvation through a gift of love: not only can lost innocence not be recovered, but, as Miriam foresees, the touch of experience will invariably corrupt innocence (see MF127). Hence, Donatello can only be united with Miriam when he has become Miriam's partner in sin through murdering her sinister persecutor (MF136f.), a mad monk (MF342), at her unspoken but implicit request. Through this "crime", Donatello is "kindled into a man", but the Faun in him is "gone forever" (MF138f.): the "creature of antique healthfulness" is replaced by "only one other morbid and remorseful man",¹⁸⁸ leading Kenyon to reflect whether "the growth of a soul" in Donatello can be "worth" this "heavy price" (MF312). And

¹⁸⁷ Indeed, Robert Martin chooses to see *The Marble Faun* and *Billy Budd* as part of an encoded dialogue in which Hawthorne and Melville negotiated their relationship through literary means (1986a:95-102 and 111). Melville read Hawthorne's novel in July 1860 (Parker 2002:433).

¹⁸⁸ Robert Martin sees the story of "the death of the faun" as "not only a theological recreation of the Fall but a sociological picture of a transition in cultural values" in which "feminine" and "androgynous" principles are displaced by "a more masculine striving" (1986a:96).

yet, even though he proposes to “entice[...]” the depressive Donatello back “into the outer world”, Kenyon declines to be Donatello’s “guide and counsellor” or “friend at need”, declaring

I am a man, and, between man and man, there is always an insuperable gulf. They can never quite grasp each other’s hands; and therefore man never derives any intimate help, any heart-sustenance, from his brother man, but from woman – his mother, his sister, or his wife. (MF228)

Robert Martin has seen Kenyon’s refusal as part of a pattern of “failures that run throughout Hawthorne’s work, the failures, to use Forster’s term, to ‘connect’” (1986a:97). Forster himself would certainly have objected to Kenyon’s denial of the possibility of successful male/male intimacy and to his urging of a heterosexual norm, as he would presumably have disagreed with Kenyon’s proposal that “Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated him” (MF364) for its implied equation between experience and sin, a concept he criticised in Hawthorne’s work (see discussion below).

It seems that Forster was not personally acquainted with either Robert Smythe Hichens or Edward Frederic Benson (who had been at King’s from 1887-91 and had known Forster’s tutor Oscar Browning).¹⁸⁹ He corresponded sporadically with Benson’s brother Arthur between 1910 and 1924,¹⁹⁰ reviewed a London Globe Theatre performance of Hichens’s play *The Voice from the Minaret* for the *Athenaeum* in 1919,¹⁹¹ and was to review a volume of Benson’s reminiscences, *As We Are*, in a BBC Book Talk in 1932.¹⁹² It seems likely, however, that Forster would have thought of both authors as homosexual, not least because both of them produced texts containing features that were typically understood to mark homoerotic subtexts by those readers who were on the lookout for them.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ See Masters 81ff.

¹⁹⁰ EMFL I:119, n.1; correspondence held at KCC (EMF/18/53).

¹⁹¹ “Grip”, *Athenaeum* No. 4662 (5 September 1919), 852.

¹⁹² “Book Talk” (Newbolt, Richards, Benson, Robins), BBC93-98.

¹⁹³ Robert Smythe Hichens (1864-1950), a friend of W. Somerset Maugham, and an admirer of André Gide and Henry James, never married; for twenty-five years he lived together with the Swiss writer John Knittel and his wife Frances and their children. Edward Frederick Benson (1867-1940), the son of Edward White Benson who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1883-96, was briefly connected with Lord Alfred Douglas and the Wilde circle before the 1895 trials; in 1894 he and Douglas went on a trip up the Nile together with Hichens (Masters 108f). Benson was a friend of Henry James’s, whose last abode, Lamb House in Rye, he was to make his own in 1919; at Cambridge he was acquainted with the painter Roger Fry, whom Forster also knew (Masters 84), but he did not care for modernist writers like Joyce and Virginia Woolf (Masters 277, 291). Benson never married, and the “subterranean stream of homo-eroticism” that pervaded his life seems indeed to have flown “so quietly and secretly” (Masters 71) that it never appears to have become manifest in physical relationships, even though Benson entertained numerous platonic friendships with younger men over the course of his life (Masters 176).

Hichens was the author of *The Green Carnation* (published anonymously by Heinemann in 1894), a satire on Oscar Wilde which was an immediate *succès de scandale* and which, although hastily withdrawn as Wilde went to court against the Marquess of Queensberry in 1895 – by which time the identity of its author had become known – had a negative effect on Wilde’s public image that far exceeded its parodic intention.¹⁹⁴ A prolific writer, Hichens was best known for his romantic novels which often feature exotic settings, and tend to engage in discourses about moral innocence, sinfulness and corruption.¹⁹⁵ It seems impossible to determine which of Hichens’s works led Forster to name him as a representative of the “School of Pan” (CPB18).¹⁹⁶

E. F. Benson’s literary output was even more copious than Hichens’s: he published over seventy novels, six short story collections, and several biographies. His Cambridge novel *David of King’s* (1924), set at his and Forster’s old college, features a platonic but emotionally charged friendship between undergraduates. Perhaps his most interesting work in the current context is the short story “The Man Who Went Too Far” (1904). It is ostensibly a cautionary tale which demonstrates the fatal consequences suffered by a protagonist who breaks with the established ways and views of society and succumbs to the lure of Pan (a process which incidentally comprises notable deviances from socially approved gender behaviour, a most pervasive motif being the male protagonist’s physical passivity as he surrenders himself to Nature).¹⁹⁷

Benson’s text can be seen to incorporate a number of thoughts and motifs which also appear in Forster’s own stories of the ‘Pan school’, notably the indictment of Christianity and a Puritan morality which is inimical to nature and to life itself, the references to Greek culture and thought, the sense of delight in the connection with a living, animated Nature that features so centrally in “The Story of a Panic”, “The Road from Colonus” and “The Curate’s Friend”, and the presence of an unenlightened outsider whose scepticism serves as a counterfoil to the protagonist’s mysterious experiences and behaviour. The violent death suffered by Benson’s protagonist – who, so the hoof-marks found on his corpse suggest, is killed by Pan himself – evokes the idea of violence and ‘panic’ (in the original sense of the word) as inherent in nature. This idea also appears in most of

¹⁹⁴ See Weintraub vii–xxviii.

¹⁹⁵ These themes are prevalent, for instance, in *The Garden of Allah* (1904) and *In the Wilderness* (1917).

¹⁹⁶ Perhaps Forster was thinking of Hichens’s novel *The Call of the Blood* (1906), which is set in Sicily. Its beautiful young protagonist, Maurice Delarey, a married man who is awakened to illicit, ‘sinful’ desire for a Sicilian girl and meets a violent death, was found to be reminiscent of Hawthorne’s Donatello by the *New York Times’s* reviewer in 1906 (Saturday Review of Books, November 3, 1906, p.BR719). The novel also features a deep friendship between Maurice and a Sicilian boy.

¹⁹⁷ The protagonist and the core events of this short story reappear as a subsidiary storyline involving the figure of Tom Merivale in Benson’s novel *The Angel of Pain*, which was serialised in the women’s periodical *The Queen* in 1905, and published as a separate volume in 1906.

Forster's texts which engage with the concept of an animated Nature, and which can by extension be read as narratives about a violent and disruptive potential inherent in sexuality, and male/male sexuality in particular. "The Man Who Went Too Far" furthermore features an encounter between the protagonist, rejuvenated by his communions with nature, and an old woman whom he kisses – a scene strikingly reminiscent of the encounter between Eustace and the three old women in Forster's "Story of a Panic", where a similar salutation takes place (TMS11). It might be speculated whether Benson is echoing this element from Forster's earlier story, which he may quite likely have known.¹⁹⁸

The Belfast novelist Forrest Reid – in whose work, contemporary critics agreed, the "presiding deity" was Pan¹⁹⁹ – was a personal friend whom Forster knew to be homosexual.²⁰⁰ It had been his novel *The Bracknells: A Family Chronicle* (1911), the "story of a dream-haunted, affection-starved adolescent, beset by visions of evil, and of a young Oxford tutor's thwarted efforts to rescue him from his uncomprehending family", which had first prompted Forster to get in touch with him (Furbank I:210). Reid had in his turn been an ardent admirer of the work of Henry James, and had corresponded with the older novelist for a while; however, by the time Forster came to know him, their personal connection had been severed under dramatic circumstances.

Encouraged by James's appreciative response to Reid's *The Kingdom of Twilight* (1904), Reid had made him the dedicatee of his second novel *The Garden God* (1905), a Platonic idyll of a schoolboy friendship abruptly curtailed by the death of the beloved. Somewhat predictably, James turned out to be appalled by Reid's

¹⁹⁸ "The Story of a Panic" appeared in the *Independent Review* in August 1904, and subsequently received reviews in other newspapers (including "abuse from the *Church Times* which Forster's friends told him "was an honour", an attitude which Benson, coming from an ecclesiastical family as he did, may well have shared). Moreover, Maynard Keynes was successfully feeding the story of the grossly indecent sexual subtext discovered in Forster's story by "a rather squeaky Cambridge aesthete and bibliographer", Charles Sayle, into the Cambridge grapevine, and it is conceivable that it may have reached Forster's fellow Kingsman Benson via these channels, too, just as it soon reached its horrified and "furious" author (Furbank I:113f.).

¹⁹⁹ This observation appeared in an article by S. M. Ellis in *The Bookman* in May 1920 (quoted in Taylor 96); Taylor reports that "Ellis went on to describe Reid's art as 'mystic and peculiar'", and explains that Reid felt that the view of his work as "lying in the sentimental tradition of ruralised Pantheism", which was to prove predominant, was a misinterpretation. The same, according to Taylor, goes for Forster's classification of Reid as a "writer of the supernatural" (unidentified source quoted by Taylor; the exact phrase does not occur in Forster's article on Reid collected in *Abinger Harvest*); for Reid's "concerns lay always with the *natural* world and its inhabitants" (Taylor 96). However, it may be that the supernatural was invoked even by critics who were alert to the undercurrents of homoerotic longing in Reid's texts, as Forster undoubtedly was, by way of providing a camouflaging recontextualisation for their problematic and prohibited content – a thought suggested by Taylor's formulation that "even Forster *prefers* to consider Reid a 'writer of the supernatural'" (96, my emphasis).

²⁰⁰ Reid, like Britten, was attracted to boys, although his pederasty, similarly to Britten's, appears for the most part to have taken an "idealised and frustrated" form (Taylor 2), finding its more or less sublimated expression largely in his art.

“slight token of respect and admiration” (thus the dedication, GG3); for although the text avoids any direct discussion of sexuality in favour of an idealising Platonism, it features a scene of nude posing, and can on the whole be seen to constitute a paean to juvenile male/male or, respectively, pederastic desire. Furthermore, and perhaps most upsettingly for James, it recognisably appears to transpose certain dialogues between Miles and the governess from *The Turn of the Screw*, which could be read as erotically charged, into a context of undisguised homoerotic longing. Indeed, Reid’s work may in some respects constitute a creative response to a subtext he perceived in the very story in which James was, in Forster’s words, “declining to think about homosex” (CPB18).²⁰¹

In his autobiography *Private Road* of 1940, Reid indicates that although James “seemed either unable or unwilling to say clearly what was wrong”, what did emerge from the “involved sentences” (69) was that “the Master was not pleased” (65).²⁰² The conclusions he draws from the incident are interesting: Reid links James’s negative reaction with “a strange moral timidity, which refuses to accept responsibility for what deliberately has been suggested” and which he detects also in the “protest of innocence” in James’s preface to *The Turn of the Screw*, a protest which Reid feels “cannot be sincere, since the internal evidence of the story points to a quite definite knowledge” of what the unnamed evil at Bly might be (70). The effect on Reid, who had regarded himself as James’s “disciple” (67), was that

my admiration for the artist remained, but an admiration more human and intimate had been lost. The intelligence that had seemed so understanding seemed now less understanding. Or perhaps I should say less courageous, less sympathetic; more worldly, more conventional. (69f.)

Reid also states that he “knew that if there had been no dedication the tone of the letter would have been different” (70).

Leaving aside the question to what extent James’s response merely reflected his anxieties about his public image, Reid’s interpretation of it can be used as a rough indicator for the degree to which queer readers were confident of their

²⁰¹ *The Garden God* features a nocturnal scene in which the youthful protagonist, looking out of a dormitory window over the moonlit grounds, has a vision of the figure of his beloved, in whose bed the two boys subsequently have a whispered conversation (GG25ff). The latter features the beloved attempting to pry into his friend’s innermost thoughts (which include a secret fantasy world populated by a beautiful boy-god), in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the governess’s relentless questionings of Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*, e.g. about the episode on the lawn (Ch. XI), and about his private thoughts (Ch. XVII). It furthermore transpires that the beloved has been sent away from school (but has been allowed to return), and that he used to have intimate friendships with other boys (GG31 and 33). This makes him similar to Miles, who has been expelled from school for some mysterious misconduct (Ch. II). On *The Garden God*’s intertextual allusions to James’s work, see also Kaylor 2007b:84, n.30.

²⁰² Regrettably, Reid destroyed the letter in which James had originally expressed the distaste that heralded his subsequent disassociation from the alarmingly candid Ulster Platonist (Kaylor 2007a:xli).

abilities to recognise kindred spirits in authors whose texts appealed to them.²⁰³ Indeed, at a time when homosexuality was still illegal, numerous friendships between queer authors and readers were formed as a result of successful decodings of what did turn out to “deliberately ha[ve] been suggested”.²⁰⁴

Forster’s own belief “that it was possible to discover the sexual tendency underlying a work” (Bakshi 5)²⁰⁵ found repeated confirmation in his own life experience; for a number of his friendships, that with Reid included, were contracted on the basis of such decodings.²⁰⁶ Communications with friends who had identified the same – or at least similar – subtexts in an author’s work, too, would have served to reinforce Forster’s confidence in the conclusions he drew about the sexual proclivities not only of contemporary authors, but also of earlier writers like Melville (whose work was in any case already part of an emerging homosexual literary tradition).²⁰⁷ It is moreover made clear by Forster’s comment about Billy’s “goodness” being “alloyed by H. M.’s suppressed homosex:” (CPB17) that Forster was convinced that an author’s sexuality would have some influence on his conception of his fictional characters.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ A case in point would be Charles Sayle’s decoding of a homosexual subtext in “The Story of a Panic” in 1904 (see Furbank I:113f. and note 198 above); on this subject, Martin and Piggford have remarked that “responses such as Sayle’s indicate that there were readers – at least in certain circles – capable of penetrating the ‘open secret’ of Forster’s stories” (26, n.2). An early pioneer who enquired into the textual markers that invited such queer decodings was John Addington Symonds, who “spent much time trying to find and define texts to which he felt clung an ‘aura’ of difference, a trace however faint or an echo however distant of the erotic flutes of Arcadia” (Fone 130) – a project which was later to be taken up by Edward Carpenter, whose collection of homoerotically themed writings, *Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship*, appeared in 1902.

²⁰⁴ *The Bracknells*, for example, brought Reid two lasting friendships, namely, with Forster and Walter de la Mare (Taylor 61).

²⁰⁵ In 1910, Forster had resolved “to work out: – The sexual bias in literary criticism, & perhaps literature. Look for such a bias in its \ideal &/ carnal form. Not in experience which refines. What sort of person would the critic prefer to sleep with, in fact” (25 October, LD16).

²⁰⁶ At the same time, however, Forster seems to have been fully aware (at least where he himself was concerned) that no literary text can be a direct representation of its author: when T. E. Lawrence complained that “the portrait” which he had abstracted from the “sayings” in Forster’s novels, which he felt were “bursting out from your heart, and represent yourself,” was “not the least like you, as I’ve sat at tea with you” (letter of 14 July 1927), Forster, replying on 9 August, “told him not to bother about reconciling the statements in his books with his conduct at the tea-table” (Furbank II:148), and went on to deplore that even “the statements” themselves could not be “reconcile[d] [...] with each other” (both letters quoted in Furbank II:148).

²⁰⁷ For an overview of British Melville-reception which emphasises the large percentage of queer men and women among his pre-1920s admirers, see Hayford/Parker/Tanselle 741-748; for an overview of Forster’s ties to the network of queer Melville enthusiasts, see section I.2.3. and Rochlitz 44-46.

²⁰⁸ See my discussion in section II.5.3.1.

II.1.3. “Satanic intimacy”?

Challenging the connection between homosexuality and evil

It seems highly significant that in the immediate context of his discussion of “satanic intimacy”, the Pan school, and his friend Forrest Reid, Forster should mention Henry James’s failure to engage with the “homosex” (CPB18) that he appears – to Forster as much as to Reid – “deliberately” to be “suggest[ing]” (Reid 70). Forster’s comment on James could be seen to complete the connection between the peculiar make-up of Melville’s “evil” master-at-arms, “satanic intimacy”, and homosexuality – specifically, a homosexuality associated with sexual repression and homophobia; for if James, whose work Forster subjected to extensive criticism in his lecture, describing his characters as “castrat[ed]” (AN111), was “declining” to consider issues of proscribed desire, Forster prided himself on *not* doing so.²⁰⁹

This connecting current can be seen to extend so far as to involve also Forster’s criticism of Hawthorne, whose conception of evil he was to classify in his lecture as “contract[ed]” by “that tiresome little receptacle, a conscience” which makes for a limiting sense of “personal worry” that diminishes the reader who is asked to “share[...]” his metaphysical “apprehensions” (AN98). A strikingly similar complaint had already appeared in an article on Forrest Reid which Forster wrote in 1919.²¹⁰ This article takes issue with “the strong ethical tendency” in Reid’s work, a phenomenon which Forster diagnoses as “rooted, however remotely, in Christianity”. Forster remarks that “here [...] one feels that Mr Reid makes too much fuss; he is almost as upset by sin as Nathaniel Hawthorne”. While Reid “is never puritanical [...] he is always a puritan, and he regards it of absolute and eternal importance that youth should reach maturity unscathed”. Forster then attempts to contain his criticism by conceding that this “ethical tendency” which contrasts “a kind of moral fragrance”²¹¹ with a “complementary [...] odour of sin” is “from the artistic point

²⁰⁹ Forster’s Commonplace Book shows that he engaged with James time and again over the course of his life; his comments consistently show his disapproval of James’s evasive style. In his notes for his Cambridge lecture, Forster observes that with James, “self-denial and timidity” are “almost the same thing” (CPB14); however, this private opinion, like Forster’s evident exasperation (“N.B. How he hates naming anything!”) and his personal dislike (“N.B.B. Not a nice character”, CPB15) is merely implied in the ‘public’ text of the lecture. In private, Forster openly derides James, numbering him among the “writers whom I find smell”, visualising him as “snipping beetroots and spring onions for his salad: for I know he would keep among the vegetables, if only because their reproductive organs are not prominent” (CPB7), and (in 1930) describing him as “fiddling, masturbational” (CPB74). In a revealing entry made in 1927, he expresses the hope that “my ability to write fuck may preserve me from too close contact with H. J.” (CPB29), an utterance which looks like an attempt at distancing himself from the troublesome and perhaps oppressive sexual inhibition that he perceived as lying behind James’s indirection. Eric Haralson has suggested that “Forster’s scolding of James drew added force from his worry that, as a fiction writer, he had perhaps foundered on the same rock” (61).

²¹⁰ “Forrest Reid”, AH73-78.

²¹¹ The phrase is Reid’s own, representing, in Forster’s words, “the highest beauty he knows” (AH76).

of view, quite sound”, because the two opposing forces serve to “connect the foreground with the background”: “Working by natural processes they lead the characters towards the supernatural, so that the world of spirits is invoked not by magic arts, but through conduct, through habits, just as Henry James invoked it in *The Turn of the Screw*” (AH76f).

Like the notes he made in his Commonplace Book in 1926, Forster’s 1919 article features a manifestation of the Hawthorne-Reid-James nexus in the context of what amounts to a discussion of good and evil, or innocence and moral corruption. Furthermore, it seems highly probable that there may be a double discourse concealed in the article’s argument, and that what Forster is also discussing here, albeit in an oblique form, may effectively amount to the very specific sense of sinfulness which he privately links with Reid’s – and, by association, the other two authors’ – “puritan” attitude towards the carnal expression of (homo)sexual desire.

In a letter of January 1915, in which he had proposed to send Reid the manuscript of *Maurice*, Forster had expressed his confidence that Reid “would, in some way, sympathise with it” but had also confessed that

in other ways it might put a severe strain on our friendship, which terrifies me. My attitude – I realise more fully than you can – is not yours. I have heard you feel things I cannot, and draw distinctions that mean nothing to me. [...] I should be very miserable indeed if your feelings towards me altered as the result of reading this book, even though I should think (as I do think) that they ought not to alter, for I have not written one word of which I am ashamed. (EMFL I:217)

It seems likely that what Forster feared his friend might object to was his celebration of a homosexuality that includes physical fulfilment. Indeed, the diffidence and phobic distaste which led some of his queer male contemporaries to reject the idea of sexual intercourse between men appears relentlessly pilloried in *Maurice* in the character of the sexually repressed Platonic Hellenist Clive, whom Forster himself was to refer to as “underdeveloped” (Forster in Furbank II:14; see below).

In the event, Forster’s worst fears were to remain unrealised, but he evidently found himself moved by Reid’s response to *Maurice* to defend his advocacy of sexual fulfilment in male/male love relationships once again. Not surprisingly, Forster’s plea engages with the moral approach to this issue; and it does so in a way that appears highly pertinent to my ongoing enquiry into his engagement with the idea of evil in Melville’s *Billy Budd*:

I do want to raise these subjects out of the mists of theology: Male and Female created He not them.²¹² Ruling out underdeveloped people like

²¹² In Ch. 25 of *Howards End*, the narrator refers to the phrase from Genesis 5:2, “Male and female created He them”, as a “questionable statement” (HE208); Forster’s thoughtful enquiry into gender

Clive [...] one is left with ‘perverts’ (an absurd word, because it assumes they were given a choice, but let’s use it). Are these ‘perverts’ good or bad like normal men, their disproportionate tendency to badness (which I admit) being due to the criminal blindness of Society? Or are they inherently bad? You answer, as I do, that they are the former [...]. The man in my book is, roughly speaking, good, but Society nearly destroys him, he nearly slinks through his life furtive and afraid, and burdened with a sense of sin. You say ‘if he had not met another man like him, what then?’ What indeed? But blame Society not Maurice, and be thankful even in a novel when a man is left to lead the best life he is capable of leading! (Letter to Reid, 13 March 1915; quoted in Furbank II:14)

In promoting his view of homosexuality as a natural condition, and in going so far as to suggest that the very concept of two distinct sexes – as perpetrated by Christian doctrine and the heteronormative hegemonic scientific discourse informed by it – is flawed, Forster is effectively attempting to separate queer identities and practices from the idea of moral depravity: if homosexuals are “good or bad like normal men”, evil in its purest form must be independent of sexuality. His thoughts can be seen to prefigure, in reverse as it were, his later criticism of the representation of evil as “sexual and social” and, as a rule, surrounded by “clouds of mysteriousness” (AN97).

In Melville’s *Billy Budd*, these obscuring vapours are often virtually indistinguishable from “the mists of theology” (Forster in Furbank II:14) in which the text tries to situate Claggart’s essentially depraved nature. Thus, conceding that, “to use a Scriptural phrase”, Claggart’s private motives and untimely demise constitute “a mystery of iniquity”, Vere dismisses this as “a matter for psychological theologians to discuss” (BB93f). For all the narrator’s efforts, the master-at-arms’s peculiar depravity ultimately remains opaque. What Forster appears to perceive as the text’s – or rather, Melville’s – refusal to equate evil with anything “sexual and social” elicits his approval and apparently disposes him to overlook the “clouds of mysteriousness” (AN97), copiously as they may pervade the story: if Claggart’s depravity should indeed consist in some ineffable “elemental evil” (BB59), Forster seems content to accept that only “H. M. [...] knows” (CPB17) his secret. Yet that part of Forster which was “think[ing] about homosex” (CPB18) may easily have connected the “mystery” of Claggart’s “iniquity” (BB93) with the “disproportionate tendency to badness” (Forster in Furbank II:14)

behaviour in this chapter not only delineates the role played by (public school) education in constructing a difference between the sexes, but also shows that this difference is constantly reinforced by simple exposition to this social construction: the railway carriage turns into “a forcing-house for the idea of sex” (i.e. the idea of essential difference between males and females, as well as the gender roles they are expected to perform), as Margaret, interacting with her male companions, finds herself “bow[ing] to a charm of which she did not wholly approve”, and refrains from correcting the men’s misidentification of the Oxford colleges which they pass on the way (HE208).

among men with homosexual inclinations, which he himself (similarly to John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter and other early advocates of homosexual rights) identifies as the result of an oppressive social climate in which homosexuality is prohibited as immoral, criminal and pathological.

The Hawthorne-Reid-James nexus which Forster so consistently invokes when criticising popular conventional conceptions and representations of evil, is, to him, clearly (if privately) associated with a view of sexual deviance as a condition to which the “odour of sin” (AH76) *necessarily* attaches, and which must therefore be rejected on moral grounds.²¹³ Forster strongly disapproved of this repressive view, prevalent as it was not only in contemporary heteronormative hegemonic discourse but also among homosexuals themselves, in whom it engendered internalised homophobia of the sort he had depicted in the character of Clive Durham in *Maurice*.

To Forster as a reader alert for textual representations of homosexual experience, and perhaps – one might speculate about this – anxious to establish *Billy Budd* as a literary site for queer (self-)identification,²¹⁴ the concept of a ‘pure’ evil, neither “sexual” nor “social”, would have made for particularly powerful and “universal” literary tragedy because the text’s depiction of homosexual desire *in itself* is not tainted by associations of sinfulness, but might well be described as “free from personal worry” (AN97f.). For beside the confusion of hints and allusions which complicate and obscure his essence, Claggart stands revealed also as a “man of sorrows” who “could [...] have loved” another man “but for fate and ban” (BB70). The “ban” could well be a social one, but his “fate” is arguably represented as a natural tragedy: “like the scorpion”, he cannot help but “recoil upon [him]self” and “act out to the end [his] allotted part” (BB59). His monomaniac hatred may be expressive of the “elemental evil” inherent in him, but his homoerotic longing, far from being part and parcel of it, is, if anything, presented as potentially redemptive.²¹⁵

²¹³ In fact, in his 1927 lecture, Forster had originally also referred to the work of Forrest Reid, along with that of Hawthorne and Mark Rutherford, as being subject to the negative “contract[ing]” effect imparted by “that tiresome little receptacle, a conscience”, which Melville was so commendably unencumbered by (AN98); for some reason, the mention of “that gifted and much neglected novelist, Forrest Reid” was omitted in the book publication (Stallybrass 1974b:154). It seems ironic that Lionel Trilling should have viewed Forster’s writerly “understanding of the inextricable tangle of good and evil and of how perilous moral action can be” as placing him in the tradition of Hawthorne and James (12f.), given Forster’s low opinion of the “strong ethical tendency” (AH76) that governs these authors’ texts.

²¹⁴ Eve Sedgwick writes that “when Benjamin Britten and E. M. Forster agreed to collaborate on an opera” twenty years after Forster’s first discussion of Melville, “the epiphany of doing *Billy Budd* came to each of them independently”. To her, this is indicative of the text’s power to evoke “all” of its readers’ “intimate, paralysing questions about the essential truths of ‘homosexuality’”, a power which she sees reflected in the text’s central position in the queer literary canon (1990:92).

²¹⁵ In 1990, Eve Sedgwick advanced a reading that connects Claggart’s depravity with the repression of homoerotic desire (95f.); the same line of interpretation appears to have been chosen by Forster in his libretto adaptation in 1948-51 (see section II.5.2.2., pp.383ff., and section III.3.1.).

II.2. Forsterian themes and narrative patterns

II.2.1. “Only one novel to write”: recurring themes and character types

Forster was one of those [authors] who have “only one novel to write”. I don’t mean this in the vulgar sense that he repeated himself: I mean that he received his whole inspiration – a vision, a kind of plot, a message – all at once, in early manhood. He became an artist because of that early experience, an experience of salvation, and his inspiration as a novelist always harked back to that moment of enlightenment. For this reason he was content to use and re-use many of the same plot-materials. (Furbank II:132f.)

The belief in the salutary nature of personal relationships lies at the heart of Forster’s entire work. It stands epitomised in the appeal of “only connect”, taken from *Howards End* (HE183),²¹⁶ which has become one of two utterances most famously associated with the name of E. M. Forster – the other one being the (frequently misquoted and misrepresented) declaration that “if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country” (ICD66).²¹⁷ Generations of his readers have long been

²¹⁶ For a discussion of this much-quoted Forsterian maxim in its immediate literary context, see section II.2.3.2. below.

²¹⁷ It seems highly probable that Forster’s famous declaration from “What I Believe” (1938) alludes to Sophocles’ *Antigone*, of which Forster wrote a few years later, in 1944: “of all the great tragic

well aware of Forster's central theme and of the liberal humanist beliefs that sustained it. Depending on their awareness of his sexual orientation, or on their alertness, as readers, to the homoerotic subtexts detectable in his works, they would, and still do, draw their individual conclusions as to the concrete implications of his creed according to their own outlook and/or personal needs; but the overwhelming importance of personal relationships remains established as his main concern.

In 1943, Lionel Trilling produced the first full-length scholarly study of Forster's work, in which he identified "the theme of the undeveloped heart" (as expounded by Forster in his essay "Notes on the English Character" of 1926) as "the great central theme" of Forsterian thought:

The theme is almost obsessive with Forster. It is not the unfeeling or perverted heart that absorbs him, but the heart untrained and untutored, the heart checked too early in its natural possible growth. His whole literary effort is a research into this profound pathology. (25f.)

As additional themes, Trilling notes those of "the insufficient imagination, of death, money, snobbery and salvation", stating that all of these "persisting themes", which would be further developed in Forster's novels, are prefigured or "announced" in his early short fiction. And not just the themes: for from the published material available to him at the time, Trilling also extrapolates a set of "character types which we shall encounter in all his novels". Thus, Trilling identifies "the progenitor of Forster's sadistic women" – Agnes Pembroke, Mrs Failing, Mrs Herriton, Harriet Herriton, and the Anglo-English women in *A Passage to India* – in Ethel Lucas from "The Road from Colonus", who, "when her father is lifted on to his saddle by a Mr Graham of the party, sighs that she 'admires strength'" (42f.). Regarding the men, Trilling observes that

Forster's male characters will descend either from the young porter of "The Eternal Moment" or from Colonel Leyland [of the same story]. The young porter is the ancestor of all the athletic young heroes whose physical beauty and strength are their spiritual grace. The first of the line may be defeated and corrupt, but in his later avatars he is triumphant and brings salvation.

As the porter's descendants, Trilling names Gino from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, George Emerson from *A Room with a View*, and Stephen Wonham from *The Longest Journey*. Their hearts, or brains, or consciences are, as Trilling puts it, "nourished

utterances that comes closest to my heart, that is my central faith" (ICD215; in "A Book that Influenced Me" [ICD212-215], an article on Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*). In the play, Creon, the King of Thebes, who has Antigone put to death for attempting to bury her dead brother in defiance of Creon's prohibition, declares "if any makes a friend of more account than his fatherland, that man hath no place in my regard [...] nor would I ever deem the country's foe a friend to myself" (*Antigone* 45). For discussions of *Antigone* in relation to *Billy Budd*, see sections II.5.1.5. and II.5.3.7.

by the physical life; and as old Mr Emerson says in *A Room with a View*, ‘love is of the body – not the body, but of the body’”. Accordingly, Trilling connects these characters with the Pan principle of the fantastic stories, in which he sees an opposition to modern life which “can kill the masculine power and tenderness” (44). The other type of male character, which Trilling sees as descending from Colonel Leyland, is

the man who betrays the female spirit. He combines a certain enlightened official insensitivity with an old-maidish fussiness. The old-maidishness will turn up in Philip Herriton and [...] in Cecil Vyse. The insensitivity is to appear in Herbert Pembroke and Gerald Dawes [...], in the Wilcox men [...] and in Ronny of *A Passage to India*. (45)

Trilling’s observation that Forster’s short fiction can be regarded as “a statement of themes” (35) and contains, in embryo, the character types which were to continue to figure throughout his entire work, still remains principally valid today, as does his recognition of two distinct male character types which are to some extent congruent with those which June Levine was subsequently to describe as the “tame” English middle-class type and his “savage” counterpart (72).²¹⁸ However, in Trilling’s second group of male characters, “goats” are indiscriminately classed with “sheep” (Trilling 97): those of the irredeemably undeveloped hearts (Cecil Vyse, Herbert Pembroke) are listed together with Philip Herriton, whose desire for Gino guides him to, and connects him with, his own identity (an experience of salvation that remains forever closed to the terminally repressed and repressive Herbert); and with Gerald Dawes, who, though undeniably insensitive, clearly figures as the object of both Agnes’s and Rickie’s desire, and ought on the strength of this to be classed among the “athletic young heroes whose physical beauty and strength are their spiritual grace” (Trilling 44).

What also fails to attract Trilling’s notice is the peculiar nature of the subject of the sadist’s gaze he recognises: it is a gaze which takes pleasure in observing the aggressive or even violent behaviour of males towards other males. Ethel’s wistful admiration of Mr Graham’s strength as he not only effects Mr Lucas’s abduction but, since he is “an expert boxer”, sends the Greek youth who rushes to Mr Lucas’s defence “sprawling with a bleeding mouth into the asphodel” (TMS83), might be regarded as an early manifestation of the “thrill of joy” evoked in Agnes by the idea of “the weak boy in the clutches of the strong one” (LJ50). While Trilling of course only had the published material available at the time to draw on, his insights appear limited by a patent lack of perceptiveness where queer discourses

²¹⁸ One might, however, find it hard to determine what exactly “the female spirit” might be in *A Passage to India*, or, for that matter, in any of the other novels including *Howards End*; or in what way Gerald is supposed to have betrayed it in *The Longest Journey*, other than by dying prematurely.

are concerned – thus, ironically, his ignorance of the traditions and conventions of an entire literary sub-culture led him to dismiss Forster’s use of Greek mythology as “inappropriate to his theme” (49).²¹⁹

Writing forty years after Trilling, and drawing on the patterns which become visible in Forster’s posthumously published homosexual fiction, June Levine presented a far more adequate description of Forster’s central male character types and the thematic concerns that accrete to them. For Levine, a “marked impulse” in Forster’s entire work, as indicated by these patterns, is one of

the tame in pursuit of the savage, oscillating within a field of attraction and repulsion. Although the strangeness is repugnant, the tame pursues the savage because conjunction will be completion. [...] The side of the tame includes [...] the English professional classes [...], educated at public school and Oxbridge, possessed of secure social position, adequate income, and religious or ethical scruples of “civilised man”; the province of the savage, the “natural” man, lies outside the English ruling class: its representatives are either foreign [...] or working-class. (72)²²⁰

While I fully accept and value Levine’s categories of “tame” and “savage”, and shall occasionally be referring to them in my discussions of Forster’s texts, I should nevertheless like to introduce another complementary pair of categories which I shall be using as the main basis for my analyses, namely, that of ‘dark’ and ‘light’ character types or character traits.

²¹⁹ Other contemporary critics were more perceptive, although, as in the cases of F. R. Leavis and Wilfred Stone, their insights did not necessarily help to endear their subject to them. A concise overview of Forster criticism can be found in Martin/Piggford 15-22.

²²⁰ Levine furthermore draws attention to a recurring triadic structure in which the normative discourses of society are embodied in a third character: “Frequently the theme is worked out through a triad in which a superorthodox Englishman stands as the antithesis of the primitive, while the hero, a member of his compatriot’s class, is uneasily compelled into a union with a man from an opposed world” (72). This triadic array of tame hero, superorthodox adversary, and savage Other bears a striking structural resemblance to the triadic character constellation of, respectively, Hero, Captain, and Dark Stranger or Handsome Sailor, which Robert Martin diagnosed as the “controlling structural pattern” in several of Melville’s narratives (1986a:3-6). Yet in Forster’s work, the triadic structure does not necessarily manifest itself in three distinct characters: the repressive forces of normative discourses are not infrequently internalised in the tame middle-class hero himself. As Martin convincingly argues, in Melville’s *Billy Budd*, the triadic character constellation is not realised, either: while the Dark Stranger has, via his avatar the Handsome Sailor, “metamorphosed into the ‘light’ figure of Billy”, the story lacks a Hero or “experiencing self”. Instead, the structural position occupied by the Captain figure has “doubled”, producing the characters of Claggart and Vere, both of them representatives of “a social order that values control and suppression” (1986a:107).

II.2.2. The 'dark'/'light' character pairing in Forster's fiction

II.2.2.1. Typology

Approaching Forster's textual patterns from the direction of the *Billy Budd* libretto, at a time when I had not yet encountered Levine's essay, the binary which lies at the centre of Forster's work first presented itself to me in its aspect of the opposition of a middle-class intellectual in need of salvation – both Vere and Claggart answer to this description²²¹ – and a desired social Other who functions as a saviour figure. The terminology of 'dark' and 'light' was first suggested by the visual appearances of, respectively, Claggart and Billy, which match those of the eponymous heroes of "Ralph and Tony", and those of Rickie and Stephen from *The Longest Journey*. In each of these three pairs, the representative of the 'light' saviour type is blond, with heavenly blue eyes; he is a shining emblem of masculinity, whose brightness is charged with latent aggression, and who figures quite explicitly as the object of the dark-haired protagonist's desire. Furthermore, even though the imagery of darkness can be seen to serve multiple symbolical functions throughout Forster's oeuvre, darkness often represents a character's inability to get in touch with his or her true feelings and desires, as well as being generally associated with the socially ordained suppression of individualism and sexuality.²²²

The pairing of a 'dark' and a 'light' character type occurs mostly, although not exclusively, between male figures,²²³ who always interact directly with one another

²²¹ In the operatic Claggart's case, his intellectual competency as well as the position of power he holds on board the *Indomitable* arguably mark him as Billy's social superior; he can therefore be seen to belong to the Forsterian character type which is usually associated with a middle-class background. The libretto retains no references to Claggart's ambiguous social background which is hinted at in Melville's novella (see BB42).

²²² Forster sometimes uses the image of darkness to symbolise different ideas within a single text. In *Maurice*, for instance, darkness functions both as a symbol for an unenlightened state of insufficient self-knowledge and as a symbol for erotic freedom (see Martin 1983:41f.). The latter symbolism recurs in "The Life to Come", where love is born "as a midnight cry" in the "dark" forest, filled with "the song" of "darkness and beauty" (LtC65). In *A Room with a View*, Lucy Honeychurch, determined to observe the dictates of social convention and refusing to acknowledge her true feelings for George, temporarily joins "the vast armies of the benighted" (RV174).

²²³ Some of Forster's heterosexual couples could arguably be read as 'dark'/'light' character pairings. It would be possible, for instance, to read Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View* as a female variant of the Forsterian middle-class hero, who attains salvation by choosing the right kind of masculinity, represented by George Emerson, an enlightened athlete possessed of a well-developed heart. However, even though George does stand up for himself in Ch. 16, he cannot be classed as an autonomous saviour figure of the same calibre as, for instance, Stephen Wonham; for Lucy's final acknowledgement of her true feelings, and, thus, her salvation, is brought about by the intervention first of Charlotte Bartlett and then of Mr Emerson. The successful union of Lucy and George would thus appear to involve not just one, but two mediators or catalysts, resulting in a doubled triangular structure in which Mr Emerson can unexpectedly be seen to take his place among the "powerful [female] agents who preside over the connection between 'the beast and the monk'" which, so Joseph Bristow has proposed, lies at the heart of Forster's

and whose character qualities are always antithetic, but depicted as complementary, i.e. striving towards fulfilment in a union – spiritual, sexual or both – even though the figures themselves rarely achieve this union as a permanently successful state. The male character pairs in whom the ‘dark’/‘light’ pattern can be studied most profitably are Ralph/Tony (“Ralph and Tony”), Philip/Gino (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*), Rickie/Stephen,²²⁴ Rickie/Gerald and Ansell/Stephen (*The Longest Journey*), Maurice/Alec (*Maurice*), Pinmay/Vithobai (“The Life to Come”), Clesant/his ghostly visitor (“Dr Woolacott”), Conway/Arthur (“Arthur Snatchfold”), Lionel/Cocoanut (“The Other Boat”), Warham/Imber (“Little Imber”) – and, fitting in nicely amongst them all, Claggart/Billy and Vere/Billy as they appear in the *Billy Budd* libretto.

The ‘dark’ character as a rule enjoys a higher social status than the ‘light’ character; typically, he is a member of the English middle classes, may have received a university education, and is of a more introspective, intellectual disposition than his rather less sophisticated ‘light’ counterpart; he may moreover suffer from chronic weak health or physical disability. The ‘light’ character is often younger than the ‘dark’ character; he may be his contemporary but he is never noticeably the older of the pair. Even though he is cast as the ‘dark’ character’s social and intellectual inferior, he ranks superior to him in his abundance of physical strength – which often comprises a potential for violence – and his enjoyment of life, qualities which make him attractive to the ‘dark’ character, who, besides feeling isolated from his surroundings by his intellectual outlook, seldom remains untouched by sexual guilt and homophobic self-hatred in one form or another. Thus, the stereotypical ‘dark’/‘light’ patterning of Forster’s homosexual pairs, predicated as it is on differences in power and social status, which it apparently

male/male pairings (1995:58). Concentrating his discussion on the contrast between the monkish aesthete, Cecil Vyse, and the virile George, and on Forster’s use of gender stereotypes, Bristow places Lucy among the presiding “figures of female authority” who effects a connection of beast and monk within the single character of George (73), but he does not investigate the possibility of Lucy functioning as the (Maurice-like) hero figure in a narrative of personal development. Since this study is concerned with the ways in which Forster’s characters are related to those of Melville’s *Billy Budd*, I shall, for the sake of simplicity, mainly be concentrating on Forster’s male characters, touching on his female characters only occasionally, and trying to avoid what would be an indefensibly facile view of them as merely gay ciphers (on this subject see Goldman, particularly 132ff.).

²²⁴ Discourses of queer desire in Forster’s work may be complicated but never entirely precluded by structures of kinship. Desire and sexual relationships among siblings exist as distinct possibilities in Forster’s imaginative universe, as demonstrated by the scenarios of incestuous, polymorphous promiscuity that conclude the unpublished short stories “The Torque” (see LtC165) and “Little Imber” (see AS235). An erotic potential of the relationship between the half-brothers Rickie Elliot and Stephen Wonham in *The Longest Journey* is therefore not to be discounted; indeed, Judith Herz reads this as the novel’s “primary love relationship” (1978:261). For a discussion of the homoerotic implications of Forster’s concept of brotherhood real or ideal, see Bristow (1997). The intimate and to some extent exclusive relationship between the Schlegel sisters in *Howards End*, too, can be and has been read as queer.

seeks to balance, can to some extent be seen to reproduce an established pattern of homosexual experience. This pattern manifested itself in contemporary literary discourses, some of them reaching back to the Greek tradition of *erastes* and *eromenos*, some of them celebrating cross-class relationships.²²⁵ On the other hand, it appeared in contemporary social practice – inter-class sexual affairs as well as stable relationships, such as that between Edward Carpenter and his partner George Merrill, featured prominently in Forster’s own circle of acquaintances. Nevertheless, Forster’s favourite male/male literary character constellation can be seen to bear the distinctive stamp of Forster’s very own form of idealism, to which his belief in the salutary nature of personal relationships is central (see below).

Writing about *A Room with a View*, Judith Herz points out that the “intricately linked antitheses” which govern the novel’s structure, and which include “the ascetic/the fruitful, dark/light, lies/truth [...] are not seen in simple either/or terms; rather they are woven into a dense narrative fabric” (2007:139); and her observation would seem to apply to much of Forster’s work. Indeed, in the more complexly worked characters of the novels and some of the short fiction, the typical ‘dark’ and ‘light’ attributes can be less schematically distributed, as I shall be demonstrating in my analyses.²²⁶ Three elements of the pattern which prove remarkably immutable, though, are the emphasis on the ‘light’ character’s physical prowess, the ‘dark’ character’s need for salvation, and the dynamics of desire that shape their relationship: in most of Forster’s narratives, it is the ‘dark’ character who is, to use Levine’s insightful term, “in pursuit of” the ‘light’ character, although there do exist some exceptions to this general rule – the most notable among them being Vithobai’s repeated attempts to renew his relationship with Pinmay in “The Life to Come”, and Alec’s efforts to put himself in Maurice’s way and thus attract his notice.²²⁷

II.2.2.2. Saving “the English character”: ‘dark’ redeemed by ‘light’

In those cases where the ‘light’ character seems virtually free from sexual inhibition and homophobia, he tends to be an Other of different social or cultural origin. Through a personal connection (which in many cases comprises the implied possibility of a sexual union) with this salutary figure – so most of the texts which I

²²⁵ See Weeks 41.

²²⁶ While Levine’s representation of the “tame” and “savage” character types is useful as a general indication of Forsterian character patterns, it would be doing a great injustice to Forster’s conception and treatment of his characters in many of his more complexly worked texts to reduce them to those categories schematically and unquestioningly, as Christopher Lane does when he writes that the “‘tame’ and ‘savage’ elements of personality [...] do not coexist in each partner but define one or the other’s exclusive property; a relatively simple schema aligns each character with a specific set of traits” (1995:163). Accordingly, Lane’s reading of “The Other Boat” in particular appears reductive because it fails to recognise the keywords that mark the ‘savage’ traits in Lionel, and the associations that link Cocomat with the ‘tameness’ of a more complexly civilised state (see section II.4.4.).

²²⁷ See *Maurice*, Ch. XXXVII and XXXVIII.

shall be studying consistently assert – the ‘dark’ middle-class character could be redeemed from his spiritual incompleteness. This spiritual incompleteness would seem to conform with Forster’s generalised view of the English middle-class male, as expressed in his “Notes on the English Character”. This essay was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1926, but an earlier, longer version, entitled “The English Character”, dates from 1913, when it was “read by Forster to a group of Indian students at Cambridge during the autumn term” (Heine 1996:404). The main points, however, appear essentially identical in both versions: products of a conventional public school education, the men of this type “go forth into [the world] with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts” – not incapable of feeling, but “afraid to feel”, having been taught to “bottle up [their] emotions” (AH4f). Forster goes on to emphasise that the middle-class Englishman as a type is “an incomplete person. Not a cold or an unspiritual one. But underdeveloped, incomplete” (AH10), implying that the development of the “emotion further down”, which “never gets used”, and of the “brain power [...] more often used to confirm prejudices than to dispel them” (AH13) might potentially lead to a salutary completion.

It is to the working classes that Forster looks as the bringers of a change that might make such a completion possible, although the circumstances of their ascendance are left unspecified, just as his belief that “the supremacy of the middle classes is probably ending”, carried over unaltered from the essay’s 1913 version,²²⁸ remains no more than a vague desideratum: some “new element” introduced by the working classes will, so Forster hopes, ensure “that the national character will alter into something [...] more lovable” (AH13). This vagueness, and the fact that the pre-War formulations reappear unchanged in the post-War publication, would seem to mark Forster’s hopes for the transformation of the middle-class Englishman’s character as part of a consistent utopian vision, rather than as a response to any concrete contemporary political development; while the time-span which lies between these two iterations of identical ideas demonstrates the consistency and tenacity with which the stereotypical figure of the middle-class Englishman occupied its position, within Forster’s writerly and critical worldview, as a target for both his criticism and his educative impulses.

The utopian element, viewed in conjunction with the date at which it was first formulated – in 1913, Forster was working on *Maurice* – serves to highlight the double nature of the essay’s subject-matter. While Forster is supplying an audience of foreigners (Indian students and American readers respectively) with a sketch of the English national character, intended, among other things, to promote understanding between the nations,²²⁹ he is at the same time showcasing the theme which formed his life-long preoccupation as a writer: not just the “pathology” (Trilling 26) of the undeveloped heart – an affliction here ascribed specifically to his *male* compatriots –

²²⁸ See Heine 1996:409.

²²⁹ See Heine 1996:409 and AH13.

but also what he saw as its potential cure, namely, its development into “something [...] more lovable” by means of a fertilising if unspecified contribution from an increasingly self-confident working-class. Forster himself tellingly stresses that his observations are “notes on the English character as it has struck a novelist” (AH13); and indeed developments of this kind form the very heart of his fiction, where personal relationships, often modulated by some form of desire, appear as the driving force that generates development, and where emotional and spiritual awakenings are frequently and explicitly associated with salvation. It is this narrative of the salutary awakening which Forster arguably strove to impose upon the figure of the Englishman Vere in his adaptation of Melville’s novella in 1949.

II.2.2.3. “It takes two to make a Hero”?

The ‘light’ saviour character as Other

Reviewing his thematic concerns as a novelist in 1930, Forster emphasised that “the only theme” he found “worthwhile” was “two people pulling each other into salvation. Not rescuer and rescued, not the alternate performance of good turns, but ‘It takes two to make a Hero’” (CPB55).²³⁰ This programmatic declaration notwithstanding, it is in effect often harder and sometimes impossible to make out the way in which the ‘light’ character, in his manifestation as a social or cultural Other, might experience, or even stand in need of, salvation or spiritual completion through a personal connection with the ‘dark’ character to a similar degree. On the contrary, critics have drawn attention to the clear tendency of Forster’s working-class or foreign saviour characters to come to grief in the process of the middle-class protagonist’s self-realisation: in a number of stories, the latter’s salvation seems indeed to involve the sacrificial death of a rescuer. Wilfred Stone, for instance, came to fix on this narrative pattern as the basis for a rather harsh criticism which takes issue with Forster’s psyche to expose what Stone subsumes under the title of “Forster’s Problems in Connection” across the boundary of class.²³¹ As Levine has rightly pointed out, Stone’s “attack” fails to be substantiated

²³⁰ The idea of salvation through love is expressed in Ch. XXI of *Maurice*, where Maurice reflects: “Clive had helped him. Clive would help him again when the pendulum swung, meanwhile he must help Clive, and all through life they would alternate thus” (M95). It will be noted, however, that both in the ultimately unsuccessful relationship between Maurice and Clive and in the successful relationship between Maurice and Alec, the progress to salvation does take the shape of an “alternate performance” of salutary acts of “help” and commitment: resolved to turn his back on society, Maurice feels that “he had brought out the man in Alec, and now it was Alec’s turn to bring out the hero in him” (M207).

²³¹ A curiously unsympathetic and deprecatory attitude already appears to underlie Stone’s 1966 Jungian study of Forster, *The Cave and the Mountain*, something which has been perceived by a number of its readers. Thus, Martin and Piggford have remarked on Stone’s use of “a hostile vocabulary that hints at illness and sterility” in connection with homosexuality (17). A close analysis of Stone’s introductory chapter moreover suggests that Forster is to some extent being made to function as an example in exposing the shortcomings of Liberalism in general.

by detailed textual analysis, not least because it passes over the fact that the 'dark' or tame character also frequently shares death with his 'light' or savage counterpart (81).

Nevertheless, it does appear that the degree to which Forster's male pairs can be seen to consist of "two people pulling each other into salvation" on convincingly equal terms is linked to class in a definitive way: the further removed a 'light' saviour character is from English middle-class culture, the less likely he will be to appear in need of salvation. It seems that the desired 'light' characters' Otherness often already includes a quality of spiritual completeness which is seldom exposed to closer scrutiny. This impression owes much to the fact that in some (though not all) of Forster's texts, the inner lives of these desired social or cultural Others either remain deliberately unanalysed and unquestioned, or are presented as less complicated than the 'dark' protagonists'. Forster himself commented on this narrative strategy in his "Note on *Arctic Summer*", composed for his reading of the first five chapters of the abandoned novel's Main Version at the 1951 Aldeburgh Festival: talking about "young March", the novel's 'light' hero character, whom the 'dark' middle-class protagonist may be understood to desire, Forster states that "he is first and foremost heroic, no thought of self when the blood is up, he can pounce and act rightly. He is generous, idealistic, loyal". Forster then turns to the question of narrative technique:

How should such a character be presented? Impressionistically – that is to say he should come and go, and not be documented, in contrast to the ['dark' middle-class] Whitby's and Borlase's [*sic*] who can't be documented too much. [...] March does gleam on the walls of Tramonta, I think. [...] The only way to present this hero was to root him as little as possible in society, and to let him come and go unexplained. (AS161)

Even though March's Otherness would seem to be neither that of a lower-class or non-English cultural Other – he ought in fact to be classed as a representative of the homophobic middle-class 'light' character type (see section II.2.2.4. below) – the lack of documentation or explanation which Forster prescribes for the presentation of "such a character" is perceptible in the realisation of almost all of his desirable 'light' characters. An observation in the same vein, made by Judith Herz about George Emerson, can to some extent be seen to apply to most of Forster's 'light' saviour figures: writing about the famous bathing scene in Ch. 12 of *A Room with a View*, Herz points out that "George, the figure the scene is constructed around, the one most looked at as he stands 'Michaelangelesque on the flooded margin' [RV130], remains only lightly looked into" (2007:143). It is interesting to note in this context that Melville's Billy also figures abundantly as the object of the narrator's or the other characters' gaze, while his thought processes are represented as exceedingly simple, and form the subject of the narrator's attention far less often than those of the other characters.

II.2.2.4. “Bring me a bath”: the homophobic ‘light’ character

The connection between class and the need for salvation is revealed all the more clearly by an examination of those representatives of the ‘light’ character type who lack the feature of clearly defined social or cultural Otherness: whenever the desired and desirable ‘light’ character shows decidedly homophobic tendencies, he will *also* be a representative of the type of English middle-class masculinity which Forster described in “Notes on the English Character”.²³² In the stories which feature this type of ‘light’ character, the desiring and pursuing ‘dark’ character can consistently be seen to attempt to overcome the ‘light’ character’s homophobia, even though he may not be entirely free from homosexual guilt himself, or is likely to have internalised the socially predominant view of homosexuality as pathological. Generally conceived as the more intellectually complex of the pair, the ‘dark’ character again desires this variant of the ‘light’ character for his animal nature and masculine strength; and the connection he thus envisions and strives for is clearly represented as potentially salutary for both characters, since the ‘light’ character’s unrefined brutality and lack of sensitivity make him an unacceptable, because incomplete, representative of the Forsterian ideal of Civilisation.²³³

In those cases where the ‘dark’ character attempts to establish a personal connection with this ‘light’ character type by stating his desire more or less directly (depending on the ‘publishable’ or ‘unpublishable’ nature of the text), the ‘light’ character’s “undeveloped heart” – his emotional “stupid[ity]” (AS89), as Margaret calls it in “Ralph and Tony” – usually leads him to react with a violently homophobic recoil. This pattern occurs in its clearest form between the eponymous characters in “Ralph and Tony”, and is echoed more obliquely in Ch. 4 of *The Longest Journey*, where Rickie Elliot offers Gerald Dawes money so that he can marry Agnes Pembroke. In both cases, it is a confrontation with death – effectively amounting to the annihilation of this aggressive virility – that uncovers the ‘light’ character’s vulnerability, and, at least in Tony’s case, qualifies him for a salutary relationship with the ‘dark’ character. While Gerald does not survive his confrontation with death, he arguably lives on redeemed in the eyes of Rickie, who henceforth glorifies a romanticised version of him.

²³² The pervasive appearance of this figure among Forster’s stock of fictional characters not only as an antagonist but, sometimes, and simultaneously with his antagonism, as an object of desire, suggests that Forster’s creative imagination may in many cases have been fuelled by the complex dynamics of attraction and repulsion, identification and rejection which are associated with the homophobic middle-class ‘light’ character.

²³³ This character type can be seen to correspond to the “imperial male” type identified by Joseph Bristow, who, “even if displaying a repugnant brutality”, is presented “as possessing an eroticised physical power that could both ennoble and maintain the race”, but whose “zealous athleticism [...] could not [...] be left to its own inhuman devices” and whose “sensibility” must therefore be “refine[d]” by “the intellectual man” – i.e. the ‘dark’ character type. In the synthesis of the two types which Joseph Bristow respectively labels “aesthete and athlete”, the latter may then “reciprocally virilise the scholarly fellow” (1995:57).

Maurice's initially shocked reaction to Clive's declaration of love, described in Ch. IX of *Maurice*, is another instance of homophobic middle-class conventionality confronted with a deviant desire. At this point, the physically strong and mentally stolid Maurice momentarily functions as the desired 'light' character to Clive's desiring (but, as it turns out, fundamentally even more homophobic) 'dark' character, who, true to the typology of this pattern, is also his intellectual and social superior. Maurice's is arguably the only case in which middle-class homophobia in a desirable 'light' character is shown to be indeed curable, even without a violent confrontation with death: it is his acknowledgement of his own complementary desire which enables him to enter his platonic relationship with Clive. However, Maurice can be seen to fulfil the role of the 'reformed' homophobic 'light' character only temporarily; for, abandoned by Clive, he becomes once more the seeker in need of salvation, and resumes his principal function of 'dark' middle-class protagonist. Again, Maurice is one of the few representatives of this latter type who achieves what the text asserts will be a lasting spiritual completion, attained through "the flesh educating the spirit" (M128) in his sexual relationship with the 'light' saviour character Alec.

Maurice's 'education' demands a painful process of self-observation and self-revision, and – so the novel notoriously proclaims – only succeeds because Maurice manages to reject the norms of society entirely, and accepts that he must live "outside class, without relations or money" (M207). It is the inability to envision or accept a queer desire that would require such a re-envisioning and re-positioning of the self in relation to the social norms, which ultimately appears responsible for all the homophobic 'light' characters' violence.

The destructive dynamics of the homophobic 'light' characters' predicament are nowhere more clearly illustrated than in "The Other Boat" (1957/58). This late text features what is perhaps one of Forster's most complexly worked character pairs, showing the least schematic distribution of 'dark' and 'light' character traits. Nevertheless, I would be inclined to classify the desirable young middle-class officer Lionel March as a representative of the homophobic 'light' character type, since it is clearly his inability to reconcile his homosexual desire with his middle-class identity which leads to his violent destruction, first of his pursuing lover, on whom he projects his homophobic self-hatred, and then of himself – in this instance, "the flesh" signally fails to "educat[e] the spirit" of the middle-class Englishman.

II.2.2.5. Eternal pursuit: sexuality, violence and death in Forster's fiction

In an imaginary dialogue between "Civis" (the 'tame' or civilised man) and "Savage", entitled "Kindness and the Rules of the Game", which he noted into his Commonplace Book in 1929, Forster gave shape to what Levine was to recognise as an essential feature of his archetypal character set-up. Civis (or Kindness), in an "aggrieved and auntish tone", pleads with the indifferent Savage:

- Civis “You oughtn’t to treat me like this – I’ve been so considerate.”
 Savage “Have you? I forget.” [...]

[Civis] “I love you. I couldn’t love my own sort, who played properly.
 Did you ever love me?”
 [Savage] “I forget.”

Noting his own “inclination [...] to sneer at her [i.e. at Kindness]”,²³⁴ Forster explains the impulse that draws her to her opposing principle: the tame must keep on seeking out the savage because “between two tamed creatures there can be no passion”; and yet “until we are tamed we cannot be civilised, and as soon as we are civilised we revolt from civilisation” (CPB50).

This particular Commonplace Book entry appears at least partly to represent an attempt of Forster’s to come to terms with a personal crisis.²³⁵ Yet the literarised abstraction which Forster creates of the irreconcilable tame and savage principles can be seen to express the dynamics of pursuit that underlie his preferred constellation of fictional characters; a constellation in which the apparent power relations can moreover be seen to correspond inversely with the characters’ putative social positions.²³⁶ At the same time, Forster would seem to be confirming the fundamental impossibility of these two opposing principles ever achieving a lasting connection (or indeed any connection at all) when he comments that it is “difficult to grasp anything about the dialogue except that it will be repeated *until one can rise no more*” (CPB50, my emphasis). The latter part of this statement might in fact be taken to imply that any encounter between these antagonistic if complementary character types may potentially prove fatal to one of them. Viewed in this light, the elements of conflict and violence which, to a greater or lesser degree, feature in virtually all of Forster’s depictions of relationships, emerge as the extrusions of one of the fundamental principles of his creative imagination; and it seems that he himself became increasingly conscious of its importance over the

²³⁴ Forster’s feminisation of the “auntish” civilised archetype is noteworthy, and would certainly be in accordance with Joseph Bristow’s observation that “although in Forster’s work effeminacy signals degeneracy, femininity often implies intellectual sensitivity. Between the two, however, there runs an ambivalent identification with the cultured side of the feminine and alienation from its vitiating influence on masculinity”. Bristow traces this patterning in Forster’s work to the “gendered meanings attached to the late-Victorian ideal of culture” (1995:59f.), specifically to the critical debate engendered by the publication of Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1867–69), the polemics of which to some extent succeeded in branding the Arnoldian concept of culture as unmanly.

²³⁵ See also Gardner’s explanatory note, Gardner 1987:274.

²³⁶ An interesting precursor for the encounter between Civis and Savage can be found in Ch. 26 of *The Longest Journey*, where the philosopher Ansell finds himself scuffling with Stephen at Dunwood House. As Stephen “nick[s] him over the shins with the rim of the book cover”, Ansell, “in the tones of a puzzled civilisation”, protests “But it hurts! [...] What you do hurts!” (LJ210). This being their first encounter, we find puzzlement instead of the “aggrieved and auntish tone” adopted in the Commonplace Book’s lovers’ quarrel, but here, too, it is the savage Stephen who carries the physical victory against the civilised Ansell.

years: in 1958, he told P. N. Furbank that “he thought the tragic theme of ‘The Other Boat’ – two people made to destroy each other – was more interesting than the theme of salvation” (Furbank II:303).

The interplay of violence and death with sexuality in Forster’s work has been observed by a number of critics, many of whom have also found it necessary to engage with the question of how far this phenomenon must be seen to have a diminishing effect on the Forsterian philosophy which proclaims the salutary nature of cross-class and cross-cultural relationships. In his recent article on Forsterian sexuality, Christopher Lane writes:

Because of sexuality’s power in Forster’s later writing [...] the gulf dividing these classes [of ‘tame’ and ‘savage’] forms one basis for betrayal, whereby friendship (at least in theory) is meant to prevail over the dictates of clans and nations. Whether it finally does, however, is open to question: sexuality in stories like “The Other Boat” and “The Life to Come” is often so volatile [...] that it destroys characters, relationships, and the principles Forster invoked to guide them, and what is betrayed, poignantly, is the sexual relationship itself. (2007:106)

To Lane, “the violence in these stories is gratuitous not redemptive, and extends a set of questions about the stakes and status of intimacy that haunts all of Forster’s work”.²³⁷ He chooses to read the “difficulties with carnality” which he sees as emerging throughout Forster’s fiction as symptoms of Forster’s “intense personal struggles with sexuality and embodiment” (115f). Lane’s earlier conclusion that

²³⁷ Lane makes a similar argument in the Forster chapter of his study *The Ruling Passion*, where he contends that “The Life to Come” and “The Other Boat” are “supplemental narrative[s]” to *A Passage to India* and *Maurice* respectively, and can be seen to “elaborate[...]” a “fantasy” of “difference, violence, and ambivalence” which, according to Lane, Forster had to substitute with the “fantasy” of “friendship, intimacy, and solidarity” in order to “achieve the literary success of the novels” (1995:165). However, Lane bases his argument for his view of “The Other Boat” as a companion piece for *Maurice* on an erroneous perception of genetic proximity, which he also carries over into his 2007 article: for some reason, he persists in regarding “The Other Boat” as “a novella written after *Maurice*”, and completed in 1915-16 (1995:171; see also 2007:114). In fact, the part of the story which depicts the adult Lionel and Cocoanut, and which is most pertinent to Lane’s argument, was not composed until 1957-58. In 1915-16, shortly after the essential completion of *Maurice*, what was eventually to grow into “The Other Boat” consisted of no more than the current first section of the story, depicting the March children and Cocoanut on their passage home (Heine 1980:xxiif; see also Stallybrass 1972:xvii). While this temporary distance between the novel and the short story does not automatically invalidate Lane’s observations in their entirety, it does deprive the neat structure which he postulates, of novels which celebrate a “fantasy” of successful male/male friendship and intimacy but whose suppressed “underside” (1995:165) emerges in a corresponding companion narrative, of much of its argumentative basis, in so far as it is predicated on an immediate, or even causal, creative connection. The short story’s actual time of genesis firmly places it among Forster’s late works, and it would therefore be necessary to investigate any relationship to *Maurice* in the light of Forster’s late-1950s revisions to his novel, and also, as Herz (1988:55f.) and Dorland (211 and 218, n.23) have suggested, in the light of Forster’s work on the *Billy Budd* libretto (see discussion in section II.4.4.).

“Forster could not conceive of homosexual desire without accompanying elements of violence, slavery and distress” is predicated not only on a reading of “The Life to Come” that apparently fails to allow for the possibility of an ironic stance on the narrator’s part, but also on an attitude that apparently regards “the tension in Forster’s writing between his imaginary and represented passions” as necessarily qualifying the “fraternal idealism” expressed in his credo essay “What I Believe” (1995:170).²³⁸

By contrast, Robert Martin and George Piggford, noting that “the encounter with an erotic other, at once threatening and appealing, remains a constant throughout Forster’s work” (4), have called for “a new and less moralistic (a queerer?) reading of Forster’s work that can take account of a sadomasochism that has frequently been silenced or condemned” (14). The “queerer” approach they propose certainly promises a welcome relief from the pronouncements of those critics who persist in regarding Forster’s engagements with the violent aspects of desire as expressions, if not quite of a personal pathology any longer, then at least of “impossibly conflicted sexual and racial desires” (Lane 1995:170). Assessments such as Lane’s are arguably narrowed by a failure to acknowledge an eroticised aesthetics of violence, or the pleasures of exploring the tensions of sadomasochist power relationships, in stories like “Ralph and Tony” and “The Other Boat”. The view of sexuality proposed by Martin and Piggford would appear to be at once broader and more inclusive, permitting readings of Forster’s texts that construct his engagements with sexuality and violence as explorations of, among other things, the erotics of power and of pain, conducted within a framework of inter-

²³⁸ From Lane’s comments on Forster’s criticism of Pierre Loti’s representation of homosexual desire in his novel *Mon Frère Yves* (1883; trans. W. P. Baines: *A Tale of Brittany*. London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1924), which, according to Lane, Forster considered “too reticent and even dishonest in its aims”, it seems clear that Lane holds preconceived notions of what an ideal form of writerly self-expression should look like. Thus, contending that Loti’s use of “*disembodied* objects of desire” leaves “room for homoerotic possibility precisely by refusing to specify the gendered object of his sailors’ fantasies”, Lane – somewhat idly – queries “why didn’t Forster adopt a similar tack?” and goes on to declare that “had he adopted Loti’s impressionist emphasis, or even a related stress on the nebulousness of objects of fantasy (following Woolf, Joyce, Mansfield, and many other contemporaries), he would have extended not depleted this effect by increasing the narrative mobility of his characters’ desires. Forster, however, hewed a more conventional, tortuous path”. This path was, according to Lane, the ‘conception’ and composition of *Maurice*, which, however, and “counterintuitively, [...] exacerbated rather than solved Forster’s quandary about how to integrate sexuality and embodiment into his fiction” (2007:113f.). Curiously, Lane, Stone and other psychoanalytical critics not only appear to insist on measuring Forster against what appears to be a normative model of psychological and writerly development, but also seem incapable of abstaining from measuring Forster’s texts against other (homosexual) writers’ engagements with homosexual experience (Stone [1978] chooses Jean Genet). Both Lane and Stone thus assume a position of authority from which they cannot but evaluate Forster in the negative light of failure, since Forster is found to fall short of the respective developmental ideals, as well as of those other writers’ solutions. The resulting readings consequently appear decidedly limited by the normative conceptions that underlie them.

class, intercultural and interracial tensions – tensions which are also inscribed in the larger discursive constructions of Western culture in general, and of Victorianism and Imperial Colonialism in particular.

As regards the question of whether Forster's interest, however conflicted or not, in some of the queerer forms and expressions of sexuality must needs have a qualifying effect on the philosophical and political ideals which he expressed, consistently and publicly, throughout his entire life, Judith Herz has emphasised that

one should be careful not to let the observation that sexuality functions disruptively in Forster's texts diminish the importance, indeed the toughness, of his liberal humanism. Discovering inconsistency, or observing the erotic in pain [...], or noting, with Stone, covert malice in the sudden deaths, need not, must not, undermine the validity of that humane (and admittedly incomplete and class-privileged) idealism. (1997:149)

In fact, June Levine's description of Forster's work as "the literature of *attempted liaison with the savage*", which "serves a public position – egalitarian, anti-imperialistic, and internationalist – as well as a romantic ideal" (72, my emphasis), remains perhaps the most astute ever given by a critic to date, because it acknowledges the political and the idealistic function of Forster's texts, yet without making the validity of the politics and ideals expressed in them necessarily and directly interdependent with the 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' nature of the narratives that explore these attempts at connection.

II.2.3. The Forsterian salvation narrative

II.2.3.1. "From confusion to salvation": "travelling light"

The typical Forsterian narrative, as Judith Herz concludes in her discussion of Forster's short fiction, is governed by what she calls "the salvation paradigm", a term drawn from Forster's declaration, already quoted above, that "two people pulling each other into salvation is the only theme I find worthwhile" (CPB55). Herz' analyses show that "the movement from confusion to salvation is both organising principle and primary thematic concern in nearly every story" (1988:62).²³⁹ Fascinatingly, her observation appears echoed and confirmed in the

²³⁹ In a number of his texts, Forster introduces the concept of salvation to set up an ironic contrast between restrictive social convention and the 'true' kind of spiritual salvation which can only be attained through connection and personal relationships. Thus, for instance, in *The Longest Journey*, Agnes and Mrs Failing join forces to "hush[...] up" the scandal of Stephen's illegitimacy which threatens their respective social status: Mrs Failing fears for her position as a respected member of the local neighbourhood, while Agnes "must hide the stain in her future husband's family". The women justify their intervention by reflecting "how grateful [Rickie] would be to them for saving him", and when Agnes comes to Rickie with the news that Stephen is ignorant of his parentage, and is to remain so, her first words are "Dear, we're saved" (LJ134f). Shortly afterwards, Rickie fails to respond to Stephen's call, thus rejecting the symbolic moment that would lead him to 'true' spiritual salvation in favour of the 'false' salvation offered by convention and embodied by Agnes, who throughout her later machinations

very wording of Forster's Prologue and Epilogue for *Billy Budd*, as Captain Vere progresses from "Confusion, so much is confusion" (LIB7) to his final realisation – however transient or deluded – that Billy Budd "has saved me" (LIB63). Herz goes on to explain that the narrative path leading "from confusion to salvation" varies from "straight" to "involved and tortuous" depending on the individual story, but that "even in stories where it doesn't function", the salvation paradigm "offers an oblique comment on the ironically disclosed turn of events" (1988:62).

The structure of the salvation narrative which Herz traces in the short fiction is arguably discernible in most of Forster's fictional work; and the "movement from confusion to salvation", for all its diversity of form, nevertheless tends to involve certain iconic elements in a recurring pattern. First of all, the 'dark' English middle-class characters will often start out "travelling light".²⁴⁰ Encapsulating Fielding's life philosophy in *A Passage to India* (see PtI112, 182, 261, 268, and 307), this phrase can be applied to all those 'dark' characters who are unwilling, and perhaps to some extent unable, to become too closely and personally involved with the human beings who surround them, let alone develop close emotional ties with any of them. In other words, these characters live in a state of emotional aloofness or withdrawal, and display a patent lack of Forsterian connectedness. They may or may not be aware of the spiritual incompleteness associated with their state in the Forsterian philosophy; some of them, like Ralph Holme, Lucy Honeychurch, Rickie Elliot, or Adela Quested, may consciously be seeking to establish a personal connection of some kind with their fellow human beings, typically across a gap of social or cultural Otherness.

A sketch of the 'dark' character's isolation is given by Philip Herriton in Forster's first published novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*:

Some people are born not to do things. I'm one of them. [...] I seem fated to pass through the world without colliding with it or moving it – and I'm sure I can't tell you whether the fate's good or evil. I don't die – I don't fall in love [...] life to me is just a spectacle [...].²⁴¹

continues to hold that she has been "sav[ing]" Rickie from the social stain which Stephen represents "all these years" (LJ251). In "The Road from Colonus", in which Mr Lucas is equated with the aged Oedipus, and the shrine he visits with Colonus (TMS76, 79), Ethel Lucas tells Mr Graham: "You have saved my father" (TMS83) when, actually, they have abducted him, thus preventing his spiritual salvation which might have entailed death (Oedipus died at Colonus and so, it is implied, Mr Lucas should have, instead of taking the road *from* Colonus). Mr Lucas is consequently condemned to continue his life in a state of spiritual death (see discussion in section II.2.4.1. below). Summers (27) discusses the ironic and non-ironic uses of the word "saved" in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*.

²⁴⁰ Nancy Mitchell (160ff.) has analysed the phenomenon of 'travelling light' in *A Passage to India* for the characters of Fielding, Aziz and Godbole.

²⁴¹ Trilling, though apparently oblivious of the encoded discourse that marks Philip's queerness, nevertheless draws a parallel here to another queer encoding: Philip is "not quite a man, though he wishes to be. To Philip, as the hero [sic] of Henry James's 'The Beast in the Jungle', nothing can ever happen; that is his tragedy" (65).

To his companion, Caroline Abbott, Philip's detachment is disconcerting, conveying to her the impression that he is "dead – dead – dead". Her response is to wish for the disruption of this isolation through some external influence (a prospect about which Philip is ambivalent, or at least equivocal):

"I wish something would happen to you, my dear friend; I wish something would happen to you."
 "But why?" he asked, smiling. "Prove to me why I don't do as I am."
 (WA120f.)²⁴²

Caroline's words contain a key phrase also used by the discontented Lucy Honeychurch, stifled by convention, in *A Room with a View*: "Nothing ever happens to me," she complains in Ch. 4. When "something [does] happen" to her (RV40f.), as it eventually does to Philip, to Ralph, to Rickie, to Adela, and to all the other 'dark' characters who are 'travelling light', the momentary collision with the Otherness of the world, whether desired or not, comes as a shock, and tends to involve acts of violence or death.

These moments of connection, thus all Forster critics seem to concur in one way or another, invariably constitute what Ann Ardis describes as an "exposure to entirely unanticipated dimensions and categories of experience" (71), presenting the 'dark' focal characters with situations for which they can draw upon "no prior referent" (69). These exposures appear designed to test and question the 'dark' character's perception of himself or herself, his or her relationship to English middle-class society and its established norms, and his or her acceptance or rejection of that normativity as the site of self-validation.²⁴³ On a basic level, Forster's strategy for educating the undeveloped heart of the English character travelling light operates on the premise that "violent contact with difference can shake some suburbanites out of complacency" (Peppis 50). As often as not, however, these collisions with the world, as well as the active attempts at connecting with the Other, not only turn out unsuccessful, but, as David Medalie has pointed out, "the quest [for connection] itself" is frequently "shown to have catastrophic repercussions for some of the characters [...] when the pursuit fails to take account of the 'complex world, full of conflicting claims'".²⁴⁴ According to Medalie, if "good intentions are so frequently shown to have negative consequences in [Forster's] fiction", then "the implication is that it is not sufficient for these benevolent impulses to be worthwhile in themselves, they need also to be mediated in relation to

²⁴² Trilling felicitously misquotes Caroline addressing Philip as "my dead friend" (65).

²⁴³ This experience can be seen to dramatise, on the character level, the clash of what Malcolm Bradbury has described as the Victorian and the Modernist elements in Forster's work, where Victorian Romantic "vision[s] of Wholeness" (32) are confronted with the "intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual relativism" (34) that characterises the Modernist view.

²⁴⁴ Medalie quotes from Forster's essay "Art for Art's Sake" (ICD 87-93) of 1949 (ICD87); in this essay, Forster "reject[s] the kind of attitude which esteems art for its disassociation from the everyday world" (Medalie 37).

contingency” (37) – a lesson which Forster may have recognised in Melville’s *Billy Budd* in the guise of Vere’s well-intended but fatal attempt to settle the question of Billy’s supposed disaffection in a private confrontation with his accuser (see section II.5.1.3.).

II.2.3.2. “The salvation that was latent in his own soul”:

connection with the Other as a means to connection with the self

The Forsterian exhortation of “only connect” which is central to Margaret’s reflections at the beginning of Ch. 22 of *Howards End* is often – and not entirely without reason or textual support – understood as an appeal urging the individual to make some form of personal commitment to the human beings who surround him (or her), and read in accordance with, and supplemental to, Forster’s creed of personal relations, as set down in “What I Believe”. Yet Medalie raises an issue much debated in Forster criticism when he observes “that few of the ambitions fuelled by the ‘personal relations’ ethos are fulfilled in Forster’s fiction” (37). Certainly, Forster’s oeuvre does not exactly abound with narratives in which instances of connection are not only survived by all parties involved, but are rewarded by enduring happiness, or the establishing of permanent cross-cultural or class-bridging personal relations. Once past the climactic moment of union, even “the sexual relationship itself” may be “betrayed” (Lane 2007:106), or implicitly revealed, like all other attempts at connection between individuals, as an ephemeral stage in a universe peopled by “dwarfs shaking hands”, in which “all [...] personal relations [...] are temporary” (PtI252).

Nevertheless, Forster’s narratives doggedly insist that connection is the key to salvation; and it appears that salvation in the Forsterian sense is centred upon the moment in which a (‘dark’) character stops ‘travelling light’ as he finds himself unexpectedly implicated in the lives of others, experiencing unprecedented levels of emotional involvement and commitment: as Fielding comes to realise, “travelling light is less easy as soon as affection is involved” (PtI268). However, it would appear that the salutary experience, though predicated on connection, ultimately concerns only the experiencing individual, who is arguably its only beneficiary – an effect which may be seen to arise not least from the persistent Othering of those with whom connections are to be established.

Significantly, the subject of Margaret’s famous “sermon” on the theme of “only connect” is “the salvation [...] latent [...] in the soul of every man”, a formulation which could be taken to point to the self-contained nature of the Forsterian concept of salvation. The stereotypical Englishman, he of the undeveloped heart, is “not a fellow who bothers about [his] own inside”; his self is divided into “the beast and the monk” – i.e. the “passion” of the “carnal”, and the “prose” of intellect and a form of “asceticism” associated with it. If such a person is to have the “unconnected arches” of his “meaningless[ly] fragment[ed]” existence “joined into a man”, then this is to be effected by a connection of “the

prose and the passion” *within himself*. This connection, which will allow “human love” to “be seen at its highest”, paradoxically appears to depend very little on close personal relationships with others: Margaret, whose voice here arguably transports the gospel of Forsterian salvation, states that in order “to help” Henry Wilcox achieve connection, “she need trouble him with no gift of her own. She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul” (HE183f.). Viewed in the light of this passage, salvation is revealed as primarily a form of self-realisation and self-validation, experienced by one (‘dark’) character, and not tied to any permanent relationship with another human being.²⁴⁵

The passage from *Howards End* furthermore indicates that Forsterian salvation closely involves the individual’s internal readiness or ability to acknowledge the carnal passions as part of himself (or herself), and – presumably – embrace them in (unexpurgated) Hellenist, Whitmanesque or Carpenterian fashion; the acknowledged flesh, as *Maurice* proclaims, will “educat[e] the spirit” (M128), so that “the roads of [a man’s] soul [will] lie clear, and he and his friends shall find easy going” (HE183). This integrative, conciliatory concept of salvation can and probably should be regarded as a general move towards overcoming the mind/body dichotomy institutionalised in Western culture. Yet its pervasive appearance, in Forster’s work, in contexts in which, covertly or overtly, questions of homoerotic desire are negotiated, suggests that Forsterian discourses about the salvation of males potentially always include the more specific meaning of overcoming homophobia and acknowledging “human love” in all its shapes and guises.

II.2.3.3. Seizing the symbolic moment:

human failure, “odious” behaviour, and the possibility of redemption

The assumption of self-knowledge will allow the individual to view himself in a meaningful relation with his fellow beings, as well as with the universe.²⁴⁶ Internal connection or self-knowledge thus precedes external connection (in the shape of personal relations and/or a sense of historical and cultural continuity), but is itself only made possible by the catalyst of external events that force connection. Yet however powerful the catalyst, it nevertheless remains up to the individual to recognise the moment at which a connection may be made, and to seize the proffered key to salvation, as Rickie explains in *The Longest Journey*:

²⁴⁵ In his reading of *Billy Budd*, Clifford Hindley interprets Forsterian “salvation” as “the sense of peace and fulfilment that flows from a self-reliance akin to Stoicism and that enables a person victoriously to confront whatever evil may hurl itself against one” (1994:107; see also 1999:149f.).

²⁴⁶ This is not so much the case in *A Passage to India*, where the concept of a meaningful universe is questioned as it is in no other of Forster’s texts, but the impulse towards connection with an animated Nature and an awareness of historical or cultural continuity can be observed in many of the earlier texts which feature salutary experiences, as for example *The Longest Journey*, “Albergo Empedocle”, “The Road from Colonus”, and “The Machine Stops”.

It seems to me that here and there in life we meet with a person or incident that is symbolical. It's nothing in itself, yet for the moment it stands for some eternal principle. We accept it, at whatever cost, and we have accepted life. But if we are frightened and reject it, the moment, so to speak, passes; the symbol is never offered again. (LJ136)

Forster's fiction contains plenty of instances in which characters fail to accept their symbol: Rickie fails to respond to Stephen's thrice-repeated call, and instead chooses to align himself with convention as embodied by Agnes, a choice which leads him into spiritual decline; Lucy Honeychurch repeatedly fails to acknowledge her true feelings for George Emerson in *A Room with a View*, and only narrowly escapes permanent consignment to "the vast armies of the benighted, who [...] have sinned against passion and truth" (RV174); in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, it is Philip's lack of interest in the contest for Lilia's and Gino's baby, expressed in his attitude of "nothing hangs on it" (WA122), which makes him implicitly responsible for the baby's abduction and tragic death; in "The Road from Colonus", Mr Lucas fails to stay at 'Colonus' (where, it is implied, he would have experienced salvation, albeit in the shape of his own death, see discussion in section II.2.4.1. below); in "The Life to Come", the missionary Paul Pinmay fails to acknowledge his homosexual love for Vithobai and hypocritically colludes in the exploitation of the native chief and his people instead; and in the opera *Billy Budd*, Vere fails to respond to Billy's personal appeal to save him, declining to contest the directives of naval law even though he is convinced of Billy's fundamental innocence.

Forster's narrator often makes a point of exhibiting the reasons which prevent a character from seizing the symbolic moment, trying to engage the reader's sympathy even against the immutable system of Forsterian moral values which can be perceived as forming the background of all his fiction. As Trilling observed, Forster's attention to the mechanisms, motives and moral failures of human behaviour

is sometimes taken for "tolerance", but although it often suggests forgiveness (a different thing), it almost as often makes the severest judgements. And even when it suggests forgiveness it does not spring so much from gentleness of heart as [...] from the moral realism that understands the one apple tasted. (17)

Trilling regards this simultaneous dispensing of "forgiveness" and "severest judgements" as the symptom of Forster's "deep and important irresolution over the question of whether the world is one of good and evil [...], or one of good-and-evil",²⁴⁷ with the latter view "on the whole" prevailing (97). Forster himself,

²⁴⁷ Trilling's formulations allude to the characterisation of Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*, who "suffered from the Primal Curse, which is not – as the Authorised Version suggests – the knowledge of good and evil, but the knowledge of good-and-evil" (LJ171).

discussing the subject of relativity in literature in 1944,²⁴⁸ observed that it is impossible to measure characters against any moral absolutes of good and evil “because the yard-measure itself keeps altering its length”, making a character appear “good or evil in relation to some other character or to a situation which may itself change”. Taking Proust as his example, he states that “most of Proust’s people are odious, yet you cannot have the comfort of writing any of them off as bad. Given the circumstances, even the most odious of them all, Madame Verdurin, can behave nobly” (TCD269f). Indeed, Forster’s own oeuvre features a considerable number of characters, both ‘dark’ and ‘light’, who behave in ways that might well be classified as “odious”, but who are also shown to be nevertheless capable of “nobl[e]” and to some extent redemptive behaviour, indicating, to speak with Mary Lago, that Forster “believes in at least the possibility of improvement” (31).

Forster’s “odious” but potentially redeemable characters include Charlotte Bartlett in *A Room with a View*, who, for all that she tries to prevent Lucy’s becoming intimate with George, is unexpectedly “given one more chance” of being instrumental to the true lover’s final union – a chance which she successfully seizes, thus proving herself “not withered up all through” (RV209). In “Ralph and Tony”, the homophobic ‘light’ character Tony systematically inflicts psychological and physical torment on Ralph, and yet he endeavours to save his life (albeit merely from a sense of duty); he has furthermore to fall victim to a crippling illness, however, before he attains a fully redeeming level of enlightenment. Rickie Elliot, the ‘dark’ protagonist of *The Longest Journey*, clinging to social convention, refuses to acknowledge his illegitimate brother and to treat him like a man in his own right; like his former antagonist Gerald Dawes, it is only in death that he bequeaths salvation on those towards whom his behaviour has been “odious”.²⁴⁹ In “Arthur Snatchfold”, Conway finds himself in a situation in which he cannot redeem himself: nothing he could do would help the man who has sacrificed himself by refusing to betray him, and in accepting this sacrifice, he has also to accept the “odious” truth of his lack of moral courage.²⁵⁰ It seems significant that Forster, writing about Melville’s *Billy Budd* in 1951, should have used the word “odious” to describe Captain Vere’s involvement in Billy’s trial; his self-declared intent of “rescuing [...] Vere from his creator” (EMFL II:237) suggests that Forster wished to endow the protagonist he had appropriated with at least the redemptive remorse which he is explicitly denied to feel in Melville’s novella (see sections II.3.10.3 through II.3.10.5.).

²⁴⁸ “English Prose between 1918 and 1939” (TCD266-277), a lecture delivered at the University of Glasgow.

²⁴⁹ For all that Rickie is cast as a victim of convention as embodied by his wife Agnes, he can also be seen to wrong her in deciding to marry her to satisfy his need for a metaphorical “home” (see section II.4.2.3.1., p.290).

²⁵⁰ See section II.4.3., in which I also discuss the role of this text as a link between Melville’s *Billy Budd* and Forster’s libretto adaptation.

II.2.3.4. “A land where she’ll anchor forever”: death, love and the salutary prophetic vision

The drastic measures required to shock the underdeveloped Englishman into an awareness of what it means to be alive and human go some way towards accounting for the central function held by death in so many of Forster’s texts, many of which can be seen to hinge on “death’s power to enhance life by forcing human beings into an awareness of the spiritual as well as the material” (Summers 124f.). Beyond its function as the ultimate external catalyst for the salutary appreciation of life, however, death must also be understood in many of Forster’s texts to be so intricately linked with love as to become exchangeable with it. Judith Herz (1988:27-40) has provided a detailed investigation of the conflation of death and eros in what she has termed Forster’s “Hermetic” fiction, where the divine messenger figures simultaneously as friend, guiding influence, object of desire, and death.²⁵¹ As the narrator of *Howards End* explains, “death destroys a man, but the idea of death saves him”, because “squalor and tragedy can beckon to all that is great in us, and strengthen the wings of love” (HE321) – love being the crucial element of Forsterian salvation which so paradoxically insists on interpersonal relations as the key to intra-personal connection. Even though death is identified as love’s “foe” in *Howards End*, he is also “his peer”; it is “in their age-long struggle” that “the thews of Love have been strengthened, and his vision cleared, until there is no one who can stand against him” (HE236) – death, then, holds a necessary part in love’s ascendancy to supreme power.

Writing about his work on the *Billy Budd* libretto, Forster emphasises the salutary quality of Billy’s death (while simultaneously making it clear that to him, Billy is not a Christ figure): “The hero hangs dead from the yard arm, dead irredeemably and not in any heaven, dead as a doornail, dead as Antigone, and he has given us life” (*Griffin* 6). As Clifford Hindley has noted, “for Forster the humanist, this gift of life meant a present experience of personal self-worth and the self-affirming reality of personal relationships if not of sensual love” (1999:154). Forster does not explicitly refer to love of any kind in this publication, but he does

²⁵¹ According to Herz, the Hermes figure functions as the mediator between worlds in Forster’s texts as well as in his writerly imagination. He is present there in his aspect of “Hermes *philanthropotatos*, most friendly of gods to man” who is, for Forster, “an essential component of the double-sexed spirit of fantasy” (1988:30), as “Puck the phallic trickster in ‘The Obelisk’” and as “the angry god in ‘The Road from Colonus’”, as well as in his capacity as guide to the dead, Hermes *psychopompos*, who can, as he does in “Dr Woolcott”, become identical with “Death as the beautiful boy” (38). In drawing a parallel between the “Hermetic” element in Forster’s writing and the work of Thomas Mann, Herz furthermore introduces the possibility of connecting Forster’s narrative imaginings with the traditions of homoerotic literature, in which the motif of the death of young men figures as a recurring trope (29). Robert Martin has connected the appearance of this trope in Forster’s work with the influence of Walter Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean*, and has linked it with A. E. Housman’s poem “To an Athlete Dying Young”, as well as – anachronistically – with Melville’s *Billy Budd* (1982:102).

insist that it is “the central warmth and [...] the bonfire in the heart and [...] the Milk of Paradise” which allow us to “flourish and endure and understand”, feeling that “not all is lost. All cannot be lost” (*Griffin* 6). Clearly, the life-giving “idea of death” that engenders this confidence and “saves” comprises more than just the bare acknowledgement of Billy’s death, but requires a recognition of “the central warmth” which inflames “the heart”. This, it would seem, is the “overtone” which Forster discerned in “Melville’s main note” of “Fate” in *Billy Budd*: in a letter to Lionel Trilling of 16 April 1949, Forster describes Billy’s “heroic” aria as being “about Fate; the black sea where he has caught sight of the far-gleaming sail that is not Fate. (Melville’s main note is Fate, but the note has an overtone to it.)” (EMFL II:237). In a private note about Billy’s and Vere’s experience of salutary connection,²⁵² Forster did make it quite plain that love is indeed the crucial ingredient which allows both men to “endure and understand” (*Griffin* 6) the inevitable: the “far-shining sail that’s not Fate” which they have “sighted [...] in the storm” (LIB61 and 63) is in fact “the sail of love” – sighted first by Billy and then “shown” by him to Vere (BPL A61:50), who identifies it as “the love that passes understanding” (LIB63).

As the surviving ‘dark’ character, Vere can thus be seen to draw his sense of salvation not from a lasting relationship in this world; rather, the source of his confidence is located in a momentary connection with Billy during the closeted interview. This has evidently enabled him to establish a meaningful connection with a universal truth somewhere beyond the confines of the material world. He could in fact be said to turn to a moment of “extension” or “reach[ing] back”, a moment of the kind which Forster regarded as a typical feature in the experience of the “prophetic” quality in fiction (AN92). It is moments of this kind, too, that can be instrumental to “the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion” (HE183) – to borrow Margaret’s words from *Howards End* in order to bring the hermeneutics of Forsterian salvation to a full circle.

Forster’s reflections on the nature and the effect of the prophetic quality in fiction in *Aspects of the Novel* are of particular interest here, because it would seem that the “partly physical” experience he describes – “the sensation of sinking into a translucent globe and seeing our experience floating far above us on its surface, tiny, remote, yet ours” (AN93) – is very much akin to the salutary moments of connection experienced by some of his fictional characters.²⁵³ The locus, and perhaps even

²⁵² “Librettist’s Note on Dirge Libretto”, BPL A61:50. See discussion in section III.2.3.4.

²⁵³ Compare, for example, one of the “prophetic” moments in *A Passage to India*, in which Fielding and Adela Quested take leave from each other, perceiving their communion “as though they had seen their own gestures from an immense height – dwarfs talking, shaking hands and assuring each other that they stood on the same footing of insight. [...] But wistfulness descended on them now [...], and objects never seen again seemed messages from another world” (PtI252). In this passage, the image of “sinking into a translucent globe” and perceiving one’s experience as “tiny” and “remote” (AN93) appears reversed, with the observing gaze looking down rather than up.

the telos, of “the prophetic vision”, of “the extension, the melting, the unity through love and pity”, lies, according to Forster, “in a region which can only be implied” (AN92). It seems significant in this context that the ship of love which Billy and Vere have sighted is “bound for [...] a land of her own where she’ll anchor forever” (LIB61 and 63). A number of Forster’s texts besides the *Billy Budd* libretto finish with a scene in which the protagonists who have undergone (and survived) a salutary experience turn their thoughts towards another such remote region – in most cases, a future which remains so nebulous that it could easily be classed in the same category as the country of “Love, the Beloved Republic” (TCD67),²⁵⁴ identical, perhaps, with the land where the sail of love anchors forever, but certainly far removed from the realm of the present, of the “not yet” and “not there” (PtI312), where men (and sometimes women) may connect briefly across gulfs of individual, social, political and cultural difference and constraint, but cannot establish any lasting personal relationships.

Thus, it is his brief encounter with Mrs Moore that kindles in Aziz “the flame that not even beauty can nourish”, which makes the “heart [...] glow” (PtI17); it is the memory of their connection which enables him to establish an equally fleeting connection with her son Ralph, who then serendipitously guides him to a visionary sight. Through this awakening of his heart, without the involvement of which “he knew nothing”, he is enabled to hear once more, “almost certainly, the syllables of salvation that had sounded during his trial” (PtI303) – i.e., the invocation of the randomly deified “Esmis Esmoor” (PtI214), his English friend of “eternal goodness” whom he “always adored” (PtI302), and in the spirit of whose “very sacred” name (PtI310) and memory Aziz is able to effect his reconciliations with Fielding and the absent Miss Quested.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the novel’s ending finds Aziz and Fielding “friends again, yet aware that they would meet no more” (PtI307) and aware that they cannot be friends while the English rule in India (see PtI312). Their friendship is of a kind that cannot be expected to withstand the contingencies of the complex and unsympathetic Here and Now.

In *Howards End*, the Schlegel sisters (and, to some extent, Henry Wilcox) have reached their “new life, obscure, yet gilded with tranquillity”, in which they “see clearly”, by “cross[ing] the “black abyss of the past” (HE334), a crossing which has brought them salvation through connection, but at the cost of the life of Leonard Bast, the father of Helen’s illegitimate child, and of the less irredeemable casualty of Henry Wilcox’s son Charles. However, the thoughts and hopes shared by the Schlegel sisters in the novel’s last chapter are turned less upon their own

²⁵⁴ “What I Believe”. The phrase is taken from Swinburne’s poem “Hertha” (1871).

²⁵⁵ Claude Summers has remarked that “the qualification – ‘almost certainly’ – expresses the characteristic scepticism of the narrative without tempering the significance of Mrs Moore’s putative influence as spiritual guardian of the conclusion” (232). Readings which bring a similar scepticism to the libretto’s insistence on Vere’s salvation would not, as the evidence of that most sceptical text, *A Passage to India*, suggests, have been entirely alien to the Forsterian imagination.

present of hostile relatives and encroaching citification and more towards a pastoral future, however improbable (see HE337), symbolised by Helen's baby son, playing in the newly-mown hay with the working-class boy Tom.

In *The Longest Journey*, Rickie, who struggles with the problem of connection throughout the novel, tragically finishes by "bequeath[ing] salvation" to his half-brother Stephen without knowing it (LJ289). Stephen, that "law to himself" (LJ279), finally acknowledges both Rickie's sacrifice and the personal connection between them, and yet at the conclusion of the novel, he stands alone, "govern[ing] the paths" connecting the past and the future of a continuous human race, and "guid[ing]" that future in which "his thoughts and his passions would triumph" through the medium of his progeny (LJ289).

In all three novels, salvation is conveyed in one transient "symbolic moment" of connection, but the connection itself, like the personal relationships that enable it, is never permanent. In those of Forster's texts which do not conclude with the Happy Ending of literary romance, a character's sense of salvation will, at the closing of the narrative, be seen to reside exclusively in the talismanic memory of that experience of connection.²⁵⁶ The Forsterian salutary experience is thus revealed as a solitary one, bordering – somewhat paradoxically in view of the emphasis which the endings of *Howards End* and *The Longest Journey* place on continuity – on the solipsistic, since the connection with another human being, once made, is almost invariably discarded from the narrative, and relocated exclusively in the mind of the experiencing individual who finally perceives his situation as spiritually meaningful. This pattern is strikingly reiterated in the *Billy Budd* libretto, framed as it is by the Prologue and Epilogue in which Vere is encountered alone, reflecting on his experience of salvation.

II.2.3.5. "But he has saved me": the strains and tensions of enforced salvation

The concept of salvation which features so centrally in many of Forster's stories has at the same time become one of the pivotal points in the deconstructing of Forster's work. Christopher Lane, for instance, concludes that "Forster's expectation of redemption precipitates an astonishing burden on his texts, forcing them to buckle under the strain of reconciling impossibly conflicted sexual and racial desires" (1995:170). Even when they do not take an explicitly deconstructive theoretical approach, most critics can, as Claude Summers has noted, be seen to agree that the optimism which colours the endings of, for example, *Howards End* and *Maurice* is but "tentative and willed, illogical and mystical" (138). Regarding the ending of *The Longest Journey*, Judith Herz has remarked that, like most of Forster's

²⁵⁶ The romances *A Room with a View* and *Maurice* are two obvious exceptions, since their Happy Endings, just like that of "Ralph and Tony", to some extent override the emphasis on the solitary salutary experience which is so striking a feature in most of Forster's other texts.

endings, it suffers from what amounts to the characters' functional overdetermination. According to her, the "varied views of Stephen" as a mythical figure on the one hand, and as "an ethical norm for the other characters" on the other hand, are held "in imperfect suspension" in the novel's last chapter:

Too much has to be resolved here (but that was always Forster's problem in his last chapters; only *A Passage to India* solves it by swerving away from it, those horses riding single file into the future). There are no doubt "cross purposes" to repeat Stone's phrase.²⁵⁷ An ethical resistance to closure, to returning the characters to their symbolic functions, clashes with a yearning for the symbolic and redemptive.

The non-mythical dimension of Forster's stories, which can to a greater or lesser degree be seen to negotiate the ethical and social concerns of liberal humanism, is located, as Herz points out, "on a quite different narrative plane from Stephen's sense of salvation through Rickie's death (or, more precisely, Forster's sense of that salvation conferred not too convincingly on his character)" (Herz 1997:148f.).

It is the insistence on salvation even against those verisimilar discourses which appear not only to work against the salutary experience, but which may be seen to question or invalidate the very concept of spiritual salvation, that must be held responsible for some readers' sense that the ostensive purport of Forster's narratives is shattered by their enforced closure. The *Billy Budd* libretto, which appears to insist on Vere's salvation even while conceding that Vere "could have saved" Billy (LIB63), but has failed to do so, could be read as a case in point; and the problem here appears exacerbated (though presumably unintentionally, on Forster's part) by the fact that the opera's action, framed as it is by Vere's Prologue and Epilogue, could be construed as narrated entirely by Vere, who might prove an unreliable narrator.

On the other hand, the sense of the imperfect reconcilability of the ethical, public, and the spiritual, private concerns, of external social 'reality' and salvation narrative in Forster's fictional texts, might also be read as a structural manifestation of the "tragedy" he laments in "What I Believe": while the existence of "an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky", recognisable to anyone with "eyes to see or hands to feel", is sufficient to convince an individual that "the experiment of earthly life cannot be dismissed as a failure", tragically, "no device has been found by which these private decencies can be transmitted to public affairs" (ICD70f.). Similarly, when the "private" salvation narrative is "transmitted" to a privileged structural position in the text, this authorially imposed "device" is frequently perceived as unsuccessful because it fails to contain the disruptive "public" discourses about Otherness, about racial and social difference and conflict, which resist its attempt at discursive government.

²⁵⁷ See Stone 1966:184.

II.2.3.6. Forster's "Nunc Dimittis" – his final word on salvation?

In a presidential address to the Cambridge Humanists, delivered at the age of eighty,²⁵⁸ Forster noted that "the subject of Salvation" was something he "used to be very keen on": "it figures in most of my early short stories, and a little in my novels up to *A Passage to India*, from which it has almost disappeared. It has now disappeared from my thoughts, like other absolutes" (IPT318).²⁵⁹ P. N. Furbank records furthermore that during the same time period (in 1958), Forster told him that

he thought the tragic theme of "The Other Boat" – two people made to destroy each other – was more interesting than the theme of salvation, the rescuer from "otherwhere", the generic Alec. That was a fake. People could help one another, yes; but they were not decisive for each other like that. (II:303)

Forster's statements to his Cambridge audience and to his biographer are noteworthy for several reasons. First of all, they show his awareness of changes not only in his personal outlook and philosophy, but also in his preoccupations and interests as a creative writer. Secondly, they throw a most suggestive light on his engagement with Melville's *Billy Budd*: not only are there few of Forster's literary productions which feature two people so eminently "made to destroy each other" as Billy and Claggart (both Melville's originals and his own adapted versions of them), but "The Other Boat", the text Forster has in mind as containing this "more interesting" theme, postdates his work on the libretto.²⁶⁰

On the other hand, however, the theme of salvation clearly occupies a position of central importance in the opera; and its introduction can be seen to be among the most important changes which the collaborators brought to Melville's original. There is also the fact that shortly after the premiere of *Billy Budd*, Forster set out once more to revise *Maurice*, adding an entire new chapter (now Ch. XLIV) celebrating the salutary physical and emotional intimacy between the eponymous hero and Alec, his "rescuer from 'otherwhere'".²⁶¹ The textual evidence would seem to indicate that, in the early 1950s at least, Forster still remained sufficiently partial, and indeed committed, to the concept of salvation to be able to confirm it both in

²⁵⁸ "How I Lost My Faith" (IPT 310-319), delivered in the summer of 1959 and published in the *Bulletin of the University Humanist Federation* in 1963.

²⁵⁹ It ought to be noted, however, that Forster's insistence, recorded in 1930, that "two people pulling each other into salvation" was "the only theme" he found "worthwhile" (CPB55) postdates *A Passage to India* by more than five years, indicating that the theme's "disappear[ance]" was by no means the linear process suggested by his 1959 representation.

²⁶⁰ See discussion in section II.4.4.

²⁶¹ According to Gardner, the idea for this chapter may date back to as early as 1923 (1999a:xxxii), but Forster only reached the decision to write it in 1952, encouraged by Christopher Isherwood (xl f.). For a discussion of the possible impact of Forster's librettistic work on *Maurice*, see also Rochlitz 53f.

his adaptation of *Billy Budd*, his “Nunc Dimittis” (EMFL II:246),²⁶² and in his revisions to the narrative of individual salvation through homosexual love which he had created almost forty years earlier. Even though he may have felt ambivalent about the question of whether it would be “worth it” to publish *Maurice* (see Gardner 1999a:xlvi), Forster was evidently so fond of his text that he never went so far as to abandon the entire project for being “a fake”, just as *Billy Budd* reportedly left Forster “deeply moved by my own words” in 1951,²⁶³ and remained a “good reason[...] for pleasure” in 1964.²⁶⁴

If *Maurice* were to be viewed, as Levine has suggested, as an “instance of Forster’s having altered his judgements during his long life, while retaining the original vision of his novel even as he continued to shape it” (78), then the strong presence of the theme of salvation in the *Billy Budd* libretto might be viewed as merely another instance of Forster’s retaining, albeit in somewhat modified form, his “original vision” of the text he had first read over two decades earlier (see section II.1.1.). At the same time, however, in the course of Forster’s self-declared project of “rescuing” Vere (who had had no part in Forster’s 1927 “vision” of Melville’s text), the theme of salvation was elevated to a prominence it does not possess in Melville’s novella – a fact which would seem to qualify Forster’s implied claim that salvation had ceased to be important to him after *A Passage to India*. The fact that each period of engagement with *Billy Budd* appears to have prompted him to re-engage with *Maurice*²⁶⁵ also suggests that his creative imagination was still drawn to a theme or narrative pattern which had evidently not “disappeared from [his] thoughts” (TPT318) quite entirely yet.

II.2.4. An affinity of literary imagination: some aspects of Forster’s and Melville’s narrative strategies

II.2.4.1. Forster’s “inside narratives”

Judith Herz was the first critic to draw attention to the pervasive presence of a double discourse in Forster’s fiction, which manifests itself as “a felt undertow. Two fictions move together in the same fictional space. Often one is true, the other a lie. Finally one or the other is displaced. This structure is visible from the earliest fantasies to the stories written late and read only to special friends” (1978:257). A recurring phenomenon in these stories is a constellation of characters and plot in which one set of characters, which can include a homodiegetic

²⁶² Letter to Britten of 9 December 1951.

²⁶³ Forster’s comment, heard at the dress rehearsal of *Billy Budd* on 30 November 1951, was recorded by Stephen Spender in his journal (Spender 127).

²⁶⁴ Diary entry of 29 February 1964, LD154.

²⁶⁵ Forster’s “Terminal Note” on the novel was composed in September 1960 (see Gardner 1999a:xliv f.), the month which also saw the opera makers’ final revisions to *Billy Budd* (see Reed 1993b:75).

narrator, are excluded from another character's experience of some momentous and often spiritually meaningful event, because of their conventionality, their moral and emotional cowardice, or their strictly materialistic perception of life.²⁶⁶ This pattern is central to all six of Forster's early short stories which were published in 1911 as a collection entitled *The Celestial Omnibus*, and which have been nicely described by Mary Lago as "fantasies of transformation, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, in which the prosaic and the philistine fail to comprehend a supernatural or semi-supernatural phenomenon that offers enlightenment and liberation" (1995:132). It also appears in "The Story of the Siren", published in *The Eternal Moment* (1928). To illustrate this pattern, I shall briefly discuss "The Road from Colonus" as a typical representative.

In "The Road from Colonus", Mr Lucas, an ageing middle-class Englishman travelling in Greece, experiences a moment of quasi-pantheistic revelation at an ancient shrine located in a hollow plane tree from which springs a small streamlet. The unexpected event invigorates him spiritually and endows all he perceives with "meaning" and "beauty" (TMS78). However, he is unable to communicate the momentousness of his experience to his unenlightened travelling companions, his daughter among them. They mock him for not joining in their own exaggerated and shallow enthusiasm, and are alarmed by his – to them – inexplicably serious desire to remain at the shrine. They finally resort to physical force to prise the old man away "for his own good" from the location where he expects to experience yet another "supreme event [...] which would transfigure the face of the world" for him (TMS82). Incapable of resisting them, Mr Lucas simultaneously loses and relinquishes his vision. He is shown, back in England some months later, to have retained no trace of it, but to have turned, by letting himself be reabsorbed by the constraints and conventions of middle-class life, into a querulous dotard who has moreover lost his autonomy as an individual – he is no longer taken seriously by his daughter. However, we learn that something momentous might indeed have happened to Mr Lucas if he had stayed at the inn next to the shrine, for his daughter happens to read an old newspaper which mentions that the tree containing the shrine blew down and killed the occupants of the inn the very same night that the tourist party had been there. Mr Lucas himself is no longer touched by this news and has thus himself become an outsider to his own spiritual experience.

As with the undisclosed climaxes in "The Story of a Panic" and "Other Kingdom", it remains for the reader to try and determine the nature of the "supreme event" which Mr Lucas had felt to be awaiting him at the shrine. This interpretative quest is guided by the references to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* which appear in the story's title, in the jocular comparison of Mr Lucas and his daughter to Oedipus and Antigone (TMS76, 79) and of the shrine and its surroundings to Colonus (TMS79), the location of Oedipus's death. They suggest that Mr Lucas

²⁶⁶ With regard to Forster's novels, too, Trilling remarks that "the theme of separateness, of fences and barriers" (130) is present in all of them, most strongly so in *A Passage to India*.

might indeed, and perhaps should, have met his death at the country inn; and yet that death would have been in accordance with his newly-gained salutary vision of connection and oneness with the world, and preferable to the undignified existence which follows after his failure to realise his vision. The description of Mr Lucas's shrine might furthermore remind a reader familiar with Plato's *Phaedrus* of the description of the "fair resting-place" on the banks of the Ilissus where most of the dialogue between Socrates and his friend, the beautiful young Phaedrus, takes place: "Here is this lofty and spreading plane-tree [...]; and the stream which flows beneath the plane-tree is deliciously cold to the feet. Judging from the ornaments and images, this must be a spot sacred to Achelous and the Nymphs" (*Dialogues* 434). The intertextual link to one of the key texts in the homosexual literary tradition opens the possibility that Mr Lucas's moment of self-realisation may include also a component of homosexual awakening or self-recognition.

Many of Forster's texts can be seen to pivot on such confrontations of the conventional with what in most cases amounts to a dissident and highly individual perception of life, and of the nature of reality. A common feature shared by virtually all of these Forsterian confrontations is the consistent pattern in which the normative power represented by the (negatively valued) conventional outsiders' perspective is shown to attempt to invalidate the non-conforming insider's experience. It attempts to do so by declaring that experience to be fatuous (this happens in the case of the boy in "The Celestial Omnibus" and of the paradise-dwellers in "The Other Side of the Hedge"), pathological (this happens to Eustace in "The Story of a Panic" and Mr Lucas in "The Road from Colonus"), criminal (Ford Worters in "Other Kingdom"), or a combination of the above (the curate in "The Curate's Friend"). These strategies of repression and control correspond directly to the strategies which were being applied by contemporary society to those of its members found to possess homosexual tendencies.

The confrontation between an unsympathetic, unenlightened and downright obtuse outsiders' perspective and an alternative, often positively depicted insider's perspective is poignantly realised in almost all of Forster's surviving homosexual short stories.²⁶⁷ It appears equally in those texts in which he is "cocking a more or less cheerful snook", as Oliver Stallybrass has put it, "at the heterosexual world in general and certain selected targets [...] in particular" (1972:xv), as well as in those that feature a more serious treatment of a problematic subject. It figures in "Arthur Snatchfold" (1928) and "The Other Boat" (1957-58), both of which are discussed in greater depth below.²⁶⁸ It can furthermore be seen to hold a central

²⁶⁷ At several points in his life, Forster destroyed a considerable number of the homosexual short stories he had been producing; his attitude towards them seems to have been highly conflicted and subject to considerable fluctuation (see Stallybrass 1972:xii ff.).

²⁶⁸ The 'insiders versus outsiders' pattern also appears in "The Life to Come", "Dr Woolacott", "The Classical Annex", "The Torque", and "What does it matter?"; it moreover forms the structural foundation of "The Obelisk".

structural position in the fragments *Nottingham Lace* (1899-1901) and *Arctic Summer* (begun 1911, revised 1951), as well as in all of Forster's novels: every one of these texts is definitively shaped by a confrontation of different concepts of what is important in life, and what constitutes 'reality'.²⁶⁹

II.2.4.2. Forster and Melville hint at mystery: "scriptural reminiscence", unsympathetic outsiders, and narratorial eloquence

Mr Lucas's inability to communicate his transformed and transforming, salutary vision to his companions is one aspect of a concern that surfaces throughout Forster's writings. In *A Room with a View*, he was to formulate what could be read as a reflection on his own approach to the literary representation of the various symbolic moments and forays into the mysterious, with which his work abounds: "Our phrases of approval and of amazement are so connected with little occasions that we fear to use them on great ones. We are obliged to become vaguely poetic, or to take refuge in Scriptural reminiscence" (RV87). Even though he rejected the teachings of institutionalised Christianity,²⁷⁰ as a writer Forster was in the habit of employing biblical language "to heighten", as Claude Summers has put it, "moments of visionary experience, which are spiritual but not religious" (27). Moreover, he regularly created narratives that expressed his own creed of personal relationships – modulated not infrequently by homoerotic implications – conveyed in a framework of mythical or quasi-religious symbolic structures. Judith Herz has observed that many of Forster's short stories "are formed out of a dense kernel of private myths that borrow the colouring of traditional mythic patterns and figures" (1988:5); to Herz, "it is the intensely personal re-creation of mythic materials that gives Forster's fiction its reverberative power" (25).

Melville's *Billy Budd*, too, might be said to draw a good deal of "reverberative power" from a varied intertextual background of mythic and religious material, of which Christian mythology forms an important part. It ought to be noted, however, that the text does not necessarily privilege the teachings of Christianity (Billy's 'barbarianism' appears to be rated superior to them), or approve of its institutionalised role in society, a role which makes it instrumental to the politics of warfare (see BB110). As Clifford Hindley has rightly pointed out, "the extent and nature of the

²⁶⁹ These conflicting views include Sawston vs. the personal outlooks of Trent and Edgar in *Nottingham Lace*, Sawston vs. Italy in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Sawston vs. Cambridge – and the Pembroke outlook on life vs. the views of Ansell and Stephen Wonham – in *The Longest Journey*, Emersons and Honeychurches vs. Vyses and Mr Beebe in *A Room with a View* and the sketches that preceded it (published in the Abinger Edition as the so-called Lucy Novels), Schlegels vs. Wilcoxes in *Howards End*, Chivalry vs. Modern Man in *Arctic Summer*, heterosexual society vs. homosexual individuals in *Maurice*, and the British Raj vs. Muslim or Hindu India and the three unconventional British protagonists in *A Passage to India*.

²⁷⁰ See "How I Lost My Faith – A Presidential Address to the Cambridge Humanists – Summer 1959" (TPT310-319). Forster also explained his misgivings about institutionalised Christianity in a letter to Britten of 30 September 1948 (EMFL II:233).

Christian element in Melville, and indeed the opera, is problematical"; Melville may employ Christian symbolism, but it remains open to debate to what extent his story was ever intended to be read, or indeed can be read, as a Christian parable. Forster, as Hindley correctly observed, "though occasionally showing in his letters an awareness of the parallels with the Christian story, omitted from the libretto the hints of a Christianising interpretation he found in Melville" (1989:372, n.28). This becomes particularly clear in Forster's treatment of Billy.²⁷¹

Whether Greek myth or "Scriptural reminiscence", Forster can be assumed to have been conscious of the way in which he was employing, appropriating and, on numerous occasions, transforming, the structures, imagery and language of his intertextual models. Writing to Lionel Trilling about his work on the *Billy Budd* libretto on 16 April 1949, he refers to "old Dansker bringing in not too obtrusively the eucharist of grog and biscuits" (EMFL II:237) as Billy lies awaiting his execution. Forster's use, in Claggart's central monologue, of the biblical image of "the light" that "shines in the darkness" (with one important difference from John 1:5, see p.102 above) can be regarded as mediated by his own earlier use(s) of this image, for example in "What I Believe" (see section II.3.8.). Donald Mitchell was one of the earliest scholars who pointed out that Vere's phrase "the love that passes understanding" (LIB63) is "actually a compound of Philippians 4:7 and Ephesians 3:19" (1952:400, note). Again, Forster had used the phrase from Philippians 4:7 before; in *Howards End*, it marks a moment of transcendent calm and an acceptance of life's vagaries:

The peace of the country was entering into [Margaret]. [...] It is the peace of the present, which passes understanding. Its murmur came "now," and "now" once more as they trod the gravel, and "now," as the moonlight fell upon their father's sword. They passed upstairs, kissed, and amidst the endless iterations fell asleep. (HE312)

In *A Passage to India*, Forster had used the same phrase to describe an outstanding, unattainable, but precious and attractive characteristic of Eastern civilisation: "This restfulness of gesture – it is the Peace that passeth Understanding, after all, it is the social equivalent of Yoga. When the whirring of action ceases, it becomes visible, and reveals a civilization which the West can disturb but will never acquire" (PtI239). Both of Forster's uses of the biblical phrase appear to hint at larger mysteries; yet these mysteries cannot be found to be specifically Christian.

²⁷¹ See my discussion in section II.5.3. below, and in section II.2.3.4. above. Stephen Arthur Allen (64ff.) has recently advanced a reading of the opera in which Billy converts to Christianity during the meeting with the Chaplain. From a Forsterian point of view, such a reading is clearly ludicrous; and it seems ironic that Allen should attempt to enlist some of Forster's comments as supporting evidence for his claim that the opera-makers intentionally Christianised their work. While Britten's views on this matter remain difficult to determine, it will be obvious to anyone familiar with Forsterian thought that Forster himself will have thought of the opera's theme of salvation in terms of his creed of personal relations rather than in Christian terms.

Bearing in mind, then, Forster's habitual borrowings from the Bible as a source of symbolically heightened language, I would agree with Hindley's view that "the biblical overtones in 'the love that passes understanding' do not [...] carry a Christian message" (1989:371f.).

In many of Forster's texts that feature the 'insiders versus outsiders' pattern, the reader is induced to suspend her scepticism and accept the fantastic or transcendent element through the very confrontation with the excluded characters' antagonistic point of view. This narrative technique strongly resembles that used by Melville in Ch. XVII of *Billy Budd*, in which the materialistic ship's surgeon can be seen to provide a foil for Vere's intuitive insight into the metaphysical dimension of the conflict between Claggart and Billy. The fact that Vere's metaphysical view of the two men appears to match that conveyed by the narrator in turn serves to undermine the surgeon's "scientific" (BB114) authority – a crucial detail, given that it was the surgeon who had earlier questioned Vere's sanity (BB85-87). The deeper spiritual mysteries, Melville's narrator emphasises in Ch. XIX, are "seldom if in any case revealed to the gadding world" (BB102) – a statement which applies also in the case of Forster's representatives of conventional middle-class society, who are unable to grasp the hidden events and transformations which lie at the heart of his fantastic short stories, or the quite solid but equally transforming truth of one man's love for another man, which generally forms the subject of his homosexual fiction. Forster's familiarity with the technique of suggesting a supernatural or spiritual mystery by making its shape appear, as it were, out of the unenlightened points of view of unsympathetic and rather obtuse outsiders may thus have played an important part in his appreciation and interpretation of Melville's story.

Many of Forster's texts feature an authorial narrator whose comments and opinions frequently intrude on the narrative, sometimes in a sententious and sometimes in an ironic vein, sometimes in speculation or conciliatory reflection. This type of narrator is characteristic of Victorian literature, and may be felt to lend an antiquated tone to Forster's texts, in comparison with the narrative experiments of his Modernist contemporaries.²⁷² On the other hand, Forster's 'antiquated' narrators bear a certain resemblance to Melville's eloquent and intrusive narrator in *Billy Budd*. Although this narrator generally has access to the minds of his characters and thus conveys the impression of being omniscient, he seems at times unwilling or genuinely unable to provide a clear account of characters (an example would be his indirection in discussing Claggart's mysterious "depravity") or events, the most prominent among these being the closeted interview: admitting that "what took place at this interview was never known", the narrator resorts to "conjectures" instead (BB101). Since he has up to that point been excessively

²⁷² Forster's texts are not, however, limited to the perspective of the authorial narrator; his narratives also use internal focalisers at times, to the point that it becomes difficult to determine the boundaries between authorial and figural point of view.

free with his comments and explanations, suggesting his complete control over the story even or particularly when explicitly drawing attention to its supposedly factual nature and “ragged edges” (BB119), the “conjectures” he advances still remain invested with a certain authority to an old-fashionedly trusting reader. The fact that Forster viewed *Billy Budd* as a story that conveyed “harmony and temporary salvation” (AS99), and Billy as its “hero” who “has given us life” (*Griffin* 6) suggests his readiness to follow the narrator’s lead in thinking of the closeted interview as the story’s spiritual climax, encapsulating some “sacrament” of “diviner magnanimity” (BB102).

Forster’s first recorded encounter with Melville’s novella took place only two years after the publication of *A Passage to India*. This novel famously contains another unexplained event, possibly a real encounter, possibly a hallucination, which takes place in the symbolically heightened location of the Marabar Caves, where Adela Quested may or may not have been sexually molested by an unidentified person whom she at first believes to have been Aziz. Forster deliberately created this ambiguity at the centre of his text by cutting an earlier, more concrete version of Adela’s experience in the cave.²⁷³ Randall Stevenson has noted that Forster’s last novel shows “wide-ranging concerns with ‘mystery’ – with perplexities pervasive both within the human sphere, and in its relation with what lies beyond”. As the focal point of these “perplexities”, the Marabar Caves provide “a context both for immediate mystery, in Adela Quested’s unexplained encounter, and for Forster’s wider vision of a universe of ultimate nullity: one existing outwith consciousness and its powers of assimilation; outside human orders of language, logic, and reason”. As Stevenson points out, Forster’s “style and strategy” in dealing with this decidedly modernist “awareness of epistemological complexities” differ from the modernist, particularly because

the novel’s narrative voice sustains a good deal of confidence even in exploring the limits of the knowable and the horizons of its own omniscience. The Marabar Caves may lie beyond human understanding, art, or reason, but Forster is memorably eloquent in saying so, providing descriptions of detailed declarative clarity. (216f.)

²⁷³ Manuscript evidence shows that Forster had actually written a scene in which Adela is very definitely assaulted, although her attacker remains unidentified (MSSPtI242-244; see also section II.3.9.). At this draft stage of the novel, the element of mystery would thus have been limited to the identity of Adela’s attacker, and would not, as it is at present, have been complicated by the possibility that Adela had been having a hallucination. In deciding to cut this scene, and thereby obscure the incident in the Marabar caves, Forster took a deliberate step towards indeterminacy: as he explained to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, “my writing mind is a blur here – i.e. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain” (letter of 26 June 1924, quoted in Furbank II:125). Ten years later, in 1934, he was to opine that his attempt “to show that India is an unexplainable muddle by introducing an unexplained muddle” had been a “fallacy, not a serious one [...], some confusion between the dish and the dinner” (letter to William Plomer, quoted in Furbank II:124f., n.2).

This “confidence” and “eloquen[ce]” in describing what lies beyond the boundaries of “the knowable” and narratorial “omniscience” may be felt to resemble that of Melville’s narrator. Both narrators can be seen to employ symbolically charged imagery and language which not only hint at meaningful spiritual mysteries, but also in some cases point to the ultimate instability or even absence of meaning in human existence in an indifferent universe. Perhaps the most perplexing and opaque image of this type in Melville’s text is the description of the scene which follows Billy’s funeral and the re-establishment of order and discipline on board the *Indomitable*:

The fleece of low-hanging vapour had vanished, licked up by the sun that late had so glorified it. And the circumambient air in the clearness of its serenity was like smooth white marble in the polished block not yet removed from the marble-dealer’s yard. (BB118)

One might well imagine that this “smooth white marble” would remain as indifferent and impervious to human concerns as the distorting echo of a Marabar Cave: “entirely devoid of distinction”, its “monotonous noise” reduces all sound to meaninglessness: “Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce ‘boum’” (PtI138f).

II.3. Forster's "little phrases": pan-Forsterian textual leitmotifs

II.3.1. Introduction

In his literary explorations of the themes of personal relations and salvation – which, despite a certain amount of fluctuation and development, continued to preoccupy his creative imagination throughout his life – Forster was (consciously or unconsciously) in the habit of employing a set of phrases and keywords that amount to a set of verbal leitmotifs. It comes as no big surprise, therefore, to find that a number of these Forsterian verbal leitmotifs are to be encountered in the *Billy Budd* libretto as well. Forster himself had described the technique of employing textual leitmotifs, which he referred to as “rhythm”, in *Aspects of the Novel* (see AN113ff.); however, he does not address his own writing practices in that discussion. It was Peter Burra – coincidentally a close friend of both Britten and Peter Pears²⁷⁴ – who presented the first detailed description of Forster’s use of this highly musical technique in 1934 (see Burra 319ff.).²⁷⁵ While some of Forster’s

²⁷⁴ For information on Peter Burra and his friendship with Britten and Pears, see Carpenter 1992:102ff.

²⁷⁵ “The Novels of E. M. Forster”, in: *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 116 (1934), 581-94. Burra’s essay was reprinted as an introduction to the 1942 and 1957 Everyman editions of *A Passage to India* (see Forster 1978b:313) and is included in the Abinger Edition as Appendix B (315-327). In

textual leitmotifs, like the wasp in *A Passage to India* or the evening primroses in *Maurice*, are confined to the structures of a single text, Forster's oeuvre is shot through with consistently recurring leitmotivic words or phrases which can be seen to appear at very similar moments in the respective stories, and to function as symbolic markers for certain key concepts of Forsterian thought and philosophy.

II.3.2. "Muddle"

Perhaps the most idiosyncratically Forsterian of these leitmotivic words in Forster's novels is "muddle". Besides denoting confusion and misunderstandings between individuals, this term tends to be associated with an individual's inability – or refusal – fully to recognise and accept themselves for all that they are, and to see their own actions in the light of the Forsterian system of moral values, which demands self-recognition and responsibility towards others according to the personal relations ethos.²⁷⁶ Given the centrality of what it represents in the web of Forsterian thought, "muddle" is conspicuously absent from the *Billy Budd* libretto; however, the word "confusion" employed by Vere in his private reflections (it features prominently in the Prologue, and also appears at the end of Act II, Sc. 1) can be seen to approximate its function very closely.²⁷⁷

The "confusion" Vere refers to is both external and internal. The Prologue expresses "confusion within" (LIB50) as Vere is arguably struggling to understand the meaning of the events surrounding Billy's death, as well as the role he himself

this essay, Burra discusses Forster's literary leitmotif technique (319ff.) and mentions the tripartite 'symphonic' organisation of *The Longest Journey* and *A Passage to India*. He concludes that "Mr Forster [...] was a musician who chose the novel because he had ideas to utter which needed a more distinct articulation than music could make" (321).

²⁷⁶ Thus, "the anodyne of muddledom, by which most men blur and blend their mistakes" (HE315) can be equated with a deliberate refusal to accept oneself and particularly one's moral or spiritual shortcomings and lapses. The seriousness of such an offence is proclaimed by Margaret Schlegel: she declares her husband, who declines to forgive Helen her sexual trespass even though he has himself committed adultery in the past, to be "muddled, criminally muddled" (HE305). The description of "muddledom" is supplemented in *Howards End* by a quotation from Sonnet XII of George Meredith's poem sequence *Modern Love* (publ. 1862), which makes it plain that to "drink oblivion of a day" is to "shorten [...] the stature of [one's] soul" (ll.15f.); this "hard saying" being reflective of a truth that "lies at the root of all character", according to the narrator (HE315). When it is not deliberately employed as a means of obfuscating an unpleasant truth about one's self, "muddle" can be applied to any kind of confusion ranging from intercultural misunderstandings (e.g. Mrs Moore's and Adela Quested's failed visit to the Bhattacharyas', see PtI62) to failures to follow the path to self-realisation because to do so would challenge the laws of social convention (see, for instance, Lucy's "muddles" as diagnosed by Mr Emerson, RV201, and Maurice's explanation that he has failed to communicate with Alec because he has been "in a muddle", M195f.).

²⁷⁷ Reed notes that "Britten must have asked Forster's advice about the use of the word 'confusion' in Vere's Prologue" because there exists a letter from Forster to Britten from January 1950 in which Forster writes that "Francis B.[ennet] suggests *disorder* for confusion – probably a better word, but too intellectual and suggests no connection with the mist. Mystery, though it [also] fails to please me" (quoted in Reed 1993a:58; Reed's bracket insertions).

has played in their unfolding, and the consequences for him as a moral and spiritual being: "O what have I done? Confusion, so much is confusion! I have tried to guide others rightly, but I have been lost on the infinite sea. Who has blessed me? Who saved me?" (LIB7).²⁷⁸ Vere's questions are resolved in the Epilogue ("But he has saved me, and blessed me", LIB63): in reflecting on the events of the past, he has progressed, to speak with Judith Herz, "from confusion to salvation" (1988:62). "Confusion [...] within" (LIB50) is also what Claggart succeeds in stirring up in the captain's mind with his false accusations against Billy, and with his covert hints about Vere's appreciation of the handsome sailor. By contrast, "confusion without" would seem to refer to external circumstances, namely, to the mood of "disappointment, vexation" (LIB50) and general unrest which descends upon the crew of the *Indomitable* as their chase of the French frigate is foiled by the return of the obscuring mist at the end of Act II, Sc. 1.

II.3.3. "Mist"

The "mist" which so effectively dominates Act II, Sc. 1 has no direct source in Melville's text, where the weather is not mentioned in the brief record of the frigate chase (BB73). In addition to its concrete role as a meteorological antagonist, the mist also functions as a metaphor for Vere's uncertainty about Claggart's character and motives: his exclamation "Oh, this cursèd mist" (LIB50), following as it does directly after the interview in which the master-at-arms has denounced Billy to him as a mutineer, undoubtedly carries a *double entendre* which prefigures Vere's purely symbolic use of the mist imagery (see his triumphant declaration, "The mists are vanishing – and you shall fail!", LIB51). The mist also represents Vere's inability to foresee the fatal consequences of confronting Claggart with Billy until it is too late: not until the master-at-arms lies dead at the hands of the young sailor does Vere grasp the full tragedy of the antagonistic forces which the two men symbolise (see Vere's "Scylla and Charybdis" speech: "The mists have cleared", etc., LIB53).

Mervyn Cooke has speculated that the idea of using the mist imagery was suggested to Forster by a reading of W. H. Auden's discussion of ships and the sea as literary symbols in *The Enchafed Flood*:

Most intriguing in the present context is [Auden's] remark that the degree of visibility at sea represents the degree of conscious knowledge of the characters on the vessel, pointing out that "fog and mist mean doubt and self-delusion, a clear day knowing where one is going or exactly what one has done" (1993b:22).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ For a discussion of the evolution of Vere's Prologue, particularly with regard to this passage, see sections III.2.3.1. and III.2.3.4.

²⁷⁹ See Auden 1951:69; Auden adduces no concrete literary example to illustrate this particular point.

The mist imagery in the *Billy Budd* libretto can certainly be seen to fit Auden's schema. So can the exchange between Billy and the Dansker in Act II, Sc. 3, where Billy is woken by the Dansker "to face what must be", i.e. his own execution. Asked what the day is to be, the Dansker informs Billy that it looks to be "a fair day" (LIB60) – both men are at this moment aware of the inevitable future that awaits the young sailor.²⁸⁰ However, a brief examination of the chronology shows that there can be no question of any influence from *The Enchafed Flood* where the opera-makers' use of this particular image is concerned.

The American edition of Auden's book was not published until 1950 (the British edition did not appear until 1951).²⁸¹ The mist, on the other hand, is already mentioned in the typescript First Rough Synopsis, which was outlined by the three collaborators in January 1949: Claggart's first approach of Vere is cut short as "an enemy-ship has suddenly appeared through the lifting of the mist" (BPL A61:22).²⁸² The mist imagery, together with its associated imagery of "light" as a metaphor for seeing clearly, is firmly in place in the four-act libretto draft of August 1949: after Vere has dismissed Claggart, he exclaims "Oh, this cursèd mist", and, shortly afterwards, invokes "the light, the light of clear heaven, to separate evil from good" (BPL A62:53), just as he does in the finished opera. The next scene opens with an early version of the monologue beginning "Claggart, John Claggart, beware", in which Vere proclaims: "The mists are vanishing and your wickedness is revealed. [...] Light has been granted to me and you shall fail" (BPL A62:53). It seems clear from the source evidence that whatever led the opera-makers to introduce the mist imagery into the *Billy Budd* libretto, it cannot have

²⁸⁰ While Billy's rejoinder, "We'd have caught that Frenchie on a fair day. Oh that cursèd mist!" (LIB60), echoes Captain Vere's ambiguous exclamation after the interview with Claggart in Act II, Sc. 1 (LIB50), it arguably returns the conversation to the mundane level of enemy visibility once again.

²⁸¹ Cooke (1993b:156, n.20) erroneously cites the American publication date as 1949; in fact, Random House published the book on 17 March 1950. Irene Morra, too, includes Auden's reflections on *Billy Budd* in her analysis, but adduces no evidence to substantiate her surmise that *The Enchafed Flood*, published "only a year before the performance of Britten's opera, no doubt influenc[ed] Britten's interest in, if not approach to, the Melville story" (2002:8; see also 2007:94).

²⁸² At this time, Auden had not even given the series of lectures which were to become *The Enchafed Flood* yet; they were delivered at the University of Virginia in mid-March 1949 (Carpenter 1981:362). I have found no records to suggest that Forster had access to Auden's material prior to its publication; there is no correspondence between Forster and Auden listed in Mary Lago's Calendar of the Letters of E. M. Forster; Stape (1993) records no meeting between Auden and Forster in the spring of 1949; and at the time of Forster's 1949 visit to the USA (19 May through 14 June), Auden was already living in Ischia, where he had removed (via England) in April (Carpenter 1981:363). Forster's only recorded engagement with *The Enchafed Flood* appears to be a review which appeared in *The Listener* on 26 April 1951 (Vol. 45, No. 1156:673; repr. in TCD260-262). Mitchell, Reed and Cooke do not include Auden in their list of Britten's correspondents in their selection of letters for the years 1946-1951 (BBLL ix), although Britten's correspondence does, as Morra has noted, "indicate[...] a constant awareness of [Auden's] intellectual and artistic engagements" (2007:94), often mediated through Britten's correspondence with Elizabeth Mayer while Auden was in the USA.

been Auden's observations. Leaving aside the fact that the imagery of mist or fog is in itself entirely commonplace as a symbol for something obscuring one's vision and preventing one from seeing clearly, Cooke's claim that this particular imagery is "not used" in Melville's text (1993b:22) is, moreover, inaccurate: contemplating Vere's situation in the light of the *Somers* incident, and reflecting on the "responsibilities of the sleepless man on the bridge" in "emergencies involving considerations both practical and moral, and when it is imperative promptly to act", Melville's narrator observes that "the greater the fog the more it imperils the steamer, and speed is put on though at the hazard of running somebody down" (BB100).

Perhaps even more pertinently, however, "mist" turns out to be another Forsterian cross-narrative leitmotif. It appears in Ch. 21 of *The Longest Journey*, which contains the short episode of the birth of Rickie's and Agnes's physically handicapped daughter, who only lives for a week. Rickie anticipates the birth of the child as a source of new meaning for his life, "a new symbol for the universe", in which he will be able to "forget himself". The chapter begins with the exact image that Forster was to use again in the libretto of *Billy Budd*:

The mists that had gathered round Rickie seemed to be breaking. He had found light neither in work for which he was unfitted nor in a woman who had ceased to respect him, and whom he was ceasing to love. [...] There remained in Agnes certain terrible faults of heart and head, and no self-reproach would diminish them. The glamour of wedlock had faded [...]. But now the mists were breaking. (LJ183)

The mist image is used here to symbolise Rickie's alienation from his self, his spiritual values, and the relationships with the "real people" (LJ24) he had found and cherished at Cambridge; the vapours that obscure his vision are the oppressive conventions which preside over his marriage to Agnes and his life as a teacher at Sawston school, an existence surrounded by "the cloud of unreality, which ever brooded a little more densely" (LJ176). Interestingly, Rickie's position at the point when he decides that "the mists [are] breaking" is analogous to that of Vere at the beginning of Act II, Sc. 2 (see LIB51: "The mists are vanishing – and you shall fail!"): both men are deluded in their belief that the event they anticipate (in the case of Vere, the confrontation of Billy and his accuser) will provide the "light" (LJ183) that will release them from their state of confusion (compare Vere's exclamation "Oh, for the light, the light of clear Heaven, to separate evil from good!", LIB50). Their confidence is respectively proved vain by the unforeseen turns of events, and their conviction that "the mists [are] breaking" or "vanishing" stands revealed as dramatic irony: external circumstances will not alleviate their confusion; rather, the time at which they will come back into relation with their own selves is yet to come, as each will face his personal 'trial' in a situation of direct conflict with, respectively, social convention and naval law.

