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Author(s): MICHAEL BROEK

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Hawthorne, Madonna, and Lady Gaga: *The Marble Faun's* Transgressive Miriam

MICHAEL BROEK

Abstract. Most criticism of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Novel *The Marble Faun* has focussed on its many images of domestic containment, its supposed argument in favor of Christian idealism, as well as Hawthorne's apparent "castration" of the American sculptor Kenyon – just another in a long list of the author's male protagonists who succumb to a mixture of self-doubt (Dimmesdale, in *The Scarlet Letter*), narcissism (Coverdale, in *The Blithedale Romance*), and the allure of the chaste virgin (Holgrave, in *The House of the Seven Gables*). This essay, however, argues that Miriam, the novel's chief female protagonist, actually completes a complicated "liberation" from the proscriptions (as Hawthorne envisioned them) of her gender, enacted by her embrace of multiple, ancient, and organic symbols. Through a simultaneous analysis of the American music icons Madonna and Lady Gaga, we find that Hawthorne engages a complex set of ideational forces – misogyny, Catholicism, and female eros – as Miriam emerges, like these famous pop stars, as an independent artist, a position that not one of the author's male protagomists is able to attain. In this sense, Miriam may be reconsidered Hawthorne's internationalized Hester, or, more aptly, his mature Pearl.

Seems like yesterday
I lay down next to your boots and I prayed
For your anger to end
Oh Father I have sinned

Madonna, "Oh Father," *Like a Prayer*

"For Heaven's sake, Miriam ... paint the picture of man's struggle against sin, according to your own idea! I think it will be a master-piece."

Kenyon, The *Marble Faun*

Silicone, saline, poison, inject me baby
I'm a free bitch
I'm a free bitch

Lady Gaga, "Dance in the Dark," *The Fame Monster*

Michael Broek is an Assistant Professor of English at Brookdale Community College in New Jersey (USA). In 2010 he completed his PhD under Prof. Richard Gray. Email: mbroek@brookdalecc.edu.

Madonna Louise Ciccone, known in her entertainment career simply as Madonna, shot the video for her hit song "Like a Virgin" in the canals of Venice,[1] employing her Italian Catholic schoolgirl-turned-sex-kitten (crucifix-wearing, underwear-flouting) persona to challenge (albeit for commercial purposes) traditional Catholic iconography. In the video, the singer is stalked by a Venetian lion, evoking the city's patron saint, St. Mark, who morphs from feline into human and ravishes the "newly minted" virgin.

In the summer of 2010, Stefani Germanotta, now popularly known as Lady Gaga, premiered the video for her song "Alejandro,"[2] which also features Catholic iconography prominently, associating sadomasochism, multiple forms of transsexuality, militarism, and fascism (of Italian, German or other origin is unclear), with the veiled penitent and the habit-wearing nun at prayer (albeit prone in bed). Gaga, who attended the Convent of the Scared Heart in Manhattan, takes Madonna's shiny, canonical breast protuberances (of the Blonde Ambition tour) and transforms them into black automatic rifles before she deep-throats a set of rosary beads and explodes in bed, inches away from a bored-looking guard with a pistol held between his legs.

Actually, all of these elements are derivative of Madonna, who in variou songs and videos – "Express Yourself,"[3] "Like a Prayer,"[4] "Oh Father"[5] – employs all of the titillating flavors of Gaga, though Madonna arguably utilizes these elements more effectively or at least more coherently. Camille Paglia asserts that Gaga, as opposed to the early, pre-Kaballah Madonna, is a "high-concept fabrication without an ounce of genuine eroticism."[6]

But regardless of whether Gaga is genuinely erotic, it is not difficult to call to mind a train of transgressive female pop singers, either in the strung-out fashion of Patti Smith or Janis Joplin, the bad-girl pastiche of Courtney Love, or the acrobatic boy-toy act of Britney Spears. Madonna and Gaga are unique, however, in their commingling of sex, violence, and spirituality (specifically Catholicism) in a form that Paglia identifies, at least in the case of Madonna, as aestheticized feminism.[7]

[1] "Like a Virgin," dir. Mary Lambert, *Like a Virgin* (Sire Records, Warner, 1984).
[2] "Alejandro," dir. Steven Klein, *The Fame Monster* (Interscope, 2009).
[3] "Express Yourself," dir. David Fincher, *Like a Prayer* (Sire Records Warner, 1989).
[4] "Like a Prayer," dir. Mary Lambert, *Like a Prayer* (Sire Records Warner, 1989).
[5] "Oh Father," dir. David Fincher, *Like a Prayer* (Sire Records, Warner, 1989).
[6] Camille Paglia, "No Sex Please, We're Middle Class," *New York Times*, 27 June 2010, WK12.
[7] Camille Paglia, "Dr. Paglia," *Vamps & Tramps: New Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 247. Though both Madonna and Gaga have been the subject of feminist debates, these debates are not central to this argument as my focus here is on the homologous relationship between Hawthorne's character Miriam and these two pop artists. The term "transgressive" is used here in the sense of border-crossing and is not necessarily evaluative of Madonna's or Gaga's relationship to feminism.

