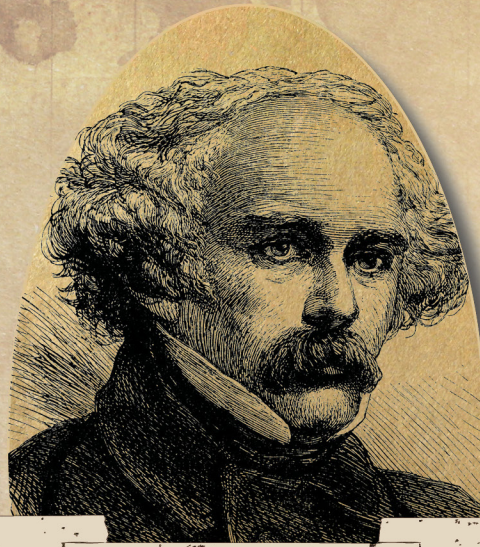
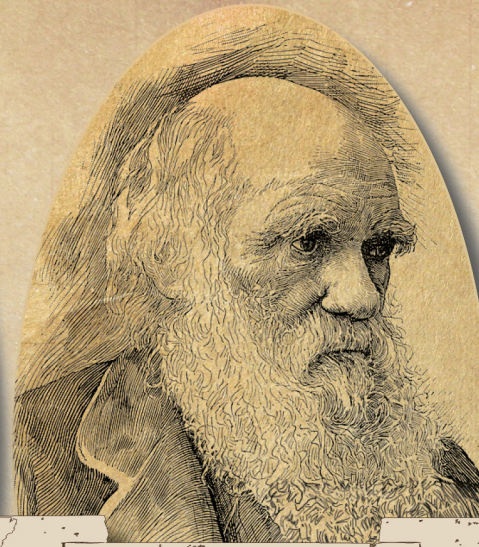




CUVIER



HAWTHORNE



DARWIN



DODO

## ANATOMY OF FICTION (Cuvier, Hawthorne, Darwin)

This chapter examines the influence of Cuvierian taxonomy on the forms and protocols of 19th-century American fiction. French naturalist Georges Cuvier is known primarily for introducing the concept of revolution in natural history to account for the phenomenon of extinction. Half a century later, Darwin's evolutionism would supersede Cuvier's revolutionism (and its subtending creationist, fixist, and racist tenets). Yet in the interim, at the height of its influence on American life sciences, Cuvier's doctrine was already taken up and contested by fiction

writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, who summoned his hermeneutic method to put pressure on his catastrophist approach to life. In this chapter, I focus primarily on Hawthorne's last finished romance, *The Marble Faun*, which concludes by theatrically rejecting Cuvier's expertise to tie up a storyline revolving around the apprehension of an elusive creature. Published only a few months after *On the Origin of Species*, *The Marble Faun* privileges a regime of uncertainty at the precise historical moment

when Darwin inflicts on the human a major narcissistic wound by depriving him of any proper position in the great chain of beings. I read *The Marble Faun* as an allegory of scientific knowledge that tests the capacity for fiction to countenance the presence of a "doubtful specimen" and, more broadly, that disputes the preeminence of an epistemic frame in which animals seem condemned to appear as vanishing, i.e. from the perspective of their inexorable extinction.

**Friday, February 23, 2018 12:00pm Crowe 2-130**

Please see attached PDF, or email [french-italian@northwestern.edu](mailto:french-italian@northwestern.edu)