The mist image is used in a similar way in Ch. IX of *Maurice*, where Maurice, returning to Cambridge after a vacation spent at his family home, suddenly realises that he has been unhappy there: “A rotten vac and I never knew it’, and wondered how long he should know it. The mist would lower again, he felt sure” (M43). As in *The Longest Journey*, the mist symbolises Maurice’s alienation from his as yet only partially discovered self. Once again, social convention as represented by his suburban middle-class family is responsible for the obscuring “clouds” of “insincerity” (M42) which threaten to prevent him from keeping to the path to self-realisation.²⁸³ In a related vein, Helen Schlegel in *Howards End* refers to the human uncertainty about death and meaning as a condition of being “in a mist”, with empire-building, middle-class materialists “like the Wilcoxes” living “deeper in the mist than any” (HE236).

An interesting variant of the mist image, in which the mist seems to be at least partially positively connoted, occurs in *The Longest Journey*. It figures at what turns out to be a more auspicious turning-point in Rickie’s life, after he has finally come to accept his illegitimate half-brother Stephen, and is facing a choice between male companionship and his failed marriage to the conventional Agnes. About to leave, Stephen calls to Rickie as an invisible voice, “already out in the mist”, inviting him to come away from his blighted life at Sawston. In this instance, the “impalpable cloud” that wraps the suburb, “descend[ing] lower” as Stephen extends his invitation, seems to represent not so much the external world of social convention, but rather the temporary suspension of its oppressive and alienating influence. Under its protective cover, “all civilisation seemed in abeyance. Only the simplest sounds, the simplest desires emerged” (LJ257), so that Rickie is finally able to seize his symbol and follow the appeal of Stephen’s call – something which he had failed to do earlier (see LJ137f.). While the mist thus appears as benign here, in that it shields Rickie from the demands of the conventional world in which he has lost his self, elements of misguided confidence and dramatic irony are nonetheless present in this array, too: they reside in Rickie’s association of the disembodied voice with the voice of his beloved mother. The mist’s obscuring presence allows Rickie to turn Stephen, whom he literally cannot see, into a symbol for the continuity of love, which will prevent him from achieving the only ultimately salutary connection with him “as a man” (LJ257f.). Seen in this light, the mist maintains its association with (self-)delusion and the lack of conscious (self-)knowledge; while the image of an obscuring medium also points to the way in which symbolic interpretation and projection can endanger the individual’s attempts at connecting with others. This problem is arguably also encountered by the operatic Vere, who

²⁸³ In fact, the mist image also makes a suggestive appearance in the letter from Forster to Forrest Reid in which Forster emphasises his objection to the moral stigmatisation of queerness: “I do want to raise these subjects out of the mists of theology: Male and Female created He not them”; the implication being that the “mist” of Christian doctrine, which provides the gender blueprints, norms, and moral evaluations by which queers are labelled “inherently bad”, is responsible for demonising, obscuring and silencing queer sexuality and identity (Letter of 13 March 1915, quoted in Furbank II:14; see discussion in section II.1.3.).

could be seen to construct Billy as a symbol and to 'misread' him through the lens of his own intellectual outlook.²⁸⁴

II.3.4. "Oh, what have I done?"

Moving on from metaphoric imagery to utterance, we encounter the phrase "Oh, what have I done?" which occupies a prominent position in the frame narrative of the opera *Billy Budd*, featuring in both Prologue and Epilogue. Unanswered in both cases – Vere's rejoinder in the Epilogue ("But he has blessed me", etc., LIB63) merely deflects the question by changing the subject to his experience of salvation – this phrase is arguably the key phrase that governs and drives the opera's entire narrative, particularly if this narrative is read as generated in the mind of Captain Vere. Commonplace though it may appear, "Oh, what have I done?" can in fact be classed among Forster's cross-narrative leitmotivic phrases that denote structurally similar moments of experience. It appears in two other texts at moments in which 'dark' characters are forced to face their own selves by a radical disruption of their 'normality', an experience which requires them to re-evaluate their conception of their selves, and to question the normative discourses of society as a site for self-validation.

In *A Room with a View*, Lucy Honeychurch, arguably a female version of the 'dark' character type (see note 223), feels vaguely unhappy and constricted in her chaperoned, conventional existence. Her "unladylike" desire for "something big" fails to be satisfied by the tourist attractions of Florence, and she deplores that "nothing ever happens to [her]" (RV39f.). Moments after this reflection, "something [does] happen": she witnesses a short argument in a public square, which culminates in a man being stabbed to death. As she is about to faint, she thinks "Oh, what have I done?", and these are also her first words as she regains consciousness in the arms of George Emerson, the unconventional and socially inferior true lover whom she will struggle so hard to reject for the longest part of the novel. The various levels of significance of the phrase "Oh, what have I done" are quite clearly presented in the text. First of all, it refers to a supposed causal relationship between Lucy's desire for something to "happen" and the subsequent events: "She had complained of dullness, and lo! one man was stabbed, and another held her in his arms" (RV41). Secondly, the question also refers to the consequences of what has "happened" on the level of personal experience: "Again the thought occurred to her, 'Oh, what have I done?' – the thought that she, as well as the dying man, had crossed some spiritual boundary" (RV43). The symbolic significance of what has "happened" is further elucidated, and its connection with development and self-knowledge is emphasised: "It was not exactly that a man had died; something had happened to the living: they had come to a situation where character tells, and where Childhood enters upon the branching paths of Youth" (RV45).

²⁸⁴ See my discussion in sections II.4.2.3.1. and II.5.1.3.

The definition of this “situation” as one “where character tells” would seem to indicate that what George calls the “tremendous” moment in the square (RV43) is in fact a shock of the sort often administered to Forster’s characters, designed to put to the test their ability and willingness to connect, particularly when they are of the ‘dark’ type who is ‘travelling light’. George resolves to “find out what it is” that “has happened”, declining to “return[...] to the old life” because he “shall want to live” and wishes to face life “without getting muddled” (RV43ff.). By contrast, Lucy, the victim of an internalised conventionality that thwarts her rebellious impulses, tries “with the cunning of a maniac” (RV42) to apply “the anodyne of muddledom” (HE315) in the shape of various attempts at evasion, hoping thereby to remedy a situation in which she finds she has exposed her true self to a man whom, even though he is “trustworthy, intelligent, and even kind” (RV44), she regards as socially unsuitable because of his lower social origin.

The phrase “Oh, what have I done” is also used by the young missionary Paul Pinmay in “The Life to Come”. Guilt-stricken and panicking after his homosexual love-act with the native chief Vithobai, he breaks down: “Losing his dignity, he sobbed ‘Oh, what have I done?’” (LtC65). The disruptive experience of having his homosexual desires realised forces this ‘dark’ character to recognise himself for all that he is. However, Pinmay is unable to accept his own inclinations and Vithobai’s love, let alone reject Church and society in general as his site of self-validation. Instead, he projects his homophobic self-abhorrence onto Vithobai, whom he casts as “his seducer” (LtC68), and proceeds to realign himself with the norms of society and the moral teachings of his Church, turning from “an open-hearted Christian knight” into “a hypocrite whom a false step would destroy” (LtC71).²⁸⁵

It can be seen that in all three texts, the disruptive experience that prompts the ‘dark’ character’s question “Oh, what have I done” is at the same time a Forsterian symbolic moment. Lucy, Pinmay and Vere are each offered the chance to recognise and embrace the salutary connection with another human being – George, Vithobai, and Billy respectively. What they have “done” in each case amounts to a personal, even intimate, involvement with, and commitment to, the affairs of their fellow humans: in their respective ways – by “complain[ing] of dullness”, by affirming homosexual desire in a sexual act, and by fatally confronting inarticulate but muscular goodness with an evil antagonist – they have ceased

²⁸⁵ Pinmay’s self-repression serves to maintain and fortify his socially and culturally privileged position at the cost of the ‘light’ character Vithobai’s decline, sickness and death. The same structure can be seen to emerge in the opera *Billy Budd*, if Vere’s refusal to save Billy is read as his refusal to admit to his personal feelings for the young sailor and thus risk his privileged position (see section II.6.8.). Like Vere, Pinmay is seen at several points (LtC65, 67f., 72, 75) to have a choice of ‘saving’ both himself and his fellow human by embracing his own inclinations – albeit at the cost of overcoming his homophobia and relinquishing his position in society. While Forster’s narrator shows himself sympathetic to Pinmay’s suffering at times, his consistent use of satire indicates that he is not condoning his decision to reject the salutary connection.

to 'travel light'. However, in all three cases, "character tells" (RV45), and none of them is able to seize this chance. Even Vere, who subsequently achieves his salutary connection with Billy, remains aware of his moral failure: in the Epilogue, it is his knowledge that he "could have saved" Billy, and that Billy "knew it, even his shipmates knew it, though earthly laws silenced them", which leads him back to the Prologue's central question, "Oh, what have I done" (LIB63).

II.3.5. "I'd die for you"

Billy's loyalty to his captain also finds its characteristic expression in a Forsterian leitmotif phrase: in his first private interview with Vere in Act II, Sc. 2, shortly before the fatal confrontation with Claggart, Billy declares "I'd die for you" (LIB51). He has already made the same declaration in his bout of exuberant hero-worship at the end of Act I, Sc. 1, where he vows to "follow [Vere] for ever"; even though at this point he has not yet met the captain, he is willing to give his life for him: "I'd die to save you, ask for to die" (LIB23). Finally, this leitmotivic phrase appears once more as Billy makes his personal appeal to Vere during his trial in Act II, Sc. 2: "I'd have died for you, save me" (LIB56). While, to the average 1950s opera-goer, this phrase might well have denoted no more than the fervent devotion of a loyal and somewhat naïve young sailor to his Commander, a contemporary audience familiar with Forster's work, and particularly with the posthumously published homosexual fiction, might recognise Billy's utterances as part of a family of interrelated Forsterian textual leitmotifs surrounding the concept of male/male love.

The notion of dying for another man as a token of deepest emotional and personal commitment figures most poignantly in *Maurice*. In Ch. III, it appears in Maurice's second important dream, in which

Nothing happened. He scarcely saw a face, scarcely heard a voice say, "That is your friend," and then it was over, having filled him with beauty and taught him tenderness. He could die for such a friend, he would allow such a friend to die for him; they would make any sacrifice for each other, and count the world nothing, neither death nor distance nor crossness could part them, because "this is my friend." (M12)²⁸⁶

In the 1914 version of the novel, this leitmotivic phrase had made a second appearance in what is now Ch. XLIII: Maurice has agreed to meet Alec at the British Museum, and Alec is considering blackmailing Maurice over their first night of lovemaking at Penge. The passage beginning "But Alec didn't catch on" (M191) at that time included the statement "during passion, he would have died for his friend" (Gardner 1999b:282). The phrase's appearance in this context suggests

²⁸⁶ Claire Seymour, too, has noted that Maurice's quest for a "friend" whom "he could die for" (M12) parallels Billy's "desire" to "die to save" Vere (Seymour 155f).

that the deep love for another man which it symbolises can also comprise an erotic component.

The leitmotivic concept of dying for a friend also features in “Dr Woolacott”, when the ghost of a young working-class man who befriends the invalid Clesant declares his love: having already held Clesant in his arms and as good as kissed him (see LtC89), the ghost pleads with him to embrace their love: “We’ve found each other, nothing else matters, it’s a chance in a million we’ve found each other. I’d do anything for you, I’d die if I could for you” (LtC90).²⁸⁷ While the ghost cannot die for his living friend Clesant, at the end of the story, Clesant dies to join his ghostly lover in his “home”, i.e. “the grave”, where they “shall be together for ever and ever”, unaffected by illness or old age (LtC96). Considering these paradisiacal prospects, and contrasting them with the misery that is life under Woolacott’s repressive regime, it may not seem as if Clesant dies “for” his friend in the sense of sacrificing himself; but if the story is read as a parable about affirming and embracing homosexual love, he could in this sense be said to “die for” their friendship nevertheless, relinquishing his joyless existence just as Maurice, on a more prosaic level, gives up his social privileges for a life with Alec “outside class, without relations or money” (M207).

The feeling of close connection with another man that could inspire such fierce devotion was at one point also spontaneously experienced by Aziz, as can be seen from the manuscripts of *A Passage to India*. In Ch. 6, Aziz, who has borrowed Hamidullah’s pony and polo gear, encounters “a stray subaltern who was also practising” this sport. “Concentrated on the ball”, the Indian doctor and the British soldier establish a brief moment of cross-cultural camaraderie:

they somehow became fond of one another, and smiled when they drew rein to rest. [...] They reined up again, the fire of good fellowship in their eyes. But it cooled with their bodies, for athletics can only raise a temporary glow. Nationality was returning, but before it could exert its poison they parted, saluting each other. “If only they were all like that,” each thought. (PtI51f.)

What today stands as a poignant but comparatively matter-of-fact parting on mutually appreciative terms had at an earlier time veered into a rather more emotional direction, and had been conveyed in rather more pathetic language:

Nationality was returning, but before <<the <memory> \episode/ could be spoilt>> \it could poison the meeting/ the subaltern <cried> said Well

²⁸⁷ The ghost’s words seem to foreshadow both Claggart’s recognition of Billy’s singular nature in the opera, where the master-at-arms refers to Billy as “a find in a thousand” (LIB16), and Maurice’s insistence to Alec that “It’s a chance in an thousand we’ve met” (M200). The chapter featuring this scene was added to *Maurice* by Forster early in 1952, closely after the premiere of *Billy Budd*. For further discussion of the possible influences of Forster’s librettistic work on *Maurice*, see Rochlitz 53f.

so long, and <<, idealising <the> one another,>> <<they parted <for ever> >> rode away. "Unlike the rest," thought Aziz, as he knocked the ball about \alone/. "For an Englishman of that <sort> \type/ I could die." <He remembered Mrs Moore.> Twice in a few days he had slipped the \grim/ sentries \, and found friendliness behind them/. (MSSPt170)²⁸⁸

Forster's final version is purged of Aziz' surprisingly intense sentiments, possibly because they appeared somewhat excessive, although their excessiveness would arguably be in keeping with Aziz' spontaneous and exuberant character.²⁸⁹ Tellingly, in the discarded passage, it is not Mrs Moore, but only the male English soldier who evokes this greatest token of appreciation in Aziz.

II.3.6. Intimatopia: "helping", "looking after", "trusting", and "feeling safe"

The salutary strength which flows from bonds of male/male friendship, respectively homosexual coupledness, but also their acute vulnerability, is clearly represented in Ch. XXXIX, as Maurice and Alec join forces in the cricket match:

[Maurice] felt that they were against the whole world, that not only Mr Borenius and the field but the audience in the shed and all England were closing round the wickets. They played for the sake of each other and of their fragile relationship – if one fell the other would follow. [...] They must show that when two are gathered together majorities shall not triumph. (M174f.)²⁹⁰

A similar sense of an embattled personal relationship appears implicit in Billy's final speech in Act II, Sc. 3, where Billy comments on his relationship with Vere:

But I had to strike down that Jemmy Legs – it's fate. And Captain Vere has had to strike me down – Fate. We're both in sore trouble, him and me, with great need for strength, and my trouble's soon ending, so I can't help him longer with his. Starry Vere, God bless him – and the clouds darker than night for us both. (LIB60)

Even though Billy's "generous nature" (BB99; see also *Griffin* 5) makes him generally inclined towards "helping" his fellow men and "sharing" his life with them

²⁸⁸ For citations from Forster's manuscripts published in the Abinger Edition, I have adopted the editorial symbols used there. See my note on citations and editorial practice, p.xviii.

²⁸⁹ The question of in how far the figure of Aziz reflects the stereotypes of colonialist representations of the subaltern concerns a different level of textual analysis which I cannot go into here. The fact that this particular feeling about English men finds expression in a textual leitmotif used by more than one of Forster's characters suggests that it was a characteristic Forsterian pattern of envisioning male/male desire, rather than any concrete concept of interracial relationships, which generated Aziz' utterance.

²⁹⁰ Compare Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

(LIB17),²⁹¹ it seems clear that, for all its vagueness, this part of Billy's final speech refers very specifically to the private bond that exists between himself and Captain Vere, symbolised by "the far-shining sail that's *not* Fate" (LIB60; my emphasis). The idea of Billy and Vere giving "help" and strength to one another recalls the ideal of mutual support envisioned by Maurice for his relationship with Clive: "Clive had helped him. Clive would help him again when the pendulum swung, meanwhile he must help Clive, and all through life they would alternate thus" (M95).

The insistence on the reciprocal nature of these relationships suggest their close kinship with Forster's concept of "two people pulling each other into salvation" (CPB55). It resurfaces also in the manuscripts of *A Passage to India*, in the scene in which Ralph Moore ventures out onto the stormy waters of the Mau tank with Aziz in "a rudderless dinghy": while Aziz is in charge of the boat, Ralph, "the guest", sits "huddled up in the stern", asking "no questions about details" (PtI302f.). At this point, the manuscript features the following short exchange:

"Do you feel safe with me?" Aziz asked him. He answered "I should feel safe with you anywhere. And you are safe with me."

"I know that," he smiled.

Ralph was silent. (MSSPtI560)

This discarded conversation completes a picture which can be seen to resonate strikingly with the opera libretto Forster produced a quarter of a century later, in which a very similar picture is evoked by Billy's fantasy about becoming Vere's coxswain: "I'd serve you well, indeed I would. You'd be safe with me. You could trust your boat to me. [...] Sir! let me be your coxswain! I'd look after you well. You could trust your boat to me, you'd be safe with me" (LIB51). Both scenarios involve two men in a boat: one of them a 'dark' English middle-class intellectual, and one a social (respectively cultural) Other, with the Other in charge of the boat's navigation and steering. In both cases, the Other character takes pleasure in the thought of being able to make the 'dark' character feel "safe" under his care; and both scenarios can arguably be read as homoerotically charged.

The sensitive Ralph Moore is easily identified as a 'dark' English middle-class intellectual character. His health, like that of his namesake Ralph Holme from

²⁹¹ Clifford Hindley has drawn attention to the fact that in Edwardian times, "sharing" was used to designate the act of "engaging in homosexual sex", and that Forster had employed the word in this sense in his (at the time still unpublished) homosexually themed novel *Maurice* (Hindley 1989:369; see M183 and M212). Reading *Maurice* in 1933, Christopher Isherwood identified the use of the word "share" for male homosexual intercourse as already dated at the time (Gardner 1999a:xxxvi). If the appearance of "sharing" in the *Billy Budd* libretto did constitute a coded allusion to homosexual sex, this piece of obsolete slang could have gone largely unnoticed except by those alert for, and knowledgeable about, such obscure subcultural references – a thought that Forster might have enjoyed. It should be noted that Britten's musical treatment takes the form of a particularly elaborate melisma (Act I, [32]+2); it is thus accorded an unmistakable prominence.

"Ralph and Tony" and that of Rickie Elliot, seems to be delicate, too: apart from the acute matter of "the celebrated bee-stings" (PtI299), about which the young man gets himself "in a state" (PtI291), a letter from Miss Qusted to Fielding's wife discusses "Ralph's health" (PtI298). The complex figure of Aziz is more difficult to fit into the 'dark'/'light' character schema; however, at this point, and in relation to Ralph, his cultural Otherness would qualify him as a 'light' character type.²⁹² It is clear that Aziz and Ralph are drawn to each other once Aziz has "forg[otten]" his initial hostility (see PtI301); and there are moreover indications that the expedition they embark upon could be read as more than merely an "act of homage to Mrs Moore's son" (PtI302), for it may be seen to carry a homoerotic subdiscourse.

We learn that the 'dark' character Ralph is admired by "the poet" in Aziz, who thinks him "rather beautiful". Moreover, the scene in which Aziz examines Ralph, planning at first to treat him cruelly, "as Callendar had treated Nureddin" (PtI299) – a character associated, however vaguely, with homosexuality²⁹³ – can arguably be categorised among Forster's erotically charged scenes between men, which often feature male/male intimacy in conjunction with a physical antagonism that points to an interest in sadomasochist power structures. The difference in social status (from a colonialist point of view) makes the power relationship between Aziz and Ralph structurally identical with that between Billy and Vere. In both cases, the social inferior possesses the superior physical power – Billy's being of a muscular nature, while Aziz is at least conscious that he holds the weakly youth at his mercy, starting out by touching him with hands that are "unkind" (PtI299), but soon adopting a protective attitude towards the man who has recognised him as his "friend" (PtI301). In both cases, the 'dark' middle class character trusts his boat to the Other, whether literally or metaphorically: while Vere never gets the chance to put Billy's boating skills to the test, he does entrust himself to him in his

²⁹² As a complexly crafted character, Aziz, like Maurice, Lucy Honeychurch, and the protagonists of "The Other Boat", cannot consistently be fitted into the 'dark'/'light' pattern. On the one hand, he can be seen to fulfil the function of a 'light' character in relation to Fielding's 'dark' character. However, in relation to Mrs Moore, it seems to be the latter who fulfils the role of saviour figure, which would leave Aziz in the 'dark' position. Furthermore, when, after his trial, Aziz gets 'muddled' by jumping to the conclusion that Fielding must have married Miss Qusted, and severs the ties of friendship between them, he displays the typical deficiencies of a 'dark' character: in refusing to continue his personal relations with Fielding, Aziz clearly stands in need of salvation according to the Forsterian philosophy. It is the emotional bond he establishes with Mrs Moore's son Ralph which brings the salutary connection.

²⁹³ Major Callendar, the Civil Surgeon, is rumoured to have "tortured" Nureddin (PtI223), the Nawab Bahadur's "elegant grandson" (PtI31) who has been in a car accident (see PtI193), by putting "pepper instead of antiseptic on the wounds" (PtI223). Major Callendar certainly takes a brutal satisfaction in describing the loss of the "debauched" (PtI77) Nureddin's good looks, which to him suggest that Nureddin "was unspeakably immoral" (PtI206) – this telling formulation can probably be assumed to be an allusion to homosexual practices (compare the phrase Maurice uses to declare himself to Dr Barry: "I'm an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort", M134).

state of heartbroken despair, as he approaches Billy's prison cabin wondering "how" Billy could "pardon" or even "receive" him (LIB58).

Scenes of men taking care of one another and providing mutual comfort are staples of what Elizabeth Woledge (100ff.) has brilliantly conceptualised as the "intimatopic" tradition of homoerotic fiction.²⁹⁴ Thus, when Clive falls ill at the Halls' in Ch. XX of *Maurice*, Maurice tries to insist on nursing his friend himself, rather than calling in a professional female nurse.²⁹⁵ The *Billy Budd* libretto also contains several scenes in which men are comforted by other men, or in which protective emotions can be discerned. I have already cited Billy's promises that he would "look after" Vere if he were his coxswain; the Dansker's nocturnal visit to the condemned Billy qualifies as another instance of shared emotional comfort. It seems significant that the opera-makers chose to substitute this final intimate encounter between friends, which has no source in Melville's text, for the more formal chaplain's visit which is described in comparative detail there, but is only briefly mentioned in the libretto.²⁹⁶

It is the scene in which the flogged Novice is led on the stage by his friend, however, which shows the closest connections to the family of Forsterian verbal leitmotifs that denote male/male intimacy and love. The Novice's friend tries to comfort the stricken youth, telling him to "Come along, kid", and reassuring him in his misery: "I'll look after you" (LIB19). As I have already indicated above, the promise to "look after" a friend or lover occurs in various forms throughout Forster's work; further instances are to be found in Ch. 31 of *The Longest Journey*, where Stephen tries to convince Rickie to leave his wife and his life at Sawston, and to come away with him, calling out to him: "Come; I will take care of you, I can manage you" (LJ257). Rickie finally succeeds in following the call, and a few months later, as Stephen and Rickie travel towards Salisbury on the train, Stephen tries to persuade Rickie to come out drinking with him in the village, because it would do him "no end of good", promising him that, if he should "plop" (i.e. presumably collapse with too much drink), "I'll catch you [...]. We shall carry you up the hill to bed" (LJ264), indicating again that he is prepared to look after Rickie and take care of him.

II.3.7. "Come"

The signal call of "come" – easily missed in the musical phrasing of the Novice's friend's appeal "Come along, kid" (Act I, [42]+6) – appears as a verbal leitmotif throughout Forster's entire work. Besides its overt significance in the respective

²⁹⁴ This "intimatopic" tradition moreover often features homosocial settings such as all-male ship-board environments.

²⁹⁵ Maurice's 'un-masculine' concern prompts Dr Jowitt to deliver the homophobic jibe that Maurice will be "wheeling the baby next" (M88).

²⁹⁶ The chaplain's visit is listed in the First Rough Synopsis but never made it into the first libretto draft of March 1949; see section I.4.1.

texts, this appeal can quite consistently be seen to open subtexts of homoerotic longing in male/male relationships, since it regularly encodes the desire for a union with a robust lover and spiritual saviour – a friend or a god, who is usually characterised by a fundamental Otherness of class, culture, creed or mode of existence. It stands most clearly revealed in this function at the close of the main draft of Forster's late unfinished short story "Little Imber", where the appeal of "come" conveys Imber's explicit invitation to Warham to come to his bed, for the shared pleasure and comfort of sexual intercourse and physical closeness (AS234).²⁹⁷

In Ch. 19 of *The Longest Journey*, Rickie, who feels unhappy in his marriage, writes a number of letters to his friend Ansell. The first letter sounds "like a cry from prison"; however, the letters never get sent, because Rickie is not ready to acknowledge his own unhappiness. In his final attempt he simply "scrawled 'Come!'" on a postcard (LJ175). Rickie's unconscious – and ultimately unuttered – cry for help and male companionship prefigures the appeals made by Maurice through the open window at Penge to "the air and the darkness", which symbolise his true desires for a robust male love. It is after his frustrating interview with Clive, during which the newly-wed country squire has been seeking to re-establish a semblance of their old friendship but has revealed himself as superficial and callous, that Maurice utters his appeal for the first time: "'Come!' he cried suddenly, surprising himself. Whom had he called? He had been thinking of nothing and the word had leapt out" (M152). The following evening, having returned to Penge after his first interview with Mr Lasker Jones the hypnotist, Maurice lies troubled by dreams in which he yearns for "the darkness where he can be free": "He really was asleep when he sprang up and flung wide the curtains with a cry of 'Come!' The action awoke him; what had he done that for?" (M165). This time, his appeal is answered as Alec climbs into his room through the window; it might be concluded that what he has been calling for is the "friend" (M12) and companion he has been dreaming of since his schooldays (see the passage quoted on p.207 above).

The word "come" can arguably be seen to receive its most significant, because most explicit, connotative charge in Ch. XII of *Maurice*, in which the slow development of Clive's love for Maurice is described: the "peculiar and beautiful expression", mixed with "a touch of – impudence" which Clive starts to observe in Maurice

beckoned to him across intellect, saying "This is all very well, you're clever, we know – but come!" It haunted him so that he watched for it while his brain and tongue were busy, and when it came he felt himself replying, "I'll come – I didn't know."

"You can't help yourself now. You must come."

²⁹⁷ "Little Imber" is discussed in more detail in section II.3.10.2. below.

“I don’t want to help myself.”

“Come then.”

He did come. (M57f.)

The beckoning agent here is a disembodied voice which, however, represents the male body’s erotic appeal to the desiring male; an appeal which is identified as bypassing the intellect, conforming with the novel’s central theme of “the flesh educating the spirit” (M128).

In “Dr Woolcott”, it is another disembodied voice – the visiting spirit of a dead soldier – which sends out the appeal of “come” to the invalid Clesant:

Come home with me now, perhaps it is a farm. [...] Come away with me for an evening to my earthly lodging [...] ... such a visit would be love. Ah, that was the word – love – why they pursued me and still know I am in the house; love was the word they cannot endure [...]. (LtC95)

Earlier in the story, looking across “gently” at Clesant, his ghostly visitor had “seemed to say: ‘Come to me, and you shall be as happy as I am and as strong’” (LtC87). Even though, technically, this robust lover has no body, his presence has a vitalising effect on the body of Clesant, in whose subjective perception the physical sensations of their erotic union – his lover’s “broad shoulders” and “lips that parted as they touched him” (LtC89), as well as their final embrace (LtC96) – are more real than his everyday interactions with the “guardians and familiars” (LtC85) who surround him.

It is a similar promise of revitalisation which Stephen makes to Rickie in *The Longest Journey*; and his appeal, too, is conveyed only by his disembodied voice:²⁹⁸

“Come with me as a man,” said Stephen, already out in the mist. “Not as a brother; who cares what people did years back? We’re alive together, and the rest is cant. Here am I, Rickie, and there are you, a fair wreck. They’ve no use for you here, – never had any, if the truth was known, – and they’ve only made you beastly. This house, so to speak, has the rot. It’s common sense that you should come.” [...]

Then he trudged away, and Rickie soon lost his colour and his form. But a voice persisted, saying, “Come, I do mean it. Come; I will take care of you, I can manage you.” (LJ257)

Having followed Stephen’s appeal, and left his unhappy marriage with Agnes, Rickie, too, finds the promise of revitalisation fulfilled through the salutary male

²⁹⁸ Disembodied voices in Forster’s work can in fact be seen to function as vehicles conveying subversive messages that open on possibilities of unconventional or queer relationships. In “New Lucy”, it is the voice of George, invisible in the darkness of the wood, which proclaims that “there are no eternal sanctities [...]. Plenty of sanctities, but none of them are eternal”, in opposition to Mr Beebe’s invocation of “the eternal sanctity of an engagement” and of institutionalised heterosexual marriage (LN111).

companionship of Stephen and, finally, Ansell, the friend to whom he had instinctively tried to turn earlier but had failed (see above): "His health was better, his brain was sound, his life washed clean, not by the waters of sentiment, but by the efforts of a fellow man" (LJ267).²⁹⁹

The appeal of "come" also figures as a major textual leitmotif in *A Passage to India*. However, in this text, the longing for the salutary companionship of a friend which it encodes is universalised to refer to the relationship between the human individual (or the material world) and a divine, sense-giving principle that implies love and spiritual salvation. The word makes its first appearance in Ch. 7, where Professor Godbole sings a "religious song" in which he places himself "in the position of a milkmaid":

"I say to Shri Krishna: 'Come! Come to me only.' The God refuses to come. I grow humble and say: 'Do not come to me only. Multiply yourself into a hundred Krishnas, and let one go to each of my hundred companions, but one, O Lord of the Universe, come to me.' He refuses to come."
[...]

"But He comes in some other song, I hope?" said Mrs Moore gently.

"Oh no, He refuses to come," repeated Godbole, perhaps not understanding her question. "I say to him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come." [...] There was a moment of absolute silence. No ripple disturbed the water, no leaf stirred. (PtI72)

In *A Passage to India*, the appeal of "come" remains essentially unanswered; it serves here as a constant reminder of the human yearning for meaning in what could well be an indifferent universe, or so it is suggested by the symbolism of setting and place in the novel. Thus, Ronny Heslop and Adela Quested, their engagement newly broken off, are being driven through "melancholy fields":

Trees of a poor quality bordered the road, indeed the whole scene was inferior, and suggested that the countryside was too vast to admit of excellence. In vain did each item in it call out, "Come, come." There was not enough god to go round. The two young people conversed feebly and felt unimportant. (PtI79)

It is particularly to the Western perception – which is largely shared by the narrator, as indeed it is inscribed in the structures of the text as a whole – that India symbolises the incomprehensible. The various passages dedicated to aspects of the Indian landscape tend to dwell on its alienness (from a Western point of view) and

²⁹⁹ In *The Longest Journey*, Forster is able to present a companionship between Rickie and Stephen which appears to conform to a broadly socialist or Whitmanesque ideal of the brotherhood of men, but which, to a reader used to decoding hidden homoerotic discourses, remains open to further interpretation, just like the friendship between the Novice and his friend in *Billy Budd*, and the relationship between Billy and Vere.

its indifference, even hostility, to Life in all its variations.³⁰⁰ The threat of the potential meaninglessness of human existence, and a concomitant sense of the essential isolation of the individual pervades the novel; it manifests itself in a characteristically Forsterian way in terms of personal relationships. Thus, in the description of the inside of one of the Marabar caves, those representatives of universal meaninglessness, to whom “nothing, nothing attaches”, and the human exploration of which can add “nothing, nothing [...] to the sum of good or evil”, we find an image of momentary connection across an impermeable barrier of difference, followed quite literally by extinction:

They are dark caves. [...] There is little to see, and no eye to see it, until the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match. Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit [...]. The two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid with lovely colours divides the lovers [...]. The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire. The cave is dark again, like all the caves. (PtI117f.)

This passage, which highlights the evanescence of human attempts at connection while declaring the fundamental impossibility of ever achieving actual union, could be, and certainly has been, read as the quintessence of Forster’s numerous narratives in which a temporary salutary connection culminates in, or is closely followed by, the death of one or both of the parties involved. At the same time, it can be regarded as belonging to a Forsterian leitmotif cluster featuring lights that burn in the darkness and are associated with love and salutary connection (see section II.3.8. below). Within *A Passage to India*, however, the appeal of “come”, actively championed by Godbole throughout the text, counterbalances the pessimistic view represented by the Marabar caves, a view that suggests that the very attempt at connection, the very search for meaning, is futile. For, as Godbole explains to Fielding, the God’s “absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, ‘Come, come, come, come’” (PtI169). Even though we subsequently learn that Godbole himself is aware that the efforts of the individual may not amount to much, the text nevertheless implies that those efforts are not to be dismissed as futile:

It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of the God and to love [Mrs Moore], and to place himself in her position and to say to the God, “Come, come, come, come.” This was all he could do. How inadequate! But each according to his own capacities, and he knew that his own were small. (PtI281)

³⁰⁰ See for example the description of Fielding’s return journey to Europe in Ch. 32, and the descriptions of Chandrapore, the heat, the sky and the sun, and the Marabar Caves, in Ch. 1, 10, and 12 respectively.

In the guise of Hindu religiosity, the figure of Godbole can thus be seen to convey something which resonates with the Forsterian creed of personal relationships, as expressed in "What I Believe". Godbole's faithful performance of the ritual of connection – a celebration of *bhakti*, the longing for the union with God – is both "duty" and "desire" to him, even while he is aware of the limitations of his "capacities". This attitude can be seen to parallel Forster's self-declaredly religion-free belief that it is, "at all events", worthwhile to "keep faith" in "personal relationships", to "show one's little light here, one's own poor trembling flame" (TCD66).³⁰¹

II.3.8. "Lights in the darkness" and "far-shining sails"

There exists another Forsterian textual leitmotif cluster which is linked with the desire for connection, one which is decidedly visual in character. As I have already briefly indicated in my discussion of the Marabar Caves above, a number of Forster's narratives feature the image of a light or fire, often burning in surrounding darkness. These burning lights are consistently associated with love and salutary connection, sometimes in a more or less overt homoerotic context, while at the same time they often function as markers for some form of passage or transition to another state of existence.

An early germ for this motif with, it might be felt, a surprisingly clear homoerotic undercurrent, occurs in "The New Lucy Novel", so entitled by Forster (Stallybrass 1977b:ix), an early draft version of what was eventually to become *A Room with a View*.³⁰² The image of a flame in the darkness, illuminating the face of a man, opens and closes a nocturnal encounter in the woods, where Mr Beebe confronts George Emerson:

<A> \Any/ man who lights his pipe in the dark <is, for some reason, a> \becomes for the moment/ mysterious and romantic. As Mr Beebe returned through the woods he heard the crack of a match, and [...] a serious passive face grew out of the darkness. It wavered and cleared as the flame sucked in and out of the bowl. Then it vanished, but its place was <still> marked by the little red dot of burning tobacco. (LN106)³⁰³

³⁰¹ Given that the signal call of "come" had already acquired its established significance as a cross-narrative verbal leitmotif in *The Longest Journey* and *Maurice*, it seems possible that, even in its manifestation in a context of Hindu religiosity in *A Passage to India*, this call might still possess close ties not only with the general Forsterian creed of personal relationships, but also with the more specific theme of homoerotic longing for a "friend".

³⁰² The exact date of the chapter in question seems hard to pinpoint; Forster started on "New Lucy" in December 1903 (Stallybrass 1977b:ix) and continued to work on the "Lucy Novel" intermittently for the next four years, laying it aside first for *Where Angels Fear To Tread* and then for *The Longest Journey* (Stallybrass 1977a:viii).

³⁰³ For further discussion of this nocturnal encounter, see section II.5.2.2., pp.379ff.

A variant of this motif of an illuminated male face may be discerned in the “scarcely”-seen face of a “friend” which appears in Maurice’s dream, a vision which “filled him with beauty and taught him tenderness” (M12).

Even though the “mysterious and romantic” (LN106) vision of George’s firelit face in the darkness of the wood does not survive in *A Room with a View*, a similar vision appears to Rickie in *The Longest Journey*, where the face is that of Stephen Wonham, the desirable male figure to whom, as Oliver Stallybrass noted, certain aspects of the earlier George’s character were “transferred” (LN112).³⁰⁴ Ch. 33 of *The Longest Journey* concludes with a scene in which Stephen and Rickie, making their way from Salisbury towards Cadover in the darkness, set a ball of burning paper afloat on the stream:

The paper caught fire from the match, and spread into a rose of flame. “Now gently with me,” said Stephen, and they laid it flower-like on the stream [...] and then the flower sailed into deep water [...] and one arch [of the bridge] became a fairy tunnel, dropping diamonds. Then it vanished for Rickie; but Stephen, who knelt in the water, declared that it was still afloat, far through the arch, burning as if it would burn for ever. (LJ272f.)

Previous to this scene, Stephen reflects on his idea of marriage: he would “find a girl” with whom he might “be happy [...] in my own way”, explaining that he would be “faithful, of course” but that a wife of his “should never have all my thoughts [...] because all one’s thoughts can’t belong to any single person”. The narrator subsequently comments on Stephen’s sober attitude to marriage, implying that marriage, as a social institution, exploits the ideal of “romantic love” which “is the code of modern morals, and, for this reason, popular”. Narratives of romantic love provide the “tempting baits” of “eternal union” and “eternal ownership” which are easily swallowed by “the average man” who may never acknowledge this “mistake” – a step which Rickie, with much help from Stephen and Ansell, his queer male allies, has finally managed to take. As Rickie wonders “how much truth might lie in that antithesis of Ansell’s: ‘A man wants to love mankind, a woman wants to love one man’”, reflecting that “the conflict, so tragic in [his and Agnes’s] own case, was elsewhere the salt of the world”, Stephen prepares the “trick with paper which Mr Failing had showed him, and which he would show Rickie now”, appearing “transfigured” into an image of “stead[ing]” and “manhood” in the light of the match he has presumably struck (LJ271f.).

As Judith Herz has compellingly argued, Stephen and Rickie may be “talk[ing] about marriage”, but their action of setting the burning “rose of flame” afloat can be taken to symbolise an act of male/male connection: “boyish play becomes

³⁰⁴ Apart from “George’s fondness for sleeping out of doors” which Stallybrass recognises as having been “transferred” to Stephen (LN112), another detail from this scene which may be felt to re-surface in *The Longest Journey* is George’s disembodied voice dispensing wisdom, much like Stephen’s does out of the mist.

romantic union" (1997:146). It seems not insignificant in this context that Stephen's "trick" has been passed down to him by Rickie's late uncle, an advocate of "the brotherhood of man" (LJ233) and campaigner for love, "the Beloved Republic" (LJ238); and that Stephen, in wishing to "show Rickie", is thus continuing this line of male influence. The particular significance of the fire image in this scene is reinforced by its earlier appearance in Rickie's vision of the birth of love, which follows his observation of Gerald kissing Agnes: "In full unison was Love born, flame of the flame, flushing the dark river beneath him [...]. Was Love a column of fire?" (LJ40). Again, the male gender of this Love is noteworthy: he is Eros, perhaps, whereas Mr Failing's conception of love is associated with Aphrodite (see LJ233). As Herz points out, in the scene in which Rickie and Stephen float the burning ball of paper down the Wiltshire stream, "what was metaphor earlier [...] is now enacted" (1997:146): as Rickie contemplates Stephen's transformation to "manhood" (LJ272), a male love is indeed "born, flame of the flame", and the "dark river" is "flush[ed]" (LJ40) by the fire which, so Stephen declares, burns "as if it would burn forever" (LJ273), just as Love's "wings" are "infinite", and "his youth eternal" (LJ40) in Rickie's earlier vision.

The image of the burning "flower sail[ing] into deep water" (LJ273) recalls another vessel of light sailing away over the water: Forster was to employ this image a few years later in *Maurice*, where it is clearly identified as a symbol of victorious and enduring male/male love. As the ship that was to have taken Alec to Argentina sails away without him, Maurice experiences this moment as a vision of love triumphant:

He watched the steamer move, and suddenly she reminded him of the Viking's funeral that had thrilled him as a boy. The parallel was false, yet she was heroic, she was carrying away death. [...] She was off at last, a sacrifice, a splendour, leaving smoke that thinned into the sunset, and ripples that died against the wooded shores. For a long time he gazed after her, then turned to England. His journey was nearly over. He was bound for his new home. He had brought out the man in Alec, and now it was Alec's turn to bring out the hero in him. (M207)

The situation at this point has certain structural parallels to that at the end of Ch. 33 of *The Longest Journey*: in contemplating the ship which carries away the prospect of a future without his lover, and thus in its "splendour" can be seen to symbolise "heroic" love itself, the 'dark' character Maurice believes that his love has "brought out the man in Alec". In a similar vein, the 'dark' character Rickie believes that the impetuous Stephen – seen in the light that will kindle the "rose of flame" which symbolises love – is developing towards Rickie's ideal of manliness: "a new spirit" seems to dwell on Stephen's "transfigured" face, "expelling the crudities of youth"; Rickie beholds "steadier eyes, and the sign of manhood set

like a bar of gold upon steadier lips” (LJ272).³⁰⁵ Both Maurice and Rickie are themselves standing on the brink of transition, although Rickie is not aware of his impending fate: he will shortly lose his life in the act of saving that of the incorrigible Stephen. Whereas Rickie’s heroism and his sacrifice are unintentional, and he dies denying the salutary power of personal relations (see section II.4.2.3.1., p.295), Maurice’s heroism and sacrifice are conscious, and will consist in his renunciation of “class”, “relations” and “money” (M207), in other words, in the death of his former social identity, all for the sake of his belief in the salutary power of male/male love.

David Leavitt (2005b:232) has explained the reference to “the Viking’s funeral that had thrilled [Maurice] as a boy” as alluding to Sir Frank Dicksee’s painting *Funeral of a Viking*.³⁰⁶ Dicksee’s work, dating from 1893, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in the same year, and shown again at the Festival of Empire held at the Crystal Palace in London in 1911, where it was titled “The Burial of the Viking”. Forster might have seen it on either occasion; either “as a boy” himself on some visit to the capital and its art exhibitions, or more closely preceding the conception of *Maurice*.³⁰⁷ but I have found no definite evidence to confirm that he was indeed acquainted with Dicksee’s painting.

In the left half of this painting, a ship carrying the Viking warrior’s body on a burning pyre is being pushed out to sea by a number of straining men wading in the surf, their well-muscled upper bodies bare. On the shore on the right, a group of armed warriors raise hands and weapons in valediction, their gleaming swords like bright answers to the dark aggressive curve of the ship’s high jutting stern. The scene takes place on a beach with the bulk of a headland looming darkly in the background; a narrow strip of pale sky gleams below a bank of stormy clouds. As a result of this compositional layout, the picture is dominated by the warm reddish light of fire, with the greatest mass of brightness located in the flames of the funeral pyre; a second brightness, smaller but more concentrated, burns from the torch held low over the water by the foremost of the men on the shore; and there are patches of firelight reflected in the water as well.

³⁰⁵ The image presumably refers to the blond Stephen’s moustache.

³⁰⁶ Unfortunately, Leavitt does not specify how he arrives at this conclusion. The painting in question was presented to Manchester City Galleries in 1928. All information regarding its provenance and history was kindly provided to me by Andrew Loukes, Curator of Fine Art at Manchester City Galleries.

³⁰⁷ According to Stape’s *Chronology*, Forster was in London on 22 June 1911 to observe the coronation procession of George V and Queen Mary (41). Forster’s Locked Diary for 22 June (Coronation Day) only records his attendance at what appear to be local celebrations at Weybridge: “sports & tea in the field” and a “dinner of old people in Holstein Hall” (LD28), Holstein Hall presumably referring to a building located on Weybridge High Street; the same entry mentions his apprehensions about the following day’s weather. This information appears somewhat contradictory, but Forster did attend some part of the London festivities, for he reported his impressions of their Majesties’ appearances at the coronation procession in a letter to Malcolm Darling of 29 July (Gardner 2011:182, n.163). Stape (42) also lists further visits to London in July.

While the brightness of the firelight is immediately striking to the eye, another characterising feature of this composition is the muscle-bulging, elemental masculinity of the scene – there are no females to be discerned in the crowd; only venerable Age is present in the shape of a snowy-headed but upright elder on the very right margin. From what the text of *Maurice* implies elsewhere, it seems probable that the all-male nature of this scene would significantly increase its powers of “thrill[ing]” a beholder capable not only of appreciating the male body aesthetically, but of desiring it physically. As Clive explains to Maurice in his study at Penge *à propos* of “that man” by Michelangelo – presumably a reproduction of *David*, whose image graced the walls of many a male Victorian and Edwardian homosexual’s domicile, functioning in part as a token of (sub)cultural identification³⁰⁸ – the desiring male gaze fixed on a male subject is capable of “arriving at Beauty” by “two roads”: a “common” one, by which “all the world has reached Michelangelo”, and another that is “private to me and a few more” (M74). Indeed, depictions of nude muscular masculinity in Victorian visual art, even in those cases where they were ostensibly intended to represent and exalt an ideal of red-blooded heterosexual manhood, would inadvertently also have catered to those male viewers whose desire was to possess, or be possessed by, rather than to emulate, the “heroic strong m[e]n” (to adapt a phrase from Melville, BB25) thus displayed for their edification. Dicksee’s *Funeral of a Viking* can certainly be seen to fall into this category of artwork, while at the same time, and perhaps even more pertinently, it represents one of the most poignant moments in human relationships – that of parting with a beloved and valued companion – in an exclusively homosocial context. If this were indeed “the Viking’s funeral” which Forster had in mind, it is not hard to see why it might have appealed to his imagination, and should subsequently have found its way into his literary work.

The fused elements of fire or bright light, a vessel moving out over the waters, and the comradeship of males, which characterise the imagery of Forster’s scenes of male/male union and salutary connection in *The Longest Journey* and *Maurice*, can be seen to resurface also in the *Billy Budd* libretto, where a radiant ship becomes the central metaphor which hints at the relationship between Billy and Vere. Describing the effects of their private communion during the closeted interview, both men refer to a “far-shining sail” which they have “sighted [...] in the storm”. Billy further specifies this as “the far-shining sail that’s not Fate” (LIB61); and from Forster’s “Librettist’s Note on Dirge Libretto”, we know that he conceived of this bright sail as “the sail of love” (BPL A61:50). Both Billy and Vere are convinced that they have “seen where she’s bound for”, namely, “a land of her own where she’ll anchor forever” (LIB61; compare Vere’s almost identical phrasing, LIB63). The vision they have shared makes them “contented” (or, respectively,

³⁰⁸ On the role of works of art as visual symbols of modern gay identity see Christopher Reed; Michelangelo’s *David* is treated by him on p.214, where he also discusses the queer appropriation of the figure of St. Sebastian (see also note 317 below).

“content”), reconciling them to the bitter truth of Billy’s death. Billy himself declares: “Don’t matter now being hanged, or being forgotten and caught in the weeds”, because “I’m strong, and I know it, and I’ll stay strong, and that’s all, and that’s enough” (LIB61). The transition to strength and self-knowledge which is implicit in Billy’s words could be seen to correspond to the transitions to manhood which the other two ‘light’ saviour characters, Alec and Stephen, are felt to have undergone in the respective scenes of male/male love triumphant I have discussed above.

It could be argued that Vere, who has been “lost on the infinite sea”, and to whom “the love that passes understanding” has come because Billy has “saved” and “blessed” him, has drawn his confidence from Billy’s magnanimity and strength; for, as a ‘dark’ character, Vere has been standing in need of being taught the salutary nature of personal relationships by a ‘light’ saviour figure. In this aspect, Vere’s position resembles that of the ‘dark’ character Rickie, who ultimately fails, however, to profit from the teachings of his ‘light’ saviour Stephen. This failure is prefigured in Rickie’s inability to follow the further progress of the burning vessel they have launched: having “sailed into deep water” and turned “one arch” of the bridge into “a fairy tunnel, dropping diamonds”, the “rose of flame” then “vanished for Rickie”. It is only Stephen, “kne[eling] in the water” (LJ272f.), immersed as it were in the “dark river” of Life (LJ40), who can see that it is “still afloat, far through the arch, burning as if it would burn for ever” (LJ273). This glimpse of love’s eternity prefigures the vision of Forster’s “sail of love” in the opera, “bound for” the “land” where it will “anchor forever”. The fact that it is the ‘light’ saviour character Billy who is first heard to describe the vision of the ship of love suggests that, like the ‘light’ saviour Stephen, he, too, is able to ‘see further’, i.e. perceive the power of love more fully, than the ‘dark’ character Vere.

It might be inferred from this that it is indeed Billy’s confident belief in comradesly love (a love to which he is so committed that he would “die to save” Vere, LIB23) which makes the salutary connection between the two men possible, and allows the heartbroken and remorse-stricken Vere to share the vision of the sail of love.³⁰⁹ If we observe, as Arnold Whittall has done, that “Vere’s use of Billy’s own words does not extend to ‘I’m strong, and I know it’” (1990:167), then this, too,

³⁰⁹ Indeed, Forster himself appears to have conceived of the process of salvation he envisioned in the opera along the same lines: in his unpublished “Librettist’s Note”, he emphasises that the sighting of “the sail of love which isn’t Fate” is “Billy’s solution” to the “plight” of being “lost” on “the infinite sea”, and that, in the Epilogue, Vere “sees what Billy’s shown him” (BPL A61:50). I would therefore disagree with Hindley, who writes that if Billy “has found the strength to face not only suffering but annihilation”, this is “in consequence of what Vere has given him in the interview”. While it is certainly true that for Billy, “the threat of dissolution is outweighed by the confident strength born of love – a love through which he becomes stronger than Fate” (1989:380), Hindley’s suggestion that “Billy’s solution”, as Forster termed it, is, in effect, a ‘gift’ from Vere is an unlikely inversion of the Forsterian pattern of salvation through love *bestowed upon* a ‘dark’ character by a ‘light’ working-class saviour figure.

would appear to be consistent with the 'dark'/'light' character constellation as manifested in the relationship between Rickie and Stephen. For the latter's ability to 'see further' is linked with a sense of superior and self-contained strength: Stephen is "a law to himself, [...] great enough to despise our small moralities" (LJ279); it is from this position of strength that he issues the call of "come" which signals the way to salvation.

There is a further textual detail which links the vision of the sail of love in the *Billy Budd* libretto to the vision of heroic love in *Maurice*: once the "sacrifice" of the ship has "tak[en] away death", Maurice, too, is "bound for his new home", the land of male/male love (M207). In the early versions of the text, Maurice was "going to his new home" (in Gardner 1999b:305; my emphasis). According to Gardner's manuscript analysis, the phrase "bound for" is an alteration made to the 1932 typescript in the 1950s, i.e. after Forster's work on the *Billy Budd* libretto; it might be speculated that Forster's 1950s revisions of *Maurice* were influenced by his librettistic work.³¹⁰ Whereas in Billy's and Vere's case, love's final anchoring-place lies beyond the confines of the material world, for Maurice and Alec, the harbour of love lies within reach, even on the shores of England, in the shape of a fully realised homosexual partnership – albeit one that must exist without sanction, beyond the "ring fence" (M185) of society.³¹¹

In the excerpt from *A Passage to India* already quoted above (p. 216), which describes the effect of a match lit in a Marabar cave, Forster again employs the image of a burning light, surrounded by darkness like the "rose of flame" in *The Longest Journey* (LJ272), in combination with the vocabulary of personal relationships of a decidedly sensuous nature: the mirror image of the flame is likened to "an imprisoned spirit"; the union of "the lovers" is impossible because "one of them breathes air, the other stone"; and yet, as "the radiance increases", they do "touch one another" and "kiss", before they "expire". The polished granite that separates them, too, is the "skin" of the cave, its smoothness "more voluptuous than love" (PtI117f.). While the conventions of a literary tradition in which love is tacitly understood to be heterosexual serve to make this image of the two loving flames inconspicuous, it might be worth noting that one of them is the mirror image of the other. Leaving aside the mirror symbolism itself (which old-school Freudian critics might take to affirm a theoretical link between homosexuality and narcissism), the implied sameness of the two flames allows a reading in which the love described here is homoerotic in a very literal sense.

³¹⁰ See also Rochlitz 53f.

³¹¹ Claire Seymour, too, finds that the "idealistic" ending of *Maurice* – Maurice's and Alec's "fictional escape to the 'greenwood'" (156) – is conceptually linked to the "land where she'll anchor forever" (LIB63), but chooses to read Forster's "Terminal Note" on *Maurice*, in which he famously declared that he was "determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows" ("Notes on *Maurice*" 216), as Forster's own admission of "the weakness" of this "fortunate conclusion not attainable in life" (Seymour 156).

The match and its mirror image, burning in the dark cave, strikingly evoke another image of lights in the darkness, which features in “What I Believe”. In his examination of “personal relationships”, Forster stresses the importance of “reliability” in successfully establishing and maintaining these relationships:

reliability is not a matter of contract [...]. It is a matter for the heart, which signs no documents. In other words, reliability is impossible unless there is a natural warmth. Most men possess this warmth [...]. Most of them [...] *want* to keep faith. And one can, at all events, show one’s little light here, one’s own poor trembling flame, with the knowledge that it is not the only light that is shining in the darkness, and not the only one which the darkness does not comprehend. (TCD66)³¹²

Forster’s image contains an allusion to John 1:5: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not”. The biblical light in question is “the light of men”, which in its turn is the “life” that is in God (John 1:4). Forster’s lights, however, belong to solitary souls doggedly signalling to one another, inspired by no other creed than their belief in the personal relationships which are “despised” (TCD66) by the vague mass of an unenlightened, utilitarian society incapable of comprehending them as something essentially human.³¹³ These solitary souls are members of “an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky”, whose “temple, as one of them remarked, is the holiness of the Heart’s affections”. They

are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. Thousands of them perish in obscurity, a few are great names.

It is the ubiquitous presence of “this type of person”, examples of which are “constantly crossing one’s path if one has eyes to see or hands to feel”, which ensures that “the experiment of earthly life cannot be dismissed as a failure,” de-

³¹² In his “Terminal Note” on *Maurice*, Forster addresses a similar concept of such “reliability”, for which he employs the term “loyalty”. Explaining that “[Edward] Carpenter believed that Uranians remained loyal to each other forever”, he goes on to affirm that “in my experience though loyalty cannot be counted on it can always be hoped for and be worked towards and may flourish in the most unlikely soil” (“Notes on *Maurice*” 218). Written in 1960, this statement appears to indicate that even though Forster had come to distance himself from his celebration of the salutary power of personal relationships in *Maurice* to some extent (see his sobering declaration, made in 1958, that “the rescuer from ‘otherwhere’, the generic Alec [...] was a fake”, in Furbank II:303), he did remain committed to the fundamental validity and importance of the personal relationships creed.

³¹³ While the biblical wording leaves room for interpretation, it seems that Forster uses “comprehend” in the sense of “understand” rather than “encompass” or “seize”; see note 125 above and my discussion of Claggart’s aria in section II.3.8. below.

spite the sobering fact that public life and politics cannot, as yet, emulate "these private decencies". Yet personal relations persist in the face of this "tragedy":

the greater the darkness, the brighter shine the little lights, reassuring one another, signalling: "Well, at all events, I'm still here. I don't like it very much, but how are you?" Unquenchable lights of my aristocracy! [...] "Come along – anyway, let's have a good time while we can." I think they signal that too. (TCD70f.)

Following their posthumous publication, Forster's homosexual writings briefly came to be cast as "the key to the whole of Forster's work" (Wilson 453) by critics who had hitherto either not picked up the homoerotic subtexts in his published work, or had refrained from addressing the subject publicly. In the course of this critical re-evaluation, the Forsterian creed of personal relationships, too, came to be read by some as a coded reference to a very particular kind of relationship. Thus, in a decidedly dismissive review of *Maurice*, C. P. Snow remarked that "'personal relations' often didn't mean what persons outside [Forster's] private world took them to mean", declaring that it had "been felt for a long time" that his work was "weaken[ed]" by "a kind of equivocation" (436). Wilfred Stone, able at last to announce explicitly his diagnosis of the deceased author's troubled psyche – the full extent of which he had only been able to hint at in his 1966 study³¹⁴ – stated bluntly that "Forster's appeal to the 'aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky' [...] is, in large part, a cryptic call to that beleaguered elite, the aristocracy of homosexuals", and went on to say that "even the much-admired creed of 'personal relationships' was a creed based on a *double-entendre*" (1978:387f.). Other critics, while affirming the necessity of performing queer readings of Forster's work, have rightly cautioned against turning the sexual preferences of its author into a "master-code" for "unlocking the text" (Royle 10).³¹⁵

Without wishing to propagate what I, too, would consider an inadmissibly reductive reading of the Forsterian concept of personal relationships, I should nevertheless like to propose that the apparently gender-neutral images of lights shining in the darkness, and thus, the personal relations they stand for, are indeed associated (if not necessarily exclusively) with male/male desire, by virtue of their link to the Forsterian leitmotif cluster of burning lights in the dark. This proposal can be seen to receive further support from the presence of the signal call of "come" which, as I have demonstrated, positively haunts those moments in Forster's work in which males experience the longing for a beloved and/or de-

³¹⁴ See Martin/Piggford 17f.

³¹⁵ As Levine (72), Herz (1988:120f.), Summers (141f.) and many other scholars have rightly pointed out, to limit the outlook of Forster's creed of personal relationships as referring exclusively to homosexual relationships between men would be to fail to do justice to the complexity of Forster's thought and liberal humanist philosophy.

sired male friend: through the darkness, “the little lights, reassuring one another” are “signalling [...] ‘Come along’” (ICD71).

Belonging as they do to the individual members of Forster’s “aristocracy”, these lights are in their turn linked to “one of them”, namely, to John Keats. To him Forster owes the insight that the “temple” of his aristocracy does not manifest itself in any form of organised religion or political creed, but rather as “the holiness of the Heart’s affections” (ICD71).³¹⁶ Forster’s enlisting of Keats is interesting in this context insofar as the figure of the poet who was considered effeminate and unmanly by many Victorian readers had subsequently come to occupy a prominent position in the slowly coagulating literary tradition that was establishing itself in what could loosely be termed a subculture of dissenting sexualities.³¹⁷ Given that, in his fiction, Forster appears to have regularly participated in an already traditional literary practice of deploying references to authors and texts identified or appropriated as queer to mark subdiscourses about homosexuality,³¹⁸ it would be inconsistent not to assume that the allusion to Keats may, at least in part, function as the marker of another such coded discourse.

Forster furthermore makes a point of stating that he would “prefer” the members of his aristocracy not to be “ascetic[s]”, being “against asceticism” himself: “I do not feel that my aristocrats are a real aristocracy if they thwart their bodies, since bodies are the instruments through which we register and enjoy the world”. It seems characteristic that this desideratum is immediately mitigated; Forster does not “insist” on what he concedes is “not a major point”: “It is clearly possible to

³¹⁶ Forster is partially quoting Keats’s famous statement “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination”, which the poet made in a letter to his early friend Benjamin Bailey, written on 22 November 1817 (Scott, ed. 54).

³¹⁷ James Najarian has traced the various ways in which later writers “attracted to their own sex” (2) were influenced by Keats, “an androgynous poet who wrote poems of indeterminate and free-flowing eroticism” (37). Najarian’s main project is to show how six major Victorian writers – Tennyson, Arnold, Hopkins, Symonds, Pater and Owen – made use of the historical “identification of Keats with transgressive sexuality” to engage with their own respective “anxiety about sexuality”; he argues “that they identify Keats with gender transgression and, most important, with the expression of male-male affection” (2). Najarian also mentions Wilde’s engagement with the figure of Keats, citing both his description of Keats’s tomb for the *Irish Monthly* of July 1877, in which Keats is associated with St. Sebastian as painted by the seventeenth-century artist Guido Reni, and his sonnet “The Grave of Keats” (publ. 1881) in which the association with St. Sebastian reappears. Najarian notes that “Wilde’s picture of the poet is erotically charged, as is Guido’s portrait of the naked, swooning, penetrated Sebastian” (19), demonstrating on the example of Wilde how the figure of Keats came to be assimilated into a wider web of queer subcultural iconography.

³¹⁸ Summers (100ff.) has traced some of the intertextual references which mark subdiscourses about homosexuality in *A Room with a View*; among them are the contents of the Emersons’ bookshelves in Ch. 12, which include works by A. E. Housman and Samuel Butler (RV125); in *The Longest Journey*, Rickie’s Cambridge study features “Omar Khayyam, with an Oswego biscuit between his pages” (LJ9) – this would have been Edward FitzGerald’s translation of the Persian poet’s *Rubaiyat* (see Heine 1984b:407). In *Maurice*, Plato’s position in the homophile literary tradition is clearly identified (see M37f., 44, 49f. and 55f.).

be sensitive, considerate and plucky and yet be an ascetic too, and if anyone possesses the first three qualities I will let him in!" (TCD70f.). Nevertheless, the fact that Forster raises this point in the first place deserves some attention.

It would, of course, be an easy step to link his statement of preferences to *Maurice*: by exposing the platonic Hellenist Clive as sexually repressed and repressive, and by narratively privileging Maurice's sexually fulfilled relationship with Alec, Forster had made it quite clear that, to him, an ideal relationship between men ought to be able to encompass also the carnal aspects of love. On the other hand, Forster's posthumously published texts, and the overt discourses about homosexual relationships contained therein, can hardly be regarded as the sole "key" to his point, since he had already exposed the shortcomings of asceticism in his published novels, particularly in *A Room with a View*, where old Mr Emerson so memorably insists to Lucy that "love is of the body; not the body, but of the body. Ah! the misery that would be saved if we confessed that!" (RV202).

Forster's 'published' ascetics – men like Cecil Vyse, Mr Beebe, Herbert Pembroke, and Henry Wilcox³¹⁹ – are consistently seen to obstruct the development of both male *and* female protagonists; while at the same time, they are presented (and occasionally ridiculed) as failures within the Forsterian paradigm of salutary personal relationships. This perditious asceticism, however, particularly where it is explicitly labelled, does tend to manifest itself in males (as opposed to the 'mere' policing of salutary male development and male/male relationships, which often falls to mothers, daughters or female spouses in league with social convention);³²⁰ it often appears in bachelors "whose psychic constitution opens onto homosexual panic, if not homosexual possibility" (Haralson 68).

There is finally the more general fact that Forster – whether by deliberate choice or by internalised social and linguistic default – appears to conceive of his aristocracy as a society of males, as indicated by his use of the male pronoun in the passage from "What I Believe" quoted above ("if anyone possesses the first three qualities I will let him in!").³²¹ To sum up, a close reading of "What I Believe" reveals that Forster's concept of "an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky" is shot through with textual leitmotifs and themes – lights in

³¹⁹ Henry Wilcox's inclusion in this group may seem paradoxical in the light of his adulterous history, but he is explicitly associated with "asceticism" (HE183); see also my discussion of Henry Wilcox's lack of "connection" in section II.2.3.2., and of Forster's ascetics in section II.5.2.2.

³²⁰ Examples of females policing male behaviour include Lionel March's mother in "The Other Boat", Maurice's female relatives, Mr Lucas's daughter Ethel in "The Road from Colonus", and Rickie's wife Agnes in *The Longest Journey*, where we also encounter the image of a female Nature defining and limiting the modalities of male/male friendship and love (see IJ64).

³²¹ In "What I Believe", Forster can be seen tacitly to affirm the structures of the patriarchal society he aims to challenge, e.g. with his criticism of "Great Men": although universal suffrage had been achieved in Great Britain a decade earlier, his Houses of Parliament remain filled with "men", while "women and children" are invoked merely in their role as victims of the warring (and male-governed) "nations of today" (TCD70f.).

the darkness, the call of “come”, and the discussion of asceticism – which can indeed be seen to link the Forsterian creed of personal relationships to the discourses about relationships between men in Forster’s fictional work.³²² Yet I maintain that to reduce its meaning, as Stone does, “in large part” (1978:387) to discourses about homosexuals is to produce an unjustifiably and unnecessarily limited reading of Forster’s Liberal Humanist idealism.³²³

While the images of lights shining in the darkness in *A Passage to India* and “What I Believe” are presented in what appears, at least on superficial reading, to be a gender-neutral context, the same image in the *Billy Budd* libretto is indisputably associated with male/male relationships and homoerotic desire. It is central to Claggart’s main aria in Act I, Sc. 3, where the master-at-arms expounds his tortured existence, lamenting the fact that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and suffers” (LIB32). It will be noted that the biblical image, left principally unchanged in “What I Believe”, has here undergone an important structural transformation: Claggart himself has become the darkness, which is no longer uncomprehending of the light that is Billy, but, in “comprehend[ing]” – and in apprehending its own desire for Billy’s “beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness”, the embodiment of human love – “suffers”.³²⁴ For, as Claggart goes on to explain, “what hope remains if love can escape? If love still lives and grows strong where I cannot enter, what hope is there in my own dark world for me? [...] That were torment too keen” (LIB33). Claggart’s suffering, and the resulting urge to eliminate Billy as the source of his pain, are easily read as

³²² This central Forsterian idea of an “aristocracy” can be seen to resonate with Melville’s conception of Billy and Vere embracing each other as “two [members] of great Nature’s Nobler Order” (BB102); see sections I.3.4. and I.4.3.

³²³ I am aware that my personal willingness to read Forster’s aristocracy and his creed of personal relationships as an inclusive creed which, despite the representational absence of women, extends the hand of comradeship to both males and females, is dependent to some extent on my quasi-unconscious readiness to erase my femaleness in order both to identify with the author’s writing consciousness and to be included among his addressees. I am aware that this automated response arises in part from the cultural mechanism which Judith Fetterley has so poignantly termed the “immaculation” of the female reading perspective: “As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny” (xx). However, another factor is, of course, my knowledge of Forster’s other works, which include, with *A Room with a View*, a novel of development featuring a female protagonist who is embedded into the Forsterian salvation narrative in a way that arguably makes her structurally equal to his male protagonists. Forster, in short, has won my trust through his treatment of female characters elsewhere, although I remain aware of what Jane Goldman has identified as Forster’s “patriarchal reinscriptions of the feminine in representational economies” (135).

³²⁴ Both the structural transformation of the biblical image and its connection to “What I Believe” are overlooked by Mervyn Cooke, who holds that what he reads as one of the libretto’s “deliberate biblical allusions” is made “in order that the religious overtones of Melville’s story are not completely sacrificed by the Chaplain’s excision” (1993c:38f). This proposition appears unlikely, at least where Forster is concerned, in the light of his rejection of Christianity as expressed in “What I Believe” (see TCD71f.) and “How I Lost My Faith” (IPT310-319).

a discourse about repressed homosexual desire and the projection of homophobic self-hatred onto the object of the unwanted desire (see section I.4.4.), while the darkness of Claggart's world links him with those Forsterian 'dark' characters who also dwell in a darkness that is symbolically associated with the repression of emotion and prohibited (homo)sexual desire.

II.3.9. "I'm done for" and "Fate"

From the large and central Forsterian leitmotivic cluster of lights in the darkness and radiant vessels of male/male love, I now move back to some simpler leitmotivic utterances which link the *Billy Budd* libretto to the rest of Forster's work. All of these are associated with the figure of the Novice, whose disruptions of the *Indomitable's* manoeuvres, arising from his inexperience and fatigue, earn him the cruel punishment of a flogging in Act I Sc. 1. I have already discussed the homoerotic implications of the scene in which the Novice's friend tries to console the battered youth, coaxing him to "come along" (LIB19); it is the Novice's hopeless insistence that he is "done for" which I wish to examine here in more detail.

The same expression is used by the narrator in Ch. 25 of *A Passage to India* to describe Aziz' experience of the system of British justice. After the trial, despite the fact that Aziz has been cleared of all charges,

victory gave no pleasure, he had suffered too much. From the moment of his arrest he was done for, he had dropped like a wounded animal; he had despaired, not through cowardice, but because he knew that an Englishwoman's word would always outweigh his own. "It is Fate," he said; and, "It is Fate," when he was imprisoned anew after Mohurram. (PtI223)

The manuscript of Ch. 16 at one point included a detailed rendition of Aziz' thoughts immediately after his arrest:

Dimly he heard <Mr Fielding> \his English friend/ being kind to him \in the language of common sense/, <and> offering to bail him out, and assuring him that the charge against him – whatever it was – would <certainly> prove false. Perhaps it would, but that wasn't the point. He had been arrested publicly, and the disgrace would cling to him and to his children. Fielding couldn't understand this, and his comforting was unacceptable. (MSSPtI252)

In the published text, the figure of Aziz has become opaque, presented only from an outside point of view; his sense of ruin is conveyed in a single utterance (apart from a sob): "My children and my name! he gasped, his wings broken" (PtI152) – the "wounded animal" is a "broken" bird. The discarded passage makes it even clearer that Aziz' despair and fatalistic resignation stem from his sense of personal, even inheritable "disgrace", which makes any comfort offered by his friend Fielding "unacceptable". Similarly, the Novice's friend cannot console the "heart-broken" youth who feels that the "shame" of the flogging "will never pass" (LIB19).

The phrase “done for” also occurs at another point in the manuscripts of *A Passage to India*: it appears in what was originally a far more detailed and unambiguous description of the attempted rape of Adela Quested by an unidentified person whom she believes to be Aziz. The discarded pages describe Adela’s struggle to free herself. As she finally flies down the hill, injuring herself in her panicked descent, she sobs, “Oh I’m safe, oh I wish I were dead”. After the experience of sexualised violence against her body, she feels that “she was saved, but what was the use of it,” and, just as Aziz on his arrest despairs under the assault on his reputation and his personal integrity, the shock of the assault on her personal and physical integrity makes Adela despair: “I’m no one, I’m done for” (MSSPtI243).

It seems that “I’m done for” is a phrase which Forster’s literary imagination associates with a character’s having suffered an assault which threatens the very essence of his or her existence and identity. The textual parallels between the reactions of the two victims of such assaults in *A Passage to India* can thus be seen to match the structural parallels which feminist critics have uncovered between Adela’s and Aziz’ experience, producing readings that equate Aziz’ experience with rape by the power structures of the British colonial system.³²⁵ In much the same way, the Novice’s experience of the disciplinary flogging – decodable as an experience of male rape³²⁶ – could be read as another such act of violation which cripples the youth’s sense of self beyond recovery, robbing him of his confidence in his own integrity: just as Adela is “done for” and has become “no one” in her own eyes, the Novice, too, is “done for”, feeling that his “shame will never pass”, and cannot be consoled by his friend because his “heart’s broken” (LIB19).

There is some overdetermination or shunting of discourses here which deserves further attention: on the one hand, the Novice’s experience of physical violation links him with Adela’s physical experience of attempted rape. At the same time, his experience of structural oppression in the shape of his forced impressment into the Navy, and of the institutionalised arbitrary cruelty of naval discipline, can be regarded as a parallel to Aziz’ getting caught up in “the wheels of Dominion” (PtI165) and the “machinery” (PtI196) of the British colonial administration’s legal procedures. The sailors’ lament which accompanies and comments the Novice’s appearance in Act I, Sc. 1 expresses a shared sense of powerlessness and resignation to the force of the similarly inhuman and omnipotent Navy which has “caught all of us”: they agree that the Novice is “heart-broken”,

³²⁵ See, for instance, Brenda Silver, “Periphrasis, Power and Rape in *A Passage to India*”, *Novel*, 22 (1988): 86-105, and Frances Restuccia, “‘A Cave of My Own’: The Sexual Politics of Indeterminacy,” *Raritan* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 110-128. Postcolonial theorists have subsequently criticised such feminist readings for their conflation of white women, cast as Other in patriarchal society but nevertheless colluding in the power structures of colonialism, with both male and female subalterns in a single representational category. Thus, Jenny Sharpe has remarked that the deployment of “rape as a master trope for the objectification of English women and natives alike [...] produces a category of Other that keeps the colonized hidden from history” (131).

³²⁶ On the symbolism of flogging in *Billy Budd*, see for instance Martin 1986a:112.

just as they are "all broken" (LIB19). In Act I, Sc. 3, the full extent of the Novice's destruction by this oppressive force is revealed: he "can't stand any more" of "the flogging and the misery" and will "do anything – anything" to ensure himself of Claggart's protection, including "betray[ing] a shipmate" and collecting "evidence against him". It can be argued that his personal disintegration starts with the moment at which "the press-gang caught me": commended for being "clever" when he was still "safe at home" (LIB33f.), now that "his home's gone" (LIB19), he has "no choice" but to set his cleverness to "serve" Claggart, who will only "protect" him if he doesn't "fail" like the contemptible Squeak.

When the Novice finds himself incapable of resisting Claggart's pressure and agrees to betray even Billy, this is arguably because, bereft of his physical and personal integrity, his only available answer to the question of purpose ("Why had it to be Billy, the one we all love? Why am I in this cruel hateful ship instead of safe at home? Oh, why was I ever born? Why?") is that "it's fate. I've no choice. Everything's fate" (Act I, [115]+8).³²⁷ His despair matches that of Aziz, as the passage quoted above demonstrates: faced with the manifest power of the British colonial administration and its justice system, under which, as he knows, "an Englishwoman's word would always outweigh his own", Aziz' reaction, too, is resignation, and he, too, is left with no consolation other than "it is Fate" (PtI223).

The arbitrariness of human existence is also attributed to an indifferent "Fate" by George Emerson in Ch. 12 of *A Room with a View*. Mr Beebe asserts that "it isn't pure coincidentalness" that George and his father have taken a cottage in the neighbourhood of the Honeychurches' residence. He attributes their arrival to a logical chain of probable events, and states his belief in human agency: "Don't say, 'I didn't do this,' for you did it, ten to one". George, by contrast, declares that, on the contrary, his removal to Summer Street is nothing but "pure coincidentalness": "It is. I have reflected. It is Fate. Everything is Fate. We are flung together by Fate, drawn apart by Fate – flung together, drawn apart. The twelve winds blow us – we settle nothing" (RV128).

The philosophy of "the world-weary George" (RV132), who lost his mother when he was twelve (see RV197), and falls into depression when he is rejected by the girl he loves, recalls the philosophy of the orphan Rickie Elliot, whose "placid outlook on the world" has been "disarrange[d]" by his bereavement: Rickie feels "that we are all of us bubbles on an extremely rough sea", and that, for all of humanity's attempts to guard against physical and spiritual calamity, to prevent the bubbles from "break[ing] so frequently or so soon", nevertheless "the sea has not altered". If he and his friends and Mrs Aberdeen the college bedder have come out of a tram accident unscathed, this is "only a chance" (LJ57) – or, possibly, Fate again.

³²⁷ The text actually set by Britten differs from the wording of the printed libretto, which has "I've no choice. Fate! Everything's fate" (LIB34 and LIB1951:35).

II.3.10. “Only a boy”: paternalism and the pitfalls of desire

II.3.10.1. Forsterian “boys”

Whereas the Novice despairs at his situation, his friend, whose experience of the warship world and its sufferings is evidently more seasoned, tries to comfort and support him. In addition, he also attempts (though apparently in vain) to engage Claggart’s pity for the young “offender”, telling him, in effect, that the Novice’s punishment has been disproportionately severe: “He’s only a boy, and he cannot walk” (LIB19). The phrase “only a boy” is again applied to the Novice in Act I, Sc. 3, this time by Billy Budd, to whom the youth complains about the “unjust” and “unfair” practice of impressment, which has “taken” him “from my home”, and of which Billy, too, is a victim. The homeless foundling Billy, blithely content with his lot but apparently sympathetic to the Novice’s misery, admits that he “never gave it a thought” but concedes: “Still, you’re right in a manner of speaking, doesn’t seem fair – and you’re only a boy” (LIB35). It seems that Billy, who has taken his own impressment in his stride, attributes the Novice’s grievance to the boy’s youth and inexperience, while his conciliatory agreement seems in keeping with his good nature. Leaving aside the fact that this exchange also serves to demonstrate Billy’s own innocence and lack of seditious feeling, his sympathetic but detached attitude, encapsulated in the phrase “only a boy”, can be taken to suggest that Billy feels he ought to make allowances for the emotional frailties of youth. In the case of the Novice’s friend, the phrase “only a boy” betrays the more experienced sailor’s protective attitude towards his younger companion, and the allowances he thinks ought to have been made are for the physical frailty of the boy’s body.³²⁸

The phrase “only a boy”, once again, is one which features throughout Forster’s entire oeuvre, where it can be seen to unlock a motivic complex involving male youth, innocence, inexperience, vulnerability, but also aggression and desire. This motivic complex also includes the responsibilities which are placed on older people, and particularly older men, in dealing with the younger males who embody or, respectively, evoke, these qualities. Of course, the emphasis on immaturity which is signified by the phrase is in itself nothing uncommon. For instance, Mrs Elliot’s reflection that Rickie is “only a boy” even though he may, as heir to the family money, bear the responsibility and privilege that come with his position (LJ26), and Dr Panna Lal’s “appeased” concession that Rafi, who has been spreading false rumours for which he has been asked to apologise, “is only a boy”, after all (PtI100), may be regarded as entirely commonplace utterances which

³²⁸ This difference in experience is apparently reflected in Britten’s musical setting, where the array of vocal registers can be seen to be in accordance with a loose musical convention (which is, however, by no means binding and is, moreover, subject to historical change, particularly where the genre of opera is concerned) under which higher voices tend to be interpreted as representing youth, while lower voices are felt to represent maturity and physical strength: the Novice is a Tenor, while both his friend and Billy Budd sing Baritone parts.

mainly refer to the youths' immature state. However, the phrase's persistent recurrence in Forster's oeuvre makes it conspicuous: clearly, youth is a category that Forster's figures tend to notice and evaluate in a certain way. What is more, some of the "boys" in question can be seen to fall into the category of desirable young men; and the characters who apply the phrase to them can in many cases be seen to be attracted to them in one way or another.

Thus, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Caroline Abbot recalls her original impression of Gino Carella, whom she found "splendid, and young, and strong not only in body, and sincere as the day" before his marriage to Lilia. Caroline blames Lilia for Gino's subsequent development to what she considers the worse: "He was only a boy – just going to turn into something fine, I thought – and she must have mismanaged him" (WA60f.). Caroline's thoughts can be taken to imply that the "splendid" youth might have turned into a paragon of desirable manhood if he had been left to his own devices, or if a woman had not interfered in his development. In the light of the fact that Caroline subsequently realises and finally admits that she loves Gino (see her confession in Ch. 10), her earlier utterance could be interpreted as an expression of her own subconscious desire and tenderness for this Italian "boy".

An interesting cross-light is thrown on the function of the word "boy" as a marker for discourses about authority and desire by its occurrence in *Howards End*. Writing to Henry Wilcox to declare her forgiveness of his adulterous past, Margaret Schlegel addresses her prospective husband as "my dearest boy" (HE237). It is evident that while she censures Henry's past behaviour, Margaret, too, very much believes that this "boy" may yet be made to "turn into something fine" (WA61), or at least into "a better man", under her own careful management (HE240). When Henry tries to cast himself as "a bad lot" who "must be left at that", Margaret tells him to "leave it where you will, boy. It's not going to trouble us; I know what I'm talking about, and it will make no difference". Her utterance appears curiously and almost uncharacteristically brusque and forceful, largely because this second address of him as "boy" is not softened by the use of "dear" or "my". Margaret's attitude towards Henry's moral lapse certainly strikes her future husband as "not altogether womanly. Her eyes gazed too straight; they had read books that are suitable for men only" (HE241).

Not only can Margaret's use of "boy" here be seen to occur in a situation in which she, by virtue of her moral integrity, holds a position of superior power over Henry, but Henry's overall "annoyed" (HE241) reaction suggests that he is also discomfited by what he perceives as her encroachment on male behavioural territory and discursive authority. Margaret's assumption of the address "boy" might in this case be read as epitomising her usurpation of masculine authority – "my boy" being Henry's preferred form of address in conversation with his son Charles, by whom he likes to be addressed as "sir" (see HE322). Henry's use of "my boy" ranges from the threatening (HE281, possibly also his address of Paul

on HE338) to the fondly paternal (HE322, 324, 325), highlighting the discursive function of word “boy” as a marker for power relations. If Henry feels Margaret’s attitude to be at odds with her sex, his annoyance might be seen to extend to her assumption of this particular form of address from a position of discursive empowerment – a position which he perceives as male-gendered (her “too straight” gaze after all draws its power from knowledge “suitable for men only”). The fact that Margaret usually addresses Henry by his name, even when angry (see particularly Ch. 38), also serves to highlight the curious incongruity of what might well be construed as the aggression of her utterance.

I would suggest that at this point (and at this point only) within this scene of heterosexual confrontation, Forster’s choice of words can be seen to create a space into which the dynamics of an erotically charged power struggle such as usually takes place between *male* characters in Forster’s fiction momentarily intrude. Margaret’s retort of “leave it where you will, boy”, rather than functioning as an expression of indifference or rejection, can be seen to mark an affirmation of love and a desire for partnership, conveyed in terms of a masculinised authority which might even be read as an erotic challenge. Her assertion that Henry’s past is “not going to trouble us; I know what I’m talking about, and it will make no difference” is strikingly reminiscent of Stephen Wonham’s challenge, made to Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*: “Come with me as a man [...]. Not as a brother; who cares what people did years back? We’re alive together, and the rest is cant” (LJ257). The claim that Margaret’s utterance is responsible for momentarily shifting the scene’s dynamics to one which is more typical of Forster’s male/male character constellations appears to receive support from the accompanying discourse about Margaret’s perceived deviance from ‘normal’ gender behaviour; at this point, Margaret could temporarily be seen to assume, in part at least, the role of the Forsterian ‘light’ saviour character, complementing the ‘dark’ Henry Wilcox whom she intends to save.

II.3.10.2. “The physical violence of the young”: the aggressive “boy” as object of erotic longing

If the word “boy” did indeed function as a marker for discourses about male-gendered or genuinely male/male desire in a context of eroticised power relationships between males in Forster’s work, a logical place to expect its appearance would be in Forster’s late erotic short story “Little Imber” (1961) – where it does indeed figure in a most revealing way. As Robert Martin has pointed out, this utopian fantasy explicitly acknowledges “the erotic power of male rivalry” and “thus provid[es] an unspoken subtext to relations such as Ralph and Tony’s, or Philip’s and Gino’s” (1997:272). Its two main protagonists – the mature, “high-minded and intelligent” but homophobic Warham, a social and sexual snob, and the virile, blue-eyed, “coarse” young Imber, identified as “not a gentleman” (AS227ff.) – form a recognisable ‘dark’/‘light’ character pair, complete down to

the implied difference in social status. Arriving to "fertilise" (AS228) a group of women as part of a breeding programme designed to stop the extinction of the human race, the men initially react antagonistically to one another, to the point that they engage in physical violence. The unexpectedly sexual outcome of their fight proves to be the key to saving the human race, as their mingled semen germinates to produce the desperately sought-after new life.

When Imber proudly declares that he is "a rough man", his older rival Warham deprecatingly retorts that he is "not a man" but "a boy" (AS230). Imber's supposed immaturity has been noted by Warham almost from the moment of their very first meeting; "immature" (AS228, and three times on 230) is the word to which the older man appears to cling as to a talisman against what turns out to be his own susceptibility to the virile Imber's erotic appeal. Warham's conflicted and aggressive reaction to Imber can easily be read as shot through with sado-masochistic desire: even as Warham dismissively diagnoses this "novice out of a Nursery" as "immature", he "switch[s] his top-boots with a cane". His being "hurt personally" by Imber's presence is associated with "a snake" which has "reared up" – an image made sexually suggestive by the fact that the two men's "hatred" is physically arousing to both of them: their naked "wrestling" culminates in mutual orgasm (AS228ff.). Warham casts their joint spilling of seed as "a bestial trifle [...]" and exactly what was to be expected from such a man. Not a man. Only a boy. Immature. He would not admit that he too had been involved" (AS230).

To the homophobic Warham, the thought that he might have "been involved" is "disquieting" (AS230); and even though he is subsequently forced to admit to himself "how erotic that wrestling had been", he still experiences fear and guilt at the idea that "he of all people" should have "acquiesced, and cooperated" (AS233) in a homosexual act. His insistence on Imber's immaturity, epitomised by the phrase "only a boy", is thus revealed as a device for distancing himself from his own desire for the "negligible boy" (AS231). And yet Imber's youth is revealed as the source of a confidence which Warham finds himself "reluctantly admiring": the idea that their sexual encounter should have generated offspring frightens Imber less than Warham, "for the reason I'm younger" (AS234). Because the "boy" Imber is focused on engendering life above all things, he proves to be broadly tolerant of sexuality in any form – a tolerance that turns out quite literally to save the ailing human race.

The evidence of "Little Imber" suggests that the term "boy", when used by an older male with the intention of claiming or fortifying a position of authority, can be regarded as potentially capable of evoking connections with a complex of discourses about eroticised male/male power relationships, comprising elements of antagonism, rivalry, homophobia and homoerotic desire. The "boy" in such a constellation is often a 'light' character whose potential for physical violence arguably forms part of his erotic appeal. The example of Warham's and Imber's "wrestling" in this late story, viewed in juxtaposition with the sado-masochist elements in Forster's early story "Ralph and Tony", makes it clear that the element of

eroticised antagonism is a fixed ingredient of the “volatile” (Lane 2007:106) sexual relationships which Forster’s creative imagination envisioned so consistently over a span of more than sixty years.

The consistency with which power relations and physical violence are associated with discourses of erotic desire in Forster’s unpublished homosexual texts suggests a strong possibility of such discourses also being present as subtexts of apparently commonplace male/male social relationships in Forster’s published fiction, with the phrase “only a boy” potentially functioning as a marker indicating the presence of these subtexts. And indeed, in *A Room with a View*, Cecil Vyse uses this phrase as he reflects on the nineteen-year-old Freddy Honeychurch’s dislike of the idea of him marrying his sister Lucy: “He is only a boy [...] I represent all that he despises. Why should he want me for a brother-in-law?” (RV89). The ascetic aesthete Cecil, “medieval [...] like a Gothic statue” that “implies celibacy” (RV86f.), is a man of “the sort that can know no one intimately” (RV172). By contrast, the “athletic” (RV85), “healthy” (RV91), easygoing Freddy, introduced by the narrator (who evidently approves of him) as “a boy of nineteen” (RV82), is represented as closely associated with the spirit of life: it is this “boy” who is capable of spontaneously hurling “one of the thunderbolts of youth” (RV126) in suggesting that George Emerson join him and Mr Beebe for a bathe. He is thus instrumental in procuring the “momentary chalice for youth” (RV133), which the three men partake of in the famous bathing scene in Ch. 12 – a scene which most modern critics agree can be read as a celebration of male companionship tinged with homoeroticism (see Herz 2007:142ff.).

Even though Cecil’s cultured snobbish disdain for the Honeychurches’ prosaic taste and way of life continues unchanged (see for example RV89 and 110), and even though his attitude towards Lucy’s family remains patronising, his reflection on Freddy’s dislike of himself appears surprisingly sympathetic (due, perhaps, to a feeling of generosity inspired by his recent engagement). The fact that he acknowledges that, to Freddy, he must naturally appear despicable, seems to suggest that his view of Freddy as “only a boy”, though perhaps patronising, is not utterly closed to the possibility of Freddy’s development over time, and thus not entirely scornful. Moreover, Cecil may be “an ascetic at heart” (RV173), but this does not mean that he is insensible to the power of “the healthy person” whom he “daren’t face” (RV91). Although himself no “coward”, and able to bear “necessary pain as well as any man”, he is afraid of getting “hurt” by “the physical violence of the young”, which he “hated” (RV111f.) – and yet we learn that Freddy feels that Cecil “praised one too much for being athletic” (RV85). Through Cecil’s casting of Freddy as “only a boy”, Freddy’s antagonism becomes part of an explainable and controllable discourse about development; by this means, Cecil is enabled to distance himself from his own involvement with the young man and what he might represent. For Cecil’s ambivalence towards the physical violence inherent to “healthy” masculine youth can be seen to establish a motivic connection between his presumptive unconscious and

repressed desires, and those of Forster's 'dark' protagonists who are simultaneously repulsed and attracted by the idea of male brutality, and upon all of whom physical violence is inflicted by a desirable 'light' male character at some point: Ralph Holme, Phillip Herriton, Rickie Elliot and John Claggart (see section II.5.2.3).³²⁹

While Cecil, an adult middle-class man of independent means, protected by social conventions, is never actually offered physical violence by the middle-class "boy" whom he "daren't face", other texts demonstrate that it may be fatal to dismiss a desirable young male – part of whose elusive attraction may turn out to stem precisely from his potential to unleash "the physical violence of the young" – as "only a boy". This would seem to apply particularly in cases where the "boy" in question is a social or cultural Other, and where the character pronouncing this dismissal fails to anticipate his reactions, mostly because his outlook tends to be blinkered by English middle-class conventionality. Gino Carella certainly falls into this group of attractive and unpredictable Others; and his physical violence is directed, not at Caroline Abbot who had originally thought of him as "only a boy", yet a desirable boy, but at Philip Herriton, who had arrogantly tried to dismiss his sister-in-law's Italian lover as "an insolent boy" (WA26). A similar form of what is essentially the Forsterian stereotype of English middle-class arrogance can be recognised in Warham's deprecatory attitude towards Imber. Despite the story's futuristic setting, this 'dark' character displays an "antique" form of social snobbishness towards the rival who is "not a gentleman", a snobbishness which is linked to his fear that the genetic "stock" of "people like Imber" might prove more proliferous than his own (AS229f.). As I have already stated, in "Little Imber", the link between the dismissive stance and the mixture of fear and attraction that drives it is made particularly explicit, as is the erotic dimension of the violent physical confrontation which ensues between the 'dark' character and the desirable male Other whom he has in vain tried to dismiss as "only a boy".

In Forster's unpublished play "The Heart of Bosnia" (1911), the failure to take into account the potential "violence of the young" across a divide of cultural difference is shown to have particularly dire consequences. In this play, Fanny, the daughter of the British consul in Bosnia, intends to amuse herself by flirting with two young Bosnian men whom she has "no intention" of marrying, and whom she patronisingly looks down on as "boys" (see excerpt quoted in Furbank I:201). Earlier in the play, Fanny is heard to say of one of her suitors that "he's only a

³²⁹ The relationship between Cecil and Freddy in fact strongly resembles that between Ralph and Tony, with Lucy occupying a position analogous to Margaret's. The dynamics of these parallel character constellations manifest themselves in the very wording of Freddy's expression of his attitude towards Cecil: rebuked by his mother for bluntly telling Cecil that he was not "off my head with joy" at the prospect of Cecil's marrying his sister, Freddy retorts that he "only let out I didn't like him. I don't hate him, but I don't like him" (RV84). Tony's dislike of Ralph is admittedly more violent and can indeed be classified as (homophobic) hatred, but, in reply to Ralph's double proposal, he, too, responds with "I do not like you, dear man," [...] in a voice which was almost kind" (AS80).

boy”;³³⁰ her father’s warnings against toying with “that unknown quantity – the heart of Bosnia” go unheeded. The two young men happen to be best friends, who are seen to “embrace passionately” (Furbank I:200f.); but their love for each other turns to deadly rivalry upon the discovery that they are both in love with the same woman.³³¹ In the structure envisioned by Forster, the introduction of the woman at the apex of what thereby becomes a triangular relationship disrupts an already established relationship of male/male intimacy and love. The price which Fanny pays for frivolously interfering with this set-up could scarcely be higher: to the two young Bosnians, love is clearly a matter of life and death, and, having been subjected to an arrogant dressing-down by Fanny, they rejoin their forces once more and kill her. The Bosnian servants take away her outraged father’s gun and explain to the distraught parents not only that it is the Bosnian “custom that one woman should not have two lovers”, but also that Fanny has – and this appears to be the graver offence since it is referred to repeatedly – jeopardised the pre-existent bond of the male/male relationship: the parents are informed that Fanny has “c[o]me between friends” who “must kill her, or she would part them”.³³² The two young men, their relationship regenerated through the desperate, violent removal of the foreign, female intruder who had marred it, leave the house unhindered.

Following the text’s logic, Fanny’s death appears as ultimately the result of her misguided casting of her two young suitors as two “boys” who “need educating”. In criticising the “bad reputation for quarrelling” attributed to Bosnians (Furbank I:201), she ironically fails to realise that this cultural stereotype may encode a difference of cultural values and norms of gender behaviour which makes her unable to predict the young men’s reactions. Arrogant and narrow-minded, she is not so much ‘travelling light’ as travelling in fatal ignorance. In wilfully flirting with the young men – that is, in pretending interest instead of genuinely trying to establish personal relationships with them – she falls a most drastic victim to the violent encounter with Otherness which, in most of Forster’s narratives, serves to jolt English middle-class characters out of their complacency and into the realities of life, death and the salutary, not to say vital, importance of personal relationships.³³³

³³⁰ Typescript (KCC: EMF/9/6), p.4.

³³¹ This triangular structure formally coincides with the erotic triangles described by Sedgwick (1985:21), in which the rivalry of two males for one woman is read as an additional relationship between men already linked by bonds of homosocial desire, and where this relationship between men is more powerful than the respective heterosexual ones.

³³² Typescript (KCC: EMF/9/6), p.33.

³³³ Fanny’s punishment for interfering with a male/male relationship may seem harsh, but it should be kept in mind that similarly drastic punishments for being snobbish, arrogant, patronising and obtuse are meted out to male characters in Forster’s fiction too, e.g. to Mr Bons in “The Celestial Omnibus”. If Forster’s play displays a pattern of misogyny, this pattern articulates, in virtually unencoded form, Sedgwick’s theories on the erotic triangle’s gender asymmetry, according to which the stronger homosocial bond of the male/male relationship reflects the superior position which relationships between males are accorded in the patriarchal power economy (1985:21-27).

II.3.10.3. Despotic fathers, obedient sons, and salutary "breaking":

Billy Budd and *Howards End*

Besides the Novice who is "only a boy", there is another "boy" to examine in *Billy Budd*, a "boy" about whose temperament other men make fatally incorrect assumptions. This boy is, of course, Billy himself; and the discourses about fatherly concern, paternal condescension, desire, and despotism which his young and apparently innocent figure evokes in Melville's text, together with his potential for violence which Vere apparently fails to take into account, may have been congenial to the adaptor whose own imaginative interests had already led him to engage with these topics in a number of narratives.

In Melville's novella, there is one instance in which one of Billy's fellow "young topmates" tells him to "sew yourself up in [your bag], Billy boy, and then you'll be sure to know if anybody meddles with it" (BB47) – this humorous piece of advice may be felt to imply an attitude of more or less affectionate condescension in the speaker. Except for this, it is only Captain Vere who ever addresses or talks of Billy as a "boy"; and he notoriously does this at crucial moments in the narrative. Before and during the first part of the confrontation with Claggart, Vere thinks of Billy as a "man" (BB78, BB82); his first exhortation to the stricken Billy is "Speak, man! [...] Speak!" It is only when he becomes aware of Billy's speech impediment that he adopts a "fatherly [...] tone", places "a soothing hand on his shoulder" and reassures Billy: "There is no hurry, my boy. Take your time, take your time" (BB83).³³⁴ When Claggart lies dead on the floor, Vere's words are "fated boy [...] what have you done!" It is in the following paragraph that Vere undergoes the transformation from "father" to "military disciplinarian" (BB84); his breathed words "fated boy" might thus be read as a first intimation of his imminent deliberate resumption of professional and personal distance from the young man who has turned out to be not quite as harmless as his helpless, *boyish* stammering had suggested – for it should be noted that Billy's predicament had reminded Vere of "a bright young schoolmate of his" with similar troubles (BB83). Even if Vere should at this point still be in a position to pity Billy in fatherly concern, he will nevertheless soon deploy his rhetorical skills and his superior position within the structures of institutionalised power to have the young man eliminated by the martial law to which he avows himself duty-pledged. In fact, his whispered words – "fated boy" – also suggest that the problematic "pre-

³³⁴ Sedgwick, in her queer deconstruction of Melville's *Billy Budd*, dwells on this man/boy binarism, linking it to a related binarism of innocence and initiation which surrounds the figure of the encoded homosexual, John Claggart: "It is possible that Billy could have succeeded in making himself intelligible as either 'man' or 'boy'. But [Vere's] instruction to him to defer as a boy, simply juxtaposed on the instruction to expedite as a man, 'touching Billy's heart to the quick' also ignites it to violence [...]. It is, of course, at this moment of Claggart's murder that Billy has been propelled once and for all across the initiatory threshold and into the toils of Claggart's phobic desire" (1985:99).

judgment” which his officers later suspect him of harbouring (BB93) is at that moment already established, if “fated” is understood in the sense of “doomed to destruction”, rather than of merely “ill-fated”.

An interesting point, which did not escape Forster’s attention when he was working on the *Billy Budd* libretto, is the question of what role, if any, Vere might play in Billy’s act of violence against Claggart. Writing to Lionel Trilling on 16 April 1949, Forster queried parenthetically, “why is it Vere’s touch on Billy’s shoulder that precipitates the blow?” (EMFL II:237).³³⁵ In the context of the on-going discussion of the complex of discourses about relationships of power and desire associated with the word “boy” in Forster’s work, Forster’s query seems all the more relevant because it draws attention to the fact that, certainly at the moment of physical contact, the captain and the young foretopman find themselves in a relationship of some kind, and one which Melville’s text links with an intense emotion on Billy’s part at least: Vere’s

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 the 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. (BB83)

Refracted through the various discourses unlocked by the word “boy” in Forster’s own texts, Melville’s Vere’s address of Billy as “boy” both before and after the fatal blow could be read as marking not only the captain’s change from benevolent paternalism to merciless disciplinarianism, but as marking also, first, his impulsive establishment of a personal relationship with a man whose perceived Otherness he patronises in an affectionate, fatherly way, and then, following Claggart’s death, his impulse to distance himself from this man *as* Other – as a subordinate, a “boy” who is “fated” and “unfortunate”. When Vere, having done his best to convince his officers that Billy must be condemned to death, declares “I feel as you do for this unfortunate boy” (BB99), his utterance ought, according to such a reading, be construed as the perfunctory profession of an emotion he does not feel, or as downright hypocrisy. The impulse to distance himself from Billy could be read as betraying Vere’s conscious or unconscious refusal to acknowledge that he may have been, as Wareham puts it, “involved” (AS230) in the act of violence committed by the younger man – for Vere could be seen to be “involved” in the killing of Claggart in a number of ways.

³³⁵ It seems likely that Forster’s query, prefaced by “N. B.”, represents not so much a desire for elucidation as rather a protest against the reading of *Billy Budd* advanced by a character in Trilling’s novel *The Middle of the Journey*, which equates Vere with the Law (see note 537).

Leaving aside the question of what Billy's act of violence might symbolise,³³⁶ it seems fairly clear that Vere is ultimately responsible for setting up the confrontation between Claggart and Billy,³³⁷ thereby creating the circumstances that trigger the "explo[sion]" of what Forster, in 1927, described as Billy's "goodness of the glowing aggressive sort which cannot exist unless it has evil to consume" (AN97). By stating that Vere arranges the confrontation in the privacy of his cabin in order to prevent "the matter" of Claggart's accusation "at once getting abroad, which [...] might undesirably affect the ship's company" (BB80) – because it would serve to "keep the idea of lingering disaffection alive" (BB77) – the text, so it would appear, aims to establish the tragic results of this confrontation as accidental, unintended and unforeseen by Vere. The fact remains, however, that it is Vere who sets in motion the immediate causal chain of events which leads up to the catastrophe. The structural position he thus occupies in the novella's plot can be compared to that held by Henry Wilcox in *Howards End* with regard to the death of Leonard Bast, as I shall demonstrate below. Furthermore, a reading of Captain Vere's "fatherly" attitude towards Billy in Melville's novella through the lens of Henry Wilcox's relationship with his son Charles uncovers further interesting structural similarities, the sum of which could be used to throw a cross-light on the changes which Forster made to Melville's characters in his libretto adaptation.

Henry Wilcox thinks of his son Charles as "little boy and strong man in one" (HE322). Yet he does not treat him as his equal but as his subordinate: when Charles expresses the wish to "keep Howards End out of" the entrapment of Helen, stating that "we don't want any more mess", his father turns on him, demanding "Who's 'we'? [...] My boy, pray, who's 'we'?", whereupon Charles apologises for "intruding" (HE281). Their exchange indicates that Henry's "fatherly" feelings are those of an autocrat who exacts obedience from his son by threat and intimidation, and who tolerates no infractions of the established familial power hierarchy. His impulse to make a confidant of his son comes at the moment when he has been deserted by Margaret, whose loyalty to her sister Helen, pregnant with Leonard Bast's child, outweighs her loyalty to her husband, once the adulterous lover of Jackie Bast,³³⁸ but now refusing to acknowledge his former prohibited desire and unfaithful behaviour as being akin to Helen's transgression.

³³⁶ For further discussion of this question see section II.6.6.

³³⁷ Sedgwick, for example, points out that "neither of the men would have been murdered" if Vere had not insisted on confronting "each with the other's visage under [his] 'impartial' eye", instead of arranging separate hearings or a court-martial (1990:106f.). Thirty years earlier, Merlin Bowen had remarked that Vere "himself [...] sets up the fatal situation and invites disaster" (225). The point was not addressed by Joseph Schiffman, who opened the critical re-examination of the character of Vere in 1950; Phil Withim merely criticises Vere's decision to have a private confrontation as being "based on the single element of prudence" and having "no relevant reason" (269).

³³⁸ The blurring of gender which comes from this choice of a nickname for Henry's erstwhile lover who subsequently became Leonard's wife might be felt to be noteworthy.

Henry's unusual display of "tenderness" towards his son at this point reflects his confidence that he possesses an ally in the younger man, whose loyalty, as his son and 'natural' subordinate, he can command as a matter of course: "Though his wife had proved unstable his children were left to him" (HE322).

If Henry attempts to establish intimacy with Charles, however, it is to serve his own purposes: because he is so upset by the thought of the Schlegel sisters ensconcing themselves in Howards End against his will that he "can't sleep", he wakes his son to "have a talk with [him] and get it over". And even the establishment of this somewhat perfunctory form of intimacy, it would seem, is fraught with the anxiety of losing position: as he "link[s] his arm in his son's", Henry finds that "somehow" he "liked him less as he told him more." The male bonding that takes place in this scene between father and son involves both the suppression of Henry's secret – he "had of course said nothing of Mrs Bast" to his son – as well as, tellingly, a discussion of "the rights of property itself", which Henry considers "something far greater" than his quarrel with his insubordinate wife (HE322f). Margaret's refusal to vacate Howards End, supplemented by what Henry interprets as her "attempt[ed] blackmail" over his past transgression (HE305), is thereby revealed as nothing less than a threat to Henry's position of male supremacy;³³⁹ a position which is predicated on absolute ownership and discursive empowerment: "The house is mine [...] and when I say that no one is to live there I mean that no one is to live there. I won't have it." Having, accordingly, made his investment in male/male intimacy as part of his strategy to fortify his position, Henry deploys his son "as my representative" to get the women to "clear out of the house at once" – "and, of course", Charles is to "use no violence" in this undertaking (HE323). The fact that Henry makes a point of reminding Charles of this is interesting: on a structural level, it anticipates the violence that does later take place at Howards End, while on the character level, it suggests that Henry may be aware of a propensity for violence in his son. The readers learn that Charles subscribes to a code of masculine honour that sanctions violence among men when he tells Tibby Schlegel that he would "send a bullet" through any man who "played about with my sister" (HE307). Henry himself, too, subscribes to a similar code; his idea of making Helen's "seducer", if he should be "married already", "pay heavily for his misconduct" is to have him "thrashed within an inch of his life" (HE302).³⁴⁰

³³⁹ The text itself could be seen to expose the struggle for male "superiority" according to the structural paradigm of patriarchy as potentially harmful: "the tragedy" – whether this refers to the immediate one of Henry's and Margaret's marital quarrel, or is meant to include the further ramifications thereof, which could be seen to comprise the death of Leonard Bast – "the tragedy began [...], like many another talk, by the man's deft assertion of his superiority" (HE300).

³⁴⁰ The fact that Henry is successfully able to ignore that, by his own logic, he would, as the married seducer of Jackie Bast, himself have been eligible for the same treatment not only points to the way in which normative conceptions of class and gender difference define and shape his perception, but arguably also expresses Forster's criticism of the conventions that surround the categories of class and gender.

By the decrees of social convention, women are normally exempt from the physical violence which can, under certain circumstance, be permissible or even requisite among males. At the same time, it would seem that women are also denied sexual agency by social convention. When Leonard Bast (whose identity Charles had extracted from the hapless Tibby) appears on the very site which embodies the embattled ground of male supremacy – Howards End – Charles is fortuitously provided with the logical *male* recipient for his pent-up outrage, which can thus bypass the 'debauched' but untouchable Helen in favour of her "seducer". The effect of this is that the entire conflict is turned into an affair of honour that can be played out between men.

Ironically, Leonard's position as a married adulterer makes him the nominal equivalent of Henry, a fact of which the "boy" Charles is unaware, since his father – his instructing authority – has not divulged the secret of his illicit acts to his filial agent and executor of his will. That Charles is very much the latter could be inferred from his declaration that he intends to "thrash [Leonard] within an inch of his life" (HE321) – an utterance which, though a standard collocation, nevertheless exactly matches Henry's conception of appropriate retribution (see above).

When Leonard unexpectedly expires as Charles attempts to administer that retribution to him with "the flat of [the Schlegels'] old German sword" (HE324), it is Charles who, under laws "made in his image", receives a prison sentence for manslaughter. Foreseeing the verdict, Henry is distraught: "Charles may go to prison. I dare not tell him. I don't know what to do – what to do. I'm broken – I'm ended" (HE331). His expression of helpless despair anticipates that of the operatic Vere, who, aware that Billy's offence carries the death penalty,³⁴¹ also finds himself at a loss for what to do: he feels he can neither "condemn" nor "save" Billy Budd in the oncoming trial, knowing only, like Henry, that his "heart" and his "life" are "broken" (LIB53). Cleaving to his duty, however, he activates the "machinery" (PtI196) of martial law. Later, as he prepares to communicate the verdict of the drumhead court to Billy, having chosen to act as "the messenger of death", Vere, though now certain of what he has to do, still wonders how the younger man can "pardon" or even "receive" him (LIB58), the bearer of such tidings – it seems that he, too, only barely "dare [...] tell him" (HE331). And yet, just as the terminal loss of Billy Budd is instrumental in "sav[ing]" and "bless[ing]" Vere through "the love that passes understanding" (LIB63), the ruin and (temporary) loss of Charles is represented as the only development capable of "break[ing]" Henry: only the complete razing of his "fortress", the brutal confrontation with the truth that he *is* connected and fundamentally involved with other human beings, can render him fit

³⁴¹ The libretto makes it completely clear that, "according to the Articles of War", even to "strike" a "superior officer" will entail "death" (LIB61).

for a salutary “new life” under the auspices of the creed of personal relationships, as held by his partner Margaret (HE331f).³⁴²

The reading of the conclusion of *Howards End* presented here demonstrates that Henry Wilcox and the operatic Vere occupy similar positions within the structure of the Forsterian salvation narrative. In both texts, the loss of a man-boy capable of evoking more or less ambiguous and anxiety-inducing emotions, including affection, in an older male, represents the shock experience, the painful realisation of connectedness, which enables the respective ‘dark’ character to develop toward salvation. Working backwards from the similarities at the narrative climax, however, it may also be possible to illumine the ways in which the relationship between Vere and Billy, and specifically the character of Vere as he appears in the libretto, differ from what is represented in Melville’s novella.

By virtue of the fact that the women are effectively written out of the violent culmination of the plot of *Howards End*, we are left with a triangular constellation of males – Charles, Henry and Leonard – that can be seen to match that of Billy, Vere and Claggart in certain ways. At first sight, of course, Leonard Bast, distraught, confused, racked by remorse and “yearn[ing] for the relief of “confession” to get him “clear of the tangle” (HE316) caused by the “wrong” he feels he has “done”, appears the almost diametrical opposite of the devious, scheming, aggressive and altogether evil master-at-arms who is established as Billy’s ‘natural’ enemy in Melville’s novella. Above all, Leonard bears no enmity against Charles, whom he has “never seen” before in his life (HE321). Regarded from Henry Wilcox’s point of view, however, the figure of Leonard Bast appears in a much darker and more dangerous light, because it is directly associated with the adulterous acts of Henry’s own past. As has already been mentioned, Margaret has done her best to make Henry acknowledge the structural correspondence between his own moral and social transgressions and those of Helen and her “seducer” (whom she does not identify to him, however) – an endeavour which Henry has interpreted as blackmail (see above). Worse still, Leonard appears to have been in league with Margaret, the wife who ought but refuses to be subordinate to Henry’s will: Charles tells his father that “they had the man up there with them too” (HE323).³⁴³

It could be argued that, seen retrospectively through Henry’s eyes, the figure of the deceased Leonard takes on all the sinister threat which is already associated with Margaret whose “eyes gazed too straight” (HE241). Regarded from this angle, the two figures of Leonard and Margaret taken together now appear as a much clearer parallel to Claggart as he might conceivably appear to Vere, if Claggart

³⁴² See also my discussion of “Ralph and Tony”, in which I argue that the breaking of Tony is the necessary prerequisite for making him a suitable partner for Ralph, and also draw a comparison to the ending of *Howards End* (section II.4.1., particularly note 370).

³⁴³ Upon Henry’s dismayed query “What – what man?” Charles claims to have “told” his father about Leonard Bast being the father of Helen’s child “last night” (HE323); however, the text does not in fact record him divulging this item of information to Henry.

is viewed not so much in his capacity as Billy's accuser but rather as the man who, besides his attempt to inspire the captain with the fear of insurrection, has made a certain "suggestion conveyed in the phrase 'a man-trap under [Billy's] ruddy-tipped daisies'" (BB79). Given Vere's established appreciation of Billy's physical beauty (see BB78), it is only a short step to decode "the import" of Claggart's "suggestion" as something approximating a blackmailer's threat.³⁴⁴ If we assume for the moment that Vere's appreciation of Billy really does involve elements of homophile desire, then such an insinuation of knowledge regarding the captain's secret proclivities would certainly have found its mark. Given the homophobic setting in which homosexual acts were punishable by death under naval law, the captain could be assumed to feel himself under a considerable threat of exposure from the "informer" who arouses in him a "strong suspicion clogged by strange dubieties" (BB80). The extermination of Claggart would constitute the removal of his all-too-acute powers of observation (the libretto's Vere refers to him as "a veritable Argus", LIB26); and, with their extinction, the threat of exposure would be removed for Captain Vere as well. It is through the "boy" Billy's unforeseen (but not, perhaps, entirely unforeseeable) violent outbreak that this removal is fortuitously effected, just as the "boy" Charles, in violently implementing his father's ideas about the appropriate punishment for sexual transgression, fortuitously removes the one independent *male* antagonist whom Henry might have expected to be able to expose his disreputable secret. Thus, both "boys" inadvertently and unwittingly become the tools that ensure the older men's safety, even though it might be felt that neither Henry nor Vere could consciously have anticipated the full consequences of their deployment of their "boys".

It is here, of course, that we find the main differences between the Vere represented in Melville's text and the Vere who figures in Forster's libretto. Following Claggart's demise, Melville's Vere does his best to have Billy condemned to death by interfering in the trial – an exercise in "unseemly harangue" which Forster criticised as making the character "come[...] out" quite "odiously" (*Griffin* 5), and which no longer appears in the libretto. To all appearances, Melville's captain declines to acknowledge any responsibility or personal involvement in the events which have led to the fortuitous removal of a man whom he may well have perceived as a threat to himself. It is this fact which might be felt to suggest that his use of the word "boy" marks a distancing strategy comparable to that observable in Warham, who also strives to deny that he has been involved in an act in which violence is commingled with prohibited desire, committed by – and with – a "boy".

By contrast, it is possible to argue that the libretto's Vere consciously realises his responsibility – far more so than Henry, whose "boy" Charles must ultimately be seen to enjoy more freedom of agency than the "boy" Billy does under the

³⁴⁴ See my discussion in sections I.4.5. and II.6.8.

claustrophobic constraints of the warship world. Vere's sense that it is not Billy but he himself who is on trial (LIB53) might be read as betraying his sense of guilt at having used Billy as a tool to bring about Claggart's downfall. For while the ostensible goal of the confrontation was to prove that Billy was innocent, its primary objective was arguably to get rid of the "evil" Claggart and to re-establish Vere in a position of discursive supremacy: before the fatal confrontation, Vere is convinced that his is the superior insight ("I have studied men and their ways", "I'm not so easily deceived") and triumphantly decrees that Claggart, who has "reckoned without" him, "shall fail" (LIB51).³⁴⁵ His confident assertion of superiority is subsequently exposed as hubris, and punished accordingly – as is the corresponding assertion made by Henry Wilcox, who declares that "when I say that no one is to live [at Howards End] I mean that no one is to live there. I won't have it" (HE323).

Furthermore, Melville's text insists that Vere, though exhibiting the "agony of the strong" (BB102) and a "stoic self-control" (BB112), apparently remains untouched by "remorse" (BB120) over having been the man who had "mainly [...] effected" the young sailor's "condemnation" (BB102). It is Billy, the text suggests, rather than Vere, who stands in need of the "something healing" that passes between them during the closeted interview (BB106). One is tempted to wonder whether Melville's Vere's lack of remorse, following after what Forster was later to refer to as his "unseemly harangue" (*Griffin* 5), and taken together with the references to the commander's more intense suffering (BB102), must not have appeared to the Forsterian sensitivity as a downright perverse attempt on Melville's part to misdirect his readers' sympathies. Following Forster's objective of "rescuing [...] Vere from his creator" (EMFL II:237), the opera-makers, as I demonstrate in section III.2.3.2., took great pains to emphasise that the members of the drumhead court have "no choice" (LIB56f.) under the Articles of War but to condemn Billy. The operatic Vere is represented as being quite as shattered and "broken" as Henry Wilcox by the unavoidable outcome of the trial. While he expresses his "agony" in private, in doing so he arguably appears neither "stoic" nor "strong", but only receives strength as a gift from Billy in the closeted interview.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ In a letter to Eric Crozier dating from late March 1949, Forster summed up this scene as "Vere [...] reflecting that C[laggart] is certainly evil and that he's got him on toast" (quoted in Reed 1993a:54).

³⁴⁶ An entirely different view of the operatic Vere has been advanced by Donald Mitchell, who writes: "Vere, after Claggart's death, appears in radically revised form, tormented by doubt and guilt in the Epilogue and with every vestige of humanity surgically removed, i.e. without any of those important manifestations of compassion allowed him by Melville" (1993:133). To Mitchell, this "compassion" manifests itself in Vere's statement "I feel as you do for this unfortunate boy" (BB99) and in the description of Vere's face, as he emerges from the "closeted interview", as "expressive of the agony of the strong" (BB102). I attempt a deconstruction of these indicators of "compassion" in section II.3.10.5. below.

II.3.10.4. The parallel case of "Arthur Snatchfold"

In my discussion of Forster's short story "Arthur Snatchfold" of 1928 in section II.4.3., I uncover a similar pattern of the pursuit of a prohibited desire, of circumstantial exculpation, and of remorse: Arthur will go to prison for the homosexual encounter initiated by Conway, while Conway is established as powerless to change the already sealed fate of his lover who declines to betray him to the authorities. Conway (however briefly) experiences pain and guilt over being unable to "save his saviour" (LtC112) who, but for his, Conway's, instigation, would not have been in a position to be apprehended by the local policeman and brought to court. I furthermore speculate that this short story, which dates from 1928, might represent Forster's creative intervention into the characterisation of Vere in Melville's *Billy Budd*. Even if this were not the case, the fact remains that in Forster's story, the relationship between a older middle-class 'dark' and a younger lower-class 'light' character is unequivocally represented as one of homosexual desire, and the prize of freedom and safety from legal persecution obtained for Conway by Arthur's sacrifice stands clearly identified. These structural correspondences of character types and salvation narrative would seem to legitimate a parallel reading that equates Vere's implied but unidentified vulnerability, which Claggart so adroitly exploits, with homosexual desire.

It seems of particular interest, therefore, that in "Arthur Snatchfold", too, the use or non-use of the word "boy" can be seen to occupy a key place in defining the relationship between the story's two main characters. Conway addresses Arthur as "boy" three times during their encounter in the woods (LtC103 and 104). Although the category of age is first introduced by Arthur, who flippantly refers to Conway as an "old granfa'" (LtC102), Conway's choice of the word "boy" for the partner whom he had previously explicitly appreciated as "a man" (LtC98) appears to be part of his erotic role-playing. The text indicates that the success of their sexual encounter, in which Conway displays a dominant behaviour, is linked with the "increase[...]" of "his sense of power" (LtC105). Conway later refers to Arthur once more as "the village boy" as he tries to learn the young man's name from Donaldson (LtC112); in this situation, Conway has every interest to distance himself from the young man by offhand diminution (and yet he would be extremely ill-advised to refer to this victim of a homophobic legal system as an "unfortunate boy"). Left alone with his "shame", however, he acknowledges the younger man as "his lover, yes, his lover who was going to prison to save him" (LtC112). At this moment, it would seem that he deliberately brings himself to efface the distance between himself and the young working-class man, whereas he had earlier reacted merely with detached dismay to the thought that "the lad" might have "come to grief" in some other sexual affair in which he, Conway, had had no part (LtC108).

Conway's sense of "shame" at having been "save[d]" from the threat of exposure while now being himself unable to "save his saviour" and "lover" (LtC112) is

essential here, because it arguably marks the discourse about salvation as, if not perhaps entirely free from acerbic irony, then certainly as distinct from the wholly ironic discourses about salvation in Forster's work – discourses in which a supposed salvation that remains ungraced by any personal connection to the “saviour” stands clearly revealed as false in the Forsterian sense.³⁴⁷ If it were not for their respective personal and emotional relationship with the “saviour” character, Conway, Henry Wilcox and Vere would not be worthy to receive ‘true’ salvation. It appears that the purgative torment of shame, guilt and remorse which they undergo is their one saving grace which, within the Forsterian salvation paradigm, prevents them from “com[ing] out” as “odiously” (*Griffin* 5) as they might be (and have been) represented by critics who call into question, or refuse to accept, Forster's setting of that paradigm.³⁴⁸

II.3.10.5. Man/boy: narrative trajectories in *Billy Budd*

In the *Billy Budd* libretto, the first moment at which Vere speaks of Billy as a “boy” occurs during his monologue at the beginning of Act II Sc. 2 (“Claggart, John Claggart, beware”), prior to his first interview with Billy. This monologue has no immediately corresponding source in Melville's text; the interview, too, is almost entirely the opera-makers' invention. Reviewing and evaluating Claggart's accusation and motives, Vere declares: “The boy whom you would destroy, he is good; you are evil” (LIB51). I have already suggested above that in this monologue, Vere can be seen to commit hubris by casting himself in a position of supreme discursive empowerment; it is therefore hardly surprising that, pronouncing judgement from this elevated distance, he should conceive of Billy as a “boy” whom he, as his superior in rank and intellectual insight, both controls and wishes with paternalistic condescension to protect. When he stands face to face with Billy, however, and hears the young sailor's glowing avowals of loyalty and affection, he realises (somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, given the naïve simplicity of Billy's words) that he is dealing not with a “boy” but with a “man” whose offer to “look after” his captain appeals to him in some unanticipated way: “And this is the man I'm told is dangerous [...]! This is the trap concealed in the daisies!” (LIB51).

It will, on the other hand, be observed that Captain Vere's addresses of Billy as “man” and “boy” during and shortly after the fatal confrontation with Claggart originate more or less directly from Melville's novella. Vere urges the dumbstruck Billy to “speak, man, speak” (LIB52; compare BB83), and to “take your time, my boy, take your time” (LIB52; compare BB83: “There is no hurry, my boy. Take your time, take your time”). Following Claggart's death, the libretto's Vere, too, utters the line “Fated boy, what have you done” (LIB53; compare BB84). How-

³⁴⁷ See notes 239 and 413.

³⁴⁸ See, for example, Stone's (1978) and Lane's (2007) readings of “Arthur Snatchfold”.

ever, once Claggart is dead, and Vere has been "broken" by the realisation of what the consequences of Billy's fatal blow must be, he does not speak of Billy as a "boy" again – not even as an "unfortunate boy". Instead, Billy now becomes "beauty, handsomeness, goodness" – the embodiment of a desirable set of abstractions, which, although it can be "destroy[ed]" (LIB58) by a man like Vere, can never be subject to his paternal power in the way that a "boy" can be.³⁴⁹ In addition to the abstraction, however, Billy becomes simply "he"; and Vere's agony can be seen to centre on the question of how "he" can "pardon" or "receive" him (LIB58), just as Vere's sense of absolution depends on the knowledge that "he" has "saved" and "blessed" him. Salvation is brought through "the love that passes understanding" (LIB63), which, so the shift from "boy", or a similarly distancing abstraction, to the essentially personal "he" suggests, is a love between equals, the love of "two people pulling each other into salvation" (CPB55).

The circumstances under which the word "boy" appears and disappears, then re-appears and disappears once more in Vere's utterances seem to suggest that the narrative trajectory which the librettists were pursuing in telling the story of Vere's and Billy's relationship might have been at odds with their intention, as adaptors, of remaining "as faithful to Melville as possible" (Crozier in BBC1960:203) – an intention which entailed their retaining as much of the novella's scant dialogue as they could. The shift from the "boy" who "is good" to "this [...] man" (LIB51) encountered face to face in the privacy of the captain's cabin for the very first time might be seen to correspond to a shift from abstract conceptualising to concrete personal recognition (and, possibly, desire). This move towards (Forsterian) personal connection is not contradicted by the demand to "speak, man, speak", as taken over from Melville. It is cancelled, however, by the invitation to "take your time, my boy": by uttering it, the operatic Vere can be seen to *resume* the paternal attitude which, in Melville's text, he is shown by this utterance to *assume* for the first time at this moment. In Melville's text, Vere's assumption of this paternal attitude is supposed to represent a move *towards* Billy; whereas in the reading of the libretto I have just proposed, it would constitute a move *away from* Billy the man, and back towards the position of personal detachment, discursive superiority and paternalistic control typical of the unconnected Forsterian 'dark' character.

The structural difference between the relationship between Billy and Vere as envisioned in Melville's novella and in the opera libretto thus stands clearly revealed. Melville's Vere, that "austere devotee of military duty", twice allows himself to "melt back" (BB101) into "fatherly" (BB83) affection, "into what remains primeval in our formalised humanity" (BB101): once during the confrontation with Claggart, where he exhorts the "boy" to "take your time" (BB83) and once during the closeted interview, where the speculating narrator draws a parallel be-

³⁴⁹ It could be argued that this symbolic abstraction and glorification represents another distancing mechanism; see my discussion of Vere's and Rickie Elliot's tendency to treat people as symbols in section II.4.2.3.1.

tween the relationship of Vere and Billy and that of Abraham and his son Isaac (BB102). By contrast, the operatic Vere, a Forsterian 'dark' character who is 'travelling light', is twice seen to fulfil the Forsterian desideratum of connecting with Billy as an equal: not as a subordinate "boy", but "as a man" (as Stephen Wonham puts it, see LJ257). The second (and salutary) connection takes place during the closeted interview; the first moment of connection – the shift from "boy" to "man" newly introduced by the librettists – takes place during the brief private interview before the confrontation with Claggart. The reversion from "man" to "boy", which takes place as Billy stands confronting Claggart, and which arguably re-establishes the distance between Vere and Billy, may be regarded as inherited from Melville's text, where it can, however, be seen to fulfil the obverse function of reducing distance by introducing the concept of Vere's paternal feelings.

Forster not only disapproved of Vere's "odious[...]" (*Griffin* 5) conduct and rhetorical manipulation during the trial so much that he strove to efface this aspect of Melville's captain as far as possible. It also seems likely that he would have rejected the idea of Vere's attitude of "fatherly" affection towards Billy. Paternalism in Forster's own work is seldom unproblematic, as the example of Henry Wilcox demonstrates; and we have furthermore seen that whenever one Forster character refers to another as "boy", the door is opened on a variety of discourses about power relations which can in most cases be seen to carry associations of desire and/or coercion.

There is every reason to assume that it would not have escaped Forster that in Melville's text, the paternal attitude is intimately connected with the concept of sacrifice, or more precisely, ritual slaughter, as manifest in the comparison of Vere to Abraham embracing his son Isaac before "resolutely offering him up in obedience to the exacting behest" (BB102). Indeed, as a reader familiar with the poetry of Wilfred Owen, and specifically with "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" (publ. 1920) which draws on the Abraham/Isaac story to pillory the slaughtering of Europe's male youth on the orders of older men in World War I, Forster would have had additional reason to distrust this particular discourse about paternal sacrifice.³⁵⁰ The fact that Billy is depicted as good-natured, innocent and desirable, but ultimately no more than a "dumb" animal, if one "of generous breed" (BB93), seems set to ensure that the apparently sensitive, thoughtful and just intellectual Vere becomes the default site for the reader's identification. As a result, the idea of sacrifice becomes almost exclusively reduced to an absolutely empowered paternal character's surrender of the son who is most dear to him, but who stands entirely disempowered himself. Totally subordinate to Abraham's

³⁵⁰ This poem was also to figure among those Owen texts which Britten used to such poignant effect in his *War Requiem*, op.66 (1962), where it forms part of the Offertory. In this context, it seems noteworthy (though not necessarily relevant) that Britten began to lay out his plans for the *War Requiem* around July 1960; while in August/September of the same year, he and his librettists were also working on the revisions to *Billy Budd*.

paternal power, Isaac's voice remains unheard,³⁵¹ and it is the "obedien[t]" father's "resolut[ion]" (BB102) which stands at the focus of attention.

This type of unilateral sacrifice for the sake of obedience to a superior power stands diametrically opposed to the Forsterian concept of heroic, voluntary – or, at least, willing – *self*-sacrifice for the sake of a fellow man,³⁵² which is salutary only because it implies equality, or so the insistence on "two people pulling each other into salvation" who are "not rescuer and rescued" (CPB55) suggests. It seems that what Forster particularly objected to in Melville's text was what he perceived as Vere's callousness in exercising his "authority and discipline":

How odiously Vere comes out in the trial scene! At first he stays in the witness-box, as he should, then he constitutes himself both counsel for the prosecution and judge, and never stops lecturing the court until the boy is sentenced to death. "Struck by an angel of God: and I must make sure that the angel hangs." It comes to that. "I take him to be of that generous nature that he would even feel for us." It comes to that too, and in those words. His unseemly harangue arises, I think, from Melville's wavering attitude towards an impeccable commander, a superior philosopher, and a British aristocrat. (*Griffin* 5)

It may strike the reader as suggestive that, in his summary of the trial, Forster himself should use the word "boy" to refer to Billy; if nothing else, his critical stance here appears to be one of ironic distance towards both of Melville's characters. More to the point, however, it seems that Forster viewed with distaste the power dynamics implied by Vere's chill, hard and – despite the narrator's claims to the contrary – heartless control over a "boy" who is little more than a helpless victim. According to Forster's representation, Melville's Vere is resolved to "make sure that" Billy is hanged,³⁵³ and, since he feels no genuine personal connection with the young sailor, the reference which he makes to Billy's "generous nature" is necessarily as hollow a gesture as the false claims to salvation made by some of Forster's most unsympathetic and repressive characters. It is here that Forster evidently felt he had to intervene by making "Billy, rather than Vere, the hero" (*Griffin* 4), and the above analyses indicate that making him a hero involved conceiving of him "as a man" (LJ257), as I also demonstrate further in section II.5.3.6. In the Forsterian version of the story, it is Billy the man who brings salvation and blessing to the "broken" Vere through his love, forgiveness and willing self-sacrifice. Perhaps the most important consequence of this is that the "diviner magnanimity" alluded to and eulogised by Melville's narrator (BB102) is identified in the libretto as very definitely Billy's gift.

³⁵¹ Compare Genesis 22:9-12: at the site of sacrifice, Isaac does not speak.

³⁵² In effect, these two types of sacrifice can be seen to correspond to the choice between "betraying my friend" and "betraying my country" (ICD66).

³⁵³ Forster misquotes Melville here; the phrase actually runs "Struck dead by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang!" (BB85). I discuss this suggestive inaccuracy in section III.2.1.

In sum, I have been arguing that Forster may have been deliberately aiming to purge the figure of Vere of his “fatherly” attitude towards Billy, an attitude which manifests itself in the captain’s use of the word “boy”. I have also shown in which way the key phrases taken over from Melville, which prominently feature the word “boy”, could be seen to disrupt the Forsterian narrative trajectory which is aimed at a connection between men; and I have suggested that this disruption is a symptom of the librettists’ intention of remaining “faithful” to Melville’s text, if not in spirit, then at least in form.

II.3.10.6. “You [...] spoke so fatherly to me”: paternal blandishments and boys’ betrayals

It might still be objected that the fact that Vere is not heard to refer to Billy as a “boy” again following Claggart’s death is simply the result of the massive excision of virtually the whole “unseemly harangue” (*Griffin* 5) – it is, after all, in the course of this that Melville’s Vere is heard to refer to Billy as an “unfortunate boy” (BB99). And yet the word “boy” remains in circulation in the libretto: it is used after Claggart’s demise, not by Vere, but by Mr Ratcliffe, the second lieutenant. Pleading for a “merciful” treatment against the sailing master’s calls for “revenge”, he declares: “The boy has been provoked. There’s no harm in the boy. I cannot believe it. Mercy on his youth – there’s no harm in the lad”, and calls for a “show” of “pity” (LIB53f). Ratcliffe’s fatherly feelings represent a creative departure from the officers’ attitude as given in the novella: to them as a collective, Billy Budd is “the last *man* they would have suspected, either of mutinous design alleged by Claggart [*sic*], or of the undeniable deed he himself had done” (BB91; my emphasis).³⁵⁴ Yet Ratcliffe’s paternal attitude towards the young sailor is again predicated on a relationship of coercion: it was he, after all, who originally “impressed” the “king’s bargain” off the *Rights o’ Man* (LIB57).³⁵⁵

It furthermore seems highly significant in this context that while virtually all of Melville’s explicit references to Vere’s fatherliness are cut in the libretto – the only exception being the sailors’ declaration that “he cares for us like we are his sons” (LIB22) – the attribute of fatherliness nevertheless remains present in the text, where it has been re-allocated to none other than John Claggart. Claggart deliberately assumes a paternal role to gain power over the Novice, and as it turns out, his ploy is successful, for the Novice ultimately lives up to his promise to “do anything –

³⁵⁴ Both Melville’s and Forster’s first lieutenants appear to be conveniently forgetting Billy’s record as, respectively, a “fighting peacemaker” (BB20) and a man who gets into fights below decks (see Act I, Sc. 3). It is only Claggart who correctly recognises Billy’s good nature as potentially violent (see below).

³⁵⁵ The practice of impressment itself constitutes an act of violent appropriation which can be read as representing a whole complex of institutional and personal power mechanisms and motivations – in Sedgwick’s terms, structures of homosocial desire encoded in the male/male power relations of patriarchal society.

anything! [...] and you've said you'll protect me, spoke so fatherly to me when you found me crying. [...] I'll do anything you want" (LIB33). Claggart not only abuses the Novice's trust in his "fatherly" feelings for his own ends, he also has no qualms whatsoever about employing physical violence and threats to ensure that the Novice – who, as we remember, is "only a boy" (LIB19) – obeys his commands.

Claggart is thus seen to wield and abuse not only the institutional power invested in him by virtue of his position; he also taps into the far more personal power associated with the paternal role as a means to achieving his own goals. It seems not unimportant in this context that Claggart is also the only person to recognise Billy's potential for violence: he "malevolent[ly]" warns Squeak that Billy will "kill you if he catches you" (LIB18f). In Forster's texts, the effectiveness of "fatherly" manipulation can be seen to depend on the older man's accurate (if in many cases intuitive and unconscious) knowledge of what his "boy" might ultimately be capable of. It is this knowledge which enables Forster's 'dark' characters to channel power for their own gain in the economy of homosocial relations, whether they are dealing in strategic, 'political' power (like Henry Wilcox), or in sex (like Conway) – in cases like Claggart's and Warham's, the two might well be found to be inseparable. If "the father in [Vere]" (BB84) has been suppressed in the libretto, and if both fatherliness and *accurate* insight into men's characters resurface in Claggart instead, this might indicate yet another way in which Vere was being "rescu[ed] [...] from his creator" (EMFL II:237): represented "as a man" (LJ257) rather than a father, it is easier for the operatic Vere to appear innocent of the sinister power and manipulative knowledge associated with the paternal stance, particularly when contrasted with the tragic but none the less villainous figure of the operatic Claggart.

This would seem a good moment for returning to Forster's query: if there did exist some form of causal relationship between Vere's touch and the blow which Billy delivers to Claggart, then envisioning a "fatherly" Vere would enable a reading of Melville's novella in which "the father in [Vere]" had consciously and deliberately set up the private confrontation between the man who had attempted to blackmail him over a suspected prohibited desire, and the loyal but dim-witted "fighting peacemaker" (BB20) who can be trusted to believe that his commander is "his best helper and friend" (BB93). Examined in the light of Forsterian discourses about the manipulative channelling of paternal power, Vere could be seen to aim Billy's goodness – "the light within that irritates and explodes" – at the "evil" Claggart (AN97f.), and then set off the fuse through a "touch on Billy's shoulder" (EMFL II:237).³⁵⁶ Claggart's death, the object of such a strategy, would thereby be revealed as ef-

³⁵⁶ This reading shares significant structural similarities with the reading of Melville's novella proposed by Sedgwick. Sedgwick goes even further to suggest that the captain's ultimate objective is to have Billy's "magnificent torso hoisted up to 'a place that would more frequently bring him under his own observation'" (1990:109). In her reading, Vere's secret desire, "his preferred form of discipline depends [...] on positioning some male body not his own in a sacrificial 'bad eminence' of punitive visibility, an eminence that (in his intention) forms the organizing summit of what thereby becomes a triangle or pyramid of male relations" (106).

fectured with and through the “boy” Billy by Vere himself, acting from his position of absolute paternal empowerment. Vere’s subsequent invocation of legal formality, coupled with his lack of remorse at his masterpiece of cool strategic manipulation, would definitely class him with the most ‘odious’ characters in Forster’s own work (Agnes Pembroke springs to mind), whilst making the idea of his salvation according to the Forsterian paradigm a clear impossibility.

It is still possible, of course, to read the operatic Vere as pursuing the same strategy, despite Forster’s efforts at making him appear in a less ambiguous light than his counterpart in the novella.³⁵⁷ Indeed, Forster’s query, made during the period of his most intensive engagement with the figure of Vere,³⁵⁸ might be taken to signify Forster’s awareness that this character continued to be implicated in Billy’s deed as well as in his execution in problematic ways, and was proving sufficiently difficult to control to make “the rescuing of Vere from his creator [...] no small problem” (EMFL II:237).

