The New Colossus

POEM TEXT

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

SUMMARY

The speaker first describes what the New Colossus will *not* be like: the giant bronze statue of the sun-god Helios in ancient Rhodes. The Colossus of Rhodes was constructed to commemorate a military victory and was thought to stand with its legs on either side of a harbor. The speaker then moves from ancient Greece to America, describing the new statue's position on America's eastern shoreline. The statue looks like a powerful woman and holds a torch that's lit through the modern wonders of electricity. She is depicted as a motherly figure who welcomes immigrants to America. She does so through the guiding light of her torch and her gentle yet powerful gaze upon New York Harbor, which is sandwiched between New York City and Brooklyn (which were still separate cities when the poem was written).

The poem then gives the statue herself a voice. She speaks directly to the nations of Europe, telling them she wants no part of their showy displays of power. Though she is a silent statue, the speaker suggests that her symbolic message is clear. She goes on to command the ancient European nations to send its impoverished citizens—the thousands who long for freedom—to America. These people have been forgotten and rejected in their overly-populated countries with limited resources. Once again, she commands the ancient nations to send her those who have been exiled and battered by the storms of misfortune. She beckons these immigrants toward her with her torch, which metaphorically illuminates the entryway to America and all the opportunities it offers.

THEMES

AMERICAN IMMIGRATION

"The New Colossus" compares the Statue of Liberty to an ancient Greek statue, the Colossus of Rhodes. While the ancient statue served as a warning to potential enemies, the new statue's name, torch, and position on the eastern shore of the United States all signal her status as a protector of exiles. Her protection extends both to the exiles who founded the United States, and to refugees hoping to make America their new home. When the speaker imagines the statue's voice, the statue speaks directly to the "ancient lands" of Europe and claims its forgotten and rejected ones as her own. Each of these features contributes to the poem's presentation of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of welcome, and to the poem's broader message to embrace foreigners with open arms.

Through its description of two statues' relationships to the land on which they stand, the poem offers contrasting ways of relating to one's homeland and to foreigners. The first involves the "brazen giant" or Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was constructed to commemorate a military victory, and its "conquering limbs" were believed to have straddled a harbor. All foreign ships would have had to pass beneath its "brazen" or bronze legs and, in so doing, to contemplate the demise of the defeated soldiers from whose abandoned weapons the statue was made. This threatening stance served as a warning to approaching sailors and potential invaders. In contrast, the New Colossus stands firmly at the "sea-washed, sunset gates" of America. This lyrical image of America's Eastern shore—the shore that faces Europe across the Atlantic Ocean—connotes a sense of openness to new visitors.

This sense of openness is confirmed in lines 4-8, in which the statue is called "Mother of Exiles" and her torch is described as a beacon. The Statue of Liberty's French sculptor included a torch to symbolize reason and liberty enlightening the world. In the poem, though, the torch instead glows for the same reason a lighthouse does: to safely guide travelers home. It is a "beacon" or sign of "world-wide welcome" to the thousands of immigrants arriving in New York.

The statue's role as patron of immigrants is solidified when the sonnet's sestet (or final six lines) puts the new world's guardian in direct conversation with the "ancient lands" of Europe from which they emigrate. The statue rejects the "storied pomp"

through which European empires, such as those of ancient Greece, were founded and maintained. The Colossus of Rhodes was built from the abandoned bronze weapons of the defeated army of Cyprus. As such, it is a pompous display of power that highlights the victor's story but obscures the suffering of the conquered people. The New Colossus commands the old lands to send its marginalized people, the "huddled masses," to her. She will ensure that those who are "homeless" and long to "breathe free" will find refuge. The statue's torch returns in the final line as a "lamp" that illuminates the "golden door" of American opportunity.

This golden promise of the Statue of Liberty, then, offers a tantalizing alternative to all that the ancient Colossus of Rhodes represented. The speaker hopes that the maternal statue and her promise of radical hospitality will become a symbol for America itself. In other words, the poem presents the Statue of Liberty as both part of America and representative of its values, and in so doing argues that America should be defined by its willingness to both accept immigrants and actively welcome them.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM

Since this poem was written to support a fundraiser for the Statue of Liberty's pedestal, the poem implicitly invites readers to compare what the poem *does* say about the historical statue to what it does *not* say. Although the poem doesn't use the statue's formal name, "Liberty Enlightening the World," it is deeply concerned with the statue's understood connection to liberty and freedom. It suggests that the expansion of powerful ancient European empires—which were founded on principles of class and military power—deprived many people of personal and political liberty, and then has the statue voice a promise to restore that fundamental human right. "The New Colossus" represents an idealistic vison of nationhood in which a government's power is used not to conquer, but to honor all people's inherent dignity and right to liberty.

The octave, or opening eight lines of the sonnet, describes the political conditions under which freedom is either offered to all or restricted to some. It pits ancient structures of oppression against a new, American commitment to welcoming exiles. The Colossus of Rhodes, an ancient statue built after a military victory, is described as having "conquering limbs." This majestic description thinly veils the consequences of war, in which the conqueror flourishes while the conquered are disenfranchised. The poem criticizes this political system by replacing this threatening statue with a welcoming yet "mighty" statue at America's eastern shoreline (the shoreline that faces Europe across the Atlantic). In naming the new statue, the speaker does not reach outside the poem for its formal, historical title: "Liberty Enlightening the World." The statue's ties to Libertas, the Roman goddess of freedom, are thus obscured. In place of a classical image of liberty as political independence, the poem instead renames the statue "Mother of Exiles." This title, along with the torch the statue raises to offer "world-wide welcome" to refugees, make this statue, and the nation on whose shore it stands, a guardian of all who wish to seek freedom in a new home. More broadly, the poem positions the statue as a "new colossus," which suggests that it is replacing the values of that old Colossus of Rhodes, and implies that these new values that America offers will replace the old militaristic and despotic forces of Europe.

However, when the word "free" finally appears in line 11, the immigrants called toward America's shores don't yet have the liberty they long for. Instead, the word is included as part of a command from The New Colossus that the ancient European lands release the forgotten people whose individual dreams have been crushed under the burden of oppression. They are the ones longing to "breathe free," for their human rights have been degraded such that they are deemed "refuse." The maternal statue claims these exiles as her own and promises to shepherd them through the "golden door" of opportunity. The implication is that, on American land, human rights are respected, and all are given the resources necessary to flourish. When the poem ends, though, the statue is left awaiting the refugees' arrival. Her promise of freedom remains unmet. "The New Colossus" thus presents freedom as a worthy ideal that has yet to be achieved in the world outside the poem.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Lines 4-7
- Lines 10-14

PATRIARCHAL VALUES VS. MATERNAL VIRTUES

The poem stages a contrast between stereotypical masculine and feminine values, but then blurs the line between them. It describes the Colossus of Rhodes in terms of strength in battle—something typically associated with masculinity—and claims that the New Colossus will be different. It then describes the New Colossus in terms of both commanding strength and maternal mildness. While the ancient statue offered a display of military dominance and a warning to powerful enemies, the new statue is both mighty and mild in her message of motherly welcome. This blended use of gendered attributes to describe the new statue makes it clear that hospitality should not be seen as some kind of female-specific weakness, but rather as a strength of American society.

