

Engendering Zionism: The Case of Emma Lazarus

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ABSTRACT: While many scholars have commented on the polemical aspects of Emma Lazarus' "Jewish" poetry, most have concentrated on her use of religious and racial imagery but have failed to acknowledge the centrality of gender tropes in her writing. In this paper I examine Emma Lazarus' attempt to reinvigorate Jewish patriotism and nationalism in 1880s America, contending that the nationalism Lazarus champions is informed by her efforts to create a "remasculinized" Jew. I argue that her endeavors were, in many ways, a reaction to the feminization of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants underway at the time. Emma Lazarus, a woman who precedes Zionism's "founding fathers" – e.g., Herzl and Nordau – refigures Jewish maleness in hyper-masculine terms, and yet, in so doing, she unwittingly exposes the problematic nature of nationalism's identity claims.

Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) has been variously described as one of the first poets to assert an ethnic voice in America, as the greatest Jewish poet of the nineteenth century, and as the first important Jewish writer "to address critically the Jewish present as it is and as it might be" (Kessner, 1994: 197).¹ In the last ten years, scholars have uncovered and analyzed hitherto unknown documents and correspondences, which have shed new light on Lazarus' life. New evidence concerning her political activism has emerged, and earlier assumptions about her personality have been challenged.² For all of these reasons, Lazarus continues to

¹ See Wolosky (1996), pp. 113; Bette Roth Young (1995), pp. 10; and Carole Kessner (1994), 197.

² Bette Roth Young writes, "The discovery of more than one hundred letters sheds astonishing new light on Emma Lazarus. They provide the social life and the personality of a vital young woman who, contrary to the persona her biographers created, went a great many places with a great many people, and met life with an unfailing sense of humor" (1995: 20). Moreover, Young claims that until the discovery of these new letters, the extent of Lazarus' political activity was unknown (ibid.: 21).

be a fascinating figure in the history of both American and American Jewish literary studies.

Particularly during the latter part of her short life, Lazarus became concerned with the Jewish Question.³ The possibility of “reviving” Jewish dignity and galvanizing Jewish patriotism were themes that began to dominate her writing in 1882. In *An Epistle to the Hebrews*, Lazarus asserts that the only way Jews could reclaim their “true” inheritance of dignity and greatness was to build up the Jewish “national, physical force.”⁴ Modern Jews, she goes on to say, were a blemished “race,” not due to any inherent flaw, but rather due to thousands of years of oppression and contempt. “Close confinement and solitary occupations” also contributed to their present state of weakness and degeneracy (30-31). On the one hand then, Lazarus unwittingly appropriated the anti-Semitic claim that Jews are flawed, and thus adopted and internalized the accusations being waged against them.⁵ On the other hand, she was convinced and tried to convince others – through her writing – that there was a relatively simple solution to the current degraded state of the Jews. A new Jew must emerge; one who is vigorous, courageous, filled with martial spirit and heroic. This ideal Jew must also be an enthusiastic patriot and an advocate of the re-nationalization of Palestine.

In this paper I examine Lazarus’ attempt to reinvigorate Jewish patriotism and nationalism, contending that the nationalism Lazarus champions is informed by her efforts to create a “remasculinized” Jew. Her endeavors were, in many ways, a reaction to the feminization of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants that was underway at the time, and resulted in the glorification of a very specific kind of Jew and Jewishness. Perusing such poems as “The Banner of the Jew” and “Bar Kochba,” I argue that we are confronted with Lazarus’ image of desirable Jewishness, which is depicted in nationalist terms. Interestingly, this new and “improved” Jew envisioned by Lazarus is one that would later be lionized by Max Nordau and Theodore Herzl.

³ Young provides the most convincing argument concerning Lazarus’ early engagement with particularly Jewish themes; her interest did not, as other critics have argued, occur suddenly in 1882. For example, as early as 1867 Lazarus wrote “In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport.” In 1880, Lazarus published two long poems in the *Independent*, “Rashi in Prague” and “The Death of Rashi.” Her most “strident poetry and prose” that dealt with the “Jewish Question” emerged in 1882 (Young, 1995: 43).

