

35. Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: With Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence*, 2:269.
36. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha*, ed. Daniel Aaron (1855; rpt. London: Everyman, 1998), 1.
37. Elizabeth Ammons, ed., *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Norton Critical Editions* (New York: Norton, 1994), xii–xiv.
38. The dissimulation in interpretation in *Hiawatha* is taken up vividly in Virginia Jackson, "Longfellow's Tradition; or, Picture-Writing a Nation," *Modern Language Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (1998): 471–96.
39. Gardner, "Stowe Takes the Stage," 83, 82.
40. Clark, "Solo Black Performance," 344.
41. This is so despite Clark correctly noting that Webb portrayed "white, black, men's, and women's voices" in a manner "unusual in pre-Civil War America." *Ibid.*, 346.
42. John William Orr, *A Brief Memoir of the "Black Swan," Miss E. T. Greenfield, the American Vocalist* (London, 1853).
43. "The Black Siddons," *Provincial Freeman*, May 12, 1855. On Cary, see Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
44. *Provincial Freeman*, March 7, 1857.
45. "The Black Siddons," *Provincial Freeman*, May 12, 1855.
46. Frank J. Webb, "A Short Biographical Sketch," in *The Christian Slave: A Drama, Founded on a Portion of Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co., 1856), ii.
47. Rosemary Crockett, "'The Garies and Their Friends': A Study of Frank J. Webb and His Novel" (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 1998).
48. Karen Haltunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
49. Crockett's recent and excellent study of the novel makes this point. See especially chapter 4.
50. Frank J. Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends* (New York: Arno, 1969), 334–36.
51. Robert F. Reid-Pharr, *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House, and the Black American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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## CHAPTER 5

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### Emma Lazarus and the Golem of Liberty

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Max Cavitch

NO POET BEARS SO MONUMENTAL a relation to Atlantic liberalism as Emma Lazarus, who is known chiefly as the author of the famous lines of "world-wide welcome" inscribed in bronze within the massive pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Her 1883 sonnet, "The New Colossus," is one of the most frequently cited poems of the nineteenth century:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land,  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman, with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin-cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she,  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free;  
The wretched refuse of your teaming shore—  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me—  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"<sup>1</sup>

Everyone knows at least a few phrases from the sestet—the part spoken by the statue—because they have become part of the lingua franca of an American integrationist fantasy. This fantasy of an open and welcoming yet coherent and unified nation has long continued to draw currency from Lazarus's poem through selective citation of these lines, even as the complexity and indeed the sublimity of the ideal the statue commemorates have been effectively suppressed in the popular imagination. The language of Lazarus's poem is commonly invoked whenever anyone feels that U.S. federal and state governments are acting inhospitably—thus

its frequent citation in contemporary debates over post-9/11 immigration policy. But the assimilation of the ideal of liberty to the discourse of liberal complaint suppresses the strangeness, danger, and contradictoriness of that ideal. Lazarus's poem offers to oppose this suppression, yet it continues to be almost universally underread. Not only is it generally reduced to its last four or five lines, but those lines are themselves abstracted from the remarkable conditions that bring them to voice both within the poem and in relation to its author and her other work. To restore these lines to the sonnet and to resituate the poem in the world of its author are crucial to recognizing how comprehensively its reception history has resisted its destabilizing relation to the iconology of liberty.

This chapter seeks to uncover and interpret that relation at a time when the national commitment to an ideology of individual liberty is, along with its colossal personification in New York harbor, perceived to be especially vulnerable to attack. Yet the identification of the Statue of Liberty with the subject of liberty has become harder, rather than easier, to sustain. Widespread concern over the erosion of civil rights by recent legislation ostensibly designed, in the words of James Sensenbrenner, to "secure our liberties," often gets viewed as somehow at odds with a more "patriotic" anxiety for the safety of national icons of freedom.<sup>2</sup> These include, most notably, the Statue of Liberty, which the federal government has placed under special protection. The world's most famous monument to national permeability was locked down entirely for almost three years following the 9/11 attacks. Although Lazarus's sonnet continued, of course, to circulate independently of its bronzen inscription (placed in the statue's pedestal in 1903), no visitor was able to read that particular inscription until the museum and pedestal areas of the monument were reopened in August 2004 after an expensive security upgrade. The interior of the statue itself remains closed indefinitely.

The Statue of Liberty inspires such restrictive care for many reasons, from its symbolic importance as an appurtenance of national identity to the structure of its interior stairways, which would make swift and safe evacuation virtually impossible. Beyond nationalist fervor and intensified concern for the safety of visitors to the monument, however, the closing attests to anxieties over the long-standing image of the statue as a maternal figure already violated in fantasy. Indeed, the iconology of the Statue of Liberty has always encouraged viewers to regard it as an animated ideal whose relation to national power turns on a mortal and specifically feminine vulnerability. Jose Martí, among the first to describe at length the exorbitant nationalism of the statue's dedication ceremony on October 28, 1886, saw a "widow's expression on her face" ("un tinte de viudez en el semblante"), but in the same essay he also likened Liberty to a "sorrowing virgin" ("virgen dolorosa"), a shared "lover" ("a quien todos hablan como a una amante adorada"), and an "immense mother among the clouds" ("allá en las nubes, aparecía como una madre inmensa").<sup>3</sup> Long before its dedication, the statue was introduced to the world in the form of severed bodily appendages: the

torch-bearing arm at Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exposition, the head at Paris's 1878 Exposition Universelle. Both pieces were open to entry by visitors, including the young Rudyard Kipling, who later recalled multiple ascents up into the dome of Liberty's skull, where he could look out "through the vacant eye-balls at the bright-coloured world beneath."<sup>4</sup> The figural violence of such entries—the desire to penetrate combined with the pleasure of identification—has been enacted millions of times.

To some, this has suggested erotic denigration. "For a fee," as one historian of "the Lady" puts it, "she is open to all for entry and exploration from below."<sup>5</sup> Kaja Silverman seeks to dispel this pornographic shade by asserting that the actual experience of climbing inside the statue (one enters through her big toe to find her insides "all system and structure") was for the tourist an "extension of the desire to 'return' to the inside of the fantasmatic mother's body without having to confront her sexuality in any way."<sup>6</sup> Yet, within the psychoanalytic frame Silverman herself establishes, this desire is structured precisely by the unconscious memory of such a confrontation with the mother's sexuality. The child's curiosity about the mother's body is grounded in preoedipal fantasies of attacking it and sadistically appropriating and destroying its insides—an interior not of "system and structure" but of phallus, feces, and babies.<sup>7</sup> The maternal idiom of care is thus always experienced in relation not only to a beneficent maternal imago but also to its potentially retaliatory counterpart—the wielder of "imprisoned lightning" in Lazarus's poem. Lazarus's epithet for the statue, "Mother of Exiles," first identified as maternal the style of solicitousness for the welfare of others that has since been precariously incorporated as an aspect of national self-understanding—precariously, because the image of an open, protective, anerotic mother is continuously under pressure to yield to the disruptions of the aggressive and libidinal energies that also help sustain it.

Thanks to the broad twentieth-century dissemination of "The New Colossus," the national style of solicitousness continues to be articulated as a maternal idiom of care by the voice with which Lazarus first endowed the statue in 1883, thereby forcing upon it the demands of a kind of life.<sup>8</sup> Liberty henceforth speaks with "silent lips," and with those lips she describes the motionless but nonetheless active gesture of her right arm: "I lift my lamp." The illocutionary force of this utterance (the element of resolution or vow enhanced by the fact that, when Lazarus wrote the poem, the statue had not yet been erected, had not yet even arrived in New York) helps to ensure that no contradiction will be perceived between the fixity of the statue's massive form and the national activity of well-intentioned beckoning for which it always, in its own voice, claims to stand. As Angus Fletcher observes of emblematic poems, "the remnants of an action are there," and Lazarus helps supply the narrative by which the beholder of the statue is involved in the perennial unfolding of that action.<sup>9</sup> Thus, amidst the welter of dynamic subjects of Thomas Edison's earliest "actualities" (those very short nonfiction movies of parades, trains in motion, a hockey game,

Niagara Falls, a man sneezing, etc.), the forty eight-second film of the Statue of Liberty is a virtually static, undisturbed three-quarter view, looking north from the Verrazano Narrows. Not even a bird flies by. Other than the slight rolling of the frame that proves the motion of the ship-deck on which the camera stood, there is no activity for Edison's Kinetograph to record other than the continuous but motionless lifting of the lamp by the personified agent it holds in view.<sup>10</sup>