Before I conclude this section, I wish to return once more to the Novice, the other “boy” in the *Billy Budd* libretto. Although he is clearly represented as the helpless victim of Claggart’s paternal manipulation, it is he who is seen to “betray” Billy by providing Claggart with “evidence against him” (LIB33f.). In section II.4.2.3.1. I propose that it is the Novice’s inability to place his faith in personal relationships which makes him vulnerable to Claggart’s machinations, and that this inability links him with the ‘dark’ character Rickie Elliot, who suffers from similar problems. There is another “boy” character in Forster’s own work who poignantly illustrates the fatal consequences that follow when “boys” to whom the concept of personal relationships is meaningless become ensnared by the supposedly benign paternalism of older men represented as father figures. This character is none other than Tibby Schlegel, whom we have already encountered involuntarily disclosing the identity of Leonard Bast to the irate Charles Wilcox.

Tibby, too, is “only a boy”, as we learn from his sister Margaret (HE175). Yet unlike most of the “boys” discussed above, the unmanly Oxford undergraduate Tibby does not fall into the category of desirable young men like Gino Carella, Imber, Freddy Honeychurch, and Billy Budd, but into the opposite category of Forster’s queer ‘dark’ characters who are ‘travelling light’. Tibby’s failure to aspire to typically masculine behaviour is criticised by his sisters; Margaret complains “I wish we had a real boy in the house – the kind of boy who cares for men. It would

³⁵⁷ In one of his discussions of the opera *Billy Budd*, Arnold Whittall remarked in passing that “it is possible to feel” that “the devious Captain Vere [...] uses Billy to fight his battle for him” (1982:125).

³⁵⁸ Forster’s letter to Trilling, which contains his query, was written in April 1949; the libretto draft produced in March had contained an extensive discussion between Vere and his officers during the trial, which was still largely in place in the August draft. It is only in the August draft that Vere begins to develop towards his present level of personal emotional involvement in Billy’s tragedy (for detailed discussion see section III.2.3.2.)

make entertaining so much easier".³⁵⁹ His unmanliness might, so his sisters playfully consider, be remedied by "a touch of the W.s" – i.e. the "irrevocably masculine" Wilcoxes, whose masculinity verges on the "brutal" (HE40f.). Tibby's most grievous and fundamental flaw, however, is that "he had never been interested in human beings": his "attention wandered when 'personal relations' came under discussion" (HE250). "Leav[ing] no hostages" among the conventions (HE306), untied by either financial or emotional obligations, he travels lighter even than Cyril Fielding.

And yet Tibby is not to be classed among Forster's disagreeable characters: for all that he is complacently conscious that he "understand[s] nobody" (HE251), and lacks the "human" experience of "young-manliness, that quality which warms the heart till death" (HE276), Tibby is nevertheless willing to execute Helen's "commissions" regarding her intended legacy to the Basts, and does not appear to censor his sister's unconventionality – as Forster's ascetics, e.g. Herbert Pembroke or Cecil Vyse, "turned so cynical about women" (RV207) after Lucy's marriage to George, might have done. Tibby is merely "amazed [...] to think what haycocks people can make of their lives" (HE251); "frigid [...] without cruelty", and "indifferen[t] to people" (HE276), he views Helen's troubling absence and Margaret's worries like "a scene behind footlights" (HE277) that does not touch him personally.

Tibby is "not enough interested in human life to see where things will lead to". It is for this reason that, pressed hard by Charles Wilcox, he provides him with the name of Bast – the crucial piece of information which alone makes Charles's fatal attack on Leonard possible. It is "without intending to" that he thus ends up "betray[ing] his sister's confidence", and he is "deeply vexed, not only for the harm he had done Helen, but for the flaw he had discovered in his own equipment", having "a strong regard for honesty" and for keeping his word (HE307f.).

His greatest betrayal, however, takes place before this, and passes unnoticed: it is he who suggests that Margaret might "tell Mr Wilcox" about Helen's troublesome behaviour. It is his "student's belief in experts", coupled with the fact that Henry Wilcox is a "practical" man, which leads him to produce this piece of advice. Margaret finds herself at a loss as to what to do: Helen has "passed into chaos" in London, "a caricature of infinity", Tibby is "all that she had left, and never had he seemed more unsubstantial", and he has moreover suggested that Helen's incomprehensible behaviour might be due to "something mental" (HE277), i.e. insanity. Margaret, "lost on the infinite sea" (LIB63) like the Novice and the unsaved Vere, comes to feel that Henry Wilcox is "the only hope" because he is "definite" and "might know of some paths in the chaos that were hidden from them". When she decides to "lay the whole matter in his hands", she

³⁵⁹ By a "boy who cares for men," Margaret presumably means a male eager to interact with other males on a social basis and according to masculine codes of behaviour, not a male who harbours erotic interest for other males; yet Forster's choice of this ambiguous formulation seems suggestive.

thereby agrees to consign (or, in effect, to betray) her “queer” (HE278) sister into Henry’s paternal power. Henry’s lack of “scruples” (HE280) and his “deft[ness]” at arranging “the capture of Helen” can be seen to stand representative for the patriarchal “machinery” (PtI196) which, employing doctors and other “specialist[s]” (HE280), and drawing “its ethics from the wolf-pack” (HE279), enforces social and medical conformity by “labell[ing]” those who deviate from the “normal” in order to “deny [their] human rights” (HE286).

Margaret soon realises her mistake, and makes futile attempts at wresting her discursive empowerment (which can be seen to depend on the Schlegel universe’s separate existence from that of the Wilcoxes’, the world of “telegrams and anger”, HE170) back from her husband, declaring that Helen’s “madness” is “madness when I say it, but not when you say it”. Tibby, by contrast, is impressed by what he regards as Henry’s “very tippy plan” to lure Helen to Howards End under false pretences and then force her to see “a specialist” (HE280f.).

Unlike Margaret, who believes in personal relationships, Tibby is ready to abandon the Schlegels’ “particular language”, which represents not only their belief in dealing with one another honestly on a basis of equality, but also their view of life and the universe. He points out that their “whole difficulty” arises from the fact that Helen “won’t talk your particular language” – will not, in fact, communicate at all. By turning to this logic of expediency, he aligns himself with the masculine world and with the paternalistic Henry Wilcox as its representative, who holds that “no education can teach women logic” (HE280f.). Tibby’s deferral to Henry Wilcox’s paternal power can be regarded as an example of dramatic irony, since by adopting the Wilcox point of view, he can be seen to fulfil his sisters’ wish that he should become more masculine. His case illustrates that the fatherless “boy” who lacks the lodestar of belief in personal relationships will end up betraying those who can and do steer by that creed. In the economy of patriarchal power, he functions as an unassigned *carte blanche* that can be enlisted into the service of older men. Under the mantle of paternalism, these men are able to manipulate not only the “boys” who trust in them but also the larger mechanisms of social control to their own advantage, and they can as often as not be seen to be in more or less conscious collusion with the repressive and normative forces of patriarchal society.

That not all “boys” need necessarily be the hapless victims of older men’s wiles is suggested in “Dr Woolacott” (1927): Clesant’s visitor, the ghost of a young working-class man, tells him that when Woolacott offered to “patch [him] up”, “I took his measure, I was only a boy then, but I refused” (LtC91). Since this is a ghost talking, however, it must be assumed that the price for this refusal to submit to the power of Woolacott – who can be seen to represent the repressive mechanisms of heteronormative society – was death.

II.4. Textual relationships: four case studies

II.4.1. “Ralph and Tony” (1903)

This story about a triangular relationship involving two young men and a young woman – one of Forster’s earliest literary endeavours – contains some of the most striking parallels to elements of Melville’s *Billy Budd*, and to Forster’s own late adaptation of it.³⁶⁰ The male protagonists of the story present a very clear example of the ‘dark’/‘light’ character constellation, albeit one that features a homophobic ‘light’ character. Concomitant with the latter’s appearance is the fact that the class difference between the ‘dark’ and the ‘light’ character is less distinctive than in most of the other texts featuring this pairing. It is furthermore worth noting that

³⁶⁰ The manuscript, left untitled by Forster, was catalogued and bound as an unfinished novel by the King’s College archivists in 1971 (KCC: EMF1/8), at which time it received its present title (Heine 1980:viii.f). It is, however, perfectly possible to read it as a complete short story. Forster’s own position regarding the completeness or incompleteness of this text seems fated to remain unknown, as his surviving letters and diaries make no mention of any story resembling it (Heine 1980:x). The fact that it was apparently never submitted for publication seems hardly surprising: not only can the characters of Ralph and his mother be seen to contain a number of autobiographical elements which Forster may have considered too revealing, but in opening the prospect of Ralph’s marriage to Margaret – a marriage which will, it is suggested, also serve to accommodate a love relationship between Ralph and Tony in some form or other – Forster explicitly endorses a prohibited solution to what could be described in general terms as a bisexual’s dilemma in a heteronormative society.

this early story is one of the few among Forster's surviving texts in which not just the 'dark' but also the 'light' character can clearly be seen to stand in need of spiritual salvation.

The story is set in a hotel in Tyrol, where Ralph Holme, a young man of about twenty-three, and his mother, who are travelling about Europe together, encounter Tony, a young medical student and keen mountaineer, and Margaret, his sister, who are taking their yearly holiday in the Alps. Ralph is eager to strike up a friendship with both siblings, and indeed succeeds in winning the affections of Margaret; however, Tony initially feels highly antagonistic towards Ralph, whom he considers affected and decadent. Ralph's proposal, made to Tony, of marrying Margaret so that they can all three live together, precipitates an outbreak of physical violence on Tony's part, whereupon Ralph attempts a solitary – one might well say suicidal – ascent of one of the local mountains. Tony, who feels duty-bound to preserve human life, comes to rescue him, suffers an unexpected heart attack and is in his turn rescued by Ralph. Having suddenly to come to terms with the fact that he is now an invalid, Tony undergoes an emotional development which enables him to reconsider his relationship with Ralph. After a private interview between the two men, the story ends with the prospect of Ralph's and Margaret's marriage, and, it is suggested, a life of quiet domesticity for all three of them together.

The 'dark' character, Ralph, is quite literally depicted as a sombre figure. He is "dressed entirely in black, with a loose black tie, a little black moustache, black eyes, and quantities of long black hair" (AS67); his appearance is considered "effeminate and unorthodox" by the other guests at the hotel (AS77).³⁶¹ He has a thoughtful and imaginative nature that verges on the eccentric: we first encounter him on the hotel balcony giving symbolically significant names to the surrounding mountains (AS67), and, a little later in the story, Margaret and Tony come upon him kneeling in a clearing in the rain, to all appearances "pray[ing] to the mountains" (AS74). Ralph's weak health is repeatedly alluded to (AS68, 72); his mother tells Margaret that he is "not strong", that he has been "not at all well" – although she hastens to add that there is "nothing serious" the matter with him – and explains furthermore that he is hampered by indecision and irresolution, which prevents him from "doing and accomplishing" anything, including his not unpromising attempts at writing poetry (AS70f.). The young intellectual with the delicate constitution and a tendency to depressiveness thus already exhibits many of what were to emerge as the typical 'dark' traits in Forster's favoured male/male character constellation, including also, albeit as a marginal detail, a slightly higher social

³⁶¹ Nicola Beauman (137, note) has remarked that Forster's Ralph Holme "has some similarities" with Ralph Touchett from Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Elizabeth Heine, too, has noted that "the influence of Henry James's later fiction, in which much that is unspoken transpires in a gesture, seems to lie behind the story of Ralph's love for Tony and his sister Margaret" (1980:ix f.).

position than that of the 'light' character: the Holmes are "well off", even "quite rich" (AS71) middle-class people. Moreover, Ralph has no profession, which leaves him and his mother free to travel about Europe at their leisure. By contrast, Tony is studying to be a doctor (AS72, 86), and "works hard all the year in London" (AS71). While the profession he aspires to still marks him as a member of the middle classes, the difference in status nevertheless seems worth recording because it prefigures the pattern that was later to come to occupy so central a position among Forster's ideas and ideals about relationships between men. On the other hand, Tony's middle-class identity is consistent with the figure of the homophobic 'light' character.

In most respects, Tony represents a typical Forsterian 'light' character. He is described as possessing the "semblance of [a] radiant demigod who had seen into heaven", a quality which is linked to his experience of mountaineering and physical exertion. In Margaret's eyes, he is "so lovable, so tall and strong" that it is "no wonder [...] that anyone liked him"; she believes that "man, woman or child could [not] do otherwise" – and indeed Mrs Holme duly compliments her on her "handsome brother" (AS69f.). Notwithstanding the fact that he is a medical student who lives and works in London (AS71, 72, 86), Tony is essentially associated with physical strength, untamed animality and the forces of life and nature: "something in his shy rough manner" reminds his sister of "a beautiful half-wild animal, to whom the valley is a place to visit rather than a home" (AS70); unshaven, he appears to Ralph "more like an animal than ever" (AS80). Surprised on the mountainside by a thunderstorm, Tony walks downhill "singing or rather howling, mad with bodily excitement and the joy of life" (AS73f.). Like the "thoroughbred pagan" Stephen Wonham (LJ123), and reminiscent of Melville's "upright barbarian" Billy Budd (BB26), Tony is

in fact a pure pagan, all the more complete for being unconscious, living the glorious unquestioning life of the body, with instinct as a soul. Intellect he had, and also that nameless residue which some suppose will be immortal, but it was still far in the background, and he had made only the physical parts truly his own. (AS89)

From Margaret we learn that his instinctive insight into emotional issues can be "extraordinary" (AS79), even though he is not given to conscious analysis, and possesses furthermore "no worldly tact": unwilling or unable to temper his attitude with the sympathy (or the polite evasiveness) that would make him a successful participant in social intercourse, he offends Mrs Holme by agreeing too frankly with her criticisms of Ralph (AS75). Conversation with him otherwise "inevitably tend[s] to mountaineering", and, it is implied, he frequently bores his listeners (with the exception of his sister) by "hold[ing] forth on his passion" in "monologue[s]", talking "gravely and slowly, without the slightest suspicion of brag". This detail of his social behaviour serves to underline Tony's masculinity, conver-

sational skills being explicitly associated with “the feminine desire to make things go off easy” (AS68). The eloquent, “effeminate” Ralph becomes, by simple contrast, associated with unmanliness – an association which is reinforced by the fact that, being of a delicate constitution, he quite naturally keeps company with his mother and Margaret, together with whom he participates in the former’s “gentle ladylike interest in botany”, taking “modest walks in search of wild flowers” and passing the evenings “very pleasantly away in classification and scientific chatter”, or reading aloud from Jane Austen, “that least disturbing of all expounders of human nature”. Meanwhile, Tony’s “strenuous” masculinity is yet further emphasised through his association with a group of local chamois-hunters: he is depicted as “living among clouds and glaciers, faring roughly among rough men, with his thoughts upon chamois and eagles” (AS78).

The strong polarisation between masculine and feminine gender roles in “Ralph and Tony” not only serves to throw into sharp relief the fact that Ralph’s behaviour is at odds with the ideal prescribed by social norm to his gender, but also exposes the shortcomings of that ideal, for Tony, who admittedly represents its extreme embodiment, “would have trampled in disgust over these innocent pursuits of the valley.” Ralph and Margaret “felt instinctively that he would not sympathise with their placid though not ignoble life.” Indeed, their apprehensions are subsequently proved right when Tony, returning from the chamois-hunt, “mischievously” uses the botanical specimens they have collected “to wipe the mud off his boots” (AS78f.). While this deliberate destructiveness constitutes an act of revenge for Ralph’s and Margaret’s increasing intimacy, of which Tony is jealous,³⁶² it also expresses his intolerant contempt for their gentle pastime, and might even be regarded, by extension, as a subtle denouncement of the “ignoble” or inferior status accorded to many of the more ‘feminine’ occupations in the gendered hierarchy of Victorian and Edwardian patriarchal society.

Yet masculine brutality in “Ralph and Tony”, as in a number of Forster’s other works, is an ambiguous issue. When Tony unexpectedly “burst[s] down” upon Ralph and Margaret as they are botanising, the peaceful scene in which Ralph is shown “lying on his face adoring the fragile Grass of Parnassus which sentiment

³⁶² The relationship between Tony and Margaret appears to comprise an erotic component, an impression which arises not only from Tony’s possessive jealousy of his sister (AS79, 81), but also from the fact that his masculine attractiveness is at times presented through Margaret’s adoring eyes (AS70, 78). There exists no apparent differentiation between Margaret’s and Ralph’s desire for Tony – a phenomenon which could be linked to the marginalized or, at any rate, unarticulated status of sexuality in this early text (see note 369 below). It might nevertheless be speculated whether, in creating his young heroic pagan and his sister, Forster as a Wagnerian may not consciously or unconsciously have been inspired by the model of Siegmund and Sieglinde from Wagner’s opera *Die Walküre*, which plays a crucial role in one of the most popular novels of the French *Décadence* – Elémir Bourges’s *Le Crépuscule des Dieux* of 1884 – and which was to serve Thomas Mann as a creative foil in his novella *Wälsungenblut* of 1905. For an in-depth study of Wagner’s influence on late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature see Koeppen; the incest motif is treated in his chapter B 1, 144-160.

forbade him to pick” is shattered by the intrusion of Tony’s downright archetypically masculine presence, which is, however, for all its aggression and roughness, presented as attractive:

[Margaret] thought she detected anger as well as greeting in his call. He was unshaven, there was blood on his clothes, and the men who followed him carried a dead chamois slung from a pole. He embraced her tumultuously, like some successful freebooter, nodding curtly to [Ralph], and she felt him full of the brutality as well as the beauty of the hills. (AS78)

When Ralph enters Tony’s room to make his proposal of marriage, he notes that, in contrast to his own quarters, which he has furnished with “little luxuries” such as “toilet-vinegar, night socks, some poetry”, and postcards of Italian Renaissance paintings, Tony’s domain contains “nothing pretty or comfortable”. Yet, again, this is presented as positive: “It was, he thought, the room of a man who despised adjuncts because he was sufficient in himself, a man who was no mere physical roisterer, but whose brain approved the deeds of his hands”. Ralph’s admiration for such self-sufficiency goes so far as to make him feel “crushed and contemptible” (AS79). It seems that he is only too aware of the distance that separates his own existence from the masculine ideal as embodied by Tony, to whom he evidently feels inferior at this point, but whose love he desperately desires.

For his part, Tony is inclined to be verbally aggressive and even cruel towards Ralph (AS72, 74). The young intellectual evokes in him a feeling of revulsion that is “inevitable” (AS69), conforming as it does with the other hotel guests’ resentment of Ralph’s appearance as “effeminate and unorthodox” – the other guests being “chiefly maiden ladies” (AS77), the stereotypical Forsterian representatives and guardians of middle-class norms and prejudices in general, and of ideas about appropriate gender behaviour in particular. After the siblings’ first encounter with Ralph, Tony pronounces him “decadent”, and, “trembling with physical repulsion”, expresses his distaste to Margaret with vehemence: “Bring me a bath [...] and a flesh-brush and a toothbrush – especially a toothbrush – for I’ve a bad taste in my mouth and he’s left me nasty all over. [...] Horrible! Who will wipe him out!” It is Tony himself who reveals the cause for this violent revulsion as he explains himself further to Margaret:

I know he likes us – both of us. [...] When he turned back and said that he had been waiting for this evening for months he meant he’d been waiting for us. Just imagine! An affectionate worm, waiting, waiting. Oh, the man’s unhealthy, body and soul – affected, decadent, morbid, neurotic. He – he stinks! [...] I only wish you hated him as I do. He likes us. (AS69)

Later, having repeatedly insulted Ralph in a conversation, Tony remarks to Margaret that “there’s not another man alive who wouldn’t have turned on his heel and

left me, or else hit me over the mouth. But he – well, he’s not a man – soft and rotten through and through” (AS72).

The hotel guests’ and particularly Tony’s comments contain several key expressions that typically mark discourses about homosexuals, such as “decadent”, “affected”, “not a man”, i.e. unmanly, and “effeminate”. The same goes for the general association of this male, who deviates from the accepted stereotype of masculinity, with the concept of disease.³⁶³ Moreover, Tony not only clearly recognises Ralph’s yearning for affection for what it is, but evidently feels his own masculinity at risk in the continuing confrontation with the unmanly Ralph. Told by Margaret that he “merely put[s] himself in a false position by bullying”, he surprises her by swearing unrestrainedly, before declaring:

I’m in a false position whenever I look at him or speak to him or when he speaks to me. He has only to come into a room and we catch him like a disease, and become affected and unnatural like himself. You as well as I – nothing true or sincere ever since he’s been with us.” (AS73)³⁶⁴

Tony’s panic at being confronted with homosexual desire becomes fully evident as he comes “bursting into [Margaret’s] room half undressed” after their expedition into the hills, during which the siblings have observed Ralph “praying” in a clearing:

“I can wait no longer,” he cried. “It’s driving me mad. When he was praying in the wet he was praying for us.”³⁶⁵ Oh, it’s torture. Who will wipe him out!” He was seized again with the terrible physical repulsion he had had the first night. He went trembling away, groping his way out of the room [...]. (AS77)

Ralph for his part confides to Margaret that he has “a sore place”: “I have had one so long, and at first I thought it right and fine to hide it. But it never healed, and

³⁶³ As a medical student in particular, Tony would probably have subscribed to the contemporary view of homosexuality as a pathological condition, which in the late nineteenth century began to supersede, but never entirely to replace, the older classification as sin and moral depravity (see Weeks 23-32).

³⁶⁴ It seems curious that it should be Tony who should feel himself “in a false position”, since it is classically the homosexual whose deviance from the social norm leads him to experience feelings of dissociation and isolation. Tony’s unease may point to the destabilising effect which being the object of Ralph’s affection has upon him, but also to the degree to which Ralph’s ‘contagious’ effeminacy challenges his own concept of what constitutes ‘proper’ masculine behaviour, as opposed to the “affected and unnatural” behaviour he and Margaret “catch” from Ralph.

³⁶⁵ Since Tony himself decides that Ralph’s prayers are addressed “to the mountains” (AS74), the meaning of the phrase “praying for us”, both in this context and in the light of later events, may probably best be understood as “praying to obtain us”, rather than “praying for our salvation”, especially since Tony has already realised that Ralph has been “waiting” for him and Margaret (AS69). This reading emphasises Tony’s resentment at being pursued by Ralph, as well as his helplessness and fear at finding himself the object of Ralph’s pursuit.

now I show it to everyone. Of course they crowd round to look, and then they shudder and go away. But what else am I to do? The only hope is to show it". Asked for more information about his "malady", he somewhat vaguely describes it as "the malady of anyone who has ever had a little brain. I worry because I can't find a standard, because I can't understand people, because things ought to fit in and don't." He further explains that his condition makes him "insincere on the surface – but that is part of my sore. The wish below is different"; and he finishes by confessing: "I'd rather have said this to Tony [...] but he wouldn't have listened. Sometime you might tell him. I may have done endless harm by speaking, but it's not as foolish as keeping silence" (AS75f).

To a reader accustomed to marking the subtle hints that may point to hidden discourses about homosexuality, Ralph's declarations would seem to leave little doubt as to the nature of his affliction. Indeed it transpires that Margaret is fully capable of decoding these hints, too; for as she contemplates Ralph's personality and his situation a little later, she realises that at the root of his unhappiness there lies

one eternal sorrowful fact which no amount of talk or thought could melt away, the fact that Ralph wanted the people he loved to love him. It was so simple after all, so simple and so unsurmountable [*sic*]. [...] He merely needed human love, and then without argument or effort all his doubts and weaknesses and unhappiness would disappear. His mother [...] did not realise what he really needed, nor could she have supplied it if she did. But Tony was strong and young [...]. If he and Ralph – for Ralph was worthy of him – had become friends, their friendship might have been heroic, on a level with the great examples of history. But something evil had come between him and Tony [...] and unless the impossible happened all hope was gone. (AS77)

Ralph's yearning for affection makes him appear pathetic: as Tony descends from the mountains, "full of the brutality as well as the beauty of the hills", Ralph becomes "restless, hovering round [Tony and Margaret] all the way home, thinking he ought to leave them, longing to be with them, hungering shamelessly for some kind word or sign" (AS78f). Again, the attraction of masculine brutality clearly outweighs any repulsive aspects it might comprise, and Ralph remains tenacious in his pursuit of Tony even though he has already experienced Tony's brutality in the shape of verbal bullying, as Tony himself admits to his sister:

The things I've said – or rather the way I've said things! [...] I went a bit further – said I was studying medicine and that he seemed pretty rotten physically. He swallowed that too. Then – what do you think I said next? – Hinted that his head wasn't over-sound either. [...] But what do you think he did? Sighed – and said I was right. (AS72)

Tony's bullying may be seen as the defensive reaction against the advances of a man whose existence is so alien to his own; and his attempt to pathologise Ralph might be considered an attempt to distance himself even further from a person whom he, like the society in which he exists, regards as deviant. At the same time, there are clear indications that Tony is not only conscious of the power he holds over Ralph, but also takes an almost sadistic pleasure in exerting that power. When he tells Margaret how he has been bullying Ralph, his account, besides giving expression to his bewilderment, contains an unmistakable element of boastfulness – indeed he himself laughingly admits that his behaviour is “absolutely immoral”, but that he “simply [doesn't] seem to mind” because Ralph “really is too awful” (AS72). His sister increasingly perceives his behaviour as “militant and aggressive”; she deplores the fact that he is “so obviously feeling his muscles and practising his strokes, before ever a challenge had been breathed or even thought of” (AS79). Her concession indicates her awareness and possibly even her fear of the violent potential in her brother's character which he does not care to control.

This violence finally erupts in Ralph's first private interview with Tony, in which Ralph, driven by the courage of despair, or so it seems, advances his unconventional marriage proposal. At the beginning of their conversation, Tony's behaviour is surprisingly calm and rational: even though he bluntly informs Ralph that he does not like him, his voice as he tells him so is “almost kind”, and in reaction to Ralph's passionate plea for love, he merely declares matter-of-factly that he is not interested. However, his temporary magnanimity shortly afterwards gives way to a rather selfish insistence that Ralph do not tell Margaret about their interview; for Tony apparently fears that his refusal to “join” in their projected marriage would lose him his sister's affection, and that he would “be parted from her”. He deliberately and callously attempts what amounts to an emotional blackmailing of Ralph: “you say you like me, and I don't see why I shouldn't take advantage of that. If you like me, do not speak”. He admits that his demand is “the word of a beast” and, “grinning”, gloats over the miserable Ralph, whom he has manoeuvred into a position of complete powerlessness:

“Either way you ruin me – do you know?”

“I know,” cried Tony, rubbing his hands as if he had a devil.

Tony's sadistic pleasure in this triumph over the weaker man turns into physical violence when Ralph breaks down and, in his desperation, pathetically begs for the love Tony will not give him: “he fell prone on the floor at Tony's feet, crying, moaning, imploring to be loved. And Tony, without a word, set his teeth and kicked him with all his force, again and again, till his supplications turned to agony, and he rolled away towards the door” (AS80f).³⁶⁶ Tony's transgression is met

³⁶⁶ This incident appears to foreshadow the scene at the end of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, in which Gino, maintaining a similar silence, attempts to torture Philip Herriton to death. In Gino's case, the violence he has recourse to may be regarded as an act of retaliation or even of self-defence,

with prompt punishment, however; for, pitiable as Ralph appears in this scene, he is “not as pitiable as Tony, who staggered onto the bed cursing himself, with his hand upon his heart” (AS81) – struck by the first harbinger of the disease which will ultimately purge him of his excessive masculinity and of his homophobic prejudices.

At this moment, Tony’s and Ralph’s respective structural positions can both be compared to those of Claggart and Billy. Tony’s violence may be seen to constitute a parallel to Claggart’s indirect violation of Billy’s innocence through his false accusation. Both acts of violence can be construed as arising from homophobia, and are immediately followed by a penalty – which in Tony’s case does not take quite as fatal a form as that suffered by the master-at-arms, who is given no opportunity to redeem himself.³⁶⁷ While Ralph can and probably should be regarded primarily as the victim of Tony’s violence, analogously to Billy with respect to Claggart, his persistent entreaties to be loved might nevertheless also be regarded as an act of provocation or aggression that precipitates Tony into a situation he is finally unable to deal with. Regarded in this light, Tony’s violence becomes a parallel to Billy’s violence, to which the latter has recourse because words fail him in the face of Claggart’s accusation. One might, in fact, as Robert Martin has done, read Ralph’s supplications as an attempt to “force[...] Tony into an engagement with his body, even if it is one of attack” (1997:260).³⁶⁸

The textual evidence of “Ralph and Tony” would seem insufficient to support a reading of Tony’s hatred as the self-denying homophobic reaction of a closeted homosexual. The extent to which he himself feels attracted to Ralph remains doubtful, and it remains open to interpretation whether their final reconciliation comprises anything beyond the promise of friendship – indeed, the concrete issues of sexuality are treated with characteristic reticence in this story.³⁶⁹ Tony’s initial hatred of Ralph, while exhibiting strong elements of homophobia, can at the same time be seen to comprise the contempt of the pragmatic, physically active

because Philip has been trying to make him accept the loss of his baby son in a rational ‘English’ manner which apparently runs contrary to the needs of Gino’s personality, and furthermore epitomises the cultural conflict around which the novel is constructed (see section II.5.1.3.).

³⁶⁷ Since the fact of Claggart’s death is inevitably dictated by Melville’s disposition of his material, Forster’s only way of redeeming this character to some extent was to clarify the motive for his hatred, and thus enable the audience to sympathise with him.

³⁶⁸ See discussion in section II.5.2.3.

³⁶⁹ Forster’s determination to maintain a certain standard of representational decency – or, possibly, as Beauman has suggested, his deeply ingrained habit of “disguis[ing] his references through *double entendre*” (122) – can be observed even in Forster’s erotic fiction not written for publication, which tends to be allusive rather than graphic in its depictions of sexuality. Forster’s reticence about sexual matters in his published work was certainly noticed, and, in some cases, criticised, by his contemporaries, a famous example of these criticisms being Katherine Mansfield’s much-quoted comment about the conception of Helen Schlegel’s child: Mansfield noted in her diary that she could “never be perfectly certain whether Helen was got with child by Leonard Bast or by his fatal forgotten umbrella” (121).

professional for the “malady of anyone who has ever had a little brain” (AS76), i.e. the perhaps somewhat convoluted complexity of the artistic intellectual.

The entire phenomenon of Tony’s intolerance is linked to his emotionally uncivilised personality – the deficiency which Forster was to call the “undeveloped heart” in his “Notes on the English Character” of 1926 (AH5). It is this emotional deficiency – his “stupidity”, to use the expression employed by Margaret – that Tony has to overcome before he can progress towards spiritual completeness through a reconciliation with the object of his contempt. The price exacted for this emotional and spiritual development is quite staggering – for, since the physical abilities Tony has lost are closely associated with his masculinity, it might be argued that his metamorphosis amounts, by inference, to nothing less than an emasculation. To enter the gentle civilisation of a feminine-gendered culture which values the *developed* heart, the wild male, so it appears, must be castrated.³⁷⁰ At the same time, Tony’s loss of all that represented his former existence may well be regarded as analogous to the operatic Billy’s loss of his actual existence in the world – both losses constitute a payment for a salutary connection and a transition to a higher level of consciousness, however unwanted by either of them.³⁷¹

Deprived suddenly of his former identity as a purely physical being, Tony spends a sleepless night battling with “misfortune and despair” (AS90). The formulation Forster uses to describe his spiritual struggle is reminiscent of Claggart’s despair as he reflects “what hope remains if love can escape? If love still lives and grows strong where I cannot enter, what hope is there in my own dark world for me?” (LIB33): Tony “passed long uncertainties before he could hope that any-

³⁷⁰ Forster’s drastic resolution is reminiscent of that chosen by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* (1847), in which the eminently masculine, even violent Mr Rochester has to suffer a comparable loss of physical abilities before he becomes an acceptable partner for the eponymous heroine. Lionel Trilling took issue with the ending of *Howards End*, which shows similar traits: “It is not entirely a happy picture on which Forster concludes, this rather contrived scene of busyness and contentment in the hayfield; the male is too thoroughly gelded, and of the two women, Helen confesses that she cannot love a man, Margaret that she cannot love a child” (116). Trilling’s criticism, though accurate, seems predicated on normative ideas about what ought to make human beings happy; it fails to perceive the subversive nature of the novel’s concluding idyll, which could be read as a queer alternative to heteronormative conceptions of the ‘natural’ patriarchal family as the ‘proper’ vehicle of continuity. The resolution to the problem of masculine domination presented in *Howards End* also echoes “Ralph and Tony”: both Tony and Henry Wilcox have to suffer a devastating experience before they are able to achieve their spiritual development in the form of a reconciliation with their former antagonists, Ralph Holme and Helen Schlegel respectively. In Henry Wilcox’s case the catalytic event is the conviction of his son Charles for manslaughter, which deprives him entirely of his former strength: after the trial, “Henry’s fortress gave way. He could bear no one but his wife, he shambled up to Margaret afterwards and asked her to do what she could with him” (HE332). His experience temporarily turns Henry into an “invalid” (HE337), leaving him “not ill” but “eternally tired” (HE334) for the rest of his life. See my discussion of the ‘breaking’ of Henry Wilcox in section II.3.10.3. For discussion of a further parallel between “Ralph and Tony” and *Howards End*, see note 372 below.

³⁷¹ For a discussion of the question of Billy’s salvation, see section I.4.3., p.97; for discussion of the ‘light’ character’s salvation in general, see sections II.2.2.3. and II.3.8.

thing might remain for him". His salvation begins when he starts to "regain his sympathies for others". In this positive fictional resolution of the conflict between homoerotic attraction and homophobia, Tony manages to achieve what is denied to Claggart: he overcomes his homophobic disgust for Ralph, realising that he himself now desires that Ralph should marry his sister. He even acknowledges the young man's human greatness: he feels that he cannot "gauge the thoughts of Ralph, so heroic under the extreme misery, so utterly true in word and spirit" (AS91).

It is the insightful Margaret who is partly responsible for the successful outcome of Tony's inner struggle. For, after the climactic incident of Tony's heart attack, Margaret, unable to gain an explanation as to what the "something evil" (AS77) that has come between Ralph and Tony might be, urges her brother to reconsider his attitude towards Ralph: "you must not be stupid. [...] There has been something evil crushing us and Ralph too, and for a time that thing was fate and we could not shake it off. But the time may be coming when it will only be there because we are stupid, and that would be appalling" (AS89).³⁷² The reference, in this context, to an evil "fate" whose power over the lives of men is not, however, absolute, but may be averted if a certain emotional 'stupidity' is overcome, can be seen to resurface in the libretto of *Billy Budd*, in which both Vere and Billy appear to experience a salutary personal communion and are subsequently able to derive spiritual comfort from the memory of having sighted "the far-shining sail that's not Fate" (LIB61).

Tony does not resign himself to "fate" – as the Novice does in *Billy Budd*, albeit under pressure from Claggart. Instead, he "at last" starts "fighting" to avert the emotional and spiritual "wreck" that threatens all three of them, and decides to attempt a personal communion with Ralph, despite the fact that "it seemed impossible and it was certainly humiliating to try" (AS91f.). Tony's sentiments of trepidation, and his overcoming of them, which enables him to attain his spiritual "victory" (AS92) in the reconciliation with Ralph, may, in spite of the differences in setting and situation, be seen as a parallel to the despair and guilty apprehension with which Forster's Vere contemplates the prospect of his private interview with the condemned Billy ("How can he pardon? How receive me?", LIB58), and which he, too, has to overcome before he can achieve salvation.

In a striking instance of creative parallelism, the private communion between Ralph and Tony takes the form of a closeted interview. The precise nature of this communion remains even more obscure than Melville's speculative account of what might have transpired between Vere and Billy. Only the outcome is made

³⁷² Margaret's mediating function could be compared to that fulfilled by Mr Emerson in *A Room with a View* as he exhorts Lucy not to deny her true feelings for George ("Lying to Mr Emerson", RV201f.). It furthermore clearly prefigures the function of Margaret Schlegel as mediatrix in bringing about the reconciliation between Henry Wilcox and her sister Helen in *Howards End*; Margaret's "Only connect" speech in Ch. 22 could be considered an elaboration of the earlier Margaret's "Don't be stupid".

explicit: as Ralph comes into the garden after several hours to fetch Margaret, his face has “become happy” – what has taken place is evidently far more than a superficial and formal “reconciliation”. All that is offered are little hints: from her room, Margaret “heard them sometimes talking but more often silent, and once Ralph seemed simply to be reading aloud” (AS91f.). The scene thus evoked is one of civilised domestic leisure of the kind associated with Ralph, for, as we remember, one of the pastimes of the “placid though not ignoble life” favoured by Ralph and Margaret is reading aloud from Jane Austen (AS78). It is Margaret who understands that the young men “want to be left alone” (AS92), and who guards their privacy against the bewildered intrusions of Mrs Holme;³⁷³ she is effectively in league with the narrator here, who, like Melville’s narrator, appears to feel that there should be “privacy” to cover the “sacrament [...] wherever [...] two of great nature’s nobler order embrace” (BB102). Margaret feels “strangely peaceful and confident” because “if Tony was at last fighting too she did not see how they could fail of victory” (AS92). Earlier passages (e.g. Margaret’s exhortation “you must not be stupid” on AS89, and Tony’s visionary dream on AS90) suggest that what Tony has begun to fight is indeed his emotional ‘stupidity’, and that the victory will consist in a spiritual development that will make Ralph’s vision of their life together come true after all.

³⁷³ To Elizabeth Heine, “Margaret functions as an entirely transparent medium for Ralph’s love for Tony” (1980:x). Rightly contesting this view, Robert Martin has written that “although it is clearly true that the essential relation in the story is that between the two men, [...] Ralph’s love for Tony and his love for Margaret, although possibly of different intensities and different corporealities, are meant, at least, to be equally valid” (1997:258). Besides fulfilling her role of “obedient handmaid” (AS91) and mediatrix between the two men, Margaret arguably has her place in the queer *ménage à trois* envisioned by Forster in a way that his later sisters and spouses – Maurice’s sisters, Clive’s wife Anne, or Rickie’s wife Agnes, and even Stephen Wonham’s unnamed wife, to name only the most prominent examples – do not.

II.4.2. The Longest Journey (1907)

II.4.2.1. Introduction and synopsis

Of all of Forster's novels it is *The Longest Journey* which possesses the most striking points of connection with both Melville's *Billy Budd* and Forster's libretto adaptation of that text. Its main 'light' character, the pagan saviour figure Stephen Wonham, though in many respects more worldly than Melville's innocent Billy, nevertheless bears a strong family resemblance to the Handsome Sailor. This emerges most notably in his robust good looks, his classlessness, and his fundamental innocence of the tortuous intellectualism or snobbish hypocrisy of the urban middle-class mind. The 'dark' character's desire for this 'light' figure emerges in the novel's protagonist Rickie Elliot, but also in Agnes Pembroke, in whom the suppression of erotic desire is shown to fuel hatred of the desired.

The Longest Journey can furthermore be seen to address certain themes and motifs which also appear in Melville's novella. These include the concepts of (mis)representation and relativity, as well as an opposition set up between a spiritually dead or tainted urban civilisation and an idealised, unsophisticated pastoral population or working-class brotherhood: a similar opposition is set up in Melville's novella between all "landsmen" who represent "citified man", tainted by contact with "the urbane Serpent" (BB26f.), and the "juvenile race" of sailors "as a class" (BB69), whose "exuberance of vitality", though not "without vices", is fundamentally "in accordance with natural law" (BB26). Finally, both texts show a preoccupation with spiritual mysticism. Through reading Melville's novella and the opera libretto through the lens of *The Longest Journey*, I hope to highlight the narrative patterns which link the Forsterian imagination with Melville's material, and which may have had their subtle background influence on the changes which Forster made to the story and characters of *Billy Budd* in his libretto adaptation.

The Longest Journey traces the career of Rickie Elliot, a young middle-class man with a hereditary physical disability – he has a deformed foot – who loses both parents at the age of fifteen. He briefly finds his ideal spiritual home in the Cambridge of his undergraduate days, its atmosphere of all-male intellectual fellowship epitomised in his homoerotically tinged friendship with the lower middle-class philosophy scholar Stewart Ansell. While Rickie is on a visit to some family friends, the schoolmaster Herbert Pembroke and his younger sister Agnes, Agnes's fiancé, the athletic Army officer Gerald Dawes, is killed in a sporting accident. Two years later, Rickie, who has conceived a highly idealised picture of their relationship, and whose romantic imagination has invested Agnes with a goddess-like status, finds himself precipitated into the decision to marry her, even though their feelings for each other are far from unambiguous.

By deciding to marry Agnes, Rickie alienates his friend Ansell, who not only questions the validity of Rickie's motives and feelings, but foresees that the conventional and narrow-minded Agnes will subject the complaisant Rickie to her views and stifle his spirit. The reader is forewarned of this development when Rickie, together with Agnes, visits his paternal aunt, Mrs Emily Failing, at Cadover in Wiltshire, and learns that Mrs Failing's protégé, the classless, semi-educated orphan Stephen Wonham, is in fact his illegitimate half-brother. Rickie immediately jumps to the conclusion that Stephen must be the issue of a transgression of his despised father's, and cannot bring himself to reveal the news of their relatedness to the young man, whose Dionysian personality both attracts and repels him. Instead, he projects all his abhorrence of lower-class coarseness and of the social stigma of illegitimacy onto Stephen, ignoring his offer of friendship, and thereby fatally aligning himself with social convention as embodied by Agnes.

Rickie subsequently completes this move towards social conformity by taking up a position as a teacher at Sawston school, where Herbert Pembroke is a housemaster. However, the hollow public school routines, the petty intrigues which he finds himself drawn into, and the general atmosphere of lovelessness and rigid conventionality make him unhappy; yet he does not have the strength to resist his assimilation. The vague plans of becoming a writer, which he has cherished since his Cambridge days, are thwarted as his short stories are rejected by publisher after publisher. A brief new sense of hope and purpose engendered in him by the prospect of fatherhood is shattered by the death of his infant daughter, whose disability is even more severe than his own.

Into this desolation enter Stephen – by now fully informed about his parentage – whose unruliness has finally prompted Mrs Failing to turn him out of Cadover, and Stewart Ansell, who quickly comes to approve of the impulsive young man. In a dramatic attempt to rouse Rickie from his spiritual decline and break Agnes's power over him, Ansell reveals the scandalous existence of the illegitimate half-brother in front of the entire boarding-house, and in this process undecives Rickie as to whose son Stephen really is, namely, the son of his beloved mother and a Wiltshire farmer, drowned in a swimming accident shortly after the conception of his son. Initially stunned by this revelation, Rickie, with Ansell's assistance, undergoes a change of heart, and soon finds himself willing to accept and love Stephen for their mother's sake.

Roused by Stephen's exhortations, he decides to leave his loveless marriage and his hated job, and for a while, the two half-brothers live with Stewart at the Ansell's. When Rickie goes to Wiltshire to visit his aunt, Stephen decides to accompany him, and, after an evening's drinking at the village pub – breaking a promise of abstinence, which serves to shatter Rickie's glorified image of him as a hero – collapses on the local railway line and is saved from death by Rickie, who is unfortunately killed himself in the act of rescuing him.

A few years later, we re-encounter Stephen, now farming in Wiltshire not far from Cadover, married to an unnamed woman, father of a small daughter, and apparently also sharing his house with Ansell.³⁷⁴ One long story written by Rickie on Stephen's and Ansell's insistence has, after all, been published, and has met with sufficient success for his other stories to be published posthumously; Herbert Pembroke has come to discuss the matter of royalties with Stephen, who refuses to be talked out of the larger share that is due to him. The novel closes with Stephen's sense of the continuity of life and nature, of gratitude, and of having been saved in more than just the physical sense by Rickie.

II.4.2.2. 'Light' characters

II.4.2.2.1. Stephen Wonham: a pagan deity in Edwardian guise

The 'light' character Stephen Wonham shares numerous similarities with both Melville's Billy Budd and Forster's recreation of this figure – so many, in fact, that it is tempting to speculate whether he might not have functioned as a medium through which Forster's creative imagination proceeded to engage with Melville's young working-class demigod. Stephen possesses a "cloudless spirit" proceeding from the happiness of the two lovers who brought him into being (LJ242); he is "fresh and companionable and strong" (LJ123). He is blond – his wet hair "seemed worked upon his scalp in bronze" (LJ87) – and he has "a straggling blond moustache" (LJ90). He also has "astonishingly blue eyes" (LJ87) which recall[...] the sky unclouded" (LJ252); these match Billy's "welkin" eyes (BB17, 49, 59). To the casual or unappreciative observer, he is not particularly beautiful; rather, he is "a powerful boy of twenty, admirably muscular, but rather too broad for his height" (LJ87). However, "his face after all had a certain beauty: at all events the colouring was regal – a steady crimson from throat to forehead: the sun and the winds had worked on him daily ever since he was born" (LJ90); this re-

³⁷⁴ Both Joseph Bristow and Nicholas Royle (22) appear in some inexplicable way to have gained the impression that the unnamed woman whom Stephen has married is in fact Agnes; Bristow uses the emerging triangular structure to contrast Rickie, the effeminate brother who has sired the disabled child that does not survive, with Stephen, the "potent 'poet' who sires a healthy daughter to Agnes", "the woman these half-brothers have both loved, at different times" (1995:71). Leaving aside the fact that it would be entirely out of character for the terminally conventional Agnes to contract a union with a social outsider, it can quite unambiguously be deduced from the conversation between Stephen and Herbert in the final chapter of the novel that Agnes has remarried and is now Mrs Keynes; she "leads a busy life" and has given birth to a healthy son, "the great Bertie" who is "perfectly well", and who has evidently been named after his uncle Herbert (LJ284f). Even more surprisingly, neither Bristow nor Royle (whose study is centrally concerned with the queer aspects of Forster's writing) seems to have taken up the brief reference which Stephen makes to Ansell's presence (he tells his wife that it will be all right for him to go and sleep outside because "Stewart's in the house", LJ288). This detail points to a continuation of the close friendship between the philosopher and the rural Dionysos, and possibly even to their having established a queer *ménage à trois* (see also Martin 1997:266).

calls the “rose-tan” of Billy’s complexion (BB106), which marks him as an outdoor worker.

Stephen is conceived not least as an embodiment of the life-force, the “Spirit of Life” (LJ181); he is characterised by “motion and passion and the imprint of the sunlight and the wind” (LJ252).³⁷⁵ It seems that his beauty is most appreciated by those beholders who are inclined to invest their surroundings with spiritual meaning, and look for a symbolic quality in everyday encounters and events – people like the late Mr Failing, to whom Stephen as a child once appeared as a “peculiarly gracious” vision (LJ119), and the philosopher Ansell, whose most important demand on personal relationships is that those whom he interacts with should have a “real existence” (LJ179). To be sure, Ansell’s first encounter with Stephen is that of “a puzzled civilisation” meeting with a “brute”, and it takes a discussion about philosophy to dispel the “atmosphere of pugilistic courtesy” which Ansell scents after their scuffle in the flowerbed, and to convince him that Stephen does not belong to the “hearty Britisher” type which Ansell “loathe[s]” (LJ210f.). Once Ansell has established that Stephen is “wonderful” (LJ213), however, we learn, looking through Ansell’s eyes, that Stephen’s face is “frank, proud, and beautiful, if truth is beauty. [...] It might be coarse, but it had in it nothing vulgar or wantonly cruel” (LJ216). Coarseness – as we are usefully informed by Mr Failing’s essay which Ansell has been reading – is distinct from vulgarity, in that it “reveal[s] something”, whereas vulgarity “conceal[s] something” (LJ207); this suggests that the latter quality may have associations with hypocrisy, while the former is far from objectionable. Rickie, too, only recognises Stephen’s beauty when he looks upon him for the first time as a symbol of continuity, with the eyes of newly-found love: “his hair was beautiful against the grey sky, and his eyes, recalling the sky unclouded, shot past the intruder as if to some worthier vision” (LJ252).

Ansell in particular sees in Stephen the embodiment of a “type” that was “common in Greece”: “certain figures of the Greeks, to whom we continually return, suggested him a little”. He furthermore attributes to him some element of divine grace: “One expected nothing of him – no purity of phrase nor swift-edged thought. Yet the conviction grew that he had been back somewhere – back to some table of the gods [...], and that he belonged for ever to the guests with whom he had eaten” (LJ212f.). In this, too, Stephen resembles Melville’s Billy Budd, who is depicted as an emissary from heaven and compared to various figures of Greek mythology.³⁷⁶ In *The Longest Journey*, discourses about Greek culture

³⁷⁵ For discussions of Stephen’s symbolic functions, see, for instance, Summers 65ff., Martin 1982:106-109, Herz 1997, and Elizabeth Heine’s extensive discussion on the novel’s “Symbols and Analogues” (1984a:x-xv), in which she traces Stephen’s descent from Wagner’s Siegfried (xiii).

³⁷⁶ When he was reading *Billy Budd* in 1949, Forster marked the line that includes the phrase “spinning yarns like the lazy gods” in the passage describing Billy’s “Life in the foretop” (BB46) in his copy of Plomer’s edition.

can be read as markers of coded discourses about homoerotic desire; viewed through the lens of Forster's novel, the Greek references in *Billy Budd* could be decoded in a similar way.

Like "Baby" Budd, also referred to as "Beauty", Stephen has a nickname – "Podge" – which could be derived from a physical characteristic (that of being "rather too broad for his height", LJ87); perhaps it also refers to a certain stodgy quality in his mental make-up. It might furthermore, via its associations with the word "hodgepodge", be construed as a reference to a more intrinsic characteristic, namely, his illegitimate or classless status (Mrs Failing deliberately uses the name to make the conventional Agnes "jump", LJ101). Stephen objects to this nickname being used by others without his consent, but evidently not to the nickname itself: "People called him 'Podge' until they were dissuaded. Then they called him 'Stephen' or 'Mr Wonham'. Then he said, 'You can call me Podge if you like'" (LJ87). In the same way, the opera's Billy insists to the Dansker that his name "ain't Baby, asking your pardon" but, unlike Red Whiskers, he does not "object" to being "called out of my name" (LIB20f.). While Billy's nicknames both appear in Melville's novella, that text records no such conflict over their use; and it might be speculated whether the short exchange that helped to make the operatic Billy less docile and more articulate contains an echo of Forster's earlier 'light' character's good-natured pugnacity over a nickname.

A desirable "coarse" man

Stephen's intellectual skills, not unlike those of Billy Budd, are but little developed. Even though he is not "illiterate" (BB26), he reads "like a poor person, with lips apart and a finger that followed the print" (LJ89). The letter he writes to an invalid boy, composed of short sentences linked by the conjunctions "and", "but", "for" and "because", and mostly beginning with "I", speaks of his simplicity and straightforwardness of thought (LJ187). According to Mrs Failing, Stephen possesses a "narrow but not uninteresting brain"; however, when she teases him, he does not catch her allusions (LJ88f.), and although he introduces a verbal image to illustrate an idea to Ansell, he reacts "blankly" when Ansell extends the metaphor (LJ214). He "could not understand clever people" and their quarrels (LJ125), or the late Mr Failing's poetic political philosophy (LJ211). Importantly, though, despite his intellectual limitations, he is no "silent strong man" (LJ90); his manner is "simple and frank, and what he could tell he would tell to anyone. He had not the suburban reticence" (LJ213).

Stephen may read *The Clarion*, a socialist and humanist newspaper, as well as pamphlets on Darwinism and agnosticism (LJ89), but he holds that their authors "aren't everything" and would himself "just as soon follow an old stone goddess" (LJ118). His personal convictions serve to distance him from contemporary social, political and scientific theories, and to associate him instead with Greek paganism as represented by Demeter, the goddess of fertility. While Mrs Failing ridicules his interest in philosophy and his attempts "to carry the eternal subtleties by violence"

like the “inexhaustible buffoon” she considers him (LJ90), the philosopher Ansell realises that he is “not stupid in essentials” (LJ211). Stephen’s frank manner and his ability to articulate his thoughts about these “essentials” make him similar to the operatic Billy, who can be seen to have attained, under Forster’s hand, a higher level of articulateness than his counterpart in Melville’s novella.

Stephen is not much given to self-analysis; intellectually, he knows “nothing about himself at all” (LJ109). Instead, a lot of emphasis is placed on his physicality and his life-affirming animal spirits. This emphasis goes far enough, in fact, for Stephen to become associated several times with an animal himself, just like Billy in Melville’s novella. Mrs Failing, scolding Stephen for shaking water out of his wet clothes and spattering her dress, calls him “bad dog” (LJ87); she also compares his tenacity to that of “an Irish terrier”, and sometimes wonders whether Stephen is “a dear boy” or “a brute” (LJ90f.). Rickie, finding Stephen’s thoughts on love relationships too crude for his taste, dismisses him as “an inexperienced animal” (LJ108). When Stephen careers triumphantly into Salisbury on a bolting horse, he has temporarily turned into “a centaur” (LJ115). Ansell calls Stephen a “little brute” during their scuffle in the flower-bed; contemplating him appreciatively as he smokes, Ansell finds that he “gave the idea of an animal with just enough soul to contemplate its own bliss” (LJ212).

Like Billy Budd, Stephen is apt to lose his temper, and does so several times in the story. Mrs Failing likes to provoke him deliberately: “The delightful moment was approaching when the boy would lose his temper: she knew it by a certain tremor in his heels” (LJ95). Sometimes Stephen’s outbreaks are accompanied by physical violence, as violence in general is part of his way of conduct. Thus, he plans to beat Flea Thompson, the shepherd who has failed to keep his word (“Eh, but he’s forgotten my fists; eh, but I’ll hurt him”, LJ106), although in the event, the shepherd gets the better of him – which Stephen accepts with good grace, even begging his pardon, because “he must acknowledge the better man” (LJ116). When a drunken soldier insults his sense of honour, Stephen throws him off his horse, yelling “I’ve done him” in exuberance (LJ115).

When Ansell annoys Stephen by ignoring and then contradicting him, Stephen uproots a lobelia and hurls it at the philosopher, complete with its clod of earth. When Ansell retaliates by throwing a book at Stephen a little afterwards, he too is flung to the ground, and, in the ensuing scuffle, receives a blow on the mouth which makes him bleed; his lesson is that Stephen is “a person who could knock one down” (LJ211). Ansell also realises that although Stephen’s face contains nothing “wantonly cruel”, nevertheless “of mercy or tact such a face knew little” (LJ216). Yet Ansell soon comes to be friendly with him, considering his irritability a “sign of grace” (LJ211), and, to his “eternal glory” (LJ225), he is allowed to present him with his entire tobacco pouch. Having realised that Stephen is “really wonderful” (LJ213), Ansell is proud to have this token of his appreciation accepted by this extraordinary being – in much the same way as the men on board the *Rights-of-Man* put themselves at the service

of the exceptional Billy Budd whom they “love”, and whom they “will do anything for” (BB20). Moreover, Ansell’s regard for Stephen is arguably heightened by their violent confrontation; in this it resembles the Red Whiskers’s fervent love of Billy in Melville’s novella, which is presented as the result of a short but impressive beating from the “fighting peacemaker” (BB19f.).

Like many of Forster’s ‘light’ characters, Stephen has a tendency to be lost for words when faced with the task of discussing complex matters, particularly when these involve conflicting viewpoints. When asked by Ansell to explain his conflict with Mrs Failing over the treatment of the farm hands, he quickly becomes “incoherent” (LJ214). Faced with the “pseudo-legal document” which Agnes is trying to get him to sign to buy his silence, it not only takes him a while to comprehend what is being proposed to him, but it is also only after a time that he recovers his powers of speech: “At last, he found words” (LJ220f.). When, upon his return to the Elliots’ house, Stephen tries to make Rickie acknowledge him as an individual rather than “as this or that’s son”, he has to struggle with his educated half-brother’s complicated interpretation of himself as “a symbol for the vanished past”: “I haven’t risen from the dead. I haven’t altered since last Sunday week”. In his anger and bewilderment, words fail him, and he “stutter[s]” because he “could not quite explain what he was” (LJ253ff.). His predicament here is not dissimilar to that experienced by Billy Budd, whose stammer is twice brought on by the confrontation with someone else’s image of himself which is at odds with his own self-conception (for further discussion see section II.5.3.4.).

Stephen is hedonistic, impulsive, and has a tendency to drunkenness, which is, however, positively connoted to some extent, being associated with the “sacred passion for alcohol” of the mystic rites of Dionysos. The text insists that “in spite of his obstinacy and conceit, Stephen was an easy person to live with. He never fidgeted or nursed hidden grievances, or indulged in a shoddy pride” (LJ266f.). He is “not an inquisitive boy” (LJ131) but is generally well-disposed towards people, and has a self-reliant, self-sufficient personality: “He liked everyone – even that poor little [Rickie] Elliot – and yet no one mattered” (LJ117). He lives very much by his “instincts”, “gratify[ing] each as it occurred, provided he could do so without grave injury to his fellows” (LJ241). He is at one with his natural surroundings, but at the same time free from any intellectual desire of “getting in touch with Nature” (LJ119) – a notion which he regards as “cant” (LJ120). Rather, he spends his life in prosaic content: he “rode [Mrs Failing’s] horses, and trespassed, and bathed, and worked, for no obvious reason, upon her fields”; he “lived too near the things he loved to seem poetical” (LJ242).³⁷⁷ When Mrs Failing, wishing to

³⁷⁷ Summers has pointed out that “Stephen’s unconscious Hellenism translates ancient ideals in to living values”, whereas “Rickie’s artificial idealisation of the ancient Greeks falsifies and distances” (65). A similar criticism of “bookish Hellenism” (Summers 159) can be found in *Maurice*, where it is embodied by the character of Clive; ironically, it is a journey to modern Greece that ‘cures’ Clive of his false creed.

have him out of the way for a few days, orders him to “Go and bathe in the sea”, he complies with a simple “All right”, pausing only “to tighten his bootlaces” and to pocket the coins she has laid out for him, before he sets out on a twenty-five-mile walk across the countryside that will take him all night to complete (LJ135).

Stephen’s fundamentally easygoing personality and his contented fatalism resemble that of Melville’s Billy Budd, who is generally well-liked by his shipmates whom he also likes in return, and who fatalistically accepts his impressment “pretty much as he was wont to take any vicissitudes of weather” (BB22). The positively connoted barbarianism associated with Melville’s Billy also has its counterpart in the positive “paganism” (LJ134) which Stephen embodies.³⁷⁸ Mrs Failing celebrates him as “a thoroughbred pagan” (LJ123); “her fancy compared [...] Stephen to the young pagans who were said to lie under this field [inside the Cadbury Rings] guarding their pagan gold” (LJ128). Similarly to Billy Budd, Stephen has no use for institutionalised religion – he has no objection to hearing the Benedicite, but leaves the church as the Litany commences (LJ123). Yet Stephen’s agnosticism, influenced as it is by his reading of socialist, humanist and agnostic pamphlets, necessarily takes a slightly more intellectual form than the uneducated young sailor’s “barbarian” indifference to Christian teaching (BB107).

Illegitimates and foundlings: social anomalies and disruptive forces

Stephen Wonham is Rickie’s younger half-brother, the illegitimate child of Rickie’s mother and a Wiltshire farmer (Ch. 29). The only person who is aware of his true identity is Mrs Failing, but, in spite of her flirtations with the “unconventional”, she, too, is anxious to suppress the “scandal” of his illegitimacy (LJ134). Stephen lives upon her estate in ignorance of his parentage; she makes it clear to him that he is a dependant (LJ91), but he has been raised as a gentleman (LJ119) and has spent some time at a private school (LJ104).

The disturbing and potentially disruptive ambiguity of Stephen’s social position is emphasised in the first part of the novel by Mrs Failing’s deliberate concealment of his identity, and, throughout the entire text, by his own unconventional behaviour. Thus, when Stephen stands in for his aunt’s shepherd (LJ86f.), she promptly makes use of this incident, presenting him to Agnes in the drawing-room as “one of the shepherds”, just to see how the younger woman will react to this breach of convention. Agnes is prepared to accept her hostess’s unconventionality, but her sense of class distinction is confused: “Still one ought to know whether it was a shepherd or not. At all events he was in gentleman’s clothing” (LJ93).

The taxonomic breakdown caused by the social anomaly that is Stephen Wonham becomes visible in the reaction of Mr Wilbraham, the agent in charge of the

³⁷⁸ Stephen’s pagan associations are explored by Levine 83f., Summers 65ff., and Martin 1982:106-109.

Cadover estate. Wilbraham is introduced as a man who “knew his place, and kept others to theirs: all society seemed spread before him like a map. The line between the county and the local, the line between the labourer and the artisan – he knew them all” (LJ97). When this man encounters Rickie and Stephen out riding together, he politely “lifted his hat to his employer’s nephew”, whereas “Stephen he ignored: he could not find him on the map” (LJ107). Ansell experiences a similar inability to fit Stephen into a familiar category, although his concern appears to be with Stephen’s very essence rather than with his social class: “What are you? [...] Who you are – your name – I don’t care about that. But it interests me to class people, and up to now I have failed with you” (LJ213).

Although Stephen, having been expelled from Mrs Failing’s house and having lost his privileged status, admits to Ansell that he “used to look down on the labourers”, to “take for granted I was a gentleman” and to “think I was something special”, his new situation has made him realise that he “feel[s] much like other chaps” (LJ213). He certainly appears altogether unconstrained by class conventions throughout the novel wherever his interactions with lower-class people are concerned, but he cannot be said to be altogether free from prejudice against the middle-class “drawing-room” culture (LJ242) whose literary productions he is capable of dismissing as “cant” (LJ120), and whose living habits he apparently disdains: as he attacks the hypocrisy of Herbert Pembroke’s philosophy, epitomised in his “sham” conception of school as “the world in miniature”, he alludes to Herbert “ordering [his] hot bottle” as a symbol for his domesticated suburban middle-class lifestyle, which he contrasts with his own life close to the Wiltshire soil, among men who will “answer back” if someone tries to “do them” (LJ286).

In Stephen’s case, middle-class attempts to “do” him not only aim for an unfair division of money, but also for the effacement of his connection with Rickie (LJ285f.), which the Pembrokes probably consider socially inconvenient as well as potentially damaging. Stephen’s resentment can therefore be seen to be directed against the double standards of a middle-class morality to which the unequal treatment of those it defines as social inferiors is intrinsic. For his part, Stephen regards his conflict with the shepherd Flea Thompson not as “a question of gentility or poverty”, but as “a question between two men”, even though it should be noted that he apparently has no objection to the shepherd addressing him, a member of the Failing household, as “sir” (LJ116).

Stephen socialises easily with unknown lower-class people, with whom the question of his social status never seems to arise; when he meets a passing soldier on his ride with Rickie, “they made friends and treated each other, and slanged the proprietor and ragged the pretty girls” in a manner which Rickie finds repellent and deeply embarrassing in its “vulgarity” and “coarseness” (LJ111ff.). When Stephen, alone and slightly drunk, reaches Salisbury – Rickie having returned to his aunt’s house – he goes to the cattle-market, where “he met and made some friends” (LJ115). Stephen is not particularly concerned about whose son he is

(LJ215, 216), and he does not know “where I do belong” nor “what I am”. When Ansell suggests that “one belongs to the place one sleeps in and to the people one eats with”, Stephen returns that as often as not, he sleeps out of doors and eats by himself. To Ansell, Stephen’s inability to place himself into any social category appears to suggest that he is simply himself: when Stephen, asked to identify himself, begins with “I –” but stops again, the philosopher reflects “that there are worse answers” (LJ213). Stephen’s illegitimate status as well as his independence of class categories make him similar to the foundling Billy Budd, who – so it is suggested in the novella – may be the illegitimate son of a nobleman (BB26) but lives contentedly (and oblivious of his parentage) among his lower-class peers, getting along easily with almost every man he meets. In the libretto, this latter character trait is extended to include the implied class-crossing friendship of equals that develops between himself and Vere.

Stephen is very much “a law to himself” (LJ279, 281): in his view, “the policeman was negligible”, and in his dealings with his fellow men, “nothing bound him but his own word, and he gave that sparingly” (LJ242). Stephen’s creed of the personal nature of human interactions may make the social conventions – which operate in close conjunction with class distinctions – appear “trivial” (LJ244) to him, but this does not prevent his coming into conflict with the normative forces of social order, which, after all, govern the world in which he lives and moves.

The political implications of Stephen’s anomalous position and personal philosophy are perceived most clearly by Mr Wilbraham the agent, who, as will be recalled, cannot place Stephen, the orphan of unknown parentage, on his social “map” (LJ107). Wilbraham considers Stephen a disruptive force and a danger to the existing hierarchy of social structures: “How could the farm go on without discipline? How could there be discipline if Mr Stephen interfered?” Thanks to Stephen’s interference, the farm labourers are “wanting things” instead of “settling down”, and Wilbraham fears that he is faced with the “germ of a Trades Union”. Stephen subsequently draws up “a list of grievances, some absurd, others fundamental” that are intended to improve the farm workers’ standard of living, effectively confirming Wilbraham’s fears, and irritating his aunt, who, fortuitously provided by Agnes with a “personal grievance” (see section II.4.2.3.2. below), proposes to send Stephen to the colonies (LJ243f.). This conflict culminates in Stephen’s eviction from his aunt’s Cadover household, and the subsequent breaking of the Cadover windows by a group of drunken villagers – a minor insurrection which is in its turn followed by the eviction of five families of village labourers (LJ279).

In both Melville’s novella and its opera adaptation, the illegitimate, classless orphan Billy can also, like Stephen, be seen to be directly associated with a threat to social stability, if only through Claggart’s false accusations of mutiny, and the lieutenant’s misconstruction of his farewell to his old ship (BB22). The stammer which prevents him from defending himself against Claggart’s accusations – on the terms envisioned by Vere and defined by naval and social protocol – has him

resorting to a form of immediate self-assertion that defies the dictates of social convention and of naval discipline. In this way, Billy, the “upright barbarian” (BB26), can be seen to disrupt the functioning of the social order through his uncompromising, unmediated self-expression. In much the same way, Stephen Wonham runs afoul of the various guardians of social convention in *The Longest Journey*, owing to the uncompromising consistency with which he pursues his course, guided only by his own “creed of ‘here am I and there are you’” (LJ244). As Forster noted in 1927, Billy “is not himself aggressive. It is the light within him that irritates and explodes” (AN97). The “light” of Stephen’s creed is also capable of “irritat[ing] and explod[ing]”: physical violence is indeed part of its natural expression,³⁷⁹ but its radiance is arguably what sets Stephen apart from a mere bully like Gerald Dawes (see section II.4.2.2.2. below).

Reviewing Sedgwick’s and Martin’s queer readings of Melville’s *Billy Budd* in section II.6., I argue that in the Britten/Forster/Crozier opera, it is also possible to read the beautiful foundling Billy as socially disruptive in another way, namely, in his ability to evoke a prohibited male homoerotic desire which acts as a destabilising force, both on the level of the desiring individual’s psyche, and in a wider system of social control that is based on the suppression of subversive male/male bonds. On the background of this reading of Melville’s *Billy Budd* and its operatic adaptation, it seems worth noting that in *The Longest Journey*, the discourses about the social stigma associated with Stephen’s illegitimacy can be seen to show slippage with discourses about Rickie’s “abnormal” (LJ12) physical disability, and that the discourses about both of these abnormalities, in their turn, show slippage with contemporary discourses about an equally stigmatised type of anomaly, namely, that of homosexual desire.

People like Stephen Wonham – so we learn from Agnes, who can be taken to represent the opinion of conventional society – are “social thunderbolts, to be shunned at all costs” (LJ135); in Herbert’s words, they are “a mass of scandal” (LJ249). The “scandal” of Stephen’s illegitimacy is a potential threat to Mrs Failing’s social status; she therefore strives to keep it secret (LJ134). In accordance with Edwardian social convention, Agnes feels “menaced by the abnormal” embodied by her fiancé’s illegitimate half-brother – a “horror” that rises “like a corpse [...] up to the surface” (LJ132). Her internalised “sense of purity” leads her to classify Stephen as “illicit, abnormal, worse than a man diseased” (LJ139, 261). Although Agnes’s judgments conform to the conventional middle-class Victorian and Edwardian attitude towards illegitimacy, it seems important to note that her choice of words places Stephen into the same category as the physically deformed Rickie (LJ9), whose disability she finds “abnormal”: “unknown fibres of her being rose in revolt against” this abnormality (LJ12). Significantly, the words which Agnes uses to label both Stephen’s deviance from the socially acceptable norm and Rickie’s deviance from the physical norm are the same that would commonly have been used to label homosexuals at the

³⁷⁹ See discussion in section II.5.3.3. below.

time.³⁸⁰ Max Saunders, invoking the predominant 19th-century view of homosexuality as “a social and moral abnormality”, comes to the same conclusion, suggesting that “Stephen Wonham’s illegitimacy could thus be seen as complementing Rickie’s disability, so that together they possess all the stigmata of deviance” (30, n.3).

That Stephen is capable of evoking prohibited sexual longings is unambiguously demonstrated by Agnes, the married woman and social snob who nevertheless finds herself, quite against her will, desiring “for one terrible moment [...] to be held in his arms” (LJ260; see section II.4.2.3.2. below). The homoerotic longing which Stephen evokes in Ansell and Rickie is somewhat more obliquely hinted at. In Ansell’s case, references to Greek culture characterise his appreciation of Stephen, and their friendship features the sharing of abodes and finances (LJ261, 288). In Rickie’s case, discourses about his love and desire for Stephen are mediated via the interposition of his love for their mother. Encoded references to homoerotic desire are present, however, in the form of pan-Forsterian textual leitmotifs, such as Stephen’s appeal of “come” (LJ257), and the horseplay which Rickie and Stephen engage in on the train to Wiltshire – a form of playful physical antagonism between males which, read through the lens of Forster’s overtly homosexual texts, can be seen to possess clear connections to the possibilities of erotic play and sexual intercourse.

While the sexual desire which Stephen evokes in the conventional Agnes is represented as unwelcome and destabilising, a threat to her functioning within the framework of social convention which she cleaves to and simultaneously represents, in Rickie’s case, his love for Stephen is portrayed as having the power to subvert the oppressive social conventions that stifle his ‘true’ self: desire here becomes potentially liberating and even salutary. Yet Rickie cannot wholeheartedly trust himself to the personal relationship with Stephen, and is ultimately “claim[ed] by “the conventions” (LJ282), just like Agnes. In the same way, in a reading of both the novella and the opera *Billy Budd* which focuses on Vere’s homoerotic longing for Billy, Vere’s refusal to save Billy can be seen as his choice of social conformity over the public admission of his prohibited private desire.

“But Jemmy Legs likes me”: assumptions and interpretations

In his self-sufficient disregard for social conventions, Stephen not only holds that ancestry is “trivial” (LJ244), but assumes the same uncomplicated attitude in the people he associates with: he innocently believes that “Rickie and Agnes are properly educated, which leads people to look at things straight, and not go screaming about blots” (LJ217). He goes to Sawston to present himself as Rickie’s half-brother, little expecting his relatives’ scandalised reaction: “Perhaps nothing would come of it; perhaps friendly intercourse, and a home while he looked around”

³⁸⁰ Forster put these and similar verbal markers of homophobic disgust into the mouths of some of his earliest as well as his latest homophobic young Englishmen, namely, Tony in “Ralph and Tony” and Lionel in “The Other Boat” (see sections II.4.1. and II.4.4.).

(LJ245). In fact, however, the Elliot-Pembrokes' middle-class prejudices and fears lead them to conclude that Stephen has come to see them with the purpose of blackmailing them, even though Stephen intends no such thing.

Only when Agnes tries to bribe him into silence does Stephen realise that he has "made a bad mistake" in thinking that they would not be ashamed of acknowledging him (LJ220f.), but he does not even think of "allotting the blame [...]". He only knew that educated people could be horrible, and that a clean liver must never enter Dunwood House again". He bears the Elliots no grudge other than that he has spent what little money he had in coming to see them: "Their suspicions and insults were to him as the curses of a tramp whom he passed by the wayside. They were dirty people, not his sort. He summed up the complicated tragedy as a 'take in'" (LJ245).

Stephen's mistaken assumptions about the Elliots' attitudes and feelings, and his failure to foresee their reaction to his approaching them, can be seen to constitute a structural parallel to Billy Budd's failure to recognise Claggart's hatred of himself. Both 'light' characters' misjudgements stem from their fundamental innocence and from their lack of experience with outlooks alien to their own nature. Both men receive warnings from others which might alert them to the possibility of conflict ahead, but neither man pays heed to these warnings – Stephen tells the Nonconformist carter, who in effect anticipates the Elliots' conventional reaction, "not to be a fool" (LJ217), in much the same way that the operatic Billy refuses to acknowledge the Dansker's warnings that "Jemmy Legs is down on you" at the end of Act I, Sc. 3 (LIB37). It is worth noting that Forster's Billy, like Stephen, explicitly declares his disbelief at the idea that Claggart is not well disposed towards him, whereas the novella's Billy is merely bewildered by the Dansker's obscure hintings but does not actively contradict the old sailor (BB67f.).

Another, similar instance of misjudgement is Billy's failure to comprehend the seriousness of the afterguardsman's – or, respectively, the Novice's – attempt to bribe him into mutiny, which the operatic Billy dismisses as an almost dream-like experience. He believes that by sending the Novice "back where he belonged" (LIB36), he has solved a problem that not only lies beyond his comprehension, but also runs contrary to his personal conception of decent conduct – a dismissal strongly reminiscent of Stephen's disgusted recoil from the moral uncleanness of Dunwood House, and his highly simplified view of that "complicated tragedy as a 'take in'" (LJ245).

If Stephen and Billy are liable to (mis)judge the motives and actions of others according to their own limited understanding, the reverse is also true – an expression of Forster's Modernist but, at the same time, intensely personal concern with relativity that emerges so poignantly in the numerous interpersonal and intercultural misunderstandings in *A Passage to India*. Stephen's actions, innocuous and consistent enough from his point of view, are liable to be misinterpreted by others

who evaluate his actions according to the laws of conventional behaviour they have internalised.

Thus, for example, Stephen's attitude to money is misapprehended by Agnes, who has "heard tales of him lending to the poor and exacting repayment to the uttermost farthing", which leads her to conclude that he must be "rapacious" (LJ222). It is clear, however, that she is judging her information from the point of view of a middle-class morality which sees itself as distinct from that of "a poor person" (LJ133), a class of social Others from whom one could evidently expect almost any kind of low and mean behaviour.³⁸¹ Stephen, on the other hand, believing as he does in life as a "personal" affair rather than a "decorous scheme", and making no distinction between himself and the poor, following his "creed of 'here am I and there are you'" (LJ244), presumably insists on his loan being paid back in full with the same straightforwardness with which he expects Flea Thompson to keep his promise of returning to his sheep after two hours.³⁸²

The misconstruction which Agnes, judging solely from her own limited perspective, places on Stephen's financial dealings leads her to misinterpret his character. The same error is involuntarily made by the *Indomitable's* lieutenant, who mistakes Billy's innocent farewell to the *Rights o' Man* for a deliberate "sly slur at impressment in general, and that of himself in especial" (BB22). In the opera, the officers, hardened and perhaps jaded by experience, persist in thinking of Billy as "dangerous" (LIB17, 27), at least during Act I. It is Vere's instinct, coupled with his idealism and, possibly, his more appreciative sensitivity, which leads him to read Billy's character correctly; yet the misunderstanding itself is never actually cleared up.

"One nips or is nipped": the Forsterian 'light' character as fatalist

The simplicity with which Stephen reflects on the unpredictability of life is noteworthy for the way it prefigures Billy's thoughts on fate as they appear in the libretto. Having unexpectedly been beaten in his fight with Flea Thompson the shepherd, Stephen finds himself

³⁸¹ When reprimanding Mrs Failing for deliberately upsetting Rickie, Agnes declares that "not even a poor person" would have stooped to make up a lie about Stephen being Rickie's illegitimate half-brother merely as an act of revenge (LJ133).

³⁸² It should be noted that on the night of Stephen's eviction from Cadover, the villagers "*subscribe*[...] a bob here and a bob there" (LJ215; my emphasis), and that Flea Thompson probably does not expect to see his "Sundays" (i.e. his best clothes) again. Stephen has no qualms about taking "a shilling from a boy who earns nine bob a week" (LJ215); it can be assumed that he regards this money as a spontaneous personal gift. When Stephen is later accidentally tipped a sovereign, he sends a postal order for this windfall to the villagers, knowing that "it did not pay them back, but it paid them something, and he felt that his soul was free" (LJ247). From this transaction it may be inferred that Stephen distinguishes between keeping agreements (loans and promises) and his personal obligations to those who voluntarily offer him gifts they can scarcely afford themselves. The fact that he considers it "inconvenient" (LJ215, 247) to avail himself of Mrs Failing's allowance – as Ansell remarks, "he would sooner die than take money from people whom he did not love" (LJ225) – supports this interpretation.

not exactly depressed, but feeling that this delightful world is extraordinarily unreliable. He had never expected to fling the soldier, or to be flung by Flea. “One nips or is nipped,” he thought, “and never knows beforehand. I should not be surprised if many people had more in them than I suppose, while others were just the other way round.”

Stephen thinks this a “quite important” discovery, and something for which all his reading of Darwinist pamphlets has not prepared him. Far from insisting on his “moral victory” – he had, after all, intended to get even with the shepherd for not keeping a promise – he feels that “he must acknowledge the better man”, and for this reason even apologises to his opponent, even though “it costs him a great deal” to utter the words (LJ116f.).

Stephen’s acceptance of the unpredictability of “this delightful world”, and of the people who cross his path, may be felt to resurface in the libretto’s *Billy Budd*. In his last conversation with the Dansker, Billy states: “I had to strike down that Jemmy legs – it’s fate. And Captain Vere has had to strike me down – Fate” (LIB60). Not only does Billy thus implicitly absolve Vere from any blame for declining to prevent his execution, but he also seems perfectly unemotional about the unexpected result of the blow with which he answered Claggart’s false accusation. Evidently, the master-at-arms whose dark personality Billy still cannot construe had “more in [him]” than Billy had supposed, while at the same time, where his physical resilience is concerned, the case was “just the other way round” (LJ117).

Forster’s Billy, like Forster’s Novice, ascribes the changes of his fortune to “Fate” – a concept which also appears in Melville’s novella, and coincidentally in conjunction with the word “nipped”: chained up and awaiting his execution, Billy can be seen “lying between the two guns, as nipped in the vice of fate” (BB106). Coincidentally, Stephen consistently uses the expression “nipped” to designate the negative turns in his fortune. Thus, for instance, when he explains to Ansell how he came to be evicted from Cadover, he tells him how the argument between him and his aunt progressed, until “in the end, I was nipped” again – caught at a disadvantage on his return from a village cricket match, and refused entry into the house once and for all (LJ214).³⁸³ When Rickie has finally left Sawston and is living with the Ansell, he is “tempted to believe” that the “harmony” which characterises their household may be due to “a more capricious power” than the ef-

³⁸³ The term ‘nipped’ occurs again immediately following Stephen’s reflections on the unpredictability of life, when, upon his realisation that “one nips or is nipped”, “his thoughts turned to a curious incident of long ago, when he had been ‘nipped’ – as a little boy” (LJ117); this incident involved him being driven through the woods by a stampeding flock of sheep. At the end of Ch. 14, Stephen thinks with pity of Rickie, “the poor fellow who had been ‘nipped’ (nothing serious, said Mrs Failing)” (LJ138) – what evokes his pity is Rickie’s fainting after learning that Stephen is his half-brother (which Stephen does not know at the time, however), and Rickie’s general physical weakness.

forts of the old Mr Ansell, namely, “the power that abstains from ‘nipping’”; and he “quote[s]” Stephen’s insight that “one nips or is nipped, and never knows beforehand” (LJ263). “The power that abstains from ‘nipping’” could in this case be identified as a still “capricious” but benevolent Fate, or as the “Spirit of Life” (LJ181), the power which is central to the novel’s internal value system.³⁸⁴ It might be speculated whether Forster, when he read and re-read Melville’s novella in the 1920s and the late 1940s, might not have found himself reminded of his favourite character’s trademark expression when he encountered Melville’s imprisoned Billy “nipped in the vice of fate”.

Whatever the details of Forster’s creative process, it is easily established that Forster was personally very fond of the figure he had created in Stephen. On 3 August 1910 he noted in his Locked Diary that he had “reread all about Stephen with pathetic approval. The L. J. is a book to my own heart. I should have thought it impossible for a writer to look back and find his work so warm and beautiful” (LD10). There is every indication that Forster continued to be fond of Stephen throughout his life. Reviewing his literary oeuvre in May 1958, he noted in his Commonplace Book that Stephen was among the characters “for whom I care”, along with Gino, Lucy, Aziz, Maurice and Alec, and Lionel and Cocoa (CPB204). It seems likely that the similarities between his pagan shepherd-god and the handsome barbarian Billy Budd will have contributed to his enthusiasm for the idea of adapting Melville’s text.

II.4.2.2.2. The petty athlete: Gerald Dawes as homophobic ‘light’ character

Agnes’s fiancé Gerald Dawes is the novel’s other character who represents the life-force, with a special emphasis on its physical aspects of athleticism, sexuality and violence. Gerald, an Army officer, is clearly shown to be spiritually flawed in comparison with Stephen Wonham’s fundamentally benevolent and generous nature: he is peevish, envious and small-minded, and he used to bully Rickie at school, where he was a prefect. Nevertheless, Gerald possesses numerous characteristics which serve to place him quite firmly among Forster’s desirable ‘light’ figures. Not the least among these characteristics is the good-looking athlete’s potential for violence, which both Rickie and Agnes, like so many other representatives of the Forsterian ‘dark’ character type, clearly feel themselves attracted by, at the same time as they are repelled by it.

The reader’s first encounter with Gerald takes place indirectly, through the medium of Agnes’s thoughts: following a rather unsatisfactory encounter with a gathering of Rickie’s friends, whose philosophical discussion she has inadvertently

³⁸⁴ The reconciliation which this power thus makes possible between “Metaphysics, commerce [and] social aspirations” (LJ263) arguably represents the successful connection between passion and prose that was to emerge as the central desideratum of *Howards End*.

broken up, Agnes muses on her absent “splendid lover, who could have knocked all these unhealthy undergraduates into a cocked hat” and might well, she thinks, have “half killed Ansell” for being impolite to her (LJ8). Agnes’s fantasies thus serve to establish Gerald as the embodiment of aggressive, healthy masculinity (which, in casting him as the chivalrous defender of her dignity, she also implicitly defines as heterosexual), while simultaneously implying some defective quality in the cloistered Cambridge intellectuals. A little later, Agnes, confronted with Rickie’s shoes, the reminders of his physical deformity which disgusts her, comforts herself by thinking of “the perfect form of Gerald, his athletic walk, the poise of his shoulders, his arms stretched forward to receive her” (LJ9), thus placing the ‘light’ figure of Gerald in direct opposition to Rickie, the ‘dark’ character whom she associates with “the abnormal” (LJ12).

A yet clearer sign that Agnes is fascinated by Gerald’s violent potential occurs when she tries to elicit information from the reluctant Rickie about their time at school together, asking him whether Gerald had not been “a kind of athletic marvel” who could “knock any boy or master down”. When Rickie confirms this with a simple “Yes”, Herbert hastens to suppress the notion of a public school boy’s brutality – capable of threatening the authority of the masters as well as the health of his peers – by adding “if he had wanted to”, a qualification evasively “echoed” by Rickie, who staunchly proceeds to express his hope that the couple will be “most awfully happy” (LJ13). When Gerald eventually tells Agnes about his bullying of Rickie at school, “she scolded him well. But she had a thrill of joy when she thought of the weak boy in the clutches of the strong one” (LJ50). It seems that Agnes’s preference for manly strength and even brutality is linked to her abhorrence of “the abnormal” (LJ12) – male weakness – just as it will later transpire that she is entirely unsympathetic towards the boy Varden, another victim of school bullying (LJ171).

Agnes’s and Gerald’s relationship is presided over by the ascetic Herbert, Agnes’s elder by “nearly twenty years” (LJ10), whose routine response to the idea of marriage is to insist on “a very long engagement” (LJ34, 48 and 84; for a discussion of Herbert’s asceticism see section II.5.2.2.). The sexual desire with which Agnes’s and Gerald’s (presumably as yet unconsummated) relationship is charged is transmuted into the almost ritualistic piercing of Agnes’s ears:

the day Gerald asked her to marry him she went to a shop and had her ears pierced. In some wonderful way she knew that it was right. And he had given her the rings – little gold knobs, copied, the jeweller told them, from something prehistoric – and he had kissed the spots of blood on her handkerchief. Herbert, as usual, had been shocked. (LJ8)

Besides symbolising an act of defloration, this incident serves to establish a motivic connection between sexuality and paganism: “something prehistoric” links the earrings to the novel’s earth imagery, and specifically to the Cadford Rings in

Wiltshire, which, said to have been the home of “young pagans”, are set up as a contrast to Christianity, symbolised by the “petty and ludicrous” sound of the “cracked church bell” in the village (LJ127f.). Agnes’s blood on her handkerchief, which is kissed by Gerald who has provided the earrings she wears, furthermore identifies violence, or more specifically, the shedding of (female) blood, as an inherent aspect of (hetero)sexuality, but one that is tabooed by convention – hence Herbert’s “shocked” reaction at being confronted with this sign of the lovers’ pre-marital bonding, a reminder of their desire for sexual union.³⁸⁵

The most telling indicator which classifies Gerald as a desirable ‘light’ character is the linking of his appearance and physical prowess with the Greek ideal, in an explicitly appreciative way. Gerald “had the figure of a Greek athlete and the face of an English one. He was fair and clean-shaven, and his colourless hair was cut rather short. [...] Just where he began to be beautiful the clothes started” (LJ35). The latter comment serves to conjure up the idea of Gerald’s naked – and desirable – “well-developed bod[y]” (AH4)³⁸⁶ beneath the sartorial armour of the Englishman. Like his predecessor, the homophobic Tony from “Ralph and Tony”, who has “made only the physical parts” of his being “truly his own” (AS89), Gerald, “a soldier and an Englishman”, abhors the “unhealthiness” (LJ49f.) which he senses in Rickie (compare AS69: Tony considers Ralph “unhealthy, body and soul”). This becomes evident in the vehemence with which he declines Rickie’s offer to present him and Agnes with the money that would see them married. Tellingly, as he indignantly reports their conversation to Agnes, Gerald uses an ambiguous construction that suggests he has detected some form of queer desire on Rickie’s part: he tells her that Rickie wishes to “marry us – he, you, and me” (LJ49). As an Englishman possessed of an “undeveloped heart[...]” and of a merely “fairly-developed” intellect (AH5), Gerald, who “like most men who are rather animal [...] was intellectually a prude” (LJ50), recoils in disgust from Rickie’s offer – an offer which might be read as the sign of a displaced erotic desire. Clearly, as Rickie himself is only too well aware, he has been going “too fast for him” (LJ49) in making this advance.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ The conventional Herbert’s disapproval may, in fact, spring from a sense that it is improper for a woman of Agnes’s social class to wear something as vulgar as earrings – the somewhat evasive excuse given by Agnes herself for not wearing them anymore once she has become Rickie’s wife is that her “taste has improved, perhaps”. Yet the earrings clearly symbolise her love relationship with Gerald – immediately after the spouses’ discussion of Agnes’s earrings, the narrator comments: “So after all they never mentioned Gerald’s name” (LJ168) – and it does not seem too far-fetched to interpret Herbert’s “shocked” reaction as connected with the idea of the lovers’ sexuality.

³⁸⁶ “Notes on the English Character”.

³⁸⁷ This scene contains clear parallels to “Ralph and Tony”. The character constellations in both texts are virtually identical: both feature a heterosexual pairing in which a brutal, super-masculine and homophobic ‘light’ character is presented as highly attractive from the point of view of an adoring female. Both of these are desired by a weak and ailing ‘dark’ character who proposes a form of unconventional, ‘queer’ marriage to the male and is violently rejected. Parallels can also

As Robert Martin has pointed out, there is “no access to that body” – the body of the English athlete – for the desiring observer “except through the mind”. Where Rickie is concerned, this access takes the shape of “an identification of himself with the female” (1997:261)³⁸⁸ as he accidentally witnesses Agnes being embraced by Gerald:

The man’s grip was the stronger. He had drawn the woman on to his knee, was pressing her, with all his strength, against him. Already her hands slipped off him, and she whispered, “Don’t – you hurt –” Her face had no expression. [...] Then her lover kissed it, and immediately it shone with mysterious beauty, like some star. (LJ39)

The scene he has glimpsed leads Rickie into a mystic vision: Gerald and Agnes become to him “priest and high priestess” of Love (LJ40). He subsequently surrounds both of them with a nimbus of mysticism, casting them respectively as a goddess (LJ65) and a Greek athlete (LJ47).

It can hardly be insignificant that Rickie’s visionary moment should be prompted by an embrace and a kiss performed by Gerald with an intensity that borders on the violent, when, only a few paragraphs before, Rickie has been thinking of him as “rude and brutal and cold: he was still the school bully who twisted up the arms of little boys, and ran pins into them at chapel, and struck them in the stomach when they were swinging on the horizontal bar”. In fact, Rickie has been wondering whether Agnes has made a wrong choice and whether “somebody [ought not] to interfere” (LJ39). It appears that Rickie feels a fundamental ambivalence towards Gerald, at whose hands he has suffered as a boy, but whose general type he might nevertheless be seen to be attracted by.³⁸⁹ This ambivalence is partly explained by Rickie’s willingness not only to accept, but also – as his reaction to Gerald’s brutal embrace suggests – to eroticise the violence which he connects intimately with the manly strength he idealises and desires:

Athletes, he believed, were simple, straightforward people, cruel and brutal if you like, but never petty. They knocked you down and hurt you, and then went on their way rejoicing. For this, Rickie thought, there is something to be said: he had escaped the sin of despising the physically strong. (LJ37)

be found in the conversation between the outraged and disgusted ‘light’ character and his female confidante, who tries to plead on behalf of the ‘dark’ character at first. However, Agnes is no Margaret; unable to perform the “woman’s job” of “pity[ing] the weak”, she regards Rickie’s offer as merely ridiculous and finishes by sharing Gerald’s disgust: having heard that Rickie “daren’t risk having any children” himself and wishes as it were to procreate vicariously by financing her and Gerald’s marriage, she ceases to find the situation amusing and refers to Rickie as a “little beast” (LJ49f).

³⁸⁸ See also Herz 1997:145.

³⁸⁹ Herz has observed that “Rickie does not, in any literal (that is, narratively realisable) sense, desire Gerald, no more does he desire Agnes (although this will take him a while to understand). Rather he desires their desire, which he responds to from the position of Agnes” (1997:145).

Trying to gain access to the desired body of Gerald “through the mind” (Martin 1997:261), Rickie romanticises this brutal English athlete, quoting from Aristophanes’ play *The Clouds*

the description of the young Athenian, perfect in body, placid in mind, who neglects his work at the Bar and trains all day among the woods and meadows, with a garland on his head and a friend to set the pace; the scent of new leaves is upon them; they rejoice in the freshness of spring.³⁹⁰

However, Rickie is himself aware that the former school bully falls short of the classical ideal, for “Mr Dawes would not have bothered over the garland or noticed the spring, and would have complained that the friend ran too slowly or too fast” (LJ47). Moreover, Gerald is “full of transparent jealousy and petty spite, nagging, nagging, nagging, like a maiden lady who has not been invited to a tea-party” (LJ37).

Such is “the Gerald of history”, whom Rickie’s literary imagination nevertheless manages to transfigure more or less permanently into “the Gerald of romance”. In his existence in these two distinct modes of Rickie’s perception, Gerald shares the fate of Stephen Wonham, who, though “more genial”, exhibits what at first seems to the bored and preoccupied Rickie “the same brutality, the same peevish insistence on the pound of flesh” (LJ106). It is not until Rickie begins to look on Stephen as, in essence, a reincarnation of his beloved mother and a symbol for love’s continuity – a form of romanticising that corresponds to the symbolic meaning with which he endows the person of Gerald – that Stephen’s objectionable character traits undergo a reinterpretation: all at once, Rickie realises that “in spite of his obstinacy and conceit, Stephen was an easy person to live with” (LJ266).

Stephen and Gerald, the ‘light’ characters of *The Longest Journey*, are thus shown to turn into sites of projection within the larger framework of the ‘dark’ Rickie’s private sense-making narratives which are shaped by his desires. Billy Budd, too, can be recognised as such a site of projection: as Robert Martin has pointed out, in Melville’s novella, Billy functions as “a kind of slate on which others inscribe their desires” (1986a:108), be it the narrator or the other characters.³⁹¹ In the absence of a narrator in the opera, we mainly witness Vere’s sense-making narratives about Billy, as for example in his monologue “Claggart, John Claggart, beware” at the beginning of Act II, Sc. 2, where he sets up a symbolically heightened opposition between Billy as “good” and Claggart as “evil” (LIB51). Problems arise, for Vere as for Rickie, when the ‘light’ characters’ actions shatter these glorified images of themselves (see pp.292ff. below).

³⁹⁰ The passage in question appears in lines 1002-1008 of *The Clouds* (Heine 1984b:411).

³⁹¹ See also my discussion in section II.5.3.5.

II.4.2.3. 'Dark' characters

II.4.2.3.1. "Too weak": Rickie Elliot, a protagonist who fails

"Rickety Elliot": queer encodings

Along with "Ansell", "Dr Woolacott" and "Little Imber", *The Longest Journey* presents one of the few of Forster's salvation narratives in which the 'light' saviour character does not come to grief in some way or other. Rather, it is Rickie Elliot, the novel's main 'dark' character, who dies to save the 'light' Stephen Wonham's life. Rickie shows all of the traits I have named as typical of the 'dark' character type: he comes from a middle-class family, has received a university education at Cambridge, and can, as a writer of short stories that draw on Greek mythology, be classified as an artistic intellectual. Like another of his 'dark' predecessors – the effeminate bisexual intellectual Ralph Holme from "Ralph and Tony", who also suffers from weak health – Rickie is characterised by physical weakness and a delicate constitution. The former is associated with the deformed foot and the concomitant lameness which runs in his father's "weakly" family (Mrs Failing has the same disability, LJ121); the latter manifests itself in a tendency to faint in moments of crisis,³⁹² as well as in "a curious breakdown" (LJ140) which confines him to his bed for a lengthy period, and which can be interpreted as a psychosomatic reaction to the shock of learning of his half-brother's existence. His Cambridge friend Tilliard finds him "a little effeminate" (LJ79); somewhat more blunt in his assessment, the energetic country lad Stephen considers him an "anaemic prig" (LJ108); at school, his house prefect Gerald Dawes's contempt for the "weak boy" made Rickie the victim of bullying and physical torment (LJ50). Rickie's physical handicap understandably makes him a nervous and incompetent horseman: unable to "leave it to the horse", he is inclined to "sit like a corpse"; whereas all he would need to do, according to Stephen, is to "tell her you're alive" (LJ109).

The implication that Rickie is not "alive" complements the images of sterility and death with which his figure is surrounded – his infant daughter's disability is "worse" than his own (LJ184), and her death confirms his conviction that he must not "risk having any children" (LJ50, 184), and that the Elliots had best "die out" (LJ193). It is an easy step to associate Rickie's "abnormal" physical condition, taken in conjunction with his effeminacy, with contemporary medical discourses about homosexuality. Rickie's relationship with his friend Ansell can also be seen to comprise homophile aspects;³⁹³ however, their friendship and their unconscious (or at

³⁹² Fainting is Rickie's reaction to his aunt's and Ansell's respective revelations about Stephen's identity; see LJ130 and 226.

³⁹³ The characters of Rickie and Ansell, as well as the relationship between them, were already identified as queer during Forster's lifetime by critics such as Frederick C. Crews, who interpreted Rickie's physical disability and his effeminacy as signs that encode a homophile disposition (Crews 57), and Wilfred Stone (1966:192-203). Later readings of Rickie and Ansell's friendship as

least unaddressed) homoerotic interest in each other are not strong enough to prevent Rickie from succumbing to the pressure of heteronormative convention. In his perception, once he leaves his spiritual “home” of Cambridge, he “shall live in the street”, where the intellectual – and homosocial – sanctuary of Cambridge is “looked down on”, something which “matters very much” to him (LJ62f.). Anxious to find a substitute for the spiritual home he is about to lose, his solution is to marry Agnes, whose person his poetic imagination has been glorifying from their first reported encounter (see LJ16f., 65), even though their feelings for each other are decidedly conflicted: Agnes shies away from the “something abnormal” (LJ74) she senses in him, and Rickie remains anxious to shield “that part of him that did not belong to her” (LJ69), which includes “all he had read, all he had hoped, all he had loved” (LJ72) – the private world that nourishes his literary creativity – as well as his friendship with Ansell.

“Lost on the infinite sea”: salvation and ruin

Like all Forsterian ‘dark’ characters, Rickie stands in need of spiritual salvation. This is offered in the shape of a connection with the desirable ‘light’ character Stephen Wonham. Rickie’s opinion of his saviour-to-be is initially rather low; thus, for instance, he looks down on Stephen as an “inexperienced animal” (LJ108) with whom he cannot discuss his exalted vision of Agnes, the woman he loves. However, once Rickie learns that Stephen is his half-brother, he instinctively feels that Stephen “must be told such a real thing”. At this point, he recognises that he has been “offered” a “symbol” which he must accept “at whatever cost” in order to “have accepted life” (LJ136).

It seems significant that, hesitating thus on the brink of spiritual salvation, his impulse is to communicate with Ansell, his mentor in male/male relationships. However, he allows this impulse to be curtailed by Agnes, who informs him that “what you call the ‘symbolic moment’ is over. You had it up by the Rings [i.e. the prehistoric site]. You tried to tell him. I interrupted you. It’s not your fault. You did all you could”. A moment later, as Stephen calls out his name from the drive, Agnes steps into her fiancé’s way to prevent him from reaching the window, “stopping his advance quite frankly, with outspread arms”. Rickie, thinking “he had never seen her so beautiful”, fails to respond to Stephen’s thrice-repeated appeal, and, rejecting the symbolic moment that would establish a personal connection with the male saviour-figure, succumbs to conventionality, aware that “the woman had conquered” (LJ137f.) He subsequently “adopt[s] her opinion” and is “glad that his brother had passed from him untried, that the symbolic moment had been rejected” (LJ139). It is only later that he comes to realise that his failure

queer include those by Summers (56ff.), Bristow (1995:69), Martin (1997:263ff.) and Royle, who goes even further in proposing that the novel “opens onto an experience of what is perhaps queerer than queer” (Royle 32).

to tell Stephen that they are half-brothers has been “hurting” his “subconscious self”, and has turned into “a poison” that has “ruined” his and Agnes’s lives, even though at that point he is not yet able to think of Stephen with “love” (LJ191).

The sense of having been “ruined” by a wrong decision could be seen to link the ‘dark’ character Rickie with the operatic Vere, who, having failed to save Billy and aligned himself with the law instead, expresses his despair in the Prologue: “Oh what have I done? [...] Who has blessed me? Who saved me?” (LIB7). While Vere’s recollection of the story of his failure appears to bring him at least a temporary relief from his despair as he (re-)evokes his sense of having been “blessed” and “saved” by Billy (LIB63), there is another character in the opera whose guilt and despair presumably remain unrelieved, and for reasons not unrelated to those that lie at the root of Rickie’s sense of spiritual defeat with which he departs from life. This character is the Novice.

Like the Novice, Rickie is unable to place his faith in the personal relationships that might save him from being “lost for ever on the endless sea” (LIB19). The deaths of his parents have left him with the realisation “that we are all of us bubbles on an extremely rough sea. Into this sea humanity has built, as it were, some little breakwaters – scientific knowledge, civilised restraint – so that the bubbles do not break so frequently or so soon” (LJ57). Tellingly, Rickie’s list is missing the one “breakwater[...]” which the text seeks to represent as ultimately salutary – the personal commitment to a fellow man *as a man*; for his marriage to Agnes, of whom he worships only a glorified image, proves ruinous, and his treating Stephen as a symbol equally disastrous. While Rickie will temporarily find the courage to follow Stephen’s appeal of “Come with me as a man”, he will do so not so much for the sake of his “kind” words, but because his voice recalls in him the memory of their mother (LJ257f). An unconditional, personal commitment to Stephen “as a man” is beyond him. Shortly before his death, he foresees that “the conventions would claim him soon” because he is “too weak”: “books and friends” are “not enough” to sustain him on the “extremely rough sea” of a life subject to the pressure of social convention, and to the hardships of loneliness and spiritual deprivation (LJ282).

The Novice, likewise, is unable to find salvation in personal relationships: his own misery makes him deaf to his friend’s reassurances, and to his declaration of his personal commitment, “I’ll look after you” (LIB19). This declaration matches Stephen’s promise of “I will take care of you, I can manage you” (LJ257), and is moreover punctuated by the signal call of “Come along, kid”, in which the appeal of “come” can be read as a Forsterian coded marker for a discourse about male/male love. Yet, conscious only of being “lost for ever on the endless sea” (LIB19), subjected to the whims of “fate” (LIB34), the Novice succumbs to Claggart’s pressure and agrees to serve as his agent in the plot against Billy.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁴ See my discussion in section II.3.10.6.

In a similar way, the spiritually rudderless Rickie becomes a tool for Agnes and Herbert, who are both shown to be plotting against those whom they perceive as threats to their personal integrity and social position. Thus, for instance, Rickie is employed by Herbert to terminate what the schoolmaster considers an irregular boarding-house arrangement involving some day-boys at Sawston school (LJ162ff.). While Rickie is never placed “into an illegal or really dangerous position”, he finds himself obliged “to do things that he would not otherwise have done”; in this way, he gradually “los[es] his independence” (LJ164) and is subjected to the Pembroke’s domination. In a striking coincidence of parallel formulation, Rickie is at this point referred to by the narrator as a “cat’s-paw” (LJ164); the same term is used by Melville’s *Dansker* (BB67) in an ambiguous allusion to the afterguardsman who may or may not have been sent by Claggart to trap Billy (see BB62-64).³⁹⁵

At the moment of his greatest crisis, the operatic Vere’s sense of being “lost with all hands on the infinite sea” (LIB58) momentarily echoes the Novice’s despair. Yet the Epilogue shows that, unlike the Novice, Vere has, through his personal connection with the man whose death sentence he has endorsed, reached the conviction (however tenuous and/or temporary) that he is no longer “lost on the infinite sea”, but that he has been “blessed” and “saved” through the sighting of “the far-shining sail” (LIB63) – the vision of a personal bond which is “not Fate” (LIB61), which he and Billy have shared.

Rickie, too, temporarily experiences the process which Forster was to describe in 1930 as “two people pulling each other into salvation” (CPB55): having saved the drunken Stephen from a fatal fall down the staircase of Dunwood House (LJ248), and having subsequently left Sawston and gone to live with Stephen at the Ansell’s, Rickie finds that “his health was better, his brain was sound, his life washed clean, not by the waters of sentiment, but by the efforts of a fellow man” (LJ267). However, his ability to commit himself to Stephen fails in the confrontation with the reality of Stephen’s personality.³⁹⁶ When, on a visit to his aunt, Rickie learns that five village families have been evicted following their participation in the window-breaking at Cadover, he confidently casts Stephen as a hero who will make a stand against such injustice:

Against all this wicked nonsense, against the Wilbrahams and Pembroke who try to rule our world Stephen would fight till he died. Stephen was a hero. He was a law to himself, and rightly. He was great enough to despise our small moralities. He was attaining love. This evening Rickie caught Ansell’s enthusiasm, and felt it worth while to sacrifice everything for such a man. (LJ279)

³⁹⁵ Forster marked the paragraph containing the phrase “a cat’s-paw” (BB67) in his copy of *Billy Budd* in March 1949.

³⁹⁶ Forster himself was conscious of this theme: in the “Author’s Introduction” which he wrote for *The Longest Journey* in 1960, he names “the ethical idea that reality must be faced (Rickie won’t face Stephen)” as one of the novel’s central components (1984b:lxvi).

Having made Stephen promise him on the train that he would not drink during his sojourn at Cadover (LJ266), Rickie cannot accept that Stephen, on getting together with those of his friends who are left in the village, could be drinking with them in complete disregard of his earlier promise. “He couldn’t be”, he tells his aunt’s servant, Leighton. “If he broke a promise – I don’t pretend he’s a saint. I don’t want him one. But it isn’t in him to break a promise” (LJ280). When reality proves him wrong, Rickie’s view of both Stephen and his own situation undergoes a sudden radical change:

Stephen was a law to himself. He had chosen to break his word, and would break it again. Nothing else bound him. To yield to temptation is not fatal for most of us. But it was the end of everything for a hero.

“He’s suddenly ruined!” [Rickie] cried, not yet remembering himself. [...] While he prayed for a miracle to convert his brother, it struck him that he must pray for himself. For he, too, was ruined.

“Why, what’s the matter?” asked Leighton. [...] “Mr Elliot, sir, don’t break down. Nothing’s happened bad.” [...]

Rickie said, “May God receive me and pardon me for trusting the earth.”³⁹⁷

“But, Mr Elliot, what have you done that’s wrong?”

“Gone bankrupt, Leighton, for the second time. Pretended again that people were real. May God have mercy on me!”

Leighton dropped his arm. Though he did not understand, a chill of disgust passed over him, and he said, “I will go back to The Antelope [i.e. the village public house]. I will help them put Stephen to bed.” (LJ281)

Faced with Stephen’s promise-breaking and his drunkenness, Rickie abruptly loses his faith in the man he had confidently and enthusiastically celebrated as a “hero” only a short time before; and, in a bitter twist of narrative irony, it is only “duty” (LJ282) which makes him save Stephen’s life at the cost of his own a short time later, whereby he literally comes “to sacrifice everything for such a man” (LJ279).

Even though Rickie finds himself in a situation where saving Stephen’s life does not lie at odds with “duty” – which it does in the case of Captain Vere and Billy – it is nevertheless interesting to compare the above passages to the events which precede and follow Billy’s fatal confrontation with Claggart. In the libretto, the interview between Claggart and Vere at the end of Act II Sc. 1 is followed by Vere’s monologue at the beginning of Sc. 2, in which he triumphantly expresses his conviction that Billy is “good” and Claggart “evil”, confidently declaring that Claggart “shall fail” (LIB51). However, the unforeseen outcome of the confrontation between the two men leaves Vere confounded, and arguably in a state of abject disillusionment which is not dissimilar to Rickie’s despair: for Forster’s Vere, as for Rickie, Billy’s deed is “the end of everything” (LJ281) for the heroic

³⁹⁷ “The earth”: i.e. the life-force, or “Spirit of Life” (LJ181).

figure he has constructed. Vere is left face to face with the real man for whom he finds himself unable to break his allegiance to the law and risk his position.

Like the stricken Rickie, the distraught Vere, too, impulsively voices his new view of the situation – “Struck by an angel of God, yet the angel must hang” (LIB54) – thereby indicating that he has already rejected any possibility of saving Billy, whom he arguably regards as “suddenly ruined” (LJ281). In Melville’s novella, the captain utters the same phrase (“Struck by an angel”, etc., BB85) in a state in which he, too, is clearly “not yet remembering himself” (LJ281) but is visibly “absorbed in thought”. His mental abstraction “profoundly discomfort[s]” the surgeon, who wonders whether his captain may be “unhinged” (BB85f.), in a way comparable to that in which Rickie’s words puzzle and even disgust Leighton.

Both Melville and Forster introduce the ‘outsider’s view’ of another character who does not attribute any spiritual significance to the events he is witnessing. This view is contrasted with their protagonist’s personal interpretation of the situation, which draws attention to the constructed and subjective nature of reality. The figure of the surgeon and the idea of an ‘outsider’s view’ disappeared from the libretto at an early stage (see note 480). However, in the libretto, Vere, like Rickie, is now seen to realise that “he, too” is “ruined” (LJ281) at this point (“My heart’s broken, my life’s broken”), and that what lies before him is not Billy’s “trial” but his own condemnation: “It is I whom the devil awaits” (LIB53). The opera’s Vere, unlike Melville’s, finds himself personally affected by Billy’s tragedy, reminiscent of the way in which Rickie, as he is “pray[ing] for a miracle to convert his brother”, realises “that he must pray for himself” because the emotional investment he has made into his glorified image of the imperfect Stephen has left him spiritually “bankrupt” – a realisation which brings him close to “break[ing] down” (LJ281).

It might be wondered whether Vere’s dramatic breakdown in the “Scylla and Charybdis” monologue is caused by a similar sense of a life-shattering awakening in his “momentary contact with reality” (LJ222). For, just as Rickie’s perception of his surroundings and of other people is structured by, and thus subject to, the sense-giving but potentially distorting influence of various kinds of textual models,³⁹⁸ the libretto’s Vere turns to the Classics to make intellectual sense of his situation,³⁹⁹ as well as to biblical narratives about good and evil. When the narrative logic of this sense-giving framework is disrupted by Billy’s unexpected act of violence and the equally unforeseen demise of Claggart, Vere realises, like Rickie, that it is he who has “reckoned without” the individual, and imperfect, humanity of the “good” Billy Budd who was so heroically to have made the “evil” Claggart’s plot “fail” (LIB51).

Like Rickie, too, Vere subsequently has to face the fact that he is “too weak” to resist the “conventions” – in Vere’s case, the requirements and constraints of

³⁹⁸ See, for example, Rickie’s glorification of Agnes, for which he is rebuked by Ansell (LJ16f.).

³⁹⁹ Act I, Sc. 2: “Plutarch – the Greeks and the Romans – their troubles and ours are the same” (LIB24).

naval law. However, unlike Rickie, who concludes that the symbols of male/male companionship and continuity – the “mystic rose” of fire, Stephen’s face, “the bather” and “the shoulders of Orion” – mean “nothing” (LJ282), Vere does not completely reject the idea of personal relationships as salutary.

In section III.2.3. I trace the painstaking process through which the librettists attempted to eradicate the ambiguities that surround the figure of the captain in Melville’s text. Their efforts led them to a point at which the largely exculpated Vere came to fit the structure of the Forsterian salvation narrative, in which the ‘dark’ character is typically left shocked and ‘broken’ by a violent encounter with Otherness – a necessary step towards achieving the salutary experience. The remorse felt by the operatic Vere – in contrast to Melville’s original text – points to his awareness that he has failed as a human being; unlike Rickie, however, he is prepared to face this painful “reality” (LJ222) – both that of his own ethical failure and that of Billy’s imperfection which he accepts rather than rejects.

Rickie saves Stephen’s life from a sense of duty, but he does so without recovering his personal bond with him, and remains spiritually unsaved. By contrast, Vere’s impulse to throw himself spiritually on the mercy of the man he will not save from destruction – the impulse to establish a personal connection with him – is rewarded by a sighting of the symbolical “far-shining sail” (LIB63). This is the salutary experience which Rickie fails to attain, for with his dying words he confirms that Mrs Failing has “been right” (LJ282) in warning him not to trust “the earth” (LJ275) – “the earth” being symbolic of the “Spirit of Life” (LJ181), the force which ranks highest in the story’s internal value system, and which can be seen to comprise the desire for successful, unconventional, ‘true’ and salutary male/male relationships.⁴⁰⁰

“Hate and envy”: Rickie Elliot as flawed ‘dark’ protagonist

While the figures of Rickie on the one hand, and Agnes and Herbert on the other hand, are clearly conceived as representatives of opposing approaches to life, engaged in a struggle for self-realisation and dominance, it is nevertheless possible in certain respects to treat them jointly as embodying merely different facets of the ‘dark’ character type. This interpretive move seems legitimate in view of the numerous allusions to the Elliot-Pembroke convergence in the text itself. These include the ominous significance Ansell ascribes to Agnes’s use of the pronoun “we” (LJ79), through which she subtly steers her husband-to-be, and Rickie’s

⁴⁰⁰ Surprisingly – and uncharacteristically – Mary Lago is among the readers who have somehow managed to avoid facing up to the spiritual bleakness of Rickie’s death; her conclusion that “it is true that Rickie dies tragically, but this ending is not unrelievedly unhappy, for just before it is too late he realises that he has seen through to an everlasting truth, that ‘conventions will not claim us in the end’” (35) is based on a passage (LJ278) which precedes Rickie’s experience of spiritual “bankrupt[cy]” (LJ281). Lago furthermore fails to engage with Rickie’s renunciation of the symbols of continuity (LJ282).

repeated acknowledgement of the fact that, as Agnes's husband (who has more-over espoused her conventional views), he is implicated in all that she does: he even finds himself forced to concede that "*We* have ruined [Stephen]" (LJ204). Cast mainly as the victim of the Pembroke's stifling conventionality, Rickie is nevertheless shown to share their intellectual prejudices, and to be subject to the same mechanisms of projection and hatred. The 'dark' protagonist Rickie's convergence with the Pembroke's, the text's 'dark' antagonists (see sections II.5.2.1. and II.5.2.2.) seems of particular interest in view of the operatic Vere's much-noted convergence – musical, textual, and structural – with the 'dark' antagonist Claggart.

Rickie's initially hostile response to Stephen can be compared to Melville's Claggart's response to Billy. Both Rickie and Claggart, having once conceived their dislike, continue deliberately to maintain their attitude by refusing to dwell on any but their negative feelings towards their chosen opponents: Rickie "had labelled the boy as 'Bad', and it was convenient to revert to his good qualities as seldom as possible. He preferred to brood over his coarseness, his caddish ingratitude, his irreligion. Out of these he constructed a repulsive figure" (LJ140). In a similar way, Claggart is seen to "brood" over the imagined slight of the soup-spilling incident (BB51), an "accident" which he construes as "the sly escape of a spontaneous feeling on Billy's part more or less answering to the antipathy on his own" (BB60). The incident is "welcome" to Claggart because it enables him to "justif[y] animosity into a sort of retributive righteousness" (BB61) and confirms his labeling of Billy as hostile to himself.

While Rickie tries to live the conventional life of Sawston, he "never doubt[s] for a moment" that Stephen is "inherently bad", and yet he can at the same time think of Stephen as "a man unlike all the rest of them – a man dowered with coarse kindness and rustic strength, a kind of cynical ploughboy, against whom [the Elliots'] own misery and weakness might stand more vividly revealed" (LJ192). These conflicting views point to an underlying ambiguity of Rickie's feelings for Stephen that cannot be explained by mere guilt about not having revealed his parentage to him when he could have done so. It seems that in spite of himself, Rickie feels drawn towards Stephen and the life-affirming principle he symbolises, in a manner reminiscent of Claggart, who, as will be remembered, occasionally looks upon Billy with a "melancholy expression" containing "a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy" (BB70).

In the repulsive image which Rickie constructs of Stephen, it is possible to detect components of frustrated jealousy and desperate self-hatred that are not dissimilar to the feelings harboured by Claggart. The death of his child has confirmed Rickie's belief in his own sterility; he feels himself to be "dead", and decries "the cruelty of Nature" who is indifferent to "refinement and piety" but, instead, favours the continuation of "coarse kindness and rustic strength", against which the withered Elliots' "misery and weakness might stand more vividly relieved" – a

fact which Rickie regards as an “insult” and which makes him feel “diseased in body and soul” (LJ192). Like Melville’s Claggart, whose hatred of Billy is linked with the Miltonic Satan’s self-consuming jealousy, and like Forster’s Claggart, whose “hate and envy” stem from his despair at being debarred from “enter[ing]” the place where “love still lives and grows strong” by his innate “depravity” (LIB32f.), Rickie, though he prays to God “that he might abstain from extreme hatred and envy of Stephen”, nevertheless projects his self-abhorrence onto the radiant figure of his half-brother, at whose “triumphant face” he strikes as it appears before him in a dream – only to find, upon waking, that he has “hurt his hand on the wall” in striking the blow (LJ192f.). In much the same way, Claggart’s attempt to destroy the shining opponent who embodies the triumph of love will lead to his own (fatal) injury.

The downfall of the master-at-arms, caused as it were by the physical confrontation with Billy’s very essence, also has its parallel in the scene in which Ansell, the prophet-champion of everything that Stephen represents, reveals that Stephen is the son of Rickie’s beloved mother: so unexpected and powerful is this ‘blow’ that Rickie, who only moments before had considered himself impregnable, his emotions “withered up at last”, ends up being “carried from the hall” unconscious (LJ225f.), having “rapped his head on the edge of the table” (LJ252).

II.4.2.3.2. Desperate villains: John Claggart and Agnes Elliot, *née* Pembroke

A remarkable precursor for John Claggart’s relationship with Billy may be discovered in the relationship of Rickie’s wife Agnes with Stephen. Unbeknownst to Rickie, Agnes has been plotting against Stephen for the sake of ensuring the protection of her husband’s (and thereby, her own) respectability and good name, and to preclude the possibility of Mrs Failing bequeathing money on Stephen, which Rickie would consider the fair thing for her to do.⁴⁰¹ The strategy by which Agnes manages to “turn the scale” of Mrs Failing’s feelings against Stephen, thereby achieving his eviction from Cadover and “ruin[ing]” him (LJ203), can be loosely compared to that employed by Claggart in his attempt to blacken Billy’s name to Vere.

Agnes writes to Mrs Failing without Rickie’s knowledge, reporting what she has learned from him about Stephen’s disrespectful behaviour – the reckless Stephen, considering himself well within his rights,⁴⁰² had made up and disseminated some irreverent verses about his lame patroness, which Rickie had described to Agnes in disgust on their engagement visit to Cadover. Stephen’s irreverence

⁴⁰¹ Rickie explains to Herbert that Stephen “ought to have my aunt’s money, because he’s lived all his life with her, and is her nephew as much as I am” (LJ204; see also LJ190).

⁴⁰² Stephen has no scruples about sharing his verses about “Aunt Em’ly” with a soldier whom he and Rickie encounter on their ride to Salisbury, but strongly objects when the soldier starts to make free with Mrs Failing’s name in his turn, a transgression for which he strikes the man down (LJ112-115).

might be construed as disloyalty which, just like his activities on behalf of the village labourers, can be read as a form of mutiny against his aunt's authority. In her letter, Agnes has evidently invoked Rickie as the source of her information, whereas Rickie himself would "sooner cut my tongue out than have it used against [Stephen]" (LJ204). This adds a further structural similarity to the operatic Claggart's plot against Billy, for Rickie's position can once more be seen to correspond roughly to that of the Novice: having been forced into setting a trap for Billy (which Rickie, admittedly, is not), the Novice is then referred to as a witness to the supposed incitation to mutiny, with Claggart distorting the evidence to suit his ends (Act II, Sc. 1; LIB48).

Agnes's activities can also be seen to resemble the machinations of Melville's Squeak, with the role of Claggart briefly shifted to Mrs Failing. Mrs Failing, already exasperated by Stephen's interference in the management of her farm, takes what has been represented to her as Stephen's lack of respect as a personal insult. Agnes has thus successfully supplied her with a "personal grievance" (LJ244), much in the same way that Squeak, in the novella, succeeds in nurturing Claggart's disapproval of Billy. Following the incident of the spilled soup, Claggart's feelings towards Billy have turned from "an antipathy spontaneous and profound" (BB53) to an intensely personal "contempt". Squeak nourishes this by supplying him with "tell-tale reports" in which "certain innocent frolics of the good-natured foretopman" are "pervert[ed]" by this "faithful understrapper" in order "to ferment the ill blood" between his superior officer and the innocent Handsome Sailor (BB60).

Neither Claggart nor Agnes can foresee the tragic outcome of their respective scheming and plotting. To Agnes, the narrator comments, "life never showed itself as a classic drama, in which, by trying to advance our fortunes, we shatter them"; her success in ousting Stephen from Cadover results in his falling "like a thunderbolt on Sawston and on herself" (LJ260). The same could be said of Claggart, whose plot against Billy brings down the rather more literal – and fatal – thunderbolt of Billy's outraged innocence on himself, in what the narrator identifies as a drama of "profound passion [...] enacted" on "the stage" of "a scrubbed gun-deck" (BB59f).

Stephen himself initially has no misgivings about Agnes. Having been evicted from Cadover, he comes to Sawston to tell the Elliots the news of his parentage, confident that they will take such a revelation in their stride. Just as the innocent Billy cannot believe the Dansker's warnings that Claggart could be ill-disposed towards him (BB49; compare the end of Act I, Sc. 3, LIB37), Stephen trusts Agnes, whom he considers "a handsome woman". This trust arises from his assumption of their fundamental similarity: "His strength and his youth called to hers, expecting no prudish response" (LJ219).

As Stephen tells her that he is Rickie's half-brother, Agnes, who believes she already knows the correct details of his parentage, initially remains "quite calm", for she has already prepared a plan of action. In exchange for a sum of money,

Stephen is to sign “a pseudo-legal document” to guarantee his “perpetual silence” over the scandalous matter. Agnes is “glad she had taken the offensive” and believes herself fully in control of the interview with the bewildered Stephen: as she is convinced that Stephen’s is a “rapacious” character, she feels confident of her scheme’s success. Stephen, however, shows no interest in the money, refuses to sign, and leaves the house, declaring that the “mistake” was his, that he will “say no more about it”, and that he “meant no harm” (LJ220ff.). Agnes is taken entirely by surprise by Stephen’s response, which she had not allowed for in her calculations, in much the same way that Claggart has presumably failed to allow for the “temper” and the “fists” (LIB18) of the man whom he had vowed to “destroy” (LIB33). Stephen’s “prosaic” manner and exit, however, remain free from physical violence, the expression of his feelings being limited to “sp[itting] into the gutter” (LJ222).

Below the surface of Agnes’s conventionality, which would suffice to account for her rejection of Stephen, there lies a complex mixture of attraction, reluctant acknowledgement and self-protective hatred which can be seen to correspond with the operatic Claggart’s feelings to a striking degree. In Ch. 31, after Rickie has unsuccessfully appealed to Stephen to remain at Sawston and live with him, Agnes, unwittingly confirming Stephen’s opinion of this offer as “ridiculous”, calls from outside the room that Stephen “can’t stop” with them (LJ254f.). For a moment her voice “peal[s]” over the desolate Rickie “in triumph”, but as she catches sight of Stephen, she bursts into tears all at once, and, unable to recover her self-control, locks herself into her room. The cause of this unexpected behaviour is hinted at as Stephen explains to Rickie: “She looked at me as if she knew me, and then gasps [*sic*] ‘Gerald’, and started crying”. Rickie tells Stephen that Agnes has always “acted as if she had forgotten [Gerald]”, adding that “Perhaps she had, and you woke him up” (LJ256). This idea would reappear some fifty years later in “The Other Boat”, where Lionel projects the burden of his homophobic self-hatred and his guilt about his sexual transgression onto his lover Cocanut, complaining that he has “woken up so much that might have slept” – i.e., his sexual desires (LtC193).

A similar self-protective reaction can be diagnosed in Agnes’s response to Stephen: besides the fact that “the poise of his shoulders” momentarily evokes in Agnes the memory of her dead lover, she also finds herself confronted with her sexual desires in the encounter with Stephen, the ‘light’ character who embodies the life-force: “She had turned to him as to her lover; with a look, which a man of his type understood, she had asked for his pity; for one terrible moment, she had desired to be held in his arms” (LJ260). To Agnes, an unhappily married woman whose personal outlook is shaped by the norms and values of social convention, and who moreover regards Stephen as a social abomination and a threat to her financial security, this revelation is far from welcome. The spontaneous awakening of unwanted and prohibited desire seems “terrible” to her. So disturbed is she by

its manifestation that she “conceal[s]” her experience not only from the inquisitive Herbert, but arguably also from herself for a while: unable as yet to analyse her feelings, she privately wonders whether she has “gone mad” to “choose such a moment” for ceasing to “pretend[...]” to herself that she “love[d] her husband” (LJ259).⁴⁰³

When Agnes eventually does confront her experience, we are told that Stephen has “reminded her of the greatest thing she had known” – her love for Gerald, which would seem to comprise both her capability of loving another human as well as her existence as a sexual being. However, her “cloudy mind” – presumably dimmed by the conventions which imprison her⁴⁰⁴ – prevents her from acknowledging this reminder as spiritually significant and salutary, as the novel’s underlying value system would seem to imply it should be taken. Instead, she classifies her experience as a “degradation”, thereby casting Stephen in the role of an aggressor: “Stephen had evoked her secret, and she hated him more for that than for anything else he had done” (LJ260); “he had drawn out the truth” (LJ261) of her disappointment over her marriage with Rickie, her bitterness and hatred and her frustrated sexuality. As Rickie and Stephen leave the house, they can faintly hear her “hopeless, vindictive” sobs (LJ257). Agnes’s reaction to this confrontation with her own misery and suffering is to project her negative feelings onto the men whom she perceives as antagonistic to her, and who thus become the external targets upon whom she can direct her hatred and aggression: Rickie, Stephen and Ansell “had wronged her; therefore she hated them, and, if she could, would do them harm” (LJ260).

In this she resembles her predecessor Mildred Peaslake in Forster’s earliest published short story “Albergo Empedocle” of 1903. On a trip to Acragas, Mildred’s fiancé Harold falls asleep on the ruins of a Greek temple, and, upon waking, appears to remember having lived before as a Greek, and having “loved very differently” and also “loved better too” (LtC25) – this may be construed as an oblique reference to Harold’s possibly homoerotic feelings for his friend Tommy who narrates the story. Mildred, “bored” with Harold’s “generalities” and longing for “vivid detail” (LtC24), but arguably also anxious to cement the intimacy between them, rouses herself into a rapture of imagination, claiming that she, too, has lived in ancient Greece together with him. She insists that she has “known” and “loved” him there, leading sacrifices with him, arming him for battle, and

⁴⁰³ Agnes’s hatred of her husband Rickie arguably predates the feelings that made her enter into a marriage with him: when she sees him shortly after the death of Gerald, dirty, out of breath and with his untidy hair falling “wildly over his meagre face”, Agnes thinks: “These are the people who are left alive!” and “from the bottom of her soul she hated him” (LJ53). In a similar way, she later declares that she hates the bullied boy Varden, but denies that her hatred of the “nasty weedy thing” (LJ171) springs from the same abhorrence of the weak and “abnormal” (LJ12) which Rickie, by his own admission even such “a nasty weedy thing” (LJ172), used to evoke in her at an earlier time (and possibly still does).

⁴⁰⁴ See my discussion of Forster’s use of the “mist” image in section II.3.3.

welcoming him after victory – experiences which might belong in a wifely sphere but which could equally represent Mildred's usurpation of the tasks a male comrade would have performed for his friend in ancient Greek society. Harold, in any case, senses that her memories of the past are not genuine, and rejects them, telling Mildred that she has not "lived at Acragas" (LtC26). Mortified by her own sense that Harold has exposed her as a "shifty, shallow hypocrite", feeling herself "humiliated before him", and unable to conceive of the idea of forgiveness other than as "a triumph of one person over another" (LtC27f.), Mildred fabricates her own sinister re-interpretation of what has transpired between them, until she has convinced herself that Harold has always meant her to "prove[...]" herself "inferior to [him]", and for this purpose has deliberately set out a trap for her. Confronted with her own self-disgust, her impulse is to re-establish her own self-esteem by transferring her negative feelings onto her fiancé, on whom she furthermore resolves to revenge herself: "'Intolerable! Intolerable!' she gasped to herself. 'If only I could expose him!'" (LtC28).

Agnes's and Mildred's responses to being confronted with their own feelings of failure, inferiority, self-hatred, and perhaps even a latent jealousy at their exclusion from male/male comradeship and intimacy, represent striking parallels to the operatic Claggart's response to Billy. The master-at-arms seeks to destroy Billy because his prohibited desire for the young sailor causes him to recognise his own misery and suffering, and his inability to "enter" where "love still lives and grows strong" (LIB33). These parallels invite speculation about the creative processes that changed Melville's Claggart into Forster's Claggart. Even though many readers have detected homoerotic overtones in the novella's depiction of Claggart's relationship with Billy, on the textual surface, Claggart's hatred of Billy is attributed only to Claggart's envy on the one hand, and to his vaguely mysterious depravity on the other. The text takes some pains to link this depravity to a metaphysical conflict between him and Billy, rather than to repressed sexual desire. Yet when Forster adapted – and thus interpreted – Melville's text for the libretto, he may consciously or unconsciously have been drawing upon a pattern he had already been exploring in his own writings: that of hatred arising from the suppression or frustration of sexual desire.

That the operatic Claggart should have come to assume, in the Forsterian reworking of Melville's figure, a motivation and behaviour pattern most strongly associated with female figures in Forster's fiction is a striking discovery, but it is a discovery which fits in surprisingly well with Joseph Bristow's observations on the role and function of certain female figures in Forster's fiction. Referring back to the structures of displaced male/male desire mediated through a triangular relationship with a woman, as described by Eve Sedgwick in 1985, Bristow has noted that the "system of social and sexual relations" typically found in these triangular constellations "is, to some degree, turned inside out in Forster's narratives": "Instead of fending off the homoeroticism that these love triangles produce almost in

spite of themselves, his plots seek to exploit it. And they do so by making women into powerful agents who preside over the connection between ‘the beast and the monk’” (1995:58). In *Howards End*, whence Bristow draws his image of connection, it is Margaret who would “preside” over the connection between the two opposing forces within her husband Henry Wilcox. Analysing the climactic encounter between Philip and Gino in *Where Angels fear to Tread*, Bristow observes that “the narrative demands that the two men shall only connect if there is a female presence to act as a catalyst”. This “catalyst” is Caroline Abbott: “like a spiritual guide”, she “set[s] the stage” for the reconciliation and salutary connection between Philip and Gino (66f).

The Longest Journey, Bristow argues, features a different structure, namely, “an erotic triangle where the woman and the scholarly young man are tragic competitors in their shared desire for the same athletic male” (68). While his reading is indisputably valid, Agnes could nevertheless at the same time be seen to function as another female “catalyst”, but a negative one, as it were: one who “preside[s]” over the connection between Rickie and Stephen far from willingly. Rather, she enables that connection in spite of herself, by trying to bind Rickie to her way of life, and putting him under pressure until he is finally jettisoned towards the alternative of male companionship offered by Stephen.⁴⁰⁵ John Claggart, it might be felt, occupies a similar position with regard to Billy and Vere: it is Claggart whose (negative) influence can be seen to “preside” over their relationship; it is through his simultaneous desire and hatred for Billy, which lead him to embark on his machinations, that Billy and Vere are brought into contact with one another, and can achieve their transient connection.

In his analysis of Forster’s narrative patterns, Bristow goes on to note that “if femininity is the medium that achieves the desired connection between men, it also has the power to break it as well” (68). Claggart’s “presid[ing]” influence, if read as a variant of the typically ‘feminine’ position in this particular Forsterian pattern, would appear to be a case in point: as his scheming effects “the desired connection” between Billy and Vere, so does the legacy of his violent death – whether that death is read as the failure or the success of his plan – ensure that their connection is doomed to be broken as soon as it is achieved.

⁴⁰⁵ It might, to continue Bristow’s line of thought, be argued that the connection between Rickie and Stephen is presided over by the positive female influence of their mother’s spirit.

II.4.3. “He would not save his saviour”: “Arthur Snatchfold” (1928)

“Arthur Snatchfold” is constructed around an erotic encounter which Sir Richard Conway, a successful middle-aged middle-class businessman, widower, and father of several daughters, negotiates with a young lower-class milkman to enliven an otherwise dull visit at the country house of his business partner Trevor Donaldson. A few weeks later, Conway coincidentally learns from Donaldson, who is also a country magistrate, that a young local man has been apprehended on a charge of indecency between males, and has been committed for trial at the Assizes. Conway’s cautious enquiries reveal not only that it is indeed ‘his’ milkman who has been charged thus, but that it was in fact their very encounter in the woods, by chance observed by a policeman, which led to his arrest. However, it transpires that Conway has not been identified, and that the milkman has chosen to shield him, even though he could have evaded the charge by exposing Conway. Thus Conway escapes with nothing more than a nasty shock, but this unexpectedly serious outcome of what both he and the milkman had enjoyed as a moment of casual amusement fills him with shame, and, having elicited at least the name of the man who has chosen to go to prison rather than betray him – Arthur Snatchfold – he notes it down “in order that he might not forget it” (LtC112).

“Arthur Snatchfold” was written in 1928, the year that followed Forster’s discussion of Melville’s *Billy Budd* in *Aspects of the Novel*. The fact that this short story so closely postdates Forster’s first recorded engagement with Melville’s text would seem to lend particular interest to the parallels and differences between it and the two versions of *Billy Budd*, especially since “Arthur Snatchfold” may to some extent be read as a Forsterian reworking of one of the novella’s central problems, namely, the sacrifice of an innocent man to an oppressive legal system – a problem which can be shown to appear in the opera in the Forsterian rather than in the Melvillean version. The results of a comparison between the three texts may shed a cross-light on some of the alterations which were introduced as Forster embarked upon the libretto adaptation of Melville’s text.

The third person narrative of “Arthur Snatchfold” mainly relates Conway’s point of view, but can at times be seen to shade into authorial commentary.⁴⁰⁶ Forster’s narrative technique occasionally makes it difficult to determine the extent to which an observation or a comment is to be taken as a rendition of Conway’s thoughts, or as an authorial utterance made by a narrator. Whereas Claude Summers (279f.) and James Malek do not comment on the problem but evidently ascribe all narrated passages to a narrator, I would incline to a more indeterminate reading, since many of the apparently authorial statements and observations occur in an environment that equally well allows them to be read as renditions of Con-

⁴⁰⁶ An example for such authorial commentary would be the statement that there is “no cynicism” in Conway’s flattery of his lover, but that he is “genuinely admiring and gratified” (LtC104).

way's thoughts and impressions in free indirect discourse. However, in "Arthur Snatchfold" this use of a limited figural narrative perspective does not seem to be intended entirely to discredit Conway's opinions through ironic exposure, in the way that the use of limited perspectives of 'uninitiated' narrators in the earlier short stories clearly is. While many of Conway's thoughts might be felt to expose him as arrogant, vain, snobbish and callous, some of the narrative's more authorial admixtures have a counterbalancing effect and could be seen to aim to endorse Conway's position within the text's internal system of values to some extent.⁴⁰⁷

Arthur Snatchfold, the handsome young working-class man who, in a very real sense, becomes Conway's saviour, represents a typical Forsterian 'light' character. His welcome appearance in a "dull costly garden" is initially described as an aesthetic improvement to the "stodgy green" scenery; the overall effect of his – quite literally – radiant presence is an almost visionary uplifting of the senses:

He had on a canary-coloured shirt, and the effect was exactly right. The whole scene blazed. *That* was what the place wanted – not a flower-bed, but a man, who advanced with a confident tread [...], and as he came nearer Conway saw that besides being proper to the colour scheme he was a very proper youth. His shoulders were broad, his face sensuous and open, his eyes, screwed up against the light, promised good temper. [...] "Good morning, nice morning," he called, and he sounded happy. (LtC98)

The young man's solid strength is associated with an equally solid self-confidence and sense of his own worth: "Seen at close quarters he was coarse, very much of the people and of the thick-fingered earth; a hundred years ago his type was trodden into the mud, now it burst and flowered and didn't give a damn" (LtC102).

As the rustic beauty approaches the servants' entrance, he is welcomed by "an outburst of laughter" (LtC98), and laughter later also marks another encounter with the housemaids (LtC105); he possesses a "vigorous voice" (LtC98). Conway fancifully sees in him "a champion" who bears "some refreshment" that might be capable of bringing his and his middle-class companions' "unflowering" existence to bloom (LtC100), thus completing the picture of Arthur Snatchfold as an embodiment of the spirit of life. As such, he can be seen to be related to the already created Stephen Wonham of *The Longest Journey*, but there also exists a link with the yet-to-be-created Billy Budd of the libretto – self-confident, vigorous-voiced, and popular for his infectious good cheer. Although Melville's Billy possesses these qualities too (see BB19-22, BB26), the novella's descriptive mode merely renders them indirectly; more pertinently however, as I have shown in sections I.4.3. and II.5.3.2., Forster's Billy is a significantly more active and extrovert figure than Melville's ultimately passive victim.

