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Hawthorne's Miriam – a female enigma: A seductive *femme fatale* or a victim of abuse?

Irina Rabinovich

Irina Rabinovich is the head of and lecturer at the English Department at the Holon Institute of Technology, Israel. Most of her research deals with the representation of women, especially Jewish female artists in 19th-century British and American literature. She has published numerous articles in various academic journals and presented papers at British, American and Jewish literature conferences. She is the author of the monograph *Re-dressing Miriam: 19th Century Artistic Jewish Women* (2012).

Abstract:
In his last published novel, The Marble Faun (Hawthorne, 1974)*, in spite of his seeming sympathy for Miriam's plea for friendship, Hawthorne's narrator relates to Miriam as a "guilty" and "bloodstained" woman, who similarly to the female Jewish models portrayed in her paintings, carries misery, vice and death into the world. The narrator's ambiguity vis-à-vis Miriam's moral fibre, on the one hand, and his infatuation with the beautiful and talented female artist, on the other, stands at the heart of the novel. The goal of this paper is mainly addressed at examining Miriam's position in Hawthorne's fiction, through an analysis of his treatment of his other "dark" and "light" women. Furthermore, I enquire whether Miriam is to be perceived in terms of the popular stereotypical representations of Jewish women (usually, Madonnas or whores), or whether she is granted more original and idiosyncratic characteristics. Next, I discuss Hawthorne's treatment of Miriam's artistic vocation, discerning her distinctiveness as a female Jewish 19th-century artist. Finally, Hawthorne's unconventional choice of Rome as the setting for his novel unquestionably entails reference to the societal, cultural and political forces at play.*

> But there was something in Miriam's blood, in her mixed race, in her recollections of her mother, — some characteristic, finally, in her own nature — which had given her freedom of thought, and force of will. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 430)

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Jewish female protagonist Miriam, one of the four heroes of his last completed romance, is an exceptional figure in mid-19th-century American literature,

not only on account of her Jewishness, but also owing to her status as a female artist. Apart from Hawthorne's Hester, the heroine of his novel *The Scarlet Letter*, and an artist of the needle, no other woman artist as a major figure appears in mid-19th-century American literature.

The main questions that have motivated my extensive interest in Miriam's character are as follows: first, why did Hawthorne, a Christian writer, a New Englander, the son of one of the oldest families in Massachusetts, and a descendant of devout Puritans, choose a Jewish woman as the protagonist of his romance? Moreover, how does Miriam's artistic nature differentiate her from the depictions of non-artistic Jewish women in other novels of the period? My main interest is what, if anything, makes a Jewish female artist unique to Hawthorne, so that he would decide to create such a character as his protagonist? Finally, I am interested in investigating whether Miriam is to be perceived in terms of the popular stereotypical representations of Jewish women (usually, Madonnas or whores), or whether she is granted more original and distinctive characteristics.

The Marble Faun, besides being a travelogue account of Rome, is a story about sin, guilt, suffering and abuse; it is also a tale about love and friendship. It is a story about the relationships between four different individuals, united by their mutual love of art. The more interesting and convincing woman of the two female characters in the novel is unquestionably Miriam. Miriam is a rebel (as her Hebrew name indicates),[i] an artist, and a compassionate and redemptive figure (as her Christian name – Mary – suggests). Hawthorne's Miriam's art is that of defiance, of rebellion; the Jewish biblical women depicted in her paintings as murderers pose a threat to social order and to patriarchal domination. Although critics and rabbis refer to her act of speaking against Moses, they mainly view her and her sin as a human blunder, for which she is punished with leprosy, but then pardoned a week later. Many midrashim, on the other hand, extol Miriam's prophetic power, her artistic and educational abilities and her competence as a leader of the women. Others refer to Miriam as a provider of water, a woman who carries a "magic well", without which there is no water (life) for the Israelites. Judith Fryer, however, conflates the two other stances, suggesting that Hawthorne's Miriam "is both a vehicle of guilt and a vessel of redemption." (Fryer, 1976, p. 66) Miriam Schaefer is her assumed name, and no one in the novel knows who she really is. Only very late in the book (in Chapter 47) does Miriam reveal some vague details about her past:

> Then Miriam spoke of her own life, and told facts that threw a gleam of light over many things which had perplexed the sculptor […] She described herself as springing from English parentage, on the mother's side, but with a vein, likewise, of Jewish blood; yet connected, through her father, with one of those few princely families of Southern Italy, which still retain great wealth and influence. And she revealed a name at which her auditor started and grew pale; for it was one that, only a few years before, had been familiar to the world in connection with a mysterious and terrible event. […] She proceeded with her story. The great influence of her family connections had shielded her from some of the consequences of her imputed guilt. But, in her despair, she had fled from home, and had surrounded her flight with such circumstances as rendered it the most probable conclusion that she had committed suicide. (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 429-430)

This lengthy description, though leaving most important facts about Miriam's identity in the dark (including her real name and association with some horrifying and mysterious events), seems to imply that her Jewishness is of importance.

