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**Rebekah Hyneman's Poetry:
A Portrait of the Artist as "The Mother and Wife in Israel"**

1. Introduction and Short Biography of Rebekah Hyneman

Rebekah Hyneman was born in Pennsylvania in 1816 to Abraham Gumpertz, a Jewish-German storekeeper, and a Christian mother. Rebekah married Benjamin Hyneman, a jewelry peddler, in 1835 and had two children, Elias Leon (born in 1837) and Samuel (born in 1839). While she was pregnant with Samuel, Benjamin went on a peddling expedition to Texas and never came back. It is thought that he was killed by either Indians or thieves.

Hyneman converted to Judaism in 1845; her sister Sarah, who was married to Benjamin's brother, Leon, had already converted before her marriage in 1834. There are neither letters nor diaries which address the issue of Hyneman's belated conversion taking place only several years after her husband's death, but we might speculate that maintaining a very close relationship with Sarah and Leon drew her closer to Judaism. Tragically, Rebekah's eldest son, a volunteer in the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry during the Civil War, was captured and died at the Andersonville prison camp in 1865. Her younger son Samuel died six months earlier of an incurable disease. The grieving mother died ten years after Elias in 1875.

Shortly after Hyneman's conversion her poetry began to appear regularly in the press. During the almost twenty years from 1846 and till the early 1860s, Hyneman published numerous poems, mainly on Jewish themes; a novel; and several short novellas, articles and obituaries. Most of these works were printed in *The Occident and American-Jewish Advocate*, one of the most influential Jewish periodicals in the mid-nineteenth-century America, which was edited by Leeser of Philadelphia, who was also the cantor of Congregation Mikveh Israel and Aguilar's publisher, as I have noted. She also contributed short stories, novellas and a serial novel to *The Masonic Mirror and Keystone*, a newspaper edited by her brother-in-law Leon Hyneman, whose publishing house printed her collection of secular poems, *The Leper and Other Poems* in 1853.

In spite of Hyneman's important literary contributions to both the Jewish and general readership, her work has almost been totally neglected in the last one hundred and fifty years. In *Writing their Nations* (1992) and in her earlier article "Fannie Hurst and her Nineteenth Century Predecessors" (1988), Diane Lichtenstein very briefly refers to few of Hyneman's literary works on Jewish themes. As far as I know, no other significant critical study has as yet been dedicated to Hyneman's extensive and truly remarkable literary production, which, I shall claim, sheds light on an important era in the history of the American nation and that of its Jews.

The questions I have asked myself time and again when reading Hyneman's works, mainly while trying to figure out the reasons for the above-mentioned neglect – and to which I have no explicit answers – are: have her and her contemporaries' works been regarded as unworthy of scholarly attention? Or, more likely, was this kind of literature marginalized or underappreciated due to its "moralistic" character? Perhaps literature aimed at educating the Jewish public was considered as lacking in artistic worth? In Tompkins's words, probably such literature "has been dismissed by its detractors...in a struggle to supplant the tradition of evangelical piety and moral commitment" by female poets and novelists such as Hyneman. "In reaction against their world view," Tompkins continues, "and perhaps even more against their success, twentieth-century critics have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority" (124). Have Hyneman's and her contemporaries' writings been viewed as trifling, mainly containing "moralistic fairy tale-like stories," as Lichtenstein suggests ("Hurst" 27)? Has this kind of literature been looked upon as having negligible value because it was written by Jewish wives and mothers as some kind of leisurely pastime? Why has Hyneman's non-Jewish literature, mainly aimed at American mainstream readership, been totally forgotten?

It is difficult to answer these questions, especially since research devoted to the artistic endeavor of nineteenth-century American-Jewish female writers has been very scarce, as almost no diaries, letters or other documents that might have shed light on the contemporary or later public or critical response to their work have not been as yet discovered. I can only speculate that the relative neglect of these writers reflects a much larger trend, that of the under-representation of nineteenth-century female writers in general. Susan Koppelman lists 1800 American women who published at least one story between 1827 and 1993. "Many of these women," comments Koppelman, "published enough stories to have filled several books, but their stories are, as yet, uncollected" (1).^{*} Literature produced by ethnic, racial or religious minorities suffers from even greater neglect than that written by the "privileged Protestant white women who had educational, and often, in their early lives, financial advantages far greater than most of their contemporaries," which might explain why the literary works of Hyneman and her Jewish contemporary female writers slipped into oblivion (Koppelman 2).