So what do these pop singers and Nathaniel Hawthorne have in common? I think more than Hawthorne would like. Most criticism of his novel *The Marble Faun* has focussed on its many images of domestic containment, its supposed argument in favor of Christian idealism, as well as Hawthorne's apparent "castration" of the American sculptor Kenyon – just another in a long list of the author's male protagonists who succumb to a mixture of self-doubt (Coverdale in *The Blithedale Romance*), narcissism (Ethan Brand in the short story of the same title), and the allure of the chaste virgin (Holgrave in *The House of the Seven Gables*).

But what of Miriam? At first glance, it would seem that her power and sexuality are also castigated and bound up, since she is finally rendered, kneeling under the dome of the Pantheon, as a veiled penitent. But there are other hints. This essay will argue that Miriam actually enacts a complicated "liberation" from the proscriptions of her gender, enacted by her embrace of multiple, ancient, and organic symbols. In this sense, Miriam may be reconsidered as Hawthorne's internationalized Hester, or, more aptly, his mature Pearl.

Indeed, if Hawthorne's daughter Una, six years old at the time of the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, is allied with the impish Pearl, then Una's near-fatal bout of malaria, contracted when she was fourteen and in Rome and while her father was working on *The Marble Faun*, draws the budding adolescent through to the tortured and sexually dangerous world of Miriam.[8]

While critic Nina Baym observes that Hawthorne's women are strong, independent, even feminist characters, she also argues that the author cannot imagine the sexes as different than they "foundationally are," hence the conflicts that arise between them.[9] In Pearl, however, Hawthorne may be suggesting a new model of personhood beyond the bounds of limited male/female perspectives, beyond the bounds of any Puritan or even any American at all. Pearl rejects the Puritan children and their "playing at going to church . . . or at scourging Quakers",[10] just as she rejects Dimmesdale, refusing to kiss her father until he publicly throws off the weight of the community's perception. Instead, she explodes symbols and creates new knowledge. She is likened to a witch, who imbues spiritual life to "the unlikeliest of materials, a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower";[11] in the terms of *The Marble Faun*, she is an artist. Like Miriam, who renders passionate and original visions of biblical women in paint, Pearl renders anew conceptions of her mother's guilt: Pearl

[8] As Hawthorne biographer Brenda Wineapple notes, Una "served as the model for Pearl." Brenda Wineapple, *Hawthorne: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 4.

[9] Nina Baym, "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism," in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, ed. Leland S. Person, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 2005), 557.

[10] Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, 64.

[11] Ibid., 65.

"took some eel-grass, and imitated, as best she could, on her own bosom, the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother's. A letter, – the letter A, – but freshly green, instead of scarlet!"[12]

But what is her origin? "Hester could only account for the child's character . . . by recalling what she herself had been, during that momentous period while Pearl was imbibing her soul from the spiritual world, and her bodily frame from its material of earth".[13] At the moment of sexual union or immediately thereafter, during pregnancy – in any case, during a period of supreme creation – Pearl is endowed with her strange and wonderful aspect. Similarly, Miriam's mysterious parentage and the sexual intrigue that hovers over her arrival in Rome have combined to place Miriam, like Pearl, in a world apart.

Critic Sacvan Bercovitch concedes that Pearl is "the one character . . . who might be imagined to offer an alternative vision in the novel," but he also views her as a restrictive force upon Hester, and, by analogy, he argues that insofar as Pearl is the biological embodiment of the "A," then the "A" is finally meant to act as a stern warning, in effect taming Hester's radicalism and channeling it into politically comfortable avenues.[14] What I am arguing is that even if this view is accurate, Hawthorne finally finds a home for this "alternate vision" in Rome and in the character of Miriam.

"Today," however, Gordon Hutner writes, "Hawthorne is more likely to be read for the ways his vision embraces masochism, fear of women, and homosexual panic."[15] Much of contemporary Hawthorne criticism has abandoned "nice determinations of crucial formal issues" as frivolous, male-centered, and naively ideological, in favor of "discerning the political and social engagements in canonical authors."[16] As a result, however, what I am referring to as the transgressive nature of Miriam's character may be overlooked and Hawthorne's supposed "fear of women" overly emphasized.