Like Edison's film, Lazarus's sonnet seeks to figure the energy of an immobilized gesture. The meaning of that gesture depends on the symbolic associations of the lamp, or torch, which extend and complicate the idea of the statue's solicitousness for human welfare. For example, an idea of solicitousness (of guidance through danger) links Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi's *Liberté éclairent le monde* with the ancient Colossus of Rhodes—traditionally understood to have been a harbor beacon—and, more proximately, with Bartholdi's unexecuted design for a colossal female peasant, meant to light the entrance to the newly completed Suez Canal.<sup>11</sup> The Suez lighthouse was to have been called "Egypt Bringing the Light to Asia," and the theme of *Éclaircissement* is sustained in the conception (and the title) of Bartholdi's American colossus. Lazarus's association with the statue opens up further symbolic domains, including that of the Jewish Enlightenment, or Haskalah. Shira Wolosky has pointed to the prevalence of lamp imagery in Lazarus's poetry, where it is "repeatedly identified with Jewish consciousness." Focusing on the image, in "The New Colossus," of the torch's flame as "imprisoned lightning," Wolosky also derives a striking etymological connection with the biblical figure of Deborah, a powerful and emancipatory figure to whom Lazarus herself was often compared by her admirers.<sup>12</sup>

A clear source for the image of the torch in "The New Colossus" that has been overlooked by commentators is Mordecai's enthusiastic cry for Jewish national renewal in chapter 42 of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876): "What is needed is the leaven—what is needed is the seed of fire. The heritage of Israel is beating in the pulses of millions; it lives in their veins as a power without understanding, like the morning exultation of the herds; it is the inborn half of memory, moving as in a dream among writings on the walls, which it sees dimly but cannot divide into speech. Let the torch of visible community be lit!"<sup>13</sup> Lazarus cites this passage twice in her serialized polemic, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (1882–1883), and she expresses her hope, in the sixth installment, that "the 'torch of visible community' may soon be raised."<sup>14</sup> Written shortly thereafter, "The New Colossus" is difficult to read without hearing the voice of Eliot's Mordecai, a voice of Jewish collective identity and national aspiration speaking up in answer to "the Jewish question." Was it in fear of such a voice that, as early as 1878, the *New York Daily Graphic* had expressed its alarm at the "awful possibility" that a *speaking* Statue of Liberty might be fashioned with the aid of Edison's new phonographic invention?<sup>15</sup>

It's hard to imagine that, by the time the statue had been erected and dedicated in 1886, any protest against Liberty speaking could have been wholly or

comfortably satiric. The "voice of liberty" would have been too closely linked in the minds of most Americans with the voice of the radical left. It had been less than six months since the Haymarket Riot had sparked national panic over foreign-led anarchism. *Liberty* also happened to be the name of the leading anarchist periodical, which had commenced publication in Boston in 1881 with a salutatory that began: "*LIBERTY* enters the field of journalism to speak for herself because she finds no one willing to speak for her."<sup>16</sup> The voice of liberty was, in many respects, the voice of anarchy. It generally was, or was held to be, an immigrant voice and often a Jewish voice. The cry of Eliot's Mordecai to "let the torch of visible community be lit" anticipates the incendiary rhetoric and violence of both immigrant activism and anti-immigrant hysteria in the 1880s. In this atmosphere Bartholdi's statue was surcharged with liberty's contradictory meanings—from transnational republicanism to international socialism; from open immigration to exclusionary nativism; from democratic universalism to liberal nationalism; from self-possession to licentiousness; from incitement to enlightenment; from promise to threat.

Phillipe Roger, yoking traditions of Jewish mysticism and modern iconology, has called the Statue of Liberty "a semiological Golem," drawn "out of its sleep of death to that excessive state, Life, and endowed . . . with the uncontrollable powers that even its creator himself could not control."<sup>17</sup> In one tradition, the golem is created out of necessity to save the blood-labeled Jews of Prague from deadly reprisals.<sup>18</sup> Lazarus, witness to the deadly czarist reprisals against Russia's Jews in the early 1880s, created out of Bartholdi's Liberty a comparable figure of violence held precariously in check. Her allusion to Judges 4 in the image of "imprisoned lightning" suggests that the statue controls and may yet wield energies drawn down from God to protect imperiled Jews.<sup>19</sup> The "mighty woman" of Lazarus's sonnet figures an aggressive response to the fact of czarist oppression.

But that response encompasses a much wider field as well, including European prejudice and American anti-Semitism. Indeed, "The New Colossus" also figures a complex gesture of admonition toward the very exiles simultaneously welcomed by the glow emanating from "her beacon-hand." In folkloric versions of the golem legend, like Jakob Grimm's, the golem accrues power and size as it works to protect the Jews, ultimately becoming, in its strength and unpredictability, a threat to the Jews themselves. Having been endowed with life through the inscription on its forehead of the Hebrew word for "truth" ('emeth), the golem is unmade through the removal of the first letter, which renders him "dead" (meth).<sup>20</sup> The life-giving letters of Lazarus's sonnet resist the statue's reception as a figure of sympathy, even as they warn against the potentially destructive consequences of subjecting the political ideal of liberty to the immobilizing violence of reification. The sonnet asks: What sort of latent or suppressed power could a speaking, reanimated Liberty unleash against the Atlantic republics (France and the United States) that conceived, built, erected, and celebrated its reification? And what difference does it make that the Statue of

Liberty was conceived, built, erected, and celebrated during a colloquy on "the Jewish question" in which America and Europe faced each other over the "huddled masses" in transit between them?

#### THE JEWISH ATLANTIC

When Lazarus wrote "The New Colossus" in 1883—as Bartholdi was bolting his statue together in the rue de Chazelles—she was, as a Jew, a presumptive member of a traditional extraterritorial caste in the process of imagining and inaugurating its own national future. In response to the displacements caused by the Russian pogroms of 1881–1882 and the May Laws of 1882 came the beginnings of internationally organized immigration to Palestine and the establishment there of stable Jewish agricultural communities. In New York, Philadelphia, London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, exilic Jewry was undertaking a new and comprehensive engagement with the ideology of modern nationalism. Lazarus bore witness to this engagement in essays published in *The Century* and *The American Hebrew* and in poems like "The New Year. Rosh-Hashanah, 5643" (1882), where she anticipated a bifurcated nationalism of territorial homeland and cosmopolitanized diaspora:

In two divided streams the exiles part,  
 One rolling homeward to its ancient source,  
 One rushing sunward with fresh will, new heart.  
 By each the truth is spread, the law unfurled,  
 Each separate soul contains the nation's force,  
 And both embrace the world.<sup>21</sup>

These lines mark Lazarus's personal entry into the streams of Jewish modernity. One stream eventually became the state of Israel; the other helped shape a new global culture, a modernist internationalism.

Neither stream would have been navigable—neither Zionism nor the possibility of a postexilic diaspora could have emerged as they did—without the fundamental changes in historical self-understanding effected by European and American Jews, from the founding, in 1819, of the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* to the political movements of the 1880s and 1890s. During this period, the work of acculturated western Jews—from Leopold Zunz and Immanuel Wolf to Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau—helped precipitate both an ideological commitment to the secularism of modern historiography and a political commitment to active intervention in history. Lazarus came to share these commitments and to express them variously in both her writings on Jewish themes and her translations of the work of Jewish poets, first from German and later from Hebrew as well. By the time of the Russian pogroms, Lazarus was poised to recognize their extraordinary consequence for Jewish history and for the shape of modernity.

The scene of her recognition was an Atlantic world encompassing (since the late-eighteenth-century revolutions) what was, for Jews, a partially emancipated Europe and a largely egalitarian United States. It was a world in which Jewishness

was generally thought to be lived somewhere between two extreme removes from modern national identity: guarded traditionalism and rootless cosmopolitanism. It was a world in which Judaism's relation to modern Western culture remained an open question. The Russian atrocities and the ensuing waves of immigration to Western Europe and America signaled to Lazarus that this state of affairs could no longer hold. In essays published in 1883, on this latest momentous phase of what she ominously called "The Jewish Problem," Lazarus expressed her conviction that all proposed solutions, other than the establishment of "an independent nationality," were but "temporary palliatives."<sup>22</sup> She was careful to assure assimilated Jews in America and western Europe that their support of Jewish nationalism need in no way conflict with their patriotism or duty as citizens of non-Jewish countries. There was, she emphasized, to be no "general ingathering from Europe and America," but rather an American-European alliance to address the "immense" need of the *Ostjuden* by establishing a modern Jewish state.<sup>23</sup> This transatlantic scene of advocacy, activism, and anticipation was also the scene of Lazarus's poetic production; of her sense of the relation between poetry and national attachment; of her poetic exploration, recreation, and refutation of shared identities; and of her management of poetic transmission through time and across the spaces of her Atlantic world.

