Billy Budd as a Mock-Hagiology:
Accusation against the Patriarchs by Melville, a Psychologically Battered Child Budding into a Sanctimonious Child-Beater

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“The Chipmunk”

Crickling, cracking
Gleefully!
But, affrighted
By wee sound,
Presto! vanish -
Whither Bound?

So did Baby,
Crowing mirth
E’en as startled
By some inkling
Touching Earth,
Flit (and whither?)
From our hearth!

**Introduction. Uncompromising Dichotomy in the Paterfamilias**

In 1842, a mutiny broke out on an American brig called the *Somers*, fore-running the February Revolution to take place in France in 1848. The *Somers* was a training ship with a crew of ninety-six trainees—all of them underage and deft of experience at sea—and two officers over twenty-one. One of the officers, Captain Mackenzie, had the typical 19th century middle-class mindset—a mindset that gravitated to reform school, prison, and asylum; toward making the *Somers* “a school ship... worked only by boys” (Rogin 81). This paternalistic idea won the approval of another officer, Guert Gansevoort, Melville’s cousin and the most successful male clan member of Melville’s generation. Gansevoort explained the mutiny thus in a letter to his mother (qtd. in Rogin 81): “[to] those apprentices, those children, entrusted to the care of the officers... I had pledged myself, to extend parental care and advice...” Before boarding the *Somers*, John Spencer, the ringleader of the mutiny, had previously gotten away with the crime of striking a superior officer without receiving the usual punishment (death), probably because he was the son of a state Supreme Court justice Ambrose Spencer, one of the dozen most prominent New Yorkers at that time. The nepotism must have infuriated Captain Mackenzie, who remained stuck to his belief in political equality, who undervalued Spencer’s aristocratic descent, and who pronounced upon Spencer, the ringleader, a sentence of death. At a time when meritocracy and bureaucratic hierarchy were every now and then marred and spoiled by nepotism and “aristocratic awning,” as illustrated in Melville’s *White-Jacket* (1850) (113), there must have been a good many captains who, like Mackenzie, aspired towards the hastily defined ideal of a captain devoted to disinterested service. Affectionate fatherly officer though he might have been, Captain Mackenzie, wanted to be loyal to the discipline and thus a rigorously fair paternal figure. This is not to say that Mackenzie had not exploited his own family connections: the captain made full use of his family’s influences and even promoted the nephew of Admiral Perry in order to secure his own promotion [without doing so, Mackenzie, an ex-merchant ship sailor, would never have been brought into the navy or quickly promoted there] (Rogin 82).
The patriarchy, a system modeled after the allegedly father-dominated Victorian middle-class families and accoutered with the navy from the 18th century to the 19th century, conjures associations of sea captains as father-figures, and stirs confusion as to where to draw the line between warships and family yachts. In *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)* (1924), Herman Melville (1819–91) dramatizes the Somers affair and describes Captain Vere as “old enough to have been Billy’s father” (115). Judging from his change of tone in ordering Billy to explain his reason for killing Claggart, Vere seems to be both a rigorous authoritative father and affectionate benevolent father at the same time. Vere says, “Speak, man! ... Speak! Defend yourself!” (98), but then, as if soothing and calming his favorite son, goes on to say, “There is no hurry, my boy. Take your time, take your time” (99). When he takes on the task of informing Billy of the death sentence, “the austere devotee of military duty, letting himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalized humanity, may in the end have caught Billy to his heart . . . .” (115). Yet, thanks to the strict regimentation and authoritarianism, Vere can enjoy his status as the law enforcer and preside over the lives and deaths of his crew. The impressment to which he resorts, and his exclamation, “Would it be so much we ourselves that would condemn as it would be martial law operating through us?” (110), bring to light the essential but hidden nature of patriarch(y). These dual natures of the patriarch must have been nagging to Melville as if substantiating that it is the imposition of male authority that lies at the heart of Western history, the author more often than not referred to old testament stories where a patriarchal religion “was supplanting the older customs and replacing the benign phallus with the wrath of Jehovah” (Martin 93).

In deciphering *BB*, it may be crucial to understand that the Somers affair, the incident referred to in the story and one of the driving factors for Melville, clearly reflects his obsession with the question of how a benevolent father should behave as well as his wavering answers to that question. “To the childless captain”, “Billy is in some ways a son” (Reich 136) and *Billy Budd* is “a legend” of “reconciliation between an erring son and a stern but loving father-figure,” according to Simon Lesser (92), who relies, in his analysis, on the Freudian assumption that those forgiving fathers are ideal benefactors. If this is so, could Vere ever be such an ideal father? Is Vere anything other than the very culprit
for the tragedy? The scholars, Merlin Bowen, John W. Rathbun, Ralph W. Willet, Joyce Sparer Adler, James R. Hurtgen, and Brook Thomas, to name a few, have repeatedly blamed Vere for his conservatism and hidden eagerness for fame. Their criticisms are best summarized by C. B. Ivis, who writes (93), “Billy’s destruction was doomed not only by the abnormal malevolence of Claggart but also by the abnormal ‘inside narrative’ of Vere’s extraordinary ‘priestly motive.’” Regrettably, these scholars do not seem to completely disentangle the complexity of the relation between Vere’s unrealized dream and his ambiguous masculinity. Another question arises: Was the author a commendable father? Some critics point out this problem without satisfactorily elaborating their arguments: Elizabeth Renker describes Melville’s autocratic side in his marital life but fails to fully explain his conflict with his brother, a conflict that appeared to stem from the problem. Edwin Haviland Miller is erroneous in ignoring the (im)possible rapport between Melville and his first-born son Malcolm, and also in reaching his rather hasty conclusion that Melville had no affection for Malcolm (318-21); Henning Cohen and Donald Yannella, perhaps overestimating Melville’s affection for his first-born, make no mention of the impact, on Melville, of the death of his second-born; and Joseph Adamson is sharp sighted in indicating the author’s deep-rooted psychological problem with his parents’ favoritism for his elder brother, but he disregards what develops in Melville’s relationship with his own sons later in the author’s life.

My primary purposes of this paper are therefore twofold. First, by exposing the fatal blunders Vere commits in his conscious and unconscious attempts to be a patriarchic captain, and thus by undermining his qualification as a heroic masculine father figure, I will refute the simplistic interpretation of *Billy Budd* as a tale of a forgiving father [Vere] and an erring son [Billy]. Second, I will delve into what prompts the author to dwell on the problem of (un)patriarchic father. The solutions to my first purpose will furnish steppingstones to my second.

In analyzing Melville’s *BB*, I have taken the stance of Donna J. Haraway’s feministic way of defining “objectivity,” that is, “objectivity” defined as “situated and embodied knowledge” (189). Though Haraway partly concurs with the self-professed post-modern critics who argue that the view that observing/narrating/interpreting comes under (in)direct influence of ideology/power/prerogative/violence, she resolutely opposes their idea of “death of the subject/author.”
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Spurning the idea that the nodal point of author’s will and consciousness has disappeared she admonishes us not to *innocently* stay in the peripheries and the depth. She writes: “Here lies a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions” (191).

