"Without Tearing the Web Apart": *Pierre*, *The Marble Faun*, and Aesthetics of Network

by

Catherine Ji Won Lee

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Abstract

In this thesis, I suggest Actor-Network-Theory as a methodology for aesthetic analysis that is faithful to the phenomenology of the aesthetic. With ANT, I examine the aesthetic landscapes of Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun: or, the Romance of Monte Beni*, two works of American literature with notoriously peculiar aesthetic, and discover in the process that new conclusions about the texts can be drawn when we focus less on aesthetic judgments and pay more attention to the particulars of each text. What I find in the two texts are networks, emerging from connections between and among human and nonhuman actors, in which subjects are thoroughly enmeshed. In *Pierre*, the implication of the involvement in networks is the loss of subjective autonomy; in *The Marble Faun*, the consequence is the evaporation of the illusion that we can know the world.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Catherine Ji Won Lee.

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Introduction: Aesthetics of Network

In *Melville and Aesthetics*, Samuel Otter and Geoffrey Sanborn argue for a reconsideration of aesthetics, which has, for some time, been something of a "dirty word" (1) in American literary criticism. "At a time when the profession as a whole has been moving in the direction of a greater textual and methodological inclusiveness," they write, "aesthetics has seemed like the relic of another age, at best, and a dangerously reactionary fetishization of dead white men's art, at worst" (1). For decades, literary scholarship in America has been concerned with eradication of the "spirit of elitist formalism, of political aloofness, and of repressive value judgment" (Ickstadt 265) that aesthetics has been associated with, focusing instead on the cultural and the political. During this time, however, there have been critics who have disagreed with the basic premise of that argument against aesthetics, that aesthetics "necessarily signifies a quasi-religious absorption in high-cultural artifacts" (Otter and Sanborn 1). These critics have insisted on the relocation of aesthetics, as it is considered, from the sphere of "absolute, universal, or even transcendent values" to the "mixed, *impure* conditions characteristic of every social practice and experience, however privileged or marginalized" (Matthews and McWhirter xv). Otter and Sanborn point out that these critics, by conceptualizing aesthetics as the "sensuous consideration of what is indeterminable in things" (Seel 16), make it possible to imagine aesthetics not as "a monumentalizing of the self" but as "a renewable retreat from the seriousness of stable identities and settled being" (Bersani and Dutoit 9). And while these critics have mostly been Europeans or philosophers "or both," a growing number of American critics have begun to contribute to the development of aesthetic understanding by "identifying aesthetics not with exclusion but with openness, not with isolation but with a richly disputatious sociality, and not with transcendence but with the unfolding of an immanent potential" (Otter and Sanborn 2).

Discussions of aesthetics in American literary criticism could eventually be "located on a new axis," Otter and Sanborn optimistically project, "one that plots the relationship between ideological and phenomenological approaches to the subject" (3).

"In order for that to happen, however, the phenomenological approach will have to become even more phenomenological" (3), Otter and Sanborn write; a problem with the existing approaches is that the critics who praise the aesthetic for its particularity nonetheless refuse to truly descend from the plane of theory. This is because once one drops into "the lower atmosphere of individual authors, works, passages, sentences, phrases, words, and sounds, political implications become foggy" (Otter and Sanborn 3). However inconvenient or uncomfortable that drop may be, Otter and Sanborn insist that it is "logically necessary" if the phenomenological approach is to gain the kind of "internal consistency" that will qualify it to "stand alongside—not displace—the ideological approach" (3).

Ultimately, Otter and Sanborn issue a call for a proliferation of experiments with the phenomenological approach to aesthetic analysis, and in this thesis, I respond to that call with Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory. One might wonder why another theory is being introduced when the preceding paragraph discusses the necessity of distancing from theory; but Actor-Network-Theory, or ANT, is rather different in kind from other theories. As John Law, another proponent of ANT, explains, while theories often try to explain why something happens, ANT is "descriptive rather than foundational in explanatory terms, which means that it is a disappointment for those seeking strong accounts" (141). In other words, ANT is unfit to serve as a detached, "safe" plane for critics to situate themselves as they attempt to untangle a particular state of affairs from afar. It does not miraculously bestow clarity upon an enigma. ANT is a theory about "how to study things, or rather how *not* to study them—or rather, how to

let the actors have some room to express themselves" (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 142). It sends critics down to the level of "things" that they intend to study so that they pay attention to the behaviours of those things, instead of looking at the things from a distance and tossing around explanations that might fit the situation. It is thus different from other theories, which keep critics in the ideological realm. Latour goes as far as to say that ANT is not really a theory but an approach, a "toolkit" (Law 141). These characteristics, I believe, are qualifications that show how ANT may be acceptably used—and in fact be exceptionally suited—for a phenomenological analysis of aesthetics that can account for aesthetic heterogeneity and that does not fall back into the trap of ideology, being grounded in the descent, in practice, in experience.

The basic tenet of ANT is that the divisions that have been ingrained in our understanding of the world for centuries, between subjectivity and objectivity, humanity and nonhumanity, society or culture and nature, and so on, are arbitrary, groundless distinctions. They are myths; society, for example, does not in fact exist, as least not as how it has been conventionally conceptualized. "[T]here is nothing specific to social order," Latour writes; "there is no social dimension of any sort, no 'social context,' no distinct domain of reality to which the label 'social' or 'society' could be attributed" (*Reassembling the Social* 4). In place of defined, closed off domains, Latour argues for networks, which emerge when local relations between and among actors are traced. These actors do not have to be human, as nonhumanity is on an equal footing with humanity in Latour's worldview. Everything can be what Latour calls a "mediator," which has a definite role in the process by which meaning or force is transmitted: "Mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (*Reassembling the Social* 39). The opposite of a mediator is an "intermediary," which transports

meaning or force without transformation. Latour outlines what he means by both terms and the difference between them in the following example:

> A properly functioning computer could be taken as a good case of a complicated intermediary while a banal conversation may become a terribly complex chain of mediators where passions, opinions, and attitudes bifurcate at every turn. But if it breaks down, a computer may turn into a horrendously complex mediator while a highly sophisticated panel during an academic conference may become a perfectly predictable and uneventful intermediary in rubber stamping a decision made everywhere. (*Reassembling the Social* 39)

Objects have too often assumed the role of intermediaries in their relationships with humans, who have been quick to dismiss the agency of objects. Latour suggests that social scientists, for whom ANT was originally designed, stop approaching the world with preconceived notions about what acts and what does not, what counts and what does not, and so on, and follow the actors diligently, all actors, to see what they reveal.

In this thesis, I take Latour's advice to the literary realm and follow the actors in the aesthetic landscapes of two American literary works, Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun: or, the Romance of Monte Beni*. Both books have been enigmas to critics since their publication due to their aesthetic peculiarity; instead of making aesthetic value judgments, I argue that a reading that is faithful to the phenomenology of the aesthetic can lead to new understandings of the texts that may have been overlooked in critical discourse.

1. "The Infinite Entanglements of All Social Things": Individual and Network in Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*

When Herman Melville offered his seventh book, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*, to his British publisher Richard Bentley, Bentley agreed to publish the book on the condition that it was done on a joint account and Melville received half the profits—as they arose. The condition was to make up for the losses that Bentley had incurred by publishing all of Melville's books beginning with *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither*, all of which had failed to recreate the successes of *Typee: a Peep at Polynesian Life* and *Omoo: a Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas*. "Your books, I fear, are produced in too rapid succession. It was not long ago since The Whale was published—not time sufficient has yet been given to it, before another is ready!" (*Correspondence* 618) Bentley said to Melville, cautioning the author against embarking on yet another risky publication.

Melville responded by assuring Bentley that *Pierre* was "much more calculated for popularity" than any of his previous books, "being a regular romance, with a mysterious plot to it, & stirring passions at work, and withall, representing a new & elevated aspect of American life" (*Correspondence* 226). Regarding this comment, Samuel Otter quips in *Melville's Anatomies*, "Melville does not seem to have considered actual letters to be vehicles of truth any more than fictional ones," for "*Pierre* may be many things, but 'regular' it is not" (322). "Herman Melville Crazy" was the headline of the New York *Day Book*'s review of *Pierre*. The book was received with hostility by critics, who deemed it impious, licentious, and unreadable. It tells the story of Pierre Glendinning, a young American aristocrat, who decides to marry and elope with a woman who claims to be his half-sister. Melville writes the story of Pierre in sprawling and dense prose, "nearly sublime in its excess" (Duquette 117). The second half of the

book unexpectedly reveals Pierre to be an author and delves into critical portraiture of antebellum American literary culture, which not only irked but also simply baffled critics. Melville's announcement that Pierre is an author is "egregiously belated" (Higgins and Parker 153) and inconsistent with Melville's earlier characterization, which presents Pierre as a mere dilettante in literature. Hershel Parker argues that negative reviews of *Moby-Dick*, which were rolling in as Melville was finishing *Pierre*, angered the author to such a degree that he decided to derail from the original plot and insert into the book an attack on the literary establishment. Nearly 150 pages were added by cutting them "directly into the middle of the finished manuscript," with "little effort at hiding the seams of the cut" (Grimstad 67). Paul Grimstad calls *Pierre* Melville's "literary experiment," the impenetrable prose and the abrupt addition of pages being demonstrative of the author's rejection of the "terms of aesthetic validation" of the literary world (67). "I write precisely as I please" (341), Melville claims in the chapter "Young America in Literature," showing his disdain for conventional literary modes and refusal to conform.

Between bold declarations of individualism and exhibited concern for the book's popularity, we can see an author who was "struggling to achieve authorial autonomy against the tyranny of mediocrity" (Nixon 720) during his time. The public wanted more books like *Typee* and *Omoo*, which Melville regarded as sophomoric and unoriginal. He "long[ed] to plume [his] pinions for a flight" (*Correspondence* 106), he told John Murray, his British publisher before Bentley. *Mardi* was the embodiment of that flight, but it was received poorly by the public. The more original Melville aspired to be as a writer, the more negative the receptions of his works became, culminating in *Pierre*, the author's most inventive and least appreciated book.

Given that Melville could not individuate himself in real life from the socio-economic and political-cultural constraints of the literary industry, studies of *Pierre* have been variously

focused on Melville's fulfillment of his desire for individualism in the book. Grimstad, for example, considers Melville's use of allegory, in addition to the insertion of pages, to be a mode of nonconformist rebellion, provided that verisimilitude was an established aesthetic criterion in the nineteenth century. Evert Duyckinck, an eminent reviewer in the literary scene and a friend of Melville, had commended Melville for the descriptive verisimilitude in *Typee*, which made Melville seem like "an expert in all things nautical" (Grimstad 65). Duyckinck was more critical in his reviews of *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* because those books employed "opaque allegorical veils" (265) that he thought obscured the prose. In his incriminating review of *Moby-Dick*, which critics have acknowledged as the "single most influential American review" (Parker 22) of *Moby-Dick* that devastated the book's subsequent reception, what Duyckinck pointed out as the book's redeeming quality was the verisimilitude when it did make an appearance. Grimstad argues that Melville, who was stung by the injurious review of his book by his friend, demonstrates a refusal to comply with the rule of verisimilitude by persevering with his "opaque allegorical veils," an act of disobedience that distinguished him from the literary majority.