LAZARUS'S FORESHORTENED CAREER (she died at thirty-eight) was from its earliest stages an undertaking in transatlantic cosmopolitanism. With poems modeled on Tennyson, Longfellow, Schumann, and Emerson, Lazarus's earliest books (*Poems and Translations* [1866] and *Admetus and Other Poems* [1871]) also included translations of works by Hugo, Leopardi, de Musset, Goethe, and Heine. In 1874, she published *Alide*, a novel based on Goethe's erotic life, and in 1876 she published a romantic verse drama about José de Ribera called *The Spagnoletto*. Her translations of early and modern European poets continued to appear throughout the 1870s, and her well-regarded *Poems and Ballads of Heinrich Heine* was published in 1881. In the theaters of New York, she heard Joseffy and Rubenstein play and saw Salvini act.<sup>24</sup> She discovered the ideal of a Jewish nation-state in the pages of *Daniel Deronda*.<sup>25</sup> In 1883, during her first trip to Europe, she met Burne-Jones, Gosse, and Hardy, dined with Goldsmids, Montefiores, and Rothschilds, discussed Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Hebraism with her widower Robert Browning, and visited William Morris's Merton Abbey workshop. Back in New York, in January 1884, she heard Matthew Arnold lecture on Emerson.<sup>26</sup> After the death of her father in 1885, she returned to Europe and traveled widely there until, in July 1887, rapidly advancing cancer forced her return to New York, where she died that November.

Lazarus did not live to see the western consolidation and antagonism of political responses, both Zionist and socialist, to the eastern European exodus.<sup>27</sup> But her self-understanding as the subject of a collectively held Jewish history was nevertheless influenced by the various strains of proto-Zionist and

proto-Autonomist thinking that would, in the decade after her death, coalesce around the Congress of Basel and the Vilna Bund, respectively. In the meantime, Lazarus's own New York became one of the most important sites of Jewish collective renewal in more than five hundred years. Lazarus guessed as much with the composition of "1492," a sonnet she wrote shortly after completing "The New Colossus." In it, the "two-faced" year first weeps, in the octet, as Spain casts out the Jews—and then smiles, in the sestet, as Columbus unveils a new world in which they will eventually find refuge. The two sonnets together create a distinctly American frame for the exilic history of Jews in the West: from the successive expulsions of European Jewry culminating in the Granadan edict of 1492 to the waves of exodus from eastern Europe that had, by the time Lazarus had written these poems, already brought thousands of Jews to New York and would bring many hundreds of thousands more by 1917.<sup>28</sup>

Lazarus helped greet and care for some of the earliest arrivals, including the young Abraham Cahan, at Ward's Island in 1882.<sup>29</sup> When, under the pressures of crowding and restlessness, rioting broke out among the inmates at the Ward's Island refuge, Lazarus advocated publicly for redoubled, more systematic efforts on their behalf.<sup>30</sup> During 1882 and 1883, her frequent journalistic pleas for assistance were directed not only at her fellow New Yorkers and their local institutions but also at an international cohort. In early 1882, she wrote in praise of the "spontaneous action of the prominent citizens of London and New York . . . in protest against the Russian atrocities."<sup>31</sup> By 1883, as the prodigious scale of human displacement and the likely permanence of Jewish insecurity in eastern Europe grew more and more apparent, she had become an advocate for international Zionism *avant la lettre*: "Re-nationalization, Auto-Emancipation, repatriation—call it by what name you will," to be supported by "the united action of American and free European Jews."<sup>32</sup>

Lazarus's expression of the shared nature of Jewish responsibility is specifically transatlantic, both politically and culturally. Her reference to "free" European Jews reveals her sensitivity to the fact that full legal and political emancipation had come for Jews only recently in France, Italy, and the Netherlands, and only very recently in Germany and England. By contrast, Jews in America had never needed to be emancipated. For European Jews emigrating to the North American colonies and later (and in much larger numbers) to the nineteenth-century United States, emancipation occurred precisely in the traversal of the Atlantic.<sup>33</sup> Owing not only to the egalitarian promise of America but also to the anxieties of postemancipation European Jewry, European Jewish aid societies, such as the Alliance Israélite Universelle, determined the United States to be the proper destination for so many of the Eastern refugees. For, were the *Ostjuden* allowed to inundate the cities of Western Europe, the precarious liberties of established Jewish populations would, they feared, be undermined. American Jews, too, had their own concerns about the Eastern immigrants, and, in advertent to these concerns, Lazarus reveals her anxiety about collective

stigma in the following passage from "The Jewish Problem": "Even in America, presumably the refuge of the oppressed, public opinion has not yet reached that point where it absolves the race from the sin of the individual. Every Jew, however honorable or enlightened, has the humiliating knowledge that his security and reputation are, in a certain sense, bound up with those of the meanest rascal who belongs to his tribe."<sup>34</sup> Incidences of anti-Semitism were already on the rise in the United States, and many assimilated American Jews of Sephardic and German descent feared the new visibility their Eastern cousins would presumably confer upon them.<sup>35</sup> But the reality of inter- and intraethnic hostilities in the United States could not impede the resulting flow—mostly through New York—of Eastern refugees, who eventually numbered in the millions.<sup>36</sup>

Culturally, the expression of Jewish responsibility also depended upon the transatlantic situation, not only of the recent Eastern arrivals but also of assimilated Jews like Lazarus. "It would be an error," writes Ira Katznelson, "to cast American Jewish history as unembedded within the recurring catastrophes of European Jewry in the age of emancipation. . . . The recurrent pattern of immigration brought both the tangible experience and memory of the worst of the anti-Jewish persecutions in the modern world directly into the consciousness of American Jews."<sup>37</sup> Such a counterexceptionalist reading of American Jewish history seems alternately refuted and embraced by Lazarus's writings: refuted most emphatically, as in certain passages of *Epistle to the Hebrews*, when she needs to assuage assimilationist reaction against Jewish statism; more often embraced—though not without ambivalence—in her poetry, which begins, long before the Eastern crisis, to explore the historical dimensions of Jewish transnational existence. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of her early interlocutors on the subject of Jewish history—a fact Lazarus had occasion to recall upon his death in 1882, shortly before the imposition of the May Laws.

#### JEWISH HISTORY AND JEWISH LIFE

Lazarus found fault with Longfellow a few weeks after he died in an obituary essay for *The American Hebrew*: "all his links are with the past; the legendary, the historic, enchanted him with an irresistible glamor [*sic*]; not only was he without the eyes of a seer, to penetrate the veil of the future, but equally without the active energy or the passionate enthusiasm of an inspired champion in the arena of the present."<sup>38</sup> From her girlhood reading of Longfellow, Lazarus was aware of the connection between his casual Hebraism and what she later described as his unreconstructed antiquarianism. In her eulogy, she cites the "well known lines" of his poem, "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" (1858)—a poem, she asserts, of which "Jewish hearers" in particular need scarcely to be reminded, but whose conclusions about Jewish history "they will not be so willing to accept."<sup>39</sup> Lazarus herself had been sufficiently unwilling to accept them two decades earlier, during the year she turned eighteen, that she had written a response poem called "In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport" (1867).

The two poems are about two related spaces: Newport, Rhode Island's Touro Synagogue, built in 1763, and its nearby cemetery, which dates back to the seventeenth century. Touro Synagogue, which its Newport congregation was forced by the British to abandon during the American Revolution, continued sporadically to be a site of both cultural assimilation and resistance for American Jews until it resumed regular services in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Longfellow visited it. For both poets, the monumental reminders of a once-vital Newport congregation represented precisely what all Jewish diaspora communities lacked—a national territorial space in which identity might be grounded; moreover, the graveyard figured a condition under which even the local history of American Jews seemed discontinuous with the present. Ultimately, however, there is a sharp difference between the two poems. Whereas Longfellow's poem seeks to bury Jewish history as something categorically of the past, Lazarus's poem envisions both a historical future for the Jews and a historical role for the Jewish poetry she understands herself to be writing.