In other words, the poem suggests that America needs both the power once associated with an all-male military and government, *and* the mild spirit of welcome once associated solely with women.

The speaker first describes what the New Colossus will *not* be like: the warlike and hyper-masculine Colossus of Rhodes, a statue of the Greek Titan sun-god, Helios. This ancient statue was "brazen" in two ways: it symbolized arrogance and strength, and it was built by melting down and re-forging enemies' bronze weapons. The reference to the Colossus of Rhodes's "conquering limbs" in line 2 recalls the statue's purpose: to celebrate a military victory against Cyprus. These displays of physical and martial strength were understood to typify masculine virtues valued by a patriarchal society, in which positions of power are held by men, and power is used to dominate others, both foreign and domestic.

Lines 4-7 then describe what the New Colossus *will* be like: a mild and mighty mother. Although the speaker first promises that this new statue will *not* be like the Colossus of Rhodes, the next lines show that she won't be its polar opposite, either. In place of the powerful male god, the New Colossus is "a mighty woman." If the ancient statue was built partly to warn off potential invaders, the New Colossus understands her role as guardian differently. She is a "Mother of Exiles" holding a torch as a glowing sign of "world-wide welcome." If the ancient statue's enormous legs straddled a harbor in the posture of a conqueror, the new statue can "command" a harbor equally well through her "mild eyes." It becomes clear, here, that hospitality is not a gendered weakness, but a societal strength.

In the poem's final six lines, signs of feminine mildness continue to merge with masculine boldness. Though the statue is imagined crying out with "silent lips," the message she silently conveys is nonetheless powerful and universally understood. Setting up one more contrast between the male and female statues, the New Colossus invites the "ancient lands" to keep their displays of power and instead entrust the powerless to her care. She will protect the "poor" and "homeless" and guide them toward the "golden door" of opportunity. She, in other words, will be a defender of the world's weakest people, and offer them the resources needed to *become* strong. The statue's gendered attributes offer a new kind of strength that, even in its pointedly peaceful purpose, rivals that of the ancient, male-dominated world and, the poem implies, will eventually replace it.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Lines 4-7
- Lines 9-10
- Lines 10-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

The first two lines of "The New Colossus" introduce the inverse simile that gives the poem its title, as well as several of its most prominent stylistic qualities. In this half of the simile between two statues, the speaker makes an allusion to the ancient Colossus of Rhodes. The ancient statue, which celebrated a military victory over Cyprus and was built from the defeated army's bronze weapons, was believed to have stood with its enormous legs straddling a harbor. The use of the word "brazen" to describe this ancient statue refers to the fact that it was made from bronze. But the word "brazen" *also* means "bold or shameless," which implies a negative connotation of this ancient statue. The description of the limbs as "conquering" also suggests that the statue stands not in welcome, but rather as a symbol of military might designed to strike fear into the hearts of foreigners.

These lines also demonstrate how the poem both conforms to and diverges from the usual iambic pentameter of its Italian sonnet form. Lines of regular iambic pentameter contain five iambs, each of which has one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. The second line of the poem follows this iambic pattern (the "quering" of "conquering" should be read as a single syllable, with a sound like "ring"):

With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

The poem's first line, on the other hand, immediately breaks from the norm by opening with a trochee (a foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable) and ending with a spondee (a foot consisting of a stressed-stressed pattern):

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame

The inverse simile and irregular meter of these first two lines are the first indications of the way that the poem's style mirrors and emphasizes its vision of America as both embracing and breaking from European tradition. Written in the form of an Italian sonnet, the poem directly connects to a long and illustrious European literary tradition. And yet in its first line, the poem refuses to follow the traditional meter of the Italian sonnet. Similarly, the inverse simile turns the original function of a simile on its head: rather than showing how two unlike things are in fact similar, the poem's simile will show how two seemingly similar things are in fact unlike each other. As the poem proceeds, these twists on traditional poetic tools will add up, and suggest ways that America itself has emerged from a

European history and tradition, and yet also turns that tradition on its head in service of new—and, the poem, argues, better—values.

The alliteration and assonance that help give the poem a repetitive sound are also featured in these first two lines. The first line uses long "a" and "i" vowels in "brazen" and "fame," "like" and "giant," while the second line uses the short forms of those vowels in "land to land" and "with" "conquering," and "limbs." Between the two lines, four words begin with an "l": "like," "limbs," "land," and "land." These two kinds of repetition overlap to create a network of corresponding sounds, one which gives the poem a sense of sonic continuity even as it argues for a radical departure from ancient values.

LINES 3-6

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.

Stylistic markers of repetition and continuity are most apparent in lines 3-6 of the poem, even as these lines also most succinctly describes the radical break from tradition that the poem proposes. Enjambment is present throughout, meaning that no punctuation marks the division between one line and the next. This one, long, multi-line sentence can therefore be read aloud fluidly, without any terminal punctuation.

The first line in this set of four also contains a grand total of seven syllables with a sibilant "s" or "sh" sound, which is accomplished through both consonance and alliteration ("sea," "washed," "sun," "set," "gates," "shall," "stand). The following three lines shift to emphasize "m" ("might," "woman," "flame," "imprisoned," "name," "Mother"). The first two lines' use of assonance to emphasize long and short "I" continues here, and an abundance of long and short "a" sounds are also present.

However, even as the *sounds* within these lines suggest continuity between these lines and the first two that describe the Colossus of Rhodes, the *content* of lines 3-6 describes a statue that, while in some ways is similar to the ancient Colossus, in others is fundamentally different. More specifically, these lines move from describing a Greek statue to describing an American one. It shifts the scene from the shoreline of ancient Rhodes to that of 19th century New York, describing America's eastern entryway through the imagery of waves and the setting sun. These natural images draw attention to the ocean that both connects and divides Europe and America, and to the passage of time that allows new days and ideas to dawn and old empires to fall.

Then, in line 4, the surprise of the inverse simile begun in line 1 becomes clear: not only does this simile describe what its subject will *not* be like (rather than what it is similar to), but it does so by comparing its subject (the Statue of Liberty) to a seemingly similar object (the Colossus of Rhodes). In most cases, a simile makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things. In this case, however, the speaker wants to emphasize that the Statue of Liberty's purpose is very different from its Greek model. This statue is female, her torch carries the spark of modern electricity, and she is a "Mother of Exiles" rather than a symbol of intimidating military power. By showing the way that two similar things are different—in this case two colossal statues—the poem is able to isolate the precise traits that make them different, and the ideas and beliefs those different traits imply. The ancient colossus is masculine, menacing, a sign of power meant to warn others to stay away. The "new" colossus is maternal, with a torch like a lighthouse, welcoming "exiles" to safety.

