

Emma Lazarus and the Golem of Liberty

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 quoted 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
Glow 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 teeming shore—
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me—
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

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. They are commonly invoked, for instance, whenever anyone feels that our government is acting inhospitably—thus their 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 and danger and contradictoriness of that ideal. Lazarus’s poem offers to oppose

doi:10.1093/alh/ajj001

© The Author 2006. Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. For permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oxfordjournals.org

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 is to recognize how comprehensively its reception history has resisted its destabilizing relation to the iconology of liberty.

This essay 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” (qtd. in Lichtblau) often gets viewed as somehow at odds with more “patriotic” anxiety for the safety of national icons of freedom. These icons 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. While 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 longstanding 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. José Martí, among the first to describe at length the exorbitant nationalism of the statue’s dedication ceremony on 28 October 1886, saw a “widow’s expression on her face” (“un tinte de viudez en el semblante” [106]), but also in the same essay likened Liberty to a “sorrowing virgin” (“virgen dolorosa” [106]), a shared “lover” (“a quien todos hablan como a una amante adorada” [109]), and an “immense mother among the clouds” (“allá en las nubes,

aparecía como una madre inmensa” [113]). Long before its dedication, the statue was introduced to the world in the form of severed bodily appendages: the torchbearing 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 into the dome of Liberty’s skull, where he could look out “through the vacant eye-balls at the bright-coloured world beneath” (6). The figural violence of such entries—the desire to penetrate and control 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” put it before the closing, “she is open to all for entry and exploration from below” (Trachtenberg 196). Kaja Silverman seeks to dispel this pornographic shade by asserting that the actual experience of climbing inside the statue (one entered 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” (82).¹ 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.² 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 wide 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.³ 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 helps to ensure that there will be no contradiction 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 maternal voice, claims to stand. As Angus Fletcher observes of emblematic poems, “the remnants of an action are there” (26), and Lazarus helps supply the narrative by which the beholder of the statue is involved in the perennial unfolding of that action. Thus, amidst the welter of dynamic subjects of Thomas Edison’s earliest “actualities” (those short nonfiction movies of parades, trains in motion, a hockey game, Niagara Falls, a man sneezing, etc.), the 48-second film *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’s 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.

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 (Trachtenberg 49–57). 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” (114). 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 compared by her admirers (114).⁴

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!" (596). Lazarus cites this passage twice in her serialized polemic *An Epistle to the Hebrews* (1882–83), expressing her hope in the sixth installment that "the 'torch of visible community' may soon be raised" (33). 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 ("Awful")?

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 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 the announcement: "*LIBERTY* enters the field of journalism to speak for herself because she finds no one willing to speak for her" (Tucker). 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 "[l]et 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.

Philippe 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" (266). In one tradition, the golem is created out of necessity to save the blood-limed Jews of Prague from deadly reprisals. 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.⁵ 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—the children of this “Mother”—welcomed by the glow emanating from “her beacon-hand.” In folkloric versions of the golem legend, such as 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*) (Scholem 159). 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 US) 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?

1. 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 1881–82 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 such as “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. (*Songs* 51)

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

Neither of these streams 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 '90s. During this period, acculturated Western Jews—from Zunz and Wolf to Herzl and 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 her writings on Jewish themes and in her translations of the work of Jewish poets. 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 US. 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 was a state of affairs that 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" (610). She was careful to assure assimilated Jews 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 (*Epistle* 73, 76). 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, re-creation, and refutation of shared identities; and of her management of poetic transmission, down through time and across the spaces of her Atlantic world.