The study of the "Cult of True Womanhood," first introduced by Barbara Welter in 1966, has set the agenda for a whole generation of scholars of women's history for more than three decades.^{**} However, while the "Cult" focuses primarily on the experiences of white women in general, it does not distinguish between the writings of white Protestant women and their Jewish contemporaries. "In this way," Tracy Fessenden suggests, "the true woman's definitional association with 'religion' allows her race and class positions to go unremarked" (164). Nineteenth-century Jewish female writers, a religious and cultural

^{*} Koppelman claims that although these women "invented the American short story genre, along with a few of their male colleagues," the ratio between women and men writers ranges from one in seven (according to one estimate) or one in eleven (according to another) (4).

^{**} The ability to tick off the four traits of true womanhood (Piety, Purity, Domesticity and Submissiveness) became a password for feminist scholars (Roberts 150).

minority within a minority (women writers in patriarchal society), have been misrepresented by their contemporaries. Modern critics have failed as well to relate to their distinctive contribution as Jews, and thus are to be held responsible for minimizing these writers' contribution to the nineteenth-century general effort. However, it should be noted that Jewish male writers of the same period have likewise not received enough critical attention, probably since most of them (Isaac M. Wise, Isaac Leeser and others) wrote mainly religious literature aimed purposely at a quite limited Jewish Orthodox readership.*

Lichtenstein contends that the "middle class Sephardic and German Jewish woman of the mid-nineteenth-century emulated the True Woman to demonstrate her own American citizenship." However, a Jewish woman also had a national ideal to live up to – that of "the Mother of Israel" ("Hurst" 28). Lichtenstein views these two missions of being both a good American citizen and a "mother in Israel" as at times conflicting. I shall claim that rather than being in opposition, these important undertakings that most female Jewish writers were full-heartedly devoted to actually complement each other. I argue that Hyneman constructs multiple identities in her factual life, prose and poetry, none of which necessarily contradicts the other. She was at once a convert to Judaism and a zealous opponent of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles (in spite of the fact that she converted six years after her husband's death). She was at once an American patriot but probably also one of the earliest Zionists, advocating the Jewish people's return to Jerusalem. She was a Jewish writer and poet, a "Mother in Israel," as I would like to call her, who concerned herself with Jewish holidays, traditions, and forced conversion to Christianity, and a writer who addressed the general public, especially female readership. One of her major efforts was dedicated to the creation of a female "sweet communion," a sort of spiritual union of all women, both Jewish and Gentile.

2. Rebekah Hyneman's Private and Religious Poetry

It is her right to teach the infant mind,
Training is ever upward in its course,
To root out evil passions that would bind
The upward current of his reason's force;
(*The Leper*, "Woman's Rights," Stanza II)

In 1853 Rebekah Hyneman published a collection of more than eighty poems, entitled *The Leper and Other Poems*. Most of the poems deal with Jewish topics such as Jewish holidays, biblical heroes and heroines, hymns, etc. Some of the poems in the collection are of a more personal nature (such as "Like Some Lone Bird," "I Dreamed of Thee" and "The Unforgotten") in which the poetess mourns her deceased husband.

* Until 1850 the Jewish population of the United States remained fairly small, numbering 50,000 out of a general population of 23 million (Karp, *Haven* 374). Most of the Jews were scattered all around America, and only those living in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and Savannah had access to Jewish journals and literature.

The series of "Female Scriptural Characters" (included in *The Leper*) carries on the tradition of her contemporary Jewish poets and writers such as Grace Aguilar, Adah Isaac Menken and Penina Moise, who, like Hyneman, were taken with Jewish biblical heroines. Hyneman's series is among the most extensive and insightful, presenting the biblical women as doting mothers, courageous leaders and wise prophetesses. In the conclusion to the series, Hyneman's narrator describes a "sweet communion" between herself and her protagonists. This close association is based on the mutual faith, reciprocal happiness and sadness, and love and anguish, commonly shared by all the members of the female sex.

