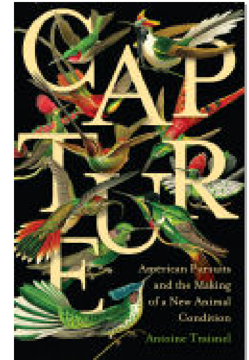
4. Fabulous Taxonomy (Hawthorne)



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FABULOUS TAXONOMY

(HAWTHORNE)

> "Unfitness to pursue our research in the unfathomable waters." "Impenetrable veil covering our knowledge of the cetacea." "A field strewn with thorns." "All these incomplete indications but serve to torture us naturalists." Thus speak of the whale, the great Cuvier, and John Hunter, and Lesson, those lights of zoology and anatomy.
> —Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

In a chapter titled "The Fossil Whale," the narrator of *Moby-Dick* turns to paleontology in hopes of once and for all capturing—fully understanding, completing his knowledge about—the animal after which the novel is named. After presenting his credentials as a geologist (his former employment as a stonemason and a ditchdigger), Ishmael speculates on the remains of a skull found in the middle of Paris in 1779, which the founder of comparative anatomy Georges Cuvier had pronounced "to have belonged to some utterly unknown Leviathanic species."[1] Ishmael then recounts the comical misidentification of a colossal skeleton exhumed in Alabama in 1842.[2] Initially diagnosed as the relic of a Tertiary marine reptile and thus christened Basilosaurus (the "king lizard"), the skeleton was shipped to England where, upon meticulous examination of the fossil's teeth, the famed paleontologist

[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-29 23:36 GMT)

Richard Owen, the "British Cuvier," declared it to belong to an extinct type of whale that had lived at the end of the Eocene epoch. Thus, the Basilosaurus descended into the inscrutable waters of cryptozoology, a pseudoscience involved in the search for animals whose existence or survival remains unfounded (the Loch Ness monster or Sasquatch being archetypal cryptids).

Curiously, however, Ishmael invokes Cuvier less to dispel the mystery enshrouding Moby Dick than to emphasize and extol the undecipherability of a beast said to be older than time itself. *Moby-Dick*'s venture into paleontology grants a properly mythic dimension to the "antechronical creature" that is the whale, whose skeleton furnishes "*but little clue* to the shape of his fully invested body" (498; emphasis added).[3] In contrast to Cuvier's method, for which a single fragment of bone provided an almost certain way of knowing the whole of the animal, Ishmael allows the immensity and undecipherability of the critter itself to contaminate his text. When he chooses to introduce the whale "in an archaeological, fossiliferous, and antediluvian point of view," he deliberately selects ostentatious and pompous adjectives (497): "Applied to any other creature than the Leviathan—to an ant or a flea—such portly terms might justly be deemed unwarrantably grandiloquent. But when Leviathan is the text, *the case is altered*" (496). We must read the altered "case" literally, as the very size and shape of the letters composing the book swell from minuscules to majuscules under the influence of its enormous subject: "Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard capitals. Give me a condor's quill! Give me the Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand!" (496). The whale, whose superlative magnitude demands that he be treated in an "imperial folio" and described with the "weightiest words of the dictionary," thus silently shapes the volume set out to contain it. If his "fully invested body" tends to vanish under the scalpel of modern science, the animal impresses itself into the figure of the novel to which it bequeaths his name.

This chapter pursues the possible correlation between literary form and the question of animal capture raised in the previous chapter. Following Ishmael's insight, it shows that different genres are more or less disposed to the apprehension of different animals, more or less suited

to the specificity of their object. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe's fugitive ape ultimately proved containable, with the help of Cuvier's taxonomic profile and by the frame of the detective story. But other "cryptic animals"—creatures that defy modern classification because of their supposed immortality (Melville's whale) or incoherent hybridity (Cooper's ass)—seem to constitute the end of modern fiction, in the double sense of its motivation and its ruin. In this chapter, I focus on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860), which also invokes Cuvier in its attempt to apprehend an elusive creature, but unlike "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," theatrically rejects the authority of the naturalist. Hawthorne's romance can thus be read, I propose, as a response to Poe's detective story. Both "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and *The Marble Faun* take place in Europe, both make their cryptic protagonists criminals, and both meditate on the animal's place (or lack thereof) in the urban spaces that make up the backdrop of their narratives and in the cultural imaginaries that predate the Darwinian revolution.[4] These works also constitute self-reflexive experiments in the evolving art of fiction writing, which responded to the pressures of and found itself shaped (at times invigorated, at times inhibited) by what we could call the modern anatomic reason epitomized by Cuvier, who devised a taxonomic hermeneutic that presumed knowledge about animality—a necessary principle for his science of comparative anatomy—while casting animals as unknowable in their singularity.

CASE IN POINT: HAWTHORNE'S PROFESSED IGNORANCE

Published only a few months after *On the Origin of Species,* Hawthorne's last finished romance, *The Marble Faun; or, The Romance of Monte Beni,* blurs the age-old opposition between humans and animals by introducing a faunlike creature into the setting of then-present-day Rome.[5] The young Donatello, count of Monte Beni, is thought by his friends to bear a striking resemblance to sculptor Praxiteles's marble faun, which depicts a mythical, hybrid being, "neither man nor animal."[6] At first sight, the marble creature seems to resist taxonomic categorization. Yet when its animality is ultimately confirmed by "two definite signs" (the faun's ears, "terminating in little peaks, like those of some species

of animals"), paradoxically, it resists being known at all: "The animal nature," we are told, "is a most essential part of the Faun's composition. . . . 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" (9–10; emphasis added). Whereas the marble faun's ears indisputably categorize him as animal (and consign it to unknowability), it is never made explicit whether Donatello himself is or is not a faun. The intrusion of this ambiguous specimen into what is otherwise a realist setting precipitates the epistemological fuzziness that characterizes *The Marble Faun* and registers the romance's resistance to the paradigm of capture that drives the taxonomic impulse. The story ends with the character of the American sculptor Kenyon politely refusing to offer a definitive answer to the question of Donatello's possible animality. When asked if Donatello's ears are as pointy as those of the titular figure, he only smiles inscrutably and says: "I know but may not tell. . . . On that point, at all events, there shall be not one word of explanation" (467).