Writing squarely from within a Christianized, European-American tradition, Longfellow positions his speaker outside the synagogue, the portals of which are emphatically closed.<sup>40</sup> Nearby, among the graves, the speaker registers the strangeness of the scene. He notes, for example, the discordant silence of the cemetery in proximity to the bustling streets of Newport and the Atlantic's "never-silent waves." He notes, too, the "foreign accent" of the hybridized, Sephardic names on the stones themselves, which, he says: "Seem like the tablets of the Law, thrown down / And broken by Moses at the mountain's base."<sup>41</sup> With this allusion to the Israelites' disobedience at the base of Mount Sinai, the speaker begins to establish the history of the buried congregation as a phenomenon, not only of another time, but of another place entirely:

How came they here? What burst of Christian hate,  
What persecution, merciless and blind,  
Drove o'er the sea—that desert desolate—  
The Ishmaels and Hagers of mankind?  
They lived in narrow streets and lane obscure,  
Ghetto and Judenstrass, in mirk and mire;

Anathema maranatha! was the cry  
That rang from town to town, from street to street;  
At every gate the accursed Mordecai  
Was mocked and jeered, and spurned by Christian feet. (336–37)

The poem proceeds by compressing and truncating Jewish history, conflating biblical and European coordinates, and occluding the history of the Newport congregation itself in order to resist the entwining of Jewish and American pasts.

The draft stages of Longfellow's poem record the history of this resistance. Several stanzas on the continued nature of Jewish suffering and on the political

and religious freedom afforded by life in the American colonies, along with the first-person narrator, were omitted from the final text.<sup>42</sup> These omissions reinforced the political and historical nonparticularity of American Jews in the poem, and they rendered all the more emphatic the concluding stanza of the poem's final version, where the Jewish race is figured away:

But ah! What once has been shall be no more!  
The groaning earth in travail and in pain  
Brings forth its races, but does not restore,  
And the dead nations never rise again. (337)

In his use here of the plural "nations" as a synecdoche for the Jewish nation, Longfellow insists upon Israel's death while further resisting its uniqueness.

By 1882, events dramatically gave the lie to Longfellow's earlier imaginative fiat. The influx into the United States of Jewish immigrants, the international response to the violence of the pogroms, and "the suffering, privation, and martyrdom," as Lazarus wrote in her essay on Longfellow, "which our brethren still consent to undergo in the name of Judaism . . . prove them to be very warmly and thoroughly alive, and not at all in need of miraculous resuscitations to establish their nationality."<sup>43</sup> Here Lazarus implicitly rejects the Christianized trope of rebirth as a means to national viability for a people still "warmly and thoroughly alive." She further asserts, in the fourteenth installment of her *Epistle to the Hebrews*, that, for the majority of imperiled eastern European Jews, a rebirth that involved migration to the United States and assimilation into American culture could be disastrous because their radically different customs and beliefs would be overwhelmed. Thus her early and vocal advocacy for the "Re-Colonization of Palestine."<sup>44</sup>

In her earlier, poetic response to Longfellow, however, the urgency of contemporary events is not yet felt. The poem's urgency—signaled by its insistent "Here" and "Now"—is not so much historical as existential: a deictic experiment with a Jewish existential base from which either past or future might be safely projected. Lazarus postpones the problem of contingency by erecting her own barrier against the present—a present in which the very survival of the Jewish nation can seem legitimately thrown into doubt by, of all people, Longfellow, America's most gentle and backward-looking poet. In the "here" and "now" of Lazarus's poem, the relevant past is the remote past, and her poem follows Longfellow's in its purposive disregard of local history.

But unlike the speaker of Longfellow's poem, who positions himself outside among the graves of the cemetery, Lazarus's speaker addresses us from within the synagogue itself. Refashioning Longfellow's initial stanza, while retaining its meter and form, Lazarus positions her speaker with rhythmic emphasis:

Here, where the noise of the busy town,  
The ocean's plunge and roar can enter not,  
We stand and gaze around with tearful awe,  
And muse upon the consecrated spot.<sup>45</sup>

With the trochaic plunge that inaugurates the poem, the speaker and her companions have already entered a space that effectively excludes the noise and motion of quotidian Newport. As a space marked by Jewish ritual and the Hebrew language, the synagogue mutes the tones of the profane present, and its interior gives rise to elegiac impressions:

No signs of life are here; the very prayers  
 Inscribed around are in a language dead;  
 The light of the "perpetual lamp" is spent  
 That an undying radiance was to shed.  
 What prayers were in this temple offered up,  
 Wrung from sad hearts that knew no joy on earth,  
 By these lone exiles of a thousand years,  
 From the fair sunrise land that gave them birth! (160)

Unlike Longfellow, Lazarus does not attempt a prosopopeia to bring the words of the departed mourners into the present of the poem. Instead, the speaker's intense contemplation of the temple—"this relic of the days of old" (160)—precipitates a dream vision of various biblical scenes, culminating in, as she tells us:

The pride and luxury's barbaric pomp,  
 In the rich court of royal Solomon—  
 Alas! we wake: one scene alone remains,—  
 The exiles by the streams of Babylon. (161)

The abruptness with which the memory of Solomonian excess returns us to the present (a "present" in which Newport has become Babylon) requires that the Newport synagogue be seen as a version of Solomon's Temple of Jerusalem. The scattering of the Newport congregation as a consequence of British occupation shortly after the Touro Synagogue's construction is thus figured here, not only as a displacement from the center of spiritual life, but as a consequence of the congregation having turned away from God. Following Longfellow, Lazarus omits direct reference to local history in order better to misremember it. They each do so, however, to opposing ends.

In Longfellow's poem, the Hebrew language is as silent as the silent Hebrews in their graves. In the penultimate stanza, it seems to have been the language of what was no more than a semiliterate and credulous people:

And thus forever with reverted look  
 The mystic volume of the world they read,  
 Spelling it backward like a Hebrew book,  
 Till life became a Legend of the Dead. (337)

"Legend" means literally "what is read," but it clearly suggests the inauthentic, that which is not historical.<sup>46</sup> Effectively, the poem says the Jews have no proper history. In Lazarus's poem, too, Hebrew is characterized as "a language dead"

(160), and the past is presented as mirage or dreamscape—a "tropic bloom" (160) displacing the barrenness of a present flattened by the Isaiah trope, "green grass lieth gently over all" (161). After this line, the poem's concluding stanza comes as something of a surprise:

Nathless the sacred shrine is holy yet,  
 With its lone floors where reverent feet once trod.  
 Take off your shoes as by the burning bush,  
 Before the mystery of death and God. (162)

The poem's valedictory injunction returns us to a biblical coordinate: prostrate before the burning bush, Moses receives God's promise of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. This retreat into biblical text is at the same time an advance into historical context—not the death of one nation, as insisted upon in Longfellow's poem, but the disjunction of two.

The vanished Jew of Longfellow's poem shares similarities with the vanished Indian figured elsewhere in his work—a pervasive topos in nineteenth-century American poetry and index of a view of American cultural history that worked against the visions of sporadic national resuscitations in nineteenth-century millennial anthropology and corresponding "revitalization" movements. Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* (1855), for example, insists, via imaginative fiat, that the Indian's only place in American life is as a part of its prehistory. Hiawatha's departure is final. At the end of Lazarus's "In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport," however, death is a "mystery" because it implies some form of continuance. The "mystery" is not that of death but the stupendous fact of Jewish survival. Longfellow occludes local history because it is a history—a continuing history—of potential renewal through cultural assimilation, and, in his America, "dead nations never rise again." Furthermore, it is an awkward reminder of the Judaic inflection of the providential vision of America, which ironically seeks to ensure there will be no special cases. In remembering Longfellow's poem, Lazarus also remembers to forget local history because it is a history of assimilation. She, too, rejects the rebirth narrative. But she does so in favor of a vision of the future in which Jewish history is neither a prelude to nor conterminous with American history. With "In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport," Lazarus's poetry begins to break free of the sites of containment where national histories seem with such monumental passivity to cohere.