The Marble Faun was written between 1858 and 1859, during Hawthorne's two-year stay in Rome and after his five-year sojourn in England when he served as the American consul in Liverpool. These autobiographical details are significant since they shed light on Hawthorne's possible contacts with English and Italian Jewry. Interestingly, while *The Marble Faun* is set in Rome, the only reference to Hawthorne's contact with Jews appears in his *English Notebooks* (Hawthorne, 1941), written while he was in England. There, he describes an encounter with a Jew and his wife while attending a dinner. This encounter might have served as his main source for Miriam's character.

Interestingly, there is no indication in any of Hawthorne's letters, diaries or fiction of any personal contact with Jews during the course of his life in America.[ii] An analysis of the Italian setting might, to some certain extent, explain Hawthorne's choice of a Jewish heroine and shed light on her depiction in the context of the Italian backdrop. Since *The Marble Faun* is the only one of Hawthorne's four romances whose plot is set in Italy, and the only romance that has a Jewish woman as its main protagonist, the connection between the novel's particular locality and the Jewishness of its heroine is significant.

Hawthorne's narrator suggests different kinds of speculation about Miriam's past. Her earlier attempts (mainly directed toward Kenyon, the American sculptor) to talk about herself were futile; actually, Miriam is silenced by the American couple — Kenyon and Hilda. The

couple seems to be the narrator's collaborators in keeping Miriam's origins as obscure as possible. They deny Miriam's efforts to disclose her story, efforts through which she is trying in vain to reach their hearts. They do this either because they fear that their close association with the mysterious Jewish woman might threaten their well-being, or, more likely in Hilda's case, because Miriam's sinfulness casts a stain upon the saint-like Hilda's moral fabric.

Miriam's life story, only partially and allusively referred to as the romance draws to a close, is an insufficient, incredible and hence ironic revelation. In Chapter 3, Hawthorne conjectures about Miriam's ostensible origins, but until the final section of the book (Chapter 47), where Miriam partially reveals her story, we know very little about her. The narrator's speculations about Miriam's actual identity in Chapter 3 do not help the reader to find out who she really is; ironically, the rumours tossed off, whose aim is allegedly to uncover the truth about Miriam, make her persona even more shadowy. Possibly, by vaguely alluding to her Jewish origins at this stage, and describing in the next chapter the Jewish thematic basis of Miriam's paintings, the narrator is slowly, but meticulously, constructing Miriam's Jewishness, until it is fully revealed in the final chapters of the book. In Chapter 3, the narrator says that one rumour suggested

> that Miriam was the daughter and heiress of a great Jewish banker (an idea perhaps suggested by a certain rich Oriental character in her face), and had fled from her paternal home to escape a union with a cousin, the heir of another of that golden brotherhood; the object being to retain their vast accumulation of wealth within the family. (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 22-23)

Here again, as in his description in *The English Notebooks* of the vile Jewish man whom he met in the house of the Lord Mayor in London, Hawthorne employs centuries-old stereotypes, depicting Jews as corrupt, greedy and manipulative. An interesting interpretation, suggested by Elissa Greenwald, is that the loathsome Model that haunts Miriam might actually be her Jewish father, or another close-family member, whom she escapes fearing incestuous rapports (Greenwald, 1991, p. 134).

Another rumour in the text suggests that Miriam was a German princess who was expected to marry a prince; still another rumour said that

> she was the off-spring of a Southern American planter, who had given her an elaborate education and endowed her with his wealth; but 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. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 23)

Finally, some said that she was the wife of an English nobleman, "and, out of mere love and honor of art, had thrown aside the splendor of her rank, and come to seek subsistence by her pencil in a Roman studio." (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 23)

No mother or any other female relation is mentioned in connection with Miriam, (similarly to Shakespeare's, Marlowe's, Edgeworth's and Scott's Jewish heroines, thus placing her together in a long line of stereotypically depicted Jewish heroines). The absence of a mother in these works poses some interesting questions: Why is it so? Does every writer portraying a Jewish female protagonist fashion his heroine in the tradition set up by Marlowe? Or, probably, the absence of a mother allows the writer to construct a certain kind of "Jewish father/Jewish daughter" relationship in which the Jewish daughter defies the patriarchal values of the Jewish home, which metaphorically relates to the Judeo-Christian conflict. While the Jewish son is not convertible (being circumcised), the Jewish daughter is. Miriam allegedly defies patriarchal rule by escaping her Jewish home, but unlike Christ, who likewise left his father's hearth, she neither finds nor brings salvation. Hawthorne ironically twists Marlowe's and Shakespeare's stereotype. The Jewish daughter does not marry a Christian, she does not convert, she does not find consolation; instead, she commits a terrible sin, a murder. Actually, Hawthorne takes the stereotype of the male Jew, often depicted as bringing ruin to the world, even further. He constructs the ultimate Jewish criminal – the Jew's daughter – who, using her beauty, artifice and sensuality, spreads devastation whenever she goes. Greven insightfully contends that Hawthorne

> finds strong, powerful women, in particular, both alluring and forbidding, he finds the Jewess both abundantly sensual and desirable and deeply, disturbingly menacing […] Jewishness was an especially stark form of genderedness, a register in which gender norms and conflicts could be negotiated but also, and more importantly, where gendered phobias could be permitted to flourish, allowed to take full, frightening, hateful, but also fascinating shape. (Greven, 2012, p. 147)

The narrator's reluctance to provide any concrete information about Miriam's past, and often about her present whereabouts, may be superficially explained by Hawthorne's adhering to the Gothic genre. Yet choosing to speculate about Miriam's identity, while referring in detail to that of the other three protagonists (except for the humoristic comment Hawthorne makes about whether or not Donatello has faun-like ears), marks Miriam as an exceptional character in the romance.

