

DISSOCIATIVE IMAGISM
A Study of Else Lasker-Schüller's Poetry

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Felix de Villiers



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ABSTRACT

The following study examines the poetry of Else Lasker-Schüller in its historical context, particularly as this is registered by idiosyncracies in the aesthetic medium. The historical background reflects conflicts like those between nature and civilisation, Rationalism and Irrationalism, conceptual logic and the aesthetic media, dissociation and totalitarianism. Such antagonisms are seen as inter-locking aspects of Lasker-Schüller's poetry. The aim has not been to impose external criteria but to reveal their constitutive role in poetry, and, in this way, to elicit its own essential significance. After an introduction the first chapter refers to aesthetic theories in Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Benjamin sees a concentration of relationships in poetry; Adorno emphasises the breach between socialised and aesthetic experience, thus illuminating a latent social purpose in the very purposelessness of art, striving for emancipation from the fetters of the past.

The last hypothesis is reflected in chapter headings. A central chapter, Inside Out (3), stands for the inversion of perspectives in poetry. The dissociating poet projects herself as a Sphinx (1) into a pre-industrial, mythological identity; she becomes a Shadow (2) in relation to modern norms; in the image of the Hieroglyph (4) the paradox of dissociation as the medium of communication between religious, aesthetic and secular domains becomes emphatic. An alien or foreign identity serves as a pretext for the poetry in the German Mother-tongue (5).

The second part of the study considers the over-lapping influences of neo-romantic Overflow (6) and expressionistic Ferment (7) and the Genesis (8) of the lyrical ego culminating in a Mirage (9) of elusive imagism. Under historical pressures the feigned reality of Lasker-Schüller's imagism becomes mannered, a Frieze (10), particularly in the fiction of a pre-industrial alternative. This fiction is relinquished and the lyrical ego finds an intermittent voice once more, despite the knowledge of failure and of real Exile (11) from Germany.

PREFATORY NOTE

Poetry is quoted in the same spacing as the text of the thesis rather than in single spacing. Compression gives the poems the appearance of genre-like miniatures, whereas wider spacing brings them into a closer correspondence with the idea of "dissociative imagism" in Else Lasker-Schüler. Particularly in her "couplet-phase" it is essential, according to the following interpretation, to feel the dividing space between couplets. For the same reason I prefer this 'marginal' poetry to be placed as near the left-hand margin as possible. We are told that it was even an idiosyncrasy of the poet's city-life to walk on the pavement as close as possible to the façades of buildings. My presentation also follows that of the Gedichte (Munich 1959) in the most recent edition of the collected works.

Thanks are due to my supervisors, Mrs. Pat Howe and Mrs Dorothy Reich, whose encouragement and critical suggestions played a large part in producing the thesis in its present form.

To Prince, Roxy and Jonathan

..... body and soul

Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves,
Caught up in contemplation, the mind's eye
Fixed upon images that once were thought.....

Yeats

Von weitem hört ich sagen: die
Unverständlichkeit sei Folge nur des
Unverstandes; dieser suche was er habe,
und also niemals weiter finden könnte.

Novalis

INTRODUCTION: JUGGLER

Würde man nun eher gar nichts mit einem
Begriffe anfangen können, als bis man
ihn definiert hätte, so würde es gar
schlecht mit allem Philosophieren
stehen.

Immanuel Kant

Else Lasker-Schüler was a committed opponent of most established categories, including that of her own art, literature. "Nur nicht lesen," she wrote to Jethro Bithell, her English academic correspondent, "ich hasse die Bücher und alle Literatur. Das Wort ist schon scheusslich, der Klang hochtrabend." (BI 63) This highly idiosyncratic response to all systematic thought presents a favourite topic of the poet's. It was associated for her with a generosity that transcended smugness and mean calculation. To Franz Jung she writes about people who give richly from the heart and opposes them to people who always want to calculate. (BII 69) She returns to the theme in her letter-novel, Mein Herz: "Ich habe mir nie ein System gemacht.....nie eine Weltanschauung mir gefestigt.....ich bin ungebunden, überall liegt ein Wort von mir, von überall kam ein Wort von mir...." On these terms she remained a poet despite her hatred of 'literature'. (PS 307)

One of the poet's favourite images was that of the juggler and this is perhaps the profession which most resembled her own, even more than that of the mystic who also looks beyond the horizon of established realities: "Ich kann Tag und Nacht machen, so wird fast alles Gaukelei in meiner Hand."¹ Alone with the Rabbi in Jerusalem for a mock-serious tête-à-tête, she asked - since no others were present - whether he really believed in God. (VP 165) She evidently chose the vocation of poet, particularly the Modernist poet of her period, because his dissociative reality is by its nature feigned. All art feigns its own reality; the realist novelist presents occurrences as though they were true. The artist of Lasker-Schüler's period and tendency stresses this difference by rejecting the realist's illusion of reality. This aspect of

1. Else Lasker-Schüler, Briefe an Karl Kraus, Cologne and Berlin, 1959, p. 55.

Modernism was particularly emphasized by Lasker-Schüller. Nevertheless, it was characteristic of her juggling nature to insist on the seriousness of her games, 'den Ernst des Spieles'.¹ She emerges as a significant poet perhaps only when this paradox is understood. There is more cunning behind the play of words, images and ideas than is often assumed. At times the poet reveals a rigorous notion of her vocation, for example, when she writes that every false step taken by a poet revenges itself in the credibility of his verses. (PS 778)

One of the serious consequences of insisting on play to resist safely demarcated categories and disciplines is fear and desolation. Desolation and playfulness alternate continually and pervade one another in Lasker-Schüller's writings; "Mein Herz ist zerfallen; o diese Einsamkeit zwischen gebrochenen Säulen!" (PS 373)....Über Eure Horizonte habe ich wohl schon lange gedacht. Aber wo komme ich hin, wenn ich über meinen Mauern und Zäunen hänge...? (PS 373) Playful juggling with the concepts of life and death is mingled with seriousness in these words to Karl Kraus: "Ich bin immer so traurig....Ich bin wie tot. Ich weiss nur eins dass Leben und Tod Hand in Hand gehen, Leben stirbt und Tod ist vergesslich zum Leben."²

Lasker-Schüller does not transcend systematised norms of rationality by becoming irrational and unintelligible. All the passages quoted above are written in intelligible German. The poet uses the form of judgements, die urteilende Sprache, of subject and predicate. This is not altered by the fact that Lasker-Schüller would evidently have liked the distinction between poetic and unpoetic rationality to be as nearly absolute as possible. In my first chapter it has been pointed out that she made an anagram of a friend's name so as to dissociate him, as it were absolutely, from his normal identity. Anagrams can only be conceived rationally, and this is one of the simplest of many rational procedures examined in the thesis as a whole. There is a profound rationality in the

1. Ibid., p. 18.

2. Ibid., p. 65.

New Testament, which, like Lasker-Schüller, plays with the concepts of life and death in more than one place, for example, in the words: let the dead bury the dead, or with seeing and blindness: seeing they see not, etc. Lasker-Schüller's notion of death becoming forgetful toward life is a variation of the New Testament notion of a life that is gained by self-surrender. In her conception there is a feeling that the risk taken may result in a complete loss of substance. The thesis as a whole will consider by what narrow margin the poet may or may not have regained an identity by losing one.

Such paradoxes, juxtapositions of terms with a fluctuating significance will also be treated as the essential medium of a critical appreciation of Lasker-Schüller's poetry. This precludes pre-established definitions in deference to those that emerge in the process of reflection. One would surely subvert the poet by re-imposing the world it was her intention to leave. This does not mean adopting poetic instead of discursive logic as a form of criticism, but, rather, allowing one's understanding in the critical medium to question itself in the same way that the poet questions established categories, and this without becoming merely capricious.

The changing significance of words affects the mode of definition. Kant treats the subject of definitions with clarity in his Kritik der reinen Vernunft, in the chapter on Die Disziplin der reinen Vernunft im dogmatischen Gebrauch. There he considers that definitions are only possible in mathematics and rejects their possibility in empirical and theoretical concepts. Of theoretical concepts (which concern us here) he writes:

...ich kann niemals sicher sein, daß die deutliche Vorstellung eines noch verworren gegebenen Begriffs ausführlich entwickelt worden, als wenn ich weiß, daß dieselbe dem Gegenstande adäquat sei. Da der Begriff desselben aber, so wie er gegeben ist, viel (sic) dunkle Vorstellungen enthalten kann, die wir in der Zergliederung übergehen, ob wir sie zwar in der Anwendung jederzeit brauchen: so ist die Ausführlichkeit der Zergliederung meines Begriffs immer zweifelhaft und kann nur durch vielfältig zutreffende Beispiele vermutlich, niemals aber apodiktisch gewiß gemacht werden. Anstatt des Ausdrucks Definition würde ich lieber den der Exposition brauchen, der immer noch behutsam bleibt,

und bei dem der Kritiker sie auf einen gewissen Grad gelten lassen und doch wegen der Ausführlichkeit noch Bedenken tragen kann." (The underlinings are mine).¹

Kant too proceeds to juggle with the word definition. Since German only has the word Erklärung as a substitute for definition and it lacks the latter's succinctness, Kant is willing to relax his intellectual rigour and adopt this word. (p 437) This does not, however lead him back to a faith in pre-established definitions. The philosopher, he continues, must not make the mistake of introducing definitions before his exposition; definition, rather, must be the end-result of the exposition as a whole: "...die unvollständige Exposition geht vor der vollständigen vorher..." He believes the philosopher should make good use of tentative definitions: "...mangelhafte Definitionen, d.i. Sätze, die eigentlich noch nicht Definitionen, aber übrigens wahr und also Annäherungen zu ihnen sind ..." (p 437) Of course, 'philosophy' stands here for all theoretical concepts.- Accordingly, in my thesis, exposition takes precedence over pre-established definition.

Language itself rebels against stratified definition: its terms are ambivalent. As an organising principle it is characterised by a dualism expressed in pairs of concepts like rational/irrational, subject/object, romantic/classic, good/evil, crudely schematic terms for the complex experiences they subsume. The terms discussed here will be key-concepts in my thesis. Most of these terms are interdependent both in theoretical and popular language. Their meanings often become inverted. Irrational contains the word rational, and so represents some kind of altered version of the latter. In Freud's psychology rationalisation stands for a type of irrationality. 18th-century Rationalism in the narrower sense is considered by many as irrational insofar as it equates nature-dominating reason, a one-sided emancipation of society, with truth. Indeed, the Augustan poets tended to equate nature with reason. The words subject and object are definable only in relation to one another; yet there are people who seem to imagine that it is possible to gain objectivity by subtracting the subjective element in thought, forgetting that

1. Immanuel Kant, Werke, Vol. I, edited by Hugo Kenner, Berlin, undated. (Verlag A. Weichert)

objectivity is determined by a necessarily subjective mind. The interdependence of these terms is such that their meanings are subject to infinite variations. Popular usage has, for example, inverted the meaning the words concrete and abstract have in Hegel. Abstract in Hegel would apply to merely empirical knowledge, isolated facts; concrete, in the sense of concrecere, to grow together, to a comprehensive understanding, bringing things and experiences together into a specific focus.¹ My thesis reverts, on the whole, to the more usual meanings of abstract (intangible) and concrete (tangible, thing-like, visible). But Hegel's remarks help to break down fixed definitions of those terms and allow the contradictory significances to resonate in one another. The terms are ambivalent as applied to Lasker-Schüller, especially in view of her inversion of reality and illusion. (see below) Chapter 9, Mirage, in particular deals with concrete realisations of intangible poetic ideas.