The issue here is not that either Madonna or Gaga had Hawthorne in mind as an influence, but rather that when he wrote *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne had in mind (however unwillingly or unconsciously) the notion of the transgressive woman – sexually powerful, spiritually polymorphic, fascinated by the intersection of violence and joy – as well as a sense of the ineffectual man, usually an artist, who is unable to access the creative (feminine) source of his art and so abandons the attempt. This is to argue that Hawthorne is

[12] Ibid., 115.
[13] Ibid., 62.
[14] Sacvan Bercovitch. "The A-Politics of Ambiguity in *The Scarlet Letter*," in Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, 583.
[15] Gordon Hutner, "Whose Hawthorne?" *Cambridge Companion To Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 263.
[16] Ibid., 263, 262.

not nearly as conservative,[17] particularly regarding women, as some contemporary critics have suggested, and it is to argue that the particular intersection of ideational forces represented by Madonna and Gaga – violence, Catholicism, and female eros – is representative of a particular American ethos, dating back at least to 1860 and the publication of Hawthorne's last complete novel.[18]

SELF-CASTRATION

A recent *New Yorker* article titled "Transformer" discusses Lady Gaga's ascension from Catholic schoolgirl to worldwide phenomenon.[19] This echoes the original English title of Hawthorne's novel, *Transformation*, which is much more apt than the novel's subsequent American title, *The Marble Faun*, since the romance takes as its subject the unmitigable trajectory of human experience from a state of primordial "Innocence" – represented here by the mythological faun – to a state of modern "Experience," which in Hawthorne's analysis is nearly synonymous with a state of "Sin."

This "Sin," however, in this, his most overtly philosophical novel, is but a necessary if grief-filled and guilt-ridden component of one's proper human development:

> Is Sin, then – which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the Universe – is it, like Sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained. Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier Paradise than his?[20]

The novel's American title obviously points to Donatello, who supposedly resembles the Faun of Praxiteles, as the source of the "transformation," and yet Donatello's morbid metamorphosis provides none of the novel's pathos. His birth into experience, like Adam's, is initiated at the behest of Miriam – his Eve – and yet he remains juvenile throughout. The "transformation" that is most profound, rendered in the novel's denouement, is the transformation of

[17] I mean here to refer to those readings, such as Bercovitch's, that render Hawthorne's works as allegories of domestic, and hence political, containment.

[18] Obviously, it is no surprise that violence and female sexuality are bound up in early American literature, as in Native American captivity narratives or the leatherstocking novels of Cooper, but these representations are particularly Protestant. The additional consideration that I am suggesting here is the Catholic iconography, which Hawthorne first encountered in a sustained way during his travels in Italy (1858–59) following his four-year stint as the US consul in Liverpool.

[19] John Seabrook, "Transformer" *New Yorker Online*, 1 Feb. 2010.

[20] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 356–57. The Oxford University Press edition is based on the authoritative Volume IV of the *Centenary Editions of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* of the Ohio State University Press.

the worried, oppressed, disconnected Miriam – the only female artist in all of Hawthorne's novels[21] – into a representative of transgressive female power.

Male artists of one type or another are often at the center of Hawthorne's novels, but in each the artist is drawn toward an image of "ideal womanhood" – Coverdale to Priscilla, Holgrave to Phoebe, Kenyon to Hilda – and each is finally unable to ally himself with the alternative female character in each novel – Zenobia, Hepzibah, and Miriam, respectively – who offers the possibility of perceiving the world in a new, ambiguous, and more "realistic" light.[22]

In the work of Madonna and Gaga, there is an equal sense that the man must either realign himself to female power and authority or else adopt an unspecified gender, able to morph into male or female as necessary. For Madonna, as in her video for "Express Yourself," the incredibly buff factory worker must succumb to the feminine, represented by a bowl of cat's milk poured down his sweaty face. He is then led by her cat to her boudoir, while his ascetic looking, buttoned-down boss reacts in horror. The issue is not that the factory worker's masculinity overpowers her, but rather that his masculinity is unleashed by the power of the feminine. (The cat is an important element of female sexuality signaling Miriam's final transformation as well, as we shall see.)

Gaga, on the other hand, in her "Alejandro" video, presents men as overtly transsexual, as gun-toting soldiers (or police) wear fishnet stockings and high-heeled shoes. In this video, masculine power very clearly dominates the feminine, but such power is alternately held by men and women, each dominating the other in turn. The video's closing moments, however, in which the gun and the phallus are rendered interchangeable and the prayerful-nun explodes on the bed, could be construed as recalling a traditional feminist critique of male violence, although the strings that seem to be attached to both figures, as if all of the characters were marionettes, brings such an analysis into question.

For Hawthorne, his male protagonists negate their own ability to perceive the world as artists as they lust after an image of "perfection" – usually, for Hawthorne, somewhat clumsily represented as the "woman in white." Coverdale, the poet, stops writing; Holgrave, the dauguerreotypist, instills himself in the dead judge's house of stone; Kenyon, the sculptor, tells Hilda he has given up sculpting.

Are all of Hawthorne's men bound to impotence? Are they all so willing to negate their own "grayness" in the face of whatever is alluringly "white"? Only Owen Warland, of Hawthorne's short story "The Artist of the Beautiful," who

[21] Though Hilda has artistic skill, she is rendered a "copyist."