On that point—that of Donatello's ears—the author himself remained obstinately tight-lipped. When readers wrote to the publisher to express their frustration with the enigmatic treatment of the character of Donatello and other ambiguities left unresolved in *The Marble Faun,* Hawthorne consented to add an explanatory postscript in the new edition of the book. His postscript, however, would only prove more vexing, for, instead of explaining, the author chastises his readers for wanting to know too much. He further disappoints them by referring to "the Author" in the third person, abandoning the omniscient voice he used for most of the romance:

> The idea of the modern Faun loses all the poetry and beauty which the Author fancied in it, and becomes nothing better than a grotesque absurdity, if we bring it into the actual light of day. He had hoped to mystify this anomalous creature between the Real and the Fantastic, in such a manner that the reader's sympathies might be excited to a certain pleasurable degree, *without impelling him to ask how Cuvier would have classified poor Donatello,* or to insist upon being told, in so many words,

> whether he had furry ears or no. As respects all who ask such questions, the book is, to that extent, a failure. (463–64; emphasis added)

How are we to understand this appeal to ignorance? What role does animality play in the epistemic, ethical, and poetic economy of the period, and in the genre of the romance—which at the time of Hawthorne's writing was already passé, out of step with its time? These questions are inextricable from one another: it is not by accident that animality frames debates about knowledge, whether "intellectual or sympathetic," at this particular point in the nineteenth century, and it is not by accident that the question of knowledge and categorization is bound up with questions of fictional genre (genre being itself a taxonomic category).

If we believe Hawthorne's *Notebooks,* the romance was initially conceived as a story of felicitous affinities between wild deities and human beings:

> I looked at the Faun of Praxiteles, and was sensible of a peculiar charm in it; a sylvan beauty and homeliness, friendly and wild at once. The lengthened, but not preposterous ears, and the little tail, which we infer, have an exquisite effect, and make the spectator smile in his very heart. . . . It seems to me that a story, with all sorts of fun and pathos in it, might be contrived on the idea of their species having become intermingled with the human race; a family with the faun blood in them having prolonged itself from the classic era till our own days. *The tail might have disappeared, by dint of constant intermarriages with ordinary mortals; but the pretty hairy ears should occasionally reappear in members of the family*; and the moral instincts and intellectual characteristics of the faun might be most picturesquely brought out, without detriment to the human interest of the story. Fancy this combination in the person of a young lady![7]

Hawthorne did not pursue the idea of a female faun, but he did center his romance around issues of filiation and hybridity.[8] Considering that Hawthorne wrote this romance on the eve of the Civil War, and

given the racism that saturated antebellum scientific discourses, this work has often been regarded as a parable on the perils of miscegenation and the corruption of America's racial and cultural integrity.[9] Yet there is little anxiety in the extract above, and, unless one adopts a strictly anthropocentric point of view, *The Marble Faun* is hardly reducible to an apologia for racial purity.[10] In light of the epistemological debates that agitated Europe and the United States at the time, I propose instead to read the romance of the modern faun as an allegory of taxonomic knowledge—as a critical examination of how the newly prominent epistemology of capture altered the view and knowledge of animals. This framing does not dispel so much as displace the specters of racism and xenophobia that permeate the romance, as it shifts racial concerns from classical to modern taxonomy—or, as Benjamin Murphy suggests, from taxonomy to genealogy (to determine Donatello's "faunship," Kenyon explicitly proposes to "investigat[e] the pedigree . . . of his forefathers" [82]).[11]

Taxonomy, in its classical version, inventories knowledge about the natural world; it distributes beings horizontally in a tabulated space, a series of side-by-side boxes, like the drawers of the naturalist's specimen room, into which various critters should neatly fit. Comparative anatomy, in contrast, verticalizes this tabulation by introducing time as a variable; this paves the way for phylogenetic and biopolitical conceptions of race and species, which are now situated along a temporal axis of transformation and evolution (a set of relationships that Darwin would come to figure by the branching and ramifying of an enormous tree). Classical taxonomy assumes an immediate correspondence between knowledge and vision; modern taxonomy also relies on vision, but a vision that has lost the privilege of immediacy: observable details now read as shifting markers indicative of relative stages of development. Not only does comparative anatomy seek to correlate the outside with the inside (as Britt Rusert argues of the changing nature of racial science in the antebellum period), but it also troubles what it means to see something when that something is part of a living being.[12]

It is precisely the visual exposure of Donatello's intimate "parts" that the romance withholds from the reader, inviting her instead to

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be content with superficial impressions, stubbornly refusing to go "deeper." Seeing superficially is not refusing knowledge but spurning a certain type of knowledge, which the romance equates with the investigations of a "genealogist . . . tracing out link by link, and authenticating [a pedigree] by records and documentary evidences" (180). *The Marble Faun* challenges the taxonomic presumption associated with Cuvier, whose name is a metonym for the rigid worldview that dominated biology and geology in Europe during the first half of the century and, later, the United States under the influence of Louis Agassiz. The pursuit of anatomic knowledge—a particular type of diagnostic and classificatory knowledge—seems irresolvably in tension with the work performed by the romance, as the disclosure of a small anatomical detail that would index Donatello's animality threatens to puncture the edifice of Hawthorne's fable. Figuring an alternative to the systematic tendencies of anatomic classification, *The Marble Faun* provides an exemplary case study for assessing the fate of fiction after Cuvier. The romance suggests that an ineradicable conjectural impulse animates Cuvier's systematics and that "poetic" speculation necessarily supplements taxonomic knowledge.[13] Pointing to this speculative element by no means impedes the "purifying" work that genealogy (in Darwin's sense) has often been enlisted to perform in the modern age. As a matter of fact, uncertainty is the very condition for a biopolitical management of race insofar as biopolitics imagines that the racial other does not threaten it "from elsewhere" but from within—and, as it were, from before.[14] Yet the insistence on the romance's function in this new grand narrative also recognizes an immanent possibility for taxonomic fabulation within this new regime of knowledge, a chance for imagining alternative economies of relation, other forms of kinship.

The Marble Faun was in Hawthorne's time his most popular romance, yet critics have consistently considered it something of a failure. In this they follow Ralph Waldo Emerson, who reportedly called it "a mere mush," and Henry James, for whom the Italian romance is "of slighter value than its [American] companions" because it lacks their completeness and mastery: "The art of narration, in

Transformation [the title of the English edition], seems to me more at fault than in the author's other novels. The story straggles and wanders, is dropped and taken up again, and towards the close lapses into an almost fatal vagueness."[15] For French critic Pierre-Yves Pétillon, *The Marble Faun* is "above all a novel 'out of focus' [*un roman flou*], in the photographic sense of the term."[16] Pétillon is perhaps hinting at the strange fate of the book, which was almost immediately taken up as a guidebook for British and American tourists, and for which the German editor Tauchnitz prepared an interleaved edition in 1860 for readers to insert personal drawings and photographs of the works referenced in the romance. The book's generic undecidability, it seems, prompted a different kind of response and compelled a different kind of attention. Its blurring effect resulted from a careful work on the reliability of the point of view, which Hawthorne deliberately left out of focus, but this makes little difference; the author himself admits that the book can only be, for the realist reader, "a failure" (464).