I. Melville: a Doting Father and Disciplinarian

Thanks to the efforts of Cohen and Yannella, we are enabled to read the annotated Melville Family Papers. Included among them are an impressive excerpt that compels me to agree with Paul McCarthy in postulating that Melville, in authoring *BB*, “tried to *resolve* the ironies and complexities of the father-son relationships that in actual life more often than not he handled ineptly” (126) (my italics). The following is an excerpt of the most impressive part extracted from the letter in question [Feb. 20th, 1849]: “Lizzie [Melville’s wife] is doing well, —also the phenomenon [referring to Malcolm], which weighs I know not how many pennyweight, —I would say, hundred-weight. —We desired much to have him weighed, but it was thought that no hay-scales in town were strong enough. It takes three nurses to dress him; and he is as robust as Julius Caesar. —He’s a Perfect prodigy.... I think of calling Him Arbarossa—Adolphus—Ferdinund —Otho—Grandissimo Hercules—Sampson—Bonaparte Lambert” (Corres., 116). This letter shows that Melville transformed from a celibate writer in apprenticeship to a doting father, up in the air, fervid with joy over the birth of Malcolm. He wrote another letter to his brother Allan Melville on Feb. 20th, 1849, completely unaware that one day, eighteen years in the future, he was to wail over the suicide of his first-born son.

Melville had previously written of a Typee society —“a society” “by ‘civilized’ standards,” “without fathers” (Haberstroh 36), where separation of a father from a son is much less devastating than it would be in places like nineteenth century Albany or New York City” [cities where Melville spent his boyhood]. He criticized the patriarchic western society in which he lived by using a disguised Pidgin English to describe a “considerable portion of his ‘Marqueasan,’” —for instance, *Marheyo* for an eccentric senile warrior, anatomized into three parts, *Mar/He/Yo*[u]. In his celibate life he detoxified “the disabling paternal influence” (Tolchin 49) and instead forged a loving father figure; but in his
conjugal life he slowly began to transform into a patriarchic figure he was loath to become. His inclination for a paterfamilias was astutely detected by his stepmother-in-law Hope Shaw, who jotted in her diary with those words full of nuance: “Mr. Herman Melville’s son born Friday—half past 7 o’clock in the morning” —not Lizzie’s baby, not Judge Shaw’s [her husband’s] grandchild, but “Mr. Herman Melville’s son.” Did the author, the formerly patriarch (y) hater and male feminist, become a renegade? No. From the outset, he had let two conflicting dispositions, pro/anti feminism, coexist within his psyche. Herman’s reaction to the birth of his first son forebode Herman’s forthcoming vacillation between the benign fatherhood and the tyrannical patriarch, the latter of which can be gleaned by the way Herman raised his own children. From his ancestors [the paternal Melvills and the maternal Gansevoorts], he inherited a rigorous method of child rearing. A sampling of his views on the disciplining of younger crew members can be found in a communication to his brother Thomas, who was capturing a vessel bound for Hong Kong. In a letter dated May 25th, 1862, Herman wrote:

As for your treatment of those young ones, there I entirely commend you. Strap them, I beseech you. You remember what the Bible says:—“Oh ye who teach the children of the nations, Holland, France, England, Germany or Spain, I pray ye strap them upon all occasions, It mends their morals—ever mind the pain.” In another place the Bible says, you know, something about sparing the strap & spoiling the child. (Corrs., 377)

The writer’s child-rearing attitude calls to mind a severe letter-of-the-law disciplinarian, Captain Vere in BB, and tempts us to place the captain and the author in a parallel relation. One point that tempts us to do so is the rhyming of the name Vere with “severe” in “Upon Appleton House,” an Andrew Marvell’s poem cited in BB: “Under the discipline severe/ Of Fairfax, and the starry Vere” (61). The following paragraph from section II in this thesis also prompts speculation on Melville’s parental severity, and Vere’s severity will also turn out to be suspicious.

After publishing the scandalous, incest-focused novel, Pierre; or, The Ambiguities (1852), Melville’s literary reputation precipitately faded away, relegating him to an exasperating obscurity that provoked a typically psychotic symptom: “When harassed by external circumstances, one [Melville] wants to attack the
universe: so one takes revenge on the first creature that crosses one’s path. Too likely it will be a creature one holds dear [i.e., his wife, Lizzie]: the animus is not directed against one, but it strikes as it were. An explosion: a blow: a raised hand: an uncontrollable outburst of vituperation—then drink, remorse, repentance, the ugly vanity of it all” (Mumford 230). Melville was “a heavy drinker and was verbally abusive toward his wife Elizabeth [Lizzie] and their children.” “[I]n [her] correspondence with her mother [Frances, Melville’s youngest daughter] in 1919, [Eleanor] asked ‘Did he rail at things general when he was angry, or were his attacks more personal?’ Frances responded in the margin, ‘personal’” (Renker 54). Upon hearing the Frances’s testimony, Henry A. Murray, Melville’s Biographer, imagined that the mere recollection of her father must have been painful for her, and further, that “Herman’s attitude in the home” must have been “as one of ritualized, emphasized, exaggerated” (qtd. in Renker 55). Edwin Haviland Miller goes so far as to mention the family tale about the author throwing his wife down the stairs (319). Moreover, his first-born son’s [Malcolm’s] suicide has been partly imputed to factors such as his inability to cope with his parents and their matrimonial tensions. Malcolm was ripped apart between a lenient but inept mother and a domineering father, or “a sanctimonious child-beater and scoundrel” (Metcalf 70).

II. Vere: the Bogus Patriarch in the Posture of Titanic Hero

II. A. Nelson as Vere’s Role Model

The problem of duality in paternity—a severe disciplinarian father vs. a benignant father—is bedeviling to the author as well as to the two captains, Mackenzie and Vere. This kind of duality calls Vere’s paternity into question whilst simultaneously qualifying and disqualifying Vere for and from the position of a patriarch who must stand in two spheres, domestic and public.

To evaluate the behavior of Vere in terms of a patriarch/ruler/master, we need to see Lord Nelson, the patriarch/ruler/master far from being a red herring (Parker 113). Both Nelson and Vere are representative of “a fleet, the right arm of a Power then all but the sole free conservative one of the Old World” (54). Fervently applauded—Nelson by Alfred Tennyson and Vere by Lord Denton, Vere’s cousin, who also cites a poet, Andrew Marvell—both Nelson and Vere were aristocrats at a time when “a certain kind of displayed gallantly” had not yet
“fallen out of date as hardly applicable under changed circumstances” (56). If, in the hierarchically layered patriarchy, the power should be conferred on the presumably well-educated Anglo-Saxon men of the eighteenth-century aristocracy or nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, then it should be conferred on Nelson or Vere in the eighteenth-century warship. Nelson deserves to be commended for his method of quelling the discontent of his crew: he resorts not to “terrorizing [them] into base subjection” but to the “force of mere presence and heroic personality” (59). Rather than misusing the brutal power, Nelson uses a moral influence that only a well-educated man can emit. Likewise, Vere, a bookish, yet pedantic, descendant of an authentic aristocratic family, can impose a moral influence over his men without shows of force: when “retiring to leeward,” he lets the officers show “the silent deference” to himself though he is “not conspicuous by his stature and wearing no pronounced insignia” (60). On the other hand, the first lieutenant, sailing master, and captain of marines, though elected as members of the summarily convened court, are repeatedly derogated for their deficient intelligence or inability to judge the delicate matter at hand. The descriptions run thus: “an enjoyer of his dinner”; “a sound sleeper . . . inclined to obesity”; “not . . . altogether reliable in a moral dilemma”; “their intelligence was mostly confined to the matter of active seamanship and the fighting demands of their profession” (105). These descriptions clearly highlight Vere’s intellectual superiority.