Another critic who has commented on *Pierre*'s individualism is Gillian Brown, who suggests in *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* that *Pierre* be recognized as a "keynote address to the program of literary individualism" (137). When Melville reveals that Pierre has been an author all along, Pierre is introduced as having published popular sentimental pieces, like "that delightful love-sonnet, entitled 'The Tropical Summer'" (342). This is when Pierre is living in what Brown describes as "idyllic domesticity" (135), under his mother's roof, engaged to the virginal and aristocratic Lucy Tartan. After leaving this domestic life, Pierre resumes authorship but attempts to write a more serious or "mature" work. Brown claims that Pierre's flight from both home and "conventional literary celebrity" is done

"[u]nder an individualistic imperative of authorship" (135). By removing Pierre from the domestic, "feminine" sphere as he pursues authorship that goes beyond writing "gemmed little sketches of thought and fancy" (Melville 342), Melville, Brown argues, "posits authorship as an annulment of the curriculum vitae supervised by sentimental motherhood and popularized by sentimental literature" (135). What he establishes is a standard of "masculine individualism," she writes, rooted in anti-sentimentalism. Comparing Melville to Harriet Beecher Stowe, whom she believes "locates in sentimentalism the individual's independence of the market" (136), Brown opines that Melville identifies sentimentalism with the market. To read *Pierre*, she concludes, is to "follow the ways that literary individualism appropriates the anti-market rhetoric of domestic individualism in order to distinguish male individuality from femininity, 'mature' from 'juvenile' authors, and, ultimately, classic American literature from mass-market publications" (136).

Other critics who have written on individualism in *Pierre* include Myra Jehlen and Gillian Silverman, who focus on the incest in the book as an individualist symbol. In *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent*, Jehlen theorizes incest as a means of incarnating "the self-made man," for reproduction is done between a man and "the female version of his own body" (185). While incest does possess a communal or relational component and a risk of "creating monsters," the "ultimate individualist apotheosis of autoeroticism" it represents eclipses that risk (Jehlen 185). Silverman, in *Bodies and Books: Reading the Fantasy of Communion in Nineteenth-Century America*, observes how Pierre's incestuous relationship with his sister "prompts him to author a profound, original, and ultimately failed book" (86). Silverman argues that Melville links incest with original authorship, "in so doing celebrat[ing] both social and aesthetic nonconformity" (86). Incest, for Melville, serves as a metaphor for literary originality, Silverman explains, for in the context of antebellum bourgeois culture, where

exogamous relations allow the continuation of white middle-class homogeneity, incest "presents the possibility of newness and rupture" (86). "It signals a break from the conventions of sameness" (Silverman 86) that governed not only familial relations but also the literary industry. Like Jehlen, Silverman does not forget to discuss the relational component of incest, calling it a perversely extreme commitment to the institution of family. "Incest thus negotiates the tricky territory between autonomy and attachment for Melville," she writes:

> It is both an unconventional means of realizing familial kinship and a familiar means of producing new and anomalous creations. In this way it harmonizes Melville's desires as author, providing a figure for a creative process alternatively informed by imaginative independence and deep communion with others. (86)

Silverman is concerned with what she calls Melville's "textual sentimentalism," "the way Melville imagines reading and writing as reciprocal activities that give way to an uncanny sense of oneness between participants" (85). The "sense of oneness," created by the connections that form through reading and writing between readers and authors, is something that Melville desires, Silverman argues; at least by a select few, Melville wants to be understood, and the more, the better. Attachment as construed by Silverman is therefore not inhibitive but encouraging for Melville's pursuit of authorship.

The aforementioned critics argue that in various ways and varying degrees, Melville's desire for literary individualism comes to fruition in *Pierre*. While I consider their readings to be reliable support for their claims of individuation, I will argue, in this chapter, that there is a way of reading *Pierre* that puts that proposition to doubt. I have observed that in *Pierre*, there seems to be in operation a phenomenological argument or principle—of attachment—that is at odds with the book's individualist ideology. When Silverman addresses attachment in *Bodies and*

Books, she prevents it from upsetting her individualist argument by limiting it as the bond between humans and spinning it as a reinforcement for the subject. Attachment, grounded in sympathy, can nourish the individual. However, what Silverman does not consider is that attachment is not experienced solely by humans. My reading of attachment in *Pierre* extends to include nonhumanity, which causes attachment to lose the sympathetic quality that Silverman imbues in her reading. The subject is not only connected to other subjects—whose "hearts beat the same" (Silverman 85) despite outward differences—but also to everything else, which may not even have a heart for beating together. Attachment grows in magnitude, becomes multifarious, and ceases to be about understanding, validating, or strengthening the subject's interiority. It becomes an unmanageable, incoherent, and overwhelming force, in which the subject finds himself swept.

My methodology for analyzing and articulating this dynamic will be Actor-Network-Theory. Originally developed by and for social scientists, ANT has nonetheless been influential across disciplines, though its potential for literary studies has only recently begun to be explored. While ANT has many progenitors—Michel Callon, John Law, and Bruno Latour, to name the most significant—I will be focusing on Latour's formulation, which has been particularly instrumental in popularizing the concept of network in critical discourse. Network, I will demonstrate, can help understand and express the attachment that is at work in *Pierre*. Latour provides a description of network that I find to be especially eloquent in his 1991 essay, "The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things":

> A social dimension to technology? That's not saying much. Let us rather admit
> that no one has ever observed a human society that has not been built with things.
> A material aspect to societies? That is still not saying enough: things do not exist

without being full of people, and the more modern and complicated they are, the
more people swarm through them. A mixture of social determinations and
material constraints? That is a euphemism, for it is no longer a matter of mixing
pure forms chosen from two great reservoirs, one in which would lie the social
aspects of meaning or subject, the other where one would stockpile material
components belonging to physics, biology and the science of materials. A
dialectic, then? If you like, but only on condition that we abandon the mad idea
that the subject is posed in its opposition to the object, for there are neither
subjects nor objects, neither in the beginning—mythical—nor in the end—equally
mythical. Circulations, sequences, transfers, translations, displacements,
crystallisations—there are many motions, certainly, but not a single one of them,
perhaps, that resembles a contradiction. (10)

Latour opposes the bifurcation that has dominated much of Western philosophy, which maintains
that the world can be divided in several ways: nature and society, science and culture, nonhuman
and human, object and subject. These distinctions are of little significance to Latour, whose
theory treats every being equally. "Nothing can be reduced to anything else," Latour writes in
"Irreductions," "nothing can be deduced from anything else, everything may be allied to
everything else" (163). What this means, as Graham Harman explains in *Prince of Networks:
Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, is that "[e]very human and nonhuman object . . . stands by itself
as a force to reckon with":

> No actor, however trivial, [is dismissible] as mere noise in comparison with its
> essence, its context, its physical body, or its conditions of possibility. Everything
> [is] absolutely concrete; all objects and all modes of dealing with objects [are] on

the same footing. . . . The world is a series of negotiations between a motley

armada of forces, humans among them, and such a world cannot be divided

cleanly between two pre-existent poles called 'nature' and 'society.' (13)

For centuries, humans inculcated the poles in order to create a hierarchy and legitimate the

subsequent reduction and exploitation of those not belonging to the "right" side. The distinction

between subjects and objects is a myth written by those desiring to assume the subject position.

Debunking the myth of bifurcation or what he calls "purification," Latour proposes network,

which emerges when the motions he mentions—"[c]irculations, sequences, transfers,

translations, displacements, crystallisations"—are traced. Detailed descriptions of these motions

can be saved for a discussion in the social sciences; the takeaway for our purposes is that these

motions are various relations that actors enter into, out of which networks arise. Networks follow

their actors and there is no design to which they must adhere, which is why "contradiction[s]" do

not exist in networks. Whatever emerges, is, and continues to fluctuate. The distinction between

subjects and objects dissolves; everything is an actor, an agent, and a mediator, shaping the

network.

The last of the three terms—"mediator"—needs to be explained in more depth;

additionally, another term, "intermediary," should be introduced. In the narrative of division that

humans have written for centuries, Latour writes, the agency of objects has been ignored.

Objects are accustomed to assuming the position of intermediaries in their relationships with

humans. An intermediary "does nothing in itself except carry, transport, shift, incarnate, express,

reify, objectify, [or] reflect, the meaning" (Latour, "The Berlin Key" 18)—it only extends what

was begun elsewhere. It is a designation that technically does not belong in the world conceived

by Latour, where everything stands on its own as a mediator. A mediator "transform[s],

translate[s], distort[s], and modif[ies] the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 39). There are ways of making objects reassume their role as mediators, and one of them, which Latour claims is the most effective, is fiction. Acknowledging the difficulty that social scientists have in envisioning objects as mediators instead of intermediaries, which is a notion that runs contrary to the doctrine of bifurcation that have been instilled in them for years, Latour suggests that social scientists can always refer to fiction for examples that should help them visualize. "[T]he resource of fiction," Latour writes, can bring "the solid objects of today into the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense. Here again, sociologists have a lot to learn from artists" (*Reassembling the Social* 82).

As I will show in the remainder of this chapter, the aesthetic of *Pierre* is one such site that social scientists could look at for inspiration. Things in *Pierre*, instead of constituting a mute and inert backdrop for humans, form relations with them as well as with each other. Instead of a monumentalization of the subject, Melville's aesthetic is a sensuous consideration of "what is indeterminable in things" (Seel 16). It is densely populated with mediators, mapping a tumultuous terrain of agencies, relations, and motions, networks. And in the networks that occupy *Pierre*, Pierre, the subject, is subject to the agency of the other, and in no way autonomous.

In the chapter "He Crosses the Rubicon," Pierre informs Lucy, his fiancée, and Mrs. Glendinning, his mother, that he is married—to his alleged half-sister Isabel Banford, though he does not disclose her identity. Upon hearing this, Mrs. Glendinning proceeds to disown Pierre and kick him out of her house: "If already thou hast not found other lodgment, and other table than this house supplies, then seek it straight. Beneath my roof, and at my table, he who was

once Pierre Glendinning no more puts himself" (Melville 258). Preparing to leave the mansion, Pierre writes a note to Dates, his servant, listing all the things that need to be packed. Included in this list is "the thing covered with blue chintz" (Melville 260), a chest that contains a portrait of his father.

Melville introduces two portraits of Pierre's father in *Pierre*; one was painted before Pierre was born, one after. The portrait that was painted after, in Pierre's father's later years, is preferred by Mrs. Glendinning, who thinks that the other portrait "signally belie[s] her husband" (Melville 99). This other portrait, which is the portrait in the blue chintz-covered chest, is a small portrait in oil, showing a "fine-looking, gay-hearted, youthful gentleman, . . . lightly, and, as it were, airily and but grazingly seated in, or rather flittingly tenanting an old-fashioned chair of Malacca" (Melville 99). The man is wearing a "peculiarly bright, and care-free, morning expression" (Melville 99), to which we will return shortly.

