



# The Marble Faun (Oxford World's Classics)

*Nathaniel Hawthorne*

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'any narrative of human action and adventure - whether we call it history or Romance - is certain to be a fragile handiwork, more easily rent than mended'

The fragility - and the durability - of human life and art dominate this story of American expatriates in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. Befriended by Donatello, a young Italian with the classical grace of the 'Marble Faun', Miriam, Hilda, and Kenyon find their pursuit of art taking a sinister turn as Miriam's unhappy past precipitates the present into tragedy.

Hawthorne's 'International Novel' dramatizes the confrontation of the Old World and the New and the uncertain relationship between the 'authentic' and the 'fake', in life as in art. The author's evocative descriptions of classic sites made *The Marble Faun* a favourite guidebook to Rome for Victorian tourists, but this richly ambiguous symbolic romance is also the story of a murder, and a parable of the Fall of Man. As the characters find their civilized existence disrupted by the awful consequences of impulse, Hawthorne leads his readers to question the value of Art and Culture and addresses the great evolutionary debate which was beginning to shake Victorian society.

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