According to Kate Millet (77, 229), a feminist proponent of the view of Friedrich Engels, the patriarchy is likely to assign its members to fixed places, transfix their roles, rob them of their subjectivities, and thus successfully maintain its domineering power through a counterfeit authority either supported by consensus or implemented by violence. Without doubt the ugly coerciveness of patriarchy is materialized in the form of slavery—the form that appears in Melville’s other works such as Moby-Dick (1851), “Bartleby” (1853), “Benito Cereno” (1855), and “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (1855). Heroic leaders though they may be, both Nelson and Vere are enslavers over the nonwhite world in the age of imperialism. As for Nelson as an enslaver, we should turn attention to his statue, the statue described thus in another of the author’s sea stories, Redburn (1849): “emblematic of Nelson’s principal victories” (155) are “[f]our naked figures in chains . . . seated in various attitudes of
humiliation and despair”; figures that Redburn could never look at “without being involuntarily reminded of four African slaves in the market-place” (155). Vere’s suitability as the patriarchic can also be born out by his identity as a possible enslaver. Robert K. Martin aptly indicates that “Slavery is at the heart of BB,” and goes on to say, “Billy himself is linked to the ‘black pagota’ and his removal from the Right-of-Man is synechdochic re-creation of the enslavement of the blacks and their loss of rights” (117-18). If asked whether Billy is the enslaved or not, we could answer that he is. He is not pure Anglo Saxon but of mixed race: a foundling from Bristol, a port town “made up by of such an assortment of tribes and complexions as would have well fitted them to be marched up by Anarcharhis Cloots before the bar of the first Representatives of the Human Race” (43).

Here we may make a small excursion on the problem of Melville’s ambiguous attachment to and detachment from Vere the father figure, in so far as it relates to the author’s political stance toward races and classes. This problem seems to reflect the Melville’s vacillating attitude toward Vere’s paternity and his own, a topic we have already discussed in section I. Melville probably criticized proslavery faction of the anti-Van Buren New York political Hunkers (Rogin 79). He therefore referred to slavery in Moby-Dick by describing the sea captains as “old hunks” (4), vented his fury against slave masters, and showed sympathy toward the Blacks or the Indians, the oppressed powerless groups who were categorized as children or idlers under the custody of adults [educated white men]. Taking himself to be akin to these oppressed racial groups, he “replac[ed] his given name with the label of a person of color,” by “signing himself ‘Tawney’ [the colloquial for Indian or Negro] in a letter to his younger brother written on December 7, 1839, upon his return from Liverpool (Rogin 43; Corres., 22–23). In his adolescence Melville was considered to be lethargic, a trait attributed to Blacks or Indians. A lamenting letter from his elder brother Gansevoort describes this lethargy: “[Herman was disinclined] to perform the especial duty of the hour which so constantly beset one of the most industrious men of the age” (qtd. in Tolchin 28–29). Even when he reached middle-age and carried on his writing in seclusion and morbidity, he was vilified as a maniac and thus must have felt relegated to the same footage as that of the reformed and corrected, the Black and the Indian. Elizabeth [his wife] usually worried about

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his mental condition, and others in the family had at least occasional doubts about
his balance or stability” (McCarthy 125–26). Herman’s family called doctors to
examine him, one of whom was Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, a defender of British
authorities and disclaimer of the insistence of Young America [American national-
ism] with which Melville sympathized. Holmes was known to “address anxie-
ties over female sexual power and family break down” in his Elsie Venner
(1861), a novel whose main character, Elsie is thought to be modeled after the
proto-feminist Margaret Fuller as a prototype. In his mind, “[s]cience could not
cure Elsie’s ‘moral insanity,’ any more than . . . it could make people of color
equal to whites” (Rogin 186). These division lines of his were disrupted by
Melville, who was then diagnosed as insane.

However, Melville’s “[u]ncanny ventriloquisms for the powerless [the
Blacks, the Indians, the working class, and the women]” paradoxically “remain
imperial,” according to Wai-chee Dimock (108). Melville was keenly aware of
his status as an intelligent member of an ex-aristocratic family on its way down.
Holmes, for example, a man of “humbler birth than [Melville’s father] Allan,”
“successfully made the transition from family to class, institution, and capitalist
development,” and Allan did not (Rogin 38); and Melville’s awareness of this
was all the more sharpened when he found the middle-class reading public (com-
posed mainly of wealthy, well-educated women) so ill-disposed, even hostile, to
his work. In a sense the author and Captain Vere belong to the same aristocratic
class—the class threatened to be ousted from society by the emergent but unre-
efined middle class and the lower insurgent classes, both of which included the
hordes of sentimental women beguiled by commercialism and (emancipated)
riot-causing blacks. As for the slum dwellers, they were viewed, in the eyes of
some intelligentsias such as Lyman Beecher (Harriet Beecher Stowe’s father, a
clergyman) and Theodore Parker (a leader of transcendentalism and liberal re-
former), as a “race of famished, infuriated animals”; the “[s]avages, the inferior
races, the perishing classes of the world”; the “[d]angerous classes of society”
“in the centre of civilization” (qtd. in Dimock 18). Alarmed by the nightmarish
presence of these slum dwellers, Horace Mann (an educator who brought about
radical change in public schools) declared that “only the utmost vigilance could
save ‘the race [the middle class]’ from being plunged at once into the weakness
and helplessness of barbarism.” In a skewed way, Melville and Vere must have
shared this sense of crisis with these intelligentsias by analogizing the insensible reading public to a “race of famished, infuriated animals,” the “Savages, the Inferior Races, the Perishing Classes of the world,” the “[d]angerous classes of society.”

