



“THE THIN DELIGHTS OF MOONSHINE AND ROMANCE”

Romance, Tourism, and Realism
in Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun*

Hawthorne’s engagement in the discourse of tourism dates back to the very beginnings of his literary activity. In the early 1830s, following various failed attempts to place his fictional work with publishers¹, the young author was investigating other avenues that might further the literary aspirations he had been nurturing for some years². The early setbacks with the publishing industry pushed the young Hawthorne to experiment with other narrative forms and, in the summer of 1832, he resolved to undertake a tour of upstate New York, New England, and Canada to collect new materials for a projected collection of travel sketches. Hawthorne probably thought that the extraordinary popularity of this genre might help to win over publishers and gain the public recognition he needed to launch his literary career. A letter to Franklin Pierce, dated 28 June 1832,

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1. For a reconstruction of the beginnings of Hawthorne’s career, see Baym 1976 and Thompson. For a recent interpretation of Hawthorne’s early phase, see also West. Hawthorne’s problematic relationship with publishers began as early as 1828 when, as is well known, he published anonymously and at his own expense, *Fanshawe*, a novel he would later repudiate.

2. In a well-known letter written to his mother at the age of sixteen, he confessed, in a mixture of serious and humorous tone, his intention to become an author with a capital A: “What do you think of my becoming an Author, and relying for support upon my pen. Indeed I think the illegibility of my handwriting is very authorlike. How proud you would feel to see my works praised by the reviewers, as equal to the proudest productions of the scribbling sons of John Bull. But authors are always poor Devils, and therefore Satan may take them,” in Hawthorne 1984, 139.

clearly indicates the motivations behind his decision:

I was making preparations for a northern tour, when this accursed Cholera broke out in Canada. It was my intention to go by way of New-York and Albany to Niagara, from thence to Montreal and Quebec, and home through Vermont and New Hampshire. I am very desirous of making this journey on account of a book by which I intend to acquire an (undoubtedly) immense literary reputation, but which I cannot commence writing till I have visited Canada.³

As Beth Lueck points out, Hawthorne's itinerary was based on the picturesque tour, a practice originated in England in the late eighteenth century which became "enormously popular in the United States in the 1820s and 1830s" (154). According to Alfred Weber, "all the places and itineraries mentioned by Hawthorne in his two letters [concerning the journey] and in the relevant travel sketches lie, without exception, on one of the three routes described in the tourist guides" (10). Both critics underscore Hawthorne's indebtedness to travel guides as well as travel writing in general, such as Washington Irving's *Sketch Book*, which he read avidly in his youth.

Alfred Weber, Beth Lueck and Dennis Berthold, editors of *Hawthorne's American Travel Sketches*, agree that "My Visit to Niagara" (1835) is the most significant piece. In Lueck's words, it "is the climatic sketch in Hawthorne's series of travel sketches from his 1832 tour, and it may well have originally been intended as the climatic piece of the framework of 'The Story Teller,' just as Niagara Falls often served as the climax of the northern tour for nineteenth-century tourists" (169). The sketch tellingly captures the transformation of travel into a touristic experience and identifies several structural features that typify the tourist logic. However, it is my contention that the importance of this sketch goes well beyond documenting either the emergence of mass tourism (which found in the Niagara Falls an iconic attraction), or its prominent role in the early stage of the writer's career. The reflections on the discourse of tourism that Hawthorne presents in this text form an illuminating report on his working of a new rationale and a new aesthetic for fiction

3. Quoted in Weber 2.

writing, which he would later formalize in the prefaces to his major romances and, above all, in *The Marble Faun*.

The sketch centers on the slow, complex process by which the narrator first manages to overcome the initial disillusionment when coming face-to-face for the first time with the renowned tourist attraction that are the Niagara Falls and then succeeds in appreciating the beauty of the place, as well as recognizing the symbolic and cultural significance of his experience there. What enables Hawthorne to attain a different perspective on the Niagara Falls is, I want to argue, his deployment of a specific aesthetic gaze produced as an alternative to the prevailing attitude towards the place—the tourist gaze.⁴ The process through which the narrator conveys this new aesthetic gaze on the Falls bears a surprising resemblance to the process through which, in “The Custom House,” Hawthorne articulates a kind of specific fiction writing he calls “romance.” It is on this basis that he, again in “The Custom House” as well as in other Prefaces to his novels, claims a higher status for romance-writing, making romance distinct from the popular fiction of his day.⁵ I will then explore how the discourse of tourism resonates in the romance which takes tourism as its central thematic concern: *The Marble Faun*. Hawthorne’s last completed long work of fiction, which received mixed acclaim from critics, is, in my view, a moment of artistic and personal crisis for the author who finds his notion of romance writing caught in a sort of double bind created by the touristic nature of his stay in Italy. As the plot of the novel suggests, in his efforts to extricate himself from the situation, Hawthorne, envisioned and experimented with a new kind of writing that led him to revise and alter radically the romance form he had previously elaborated in favor of a much more realistic style of fiction.