If words like rational and irrational, therefore, are inadequate schematic symbols for complex subject-matter, then the critical thinker's task is not unlike that of the poet who juggles with words in order to elicit meanings from them which would otherwise be stifled by the strait-jacket of dictionary definitions. Those who have worked with two languages and translation will know how often words are untranslatable and only yield their meaning or several meanings in context and through experience. Context is the best medium for the definition of terms, especially if their meaning does not remain constant. The aim of juggling with words here is greater precision.

When Lasker-Schüller writes: "Ich hasse und verachte die Menschheit ohne Ausnahme" in a letter to Karl Kraus² she is expressing frustrated love (as when she dedicates Mein Herz, after recording her experience of thwarted love in it, to Niemandem). Yet it would be completely false to assume that this Hass simply corresponds to love. The tensions of these inter-locking emotions are recognised by the paradoxical term love-hate. Lasker-Schüller's statement gains its strength by the denial of love and the addition of Verachtung to Hass. The dynamic use of Hass as a verb with the personal Ich

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1. G.W.F. Hegel, Recht, Staat, Geschichte, Stuttgart 1964, p.142, p.149: concrete reality here is Dasein in seinem Begriffe.
 2. Lasker-Schüller, Briefe an Karl Kraus, op. cit.

as its subject and the curt, despairing phrase die Menschheit ohne Ausnahme colour the significance of this Häss. One can explain and interpret in order to approach the meaning of this word, but it has an indefinable significance of its own drawn from its context. There is a paradoxical love-hate in Lasker-Schüller's oeuvre, which does indeed take the whole of my thesis to interpret. - Conversely, love, in her poetry, is a kind of inverted hatred, since it excludes the alien world rejected by her imagination.

What applies to the emotive language of Lasker-Schüller's prose and poetry is no less true of the cooler language of literary interpretation and its distinctions. And, since poetry uses concepts, there is no clear dividing line between the language of discursive logic and that of poetry. As a critic one has to grapple with the fact that Lasker-Schüller, following a tradition of mysticism, as well as her own idiosyncratic play with images and ideas, insists that reality is an illusion and that her illusions are real. (See p. 227) Then, she rejects the world for her imaginative life while the aim of her imagination is to reach the world, to be published, read and appreciated. The reader will find several indications in my thesis of the fact that Lasker-Schüller, in her very dissociation, believed she was finding a voice for the community as a whole, the community she so often appeared to despise. This commitment, associated with a certain diffidence or Schüchternheit, is most tellingly expressed in two lines from Der Letzte: "In meiner Hand liegt schwer mein Volk begraben, / und Wetter ziehen schüchtern über mich". (G 144) She saw poetry, indeed, as the voice of all repressed humanity: "Wir Dichter, die wir uns täglich mit den Unterdrückten jeder Klasse auflehnen." (PS 517) (My underlinings) She hates the word 'literature' but is a poet. - Thus one is dealing continually with paradoxes that must necessarily be reflected¹ in the critical medium. This creates

1. The word reflected has two meanings both of which are implied here: mirrored and critically reflected. For this writer the paradoxes of poetry and critical thought are inter-locked and he cannot conceive of a completely independent position outside that of the poetry, even though his aim is to interpret from a relatively independent standpoint. In this sense the method adopted is 'immanent'.

difficulties, both for the interpreter and the unprepared reader, though these difficulties are both stimulating and rewarding. "If one glides through paragraphs without any resistance from them this suggests pre-established mental patterns, the elimination of dialogue."¹ (These remarks refer to other paragraphs than my own which must speak for themselves as best they can).²

Most of the terms used in my thesis are established in literary criticism or in the basic language of critical thought: subject/object, ego/non-ego, identity/non-identity. My notions of identity and non-identity are taken over from the Hegelian tradition of critical thought as well as from a German literary tradition represented by central figures like Novalis. Such terms are introduced to develop essential ideas which could not be expressed in any other way. My conscious intention is to use only words rooted in popular usage or with a transparent significance, so that their changing significance becomes more easily self-evident in the process of exegesis.

Most people have some notion of the word identity, for example, and its significance is still transparent in the concept of non-identity. Non-identity, in my thesis, stands for an intensive concentration of relationships in a unity which sheds empirical and one-sided idealistic notions of identity: in the case of a person, not the ego which happens to be walking about just as society produced it, but the one that has found itself in the process of reflection, in ideas and poetry.³ In this context Ich stands, at times, for a nature-dominating agency, at times for the opposite, a nature-releasing one, represented by the terms non-ego, lyrical ego and hieroglyphic ego. But here too no fixed boundaries can be drawn between ego and non-ego, since the two are interdependent. An ego that surrendered itself

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1. Felix de Villiers, Some short paragraphs written in favour of long ones, The Agent, November 1979.
 2. The present version of this thesis is the result of a painstaking effort to clarify and simplify without compromising a critique in which language and method are interdependent.
 3. The 'one-sidedly idealistic ego' is considered in Chapter 1 in the difference between Hegel and Adorno.

completely would, as Lasker-Schüller sensed, risk a complete loss of identity (and 'nature' can be as tyrannical as the nature-dominating ego). The term empirical ego is necessarily crude and open-ended. It stands in my thesis for the ego whose sense of identity is based mainly on given experience, on its more or less predetermined role in society. For this agency the term socialised ego has also been used. Naturally there is no such thing as a purely 'empirical' ego, since there is a mixture of tendencies in each person.

The notions of art and criticism can be as ambiguous as any of these terms. In relation to Lasker-Schüller, with her hatred of 'literature' and her peculiar elusiveness as a poet, the term 'literary criticism' sounds odd and inappropriate.¹ One cannot approach her with Leavisite notions about the integrity of the work of art. More than art Lasker-Schüller wanted actually to live the life of her imagination in reality. Her attempts to do so are now legendary and one of the favourite topics of essays and reminiscences on the poet. She could not be satisfied with art as a substitute for a really metamorphosized way of life. So her art became elusive, a residual margin of aesthetic experience suspended in momentary crystallisations of poetic ideas, between life in the prevailing world and a life outside it. "Kunst," the poet claimed in her essay on Fritz Huf, "ist der Zustand nach dem Leben....oder vor dem Tod." (PS 229) Rather than creating an alternative reality in her poetry, she laments its absence: "Wo bist du, ferne Stadt/Mit den segnenden Düften?" (Vollmond, G 174) The absent realities, every-day and imaginary, echo strangely in her dissociative imagism: "Im Spiegel der Blüthe/Finde ich mein Bild nicht mehr." (Leise sagen -, G 163)

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1. Apart from the fact that Lasker-Schüller really does make one think again about 'literary criticism', my remark here is deliberately provocative, aimed not least at making me question a category I tended to take for granted. Provocative jolts extend the field of critical dialogue. For this reason I am grateful to authors like Dieter Bänisch whose 'outrageous' remarks caused me to reassess Lasker-Schüller and even to see a rich content in the poetry which I might otherwise have glossed over.

Even in a poem like Ein alter Tibetteppich (G 164) which has a sonnet-like internal concentration, the carpet's stitches are suspended in eternity, maschentausedabertausendweit, and the lovers in the poem are stylised images suspended between opposing realities.¹ Biographers, writers and anthologists have tended to illustrate the poet's work with examples like this one and the later poems, probably because of their more conventional appearance. My endeavour has been to draw such poems into the more elusive perspective of Lasker-Schüler's art, this also where her dissociation develops a tremendous daemonic power.

The eccentricity of her poetry has posed problems for the writers of dissertations. Very few deal with any degree of thoroughness with the internal constitution of the poems. Often critics respond by substituting a cohesive Weltanschauung where one seems to be lacking in the poetry. Their interpretations branch off into mysticism, religion, Judaism, psychology, in a way that glosses over the poetic formulations and does not lead back into them. Hans W. Cohn treats her more or less as though she were a patient undergoing counselling therapy. These interpretations are considered at appropriate points in the thesis. For the present discussion of critical method Dieter Bänisch's thesis offers more.² Bänisch, perhaps more effectively provoked than most critics by the poet's evasiveness, claims that there is no cohesion in Lasker-Schüler's poetry; since it belongs to no category, according to him, it falls apart: "Die ästhetische Immanenz des Gedichts, kaum hergestellt, wird gesprengt..." (p. 4) He writes about an Ich speaking in the status of enigmatic uncertainty (p. 2). "Was verlautbart wird, bleibt trotz der Klarheit der Worte im Dunkeln". (p. 1) He sees the poetry as an endless vicious circle of unclarities. (p. 7) The poem is not self-sufficient. (p. 12) He writes of the paradox of endings that don't end (p. 13), here touching unintentionally on my theory of the suspended reality of the poetry. In order to understand all these contradictions and illogicalities Bänisch feels that he has to look outside the poetry in order to make some sense of its non-sense by considering the world in which it arose. My own intention is only one step away from that of Bänisch, but it is a decisive one and results in an entirely

1. See pages 102f., and p. 216.

2. Dieter Bänisch, Else Lasker-Schüler Zur Kritik eines etablierten Bildes, Stuttgart, 1971.

different interpretation. What Bänisch sees as non-sense I see as the quintessence of Lasker-Schüller's poetry.

My aim, in bringing the context, historical and literary, into play, is to lead more deeply into this dissociating quintessence; not to re-integrate it, but to bring its own distinctive patterns into relief. Unlike Bänisch, I do believe that the poetry has an integrity of its own, even in its evasiveness. Both approaches (like most theses on the poet) exclude work-immanent criticism in the narrower sense which sees the work of art as a self-sufficient entity, more or less divorced from the social and historical context. Any such 'divorce', separation or self-sufficiency, as these words themselves suggest, indicates a relationship, the 'broken' relationship often mentioned by writers on Lasker-Schüller. One cannot be self-sufficient except in relation to something outside oneself. Lasker-Schüller emphasizes a brokenness that characterises all art. By exploring this relationship, my intention is to illuminate the inner structure of the poems more thoroughly than work-immanent criticism normally does.

