

Melville Electronic Library

a critical archive

HOME

ARCHIVES

EDITIONS

PROJECTS

ABOUT US

Welcome to the Melville Electronic Library (MEL)

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nulla vel nibh pellentesque, luctus lacus sed, feugiat purus. Nunc eleifend tortor magna, non rhoncus purus interdum a. Nullam tempor faucibus sodales. Pellentesque vitae ultrices ligula, vel feugiat urna. Curabitur porttitor in libero sed luctus. Donec neque erat, vehicula non orci non, commodo rutrum tortor. Duis id nunc arcu. Pellentesque sed urna vel neque fringilla rutrum. Mauris sed mi feugiat, venenatis velit a, sagittis leo. Praesent magna turpis, bibendum eu neque non, finibus fermentum quam.

Versions of Melville

During his lifetime, Melville published nine book-length works of fiction, a collection of tales, and four volumes of poetry. At his death, among other documents, he left in manuscript several uncollected tales (including Billy Budd), numerous poems (including Weeds & Wildings), and a handful of reviews, including his literary manifesto "Hawthorne and His Mosses." Most of Melville's manuscripts appeared posthumously in print. For various reasons, almost every Melville title exists in multiple versions, either in print or manuscript, due to

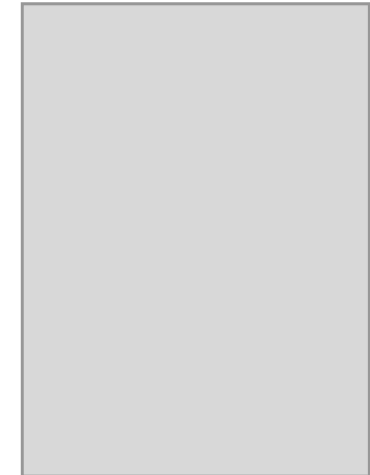


First English and American Editions, 1851

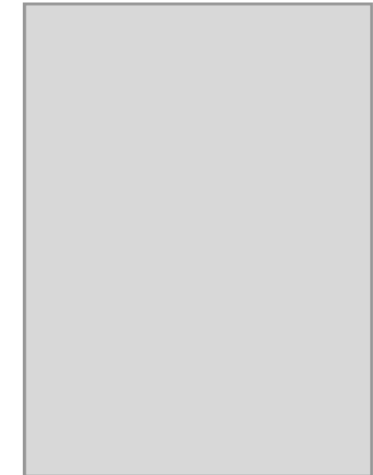
authorial or editorial revision. Changes to a work also occur in forms of adaptive revision, with or without authorial control, as in plays, films, opera, or even the cultural "meme." As a body of work that exists in multiple versions, Melville's corpus of writing is a remarkable fluid text, and therefore a considerable challenge, editorially and digitally.

MEL Toolkit

In building MEL, we have developed a suite of archival, editorial, and workspace tools in collaboration with Hofstra IT, MIT, Hofstra's Digital Research Center (DRC), and Performant Software Solutions. Together on one platform, these open-source, user-friendly tools are designed for textual editing (TextLab), content and metadata management (MELCat), OCR, collation,



Versions of
Moby-Dick



Versions of
Battle-Pieces



Versions of
Billy Budd

Melville Electronic Library

a critical archive

[HOME](#)

[ARCHIVES](#)

[EDITIONS](#)

[PROJECTS](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

VERSIONS OF BILLY BUDD: A Fluid-Text Edition

MEL's Versions of Billy Budd is a digital space containing various edited units that give the reader unprecedented access to the Billy Budd manuscript. On view are MEL's edition, with its textual, contextual, and revision annotations, links to collations of MEL's base version and reading text and projected collations of the 20th-century versions of Billy Budd, and a display of all leaf images of the Billy Budd manuscript.

[Enter the Edition](#)

INTRODUCTION

Billy Budd is Melville's last and perhaps his second most familiar work of fiction. As with Moby-Dick, the novella has devoted readerships in academe, the arts, and the popular culture. It has been the center of critical controversies regarding political resistance and Christian acceptance, authority and duty, masculinity and beauty, fathers and sons, romance and irony, and Melville biography. It continues to be a seminal text in fields of literary study worldwide, including law, war, gender, sexuality, and the editing of manuscripts.

Unlike Moby-Dick, which emerged in 1851 in two radically different first editions, Billy Budd was never published in Melville's lifetime. It exists fundamentally as a manuscript. At the time of his death in 1891, Melville had "completed" his novella to the extent that its plot, characters, and narration had been developed into a coherent whole. But the manuscript is far from polished, and its many leaves and leaf fragments reveal a complex revision history through numerous versions of the tale. Billy Budd is perhaps Melville's most remarkable fluid text, as our Tracking the Versions link attests.

MEL's Versions of Billy Budd is a digital space containing various edited units that give the reader unprecedented access to the Billy Budd manuscript. On view are MEL's edition, with its textual, contextual, and revision annotations, links to collations of MEL's base version and reading text and projected collations of the 20th-century versions of Billy Budd, and a display of all leaf images of the Billy Budd manuscript. Introductions explaining these features and our coding and emendation approaches can also be reached by the links to the right.

For ideas about how readers might use Versions of Billy Budd, please visit MEL's Projects section. To contribute a Use Case of your own, or if you would like to join MEL, Contact US.

VERSIONS OF BILLY BUDD: A Fluid-Text Edition

[How to Use the Edition](#)

[Tracking the Version: Billy Budd](#)

[How Billy Grew](#)

DIGITAL EDITING

[Modes of Digital Editing](#)

[Transcription Coding](#)

[Foliation, Leaves, Leaf Images](#)

[Emending the Reading Text](#)

COLLATIONS

[Billy Budd: Manuscript Base Version v. MEL Reading Text](#)