The early speculations about Miriam's identity reflect the narrator's later reluctance to side with the Jewish heroine. Already at this early point in the novel, the narrator hints at a certain inappropriateness regarding Miriam: "these two [Hilda and Kenyon]," says the narrator, "received her [Miriam] as a dear friend into their hearts, taking her good qualities as evident and genuine, and never imagining that what was hidden must be therefore evil" (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 23-24). The narrator implies here that there is something evil about Miriam. In contrast, the kindness and generosity of her friends is emphasized, though up to this point in the novel we have not heard about any of their merciful acts, nor do we later, especially, when Miriam begs for help. His views are well reflected in his uncommitted and at times unsympathetic attitude. Even the physical description of Miriam is provided mainly through her self-portrait, as it is envisioned by Donatello, rather than by the narrator.

Nevertheless, Hawthorne's narrator has an obvious infatuation with the beautiful Jewish woman – "She was beautiful and attractive," and at the same time he feels repugnance towards her and her race – "I never should have thought of touching her, nor desired to touch her; for, whether owing to distinctness of race, my sense that she was a Jewess, or whatever else, I felt a sort of repugnance, simultaneously with my perception that she was an admirable creature" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 23; Hawthorne, 1941, p. 321).

The novel's plot begins as a trifling adventure of a group of young artists in the Roman catacombs but develops into a series of disasters, starting with Miriam's being chased by the Specter of the Catacombs, the Model, and leading to the tormentor's murder. As in the case of Miriam, the narrator never reveals who this fiend really is:

> She [Miriam] made no immediate response to their inquiries and tumultuous congratulations; and, as they afterwards remembered, there was something absorbed, thoughtful, and self-concentrated in her deportment. She looked pale, as

> well she might, and held her torch with a nervous grasp, the tremor of which was seen in the irregular twinkling of the flame. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 29)

Miriam's entry to the Catacombs brings the demon out, and the narrator blames Miriam, though not overtly, for tempting the devil and setting him free (undertakings similar to those of Hawthorne's male Jews in "Virtuoso's Collection" and "Ethan Brand"). The Model is described as having "a broad-brimmed, conical hat, beneath the shadow of which a wild visage was indistinctly seen, floating away, as it were, into a dusky wilderness of mustache and beard" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 26). It was said that for many centuries he had been haunting the Roman catacombs in search of "parties that come into the catacomb, especially if they be heretics, hoping to lead some straggler astray. What this lost wretch pines for, almost as much as for the blessed sunshine, is a companion to be miserable with him" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 26). He is also described as "the lost survivor of a vanished race" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 30).

Although critics have often associated the Model with the identity he assumes later, when disguised as the Capuchin Brother Antonio, I would like to argue that Hawthorne hints at the fiend's Jewish origins. First, the Model's outer description reiterates Hawthorne's extremely anti-Semitic portrayal of the vile and disgusting Jew whom he met in London in 1856 at the Lord Mayor's house: "I never beheld anything so ugly and disagreeable, and preposterous, and laughable, as the outline of his profile; it was so hideously Jewish, and so cruel, and so keen; and he had such an immense beard that you could see no trace of a mouth…" (Hawthorne, 1941, p. 321). Second, we learn that the Model has known Miriam since her childhood, and for an unknown reason has a strong claim on her: "there seemed to be a sadly mysterious fascination in the influence of this ill-omened person over Miriam; it was such as beasts and reptiles of subtle and evil nature sometimes exercise upon their victims" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 93). Moreover, Hawthorne's speculations about Miriam's alleged breaking off from a disagreeable union with a Jewish relation might lead us to believe that the Model might have been her destined husband. If he is not Miriam's husband, he could have been her father, similarly to Shylock, chasing a disobedient daughter. During one of their ghastly interviews, the Model tells Miriam:

> You must throw off your present mask and assume another. You must vanish out of the scene: quit Rome with me, and leave no trace whereby to follow you. It is

> in my power, as you well know, to compel your acquiescence in my bidding…We have a destiny which we must fulfill together…The threads are twisted into a strong cord, which is dragging us to an evil doom. Could the knots be severed, we might escape. But neither can your slender fingers untie these knots, nor my masculine force, break them. We must submit! (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 95)

The Model has a strong dominion over Miriam; their mutual bond is unbreakable. It seems to be an even stronger attachment than the one between husband and wife or father and daughter. Destiny, or probably crime, binds them together. The author describes the Model as "so evil, so treacherous, so vile, and yet so strangely subtle, as could only be accounted for by the insanity which often develops itself in old, close-kept races of men, when long unmixed with newer blood" (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 430-431). These lines imply again that the Model is probably a Jew who himself is the victim of the intermarriage widespread throughout "close-kept races".