⁴⁰⁷ An example for this phenomenon would be the description of Conway as "a man of experience" and "a decent human being" in the middle of a passage which also features clear signs of free indirect discourse (LtC97).

Arthur Snatchfold is certainly neither passive nor a victim of sexual coercion. He is clearly conceived to appear as Conway's equal in articulate self-confidence, strength, and sexual appetite. He responds to Conway's advances with humorous impudence; he enjoys Conway's praise of "his thrusting thrashing strength" (LtC102f.); and, having expressed his regret that Conway could not accompany him for a swim, he also declares that, far from having consented to have sex with Conway only with a view to financial gain, he has done it for his own enjoyment. When, upon their parting, Conway offers him a present of money, he insists that he "didn't do it fer that. [...] Naow, we was each as bad as the other". After their encounter, he gives Conway a hand and pulls him up, brushing and tidying his raincoat for him "like an old friend" (LtC104). This detail serves to demonstrate his good-naturedness and generosity, but at the same time, it evokes the idea of the class-bridging potential of homosexual relationships, which Forster had already expounded in *Maurice*. It is furthermore emphasised that Arthur has "his own life", just as Conway has his; and that neither of them expects anything from the other beyond what they have shared together: "They would never meet again, and they did not exchange names" (LtC104f.). With his independence thus clearly established, Arthur Snatchfold's subsequent decision to shield Conway – to "save him" (LtC112) – cannot therefore be taken as anything other than his own conscious choice.

Unlike many other Forsterian 'dark' characters, Sir Richard Conway is conspicuously free from homophobia and physical weakness. Nevertheless, he can be seen to possess other characteristic 'dark' traits – beside his middle-class status, a spiritual incompleteness, an instance of the phenomenon I have discussed under the heading of 'travelling light'. A symptom of this condition is the ironic detachment with which Conway passes through life, analysing his fellow beings and himself apparently without being touched emotionally – without fully connecting the head and the heart, as it were, which might otherwise lead him to some sense of personal involvement with the human beings who surround him. Dwelling upon his unexpected "vision" of the milkman in the garden, Conway wonders what his name might be, and whether he is a local man, "but not vehemently"; we learn that he is "not a sentimentalist" and that there is "no danger of him being shattered for the day" by curiosity and desire. Interestingly, in his appreciative musings on how he would like to spend the day with the young man, Conway actually thinks of him as "a vision" and accordingly refers to him as an "it" (LtC99). Conway's perception of the young man as the quarry of his amorous chase is exemplified in a fishing metaphor: "[the youth] was hooked, and a touch would land him" (LtC103). Forster thus makes it quite clear that to Conway, the attractive young man is chiefly an object of desire – nothing more and nothing less than something to divert him from boredom, a prize to be attained, enjoyed, and then thought about no more, ranking on much the same level as his "intrigue with a cultivated woman" we are told is "gradually ripening" in the second part of the story

(LtC108). Just as we are informed that “hating never interested him” (LtC105), the text seems to imply that loving does not rank centrally among Conway’s preoccupations either.

The fact that the milkman does not call him “sir” pleases and flatters Conway; he appreciates being thus treated “as if they were equals” (LtC98), possibly because he chooses to interpret the informal address as an acknowledgement of his physical existence as a fellow man, and, by implication, given the direction of Conway’s thoughts, a sexual being. The idea of equality, pleasant as it may appear to him, does not express a particularly critical attitude towards the class system on Conway’s part, however: in his thoughts and behaviour, he can be seen to retain at all times the detached and rather arrogant position of a social and intellectual superior as a matter of course – a position which incidentally also characterises his relations with his middle-class acquaintances (see LtC99f.).

The well-calculated routine with which Conway stalks his quarry and negotiates for his pleasure marks him as something of a connoisseur – an impression supported by his rather patronising assessment of Arthur Snatchfold: “Conway guessed that he was vain, the better sort often are” (LtC103). His arrogance and calculating hedonism may possibly be one of the reasons why early critics took against him to such a degree.⁴⁰⁸ It is also possible, however, to read the smooth progress of the little affair as a celebration of the practice of casual anonymous sex between men, epitomised perhaps in the observation that the two men negotiating for one of “the smaller pleasures of life” understand one another “with a precision impossible for lovers” (LtC103).⁴⁰⁹

For even though Conway is firmly identified as the driving force in the affair, and even though it is emphasised that besides his sexual appetite, it is also very much Conway’s “vanity” and “sense of power” (LtC105) that have been gratified by the success of his “clever manoeuvres” (LtC112), it is nevertheless made clear that both men are equally satisfied with their sexual encounter, and that the affair, “trivial and crude” as it may be, nevertheless possesses a quality of perfection that counterbalances and even glorifies its stereotypical progression (LtC104). The sexual encounter in the woods is likened to “a flower” which has fallen “upon similar flowers” (LtC103), in contrast to a parallel formulation used to describe the sterile tedium of the middle-class house-party which, but for Conway’s life-affirming intercourse with Arthur, would have fallen “like a leaf [...] upon similar leaves” (LtC100). The repeated reference to the affair as “trivial” (LtC104, 112) might furthermore be interpreted as an indirect protest against the legal and social sanctioning of something as prosaic as casual sex between two consenting adult men, a matter directly addressed by Conway and Arthur Snatchfold as they prepare to part (LtC104).

⁴⁰⁸ Early critical responses are discussed by Summers (281).

⁴⁰⁹ Forster’s narrative technique makes it difficult to determine the extent to which these observations are to be taken as Conway’s thoughts or as more authorial observations made by the narrator.

While the “armour” (LtC97, 108) of ironic detachment and social skill with which Conway has fortified himself serves him as an efficient and necessary protection against a potentially hostile society, it also disconnects him from his fellow human beings. Even the momentary perfection of the sexual encounter with Arthur leaves Conway spiritually untouched, which may be yet another partial explanation for his perception of their affair as “trivial”. Conway can thus be seen to live in a state that, according to the Forsterian philosophy, would appear to require salvation through a connection with, or personal commitment to, a fellow human being.⁴¹⁰ The catastrophe that shatters Conway’s complacency and forces him to acknowledge that, for all his detachment, he cannot escape becoming personally involved in human relationships, is built up as a series of shocks, the impacts of which gradually close in on Conway until he fears himself on the brink of personal ruin through exposure.

As the facts and the circumstances surrounding the court case emerge, Conway initially only feels apprehension on his lover’s behalf. The thought of “that good-tempered, harmless chap” unnecessarily “bruised and ruined” fills him with “much regret and compassion” and even with a certain amount of guilt: he fears he may possibly have given the young man the idea of using the wood “as a rendez-vous” for further meetings (LtC109).⁴¹¹ In his unconcerned self-assurance, it does not even occur to him at first that he, too, might be implicated in the case. When he does begin to realise the truth, he almost betrays himself by referring to a previously unmentioned detail, but manages to cover his slip – an instance of seemingly clumsy storytelling which may, however, be read as an ironic illustration of the way in which Conway is protected by the mechanisms of class membership and social connections. Even Donaldson, with whom Conway has a “business feud” by this time, and who might therefore conceivably be interested in ruining him, is apparently safely incapable of entertaining the notion that his former busi-

⁴¹⁰ In this respect, Conway may be linked to the successful businessman Henry Wilcox of *Howards End*, himself a secret dabbler in illicit (heterosexual) relationships at very little risk to himself, who has to suffer what amounts to a personal bereavement in order to pass from his state of selfish arrogance to one of humility and increased appreciation of his fellow beings (see section II.3.10.3.). Stallybrass (1972:xvi) also connects the two characters but does not investigate this structural parallel. Conway might even be regarded as remotely related to Maurice in some ways: Forster conceived his successful homosexual hero as “handsome, healthy, bodily attractive, [...] not a bad business man and rather a snob” (“Notes on *Maurice*” 216); it is only through the experience of his own sufferings that Maurice is finally led to an unprejudiced appreciation of his working-class lover.

⁴¹¹ Christopher Lane has complained that one “scene in ‘Arthur Snatchfold’ creates confusion”: he is under the impression that Arthur Snatchfold “is arrested when he later *returns* to the scene with someone else” (1997:177). However, the “confusion” supposedly created by Forster is merely Lane’s own, because he fails to identify the passage in question as free indirect discourse rendering what is merely a stage in Conway’s gradual process towards full realisation. A considerable amount of this meticulously crafted story’s irony and tension is derived from Conway’s various faulty reconstructions of the events surrounding Arthur Snatchfold’s arrest as the details of his own narrow escape gradually become clear.

ness partner could be involved in anything as “unsavoury” (LtC111) as homosexual intercourse with a lower-class man. Conway’s subsequent, more careful questions are presumably asked with a view to finding out whether he is in any danger of being exposed, or indeed blackmailed, by his unfortunate lover. However, what he learns from Donaldson about the young man’s vehement and evidently successful effort to lead the inquiry astray not only assuages his fears of discovery, but forces him to face both his indebtedness to the stalwart milkman and, more poignantly, his own moral failure as he realises he will continue to “countenanc[e]” the oppressive system of the “cruel stupid world” (LtC109) because he is “not up to” sacrificing his name and his career to it:

He was safe, safe, he could go forward with his career as planned. But waves of shame came over him. Oh for prayer! – but whom had he to pray to, and what about? He saw that little things can turn into great ones, and he did not want greatness. He was not up to it. For a moment he considered giving himself up and standing his trial, but what possible good would that do? He would ruin himself and his daughters, he would delight his enemies, and he would not save his saviour. He recalled his clever manoeuvres for a little fun, and the good-humoured response, the mischievous face, the obliging body. It had all seemed so trivial. Taking a notebook from his pocket, he wrote down the name of his lover, yes, his lover who was going to prison to save him, in order that he might not forget it. Arthur Snatchfold. He had only heard the name once, and he would never hear it again. (LtC112)

It would certainly be possible, as numerous critics have done, to read this passage as a final culmination of sarcasm, and to condemn Conway’s reflections as the contemptible mental agony of a privileged man who lacks the courage to show true human greatness because to do so might endanger his own position in the oppressive society to which he has hitherto successfully conformed. However, Conway’s failure, like the failures of many of Forster’s other ‘dark’ characters, appears designed to appeal to the readers’ sympathy, showcasing as it does the individual’s inability to foresee the consequences of his acts, and the limitations of human strength and courage.⁴¹²

The story’s last sentence – “He had only heard the name once, and he would never hear it again” – with its perhaps overly melodramatic emphasis on the finality of the situation and on the complete rupture of any remaining connection be-

⁴¹² Forster’s awareness of these limitations is easily traced throughout his entire work; it finds expression even in his much-quoted (and often misquoted) dictum from “What I Believe”: “if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend *I hope I should have the guts to betray my country*” (TCD66, my emphasis). The characteristically tentative formulation points to Forster’s very realistic recognition of the social constraints and the human weakness that constantly threaten the existence of the personal relationships which lie at the centre of his philosophy (see also Herz 1988:121).

tween Conway and Arthur except a spiritual one, might of course be interpreted as a sign of Conway's continuing failure to make any personal commitments, and hence, as expressing nothing more than callousness and cowardice on his part (for presumably it would be possible for Conway to establish a recompensatory contact of some sort with his "saviour" after he is released from prison). Given the central position which the idea of salvation occupies in the Forsterian outlook, however, and in view of the fact that the words "saviour", "saved" and "salvation" can be seen to possess a relatively fixed meaning throughout Forster's writing, the appearance of this theme at the end of "Arthur Snatchfold" might be taken to indicate that Conway's shame is the sign of a genuine salutary experience, however momentary, in which he recognises true human greatness in what he evidently feels amounts to a magnanimous self-sacrifice on the part of Arthur Snatchfold.⁴¹³

This reading can furthermore be supported by the highly significant change in Conway's self-perception. Whereas after his successful adventure, a look in the mirror shows him "the figure of a superior city-man" (LtC105), the conversation with Donaldson has evidently devastated his self-contentedness to the point where he recognises his reflection as "the face of an old man" (LtC112) – his age being something the vain elderly pleasure-seeker has hitherto been choosing to ignore (see LtC102: "Old granfa' indeed. ... I'll granfa' you"). Although it remains an open question whether Conway will be permanently changed by his experience, the shock he has received, which has led him to a new, disenchanting view of himself, is a characteristic feature of the Forsterian salvation narrative, in which the 'dark' character who is 'travelling light' must first be broken before he becomes fit to receive the salutary experience (see section II.2.3.1.).

The parallels between Conway's and the operatic Vere's conflict on the one hand, and Arthur's and the operatic Billy's self-sacrifice on the other, particularly suggest a comparison of "Arthur Snatchfold" with both Melville's and Forster's versions of *Billy Budd*. It is, first of all, important to note that in "Arthur Snatchfold", Forster constructs a situation in which Conway finds himself presented with

⁴¹³ There are admittedly instances in which Forster sets up an ironic 'false' salvation, which is usually contrasted with a 'true' salutary experience in some way (see note 239). The characters who falsely claim to have been 'saved' are usually firmly aligned with social convention, (hetero)normativity, and sexual repression; their 'salvation' usually consists in the removal of a problem which endangers their respectability. Given this, Conway's case might be read as ambiguous, since he clearly sets great store by the appearance of respectability, but is at the same time represented as belonging to an oppressed sexual minority, while he conspicuously lacks the association with sexual repression. Judith Herz adopts something approximating the 'ironic' alternative in proposing that Conway "is not saved in the terms that the salvation paradigm would suggest, although Arthur Snatchfold had certainly saved him in the more worldly terms Conway has based his life on"; at the same time, however, she stresses that the story's "great achievement is to endow Conway's moment of recognition with enormous human weight, making that moment comment on his entire life" (1988:62), an effect arguably lacking in the instances of 'false' salvation in *The Longest Journey* and "The Road from Colonus".

a legal *fait accompli*. The local Magistrates' court has already committed Arthur for trial by the Assizes, and it should probably be assumed that the plea bargain mentioned by Donaldson as having been offered to Arthur (LtC111) is not going to be offered again by the Assizes court.⁴¹⁴ Any decision, therefore, that Conway might make along the lines of "giving himself up and standing his trial" (LtC112) would have no effect on the fate of his one-time lover. Forster, it seems, wanted to establish that Arthur could at one point in the past have betrayed Conway to save himself but has irrevocably chosen not to do so. His choice thus not only represents a touchstone of his integrity, but can also be seen to assume the quality of a conscious self-sacrifice. Indeed, Arthur's 'gift' might be regarded as a modernised and less nebulous manifestation of the "diviner magnanimity" invoked by Melville's narrator in his speculative account of the closeted interview (BB102) – but one in which the guileless, passive working-class victim has been transformed into a lover, a hero, and an active saviour.

It is Conway, by contrast, who is placed very firmly in a passive position which appears contrived to preclude the necessity for making a choice of any kind, unless it be that of attempting an ineffective gesture of moral heroism. As Claude Summers has pointed out, "the point of the story is not to attack Conway for moral cowardice in refusing to sacrifice himself and his family but to expose the cruelty of a repressive system"; Conway's failure to come forward may render his position morally ambivalent, but from a material point of view, he is "guilty only to the extent that he [...] is complicitous in the society that condemns Arthur" (281). However unpalatable his lack of moral fibre may appear, it must be stressed that Conway is free from the direct and problematic responsibilities adhering to Melville's Vere, whose highly ambivalent active intervention in Billy's trial Forster was to condemn as "odious[...]" in 1951 (*Griffin* 5).

If Forster's aim in 1928 was thus to exculpate his middle-class 'dark' character Conway from a technical, though not from a moral point of view, the same pattern can be shown to resurface again over twenty years later in the libretto adaptation of Melville's text, in which one of Forster's self-proclaimed goals was "the rescuing of Vere from his creator" (EMFL II:237). In section III.2.3.2. I discuss the series of libretto drafts, in which Vere's situation can be observed to change from a scenario that retains the novella's option of deferring the trial, to the final version in which that option is no longer available, and in which Vere finds himself forced by the law to have Billy condemned. Whereas in the earlier draft versions, Vere can still be seen to play an active role in the officers' discussion, his

⁴¹⁴ One cannot help but feel that many of the critics who have so violently condemned Conway must somehow have overlooked the care with which the plot is constructed to lead up to what amounts to an *in vitro* presentation of a purely moral conundrum; or that, as seems to be the case with Stone (1978), their objections are directed above all at Forster himself as the creator of this particular set-up. Stone's criticism is moreover based on a gross misreading of the story's plot (see also Levine 79).

role has become almost completely passive in the finished libretto, while it has fallen to the officers to state emphatically that “there’s nought to discuss” and that there is “no choice” (LIB56) but to sentence Billy to death. And yet, as Harold Farwell has remarked, “Forster’s apparent intention is to make Vere’s choice correct in only the most narrow, legalistic sense in order to heighten the disparity between his conduct and Billy’s forgiveness” (32); Forster’s intentions regarding Conway may have been similar.

Far from simply reproducing the pattern of “Arthur Snatchfold”, however, the libretto presents a ‘dark’ character whose personal involvement in the conflict between the law and moral justice runs far deeper than Conway’s. Whereas Conway’s realisation that he is “not up to [greatness]” (LtC112) fills him with shame and has at least a momentarily sobering effect on his inflated self-esteem, Vere’s agony of conscience as he realises that he “cannot” intercede on Billy’s behalf (LIB57) can be seen to stem from a far more devastating sense of moral failure. In his “Scylla and Charybdis” monologue, he acknowledges that the upcoming trial is not Billy’s but his own, and that it is he “whom the devil awaits” (LIB53); before the closeted interview, he approaches Billy’s prison in a state of abject despair; and the opera’s Prologue and Epilogue show him still filled with remorse years after the event. Despite the difference of circumstances and dramatic intensity, it is nevertheless possible to read Forster’s Vere’s conflict as an exacerbated version of Conway’s moral predicament.

Yet while Conway only has to engage with Arthur’s trial as an event of the past, Vere, for all that his role has become seemingly passive, is in fact presented with an immediate choice to become personally involved, as both Billy and the officers explicitly appeal to him for help. Billy implores the captain four times to save him, and the officers, while they are aware that the law leaves them “no choice”, ask their superior officer to “join us, help us with your knowledge and wisdom. Grant us your guidance”, before they pronounce the verdict that they are evidently reluctant to return.⁴¹⁵ In the face of these direct appeals, Vere, unlike Conway, is forced to confess his moral failure in public, admitting to those who have asked him for help that he “cannot” give it (LIB57). He subsequently clarifies the motives for this refusal in his “I accept their verdict” monologue: he has pledged himself to uphold “the laws of earth” within the “floating monarchy” of which he is the “king” (LIB58). Like Conway, Vere has been overtaken by the unforeseen consequences of his own self-confidence or even hubris – in Vere’s case, this has taken the form of his arranging the fatal confrontation between Claggart and Billy in the seclusion of his cabin (see section II.5.1.3.). Like Conway, Vere cannot and will not accept the burden of a personal involvement with “greatness” (LtC112), since this would involve challenging the law (and, possibly, jeopardising his military and social reputation); the added complication being that,

⁴¹⁵ Neither appeal can be traced directly back to Melville beyond the general fact that both Billy and the officers necessarily look to the captain as a figure of authority in a perplexing situation.

either by virtue of his authority as captain of the ship, or in his capacity as “the sole earthly witness” (LIB54), Vere “could have saved” Billy from his death sentence (LIB63), whereas it appears impossible that Conway could have saved Arthur from being sent to prison.

As I have proposed above, it is possible to read “Arthur Snatchfold” as a creative response to Melville’s *Billy Budd*, in which Forster realised his own version of one of the novella’s central problems – that of an innocent man falling victim to an oppressive legal system and to the misguided zeal of its representatives. According to such a reading, both the captain’s ambivalent behaviour during the trial scene and the young working-class sailor’s passive acceptance would appear to have been changed and remodelled to fit the pattern of the Forsterian salvation narrative. Through the reworking of Billy’s passive sacrifice into a gift consciously bestowed by a desirable ‘light’ saviour character upon a morally and spiritually broken ‘dark’ middle-class character, the power relationships between Melville’s figures, which run contrary to the dynamics of inter-class relationships that are typical of the Forsterian ‘dark’/‘light’ character constellation, could furthermore be seen to have been ‘rectified’ to conform to the Forsterian pattern.

This view of “Arthur Snatchfold” as a form of narrative intervention would in turn seem to connect with a comment Forster made in 1951 *à propos* of his libretto adaptation of Melville’s text. The librettists’ problem, he writes in his “Letter from E. M. Forster”, had been “how to make Billy, rather than Vere, the hero”: “Melville must have intended this; he called the story Billy Budd, and unless there is strong evidence to the contrary one may assume that an author calls his story after the chief character. It is what I assume here” (*Griffin* 4f.). “Arthur Snatchfold”, written shortly after Forster’s critical engagement with Melville’s story, presents us with just such an eponymous Forsterian “hero” character, whose simple upright decency throws the moral failure of his arrogantly superior counterpart into sharp relief. By virtue of Conway’s final act of recording the young man’s name “in order that he might not forget it” (LtC112), this name moreover acquires a symbolic charge which might be felt to reflect back onto the story’s title, investing it with an even stronger significance.⁴¹⁶ It might be wondered whether this detail of a name that assumes an almost talismanic function owes anything to Forster’s reading of Melville’s text, in which Vere, on his deathbed, is heard to murmur repeatedly the name “Billy Budd”, albeit – and this is a crucial point – “not [in] the accents of remorse” (BB120). This point in particular may well have struck Forster as an outrage.

In his 1927 discussion of Melville’s novella, Forster had concentrated exclusively on the conflict between Billy and Claggart. Yet given his own long-

⁴¹⁶ The effect of this final disclosure is perhaps all the more powerful because it resolves the tension resulting from the expectations raised in the reader who, having read the story’s title, has been aware of the hero’s name all along, while it has been deliberately withheld within the narrative itself.

established preoccupation with narratives of salvation and sacrifice in human relationships, it might be speculated that the irritating relationship between Billy, the passive working-class victim, and Vere, the aristocrat “who mainly had effected his condemnation” (BB102) but supposedly remains untouched by remorse, might have lodged itself in Forster’s creative imagination as a seed that was eventually to germinate into a ‘corrective’ narrative response which took the shape of “Arthur Snatchfold”.

II.4.4. “The Other Boat” (1957/58)

The main action of this late short story takes place on a ship bound for Bombay in the first decade of the twentieth century. The contrasting pair of protagonists – and lovers – are a young British officer, Lionel March, and a mixed-race member of the ship’s crew, nicknamed Coconut, of roughly the same age. The development of their relationship is traced from its beginnings in a childhood encounter on an “other boat” (LtC171) to its climactic ending: Lionel, overcome by his feelings of shame and disgust at Coconut’s and his own relationship, and by his fear of discovery and social ostracism, murders his lover, and immediately afterwards commits suicide by jumping overboard. Internalised homophobia, in combination with guilt over the transgression of race, culture and class boundaries, is responsible for the catastrophe of “The Other Boat”.

This story, which Forster completed in 1957/58, evolved from an episode depicting the early life of the March family who figure in *Arctic Summer*, a novel Forster started in 1911 but abandoned in 1913 or early 1914.⁴¹⁷ As Forster explained when he read the first five chapters of that work at the 1951 Aldeburgh Festival, the novel’s main theme was to have been “the antithesis between the civilised man [...] and the heroic man”. However, he had been unable to overcome some grave technical “problems” in the construction of his main “heroic” character, and had moreover never been able to settle the question of what the novel’s “major event” was going to be (AS161f.).

The “Main Version” of *Arctic Summer* features a number of typical Forsterian themes; thus, for example, in the first chapter, Clesant March, a desirable heroic ‘light’ character, is seen quite literally “pulling” Martin Whitby, the ‘dark’, civilised middle-class protagonist, “into salvation” (CPB55) as he is almost killed by an incoming train (AS121). Martin, who can be counted among Forster’s ‘dark’ characters who are ‘travelling light’, is forcibly brought to face the reality of his own human shortcomings: when a fire breaks out in a cinema, Martin impulsively saves himself, leaving his driver Aristide, “his guest, a social inferior who trusted him [...] to be trampled under, because he [i.e. Martin] was afraid”. Although it turns out that Aristide, too, has escaped alive and unscathed, Martin’s sense that he has “been a coward” completely destabilises his self-image: “He, who believed he had solved life’s grosser problems, who had steered so cleverly through religion and work and love, had been toppled base upward in a moment, and could never trust himself again” (AS158f.). This moment of self-recognition can be identified as a staple element of the Forsterian salvation narrative.

In the later part of the text, the theme of a proscribed and scandalous sexuality gradually moves to a central position. Clesant and his brother Lance, a likeable

⁴¹⁷ See Heine 1980:xi and xxiii. Christopher Lane inexplicably persists in dating “The Other Boat” to 1915-16 (1995:171 and 2007:114); see note 237.

young man full of laughter who “had the key to men’s hearts” (AS168), discuss “falling in love”, with Lance hinting that his kind of love is not “anything decent” (AS180). Soon afterwards, Lance is sent down from Cambridge for an offence by which he has “disgraced the college and himself” as well as his family (AS189). Driven to despair by his brother’s reproaches, Lance shoots himself in the final scene of the “Main Version”. Lance’s unspecified offence is associated by Clesant with heterosexual transgression – he accuses him of “tak[ing] to filth and go[ing] with women” (AS191) – but he may once again “not” have “understood” (AS180) the real nature of Lance’s offence. Forster had planned *Arctic Summer* as a “publishable” novel (Heine 1980:xvii), but the verbal “violence of inexperience” (AS192) unleashed on Lance by Clesant is conveyed in the language that marks homophobic revulsion in Forster’s other works. Clesant can in fact be read as a homophobic ‘light’ hero character with a “black-and-white mind” (AS188) that resembles Tony’s from “Ralph and Tony”.

The chapters of *Arctic Summer* Forster read and discussed at Aldeburgh in 1951 did not, in fact, include the episode which was later to become the first part of “The Other Boat” (LtC166-170): written in 1913 or 1914, this fragment does not form part of the “Main Version” of *Arctic Summer*. It had, however, been published by Forster as the “Entrance to an Unwritten Novel” in the *Listener* on 23 December 1948, the period which saw the beginning of his creative engagement with *Billy Budd*. A connection, however elusive, may thus be felt to exist between *Arctic Summer*, and particularly the members of the March family in their various stages of development, and Forster’s work on *Billy Budd*. I shall return to this point at the end of this chapter.

“The Other Boat” shows certain structural similarities to *A Passage to India*, not only in its subject-matter of a doomed cross-cultural encounter between two men (in the unpublished short story’s case, this relationship is openly erotic, rather than merely deeply friendly like that between Aziz and Fielding), but also in its use of multiple narrative points of view, and, thus, in its foregrounding of the relativity of any one individual’s perception of reality. Far from judging or condemning either young man’s attitude, Forster makes his short story a study of the mechanisms that work towards the tragic failure of this relationship – a failure which is brought about by the clash of two contrasting personalities who are, moreover, shaped by cultural and social concepts and prejudices that, in Lionel’s case, run contrary to his personal proclivities. The conception of the two main characters, Lionel and Coconut, presents interesting parallels to the characters of Billy Budd and Claggart, both in Melville’s novella and in the *Billy Budd* libretto.⁴¹⁸ Their relationship seems to revive, to some extent, the dynamics of the implied relationship between the libretto’s young foretopman and the master-at-arms, albeit with certain differences.

⁴¹⁸ See also Francis 63.

Lionel, despite being a member of the “Ruling Race” (LtC169), and thus Cocoanut’s social superior, is conceived, rather stereotypically, and similarly to Billy Budd, as a good-natured, blond and blue-eyed barbarian: he has “thick fairish hair, blue eyes, glowing cheeks and strong white teeth” as well as strong, hairy hands that “suggest[...] virility”. It is pointed out that “he must have known” that his obvious masculinity makes him “irresistible to the fair sex”,⁴¹⁹ but his attraction, as that of most Forsterian ‘light’ characters, is solid rather than dazzling: “His voice was quiet, his demeanour assured, his temper equable” (LtC172). He is described as a “Nordic warrior” (LtC174), “half Ganymede, half Goth” (LtC178), and as “a Viking at a Byzantine court, spoiled, adored, and not yet bored” (LtC180). Significantly, through the image of the “Byzantine court” where Lionel is ‘kept’, the non-white Cocoanut who ‘keeps’ him is identified, by implication, with a highly-developed, legendarily mysterious, and fundamentally Other civilisation. At the same time, the image of the Viking hints at Lionel’s potential for raw, uncivilised violence, and at his enjoyment of “brutal pleasure” (LtC180).

Lionel’s affection for Cocoanut appears to be genuine and deep: he tenderly declares that Cocoanut “ought to have someone to look after [him]” (LtC187), a wishful fantasy which incidentally places Cocoanut in a vulnerable, stereotypically feminine role, and, interestingly, echoes Billy’s declaration to Vere that he wishes to be the captain’s coxswain to “look after you” (LIB51). On the other hand, Lionel does not consciously understand his own feelings: “he did not even know that he was falling in love” (LtC188).

Lionel is simple and sociable, but a stranger to the world of unofficial negotiations and intrigue inhabited by the resourceful Cocoanut, who administers tips and bribes (LtC189, 190, 194), studies “people’s weaknesses”, is privy to every scandal (LtC180), and even employs an “elderly Parsee secretary” (LtC176). Like Claggart, Cocoanut, though no officer, is thus a force to be reckoned with on board the ship; like Claggart’s, his power is regarded with suspicion and distaste by the socially superior British, although they merely despise rather than fear him: to them, he belongs to “the tagrag and coloured bobtail stuff that accumulates in corners and titters and whispers, and may well be influential, but who cares?” (LtC176).

It is Cocoanut, the “subtle, supple boy” (LtC174), “the deep one” who watches, schemes and plans (LtC178), who eventually succeeds in seducing the simpler Lionel – a seduction which fills Lionel with confusion and guilt: “Curse, oh curse! How on earth had it happened? Never again” (LtC177). His resolve notwithstanding, “more happened off the coast of Sicily, more, much more at Port Said”, until it comes to the point where Cocoanut feels that “Lionel knew that he was in the net or almost in it, and did not mind” (LtC183), concluding confidently that “before

⁴¹⁹ By stating Lionel’s attractiveness to females and then showing him in a love-relationship with a man who is just as irresistibly attracted to him, Forster may be “cocking” yet another ironic “snook at the heterosexual world” (Stallybrass 1972:xv).

morning I shall have enslaved him” (LtC187). For while Lionel, though “only a boy” (LtC196) himself, affectionately if patronizingly thinks of Cocomanut, his contemporary, as a “kid” (LtC194), “an excellent kid” (LtC173), it is Cocomanut who has secretly plotted to bring about their relationship: he has “marked [Lionel] down, spent money to catch him and lime him, and here he lay, caught, and did not know it”. Cocomanut also has his very personal ideas as to what shape that relationship should take: “All his life he had wanted a toy that would not break, and now he was planning how he would play with Lionel forever” (LtC174).

Cocomanut somewhat naively expects that once Lionel is fully ensnared by his cunning, he “will begin doing whatever I put into his mind”. However, he also knows “by experience that though he always got what he wanted he seldom kept it, and that too much adoration can develop a flaw in the jewel” (LtC187). Cocomanut can thus be seen to turn Lionel into an object, his choice of imagery faintly echoing Claggart’s evaluation of Billy, the Handsome Sailor, as “a beauty, a jewel, the pearl of great price” and “a King’s bargain” (LIB16). Claggart-like, Cocomanut wants to assert his complete dominance over Lionel, planning “to contrive his exit from the Army” and “to dispose of” his fiancée. His motives are entirely selfish: “He had no scruples at perverting Lionel’s instincts in order to gratify his own, or at endangering his prospects of paternity. All that mattered was their happiness, and he thought he knew what that was” (LtC182). Cocomanut enjoys his power over his lover and feels superior to him: “The half-caste smiled as the warrior floundered. Indeed he valued him most when he fell full length”. Feeling “a sense of approaching victory” in a conversation about Lionel’s father’s dishonourable defection into native Burma, he presses home his advantage in an aggressive and consciously manipulative way: “Cross-question him further! Quick! Rattle him!” (LtC183). Cocomanut even expresses his awareness of his own superiority to Lionel directly: “Dear Lionel, you don’t know how to throw dust or even where it is. Of mud you know a little, good, but not dust” (LtC181).

There is, however, something fantastic and even absurd about Cocomanut, who is at one point identified with a “monkey” and referred to as a “twister”, but one who is “irresponsible” rather than sinister (LtC181). He is by no means depicted as a fearsome tyrannical manipulator; rather, he is presented in what may be recognised as a sympathetic manner, even if the text shows the same patronising and tacitly racist attitude towards its non-European protagonist that also shapes the characterisation of Aziz in *A Passage to India*. In the same way, the presentation of Lionel, too, can be seen to aim at engaging the reader’s sympathy: despite his colonialist and racist prejudices, the young British officer is clearly not intended to appear emotionally stunted and inhuman, as is the case with so many other colonial officers in Forster’s oeuvre. The reader is arguably invited to identify with both characters: the narrative perspective frequently shifts from the authorial towards the figural, rendering the young men’s private thoughts and ideas about each other through free indirect discourse. Furthermore, the narrator’s comments serve to make the reader

aware of the tragic nature of the lovers' situation, as, for instance, when he observes "There they lay caught, both of them, and did not know it" (LtC174).

It goes without saying that, unlike *Billy Budd*, "The Other Boat" focuses primarily and quite openly on a tragic love relationship between two men. Nevertheless, there exist some striking parallels to Claggart's 'dark' character in the differently and quite literally 'dark' Coconut's aggressive and dominating use of his power, in his manipulative planning and scheming, and in his consciousness of his own intellectual advantage over a blond and blue-eyed, inexperienced young man. These parallels help mark the story as yet another reworking of a central Forsterian pattern; namely, the erotically charged "pursuit" (Levine 72) in which a 'dark', introspective and intellectual, or, in this case, more experienced and complex, character of inferior physical strength seeks to establish a relationship with a 'light', strong, even physically aggressive character who possesses cheerful animal spirits, but whose intellectual insightfulness does not match that of his counterpart, and whose powerful masculinity is linked with homophobia.

Similarly to Tony in "Ralph and Tony", Lionel has to contend with repressive late Victorian attitudes to sexuality in general, and homosexuality (combined, in Lionel's case, with racial prejudices) in particular, even though in "The Other Boat", these issues are addressed far more explicitly than in the much earlier "Ralph and Tony". Lionel knows homosexuality to be "the worst thing in the world, the thing for which Tommies got given the maximum"; a homosexual, to him, is someone he "would never have touched [...], no, not with tongs" – and yet Coconut's very first open advance tellingly leads him to wonder whether he should report the young man for an offence against decency "or blow his own brains out" (LtC175f.), a startlingly extreme notion which suggests his subconscious recognition of the deviant desire within himself.

Lionel's socialisation into the Victorian code of male behaviour has impelled him to curb his sexuality in preparation for meeting his fiancée: "Learning that he was to be posted to India, where he would contact Isabel, he had disciplined himself more severely and practised chastity even in thought. It was the least he could do for the girl he hoped to marry" (LtC193). Within the paradigm of the Forsterian creed, which rejects asceticism,⁴²⁰ it is Lionel's voluntary self-restraint, rather than his carnal impulses, which stands revealed as 'unnatural'. Lionel's deep-seated feelings of sexual guilt and shame are associated with the figure of his mother, whom he reveres, but who is at the same time identified with sexual repression: she is placed "outside carnality" and is "incapable of pardoning it"; there is "no reasoning with her or about her, she understood nothing and controlled everything", and Lionel feels certain that she is "condemning him [...] for sin".⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ See discussion in section II.5.2.2.

⁴²¹ As Tamera Dorland has impressively demonstrated, "both son and narrator cast Mrs March [...] as the Jehovah-like arbiter of the inextricable codes of normative sexuality, morality, and culture required for ensuring caste affiliation and public honour" (205).

In accordance with the Victorian taboo on female sexuality, and the ideal of male chivalrous behaviour which serves to complement it,⁴²² Lionel considers it his responsibility to ‘protect’ both his mother and his fiancée Isabel by negating his own sexual needs: he makes a promise to his absent mother that he will “never again” consort with Cocomat, because “the sight of him [i.e. Lionel] stripping would have killed her” (LtC193).⁴²³

When he is abruptly brought to the realisation that he has been risking his reputation and his career by having an affair with Cocomat, the guilt he feels about having failed to restrain himself according to his chivalrous ideal is added to his feelings of revulsion and fear at his sexual and social transgression; indeed, for Lionel, to lose his identity as a member of respectable British society would be to “perish” (LtC195). Incapable of accepting his own carnality, Lionel puts the blame for his lapse on Cocomat: “Sex had entirely receded – only to come charging back like a bull. That infernal Cocoa – the mischief he had done. He had woken up so much that might have slept” (LtC193). The fundamental ambivalence of Lionel’s feelings for his lover, and his fear and hatred of the cultural, racial and sexual Otherness and deviance which the youth represents, is further betrayed by the young officer’s association of his lover with the “savage” (LtC186) who had wounded and “nearly unmanned him” in a “little desert war”: when Cocomat asks him who gave him the scar in his groin, Lionel replies, “One of your fuzzy-wuzzy cousins” (LtC179).⁴²⁴

⁴²² His chivalrous ideals may be felt to point to Lionel’s descent from *Arctic Summer*’s Clesant March, described by Forster as “a Knight errant born too late in time”. As Forster told his friend Forrest Reid, the novel was to have explored the outdated notion of “chivalry”, and to have shown its inadequacy for dealing with the realities of modern society (letter of 2 February 1913, quoted in Heine 1980:xxi).

⁴²³ Forster substituted the less offensive “stripping” for the more explicit phrase “topping a dago” (LtC193, editor’s note). While the coarser wording of the earlier version clearly expresses Lionel’s disgusted recoil from his own transgression of both sexual and racial taboos, the substitution extends the borderlines of disapproval to an even more general level of what would have been considered indecent within the Victorian value system that governs the story’s historical setting. The act of substitution itself creates the impression that in revising, Forster was emulating Lionel’s inhibitions by deciding to suppress the explicit image that would have been all the more shocking to the Victorian imagination (see also Dorland 212).

⁴²⁴ Lionel’s projection of his own feelings of guilt and (homophobic) self-aborrence onto his lover is facilitated by the patterns and prejudices of colonialism and racism he would have been brought up to think in, and which lead him repeatedly to dwell upon the “touch of the tar-brush” (LtC171, 173) that sets his lover apart from him. Even though it is stated early in the story that Lionel’s “colour-prejudices were tribal rather than personal, and only worked when an observer was present” (LtC174), it appears nevertheless that his cultural conditioning effectively provides him with the means of distancing himself at least to a certain degree both from his lover and, through projection, from his own homosexual inclinations. He cannot accept the latter as his own because to do so would place him in total opposition to the society he inhabits. As Tamara Dorland has pointed out, Lionel’s “public and private sexual identities ultimately prove inextricable in terms of a family honour and moral stance already jeopardized by the father’s fall into the ‘depths of Burma’” (205).

Lionel's internalised homophobia and his projection of his sexual panic and homophobic self-hatred onto the object of his desire can be read as an explicitly realised parallel to the coded discourses about homophobic self-repression and projective hatred that surround the figure of the operatic Claggart. Both Lionel and Claggart perceive the men who have roused their unwanted homoerotic desire as a destabilising threat to their very existence, and cast them as aggressors and enemies. Claggart's lament that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and suffers" can also be read as an accusation against the attractive young sailor's intrusion into Claggart's "dark world" (LIB32f.); and Claggart's subsequent decision to destroy Billy can be viewed as an attempt of simultaneous self-reassertion and self-punishment, directed at Billy as the external manifestation of his own deviant desire.

Like Claggart, Lionel is unable to face the possibility that "love can escape" (LIB33), as it might if he were to take Maurice's solution, i.e. renounce the society which demands his self-suppression, and take up an "alternative" existence as Cocoanut's "assistant manager at Basra" (LtC190). Clearly, this alternative vision in which love could "live[...] and grow strong" is one that Lionel "cannot enter". Caught between the irreconcilable forces of society and his own sexuality in a "torment too keen" (LIB33), Lionel kills his lover during the very sexual act that represents his "depravity" (LIB32), the prohibited deviant desire, thereby symbolically eliminating the act itself as well; only after this can the deviant element be purged entirely through the ultimate negation of Lionel's own death. In Lionel's case, "the flesh" does not succeed in "educating the spirit" (M128) of the desirable but homophobic Englishman, and his implied redemption, symbolised by his lover's coffin following him "contrary to the prevailing current" (LtC196), has been perceived by many readers as forcibly imposed by Forster.⁴²⁵

The linking of sexuality with violence and death in this late 1950s text can be seen to throw a retrospective light on the relationship between Billy and Claggart in the libretto. In "The Other Boat", Lionel strangles Cocoanut after a final violent and ecstatic sex act which is coupled with a vision of Lionel "going berserk" in the desert war, and killing the "dying savage who had managed to wound him" then (LtC186). It appears that this final catastrophe is brought about by Cocoanut's apparent underestimation of Lionel's potential for violence: when Lionel refuses to kiss him, Cocoanut bites him and wounds him seriously enough to draw blood. This final confrontation takes place in Lionel's berth, the young officer's "secret place, the sacred place whence strength issued", which is "forbidden to [Cocoanut], although nothing had ever been said" and which Cocoanut knows to be "the lair of a beast who might retaliate" (LtC191).

Similarly, in *Billy Budd*, Claggart can be seen to violate the integrity of the young sailor's innocence (which is also his strength) by accusing him of mutiny,

⁴²⁵ See, for instance, Lane 1995:174f. and Dorland 214.

which results in a superficially different but structurally similar act of violent retaliation. Claggart is not shown to be consciously expecting Billy's fatal reaction – after all, he is, to all intents and purposes, determined to destroy Billy to make his own existence bearable, even though he has warned Squeak about Billy's temper and must thus know that he is himself “playing with fire” (LIB18) in attempting to interfere with the pugnacious foretopman. Coconut, by contrast, is only too well aware that, by entering Lionel's “lair”, he is trespassing into unsafe territory that may even prove fatal to him: “Whatever else he ventured, it must not be that” (LtC191). It might be felt that his violation of Lionel's private space and, later, his body, stems, if not actually from suicidal despair at having lost the lover he thought he was going to possess so completely, then at least from a desperate disregard for his own safety. In view of the sexual context in which it is situated, Coconut's trespass could even be interpreted as expressing a masochistic longing for a violent and possibly destructive confrontation. As Robert Martin has argued for the parallel case of “Ralph and Tony”, following “the logic of sadomasochism”, Coconut's apparent submission, even if it takes the extreme form of submitting to murder, could ultimately be seen to signify the triumph of his domination over Lionel, whom he has successfully provoked into a final “engagement with his body” (1997:260). Read through the lens of “The Other Boat”, the operative Claggart's decision to confront Billy with his false accusation can be viewed as motivated by an analogous longing (see discussion in section II.5.2.3.).

In comparing “The Other Boat”, not only to *Billy Budd*, but also to Forster's other writings which feature a similar juxtaposition of a ‘dark’ and a ‘light’ character, it is worth noting that in the case of Lionel and Coconut, the predominant pattern of allocating a lower social class to the ‘light’ character has been reversed, and that the feelings of homophobic anxiety experienced by Lionel serve to place him among Forster's desirable but homophobic ‘light’ characters who are usually associated with a middle-class socialisation. Yet if Lionel runs true to type in this respect, in other respects, he does not. For even though he is less “deep” (LtC178) than Coconut, and not much given to self-analysis, Lionel does reflect on his situation in some depth, certainly more than Forster's less articulate working-class ‘light’ characters usually do, and also more than the homophobic ‘light’ characters Tony and Gerald Dawes do. What is unusual about “The Other Boat” is the amount of access it grants the reader to the mind of the desirable ‘light’ character, an access that is extremely rare in Forster's short fiction, and which even in the novels is tightly restricted. In this late narrative, which consistently presents both its protagonists' points of view, and which is centred on a cross-cultural relationship in which the cultural Other does not appear as the desirable ‘light’ saviour character, but assumes a part of the intellectual superiority usually reserved for the ‘dark’ character, Forster can be seen to move beyond his usual patterning of cross-class or cross-cultural male/male relationships, and to create what is one of his most complex intermixtures of the ‘dark’ and ‘light’ character types.

Judith Herz has advanced the view that while “The Other Boat” “in many ways draws together the whole of Forster’s oeuvre”, it was Forster’s work on the *Billy Budd* libretto in particular which “provided a focus for the quasi-mystical conclusion, at once tragic and transcendent” (1988:53).⁴²⁶ Both Herz and Tamera Dorland have furthermore found parallels between Melville’s novella and “The Other Boat”.⁴²⁷ *A propos* of the “tragic theme” (Furbank II:302f.) of Forster’s late short story, Mary Francis has speculated that “his work with Britten” may have “led Forster to a darker view of love, similar to the view that so many of Britten’s operas exemplify” (64). Yet such a “darker view of love” can be seen to have existed in the background of Forster’s work all along, in the shape of the narrative patterns that link eroticism with violence and death (see sections II.2.2.5., II.5.2.3., and II.5.3.3.). If Forster’s collaboration with Britten had any influence on his creative expression (which it undoubtedly did), I would suggest that where “The Other Boat” is concerned, that influence is to be sought in Forster’s prolonged engagement with *Billy Budd*, begun in 1926, renewed in 1947 and intensified to a creative maximum in 1948-51, and specifically with the “tragedy” of Claggart’s destructive homosexual desire, which is met by Billy’s equally destructive “good-

⁴²⁶ Like Robert Martin (1986b:51), Herz views the opera’s resolution as “a strongly Christian reading” of Melville’s more ambiguous story; consequently, she admits to “difficulties in assessing [Forster’s] participation” in “so thorough-going a Christian enterprise” (Herz 1988:55f.), which seems at odds with Forster’s known reservations about Christianity. To Herz, the supposed Christianisation of Forster’s libretto represents his “misreading of Melville” which, she argues, Forster “both corrects and vindicates” in “The Other Boat”. Suggesting that “the opera’s movement towards transcendence, its other-worldly resolution, may very well have echoed in his mind” and may have influenced his creative process, she points out that in the later text, “the solace he allowed his characters [...] was not that of a Christian consolation, but of a *Liebestod*” (56). Given her insightful readings of Forster’s narrative strategy in “The Life to Come” and other short stories, it seems curious that Herz should (mis)read the opera’s “other-worldly resolution” in this way; for in her analysis of “The Life to Come”, Herz demonstrates that Forster appropriates both “biblical language” and “biblical metaphor” to produce a text that is “religiously syncretic”, while at the same time, it also expresses “an important private dimension” of Forster’s personal homosexual experience (46f.; see also my discussion of Forster’s use of biblical language in section II.2.4.2.). Applied to *Billy Budd*, Herz’ own findings would help clarify Forster’s “participation” by demolishing the view of the opera as “a Christian enterprise”.

⁴²⁷ Herz compares Coocanut’s sea burial at the end of “The Other Boat” to the scenes surrounding Billy’s death in Melville’s novella: his descending corpse is eagerly watched by “the native crew” who react with approval when it is seen to “move[...] northwards – contrary to the prevailing current”, i.e. as if seeking to rejoin the body of Lionel (LtC196). To Herz, the “echoes” these events evoke of Melville’s crew’s various vocal utterances as they witness Billy’s benediction of Vere, his execution, and his burial, are “striking”; however, she appears to read these utterances mainly as expressive of the crew’s “almost dumb sympathy” and does not address their further implications of (ultimately unsuccessful) resistance (1988:55). Dorland has noted the physical similarity between “the virile Aryan officer” Lionel and “Melville’s ‘Handsome Sailor,’ the ‘pristine and unadulterate’ object of desire” (211); she also finds that “the snake imagery incorporated into the narrative of Lionel’s seduction by Coocanut [...] and the purity initially ascribed to the ‘half Goth’ Lionel [...] link Forster’s short story with Melville’s in terms of their homoerotic adaptation of man’s Fall” (218, n.23).

ness, of the glowing aggressive sort” (AN97). Working on a character constellation that so closely resembled his own favoured ‘dark’/‘light’ character pairing may have helped Forster towards a clearer realisation of his interests, and subsequently to a more immediate expression of those interests in his late erotic short fiction.

“The Other Boat” can be viewed as Forster’s renewed endeavour to explore in more explicit detail the dynamics of antagonistic desire and the topics of internalised homophobia and homophobic violence, all of which can be seen to play into his adaptation of Melville’s *Billy Budd*. P. N. Furbank not only records Forster’s comment, made in 1957 *à propos* of his work on “The Other Boat”, that he found it “easy to write tragedy”, but also that Forster “thought the tragic theme of [...] two people made to destroy each other [...] more interesting than the theme of salvation” (II:302f.). In December 1960, the year which had seen yet another engagement with *Billy Budd* in the shape of the September revisions that produced the opera’s final two-act version, Forster summarised his view of “The Other Boat” to Donald Windham as “a movement from sex to disaster”. He went on to comment that while “a fascinating novel might have been evolved if I had the skill and the restraint to make the disaster gradual or partial”, he had “wanted a catastrophe of the more romantic type where both crash at the height of their powers” (letter of 21 December, Windham, ed. 41). The fact that the March family was resurrected for this purpose invites speculation, suggesting as it does Forster’s return to, and reworking of, the text he had abandoned at the time at which he completed *Maurice*, his ‘unpublishable’ novel of victorious homosexual love. The “Main Version” of *Arctic Summer*, originally “intended to be publishable” (Heine 1980:xvii), had closed with what could be read as a homosexual suicide to which the “disgraced” (AS189) Lance is driven by the unappealing invective and verbal “violence” (AS192) of his homophobic brother Clesant (see above).⁴²⁸ In contrast to the defeatist self-murder of a single man whose passion is never depicted, the double murder that literally forms the climax of “The Other Boat” represents and even celebrates a physical violence which is erotically charged in spite of, or maybe even because of, its homophobic component. The fact that the lovers’ violent death is aesthetically heightened and even romantically glorified as a homosexual “*Liebestod*” (Herz 1988:56) suggests a move away from all-too-realistic defeatism or “gradual or partial” decline towards a bolder, decidedly operatic, and quasi-mystical affirmation of the tragedy and the erotics of violent and (self-)destructive, passionate desire.

⁴²⁸ The conflict between these two desirable ‘light’ middle-class characters can in fact be recognised as reiterated in “The Other Boat” within a single character, in the shape of Lionel’s inner conflict.

II.5. Character relationships: protagonist, villain, saviour

II.5.1. “A man who despite his education, understands”:
Forsterian readings of Captain Vere

II.5.1.1. Representation and transformation:
the Vere of the 1947 BBC Book Talk

In February 1947, twenty years after the publication of *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster returned to the subject of *Billy Budd* in one of his BBC Radio Book Talks.⁴²⁹ His occasion was the publication of Melville’s novella as a separate volume edition prepared by his friend William Plomer – little did he know at the time that he would shortly be engaging with this story yet again in a most intimate way as Britten’s librettist. Unlike in *Aspects of the Novel*, which makes no mention of Captain Vere whatsoever, Forster allocates a fair share of attention to the figure of the captain in this, his second critical encounter with the text. In 1947, as in 1927, Forster introduces Billy and Claggart as two men who at the same time function as symbolic representatives of good and evil, but he then goes on to provide a

⁴²⁹ “Some Books” (*Billy Budd*), BBC384-388.

much more detailed account not only of their conflict and its ramifications, but also of the story's third main character:

In Captain Vere, the third of this unusual trio, Melville portrays a man who despite his education, understands. Yes, despite education. For the depths of human nature, he thought, are not revealed by study or books or even by experience and are sometimes obscured by them. Knowingness never helps us to know. But Captain Vere, though conversant with the world, has not lost his natural insight and he knows that Claggart is evil, Billy good. "You have but noted his fair cheek your honour" insinuates Claggart. "A mantrap may be under his ruddy-tipped daisies". The Captain is contemptuous of the charge and summons both men to his cabin to examine it.

Then the catastrophe occurs. Billy, absolutely innocent, is utterly unprepared for the charge. The shock makes him speechless. Then the terrifying, paralysing stammer, the diabolical inhibition starts. "The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck." He is dead. Evil is dead. But the avenging angel, the glorious athletic youth must die too.

The closing scenes, the visit of the surgeon, the drumhead court, Billy's arraignment and condemnation, his final interview with Captain Vere (none other being present), the visit of the bewildered chaplain, the hanging from the yard arm, form a sequence of events which are poignantly human and also have an overtone, a halo which takes us into a region where thought fails, and events are in progress which cannot be put into words.

[Here Forster cites the passage describing Billy's 'ascension' (BB112f.); see discussion below.]

Melville in this story shows what he most admires in human nature: natural goodness, barbarian innocence, "unworldly servers of the world" is a phrase in one of his poems. And he also shows that this innocence is not safe in a civilisation like ours, where a man must practice a "ruled undemonstrative distrustfulness" in order to defend himself against traps. This "ruled undemonstrative distrustfulness" is not confined to business men, but exists everywhere. We all exercise it. I know I do, and I should be surprised if you, who are listening to me, didn't. All we can do (and Melville gives us this hint) is to exercise it consciously, as Captain Vere did. It is unconscious distrustfulness that corrodes the heart and destroys the heart's insight, and prevents it from saluting goodness. (BBC386f.)

Forster's insistence on the seeming paradox of Vere "understand[ing]" Claggart's and Billy's 'true' natures "despite education" is of paramount interest here, because it can be seen to connect his representation of Vere to one of the most central of Forsterian concerns, namely, that of "the English Character", as embodied in those public-school educated men with "fairly developed minds, and undevel-

oped hearts” (AH4),⁴³⁰ whose “knowingness” certainly “never helps” them “to know” (BBC386). These are learned men like the schoolmaster Herbert Pembroke, as well as men of the Wilcox type, also to be encountered among the colonial administrators of *A Passage to India*, and, so it would seem, among Vere’s fellow officers in His Majesty’s Navy. It is arguably from men of this type that Vere – though himself not just an experienced “sailor of distinction”, “thoroughly versed in the science of his profession” (BB36) but also “long versed in everything pertaining to the complicated gun-deck life” (BB76), in other words, “conversant with the world” (BBC386) – is to be differentiated. Forster’s representation of Vere as a man who “has not lost his natural insight” (BBC386) probably owes much to Melville’s narrator’s indication that “something exceptional in the moral quality of Captain Vere made him, in earnest encounter with a fellow-man, a veritable touchstone of that man’s essential nature” (BB79). And yet it also appears to draw on the comments on “spiritual insight” made by the “honest scholar” of the narrator’s acquaintance:

I am not certain whether to know the world and to know human nature be not two distinct branches of knowledge, which while they may coexist in the same heart, yet either may exist with little or nothing of the other. Nay, in an average man of the world, his constant rubbing with it blunts that fine spiritual insight indispensable to the understanding of the essential in certain exceptional characters, whether evil ones or good. [...] I have seen a girl wind an old lawyer about her little finger [...] he knew law better than he knew the girl’s heart. Coke and Blackstone hardly shed so much light into obscure spiritual places as the Hebrew prophets. And who were they? Mostly recluses. (BB54f.)

It is in this passage from the novella that the “obscur[ing]” effect that “study or books or even [...] experience” have on “natural insight” (BBC386) is discussed most explicitly, both in its first image of “an average man[’s] [...] fine spiritual insight” being “blunt[ed]” by “constant rubbing” with “the world”, and in its second image of the “old lawyer”, who has presumably studied the books of jurists like “Coke and Blackstone” in great detail (BB55), but whose professional “knowingness” does not “help[...]” him “to know” where matters of “human nature” are involved (BBC386). At the same time, the reference to the insights gained “into obscure spiritual places” by “the Hebrew prophets”, themselves “mostly recluses” (BB55), could be taken (albeit out of its local context) as an apology for Vere’s own reclusive or exclusive nature, as well as for his “dry and bookish” (BB40) ways (see discussion below).

It will be noted that Forster’s summary of the “sequence of events” that follows Claggart’s death does not in any way refer to the issue of Vere’s “odiously” (*Griffin* 5) ambivalent behaviour during the trial, which was to pose such a “problem” (EMFL II:237) to the adaptors of Melville’s novella a mere two years later. Indeed, Vere is not represented as involved in the disciplinary proceedings at all; “Evil is dead”, Forster

⁴³⁰ “Notes on the English Character”.

tells his listeners, “but the avenging angel [...] must die too” (BBC386). Forster appears instead to be attempting to represent Vere as an Everyman figure, by emphasising that the “ruled undemonstrative distrustfulness” supposedly exercised (and “consciously” at that) by the captain “is not confined to business men, but exists everywhere”, and is moreover something he (Forster) himself exercises just as much as his conjectured audience (BBC386f). This “ruled undemonstrative distrustfulness” which Forster ascribes to Vere is not, in fact, part of any description of the captain in the novella, but appears in one of the narrator’s general observations regarding the peculiar innocence of common sailors “as a class”, which is contrasted with the habits of all landsmen in general, and “certain men of the world” in particular:

Every sailor, too, is accustomed to obey orders without debating them; his life afloat is externally ruled for him; he is not brought into that promiscuous commerce with mankind where unobstructed free agency on equal terms – equal superficially, at least – soon teaches one that unless upon occasion he exercise a distrust keen in proportion to the fairness of the appearance, some foul turn may be served him. A ruled, undemonstrative distrustfulness is so habitual, not with business-men so much, as with men who know their kind in less shallow relations than business, namely, certain men of the world, that they come at last to employ it all but unconsciously; and some of them would very likely feel real surprise at being charged with it as one of their general characteristics. (BB69)

As he takes his quotations from this passage out of their local context, Forster can be observed in the process of adapting Melville’s observations to his own creed of personal relationships, which he projects onto the figure of Vere. Forster’s 1947 reading of Melville not only shows some suggestive structural parallels with his short story “Arthur Snatchfold” of 1928, but can also be seen to prefigure the interpretive strategy which the opera-makers were to pursue in 1948-51 – a strategy the result of which, I suggest, is a re-iteration of the Forsterian salvation narrative. To Forster, Vere is neither a “business m[a]n” like Henry Wilcox, nor a mere “m[a]n of the world” – for according to Forster’s reading, “Vere, though conversant with the world, has not lost his natural insight” (BBC386; see above), since he is evidently able to “know human nature” in a way for which mere “*knowledge of the world*”, itself only “a superficial knowledge”, could never account (BB54).⁴³¹

⁴³¹ In Melville’s text, moreover, “the world”, particularly the world ashore as contrasted to the innocent world of the sailors, could in many cases be seen to be negatively connoted; and it is probably no accident that Claggart is associated with a ‘worldly’ past in the most negative sense of the word, for he is rumoured to have been “a chevalier” who has been “arraigned” for “some mysterious swindle” (BB42). A distinction between the ‘worldly’ Claggart and Vere who is “conversant with the world” may be felt to emerge in the libretto, where Claggart demands “Have I never studied man and men’s weaknesses?” (LIB18), thus revealing an interest in manipulation, while Vere declares “I have studied men and their ways” (LIB51), and correctly recognises Claggart’s accusations against Billy as false.

Forster's reading of the figure of Vere incorporates passages of Melville's text which do not explicitly refer to the captain, but which are made to serve Forster in constructing a protagonist with whom, as with a number of his own 'dark' protagonists, he appears to identify to some extent (however limited). It is through Forster's selection and connection of such remoter passages, but most importantly through his suppression of Vere's active role in bringing about Billy's trial and execution, that Vere can be seen to assume the characteristics of a Forsterian 'dark' protagonist. Vere's "understand[ing]" is not limited to merely "know[ing] that Claggart is evil, Billy good" (BBC386). His "heart", which has not been "corroded" by "unconscious distrustfulness", retains its "insight", and more yet: the ability not just to "apprehend[...] the good" (BB59) as Claggart does, but – here Forster's choice of formulation seems important – to "salut[e] goodness" (BBC387) as Claggart cannot; in other words, to connect, personally if only fleetingly, with "the glorious athletic youth" (BBC386) who embodies "goodness".

At the same time, Forster's representation of Vere effaces the captain who, in urging his officers to pass the death sentence on Billy, argues against "Nature" in favour of "martial law", against "the private conscience" in favour of "that imperial one formulated in the code under which alone we officially proceed", and who insists that "the heart" which "is the feminine in man [...] must here be ruled out" (BB96f.). Among Forster's own characters, even those who least enjoy his sympathy – whether they be the representatives and enforcers of colonialism in *A Passage to India*, or of social and sexual conformity, like Dr Barry (*Maurice*) or Mansbridge (*Howards End*) – are never brought to the extreme of expressing so stark and deliberate a commitment to what amounts to a creed of blind obedience to man-made norms. If Forster's characters are seen to behave "odiously" (*Griffin* 5), this is due to their fundamental state of 'muddle' as often as not: a state which is scarcely conscious, and which the narrator tends to show in relation to the characters' circumstances, even in cases that do not carry the possibility of redemptive behaviour (see section II.2.3.3.). Forster's work arguably contains no characters who would be able to plead a creed like Vere's on a comparable level of 'inhuman' abstraction; and it is tempting to believe that Forster simply refused to engage with this particular fruit of Melville's creative imagination, not only because it disagreed sharply with his own philosophical outlook, but also, perhaps, because Melville's conception of this fictional character (a conception which he was later to describe as "muddled", *Griffin* 5)⁴³² disagreed with his own patterns of literary creativity.

This thesis might be felt to receive support from Forster's and Crozier's 1960 discussion of the changes which the collaborators had made to the figure of Melville's captain. Crozier remarks: "We surely humanised him and made him much more aware of the human values that were involved, and not simply sticking by a

⁴³² See also discussion in section II.5.1.5. below.

book of rules and saying “Thus it must be because it’s laid down”. To which Forster agrees: “Yes. We felt that Melville was disgracing Vere. I suppose *he* would feel we had disgraced *him*” (BBC1960:206). Just like his remark about “rescuing [...] Vere from his creator” (EMFL II:237), Forster’s differentiation between the figure of Vere and the author who had created him would seem to indicate that he conceived of the character as leading an independent existence in his own right. The character could therefore be appropriated and rendered in a way that did him justice in Forster’s eyes, just as Melville had paradoxically ‘appropriated’ the character he had created, and had succeeded in “disgracing” him. Forster’s intervention into Melville’s narrative – the process in which Vere was eventually to be assimilated into a Forsterian narrative array – could thus be seen to have already been under way in his 1947 reading of Melville’s novella. The suppression of Vere’s ambiguous agency in Billy’s trial in this reading foreshadows the direction which the libretto adaptation would take two years later; but other aspects of his BBC Book Talk, too, suggest that Forster was already beginning to link Vere with his ‘dark’ protagonist character type before he undertook to adapt Melville’s novella for the operatic stage.

If, in his 1947 Book Talk, Forster dwells so insistently on “the heart’s insight” (BBC387), this might be felt to evoke echoes of his essay “What I Believe” of 1938, in which he had lauded “the holiness of the Heart’s affections” as the “temple” of his “aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky” (TCD70f.). In fact, what Forster perceives as Vere’s ability to “salut[e] goodness” (BBC387) may well mark the meeting-point of the Forsterian creed of salutary personal relationships with Melville’s concept of “diviner magnanimity” that becomes manifest at the climactic moment at which “two of great Nature’s nobler order embrace” (BB102) – “none other being present” (BBC386) – and which is elevated to a “sacrament” (BB102). It is tempting to imagine that Forster perceived a kinship between this communion of “two of great Nature’s nobler order” and the “reassuring” messages passing between the “unquenchable lights of my aristocracy” which “shine” in “the darkness”, an aristocracy which “represent[s] the true human tradition” and whose “members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages” (TCD70f.). Having formulated the concept of this “aristocracy” in such detail almost a decade earlier, Forster, re-reading *Billy Budd* in 1947, may have found the “nobler order” of “great Nature” meaningful in a different sense than when he first encountered Melville’s text in 1926/27.⁴³³

⁴³³ A suggestive parallel might be felt to exist between Forster’s “aristocracy” and the “aristocracy of the spirit” invoked by the Austrian writer Stefan Zweig in the first chapter of his life of Erasmus of Rotterdam (20). In a BBC Book Talk of 4 March 1942 (“Some Books” [Zweig], BBC172-176), devoted mainly to Zweig’s work, and delivered only a few days after the exiled writer committed suicide in Brazil, Forster states that he “knew and respected” Zweig (BBC174); on 15 August 1938, he met Zweig, about whom he noted: “A good man. No nonsense to him” (LD86). It is tempting to imagine a connection of some kind between Zweig’s representation of Erasmic humanism, which, begun in 1933, at a time when his books were being burnt in Nazi Germany, also

Granted, Forster's 1947 summary of Melville's novella suggests that he still regarded "the catastrophe" of Billy's blow as the story's structural climax, since he refers to its remaining part as "the closing scenes" (BBC386), and from this it might be surmised that his focus still rested mainly with Claggart and Billy.⁴³⁴ And yet the "overtone" or "halo" which, according to Forster, emerges in "the closing scenes" that follow the climax of Claggart's death, "form[ing] a sequence of events which are poignantly human" (BBC386) – this "overtone" or "halo", it would seem, is virtually unconnected with the figure of John Claggart, but has everything to do with the way in which Billy's "poignantly human" further progress is presented to the reader.

Forster's claim that it "takes us into a region where thought fails, and events are in progress which cannot be put into words" (BBC386) would seem to hark back to 1927 and *Aspects of the Novel*, where he had cited the "remote unearthly episode" of *Billy Budd* as an example for the prophetic quality in fiction, opining that in this story, "Melville [...] reaches straight back into the universal, to a blackness and sadness so transcending our own that they are indistinguishable from glory", and "g[ives] us harmony and temporary salvation" (AN98f.). As Irene Morra has so usefully pointed out, in Forster's 1927 reading, "this transcendence is achieved by the reader [...] rather than by the characters in the tale" (2002:8f.); there is nothing in Forster's BBC Book Talk to suggest that his view of the story had essentially altered in this respect by 1947.

Indeed, the passage from Melville which Forster chooses to cite in 1947 to illustrate his point about the "region where thought fails" and where "words" cease to serve comprises the two paragraphs in which the narrator describes Billy's execution (BB112f.).⁴³⁵ While this scene is "watched by" an audience – "the wedged mass of upturned faces" – who view with "wonder" the absence of convulsive movement in Billy's hanged body, this audience, consisting simply of "all", remains anonymous. To Forster's listeners, the scene of Billy's 'ascension' is pre-

contains a passionate appeal to his contemporary readers' reason, and Forster's 1938 statement of his humanist creed in "What I Believe" (which first appeared in the New York *Nation* on 16 July). Forster, who names Erasmus among his "law-givers" (TCD65), would almost certainly have read Zweig's book by that time, and would unfailingly have recognised, by means of the "secret understanding" he postulates between the members of his aristocracy (TCD70), a kindred spirit in Zweig. Zweig represents Erasmus as "the intractable anti-fanaticist" positioned between the "exaggeration" of fanaticism "to right [...] and to left" and trying "in vain [...] to save the universal heritage of culture and civilisation from wanton destruction" (Zweig 23f.) – a description which Forster, who rejected all forms of political extremism, might equally have applied to himself as he watched European culture and civilisation fall under the threat of yet another war (see section II.5.1.2.).

⁴³⁴ Indeed it seems possible that Forster's use of the word "catastrophe" not only signifies "disaster" here but indicates that he was reading the novella as a Greek tragedy, with Billy cast in the position of its doomed protagonist.

⁴³⁵ Forster's quotation opens with "The hull, deliberately recovering" (BB112) and closes with "a great ship heavy cannoned" (BB113).

sented as a tableau free from associations with the novella's other named figures. The narrator's account is characterised by impressions of light, silence, and stillness, and deploys religious images which seem chosen to evoke an atmosphere of solemnity and transcendence: "the last signal" for Billy's "ascen[t]" is a "dumb one". As it is made, "the vapouring cloud fleece hanging low was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God seen in mystic vision, and [...] Billy [...] ascending, took the full rose of the dawn";⁴³⁶ in Billy's "pinioned figure [...], no motion was apparent save that created by the slow roll of the hull, in moderate weather so majestic in a great ship heavy cannoned" (BBC386).

It is after quoting this passage from *Billy Budd* that Forster produces his conclusions about what it is that "Melville in this story shows" (BBC386; see the full quotation on p.326 above), but it seems striking that he should then return once more to the figure of Vere, whose acts he associates with observations about "the heart's insight" and the "saluting" of "goodness" that are recognisably Forsterian (BBC387; see above). Appearing thus at the close of Forster's discussion, these remarks might be felt to indicate the presence of a faint but familiar gravitational pull in his representation of Melville's *Billy Budd* – a force which, however, is centred around an absence. For where, in Forster's account of the story, does Vere in fact "salut[e] goodness"? The fact that "he knows that" Billy is "good" merely enables him to be rightfully "contemptuous" of Claggart's "charge" that Billy's "ruddy-tipped daisies" conceal "a mantrap". To someone acquainted with the whole of Melville's text, Vere's most promising opportunity for "saluting goodness" would seem to lie in his and Billy's "final interview [...]" (none other being present)", which, save for the parenthetical addition, figures so inconspicuously in Forster's listing of the story's "closing scenes" (BBC386). This is not to suggest that the transcendent "overtone" or "halo" which colours the death of Billy Budd need necessarily have its source in such a second structural climax, just as it would hardly be possible to argue on the basis of the textual evidence that Forster was at this point deliberately suppressing an alternative private reading of Melville's novella, which centred on a salutary connection between Vere and Billy, established in their "embrace" (BB102) during the "closeted interview" (BB104, 106). And yet, if Forster's 1947 BBC talk is taken as an intermediary stage between his 1927 reading of *Billy Budd* and his 1948-51 librettistic interpretation of the story, then the "closeted interview", the one moment at which Captain Vere, now registering for the first time on the radar of Forster's attention, might be seen to "salute goodness", may well represent the catalyst responsible for the deployment of what appears to be a rudimentary Forsterian salvation narrative in this reading, as well as in the opera-makers' later interpretation of Melville's story, where its structure can be seen to emerge quite clearly.

⁴³⁶ Forster's quote does not reproduce the wording of Plomer's edition with complete accuracy; it reads there "the vapoury fleece hanging low in the east" and "mystical vision" (BB113).

Interlude: the “closeted interview” as moment of connection

It seems important to note that all three main characters of Melville’s *Billy Budd* seem in one sense or another to exist alone and isolated, set apart from the rest of their fellow beings. Billy, the innocent “rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces” to a noble’s “court” (BB24), who apprehends neither the “ambiguous smile[s]” nor the “peculiar” approval with which he is viewed by some of his fellow men (BB24f.), nor Claggart’s evil intentions, nor the Dansker’s cryptic warnings, is trapped in epistemological and communicative isolation; Claggart is hiding in communicative isolation trying to disguise his evil nature, and is depicted as ontologically isolated from “normal nature” by a “deadly space between” (BB54); and Vere is immured in intellectual isolation and, as “a true military officer” whose “allegiance” lies strictly with “martial duty”, leads a life of “monk”-like emotional “self-abnegation” (BB89), which could, following the Forsterian paradigm, be interpreted as isolation from his own self.⁴³⁷ Viewed in this light, the supposed moment of sacramental communion during the closeted interview between Billy and Vere would indeed appear as a significant structural climax, being the only point at which two characters are freed from their isolation to partake of “the sacrament” of an “embrace” (BB102), also referred to as “something healing” (BB106).

Yet this moment of greatest spiritual intensity is located on the remotest possible narrative level, namely, that of speculation; the narrative’s structural climax thus remains essentially blank. It might be of parenthetical interest in this context to reflect that Forster had once deliberately ‘blanked out’ Adela Quested’s experience in the cave in *A Passage to India* in order to create an unresolved mystery at the structural centre of his novel (see p.197 above). However, if Melville’s “closeted interview” (BB104) did form a point of connection with Forsterian thought as expressed in his creative imaginings, the relevant parallel in Forster’s work

⁴³⁷ The fact that “the austere devotee of military duty” who “may in the end have caught Billy to his heart” (BB101f.) is likened to a “monk” (BB89) may be felt to represent a verbal link to the Forsterian desideratum of “only connect” as expressed in *Howards End*, where connection is supposed to abolish the “meaningless fragments” of “the beast and the monk” existing in “isolation” (HE183f.) within the souls of men like Henry Wilcox, alienated from their own selves. While the textual surface of Melville’s novella shows little evidence of “the beast”, i.e. the carnal, in Vere – save, perhaps, in the aesthetically sublimated form of his readiness to imagine Billy “in the nude” posing as “young Adam before the Fall” (BB78) – the sterile intellectualism of this military “monk” is revealed with a vengeance as able to suppress all human compassion and *refuse* to “see the connection”. Henry Wilcox is made to “see the connection if it kills [him]” (HE305) – which it almost does, for his son’s imprisonment for manslaughter achieves the razing of his “fortress”, leaving him little more than a “shamble[s]” (HE332). By contrast, Melville’s Vere, though seen to “suffer[...]” more than “the condemned” Billy, is not recognisably represented as devastated or even fundamentally changed by his experience; he remains the cool strategist “who mainly had effected the condemnation” (BB102), apparently untouched by “remorse” (BB120), and it is only Billy who is “kill[ed]” (HE305). It remained for the opera-makers to ‘break’ the captain, and thus make him fit to experience a Forsterian salutary connection (see discussion in section II.3.10.3.).

would appear in the fragment “Ralph and Tony” (1902/03), one of his earliest and, as I suggest, most operatic short stories (see section II.4.1.). Its final resolution, the reconciliation of its two eponymous heroes, also takes place in a closeted interview, to the events of which the readers are not privy. Instead, they are left to deduce that what takes place in the privacy of Tony’s room is some form of salutary connection between individuals formerly isolated from each other – both of them male, one of them a ‘dark’ middle-class intellectual in search of love and salvation, the other an initially homophobic ‘light’ character of the violent but barbarically attractive type. To “the gadding world” (BB102) of hotel guests and female relatives – be they well-meaning but impedimental mother, or “obedient handmaid” (AS91) in an erotic triangle – as well as to the readers of this story, there is no representing, “no telling the sacrament” of connection which opens on queer desire and love between men: here, too, “is privacy at the time”. Yet this particular moment of “diviner magnanimity” (BB102), in which one man finds it in his illness-stricken heart to replace aggressive rejection with “the holiness of the heart’s affections” (TCD71), passes with not just one “survivor” but with two, and its “sequel” is not “holy oblivion” (BB102), but the promise of lasting fulfilment – a vista opening, much as it would at the end of *Maurice*, on the “land” in which “the far-shining sail” (LIB61, 63) – “the sail of love”, according to Forster (BPL A61:50) – could “anchor forever” (LIB61, 63).

II.5.1.2. Reading matter(s): E. M. Forster and E. F. Vere

Starting from the 1950s, a younger generation of literary critics began to pursue what became known as ‘Ironist’ readings of Melville’s *Billy Budd* (see section I.2.2.). These approaches tended to centre on questioning the narrative depiction of Captain Vere, who came increasingly to be seen as the story’s ‘real’ villain: a clever autocratic authoritarian who abuses his position of power for his private ends, and yet still contrives to appear as the story’s hero, forced to effect Billy’s execution by circumstances of tragic necessity. A number of these readings take issue with Vere’s literary choices, political opinions and philosophical outlook as presented in Ch. VI, where we learn that

his bias was toward those books to which every serious mind of superior order, occupying any active post of authority in the world, naturally inclines; books treating of actual men and events no matter of what era – history, biography, and unconventional writers who, free from cant and convention, like Montaigne, honestly and in the spirit of common sense, philosophise upon realities. In this love⁴³⁸ of reading he found confirmation of his own more reserved thoughts – confirmation which he had vainly sought in social converse, so that as touching most fundamental topics, there had

⁴³⁸ H/S62 reads “line”.

got to be established in him some positive convictions which he felt would abide in him essentially unmodified so long as his intelligent part remained unimpaired. In view of the humbled⁴³⁹ period in which his lot was cast this was well for him. His settled convictions were as a dyke against those invading waters of novel opinion, social, political, and otherwise, which carried away as in a torrent no few minds in those days, minds by nature not inferior to his own. While other members of that aristocracy to which by birth he belonged were incensed at the innovators mainly because their theories were inimical to the privileged classes, Captain Vere disinterestedly opposed them not alone because they seemed to him incapable of embodiment in lasting institutions, but at war with the world and the peace of mankind.⁴⁴⁰ (BB39f.)

In the 1950s, and even more so in the late 1960s and 1970s, many critics, sensitised to universalising doctrinal claims as well as suspicious of authority in general, interpreted this passage to the effect that in his choice of reading matter, Vere merely seeks confirmation for his own prejudices and political opinions. Phil Withim, writing in 1959, was only one of the numerous critics who have insisted that the narrator's discourse is to be taken as ironic throughout most of the text, and that Melville deliberately deployed this irony to mislead 'naïve' readers as to the 'true' character of Captain Vere. To Withim, the passage's "last phrase sounds suspiciously like cant, like sarcasm". He suggests that the entire passage be read as Melville's ironic criticism of Vere: "the reader is expected to understand that Vere's reasoning is presented without comment because it is simply and transparently a rationalisation of an uninformed and bigoted man who reads only those authors who reinforce his views" (268).⁴⁴¹

Such an interpretation would hardly have occurred to Forster when he encountered Melville's novella for the first time in the mid-1920s; nor does it appear to have done so at the time of his renewed engagements with the text in 1947 and 1948-51. Indeed, the novelistic Vere's reading habits resurface in the libretto to form an important element in the characterisation of his operatic counterpart, whose younger self is encountered reading Plutarch in a contemplative mood in his cabin in the present-day Act I, Sc. 2 (LIB24).⁴⁴² His "love of reading" (BB39) can be seen to place the upper-class Vere very firmly in the category of Forsterian 'dark' protagonists, who often display a heartfelt appreciation and familiar respect for literature, art and cultural tradition – a form of intellectual humanism which is positively connoted within the Forsterian value system. Indeed, there is every

⁴³⁹ H/S62 reads "troubled".

⁴⁴⁰ H/S63 reads "at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind".

⁴⁴¹ A number of critics have advanced similar readings of this passage, among them Robert Martin (1986a:114 and 1986b:51f.).

⁴⁴² In the original four-act version, Vere's first appearance in the opera proper had been at the Captain's Muster where he gave a rousing patriotic speech; see section III.2.6. and discussion below.

reason to assume that Forster may have found the intellectual leanings and literary practices of Melville's "dry and bookish gentleman" (BB40) congenial to his personal experience,⁴⁴³ for his own literary practices, as documented in his essays and radio broadcasts as well as in his *Commonplace Book*, can be seen to resemble those of Melville's commander in surprising ways. It might reasonably be speculated that a perceived kinship of intellectual leanings and habits helped to shape Forster's perception of Melville's Vere, and may have influenced his decision to embark on his librettistic 'rescue operation' as a form of artistic intervention against Vere's 'odious' behaviour during Billy's trial.

This is not to say, of course, that Forster personally identified with Vere entirely. Writing to his friend Robert Trevelyan on 4 April 1950, he described the libretto's Vere as "conservative" – i.e. politically distinct from a liberal humanist like himself, a Wilcox rather than a Schlegel – "patriotic" and "averse to foreigners, particularly to the atheistical frogs whom he is about to fight" (EMFL II:239). Forster tended to be suspicious of patriotism, and although his work frequently deploys national and cultural stereotypes in a manner that has long been attracting critical attention, he would hardly have thought of himself as "averse to foreigners", not even in times of war.⁴⁴⁴ At the same time, Forster saw his Vere as an "intellectual" who is nevertheless "in touch with the common man in his own country" (EMFL II:239). The latter formulation in particular suggests that Melville's aristocrat, the "officer mindful of the welfare of his men" (BB36), has been touched by the influence of Forsterian class-bridging idealism, since this detail may be felt to open a link to the cross-class or cross-cultural longings of Forster's intellectual 'dark' protagonists, men like Philip Herriton, Cyril Fielding or Rickie Elliot, for whom getting "in touch with the common man" is presented as the means to personal salvation.

In her analysis of Forster's historical essay "Gemistus Pletho" (1905),⁴⁴⁵ Judith Herz has produced a good description of "the essential stance" which Forster "takes to his materials no matter what the genre": in "the portrait of Gemistus Pletho that Forster sketches",

there is a continuous movement between text and context, figure and foreground, subject and self. Although it is not a matter of the writer identifying with his subject (the differences are far more critical than the similarities), that subject is nonetheless constructed as much out of the writer's own experiences

⁴⁴³ In 1949, Forster marked the passage containing this phrase in his copy of Plomer's edition of *Billy Budd*.

⁴⁴⁴ In one of his "Anti-Nazi broadcasts" of 1940, entitled "What Has Germany Done to the Germans?" (TCD35-38), he called to mind the Nazi persecution of dissident artists, scientists and writers, and the book-burnings of 1933, and pointed out that "Germany had to make war on her own people before she could attack Europe [...] during the past seven years she robbed and tortured and interned and expelled and killed thousands and thousands of her own citizens" (TCD35).

⁴⁴⁵ AH171-182.

and values as out of the 'real' historical materials. It is a relationship between writer and subject that a line from George Herbert's poem "Vanitie I" suggestively catches – "he imparts to them his mind". (1988:23)

There is ample evidence in the operatic Vere of such "impart[ing]": he arguably becomes a Forsterian character not only in terms of his assimilation into Forster's preferred fictional patterns but also on a more intimate level, on which he can be seen to share some aspects of Forster's personal outlook and habits.

In "What I Believe" (1938), Forster states that his "law-givers are Erasmus and Montaigne" (ICD65); he could thus be seen to share the philosophical outlook of Melville's Vere, who appreciates Montaigne as able to "philosophise upon realities", "honestly, and in the spirit of common sense" (BB39). Yet even before 1938, Forster, too, had long been in the habit of turning to books at times of personal unhappiness and anxiety about the future of civilisation, freedom, and culture as he perceived them, and he was to continue to do so for the rest of his life. His literary solace consisted not only of poetry and fiction, but also prominently included "books treating of actual men and events no matter of what era – history, biography" (BB39). Interestingly, these deliberate seekings-out of literary support and consolation occur most poignantly and in their most articulate form during the First and Second World Wars – in situations, in fact, where Forster found his liberal humanist values under duress. His position in these situations may be regarded as parallel to that of Vere, whose convictions and courage are similarly challenged by the atmosphere of social and political upheaval that dominated the 18th-century French Revolutionary Wars.

Forster published several articles in which he tried to set out the benefits and the consolation that might be gleaned from these diachronic colloquies with the minds of artists and philosophers. The earliest of these, on "The Functions of Literature in Wartime", dates from 1915.⁴⁴⁶ Forster states there that "books are not merely the solace of a peaceful hour or the occasion for cultured talk, but spiritual possessions that survive in the hour of war". About "the sort of literature that one is supposed to read at the present moment – the pamphlets, books, poems etc." which "try to tell us what we should think or feel about the war", he remarks that he does not think them "of much use [...] because they are inspired not by emotion, but by excitement. Little good comes out of excitement". Contemporary writers who are "inspired by emotion, not excitement" and "have purged their work from selfishness and vulgarity, and consequently can help us [...] are exceptions" (AE177f.). It is to "the literature of the past", consequently, that Forster turns for what "indirect influence" it has to offer to "help[...] us to endure danger and ingratitude and answer a lie with the truth": this is "the world of the spirit [...]; the world that we look for also in religion" (AE178f.); "it recalls us to the contemplation of greatness, and, that once achieved, there is no room for fear; you go on with your job instead" (AE181).

⁴⁴⁶ AE176-183.

The same strategy is evidently pursued by the operatic Vere, who turns to the historians of the Classical past, themselves already producing their narratives at a remove from the events they describe and thus less likely to be “inspired by [...] excitement” (AE178): “Plutarch – the Greeks and the Romans – their troubles and ours are the same. May their virtues be ours, and their courage” (LIB24). At the end of the scene, he “takes his book” again and reads about the battle of Salamis, in which the Greeks won a decisive victory against the Persian invaders despite their “vastly inferior numbers” (LIB27).⁴⁴⁷ If the “virtues” and “courage” of the ancients present an example worth aspiring to, Vere’s “contemplation of greatness” (AE181) can also be seen to lead him directly on into “the world of the spirit [...] the world that we look for also in religion” (AE179), for his meditation at the beginning of the scene is followed by a prayer: “O God, grant me light to guide us, to guide us all” (LIB24).⁴⁴⁸

In “A Note on the Way”, written in 1934, Forster returns to his earlier experience, reaffirming that “in the ‘great’ war [i.e. World War I], books helped me enormously”. Even though the writings of “Blake, William Morris, the early T. S. Eliot, J. K. Huysmans [and] Yeats” had “had nothing tangible to offer”, their merit had lain in their ability to take him “into a country where the will is not everything, and the braying patriots of the moment made no sound” (AH71). Forster’s opinion is that “the great minds of the past” can “prop our minds” – not, “as Matthew Arnold thought”, in the sense that “quoting their beauties or remembering their thoughts could steel one[...] against injustice or cruelty”, but because “the past, through its very detachment, can re-interpret” (AH69f).

Once the Second World War had begun, this desire for re-interpretation became painfully acute, and it was to the past that Forster turned in May 1942, when, worried by the prospect of civilisation as he understood and valued it falling victim to a Nazi victory in Europe, he started to read historical accounts of the fall of another great civilisation, namely, the collapse of the Western Roman Empire (see CPB131-146). In a BBC broadcast on “Gibbon and his Autobiography”,⁴⁴⁹ written in July, he explained his enterprise:

I have been rereading *Decline and Fall*⁴⁵⁰ and have been trying to find parallels between the collapse of the Mediterranean civilisation which [Gibbon] there describes and the apparent collapse of world civilisation today. I have not found many parallels, but I do think it strengthens our outlook occa-

⁴⁴⁷ On the supposed quotation from Plutarch, see note 132.

⁴⁴⁸ In view of the ongoing critical debate about the opera-makers supposed intentions to ‘Christianise’ Melville’s story (see Allen), it seems worth noting that Vere is not praying for divine guidance here, but merely for enlightened clear-headedness for himself (“God, grant *me* light”, my emphasis) to enable *him* “to guide us all”. His attitude could be interpreted as hubris, but seems at the very least to indicate a somewhat reserved opinion of the guiding abilities of divine grace.

⁴⁴⁹ TCD157-161.

⁴⁵⁰ Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (publ. 1776-89).

sionally to glance into the past, and to lift our eyes from the wave that threatens to drown us to the great horizons of the sea of history, where personal safety no longer signifies. (TCD157)

In May, he had opened his section of private note-taking in his *Commonplace Book* with the statement that he had “been seeking in that period *not* an explanation of our disaster, but wisdom with which to bear them [*sic*]” (CPB131).⁴⁵¹ It could be argued that in the libretto for *Billy Budd*, written less than five years after “the apparent collapse of world civilisation” (TCD157) had finally been averted, Forster projected his own strategy of seeking strength in the writings of earlier – sometimes much earlier – authors onto the figure of Captain Vere, a man preparing for battle against a foreign power that threatens the existing political and social system as well as the values he personally subscribes to. Vere’s invocation of “the Greeks and the Romans”, of “their virtues [...] and their courage” (LIB24), could be regarded as related to Forster’s belief that “the past” can “strengthen[...] our outlook” (TCD157) in times of social and political upheaval.

The question of what position Melville’s novella takes regarding the social and political upheavals of the late eighteenth century has formed the subject of critical debate since the 1950s, complicated by the fact that the text itself changed shape as successive editors engaged with Melville’s unfinished manuscript material. For our present purposes, it ought to be remembered that the text of *Billy Budd* as Forster knew it was in all editions then extant headed by a “Preface”⁴⁵² which was generally taken to fulfil its prefatory function of providing a frame of reference for the story:

The year 1797, the year of this narrative, belongs to a period which, as every thinker now feels, involved a crisis for Christendom, not exceeded in its undetermined momentousness at the time by any other era whereof there is record. The opening proposition made by the Spirit of that Age, in-

⁴⁵¹ About two months further along in his investigations, pessimistic about his prospects of ever seeing the South of France or Egypt again (in an entry dated “30-6-42”, CPB137), Forster increasingly finds his project failing: “My original impulse in this excursion was the discovery of parallels, then I was diverted into interest in the past, now that too is flagging, and I have driven myself with difficulty to finish this analysis. My ignorance and the powerless [*sic*] of knowledge weigh on me” (CPB141). However, his private pessimism did not prevent him from publicly reaffirming his belief in the wholesome strength to be gained from the “occasional[...] [...] glance into the past” in his article on Gibbon (TCD157), nor from admitting that it is “soothing” to find confirmation that “few of us can think long at a time or often about tragic changes. We keep on pretending that the past continues” – an impression gleaned from his reading of the Fifth century bishop Apollinaris Sidonius, who “saw the universe as still Roman, it seems, and the Goths as a poor joke” whose reign “would pass”, just as Forster and his contemporaries believed that “Hitler will pass” and could not “imagine a new barbarism” (CPB137).

⁴⁵² It was not until 1962 that Hayford and Sealts found this supposed “Preface” to consist of material which Melville had discarded, and which had been included erroneously by all previous editors; see Hayford/Sealts 1962a:18f. and section I.2.1.

volved a rectification of the Old World's hereditary wrongs. In France, to some extent, this was bloodily effected. But what then? Straightway the Revolution itself became a wrongdoer, one more oppressive than kings. Under Napoleon it enthroned upstart kings, and initiated that prolonged agony of continual warfare whose final throes was Waterloo. During those years not the wisest could have foreseen that the outcome of all would be what to some thinkers apparently it has since turned out to be, a political advance along nearly the whole line for Europeans. (BB13)

There follows another paragraph in which the Spithead and Nore mutinies are represented as influenced by the "Revolutionary Spirit", and described as preparing the way to naval reform, despite the fact that "by Englishmen" they were "naturally deemed monstrous at the time" (BB14).

Opening the novella as it did, this "Preface" would necessarily have influenced readers' perceptions of the text's stance towards the French Revolution, which it appears to censure severely as "a wrongdoer [...] more oppressive than kings" even while it concedes (albeit with caution) that "some thinkers apparently" consider it to have brought about the political progress of Europe. Readers conceiving of, or accepting, the novella's setting as "a period" of unprecedented "crisis for Christendom", and particularly English readers who had been taught to think of the French Revolution as a bloody uprising that spawned a reign of terror and involved their own nation in a war that lasted two decades, would easily conclude that the "invading waters of novel opinion, social, political, and otherwise" (BB39f.), which Vere views with such distrust, are none other than the ideas and propositions associated with the French Revolution.

Even without the supposed "Preface", the influence of revolutionary ideas on the Nore mutineers in particular can be seen to be represented in the text by imagery which is, on the surface at least, negatively connoted. Thus, the British flag is described as "the flag of founded law and freedom defined"; stripped of "union and cross", it appears as "the enemy's red meteor of unbridled and unbounded revolt" (BB29f.). "Founded law and freedom defined" appear to be positively connoted here in contrast with the "unbridled" and "unbounded" anarchy of "revolt", which is moreover associated with an "enemy"; a "meteor", too, if it threatens to hit the earth, is a negative force that inspires fear. The narrator continues: "Reasonable discontent growing out of practical grievances in the fleet had been ignited into irrational combustion as by live cinders blown across the Channel from France in flames" (BB30). Again, "reasonable discontent" founded on "practical grievances" is contrasted negatively with "irrational" revolt. If "in flames" is parsed as a complement to "France" (rather than to the "live cinders"), evoking the image of a burning country, this image can be linked back to the narrator's preceding simile involving urban conflagration: "To the Empire, the Nore Mutiny was what a strike in the fire-brigade would be to London threatened by general arson" (BB29). Once more, revolution is equalled to fire here, and more

specifically to “arson” which evokes associations of deliberate destruction. Such a negative view of naval revolt, and, by extension, of the revolutionary ideas from France that are said to have inspired it, emerges in yet another simile: “To some extent the Nore Mutiny may be regarded as analogous to the distemping irruption of contagious fever in a frame constitutionally sound, and which anon throws it off” (BB31).⁴⁵³

While Ironist critics might argue that all of these images are to be read in the light of an overall ironic stance on the narrator’s part, it is highly unlikely that an early reader like Forster would have questioned the narrator’s basic reliability to such an extent, even though he might have disagreed with him on certain points, for instance on his extolling of Nelson’s supposed virtues.⁴⁵⁴ To Forster, as to his early contemporaries, the narrator’s deployment of positively and negatively connoted images would almost certainly have created the impression that the text, for all that it is critical of warfare and of abusive authoritarian practices like impressment, tends towards a traditionalist, anti-revolutionary stance which endorses the interests of “a power then all but the sole free conservative one of the Old World” (BB29).

The fact that Vere possesses certain “settled convictions” that serve him “as a dyke against those invading waters of novel opinion” (BB39) may well have found Forster’s approval, particularly since Vere, like Forster himself,⁴⁵⁵ counts Montaigne among his “law-givers” (TCD65; see BB39). It certainly seems highly unlikely that it would have occurred to Forster to read the description of Vere’s attitude towards the French Revolution as ironic, given that he himself tended to be distrustful of political extremism. From the early 1930s, in his BBC broadcasts and in his work as an essayist, Forster had been establishing himself, in the words of Claude Summers, as “a moral presence, a liberal conscience that countered the excesses of left and right alike” (19). Fascism Forster rejected outright; with Soviet communism he was disappointed.⁴⁵⁶ Even though, in 1934, in an article written for *Time and Tide*, Forster had cautiously conceded that “if the present order

⁴⁵³ Compared to the convoluted hints about Claggart’s mysterious “mania” (BB56), or respectively “monomania” (BB72), this image of a “contagious fever” quickly overcome by a robust body appears straightforward and unambiguous.

⁴⁵⁴ Forster’s 1935 commemorative article on his friend T. E. Lawrence (AH136-141) indicates that he considered the figure of Nelson to have been “twisted from his true bearings” by a popular mythmaking process which serves the patriotic and military interests of patriarchal authority, represented by “the tattoo master”, the Boy Scouts, and the Girl Guides (AH141). See also my discussion at the end of section I.3.4.

⁴⁵⁵ In “What I Believe”.

⁴⁵⁶ Having visited the Paris Exhibition of 1937, Forster wrote about the Soviet Pavilion: “we enter a realm which is earnest, cheerful, instructive, constructive and consistent, but which has had to blunt some of the vagrant sensibilities of mankind and is consequently not wholly alive. [...] [T]he art-stuff on the walls might just as well hang on the walls of the German Pavilion opposite: the incidents and the uniforms in the pictures are different but the mentality of the artists is the same, and is as tame” (“The Last Parade” [TCD3-8], 5f).

breaks, communism seems the only hopeful alternative”, he was at the same time convinced that communism “would destroy nearly every thing I understand and like”, which led him to the conclusion that “I want the present economic and social order to continue” (quoted from Furbank II:190). In this respect Forster can be seen after all to share Vere’s “conservative” (EMFL II:239) attitude to political change.

Furthermore, I suggest that at the time of the libretto’s genesis, less than five years after the end of World War II, Forster may have read the figure of Vere in the light of his own recent experience of a war situation in which he had felt the preservation of civilisation itself to be at stake, and in which he had found his liberal humanist and basically pacifist convictions compromised under the threat of Nazi totalitarianism. For Forster regarded the survival of civilisation – which to him included the continuities of cultural tradition as well as creative freedom – as so imperative that he had publicly endorsed its defence by military force. In an “Anti-Nazi Broadcast” of 1940,⁴⁵⁷ he presented his argument as follows: “[The Nazis] have identified civilisation with the State, and the National Socialist state cannot be secure until no civilisation exists except the particular one which it approves. This being so, I think we have got to go on with this hideous fight” (TCD41).

This attitude may be felt to resurface in Vere’s rousing address to the crew at the end of the Captain’s Muster which formed the finale of Act One in the 1951 four-act version of *Billy Budd*.⁴⁵⁸ After appealing to the crew’s patriotic feelings as “true British seamen”, Vere proceeds to emphasise that both they and he together “share a common duty” and “fight a common foe”, namely, the French who are “bold enemies and bad masters” and “want all the world to be slaves. They have enslaved their neighbours and killed their king”. To fight them is to “fight for freedom”; it is imperative “to destroy the foreigners who threaten us with slavery”. For all its “Death or victory!” bravado (LIB1951:23), Vere’s speech, tapping into a historical situation in which French Revolutionary armies had seized control of Belgium, the Netherlands, the Rhineland, and large parts of Italy, may be read as an echo of Forster’s concern about Europe (including Britain) falling victim to “slavery” under a Nazi regime in the event of a German victory.

The Captain’s Muster was excised during the 1960s revisions of *Billy Budd*, a loss deplored by Donald Mitchell as “a fundamental diminution of the characterisation of Vere” as “a man of action as well as emblem of sensibility and civilisation” (1993:120). Indeed, the excision of Vere’s oration and of the crew’s enthusi-

⁴⁵⁷ “What Would Germany Do to Us?”, TCD38-42.

⁴⁵⁸ In 1960, Crozier recalled that the Captain’s Muster was originally created because Britten “wanted a bigger climax for the end of the first act” (BBC1960:203); it seems that none of the collaborators ever felt particularly comfortable with what Britten referred to as “Vere’s haranguing of the crew” (letter to Crozier of 5 August 1960; quoted in Reed 1993b:75). See discussion in section III.2.6.

astic response as he addresses them drastically lowers the degree to which he appears as “a leader of men, a man of action in troubled and dangerous times” (Reed 1993b:79). While the expectations raised in the Prologue by Vere’s description of himself as “a man of action” who has “fought for [his] King and country” (LIB7) might be felt to warrant such criticism, it is “interesting”, as Forster remarked in 1960, to find that the opera in its revised form “approximates more closely to the original Melville” (BBC1960:203).

The present-day Vere, “bookish” (BB40) and “civilian” (BB37) once again, emerges all the more clearly as a Forsterian ‘dark’ character who can be read as queer, and whose relationship with “the common man” (EMFL II:239) of his ship’s crew can be seen to appear all the more intimate for the partial silencing of those discourses which had previously drawn attention to the immediate realities of war. For where, in the four-act version, Vere had appeared in the role of a commander exhorting his men, the instructional part of his patriotic speeches had outweighed his reassurances of personal commitment: only once does he declare “I’m with you”. The chorus of main-deck crewmen, for their part, could still be felt to be responding to some considerable extent to Vere’s patriotic zeal and prowess as a military leader when they confirm “You’ll do your best for us and we’ll do our best for you. We’re with you” (LIB1951:23). Since, in the revised version, Vere no longer appears in person, the crew’s celebration of their “Starry Vere” cannot be explained as immediately inspired by a rousing patriotic speech. The fact that Billy is now told about Vere’s courage and goodness in a conversation among friends, and by individual voices – Donald’s and the Dansker’s – rather than by the amorphous chorus, emphasises the effect which Vere has on his men’s personal feelings, while the chorus re-introduces Melville’s image of Vere as a father-figure (BB84): “He cares for us, he wishes us well, he cares for us like we are his sons” (LIB22).⁴⁵⁹ The martial atmosphere of the four-act version, which arguably attempted to establish a sense of common ground between the commander and his men while confirming the power relationships of the military hierarchy, is replaced, in the revised two-act version, with a more informal atmosphere of familiar affection, in which the hierarchy of military power is recast in a framework of ostensibly benign patriarchal domesticity.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁹ For a discussion of the problematic aspects of Vere’s paternalism, see sections II.3.10.3 through II.3.10.6.

⁴⁶⁰ This recasting of the power relationship between Vere and his crew in domestic terms can be seen to agree well with readings of the opera *Billy Budd* as a school story, as proposed, for instance, by Humphrey Carpenter (1992:288-290). Like the decision, made at an early draft stage, to omit the flogging of the Novice (see section III.2.5.), this change in the representation of Vere might reflect the opera-makers’ difficulties in reconciling Vere’s high position in the military hierarchy with the more humane and humanist side of his character. Critics who have focused on the effect of the 1960 revisions on the figure of Vere have tended to overlook that these changes also have some rather curious side-effects on the crew in their new position as Vere’s “sons”, as well as on their common enemy. “The French”, no longer “bold enemies and bad masters”

II.5.1.3. “Natures constituted like Captain Vere’s” among the Forsterian ‘dark’ characters

As noted above, a fondness for books and reading distinguishes many of Forster’s ‘dark’ characters, in whom it often goes hand in hand with a certain amount of isolation from their more conventional or downright philistine peers. Melville’s Vere, too, finds himself intellectually isolated from the other “officers of his rank” whose “minds [are] less stored than his and less earnest”, and “whose reading was mainly confined to the journals”. These men are alienated by Vere’s tendency to “cite some historical character or incident of antiquity with the same easy air that he would cite from the moderns” (BB40),⁴⁶¹ just as Vere’s officers in the opera are puzzled when Vere refers to Claggart as “a veritable Argus” (LIB26).⁴⁶²

In Forster’s work, a cultured, “bookish” individual’s state of isolation, aloofness or estrangement from conventional society can often be read as marking sub-discourses about queerness. The aesthetes Cecil Vyse and Tibby Schlegel are cases in point, but so is Clive Durham, who, finding that his homosexuality places him at odds with society and the religious doctrine that determines its moral and social norms, “withdrew higher into the classics yearly” (M56). So, too, are Rickie Elliot, whose approach to literature clashes with that of the utilitarian Herbert Pembroke (see LJ45-47), and his friend, the queer philosopher Ansell, whose behaviour towards those whom he believes to be “fools” (LJ65) frequently appears downright ill-mannered, as when he refuses to acknowledge the presence of the Pembrokes (LJ7, 17), answer Rickie’s letters (LJ56), or respond to Stephen’s “superfluous” greeting (LJ207). Indeed, Ansell’s idiosyncrasies may be seen to present some interesting parallels to those of Melville’s philosopher Captain Vere, who is prone to moodiness and mental abstraction:

Captain Vere though practical enough upon occasion would at times betray a certain dreaminess of mood. Standing alone [...], he would absently gaze off at the black sea. At the presentation to him then of some minor matter interrupting the current of his thoughts, he would show more or less irascibility; but instantly he would control it. (BB37)

(LIB1951:23), could in fact be seen to take on the role of a bogeyman: the music drops dramatically to *pianissimo* as Donald tells Billy in the hushed tones of a dormitory storyteller, “They killed their king and they’ll kill ours” (Act I, [57]+2). Billy, asking naively whether “Starry Vere will stop them”, is reassured by Donald that their captain will “destroy them. He knows all their tricks. He’s brave, and he’s good” ([58]) – it is precisely at that point that the chorus introduces the concept of a paternal relationship between the commander and his crew ([58]+6: “He cares for us [...] like we are his sons”). The crew’s status as adult equals might be felt to be diminished in comparison to the four-act version as Vere is converted into a fatherly headmaster figure (which is, however, characterised by musical ambiguity, see section I.5.3.3.).

⁴⁶¹ In 1949, Forster marked the passage containing this phrase in his copy of Plomer’s edition of *Billy Budd*.

⁴⁶² For further discussion of the Argus image, see section II.6.8.

Vere's fellow officers find him somewhat "lacking in the companionable quality" and scent in him "a queer streak of the pedantic" (BB40);⁴⁶³ the "pedantic" (LJ208) Ansell, who wilfully refuses to be sociable, strikes even his own sister as "a very peculiar person" whom "ladies can't understand" (LJ197)⁴⁶⁴ – but neither can conventional people like the Pembrokes. So uncompromisingly does Ansell pursue his private ideals of honesty and truth that he does not hesitate to confront Rickie and the Pembrokes in the presence of their schoolboy charges at Sunday dinner, dropping the bombshell news about Stephen Wonham being Rickie's illegitimate half-brother like "a Hebrew prophet passionate for satire and the truth" (LJ225). Ansell's provocation here is conscious, but his basically uncompromising attitude – "Ansell doesn't spare one", as Rickie tells Stephen (LJ253) – might be felt to be related to the lack of "considerateness" encountered "in natures constituted like Captain Vere's", whose "honesty prescribes to them directness, sometimes far-reaching like that of a migratory fowl that in its flight never heeds when it crosses a frontier" (BB40).⁴⁶⁵

Resigned to the shortcomings of their fellow men, both Vere and Ansell find fulfilment and self-validation in the communion with the minds of kindred spirits through the medium of books. Thus, Vere's "love of reading" brings him "confirmation of his own more reserved thoughts – confirmation which he had vainly sought in social converse" (BB39), just as the "book-encircled space" of the British Museum's reading room confirms Ansell's private conviction that "it was worth while to grow old and dusty seeking for truth though truth is unattainable" and that "it was worth while reading books, and writing a book or two which few would read, and no one, perhaps, endorse" (LJ177). And yet, his intellectualism notwithstanding, Ansell, like the Vere of Forster's Prologue, views himself as "a man of action" (LIB7); for what he has "found [...] in books" is nothing less than "the Spirit of Life" itself (LJ181). As its champion, he considers it imperative to become active: "When the moment comes I shall hit out like any ploughboy" (LJ180), "but I want to act rightly" because "nothing's easier than action; as fools testify". Ansell's idea of the "action" he must take involves a form of moral and spiritual intervention into the Pembrokes' stranglehold on his friend Rickie: his plan is to "fuse Mrs Elliot" (LJ179).

In section II.4.2.3.2., I have discussed the structural parallels between Agnes and John Claggart. On the basis of these parallels, it would be possible to see Ansell in the position of Vere at the beginning of Act II Sc. 2 as he prepares to "fuse" Claggart by confronting him with Billy, whom the captain suspects to be the intended

⁴⁶³ In 1949, Forster marked the passage containing these phrases in his copy of Plomer's edition of *Billy Budd*.

⁴⁶⁴ Ansell, the "peculiar person" whom "ladies can't understand", and who is clearly decodable as a homosexual character, represents an interesting parallel to John Claggart, himself a "peculiar human creature" and, like the man X— described by Melville's narrator, "a nut not to be cracked by the tap of a lady's fan" (BB54).

⁴⁶⁵ In 1949, Forster marked this passage in his copy of Plomer's edition of *Billy Budd*.

victim of some iniquitous design on Claggart's part. Ansell's scruples about "act[ing] rightly" may be felt to be related to the operatic Vere's avowal, in the Prologue, that he has "tried to guide others rightly" but has "been lost on the infinite sea". It could be argued that Vere's view of himself as "a man of action" is, like Ansell's, closely linked with his moral and spiritual self-concept: even though Vere specifies that he has "fought for my King and country at sea", it is arguably his intellectual engagement with philosophical questions – he has "read books and pondered and studied and tried to fathom eternal truth" – which has shaped his attempts to "guide others rightly", both as a high-ranking naval officer and "a man of action" (LIB7) fighting the "mist" (LIB50) of moral and spiritual "confusion" (LIB7, 50).

With only their books and their own intellect to confer with, both Vere and Ansell necessarily act autonomously (thus incurring the risk of hubris) but also acknowledge that they are personally responsible for their actions: Vere agonises over what he has "done" (LIB7), and Ansell, having struck Rickie down with the truth, subsequently sees to it that he stays "alive" (LJ261) and helps him find the strength to break away from the Pembrokes. Ansell, whose detached attitude to life lets him perceive complex situations like "Greek Drama, where the actors know so little and the spectators so much" (LJ217), could be seen as belonging to the group of Forsterian 'dark' characters who are 'travelling light', and who, following the patterns of the Forsterian salvation narrative, must be shocked out of their detachment by the realisation that they, too, have connecting ties to other human beings, before they become eligible for salvation. Ansell, we are told, "had a great many facts to learn" (LJ209), and is prone to "forgetting that all this world, and not part of it, is a stage" (LJ218) – the implication being that Ansell, too, is a player in the drama of Life. Yet his "momentary contact with reality" (LJ222) is limited to the scuffle in the flowerbed with Stephen; for all that Ansell receives "a blow on the mouth" (LJ210), Agnes's lobelias emerge as the only serious casualty of this salutary encounter. By contrast, the operatic Captain Vere, who can also be classed as 'travelling light' up to the fatal confrontation in his cabin, has a higher price to pay for his experience.

As I have already indicated in section II.2.3., the figure of Captain Vere can be seen to fit into the structure of the Forsterian salvation narrative. To recapitulate, then, the "dry and bookish" (BB40) Captain Vere of 1797, an English intellectual with an "undeveloped heart[...]" (AH4),⁴⁶⁶ appears as a man who passes through life 'travelling light'. He is violently brought into contact with "reality" (LJ222) as his self-confident attempt to resolve what he regards as a conflict between good and evil turns into a catastrophe. The libretto's Vere is forcibly brought to a point where he feels that his "heart" and his "life" are "broken" (LIB53) because he holds himself responsible for Billy's fate which he cannot (for whatever reason) avert. In declining to respond to Billy's personal appeal to save him, he fails to

⁴⁶⁶ "Noted on the English Character".

seize a Forsterian symbolic moment at which he is invited to make a personal commitment to a fellow man. And yet the 'light' heroic working-class saviour character Billy is sufficiently "strong" (LIB61) to "pardon" and "receive" (LIB58) him, and they achieve a salutary connection which allows Vere to feel that he has been spiritually "saved" by Billy (LIB63). It ought to be emphasised here that if Vere is "broken" before he is "saved", this is crucial to the Forsterian salvation narrative, and places him among the other "undeveloped" Englishmen who must be "broken" to become eligible for salvation: Philip Herriton, Henry Wilcox, Conway, but also the homophobic 'light' character Tony.⁴⁶⁷

In section II.2.3.1., I have presented Philip Herriton as an exemplary case of a Forsterian 'dark' character who is 'travelling light'. The phrase itself, however, is a verbal leitmotif associated with Cyril Fielding in *A Passage to India*, where it expresses his life philosophy: "travel[ling] light" allows a man to be free and, as Aziz realises, "fearless" because he has "nothing to lose". Yet this state of freedom, which Fielding compares to that enjoyed by the Indian *saddhus*, comes at the cost of personal relationships: it is impossible to "travel light" with "a wife and children" – this is "part of [Fielding's] case against marriage" (PtI112). And yet the ability to commit to another kind of personal relationship – that of male/male friendship – is also impaired in those who 'travel light'. While Fielding's detachment affords him "equilibrium", he realises that "the corollary" is that he "shall not really be intimate with [Aziz] [...] nor with anyone" (PtI109).

Even though his case is less extreme than that of Cecil Vyse, the "ideal bachelor" (RV85) who is "the sort who can't know anyone intimately" (RV172), or that of Tibby Schlegel, who "had never been interested in human beings" (HE250), Fielding, too, "was content to help people, and like them as long as they didn't object, and if they objected pass on serenely". Fielding "had to confess that he really didn't mind" his inability to "be intimate" with others. Nevertheless, the text implies that Fielding is found wanting in terms of the Forsterian value system: "Experience can do much, and all that he had learned in England and Europe was an assistance to him, and helped him towards clarity, but clarity prevented him from experiencing something else" (PtI109). This "something else" seems to involve the concept of being "really and truly successful as a human being": Fielding himself occasionally doubts whether he is, and "felt he ought to have been working at something else the whole time – he didn't know at what, never would know, never could know, and that was why he felt sad" (PtI181).

It is arguably this obscure yearning to fulfil some human potential beyond self-knowledge and efficiency – to experience the "passion" to complement the "prose" (HE183), perhaps – which helps to make Fielding one of Forster's more promising 'dark' protagonists. As regards the "prose" of Fielding's life, we learn that

⁴⁶⁷ Another Forsterian 'dark' character who is shocked out of 'travelling light' into a self-recognition akin to Vere's is Martin Whitby from Forster's abandoned novel *Arctic Summer* (see section II.4.4., p.314).

after forty years' experience, he had learned to manage his life and make the best of it on advanced European lines, had developed his personality, explored his limitations, controlled his passions – and he had done it all without becoming either pedantic or worldly. (PtI181)

Leaving aside the point about pedantry, it is possible to see in Fielding a partial precursor of his contemporary, Captain Vere, another “bachelor of forty or thereabouts” (BB36), and to read the operatic Vere as a parallel to Fielding: a Forsterian ‘dark’ character who is ‘travelling light’, but is forced to face the reality of his emotional commitment to a fellow man. Granted, Fielding, unlike Vere, has no difficulty in deciding to break with his patriotic countrymen rather than betray his friendship with Aziz; he takes his leave from the British community at little emotional cost to himself, “so light did he travel” (PtI182). His moment of truth arrives after the trial is over, when Aziz turns jealous of Fielding’s friendship with Adela Quested. His doubts about his ability to achieve intimacy notwithstanding, Fielding is sufficiently “fond of Aziz” to be shaken by his friend’s “hostile” behaviour, and is forced to concede in the end that “travelling light is less easy as soon as affection is involved” (PtI268).⁴⁶⁸

Anticipating the thoughts of Forster’s essay “What I Believe”, Fielding believes that “the world [...] is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence – a creed ill suited to Chandrapore” (PtI56), or, indeed, the British Navy of 1797, if Vere is seen as sharing Fielding’s Forsterian outlook. The unorthodox schoolmaster Fielding finds himself very much at odds with the racist, conventional and ultra-patriotic British colonial society which is centred around the Chandrapore Club; this has to do with the fact that he “had come out” to colonial India “too late to lose” his humanist “creed” of “goodwill plus culture and intelligence” (PtI56). Similarly, Captain Vere stands isolated among his peers in the Navy as “an exceptional character”, arguably not least because his “long and arduous service with signal devotion to it had not resulted in absorbing and *salt*ing the entire man” (BB39).

⁴⁶⁸ It ought to be emphasised that the parallels between Fielding and Vere must be sought in their make-up as Forsterian ‘dark’ characters’, rather than in the respective texts’ plot events or overall narrative trajectory. Whereas the opera can be seen to celebrate a successful salutary connection, *A Passage to India* can be (and has been) read as a case study in the almost hopeless difficulty of achieving connection in an indifferent universe. Moreover, Fielding’s crisis of connection, if it can be called a crisis, is far less personally devastating to him than Vere’s, not least because Fielding essentially remains on the periphery of the drama involving Aziz and Adela, and bears little direct responsibility for their catastrophe. Because he “never would know, never could know” (PtI181) his own human potential beyond the prosaic, the tragedy of his failure to achieve an enduring commitment to Aziz peters out quietly in “the last gutterings of Chandrapore” (PtI268): the friends’ mutual estrangement, Fielding’s departure from India, his subsequent marriage to a woman who is never heard to speak, Aziz’ removal to Mau, and the overall historical and political circumstances, famously symbolised by the horses and the Indian landscape insisting that their friendship is “not yet” possible (PtI312).

If the libretto's Vere, like his counterpart in the novella, declines to adapt his utterances to suit the understanding of his officers, he is on the other hand inclined to believe the best of the common sailors: against the officers' calls for "vigilance]" against a possible mutiny, Vere urges them to "listen to them singing below decks. Where there is happiness there cannot be harm. We owe so much to them – some torn from their homes". What engages Vere's approval and sympathy is viewed with distrust by his officers, who point out that the latter fact constitutes "more reason we should watch them" (LIB27). If we accept that Vere's benevolently paternal attitude towards the lower-class ship's crew is to be read as neither naïve nor patronising (even while he appears to euphemise the fact that some of "them" have been pressed into service by force), his position may in some ways be compared to Fielding's, who regards the materialistic British colonial administrators, his nominal peers, with emotional indifference, while he actively attempts to befriend the subaltern colonial subjects.⁴⁶⁹ As Aziz talks fantastically about the works of the Mogul Emperors, we are told that Fielding does not react to his display as the orthodox representatives of British Colonialism would have done: "Ronny would have pulled him up, Turton would have wanted to pull him up, but restrained himself. Fielding did not even want to pull him up; he had dulled his craving for verbal truth and cared chiefly for truth of mood" (PtI65). Fielding's instinct for "truth of mood" is validated by the authority of the narrator, and confirmed further by the evidence of those passages in which the narrative voice shades into the thoughts of Aziz.

Like the other colonial officials, Ronny routinely distrusts all Indians; when he sees "Aziz, flamboyant, [...] patronising Mrs Moore", his response is to demand of Fielding whether he "can't [...] see that fellow's a bounder" (PtI70). Ronny's "education" in colonial administration has clearly made him proficient in a kind of colonial "knowingness" which does not, however, "help[...]" him "to know" or "understand[...]" (BBC386). The "distrustfulness" – not, perhaps, particularly "unconscious" but certainly far from being "ruled" or "exercise[d] [...] consciously" – which governs his interactions with all Indians has clearly "destroy[ed]" his "heart's insight, and prevents it from saluting goodness" (BBC387). The schoolmaster Fielding, by contrast, appears as the Forsterian type of "a man who despite his education, understands" (BBC386): he correctly realises that Aziz's "nerves are on edge, that's

⁴⁶⁹ For the purposes of this comparison, I am loosely equating the categories of Class and Race; both the crew of the *Indomitable* and the Indians as colonial subjects can be seen to occupy a subaltern position, while both Vere's and Fielding's own complicity in oppressive power structures has to be glossed over in order for their humanism to appear in a positive light. A similar point about Vere's tacit complicity in oppressive power structures has been made by Barry Emslie: "Vere clearly has the status of a benevolent patriarch and, equally clearly, represents an historically conditioned view of social stability, one hostile to radical change. When, listening to the crew singing below decks, he remarks: 'We owe so much to them – some torn from their homes', notions of consensus and shared responsibility are unavoidably linked to an acknowledgement of socially institutionalised brutalities in which Vere himself is implicated" (44).

all” (Pt170). In a manuscript draft of this scene, his reprimand had appeared even more authoritative: “Can’t you tell the difference between a bounder and a man with his nerves on edge?” [MSSPt196]. When Aziz is accused of sexual assault, Fielding never doubts Aziz’ innocence: “I know him to be incapable of infamy” (Pt1155).

The operatic Vere arguably possesses a similar instinct for character and “truth of mood”, as does his counterpart in the novella, about whom we are told that “something exceptional in [his] moral quality [...] made him, in earnest encounter with a fellow-man, a veritable touchstone of that man’s essential nature” (BB79). In the libretto, Vere’s intuition emerges in his dismissal of Billy’s valediction to the *Rights o’ Man*, which the officers continue to view with deep suspicion, as harmless: “Oh, that’s nothing [...] just youthful high spirits. Don’t let that worry us. No danger there, gentlemen” (LIB27). Just as Fielding’s judgements are presented to readers of *A Passage to India* as sound, the judgements of Vere will appear correct to an opera audience who witness not only Billy’s loyal eagerness – as expressed, for instance, in his avowal that he would “die” for “Starry Vere” at the end of Act I Sc. 1 (LIB23), and in his conversation with the Dansker which closes Act I – but also Claggart’s sinister plotting.

When Vere decides to confront the “good” boy Billy with the “evil” Claggart, he does so because he feels sure of his ability to judge men’s characters, having “studied men and their ways”. His confident declaration that Claggart “shall fail” (LIB51) could be regarded as a classic instance of hubris, which is punished by the unforeseen outcome of the confrontation.⁴⁷⁰ However, as I have outlined in section II.2.3.1., Forster’s own stories, too, are often organised around a character’s collisions with an external world that is unpredictable and often represented as fundamentally Other. David Medalie has drawn attention to the fact that in Forster’s work, “good intentions are [...] frequently shown to have negative consequences”; the implied message being that “it is profoundly dangerous to attempt to transpose values without a careful consideration of the contexts in which they are to be applied”. Medalie illustrates his point using the example of Adela Quested in *A Passage to India*, who “seeks, in an environment which is conspicuously resistant to her designs, to implement her Bloomsbury values” and suffers what he sums up as a “rebuff” (37f.). Adela’s idealistic approach precipitates her into a situation in which she feels compelled to lodge an accusation against the Indian man she had wished to befriend. Viewed in this light, her case appears as a parallel to that of Captain Vere. While Vere’s values are not exactly those of Bloomsbury, they could arguably be interpreted as humanist; what is certain, however, is that in the novella as well as in the libretto, Vere’s view of the world is highly literate, mediated by texts of history, philosophy and – in the novella more so than in the opera – the Bible, as demonstrated by Vere’s exclamation that Clag-

⁴⁷⁰ See section II.3.10.3., p.246.

gart's death "is the divine judgement on Ananias" (BB85). In the novella, a good deal of the mediating discourse about the moral and spiritual dimensions of the conflict between Claggart and Billy is contributed by the narrator; in the libretto, it is very clearly Vere who introduces the moralistic reading of Claggart's antagonism as "evil", and proposes to set up a confrontation in which evil shall be made to "fail" by the forces of "good" (LIB51). Vere's interpretation of the situation can thus be regarded as shaped by his personal outlook, the outlook of a "bookish gentleman" (BB40) whose self-declared knowledge of "men and their ways" (LIB51) does not, after all, enable him to predict Billy's violent reaction to Claggart's accusation.⁴⁷¹

In his naïve confidence, which arguably arises from a fundamental failure to respect the Otherness of a man of whom he approves in principle, Vere could also be seen to resemble Philip Herriton in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* as he confronts Gino Carella with the news that his baby son has been killed. It is arguably because he assumes that Gino will behave and react as a middle-class, public-school educated Englishman would that Philip almost comes to grief at the hands of the bereaved and distraught Italian. Having "seen too much to be nervous" – a remark which might suggest that perhaps he ought to be – Philip recounts the story of the baby's abduction and subsequent death in a carriage accident "in low, even tones". Gino receives the news in silence and does not react to Philip's confession of guilt ("It is through me [...]. It happened because I was cowardly and idle"); instead, he merely starts "pass[ing] his hands over things" – the furniture and the walls – like a man disturbed. Philip is "driven to intervene" because Gino's behaviour is "so uncanny": he "touche[s] him on the shoulder" with the words "Gently, man, gently; he is not here" (WA134f.), much like Vere tries to soothe the tongue-tied Billy. Because "the tension" has become "too great", Philip attempts "to comfort" Gino, and this is where he may be felt to project his own English middle-class behavioural parameters onto Gino in a fatal way:

"Break down, Gino; you must break down. Scream and curse and give in for a little; you must break down."

There was no reply, and no cessation of the sweeping hands.

"It is time to be unhappy. Break down or you will be ill like my sister. You will go –"

The tour of the room was over. He had touched everything in it except Philip. Now he approached him. His face was that of a man who has lost his old reason for life and seeks a new one.

"Gino!"

He stopped for a moment; then he came nearer. Philip stood his ground.

⁴⁷¹ For a discussion of the possibility that Vere does in fact anticipate Billy's violent reaction, see section II.3.10.3.

“You are to do what you like with me, Gino. Your son is dead, Gino. He died in my arms, remember. It does not excuse me; but he did die in my arms.”

The left hand came forward, slowly this time. [...] Then it descended and gripped him by his broken elbow. (WA135)

By exhorting Gino to “break down”, Philip may, in terms of dramatic irony, be seen to invite disaster; he can also, at the same time, be seen to “transpose values” across individual, social and cultural boundaries “without a careful consideration of [...] context[.]” (Medalie 38). Even though it could be argued that Philip subconsciously expects an angry or even violent response when he tells Gino “to do what you like with me”, it is clear that he does not expect to be tortured: “the Englishman” hits out in self-defence, exclaiming “You brute! [...] Kill me if you like! But just you leave my broken arm alone”. As Gino, having recovered from Philip’s retaliating and instantly regretted blow, makes for the room’s only lamp which he will toss outside, Philip utters another of his contradictory appeals: “Do what you like; but think first –” (WA135f.). Philip, it seems, expects (however paradoxically) to remain in control of the situation; he can also be seen to claim and exercise a discursive supremacy that privileges his own intellectual and cultural outlook – that of an educated middle-class Englishman – over that of the grief-stricken Italian dentist’s son.

It is Philip who decrees that Gino “must break down” because otherwise he “will be ill” or “go –”; presumably the missing word is ‘mad’, for Philip’s sister Harriet suffers a nervous breakdown and an undefined subsequent illness over the fatal outcome of her attempt to abduct the baby. Clearly, if an emotional breakdown would have ensured the well-being of the repressed and repressive (female) English middle-class psyche, which, in Harriet’s case, presumably does not remain untouched by guilt, then there can be no doubt that “break[ing] down” would have a beneficiary effect on Gino, too – or so Philip can be assumed to believe. His own emotions controlled by habitual moderation, reason and logic, Philip tries “to comfort” (WA135) Gino to the best of his ability, evidently trusting that his sober account, delivered (to apply a pertinent phrase from Melville) “honestly and in the spirit of common sense” (BB39) as a matter of “nobility and pride” (WA136), will at least be acknowledged, if not received in like manner. And yet his common-sense approach not only fails to breach Gino’s impenetrable silence, but leaves Philip unprepared for his violent reaction, for the “care” with which this “brute”, guided by “instinct”, systematically sets to torturing and choking him to death, all, apparently, without any sign of stopping to “think first” (WA135ff.).

It is here that some similarities might be felt to exist between the ‘light’ characters Gino and Billy Budd, and the ‘dark’ English middle- or upper-class characters Philip and Vere. Both Gino and Billy can be seen to appear as fundamentally Other in their moment of crisis, and in both cases their state of Otherness is expressed in a radical breakdown of verbal communication. It should be remem-

bered that in Forster's work, verbal communication skills are most often associated with 'dark' middle-class intellectuals, and thus ultimately with a position of superior social power. It is the 'light' characters of inferior social or cultural status who are most consistently trapped by an inability to express themselves, often at moments in which they find themselves misrepresented or misunderstood; and they tend to compensate for this failure of verbal self-representation by physical violence.⁴⁷² The physical violence which ensues from Gino's and Billy's respective crises of self-expression does not, on the textual surface, appear to fall within the 'dark' characters' horizon of experience or expectation.⁴⁷³ In Melville's novella in particular, Vere apparently intends to solve the question of Claggart's honesty of purpose "in a quiet undemonstrative" (BB80) and, above all, *rational* and common-sense fashion⁴⁷⁴ by first confronting him in private with the young sailor he has accused of mutiny. Neither the novella nor the libretto overtly indicates that Vere foresees the unpredictable outcome of the confrontation between the two men, who are moreover represented in both texts as embodying two absolute and therefore essentially *irrational* moral forces.⁴⁷⁵

If moments of crisis such as the confrontational climaxes of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *Billy Budd* are read as instances of a 'dark' English middle- or upper-class character's encounter with Otherness, the element of unpredictability is revealed as a vital part of a recurring Forsterian pattern which links Vere with Philip Herriton, Adela Quested, Rickie Elliot, the philosopher Ansell, Henry Wilcox, and even the Schlegel sisters – characters who are unexpectedly precipitated into a "reality" (LJ222) in which their subjective outlook, based as it is on a scope of experience that Forster's texts consistently identify as limited, is destabilised through a collision with individual, social, or cultural Otherness. These confrontations are usually brought about to a large extent through the 'dark' characters' own agency, however well-meaning, and can, on an abstract level, be seen to revolve around issues of discursive supremacy and representational power.

⁴⁷² See discussion in section II.5.3.4.

⁴⁷³ Closer readings might, as I have suggested above, reveal that Philip does feel somewhat apprehensive about Gino's reaction; and even in the case of Vere, it is possible to produce readings in which he deliberately deploys Billy's violent potential against Claggart (see section II.3.10.3.).

⁴⁷⁴ For the sake of this argument, I am here ignoring readings of Vere which see his actions as motivated either by some obscure and irrational private desire (Sedgwick 1990:108-113) or by military power politics which depend on the suppression of his own desire for Billy (Martin 1986a:106f.).

⁴⁷⁵ It is true that in the libretto, Vere himself recognises Billy and Claggart as "good" and "evil"; however, beyond his declaration that Claggart "shall fail" (LIB51), he does not envision any concrete result for the confrontation he has set up.

II.5.1.4. “Was he unhinged?”: Melville, Forster and the voice of Science

“Sanity is the focus of the majority.” (“Ralph and Tony”, AS73)

In *A Passage to India*, Adela Quested’s experience in the cave highlights the racial and cultural divide that separates the British and Indian communities. The idealist Fielding, “seasoned and self-contained, devoid of the fervours of nationality or youth” (PtI179), inspires his British colonial “peers” (PtI181) with distrust. When he refuses to “toe the line” (PtI177) and adopt the ‘official’ bias against Aziz, they end up by “offer[ing] him violence” (PtI181). As the highest figure of authority in the Chandrapore Club, the Collector pronounces the ostracising verdict on him: “You have sunk to the level of your [Indian] associates; you are weak, weak, that is what is wrong with you” (PtI180).

In Forster’s work, it is frequently the fate of ‘dark’ characters to be thus ostracised for failing to conform to social conventions and norms, which their peers feel they are betraying. Their social dissent often signifies also a dissenting sexuality, and is often associated with discourses about weakness, illness, and insanity – Ralph Holme, Rickie Elliot, the invalid Clesant from “Dr Woolcott”, and even the depressive George Emerson spring to mind, but also Helen Schlegel. Helen temporarily stands in danger of being diagnosed as mentally disturbed, all because of her inexplicably odd behaviour, which turns out to conceal a social and sexual transgression committed in accordance with the principles of her dissident personal outlook on life and on people. With this background, the doubts which are thrown on Captain Vere’s sanity by the ship’s surgeon in Melville’s novella could be used to support a Forsterian reading of Vere as an embattled ‘dark’ character who has to contend with the normative expectations of a social environment in which his idiosyncratic self-expressions are regarded with incomprehension and suspicion. At the same time, the materialist views of Melville’s surgeon can be seen to function as a contrasting foil for the metaphysical discourse which is so central to the narrative – a device which may be felt to validate that discourse precisely by dismissing it, in a way not dissimilar to Forster’s deployment of the unenlightened outsider’s perspective in his own fiction (see section II.2.4.).

Throughout Forster’s work, medical and scientific experts are most poignantly cast as representatives and enforcers of conformity when it comes to both psychology and sexuality. His close friendship with the homosexual psychologist W. J. H. (“Sebastian”) Sprott notwithstanding, Forster himself took a bleak view of psychoanalysts in general, noting that he “mistrust[ed] not so much their judgement as their influence”: once they started to “meddle with me”, they might, so he objected,

make me change my estimate as to what is within myself. What they call a toad may be something that I call a precious stone [...]. These people have no sense of literature and art and I regard with resentment and foreboding their offers to turn an artist upside down. (Letter to Forrest Reid of 3 March 1920, in Furbank II:64)

Forster's "resentment and foreboding" concerning psychoanalysis, coupled with his apprehensiveness that a "meddl[ing]" psychoanalyst might "change" his own self-perception in a negative way, could be understood to reflect Forster's sense of the complicity of psychoanalysis in heteropatriarchal normative social discourse.⁴⁷⁶ In his fiction, the private world of individual and creative experience which was so "precious" to him is revealed time and again as something which has to be protected from these normative discourses of "science". Thus, as he lies in his bed at Penge "worrying", Maurice senses that

there was something better in life than this rubbish, if only he could get to it – love – nobility – big spaces where passion clasped peace, spaces no science could reach, but they existed forever, full of woods some of them, and arched with majestic sky and a friend... (M165).

Science, particularly when applied to human beings in the form of clinical psychology, is inadequate when it comes to recognising and representing individual experience. In *Howards End*, Margaret feels that

Science explained people, but could not understand them. After long centuries among the bones and muscles it might be advancing to knowledge of the nerves, but this would never give understanding. One could open the heart to Mr Mansbridge [the doctor] and his sort without discovering its secrets to them, for they wanted everything down in black and white, and black and white was exactly what they were left with. (HE328)

The vivisectionist approach to "explain[ing]" human beings may be conducted with increasingly fine tools, and yet those tools are doomed to remain useless when it comes to discover the heart's "secrets", not only because those cannot be set "down in black and white", but also because the "scientific" approach taken by medical experts in particular is revealed as inimical to both individual experience and to life itself. This is conveyed in *Maurice* through the description of the hypnotist Mr Lasker Jones, who represents Maurice's "idea of what an advanced scientific man ought to be. Sallow and expressionless, he sat in a large pictureless room", and "offered a bloodless hand. [...] It was as if they met to discuss a third party" (M155).

"Sallow", "expressionless", "bloodless" experts, working in austere surroundings (a "pictureless" room) and adopting an impersonal stance towards their 'subject', a stance which is passed on to their clients whose experience is offered to

⁴⁷⁶ Forster's misgivings foreshadow a central concern which queer and feminist critics, among others, have brought to Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytical models of human development, namely, that these models privilege a heteropatriarchal perspective whose "influence" functions in a normative way, and tends to cast queer (or female) experience as deviant, often in a vocabulary associated with failure and shortcoming if the dissident experience fails to follow the posited 'normal' developmental trajectory.

their scrutiny – these are the doctors most often encountered in Forster’s work. It is this kind of science – impersonal, alienating, and potentially able to “change” an individual’s “estimate as to what is within [him]self” (Forster in Furbank II:64) – which both governs and expresses the normativity these doctors propagate and try to enforce. The normative power of medical discourse is exhibited in Maurice’s attempt to discuss his homosexual longings with Dr Barry, a neighbour and something of a substitute father, in Ch. XXXI of *Maurice*:

“So you’ve never guessed,” [Maurice] said, with a touch of scorn in his terror. “I’m an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort.” [...] He sat motionless, having appealed to Caesar.

At last judgement came. [...] It was “Rubbish, rubbish!” He had expected many things, but not this; for if his words were rubbish his life was a dream.

“Dr Barry, I can’t have explained –”

“Now listen to me, Maurice, never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to you again.”

The voice impressed him, and was not Science speaking?

“Who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a decent fellow! We’ll never mention it again. No – I’ll not discuss. I’ll not discuss. The worst thing I could do for you is discuss it.” (M134)

In the following chapter, the narrator goes on to explain that Dr Barry, ignorant of the contemporary “scientific works on Maurice’s subject”,

believed that Maurice had heard some remark by chance, which had generated morbid thoughts, and that the contemptuous silence of a medical man would at once dispel them. And Maurice went away not unimpressed. Dr Barry was a great name at home. [...] He had been their ultimate authority for nearly twenty years – seldom appealed to, but known to exist and to judge righteousness, and now that he pronounced “rubbish”, Maurice wondered whether it might not be rubbish, though every fibre in him protested. (M136)

The character of Dr Barry can be seen to unite the “ultimate authority” of a father-figure, superelevated to that of a judge and even a “Caesar”, with the authority of “Science”, whose “voice” is “impress[ive]” even though, ironically, the “judgement” it pronounces reflects a traditional moral rather than any contemporary medical view of homosexuality. Supremely confident of its own power or “influence” (Forster in Furbank II:64) – and confident not without reason, as Maurice’s unsettled reaction demonstrates – the voice of patriarchal authority is here conflated with that of an obsolete “Science” to represent the oppressive and destructive normativity of the social and legal climate in Britain. By contrast, the cold, unsympathetic but far better informed Mr Lasker Jones is identified as a foreigner by his American accent (M155).