⁴ Emma Lazarus, *An Epistle to the Hebrews*, 30-31. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵ This kind of discourse had been circulating in Europe by liberal Christians and formed part of the ideology of the Jewish Emancipation. The solution to the Jewish problem, according to the liberal Christians, was for the Jews to eschew their primitive and “Oriental” way of life. See Boyarin (1997), pp. 279.

My claim, in a nutshell, is that the creation of these images of Jewishness, embodied in martial heroes such as Bar Kochba and the Maccabees, had just as much to do with contemporaneous gender norms as they did with a prescription of how to revive Jewish dignity and galvanize Jewish patriotism. As Cynthia Enloe (1990), Jan Pettman (1996), Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), Anne McClintock (1997) and others have all argued, nationalism and patriotism are both constructed on and through gender norms; nationalisms are “constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power” (McClintock, 1997: 90). I contend that one way of understanding Lazarus’ call for the re-nationalization of Palestine and for patriotism is through the anxiety Daniel Boyarin discusses in his book *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*. In order to counteract the social stigma of effeminacy and passivity (and queerness) that was being increasingly attached to Jews during the 1880s, and to attempt to make a distinction between assimilated modern Jews and so-called backward ones, a *hyper-masculine* patriotism and nationalism was fashioned and advocated.⁶ Boyarin discusses Sigmund Freud and Theodor Herzl as two influential proponents of this new hyper-masculine Jew, claiming that both psychoanalysis and Zionism were two “specifically Jewish cultural answers to the rise of heterosexuality” and the feminization and queering of the Jewish male (Boyarin, 1997: 28). I show that Lazarus, who was writing her poetry before the foundation of these intellectual strains and in a different geographic location, was also affected by a similar anxiety; Lazarus as a way of containing this widespread cultural anxiety employed the invocation of nationalism and patriotism.

On the one hand, Lazarus’ call for the re-nationalization of Palestine by Eastern European Jews was “radical” for the time. On the other, however, her poetry is saturated with reactionary elements – most striking of which is her refashioning of ideal Jewishness through tropes of hyper-masculinity. It was on and through the bodies of men that Lazarus’ nationalism was built. This is particularly interesting in the context of the 1880s and the increasing mobilization of women’s movements in the United States. While most scholars investigating Zionism have concentrated on the men who championed the emergence of the

⁶ Of course Boyarin was not the first to make this claim. See also Paul Breines (1990); Jacques Kornberg (1993); and George Mosse (1996). Boyarin’s emphasis on the “rise of heterosexuality” alongside the feminization of Jews, though, is a very nuanced and convincing one. The feminization of Jewish men, the emergence of the homosexual and the heterosexual as species, and the consequent production of the hyper-masculinized Jew which was accomplished through Zionism are, I believe, inextricably interrelated. Reinforcing normative gender roles translates into a reinforcement of heterosexuality, and I think that Boyarin is correct when he links the emergence of Zionism with the rise of heterosexuality.

new “tough” Jew, one of the questions I address towards the end of this essay is whether her gender position makes a difference; for this is certainly one of the traits that differentiates her from later proponents of Zionism.

Feminization

Emma Lazarus became a spokesperson and activist for the resettlement of Jews in a re-nationalized Palestine, advocating Zionism thirteen years before Theodore Herzl coined the term. Her solution to the Jewish Question was an interesting and complex one, for she did not envision Palestine as a place of asylum for all Jews, but only for those in Eastern Europe who were suffering from tyranny and oppression. Jews in “emancipated” countries, such as the United States and Europe, were emphatically urged to support the establishment of a re-nationalized Palestine but were not encouraged to look upon Palestine as their future home. In other words, she urged patriotism for American and European Jews and nationalist aspirations in Palestine for Eastern European Jews. Her solution was one that helped reconcile the dual and seemingly contradictory impulses to assimilate and to be self-assertive in the face of anti-Semitism.⁷ It also attempted to deflect the accusation that Jews were national outsiders and had a questionable loyalty to the state. The form of patriotism she advocated involved identification with the state, its customs and norms, and simultaneously an assertion that Jews – as a distinct minority – were proud and active partisans.