It's also worth noting that even though the "new colossus" that the poem is describing is obviously the Statue of Liberty, the poem itself never uses that name. Instead, it calls the statue by the name of "Mother of Exiles." The poem's renaming of the statue is also a way of reframing the *meaning* of the statue. Originally, the Statue of Liberty was given to the United States by the French as a symbol of the light of freedom and liberty that animated the new country of the United States. The poem here connects those ideas with that of the statue, and America, being the "Mother of Exiles." The poem is arguing that the promise of liberty that lies at the heart of the statue and of America must be extended to those who need it; that welcoming downtrodden immigrants is integral to the symbolic meaning of America and the Statue of Liberty.

LINES 6-8

From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

In the second half of line 6 through the end of line 8, the poem deepens the symbolic meaning of the new statue. First, these lines extend the significance of the statue's torch, which was first mentioned in line 4. While the statue's French designer included a torch to represent reason and liberty shining forth from America and enlightening the world, the poem's speaker turns the torch into a beacon (or sign) of hospitality. Like a lighthouse, the statue's torch glows to welcome visitors from all over the world to America's shores. Using the word "beacon-hand" begins to suggest that the statue represents the American people's ideals. The image involves the statue's hand in the work of sharing the glow of hospitality, making that single body part representative of the statue's larger purpose. Similarly, the statue's "mild eyes" look out upon the sea in a sign of gentle welcome and watchful protection.

Line 8 offers a description of New York Harbor, making an implicit comparison between ancient Rhodes's Mandraki Harbor and this new world equivalent. Legend had it that all ships entering Rhodes passed between the ancient Colossus's enormous bronze legs, which was likely meant to evoke wonder

and to serve as a threat to potential enemies. The modern harbor is not framed and connected by colossal limbs, but by the open air and the "twin cities" of New York and Brooklyn (or New York and Jersey City, depending on which literary critic you ask). The statue stands between them, her less intimidating posture mirrored by the mildness of her expression. The new statue welcomes, where the old one seeks to overawe.

It's worth noting, though, that while the new statue is presented as mild and welcoming, it is never portrayed as weak. The statue's "mild eyes command" the harbor. The contrast between the new Colossus and the old Colossus is not one of weakness versus strength. They are both strong, but in different ways, and the poem clearly argues that the *way* in which the new Colossus is strong is better. While the old Colossus is portrayed as "brazen," which has a negative connotation, there is no negative connotation associated with the new Colossus.

These lines also contain three of the hyphenated compound words that are found throughout the poem, all of which vary the poem's iambic pentameter. Two of them, "world-wide" and "air-bridged," figure into the poem's heavy use of spondees. Both syllables of the compound word are stressed uniformly, perhaps creating a parallel between the poem's advocacy of equality and liberty for all people and these equal accents.

LINES 9-10

> *"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she*
> *With silent lips.*

A typical Italian sonnet contains a formal break, called a "turn" or *volta*, between its octave (first eight lines) and sestet (final six lines), in which a problem is stated in the former and a resolution offered in the latter. "The New Colossus," however, contains no such shift. The problems of exile and poverty are mentioned throughout the poem, but so is the solution of hospitality and freedom symbolized by the new Colossus. This lack of a "turn" is another way in which "The New Colossus" breaks from European traditions, even as the poem itself asserts a break from European values and ideas.

But even as the poem asserts these breaks, it *also* still maintains a connection to that past. And so there *is* a shift that occurs in line 9 of the poem, as the sestet begins. This shift involves the speaker, who begins to speak *through* the statue, essentially giving the statue a voice to address the world. That statue, in its speech, issues a command to the "ancient lands," which is a reference to the old countries of Europe (the poem does not really address immigration from non-European lands). Here, the statue tells Europe she wants none of its lavish, and perhaps empty, displays of power. By calling the "pomp" of these lands "storied," the statue implies that its triumphs remain in the past, in legends and chronicles, while America's untold and limitless promise lies in the future. Further, the reference to "pomp" seems to be directed at the sorts of wealth and display that were a characteristic of the European class system, with monarchs and nobility at the top and common people crushed below. Seen in this way, the refusal of "pomp" is the result of a belief in equality and opportunity, in seeing *all* people, even the commoners, as worthy.

The paradoxical description of one who "cries" with "silent lips" reinforces the fact that the statue, though an inanimate object, nonetheless offers a powerful message. It also ties into the statue's identity as a female statue who defies stereotypes of femininity. Her silence does not imply timidity and weakness, but is instead a sign of her unwavering confidence and ability to communicate in unconventional ways. The statue may express herself silently, but the "ancient lands" dare not contradict her within the bounds of this poem.

LINES 10-12

> *"Give me your tired, your poor,*
> *Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*
> *The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*

As the statue continues to speak, she offers the most explicit statement of the problem being addressed through the poem. Simultaneously, she offers a potential solution to that problem. Once again, this blended statement of problem and solution counter the usual form of an Italian sonnet, where the problem is stated in the octave and a "turn" in the sestet gestures toward a solution.

Here, the statue directly chastises the ancient world of Europe for failing to provide adequately for those who call it home, noting that many of its inhabitants are impoverished and longing for freedom. The language used to describe the thousands of impoverished people imagines them grouped in an enormous crowd on the shores of Europe, which cannot adequately contain them. They are "huddled" together, perhaps leaning against one another for necessary warmth and protection. The statue implies that these ancient lands, by failing to value these people, have failed them.

The statue then addresses this problem by commanding the ancient world to send these rejected ones to her. The imperious tone of the phrase "give me" implies that the statue has the authority, ability, and willingness to provide for these exiles in a way their homeland did not. In this way, the statue frames its willingness to take in the weak, the poor, and the needy with *strength*. By this point, the statue is also clearly speaking as a kind of spokeswoman for America, and as such is arguing two things. First, that the ideals of America, that all men are created equal, are the source of this strength. But also, the poem is making an argument *to* America—that America should see itself in exactly the terms that the statue is describing. When the poem was written, the American political scene was actually animated by an increasing anti-immigrant stance, and the poem is arguing against that stance by arguing that it is through accepting the "huddled" masses that America is most strong.

This section of the poem also contains several literary devices involving repetition, which amplify the rhetorical persuasiveness of the statue's speech. Through assonance, the poem stresses both long and short "e" sounds ("breathe" "free" "wretched" "refuse" "teeming"). In a poem whose subject is the Statue of Liberty but that never mentions the word, these repeated "e" sounds draw attention to the poem's only use of the word "free." In addition, the word "your" is repeated four times in three lines, each time referring to Europe. The first three appearances of the world involve the almost immediate repetitions of diacope ("your tired, your poor, your huddled masses...") and read like a kind of accusation or condemnation of the failed ideas of Europe.

LINE 13

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

In line 13, the statue continues her command that the ancient lands send their poverty-stricken citizens to America. In doing so, the statue deploys a rich literary allusion. The word "tempest-tost" is taken from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which itself likely borrows the word from the Acts of the Apostles in the Geneva Bible. In *Macbeth*, one of the three Weird Sisters curses a sea captain so that his ship will encounter a tempest, or storm. In the Bible, the apostle Paul's ship is similarly tossed by rough waves in a storm. In general, literary sea voyages often show the unpredictable nature of fortune. Here, the allusion gestures toward the dangerous journey immigrants feel compelled to make in order to seek a better life, as well as the misfortunes that have marked their lives.

