

The New Colossus - a sonnet at the Statue of Liberty

by Emma Lazarus

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
Glowes 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-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Even though the Statue of Liberty hadn't yet been constructed when Emma Lazarus began work on her poem 'The New Colossus' in 1883, she already understood what such a symbol would represent to Americans both native and new: a warm and welcoming beacon of hope. She opens the piece by contrasting the intimidating and ancient Colossus of Rhodes with the new colossal figure of a mighty woman who cordially greets all those who enter New York Harbor.

The statue herself then takes over the poetic narration as she draws contrasts between America and the Old World by claiming that the 'ancient lands' are more concerned with 'storied pomp' than the welfare of their people. She then calls out to all the disenfranchised throughout the world, beckoning them to a life of freedom and opportunity, 'I lift my lamp beside the golden door!'

If you've spent any time in an English class, you're probably somewhat familiar with the sonnets of Shakespeare. To help us better understand Emma Lazarus' famous poem, it's important to know that it is also a sonnet, only it's a type known as a **Petrarchan sonnet**, an Italian sonnet form that divides the poem **by rhyme groups into a section of eight lines (octave), followed by one of six (sestet). Or 14 lines structured as 3 quatrains and a couplet.**

The usual rhyming scheme is a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g

The octave of Lazarus' sonnet begins by establishing the stark contrasts between the old Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and the New Colossus that is to take its place as a mark of human endeavor. For Lazarus, the old statue is masculine and oppressive, symbolizing the often domineering nature of Old World patriarchies.

On the other hand, the new one is a 'mighty woman' who brandishes a torch 'whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning,' which references not only the harnessing of electricity, but also her ability to command a force often reserved for Zeus, Thor, or other male deities. Through a combination of her soft features and firm hand, she becomes the Mother of Exiles, both in a traditional nurturing sense, and in reference to matronly authority that allows her to 'command / The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.'

No matter what type it is, every sonnet contains a *volta* (Italian for 'turn') of some sort, which represents a change in the poem's subject matter. Change in narrator to Lady Liberty herself in the final Sestet.

Now lets look at one of Shakespeare's sonnets

Sonnet 14

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck;
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality;
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,
Or say with princes if it shall go well,
By oft predict that I in heaven find:
But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
And, constant stars, in them I read such art
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,
If from thyself to store thou wouldst convert;
Or else of thee this I prognosticate,
Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

Paraphrase of Sonnet 14

I do not receive my knowledge or make my decisions by
the stars;
Though I have enough training in astrology to do so,
I cannot predict good luck or bad,
Or plagues, or famine, or the weather;
Nor can I say what will happen at any given moment in
our daily lives,
Alloting to each man his thunder, rain, and wind [i.e., he
cannot foretell our personal troubles],
Or even tell princes if things will go well for them,
By frequent omens that I see in the heavens:
But from your eyes alone do I derive my knowledge,
And they are my constant stars, in which I read such art
[gain such knowledge]

That I see truth and beauty will live together in harmony,
If you would only turn your focus from yourself to creating a child;
Or else this is my prophecy:
That truth and beauty will all end when you die.

In Sonnet 14 the poet first reveals that it is not through science ("astronomy"), his own judgement, or personal experience that he obtains his knowledge about life and love -- all that he knows comes simply and only from his lover ("But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive"). And the primary lesson the poet learns from his lover's eyes is that, if his lover refuses to create a child to carry on his (or her) lineage, all the ideals embodied by his lover will cease to exist. This is yet another variation on Shakespeare's theme of the necessity of procreation that dominates the early sonnets. For much more on this theme, please see the commentary for the other sonnets (1-18) and the article [How to Analyze a Shakespearean Sonnet](#).

my judgement pluck (1): obtain my knowledge.

have astronomy (2): know astrology.

dearths (4): famine.

pointing (6): appointing.

oft predict (8): frequent predictions.

art (10): knowledge.

If...convert (12): i.e., If [your focus] would turn from yourself to having children ('to store').

UNAWARE *by Kaitlyn Guenther*

Isolation quickly overwhelms me
Begging for forgiveness, a fallen hand
Desolation I now begin to see
Hanging by a thin thread, a single strand

I watch them... Their fears, their misbehaviour
Mistreat, abuse.... Completely unaware
I am the land, their glorious saviour
Someday they will learn to treat me with care

I wish they would learn to trust each other
To join as one, to stand strong together
A bond, a band and a mighty brother
Forever as one, a powerful tether

You may not know, that fear is their captor
So you may not see each special factor



Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
Nor shall death brag thou wanderest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest.

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

by William Shakespeare

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