4. John Urry coined the definition “tourist gaze” to indicate a way of seeing the attractions and the reality in general experienced by tourists as individual, but actually “socially organized and systematized,” that is to say largely framed by the institutions, discourses and practices which govern tourism itself. The tourist gaze is thus inevitably less a reflection of the reality seen and more a projection of a specific protocol of seeing upon a given reality (Urry 1). This concept continues to be a staple of tourist studies, even though it has been subjected to criticism and revision (see especially MacCannell 2011).

5. On this, see Brodhead 1986, 48–66; and Arac.

Some years ago, Winfried Fluck wrote that “In the emergence of the study of American literature and the formation of a separate discipline called American Studies, the ‘invention’ of the concept of an ‘American romance’ has played a crucial role” (415). Fluck’s statement can be taken as the end point of a powerful revisionary process experienced by the category of romance. From being regarded as a foundational and axiomatic tenet of a supposedly unique American tradition—the bedrock of the sister disciplines American literature and American Studies—the concept became increasingly untenable when new research exposed both its historical inconsistencies and the underlying vested interests. From the 1980s on, the “romance hypothesis” was parsed as a critical mystification, an ideologically inflected paradigm obfuscating behind its seemingly intellectual and critical guise a vision of the American literary and cultural tradition that was male-oriented, based upon the repression and exclusion of a substantial number of other subjects—primarily, but not exclusively, women—and historically and theoretically flawed.⁶

Yet, romance as a category is far from having disappeared from critical discourse. Along with Fluck, other scholars have begun to investigate romance from a different angle: notably its social use, as well as its cultural and literary functions within the literary field. Jonathan Arac, in particular, has maintained that “Hawthorne called his long narratives ‘romances’ to claim their difference from the novels of the day,” which enabled him “to establish an independent imaginative space, to gain for his work freedom from compromising involvement with his personal political commitments as a Democratic party loyalist or with larger, national controversies with slavery” (135). In other words, both through the definitions of “romance” presented in the Prefaces and the kind of fiction used in his major works, Hawthorne articulated a call for recognition of the special cultural and artistic authority of specific forms of fiction he called romance. For Hawthorne, then, the element distinguishing romance from common

6. Among the most relevant critiques and revisionary interventions into the “romance hypothesis,” see Baym 1984; Dekker; Ellis; McWilliams; Fluck.

novels lies precisely in the literary status it aspired to, an aspiration which the critical establishment later elevated into orthodoxy.

It must also be remembered that the context in which Hawthorne developed his vision of romance was characterized by the rise of the market as the dominant economic force. Its pervasive influence grew so rapidly that the very concept of literature in its modern sense evolved in response to the advent of the market. Given the extremely fluid, not to say chaotic, state of the antebellum literary scene, the increasing force of the market, and the virtually complete absence of other institutions capable of supporting literature, it is hardly surprising that Hawthorne tried to steer a middle course between the demands of literature, on the one hand, and those of the market, politics, nationalism, and other external determinants, on the other. Among the forces that were exerting their influence over literature, tourism played a significant role, for it was a crucial agent in the transformation of the cultural scenario of antebellum America.

Since Dean MacCannell's groundbreaking book, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976), tourist studies have become an established field of research and an interesting example of the cross-fertilization generated by the intersection of different disciplines. In addition to sociology, geography, anthropology, ethnography, and economy, other areas of inquiry have converged to create the multi-disciplinary field of tourist studies as it appears today. Among these other disciplines, literature figures prominently for various reasons, the most evident being the investment in the imaginary and the symbolic that literary and touristic activities share. Both entail similar questions concerning the value they attach to the representational practices in which they engage. From a historical point of view, literature, in its current meaning, and tourism emerged around the same period, between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. As James Buzard noted, tourism and literature, at least during the second half of the nineteenth century, have a similar approach towards culture, its representation, and the ways in which readers and tourists can achieve varying degrees of "acculturation."⁷

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7. Buzard 5.