It is not coincidental that Lazarus was formulating her position on Palestine and the Jewish Question during the first major wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. The new immigrants were poor, not yet acculturated and Orthodox; they dressed differently and had “alien” habits.⁸ Or, in Lazarus’ own words, these refugees had “antiquated, semi-barbarous customs”; they lived in “mental darkness and petrified superstitions” (*Epistles*: 68). The traditional gendering of Jewish life that many brought with them was antithetical to a society in which the cult of domesticity still reigned supreme.⁹ The Talmud scholar as an ideal for Jewish men lost ground very quickly in the United States, as did the workingwoman who supported his studies. Moreover, the new arrivals were seen to constitute a very real threat to the already well-established and assimilated Jews. As Eric Goldstein has claimed, “[T]he tendency of American

⁷ For an interesting discussion of this dual instinct and how Zionism served to answer both, see Boyarin (1997), pp. 282-283.

⁸ See, for example, Eric Goldstein (1997), pp. 29.

⁹ See Boyarin (1997); and Young (1995), p. 63. The cult of domesticity was being challenged by many first-wave feminists; but precisely because it was being threatened, its supporters and proponents came to its defense all the more vehemently.

society to lump native and foreign Jews together meant that the standing of the established community was also in question" (Goldstein, 1997: 54). The specter of anti-Semitism was reawakened during this period; indeed, it was on the rise.

One of the ways in which anti-Semitism manifested itself at the turn of the century, as Daniel Boyarin (1997), Paul Breines (1990), George Mosse (1996) and others have argued, was through the feminization and queering of Jewish men. America of the 1880s was no exception. In the wake of the pogroms against the Jews in Russia, the Jewish Question became a matter of concern to both Gentiles and Jews in the United States. Alongside the concern for the persecution of Russian Jews, however, there also (re)emerged a vitriolic anti-Semitic voice, which accused Jews of servility, abjectness, want of manliness and failing to stand up for themselves and resent injuries. As Paul Breines states in *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry*:

It was a period of anti-Semitic rhetoric proclaiming the effeminacy of Jewish males, and a broader, non-Jewish (and Jewish) Western, heterosexual, male crisis of masculinity occasioned by such challenges as the emergent women's rights movements as well as the openly homosexual subcultures that were starting to appear (Breines, 1990: 36).¹⁰

Thus, it is my contention that the Jewish nationalism (and patriotism), which Lazarus advocated, became a means of countering these attacks and a way of demonstrating that Jews could be proud, manly and very heterosexual – i.e., just like everyone else. Lazarus saw patriotism and "re-nationalization, in an age where nationalism was a powerful new concept, as a transcending, cleansing experience for a people seriously flawed" (Young, 1995: 56).

For Lazarus, then, her call for the re-nationalization of Palestine and the promotion of Jewish patriotism in the U.S. became a means of refuting and disabusing accusations made against the Jews.¹¹ However, as with other

¹⁰ Although Breines speaks about the 1890s through the 1920s, it seems to me that the 1880s should be included as part of this period. The anti-Semitic rhetoric, which emerged as the first wave of Eastern European immigrants arrived in the United States, was one that emphasized the want of manliness in the Jews. (See, for example, Ragozin, April 1882) Moreover, as Elizabeth Ammons claims in *Conflicting Stories* (1992: 5), "The 1880s and 1890s saw the emergence of a novel social and political phenomenon – the New Woman."

¹¹ It is interesting to note that Lazarus' ideal of patriotism (whether it was in America or in a re-nationalized Palestine) included two other interrelated elements. One was the need for Jews to "return to the land" and to "productive" industry, i.e., for Lazarus, it was imperative "to revive and develop the honorable love of manual arts and of wholesome outdoor pursuits" (*Epistles*: 9).

nationalisms, Lazarus' proto-Zionism involved the valorization of hypermasculinity. A dialectical relationship seems to have emerged – one that would characterize nationalist discourse throughout the next century (Nandy, 1983; Yuval-Davis, 1997). On the one hand, nationalism functioned as a reaction and solution to a certain kind of anti-Semitic gendering (i.e., the feminization of Jewish men). On the other hand, Lazarus' nationalism and conception of patriotism reproduced uncannily similar gender codes – i.e., ones which appropriated, invoked and enhanced hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity; the very same norms that had produced and positioned Jewish men as “abnormal” in the first place.¹² It is not surprising, therefore, that throughout her writing on the Jewish Question and in her “Jewish” poetry Lazarus herself feminizes and “others” those Jews who have been uprooted, those immigrants who refuse to give up their traditional ways of life, those, in effect, who do not live up to her particular version and understanding of patriotism and thus manliness.¹³ In this way, she unwittingly reproduces the same tropes used and circulated by the anti-Semites of the period. She also reinforces the anti-feminist discourse, which developed in reaction to the nascent women's movement.

