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Leviathan, Volume 16, Number 2, June 2014, pp. 90-91 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/lvn.2014.0017



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Report: *Melville Society—Bezanson Archive Fellowship 2013*

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Thanks to a generous \$500 stipend from the Melville Society and the free use of the beautiful scholars' quarters at the New Bedford Whaling Museum Research Library, I was able to take advantage of a wonderful opportunity during the summer of 2013. I came to the Melville Society Archive in New Bedford in June as a Walter E. Bezanson Fellow with a specific goal in mind: to work on my research on Melville and biblical genealogy. However, something happened to me when I actually arrived at the archive room. As I stared at the stacks of books and papers owned by Harrison Hayford, Merton Sealts, Jay Leyda, Joyce Sparer Adler, and Walter Bezanson, a feeling came over me. It was intimidation. These scholars have contributed lasting legacies to the Melville community, and here I was, only a year removed from defending my dissertation. I sat down at the tables outside of the archive room and gathered my thoughts. Then, in a moment of clarity, I decided to spend the first half of each day—roughly 3–4 hours—studying the scholars themselves through their books, marginal notes, and miscellaneous papers. What I learned from this experience has had a consequential professional and personal impact on me.

I spent hours going through the Bezanson papers. They are filled with wonderful insights and intriguing comments concerning possible avenues for Melville scholarship. One letter, however, really spoke to me. A young Bezanson, his Ph.D. freshly minted, had written a personal letter to a friend in which he revealed that at one point Stanley T. Williams referred to his dissertation as “a young man’s book.” I was in disbelief that such a remark was made about Walter Bezanson, the man whose name and career are honored by this fellowship. I stared at the letter for a moment and then I laughed, not at Bezanson’s expense, but at the thought that the universal thump had been passed, for I, too, have written a young man’s book. As I continued to read the letters, it seemed to me that with each passing year that he revised his work on *Clarel*,

Bezanson began to understand his mentor's comment, even as with each passing month that I revise my own work, I also begin to understand what Williams meant.

With renewed confidence, I went into the Archive and began to peruse the stacks. A particular book caught my eye in the Hayford section: an edition of John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*. In my own study, I discuss the possible connections between Kitto's *Cyclopedia* and Melville's grasp of biblical genealogy. Questions immediately surfaced in my mind. Did Hayford mark the same passages in his copy that I have marked in mine? Did he believe Melville owned or read the 1852 Boston, Gould, and Lincoln edition specifically, or is this edition here as a representative example? I carefully looked through Hayford's copy and realized that he had, in fact, marked many passages that I noted. Also on Hayford's shelf were books by John Bryant, Wyn Kelley, and Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, books that are on my own shelf. Perhaps, this was the greatest lesson that I took away from the experience: the communal feeling of working on Melville, the legacy of scholarship, and the feeling that I am a part of it all.

Embedded within Bezanson letters is the history of the Melville Society, which began as a series of informal meetings at various conferences. In a 1946 letter to Bezanson, Tyrus Hillway discusses expanding the Melville Society's reach to Australia. Today, such a task would be as simple as sending an email, a text, or even a tweet. I already had tremendous respect for Hillway because of his scholarship, but reading this letter made me appreciate the hard work undertaken by him and many others to build a Society, part of whose legacy is the sponsorship of someone like me to conduct research in New Bedford. The Melville Society continues to thrive through the hard work of many individuals. I encourage all to read these letters and learn about its history.

I owe many thanks to those who made my trip possible and to the diligent staff at the Research Library. Although scholars of any age and position in academia can benefit from the Melville Society Archive, I highly recommend that advanced graduate students and post-graduate researchers take advantage of this wonderful opportunity. If you are fortunate enough to be able to come to New Bedford, remember the words of Melville: "I love all men who *dive*." And dive you must. Dive into the books and the papers. Pull the books from the shelves and read them. Hold a first edition of *Moby-Dick* and read the line "Call me Ishmael" with renewed wonder. Never let anyone convince you that nothing more can be said about Melville. Oh, there is plentiful scholarship to be sorted and published. What say ye, my fellow Melvilleans? Will ye splice hands on it, now? I think ye do look brave.