That there is an interplay of socio-economic and aesthetic forces is self-evident. Lasker-Schüller was explicit about her dissociation from post-industrial man, from the era in which the middle-class represents the social norm. "Ich erlebe alle Arten des Herzens, nur den Bürger nicht," she wrote in Mein Herz. (PS 381) The resultant conflict is registered in aesthetic qualities, in idiosyncracies and taboos, in the poet's evasiveness, in the happiness of her truancy and in her choice of oriental images like the hieroglyph and the sphinx. The risk of error remains, whichever critical method one adopts. But considerations of the intensive inter-action of historical forces in art should represent the effort to master history rather than being mastered by it, to raise art up from its subservience as a functionalised discipline, even to strengthen its resistance to historical determinism. My own conviction, that every critical text represents a broken or distorted fragment of what might be true, precludes any faith in fixed frameworks, though not in logical coherence and substantiation. Historical factors are changing continually and are registered in different ways by each artist and in each epoch, and, therefore, by each critic and his changing standards.

Criticism which sees a striving for social change, whether conscious or unconscious, in art is often associated with fanatical utopianism and religious conviction. A theological tendency is undoubtedly present in my study too; it would be difficult to avoid in a study of Lasker-Schüller, who was no less undoubtedly a messianic poet. A theological component is an indispensable aspect of my thesis as of my critical thinking. But this theology probes those aspects of religious transcendence which aim at real fulfilment and an enrichment of people's lives. This Marx describes as his own intention when he writes that his philosophy does not wish simply to destroy the imaginary flower of religion, but, rather, to transform it into a living flower.¹ Accordingly, I have criticised the positive theological interpretations of Lasker-Schüller and emphasized the secularising tendency of her poetry - her own desire to pluck the living flower - rather than the child-like religiosity which, to some extent, gains the upper hand in her later poetry.

Without the 'leap of faith', Lasker-Schüller, together with many other poets, including the atheist, Shelley, would be robbed of her *raison d'être*. This faith does not consist of an established set of convictions, but resembles, rather, a step into the unknown, beyond the established world. There is also something in it of the plant which cannot reason about the fact that it wants sunlight and warmth to blossom. Lyrical poetry reconciles such unreasoning desire with reason; it releases reason from its bondage within a restrictive, nature-dominating system². However unlikely the fulfilment of such religious faith in society is, life hardly seems worth living without some kind of striving towards it, and criticism hardly worth writing without its motivating force. The theological component in criticism can be related also to the Greek notion of eudaemonism, or to Plato's enthusiasm, to Hegel's drunkenness.³ Kröner's Philosophisches Wörterbuch describes Eudämonismus as "die Glückseligkeit als Motiv und Ziel alles Strebens betrachtende Ethik."⁴ As an antidote to

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1. Karl Marx, Die Frühschriften, 'Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie', Stuttgart, 1964, p. 208.
 2. Anti-lyrical poetry registers disappointment with an unfulfilled promise and, in this way, remains faithful to the idea of it.
 3. Hegel, op.cit. on p.V: "Das Wahre ist der bacchantische Taumel, an dem kein Glied nicht trunken ist...", p. 150.
 4. Kröner, Philosophisches Wörterbuch, Stuttgart, 1969.

vague enthusiasm, both in poetry and criticism, there is Hölderlin's concept of heilige Nüchternheit. My thesis is intended as an exercise in sober and rigorous academic exegesis, but, at the same time, understanding of Lasker-Schüller's poetry does not seem possible without a good measure of empathy, without an echo of her feelings, conflicts and obsessions in the language of criticism.

The mode of interpretation varies with each poem, depending on the points it was appropriate to illustrate. In my review of the poem Sulamith (p. 78f.) it is only by initially suspending critical detachment & following the poem's fervent elan that I arrive at a critical evaluation of the poet's use of mixed metaphors. This element of spontaneity allows Lasker-Schüller to take her critic by surprise from moment to moment and to reveal things he would not have discovered otherwise. In this way the poet foils many of the critic's original intentions. He is, after all, a mediator between the poet and the world she is addressing.

Lasker-Schüller, as a person, evidently had as many faults as any vulnerable mortal, and no attempt has been made in the thesis to idealise her. The thesis is primarily concerned with her projected poetic self. While I do not hesitate to identify weaknesses, my intention is to concentrate on the best part of her achievement, since this has, to my mind, been neglected in criticism of the poet. From the start, her words: "Ich bin am Ziel meines Herzens angelangt," have been borne in mind (G 154); this goal has been pursued, and an attempt is made to look back via the critical medium, as it were, with her hieroglyphic eyes, more or less in accordance with Oscar Wilde's view that each artist's vision excludes all others: "The energy of creation hurries him on blindly to his own goal." (p. 58) "...he cannot conceive of life being shown or beauty fashioned, under any conditions other than those he has selected." (p. 59)¹ This leads me to comparisons unfavourable to Rilke, George, Trakl and Benn which should not be misunderstood. It would be equally possible to explore Rilke's imaginative world and to compare his strengths to Lasker-Schüller's weaknesses. It would also be possible to set out with the intention of emphasizing the drawbacks of her position as dissociating lyricist, to consider what she loses and others gain for poetry. My polemical intention, however, is to defend the

1. Oscar Wilde, Plays Prose Writings and Poems, London, 1972.

strength of her losses and the risks they involved.

Since I have been concerned with the work of Lasker-Schüller, one of the most persistent questions to arise has been that of her status as a German poet. It will be seen that it is precisely her uncertain status - the result of a deliberate ruse on her part - which interests me: the fact that she resists categorisation in the traditional gallery of great artists. There is often a certain violence in the authority of great art, in its unequivocal gesture, which seems to say: this is truth, or, even when expressing uncertainty: this is what matters. Even discussions about the 'crisis of language' would have seemed self-important to Lasker-Schüller and one cannot imagine her participating in them, despite the fact that her own language was in crisis. The pose of the artist as exceptional being is certainly evident in her life and her views. There is one moment in particular in Mein stilles Lied, a central poem in Lasker-Schüller's oeuvre, when she rises up in defence of the artist's authority, saying: I am the vehicle of truth, "Ich bin der Hieroglyph, / Der unter der Schöpfung steht." But this too is an eccentric moment, by normal standards, and its protesting self-assertion speaks for an imaginative world of sheer, purposeless playfulness.¹ For the most part the assertive pose is revoked in the poetry, particularly in the most playful couplet-poems.

Poets during Lasker-Schüller's period often associated themselves with hieratic figures, most probably to compensate for the feeling that poetry was losing ground in the modern world. Lasker-Schüller as a person was pauper and make-believe Prince in one. While Edith Sitwell dressed the part of Queen of English Poetry with expensive clothes and genuine jewelry, Lasker-Schüller's clothes were cheap, her ornaments fake. Gottfried Benn calls her rings servant-girl rings and explains that she ate little and irregularly, and slept, at times, on benches.² Someone who knew the poet in Jerusalem told me it was hard for intellectuals there to decide whether she was a member of the intellectual elite or a tramp. Hieratic figures rarely enter

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1. This theme is treated in the thesis as a whole. See discussions of Mein stilles Lied on p. 40f., p. 62f., p.151f., p. 184f.
 2. Gottfried Benn, Essays Reden Vorträge, Wiesbaden, 1965.

her poetry, but when they do they tend to be identical with impoverished, homeless orphans, as in a poem to Benn called Giselheer dem Knaben:

An meiner Wimper hängt ein Stern,
Es ist so hell
Wie soll ich schlafen -

Und möchte mit dir spielen.
- Ich habe keine Heimat -
Wir spielen König und Prinz.

(G 206)

It would be as absurd to compare this poem and the poet's most idiosyncratic couplet-poems with the Duineser Elegien as it would be to judge Erik Satie's Cinq Grimaces by comparison with Brahms' Vier ernste Gesänge. In contrast to Rilke, Lasker-Schüller is the protagonist of the trite, insubstantial debris of literature, above which the elevated gesture of great art presumes to rise. The dividing line between these two poets is in some senses thin, since Rilke was extremely sensitive to the vulnerability of things. Where he, in his Dinggedichte, attempts to rescue the world of things for poetry, Lasker-Schüller sympathises more completely with the dispossession of this world and turns her art itself into a forsaken play-thing. At the same time a penetrating echo of her historical epoch and its prevailing tendencies raises her art above the level of mere playfulness. In these days of feminism it would be worth considering whether her elusive spontaneity, her poetry of flickering impulses, resisting the mainstream of authoritative literature, does not have indirectly political implications.¹ It certainly offers something different rather than better or worse than main-stream literature.

Compared with contemporaries like Benn and Trakl, Lasker-Schüller's achievement is so striking and original that judgements about relative greatness seem irrelevant. An attempt to decide whether Trakl's Grodek is a greater poem than Lasker-Schüller's Mein Volk seems futile. Mein Volk is considered in my thesis as an exemplary poem, one whose passionate authority is in its self-surrender, its relinquishment of authority. Such poems have an immediacy and self-abandonment

1. These remarks are not intended as an apology for merely wayward 'femininity'. The thesis shows a powerful intellect underlying the playfulness of the couplet-poems and an intensive dialectic leading into them.

quite unlike anything to be found in the other poets mentioned. This immediacy results in many formulations that are disarming in their simplicity and directness, for example, when she writes about her own art: "Ich habe die Welt, die Welt hat mich betrogen." (G 318) This statement from the later poems is cited in my concluding chapter, but it is not unfitting here in the prelude of my study. - Perhaps the critic should be less concerned with 'greatness' than with the particular experience each poet has to offer. Once one puts aside the large-scale achievements of Hölderlin, Rilke and others and considers Lasker-Schüler among the authors of short lyrical poems, then it surely becomes impossible to put her aside in conventional terms as a 'minor poet.'

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ABBREVIATIONS

- G Gedichte, Munich 1959.
PS Prosa und Schauspiele, Munich 1962.
VP Verse und Prosa aus dem Nachlaß, Munich 1961.
BI Lieber gestreifter Tiger Briefe I, Munich 1969.
BII Wo ist unser buntes Theben Briefe II, Munich 1969.
DD Dichtungen und Dokumente, ed. Ernst Ginsberg, Munich 1951.

Page numbers are indicated next to the abbreviations. Comments on Else Lasker-Schüler's poetry by Karl Kraus were collected in Dichtungen und Dokumente, so all these Kraus-references will be to DD.

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THE CIRCLE OF LETTERS

PART 1

- 5 -

THE CIRCLE OF IDENTITIES

CHAPTER I

Chapter II: SPIRIT

Keine Handschrift hat als
Hintergrund den Staat des
Orients.

Klaus Lecker-Schiller

Gerade die schönsten Leistungen
der Kunst beziehen sich auf das
unmittelbare Gefühl des Lesers,
die nicht-fach aber, ihrer
Fähigkeit nach, auf eine be-
wundernswürdige Weise Später
das Gedächtnis.