Shira Wolosky and Diane Lichtenstein have both commented on the way in which America becomes naturalized and feminized in Lazarus' writing (Wolosky, 1996: 114-116; Lichtenstein, 1987: 260-261). But in reading “1492,” I would like to shift the focus onto the portrayal or depiction of the immigrants themselves:

Thou two-faced year, Mother of Change and Fate,
Didst weep when Spain cast forth with flaming sword,
The children of the prophets of the Lord,
Prince, priest, and people, spurned by zealot hate.
Hounded from sea to sea, from state to state,
The West refused them, and the East abhorred.

However, in fact, this push for the return to physical labor was reserved mostly for the “effeminate,” lower class and unassimilated Eastern European immigrants. See her poem “In Exile” for an example of this. The second element included an embrace of science, which I believe can be also be understood as a reaction to the accusations of backwardness and superstition being waged against the newly arrived *Ostjude*, and consequently against Jews more generally.

¹² Zionism is certainly not unique in this respect. I would even venture to say that this dialectic relationship *vis-à-vis* gender is one that has characterized many if not most nationalisms. (Re)fashioning gender, in this or in similar ways, has been one of the dominant features of nationalist projects.

¹³ See, for example, Lazarus' description of Eastern European immigrants in her *Epistles*, p. 72.

No anchorage the known world could afford,
Close-locked was every port, barred every gate
Then smiling, thou unveil'st, O two-faced year,
A virgin world where doors of sunset part,
Saying, "Ho, all who weary, enter here!
There falls each ancient barrier that the art
Of race or creed or rank devised to rear
Grim bulwarked hatred between heart and heart!"¹⁴

The trope of the virgin world ready for penetration, i.e., colonization, is today a familiar one. As in "The New Colossus," in which the Statue of Liberty is characterized as a "mighty woman with a torch...Mother of Exiles," the feminization of America certainly becomes clear in "1492." In the context of my argument, the more interesting aspect of this poem has to do with the gender positioning of the "children of the prophets." These Jews are depicted as pitiable and passive; they "are spurned," "are hounded," "are excluded"; it is in this sense that they are feminized. It seems that they have submissively accepted their fate. The Gentiles or non-Jews in the poem are active and masculinized. The West "refused," the East "abhorred"; the difference in the language used underscores the emasculated position of the uprooted refugees. But it is in this "new" land that the prejudices, that unnatural "barrier that the art/ Of race or creed or rank devised" of the Old World, are abandoned and the prospect of a new life and a new patriotism emerges. One could even argue that the emasculated Jews regain the possibility of masculinity through "entering" the feminized virgin America. That is, perhaps America is conceived of as the new Jerusalem in which the proper sexuality for the children of the prophets could be regained.

In her *An Epistle to the Hebrews*, Lazarus asseverates that Jews were "as a rule a race of soft-handed, soft-muscled men" who must return "instantly" to the "avocations of our ancestors in the day when our ancestors were truly great and admirable" (17, 19-20). The new and ideal Jew, it should be noted, is always conceived of in the masculine. This is not, in my opinion, fortuitous. It is not as if the Jewess as a separate entity does not appear in Lazarus' writing. Indeed she does. In her response to an anti-Semitic article, which basically justified the pogroms by claiming that the Jews had exploited their peasant neighbors, Lazarus writes, "Witness the disproportionate number of Jews and *Jewesses* thronging the

¹⁴ Lazarus' poems are cited from *The Poems of Emma Lazarus*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1989); and *Emma Lazarus: Selections from Her Poetry and Prose*, ed. Morris Schappes (New York, 1967).

[Russian] universities.”¹⁵ Moreover, in this very same letter, she refers to herself as a Jewess. But when speaking of the reborn Jew, the one who would reclaim the age-old dignity of ancient Israel, that Jew is always *he*.