[22] This may be an unusual reading of Hepzibah, but she is the only character in the novel who has to come to terms with her "fallen" state and assume a new course of life, this time as the proprietor of a cent-shop. She is Phoebe's antipode.

is rejected by the image of female perfection that he seeks, is rendered a "successful" artist, creating something entirely new, profound, delicate, and otherworldly. Warland (at war with himself? with men? with women?) creates the mechanical butterfly, which is quickly destroyed by his wished-for lover's baby. It is of little consequence to Warland, but the allegory of domestic containment is clear. Those men who are embraced by the female "other" are bound to find their powers diminished or else, like Dimmesdale, to simply die. Interestingly, as biographer Brenda Wineapple notes, Warland himself is "an effeminate anomaly in a world that gauges manliness . . . by the girth of a blacksmith's big arm or the heft of his wallet."[23] Hawthorne describes Warland in nearly transgendered terms: he possesses a "lack of sturdiness"; spends hours chasing butterflies; and, confronted by the strong and gruff Robert Danforth, resolves, "But I, too, will be strong in my own way."[24] Perhaps the suggestion is that the male artist will only succeed to the degree that he incorporates the female "other" into himself, thus freeing him from the task of seeking the female in another. He must be one of Gaga's transgendered men if he is to embrace his art.

A Rolling Stone interviewer recently remarked that Gaga, a former student at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, "seems, at times, like a gay man trapped in a woman's body,"[25] and it may be this sense of transgenderedness that Paglia describes as Gaga's lack of "genuine eroticism." Indeed Gaga's strangely un-erotic video for "Bad Romance"[26] ends with her lover (or customer/creator) not exploding with ecstasy but rather burned and mutilated while sparks erupt from the singer's brassiere. His lust for the "perfect woman" has resulted in his immolation.

Similarly, toward the end of *The Marble Faun*, as Kenyon wanders through the Roman Carnival in search of his missing Hilda, the masqueraders pelt him with "missiles" of rotten flowers and fake sugar plums in a scene that recalls the woodland masquerade of *Blithedale* and the street parade of *The House of the Seven Gables*.[27] In *Faun*, however, the sculptor is assaulted by "a gigantic female figure, seven feet high, at least, and taking up a third of the street's breadth with the preposterously swelling sphere of her crinoline skirts." This harlequin commences to enact a "ponderous assault upon his heart," which culminates in his mock murder: "Her suit meeting no favour, the rejected Titaness made a gesture of despair and rage; then suddenly drawing a huge

[23] Wineapple, *Hawthorne: A Life*, 176.
[24] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," in *idem, Tales and Sketches*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Library of America, 1982), 910, 912.
[25] Neil Straus, "The Broken Heart & Wild Fantasies of Lady Gaga" *Rolling Stone*, 1108/09 (8 July 2010), 66–74.
[26] "Bad Romance," dir. Francis Lewis, *The Fame Monster* (Interscope, 2009).
[27] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 345.

pistol, she took aim at the obdurate sculptor's breast, and pulled the trigger."[28] Kenyon suffers it all, a silent "victim" of the revelers in their outlandish and suggestive disguises who wave their mawkish masked heads and party contraptions in his astonished and defeated face. Hawthorne had heretofore never subjected his male artists to such emasculating abuse.

Baym, in her excellent article "*The Marble Faun*: Hawthorne's Elegy For Art," argues that the sculptor vacillates in his attraction between the sexualized eros represented by Miriam and Donatello on the one hand, and the cult of chastity offered by the virginal Hilda on the other, who not incidentally allies herself with and so represents the oppressive constraints (in the context of the novel) of the Roman Catholic state.

As Baym points out, Kenyon brokers the reunion between Miriam and Donatello, between the passionately erotic, dark-haired beauty and her new Adam, but then he demands that they remain celibate and penitent, thereby signaling "his fatal imaginative timidity... [and] his collapse as an independent man and artist."[29] What brings about this philosophical turn? Why does Kenyon adopt what Baym refers to as the conservative, emasculating "Victorian ideal" personified by Hilda, at the same time as he scorns her "unworldly and impracticable theory" and "remorselessness."[30] Whereas Coverdale is consistently self-doubting, Holgrave is pompous and voyeuristic, and Dimmesdale is enormously repressed; Kenyon cannot be said to possess any obvious personal dysfunction, so why does he choose Hilda, "the true castrator"?[31] This formulation, however, may overstate Hilda's agency, and I think it is more illuminating to ask why Kenyon chooses to castrate himself.[32]

For Hawthorne, the male artist, unless perhaps he can locate the woman within, is perpetually imprisoned, whether reclining by the domestic fireside or – like Kenyon and Donatello – isolated in his wild tower. The only consistent argument that Hawthorne seems to make is that women, perhaps because they are already culturally marginalized, are more apt than men to experience real, sustained, creative genius, albeit at great personal cost – the cost of ridicule and isolation. That Madonna has been wildly successful does not obviate the fact that she has also been widely mocked and criticized, drawing the ire of the Vatican itself.[33] In *The Marble Faun*, Miriam suffers the

[28] Ibid., 346.

