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# Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Meiosis of Americanism in *The Marble Faun*

Rasoul Aliakbari

Such genres as popular movies and video games often contain images of American superiority but this imagery, it should be noted, has not developed overnight; rather, it has its roots in the history of literary representation. To throw some light on this background, this paper emphasizes political reading of literary texts. In particular, I aim to provide a political response to a poetic dilemma that *The Marble Faun* (1860) features. In the preface to *The Marble Faun*, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) professes his intention to set his new novel in Italy, which he views as the proper land for Romance, “as a sort of poetic or faery precinct” (viii). The American novelist downplays his native land as inappropriate for his narrative, as it possesses “no shadow, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity” (viii). The authorial tendency develops a binary at the outset in which the Roman setting is upheld as the proper venue for laying the story and American materialism is denounced. A legitimate Romantic pursuit though it may sound, the binary is reversed in the course of the novel. *The Marble Faun*, which narrates the account of the visit of a group of American artists to Italy, provides a Manichean appraisal of Italy. While they amplify ancient Roman history and promote its art, the American visitors continually degrade contemporary Italy, and particularly Rome. Stereotypes of the “beggar-haunted”

and “idle” Italy and the “nervous and unwholesome atmosphere” of Rome develop, and contemporary Italians are presented pejoratively (189, 24). The only Italian characterization in the novel is maimed, imperfect in intellects, and animalistic. Additionally, unlike the Italians included in the novel, the American artists are presented as sophisticated observers of the Italian milieu who comprehend Roman art and history.

To respond to the aesthetic dilemma (namely, the prefatory sublimation vis-à-vis the actual degradation of Italy along with maintenance of American superiority) I will examine the novel’s intertextualities with European Orientalism. While European Romantics are fascinated with the ancient past of the Orient, they do not appreciate what they perceive to be its present mundane status. Although the novel is set in Italy, which is an occidental territory, I will argue that the American novelist deploys devices, themes, and strategies in dealing with the Italian setting and people that are characteristic of Orientalist writings. I maintain that the Gothic travelogue bears similarity to typical Orientalist trips, in which the target space is exoticized and its inhabitants are stereotyped. As such, I will also investigate Italian identity as an American construct and will seek to find out the ways in which such journey rituals as sightseeing serve the purpose of Othering and Orientalizing. Ultimately, I will examine Othering in connection with American imperialism, which hinges on a sense of American “greatness,” “ascendancy,” and “specialness” (*Culture and Imperialism* 8–9). Excerpts from the novel will demonstrate how American superiority and progress are promoted in contrast to contemporary Italian corruption and primitiveness. As such, I will show *The Marble Faun* to be (along with its contemporary novels such as *Moby Dick*) a textual corroboration of the American imperialism that started during the nineteenth century.

## Initial Remarks

The prominent postcolonial critic Edward Said chiefly focuses on Franco-British Orientalism, in contrast to which, as he indicates, “the American understanding of the Orient will seem considerably less dense” (*Orientalism* 2), growing in the wake of the Second World War (1939–45). Also, postcolonial theory focuses on misrepresentation of the Orient as carried out by Westerners. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in the American demonstration of Italy, as is evident in *The Marble Faun*, Orientalist topoi and elements are recurrently employed. The

novel consequently serves to reflect and corroborate emerging Americanism. While Said restricts himself, and does so expediently, to the “set of questions to the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam” (*Orientalism* 16), it is worth examining the ways in which transatlantic Orientalism takes place in an inter-Occidental spatiality.