Hawthorne's description of the crammed Jewish Ghetto of Rome reiterates the Model's vileness and impurity. He is an animal, a beast, a reptile; the Jews in the Ghetto are maggots. Both strangle or destroy others; both bring evil, vice and decay to the world. The Model's viciousness and heresy is further emphasized by his reaction to Miriam's pronouncing of the word "prayer". When hearing the word "prayer",

> tremor and horror appeared to seize upon her persecutor, insomuch that he shook and grew ashy pale before her eyes. In this man's memory there was something that made it awful for him to think of prayer; nor would any torture be more intolerable than to be reminded of such divine comfort and succor as await pious souls merely for the asking. His torment was perhaps the token of a native temperament deeply susceptible of religious impressions, but which had been wronged, violated, and debased, until, at length, it was capable only of terror from the sources that were intended for our purest and loftiest consolation. (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 95-96)

The Model, of course, cannot be a Christian monk; Brother Antonio would not have been intimidated by a prayer. The apparently Jewish Model becomes a Catholic Monk – Judaism is akin to Catholicism – both are corrupt. While critics usually consider the Model as some kind of an evil spirit from Miriam's past whose role is to enact the story of Miriam's and Donatello's crime or the story of the Fortunate Fall, I believe that Hawthorne's intention in portraying the Model is to reenact the story of the Wandering Jew.[iii]

Already in *The English Notebooks* Hawthorne calls the Lord Mayor's Jewish guest "the very Jew of Jews...he was Judas Iscariot; he was the Wandering Jew" (Hawthorne, 1941, p. 321). The male Jews in his short stories, "Virtuoso's Collection" and "Ethan Brand", are also portrayed as bearing a likeness to the figure of the Jewish infidel. In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne's Wandering Jew is much more villainous and treacherous than those in his short stories. The Model is depicted as an absolute heretic, a snake, a beast. The guard of the catacombs suggests that he is Memmius, who, similarly to The Wandering Jew, sinned and was given a chance to ask for forgiveness, but never did. "By divine indulgence," says the guide, "there was a single moment's grace allowed to Memmius, during which, had he been capable of Christian faith and love, he might have knelt before the cross, and received the holy light into his soul, and so have been blest forever. But he resisted the sacred impulse" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 33). Interestingly, Hawthorne seems to sympathize neither with the abuser (the Jew), nor with his victim (Miriam). He certainly implies that Miriam is the infidel's associate, though she pretends to be his innocent victim:

> *Marvelous it was to see the hopelessness* with which being naturally of so courageous a spirit she resigned herself to the thralldom in which he held her. That iron chain, of which some of the massive links were round her feminine waist, and the others in his ruthless hand, — or which, perhaps, bound the pair together by a bond equally torturing to each, — must have been forged in some such unhallowed furnace as is only kindled by evil passions, and fed by evil deeds. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 93; *italics mine*)

The writer marvels at the poor woman's "hopelessness", but there is little sympathy here. He actually accuses Miriam of sharing with her persecutor an "unhallowed furnace … fed by evil deeds." She is responsible for establishing a close bond with the fiend; and she is to pay the price. She is guilty of bringing the phantom out; of seducing him: "She came to me when I sought her not," says the Model, "she has called me forth, and must abide the consequences of my reappearance in the world" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 31). Miriam, the Model's victim, becomes the victimizer; she is the one who tempts him to leave his crypt. We are also told that Miriam lets the Model into her studio, although it is not clear whether it is done willingly or not. The author hints, however, that the persecutor was haunting Miriam, often "sitting at her threshold" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 32), and waiting for her to let him in.

However, it seems as if Miriam enjoys his presence and even exploits him as her model:

> being often admitted to her studio, he left his features, or some shadow or reminiscence of them, in many of her sketches and pictures. The moral atmosphere of these productions was thereby so influenced, that rival painters pronounced it a case of hopeless mannerism, which would destroy all Miriam's prospects of true excellence in art. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 32)

He is Sisera, Holofernes, John the Baptist or the Wandering Jew in Miriam's portraits. Miriam is accused of acting in the same manner as her vengeful biblical models – Jael, Judith and Salome – do; she attracts her prey using her beauty and seductiveness and then mercilessly kills him. Ironically, while Jewish heroines (except for Salome) have been usually praised for their courage and for saving their people when killing their nation's enemy, Miriam is certainly scrutinized by Hawthorne for luring the beast. Her act does not free the people. Instead, the author suggests that it breaks Donatello's spirit, leads to his imprisonment, stains Hilda's uncontaminated morality, brings about Hilda's kidnapping by the State or Church authorities, and finally drives the American couple out of Italy.