The treatment of Donatello's character is exemplary of the romance's nebulosity. Henry James comments:

> Every one will remember the figure of the simple, joyous, sensuous young Italian, who is *not so much* a man as a child, and *not so much* a child as a charming, innocent animal, and how he is brought to self-knowledge and to a miserable conscious manhood, by the commission of a crime. Donatello is *rather vague and impalpable*; he says *too little* in the book, shows himself *too little,* and *falls short,* I think, of being a creation.[17]

Riddled with seminegations, James's assessment suggests that Donatello's portrait is vague because the creature is categorically out of place, "as if a painter, in composing a picture, should try to give you an impression of one of his figures by a strain of music."[18] He finds the specimen literally ungraspable and therefore literarily disappointing: "The fault of *Transformation* is that the element of the unreal is pushed too far, and that the book is neither positively of one category nor the

other. . . . This is the trouble with Donatello himself."[19] It was not only the readers or the critics that were reluctant to accept Donatello's generic ambiguity. The characters themselves are also fixated upon establishing Donatello's common ancestry to his marble counterpart, interested in classifying him as related to or distinct from the faun, wishing for "a substantial fact" that "may be tested by absolute touch and measurement" to allow them to pin him down (7). To ascertain whether he shares the faun's "pointed and furry ears" ("the sole indications of his wild, forest nature") his friends tauntingly ask him to move aside his brown curls and expose his ears to their scrutiny (10). But Donatello begs his companions not to examine him too closely: "'I entreat you to take the tip of my ears for granted.' . . . 'I shall be like a wolf of the Apennines . . . if you touch my ears ever so softly. None of my race could endure it. It has always been a tender point with my forefathers and me'" (12). The play on the "sensitivity" of his ears (and his sensitivity on the subject of his ears) underscores the book's erotic subtext, played up by its echoes of Titania's spellbound attraction for Bottom's furry ears in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*[20]

Donatello's protestations, his repeated refusal to submit his body fully to legibility, call to mind what Daphne Brooks calls the "spectacular opacities" staged by black subjects to "confound and disrupt conventional constructions of the racialized and gendered body."[21] The most infamous case of this "'dominative imposition of transparency' systematically willed on to black figures" is that of Sara "Saartjie" Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman exhibited as a curiosity in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century because her secondary sex characteristics (her breasts, buttocks, and genitalia, including both external and internal organs) were viewed as abnormally large. After Baartman's death at the age of twenty-six, Cuvier made a plaster cast of her body before dissecting it and extracting her brain and genitalia, which were exhibited in the Museum of Natural History until 1974. The anatomist, who compared Baartman to an orangutan on account of a suspiciously selective set of criteria,[22] was particularly obsessed by her sexual organs, whose perceived hypertrophy inverted

the "ideologies of anatomical size that governed investigations of brains and skulls where largeness was equated with superiority and civilizing potential."[23] It is thus telling that the "point" that rouses inquisitiveness and on which Donatello's friends' understanding stumbles is sexually marked. It is just a detail, but details are precisely what demarcate one species from another. Comparative anatomy is, indeed, a matter of detailing (from the French *tailler,* "to cut"), of cutting (from the Latin, *ana-tomia,* "cutting up"), of dissecting, and, according to Michel Foucault, of "dividing [bodies] into distinct portions" in order to disclose "the great resemblances that would otherwise have remained invisible."[24]

It is precisely this anatomizing logic, which dismantles bodies in the name of a hidden, transhistorical, unitary principle—life, heredity, sexual drive—that the romance so dramatically rejects.[25] *The Marble Faun*'s avowed unfinishedness, its blurring of categories both taxonomic and generic, is thus less a symptom of the writer's fatigue than the sign of a poetic and ethical calculation. For Emily Miller Budick, the sort of generic indeterminacy on display in *The Marble Faun* is the trademark characteristic of the American romance, which operates in direct contrast with the realist conventions of the European novel.[26] Hawthorne himself famously makes the distinction between novel and romance in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables,* claiming for the romance "a certain latitude both as to its fashion and material," whereas the novel "is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the *probable and ordinary* course of man's existence."[27] Consciously running the risk of "failure," Hawthorne plays the romance's fabulous taxonomy against the taxonomic fabulations of the realist novel.

FICTION IN THE AGE OF CUVIER

Of course, not all fiction is imperiled by the type of knowledge Cuvier personifies. The French naturalist's influence on a novelist like Honoré de Balzac, who claimed to have modeled *The Human Comedy* after his system of comparative anatomy, is well known.[28] "Is not Cuvier the

greatest poet of our century?" exclaims the narrator of Balzac's *The Wild Ass's Skin*:

> Certainly, Lord Byron has expressed in words some aspects of our spiritual turmoil; but our immortal natural historian has *reconstructed worlds from bleached bones,* has, like Cadmus, rebuilt cities by means of teeth, peopled anew a thousand forests with all the wonders of zoology thank to a few chips of coal and rediscovered the races of giants in a mammoth's foot. . . . He calls æons back into being without pronouncing the abracadabra of magic; he digs out a fragment of gypsum, describes a footprint in it, and cries out: "Behold!" *And suddenly marble turns into animals* [*les marbres s'animalisent*], dead things live anew and lost worlds are unfolded before us![29]

What Balzac's narrator extols is the synecdochic genius of Cuvier's method, which connects seemingly insignificant details to otherwise lost, invisible wholes. It is easy to understand what resource a realist novelist, who "unfolds the poeticality, the historicity written on the body of ordinary things," could derive from an epistemological model where every trivial thing becomes a "clue" unlocking worlds of knowledge for whoever is capable of reading it.[30]

The polar opposite of Hawthorne's romance, which prioritizes "the possible" over the "the probable," detective fiction is the genre that best employed and dramatized Cuvier's diagnostic genius, making the most of what historian Carlo Ginzburg calls the "evidential paradigm" (whose emergence Ginzburg situates in the second half of the nineteenth century across fields as varied as criminology, psychoanalysis, and art history).[31] In the ambitious genealogy he outlines in his essay, Ginzburg notes that Voltaire's Zadig prefigures the characters of Dupin and Sherlock Holmes when he deduces with uncanny precision the species and shape of some animals by simply looking at their tracks. It comes as little surprise, then, that Cuvier's name crops up at the end of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Detective fiction is the genre that corresponds to a universe ruled by conjecture

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and probability (it is the ourang-outang's improbable presence, we remember, that subjected him to the detective's capture). Cuvier himself, when he praised the new science of paleontology, compared its deductive powers to those of Voltaire's proto-detective:

> Today, anyone who sees only the print of a cloven hoof might conclude that the animal that had left it behind was a ruminator, and this conclusion is *as certain as any in physics and in ethics.* This footprint alone, then, provides the observer with information about the teeth, the jawbone, the vertebrae, each leg bone, the thighs, shoulders and pelvis of the animal which had just passed: *it is a more certain proof than all Zadig's tracks.*[32]