Klaus Lecker-Schiller

CHAPTER I

There is a sense in which all art is dissociative or broken
in its form, however realistic it may be in appearance: it is
broken insofar as it transposes images or experiences into another
medium. The quality of a work of art, one may claim, depends on
the modifications it undergoes in this transposition, and on the
intensity with which the opposing realms of life and art are
reflected in one another. One of the principal suppositions in
this study is that art in its significant examples always stands
for an alternative reality and therefore represents a scandal in
consciousness, a scandal it shares with or inherits from the great
religions of the same essentially mythical past. The conflict
between opposing tendencies gave rise to the collision against
which Nationalism which resulted in a compromise of German literature
in the 19th century. Sturm und Drang, Romanticism and
Expressionism, although they celebrated 'irrationalism' at times,
were only opposed to Nationalism in its limited sense as a narrow-
containing principle. Goethe, while using the name of Sturm
und Drang, was not a scientific artist. Kluge, in *Die
Kunst des Films*, wrote his pupils "Kunst ist die Kunst des
Menschen und der Welt" and *Filmkunst* is defined as "...eine
menschliche Tätigkeit, die alle ihre Kräfte und nach dem

Chapter 1: SPHINX

Meine Handschrift hat als
Hintergrund den Stern des
Orients.

Else Lasker-Schüller

Gerade die schwächsten Leistungen
der Kunst beziehen sich auf das
unmittelbare Gefühl des Lebens,
die stärksten aber, ihrer
Wahrheit nach, auf eine dem
mythischen verwandte Sphäre:
das Gedichtete.

Walter Benjamin

There is a sense in which all art is dissociative or broken in its forms, however realistic it may be in appearance; it is broken insofar as it transposes images or experiences into another medium. The quality of a work of art, one may claim, depends on the modifications it undergoes in this transposition, and on the intensity with which the opposing realms of life and art are reflected in one another. One of the principal suppositions in this study is that art in its significant examples always stands for an alternative reality and therefore represents a schism in consciousness, a schism it shares with or inherits from the great religions or the more emphatically mythological past. The conflict between opposing tendencies gave rise to the rebellion against narrow Rationalism which resulted in a renaissance of German literature in the 18th century. Sturm und Drang, Romanticism and Expressionism, although they celebrated 'irrationalism' at times, were only opposed to Rationalism in its limited sense as a nature-dominating principle. Novalis, while being the author of Hymnen an die Nacht, also had a scientific mind. Klingsor, in Heinrich von Ofterdingen, warns his pupil: "Begeisterung ohne Verstand ist unnütz und gefährlich" and Verstand is defined as "...Euren natürlichen Trieb zu wissen, wie alles sich begibt und nach Gesetzen

der Folge zusammenhängt."¹ The rebels against Rationalism were intensely rational beings; in their art and philosophy they sought a new awakening of understanding rather than its eclipse. Else Lasker-Schüller may have been the sworn enemy of all schoolish rationality; nevertheless, her friend Werner Kraft tells us that Systematik and Methodik were two of her favourite words in conversation.² She was not nearly as philosophic as Novalis but there is a theoretical mind at work in her essays. Her poetry was not so anarchic as to dispense with concepts altogether; rather her hieroglyphic imagism results in a subtle transformation of these. After the brief moment of Enlightenment, when it seemed as though society was to become completely emancipated from the past, religion, myth and nature celebrated their problematic return during the period when Shakespeare, the Bible and folk-song were rediscovered in Germany. Lasker-Schüller participated in these tendencies, and did so precisely in order to dissociate herself from the secular world of her time; the argument here is that the poet's provocative dissociation was striving for a goal diametrically opposed to the one it appears to pursue, that it was in reality striving after a new form of emancipated secular consciousness; in other words, that it maintains, in its own surreptitious way, the intentions of a thwarted Enlightenment.

The intensive research of the Frankfurt School of Philosophy has sought in several essays and books to reveal the degree to which Enlightenment, even in its earliest manifestations, was always ambivalent, partly humane in its intentions, partly - and this more effectively - a pretext for the blind and ruthless exploitation of nature and of mankind itself.³ I refer, only in passing, to some of the more obvious features of misfired emancipation: above all a situation in which people do not dispose as fully developed beings of their own lives and are "free" mainly as agents of blind market forces. Individuals become functions of these forces and have difficulty in recognising the patterns that have become ingrained,

1. Novalis, Werke, Munich, 1969, p. 222.

2. Kraft in UP 159.

3. Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklärung, Frankfurt, 1969.

especially since the market, as opposed to a despotic ruler, is largely invisible. However, even popularly there is recognition of the negative aspect of scientific emancipation in the destructive powers of unleashed industrialisation and technology; these forces have a life of their own infinitely more threatening than that of nature ever was, a life now difficult to control.

In opposition to Hegel's philosophy of identity, Adorno emphasised the role of non-identity. In his view the radical emancipation of human consciousness per se has something tyrannical about it; it tends to make the dominating (herrschaftliche) human subject the measure of all things.¹ True emancipation would consist largely in the determinate suspension of this ruling subject:² determinate, because the rationality which originally strove to raise mankind above the blind tyranny of nature could not simply be jettisoned, but would have to be modified. The controlling subject would give way to something dark and vulnerable, to an element of nature in ourselves, to our expressive being. But it would do this without ceding to blind mythical forces; rather, repressed nature would emerge in a new untrammelled rationality as it has sought to do intermittently in poetry, music and the other arts. - There is a glimmer of such insight in Lasker-Schüler's observation about her friend, Peter Hille: "Er heisst wie die Welt heisst" (PS 56); the subject as we normally think of it has been erased and has given way to a new sense of identity expressed in the fusion of Er-Welt; this is conveyed grammatically in the peculiar complex of identification, apposition and simile. Lasker-Schüler's poetry could be described as a series of glimmerings. When she inverts the name Johannes into Senna Hoy, this allows something oblique and strange to infiltrate the normal identity of self.³ - Not surprisingly, Adorno, in whom

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1. T.W. Adorno, Stichworte, Frankfurt, 1969. This volume contains a brief exposition of Adorno's ideas in the essay called Anmerkungen zum philosophischen Denken. Also, T.W. Adorno, Philosophische Terminologie, Band 2, Frankfurt, 1973, (consisting of tape-recorded lectures), p. 82: "Ich meine, die Art von Integration, deren oberster Ausdruck es ist, alles, was da ist, auf Eines, ein Vereinheitlichendes zurückzuführen, mit dem es eins sein soll, ist die begriffliche Gestalt der Naturbeherrschung, ist das Prinzip, an dem der Subjektbegriff sich gebildet hat" etc. ZX
 2. I have, here, taken over the Hegelian notion of bestimmte Negation. The determinate suspension of subjectivity is explained in the next clauses.
 3. See Chapter 9.

a corresponding 'negative dialectic' evolved, was himself a pianist and composer; a conceptual thinker who embraced the expressive media more completely than most. His interpretation would concur not only with the Freudian theory of a civilisation developed at the expense of our instinctual self, it corresponds also to the subterranean forces of Enlightenment in modern art.

These forces are reflected quite literally in Lasker-Schüller's generation of modernist poets, especially those most closely associated with her. Though she, Trakl and Benn are in some senses worlds removed from one another, all allow discursive rationality to give way to a stream of mythical images - a kind of stream of consciousness -; all nevertheless continue to use (in modified form) the synthesising logic of discursive language. The result is a dislocated rationality striving tentatively, groping in the dark, for new forms of consciousness. Attraction to irrationality, to the blindness of mythical forces, is one of the consequent risks. Benn championed the doctrine of irrationality itself: "...irrational heisst schöpfungsnah und schöpfungsfähig."¹ The ambivalence of Benn's position is left as an open question here. One may note in passing that the conflict of self-undermining rationality in his early poetry is far too ironic and also too intense to represent a one-sided lapse into Dionysian irrationality, and that there is a sadness so overwhelming in his next phase, so deep a desire for fulfilment, alternating with bouts of disappointed cynicism, that these traits alone are irreconcilable with acquiescent blindness.

Trakl's poetry itself threatens to sink into a mythical stream, almost to the point of amorphousness: mythical in the sense of a reality spell-bound in its irrational or alogical relationships. (Here one has to bear in mind the ambivalence of 'alogic' as a surrender to irrational pressures or an intensified, de-regimented rationality). Despite the play with some changing forms of versification, relatively few of his poems stand out distinctively against one another; they belong essentially, or at least in

1. Gottfried Benn, Leben ist Brückenschlagen, Wiesbaden, 1962, p. 97.

tendency, to one stream of images. The eternal sameness of myth,¹ unable to break out of its spell, is reflected in the continual return of the same images. However, it is precisely in this nearly amorphous region - Lasker-Schüller calls it Styx² - that Trakl's intelligence catches up the darkened flow of consciousness and infiltrates it with an intensively active rationality. It is in this configuration of tendencies that his distinctive imagism seems to arise.³

Walter Benjamin takes the theme of myth as an ambivalent force with regressive and progressive tendencies in his essay on Hölderlin. He uses the word Mythologie for myth that is, as it were, locked in prehistory, and Mythos when it has become one with the striving, emancipatory destiny of mankind, though the aim even of such mythos would be precisely to transcend and supersede itself.⁴ Lasker-Schüller's vehemently humane temperament achieves this unity in a more immediately striking way that either Benn or Trakl in the poem appropriately entitled Weltschmerz:

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1. The 'eternal sameness of myth' stands here for the 'reality spell-bound in its irrational or alogical relationships.' For example, when repeated performances of classical dramas have a mainly cathartic function and serve to repress rather than release the enlightened rationality seeking a tentative outlet in them. Their mythical content festers blindly without achieving self-consciousness. Similarly, the communication between sacred and secular domains in religion can be frozen so that they reaffirm one another compulsively in a dead-locked dialogue and a vicious circle of repression. The dialogue between Reason and Myth has an emancipatory potential and the great myths are surely those in which this becomes evident.
 2. The title of her first volume.
 3. As this tentative interpretation of Trakl would also require a detailed study, features have been chosen that are more or less self-evident in his poetry as presented in Die Dichtungen, Salzburg, 1938. This excludes early poetry published since.
 4. Walter Benjamin, Illuminationen, Frankfurt, 1969, p. 28 and the essay as a whole. Here it should be noted that I am distinguishing different interpretations of the concept of myth.

Ich, der brennende Wüstenwind,
Erkaltete und nahm Gestalt an.

Wo ist die Sonne, die mich auflösen kann,
Oder der Blitz, der mich zerschmettern kann!