One of the novel's major themes is that of friendship, though almost no critical attention has been given to it; or, as I shall claim, the failure of friendship. The four artists are drawn to each other by their mutual love of art. In Chapter 1, they are introduced as free, enlightened and enthusiastic youths: "Of these four friends of ours, three were artists, or connected with Art; and, at this moment, they had been simultaneously struck by a resemblance between one of the antique statues, a well-known masterpiece of Grecian sculpture, and a young Italian, the fourth member of their party" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 7). Their strolls among Roman monuments, their visits to Roman galleries and museums and their conversations about painters and paintings seem perfect opportunities for creating a strong union.

However, the two American artists, "whom she [Miriam] appeared to acknowledge as friends in the closer and truer sense of the word; […][for] these more favored individuals did credit to Miriam's selection," (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 21) let her down during one of the most critical moments in her life. "Hawthorne gives their friendship a deceptively romantic aura, but a closer look at the four characters reveals that the Europeans are constantly quarreling with the Americans," maintains Udo Natterman (Natterman, 1994, p. 56). After the Model's

murder, Miriam comes to Hilda's dovecot asking for compassion and comfort, but Hilda's accusing gestures and her morally priggish tone discourage Miriam. Miriam offers Hilda true sisterly love: "I loved you dearly! I love you still! You were to me as a younger sister; yes, dearer than sisters of the same blood; for you and I were so lonely, Hilda, that the whole world pressed us together by its solitude and strangeness" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 207); Miriam also offers Hilda her hand, but the Protestant girl refuses to touch the bloody Jewish woman. Hilda rejects Miriam's friendship; she is afraid of becoming contaminated or "spotted".

John L. Idol suggests that women, unlike men, are usually well known for their ability to overtly express their feelings, "by standing or sitting close together, by kissing or by touching" (Idol, 1991, p. 144); Hilda, however, detaches herself both emotionally and physically from Miriam. Like Hilda though less straightforwardly, Kenyon refuses Miriam's plea for consolation. When she tries to reveal her story and asks for some solace, imploring to be heard, she cries,

> Will you be my friend indeed? I am lonely, lonely, lonely! There is a secret in my heart that burns me, — that tortures me! Sometimes I fear to go mad of it; sometimes I hope to die of it; but neither of the two happens. Ah, if I could but whisper it to only one human soul! And you — you see far into womanhood; you receive it widely into your large view. Perhaps — perhaps, but Heaven only knows, you might understand me! O, let me speak! (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 128)

The Christian Kenyon refuses Miriam's confession. She sounds "unnatural" to him in the same way that strong and defiant women often seem unnatural to Hawthorne. Kenyon, like his creator, is "the morality's keeper"; he is not willing to give way to Miriam's guilty conscience, although he feels some mercy toward the victim. Miriam's sexuality and her transgressive art that attempts to recreate primordial experience threaten his equilibrium. He is afraid of revealing his feelings towards Miriam in the same way that he is afraid of creating a tie of sympathy with his statue of Cleopatra:

> In his secret soul, to say the truth, the sculptor doubted whether it were well for this poor, suffering girl to speak what she so yearned to say, or for him to listen... Unless he could give her all the sympathy, and just the kind of sympathy that the occasion required, Miriam would hate him by and by, and herself still more, if he let her speak. (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 128-129)

Miriam, who initially thought that Kenyon, the creator of a fervently feminine statue of Cleopatra, could experience strong feelings, is disappointed: “I thought often of revealing it [her life story] to you…,” says Miriam, “after you had shown me your Cleopatra; it seemed to leap out of my heart, and got as far as my very lips. But finding you cold to accept my confidence, I thrust it back again. Had I obeyed my first impulse, all would have turned out differently” (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 432-433).

Miriam mistakenly believes that an artist who is capable, like herself, of creating “stronger, and more passionate creatures” is also capable of genuine empathy and humane concern (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 378). Both Kenyon’s inability to come to terms with Cleopatra’s claim on him, and Hawthorne’s own inability to sympathize with his “dark women”, is well-reflected in their similar ambiguity towards Miriam. Both Kenyon and his creator are passionately captivated by their “dark” and sensuous heroines. These women overpower their creators by their mysterious charms; however, being trapped by the stereotypically moralistic social norms, which disapprove of female bold sensuality and audacity, both artists find it difficult to sympathize with their creations. This duality is quite apparent in Hawthorne’s fascination with/reprimand of the wild child/adolescent Pearl in his *The Scarlet Letter* and of Miriam. Broek’s contends that “Miriam actually enacts a complicated ‘liberation’ from the proscriptions of her gender, enacted by her embrace of multiple, ancient and organic symbols” (Broek, 2012, p. 627). He sees Miriam as the mature Pearl since both women transgress gender differences, defy Puritan conventions and create original artistic compositions.