In the preface to the book Hyneman quotes from Hawthorne's Preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, where he somewhat apologetically acknowledges a writer's rather delicate position:

It is a good lesson thought it may be a hard one, for a person who has dreamed of literary fame, and of making for himself a rank among the world's dignitaries by such means, to step out of the narrow circle in which his claims are recognized, and to find how utterly devoid of significance beyond that circle, is all that he achieves and all that he aims at. (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*)

Stepping out of that "narrow circle" is a harsh experience for Hyneman, whose only publications until 1853 were within the homely and friendly frame of *The Occident*, a journal mainly addressed to and read by a Jewish readership. Now, as her new book is intended for a wider, Jewish and non-Jewish audience, she "trembles" that the non-Jewish audience specifically will scrutinize the "unassuming little volume," whose writer comes "before them unknown and unnamed" (*Leper* iii). She confesses that she feels much safer when addressing her coreligionists, as she believes that they will appreciate the sincere love she "bear[s] for the faith of [her] adoption" (*Leper* iii), and thus will be more lenient in their judgment.

In addition to presenting personal contemplations on various topics, Hyneman's poetry has a much broader program, namely bridging the gap between Jews and Gentiles. Hyneman, like Aguilar, felt that the Gentiles' lack of knowledge of Jewish traditions leads to estrangement between Jews and non-Jews. Gentiles educated on centuries-old anti-Semitic stereotypes are often biased towards Jews. Both Aguilar and Hyneman believed that literature portraying the beauty of Jewish practices and the moral conduct of their coreligionists would aid in eradicating the existing prejudices against Jews. Stepping out of the "narrow circle," Hyneman describes to her non-Jewish readership her people's strong yearning for Zion ("Jerusalem," "Holy Land"); the beauty, grace and courage of Jewish biblical women ("Female Scriptural Characters"); the magnitude of Jewish leaders ("The Leper," "The Lament of Judah," "Samuel"); and the splendor and awe of Jewish holidays ("Pentecost," "The Day of Atonement"). Poems describing Female Scriptural Characters, I would estimate, could interest Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, as both groups were well-acquainted with the history of the Jewish matriarchs. Actually, such poems were "determined to underscore the values and teachings that Jews and Christians share" (Nadell and Sarna 5).

Hyneman's non-religious poetry describes her personal musings, her painful longing for her deceased husband, and her avid motherly sentiments; it is mainly directed at

other women, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Some of these poems are of a very intimate nature, but as her intended readership is mostly female Hyneman creates a certain kind of collective experience, a sort of intimate bond between herself and her readers. When building a “sweet communion” between herself and her biblical heroines – wives and mothers in Israel – Hyneman places herself along a continuum of Jewish women who have been striving for the well-being of their people (*Leper* 107).

When sharing her intimate feelings of pain and suffering with her contemporary female readership she creates a different kind of “sweet communion.” Many of these women, like she, lost their husbands or fiancés at war or during raids; many of these women are mothers, who, like Hyneman, worry about their sons and daughters. Hyneman is no feminist; yet, her poetry is that of a woman addressing women. It praises the woman for her multifaceted roles (mother, wife, and daughter), and it glorifies her strength of character matched with consideration and devotion. In “The Dignity of Woman,” she praises the sensible and modest woman who shows her might when bringing her man back home:

But ever, with Magical force and skill,
Woman proves the might of her Empire still,
And Fails to win the fugitive back;
The wanderer returns at once, at her call,
And ever remains beneath modesty’s thrall,
While she guides him with silken thread on the track.
(Hyneman, *The Leper*, “The Dignity of Woman” 177, Stanza III)

The man, the wanderer, tries to “grasp the wind,” to “clutch the distant star,” to participate in warfare. The man is haughty, proud and self-reliant; he “knows not the exchange of soul.” Nevertheless, he succumbs to the woman’s gentle but firm power. The woman “guides” him, she “teaches the strength which can overcome hate” and “brings peace to his bosom.” While men are preoccupied with “short-lived power,” temporary ambitions and hatred, women possess wisdom, grace and warm affection. In Hyneman’s view, the woman’s role is to guide, to secure and to teach her man.

But ever, with the gentlest and mildest tone
Woman secures him, a slave to her throne.
(Hyneman, *The Leper*, “The Dignity of Woman” 177, Stanza IX)

Between 1830 and 1860 America experienced wide-ranging social and economic changes commonly referred to as urbanization and industrialization. These changes brought to economic panic, social turmoil and escalated crime rates, which in turn exacerbated the clash between the serene female home environment and the outer chaotic male sphere. “The world outside woman’s tranquil home was unstable, impersonal and rugged,” comments Mary P. Ryan (145). The woman is the queen of the house; the man, tired and disappointed by the hardships of the world, comes back to his queen’s “holy fire.” The woman’s apparent meekness is thus also her strength.