Blick nun, ein steinernes Sphinxhaupt,
Zürnend zu allen Himmeln auf. (G 94)

The transformation of mythology into myth is achieved in the most palpable way with the simplest means within the confines of a diminutive poem. This concentration of tendencies, so instantaneously locked into one another that all superfluous material falls away, characterises the articulate core of Lasker-Schüller's poetry. - On the one hand, the ego of Weltschmerz withdraws completely into mythology, into a quasi-Egyptian past represented by the Sphinxhaupt. This is half-human, half-creature and a stultified or imprisoned being. Ich-Wüstenwind is a metaphor of de-subjectified self; in the last verse the personal pronoun falls away leaving only the stone-sphinx-head. The norms of the surrounding contemporary world are suspended, subjected to a taboo or Bilderverbot. All images are dislocated and mythologised. The scenario is located entirely outside the modern Western world. Yet, as the imagery of essentially German poetry, the same scenario is re-inserted into this world in its very dislocation: dissociation and repenetration are simultaneous. Apart from the fact that Lasker-Schüller is addressing a German public, the lyrical ego, in the very passion of its identification with the sphinx, challenged the modern secular world in which a mythical past is trapped.¹ Only residual vestiges of this metaphorically represented dimension remain, demanding a resolution, and modern German is their medium. With burning intensity the sphinx questions the possibility of its release. An exclamation mark in the place of a question mark at

1. Where Sigrid Bauschinger is concerned with the exploration of mythical dimensions in Lasker-Schüller, particularly archetypal mother-symbolism, this study emphasises the poet's impulse to break out of this dimension and the "collective unconscious". See Sigrid Bauschinger, Die Symbolik des Mütterlichen im Werk Else Lasker-Schüllers, Diss., Frankfurt, 1960.

at the end of the second verse emphasises the sense of urgency. Many of Lasker-Schüller's most significant poems contain a residue of mythological images, serving to bring modern German into an intensely articulate focus. These images open a devastating perspective, an epic distance dividing the aesthetic dimension from its own social world. From this schism the poet derived her own sense of an identity in the remote past:

Eisige Zeiten verschollen - Leben vom Leben,
Wo liegt mein Leben -
Und träumt nach meinem Leben.

("Täubchen, das in seinem eigenen Blut schwimmt,"
G 119)

When Lasker-Schüller calls herself a hieroglyph in Mein stilles Lied (G 285) she is seeking to bring the alienated aesthetic dimension into focus with the present and the future. The hieroglyph is one stage less mythological than the sphinx, insofar as it is another word for enigma. While the residue of mythological images is extraordinarily evocative in Lasker-Schüller, a powerful impulse draws her language into a German so foreign and transfigured in itself that the literally foreign imagery dissolves. In Heimweh a mythological language is represented as a dissolving element:

Wer salbt meine toten Paläste -
Sie trugen die Kronen meiner Väter,
Ihre Gebete versanken im heiligen Fluss. (G 168)

Weltschmerz is concentrated in the sense of gedichtet, but not fulfilled in the aesthetic dimension: its idea can only be fulfilled in reality, in the emancipation it demands from mythical entrapment and in the transition from art into reality.¹ Lasker-Schüller had a very distinct sense of this border-line between art and reality. In another early poem, Vergeltung, the aesthetic domain is represented by a dancing moment:

Da kam ein Augenblick,
Ein tanzender, jauchzender Augenblick
Und tanzte mit mir ins Leben zurück
Bis zur Grenze.

Footnote 1: see following page.

The poet's ego freezes in Weltschmerz when it takes on form: Gestalt-annahmen can be interpreted as the crystallisation of experience in an art form represented by the sphinx-head. Adorno conjectures in Ästhetische Theorie whether all art, viewed from another planet, would not appear Egyptian.¹ This theme is taken over from Walter Benjamin's essay on Hölderlin: Benjamin writes of a "flächenhafte Einheit", refers to Byzantine mosaics, and characterises Hölderlin's late, and in his view greatest poetry as 'oriental'.² If this metaphor represents an oblique relationship to the world, then the same theme is central to Thomas Mann's Tonio Kröger, whose very name is slanted German.³ Kröger's dilemma is his oblique relationship to life; he repeats the view expressed in Benjamin's essay, that any direct expression of life in art would result in kitsch; in this sense the artist is "cold", because he is continually treating his experiences as material and is preoccupied with formal articulation.⁴ Coldness is an ironic cover in Thomas Mann for the most passionate imaginative commitment, next to which supposedly spontaneous sociability can be a guise for an even more impenetrable coldness. In this dialogue Lasker-Schüller's Weltschmerz with its cold but angry sphinx-head, is a protest against the world which blocks the 'oriental' dimension, drives it back behind the screen of aesthetic experience, and prevents it from flowering in people's lives.

Note 1, p.13

"Alles Vollkommene in seiner Art muß über seine Art hinausweisen, es muß etwas anderes, Unvergleichbares werden." Goethe, Die Wahlverwandtschaften, Leipzig, undated, p. 146. Lasker-Schüller registers this incomparable otherness in her poems themselves. Her 'perfection' is already an articulate imperfection.

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1. Theodor W. Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, Gesammelte Schriften 7, Frankfurt, 1970, p. 209.
 2. Benjamin, op. cit., pp. 35, 44.
 3. Thomas Mann avoids a normal German identity by giving his outsider hero an Italian christian name and a low German surname. In this way he employs the technique of oblique stylisation which is considered here as 'Byzantine' or 'oriental' in a metaphorical sense.
 4. Th. Mann, 'Tonio Kröger' in Die Erzählungen 1, Frankfurt and Hamburg, 1967, pp. 228ff.

CHAPTER II

Chapter II: SIBON

The moral is plain: the apothecary of
the age and the principle of self-preservation
as such culminate in the
utter insecurity of the individual, in
his complete negation.

Bar Nordheim:

CHAPTER II

Bar Nordheim's early works were mostly of the sort
which are known as "novels" and which contain a shadowy figure in modern German
literature. Compared with other representatives of the expressionist
movement, Nordheim and Bar Nordheim - they were closest to her
in their thinking, and also her personal friends - she is hardly
known in England except to the smallest number of people; only
a few scattered translations have been published. Even among
Germans it is still possible to meet people with a university
education who have not heard of her.¹ Prominent at least among
the literary intelligentsia and among technicians during the early
twentieth century in Berlin were she lived, and in associated
cities, Leipzig, Dresden, etc., together with several other
writers, was born of her circle of literary associations by
the spread of the novel world war. It evoked the very anti-
individualism which she saw the sake of an alternative reality.²
All the emphasis and energy of their socialist movement, its
entirely honest and sincere belief in the prevailing social

¹ The historical novel affecting Nordheim's fate as
well as her own is a personal experience. I was sitting in a
London cafe with the elderly Jewish-German ladies when they
suddenly entered and revealed the fact. "Good heavens!" they
exclaimed, "you beautiful girl appeared as the last word in
modern literature!" It was the first time that I was
recognized as the first and foremost of the expressionist
movement.

² One of the things which Nordheim's expressionism is a
struggle of spirit and will, the feeling of discovering
yourself out of a world having lost its direction.

Chapter 2: SHADOW

The moral is plain: the apotheosis of the ego and the principle of self-preservation as such culminate in the utter insecurity of the individual, in his complete negation.

Max Horkheimer

Else Lasker-Schüller, who surely wrote some of the most remarkable German poems, remains a shadowy figure in modern German literature. Compared with other representatives of the expressionist phase, Trakl and Benn, for example - they were closest to her in their imagism, and also her personal friends - she is hardly known in England except to the smallest number of people; only a few scattered translations have been published. Even among Germans it is still possible to meet people with a university education who have not heard of her.¹ Prominent at least within the literary avant-garde and among bohemians during the early twentieth century in Berlin, where she lived, and in associated cities, Leipzig, Munich, Vienna, she, together with several other figures, was more or less erased from literary consciousness by the upheaval of the second world-war. It exacted the very annihilation risked by them for the sake of an alternative reality.² All the excitement and newness of their modernist movement, its cataclysmic thrust of self-discovery beyond the prevailing social

1. The historical hiatus affecting Lasker-Schüller's fame is well illustrated by a personal experience. I was sitting in a London café next to two elderly Jewish-German ladies when they suddenly noticed I was reading the poet. "Good heavens!" they exclaimed, "is this possible! she appeared as the last word in unconventional feminism to us as young girls in Berlin." It was evident from the shock of recognition that this was the first time Lasker-Schüller had re-entered their consciousness.

2. One of the things that characterises Expressionism is a mixture of elation and nihilism, the feeling of discovering a new world and of a world heading for destruction.

norms, seemed to risk catastrophe in its own precipitous gesture. The poem in which Lasker-Schüler registered such annihilation of the ego in its very act of self-discovery ensures that she will not after all be so easily forgotten:

MEIN VOLK

Der Fels wird morsch,
Dem ich entspringe
Und meine Gotteslieder singe ...
Jäh stürz ich vom Weg
Und riesele ganz in mir
Fernab, allein über Klagegestein
Dem Meer zu.

Hab mich so abgeströmt
Von meines Blutes
Mostvergorenheit.
Und immer, immer noch der Widerhall
In mir,
Wenn schauerlich gen Ost
Das morsche Felsgebein,
Mein Volk,
Zu Gott schreit.

(G 137)

The imagery of this poem with its dislocated, plummeting ego is not so much fanciful and eccentric as acutely realistic. It is only remarkable that Mein Volk was published in 1905, *twenty-* ~~seventeen~~ years before Nazi-totalitarianism came to power and imposed an absolute taboo on all articulate self-consciousness.¹ Lasker-Schüler registered the conflict before totalitarian repression had become overt, when it was still a more clandestine aspect of society.

While the identical antagonism to modern art is still official policy in the Eastern block, it also thrives more or less unofficially in the relatively more open-ended democracies;

1. In this formulation the word self-consciousness should be stressed. What is meant is the emphatic articulation of self-consciousness, not any facile articulacy.

'open-ended' insofar as artists do not have to submit as directly to social authorities. Despair and nihilism themselves become marketable commodities, and artists are given the freedom, intermittently, to express their unfreedom. The resultant paradox, in significant examples, is that of extreme individuality culminating in blank canvases and musical silence, in self-effacement. So great is the pressure of manipulative forces, that the very effort to achieve self-consciousness is liable to find itself projected into the void. The dilemma is particularly remarkable in Lasker-Schüller, who was probably one of the most gregarious of all German poets. Her poetry is characterised by extreme evasiveness toward the market, toward the every-day norms of communication and also institutionalised categories of understanding, for example, that of self-sufficient academicism. The evolution of her forms registers the narrowing margin of articulate subjectivity in the era of capitalist expansion and totalitarian reaction. In retrospect her poetry can be seen as though it were cunningly attracted to the remaining loop-holes for the lyrical ego in this impasse. No poem articulates the broken relationship to the community more powerfully than Mein Volk, in which the poet's own Jewish background provided her with a powerful metaphor.