Kenyon and Hilda, the civilized New Englanders, unlike the rustic and naïve Italian Donatello, cannot face up to such self-sufficient women as Cleopatra or Miriam. Subservient women like Kenyon’s fiancée, Hilda, or Hawthorne’s wife, Sophia, whom he often calls his “dove” are easy to take in. The narrator criticizes the American couple’s lack of sympathy towards Miriam. Again and again, he reverts to her tragic plea; time and again, he reiterates the Americans’ refusal to come to her aid. The true companionship, “feminine sympathy” or “brotherly counsel” that Miriam yearns for is denied by her American “friends”; apparently, Miriam’s only genuine friend is Donatello, who is willing to sacrifice his life to free Miriam from her persecutor (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 113). Although their attachment is one that was

conceived in sin and guilt, it is a heartfelt bond based on love, empathy and reciprocal compassion:

> She turned to him, — the guilty, bloodstained, lonely woman, — she turned to her fellow criminal, the youth, so lately innocent, whom she had drawn into her doom. She pressed him close, close to her bosom, with a clinging embrace that brought their two hearts together, till the horror and agony of each was combined into one emotion… (Hawthorne, 1974, pp. 173-174)

In spite of his seeming sympathy for Miriam's plea for friendship, the narrator calls Miriam a "guilty" and "bloodstained" woman, who in a manner similar to that of her feminine Jewish role models, brings horror, sin and death into the world. He accuses her of seducing Donatello and thus bringing about his miserable fall.

Hawthorne's narrator frequently uses metaphors in which Hilda is portrayed as a "white," naïve, unspotted young maiden living in "a dove-cote…conversing with the souls of the old masters, feeding… [her] sister doves, and trimming the Virgin's lamp" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 69), while Miriam is characterized by crimson or blood-like colours. The Model claims that "men have said that this [Miriam's] white hand had once a crimson stain" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 97). When unsuccessfully trying to reveal her secret to Kenyon right after the Model's death, Miriam, heavily disappointed by Kenyon's indifference, ("cold and pitiless…marble" [Hawthorne, 1974, p. 129]), calls her sin "my dark-red carbuncle", her painful sore and her red blemish. Yet she also refers to it metaphorically as her "rich gem" (which is later symbolized by a ruby necklace she is wearing while in a carriage) and is not ready to entrust it into Kenyon's untrustworthy "casket". "It [Kenyon's heart] should never be the treasure Place of my secret. It is no precious pearl, as I just now told him; but my *dark-red carbuncle — red as blood* — is too rich a gem to put into *a stranger's casket*" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 130; *italics mine*). Kenyon is no longer a friend; he has betrayed Miriam's faith.

Miriam's "dark-red" gem, which symbolizes her sin, calls to mind Hester's "scarlet letter", her sinful badge, "the scarlet token of infamy on her breast" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 25). Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance* fills her basket with maple twigs, the leaf of which "looks like a scarlet bud in May" (Hawthorne, 1977, p. 33). She then decorates her hair with one of these scarlet flowers. Hawthorne's "dark" women are closely associated with the colour red,

which further emphasizes their sensuality and unruliness. Miriam's red gem and Hester's scarlet letter indicate their sinfulness and unlawfulness, as the colour red is the colour of blood.

The red carbuncle might also allude to the Jewish woman's uncleanliness (menstruation); her pervasive sexual appetites and moral corruption; or to Miriam's lost virginity which she refuses to "put" into Kenyon's treasure chest. Here again the popular 19th-century theme of depicting the Jewish woman as a temptress is at play. Similarly to the Jewish male, who is sexually marked by circumcision, the Jewish woman is labelled by her explicit sensuality. Miriam's Jewish biblical models reflect their creator's "imagination … run on these stories of bloodshed, in which [a] woman's hand was crimsoned by the stain" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 48). Again, their bodies are stained by blood; it is either their own blood (because they menstruate) or the blood of their male victims.[iv]

Hawthorne suggests that Miriam's magnetism and her seductive scheme probably extend to other men, besides Donatello. In Chapter 43, Kenyon accidentally meets Miriam while she is driving with a strange-looking Italian man in a beautifully decorated carriage. Nothing is said about Miriam's companion or about her whereabouts. Nevertheless, Hawthorne implies that Miriam's richly decorated attire, her attempt at secrecy and her highly animated mood are directed at another conquest. Kenyon hardly recognizes Miriam because of:

> a gem which she had on her bosom; not a diamond, but something that glimmered with a clear, red lustre, like the stars in a southern sky. Somehow or other, this colored light seemed an emanation of herself, as if all that was passionate and glowing in her native disposition had crystallized upon her breast, and were just now scintillating more brilliantly than ever, in sympathy with some emotion of her heart. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 396)

This red lustrous gem, in addition to symbolizing Miriam's "passionate and glowing disposition" and the "sympathy with some emotion of her heart", is also tightly connected to the Jewish sacred candlestick, mentioned twice in the romance. First, the artists see it curved in marble on the Arch of Titus:

> The moon shone brightly enough within it to show the seven-branched Jewish candlestick, cut in the marble of the interior. The original of that awful trophy lies buried, at this moment, in the yellow mud of the Tiber. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 159)

Later in the novel, the candlestick acquires a more gleaming effect when Hilda and Kenyon speculate about its possible location in the mud of the Tiber:

> Hilda wondered whether the seven-branched golden candlestick, — the holy candlestick of the Jews…had yet been swept as far down the river as this…There was a meaning and purpose in each of its seven branches, and such a candlestick cannot be lost forever. When it is found again, and seven lights are kindled and burning in it, the whole world will gain the illumination which it needs…As each branch is lighted, it shall have a differently colored lustre from the other six; and when all the seven are kindled, their radiance shall combine into the intense white light of Truth. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 371)

The "red lustre" of Miriam's gem and the "colored lustre" of the Jewish candlestick are closely linked. The Jewish Miriam offers the world her sympathy, her radiance, as the Jewish candlestick, if found, will illuminate the world and will provide the "white light of Truth". Unfortunately, the American artists can only admire the metaphorical significance of the old Jewish relic; they are unable to appreciate the warmth and the kindness that their Jewish companion radiates.