To effect this break, Lazarus's poem identifies itself with the emergence of a new, active coherence—the late-nineteenth-century form of the ancient and abiding discursive coherence of extraterritorial Judaism. It marks, that is, both the diversification of religious and political identities and the cosmopolitan beginnings of modern Jewish culture. The poem begins with its speaker's powerful act of self-location in the trochaic substitution at the start of the first line ("Here, where the noise of the busy town"). Standing, gazing, musing, Lazarus's speaker immediately distinguishes herself from Longfellow's through her activity as well as her first-person voice. It is also, crucially, a plural voice, projecting its unspecified



subjects backward, into lost times and places, as well as forward as agents of a yet unfolding history. It's a voice in which many nineteenth-century American poets, as instanced for Lazarus by Henry Longfellow, found it increasingly difficult or perhaps even dangerous to speak. "Here is no painful crudity of rough strength," she wrote of Longfellow's poetry in her 1882 eulogy, "no intellectual or moral audacity engendered by democratic institutions, and by unprecedented vistas of a broadly developing nationality" (99).<sup>47</sup> Her indictment of Longfellow's failure to advance beyond antiquarianism was also a question for her own poetic practice: could she bring such "crudity" and "audacity" to bear on her experience as both the subject and the author of a collectively held Jewish history?

#### VOICES IN AND OUT OF EXILE

One of the first poems Lazarus wrote after thus posing the question was "In Exile," inspired by a letter, published in 1882 in *The Jewish Messenger*, from "a party of young Russian refugees sent to Texas to organize an agricultural colony."<sup>48</sup> This Texan venture was just one of many attempts to establish Jewish farming communities throughout the United States, a movement paralleling the more successful efforts in Palestine.<sup>49</sup> The refugees' letter is an excellent advertisement for these largely utopian, westerling experiments: a comic account of accommodation to the new. Upon arrival, they are incredulous at seeing images of their future selves in the transformed refugees who have preceded them: "We met our friends just when they were driving the cattle from the prairie. It was impossible to recognize them, so healthy, plump, and tanned they were—no traces of the previous intellectual occupation; genuine workingmen!" They quickly find that, to succeed at the plow, they first have to learn the language of horses and oxen ("far more difficult than Greek and Latin"). Unsure of what to do with raspberries, they try to make soup. Neither fatigue from unwonted labor nor the Texan heat can break their "merry disposition." Even the "abundance of snakes and scorpions" in this new Eden is merely "unpleasant."<sup>50</sup>

That these might be understood as transformed conditions of ancient exile registers most plainly in the lines Lazarus selects from the letter as the epigraph to her poem: "Since that day till now our life is one unbroken paradise. We live a true brotherly life. Every evening, after supper, we take a seat under the mighty oak and sing our songs."<sup>51</sup> With oak tree in lieu of willow, the Texas Jews rework Psalm 137 and sing their songs on alien soil. In so doing they seem to have produced a feeling of attachment to their circumstances and surroundings akin to what Yosef Yerushalmi has called "the sentiment *in exile* of feeling at home."<sup>52</sup> Lazarus's poem extends this sentiment by grounding it explicitly—in a way that the refugees' letter does not—in a sacred frame of reference:

Freedom to love the law that Moses brought,  
To sing the songs of David, and to think  
The thoughts that Gabirol to Spinoza taught,

Freedom to dig the common earth, to drink  
The universal air—for this they sought  
Refuge o'er wave and continent, to link  
Egypt with Texas in their mystic chain,  
And truth's perpetual lamp forbid to wane.<sup>53</sup>

The allusion to Psalm 137 is discernible in the refugees' letter. Lazarus insists upon it: "songs" become "songs of David," though the greater likelihood is that the refugees were singing Russian songs, such as the "sweet songs" of Nikolai Nekrasov referred to in the memoir of Lithuanian refugee Israel Kasovich.<sup>54</sup> The claims of shared identity expressed in the "brotherly life" fashioned by the Texas refugees are translated by Lazarus into the "mystic chain" of sacred history that links "Egypt with Texas." Even the agrarian idealism ostensibly realized in their "freedom to dig the common earth" is described in a phrase that resonates with the importance not so much of farming as of sepulture, both to ancient Jewish land claims and to the Jew's experience of feeling at home in exile.<sup>55</sup>

Like "In Exile," most other poems collected in Lazarus's *Songs of a Semite* (1882) embed Jewish experience in sacred history or remote secular history.<sup>56</sup> The book as a whole consequently betrays some uneasiness on Lazarus's part with the contemporary, frequently anti-Semitic image of the unassimilated Jew—the prerusticated Jew, sick, thin, and pale, awaiting transformation under the Texan sun into something more like the herdsman of Canaan or the Maccabean warrior. One critic goes so far as to infer her "discomfort with the modern Jewish body."<sup>57</sup> Certainly Lazarus was surrounded by such discomfort, expressed not only in the increasingly virulent language of late-nineteenth-century American anti-Semitism but also in the early discourse of Zionism, which turned on a critique of Jewish powerlessness. In both her ambivalence toward the spectacle of the *Ostjuden* and her recourse to remote history for images of strong, healthy Jews, Lazarus anticipated the struggle of later figures like Max Nordau to overcome what David Hartman calls "the anthropology of exile . . . the frightened, emaciated, mind-obsessed Jew." Secular Zionists, Hartman argues, valued the Bible as "a way of discovering and legitimating new expressions of Jewish peoplehood."<sup>58</sup> He does not add that they valued it, too, because it enabled Palestine to be seen as the inevitable site of a modern Jewish state. The Bible represented a universally disseminated and valorized link between "the People of the Book" and its "fatherland," Eretz-Israel.

To help invoke that link, overcome the "anthropology of exile," and transform the "Land of the Jews" into a nation-state, Zionists promoted a vision of the future that would restore an ancient past in modern terms—terms that included linguistic, as well as political and territorial, identity. Benjamin Harshav observes that, "after 1882, a new secular culture emerged in the internal Jewish domain, giving rise to a rich and variegated literature written in Yiddish and Hebrew," even as Jews continued to write in the various state languages of the diaspora.<sup>59</sup>



Initially, Yiddish was the more likely vehicle of the new Jewish nationalism. But, as Harshav reports, it was the revival of Hebrew that, in the long run, helped fulfill statist aspirations beyond mere cultural autonomy within non-Jewish states. "The advantage of Hebrew over Yiddish," Harshav writes, "was its inherent link to a territory and to a classical, private, and also internationally sanctified, literature: the Bible. . . . [The Jews] called Palestine by its old name 'Eretz-Israel'. . . and the Hebrew language was enshrined as the language of that land." Far, however, from being a backward-looking impulse to mythologize Jewry's return to ancestral land, the Hebrew revival was the creation as it were of a new language (Alicia Ostriker calls it "the world's oldest and youngest").<sup>60</sup> "Recreated," Harshav explains, "in the very heart of the transitions of modernity. . . . Hebrew grew as a language of modern sensibilities, fiction, politics, and ideology, while roaming a library of texts written over a period of several thousand years."<sup>61</sup>

Thus the beginnings of modern nationalist consolidation came with the creation in Jewish languages of a culture parallel to the national and cosmopolitan cultures of Europe and America. The voices—particularly the Yiddish and Hebrew voices—of this parallel culture, however, quickly came to be a focus of contempt, not only among non-Jewish commentators, such as Lazarus's friend Henry James, but also among assimilated western Jews. Lazarus's cousin Benjamin Franklin Peixotto is a case in point. As the American consul at Bucharest in the 1870s, Peixotto had actively promoted the emigration to America of Romania's oppressed Jews, and during the 1880s he was, like Lazarus's friend Michael Heilprin, with whom he worked, a promoter of Jewish homesteading in the United States. Regarding the new Jewish settlements in his own city, however, he had this to say in an 1887 address to the New York Y.M.H.A.:

If 500,000 Jews come into this city within the next thirty years, there will creep up a spirit of enmity; there will be bitter relations here, as there is in old Europe to-day. There will be no safety; there may be dishonor, disgrace and misery on every side. There is enough of misery already. Go over to the East side, where from 40,000 to 50,000 Jews now live. Go into the tenement houses along Hester, Forsyth and Division Streets. Go on Sunday and look at the crowds of Jews on the corners of the streets, jabbering, uttering language unnatural, inhuman, making day hideous with their sights and voices.