In Germany the repression of Jews and of critical and aesthetic self-consciousness formed one programme, and the poem articulates the destitution of society under the taboo on its otherness. Lasker-Schüller herself was driven into exile; she went first to Switzerland and then to Jerusalem where she died in 1945. The lyrical abandonment that plunges to the point of obliteration in Mein Volk carries with it the echo of a nomadic tribe in the distant East, decaying and crumbling in itself. This people is considered in my interpretation as the transposed alter-ego of modern Germany,¹ the quasi-primeval consciousness in modern man that is repressed or destructively manipulated by a blindly rationalised world, the resistant counterpart of the Brave-New-World population

1. The concept of a regenerated Volk, foreshadowing Nazism, was very much in vogue in the neo-romantic movements with which Lasker-Schüller was associated during her youth. Her transposed Volk was the dialectical counterpart of the Volk later extolled by Nazism. See Richard Hamann and Jost Hernand, Stilkunst um 1900, Frankfurt, 1977, p. 36ff.

portrayed by Aldous Huxley.¹ Lasker-Schüller's dialectic of repressive civilisation and a protest that is identified with pre-industrial societies is corroborated in the work of many artists and writers, including Freud. His career as a writer corresponds almost exactly to that of Lasker-Schüller; both began to publish over the turn of the twentieth century; Totem and Taboo, in which Freud studied primitive societies in association with modern neuroses was published in 1912,² one year before the poet's Hebräische Balladen. In her case the distant eastern past (it is often Egyptian, sometimes even African) is a self-evident fiction, representing by implication the tentative liberation of repressed levels of consciousness. In Mein Volk such consciousness appears oblique and distorted under massive pressure, and the effort to elicit an individualised self out of it brings the risk of annihilation. Paradoxically, therefore, the most emphatic individualism in modern art registers the suspension of individuality. "Nie ahnte ich, daß das Leben hohl sei," Lasker-Schüller wrote in Der letzte Stern (G 146) in another moment of poetic realisation.

Together with several of her contemporaries - Dehmel, Däubler, Mombert, Dauthendey, in particular her idolised friend Peter Hilde - Lasker-Schüller risked historical oblivion by tentatively suspending the prevailing social reality in its entirety. Utterances like the following, for example, are typical of Mombert: "... Wie lange ist es her, daß ich gelebt?/Doch starb ich nicht..."; Ich wandelte in tiefer Nacht,/ In tiefer Ruh, in tiefem Tod./ Mir glühte kein Gedanke mehr ..."; "... Die Seele schwimmt im Dämmerwald ..."; "...Meine Seele ist beschattete Liebe..."; "...Nur eine Stimme die hier spricht./

1. Aldous Huxley, Brave New World, London, 1932.

2. See Marinoni, O., Freud, Paris, 1968, p 185.

Ist es mein Geist, ist es das Licht;/ Ich weiss es nicht..."¹
and so on, from page to page. "Alfred Mombert hat wie Mondlicht
gelesen", wrote Lasker-Schüler to Richard Dehmel in 1906 (Bl 15)
Däubler, in his apocalyptic dislocation, reaches back for a more
terrestrial ground to his poetic visions: "...geträumte Träume/
Halten dich zu leicht im Raum./ Eben treten Schauersäume/Blau
und panisch in den Traum./ Halte dich an deine Bäume!/ Fass
dich, denn du fühlst dich kaum!"² A return from an invisible,
inverted reality is the programmatic intention of Dauthendey in
the piece which opens his first volume of poetry, Ultra Violet:³

Noch lebe ich unsichtbar.

Aber ihr könnt mich alle empfinden.

Versucht es mich zu erkennen.

Ich will euch neue Sonnen,

Neue Welten geben.

Peter Hille was perhaps one of the first prototypes of the
modern 'drop-out' from the bourgeois class; and where Rimbaud
and Verlaine still cultivated a relatively formal type of versifi-
cation, Hille also let go of the hold on form (at least in its
more symmetrical guise), as he did his hold on financial security.
Lasker-Schüler followed his example in her life-style; his relaxa-
tion from formal versification opened the way for a spontaneous
concentration of form in his friend.⁴ There was a distinct aware-
ness even among contemporary critics of the risk of self-oblivion
in figures like Peter Hille. In 1900 one critic observed about
him: "Vielleicht existiert er aber gar nicht. So etwas unglaub-
liches ist in seinen Büchern, daß man glaubt, sie seien nicht

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1. Alfred Mombert, Auswahl und Einführung in sein Werk Verschollene und Vergessene, ed. Hans Hennecke, Wiesbaden, 1952, pp 30, 31, 36, 38.
 2. Theodor Däubler, Auswahl und Einführung in sein Werk Verschollene und Vergessene, ed. Hans Ulbricht, Wiesbaden 1951, p. 49
 3. Max Dauthendey, Gesammelte Werke Lyrik, Munich, 1925.
 4. This influence is examined in Chapter 6,

von einem der da lebt."¹

Lasker-Schüler stands out among her contemporaries, who, together with neo-romantic contemporaries in England (e.g. J.E. Flecker), are drifting more effectively into historical oblivion, because her poetry registers the impact of antagonistic realities on one another in the moment of self-suspension² so much more drastically, particularly in Mein Volk. She seems, therefore, to have re-arisen in her own emphatic way from the ravages of the second world-war; it even seems appropriate that her provocatively evasive genius should be half-remembered, half-forgotten. One of the first selections of her writings to reappear after the war was published in a series called Verschollene und Vergessene³ in a conscious effort to revive her, Hille and others. The fitfulness of her presence now is reflected in the mixture of ignorance and awareness concerning her poetry; if many Germans have no conception of her existence her portrait nevertheless found its way onto a postage stamp issued in 1975 by the Deutsche Bundespost. Despite the powerful wave of anti-esotericism that has prevailed in Germany and Europe from the late nineteen-sixties onwards the Suhrkamp

1. Peter Hille, Auswahl und Einführung in sein Werk Verschollene und Vergessene, ed. Erich Naused, Wiesbaden, 1958, p. 15.

2. Two lines from Mombert's poetry will serve to pinpoint one of the specific weaknesses avoided for the most part by Lasker-Schüler. They are taken from a poem in a series entitled Die Schöpfung:

Jetzt ist mein Herz nur noch Geist.
Und jetzt fängt die hohe Nacht zu tönen an. (op.cit. p.39)

Transcendent reality here is precious; weakly it echoes the bygone hubris of Idealism and its enthronement of mind or spirit, a dimension quite hollowed out in Lasker-Schüler. One feels a sanctimonious, narcissistic projection of the empirical ego (supposedly denied) in the "hohe Nacht" of this Geist. In Lasker-Schüler the crystallisation of hieroglyphic being coincides with the moment of most extreme differentiation or otherness.

3. Else Lasker-Schüler, Auswahl und Einführung in ihr Werk Verschollene und Vergessene, ed. Werner Kraft, Wiesbaden, 1951.

Verlag republished Mein Herz,¹ the letter-novel which documents the poet's bohemian cafe-life, in 1976 in a separate volume taken out of the collected works. The dtv Wissenschaftliche Reihe in its representative volume of expressionist poetry² (1976) includes Die Stimme Edens by Lasker-Schüler; early poems of this kind in which she really breaks through into a new dimension of consciousness tended to be eclipsed by more conventional-looking poems for a long time after the second world-war. It is as if her poetic spirit is trying to penetrate the forgetfulness it almost provoked; her poetry appears now as though the blindness and amnesia that would affect it were inscribed into her verses from the start. Klein Sterbelied, for example, is an expressionistic metamorphosis of a child's prayer:

So still ich bin,
All Blut rinnt hin.

Wie weich umher.
Nichts weiss ich mehr.

Mein Herz noch klein,
Starb leis an Pein.

War blau und fromm!
O Himmel, komm.

Ein tiefer Schall -
Nacht überall.

(G 213)

Confronted with the barbarism of the instrumentalised world insofar as it allows itself to unfold at the expense of a humane consciousness³, only a small space remains for the brief cry, "O

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1. Else Lasker-Schüler, Mein Herz, ed. Silvio Vietta, Frankfurt, 1976.
 2. Die Lyrik des Expressionismus, Tübingen, 1976.
 3. The reader should perhaps be reminded here that the world excluded by Lasker-Schüler's dissociative poetry is nevertheless constitutive in it. See my Introduction and first chapter and the opening pages of this chapter. Instrumentalised world = the world in which abstract socio-economic forces assert themselves over people's heads.

Himmel, komm." The threat which afflicts the lyrical ego seems to be registered in the smallest details of punctuation; one expects the exclamation mark of the previous line again after the invocation of heaven, but it is cut off with a full-stop. Thus most of the couplets shrink into themselves and even split up again within themselves and are arranged in a mosaic of hieroglyphic images. Hieroglyphs represent a lost or extinct world; later, in an unpublished poem, the exiled poet sees the world from which her lyrical ego has become estranged as a faded mosaic: "Die Lande unter uns: verblichnes Mosaik." (VP 128). In her early poems an instinct of furious power is pitted against the disconnection of poet and reality; in the middle period of couplet-mosaics this overt rebellion, to which we owe the poet's continued significance, is tactfully withdrawn. Overtly demonic lines like the following, characteristic of the youthful phase, are removed from a later edition of the same poem, Mein stilles Lied:

Ich riss die ewigen Blicke von meinen Augen,
Das siegende Licht von meinen Lippen -
Weisst du einen schwereren Gefangenen,
Einen böseren Zauberer, denn ich. (G 136)

Here the lyrical ego feels trapped in the world; it tears even its own transcendent dimension wilfully from its lips and eyes. While this demonic Zauberer may be withdrawn from the phase of suspended couplets, these are still the residue of an aggressive impulse which has provocatively erased an antagonistic reality. Later, in the period of exile from Germany and advancing years a death-like void or distance - present in every phase - emerges more distinctively:

SO LANGE IST ES HER...
Ich träume so fern dieser Erde
Als ob ich gestorben wär
Und nicht mehr verkörpert werde.
Im Marmor deiner Gebärde
Erinnert mein Leben sich näher.
Doch ich weiss die Wege nicht mehr.

Nun hüllt die glitzernde Sphäre
Im Demantkleide mich schwer.
Ich aber greife ins Leere. (G 360)

In this poem neo-romantic inwardness has become singularly transparent and self-aware. The ornamental diamond dress (of stars) suggests the social image of a lady of the period as she might be portrayed on an art nouveau poster, though she is still more strangely suspended and hidden in a cosmic void. Infiltrated in her being by the poetic ego (or non-ego) her material image has been projected into an almost occult presence which still feels the weight of the diamond dress. - The poem implies that neo-romantic inwardness really does represent a loss of substantiality and that it needs to unravel itself from within a material incarnation; otherwise it would lose itself in emptiness. On the one hand the poetic ego has been obliged to detach itself from a reality in the grip of false consciousness¹ - this reality plays its active role too in driving articulate consciousness into exile -; on the other hand, material reality emerges within a new perspective as the indispensable counterpart of conscious experience. The lines in which this reality returns or beckons tentatively ("Im Marmor deiner Gebärde/Erinnert mein Leben sich näher") are remarkable in their suggestiveness; the life in them - reaching through a lover's gestures - is frozen, with a heavy spell (like the diamond dress) cast over it. The peculiarity of this poem in particular results from a doubly suspended reality: the element of neo-romantic decorativeness projected into it is indeed an almost occult remainder from a period that had been thoroughly overtaken by historical events. (It appeared in 1943 with the poems of Mein blaues Klavier in Jerusalem).

