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Report: Melville Society Archive Fellowship 2011

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Melville Society Archive Fellow Laura López Peña in the Research Library of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. Photo courtesy of Robert K. Wallace.

As I write about my two weeks in the Melville Society Archive in New Bedford as the 2011 Melville Society fellow, I am aware of the dangers of turning this report into a deeply-felt expression of gratitude. Yet how could it be otherwise? I am indebted to the Melville Society for their generosity in and outside the Archive, and I am fortunate to have been part of the Melville family since the remarkable 2009 Jerusalem conference. The Melville Society Archive Fellowship is the best gift any Melvillean could receive. I could not imagine my time in New Bedford without at least part of the Melville crew, which is why I decided to plan my visit for the *Moby-Dick* Marathon in early January. No matter how freezing the “cold north” was, I was sure that being close to the Melville Society friends would keep me warm.

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The fellowship, including \$500 and free accommodation in New Bedford for two-weeks in a luxurious apartment which I had the pleasure to share with the wonderful Whaling Museum intern Jordan Berson, provided me with the opportunity to dive deeply into a large variety of Melville-related treasures accompanied by exceptional guides. My first days in New Bedford were spent among Melville scholars and enthusiasts attending not only the fifteenth *Moby-Dick* Marathon, impeccably organized by the New Bedford Whaling Museum, but also some other activities around the event such as Elizabeth Schultz's excellent lecture "Is *Moby-Dick* Still the Great American Novel?," the superbly crafted "Visualizing Melville" exhibition, the hilarious "Stump the Scholars" session, and one-to-one interviews with Melville scholars.

After the Marathon, I remained in New Bedford for two more weeks studying the treasures of the Melville Society Archive. As a Melville scholar from Barcelona, I was amazed at the variety of primary and secondary sources. As a PhD student working on *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel*, I was particularly attracted to the Robert Madison Collection, containing the same editions of the books that Melville read and also compilations of poetry on the Civil War. The secondary resources in the Sealts, Leyda, Hayford, and Melville Society general collections supplied me with multiple resources on Melville's poetry, Holy Land literature, and Melville-related topics such as transnationalism, religion, science, and the (im)possibilities of inter-cultural dialogue, which illuminated many of the research topics I am currently examining in my doctoral dissertation.

For most of my time in the Archive, however, I was under the spell of Walter Bezanson, my dear guide to *Clarel* for more than two years who, despite not being present, was now sharing with me his hundreds of handwritten personal annotations, his carefully collected books on the Holy Land, and the many articles, MA theses, and PhD dissertations on *Clarel* and on Melville's poetry that he had so thoroughly read and reviewed over the years. I discovered Bezanson's collection of more than fifty engravings and prints on the Holy Land and, more generally, the Ottoman Empire. I studied with care the two small green boxes of annotated cards with ideas and critical bibliography on *Clarel*, which he had used for his doctoral dissertation. Reading Bezanson's handwritten annotations brought me closer to the scholar who helped to rescue the poem from undeserved oblivion. As I spent hours reading his carefully-crafted annotations, I could imagine how difficult it must have been for him to write his brilliant dissertation on *Clarel* in 1943. By the end of my intense hours at the Archive, I had the feeling that Bezanson had become a patient friend from whom and with whom I was learning.

I again would like to express my gratitude to the Melville Society for providing me with privileged archival resources and material conditions during my stay in New Bedford, and also for integrating me within an exceptional community of scholars whose continuous support has increased my love for Melville and *Clarel*. I especially thank the members of the Melville Society Cultural Project for their generosity, conversations, and company. I was pleased to meet Jennifer Baker and enjoyed her conversation at Antonio's. I thank Mary K. Bercaw Edwards for having shared with me her insightful knowledge of the Archive, the sea, and *Moby-Dick*, and for her superb guided tour of Mystic Seaport. I am grateful to Timothy Marr for his interest in my work on *Clarel* since the Jerusalem conference, his helpful "*Clarel*-focused tour" of the Archive resources, his recommendations about critical bibliography on the poem, and his introduction to a whole world of electronic resources. I thank Christopher Sten for his information about Melville and transnationalism and his help in getting me oriented to the Harvard campus. I send an affectionate "abrazo" to Robert K. Wallace, who patiently showed me the collection of Melville's prints in the Archive and encouraged me to apply for this fellowship. From my arrival in Boston until my departure two months later, Wyn Kelley provided me with academic assistance and personal delight, making me feel not only at home but even part of her family. Without her, my time in New England would not have been half as pleasurable and productive. There is no cold in New England in January if the Melville Society friends are around.