They are "dumb," Peixotto insists, "because they cannot make known their own wants except to those of their own condition." We must, he argues, "give them speech," by which he means to take away their "unnatural, inhuman" languages and replace them with English.<sup>62</sup>

In a sense, this is precisely what Lazarus does in her poem "In Exile." The epigraph from the refugees' letter seems to promise a certain journalistic immediacy, a feeling for the texture of immigrant experience. Yet "In Exile" is told, not in the voice of the refugee (now, in America, free to "sing the songs of David"), but in the voice of the assimilated poet, whose pastoral diction is Gray's

(e.g., "rich, black furrows of the glebe") and whose Italianate stanza is Byron's (from *Don Juan*). Once the poem begins, the "voices rough" of the Russian exiles are inaudible against the dinning background of English poetry. The poem gives the exiles a kind of picturesque audibility—a sound that may be seen but not heard:

Hark! Through the quiet evening air, their song  
Floats forth with wild sweet rhythm and glad refrain.  
They sing the conquest of the spirit strong,  
The soul that wrests the victory from the pain;  
The noble joys of manhood that belong  
To comrades and to brothers. In their strain  
Rustle of palms and Eastern streams one hears,  
And the broad prairie melts in mist of tears. (41–48)

The poem ends here, with the dissolution of the radically displaced image of a sound, a sound the poem asks us to imagine, but does not imitate: the "dumb" voice of the Eastern immigrant. "In Exile" tenses before the possibility of voicing an alien but contemporary and suddenly proximate Jewish culture in its own languages and accents. Around this time Lazarus herself began to study Hebrew.<sup>63</sup> But the imminent, prodigious voicing—for which she came to be known, and yet in which her own voice was subsumed—was a sonnet in English.

#### LAZARUS'S WOUNDS

The terms of France's gift to the United States of Bartholdi's *Liberté éclairant le monde* did not provide for the financing of the pedestal on which it was to stand. The various fundraising activities, none of which was more successful than Joseph Pulitzer's populist newspaper campaign, included an exhibition and auction at New York's National Academy of Design in December 1883. One of this event's organizers, Constance Cary Harrison, asked Lazarus to contribute some verses. According to Harrison, Lazarus initially balked at the idea of writing "to order," but agreed once Harrison had put her in mind of the *Ostjuden*: "'Think of that Goddess standing on her pedestal down yonder in the bay, and holding her torch out to those Russian refugees of yours you are so fond of visiting at Ward's Island,' I suggested. The shaft sped home—her dark eyes deepened—her cheeks flushed—the time for merriment was passed—she said not a word more, then."<sup>64</sup> In this 1887 memorial, Harrison conjures a picture of Lazarus envisioning the statue on Bedloe's Island, refugees massing under its view, while herself standing statuelike in a galvanized silence induced by Harrison's challenge to write. Harrison even evokes some details of Lazarus's poem: the "mild eyes" that "command" the harbor, and the "silent lips" that are paradoxically full of speech—speech that came so widely to be regarded as the plausible voice of America addressing the world:

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp," cries she,  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free;  
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore—  
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me—  
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

It's easy to ask: How could these words ever have been heard as anything other than a ruse? Wasn't 1882 the year, not only of the Russian May Laws but also of the United States Chinese Exclusion Act? Wasn't the era of the Statue of Liberty, beginning with its conception in the 1870s, precisely the era of regional and federal moves to abandon the de facto principle of openness to immigration? The style of solicitousness for others that the Statue of Liberty represents seems in this light fraudulent, a style born of selfishness and racism and swaddled in liberal sentiment, a style grown so vacuous and fixed that nothing could do to represent it other than a hollow colossus of iron trusswork and copper skin—to Mark Twain "the very insolence of prosperity," to James Baldwin "a bitter joke."<sup>65</sup>

Such stirring expressions of mistrust and frustration contribute to a long and variegated tradition of iconoclastic treatments of the statue. Yet the eloquence of the urge to repeal Liberty's idealization has been very successfully assimilated by the machinery of national fanfare, such as the 1985 Ken Burns film, *The Statue of Liberty*, that swallows up and digests Baldwin's profound contempt. Just a few months before Lazarus wrote "The New Colossus" Nietzsche's Zarathustra said to "those who overthrow statues" that "nothing is more foolish. . . . The statue lay in the mud of your contempt; but precisely this is its law, that out of contempt life and living beauty come back to it. It rises again with more godlike features, seductive through suffering."<sup>66</sup> More than a century's worth of images of the Statue of Liberty's alteration and mutilation have for the most part only helped to confirm the sense of iconic durability conveyed by Lazarus's promise, in her poem, that the statue "shall stand."

"Language may make ideas into statues," writes Kenneth Gross, "but that they remain statues may depend on our failure to reanimate the language we inherit, our failure of desire or tact, a submission to the contingent priority of our words; it may also be the result of a need to lend an illusory stability to ideas, even at the cost of emptying them out."<sup>67</sup> Or of arming them. One thinks not only of the hollowed-out form of the Statue of Liberty—that extraordinary vacancy through which regimented visitors (used to, and will again presumably) ascend and descend—but also of Kafka's transfiguration of Liberty's torch into a sword at the opening of his novel *Amerika*.<sup>68</sup> Liberty might not merely fail to redeem its radically democratic promise; it might, as the figure for a powerful, possibly oppressive state, menace even as it draws toward itself the abject immigrant, caught up in the "vortex of summons and repulsion" that Julia Kristeva has so powerfully characterized as the sublime dynamics of abjection.<sup>69</sup>

Like Kafka's, Lazarus's manipulation of the statue's image does not seek to interfere destructively with its form. But she does, out of the poem's language,

craft for it a new maternal body, the body she names "Mother of Exiles," the life and living beauty of which are in the faith it seems to keep with the seductions of suffering and the sublimity of abjection. James Russell Lowell may have glimpsed this first, writing Lazarus from London in 1883 to say that she had given her subject "a *raison d'être*, which it wanted before quite as much as it wants a pedestal. You have set it on a noble one, saying admirably just the right word to be said, an achievement more arduous than that of the sculptor."<sup>70</sup> The justifying effect of the sonnet is also a vivifying effect, endowing the statue with a kind of speech ("just the right word") that is tantamount to the life no sculptor could bestow upon it. Lazarus says the word that is "to be said" by the statue—predicting the "*raison d'être*" the statue would in turn bestow upon the abject populations it seems, thanks to Lazarus, to call toward itself.

The "right word," that is, is "refuse." It is the word that stands for the jettisoned object that must be incorporated even as it is subjected to the violence of a purifying wish. "Refuse shows me," writes Kristeva, "what I permanently thrust aside in order to live."<sup>71</sup> This paradoxical gesture—of keeping close to what one fears or loathes by being always in the position of casting it—recalls the illocutionary force of the statue's "I lift my lamp," the power, that is, of a continuously enacted wish. So it is that the right word has seemed like just the wrong word to many—a word that disfigures or dehumanizes immigrant bodies and the nation of immigrants for whose interests the statue ostensibly stands. The phrase "wretched refuse" has long been singled out for criticism and even excision. For example, Lowell's compliment to Lazarus on the sculptural qualities of her sonnet finds its expurgatory counterpart in the marble plaque at New York's JFK International Airport (whose operators have always advertised it as the later-twentieth-century equivalent of Ellis Island). Subjected to the violence of a purifying wish, the poem actually begins to disappear:

Give me your tired, your poor,  
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . .  
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.  
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

The omission of the sonnet's antepenultimate line not only condescends to those who might potentially be identified (or want to identify) with its object but also literalizes the censorious casting out of the very "wretched refuse"—those whom oppressive regimes in "ancient lands" might thus, Lazarus wants to remind us, have described them—whose place of asylum the United States so often chooses *not* to be.

The polished tablet of Lazarus's maimed sonnet, set against the backdrop of jet-age immigration policy, reflects the arriving exile as having sustained a fresh diminishment or wound, while encouraging an identification with the destructive impulse to which the poem itself has been subjected. Lazarus's own final meditation on the wound of exile comes in another sonnet, the last she

wrote—ironically, on another statuary icon of French culture: the maimed Miloan Venus, which she had visited at the Louvre in the summer of 1883. In this sonnet, “The Venus of the Louvre” (1884), she conflates her own visit to the museum with the one Heinrich Heine made in 1848. Lazarus’s identification with Heine was profound. One of his most devoted nineteenth-century translators, Lazarus sought to extend this identification by completing a Jewish-themed poem sequence that Heine had left unfinished.<sup>72</sup> She also celebrated the continuities she observed between Heine’s poetry and that of Judah Halevi, of whom Lazarus was also a translator and about whom Heine had written an important, though fragmentary, poem concerning the role of the poet and of poetry to a people in exile—a poem that provides yet another likely source for the image of the torch in “The New Colossus”:

Ja, er ward ein großer Dichter  
Stern und Fackel seiner Zeit,  
Seines Volkes Licht und Leuchte,  
Eine wunderbare, große  
Feuersäule des Gesanges,  
Die der Schmerzenskarawane  
Israels vorangezogen  
In der Wüste des Exils.<sup>73</sup>

[Yes, he became a great poet,  
Star and beacon of his age,  
Light and lamp for all his people,  
Wonderful and mighty as a  
Pillar of poetic fire  
At the vanguard of Israel’s  
Caravan of woe and sorrow  
Through the wilderness of exile.]