At the same time, in the later years, there is a compensatory return, intermittent but powerful, of the early, rebellious instinct, referred to by the poet herself as "meines Herzens ungezähmte Wucht." (G 326) Her essential achievement as a lyricist crystallised between the extremes of shadowy withdrawal

1. Rising totalitarianism, for example.

and emphatic reappearance. The inter-locking tendencies (each is implied in the other) became more distinctly articulate in her than in most of her neo-romantic contemporaries, and it is the resultant idiom with its peculiar blend of vagueness and distinctiveness, its alogical logic, which pre-figures the imagism of Trakl and Benn. While Hille, Mombert and Deubler relaxed the rationalised norms of language, Lasker-Schüler, Benn and Trakl fused free associations into a more subtle imagism, as in the succinct couplet in which Lasker-Schüler portrays her evanescent lyrical ego:

Zwischen Dunkelheit verlischt mein Leben

Im scheidenden Antlitz des Mondes.

(G 244)

Lasker-Schüler's own life - on its empirical plane - is as peculiarly elusive as the parting countenance of the moon in her poem. So great was her involvement in a mythomaniacal camouflage of sober realities that her biography resists all attempts to pin it down. As Hans W. Cohn puts it, this "blurring of the borderline between 'Dichtung und Wahrheit', fantasy and reality, was an aspect of the very structure of Else Lasker-Schüler's life."¹ 'Blurring of the borderline' is one way of describing the poetry itself; its formulations may have a clarity and distinctiveness of their own, but they arise from an aggressive dissociation in relation to the empirical world. It was with the birth of her poetic consciousness, coinciding with her break from conventional ties, that the most significant and drastic breach between antagonistic realities arose. Between 1900 and 1901 she ended seven years of marriage to a Dr. Lasker in Berlin

1. Hans W. Cohn, Else Lasker-Schüler, The Broken World, Cambridge, 1974, p. 15.

in order to commit herself to poetry and the bohemian world of that city.¹

The Peter-Hille Buch, a series of prose poems in the form of a quasi-biblical narration appeared in 1906 and described the drastic breach with established reality in its first paragraph: "Ich war aus der Stadt geflohen....die Nacht hatte meine Wege ausgelöscht, auch konnte ich mich nicht auf meinen Namen besinnen." (PS 9) In this state of absolute desolation the narrator meets a stranger (Peter Hille) who gives her the name, Tino. Tino (Princess of Bagdad) was the first imaginary persona Lasker-Schüler was to adopt in denial of her bourgeois identity and the prevailing Western civilisation.

For Lasker-Schüler, this denial or dislocation went back to her childhood when, already impervious to the systematisation of an alien reality, she could not make any progress at school. "Ich guckte so exotisch," she wrote later, "fanden meine Mitschülerinnen, näherten sich mir neugierig oder rückten unsicher von mir ab." (PS 854) In the same spirit she dedicated a volume of poems to her dead mother with the words: "Meine Mutter blickte immer auf Venedig." Hence her mother was an ally. Later she wrote again: "Oft blickten beim Abendbrot meiner Mama prachttvolle spanische Augen ganz weit in die Ferne....ich glaube nach Toledo." (PS 876) Gottfried Benn distinguished a similar trait in Lasker-Schüler herself: "Sie...hatte...grosse rabenschwarze bewegliche Augen mit einem ausweichenden unerklärlichen Blick."²

1. Biographical material is taken from the following authors: Wallmann, Jürgen P., Else Lasker-Schüler, Muhlacker, 1966. Schmid, Michael, ed., Lasker-Schüler, Wuppertal, 1969. Kupper, Margarete, in Else Lasker-Schüler's Sämtliche Gedichte, Munich, 1966. Gehlhoff-Claes, Astrid, in Else Lasker-Schüler's Briefe an Karl Kraus, Cologne and Berlin, 1959. Bauschinger, Sigrid, Else Lasker-Schüler Ihr Werk und ihre Zeit, Heidelberg, 1980. Klüsener, Erika, Lasker-Schüler, Hamburg, 1980.
2. Gottfried Benn, Essays, Reden, Vorträge, Wiesbaden, 1968, p. 537.

Her essays refer often to the trauma of her difficulties at school: "Ich träume - rügte mich die Lehrerin fast täglich in der Schule - und die Folge davon, ich untenan sässe." (PS 866) The catastrophic dénouement of her play, Die Wupper is brought on by approaching school-exams allied to a more general portrayal of distorted social conditions and class-conflict. Lasker-Schüler claims that she herself was taken out of school due to the fits she suffered; while these may well have been psychosomatic in origin, she remembers exaggerating them to achieve her purpose.

Her entire life was to be a protest against the social taboo on dreaming enforced by her teachers. Dreaming is capable of sinking into acquiescent passivity, but for Lasker-Schüler it was a challenge rather than an escape, a secret weapon to be cultivated (as for Schumann in the devious articulation of his Träumerei). In the poet it became the spring-board for a commitment that found its own form of activism and in this spirit she chose her alternative way of life as a bohemian - the virtual impossibility of such an alternative against overwhelming pressures does not discredit the effort - and, more effectively, she chose her vocation as a poet.

Since she was so single-minded in her denial of the prevailing reality, it seems almost as though fate conspired to apply her own negative device to all the events of her life. The members of her family to whom she was particularly devoted - her father, mother and brother Paul - were all transported early by death to the realm of shadows, another reality. Her son, Paul, died young and was born out of the realm of shadows; his father's identity remains completely enigmatic and, even in the recollections of her friends, survived only as the fantasy-figure Alcibiades de Rouan¹ the Greek or, alternatively, as 'the Spanish Prince.'²

1. "Alcibiades de Rouan, dessen Namen sie selbst den nächsten Freundinnen verschwieg..." Gehlhoff-Claes, op. cit., p. 537.

2. Benn, op. cit., p. 537.

Lasker-Schüler's father is remembered for his clownish humour rather than for his profession as a banker (PS 596f & 696f.). Her brother Paul was religious and had a collection of precious stones (PS 603). Her mother too is remembered as an other-worldly figure. As a woman she did not participate directly in the economic mediations of her world but responded to them in a more passive role. According to Lasker-Schüler she was reflective, loved Goethe and wrote poetry. As the wife of a banker she had enough leisure to feel something of the empty void outside the filled void of social activities, while not being accomplished enough to pursue an alternative course, like her daughter. In all this there is an echo of the dissociative purposelessness which was to become a committed purpose in the poet. In particular the mother is remembered for letting her daughter play with useless bric-a-brac, beads and stones or buttons, and this memory is transposed into the play Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter. When Arthur goes to the cemetery to visit his grandfather's grave with his mother, she encourages him to play on the gravestone, much in the way Lasker-Schüler was to arrange her verses during the phase of her couplet-poems: "Nun hol deine Steinchen aus deinem Perlentäschchen und lege sie kunstgerecht, wie du deine Bauklötze legst, eines neben dem andern und über dem andern auf die grosse Steintafel." (PS 1138) In one particularly significant passage Lasker-Schüler expresses the conviction that it was her mother's destiny which compelled her to become a poet. The mother seemed to be lost on one of her walks, causing intense anxiety in the family: "Auf einmal sah ich meine liebe, liebe Mama so traurig den Berg herabkommen, so traurig, das mag meine Hand nicht zu schildern, da müsste ich schon mein Herz aus der Brust nehmen und es schreiben lernen." (PS 699). In Das Hebräerland she writes still more explicitly: "...sie" war die Dichterin und ich nur die Sagerin ihrer reinen schwärmerischen Gedanken." (PS 876). In this way the mother was as closely associated with the lyrical ego as its indispensable counterpart in the lover. Exile from the mother's womb, death of the mother and dissociative lyricism are all fused into one conception in an early poem:

MUTTER

Ein weisser Stern singt ein Totenlied

In der Julinacht.

Wie Sterbegeläut in der Julinacht.

Und auf dem Dach die Wolkenhand,

Die streifende feuchte Schattenhand

Sucht nach meiner Mutter.

Ich fühle mein nacktes Leben,

Es stösst sich ab vom Mutterland,

So nackt war nie mein Leben,

So in die Zeit gegeben,

Als ob ich abgeblüht

Hinter des Tages Ende

Zwischen weiten Nächten stände,

Alleine. (G 275)

It seems regrettable that two of the latest and otherwise illuminating books on Lasker-Schüller (Bauschinger and Klüsener, cited on page 27) should cite this poem in its earlier version with an ending that exemplifies the poet's most dispensable neo-romantic vitalism:

Als ob ich

(...)

Versunken

Zwischen weiten Nächten stände,

Von Einsamkeiten gefangen.

Ach Gott! Mein wildes Kindesweh!

... Meine Mutter ist heimgegangen. (G 13)

The whole significance of the poem seems to crystallise in the one word alleine in the second version. Dissociation is experienced as abandonment and desolation, while, at the same time, alleine represents the goal of Lasker-Schüller's poetry, the furthest point meinwärts in Weltflucht (G 80), at which the distinctive lyrical ego will emerge.

The remaining sister, of whom Lasker-Schüller was evidently

very fond, lived long enough to see the poet take the perilous step out of marital security. The older sister's anxiety is portrayed in the Peter Hille-Buch:

"...meine Schwester hatte uns kommen sehn und war sehr nachdenklich. Ich wusste, daß die Majestät Petrus sie beängstigen würde - und sie erfasste sorgenvoll meine Hände: 'Willst du nicht bei uns bleiben?'

"Aber Petrus wandte sein Antlitz, und plötzlich war es hell über dem kleinen Blumengarten. Doch meine Schwester senkte betrübt den Kopf; ich riss mich los, streichelte Sage und Haidelkraut, küsste meinen kleinen Wildfang und ging dem Herrlichen nach. Als ich mich umwandte, sah ich meine Schwester am Fenster stehen; ihre Augen waren verwundert aufgetan; sie blickte noch lange, lange hinter unsern Flug." (PS 11)

This passage suggests that the poet's devotion to her family, had they lived, would not have prevented her from following Hille into a life outside the norms and material security. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine her accomplishments without the considerable recognition and support of fellow bohemians and a wide circle of artists and critics, Kraus, Benn, Trakl, Wedekind, Groß, Altenberg, Werfel, Marc, Kokoschka, Brod, Buber and innumerable others. For them she changed from Tino of Bagdad to the Prince of Thebes or Yussuf. For Berlin too she found an alter ego as the imaginary city of Thebes. Friends, whom she met mainly in the Café des Westens, were enticed into the game of alternative identities. The utopian impulse of her poetry was insatiable, and if she could have had her way she would have drawn everyone effectively into a different world. Her prose-books register disappointment at the unwillingness of friends to commit themselves completely to an imaginative world beyond that contained in books: "O wie arm diese Abendlande, hier wächst kein Paradies, kein Engel, kein Wunder. Wie hat mich diese Armut so beschämt, Eure Armut...". (PS 386). The first name of

Johannes Holzman, an anarchist who died as a revolutionary in Russia, was inverted into that of a hieroglyphic being, Senna Hoy. For him she wrote some of her most beautiful love-poems. She invented the name of Der Sturm, one of the journals that championed modern art, and also that of its editor, Herwarth Walden. To him she was married for a while. In the long run marriage would be a compromise with the security to which she was constitutionally averse. As she put it to Walden in an open letter (PS 314), she could only thrive on miracles, on being in love spontaneously, unpredictably, unharnessed by social purposes. Again, it seems characteristic that the most significant of friends should have been Peter Hille, the bohemian vagabond who has fallen into obscurity and survives mainly in Lasker-Schüler's writings.