By conferring a privileged status upon men, Lazarus “engenders the nation” and thus becomes complicit in the exclusion of women from the public sphere and positions of power.¹⁶ She, in effect, continues and reinforces the tradition in which the soldier, the citizen and thus the political subject are gendered male (Pettman, 1996: 96). Similar to Max Nordau and Theodore Herzl, Emma Lazarus’ Zionism constructed itself first and foremost through a very specific male stereotype; heterosexual masculinity (and not femininity) was used as the standard by which to measure the normalcy of the Jewish people. My claim then is in sharp contrast to critics who have argued that Lazarus’ poetry reverses the valuation of male and female power. In her article “Matrilineal Dissent: The Rhetoric of Zeal in Emma Lazarus, Marie Syrkin, and Cynthia Ozick,” Carole Kessner argues that Lazarus “rejects Western Culture’s Hellenistic glorification of male conquering power” (1994: 199). Instead, according to Kessner, Lazarus asserts the power and comfort of womanhood, and the Hebraic prophetic values of compassion and consolation. Shira Wolosky also contends that Lazarus asserts a uniquely female power. In her analysis of “The New Colossus,” Wolosky argues that Lazarus intends her “New Colossus” (i.e., the Statue of Liberty) to be opposed against the ancient Colossus of Rhodes. The “Greek giant acts in the poem as a figure for Europe” and is implicitly contrasted to the Hebraic America, the mighty mother of exiles, which is portrayed as preferable (Wolosky, 1996: 114). While the Greek Colossus is indeed portrayed as a “brazen” and conquering giant (“Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,/With conquering limbs astride from land to land”), the particular Hebraic tradition that Lazarus draws upon and endorses is very similar to the one she seems to be positioning as less desirable in this poem. The warrior, brazenly patriotic (not to mention patriarchal) tradition of Bar Kochba and the Maccabees, both of whom were usually marginalized in rabbinic Jewish tradition, is the one Lazarus passionately revitalizes.

Although I agree that Lazarus does assert the power and comfort of womanhood in certain poems, as seen in her most famous one, “The New Colossus,” the claim that, for Lazarus, the power of womanhood trumps and is privileged over male conquering power seems to me unfounded. It is not comfort of womanhood that is praised and glorified in poems such as “In Exile,” but

¹⁵ Emma Lazarus, “Russian Christianity Versus Modern Judaism,” 48, 52. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶ Consult Nira Yuval-Davis (1993).

rather the “noble joys of manhood.” In “The New Ezekiel,” Lazarus predicts – with passionate assurance – that “Where lay dead bones, a host of armed men” will stand. More importantly, traditional gender roles and traits continue to be hyperbolically advocated in Lazarus’ poetry, and especially in her “Jewish” poetry. The Statue of Liberty that Lazarus describes does not break with normative gender roles. The New Colossus, it should be remembered, “[g]lows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command”; she cries with silent lips. In other words, she is mild, silent, but exudes a “properly feminine” promise of care and nurture. Perhaps a certain conception of motherhood is needed as the nurturer of the new Jewish patriot; or in Jan Pettman’s words, “[T]he civic mother must bear and bring up sons for the state” (1996: 96). America then, as this naturalized, feminized site can be understood to be the necessary vessel for the production of a re-masculized Jew. In this way, Lazarus also reinforces normative heterosexuality.

One has only to read “The Banner of the Jew,” which was written in the same period as “The New Colossus” to see how problematic Kessner’s claim is. This poem is a tribute to the “glorious Maccabean rage,” the Maccabean clan, “who sang/Their *battle*-anthem to the Lord,” that is, to these heroes who fought to maintain their national identity. These five brothers are heroes because they “lead” the masses to a martial victory: “Then from the stony peak there rang/A blast to ope the graves: down poured/ The Maccabean clan...Five heroes lead, and following see,/Ten thousand rush to victory!” Lazarus implores the reader: “O deem not dead that *martial* fire,” and claims that the Jews “ancient *strength* remains unbent” (emphasis added). The last lines of the poem urge the Jews to defend their banner: “Strike! For the brave revere the brave.” It is not the power of “womanhood” that is being eulogized here; in fact, women are only mentioned in passing: men fight and bleed while “women weep.”