Heine’s poem argues for the prominence and continuity of poetic authority in Jewish history, despite the alienation he endured as a poet in exile—as, in his words, “a poor Jew sick unto death, an emaciated image of wretchedness, an unhappy man.”<sup>74</sup>

In her essay, “The Poet Heine,” which accompanied the initial publication of “The Venus of the Louvre,” Lazarus quotes from Heine’s account of his final visit to the museum, to which he carries the guilty burden of his disappointment with romantic idealism and what sounds—particularly when heard against the revolutionary backdrop he does not mention—like the symbolic projection of a fear of castration:

“It was in May, 1848, the last day I went out, that I took leave of my lovely idols whom I had worshipped in the time of my happiness. I crawled painfully as far as the Louvre, and I almost fainted away when I entered the

lofty hall, where the ever-blessed Goddess of Beauty, our beloved Lady of Milo, stands upon her pedestal. I lay for a long time at her feet, and I wept so bitterly that even a stone would have pitied me. And indeed the goddess looked down upon me compassionately, yet at the same time so disconsolately, as if she would say: ‘Do you not see that I have no arms, and that I cannot help you?’”<sup>75</sup>

In her sonnet, Lazarus enters this scene, as if to assume the guilty burden of the maimed statue that cannot help—animate, but unable to reach or to trope further upon the implacable figure of the dying Jew:

Down the long hall she glistens like a star,  
The foam-born mother of love, transfixed to stone,  
Yet none the less immortal, breathing on;  
Time’s brutal hand hath maimed, but could not mar.  
When first the enthralled enchantress from afar  
Dazzled mine eyes, I saw not her alone,  
Serenely poised on her world-worshipped throne,  
As when she guided once her dove-drawn car,—  
But at her feet a pale, death-stricken Jew,  
Her life-adorer, sobbed farewell to love.  
Here *Heine* wept! Here still he weeps anew,  
Nor ever shall his shadow lift or move  
While mourns one ardent heart, one poet-brain,  
For vanished Hellas and Hebraic pain.<sup>76</sup>

Here another iconic mother (“mother of love”) draws the exile toward herself, beckoning not with the promise of liberty but with the enchantments of a desire that will enthrall rather than free its subject. Unrequited love, as Theodor Adorno observed, is Heine’s “image for homelessness.”<sup>77</sup> Transfixed to stone herself, Venus is henceforth attended by the transfixed, weeping “shadow” of Heine, helpless himself to restore the mother’s damaged comeliness, the damage of preoedipal fantasy. Held in Lazarus’s view, what starts out as a spatial, vaginal vista, “down the long hall,” becomes by the end of the poem a vista down time—a view of futurity emblemized by the image of the ever-weeping exiled Jew and extended in a potentially limitless way by the perennial figure of the lone, estranged Jewish poet.

In its refusal to release Heine either to oblivion or to a reconciled world, Lazarus’s “Venus of the Louvre” shares something, across the profound divide of anti-Semitic genocide, with Adorno’s universalizing assessment of Heine as a shared “wound,” a figure for “the homelessness [that] has also become everyone’s homelessness.”<sup>78</sup> Yet the conditions of Adorno’s own 1949 return to Germany from exile were undreamed of by Lazarus when, standing by Heine’s Montmartre grave in the summer of 1883, she forecast a “possible Germany of the future”—a

Germany "free from race-hatred and bigotry . . . and ready to receive her illustrious Semitic son."<sup>79</sup> Just a few months later, back in New York, Lazarus wrote the poem that created such a compelling image of a nation always "ready to receive" that it has largely withstood the nativist disruptions that have turned away many a Semitic son and daughter, including those aboard the USS *St. Louis* in 1939.

Acting to preserve a symbol of liberty is a fully defensible practice of American civic religion, when its practitioners honestly and humbly aspire to help, to heal, and to console. But our moral interpretations of that symbol elude justification when we contract ourselves, and those we can compel, into smaller and smaller precincts of freedom. One notes with irony the new scene at the reopened monument: visitors massing at the gates, being herded into a glassed-over box, and allowed, for a moment, to crane their necks to look up into the now depopulated, inaccessible space of the statue's interior. Who imagines it's safer this way? Lazarus's "Mother of Exiles" has long stood to remind us that the subject of liberty has unruly tendencies, not merely to question authority and its excesses, but to recall its own early history of unmanageable hunger and rage.

## NOTES

- I conducted much of the research for this essay at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, and I am particularly grateful to Arthur Kiron, curator of Judaica Collections, for invaluable guidance and conversation. For their generous help I would also like to thank Nancy Bentley, Joan Dayan, Lisa Gitelman, Matthew Parr, Maggie Robbins, and especially Meredith McGill. Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," in *Catalogue of the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition* (New York: National Academy of Design, 1883), [9].
- "To my mind, the purpose of the Patriot Act is to secure our liberties and not undermine them." House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner, as quoted in Eric Lichtblau, "Threats and Responses: The Justice Department; Ashcroft Seeks More Power To Pursue Terror Suspects," *New York Times*, 6 June 2003, sec. A.
- Jose Martí, "Fiestas de la Estatua de la Libertad" (1887), in *Obras Completas*, vol. 11 (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1991), 106, 109, 113.
- Rudyard Kipling, *Souvenirs of France* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 6.
- Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Statue of Liberty* (New York: Viking, 1976), 196.
- Kaja Silverman, "Liberty, Maternity, Commodification," *New Formations* 5 (Summer 1988): 82. On the Statue of Liberty's "consent to femininity" and the feminization of its interior spaces, see also Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 26–28. For a history of the feminine iconography of Liberty, see Pierre Provoyeur, "Artistic Problems," in *Liberty: The French-American Statue in Art and History*, ed. Pierre Provoyeur and June Hargrove (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 78–99.
- See, for example, Melanie Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict," in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Free Press, 1987), 69–83.
- The poem's many promulgators include populist historian and journalist Louis Adamic; Charles Boyer (in Mitchell Leisen's 1941 film *Hold Back the Dawn*); Priscilla Lane (in Hitchcock's 1942 film *Saboteur*); Allyn Ann McLerie (in Irving Berlin's 1949 musical *Miss Liberty*); John F. Kennedy (in his 1958 book *A Nation of Immigrants*); and the U.S. Mint (on its 1986 Liberty silver dollar).
- Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 26.
- Statue of Liberty* (Thomas A. Edison Inc., 1898), 48 sec.; 35 mm; from Library of Congress, *Inventing Entertainment: The Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies*, MPEG <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edhome.html>.
- Trachtenberg, *Statue of Liberty*, 49–57.
- Shira Wolosky, "An American-Jewish Typology: Emma Lazarus and the Figure of Christ," *Prooftexts* 16 (1996): 114. In his eulogy for Lazarus, Rabbi Gustav Gottheil called her "the Deborah of the nineteenth century"; see *The American Hebrew* 33, no. 5 (9 December 1887): 78. Similar comparisons are made repeatedly in the tributary letters published in this same memorial issue.
- George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 596.
- Emma Lazarus, *An Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Federation of American Zionists, 1900), 33.
- Daily Graphic* (New York), March 21, 1878, 1.
- Benjamin Tucker, "Salutatory," *Liberty* 1, no. 1 (August 6, 1881): 1.
- Phillipe Roger, "The Edifying Edifice," in Provoyeur and Hargrove, *Liberty*, 266.
- Gershom G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1965), 202.
- In Judges 4.3, Deborah summons Barak (whose name in Hebrew means "lightning") and inspires him to lead his army against Sisera and the troops of King Jabin, who had "oppressed Israel ruthlessly for twenty years."
- Grimm cited in Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 159.
- Emma Lazarus, "The New Year. Rosh-Hashanah, 5643," in *Songs of a Semite: The Dance to the Death, and Other Poems* (New York: Office of "The American Hebrew," 1882), 51.
- Emma Lazarus, "The Jewish Problem," *The Century* 25, no. 4 (February 1883): 610.
- Lazarus, *Epistle*, 73, 76.
- Bette Roth Young, ed., *Emma Lazarus in Her World: Life and Letters* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 23.
- See Lazarus, "The Jewish Problem," 610. Lazarus was also among the earliest champions of another proto-Zionist work, Leon Pinsker's "Autoemancipation!" *Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden* (1882). See *Epistle*, 34.
- Emma Lazarus, letter to Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, January 29, 1884, in *Emma Lazarus in Her World*, 199.
- Milestones of this consolidation include the publication of Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* in Vienna in 1896, and the founding, in 1897, of the World Zionist Organization in Basel, of the Jewish Workers Party in Vilna, and of *Forverts*, the socialist Yiddish newspaper, in New York. See Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 63.
- Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 20.
- Abraham Cahan, *The Education of Abraham Cahan*, trans. Leon Stein et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), 354.
- Emma Lazarus, "The Schiff Refuge," *The American Hebrew* 12, no. 10 (October 20, 1882): 114–15. According to James Hoffman, Lazarus was on Ward's Island the day (October 14) the rioting broke out; see Letter, *The American Hebrew* 33, no. 5 (December 9, 1887): 71.
- Emma Lazarus, "Russian Christianity Versus Modern Judaism," *The Century* 24, no. 1 (May 1882): 48.
- Lazarus, *Epistle*, 43, 45.
- Ira Katznelson, "Between Separation and Disappearance: Jews on the Margins of American Liberalism," in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, ed. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 165–70.
- Lazarus, "The Jewish Problem," 608.