Here, let us return to the earlier, more pressing problem of the dissimilarity between Vere and Nelson, and observe the symbolic incident where Nelson “was directed . . . to shift his pennant from the Captain, to the Theseus” (59). This incident removes Nelson from the ship Captain and, by extension, breaks the linkage between Nelson and Captain (Vere). Entrusted with the task of containing a possible mutiny on the ship Captain, Nelson is placed in the exactly the same position as Theseus—the conqueror of the monster/demigod Minotaur in Greek mythology. The educated and therefore politically vociferous women of the late 19th century were equated with “raving predatory beast[s].” Thus, in the hallucinations of the intelligent gynophobic men, these monstrous beings seemed to prey on them “out of sheer sadistic self-indulgence” (Dijkstra 234). Given that these beasts were also associated with Jews and Africans, as well as slum dwellers alleged to show the features of colored races (see Figure I and II), we could say that Nelson’s transferal to the Theseus implies his domineering power over his inferior members such as women, colored races, and the working class. Captain Vere is the antithesis of the Theseus-like Nelson. While both men shoulder a similar responsibility, that is, to nip possible rebellions in the bud [Budd]—rebellions comparable to that raised by the lower class or the subaltern/subject/abject/monstrous beings—Nelson must prevent a large scale mutiny, whereas Vere has to deal with just a small one comparable to the Somers affair caused by mere boys.

The second point that distances Vere from Nelson is the former’s discursively defined racial identity: Nelson’s racial identity is never questioned in BB, while Vere’s is. It may seem curious, but we can assume that Vere, English though he is, situates himself in a circumstance similar to that of American Indians, the tribes who suffered the crisis of near-extinction. Vere’s separation from his role model, Nelson, deals another fatal blow to his racial superiority, a trait that presumably warrants his patriarchic nature. This becomes all the more plausible when we note the similarity between Vere’s behavior in the drumhead court-martial to that of “Peter the Barbarian” [the founder of the new Russian
capital St. Petersburg] (103) : Vere is a counterpart to Peter the Great Barbarian, approximating all the more to the allegedly barbaric Indians. In the antebellum white middle-class America, a society of capitalism on the make, there spread a discourse that imputed the extinction of the Indians to their own savage self. It was not the evil habits (such as drinking) and diseases (such as smallpox and dysentery) that Europeans brought with them to the New World, still less was it to the atrocious policy removing the Indians to the western reservation: it was the alleged stubbornness of the Indians and their self-contained way of life, “their benighted refusal to quit their savage ways” (Dimock 116), that led to their extinction. In this logic of blaming the victims, the Indian becomes the “punitive self-government[s]” (Dimock 109–139), exemplifying the negative side of the Emersonian philosophy of Self-Made Man: Vere is also responsible for, guilty of, and committed to his own fate. Exactly the same discourse was adopted by Melville’s contemporary, Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), an adherent to the Emersonian philosophy of the Self-Made Man, and a proto-ecologist who lived in the woods near a pond and tried to “occupy the Native American’s position” during the age of Indian removal (Powell 80). Thoreau covertly excluded from his text the existence of the Indians by saying that “[t]he African will survive, for he is docile, and is patiently learning his trade and dancing at his labor; but the Indian does not often dance, unless is the war dance” (Powell 82). In the imagined community of economic citizenship from which Thoreau ironically appeared to be dissociated, the Indian appeared not to be endeavoring to absorb the “universal knowledge” of “profit and loss” (Thoreau 120), the golden rule of capitalism. A contemporary historian, Francis Parkman, also jumped on to the bandwagon and said that Indians were “destined to melt and vanish before the advancing waves of Anglo American power” (qtd. in Dimock 117). Melville must have been well aware of the infiltrating power that this harmful discourse wielded, and he must have boldly applied it to Vere, an officer aloof from and unsociable with others of his rank. His colleague speak ill of him: “But between you and me, don’t you think there is a queer streak of the pedantic running through him?” (63) Self-contained, complete in himself, he is in the Indian’s shoes. He exemplifies the punitive self-government, and reminds us of the fate of extinction that the Indian suffered. While Nelson still relishes a heroic status, Vere passes away, unknown to the public, unmentioned even in the authorized
naval account of the possible mutiny. This shows the difficulty in realizing Vere’s desire to be a Nelson-like patriarchic leader—the desire kept inarticulate but betrayed by the narrator, who says, “Unhappily he [Vere] was cut off too early for the Nile and Trafalgar. The spirit of that spite its philosophic austerity may yet have indulged in the most secret of all passions, ambition, never attained to the fullness of fame” (129).

II. B. Vere’s Infringement of the Gender Norm

Another significant point differentiates Nelson from Vere. It has something to do with the problem of keeping the women under the control of patriarchy—a problem which, within the confines of the story, haunts not Nelson but only Vere. Vere’s frantic need to fortify his fragile patriarchic status is obliquely described in “Appleton House,” an Andrew Marvell’s poem inserted in the story: “This ’tis to have been from the first / In a domestic heaven nursed, / Under a domestic heaven severe / Of Fairfax and the starry Vere” (28). On one level, the narrator’s nonchalant thrust in citing this poem is to explain how Edward Fairfax Vere comes to be called “Starry Vere.” Lord Denton, Vere’s “favorite kinsman,” happens to turn over the anthology of Marvell, a tutor for Mary Fairfax, whose mother, Anne Vere Fairfax, was awarded the word “starry” for her status as an ideal housewife. Though the word “starry” in the poem was originally dedicated to the lady, it is later directed and applied directly to Vere. Here, we must recall that Vere is a name presumed to confer some effect on the captain through its association with virility (manhood), or the condition required for a patriarch. Despite gender differences and Vere’s social identity as a warrior, the exemplar of masculinity in the age of imperialism, he becomes disturbingly close to or equated with a woman, and thus preoccupies the queer status of the 19th-century clergymen, as Ann Douglas indicates in her *Feminization of American Culture.*

Captain Vere becomes more and more disqualified from masculine patriarchic status when we recall his 17th-century ancestor, Fairfax. Fairfax was certain that human beings had been originally androgynous, morphed and severed into two separate beings, male and female, and cursed with heterosexual voluptuousness in their need to reproduce (Yoshinaka 3). By inference, the bachelor Vere is also a gynophobic admirer of androgyny, and thus disqualified from patriarchic status, the mandatory condition of which is—it goes without saying
to be heterosexual. He is described as “old enough to have been Billy’s father” (115), but in fact is far from an ideal or heterosexual father. Two of Marvell’s political positions deepen our conviction that Vere is disqualified as an ideal patriarchic; that is, the poet’s opposition against the radically democratic demand of the Leveller, and second, his vehement vilification of the Catholic nunnery system for its latitude—a latitude that considerably outstretched the scope of, and therefore was subversive of, (secular) patriarchy. At a time when women were supposed to be reticent about political issues, Fairfax’s wife, Anne, intruded with opinions as to whether Charles I (1625–49) should be hanged and whether England should conquer Scotland. Anne, a supporter of constitutional monarchy, an opponent of the lethal dethronement, and a member of the Presbyterian Church [a sect that became dominant in Scotland], henpecked her husband to retirement in Appleton. Observing this, Marvell divested Anne of her political voice, assigned her the role of the nurturer of children as an ideal mother, and thus forcefully confined her in what the 19th century middle class would have called a domestic Eden. Thus, the poet fortified the androcentric system for the sake of his patron. This historical happenstance suggests that, without the prop of the gynophobic poet, Fairfax, and by extension, Captain Vere, would have been crestfallen.