Masculinity and Nationalism

As I have already argued, Lazarus’ conception of desirable or ideal Jewishness is inextricably tied to nationalism and patriotism: “patriotism and religion are so blended as to be practically inseparable” (*Epistles*: 63). In fact, it would seem from her “Jewish” poetry and prose that nationalism for displaced Eastern European Jews and patriotism for American Jews were the two crucial elements that would inevitably remedy the deplorable state of Jewish dignity; that is, make Jewish men manly. Hyper-masculinity then, for Lazarus, served as a symbol for the ideals and hopes of Jewish society.

Bar Kochba, as Lazarus envisions him, becomes the Jew’s “spiritual father,” one of the paradigms for Jewish revival:

Weep, Israel! your tardy meed outpour
Of grateful homage on his fallen head,
That never coronal of triumph wore,
Untombed, dishonored, and unchapleted.
If Victory makes the hero, raw Success
The stamp of virtue, unremembered
Be then the desperate strife, the storm and stress
Of the last Warrior Jew. But if the man
Who dies for freedom, loving all things less,
Against world-legions, mustering his poor clan;
The weak, the wronged, the miserable, to send
Their death-cry's protest through the ages' span—
If such an one be worthy, ye shall lend
Eternal thanks to him, eternal praise.
Nobler the conquered than the conqueror's end!

This last warrior Jew is virtuous because he dies fighting for freedom, and loves all else less. Of course, the freedom referred to here is wrapped up in national identity; it is the freedom to oppose colonization and imperialism. Bar Kochba is depicted as superbly daring and courageous, for despite the great odds against his poor clan, he manages to mobilize his people to fight against "world-legions." In this way, Lazarus invokes and utilizes tropes of heterosexual masculinity to envision this honorable and praise-worthy Jew. Bar Kochba is active; here the warrior Jew is posited in opposition to the weak, wronged and miserable masses. He is heroic, because of his *deeds*, his military valor; he does not submissively accept aggression. Lazarus honors this mythical figure and implicitly claims that it was he who was responsible for sending the Jewish national protest "through the ages." In Lazarus' own words, Bar Kochba embodies "the last supreme manifestation" of "the martial spirit of his people."¹⁷

It is interesting to note that in her essay, "The Last National Revolt of the Jews," Lazarus not only recounts the story of the rebellion against Rome, but also delineates – what she sees to be – the traits that once characterized the Jews: courage, discipline, religious zeal, unquenchable love of liberty, military genius, and moral wisdom (102). These various qualities were embodied in the two leaders of the 135 A.C.E. revolt, Bar Kochba and Rabbi Akiba. Bar Kochba was the military man, and Rabbi Akiba represented "the intellectual and moral

¹⁷ Emma Lazarus, "The Last National Revolt of the Jews." *Emma Lazarus: Selections from her Poetry and Prose*, 102. All subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

resistance to oppression" (ibid.). According to Lazarus, this intellectual and moral resistance to oppression is still what "eminently distinguishes the Jews among all peoples of the earth" (102); yet the other aspects of bodily courage and discipline, and military genius have been lost. And, I argue that it is precisely these characteristics rather than the others that Lazarus ultimately glorifies: "Our spirit has been abundantly fed, but our body has been starved, and has become emaciated past recognition" (*Epistle*: 31).¹⁸ Regeneration and rehabilitation of the Jews could only come by regaining the physical and material, which is intimately connected to uniting in nationalist sentiment. Normalization would occur only through the refashioning of the male ideal. As Cynthia Enloe has claimed, nationalisms have "typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope" (Enloe, 1990: 100).

In her poem "The Feast of Lights," Lazarus once again invokes and praises the Maccabees:

Five branches grown from Mattathias' stem,
The Blessed John, the Keen-Eyed Jonathan,
Simon, the fair, the Burst-of-Spring, the Gem,
Eleazar, Help-of-God; o'er all his clan
Judas the Lion-Prince, the Avenging Rod,
Towered in warrior-beauty, uncrowned king,
Armed with breastplate and the sword of God...