The subject of normativity had already been raised in *Howards End*, where science, even in its contemporary form, is dismissed as incapable of achieving a true “understanding” (HE283) of human nature (see above). It is no wonder that Margaret Schlegel, the Forsterian heroine of connection and “the inner life” (HE296), should be outraged when Doctor Mansbridge, “a very young man” (HE285), “vulgar and acute” (HE328), attempts to ascertain whether her sister Helen is “normal”, or whether there is “anything congenital or hereditary” in her psycho-medical history (HE285):

How dare these men [i.e. Mr Wilcox and Dr Mansbridge] label her sister! [...] What impertinences that shelter under the name of science! [...] Were they [i.e. the Schlegels] normal? What a question to ask! And it is always those who know nothing about human nature, who are bored by psychology and shocked by physiology, who ask it. (HE 286)⁴⁷⁷

It will scarcely have escaped Forster that in Melville’s novella, all three main protagonists are to varying degrees subjected to the scrutiny of medical (and medico-moral) experts. As Eve Sedgwick has pointed out,

the specifically *medical* discourses in *Billy Budd* are actually the ones that most force on the reader’s attention the congruence of Claggart’s character with Vere’s, thus offering the story’s least complacent thematic view of the forms of knowledge by which minority and majority, illness and health, madness and sanity are to be distinguished. (1990:122)

Thus, the discussion of Claggart’s mysterious “depravity” conflates moral and medical discourses as it hints at the differences between “a normal nature” (BB54) and “the mania of an evil nature”, “born with him and innate” (BB56). Captain Vere, the supposedly “normal” representative of political authority, is suspected of being insane by his ship’s surgeon (see discussion below). The same ‘expert’ also voices his professional bafflement at the “absence of spasmodic movement” (BB114) – i.e. erection or ejaculation – in Billy’s executed body. All three men are thus represented as anomalies which challenge the established “forms of knowledge”: Claggart’s condition cannot be properly explained, only hinted at; Vere’s state of mind is one of those “instances where it is next to impossible to determine whether a man is sane or beginning to be otherwise” (BB87)⁴⁷⁸ – in other words, it highlights the effective limits of medical diagnosis, as does the inexplicable stillness of the hanged Billy’s body. Given the contemporary conflation of discourses about medical, psychological and moral anomalies with discourses about homosexuality – as demonstrated, for instance, by *Maurice* and *The Longest*

⁴⁷⁷ Claude Summers is by no means the only critic who has observed that “Margaret’s indignation at the men’s measuring of her sister according to some arbitrary scale of normality undoubtedly reflects Forster’s own resentment at the persistent labelling of homosexuals as abnormal” (123).

⁴⁷⁸ This sentence was dropped from the Hayford/Sealts reading text of *Billy Budd*.

Journey – all three main characters of Melville’s novella could be read as marked by a pathology which encodes their dissenting sexuality.

Forster’s distrust of, and contempt for, the medical and scientific ‘experts’ who not only claim to understand human nature, but who can at the same time be seen to participate in the normative and oppressive hegemonic discourse, may have played into his perception of the character of the ship’s surgeon in Melville’s *Billy Budd*. The surgeon, “spare and tall, one in whom a discreet causticity went along with a manner less genial than polite” (BB113), bears a striking family resemblance to Claggart. Claggart, too, is “spare and tall” (BB41), and his “contempt” for Billy’s innocence is likened to “vitriol” (BB60), although he mostly maintains the discretion and “respectability” which is concomitant with a “natural depravity” such as his (BB55), and is a master of politeness when it comes to interacting with his superiors, as his interview with Captain Vere demonstrates (BB74ff.). The surgeon is a materialist who is heard to dismiss anything smacking of the “imaginative and metaphysical” as “Greek”, refusing to deal in any but “scientific term[s]” that are “included in the lexicon of science” (BB114). Given the high value the novella’s narrator places on metaphysics, and given his latent contempt of “professional experts” (BB87, see below), it is an easy step to categorise the character of the surgeon – already suspicious for the traits he shares with the official villain of the text – as a figure whose views are to be deprecated, at least judging by the text’s main discursive preoccupations.

As Hayford and Sealts have pointed out, the “unimaginative obtuseness” of the ship’s surgeon in *Billy Budd* – a “near caricature” – is “in line with Melville’s usual treatment of doctors and other ‘men of science’” (1962a:35). It is precisely such “unimaginative obtuseness” which can be seen to belong among the traits almost guaranteed to place a character in the least favourable position within the internal value system of any Forster text. The dismissal of all things “imaginative and metaphysical” as “Greek” by a scientific ‘expert’ in particular can be seen to resonate with Forster’s work, in which the protagonists’ most meaningful experiences tend to be associated with references to Greek thought and culture – which, moreover, regularly serve as markers of encoded discourses about male/male desire.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁹ Robert Martin, who reads the figure of Billy Budd as a “homosexual icon” (1986a:108), the destruction of which serves to highlight the complex mechanisms of a power economy dependent on the suppression and transformation of male homoerotic desire, has commented on the surgeon’s role within this power economy and the epistemology that underpins it: “Billy’s story will be normalized and heterosexualized. [...] Melville intervenes with figures of authority that can speak in the name of science, enacting in this specific case the role they are being assigned in the culture as a whole as arbiters of sexuality and identity. [...] The conversation between the purser and the surgeon [...] testifies [...] to the ways in which medical professionals will appropriate sexuality through a taxonomic authority that coincides with the establishment of models of sexual identity” (1998:199).

It is this ‘man of science’ who, called in to attest Claggart’s death, is led by Vere’s “unwonted agitation” and “excited exclamations, so at variance with his normal manner” to wonder whether the captain may be “unhinged”. The discussion of “sanity and insanity” (BB86f.) which follows his interview with Vere draws explicit attention to the “arbitrary” nature of the “scale of normality” (Summers 123) by which “professional experts” decide on the mental states of their “cases”. At the same time, the passage might be felt to resound with subliminal disdain for those “experts” who will offer their “professional” opinions “for a fee”:

Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the orange tint begins? Distinctly we see the difference of the colour, but where exactly does the first one visibly enter into the other? So with sanity and insanity. In pronounced cases there is no question about them. But in some cases, in various degrees supposedly less pronounced, to draw the line of demarcation few will undertake, though for a fee some professional experts will. There is nothing nameable but that some men will undertake to do for pay. (BB86f.)

Like *Howards End*, *Billy Budd* shows a recognition of shades and degrees of experience that cannot be fixed “in black and white” (HE328) but forever elude “the line of demarcation” (BB87), while it also posits a difference between knowledge profane and profound, between “the world” – which might be understood to include materialist science – and “human nature” (BB54). And, as in Helen Schlegel’s case, it is Vere’s unconventional and inexplicable behaviour which mainly throws suspicion on his state of sanity. For what actually causes the surgeon to feel “disturbed” is, first and foremost, Vere’s unusual comportment, which alternates between self-absorbed silence and “motionless[ness]”, and “vehement[...] exclam[ation]”, accompanied by unexpected bodily contact as he “catch[es] the surgeon’s arm convulsively” (BB85). A close reading of the passage in which the surgeon ponders the situation reveals that, according to the surgeon, to follow proper naval “usage” in the matter of Billy Budd’s “extraordinary case” would be merely to “postpone further action” until the case can be “transfer[red] [...] to the admiral”, a view shared by “the lieutenants and captain of marines” (BB86). It ought to be noted that no mention is ever made of whether the admiral’s court would be likely to acquit the young sailor. It could therefore be argued that if Vere’s decision to summon a drumhead court “struck the surgeon as impolitic, if nothing more” (BB86), what the surgeon considers to be at issue here appears to be mainly a question of proper procedural form: at this point, the infamous question of Vere’s “prejudgment” (BB93) is not yet addressed.

It is explicitly stated that in this situation, the surgeon plays the role of an unenlightened outsider: he is “profoundly discomforted” because Vere’s “interjections” cannot but appear as “incoherences to the listener as yet unapprised of the antecedent events” (BB85). As Forster’s numerous short stories featuring the

perspective of the unenlightened outsider testify, this is a familiar Forsterian narrative situation, in which misunderstandings, serious misapprehensions and conflicts are created by pitting unenlightened and obtuse conventionality against a more sympathetically represented deviant individuality (usually associated with a queer subdiscourse of some kind, see section II.2.4.1.). The chapter's concluding sentence, moreover, appears designed to invite the reader to question the surgeon's view: "Whether Captain Vere, as the surgeon professionally surmised, was really the sudden victim of any degree of aberration, one must determine for himself by such light as this narrative may afford" (BB87).

The reader who has followed the development of "this narrative", meanwhile, is fully privy to the metaphysical discourse which has accrued around the figures of Billy and Claggart, and can therefore make sense of Vere's "incoherences" which are in accordance with that discourse. The reader will furthermore be aware that Vere has been harbouring a "strong suspicion clogged by strange dubieties" (BB80) regarding Claggart and his accusations, and that his feelings towards Billy have been benevolent and even "father[ly]" (BB84). Knowing also about Vere's "bookish" (BB40) and solitary tendencies, the reader will hardly be surprised by Vere's utterances which indicate that, like the narrator, the captain is interpreting what has happened in terms of religious moral categories and sense-making narratives. The high level of emotion displayed by Captain Vere, which so "disturb[s]" the "self-poised" (BB84) surgeon, could easily be explained not only by the nature of what Vere has just witnessed – the death of a man unexpectedly struck down before his very eyes – but also by the fact that, as the man responsible for setting up the fatal confrontation between Billy and Claggart, he may feel personally responsible for the latter's death, and the former's "fated" (BB84) act of violence. Last but not least, Vere's apparent "desire for secrecy", by which the surgeon is also "disturbed" (BB85), can be accounted for by the reader who remembers Vere's earlier concern that "the ship's company" might be "undesirably affect[ed]" if the substance of Claggart's allegations concerning Billy's mutinous intentions were to "get[...] abroad" (BB80) – in other words, Vere's concern about the possibility of a mutiny.

If the surgeon is "discomforted" (BB85) by Vere's loss of control over his emotions, and if he and the officers are suspicious or critical of Vere's decision to take the case in hand himself without delay, instead of deferring it to the admiral, it may be that the most perturbing factor to them is their sense of Vere's failure to maintain the professional detachment and control they expect of him. In a Forsterian reading, the implied conflict between Vere and the surgeon can be interpreted as a conflict between the dissenting individualism of a Forsterian 'dark' intellectual protagonist and the unsympathetic and uncomprehending forces of repressive social convention. It is a conflict between the "inner life" (HE296) in which "personal relations" – and obligations – "are the important thing for ever and ever", and the materialist, prosaic and philistine "outer life" (HE170). An

insider's perspective which is governed by literary, symbolic interpretations of events and which involves strong personal emotions is contrasted with an unsympathetic outsider's perspective which insists on conventional "usage" and is "disturbed" by a show of emotion it considers inappropriate. That this outsider should be a medical 'expert' who, baffled by his glimpses of the 'dark' character's personal outlook, is immediately led to question his sanity, can be seen to link *Billy Budd* all the more closely with Forster's own narrative patterns.

When it came to adapting Melville's story for the operatic stage, the surgeon, and with him, the discourse which explicitly questions Vere's sanity, disappeared from the libretto at a very early stage.⁴⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the trial scene in the March Draft suggests that Forster and his collaborators were at this point still aiming to make the conflict between the "inner" and the "outer life" – as represented by Vere and his officers respectively – the subject of explicit discussion, even though the question of Vere's sanity is no longer at issue. What the draft does indicate, however, is that the intense emotions displayed by Melville's Vere over Billy's "extraordinary [...] case" (BB86), which lead the surgeon to doubt his sanity, have been interpreted by the librettists as an expression of his "inner life" approach, which insists on the importance of personal relations and responsibilities:

FIRST LIEUTENANT: [...] Sir, I have found a way out.

VERE: Reveal it, in God's name.

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Put Budd in irons until we rejoin the fleet.

RATCLIFFE: I agree. Let the admiral's court try him.

SAILING MASTER: Aye. Let others condemn him.

VERE: (*after a pause*) No. If he is to be condemned, it must be here. If his blood is to be on another's head, let it be on mine. If his innocence –

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Sir, he's not innocent. Promising seaman, we agree, pleasant enough lad, and struck in a fit of temper, but he's done it.

VERE: Mr Redburn, he is innocent, but these things lie too deep. They are a private trouble which I should not have raised into light. (BPL A61:365)

At this stage, the librettists had already established that Billy was to be definitely guilty according to the codes of naval law, and that the officers should agree that Billy could not be acquitted. Vere's "impolitic" decision to "call a drumhead court" (BB86) is explained here as motivated by a sense of personal commitment to the young sailor's case: if he must die, Vere wishes to assume personal responsibility for his death ("If his blood is to be on another's head, let it be on mine").

⁴⁸⁰ The early draft materials still include a short dialogue in Eric Crozier's hand between Vere and the surgeon (this exchange was not incorporated in the typed March Draft, see BPL A61:161). However, the surgeon's utterances in this early draft are limited to formalities: he only pronounces Claggart dead and asks whether the body is to be removed. There is nothing here to suggest that he is disconcerted by Vere's comments about "the divine judgement of Ananias" and "the angel" who "must hang", or that he is unduly surprised by his superior's demeanour or by his orders (BPL A61:86).

It seems clear that the collaborators rejected the surgeon's "professional" questioning of Captain Vere's sanity. Once this figure and the perspective of the medical "professional" had been removed, what remained visible on the stage was only the conflict between Vere's isolated intellectual perspective and the officers' prosaic materialism. Ironically, however, despite the collaborators' efforts at 'rescuing' Vere by cutting his ambiguous speeches and explicating his thoughts, the question of Vere's psychology started increasingly to come to the fore once again as critics began to investigate the implications of the opera's framed structure, which could make Vere the narrator of the entire opera. As Irene Morra has noted, the Prologue and Epilogue had very probably been intended as "a choral device to provide structure rather than to place dramatic emphasis on Vere himself" (2002:17; see section III.2.3.1.). Nevertheless, their presence has the effect of re-introducing not just the problems of perspective and reliability, but also of inviting the very speculations about Vere's psychopathology which had originated with the character of the surgeon in Melville's novella.

II.5.1.5. "I who am king of this fragment of earth": the problem of authority

In 1944, Lionel Trilling observed that Forster's early attacks on authority are conspicuously lacking in "some equally forceful indication of what *right* authority should be". He went on to say that "Mr Fielding [...] is the single example of a responsible man who is admirable, but significantly he is admirable only so long as he rather despises the job he does so well; when he takes it seriously he is less to be trusted" (100).⁴⁸¹ June Levine, too, famously noted a recurring pattern in Forster's fiction in which "power resides in the world of the tame, 'civilised' man" but is "suspect because it rests on institutionalised force". Yet Levine also realised that the "egalitarian, anti-imperialistic, and internationalist" possibilities offered by the "attempted liaison with the savage" (72) can hardly ever be said to be successfully realised in Forster's fiction: even a character like Maurice, who succeeds in "connect[ing] privately on both the sexual and the political levels", must be regarded as having "failed as a public person", since he retreats from a homophobic and class-bound society, instead of "attempting to alter any part of its ethos" (80).

⁴⁸¹ When Fielding returns to India as a school inspector for the colonial government in the third part of the novel, he has adopted the official government approach of his British peers to some extent: "he did not travel as lightly as in the past; education was a continuous concern to him because his income and the comfort of his family depended on it" (PtI307). Hence, he is inclined to censor the Indian Native States' negligent attitude towards the idea of education, even if he is still able to spare a laugh for "the tangle and waste of energy" in which the recently-opened school "had been converted into a granary" while "it still flourished on paper" (PtI307). It is presumably this passage which led Trilling to conclude that Fielding is no longer quite as "admirable" (Trilling 100) as he was before "education" became "a continuous concern to him" in a professional (and culturally biased) colonial administrator's way.

Forster's struggle with the problem of authority could be seen to resurface poignantly in the figure of Vere. Writing about his librettistic engagement with Melville's text in 1951, Forster expressed the opinion that "Melville got muddled" in his conception of this character and, "deflected" by "his respect for authority and discipline", elevated Vere to the position of the text's "hero", "particularly in the trial scene" (*Griffin* 4f.).⁴⁸² Forster diagnosed in Melville a "wavering attitude towards an impeccable commander, a superior philosopher, and a British aristocrat" who is "well-educated and just" (*Griffin* 5).⁴⁸³

Textual evidence as well as the opera-makers' own statements confirm that they worked to tone down the problematic aspects of Vere as a figure of authority and a "military disciplinarian" (BB84), and tried to emphasise that, while he may be "well-educated and just", their Vere is also a man who is "much more aware of the human values that [are] involved" (Crozier in BBC1960:206). The basic structural problem of Vere's position as the officer who ultimately ratifies the court's death verdict remains in the libretto, however, to a degree that makes Robert Martin's reading of the "dilemma" of Melville's novella just as applicable to the opera adaptation. According to Martin,

the political drama is located in the conflict between Billy and Vere. That drama is also partly psychological, since Vere is no mere villain but a portrait of a reasonable man in the service of an unreasoning office. [...] Because Vere is "normal" [...], we are faced with a story that deals with a permanent political dilemma: Can the good person serve the state? (1986a:113)

For all that the opera-makers took care to accentuate the constraints of martial law under which Vere is acting, they were unable to eradicate the basic truth of Vere's deferral to, and complicity in, oppressive political and military power structures – the fact that, as Philip Brett has put it, "Vere is hopelessly contaminated by his role in killing men" (2001:375). If the opera audience are to accept Vere as a "good person" or even an Everyman figure they can identify with, they will automatically be accepting the tacit endorsement of the existing oppressive power structures of which Vere is a representative, however reluctant. It is this problem, which has attracted considerable critical attention, that the *Billy Budd* libretto can be seen to share with a number of Forster's own fictional works, many of which became increasingly subjected to critical scrutiny and even attack as scholars began to deconstruct Forster's narratives in order to expose the doctrinal frameworks on

⁴⁸² For a discussion of Forster's concept of a "hero", see section II.5.3.6.

⁴⁸³ Forster's impression that "Melville got muddled" turns out to have been a remarkably shrewd appraisal, considering what was subsequently discovered about Melville's multiple revisions of his ultimately unfinished text, during which Vere's character in particular acquired the ambiguities which might with some justification be felt to deserve the description of "muddled" (see Hayford/Sealts 1962a:3-12 and Wenke 1999).

which they depend. Numerous critics have engaged with the assumptions that Forster's texts make about categories such as gender, class and race, and have examined the ways in which his narratives are shaped by these assumptions.

With regard to the operatic Vere and the problem of authority, a detail from *A Passage to India* can serve to illustrate the political limitations of a humanist outlook which does not fundamentally question the existing power structures of, in this case, British Imperialism. When Ronny Heaslop tells his mother about his life as a British administrator in India, he insists that the British are "not in India to behave pleasantly" but "to work" and "to hold this wretched country by force". His mother, Mrs Moore, is repelled by the way in which her son "revelled in the drawbacks of his situation", by his insistence on "not [being] in India to behave pleasantly", and by the "positive satisfaction" he seems to "derive [...] therefrom":

His words without his voice might have impressed her, but when she heard the self-satisfied lilt of them, when she saw the mouth move so complacently and competently beneath the little red nose, she felt, quite illogically, that this was not the last word on India. One touch of regret – not the canny substitute but the true regret from the heart – would have made him a different man, and the British Empire a different institution. (PtI44f.)

In an earlier manuscript version, the explanatory insertion in the last sentence reads: "not conversational regret, but the stab that goes down to the soul" (MSSPtI62). It might well be objected here that "regret", whether the "true regret from the heart" or "the stab that goes down to the soul", even if felt by every colonial administrator, would hardly serve to alleviate or abolish the ethical and moral problems of Western Colonialism. Mrs Moore, while she need not necessarily represent Forster's unmediated opinion here, can nevertheless be seen to advocate a broadly humanist approach to colonial government, which does not, however, question the "institution" of the British Empire *per se*. Many critics have argued, on the basis of examples like this, that *A Passage to India* tacitly endorses the "institution" of Imperialism; indeed, what the text appears to offer in terms of critique can be read as merely different ways and means of "managing 'The White Man's Burden'" (Lane 1995:145). Similarly, the operatic Captain Vere may have been "humanised" (Crozier in BBC1960:206) in comparison to his counterpart in Melville's novella, and yet it may be (and has been) objected that the "regret" – be it never so "true" and "from the heart" (PtI44) – and the feelings of doubt and guilt which he continues to experience to the very end of the opera, do not alter the fact that he both represents and confirms the oppressive power system of naval discipline and military politics.

Following the Forsterian paradigm, the question – as introduced by Robert Martin – of whether "the good person" can "serve the state" (1986a:113) must apparently be answered in the negative, if loyalty to the state is to rank above per-

sonal relationships. Forster's credo essay "What I Believe" certainly suggests such an answer: in it, he deplores

the tragedy [...] that no device has been found by which these private deficiencies [of personal relations] can be transmitted to public affairs. As soon as people have power they go crooked and sometimes dotty as well, because the possession of power lifts them into a region where normal honesty never pays. (TCD71)

In the same essay, Forster famously (and with characteristic tentativeness) declares: "if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (TCD66). It seems highly probable that Forster's formulation constitutes an allusion to Sophocles' *Antigone*, a text which occupied an important position in Forster's thoughts: in 1944, he stated about this play that "of all the great tragic utterances that comes closest to my heart, that is my central faith" (TCD215).⁴⁸⁴ In the drama, Creon, the king of Thebes, orders Antigone to be executed for attempting to perform the burial rites for her brother Polyneices in defiance of Creon's prohibition: for Creon has declared Polyneices an enemy of the state. Creon formulates his creed of loyalty to the state in words which must sound instantly familiar to Forster readers:

if any makes a friend of more account than his fatherland, that man hath no place in my regard [...]; nor would I ever deem the country's foe a friend to myself; remembering this, that our country is the ship that bears us safe, and that only while she prospers in our voyage can we make true friends. (*Antigone* 45)⁴⁸⁵

In this context, it is interesting to find that Forster apparently thought of the Handsome Sailor Billy Budd as a parallel to the eponymous heroine of Sophocles' drama. Writing about his librettistic work on *Billy Budd* in 1951, he summarised the story's conclusion as follows: "The hero hangs dead from the yard arm [...], dead as Antigone, and he has given us life" (*Griffin* 6). By extension, Vere, who orders Billy's execution, can be seen to occupy the position of Creon, whose creed of loyalty to the state at the cost of loyalty to a friend or fellow man Vere can be seen

⁴⁸⁴ In "A Book that Influenced Me" (TCD212-215), an article on Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*.

⁴⁸⁵ Nicola Beauman has also made a case for Sophocles' influence at work in "What I Believe": "When [Forster] declared [...] that he would rather betray his country than his friend, he was making direct reference, for those who could see it, to Antigone's putting her loyalty to her brother before her loyalty to the State, and Creon declaring, from his own authoritarian viewpoint, 'No man who is his country's enemy / Shall call himself my friend.' Not only did Sophocles help to determine Morgan's loathing of tyranny and implacability; he also made him even more sensitive than he might have been to Antigone's humanity and courage and to Creon's inhumanity and rigidity" (77f.). Beauman quotes anachronistically from a 1965 Penguin edition of Sophocles' Theban plays, containing a 1947 verse translation by E. F. Watling. My quotations are taken from R. C. Jebb's prose translation in his 1888 Cambridge edition of Sophocles' plays, an edition which Forster acquired in 1898 or 1899 (Stape 6).

to apply in order to ensure the continuing prosperous “voyage” of his own vessel, while he simultaneously fails to live up to the Forsterian counter-ethos of putting friend before country.

As “king” of his “floating monarchy”, Vere insists that “Death is the penalty for those who break the laws of earth” (LIB58); these are evidently the same “earthly laws” that “silence[...]” Billy’s “shipmates” who know, as do Billy and Vere himself, that Vere “could have saved” Billy (LIB63), and perhaps “ought to have saved him” (BPL A61:178), in accordance with the demands of the “heavenly laws” by which he has “erred” (BPL A62:70) – these phrases appear in earlier draft versions of the Epilogue.⁴⁸⁶ In the same way, Creon’s decree that Polynices shall be denied the customary burial rites is represented as an “earthly” decision of political expediency made by Creon, who thus “err[s]” “by the heavenly laws” which regard a proper burial as a most basic act of human decency. Creon’s erroneous decision leads to the destruction of Antigone, who feels that her highest personal obligation lies with her dead brother, rather than with “earthly laws”. It also leads to Creon’s punishment and downfall.⁴⁸⁷ The operative Vere – a man who can, like Creon, be seen to act in the interests of statecraft – may, in the words of the sailor Donald, be “brave” and even “good” (LIB22), but his “goodness”, which so impressively kindles and commands Billy’s loyalty (LIB22f.), is compromised by his allegiance to “the laws of earth”.

Like many other readers of his generation, Forster may simply have dismissed the ambiguous and contradictory elements which surround the figure of Vere in Melville’s novella as authorial idiosyncrasies, and thus may never have felt the pressing need to ask the question investigated so extensively by later generations of critics, namely, that of whether Vere’s decision of trying Billy on the spot, and his extensive involvement in the trial itself, were in fact the acts of an insane despot who was the ‘real’ villain of the text. Instead, Forster seems consciously or unconsciously to have interpreted Vere’s situation as analogous to a pattern of Classical Greek tragedy – the conflict between law and justice, as exemplified in *Antigone*. On the other hand, it is in the comparison with Creon that the opera-makers’ efforts at exculpating Vere to some degree are thrown into sharp relief. It appears that Creon is personally responsible for enacting the “earthly laws” that demand Antigone’s death; it might therefore be assumed that he could ultimately

⁴⁸⁶ The phrase “ought to have saved him” only appears in an early draft of the Epilogue in Britten’s hand in his copy of the typed Three-Act March Draft (BPL A61:178); the phrase “By the heavenly laws I have erred” appears in Forster’s first manuscript draft of the Epilogue (BPL A61:375) as well as in the typed August Draft (BPL A62:70).

⁴⁸⁷ Even when appealed to by his son Haemon, who is betrothed to Antigone, and by Antigone herself, Creon still refuses to revoke his decree. It is only when the blind seer Teiresias prophesies doom that he changes his mind; however, by this time it is too late: Antigone has hanged herself, Haemon falls on his own sword, and Creon’s wife also commits suicide. Creon is utterly crushed. The Chorus’s final comment runs “Great words of prideful men are ever punished with great blows, and, in old age, teach the chastened to be wise” (*Antigone* 237ff.).

be in a position to revoke his harsh decree. Vere, on the other hand, is not represented as a modern despot, but as a commanding officer under obligation to the demands of the naval codes and the Articles of War, which are supposed to regulate his behaviour, and which are not for him to revoke (even if they might be for him to reject).

The assessments of the figure of Vere which the opera-makers gave in 1960 would appear to confirm that they saw their Vere at least in part as the tragic victim of the constraints of martial law. In Britten's view, Vere "realised later he could have saved Billy *and yet circumstances forced him* to sacrifice him"; Crozier confirms that "Vere is the man of feeling who has a choice of action and who finally *has to stick by a code* but knows that he was wrong to do so, or feels that in the final resort he must have been wrong to do so", which makes him "perhaps the most dramatic character"; and Forster agrees that "he's the only character that is truly tragic", whereas Billy and Claggart "are doing their jobs, following their destinies" (BBC1960:207; my emphasis).

II.5.2. Sympathy for the Devil:

the Forsterian 'dark' character as villain, victim and lover of violence

II.5.2.1. Goats or sheep?

Homosexual panic, repression, homoerotic longing and salvation

In 1926, E. M. Forster may have claimed ignorance of "what H[erman] M[elville] means" by his description of Claggart's "Natural Depravity" (CPB17), but he would not have found it too difficult to provide an answer to the question which opens the novella's Ch. X: "What was the matter with the master-at-arms?" (BB53). For there are patterns in his own work that suggest that in his creative writing, at any rate, Forster had already mapped out a territory that closely resembled "the deadly space between" the massed opposing forces of "normal nature" (BB54) – normative social discourse – and its "satanic" (CPB18) antagonists – identifiable as the products of that same discourse.⁴⁸⁸ At the time when he first encountered Melville's novella, Forster had already made extensive use of contemporary discourses about homosexuality in his own texts, on various levels of encodedness. The keywords which Melville uses to characterise Claggart would

⁴⁸⁸ Hershel Parker has helpfully provided a "footnote to a footnote" in which he explains that it was Stanton Garner who identified the provenance of the phrase "the deadly space between" quoted by Melville; it occurs in Thomas Campbell's poem "The Battle of the Baltic". Parker goes on to report that "in his copy of *Paradise Lost*, Melville underlined 'A dreadful interval' (Book VI, line 105) and noted at the bottom of the page "'The deadly space between' / Campbell" (Parker 1984:239). In both cases, the "space" in question is that between two armies poised for battle; the heavenly hosts and the forces of Satan in Milton, the English and Danish fleets in Campbell. The connection with Milton is pertinent inasmuch as it reinforces the identification of Claggart with the Miltonic Satan.

therefore have been easily recognisable to Forster as markers identifying a closet homosexual, one of a kind particularly inimical to the realisation of homoerotic desire: a sexually repressed character whose secret homoerotic longings are being, or have already long been, poisoned by his own internalised homophobia and dread of sensuality. In Forster's own work, this type of disposition is to be found mainly in male characters, bachelor figures "whose psychic constitution", as Eric Haralson has so neatly summarised, "opens onto homosexual panic, if not homosexual possibility" (68),⁴⁸⁹ and who can often be seen to harbour ambivalent feelings towards athletic young males whose physical prowess both attracts and frightens them.

It should, however, be noted that insofar as (self-)repression and homophobia tend to be mainly associated with 'dark' middle-class Englishmen with "undeveloped hearts" (AH4) who are 'travelling light', Claggart is not the only figure in Melville's novella whose motives and actions can be read, through the lens of Forster's texts, as shaped (or warped) by these characterising traits. Captain Vere, "a bachelor of forty or thereabouts" (BB36), identified as "an exceptional character" (BB39) whose "dry and bookish" (BB40) ways serve to isolate him from his fellow officers, can also be seen to share some of the key features of the Forsterian 'dark' character type, albeit ones that are often connoted positively within the Forsterian value system. Even though Vere's role in both novella and opera is, on the textual surface, different from that played by Claggart, and even though the librettists undertook to make their captain behave less "odiously" (*Griffin* 5), the Vere 'rescued' from Melville remains identifiable (as it seems he was always intended to be) as belonging in the same basic Forsterian character category as the story's ostensive villain: a category of characters through whom issues of male/male desire – unconscious, suppressed or fully realised – can be seen to be explored and negotiated.⁴⁹⁰

Treating Claggart and Vere as embodiments of different aspects of the same Forsterian character type can lend support to readings of the opera adaptation which view the two men's interest in Billy as opposite sides of the same coin. Indeed, an

⁴⁸⁹ For his discussion of Forster's bachelor figures, Haralson draws on Sedgwick's anatomy of the Victorian bachelor figure. Sedgwick sees the beginnings of this figure in the creations of Thackeray and his contemporaries, but traces their descent from the male heroes of the paranoid Gothic, "the literary genre in which homophobia found its most apt and ramified embodiment" (1990:186). Sedgwick proposes that "in the work of such writers as Du Maurier, Barrie, and James, among others, male homosexual panic was acted out as a sometimes agonized sexual anesthesia that was damaging to both its male subjects and its female non-objects". In the literary figure of the Victorian bachelor, the destructive and subversive power of the Gothic hero underwent a "domestication"; he became "housebroken by the severing of his connections with a discourse of genital sexuality" (Sedgwick 1990:188ff).

⁴⁹⁰ Viewed in this light, Forster's librettistic interpretation of Melville's novella could be seen to anticipate the queer readings performed over thirty years later by Martin and Sedgwick: readings which accept that, in Sedgwick's words, "every impulse of every person in this book that could at all be called desire could be called homosexual desire, being directed by men exclusively toward men" (1990:92).

utterance made by Forster himself suggests that he himself viewed Vere and Claggart's positions with regard to Billy as linked in this way. In his famous letter to Britten of early December 1950, in which he voiced his criticism about Britten's original setting of Claggart's monologue, he queried as an afterthought: "Has it [i.e. Claggart's monologue] any inverted relationship to Vere's music when he moves towards the inner cabin, end of Act III?" (EMFL II:242; see discussion in section III.3.4.).

Clifford Hindley's examinations of the opera's music suggest that Britten, too, may have conceived of Claggart and Vere as harbouring kindred desires. Hindley's reading, inspired by a remark made by Philip Brett about the kinship between the Interview Chords and the triads that appear "whenever Claggart address[es] Billy" (Brett 1984:142), draws on the observation that "in other works by Britten, sequences of triads occur in contexts portraying love, whether homosexual or heterosexual". This pattern can be seen repeated not only in the Interview triads that represent Vere's and Billy's closeted communion, but also in those "similar triads (though with a more sinister flavour)" which "appear at moments when Claggart, in his own perverted way, is drawn to Billy" (Hindley 1999:152). Moreover, Hindley elsewhere cites a number of Britten's operas in which "the same motif is associated with opposed characters in the drama to symbolise a characteristic or attitude held in common but manifested in quite contrary ways" (1994:112f.). In Hindley's view, the opera *Billy Budd*

presents Claggart and Vere as standing in a symmetrical relationship toward Billy: they both desire him, one in a way that is perverted and destructive, the other with a positive regard and warmth of feeling. This symmetry is expressed musically by the triads that represent a similarity of underlying desire, whose emotional tone may nevertheless be subtly modified according to the very different forms it assumes. (1994:125, n.30)

A corresponding symmetry of negative/sterile, and of positive/fruitions homoerotic desire can be detected among the representatives of Forster's 'dark' character type; this symmetry correlates roughly with the characters' inability or ability to connect with their fellow human beings in a salutary way, but allows for the possibilities of positive or negative development.

At the same time, focusing on the Forsterian 'dark' character type's ambivalent associations with discourses about social conformity, normativity, (self-)repression and phobia – which can be observed even in 'dark' characters who do achieve a salutary connection with a 'light' character – could shed additional light on the ambiguities arising from what many critics have identified as the textual and musical convergence of the figures of Claggart and Vere in the opera. What Philip Rupprecht has declared "the opera's boldest reinterpretation of its literary source" – the linking of "Vere's culpability as the strict disciplinarian of the trial scene [...] to the uncanny prominence of Claggart's musical voice" (119) – need not necessarily be understood as exclusively representing Britten's interpretation of Melville's text.

Read as one of a continuum of Forsterian ‘dark’ characters, the libretto’s Vere may appear implicated in pan-Forsterian discourses about repression, (sexual) guilt, and the abuse of power (personal, institutional and political) to a degree that might well be felt to challenge any over-simplified notions about Forster’s aims in “rescuing [...] Vere from his creator” (EMFL II:237).

II.5.2.2. Ideal bachelors and “a certain devil” known as asceticism: the dark side of respectability

Stupidity

The end of Ch. 17 of *The Longest Journey* features an enquiry into the character and behaviour of the bachelor schoolmaster Herbert Pembroke, brother of Agnes and brother-in-law of Rickie Elliot. The narrator, his voice blending with Rickie’s perspective to some extent, begins his reflections with the question “What was amiss with Herbert?” (LJ165). The similarity of this rhetorical device to that employed by Melville with respect to Claggart (“What was the matter with the master-at-arms?”, BB53) is striking. Granted, the flaws in Herbert’s character appear at first sight far more harmless than those hinted at with regard to the master-at-arms’s mysterious “natural depravity”. Herbert, we learn, is merely “stupid”, not in the sense that he lacks intelligence, but “stupid in the important sense: his whole life was coloured by a contempt of the intellect”, particularly of intellectual “efforts not so much to acquire knowledge as to dispel a little of the darkness by which we and all our acquisitions are surrounded” (LJ166f).⁴⁹¹ Nevertheless, Herbert’s ‘stupidity’ can be read as part of a web of textual leitmotifs within Forster’s oeuvre by which Herbert is identified as representing a power at least as dangerous as Claggart’s jealous monomaniacal hatred: the repressive power of a society which seeks to eradicate all forms of deviant desire from a world that depends on male homosocial power structures.⁴⁹² At the same time, the zealotry with which this society propagates its ideal of masculinity and seeks to police the borders of gender behaviour is repeatedly exposed as springing from its own suppressed (homo)sexual panic.

The identification of ‘stupidity’ with repressive conventionality pervades Forster’s early work and is regularly associated with a male character’s inability to be “joined into a man” (HE183) – to achieve a state of internal connectedness in which mind and body, intellect, emotion and sexuality are successfully integrated into a whole, and in which a character can achieve Forsterian salvation. Thus, in *Howards End*, Henry Wilcox’s “obtuseness” (HE184), which arguably functions here as an equivalent for this type of stupidity, thwarts Margaret’s intention to help him “connect the prose and the passion” within himself (HE183). This “obtuse-

⁴⁹¹ On the symbolism of darkness in Forster’s work, see note 222 and section II.3.8.

⁴⁹² A similar point is made by Martin: “Herbert plays the traditional patriarchal authority, in his case a bully without sex appeal” (1997:265).

ness” is associated not only with “intellectual confusion” and an inability to profit from the “personal influence” of others, but also with “strong but furtive passions” (HE240) – “furtive” because they are tainted by “the sneaking belief that bodily passion is bad”, and have come to be “ruled [...] by an incomplete asceticism” (HE183). The persistence of this “obtuseness” or stupidity will result in an inability to “connect [...] the beast and the monk”, and hence, ultimately, in an inability to fulfil a potential for “human love” (HE184). Besides what could be termed a form of Platonic idealism, what can be observed here, too, is a discourse about sexual repression, tagged by the key concept of a desultory and passionless “asceticism”, which Forster also deploys in numerous other texts (see discussion below).

In “Ralph and Tony”, the hyper-masculine Tony’s ‘stupidity’ is directly associated with his quasi-instinctive homophobic hatred of the effeminate Ralph. When Tony unexpectedly turns invalid, it is his sister, Forster’s earlier Margaret, who exhorts him not to be “stupid” (AS89 and 90) and thereby starts the development which enables Tony to start “fighting” (AS92) both his homophobic disgust and the conventional norms it can be seen to conform with. ‘Stupidity’ or “obtuseness” are thus revealed as the means by which a character possessing an “undeveloped heart[...]” (AH4) can, by his unquestioning adherence to normative and repressive social conventions, become terminally trapped in a state of human incompleteness – sexual as well as spiritual – with no hope of self-realisation, let alone salvation.

‘Stupidity’ is clearly associated with social conformity and, as the examples of Henry Wilcox and (to a certain degree) Herbert Pembroke demonstrate, material and social success. This idea can be found expounded in *Howards End* by the late Mr Schlegel, father of Margaret and Helen, in whose view ‘stupid’ people “only care about the things that [they] can use, and therefore arrange them in the following order: money, supremely useful; intellect, rather useful; imagination, of no use at all”. Himself an “idealist, inclined to be dreamy”, he defines “stupidity” as “us[ing] the intellect” without “car[ing] about it” (HE26f.). Herbert Pembroke, with his “contempt of the intellect” (LJ167), fits this profile very well, and Mr Schlegel’s arrangement of the utilitarian priorities of the ‘stupid’ helps to elucidate Rickie’s assessment of Herbert: even though Herbert is “kind and unselfish”, “truly charitable”, “capable of affection” and “usually courteous and tolerant”, Rickie nevertheless feels “that he was wrong as a whole”, because “for all his fine talk about a spiritual life”, Herbert’s single “test for things”, his one standard, is that of “success for the body in this life or for the soul in the life to come. And for this reason Humanity, and perhaps such other tribunals as there may be, would assuredly reject him” (LJ165f.).⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ The reference to “the life to come” prefigures the title of Forster’s later short story “The Life to Come” of 1922. It would be possible to link Herbert, who takes clerical orders later in the novel (see LJ283), with the young missionary Paul Pinmay, whose homophobic rejection and suppression of his feelings for the young native chief Vithobai can be seen to equal the rejection and suppression of love itself. It eventually results in both men’s deaths and the punishment of Pinmay’s soul by eternal enslavement to Vithobai in the afterlife.

Rickie's high regard for the intellectual battle against the "darkness" of 'stupidity' is explicitly associated with the all-male intellectual companionship of Cambridge: it is there that he has learned that it is important to make "such use of his brain as he could, just as a weak athlete might lovingly exercise his body". It is this successfully absorbed lesson alone which proves that his time at Cambridge has "not been vain" (LJ166). The association between intellectual application and humanist values is an obvious one, but arguably goes further to include also the intellectual appreciation of other humans – at Cambridge, other males – in friendship and love.

A clear connection between love and "the intellect" (LJ167) is made by George Emerson in Ch. 16 of *A Room with a View*, where, urging his suit to Lucy Honeychurch, he declares "that love and youth matter intellectually" (RV167) – a statement which Lucy and Charlotte Bartlett, "benighted" (RV174) and trapped in the 'stupidity' of their conventionality, dismiss as "nonsense" (RV167). The same lack of 'true' intellectual insight into the importance of "love and youth" is displayed by Herbert Pembroke, who, even though he has been "violently in love" at one point earlier in his life, "had laid the passion aside" until "a more convenient season" – only to find "that love had vanished from him" when marriage suggests itself to him as an advantageous career move fifteen years later. Unable to conceive of himself as having "deteriorated", he deludes himself into thinking that love without passion, without "the fire of youth" (in any case an uncontrollable and inconvenient factor) can be "a nobler, riper emotion", thus actively committing the Forsterian 'sin' of getting "muddled" over his inner life (LJ149f).⁴⁹⁴ The "violence" with which his proposal is refused, and the "disgust" felt by the lady in question (LJ150) point to the wrongness of Herbert's pretending, for the sake of satisfying the demands of social convention, to a desire he does not feel.⁴⁹⁵ Herbert's failure to acknowledge the importance of "the fire of youth" is also evident in his leitmotivic insistence on "a very long engagement" first for Agnes and Gerald (LJ34, 48) and then for Agnes and Rickie (LJ84).

Asceticism

Herbert is "shocked" by Agnes's decision to have her ears pierced so that she can wear the earrings presented to her by her fiancé Gerald (LJ8). His response may reflect his associating the wearing of earrings with a vulgarity unsuitable for a woman of Agnes's social class; and yet the fact that the piercing of Agnes's ears is

⁴⁹⁴ For a discussion of the dangers of "muddle" see note 276.

⁴⁹⁵ Read in this light, the episode of Herbert and Mrs Orr is reminiscent of the "Episode of Gladys Olcott" in which Maurice, not yet conscious of his own sexual proclivities, unsuccessfully attempts to court a girl whom he is not truly interested in, and who is "revolted" by his advances because she instinctively feels that "something was wrong" (M41). This parallel could be seen to link Herbert with Forster's other males for whom marriage to a woman is represented as constitutionally impossible.

represented as a symbolic defloration points to Herbert's "shocked" reaction as betraying one of the most grievous faults a Forsterian character can be guilty of: a combination of sexual panic and intellectual prudery disguised as asceticism. Asceticism, which Forster himself explicitly rejected as going against his principles in "What I Believe" (TCD70f), is defined in *A Room with a View* as "a certain devil whom the modern world knows as self-consciousness, and whom the medieval, with dimmer vision, worshipped as asceticism"; it is embodied by Cecil Vyse and associated with celibacy as epitomised in the image of "a Gothic statue". The frigid quality ascribed to this type of medieval art is contrasted with Greek sculpture which "implies fruition", and linked with an inability to share in human comradeship or love: Freddy Honeychurch cannot even "imagine Cecil wearing another fellow's cap" (RV87); and Cecil is ultimately rejected by Lucy in favour of the Whitmanesque George Emerson.

Most critics agree in identifying the ascetic aesthete Cecil Vyse as a "repressed homosexual" (Herz 2007:144),⁴⁹⁶ similar to the text's other advocate of celibacy, the clergyman Mr Beebe. Mr Beebe is, "from rather profound reasons, somewhat chilly in his attitude towards the other sex" (RV32), preferring to treat women, as Eric Haralson has put it, "as objects of strictly anthropological curiosity" (68). "Stout but attractive" (RV4), Mr Beebe appears at first sight as "a slightly more hopeful incarnation of the Victorian bachelor figure" (Haralson 68). Where Cecil Vyse takes "a malicious pleasure in thwarting people" (RV114) or in "playing tricks" on them (RV166), Mr Beebe's interest, however detached, in Lucy's development appears positively connoted in Forsterian terms, since it seems he desires to see her move towards connectedness: "The water-tight compartments in her will break down, and music and life will mingle. Then we shall have her heroically good, heroically bad – too heroic, perhaps, to be good or bad" (RV92). The famous bathing scene with Freddy and George in Ch. 12 even has Mr Beebe cast aside the conventional strictures of "the world of motor-cars and Rural Deans" (RV130) to participate temporarily in what is nowadays commonly read as a pastoral idyll coloured by male homoeroticism.⁴⁹⁷

Yet despite this promising interlude, Mr Beebe – who can be classed among Forster's 'dark' characters who are 'travelling light' – ultimately fails to be confirmed as either beneficiary or advocate of Forsterian salvation through personal relationships. This failure is linked to the fact that "carefully concealed beneath his tolerance and culture" there lurks a "reticent" but powerful "belief in celibacy", expressed in a creed adapted from I Corinthians 7:38:

⁴⁹⁶ As an ascetic aesthete whose proclivities could be said to tend towards the homoerotic, Cecil Vyse can be seen to resemble the aesthete Tibby Schlegel from *Howards End*, who actually names a "Mr Vyse" among his role models (HE108). Elizabeth Langland identifies Philip Herriton from *Where Angels Fear to Tread* as another character who embodies "the association of asceticism with aestheticism" (95).

⁴⁹⁷ See, for example, Herz 2007:142.

“They that marry do well, but they that refrain do better.” So ran his belief, and he never heard that an engagement was broken off but with a slight feeling of pleasure. [...] The feeling was very subtle and quite undogmatic [...]. Yet it existed, and it alone explains his action subsequently, and his influence on the action of others. (RV186f.)

Mr Beebe feels that, in renouncing marriage, Lucy is “choosing the better part”; if he experiences some slight feelings of doubt over Lucy’s song in praise of renunciation – “Vacant heart, and hand, and eye / Easy live and quiet die”, “a song that Cecil gave her” and which “perhaps [...] stated ‘the better part’ rather too strongly” (RV188f.) – these doubts remain but momentary.

The “action” and “influence” of Mr Beebe “subsequently” consists in his championing Lucy’s wish to go to Greece (RV187). His support of this particular plan may be read as an instance of narrative irony, for, to Mr Beebe, Greece, “godlike or devilish”, is “too big for our little lot” and a place where he himself “do[es]n’t mean to go” (RV177). In becoming active on Lucy’s behalf, he is misguided to some extent by Lucy and by Charlotte Bartlett, who colludes in Lucy’s tenacious endeavours to suppress the truth about her own feelings. For, to Lucy, Greece merely represents a means of escape from having to face the fact that she really loves George Emerson. By embracing Lucy’s cause, Mr Beebe can be seen to lend support to the forces of conventionality and to cater, if unwittingly, to the Forsterian ‘sins’ of ‘muddle’ and self-suppression.

And yet Mr Beebe’s opposition to the lovers’ union extends beyond the level of dramatic irony all the way into his own character. When Mr Emerson discloses to him that Lucy and George “have loved one another all along”, Mr Beebe, poised and waiting to hear the truth from Lucy herself, turns “very quiet”, and “his white face” is seen to appear “suddenly inhuman”; when he is sure of the truth, “a look of contempt came over him”.⁴⁹⁸ Appealed to by Lucy for support once more, he looks “amazed at the request”, telling her “in a low, stern voice: ‘I am more grieved than I can possibly express. It is lamentable, lamentable – incredible’”. He furthermore declares that George “no longer interests me”; when he tells Lucy to “marry George [...]. He will do admirably”, his recommendation might still be felt to be ringing with “contempt”, as well as with an arid cynicism (RV203). One cannot help but feel that, when he leaves the room, he has turned

⁴⁹⁸ There are some interesting visual similarities between Mr Beebe in this scene of confrontation and Claggart confronting Billy in Melville’s novella: not only is Mr Beebe described as turning “very quiet” and his face as assuming a “suddenly inhuman” aspect, but as he stands waiting, he is compared to “a long black column” (RV203). Claggart, too, adopts a “calm collected air” (BB82) and can be seen to turn “inhuman” (RV203) as his eyes, “those lights of human intelligence[,] los[e] human expression” (BB82). Although the colour of Claggart’s clothes is not specified, the stiffness of the black-clad, “column”-like Mr Beebe is paralleled by the stiffness of Claggart’s body as it “fell over lengthwise, like a heavy plank tilted from erectness”. Both images have been read by critics as instances of phallic symbolism.

his back upon the two young people for good. Indeed, Lucy is probably right when, married to George at last, she declares that Mr Beebe “will never forgive us – I mean, he will never be interested in us again”, and when she senses his influence at work in her family, whom her unconventional moves have “alienated” (RV207). As Herz has noted, by the end of the novel, Mr Beebe has become “an active antagonist” (2007:143).

In his rejection of Lucy, Mr Beebe is seen to turn distant and hostile towards the human being whom he had first patronised appreciatively as she “found wings” (RV92), and had subsequently hoped to enlist in the cause of celibacy, with her youthful energies to be contained in his ideal of a domesticated existence “neither sensual nor sensational” (RV188). As Herz has pointed out,

it is [Beebe’s] vision of Lucy that makes her worthy of being a heroine. It is Beebe who interprets her to us, who insists upon the process of discovery that finally casts her into opposition to him. But insofar as Lucy is Beebe’s creation, his casting off at the end has an odd note of betrayal to it. (1978:258)

Mr Beebe’s act of “betrayal” could be compared to Vere’s betrayal of Billy, whom he has arguably ‘created’ or constructed as a symbol of innocence and goodness – “young Adam before the fall” (BB78), or, in the libretto, the “evil” Claggart’s opponent: a “boy” who is “good” (LIB51).⁴⁹⁹ In the opera, Vere’s betrayal can be seen to take the form of his silence during the trial (see discussion below). In the novella, the moment of betrayal can be located at the point where Vere turns from “father” to distanced “military disciplinarian”, assuming “quite another aspect” (BB84); the marked physical change described here parallels that undergone by Mr Beebe in his moment of crisis (RV203). From Mr Beebe’s perspective, however, the betrayal is Lucy’s: she turns out, by lying to him about her true feelings, to have made a mockery both of him and of the creed of celibacy which has, for “rather profound reasons” (RV32), become the foundation of his life. He is left, Claggart-like, thwarted and humiliated by the power of love which “lives and grows strong where [he] cannot enter” (LIB33).

If it is true that, as Herz remarked, “finally, Beebe is condemned” because “his celibacy [...] turns out to serve religion and all the institutions that stifle instinct” (1978:258), it is on the other hand worthwhile noting with Claude Summers that Mr Beebe himself could equally “be understood as a victim of social and religious attitudes that he has embraced to his own detriment”, and that “his opposition to the lovers is thus a consequence of his self-denial, a function of his own repression” (97). The operatic Claggart may be viewed in a similar double light. He is arguably “condemned” because he not only serves but makes use of the mechanisms of institutionalised oppression – naval law – to advance his plan to eradicate Billy, who can be seen both to evoke and to represent an “instinct” which it is in

⁴⁹⁹ I discuss the theme of people turning others into symbols in Forster’s work in section II.4.2.3.1.

the interest of those institutions to “stifle”.⁵⁰⁰ Yet at the same time, Claggart also stands revealed as the victim of “this hateful world”, the “accursed ship”, to which he has “apprenticed” himself (LIB18).

A related narrative of policed and repressed homoerotic longing emerges in “Dr Woolacott” (1927), where the oppressive forces of normativity are represented by the omnipresent influence of the eponymous doctor, who remains himself largely absent. The story’s ‘dark’ protagonist, the invalid Clesant, is befriended by a young working-class man. This desirable ‘light’ saviour character turns out to be the ghost of a wounded soldier who has chosen to die rather than to submit to Woolacott’s treatment. It can be seen that Clesant’s life is governed, if not exactly by “an order such as reigns in Hell” (LIB32), then by the equally life-denying regime of seclusion and self-denial imposed by Woolacott: the young man “must avoid all excitement”, “must never get tired”, and, most importantly, “mustn’t be intimate with people” (LtC84). His disease can be read as a metaphor for the individuality which conflicts with his ostensibly well-meaning but repressive and repressed materialistic middle-class environment; for he is hyper-sensitive, artistic, and longs for physical intimacy with (male) “handsome strangers”, a “weakness” Woolacott has explicitly warned him against (LtC92).⁵⁰¹ Clesant’s tendency to “abase himself before his disease” (LtC94) suggests his acceptance of society’s perception of himself as deviant, and thus, his internalised homophobic self-disgust.

A “superbly organized” “machinery” compensates for the “discomfort and pain” (LtC93) his disease inflicts upon him. Having almost entirely succumbed to this repressive “order” in which, like Claggart, he has “found peace of a sort” (LIB32), Clesant is torn between his deep-rooted impulse to choose love and the socially conditioned need to shun it, to the point where he implores the ghostly visitor to leave him alone: “Do not love me, whatever you are; at all events this is my life and no one shall disturb it; a little sleep followed by a little pain” (LtC95). A similar wish can be detected in Claggart’s exclamation “O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness! would that I had never seen you” (LIB32), for Billy has stirred the impulses of desire Claggart had been successfully repressing, and, “disturb[ed]” from his “sleep” (LtC95) by Billy’s “light”, the master-at-arms “suffers” (LIB32).

⁵⁰⁰ For further discussion of the subject of institutionalised homophobia, see sections II.6.3. and II.6.8.

⁵⁰¹ While it is possible thus to interpret Clesant’s disease as a metaphor for his sexual deviance from the socially accepted norm, it would probably do more justice to the complexity and diversity of Forster’s artistic and philosophical concerns to read this story also as a treatment of the question of quality versus quantity – the question, in fact, of what makes a life worth living. The bleak outlook of surviving “until 1990 or 2000” (LtC90) in the bland manner approved of by Woolacott (and, it may be inferred, by middle-class society) is contrasted with embracing life without reservations and with all the consequences, linking “Dr Woolacott” with “The Point of It” (1928) and with “The Road from Colonus”, the central point of which is “that death and the value of the good life are related, that death is in league with love to support life: death, indeed, is what creates love” (Trilling 39).

Claggart's decision to bring about Billy's destruction does end his suffering, albeit not quite in the way he had planned, namely, through his own death. Death is the means by which Clesant, too, is finally liberated when he follows his true desires and accepts his ghostly lover, choosing eternal union in death over the prolonged death-in-life offered by Woolacott and the ascetic regimen he prescribes. Like the *Billy Budd* libretto, Forster's short story ends on a decidedly positive note of transcendence which, in the story, is associated with an explicitly sexual connection with the 'light' saviour character. Following Herz (1988:27-40), who shows that some of Forster's 'light' saviour figures embody both love and death at the same time, Claggart's death by Billy's hand could, on a very abstract level, be interpreted as ultimately a choice of love, antagonism being the only form of self-expression and connection available to a man in Claggart's desperate and hopeless position.⁵⁰² At the same time, the fact that this final connection, like the salutary union at the end of "Dr Woolacott", takes the shape of death can be seen to express a pessimistic view of the dissenting, deviant individual as ultimately helpless against the absolute power held by the forces of normativity.

"Pale ire, envy and despair":

Mr Beebe and the 'dark' characters of *Billy Budd*

Mr Beebe's "inhuman" (RV203) dissociation from the two human beings he had previously been so very appreciative of, taken in conjunction with his secret gratification at every broken-off engagement, could be seen to suggest that his creed of celibacy can be traced back to a chronic condition of frustrated jealousy. It is here, of course, that readings of Mr Beebe as a repressed homosexual can find much to support them, although it remains hard to determine the degree to which he is aware of his own proclivities, and whether his belief in celibacy can really be regarded as the result of "a *conscious* repression of his own nature" (Summers 97, my emphasis). If, as Herz has recently proposed, Mr Beebe is not "secretly" in love with George but merely comes "to the brink of that possibility" in the famous bathing scene (2007:143), it could be argued that he feels broadly antagonistic towards successful love relationships in general, rather than jealous of George's love for Lucy in particular.⁵⁰³ His antagonism, interpreted as the product of his

⁵⁰² See discussion in section II.5.2.3. below.

⁵⁰³ Mr Beebe's remark, made some time after the bathing scene, that George is "a nice fellow" who "is waking up" (RV143) constitutes a parallel to his earlier perception that Lucy has "found wings, and mean[s] to use them" (RV92), and would seem to show a similarly detached interest in a younger person's development. There seems to be little to suggest a more specific interest in George on the clergyman's part, unless one were to grant a greater weight to his interest in men on the basis of his professed misogyny (apparent in his question "We are to raise ladies to our level?", RV126). There is, however, the fact that at one point in the text, Mr Beebe's appreciation of George is structurally linked with Lucy's in such a way as to produce a suggestive parallel: we learn that both "Mr Beebe and Lucy" have "always known to exist in him" a "kindness", "like sunlight touching a vast landscape – a touch of the morning sun" (RV152).

own loneliness and isolation, could be seen to link him to both Melville's Claggart, who "could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban" (BB70), and to Forster's Claggart, who, "comprehend[ing]" what attracts him, "suffers" because he is barred from sharing in a "love" that "lives and grows strong where I cannot enter" (LIB32f).

The symbolism of Mr Beebe's half-admiring, half-demonising rejection of Greece (RV177, see above) could be taken to indicate that in his case, jealousy of socially sanctioned heterosexual alliances is coupled with a homophobic fear of realising or even acknowledging his own homosexual inclinations. There is also the fact that Mr Beebe has never, or so he claims, heard of A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* or Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, two key texts of the homosexual literary tradition which appear on the Emersons' bookshelves (RV125). It might be felt that if he were only enabled to recognise the contents of the Emerson's library as opening on the possibility of homosexual comradeship, he might question his conviction that men like him are "better detached" (RV85): if Mr Beebe were presented with an alternative to celibacy – as embodied by the "ideal bachelor" (RV85) Cecil Vyse whom he "dislike[s]" (RV187) – he might be able at least to reconsider his position with respect to "the world of motor-cars and Rural Deans" (RV130). In the case of Forster's Claggart, such a "detached" life which complies with the rules of a repressive society ("this hateful world", LIB18) is shown to bring only "peace of a sort", and the self-suppression involved in such a self-imposed separation from human society is revealed as "an order such as reigns in Hell" (LIB32).

Another detail of behaviour which links Mr Beebe and Melville's Claggart is an association with equivocation: Freddy mentions "Mr Beebe's funny way, when you never quite know what he means" (RV85). Eric Haralson has drawn attention to "Forster's indirection in describing Beebe" by means of "tactful but no longer difficult allusion" – as an example, Haralson cites the description of Mr Beebe as having "rather profound reasons' for responding coolly to women" (68). Both Mr Beebe's ambiguous speech and the allusive style employed to describe him can be seen to have a parallel in Melville's Claggart, whose "equivocal words" – "Hand-somely done", etc. – are taken by his audience "as meant for humorous" (BB51), while the narrator's indirection in his disquisition on Claggart's "depravity" (BB55) has by this time become notorious. Equivocation – so the evidence of both texts might be taken to suggest – emerges as a discursive strategy employed both by queer persons, who in their utterances could be seen habitually to negotiate a constant tension between the interests of self-repression, active camouflage, and self-expression, and by third parties (often claiming or, in the case of the 'traditional' literary narrator, defaulting to, positions of 'neutral' authority) when addressing the prohibited subject of queerness.

In an earlier draft version of *A Room with a View*, Mr Beebe's opposition to the match between Lucy and George is identified as being directly responsible for the tragic death of George. In his draft, Forster noted that "Mr Beebe feels hostility to

George whom he likes” (LN106). This seeming paradox is characteristic of a large number of Forster’s male/male relationships in which antagonism can be seen to co-exist with homoerotic desire. Moreover, the reasons for this earlier Mr Beebe’s “hostility” provide an interesting counterpart to the present-day Mr Beebe’s attempts to secure Lucy’s celibacy, for we learn that the early Mr Beebe’s liking of George had depended on George being unhappily, because unsuccessfully, in love with Lucy:

So long as he could think of [...] George as diseased Mr Beebe had been pitiful and even sympathetic. He was ready to soothe and comfort [...] his hopeless passion, to bind up his broken heart, to nurse him back to daily life. But the suggestion of vigour infuriated him. He became personally hostile. (LN110)

Indeed, Mr Beebe “openly” (LN111) declares himself to the “victorious” (LN108) George as “your enemy” (LN111) at the end of a nocturnal encounter in the woods. This encounter opens with a “mysterious and romantic” vision of George’s “serious passive face” in the darkness, illuminated by the fire of a match as he lights his pipe (LN106).⁵⁰⁴ The exchange that follows is remarkable not just for its verbal sparring (frequently a feature of Forster’s overtly amorous encounters between males), which is moreover conducted on the subject of romance, but also for the fact that, lacking any contextual references to the Lucy/George plot, it could be seen to shed an ambiguous light on what exactly it is that Mr Beebe fears and feels he has to “prepare” against:

“Is that face yours?” [Mr Beebe] called.
 “I’m all here tonight,” was the reply.
 The remark struck him as vaguely ominous. “What do you mean?” he asked laughing.
 “Come and sit down. You may find out.”
 Wild thoughts of a midnight assignation had darted through the clergyman’s head. <He> \It is true that he/ dismissed them as unworthy. But nonetheless did he prepare for action.
 “My dear George, you are the most romantic person. It is a wonderful gift.”
 “Romantic?”
 “You get into such poetic situations. \When I retire to bed with my flat candlestick I often think of you lying in the open, listening to the invisible water, watching the fir tops brush the stars./” (LN106)

Even though Mr Beebe, who, it transpires, scents a secret understanding between George and Lucy which he wholly disapproves of, is presented as George’s antagonist throughout this scene, his “attack” on the young “romantic” (LN107)

⁵⁰⁴ The vision of George’s firelit face can be seen to be linked with a cluster of visual leitmotifs accompanying moments of male/male desire and connection; see section II.3.8.

takes the highly equivocal form of a series of compliments. These culminate in the “dar[ing]” delivery of “the full impertinence”: “My dear man, I’ll say to you what I wouldn’t say to anyone. You’re what the cads call irresistable [*sic*]” (LN108). The half-patronising, half-amicable form of Mr Beebe’s address, coupled with an oblique declaration of personal antagonism, seems to hark back to “Ralph and Tony”, where Tony, “in a voice which was almost kind”, tells Ralph: “I do not like you, dear man” (AS80). It could also be seen to parallel the equivocal compliment made to Billy by Melville’s Claggart (“Handsomely done, my lad”, etc., BB51), which is reproduced *verbatim* in the opera libretto (LIB31f.).

George, preoccupied with his knowledge of Lucy’s love for himself, is not offended by Mr Beebe’s antagonism: he subsequently grasps the hand with which Mr Beebe, “ben[ding] down”, had “touched his prostrate figure kindly”, and, in his turn, “touche[s] it lightly with his lips” (LN108f.). If Mr Beebe’s equivocation survives in the finished novel as “Mr Beebe’s funny way, when you never quite know what he means” (RV85), the ambiguity that characterises not only the utterances but also the narrative presentation of Mr Beebe and George in this nocturnal scene can be seen to create a far stronger sub-discourse of homoerotic possibility and homophobic repression in Mr Beebe’s relationship with George in this earlier version of the story.

The early Mr Beebe, a man with “a natural distaste to passion”, thinks of the “handsome & ‘romantic’” (LN109) George as a man who “ought never to marry” because he is “intellectually diseased”, and condemns George’s pursuit of Lucy as “selfish” (LN118), having “persuaded himself that true love [...] \would be/purer” (LN110). This last detail points forward to Herbert Pembroke compensating for his emotional sterility by persuading himself that love without passion is “a nobler, riper emotion” (LJ150). The introduction of the concept of disease opens onto contemporary discourses about sexual deviance. Read in their light, the apprehension with which Mr Beebe contemplates the not-too-distant future, in which George “will begin to enquire into the nature of love, and if he <is married, the Lord help his> has married for love, the Lord help his wife” (LN118) can be decoded as his realisation that George’s proclivities are of a homosexual nature.⁵⁰⁵

Mr Beebe’s fatal “betrayal” of the lovers in this earlier version of the story occurs in Forster’s “Outline of last chapter” (LN120). As Lucy and George are on their way to the registry office, where they mean to “settle” their marriage inde-

⁵⁰⁵ These fears of the early Mr Beebe are proved accurate by Forster’s late epilogue to *A Room with a View*, published in the *Observer* and the *New York Times Book Review* on 27 July 1958 (reprinted in the Appendix of the Abinger Edition, RV210-212). It reviews the progress of Lucy and George through the First and Second World Wars, and even features a short mention of Cecil Vyse, although we learn nothing about the further doings of Mr Beebe. “At the age of fifty”, we learn, George enlisted as a front soldier in World War II and “discovered that he loved fighting” but also “that away from his wife he did not remain chaste” (RV211). Since George is living as a soldier among soldiers, there is a possibility that his extra-marital relationships are not with women but with other men.

pendently of conventions or family interests, Lucy receives a letter from her spurned fiancé Cecil, in which he tells her that he is financially “ruined” (LN124f.). Mr Beebe, also met on the road, knows this letter to be nothing but “a bit of spite from a rejected lover who [...] \was posing/ as a bankrupt to make the lady unhappy”, but even though his “instinct” is “to reassure Lucy”, he remains silent (LN126). Her confidence disturbed, Lucy decides to postpone their plan; for this reason, George goes home by another road in the storm and is killed by a falling tree. Mr Beebe immediately realises that through omitting to speak what he knew to be the truth, he has sent George to his death; if the pair had gone on together to the registrar’s, “both would have been saved”. Feeling that he has “sinned against youth” and that “there is no one who can wholly forgive me”, Mr Beebe asks the women present to “ask her to pardon me, but I [...] dare not ask myself” (LN130f.).

His sense of guilt at this moment can be seen to link Mr Beebe with the operatic Vere, but unlike Vere, who does dare to confront Billy even though he wonders how Billy can “pardon” or “receive” him (LIB58), Mr Beebe does not have the courage to take the responsibility for his “betrayal” in the way that, for instance, Philip Herriton takes responsibility for the death of Gino’s baby in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. It might be speculated that this is impossible for him because, as a member of the category of ‘dark’ repressed bachelor characters who are inimical to love, he is irredeemable, and would be no more able to establish a salutary connection with Lucy (or anyone) than Herbert Pembroke would be. For her part, Lucy, who tries to break free from her allegiance to social convention, must be classified as another ‘dark’ character in need of salvation, which she would have found in George. Since the logic of the Forsterian salvation narrative cannot unfold between two ‘dark’ supplicant positions, but requires one of the parties involved to occupy the position of a ‘light’ character at least temporarily,⁵⁰⁶ it seems unlikely that Lucy would be able to bestow salvation on Mr Beebe in any case.

In this early version of *A Room with a View*, the ‘dark’ character Mr Beebe emerges structurally as the agent who destroys the desirable ‘light’ character. His position can be seen as similar to both the operatic Claggart’s, whose suppressed

⁵⁰⁶ The example of Maurice suggests that the same character can occupy both ‘light’ and ‘dark’ character positions depending on narrative context (see section II.2.2.4., p.174). The example of Margaret Schlegel, who understands and offers salutary connection to Henry, and can thereby be seen to assume a ‘light’ position, would seem to suggest that the fact that Lucy is a woman is of secondary importance as an impediment to a salutary connection, compared to the impediment of her structural position as a ‘dark’ character requiring salvation from the ‘light’ saviour character George. On the other hand, if one were to follow Joseph Bristow, who sees Forster’s female figures as “presid[ing] over the connection between ‘the beast and the monk’” (1995:58), i.e. the two male positions in a Sedgwickian love triangle, one might reflect that in this early version of the story, it would be structurally impossible for Mr Beebe to connect with Lucy because she occupies the position of the presiding female “catalyst” (Bristow 1995:66) whose function would have been restricted to enabling a connection between Mr Beebe and George, now made impossible by George’s death.

homoerotic longing can be seen to lie at the root of his jealous hatred and his persecution of Billy, and, more intriguingly, the operatic Vere's, whose refusal to speak at the trial makes him tacitly complicit in Billy's death. Like Vere's silence, the silence of Mr Beebe ostensibly serves the interests and demands of social convention – in Vere's case, naval law and discipline. Yet it could be argued that Mr Beebe's choice not to tell what he knows to be the truth is also motivated by his own concealed fear and loathing of George.

Mr Beebe's opinions of George suggest that he feels that a man with his "irresistible" (LN108) personal appeal represents a threat to relationships, persons, and modes of existence sanctioned and protected by the rules of social decorum. For the "handsome & romantic" George is capable of eliciting a response that overrides considerations of "duty" and "worth" (LN109). His powerful magnetism may represent "love of a kind", but must, according to Mr Beebe, nevertheless "be checked, or <certain> tragedy awaited them all" (LN110). That George's "irresistible" attraction has sexual implications can be inferred from the fact that his "selfish" appetites and "diseased" psyche are associated with "enquir[ies] into the nature of love" detrimental to any wife he might ever marry (LN118). The vagueness of these allusions would enable not only Forster's readers but also Mr Beebe himself to believe that George must be condemned for the sake of protecting his potential *female* victims. But the ambiguous sub-discourse of homoerotic possibility which pervades the nocturnal scene in the woods can be taken to suggest that Mr Beebe himself ought to be included among those whose peace of mind and mode of existence are threatened by George's "irresistible" appeal.⁵⁰⁷

It is by choosing to remain silent that Mr Beebe ultimately effects the removal of the threatening George, although, unlike Vere, he is in no position to foresee the consequences of his silence.⁵⁰⁸ Nevertheless, like Vere, Mr Beebe can be seen to fail the test of a Forsterian symbolic moment that invites him to make a personal commitment to the life-affirming, if potentially anarchic, forces of "youth" (LN130) and sensual love. In focusing on the similarities between these two Forsterian 'dark' middle-class bachelors, it would be possible to interpret the motives and actions of Vere as parallel to Mr Beebe's, and thus to arrive at a reading

⁵⁰⁷ It is possible that, unlike Claggart, Mr Beebe does not consciously think of George as a threat to himself; there is certainly no-one to put a direct blackmailer's pressure on him, as Claggart does on Vere through his insinuation that Vere might harbour an unseemly interest in Billy's "masculine beauty and strength" (LIB49).

⁵⁰⁸ In some respects, Mr Beebe's position as he declines to intervene is rather similar to that of the operatic Vere as he decides to confront the "evil" Claggart with the "good" Billy, in that both Mr Beebe and Vere are acting from a position of self-assumed superior insight that is subsequently proven fatally false by means of dramatic irony. Where Vere can be seen to commit hubris in declaring that Claggart "shall fail" (LIB51), Mr Beebe is arguably guilty of the same fault: sensing that Lucy is "in the midst of so dangerous a crisis", he "permit[s] the introduction of the lie" (LN126) in order to ensure the failure of the young people's plan to get married – his aim is to have Lucy "turned to poor afflicted Cecil again" (LN129). The plan does fail, but at the personal cost, to Mr Beebe, of both George's life and – so the ending suggests – Lucy's friendship.

of the operatic captain that would explain not only his failure to speak up at the moment of crisis, but also his uneasy conscience which shapes the agonised questionings of Prologue and Epilogue, as linked to a sinister underlying truth: namely, that his “betrayal” of Billy ultimately points to his own repression of his attraction to the “irresistible” Billy (see section II.6.8.).

“Nothing of the sordid or sensual”:
respectability, asceticism and Forsterian concepts of evil

Forster’s work consistently draws a clear connection between his ‘dark’ middle-class characters’ conscious or unconscious sexual self-repression and their respectability, i.e. their adherence to, and advocacy of, normative social convention, which ensures their social standing. It is significant in this context that many of those characters for whom respectability stands as the ultimate guiding principle – Cecil Vyse, Mr Beebe, Herbert Pembroke, Clive Durham from *Maurice*, and Paul Pinmay from “The Life to Come” – are associated (however loosely) with pan-Forsterian discourses about homoerotic desire in conflict with normativity and homophobia, and are presented as unable to accept a salutary connection even when it is offered to them as plainly as it is to Clive and Pinmay. Their failure can prove damaging to others as well as obstructive to the progress of a story’s protagonist; indeed, although their motives and feelings can be explored and explained thoroughly and insightfully, these characters tend to end up, as Herz has formulated with regard to Cecil Vyse, “on the negative side” of a text’s “ethical/sexual accounting” (2007:144).

This negative balance generated on the *ethical* plane of narrative “accounting” by respectability linked with repression provides a connection between Forster’s repressed ‘dark’ characters and Claggart’s “evil nature” (BB56) as described in Melville’s *Billy Budd*. For the “natural depravity” that is responsible for placing the master-at-arms in the narrative’s ethical bad books “folds itself in the mantle of respectability” to the point where it achieves an existence “without vices or small sins”. “Civilisation”, as Forster copied into his Commonplace Book in 1926, “especially if of the austerer sort, is auspicious to it” (BB55),⁵⁰⁹ for “the depravity here meant partakes nothing of the sordid or sensual. It is serious, but free from acerbity” (BB56; compare CPB17 and AN98). What makes Claggart “not like any other villain” (AN98) can in fact be identified as a form of asceticism.

Besides being openly identified with evil, the ascetic Claggart is described in subterranean images suggesting hellfire in Melville’s text. With a view to reconstructing Forster’s reading of the novella’s master-at-arms, it is important to note that in Forster’s work, asceticism also carries an explicit association with the dia-

⁵⁰⁹ Starting from this sentence, Forster marked this and the following two paragraphs up to “the method and the outward proceeding is always perfectly rational” (BB56) in his copy of Plomer’s edition of *Billy Budd* when he was preparing for work on the opera libretto in March 1949.

bolical, since it is described in *A Room with a View* as “a certain devil”, “worshipped” by a “medieval” personality type whose disdain of carnality is contrasted against Greek culture and the “fruition” it “implies” (RV87) – a symbolism which, by implication, evokes an opposition between sterile male celibacy and fulfilling male homosexuality.⁵¹⁰

In *Maurice*, Forster had made it clear that the chaste brand of Victorian Hellenism was not the kind of ‘Greek love’ he envisioned as salutary.⁵¹¹ This ‘wrong’ type of sublimated homosexual desire is represented by the sexually repressed ‘dark’ character Clive Durham, whose intellectualised Platonism is exposed as colluding with Victorian and Edwardian taboos on sexuality in general, and whose eventual ‘conversion’ to heterosexuality can be read as a submission to social normative pressure. If Mr Beebe can be regarded as “a victim of social and religious attitudes that he has embraced to his own detriment” (Summers 97), then Clive, whose uneasy relationship towards his own proclivities is dissected not without sympathy in Ch. XII, emerges very much as the victim of his repressive Victorian upbringing, which posits that “between men [sex] is inexcusable, between man and woman it may be practised since nature and society approve, but never discussed nor vaunted” (M140).⁵¹² The vocabulary of pollution, pathology and sinfulness which pervades the accounts of Clive’s self-perception and personal development (see, for instance, M55f. and 58f.) can be used to gauge the magnitude of an internalised homophobia which is directed both against himself and against others.

Not surprisingly, Maurice’s disclosure that he has had sexual intercourse with Alec Scudder fills Clive with “nausea” and “disgust”, because to Clive, “the sole excuse for any relationship between men is that it remain purely platonic” (M212). Having himself safely performed the move “from illicit to licit love” (M128), Clive regards his own onetime homoerotic inclinations as “a cesspool” that poses a risk to his political career (M214). Once again, “the mantle of respectability” so approved of by “Civilisation [...] of the austerer sort” (BB55) is linked, explicitly in

⁵¹⁰ While old-school psychoanalytic critics, used to associating homosexuality with sterility, might have contested the association of homosexual love with “fruition”, a similar symbolic ordering in which homophobia emerges as the cause of sterility has been detected by Robert Martin in Melville’s paired narrative “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (1855): in Martin’s convincing reading, “the sterility of the men, associated with their status as ‘bachelors,’ comes [...] not from the fact that they are not married but from the fact that they have suppressed the erotic” (1986a:106).

⁵¹¹ Analyses of the different models for homosexual identity in *Maurice*, associated respectively with Victorian Hellenism and a ‘modern’ view propounded by Edward Carpenter among others, have been presented by Robert Martin (1983) and Tariq Rahman.

⁵¹² It is hardly surprising that Clive’s repressive attitude to sexual matters should be carried over into his eventual marriage: the partners never see each other naked, and Clive’s sexual union with his wife is characterised by non-communication and “secrecy” which affects “much else of their lives” with a mutual lack of confidence (M140). Their relationship stands in contrast with the more articulate relationship of Maurice and Alec as celebrated particularly in the hotel chapter (Ch. XLIV), in which both their physical partnership and their outspokenness are dramatised.

this case, with the repression of homoerotic desire: it is “by respectability” that Clive is “descended” (M214) from his younger self, which had been briefly capable of sustaining a functioning (if celibate) relationship with another man, to a self-repressed and repressive representative of social conformity. The “respectab[le]” Clive is ultimately condemned in terms of the novel’s internal value system, which privileges self-realisation and sexual fulfilment over repression and ascetic abstinence. His condemnation completes the identification of the “respectability” whose “mantle” (BB55) now covers him with the negative normative forces “that stifle instinct” (Herz 1978:258) – a Forsterian equivalent, in fact, of evil.

The sexual panic which leads the youthful Clive to rejoice at the fact that Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where he at last finds “his malady described exquisitely”, constitutes “no invitation to licence” (M55f.) can also be found to reverberate with Claggart’s mysterious “depravity” which “partakes nothing of the sordid or sensual” (BB56). As Sedgwick (1990:94-97) and others have demonstrated for Melville’s text, this depravity can be read as encoding Claggart’s homosexuality. At the same time, Forster’s narrative finally ‘condemns’ Clive for his rejection of the carnal aspects of homosexual desire, a rejection which can be read as a symptom of homophobic self-aversion. This narrative ‘judgement’ can be seen to match Sedgwick’s alternative proposal that Claggart might equally be “depraved not because of the male-directed nature of his desire, here seen as natural or innocuous, but, rather, because he feels toward his own desires only terror and loathing (call this ‘phobia’)” (1990:96).⁵¹³

Forster’s comments about his monologue for Claggart suggest that he was favouring a similar line of interpretation: the feelings he envisioned for Claggart were those of “love constricted, perverted, poisoned”, and of “a sexual discharge gone evil” (letter to Britten of early December 1950, EMFL II:242). It will be noted that neither this “love” nor the “sexual discharge” are themselves identified with moral depravity or “evil”, but that sexual desire has “gone evil” because “love” has been “constricted, perverted, poisoned”. Claggart’s “natural depravity”, as Forster realised, “is not the same as absolute evil” (letter to Plomer of 10 March 1949, quoted in Furbank II:284); yet if this “natural depravity” is understood to encode his “natural” homoerotic desire, Claggart arguably becomes “evil” in the process of homophobic self-suppression.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ In fact, Sedgwick’s earlier findings would allow the identification of Claggart’s “monomania” (BB72) and paranoid misinterpretation of Billy’s soup-spilling as a deliberate and hostile act (BB60f.) as pathologically connected to homophobic self-repression: according to Sedgwick, one of Freud’s case studies (Dr Schreber) “shows clearly that the repression of homosexual desire in a man who by any commonsense standard was heterosexual, occasioned paranoid psychosis”. Sedgwick goes on to point out that “the psychoanalytic use that has been made of this perception, however, has been, not against homophobia and its schizogenic force, but against homosexuality – against homosexuals – on account of an association between ‘homosexuality’ and mental illness” (1985:20) – incidentally providing a powerful vindication of Forster’s lifelong distrust of psychoanalysis.

⁵¹⁴ See my discussion of Forster’s criticism of the repressive moral discourses in the works of Hawthorne, Reid and James in section II.1.3.

The parallels with Forster's other repressed 'dark' characters would seem to indicate clearly that the "pervert[ing]" and "poison[ing]" of Claggart's "love" is the result of the "constrict[ing]" self-imposed "order such as reigns in Hell" (LIB32), a reading which approximates that proposed by Sedgwick.

II.5.2.3. "On the surface they were at war": the erotics of antagonism

Once it has been accepted that Claggart's hatred of Billy is linked with homosexual desire, however complex or conflicted, the antagonism and the envy he feels towards Billy can begin to appear ambiguous in yet another way. For, read through Forster's own texts, male antagonism itself can be seen to open onto erotic possibility. Writing about Forster's late incomplete short story "Little Imber" (1961), Robert Martin has pointed out that this story, in which a bout of angry wrestling brings both antagonists to ejaculation and is recognised, in retrospect, as "erotic" (AS232), explicitly foregrounds the sexual appeal of "the agonistic relationships between men that had by now preoccupied Forster for 60 years". Martin sees this "recognition of the erotic power of male rivalry" as "providing an unspoken subtext to relations such as Ralph and Tony's, or Philip's and Gino's" (1997:272). The same erotic antagonism and linking of sexuality and violence can be observed in Lionel and Cocoanut's relationship in "The Other Boat" (1957/58), and in "The Torque" (dating from 1958 at the latest), which features acts of more or less consensual rape. While these late writings represent the most sexually explicit end of the Forsterian spectrum, they would merely seem to confirm a general pattern observable in all of Forster's work, which not only tends to view love – often literally – as an essential matter of life and death, but also tends to link sexuality *and* love with unpredictability and violence: as Judith Herz has put it, "that leitmotif, love [...] is energy as much as idea, and sometimes more bloody than bloodless" (1978:254).

Instances of more or less serious physical and verbal antagonism figure as part of the sexual play between most of Forster's male couples in the overtly homosexual fiction. In *Maurice*, "ragging" is part of Clive's and Maurice's unconscious courtship at Cambridge, where "they would butt and spar and embroil their friends" at every meeting (M33). Maurice's and Alec's mutual approach, too, repeatedly takes the form of half-playful quarrelling, and nowhere more strikingly than during their meeting at the British Museum in Ch. XLIII, where Alec has ostensibly come to blackmail Maurice:

They would peer at a goddess or vase, then move at a single impulse, and their unison was the stranger because on the surface they were at war. [...] When [Maurice] chose to reply their eyes met, and his smile was sometimes reflected on the lips of his foe. The belief grew that the actual situation was a blind – a practical joke almost – and concealed something real, that either desired. (M193)

A similar temporary “blind” concealing a “real” desire can be detected in “Arthur Snatchfold”, where Conway and Arthur tease one another with playful aggression as they work towards an agreement to engage in sexual intercourse (LtC102f).

Where instances of playful or serious male physical antagonism appear in the published texts, such scenes could by extension be read as markers that denote the antagonists’ homoerotic interest in each other. Examples in *The Longest Journey* include Ansell and Rickie’s good-natured tussle on the meadow in Ch. 7, where Ansell, trying to prevent Rickie from going off to meet Agnes, “with unusual playfulness” briefly holds Rickie “prisoner” (LJ65), Ansell’s and Stephen’s scuffle in the flowerbed at Dunwood House in Ch. 26, and Stephen’s and Rickie’s playful verbal (and to some extent physical) sparring on the train in Ch. 33. Nicholas Royle, among others, has proposed a queer reading of Gino’s torturing of Philip in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* that decodes the dynamics between the antagonists as “sex between men” (10). The famous bathing scene in *A Room with a View*, too, features “splash[ing]”, “duck[ing]”, “kick[ing]”, “mudd[ying]”, as well as a football match with everyone’s discarded clothes that gets “delirious[ly]” out of hand, to the alarm and deep social humiliation of “poor Mr Beebe” (RV131f).

It seems not unlikely that Melville’s novella would have appealed to Forster’s imagination because the dynamics between Claggart and Billy open onto the possibility of a familiar pattern of simultaneous antagonism and erotic attraction between males, in which physical violence could be read as fulfilling an erotically charged function in a deadly sexual power game. In this light, the soup-spilling incident in which Claggart “playfully tap[s] [Billy] from behind with his rattan” (BB51) can be decoded as an allusion to male rape, or at least as offering a subtext of Claggart’s sexual interest in Billy, whom he “could even have loved [...] but for fate and ban” (BB70). Martin has noted that this “playful tap of an instrument of punishment” evokes a set of contradictory possibilities: “ejaculate or strike, play or punish, cock or rattan”, not least because “the rattan that Claggart carries is [...] a perfect figure for the repressive authority that relies upon a transformation of the erotic” (1986a:112).

If the warning tap of the instrument of authority can come to express “the desire to sodomise Billy” in a “social context” where “to sodomise means to exert power” (Martin 1986a:112), one of the effects of this “transformation of the erotic” would seem to be the creation of a slippage between discourses about power and discourses about sex. This would be one way of arriving at a reading of Melville’s text in which the entire conflict between Claggart and Billy becomes decodable in terms of an erotics of sadomasochism.⁵¹⁵ In fact, Martin’s reading presents Claggart’s death as the fulfilment of his sadomasochistic desire:

⁵¹⁵ Indeed, in Martin’s reading of Melville’s *Billy Budd*, all sexuality in the novella appears structured in sadomasochistic terms by the “attraction between power and powerlessness” (1986a:108).

Claggart's desire for Billy is not only a desire to hurt Billy, but also a desire to *provoke* Billy, so that *he* (Claggart) can be raped by Billy. [...] When Billy strikes Claggart, he in some strange way fulfils Claggart's desire: Claggart dies instantly, at last possessed by that which he has sought to possess. (112)

There is no reason why Martin's interpretation of the novelistic Claggart's secret desires should not be applicable to the operatic Claggart, who can be seen to rearticulate a pattern of desire which is arguably latent in a number of Forster's other 'dark' characters.

Thus, in "Ralph and Tony", one of Forster's earliest stories, the desiring 'dark' character Ralph Holme could actually be seen to provoke the desired 'light' athlete Tony through excessive supplications into physically attacking him (AS81). Writing about this text, too, Martin has observed that Ralph, in pursuing his desire, practically "forces Tony into an engagement with his body, even if it is one of attack". Martin then goes on to make the very important point that "in the logic of sadomasochism, Ralph's 'submission' is also his domination of Tony, who is forced into an act of physical desire and expression, albeit in a disguised form as aggression" (1997:260). A very similar structure of provocation, submission and domination can be observed to govern Claggart's interactions with Billy: Claggart, too, forces the desired 'light' character into a physical engagement in the form of an attack. His 'submission' may manifest itself in the rather extreme form of his death, but he can nevertheless be seen to have achieved domination over Billy at the moment at which Billy strikes him – since he also embodies the institutional powers of naval discipline, this is a domination so absolute that it culminates in Billy's own death.⁵¹⁶

A 'dark' character who provokes a desired 'light' character to physical violence arguably also appears in Forster's late story "The Other Boat", whose protagonists, as Mary Francis has noted, "are much closer to Claggart and Billy than to Vere and Billy" (63). Although each of them features a mixture of 'dark' and 'light' character traits which is complicated in a unique way by the category of race, it is possible to read Cocanut as a 'dark' character, and his carefully plotted pursuit of the desirable barbarian Lionel as a parallel to Claggart's perverted pursuit of Billy. Cocanut, too, could ultimately be seen to provoke Lionel into violence by the

⁵¹⁶ The idea of Claggart's desire as directed towards Billy from both a position of power and a position of powerlessness could also be detected in W. H. Auden's poem "Herman Melville" (1939), in which Claggart's position is rendered as follows: "It is the Evil that is helpless like a lover / And has to pick a quarrel and succeeds / And both are openly destroyed before our eyes" (ll.24-26). Claggart can "pick a quarrel" from his position of power, not just by having Billy secretly persecuted by his underlings and by making allegations against him, but also by virtue of his being protected by naval law which extends its formal protection beyond his death in the shape of capital punishment for the striker. At the same time, he is "helpless like a lover"; being powerless to approach Billy or win his affections because of "fate and ban" (BB70), his only means of engaging with the desired one is "to pick a quarrel" in which his 'submission' – his destruction – completes the sign of his powerlessness.

deliberate transgression of a personal boundary – he climbs into his berth and goes so far as to attack him physically. This transgression might, like Claggart's, be read as motivated by a desperate desire to force the lover whom he is losing to engage with him once more, even if it be in the form of a physical violence that culminates in murder. Lionel's subsequent suicide, committed partly in the desperate realisation that his homosexual desires are incompatible with his English middle-class identity, could be recognised as ultimately affirming the dead Coconut's domination – just as Billy's death following the requirements of naval law represents the ultimate victory of Claggart's desires, however perverted.

Significantly, the libretto's Claggart is the only person who correctly recognises the violent potential which lies at the heart of Billy's good nature. In 1927, Forster had noted that Billy's goodness is “of the glowing aggressive sort which cannot exist unless it has evil to consume. [...] It is the light within him that irritates and explodes” (AN97). The operatic Claggart displays a strikingly similar insight regarding the aggressive potential of Billy, the desired embodiment of “beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness” (LIB32), when he “malevolent[ly]” warns Squeak about Billy's “temper”, and the “fists” that might make short work of a villainous sneak-thief and sinister prankster like him: “You're playing with fire, Squeak, with fire... [...] He'll kill you if he catches you” (LIB18f.).

Claggart's lucid assessment of Billy provides another link to some of his fellow Forsterian ‘dark’ characters who are simultaneously attracted and repulsed by a ‘light’ character's potential for violence. Cecil Vyse, for instance, is repelled by “the physical violence of the young” (RV112) at the same time that he is fascinated by the “athletic” (RV85) youth Freddy Honeychurch. Even though the ascetic Cecil manages to steer clear of physical conflict in the comfortable, safe environment of middle-class conventionality, a number of other ‘dark’ characters are subjected to physical violence by a ‘light’ character to whom they feel attracted. These include, as has already been stated, Philip Herriton, who is tortured by Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and Ralph Holme, who is maltreated by Tony in “Ralph and Tony”, but also Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*, bullied at school by the “straightforward [...], cruel and brutal” athlete Gerald Dawes (LJ37), whose violence, however, has an ambivalent and eroticised appeal to him as an adult man.

The erotic appeal of violence is articulated particularly clearly by a female character, Hilda, in the short story “The Obelisk” (1939). In this story, Hilda's heterosexual escapade with a chance-met sailor, described in great detail, functions as a narrative foil for her husband's parallel homosexual escapade with the sailor's companion, revealed only by implication. Hilda is very much attracted to ‘her’ well-mannered, dark-haired and handsome sailor not least because “there was something dangerous about the man, something of the bird of prey. He had marked her down for his fell purpose, she must be careful like any other heroine. If only he wasn't so handsome, so out-of-the-way handsome” (LtC118). Hilda's

desires and fantasies are explicitly identified in the text as clichés of heterosexual romance transported especially by “the Pictures” (LtC124); and yet the figure of an attractive because “dangerous” lover arguably appears throughout Forster’s work far too consistently for passages like this to be dismissed as simple, unambiguous mockery of heterosexual clichés.⁵¹⁷ The gentlemanly lover’s dangerousness is once again closely linked with aggressive emotions and the threat of violence: when he furiously turns on his companion who is making crude sexual allusions, Hilda finds him even more attractive in his anger: “he seemed needlessly vexed, but oh, how handsome he looked, and how his dark eyes flashed; she was glad to see him angry” (LtC126).

Hilda’s erotic appreciation of male violence can be seen to match that of Agnes from *The Longest Journey*, who, hearing how Gerald used to bully Rickie at school, “had a thrill of joy when she thought of the weak boy in the clutches of the strong one” (LJ50). In *Howards End*, Margaret Schlegel is attracted by the “agreeable menace” in Henry Wilcox’s eyes (HE158). It ought to be emphasised at this point that an erotic interest in male brutality is by no means an exclusively female domain in Forster’s work; rather, it is a trait shared by many Forsterian male ‘dark’ characters, in whom it admittedly tends to be coupled with effeminacy.⁵¹⁸ It is not only the “effeminate” Ralph Holme (AS77) from “Ralph and Tony” who springs to mind here: the “effeminate” Rickie (LJ79), too, feels the attraction of Gerald’s strength when he observes Agnes being kissed by him brutally enough for her to complain that he is hurting her (LJ39). Indeed, Judith Herz has argued convincingly that Rickie “responds to” the scene “from the position of Agnes” (1997:145).

In several of Forster’s texts, the quality of “agreeable menace” (HE158) which is sexually attractive can be found concentrated in a character’s eyes, whether it be those of Henry Wilcox, or the “flash[ing] dark eyes” (LtC126) of Hilda’s sailor: “those eyes, cruel eyes, kind eyes, kind, cruel, oh! they burnt into your shoulders, if you turned and faced them it was worse” (LtC121). In *Maurice*, the attractive quality of Alec’s eyes can even be seen to have undergone an interesting change: during the encounter at the British Museum, where Alec appears to be attempting to blackmail Maurice, we learn that “he looked handsome as he threatened – includ-

⁵¹⁷ While the story is certainly full of ironic commentary on the staples of heterosexual romance writing and its cinematic equivalent, it could at the same time be seen to queer the stereotypes of female desire for males by means of its parallel homosexual sub-plot, which might be felt to introduce the possibility of a desiring *male gaze* directed at the male erotic object. At the same time, the fact that Hilda’s ‘handsome sailor’ of the ‘distinguished gentleman’ type is explicitly contrasted against her husband’s choice of his “huge” (LTC117) and “boisterous” lower-class (!) companion, whom Hilda finds “terribly common” and “thoroughly unattractive” (LTC126f), makes the text appear to propound a fundamental difference between (stereotypical) female and male desire for males.

⁵¹⁸ For a discussion of the stigmatisation of effeminacy in Forster’s work, see Bristow 1995 (especially 9, 59 and 67f.).

ing the pupils of his eyes, which were evil” (M193). According to Philip Gardner’s manuscript analysis, the wording of this sentence was revised by Forster in the 1950s to include Alec’s “evil” eyes in the qualities that make him “handsome”: the 1932 typescript has “handsome as he spoke, *except* for the pupils” (in Gardner 1999b:285; my emphasis). Forster’s revision highlights the association of this particular eroticism of gazes and eyes with qualities which are nominally categorised as negative or “evil”.

I have speculated elsewhere that Forster’s revision might indirectly be traced back to his librettistic work on *Billy Budd* and particularly to the sinisterly attractive figure of the evil John Claggart (Rochlitz 53f.). It ought to be remembered that in Melville’s novella, Claggart’s eyes, “approaching a deeper violet, the softest of shades” (BB70), but well able to “cast a tutoring glance” (BB41), i.e. project authority, are among his most expressive features. During the climactic confrontation with Billy, every change of their “mesmeric glance” – their colour’s “blurring into a muddy purple” as they “los[e] human expression”, finally becoming predatory “as the hungry lurch of the torpedo-fish” – is noted in fine detail, as is Billy’s “blue, dilated” gaze as he stands “like one impaled and gagged” (BB82f.). The intensity of this scene, centred as it is around the compelling and, by implication, penetrating power of Claggart’s gaze, could well be decoded in erotic terms as a fantasy of sexual coercion, particularly in a reading which recognises a conflation of discourses about power and sex in Melville’s text.⁵¹⁹ The patterns of Forster’s own texts, in which scenes of confrontation between males frequently open onto erotic possibilities shaped by sadomasochistic structures, suggest that a reading of the relationship between Claggart and Billy as an eroticised power struggle would not have been particularly alien to Forster’s creative imagination.

In 1927, Forster had dwelled on Claggart as an exemplary evil villain, albeit one “not like any other”. At this time, he had not enquired into his motives but had limited himself to a simplified and abstract presentation of his conflict with Billy, the representative of goodness: “Claggart [...] at once sees in him the enemy – his own enemy, for Claggart is evil” (AN98). Twenty years later, retelling the story of *Billy Budd* in his BBC Book Talk, Forster chose to include a cautious hint at a more complex motivation behind the master-at-arms’s persecution of Billy: Claggart “determines [...] to destroy him, moved it would seem by reluctant love as well as by hate” (BBC385). In his libretto adaptation of Melville’s text, he pursued this motivation further, following the patterns of his own earlier imaginings of such antagonistic love-hate relationships between men, yet encoded to such an extent that even his co-librettist Eric Crozier apparently failed to recognise them (see section III.1.4.). In the late fiction that followed his creative engagement with *Billy Budd*, Forster produced what may be considered his clearest realisations of

⁵¹⁹ If sexuality can, as Sedgwick has formulated, “function[...] as a signifier for power relations”, this relationship is easily reversed, as she herself observes (1985:7f.).

the sexual dynamics that had arguably been shaping these patterns since the earliest days of his writing career. It seems all the more significant, then, that for one of these late clarified reiterations of his favourite narrative patterns, “The Other Boat”, he should have chosen as his point of departure a fragment of an early work, *Arctic Summer*, abandoned partly, it would seem, because he was unable to resolve the conflict between what he wanted to write and what he could publish.

II.5.3. Billy Budd: a man “in the precise meaning of the word”

II.5.3.1. “Alloyed by H. M.’s suppressed homosex:”:

Forster’s earliest encounter with Billy Budd

In 1926, when Forster was collecting notes in his Commonplace Book for his 1927 Cambridge Clark Lectures, it was the figure of Billy Budd that stood at the beginning of his engagement with Melville’s novella. Having started a section headed “*H. Melville*” with a sub-section on “*Evil*”, Forster then turns to *Billy Budd* to remark that “*Billy Budd* has goodness – faint beside Alyosha’s⁵²⁰ and rather alloyed by H. M.’s suppressed homosex! Still he has goodness, of the glowing

⁵²⁰ Alyosha – Alexei Fyodorovich Karamazov – from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880; transl. by Constance Garnett, 1912). The youngest of the three Karamazov brothers at twenty years of age, Alyosha, the novel’s proclaimed “hero” (BK361), does indeed embody an extraordinary “goodness” (CPB17): “chaste and pure”, but a “lover of humanity” and deeply “fond of people”, he “did not care to be a judge of others” and would neither “criticise” nor “condemn anyone for anything” (BK13f.). Despite his quiet, “dreamy” and “solitary” disposition (so unlike that of the boisterous Billy Budd), he is beloved by all: “the gift of making himself loved directly and unconsciously was inherent in him” as it is in Billy; he is “bright and good-tempered” (BK14) and intelligent, yet completely unpretentious. Although he is teased and even physically tormented over his abhorrence of immoral talk, he otherwise “completely conquered and captivated” his schoolfellows, among whom “he was a general favourite”, by the fact that “he never resented an insult”. He is “never afraid of anyone” but “seemed to be unaware that he was bold and courageous” (BK15). Living by a creed of love, he is drawn to the religious life and enters the local monastery; however, his elder Father Zosima tells him that his path lies “in the world”. After the elder’s death, Alyosha falls into a mystic “rapture” of connection with the universe and “all men”, a fortifying experience from which “he rose up a resolute champion” of faith and love (BK387) and duly returns to the secular world. In the novel, Alyosha tends to function as witness, interlocutor, confessor and messenger for the other characters; although he is thus mostly seen in a detached or passive role in the main plot, we learn of his active and successful endeavours to reconcile a group of schoolboys with their dying schoolfellow in a sub-plot of which the keynote is love and comradeship between male youths. This theme is epitomised in a strikingly Forsterian conversation between Alyosha and the thirteen-year-old Kolya Krasotkin, the dying boy’s idolised friend, in which Alyosha encourages the “sensitive” Kolya to be himself and not hide his feelings from fear “of being ridiculous”, which would make him “like everyone else” (BK599f.). To Kolya, their mutual confidences are “like a declaration of love”; and he tells Alyosha “in positive ecstasy”: “I love you and admire you at this moment just because you are rather ashamed! Because you are just like me” (BK601). The novel closes with Alyosha’s speech to the schoolboys after their friend’s funeral, in which he turns the dead boy’s memory into a touchstone of friendship, goodness and love for all of them, including himself.

aggressive sort which cannot exist unless it has evil to consume" (CPB17).⁵²¹ It is hardly surprising that Forster's thought about the effect of Melville's "suppressed homosex:" on the character of Billy does not appear in his finished, public and published lecture. The second sentence, by contrast, is carried over verbatim into the description of the young sailor (AN97). Forster's 'private' verdict on Billy and his author raises a number of interesting questions: the first being, as with all his lecture notes collected in the Commonplace Book, precisely how 'private' this verdict might in fact be. As I have noted in section II.1.2., Forster's judgement as recorded on the page may already be mediated by his awareness that he is writing for an audience, and as such may be shaped by conscious or unconscious evasion and self-distancing from Melville and his sexuality, while at the same time, the fact that Forster introduces this point in the first place indicates that the subject of homosexuality had its place in his reading of Melville's text and its main character(s) from the very beginning.

Billy's goodness might be "faint" in comparison to that of Dostoevsky's proclaimed "hero" (BK361), but what is most interesting here is that Forster should regard it as "alloyed" by Melville's "suppressed homosex:". The word "alloyed" seems in this context to add yet another limitation to that of faintness: both "faint" and "alloyed" appear to be qualifications that detract from the power of Billy's "goodness". In Melville's novella, the word "alloy" appears, with the negative connotation of impurity or adulteration, in the immediate vicinity of the passage about "Natural Depravity" which Forster selected for quotation a little further on (CPB17; see section II.1.1.): "notable instances" of this depravity "have no vulgar alloy of the brute in them, but invariably are dominated by intellectuality" (BB55). It seems possible that Forster, trawling the pages of *Billy Budd* for suitable quotations, deliberately or accidentally assimilated Melville's negatively connoted image into his assessment of Billy. Returning to this assessment, it might further be wondered whether the "alloy[ing]" encroachment on Billy's "goodness" arises from the "homosex[ual]" nature of his creator's supposed sexual inclinations, or from the fact that these inclinations are "suppressed". Is Forster criticising the figure of Billy as an unsuccessful combination of innocent angel-saviour and object of Melville's homoerotic longing or wish-fulfilment (thereby incidentally adopting a stance which could be interpreted as homophobic), or is he criticising Melville for not daring to make the homosexual potential he, Forster, detects in Billy – offering visions of class-bridging comradeship and, possibly, spiritual salva-

⁵²¹ At a casual glance, it seems not entirely clear whether Forster is referring to Melville's novella or to its eponymous hero in his first sentence; the ambiguity arises from Forster's practice of underlining his section headings as well as book titles and emphases (all of which are rendered as italics in Gardner's edition of the Commonplace Book). There is, however, the fact that in the same sentence, Forster introduces the comparison to another fictional character – Dostoevsky's Alyosha. Since in his next sentence, Forster is obviously talking about Billy himself ("he has goodness"), this suggests that in the first sentence, too, it is the character he has in mind, rather than the entire story.

tion – more explicit?⁵²² Is Forster doing both of these, or is he, by casually introducing the subject, merely looking to assert a covert claim both for the newly published *Billy Budd* and for its author as part of the homosexual literary tradition? While the latter concern may have played into Forster's utterance, it will hardly have been his sole motivation. The immediate textual evidence of the Common-place Book provides no further illumination in this matter. Yet it is possible to place Forster's assessment within a larger context of Forsterian thoughts and ideas, and to sketch a line of development which starts with Forster's 1926 encounter with the figure of Billy and leads to the eventual transformation of the character into the opera's Forsterian "hero" (*Griffin* 4).

That Melville's personal feelings were implicit in the constitution of his fictional characters was presumed as a matter of course among Forster's contemporaries. Writing about Britten's, Forster's and Crozier's opera adaptation of *Billy Budd* in 1952, Andrew Porter, who had studied Melville's novella in far more detail than many of his fellow reviewers, remarked that

There is, of course, another element in Claggart's hatred; he looks at Billy with "a touch of soft yearning, as if he could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban". But this undertone runs through the description of what all the characters think of the Handsome Sailor, and seems to be no more than a projection of the love Melville felt for his hero. (111)

Similar speculations were to abound about Forster's own relationship with his texts following the posthumous publication of his homosexual fiction. Thus, for instance, Philip Brett, writing about the opera adaptation of *Billy Budd* a good thirty years later, suggested that "perhaps in [Forster's] creation of the young sailor there was an element of the wish-fulfilment that is evident in Maurice and some of the posthumously printed stories" (1984:136). Writing about *A Room with a View*, Judith Herz has recently suggested "that Forster 'loved' George, that is, created him out of his own desires" (2007:143). For his own part, Forster himself had always acknowledged that he "care[d]" (CPB204) deeply for certain of his own fictional characters: on 3 August 1910, he recorded in his Locked Diary that he had turned once more to *The Longest Journey* and "reread all about Stephen with pathetic approval" (LD10). In May 1958, he made an overview of "character[s] [...] for whom I care. In *Where Angels Gino*, in *L. J. Stephen*, in *R. with V. Lucy*, in *P. to I. Aziz* ... and Maurice and Alec ... and Lionel and Cocoa ..." (CPB204). We also know, from comments like those on the "maimed" (AN110) characters in the work of Henry James, or on the librettistic "rescuing of Vere from his creator" (EMFL II:237), that Forster was capable of developing, if not necessarily always

⁵²² To these questions might be added another, yet more speculative one: is it in any way significant that Claggart's "Depravity", the "evil" opposite of Billy's "goodness", is not "alloyed" by his creator's "suppressed homosex.", and could this be because the discourses surrounding Claggart already identify this character as a suppressed homosexual?

positive or protective feelings for the characters created by other authors, then certainly some very clear ideas of what he considered weaknesses or flaws in their conception, and of the way in which he felt they *ought* to have been conceived. In the case of *Billy Budd*, these ideas manifest themselves in a singular way in the changes made to its main characters in the libretto adaptation, but also, as I have suggested with regard to the figure of Vere, in Forster's earlier representations of Melville's story to his listeners or readers.

II.5.3.2. "Belted Billy" as the desirable Forsterian 'light' character

In his 1947 BBC Book Talk, Forster ends his discussion of Melville's novella with "a word of caution" addressed to its potential readers: "The style is often clumsy and dowdy. Wonderful phrases leap out, the sum total is overwhelming, but if you judge young Billy by what he says and by much that is said of him, you'll think him an incredible stick" (BBC387). Much of what Melville's Billy "says" can be seen to characterise him as good-natured but, indeed, somewhat dull and naïve. But what of the things that are "said of him", which might make a reader take against him? The narrator's various references to his intellectual simplicity which is repeatedly equated with that of animals merely confirm his lack of cognitive insight. However, the numerous comparisons to antique heroes, works of art, and the biblical figures of Adam and Christ crucified might serve to arouse feelings of ridicule and disdain among readers perceiving Melville's imagery as overblown, and ill-suited to the figure of the innocent but otherwise common and simple-minded young sailor. In 1927, Forster had warned his audience that "prophecy asks for humility and even for a suspension of the sense of humour, so that we are not allowed to snigger when a tragedy is called *Billy Budd*" (AN101); without "humility", he had reminded them, "we shall not hear the voice of the prophet, and our eyes will behold a figure of fun instead of his glory" (AN87). The fact that, in 1947, he again feels the need to remind his listeners that "a little patience in reading is desirable, and a little humility", would seem to indicate that the same thought underlies his concern about the average reader's possible reaction to the figure that was, to him, "the avenging angel, the glorious athletic youth" (BBC386f).

Beside the problem of a humble and patient engagement with the 'prophetic' text and its hero, however, there is another potentially problematic area that Forster might have been anxious about, namely, some readers' reaction to the way in which Billy's appearance is described. While some passages emphasise his "masculine beauty" (BB27) and physical prowess, others dwell on the angelic quality of his girlish good looks (BB108), his "as yet smooth face, all but feminine in purity of natural complexion" (BB24), or his delicate features and build which supposedly suggest his noble descent (BB25). These latter passages might be felt to destabilise Billy's masculinity and render him effeminate – effeminacy being a

quality which, as Joseph Bristow has shown, is negatively connoted or at least problematic within the Forsterian value system.⁵²³

In his “Letter from E. M. Forster”, dated September 1951, and written at a time when his work on the opera libretto was as good as completed, Forster elaborated on this particular area of what “is said of” Billy (BBC387):

he must not be pathetic, and he must not be emasculated. [...] Some critics, while accepting him as hero, have noted his almost feminine beauty and the suggestion of his gentle birth. (The *Indomitable* is riddled with gentle births – even Claggart has one.) And the absence of sexual convulsion at his hanging has persuaded them that Melville intends him as a priest-like saviour, a blameless fool. They can make out a case. But the hints of masculinity seem stronger. “Belted Billy” belongs to adolescent roughness, to the watches of Queequeg and Jack Chase and John Marr:

Tattooings, ear-rings, love-locks curled;
Barbarians of man’s simpler nature,
Unworldly servers of the world,

whom the world can easily trap and destroy, but who are, in the precise meaning of the word, men. (*Griffin* 5)

It will be noted that Forster’s insistence on Billy’s “masculinity” is coupled with his gentle mocking of the idea of Billy’s supposed noble descent – a device commonly associated with the romance genre which, so Melville’s narrator assures his readers, his story does not belong to (BB28). Indeed, all references to “gentle births” have disappeared from the opera libretto, even the most indirect ones: Billy states that he was “found in a basket tied to a good man’s door, the poor old man” (LIB16), but there is no mention of this container having been “pretty” and “silk-lined” (BB25). While it can be viewed as a simplification of the plot, this omission can at the same time be seen to have the effect of tacitly establishing the founding Billy as a working-class man just like his two fellow impressed men (both of whom are new additions to the story’s cast of characters), thereby assigning to him the typical social position of the Forsterian ‘light’ character.

Forster’s rejection of the view “that Melville intend[ed] him as a priest-like saviour, a blameless fool” can equally be read as a sign that Forster saw “belted Billy” as belonging in the same category as his own desirable ‘light’ characters: handsome, good-natured, but certainly virile; a lower-class saviour not without sexual attraction – a man, “in the precise meaning of the word” (*Griffin* 5). None of Forster’s attractive males are conceived as morally pure as Melville’s Billy Budd; indeed, his criticism of Forrest Reid’s “puritan” morals (AH76) indicates a certain “disdain of innocence” (BB59) on his own part, at least of the type of moral innocence he associated with the proscription of sexual experience and fulfilment (see

⁵²³ See Bristow 1995:9f. and his chapter on Forster, 55-99.

section II.1.2.). At the very beginning of his collaboration with Britten and Crozier, Forster had been similarly insistent about the “unworldly” Billy’s worldliness (*Griffin* 5). On 12 December 1948, he wrote to Britten:

I fear that a 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. (EMFL II:235)⁵²⁴

If Forster rejects the idea of a “priest-like”, asexual Billy, this can in fact be seen to agree with his fundamental disapproval of asceticism, a disapproval he expressed at length in “What I Believe” (see section II.3.8.) but which also shapes the conception of a number of his more unappealing ‘dark’ characters (see section II.5.2.2.). Although Billy may, in his innocence, be “easily trap[ped] and destroy[ed]” – much like Stephen Wonham in his open-hearted straightforwardness – Forster evidently refuses to think of him as a “blameless fool” (*Griffin* 5). This view is arguably realised through his librettistic transformation of Melville’s passive, dog-like and fatalist young sailor into a more active, more self-confident and more articulate desirable working-class character – a ‘light’ character more closely related to Stephen Wonham or Alec Scudder.

II.5.3.3. “The light [...] that irritates and explodes” – and inspires desire

It seems that Forster never regarded Billy exclusively as a harmless victim. His *Commonplace Book* documents that as early as 1926, he had been devoting a great deal of attention to Billy’s violence. In 1927, as will be recalled, he famously proclaimed that Billy “has goodness of the glowing aggressive sort which cannot exist until it has evil to consume. He is not himself aggressive. It is the light within him that irritates and explodes” (AN97; compare CPB17). Forster’s qualification is important because it constructs Billy’s violence as a function of his goodness, rather than – an equally possible interpretation – as the fatal side-effect of his unfortunate stammer, the “imperfection” or “little card” that is the contribution

⁵²⁴ Forster’s letter can be seen to link Billy Budd with a central figure within the Forsterian creative imagination, namely, that of Orion. As Herz has remarked, the figure of Orion “provides a recurrent image in Forster’s fiction, a promise of freedom, a vision of the enlarged male self, the rough woodsman” (1988:29). On 11 January 1908, *à propos* of observing the constellation of Orion, Forster commented in his *Diary* on the personal significance the figure held for him: “the sight of him gives physical joy, as if a man of the kind I care for was in heaven” (*Diaries* I:159); this utterance suggests that Forster associated the figure of Orion with homoerotic love and companionship. In *The Longest Journey*, published a year previously, the constellation of Orion is associated with the triumph of the life-force as embodied by Stephen, and represents one of the touchstones that symbolise salvation through the love of a fellow man (see LJ193, 251 and 282). Orion also fulfils an important symbolic function in Forster’s dystopian Science Fiction short story “The Machine Stops” of 1909 (see Herz 1988:60f.).

of evil to “every human consignment to this planet of earth” (BB28). In his 1947 BBC Book Talk, Forster was to opine that Billy’s “stutter [...] not only prevents the young sailor from being a plaster saint, too good to be true, but has a symbolic value. Everywhere evil has some hold” (BBC385); it will be noted, however, that it is still only “the terrifying, paralysing stammer” that Forster thinks of as a “diabolical inhibition”, not the explosive violence of the fatal blow itself, which he appears to view as an act of just retribution by the “avenging angel” who is otherwise “absolutely innocent” (BBC386). It would seem that Forster associates the physical violence of the “upright barbarian” (BB26) Billy Budd not with any moral flaw, but rather, as he was to illustrate with the quotation from “John Marr” in 1951, with the innocent, “unworldly”, unspoilt expression of “man’s simpler nature”, as celebrated in Melville’s poem (*Griffin* 5). Indeed, as far as Forster’s own “barbarians” and “glorious athletic youth[s]” are concerned, an “irritable” disposition represents, *pace* Ansell, “a frequent sign of grace” (LJ211); sudden explosions of violence and even aggression itself can often be seen to function as the signs of a ‘light’ character’s connection with the life-force, and thus as instances of virile self-expression, which are perceived by ‘dark’ characters as both repulsive and attractive at the same time.⁵²⁵

In *The Longest Journey*, such a view is put into words by Rickie Elliot as he compares the brutal but attractive Gerald Dawes to his glorified ideal of the athlete (of which Gerald, however, is found to fall short): if “athletes [...] knocked you down and hurt you, and then went on their way rejoicing”, they are still to be viewed in a positive light as “simple, straightforward people, cruel and brutal if you like, but never petty” (LJ37). Other incarnations of the violent but “glorious athletic youth” (BBC386) in Forster’s work, each with his greater or lesser shortcomings, include “the strenuous Tony” (AS78) from the early story “Ralph and Tony”, who is “in fact a pure pagan, all the more complete for being unconscious, living the glorious unquestioning life of the body, with instinct as a soul” (AS89), and who, in his irritation and homophobic disgust, physically attacks the pathetically grovel-

⁵²⁵ The psychoanalytic critic Noel Bradley’s has claimed that, in *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster “virtually has Billy provoking Claggart” (238), a claim which can be seen to fit the patterns of antagonistic eroticism that characterise Forster’s male/male relationships, even though in Forster’s texts, it is more often the ‘dark’ character who can be seen to provoke the ‘light’ character into violence (see section II.5.2.3.). However, Bradley’s article, in which he attempts to unravel Forster’s attitudes and reactions to Melville’s text, is to be taken *cum magno grano salis*. Bradley’s textual interpretations – which he uses to “test” or validate his analyses of Melville’s and Forster’s psyche – appear ludicrously contrived at times, and can be seen to confirm Forster’s worst misgivings about professional psychoanalysts: “these people have no sense of literature and art and I regard with resentment and foreboding their offers to turn an artist upside down” (letter to Forrest Reid of 3 March 1920; quoted in Furbank II:64). Bradley’s investigation of Forster’s response to Melville’s text is moreover warped by his intention to prove “a clinical psychoanalytic theory” which views “male homosexual love” as “the solution of conflict between love and intense unconscious hatred and envy for the same person” (233; for Sedgwick’s queer critique of the Freudian schools’ pathologising of homosexuality, see note 513).

ling Ralph. Stemming from the late, post-*Billy Budd* years of Forster's literary creativity, there are also the figures of Lionel from "The Other Boat", whose murder of his mixed-race lover is coupled with sexual violence, and of the pugnacious "Little Imber". Finally, there is Euric the Goth from "The Torque", the leader of the band of "barbarian" invaders (LtC157) who captures and rapes the youth Marcian – acts of violence which Marcian is happy enough to accept and even enjoy, feeling that Euric no more deserves to be killed for his deeds than would "beasts or babies" (LtC158).

Although it is hardly any abstract "goodness" which is responsible for the violent acts of these desirable 'light' characters, their transgressions are often associated with natural exuberance and the high spirits of powerful and desirable masculinity. They are precipitated by a different, a decidedly "pagan" (AS89) kind of explosive "light within" (AN97) which is independent of Christian morality, but associated in its best moments with "the creed of 'here am I and there are you'" held by the most Billy-like of Forster's characters, the classless Stephen Wonham – a creed that views "life" as "no decorous scheme, but a personal combat or a personal truce" (LJ244).

As illustrated by Stephen's case, this intensely personal "creed" routinely involves the settling of "combat" and "truce" through physical violence. When the chance-met soldier persists in insulting Mrs Failing, Stephen flings him off his horse (LJ115); when the shepherd Flea Thompson fails to relieve Stephen at the appointed time, Stephen attempts to get even with him in a fight in which he is, however, "flung" by Flea (LJ116); when Ansell first ignores and then responds rudely to his greetings, Stephen uproots one of Agnes's lobelias and throws it at the wayward philosopher, whereupon a scuffle ensues; and under the "sacred" influence of alcohol – associated in Stephen's case with the mystic rites of Dionysos (LJ267) – he breaks the windows of the Failings and Pembrokes who try to manipulate him against his will (LJ244 and 247). Following his "creed" of mutual and personal accountability between men, and guided by his own, Forsterian version of "the light within [...] that irritates and explodes" (AN97), Stephen is hailed by Rickie as "a hero. He was a law to himself, and rightly. He was great enough to despise our small moralities" (LJ279). Not merely capable of "attaining love", he is, above all, capable of inspiring it in Rickie, the 'dark' character who stands in sore need of salvation, as well as in Ansell, the 'dark' character who may be on the way to finding it realised in an implied relationship with Stephen (see note 374): "This evening Rickie caught Ansell's enthusiasm, and felt it worth while to sacrifice everything for such a man" (LJ279). Presumably drawing on Melville's hints about the tearful "melancholy", "soft yearning", and even "love[...]" *in potentia*, which the sight of "belted Billy" inspires in Claggart (BB70), Forster made it clear in his libretto that "belted Billy" (*Griffin* 5) possesses a similar power to inspire love in both of the 'dark' characters who perceive his extraordinary power: Claggart and – it may be inferred – Vere.

With regard to Claggart's "O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness" monologue, Harold Farwell has remarked that it "clarifies his idea of Billy Budd's greater power". In his view, the monologue "shows that Forster's basic interpretation of the power of Billy's goodness did not alter in the twenty years that separates his criticism from his libretto". Farwell is only one of many critics who have seen the operatic Billy as "the product [...] of early English critical responses which saw him as an idealised counter to Claggart's depravity, views intensified by Forster's benign humanism" (32f.). Yet the status and function of violence both in Forster's conception of his own desirable 'light' characters and in his early reading of the figure of Billy Budd makes it necessary to complicate any overly simplistic or naïve view of this "benign humanism".

In 1979, Donald Mitchell noted that "an important theme in the opera" is "the power of beauty not only to attract, seduce, intoxicate or inspire, but also to destroy. Billy, despite his goodness and virtue [...] is a destroyer as well as one who is destroyed" (1993:116f.).⁵²⁶ Almost contemporaneously, Judith Herz pointed out that in Forster's work, it is "love" which "is energy as much as idea, and sometimes more bloody than bloodless" (1978:254). If "the power of Billy's goodness" (Farwell 32), inseparable as it is from his beauty and "the light within him that irritates and explodes" (AN97), is shown to inspire a prohibited, subversive form of desire – identified by Forster in 1950 as "love constricted, perverted, poisoned [...] a sexual discharge gone evil" (EMFL II:242)⁵²⁷ – and if this build-up of erotic "energy" (Herz 1978:254) takes the form of a "pursuit" (Levine 72) that finds its violent release in mutual destruction, then this, too, is arguably revealed as a typical Forsterian pattern.

This pattern is usually present in rudimentary form in Forster's early fiction; it can be seen to shape many of the – more or less violent – encounters with Otherness that often involve a salutary moment of connection, but in the process of which the violent (and in some cases eroticised) "discharge" of "love" or salutary knowledge regularly claims lives, or otherwise maims them. The idea of beauty as both attractive and destructive finds its clearest articulation in Forster's late unpublished short stories, where it appears in its most *Billy Budd*-esque form of "two people made to destroy each other" (Forster in Furbank II:303) in "The Other Boat", and in its less extreme manifestation as eroticised physical antagonism between males in "Little Imber" and "The Torque". Forster's 1926 reflections on Melville's novella, particularly where they concern its hero and his antagonist, might thus be felt not only to resurface in his 1949-51 libretto adaptation of Melville's *Billy Budd*, but to possess connections also to the narratives that came after his creative engagement with the novella and its characters.

⁵²⁶ The first part of Mitchell's "Notebook" chapter for the *Billy Budd* Cambridge Opera Handbook (1993), "Authorities, ambiguities, hierarchies, heights and depths" (pp.111-122), in essence dates from 1979; see Mitchell 1993:166, n.1.

⁵²⁷ In his letter about the Claggart monologue, written to Britten in early December 1950.

II.5.3.4. “He’s a-stammer”’: (mis-)representation, inarticulacy and violence

In 1969, the novelist Elizabeth Bowen observed that the majority of characters in Forster’s novels are “more than effectively armed with words”, and that “the few who are physically aggressive (Gino, for example, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, or Charles Wilcox in *Howards End*) are caused to explode into their aggressions by a rising and maddening pressure: their inarticulateness” (7). Indeed, the link which Bowen perceived between a character’s physical violence and his inability to speak out is a typical feature of the Forsterian ‘light’ character, in whom it arguably serves to emphasise his status as cultural, social or individual Other. Moreover, these unilateral breakdowns of communication, such as Gino’s silence on learning about the death of his child, typically occur in situations where a ‘dark’ character can be observed projecting his or her English middle-class views and expectations onto a cultural, social or individual Other, whose loss of voice and subsequent recourse to physical violence can be read as reactions to these (mis-)readings or (mis-)representations of themselves, with physical violence functioning as a non-verbal attempt at self-(re)assertion against the ‘dark’ character’s position of superior discursive empowerment.

In section II.5.1.3., I have discussed the way in which Philip Herriton projects his English middle-class values onto the Italian dentist’s son Gino Carella, with results that are nearly fatal to himself; I have also sketched the parallels between this scene and the confrontation between Billy and Claggart which Vere arranges in his cabin, little anticipating its fatal results which, again, directly involve inarticulateness and physical violence. Two further reiterations of this pattern that involve the Billy-like Stephen Wonham can be found in *The Longest Journey*. When confronted by Agnes with the “pseudo-legal document” (LJ220) with which the Pembrokes plan to secure his silence over the scandal of his parentage, Stephen is initially struck dumb. In coming to Sawston, Stephen only intends to bring his half-brother and his in-laws the “tremendous news” (LJ219), naively expecting them to “look at things straight, and not go screaming about blots” (LJ217), i.e. the social stigma that would attach to their being associated with illegitimacy. However, the Pembrokes – somewhat against Rickie’s wishes, who advocates “waiting” to see what Stephen will do – decide to “take[...] the offensive” and offer him money in exchange for his promise “to restrain from libellous . . . never to molest the said Frederick Elliot by intruding –”. Stephen has difficulty in understanding the import of the document, and it takes him some time until he can “at last” interrupt Agnes’s flow of words with an utterance of his own, while he continues “bewildered” by the situation (LJ221).

Stephen’s confusion can on the one hand be seen to arise from the unexpected confrontation with an alien representation of himself which both he and the reader can recognise as a blatant misreading: “Here’s a very bad mistake” is his response to Agnes’s assumption that he has “come to be silenced”. Indeed, Agnes’s anticipation of Stephen’s intentions depends on hearsay, and her con-

struction of his figure is revealed as made up out of her own misinterpretations of his acts. She considers him hostile, untrustworthy and “rapacious: she had heard tales of him lending to the poor and exacting repayment to the uttermost farthing”,⁵²⁸ when he declines to engage with her “document” she turns defiant: “Then do your worst!” (LJ221f.). On the other hand, Stephen now realises that he has been attributing to the “educated” (LJ217) Elliots a broadmindedness they do not in fact possess; he concludes “I’ve made a bad mistake” (LJ221). Even though we are told that “he never thought of allotting the blame” for this painful collision of mutual misapprehensions, he turns his back on the Elliot-Pembroke household, convinced that “a clean liver must never enter Dunwood House again” (LJ245).

As he “step[s] forth to make money” – a “stepp[ing] forth” which takes the form, however, of “slouch[ing] disconsolately northwards” – Stephen shows signs of distraction which are similar to those shown by Gino in his state of speechless shock: he is “touching the walls, frowning [and] talking to himself at times” (LJ245), just as Gino had “passed his hands over things” – walls and furniture – and “touched everything” in the room (WA135). Although Stephen is no longer dumbstruck at this point, he still moves in a self-contained world; “tawdry girls screamed at him” and “matrons averted their eyes” from the “villainous young brute he looked” (LJ245). The narrative then moves forward: after “ten days” (LJ246), Stephen returns to Sawston, gets drunk, and turns violent. Having thrown a brick through the study window at Dunwood house, he proceeds to “wreck[...] the hall”, before being rescued from falling down the stairwell by Rickie (LJ247f.). It is thus that this somewhat extended chain of misrepresentation, failure of communication and foundering of speech, and attempted self-reassertion through physical aggression is brought to completion once again.

A similar chain can be seen to structure the events of Stephen’s eviction from Cadover. Mrs Failing, annoyed with Stephen, and influenced by the machinations of Agnes, decides to send Stephen to “our distant colonies” (LJ244). (Later, as Stephen attempts to explain his initial argument with Mrs Failing to Ansell, he quickly becomes “incoherent”; see LJ214.) When Stephen passionately rejects the idea of leaving England, Mrs Failing challenges him to explain himself, taunting him with the question “Are you in love?” to which she receives “no answer” from Stephen. Instead, he merely “pick[s] up a lump of the chalk”; and it is “a lump of chalk” which shatters “her drawing room window” (LJ244) on the night of Stephen’s riotous drunken departure from the village.

When confronted with the superior verbal power of people whose image of himself is at odds with his own self-conception, Stephen relinquishes words, or is forsaken by them; his protest against discursive injustice finds its expression in the form of physical violence. The same could be said of Billy Budd: although not every instance of his stammering follows an experience of misrepresentation, it

⁵²⁸ See also discussion in section II.4.2.2.1., p.282, and section II.4.2.3.2., p.298.

may be seen to conform to the pattern I have indicated above in two important scenes. In the first of these, his speech impediment is brought on by the Novice's attempt to incite him to mutiny – something which the “loyal” young sailor considers a “foul thing[...]” which he “never, never could [...] do” (LIB55). To him, it would seem, it is inconceivable that anyone could expect him to condone the idea of mutiny, let alone participate in mutinous activities; it is his outrage at this misreading of his character which strikes him dumb. He “clenches his fist with rage” and “the Novice flies in terror” (LIB36); once the provoking agent is gone, however, Billy's aggression evaporates and he can express himself in words once again.⁵²⁹ The second scene is, of course, the fatal moment of confrontation between Billy and Claggart, and here the pattern of misrepresentation, loss of speech, and physical violence is complete once more.

II.5.3.5. Beautiful males, icons of desire:

Billy Budd and other Forsterian ‘light’ characters

Robert Martin has remarked that even though “in many ways, the homosexual in [Melville's] story is not the beautiful Billy but the evil Claggart” (1998:198), nevertheless, “Billy's beauty makes him a homosexual icon”. It is important to note with Martin that Melville's Billy is “not a figure in a realized homosexual relationship. His blankness is a kind of slate on which others inscribe their desires. He is a sexual object, made over by the perceiver” (1986a:108). The inscription of desire on Billy's figure can on the one hand be seen to take place on the character level within the text itself, where Billy is implicitly identified as the object of certain men's erotic interest (BB24f.). Billy himself, as Clifford Hindley has noted, “is basically unaware of the sexual interest that his presence arouses” (1989:370), and remains oblivious of the “ambiguous smile[s]” and the “peculiar” approval with which he is viewed by “one or two harder faces among the blue-jackets” as well as by “the more intelligent gentlemen of the quarter-deck” (BB25). The latter could, as Hindley (1989:364) and Sedgwick (1990:108f.) have suggested, be seen to include Captain Vere, who, “though in general not very demonstrative to his officers, [...] had congratulated Lieutenant Ratcliffe upon his good fortune in lighting on such a fine specimen of the *genus homo*, who in the nude might have passed for a statue of young Adam before the Fall” (BB78). On the other hand, the readers of Melville's text, too, are invited on numerous occasions to turn a similarly appreciative and/or desiring gaze on the figure of the beautiful young sailor as the narrator compares him to various works of art, and to the heroes of Greek mythology.

⁵²⁹ In its object-oriented functioning, Billy's aggression represents the obverse of Claggart's: provoked by the sight of the “handsome” Billy, but unable to express his commingled desire and aggression, Claggart vents his feelings by shouting orders (“Get those men aloft”, LIB21) or in physical violence (“he lashes savagely” at the boy who accidentally collides with him, LIB32).

A. A. Markley has drawn attention to a similar profusion, in Forster's work, of tableaux which present male objects to the (male) reader's desiring gaze. As examples, Markley cites the description of George Emerson among the violets at the end of Ch. 6 of *A Room with a View* (RV67f.), Lucy's contemplation of him in Ch. 2, which features a visual reference to Michelangelo's work in the Sistine Chapel (RV24), and the famous bathing scene in Ch. 12. Markley also adduces the description of Gino in Ch. 2 of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, with its suggestively sexual imagery of the spaghetti he is eating: "those delicious slippery worms [...] flying down his throat" (WA23), his enjoyment exposed to the desiring gaze of the admiring Philip Herriton; and the prolonged gaze which Maurice directs at the sleeping Dickie Barry in Ch. XXIX of *Maurice* (M124), a passage in which "the reader is invited to join Maurice as he gazes" (Markley 285).

Indeed, many of Forster's desirable 'light' characters could be said to tend towards the iconic, a tendency which is intensified by the persistent Othering observable in all Forsterian 'light' characters, and which can be seen to arise from a narrative strategy that aims to leave these characters more opaque than their 'dark' counterparts.⁵³⁰ While it is the 'light' characters who are "most looked at", as Judith Herz has observed with regard to George Emerson, it is also they who "remain[...] only lightly looked into" (Herz 2007:143). In certain important moments, these iconic characters can moreover take on a transcendent nimbus not dissimilar to that which surrounds Melville's young sailor. An example for this phenomenon could be found in the intensely visual description of Stephen Wonham's "transfigured face" as he sends the "rose of flame" floating down the night-time stream (LJ272).

Perhaps the most poignantly iconic figure in Forster's work is the lower-caste punkah-wallah in the courtroom in *A Passage to India*, glorified as god-like:

Almost naked, and splendidly formed, he sat on a raised platform near the back, in the middle of the central gangway [...], and he seemed to control the proceedings. He had the strength and beauty that sometimes come to flower in Indians of low birth. When that strange race nears the dust and is condemned as untouchable, then nature remembers the physical perfection that she accomplished elsewhere, and throws out a god – not many, but one here and there, to prove to society how little its categories impress her. [...] Pulling the rope towards him, relaxing it rhythmically, sending swirls of air over others, receiving none himself, he seemed apart from human destinies, a male Fate, a winnow of souls [...] he scarcely knew that he existed and did not understand why the court was fuller than usual, didn't even know he worked a fan, though he thought he pulled a rope. (PtI207)

⁵³⁰ See section II.2.2.3.

Once Adela Quested has withdrawn her charge and the trial is over,

before long no one remained on the scene of the fantasy but the beautiful naked god. Unaware that anything unusual had occurred, he continued to pull the cord of his punkah, to gaze at the empty dais and the overturned special chairs, and rhythmically to agitate the clouds of descending dust. (PtI219)

The punkah-wallah's radiant physical perfection makes him not dissimilar in principle to the iconic Handsome Sailor, himself another embodiment of "strength and beauty" (BB16; compare PtI207). Yet both as a member of the "untouchable" caste of the subaltern culture, and as a superelevated "beautiful naked god", he seems constructed to appear as essentially Other. His utter unconsciousness and inarticulacy surpass even those of Melville's innocent "fatalist" (BB22) Billy, whose ability to think and speak, even though his cognitions and communications are naïve, ensures him at least some degree of humanity. Forster's beautiful punkah-wallah, by contrast, is no fatalist but "Fate" personified. At the same time, he not only represents the ultimate "slate" (Martin 1986a:108) for the inscription of desire, but is furthermore placed entirely beyond anything like the Melvillean categories of good and evil: like the universe (and the much-invoked but unresponsive deity, see for instance PtI72 and 79), he will remain unaware of, and indifferent to, human concerns or desires forever, heedless of any appeal of "come", "untouchable" in every sense of the word.

The punkah-wallah may be an extreme example, the blankest and most unattainable "slate" in all of Forster's work, but the deification of beautiful males is a recurring element in many of his texts, where the aesthetic and conceptual elevation of the desirable Other arguably produces "homosexual icon[s]" (Martin 1986a:108) following a recognisable pattern. Thus, the gods of Classical Antiquity walk the earth in Forster's Italy: "The Italian boys", he writes in the earliest version of what was later to become *A Room with a View*, "are the cupbearers of the gods and the Italian youths are the gods themselves". They can be encountered "pester[ing] you with dead flowers & stale fruit & fresh antiquities as Ganymede", "shak[ing] you to a jelly in a cab & then grossly overcharg[ing] you as Apollo", or "misdirect[ing] you or dropp[ing] your trunks in the mud as Mercury". Even as "very fat and corporeal" old men, they "do not forget where they have been, but speak with phrase & gesture redolent of the higher air" (LN11f).⁵³¹ This last idea may be seen to resurface in *The Longest Journey*, where Ansell feels that Stephen Wonham "had been back somewhere – back to some table of the gods [...], and that he belonged for ever to the guests with whom he had eaten" (LJ213).

⁵³¹ In quoting from this passage I have tacitly omitted Forster's various cancellations and cited only his final choices.

Ch. 6 of *A Room with a View* shows that Forster retained his idea of the god-like Italian youths, but chose to represent it in a heterosexual scenario (in keeping, perhaps, with the novel's heterosexual surface plot):

It was Phaeton who drove them to Fiesole that memorable day, a youth all irresponsibility and fire, recklessly urging his master's horses up the stony hill. Neither the Ages of Faith nor the Age of Doubt had touched him; he was Phaeton in Tuscany driving a cab. And it was Persephone whom he asked leave to pick up on the way, saying that she was his sister – Persephone, tall and slender and pale, retuning with the spring to her mother's cottage, and still shading her eyes from the unaccustomed light. [...] [Finally] the goddess was allowed to mount beside the god. (RV58)

Given that Forster's own encodings of homoerotic desire, which show a tendency to turn desirable 'light' characters into icons, regularly operate on the basis of discourses about Greek culture, the discourses about Greek gods and heroes that surround the iconic figure of Melville's Handsome Sailor, and its imperfect derivative, the hapless Billy Budd, can be seen to fit a long-established Forsterian pattern of character conception.

In its general outline, the figure of Melville's Billy was congruent with the Forsterian 'light' character type from the very beginning. However, when it came to adapting – and appropriating – Melville's text for the operatic stage, Forster took the opportunity to make some changes to the character, specifically to "what he says" and to what "is said of him". These changes presumably aimed to reduce the danger of his appearing "an incredible stick" (BBC387), and they can be seen to enhance his attractiveness according to the Forsterian ideal of the robust, self-asserting and self-confident working-class lover and saviour.

Clifford Hindley (1989:375ff.) has traced the gradual strengthening, over the libretto's successive draft stages, of the relationship between Billy and Captain Vere (see section III.2.4.); a comparison of the novella and the libretto reveals that the operatic Billy is indeed more articulate and self-confident than his counterpart in Melville's text. Both Billy's declaration of his personal commitment and devotion to Vere during their first direct encounter in Act II, Sc. 2 and his final conversation with the Dansker in Act II, Sc. 3 testify to Billy's active and protective interest in the captain. As I have demonstrated in section II.3.6., these scenes, in which one male reassures another of his friendship and support while inviting him to trust him, or, respectively, expresses his desire to stand by him and "help" him (LIB60), reiterate a typically Forsterian pattern that appears throughout Forster's entire work in various depictions of friendship or love between two men.