Lazarus's foreshortened career (she died at 38) was from its earliest stages an undertaking in transatlantic cosmopolitanism. With poems modeled on Tennyson, Longfellow, Schumann, and Emerson, Lazarus's earliest books also included translations of works by Hugo, Leopardi, de Musset, Goethe, and Heine. In 1874 she published a novel based on Goethe's erotic life, and in 1876 she published a romantic verse drama about José de Ribera. Her translations of early and modern European poets continued to appear throughout the 1870s, and her *Poems and Ballads of Heinrich Heine* was published in 1881. In the theaters of New York, she heard Joseffy and Rubinstein play and saw Salvini act (Young 23). She discovered the ideal of a Jewish nation-state in the pages of *Daniel Deronda*.⁶ 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 workshop. Back in New York, in January 1884, she heard Matthew Arnold lecture on Emerson (Young 199). She returned to Europe in 1885, traveling widely until, in July of 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.⁷ 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 City would become one of the most important sites of Jewish collective renewal in over 500 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 (*Poems* 22–23). 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 wrote these

poems, already brought thousands of Jews to New York City and would bring many hundreds of thousands more by 1917.

Lazarus helped greet and care for some of the earliest arrivals, including the young Abraham Cahan, at Ward's Island in 1882 (Cahan 354). 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" ("Russian" 48). 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" (*Epistle* 43, 45).

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 North American and Caribbean colonies and later (and in much larger numbers) to the nineteenth-century US, emancipation occurred precisely in the traversal of the Atlantic (Katznelson 165–70). It was owing not only to the egalitarian promise of America but also to the anxieties of postemancipation European Jewry that European Jewish aid societies, such as the Alliance Israélite Universelle, determined the US to be the proper destination for so many of the eastern European 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. But American Jews had their own concerns about the eastern European 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" (608). Incidences of anti-Semitism were already on the rise in the US, and many assimilated American Jews of Sephardic and German descent feared the new visibility their eastern European cousins would presumably confer upon

them.⁹ But the reality of inter- and intraethnic hostilities in the US could not impede the resulting flow—mostly through New York City—of eastern European refugees, who would eventually number in the millions.¹⁰

Culturally, the expression of Jewish responsibility also depended upon the transatlantic situation not only of the recent eastern European 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. . . . [T]he 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” (168). 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 European crisis, to explore the historical dimensions of Jewish transnational existence. Longfellow was one of Lazarus’s early interlocutors on the subject of Jewish history—a fact she had occasion to recall upon his death in 1882, shortly before the imposition of the May Laws.

2. Jewish History and Jewish Life

A few weeks after Longfellow died, Lazarus found fault with him in an obituary essay for *The American Hebrew*: “[A]ll 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” (98–99).

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” (99). Lazarus herself had been sufficiently unwilling to accept them two decades earlier, during the year she turned 18, 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. For both poets as well, 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. For whereas Longfellow's 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.

Longfellow positions his speaker outside the synagogue, the portals of which are emphatically closed.¹¹ Nearby, among the graves, the speaker registers the strangeness of the scene. He notes, for example, the discordant silence of the cemetery beside 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" (336). 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. The poem proceeds by compressing and truncating Jewish history, conflating biblical and European coordinates, and occluding the history of the Newport congregation itself to resist the entwining of Jewish and American pasts. In draft stages of the poem, Longfellow omitted several stanzas about the ongoing nature of Jewish suffering and on the political and religious freedom afforded by life in the American colonies.¹² His final text concludes instead by figuring away the Jewish race, as one of many "dead nations never [to] rise again" (337).

By 1882, events dramatically give the lie to Longfellow's earlier imaginative fiat. The influx into the US 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"

(99). 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 US 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” (77).

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. (160)

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)

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

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 semi-literate 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.¹³ 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 Isaiahan trope, "green grass lieth gently over all" (161). After this line, Lazarus'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. It is a retreat into biblical text that 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. Hiawatha's departure is, famously, a final one. 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 coterminous 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 backwards, into lost times and places, as well as forwards, as agents of a yet unfolding history. It's a voice in which many nineteenth-century American poets, as instanced for Lazarus by Longfellow, found it increasingly difficult or perhaps even dangerous to speak. “Here is no painful crudity of rough strength,” she wrote retrospectively of Longfellow's poetry, “no intellectual or moral audacity engendered by democratic institutions, and by unprecedented vistas

of a broadly developing nationality” (99). 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?