In using an abundance of adjectives and nouns to describe immigrants in this line and the previous four, the poem seeks to awaken the compassion of its readers. While the word "immigrant" sounds neutral in tone, "homeless" and "tempest-tost" do not. These words identify the suffering experienced by exiles and immigrants, and implicitly implore readers—Americans—to help alleviate that suffering. These words also give not only one name, but many, to those who have been forgotten and rejected.

This line also extends the poem's use of assonance. Other than its article and preposition, each word in this sentence contains a long or short "e" vowel ("send" "these" "homeless" "tempest-tost" and "me"). This extremely repetitive soundscape adds to the insistent nature of the statue's command.

LINE 14

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The poem's final line brings the symbolism of the statue's torch back to the foreground. The New Colossus has commanded the ancient lands to send their exiles to America, and now she makes it clear what she will do for them once they arrive. With her torch, she will illuminate the "golden door." In one sense, this image describes the statue's position on the shoreline, at one of America's physical entryways. The "golden" door, however, also represents all the rich opportunities that America offers. Rather than using a proliferation of words that name several of these opportunities (a strategy that would have paralleled the accumulation of names for the immigrants in lines 10-13), the speaker chooses this single, evocative image to encompass them. The statue's promise, in other words, remains figurative rather than concrete. Because the promise is nonspecific, it is also limitless.

The use of the word "golden" melds the glowing light of the torch with the entryway it illumines, but also implies that the land beyond will also be golden, or full of limitless possibility. The poem itself seems to make this claim earnestly and unironically: that the immigrants who come will experience possibilities and wealth they never could have dreamed of in their "ancient lands." And, it must be said, many did experience just that!

But the line also seems to hold an ironic undertone that the poem itself seems not to have intended. Many immigrants held the misguided belief when they undertook the journey to America that the streets themselves were paved with gold, and that getting to America was the hard part to be followed by easy wealth and comfort. The reality was different. America offered opportunity, but also squalor, and exploitation, and, even for the luckiest immigrants, incredibly hard work. Many later critics and poets have criticized "The New Colossus" for its idealistic vision of American immigration, and so it is possible to look at this last line as representing both that idealism but also all the painful realities and hardships that such idealism served to obscure.

Unlike many other lines in "The New Colossus," this last line falls into even iambic pentameter. In a poem peppered with trochees and spondees, this final line's regularity can be read as honoring the European poetic traditions upon which it is based. Seen in this way, the line suggests that it is possible to revise tradition while still working within them. Perhaps it is also a subtle reminder of how America built its revolutionary, and (at least in the poem's eyes), better, ideas of nationhood upon the European institutions it rebelled against.

SYMBOLS

THE NEW COLOSSUS

The New Colossus is the poem's name for the Statue of Liberty. For France, which designed the statue and gave it to the fledgling United States as a gift, the statue was meant to honor America's commitment to political independence and to honor the relationship between France and the U.S. The poem, however, significantly broadens the statue's symbolic significance. The statue both physically

stands at America's Eastern shore and meets the gaze of all who arrive, and symbolically gestures toward this young nation's willingness to welcome immigrants and look kindly upon all foreigners. As such, in the poem the statue takes on a world-wide appeal—and symbolizes a new view of the world, founded on dignity and opportunity—that moves beyond America's connection to France alone.

In the octave that makes up the sonnet's first eight lines, the new statue's symbolic meaning is described by contrasting it to a much older statue: the Colossus of Rhodes. While the ancient colossus's "conquering limbs" represented a military victory and thus a threat to potential invaders, the new colossus's torch and "mild eyes" represent her message of motherly welcome to all visitors. That the Statue of Liberty is described in the poem's title as "The New Colossus" further implies that the symbolic meaning of the new statue will replace that of the old, militaristic Colossus of Rhodes.

In the last six lines of the sonnet, called the sestet, this message of hospitality is stated even more explicitly when the statue is given a voice. The statue commands the ancient nations of Europe to send its exiles to the U.S., where she herself will show them the golden door of opportunity. In giving its major symbol this confident voice, the poem hopes to encourage readers to join their voices with Lady Liberty, to embrace this idea of both the statue and America, and to welcome the stranger.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

THE TORCH

The statue's torch has a number of symbolic meanings, each of them tied to the guiding and life-giving capabilities of light. The torch is first presented as containing "the imprisoned lightning," a phrase that references its electric bulb but also symbolizes the power associated with the Greek God Zeus's lightning bolt. Esther Schor, a scholar who has studied Emma Lazarus and her work, suggests that the torch's symbolic resonances may also encompass "enlightened Jewish nationalism," or support for the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland. In this poem, however, any culturally-specific undertones are folded back into its universal concerns. In the next line, the torch joins with the statue to create a "beacon-hand" that "glows world-wide welcome." This line makes it clear that the torch glows for the same reason a lighthouse does: to guide travelers—all travelers—to safety.

The torch returns in the poem's final line as a "lamp" that shines upon the "golden door" of American opportunity. Both of these phrases reference the creative potential of light—it literally illumines our path and figuratively helps us imagine what is possible. In a broad sense, the torch here symbolizes the golden promise of a better life in America, which beckons immigrants toward its shores.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "a torch"
- **Line 14:** "my lamp"

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration occurs in almost every line of "The New Colossus," and serves a dual purpose. It helps create a sense of sonic continuity throughout the poem, but also helps set up strong contrasts between two statues and two continents. In the first part of the poem, for example, this dual purpose is achieved by using alliterative words to describe both statues, but repeating *different* consonants in the two descriptions. "L" is used most often to begin words describing the Colossus of Rhodes, while "s" and "m" are used often to begin words describing the New Colossus. In both cases, the emphasis placed on these consonants is greatly increased through the use of consonance.

Throughout the poem, but particularly in the third line, consonants also create a rhythmic sound that mimics waves crashing on the shore one after another. The sea both joins and separates the old world of Europe and the new world of the United States—it puts distance between them, but its vast expanse touches both continents. The alliterative phrase "sea-washed, sunset gates" emphasizes that connection.

In the last six lines of the sonnet, there are fewer examples of alliterative but distinct words (i.e. different words that share sounds). Here, however, the presence of words that share an initial consonant because they are the *same* word increases. Six words in the sestet begin with a "y," but five of them are the word "your." This shift, in which the repetition of sounds gives way to the repetition of words, a shift from alliteration to diacope, can be read as highlighting the statue's righteous anger. She is less concerned with fashioning strings of harmonious sounds, and more concerned with deploying the tools of rhetorical persuasion.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "like"
- **Line 2:** "limbs," "stride," "land," "land"
- **Line 3:** "sea-washed," "sunset," "shall stand"
- **Line 4:** "mighty"
- **Line 5:** "lightning"
- **Line 6:** "Mother"
- **Line 7:** "mild," "mmand"
- **Line 9:** "lands,," "storied," "she"

- **Line 10:** "silent," "lips," "me"
- **Line 11:** "masses"
- **Line 12:** "shore"
- **Line 13:** "Send," "me"
- **Line 14:** "lift"

ALLUSION

Because "The New Colossus" was written for an exhibition to raise funds for the Statue of Liberty's pedestal, the entire poem can be understood as an allusion to its historical subject. The poem's title and content reveal that it also relies on an allusion to a much older statue. The poem uses these references to entities outside itself to make a political statement, and ends with a literary allusion that grounds that statement in time-honored literary traditions.