As early as 1952, Andrew Porter drew the connection between the unseen events of the opera's closeted interview, "the relationship between Billy and Vere", and the Forsterian creed of "Salvation through personal relationships", complaining, however, of the overall "vagueness" and "imprecis[ion]" with which that creed is

realised in the opera as well as in Forster's other writings. In Porter's view, "Salvation through personal relationships [...] remains a mere form of words, not a convincing dramatic actuality" in the opera (112). Following the posthumous publication of Forster's homosexual writings twenty years later, critics were at last 'officially' enabled to construe the "vagueness" and "imprecis[ion]" which had so dissatisfied Porter as the side-effects of covert discourses about a very specific type of salutary personal relationship, and to recognise in Billy a Forsterian working-class saviour whose appeal is associated with the possibility of erotic love between men.

Thus, Philip Brett was one of the earliest critics of the opera to observe that "just as the crippled Rickie (in *The Longest Journey*) is saved by the boisterous Stephen Wonham, just as Maurice is saved by the love of that other gamekeeper of English fiction, Alec Scudder, so the intellectual Captain Vere is saved by the love of his handsome sailor Billy". Indeed, the dynamics of the 'dark'/ 'light' character constellation and the narrative patterns of Forster's own texts would seem to lend support to the idea, formulated not just by Brett, that "for Forster the apprehension of Billy's beauty and goodness by both Claggart and Vere includes sexual passion among other feelings" (1984:136). Given that Forster had already identified the figure of Billy as in some way shaped by his creator's "suppressed homo-sex:" in 1926 (CPB17), and that, as a "homosexual icon" (Martin 1986a:108), Billy can be seen to resemble certain of Forster's 'light' characters of the desirable Other type, this idea appears plausible enough.

Finally, as regards the "imprecise" notion of "Salvation through personal relationships" (A. Porter 112), there is some evidence that for Forster, this notion was palpable enough to provide strength and comfort in times of personal crisis. In the autumn of 1935, Forster had to have a prostate operation, from which he thought it quite likely that he might die (as his friend and mentor Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, in his seventies at the time, had died in 1932). According to Furbank's biography,

half an hour before leaving for the nursing-home, he wrote Bob Buckingham a tender letter, telling him he felt cheerful and calm but "having an open mind whether I shall get through or not. I don't feel afraid of anything, and it is your love that has made me like this." (II:210)

It could be speculated that the man who had written these words to his lifelong friend and effective partner might have had a personal and very specific experience to bring to his interpretation of Melville's Captain Vere dying with the name of Billy Budd on his lips (BB120).

II.5.3.6. “To make Billy, rather than Vere, the hero”: an exercise in communicative ambiguity

For E. M. Forster, Billy Budd the handsome sailor was, as critics so frequently point out, “the centre of the story” (Brett 1984:136). “Now I think of the play and before I think of anything else I think of Billy” (BBC1960:207), Forster declared in the opera-makers’ much-quoted 1960 BBC interview,⁵³² in which he also stated “I tend to think Billy the central figure” (BBC1960:198). In the same interview,⁵³³ Britten declared “I think that it was the quality of conflict in Vere’s mind [...] which attracted me to this particular subject” (BBC1960:207), and that he had felt that it was “Vere, who has what seems to me the main moral problem of the whole work, round whom the drama was going to centre” (BBC1960:197). This has led a number of critics to dwell at length on the subject of Forster’s and Britten’s differing and even conflicting perception both of Melville’s story and of the narrative they were aiming to produce in their adaptation.

That each of them did follow a distinctly personal artistic agenda would seem to stand beyond doubt, and it seems equally clear that what “disagreement” existed “between the composer and the librettist” fundamentally involved their respective ideas “about the main emotional and moral focus of the story” (Francis 59). However, critics who conclude from Forster’s insistence on “Billy’s primacy” (*Griffin* 5) that “Forster himself seems not to have recognised the new centrality of Vere in the operatic version” (Law 301) would seem to be overlooking Forster’s 1960 acknowledgement “that one certainly could argue that Vere was the main character” (BBC1960:207).

In fact, Forster was ready enough to differentiate between Billy, the “hero” (*Griffin* 4) whom he considered the story’s “central figure” (BBC1960:198), and Vere, who, as “the only character that is truly tragic” might well be considered its “main character” when contrasted with “the others” who “are doing their jobs, following their destinies” (BBC1960:207):

⁵³² Paul Kildea’s edition of the full transcript of the 1960 BBC interview was only published in 2003. Excerpts of the interview had previously been published in the Cambridge Opera Handbook. These excerpts differ from Kildea’s version – in one case significantly, as Forster is cited as declaring “I *don’t* think Billy the central figure” (Cooke 1993c:28), whereas Kildea has “I *tend to* think” (BBC1960:198; my emphases), which agrees with the recording of the interview. Cooke’s excerpts do, however, include Forster’s concession that Vere “is the only character who is truly tragic”, as well as his admission that “it’s very easy to place him at the centre of the opera” (28f.). Notwithstanding this fact, critics have focused on what looks to be Cooke’s error of transcription (or, possibly, a disagreement of source texts), and have persisted in reading these excerpts as evidence of “Forster’s overwhelming interest in Billy”, which stood in conflict with Britten’s view of “Vere as a central character” (Morra 2002:18f.). Morra (2007:107) has been led to speculate even further on Forster’s apparently contradictory view of Billy, as suggested by the wording of Cooke’s excerpt.

⁵³³ The BBC interview is something of a curiosity in that it was not recorded as the three-way conversation it purports to be; for details see section III.2.1.

I quite see the position of Vere as – it's very easy to place him in the centre of the opera, because he has much more apprehension than poor Billy, who's often muddling about in an instinctive way. Vere responds much more to what's going on. He really understands it. When he gets the facts, he understands everything, and Billy is always a little bewildered. (BBC1960:198)

Forster's comments suggest that he was well aware of the operatic Vere's central *structural* position as the character who, because "he understands everything", is mainly responsible for explicating the narrative to the audience. Forster was evidently willing to acknowledge his importance on that level – a level which he considered, however, "one of those discussion subjects [...] which never interest me that much" (BBC1960:207).

Contrasting the evidence of Forster's 1951 *Griffin* "Letter", in which he named Billy as the "hero" of the story, with Britten's 1960 statement about Vere's centrality (cited above), Claire Seymour writes that "one of the fundamental disparities between Britten's and Forster's readings of Melville appears to have centred on the identification of the 'hero' of the novella" (134). Seymour and others who have engaged with this particular disparity⁵³⁴ mostly appear to equate the term "hero" unquestioningly with the story's structural protagonist, its "main" or "central" character. In the sense that – due to his appearance in the Prologue and Epilogue – he would seem to appear as the opera's central experiencing character, and perhaps even its narrator, Vere could certainly be described as the story's "hero". Such a view would correspond with June Levine's rendering of the typical Forsterian character constellation as "tame [...] hero" and "savage" Other (72). As Mary Francis has very perceptively pointed out, however, "the conflict over whether Vere or Billy is properly the main character in the opera" is immediately connected with the question of "which of them deserves to earn the listener's sympathy" (60).

On his own evidence, Forster's view of Billy as the story's "central figure" (BBC1960:198) would indeed seem to stand revealed as a personal preference or "interest" (Allen 45), as a matter of "sympathy" (Francis 60). Given that Melville's Billy, like many of Forster's own characters "for whom I care" (CPB204), can be seen to fit into the Forsterian desirable 'light' character category, Forster's favouring of him is hardly surprising. At the same time, Forster's 'formal' argument in favour of "Billy's primacy" (*Griffin* 5) cannot be dismissed as invalid, particularly since it can be seen to be supported by the example of Sophocles' *Antigone*, a text which Forster invoked as a parallel to *Billy Budd* in the same article.⁵³⁵ In Forster's view, "Melville [...] called the story Billy Budd [*sic*], and unless there is strong evidence to the contrary one may assume that an author calls his story after the

⁵³⁴ See, for instance, Morra 2007:112.

⁵³⁵ See discussion in section II.5.1.5. below.

chief character”.⁵³⁶ Forster’s statement that the adaptors had endeavoured “to make Billy, rather than Vere, the hero” (*Griffin* 4) would seem to suggest that he was perfectly aware that Vere was indeed a strong contender for the position of “chief character” in Melville’s text.⁵³⁷ The very fact that Forster takes the time to criticise “Melville’s wavering attitude towards” Vere, which led the “muddled” author at times to “douse[...] Billy’s light” in order to let the “well-educated and just” commander “shine like a star” (*Griffin* 5), may be felt to support this thesis. Indeed, in terms of writing and re-writing, the painstaking effort which Forster devoted to the project of “rescuing [...] Vere from his creator” (EMFL II:237) far exceeds the amount of work he did on the figure of Billy, a fact which also suggests that Forster recognised the key importance of Vere for the narrative as a whole.

Beyond these considerations, however, it is possible to speculate that Forster’s use of the word “hero” here may well point to a concept which is not equivalent to the structural concept of “chief character”, but has much to do with Forster’s concept of the heroic. Admittedly, Forster’s reference to Henry James’s *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) in this context might at first sight be felt to challenge this proposition to some extent, for the title character of James’s novel does not occupy the same structural position as the title character of Melville’s novella. James’s novel follows the progress of the classless orphan Hyacinth Robinson, who is the story’s main protagonist but, through his innocent credulity and his

⁵³⁶ It ought perhaps to be remarked that Forster did not always follow his own guideline; a case in point is his short story “Dr Woolacott”, which might however be regarded as containing “evidence to the contrary” of a sufficiently strong type, in that Woolacott is clearly the story’s chief villain character (see section II.5.2.2., p.376f.).

⁵³⁷ Forster’s insistence on Billy as the story’s central character may at least in part be a reaction to the view emerging among critics at this time of Vere as the central character. We know, for instance, from a letter he wrote to Lionel Trilling on 16 April 1949, that he had reread and “disagree[d], and no doubt was meant to disagree” (EMFL II:237) with the interpretation of *Billy Budd* given by a character in Trilling’s 1948 novel, *The Middle of the Journey*. Some days later, he wrote to Eric Crozier: “There is a most interesting passage about Billy in Trilling’s novel *The Middle of the Journey* – towards the end of Ch. VI. Though, since the author puts the criticism in the mouth of a character of whom he himself is critical, one gets a little confused!” (22 April 1949, KCC: EMF/18/135). In Trilling’s book, the novella is treated as a political parable, but “on a higher level than we are used to taking our political parables” (MJ173); Billy is identified with Spirit, Claggart with Evil, and Vere with Law. Accordingly, the story is “the tragedy of Spirit in the world of Necessity. And more, it is the tragedy of Law in the world of Necessity, the tragedy that Law faces whenever it confronts its child, Spirit. [...] Spirit blesses Law, even when Law has put the noose around his neck, for Spirit understands the true kinship [i.e., the father-son relationship between the Law and itself]. As long as Evil exists in the world, Law must exist, and it – not Spirit – must have the rule. And Vere’s is the suffering, his is the tragic choice of God the Father, who must condemn his own son to death [...] for the sake of the Son himself, for the sake of Spirit in humanity. For Billy Budd is not only Christ, he is Christ in Adam, and is therefore imperfect, subject to excess” (MJ173ff.). It is highly probable that Forster’s *Griffin* “Letter”, in which he writes about William Plomer’s view of Melville that “it avoids such equations as ‘Vere=Law’” (*Griffin* 6), contains a challenge of the view of Captain Vere expressed in Trilling’s novel; Trilling, it ought to be remembered, was one of the editors of the *Griffin*.

lack of insight into the designs and doings of the people who surround him, also figures as its principal Jamesian ‘victim’ character; in this respect, it is he who ought to be regarded as occupying a parallel position to the hapless Billy Budd. The Princess, by contrast, is merely one among a number of supporting characters, all of them arguably of equal importance in their fatal influences, who can be seen to accompany Hyacinth’s progressive entanglement in a web of external (i.e. social and interpersonal) and internal (i.e. psychological) constraints and failures that eventually lead him to commit suicide. Moreover, insofar as the Princess holds a position of superior empowerment – social and financial – to Hyacinth and to his friends whom it pleases her to patronise, her structural position can be seen most closely to approximate that of Vere. Heroic in the Forsterian sense (see discussion below) the Princess certainly is not. And yet it is possible to read Forster’s reasoning in the *Griffin* as an entwining of two different argumentative strands.

Forster starts out by declaring that the collaborators’ aim had been “to make Billy, rather than Vere, the hero”. Claiming that this “must have” corresponded to Melville’s view of the story, he then advances the point about the story’s title: “unless there is strong evidence to the contrary one may assume that an author calls his story after the chief character” (*Griffin* 4). As an example, he cites *The Princess Casamassima*, “another disputable case”. But he then turns to criticising, not the fact or proportion of Vere’s prominence, but the details of what the character is made to say and do in his “unseemly harangue” by his “muddled” creator, “deflected” as he is by “his respect for authority and discipline” (*Griffin* 5). It is here, I should like to propose, that a difference of meaning for “hero” and “chief character” becomes discernible, and Forster’s example of *The Princess Casamassima* is revealed as part of a “chief character” argument which is not entirely congruent with Forster’s “hero”-making agenda.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁸ In this context, it is interesting to note that in 1926, Forster had compared Billy Budd to Alyosha from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, whose position as the novel’s “hero” (BK361) could be seen to represent a “disputable case” of a kind more closely connected with Forster’s ideas about “hero” figures. Alyosha’s creator in fact anticipated such a dispute in a foreword “From the Author”, in which he defends his view of Alyosha as the novel’s “hero”. However, in 1926 Forster could not have known this, since the foreword does not appear in either the 1912 or 1920 Heinemann editions of Constance Garnett’s translation of Dostoevsky’s novels (among the books owned by Forster at the time of his death were five unidentified volumes from what seems to have been the Heinemann series; see list of Forster’s books catalogued in KCC: EMF 31/1). The 1927 Everyman’s Library edition published by Dent does not contain the foreword either; it seems to have first appeared in 1933 in a revised edition produced by Avrahm Yarmolinsky (New York: Limited Editions Club). Besides being the central figure in some strikingly Forsterian scenes (see note 520 above), Alyosha is explicitly referred to by the narrator as “my hero” at a moment at which his “heart [is] bleeding” for his late “beloved elder”, “the man he loved above everything on earth” who is posthumously “put to shame and humiliated”. The narrator’s opinions regarding the behaviour of his “hero” also appear distinctly Forsterian: “I am glad that my hero showed himself not too reasonable at that moment, for any man of sense will always come back to reason in time, but, if love does not gain the upper hand in a boy’s heart at such an exceptional moment, when will it?” (BK360f).

For what Forster is objecting to, beside the “unseemly harangue”, appears to be the fact that Vere is made to “shine like a star” at the cost of “Billy’s light” being “doused”; in other words, the fact that, “particularly in the trial scene”, Melville is attempting to engage the reader’s sympathy, appreciation and admiration in the captain’s favour. Forster’s objections would thus appear to be made on a twofold basis: not only can Vere’s ‘odious’ behaviour hardly be classified as heroic according to Forster’s own narrative codes, but following the Forsterian salvation paradigm and the ‘dark’/‘light’ character pattern, Vere would seem to be in no position to appear as the story’s “hero” in the first place. Rather, it is the ‘light’ saviour character who is capable of “giv[ing] us life” (*Griffin* 6) to whom the position of “hero” is due; it is he who “must shine like a star”, even if his “light” occasionally does get “doused” (*Griffin* 5) – as Stephen Wonham’s coarseness and occasional sullen moods might be felt to cast a shadow on his brilliance. It is not for the ‘dark’ character to “shine like a star”, even though he may, like Rickie Elliot accepting his illegitimate half-brother (LJ250f.), partake of his brilliance as he experiences moments of epiphany brought about by successful acts of connection; it is particularly not for him to dispense the strength and comfort of “the something healing in the closeted interview”, by which “Billy’s agony” is eased (BB106). For the Forsterian ‘dark’ character is essentially deficient where “the bonfire of the heart” is concerned; it is because of this that he stands in need of salvation from the ‘light’ Other. If Forster declares that he and Eric Crozier had “plumped for Billy as hero [...] and we have ventured to tidy up Vere” (*Griffin* 6), this statement can be seen to imply far more than a vindication of the story’s title figure as the opera’s “chief character”: it rather suggests a systematic alignment or even re-assignment, a “tidy[ing] up”, of character functions which are made to correspond to the archetypal pattern of the Forsterian salvation narrative.⁵³⁹

Even though there exists in Forster’s work a strong tendency towards questioning and subverting traditional and conventional discourses about heroes and the heroic,⁵⁴⁰ often by means of the mock-heroic mode, there also exists another, distinctive and ‘serious’ concept of the heroic within the context of the creed of personal relationships. There are plenty of examples for the mock-heroic mode to be found in Forster’s work, but there is a conversation between Agnes and Mrs Failing in *The Longest Journey* which contains an almost programmatic juxtaposition of the ‘ironic’ and the ‘serious’ view of heroism. When Rickie and his fiancée come to visit at Cadover, Mrs Failing presents Stephen to Agnes as “a hero”. According

⁵³⁹ Eric Crozier’s comments might be seen to confirm this thesis of the reassigning of character functions: in 1979 he told Stephen Wadsworth that “we spent a lot of time ‘rescuing Vere from Melville’, as Forster said, *softening Melville’s emphasis on his tormented captain and making Billy the hero*” (in Wadsworth 14, my emphasis).

⁵⁴⁰ In “What I Believe”, Forster made it quite clear that he felt that “Hero-worship is a dangerous vice” and that he “distrust[ed] Great Men”, to whom he attributed “an iron will, personal magnetism, dash, flair, sexlessness”; equipped with these, “they produce a desert of uniformity around them and often a pool of blood too” (TCD69f.).

to her, “the life-work of a hero” is “to snub people! to set them down! to be rude to them! to make them feel small!”; his “chief characteristics” are an “infinite disregard for the feelings of others, plus general inability to understand them”, while at the same time, for all his showy, noisy bullying, “a hero is always wrong”. When Agnes insists “rather gently” that to her, “a hero has always been a strong wonderful being, who champions –”, Mrs Failing interrupts her, suggesting that she consider the matter from the perspective of “the dragon [...] that wants nothing but a peaceful cave. Then in comes the strong, wonderful, delightful being, and gains a princess by piercing [the dragon’s] hide” (LJ102f).⁵⁴¹ Since Mrs Failing is at this moment either speaking ironically, or is herself being presented as the object of narrative irony, and since Agnes (who is not, on the whole, a character whose ideas can be trusted, for all that her “gentl[eness]” seems at this moment intended to engage the reader’s sympathy) is interrupted in her counter-argument, the question of what a ‘true’ hero might be remains open at this point. Answers can, however, be found in other Forster texts.

Thus, in *Howards End*, Helen Schlegel, who disapproves of Margaret’s future husband Henry Wilcox, nevertheless tells her sister that she believes in her power to “attempt” a “difficult relation[...]” and to change it for the better:

“Go on and marry him. I think you’re splendid; and if anyone can pull it off you will [...] you’re a heroine.”

“Oh, Helen! Am I? Will it be as dreadful for poor Henry as all that?”

“You mean to keep proportion, and that’s heroic, it’s Greek, and I don’t see why it shouldn’t succeed with you. Go on and fight with him and help him.” (HE191)

Helen’s premonition that Margaret will have to “fight” Henry in order to “help him” is subsequently proved accurate, but so, it would appear, is her assessment of her sister as a “heroine” of personal relationships and connection. At the novel’s close, Helen sums up Margaret’s achievement: it is “through [her]” that “the racket and torture” of the scandal of Helen’s illegitimate pregnancy and of Leonard Bast’s death and Charles Wilcox’s imprisonment has been “change[d]” to happiness. If Helen and Henry have “learned to understand one another and to forgive”, this is entirely due to Margaret “who settled us down”: as Helen expresses it,

⁵⁴¹ Given the pervasive Wagnerian discourse in *The Longest Journey* (on this subject see Herz 1997), Mrs Failing’s reservations against ill-mannered dragon-slaying heroes might be felt to hark back to the end of Forster’s lecture on “Pessimism in Literature” of 1906, in which he took issue with the opening scene of Wagner’s opera *Siegfried*, judging that “the youthful Siegfried on the stage is intolerable. [...] He is a bounder in a [...] fatal sense – neither a hero nor a school boy, but a cad”. He just “will not do”: “we cannot believe in Siegfried as a hero”; he “remains to the end an upstart boy, who marries a woman ten times better than himself” (AE143f).

“I wanted you; he wanted you; and everyone said it was impossible, but you knew. Just think of our lives without you [...]. But you picked up the pieces, and made us a home. Can’t it strike you – even for a moment – that your life has been heroic? Can’t you remember the two months after Charles’s arrest, when you began to act, and did all?”

“You were both ill at the time,” said Margaret. “I did the obvious things. I had two invalids to nurse. Here was a house, ready-furnished and empty. It was obvious. I didn’t know myself it would turn into a permanent home. No doubt I have done a little towards straightening the tangle, but things that I can’t phrase have helped me.” (HE336f.)

To achieve, often against heavy odds of personal antipathy coupled with breaches of social decorum, stable resolutions of peaceful domesticity and interpersonal reconciliation: it is this which is revealed as “heroic” in the ‘serious’ Forsterian sense. To be “heroic”, it is indicated in *Maurice*, is, in effect, to “carry[...] away death”, like the “heroic” steamer which leaves for Argentina without Alec. Maurice has “brought out the man in Alec” (M207), who has found the courage to forego his passage and his “definite job” (M202) in Argentina to stay in England and “fight” for their relationship even though “all the world’s against us” (M199) – odds even heavier than those which Margaret has to contend against. Again, Alec’s commitment to their relationship falls into the category of the “heroic”; in *Maurice*, it arguably does “take[...] two to make a hero” (CPB55), for “now it was Alec’s turn to bring out the hero in [Maurice]” (M207).⁵⁴² In *Maurice*, the ‘serious’ Forsterian hero appears as someone who is prepared to renounce society in its entirety for the sake of a personal relationship: the successful connection with the man he loves is life-giving – “carrying away death” – for both of them.⁵⁴³

This ‘doubled’ heroism of what Robert Martin has identified as the Forsterian “idealised male couple that could operate against the boundaries of class and nation” (1997:256) can be seen to surface also in Rickie’s idealisation of the classless Stephen as a strong and self-reliant “hero”, capable both of standing up to the normative pressures of society and of inspiring a salutary love in his fellow men:

Against [...] the Wilbrahams and Pembrokes who try to rule our world Stephen would fight till he died. Stephen was a hero. He was a law to himself, and rightly. He was great enough to despise our small moralities. He was attaining love. This evening Rickie caught Ansell’s enthusiasm, and felt it worth while to sacrifice everything for such a man. (LJ279)

⁵⁴² But see my discussion of “the alternate performance of good turns” in section II.2.2.3.

⁵⁴³ The men’s sacrifice of their social identity could in fact be read as a less terminal version of the sacrificial deaths which figure at the resolution of a number of Forster’s other homoerotic writings, such as “The Life To Come”, “Dr Woolacott” and “The Other Boat”. This salutary ‘death of identity’ could moreover be read as a parallel to Billy’s death at the end of the opera, which is preceded by a shared vision of a place where “the sail of love” (Forster’s “Librettist’s Note”, BPL A61:50) will “anchor forever” (LIB61 and 63).

II.5.3.7. “The strength of Antigone”: acceptance, fortitude and forgiveness

That the strength and self-reliance which characterise the robust Forsterian saviour-hero were central to Forster’s view of Billy Budd is suggested by a letter to his friend Bob Buckingham, written on 7 February 1952, three months after the opera’s premiere in December 1951:

Do you remember the passage in Act IV after the Darbies where [Billy] ends “I’m strong, and I’ll stay strong and that’s all and that’s enough?” It’s immensely important to the opera and to my view of things, and, I think, to Melville’s... (quoted from Hindley 1989:379).

The fact that Forster regards Billy’s confident strength as “immensely important to the opera” can be seen to support my reflections on the parallels between the ‘light’ saviour-heroes Stephen Wonham and Billy Budd, who each impart a transcendent, hope-inspiring vision of a vessel of love to their respective ‘dark’ partners, Rickie Elliot and Captain Vere, and who are confidently able to convey their vision of a love that will “burn for ever” (LJ273) to the ‘dark’ characters, whose range of vision remains limited and clouded with doubt and uncertainty.

In an essay on his literary influences written in 1944,⁵⁴⁴ Forster declares of Sophocles’ *Antigone* that “of all the great tragic utterances that comes closest to my heart, that is my central faith”,⁵⁴⁵ and he concludes his essay by stating his preference for “the strength of Antigone” over “the strength of Carlyle’s dictator heroes, who foreshadow Hitler” (TCD215).⁵⁴⁶ This brings us back once more to Forster’s *Griffin* article, in which he explicitly links the figure of his “hero” with the title character of Sophocles’ play: “The hero hangs dead from the yard arm [...], dead as Antigone, and he has given us life” (*Griffin* 6).

As I have already indicated above, the play can be regarded as analogous to Melville’s novella insofar as both texts are named after the figure which Forster would consider not just the story’s “chief character” but also its “hero” (*Griffin* 4 and 6). As he “hangs dead from the yard arm”, Billy is likened to the heroine of Classical Antiquity whose death, too, Forster would seem to consider capable of “giv[ing] us life”. However, *Antigone*, too, features another character who, as Forster conceded with regard to Vere in 1960, “one certainly could argue [...] was the main character” (BBC1960:207). Granted, King Creon does not experience

⁵⁴⁴ “A Book that Influenced Me” (TCD212-215), which focuses mainly on Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon*.

⁵⁴⁵ Forster had acquired R. C. Jebb’s 1888 Cambridge edition of Sophocles’ plays while he was a student at King’s, using the college prize money he was awarded for Latin Composition and Declamations in December 1898 (Stape 6). Sophocles was among the authors he read, or re-read, in 1899 (Furbank I:70); two years earlier, in his first year at King’s, he had admitted to Oscar Browning that he did not like Sophocles, which Browning had told him was “a great mistake” (Furbank I:54). Forster’s opinion of Sophocles evidently improved, at least with regard to *Antigone*.

⁵⁴⁶ Forster is referring to Carlyle’s *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841). For Forster’s thoughts on “Hero-worship”, see note 540.

feelings of guilt and agony as he consigns his prospective daughter-in-law to death – it is Teiresias' prophecy of doom that leads him belatedly to reconsider his verdict. And yet it is Creon who, in theory at least, “has a choice of action” (as Crozier remarked about Vere), but decides “to stick by a code”; it is only after the catastrophic consequences that he realises with a vengeance “that he was wrong to do so, or feels that in the final resort he must have been wrong to do so” (Crozier in BBC1960:207).⁵⁴⁷

From a Forsterian perspective, Antigone ought probably be seen to sacrifice her life not so much for the sake of fulfilling the formal demands of religious custom, but rather for principles and ideals that are fundamentally human, and that take the very concrete shape of placing her loyalty and devotion to her dead brother – i.e. personal relationships – above the loyalty to the state which Creon demands. As I have noted in section II.5.1.5., Forster's famous dictum “if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country” (“What I Believe”, TCD66) appears to be a response to the creed expressed by Creon in *Antigone*. It is in the eponymous heroine's refusal to betray her personal relationship, and in her calm determination to “d[o] the obvious things” (HE336f.), that “the strength of Antigone” (TCD215) is to be found: to give the beloved dead their due, to uphold “personal relations” as a lodestar in the midst of the “outer life” of Creon's messengers and anger (HE170), is “to keep proportion” like Margaret – “and that's heroic, it's Greek” (HE191). This is not to say, of course, that Forster thought of Billy *as* Antigone; in Billy's case, his heroic strength and fortitude would appear to consist in his bestowing on Vere his forgiveness and a vision of salutary love through human connection, even while he accepts that he must die because Vere “cannot” be “ask[ed]” (LIB57) to try to contravene the codes of naval law on his behalf – a sacrifice which, Forster appears to feel, is as uplifting and life-giving as Antigone's.

It should be noted that Forster is writing for the *Griffin* at a late stage in the opera's genesis. His “Letter”, dated “September 1951”, postdates Forster's and Britten's correspondence about the opera's ending, in which Forster famously declared that “Billy's last cry [...] was compassion, comprehension, love”, and observed “who but Billy, at such a moment, could bless?” (letter of 8 August; quoted in Reed 1993a:67).⁵⁴⁸ Regardless of which of the collaborators had contributed each of its actual details, the Forsterian pattern was now completed and in place: in the process of “tidy[ing] up”, Vere had become a Forsterian ‘dark’ character who is saved by the connection with the strong and magnanimous ‘light’ “hero” Billy Budd. The operatic Vere is clearly identified as a character who stands exclusively in need of salvation. Unlike Rickie, who loses his life, or Maurice, who gives up his place in society, he offers no sacrifice to his connection with Billy; he approaches him as a supplicant, tendering only his remorse. Billy's sacri-

⁵⁴⁷ For a discussion of the parallels between Vere and Creon, see section II.5.1.5.

⁵⁴⁸ For further discussion of Forster's letter, see section III.2.3.4.

face, on the other hand, is 'truly' heroic in the Forsterian sense: his strength, like Antigone's and Margaret's, enables him to "d[o] the obvious things" (HE336f.), namely, "to face what must be" (LIB60), while at the same time he bequeaths the salvation of "the love that passes understanding" (LIB63) to his fellow man.

II.6. Mutiny and homosexuality in *Billy Budd*: queer reading(s)

II.6.1. Introductory: “Naval report U. S. A.”

Among Forster’s papers kept at King’s College, Cambridge, there is a typescript document, headed, in Forster’s hand, “Naval report U. S. A.”, and tentatively dated by the archivists to the 1930s. These typed pages contain a summary of a 1921 Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs of the United States Senate, relating to “Alleged Immoral Conditions and practices a[t] the Naval Training Station, Newport, R. I.”⁵⁴⁹

The report deals with the year 1919 [...], when 15-20000 boys and young men were being trained for the Navy at Newport. In Feb[ruary] there arrived one Ervin Arnold, a man of no education, but pertinacious and ambitious; by rank Chief Machinist’s Mate; 15 years Naval Service, and 9 years previous as a State Detective; age 44. He claimed to detect perverts at sight, and while in hospital for rheumatism after his arrival, he noted many cases among the enlisted person[n]el. He reported these to Lt E. M. Hudson, Medical Corps, U. S. A., attached to the Hospital, and after he came out

⁵⁴⁹ This Report itself is reprinted in Katz, Jonathan, ed.: “Government Versus Homosexuals” (New York: Arno Press, 1975:1-37).

they discussed with others methods of combatting vice. Hudson reported to the Chief Secretary of the Navy Daniels and Asst. Sec. Franklin Roosevelt, and (May-June) a special investigating Squad is sanctioned [...]. The Squad consisted of 39 young men under Hudson and Arnold, 10 of them between 16-19, none of them over 32. Their duties were to tempt suspected perverts for the sake of obtaining evidence; they were not to make advances, but if advances were made to them, they were to use their discretion as to how far things should go, and to allow “completed acts” if they thought fit (in the subsequent enquiry, 1 operator admitted 4 completed acts, 3 others 3 each, several others 1 and 2 each). The Squad was recruited voluntarily, but Arnold stated that no one whom he asked to join refused [*sic*], the duties in question being exhibited in a patriotic light. Hudson obtained legal immunity for them before the organisation was completed. Numerous civilians and others were arrested in consequence, and 18 were kept in prison for 4-6 months without being charged or (in some cases) guessing the nature of the charge. (KCC: EMF 16/4/6)⁵⁵⁰

When Forster set out to engage with Melville’s *Billy Budd* as Britten’s librettist in the late 1940s, he may have remembered the curious and highly pertinent document he had obtained in the 1930s as related to the work he was about to undertake. A “pertinacious and ambitious” man of uncertain provenance; an ex-State Detective – connected to the police force – who works his way into the favours of the naval authorities by offering to identify and entrap so-called ‘perverts’ (who are commonly assumed to pose a potential threat to the security and morality of the naval recruits); a man who is, for whatever reasons, interested in imagining scenarios and traps that create the very situations he is officially seeking to eradicate; a man, finally, who deploys his youthful subordinates as decoys to entrap the targets whom he, presumably, despises – this figure can be seen to display some striking parallels to John Claggart, the *Indomitable’s* master-at-arms and “chief of police” (BB41). For Claggart displays an “ingratiating deference to his superiors”, owes his position to “a peculiar ferreting genius”, and employs his “compliant” subordinates to work the “converging wires of underground influence [...] to the mysterious discomfort, if nothing worse, of any of the sea-commonality” (BB45) – down to and including, in the opera, the deployment of the Novice to tempt and thus entrap Billy Budd, the beautiful young sailor who evokes the most destabilising feelings of desire and hatred in Claggart himself.

The parallels between the methods of policing by entrapment employed by Ervin Arnold and by Claggart can be seen to highlight not only the parallels but

⁵⁵⁰ Public indignation was to arise over the case of a local clergyman, one of the “numerous civilians” who fell victim to the Squad’s activities; protests were made to Roosevelt, leading to the Senate’s appointing a Committee of Enquiry, which “severely censur[e]d the method employed”, as well as Daniels, Roosevelt and Hudson, and “recommen[d] that Arnold be struck off the roster of the Navy” (KCC: EMF 16/4/6).

also the slippage between the activities they seek to police. In this chapter I shall be presenting a reading which explores the interpretive possibilities opened by a slippage between discourses about mutiny and homosexuality in the opera *Billy Budd*.

II.6.2. “Aught amiss”:

discourses about mutiny and homosexuality in Melville’s novella

In their respective writings about Melville’s *Billy Budd*, both Robert Martin and Eve Sedgwick have drawn attention to what Sedgwick has identified as “the ineradicable double entendre in this book between the mutiny question and the homosexuality question” (1990:103). Both mutiny and homosexuality are surrounded by a nimbus of communicative prohibition and structures of initiate knowledge:

The [...] evocations of mutiny in the novella suggest that the difficulty of learning about it is like the difficulty of learning about such scandalous secrets as proscribed sexuality. Both are euphemised as “aught amiss” [BB30, BB104]. As with that other “deadly space between” [BB54], the terms in which mutiny can be described must be confined to references that evoke recognizant knowledge in those who already possess it without igniting it in those who may not [...]. Specifically, in Captain Vere’s exposition and orders around the disciplining of Billy Budd, “the word *mutiny* was not named” [BB103]. (101)

The implications of this *double entendre* for a reading of the text as a discourse about power politics can be further elucidated by an earlier observation of Sedgwick’s, namely, “that even motifs that might ex post facto look like homosexual thematics (the Unspeakable, the anal), even when presented in a context of intensities between men, nevertheless have as their *first* referent the psychology and sociology of prohibition and control” (1985:116). Given the slippage, perceivable in Melville’s *Billy Budd*, between discourses about prohibited forms of personal and political self-expression – male/male sexual relations and mutiny – it is easy to arrive at a reading of Melville’s novella as foregrounding the position and function of male/male desire, not just in the power hierarchies of all-male institutions, but in Western culture as a whole: “Is men’s desire for other men the great preservative of the masculinist hierarchies of Western culture, or is it among the most potent of the threats against them? *Billy Budd* seems to pose the question frontally” (Sedgwick 1990:93).

In Martin’s readings of *Billy Budd*, this question tends to be answered in the latter direction. In Martin’s view, the story “enacts the destruction of the beautiful young man by a system of power that cannot allow for the subversion of the erotic” (1998:197); moreover, compared to Melville’s earlier texts, this late work exhibits a pessimistic view of the oppressive power system as the stronger and prevailing force:

the state, in its benign form of justice (Vere) or its malign form of police power (Claggart), could only perceive love as a threatening force that would ultimately lead to mutiny. Power depends, in *Billy Budd*, on the suppression of eros. Male friendship, once a potent force to counteract the arbitrary authority of the Captain, has now gone underground. Sexuality now exists in the sly innuendo rather than in the bold affirmation of *Moby-Dick*. (1986a:124)

While there exists no documented evidence to suggest that Forster, Britten and Crozier ever arrived at a comparably pointed reading of Melville's text, it nevertheless seems possible that they entertained similar thoughts, and that, more specifically, they perceived a link between the discourses about mutiny and homosexuality. More importantly, however, the textual and musical structures of the finished opera allow readings which can be seen to approximate those advanced by Martin and Sedgwick three decades later quite closely, in spite of the changes which the collaborators made to the character of Captain Vere in their attempt at 'rescuing' him from Melville.

II.6.3. "Death is the penalty":

mutiny and homosexuality in naval law and Imperialist ideology

Forster's and Crozier's extensive historical research into late eighteenth century naval life, and into the Spithead and Nore mutinies in particular, will in all likelihood have acquainted them with naval law and the Articles of War, at least in a general way, at a very early stage of their librettistic work, even though the writing of the "Articles of War" speech at Billy's execution was left until very late in the day.⁵⁵¹ That Forster paid detailed attention to the legal aspects of the story of Billy Budd from the start is indicated by the fact that he marked the lines containing the reference to Billy's act of violence against Claggart, "the blow itself", being, "according to the Articles of War, a capital crime" (BB97) in his copy of *Billy Budd* in March 1949.

According to the Articles of War which became effective in 1749,⁵⁵² some offences – desertion, for instance – were punishable by "Death, or such other Punishment as the Circumstances of the Offence shall deserve, and a Court-martial shall judge fit" (article XVI, Rodger 25). In the case of certain other offences, however, capital punishment was the only option; these included murder (article XXVIII), striking a superior officer (article XXII), "mak[ing] or endeavour[ing] to make muti-

⁵⁵¹ The writing of "the 'articles of war' speech", for which a blank space had been left in the typed libretto Draft of August 1949, was on Forster's agenda when he came to work with Britten at Aldeburgh in December 1949 (letter from Forster to Crozier of 1 December 1949, BBLL559, n.2), but it seems they encountered technical difficulties at this point (see section III.2.2.). The speech did not reach its final form until September 1951 (see letter from Britten to Erwin Stein of 9 September, BBLL677).

⁵⁵² The relevant sections of the 1749 Articles of War remained essentially unchanged until substantial revisions were introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century (Rodger 10f.).

nous Assemblies” (article XIX), and “the unnatural and detestable Sin of Buggery or Sodomy with Man or Beast” (article XXIX; see Rodger 26f.). When Forster studied the Articles of War, it will not have escaped his attention that “Buggery or Sodomy” carried the same penalty as physical insubordination, mutiny, and murder – all of these three being offences closely scrutinised in Melville’s story.

In their historical note on the treatment of homosexual acts in the Navy, Baker and Stanley have stressed that “buggery was seen to be as serious as desertion, mutiny and murder in the navy”,⁵⁵³ and that well into the later part of the twentieth century, “one of the main stated objections to having gay men in the armed forces was that they were open to blackmail and could thereby weaken a nation’s strength” (Baker/St Stanley 29) – ironically, of course, this potential security threat was itself merely the result of the laws which made homosexuality a criminal offence in the first place. As a further objection to having homosexuals in the Army and Navy, Jeffrey Weeks has cited the concern (familiar also as an argument against allowing women to enter the armed forces) about the effect that cross-rank sexual relationships might have on military discipline: “the armed services [...] believed themselves to have special problems of order and discipline: sexual contact among men, and especially across ranks, threatened to tear asunder the carefully maintained hierarchy” (13).

The perception of homosexuality as a threat to the nation had reached a high point in the late nineteenth-century moral purity campaigns, in which sodomy and masturbation were cast as “threat[s]” to “self and nation” and to civilisation itself.⁵⁵⁴ In a historical context of High Imperialism, these discourses about sexual deviance as a cause of “dire personal and imperial decay” (Weeks 17) can be seen to point to underlying cultural anxieties about power structures, the uniformity of cultural identity, and the preservation of control. Seen in this light, the policing of subversive desire in the individual is revealed as an important mechanism within the larger system of political and ideological operations, in which “homophobic blackmailability” functions as an instrument of control (Sedgwick 1985:90). Born in 1879, Forster was not only old enough to have been raised during the high period of these moral purity campaigns, he was also to grow up subject to the legacy of that period, which included the Labouchère Amendment of 1885 (popularly known as the “Blackmailers’ Charter”, see Weeks 22), under which all male homosexual acts were made illegal, as well as the Vagrancy Act of 1898 and the 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Act, under which any form of importuning for immoral purposes – which would have included the preliminaries of establishing contact with a potential sexual partner – was criminalised.

⁵⁵³ See also Weeks 13.

⁵⁵⁴ In the early summer of 1951, while the work on *Billy Budd* was nearing completion, the Burgess-Maclean scandal was to re-establish the link between homosexuality, subversion, and the threat to the nation in the public consciousness; the homosexual Burgess, a Trinity man, was an Apostle, a member of the secret Cambridge debating society which Forster also belonged to.

II.6.4. Subverting “civilisation as we have made it”:

Forster and queer desire

Forster was to address the very pressing topic of homosexual men’s vulnerability to blackmail when he wrote *Maurice* in 1913.⁵⁵⁵ In the same text, however, he was also to represent a vision of a class-bridging homosexuality as a potentially disruptive political force. For if *Maurice* is an appeal for sexual tolerance, it is at the same time an attack upon the British class system, which, according to Forster’s narrator, can be seen to be threatened by the subversive idea of inter-class relationships between men:

But all that night [Maurice’s] body yearned for Alec’s, despite him. He called it lustful, a word easily uttered, and opposed to it his work, his family, his friends, his position in society. In that coalition must surely be included his will. For if the will can overleap class, civilisation as we have made it will go to pieces. (M179)

The above passage exposes the mechanisms of power that work together to maintain the established social order, clearly identified here as a “made” cultural construct: by instilling in the individual a doctrine that labels the physical desires of the body as morally reprehensible, it is ensured that the individual himself will attempt to suppress his desires, or direct them towards objects which represent less of a threat to the class system (female prostitutes, for instance). Following the model of writers like Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds, Forster presents an idealistic image of homosexual love as a revolutionary force which can promote a democratic equality because of its potential for “overleap[ing] class”.⁵⁵⁶

Writing about the theme of subversive homosexual love in Forster’s work, Robert Martin has observed that

Forster’s texts reveal a drive toward an idealised male couple that could operate against the boundaries of class and nation. The endings of his texts thus more often than not enact this tension between union and community. So too the utopian vision of ideal love, often inscribed as friendship, must be reconciled with an erotics that is grounded in struggle and domination. (1997:256)

⁵⁵⁵ See *Maurice* Ch. XLII and XLIII.

⁵⁵⁶ As Weeks has explained, the sturdy working-class lover “was a recurrent theme in the literature of homosexuality from the 1880s to the 1930s and beyond”, a theme that “could even become the focus of a sentimental reconciliation between the classes” (41). This middle-class “dream of class reconciliation” through homosexual love was, however, coexistent with an “avidly exploitative sexual colonialism” (44), and the idea, popular among middle-class homosexuals, “that the working class was not particularly bothered about homosexuality” (40) was a homosexual middle-class fiction.

Writing together with George Piggford, Martin also emphasises “Forster’s sense of a constantly baffling eros that can strike at any moment, touching anyone, and that is not gentle and loving but powerful and disruptive”. To Martin and Piggford, Forster’s “insistence on the peculiarities of passion” is “one of the ‘queerest’ elements of [his] work” (4).

Given the long-established links between subversive cross-class or cross-cultural (homo)sexual desire, violence, and death in Forster’s own work, the interpersonal dynamics between the three main characters of Melville’s *Billy Budd* would have readily presented themselves for assimilation into the Forsterian imagination. Indeed, writing about Herman Melville’s work, and specifically about the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg in *Moby-Dick*, Martin diagnoses a discourse about male/male desire as potentially subversive that can be seen to resemble the discourses about queer desire in Forster’s work: “Melville is not suggesting that homosexuality is superior to heterosexuality but rather that transgressive sexuality of any kind, by putting conventional order and authority in question, offers a subversive, or queering, potential”. Martin then goes on to point out that

of course, many homosexual acts participate fully in the system of power and indeed exploit sexuality for personal interest. [...] In its worst version, such desires, if unfulfilled, can lead to accusations and revenge, as in *Billy Budd*. In such cases, the differences in status and power work against any transgressive potential and indeed place the men in a feminised position of powerless passivity. (1998:193)

The changes which Forster made to his version of *Billy Budd* include, as I have shown in section II.5.3.2., a deliberate development of the figure of Billy away from such a “feminised”, passive position. They furthermore include a definite attempt to present Claggart not only as the beneficiary, but also as very much the victim of “the system of power” which he represents. The same impulse might be diagnosed in the collaborator’s attempts to “humanise[...]” Captain Vere (BBC1960:206), although they were, in the end, unable to extricate him from his position within the system of power he participates in, and thereby upholds.

The opera-makers may thus have failed to change the fundamental structure of the narrative – something which their attempts to exculpate Vere by omitting his ‘odious’ intercession on behalf of naval law during Billy’s trial suggest they may have been trying to do to some extent, and which could arguably only have been achieved by abandoning Melville’s basic set-up of plot and characters. The opera-makers may, however, be credited with allocating a cautious but nevertheless remarkable centrality to the various discourses about male/male desire which Queer critics were to detect in Melville’s text in the 1980s, including, as I am going to demonstrate, discourses that represent the subversive, disruptive and destabilising potential of erotic longing, as well as discourses which highlight the mechanisms that control and police these subversive desires in order to preserve the hegemonic power system.

Many of these discourses are to be found in the web of motivic relationships that pervade Britten's music; and at the centre of this web stands the motivic cell of fifth plus tone or semitone popularly known as the Mutiny motif (see section I.5.2.). Before I come to the music, however, I wish to return once more to the narrative patterns in Forster's work which prefigure and complement the narrative patterns of the *Billy Budd* libretto, and which reveal the link between queerness and its potential for subverting the social order as a central element of the Forsterian creative imagination. This queerness may, as it does in *Maurice*, take the unequivocal shape of homosexual desire, or it may appear in the shape of other forms of non-normative, stigmatised states of being that can often be seen to encode a deviant sexuality – Stephen Wonham's illegitimacy and Rickie Elliot's physical disability being two prominent examples.

The case of the classless Stephen Wonham, arguably one of Forster's most Billy-like 'light' saviour characters, illustrates that the desirable and desired 'light' character's disruptive potential is both sexual and social: not only do Ansell, Rickie and Agnes all feel attracted to Stephen,⁵⁵⁷ but Stephen's disregard of class distinctions and his own ambiguous social status are perceived as a potential threat to political stability and social "discipline" among the village labourers of Cadover. In Ch. 30 of *The Longest Journey*, Mr Wilbraham the agent points out the incongruity of Stephen's position and the disruptive effect of his behaviour:

How could the farm go on without discipline? How could there be discipline if Mr Stephen interfered? [...] He spoke to the men like one of themselves, and pretended it was all equality, but he took care to come out top. Natural, of course, that, being a gentleman, he should. But not natural for a gentleman to loiter all day with poor people and learn their work, and put wrong notions into their heads, and carry their newfangled grievances to Mrs Failing. (LJ243f.)⁵⁵⁸

In rather Melvillean fashion, the narrator steps forward here to prevent the reader from misinterpreting Stephen's advocacy of the labourers' interests, and to point to the personal and spiritual outlook which informs his actions:

Do not brand him as a socialist. He had no quarrel with society, nor any particular belief in people because they are poor. He only held the creed of "here am I and there are you", and therefore class distinctions were trivial things to him, and life no decorous scheme, but a personal combat or a personal truce. (LJ244)

⁵⁵⁷ In Agnes's case, the sexual nature of this attraction is even made fairly explicit (see LJ260 and section II.4.2.3.2.).

⁵⁵⁸ In fact, on the night that Stephen is turned out of his Aunt's house, some of the villagers, who may be remembering Mr Failing's socialist idealism and are moreover under the influence of alcohol, rise up in sympathy and break the windows of Mrs Failing's house. On this occasion, "the mad plumber" is heard "shouting 'Rights of Man!'" (LJ215).

It is the effect of such “personal” relationships with their fellow men, rather than any intellectual political creed, which makes for the strong disruptive potential embodied in Forsterian ‘light’ characters like Stephen Wonham and Billy Budd. The idea of social disintegration through personal relationships, private desires, love and loyalty is equally threatening to the British class system, the Pembroke’s notions of middle-class social decorum, and the functioning of naval discipline in the strongly hierarchical shipboard society of the *Indomitable*. Tellingly, it is at the moment that he is asked to betray Billy, “the one we all love”, that the Novice, having previously declared his abject obedience, makes his final, though ineffective, attempt to defy both Claggart and the oppressive power system he represents, telling him: “Not that one” (LIB34).

II.6.5. “I’ll not discuss”: the unspeakable in Forster’s work

In an enquiry into what she considers “one of the most distinctive of Gothic tropes, the ‘unspeakable’”, Sedgwick outlines the intimate connection which links this trope with discourses about male/male erotic relationships: “Sexuality between men had, throughout the Judaeo-Christian tradition, been famous among those who knew about it at all precisely for having no name [...]. [...] Its very namelessness, its secrecy, was a form of social control” (1985:94). Forster’s work indicates his awareness of both the external, social prohibition against speaking about men’s erotic desire for other men, and the more insidious internal, or internalised, effects and symptoms of this prohibition in the individual who finds himself experiencing ‘the love that dare not speak its name’.⁵⁵⁹ *Maurice* in particular is pervaded by discourses which delineate and explore the boundaries between the unspeakable and the circumstances under which it is possible to speak about it, but also by discourses about the failure of speech and, indeed, of words, to describe what is prohibited by society as immoral, criminal or pathological.

In *Maurice*, Cambridge students translating Greek literature are expected to “omit” passages referring to “the unspeakable vice of the Greeks”. What Clive, having already progressed further in terms of theoretical and literary self-recognition, lauds as “the mainstay of Athenian society” is a subject that Maurice “had never mentioned to any living soul. He hadn’t known it could be mentioned”, and he experiences the mentioning of it as “a breath of liberty” (M37f).⁵⁶⁰ This liberty is, however, precarious and fragile, as the example of

⁵⁵⁹ This famous designation, which gained its notoriety during the trials of Oscar Wilde, is taken from the final line of the poem “Two Loves” (1894) by Lord Alfred Douglas.

⁵⁶⁰ The concept of “liberty” and its link with language and speech is further elaborated and even celebrated as Clive and Maurice “establish[...] perfection in their lives” in an all-night discussion of their love at Penge: “their love scene drew out, having the inestimable gain of a new language. No tradition overawed the boys. No conventions settled what was poetic, what absurd. They were concerned with a passion that few English minds have admitted, and so created untrammelled” (M75).

Clive's reversion to conventional heterosexuality demonstrates: his platonic love-affair with Maurice, that "episode of his immaturity", becomes "unmentionable" (M140) once more as Clive embraces his new identity of the married country squire. A similar communicative prohibition is placed on the subject of homosexual love in "The Life to Come", where the homophobic and guilt-stricken Paul Pinmay, determined to suppress the truth about his own homosexual proclivities, forbids Vithobai, his subaltern one-time lover, "ever to mention this subject" again (LtC75; see also LtC72).

The effective silencing mechanisms of normative authoritative discourse – which *Maurice* locates in Christian morality and in science – are exposed in the scene in which Maurice tries to make his fatherly neighbour, Dr Barry, understand that he is "an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort". Dr Barry's reaction can be seen to combine authoritative denial, which devalues Maurice's self-identification, with the attempt to suppress the subject by refusing to engage with it at all:

Now listen to me, Maurice, never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to you again. [...] Who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a decent fellow! We'll never mention it again. No – I'll not discuss. I'll not discuss. The worst thing I could do for you is discuss it. (M134)

So unassailable is Dr Barry's confidence in his own role as a representative of scientific – and, by extension, social – authority that he believes "quite sincere[ly]" that "the contemptuous silence of a medical man would at once dispel" Maurice's "morbid thoughts" (M136).⁵⁶¹

The silencing tactics of Dr Barry's reaction are mirrored in Maurice's own initial "scandalised, horrified" rejection of Clive's confession of love: "Don't talk nonsense. I'm not offended, because I know you don't mean it, but it's the only subject absolutely beyond the limit as you know, it's the worst crime in the calendar, and you must never mention it again". Maurice's response is immediately identified as socially conditioned, as a quasi-automatic and involuntary reproduction of what would be the appropriate conventional "suburban" response to an outrageous confession like Clive's: "the words, the manner were out of him before he could recall them" (M44). It is his social conditioning – "words" and "manner" – which overrides his personal and emotional commitment to his friend, and which he subsequently manages to overcome when he can admit to himself that he "loved men and always had loved men" (M47).

The voice of institutionalised authority, which pronounces a prohibition against mentioning or discussing a subject clearly associated with a socially destabilising and subversive potential, occupies a central structural position in Melville's *Billy Budd*, where, as Sedgwick has pointed out, "the difficulty of learning about

⁵⁶¹ See also my discussion of Forster's engagements with the normative discursive authority of science in section II.5.1.4.

[mutiny] is like the difficulty of learning about such scandalous secrets as proscribed sexuality” (1990:101). Thus, Dr Barry’s exclamations of “I’ll not discuss!” may be felt to reverberate with Vere’s “peremptor[...y]” interruption “Never mind that!” when Claggart threatens to bring the subject of mutiny too close for comfort. Claggart concludes his report about the supposed mutiny plot on Vere’s ship with the utterance “God forbid, your honour, that the *Indomitable*’s should be the experience of the —” (BB76). It is at this point that he is cut short by Vere’s exclamation, because Vere “divin[es]” that he is about to refer to a certain ship “in which the Nore Mutiny had assumed a singularly tragical character that for a time jeopardised the life of its commander”, and is “indignant at the purposed allusion” (BB76).

Mutiny, as Sedgwick has also observed, can only be mentioned under certain circumstances to certain initiated members of specific social groups using “references that evoke recognizant knowledge in those who already possess it” (1990:101). To avoid “trouble”, no knowledge of this kind, not even the “apprehension” (BB104) of its existence and circulation, must on any occasion be communicated to those who rank lower in the shipboard hierarchy: when Vere first addresses the assembled crew to inform them of Claggart’s death, and of the scheduled execution of his killer (who is not identified by name), “the word *mutiny* was not named in what he said” (BB103). Even among the high-ranking officers, communication about this sensitive topic is subject to considerable restrictions. Claggart’s lower rank and ignominious function as “a sort of chief of police” (BB41) and supervisor of the crew’s less savoury activities exclude him from this group. For him to force this subject *and his own familiarity with it* on the captain’s attention is to commit a transgression not only against the conventions of decency, but against the boundaries of the social hierarchy – a transgression which Vere interprets as inimical to himself in some way:

When the commissioned officers themselves were on all occasions very heedful how they referred to the recent event, for a petty officer unnecessarily to allude to it in the presence of his captain, this struck him as a most immodest presumption. Besides, to his quick sense of self-respect, it even looked under the circumstances something like an attempt to alarm him. (BB79)

Vere’s “quick sense of self-respect” is of course challenged once again only a little later by Claggart’s “suggestion conveyed in the phrase ‘a man-trap under his ruddy-tipped daisies’” (BB79; see also exchange on BB77). Claggart is consistently seen to exert pressure on Vere by intimating that he has knowledge of two types of subversive energies – mutinous unrest among the crew and homoerotic longing in Captain Vere – which could destroy Vere’s official and personal authority. Claggart’s knowledge thus acquires the power of the blackmailer’s chief weapon; the association with blackmail, in turn, arguably emphasises the slippage between mutiny and prohibited desire (see section II.6.6. below).

The libretto can be seen to retain the novella's division of circumstances into those under which mutiny can be discussed – in the privacy of Vere's cabin, with his staff officers – and those under which to mention it becomes a transgression. As in the novella, the word “mutiny” is never spoken in the officers' addresses to the crew; and when Claggart uses it in his second interview with Vere in Act II, Sc. 1, this is immediately interpreted by Vere as an attempt to “scare[...]” him (LIB48) – in other words, as a presumptuous effort on Claggart's part to exert pressure on him. In contrast to the novella, and no doubt partly owing to the practical requirements of the operatic medium, there are clearly “moments” at which, in the absence of a narrator, the unspeakable “has to be spoken” (LIB26) by the characters on the stage. However, it seems only consistent with the librettists' aims to amend and improve the figure of Vere that it should be the “wise and thoughtful naval commander” (Crozier 1986:13) who, as the highest ranking officer, accepts it as both his privilege and his responsibility to be the first to actually pronounce the “word which we scarcely dare speak”, carefully euphemised by his first lieutenant as “French notions” (LIB26).

In Vere's confrontation with Claggart, it seems clear from Claggart's elaborate, even tortuous approach to his point that he is aiming to endow the speaking of the prohibited “foul word” (LIB48) with a maximum of portentous effect. In the private conversation with his officers in Act I, Sc. 2, Vere's preparatory remark and the extra long *fermata* pause before the word “mutiny” ([67]-2) arguably create a comparably tense atmosphere. Yet the officers' repetitions of the word “mutiny” here join Vere's sustained final note to complete the B minor Mutiny chord which pervades the following passage, suggesting their ‘harmonious’, shared feelings of apprehension and fear. Vere's confrontation with Claggart in fact echoes this threefold repetition of the word “mutiny”, but the dramatic downward glissando by which Claggart arrives at the word “mutiny” suggests that he seeks deliberately to make an impression on Vere. Vere's indignant, twofold *crescendo* repetition of the word “mutiny” not only shatters the atmosphere of Claggart's low-register *pianissimo* announcement, but abruptly moves away from the shifting tonal environment of Claggart's insinuations (Act II, [40]ff.) by means of a conspicuous key change to G minor ([41]-4). In this way, Vere seems briefly to reassert his control over the situation (only to have his new key usurped by Claggart's “evidence”, presented in the parallel key of B major, see [41]ff.).

Even though Vere finally succumbs to the pressure and decides to confront Claggart with the man he has accused, it seems important to note once more that Vere is not afraid of words, even if they are identified as potentially unspeakable: he remains in command of his speech even when Claggart indirectly accuses him of harbouring another type of unspeakable desire himself. In Melville's text, “speech”, as Robert Martin and many other critics have observed, “is the means of power” (1986a:111); the same can be seen to apply in the opera libretto. At the same time, the power of speech is associated with a superior position in the hier-

archy of power – a parallel to Forster’s oeuvre, in which the ‘dark’ middle-class characters in particular are so frequently “more than effectively armed with words” (E. Bowen 7), whereas the ‘light’ characters, who often occupy a lower social position, are not. While Claggart undoubtedly possesses the power of speech, Vere is able to counter Claggart’s provocative remark about the “mantrap [...] under those ruddy-tipped daisies” with an indirect reminder of his superior power as the ship’s commanding officer and highest authority – a threat that silences Claggart not least by putting him back in his place: “Claggart! take heed what you speak.⁵⁶² There’s a yard-arm for a false witness” (LIB49; compare BB79).

It is, of course, Billy, the lower-class sailor, who conspicuously “lacks speech”, his stammer being, according to Martin, “a sign of his powerlessness, an inability at once sexual and verbal” (1986a:111). Martin’s point is part of his larger argument which reads *Billy Budd* as “perhaps [Melville’s] darkest work, offering no alternative to the corrupt world of Vere and Claggart except the barely adequate Billy” (1986b:55), and which views “the sexuality of *Billy Budd*” as “a sexuality divested of its subversive power: it is the sexual attraction between power and powerlessness, a sado-masochistic drama that contains all its energies and turns them inward” (1986a:108). While it would be perfectly possible to perform a similar reading on the opera,⁵⁶³ it is also possible, on the other hand, to pursue a reading which highlights the connection between Billy’s speechlessness and the position of the male individual under the compelling normative pressure of (sexual) self-definition, self-positioning and/or self-labelling, which, in Forster’s work, is poignantly associated with the ability or inability of using words and speaking out.

Again, the clearest examples for this can be found in *Maurice*. Once Maurice has accepted his own homosexuality, he tries to make it clear to his friend Clive that he has “always been like the Greeks and didn’t know”. When Clive asks him to “expand the statement”, Maurice suddenly finds himself struck dumb: “Words deserted him immediately. He could only speak when he was not asked to” (M50). It is arguably not just the lack of precedent – the virtual absence of readily available role models and discursive frameworks within which Maurice might locate a positive new identity (an absence lauded as liberating elsewhere in the novel, see note 560) – that renders Maurice speechless, but also the very fact that he is required to deliver a description of *what he is* in the first place.

The idea that the social and moral stigma which adheres to this particular identity is liable to render the homosexual individual incapable of speech, unable either to deny or to confirm, and thus defenceless, when confronted by the representatives of social and moral normativity, is illustrated by the first confrontation be-

⁵⁶² The line “take heed what you speak” which appears thus in the published two-act and four-act librettos corresponds directly to Melville’s wording (see BB79); however, the published scores have “what you say” (Act II, [45]-2), which seems the more singable variant and can be heard in most recordings.

⁵⁶³ Martin himself regrettably fails to acknowledge this possibility (1986b).

tween Maurice and Mr Borenus the parson in Ch. XLV of *Maurice*. Having travelled to Southampton to see off Alec, scheduled to emigrate to Argentina, Maurice encounters Mr Borenus, and begins to fear that the clergyman may suspect the true reason for his interest in the young gamekeeper. Mr Borenus “spoke as one social worker to another, but Maurice thought there was a veil over his voice. He tried to reply – two or three normal sentences would save him – but no words would come, and his underlip trembled like an unhappy boy’s” (M204f.). The clergyman appears to be suspicious of Maurice’s presence; his insistent questioning acts upon Maurice like an implicit accusation:

The trembling spread all over his body, and his clothes stuck to him. He seemed to be back at school, defenceless. He was certain that the rector had guessed, or rather that a wave of recognition had passed. A man of the world would have suspected nothing [...] but this man had a special sense, being spiritual, and could scent out invisible emotions. Asceticism and piety have their practical side. They can generate insight, as Maurice realised too late. [...] The shock was terrific. He feared and hated Mr Borenus, he wanted to kill him. (M205)

Caught in “the trap”, paralysed by “the voice” which makes insinuations about Alec’s supposed “sexual irregularities”, Maurice is reduced to the level of a “defenceless” schoolboy and becomes “the victim” of the ascetic clergyman’s uncanny “insight”.⁵⁶⁴ The confrontation leaves him “utterly to pieces” and unable to process what goes on in his surroundings: “he heard voices, but did not understand them” (M205f.).

In *Billy Budd* there exists of course a parallel instance of speechlessness, brought on by an equally paralysing threat of shameful discovery and legal sanctions, even though, on the textual surface, Billy’s fatal stammer is a reaction of outraged innocence rather than of guilty anxiety. Both Mr Borenus and Claggart are perceived by their ‘victims’ as intimidating and threatening; the image of Claggart as “an asylum physician [...] approaching some patient” (BB82) can furthermore be seen to establish a most intimate link between his superior institutionalised power and a superior, i.e. equally institutionalised, knowledge or “insight” (M205). The effect of both men’s presence and of their discourse on both ‘victims’ is diminishing and infuriating as well as debilitating: Maurice feels like a schoolboy and wishes “to kill” Mr Borenus; Billy reminds Vere of “a bright young schoolmate of his”, turns into “a condemned vestal priestess in the moment of being buried alive”, and presents “an expression which was as a crucifixion to behold”, appearing as “one impaled and gagged” (BB82f.), before he, finally, does kill Claggart,

⁵⁶⁴ The reference to Mr Borenus’s “asceticism” might be felt to establish a subtle connection to other Forsterian “ascetic” ‘dark’ characters like Herbert Pembroke, Cecil Vyse and Mr Beebe, whose suppression of their own (homo)erotic longings makes them inimical to the love relationships of others.

albeit unintentionally. In the libretto, Billy explains himself in words that seem prefigured in the description of Maurice's predicament: "I tried to answer him back. My tongue wouldn't work" (LIB55; compare M204f.: "He tried to reply", etc.; see above).

II.6.6. "Never could I do those foul things":
negotiating the borders between homoerotic longing and homophobia (I)

In Forster's work, speechlessness can be brought on in a character by fear of recognition, as in Maurice's case, or by others' flagrant misrepresentations or misreadings that violate the character's sense of self. As I have suggested in section II.5.3.4., Billy's moments of speechlessness can be seen to belong in the latter category. In his good-natured innocence, he reacts sympathetically to the Novice's tale of woe, but does not immediately understand its full meaning; it is furthermore the "pretty" sight of the "twinkl[ing]" guineas that are offered to bribe him, rather than their value, which enchants him. It is only when he does understand what is being asked of him that he is rendered speechless, and "clenches his fist with rage" (LIB36). Once he has overcome his anger, Billy, like Vere, is not afraid of words either: in the conversation with the Dansker immediately afterwards, he is able to speak the word "mutiny" when he recounts the incident (LIB36). This might be read as a sign that it is not the concept of mutiny so much as the idea that anyone might think *him* capable or willing to let himself be bribed into getting involved in one which shocks him. His reaction in the confrontation with Claggart in Act II, Sc. 2 arguably stems from the same feelings of outrage, presumably exacerbated by the presence of Captain Vere, to whom he has only just declared his heartfelt loyalty and devotion.

In a reading of the opera which equates discourses about mutiny with discourses about homosexuality, Billy's outrage, both at being approached about participating in mutinous activities (and for money at that) and at being accused of being involved in them, can be seen to mark the site where different forms of, and approaches to, male homoerotic desire are negotiated. The violence which is concomitant with these negotiations can accordingly be read as homophobic, linking Billy with the desirable but homophobic 'light' characters in Forster's work – Tony from "Ralph and Tony", Gerald from *The Longest Journey*, and Lionel from "The Other Boat" – all of whom can be seen to meet the approaches of their desiring 'dark' admirers with violence at some point.

In the case of Lionel, a character who does in fact maintain a sexual relationship with another man, this homophobic violence (complicated by racism) is identified as arising ultimately from the normative pressures of the homophobic and racist society that shaped him. Having internalised its views, he cannot escape them except by killing himself as well as his lover, on whom he can be seen to project his homophobic self-hatred, and whom he blames for his own failure to adhere to the code of male chivalrous behaviour. A similar interplay of social con-

ditioning, male self-definition and homophobic violence could be detected in the behaviour of Tony: his homophobic dislike of Ralph is linked to his own hyper-masculine self-perception as well as to the “stupid[ity]” (AS89) that has arguably been instilled in him by the normative conventions. The “athlete” (LJ37) Gerald’s violent persecution of the weaker Rickie in their common schoolboy past is not carried over into their adult present; however, Gerald’s violent disgust at Rickie’s proposal to finance his and Agnes’s marriage can be read as an echo of Tony’s disgust when he realises that Ralph “likes” him and his sister (AS69), a disgust which in Tony’s case finds its expression in physical violence following Ralph’s proposal to marry Tony’s sister and live with the pair of them.

If ‘mutiny’ is read as ‘homosexual desire’ in the opera *Billy Budd*, Billy’s “rage” at the Novice’s proposition, which brings him close to physical violence (LIB36), can be seen to parallel the violent homophobic rejection with which Tony and Gerald encounter Ralph’s and Rickie’s offers of unconventional relationships and the proscribed affections they imply. The fact that a bribe is involved seems highly significant in this context, and for more than one reason. First, it might be wondered whether the offer of money in conjunction with a proposition they consider indecent intensifies Billy’s and Gerald’s feelings of outrage because they consider the idea of being ‘bought’ an insult to their independent manhood. Certainly in Billy’s case, love, support, loyalty and affection are usually given freely and impulsively, as is demonstrated by his sympathetic reactions to the whipped Novice’s pain in Act I, Sc. 1 (LIB20) and outpoured grievances in Sc. 3 (LIB35), as well as by his spontaneous vow to “follow” the “good” Captain Vere “forever”, and to “die” for him if necessary (LIB23). Had Billy not committed himself to “goodness” as embodied, somewhat ironically, in the figure of “Starry Vere” (LIB22) and, by extension, the authoritarian system he represents, one might even imagine that personal relations could have moved him to place his friend above his country and support a real uprising among the crew. Yet it ought to be remembered that although the heartbroken Novice’s grievances may be genuine, he is not sincerely proposing mutiny, but is acting as Claggart’s pawn to entrap Billy – and with this, we are back at the Newport Naval Training Station, and the entrapment of homosexual personnel by means of seemingly genuine offers of personal interest, desire, affection, or even love. Once a bribe is introduced into this strategic game of temptation, it ceases quite obviously to be a matter of purely personal relationships – whether social and political or private and sexual.

Offers of money, so the textual evidence of Forster’s “Arthur Snatchfold” suggests, may be part of the homosexual experience especially in cross-class sexual encounters, but the circumstances under which such offers can be made and accepted must be carefully negotiated. Besides being potentially insulting to the lower-class partner’s dignity, offers of money may devalue the sexual communion which is represented, in its ideal form, as egalitarian and an end in itself, consisting in the voluntary sharing of mutual desire and gratification. In Forster’s

short story, Sir Richard Conway offers his money as a parting gift – perhaps not accidentally following a discussion of the legal penalties pertaining to acts such as he and Arthur have just committed – and it is accepted only after Arthur has ascertained that Conway can “honestly afford it” (LtC104). Money, it seems, belongs to the quotidian world of social politics and legal sanctions, not to the private world of desire and gratification. Bearing this divide in mind, it seems highly significant that Billy “didn’t rightly wake until he offered me them guineas”, becoming “fully awake at last” only at the mention of a “gang” of conspirators “wanting a leader” and offering money “to make me mutiny” (LIB36). I shall return to this point below, but before I do so, I wish to examine Billy’s conversation with the Novice under the aspect of (self-)identification and labelling.

Billy’s shocked reaction to the Novice’s overtures might well be compared to Maurice’s negative, quasi-reflex response to Clive’s declaration of love, a reaction which can be read as socially conditioned (see p.428 above). The narrator of *Maurice* points out that Maurice’s unfavourable response to Clive’s confession must be regarded as a direct result of Clive’s attempt to present Maurice with a historical and literary model for homosexual love – namely, Plato’s *Symposium* (M44):

books meant so much to [Clive] he forgot that they were a bewilderment to others. Had he trusted the body there would have been no disaster, but by linking their love to the past he linked it to the present, and roused in his friend’s mind the conventions and the fear of the law. (M58)⁵⁶⁵

These references to textual and verbal, as opposed to physical, (self-)identification, and to the positioning of the individual within a historical context may be read as indirect comments on the labelling process which started in the second half of the nineteenth century, and which subsequently came to be regarded as having brought about the formation of a distinct male homosexual identity.⁵⁶⁶ Some of the more disturbing effects which this labelling process has upon the individual’s relation to his private experience also emerge in Forster’s novel. Once Maurice has verbalised his communion with Alec in an “exhaustive” and “detailed” “confession” authoritatively elicited from him by Mr Lasker Jones the hypnotist, “the perfection of the night appeared as transient grossness”. Maurice “spared neither his lover nor himself”; dissected thus in “the afternoon sunshine” (M184) and exposed to the light of conscious analysis, his *private* nocturnal experience of sexual fulfilment becomes the object of medical and legal, and thus, by implication, *public*, interest. It is thereby turned into a shameful and illegal act of “perversion”

⁵⁶⁵ The narrator’s insistence that “there would have been no disaster” if Clive had “trusted the body” may perhaps seem overly optimistic in view of Maurice’s own latent tendency to homophobic self-abhorrence (see, for instance, his guilty reflections on “Lust” (M127), i.e. sexual desire, in Ch. XXX and Ch. XXXI).

⁵⁶⁶ See Weeks 21f. and 23-32, and Foucault 43f.

upon which a “verdict” (M185) must inevitably be pronounced by “the conventions” and “the law” (M58).

It is possible to perform an analogous reading of Billy’s interaction with the Novice. The “dreaming, drowsing” nocturnal mood that has Billy sympathising with the Novice’s plight is destroyed by the Novice’s talk of the “gang [...] wanting a leader” and his offer of “more” gold “if you’ll lead us” (LIB35f.). These are reminders of the outside world, in which certain acts committed by and between men are penalised under the laws that ensure the functioning of “civilisation as we have made it” (M179). Once Billy is sufficiently awake to be able to apply the label of “mutiny” to what the Novice has been proposing to him – even if, in his initial flare of outrage, he is unable to pronounce the ‘unspeakable’ word itself – his social conditioning overrides his personal sympathy and affection for the Novice: in his “mind”, too, “the conventions and the fear of the law” could be said to be “roused” (M58) through contextualisation and labelling of “the queer things he said” (LIB36).

If Billy’s failure of speech in the confrontation with Claggart can indeed be understood as his outraged response to Claggart’s deliberate misrepresentation of himself, Claggart’s accusation also crucially involves another such act of labelling. It is arguably the mere application of the label of ‘mutineer’ which suffices to place Billy in a situation in which he must quite literally defend himself or die – for not to defend himself would presumably be equivalent to admitting himself guilty of what Claggart accuses him of, namely, a crime which would entail capital punishment. However, given the secret, unspeakable and hidden nature of his supposed crime, he will hardly be able to clear his name except by denying the misrepresentation and protesting his innocence: as long as Claggart is alive and present on the *Indomitable* to persecute him, suspicion or stigma can be expected to continue to attach to Billy. His accidental killing of Claggart may prove his innocence to Vere, who interprets the accident as “divine judgement” (BB85), but at the same time, it places Billy in a fatal checkmate position because his impulsive self-representation through physical violence (words having failed him) constitutes a capital crime according to the Articles of War, the legal framework that governs the warship world.

In her chapter on “Terrorism and Homosexual Panic”, Sedgwick suggests that “the importance – an importance – of the category ‘homosexual’ [...] comes [...] from its potential for giving whoever wields it a structuring definitional leverage over the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution”. According to Sedgwick, “what modern European-style homophobia delineates is [...] a space, and perhaps a mechanism, of domination” (1985:86f.), whose power extends across “the entire spectrum of male homosocial organisation” (115). Control over male/male bonds *of any kind* is achieved by what she identifies as a form of combined physical and psychological terrorism:

Not only must homosexual men be unable to ascertain whether they are to be the objects of “random” homophobic violence, but no man must be able to ascertain that he is not (that his bonds are not) homosexual. In this way, a relatively small exertion of physical or legal compulsion potentially rules great reaches of behaviour and filiation. (88f.)

This “mechanism” is effective because all men, whether self-identifying as homosexual or not, are automatically “subject to control through homophobic blackmailability” (90).

The slippage between discourses about homosexuality and mutiny in *Billy Budd* stands nowhere more clearly revealed than when regarded under this aspect of “blackmailability”. When Claggart denounces Billy to Vere as being “dangerous”, as “sapping loyalties” and “corrupting messmates” and as having “crept [...] at dead of night to a young novice” to “tempt” him with “gold” (LIB48), and when he accuses Billy of “insubordination and disaffection” (LIB52), the impact on Billy’s situation is the same regardless of whether the proscribed “male bonds” or “practices” (Sedgwick 1985:86f.) he is accused of having formed or participated in should take the shape of homosexual or mutinous activities, and regardless of whether he is actually guilty of the crimes he is challenged with. Claggart’s labelling of Billy can thus be read as a masterful application of an “implement of oppression” (Sedgwick 1985:87) which serves to police male/male social and/or sexual bonds in the interest of preserving, in this case, the system of power on board the *Indomitable*, a hierarchical system which is dependent on the suppression of all male/male bonds and all forms of male/male desire that might subvert it.⁵⁶⁷ If Claggart, who, in Forster’s reading just as in Robert Martin’s, desires Billy, thus “enforces laws he does not make, against crimes he himself commits, or would commit” (Martin 1986a:111f.), this could be viewed as an instance of tragic irony. Yet it could also be read as a denouncement of a homophobic society capable, through the “ban” it imposes, of distorting the homoerotic desire of a man who “could even have loved Billy” (BB70) into nothing more and nothing less than, as Forster saw it, “love constricted, perverted, poisoned [...], a sexual discharge gone evil” (letter to Britten of early December 1950, EMFL II:242).

Humphrey Carpenter has suggested that “Forster wanted *Billy Budd* to be a tract on the redeeming power of homosexual love, with Billy as a specimen of lower-class goodness [...] destroying the ‘perverted’ aspect of homosexuality (Claggart) and becoming a saviour-figure to the rest of the ship” (1992:286f.).⁵⁶⁸ If Claggart’s destructive repressed desire for Billy is read, as Forster may have intended it to be, as the fruit of internalised homophobia and homophobic self-hatred, then it is indeed “perverted”. More to the point, however, the male/male

⁵⁶⁷ See also Martin 1986a:107f.

⁵⁶⁸ Whether it is indeed “to the rest of the ship” that Billy becomes “a saviour-figure” might be debated; what the libretto makes clear, however, is that he becomes a saviour-figure to Vere.

relationships offered by Claggart's agent, the Novice, encoded as 'mutiny' and revealed as fabricated, are equally "perverted" and "gone evil" because they rely on coercion, deceit and bribery. Like the activities of the Newport entrapment squad, they are deeply implicated in the mechanisms of repression, oppression and the (homophobic) policing of subversive male/male relationships of any kind. To "bribe [...] comrades and lure them from their duty", using enemy "gold", is arguably the most insidious kind of "disaffection" (LIB48) in the Forsterian moral system, which insists on sexual honesty and loyalty among comrades. Money in particular must not be allowed to gain power over the world of personal relationships and love, as is demonstrated by the example of Maurice and Alec, who both give up their prospective careers in order to make a life together.⁵⁶⁹ Given these considerations, it is hardly surprising that Billy should feel the urge to distance himself from "those foul things" (LIB55): far from offering a subversive, revolutionary potential, the homosexual relationships encoded as 'mutiny' in *Billy Budd* stand revealed, in this reading, as dishonest and 'wrong', because they can be seen to proceed from, and ultimately to serve, the oppressive social system itself.

II.6.7. "We are both in sore trouble, him and me":

negotiating the borders between homoerotic longing and homophobia (II)

If Claggart's repressed desires and the false male/male relations tainted by dishonesty and bribery represent "the 'perverted' aspect of homosexuality", then it is the Billy/Vere relationship which the libretto aims to establish as representing the salutary quality of love between men, the 'right' kind of "redeeming [...] homosexual love" (Carpenter 1992:286f.). This salutary quality can be seen as mutually beneficial: in the *Billy Budd* libretto, a late reiteration of the Forsterian salvation narrative, it does indeed "take[...] two to make a Hero" (CPB55) once more. Vere declares himself "blessed" and "saved" by Billy (LIB63), but at the same time, it is arguably the personal connection which the two men establish during their closeted interview that truly enables Billy, who had vowed to "die to save" Vere (LIB23) even before he had met him, to face death "contented" and "strong", because he is now convinced that he has "sighted [...] the far-shining sail that's not Fate" (LIB61).

Love of the kind offered by Billy, magnanimous, and given freely and spontaneously in the first place, can endure even the tragedies of necessity – if there was ever any message about homosexual love which Forster intended to convey through his version of the narrative about Billy's acceptance, and the blessing he bestows on the heart-broken captain who cannot go against the requirements of naval law, this would appear to be it. "Two men can defy the world" (M114),

⁵⁶⁹ Maurice and Alec discuss their plans for the future in Ch. XLIV, where the issue of money versus fulfilment in personal relationships can be seen to form an important part of their controversy (see particularly M201f.).

Forster had written in *Maurice*; being “both in sore trouble” (LIB60), they “must help” (M95) one another, for “if one fell the other would follow” (M175). Even though Billy, whose “trouble’s soon ending”, will not be able to “help [Vere] longer with his” (LIB60), his salutary blessing, so the Epilogue invites us to accept, brings “the love that passes understanding” to Vere. Billy’s gift confirms their bond and proves, through the shared vision of the “far-shining sail” and the “land where she’ll anchor forever” (LIB63; compare LIB61), that although “the clouds [are] darker than night for us both” (LIB60), nevertheless their experience of love and connection remains valid and victorious: “when two are gathered together majorities shall not triumph” (M175).

On the textual surface, nothing could be further from ideas of disaffection and mutiny than the fervent sentiments of affection and loyalty which Billy brings to his first private encounter with his captain in Act II, Sc. 2. However, not only does the personal nature of Billy’s attachment to Vere exceed the requirements of patriotism and naval discipline to a degree which could already be viewed as ambivalent and thus potentially subversive all by itself, but in a reading based on a perceived congruency of discourses about mutiny and homosexuality, Billy’s fervour, which disregards the interdicts of military and social protocol in actively expressing a desire for physical proximity and mutual “trust” (LIB51), will indeed stand revealed as a form of mutiny.

On a concrete textual level, the association of Billy’s person with mutinous activities is planted in Vere’s mind by Claggart’s accusations, even if Billy himself remains initially innocent of any such thoughts. Vere, in fact, comes closest to expressing a connection between mutinous activities and homoerotic desire when he links his observation of Billy’s ardent devotion with the concept of “the artful mutineer” who “is dangerous”, and with “the trap concealed in the daisies” (LIB51). The latter phrase echoes Claggart’s taunt from the end of Act II, Sc. 1 (LIB49), which can be decoded as a barely concealed hint at Billy’s capacity for evoking homosexual desire. Vere’s reiteration of this phrase at this point could be taken to mark not only his recognition of just what Billy is offering, but at the same time, his realisation that he could indeed be vulnerable to the blackmailer’s pressure which Claggart has indirectly begun to exert upon him, and why: it is the attraction of Billy’s glowing, open-hearted and sincere affection which could become a “trap” for Vere, rather than any “artful” “schem[ing]” or “plott[ing]” on the young sailor’s part.

In her reading of Melville’s novella, Sedgwick has proposed that Vere “who is rendered suspicious by Claggart’s projective suggestion that Billy’s ‘daisies’ might conceal ‘a man-trap’ apprehends Claggart himself, in turn, as part of a gestalt of submerged dangers the very recognition of which could enmesh him the more fatally in their operations” (1990:107, n.13). A feature of these unspecified “submerged dangers” could well be Claggart’s desire for Billy; it is, after all, from Claggart’s own suppressed desires that the threat of what appears as his uncanny

knowingness partly proceeds. For Vere to indicate openly that he recognises such a desire in Claggart – to admit that he is capable of such “recognition” – might have unpredictable consequences that could indeed “enmesh him [...] fatally” in a “submerged” parallel world of covert machinations, power struggles, and blackmail: to prove himself too knowledgeable here could effectively cost him his position of power and authority.

The fact that Vere is heard early in the opera to describe Claggart as “a veritable Argus” who “has a hundred eyes” (LIB26f.) could be taken to indicate that he already perceives his own situation as precarious. For if Vere is indeed a man susceptible to “the flower of masculine beauty and strength” (LIB49), he will recognise Claggart’s innuendo as based on close observation of himself. His association of Claggart with Argus, the ever-vigilant guardian employed to prevent an illicit love,⁵⁷⁰ speaks of his uneasy feeling of being watched by him, and of his resentment of this. The association of Vere with the ‘Greek temperament’ is established in the opera through the suggestive juxtaposition of his musings on the deeds of “the Athenians...” with his wistful appreciation of the “men singing between decks” (LIB27), which segues into the masculine nautical idyll at the beginning of Act I Sc. 3. As a closeted homosexual, Vere would have every reason to fear and hate that “veritable Argus”, Claggart, and the “police” (LIB17) he commands. For the operatic Claggart, far more than the novella’s “sort of chief of police” (BB41), might be felt to represent an independent force in his own right (the officers tell him to “instruct *your* police”, LIB17; my emphasis), an all-seeing power that can easily turn into a threat to those whom it apparently serves, if they happen to harbour the prohibited sentiments it specialises in tracking down – all in the name of a power system which depends on homophobia as a means of controlling relationships between men. If dealing in homoerotic desire is the prohibited activity which Claggart has accused Billy of, then not only can Claggart be seen secretly to participate in that activity, but Vere, too, will be found guilty of harbouring this particular kind of mutinous sentiment.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ Argos Panoptes (the “all-seeing”) was a giant or monster with many eyes (in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for instance, their number is given as a hundred). He was placed by Hera to guard the nymph and priestess Io, whom Zeus had fallen in love with and turned into a cow to protect her against the wrath of his jealous wife. However, Argos was overcome and slain by Hermes, sent by Zeus to carry off Io (Roscher, ed., vol. 1: 537-539).

⁵⁷¹ It is from this situation that Vere is delivered through Billy’s accidental removal of Claggart. In sections II.3.10.2. through II.3.10.5., I have presented an extensive discussion of the various interpretive possibilities opened by this seemingly fortuitous deliverance. Billy, the agent of deliverance, is turned over to the law which is allowed to take its course, with Vere declining to intervene on his behalf. The ‘gift’ of freedom Vere can thus enjoy highlights both the parallels and differences between *Billy Budd* and Forster’s short story “Arthur Snatchfold” of 1928, which I suggest could be read as a narrative response to Melville’s novella.

II.6.8. The Mutiny motif:

negotiating the borders between homoerotic longing and homophobia (III)

The Mutiny motif, consisting of a motivic cell of a rising fifth-plus-tone or semitone (see Appendix A, Figure 1) is one of the most pervasive leitmotifs of the opera's musical discourse. It has been described by Philip Rupprecht as a "conceptual abstraction" (88) at the centre of an interlinked sequence of plot events; in section I.5.2., I have proposed a view of this "abstraction" as connected with the idea of destabilisation or disintegration in a broader sense. Depending on perspective, that idea is perceivable both as a threat to social stability and naval discipline when regarded from the point of view of the hegemonic power, and as a resisting, rebellious impulse against an oppressive social system when regarded from the subaltern point of view – an impulse, however, which is ultimately always contained through the intervention of hegemonic authority.

If the reading of *Billy Budd* which equates discourses about mutiny with discourses about homoerotic desire is extended to include the opera's *musical* discourse, a number of the Mutiny motif's appearances can be seen to mark various private struggles with homoerotic desire and homophobia (both internalised and institutionalised in the social system). While there is at least one case in which the Mutiny motif may be felt to denote subversive homoerotic longing, more often it appears to represent this prohibited desire as a threat connected with the individual's fear of personal, private and psychological destabilisation or disintegration. This is hardly unexpected, for, after all, in a homophobic environment, feelings of homoerotic desire must be assumed to be capable of challenging the very essence of the individual whose position in society and whose sense of self depend on self-control and even self-suppression – on the routine submission, in Melville's terms, to "the law of reason". To give in to prohibited deviant desire, to "monomania", to *unreason*, is linked to social upheaval in the novella: "though the man's even temper and discreet bearing would seem to intimate a mind peculiarly subject to the law of reason, not the less in his soul's recesses he would seem to riot in complete exemption from that law" (BB56). It is the dangerous, potentially 'riotous' quality of desire which can be traced in some of the less-noted appearances of the Mutiny motif in the opera's musical discourse.⁵⁷²

The most obvious figure whose relations with the Mutiny motif can be examined in this light is Claggart. A short but important moment hinting at some private experience of vulnerability occurs in Act I, Sc. 3, as he delivers his ambiguous compliment of "Handsomely done [...]. And handsome is as handsome did it, too" to Billy: as soon as he has pronounced these words, the figure of fifth-plus-

⁵⁷² It would of course be possible to perform an extreme (and indeed in most respects overly simplistic and banal) reading in which the deployment of the Mutiny motif during the nocturnal scene in Act I, Sc. 3, where the Novice attempts to persuade Billy to turn mutineer, could be read as encoding a discourse about sexual seduction. However, such a reading would hardly do justice to the complexity of the opera's textual and musical discourses.

tone is heard in retrograde (i.e. descending tone followed by descending fifth) in the orchestra (Bsn., Bass Cl., Harp, Vc. and Db. at [102]-4; D. Bsn. at [102]-3; see Appendix A, Figure 2). While Claggart manages, with the help of what Rupprecht calls his musical “mask” (96), to disguise his feelings during his speech acts, the orchestral ‘voice’ could be seen to present a glimpse of the suppressed effect which the dangerous attraction of the “handsome” Billy has upon the master-at-arms; for it is this aspect of the young sailor – his “handsome[ness]” – upon which he subsequently continues to muse ([103]+6ff.), and from which his famous agonised monologue ([105]ff.) may be felt to proceed.

Interestingly, the fifth-plus-tone motif does *not* appear in the musically parallel passage in Act I Sc. 1, in which Claggart, again talking equivocally through his musical “mask”, takes issue with Billy’s personal appearance, too: “Look after your dress. Take a pride in yourself, Beauty! And you’ll come to no harm” ([55]-4). It might be speculated whether this absence of the motif in their earlier confrontation could indicate that Britten chose to represent a gradual development of Claggart’s hatred of Billy, rather than the “antipathy spontaneous and profound” (BB53) proclaimed in the novella. Melville’s arrangement is certainly the more static one, locating the explanation for Claggart’s conduct in his “Natural Depravity” (BB55) and in divine ordinance – as suggested, for instance, by the comparison of Claggart with the scorpion “for which the creator alone is responsible” (BB59) – rather than in the psychological dynamics of homosexual panic. If the Mutiny motif represents the threat of psychological destabilisation, its relatively late appearance in Claggart’s music in Act I, Sc. 3, where it flashes up so suggestively between Claggart’s ambivalent compliment and his agonised monologue, might be felt to mark either the moment at which Claggart himself becomes conscious of the fact that his personal stability is threatened by the hitherto underestimated power of Billy’s irresistible attractiveness, or the orchestra’s allusion to his as yet unconscious thought processes. Both readings would be in accordance with the libretto’s implications that Claggart genuinely “suffers” in Billy’s presence (his suffering arising from the conflict between his homoerotic desire and his homophobic inability to love Billy), and that his decision to “destroy” Billy is finally reached as a form of self-defence against a “torment too keen” (LIB32f.) – the threat of personal disintegration. The opera could thus be seen to represent the progress of the Claggart/Billy relationship as a psychological process: although Claggart’s “nice dark music” (Britten in BBC1960:197) arguably characterises him as a villain from the very start, the fine details of the opera’s motivic discourse could be seen to provide an alternative to the novella’s claim that Claggart’s hatred of Billy is merely the instantaneous (il)logical expression of his supposedly evil nature.

Another passage featuring the Mutiny motif, one which is most relevant to the current investigation, occurs in Act II, Sc. 1, starting just after Claggart has disclosed the name of the supposed mutineer William Budd ([43]-[45]). As Vere pro-

tests vehemently against the substance of Claggart's accusations ("Nay, you're mistaken", etc.), the motif appears in retrograde shape in the cellos and basses, with the fifth prominently reinforced by the tuba ([43]). Claggart, re-entering the fray a few bars later, takes up the Mutiny motif as he continues to press the captain further, addressing the deceptiveness of Billy's "pleasant looks" and "good temper" ([44]-2), with continuing support from the cellos, basses and tuba who follow his vocal line throughout the rest of the passage. The motif also appears when Claggart mentions Billy's beauty, insinuating that Vere is letting himself be blinded by it: "You do but note his outwards, the flower of masculine beauty" ([44]+3, my emphasis; see Appendix A, Figure 2).

It is worth taking a moment at this point to note that the phrase "masculine beauty" is in fact a musical echo of Claggart's Act I, Sc. 1 description of Billy as "a find in a thousand", as well as of his insistence that "there are no more like him" ([29]+4). Not only does this motivic link clarify what makes the young sailor so unique to Claggart, but its subsequent reappearance in Billy's trial, where it carries both the first lieutenant's question "Why should the Master-at-Arms accuse you wrongfully?" and Billy's reply "Don't know, don't know such things" (Act II, [86]), serves to connect that crucial exchange with the two earlier passages, and can thus be seen to provide a plot summary of Claggart's tragedy that spans almost the entire length of the opera: Billy's "masculine beauty" makes him "a find in a thousand"; it is because of his prohibited desire for this singular figure that Claggart finds himself forced to "accuse" Billy "wrongfully", while Billy remains oblivious to "such things" (see Appendix A, Figure 2a).

While Vere is not physically present to 'hear' Claggart musically describe Billy as "a find in a thousand" in Act I Sc. 1, it would be possible for him to 'hear' the same musical phrase when Claggart mentions "masculine beauty", as well as when the officers question Billy about the reason for Claggart's accusation during the trial. Vere himself in fact refuses to answer the same question put to him; the music, at this point, frames his statement "I have told you all I have seen. I have no more to say" – uttered in the one-tone recitative of official, controlled speech⁵⁷³ – with, respectively, the Accusation motif and Claggart's Death chords (Act II, [86]+5ff. and [87]-3ff.). Whereas the music *carrying* both the officer's question to Billy and Billy's perplexity provides an eloquent explanation of its own, Vere's monotone refusal to discuss Claggart's motives at all – echoing, it might be felt, the erasive silencing tactics employed by the guardians of social propriety in Forster's work – is complemented by a correspondingly pared-down orchestral

⁵⁷³ This type of monotonic recitative characterises a number of 'official' speech acts in *Billy Budd*, such as Lieutenant Ratcliffe's report of the recruiting mission to the *Rights o' Man* in Act I, Sc. 1 ([19]+5) and the first lieutenant's reading of the Articles of War and the verdict before Billy's execution (Act II, [130]). The use of the monotone for formal or official speech can be encountered throughout Britten's work (see, for instance, the arraignment and oath which open the trial in the Prologue of *Peter Grimes*). For a discussion of Vere's use of the monotonic recitative, see Rupprecht 120ff.

account of Accusation followed, quite simply, by Death: Vere is indeed telling “all” he has “seen”, but no more than that, either.⁵⁷⁴

I now return to examining the functioning of the Mutiny motif in the confrontation between Claggart and Vere on the quarter-deck in Act II, Sc. 1. Following the implications of what Rupprecht calls “phenomenological on-stage ‘hearing’”, a concept which refers to the possibility of leitmotifs being “understood by others on stage (and only secondarily by a listening audience)” (89), the appearances of the Mutiny motif in this confrontation can be interpreted from more than one point of view and on more than one structural level. It hereby becomes possible to perform a reading of this passage in which the Mutiny motif fulfils a far more complex function than that of merely reminding the audience that Claggart is talking about the danger of mutiny among the crew.

From a Claggart-centric perspective, first of all, the appearance of the Mutiny motif in his vocal line might again point to his own sense of being threatened by the desire he feels for Billy’s “masculine beauty”. In section I.4.4., I have drawn attention to the fact that as soon as his ‘rehearsed’ blank verse accusation has culminated in the pronouncing of Billy’s name, Claggart tries to convince the protesting Vere of Billy’s dangerousness with arguments which might equally express his own struggle with Billy’s “dangerous” (LIB48) powers of attraction. For Claggart’s plan to rid himself of Billy to succeed, it is vital not only that he should persuade the captain that Billy is involved in a mutiny plot – “mutiny” being the most literal meaning of the Mutiny motif – but also that he should control the ongoing “riot” (BB56) of his own desire – also referenced by the Mutiny motif – which threatens his psychological stability.

In order to explore the functioning of the Mutiny motif in this passage from a Vere-centric perspective, it is first necessary to establish a few points about Vere’s state of mind at this moment. The entire passage clearly depicts Vere in a state of high emotion, as suggested by an increased tempo and a hectic and palpitating orchestral texture of horns and high strings. The vocal line of his incredulous exclamation “Budd, Billy Budd, foretopman!” which stands at its opening ([43]-3), rising to G flat, may be felt to denote a sudden increase of his emotional tension, moving as it does into the upper regions of a tenor’s vocal range.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ I cannot accept Rupprecht’s reading of the orchestral ‘voice’ as it manifests itself during the trial scene as that of Claggart (125-129); indeed, Rupprecht himself subsequently qualifies his claim and proposes a reading of the orchestral ‘voice’ during the trial scene as that of “an ordering agency beyond the viewpoint of any one character on stage” (129), a reading which does agree very closely with my own. It ought to be noted that Rupprecht’s view of the orchestral ‘voice’ operating as an “independent” (113) narrative voice located “beyond” the stage characters here and elsewhere in the opera (for instance in the Mist interlude, see Rupprecht 111-115) would not necessarily preclude the possibility that the aged Vere of the Prologue and Epilogue may be the narrator of the entire opera.

⁵⁷⁵ The upper limit of the tenor voice’s vocal range generally lies around the A above middle C (A₄); soloists may be expected to work up to C₅. The link between rising vocal lines and increasing

It is presumably no accident that at this moment, Vere should closely echo his first utterance of Billy's name in Act I, Sc. 2, albeit with an important difference: whereas in Act I, "Budd, Billy Budd, foretopman!" is set to a rising E major scale, ending on the major third G sharp ([71]+2), Vere's Act II repetition takes the shape of a rising E flat minor scale, its final note, G flat, being the minor third ([43]-2). Much as the crew's choral music in Act II, Sc. 1 changes from a triumphant battle song in the major mode ("This is our moment", etc., [26]ff.) to dejected, meandering disappointment when the chase is abandoned ("Gone is our moment", etc., [35]+2) – a musical distortion achieved largely through replacing the former major thirds by minor thirds – Vere's second utterance of Billy's name could be seen to mark a changed situation. In the relaxed atmosphere of his cabin in Act I, Sc. 2, Vere's thoughts of Billy had taken the shape of pleasant, possibly even wistful contemplation, as I shall demonstrate in a moment. By contrast, Claggart's revelation precipitates Vere into doubt and uncertainty: his former shining image of Billy Budd is harshly challenged. Its radiance, it might be felt, momentarily appears diminished in both his thoughts and his music, and yet the key change from Claggart's B flat accusation to Vere's defence in B appears to re-establish Vere's discursive control at this point.

The quasi-recurrence of the musico-verbal phrasing from Act I, Sc. 2 serves to establish a connection with Vere's earlier feelings about the young man that is worth investigating. In the earlier scene, admitting that he had "noted the fellow in question", Vere had "quietly" dismissed his officers' concern about "that young chap who shouted out 'Rights o' man'" with the words "Oh, that's nothing" ([71]), and had gone on to pronounce the sailor harmless. Both the officers' warnings and Vere's dismissal are carried by the Mutiny motif in this scene; as regards the officers' warnings, this would seem to be an obvious choice (in fact, the phrase "Rights o' man" is firmly associated with the Mutiny motif throughout the entire opera). A little more complexly, the musical component of Vere's utterance – the Mutiny motif – might be felt to acknowledge the officers' concern about Billy's being a potential mutineer, while his actual words – "Oh, that's nothing" –

emotional charge, which is traditionally assumed to exist by theories of Western music, is generally thought to arise from the physiological conditions of the human voice. When Vere warns Claggart to "take heed what you say", his vocal line ascends to A²; although this note is also reached elsewhere in the opera, for example in the "Claggart, John Claggart, beware" and "I accept your verdict" arias ([58]+5 and [98]), it is mostly touched in passing, often as part of a melismatic ornament, and does not attain the prominence it does as the end note of a linear ascent. When Vere exclaims "O this cursèd mist" after the confrontation with Claggart, his emotional turmoil leads him to erupt onto an angry and frustrated B flat on "cursèd" ([48]+4). The highest note in Vere's part is B³, which is again reached by linear ascent when Vere interrupts Claggart's solicitations to dismiss him: "Be so good as to leave me!" ([47]); the score of *Billy Budd* provides an alternative descending vocal line for singers who cannot deliver the B³ which Britten requires for what his scoring suggests is another highly emotional outburst.

simultaneously dismiss that idea. However, it is possible *at the same time* to read the appearance of the motif in Vere's music as carrying a more private implication.

It is at the moment that Vere is heard to pronounce his reassuring words that the mood of the scene abruptly changes from the martial, *stringendo* and *crescendo* urgency of the officers' interlocking voices, accompanied by wind instruments and timpani, into the downright lyrical. According to the stage directions, "the sound of a shanty is heard from below decks" at this point ([71]), and yet the soft chorus of male voices initially merely provides a wordless background texture of sustained chords to Vere's quiet protestations, a texture which becomes discreetly supported by the lower strings. This moment anticipates the masculine nautical idyll at the end of the scene ([74]), and might be felt to tap into the same discourses about homoerotic longing that can be detected there. In this case, the Mutiny motif's appearance in Vere's reassuring "Oh, that's nothing" might speak of his secret appreciation of, or even desire for, a very different kind of subversive energy in male/male relations. However, despite the lyrical mood of the scene, such a desire may nevertheless be mingled with apprehension.

Keeping in mind my reading of Vere's use of the "Argus" image (see p.440 above), it is worth noting that the musical treatment of Vere's description of Claggart ("He is indeed a veritable Argus", [70]) also shows the rising inflection associated with a sudden increase in emotional tension, which does not abate when he addresses Claggart's power of observation. In fact, the phrase "He has a hundred eyes", delivered on the same high note in the upper regions of the tenor's vocal range (G sharp), receives extra emphasis from what is effectively an orchestral crescendo created by the staggered entries of several wind instruments ([70]+2ff.). Its conspicuous timbre, too, created by an orchestral texture of wind and percussion instruments which may be felt to be related to the music of the Mist interlude at the end of Act II Sc. 1, helps to mark this as a moment of unexpected and therefore peculiarly suggestive intensity.⁵⁷⁶ Vere's thoughts of Claggart's watchfulness, so this brief musical climax suggests, are far from serene, but are charged with emotions of uncertainty and "confusion without and within" (LIB50) – at least that is what the orchestral foreshadowing of the Mist might be taken to insinuate. Paralleling the communicative rift between Vere and his officers who do not catch his allusion to Greek mythology, this striking musical moment might denote the intrusion of Vere's private thoughts and apprehensions into the ongoing discussion of the danger of an actual mutiny.

⁵⁷⁶ The instrumental background texture which appears at the first lieutenant's introduction of the subject of Claggart (bass clarinet trill and small gong, [70]-1), and the rising B minor chord in the low strings which is heard together with Vere's comment about the "veritable Argus" ([70]), can be seen to hark back to the first discussion of the subject of actual mutiny in this scene at [67], where the B minor chord is associated with the word "mutiny" itself, and to the first lieutenant's recollections of his experiences at the Nore. However, the framework of this already familiar musical environment is here momentarily disrupted by the C sharp minor chord which accompanies Vere's comment about Claggart's "hundred eyes".

Similarly, when, a few moments later, Vere expresses his opinion of Billy (“Oh, that’s nothing”, [71]), the musical change of mood could be seen to indicate another shift of the narrative perspective towards Vere’s point of view. As I have already stated, the deployment of the Mutiny motif at this moment may represent either a link with the subject of actual mutiny, or Vere’s secret homoerotic longings, which his uneasiness at the thought of Claggart indicates he may be experiencing as a threat to his own safety.

At the three crucial points at which Vere declares his position regarding Billy and Claggart in Act I, Sc. 2 and Act II, Sc. 1, either by naming (Billy) or by otherwise identifying them (Claggart as Argus), Vere’s heightened emotional involvement with these two men can be seen to be confirmed by the music, which sends his voice rising towards the upper limits of its range. From both the textual and the musical evidence of Act I, Sc. 2, it can be surmised that Vere has indeed formed a favourable opinion of the handsome young sailor and his “youthful high spirits”, and that he is already wary or even resentful of Claggart and his powers of observation. Consequently, if the passage from the confrontation with Claggart in Act II, Sc. 1 is examined from Vere’s point of view, the appearance of the Mutiny motif in both the orchestra and in Claggart’s vocal line might be found to denote not only the onset of a psychological struggle between Vere’s inner conviction of Billy’s innocence and the confusion caused by Claggart’s accusation, but also his fear that Claggart might succeed in uncovering the secret of his own subversive, prohibited, ‘mutinous’ interest in Billy. It could thus be Vere who ‘hears’ the Mutiny motif when Claggart speaks of Billy’s “pleasant looks” and “good temper” ([44]-2), suggesting that Vere only “note[s] his outwards, the flower of masculine beauty” ([44]+3); Vere who has to acknowledge the disquieting implications it carries about his own feelings; and Vere who experiences a destabilising fear as he realises that Claggart may be putting a blackmailer’s pressure on him.⁵⁷⁷ In addition, it might be noted that Vere’s descending vocal line as he protests “Nay, you’re mistaken”, etc. moves consistently within the interval of a fifth. If this musical protest is read as related to the mutiny motif, it, too, might be taken to express the destabilising emotional turmoil experienced by Vere at this point.

There is one more, very prominent manifestation of the Mutiny motif which could be understood to express the fear of personal destabilisation, and one which arguably has the most far-reaching interpretive impact upon the opera as a whole. It can be found in Vere’s tortured exclamation, in the Prologue, of “O what have I done”, and in the “confusion” he feels and/or recalls experiencing ([3]+2). Rup-

⁵⁷⁷ If the orchestral ‘voice’ is read as analogous to that of a narrator, the appearance of the Mutiny motif in the cellos, basses and tuba at [43] (before it starts to double Claggart’s vocal line) might be understood as a commentary on Vere’s state of mind at this point, but could equally denote the presence and influence of Claggart, or, indeed, a discourse about mutiny. As Rupprecht has pointed out, “voice-instrumental relations are nothing if not supple”, and “hearing unambiguous signs of narrative distance in opera [...] is tricky” (115).

precht identifies these appearances of the Mutiny motif as “loosely prefigur[ing] explicit announcement of a mutiny threat in Act I, Sc. 2”; in his semiotic model, the musico-verbal signifier “what have I done” signifies “confusion” (88f.). Yet the fact that the Mutiny motif so prominently accompanies Vere’s poignant interrogation of his personal role in the events he recalls already seems to point beyond mere prefiguration of plot.

When Vere reiterates his question in the Epilogue, there is a telling change in the musico-verbal phrasing: where the Prologue had placed melodic emphasis on “what *have* I done” ([3]+2), the Epilogue changes this to “what have *I* done” ([142]; my emphases). Far from representing, as Andrew Porter opined in 1952, merely an instance of the “wilful oddities of word-setting” in Britten’s overly “mannered” compositional style (118), the Prologue’s musical stress on the auxiliary verb “have” reflects the prosody of a spoken sentence expressing dismay and regret at what has been “done”. The question’s concern would seem to lie with the deed itself and its significance on both a material and a moral or spiritual level; to what degree it comprises an interrogation or deconstruction of the “I”, the self that has perpetrated the deed, remains open to speculation. By contrast, the changed stress to the personal pronoun “I” in the Epilogue would seem to indicate that it is Vere’s sense of his own identity which has now become the focus of his self-interrogation: as he considers himself as the perpetrator of the deed which has just passed under the close scrutiny of his recollection, it might be felt that his very image of himself has been destabilised or is in danger of disintegrating altogether. Following immediately after this, his declaration “But he has saved me and blessed me”, etc. might be understood as an attempt to reassure both himself and his audience, and thereby to contain the threat of self-dissolution that might be the consequence of acknowledging his true motives for having acted as he did. Such a reading of the Mutiny motif conjoined to the phrase “Oh, what have I done” would be in accordance with a reading that viewed the entire opera as a fantasy of reconciliation invented by Vere (or by his guilty subconscious).

I have been arguing that besides being linked to the concept of social destabilisation or disintegration, the “conceptual abstraction” (Rupprecht 88) denoted by the Mutiny motif can in some cases also be read as linked to the destabilising, threatening aspects of homoerotic desire. The resulting possibilities for reading both the opera’s plot and its characters can be seen to agree with the queer readings of Melville’s *Billy Budd* proposed, among others, by Robert Martin, readings in which “Billy’s visible beauty acts as a disruptive erotic force” (1998:198) upon the structures of “a social order that values control and suppression” (1986a:107). If “Claggart’s unfulfilled desire for Billy ultimately leads him to accuse Billy of mutiny”, then, according to Martin, “the accusation must also be taken in a symbolic sense”, because such a “disruptive erotic force [...] cannot be tolerated on board ship, where desire must be subordinated to duty” (1998:198). Martin has further-

more suggested that Vere's plea for Billy's execution arises from a suppressed homoerotic desire comparable to Claggart's, and can be understood as a move towards eliminating the "disruptive erotic force" which Billy represents:

Both Claggart and Vere are betrayed by their place in a social order that values control and suppression. The police and the military are devoted to control both internal and external; they require of those under their authority a loss of self and the replacement of personal desire by aggression. They must kill that which threatens their precarious control of self. (1986a:107f.)

Even though the librettists, in close collaboration with the composer, saw to it that Vere should no longer argue in favour of Billy's execution, the operatic Vere, who, when directly appealed to, refuses to intervene and "save" the young sailor (LIB56), can be seen ultimately to remain in a position of responsibility for Billy's death – something which he tentatively acknowledges in the Epilogue: "I could have saved him" (LIB63). His refusal to become active on Billy's behalf might be interpreted as an act of "control and suppression", arising from his own fear of acknowledging, and thus disclosing, the subversive, 'mutinous' nature of his "personal desire" (Martin 1986a:107f.). A corresponding reading of the operatic Vere had already been advanced, in passing as it were, by Christopher Palmer in 1983, when he noted that

there is an undeniable element of suppressed sexuality, of unwelcome and deeply-concealed self-knowledge in [Vere's] relationship with Billy. Billy awakens a conflict which Vere hoped *he* had resolved; and when *he* signs *Billy's* death warrant he also "proves himself to himself", not merely his dutiful Captain's self but his "personal, anti-sexual" self. (86)⁵⁷⁸

Vere's refusal to save Billy can be read not just as an act of protective self-suppression, but also as betraying his concomitant inability or refusal to challenge the social system to which he owes his privileged position, and whose authority he represents. Such a reading can in turn be seen to agree with Rupprecht's view of the Mutiny motif as representing "a conceptual abstraction" that is "defin[ed]" as "a threat to the world of Vere's ship" (88), since that shipboard world can be understood as a metaphor for both the individual psyche and the rule-bound world of society. Furthermore, if "mutiny" is interpreted as a threat to the effective "control and suppression" of "personal desire" (Martin 1986a:107f.), Rupprecht's observation that all of "the opera's main plot events" can be "grouped [...]"

⁵⁷⁸ Palmer reached his insight in an article on *Gloriana* (1953), Britten's next opera after *Billy Budd*. In his article, Palmer drew a direct comparison between that opera's central figure, Elizabeth I, and Captain Vere, "King" of his "floating monarchy" (LIB58): "Vere is fatally (for Billy) torn between his attraction to Billy, his (private) awareness of Billy's essential goodness, and the sense of (public) duty which compels him to sentence to death any man guilty of killing a superior officer [...]. [...] Vere's conflict, like Elizabeth's, is not merely between duty and inclination" (85).

around” this “conceptual abstraction”, so that “other melodic moments apparently function as exemplary instances of a single concept” (88), becomes particularly suggestive in a reading of the opera *Billy Budd* as a text about the disruptive potential of male homoerotic desire.

That Claggart’s discourse upon Billy’s attractiveness should, in the opera, be tagged by the musical motif which also denotes “mutiny” itself, and that Vere’s music, too, shows instances in which the Mutiny motif is employed in a highly ambivalent context, would seem to support a view of the opera as retaining a greater deal of the interpretive possibilities so famously latent in Melville’s novella than has generally been allowed by those critics who have dismissed the Britten/Forster/Crozier adaptation as a “sanitised” (Carpenter 1992:288), “depoliticised and de-eroticised” and “Christianised” (Martin 1986b:51) reduction of Melville’s rather more subversive text. In fact, it remains possible to apply queer readings of Melville’s novella as a text about the institutionalised control of subversive erotic desire to the opera as well. The much-noted phenomenon of Vere’s musical convergence with Claggart in Act II could be seen to support a view of Claggart and Vere as representatives of the same oppressive social power. Building on my readings of the Mutiny motif, it is possible further to strengthen the case for a reading in which the Claggart-Vere convergence can be seen to extend to both men’s shared reason for wishing to rid themselves of Billy, namely, their destabilising fear of acknowledging their own suppressed homoerotic longings for the fatally attractive Handsome Sailor, the desirable figure that represents such a threat to their repressive yet perpetually vulnerable self-control and self-abnegation.

Part Three: genesis of an opera: the sources' tale

III.1. Let's make an opera (I): the genesis of *Billy Budd*

III.1.1. Introduction

E. M. Forster and Benjamin Britten met in person for the first time in February 1937, at a dress rehearsal for the Group Theatre's production of W. H. Auden's and Christopher Isherwood's play *The Ascent of F6*, for which Britten had composed incidental music. Forster, who was in his late fifties at the time, commented favourably to Isherwood about Britten's music (BBL362, n.9), but after this initial meeting, little contact ensued between the writer and the composer, who was Forster's junior by over thirty years.⁵⁷⁹ Two years later, in 1939, Britten moved to the USA together with the tenor Peter Pears, who was subsequently to become his lifelong partner. Over the next two years, Britten was seriously considering whether he should settle in the USA for good, as Auden and Isherwood had done. In this difficult period, it was the voice of E. M. Forster which was, by serendipitous coincidence, to give a crucial impulse to the young composer's life decisions in more than one respect. On 29 May 1941, the *Listener* published an article which Forster had written about the Suffolk poet George Crabbe.⁵⁸⁰ Reading this article,

⁵⁷⁹ For further details regarding the circumstances of this first encounter see Furbank II:213f. and BBL362, n.9

⁵⁸⁰ "George Crabbe: The Poet and the Man", TPT127-132.

with its “potent reminders of home and Suffolk” (Mitchell 1991:36), doubtlessly influenced the Suffolk-born Britten in the process of making his decision to abandon his plans of emigration and return to his native country. At the same time, Forster’s article also stirred the composer’s interest in Crabbe, whose narrative poem *The Borough* (1810) contains the tale of the fisherman that was to become the basis for Britten’s opera *Peter Grimes* (1945), the work which successfully established Britten as a composer of English opera.⁵⁸¹

On Britten’s return to England, his contact with Forster was renewed, and soon “blossomed into a warm friendship: the two men frequently corresponded and met”, with Forster’s letters to Britten generally showing “an enthusiasm for each of his new works” (BBLL363, n.9; see also Furbank II:281f.). Forster was the dedicatee of Britten’s comic opera *Albert Herring* (1947); at the first Aldeburgh Festival in 1948, he delivered a lecture on “George Crabbe and Peter Grimes”,⁵⁸² in which he speculated at some length on “what an opera on Peter Grimes would have been like if I had written it” (TCD178). This would seem almost to amount to an oblique offer to work as librettist for Britten, and Britten, who had at about that time been invited to compose an opera for the 1951 Festival of Britain,⁵⁸³ did indeed approach Forster about writing a libretto for this project, the subject-matter of which, however, remained yet to be determined.⁵⁸⁴

III.1.2. “Our most musical novelist”: Forster’s operatic affinities

Among the recurring topics of Forster criticism, the ‘melodramatic’ quality of his plots is one remarked upon by critics of all generations. In his 1943 study of Forster’s work, Lionel Trilling can be seen to express the feelings of many other readers when he writes that Forster “delights in surprise and melodrama and has a kind of addiction to sudden death” (11). Death in particular is a pervasive presence in most of Forster’s stories. Many readers commented on this phenomenon, and in some cases complained about it: thus, for instance, an anonymous reviewer of *The Longest Journey* opined that Forster “uses the accident of sudden death too frequently in his artistic scheme” (in Gardner, ed. 71).⁵⁸⁵

As Judith Herz has summarised, the “sudden deaths and coincidences” which abound in Forster’s plots “are often identified as symptoms” of Forster’s “own difficulties with (or indifference towards) the purely story-telling part of novel

⁵⁸¹ See Carpenter 1992:155f. and BBLL362f., n.9.

⁵⁸² TCD166-180.

⁵⁸³ For a detailed presentation of the complex history of the commissioning and placing of the first production of *Billy Budd*, see BBLL436-439 and 563-567. Paul Kildea (2002:125-132) also provides an extensive account of Britten’s interactions with the Arts Council and of the commissioning of *Billy Budd*; he also discusses Britten’s writing of ‘grand opera’ from an economic point of view.

⁵⁸⁴ For further details about the preliminaries to this collaboration, see BBLL410f., n.5.

⁵⁸⁵ Unsigned review in *Nation* 1, no. 9, 27 April 1907, 357-8; reprinted in Gardner ed., *Critical Heritage*, item 17 (68-71).

writing" (1988:9). Herz is alluding here to Forster's memorable comment on "Story", "the fundamental aspect without which [the novel] could not exist", a comment which he imagines making "in a sort of drooping regretful voice": "Yes – oh dear yes – the novel tells a story" (AN17). However, Herz goes on to point out that Forster's plots appear as "the stuff of melodrama" only "if we detach them from their words and cease listening to the 'melody'" – i.e. the elements of "fantasy and prophecy" which, rather than "story", can be seen as the motive power of so many of Forster's short stories (8f).⁵⁸⁶

Herz is by no means the first critic to view Forster's work in musical terms. In his 1934 essay on "The Novels of E. M. Forster", Peter Burra had observed that "though the materials out of which they are made seem to belong more properly to sensational fiction, Mr Forster's stories are the most distinguished pieces of craftsmanship" (318), not least owing to Forster's textual leitmotif technique which Burra describes with great insightfulness (319ff).⁵⁸⁷ Ten years later, Trilling was to write that the "web of [motivic] reverberation" in *A Passage to India* "gives [the] book a cohesion and intricacy usually only found in music" (134). Burra furthermore pointed out the tripartite, "symphon[ic]" organisation of *The Longest Journey* and *A Passage to India*, and concluded that "Mr Forster [...] was a musician who chose the novel because he had ideas to utter which needed a more distinct articulation than music could make" (321).⁵⁸⁸

On his own evidence, Forster had always admired music as a 'higher' art form, compared to which the novel, his own medium of artistic expression, was a deplorably "low atavistic form" (AN17). It is striking, therefore, to find that his 'melodramatic' plots have been found to reflect the "low atavistic", i.e. the verbal, component of a genre which combines both words and music: namely, opera. Indeed, Peter Burra's *tour de force* through Forsterian plot construction would hardly appear out of the ordinary in an inventory of opera plots:

Mr Forster's novels tell stories. But what stories! What monstrous improbabilities they are! What fearful, sensational things they are made of! Manslaughter,

⁵⁸⁶ Another perspective on Forster's relation to "the purely story-telling part of novel writing" (Herz 1988:9) is offered by Sheenagh Pugh, who links Forster's "regretful" comment with a type of creative imagination which privileges character relationships over plot incident: "Where there is 'incident' it will not usually be there for its own sake. If its purpose is to move the plot along, it is liable to be skated over at speed, and if what is wanted is to create tension, then [...] tension equals people and their relationships" (137). Following Pugh's model, Forster's dramatic coincidences, surprising plot turns, and sudden deaths could be classified as plot devices designed to create disruptions and new situations in which the characters can then be explored further by a writer who is essentially interested in the personal relationships between his characters.

⁵⁸⁷ Forster greatly appreciated Burra's essay, feeling that Burra had "understood" what he "was trying to do" (Forster 1978b:313). See note 275.

⁵⁸⁸ It was almost certainly this essay which Britten refers to on a postcard to Burra of 16 March 1937: "The Forster article is first-rate. [...] Christopher Ish. was here last night [...]. Told me a lot more about E. M. F." (BLL67). Britten's interest in Forster may have been aroused by his first personal encounter with the older writer: *The Ascent of F6* had premiered on 26 February.

bribery and blackmail, slander and false witness, violent sex episodes, illegitimate offspring, village idiocy, public-school intrigue, far-fetched coincidence, a mysterious housekeeper who has stepped straight from the pages of Gothic romance, death in carriage accidents, at level-crossings, by drowning, on the football field. [...] Nothing of the story in the four early novels can be believed in; little of it even seems to claim credibility. (317f.)

Yet Burra insists that “this apparent artlessness must be more than a fine disregard for a ‘low atavistic form’ only put up with as a convenient framework for [Forster’s] ideas about people”. In Burra’s view, “the violence” of Forster’s plots is “a planned violence” which serves a relevant function in the creation of an “aesthetic compactness” comparable to that found in the musico-dramatic genre of opera: “in relation to themselves”, Burra contends, Forster’s stories are “true enough”, and “carr[y] the sort of declamatory conviction that good opera carries”.⁵⁸⁹ To illustrate his claim, Burra cites the scene from *The Longest Journey* in which Ansell reveals the truth about Rickie’s illegitimate brother in front of the assembled school house: “It is written with such intensity that it carries a ringing conviction with it. It possesses that operatic truth” (Burra 318).

Some thirty years later, on the occasion of Forster’s ninetieth birthday, Britten was to cite the same example in an even more striking analysis of Forster’s literary technique in operatic terms:

the construction of Forster’s novels often resembles that of the ‘classical’ opera (Mozart – Weber – Verdi) where recitatives (the deliberately un-lyrical passages by which the action is advanced) separate arias or ensembles (big, self-contained set pieces of high comedy or great emotional tension). As examples of the latter, think of the bathing episode in *A Room with a View*, the school Sunday dinner at which Ansell confronts Rickie in *The Longest Journey*, and, perhaps greatest of all, the trial in *A Passage to India*. (1969:82f.)

Britten had first read *A Passage to India* in 1936 (Carpenter 1992:83), and it seems fairly safe to assume that by the time he began to consider asking Forster to become his librettist in 1948, Britten was also familiar with his other published works.⁵⁹⁰ Writing almost twenty years after Forster had produced the *Billy Budd*

⁵⁸⁹ Judith Herz has taken up and developed Burra’s thought in her article on “The Orphic and the Operatic in *The Longest Journey*” (1997:138f.).

⁵⁹⁰ In 1939, Britten suggested to the young Wulff Scherchen that he should “try E. M. Forster” (letter of 8 December, BBLL II:743); in 1942, he read *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, apparently not for the first time, for he reported to Enid Slater that he “love[d] it as much as ever” (letter of 23 November, BBLL II:1101). According to Carpenter’s biography, Forster lent the manuscript of *Maurice* to Britten and Pears (Carpenter 1992:287), but Carpenter gives no indication of the time at which they received the manuscript and cites no source for his information. John Stape’s *Forster Chronology* lists Forster as having “lent [*Arctic Summer*] and *Maurice* to Britten and Peter Pears” by 10 June 1951 (151) – the date of Forster’s reading of *Arctic Summer* at the Aldeburgh Festival; frustratingly, Stape cites no source for this information, either.

libretto for him, Britten was moreover able to look back on his personal experience with Forster's gift for set piece scenes (these incidentally include another trial scene). If Britten perceived a resemblance between Forster's writing and the operas of Mozart and Verdi – the two composers he saw himself most influenced by as a composer of opera – he may perhaps also have been conscious of having benefited from this affinity in the collaboration on *Billy Budd*. During the genesis of the libretto, he had commended Forster's work as “superb. He has a wonderful natural sense of the theatre, & his crisp pregnant dialogue will be good to set, I think” (letter to Edward Sackville-West of 27 July 1949, BBLL.535). In other ways, however, Forster's ‘operatic’ tastes had proved troublesome, and had at times put considerable strain on their working relationship, as well as on their friendship.

“There is no doubt that E. M. Forster is our most musical novelist”. Thus runs Britten's opening sentence for “Some Notes on Forster and Music” (1969:81), his contribution to a collection of essays in celebration of Forster's ninetieth birthday. A “most musical novelist” Forster may have been, but both his level of musicality and his ideas about music differed considerably from Britten's, whose musical genius and professionalism served to set him apart from Forster at least as effectively as the generation gap between the two men. Indeed, it is likely that Britten was always well aware that Forster's musical tastes were different from his own. Forster did possess a good ear for music, and had some skill on the piano. However, unlike the composer, Forster preferred Beethoven to Mozart, and was furthermore an ardent Wagnerian,⁵⁹¹ to a degree that led him to wonder at one point during his time as Britten's librettist whether he was not “being deflected by Wagnerism from essential truth” in his envisioning of the “difficult end” of *Billy Budd* (Letter to Crozier, 8 April 1949; in Crozier 1986:20).⁵⁹²

Forster's 1948 lecture on “George Crabbe and Peter Grimes”, in which he had sketched the alternative ending he should have produced for *that* opera, could (and probably will) have forewarned Britten about the nature of the difficulties that would attend their collaboration:

⁵⁹¹ The wealth of intertextual references to Wagner's operas in his writings testifies to the important position Wagner's work occupied in Forster's creative imagination. Judith Herz (1997) has brilliantly investigated the web of intertextual references to Wagner's operas in *The Longest Journey*. Characters and features from Wagner's *Ring* cycle in particular appear throughout Forster's entire work; thus, for example, in “The Celestial Omnibus”, the rainbow bridge from *Das Rheingold* carries the boy protagonist across a river into a Paradise of art and literature, accompanied by the sounds of the opera's prelude (TMS42); a “rainbow bridge” also appears in *Howards End*, where it “should connect the prose in us with the passion” (HE183). I have discussed some of the Wagnerian elements in “Ralph and Tony” in note 362. Herz has furthermore drawn attention to the fact that “interest in Wagner at the turn of the century was not just evidence of an avant-garde aesthetic, it was also, for homosexuals, a lightly coded affirmation of sexual preference” (1997:141), expressed by the Wagner references in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and Aubrey Beardsley's *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* (1907).

⁵⁹² I discuss Forster's letter in section III.2.3.1.

I should certainly have starred the murdered apprentices. I should have introduced their ghosts in the last scene, rising out of the estuary, on either side of the vengeful greybeard, blood and fire would have been thrown in the tenor's face, Hell would have opened, and on a mixture of *Don Juan* and the *Freischütz* I should have lowered my final curtain. (TCD178)

As Irene Morra has accurately summarised, “Forster’s operatic vision indicates his willingness to transform events into an operatic idiom defined by spectacle and melodrama” (2002:11). At the same time, Forster’s choice of (presumably) the dramatic climax of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and Weber’s Wolf’s Glen scene as models for his grand finale “indicates”, in Mary Francis’s words, “the extent to which his ideas about opera were rooted in the century of his birth” (50).⁵⁹³ The same view was expressed by Britten in 1969, when he summarised Forster’s musical tastes:

Forster prefers music based on striking themes, dramatic happenings, and strong immediate moods, rather than on classical control and balance, beautiful melodies and perfection of detail; music which benefits from being listened to closely and from some knowledge of it. He prefers the Romantic to the Classical. And why shouldn’t he? – he was brought up musically at the end of the nineteenth century.

Even though Britten conceded that “Forster *is* interested in new music – I have heard him react sympathetically to Stravinsky, to Michael Tippett, and also to some of my own pieces” (85), it seems that Forster’s reactions, though “sympathetic[...]” in some cases, might nevertheless also have originated in an attitude which can be described as “Romantic”. The numerous comments on music that appear in his work certainly seem to suggest that Forster privileged an emotional and imaginative approach to music over a more intellectual, analytical appreciation, which he tended to regard as overly cerebral, and therefore suspect.⁵⁹⁴ Brit-

⁵⁹³ It has to be noted, however, that Forster probably considered his version of *Peter Grimes* closer to Crabbe’s original, which does feature ghosts and visions of horror and hellfire, and in which “Grimes is tough, hard and dull”: Forster cites Crabbe’s note on the character, whom Crabbe describes as “untouched by pity, unstung by remorse, and uncorrected by shame”. In Forster’s eyes, “a sensitive Grimes would mean a different poem” (TCD174f), and it is precisely that which the Slater/Britten opera has created: the new Grimes is “revealed as the exception, the poet”, and the opera features “no ghosts, no father, no murders, no crime on Peter’s part except what is caused by the far greater crimes committed against him by society. He is the misunderstood Byronic hero. [...] He is an interesting person, he is a bundle of musical possibilities, but he is not the Peter Grimes of Crabbe” (TCD178f). Forster’s reading of Crabbe would evidently have resulted in a different librettistic transformation, but on the other hand, his reading of the opera, which includes the observation that “the community is to blame” (TCD179) does, as Mary Francis notes, “demonstrate his understanding of Britten’s theme of the outcast” (50) – a theme which was, after all, far from alien to his own creative imagination.

⁵⁹⁴ The ideas Forster explored in his essays “Not Listening to Music” and “The C Minor of that Life” (1941, TCD119-121), as well as the famous description of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in Ch. 5 of *Howards End* and some of the thoughts about music that appear in various other texts,

ten realised this, noting a “curious tendency to mock at any intellectual approach on the part of the listener” (84) in Forster’s 1939 essay “Not Listening to Music”,⁵⁹⁵ as well as in Ch. 5 of *Howards End*. The latter, in which the Schlegels attend a concert performance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, features the famous description of the work’s third movement in the form of a programmatic narrative which unfolds in Helen Schlegel’s mind, and with which the novel’s narrator appears to sympathise; indeed, the passage can be seen to contain a number of elements which reappear in Forster’s description of his own listening habits in “Not Listening to Music”. As the focus of the scene, Helen’s imaginative response to the music is contrasted with that of her brother, the aesthete Tibby Schlegel, “who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee”, but whose only verbal contribution – he “implored the company generally to look out for the transitional passage on the drum” – is met with incomprehension and dismissal by his female relatives (HE29f.). In Britten’s reading,

the novelist is determined to paint Tibby black, or dark grey [...] and one of the ways of doing this is to make him “intellectual” about music, and therefore not “feel” it; it is “dangerous” to know a lot about it. [...] For some reason Forster does not want to admit that knowing about music is a help: Tibby should not bother about transitional passages. (84f.)

Since Britten, a professional musician and a gifted composer of superb technical skill, was not only profoundly “know[ledgeable] about music” but also produced “music which benefits from being listened to closely and from some knowledge of it”, his criticism of Forster’s “mock[ery]” of Tibby is understandable: “I can’t help reacting sympathetically to the boy and want to know more about him” (84f.).

What Britten perceived as Forster’s apparent disdain for analytical approaches to music may have been partly responsible for moments of frustration during their collaboration on *Billy Budd* – experiences such as the one Britten recorded in a *cri de coeur* to Erwin Stein on 9 Sept 1951, when Forster was staying at Aldeburgh:

He’s done some work with me, & demanded to have the work played to him – but cannot remember *at all* what he’s previously heard of it! I’ve played him Acts II, III, & IV – & apart from excitement about Claggart’s Monologue (rather ironical that!), no comment *at all*, not even of disapproval! He doesn’t seem to be able to grasp it at all – or [be] really interested in the musical side of the opera. Still, I must be grateful for a wonderful libretto. (BLL677f.; editors’ emendation)

To Claire Seymour, this letter suggests that “Britten seems to have sensed that Forster [...] failed to recognise the full potential of the opera’s musical discourse,

suggest that he was familiar with the experience of synaesthesia; which is not to say, of course, that synaesthesia and analytical appreciation are mutually exclusive.

⁵⁹⁵ TCD122-125.

neglecting the expressive power of concordance and contradiction between the verbal and musical strands" (157). It ought perhaps to be objected here that, as an amateur musician and seasoned Wagnerian, Forster will presumably have been basically capable of engaging with Britten's leitmotivic musical discourse, albeit on a level which could hardly have matched the composer's level of insight. Yet as long as it is not taken as the final word on Forster's perception of the opera, Seymour's conclusion may be regarded as valid in the light of the considerable differences in Britten's and Forster's relations to music, which would have included their level of analytic listening as well as their habits of perceiving and thinking about musical structure, and, indeed, their individual musical tastes.

As a writer of opera, Britten acknowledged Mozart and Verdi as his chief influences.⁵⁹⁶ His description of Forster's musical preferences (see above) seems subtly to imply that it was he who, in contrast to Forster, had a decided preference for "classical control and balance", and placed the highest value on "perfection of detail" (85). Britten's self-declared musical aim was "to achieve perfect clarity of expression", and his method was "to clarify, to refine, to sensitise" (in Schafer 227), an undertaking which went hand in hand with his explorations of the technical and artistic possibilities offered by smaller chamber ensembles. As Arnold Whittall has summarised, "Britten revealed that anything smacking of an expansively grand manner would always be achieved against the grain: and so the overwhelming climaxes of *Billy Budd*, *Gloriana* and the *War Requiem* may be savoured all the more for their relative rarity" (1982:113).

Both *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946) and *Albert Herring* (1947), the operas which preceded the idea of a collaboration with Forster, had been chamber operas; the English Opera Group (EOG), founded in 1946/47, of which Britten was an artistic director, had moreover decided to match the musical aesthetics of the new small-ensemble medium with the use of simplistic scenery (a decision motivated also by practical considerations of economics and touring logistics). In fact, it seems that when it came to collaborating with Britten, Forster, with Britten's recent operas in mind, had some initial misgivings regarding the scale and format of the project he was about to embark on. According to Crozier, Forster had made it clear in a "preliminary discussion" that he "did not care to write a comedy (as had been suggested) 'because comedy must be either satirical or nostalgic', nor did he want to write a chamber-opera: any opera with which he was connected must be on the grandest possible scale" (1979:31).⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁶ See, for instance, Tracey 293 and Mitchell 2004:21.

⁵⁹⁷ Crozier and Britten had at one time envisaged "a social comedy, perhaps in an English country house setting"; another subject they had been considering was *The History of Margaret Catchpole: A Suffolk Girl* (1845), by Richard Cobbold, which tells "the story of a servant girl's fatal relationship with a smuggler", and which would, by virtue of its Suffolk background, have been connected with *Albert Herring* and *Peter Grimes* (Reed 1993a:45).

On 20 December 1948, when the subject-matter had already been decided upon, Forster sent a letter to Britten in which he indicated his reservations against too much symbolic abstraction both on the structural level and in visual terms: emphasising his wish to “keep human beings and the smell of tar”, he went on to explain:

I like the idea of a chorus, shanties &ct, provided it is at the level of the half-informed Greek chorus, which was always making mistakes. The well-informed commentator, the person or personages outside time, would not here be suitable. At least that is my first reaction, so I do not altogether agree with the three of you⁵⁹⁸ – formidable thought. But the idea is all new to me, and I may change when I have thought more about it. 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 that a mystic Billy would not support more than two acts. (EMFL II:235)

Forster's wish for “grand opera” is often cited without the first half of his sentence which seems, however, to be of crucial importance for any attempt to render his point of view. While his statement can be taken to suggest that Forster may have had his doubts about the musical effects which could be achieved in a chamber opera, it demonstrates unequivocally that the visual associations and the overall imposing style of “grand opera mounted clearly and grandly” were among his primary concerns. Taken in conjunction with his comments on “the well-informed commentator, the person or personages outside time”, Forster's letter suggests that he may secretly have feared he would be required to follow the structural model of *The Rape of Lucretia*, and produce a symbolic work for a small cast of sublimated characters who would move about on an abstract stage designed in what he once referred to as the “drippy and apocalyptic” style of John Piper,⁵⁹⁹ accompanied by a modest ensemble of solo instruments. As Crozier recalls, however, the fact that the new work had by this time been commissioned for performance at the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden meant that it was in any case going to “have to be a large-scale opera” (1979:31), and so, in the event, the overall conception of the opera finally arrived at by the collaborators was happily in accordance with Forster's wishes.

⁵⁹⁸ Lago and Furbank (II:235, n.3) and Reed (1993a:46) agree in identifying “the three of you” as Britten, Crozier and Peter Pears.

⁵⁹⁹ Letter to Joe Ackerley of 15 August 1949. In his letter, Forster expresses his misgivings about working with John Piper, another of the EOG's artistic directors and its principal stage designer, who had already worked with Britten on *Lucretia* and *Albert Herring*. “I want a ship that looks like one and is not drippy and apocalyptic” (KCC: EMF/18/6/7; this letter is also quoted by King [103], where the source of Forster's utterance remains unidentified, however). A great part of Piper's work shows a preference for darkly muted colours and abstracting tendencies of sketchiness or disintegration. Forster's fears were to remain unrealised; the ship did indeed look like one, and Piper's stage designing seems to have met with Forster's approval.