Henry James wrote of *The Marble Faun* in 1879 as “the most popular of Hawthorne’s four novels,” a text that became “part of the intellectual equipment of the Anglo-Saxon visitor to Rome, and is read by every English-speaking traveller who arrives there, who has been there, or who expects to go” (165). James characterized the text as a popular travel guide, and his contemporary American author and critic William Dean Howells (1837–1920) announced that despite its indefinite close, “Everybody was reading it” (56). Moreover, it is known that Hawthorne was commissioned to Europe on a political post (1853–57) and afterwards wrote down his observations during a year and a half of residence in Italy. He reworked the notes into the Gothic travelogue that he published in 1860 in Britain, under the title of *Transformation: Or the Romance of Monte Beni*, and simultaneously in the United States as *The Marble Faun*. The travelogue features valuable factual information regarding Italian tourist sites. Thomas Woodson, editor of the first edition of *The French and Italian Notebooks*, has stated that Hawthorne’s visit to Rome in 1858 produced “the most sustained and detailed journalizing of [his] life” (903). Despite its being a Gothic composition, the novel thus carries credit as an allegedly dependable account of the Italian milieu. That *The Marble Faun* is widely read and trusted as an introduction to Italian setting and life for its contemporary American readers is reminiscent of European Orientalist writings as they provide fascinating and (purportedly) accurate accounts about the Orient. For instance, William Lane’s *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* has been mentioned as a popular travelogue among a constellation of later writers including Gérard de Nerval (1808–55), Gustave Flaubert (1821–80), and Richard Burton (1821–90) (*Orientalism* 23). Hawthorne’s Gothicism in *The Marble Faun* further echoes accounts of Oriental travel writings that grew popular among Europeans in the late eighteenth century. It has been stated that among other Orientalists, “Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, for example, urged upon their countrymen, and upon Europeans in general, a detailed study of India because, they said, it was Indian culture and religion that could defeat the materialism and mechanism (and republicanism) of Occidental culture” (*Orientalism* 115). The German poet and critic Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) viewed “the Orient

as the being the purest form of Romanticism” (137). Lord Byron (1788–1824), François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) made successful attempts at producing exotic accounts of the Orient. In a similar way, in the novel’s introduction Hawthorne highlights Italy as the proper land for Romance and fairy tales, in contrast to his native land (America) with its modern, mundane, materialist progressivism (viii). As the preface suggests, Hawthorne expresses uneasiness with the material progress he notices in his contemporary America and prefers instead a quixotic setting in which to place his narrative. The pursuit of enchantment was common to Romantics in general, and they would often realize it in the Orient. While he does not enact his narrative in the Orient as his European counterparts do, Hawthorne manages to recreate the Orient within the Occidental territory of Italy, as I will demonstrate in later examples.

Pertinent to Orientalization is the politics of travel writing that informs Hawthorne’s account. Said (who is cautious about the textual attitude as the outlook one forms toward a space based on a text and not through close contact) mentions travel guides as one of its manifestations: “Travel books or guidebooks are about as ‘natural’ a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book, . . . precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one’s equanimity” (*Orientalism* 93). Hawthorne establishes a textual attitude for his American audiences through his guide that (as contemporary reviews witness) fell to their favor, exciting their imaginations.

A textual attitude is more likely to be established as the travel writer attempts to deliver a detailed picture of the milieu as a gesture of inclusivity and objectivity. By the same token, Hawthorne provides detailed accounts of the Italian space, which include descriptions of everyday Roman life. About Orientalist writings, Said suggests that often a “work on the Orient . . . tries to characterize the place, of course, but what is of greater interest is the extent to which the work’s internal structure is in some measure synonymous with a comprehensive interpretation (or an attempt at it) of the Orient” (*Orientalism* 158; italics in original). Likewise, there is a constant effort in *The Marble Faun* to cast an exotic light on the scenery and to foreground those aspects of architecture that help to serve similar ends. In this respect Orientalization also helps to achieve the intended bizarreness or “interpretation” of the place. The Roman architecture is first associated with Oriental imagery as the granite obelisk in Piazza del Popolo is described in connection with its historical

construction “on the borders of the Nile” (81). This kind of Orientalization of architecture abounds in the novel. One of the visiting American artists, Kenyon, is hosted by their Italian companion, Donatello, in the latter’s castle of Monte Beni. During the stay, the American sculptor wanders about the castle and observes the following:

It was a square and lofty entrance-room, which, by the solidity of its construction, might have been an Etruscan tomb, being paved and walled with heavy blocks of stone, and vaulted almost as massively overhead. On two sides there were doors, opening into long suites of anterooms and saloons; on the third side, a stone staircase of spacious breadth, ascending, by dignified degrees and with wide resting-places, to another floor of similar extent. Through one of the doors, which was ajar, Kenyon beheld an almost interminable vista of apartments, opening one beyond the other, and reminding him of the hundred rooms in Blue Beard’s castle, or the countless halls in some palace of the Arabian Nights. (172)