Given this literary origin, and given the eminently narrative character of the diagnostic paradigm—which Ginzburg associates with the hunter's ability to convert disparate and seemingly insignificant details into a coherent sequence of events—what are we to make of Hawthorne's professed antipathy toward Cuvier?[33] His aversion, I contend, pertains to the metonymic arrogance of the anatomist's epistemological model when it purports to situate "with certainty" a singular entity in relation to a given reality.[34]

Cuvier's unfavorable comparison of Zadig's method with paleontology suggests that the naturalist was not entirely satisfied with the diagnostic paradigm Voltaire narrativizes. His dissatisfaction, we can speculate, stems from the fact that the paradigm is by definition "conjectural" and thereby, to a degree, as Ginzburg concludes, "unscientific," if *scientific* means exact, systematic, and unequivocal.[35] Inherited from immemorial venatic lore and divinatory practices, the diagnostic method is "far removed from higher forms of knowledge which are the privileged property of an elite few"; instead, it is the property "of hunters, of sailors, of women," and it "binds the human animal closely to other animal species."[36] In that regard, it appears incompatible with the totalizing and systematic aspirations of the naturalist's "anatomical" model.[37] What Cuvier praised in the diagnostic method, therefore, is less the method itself (which includes an

ineradicable element of chance) than its underlying epistemology, the metonymic structure that correlates the singular with the general. (It is precisely this romantic devotion to wholeness that impressed Emerson so deeply when he first encountered Cuvier's work during his visit at the Jardin des Plantes in 1833.[38]) Comparative anatomy absolutizes the hunter's hunch by presupposing the existence of a single, all-encompassing principle that Cuvier names "life": "the only cause of all compositions—the mother, not only of animals and vegetables, but all bodies which now occupy the surface of the earth."[39] Anatomic details, for him, are significant only insofar as they are subordinated to a more general (and more essential) functionality; specimens count only insofar as they represent their species, genus, order, etc.[40] From his perspective, as I argue in the introduction, animals and humans alike disappear in their manifestation of a life that itself remains invisible. To say it with Foucault: "Animal species differ at their peripheries, and resemble each other at their centres; they are connected by the inaccessible, and separated by the apparent. . . . The more extensive the groups one wishes to find, the deeper must one penetrate into the organism's inner darkness, towards the less and less visible, into that dimension that eludes perception. . . . In short, living species 'escape' from the teeming profusion of individuals and species; they can be classified only because they are alive and on the basis of what they conceal."[41]

What Hawthorne (and Donatello) want to play with as metaphor, Cuvier (and the reader) demand to determine as metonymy. When Hawthorne refrains from disclosing small details of Donatello's anatomy, he rejects the correlationist closure of a system that would situate his character within or without a given category (in this case, the human species). When he declines to turn his character's ears into "two definite signs," he eschews the totalizing semiology wherein signs signify to the extent that they are negatively defined in relation with other signs. This formulation evokes not merely Saussure's differential conception of language "without positive terms" but also Rancière's definition of *literature* as the "modern regime of the art of writing"—which Rancière explicitly links to the work of Cuvier—that

breaks with the representational model of the belles lettres toward a scriptural regime where "meaning becomes a 'mute' relation of signs to signs."[42] And indeed, there is something comically anachronistic and antimodern in the romance's stubborn refusal to anatomize Donatello, whose affinities with the faun can only be determined by way of a superficial "likeness" and not a structural homology in the arrangement of the organs. It is tempting thus to read *The Marble Faun* as resisting the imperatives of modern biology in its reluctance to privilege internal organizations over external resemblances. It is as if the romance asks whether we can appreciate Donatello not for what or who he is "deep inside" but for what he appears to be, on the surface—and whether this impression might impart any (unscientific yet valuable) knowledge to the observer. *The Marble Faun*'s anatomical reticence is proper not to fiction in general, as Poe and Balzac show, but specifically to the untimely genre of romance, which Cooper had doomed to extinction (see chapter 2), and which Hawthorne makes the preserve of "anomalous creatures" like Donatello:

> [The Author] reluctantly avails himself of the opportunity afforded by a new edition, to explain such incidents and passages as may have been left too much in the dark. . . . He designed the story and the characters to bear, of course, *a certain relation to human nature and human life,* but still to be so artfully and airily removed from our mundane sphere, that some laws and proprieties of their own should be implicitly and insensibly acknowledged. (463; emphasis added)

For Cuvier, knowledge aims at banishing or vanishing all uncertainty, whereas for Hawthorne, certainty is the point at which romantic fiction vanishes. Before asking what might be the meaning of the romance's reticence toward modern anatomic reason and what alternative form of knowledge it makes possible, let us look briefly at a case that exemplifies how Cuvier handles anomalous creatures, what the naturalist calls "doubtful specimens."

CUVIER'S SIREN, DARWIN'S POINT

In *The Open: Man and Animal,* Giorgio Agamben reminds us that Peter Artedi cataloged sirens alongside seals and sea lions in his 1735 zoological treatise. They were then cautiously added to the second edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735), in the section entitled "Animalia Paradoxa." In *The Platypus and the Mermaid,* Harriet Ritvo records cases of mermaid spotting in England as late as 1822. Claims to have seen these fabulous human/animal hybrids, however, were being systematically disproven by anatomists.[43] Ritvo, for instance, relates the case of Captain Eades, who brought back a specimen of mermaid (or merman) from his journey to the Fiji islands. Upon inspection, William Clift, the curator of the Hunterian collection at the Royal College of Surgeons, proved that the mermaid was inauthentic, a "fraud, constructed of the cobbled remains of an orangutan, a baboon, and a salmon."[44] After that, sirens found shelter only in volumes of cryptozoology (and in P. T. Barnum's museum of "monsters," whose considerable popularity betrayed a desire for a world not yet entirely known and domesticated).[45]

In an 1807 text entitled "Anatomical Research on Reptiles Still Regarded as Doubtful by Naturalists [*Recherches anatomiques sur les reptiles regardés encore comme douteux par les naturalistes*]," Cuvier examines the case of three aquatic creatures that had until then defied classification. Each of the reptiles possessed both gills and lungs and, because of their large size, it was uncertain whether they were larvae or adult specimens. Up to that moment, the only known amphibian animals had been tadpoles, whose gills shriveled and disappeared as their lungs developed. The first reptile Cuvier studied bore the name of "siren" (*sirène*), presumably named after the mythical creature for its two front legs and a long tail. Sent from the Americas to Linnaeus in 1765, the creature was at first classified as an amphibian. But in 1785, Dr. Camper, a Dutch zoologist and pioneer in the new science of comparative anatomy, dissected a specimen of the siren that was owned by the British Museum of London and discerned no lungs, changing the creature's classification to "fish." In order to settle the dispute between his predecessors, Cuvier ordered that a fresh

siren be sent from the New Continent. The autopsy confirmed that the animal possessed both gills and lungs and that its lateral appendages were legs, not fins. After a minutely detailed description of the animal's bone structure, Cuvier concluded that it was an adult specimen. To remove any remaining "doubt," the naturalist created a new order, the Perennibranchiata (a name that indicates that the batrachians' gills, or branchia, are perennial, persisting into adulthood). But this addition did not really add anything; it only filled in the gaps of an infinitely capacious taxonomic system. About Cuvier's method (and its material correlative, the organization of the natural history museum at the Jardin des Plantes), Lee Rust Brown observes that "nothing could be discovered that did not have an open place waiting for it." Any new specimen only confirmed, retroactively, the system's wholeness. "In the largest sense," Brown explains, "specimens did not so much fill these *lacunes* as they disappeared into them. . . . The Muséum could afford to welcome all new facts precisely because it was sure that every new fact would disappear into one *lacune* or another, and bring its encyclopedic representation of the world a step closer to perfection."[46] Thus, the fabulous siren disappeared, leaving the mythic waters of the Strait of Messina to be thrust into the rational universe of modern science.[47]