III.1.3. Setting to work

Since Forster had felt doubtful at first about whether he had sufficient experience in dramatic writing, Britten had enlisted the help of his close associate Eric Crozier for the project. Crozier had been the stage director of the first performances of *Peter Grimes* and *The Rape of Lucretia*, had written the libretto for *Albert Herring*, and had provided words for *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1946), *Saint Nicolas* (1948) and *The Little Sweep* (1949); he was also one of the artistic directors and founding members of the EOG. He had furthermore served as a “go-between” for Britten and Montagu Slater, who had written the libretto for *Peter Grimes*, “helping to mould [the] dramatic shape” of Slater’s text so that it would better suit Britten’s needs as a composer. He had done similar work for *The Rape of Lucretia*, “play[ing] mediator” for Britten and the librettist Ronald Duncan.⁶⁰⁰ At the time which saw the beginning of the collaboration with Forster, Britten was “ha[ving] constant recourse to [Crozier’s] practical knowledge of theatre and his great sensitivity to dramatic gesture” (Wadsworth 11), so that Crozier was the composer’s natural choice when it came to finding someone who would assist Forster in writing a libretto for the new opera.⁶⁰¹ However, progress on the project was initially slow, because a suitable subject had not yet been found.

The earliest documented reference to Melville’s novella appears in a letter from Forster to Britten of 11 November 1948, in which Forster emphasises his familiarity with *Billy Budd*: “I *have* read Billy Budd, and did once broadcast on it” (Reed 1993a:45). The broadcast Forster refers to would have been none other than his 1947 BBC Book Talk on *Billy Budd*.⁶⁰² In 1960, Forster recalled how he had received a letter from Britten – “quite a short one suggesting this Melville thing *Billy Budd*, and I wrote back and said yes; it suited me at once and I was absolutely delighted to get this tiny note” (BBC1960:194). In his 1951 BBC Radio talk on “Writing an Opera”, the script of which was read and corrected by Forster, Eric Crozier states that it was Britten who suggested the story as a possible subject for the projected work, but notes that “Forster must be recognised as the godfather of Britten’s *Billy Budd*” because “it was his appreciation of Melville’s novel” in *Aspects of the Novel* “that sowed fertile seed in the composer’s mind” (typescript [BPL], p.4). In 1960, Britten was uncertain

⁶⁰⁰ For further details about Eric Crozier, see also BBLL212f., n.2.

⁶⁰¹ Crozier gives some valuable information on the conception and the development of the opera *Billy Budd* in “Staging first productions” (Crozier 1979) – an article he contributed to David Herbert’s edition of Britten’s complete opera librettos – and a highly detailed account of the genesis and growth of the work in his article “The Writing of *Billy Budd*” (Crozier 1986). Further information has been collected and presented by Reed in his comprehensive article “From first thoughts to first night: a *Billy Budd* chronology” (Reed 1993a) in the Cambridge Opera Handbook of *Billy Budd*.

⁶⁰² “Some Books” (*Billy Budd*), BBC384-388. See my discussion of this broadcast in sections II.5.1.1. and II.5.3.2.

whether it was the passage in the *Aspects of the Novel* [...] that reminded me of this extraordinary short story of Melville. I can't remember exactly. I have a feeling that somewhere on tour in England, just after the war, I bought the little reprint of *Billy Budd* and that excited me very much, and I think I wrote to you almost immediately and you replied very warmly [...]; stupidly one forgets these things so easily. (BBC1960:195)⁶⁰³

Once the idea of *Billy Budd* had materialised, Britten and Forster began to consider this subject-matter in earnest; and Crozier was duly summoned to Aldeburgh a short while later – “one cold winter's day late in 1948” (Crozier 1979:31f.) – so that the two of them could present the idea to him: they “put me in a room by myself with a copy of *Billy Budd*, which I had never seen before, and left me alone ‘til lunchtime to study it” (Crozier in BBC1960:194).

Confusingly, both in the 1960 radio discussion and in his article “The Writing of *Billy Budd*”, Crozier gives the time of his first encounter with Melville's text at Britten's house as January 1949 (BBC1960:194 and Crozier 1986:12). Yet Forster's letter to Britten of 20 December 1948, in which he discusses some of his ideas concerning the conception of the opera, clearly refers to a previous exchange with “the three of you” (EMFL II:234f.; see p.461 above), and it seems unlikely that these three would have been anyone other than Britten, Pears and Crozier (see note 598), who ought accordingly to be assumed to have read Melville's novella by that date. In his article “Staging First Productions” (1979), on the other hand, Crozier establishes a time-line which agrees with a scenario that dates his first *Billy Budd* summons to late November or early December 1948; a letter written by Forster to his friend Bob Buckingham on 30 November 1948 (KCC: EMF/18/82/29) establishes that Forster had indeed been at Aldeburgh around the end of that month.⁶⁰⁴

Crozier states that the collaborators' first meeting produced the so-called ‘Earliest Materials’ – a list of characters and a list of “the dramatic episodes as they occur in the book” in Britten's hand, as well as Britten's sketch of a sailing ship “annotated” by his collaborators.⁶⁰⁵ Crozier then goes on to mention a *second* “meeting in January 1949” which produced “a kind of dry working-synopsis, a scenario in five main scenes, each one sub-divided into episodes” (1979:32); this

⁶⁰³ The time-scale of Britten's narrative of his (re)discovery of *Billy Budd*, his excitement over the story and his writing to Forster “almost immediately” appears somewhat vague and contracted; “just after the war” would in fact seem to cover a period of about two years, ranging from 1946 (the year in which Plomer's “little reprint” was first published and he could first have obtained it) right up to 1948, if Britten's account is understood to imply that he not only bought but also read the book while on tour, became “excited” by it and then “almost immediately” communicated with Forster. In his postscript to William Plomer's 1975 autobiography, Simon Nowell-Smith claims that “when Britten persuaded Forster into a collaboration, it was William who suggested Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*” (in Plomer 1975:438); however, I have found no documented evidence from the opera-makers' side to support this claim.

⁶⁰⁴ See also Reed 1993a:45.

⁶⁰⁵ The sketch and the list of episodes (BPL A61:14f.) are reproduced in Reed 1993a:47-49.

five-scene “working synopsis”, known as the First Rough Synopsis, was subsequently typed up by Crozier (Reed 1993a:49).⁶⁰⁶ According to Crozier’s 1979 account, the famous March conclave, during which Forster and Crozier spent two weeks at the composer’s house producing their first full-length libretto draft (i.e. the manuscript drafts which preceded the typed March Draft), was in fact the collaborators’ third *Billy Budd* meeting.⁶⁰⁷

III.1.4. “A positive challenge”: all-male opera and relations between men

In his biography of E. M. Forster, P. N. Furbank states that once Britten and Forster had “hit on the idea of Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd* [...] it seemed to them, instantly, the right, the perfect choice” (II:283). However, “as a practical man of the theatre”, Crozier was initially sceptical about “the enormous difficulties of the undertaking” (Crozier 1986:12): “Who but a composer could have envisaged an opera that takes place entirely on a man-of-war, that has no women characters, and whose hero suffers from a paralytic stammer?” (1979:31). Even though Crozier was later to concede that “in terms of human action”, the story was “a most powerful tale”, it appears to have been especially the absence of “contrast between man and woman”, something he considered “fundamental” to “any great work of art for the stage”, which made him doubt the suitability of the material for a stage adaptation:

I felt that by restricting the work to an all-male man-of-war, you would miss out just as much on a contrast of emotional conflict as on a contrast of vocal colours or locale. And this neither of them would admit to, because they were both homosexual; and I wasn’t. They felt it was a positive challenge. (In Wadsworth 12)

In the end, Crozier’s doubts and objections were swept aside: Forster and Britten were set on the subject, and their enthusiasm was to prevail, although Forster was at one point to confide to Trilling: “What an opera with all-male parts will be like, passes me; the only precedent, *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*,⁶⁰⁸ is not encouraging”

⁶⁰⁶ Forster’s annotated copy of this is archived on BPL A61:19-24.

⁶⁰⁷ In this representation of the order of events, I differ from that given in BBLL480, n.3, and by Reed, who (following Crozier’s 1960 and 1986 statements) accepts January 1949 as the collaborator’s first meeting. It appears that Reed arrives at his chronology without considering Crozier’s 1979 representation, since he does not name that article in his list of Crozier’s other accounts of the opera’s genesis (1993a:160, n.10). Reed interprets Forster’s letter of 20 December 1948 as suggesting that Crozier “already had some inkling of the *Billy Budd* proposal” (47); however, given that in 1960, Crozier claimed “never” to have “seen” the book “before” his first reading of it (in BBC1960:194), it seems highly improbable that the discussion Forster’s letter refers to should have taken place before Crozier had read the novella, since the surprise confrontation with *Billy Budd* which preceded all discussion of detail consistently figures in all of Crozier’s accounts of the idea’s gestation.

⁶⁰⁸ *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame* (1902), by Jules Massenet, with a libretto by Maurice Léna, based on a short story of the same name by Anatole France (1892), which draws on a medieval religious

(letter of 16 April 1949, EMFL II:237). In the event, the musical challenge was solved by Britten's skilful scoring, which often makes use of the higher wind instruments to counterbalance the lower range of the vocal parts.

Even though Crozier suggests that both Forster and Britten were attracted to Melville's text because it appealed to their personal interest in male/male relationships, he "never discussed homosexuality with either Forster or Britten – neither in a general sense nor insofar as it might pertain to their opera or ways in which it might be interpreted" (Wadsworth 12). This hardly comes as a surprise, given that both men were not only habitually inclined to be reticent on the subject of homosexuality, but also tended to choose their confidants for what they would very probably have considered a private subject with some care. Indeed, it seems possible that they may never have communicated their private thoughts and ideas on this sensitive subject either to each other or to Eric Crozier, with whom their "enormously long discussions" appear to have focused on subjects like the philosophical question of good and evil (BBC1960:205f.; see also Crozier in Wadsworth 14) as well as on the technical and historical aspects of the work. It appears that among the collaborators, "it was taken for granted that [homosexuality] was part of [Forster's and Britten's] response to the story but not necessarily something they were going to play *for*" (Wadsworth 12). Yet many modern critics tend to view *Billy Budd* as "the most direct and public treatment of the homoerotically charged relationships between men" which either Forster or Britten "had [yet] produced" (Francis 51).

It is probably in the nature of things that, where the subject of the opera's homoerotic overtones is concerned, a lot of critical writing should be focused on Forster's contribution, since he was officially the principal creator of the work's verbal discourse. Furthermore, compared to the reticent Britten, Forster can be seen to have left the more promising hints at the private significance which his work on *Billy Budd* had for him. Thus, for instance, he famously felt that he and Britten had "both put into it something which lies deeper than artistic creation, ~~something~~ and which we both understand. It could never have got there but for both of us" (letter to Britten of 9 December 1951, EMFL II:246). Clifford Hindley has proposed that the "something [...] deeper than artistic creation" which Forster alludes to may be linked with Forster's sense that "in collaboration with Benjamin Britten", he had finally found "the means of making a public statement" about homosexual love "that had up till then eluded him" (1989:365). By contrast, Britten's position as the creator of the opera's non-verbal discourse is generally understood to be much harder to determine, and is moreover often seen as conflicting with Forster's to some extent (see discussion below and in section III.2.1.). Numerous critics have characterised Forster's approach to the adaptation of Melville's text as following a homosexual narrative agenda, drawn more or less directly

legend. The opera does in fact contain two small but important soprano parts (the voices of Angels who appear at the climax in Act III) which are usually performed by female singers.

from the preferred Forsterian narrative patterns: thus, Humphrey Carpenter has proclaimed that

Forster wanted *Billy Budd* to be a tract on the redeeming power of homosexual love, with Billy as a specimen of lower-class goodness, like Alec Scudder in his then unpublished novel *Maurice* which he showed to Britten and Pears, destroying the 'perverted' aspect of homosexuality (Claggart) and becoming a saviour-figure to the rest of the ship. (1992:286f.)

Forster's frustration over what he perceived as the impossibility of publishing the homosexually themed fiction he had produced is well established (*Maurice* being, of course, the most prominent text concerned). It seems to have gone hand in hand with a latent frustration over his increasing inability to achieve a satisfying level of self-expression in fiction. As early as 1911, Forster had famously noted his "weariness of the only subject that I both can and may treat – the love of men for women & vice versa" (16 June, LD27). In 1932, almost a decade after the publication of *A Passage to India*, he observed that "it is now only in letters I write what I feel: not in literature any more, and I seldom say it, because I keep trying to be amusing" (CPB92). His work for the BBC Third Programme was to enable him to express his thoughts and feelings to a wider audience once more, but the public nature of the medium imposed a limit on how close he could come to articulating some of his most cherished concerns. A few surviving short stories from the period indicate that Forster did not entirely abandon his attempts at literary self-expression, but the texts' homosexual content again precluded their dissemination beyond the circle of his friends.

In October 1948, at the age of 69, Forster went through a phase of deep depression, during which he felt his faith in personal relationships slip away, and experienced intensified anxiety about the waning of his creative energies (Furbank II:282). Forster's enthusiasm over the idea of collaborating with Britten appears to have helped not only to restore his spirits, but also to renew his creative energies; indeed, his engagement with *Billy Budd* might be seen to have reverberated well into the 1950s. This was the period which saw the publication of a selection of his essays as *Two Cheers for Democracy* in November 1951, as well as, more significantly, some important revisions and additions to *Maurice*, and the growth of a scene from his abandoned novel *Arctic Summer* into the short story "The Other Boat" (1957/58).⁶⁰⁹ In consideration of all these facts, it seems all the more probable that Forster's perception of *Billy Budd* would indeed have included an awareness that the finished opera did in some way represent, in Hindley's words, the "public statement" about love between men "that had up till then eluded him" (1989:365). Philip Brett was among the earliest scholars to express the opinion that for Forster, writing the libretto was "the opportunity to write about profound rela-

⁶⁰⁹ See section II.4.4. and Rochlitz 52ff.

tionships between men: symbolically to evoke the power of homosexual love without being in any way sexually explicit" (1984:135).

Critics who subscribe to the view that *Billy Budd* represents a conscious attempt on the collaborators' part to address relationships between men from a homosexual perspective generally acknowledge the necessarily oblique quality of the opera's homosexual implications.⁶¹⁰ As Hindley reminds the modern reader, "not much historical imagination is needed to realise just how difficult it was in the 1950s, when *Maurice* still lay hidden, unpublished, in Forster's drawer, to say anything at all on the stage about love between men" (1989:365). Britten and Forster, both of whose homosexuality was to some extent an open secret even though they were, in their different ways, discreet about it, were writing from their respective established positions within the cultural centre. Since their aim was, from this position, to produce a 'public', publishable work, the entire issue of homoerotic desire would have had to remain sufficiently encoded to avoid not only personal scandal but censorship.⁶¹¹ From their point of view, any allusions they might wish to make about male/male relationships which went beyond the socially sanctioned norm would require a "safe arena" (Francis 51).

In this respect, their choice of a firmly canonised text by an equally firmly canonised author like Melville was a happy one, since Melville's novella could if necessary have been identified as the source of the more overt discourses about male/male desire which surround the figures of Claggart and Billy; while these discourses themselves were sufficiently vague for the novella to have remained 'officially' free from scandalous association. Melville's text explicitly states that Claggart's depravity "partakes nothing of the sordid or sensual" (BB56), but at the same time, it provides a number of other points that might, had the occasion arisen, have served well enough to justify the librettists' interpretation of Claggart's envy and hatred as stemming from his exclusion from the group of those capable of loving Billy.⁶¹² The obvious example would be the statement that Claggart "could even

⁶¹⁰ It was not until 1956 that the Wolfenden Committee began its work on the Report on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (published in 1957) which was to advocate the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting male adults; male homosexuality remained a criminal offence under British law until 1967.

⁶¹¹ As an example for the realities of censorship, Donald Mitchell (1993:168) cites the Lord Chamberlain's 1956 prohibition against the public performance of Arthur Miller's play *A View from the Bridge*; this contains a scene in which a male character challenges another's masculinity and kisses him to make his point. The play, like other works whose content was deemed unsuitable, ended up having to be performed at a private theatre club, in this case the Comedy Theatre in London.

⁶¹² It is possible that herein lies a partial explanation for the collaborators' repeated insistence that they had tried to produce "as faithful" a rendition of Melville's original "as possible" (Crozier in BBC1960:203): while Crozier tends to stress the historical and technical accuracy of the libretto, Forster emphasises that "I had the general feeling of salvation of course, but I don't think we put in anything in that region which Melville did not give us. We imagined ourselves anyhow to be following his symbolism" (BBC1960:205).

have loved Billy but for fate and ban" (BB70) – the nature of this "love" remaining sufficiently open to interpretation in the libretto.

In order to insure themselves against possible accusations of presenting indecent material, the opera-makers would have been able to conceal the possibility of Claggart's harbouring a homoerotic desire for Billy within the commonly accepted framework of Melville's text as a parable on the conflict between good and evil; and they would arguably have been aided in such a project by the genre conventions of opera. Claggart's Iago-like scheming sufficiently agreed with existing dramatic models to identify him as the obvious villain figure, and the "nice dark music" (Britten in BBC1960:197) which Britten produced for him completed the operatic stereotype at least superficially. Any 'perverted' feelings Claggart might display – whether they hinted at same-sex desire or at a sadistic enjoyment of others' suffering – were not only likely to be absorbed by his overall role as the villain of the piece, but could furthermore be assumed to fall more or less safely into a no man's land of tolerance by virtue of the very convention that would have made the publication of *Maurice* impossible at the time: stories with identifiably homosexual characters tended to be tolerated provided that they did not present a positive view of homosexuality (let alone a successful homosexual hero). Claggart, the villain figure of *Billy Budd*, identified as "evil" in Captain Vere's "Claggart, John Claggart, beware" monologue at the opening of Act II, Sc. 2 (LIB51), is duly punished for plotting to destroy the opera's eponymous hero; and it is likely that the discourses about "divine judgement" and "iniquity overthrown" (LIB58) would have sufficed to appease any concerns which might have arisen about the implied nature of his depravity.

The fact that Claggart's famous Act I monologue "O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness" can be read as an attempt to evoke sympathy for the ultimately tragic predicament of a repressed and homophobic homosexual (see sections I.4.4. and III.3.) seems to have gone unnoticed, or at least remained uncommented, by the opera's early critics, who tended to look no further than what operatic convention offered. Writing in 1952, Andrew Porter, who had studied Melville's novella thoroughly enough to remark on the "undertone" of desire which characterised Claggart's relationship with Billy in that text (111), was ultimately dismissive of the aria, remarking that "the librettists have constructed from Melville's paragraphs on natural depravity a self-explanatory soliloquy for him, an 'I am a villain' monologue" (113).

It is surprising to find, however, that even Eric Crozier seems to have remained oblivious of the full implications of Claggart's central monologue, his claims about the influence which his collaborators' homosexuality had on their choice of subject notwithstanding. Humphrey Carpenter, who interviewed Crozier on the subject of Claggart, reports that Crozier "felt that Claggart had come out as a 'boring, black-masked villain, not a tormented individual who is driven into evil by some kind of inadequacy in his nature'", and that he "felt Britten wasn't sufficiently interested in Claggart, he was interested in Vere" (1992:292). Some years

earlier, Crozier had voiced a similar criticism in an interview with Stephen Wadsworth:

I've never really felt the three of us really understood Claggart. To me he's much too conventional a villain. [...] The Claggart aria seems to me an attempt to present pure evil, and it becomes boring. It could have been more interesting, if we'd taken the same trouble with Claggart as we did with Billy and Vere. [...] If you read Melville, you do feel sympathy for Claggart. There is this aching unhappiness. He's described somewhere as Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*, gazing at Adam and envying his beauty. (In Wadsworth 14)

If even Crozier failed to recognise the “aching unhappiness” implied in the operatic Claggart's repeated references to the “torment[ed]” existence he is doomed to lead in his “own dark world” (LIB32f.), and if even he persisted in thinking of the aria which Forster considered his own “most important piece of writing” within the libretto (EMFL II:242)⁶¹³ as merely “an attempt to present pure evil” (Crozier in Wadsworth 14), this would seem to testify to the efficacy of Claggart's villain camouflage. At the same time, Crozier's views demonstrate that there really did exist considerable communicative barriers among the three collaborators where their respective views of the different characters and their personal views of the opera's overall significance were concerned.⁶¹⁴

As Hindley (1989:375ff.) has shown, the relationship between Billy and Vere also underwent a gradual development in which the collaborators created a more intense emotional bond between the two men (see also section III.2.4.). Again, the genre conventions of opera (and of grand opera in particular) would have been able to some degree to absorb what an audience might otherwise have objected to as a slightly overblown quality to Billy's loyal enthusiasm in his encounter with Vere in the captain's cabin. Furthermore, as I have noted elsewhere,

with the end of World War II little more than six years in the past, positively connoted images of male homosocial bonding in the armed forces would still have been sufficiently present in the public consciousness for the relationship's implied homoeroticism to blend with socially sanctioned narratives of heroic officers and equally heroic loyal subalterns. (Rochlitz 52)

There should be no need to point out that I am not by any means proposing that either Forster or Britten was exclusively preoccupied with the homoerotic subtext of the *Billy Budd* they were going to produce. Both artists' lifelong concern lay equally strongly with questions of the individual's relation to society, institutional-

⁶¹³ Letter to Britten of early December 1950.

⁶¹⁴ In “The Writing of *Billy Budd*”, Crozier reports that it was only when he read Furbank's biography of Forster (publ. 1978) that he fully understood some of the details which had led to the quarrel between Britten and Forster late in 1950, even though it was he to whom it fell to play the role of mediator in their conflict (1986:23; see also note 720).

ised oppression, pacifism, and the right to free speech, to name only a few of their shared preoccupations. Another feature of Melville's story which would have been a challenge especially to Britten is its treatment of the theme of innocence and corruption, a theme which reappears throughout the composer's entire work in manifold guises. The violation of innocence had been poignantly portrayed in *The Rape of Lucretia*; in *Billy Budd*, both Billy and the Novice can be seen to suffer a violent initiation into the realities of the warship world, which, in the Novice's case, is concomitant with enforced corruption and the loss of moral innocence as he agrees to betray Billy. The fatal conflict between the individual and a hostile social environment, which lies at the centre of *Peter Grimes*, is also addressed in *Billy Budd*, where it is arguably represented by all three main characters. While Mervyn Cooke merely notes that Billy, "innocence at odds with its surroundings", is "less of an 'outsider' than Peter Grimes since he gets on so well with most of his shipmates" (1993c:289), it is in fact possible to see not only Billy, but also Claggart and Vere as 'outsiders', with the socially popular Billy actually the least isolated of them all. Finally, Hindley has pointed out that the choice of Melville's novella as the subject for the opera commissioned for the 1951 Festival of Britain "enabled the composer to deal with a victorious period of British naval history" (not inappropriate to the commission), yet in a way which reflected his own concern with the evils of war".⁶¹⁵ For, as Hindley correctly observes, the Britten/Forster/Crozier *Billy Budd* "is no panegyric of the British Navy"; rather, "protest against the evils of war is a significant part of the opera's message" (1989:363).⁶¹⁶

III.1.5. "We did steep ourselves in this story": researching the historical background

In his letter to Britten of 20 December 1948 (see p.461 above), Forster emphasised that his creative concept was "to start" with a "ship and crew" that were "realistic[...]": while he confirmed his awareness that "good and evil and eternal matters" would have to "shine through them", he stressed that he was anxious to "keep human beings and the smell of tar" (EMFL II:235). A consensus was evidently reached in this matter; and since the bulk of the responsibility for creating the opera's realistic backdrop was naturally going to rest with the librettists, Forster and Crozier subsequently embarked on a project of extensive historical research in preparation for their task. According to Crozier, their aim was to "steep ourselves in this story" (BBC1960:203); and so, besides collecting information from books and pictures,⁶¹⁷ they visited the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich in February 1949 (Crozier 1986:13f.) and went to Portsmouth late that

⁶¹⁵ Allen Frantzen has recently examined *Billy Budd* in the context of the 1951 Festival of Britain; his article also discusses the other operas commissioned by the Arts Council for this occasion.

⁶¹⁶ Both Britten and Pears had been Conscientious Objectors during World War II.

⁶¹⁷ For more detailed information on the book research done by Forster, see Reed 1993a:49ff.

spring to visit HMS *Victory* (BBC1960:202). Crozier also recalls visiting “the Science Museum to look at their models of ships”, and states that “we did our homework pretty thoroughly and were fairly well up in the technique of sailing ships and the kind of life that was lived aboard” (BBC1960:203). It seems that Crozier came to be regarded as the expert on technical details, for Britten explicitly mentions that they had initially had “problems over the nautical terms and tactics, but Crozier did endless research over these, and a naval friend carefully checked everything” (1969:86).

The librettists’ immersive approach, which Crozier links with the idea of remaining “as faithful to Melville as possible” (BBC1960:203), was to prove valuable for their attempt to “try to imagine what life can have been like on a man-of-war” (Crozier 1986:14), and also served as a help towards understanding some of the issues addressed in Melville’s text. Thus, Forster recalls that “the *Victory* was very useful for the scene below decks” (BBC1960:202), and Crozier elaborates on their “remarkable experience” on board Nelson’s flagship:

And to see the incredible darkness and confinement in which those sailors lived. It was something to me quite extraordinary; I shall never forget seeing the surgeon’s cabin, which was the size of a small wardrobe, and where presumably all the major operations and amputations had to be carried out. (BBC1960:202)

The everyday experiences and hardships of the common sailors, as well as the institutionalised abusive shipboard practices and general bad conditions which led to the Spithead and Nore mutinies, appear to have represented an important focal point for Crozier in particular (an impression which may, however, be distorted by the fact that Crozier produced the greatest number of preserved statements on this topic). In 1951, Crozier published an article on “The British Navy in 1797” in *Tempo*, citing George Ernest Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée’s account of the Spithead and Nore naval mutinies, *The Floating Republic*, as his source for “many facts” (1951:11). Crozier opens his article with a quotation by Samuel Johnson: “No man will be a sailor who has contrivance to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned”.⁶¹⁸ Stating that “in popular song and story, the British seaman was an epitome of freedom and manly independence”, Crozier goes on to ask “What was the reality? What kind of men were those who fought under Nelson at the Nile and Trafalgar? Were they near slaves, as Johnson suggests?” (9).

The information Crozier then supplies indicates that he is inclined to agree with Johnson. Positing that “we shall expect to find naval life harsh and rigidly disciplined”, he proceeds to show that “the reality” was even more grim than that. Crozier’s article presents “the abuses that in 1797 provoked the Fleet to mutiny”,

⁶¹⁸ Johnson’s dictum, which appears in his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, is cited by James Boswell in his famous *Life of Samuel Johnson* of 1791 (246).

first and foremost among them the poor wages, withheld for the entire duration of several years' voyaging, and earned under conditions where "British seamen were prisoners aboard their ships. Shore-leave was unknown: it would have led to wholesale desertions" (9). Crozier explains that "during the period of the French wars, the Navy expanded rapidly", with something like an eightfold increase of personnel

obtained by impressment, by dragging men away from homes and families or by seizing them from merchant-ships. No one was safe from the armed press-gangs that scoured the country. [...] Convicts were drafted straight from His Majesty's prisons to His Majesty's ships.

Crozier emphasises that the men on board ship "lived herded together like cattle in the semi-darkness and foul air of the lower decks. Fourteen inches of space for each hammock was the regulation allowance"; while "the food aboard ship was monotonous and disgusting". Crozier also notes that even though rum, "the only adequate and universally welcome provision", was issued to the sailors daily, "drunkenness was punished by flogging" (10). Furthermore, Crozier mentions that "from time to time during the 1790's petitions were addressed to the Admiralty" complaining of "the abuse of power" by "brutal officers", and he stresses that "men were flogged (and severe flogging crippled or killed) for the most trivial offences, for 'silent contempt', for being last to obey an order". He concludes his article with a brief observation on Melville's treatment of the Spithead and Nore mutinies in *Billy Budd*: "Though sometimes bookish, Melville's account of naval life in 1797 is vivid and exact [...]. [...] Billy, Claggart and Vere [...] exist immortally in Melville's tragic story against a background of exact observation and realism" (11). Crozier's article represents a self-declared attempt at debunking the "romantic view of naval life" (9). Drawing on his (and Forster's) historical research, he paints a picture of institutionally sanctioned exploitation and abuse, with the common sailors, many of them forcibly pressed into service, existing under inhuman conditions in situations of extreme and overcrowded physical confinement and overall disempowerment.

In enumerating the supposed changes which the collaborators made to Melville's shipboard setting,⁶¹⁹ Humphrey Carpenter has claimed that Melville's novella depicts "an American-style community of different nationalities and cultures who rub along cheerfully", and a disciplinary system under which the flogging of the novice (see BB46) is ordered "for a major infringement of discipline" rather than "merely for being slightly cheeky".⁶²⁰ By contrast, so Carpenter maintains,

⁶¹⁹ Among these supposed changes, Carpenter erroneously includes the "renam[ing]" of the ship from *Bellipotent* to *Indomitable*. His unfortunate lack of acquaintance with the novella's textual history leads him to interpret this supposed substitution as a "suppress[ion] [of] the sexual implication of *Bellipotent*" (1992:288). See also section III.2.5.

⁶²⁰ It is true that, as Carpenter notes, Melville's novice incurs his flogging for being "absent from his assigned post" during a manoeuvre and thus causing "a rather serious hitch" (BB46) in the operation. By contrast, the operatic Novice is punished for his accidental clumsiness just as much as

“the opera takes place in a very different sort of society, intensely hierarchical, with each rank, however humble, bellowing commands to those below it, and behaving obsequiously to superiors” (1992:288f).⁶²¹

Carpenter's unaccountably blithe image of the “cheerful[...]” shipboard community – which does admittedly manifest itself in the easygoing camaraderie of “life in the foretop” (BB46) – is easily demolished when read against the narrator's comments, made elsewhere in the text, about the dire and conflicted state of the British Navy in general, manned as it was to a large extent by impressed men (see BB43f.), and on the tense atmosphere and sense of “grievance” (BB35) which still pervaded the fleet in the aftermath of the Nore mutiny (see BB29ff. and BB35f.). On a less general level, the soup-spilling incident in Melville's novella presents a scene in which the seamen's “counterfeited glee” at Claggart's remark is explicitly declared to be governed by considerations of hierarchy; the episode also features an incident of casual violence on the part of a petty officer (Claggart) against a misfortunate drummer-boy (BB51f.). Mention should also be made of the ominous unseen activities of Claggart's corporals, and of the general “disrespect and dislike” harboured by any crew for “a master-at-arms in those days, zealous in his function” (BB60f.). It was evidently on passages like these that the librettists chose to focus for their evocation of atmosphere and background detail, as their extensive research into the naval and social history of the period suggests. While their libretto does include scenes of “cheerful[...]” (Carpenter 1992:288) socialising among the common sailors, it appears to have been the historically documented “reality” (Crozier 1951:9) of hardship, oppression, and the institutionally sanctioned abuse of power which they sought to bring to the stage, as Crozier's publications so consistently assert.

In his preface to his 1946 edition of *Billy Budd*, William Plomer remarks that Claggart “has a prototype in Jackson, who occurs in *Redburn* [...], and who fastens a ‘deep, subtle, infernal-looking eye’ upon the young and handsome Redburn, much as Claggart looks at Budd” (1946:9). It can only be speculated whether, when it came to adapting Melville's text for the operatic stage, the librettists followed Plomer's lead and turned to any of Melville's other descriptions of ship-

for his “slightly cheeky” failure to address a superior officer correctly. This change does serve to convey an impression of the arbitrary cruelty and casual violence that characterises the atmosphere on board the operatic *Indomitable*. Given the evidence of Crozier's representation of shipboard life in 1797, however, it seems unnecessary to cast the mere fact of the Novice's arbitrary punishment as Britten's subconscious return to the practices of corporeal punishment at his preparatory school (Carpenter 1992:289). See also section III.2.5.

⁶²¹ Carpenter's identification of life on the operatic *Indomitable* as possessing ties of kinship with “the English single-sex school” (1992:288) is interesting and wholly valid; however, it ought to be reflected that the resemblance between an all-male public school and a military barracks or shipboard environment also suggests the influence of the latter on the former, and indeed a general structural resemblance of disciplinary systems (as outlined by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*), rather than any incisive reinterpretation on the opera-makers' part.

board life. Their most likely choice would have been *White-Jacket* (1850), which is set on board the nineteenth-century American warship *Neversink*, and contains material which might have served to inspire the librettists as they began to shape the world of the *Indomitable*.

Thus, the novel's opening chapters give an overview of "the Principal Divisions into which a Man-of-War's Crew is divided" (Ch. 3, WJ8), while a later chapter dwells upon the impertinence of midshipmen, and the resentment which the adult common sailors feel for them (Ch. 52). In Ch. 22, "the operation of holy-stoning" is described (WJ86); the narrator draws attention to the fact that holy-stoning "is one of the punishments which a lieutenant of the watch may easily inflict upon the crew, without infringing the statute which places the power of punishment solely in the hands of the Captain" (WJ88) – a detail which fits Crozier's representations of naval life as dominated by arbitrary cruelty towards the common crew. Ch. 90 takes issue with "The Manning of Navies" (WJ377) by impressment; Ch. 33 contains a detailed description of a flogging, while the succeeding chapters criticise this brutal and dangerous disciplinary practice which adds humiliation to the physical punishment: "what torments must that seaman undergo who, while his back bleeds at the gangway, bleeds agonized drops of shame from his soul!" (WJ142) – a thought which is elaborated in the Novice's Dirge ("The shame will never pass", LIB19), but which is common enough in discussions of this form of institutionalised corporeal punishment (see, for instance, Manwaring/Dobrée 68), and need not indicate the influence of any particular textual source. Ch. 16 features a detailed description of "general quarters", which is "a mustering of all hands to their stations at the guns on the several decks, and a sort of sham-fight with an imaginary foe" (WJ64), and which could have given the librettists ideas for the battle preparations in Act II, Sc. 1; the subjects discussed include "Powder-monkeys" (WJ67f.) and carronades (WJ65, n.1; compare LIB42f. and 46).

III.1.6. From draft to opera stage: a brief timeline

Work on the libretto began in earnest in March 1949, when Forster and Crozier came to stay with Britten at Aldeburgh.⁶²² At this early stage, the writing itself mainly fell to Forster and Crozier; Britten was at that time still working on his *Spring Symphony*. However, since the librettists were working together in the composer's house, he would regularly receive reports on their progress, and also, during the lunch break and on the customary walk which followed it, take part in the discussion of problems Forster and Crozier were encountering. Almost forty years

⁶²² A very detailed account of the opera's genesis can be found in Philip Reed's *Cambridge Opera Handbook* chapter "From First Thoughts to First Night: A *Billy Budd* Chronology" (1993a). Reed's chronology is definitive on most counts, but I disagree with his dating of Crozier's famous first encounter with the text of *Billy Budd* (see note 607 above). See also timeline in Appendix B.

later, Crozier described their work routine in an article entitled "The Writing of *Billy Budd*". Using the typed First Rough Synopsis as a "guide",

we would begin our morning's work by carefully reading the relevant passage in Melville's text. Then we talked about it: we considered the characters and their motives; we checked any points of nautical procedure and life aboard ship that we did not understand [...]. When we were satisfied, we drafted our own version of the episode. Sometimes one of us did this, sometimes both. I was mostly responsible for the technical scenes and the dialogues; Forster undertook "the big slabs of narrative".⁶²³ Afterward we would read our drafts aloud, comparing and criticising them. (1986:16)⁶²⁴

Subsequent to this latter process of "comparing and criticising", the librettists would set to re-writing the scene, and, as Crozier recalls, would "very often amalgamate our two versions to arrive at a final version" (BBC1960:199). The product of their fortnight or so of intense work was the three-act March Draft, "some forty pages of typescript, leaving blanks for scenes needing further research" (Crozier 1986:16).

There followed a period during which all three collaborators had to turn their attention to various other projects – Britten to the children's opera *The Little Sweep* which was performed at the second Aldeburgh Festival in June, an event which also involved Crozier, and Forster to a lecture trip to the USA in May, where he met with Lionel Trilling and learned about the dramatised version of *Billy Budd* by Louis O. Coxe and Richard Chapman.⁶²⁵ Crozier, meanwhile, finding himself in straitened financial circumstances, resigned from the English Opera Group after that year's Aldeburgh Festival to look for more profitable employment; his relationship with Britten seems to have grown rather distant at that time.⁶²⁶ Neverthe-

⁶²³ As Crozier put it in a letter written roundabout "the end of our first week" to his future wife, the singer and EOG member Nancy Evans, "Morgan is in charge of the drama, I am in command of the ship, and we share matters out between us" (1986:18). Crozier's letter is dated to 11 March by Mitchell, Reed and Cooke (BBL407).

⁶²⁴ See also BBC1960:199f.

⁶²⁵ This dramatised version was created by Coxe and Chapman in 1949 with the agreement of Melville's granddaughter, Eleanor Melville Metcalf, and produced on Broadway in February 1951 (Reed 1993a:55 and note 21, p.161). Shannon McKellar (270ff.) has provided an interesting juxtaposition of the closeted interview's non-representative realisation in the Britten/Forster/Crozier opera with its dramatisation as a fully-realised dialogue in the Coxe/Chapman play.

⁶²⁶ According to Crozier himself, his resignation from the Group "caused a near-estrangement with Britten except in respect of *Billy Budd*. In a letter to Nancy Evans written in the middle of July 1949, he acknowledges a feeling of having "outlive[d] his usefulness to [Britten]", and his unwillingness "to make matters worse by clinging to a relationship that is outworn". He continues: "I have known since early this year that Ben was done with me and that we could not work together again – not for some years, anyway" (1986:20f.). Carpenter reads this as a move on Crozier's part to "leave the Britten 'family'" for fear that "otherwise he would soon be ejected", and points out that "Britten gave no overt sign of wishing to be rid of Crozier" (1992:284) – his letters remained sympathetic and kind, and he seems to have felt that the wish for separation originated with Crozier.

less, work on *Billy Budd* was to continue, and the three collaborators met again at Aldeburgh for several weeks in August 1949 “to revise and simplify the text” (Crozier 1979:32), a time during which Crozier’s and Britten’s relationship improved once again (see Crozier 1986:21f.).

According to Crozier, Britten “had been studying” the three-act draft in the meantime, “and his musical ideas had been developing”. From this point, “he assumed the dominance in our partnership and led the discussions” (1979:32; see also 1986:21). In the 1960 BBC interview, Crozier recalled that at this stage, “we had you, Ben, with us all the time, watching what we were doing, saying ‘there are too many words there. You must reduce these lines’, or ‘Here is an idea that I would like you to expand in a more lyrical form...’” (BBC1960:201). Nevertheless, writing at the time itself, “thrilled by the work” and elated by his collaborators’ company, Crozier emphasised his sense of their joint creative process:

when we have a good morning’s work, the ideas that come seem to have a life of their own and to present themselves for testing by each of us in turn, and each one may add a little contribution to the subject under discussion and gradually a whole scene is built up from hints that have been floating in the air between us. (Letter to Nancy Evans of 22 August 1949, BBLL537, n.3)

At this time, the collaborators made some structural changes: at Britten’s request, the large choral ensemble of the Captain’s Muster was created as a climax for what was then the first act,⁶²⁷ and the elaborate flogging scene which Forster and Crozier had constructed in the March Draft was removed again. The flogged Novice was “fused” (Crozier 1979:32) with “Melville’s ‘cracked afterguardsman’” (1986:21f.).

Besides making these major modifications, the collaborators “went through each scene word by word, line by line, checking, compressing, tautening”. On the other hand, “since the libretto had inevitably fallen into prose, an important task was to provide small lyrical episodes wherever possible that would enable the music (as Britten expressed it) ‘to flower’” (Crozier 1979:32). The result of this joint period of work was the four-act August Draft, comprising 57 typewritten pages; “from this almost final text” (33), Britten was eventually to begin composing early in 1950,⁶²⁸ but before that point, Forster and Britten met once more to make further “adjustments to the text” (Reed 1993a:57). In December 1949, Britten reported to Crozier on the state of affairs at Aldeburgh: “Morgan & I work on

⁶²⁷ This scene was jettisoned in the 1960 revisions; see section III.2.6. for a detailed discussion.

⁶²⁸ Crozier had sent the typed libretto to Forster by 23 October 1949 (BBLL547, n.7), but there seems to have been some delay in getting the libretto to Britten, who was touring the USA with Pears, and did not receive it until the end of November (BBLL 556; see p.490 below). Reed (1993a:58) dates the beginning of composition to January 1950; however, it was not until 3 Feb 1950 that Britten reported “I have today written the first notes of the new opera” in a letter to the Dutch pianist and composer Henriëtte Bosmans (BBLL 576).

hard – & hope to have lots of improvements to show you soon” (BBL559).⁶²⁹ Over the next two years, various further alterations were made to the libretto to suit the composer's requirements.

In the spring of 1950, Forster, who was convalescing from a prostate operation, stayed with Britten from the middle of March through 1 May (see BBL582 and 587). It seems this sojourn at Aldeburgh saw the beginning of a period of increasing friction between Forster and Britten. Britten's style of working, which involved frequent breaks for other professional engagements, was alien and frustrating to Forster; later that year, Britten was to turn to Crozier for help in making Forster understand that “I always do twenty things at once, & that there'll be a good chance of the opera being done in time!” (letter of 29 August 1950, BBL611). In the spring, Forster, already impatient at what he perceived as the project's lack of progress, “began to meddle and to criticise at the vital growing point of the composer's creative process, a form of interference that, to an artist of Britten's extreme sensitivity, was intolerable” (Crozier 1986:23). A letter Forster wrote during this time to his friend Bob Buckingham sheds some light on the details of this “interference”: reporting that “Ben has played me most of the first Act”,⁶³⁰ Forster goes on to record his “first difference of opinion with him – over the dirge for the Novice”. Forster complains that the “dry contrapuntal stuff” which Britten had done for the Novice's Dirge, although “no doubt original and excellent from the musician's point of view”, was “not at all appropriate from mine”, and announces “I shall have a big discussion when the act is finished” (letter of 23 April 1950; quoted in Hindley 1989:365, n.10)⁶³¹. His “Librettist's Note on Dirge Libretto”, preserved among the libretto drafts at the Britten-Pears Library, and convincingly dated by Hindley to that same period or an even later time “when Forster judged the time was opportune for discussing the music with

⁶²⁹ Forster was staying with Britten and Pears for Christmas (Reed 1993a:58). I discuss their December 1949 work session in section III.2.2.

⁶³⁰ This play-through, at which several other friends of Britten's were also present, took place during the weekend of 22–23 April 1950 (see BBL588, n.1). Britten was in the habit of playing through his work to his friends, and of discussing it with them; they included the musicologist and publisher Erwin Stein, as well as some professional associates, among them Anthony Gishford of Boosey & Hawkes, and David Webster, General Administrator of the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden. Their positive reactions often did much to restore his confidence, as did the encouragement and the professional approval of his partner Peter Pears.

⁶³¹ Claire Seymour has commented that “the ‘dry contrapuntal stuff’ which Forster refers to is in fact a sinuous, lyrical melody rendered by the seductive tones of the saxophone” (147). However, before Forster's criticism is dismissed as inappropriate or incompetent, it should be reflected that what Forster actually *heard* at this point was Britten's rendering of this passage on the piano, all of the vocal parts being, as Basil Coleman recalls, “half sung” by himself (in Carpenter 1992:298). Not only is it doubtful whether such a rendition would have enabled Forster to imagine the sustained woodwind and vocal lines of the finished version, but the counterpoint, in characteristic Britten style, involves, roughly speaking, two decidedly autonomous lines in fairly distant and distinct tonal registers, which might have felt just a little “dry” to someone whose aural expectations were attuned to the fuller sounds of grand opera.

Britten" (1989:365, n.10), demonstrates that Forster had had his own ideas about the musical shape which his words should have assumed: "I'd thought of the dirge in strongly defined stanzas of increasing length, each ending in a recognisable refrain. That there would be contrapuntality hadn't occurred to me" (BPL A61:50).

According to Furbank's biography, Forster eventually "left Aldeburgh rather earlier than he had planned" (II:285). However, he was to return to Aldeburgh a few weeks later for the Festival, delivering a lecture on the poet John Skelton on 22 June (BBL544, n.4). He then remained there for some time while Britten and Pears were pursuing their respective projects abroad.⁶³² In August, Forster was at Aldeburgh again, and listened to a play-through of Act I which Britten had finished drafting by this time (Reed 1993a:59). When Forster reviewed the events of the past year on 31 December 1950 in his Locked Diary, he recalled that it was at this time that a "coolness" had grown between himself and Britten, and that he had "left Aldeburgh a little earlier than I might because [Britten] would spend his time conferencing &st instead of working with me" (LD112f).⁶³³

The tension which Forster's criticism and impatience had caused between the two men earlier in the year increased dramatically towards the end of November, when Britten visited Cambridge (see Crozier 1986:23 and Reed 1993:60), and the situation was worsened when Forster criticised the music which Britten had written for Claggart's central monologue (see section III.3.). Forster appears to have been unaware of how sensitively Britten always reacted to criticism of his work, and his comments "seriously worried" the composer. It was Crozier, whose relationship with Britten still remained close enough for Britten to consult him in this matter, and who knew Britten's work methods from long experience, to whom the task fell of warning Forster that more criticism of this kind might prove "disastrous" to Britten's work (Crozier 1986:23f.). Forster responded to this information with characteristic goodwill, thanking Crozier for his "hint" and explaining that he had not anticipated the effect his comments would produce, since Britten had appeared to take his earlier criticism on the Novice's Dirge "so easily" (letter dated to 19 December 1950, EMFL II:243; see also Crozier 1986:24). Thanks to Crozier's intervention, the relationship between Forster and Britten subsequently improved again.

Britten meanwhile continued to work on the opera with steady progress, although there were periods during which he began to lose confidence, partly due to the "size & tension" of the work, as he explained in a letter to Pears of 16 March 1951 (BBL661). Writing to Lady Harewood on 4 March 1951, he reported that although the work was going well, it was "*very* hard going & I get madly depressed.

⁶³² See postcard from Forster to Kenneth Harrison of 27 June 1950, KCC: EMF/18/247.

⁶³³ It seems possible that Furbank, writing that Forster "left Aldeburgh rather earlier than he had planned" in the spring of that year (II:285), confused the time Forster's diary entry refers to (August) with the time of Forster's spring sojourn at Aldeburgh, which lasted for a month and a half.

I've never been so obsessed by a piece" (Reed 1993a:63). There also remained some technical difficulties still to be overcome, notably concerning the shanties which the crew sing in what is now Act I, Sc. 3: it was a matter of finding the right words for music which had already been composed, and the librettists' earlier attempts had been unsatisfactory. The problem was solved in February/March 1951 by Forster's Cambridge friend and colleague Kenneth Harrison, whose verses finally proved successful.⁶³⁴

Britten finished the composition draft on 10 August 1951 (Reed 1993a:67 and BBL676, n.8). There followed another period of intensive work:

While Britten pressed on with the full score (it was not to be finished until 2 November, only a month before the premiere), Erwin Stein completed the vocal score from which the singers would learn their rôles, and Forster and Crozier prepared the libretto for Boosey & Hawkes which was to be available for sale at the first night. (Reed 1993a:69)

It seems safe to assume that the typed versions of the Final Libretto⁶³⁵ were produced at this time. Furthermore, Forster's correspondence between September 1951 and March 1952 indicates that the librettists were planning to publish a modified reading text of the libretto with Forster's publishers, Edward Arnold (London) and Harcourt, Brace & Co. (New York); however, this scheme was eventually abandoned again.⁶³⁶

It was partly due to the straitened time schedule that the conductor Josef Krips, who had already begun rehearsing at Covent Garden but had difficulty working from the manuscript score, resigned his conductorship at the last moment, and Britten himself had to take over (see Reed 1993a:69-72). The first performance of *Billy Budd* took place on 1 December 1951,⁶³⁷ and with it, all conflicts between Britten and Forster seem to have been forgotten. On 7 December, Britten wrote to Forster:

it has been the greatest honour to have collaborated with you, my dear. It was always one of my wildest dreams to work with E. M. F. – & it is often difficult to realise that it has happened. Anyhow, one thing I am certain of – & that's this; whatever the quality of the music is, & it seems that people

⁶³⁴ See Reed 1993a:64-68 and BBL633, n.6, 643, and 657f.

⁶³⁵ See list of preserved libretto drafts in section III.2.2., and Hindley 1989:368.

⁶³⁶ Forster's letters to Crozier from this period (KCC: EMF/18/135) frequently refer to the progress of this project, and report on discussions with the respective publishers' representatives, Brian Walter Fagan (Arnold) and Robert Giroux (Harcourt, Brace & Co.). Forster's correspondence suggests that the project's failure was partly due to his creative interests turning towards other projects (in January and February 1952, these would have included his renewed revisions to *Maurice*), as well as to a feeling that, for him, the time of his creative engagement with *Billy Budd* had passed, although he continued to feel happy over the results of the collaboration.

⁶³⁷ A selection of the earliest press reactions can be found in BBL682-698.

will quarrel about that for some time to come, I think you & Eric have written incomparably the finest libretto ever. (BLL682)

Forster replied to Britten on 9 December, saying that

it has been a great event, and I am proud and happy to have been in it and to think of it. You and I have both put into it something which lies deeper than artistic creation, ~~something~~ and which we both understand. It could never have got there but for both of us. I hope to live and write on it in the future, but this opera is my *Nunc Dimittis*, in that it dismisses me peacefully and convinces me I have achieved. (EMFL II:246)⁶³⁸

Britten had written to Crozier on 7 December, too, telling him: “I think you & [Forster] have produced the finest libretto I’ve ever heard or read” (BLL698). Crozier also wrote to the composer, congratulating him on “this new achievement of yours” which had “fired the imagination of an astonishing number of people”, and proposing, “oddly enough in retrospect”, that Britten should consider another collaboration with Forster (1986:25). This suggestion was never followed, and the only further instance of collaboration between the three men took place in 1960, when, having exchanged some preparatory correspondence, they met at Aldeburgh on 13-14 September to produce the revised two-act version of *Billy Budd*.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁸ It is tempting to speculate about the nature of this “something [...] which we both understand” which Forster hoped to explore further “in the future”. As far as Forster is concerned, “it” may well refer to his ideas about relationships between men, and love relationships between men in particular (see p.465 above). “It” might also, of course, refer to the opera in general, and/or to his experience of collaborating with Britten on the opera. However, apart from the 1960 BBC radio discussion on *Billy Budd*, Forster was not to record any further specifically significant thoughts regarding his work on *Billy Budd* after all.

⁶³⁹ A detailed account of the 1960 revisions has been produced by Reed (1993b); I discuss some of them in section III.2.6.

III.2. Let's make an opera (II): evolution of the libretto

III.2.1. "How odiously Vere comes out in the trial scene": readings, responses, re-imaginings

In recent scholarship on the opera *Billy Budd*, there appears to be a tendency to emphasise the "divergence of interest in the principal characters between composer and librettists" (Allen 45).⁶⁴⁰ Irene Morra has spoken of "Forster's overwhelming interest in Billy" as opposed to his merely "ambivalent interest in Vere's moral dilemma", contrasting his attitude with Britten's "consistent[...] advoca[cy] [of] the importance of Vere as a central character" (2002:18f.). There are a number of sources upon which these critical engagements with the question of Forster's and Britten's respective interest in the characters of Billy and Vere are able to draw (Eric Crozier's opinion has generally attracted less critical attention). Chief among these are Forster's "Letter from E. M. Forster" which he published in *The Griffin* in 1951, and the three collaborators' 1960 BBC radio "Discussion on *Billy Budd*". In the interest of putting into perspective the latter's representative value as

⁶⁴⁰ Mary Francis is another recent critic who has examined "the conflict over whether Vere or Billy is properly the main character in the opera", a conflict which, to her, "is related to a deeper conflict between Forster's and Britten's views of the story" (60); similar views have been advanced by Law (301) and Seymour (134). See also discussion in section II.5.3.6.

a documentation of the collaborators' respective views, I shall here present a brief discussion of its somewhat curious genesis, and of the problems that may be seen to arise from it.

The "Discussion on *Billy Budd*" was broadcast on 12 November 1960, one day before the first performance of the revised Two-Act version of *Billy Budd*, which took the form of a BBC radio broadcast. Yet the "Discussion" is not, in fact, the three-way conversation it purports to be, but a fabrication compiled from two separate interviewing sessions: Forster and Crozier pre-recorded on 4 November, Britten and Crozier pre-recorded on 9 November (BBC1960:194, editor's note). The material was subsequently edited, almost certainly under Crozier's direction,⁶⁴¹ to suggest to the radio audience that all three men were present and having a conversation together. Once again, Eric Crozier assumes his role of, quite literally, go-between and technician; as the person responsible for guiding and shaping the discussion, it is he who most often introduces a subject and asks leading questions, but he also provides a great deal of analytical commentary, to which both Forster's and Britten's responses tend to be somewhat reserved.⁶⁴²

While the interviews themselves were not scripted, Kildea considers it "probable that Crozier had the transcript of his conversation with Forster by the time he sat down with Britten, and used it to feed lines to the composer" (personal communication). The structure of the finished conversation certainly suggests this: a number of Britten's contributions which are not clearly part of a sustained exchange with Crozier take the shape of comments on the points made by Forster and Crozier. Moreover, while Forster occasionally addresses his remarks directly to Crozier, he never explicitly addresses Britten,⁶⁴³ whereas Britten frequently addresses remarks and even interjections to "Morgan".

To acknowledge the "Discussion on *Billy Budd*" as the artefact it is means to acknowledge that the conversation as it appears on the page is the result of a con-

⁶⁴¹ According to Paul Kildea, "Crozier would have worked with the BBC producer on the editing"; Kildea considers it likely that Crozier was responsible for the final shape of the interview (personal communication).

⁶⁴² A comparison with Crozier's various other publications on *Billy Budd* – his 1951 BBC Radio broadcast, his 1979 article on "Staging First Productions" for the collected edition of Britten's opera libretti, the interview which Stephen Wadsworth conducted with him for *Opera News* in the same year, and finally his 1986 article on "The Writing of *Billy Budd*" in the *Opera Quarterly* – suggests that Crozier had a relatively fixed view of the work; a view which tends to be more focused on the technical side of the drama than either Forster's or Britten's, who were both as a rule disinclined to comment very much on their own work in public. Crozier's various publications can be seen to reiterate his analytical view of the work with great consistency, often using the same keywords. Thus, for instance, his ideas on the "quality of extension" inherent in Melville's story, a quality he believes to be important to a composer like Britten (BBC1960:196), reappear in his 1979 article (31), Britten's cool reaction in the BBC interview notwithstanding.

⁶⁴³ The only exception seemingly occurs at the top of BBC1960:205, where there are two successive utterances attributed to Forster; however, a comparison with the broadcast recording reveals that this is an error, and that the second utterance ("Yes – the Credo, yes. Did that occur to you at all Ben?") is actually Crozier speaking.

siderable amount of cutting and editing, particularly at those points at which Forster appears to respond to what Britten has just said. Therefore, whenever this interview is approached as a source which documents the famous difference of opinion between Forster and Britten over whether Billy or Vere should be considered the central character of the opera, it ought to be kept in mind that their views were not actually negotiated in this discussion. For the most part, Forster (led by Crozier, some of whose questions may subsequently have been re-formulated) stated his opinions, and Britten added his views afterwards – views to which Forster never had the chance to respond. While this does not change the fundamental fact that they did hold differing opinions and preferences, it may well be that the editing process, as well as the way in which Crozier sought to draw out his interlocutors, is to some extent responsible for exacerbating the impression of a conflict of views between Forster and Britten.

In the end, whatever the details, it seems important to note with Mary Francis that “Forster’s remarks on the importance of Billy show clearly the nature of the disagreement between the composer and the librettist about the main emotional and moral focus of the story”. This disagreement, so Francis points out, hinges on the question of whether it is Vere or Billy who properly “deserves to earn the listener’s sympathy” (59f.). In section II.5.3.6., I have discussed some aspects of Britten’s and Forster’s “divergence of interest” (Allen 45) as expressed in Forster’s argument for Billy as the novella’s (and the opera’s) central character; for this I have drawn on his utterances in both the *Griffin* and the 1960 radio discussion. As far as the collaborators’ original impression of Melville’s Vere is concerned, however, it ought to be stressed that all three of them were decidedly critical of this character as it appears in the novella.

As Mervyn Cooke has pointed out, “Forster and Britten both had a poor opinion of Melville’s treatment of Vere, particularly in the trial scene, and set out to ‘rescue’ him from the author” (1993c:28). To Forster, Vere’s role in the trial was notoriously “odious[...]”. His resentment can be gauged from the way he misquotes Melville’s captain as he pronounces his spontaneous personal judgement on Billy’s fate: “Struck by an angel of God: and I must make sure that the angel hangs” (*Griffin* 5). While it has often been read in this way by the later generations of critics, Vere’s original declaration ultimately remains equivocal on the question of to what extent Billy’s death is part of any *personal* agenda: “Struck dead by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang!” (BB85). Forster’s inaccurate rendition of the more neutral original suggests that, at this point, he held a far more negative view of the novella’s Captain Vere than most early and many contemporary critics, including himself only a few years earlier in his 1947 BBC Book Talk.

Forster’s disapproval was evidently shared by his collaborators. In the 1960 radio interview, Crozier explains that theirs was a “humanised” Vere who was “not simply sticking by a book of rules and saying “Thus it must be because it’s laid down””; Forster adds that they had “all felt that Melville was disgracing Vere”.

Britten declares that “the way that Melville made Vere behave in the trial would not have been sympathetic or encouraging to me to write music” (BBC1960:206f.). Even though this statement might be felt to be characteristically circumspect, it clearly reflects Britten’s agreement that there did exist a need for narrative intervention – in Forster’s words, for “rescuing [...] Vere from his creator” (EMFL II:237).

It is telling that, finding themselves agreeing that the character of Vere “comes out” so “odiously” (*Griffin* 5) in one of the novella’s central scenes, the collaborators should have chosen to perform this “rescuing” operation or narrative rehabilitation, rather than, for instance, expose the captain as the corrupt representative of an oppressive authoritarian system – a possibility which was increasingly to be explored in scholarly readings of Melville’s text only a few years later. It seems that wherever their personal sympathies lay, neither Britten, nor Forster, nor Crozier radically questioned the popular view of Vere as “wise and thoughtful” (Crozier 1986:13). Crozier saw Vere as “the man of feeling who has a choice of action and who finally has to stick by a code but knows that he was wrong to do so, or feels that in the final resort he must have been wrong to do so”; Forster admitted him to be “truly tragic” (BBC1960:207). Britten felt that Vere “has what seems to me the main moral problem of the whole work” (197) – the “conflict” that interested him in this character being connected with “the fact that he realised later he could have saved Billy and yet *circumstances forced him* to sacrifice him” (207, my emphasis). In casting Vere as the victim of these “circumstances”, Britten leaves the subject of Vere’s own implication in the mechanisms of oppressive authority unaddressed.

If Vere had to be ‘rescued’, all three collaborators can be seen to have agreed on the new direction in which the character would have to be developed: in Crozier’s terms, it was important that he should be “humanised” and become “much more aware of the human values that were involved” (BBC1960:206). Viewed in terms of Forster’s fictional patterns, Vere was assimilated into the character group of ‘dark’ middle or upper-class Englishmen with “undeveloped hearts” (AH4) – a move which, as the example of Conway from “Arthur Snatchfold” suggests, does not preclude a critical view of the moral decisions he makes. Britten’s focus lay on the moral dilemma in which “circumstances” had placed the captain: what Donald Mitchell later identified as the “fierce conflict between public duty and private inclination, in which duty triumphs” (1993:123) is a recurring theme in his work.

This conflict, as Arnold Whittall had pointed out earlier, is connected with the topos of “the anguish of those in authority”; Whittall also observed that

[the] theme of vulnerable authority naturally has links with that of the personality of the outsider, the person unable to ‘connect’, and it links Vere, Gloriana, and the Governess in *The Turn of the Screw*: all experience agonies of indecision, and act, on the whole, for the worse. (1982:146)

“Vulnerable authority”, “the personality of the outsider”, and the “conflict between public duty and private inclination” are themes which both Whittall and Mitchell see at the centre of Britten’s other two 1950s operas, *Gloriana* and *The Turn of the Screw* (Mitchell 1993:130). While Whittall’s use of the word “connect” in this context constitutes no explicit reference to Forsterian thought, his happy choice of words in describing Britten’s thematic preoccupations may be felt to tap into the similarities which can, after all, be seen to exist between Britten’s and Forster’s approaches to the character of Vere.

In section II.5.1.3. I have traced the ways in which Vere as he appears both in the novella and in the opera can be linked with the Forsterian ‘dark’ character type; as I have moreover demonstrated, these ‘dark’ characters are usually surrounded by discourses about outsiderdom, which frequently show slippage with discourses about homosexuality. The very fact that, in his *Griffin* article, Forster criticised Melville’s treatment of this character so extensively, and that, in his libretto adaptation, he took considerable pains over “the rescuing of Vere” (EMFL II:237), drafting and redrafting the trial scene until he and his collaborators were finally satisfied with the result, ought to render questionable any representation which attempts to ascribe to Forster an “overwhelming interest in Billy” (Morra 2002:19) supposedly matched by a corresponding lack of interest in Vere (see also Allen 45). Forster’s self-declared preference for Billy need not automatically imply a lack of either interest in, or even sympathy with, Vere, in the same way that his self-declared preference for Maurice and Alec over the backsliding Clive – who, forsaking Maurice, “turn[s] to women” – clearly does not imply a lack of interest in this unsuccessful ‘dark’ character, although Clive does increasingly lack Forster’s sympathy:

Henceforward Clive deteriorates, and so perhaps does my treatment of him. He has annoyed me. I may nag at him over much, stress his aridity and political pretensions and the thinning of his hair, nothing he [...] does is ever right. [...] It may be unfair on Clive who intends no evil (“Notes on Maurice”, Forster 1999b:217).

Her analyses of the opera and its genesis have led Irene Morra to conclude that “ultimately, Forster did not conceive of Vere as central to the tale; the central conflict was to remain that between Claggart and Billy” (2002:18). As I have demonstrated in section II.5.1.1., the evidence of Forster’s 1947 BBC Book Talk certainly suggests that Forster brought the habit of focusing on the conflict between Billy and Claggart with him when he began his librettistic engagement with the novella. In the 1960 radio discussion, he returned at length to “the question of goodness, and of making goodness interesting” (BBC1960:198; the topic is taken up again on p.205f., where Claggart is discussed).⁶⁴⁴ This too suggests that he still

⁶⁴⁴ It might be speculated whether Forster’s insistence on “making goodness interesting” is partly the ‘public’ discursive manifestation of a personal interest in making Billy’s “goodness” desirable. See also my discussion in section II.5.3.2.

saw the struggle between good and evil as embodied by Billy and Claggart as central to the work. However, Morra's view that Forster's focus "was to remain" on Claggart and Billy, and that "*ultimately*" Vere was never to gain any "central" importance for Forster (2002:18; my emphasis), seems an unlikely one if considered against the source evidence of the libretto's progressive development.

For, once Forster and his collaborators set out on their project of "rescuing" Vere, once this figure took shape and began increasingly to fit the pattern of the Forsterian 'dark' character, once the relationship between him and Billy had been strengthened to the point that it became pervaded by textual leitmotifs which function as markers for Forsterian discourses about male/male desire, and once the topic of Vere's experience of salvation through "what Billy's shown him" – namely, "the sail of love which isn't Fate" – had been established *by Forster himself* as a vital element of the story (in his "Librettist's Note on Dirge Libretto", BPL A61:50), it appears increasingly improbable that Forster's attitude towards the character he had thus claimed from Melville should have remained unchanged. This is not to say, however, that Vere may not to the last have remained a morally ambiguous figure in Forster's eyes. Indeed, as a Forsterian 'dark' character who stands in need of salvation by a 'light' working-class Other, it would seem obvious that Vere never could have ranked among Forster's "character[s] [...] for whom I care" (CPB204): the latter sentiment, as the list of favourites he made in 1958 indicates, remained in most cases reserved for his desirable 'light' saviour characters.

III.2.2. The source material: overview and general observations

The libretto drafts of *Billy Budd*, preserved in the Britten-Pears Library at Aldeburgh, offer some invaluable insights into the development of the opera's three main characters. A short overview of the material will be useful at this point.⁶⁴⁵ The material can be grouped as follows:

1. Earliest Materials (January 1949). A list of characters, a list of plot events, and a sketch of a sailing ship. Described by Crozier (1986:12) and Reed (1993a:47-49, with reproductions).
2. First Rough Synopsis. A typed five-scene synopsis (January 1949), "subdivided into episodes" (Crozier 1979:32).
3. Manuscript Drafts (mainly Forster's) for three-act Libretto (January-March 1949). The material also comprises Forster's and Crozier's separate versions of the Trial Scene. Mainly the fruits of Forster's and Crozier's March 1949 conclave. This resulted in
4. Typed Libretto Draft, March 1949 (three acts). All three collaborators' annotated copies are preserved in the Britten-Pears Library.

⁶⁴⁵ For a yet more detailed description which more fully reflects the Aldeburgh archivists' grouping of the material, the reader is referred to Clifford Hindley's invaluable overview (1989:367-369).

5. Manuscript drafts and reworkings of existing passages in Forster's hand (March-August). The new material generated here was mostly incorporated into
6. Typed Libretto Draft, August 1949 (four acts). All three collaborators' annotated copies are preserved at the Britten-Pears Library. Of Britten's copy, a total of eighteen pages are missing, including the Prologue, most of Act I, Sc. 1, and the opening of Act III, Sc. 1 (now Act II, Sc. 1).⁶⁴⁶ This was, as the Aldeburgh archivists have recorded, Britten's working copy which he used and annotated as he composed the opera. Forster's copy was acquired by the Britten-Pears Library at the comparatively late date of 1988 and has not been microfilmed. Crozier's copy is typed on a different machine but carries the same text. Britten's and Forster's copies are heavily annotated; the handwritten annotations in Britten's copy show more cancellations and re-orderings than those in Forster's (see discussion below).
7. Final Copy of Libretto, 1951 (four acts). Two non-identical typescript copies, one of them seemingly corrected for publication, which are in their turn not quite identical with the text actually set by Britten and published by Boosey and Hawkes (see Hindley 1989:368).

Further papers preserved at the Britten-Pears Library under the heading of "Supplementary Materials" include miscellaneous handwritten notes and drafts of uncertain relation to the other items. Among these are two pages of notes on Billy and Claggart in Forster's hand, which can in fact be dated to his reading of the Freeman edition of *Billy Budd* in May 1949 (see section I.2.4., p.51).

Comprehensive as it appears, this source material must be approached with caution when it comes to trying to trace the collaborators' individual contributions to the process of the libretto's genesis. Even though each of the three collaborators possessed his own copy of the respective typewritten libretto drafts, in which changes, corrections and additions were noted, the circumstances under which these handwritten changes were made are ultimately impossible to determine. In some cases where new material appears in two or more copies, a higher number of in-line cancellations and insertions in one of these could be (and frequently is) taken to indicate that its owner single-handedly drafted the passage in question in the absence of his collaborators, who later merely copied the finished version from him. However, it should be kept in mind that there always exists the alternative possibility that the new passages were the result of a joint working session, in which one of the collaborators – Britten, for the most part – temporarily assumed the role of scribe, while the wording itself emerged in discussion, of which the cancellations and insertions might equally be the visible signs.

As Clifford Hindley has pointed out, "there was extensive discussion between the three men at nearly every stage [...], and it should not necessarily be assumed that an idea originated with the author in whose hand it appears" (1989:368).

⁶⁴⁶ In the typed pagination, the missing pages are 1-8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17 and 25-29.

Hindley's caution seems fully justified in the light of Eric Crozier's repeated emphases on the communal nature of their creative working sessions, and in view of Britten's various reports about additional work being done by him together with either Forster or Crozier. The fact that Britten's and Forster's copies of the August Draft each contain one annotation in the handwriting of the respective other collaborator can also be counted as evidence of joint labour.⁶⁴⁷ Accordingly, when it comes to analysing the libretto drafts for *Billy Budd*, it seems safest to follow Hindley, who declines "systematically to assign responsibility for changes to various members of the trio". Instead, he treats the "changes in the successive drafts simply as a guide to the interpretation of different emphases in the evolution of the libretto as a joint enterprise", and the succession of typescript drafts "as points of consolidation, which embody the conclusions reached in the discussions and manuscript drafts which precede each of them" (368f).

On general principle, and for practical purposes, on the other hand, Forster seems to have been "recognised as master of the libretto" (Hindley 1989:368) by his fellow opera-makers, even though Forster himself always insisted that he and Crozier should be acknowledged as equals in their creative partnership.⁶⁴⁸ Both Crozier and Britten variously acknowledged Forster in his role as principal librettist. Crozier described himself as "mostly responsible for the technical scenes" (1986:16) whereas Forster was "in charge of the drama" (18); when asked to contribute an entire scene on his own, Crozier recorded his "lively sense of my own inferiority to Morgan as a writer", and his pleasure at Forster's approval of what he had done (letter to Nancy Evans of 22 August 1949, BBL537, n.3).

Britten's copy of the March Draft indicates that he expected Forster, rather than Crozier, to produce what alterations and new material he required. His deletion of an early version of the impressment scene is accompanied by the note "New bit – EMF" (BPL A61:120), and his handwritten outline of the required substitute for the deleted flogging scene ("Arrival of beaten novice / Flogged novice & semi-chorus / Set piece") is tagged "EMF" (BPL A61:124). When Britten told Edward Sackville-West about the collaborators' upcoming working session of August 1949, his focus was very firmly on Forster, even though Crozier was to be equally involved in the work:

⁶⁴⁷ Forster added the phrase "You are caught in your own trap" to Vere's "Claggart, John Claggart, beware" monologue in Britten's copy of the August Draft (BPL A62:114; see discussion in section III.2.3.3. below). On the verso page facing the last page of the frigate chase sequence in Forster's copy, Britten jotted down "Wind fall's + mist thickens, nothing's achieved. Back, back to our troubles" (BPL AD-EMF:34v). Some further ink annotations in Britten's copy (see, for instance, BPL A62:131) appear to be in a third person's hand; these annotations do not occur in Forster's copy.

⁶⁴⁸ Forster was at one point to insist that Crozier's name take precedence over his in the official announcements "for the simple reason that C comes before F" (Crozier 1986:19); in a diary entry of 31 December 1950, reviewing the events of the past year, he was to record that "Eric Crozier and I have finished the Billy Budd libretto" (LD112).

After this week I settle down with Morgan to finishing the Billy Budd libretto. So far what he's done is superb. He has a wonderful natural sense of the theatre, & his crisp pregnant dialogue will be good to set, I think. (Letter of 27 July 1949, BBL535)⁶⁴⁹

In December 1949, it was Forster who was “invited to Aldeburgh for final adjustments to the text” (Reed 1993a:57). As Forster told Crozier, these were to include writing “the ‘articles of war’ speech” which precedes Billy’s execution, for which a blank space had been left in the typescript August Draft, as well as the “fill[ing] in” of “any other gaps, with Ben’s help” (letter of 1 December 1949, BBL559, n.2). By 16 December, the collaboration was well under way: writing to his and Pears’s friend Mary Behrend, Britten reported “I am down here now with E. M. Forster – working terrifically hard on Billy Budd. It is going very well, & most exciting to work on. I think it’s going to be quite a piece! But surprising” (BBL559, n.2). Around the same time, Britten informed Crozier about their progress, and turned to him once again for technical assistance:

Morgan & I work on hard – & hope to have lots of improvements to show you soon. I feel sure you’ll approve. Morgan is in splendid form, and very inclined to overwork me!! Two queries for you, please (i) The ship at the start is hove to – hadn’t we better start her? How does one do this? Could you put this on a p.c.⁶⁵⁰ perhaps for us & also (ii) the provisional list of chorus, & chorus-division, I think you had? Morgan is in touch with the Admiralty about Articles of War. (Undated letter of December 1949, BBL559)

Britten’s comment about the Articles of War seems to hint at technical difficulties of some kind.⁶⁵¹ Yet whatever these may have been, they were eventually resolved: in Forster’s copy of the August Draft, the blank space is filled with Forster’s handwritten draft of this speech (BPL AD-EMF:49r), which incorporates extensive verbatim quotations from Articles XXII (striking a superior officer) and XXVIII (murder; see Rodger 26f.).⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁹ Crozier had distanced himself from the Britten ‘family’ by this time; for the duration of their August collaboration, he had rented a holiday accommodation for himself and his two small daughters, while Forster was staying with Britten (Crozier 1986:21).

⁶⁵⁰ i.e. a postcard.

⁶⁵¹ According to Rodger, “the actual texts” of the Articles of War would, at the time of the opera’s genesis, have “been easily available only in those libraries with copies of the *Statutes of the Realm*” (7). Forster might have contacted “the Admiralty” directly to enquire about the precise wording, or he might, more indirectly, have got “in touch with” his friend William Plomer, who had worked for the Admiralty’s Naval Intelligence Division during World War II.

⁶⁵² The speech was subsequently cut down again to a much shortened and simplified form. Britten’s copy of the August Draft shows more than one layer of revision: a text corresponding exactly to that found in Forster’s copy is set out in a neat hand on the preceding verso page and in the blank space (BPL A62:128-130). Parts of this have been crossed out in a later process of revision; in a hastier hand, Britten noted down a condensed version of the speech. Among the material pertaining to Crozier’s copy of the August Draft, there is a small piece of lined paper containing

It seems highly probable that the “improvements” Britten also mentions in his letter to Crozier included some crucial revisions and additions to the trial scene, and to Vere’s speeches in particular, as well as general revisions to the libretto as a whole. A comparison of Britten’s and Forster’s copies of the August Draft certainly indicates that some of Britten’s manuscript additions and revisions to, for instance, Vere’s “Claggart, John Claggart, beware” and “I accept their verdict” speeches postdate an earlier stage of revision reflected in both his and Forster’s copy (see sections III.2.3.2. and III.2.3.3. below). The later layer of revisions which appears only in Britten’s copy may well date from the time of composition, and was quite possibly made without consulting the librettists over details; this would account for the fact that these revisions do not appear in their copies. By contrast, the fact that the earlier layer of revisions *is* reflected in both Britten’s and Forster’s copies⁶⁵³ suggests that these changes, unlike the later layer in Britten’s copy, were made in collaboration with the “master of the libretto” (Hindley 1989:368), even though some of the manuscript additions in Forster’s copy may show “all the appearance of being a fair copy taken from elsewhere” (Hindley 1989:374, n.37; see discussion below). If this collaboration took place in December 1949, Britten, who humorously described himself as being “overwork[ed]” by Forster (BBL559), could have acted as the main scribe, and Forster could have copied the lengthier revised and added speeches into his text once the new wording had been finally agreed upon.

It is comparatively easy to imagine that Britten made the late revisions which only appear in his own working copy of the August Draft single-handedly as he came to compose the passages in question. It is somewhat less easy (though not impossible) to envision a scenario in which he engaged in an earlier, solitary round of substantial revision that had a fundamental impact on the characterisation of Vere, produced two consecutive drafts for an entirely new monologue (“Scylla and Charybdis”, see section III.2.3.3. below), and then invited Forster to copy his alterations afterwards. If Forster’s copy of the August Draft is assumed to reflect the December 1949 period of joint revision, then the time frame for such a scenario is rather restricted. In the autumn of 1949, Britten and Pears were on a concert tour in the USA. A copy of the typed August Draft which Crozier had produced by this time was sent off to Britten on 23 October (BBL547, n.7); yet by 5 November it still had not reached him: “WHERE is BILLY BUDD??” he wrote in despair to Erwin Stein from New York (BBL551). It was not until 30 November that he wrote to Crozier from Los Angeles to thank him “for getting Budd sent. I am full of it, & long to plunge into it!” (BBL556).

Forster’s manuscript draft of the shortened final version of the speech (BPL A62:68). The finished text was among the last-minute changes Britten communicated to Erwin Stein, who was preparing the vocal score, on 9 September 1951 (BBL677).

⁶⁵³ Crozier’s copy of the August Draft is hardly annotated at all; it contains only a few technical notes about the filling-in of some remaining gaps, and corrections of spelling and capitalisation.

By 1 December, Forster knew he was going to be working on the libretto with Britten during the pre-Christmas period,⁶⁵⁴ although his Christmas visit to Aldeburgh may well have been fixed by an earlier arrangement. On 10 December, Britten and Pears returned to Aldeburgh; by 16 December, as Britten's letter to Mary Behrend records, he and his irrepressibly keen main librettist were engaged in the "exciting" task of revising what struck Britten as a "surprising" work at this time (BLL559, n.2). In the two weeks or so that lie between Britten's receipt of the libretto and the start of his working session with Forster, he would have been busy with, and very probably exhausted by, the remainder of his and Pears's concert tour and the travelling it involved.⁶⁵⁵ Yet eager as he was, he might have seized what opportunity he had to "plunge into" (BLL556) the long-awaited libretto at this time, and, unable to avail himself of the assistance of his librettists, might have made some alterations on his own. It remains open to speculation, however, how extensive such alterations could have been.

The fact that both Britten and Forster explicitly refer to the December 1949 round of hardworking revision in their communications with Crozier and others would also seem to support a dating of the revisions reflected in Forster's copy of the August Draft to this period. A letter written by Forster to Kenneth Harrison on 1 January 1950 certainly indicates his sense of having completed a significant stage in the libretto's development: "We redid and finished the libretto, and I think Ben will be starting the music of the first act quite soon" (KCC: EMF/18/247). Granted, once Britten had started composing early in 1950, Forster would again have been available for consultation as the need arose: he was at Aldeburgh from 16 March through 1 May, and returned there in June and August. Yet in view of the chronological nature of Britten's compositional progress, it seems doubtful whether he would have interrupted his work on Act I during Forster's sojourns at Aldeburgh in spring and summer 1950 for further revisions of the trial scene. Moreover, Forster's presence evidently proved trying rather than helpful to the composer during his long visit in spring, and their relationship deteriorated dramatically as the year progressed (see section III.1.6. above).

It was not until January 1951, when Britten was approaching the end of what was then Act II, and was preparing to begin work on Act III (now Act II), that the next recorded working sessions with the librettists took place. On 5 January, Britten told Pears: "Nancy & Eric are coming over for lunch & I shall do a bit of work on the great Battle scene with him. It needs greatly tidying up" (BLL635). The results of their work, which included the creation of the passage in which the officers call for boarding volunteers, were communicated to Forster, who approved of what they had done. On 14 January, he wrote to Britten:

⁶⁵⁴ Letter to Crozier of 1 December 1949, BLL559, n.2.

⁶⁵⁵ As Forster reported to Kenneth Harrison on 1 January 1950, both Britten and Pears had suffered from bad health over Christmas due to "Over-fatigue from America" (KCC: EMF/18/247).

I think that you and Eric are right and that it would be unwise to keep [Billy] out of the battle scene. He could be nicely seen fighting for his country instead of fighting his countryman, and could be grouped with other characters one likes – Dansker, Donald. (KCC: EMF/18/71)⁶⁵⁶

Later that month, Forster was invited to stay for a week, joined by Crozier for two days (BBL633, n.3), during which *Billy Budd* was once again the subject of their discussions, and Forster and Britten re-established a more relaxed relationship, as Britten reported to Pears: “He [Forster] is very well & is in splendid form, helpful over Billy, agreeing to postpone Claggart problems [...]. So I didn’t need to worry!” (letter of 28 January 1951, quoted in Carpenter 1992:293).

While Forster’s copy of the August Draft contains a number of revisions to “the great Battle scene” (BBL635), it shows no trace of the newly created call for volunteers. It seems likely, therefore, that the revisions recorded in Forster’s copy of the August Draft predate the collaborators’ meeting in January 1951. Given the extensive nature of these revisions, and the substantial impact they have on the figure of Vere (see sections III.2.3.2. and III.2.3.3. below), it is hard to imagine that they could have been made at this time, and so far into the process of Britten’s compositional work. Not only would Britten have had to abandon his work on the battle scene to look ahead to the trial, but his relationship with Forster was only just beginning to improve again after their temporary estrangement. Furthermore, Britten’s letter to Pears records relief, rather than anything approaching the sense of successful innovation conveyed in his letters of December 1949.⁶⁵⁷

As far as can be told from the available source evidence, neither Forster nor Crozier appears to have been called in for another working session between February and April 1951⁶⁵⁸ – the time period during which Britten worked on the

⁶⁵⁶ Mitchell, Reed and Cooke interpret this letter (which they cite only partially and erroneously identify as “undated”) to indicate that “Forster had to be persuaded by Britten and Crozier to include Billy in this scene” (BBL637, n.3). Apart from the fact that the call for boarding volunteers does not yet appear in the typed four-act August Draft Crozier and Britten had been “tidying up”, there is nothing to suggest there was ever any need for persuasion; what Mitchell, Reed and Cooke read as Forster’s “conce[ssion]” could equally be a reaction to the wording of Britten’s and Crozier’s proposal (unfortunately lost) or, more generally, an expression of approval, its conciliatory tone possibly arising from Forster’s wish to reassure Britten, with whom relations had recently been so tense.

⁶⁵⁷ In his letter of 28 January 1951, Britten also reported to Pears that Forster now “underst[ood] the working situation” – as Carpenter explains, this comment refers to “Britten’s inability to devote all his time to the opera” (1992:293).

⁶⁵⁸ Around 24-25 February, Forster came to Aldeburgh to join a weekend house party which included a play-through of *Billy Budd* – at this time, the work had been completed up to and including Act III Sc. 1 (Act II Sc. 1 in the revised two-act version), see note 659. However, it seems improbable that Forster and Britten did any work on the libretto during what Britten described to Peter Pears as a “wild weekend” (letters of 20 and 27 February, BBL654, n.2, and 655).

crucial scenes involving Captain Vere and Billy.⁶⁵⁹ It seems likely, therefore, that the additions and changes to Vere's speeches which appear only in Britten's working copy of the four-act August Libretto Draft originated with the composer. As with "the great Battle scene" that had needed "tidying up" (and, as it turned out, adding to) before he could set it to music (BBL635), Britten may have felt the need to revise Vere's existing speeches yet again as he came to compose the scenes in question. Yet the changes he made at this stage may be considered minor compared to those made at the stage which is reflected in both his and Forster's copy of the August Draft.

The question of Britten's, Forster's and Crozier's respective contributions to the shaping of the libretto, and of the character of Vere in particular, remains a fascinating one, but one that cannot be resolved with complete certainty from the evidence of the existing documents. Yet even if the individual collaborators' views of their joint creation differed – as they undoubtedly did – it seems nevertheless important to remember with Hindley that ultimately, the libretto constitutes "a joint enterprise" (1989:369), and was accepted as such by all three collaborators, even though they thought of Forster as the principal librettist. It also seems important to note that there is no source evidence to suggest that Forster ever criticised the changes made to the character of Vere. This would seem to indicate that he accepted and approved the end result of the collaborative librettistic 'rescue operation', even though some ideas and textual details may have originated with Britten or Crozier.

To all general intents and purposes, Forster viewed the libretto as his and Crozier's joint creation. Yet the fact that he held such strong feelings about Claggart's central monologue ("my most important piece of writing", EMFL II:242),⁶⁶⁰ and was to describe the finished opera as his "Nunc Dimittis" which "convinces me that I have achieved" (EMFL II:246)⁶⁶¹ suggests that he nevertheless felt about the finished libretto as he did about his own creations (I return to this subject in my discussion of Forster's "Librettist's Note" in section III.2.3.4.).

⁶⁵⁹ On 12 February 1951, Britten wrote to Crozier that he was "now launching into [Act III] sc.II" (BBL645), i.e. the interview between Vere, Billy and Claggart; on 4 April, Britten reported to Forster that he had completed "Billy in the Darbies" and had "only the last scene to finish" (BBL663) – presumably Billy's execution, as well as the Epilogue.

⁶⁶⁰ Letter to Britten of early December 1950.

⁶⁶¹ Letter to Britten of 9 December 1951.

III.2.3. "I am an old man": the metamorphoses of Captain Vere

III.2.3.1. "Vere [...] had better live on": changed functions of a changed figure

Britten's interest in Vere's "moral problem" which the composer regarded as central to "the whole work" (Britten in BBC1960:197) is generally linked with his allocation of this part to Peter Pears. The frame structure of the opera seems to have evolved from this foregrounding of Vere, as reported by Crozier:

Most composers would have allotted the tenor role to the innocent young hero, Billy. Britten took it for granted that it would go to Melville's wise and thoughtful naval commander, Vere, who would be sung by Peter Pears. After that decision, it seemed a natural development that the action on board ship should be "framed" by a prologue and epilogue of Vere as an elderly man looking back on the troubled days of his wartime command. [...] For operatic purposes it seemed necessary for him to live on. (1986:12f.)

To Forster, it seems, Britten's choice came somewhat unexpectedly, as a remark he made to Christopher Isherwood suggests: having told Isherwood about the new project, Forster found it necessary to add "N.B. Peter would play Vere, not Billy" (letter of 27 March 1949, KCC EMF/18/271). If Forster had indeed expected the tenor Pears to be cast as Billy, this could be seen to agree with his view of Billy as the story's eponymous hero character: after all, the title parts of both *Peter Grimes* and *Albert Herring* had been written for Pears. The genre conventions of grand opera, which favour tenor heroes, would have led Forster to expect a similar choice for the "hero" (*Griffin* 6) of *Billy Budd*. Yet, as Robert Martin has usefully pointed out, it is Vere who, by virtue of his "tenor voice", is made to appear as "the conventional hero" (1986b:55).⁶⁶²

Even though Forster's initial expectations regarding the operatic incarnation of two of the story's main protagonists may have been disappointed at this very early stage, he set to work with enthusiasm, creating his first draft of Vere's Prologue, sent to Crozier from Cambridge on 27 January 1949, even before their collaboration had properly begun (Reed 1993a:49).⁶⁶³ Forster's first draft of Vere's Prologue is headed "Vere as Chorus"; at the bottom of the page, Forster added "N.B. in the story Vere dies soon after, But had better live on" (BPL A61:40). The designation "Vere as Chorus" seems to hark back to the collaborators' discussion of the chorus and its function in December 1948, when Forster had told Britten:

⁶⁶² It may be of interest to note Ghedini's assignment of vocal parts here: as in Britten's opera, Billy is a baritone, but it is Claggart who is sung by a tenor – tenor villains have included Monostatos in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (1791) and Mephistopheles in Busoni's *Doktor Faust* (1925) – whereas Vere is allocated a paternal bass voice.

⁶⁶³ In 1960, Forster commented "I would start before the time" (BBC1960:201).

I like the idea of a chorus, shanties &^{ct}, provided it is at the level of the half-informed Greek chorus, which was always making mistakes. The well-informed commentator, the person or personages outside time, would not here be suitable. (Letter of 20 December 1948, EMFL II:235)

In rejecting “the well-informed commentator, the person or personages outside time”, Forster may have been thinking of the Male and Female Chorus in *The Rape of Lucretia*, who provide a Christian reading of the story and sufferings of Lucretia.⁶⁶⁴ Forster, by contrast, envisioned a “realism” in which “good and evil and eternal matters” ought to “shine through” a story of a “ship and crew”, of “human beings and the smell of tar” (EMFL II:235), rather than be explicated by an omniscient “commentator” or narrator. Forster’s first speech for “Vere as Chorus” accordingly couches the metaphysical reflections made by Melville’s narrator on the meaning of Billy’s stammer (BB27f.) in a narrative of *personal* experience:

I am an old man who has experienced much. I have been a man of action and fought for my King and Country at sea. I have also read books and studied and pondered and tried to fathom eternal truth.

Much good has been shown to me and much evil. The evil has sometimes been absolute. And the good has never been perfect. There has always been some flaw in it, some defect, some imperfection in the divine image, some stammer in the divine speech, some fault in the angelic song. So that – I am an old man now – it seems to me that the Devil must have had his part in this make up of ours. God grant that it be a small part.

On sea as on land that fight between good and evil continues. And my mind goes back to the summer of 1797, to the French wars, to the difficult and dangerous days after the Mutiny of the Nore, to the days when I, Edward Fairfax Vere, commanded the *Indomitable*. (BPL A61:40; reproduced in Reed 1993a:51)⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶⁴ According to Mitchell, Reed and Cooke, Forster “saw *Lucretia* at Glyndebourne in 1946 when he found much to admire but was disturbed by the ‘Christian enhaloing’ of the story” (BBL363, n.9).

⁶⁶⁵ An interesting crosslight is thrown on Forster’s earliest version of Vere’s Prologue by another piece of his dramatic writing, a pageant play entitled *England’s Pleasant Land* (1938). This was the second text for a local village pageant Forster had written; in both this and the first, the *Abinger Pageant* of 1934, the music was directed by the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, who also lived locally (Heine 1996:443f.; Furbank II:198 and 225f.). Crozier recalls that “Forster [...] brought one of [his pageant plays] to our very first meeting in autumn 1948 as though to convince me (and perhaps himself) of his dramatic capacities” (1986:18f.). There is no telling which of his two Forster may have thought most suitable for this purpose; it can only be speculated that his choice could have fallen on *England’s Pleasant Land* as the more recent as well as the longer and more elaborate of the two productions. *England’s Pleasant Land* consists of a number of episodes which highlight particularly important points in the historical development of the English countryside. The second act, set in 1899, revolves around the consequences of the introduction of death duties in 1894, which brought about the end of the “old order” (AH393) of land ownership

Although Vere's memories are refined into poetic abstraction, the images he uses – “the divine image”, the “stammer in the divine speech”, and “the angelic song” – can all be linked to the shining but “imperfect[...]” figure of Billy Budd, who was once a “human being[...]” carrying with him “the smell of tar” (EMFL II:235). Vere's reflections on the role of the Devil, too, are based on his own personal encounters with the “good” and “evil” he himself “has been shown”.

It will be noted that Vere's agonised self-interrogation (“Oh what have I done?”), his “confusion”, and his querying of his own authority (“I have tried to guide others rightly, but I have been lost”, etc.) and spiritual state (“Who has blessed me? Who saved me?”, LIB7) do not figure in Forster's earliest draft version.⁶⁶⁶ As Forster's earlier publications on *Billy Budd* indicate, he appears originally to have thought of the story as centred on the conflict between Billy and Claggart; in 1947, he chose to represent Vere as mainly an observer who “understands” (BBC386) the metaphysical implications of that conflict. This view of Vere might be felt to be reflected in Forster's first draft for Vere's Prologue, which, for all that it introduces his personal perspective, still presents a Vere who views the events of the past with far more detachment than the finished character.

It might be wondered for whose benefit Forster thought it necessary to note on his draft that Vere “had better live on” (Reed 1993a:51), if the collaborators had already decided that the opera would be framed by a Prologue and an Epilogue. That this had indeed been decided is made clear by the fact that Vere's Epilogue is already listed in the typed First Rough Synopsis Crozier produced in January 1949, which served the librettists as a guide when they settled down to work in March: once the officers and crew have “disperse[d]” after the “protest” has been quelled, Vere, “left alone [...] resumes his function as chorus and brings the action to an end with an Epilogue” (BPL A61:24). However, while Forster had shown such zeal over the Prologue, he appears to have been more doubtful about

in rural England, together with that of the concomitant social structure of the village and the manor house. In the play, the “old order” is represented by Squire George, one of whose speeches from Act II, Sc. 1 rather strikingly resembles Forster's first draft for Vere's Prologue in its use of simple statements all beginning with “I have”:

SQUIRE GEORGE: I belong to the land and kept [*sic*] faith with it. I have worked and made others work and have punished them when they were idle, and it has been for England's good. I have been hard on my people sometimes, but I have protected them against robbers and beasts, and put down crime and led them to fight for my King, I have drained the land and grown wool and ploughed, made hedges and enclosed and improved. No one can say I have deserted my heritage [...]. But I'm an old man now, no one listens to me, and I can't see how it will end.

YOUNG GEORGE: Yes, Father, come in now, it has been a long day for you, you must be tired.

SQUIRE GEORGE: Yes, I'm an old man, and it's getting late.

GUESTS: Yes, by all means – thank you so much – Domesday.

SQUIRE GEORGE: (*his voice failing*) I'm an old man and I must get back into the house of my fathers. (AH390)

The old man's repeated insistence upon his age also reoccurs in Forster's first sketch for Vere's Prologue; however, these repetitions were subsequently cut, probably for reasons of stringency.

⁶⁶⁶ See also my discussion in section III.2.3.4. below and Hindley 1989:371.

Vere's Epilogue, which remains unrealised in the three-act March Draft: in its typescript form, the librettists' first joint effort closes with only a stage direction: "The scene is entirely empty and dark, except for Vere who stands on the quarter deck" (BPL A61:177).

It seems Forster continued to harbour doubts about the opera's ending as a whole even after he and Crozier had completed their three-act March Draft. In an "undated letter" to Crozier, "probably written in late March [1949]" (Reed 1993:54), Forster explained his concerns:

As for the end, I believe that the abortive mutiny should come (if at all) before Billy's words. I am not sure whether it should come at all: two anticlimaxes (this and frigate chase) being too much for one drama. – I would like "God bless Captain Vere" to be taken up first by the crew and then by the echo, as Rights of Man was in I, i – light fading on the echo. (Quoted in Reed 1993:54)

Only a short while later, on 8 April 1949, Forster wrote to Crozier once more on the same subject:

We shall discuss the opera's difficult end. Perhaps I am being deflected by Wagnerism from essential truth, but I do feel that the abortive mutiny might be an anti-climax, whereas Billy's last phrase [this is "Starry Vere, God bless you!" – our more singable version of Melville's "God bless Captain Vere!"], if Ben could get it into the air as he did the last phrase in *M-cretia*, might be very fine. (Quoted in Crozier 1986:20; the bracketed insertion is Crozier's)

The fact that Forster neglects to mention the Epilogue in these letters may have various explanations and, on its own, could hardly be taken as evidence that he was altogether against its inclusion. However, Forster's vision of the opera's last scene offers a tantalising glimpse of a work which might be felt to constitute a more naïve reading of Melville's text, but which, at the same time, favours an ending which is less definite in the claims it makes than the present conclusion.

Forster's concern about the anticlimactic effect of the "abortive mutiny" suggests either that he did not see the political theme of repressive authority as central to the text, or that, as in 1927, he still considered the theme of "temporary salvation" (AN99) through forgiveness and love, brought by the heroic 'light' saviour character, to be of such overriding importance that he was willing to sacrifice the crew's moment of (ineffective) resistance in order that the opera should conclude, in a truly 'operatic' spirit, with the epiphanic moment of Billy's blessing, "taken up first by the crew and then by the echo [...] – light fading on the echo." If this were indeed to have stood as the ending of the opera, and had not been followed by the Epilogue, the effect would arguably have been closer to Forster's original reading of Melville's story as a 'prophetic' text which bestows its bounty

of “harmony and temporary salvation” on the reader or audience (on “us”, AN99), rather than on Captain Vere.⁶⁶⁷ It ought to be recalled that in Forster’s reading in *Aspects of the Novel*, the “transcendence” inspired by “the overall effect of Melville’s tale” is experienced “by the reader in his recognition of an implicitly higher state, rather than by the characters in the tale”, as Irene Morra (2002:8f.) has so usefully pointed out. Vere’s added Epilogue not only imposes a definite interpretation on the events of the past (an interpretation which is immediately complicated, however, by the question of narrative perspective); it also effectively turns Vere into the “ideal audience, transformed to inner peace and conviction through the catharsis invited by the performed drama” (Morra 2002:20), thus placing “us” at a remove from this experience as we begin to question the reliability of what may now appear as Vere’s account both of the events of the opera proper and of his own transformation.

Hindley has taken Forster’s note on his first draft for the Prologue (“Vere [...] had better live on”) as evidence that it was not only decided at this early stage “that Vere should live on”, but also “that the drama should be relived through his memory” (1989:371). The notion that Vere’s is the opera’s narrating consciousness has become a common assumption among many scholars and critics. Indeed, it was shared by Basil Coleman and John Piper, the producer and designer of the opera’s first performance: in a “Discussion” published a few months before the work’s premiere, Piper reminded the readers of *Tempo* that “we must never lose sight of the fact that the whole thing is taking place in Vere’s mind, and is being recalled by him” (Coleman/Piper 21).⁶⁶⁸ And yet it seems doubtful whether Forster, reminding Crozier and himself that Vere “live[s] on” in January 1949, was conscious of the interpretive consequences which would follow from this momentous decision. His alternative envisionings of the opera’s end, together with the fact that the Epilogue remains unrealised in the first full-length libretto draft, could be taken to indicate that Forster’s main focus continued to rest with the story of the opera proper. Morra has advanced the convincing view that “Vere’s narrative was originally planned as a choral device to provide structure rather than to place dramatic emphasis on Vere himself” (2002:17); if this was indeed the case,

⁶⁶⁷ Forster’s reference to his own “Wagnerism” (Crozier 1986:20) might be taken as an allusion to the highly dramatic and/or cathartic endings of operas such as *Götterdämmerung*, *Tristan und Isolde*, or *Parsifal*, all of which conclude with grand climaxes that are quasi-‘prophetic’ in the Forsterian sense of engaging the audience in “the extension, the melting, the unity through love and pity” (AN92).

⁶⁶⁸ Britten’s view of the opera’s narrative perspective can only be speculated on, and Crozier’s recollections do not provide definite information either: in the excerpt already cited above, he only mentions “that the action on board ship should be ‘framed’ by a prologue and epilogue of Vere as an elderly man looking back” (1986:12f.), which does not necessarily mean that Vere is the narrating consciousness of the opera proper. Writing in 1952, Erwin Stein also drew attention to the structural importance of Vere’s position: “Though Billy is the central figure, the opera is framed by Captain Vere. It is his eyes through which the events are seen, and his mind that reflects on them. [...] His memory’s vision becomes the reality of the stage and unfolds before us” (206).

it seems possible that Forster retained this view of the Prologue and Epilogue far into the work's development.

III.2.3.2. "Really the worst of our problems":⁶⁶⁹ rewriting the trial scene

The one feature which the opera-makers found most objectionable in Melville's depiction of Captain Vere was the "unseemly harangue" (*Griffin* 5) he delivers during the trial scene (BB95-99), in which he effectively persuades the officers that Billy must be sentenced to death. The decision not to make this speech appear in the opera libretto will have been an obvious one, but its omission was only a first step in the librettistic 'rescue operation': through the various stages of the opera's development – which in fact did not come to an end until the 1960 revisions – there were to be numerous other changes, additions and reworkings before the collaborators were finally satisfied with their version of Vere, and with the role he plays in the trial and in the events immediately surrounding it.⁶⁷⁰ The trial scene in particular underwent some of the most numerous and substantial reworkings within the whole process of the libretto's genesis, and it seems worthwhile to examine these developments in more detail.

When Forster and Crozier, staying with Britten at Aldeburgh in March 1949, embarked upon their project of turning Melville's novella into a libretto, Forster, reading through Vere's "unseemly harangue", marked the lines in which Vere reminds his officers that "the blow itself is, according to the Articles of War, a capital crime" (BB97) in his copy of Plomer's edition of *Billy Budd*.⁶⁷¹ This given legal situation, which the officers do not dispute in Melville's novella, may have provided the librettists with a fixed point of departure for their re-envisioning of the figure of Vere. Even though they could not resolve the problem of Vere's position as the superior officer who has to validate the verdict of the drumhead court, and thus ultimately remains responsible for Billy's execution, Forster and Crozier were able to build on the severity of the legal constraints under which Vere and his officers are acting. With this basic premise established, the librettists were able to set to 'rescuing' Vere in earnest.

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Their first attempts at doing so are documented in the handwritten draft material which precedes the typed March Draft. Their "solution", as Hindley has summarised, was

⁶⁶⁹ "Our attempts to rescue Vere from Melville: really the worst of our problems" (letter from Forster to William Plomer of 17 March 1949, KCC EMF/18/435/3).

⁶⁷⁰ In his pioneering investigation into the evolution of the libretto and its main characters, Hindley (1989:372-375) has provided a very valuable overview and analysis of the successive stages of this development.

⁶⁷¹ For my dating of Forster's annotations, see section I.2.4., p.49.

to shift from Vere to his officers all the statements in Melville which suggest the overriding duty of obeying naval law and of disregarding the claims of natural justice. It is then left to Vere to raise doubts: the “mystery of iniquity”; the plea of natural justice on behalf on one obviously innocent; the private conscience.

Indeed, as Hindley notes, “the idea that the officers should bear the brunt of advocating unrelenting application of the law [...] survives into the final version”, where it finds its poignant expression in their trio (“Poor fellow, who could save him”) with its “almost liturgical refrain ‘We’ve no choice’”, even if “their viewpoints gradually come to be differentiated in degrees of severity” (1989:372).

From Forster’s and Crozier’s manuscript drafts of the trial scene – they each wrote a separate one (see Hindley 1989:367) – the collaborators produced a revised version of the scene which appears in the typed three-act Draft Libretto of March 1949. This early version of the trial scene deserves extensive quotation, since it can be seen to mark an intermediate stage in the process of Vere’s development. In addition, it also demonstrates the librettists’ endeavours to retain some of Melville’s phrasings (I have underlined these and given the relevant page numbers).

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Sir, you must surely preside.

VERE: No, no. I am present in this court as a witness – the sole witness [BB91]. You will take charge.

SAILING MASTER: I can’t see he need be tried at all, he’s a madman, a monster for whom hanging’s too good. He ought to be treated as he treated poor Claggart there – the black blood oozing from nose and ears [BB85], did you see? I have seen men die in battle and may be killed there myself. But this is different. Let him be executed forthwith, I say.

FIRST LIEUTENANT: We must keep to the King’s regulations, Mr Flint.

RATCLIFFE: Aye, but that it should be this particular man puzzles me. I impressed him myself not a week back, and little did I think what would happen, for a finer upstanding lad I never saw – never any trouble, and liked by all, recommended for promotion. Billy Budd the handsome sailor [e.g. BB78]. I don’t understand. Nay, can’t he go free?

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Mr Ratcliffe, Mr Ratcliffe, the court sits. (*to Vere*) Sir, do you prefer to give your account before the prisoner enters? Or will you first speak in his presence?

VERE: (*after a pause*) Summon the prisoner.

The door is unlocked and Billy enters

FIRST LIEUTENANT: William Budd, you are accused by Captain Vere [...] [...]

BILLY: [...] never could I do those foul things. I have eaten the King’s bread and I am true to the King [BB91].

VERE: I believe you, my man. [BB91]

BILLY: ~~God bless you for that, sir.~~ God will bless you for [BB91] standing my friend.

FIRST LIEUTENANT: ~~Silence!~~ \Quiet!/ ~~Budd?~~ Had you any malice [...] [...]

[The first lieutenant asks why Claggart should have accused Billy wrongfully]

VERE: The question is beyond me too. The only ~~person~~ \one/who could answer ~~it is – there (points), and he will~~ \can/never speak. He is tonguetied [BB94] for ever. ~~We are concerned not with the dead man's motives but with his death.~~ \But/ Even if ~~the~~ \his/ motives were foul, even if he did desire to destroy handsomeness, beauty and goodness, we must ignore them. There is a mystery here, whose veil no one can lift. Maybe it is the mystery of iniquity [content BB93].

BILLY: (*pondering*) Iniquity. Iniquity. (*He clenches and looks at his fist*)

OFFICERS: Iniquity.

[...]

[“Poor fellow”, etc.]

\VERE: My friends, what is your verdict?/

FIRST LIEUTENANT: ~~Sir, do us the honour to join us and help us. We shall announce our verdict formally, but let us feel in this privacy that we may consult you. We need your judgement, your leadership.~~ \Join us and help us. Grant us your leadership./

VERE: My friends, I cannot lead you here. ~~I am only a witness, and what I saw dazzled me. What happened, I ask myself? Why that hellish accusation, this death as from heaven – struck dead like Ananias [BB85] as he lied?~~

If indeed there is a mystery of iniquity [BB93], may there not be a mystery of goodness – deeper still, too deep for the vision of men? ~~If Claggart were evil, and this boy – save for that fatal defect, that stammer – were good, if he were perfect, what then? Where then do we stand?~~

~~We are cooped in this little cabin on a ship which floats upon a great sea; the sea is but part of the world, the world but a speck in space. Infinity surrounds us.~~ Before what tribunal do we stand if we destroy goodness?

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Do you mean we should acquit ~~Budd~~ \him/, sir?

[Cut section:]

VERE: (*after a pause*) No.

FIRST LIEUTENANT: That is my opinion, but I have been thinking too, about tribunals. Sir, I have found a way out.

VERE: Reveal it, in God's name.

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Put Budd in irons until we rejoin the fleet [content BB86, BB89].

RATCLIFFE: I agree. Let the admiral's court try him [content BB86, BB89].

SAILING MASTER: Aye. Let others condemn him.

VERE: (*after a pause*) No. If he is to be condemned, it must be here. If his blood is to be on another's head, let it be on mine. If his innocence –

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Sir, he's not innocent. Promising seaman, we agree, pleasant enough lad, and struck in a fit of temper, but he's done it.

VERE: Mr Redburn, he is innocent, but these things lie too deep. They are a private trouble which I should not have raised into light.

[End of cut]

\VERE: I cannot help you. Pronounce your verdict./

[The officers pronounce the verdict of "guilty"]

VERE: ~~I accept your verdict, gentlemen. It will be carried out. \I accept your verdict; I assume responsibility; let his blood be on my head./ Mr Redburn, all hands to witness punishment at one bell in the morning watch. \I will myself inform the prisoner. I thank you./ Previous to that let the body of the Master at Arms receive honourable burial. The court is dismissed. Thank you, gentlemen. I will myself communicate your verdict to the prisoner.~~

[Cut section:]

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Very well, sir. It's a sad, sad business. We take our leave. We may not here temper justice with mercy.

ALL: Justice.

(*The Officers withdraw*)

VERE: Justice and mercy! Justice and mercy! Ah, the age-long conflict between them, and oh that it was the only conflict here. Then could my soul be at peace. But Thrones and Dominations come down from the height and ascend from the depths. This little ship of mine, this tiny Indomitable, is their battlefield.

I have seen the flames of hell open, and the strength of heaven strike them down, and I am obliged to choose. The choice has been made on earth, a boy has transgressed earthly laws and will die, but in the heaven, in the heights and the depths, ah what?

I must not too closely consider these mysteries. As mysteries let them remain. I serve the King and my course is laid out for me. I must pursue it inflexibly. Honour, tradition, the safety of my ship, the exigencies of war compel me. Poor lad! Poor lad! May God grant him strength.⁶⁷²

[End of cut]

(Excerpts quoted from Britten's copy of the March Draft, BPL A61:162-167)

⁶⁷² This monologue is immediately followed by the ballad of "Billy in the Darbies"; no mention is made as yet of the closeted interview.

It can be observed that Melville's conflict of opinions between Vere and the officers is turned into a highly polarised and emotional confrontation between the sailing master and the second lieutenant, Ratcliffe, who plead, respectively, for Billy's immediate execution and for his acquittal. As the presiding officer in charge of the drumhead court, the first lieutenant mainly has the role of the arbiter who calls the other men to order and whose task it is primarily to remind them of the law's requirements. His invocation of the King's Regulations in this context (near the beginning of the passage) might be felt to be somewhat counterproductive, since these laws would seem to protect Billy at this point, if only against the overly hasty retribution without a trial demanded by the sailing master. In the libretto's final version, this unnecessary complication has been abolished; the King's Regulations are now only referred to in the officers' trio, where they are invoked along with the other laws that would condemn Billy (LIB57).

It also falls to the first lieutenant to raise the possibility of deferring Billy's trial until his case can not only be "reported to the admiral", as the surgeon and the officers think it should be in Melville's novella (BB86), but placed entirely under that superior's "judgement" (BB89). The passage which engages with Vere's motives for having Billy tried at once by a drumhead court of his officers, which he will nevertheless be "supervis[ng]" (BB89f.), is one of the most ambiguous sections of Melville's text, since its elaborate formulations and somewhat tortuous logic could be (and have been) taken as ironic.⁶⁷³ It is important to note, therefore, that the librettists' first lieutenant refers to the idea of having Billy tried at a later point as "a way out" of what all those present appear to consider a conundrum, and that the other officers immediately understand his proposal to mean that Billy should be tried and "condemn[ed]" by "others". Their reactions imply that they regard Billy's fate as sealed: any other court would find Billy guilty of multiple capital crimes under the Articles of War, "the blow itself" (BB97) being merely the least of these.

This brief exchange suggests that the opera-makers had adopted a view in which deferring the case to the admiral's court would merely have meant trying to avoid assuming personal responsibility for pronouncing or endorsing a death sentence that was, according to naval law, unavoidable in any case. It is here, I would contend, that we find the explanation for Vere's insistence that if Billy "is to be condemned, it must be here. If his blood is to be on another's head, let it be on mine" (BPL A61:166),⁶⁷⁴ an insistence which Hindley finds "not entirely clear" in terms of motivation (1989:373). Even though the longer exchange and the option of deferring the case were discarded, the new lines "I assume responsibility. Let

⁶⁷³ The comparison of Vere's "maintenance of secrecy" to the political practices of the Russian tsar Peter the Barbarian, "great chiefly by his crimes" (BB89), contributes to the ambiguity of Vere's character as it emerges in this passage.

⁶⁷⁴ The image of someone's blood being upon someone's head as a metaphor for assuming responsibility for their death is biblical (Joshua 2:19, 2 Samuel 1:16 and 3:29, 1 Kings 2:32, 33 and 37, Ezekiel 33:4, Matthew 27:25). The deployment of biblical language at this point may be felt to underline the solemnity of Vere's feelings.

his blood be on my head”, added to Vere’s statement “I accept your verdict”, indicate that at this point, the collaborators were interested in retaining the idea of Vere’s accepting not only the inescapable verdict, but also the personal responsibility for Billy’s death – a personal responsibility which can be seen to fit the Forsterian idea of ‘dark’ characters who ‘travel light’ being forced to realise that they are deeply and personally implicated in their relations with their fellow human beings.

Vere’s self-declared acceptance of personal responsibility for Billy’s death directly contradicts the characterisation of Vere as given in the novella (one which has, moreover, been construed as ironic criticism of the captain by numerous readers): “Very far was he from monopolising to himself the perils of moral responsibility, none at least that could properly be referred to an official superior, or shared with him by his official equals, or even subordinates” (BB89). The librettists’ solution seems designed to emphasise Vere’s feelings of personal obligation towards Billy Budd, and to establish his uprightness, inner strength and determination. At the same time, however, it might be felt that in his philosophical reflections, this strength and determination still lie very close to emotional detachment. In the cut monologue quoted above, not only does Vere appear to be making the somewhat incongruous and – it might be felt – cold-hearted claim that his “soul” might “be at peace” if Billy’s case had merely been a “conflict” between “justice and mercy”, but, having pondered on the conflict between “hell” and “heaven” which he sees embodied in Billy’s tragedy, he then decides that he “must not too closely consider these mysteries”, and resolves to “let them remain” “as mysteries”, because he must pursue the course which is dictated by his position as a servant of the King (BPL A61:167). Despite the fact that his monologue concludes on a note of pity and compassion (“Poor lad! May God grant him strength”), this early Vere still seems much closer to Melville’s conception of the figure as it appears in Ch. XIX than to the heart-broken, devastated Vere who approaches Billy’s prison not daring to hope that he will be pardoned for his choice. In the March Draft, he can still be read as a “stoic” man who may allow himself to “melt back into what remains primeval in our formalised humanity” (BB101) and feel compassion, but who remains preoccupied with the moral symbolism of the tragedy, and is not personally touched or transformed by his experience.⁶⁷⁵

In this early draft version of Vere’s conversation with the officers, there also appears a certain amount of material which can be shown to have its source in Melville, but which has undergone some important modifications. Asked why Claggart should have wrongfully accused Billy, Vere tells his officers that the court must concern itself “not with the dead man’s motives but with his death” (BPL

⁶⁷⁵ Given these considerations, Hindley’s summary of Vere’s character as it appears in the March Draft’s trial scene seems altogether too celebratory: “Through all this, Vere, unable to find any way of saving Billy, is shown as a man of passion and sensitivity, deeply aware of the human cost of the decision which he feels obliged to make in the execution of his duty as a naval officer” (1989:373).

A61:165). His reminder might be felt to hark back to a similar comment made by Melville's Vere, who declares that "a martial court must [...] confine its attention to the blow's consequence, which consequence is to be deemed not otherwise than as the striker's deed" (BB93). The difference is, however, that Melville's Vere is stringently reminding his officers of their duty to investigate *Billy's* "deed", as part of his overall argument for Billy's conviction. By contrast, the librettists' Vere altogether avoids the subject of Billy's "deed" in favour of speculating, despite himself, upon "the dead man's" possible "motives", and introducing the idea that these might involve a "mystery of iniquity" – in the novella, the idea of something "mysterious in this matter" is first introduced by "the soldier" (BB93), i.e. the captain of marines (see BB90); Vere then takes up this thought and elaborates upon it (BB93).

A little further on in the draft of the trial scene, Vere returns to the idea of "a mystery of iniquity" once more. The phrase itself is taken directly from Melville; however, in the novella, Vere then refuses to take into account "any conceivable motive actuating the master-at-arms", treating the "mystery of iniquity" as "a matter for psychological theologians to discuss" and insisting once again that it is "the prisoner's deed [...] alone" with which "we have to do" (BB93f.). By contrast, the librettists' Vere, still willing to respond to his officers' request for "help" at this stage, has become something of a "psychological theologian" himself: stating "I cannot lead you here", he is nevertheless ready enough to delve into the metaphysical dimension of the conflict between Billy and Claggart. He embarks on yet another discussion of good and evil, exploring the idea of "a mystery of goodness" – an idea which was to displace Melville's "mystery of iniquity" altogether in the finished libretto – and asking "Before what tribunal do we stand if we destroy goodness?" The latter question, it should be noted, still presupposes a collective responsibility at this early stage, rather than expressing Vere's sense of sole personal responsibility, as it does in the finished libretto. Vere even goes so far as to tell his officers that Billy "is innocent", a claim which the first lieutenant, concerned as he is with the rather more material aspects of the case, cannot accept.

The fact that there is altogether more communication between the officers and the captain in the March Draft makes their relations appear less formal, almost intimate, in comparison with the finished libretto's curt exchanges. Vere is also repeatedly heard to address the officers as "my friends", something which, in the final version, he only does in the relatively relaxed, peaceful atmosphere of Act I, Sc. 2. In this early draft, it appears as if Vere and his officers were endeavouring to work together to find a solution; while at the same time, there is far more discussion and controversy, especially in the cut dialogue in which the option of deferring the trial and the question of Billy's innocence are addressed. This early Vere furthermore appears less decisive and less sure of himself: he hesitates three times before replying, which could indicate that he is only at that moment making a decision; and when the first lieutenant mentions that he has "found a way out", he is impatiently eager to hear it ("Reveal it, in God's name").

By contrast, the Vere we meet in the finished libretto not only appears far more contained, but also interacts less with the officers, which has the effect of making him appear more in control of the situation: it is he who simply announces the constitution of the drum-head court, and that he will himself be “present as witness” (LIB54). The question of his presiding instead of the first lieutenant is not raised at all. The increased formality between the captain and his officers underlines the distance between them, and highlights the discrepancy between the outer world of martial law and military proceedings, and the inner world of Vere’s private thoughts, which include his sense of the spiritual dimension of the tragedy. Save for his exclamation “Struck by an angel”, etc. (LIB54), Vere’s private thoughts are no longer voiced in the presence of his officers; instead, he expresses his private agony in the monologues that now frame the trial. It seems as if these monologues, and the insight they provide into Vere’s private emotions, were conceived to counterbalance what might otherwise well be taken for his cold, unfeeling despotism during the trial scene. His clipped commands and his refusal to help either Billy or his officers could thus be explained by a sympathetic audience who have just witnessed his private agony as a valiant effort of self-control, made by a heartbroken man who despairs of communicating his private views quite as much as he feels unable to defy the course of naval law.⁶⁷⁶

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With hindsight, it seems obvious that any mention of the option of having Billy tried by the admiral’s court had to be discarded altogether, if Vere’s refusal to save the young sailor was to appear in as unambiguous a light as possible. As Hindley has pointed out, this “suggestion of delay [...] is indeed unanswerable, and if allowed to surface would make Vere’s resolute refusal to save Billy (already difficult) wholly unacceptable” (1989:373). It appears that the opera-makers came to the same conclusion fairly rapidly, since, indeed, all references to this dubious “way out” have disappeared from the August Draft, where, instead, Vere is first heard to say “Our enemy is near and the prisoner must be tried at once” (BPL A62:57); almost exactly the same words appear in the finished libretto (see LIB54). Although it might be objected that we still only have Vere’s word for this, it ought to be noted that there is no indication in the libretto that the officers disagree with his representation here. Thus, Vere’s declaration, as Hindley correctly remarks, serves to establish for the opera’s audience that “judgement must be delivered immediately”, on the simple basis that “no alternative to immediate judgement is presented to our minds” (373).

⁶⁷⁶ An audience who question such a view of Vere, on the other hand, might still read his agonised monologues as vain attempts at raising sympathy for a man in a position of power who lacks the courage to make a morally correct choice that might endanger his privileged position.

The collaborators had also been dissatisfied with Vere's monologue at the end of the scene, particularly, or so it would seem, with Vere's deliberate decision not to "consider" the "mysteries" of good and evil "too closely", because he feels "compel[led]" to "pursue [...] inflexibly" the "course" dictated by his duty to the King, "Honour, tradition, the safety of my ship", and "the exigencies of war" (BPL A61:167).⁶⁷⁷ Forster accordingly drafted a new version of this monologue (BPL A61:367), which subsequently appeared in the typed August Draft:

I accept your verdict: but I have seen what you cannot see: iniquity overthrown, the divine judgment from heaven. Cooped in this narrow cabin, I have beheld the mystery of goodness, and I am afraid. The powers of the spirit, the invisible legions, descend from the heights and arise from the depths, this ship of mine, this tiny *Indomitable*, is their battlefield, my ship floating on the sea and the sea is but part of the world, and the world but a speck in space. Eternity surrounds me. I am nothing, yet in my presence goodness has triumphed, the angel of God has struck.

And the angel must hang.

Death is the penalty for those who break the laws of earth, and I who am King of this fragment of the earth, this floating monarchy, exact death. I will not save him. Beauty, handsomeness, goodness, it is for me to destroy you. Poor lad, poor lad, may God grant him strength! (*He moves towards the room where Billy is waiting*) No No! God grant me strength, me, Edward Fairfax Vere, Captain of the *Indomitable*, lost with all aboard upon the infinite sea. (BPL A62:61)⁶⁷⁸

While the metaphysical reflections on the cosmic battle between good and evil are still heavily present in this version, it seems that the librettists' conception of Vere and his feelings must have undergone a change: Vere now realises that it is he

⁶⁷⁷ Hindley has reflected on the possible reasons for Britten's and Forster's dissatisfaction with this monologue in its March Draft form: "One cannot but surmise that, in the end, neither the life-long pacifist who was later to write the War Requiem, nor the writer whose creed bade him put his friend before his country, could accept the thought that naval regulations of wartime emergency could be made to justify the killing of an innocent man. For them this, it seems, had to be seen as part of the evil decreed by an irrational fate" (1989:373). Indeed, to retain Vere's explicit invocation of "Honour, tradition" and "the exigencies of war" (BPL A61:167) in this context would have clashed with the collaborators' basic conception of Vere as a flawed but emotionally sensitive and even vulnerable protagonist (see below). Viewed in Forsterian terms, and with regard to this aspect of his character, the Vere of the finished opera is more closely related to Rickie Elliot, who, even though he lets himself be misguided by the moral views and normative pressures of society, acknowledges the supreme value of personal relations as a matter of course, than to Henry Wilcox, who does not. Yet the omission of Vere's explicit reference to the "exigencies of war" cannot change the fundamental problem of his structural position; hence, perhaps, the August Draft's increased emphasis on Vere's sense of personal responsibility and failure.

⁶⁷⁸ Even though the stage direction now states that Vere "moves towards the room where Billy is waiting", he is not yet seen to enter it.

himself who is in need of “strength”, and that he is “lost [...] upon the infinite sea”. What can be observed here are arguably signs of the development of Vere’s conflict from an intellectual and philosophical conundrum towards a personal tragedy that would foreground his private feelings and sufferings. Given the recent critical focus on Forster’s and Britten’s differing views of the story and its two main protagonists, it seems important to note not only that this line of development in Vere’s character was first recorded in a draft handwritten by Forster sometime between March and August 1949, but also that it did not in itself constitute an entirely new idea at this stage: Forster’s earliest handwritten drafts for Vere’s monologue at the end of the trial scene, which had, for some reason, never made it into the typed March Draft, had already shown a Vere aware of having “betrayed” Billy, and wondering how Billy could “ever forgive”, “pardon” or “understand” his choice (BPL A61:102; see discussion below).

“I accept their verdict”: Forster’s and Britten’s manuscript revisions

Both Forster’s and Britten’s copies of the typed August Draft show handwritten alterations to Vere’s aria “I accept their verdict” (BPL A62:123 and BPL AD-EMF:44r). Britten’s copy furthermore contains a complete reworking which corresponds almost exactly to the final version (see discussion below). A comparison between Forster’s and Britten’s copies reveals an early layer of revisions, added to the typed block of text, which is reflected in both copies, and a later layer of revision which only figures in Britten’s copy. This evidence of multiple revision suggests a scenario in which Britten and Forster first altered the text in a joint working session, probably in December 1949, and in which Britten then further revised the text as he came to set it to music in the spring of 1951. The fact that Britten’s final revision was not transcribed by Forster into his working copy can be seen to support this scenario.

In the first round of revision, the aria’s opening words can be observed to have assumed a form which arguably serves to distance Vere from his fellow officers: instead of “I accept your verdict”, they now read, as in the final version, “I accept *their* verdict” (my emphasis; compare LIB58). At this stage, Forster and Britten also relocated the question “Before what tribunal do we stand if we destroy goodness?” which Vere had presented to his officers in the March Draft (BPL A61:166)⁶⁷⁹ and in the typed August Draft (where this entire speech was cancelled, however, see BPL AD-EMF:43r and note 685): this question was inserted into his “I accept” monologue. Yet Vere’s question, too, has undergone an important alteration, for it is now he alone who is summoned to judgement: “Before what tribunal do I stand if I destroy goodness?” It was at this stage, too, that Forster and Britten emphasised Vere’s feelings of personal responsibility for

⁶⁷⁹ See excerpt quoted on pp.500ff. above.

Billy's death by adding the words "through me" to his more detached realisation that "the angel must hang" (BPL A62:123 and BPL AD-EMF:44r).⁶⁸⁰

In Britten's copy, the entire speech with its previous revisions was subsequently crossed out and replaced by what is virtually the text of the aria in its current form, written in a neat hand on the bottom of the typed libretto page and the following recto page which had merely featured the typed heading "Act Four" (BPL A62:123f.). Among the supplementary materials which are preserved at the Britten-Pears Library, there is a rougher draft of Vere's "I accept" speech, handwritten by Britten on a sheet of English Opera Group notepaper (BPL A62:166f.). This draft presumably precedes Britten's neat handwritten replacement text in his copy of the typed August Draft, for it still features the typed August Draft's line "God grant me strength, me, E[dward] F[airfax] Vere" (BPL A62:167), which has disappeared from Britten's neat final version (BPL A62:124; compare LIB58).

Britten's draft of the monologue on the EOG notepaper peters out in an abandoned exploration of Vere's emotional state, and specifically of his sense of isolation:

I am the messenger of death. \How can he pardon?/ How will he receive
me? ~~My loneliness~~
~~Who am sending him to loneliness eternal~~
~~Lonely like all men~~ I feel his loneliness (BPL A62:167)

Even though the subject of Vere's "loneliness" was not, in the end, to surface in this speech after all, it is nevertheless possible, as Arnold Whittall (1982:146) and Donald Mitchell (1993:122-134) have done, to recognise the Vere of the finished opera as an isolated and lonely figure, related to a number of similar Britten protagonists. The same loneliness also links him to Forster's 'dark' intellectual middle-class protagonists, whose isolation is moreover often associated with queerness.

It is in Vere's anxious questions ("How can he pardon? How will he receive me?"), added by Britten at the end of the monologue (BPL A62:167), that the extent of his agony is expressed, far more poignantly so than in the typed August Draft, where he had concluded by asking God to "grant me strength" (BPL A62:61). In Britten's final revised version, Vere no longer turns to God for support, either for the "poor lad" Billy or for himself, "lost" as he is "upon the infinite sea". His apprehensiveness has now been relocated to a level of purely personal concern: it is the thought of how Billy, "the angel of God", will react to the news that he "must hang – through me", which causes Vere to despair as he had not done before. It is this thought that brings on the self-interrogation which had been so conspicuously absent from the August Draft, where Vere simply declares that "the angel must hang", that he will "exact death", and that he "will not save him" (BPL

⁶⁸⁰ A further revision was made at this early stage: after the sentence "I have seen [...] the divine judgment from heaven" (BPL A62:61; see excerpt quoted on p.507 above), both Britten and Forster inserted "What have I done? I have denied it" (BPL A62:123 and BPL AD-EMF:44r). These phrases do not reappear in Britten's later revisions.

A62:61; see excerpt quoted on p.507f. above). Britten now also added the stage directions which so uniquely mark the closeted interview offstage as a significant temporal and narrative space: his questions asked, and his speech completed, Vere “goes into Billy’s room. The curtain remains up, & then slowly falls at the end of the music” (BPL A62:124).

While Britten may single-handedly have produced his revised final version of Vere’s monologue when he came to compose this section of the opera, he did not, as it turns out, take the character of Vere in an entirely new direction when he decided thus to heighten the sense of his personal agony and “deep inward torment” (Hindley 1989:374). For the two questions Vere now asks at the end of his monologue – “How can he pardon? How will he receive me?” – which had not appeared in either the August or the March Draft, turn out nevertheless to have had their antecedents in Forster’s earliest handwritten drafts for the trial scene. At that early stage, Vere’s “Justice and mercy!” monologue – which concludes the scene (see excerpt quoted on p.502 above), and from which the “I accept” speech was to evolve – had included the following passage:

I could have saved him. At the price of my honour, perhaps of my life, and of my ship’s safety, it could have been done. I could have rescued him from the snare, I could have rescued goodness. O beauty, o handsomeness, o goodness, how will you ever pardon me? ~~Will you ever understand?~~ I too have betrayed you. \Will you ever forgive me?/ Will you ever understand? How shall I tell him? Until I see him I cannot know. (BPL A61:102)⁶⁸¹

The questions envisioned by Forster – “how will you pardon me?” and “How shall I tell him?” in particular – are similar enough to the questions devised by Britten to suggest that Britten may have had the discarded drafts of the trial scene to hand when he revised this speech for composition. In any case, however, Forster’s discarded draft establishes beyond doubt that he had quite early on in his librettistic engagement with Melville’s text envisioned a decidedly destabilised, remorseful, perhaps even broken-hearted Vere who is conscious of having “betrayed” Billy, and who is anxious for Billy to “pardon”, “forgive” and “understand” his failure to “rescue[...]” him “at the price of” his own “honour” and possibly his “life”. Forster’s earliest version of Vere, in fact, might be felt to possess some similarity to the momentarily “shame[d]” (LtC112) and humbled Conway in Forster’s short story “Arthur Snatchfold”, which I have proposed might represent an early creative response to Melville’s story. It remains open to specula-

⁶⁸¹ This passage, which Claire Seymour refers to as part of “the 1949 January-March draft” (140), was to have stood between the section ending “in the heaven, in the heights and the depths, ah what?” and the section beginning “I must not too closely consider these mysteries” as they appear in the typed March Draft (see excerpt quoted on p.502 above). In Forster’s manuscript draft, the quoted passage is crossed out; a note in the margin reads “Epilogue?” For further discussion of this draft see section III.2.3.4., p.517 below.

tion why this passage was not included in the typed March Draft; what is important to realise, however, is that Vere's feelings of guilt and despair were not, in fact, single-handedly introduced into the libretto by Britten at this late stage as a completely new development, but had, at least in embryonic form, already been present in Forster's earliest disposition of Vere's character.

III.2.3.3. From hubris to "the straits of Hell":

Vere's shorter Act II monologues

Neither Vere's monologue "Claggart, John Claggart, beware" nor his "Scylla and Charybdis" speech appear in the typed three-act libretto draft of March 1949. As in Melville's novella, Claggart's accusation is almost directly followed there by the confrontation with Billy (compare BB81f.); no detailed insight into Vere's private thoughts is provided at this point, although Billy is heard to "state his hopes for promotion and the honour of it" to the captain, who "tells him immediately that he must put such thoughts out of his mind" (Hindley 1989:377).⁶⁸² Once Claggart's death has been established by Billy and Vere, Vere sends for the first lieutenant, who arrives almost immediately to find Vere in a state of agitation, which prompts him to tell the captain to "sit down for one instant and compose yourself"; he then leaves the room again to call the other officers. As a consequence, Vere's exclamation "Struck by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang" remains a private utterance, as there is no-one else present (BPL A61:161f.).

The role of the first lieutenant at this stage faintly recalls that of the surgeon in the novella, in that he reacts to Vere's upset state and draws attention to it.⁶⁸³ The Vere of the finished libretto, by contrast, is perfectly capable of controlling his emotions: no-one but the audience (and, presumably, Billy in the closeted interview) is permitted to witness his private agony. The contrast between Vere's private suffering and the 'official' front he presents to his officers is thus considerably heightened. It might also be felt that the loneliness of Vere's position is emphasised through this separation of private self-expression and public self-control.

By August 1949, it had evidently been decided that a monologue was needed in which Vere would express his feelings prior to the confrontation he was planning between Billy and his accuser. In the typed August Draft, this monologue runs as follows:

⁶⁸² The relevant passage in the March Draft can be found on BPL A61:158f. As Hindley has noted, the earliest handwritten drafts of the trial scene follow Melville's text even more closely in terms of what is actually spoken aloud. Thus, the notion of Billy's "hopes for promotion" does not surface at all; instead, "Billy's entrance is followed almost immediately by that of Claggart, who at the captain's command launches straight into his accusation" (1989:377).

⁶⁸³ The earliest draft materials in fact include a short dialogue between Vere and the surgeon in Crozier's hand (BPL A61:86); however, the figure of the surgeon was never included in the typed March Draft. See note 480.

Claggart, John Claggart, beware! I have studied men and their ways and desired wisdom. The mists are vanishing and your wickedness is revealed. You hoped to entangle innocence in your coils. You have reckoned without me. Light has been granted to me, and you shall fail. (BPL A62:114)

A comparison of Britten's and Forster's copies of the August Draft again reveals multiple layers of revision. On the facing verso page of his copy, Britten wrote out a new draft of this speech which can be seen to combine already existing material with new elements:

Claggart, John Claggart, beware! I have studied men and their ways. ~~I have tried to fathom eternal truth.~~ I am not so easily deceived [arrow and writing indicating that this latter sentence is to be inserted after "beware!"]. ~~God alone understands your motives. You are false, you are evil.~~ This boy whom you would destroy, he is good, you are evil. You have reckoned without me. The mists are vanishing and you shall fail. (BPL A62:112)

In Forster's copy, a new version of the monologue is inserted in a neat hand to complement the retained typescript beginning, "Claggart, John Claggart, beware! I have studied men and their ways":

I have tried to fathom eternal truth. I am not so easily deceived. This boy whom you would destroy, he is good, you are evil. You have reckoned without me. The mists are vanishing and you shall fail. (BPL AD-EMF:39r)

Inserted after this in a darker ink suggesting a later time of origin is the phrase "You are caught in your own trap". The same phrase also appears inserted into Britten's copy in Forster's hand (BPL A62:114), suggesting an idea reached in discussion.⁶⁸⁴

A close examination of these different draft versions of Vere's speech as they appear in the respective copies suggests that Britten's cancellation of the phrases "God alone understands your motives. You are false, you are evil" took place before Forster made what appears to be his neat transcription of the results of a first process of revision, since they do not appear there. The sentence that replaces them ("This boy whom you would destroy, he is good, you are evil") might indicate a slight shifting of focus from Vere's preoccupation with Claggart and his evil, which had also predominated in the typed version of the monologue, to the setting up of a simplified contrast between "good" and "evil". Again, it seems probable that this first round of revision dates from Britten's and Forster's joint work session in December 1949, just like the first layer of revisions to Vere's "I accept" monologue.

⁶⁸⁴ It seems unlikely that Forster would purposely have annotated Britten's copy without the composer's consent.

The comparison of the two libretto copies also suggests that the phrase “I have tried to fathom eternal truth” – an echo from Vere’s Prologue, which is cancelled in Britten’s copy – was jettisoned by Britten at a later point, since the phrase appears uncanceled in Forster’s neat version of the speech. Britten’s relocation of the phrase “I am not so easily deceived” can also, on the same grounds, be assumed to have taken place at this later time – quite probably the time of composition, since the resulting new version corresponds so closely to the final version.

The most important addition to the August Draft is, without doubt, the “Scylla and Charbydis” monologue. As Hindley has noted, “this insertion profoundly alters our appreciation of Vere’s position [...], we see into his soul and are shown the deep inward torment the decision is bound to cost him” (1989:374). The drafting of this speech can be seen to have taken place in two distinct phases in Britten’s copy of the August Draft. On the verso page facing the point of insertion after Vere instructs the Boy to call the officers, a first draft has been crossed out:

The mists have cleared, and, o terror, what do I see ~~Where shall I turn~~ I cannot command, I am done for. He must be tried, but it is not his trial, it is I whom the devil awaits. Which way shall I turn between these chasms of hell. I see them too late, I see all that the mists concealed. How can I save him, how can I condemn him. I am rent asunder. My life’s broken, my heart’s broken. (BPL A62:115)

A revised version – involving a re-ordering of the first speech into a tighter progression from dismay to despair – is written above the first draft:

The mists have cleared, ~~and~~, o terror, what do I see? Scylla and Charybdis, and the straits of Hell. I sight them too late; I see all ~~that~~ the mists concealed. ~~He is~~ \Beauty, Handsomeness, Goodness/ coming to trial, how can I condemn him, how can I save him? \How, how?/ My heart’s broken, my life’s broken, ~~I am rent asunder~~. It is not his trial, it is mine, mine. It is I whom the devil awaits. (BPL A62:115)

In Forster’s copy of the August Draft, a text largely corresponding to the latter version appears on the verso page facing the typescript, with an arrow marking the point of insertion:

The mists have cleared and, o terror, what do I see? Scylla and Charybdis and the straits of Hell. I sight them too late; I see all that the mists concealed. Beauty, handsomeness, goodness is coming to trial; how can I condemn him, how can I save him? My heart’s broken, my life’s broken, I am rent asunder. It is not his trial, it is mine, mine. It is I whom the devil awaits. (BPL AD-EMF:39v)

The fact that Forster's neat copy features a phrase which is cancelled in Britten's manuscript – "I am rent asunder" – suggests that Britten revised the speech once more *after* he and Forster had agreed on the earlier version; again, it seems probable that this later revision took place during the process of composition, and that Forster's copy of the August Draft records an intermediate stage of the libretto's development reached collaboratively in, presumably, December 1949.

Hindley has noted that "Britten's manuscript note shows the deletions and revisions which are the mark of composition, while in Forster's copy the speech is inserted in a neat hand, with all the appearance of being a fair copy taken from elsewhere". To Hindley, this evidence "tends to support the suggestion that Britten was the innovator here" (1989:374, n.37). In the light of my above discussion of other similarly clean transcriptions in Forster's copy, Hindley's suggestion may well be questioned.