Primarily, it is noteworthy that the space is being viewed and described from Kenyon’s vantage point and not Donatello’s, which gives the American visitor’s position prominence in the novel as he attempts to produce a detailed account of the architectural scene. Also, during the sightseeing the milieu is being gothicized as it is compared to an Etruscan tomb (the macabre being a recurrent ingredient in Gothic stories). More importantly however, the setting is Orientalized under the American’s gaze through the links that are established with *The Arabian Nights*, the text that contains Persian, Arabic, Indian, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian folktales and received extensive attention from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalists. As a consequence, Donatello’s palace is assimilated with a typical Oriental castle and as such receives associations as being both stately and outlandish.

Aside from the castle, the Italian scenery in general is recurrently observed and commented upon by the American sculptor. While passing through an Italian village with Donatello on their way from the castle back toward Rome, Kenyon observes, “In Italy there are . . . no pleasant, vine-sheltered porches; none of those grass-plots or smoothly shorn lawns, which hospitably invite the imagination into the sweet domestic interiors of English life. Everything . . . [is] disheartening in the immediate neighborhood of an Italian home” (233). While Orientalization may do it obliquely, such statements as this directly place Italy in an inferior position vis-à-vis the observer’s lifestyle. Architectural

description, sightseeing, and milieu reflection—which may constitute the rituals of any journey—serve at these points to promote Americanness over Italian identity. Hierarchization of this type challenges the initial Hawthornian rationale behind choosing a “poetic or faery precinct” for his narrative (viii). As it has been noted,

It is true, of course, as the preface declares, that Italy is exotic and America is commonplace. . . . [But] the gloomy wrongs of Italy are more oppressive than picturesque; and when Hawthorne justifies his choice of a setting with the assertion that “Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make them grow” (p. 3), he seems to have forgotten that Italian ruins as he presents them are not the kind upon which romance and poetry depend. (Levy 139)

The environment reflections that Kenyon produces as one of the major characters in the novel deviate from the professed prefatory thesis and shift the romantic and exotic account to a tarnished view of the Italian lifestyle. In contrast to the “depraved” Italy, American scenery (and life) is upheld as pure and pleasant.

## The Aesthetic Dilemma and Othering

The prefatory note appears as contradictory to the depiction of everyday Italian life and thus develops an aesthetic dilemma. There is a marked contrast between the exotic that is intended and the mundane that is presented. Nonetheless, resolution to the Hawthornian dilemma may be available in Orientalist scholarship. It has been argued that European Orientalists were fascinated less with the modern reality of the Orient than with its ancient past. As an instance, the German poet and critic Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) has been said to be entirely concerned with the past of the Orient; Said argues that when Schlegel said, “It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism,” he meant the Orient of the *Sakuntala*, the *Zend-Avesta*, and the *Upanishads* (*Orientalism* 98). Similarly, upon his first visit to Egypt the French poet Nerval famously lamented the loss of the visionary past: “It is Egypt that I most regret having driven out of my imagination, now that I have sadly placed it in my memory” (qtd. in *Orientalism* 100). Similar to the Romantic Orientalists who

display compassion about the past of the Orient and do not engage with its contemporary status without uneasiness, the American viewers in *The Marble Faun* are infatuated with Roman art and have basically taken the trip to Italy in order to study and reproduce it in their performances. We see this when Hilda, one of the female painters of the group, contemplates the history of the city in contrast to its present condition: “‘I sometimes fancy,’ said Hilda, on whose susceptibility the scene always made a strong impression, ‘that Rome—mere Rome—will crowd everything else out of my heart’” (84). The positive appraisal of the Roman past contrasts to Kenyon’s negative view of contemporary Italy as “fallen.” Thus, while they are passionate about the old Roman architecture and art, the American viewers tend to denigrate its current Italian inheritors. The imagined past is pleasing and the modern “real” is detestable. Along these lines, the aesthetic dilemma betrays another chief connection to European Orientalism in *The Marble Faun* where the ancient past is pleasant and fosters romantic imagination and the current conditions are despicable and are therefore underrated.