Pierre's aunt Dorothea reveals to Pierre in the chapter "Retrospective" that the small portrait was painted without Pierre's father's knowledge. Ralph Winwood, a cousin of Pierre's father, had a penchant for painting his friends and hanging their portraits on his walls, and wished to include his cousin in his collection; but his cousin was never quite available for a sitting, which drove Ralph to paint him in secret. "[E]very pleasant morning," Melville writes, Ralph "kept his easel and brushes and everything in readiness; so as to be ready the first moment [his cousin] should chance to drop in upon him from his long strolls" (103–4). Around this time, Pierre's father was acquainted with a beautiful French émigré, whose connection to him was not approved by his friends. "[T]hey were fearful that as the young lady was so very beautiful, and a little inclined to be intriguing—so some said—[he] might be tempted to marry her," which, they thought, "would not have been a wise thing for him" (Melville 105). Eventually, Pierre's father

stopped visiting the young lady, and she disappeared. Prior to her disappearance, however, Ralph, who fancied that his cousin was courting the émigré, decided it would be a good idea to paint him as her "wooer"—"that is, paint him just after his coming from his daily visits to the emigrants" (Melville 106). Thus, when Pierre's father was still visiting the young lady and would stop by at Ralph's after, Ralph pretended to be at work on a different painting, while stealthily preparing to paint his cousin. "[T]ell us something of the emigrants, cousin Pierre," he would say so that his cousin's thoughts might run "that supposed wooing way, so that he might catch some sort of corresponding expression" (Melville 106).

While Ralph was able to finish the portrait, Pierre's father soon confronted him: "You have not been hanging my portrait up here, have you, cousin Ralph?" (Melville 108) While Ralph denied the fact, Pierre's father nonetheless told him to destroy the portrait—if he had been painting it—and at the least, to not show it to anyone. "[Y]our father never so much as caught one glimpse of that picture," aunt Dorothea tells Pierre, "indeed, never knew for certain, whether there was such a painting in the world" (Melville 108). When Pierre asks why his father did not want his portrait taken, aunt Dorothea responds that while she does not know, Ralph had a speculation, having noticed, at one time, a book on physiognomy in his cousin's room, "in which the strangest and shadowiest rules were laid down for detecting people's innermost secrets by studying their faces" (Melville 109). The reason that his cousin did not want a portrait of himself, Ralph believed, was that he was in love with the French émigré, and feared that his secret could be published in a portrait.

The portrait becomes a mysterious object to Pierre. Having learned its history, he can understand his mother's distaste for it. While it was never confirmed, Pierre thinks it is possible that his father and the French émigré were involved with one another and can see how the

portrait would be "not congenial," "not familiar," and "not altogether agreeable" (Melville 114) to his mother. "[T]hat thing I should perhaps call a tender jealousy, a fastidious vanity, in any other lady," Pierre reflects, "enables her to perceive that the glance of the face in the portrait, is not, in some nameless way, dedicated to herself, but to some other and unknown object" (Melville 114). Even as he empathizes with his mother, Pierre also knows that there is no solid proof, and whatever the truth is lies hidden in the portrait. It is at this point that Melville begins to write in the voice of the portrait, speaking directly to Pierre. "Consider this strange, ambiguous smile," says the portrait:

> Is there no little mystery here? Probe a little, Pierre. Never fear, never fear. No matter for thy father now. Look, do I not smile?—yes, and with an unchangeable smile; and thus have I unchangeably smiled for many long years gone by, Pierre. Oh, it is a permanent smile! Thus I smiled to cousin Ralph; and thus in thy dear old aunt Dorothea's parlour, Pierre; and just so, I smile here to thee, and even thus in thy father's later life, when his body may have been in grief, still—hidden away in aunt Dorothea's secretary—I thus smiled as before; and just so I'd smile were I now hung up in the deepest dungeon of the Spanish Inquisition. (Melville 116)

I have not yet revealed my reason for beginning my analysis with the portrait, which is demonstrated in this passage—to show a mediator at work. The portrait, as depicted by Melville, is far from being an intermediary, which, to refresh our memory, is "what transports meaning or force without transformation" (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 39). "[D]efining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. For all practical purposes, an intermediary can be taken not only as a black box, but also as a black box counting for one, even if it is internally made of many parts"

(*Reassembling the Social* 39), Latour explains. An intermediary does not complicate, even if it itself is internally so; its contribution to the network in which it participates may count for just one, at most, or "even for nothing at all because it can be easily forgotten" (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 39). However, the portrait, as shown here, while being ostensibly simple—"bright" and "care-free" (Melville 99), with an unchanging smile—complicates immensely. It has formed various relations, with Ralph, with aunt Dorothea, with Pierre, and so on, and will continue to do so, even in the "deepest dungeon of the Spanish Inquisition." In these relations, its smile is a fixed attribute that gives it the status of a mediator. "*Mediators*," Latour describes, "cannot be counted as just one; they might count for one, for nothing, for several, or for infinity. [They] transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (*Reassembling the Social* 39). This is what the smile allows as it intimates possibilities but never commits to a singular truth; and Pierre agonizes over the possibilities, the "concealed lights of the meanings that so mysteriously moved to and fro within . . . all those ineffable hints and ambiguities, and undefined half-suggestions" (Melville 117). At last, he decides to remove the portrait from his sight, concealing it in the large chest, covered with blue chintz. As he does so, Pierre pronounces: "I will no more have a father" (Melville 121).

While I will presently explore the significance of this pronouncement, we must beforehand return to where we began: Pierre's departure from Mrs. Glendinning. Pierre, having left the mansion, finds himself at an inn with his belongings, and in front of him again is the blue chintz-covered chest, with the portrait inside. Pierre cannot find his keys and resorts to prying open the chest, and when he does so, the portrait immediately comes into view, "[f]ace up," meeting him with its "noiseless, ever-nameless, and ambiguous, unchanging smile" (Melville 273). Seeing the portrait again in changed circumstances, Pierre observes "certain lurking

lineament in the portrait" (Melville 274) that, somehow, is visible in the countenance of Isabel. A connection forms between Isabel and the portrait:

> Painted before the daughter was conceived or born, like a dumb seer, the portrait still seemed levelling its prophetic finger at that empty air, from which Isabel did finally emerge. There seemed to lurk some mystical intelligence and vitality in the picture; because, since in his own memory of his father, Pierre could not recall any distinct lineament transmitted to Isabel, but vaguely saw such in the portrait; therefore, not Pierre's parent, as any way rememberable by him, but the portrait's painted *self* seemed the real father of Isabel; for, so far as all sense went, Isabel had inherited one peculiar trait nowither traceable but to it. (Melville 274)

We can see the portrait behaving as a mediator again, fabricating meaning and transforming the state of affairs. It is depicted as being not only an effect but also a cause, as Isabel arises from the tip of its "prophetic finger." While still not an indisputable proof or a conclusive key to truth, the lurking lineament, the "one peculiar trait nowither traceable" but between Isabel and the portrait, inexplicably lays credence to Isabel's claim that she is Pierre's half-sister, begotten between his father and the French émigré. The portrait never ceases to obfuscate; it continues to entangle Pierre in the past, fixating his mind on what is unknowable. It consistently throws him back into the network that extends through time, with actors that are unfamiliar to him—his father before him, the French émigré, Ralph, and so on—of which he wishes no part. Whoever his father really was and whatever transpired between him and the émigré, Pierre will never truly know. It is loathsome to Pierre, Melville writes, that in the shadow of this network, the image of Isabel, who matters the most to him in the present and has become "a thing of intense and fearful love" for him, should be "so sinisterly becrooked, bemixed, and mutilated to him" (274).

Wishing to disconnect from the past and start his life afresh, Pierre determines that the portrait "shall not live" (Melville 275). Along with other "mementoes and monuments of the past" (Melville 275), the portrait is burned. "[T]hrough the flame and smoke," Melville writes, "the upwrithing portrait tormentedly stared at him in beseeching horror, and then, wrapped in one broad sheet of oily fire, disappeared forever" (276). The portrait, even to its end, displays expressiveness of a mediator and not an impassive intermediary. When Pierre sees that the portrait has been successfully destroyed, he becomes frenzied with a sense of triumph and proceeds to burn other "memorials in paper," yelling:

> 'Thus, and thus, and thus! on thy manes I fling fresh spoils; pour out all my memory in one libation!—so, so, so—lower, lower, lower; now all is done, and all is ashes! Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammelledly his ever-present self!—free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!' (Melville 277)

The desire to "hath no paternity," which Pierre has exhibited before, is the desire to individuate oneself completely, to stand alone, unlinked. Pierre mistakenly believes that simply by destroying the portrait and other miscellaneous papers, "all is done, and all is ashes." He imagines his present situation as if he were the only dot on a blank canvas, "untrammelled" and "free," able to carry out whatever design on his mind to "whatever end."

But the future is not blank. The canvas in *Pierre* is already populated by copious other actors, mediators, and networks. Destroying a handful of them does not lead to the individuation that Pierre anticipates and is convinced that he has accomplished. A telling example is in the chapter "The Journey and the Pamphlet," when Pierre leaves Saddle Meadows. Melville

constantly brings attention to objects surrounding Pierre and moments of contact, retaining particularity in his aesthetic topography. For example, when Pierre first enters the coach, Melville writes: "Pierre had pressed his hand upon the cushioned seat to steady his way, [when] some crumpled leaves of paper had met his fingers" (285). A network can be traced even in this passing sentence, with relations forming between Pierre's hand and the cushioned seat, Pierre's fingers and the crumpled leaves of paper, Pierre and the coach. Melville proceeds to slowly unfold the scene:

> In this mood, the silence accompanied him, and the first visible rays of the morning sun in this same mood found him and saluted him. The excitement and the sleepless night just passed, and the strange narcotic of a quiet, steady anguish, and the sweet quiescence of the air, and the monotonous cradle-like motion of the coach over a road made firm and smooth by a refreshing shower over-night; these had wrought their wonted effect upon Isabel and Delly; with hidden faces they leaned fast asleep in Pierre's sight. Fast asleep—thus unconscious, oh sweet Isabel, oh forlorn Delly, your swift destinies I bear in my own! (287)

"This mood" refers to Pierre's uncertainty about leaving Mrs. Glendinning and Lucy and standing by Isabel. Pierre cannot help but recall "the dread, fateful parting look of his mother" and "the lifeless Lucy" before him, "wrapped as in the reverberating echoings of her own agonising shriek" (Melville 286). "Lo! I leave corpses wherever I go!" (Melville 286) Pierre bemoans, wondering whether with "corpses" behind him and the sin of marrying his half-sister, his conduct can be right. Around his confused subject, Melville draws a network, showing how even during Pierre's private reflection, a moment of apparent solitude, there are other actors at work, interacting with each other as well as with the human subjects. For example, the

"refreshing shower over-night" has an effect on the road, making it "firm and smooth," over which the coach moves in a "cradle-like" manner. These factors, joined by the "strange narcotic of a quiet, steady anguish, and the sweet quiescence of the air," have a "wonted effect" upon Isabel and Delly, who subsequently have an effect on Pierre. Looking at the sleeping women, burdened with their destinies, Pierre feels distressed instead of liberated.