The title "The New Colossus" connects the Statue of Liberty with the ancient Colossus of Rhodes, but the poem itself uses that allusion to claim that the statues have opposing purposes. The first two lines allude to the Colossus of Rhodes by describing the ancient statue's posture. The "Greek" statue was known to be "brazen," or made of brass, and was believed to stand with its legs "astride" either side of a harbor. The word "brazen" also means bold and shameless. These meanings of "brazen" suggest that the statue's purpose was to flaunt Rhodes's status as conqueror of Cyprus and threaten any future enemies. The poem then positions the statue of liberty—the "New Colossus"—as standing in contrast to the old Colossus of Rhodes. While the ancient statue's threatening posture paralleled its purpose to ward off enemies, the new statue's torch and eyes, for instance, glow with "world-wide welcome" for immigrants.

The final six lines of the poem also contain a Shakespearean and Biblical allusion that gives gravitas to the statue's role in welcoming those traveling by sea. The word "tempest-tost," which is used to name the immigrants and describe their battered condition, is an allusion to a word in the first act of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In that scene, a witch curses a sea caption so that his ship will be battered by a stormy sea. Shakespeare himself likely took this idea from the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, where the apostle Paul's ship is tossed by a storm. The poem's use of this allusion links the immigrants to a broader historical and literary tradition of perilous but necessary sea travel, and is meant to evoke compassion in the poem's readers for the immigrants daring to face "tempests" in their quest for freedom and opportunity in the United States.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "the brazen giant of Greek fame, / With conquering limbs astride from land to land"
- **Lines 4-8:** "A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name / Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand / Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command / The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame"
- **Line 13:** "tempest-tost"

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

"The New Colossus" gives an inanimate statue several human attributes in its octave (first eight lines), and a human voice in its sestet (final six lines). Anthropomorphizing the statue functions on two levels. First, it allows the poem's comparison between a statue and the United States to function by making both the country and the Statue of Liberty living beings. Secondly, anthropomorphism plays into the poem's goal to awaken compassion in American citizens.

The octave describes the statue as gentle yet powerful, and identifies those human qualities with the United States as a whole. The statue is first described as "a mighty woman." Although it's clear that the poem is in fact referring to an artistic representation of a woman rather than a flesh-and-blood female, by referring to the statue as if it is a real woman the poem influences readers' initial responses to the statue. This "woman" is then described as a "Mother of Exiles" with "mild eyes" that communicate her kind nature and commitment to hospitality. Importantly, before offering any of these anthropomorphic details, the poem describes the statue's position at "our" American shores. The implication is that each of the qualities being described in the following lines should apply not only to the statue, but to the nation she represents.

In the sestet, the statue's human voice more explicitly conveys the message that the poem suggests all Americans should support. She criticizes the immigrants' "ancient lands" for failing to care for them, and commands those lands to "give" and "send" its outcasts "to [her]." The statue's authoritative tone has great pathos—it demands tenderness and pity from the American readers to which it is directed. Just as importantly, the statue's human compassion and commitment to hospitality show those readers what qualities they should emulate.

Where Anthropomorphism appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "brazen"
- **Line 2:** "conquering limbs "
- **Line 4:** "A mighty woman"
- **Lines 5-6:** " her name / Mother of Exiles"
- **Line 7:** "her mild eyes"
- **Lines 9-10:** "cries she / With silent lips"

APOSTROPHE

In the final six lines of "The New Colossus," the statue speaks

directly to the "ancient lands" of Europe. Apostrophe always involves a speaker addressing an absent party who cannot speak back. In this case, however, the absent party cannot respond because it is inanimate and therefore voiceless. The irony is that the statue addressing Europe is *also* actually inanimate and incapable of human speech. Staging this impossible, one-sided conversation accomplishes several things. As the statue is a symbolic spokeswoman for America, it puts America in direct conversation with the "ancient lands" of Europe from which its own history arose. It also emphasizes the communicative power of the Statue of Liberty, who "cries" out with "silent lips" but nonetheless is heard. And perhaps most importantly, the poem highlights its own rhetorical nature—the fact that it is making a political argument—by fashioning the statue's message of welcome into a speech.

The poem fashions its written argument into a performative speech laden with the rhetorical devices of persuasion. Rhetoric, which is the art of effective speaking or writing, comes with several ancient modes of persuasion derived from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The modes of persuasion—which are rhetorical devices used to appeal to a speaker's audience—include ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos. Each is conspicuously present in the statue's speech. Ethos (or appeal to the speaker's authority) is set up in the poem's octave and developed through the statue's own authoritative command. Pathos (or appeal to an audience's emotions) is created through the statue's repeated use of pathetic words to describe immigrants. They are called "poor," "wretched refuse," "homeless" and "tempest-tost." Logos (or appeal to logic) is carried out by stating both a problem and a solution. The statue makes it clear that exiles and immigrants have suffered in their home countries, and now suggests that they should be able to leave all this behind and pass through the "golden door" of American opportunity. Kairos (or appeal to the present moment and place) is used when the statue commands the ancient lands to "give" and "send these" immigrants to America immediately. These four rhetorical tools are used to persuade the true audience for this speech, which is not apostrophized "ancient lands" but American citizens, that generosity to immigrants is the only viable way forward.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-14:** ""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!""

ASSONANCE

Assonance is used throughout the poem, achieving several different local effects and contributing to the poem's overall sense of sonic fluidity. In the octave (first eight lines of the poem), similar vowels are repeated near line endings to further emphasize similar sounds in the rhyme scheme. A short "a" sound, for example, echoes through "land to land" to "shall stand" at the ends of lines two and three. The octave is also full of long and short "a" and long "e" sounds, giving continuity to the entire section.

The poem's sestet (final six lines), by contrast, is dominated by long and short "e" vowel sounds. The sestet uses the repeated long "e" sounds to heighten emphasis on the word "free" in line eleven. This word might be said to represent the poem's climax, as the poem is about the Statue of Liberty and freedom is a thematic focus of the poem. A number of words surrounding "free" share its long "e" sound, including "storied," "she," and "breathe."

Two vowel sounds that echo throughout the entire poem are the long and short "i," which are included in almost every line. These sounds are often found in each word of a longer phrase or string of words, including "conquering limbs astride," "imprisoned lightning," "twin cities," and "silent lips." While some vowels drop out to heighten contrasts, this sound remains constant. In order to understand how the effects of repetition created through assonance function in the poem, one should also analyze the poem's use of consonance, alliteration, and diacope.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 2
- Line 3
- Line 4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Line 9
- Line 10
- Line 11
- Line 12
- Line 13
- Line 14

CONSONANCE

Like assonance and alliteration, consonance contributes to the poem's dense network of both repetitive and contrasting sounds. The interplay between the two gives the poem its fluidity. To maximize the number of repeated consonants within a string of words, the poem often uses both alliteration and consonance to pack in those similar sounds. Line three includes seven syllables with "s" or "sh" sounds, ("sea," "washed," "sun," "set," "gates," "shall," "stand), while the following four lines include ten words with an "m." ("might," "woman," "flame,"

"imprisoned," "name," "Mother," "welcome," "mild," "command," "frame"). Thus consonance often works in tandem with alliteration to achieve the most dramatic sonic effect.