Taking my cue from the recent debate on romance and combining this with the tourist studies developed in the pioneering work of, among others, MacCannell, Urry, and Buzard,⁸ I would like to suggest that the tourist experience recounted in “My Visit to Niagara” functioned as a testing laboratory through which Hawthorne undertook a reconfiguration of fictional writing, equipping it with the symbolic status he thought it deserved.

The sketch presents a typical touristic experience that was already a well-established reality as early as 1835. The narrator arrives at the Niagara Falls full of expectations derived from his readings and the hearsay about the Falls: “never did a pilgrim approach Niagara with deeper enthusiasm, than mine” (Hawthorne, 1989, 55). It could be argued that in a virtual but, at the same time, very realistic sense, when Hawthorne arrived at the Falls, he had already been there. He had seen Niagara in thousands of representations, both visual and verbal, that a booming print industry had disseminated all over the country, making the site into a worldwide tourist attraction and national symbol. This is why, upon arrival, the narrator does not rush to see the Falls in person, but delays his visit for fear that they might not meet his expectations, as indeed actually happens. After a rather flat, unemotional description, Hawthorne asks: “Were my long desires fulfilled? And had I seen Niagara?” Here is his answer:

I had come thither, haunted with a vision of foam and fury, and dizzy cliffs, and an ocean tumbling down out of the sky—a scene, in short, which nature had too much good taste and calm simplicity to realize. My mind had struggled to adapt these false conceptions to the reality, and finding the effort vain, a wretched sense of disappointment weighed me down. (58)

The disappointment the narrator experiences is hermeneutic: the image of the Falls he had formed in his mind through the countless reproductions had assumed a consistency, even a reality, of its own that now clashes with the actual perception. He finds it impossible to reconcile his idealized presupposition derived from guidebooks and other travel writings with the Falls he actually sees. Imagination appears here in the guise of a standard-

8. See MacCannell 1999; 2011; Urry; Buzard.

ized, commercialized, and counterfeit product, a fake or forgery for the consumption of a mass public of tourists and readers alike. This experience provokes a crisis of authenticity, while a sense of inadequacy overwhelms the narrator who confesses to feel “unworthy to look at the Great Falls, and careless about beholding them again” (58). Sightseeing appears to him as a debased form of experience—an all too common stereotype in tourism studies.

There are some asterisks between this first section of the sketch and the second section that starts with a transformation in the middle of the night when the narrator’s dreams are intermixed with the tumult of the Falls. Hawthorne describes it at length:

The noise of the rapids draws the attention from the true voice of the Niagara, which is a dull, muffled thunder, resounding between the cliffs. I spent a wakeful hour at midnight, in distinguishing its reverberations, and rejoiced to find that my former awe and enthusiasm were reviving.

Gradually and after much contemplation, I came to know, by my own feelings, that Niagara is indeed a wonder of the world, and not the less wonderful, because time and thought must be employed in comprehending it. Casting aside all pre-conceived notions, and preparation to be dire-struck or delighted, the beholder must stand beside it in the simplicity of his heart, suffering the mighty scene to work its own impression. Night after night, I dreamed of it, and was gladdened every morning by the consciousness of a growing capacity to enjoy it. (59)

What comes after this transformative process is no longer a mere travel report, but an aesthetic description of the place, a “contemplation.” Other tourists are perceived as an annoying interference but also a structural element of the picture Hawthorne depicts. This process culminates at the end of the sketch, when the narrator, about to leave and now at some distance from the Falls, is finally alone:

My enjoyment became the more rapturous, because no poet shared it—nor wretch, devoid of poetry, profaned it: but the spot, so famous through the world, was all my own! (61)

By sublimating the tourist gaze into an eminently aesthetic one, the narrator is finally able to enjoy the Niagara Falls, which now appear to him as a natural and aesthetic object at the same time. Sightseeing is thus transformed, in Hawthorne’s narrative, into

a powerful, subjective aesthetic gaze able to transcend the limits of the tourist gaze and regain the sublime quality of the landscape.

The change in perspective effected by the nightly process appears remarkably similar to another, much more famous, change in perspective found in “The Custom House,” the sketch which introduces *The Scarlet Letter*. In an effort to present the specific qualities of romance writing, Hawthorne contrasts the daytime routine of his business at the Custom House—boring or interesting as it may be—among the various characters that keep him company there with the action of daydreaming in which a romance writer is involved at night. If during his daily working hours his “imagination was a tarnished mirror” (Hawthorne 2008, 29), in the dead of night it was magically rekindled, and became creative again. “If the imaginative faculty refused to act at such an hour, it might well be deemed a hopeless case. Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly—making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility—is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests” (30). Hawthorne’s transformation of the “domestic scenery,” the ordinary, daytime life into “things of intellect” (30), closely follows the process through which he had rescued the Niagara Falls from the tourist gaze to reinstate them in an aesthetic realm.