3. 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” (“Russian Emigrants”). This Texan venture was one of many attempts to establish Jewish farming communities throughout the US, paralleling more successful efforts in Palestine.¹⁴ The refugees’ letter is an excellent advertisement for these largely utopian westering 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 working-men!” 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 nor the Texas heat can break their “merry disposition.” Even the “abundance of snakes and scorpions” in this new Eden is merely “unpleasant.”

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.” With oak tree in lieu of willow, the Texas Jews rework Psalm 137 and sing their songs on alien soil. In doing so they seem to have produced a feeling of attachment to their circumstances and surroundings akin to what Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi has called “the sentiment *in exile* of feeling at home” (6). Lazarus’s poem extends this sentiment, 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. (*Songs* 53)

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.¹⁵ 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 "[f]reedom 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.¹⁶

Like "In Exile," most of the other poems collected in Lazarus's *Songs of a Semite* (1882) embed Jewish experience in sacred history or remote secular history.¹⁷ 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 pruritic 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" (Omer-Sherman 39). It's certainly true that 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 in her recourse to remote history for images of strong, healthy Jews, Lazarus anticipated the struggle of later figures such as Nordau to overcome what David Hartman calls "the anthropology of exile . . . the frightened, emaciated, mind-obsessed Jew" (7). Secular Zionists, Hartman argues, valued the Bible as "a way of discovering and legitimating new expressions of Jewish peoplehood" (8). 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 (3). Initially, Yiddish was the more likely vehicle of the new Jewish nationalism. But, as Harshav explains, 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” (82). 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” [xiii]). “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” (82–83).

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 supported the emigration to America of Romania’s oppressed Jews, and during the 1880s he was a promoter of Jewish homesteading in the US. Regarding the new Jewish settlements in his own city, however, he had this to say in an 1887 address to the New York Young Men’s Hebrew Association: “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” (12). 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 (12).

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 (for example, “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 dining background of English poetry. What the poem does give them is 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 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. (*Songs* 54)

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. It was around this time that Lazarus herself began to study Hebrew.¹⁸ But the imminent, prodigious voicing—for which she would come to be known, and yet in which her own voice would be subsumed—was a sonnet in English.

4. Lazarus’s Wounds

The terms of France’s gift to the US of Bartholdi’s *Liberté éclaircit 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.” 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 of the details of Lazarus’s poem: the “mild eyes” that “command” the harbor, and the “silent lips” that are paradoxically full of speech—speech that would come 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 US 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.”

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 reification 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. It was just a few months before Lazarus wrote “The New Colossus” that 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” (131). More than a century’s worth of images of the Statue of Liberty’s alteration and mutilation has 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” (16)—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 may, someday, once again) ascend and descend—but also of Kafka’s transfiguration of Liberty’s torch into a sword at the opening of his novel *Amerika*. 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 characterizes as the sublime dynamics of abjection (1).

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” (74). 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” (3). This paradoxical gesture—of keeping close to what one fears or

loathes by being always in the position of casting it away —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 City’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 US 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 also sought to extend this identification by completing a Jewish-themed poem sequence Heine left unfinished.¹⁹ 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”:

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.²⁰

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” (Praver 531).²¹

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?’” (211). 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. (“Venus of the Louvre”)

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” (85). Transfixed to stone herself, without arms and unable to help, 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, “[d]own 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” (85). 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” (“Poet” 214)—a Germany “free from race-hatred and bigotry . . . and ready to receive her illustrious Semitic son” (217). 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 *SS 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 with humility 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

Acting to preserve a symbol of liberty is a fully defensible practice of American civic religion, when its practitioners honestly and with humility aspire to help, to heal, and to console. But our moral interpretations of that symbol elude justification when we contract ourselves, and those we compel, into smaller and smaller precincts of freedom.