Consonance and alliteration work differently, however, in setting up the comparison between the Colossus of Rhodes and the New Colossus. "L" is used most often at the beginning of words describing the Colossus of Rhodes, while "s" and "m" are used most often at the beginning of words describing the New Colossus. Alliteration, then, helps set up a contrast between the statues. All three of those consonants, however, appear *within* words describing *both* statues. Two of those consonants continue to appear within words throughout the final six lines. Words with an "l" include "silent," "huddled," "homeless," "golden," while words with an "m" include "pomp," "teeming," "homeless," "tempest-tost" "lamp." While alliteration helps set up a contrast, then, consonance helps create a sense of continuity throughout the poem.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "fame"
- **Line 3:** "washed," "set"
- **Line 4:** "man," "flame"
- **Line 5:** "im," "name"
- **Line 6:** "Exiles"
- **Line 7:** "world," "mild," "mand"
- **Line 8:** "frame"
- **Line 9:** "pomp"
- **Line 10:** "lent"
- **Line 11:** "led," "ses"
- **Line 12:** "ming"
- **Line 13:** "homeless," "tem"
- **Line 14:** "lamp," "gol"

DIACOPE

The poem uses the repetition of diacope at times as a tool to add emphasis and augment the meaning of its language. For instance, in line two the repetition of "land" in "land to land" is an example of diacope. In this instance, the repetition mirrors the actual structure of the Colossus of Rhodes that's being described. The "land to land" captures the way that the Colossus stands astride the harbor, one foot on each side, providing connection.

Later in the poem, diacope is used as a tool of rhetorical persuasion to help make the poem's argument about America's role in the world as a place that should welcome immigrants. In the sestet, three of five uses of the word "your" are connected through diacope. Because only one word separates the repetitions of the word, it rings out loud and clear. This insistent usage of "your" is linked to the statue's use of the word "me." In this imagined conversation between the Statue of Liberty and the ancient lands of Europe, "you" is Europe and "me" is the statue as spokesperson for America. In relation to Europe, the repeated word "your" serves as an indictment of these nations' failure to care for their own people.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "land to land"
- **Lines 10-11:** "your tired, your poor, / Your"

ENJAMBMENT

Extended enjambment occurs in lines three through eight of the poem, in which the New Colossus is described. These connected lines lend elegance to this instance of ekphrasis—a verbal description of a visual object. The series of enjambed lines also creates suspense. For instance, the reader must move from line two to three to learn who "shall stand" at America's gates, and the result is a surprising figure: *not* the brash soldier described in lines one and two, but rather "a mighty woman"—the Statue of Liberty. Enjambment thus lends a graceful smoothness to the dramatic contrasts set up in this section, while also swiftly moving the reader from line to line and forcing the reader to experience those contrasts at speed, heightening their effect.

The lines joined by enjambment also parallel the sense of continuity the poem imagines between the old world and the new world. While the poem imagines a radically new way of relating to foreigners than that represented by the old Colossus and allows the statue to actively chastise the "ancient lands" in the sestet, it nevertheless implicitly honors the lands from which its citizens or their ancestors emigrated. America has always been a nation of immigrants, with a deep sense of connection to other nations. The poem's use of enjambment both mirrors that connection, in the way that enjambment connects the lines of the poem, but also the contrasts, in the way it forces the reader to experience each contrast at full force.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-7:** "Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand / A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name / Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand / Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command"
- **Lines 9-10:** ""Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she / With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,"

IMAGERY

The imagery of light throughout the poem appeals to readers' sense of sight, and seeks to awaken their sense of compassion. Readers are invited to picture the Colossus of Rhodes' brass ("brazen") exterior, a metal that glints in the sun. They are then whisked away to the "sunset gates" of America, where the New

Colossus holds out a "torch" whose significance is developed through imagistic language in the rest of the poem. Its "flame" is one of "imprisoned lightning," an idea that conjures associations with modern electricity as well as the ancient Greek god Zeus's trademark lightning bolt. When the torch is joined to the statue it becomes a "beacon-hand," an image that involves the statue's body in the sensory work of sharing that light. When the torch returns in the poem's final line, it becomes clear what all of the light imagery gestures toward. The torch has become a "lamp" illuminating a "golden door," an image that frames America itself as the land of rich opportunity.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "torch," "flame"
- **Line 5:** "lightning"
- **Line 6:** "beacon-hand"
- **Line 7:** "Glows"
- **Line 14:** "lamp," "golden"

JUXTAPOSITION

The poem opens with one juxtaposition that prepares us for another. Though "The New Colossus" begins with the specific language of an inverse simile ("not like"), its language loosens into a poem-length juxtaposition between two statues and the nations they represent. The statues are quite literally put side by side, as the poem suggests that they are on a single plane connected by an ocean. The "sea-washed" shore at which the new statue stands might just as easily describe the location of the old Colossus. Putting the Colossus of Rhodes beside the New Colossus allows the speaker to compare the values these statues represent.

In the sestet, the speaker explicitly juxtaposes America with Europe. When the statue speaks to the "ancient lands," she is juxtaposing the way people are treated in Europe with the way she hopes they'll be treated in America. While in Europe many are "tired," "poor," and "yearning to breathe free," in America they can reap the benefits of all that lies behind its "golden door."

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "brazen giant"
- **Line 2:** "conquering limbs," "astride from land to land"
- **Line 3:** "at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand"
- **Line 4:** "A mighty woman"
- **Line 7:** "her mild eyes"

METONYMY

Although the "The New Colossus" can be said to be a poem about the Statue of Liberty, it is important to understand that the poem makes Lady Liberty a metonym for America itself.

With her position at America's "sea-washed sunset gates," the statue forms a prominent part of America's eastern shoreline. With her title "Mother of Exiles," she represents America as motherland—a word commonly used to describe one's home country or the land of one's ancestors. Put another way: the poem has replaced "motherland," a word for the United States, with the statue's name. In the poem, the statue literally stands in for the country. Further, when the statue speaks directly to the ancient lands, the poem stages a conversation between America and Europe, and the statue becomes the spokesperson for the United States.

By making the Statue of Liberty stand in for the nation itself, the poem is able to associate the *values* of the statue—liberty and welcoming hospitality—with the country as well. In a poem that describes the nation in idealistic terms rather than wholly realistic ones, this use of metonymy encourages and hopes to inspire Americans to incorporate the statue's values more fully into their culture.

Where Metonymy appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-8:** "A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name / Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand / Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command / The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame."

SIMILE

The first stanza of "The New Colossus" uses a single, powerful inverse simile. Rather than stating what object the New Colossus is *like*, the speaker instead says what object she is "not like." While similes usually emphasize a surprising likeness between two unlike things, "The New Colossus" emphasizes the surprising differences between two similar objects.