The Italian setting and the Italian imperialistic past play an important role in the scenes where the Jewish candlestick is mentioned. Titus's Arch of Triumph, ornamented by the seven-branched candlestick, symbolizes the power of the strong colonizer, Rome, over the powerless Judea. The Americans' condescending and heartless attitude towards the Jewish heroine and her sorrow reiterate the pitiless handling of the vulnerable by the strong. The modern colonizers (the Americans) take the place of the ancient ones. Ironically, right after the conversation about the beauty and the brightness of the candlestick, Hilda voices her wish to leave Rome which is "dreary and awful, [and] which we can never quite escape" (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 371). Thus, the irony is further emphasized – the Americans have a choice, they can leave Rome immediately; Miriam and Donatello cannot – they are Rome's (the ancient colonizer's) prisoners.

The artists' final encounter is no less symbolic. This scene follows another climactic incident during which Hilda was detained in the Convent of Sacré-Coeur, while on Miriam's errand. Hilda's task was to deliver a mysterious package Miriam entrusted her with to the Cenci Palace, located close by the Jewish Ghetto. Just before the American artists are about to leave Rome, after the exchange of "prisoners" is made – Hilda is released from the convent where she had been kept for a few days and Miriam and Donatello hand themselves over to the Roman authorities – the farewell scene is enacted. When they last meet, Miriam presents Hilda with a bridal gift:

> It was a bracelet, evidently of great cost, being composed of seven ancient Etruscan gems, dug out of seven sepulchers, and each one of them the signet of some princely personage, who had lived an immemorial time ago… the Etruscan bracelet became the connecting bond of a series of seven wondrous tales, all of which, as they were dug out of seven sepulchres, were characterized by a sevenfold sepulchral gloom; such as Miriam's imagination, shadowed by her own misfortunes, was wont to fling over its most sportive flights. (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 462)

This expensive bracelet mainly symbolizes Miriam's "gloom", since it is "shadowed by [her]…misfortunes". It connects Miriam to her persecutor and to her crime. The bracelet was dug of seven sepulchres, as was the fiend who emerged from the catacombs. Both the Model and the bracelet are connected to "an immemorial time" – to some shadowy past, to some mysterious events, to misery. Both have some connection to Judaism; the seven-gem bracelet reminds the reader of the Jewish candlestick lying somewhere in the mud of the Tiber, whereas the Model, as I have explained earlier, is linked to the figure of the Wandering Jew. This concluding scene actually encapsulates all the major themes presented in the novel – Miriam's anguish, her one-sided friendship with the Americans, the crime, her Jewishness, and her artistry (since the jewel is uniquely original).

I suggest that the "bracelet episode" is inspired by the touching "jewel episode" in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. In both novels the Jewish heroine presents her righteous Christian light-haired counterpart with a wedding gift – a jewel – during the book's farewell scene. Miriam offers Hilda a beautiful and expensive Etruscan bracelet; Rebecca gives Rowena a set consisting of a diamond necklace and earrings. "One, the most trifling part of my duty,

remains undischarged,2 says Rebecca, before parting, “Accept this casket – startle not at its contents” (Scott, 2000, p. 400). Similarly to Hilda, the pale Christian Rowena is extremely surprised at the beauty of the jewels and the generosity of their giver:

> Rowena opened the small silver-chased casket, and perceived a carcanet, or neck lace, with ear-jewels, of diamonds, which were obviously of immense value. “Yet keep it, lady,” returned Rebecca. – “You have power, rank, command, influence; we have wealth, the source both of our strength and weakness; … Accept them, lady – to me they are valueless. I will never wear jewels more.” (Scott, 2000, p. 400)

