

The Literary Friendship of Hawthorne (Bowdoin class of 1824) and Melville ("a whale ship was my Yale College and my Harvard")

Fall 2026

Professor Chakkalakal

Office: 318 Adams Hall, drop-in hours W 9-noon

ENGL 3801 Syllabus

TR 8:30-9:55 am

Description:

During a mountain picnic in the summer of 1850, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville struck up a private conversation. That champagne-fueled talk led to an intense, maddening, and relatively brief friendship, a friendship that grew out of writing, that was mediated by writing and reading, that can only be approached by way of writing and reading. What was it like? How did it affect each of them? What might it suggest about the nature of the intimacies that are made possible by words on a page? In pursuit of the answers to these and other literary questions, we will focus our reading on what Hawthorne and Melville wrote between July 1849 and December 1852. That will mean reading all of *Moby-Dick*, *A Wonder Book*, *The Blithedale Romance*, Melville's essay "Hawthorne's Mosses" and sections from their letters and journals. You are responsible for purchasing the books and I will provide a reader with the other material. I would also like you to purchase a co-written 2023 novel by Chris Bachelder and Jennifer Habel, *Dayswork*, that offers a contemporary spin on Melville's life and the role Hawthorne's friendship played in it.

Course Objectives: Making friends through conversation about literature, writing to friends about literature, reading with friends about literature, cultivating wisdom, creating the conditions for surprising changes of heart and new life in community.

Assignments: Oral Presentation (20%), 15 hand-written letters, submitted to your assigned class "friend," revised and edited (by your friend) for grading on the last day of class (30%).

Final In-class written exam, taken on the last day of class (20%). Mid-term 10-15 page personal essay on *Moby-Dick*, typed, double-spaced, submitted in class on **Thursday October 15 (20%)**

Course Schedule:

Tuesday 9/1 - INTRODUCTIONS; MEETING HAWTHORNE AND MELVILLE, MELVILLE READS HAWTHORNE'S *MOSES FROM AN OLD MANSE*:

<https://takenote.library.harvard.edu/21-living-note>

HAWTHORNE READS MELVILLE'S *TYPEE*

<https://www.amerlit.com/documents/REVIEW%20of%20Typee%20or%20a%20Peep%20at%20Polynesian%20Life%20by%20Herman%20Melville.pdf>

Thursday 9/3 - Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses"

<https://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/nh/hahm.html>

Tuesday 9/8 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 1-10

Thursday 9/10 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 11-18

Tuesday 9/15 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 19-40

Thursday 9/17 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 41-51

Tuesday 9/22 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 52-72

Thursday 9/24 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 73-83

Tuesday 9/29 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 84-104

Thursday 10/1 - *Moby-Dick*, ch. 105-120

Tuesday 10/6 - complete *Moby-Dick*

FALL VACATION

Thursday 10/15 - submit personal essay on *Moby-Dick*

Melville's Letters to Hawthorne (and interpretations of them)

<http://www.melville.org/corresp.htm>

<https://lithub.com/read-a-love-letter-from-herman-melville-to-nathaniel-hawthorne/>

Tuesday 10/20 - Read Introductory Notes, Preface + The Gorgon's Head from Hawthorne's *A Wonder-Book*

Thursday 10/22 - Read The Golden Touch section of *A Wonder-Book*

Tuesday 10/27 - Read The Paradise of Children and Three Golden Apples sections of *A Wonder-Book*

Thursday 10/29 - Read The Miraculous Pitcher section of *A Wonder-Book*

Tuesday 11/3 -

Class meets in Special Collections to look at editions of *Wonder-Book* and *Moby-Dick*

Thursday 11/5 - *Blithedale Romance*, Preface - ch. 5

Tuesday 11/10 - *Blithedale Romance*, Ch. 6-20

Thursday 11/12 - *Blithedale Romance*, Ch. 21-25

Tuesday 11/17 - *Blithedale Romance*, Ch. 26-End

Thursday 11/19 - Submit letters and present your take on the Melville - Hawthorne "bromance" orally

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Tuesday 12/1 - *Dayswork*

Thursday 12/3 - *Dayswork*

Tuesday 12/8 - *Dayswork*

Thursday 12/10 - FINAL EXAM on key terms, characters, dates from the Hawthorne-Melville Friendship + essay question