Once the reader understands the allusions being made to two historical objects, it is clear that both objects of the simile are brass statues, both stand on a nation's shore, and both represent that nation's values. Since it is immediately apparent how the Colossus of Rhodes and the Statue of Liberty are similar, the poem's job is to show how different the values these statues represent *should* be. This is accomplished by describing the Colossus of Rhodes's warlike posture and contrasting it with the Statue of Liberty's welcoming torch and "mild" gaze. Opening with a revised version of the familiar simile thus sets the reader up for the poem's central argument, which is that the New Colossus should symbolize America's commitment to radical hospitality rather than military victory.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-6:** "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"

VOCABULARY

Colossus () - A much larger than life size statue of a person or a god. The poem describes the Colossus of Rhodes and calls the Statue of Liberty a "new" colossus in its title.

Brazen (Line 1) - "Brazen" has two meanings:

- Made of brass
- Bold or shameless

Historically, brass referred to all alloys of copper, which means that the metals used to construct both the Colossus of Rhodes and the Statue of Liberty might be described as "brazen." The Colossus of Rhodes was made of bronze (copper and zinc), while the Statue of Liberty is covered in copper sheets."Brazen" in reference to boldness often has a bit of a negative connotation, with the boldness being connected to shamelessness or presumptuousness. It seems to have that connotation in the poem as well, with the maternal strength of the "new" Colossus generally being held up as superior to the more militaristic or "showy" strength of the old Colossus.

Astride (Line 2) - Standing with one leg on either side of an object. In this case, the Colossus of Rhodes was believed to straddle the entrance to a harbor.

Sunset gates (Line 3) - A lyrical way to describe the entryway to the America constituted by New York Harbor and, symbolically, by the Statue of Liberty herself. The reference to a sunset refers to the fact that the harbor and statue are faced toward the East, which is where the sun sets.

Imprisoned lightning (Line 5) - Refers to the electric light in the Statue of Liberty's torch. This phrase also contains a mythological reference, alluding to the Greek God Zeus's lightning bolt.

Exiles (Line 6) - The immigrants who seek refuge in America because they no longer feel welcome in or able to sustain a life in their homeland.

Air-bridged (Line 8) - The air between the cities on either side of New York Harbor. Some suggest that the phrase also references the Brooklyn Bridge, which was completed to much celebration in the same year the poem was written.

Pomp (Line 9) - Ceremonial displays, usually ones that are very showy and expensive. The poem imagines the Colossus of Rhodes as just such a magnificent and boastful display.

Huddled masses (Line 11) - The many downtrodden people who cannot sustain a life in their homeland. The Statue of Liberty, given voice in the poem, imagines the thousands of people existing in this condition filling Europe's shores and crowding or "huddling" together for warmth and safety.

Refuse (Line 12) - That which is rejected or treated like rubbish. In the poem, the term refers to the immigrants who are turned away from their homes and treated poorly.

Teeming (Line 12) - Filled to the brim, overflowing. The poem suggests that Europe can no longer accommodate all those who were born there.

Tempest-tost (Line 13) - A ship that is tossed by rough waves in a storm. This is a line from Act 1 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which one of the witches curses a sea captain: "though his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest-tost." Shakespeare himself likely adapted the line from the Geneva Bible's description of Paul's ship being "exceedingly tossed with a tempest" in the Acts of the Apostles. The poem uses the term to describe those who have been "tossed" by fate, political events, and the sea itself as they seek to come to America and a new life.

Golden door (Line 14) - The symbolic entryway to the opportunities that America offers.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The New Colossus" is an Italian sonnet (also called a Petrarchan sonnet). Italian sonnets contain fourteen lines, and usually consist of an eight-line stanza called an octave followed by a six-line stanza called a sestet. The octave is broken into two four-line quatrains, while the sestet is broken into two three-line tercets. The poem follows these standard formal divisions:

- Octave
  - Quatrain
  - Quatrain
- Sestet
  - Tercet
  - Tercet

In a typical Italian sonnet, the formal divisions of the poem coincide with shifts in the poem's argument or narrative. Most Italian sonnets set up a problem in the octave, while the sestet initiates a "turn" toward resolving that problem. Usually this problem has to do with an issue of unrequited love.

"The New Colossus" differs from a typical Italian sonnet in both of these respects. First, the "problem" it focuses on is not one related to romantic love, but rather to the suffering of exiles and immigrants hoping for a better life in America. Second, the problem and its potential resolution cannot be linked to the

poem's formal divisions. There *is* a shift in focus between the sonnet's octave and sestet, with the octave describing the New Colossus in relation to the Colossus of Rhodes, while in the sestet the new statue chastises the "ancient lands" of Europe and welcomes exiles. But it is not a shift from problem to solution.

Already in the octave, the statue's role as "Mother of Exiles" is established, offering a potential solution to the problem of the exiles' suffering and homelessness. But at that point in the poem the issue hasn't yet been stated explicitly. Only in the sestet is the problem stated (thousands of people treated like "refuse" and "yearning to breathe free"). Even in the poem's final two sentences, the statue both identifies the suffering that exists and offers to alleviate it.

In a sense, the change or "turn" in "The New Colossus" is already present in line one, where the speaker states that The New Colossus represents a radical departure from the ancient Colossus of Rhodes. The poem doesn't need to spend eight lines stating the problem and six lines proposing a solution. Instead, it integrates both problem and solution into one extended discussion of the Statue of Liberty's symbolic meaning for American citizens and hopeful immigrants.

METER

Like most Italian sonnets written in English, "The New Colossus" falls into a meter of iambic pentameter. Each line of iambic pentameter can be divided into five "feet" consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. While most sonnets follow this meter precisely, though, "The New Colossus" follows this rhythm only roughly.

A signal of the poem's metrical irregularity comes in the first line, which begins with a trochee (a foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable) and ends with a spondee (a foot consisting of two stressed syllables):

> Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame

Showing that it can play by the rules when it pleases, however, the poem's next line is in perfect iambic pentameter (though you do have to treat the "quering" in "conquering" as a single syllable to hear it):

> With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Lines in strict iambic pentameter can also be found in lines eleven, twelve, and fourteen. Each of the other lines replaces at least one iamb with a trochee or a spondee. Many of these spondees are formed because of the poem's heavy use of hyphenated compound words like "sea-washed," "world-wide," and "air-bridged." In these three cases, the words joined by a hyphen each contain one syllable, and each will be stressed when read aloud. These consecutive stresses result in a number of spondees throughout the poem, and even a few instances of consecutive spondees like this one:

> Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

While the poem's meter is overall in iambic pentameter, then, the poem also draws regular attention to the multitude of trochees and spondees varying its rhythm. Perhaps this pro-immigration poem is suggesting that the melodious effect of metrical variation might be replicated through openness to a pluralistic society. Perhaps, too, the many spondaic compound words reference America as a great melting pot, where those from many lands and cultures join to form one nation. All stresses in these spondees, like all citizens of America, are equal.