But if Cuvier contributed to the vanishing of hybrid animals into the mists of cryptozoology, there is nonetheless in his method something that appears monstrous to our post-Darwinian sensibility. Although he spearheaded the development of modern biology, breaking with the neatly tabulated spaces of Classical Age taxonomy to inject "historicity" into what had been a relatively static science, the founder of comparative anatomy unwaveringly believed in the immutability of species.[48] The predetermined character of Cuvier's classificatory system, not to mention its relative arbitrariness and blatant racism, would be questioned some fifty years later by Darwin's work, which revives (without fully endorsing) Buffon's continuist and Lamarck's transformist intuitions. Yet Cuvier's notorious fixism is not antithetical to Darwin's evolutionism, as Foucault shows that the former paved the way for the theory of evolution by positing the existence of an invisible

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unified plane connecting all living beings despite their surface differences (the "invention of life" discussed in the introduction). What truly sets the two scientists apart, Foucault contends, is less their views on species transformation than the priority Cuvier grants to general categories over empirical individualities:

> Darwin acknowledges that all the taxonomic frames proposed for classifying animals and plants are, to a certain point, abstract categories. For Darwin, then, there is one reality that is the individual and a second reality that defines the "varietivity" [*variativité*] of the individual: its capacity to vary. Everything else (be it species, genus, order) is a kind of construction built from this reality's starting point: the individual. In that sense, we can say that Darwin is absolutely opposed to Cuvier.[49]

Instead of thinking from the species down to the specimen, Darwin identifies numerous borderline cases where it is difficult to distinguish between species and variety; where Cuvier is anxious to incorporate anomalous cases into clearly defined species categories, Darwin highlights their irregularities to challenge the idea of the predetermined and immutable category of "species." In the first edition of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin elects the platypus and the siren—not Cuvier's North American siren but the *Lepidosiren paradoxa,* a South American lungfish—as his aberrant specimens of choice to explain his theory of evolution by natural selection:[50]

> The affinities of all the beings of the same class have sometimes been represented by a great tree. I believe this simile largely speaks the truth. The green and budding twigs may represent existing species; and those produced during each former year may represent the long succession of extinct species. . . . From the first growth of the tree, many a limb and branch has decayed and dropped off; and these lost branches of various sizes may represent those whole orders, families, and genera which have now no living representatives, and which are known to us only from having been found in a fossil state. As we here and there see a thin straggling branch springing from a fork low down

> in a tree, and which by some chance has been favoured and is still alive on its summit, *so we occasionally see an animal like the Ornithorhynchus or Lepidosiren, which in some small degree connects by its affinities two large branches of life, and which has apparently been saved from fatal competition by having inhabited a protected station.*[51]

Darwin views these aberrant creatures not as "doubtful specimens" awaiting taxonomic determination but as living clues pointing to a dynamic, open system founded on a principle of modification that is inherent to every organism.[52]

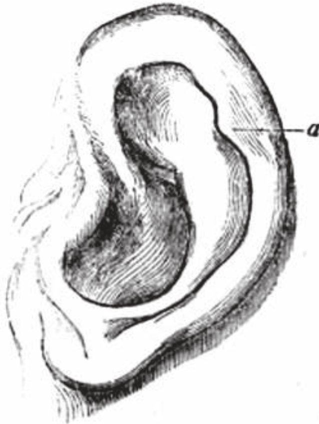
A decade later, in *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin tackles a subject that he had not dared to address in *On the Origin of Species*: the applicability of his theory of "descent with modification" to humans. It is with regard to the exceptional position of Man that Darwin departs most radically from Cuvier. "The greater number of naturalists who have taken into consideration the whole structure of man," he sneers, "have followed Blumenbach and Cuvier, and have placed man in a separate Order. . . . If man had not been his own classifier, he would never have thought of founding a separate order for his own reception."[53] In the first pages of the work, Darwin remarks that a significant percentage of human ears present a congenital condition: a protuberance at the junction of the upper and middle thirds (see Figures 9a and 9b), commonly known as "Darwin's point" (or "Darwin's tubercle"). This oddity inaugurated the scientist's exploration of atavistic features in humans that evidence common ancestry with other primates. The small auricular mutation was mentioned to the naturalist by Thomas Woolner, a Pre-Raphaelite sculptor whose attention "was first called to the subject whilst at work on his figure of Puck, to which he had given pointed ears" and was "thus led to examine the ears of various monkeys, and subsequently more carefully those of man."[54] It is perhaps not fortuitous that a sculptor who was creating long, pointed ears for a humanlike cryptid was the first to spot "Darwin's point," when most professional anatomists (trained in Cuvier's tradition) dismissed this detail as an irrelevant malformation. There is a long history of the influence of anatomy on Western painting and sculpture, but in this

case we witness the reverse influence of an artist on an anatomist.[55] Darwin, who jokingly referred to the excrescence as the "Angulus Woolnerianus," would later consult Woolner to write *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), in which he argues that human emotions are not essentially different from instinctual animal behaviors. Although he deplored the artists' tendency to "sacrifice truth for the sake of beauty," he praised sculptors and painters for their unusual powers of observation.[56] About Woolner's discovery, Darwin notes that it is "probable that the points in question are in some cases, both in man and apes, vestiges of a former condition."[57] By highlighting the "co-descendence" of apes and humans, Darwin blurs the sharp species demarcation that Cuvier sought to enforce.[58]

This is where the affinities between *The Descent of Man* and *The Marble Faun* become troubling. It seems as if Hawthorne, attentive to Praxiteles's sculpture, anticipated Darwin's conclusions by more than ten years. The abovementioned passage from the *Notebooks* uncannily describes the recessive character of some phenotypical traits like the pointed ears, which can skip generations and indicate common ancestry between humans and nonhumans: "The tail might have disappeared, by dint of constant intermarriages with ordinary mortals; but the pretty hairy ears should occasionally reappear in members of the family."[59] Just like Darwin makes atavistic signs a function of "sexual selection," Hawthorne imagines the pointy ears as an indication of a past kinship. Instead of dispelling doubtful specimens by boxing them in new taxonomic categories, as Cuvier does with the siren, Hawthorne and Darwin use cryptids as "pointers" that reveal something that Cuvier made thinkable but could not admit, especially when it came to Man: that is, that Nature does not only work in spurts, catastrophically making some species extinct and providentially maintaining others, but that it is moved by a continual, aleatory process of "selection" that binds all living organisms. The pointy ears, for both, indicate that what is could have been otherwise and that Man is neither the beginning nor the end of the story.