This special space is described as a “neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and the fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (30). The narrator might have been able to fabricate other forms of writing while working in the Custom House,⁹ but not romance. For romance requires a dedication of its own, incompatible with his position as a surveyor: “I had ceased to be a writer of tolerably poor tales and essays and had become a tolerably good Surveyor of the Customs” (32). However, Hawthorne had to be either an author with a capital A or a public officer, he could not be both. In other words, it is not the profession of authorship as such, but that of the author as an artist (the romance writer), which is incompatible with any other occupation. To transmute

9. “I might for instance have contented myself with writing out the narrative of a veteran shipmaster” (Hawthorne 2008, 31).

an imaginary piece of “fine red cloth, much worn and faded” (27) into a work of literary art requires for Hawthorne an unconditional commitment and strict adherence to the rules of aesthetic production.

“A CHARMING ROMANCE WITH INTRINSIC WEAKNESSES”?

Hawthorne’s last finished romance, *The Marble Faun*, takes its inspiration from his first, long journey outside America. First, he went to live in Great Britain, where he served four years as US consul in Liverpool. In 1857, when president Pierce—a lifelong friend to whom he owed the appointment—was not reelected, Hawthorne resigned from the highest paying job he ever had. However, at the insistence of his wife, Sophia, he decided to prolong his stay abroad. The Hawthornes traveled first through France and then Italy, where they settled for a year and a half. In spite of the length of time spent in Italy, from January 1858 to the middle of May 1859, Hawthorne seems to have been rather uncomfortable there. His notebooks suggest that he was not interested in social life, in the customs and manners of the places he visited, nor in the events that were taking place in the country. He seems to have been indifferent to the “actualities” (Hawthorne 1990, 3) of Italy at that time, characterized by the dramatic events of the Risorgimento. For him, the country appears to exist only in its aesthetic dimension: “the sum of the art works and art history assembled there” (Brodhead 1986, xii). Even Italy’s artistic treasures apparently left him, on the whole, unresponsive, if not plainly distressed and baffled, as this passage from his notebooks shows: “I soon grew so weary of admirable things, that I could neither enjoy nor understand them. My receptive faculty is very limited, and when the utmost of its small capacity is full, I become perfectly miserable” (Hawthorne 1876, 50). Apparently, Hawthorne was not fascinated by Italian art, which induced in him a peculiarly touristic form of shame,¹⁰ which recalls the reaction he had been

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10. “He often failed,” Brodhead observes, “to experience the ecstasies mandated by touristic expectation, and his notebooks show him afflicted with two emotions generated by such failures: what Dean MacCannell has called touristic shame, painful inward self-criticism for his inability to feel the magical power in works that often bored him to stultification; and what

experiencing upon his arrival at Niagara Falls and definitely made him “not a very successful tourist” (Brodhead 1990, xii).

Brodhead’s comment reiterates a commonly held view of Hawthorne’s sojourn in Italy first proposed by Henry James who, in his 1879 study, defined his compatriot’s approach to Italy “simply that of the ordinary tourist—which amounts to saying that he was extremely superficial” (1984, 439). Proof of this is, for James, the persistent “impression that Hawthorne was a good deal bored by the importunity of Italian Art, for which his taste, naturally not keen, had never been cultivated” (440), as well as “his curious aversion to the representation of the nude in sculpture” (441). In his typical, subtly acrimonious ways (“one feels that the brightness or dinginess of the frame is an essential part of his impression of the work” [441]), James insists on his countryman’s ineptitude in appreciating Italian art, and ascribes this shortcoming to the fact that Hawthorne represents “the last specimen of the more primitive type of men of letters” (442). “An American as cultivated as Hawthorne,” James observes, “is now almost inevitably more cultivated, and, as a matter of course, more Europeanised in advance, more cosmopolitan” (442). This lack of acculturation did not, however, prevent Hawthorne from producing a book from his stay in Italy, which by the time James writes his biographical essay had become “part of the intellectual equipment of the Anglo-Saxon visitor to Rome and is read by every English-speaking traveler who arrives there, who has been there, or who expects to go” (444).