Regarding the denigration of modern Italy, it is noteworthy to study how Italians are cast in stereotypes during the Americans’ adventurous trip to a Roman catacomb. Miriam, another female painter of the group, consents to the accompaniment of a specter she has met in the cave. His attendance, however, quickly becomes tenacious and menacing: “He haunted her footsteps with more than the customary persistency of Italian mendicants, when once they have recognized a benefactor” (21). Observations of this sort about the residents of a tourist destination may appear in any travel writings; however, their recurrence in Hawthorne’s novel develops a stereotypical picture of modern Italy. In fact, such descriptions of Italy as “beggar-haunted” (189) and of modern Rome as “the native soil of ruin” (54), possessing a “nervous and unwholesome atmosphere” (24), recur in *The Marble Faun*. The novel thus constructs a fallen and stereotypical picture of the Roman populace.

Also, as already mentioned, the bipolar view of the Italian past and present coincides with promotion of American manners as superior to Italians’. Germane to this predisposition in *The Marble Faun* is Othering. Coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Othering is “a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes;” it is “the business of *creating* the enemy . . . in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others” (Ashcroft 173; italics in original). Although the United States did not colonize Italy physically, nineteenth-century Italy as



presented in *The Marble Faun* serves as an inferior Other to the artists' homeland and contains that whose occurrence must be rejected in the progressing land of America. Modern Italy, as far as *The Marble Faun* is concerned, lacks American prosperity, and beyond that, bears features—particularly corruption and beggary—that America defines negatively.

Not only is contemporary Italy Othered, but “non-American” features are denounced within the American characters. The American artist Miriam receives positive ascriptions for her “natural language, her generosity, kindness, and native truth of character” (14). She is also said to be born to a South American planter who has given her wealth and education; however, “the one burning drop of African blood in her veins so affected her with a sense of ignominy, that she relinquished all and fled her country” (14). Despite her privileged paternal background, Miriam is doomed to eternal wandering. It seems that the “ignominious” African background, coupled with the mysterious murdering of the catacomb specter, haunts her life so much that she achieves no tranquility even as the novel ends.

Indifferent to its hideous aftermath, Miriam displays a degree of agency in murdering the infidel. Unlike her is the Italian companion Donatello who, out of passion for the American painter, becomes an accomplice in the murder. In fact, Donatello's characterization is a significant component in the picture Hawthorne constructs of Italy. Initially, Donatello's reaction against the haunting specter is characterized as “not so much a human dislike or hatred, as one of those instinctive, unreasoning antipathies which the lower animals sometimes display, and which generally prove more trustworthy than the acutest insight into character” (24). Further on, in one of their meetings in a wooded path in the Roman outskirts, Donatello is said to give Miriam “the idea of a being not precisely man, nor yet a child, but, in a high and beautiful sense, an animal, a creature in a state of development less than what mankind has attained, yet the more perfect within itself for that very deficiency” (57). Donatello is further presented as underdeveloped through the weird manner in which he expresses his love for Miriam:

Miriam could not think seriously of the avowal that had passed. He held out his love so freely, in his open palm, that she felt it could be nothing but a toy, which she might play with for an instant, and give back again. And yet Donatello's heart was so fresh a fountain, that, had Miriam been more world-worn than she was, she might have found it exquisite to slake her thirst with the feelings that welled up and brimmed over from it. She was far, very far, from

the dusty mediaeval epoch, when some women have a taste for such refreshment. Even for her, however, there was an inexpressible charm in the simplicity that prompted Donatello's words and deeds; though, unless she caught them in precisely the true light, they seemed but folly, the offspring of a maimed or imperfectly developed intellect. (59)

As the excerpts suggest, the Italian figure is represented as belonging to a race lower than human beings, and as closer to nature than to civilization. He acts instinctively and is unmindful, enamored, and underdeveloped in intellect.