Continuing with this network, Melville turns Pierre's gaze to his hand, which is still clutching the crumpled leaves of paper from before. "[Pierre] knew not how it had got there, or whence it had come, though himself had closed his own grip upon it" (287), Melville writes, pointing out that grabbing the paper is not a conscious decision made by Pierre but something that Pierre is made to do by some other, unknown force. It is "a thin, tattered, dried-fish-like thing" that Pierre has in his hand, "printed with blurred ink upon mean, sleazy paper" (Melville 287). Melville emphasizes the materiality of the paper, reiterating that it is a lowly thing, a "miserable, sleazy paper-rag, which at any other time, or in any other place, [people] would hardly touch with St. Dunstan's long tongs" (288). At any other time or in any other place, in other words, the paper would have remained an intermediary as objects are habituated to being in their relationships with humans—calling no attention to itself, appearing as negligible junk. In this context, however, within the network that has formed, the paper shines as a mediator, captivating Pierre with its possible profundity. The paper, a pamphlet, is "so metaphysically and insufferably entitled" "Chronometricals and Horologicals" (288), which, Melville writes, is an indicator of its depth. However, the pamphlet alone is not enough to prompt Pierre to read, "[for] when a man is in a really profound mood, . . . all merely verbal or written profundities are unspeakably repulsive, and seem downright childish to him" (Melville 288). Pierre is both

fascinated and repelled by the pamphlet, and what provides the final push is the network that surrounds him, as Melville describes:

> Nevertheless, the silence still continued; the road ran through an almost unploughed and uninhabited region; the slumberers still slumbered before him; the evil mood was becoming well-nigh insupportable to him; so, more to force his mind away from the dark realities of things than from any other motive, Pierre finally tried his best to plunge himself into the pamphlet. (288)

Melville calls what Pierre wants to escape from "the dark realities of things," which are, in a way, what networks are. Things exist in a manner that is not necessarily favourable to humans, in a manner that can be "well-nigh insupportable," which is in a network or in various networks with humans. Even as Pierre struggles to break away from this network, he cannot, because even his very move away from the network is one that is caused and controlled by the network. The pamphlet is a part of the network, a mediator by which, as Melville writes, "Pierre may not in the end be entirely uninfluenced in his conduct" (292). The effects of the pamphlet are not shown until in the chapter "Plinlimmon," to which I will now turn.

After arriving in the city, Pierre moves into the Church of the Apostles', which, despite the name, is less of a church and more of a sanctuary for poor artist-types. An ancient church, no longer needed for its original purpose, was "divided into stores; cut into offices; and given for a roost to the gregarious lawyers" (Melville 370). It was then supplemented by a modern edifice, which was likewise to be rented to the legal crowd. However, there were not enough tenants to occupy the modern building, and soon the building was taken up by "scores of those miscellaneous, bread-and-cheese adventurers, and ambiguously professional nondescripts . . . and unaccountable foreign-looking fellows" (Melville 371). "They are mostly artists of various

sorts," Melville writes, "painters, or sculptors, or indigent students, or teachers of languages, or poets, or fugitive French politicians, or German philosophers" (372). These individuals eventually formed a "certain mystic Society," of which a man named Plotinus Plinlimmon is the "Grand Master" (Melville 405). Plinlimmon is also the author of "Chronometricals and Horologicals."

One day, while walking down a brick colonnade at the Apostles', Pierre encounters Plinlimmon. Plinlimmon recognizes Pierre, "lift[s] his hat, gracefully bow[s], smile[s] gently, and pass[es] on" (Melville 404–5). Pierre is at first confused, but soon realizes that he has seen Plinlimmon before: "Very early after taking chambers at the Apostles', he had been struck by a steady observant blue-eyed countenance at one of the loftiest windows of the old gray tower, which . . . rose prominently before his own chamber" (Melville 406). Pierre is mystified by Plinlimmon's face, a "remarkable face of repose,—repose neither divine nor human, nor anything made up of either or both—but a repose separate and apart—a repose of a face by itself" (Melville 406). One look at that face, Melville writes, could convey to most philosophical observers "a notion of something not before included in their scheme of the Universe" (406). When Pierre learns that Plinlimmon is the author of "Chronometricals and Horologicals," he wishes to read the pamphlet again. It is revealed that Pierre could not understand the pamphlet upon the first reading; he could not "master the pivot-idea of the pamphlet; and as every incomprehended idea is not only a perplexity but a taunting reproach to one's mind, [he] had at last ceased studying it altogether" (Melville 407). After being introduced to Plinlimmon, however, Pierre reckons the pamphlet must contain some valuable insight, proportional to the depth that is indicated by its author's face.

Unfortunately, the pamphlet is nowhere to be found. Pierre searches all the pockets of his

clothes, but to no avail. He entreats Charlie Millthorpe, an old acquaintance and a fellow resident

at the Apostles', to procure him another copy, but Millthorpe too is unsuccessful. Even

Plinlimmon himself cannot furnish one. Pierre, left in a limbo, begins to fantasize about the

pamphlet:

> Then would all manner of wild fancyings float through his soul, and detached
>
> sentences of the 'Chronometrics' would vividly recur to him—sentences before
>
> but imperfectly comprehended, but now shedding a strange, baleful light upon his
>
> peculiar condition, and emphatically denouncing it. (Melville 409)

The "peculiar condition" refers to Pierre's life as it has progressed, regarding which Pierre is

overwhelmed with doubt. Ever since moving to the city, Pierre has been suffering from

depression, unsure about the "integrity of his unprecedented course in life" and the prospect of

his plan to author a "deep book" (Melville 408). We can see the pamphlet mediating here,

influencing the state in which Pierre's own life appears to him. The "strange, baleful light" it

shines has the effect of making Pierre's misgivings about his choices more concrete, even if

Pierre has no idea what it says. The reason that I have not discussed the content of

"Chronometricals and Horologicals" is essentially that it is not very important. Pierre is under

the assumption that it contains great knowledge, and the fact that he has lost it is sufficient to

cause him immense grief. "Cursed fate that I should have lost it," Pierre cries, "more cursed, that

when I did have it, and did read it, I was such a ninny as not to comprehend; and now it is all too

late!" (Melville 410) The pamphlet plays a key role in how Pierre interprets his situation and

ultimately himself, as Pierre goes from seeing himself as a capable individual in control of his

fate to a hopeless "ninny" for whom all is too late.

The irony, which Melville reveals at the end of the chapter, is that the pamphlet is with

Pierre all along. "Yet—to anticipate here—when years after, an old Jew clothesman rummaged

over a surtout of Pierre's—which by some means had come into his hands—his lynx-like fingers

happened to feel something foreign between the cloth and the heavy quilted bombazine lining"

(Melville 410). When the clothesman rips open the skirt, several old pamphlet pages fall out,

"soft and worn almost to tissue, but still legible enough to reveal the title—'Chronometricals and

Horologicals'" (Melville 410). Pierre apparently thrust the pamphlet into his pocket with too

much force, causing the pamphlet to work through a rent inside the pocket and down into the

skirt, and become a part of the padding. "[A]ll the time [Pierre] was hunting for this pamphlet,"

Melville writes, "he himself was wearing the pamphlet. When he brushed past Plinlimmon in the

brick corridor, and felt that renewed intense longing for the pamphlet, then his right hand was not

two inches from the pamphlet" (410). Another evidence of network is thus displayed here, with

the collective agency of objects trumping that of the subject. Not only the pamphlet, but also the

surtout, the pocket, the rent inside the pocket, the skirt, the padding and so on, are mediators that

must be taken into account, even if Pierre is unaware of their influence. Even if all those things

may seem humble and trivial, each one of them has a direct sway on the result, which is again

the demoralization of Pierre.

It is back to Pierre's "peculiar condition" that I will now turn—which was mentioned

briefly in the discussion of the pamphlet—and examine in detail the circumstances that lead to

this condition, which have thus far been left out of my analysis. In particular, the challenges

Pierre faces in authorship warrant our attention. They are especially detrimental to Pierre's goal

of individuation, for the failure to write a successful book subsequently means the failure to

provide for himself as well as his dependents. Without the Glendinning wealth to cushion the

blow, it is imperative that Pierre succeeds as an author. Alas, soon after moving into the Apostles', Pierre cannot bring himself to write; and partially responsible for this inability are the mediators and networks that surround him.

In the chapter "The Church of the Apostles'," Melville begins depicting Pierre's state by describing Pierre's material surroundings. "On the third night following the arrival of the party in the city, Pierre sat at twilight by a lofty window in the rear building of the Apostles'" (376), Melville writes. He repeats this sentence a number of times, slightly altering it each time: "There, on the third night, at twilight, sat Pierre by that lofty window of a beggarly room in the rear building of the Apostles'" (376). "There, then, on the third night, at twilight, by the lofty window of that beggarly room, sat Pierre in the rear building of the Apostles'" (377). "There he sits, a strange exotic, transplanted from the delectable alcoves of the old manorial mansion, to take root in this niggard soil" (377). Melville's focus in these descriptions is the beggarliness; and what is highlighted by the repetition is the reality of poverty sinking in for Pierre, who has never experienced such a thing before. The registering of reality is followed by an onset of doubt— about Pierre himself, about the decisions he has made—and present in this transition in Pierre's state of mind are things that quicken the process of undermining his morale.

There is, for example, a "curious-looking, rusty old bedstead" (Melville 376) that belonged to Pierre's grandfather. Gazing at the bedstead, Pierre reflects on how the object was once used by his grandfather, the "valiant captain in many an unsuccumbing campaign," "the glorious old mild-eyed and warrior-hearted General" (Melville 376). It once had a place on the war field, next to the "knight-making sword"; it now sits inside a dingy room, next to a desk made of "empty flour barrels" (Melville 376). "[H]as that hard bed of War, descended for an inheritance to the soft body of Peace? . . . [I]s the grandson of two Generals a warrior too?"

(Melville 377) Pierre wonders to himself, the bravado of the "untrammelled" self wholly

dissipated. While he would like to believe that he too is a warrior, compared to his grandfather

he feels weak and insignificant:

> For Pierre is a warrior too; Life his campaign, and three fierce allies, Woe and
>
> Scorn and Want, his foes. The wide world is banded against him; for lo you! he
>
> holds up the standard of Right, and swears by the Eternal and True! But ah,
>
> Pierre, Pierre, when thou goest to that bed, how humbling the thought, that thy
>
> most extended length measures not the proud six feet four of thy grand John of
>
> Gaunt sire! (Melville 377)

The bed functions as a mediator here, since it is from its presence in Pierre's chamber that the

connection between Pierre and his grandfather is formed—or rather, reminded. The bed, like the

portrait, is involved in a network that stretches from the past to the present, in which it

effectively implicates Pierre. Instead of staying in the background as a silent intermediary, it

engages with the subject, posing him questions, hinting at meanings, eroding him.