Clearly, Judas is the shining star; he is the larger than life leader. Towering over his brothers-in-arms, Judas is described in all his splendor. His beauty and his closeness to God are concatenated to and inseparable from his warrior spirit. The other Jews, who were "camped within the mountain-pass/Couched on the rock, and tented near the sky," begin to mourn, wail and rent their garments as soon as

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that Lazarus' earlier work on Jewish themes, such as "Raschi in Prague," deals with men more like Rabbi Akiba. Although it is interesting to note that in "Raschi in Prague," Lazarus describes him as being forceful, strong and having "virile beauty"; and when he is taken into the Duke's presence, he implores the Duke to "[c]hange [the Jews] to men" by releasing them from oppression. While the theme of recovering Jewish manhood is already very present, the depiction of these rabbis emphasizes their wisdom and courage – "Above all beauty of body and brain/Shone beauty of a soul benign with love" – rather than their martial abilities. As the early 1880s proceed, I argue, the ideal Jewish man as warrior becomes more and more prominent in Lazarus' poetry. There is, however, an interesting tension between her desire to promote a heroic Jewish patriot, and the history of Jewish defeat and humiliation at the hands of their enemies. This tension manifests itself, for example, in the ending of her poem, "The Crowing of the Red Cock" and the idea in "Bar Kochba" that "the conquered" can be nobler than the "conqueror's end." This is a topic for further research.

they see the Temple desecrated. They are described as “Crushed as a wind-swept bed of reeds is bowed.” It is only when Judas sounds the battle cry that “Even they by one voice fired, one heart of flame,/Through broken reeds, had risen, and were men,/They rushed upon the spoiler and o’ercame...” It is through battle – through becoming active agents in the fight – that these men regain their manhood. Lazarus seems to be implying that mourning and wailing (as we saw in “The Banner of the Jew”) – and thus passivity – is woman’s business. Real men are made of very different stuff. The ending of the poem both laments the dearth of such men in contemporary society and passionately urges a revival of “true” masculinity:

Still ours the dance, the feast, the glorious Psalm,
The mystic lights of emblem, and the Word.
Where is our Judas? Where our five-branched
palm?
Where are the lion-warriors of the Lord?
Clash, Israel, the cymbals, touch the lyre,
Sound the brass trumpet and the harsh-tongued
horn,
Chant hymns of victory till the heart take fire,
The Maccabean spirit leap new-born!

The image of Rabbi Akiba has clearly been overshadowed by this encomium to the warrior Maccabees. Moreover, women have also disappeared from the scene. It is almost as if this type of hyper-masculinity *necessarily* elides women or, at the very least, pushes them into the background.

Gender Trouble

It is important to remember that Lazarus was writing during the period in which women such as Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin were challenging existing heterosexist norms and traditional gender roles. These women were not only fighting for women’s enfranchisement, but were also advocating for their active participation in the public sphere. The need for divorce and child custody reforms, equitable marriage laws, equal pay and voluntary motherhood were among the crucial issues these suffragettes raised and tried to place on the public agenda. In the early 1870s, Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin had already begun advocating sexual freedom for women, emphasizing the central importance of sexual love; they were harsh critics of women’s economic dependence, and

Woodhill even went so far as to label wives “sexual slaves” (Schneir, 1972). In other words, women themselves were publicly calling into question some of Victorian America’s most deeply entrenched gender norms, and were producing and circulating less normative models.

Perhaps identifying with alternative gender models would have endangered Lazarus’ assimilationist impulses, for it would have positioned her even further on the margins of American society. Be that as it may, Lazarus’ “Jewish” poetry serves, I believe, as a reminder and a warning of the way in which the Zionist “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) was constituted through the invocation and reinforcement of hegemonic gender norms. As Anne McClintock asserts, “Not only are the needs of the nation typically identified with the frustration and aspirations of men, but the representation of male national power depends upon the prior construction of gender difference” (1997: 89; see also Yuval-Davis 1997). Nationalistic discourse almost unfailingly positions women as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition; they are represented as the natural, inert and backward looking. In this way, traditional conceptions of women as passive, in need of protection and as closer to nature are reinscribed. In Lazarus’ poetry, as we have seen, women are elided, characterized by their passivity or constructed as the cultural symbol of America as in “The New Colossus” and “1492.” Men, on the other hand, are represented as the “progressive agent of national modernity, forward-thrusting, potent, and historic” (McClintock, 1997: 89, 92); they are presented as the movers and shakers of history.