Characterizing Donatello as impulsive and primitive bears striking closeness to Orientalists' view of the Oriental. In fact, his features echo designations made by the French philologist Ernest Renan (1823–92) to the Oriental Semite:

One sees that in all things the Semitic race appears to us to be an incomplete race, by virtue of its simplicity. This race—if I dare use the analogy—is to the Indo-European family what a pencil sketch is to painting; it lacks that variety, that amplitude, that abundance of life which is the condition of perfectibility. Like those individuals who possess so little fecundity that, after a gracious childhood, they attain only the most mediocre virility, the Semitic nations experienced their fullest flowering in their first age and have never been able to achieve true maturity. (qtd. in *Orientalism* 149)

As the Orientalist piece suggests, both Donatello and Semite are spontaneous and immature in conduct. They are imperfect in intellect and simple in nature. Even as she shows her self-portraiture to Donatello, Miriam is doubtful if her efforts are “perceptible to so simple and natural an observer as Donatello” (36). While his American friends are in possession of artistic knowledge and skill, the Italian figure displays almost no interest in or understanding of art. Though he has Occidental breeding and upbringing, the Italian figure constantly receives blatantly primitive and Oriental attributions that are meant to relegate him to an inferior place compared to the human race in general and to his American companions in particular.

## Americanness and Imperialism

Not only Miriam but also all three American artists are represented as possessing high aesthetic taste, skill, and comprehensive knowledge of the Roman

art—hence their mission to study and reproduce it. Hilda copies the paintings of the old Italian masters, Miriam paints portraits, and Kenyon sculpts. It is noteworthy that the American artists are committed to studying and perpetuating Roman art while no Italian figure is mentioned in *The Marble Faun* as having similar engagements. As self-professed guardians of Roman art, the American visitors then resemble Orientalists who studied classical Oriental art and history: “The modern Orientalist,” Said suggests, saw himself as “a hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished,” just as Champollion “reconstructed Egyptian hieroglyphics out of the Rosetta Stone” (*Orientalism* 121). Likewise, Roman art and history grow to be a favorite topic of investigation and discussion for the American artists, and no artistic opinion from Italians is mentioned in the novel.

In addition to the study and practice of art, Kenyon also undertakes a study of Donatello’s pedigree. Yet, Kenyon is not the first visitor to Donatello’s castle. Prior to his visit, a few English visitors had frequented “the fairy place” for the purpose of investigating the Italian Count’s background, particularly an old English man (a necromancer), who “had gathered up all the traditions of the Monte Beni family” (198). The attempt of the American observer (Kenyon) to investigate the history of an Orientalized figure displays further intertextualities with the characteristic Orientalist writings in which

the Orient and Orientals [are regarded] as an “object” of study, stamped with an otherness—as all that is different, whether it be “subject” or “object”—but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character. . . . This “object” of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a “historical” subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself. (Abdel-Malek 107–08)

The American sculptor is represented as possessing a firm grasp of Roman art and history and also having qualifications to study Donatello’s parental background. The Italian companion, who is already Othered and lowered to a place inferior to human beings, grows to be the object of study during the Monte Beni trip. Interestingly enough, Donatello himself requests the investigation. Moreover, he does not violate the patterns of conduct of a typical Oriental in that he demonstrates continued dependence on Kenyon for discovering his own past and agrees with his (Kenyon’s) findings.

Looking at the Monte Beni sightseeing incident from a closer angle, Kenyon's perseverance in producing observations on the milieu becomes striking. Upon seeing Donatello back in Monte Beni, Kenyon admits to his prejudice: "I have fancied you in a sort of Arcadian life, tasting rich figs, and squeezing the juice out of the sunniest grapes, and sleeping soundly all night, after a day of simple pleasures" (171). In fact, in the second part of the novel there is a tendency to suggest that Donatello has partly grown out of the childish and romantic phase. In his visit to Donatello's vineyard, Kenyon perceives that he is no longer "the sylvan and untutored youth, whom Miriam, Hilda, and himself had liked, laughed at, and sported with; not the Donatello whose identity they had so playfully mixed up with that of the Faun of Praxiteles" (169–70). No matter how much Donatello's native gaiety is lost after the felony of the murder, it still takes the American's connoisseurship to recognize the alteration. Kenyon is presented as perspicacious enough to recognize and inform on the subtleties in Donatello's personality; he is "naturally and professionally expert at reading the expression of the human countenance" (169). Added to this, the American sculptor is a keen observer of his surroundings, does not allow details to escape his notice, and makes use of them in reaching his conclusions.