Things outside of Pierre's window also affect Pierre's psychology. Out of the "lofty"

window, "except for the donjon form of the old gray tower, seemingly there is nothing to see but

a wilderness of tiles, slate, shingles, and tin" (Melville 377). There are no more "sweet purple

airs of the hills round about the green fields," which would come "revivingly wafted to his

cheek" (Melville 377) back in Saddle Meadows. Nature has been a source of poetic inspiration

for Pierre—"blow[ing] her wind-clarion to him from the blue hills, and murmur[ing] melodious

secrecies to him by her streams and her woods" (Melville 358). No longer surrounded by "blue

hills" and "green fields," but by "tiles, slate, shingles, and tin," Pierre is no longer inspired, as

Melville writes: "Like a flower he feels the change; his bloom is gone from his cheek; his cheek

is wilted and pale" (378). Before, Pierre felt that in him existed the "fine gold of genius" (Melville 359) that simply had to be excavated by a skilled hand. Now, he perceives all that he has to be "trash," "dross," "dirt" (Melville 379).

The change in Pierre can be interpreted as the consequence of differently comprised networks. In Saddle Meadows, the "blue hills," "green fields," "streams," and "woods" come together to have a positive, nurturing effect on Pierre. In the Apostles', however, Pierre is surrounded by a different group of mediators, the collective effect of which is oppressive and debilitating. The "desolate hanging wildernesses of tiles, slate, shingles, and tin" (Melville 377) do not whisper "melodious secrecies" to Pierre. Instead, "like a profound black gulf the open area of the quadrangle gapes beneath him" (Melville 378). Instead of answers, what these mediators give him are questions; the gaping area of the quadrangle is like a big question mark staring in Pierre's face, making him dubious about the circumstances that have brought him hither and the future that lies ahead. Perceived from the "lofty" window of a "beggarly" room in the rear building of an old church converted into a commune, surrounded by nothing but "tiles, slate, shingles, and tin," the future, like the gulf, appears exceedingly bleak.

Pierre does eventually begin writing, but the process is nonetheless gruelling. He becomes increasingly aware of the "intensely inauspicious circumstances of all sorts" under which his labour must proceed:

> At length, domestic matters—rent and bread—had come to such a pass with him, that whether or no, the first pages must go to the printer; and thus was added still another tribulation; because the printed pages now dictated to the following manuscript, and said to all subsequent thoughts and inventions of Pierre—*Thus and thus*; *so and so*; *else an ill match*. Therefore, was his book already limited,

bound over, and committed to imperfection, even before it had come to any confirmed form or conclusion at all. Oh, who shall reveal the horrors of poverty in authorship that is high? . . . On either hand clung to by a girl who would have laid down her life for him; Pierre, nevertheless, in his deepest, highest part, was utterly without sympathy from anything divine, human, brute, or vegetable. (Melville 471)

This passage effectively illustrates the fact that writing, which is supposed to be the ultimate exercise of subjectivity and subsequently the key to Pierre's project of individuation, does not happen in a vacuum but in a network, with "domestic matters" like rent and bread mediating the process. Accordingly, writing becomes neither of the things it is intended to be. It is not Pierre, but rent and bread, that decide "the first pages must go to the printer" before the book is even finished. Were he not pressed by such matters, Pierre could take his time, read over the pages again, and perfect them along with the rest of his book. The pages, printed, become mediators with agencies that do not necessarily align with Pierre's—and it is they who have authority over how Pierre's book progresses, imposing the rule of continuity on the pages that are being written. Implicated in a network with utterly unsympathetic mediators that work against him—or more accurately, not *for* him—Pierre is not free in the writing process and will not be as the result of his writing. He ends up writing a failed book, which is rejected and chastised by his publishers, and brings him closer to his ruin.

In this chapter, I have illustrated the existence of networks in *Pierre*, webs of relationships that are fundamentally opposed to individuation of the subject. Not only humans but also things participate in these networks, and networks can be found anywhere, even in authorship that is generally regarded as the site of individuation. It is unclear whether the

networks in *Pierre* are products intended by Melville or inadvertent occurrences that have now been brought to light. Melville does display a "network-like" sensibility when he writes, in the chapter "Isabel," that there are "myriad alliances and criss-crossings among mankind, the infinite entanglements of all social things, which forbids that one thread should fly the general fabric, on some new line of duty, without tearing itself and tearing others" (267). As the "myriad alliances and criss-crossings" are limited to mankind here, it is likely that Melville had some sense of network but perhaps not in its full scope, though his writing then evidently goes to supplement what is left out in his voiced idea. Whichever the case is, the question of intentionality reinforces the notion that agency is distributed, and not centralized under the subject, in authorship.

2. "Half as Real Here as Elsewhere": Mysteries and Networks in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun: or, the Romance of Monte Beni*

Nathaniel Hawthorne's last finished romance, *The Marble Faun: or, the Romance of Monte Beni* is something of an outlier in the author's corpus. As Julian Hawthorne writes in the biography of his father, *The Marble Faun* was "the first that Hawthorne had written which had not been cordially welcomed" (238). Even Henry Chorley, a previously sympathetic critic of Hawthorne, penned an ultimately critical review of it in the *Athenaeum*:

> In spite of the delicious Italian pictures, noble speculations, and snatches of arresting incident, which it contains, we know of little in Romance more inconclusive and hazy than the manner in which the tale is brought to its close. Hints will not suffice to satisfy interest which has been excited to voracity. Every incident need not lead to a mathematical conclusion nor *coup de theatre* . . . but the utter uncertainty which hangs about every one and every thing concerned in the strong emotions and combinations of this romance, makes us part company with them, as though we were awaking from a dream. (319)

Many readers shared Chorley's sentiment. Henry Bright, a friend of Hawthorne, complained to the author that there were "a hundred things" he wanted to know after reading the book: "who Miriam was, what was the crime in which she was concerned and of which all Europe knew, what was in the packet, what became of Hilda, whether Miriam married Donatello, whether Donatello got his head cut off, etc" (J. Hawthorne 240). "Of course you'll say I ought to *guess*," he said to Hawthorne, "[but] I want to *know*" (J. Hawthorne 240).

As is apparent from the grievances of its readers, *The Marble Faun* is thick with mysteries. Hawthorne was compelled to write an elucidating postscript for the second edition of

the book, but the postscript reveals almost nothing. It is "a subtle joke on his readers' obtuseness" (249), Nina Baym has observed; those who object to the obscurities of *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne would go on to say, "[do] not know how to read a Romance" (Turner 347).

In "Perplexity, Sympathy, and the Question of the Human: a Reading of *The Marble Faun*," Emily Miller Budick argues that romance fiction, as practiced and defined by Hawthorne, is fundamentally concerned with the notion that human knowledge of the world is inherently limited. In his romances, Budick claims, Hawthorne bids us to be mindful of the subjectivity of our perception, and of the "unknowability" and "undecidability" of phenomena. Budick's argument illuminates the obscurities of *The Marble Faun* as exemplifications of this truth. Far from being signs of Hawthorne's "dwindling genius" (Ullén 265)—a claim that many critics have made—the obscurities can be interpreted as products of deliberate aesthetic choices that Hawthorne makes to communicate his message.

This message may be found in the opening scene of *The Marble Faun*. Hawthorne's romance begins with four individuals, Miriam, Hilda, Kenyon, and Donatello, who are in one of the saloons at a sculpture gallery. After describing the statues in the gallery—a dying gladiator and various deities—Hawthorne turns to a window, from which the Capitol can be seen, as well as the arch of Septimius Severus. Farther on is "the desolate Forum," near which are "a shapeless confusion of modern edifices, piled rudely up with ancient brick and stone," and "the domes of Christian churches, built on the old pavements of heathen temples, and supported by the very pillars that once upheld them" (Hawthorne 20). In the distance we see the Coliseum, under the blue sky, and farther off, the Alban mountains, "looking just the same, amid all this decay and change, as when Romulus gazed thitherward over his half-finished wall" (Hawthorne 20). "We glance hastily at these things," Hawthorne writes:

—at this bright sky, and those blue distant mountains, and at the ruins, Etruscan, Roman, Christian, venerable with a threefold antiquity, and at the company of world-famous statues in the saloon,—in the hope of putting the reader into that state of feeling which is experienced oftenest at Rome. It is a vague sense of ponderous remembrances; a perception of such weight and density in a by-gone life, of which this spot was the centre, that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real here as elsewhere. Viewed through this medium, our narrative—into which are woven some airy and unsubstantial threads, intermixed with others, twisted out of the commonest stuff of human existence—may seem not widely different from the texture of all our lives. (20)

"It is in order to display the unknowability of the world," Budick writes, "that Hawthorne's fiction veers toward the historical and the supernatural, sometimes both" (231). In this scene, we are presented with the historical; the supernatural will soon follow. Budick explains that Hawthorne relies on the historical due to its ability to impress upon us "an awareness that reality is literally unknowable and unverifiable" (231). The "vague sense of ponderous remembrances" is a perception of only the "weight and density" of the "by-gone life"—as to what that life actually entailed, we have no idea. We can only perceive what the past has left behind, which points us to the existence of something that we can neither perceive nor know.

The historical is really Hawthorne's device for turning our attention to the same unknowability of the present. It is certainly "far easier for us to accept," Budick writes, "that we can never know what happened *then*, in the past, not before our very own eyes, than to accept what is also true and perhaps even more pertinent: that the evidences of our senses in the here

and now are hardly more reliable" (231). But that is the point that Hawthorne wants to get across, which is revealed in his swift transition, in the passage above, from the rumination of the past to that of the present. "[O]ur individual affairs and interests are but half as real here as elsewhere," he writes; our narrative may not be so different "from the texture of all our lives." We are surrounded by what we do not and cannot know, which we will become to some other group someday. The concreteness of our reality suddenly seems as mythical as the legend of Romulus, the deities surrounding the dying gladiator.

Observable in this scene of realizations—about the indefinition that marks human existence and interaction with the world, the lack of human knowledge and understanding, the mystery of phenomena—is imagery of a web or a network. Some "airy and unsubstantial threads" are woven into our narrative, enmeshing us in something larger, a network that stretches through time. We are connected to the things that we see, which are also connected to each other; they and we together form the texture, the fabric, the thing woven, the web, the network. What I will show in this chapter is that *The Marble Faun* as a whole can be interpreted as a reproduction of such a network in which our experiences are located. Hawthorne's romance is an aesthetic enactment of his message; the world and its mysteries, and our state of being implicated in such a world with all of its mysteries, are represented in the book's aesthetic. The readers and the characters alike tread through the web that Hawthorne produces in *The Marble Faun*.