RHYME SCHEME

Although an unconventional Italian sonnet in many respects, "The New Colossus" follows the form's standard rhyme exactly:

> ABBAABBACDCDCD

The poem also makes use of diacope and assonance near line endings, thereby heightening the impact of corresponding sounds in the rhyme scheme. Examples of diacope include "land to land" in line two, while instances of assonance include "shall stand," "your poor," and "breathe free."

SPEAKER

The speaker of "The New Colossus" is an American with a distinct vision for America's future and role on the world stage. The speaker refers to the shores of New York as "*our*" gates, describing its harbor and new statue in loving detail. This is no objective voice—the way the speaker describes the statue has political overtones. In lines one and two, the speaker explicitly states that the new statue's purpose is different from that of an ancient colossus that celebrated a military victory. In lines four through eight, the speaker gives the statue the name "Mother of Exiles" and describes the statue's torch as a light guiding exiles toward their new home. The speaker clearly privileges compassion and hospitality over conquering might.

In the second stanza, the speaker seemingly introduces a second voice: that of the statue herself. The statue, too, presents herself as a motherly figure waiting to welcome immigrants to America. The direct correspondence between these two voices makes it apparent that the speaker has put words in the statue's mouth. The voice of an inanimate statue becomes one strategy among many for the speaker to advocate for radical hospitality for immigrants. In other words, one can reasonably argue that the speaker in both stanzas of the poem remains essentially the same.

The speaker's idealism and strident confidence in the American

dream puts some distance between the poem's speaker and its author. Although Emma Lazarus was actively involved in immigration activism, she also became disillusioned with some of the organizations she supported. Born into a wealthy Jewish family, Lazarus used her resources to help found the Hebrew Technical Institute, which provided vocational training to Jewish immigrants. She also volunteered with the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society's employment bureau. Later, however, she lost faith in this effort, and instead advocated for the creation of a Jewish homeland. Given this complicated history, perhaps the poem's speaker might be said to voice Lazarus's early and idealistic vision of what America could be, and to either precede or put aside her disappointment in what she came to see as its failings.

SETTING

In line three of "The New Colossus," it becomes clear that the poem's setting is the precise location where the Statue of Liberty stands: Liberty Island in New York Harbor. The poem describes "here" as the point where the statue stands at America's eastern shore, or "sunset gates." The poem also references how the statue looks outward toward "twin cities," which have been interpreted as either New York and Brooklyn or New York and Jersey City. Either way, the setting does not shift very far. Just as the poem makes the Statue of Liberty representative of America and its inhabitants' values, the setting might also be broadened to include the country as a whole. The statue may stand at one particular "harbor," but as the guardian of a "golden door," it is one part of a larger entity: an entire nation founded on the ideals of liberty, justice, and opportunity for all.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

As citizens of a new country only recently founded, many 19th-century American writers sought to create a distinctly American literature. This project spans from James Fenimore Cooper's celebrations of rugged frontier life to the American individualism of Walt Whitman's poetry. Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus" both participates in this work and pushes against it. "The New Colossus" offers a vision of what America could be that involves rejecting ancient European ideas of military valor and class hierarchy, but that also involves welcoming exiles from Europe and other lands. In other words, this poem both embraces a unique American identity and insists that this identity encompasses many cultures.

The poem's political concerns place it in the second half of Emma Lazarus's career, during which time her activism intertwined with her literary activity. Though born into a wealthy Jewish family, Lazarus was uninterested in her own heritage until she read George Eliot's novel *Daniel Deronda*. Eliot's nuanced exploration of Jewish identity precipitated Lazarus's own probing treatment of the theme in much of her later work. Lazarus scholar Max Cavitch suggests that, in "The New Colossus," the statue's lamp is a veiled reference to a quote from *Daniel Deronda*'s Mordecai. Mordecai, who advocates for the creation of a Jewish homeland, declares that Israel's heritage beats in the pulses of the multitudes and must be made visible: "let the torch of visible community be lit!" In Lazarus's poem, the specificity of Eliot's image is broadened to a "world-wide" appeal. This lamp lights the way not just for Jews, but for all exiles. The poem shares its sense of humanity's interconnected nature with Walt Whitman's poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," which describes the speaker's sense of connection to "men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence." The poem may also have been influenced by Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias," a famous sonnet written about a statue earlier in the 19th century.

"The New Colossus" has influenced many later poets, particularly those who use poetry to make political statements. However, not all later poets saw "The New Colossus" in a complimentary way. Poets such as Claude McKay implicitly criticize its starry-eyed idealism by undercutting ideas of American greatness or exceptionalism. Sylvia Plath's "The Colossus" obliquely references the poem in a different way, by comparing another contemporary figure (the speaker's father) to the Colossus of Rhodes. In that poem, the emphasis is on the irreparably broken state of the ancient statue, rather than its martial glory astride the harbor.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The New Colossus" was written during a major wave of American immigration, spanning roughly from 1880 to 1920. Though many of these immigrants did successfully make a new home for themselves in America during this era, doing so was not easy. The boom in U.S. industrialization meant that more jobs existed than ever before. As thousands arrived seeking these opportunities, however, many Americans saw the newcomers as unwelcome competition. In addition to the growing anti-immigrant sentiment, immigration became further restricted at the federal level. Emma Lazarus penned "The New Colossus" just one year after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 limited the immigration of Chinese laborers. Lazarus herself concentrated her efforts on the plight of the Jewish refugees, who were fleeing anti-semitic violence across Europe and particularly in Russia. She wrote a defense of these Russian Jewish immigrants for the Century Magazine, along with a series of articles from 1882 to 1883 called "An Epistle to the Hebrews," in which she argued that Jews must receive a robust education and began to advocate for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. During this same period, she wrote "The New Colossus," which describes the Statue of Liberty

beckoning refugees toward U.S. shores. If the cracks had already begun to show in an idealistic image of America as welcoming mother—as the anti-immigrant sentiment of the time would seem to suggest—nonetheless Lazarus's poem tried to restore it.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poetry Foundation's Guide to "The New Colossus" — The Poetry Foundation offers an essay that serves as a poem guide to "The New Colossus." It covers historical background, offers an analysis of the poem itself, and describes the poem's influence on American culture. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/144956/emma-lazarus-the-new-colossus)
- Interactive Poem through Nextbook Press — This interactive poem has been annotated by Princeton professor of English Esther Schor, who published a biography of Emma Lazarus. (https://nextbookpress.com/new-colossus/)
- The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation: "About the Statue of Liberty" — Learn more about the poem's inspiration, the Statue of Liberty, on this foundation's website. (https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/about-the-statue-of-liberty)
- History.com: Background on 19th century American Immigration — In this survey of pre-1965 U.S. immigration, you can learn about the waves of immigration occurring during the 19th century and read an introduction to federal immigration regulations. (https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/u-s-immigration-before-1965)
- Library of Congress: "The New Colossus" Read Aloud — Hear the acclaimed, Brooklyn-born contemporary poet Alicia Ostriker read "The New Colossus" aloud and offer commentary on it. (https://www.loc.gov/poetry/poetry-of-america/american-identity/aliciaostriker-emmalazarus.html)

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