In “Woman’s Rights,” Hyneman’s woman is less “regal” than her counterpart in “The Dignity of Woman.” In this poem Hyneman transforms “the woman’s duties” into

the "woman's rights." The woman is responsible for "making his [the man's] home an earthy paradise." Moreover, she is responsible for the education of the children:

It is her right to teach the infant mind,
Training is ever upward in its course,
To root out evil passions that would bind
The upward current of his reason's force;
(Hyneman, *The Leper*, "Woman's Rights" 177, Stanza II)

It is also her right "to sooth the couch of pain." Like her fictional character Deborah Malchoir, the woman should not complain about the various tasks she is expected to perform, as she was ordained by God to carry out these duties and it is in her power to perform them well. The woman is well-protected within her home; she is a "flower" sheltered from the dark storm (the threatening world), yet it is her role to protect others – those weaker and less shielded – such as the children and the sick.

She is a flower that blossoms best, unseen,
Sheltered within the precincts of her home;
There, should no dark'ning storm-cloud intervene,
There, the loud-strife of wordlings never come.
(Hyneman, *The Leper*, "Woman's Rights" 177, Stanza IV)

Lichtenstein asserts that Hyneman's poetry, as a rule, does not challenge the nineteenth-century accepted gender roles and therefore, she concludes, it is of negligible value (*Writing* 69). Conversely, while Lichtenstein criticizes Hyneman's work for lacking a feminist credo, I suggest that its conformity to the nineteenth-century traditional values does not reveal its weakness. Hyneman's work, besides promoting a deliberate political agenda – that of bringing together Jews and Gentiles together, as I have suggested – is aimed at creating "a sweet communion" of women. As such, her poems are perfectly in line with the Victorian ideals of "True Womanhood," and with her more personal interest in promoting the role of the Jewish mother (the "Mother of Israel" image). While complying with the popular sentimental poetic genre and portraying conventional characters concurrently with her presentation of Jewish women and mothers in the most righteous fashion, Hyneman empowers the Jewish woman without creating antagonism. In "The Dignity of Woman" and "Woman's Rights" as well as in her tale "The Lost Diamond," woman's gentleness, devotion, care of the family, and piety are definitely seen by Hyneman as her gender's strong points. The woman's contributions to her family and her nation are no less important than the male's function in the public space. The woman educates the children according to her spiritual, religious and moral beliefs, and these children, in turn, according to Hyneman, shape the nation's values.

Hyneman's private poems in which she laments her dead husband are among the most touching and affectionate of her collection. In "Like Some Lone Bird" the poet compares herself to a lonely bird that lost her mate. The bird's "wailing note tells of its grief o'er wood and plain" (*The Leper*, "Like Some Lone Bird" 149). She also likens herself to

a “crushed and pale” flower whose “leaflets scattered to the gale” (*The Leper*, “Like Some Lone Bird” 149). There is no one to support the lonely bird, no one to “raise that drooping flower” (*The Leper*, “Like Some Lone Bird” 149). A woman, like the bird, Hyneman suggests, is very miserable without a mate. In “I Dreamed of Thee,” the poet dreams about being reunited with her deceased husband whose love she experiences only in a short vision, for a “brief moment.” After waking up from her “sweet dream”, she feels it was “cruel mockery” (*The Leper*, “I Dreamed of Thee” 186). She is frail, miserable, and all alone:

Oh! why did earth recall me then?
Too soon that glorious vision faded;
And I awoke from that sweet dream,
To bear my lot alone – unaided.