I will examine the obscurities of *The Marble Faun* with Actor-Network-Theory as my methodology, the particulars of which, I find, are especially suited for articulating aspects of the network that the obscurities form and signal. Bruno Latour, whose theorization I will be using, argues for a replacement of bifurcation with network. The notion that the world is divisible along the lines of subjectivity versus objectivity, humanity versus nonhumanity, society and culture

versus nature, and so forth, Latour argues, is a myth that has been devised by humans to assume

the upper hand in the world, to reduce and manipulate those on the "other" side. Jettisoning such

distinctions, Latour insists that each and every being in this world is an actor that is irreducible,

and what the world is made of are networks that emerge from tracing local relations between and

among actors. There are two terms that he uses to refer to the beings of the world, which are

"mediator" and "intermediary":

> An *intermediary*, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without
>
> transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. For all practical
>
> purposes, an intermediary can be taken not only as a black box, but also as a black
>
> box counting for one, even if it is internally made of many parts. *Mediators*, on
>
> the other hand, cannot be counted as just one; they might count for one, for
>
> nothing, for several, or for infinity. Their input is never a good predictor of their
>
> output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. Mediators
>
> transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are
>
> supposed to carry. No matter how *complicated* an intermediary is, it may, for all
>
> practical purposes, count for just one—or even for nothing at all because it can be
>
> easily forgotten. No matter how apparently simple a mediator may look, it may
>
> become *complex*; it may lead in multiple directions which will modify all the
>
> contradictory accounts attributed to its role. . . . As we will slowly discover, it is
>
> this constant uncertainty over the intimate nature of entities—are they behaving as
>
> intermediaries or as mediators?—that is the source of all the other uncertainties
>
> we have decided to follow. (*Reassembling the Social* 39)

Intermediaries technically do not belong in Latour's worldview, being reducible in the process through which meaning or force is transmitted. The reason that they exist as a concept, however, is that objects, in their relationships with humans, have been reduced to intermediaries for a long time, rather than being recognized as mediators. As Latour writes in "Irreductions," humanity has consisted of various groups of reducers: Christians who love a God "who is capable of reducing the world to himself because he created it," Kantians who reduce "things to grains of dust and then [reassemble] them with synthetic a-priori judgments" (162), and so on. "To put everything into nothing, to deduce everything from almost nothing, to put into hierarchies, to command and to obey, to be profound or superior, to collect objects and force them into a tiny space" (Latour, *Pasteurization* 163) have been the aims and the accomplishments of modern humans for centuries. But there are ways of liberating objects, of allowing objects to express their truly enigmatic nature, of helping them become mediators once again; and one such way, Latour writes, is through fiction, by the power of imagination.

This is precisely what happens in *The Marble Faun*. Whatever sense of certainty that humans may have had about the world and its objects disappears when they are placed in a web of mediators. The images, objects, and events that I will look at can never count for just one, or be ignored. Endlessly, they perplex and implicate their onlooker, making his or her subjective limit clear.

The plot of *The Marble Faun*, in an extracted form, is "the story of the fall of man" (Hawthorne 491). Donatello, the "Faun" of the title—and the "Count of Monte Beni"—is a simple and unworldly rustic, who is infatuated with Miriam, a dark, alluring, and beautiful painter of a mysterious origin. One day, during a visit to the catacomb of St. Calixtus, Miriam

suddenly disappears, only to reappear accompanied by a stranger, whose exact relationship to her is never fully disclosed in the book, aside from the fact that they have a long history together. The stranger, who is referred to as Miriam's model, becomes a source of distress for Miriam; and one night, at her silent and largely unconscious bidding—a "glance" (Hawthorne 204)— Donatello throws the model over a cliff, killing him. The rest of the book chronicles how the individuals—including Hilda and Kenyon, who are witnesses—cope with the fact of sin in their lives, with the most emphasis given to Donatello, who experiences a complete transformation due to his action.

When the book begins, in the sculpture gallery, the four characters come across the Faun of Praxiteles, "a well-known masterpiece of Grecian sculpture" (Hawthorne 21). It is the resemblance to this Faun that makes Donatello the Faun for the rest of this romance. "You must needs confess, Kenyon," Miriam says to her sculptor friend, "that you never chiselled out of marble, nor wrought in clay, a more vivid likeness than this, cunning a bust-maker as you think yourself. . . . Our friend Donatello is the very Faun of Praxiteles. Is it not true, Hilda?" (Hawthorne 21) Hilda agrees, and Miriam continues, observing that Donatello is like a Faun not only in appearance but also in demeanour: "[N]o Faun in Arcadia was ever a greater simpleton than Donatello. He has hardly a man's share of wit, small as that may be. It is a pity there are no longer any of this congenial race of rustic creatures for our friend to consort with!" (Hawthorne 22)

Hawthorne provides a description of the marble Faun of Praxiteles, seemingly, for the readers to in fact learn about Donatello's character. Praxiteles has wrought in "that severe material of marble . . . an amiable and sensual creature, easy, mirthful, apt for jollity, yet not incapable of being touched by pathos" (Hawthorne 23). There is no "high and heroic ingredient"

(Hawthorne 24) in the character of the Faun. He would not comprehend virtue, "but he would be true and honest by dint of his simplicity" (Hawthorne 24). "We should expect from him no sacrifice or effort for an abstract cause," Hawthorne writes, "[for] there is not an atom of martyr's stuff in all that softened marble; but he has a capacity for strong and warm attachment, and might act devotedly through its impulse" (24). We will see later that this capacity for acting for attachment and on impulse will be the cause of Donatello's criminal act, committed for Miriam.

The most significant aspect of the Faun's composition is his animal nature, which is mixed with humanity in this "strange yet true and natural conception of antique poetry and art":

> Praxiteles has subtly diffused throughout his work that mute mystery which so hopelessly perplexes us whenever we attempt to gain an intellectual or sympathetic knowledge of the lower orders of creation. The riddle is indicated, however, only by two definite signs; these are the two ears of the Faun, which are leaf-shaped, terminating in little peaks, like those of some species of animals. (Hawthorne 24)

To see whether the likeness is carried to the minutest detail, Miriam and Kenyon entreat Donatello to show his ears. "Donatello, . . . do not leave us in this perplexity! Shake aside those brown curls, my friend, and let us see whether this marvellous resemblance extends to the very tips of the ears" (Hawthorne 26). Donatello refuses, however, claiming that the ears have always been a "tender point" (Hawthorne 26) for his ancestors and him. As Kenyon will learn later in the romance, pointed ears are rumoured to be a hereditary peculiarity that runs through the genealogy of the Monte Beni, one of the oldest families in Italy:

The Monte Beni family, as this legend averred, drew their origin from the

Pelasgic race, who peopled Italy in times that may be called prehistoric. . . . In

those delicious times, when deities and demi-gods appeared familiarly on earth,

mingling with its inhabitants as friend with friend,—as when nymphs, satyrs, and

the whole train of classic faith or fable hardly took pains to hide themselves in the

primeval woods,—at that auspicious period the lineage of Monte Beni had its rise.

Its progenitor was a being not altogether human, yet partaking so largely of the

gentlest human qualities, as to be neither awful nor shocking to the

imagination. . . . [O]nce in a century, or oftener, a son of Monte Beni gathered

into himself the scattered qualities of his race, and reproduced the character that

had been assigned to it from immemorial times. (Hawthorne 269–71)

One of these qualities is "the ears, covered with a delicate fur, and shaped like a pointed leaf"

(Hawthorne 271). To reiterate, this is a legend that Kenyon hears from an old butler of the Monte

Beni family. Neither the characters nor the readers get to see Donatello's ears—perplexity is the

state in which they are held to the end of this romance. So does he, as the story goes, have the

pointed ears of the Faun? Why is he intent on hiding his ears? If he indeed had the pointed ears,

what would the implications be? Would that mean that there really existed—and still exist—the

mythical creatures in whom the race of men and the race of animals "meet on friendly ground"

(Hawthorne 25), the mixtures that we are accustomed to dismiss as unreal? Could the

mythological be real? Could there truly have been a time when "deities, demi-gods, . . . nymphs,

satyrs, and the whole train of classic faith or fable" occupied the same space as humans?

Hawthorne seems to enjoy teasing his readers with these questions, intimations, and possibilities,

for he makes regular references to Donatello's ears throughout his romance, without offering any words of clarification. For instance, he writes:

> How mirthful a discovery would it be . . . if the breeze which sported fondly with his clustering locks were to waft them suddenly aside, and show a pair of leaf-shaped, furry ears! What an honest strain of wildness would it indicate! and into what regions of rich mystery would it extend Donatello's sympathies, to be thus linked . . . with what we call the inferior tribes of being, whose simplicity, mingled with his human intelligence, might partly restore what man has lost of the divine! (90)

If Donatello had the "leaf-shaped, furry ears" of the Faun, they would be indications of the riddle—not its answers. What they would denote, in other words, is the existence of something that is not available for human knowledge. They would not lead to more insight, but more confusion. Even in the present state, hidden from view, Donatello's ears are plenty enigmatic, drawing questions, suggesting possibilities. With their ability to "extend into regions of mystery"—to produce connections and meaning—Donatello's ears are mediators that signal the existence of a mysterious and complicated network that is spread out across history and consists of diverse beings of the past and the present, human, partially human, and nonhuman. In this our subjects are implicated, not only Donatello but also the others who interact with him and ponder the matter and the significance of his ears. Donatello's ears indicate one of the many networks that are in formation in *The Marble Faun*, and we will continue to explore the others. The subjects' awareness of their involvement in these networks, while faint at first, will grow more concrete over the course of the romance.

The day after Donatello's murder, Miriam, Donatello, and Kenyon meet at the Church of the Capuchins, to discuss a painting of the Archangel by Guido Reni. Hilda, who is also supposed to be there, is absent. When the three individuals enter the church, their eyes fall upon a strange object in the centre of the nave, "either the actual body, or, as might rather have been supposed at first glance, the cunningly wrought waxen face and suitably draped figure of a dead monk" (Hawthorne 214). In the background, the "deep, lugubrious strain of a *De Profundis*" reverberates, sounding like "an utterance of the tomb itself," rumbling through the burial vaults, "ooz[ing] up" among the gravestones and epitaphs, and filling the church "as with a gloomy mist" (Hawthorne 214). Startled, Miriam, Donatello, and Kenyon do not immediately approach the object; it is not for this that they have come, after all, but to see and discuss Guido's picture.

While standing before Guido's Archangel, however, and dissecting it with Kenyon, Miriam notices that she is inexplicably and unduly agitated, and that Donatello, all this while, has been "very ill at ease, casting awe-stricken and inquiring glances at the dead monk" (Hawthorne 217). Miriam asks Donatello what the matter is, and Donatello tells her that he feels oppressed by the music, which thickens the air, and the dead monk. "I feel as if he were lying right across my heart" (Hawthorne 218), says Donatello.

Miriam, Donatello, and Kenyon walk up to the dead monk. He is dressed in a brown woollen frock, with the hood drawn over his head, but with his features uncovered. His hands are folded over his chest, and his feet protrude from beneath his habit, naked, tied together at the ankles with a black ribbon. When Miriam and Donatello see the face of the dead monk, they become speechless; "gazing at them beneath its half-closed eyelids, [is] the same visage that had glared upon their naked souls, the past midnight, as Donatello flung him over the precipice" (Hawthorne 220). They see the face of Miriam's model.