Above all, Kenyon displays a thorough grasp of Italian history, which Donatello must—ironically so—lack, despite his being an Italian count. Reflecting on the history of the region and of Donatello's castle in particular, Kenyon, with his somewhat colonial and appropriative gaze upon the milieu, has "found a great deal to interest [him] in the mediaeval sculpture hidden away in the churches hereabouts" (175). He also opines that the castle's "tall front is like a page of black letter, taken from the history of the Italian republics." Observing the castle further, Kenyon develops his account of the Italian count's forefathers: "At some period of your family history . . . the Counts of Monte Beni must have led a patriarchal life in this vast house" (171). Unlike the American guest with his piercing gaze, Donatello is presented as a man of pleasure and not of curiosity or investigation, as he has already admitted: "I know little or nothing of its history" (170). In fact, he can only be grateful to his "forefathers for building it so high." He states, "I like the windy summit better than the world below, and spend much of my time there, nowadays" (170). As such, the American sculptor is the observing eye and the Italian youth, very much like his castle, is being observed and commented upon.

Advancing the above binary of observing and being observed, it should be noted that observation and the production of knowledge are significant topics

in Orientalist discourse. Regarding contact between the West and the Orient, it has been indicated that “the West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior” (*Orientalism* 109). Moreover, the historian of empire David K. Fieldhouse has pointed out that “the basis of imperial authority was the mental attitude of the colonist. His acceptance of subordination—whether through a positive sense of common interest with the parent state, or through inability to conceive of any alternative—made empire durable” (103). The statement provides insights into the relationships that develop in the course of the novel, particularly between Kenyon and Donatello, and between the American artists and the Italians more generally. Kenyon assumes an observing position from the start, and Donatello cannot escape that gaze; he is perpetually reflected upon in terms of his countenance, personality traits, and familial history. Additionally, Donatello confirms his intellectual subordination to the American visitor on more than a few occasions. As an instance, the count, who is grappling with religious apprehensions, decides to ask Kenyon’s opinion on his future plans: “Should I do wisely, do you think, to exchange this old tower for a cell?” (210). The sculptor immediately rejects the idea as “horrible,” while Donatello cannot argue for it meaningfully (210). Donatello’s obedience to Miriam in the murder of the infidel and his later submission to Kenyon’s accounts of the castle reinforce his American fellows’ sense of superiority. Donatello’s character, history, and future take form in the novel according to the proclivities and reflections that the American visitors express, and which he pursues and confirms by his conduct.

Related to the American sense of superiority is the binary opposition that the American political diplomat and writer Henry Kissinger (b. 1923) once introduced. He argued for a distinction between the developed and the developing countries. “The West,” he points out, “is deeply committed to the notion that the real world is external to the observer, that knowledge consists of recording and classifying data” (528). On the other hand, “Cultures which escaped the early impact of Newtonian thinking have retained the essentially pre-Newtonian view that the real world is almost completely *internal* to the observer” (528; italics in original). Interestingly enough, the imperialist distinction is conspicuously evident in *The Marble Faun*. Primarily, the American artists leave their homeland and travel to the outer world, seeking to capture and reproduce a history and art that is different from that of their native home. More importantly, Kenyon (as a keenly observing character) reaches out for the external world of Italy and, possessing historical knowledge, studies and

reflects on Italian life and manners. Therefore, an American post-Newtonian character (Kenyon) is privileged vis-à-vis Donatello, who is primarily submissive and pensive at times when he is not impulsive or animalistic—hence a pre-Newtonian Italian type.