[29] Nina Baym, "*The Marble Faun*: Hawthorne's Elegy For Art," *The New England Quarterly*, 44, 3 (Sept. 1971), 365.

[30] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 298, 299.

[31] Baym, "*The Marble Faun*: Hawthorne's Elegy For Art," 371.

[32] Baym notes that Hawthorne's characterization of Hilda, insofar as her self-repression represents "the apotheosis of his culture's ills," is dangerous since it mocks conservative Christian idealism. "He is risking professional destruction," writes Baym, "*The Marble Faun*: Hawthorne's Elegy For Art," 369.

[33] Steven McElroy, "One for the Pope," *New York Times*, 8 Sept. 2008, E2.

isolation of the artist as a consequence of her freedom, while Kenyon chooses what is safe – the Puritan American.

Critic Paul Brodtkorb Jr. suggest that Kenyon exhibits "Hawthorne's customary reservation about the artist or the intellectual as human being," since the artist, as a consequence of his aesthetic vision, must necessarily stand aloof from humanity.[34] Such aloofness, then, could explain Kenyon's strangeness toward Miriam–Donatello and his embrace of Hilda, herself aloof in her virgin tower. And yet his embrace of Hilda actually signals the end of his success as an artist: "Imagination and the love of art have both died out of me," Kenyon declares.[35] He is no lion of St. Mark, ravishing his virgin. In addition, Brodtkorb's analysis does not seem adequate in terms of the aesthetically insightful Miriam, since she gains artistic insight at the point that she feels most passionate towards Donatello.

LIKE A VIRGIN (ONLY NOT)

'Cause it's a hard life, with love in the world,
And I'm a hard girl,
Loving me is like chewing on pearls.

Lady Gaga, "I Like It Rough," *The Fame*

Miriam is no virgin, at least not in the sense of "pure." She is described as "mixed race,"[36] and her artistic subjects are often violent, sexually potent, biblical women: Jael, Judith, and Salome.[37] Miriam may not even be a virgin in the sexual sense, though this is never absolutely clear, her history being the subject of rumor and innuendo. Similarly, Madonna is no virgin in her song "Like a Virgin," the simile of the song suggesting that the singer is sexually experienced but that her new lover makes her feel, as the song goes, "brand new"; such a feeling is what Miriam experiences after Donatello throws her pursuer, the Model, off the Tarpeian Rock.

Hilda, however, is clearly virginal in every sense and clearly represents the domesticating spirit to which Kenyon must prostrate himself, though Bercovitch argues that Hawthorne does not in fact present Hilda as utterly "remorseless" but rather offers her as a model of Christian charity. This may seem odd, since she so sternly rejects Miriam at her time of greatest need, but Bercovitch finds that Hilda's association with the "wise virgins" of Mathew 25:1–9, who reject their "foolish" sisters, argues in favor of Hilda's "humility" and "true Christian compassion."[38] Hilda's rejection, then, is recast as an act

[34] Paul Brodtkorb Jr., "Art Allegory in *The Marble Faun*," *PMLA*, 77, 3 (June 1962), 258.
[35] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 332. [36] Ibid., 334. [37] Ibid., 35–36.
[38] Sacvan Bercovitch, "Of Wise and Foolish Virgins: Hilda versus Miriam in Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*," *New England Quarterly*, 41, 2 (June 1968), 285.

that "help[s] direct a distraught friend to face her guilt . . . and thereby, perhaps, to find her dark and lonely way to redemption."[39] But this interpretation, while it was certainly offered by Hawthorne's contemporary conservative critics,[40] assumes that Miriam is actually guilty of something requiring redemption, when even the Roman authorities see fit to exculpate her of any responsibility for the Model's murder. She certainly feels guilty, but this feeling is at least partly a consequence of Hilda's cold and self-protecting rejection of her friend.

Immediately following the murder of her mysterious pursuer, Miriam experiences new life. "The foremost result of a broken law is ever an ecstatic sense of freedom," the narrator notes, as Miriam and Donatello are overcome by a sense of "bliss, or an insanity," resulting from having torn free from "the sleepy innocence that was forever lost to them."[41] Similar to the sense of exhilaration experienced by Hepzibah and Clifford following the death of Judge Pyncheon, Miriam and Donatello are born into a new existence.