Thus, we see Nelson as a role model that Vere cannot emulate, yet Nelson is not such an ideal model as Vere thinks. Compared to the medieval gallant knight and the wooden battleship as a “decaying monument of a fame incorruptible” (57), and criticized by the martial utilitarians for his propensity for “ornate publication of his person in battle” (57), Nelson invites the risk of devaluing “each more heroic line in the great epics and dramas” down to the mere “affection and fustian” (58). The same is true of Vere, a man obsessed with the epic posturing of heroism and dramatic self-aggrandizement. Though he replenishes his library before going to sea, Vere does so only to show off his intellectual superiority to those officers who would read only naval chronicles.

As an aristocrat who outlives an allotted time span, Vere reminds us of the wooden warship such as Nelson’s Victory, the ship fated to be extinguished and supplanted by the ironclads. This allows us to say metaphorically that Vere, like Nelson himself, is incapacitated from wielding patriarchic power over the society. Given Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s indication that “[t]he [social] power of women
[if they had any] was assigned the same metaphysical, superstitious, undergrounded status that was supposed also, in the nineteenth century, to inhere in the power of the hereditary aristocracy” (157), then it follows that Vere is emasculated into the status of a middle-class woman incarcerated in the so-called domestic haven. Besides, what matters is his bachelorhood. Though Vere lives at the end of the eighteenth century, the author writing *BB* at the end of the nineteenth century must have been well versed in the decadent bourgeois culture in Europe and thus made the intervening century seem negligible. Melville used two strategies to fill this time span of a century—first, by entering the old narrator who reflects the past, and second, by dedicating the story to Jack Chase, a character modeled after “John J. Chase, an Englishman and the captain of the foretop of the *United States* ... the naval vessel on which Melville served (1843–1844)” (Gale 70). Thanks to this manipulation, an end-of-18th-century affair was supplanted to the context of the 19th-century, an age when the bachelors of America and Europe garnered much more attention because they were more or less connected to the pleasure-loving and leisure-flaunting, and thus personifying attributes that the aristocracy might have had: dissipation, connoisseurship, effeminacy, and unspecified homosexuality (Sedgwick 83–96). These features of bachelors are disadvantageous to Vere.

Let us then refer to the nineteenth-century discourse on sexuality in order to substantiate Vere’s ambiguous gender. We must recollect that in *English Traits* Emerson gibed at England’s best heroes for their hermaphroditism (Crain 244): “Nelson, dying at Trafalgar, sends his love to Lord Collingwood, and, like an innocent schoolboy that goes to bed, says, ‘Kiss me, Hardy,’ and turns to sleep” (Emerson 802). This suggests that Vere may be hermaphrodite like his role model, Nelson. Quoting Reverend John Todd, Vincent J. Bertolini validates that “marital sexuality was increasingly a matter of public discussion and regulation,” and that binarity between heterosexuality and homosexuality loomed large (36). Todd was a pastor of the Congregational Church of Pittsfield during Melville’s stay (1850 to 1863) at Arrowhead, and a subject of ridicule in Melville’s “The Lightening-Rod Man” (1854). In his capacity as a “male purity” reformer, a vindicator of “normative (bourgeois/professional.married/paternal/patriarchal) masculinities,” Todd was also famous for authoring *The Student’s Manual*, a copy of which “was to be found at Melville’s boyhood home from 1839 on” (Bertolini
36, 35). “[I]nveigh[ing] against the rovings of the imagination” and “the habit of reverie,” Todd condemned these states of mind as the horrific results of “permitting the thoughts to wander when alone” and “evils which want a name [i.e., homosexuality], to convey any conception of their enormity” (29). The “evils” in question are the evils committed by Vere, who “though practical enough upon occasion would at times betray a certain dreaminess of mood,” and who, “[s]tanding alone on the weather side of the quarter-deck, one hand holding by the rigging,” “would absently gaze off at the blank sea” (61). In addition, there is another definitive proof for his ambiguous masculinity. Seeing the common sailors fluttered at the scene of Billy’s execution, and dreading their impulsive anger and possible riot against their officers, Vere orders all the sailors to return to their allotted positions “at an hour prior to the customary one” (126), though he knows that this command is “a variance from usage” (126). In justifying this variance, he pretends to be “a martinet” and quibbles like this: “With mankind, forms, measured forms, are everything; and that is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spellbinding the wild denizens of the wood” (128). Reasonable and educated, Vere deprecates all shows of emotion as effeminate, later proclaiming, “[W]ill an upright judge allow himself off the bench to be way-laid by some tender kinswoman of the accused seeking to touch him with her tearful plea? Well, the heart hears, sometimes the feminine in man, is as that piteous woman, and hard though it be, she must be ruled out” (111). Ironically, Vere does not resort to his staple of pedantry but rather appeals to the emotion and instinct that he disdains as feminine, because he successfully ends in rousing the three hesitant officers at the drumhead court, and thus in spellbinding them like Orpheus. According to Ovid, “Orpheus is also the mythic intruder of homosexuality, and he is destroyed for his ‘crime’” (Martin 52–53).

Speaking of Orpheus, a certain logic dictates that all three—Vere, Claggart, and Billy—are part of the same gang. To begin with, all the three are categorized in the same rank, depriving the captain of his privileged position as a patriarchic superior. Billy, like Orpheus, is gifted enough to “spellbind the wild denizens of the wood [meaning perhaps uncivilized rustics or uneducated seamen].” Billy’s resemblance to Orpheus, however, sounds ominous to Captain Vere because of Billy’s stutter, an antithesis to the melodious sound of Orpheus’s Lyra. This resemblance relates to the revolution or the “din and dust of the fallen Bastille”
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(66), and insinuates an alleged mutiny where the superior [Vere the captain] is supplanted by the inferior [Billy the common sailor]. Claggart, on the other hand, is described as “too fair-spoken man” (88) endowed with a “silvery” (97) “low-musical voice,” (72) that is, with more traits that remind us of Orpheus. Thus, an axis is formed between Claggart and Vere, to both of whom, “[educated] men are beasts to be tamed, [or] ‘wild denizens of the wood’ [meaning perhaps uncivilized rustics or uneducated seamen, represented by the illiterate Billy] who must be bound.”

Given the evil image of Claggart, a character forged from the memory of Melville’s own father, a man who deserted his family by dying young, this Claggart-to-Vere combination undermines Vere’s image as an ideal father (if he is to be so described). The “clag” in the name Claggart means a stain or flaw in character, as well as a sticky substance on one’s clothing and an encumbrance on one’s property (Tolchin 165). This produces a negative impression of the author’s father, whose profession was to import French fashions for middle-class women. In turn, this subtle disparagement of the author’s own father, as likely or not, imposes the same negative image on the supposedly good father figure of Vere.