into a glass-ceilinged 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

1. On the Statue of Liberty's "consent to femininity" (27) and the feminization of its interior spaces, see Berlant 26–28. For a history of the feminine iconography of Liberty, see Provoyeur.
2. See, e.g., Klein.
3. 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 US Mint (on its 1986 Liberty silver dollar).
4. In his eulogy for Lazarus, published in *The American Hebrew* shortly after her death, Rabbi Gustav Gottheil calls her "the Deborah of the nineteenth century" (78). Similar comparisons are made repeatedly in the tributary letters published in this same memorial issue.
5. 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."
6. 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.
7. 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 City. See Harshav 63.
8. See Cahan 354.
9. In 1877, Joseph Seligman, a New York City 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 Ginsberg 82–86.
10. See Sachar 121–26.

11. 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" (*Touro* 12).

12. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana provides an impressionistic account of the poem's composition and revision in *Touro*, 45–50.

13. 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. (Longfellow 346)

14. See Uri D. Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880–1910* (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 (Peixotto 8).

15. See Kasovich 163, 173.

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. "I have reached a point now where I *must*," she wrote to a friend in August (Young 192). Her first direct translation of a Hebrew poem was published the following May (see "Consolation"). Lazarus had earlier sent the poem to Philip Cowen, telling him, "I have translated this from the original Hebrew—& so am very proud of it as my first effort!" (*Letters* 57).

19. 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" (qtd. in Lazarus, *Songs* 60). Lazarus tried to fulfill Heine's intentions in her poems "Don Pedrillo" and "Fra Pedro."

20. This is my translation of the following:

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. (Heine 134–35)

21. 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.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor. "Heine the Wound." 1956. *Notes to Literature: Volume One*. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 80–85.
- "Awful Possibilities of the New Speaking Phonograph." *Daily Graphic* [New York] 21 Mar. 1878: 1.
- Baldwin, James. Interview. *The Statue of Liberty*. Dir. Ken Burns. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2002.
- Berlant, Lauren. *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.
- Cahan, Abraham. *The Education of Abraham Cahan*. Trans. Leon Stein et al. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969.
- Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986.
- Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1964.
- Ginsberg, Benjamin. *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.
- Gottheil, Gustav. "Dr. Gottheil's Eulogy at Temple Emanu-El." *American Hebrew* 9 Dec. 1887: 78.
- Gross, Kenneth. *The Dream of the Moving Statue*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992.
- Harrison, Constance Cary. "She Gave an Impulse to Higher Things." *American Hebrew* 9 Dec. 1887): 69.
- Harshav, Benjamin. *Language in a Time of Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
- Hartman, David. *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition: An Ancient People Debating Its Future*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000.
- Heine, Heinrich. "Jehuda ben Halevy." 1851. *Romanzero, Gedichte. 1853 und 1854, Lyrischer Nachlass*. Ed. Frauke Bartelt and Alberto Destro. Hamburg: Hoffmann, 1992. 130–58.
- Kasovich, Israel Isser. *The Days of Our Years: Personal and General*