Significantly, however, it is only Miriam who really gains new sight, a new perception. Donatello nearly immediately "falls" into dejection and despair, while Miriam is endowed with a greater sensitivity, and in fact a greater artistic sensibility. The morning after the murder, while viewing Guido Reni's painting *St. Michael Trampling the Devil*, Miriam remarks, "But is it thus that Virtue looks, the moment after its death-struggle with Evil? No, no! I could have told Guido better."[42] And she does, redrawing the painting for Kenyon. She imagines, "A full third of the Archangel's feathers should have been torn from his wings; the rest all ruffled, *till they looked like Satan's own!*"[43] Her subsequent imaginative revisions prompt the American sculptor to exclaim, "For Heaven's sake, Miriam . . . paint the picture of man's struggle against sin, according to your own idea! I think it will be a master-piece."[44] Her sense of moral complexity is infinitely improved as a consequence of the murder of the Model. She rejects the simplicity of the monological perception, adopting instead a recognition of the essentially ambiguous nature of "good" and "evil."

Madonna similarly embraces a complex and ambiguous moral view, as in her video for "Justify my Love,"[45] the transgendered, sadomasochistic images of which clearly presage Gaga's "Alejandro." When "Justify My Love" was banned from Music Television (MTV) in 1990, Madonna earned an interview on the ABC program *Nightline* (which aired the complete video), and when challenged to justify her work in videos such as "Express Yourself" the singer

[39] Ibid., 286.
[40] For the popular reception of *The Marble Faun*, see Wineapple, *Hawthorne: A Life*, 326.
[41] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 137.
[42] Ibid., 143.
[43] Ibid., 143, emphasis added.
[44] Ibid., 144.
[45] "Justify My Love," dir. Jean-Baptiste Mondino, *The Immaculate Collection* (Sire Records Warner, 1990).

argued, "There wasn't a man that put that chain on me. . . . There wasn't a man . . . making me do it. I do everything by my own volition."[46] It is this sense of freedom from proscription that provides the energy behind the singer's art.[47]

Similarly, Miriam transforms herself into an agent of self-creation. Following the murder of her pursuer, Miriam is as bold as Hester:

> It was wonderful to see how the crisis developed in Miriam its own proper strength, and the faculty of sustaining the demands which it made upon her fortitude. She ceased to tremble; the beautiful woman gazed sternly at her dead enemy, endeavouring to meet and quell the look of accusation that he threw from between his half-closed eyelids.[48]

This "look of accusation" suggests Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" video, in which the singer emerges from a sleek, white, coffin-shaped pod, upon which is a Christian cross and the word "Monster." She is emotionally and physically "raped" by the women around her, though it seems at the behest of the men who have gathered to witness her gyrations. (Miriam later describes for Kenyon and Hilda, albeit in hazy terms, how she was victimized by her pursuer and fled into exile.) That Gaga finally leans over her dead "lover," breasts ablaze, does not negate the trials that brought her there.

Miriam, however, like Zenobia, is rejected by all those who might be sympathetic to her troubles, whether out of love or friendship. Prior to the murder, Kenyon rejects Miriam's desire to confide the truth of her apparently ugly past. Subsequent to the murder, Donatello rejects her overtures of love. She is left entirely isolated. Zenobia's response is to drown herself, and in what seems a clear link between the two "heroines," Miriam remonstrates with Kenyon, following his rejection of her, "My secret is not a pearl. . . . Yet a man might drown himself in plunging after it!"[49]

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Dimmesdale's death occurs near the novel's close, and Hester's "voluntary" isolation in her cabin and Pearl's escape abroad form a quick denouement. In *The Marble Faun*, the murder and Miriam's transformation occur in the first third of the novel, and Hawthorne spends the next two-thirds redrawing the characters' psychic landscapes. Donatello might not have "sinned" in murdering the phantom-like Model, who in Baym's psychological interpretation represents the oppressive "father" figure, but Donatello surely errs in choosing to isolate himself, like Ethan Brand, from the possibility of human intimacy. Kenyon, as has already been noted, rejects complexity (and artistry) in favor of the single point of view offered by chaste idealism. And Hilda, I have argued, is nearly a mockery.

[46] Interview with Forrest Sawyer, *Nightline*, 3 Dec. 1990.

[47] I understand that feminist critics might consider this statement highly arguable. See note 7 above.

[48] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 149.

[49] Ibid., 101.

But what of Miriam? Immediately prior to Hilda's disappearance, Kenyon finds Miriam being drawn by a carriage through the streets of Rome, bejeweled by

> 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 coloured 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.[50]

Miriam's red gem recalls Zenobia's "hothouse flower," worn on her breast and signaling her passion and strength, but whereas Zenobia is stripped of her flower by that novel's close, Miriam gains her gem after her involvement in the Model's murder. Moreover, when Miriam and Donatello meet Kenyon in the countryside, she insists that they spend "one more day in the wild freedom of this sweet-scented air!"[51] And besides free, she seems wise, having "assured him [Donatello] that there is no such thing as earthly justice, and especially none here, under the Head of Christendom!"[52]

Evidently, while she has nominally subjugated herself to Donatello, the "gem" of her humanity has grown even more brilliant, and I believe that this is because Miriam, finally, is an extension of Pearl and Hawthorne's unconscious experiment in imagining a possible future for his diminutive wild girl.