If it overturned long-held hierarchies that saw Man as the crowning jewel of the natural world, the Darwinian revolution in no way

A



B

FIGURE 9. *(a)* "Human Ear. Modeled and drawn by Thomas Woolner. *a.* The projecting point." Darwin, *Descent of Man,* 32. *(b)* "Foetus of an Orang. Exact copy of a photograph, showing the form of the ear at this early age." Darwin, *Descent of Man,* 33.

"stopped" the relentless labors of anthropogenesis, that machine for creating Man; instead, as Agamben observes, it prompted the inversion of its mechanism. In the ancient variant, "the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal: the man-ape, the *enfant sauvage* or *Homo ferus,* but also and above all the slave, the barbarian and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form."[60] In modern anthropological thinking, however, the animal threatens Man from the inside. The modern anthropological machine "functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human: *Homo alalus,* or the ape-man."[61] This new machine follows a subtractive process, extirpating the animal from out of the human to reveal Man alone, unmixed with lower species and races.[62] This is why biopolitics is so relevant in the modern age, for biopower is the attempt to isolate and control the animal life that secretly abides in Man.

(Recall that in my discussion of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," I argued that the criminalization of marginalized humans began to be internalized, with criminality being seen as an instinctive behavior attributable to an animal within, which must be controlled lest it explode in violence.) The rise of evolutionary theories in the nineteenth century marks the moment of shift from the ancient to the modern anthropological machine: the animal, which can no longer be neatly confined in a safe "elsewhere" or in hermetic taxonomic "cases," will have to be excised from within the human. Hence, we can speculate, the insistence with which *The Marble Faun*'s readers wished to lift Donatello's curls to ascertain his animality and perhaps his criminality (Donatello's guilt is said to have "kindled him into a man" [134], suggesting that it is his animal instincts that pushed him to murder Miriam's persecutor).

Symptomatically, Darwin's evolutionary theory was appropriated by Cesare Lombroso only five years after the publication of *The Descent of Man.* Lombroso, who argues in *L'Uomo Delinquente* (*Criminal Man,* 1878) "that most criminal behavior is atavistic, a reversion to evolutionary primitive actions," takes ears as exemplary sites for identifying the criminal body.[63] As Michael Sims writes, Lombroso played "into the fear of our animal nature exemplified throughout mythology, in which one of the bestial attributes of satyrs is their pointed ears."[64] A few years later, Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin and the "father" of eugenics, notoriously used "composite photography" to capture the biometric "ideal-type" of the criminal and devised the method for classifying fingerprints that we still use today.[65] He later "attempted to distinguish racial peculiarities in the fingertips, but without success; he declared, however, that he would pursue the research on Indian tribes in the hope of discovering there 'a more monkey-like pattern.'"[66] Nietzsche warned against reading the title of *The Descent of Man* teleologically, for evolutionism does not stage the emergence of humanity as the ultimate chapter in the history of the world.[67] Yet this teleologization is precisely what occurs in Lombroso's and Galton's racist and classist targeting of the allegedly less evolved (i.e., less human) specimens of humanity. Retrieving the animal in the human

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is not enough to "jam" the anthropogenic machine, however, because this "ironic apparatus" feeds on the lability of the human/animal partition.[68] Anomalous creatures or aberrant morphologies can always be enlisted as representatives of an immature stage in the "progress" of evolution. (Think, for example, of the enduring myth of the "missing link," which is plentifully deployed in post-Darwinian racist discourses.)[69] Needless to say, this is a gross misreading of Darwin's theory, which rejects the notion that nature gradually moved from defective, rudimentary prototypes toward the more perfect specimens that people the present. Darwin's point, "bearing the stamp of inutility," is not the sign of a residual animality out of which Man (should have) evolved but simply the marker of a common ancestry—not a link in an unbroken chain but a branch of the family tree of life.

What, then, should we make of Darwin's siren, the "living representative" of a quasi-extinct species that "connect[s] to a certain extent orders at present widely separated in the natural scale"?[70] In his pathetic portrait of the siren, "which has apparently been saved from fatal competition by having inhabited a protected station," Darwin registers the animal's anachronistic endurance, its uncanny maintenance in a present that seems no longer its own. A vestige of a bygone era, this "living fossil" belongs at the same time to the past—by genealogic necessity—and to the present—by geological chance. With this survival of the unfit, we are confronted with the heterogeneous temporality of evolution, where the lateral "unity of type" (to which Cuvier gave priority) momentarily defies the vertical, temporal march of natural selection—which was, for Darwin, an even "higher law" than the logic of descent. How can we account for this ephemeral present without turning it into the waiting room of evolution?[71] Can we resist the urge (one that even Darwin felt, betrayed by his elegiac tone) to see the siren's "presence" as meaningful only in relation to the inexorable march of natural selection—in the terms imposed by the temporality of capture, which assumes the animal(ized) as essentially fugitive and passing? This precarious position, as Sylvia Wynter warns, makes individuals eminently susceptible to the racist logic

that shadows the biocentric and taxonomic reinvention of Man as species.[72] It is precisely a foray into this strange intercalary time, neither momentary nor geologic, that *The Marble Faun* stages. The book's conceit is the unexpected persistence of an anomalous specimen after its presumed extinction, and the book itself is also calculatedly anachronistic: as a romance, it stages its survival from an older time, marooned in a sea of modern realist novels.

