

Historically Conceiving the Irrationality of Moby-Dick through Antebellum America, or: the Apotheosis of Paradox

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Hesburgh was so vital to my work this past year that it would border on criminal to only offer a single example. As such, I offer three projects which collectively highlight a broad range of the library's research assets. These are, first, an essay offering an interpretive hermeneutic for *Moby-Dick*; second, a report on social networks during China's Qin and Han periods; and third, a suite of educational materials on Primo Levi, intended to help primary and secondary school teachers. These projects would have been impossible if not for the contributions of Professor Jake Lundberg, Professor Liang Cai, and Dr. Caterina Agostini, respectively; I thank them deeply for their expert mentorship.

The *Moby-Dick* piece was the most traditional academic work. Building the wealth of primary and secondary sources I needed to complete it saw me engage more deeply with library's resources than I ever had previously. I spent hours tucked away in the stacks or in reserved study spaces, poring over search results in OneSearch, ND Catalog, Hathi Trust, and WorldCat. Whether in physical or digital books, online articles, or 19th century artifacts in Rare Books & Special Collections, Hesburgh always had what I needed. Librarians and archivists were also consistently a boon to my academic pursuits, even when I was working with them on an entirely separate project. For instance, I worked with the incredible Mark Robison to identify sources for an eventual political science thesis. That mentorship was valuable enough in its original aims, but more than that, two of the texts he pointed out to me ended up being essential to my rewrite of the paper for the history department's O'Brien Award competition. Thus, this first paper—which I selected as my submitted piece purely due to its conformity to traditional standards of academic writing—already reflects the invaluable contributions of the library, in facilitating identification of appropriate sources through online catalogs, providing access to such

a wealth of physical and digital texts and artifacts, and offering expert guidance through subject librarians.

My report on Qin-Han social networks was my first true foray into digital humanities, and contributes additional perspective on Hesburgh's steady support of student work. Though I have had the pleasure of being deeply involved in the Navari Center's in-person sessions and online carpentry workshops as a student leader with the Kellogg Developing Researchers Program, I had never attempted an entire project grounded in its methods. My past work was thus invaluable in this pursuit. It was also for this report that I first experimented with some of the library's less-appreciated loan services. One article on Qin legal codes, for instance, was available to me only through an interlibrary loan; I was exceptionally fortunate that Hesburgh goes to such lengths to maximize the resources available to students, as this piece was ultimately essential to my final report. I also made my first in-library loan, giving me two hours to read from a much-needed commentary on the philosophy of Han Fei.

The Primo Levi project is another adventure in digital humanities methods, and an exciting opportunity to incorporate service into my academic work. Though only partially complete, the final project will consist of a website with printable lesson packs covering Levi, and focusing on the roles of memory and illustration in his corpus. Whatever grade they instruct from kindergarten through high school, teachers will have free access to tailor-made English and Spanish lesson plans. To me, there's something poetic in this: by supporting intellectual life at the University, Hesburgh is reaching far beyond campus. My story and those of others show that, through enabling students, the library is nourishing a love for learning across the nation. It is, in a word, a force for good in the world.

Indeed, consider the support Hesburgh provided me throughout this project. Central to my work was the Visual Resources Center, which provided access to the ARTstor image database, and maintained a curated list of art and art history blogs that introduced me to what was previously a foreign discipline. Notre Dame's membership in the IIF Consortium, and the many contributions of Hesburgh staff to that project, were equally key. Without the Marble site (for the uninitiated, the Museums, Archives, Rare Books & Libraries Exploration Platform) and its IIF-integrated Mirador image viewer, I would have had to study the illustrations of Levi's pieces with a woefully inadequate alternative.

The library also supported me in more routine ways. For instance, it was only because of my participation in various workshops over the past two years—primarily through the Navari Center—that I was able to build my understanding of Levi's thought as quickly as I did. The Distant Reader, ATLAS.ti, Mendeley, AntConc: all of these were vital to processing and organizing my evidence, and my fluency in all of them came through in-person workshops.

Lastly, Dr. Agostini and her course in data in the humanities provided by far the most important support for the project. Hesburgh-associated experts who guest lectured in the class all inspired my project in a meaningful way. Our focus on the mission of the Navari Center also left me with competency in assets like Voyant Tools, which I used to help understand broad themes of different eras of Levi's work, and Notion.

Of unmatched value were our multiple class visits to Rare Books & Special Collections. It was these trips which ignited my interest in the culture and context surrounding written works, and my desire to understand how non-literary aspects of their physical presentation influence the reader's engagement with them. The incredible knowledge of the Rare Books librarians was also admittedly what caused me to take up the Levi project. Formerly, my semester project was going

to focus on Hobbes's *Leviathan*. But after engaging with some of the pieces of the largest Primo Levi collection in North America, and hearing the curator lecture with impressive fluency on Levi's life, I could not help but be consumed with interest in the writer and his mode of expression.