Hester Prynne, in terms of her embellishment of the "A" and her skill with the needle, is arguably the first of Hawthorne's female artists, though really her creative forces are bound up with Pearl. She is a radical creation, dwelling outside the bounds of traditional Puritan morality and thus forced to flee America. Imagined thus, Miriam is an adult Pearl. A child of Protestant English and Catholic Italian parents, possessed also of Jewish ancestry, and rumored to harbor "one burning drop of African blood in her veins,"[53] Miriam embodies cosmopolitan, transnational modernity. Unlike Hilda, who identifies herself as a "daughter of the Puritans,"[54] Miriam's origins are complex and indefinite, but her creative aspirations, her desire for experience, are clear and earnest. She is a child of many nations, and yet she refuses, like Pearl, to employ any one single perception.

The last time we see Miriam is beneath the open dome of the pagan-era Pantheon, which "stands almost at the central point of the labyrinthine intricacies of the modern city."[55] Here, inside this edifice converted into a Catholic place of worship, Hilda and Kenyon find a somnolent cat napping across one of the altars: "Their footsteps disturbing her, she awoke, raised herself, and sat blinking in the sun, yet with a certain dignity and

[50] Ibid., 308. [51] Ibid., 332. [52] Ibid., 336. [53] Ibid., 20.
[54] Ibid., 44. [55] Ibid., 354.

self-possession, as if conscious of representing a Saint." Kenyon then remarks that such a creature has not been in the Pantheon "since the [pagan] days of ancient Egypt."[56] This association aligns the cat – a symbol of female sexuality, as in the Madonna video – with his unfinished Cleopatra, and moments later they find Miriam at the spot where, through an opening in the institutional edifice, something new and natural grows. Hilda cannot help but look up at the clear, blue, unambiguous sky appearing through the dome, but Miriam is kneeling, tree-like, in the same spot where, Kenyon notes, "so much rain has fallen . . . in the last two thousand years, that it is green with small, fine moss, such as grows over tombstones in a damp English churchyard."[57] Miriam, it seems, is the female pagan, much as Pearl is the rebellious child who forms the letter "A" in green seaweed, thereby mocking the Puritanical trappings of her mother's guilt. Indeed, the red gem that Miriam has sported on her breast is the scarlet "A" transformed into an object of transcendence.

Finally, earlier in the novel, Hilda muses upon the location of the "the holy candlestick of the Jews," supposedly tossed into the Tiber during the reign of the first Christian emperor, Constantine. Kenyon retorts, "It probably stuck where it fell . . . imbedded thirty feet deep in the mud."[58] Hilda, however, thinks otherwise:

> When it is found again, and seven lights are kindled and burning it it, the whole world will gain the illumination it needs . . . As each branch is lighted, it shall have a differently coloured lustre from the other six; and when all the seven are kindled, their radiance shall combine into the intense white light of Truth![59]

If Hawthorne ever fashioned a symbol to illustrate the value of moral complexity and multiple points of view, then the seven-armed candlestick, each festooned with a different light, is that symbol. Hilda, however, is not able to render her idea into art, and she says that she will suggest the conception to some artist back in America. But Miriam, as at least partly Jewish, is already allied with her idea. And in fact, in the novel's final two paragraphs,[60] the connection between the menorah and Miriam is cemented in the form of her bridal gift to Hilda – a bracelet "composed of *seven* ancient Etruscan gems."[61] Hilda recalls how Miriam, "once, with the exuberance of fancy that distinguished her . . . had amused herself with telling a mythical and magic legend for each gem, comprising the imaginary adventures and catastrophe of its former wearer."[62] Miriam is the author of the lights, each composed of a different story. Thus the multiplicity of narratives is blended together to form a unique and beautiful whole, as the seven lights, taken together, render "the

[56] Ibid., 355. [57] Ibid., 354. [58] Ibid., 288. [59] Ibid., 288.
[60] Not including the Postscript, which was added by Hawthorne to the second edition at the behest of a confused reading public.
[61] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 358, emphasis added. [62] Ibid., 358.

light of Truth." Miriam is the finished Cleopatra, which Kenyon has given up. "In a word, all Cleopatra – fierce, voluptuous, passionate, tender, wicked, terrible, and full of poisonous and rapturous enchantment – was kneaded into what, only a week or two before, had been a lump of wet clay from the Tiber."[63] This is the same Tiber from which the candlestick emerges, the clay having been transformed into Miriam.

Brodtkorb argues that the legendary destruction of the menorah signals "the coming of institutionalized religion [which] allows the genius of art to be swallowed up,"[64] though he qualifies his argument to suggest that Hawthorne also points to the corruption of both Catholic *and* pagan Rome, and thus the destruction of the menorah does not merely symbolize the "drowning" of art at the hands of institutional Christianity. Nevertheless, I would argue that the resurfacing of the seven lights, this time in the form of Miriam's bracelet – her wedding gift to the Puritanical Hilda – at least signals "how much history is heaped into the intervening space" between Etruscan, Roman, and Christian,[65] between narratives; and how each is built on the crumbling ruins of the other. Miriam's gift, then, metaphorically represents the resurgence of a new, albeit ancient, artistic vision, though it is highly doubtful whether the American will view it as such.