From the nostrils of the dead monk, suddenly, blood begins to ooze. Kenyon hypothesizes that the monk died of apoplexy, "or by some sudden accident, [since] the blood has not yet congealed" (Hawthorne 221). Miriam, meanwhile, interprets the blood as an indication of the murderer's presence in the church. Thoroughly disturbed, she suggests that they leave.

Before exiting the church, however, Miriam decides to check the face again. "[S]he fancied the likeness altogether an illusion," Hawthorne writes, "which would vanish at a closer and colder view. She must look at it again, therefore, and at once; or else the grave would close over the face, and leave the awful fantasy that had connected itself therewith fixed ineffaceably in her brain" (222). Unfortunately, when Miriam returns to the face, it remains very much the one that she remembers so well, the face that she saw the night before, the face of her model.

Here is an example of Hawthorne's supernatural, "a circumstance that would seem too fantastic to be told" (Hawthorne 221). Questions are raised—is the dead monk in fact Miriam's model, or do the two men look remarkably alike? And if it is indeed the same person, how could Miriam not have known that her model was a monk, given that she is supposed to have known him for a long time in the past? How did the body make its way to the church, and how is it so preserved? When it was last seen, it was "a dark mass, lying in a heap, with little or nothing human in its appearance" (Hawthorne 204). Hawthorne leaves these and many other questions unanswered in his romance. The characters, despite their attempts to make sense of what they see, never know what really happened; and the objects in the scene, instead of serving as clues, only further complicate the riddle. What is the meaning of the oozing blood? Why are the dead monk's feet tied with a black ribbon? Each object is a mediator that must be taken into account, having the ability to either enlighten or obfuscate. It bespeaks the existence of a network, a mysterious plot in which our subjects are entangled, but the exact constituents, the scope, and the

significance of which are all unknown. The mediators in this scene refuse to comply with the will of the subject to know. When Miriam returns to the face, she believes or wishes to believe that upon looking at it again, the face would turn into something that is explicable, an illusion, a slip or a trick of the senses that, once seen again in a "colder view," would be comprehensible. It would be an intermediary for which she can devise an explanation. But the face does not yield—it stares back at Miriam, suggesting countless possibilities, making her lack of knowledge and control clear.

Soon after the incident at the church, Donatello and Miriam quit one another. Miriam feels guilty for corrupting the once innocent Faun, who now has blood on his hands. Donatello, despite loving Miriam, cannot separate the memory of murder from her, which weighs on his conscience and has stripped him of his innocence. He returns home to Monte Beni.

Kenyon visits Donatello after some time, and upon seeing him, Kenyon is struck by how different his old friend is from the "sylvan and untutored youth" (Hawthorne 252) of his memory. There is "something lost, or something gained," which sets "the Donatello of to-day irreconcilably at odds with him of yesterday"—certain gravity in his step, which has nothing in common with the "irregular buoyancy [that used] to distinguish him" (Hawthorne 252). Kenyon asks Donatello to model for a bust, which Donatello accepts.

As Kenyon tries to produce Donatello's bust, however, he finds the process to be extremely challenging. There is no special difficulty in "hitting the likeness," but Kenyon is at a loss as to "how to make this genial and kind type of countenance the index of the mind within" (Hawthorne 312). After committing the act of sin, Donatello is passing through a "moral phase"; it appears that he no longer has any permanent trait in him but is as evanescent as vapour, which,

Kenyon thinks bitterly, is "the material in which [his character] ought to be represented" (Hawthorne 313). "Hopeless of a good result," Hawthorne writes:

> Kenyon gave up all preconceptions about the character of his subject, and let his hands work uncontrolled with the clay, somewhat as a spiritual medium, while holding a pen, yields it to an unseen guidance other than that of her own will. Now and then he fancied that this plan was destined to be the successful one. A skill and insight beyond his consciousness seemed occasionally to take up the task. The mystery, the miracle, of imbuing an inanimate substance with thought, feeling, and all the intangible attributes of the soul, appeared on the verge of being wrought. And now, as he flattered himself, the true image of his friend was about to emerge from the facile material, bringing with it more of Donatello's character than the keenest observer could detect at any one moment in the face of the original. Vain expectation! some touch, whereby the artist thought to improve or hasten the result, interfered with the design of his unseen spiritual assistant, and spoilt the whole. There was still the moist, brown clay, indeed, and the features of Donatello, but without any semblance of intelligent and sympathetic life. (313)

We can see that Kenyon conceives his material as an intermediary, a passive medium that is to be imbued with meaning but that is not to have any effective role in the creative process. All that the clay has to do is submit itself to Kenyon's hands, which are operating under some greater, unseen influence. Such a consideration or treatment of the material is a common artistic conception; even Hawthorne, in his story "The Artist of the Beautiful," defines art as "the spiritualization of matter." However, he has something different in mind for art in *The Marble Faun*. Kenyon's attempt to spiritualize the "moist, brown clay" fails, and when Kenyon asks

Donatello whether his creation has "any matter of likeness to [Donatello's] inner man,"

Donatello replies none—it is "like looking a stranger in the face" (Hawthorne 313). Frustrated

and embarrassed, Kenyon falls into a fit of passion and begins to compress, elongate, widen, and

alter the features of the bust "in mere recklessness" (Hawthorne 314), asking Donatello at every

change whether the expression on the bust is any more satisfactory.

At some point, Donatello tells Kenyon to stop, grabbing his hand. "By some accidental

handling of the clay, entirely independent of his own will," Kenyon "[has] given the countenance

a distorted and violent look, combining animal fierceness with intelligent hatred" (Hawthorne

314). It is the same face that Donatello had when he was holding Miriam's model over the edge

of the precipice. While Kenyon is shocked at the result, Donatello tells the sculptor to not alter it,

but rather chisel it, "in eternal marble": "I will set it up in my oratory and keep it continually

before my eyes. Sadder and more horrible is a face like this, alive with my own crime, than the

dead skull which my forefathers handed down to me!" (Hawthorne 314)

Kenyon, however, quickly applies his fingers to the clay again, rubbing away the

expression. Kenyon is full of sympathy for Donatello, whose internalization of the crime that he

has committed is eating away at him. At this point in the romance, Kenyon is not aware of

Donatello's murder of Miriam's model, but offers his friend some words of advice nonetheless:

"Has there been an unalterable evil in your young life? Then crowd it out with good, or it will lie

there corrupting forever, and cause your capacity for better things to partake its noisome

corruption" (Hawthorne 315). Donatello responds that Kenyon's advice gives him much food for

thought, and the two leave the studio together.

Hawthorne lingers on Donatello's bust to point out that the sculptor's "last accidental

touches, with which he hurriedly effaced the look of deadly rage," has given the bust "a higher

and sweeter expression than it had hitherto worn" (315). This expression can be attributed not to

Kenyon's artistic imagination, but to the process in which the clay and the hand have played an

active role. The clay is not an intermediary that can easily be manipulated, as seen from

Kenyon's earlier struggles with it, but a mediator with a certain mystery of its own, lying outside

of the scope of the subject's knowledge. It is impossible to predict whether and when it will

cooperate with the subject in his artistic pursuit; and without its cooperation, success is also

impossible. The hand, when Kenyon uses it to touch the clay, is not working for any grand

artistic ideal; the contact made between it and the medium of clay is "accidental," physical—and

yet also absolutely crucial. Essentially, the artistic success depicted in this scene is a chance

occurrence that may never have come about, and would not have come about, without those

involved behaving as mediators. Something mysterious is at work here, certain agency or a set of

agencies working with but not for the subject, which shapes the artistic process while the artist is

not entirely aware of what is going on. What is shown here is that art, a "world" to which the

sculptor has devoted his life, is a network that involves many mediators including the subject,

but regarding which the subject's knowledge is limited.

This is demonstrated again when later in the book, Kenyon shows Donatello's bust to

Hilda. Kenyon never saw the "higher and sweeter" expression on the clay bust; from

Hawthorne's description, it appears that the object was left in Monte Beni. Kenyon produces

another bust, however, which is close to reaching its completion in marble, and which

fortunately too has that sweet expression. Hilda describes the countenance of the marble bust as

"giv[ing] the impression of a growing intellectual power and moral sense," instead of the "genial,

pleasurable sort of vivacity" (Hawthorne 433) that Donatello possessed prior to his crime. When

Kenyon tries to take credit for this accomplishment, Hilda informs him that sadly, she does not

think that this effect "has been brought about by any skill or purpose on the sculptor's part" (Hawthorne 433). "I believe you are right" (Hawthorne 433), Kenyon eventually says to Hilda, for the bust, after all, is not complete when he shows it to her. What Kenyon has so far, which Hilda thinks is already perfect, may have been ruined had he struck another blow to the marble, which he could have easily done. Again, even as he participates in it, art is not transparent to Kenyon. It is full of uncertainties, including his very own creation. The marble bust is not a mere material expression of Kenyon's idea, but an enigma in its own right.

Hilda disappears shortly after the above-mentioned meeting with Kenyon. They make a plan to visit the galleries of the Vatican the next day, but when Kenyon arrives, he sees "nothing of his expected friend" (Hawthorne 444). Disappointed and confused, he wanders the streets of Rome, where he encounters a group of passers-by and loiterers, then a penitent in a white robe with a mask over his or her face. "Such odd, questionable shapes are often seen gliding through the streets of Italian cities, and are understood to be usually persons of rank, who quit their palaces, their gayeties, their pomp, and pride, and assume the penitent garb for a season, with a view of thus expatriating some crime" (446), Hawthorne explains. These figures usually "ask alms" (Hawthorne 446), donations for beneficent or religious purposes; this penitent, however, asks no alms of Kenyon, but stares at him for a minute or two before asking: "Is all well with you, Signore?" (Hawthorne 447) Kenyon realizes that the penitent is Donatello, whom he left in Monte Beni after helping him reunite with Miriam. Donatello does not reveal himself, however, and takes off after asking his question. Bemused, Kenyon wonders what his old friend is doing in Rome, "where his recollections must be so painful," and, considering his crime, "his presence [must be] not without peril" (Hawthorne 447), and whether Miriam is with him.