BETWEEN TIMES

From the very first lines of the preface of *The Marble Faun,* Hawthorne speaks as from beyond the grave. Faithful to the "antique fashion of Prefaces," he appeals to the benevolence of a reader, a "congenial friend," who may or may not still be "extant now": "The Gentle Reader, in the case of an individual author, is apt to be extremely short-lived; he seldom outlasts a literary fashion. . . . If I find him at all, it will probably be under some mossy grave-stone, inscribed with a half-obliterated name, which I shall never recognize" (2). Whether it is the author or the reader that is now at rest, *The Marble Faun* comically mourns the improbable (yet not impossible) elective affinity between itself and its readers. Hawthorne, whom Henry James sneered was the "last specimen of the more primitive men of letters," declares his consciousness of having outlived his time as a writer. Hawthorne thus appears as an avatar of the antique faun, wandering in modern life. This prefatory confession should of course be taken with a grain of salt, as should the "thoughtful moral" the author seeks to "evolve"—a rather curious word choice—out of his romance (3). This moral is spelled out in the last chapter by Kenyon, pressed one final time by his friend Hilda to reveal if Donatello was "really a Faun":

> "If you had ever studied the pedigree of the far-descended heir of Monte Beni as I did," answered Kenyon with an irrepressible smile, "you would have retained few doubts on that point. . . . It seems the moral of his story, that human beings of Donatello's character, compounded especially for happiness, have no longer any business on

> earth, or elsewhere. Life has grown so sadly serious, that *such men must change their nature, or else perish, like the antediluvian creatures,* that required, as the condition of their existence, a more summer-like atmosphere than ours." (459; emphasis added)

When Hilda refuses to accept her friend's stern lesson, he quickly replies: "'Then, here is another; take your choice!" (460). The second moral, an adaptation of the theory of the felix culpa to Donatello's story, does not appear to be any more satisfactory to Hilda. The romance thus refuses the closure (the boxing in, the determination, the full and definite knowledge) of its morals—which risks, as the author of *The House of the Seven Gables* warned, "impal[ing] the story . . . as with an iron rod,—or rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly,—thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude."[73]

Instead of this pinning down of the story, the reader instead is invited to become momentarily lost (like Kenyon at the end of the romance) in the euphoric openness of a carnival (which uncannily resonates with the messianic banquet Agamben describes at the end of *The Open,* as we will see shortly). Here is Hawthorne's description: "Hereupon, a whole host of absurd figures surrounded [Kenyon], pretending to sympathize in his mishap. Clowns and particoloured harlequins; orang-outangs; bear-headed, bull-headed, and dog-headed individuals" (446). These celebrants are all strange cryptids, hybrid animal/humans (and note that the orang-outang makes an appearance, echoing Poe's murderous animal). Ultimately, Kenyon and Hilda leave an Italy they deem impure (for Hilda, the impurity is religious, but in light of the themes of animality and evolution that subtend the romance, the term seems also to invoke the impurity of humanity, with its admixture of animality). They return "home to America," while Miriam consents to the monstrous community offered by Donatello. But things soon go awry. Everything has an end in *The Marble Faun*: Donatello ends up captive in a jail of the Vatican and Miriam's final appearance shows her to be mute:

> When the kneeling figure beneath the open Eye of the Pantheon arose, she looked towards [Hilda and Kenyon] and extended her hands with a gesture of benediction. Then they knew that it was Miriam. They suffered her to glide out of the portal, however, without a greeting; for those extended hands, even while they blessed, seemed to repel, as if Miriam stood on the other side of a fathomless abyss, and warned them from its verge. (461)

Miriam's intimacy with Donatello has banished her from the community of humans, removed from her the power of speech assumed to distinguish Man from the animal. While *The Marble Faun* opens up the possibility of hybridization, imagining "a being in whom both races meet on friendly ground," it also, crucially, raises the specter of a dystopic dissolution into the unknown. "*To-day* Donatello was the sylvan Faun; *to-day* Miriam was his fit companion, a Nymph of grove or fountain; *to-morrow*—a remorseful man and woman, linked by a marriage bond of crime" (435; emphasis added). Miriam falls silent, contaminated by the "mute mystery" that, for the romance, characterizes the animal in whose name it is impossible to speak, if improperly (10). Does Hawthorne's romance, which reduces Miriam to be spoken of but unspeaking, in the end announce Cuvier's victory? Perhaps. If there is one thing that we are taught by the irony of the postscript to *The Marble Faun,* however, it is that no end is definitive, no case is perfectly closed, and something always returns, "after all." Pondering Miriam and Donatello's miscegenation, their "bond of crime," Kenyon tells Hilda, "'You do not know . . . what a mixture of good there may be in things evil; and how the greatest criminal, if you look at his conduct from his own point of view, or from any side point, may seem not so unquestionably guilty, after all. So with Miriam; so with Donatello." "And, *after all,*" the narrator tells us, "the idea [of the faun] may have been no dream, but rather a poet's reminiscence of a period when man's affinity with Nature was more strict, and his fellowship with every living thing more intimate and dear" (10–11; emphasis added). What remains, after all, then, of the story of Donatello? The romance

points toward a posthistorical time that, after *all*, might be a time of reconciliation between humans and animals.

Agamben opens and closes his biopolitical meditation on the "question of the animal," *The Open: Man and Animal,* with the image of a messianic banquet (found in a thirteenth-century Hebrew bible) in which the representatives of a "concluded humanity" are "depicted with animal heads."[74] If these righteous men are indeed those who are "still alive at the moment of the Messiah's coming," as the Rabbinic tradition assumes, what are we to make of their hybridity? Agamben reads it as resulting from the suspension of the "metaphysico-political operation in which something like 'man' can be decided upon and produced" in contradistinction with the animal.[75] He sees in their composite form a counterpoint to the relentless "animalization" of human beings under biopolitics (insofar as animalization here preserves the categories of animal and human). While he deplores this animalization, Agamben sees in the biopolitical moment an unprecedented opportunity to gauge the possibility of a "different economy of relations between animal and human" that could "render inoperative" the "anthropological machine" that tirelessly demarcates between humans and animals.[76] Dominick LaCapra denounces Agamben's cautious optimism as an "empty utopianism of pure, unlimited possibility," in part because animals in *The Open* "are not figured as complex, differentiated living beings but instead function as an abstracted philosophical topos."[77] LaCapra is not wrong to denounce the reduction of the animal to a mere philosopheme—Derrida would say "theorem," something seen but that cannot return the seeing—but his attack misses its mark, for Agamben's avowed ambition is never animals qua animals but the category of "the animal"—the animal as anthropogenic concept, as distinguished from Man. And this concept, pace LaCapra, is not transhistorical, if only because *The Open* posits that it underwent a profound mutation with the advent of biopolitics.

For Agamben, biopolitics can be said to inaugurate the "end of history" insofar as history is conceived as a deeply anthropocentric paradigm. In other words, taking seriously the premise of biopolitics demands that we envision the end of a politics addressing autonomous

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subjects and the end of a history only made of and by conscious and volitional actors. This envisioned future "other-than-anthropocentric" history is gestured to by LaCapra; at the end of his essay, he calls for "situating the question of the human and the animal in a broader but differentiated ecological perspective or wide-ranging networks of relations." But this gesture (avowedly) constitutes the "limits" of his own essay and methodology.[78] This is not to say that I side with Agamben's esoteric "solution" to the problems posed by the supposedly "idling" anthropological machine of biopolitical modernity. I share LaCapra's skepticism toward *The Open*'s "all-or-nothing paradoxicalism" and his irritation with Agamben's condescending tendency to delegitimize any reformist politics as inauthentic or misguided because it does not have the pretention to overturn the structure of biopolitics, which while only recently articulated is arguably as old as Western politics itself.[79] But I take issue with LaCapra's assertion that Agamben summons Benjamin at the end of his book "as a deus ex machina or distancing lever with respect to Heidegger."[80] To be sure, Agamben follows rather unquestioningly Heidegger's definition of the animal as "poor in world"; his reading of the work of biosemiotician Jakob von Uexküll on the tick suggests that Agamben embraces Heidegger's dubious ethological claim that the animal is entirely absorbed, benumbed, or "captivated" by its environment and therefore deprived of access to the world "as such" (contrary to Man). Nevertheless, when Agamben invokes Benjamin, it is as a messianic figure glimpsing redemption not through history—which is what LaCapra would want Agamben to propose, although Agamben makes clear that Man's "becoming historical" is already an effect of the "anthropological machine"—but *in* history.[81]