35. In 1877, Joseph Seligman, a New York banker of German descent, was barred by Conrad Hilton from the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York. Highly publicized, the Seligman-Hilton affair helped inaugurate an era of exclusionary practices that winnowed and barred Jews from the institutions of elite-formation, such as resorts, clubs, private schools, and universities. See Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 82–86.
36. Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 121–26.
37. Katznelson, "Between Separation and Disappearance," 168.
38. Emma Lazarus, "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," *The American Hebrew* 10, no. 9 (April 14, 1882), 98–99.
39. *Ibid.*, 99.
40. Contrary to what the poem suggests, irregular summer services were held at the Touro Synagogue beginning in 1850 and continuing until the recommencement of regular Sabbath services in the 1880s. From 1853 to 1861, the synagogue's visitor's book records "103 Jewish visitors and no less than 762 Christian visitors"; see *Touro Synagogue of Congregation Jeshuat Israel* (Newport: The Society of Friends of the Touro Synagogue, 1948), 12.
41. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport," in *Poems and Other Writings*, ed. J. D. McClatchy (New York: Library of America, 2000), 336. Further quotations from this poem are cited parenthetically by page number within the text.
42. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana provides an impressionistic account of the poem's composition and revision in *Touro Synagogue*, 45–50.
43. Lazarus, "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," 99.
44. Lazarus, *Epistle*, 77.
45. Emma Lazarus, "In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport," in *Admetus and Other Poems* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1871), 160. Further quotations from this poem are cited parenthetically by page number within the text.
46. Longfellow's fascination with Talmudic legend is recorded in "Sandalphon" (1858), a poem inspired by Heinrich Corrodi's *Kritische Geschichte des Chiliasmus* (1781): "It is but a legend, I know, / A fable, a phantom, a show, / Of the ancient Rabbinical lore; / Yet the old medieval tradition, / The beautiful, strange superstition, / But haunts me and holds me the more" (346).
47. Lazarus, "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," 99.
48. "The Russian Emigrants," *The Jewish Messenger* 51, no. 17 (April 28, 1882): 2.
49. See Uri D. Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880–1910* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981). Lazarus's friend Michael Heilprin and her cousin Benjamin Franklin Peixotto were both active in the effort to "plant colonies" of Jews in the rural and western parts of the country; see Benjamin F. Peixotto, *What Shall We Do With Our Immigrants?* (New York: Young Men's Hebrew Association, 1887), 8.
50. "The Russian Emigrants," 2.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Yerushalmi, "Exile and Expulsion," 6; emphasis in original.
53. Lazarus, *Songs of a Semite*, 53. Further quotations from this poem are cited parenthetically by line number within the text.
54. Israel Isser Kasovich, *The Days of Our Years: Personal and General Reminiscence (1859–1929)*, trans. Maximilian Hurwitz (New York: Jordan Publishing Company, 1929), 163, 173.
55. In Genesis 23, Abraham's purchase of a burial site for Sarah in Hebron is where Jewish legal claim to divinely promised land ostensibly begins.
56. For example, with the psalmist on the way to Jerusalem ("The Valley of Baca"), in fourteenth-century Malta ("The Guardian of the Red Disk"), in Saragossa during the Inquisition ("Don Pedrillo" and "Fra Pedro"). Most of the bulk of the volume is taken up by her verse drama, *The Dance to Death*, set in medieval Nordhausen, and by her

- translations from three Hebrew poets (Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Judah Halevi, and Moses Ibn Ezra) of the Spanish Golden Age. Lazarus's other poems include a pair on Rashi, the eleventh-century Talmudist; one on Moses Maimonides, the twelfth-century philosopher; "An Epistle from Joshua Ibn Vives," set in fifteenth-century Spain; "The Birth of Man," based on Talmudic legend; and "Bar Kochba," about the martyred leader of the second-century Jewish revolt against Roman rule in Palestine.
57. Ranen Omer-Sherman, *Diaspora and Zionism in Jewish American Literature: Lazarus, Syrkin, Reznikoff, and Roth* (Hanover, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 39.
58. David Hartman, *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition: An Ancient People Debating Its Future* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8–9.
59. Harshav, *Language*, 3.
60. Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Foreword, in *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess (New York: The Feminist Press, 1999), xiii.
61. Harshav, *Language*, 82–83.
62. Peixotto, *What Shall We Do With Our Immigrants?*, 12.
63. "I have reached a point now where I must," she wrote to a friend in August (letter to Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, August 23, 1882, in *Emma Lazarus and Her World*, 192; emphasis in original). Her first direct translation of a Hebrew poem was published the following May; see [Judah Al-Harizi], "Consolation," *The American Hebrew* 14, no. 13 (May 11, 1883), 147. Lazarus had sent the poem to Philip Cowen along with her thank-you note for *Picturesque Palestine*. In the same short letter she told him: "I have translated this from the original Hebrew—& so am very proud of it as my first effort!" (*Letters of Emma Lazarus*, 57).
64. Constance Cary Harrison, letter, *The American Hebrew* 33, no. 5 (December 9, 1887): 69.
65. Mark Twain, "Mark Twain Aggrieved. Why a Statue of Liberty When We Have Adam!," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1883, 2; James Baldwin, interview, *The Statue of Liberty*, DVD, directed by Ken Burns (1985; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2002).
66. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1978), 131.
67. Kenneth Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 16.
68. Franz Kafka, *Amerika*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York: New Directions, 2002), 3.
69. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.
70. James Russell Lowell, letter to Emma Lazarus, December 17, 1883, in *Letters to Emma Lazarus in the Columbia University Library*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 74.
71. Kristeva, *Powers*, 3.
72. Heine's "Donna Clara" (1823) concerns a medieval Spanish knight who, passing as a Christian, woos and impregnates the anti-Semitic daughter of the alcalde and only then reveals to her his true identity as a Jew. Heine wrote to a friend that the poem "was only to be the first part of a trilogy, the second of which shows the hero jeered at by his own child who does not know him, whilst the third discovers this child who has become a Dominican, and is torturing to the death his Jewish brethren" (quoted in Lazarus, *Songs of a Semite*, 60). Lazarus tried to fulfill Heine's intentions in her poems "Don Pedrillo" and "Fra Pedro."
73. Heinrich Heine, "Jehuda ben Halevy," 1851, in *Romanzero; Gedichte. 1853 und 1854; Lyrischer Nachlass*, ed. Frauke Bartelt and Alberto Destro (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1992), 134–35. The translation is mine.
74. Quoted in S. S. Praver, *Heine's Jewish Comedy: A Study of His Portraits of Jews and Judaism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 531. Interestingly, one of Heine's favorite personas in his later poetry was a version of the Lucan and Johannine figures of Lazarus, a fact

Emma Lazarus must have observed, but which she never comments on in her extant writing.

75. Emma Lazarus, "The Poet Heine," *The Century* 29, no. 2 (December 1884): 211.
76. Emma Lazarus, "The Venus of the Louvre," *The Century* 29, no. 2 (December 1884): 210.
77. Theodor Adorno, "Heine the Wound" (1956), in *Notes to Literature: Volume One*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 85.
78. Ibid.
79. Lazarus, "The Poet Heine," 214, 217.

## PART TWO



# A Marriage of Cultures

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