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ALL THE BOAT IS A STAGE: CLASSICAL TRAGEDY MEETS AMERICAN NARRATIVE – RE-READING MELVILLE’S *BILLY BUDD, SAILOR*

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RESUMO

Billy Budd, Sailor, obra derradeira de Herman Melville, situa-se, desde o subtítulo *An inside narrative*, num plano de interioridade. No interior de um navio de guerra ou no interior da alma humana, navegando pelos mares e pelas contradições, indecisões e instintos incompatíveis do homem. Através desta obra, Melville reescreve a tragédia atemporal e universal do Bem e do Mal, em eterno confronto, recuperando na América do séc. XIX o espírito também ele atemporal e universal da tragédia clássica. Melville reescreve na sua tragédia velhos mitos e arquétipos, com uma sensível objectividade. Da cultura clássica, Melville recupera as leis trágicas do destino, da honra, do comedimento e da obediência aos deuses. Em *Billy Budd*, reiventa simbolicamente as leis – não menos trágicas – da guerra e das instituições, e também da Natureza e dos mais puros sentimentos humanos.

ABSTRACT

With *Billy Budd, Sailor: An Inside Narrative*, Herman Melville rewrites the eternal and universal tragedy of good and evil at fight, recovering, in the 19th century America, the likewise eternal and universal spirit of classical tragedy. *Billy Budd*'s plot is staged inside a HMS man-of-war and, simultaneously, inside human soul, sailing through the seas and through the contradictions and incompatible instincts of mankind. Melville founds his tragedy on a new myth, recycled from the Ancients. A myth expresses the rules of conduct of a certain social or religious group. Among the Greeks, the laws of destiny, honour, moderation and obedience to the Gods. In *Billy Budd*, not only the laws of war and institutions, but also the laws of nature and purest human feelings.

Billy Budd, Sailor, Herman Melville's last novel, was left as a manuscript when the author died, on 28 September 1891, and remained unpublished until 1924. Considered one of Melville's most symbolic works, *Billy Budd*'s plot is staged at sea but the overall pattern of action happens at an internal level (see the subtitle *An*