(*The Leper*, “Like Some Lone Bird” 149, Stanza VII)

In “The Unforgotten” the speaker again grieves over the loss of a husband, whose grave is “far, far away, in a distant land,” unadorned by her hand and “unwept by a kindred eye” (Hyneman, *The Leper*, “The Unforgotten” 192). The sad knowledge that she neither knows where her husband was buried nor is able to water his grave “by tears of love” fills her heart with deep sorrow (Hyneman, *The Leper*, “The Unforgotten” 192). Interestingly, her personal experience grows to be a collective one. “Thy grave” and “thy death” in stanza I are transformed in stanzas III and IV to “those graves” and “many a scene where mourners rove” (*The Leper*, “The Unforgotten” 192). The only consolation a woman may feel is when recalling “those happier hours” spent with her beloved, but the idea that there is no solace in her “saddest hours,” as there is no grave she can shed tears on or attend to makes her mourning almost unbearable (*The Leper*, “The Unforgotten”). The speaker’s private sorrow is shared by many other women and wives who have lost their dear ones in war or while traveling on business. The collective experience does not ease the individual’s pain in any enduring manner, but perhaps the sense of “sweet communion” that exists among women, gives some kind of temporary consolation.

Hyneman’s group of poems entitled “Female Scriptural Characters” appeared in *The Occident* between 1846 and 1850 and was collected in *The Leper and Other Poems* in 1853. The collection is divided into two series. The first includes poems describing Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel, Miriam, Ruth, and Naomi and Esther. The second series contains poems about Jochebed, Deborah, Huldah, Hannah, Judith, and Hannah – Mother of Seven Martyrs. The opening poem of the book is entitled “The Leper” and tells the tragic story of a leper, who “sprang from the princely Maccabees,” was betrayed, victimized, and banished by his family from home (*The Leper* 1). His leprosy forced him to travel only at night, hide from people, sleep in caves, and eventually brings about his tragic death.

Lepers have been considered as outcasts since biblical times; actually, the term “leper” became a metaphor for an outsider. Leprosy often brought the bearer under communal scrutiny and, at times, contempt. In the biblical times, leprosy involved separation from the community and the priestly performance of restorative purification rites (*Leviticus* 13-14). Susan Sontag comments that leprosy “was a social text in which corruption

was made visible; an exemplum, an emblem of decay. Nothing is more punitive than to give a disease a meaning – that meaning being invariably a moralistic one" (58). I suggest that Hyneman's choice of *The Leper and Other Poems* as the title for her book is not unintentional. Hyneman, as a convert, might have felt at times as an outsider, especially after the death of her husband. A converted widow would probably be watched by the Jewish community with some suspicion; questions might have also been raised about the kind of Jewish education she gave to her orphaned sons. Moreover, as a woman writer living in male-dominated society and making a living by writing she might have been viewed with some mistrust. Her "Maccabben leper," I would speculate, symbolizes her own feeling of social and cultural estrangement, which might also explain her incessant attempts to fit in by pleasing both her Jewish and non-Jewish readership.

The group of poems entitled "Female Scriptural Characters," describes the Jewish matriarchs as very beautiful, of "a high and noble race" ("Sarah") or "birth and lineage high" ("Rebekah"). Rebekah is praised for her faith, love and "modest worth" (*The Leper*, "Rebekah" 81). It is worthy of note that at first sight it seems that Hyneman's mothers of Israel are paradoxically portrayed as being in line with the stereotypical images of Jewish women popular with nineteenth-century non-Jewish male writers and poets. Both they and she portray Jewish women as outstandingly beautiful. However, though the Romantic male writers often challenged Jewish women's moral demeanor while admiring their exotic splendor, Hyneman employs similar stereotypical images of Jewish oriental beauty in a different way.

Rather than portraying the Jewish women as "dark ladies" or as whores (using the opposing image of the Madonna), Hyneman transforms her protagonists into her friends and companions. The lavish oriental sexuality of Jewish women as portrayed in the works of many nineteenth-century Romantic poets and writers (such as Balzac's Judith in *Le Médecin de Campagne*; Byron's Jewish women in *The Jewish Melodies*, etc.) is converted in Hyneman's work into familial grace and gentility. The matriarchs are viewed as beautiful and mysterious, but they are not portrayed as sexualized women. Sarah wears a "regal robe, on her brow the diadem." Rebekah is the "fair daughter of the East." Her virgin's brow is veiled and only her dark eyes are seen. Rachel is the "fair and happy bride" who gleams of sunshine, while Leah, the "sad dove" has no beauty, but her heart is ready for sacrifice. While one sister is happy in her love, the other bears "woman's lot," that of "deep grief" (*The Leper*, "Sarah" 80; "Rebekah" 81; "Leah and Rachel" 82).