Given this theoretical framework, Daniel Boyarin’s fascinating account of why Herzl advocated Zionism gains credence. Herzl’s call for a Jewish state, according to Boyarin, should be understood as a reaction to the “masculinized humiliation” of the feminization of Jewish men. Zionism was conceived by Herzl as a “masculinized hope,” for through nationalism emasculated Jewish males could be transformed into dignified masculine human beings and thus redeemed. Boyarin also discusses Freud in this context, contending that “Zionism had for Freud...the same function that oedipality had for him at other nodes. Both signify a masculinizing of the allegedly feminized – queer – Jewish male” (Boyarin, 1997: 272). Although Boyarin’s assertion that Freud invented the Oedipal complex as a means of countering his own homosexual desire (or desire for the “passive, feminine,” hysterical role of male “birth giver”) seems rather far-fetched and inconclusive, the account given of Freud’s attraction to Zionism does not. Zionism promised to fulfill nationalist aspirations, and gender redemption was a major and inextricable part of that project. According to the early Zionists, it was only through gender refashioning that the nationalist project could hope to succeed. Or perhaps it should be put the other way around: it was only through

nationalism that gender refashioning could hope to succeed. And it was only through gender refashioning that Jews could hope to become just like everyone else.

If, however, Cynthia Enloe's remark about the masculinized hope of nationalism is correct, then Lazarus' early and vehement advocacy of a proto-Zionism is somewhat of an anomaly. One cannot really claim that Lazarus' call for a new "tough" Jew was a response to a perceived threat of emasculation. In fact, her anxiety probably had less to do with fears about emasculation *per se*, and more to do with the threat the anti-Semitic backlash held for the middle-class Jewish-American bourgeoisie. The health of Jewish men, then, became the litmus paper for determining the health of the Jewish middle class more generally. This is an important reminder, I believe, of how masculinity has and continues to serve as the standard – the real norm – in our society. While I do not intend to collapse back into an essentialist argument, I think that the dissonance elicited by our knowledge of Lazarus' gender position and her glorification of hypermasculinity – as the national ideal – to the point of the elision of women is an important one. For this dissonance can (and perhaps should) serve to highlight -- in ways that analyses of Herzl, Nordau and Freud do not seem to -- that Zionism's reconceptualization of the Jewish male is constructed and built upon extremely problematic (and violent) revisions and exclusions. While Daniel Boyarin, Paul Breines and George Mosse all suggest that this new discourse had serious consequences for women, their discussions concentrate on the effects the new ideal "tough Jew" had on men and the construction of masculinity.

Norms, especially those that attempt to present only one possible ideal, as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have argued, operate through the violent exclusion of the other. In fact, one of the reasons Lazarus' powerful "Jewish" poetry should be read today is to remind and warn us that the gender and ethnic ideals set up by nationalistic discourse are predicated on a series of – potentially – dangerous elisions. The *modus operandi* of such discursive regimes is exclusion and homogenization rather than toleration of difference.

A critical analysis of Lazarus' writing lays bare the problematic aspect of this discourse, not only in the sense that this reconstituted Jewish male is an appropriation of dominant hegemonic gender norms and an internalization of and a reaction to the feminization of Jews, but also because this discourse glorifies a hypermasculinity that has very serious and very real repercussions for women, for men who do not fit the hypermasculine bill, and for gender norms more generally. This kind of nationalist discourse functions not only as a reactionary move, as others have argued, but also as a way of (re)producing, circulating and inculcating heterosexist gender norms, which privilege men over and against, and

at the expense of women. Lazarus' own career exemplifies the repercussions of this discourse.

Although Emma Lazarus' rhetoric is strikingly similar to Max Nordau's and Theodore Herzl's, her work has rarely been credited with helping to mobilize (or engender) Zionist sentiments in the United States. Nor has she been mentioned when scholars trace and discuss the emergence of the discourse of the new hypermasculine Jew. While masculinist standards may continue to serve as the unexamined ground of the scholarship on the early advocates of Zionism, it may also be that Lazarus fell victim to her own rhetoric. Freud, Herzl and Nordau cannot be said to have elided their own agency by advocating a hyper-masculinity. An examination of Lazarus' work and legacy lays bare, in a striking manner, the way in which the glorification of masculinity erases women. Remembered, if at all, for her sonnet on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, her "Jewish" poetry has all but been forgotten. In a sense then, Lazarus wrote herself out of history.

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