Kissinger's binary is a blatantly imperialist attitude. One major way of maintaining and perpetuating the imperial attitude is to develop Kissingerian types of division in which upholding the empire comes at the expense of denouncing the Other. As the outspoken critic of American hegemony Noam Chomsky (b. 1928) has it,

It is an absolute requirement for the Western system of ideology that a vast gulf be established between the civilized West, with its traditional commitment to human dignity, liberty, and self-determination, and the barbaric brutality of those who for some reason—perhaps defective genes—fail to appreciate the depth of this historic commitment, so well revealed by America's Asian wars, for example. (85)

Chomsky expresses concern about the imperial gulf that separates the modern-day America from the Othered, non-American world. Once the gulf is established, America is viewed as the preserver of human dignity and liberty against its opponents, which are considered to be essentially imperfect and abnormal. One of the material outcomes of the intellectual division is America's Asian wars, and particularly its apogee, the Vietnam War (1956–75).

While modern imperialism is a legitimate concern, one should bear in mind the germination of American imperialism that took place during the nineteenth century. Said has convincingly argued that imperialism is not a mere act of materialist appropriation; rather, both colonialism and imperialism “are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (Culture and Imperialism 9; italics in original). The politicized attitude, or the imperialist American knowingness, it must be noted, has been textually endorsed as of the nineteenth century with production of the contrastive imagery of Americans versus foreigners. On the sources of the American sense of ascendancy, reference has been made to nineteenth-century American literature. As an instance, Capitan Ahab in *Moby-Dick* has been said to be “an allegorical representation of the American world quest; he is obsessed, compelling, unstoppable, completely wrapped up in his own rhetorical justification and his

sense of cosmic symbolism” (*Culture and Imperialism* 288). Working toward the same end is *The Marble Faun*, which features the presentation of American sophistication and their racial Othering of Italians.

Regarding Hawthorne’s representational tendencies in this novel, it has been argued that Italy is painted as “a posthistorical, aesthetic, feminized space whose transcendent status helps to solidify the identity of the United States as the province of language, masculine political agency and contemporary history” (Bailey 176). As the previous excerpts have already suggested, the notion of American imperialist superiority recurs in the novel and is developed to the same degree that modern Italian identity is denounced. In this binary, Italian nationalist efforts are denied as well: while America is presented as pure and progressing, Italian nationalism is only barely mentioned, overshadowed as it is by French garrison presence (see pages 37, 64, 118, and 348). Moreover, contemporary Italy is economically dependent on revenues from Western countries. Despite the romantic valorization that the Eternal City receives, the capitalist underpinning of the text is exposed as the narrator indicates how dependent Italy is on the revenues procured through tourism: “as summer approaches, the Niobe of Nations is made to bewail anew . . . the loss of that large part of her population, which she derives from other lands, and on whom depends much of whatever remnant of prosperity she still enjoys” (167). As such, the so-called fairy land of Italy is in need of American finances to preserve its remainder of grandeur.

Added to insinuation of superiority, sightseeing also betrays the American attitude of possessiveness. In this regard, it is significant to consider the account of the visit to the Coliseum where Hilda and Kenyon maintain a conversation about the site. Kenyon seconds Hilda’s statement and adds,

The Coliseum is far more delightful, as we enjoy it now, than when eighty thousand persons sat squeezed together, row above row, to see their fellow creatures torn by lions and tigers limb from limb. What a strange thought that the Coliseum was really built for us, and has not come to its best uses till almost two thousand years after it was finished! (120)

While made in a somewhat light-hearted mood, this statement must be considered in light of the overall attempt on the part of the American visitors in the novel to observe and produce reflections about Italy. In fact, the comment betrays the imperialist and colonialist mindset that motivates the Americans’ claim about the ultimate goals for which the site originally came about. Related

to the notion of American possessiveness in the novel is the presentation of Hilda's artistic experiences. It is significant that the American painter, and no Italian artist, is able to copy the old masters' creations with comparable dexterity: "the spirits of the old masters were hovering over Hilda and guiding her delicate white hand" (42). More importantly, some of Hilda's copies tended to surpass the originals. In such instances, "she had been enabled to execute what the great master had conceived in his imagination, but had not so perfectly succeeded in putting upon canvas" (42). Political reading of the statement in the overall context of the novel suggests that the grandeur of the old Italian civilization is capable of being reproduced only by the hands of the newly arrived American artists. Subsequently, the Americans seek to attach to themselves the ancient past of Italian people, having regarded contemporary Italians as "corrupted" (39), "primitive" (217), and underqualified to guard it by themselves.