The speaker keeps each of these women in her "earnest Jewish heart." These "sweet forms" turn her hours of pain to happiness. She, her female friends, and the biblical heroines form a "sweet communion," a special alliance of women, in which "our spirits [are] held together" (*The Leper*, "Conclusion" 106). The speaker believes that each Jewish woman cherishes the vision of her biblical female ancestors that she holds in her soul. Hyneman suggests that her task as a poet is to immortalize the biblical heroines' images, to bring them "back to life," to make them real. These women, like Hyneman and her

* Numerous nineteenth-century writers described their Jewish protagonists as wearing expensive and lustrous jewelry. (See Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine*, etc.). Jewish beauty, ornate with the best and richest stones, evoked deep-rooted images of the Jewess's eroticism and her father's wealth.

contemporaries, had their “woman’s share of anguish.” They “lived, loved and suffered,” and that is what makes them human and approachable. However, these are not common women, they are the Jewish matriarchs. That is, they are regal and noble, but nonetheless not distanced from their people as evidenced by Hyneman’s intimate portrayal of Sarah:

From her our race hath sprang-
She has given us a dower
More dear than gems or robes of price,
Or the pomp of earthy power.
(*The Leper*, “Sarah” 80, Stanza IV)

Hyneman’s treatment of the biblical Miriam differs from that of the matriarchs in several ways. First, her poem is entitled “Miriam’s song,” rather than just “Miriam.” Miriam’s art – her music – is at the center of the verse. Secondly, the poem contains a lengthy introduction in which the speaker describes the historical events that preceded Miriam’s song. After recounting the fatal defeat of the mighty Egyptian king and his warriors, she devotes the last stanza of the introduction to Miriam’s song:

Now on the air,
And home across those waters, comes the sound
Of woman’s voice; exultingly it swells;
Earth hears it, and rejoices, and the sea
Flows with a softer murmur to the sound.
(*The Leper* 86, Stanza V)

Moses, Aaron, and the people of Israel are not mentioned; only the sound of Miriam’s song is present. Parah’s defeat, however, is juxtaposed with Miriam’s beautiful song. Nature itself seems to be against Israel’s foes; it rejoices at Miriam’s song. The poet Miriam, praises God, and Nature actively participates in her song of glory:

A song, a song of praise to Israel’s God,
Whose strong right arm hath triumphed o’er our foes;
.....
Let earth, and sea, and air, repeat again
The loud hosannahs of our joyful strain.
(*The Leper*, “Miriam’s Song” 86, Stanza I)

In the final stanza of Miriam’s song the speaker pays tribute to her heroine. Miriam died long ago, records the poet, but her “fond lips that breathed aloud that joyful prayer” will never be forgotten. She is “weak and powerless,” but her task of pruning “the budding branch and bid it bloom for heaven” makes her more powerful than her brothers (*The Leper*, “Miriam’s Song” 87). A woman’s meekness, the verse implies, is misleading; Miriam’s poetry – her art – makes her strong, since the song is eternal. An additional strength of a woman, and of Miriam in particular, is her accord with Nature; she is portrayed as an integral part of Nature, and Nature is in her full command.

Miriam's identity as a poet-singer to whom the women's special "Song of the Sea" is attributed is quite important for the understanding of Hyneman's own identity as a poet and a writer. The biblical Miriam, like Hyneman, uses poetry to celebrate her faith in God and to give confidence to other women. The biblical Miriam "took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels. And Miriam chanted for them, 'Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea'" (*Exodus* 15:20-21). In spite of the haste and fright of the escape from Egypt, Miriam and her Jewish counterparts took with them their musical instruments. Their certainty and faith in the Jewish people's salvation and in their brighter future are unshaken. Zornberg comments that the women leapt into danger with joy. This is what is required – at least from prophets, if not from the lesser mortals: joy and song in the midst of the greatest danger (213-20).