In Madonna's "Like a Prayer" video, the singer witnesses a woman's murder at the hands of a gang of white men. The police, however, arrest a black man who has come to the victim's aid. What follows is a complex series of images, all related to Catholic iconography, in which the black man is rendered as a Catholic saint, the singer is stricken with stigmata, and wooden crosses are set ablaze while Madonna dances, breasts bouncing, in the foreground. She frees the saint with her kisses, symbolizing the freeing of the man for the crime he did not commit. Signs of transgressiveness abound: no longer in his saintly garb, the black man kisses her passionately while she is prostrate on a pew, a black Gospel choir sings in the otherwise Catholic church, and the burning crosses are rendered a cultural critique of racism, Christianity, and sex roles.

Arguments could be made for relating Hawthorne's work to contemporary female pop artists other than Madonna and Lady Gaga, and such homologies would be intriguing. What sets these artists apart from earlier female pop "transgressors," however, is also what sets *The Marble Faun* apart from other Hawthorne novels – its focus upon visual media. The artworks at the center of *The Marble Faun* – paintings, sketches, sculptures, Roman ruins, the Colosseum, the Parthenon, and especially the Faun of Praxiteles itself – serve to carry much of the pathos of the plot, and each character's relationship to his

[63] Ibid., 99. [64] Brodtkorb, "Art Allegory in *The Marble Faun*," 255.
[65] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 7.

or her visual medium serves to inflect and deepen the reader's perception of each. Critic Antoine Traisnel recently made a similar point regarding the centrality of the novel's *art-ifacts* to the novel's theme, arguing, "Uncertainty [vis-a-vis these artworks] is the condition of authenticity."[66] Each artist – Kenyon, Hilda, and Miriam – both perceive and create differently, each approaching the Ideal from a different quarter and thereby revealing to the reader the incompleteness of such. "It seems *The Marble Faun* invites readers to look at objects for what they stand for, not for what they are."[67]

The centrality of the image is key to Madonna and Lady Gaga as well, each artist directing the audience's gaze toward objects that represent a realignment of perceptions. These objects are not startling in themselves – the bowl of milk, the cross, the coffin, the lion of St. Mark – but they are narrativized in such a way that their meaning is re-imagined.

Madonna was the first major female pop star to utilize the music video to augment her popular reception and to narrativize herself in a way that was not possible through her recordings alone. MTV, which began airing in 1981 with "Video Killed the Radio Star" by the Buggles, was critical to shaping her image, each hit song accompanied by a popular video that, as I have described, served to highlight the images and icons that provide a narrative backdrop for the song's lyrics. Indeed, a song such as "Like a Prayer" is really devoid of a narrative context until experienced in the music video, which not incidentally was reviled by the Vatican for its transgressive handling of Catholic iconography.[68] Similarly, Gaga's "Bad Romance," for which she won an MTV "Video of the Year" award in 2010, is only transgressive in its video form; the lyrics themselves are quite tame and free of coffins, crosses, monsters, and male incineration.

At MTV's televised awards ceremony, Gaga wore a dress composed of dried meat, accepting her award from Cher, who wore an outfit that recalled a similar one that had caused her video for "If I Could Turn Back Time," to be banned from MTV in 1989.[69] But whereas Cher's clothing had been controversial because it was sexually revealing, Gaga's border-crossing arises not from her sexuality per se but as a consequence of her conflation of sexuality, violence, misogyny, and gender questioning. The meat dress inverts the image of Cher's provocative clothing, placing Gaga at the center of a slew of opposing social forces.

[66] Antoine Traisnel, "The Temptation of Kitsch: The Fall of Hawthorne," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, 34, 1–2 (Spring–Fall 2008), 65.
[67] Ibid., 77.
[68] McElroy, "One for the Pope," E2.
[69] Krista Smith, "Forever Cher," *Vanity Fair*, Dec. 2010.

Miriam, as well, occupies a similar nexus at the close of *The Marble Faun*. This reading of Miriam is suggested by recent Hawthorne critics, as by Robert Milder, who notes,

> As an ideologist of freedom, Miriam is the most radical of all [of Hawthorne's primary female protagonists]. The real threat of the dark heroine is not that she is a transgressor but that she comes to understand transgression circumstantially rather than absolutely and as a vehicle for moral freedom.[70]

Or, as Lady Gaga declares, "I'm a free bitch."[71] Miriam is arguably the same.

[70] Robert Milder, "Beautiful Illusions: Hawthorne and the Site of Moral Law," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, 33, 2 (Fall 2007), 10.
[71] Lady Gaga, "Dance in the Dark," *The Fame Monster* (Interscope, 2009).