II. C. Foreboding the Fatherless Anti-Euphoric Society

As for the aspect right and fitting to the patriarchic status, we cannot but observe an anthropologically noteworthy atmosphere pervading in the warship. Milcea Eliade, an anthropologist, postulates that our secular world has some sacred and privileged nooks where “foundational pillars” stand erect and establish the order in our secular world (Ichikawa 244–45). Justifiably enough, this theory can be applied to the Bellipotent when we trace back to the etymological origin the captain’s name, the Honorable Edward Fairfax Vere—a name that decomposes to the heavenly (Starry) Creator (Fair-Fax) God (Vere-the name derived from verity/verus). Figuratively, Vere anthropomorphizes God and the Bellipotent forges a kind of supernatural territory where the formal/outer/secular meets vis-à-vis and commingles with the private/inner/sacred. Even if Vere fails to anthropomorphize God, Vere can at least help create a sacred atmosphere, in so far as the narrator imbues him with a certain religiosity: “a true military officer [Vere] is in one particular like a true monk” (104).
However, the patriarchy of God/Father/Law in *BB* has already disappeared. This means, in turn, that the issue of sibling rivalry comes to the fore, and further, that the feminist criticism based on Freudian psychology cannot be directly applied to the story. The feminist Millet contends that the foundation for the patriarchic institutions such as family, nation, school, and the navy is based not on love or spontaneity, but slavery-like enforcement and exploitation. However, I cannot entirely agree with her rough generalization of the exploitive nature of patriarchy. Her view cannot be directly applied to the complexity in *BB*, where women are excluded from the very beginning and represented only by the gays, who, in turn, are likely to replace the rude patriarchy with the pre-oedipal. When he postulated that the unrefined violent paterfamilias is a god anthropomorphized, Freud had in his mind an image of the 19th century middle-class family. As it stood, however, the triangle of Father/God/Law had been gravely damaged since the 1790s and the patriarchic power had already begun to wane. This phenomenon of God/Father being dethroned is suggested in *BB*, where Vere’s *Bellipotent* is attacked by the French line-of-battleship aptly named as the *Athée* (meaning the *Atheist* in English).

Historically, the legal system that Vere regards as essential for justice and for the maintenance of social/naval order, that is to say, the staple for the patriarchy, turns out to be not impartial, but exploitative of the lower classes and beneficial only to his own aristocratic class. The propertied aristocracy in eighteenth-century British “congratulat[ed] [themselves] on their humanity” whilst “pass[ing] one of the bloodiest penal codes in Europe” and convincing themselves and the lower classes on the justice of the law (Thomas 375). On this pretext, the aristocrats suspended their Protection of Personal Liberty Act; imprisoned Thomas Pain; killed countless people (but killed them justly); and prohibited the establishment of political organizations and labor unions. These facts exemplify Max Weber’s cogent remarks that the state [i.e., “a relation of men dominating men”] is supported “by legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence” because “‘politics’... means striving to share power or striving to share influence the distribution of power... among groups within a state” (Gerth and Mills 78).

Vere clearly spells out these blatant craving for power when he remarks: “For that law and the rigor of it, we are not responsible. Our vowed responsibil-
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ity is in this: That however pitilessly that law may operate in any instances, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it” (110). Protected by the laws and enjoying the privileges these laws guaranteed, the aristocracy from the late 18th century to the beginning of 19th century had continued to push forward the policy of enclosure and depriving farmers of their land. When the farmers in nearby France deprived their own propertied classes of land, the British aristocrats redoubled their efforts to fortify themselves against the aftermath of the upheaval in the French Revolution.

Thus, we can see the miasmal erosion in the triangle of Law/Father/God. Like the chaplain who advances towards the death-awaiting Billy for giving him futile consolation, the Starry/God-like Vere is merely “serving in the host of the God of War-Mars” (122). Small wonder that as “a true military officer [Vere] is in one particular like a true monk” (104). Unsurprisingly, when the warship is under strict discipline, it resembles an abbey established on austere canons. Vere merely prompts Billy to meekly parrot the recitation, “I have eaten the King’s bread and I am true to the King” (106), and Billy’s “[s]ilence in the face of his judgment is what [Vere] desires” (Thomas 377). However, loyalty to the King is a mere investiture. As the narrator declares, even mutineers could be easily turned into patriots: “those battles [against France], and especially Trafalgar, were a plenary absolution and a grand one” “[t]o the mutineers [of Spithead or Nore affair]” (56). Moreover, because George III (kingship 1760–1820) is said to have been insane in his later years, Vere sounds hollow in remarking, “But do these buttons that we wear attest that our allegiance is to Nature? No, to the King” (110).

Speaking in summary, we have already seen, first, that Nelson in himself is an unworthy model; second, that Nelson and Vere both fit poorly into analyses through Freudian theory and the theory that binds together Law/God/Father. Based on the foregoing, I can now go on to satisfy one of my goals of this thesis — that is to say, to disqualify Vere as a paterfamilias and thereby undermine the premise that BB is the story of an erring son vs. a benign and respectable father.

It also follows that “Nelson [might be] a false standard from the beginning” (117), as Robert Martin puts it. Or it can be said that Nelson is demoted from the position of ideal patriarchic leader to that of Vere’s sibling, a kind of competitor for the same goal and trophy. According to Girard, the father has never been
the son’s inspiring model. This theory compels us to reread *BB* not in terms of the father-son relationship, but in terms of a sibling relationship or a pre-oedipal rivalry between brothers. Such a reading may shed light on my second inquiry, that is, the prompt that compels the author to dwell on (un)patriarchic problems. If Melville had no intention to focus on the problem of father vs. son, then what? Upon the son versus son problem, i.e., the sibling competition.

Earlier Melville had depicted (*Moby-Dick* 1851) a fierce competition for masculine power between a monstrous whale and a man. This competition is converted into Leviathan versus the idolatrous and unrepentant king of Israel, or, one of those “proud gods and commodores of this earth” (*MD*, 48) versus “one of those ‘sons of pride’ [Job 41:34]” (Adamson 101). Both of these pairs are subsumed into the competition between the symbolically “Archetypal Parent” and the defiant son (Tolchin 197). However, we can catch a glimpse of foreboding in a shift of Melville’s attention from the father-versus-son problem to the sibling one. We can recognize this in the biblical connotations of the names of the two beings: Moby in Hebrew as “seed of the father” and Ahab also in Hebrew as “the brother of the father,” or confusingly, “uncle or father of the brother” (Tolchin 198). In *BB* we see no patriarchs: neither in the public place where the rigorous patriarch dominates, nor in the domestic place where a middle-class nagging woman behaves in her own way, as an Angel in the house. The fatherless world may appear a euphoric place suffused with brotherly love, but on the contrary it turns out to be heinous. According to James Creech (73, 82), it is located “at the antipodes of the moral, sexual universe which the bourgeoisie had stalked out as its natural habitat [their own private patriarchic homes],” a universe that can be “figured as wholly other to the psychological space of hearth, home and land.”

