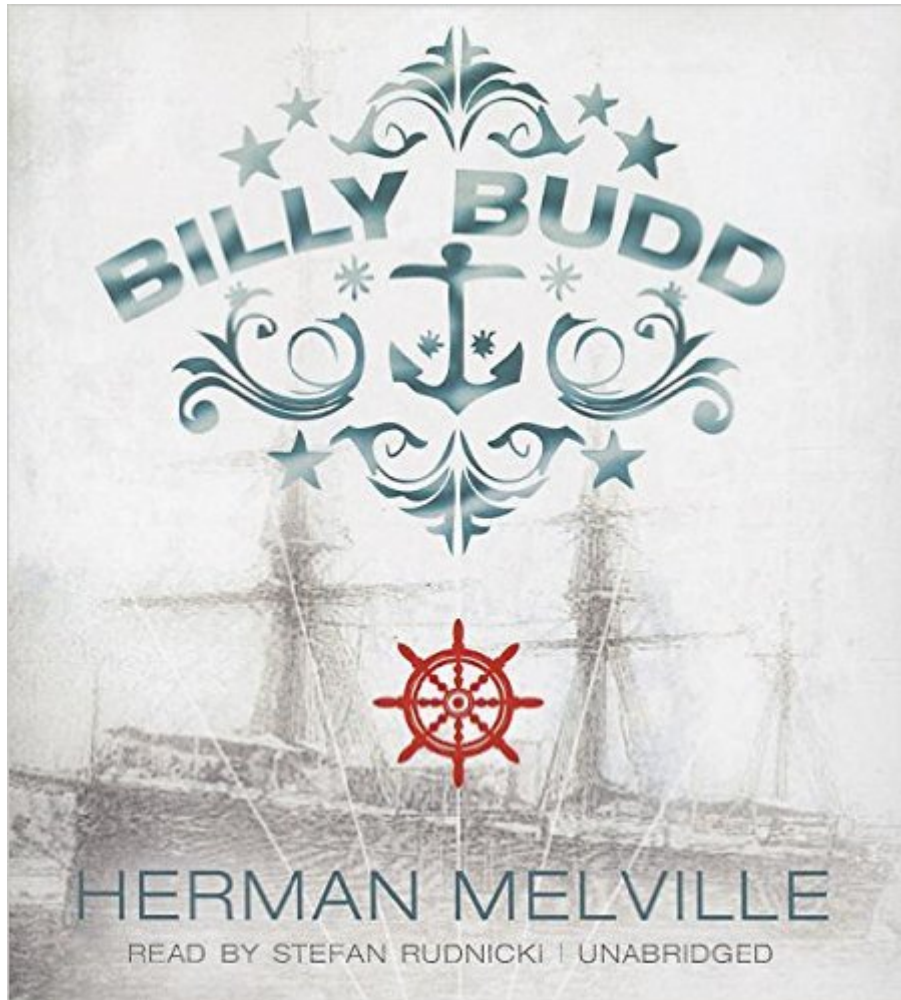


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Billy Budd



Synopsis

Billy Budd, an orphaned, illegitimate child suffused with innocence, openness, and natural charisma, has been impressed into service aboard the HMS Bellipotent. He is adored by the crew but for unexplained reasons arouses the antagonism of the ship's master-at-arms, John Claggart, who falsely accuses Billy of conspiracy to mutiny. Set in 1797, Billy Budd exploits the tension of this period during the war between England and France to create a tale of treachery, tragedy, and great pathos that explores human relationships and the inherently ambiguous nature of man-made justice.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (127 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,852,657 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in Â Books > Books on CD >

Authors, A-Z > (M) > Melville, Herman #235 in Â Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction >

Short Stories #531 in Â Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Classics

Customer Reviews

Authors really have a hard time avoiding the fact their stories nearly always mirror their most closely guarded personal concerns. But the writers who care deepest about the messages they're sending are usually the hardest hit. "Billy Budd, Sailor, and Other Stories"--a Penguin Classic pairing of both well-known and comparatively obscure short stories by America's ultimate "writer's writer"--details the immense artistry, messianic eccentricity and wounded vanity of a deeply troubled man who toiled--unsung, ridiculed--long before his time ever could have come. This particular collection, refracted as it is by a heartfelt introduction by contemporary American author Frederick Busch, highlights both author and character in alienated reserve in the well-known "Bartleby, Scrivener"; exhibits the writer's knowing infatuation with the great satires of Swift and allegories of Milton in "The Paradise of Bachelors and Tartarus of Maids" and "The Encantadas"; his obsession with the interplay of virtue and pragmatism in "Billy Budd, Sailor"; and reveals even prophetic intonations in a

story about race, "Benito Cereno." Some seem little more than amusing studies, but even the least in this collection testifies to Melville's eternal ability to astonish and take your breath clean out of your body. Indeed, Melville's shorter work reveals just how far he was from the day's critical appraisal of him as an unsuccessful writer of mere adventures that simply didn't fit the bill.

Reading, be the target novels, short stories, poems, or road maps, demands an investment from readers of a certain number of hours from their life spans. Perhaps I am too demanding, but I feel that, if I am to trade a portion of my life for the message left for me by an author, the message should be meaningful, and I should lay down the completed book feeling that I have gained something positive from having read it: a new insight, a new word added to my recognition vocabulary, or a new vicarious experience. I also detest having my attention diverted from the author's message by having to stumble around malapropisms, misspellings, or nonstandard punctuation. This collection of short stories (and I have no objection if one wishes to characterize "Billy Budd" as a novella) does not disappoint. From these eight stories I have gleaned new vocabulary and new vicarious experiences, and in none of them is the writing any less than superb. This is not to claim that the writing is always easily read. The acceptable and educated writing style of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was far more periphrastic than is today's streamlined and, at times, abbreviated and almost staccato style. Simple sentences were not preferred over compound-complex sentences. Writers were not hesitant to select words that best fit their purpose, the number of syllables and the antiquity of a word notwithstanding. We tend to see such writing today as "dense, impenetrable and boring," but just think of the opportunity to expand one's vocabulary and to practice concentrating on the meaning being conveyed by those wonderfully detailed sentences!

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