The chance meeting with Donatello, coming just after Hilda's nonappearance at the Vatican, heightens Kenyon's concerns. "It caused him to fancy, as we generally do," Hawthorne writes, "in the petty troubles which extend not a hand's-breath beyond our own sphere, that the whole world was saddening around him. It took the sinister aspect of an omen, although he could not distinctly see what trouble it might forebode" (448). After the meeting with Donatello, Kenyon is still roaming the streets when a carriage passes by him, and he recognizes Miriam's face in the window. He hastens to the carriage, which stops, and exclaims incredulously: "Miriam! you in Rome? . . . And your friends know nothing of it?" (Hawthorne 450) "Is all well with you?" (Hawthorne 450) says Miriam. "This inquiry, in the identical words which Donatello [has] so recently addressed to him," startles Kenyon:

> He looked still more earnestly at Miriam, and felt a dreamy uncertainty whether it was really herself to whom he spoke. True; there were those beautiful features, the contour of which he had studied too often, and with a sculptor's accuracy of perception, to be in any doubt that it was Miriam's identical face. But he was conscious of a change, the nature of which he could not satisfactorily define; it might be merely her dress, which, imperfect as the light was, he saw to be richer than the simple garb that she had usually worn. The effect, he fancied, was partly owing to a gem which she had on her bosom; not a diamond, but something that glimmered with a clear, red lustre, like the stars in a southern sky. Somehow or other, this colored light seemed an emanation of herself, as if all that was passionate and glowing, in her native disposition, had crystallized upon her breast, and were just now scintillating more brilliantly than ever, in sympathy with some emotion of her heart. (Hawthorne 450–1)

Kenyon is painfully aware of his ignorance, of the fact that there is something going on, some shadowy plot in which he is also involuntarily partaking, that is nevertheless utterly unknown to him. This awareness affects him to such a degree that he even questions the evidence of his senses. And as we have observed in the previous examples, and can now see here, the objects in the scene are integral components of the plot-network. While Kenyon cannot "satisfactorily define" the nature of the change that he senses in Miriam, it appears to be linked to and even produced by the dress and in particular the red gem on her bosom, which is connected to "some emotion of her heart." They do not translate directly to digestible meaning, but indicate to the observer that there is meaning to be obtained when their mysteries are deciphered. The dress being richer than what Miriam normally wears must mean something—the glow of the red gem must say something about Miriam's soul—but their information is withheld from Kenyon. Helpful or not, these objects cannot be taken out of the picture, being just as enmeshed in the network as our befuddled subject.

Kenyon desperately asks Miriam to tell him what is going on; Miriam's answer is that she can tell him nothing. "Only, when the lamp goes out do not despair" (Hawthorne 452), she says, before driving away. While Kenyon is still confused after this "unsatisfactory interview" (Hawthorne 452), he understands that Miriam is talking about the Virgin's lamp, which Hilda attends at Via Portoghese. Suspecting that something must have happened to Hilda, Kenyon hastens to her tower.

While it may appear from the course of the events that Donatello and Miriam finally understand everything that is going on, they do not. They certainly know more about their own affairs than Kenyon does, which is to be expected, and are more deeply involved in the perplexing plot than Kenyon, but they too are operating with limited knowledge. "It is still a dim

mystery," Miriam will later confess to Kenyon, when they see each other again, "a gloomy twilight . . . that I myself can explain only by conjecture" (Hawthorne 488–9). The reason that Miriam somehow knows about Hilda's whereabouts is that she is the cause of Hilda's disappearance. Near the beginning of this romance, she confided to Hilda a sealed packet and instructed her to deliver it according to its address, should Miriam herself not claim it after a certain period. That period has passed, and Hilda has gone to deliver the packet, though Miriam does not inform Kenyon of this fact.

Upon arriving at the tower, Kenyon is staggered to find the extinguished lamp, which signifies Hilda's absence. He knocks on her door, but no answer comes from within. Subsequently, Kenyon, who is in love with Hilda, makes finding her his utmost priority, and begins to act as a detective. He asks her neighbours for sightings, and obtains the information that she was last seen leaving the tower with a sealed packet in her hand. He acquires a duplicate key to Hilda's apartment from "the wife of the person who sublet[s] them" (Hawthorne 460). When Kenyon enters the apartment, he notices that a small ebony writing-desk, which he remembers seeing in the room, is missing, and asks the matron about its whereabouts:

> "What has become of it?" he suddenly inquired, laying his hand on the table.
>
> "Become of what, pray?" exclaimed the woman, a little disturbed. "Does the Signore suspect a robbery, then?"
>
> "The signorina's writing-desk is gone," replied Kenyon; "it always stood on this table, and I myself saw it there only a few days ago."
>
> "Ah, well!" said the woman, recovering her composure, which she seemed to partly have lost. "The signorina has doubtless taken it away with her. The fact is

of good omen; for it proves that she did not go unexpectedly, and is likely to

return when it may best suit her convenience." (Hawthorne 462)

The matron brushes off the topic, insisting that Hilda must have taken the desk with her, but

Kenyon finds it to be very unusual. Unlike the matron, Kenyon no longer assumes that anything

can instantly be a proof of something, even as he yearns for such ease; over the course of this

romance, he has become increasingly unsure. The absence of the desk, instead of narrowing

down the number of possibilities, multiplies them, and Kenyon is tormented by the thought of

these possibilities, imagining the worst for his dear Hilda. In his "unstrung and despondent mood"

(Hawthorne 470), he sees Hilda's doves—the sweet, virginal Hilda had doves for companions,

and was often called the Dove herself—starting to desert their missing mistress's place, which

pains him greatly. "Only a single dove remained," Hawthorne writes, "and brooded drearily

beneath the shrine. The flock, that had departed, were like the many hopes that had vanished

from Kenyon's heart; the one that still lingered, and looked so wretched,—was it a Hope, or

already a Despair?" (471) Like many other objects that we have looked at, the lone dove

emanates a sense of uncertainty, even as it staunchly stays in its place. Its status as a mediator

makes it unusable, either for stirring hope or for inculcating despair.

Unfortunately for Kenyon, as the romance nears its end, it appears that Hawthorne has

chosen him as the main subject to be repeatedly tossed into webs of mediators and confront his

limit. Some time after Hilda's disappearance and his failed pursuit of her, Kenyon goes on a

walk and runs into his two old friends, Donatello and Miriam, who have an air of mystery about

them. Where they have been, why they are back in Rome, and so on, remain very obscure. When

asked about Hilda, Miriam informs Kenyon that Hilda will return to him in two days. Still

refusing to disclose the details of her friend's disappearance, she says to him: "The day after to-

morrow, . . . an hour before sunset, go to the Corso, and stand in front of the fifth house on your left, beyond the Antonine column. You will learn tidings of a friend" (Hawthorne 492). Kenyon wants to know more, but Miriam "[shakes] her head, put[s] her finger on her lips, and turn[s] away with an illusive smile" (Hawthorne 492).

When Kenyon heads down to the Corso two days after, the Corso is swarming with people; it is the day of the Carnival. His sympathies being far removed from the festivities of the scene—as all he can think about is Hilda—Kenyon watches the people and the objects as though he were "gazing through the iron lattice of a prison-window" (Hawthorne 500). However, he then catches a glimpse of two figures that resemble Donatello and Miriam in costume, "the peasant and contadina" (Hawthorne 500), and chases after them. They quickly drop out of sight, however, and Kenyon finds himself in the middle of a motley crowd:

> Fantastic figures, with bulbous heads, the circumference of a bushel, grinned
> enormously in his face. Harlequins stuck him with their wooden swords, and
> appeared to expect his immediate transformation into some jollier shape. A little,
> long-tailed, horned fiend sidled up to him, and suddenly blew at him through a
> tube, enveloping our friend in a whole harvest of winged seeds. (Hawthorne 503)

The creatures mentioned in the passage above make up but a fraction of the numerous absurd figures that bombard Kenyon. Here is perhaps the most outlandish and supernatural scene in *The Marble Faun*, which overwhelms Kenyon "like a feverish dream" (Hawthorne 505). Each object that throws itself into Kenyon's field of view has the ability to mediate the situation; the scene is brimming with possibilities. All Kenyon knows is that he will "learn tidings of [his] friend," but he has not a clue regarding what those tidings are, what shapes they might take, what their effect on him would be, and so on. Hilda could suddenly pop up behind one of the oddities, glowing

with joy to see Kenyon again; one of the creatures may turn out to be a messenger, the bearer of bad news; Kenyon might see Hilda, but she might disappear again into the sea of bodies, as mysteriously as she did the first time. The objects form an ever-shifting network, the outcome of which is absolutely unpredictable. Kenyon, uninformed, unsure, and hopeless, does not attempt to interpret what his senses bring him anymore. He "resign[s] himself to let it take its course" (Hawthorne 505), understanding that he will never understand what he sees. If it be real, let it be real; if it be a dream, then let it be a dream.

Hilda's return is just as hazy as every other event we have examined in this chapter. She simply appears—like an apparition—on one of the private balconies that overlook the street, astonishing the original occupants of the balcony. Regarding where she has been all this time— the delivery of the packet, after all, took way longer than it should have—Hawthorne states that he will not reveal it to the readers at this time, encouraging them to exercise their imagination. He will also not "retrace the steps by which she return[s] to the actual world"; "[f]or the present, be it enough to say that Hilda had been summoned forth from a secret place, and led we know not through what mysterious passages, to a point where the tumult of life burst suddenly upon her hears" (511–2). Upon her arrival, Hilda instantly becomes "a portion of the scene" (Hawthorne 512), with relations quickly forming between her and her surroundings. As Hawthorne writes, "[h]er pale, large-eyed, fragile beauty, her wondering aspect and bewildered grace, attracted the gaze of many, and there fell around her a shower of bouquets, and bonbons— freshest blossoms and sweetest sugar-plums, sweets to the sweet" (512). Beneath the balcony, she sees Kenyon, who is still stricken with sorrow, and grabs one of the rosebuds that have been thrown to her and tosses it in his way. It lands right on Kenyon, who "turn[s] his sad eyes upward" (Hawthorne 512), and sees Hilda. It is a happy ending that awaits Hilda and Kenyon; as

for Miriam and Donatello, we will not hear of them again, until the postscript that Hawthorne added afterward.

In what was the last chapter of *The Marble Faun* before the addition of the postscript, Hawthorne addresses the "gentle reader," which is an imaginary figure that Hawthorne desires for his readership, a reader who understands just how his romances are supposed to be read. This reader would not demand "one of those minute elucidations, which are so tedious, and, after all, so unsatisfactory, in clearing up the romantic mysteries of a story," he writes:

> He is too wise to insist upon looking closely at the wrong side of the tapestry, after the right one has been sufficiently displayed to him, woven with the best of the artist's skill, and cunningly arranged with a view to the harmonious exhibition of its colors. If any brilliant, or beautiful, or even tolerable effect have been produced, this pattern of kindly readers will accept it at its worth, without tearing the web apart, with the idle purpose of discovering how the threads have been knit together; for the sagacity by which he is distinguished will long ago have taught him that any narrative of human action and adventure—whether we call it history or romance—is certain to be a fragile handiwork, more easily rent than mended. The actual experience of even the most ordinary life is full of events that never explain themselves, either as regards their origin or their tendency. (514)

Hawthorne's message—to which we arrived at in the opening scene—is reiterated here, and visible in this passage again is the web. Contrary to what was the dominant critical opinion of the past, that *The Marble Faun* displays Hawthorne's shoddiness, *The Marble Faun* is in fact the product of the author's most careful "handiwork," a tapestry that has been woven with utmost care, a network with mediators exhibiting their true and diverse colours. Through his aesthetic,

Hawthorne desired to make his readers, like his characters, more aware of that scarcity of

knowledge by which our subjective experiences are characterized.

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