As exemplified by Miriam's song, Hyneman's poetry is aimed at achieving two complementary goals. To begin with, poetry is for Hyneman a tool for praising God. In her poem "The Hour of Death," written just a few weeks after her conversion in 1845, Hyneman's speaker asserts that even at a time when Israel is oppressed and debased it holds fast to its faith and prays to God:

Then hear, O Israel, your God is one;
Bow down your heads and glorify *His* name,
Proclaim his unity from sire to son.
(*The Leper*, "The Hour of Death" 155-56)

Secondly, as for Miriam, for Hyneman poetry is a means of creating a spiritual union of Jewish women and thus empowering them. In "The Dignity of Woman" and "Woman's Rights," women's softness and dedication attest of their strength. In "Miriam's Song," the poetess's art (both Miriam's and Hyneman's) gives inspiration, faith, and hope, thus deepening the moral strength of her female followers. In spite of the fact that Miriam was punished with leprosy and was sent away from the camp for seven days, the Jewish women refused to move forward until their leader had recovered. The same is metaphorically true for Hyneman. Despite the fact that Hyneman might have felt at times like a "leper," an outcast within the Jewish community, her poetry was regularly published in Jewish periodicals, thus, probably even paradoxically, placing her amongst the chief Jewish artists of her time.

Among Hyneman's "Scriptural Characters," the only other biblical woman besides Miriam who sings a song is Ruth, though there is no mentioning of Ruth's singing in the Bible. Hyneman dedicates two poems to the story of Ruth. The first, "Ruth and Naomi," describes Ruth's complete devotion to her mother-in-law; when Naomi urges Ruth to leave her and return to her Moabian family, Ruth firmly declines the offer, saying:

I cannot leave thee, mother! In my heart
There springs a well of such deep tenderness,
A fountain gushing with such earnest love –

Earnest, untiring love for thee, as spring
Only from God.

(*The Leper*, “Ruth and Naomi” 88, Stanza III)

While many of Hyneman’s poems (“Hannah,” “Hannah – Mother of Seven Martyrs,” “Woman’s Rights,” etc.) are dedicated to doting mothers, this is the only poem describing boundless daughterly devotion. Like Ruth, who tied her fate with the Jewish family of her deceased husband, Hyneman herself converted and became a devout Jew after the death of her Jewish husband. Both women share a strong belief in God, piety, and a sense of binding devotion to their husbands’ faith. Depicting Ruth as a fellow artist strengthens even more powerfully the ties between the poet and her heroine.

In “Ruth’s Song,” the singer, like Miriam, feels that Nature protects her and Naomi from the night’s darkness and the dangers the two women may encounter on their long route:

The pale stars above us
Shed around their pure light
Like eyes that still love us,
Keeping watch through the night.

(*The Leper*, “Ruth’s Song” 89, Stanza IV)

Ruth prays for a peaceful night’s rest, for slumber that will relieve the travelers from the “toil and their sorrow.” It is not only a plea for physical rest but rather a prayer to grant the two miserable widows some spiritual comfort. Nature (“the pale stars”) and the “fair angels,” who “are keeping their vigils above,” willingly respond to Ruth’s heartfelt request (*The Leper*, “Ruth’s Song” 90). Like the rest of Hyneman’s scriptural characters, Ruth’s story is commemorative, and she becomes another important member of the Jewish women’s “sweet communion.” Ruth is rewarded “even here on earth” (when she marries Boaz), and also for eternity – “Ye passed from penury and hopeless grief to an immortal name” (*The Leper*, “Ruth’s Song” 90).

Hyneman’s other female scriptural characters are divided into two groups: the Mothers in Israel and the Jewish heroines who saved the nation. Esther, whose “meek prayer breathed fervently to God” is one of the women in the latter group (*The Leper*, “Esther” 98). Deborah, who comes “amid havoc and blood” to save her people, is another (*The Leper*, “Deborah” 97). She is described as a “gentle woman,” meek in her might, who, in spite of her modesty leaves her “quiet dwelling” to help her people. Deborah succeeds where men – Barak and his army – have failed. Hyneman traces Deborah’s might to the heroine’s unshaken belief in God and to Deborah’s art, her song, which inspired men:

And thou, gentle woman, so meek in thy might,
God-fearing and loving, thou aidest the fight,
And thy song, as we trace it, recalls thee as when
Thy presence gave hope to the fortunes of men.

(Hyneman, *The Leper*, “Deborah” 98, Stanza IX)

A woman's piety and her art empower her, Hyneman's verse declares, without making her unwomanly.

