

Multitudes: A Celebration of the Yale Collection of American Literature, 1911–2011
On view at Beinecke Library, Yale University, July 8 through October 1, 2011

Checklist and Descriptions: Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Noted for its bibliographic strength in nineteenth-century writings, the Collection includes first and other significant editions of virtually every major work of American literature published by prominent authors of the period, often in copies of distinguished provenance, such as Henry David Thoreau's inscribed copy of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Essays*. The work of writers James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and others, are represented in books and manuscripts, as are mid-century greats associated with Transcendentalism and the so-called American Renaissance: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The writers of the nineteenth century helped to shape a uniquely American literature, exploring a range of literary styles and considering specifically American subject matter. Important and well-loved books of the period, including Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, have come to represent the spirit of American literature.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter: A Romance* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1850).

Herman Melville, *The Whale* (London: Richard Bentley, 1851).

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851).

Herman Melville, letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, July 17 [1852?].

From the Nathaniel Hawthorne Collection.

My Dear Hawthorne:—This name of “*Hawthorne*” seems to be ubiquitous. I have been on something of a tour lately, and it has saluted me vocally & typographically in all sorts of places & in all sorts of ways. I was at the solitary Crusoeish island of Naushon (one of the Elisabeth

group) and there, on a stately piazza, I saw it gilded on the back of a very new book, and in the hands of a clergyman.—I went to visit a gentleman in Brooklyne, and as we were sitting at our wine, in came the lady of the house, holding a beaming volume in her hand, from the city—“My Dear,” to her husband, “I have brought you *Hawthorne’s* new book.” I entered the cars at Boston for this place. In came a lively boy “*Hawthorne’s* new book!”—In good time I arrived home. Said my ladywife “there is Mr *Hawthorne’s* new book, come by mail” And this morning, lo! on my table a little note, subscribed *Hawthorne* again.—Well, the Hawthorne is a sweet flower; may it flourish in every hedge.

I am sorry, but I can not at present come to see you at Concord as you propose.—I am but just returned from a two weeks’ absence; and for the last three months & more I have been an utter idler and a savage—out of doors all the time. So, the hour has come for me to sit down again.

Do send me a specimen of your sand-hill, and a sunbeam from the countenance of Mrs. Hawthorne, and a vine from the curly arbor of Master Julian.

As I am only just home, I have not yet got far into the book but enough to see that you have most admirably employed materials which are richer than I had fancied them. Especially at this day, the volume is welcome, as an antidote to the mooniness of some dreamers—who are merely dreamers—Yet who the deviant a dreamer?

H Melville

My remembrances to Miss Una & Master Julian—& the “compliments” & perfumes of the season to the “Rose-bud.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne, excerpt from “The Chimera,” 1858.

From the Nathaniel Hawthorne Collection.

“It had a tail like a boa-constrictor; its body was like I do not know what; and it had three separate heads, one of which was a lion’s, the second a goat’s, and the third an abominably great snake’s; and a hot blast of fire came flaming out of each of its three mouths. Being an earthly monster, I doubt whether it had any wings; but, wings or no, it ran like a goat and a lion, and wriggled along like a serpent, and thus contrived to make about as much speed as all three together.”