I wish to expand a little on James’s comments, because they have contributed significantly to the course of the subsequent critical debate on *The Marble Faun*, but also, more importantly, because they are indicative of the conundrum in which Hawthorne found himself when he wrote the novel. After having exposed the limitations of Hawthorne’s aesthetic perception, the paucity of his cultural capital in classic art, his being, in a word, nothing more than an “ordinary tourist” in Italy, James moves on to discuss *The Marble Faun*, which he considers a less accomplished romance than Hawthorne’s previous work, on account of its

might be called touristic aggression, a satirical rage against the structure of expectation that made him feel such incompetence and remorse” (Brodhead 1990, xii–xiii).

huge popular success and its status as a travel guide for tourists. James remarks twice (with a touch of envy?) that although this "moonshiny romance" was "the most popular of [Hawthorne's] works," on the whole, "the thing remains a charming romance with intrinsic weaknesses" (445). These weaknesses originate in its touristy appeal, which, in James's eyes, impairs any serious artistic intent it may have aspired to, and makes it "something second-rate and imperfect" (445). Myth replaces history, pushing the balance between the real and the imaginary too much toward the latter and turning the narrative into "an almost fatal vagueness" (447).

James's criticism, however, takes on a different value when read less in terms of the qualities of *The Marble Faun* itself and more with regard to the function the tourist discourse plays in the novel. In this perspective, I would suggest that the Italian experience caused a deep personal and artistic crisis in Hawthorne, a crisis epitomized in his status as a tourist. Interestingly, Hawthorne's reaction to the Italian environment was completely at odds with that of his wife, whose notebooks testify to her joy and delight at being in Italy. This disparity, I suspect, lies precisely in their divergent attitudes. Sophia, herself a painter and copyist, did not seem to resent her tourist status, while for her husband, this condition was highly problematic, since it presupposed a debased form of perception and experience that was essentially incompatible with the specific artistic project he was pursuing. If, at first sight, *The Marble Faun* might seem partially to replicate and partially to combine the perspective deployed in "My Visit to Niagara" and "The Custom House," the scene portrayed marks an obvious difference. Set in the Old World, the novel does not focus on a natural panorama or American history, but on the monuments from Italy's past, the remnants of a history as old as Western society itself, and on some of the most renowned works of art in Western society.

From this point of view, Italy represented a formidable challenge for Hawthorne. It constituted a sort of ultimate test for his romance theory, which, in this country, faces a paradox: how can a writer deploy an aesthetic gaze able to "remove farther from the actual and nearer to the imaginative" (Hawthorne 2008, 31)

what is an already highly aestheticized, imaginary reality? While in *The Scarlet Letter* the “rag of scarlet cloth” is only imaginatively a “ruin,” the result of a “now forgotten art” (27), in the Italy portrayed in the novel and experienced by Hawthorne himself, the object of sightseeing is an actual, already highly wrought artistic landscape of almost unfathomable historical depth.

I propose to read *The Marble Faun* as symptomatic of Hawthorne’s dilemma. The aesthetic gaze codified in his romance theory gets caught between sightseeing, on the one hand, and the much more sanctioned aesthetic gaze protocols of Italian high art, on the other. What function can romance still perform in this context? These seem to be some of the key concerns at stake in Hawthorne’s last published work. *The Marble Faun* is witness of his changing perspective on the functions of literary writing under the impact of the developing tourist industry within a very unstable and mobile cultural panorama. The preface to the novel, in which Hawthorne records and deplors the disappearance of an idealized figure of the reader is emblematic of his predicament. Although, he admits, he never “personally encountered, nor corresponded through the Post, with this Representative Essence of all delightful and desirable qualities a Reader may possess,” nonetheless he had always maintained a “sturdy faith in his actual existence, and wrote for him year after year during which the great Eye of the Public (as well it might) almost utterly overlooked [his] small productions” (Hawthorne 1990, 1–2). Now, by contrast, Hawthorne seems inclined to tolerate the fact that his idealized reader figure, if she or he ever existed, is more likely to be found “under some mossy grave-stone, inscribed with a half-obliterated name, which [Hawthorne] will never recognize” (James 1984, 2). The new reader he is now addressing appears to be much more similar to the tourists he had come across during his stay in Italy, rather than the intimate friend he had in mind for his previous works.