### III. Melville in the Heinous Home

Contrary to the nineteenth-century definition of home as a sacred inviolable sphere, the author’s own home turned out to be heinous because of the domestic violence he himself inflicted. From the publication of *Pierre* (1852), Melville had been almost entirely ignored by the reading public. Melville thus found himself, to use the curious syllogism, *almost* identical to Orpheus. Here, we may turn to *Redburn* and focus upon Harry Bolton, “Melville’s ultimate figure of the perse-
cuted artist” (Dimock 107). The ignored Melville is analogous to the persecuted Harry (Melville ≡ Harry), a figure who resembles Orpheus (Harry ≡ Orpheus). Hence, the syllogism: Melville ≡ Harry ≡ Orpheus, therefore Melville ≡ Orpheus. It is natural that Harry and Orpheus sit among the “leopards and tigers” (Redburn, 278) while Melville is surrounded with a readership of insensitive/barbaric and demanding/imperialistic contemporaries. This logic makes Melville analogous to Orpheus, the homosexual, who can be “figured as wholly other to the psychological space of hearth, home and land.”

According to the recollections of Eleanor, Melville’s granddaughter, the author had to use “an inclined plane” as a substitute for his desk, and on one of the inside walls of the desk “he pasted the maxim, ‘Keep true to the dreams of thy youth’” (Dillingham 365). In William D. Dillingham’s view, Captain Vere is a man who failed to know himself and to be true to himself. In my view, the author himself was a man who did NOT fail to be true to himself. Melville’s maxim—like Emerson’s individualism and preaching of the virtue of the self-reliant man—prescribed how Melville should behave in relation between himself and others at the cost of the consequences in later life. Here we ask, what were the dreams/nightmares that troubled Melville throughout his life?

In his early boyhood at school, young Herman was always outshined by Gansevoort, his elder brother, “a perennial winner of the classroom firsts and scholarship prizes” (Adamson 28) — differently put, a handsome boy reminiscent of Billy Budd. In his home, the “graceful Gansevoort,” the possessor of “Appollonian and hermaphrodite elegance of his father” was “the idol of his parents,” on whom “the attention and hopes of both parents were from the beginning unhealthily focused” (Adamson 28). In the meantime, their father praised the second son Herman for his innocence and good nature—the qualities that offset his flaws. In his letters, his father half-detractingly remarked on Herman’s slowness of speech and unexceptional intelligence, traits that recall the stuttering and innocence of Billy. Though in a sense Herman had revered Gansevoort as a role model, he had been embittered by his resentment of his brother since childhood and retained his bitterness even after the death of his rival. He showed the symptoms of so-called “ugly duckling” syndrome (Adamson 27–28), a mindset said to become aggravated when a child becomes inured to the idea that he is hated and deserted by his parents. Melville’s “ugly duckling” syndrome was ag-
gravated in part by the rejection and desertion of his own father, who died young before giving the son opportunities for retaliation, and in part by the rejection of the reading public and Nathaniel Hawthorne, a fellow author with whom Melville once desired in vain to enjoy a homosocial synergism. Therefore, it is not altogether without reason that the author portrayed the picture of the captain of the Bellipotent [Vere] as a man symbolically forsaken by Nelson, who moved from the Captain to the Theseus. After his father and brother died, the task of fulfilling his mother’s expectations fell upon Herman, compelling him to occupy “a mediatory zone on which the mourner [his mother] seeks to control [her] negative feeling toward the dead [his father]” (Tolchin 19). In this logic forged by the mourners, the son became a living linking object, the dead person’s [the father’s] representative, the main function of which is “to provide an illusion of being able to keep or kill someone [the father] now dead”: “Identifying with the maternal image of his father, the child [Herman] ‘becomes’ him.” This identifying process must have been promoted by the author’s mother Maria who “orchestrated the family strategy [and in a way] silenced his novelistic voice” (Tolchin 31). “When the child’s obstructed grief disrupts his life in adulthood, he often enacts literally or symbolically, the symptoms of his father’s last illness” (Tolchin 20). True to this psychological mechanism, the author actually went on to become an autocratic paterfamilias whom he was loath to become and against whom he continued to rail. Just as his father [Allan Melvill] treated the son harshly, so did Herman, his children; just as his father displayed favoritism for his elder son [Gansevoort], so did Herman for Malcolm. In a word, the author repeated and intensified exactly the same problem that his father had created. Curiously enough, this was fated from as early as the beginning of Herman’s life. The year before Herman was born, Allan [his father] wrote to Maria [his mother] from Liverpool, urging her to “teach our tender Babes as far as their little hearts are susceptible of impressions to cherish the recollections of their absent Father” (qtd. in Haberstroh 134). Whether from this effect or not, the child among the Melville’s children who was to be the most “susceptible of impressions” of an absent Allan was Herman, who confessed in Mardi (1849) through the ventriloquism of Babbalanja, “We are full of ghosts and spirits; we are as grave-yards full of buried dead, that start to life before us. And all our dead sires, verily, are in us; that is their immortality” (593–94).
In short, the author reproduced his father’s crimes while he was caged in a pre-oedipal state of sibling-like rivalry, vying for the love of his father. Numerous phrases in BB tinctured with biblical illustrations allude to the sibling competition for the love of father; e.g., “transmitted from a period prior to Cain’s city and citified man [the state of sibling rivalry represented by Cain and Abel]” (53); “apprehensive jealousy that marred Saul’s visage perturbedly brooding on the comely young David” (50); “the spokesman of the envious children of Jacob deceptively imposing upon the troubled patriarch the blood-dyed coat of young Joseph” (96). Without having solved the pre-oedipal sibling problem, the author probably took the position of a patriarch in an enforced way, and thus placed himself in position he would have preferred not to be. He was ironically true to “the dream of thy youth,” the nightmare of sibling rivalry, and blinded to his acts against his children.

**Conclusion. A Dirge for the Sons**

The time has come to offer an answer to my main question for this thesis: What prompts the author to dwell on the problems of (un)patriarchic father? Here we may refer to one of Melville’s poems, “The Chipmunk,” published posthumously in a collection of Melville’s lyrical poems, Weeds and Wildings: “Heart of autumn! / Weather meet; / Like to sherbet / Cool and sweet. / Stock-still I stand, / And him I see / Prying, peeping / From Beech-Tree; / Crickling, cracking / Gleefully! / But, affrighted / By wee sound, / Presto! vanish - / Whither Bound? / So did Baby, / Crowing mirth / E’en as startled / By some inkling / Touching Earth, / Flit (and whither?) / From our hearth!” The author composed this poem with his lost first-born son analogized to the fleeing chipmunk. Ironically, the eighteen-year-old boy’s suicide was restorative in that it brought the estranged Melville couple back together. This recalls a kind of restorative power in the death of Billy, who before he dies gives benediction and absolution to his pseudo-father Vere. However, the author needed a very long time to disentangle himself from his family obsession and forge a different perspective on family—too long to afford him the joy of a reconciliation with either his first beloved born Malcolm or his second son Stanwix, a rather negligible figure (if we may say so) overshadowed by his promising brother and alienated from his father by choice.