To say the least, Agamben's interpretation of Benjamin's "saved night" is cryptic, but it does not gesture toward a nontime of festive reconciliation between humans and animals. Such an eschatological conception would run counter to his reflections on "the practical and political mystery of separation" between Man and animal.[82] Instead, Agamben proposes to rethink the concept of history and its possible suspension through the image of Benjamin's "dialectics at a standstill." Rereading Foucault's famous prophecy at the end of *The Order*

of Things, Agamben sees the disappearance of Man not as a geological accident but as a political event, a hybridization to come that would represent not "a new declension of the man-animal relation so much as a figure of the 'great ignorance.'"[83] This ignorance, which signals the suspension of the tireless partitioning of the anthropological machine, forms a "zone of nonknowledge—or better, of aknowledge," a zone "beyond both knowing and not knowing"[84]—a refusal that recalls Kenyon's Cheshire cat smile in *The Marble Faun*'s final words: "I know, but may not tell. On that point, at all events, there shall be not one word of explanation" (467).

"I know, but may not tell." There is knowledge here, but it is beside the point. By concluding on an utterance that retracts itself, an unapologetic performance of reserve, *The Marble Faun*'s profession of ignorance does not ultimately promote a naïve or reactionary antiscientific attitude but an alternative economy of meaning and attention. Of course, Kenyon's words are spoken from a position of privilege: not all are allowed his reserve when silence can be used against you—as we saw with Poe, lack of recognizable speech can be a (negative) sign of culpability. Reserve can always be converted into muteness (as with Miriam) and thereby find itself absorbed or resorbed in an overarching semiotic system—a clue to be deciphered or a symptom to be decoded (tellingly, ears in *The Marble Faun* are primarily things to be seen, symptoms, or clues rather than mediums of hearing, indices of the faun's aural powers). Only once anomalous animals are muted (dissected, pinned by an iron rod like a moral in a story or a butterfly on a board) do they become legible to "Cuvier's hermeneut of osseous textuality"; only once they are petrified or fossilized—in other words, once they are conceived as "inanimate signs of what is not"—are they susceptible of "disclosing the secret of life."[85] Cuvier turns marble into animals, as Balzac raves, but his animals all belong in an irrevocably bygone epoch.[86] It is quite different with Hawthorne, whose fiction seeks to animate a past that is never fully extinct. Not only do atavistic features threaten to resurface at any moment in *The Marble Faun,* but the romance literally turns marble into an "animate sign." Hawthorne had initially envisaged titling his romance *Marble and Life,*

and one of the themes of the book is the false sense of timelessness and purity conveyed by the immaculate sculptures strewn all over the Eternal City. Hawthorne shows that marble, too, is susceptible to time: he bemoans the Italian weather for its "fossilizing" quality that leaves not only art but entire cities "without enough of life and juiciness . . . to be any longer susceptible of decay" while repeatedly insisting on the slow but inevitable corruptibility of marble, a material that in the very first paragraph of the romance appears "yellow with time" (5). Marble, in its customary association with pristine whiteness and white superiority in antebellum culture, is from the outset subjected to the force of decay that is life. Textually importing the Faun of Praxiteles to the cloudier climes of New England, the author vivifies old European marble into a living allegory of the new yet already outdated American art of the romance, which "like ivy, lichen and wall-flowers, need[s] Ruin to make [it] grow" (3).

The precarious temporality of the romance is perhaps best exemplified by Kenyon's reconstruction of a statue of Venus from what strikes him at first glance to be a "shapeless fragment of stone." Not unlike in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," where Dupin shows us that the astronomical Venus appears to whoever views her "in a side-long way," the Goddess of Beauty emerges in *The Marble Faun* when the sun falls "slantwise" on the statue's fragments, which Kenyon reassembles in characteristic Cuvierian fashion.[87] Finally, for a moment, the statue appears complete, but it inhabits a wavering between present and past, knowability and illegibility: "The beautiful Idea at once asserted its immortality, and converted that heap of forlorn fragments into a whole, as perfect to the mind, if not to the eye, as when the new marble gleamed with snowy lustre. . . . Kenyon . . . almost deemed himself rewarded with a living smile" (329). It seems that Kenyon has brought to life in the present the long-dead model for the statue, made her visible through the lifeless marble itself (echoing Donatello's possible position as the living model for Praxiteles's marble faun). But soon enough "the divine statue seemed to fall asunder again, and become only a heap of worthless fragments" (329)—to retreat back into the impenetrable past from which Kenyon had sought to redeem

and preserve. For Hawthorne, then, as Baudelaire theorized around the same time in "The Painter of Modern Life," the Ideal is only a moment of the artistic experience. Contingency is an essential part of art just as transience is the rhythm of life, a transience that can be neither entirely domesticated under the linearity of secular progress (Darwin) nor monumentalized by the timelessness of the Ideal (Cuvier). Indeed, it finds itself constantly threatened by both. Hawthorne's elusive faun, grasped on the brink of either metamorphosis or extinction, is the fragile incarnation of this interstitiality. Dupin finds his cryptic creatures approachable, indeed knowable, only negatively, as the mirror image of human rationality; Hawthorne glimpses the possibility, however faint and ephemeral, however inconceivable and unspeakable within the epistemological frame erected by Cuvier, of a knowledge that extends beyond—or rather between—the taxonomic confines of species determination. This interval, which is not timeless, makes possible Hawthorne's fabulous taxonomy. It opens a space for his romance on the figure of Man, for the dream of Man's transformation into something different altogether, and for an ethics of relating differently to what can only be partially seen and known.

Playing Cuvier's orderly fossils against Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's aberrant specimens, Deleuze and Guattari affirm that "Cuvier reacts in terms of discontinuous photographs, and casts of fossils."[88] The unity of life postulated by comparative anatomy remains abstract and hidden in Cuvier, a transcendent principle, a "sovereign vanishing point." Thus conceived, life clearly appears in its historicity and technicity, as conditioned by the rendering still—both mute and immobile—of discretized elements of life, which are turned into mere points, seen as devoid of intensity or motivation. Is it possible to develop a positive image of this untimely animality that appears lost in and for modern life?