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Billy Budd,sailor (American Collection)



Synopsis

On one level, Melville's tale is an historical adventure story telling of life aboard ship shortly after the mutiny at Spithead in 1797. Billy is taken from a homeward bound merchantman to serve on the 'Seventy Four' HMS Indomitable. He falls foul of Claggart, the 'Master at Arms' and the final confrontation results in death. However, below the surface lie some of Melville's thematic obsessions - the aristocratic savage pitted against inhumanity born of service and the institutions of war, innocence overtaken by fate and the law, the worthy encompassed by the inevitable. Billy becomes an unwilling martyr - what passes for justice must be implemented because of the rebellious climate of the time. The natures of evil and conscience are explored and Billy Budd is the author's 'last word upon the strange mystery of himself and human destiny.' Melville is regarded by many as the finest author America has produced.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 9 Up--In this distinguished presentation of Herman Melville's American literary tragedy set during the Napoleonic wars, the voice of actor William Roberts is so firm and knowledgeable that listeners feels as though he is relating his own experiences. He makes subtle voice changes for the speech and emotions of the characters. Being careful not to over-dramatize the story, Roberts allows Melville's own words to take priority and not his interpretation of them. Because Roberts clearly enunciates each syllable, he is easy to understand. With the exception of the word, "lieutenant," there is no noticeable accent to distract students. The overall atmosphere is maintained

with a somber tone, but Roberts' somewhat brisk pace keeps it from becoming maudlin. His speed does fluctuate when necessary to present different moods. Periodically a musical interlude is used to foreshadow the upcoming events. An excellent addition to high school library collections.--Claudia Moore, W.T. Woodson High School, Fairfax, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

"The most studied and admired of Melville's works except for Moby-Dick." --John Updike "[A] late-life masterpiece." --The New York Review of Books --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Melville and I have a complicated relationship. He was undoubted brilliant and a great writer. His work is much deeper, and more complex and nuanced than it often appears on the surface of a first reading. The enjoyment of reading Melville is for me personally in the subsequent analysis of it. The reading of it, however, (for me) feels like slow and deliberate torture. I often beg and plead for him to get the point. Sometimes it seems he goes on and on saying the same thing, or mundane details that seem irritatingly dry and irrelevant -- of course on further examination it is purposeful, but that is not always initially apparent until I go back and ask what the point was. I would therefore characterize Melville as a challenging read, rather than an enjoyable read; but a valuable read --well worth the time and effort, if the reader is so inclined to read beneath the surface. This is a nice collection, and I look forward to returning to it to read some of the selections which I did not this time. (Melville in small doses for me).

I like this book though, like "Lord Jim", that I recently read, I had to get used to the writing style all over again. The sentences are long, and need concentration in order to understand. Yet, in this book, they convey an almost lyrical, poetic quality to the story, and you feel the emotion and the atmosphere of the scenes that Melville creates. The tragedy of Billy Budd does stay on - an abandoned child, illiterate, good-looking, almost innocent in his persona, condemned to death for one mistake made in panic, over a charge that was patently false, and made with malicious intent. Is this an allegory on life as well? As an old coach once said, 'Life is not fair. Neither is it fair. It is what it is'. Having said that, innocent die and the world forgets those who are not in positions of power. This is clearly demonstrated in the epilogue. The book could have been written in a style that is angry and bitter. Yet, the lyrical quality of the writing makes the tale even more poignant.

Billy Budd is a tough read, but well worth it. The ethical and moral issues it presents are thought

provoking and challenging. The characters are symbols rather than flesh and blood but their dilemmas are real. I led a discussion of it in a large, sophisticated group and the group members were avidly trying to make their contributions before time ran out. I really commend it to book clubs. Although the reading is challenging because of the author's style, the book is short.

I finished Billy Budd with tears in my eyes. I think one of the themes is "one can be too good for one's own good." Times were different back then; justice was sure and swift. Today, perhaps Billy would be tried for manslaughter or some other less crime. Another thought entered my mind: if Billy had not had the speech defect, he could have defended himself orally. Instead, all he had was that rush of helplessness which led to physical action. The bottomline is watch out for people who may be out to get you; possess a little paranoia in every relationship. Marie Nowell

I am glad I gave this book a chance. After years of teaching Moby Dick, I was hesitant, but I really enjoyed this novel.

Purchased as a "required reading" for high school student. Initially was concerned the book wouldn't be good.....but was pleasantly surprised that she enjoyed the book.

I wanted to read this classic because somehow I missed it in high school. I heard the Sopranos talking about it with their 2 kids and when Meadow said it was about a gay guy, etc. Mother Carmella was shocked and denied the fact completely. It was an enjoyable read later in my life. Buy with confidence. Very smooth transaction

I bought this book for the Benito Cereno novella that's included, as I had to read it for a class-- that story alone makes this collection worth it. Alarming and chilling, but satisfyingly written, that's a short novel that I think everyone should read-- the perfect merging of the the more formal/literary aspects of the writing with Melville's political intentions.

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