In fact, in the second half of the Preface, Hawthorne openly connects romance with tourism.¹¹ He does so, however, by fur-

11. According to Nattermann, the well-known passage from the Preface in which Hawthorne specifies that “Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where

ther expanding on an aesthetic protocol he had already brought up in his earlier novels: the picturesque. In two of the three prefaces to his previous longer works of fiction, this aesthetic protocol is invoked to connote either positively or negatively, i.e. as picturesque or unpicturesque, the subjects of his writing as well as the kind of writing he was striving to produce. A similar function of the picturesque occurs also in all three previous texts. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester's strong "spirit" is marked "by its wild and picturesque peculiarity," just as "this beautiful woman"'s "attire and mien" appears "so picturesque" (Hawthorne 2008, 44). Pearl also is characterized by the "brilliant picturesqueness of her beauty" (James 1984, 162). For the sake of brevity, I only reference these examples, but similar cases can be found in both *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Therefore, Hawthorne's notion of romance appears to overlap with the category of the picturesque. However, as Lueck noted, in employing this concept, Hawthorne rather had the model of the picturesque tour in mind than the aesthetic protocol theorized by William Gilpin and Uvedale Price. The picturesque was already outmoded by the time Hawthorne was writing his novels, but it had seen a powerful comeback thanks to the tourist industry, which made it a popular component of sightseeing.

As the Preface to *The Marble Faun* illustrates, Italy now seems to offer the favorable conditions to overcome the historical and social impediments which made romance writing so difficult in America. At the same time, the artistic landscape of Italy far surpasses the code of the picturesque, thus again destabilizing and complicating the task of the romance writer. In Italy, art is not encased only in museums, where it is exposed to a highly codified aesthetic gaze, but is part and parcel of everyday life. How can the romancer hold out, when confronted with such a complex reality?

My suggestion is precisely that *The Marble Faun* exposes both the personal and artistic crisis that Hawthorne faced as a result

actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America" (Hawthorne 1990, 3), "represents the realm of American tourist expectations about Italy" (Nattermann 64). The article is an early, extensive treatment of the functions of tourism in Hawthorne's novel.

of his tourist status in Italy. Since publication in 1860, criticism has mostly focused either on the moral conflict and the guilt theme at the center of the plot or on the peculiar tourist guide quality of novel, which resembles a sort of Murray travel guide with a literary twist. Beside the obvious drama of Donatello and Miriam, there is another case that unfolds in the artistic aspirations of the two American protagonists, the sculptor Kenyon and the painter Hilda. Both come to Italy to hone their talent and perfect their art, but also to achieve social recognition and a form of consecration. Their artistic aspirations constitute a core aspect of the plot. From this point of view, the novel is the story of an artistic failure, since neither Kenyon nor Hilda manage to attain recognition as successful artists, while their inability to achieve artistic success is ultimately related to their tourist status. These two characters mirror the “rise to prominence in American life of the Europe of tourism and high art, in inextricable alliance with a certain program of class assertion” (Brodhead 1990, xv). Hawthorne realizes that their artistic aspirations are linked to social status. The ability to appreciate Italian art was rapidly becoming a class marker, identifying a new, cosmopolitan, affluent class, which found in acculturation and familiarity with European art a standard of legitimacy.

The novel opens with a scene which epitomizes a tourist gaze in action. In the Capitoline museum, “four individuals” (Hawthorne 1990, 5) are engaged in admiring works of art and, at the same time, gazing out from a huge window towards the Forum, the Coliseum, and, further away, the Roman Hills. The scene encapsulates a “must-do” of the eternal city. Thus, the first picture of the protagonists of this story portrays them as tourists intent on admiring a world famous tourist attraction. The narrator then informs us that three of them are “artists, or connected with Art” (7), while the fourth is a young Italian whose “connection” with art is of a different sort. He is a rather mysterious character, appearing to be a strange combination of aristocratic and rural attributes suspended midway between human and animal life. He also bears a striking resemblance to the statue of the faun they are admiring in the museum. While the other three are, or would like to be, artists, Donatello seems an object of art: a living combination of classic beauty and rustic

life, he materializes the picturesque, a quality which makes him a desirable companion, a sort of tourist attraction himself.¹²

What kind of artists are the other three protagonists of the story? Miriam is also a mysterious figure, a young and beautiful woman of rather obscure origins, partly Italian, partly English, but also possibly Jewish and African-American. On a card which she has on the door of her studio, she calls herself an "artist in oils" (39). Although she seems to possess genuine talent, readers are offered only sketches of possible future works in oil which seem to remain at the stage of mere attempts. Hawthorne's characterization of the two American protagonists, Hilda and Kenyon, is particularly interesting. They are defined by a curious double standard. On the one hand, they present themselves as artists, while, on the other, the narrative undermines this designation by insistently suggesting that they ultimately do not measure up to their aspirations. Kenyon, for instance, perhaps the most promising of the three, is reported to have set up his studio in the same rooms Canova had occupied in the past. Unlike his illustrious predecessor, however, he can count on "chiefly the attempts and experiments, in various directions, of a beginner in art, acting as a stern tutor to himself, and profiting more by his failures than by any successes of which he was yet capable" (117). This is not exactly a flattering judgment. Kenyon is basically portrayed as a "wannabe" artist. This definition applies also to Miriam and Hilda. Much as they are always busy working, none of the three ultimately manages to produce a finished piece.

