

THE MEANING OF *BILLY BUDD**Limin Chu*

## Abstract

Just as written by the author into his posthumous work *Billy Budd* that Billy's story properly ends with his life, so the author thinks it would not be amiss to go on for three more chapters. This he did obviously for a particular purpose.

Moreover, Chapters IV and V have nothing to do with Billy's story, but scholars who worked on *Billy Budd* often used certain details in those two chapters for reflecting on Captain Vere. This paper also studies Melville's digressions on Nelson and interprets them as the author's reflection on Vere's mediocrity.

Like Chapters IV and V, Chapter XXIX is extraneous to the development of Billy's story, but it is crucial to understanding the meaning of the novelette, although critics usually passed it by. In fact, "News from the Mediterranean" in the chapter, which distorts the case of Billy Budd, is Melville's declaration of his position in opposition to that of the naval authorities.

Recent efforts to revive the argument of "testament of acceptance" have not been successful in my point of view. As long as Chapter XXIX stands as it is, the argument of "testament of acceptance" will continue to suffer from serious weaknesses. The meaning of *Billy Budd*, tested in Chapters IV, V, and XXIX especially, is its continuance of Melville's spirit of protest.