



Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales (Oxford World's Classics)

Herman Melville, Robert Milder

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'Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges.' So wrote Melville of Billy Budd, Sailor, among the greatest of his works and, in its richness and ambiguity, among the most problematic. As the critic E. L. Grant Watson writes, 'In this short history of the impressment and hanging of a handsome sailor-boy are to be discovered problems as profound as those which puzzle us in the pages of the Gospels.'

Outwardly a compelling narrative of events aboard a British man-of-war during the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars, Billy Budd, Sailor is a nautical recasting of the Fall, a parable of good and evil, a meditation on justice and political governance, and a searching portrait of three extraordinary men. The passion it has aroused in its readers over the years is a measure of how deeply it addresses some of the fundamental questions of experience that every age must reexamine for itself.

The selection in this volume represents the best of Melville's shorter fiction, and uses the most authoritative texts. The eight shorter tales included here were composed during Melville's years as a magazine writer in the mid 1850's and establish him, along with Hawthorne and Poe, as the greatest American story writer of his age. Several of the tales - Bartleby the Scrivener, Benito Cereno, The Encantadas, The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids - are

acknowledged masterpieces of their genres. All show Melville a master of irony, point-of-view, and tone whose fables ripple out in nearly endless circles of meaning.

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