Following these lines, the corrupted and beggar-ridden modern Italy—for so it is presented in *The Marble Faun*—is unable to preserve its own artistic past (whose revitalization is contingent on American skillfulness), it is unable to guard its past architectural grandeur without reliance on English and American revenues, and most significantly, it does not exist except as presented from an American vantage point:

Rome, as it now exists, has grown up under the Popes, and seems like nothing but a heap of broken rubbish, thrown into the great chasm between our own days and the Empire, merely to fill it up; and, for the better part of two thousand years, its annals of obscure policies, and wars, and continually recurring misfortunes, seem also but broken rubbish, as compared with its classic history. (84)

Underrating modern Italy and simultaneously amplifying its ancient history can be a political strategy to undermine contemporary Italians' efficacy in claiming their past grandeur, which then should be consigned to the American artists—such as Kenyon, who researches Donatello's noble pedigree, and Hilda, who produces outstanding copies—for preservation. The aesthetic dilemma in *The Marble Faun* betrays much of the political unconscious of the text and exposes the imperialist agenda behind romanticizing Roman art and history. The contrastive appraisal exposes the nexus that—perhaps inadvertently, but still significantly—is established between ancient sublimity and modern-day imperialism. Roman art is contingent upon American connoisseurship, as its magnificence is (as far as the novel suggests) exhumed by fervent American



visitors. The United States never actually colonized Italy, yet the textual attitude that is developed in the travelogue of *The Marble Faun*, as in other similar nineteenth-century texts, facilitates the formation of the notion of American superiority over Italy. It is thus not difficult to read in the description of the American “commonplace prosperity” (viii) a meiosis surreptitiously indicating a positive view of Americanness in the novel.

## Conclusion

This paper started with the argument that despite its narrative space (modern Italy), *The Marble Faun* displays intertextuality with Orientalist writings. Architecture and milieu reflections that the American visitors produce indicate that the Italian setting is Orientalized to a certain degree. Further intertextuality is evident in the aesthetic dilemma of the novel: while the preface promises a romantic exaltation of Italy and denounces American materialism and progress, *The Marble Faun* features (somewhat contrarily) a denigration of contemporary Italian life and an assertion of American superiority. Coupled with this aesthetic complexity, ancient Roman art and architecture’s being upheld by the American visitors was shown to be similar to European Orientalists’ tendency to amplify the Oriental past and debase its modern status. While past Roman grandeur is promoted, contemporary Italy is stigmatized by recurring references to beggary and corruption.

This paper contended that ensuing denigration of contemporary Italy bolstered American ascendancy that materialized (among other ways) by characterizing Donatello as spontaneous, instinctive, and animalistic and by portraying Americans as having thorough familiarity with Italian art and history. The relationship between Kenyon and Donatello particularly suggests that the former is in an observing position and the latter is a passive recipient of the accounts made by his American guest. Further on, we examined the split between Americans and Italians in the context of germination of American imperialism and ascendancy during the nineteenth century. This paper endeavored to show how Hawthorne’s Gothic travelogue corroborates American superiority. Also, ancient Italian grandeur was demonstrated to be dependent on revenues from American tourists and on the American artists’ dexterity. Predicated on the American sense of superiority, this paper contended that a possessive

attitude developed in the novel, implying that ancient Italian grandeur is to be conserved by qualified American visitors, rather than by Italians.

To comprehend American imperialism in the modern digital age we must place it in the broader frame of fictional imagination of the nineteenth century, where the notion of American superiority started to germinate, as shown through Hawthorne's simultaneous strategies of exoticizing and denigrating the Other. Though postcolonial studies (which concerns, among other things, Western textual treatments of the Orient) is by now an established avenue of scholarship, this paper is an example of extending postcolonialist readings to the inter-Occidental arena and exploring how Orientalist devices are utilized to project colonial imaginations inside the West. Future studies in this vein will expand postcolonial areas of study and help us challenge the homogeneous picture that classical postcolonial studies often assumes about the West, highlighting the significance of expanding of our horizons by engaging in political readings of the literary past.

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