Stanwix died in a ditch at thirty five. His death dealt Herman a fatal blow.
The loss brought forth again the painful memory of his beloved first-born, and it revived his lifelong, unresolved grief for his own father and unmitigated resentment against his elder brother. More importantly, however, the death of his second son awakened him to his earlier unfairness towards his children. Herman began working on *BB* within weeks of Stanwix’s death. It was after victimizing his two sons that the author was finally released from his lifelong pre-oedipal trauma of resentment against his brother and father—the father-son problem, and more importantly, the sibling problem. In this sense, if it is to his wife Lizzie that Melville dedicated *Weeds and Wildings*, then it is to his two sons that he dedicated *BB*. Melville must have wanted to make a farewell declaration to and resignation of (his possessed idea of) a perfect paternity that he could never possess no matter how he desired. As we have seen, the author accused the three non-ideal patriarchic figures—Vere, Nelson, and himself—and wrote a mock-hagiology. Like Vere, who before dying, “was heard to murmur … ‘Billy Budd, Billy Budd’” (129), or like his own father in his death bed who raved and “present[ed] the melancholy spectacle of a deranged man” (qtd. in Tolchin 2), the author with his own death near at hand lamented the death of his children and poured out affectionate but remorseful delirious utterances. This murmur resulted in the formulation of *BB*, his posthumously published novel. Just as Vere’s death comes not long after Billy’s, so did the author’s after completing his last story. By the time he finished *BB* and at last resolved his lifelong suffering, Melville had only five more months to live.
Figure I: Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901). *Fauns and Sleeping Nymph*. 1884.

“[Böcklin] deliberately made his fauns onto animalesque creatures with not only grotesquely caricatured Semitic or negroid features but the postures of monkeys as well.... The fact that fully developed women were the usual companions of these creatures were a telling indictment of the static nature of femininity; whereas once they might have been considered more human than man's ancestors, they had in the intervening centuries of male evolution proved to be incapable of evolving with him” (Dijkstra 280).
Notes

1. Hereafter the title of the story in this thesis is shortened to BB. All subsequent references to this story will be parenthetically included in this thesis. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, eds. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (1924; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962).

2. “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” is a compelling proof of the author’s stance as a male feminist.

3. After Allan, the author’s father, died, “e” was added next to the last letter of Melvill.
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5. For details on how the Blacks and Indians were categorized in the nineteenth-century America, see Takaki and Dimock.

6. Cf. Hurtgen regards Vere’s name a source of ambiguity. “Vere” has something to do with “vereor,’ a meaning to be afraid of,” and his acquired name “Starry” with “abstract, remote, unfeeling, cold, undiscriminating” (175).

7. Formally, the author dedicated the story to Jack Chase, the ideal father model applauded in WJ, though.

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Billy Budd as a Mock-Hagiology

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Billy Budd as a Mock-Hagiology:
Accusation against the Patriarchs by Melville, a Psychologically Battered Child Budding into a Sanctimonious Child-Beater

Sasaki, Eitetsu

In 1842 a mutiny broke out on the Somers, the training ship on which Melville’s cousin, Guert Gansevoort, served as an officer. Captain Mackenzie, the commander of the vessel, believed that a man in his station should be paternalistic to his boy sailors, but this did not stop him from sentencing the young ring-leader to death. The problem of defining an ideal paterfamilias inspired Herman Melville to write Billy Budd, a tale in which Melville somehow manages to define a handsome boy Billy Budd, as the son of a childless bachelor, Captain Vere. In this thesis, I try first to refute the reductive reading of Billy Budd as the simple story of an erring son vs. loving father figure. I attempt to do so by questioning Vere’s qualification for the paterfamilias as a way of undermining the basis of the father-son story; and then I unearth the author’s personal history in an effort to clarify what prompted the author to dwell on the problem of the (un)patriarchic father.

A comparison between Vere and Nelson is helpful in evaluating Vere’s qualification as a patriarchic leader. Both men are defined as well-educated aristocratic (cunning) exploiters of the lower classes and enslavers over the non-white world in the age of imperialism—favorable qualifications for patriarch-aspiring men of the 18th century. Indeed, Vere’s status as an enslaving master is suggested in his autocratic attitude towards his men and Billy’s linkage to the ‘black pagota.’ Vere’s racial superiority, on the other hand, is nullified when he is placed in a position analogous to that of the American Indians—the race on the brink of extinction. Pedantic and unsociable, Vere tries to remain true to himself unsuccessfully. His efforts backfire, overlapping, as they do, with the alleged
stubborn preference of the Indians for their own lifestyle over the ethos of modern capitalism. Both Vere and the Indians end in exemplifying the negative side of Emerson’s insistence of the Self-Made Man. Hence, Vere’s impairment of racial superiority. In addition, Vere’s masculinity is not too resilient to dispense with the poem supporting androcentricity, i.e., the poem that Andrew Marvell composed for the sake of his henpecked androgyny-prone master. Vere’s inclination towards reverie and rovings of the imagination—if Melville’s contemporary male purity reformer, Reverend John Todd is invoked—implies his homosexual identity. Moreover, doomed to be besieged and threatened by the emergent middle class, possibly the riotous metropolitan working class and enslaved blacks, the privileged men of aristocratic status such as Vere and Nelson are endangered and actually demoted into the position of women. As for Vere, his linkage to Orpheus, a mythic intruder of homosexuality (according to Ovid), is a fatal blow to his establishment of the status of patriarch, whose condition is heterosexual. Taken together, all of these analyses suggest that Vere (as well as Nelson) is not an appropriate masculine father figure; hence, *Billy Budd* is not the story of the erring son versus the benevolent ideal father. Vere’s aspiration to become a patriarchic captain is completely shattered by the nullification of the triangle of God/Father/Law from the following findings: first, Vere, the father aspirer, pledges allegiance to the insane (King Gorge III, the figurative father of the nation); second, he serves not Christ but Mars; and third, he insists they should obey the (military) law, but the law at that time functions favorably only to the aristocrats like him.

If autocratic infuriating fathers disappeared, then a euphoric world would come to be. The reality, however, is different. A heinous atmosphere is likely to prevail in the fatherless family, the family which, for better or for worse, Melville created. His boyhood life was completely marred by the existence of his elder brother Gansevoort, the pet of his parents, and by the early death/desertion of his father Allan. Even after his domestic enemies—his brother and father—died, he remained trammeled in the pre-oedipal state throughout his life, goaded not by the Freudian competition against his father, but by the sibling rivalry vying for father’s love and attention. This inclination was ultimately augmented by his mother’s expectation that Melville become a substitute for Allan. In short, Herman, while still in the pre-oedipal state, became like Allan, the patriarch, and as
a result reproduced the very crime that the latter committed, i.e., favoritism and
domestic violence. He transformed himself into a child-beating father. The vic-
tims were his two sons, Malcolm, who killed himself at the age of eighteen, and
Stanwix, who left his father and died in a ditch at thirty five. Upon the death of
his alienated/alienating second son, he became for the first time aware of how
guiltily he behaved as a paterfamilias as well as of how inescapably he was im-
mersed in a pre-oedipal state. Like Vere at the brink of death, or like his own fa-
ther, Allan, insane on his deathbed, the author must have babbled and raved. By
indirectly accusing himself through the indictment of the patriarch-aspiring Nel-
son and Vere, he composed a dirge for his sons as an expiation of what he had
had done against them.