Hilda is certainly the most interesting of the three.¹³ When still in the US, she had evinced "a decided genius for pictorial art," but "since her arrival in the pictorial land, Hilda seemed to have entirely lost the impulse for original design, which brought her thither" (56). She is so overwhelmed by the richness and beauty of the Old Masters that she suffers from something that recalls the Stendhal syndrome. Her very talents, the deep feelings

12. For a reading of Donatello's picturesqueness in connection with his problematic classification in terms of race and national identity, and how it echoes in James's perception, see Johnson 25-59.

13. Hawthorne may, perhaps in some measure at least, have taken inspiration for the character of Hilda from Sophia herself and her sisters. On this, see, Valenti 191-199.

enabling her to establish a special relation with the works of art, and, above all, her reverential attitude towards the unapproachable greatness of their art, turned out to be obstacles much more than assets. According to Brodhead, Hilda “represents the bearer of a militant high-cultural spirit. She is the exponent of a canonical attitude, the attitude that identifies art with an exclusive group of transcendental makers” (Brodhead 1986, 73). In embodying “the sort of forces that, in *The Marble Faun*’s own decade, worked to stratify a previously unified literary expression into separated literary and popular categories” (Brodhead 1986, 73), she “belongs to a historical transformation of art into an object of reverence” (Hawthorne 1990, 74). However, the consecration of art to which Hilda cedes can only be attained at the cost of relinquishing her own artistic ambitions. “Reverencing these wonderful men so deeply, she was too grateful for all they bestowed upon her—too loyal—to humble, in their awful presence—to think of enrolling herself in their society” (Hawthorne 1990, 57). In the end, she resolves to confine her skill to the profession of a mere “copyist” (57) of Old Masters: “All that she would henceforth attempt—and that, most reverently, not to say, religiously—was to catch and reflect some of the glory which had been shed upon canvas from the immortal pencils of old” (57).

While Miriam and Kenyon insist on attempting to create original productions, Hilda, with a much more practical approach, turns to simply making copies. However, in “sacrificing herself to the devout recognition of the highest excellence in art” (60), Hilda is achieving something beyond the sacralization of art. Her devotional, reverential attitude transforms the work of art into a tourist attraction, as much as her reproductions, faithful as they are, convert the work of art into a commodity disseminated and sold almost everywhere. She is similar to that “class of men whose merely mechanical skill is perhaps more exquisite than was possessed by the ancient artificers, who wrought out the designs of Praxiteles, or, very possibly, by Praxiteles himself” (115). They transpose the artist’s idea into a reality of hard marble, whereas Hilda glorifies the original picture by translating it into a marketable commodity.

Her powers of appreciation and her empathy with the masterpieces are the prerequisite upon which she builds the *aura* of the works she reproduces. By copying the productions of the Old Masters, she authorizes their authenticity, their meaningfulness, their almost sacred status. However, when the originals become tourist attractions in their own right, the copies operate as tourist markers, which make the work of art recognizable, popular, and, paradoxically, attest its authenticity as an attraction.¹⁴ On the one hand, Hilda wants to establish a canon of consecrated artists; on the other, she accomplishes her mission by producing what are basically souvenirs of the Old Masters. *The Marble Faun* seems to suggest that when the work of art is turned into a tourist attraction, all that remains for modern artists is the sublime sterility of Italian art and the classical tradition, which, at best, can be admired, venerated, and copied, but which can hardly generate new creative inspiration.¹⁵

The predicament in which Hilda finds herself is, in many ways, the same predicament Hawthorne had to face in writing his romance in and about Italy. The solution he devised was at Hilda's and Kenyon's expense, so to speak.¹⁶ For he projects onto their story his own dilemma, thus making it the subject of his literary production. He exorcised both the artistic and the existential fears

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14. On the notion of marker and its function in tourism, see MacCannell 1999, 109–131, and Culler.