Judith is another brave woman whose power lies in her godliness and patriotic devotion. Hyneman portrays her as "A woman! A fair, lovely flower" who "trembles like a timid dove," but does not hesitate to save her nation by beheading Israel's foe, Holofernes (*The Leper*, "Judith" 103). Hyneman disapproves of the idea that a woman is forced to participate in bloody battles; the natural place for a woman is in her "quiet dwelling," at home. Yet, the delicate and meek woman is at times the only one who can save her people. Judith is thus obliged to mock "at Nature's soft control"; she has no other choice but to kill the enemy (*The Leper*, "Judith" 104). Judith definitely loathes the idea of going to battle; she leaves the violent scene immediately and speeds away with Holofernes' head, praying to God to protect her and her people. The poem ends with a rhetorical question showing Hyneman's discomfort with the need for Judith to take part in a brutal act:

Oh! not by woman's gentle hand
Should blood be shed or victory won;
Yet, for her God, her love, her land,
What hath not woman done?

(*The Leper*, "Judith" 104, Stanza V)

The last group of "Scriptural Characters" is dedicated to "The Mothers in Israel." These women – Hannah, Jochebed and Hannah, Mother of Seven Martyrs, – were ready to sacrifice their children for their nation's wellbeing. Jochebed's son Moses is another Isaac, this time sacrificed by his mother rather than his father. The heartbroken Jochebed laments her son, her "pearl," "her jewel without price," her "lamb selected for the sacrifice." The speaker intervenes, trying to soothe the weeping mother:

Fond, mourning mother, its is heaven's decree;
In yielding him, thou givest a nation joy –
Quell, then, the torrent of thine agony,
And yield to God's own hand thy cherished boy.

(*The Leper*, "Jochebed" 96, Stanza X)

The speaker's attempt to comfort the suffering of the desolate mother is based on unquestionable religious and patriotic sentiments, in Hyneman's or her speaker's attempt to persuade herself that the private sacrifice will benefit her nation. The mother should yield to God's will, thus ensuring the nation's joy. The speaker again addresses Yochebed as her close companion. She is part of the female "sweet communion"; their "spirits [are] held together" as each of them "once bore... woman's share of anguish" (*The Leper*, "Conclusion" 106).

The poem about Hannah – the Mother of the Seven Martyrs - concludes the series of Scriptural Characters. This poem is the most touching one in the series, portraying a

mother “who seven times died in those she loved” (*The Leper*, “Hannah – the Mother” 106). This mother’s story is even more tragic than the stories of Hannah, Samuel’s mother, and of Jochebed, Moses’s mother. The latter’s sons were taken away to become national heroes and leaders, while the seven sons of Hannah died without leaving a trace in the world. This Jewish mother sacrifices her own children so that they will not be forcibly converted to idolatry. Nothing is left to be “handed to posterity” (*The Leper*, “Hannah – the Mother” 105). Whereas every man, says the speaker, “gains a name,” while on Earth – one becomes a “patient scholar,” another – a “daring chieftain,” Hannah’s children are nameless; the speaker prays to God that at least the mother’s name will be remembered:

High-hearted mothered! Honored be the name
Of her who stifled Nature for her God,
And led her sons to heaven.

(*The Leper*, “Hannah – the Mother of the Seven Martyrs” 106)

The poem is a tribute to the female “stern warrior” whose suffering made her a “model to mankind.” It was published in 1853; Hyneman lost her two sons in 1865. Like most mothers, losing a son, especially after the tragic death of her husband, was her greatest latent anxiety. Ironically, obviously without knowing that a fate similar to that of Hannah and Jochebed awaits her, Hyneman’s task, as she confesses in the conclusion to the series, is to create a “sweet communion” with her biblical heroines, a communion based on shared fate which might help all Jewish women to find consolation in their sacrifices.

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ირინა რაბინოვიჩი (ისრაელი)

რებეკა ჰაინმენის პოეზია: ხელოვანის პორტრეტი, როგორც „დედა და ცოლი ისრაელში“

რეზიუმე

საკვანძო სიტყვები: იუდაიზმი, დედობა, განსხვავებულობა, გაუცხოება, დიასპორა.

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1853 წელს ჰაინმენმა გამოაქვეყნა კრებული, სადაც ოთხმოცზე მეტი ლექსი შევიდა, სახელწოდებით „კეთროვნები და სხვა ლექსები“. მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ ჰაინმენმა მნიშვნელოვანი ლიტერატურული წვლილი შეიტანა როგორც ებრაელ, ასევე, ზოგადად, მკითხველთა წრეებში, მისი შემოქმედება აბსოლუტურად უგულვებელყოფილი იყო.

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