- Reminiscence (1859–1929)*. Trans. Maximilian Hurwitz. New York: Jordan, 1929.
- Katznelson, Ira. "Between Separation and Disappearance: Jews on the Margins of American Liberalism." *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*. Ed. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995. 157–205.
- Kipling, Rudyard. *Souvenirs of France*. London: Macmillan, 1933.
- Klein, Melanie. "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict." *The Selected Melanie Klein*. Ed. Juliet Mitchell. New York: Free Press, 1987. 69–83.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- Lazarus, Emma, trans. "Consolation." By Judah Al-Harizi. *American Hebrew* 11 May 1883: 147.
- . *An Epistle to the Hebrews*. New York: Federation of American Zionists, 1900.
- . "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow." *American Hebrew* 14 Apr. 1882: 98–99.
- . "In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport." *Admetus and Other Poems*. New York: Hurd, 1871. 160–62.
- . "The Jewish Problem." *Century* Feb. 1883: 602–11.
- . *The Letters of Emma Lazarus: 1868–1885*. Ed. Morris U. Schappes. New York: New York Public Library, 1949.
- . "The New Colossus." *Catalogue of the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition*. New York: National Academy of Design, 1883. [9].
- . *The Poems of Emma Lazarus*. Vol. 2. Boston: Houghton, 1889.
- . "The Poet Heine." *Century* Dec. 1884: 210–17.
- . "Russian Christianity Versus Modern Judaism." *Century* May 1882: 48–56.
- . *Songs of a Semite: The Dance to the Death, and Other Poems*. New York: Office of *The American Hebrew*, 1882.
- . "The Venus of the Louvre." *Century* Dec. 1884: 210.
- Lichtblau, Eric. "Threats and Responses: The Justice Department; Ashcroft Seeks More Power to Pursue Terror Suspects." *New York Times* 6 June 2003: A1.
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Poems and Other Writings*. Ed. J. D. McClatchy. New York: Library of America, 2000.
- Lowell, James Russell. Letter to Emma Lazarus. 10 Dec. 1883. *Letters to Emma Lazarus in the Columbia University Library*. Ed. Ralph L. Rusk. New York: Columbia UP, 1939. 73–74.
- Martí, José. "Fiestas de la Estatua de la Libertad." 1887. *Obras Completas*. Vol. 11. Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1991.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1978.
- Omer-Sherman, Ranen. *Diaspora and Zionism in Jewish American Literature: Lazarus, Syrkin, Reznikoff, and Roth*. Hanover: Brandeis UP, 2002.
- Ostriker, Alicia Suskin. Foreword. *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present*. Ed. Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess. New York: Feminist Press, 1999. xiii–xiv.

- Peixotto, Benjamin F. *What Shall We Do with Our Immigrants?* New York: Young Men's Hebrew Association, 1887.
- Prawer, S. S. *Heine's Jewish Comedy: A Study of His Portraits of Jews and Judaism*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1983.
- Provoyeur, Pierre. "Artistic Problems." *Liberty: The French-American Statue in Art and History*. Ed. Provoyeur and June Hargrove. New York: Harper, 1986. 78–99.
- Roger, Philippe. "The Edifying Edifice." *Liberty: The French-American Statue in Art and History*. Ed. Pierre Provoyeur and June Hargrove. New York: Harper, 1986. 266–88.
- "The Russian Emigrants." *Jewish Messenger* 28 Apr. 1882: 2.
- Sachar, Howard M. *A History of the Jews in America*. New York: Vintage, 1993.
- Scholem, Gershom G. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken, 1965.
- Silverman, Kaja. "Liberty, Maternity, Commodification." *New Formations* 5 (Summer 1988): 69–89.
- Statue of Liberty*. 1898. Thomas A. Edison, Inc. MPEG. Library of Congress.
- Inventing Entertainment: The Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies*. 23 Sept. 2004. <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edhome.html>>.
- Touro Synagogue of Congregation Jeshuat Israel*. Newport: Society of Friends of the Touro Synagogue, 1948.
- Trachtenberg, Marvin. *The Statue of Liberty*. New York: Viking, 1976.
- Tucker, Benjamin. "Salutatory." *Liberty* 6 Aug. 1881: 1.
- Twain, Mark. "Mark Twain Aggrieved. Why a Statue of Liberty When We Have Adam!" *New York Times* 4 Dec. 1883: 2.
- Wolosky, Shira. "An American-Jewish Typology: Emma Lazarus and the Figure of Christ." *Prooftexts* 16 (1996): 113–25.
- Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. "Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History." *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*. Ed. Benjamin R. Gampel. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 3–22.
- Young, Betty Roth, ed. *Emma Lazarus and Her World: Life and Letters*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995.