15. A recent article argues that the novel "is Hawthorne's attempt to solidify the United States' position as a major nation on the rise [...] by demonstrating that nineteenth-century Americans have more of a right than their contemporary Roman counterparts to claim Italy's historical legacy" (Ochonicky 222, 223). According to the critic, by presenting themselves as inheritors of classic Rome, by appropriating Roman cultural heritage, the American protagonists make visible "Hawthorne's national identity-building project" (Ochonicky 223). While I agree that Hilda and Kenyon betray "the imperialistic dictates of transnational tourism," I find the critic's assumption that the novel confers them "the status of rightful heirs to Italy's past greatness" (Ochonicky 229) much more problematic, as the ending of the story suggests.

16. In a similar perspective, Jonathan Auerbach interestingly sees Kenyon as "Hawthorne's scapegoat" (Auerbach 1980, 119). The author "attempts to purge his anxiety by sacrificing another model, transferring all of his confusion and frustration to the figure of Kenyon, his fellow artist" (Auerbach 1980, 119).

that his experience as a tourist in Italy had engendered by instantiating them in the story of his four protagonists. The Americans Hilda and Kenyon treat Donatello as a native informant who can assist them in making their experience of the country more real and interesting, but who remains “other,” a “faun,” something radically different from them. Despite their benevolence and consideration, they maintain a non-committal attitude towards him typical of tourists. In the concluding pages of the novel, we learn that Donatello is in prison serving a probable life sentence, while Miriam is left alone drifting with the burden of her family’s past. Nevertheless, despite the many tragic events, the novel ends on a positive note, when Kenyon eventually finds the courage to confess his love to Hilda. The confession immediately leads to the subsequent decision to return to America: “Oh, Hilda,” exclaims Kenyon in the concluding pages of the novel, “guide me home!” (Hawthorne 1990, 461). Having had enough of Italy, Kenyon and Hilda are now ready to go back to their country, leaving behind Donatello and Miriam. Their prospected return to America, though, entails yet another resolution, namely to relinquish the artistic ambitions that they are now ready to exchange for the real life of business and comfort. “When I go back to my dear native land, the clouds along the horizon will be my only gallery of art” (265), Kenyon says at one point midway in the novel, prefiguring his decision to relinquish his interest in sculpture altogether.

The happy ending of the story might at first seem an effort to reinstate the romance atmosphere undermined throughout the plot, but closer inspection suggests a different picture. The way out of the artistic and experiential impasse Italy posed to Hawthorne is no longer provided by a return to the spirit of romance with its ivy, lichens, and historical ruins, but rather by immersion into contemporary life, into a modern perception, a modern relationship with those ruins, i.e. an immersion into the contemporary world of modern international tourism, its discourses, practices, and rituals.

The novel records Hawthorne’s keen but discomforted awareness of the increasing importance of tourism in the social, historical, cultural and literary fields. As a premonitory of the incredible impact tourism was bound to exert on the literary world, we need only

to think of Hawthorne's de facto invention of the transatlantic, international theme that would prove a corner-stone of much realistic fiction of the early phase. In this light, the overarching presence of tourism in the novel is far from being a mere reverberation of a major contemporary social phenomenon, or Hawthorne's way of putting aside the anxiety caused by the impending threat of the Civil War by seeking refuge in an aestheticized, foreign land. Rather, in addressing the touristic logic in detail, Hawthorne is actually laying the premises of the new realistic writing that would boom in the US shortly afterwards.¹⁷

We are still a long way from realism as such, but it is precisely through the emphasis on the touristic dimension that Hawthorne points the way in this direction. It can hardly be a coincidence that just a few years later, in a text regarded as a landmark of realism in fiction, we once again find the figure of the copyist of Old Masters. In one of the most famous and hilarious passages of *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain describes his visit to the "most celebrated painting in the world," Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. "I could not help noticing how superior the copies were to the original [...]. Wherever you find a Raphael, a Rubens, a Michael Angelo, a Caracci or a da Vinci (and we see them every day), you find artists copying them, and the copies are always the handsomest" (Twain 2002, 135–136). The veneration of the Old Masters now occurs within a touristic ritual in which art is adored through the liturgy of consumption that Hilda and Kenyon had, albeit unintentionally, helped significantly to establish. Hawthorne's narration of their story laid the foundations for the house of realistic fiction that other American writers would erect in following his footsteps through the streets of Rome, Italy, and old Europe.

17. For a reading of the problematic emergence of realism in relation to conflicting vision of pictorial art in *The Marble Faun*, see Glazener 51–92.

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