The bracelet is a token of love and friendship but it is also an indication of the Jewish protagonist’s withdrawal from the novel’s plot and from the world. Similarly to Miriam, whose future is doomed once she is in the hands of the Roman authorities, Rebecca is also condemned to a lonely and miserable life. Interestingly, the reactions of the Christian maidens to the Jewish women’s sacrifice are almost identical. They sympathize with the wretched Jewish women, but they do not offer much solace. Rowena is at least trying to find some kind of a solution to Rebecca’s distress. She first enquires about the possibility of Rebecca’s conversion to Christianity which would allow the Jewish girl to remain with her Christian friends. Secondly, she suggests that Rebecca enter a Jewish convent, if such is in existence. The first possibility has obvious colonialist undertones and is perfectly in line with popular British 19th-century imperialistic and conversion-promoting discourses, discussed at length in Chapter 3.[v] In *The Marble Faun*, Hilda’s response to Miriam’s kind deed is even less sympathetic; Miriam’s gesture makes Hilda shed some tears: “the bracelet brought the tears into her eyes, as being, in its entire circle, the symbol of as sad a mystery as any that Miriam had attached to the separate gems”, but this short-term sadness is immediately undermined by the novel’s extremely ironic last sentence: “But Hilda had a hopeful soul, and saw sunlight on the mountain-tops” (Hawthorne, 1974, p. 462). Miriam’s sorrow and Rebecca’s sacrifice do not matter; the Christian maiden is to be married to her betrothed and live happily ever after, because for her there is “sunlight on the mountain-tops”. The Christian male artist, Kenyon, and correspondingly, Hawthorne, choose the safe path when complying with the dominant Puritan standards. The Jewish woman, the only “true2 artist, on the other hand, is destined for torment. Miriam will never see the Promised Land!

Endnotes:

[i] Miriam's name derives from the Hebrew word "meri", which means 'rebellion'. In the *Book of Exodus* Miriam is described as a singer, an artist. "Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing." Miriam sang to them:
'Sing to the Lord,
for he is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.' (*The Bible, Exodus* 15:20-21)
Miriam's faith and ability to think and take decisive action, even as a young woman, help us to understand why God chose her, along with her brothers, Moses and Aaron, to lead Israel out of Egypt: "I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam" (*The Bible, Micah* 6:4). Yet, in spite of her prominence, Miriam, and her brother Aaron, feared their influence was waning. Out of jealousy, they started to gossip about Moses's marriage to an Ethiopian woman: "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?... Hasn't he also spoken through us?" (*The Bible, Numbers* 12:2) Miriam was punished with leprosy and shut out of the camp for seven days before God removed her humiliating punishment. Like her brothers, Miriam did not enter the Promised Land, and was buried in the wilderness (similarly to Hawthorne's Miriam, who metaphorically is doomed to remain in Old Rome).

[ii] In the 1850s there were approximately 150,000 Jews in America, mostly settled in New York, Philadelphia and Cincinnati, while Hawthorne spent most of his life in Massachusetts. So, the chances of Hawthorne having interacted with Jewish people in his homeland are very minimal.

[iii] The Wandering Jew, also known as Ahasverus or Buttadaeus, was given the curse of immortality by Jesus Christ. As Christ was carrying his heavy cross from Pilate's hall and towards his place of crucifixion, Ahasverus, then a porter in Pilate's service, struck Christ, and mocked him for walking so slowly. Christ, in turn, told the insolent porter to wait for his return, that is, until the Second Coming. In some versions of the tale, Ahasverus is an officer of the Sanhedrim (an order of Jewish priests); in others, he is merely a shoemaker with a quick temper. Whatever his origins are, all versions of his tale agree that the Wandering Jew soon repented of his sins and was baptized Catholic. He grows old in the normal fashion until reaching one hundred whereupon he sheds his skin and rejuvenates to the age of thirty. The Middle Ages abound with sightings of the Wandering Jew, generally telling his story in return for meager food and lodging, sometimes even undergoing tests of authenticity by local professors and academic figures. Encounters with the Wandering Jew occurred all throughout Europe – during the Middle Ages, there were sightings in Armenia, Poland, Moscow, and virtually every Western European city including London. By the 19th-century, sightings of the Wandering Jew were largely attributed to imposters and madmen. In the 1840s, he reappeared in New England, although this time only in literary form, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "A Virtuoso's Collection" and "A Select Party" (both stories were originally published in magazines, but later were collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846). In both stories, Hawthorne departs from the traditional depiction of the Wandering Jew as a world-weary penitent; instead he outlines more of a cynical, earthy figure. At the same time, Gustave Dore created a series of elegant woodcuts, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, (1856) probably the finest portrayal of the traditional myth. (Jacobs, Joseph. "Wandering Jew", *Jewish Encyclopedia.com*, n.p.)

[iv] Here, another stereotypical discourse is employed, that of the Jewish woman who emasculates men. She takes the power into her hands, seduces and then kills the male victim. The male is rendered impotent; he can neither protect his wife nor his people; hence, the Jewish woman acts instead. The biblical Miriam, though uncontaminated by blood, took power in her hands when

saving her brother Moses from Paroah's bloody plot. One can claim that by saving baby Moses she also emasculated men, since neither her father nor her brother, Aharon, were capable of acting on their own to save the child.

[v] Jews' conversion to Christianity was strongly encouraged by prominent Christian institutions, such as The London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews (founded in 1809) or the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews (founded in 1842). Michael Ragussis describes the strong power these societies gained among the general public during several decades: "Numbering among their members some of England's best known-citizens, from powerful members of Parliament to influential clergymen…, and even enjoying the royal patronage of the Duke of Kent, such societies became the subject of immense public attention and intense national debate" (Ragussis, 1995, p. 15).

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Irina Rabinovich

Holon Institute of Technology

52 Golomb Street

Holon 5810201, Israel

irener@hit.ac.il.