In terms of dramatic tension, the "Scylla and Charybdis" speech, coming as it does before the trial begins, is guaranteed to heighten the audience's sense of Vere's torment during the trial, since it provides, as Hindley puts it, "a new and moving revelation of the intense personal stress under which Vere labours" (Hindley 1989:375). In essence, this monologue shows a Vere shattered by the realisation that he will either have to authorise Billy's execution or make a personal stand against the proceedings of naval law to save the young sailor, and that neither alternative will leave his personal integrity unscathed. If Forster's copy of the August Draft is taken to reflect a relatively compact period of revision, the in-line revisions and cancellations which appear in the typescript trial scene suggest that the "Scylla and Charybdis" monologue was created at roughly the same stage at which most of Vere's remaining speeches during the trial, largely carried over into the August Draft from the March Draft, were finally discarded.⁶⁸⁵ This was also the stage that saw the first round of revisions to the August Draft's "I accept" speech, in which Vere realises that "the angel must hang – through me" (BPL A62:123 and BPL AD-EMF:44r; see p.508 above). The decision to have Vere refuse to give his personal opinions during the trial, and to have him expound a heightened private agony before the arrival of the officers instead, appears thus to have been reached contemporaneously with the decision to heighten Vere's sense of personal responsibility and personal implication in Billy's tragic fate.

⁶⁸⁵ In Forster's copy of the August Draft, what remained of Vere's philosophical utterances carried over from the March Draft is heavily cancelled. The first of the discarded speeches roughly corresponds to the March Draft's "The question is beyond me too", etc. (see excerpt quoted on pp.500ff. above); in Forster's copy of the August Draft, only the last phrases, "There is a mystery here, whose veil no one can lift. Maybe it is the mystery of iniquity" remain uncanceled (BPL AD-EMF:43r). The second discarded speech is a much reduced version of the March Draft's "My friends, I cannot lead you here"; it still featured Vere's question "Before what tribunal do we stand if we destroy goodness" (BPL AD-EMF:43r), which was moved into Vere's "I accept" speech at this stage of the revisions (see p.508 above).

Vere's exclamation "I am done for", which only appears in Britten's first cancelled draft of the "Scylla and Charybdis" speech (BPL A62:115), and his realisation that his "heart" and "life" are "broken", which remains in the present-day libretto, may be felt to evoke familiar Forsterian territory, regardless of who actually introduced these ideas. The phrase "I'm done for", also used by the beaten Novice in Act I, Sc. 1, is regularly uttered in Forster's fiction by characters who have experienced a loss of their personal physical and/or psychological integrity. Similarly, Vere's sense of having been "broken", while it echoes the laments of the "broken" crew and the "heart-broken" Novice (LIB19), also has parallels in Forster's work, particularly in the character of Henry Wilcox. Even if it was Britten to whom Vere's "deep inward torment" was the story's most interesting feature (Hindley 1989:374), and even though Forster saw Billy as the opera's "hero" (*Griffin* 5), the fact remains that the tormented 'dark' character is an indispensable element of the Forsterian salvation narrative, and that, as a rule, Forster devotes considerable care to depicting and analysing this type of character.

It is undeniably Britten's copy of the August Draft which bears the clear traces of textual composition, and it is even possible that he may have drafted at least the first version of the new speech single-handedly, perhaps during the few weeks that lay between his receipt of the libretto in November 1949 and the beginning of his working session with Forster in mid-December.⁶⁸⁶ Nevertheless, I hesitate to accord as overwhelming a weight to this source evidence as the numerous critics who have used it to support their claim that it was Britten who "shifted the focus of interest from Billy to Captain Vere" (Hindley 1989:374; see also discussion in section III.2.3.4. below). Once again I would propose that, as with the other monologues discussed above, at least one of the multiple layers of composition and revision of the "Scylla and Charybdis" speech recorded in Britten's copy of the August Draft reflects the result of a joint working session, or at least a discussion, with Forster. In any event, its inclusion into the libretto can be taken to imply Forster's unconditional approval of the new material.

III.2.3.4. "Lost on the infinite sea": from "confusion" to transcendent vision

The theme of salvation, and of Vere's salvation in particular, is central to the opera *Billy Budd*; its introduction can be seen to constitute one of the most momentous departures from Melville's text. Yet as Hindley has demonstrated in his valuable analysis of the libretto drafts, the "idea" of Vere's achieving "a form of healing or salvation through his relationship with Billy [...] was not set down all at once". Hindley, too, notes that Forster's first draft for Vere's Prologue "does not refer to the possibility of salvation",⁶⁸⁷ and goes on to state that the beginnings of this idea

⁶⁸⁶ See section III.2.2., p.490 above.

⁶⁸⁷ See my discussion in section III.2.3.1. above.

were only introduced in Forster's manuscript redraft of the Prologue which superseded the typed March Draft's version (1989:371). In this redraft, Vere is given a number of new lines that directly address the question of his own spiritual state:

Oh confusion, ~~all is confusion~~ so much is confusion. I have tried to guide myself and guide others rightly, yet I have been lost on the infinite sea. Who has rescued me, who blessed me? (BPL A61:256)

Hindley's claim notwithstanding, Forster's redraft is not, in fact, the only document recording this new line of development. Both Forster's and Britten's copies of the March Draft show evidence of editing and drafting, both in the shape of cuts and insertions in the typescript itself, and of an insertion on the preceding verso page. In Forster's copy, the latter reads:

Oh, confusion, so much is confusion. I have had to choose in ~~my life~~ \the darkness/ I have tried to choose rightly, yet \and/ I found myself lost on the infinite sea. Who rescued me? ~~I have~~ (BPL A61:255)

Forster's draft shows cancellations and insertions in an early pencil and a later ink layer. The corresponding insertion in Britten's copy shows fewer alterations:

O confusion, ~~all~~ so much is confusion. I have had to choose the darkness, I have tried to choose rightly, yet I found myself lost on the infinite sea. Who rescued me? (BPL A61:116)

These additions to Forster's and Britten's copies of the March Draft were presumably superseded by Forster's redraft of the Prologue, since the reference to "choos[ing] the darkness" no longer figures in that version, which subsequently appeared in the typed August Draft:

O Confusion, so much is confusion! I have tried to guide myself and guide others rightly, yet I have been lost on the infinite sea. Who has rescued me, who blessed me? (BPL A62:10)

The theme of salvation, in the shape of Vere's early answer to these questions, reappears in the August Draft's Epilogue. This was an entirely new addition; as has already been stated above, the March Draft had concluded, once the decks had been cleared, with only a stage direction: "The scene is entirely empty and dark, except for Vere who stands on the quarter deck" (BPL A61:177). Again, it was Forster who eventually provided the full-length handwritten draft for the missing Epilogue (BPL A61:375), which was then carried over into the typed August Draft. Yet as had been the case with the Prologue, Britten's copy of the March Draft also records some planning and drafting: noted on the verso page preceding the last typescript page, it contains not only a handwritten general outline of what would be required, but also some lines that figure in Forster's manuscript draft and in the August Draft:

Epilogue – starting with partial repetition of Prologue

Vere realises that there was another choice

X For I could have saved him; I ought to have saved him. He knew it – even his shipmates knew it \tho' earthly laws silenced them./

By the heavenly laws I have erred, & if heaven never passes into action X – (BPL A61:178)⁶⁸⁸

The idea that Vere “ought to have saved” Billy can be seen to highlight the magnitude of Vere’s moral failure, as well as his sense of having done the wrong thing. However, it does not reappear in either Forster’s handwritten draft (BPL A61:375) or in the August Draft, suggesting that the short fragment in Britten’s copy of the March Draft records a superseded stage of the libretto’s development.⁶⁸⁹

The opening paragraph of the Epilogue in the typed August Draft is virtually identical with the final version we know today; it ends in “soon it was full day – day in its clearness and strength”. The text then continues:

God has blessed me and also admonished me. For I could have saved him. He knew it, even his shipmates knew it, but earthly laws silenced them. 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. I was lost on the infinite sea but I've sighted a sail in the storms, the far-shining sail, and I'm content. I've seen where she's bound for. There's a land where she'll anchor forever. (BPL AD-EMF:50r)

The notion that Vere “could have saved” Billy, which also figures in the short fragment in Britten’s copy of the March Draft, is not new at this point. Like Vere’s apprehension about whether Billy can ever “pardon” or “forgive” him, it had figured in Forster’s earliest manuscript drafts for Vere’s monologue at the conclusion of the trial scene, but had not been carried over into the typed March Draft (see p.510 above): “I could have saved him. At the price of my honour, perhaps of my life, and of my ship’s safety, it could have been done. I could have rescued him from the snare, I could have rescued goodness.” In Forster’s manuscript, the rejected passage has been crossed out; a note in the margin reads “Epilogue?” (BPL A61:102). It cannot be determined when this tentative relocation was planned, yet it seems important to note that the idea of having Vere realise that he “could have saved” Billy dates back to Forster’s (and Crozier’s) earliest envisioning of Vere’s character and of the further implications of his problematic choice.

⁶⁸⁸ Britten’s “X” presumably indicates that the first two sentences were intended to come after the second, as indeed they do in the typed August Draft.

⁶⁸⁹ As with the Prologue, Hindley’s claim that “the first draft of [the Epilogue] to appear is as an expansion (in Forster’s hand) of the March Draft” (1989:371) overlooks the evidence of Britten’s copy of the typed March Draft. This is not necessarily to say, however, that it was Britten who was solely responsible for creating these additions.

It will have been noted that in the typed August Draft, Vere is now heard to describe himself as “lost on the infinite sea” in both Prologue and Epilogue, as well as in his “I accept” aria. This key phrase of course also occurs as the refrain of the Novice’s Dirge, which, like the Epilogue, is another entirely new addition to the August Draft. It was created to replace the full-length onstage flogging of the Novice which had featured in the March Draft, but which had met with Britten’s disapproval (see section III.2.5. below). In the event, the “Set piece” Britten had requested from “EMF” (BPL A61:125) as a substitute for the cut scene was, in terms of its symbolic weight, to go far beyond what had been envisioned in the general outline recorded by Crozier in his copy of the March Draft, which merely mentions a “short choral statement in most general terms on hardship of sea life”, in which the “Novice does not sing” (BPL A61:194). The Novice’s Dirge might in fact be regarded as a meditation on man’s abject state of isolation and lack of connection in a hostile or indifferent universe governed by blind, uncaring fate. At the same time, its burden of “lost for ever on the endless sea” (BPL AD-EMF:14r) can be seen to link it with the discourse about Vere’s search for spiritual meaning, which was newly introduced into the August Draft.

It can be assumed that the changes made to the character of Vere which are reflected in the typed August Draft were agreed upon in discussion during the opera-makers’ August conclave. Yet Vere’s new realisation that he is, or respectively has been, “lost on the infinite sea” must also be recognised as essential to Forster’s personal view of the libretto’s plot, as expressed in his “Librettist’s Note on Dirge Libretto”. In this “Note”, probably written sometime between spring and the late summer of 1950,⁶⁹⁰ Forster was to record his sense of this “plight” as being connected to the idea of salvation through love:

I intended to convey not only that the men were lost, but *where*: – the infinite sea. First of four references to such a plight; the next being Vere’s after trial [*sic*]; the next Billy’s solution when he sights the sail of love which isn’t

⁶⁹⁰ In the later part of his “Note”, Forster records his thoughts about Britten’s musical setting of the Novice’s Dirge, which he had not anticipated: “That there would be contrapuntality hadn’t occurred to me” (BPL A61:50). Britten did not start composing until early in 1950: according to Reed (1993a:58), he began in January; according to a letter from Britten to Henriëtte Bosmans, he wrote “the first notes” on 3 February 1950 (BBLL576). Based on Forster’s criticism of the music in his “Note”, Hindley accordingly makes a convincing case for dating this document to “the early months of 1950” or even later. He draws further support from a letter to Bob Buckingham of 23 April 1950, in which Forster reports that “Ben has played me most of the first Act”, and records “my first difference of opinion with him – over the dirge for the Novice”. Forster complains that the “dry contrapuntal stuff” which Britten had written, although “no doubt original and excellent from the musician’s point of view”, was “not at all appropriate from mine” and announces “I shall have a big discussion when the act is finished” (quoted in Hindley 1989:365, n.10). Britten had completed Act I by 23 August 1950, as he reported to Ralph Hawkes (BBLL606).

Fate; the last Vere's in the Epilogue when he sees what Billy's shown him.
(BPL A61:50)⁶⁹¹

What Forster delineates here is, in effect, the opera's salvation plot, neatly tagged by the image of being "lost [...] [on] the infinite sea".⁶⁹² The fact that he makes a slip over the third "reference[...] to such a plight" only supports this reading: Billy's speech in Act II, Sc. 3, in which he mentions "the far-shining sail that's not Fate" (LIB61), does not actually contain any direct reference to being "lost on the infinite sea", neither in the finished libretto nor in Forster's copy of the August Draft (BPL AD-EMF:47r), but it does quite clearly represent "Billy's solution" of "love" and salutary connection. Forster's 1950 outline shows how far his librettistic work on *Billy Budd* had taken him from his 1927 reading of Melville's novella, in which Vere is not mentioned, and in which "transcendence" – to repeat Irene Morra's important observation – "is achieved by the reader [...] rather than by the characters in the tale" (2002:8f.).

Hindley has correctly pointed out that the typed August Draft's Epilogue contains "no direct reference [...] to the idea that Billy might be the agent of salvation, nor to the power of love" (1989:371; see p.517 above). Yet the textual innovations which figure in the typed August Draft can collectively be read as evidence that the collaborators' view of Vere was already developing in a direction which would eventually lead to the possibility of salvation for this character. The fact that, in his 1950 "Librettist's Note", Forster was to insist that the leitmotivic chain of "references" to the "plight" of being "lost [on] the infinite sea" marked an idea which he, the "Librettist", had "intended to convey" (my emphasis) could furthermore be taken to imply that he considered himself responsible for this idea. Alternatively, if, as Britten's handwritten additions to the Prologue in his copy of the March Draft could be taken to indicate, the idea of this "plight" and its implied solution was one that emerged in discussion, Forster may at least be assumed to have fully embraced it, since he was so emphatically to claim responsibility for the "convey[ing]" of it.

It is in Forster's and Britten's handwritten revisions to the Epilogue in their respective copies of the August Draft that the movement from a Vere "admonished"

⁶⁹¹ Forster's list of "four references to such a plight" in fact omits the earliest appearance in the Prologue, possibly because he was making his argument while preoccupied with the Novice's Dirge.

⁶⁹² The linked ideas of being "lost [...] [on] the infinite sea", of "Fate", and of salutary "love" as a "solution" to this "plight" (BPL A61:50) can be seen to resonate deeply with the ideas and symbolic imagery of *The Longest Journey*, in which Rickie Elliot is heard to reflect "that we are all of us bubbles on an extremely rough sea" (LJ57); a metaphor for human existence governed by an indifferent fate (see section II.3.9., p.231, and section II.4.2.3.1., p.291). In my chapter on *The Longest Journey* I have argued that in his ultimate inability to find salvation in personal relationships, Rickie resembles the hapless Novice who remains "lost for ever on the endless sea" (LIB19) and resigns himself to the view that "everything's fate" (LIB34); whereas Vere, as Forster's "Librettist's Note" implies, attains at least a temporary salvation from his "plight" by accepting Billy's "solution" of "love" and embracing "what Billy's shown him".

by “God” to a Vere “saved” and “blessed” by Billy’s “love” can be discerned. As with the “I accept” aria, Britten’s copy appears to show two layers of revision, the earlier of which is reflected in Forster’s copy; once again, this earlier phase of revision may be assumed to have taken place in December 1949. Both Forster and Britten cancelled the line “God has blessed me and also admonished me”, and revised the sentence “I have erred, but pardon has come to me, and the wisdom that passes understanding” to read “He has saved me and he blessed me, and the love that passes understanding has come to me” (BPL AD-EMF:50r and BPL A62:131). In Forster’s copy, the phrase “and I’m content” is cancelled; Britten evidently revoked this decision at a later stage, since these words still figure in the text he finally set to music.⁶⁹³ The manuscript evidence, then, suggests that the crucial decision to make Billy, rather than God, the source of the “bless[ing]” Vere receives, was reached collaboratively, very probably during the same period that saw the introduction of Vere’s sense of personal responsibility for Billy’s death and of the “Scylla and Charybdis” monologue.⁶⁹⁴

In his pioneering study of the libretto drafts, Hindley had emphasised that “the substitution of Billy for God as the agent of blessing and salvation [...] is fundamental to Forster’s world view” (1989:371), and to the Forsterian theme of “Love as the means of salvation from a hostile Fate, the solution to being ‘lost on the infinite sea’” (366). Yet owing to the fact that Forster’s copy of the August Draft was not acquired by the Britten-Pears Library until after his article had been accepted for publication, Hindley had only been able to integrate cursory references to the new source in his footnotes. Noting the neatness and lack of deletions in some of Forster’s insertions, as compared with Britten’s more heavily revised copy, he had tentatively advanced the view that “Forster may have been simply recording changes initiated by Britten” (1989:376, n.44).

Following the publication of Hindley’s article, Forster’s copy of the August Draft was apparently never subjected to closer scholarly scrutiny again. Subsequent

⁶⁹³ In Britten’s copy, this phrase was also cut at one stage, but the pencil cancellation was subsequently erased again.

⁶⁹⁴ The fact that a couple of years later, Forster recalled the Epilogue’s original wording in an entry made into his Locked Diary on 28 December 1952 is neither here nor there: looking back on what he refers to as an “annus mixtus”, Forster records a meeting with “old Reg, who came up to the flat on the morning of the 26th and was sweet. When you think you fail you perhaps haven’t – and alas vice-versa. He is fond of me and has said so. [...] Even if we meet no more, I am content. ‘God has blessed me’ as Vere remarks: ‘if not in the terms I most hoped. And God has nowhere cursed me, as he has some, whose love has never fruited or even flowered’” (LD117). A consultation of the original document reveals that in fact, while Forster placed an opening quotation mark after the colon in the latter part of the final sentence, there is no closing quotation mark (KCC: EMF/12/8: p.99); this has apparently been added by the editor, Philip Gardner. Gardner’s claim that Forster is quoting from Melville’s *Billy Budd* here (2011:226, n.761) is erroneous: nowhere in the novella (or indeed the libretto) does Vere make any personal comment of this kind. I would suggest, rather, that the latter part of the sentence (“if not in the terms”, etc.) is not a quotation at all, but a continuation of Forster’s own observations.

critics of the opera have as a rule built their arguments either exclusively on Hindley's provisional interpretation of the source material, or (it would appear) on the evidence of the Britten-Pears Library's microfilmed material, which does not include Forster's copy of the August Draft. This failure to give proper consideration to *all* of the available source material would seem to be partly responsible for the marked tendency in recent *Billy Budd* scholarship to cast Britten as the 'true' author of the final decisive changes to the figure of Vere. As a result, a number of scholars have produced readings of the opera's genesis similar to that lately advanced by Allen Frantzen: his impression that it was Britten who replaced God as "the agent of the blessing" with Billy, and "the wisdom that passes understanding" with "love" – an impression apparently conceived solely on the evidence of Britten's copy of the August Draft – leads him to proclaim that Britten created "a better rendering of Forster's intention than Forster himself seems to have achieved" (64). A consultation of Forster's copy of the August Draft exposes this paradoxical view as a fallacy.

The cuts and revisions which appear only in Britten's copy of the August Draft indicate that the Epilogue went through a further revision process that postdates the revisions reflected in Forster's copy.⁶⁹⁵ Britten cut the sentence "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?" and inserted the phrase "Oh what have I done" (BPL A62:131). It seems possible that it was this latter insertion – an echo from the Prologue – which formed the subject of an unidentified communication from Britten to Forster, to which Forster evidently responded in a letter to the composer dated 8 August 1951:

Yes, of course, the epilogue should cite the prologue wherever possible. I hadn't noticed. Vere's Billy's last cry is insoluble, for it was not articulate. It was compassion, comprehension, love. Only Vere understood it and it has the supernatural force inherent in something which only one person understands. I wish it could have been purely musical. Since we have to use words, Starry Vere seems better than Captain Vere, but the really wrong word is "God". Who but Billy, at such a moment, could bless? (KCC: EMF/18/71)⁶⁹⁶

The greater part of Forster's letter evidently refers to Billy's final benediction of Vere just before the hanging.⁶⁹⁷ In the typed August Draft, this had still been a *verbatim* quotation of Melville's original, "God bless Captain Vere" (BB112); the line remains uncanceled in Forster's copy of the August Draft (BPL AD-EMF:49r). In Britten's copy, the line is cancelled and replaced by "Starry Vere,

⁶⁹⁵ The revisions in Britten's copy which correspond to those in Forster's are made in a lighter pencil, and are superseded by a layer written in heavier pencil.

⁶⁹⁶ The excerpt from this letter cited by Reed 1993a:67 is incomplete and contains variant readings.

⁶⁹⁷ See also Francis 60. Claire Seymour (154) believes that all of this excerpt from Forster's letter refers to the Epilogue; yet in view of the fact that the reference to God had already disappeared from the Epilogue in the first round of revisions recorded in both Forster's and Britten's copies of the August Draft, her reading cannot be sustained.

God bless you" (BPL A62:130); it seems probable that Britten changed this when he came to setting the passage, and wrote to Forster to inform him of this. In the event, Forster's criticism of Billy's invocation of "God" did not lead to yet another revision of Billy's "conventional felon's benediction" (BB112). Yet his letter suggests that to him, at least, the final form, "Starry Vere, God bless you" (LIB62), may have been far from being merely the opera-makers' "more singable version" of Billy's last words, as Crozier (1986:20) considered it to be. Even though the word "God" remains, the intimacy suggested by the use of the affectionate nickname "Starry Vere" could be felt to convey a meaning that is specifically Forsterian, designating a moment of salutary and above all intensely *personal* connection.

On 10 August, Britten finished his composition draft,⁶⁹⁸ but he had yet to provide the orchestral score. As late as 9 September he wrote to Erwin Stein, who was preparing the vocal score, to inform him of some last-minute modifications to the libretto, which include the echo from the Prologue:

Towards the end of the Epilogue, Vere should sing, instead of: "Yes, I have erred ... by the heavenly laws I have erred."

Brass – O What have I done? O What, what have I done? etc.

But he has saved me –

In the same letter, Britten told Stein that Forster was staying at Aldeburgh and had "done some work with me", although once again, Forster's presence had caused him considerable exasperation: besides the "unreasonabl[e]" demands Forster made on Britten's time and attention, his lack of response to the music Britten had produced and played to him evidently sorely disappointed the composer, who complained that "He doesn't seem able to grasp it at all – or [be] really interested in the musical side of the opera!" (BBLL677; editors' insertion). Yet in spite of these grave irritations, Britten's letter demonstrates that Forster remained involved in the librettistic work on *Billy Budd* to the very last; and Britten readily conceded that "I must be grateful for a wonderful libretto [...] & not demand anything else I suppose" (BBLL677f).⁶⁹⁹

The preserved correspondence between Britten and his librettists contains no discussion of the substantial changes made to the character of Vere in the revisions I have so far been discussing. While Forster's criticism of some of Britten's music is famously documented in his letters (see section III.3. and note 690 above), there is

⁶⁹⁸ Reed 1993a:67 and BBLL676, n.8.

⁶⁹⁹ The full text of Britten's sentence actually runs "I must be grateful for a wonderful libretto (with the one exception) & not demand anything else I suppose" (BBLL677f). The "exception" he refers to remains unidentified at present (see BBLL678, n.3); there is nothing in the preserved source material to indicate that Britten disapproved of any specific passage produced by either Forster or Crozier that remained in the finished text, unless it be Vere's patriotic address to the crew which stood at the end of what was then Act I (now Act I, Sc. 1), and with which none of three of the collaborators were ever entirely happy (see section III.2.6. below).

no evidence to suggest that he disapproved of the way in which Vere's character was developed in the slightest. On the contrary, his "Librettist's Note" indicates that he assumed full responsibility for the narrative trajectory which culminates in the 'broken' and "lost" Vere's consolation through his salutary vision of love. It was Crozier, by contrast, who felt the need to register his objection to Vere's assumption of guilt in his "I accept" monologue. In the Final Copy of the libretto, which dates from the time following the opera's essential completion in the late summer of 1951, the page containing this monologue also features an annotation in Crozier's hand:

I don't like the insistence on "through me". It seems to weaken the force of the previous sentence and to belittle the tragedy of the situation. Is it even accurate? The officers have tried Billy, Vere has refused to help them in their verdict, & it is they who have found him guilty and condemned him.
E. C. (BPL A62:286)

It seems probable that by "the previous sentence", Crozier means the first half of Vere's statement, "The angel of God has struck and the angel must hang". It appears to have been Crozier who showed resistance to the 'breaking' of Vere which is recorded in Britten's and Forster's manuscript revisions to the August Draft. Likewise, it appears to have been Crozier who had difficulty accepting the development by which Vere was turned from a detached observer of "the tragedy of the situation" to a man whose refusal to intervene against the law on Billy's behalf, combined with his position of ultimate responsibility, reveals him as personally and guiltily implicated in Billy's condemnation.

III.2.4. "This is the trap concealed in the daisies": the evolution of the Billy/Vere relationship

In his analysis of the *Billy Budd* libretto drafts, Hindley traces the development of Billy's personal devotion to Vere through the different draft stages of the libretto (1989:377-379). His investigation focuses especially on the introduction and gradual elaboration of the interview between Billy and Vere which precedes the confrontation between Claggart and Billy at the beginning of Act II, Sc. 2. The germ for this scene can be found in the novella: as Billy "[f]inds] himself closeted [...] in the cabin with the captain and Claggart", he muses: "Yes, the captain, I have always thought, looks kindly upon me. Wonder if he's going to make me his coxswain. I should like that. And maybe now he is going to ask the master-at-arms about me" (BB82). In the typed First Rough Synopsis, Melville's scenario, in which the description of the confrontation opens with all three men already present in the captain's cabin, appears unchanged: after Vere has issued instructions for Billy to be brought to his cabin, and for Claggart to present himself there, the new scene opens as "Claggart and Billy are admitted to the cabin by Vere's servant" (BPL A61:23). Crozier's handwritten initial draft of the trial scene features

the same order of events: as Hindley has recorded, “Billy’s entrance is followed almost immediately by that of Claggart, who at the captain’s command launches straight into his accusation” (1989:377; see BPL A61:85).

It is in the typed March Draft that a short conversation between Billy and Vere makes its appearance before Claggart’s entrance: in it, Billy is heard to “state his hopes for promotion and the honour of it, either as captain of the mizzen-top or as the captain’s coxswain. But Vere tells him immediately that he must put such thoughts out of his mind” (Hindley 1989:377; see BPL A61:159). Only in the August Draft does the idea of “the personal association with Captain Vere” (Hindley 1989:377) become fully realised, as Billy, using the phrases that remain in his speech to the present day, promises “I’d serve you well, indeed I would. You’d be safe with me. You could trust you boat to me. Couldn’t find a better coxswain – that’s to say I’ll look after you my best” (BPL AD-EMF:39r).

Billy’s declarations of loyalty were taken yet another step further by the hand-written additions which appear in both Forster’s and Britten’s copies of the August Draft. Like Vere’s “Claggart, John Claggart, beware” monologue which appears on the same page, the exchange between Vere and Billy shows several recognisable layers of revisions in Forster’s as well as in Britten’s copy, and at least one additional layer which is only reflected in Britten’s copy. Britten’s pencil annotations provide little information about these respective layers, but judging from the different shades of Forster’s ink annotations, a first round of revision saw the addition of the words “Billy Budd” to Vere’s existing question “So you’d like to be captain of the mizzen?”⁷⁰⁰ and of the single sentence “I’ll die for you, and so would they all” following the end of Billy’s typescript speech quoted above (BPL AD-EMF:39r). Both these innovations figure in Britten’s copy as additions in the typescript itself (BPL A62:114) and on the preceding verso page (BPL A62:112). It is on this latter page that Britten sketched out a longer addition to Billy’s speech:

Aren’t I glad to be here. Didn’t know what life was before now, & o for a fight! ~~Sorry she got away.~~ Wish we’d got that frigate, I do, but we’ll catch her another day. Sir. ~~Can’t I~~ \Let me/ be your ~~coo~~ coxswain? (BPL A62:112)

This speech is enclosed in a balloon; an arrow points to the appropriate place of insertion in the typescript opposite. Below it is another balloon containing Vere’s reaction to Billy’s eager outpourings; these newly added lines express his recognition of Billy’s devotion and, by implication, of Claggart’s perfidy:

And this is the man I’m told is dangerous – the schemer, the plotter, the artful mutineer. This is the trap concealed in the daisies! Claggart, John Claggart, beware! (BPL A62:112)

⁷⁰⁰ Only Britten’s copy shows Vere’s question revised to its final form, “Would you like to be captain”, etc. (BPL A62:114).

The content of both balloons also appears in Forster's copy of the August Draft; Billy's new lines are added in a darker ink into the typescript itself, while Vere's interjection is noted in the same darker ink on the preceding verso page, with an arrow indicating its place of insertion (BPL AD-EMF:38v and 39r). Forster's transcription of Billy's new lines is not entirely congruent with Britten's version:

Aren't I glad to be here. Didn't know what life was before now, and oh for a fight. Wish we'd got that frigate, I do, but we'll catch her another day, Sir.
Can't I be your coxswain? (BPL AD-EMF:39r)

Again, the fact that the line "Sorry she got away" appears, cancelled, only in Britten's copy indicates that Forster copied the speech from there once its final form had been agreed on. The fact that only Britten's copy shows the alteration of "Can't I" into "Let me" indicates that this latter revision dates from a later stage – again, possibly the time at which Britten came to compose this passage. A further addition to Billy's speech appears only in Britten's copy; spilling out of Britten's original balloon, it merely repeats phrases which had already figured in the typescript, suggesting that Britten added these sentences when he came to compose this passage to lengthen Billy's speech, which runs parallel to Vere's aside in the finished opera: "I'd look after you well. You could trust your boat to me. You'd be safe w. me. Please, Sir" (BPL A62:112).

Hindley has summed up the overall trajectory of these successive draft versions as showing "the steady development of the relationship between the two men" (1989:378), a relationship which he views as "more positive" than what "is to be found in Melville" (372): in the finished libretto, Billy's growing "ardour" is met and matched on Vere's side by "what in effect is a positive appreciation of the young man's loyalty". Hindley also notes the replacement of the "dog-like" submissiveness found in the novella's Billy by an increased confidence that makes Billy "speak with his captain on terms of equality" (378). The multiple layers of revision discernible in Forster's and Britten's copies of the August Draft indicate that the development of Vere's and Billy's relationship was the result of a joint creative effort. The strengthening of their relationship, and of Billy's role in particular, can be seen to stand in accordance with Forster's view of Billy as expressed in his 1951 "Letter from E. M. Forster" which appeared in the *Griffin* (see section II.5.3.2.). At the same time, it can be seen to move Billy further towards the Forsterian character type of the 'light' saviour.

It is made clear in Melville's novella that Billy's beauty makes him attractive to a number of men on board the *Indomitable* (BB25). As numerous critics have proposed, Captain Vere might be counted among these.⁷⁰¹ At the very least, his description of Billy as "a fine specimen of the *genus homo*, who in the nude might

⁷⁰¹ See, for instance, Hindley 1989:364 and Sedgwick 1990:108f.

have passed⁷⁰² for a statue of young Adam before the Fall” (BB78) might be taken to imply his appreciative interest in the young sailor’s naked body. In this context, Claggart’s comment about the “man-trap” hidden beneath the “ruddy-tipped daisies” of Billy’s good looks (BB77) can be and often is read as sexual innuendo, suggesting that Claggart is trying to insult or even threaten Vere at this point (see sections I.3.3., I.4.4., and II.6.8.).

As Hindley (1989:376f.) has demonstrated, the succession of libretto drafts of the scene in which Claggart confronts Vere about Billy’s supposed mutinous activities shows a certain amount of wavering in the deployment of Claggart’s innuendo and Vere’s reaction to it. In the novella, the conversation between Claggart and Vere would, but for the narrator’s lengthy interpolated comments, in its essential parts have run thus:

[Vere:] Name him.

[Claggart:] William Budd, a foretopman, your honour.

[Vere:] William Budd! [...] and mean you [...] the young fellow who seems to be so popular with the men – Billy, the Handsome Sailor, as they call him?

[Claggart:] The same, your honour; but for all his youth and good looks, a deep one. [...] You have but noted his fair cheek. A mantrap may be under his ruddy-tipped daisies. [...]

[Vere:] Do you come to me, master-at-arms, with so foggy a tale? As to Budd, cite me an act or spoken word of his confirmatory of what you in general charge against him. Stay [...], heed what you speak. Just now and in a case like this, there is a yard-arm for the false witness. (BB77-79)

Vere’s suspicions as to “the informer’s good faith” may be aroused, as the narrator explains just before Vere’s last speech, by the “suggestion conveyed in the phrase ‘a man-trap under his ruddy-tipped daisies’” (BB79), but his threat of the yard-arm, preceded as it is by the references to the “charge” of disaffection “against [Billy]”, and to the delicate situation in the fleet “just now”, i.e. after the Spithead and Nore mutinies, appears as a general warning against turning “false witness”.

In the March Draft, Vere’s threat of the yard-arm follows immediately after Claggart has named the suspect:

VERE: William Budd? There’s a yard-arm for a false witness, Master-at-Arms.

CLAGGART: Sir, sir! Your honour!

VERE: Nay, you’re mistaken, your police have deceived you. Don’t come to me with so foggy a tale. That is the foretopman I get good reports of – cheerful, willing, serviceable, popular.

⁷⁰² The Hayford/Sealts reading is “posed” (H/S94).

CLAGGART: You have but noticed his outwards, your honour – his pleasant looks, his frank temper. They are but a mask. A man-trap lurks under those ruddy-tipped daisies. (BPL A61:157f.)

As Hindley has summarised, in this early version of the libretto,

Vere then calls Mr Redburn to discuss the weather, and is only persuaded to interview Billy Budd by what amounts to a threat of resignation from Claggart, who gives notice that he will seek another ship and says “I cannot maintain order here without your honour’s confidence.” (Hindley 1989:376)

The ordering of the dialogue between Vere and Claggart as set down in the March Draft can be seen to deviate from Melville’s original ordering, which had featured Vere’s threat of the yard-arm at the end of the exchange, rather than as a direct response to Claggart’s innuendo. It might be felt that in the librettists’ early version of the conversation, Vere’s threat, though perhaps dramatically effective for its impulsiveness, lacks the impetus of clear motivation, since Vere has yet to state his reasons for his faith in the accused.

When Forster subsequently came to redraft this dialogue, he augmented Claggart’s description of Billy’s physically attractive “outwards” by adding the phrase “the flower of masculine beauty and strength”, which he had gleaned from his reading of Freeman’s 1948 edition of *Billy Budd* in May 1949.⁷⁰³ Even more importantly, in Forster’s handwritten new version of the conversation, Vere’s reference to the “yard-arm for a false witness” is shifted to appear as the immediate response to Claggart’s newly heightened representations of Billy’s “masculine beauty”, and to the innuendo about the “man-trap” concealed under his “ruddy-tipped daisies” (BPL A61:339). This re-ordering incidentally restores Vere’s threat to its original place at the end of the sequence, but it significantly changes its reference, and thereby alters the conversation’s meaning. The relocation of Vere’s threat can not only be seen to lend added support to a reading of Claggart’s challenge as a deliberate sexual innuendo, but also suggests that Forster (and, possibly, his collaborators too) had identified a structure in Melville’s text which could be construed as a blackmailing scenario.

Both Forster’s and Britten’s copies show handwritten alterations and insertions; once again, these can be seen to reflect multiple layers of revision, and suggest that after an early phase which is reflected in both Forster’s and Britten’s copies, Britten was responsible for further, fairly extensive rearrangements and emendations of this passage, which Forster’s copy does not record. Notable among these is the cancellation of the address “your honour” from the sentences which provoke Vere’s threat in the final version of the libretto (see LIB49); this

⁷⁰³ Unlike the new lines from Billy’s ballad, also gleaned from the Freeman edition, this phrase was added to none of the three collaborators’ copies of the March Draft, but only appears in Forster’s manuscript redraft (see section I.2.4, pp.50ff.).

has the effect of making Claggart appear more insolent.⁷⁰⁴ It may be that in his eagerness to blacken Billy's character, he forgets himself, but it is equally possible that his growing insubordination accompanies his ascendancy to a blackmailer's position of power. Yet it should be noted that what Hindley describes as Britten's "complex reworking of the passage" ultimately merely "disentangled" and re-ordered "the two strands in this dialogue", namely, "Billy's moral uprightness and his physical beauty". Developed into its final shape, the exchange now shows "a delicate but clear psychological progression" in which Vere twice states his confidence in Billy's loyalty, "whereupon Claggart hints at a somewhat less honourable motive for Vere's attitude", and Vere responds with the threat of the yard-arm (Hindley 1989:376f.). However, the blackmailing structure, which had already been set down in Forster's manuscript redraft and in the typescript of the August Draft, remained unaffected by Britten's late revisions: in the finished version, Vere's threat of the "yard-arm" still figures as the direct response to Claggart's suggestive remark about the "man-trap" beneath Billy's "ruddy-tipped daisies" (LIB49). This observation would seem to be of particular significance for any reading of the opera *Billy Budd* as a coded engagement on Forster's part with aspects of the homosexual experience (see section II.6.).

III.2.5. "A sanitised *Billy Budd*?" Concerning the flogging of the Novice

Humphrey Carpenter's biography of Britten seems to have been to some extent responsible for popularising the notion of "a sanitised *Billy Budd*" supposedly produced by the opera-makers (see Carpenter 1992:287-290). Thus, for instance, Carpenter propagates the misapprehension that it was the opera-makers who "re-named" Melville's warship, substituting the name *Indomitable* and thereby "suppressing the sexual implication of *Bellipotent*" (1992:288). A closer (and, it might be felt, obligatory) familiarity with the publication history of Melville's text would have revealed that prior to the publication of the 1962 Chicago edition by Hayford and Sealts, the name of Captain Vere's ship appeared as *Indomitable* in all available editions,⁷⁰⁵ and that there was in fact no question of the opera-makers "suppressing" any "sexual implication" of the ship's supposed 'real' name.

Carpenter attaches a related significance to the fact that in the opera, the flogging of the Novice "is administered out of sight" and is not witnessed by Billy, unlike in the novella.⁷⁰⁶ A similar view is advanced by Claire Seymour, who de-

⁷⁰⁴ See also Hindley 1989:377.

⁷⁰⁵ Two editorial footnotes in Freeman's 1948 edition mention the name *Bellipotent* (Melville 1948:212, n.4 and 274, n.3), but the ship's name is rendered as *Indomitable* throughout the reading text; see also section I.2.1.

⁷⁰⁶ To Carpenter, the Novice's desperate protest as Squeak takes him away to be punished – "Sir, no! – not me! [...] Don't have me flogged – I can't bear it – not flogging! [...] Not that!" (LIB11) – appears to be conveyed in "curiously schoolboyish language"; this leads him to link the flogging episode to "a painful area" of Britten's public school "past", where corporeal punishment formed

tects “the efforts of Britten and Forster to ‘sanitise’ Melville’s text” not only in “the simplification of Claggart and Billy” and the supposed “removal of the physical attraction latent in the relationships between Melville’s characters”, but also in “the corresponding excision of physical violence from the text” (145f.). Seymour sees this “excision” in the fact that a full-length flogging scene had appeared in the March Draft, but was subsequently removed from the libretto. It seems necessary at this point to take a close look at the representation of this scene in Melville’s text.

The flogging of the novice occupies only a brief paragraph in the novella. Its chief overall focus lies on

the impression made upon [Billy] by the first formal gangway-punishment he had ever witnessed [...]. It had been incurred by a little fellow, young, a novice, an afterguardsman absent from his assigned post when the ship was being put about, a dereliction resulting in a rather serious hitch to that manoeuvre [...]. When Billy saw the culprit’s naked back under the scourge gridironed with red welts, and worse; when he marked the dire expression in the liberated man’s face, as with his woollen shirt flung over him by the executioner he rushed forward from the spot to bury himself in the crowd, Billy was horrified. (BB46)

It will be noted that apart from the one iconic image of the “culprit’s” injured body, Melville does not here provide an extensive graphic description of the proceedings, as he had done in Ch. XXXIII of *White-Jacket*. Rather, the passage’s chief interest arguably lies with the effect this scene has on the “horrified” Billy, who “resolved that never through remissness would he make himself liable to such a visitation, or do or omit aught that might merit even verbal reproof” (BB46).

From the earliest stages of the libretto up to the three-act March Draft, the collaborators had intended to include a dramatic representation of this scene in the opera’s onstage action. Their earliest list of scenes, recorded in Britten’s hand, includes “Scourging of slack after-guardsman” after the “Questioning” of the newly impressed man or men (BPL A61:14). The typed First Rough Synopsis contains a more detailed outline of events, but does not yet provide a scene in which the culprit is seen to commit the offence that earns him the punishment. After the impressment, once the officers have ordered Claggart to “hav[e] the new men watched”, and Claggart has relayed these orders to his “narks”, events progress as follows:

part of the disciplinary system (1992:289). Yet it ought to be kept in mind that in both fiction and historical scholarship, flogging is regularly represented as one of the most cruel and dangerous forms of corporeal punishment in the Navy’s disciplinary arsenal: in Melville’s *White-Jacket*, for example, it is referred to as “unendurable torture”; the novel also mentions the culprit’s “weeping entreaties and vows of contrition” before the punishment begins (WJ138). Crozier, following Manwaring and Dobrée’s account of eighteenth-century naval customs, emphasised the fact that “severe flogging crippled or killed” (1951:11; compare Manwaring/Dobrée 68). Given these considerations, it is to be wondered whether the operatic Novice’s protests are really all that conspicuously reminiscent of a schoolboy’s fear.

The officers go to the quarterdeck to warn Vere of the flogging that will take place at the change of watch. The ship's company is mustered for the scourging of the culprit.

The scourging. ("...ceremonial flogging was carried out in all the forms with the reading of the Article of War against which the man was supposed to have offended, and the raising of everybody's hat out of respect for the King's ordinance." *Floating Republic*.)⁷⁰⁷ Billy Budd resolves that he will never commit faults that might expose him to similar trouble. (BPL A61:21)

Crozier subsequently drafted a more detailed elaboration of the proceedings of the flogging, which was largely carried over into the typed March Draft (see below). His draft also envisions a brief speech in which "Vere expresses abhorrence of flogging for trivial offences, but realises that it is the only way of keeping discipline on a man-of-war whose crew contained a large proportion of impressed men" (BPL A61:29f.). This passage, however, is already cancelled in Crozier's typescript; no trace of it appears in the three-act March Draft. It seems that the opera-makers decided against providing such an obvious exposition of Vere's equivocal role as the *Indomitable's* highest authority, in whose name the enforcement of all naval discipline takes place.⁷⁰⁸ What did get carried over into the March Draft typescript was largely a description of the scene:

⁷⁰⁷ The quotation, which is accurate apart from the third word "was", inserted for grammatical reasons, can be found in Manwaring/Dobrée 68f.

⁷⁰⁸ It is certainly possible to draw a comparison between the opera-makers' representation of ship-board life and the world of "the English single-sex school" (Carpenter 1992:288); the interest, however, would seem to me to lie less in the psycho-biographical sphere than in the narrative and representational patterns invoked. In fact, even the explicit exposition of Vere as ultimately responsible for the harsh regime of naval discipline would be in accordance with what might be called the school story paradigm, as perpetuated in, for example, Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) or Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (1899). The classic boys' school novel tends to represent the lower ranks of the schoolboy population as living in permanent opposition to, and to a greater or lesser extent at the mercy of, a set of more or less brutal and obtuse older boys, prefects and masters (with the occasional benevolently avuncular exception), who possess and often abuse the power to order or inflict physical violence at any time. This pyramidal hierarchy is quite regularly presided over by the remote figure of a stern but just and fundamentally benign headmaster, to whom the boys tend to look up with an awe that sometimes contains elements of hero-worship, even though he may administer corporeal punishment himself. This often omniscient and god-like power visibly intervenes in the schoolboys' everyday experience only on exceptional occasions; when he does intervene, any punishment he metes out is usually represented as well-deserved. By contrast, the arbitrary cruelties and injustices perpetrated by his subordinates, with which the boys have to contend on a daily basis, tend to be represented as obstacles or challenges which the heroes must deal with unaided. See also note 621.

(Act One. Scene One. EC)⁷⁰⁹

The scourging

At the change of the watch, the Marine Sentry sounds eight bells, which are repeated forward.

SENTRY: Sound the bell eight, forward!

The bosun's [*sic*] pipes call all hands on deck for the flogging.

BOSUNS: All hands to witness punishment! All hands on deck!

Captain Vere comes down from his cabin to join his other officers on the quarter deck, the marines are marched into place across the quarter deck and half deck, a gang of seamen brings a square hatch grating to which the offender is to be lashed, the ship's corporal stands ready with a whip, the crew assembles to watch, taking the whole punishment as a matter-of-course affair.

At Vere's order, two sentries bring the prisoner – the little novice – and the Master at Arms takes off his hat from behind him. The First Lieutenant reads the Article of War relating to the flogging, all raising their hats at the King's name. The prisoner is lashed by the wrists to the grating, and the marine drummer beats the rhythm for flogging.

After ten strokes, the prisoner is released and is pushed away to hide himself among his messmates. The officers leave the quarter deck. The bosun's [*sic*] pipe "Watch below!", the marines march off, and those seamen whose watch it is disperse to their stations.

The off-duty men stay on the main deck, talking and lounging, and the two newcomers, Red Whiskers and Billy Budd, are a centre of interest for their shipmates. (BPL A61:195)

As Crozier recalls, it was Britten who decided against the inclusion of this scene (Crozier 1979:32). Indeed, in the composer's copy (unlike in Crozier's), this page is crossed out; the word "Out" is written at top in Britten's hand (BPL A61:125). A handwritten note on the preceding recto page outlines the substitute scene he wished Forster to create instead: "Arrival of beaten novice / Flogged novice & semi-chorus / Set piece / – EMF" (BPL A61:124f.). In his copy, Crozier made some more detailed notes describing what was wanted: "Procession of small chorus across deck, supporting the injured novice after flogging. Short choral statement in most general terms on hardship of sea life, with verse lines & repeating couplet. Novice does not sing" (BPL A61:194). Forster accordingly produced a handwritten draft of the Novice's Dirge (BPL A61:277).

Even without a potentially equivocal speech about the necessities of maintaining discipline, the fact that Vere would have been seen to preside over the administration of so brutal a punishment would have served to cast an ambivalent light on him as a character. More importantly, perhaps, there was the question of dramatic

⁷⁰⁹ The initials "EC" which appear next to the act and scene designation indicate that Crozier had been responsible for this episode.

proportion to be taken into consideration. A realistic real-time representation of the flogging scene as sketched in the March Draft would have occupied a substantial amount of stage time, and would merely from this circumstance have acquired a correspondingly substantial importance as a dramatic event – an importance which it arguably does not have in the novella, where, as I have suggested above, Melville's poignant one-sentence description of the incident largely serves to explain Billy's resolve never to run afoul of the shipboard rules and regulations (while of course also serving as a reminder of the harshness and brutality of naval discipline). Viewed in this light, Britten's decision *not* to burden the opera with the *addition* of what would have been quite a long and elaborate scene centred on a climax of graphic brutality, which in itself would have possessed comparatively little relevance to the plot, seems only too understandable. In my opinion, this decision can hardly be adduced as evidence for any supposed "efforts of Britten and Forster to 'sanitise' *Melville's* text" (Seymour 145, my emphasis).⁷¹⁰

Concerning the nature of the Novice's offence, Carpenter has drawn attention to the fact that "whereas in Melville the seaman is punished for a major infringement of discipline which has resulted in a 'rather serious hitch' to the ship's progress, in the opera he is picked on merely for being slightly cheeky" (1992:289). Following his psycho-biographical approach, Carpenter links this change in the libretto with Britten's experience at his preparatory school, South Lodge, where, as John Pounder, one of his schoolmates recalled, "you got beaten on the slightest pretext" (in Carpenter 1992:289).⁷¹¹ Yet rather than follow Carpenter's speculations any further, it seems useful at this point to recall Crozier's and Forster's research into the historical setting of Melville's story. As Crozier's article on "The British Navy in 1797" suggests, the opera-makers had been impressed by the arbitrary reign of terror which, according to historians like Manwaring and Dobrée, was the daily reality on many of His Majesty's warships at that time, where "the abuse of power" by "brutal officers" was the rule rather than the exception, and where "men were flogged [...] for the most trivial offences, for 'silent contempt', for being last to obey an order" (Crozier 1951:11). The typed First Rough Synopsis of January 1949, produced by Crozier, features a quotation about the official procedure of flogging taken from Manwaring and Dobrée's "*Floating Republic*" (BPL A61:21; see p.530 above); in the same passage, the historians emphasise that a formal punishment of flogging

was not the only doom that could overtake a man without warning. Any officer, even a midshipman, could unmercifully beat, or have beaten, about

⁷¹⁰ Seymour's representation at this point, as elsewhere in her chapter on *Billy Budd*, seems to point at an insufficient familiarity with the details of Melville's text, as well as with the possibilities for interpretation it offers. These are by no means as fixed as her reading, which is reminiscent of Martin's or Sedgwick's, appears to assume.

⁷¹¹ I discuss Carpenter's linking of the *Billy Budd* libretto with the world of "the English single-sex school" (Carpenter 1992:288) in notes 621, 706 and 708.

the head, arms, and back, any wretch with whom he momentarily lost his temper, a pastime known as “starting”, which was carried out with a knotted rope until its wielder was weary. (Manwaring/Dobr e 69)

They also comment on the psychological consequences of institutionalised corporeal punishment in terms which may be felt to resonate with the sad deterioration of the operatic Novice in a striking way: “A severe flogging smashed a man; he was ill for weeks after it, and rarely recovered his self-respect if he originally had any good in him” (68). It would appear, then, that there exists ample evidence to suggest that the representation of the Novice’s offence, as well as of the effects his punishment has on him, can be traced back to these known textual sources, discovered by the librettists who had done their research so diligently.

III.2.6. “We’ll take no quarter”: the Captain’s Muster and the 1960 revisions

I had to write a big new chorus scene for the end of Act I, which I did with a lively sense of my own inferiority to Morgan as a writer. But he was delighted with what I had done and complemented me generously on it. (Letter from Eric Crozier to Nancy Evans of 22 August 1949, BBL537, n.3)

What Crozier had written was the first draft of the Captain’s Muster which was to appear as the finale of Act I in the 1951 four-act version of the opera (concluding what is now Act I, Sc. 1), but which was ultimately cut again in the 1960 revisions (see below). In the opera-makers’ 1960 radio discussion on *Billy Budd*, Crozier summarised the creation of this scene as follows:

when we came to make our second draft – that was in August 1949 – of the libretto, you, Ben, wanted a bigger climax for the end of the first act [...] and we did a big finale for the end of the first act with Vere addressing the whole ship’s company. (BBC1960:203)

The three typed pages comprising what appears to be Crozier’s initial draft of this finale (BPL A61:291-293) were scrutinised and amended by Forster, and the new scene appeared incorporated in the typed August Draft. Forster’s copy of this contains a further set of handwritten alterations, as well as a rough outline, on the facing verso page, of a revised ordering of Vere’s speeches and the crew’s reactions; it is here that Vere’s declaration “I’m with you” and the crew’s response “We’re with you” first appear (BPL AD-EMF:16v). Among the supplementary material pertaining to the August Draft, there are two sheets containing Forster’s handwritten redraft of the passage, which more or less follows his rough outline. Some further alterations and additions are inserted in Britten’s hand, most notably the phrases “They want all the world to be slaves” and “They have enslaved their neighbours and killed their king”, as well as the patriotic utterances of the quarter-deck chorus (BPL AD-EMF:51r and 52r). This last joint effort comes very close

to the final version of the Captain's Muster as it appears in the printed four-act libretto:

VERE: Officers and men, we are nearing France. We sail in hostile waters towards a hostile shore. We sail into action alone. We meet our dangers alone, and we'll meet 'em like true British seamen.

CHORUS (*main-deck*): We're with you. We don't fear, Starry Vere.

VERE: I speak to all. Veteran and novice, sailor and marine, officer and man, we share a common duty, we fight a common foe. And I'm with you.

CHORUS (*main-deck*): You'll do your best for us and we'll do our best for you. We're with you.

VERE: The French are bold enemies and bad masters. They want all the world to be slaves. They have enslaved their neighbours and killed their king. But we'll fight 'em to a finish. We'll take no quarter. Death rather than surrender. Down with them.

CHORUS (*main-deck*): Down with the Frenchies! Death or victory!

VERE: Ay! Death or victory! Expect action at any time. Double vigilance on watch. Sleep with your eyes open. Listen for the drum beating to quarters – and then the chase, then the fight for freedom. Then to destroy the foreigners who threaten us with slavery. Then to destroy the French.

CHORUS (*main-deck*): That's well said.

BILLY: I'll follow you, I'll serve you, I'm yours, I'll die for you, Starry Vere.

CHORUS (*main-deck*): We'll follow you, Vere.

ALL VOICES (*main-deck*): Starry Vere, we'll fight!

We'll drive 'em from the sea!

We're for the King!

It's death or victory!

We'll fight for you!

We'll die for you, Starry Vere!

ALL VOICES (*quarter-deck*): Long live our Captain!

Here's to our Navy!

Long live our Sovereign!

God bless our enterprise!

We're proud to serve you, Starry Vere!

BILLY: I'll follow you, I'll serve you, I'll die for you, Starry Vere.

ALL VOICES (*main-deck and quarter-deck, together*): We're proud to serve you, Starry Vere!

(*Upon a scene of great excitement, the Curtain falls*) (LIB1951:23f.)

Created for reasons of dramatic and musical effect, this scene was to remain dissatisfying to the opera-makers in many ways. Granted, the stereotypical patriotism of Vere's rousing speech – Forster's rough outline summarises the passage in which he insists they will go into battle “like true British seamen” as “Heroics”

(BPL AD-EMF:16v) – was tempered with the more personal note of Vere's and the crew's mutual reassurances of trust and support ("I'm with you" and "We're with you"). Furthermore, the memory of the recently overcome threat of a Nazi invasion may well have lent an especial poignancy to Vere's reminder that the French are "threaten[ing]" the entire "world" with "slavery". Nevertheless, the collaborators were to continue to perceive the scene as somehow at odds with their conception of the work as a whole, and, it could be inferred, of the character of Vere in particular.

In the summer of 1960, as the collaborators were preparing to revise *Billy Budd* for the planned BBC Third Programme revival,⁷¹² Britten wrote to Crozier:

I have never been happy (and I find now that Morgan feels the same) with the present end of Act I. Vere's haranguing of the crew does not seem to ring true – none of us I think really had our hearts in this section. (5 August 1960; quoted in Reed 1993b:75)

In November, in the collaborators' radio discussion, Britten stated: "We put this rather public oration scene in, and I think, Morgan and Eric, we agree that it was rather against our will; we didn't feel very convinced about this scene". Crozier agreed that "it was a – well not a stop-gap exactly, but it was something that we *imposed* on our original idea" (BBC1960:203). In his 1969 "Notes on Forster and Music", Britten was to write that "neither of us was comfortable" with "Vere's sermon to the crew" (86). Even if Vere's new "harangue" was not as "unseemly" (*Griffin* 5) as that which Melville had had his captain deliver during Billy's trial, it seems that the collaborators felt it did not properly represent the Vere they had so painstakingly created. Their lack of enthusiasm for their added scene suggests that the Captain's Muster had by no means been "intended to have established Vere as a forceful commander on his first appearance in the opera" (Cooke 1993c:35), at least not as a primary objective: this had been, as Crozier stated, the creation of "a bigger" dramatic and musical "climax" at the end of the act (BBC1960:203).

That this objective may have led them to create something of a foreign body within the overall structure of the opera and the depiction of Vere is suggested by the reaction of the *Sunday Times*'s critic Ernest Newman, whose review of the opera's 1951 premiere was severely critical of the libretto, condemning it as "inexpert" because "falling between the two stools of conventional 'opera' and modern psychological music-drama". Newman took issue with

one or two scenes that are too "operatic" in the unflattering sense of the term, the worst example being the ensemble of the ship's company in praise of Captain Vere [...]. I could imagine something of this sort happening on

⁷¹² A full account of the 1960 revisions is given by Reed (1993b).

the deck of H.M.S. *Pinafore* but hardly on that of H.M.S. *Indomitable*. (*Sunday Times*, 9 December 1951; quoted from BBLL697)⁷¹³

Though hardly flattering, Newman's criticism can be seen to have been prompted by the very scene about which the opera-makers themselves harboured their private misgivings. It may furthermore be supposed that as pacifists who had been Conscientious Objectors during the war, neither the composer nor his partner Peter Pears, for whom the role of Vere had been written, would have felt entirely at ease with their main character's patriotic "death or victory" speech. In addition to this, it appears that Pears had trouble with Vere's vocal part in this passage, "which required from him a quality of singing he did not by nature possess" (Reed 1993b:79). Accordingly, when Britten, Forster and Crozier met at Aldeburgh on 13-14 September 1960 to "condens[e] the opera's four acts into two" (Crozier 1986:25), Crozier and Forster each brought with them a draft for an alternative ending of the scene (Reed 1993b:75). The three men then combined their efforts to create the revised version commonly seen on stages today.

Donald Mitchell has deplored the excision of the Captain's Muster as "a fundamental diminution of the characterisation of Vere" as a "man of action as well as [an] emblem of sensibility and civilisation" (1993:120). Whether the pathos of Vere's patriotic exhortations really did serve to represent Vere as "a man of action" any better than his active competence during the frigate chase in Act II, Sc. 1 would seem debatable. On the other hand, it might be felt that the excision of the added scene brings Vere closer once more to the character depicted in Melville's novella. Although Vere's professional expertise and experience are established early in the exposition of his character (see BB36), it is on his "dry and bookish" (BB40) qualities, and on his "civilian" (BB37) comportment that the text places most of its emphasis – characteristics which set him apart from his fellow professionals to the point that they feel alienated by them (BB40). It is this aspect of the character, I have argued, that would most have appealed to Forster because it matched features typically encountered in his own 'dark' characters and, indeed, in his own literary practices (see section II.5.1.2.). It was this line of characterisation, too, which the opera-makers can be seen to have followed in creating Vere's quiet philosophical meditations in what is today Act I, Sc. 2, and in deciding not to include an onstage flogging scene over which Vere should have presided.

⁷¹³ *H.M.S. Pinafore; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor* (1878), a highly popular comic opera by William Schwenck Gilbert (libretto) and Arthur Sullivan (music). Newman's criticism may appear slightly unfair; in the librettists' defence, it must be noted that the literature on naval history they consulted during their researches contained numerous references to the extreme loyalty expressed by some of the late eighteenth-century sailors to some of their most beloved captains. Thus, in their account of the Spithead and Nore mutinies, Manwaring and Dobrée write: "Admiral Duncan was so loved by his men that they declared themselves ready to do anything for him, down to the shedding of the last drops of their blood"; they also cite a petition by a ship's company who ask to be transferred along with their beloved captain, who had been appointed to the command of another vessel (71f.).

Through the excision of Vere's speech, thick as it was with patriotic pathos, and delivered in a scene that was, in Newman's words, "too 'operatic'" (BBL697) in its effect, the figure of the captain could be said to have gained greater coherence and integrity. With the partial exception of the frigate chase in Act II, Sc. 1, where he is shown as a capable (if not always successful) commander, Vere now appears throughout the opera as a thoughtful intellectual who is very much concerned with the spiritual dimension of human existence and human conflict. To retain the scene that showed this man passionately spouting what is effectively war propaganda would not only have meant to retain a conflict with the figure of the gentlemanly humanist philosopher depicted in Act I, Sc. 2; it could also have severely undercut Vere's role as a tragic figure. For if his being, in Forster's words, "the only character that is truly tragic" depended on his being, as Britten put it, "forced" by "circumstances [...] to sacrifice" Billy (BBC1960:207), and if he was thus to appear partly as a victim of the warship world and its merciless laws, then having him first deliver his patriotic address would arguably have exposed the equivocal nature of his position as the representative of the warship world even more clearly, and perhaps rendered him a less likely object for the audience's (and indeed the opera-makers') sympathy.

At the same time, Philip Reed has rightly pointed out that the original "Verdian, heroic set-piece" scene had more successfully "explicated the crew's total loyalty to their commander and, moreover, Billy's own impetuous enthusiasm for Vere". By contrast, the new version, in which the captain's singular character is merely evoked by his loyal crew, can leave an audience "feeling that the crew's and Billy's loyalty is less credible, while recognising that it is no less equivocal" (1993b:79).

It was the 1960 revisions that saw the introduction of the idea that Vere cares for the crew "like we are his sons" (LIB22). While this line was probably intended to establish Vere's humanity and the strong feelings of personal loyalty that bind his crew to him, it might also be felt to open a connection with more ambiguous types of father-son relationships. Thus, the fact that "the father" and the relentless "military disciplinarian" are coexistent within Vere (BB84) is established in Melville's novella, as is the association of Vere's readiness to sacrifice Billy with Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac (BB102).⁷¹⁴

On the other hand, Hindley has correctly pointed out that with the 1960 reworking of the scene, "librettist and composer brought a new dimension to the

⁷¹⁴ For a discussion of Vere's paternalism as read through the lens of Forster's work, see section II.3.10.3. A particularly poignant reworking of the Abraham/Isaac story features in Wilfred Owen's "Parable of the Old Man and the Young" (publ. 1920), a poem denouncing the waste of human life in World War One, in which "the old man" Abraham declines to sacrifice the proffered "Ram of Pride", but instead "slew his son, /And half the seed of Europe, one by one" (ll.14ff.). This poem was to figure among those Owen texts which Britten used in his *War Requiem* (1962), provisionally entitled the "Owen Mass" for some time; Britten had started planning the work around July 1960, only a month before he and his librettists began to tackle the revision of *Billy Budd*.

vehemence and ardour of Billy's affirmation" (1989:378f.). Instead of responding to Vere's rousing address, Billy is now seen to respond to Donald's account of Vere's goodness, which was also newly introduced during the revisions. Furthermore, in the four-act version, both the crew and Billy had uttered very similar words: the chorus had sung "We're with you", "We'll follow you", "We'll fight for you! We'll die for you"; Billy had declared: "I'll follow you, I'll serve you, I'm yours, I'll die for you" (LIB1951:23f.). In the revised version, the chorus now mainly praise Vere's qualities of leadership, affirming merely that they will "follow Vere, right thro' the gates of Hell". It is now only Billy who is left to state his readiness to "die for" Vere, and his declaration has acquired a significant new addition: he would "die to save you, ask for to die" (LIB22f.). As Hindley observes, Billy's offer to "die to save" Vere completes the process of textual evolution in which "Billy's dedication" to Captain Vere is carried "beyond the call of patriotic duty, and beyond the heroism called forth by a Nelson" (1989:379). As I have demonstrated in section II.3.5., Billy's singular devotion may now be read as expressing a concept of personal relationships that can also be seen to figure in the structures of the Forsterian salvation narrative.

III.2.7. Editing tendencies: from historical realism towards 'the universal'

The libretto drafts of Vere's address to the crew during the Captain's Muster, as well as the drafts of his conversation with the officers about the French Revolutionary Wars in what is now Act I, Sc. 2, demonstrate that the librettists had initially been trying to retain even more of Melville's original material. At the same time, the early versions of these scenes show that the librettists had also tried to introduce more historical background, political comments, and British nationalist thought into Vere's and the officer's utterances; however, this material was later excised again.

Thus, what is presumably Crozier's first typed draft of Vere's address to the crew contains a concrete statement of the object of the *Indomitable's* mission: "It falls to us to test the battlefield and to bring back information" (BPL A61:292; allusions to the *Indomitable's* missions "as a scout" can be found on BB29 and BB73). The action is anchored more firmly into its historical context when Vere cries "God bless King George"; this was cut by Forster and replaced by the more universal "God bless the King" (BPL A61:293). In Forster's manuscript redraft of the March Draft's conversation with the officers in what is now Act I, Sc. 2, Vere mentions that "it is scarcely three months since the Nore was suppressed" (the novella's temporal setting is established on BB29), and that there is "great danger on shore, Mr Redburn, thanks to our misguided politicians" (BPL A61:300).

A general allusion to the political situation is still present in the August Draft, but the comment about the politicians is reassigned to the sailing master and sharpened by an angry threat, in contrast to which Vere's agreement may be felt to appear more controlled:

FIRST LIEUTENANT: Any danger of French notions spreading this side, sir?

VERE: (gravely) Great danger, great danger.

SAILING MASTER: Thanks to our politicians. Wouldn't I like to get them here, and –

VERE: You are right, they are largely to blame. But the trouble spreads further than that. There is a word which we scarcely dare speak [...]. (BPL A62:30f.)

The typewritten March Draft of this scene had featured a speech which had contained elements of what is now Vere's aria "Ay, at Spithead", etc. (LIB26), but which had also introduced a historical 'lineage' of the conflict between France and England which is entirely absent in Melville:

VERE: Rights o' Man! How bright the words sound! What infamy they cover! We are fighting the French today as so often in our history – Poitiers, Crécy, Agincourt: we do but repeat those campaigns in terms of the sea. But we are fighting a France we never fought before, the France of the Rights of Man, France the republic, France the atheist, the regicide, France who would tyrannise under the guise of democracy, France whose egalitarianism is incapable of embodiment in lasting institutions and is at war with the world and the peace of mankind. (BPL A61:131f.)

As can be seen, an attempt was made here to retain some of the key phrases of Vere's philosophy as they appear in Melville, specifically the idea that the French revolutionary "theories" are "incapable of embodiment in lasting institutions" and "at war with the world and the peace of mankind" (BB40), but the result is cumbersome. Forster subsequently redrafted the scene, dividing the material of Vere's speech to produce two separate utterances (BPL A61:294f.); the new version appears in the typed August Draft (BPL AD-EMF:19r-21r). The historical references to Poitiers, Crécy and Agincourt were retained at this stage, but were ultimately discarded.⁷¹⁵

The August Draft's rewritten version of the speech's original second section ("But we are fighting a France", etc.) is almost identical to Vere's speech as we know it today ("Aye, at Spithead", etc.). The single nouns which are used to characterise France in the March Draft ("atheist", "regicide") have been replaced by the short sentences we hear today: "France who has killed her king and denied her

⁷¹⁵ A "List of wars" also appears in Forster's rough outline of Vere's speech during the Captain's Muster, made on a verso page in his copy of the typed four-act August Draft (BPL AD-EMF:16v), but no such enumeration figures in his manuscript draft of the speech (BPL AD-EMF:51r and 52r).

God”, etc. (BPL AD-EMF:20f.; compare LIB26).⁷¹⁶ Abstract categorical labels are thus changed to concrete descriptions of the outrageous acts committed by the enemy. At the same time, the sentence structure of the speech as a whole is grammatically simplified. The result is a more aesthetically uniform rendition of Vere’s denunciation of the “French notions” which supposedly fuelled the Nore mutiny. This uniformity is mainly generated by the parallel structure of the sentences (which is matched in the finished opera by the structure of the music):

France	who has killed her king	and denied her God
France	the tyrant	who wears the cap of liberty
France	who pretends to love mankind	and is at war with the world
France	the eternal enemy of righteousness.	

(LIB26)

It is worth noting at this point that Vere’s representation of the Nore mutiny as an act of “revolution” betraying the influence of “the Jacobins” (LIB26) does not agree with the factual information the librettists would have found in the course of their research into the historical period in which the novella is set. Manwaring and Dobrée, whose monograph on the naval mutinies of 1797 appears to have been central among the sources they consulted,⁷¹⁷ cite extensively from the findings of various government inquiries conducted at the time, which established without a doubt that neither the Spithead nor the Nore uprising was influenced by any French Revolutionary “doctrines”, even though the government and the Prime Minister, William Pitt, “with a touching fidelity to the idea of foreign influence, made every effort to discover Jacobin propaganda at the bottom of the murky business” (245).⁷¹⁸ If the librettists nevertheless chose to have Vere link the Nore mutiny with “the infamous spirit of France” (LIB26), it may be that (not least for reasons of dramatic exposition and effect) they decided to portray him as

⁷¹⁶ In their annotations to their 1962 edition of Melville’s *Billy Budd*, Hayford and Sealts comment on the “re-christening under the Directory” (BB119) of French warships, and quote a passage from Ch. 13 of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Wing-and-Wing* (1842), in which “Nelson, represented as commenting on the French and their infidelity, instances the ‘sort of names they give their ships [...] now they have beheaded their king, and denounced their God’” (Hayford/Sealts 1962b:199). The latter phrase strikingly resembles Vere’s comment on “France who has killed her king and denied her God”; however, there are no further textual parallels to be found with this passage of *The Wing-and-Wing*, and we have no way of knowing whether the librettists’ extensive research into naval history included the reading of this particular novel.

⁷¹⁷ In his article on “The British Navy in 1797”, Crozier names Manwaring and Dobrée’s *Floating Republic* as his main source; the typed First Rough Synopsis of January 1949 features a quotation about the official procedure of a “ceremonial flogging” taken from this work (BPL A61:21; see p.530 above).

⁷¹⁸ Even though Manwaring and Dobrée criticise the Nore mutiny as lacking the clear political aims and efficient organisation of the mutiny at Spithead, they come to the conclusion that both uprisings “were thoroughly justified” in view of the abominable conditions the seamen were kept in, and that, furthermore, both uprisings were badly mishandled by the responsible authorities (241-251).

a man who, despite his philosophical detachment, nevertheless shared the anti-French views of his contemporaries. Their choice can moreover be seen to agree with Melville's text, which draws a clear connection between the Nore mutiny and revolutionary ideas "blown across the Channel from France in flames" (BB30).

In sum, it seems that the librettists initially tried to embed their material more deeply into a historical context, one that focused specifically on England's 'hereditary' conflict with France, by adding some historical and political allusions which do not occur in Melville's novella. In their subsequent revisions, however, they gradually removed a large part of these allusions once again, with the result that the story now stands relatively independent of its concrete historical background. Just as "Melville – after the initial roughness of his realism – reaches straight back into the universal" (AN98), the opera-makers, too, severed some of their libretto's ties to "realism", and moved their text closer to "the universal", much as Forster had envisioned when he wrote to Britten on 12 December 1948: "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" (EMFL II:235).

III.3. Coda: the Claggart monologue: resisting and rewriting

III.3.1. “It is *my* most important piece of writing”:
Forster’s “big monologue for Claggart”

In 1939, ten years before Britten, Forster and Crozier embarked upon the writing of their opera *Billy Budd*, W. H. Auden had written a poem on “Herman Melville”, which had declared that “Evil is unspectacular and always human”; while “Goodness”

has a name like Billy and is almost perfect,
But wears a stammer like a decoration:
And every time they meet the same thing has to happen;
It is the Evil that is helpless like a lover
And has to pick a quarrel and succeeds,
And both are openly destroyed before our eyes. (ll.17-26)

When Forster had discussed *Billy Budd* in 1927, he had not engaged with Claggart’s motives for his hatred of Billy at all, summarising only that Claggart “at once sees in him the enemy – his own enemy, for Claggart is evil” (AN98). In his 1947 BBC Book Talk on *Billy Budd*, by contrast, Forster had cautiously suggested to his audience that in deciding to destroy Billy, Claggart was “moved it would seem by reluctant love

as well as by hate" (BBC385). It is tempting to speculate that Forster's move towards addressing the topic of Claggart's love for Billy a little more openly may owe something – whether directly or indirectly – to the influence of Auden's poem: even if Forster will hardly have required Auden's explanation of the dynamics of Claggart's relationship with Billy (which Forster may safely be assumed to have decoded for himself as homoerotic longing in 1926), it might be that Auden's representation helped encourage him to take a small step towards speaking about the unspeakable in his renewed public engagement with Melville's master-at-arms and his mysterious "Natural Depravity" (BB55).

In sections I.4.4. and II.3.8., I have demonstrated that the idea of "reluctant love" (BBC385) can indeed be seen to lie at the heart of Forster's central aria for Claggart – "O Beauty, o handsomeness, goodness" (LIB32f.) – which he considered his "most important piece of writing" (EMFL II:242) in the libretto. Clifford Hindley's examinations of the available source evidence, notably of Forster's letter to Britten of December 1950 (see discussion below), have led him to conclude that to Forster, as the opera's principal librettist, Claggart had from the start represented a "repressed love which goes sour":

[Forster] seems [...] to have reached this view of Claggart at a very early stage, and neither in the monologue nor elsewhere in Claggart's part do successive drafts of the libretto reveal changes of significance on a par with the remarkable developments that can be traced in the evolution of the relationship between Vere and Billy. (1989:364)⁷¹⁹

Writing to Lionel Trilling on 16 April 1949, Forster told the critic: "Claggart came easy – natural depravity, not evil, being the guide – and I have written him a monologue which though akin to Iago's in Verdi's [*Otello*], works out on different

⁷¹⁹The one notable change in Claggart's role concerns the part he plays during the impressment scene. Until as late as the August Draft, it had fallen to the first lieutenant to interview the new recruits, with Claggart enforcing compliance by means of his rattan where necessary (BPL A62:16-18), much as in the present version. Forster's copy of the August Draft shows no changes in the typescript as far as the allocation of parts is concerned (BPL AD-EMF 9-11), which would seem to speak against this change having been the result of his and Britten's joint working session in December 1949. It may be that Claggart only acquired his new verbal (and hence, musical) prominence in this scene as Britten came to compose it; the relevant pages are missing from Britten's copy of the August Draft. Britten as a rule composed chronologically; by 23 April 1950, he had completed what was then Act I (now Act I, Sc. 1) at least as far as the Novice's Dirge (see note 690 and timeline in Appendix B). Claggart's comparatively late rise to verbal prominence in this scene is surprising, but might perhaps be explained as the legacy of Melville's novella, in which Billy is taken off the *Rights-of-Man* by a lieutenant (BB18-22) and "formally mustered" by an unspecified "officer" (BB25). When the opera-makers introduced Claggart into the impressment scene, they evidently thought of him primarily in terms of his role as "chief of police" (BB41) and enforcer of the officers' orders. In the final version, he not only appears more menacing, but arguably comes closer to representing the oppressive forces of institutionalised power, even though he remains subordinate to the officers, who could, by contrast, be seen to represent the 'clean' formal and legal facade of naval authority.

lines” (EMFL II:237). A month earlier, while working on the libretto with Eric Crozier, Forster had written to William Plomer, reporting that “the work proceeds with un hoped-for smoothness” and informing his friend that his editor’s preface to *Billy Budd* had influenced his conception of the character of Claggart:

Notably I have contrived a big monologue for Claggart, being greatly helped thereto by a remark in your preface that “natural depravity” is not the same as absolute evil. We were anxious to avoid competition with Iago’s monologue in Verdi’s *Otello*, and this aids us – Iago being absolutely evil, and quite chirpy in consequence. (Letter to Plomer of 10 March 1949, KCC EMF/18/435/3)

It is possible to connect Forster’s admission of having been “greatly helped” by Plomer’s observation to his first engagement with Melville’s extraordinary villain over twenty years earlier. At that time, Forster had linked Melville’s story with the writings of “other claimants to satanic intimacy” (CPB18) – authors who produced texts containing encoded discourses about homoerotic longing articulated onto a moral paradigm. While Forster had not, at the time, thought to distinguish between Claggart’s “natural depravity” and his “absolute evil”, his 1926 notes can be seen to tap into a web of Forsterian discourses closely concerned with detaching a particular kind of “natural depravity” – homosexuality – from moral categories of sinfulness and evil (see section II.1.). Plomer’s “remark” in his 1946 preface to *Billy Budd* may have inspired Forster to return once more to the chain of associations he had developed in 1926, and to take a decisive step towards identifying “natural depravity” with a “congenital homosexuality” (M156) that could be – and, as Forster had always insisted, had to be – viewed independently of any moral categorising.⁷²⁰

Forster’s letter to Plomer also explains in more detail than his letter to Trilling the difference between Iago and Claggart as he saw it, revealing that Forster had been thinking of Iago’s “Credo”-monologue in Verdi’s *Otello* as something of a negative model against which Claggart’s monologue was to be “contrived”.⁷²¹

⁷²⁰ If, to Eric Crozier, Claggart’s monologue nevertheless always continued to represent “an attempt to present pure evil” (in Wadsworth 14), and if both Crozier and Forster were, in their 1960 radio discussion, to dwell on the collaborators’ lengthy discussions of questions of good and evil (BBC1960:206), as well as on the problem of “making goodness interesting” (BBC1960:198), this would seem to imply that Forster did not abandon the moral discourse which lies at the heart of Melville’s text, and which still occupies a central position in the opera. At the same time, Crozier’s view of Claggart, as well as the points addressed in their discussion, might be taken as evidence that the three collaborators did not communicate all of their ideas about their project to one another (see section III.1.4.).

⁷²¹ Robert Martin has noted that even though Forster “was careful to write [Claggart’s monologue] in such a way to distinguish it from Iago’s aria in *Otello*”, his “effort [...] seems to have been unsuccessful, since almost every reviewer of the opera made the comparison” (1986b:53). Forster himself did not always make it sufficiently clear that he had intended Claggart’s monologue to “work[...] out on different lines” from Iago’s, as he had told Trilling (EMFL II:237): in the opera-makers’ 1960 radio discussion, Forster merely states, somewhat misleadingly, that “in [...] that particular monologue of Claggart – I was thinking a bit of the one in Verdi’s *Otello*, of the Iago monologue” (BBC1960:205).

Iago's monologue in Act II, Sc. 2 of Verdi's opera establishes that Iago sees his (and all of mankind's) evil nature as ordained by a malignant creator, and that, therefore, he has no qualms about sinning. Nor does he need to feel remorse because he does not believe in an afterlife where his actions will be judged: the evil deeds which he commits will find fulfilment in his destiny in this life.⁷²²

By contrast, Forster (following Melville's lead) appears to have been anxious to emphasise Claggart's private torment and inner conflict, rather than to present him as Billy's villainous antagonist who blithely pursues his evil designs while accepting them as simply his destiny. In 1960, he stated that "certainly Claggart is not happy in his evil", clarifying that "certainly he does not enjoy his evil to the extent to which I think Iago enjoys his" (BBC1960:206). Forster's famous letter to Britten of early December 1950, written at the time of his disagreement with the composer over the monologue's musical setting, indicates just how far Claggart is from "enjoy[ing] his evil": he suffers the "passion" of a "love constricted, perverted, poisoned", the experience of which is "agonising" (EMFL II:242). Connecting the moral discourse associated with the operatic Claggart with the encoded discourses about homosexual desire that can also be seen to surround this figure, Robert Martin has concluded that "Forster's Claggart speaks as a Lucifer of thwarted love" (1986b:53).

III.3.2. "Not soggy depression or growling remorse": composer and librettist at odds over the opera's villain

A number of recent critics have laboured under a serious and alarmingly popular misapprehension, namely, the misapprehension that Forster's criticism of Britten's setting of the Claggart monologue would have applied to the passage *as it stands in*

⁷²² The full text of Iago's monologue in Act II, Sc. 2 of Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* (1887, libretto by Arrigo Boito) runs: "Credo in un Dio crudel che m'ha creato simile a se, e che nell'ira io nomo. Dalla viltà d'un germe o d'un atomo vile son nato. Son scelerato perchè son uomo, e sento il fango originario in me. Sì! Quest'è la mia fè! Credo con fermo cuor, sicome crede la vedovella al tempio, che il mal ch'io penso e che da me procede per mio destino adempio. Credo che il giusto è un istrion beffardo e nel viso e nel cuor, che tutto è in lui bugiardo, lagrima, bacio, sguardo, sacrificio ed onor. E credo l'uom gioco d'iniqua sorte dal germe della culla al verme dell'avel. Vien dopo tanta irrision la Morte. E poi? E poi? La Morte è il Nulla, è vecchia fola il Ciel!"
Translation: "I believe in a cruel God who has created me similar to himself, and whom I name but in anger. I am born of the vileness of a germ, or of a base atom. I am a villain [wicked] because I am a Man, and I feel the original mud in me. Yes! This is my faith! I believe with a firm heart, as the young widow believes in the church [temple], that the evil that I think and which proceeds from me will find fulfilment in my destiny. I believe that the Just [God] is a mocking ham actor, both in aspect [in the face] and in the heart, that everything in him is deceitful, tear, kiss, look, sacrifice and honour. And I believe Man to be a game of evil kind from the seed in the cradle to the worm in the tomb. [And finally], after so much mockery comes Death. And then? And then? Death is nothingness, Heaven is an old fairy-tale!"

the finished opera.⁷²³ In fact, however, Forster's criticism was directed at Britten's original intended setting of Claggart's speech. This early version of the aria can be seen to differ drastically from what appears in the opera today, not only in terms of its structural organisation (which forms the main focus of Philip Reed's analysis, see Reed 1995:242-246), but also in melodic content and musical character. The aria in its present form is the result of Britten's decision – not an easy one, and “grudgingly” made (Reed 1995:242) – to rework substantial parts of the original setting.

Chronology

Around the end of August 1950, Britten wrote to Eric Walter White: “Billy progresses apace – I've done Act I & am launched into Act II [Act I, Sc. 2 in the revised two-act version]. Quite pleased” (undated letter, BBLL566). On 20 October, he reported to Crozier that he was “getting on splendidly with Act 2 – very pleased with life” (BBLL618). By 23 November, when Britten and Crozier met up with Forster at Cambridge for a play-through and discussion, Britten had evidently progressed at least as far as the Claggart monologue in what today has become Act I, Sc. 3.⁷²⁴ It was at this meeting that Forster, with whom relations had already been growing strained over the past few months, took exception to Britten's musical setting of the monologue.⁷²⁵ Forster's criticism famously survives in an undated letter to Britten from early December 1950:

It is *my* most important piece of writing and I did not, at my first hearings, feel it sufficiently important musically. [...] 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. I seemed turning from one musical discomfort to another, and was dissatisfied. I looked for an aria perhaps, for a more recognisable form. I liked the last section best, and if it is extended so that it dominates, my vague objections may vanish. “A longer line, a firmer melody” – exactly. (EMFL II:242)

Britten was upset and deeply troubled by Forster's criticism, which evidently threw him into a crisis of uncertainty, as Crozier reported to Nancy Evans:

⁷²³ This group of critics includes Claire Seymour (142f.), Irene Morra (2002:20f. and 2007:112) and – somewhat surprisingly – Donald Mitchell (1993:169, n.17); the notion that Britten refused to re-write Claggart's aria has recently been disseminated by Norbert Abels (17). A possible source for this unfortunate misapprehension may be Crozier's article “The Writing of *Billy Budd*”, in which he comments that his intervention, “so far as I know, settled the matter, and no further consideration was given to the idea of rewriting Claggart's aria” (1986:24). However, the revisions are mentioned in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook* (Reed 1993a:61 and 66), which remains to this day a standard text of *Billy Budd* scholarship, and are discussed in detail in Reed's article “On the Sketches for *Billy Budd*” (1995:242-246).

⁷²⁴ The rest of what was then Act II was to be completed in late December 1950 (see BBLL633 and Reed 1995:242).

⁷²⁵ See section III.1.6. and BBLL618ff., n.1.

Ben has received from Morgan a very deflating letter, full of sharply-pointed darts about *Billy*, and he is still not certain, after long discussion with Peter and with Erwin Stein, how much the criticisms are deserved. So before replying he wants to have a long talk with me and go through some of the music. (Letter of 9 December 1950, Crozier 1986:23)⁷²⁶

It fell to Crozier to “heal this rift” (Crozier 1986:24) by explaining the situation to Forster, who had apparently been unaware of Britten’s extreme sensitivity to criticism. Forster’s reply to Crozier’s warning was conciliatory:

I am most grateful for the hint about Claggart’s monologue. [...] [Ben] took my still stronger representations about the Dirge in Scene 1 so easily that I did not realise that I was here touching him on the raw [...] I think he knows that (except in the two items above) I go with every note he has written. Your suggestion that he should postpone reconsidering the monologue until Act III is done is excellent. (Letter dated to 19 December 1950, EMFL II:243).

Crozier’s suggestion that Britten should lay aside the monologue for the time being was evidently welcomed by the composer, too:⁷²⁷ after Forster’s next visit in Aldeburgh, he reported to Pears with some relief that Forster had been “helpful over Billy, agreeing to postpone Claggart problems” (letter of 28 Jan 1951, quoted in Carpenter 1992:293). By the beginning of April, Britten was able to inform Forster: “I am well satisfied with the progress of Billy. ‘Billy in the Darbies’ is now finished – so, apart from tidying Claggart’s monologue, I have only the last scene to finish” (letter of 4 April 1951, BBLL663).

This final “tidying” – or rather, partial rewriting – of Claggart’s monologue has been dated by Reed to “July 1951 when most of the draft had been completed” (1995:242; see also 1993a:66). Forster’s opinion of the revised aria can only be guessed at from a letter Britten wrote to Erwin Stein in some exasperation after a play-through at Aldeburgh: “I’ve played him [i.e. Forster] Acts II, III, & IV – & apart from excitement about Claggart’s Monologue (rather ironical that!), no comment *at all*, not even of disapproval” (letter of 9 Sept 1951, BBLL677). Forster’s “excitement”, together with the fact that Britten finds this “ironical”, ought probably to be understood as implying that Forster’s reaction was positive, given that he seems to have uttered no “disapproval” at this meeting.

⁷²⁶ Britten usually relied on discussions of his work with his close friends for feedback as well as for emotional support; see note 630.

⁷²⁷ There is evidence that suggests Britten may have entered a first phase of revision, in which he made some changes to the middle section of the passage (see Reed 1995:243), while the December crisis was still acute: Lago and Furbank report that “on 12 December Crozier wrote to Nancy [Evans] that Britten was busy rewriting” (EMFL II:242, n.1). The decision to postpone further work on Claggart’s monologue – which was only completed in July 1951 – may be taken as indicative of the difficulties in which Britten found himself over “this troublesome passage” (Reed 1995:242f.).

III.3.3. “I seemed turning from one musical discomfort to another”: Claggart’s aria, first version

In 1993, Donald Mitchell, evidently unaware of the revision history of the passage in question, wrote that

it was an ironic twist indeed that Forster was particularly proud of the words he had devised for Claggart’s Credo but was himself disappointed by the music Britten wrote for it. It seems hardly credible that someone as musical as Forster (even though his tastes were of a pretty conventional character) should not have heard for himself how successful the music was in exploring the imagery of his own text, endowing it with just those dimensions and characteristics that he claimed not to perceive! (1993:169, n.17)

Mitchell’s surprise at Forster’s failure to appreciate Britten’s setting matches that of most critics – whether aware of the revision history or not – who have commented on Forster’s dissatisfaction with both this aria and the contrapuntal setting of the Novice’s Dirge (see note 631). As always, however, it is necessary to establish what it was that Forster actually heard at the time in order to do justice to his criticism.

Forster had told Britten that he liked “the last section best” (EMFL II:242); and the fact that Britten, apparently in accordance with Forster’s suggestion, worked to expand the latter part of the aria proper,⁷²⁸ might be taken as a clue indicating which section Forster would have been referring to. The “quick and determined” passage in which Claggart explains that he is “doomed to annihilate” Billy, and his exclamation “So may it be”, accompanied by its heavy brass chords (Act I, [107]+1 through [109]-1) have remained virtually unchanged. It was in the following section that Britten considerably rearranged the original text distribution and created, among other things, a more dramatic developmental passage for Claggart’s insistence that “beauty, [...] handsomeness, goodness” are “in my power” and that “nothing can defend you” ([109]-1 through [110]-7). On the whole, however, the changes to the musical material contained in this section are minor compared to the radical re-imagining of the opening passage, in which Claggart exposes the “agon[y]” of his “passion”, of “love constricted, perverted, poisoned” (EMFL II:242). A good part of the new musical material that appears in the revised latter section of the aria can moreover be traced back to this revised opening section; in fact, the final passage (“If love still lives and grows strong” through “That were torment too keen”, [110]+1 up to the General Pause) can be regarded as a quasi-recapitulation of the new opening passage.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁸ The declaratory F minor coda, “I, John Claggart”, etc., was retained in its original form; see section III.3.4. below.

⁷²⁹ Peter Evans has provided a convincing reading of Claggart’s revised aria as a sonata movement, which views the passage in question as a “drastically abridged restatement” (178).

In describing Britten's revisions of Claggart's aria, Reed has focused mainly on the changes which Britten made to the overall structure and the text distribution. His comment that "the revised draft" of the "crucial, revelatory passage" which opens the aria "makes more dramatic use of the identical text" (1995:243) unfortunately fails to convey the drastic musical difference effected by "the newly spun vocal line" (246) which Britten contrived for this section.⁷³⁰ For, once Britten's original vocal line for this opening section is examined, a comparison with the revised version that apparently found Forster's approval reveals what may well have been the very features he took exception to in the early version.

O hand-some-ness, O beau-ty, O good-ness Would that I ne-ver en- coun-tered you!

Would that I lived in my own world al-ways In that de-pra- vi-ty in which I was

born There I found peace— of a sort There I es- tab-lished an or-der

such as reigns— in Hell But a- las, a - las— But a-las, a - las—

⁷³⁰ In her otherwise highly insightful article, Mary Francis, aware of the aria's revision history but apparently relying solely on Reed's description of these revisions, draws a picture of Forster's and Britten's respective views of Claggart from their "struggle over the appropriateness of the music" that appears decidedly skewed. Francis claims that "Claggart is pure evil for Forster", and that "only at the end of the aria does Claggart's vow, 'I will destroy you,' ring out with the kind of determination Forster evidently expected throughout" (58f.; a similar view is advanced by Morra 2007:112). Francis concludes: "Claggart is not, for Britten, a symbol of pure evil with a trumpeting relish for wickedness, but a man, bitter and trapped by his feelings for Billy, which he cannot ever gratify. The 'musical discomforts' Forster heard are Britten's interpretation of the 'sexual discharge gone evil': an ordinary human love cramped and turned destructive" (59). First of all, it seems highly unlikely that Forster was referring to the final six-bar statement ("I, John Claggart", etc.), which hardly qualifies as a "section", when he declared that he "liked the last section best" (EMFL II:242); this passage was moreover never affected by the revisions (see section III.3.4. below). Francis's claim that it was Britten who insisted on providing the element of "an ordinary human love cramped and turned destructive", whereas Forster wanted "pure evil", cannot be upheld in the face of the evidence of Forster's letter, in which he refers to the "agonising" nature of Claggart's "passion" (EMFL II:242), and of his insistence that "Claggart is not happy in his evil" (BBC1960:206). The "musical discomforts", I contend, are to be sought in Britten's early setting of the aria's opening section.

— the light shines— in the dark ness and the darkness com-pre-hends it— and suf- fers.

a- las, a - las— O hand-some-ness, O beau- ty, O good-ness

— would that I'd ne-ver seen you— Would that I'd ne-ver seen you—

Transcript of the vocal line from Britten's holograph draft of Billy Budd, BPL X3:110 (bar 1-3) and discarded leaves presented by Britten to John Culshaw, now Vienna Mus. Hs. 38741:5r and 5v.

As Reed has noted, this vocal line was to be accompanied by a trombone obbligato and string arpeggio figures in a way "loosely similar" to the present-day version (1995:246).

Besides the fact that the opening phrase's word order is slightly different,⁷³¹ it will be noted immediately that Britten's early version of the opening section of Claggart's aria does not feature the repeated fourths of the invocation of "Beauty, handsomeness, goodness", which so characteristically pervade the aria in its present shape, and which also feature so famously in Vere's music whenever he invokes "Beauty, handsomeness, goodness" in his turn. Rather, what characterises this early version of the aria's opening is an obsessive circling movement, involving a motivic cell of a rising minor third and falling tone, with the range of each phrase limited to the interval of a tritone – a choice which can be seen to reflect Britten's typically literal approach to the musical characterisation of evil.⁷³² Although the overall pitch of the music gradually rises to a local climax ("But alas, alas" through "the darkness comprehends it and suffers"), the respective musical phrases themselves always remain within the intervallic constraint of the tritone (A sharp – E, C sharp – G, E – B flat), and without exception end on a falling note, creating an oppressive, claustrophobic atmosphere which might well have been responsible for Forster's impression of "soggy depression or growling remorse", and of "turning from one musical discomfort to another" (EMFL II:242).

⁷³¹ As his 1986 article suggests, Eric Crozier seems never properly to have registered the revisions made to the Claggart aria (see note 723 above); this impression is further strengthened by the fact that in the 1960 radio discussion, he quotes this superseded version of the text (see BBC1960:204).

⁷³² Britten routinely uses the tritone interval, traditionally associated with evil in the musical language of pre-modern music, and popularly termed the 'diabolus in musica', at moments which can be read as literal references to the concept, the presence, or the agency of evil. In *Billy Budd*, it occurs, among other places, at Billy's fatal tongue-tie during the confrontation with Claggart (see section I.5.3.1., p.128f.).

Act I, [105]

ppp

O beau-ty, O hand-some-ness, good-ness, would that I nev-er en - coun-tered you!

Would that I lived in my own world al-ways, in that de-pra-vi-ty___ to which I was born.

There I found peace of a sort. There I es-tab-lished an

[106] *f*

order such as reigns___ in hell. But a-las, a-las!___ the light shines_ in the

dark - ness, and the dark-ness com-pre-hends it and suf - - - fers. O

beau - ty, O hand-some-ness, good-ness, Would that I'd nev-er seen_ you!

più p

Would that I'd nev-er seen_ you!

The vocal line of the revised aria's opening section, transcribed from the revised two-act score.

A comparison between the old and the new vocal lines reveals that, as Reed has remarked, the effects of the new version are indeed “more dramatic” (1995:243). The restrictively framed, obsessively circling musical phrases of the old version are replaced by the famous haunting fourths in the first eight bars. A succession of quicker, shorter units then rises sequentially to an earlier climax on “hell” ([105]+9 through [106]) instead of “alas”. Whereas in the first version, each phrase of Claggart’s lament (“There I found peace of a sort, there I established an order such as reigns in hell”) had ended in a downward movement – suggesting “depression” – the new version ends each sequential step with a rising fourth from which the next

phrase departs yet higher, creating a sense of increasing urgency and desperation, enhanced by a crescendo that culminates in the passionate outbreak “But alas, alas!” – a strikingly lyrical moment, lent additional colour and pathos by the entry of the violins (which complete the presence of the full string section), brass wind chords, and harp arpeggios, and encompassing the entire Forsterian textual leitmotif of the “light” that “shines in the darkness” ([106] through [106]+6). While in Britten’s first version, the latter line had also been accorded a relative prominence in terms of pitch, the melodic shape it is set to ultimately merely reiterates the passage’s basic motivic cell of rising third and falling tone – remaining trapped, it might be felt, in “soggy depression”. The cancelled bar with Britten’s yet earlier version of “But alas, alas”, which returns to a lower register, might even be taken to indicate that Britten had at one point intended not to take the melodic line into a higher register at all.

In comparison with Britten’s original setting of Claggart’s monologue, the new version is revealed as decidedly more dramatic – and thus more in the style of grand opera envisioned by Forster – as it places greater emphasis on the emotional intensity of Claggart’s suffering, which is arguably at its most “agonising” (EMFL II:242) in the expository opening passage. By contrast, the earlier version of this passage might be felt to reflect Britten’s concern with the constrained and obsessive workings of Claggart’s mind, trapped and “recoil[ing] upon itself” (BB59) as it revolves endlessly through the bleak, oppressive pathways of its evil.

III.3.4. Haunting fourths:

Britten, Forster and the musical convergence of Claggart and Vere

As I have stated above, the available records indicate that the revisions of the Claggart aria, during which Britten allocated the haunting fourths to Claggart’s invocations of “beauty, handsomeness, goodness”, took place *after* the completion of the trial scene. This means that the new setting and revised word order post-date Britten’s setting of Captain Vere’s speeches in Act II (then Act III), in which the words “beauty, handsomeness, goodness” had appeared in their present order since the August Draft (BPL A62:61; see Hindley 1989:374), and had been set by Britten to the famous fourths. Given the late time of re-composition, it would thus seem safe to conclude that the “obsessive [...] use of the interval of the fourth and [the] interlocking references to other motivic cells from the opera”, which Reed observes in the aria in its present form (1995:243ff.), were quite probably compositional choices made with hindsight, with the rest of the opera’s musical discourse already definitively fixed in its final shape.

It looks as if Forster’s criticism of the aria’s early version may thus to some extent, if indirectly and unintended by himself, have been responsible for increasing the musical convergence of Claggart and Vere, which has engaged so much critical attention over the past decades. A large part of the convergence effect is, of course, due to the reappearance of Claggart’s characteristic figure of fourths-plus-

tone or semitone in Vere's music – as, for instance, when the captain sees “Beauty, handsomeness, goodness coming to trial” (Act II, [74]) or exclaims “it is for me to destroy you” ([99]+18). This characteristic figure had already appeared in Britten's early version of Claggart's aria, notably in Claggart's concluding declaration “I will destroy you, I will destroy you” (Act I, [111]-4; see Appendix A, Figure 3), which Britten's manuscript shows to have remained untouched by his late revisions (BPL X3:119). However, the falling fourths and the upward-leaping fourths that lead up to the climax of “hell” were clearly not part of Britten's original concept of the opening section of Claggart's aria, onto which the convergence phenomenon was extended retroactively as it were. Vere's musical convergence with Claggart is regularly invoked as evidence in the attempt to differentiate Britten's view of the opera, and of Vere in particular, from Forster's (Britten's being, perhaps with some justification, regarded as the less optimistic and more complex one). Yet it is hardly ever appreciated that this convergence as it manifests itself musically in the opening section of Claggart's central aria appears to have emerged as something of an afterthought on Britten's part, and one which it seems possible he might not have arrived at if it had not been for Forster's objections.

A postscript which Forster added to his critical letter of December 1950 might be taken as a warning against underestimating Forster's grasp of the structural relationship between Claggart and Vere. Returning once more to the subject of Claggart's monologue, he asked whether “it” had “any inverted relationship to Vere's music when he moves towards the inner cabin, end of Act III” (EMFL II:242). Whether it was Forster who thus planted the seed for the characters' later musical convergence in the composer's mind can only be speculated on. Even though the music for the end of the trial scene had not yet been written at the time of Forster's query, it may well have been envisioned already in Britten's mental conception of the opera's overall *gestalt*.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the “relationship” Forster envisions between Claggart and Vere is an “inverted” one, while the musical relation Britten eventually created is to a large extent one of identity. In this respect, Forster's view of Captain Vere is indeed revealed as the more optimistic or naïve one; for if Claggart's love for Billy is “constricted, perverted, poisoned”, and if Vere's feelings are the inverse of Claggart's, Vere and his motives and actions can remain uncontaminated by his position and participation in the oppressive power structures of which Claggart, his nominal opponent, is both the victim and the representative. Such immunity is denied to Vere by the relationship of musical identity created by Britten.

The fact that Forster viewed the “relationship” between Claggart and Vere as “inverted” can be seen to lend weight to Humphrey Carpenter's claim that “Forster wanted *Billy Budd* to be a tract on the redeeming power of homosexual love, with Billy as a specimen of lower-class goodness [...] destroying the ‘perverted’ aspect of homosexuality (Claggart)” (1992:286f.). And yet the vehemence of Forster's engage-

ment on behalf of Claggart, a 'dark' character whose "passion" he wanted to have more adequately represented, could well be taken to suggest that even though he identified Claggart's desire or "love" for Billy as "perverted", this had everything to do with the fact that the "sexual discharge" of that desire "gone evil" had been "constricted" and "poisoned" (EMFL II:242). Given the evidence of the narrative patterns surrounding the 'dark' character type in Forster's other works, there is every reason to suppose that Forster's use of the word "perverted" in this context ought to be assumed to connect Claggart's "perver[sion]" with homophobia, self-suppression and self-hatred, rather than with the fact that he feels homosexually attracted to the radiant young sailor in the first place.

Conclusion and outlook

The collaboration with Britten and Crozier on the opera adaptation of *Billy Budd* provided Forster with welcome and effective relief from a phase of acute depression which had threatened to overwhelm him in 1948. His desolation had arisen from a sense that he might be losing his faith in personal relationships, and it was accompanied by the ever-present fear that his creative energies might run dry.⁷³³ Such a sense of decline had been looming over Forster for years, at least where the subject of his literary creativity was concerned. Five years earlier, in 1943, Forster's friend and partner Bob Buckingham had advanced a "plea" for "one more novel", and Forster had recorded his arguments in his *Commonplace Book*: "Repeat yourself" he said: "it does not matter, so changed are the conditions." "Say again that you believe in human relationships and disbelieve in power" (CPB150f.). Forster's reaction to Buckingham's suggestion was ambivalent and speaks of insecurities and uncertainties on personal as well as on technical levels:

I consider my age 64, my family record of idleness, inability to start, and three years of war which have weighed down my spirits, like everyone's [*sic*] [...]. The plea remains, something which cannot be whittled away or stated in any other words. And my fear that – in spite of success far beyond my hopes and of a gratification far beyond most men's – I haven't fully come

⁷³³ See Furbank II:282.

off, would be laid. [...] I have seen my obstacles: trivialities, learning and poetry. This last needs explaining: the old artist's readiness to dissolve characters into a haze. Characters cannot come alive and fight and guide the world unless the novelist wants them to remain characters. (CPB151)

His work on *Billy Budd* seems in some ways to have been the vehicle for a renewed creative expression by which Forster's "fear" of artistic insufficiency was at least temporarily "laid", and in which the problem of "dissolv[ing] characters" was overcome thanks to the demands for clarity and definiteness imposed by the dramatic medium of opera. At the same time, the Britten/Forster/Crozier opera adaptation of Melville's 'prophetic' "inside Narrative" (BB15) can be seen to have provided a framework which welcomed – or even demanded – a certain amount of poetic dissolution and "haz[y]" indirection, at least where the librettistic delineation of the precise nature of the characters' relations was concerned. As a restatement of Forster's "belie[f] in human relationships" and, by implication, his "disbelie[f] in power" (as encoded in the tragedy of Billy Budd and the salutary 'breaking' of Vere), the *Billy Budd* libretto can furthermore be regarded as a successful confirmation of Buckingham's insight that Forster might as well "repeat [him]self". The Forsterian creed of personal relationships, articulated onto the ethical, personal and political dilemma of a commanding officer forced to decide between the demands of martial law and the demands of his private conscience and sense of justice – not to mention his personal feelings – did indeed appear in a pertinent and newly significant light in the changed "conditions" after World War II. At the same time, this reiteration of Forster's central beliefs is inextricably entwined with the ambiguities inherited with the structure of Melville's story, and equally closely combined with the tensions and ambiguities inherent in Britten's music. The resulting new integral text can thus be seen to possess a multi-layered and multi-faceted complexity which serves to place the opera as an autonomous work of art well beyond the confines of mere Forsterian self-repetition.

Forster, as will be remembered, famously considered the opera "my Nunc Dimittis, in that it dismisses me peacefully and convinces me I have achieved" (letter to Britten of 9 December 1951, EMFL II:246). Where Forster himself is concerned, this "achieve[ment]" might be regarded as marking his transition into the late period of his creativity; for he was to enjoy a busy and productive life for almost another twenty years. As his services as a librettist ceased to be needed in 1950, he set to selecting and preparing for publication a miscellany of his essayistic work (published as *Two Cheers for Democracy* in 1951), a process which necessarily entailed a reviewing of his past literary and critical concerns, but also of his personal preoccupations and beliefs. In the spring of 1951, he furthermore revised the first five chapters of *Arctic Summer* for reading at the Aldeburgh Festival in June; it was from another fragment of this abandoned novel that his late short story "The Other Boat" was to evolve in 1957/58.

In December 1951, Forster witnessed the operatic apotheosis of his creed of salutary personal relationships in general, and of salutary love between men in particular. Even if it was stated obliquely, nevertheless that creed was at last stated publicly. Only a few weeks later, in January 1952, Forster turned once more to revising *Maurice*. Encouraged by Christopher Isherwood, he decided to create a celebration of physically fulfilled love between men in the shape of an entirely new chapter depicting Maurice and Alec's confirmation of their relationship in their hotel room (Ch. XLIV; see Gardner 1999a:xl ff.). The new chapter could be seen to include a textual residue from the *Billy Budd* libretto: as he considers his lover, Maurice, echoing Claggart's first recognition of Billy's singular attraction, describes Alec as "a find in a thousand, the longed-for dream" (M198, my emphasis; compare LIB16).⁷³⁴ The salutary nature of this love, too, is symbolically connected with the image of a ship, but it is a real ship in this story, and one which sails without Alec (Ch. XLV). As Forster explained in a letter to Isherwood, the hotel chapter has Alec full of doubts and anxieties about abandoning his plan to emigrate to Argentina. He hesitates to commit himself to Maurice and to his love, declaring that he "can't", and "daren't"; but "in the boat chapter he has dared, Maurice has won him" (14 January 1952, quoted in Gardner 1999a:xl). Rather than having to console themselves with the mere vision of a "sail of love which isn't Fate" (Forster's "Librettist's Note", BPL A61:50), the lovers are able to remain in England, and to experience the living fulfilment of their salutary relationship.

The opera, 'faithful' to Melville's plot in this respect (as well as, incidentally, conforming to the legal and social interdict against homosexuality), had provided no opportunity for addressing the subject of successful and lasting male/male love relationships, other than by implication through the symbolism of the "land where she'll anchor forever" (LIB63). Yet the fact that Forster began to revise and expand *Maurice* once more soon after the premiere of *Billy Budd* suggests that his collaboration on the opera had inspired him with a renewed interest in the text which so emphatically and explicitly affirmed his belief in homosexual love, and perhaps also with a new sense of its importance as a personal, political and artistic statement. The end of 1952 saw Forster taking what might well be regarded as a small but momentous decision with relation to his 'unpublishable' novel: in October, he entrusted Isherwood with the task of arranging a posthumous publication of *Maurice* in the USA, thus confirming at last that he did in fact wish the novel "to be published sometime, somewhere" (Gardner 1999a:xlif.).

The connection between *Billy Budd* and *Maurice* surfaces once more almost a decade later. In September 1960, Forster, Crozier and Britten met at the composer's house to make their final revisions to the opera, which turned the four-act version into the two-act version. Over three decades separate this, Forster's final creative engagement with Melville's text and the operatic adaptation he had col-

⁷³⁴ I have discussed some further details of textual parallels between the *Billy Budd* libretto and Forster's 1950s revisions to *Maurice* elsewhere; see Rochlitz 53f.

laborated on, from his first encounter with the novella and its characters in 1926. In that same month, Forster also produced a short essay – his “Notes on *Maurice*” – in which he reviewed the text and the characters that had occupied his thoughts for the even longer time span of over four decades.⁷³⁵

What is perhaps most striking about Forster’s 1960 reflections on *Maurice* in the context of their proximity to his re-engagement with *Billy Budd* is that they include a section entitled “Notes on the three men”, in which Forster reviews his construction and treatment of the novel’s three main characters. He observes that Maurice is “finally save[d]” from his “respectable” existence that conforms with stifling social convention by his acceptance of his homosexuality. He also concedes, not without sympathy, that Clive, who has “annoyed” him (i.e. Forster) and consequently gets treated “unfair[ly]” by him, really “intends no evil” after all (1999b:217). As my analyses of Forsterian character types and narrative patterns have demonstrated, these two ‘dark’ characters – both of whom have to struggle with the conflict between their own internalised homophobia and their homoerotic longings in the wider context of a homophobic society – may be seen to possess a number of points of connection with both Vere and Claggart. Alec Scudder, on the other hand, a ‘light’ saviour character who Forster felt “must loom out of nothing until he is everything”, a man who “objected to nothing” and was “capable of loyalty” (218), bears more than just a faint resemblance to the operatic Billy. It might be speculated that Forster’s 1960 return to *Billy Budd*, the work he had considered his “Nunc Dimittis” almost ten years earlier, prompted him to reconsider this other, as yet unacknowledged literary legacy he would be leaving to posterity. *Maurice* would one day be received not just by a readership in the USA, but also by a British readership that had seen the publication of the Wolfenden Report three years previously – even if, in 1960, Forster was inclined to be pessimistic about the prospects of the Report’s recommendations ever affecting the legal situation (220).⁷³⁶

Beyond prompting Forster’s returns to *Maurice* and a general revival of his literary activities, the “achieve[ment]” of his “Nunc Dimittis” may also have had some influence on the themes, structures and textual details which surface in the short stories dating from Forster’s late creative period. After its final restatement in *Billy Budd*, the theme of salvation through personal relationships may indeed be seen to recede in Forster’s fiction in favour of the further exploration of the dynamics of desire and repulsion between ‘dark’ and ‘light’ character types. His librettistic engagement with the relationship between Claggart and Billy, and possibly also with that between Vere and Billy, may to some extent have been responsible for bringing into focus an interest in the more darkly attractive and even destructive side of

⁷³⁵ See Gardner 1999a:xlivf.

⁷³⁶ The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, published in 1957, had recommended the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults.

love and desire. It ought to be stressed here that such an interest can be detected as a latent presence in most of Forster's literary productions; it emerges, for instance, with surprising clarity in one of his very earliest stories, "Ralph and Tony" of 1903. Yet this interest can be seen to have undergone a marked development towards more direct representation in the late fiction, which features some quite explicit engagements with the erotics of violence and antagonistic desire. In "The Other Boat" (1957/58), this engagement assumes the form of tragedy: male/male sexual desire, articulated in terms of eroticised power struggles and physical violence, is portrayed as a destabilising and ultimately self-destroying force which stands in irreconcilable opposition to the social conventions that prohibit it. Yet in "The Torque" (ca. 1958) and "Litte Imber" (1961), two fantasies set respectively in a remote past and a remote future, the link between sexuality and violence is represented as anti-social, destabilising or even 'mutinous' in a positive sense of being revolutionary, liberating, and socially as well as sexually regenerative: both stories conclude on a triumphant note with the establishment of an exuberantly queer libertarian and libertine utopia.⁷³⁷

In 1951, the result of his collaboration with Britten and Crozier left Forster with the happy feeling that he had "achieved". From a literary critical and musicological perspective, the 'achievement' of the Britten/Forster/Crozier opera adaptation of *Billy Budd* can be seen to consist in the creation of an autonomous work of art which can at the same time be seen to possess manifold connections to a wider context of cultural and artistic discourses about social, political and sexual dissent, and to a tradition of literary and artistic engagements with the subject of erotically charged relationships between men. Perhaps most interesting in this respect is the realisation of just how far the opera *Billy Budd* can, similarly to Melville's novella, be read as a queer challenge to a normative system of authority based on the suppression and strict policing of emotional bonds between men. In my explorations of the discursive parallels between the themes of mutiny and homoerotic longing in the opera *Billy Budd*, I have demonstrated that the leitmotivic structures of the opera's music can be seen to reinforce the slippage between discourses about social and sexual control and dissent that can be detected in the libretto.

The opera can furthermore be regarded as a central node in an extensive intertextual web that connects Melville's story, Forster's own literary work, and Britten's artistic oeuvre on a number of different levels and in various complex ways. From the point of view of Forster scholarship, a wealth of insight into the themes and patterns of Forsterian literary creation can be gained from Forster's creative involvement in the adaptation of Melville's story, as my extensive textual analyses

⁷³⁷ For the sake of completeness, it should be noted here that the queer utopian visions which stand at the end of these respective stories privilege a decidedly male-oriented and more or less heavily misogynist perspective: both narratives explicitly assert male victories over a female predominance which is cast as repressive but ultimately ineffective.

have demonstrated. This is not least due to the fact that adaptations are by their very nature *declared* responses to an adapted text – what Linda Hutcheon has described as “deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works” (xiv). Forster’s well-documented collaboration with Crozier and Britten on the *Billy Budd* libretto provides us with the singular opportunity of tracing his creative interventions and librettistic ‘rescue operations’ *as* interventions, (re)interpretations, and re-creations. The comparison of the libretto with Forster’s literary oeuvre allows us to recognise and analyse the narrative patterns which were substituted for Melville’s; in this process, it becomes possible not only to read and interpret the libretto as a genuinely Forsterian work, but to gain some understanding as to why Forster in particular would have found it necessary to embark on these interventions and rescue operations in the first place. Taken in conjunction with Forster’s earlier documented interpretations of Melville’s novella, the evidence of my textual analyses reveals the multiple levels on which the *Billy Budd* libretto can be regarded as shaped by the pervasive influence of the Forsterian creed of salutary personal relations, which tends to manifest itself in Forster’s fiction in the shape of distinct and relatively fixed character constellations, themes, and narrative patterns. My analyses of pan-Forsterian textual leitmotifs show just how consistently the manifestations of central Forsterian themes are marked by key words and phrases that recur throughout his entire literary work. The reappearance of virtually all of these textual leitmotifs in the *Billy Budd* libretto indicates the extent to which the libretto represents Forster’s creative appropriation and assimilation of Melville’s story into the framework of his own personal and artistic concerns and modes of expression.

At the same time, the *Billy Budd* libretto can be made to assume the function of a key text which can be used to reveal the narrative patterns in other Forster works more clearly. In the special case of “Arthur Snatchfold”, a comparison of its ‘dark’ protagonist Conway with the figure of Melville’s Vere and with the Vere of the libretto even makes it possible to view Forster’s 1928 short story as an early creative response to Melville’s *Billy Budd*. Forster’s careful construction of Conway’s dilemma can be seen to foreshadow the opera-makers’ later attempts to exculpate the captain, while the earlier story’s explicitly homosexual theme can in turn be drawn on to elucidate and complicate the operatic Vere’s relationship with his handsome saviour Billy Budd.

Comparing the *Billy Budd* libretto to other works by Forster also serves to throw fresh light on the irresolvable tensions, problems and conflicts which critics have been detecting in Forster’s stories and novels for many years, particularly where the claims to the validity of various ‘dark’ middle-class characters’ salvation made by these narratives are concerned. The struggle to turn Vere from an ‘odious’ character into a tragic protagonist and to assert his salvation can be seen to have assumed an increasing importance over the successive stages of the *Billy Budd* libretto’s genesis. Contrary to the prevailing critical view that it was Britten who

was mainly responsible for introducing the crucial changes made to the character of the captain after August 1949 – a view based largely on Clifford Hindley’s pioneering but unfortunately limited 1989 analyses of the libretto drafts – my detailed re-examination of the currently available material in its entirety suggests that Britten and Forster collaborated closely on the greater part of these changes. Made very probably in December 1949, they serve to establish Vere’s intense private anguish and despair, as well as his sense of personal responsibility for Billy’s death. Vere’s painful acknowledgement of his own human failure is recognisable as the ‘breaking’ of the ‘dark’ character, which is one of the most crucial features of the Forsterian salvation narrative, and which can arguably be seen to be the validating element in Vere’s progression from “confusion” in the Prologue to the sense he expresses in the Epilogue of having been “blessed” and “saved” by Billy. To acknowledge Forster’s close involvement in the introduction of these changes is at last to debunk the paradoxical view – popular in recent *Billy Budd* criticism – which has been holding Britten responsible for creating, as Allen Frantzen has put it, “a better rendering of Forster’s intention than Forster himself seems to have achieved” (64).

Britten’s and Forster’s collaborative consensus over the wording of the libretto notwithstanding, the finished opera as a whole can nevertheless be seen to remain ambivalent about the question of Vere’s salvation; and this is largely due to the rich indeterminacies provided by Britten’s music. As Britten scholars have been establishing in ever-increasing detail for at least three decades, the opera’s musical discourse can be seen to resist, qualify, and even contradict the assertions of closure and certainty made by the libretto with regard to the theme of salvation, and of Vere’s salvation in particular. This is often viewed as expressive of Britten’s more uncertain, and, by implication, less naïve approach to a subject matter centred on an irresolvable ethical conflict. The opera adaptation of *Billy Budd* can be and has been linked with Britten’s various other critical artistic engagements with the theme of power and authority, and with the problems and conflicts that have to be faced by the representatives of authority – a concern which regularly emerges in his artistic output, and which lies at the heart of *Gloriana* (1953), his next opera after *Billy Budd*.

The musical discourse of *Billy Budd* may and indeed should be taken to represent Britten’s very own view of the story and its characters – both as they appear in Melville’s novella and as re-interpreted, with his personal collaboration, in the libretto. His musical interpretation of the latter may well include elements of resistance to, and shrewd interrogation of, his septuagenarian librettist’s final reiteration of his creed of salutary personal relations between men. Yet it ought also to be remembered that the tensions and moral ambiguities which result from the narratively ‘enforced’ salvation of a ‘dark’ middle-class protagonist – a salvation which often (but by no means always) involves the sacrificing of a ‘light’ Other saviour character – have long been identified as an underlying and irresolvable problem of many Forster texts. That the aged Forster himself was not unaware of

this problem is suggested by his comment, made in 1958, that “the theme of salvation, the rescuer from ‘otherwhere’, the generic Alec [...] was a fake” (Furbank II:303). Dating from three decades before that, “Arthur Snatchfold”, which is far from unambiguous in its assertion of the ‘dark’ character’s salutary experience, and has prompted what may well be some of the most violent reactions in Forster criticism, can be regarded as a prime example for the many-layered complexities of Forster’s own struggles with the problems of narrative authority.

Viewed in this light, the perceptible tensions between the opera’s verbal and musical discourses, which serve to emphasise the ambiguity of Vere’s position and to suggest the ultimate uncertainty of his salvation, might be regarded as nothing more and nothing less than the articulation, in musical terms, of an irresolvable problem which is itself, however, a typical feature of Forsterian fiction, *especially* of those texts which, following the structure of the Forsterian salvation narrative, assert narrative closure in the shape of a ‘dark’ character’s sobering but salutary experience of personal connection with a ‘light’ saviour character. Furthermore, beyond the confines of the opera itself, Britten’s musical questioning of Vere’s interpretation of Billy’s sacrifice could be read as a general challenge to public and authoritarian, as well as private and individual, self-justification and myth-making – a challenge of which Forster, ever aware of the frailties and self-delusional tendencies of human nature even while most urgently proclaiming his belief in the salutary nature of personal relations, would have whole-heartedly approved.

Appendix A: Musical examples

Figure 1: The Mutiny Cluster

Fifth plus semitone Fifth plus tone

Act I, [3]+2

VERE *passionately*
O what have I done —

Act I, [5]

TENORS *dragging*
pp O heave! — O heave a - way, heave! O heave! —

Act I, [67]+1

SAILING MASTER *freely, mezza voce*
pp Spit-head, The Nore, the floa - ting re - pub-lic —

Act I, [117]

OBOE 1
pp *very short*

NOVICE
pp
It's un - just, it's un-fair!

Act I, [10] "Naval Discipline" motif

FLUTES *f*
trem. (12) (6)

1. & 2. TRUMPET in C

Act I, [66]

CLAGGART [coloration]
pp cresc. Wil-iam Budd, I — ac - cuse you

Figure 2: The Mutiny motif as a marker of threatening personal destabilisation

Act I, [101]+1
CLAGGART

And hand-some is _ as hand-some did it, too _

BASS CL., BSN., D. BSN., HARP, VC., DB.

pp sonorous

Act II, [44]-2
CLAGGART

Ah! _ Pleas-ant looks, _ good tem-per, they're but a mask, he is deep, deep! _

_ You do but note his outwards, the flower of mas - culine beauty and strength.

Figure 2a: Billy's singular beauty

Act I, [29]+4
CLAGGART

A find _ in a thou - sand, your ho-nour

CLAGGART

Act II, [44]+4 the flower of mas - cu-line beauty and strength.

Act II, [86]

BILLY

1st LIEUT.

Why should the mas-ter-at - arms ac-cuse you wrong-ful-ly?_ Why?

Don't know, don't know such things. Ask Cap - tain Vere

Figure 3: Claggart's falling fourths plus rising semitone or tone

Act I, [111]- 4

CLAGGART

And I will des-troy you,___ I will des - troy you

Act I, [36]+5

CLAGGART

And oh, the fools !___

Figure 4: The Interview Chords, Act II, Sc. 2, [102]

Brass Tutti W.W. Str. W.W.& Hns. Tutti Str. W.W. Brass

f ff mf p mf fff mf p pp

F maj A maj D flat maj C maj D min A flat maj D maj B flat min A min

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Hns. W.W. Hns. Str. Fl. & Brass W.W. Str. Brass W.W.

pp p pp p f mf p pp ppp

B flat maj A flat maj F min C maj F sharp min B flat maj C min A maj F maj

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

Hns. W.W. Brass W.W. Hns. Brass W.W. Str.

pp ppp pp ppp pp mf pp ppp

C maj F maj D maj F maj C maj F sharp min F maj A flat maj

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26

W.W. Hns. Str. W.W. Hns. W.W. Brass (con sord.) Hns. **Scene 3**

pp ppp ppp pp ppp ppp ppp ppp

F maj C maj D flat maj F maj C maj F maj D maj C maj ⇨ F maj

27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34

Appendix B: E. M. Forster and *Billy Budd*: timeline

- 1926** Forster reads John Freeman's newly-published study *Herman Melville* and is "indebted" to Freeman "for knowledge of" *Billy Budd* (AN97, n.1). Forster reads the novella in preparation for his Cambridge Clark lectures, makes notes in Commonplace Book (CPB17f).
- 1927**
- Jan 21-
Mar 11 Forster delivers eight Clark Lectures (Stape 95f.)
Oct 20 *Aspects of the Novel* published by Arnold (London) and Harcourt, Brace & Co. (New York).
- 1947**
- Feb 11 Forster records BBC Book Talk "Some Books" (*Billy Budd*); it is broadcast on the Eastern Service on 12 Feb and repeated on other services during the following week (BBC384).
- 1948**
- Jun 3-9 Forster at Aldeburgh (LD105), gives lecture on "George Crabbe and Peter Grimes" at first Aldeburgh Festival. Possibility of Forster's writing a libretto for Britten is discussed (BBLL410, n.5).
- Jun 20 Forster to Britten: "I shall be very glad dear Ben to discuss the libretto question" (BBLL410, n.5).
- Aug 17-22 Forster at Aldeburgh (BBLL410, n.5).
- Sep 16 Forster at Aldeburgh (letter to Bob Buckingham, KCC EMF/18/82).
- Sep 20 Forster at Aldeburgh (postcard to Buckingham, KCC EMF/18/82).
- Oct Forster suffers phase of severe depression (Furbank II:282).
- Oct 8 "My worst trouble [...] is that I have got tired of people and personal relationships. [...] I feel scared. If human beings have failed me, what is left?" (LD106f).
- Nov 5 Forster expected at Aldeburgh "in a day or so again" (letter from Britten to Elizabeth Mayer, BBLL455).
- Nov 11 Forster to Britten: "I *have* read *Billy Budd*, and did once broadcast on it" (BBLL411, n.5; Reed 1993a:45).
- Nov 30 Forster at Aldeburgh (postcard to Bob Buckingham, KCC EMF/18/82).
- Nov/Dec Crozier is summoned to the first *Billy Budd* meeting at Aldeburgh. The product of this are the so-called 'Earliest Materials': Britten's lists of the characters and plot events of *Billy Budd*, and a sketch of

- the *Indomitable* (Crozier 1979:31f.; for a discussion of the varying accounts of the chronology of the *Billy Budd* meetings, see p.462f.).
- Dec 20 Forster writes to Britten about his ideas on realism and the use of a chorus in the projected opera, stating that “the well-informed commentator, the person or personages outside time, would not here be suitable. [...] I do not altogether agree with the three of you – formidable thought” (EMFL II:235; see p.461).
- 1949**
- Jan (mid) Forster, Britten and Crozier at Aldeburgh for second *Billy Budd* meeting. They produce the five-scene “working synopsis” (Crozier 1979:32) known as the First Rough Synopsis (see p.463).
- Jan 18 Forster at Aldeburgh (letter to Bob Buckingham, KCC EMF/18/82).
- Jan 20 Britten to Ralph Hawkes: “E. M. Forster has been here for a few days & the plans for the libretto of the big opera for 1951 are going ahead” (BBLL479f.).
- Jan 27 Forster sends first draft of Vere’s prologue to Crozier (reproduction on BBLL482)
- Mar 2-16 Forster at Aldeburgh (Stape 149) for the third *Billy Budd* meeting with Crozier and Britten. Following Crozier (1986:16), BBLL496, n.2 has 2-15 March. Forster and Crozier produce their first complete libretto draft, subsequently to become the typed March Draft. On 12 April, Forster looks back on “sixteen remarkable Billy Budd days at Aldeburgh” in his Locked Diary: “Even if I achieve no more the scene is set” (LD108).
- May 13 Forster writes to Crozier reporting on his reading of F. B. Freeman’s 1948 edition of *Billy Budd* (KCC: EMF/18/135).
- May 19 Forster departs for the USA (Stape 149).
- Jun 14 Forster returns to England (Stape 149).
- Aug 8 Forster goes to Aldeburgh for several weeks to work with Britten and Crozier on the *Billy Budd* libretto; the result of their work is the August Draft (Reed 1993a:56).
- Sep 8 Ghedini’s *Billy Budd* premieres in Venice. Boosey & Hawkes subsequently obtain a copy of the libretto for Crozier (Reed 1993a:57).
- Oct 23 The August Draft, typed by Crozier, is sent to Forster and to Britten who is on a concert tour in the USA (BBLL547, n.7).
- Nov 5 Britten to Erwin Stein (from New York): “WHERE is BILLY BUDD?? I am getting really desperate about it – I’d hoped to start writing in December, but this delay makes that quite unlikely” (BBLL551).
- Nov 30 Britten writes to Eric Crozier (from Los Angeles), acknowledging the receipt of the *Billy Budd* libretto (BBLL556).
- Dec 1 Forster writes to Crozier to thank him for receipt of Quasimodo’s libretto for Ghedini’s opera *Billy Budd* (KCC EMF/18/135), and in-

- forming him that during his Christmas sojourn at Aldeburgh, he and Britten will be doing some more work on their libretto: “I propose to write in the ‘articles of war’ speech and fill in any other gaps, with Ben’s help” (BLL559, n.2).
- Dec 10 Britten and Pears return from the USA (Reed 1993a:57).
- Dec 16 Britten to Mary Behrend: “I am down here now with E. M. Forster – working terrifically hard on *Billy Budd*” (BLL559, n.2).
- Dec Britten to Nancy Evans & Crozier undated, from Aldeburgh: “Morgan & I work on hard - & hope to have lots of improvements to show you soon. [...] Morgan is in touch with the Admiralty about Articles of War.” (BLL559).
- Dec Forster at Aldeburgh for Christmas period (Reed 1993a:58).
- 1950**
- Jan 1 Forster to Kenneth Harrison: “We redid and finished the libretto” (KCC EMF/18/247).
- Feb 3 Britten to Henriëtte Bosmans: “I have today written the first notes of the new opera” (BLL576).
- Mar 16 Forster at Aldeburgh, convalescing from prostate operation (Letter to Harrison, KCC EMF/18/247).
- Mar 17 Forster convalescing at Aldeburgh (BLL582).
- Mar 24 Forster convalescing at Aldeburgh; Britten invites Marion Harewood: “Morgan is better, but it would do him the world of good to have you here to cheer him up. You could also see how *Billy Budd* goes on. Towards the end of April perhaps?” (BLL585).
- Apr 23 Forster writes to Bob Buckingham from Aldeburgh, recording his “first difference of opinion” with Britten “over the dirge for the Novice” (quoted in Hindley 1989:365, n.10; see p.477).
- Apr 26 Forster writes to Eric Fletcher from Aldeburgh, recording visits from the Harewoods, the Steins and Bob Buckingham (EMFL II:240).
- May 1 Forster goes back to London (Letter of 30 April from Britten to his sister Barbara, BLL587).
- Jun 22 Forster lectures on the poet John Skelton at Aldeburgh Festival (BLL544, n.4).
- Jun 27 Forster still at Aldeburgh, will stay on at Britten’s house while Britten and Pears are engaged elsewhere (Postcard to Kenneth Harrison, KCC EMF/18/247).
- Aug 11 Forster at Aldeburgh (Letter to Harrison, KCC EMF/18/247).
- Aug Forster “left Aldeburgh a little earlier than I might”, dissatisfied with Britten, who has other engagements and cannot work on *Billy Budd* with him (LD113).

- Aug 20 Britten to Crozier: "As you probably know I'm having a bit of a worry with Morgan, who can't quite understand my method of work!" (BBLL611).
- Aug 23 Britten to Ralph Hawkes: "Act I is satisfactorily done, & Act II beginning well" (BBLL606).
- Aug (end) Britten to Eric Walter White: "Billy progresses apace – I've done Act I & am launched into Act II" (BBLL566).
- Oct 20 Britten to Crozier: "I'm getting on splendidly with Act 2 – very pleased with life" (BBLL618).
- Nov 23-24 Britten and Crozier meet Forster at Cambridge; Forster criticises Britten's setting of the Claggart monologue (BBLL618ff., n.1).
- Early Dec Forster writes to Britten, explaining his dissatisfaction with Britten's setting of the Claggart monologue in more detail (EMFL II:242f.; see p.547).
- Dec 12 Crozier writes to Nancy Evans that Britten is "busy rewriting" (EMFL II:242, n.1).
- Dec 14 Britten to Forster: "Act II is nearly done. I've had some trouble with Novice & Billy, but got that one solved, & want to talk my solution over with you some time. Perhaps you'll come here early in the new year?" (BBLL633).
- Dec 19 Forster to Crozier: "Your suggestion that [Britten] should postpone reconsidering the [Claggart] monologue until Act 3 is done is excellent" (EMFL II:243).

1951

- Jan 5 Britten to Pears: "I've started Act III & am quite excited by it." Reports his plan to "do a bit of work on the great Battle scene" with Crozier (BBLL635).
- Jan 26-31 Forster at Aldeburgh; Crozier joins him and Britten on 28-30 Jan (BBLL633, n.3).
- Jan 28 Britten to Pears: "[Forster] is [...] helpful over Billy, agreeing to postpone Claggart problems" (Carpenter 1992:293).
- Feb 11 Britten writes to Forster expressing his pleasure and relief over having found, in Kenneth Harrison, someone capable of providing the hitherto still missing shanty texts (BBLL643f.).
- Feb 12 Britten to Crozier: "finished Act III sc. I & am now launching into sc. II!" (BBLL645).
- Feb 18 Forster writes to Eric Fletcher, reporting that he plans to read from his unfinished novel *Arctic Summer* at the Aldeburgh Festival (KCC EMF/18/184).
- Feb 24-25 Forster at Aldeburgh to join a weekend house party which included a play-through of *Billy Budd* up to and including Act III Sc. 1 (BBLL654, n.2, and 655; see also note 658).

- Mar 2 Britten writes to Kenneth Harrison to express his great satisfaction with his shanty texts, and to request some more (BBLL657f).
- Mar 4 Britten to Marion Harewood: “Budd goes on apace – murder over, & I’m well on” (Reed 1993a:63).
- Mar 16 Britten to Pears: “Work is going on slowly but steadily towards the end of the Act [III]” (BBLL661).
- Mar 18 Britten to Pears: “I’ve finished Act III [...] & I’m well into Act IV!” (BBLL661f, n.1).
- Mar 25 Britten to Lord Harewood: “finished Act IV Scene II – only one more scene!” (BBLL664, n.2).
- Apr 4 Britten to Forster: “‘Billy in the Darbies’ is now finished – so, apart from tidying Claggart’s monologue, I have only the last scene to finish” (BBLL663).
- Jun 10 Forster reads the newly revised first five chapters of *Arctic Summer* at the Aldeburgh Festival (Heine 1980:xi).
- Jul Britten revises Claggart monologue (Reed 1995:242).
- Aug 8 Forster writes to Britten discussing changes to Epilogue and “Billy’s last cry” (KCC: EMF/18/71; see also Reed 1993a:67 and p.521f.).
- Aug 10 Britten finishes the composition draft (BBLL676, n.8).
- Aug 22 Britten reports to Eric Walter White that “the sketches have been complete some time, the vocal score is nearly finished – & already more than half in print – the orchestral score going on well – but o, o, what an awful lot of notes” (BBLL674).
- Sept 9 Britten to Erwin Stein: “I’ve played [Forster] Acts II, III, & IV – & apart from excitement about Claggart’s Monologue (rather ironical that!), no comment *at all*, not even of disapproval!” (BBLL677).
- Sep 23 Forster writes to Crozier, referring to plans of publishing a modified reading version of the *Billy Budd* libretto with Edward Arnold (London) and Harcourt, Brace & Co. (New York) (KCC: EMF/18/135).
- Nov 2 Britten finishes full score (Reed 1993a:69).
- Dec 1 Crozier’s Radio talk “Writing an Opera” broadcast on BBC Third Programme (6.40-6.58 p.m.).
Billy Budd premieres at Covent Garden.
- Dec 7 Britten writes letters of thanks to Forster (BBLL682) and Crozier (BBLL698; see p.479f.).
- Dec 9 Forster writes to Britten expressing his joy about the achievement of the collaboration (“Nunc dimittis” letter; see p.480).
- 1952**
- Jan-Feb Forster engages on important revisions of *Maurice*, encouraged by Christopher Isherwood. These include the hotel chapter (Ch. XLIV; Gardner 1999a:xl ff.).

- Mar 14 Forster writes to Crozier, informing him that their plans of publishing a reading version of the *Billy Budd* libretto will finally have to be abandoned (KCC: EMF/18/135).
- 3 Oct Forster writes to Isherwood, offering to entrust him with the posthumous publication of *Maurice* in the USA (Gardner 1999a:xliv).
- 1957** Wolfenden Report published.
- 1957/58** Fragment of *Arctic Summer* developed into “The Other Boat” (Heine 1980:xi and xxiii).
- 1960**
- Sep Forster writes his “Notes on *Maurice*” (Stape 157).
- Sep 13-14 Forster and Crozier meet with Britten at Aldeburgh for *Billy Budd* revisions (Reed 1993b:75).
- Nov 8 Revised version of *Billy Budd* recorded at the Camden Theatre, with Britten conducting and Pears singing Vere (Reed 1993b:78).
- Nov 13 Revised version of *Billy Budd* premieres as BBC Third Programme radio broadcast.
- 1963**
- Nov 22 Forster publishes the first chapter of *Arctic Summer*, revised for reading at 1951 Aldeburgh Festival, as “*Arctic Summer*: Fragment of an Unfinished Novel” in *A Tribute to Benjamin Britten on his Fiftieth Birthday* (ed. by Anthony Gishford, London: Faber).
- 1964**
- Jan 9 Forster and Crozier attend the premiere of the revised *Billy Budd* at Covent Garden (conducted by Sir Georg Solti) and take bows on stage (Stape 159).
- Jan 12 Forster sends Crozier a copy of his letter to the *Times* in which he reprimands the paper’s music critic for his failure to appreciate his and Crozier’s librettistic contribution to the opera in his review (Crozier 1986:26).
- Feb 29 In his diary, Forster records *Billy Budd* as one of his “good reasons for pleasure” (LD154).

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E. M. Forster first encountered *Billy Budd* in 1926. Some twenty years later, he embarked on a collaboration with Benjamin Britten and Eric Crozier, adapting Melville's novella for the opera stage. The libretto they produced poignantly reaffirms the Forsterian creed of salvation through personal relationships.

This study presents an extensive exploration of Forster's involvement in the interpretation, transformation and re-creation of Melville's text. It situates the story of the Handsome Sailor in the wider context of Forster's literary oeuvre, his life, and his life writings. In detailed readings, *Billy Budd* becomes a lens through which the themes, patterns and leitmotifs of Forsterian thought and creative imagination are brought into focus. A close re-examination of the libretto sketches serves to shed new light on the collaborative process in which Melville's story was changed to fit an archetypal array of plot and character types that is central to Forster's own storytelling.