Apart from his renunciation of financial security, Peter Hille was in other ways the model for Lasker-Schüler's own shadow-existence. He survives in her writings only in mythical portrayals, but, insofar as these can be deciphered, he was as active as Lasker-Schüler herself in camouflaging the realities of the modern world. His own writings confirm this impression; it is still possible to find some of his poems in anthologies in second-hand bookstores in London, otherwise only in a museum or comprehensive library. Lasker-Schüler portrays him in consistent dissociation from an individual (i.e. bourgeois) identity; he is elevated by her as a saint or prophetic figure, not merely to nurture the ideological cult of genius, but as a means to dissolve the world of the more rationalised or rationalising ego; no-one, she claims, knew when Peter Hille's birthday was (similarly her own was kept a secret, since the age of bourgeois maturity was taboo) (PS 150); he is described further as a being of primal consciousness, barely out of touch with Moses, Buddha and Jesus (PS 148), as a wandering landscape (PS 12) composing poems out-of-doors, even as an invisible being: "Peter Hille konnte man nicht anblicken, er war unsichtbar." (PS 343). He, like Lasker-Schüler herself, had visions:

"Aber dass Sankt Peter Hille einmal ein Engel begegnete auf dem Felde, das weisst du wohl nicht, Herwarth? Wie er mir das sagte, waren seine braunen Augen himmelblau und ein Blinder, der unserem Gespräch lauschte, vertraute mir später verzückt, er habe sehen können." (PS 319). In all this there is the intention of "planting inward eyes"¹ and shifting perspectives; in the poetry itself (at its best) the fictions dissolve altogether or give way to modernist imagism. The invisibility of Peter Hille corresponds to Lasker-Schüler's idea of her poetry as her most invisible incarnation, "meine unsichtbarste Gestaltung" (PS 370); in her essay Sterndeuterei this becomes the invisible being of mankind: "Aber wer an meine Dichtungen glaubt, die man auch nicht in die Hand nehmen kann und doch vorhanden sind, wird auch nicht zweifeln an den Sternen der Menschen, wovon ich Ihnen erzähle.....Ich spreche von Ihrem Unsichtbarsten, von Ihrem Höchsten, das Sie nicht greifen können, wie die Sterne über Ihnen." (PS 147). In the functionalised world the essence of humanity is as remote and unreal as the stars. At the end of the Peter Hille-Buch there is a remarkable volte face of invisibility when Tino writes in the sand on her friend's grave: "Er heisst wie die Welt heisst"; when the invisible being of poetry is fulfilled it resembles the world or is the world. This dialectical metamorphosis seems to characterise the achievement of Lasker-Schüler herself more than that of Hille; the capacity for such shifts in perspective and the tension maintained between them make her the more articulate and significant poet.

1. Milton, Poems, London, 1973, p. 201.

Chapter 3: INSIDE OUT

Gelingt es dem gequälten, sich
umzublättern in die Gegenwart,
so genügt das Auflehnen einer
kleinen Blutwelle seines Herzens,
die vergilbte Seite vom Vorerinnern
wieder aufzuschlagen.

Else Lasker-Schüller

In the inverted reality of her poetry Lasker-Schüller conjures a strange language, essentially the language of dissociation or modernist poetry, out of German. This undertaking is closely associated with the notions of originality deriving from Hamann, Herder and the Sturm und Drang movement. The term "originality" has several overlapping significances, two of which are partial contradictions of one another. In one sense it refers to experience which has become self-reliant, which the ego derives from within itself due to the feeling that the general experience of society has become alien and is determined by a cold, calculating rationality. Art can no longer rely on external props and must derive its own laws from within itself or by negating the rationality of the surrounding world. This tendency is determined after all by the world it negates: if it loses sight of this relationship it risks becoming an all the more helpless agent of the very rationality it seeks to evade. On one level fetishised originality has come to stand for any gimmick serving as a means of self-advertisement on the market, for faddish novelty or commercialised shock-tactics.

In its other sense originality points back - no less ambivalently - in the opposite direction from such novelty to 'origins' in the more literal sense, to earlier stages of historical experience, ideally preceding the abstract socio-economic mechanisms that operate blindly over people's heads. Gottfried Benn treated the idea with appropriate irony precisely by taking it literally: "O dass wir unsere Ururahnen wären./ Ein Klümpchen

Schleim in einem warmen Moor."¹ These lines recognise by implication that it is impossible to separate socialisation from an experience that lies entirely outside it; this is most probably the difficulty which tempted many (Nietzsche, D.H. Lawrence) to imagine that they preferred the tyranny of nature to that of advanced socialisation for the sake of a more immediate experience of relationships and of the world. In this spirit Lasker-Schüler singles out the unpremeditated cruelty of animals. In one of her semi-fictional open letters to Franz Marc (called Ruben) she wrote: "Du lehrtest mich das Wort vom keuschen Totschlag. Du bist Ruben der noch unberührte Mensch der Bibel." (Der Malik, PS 419). In a letter to Dr. Eduard Korrodi after the first world-war she wrote: "Von der maschinellen Bewegung des Krieges waren die Menschen eingeschlüpfert. Zu Maschinengewehren gehören Bleisoldaten. Die wilden Stämme der Wüste überfallen sich über Nacht, Herr Doktor, um sich in der Frühe schluchzend zu versöhnen. Solche Kämpfe sind mir verständlich, sie sind organisch und menschlich und sozusagen wildaufgewachsen." (DD 531). The historical observation may not be accurate but Lasker-Schüler's conception of such 'primitive' conflicts gives away the humane intentions behind her espousal of pre-industrial man.

For the Sturm und Drang generation the earlier stages of civilisation appeared also to be more immediately, unconsciously poetic by their very nature. In the modern world therefore Ursprünglichkeit becomes a self-conscious quest to retrieve a primal consciousness; "primal" should also be taken literally here to represent a first, immediate experience of things in people, unsubsumed by a rationalised thought process. For Lasker-Schüler, childhood or a child-like response to the world is an almost imperative means of evasion, even to the point of contradicting itself as a mannered affectation or of lapsing, especially in later years, into a helpless pathos:

1. Gottfried Benn, Gedichte, Wiesbaden, 1966, p. 25.

Und glaube unserm Monde, Gott,
Denn er umhüllte mich mit Schein,
Als wär ich hilflos noch und klein,
- Ein Flämmchen Seele. (G 338)

Apart from Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Proust's conception of an involuntary memory also proposes that essential experiences have been repressed by an external rationality. (The existence of these theories is registered in passing here.) Lasker-Schüler may well have known Karl Kraus' aphorism on the same theme: "Die Sprache tastet wie die Liebe im Dunkel der Welt einem verlorenen Urbild nach. Man macht nicht, man ahnt ein Gedicht."¹ This idea could be tentatively interpreted as follows: it speaks of a consciousness divided within and against itself; something essential in our being appears remote and out of reach, as though it belonged to prehistory; in the functionalised world this latent rationality has been thrown back into a subterranean dimension beneath the superficially intelligible world; a poet seeks to raise this dimension out of the darkness in which it is concealed² - "Birg dich tief in das Auge der Nacht,/ Dass dein Tag Nachtdunkel trage" - (G 157); he must suspend the external rationality determining the role of the empirical ego in the world; he feels (tastet...ahnt) for a synthesis rather than imposing one. In the very tone of Kraus' formulation one senses the desire for a release of nature in a humane consciousness; this desire resonates in the significance and overtones of the word Liebe. A corresponding formulation in Lasker-Schüler touches unsuspectingly on the Freudian Es or Id: "...es wird in mir gedichtet, es dichtet in mir. Der Dichter beabsichtigt beim Dichten seiner Dichtungen überhaupt nie etwas." (VP 45). It is the poetic ego, however, that seeks to emerge from this unconscious.

The breach between egos does not simply exist, but results from an historical process; it is determined by the external,

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1. Karl Kraus, Nachts, Munich, 1968, p. 34.
 2. This idea - a main theme of my thesis - recurs particularly on pages 88 and 131f. in different contexts. The repetitions seem unavoidable. Indeed, a continual return of themes in different contexts is essential to my interpretation.

nature-dominating rationality and this is self-fractured in modernist poetry. The fictional Urbild is determined in its innermost nature by the modern world: its tendency is either to lapse passively into itself, thus affirming the very world it pretends to oppose, or, more painfully, to reflect the interpenetrating contradictions in the hope of breaking out of them. - To extricate 'primal experience' absolutely from modern rationality would be transparently absurd and impossible; it would always be in some sense rationally determined in itself. This dialectic of inverted rationality has for the most part been neglected by Lasker-Schüler criticism; often the mythical fictions are taken quite literally (Hebrew origins, for example) not only by partisans but also by antagonists like Dieter Bänisch who simply exposes them as lies, thus missing their transposed significance in poetry.¹

The over-lapping and contradictory significances operating in the concept of originality are constitutive in Lasker-Schüler's work. Her prose reflections are relatively indulgent toward the fiction of a return to origins whereas all this tends to dissolve in her poetry in deference to modernist imagism. The essays often dwell on childhood, the phase before "shades of the prison-house begin to close" and on pre-industrial religiosity or mysticism, when mythical and secular domains were much less divided. Hence the phantasy world of kings, princes, saints, prophets, monks, knights into which her bohemian and artistic circle was transposed, the collective term for all friends being Indianer.² Essays on artistic creativity dwell on concepts like Ureigentum delved out of the historical or pre-historical past by poets (PS 148). Little of this remains in the poetry: even the poet's

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1. Dieter Bänisch, Else Lasker-Schüler Zur Kritik eines etablierten Bildes, Stuttgart, 1971. The poet's "lies" are a main theme of his study.
 2. Paul Goldscheider, 'Wo ich bin ist grün' in Lasker-Schüler, ed. Michael Schmid, Wuppertal, 1969, p. 54.

immediate phantasy world - much of her imaginative life itself - dissolves in favour of laconic formulations and of the ego as hieroglyphic or enigmatic being. Even the beloved city of Thebes that accompanied the poem Vollmond originally was omitted from later editions.¹ The Prince of Thebes too is absent. Knights, monks etc. remain only as a residue of the phantasy-world in the titles of poems, and then they stand more or less as dedications, Dem Mönch, Giselheer dem Heiden, An den Gralprinzen. Even the tendency toward 'orientalised' pictorial hieroglyphics tends to vanish in enigmatic script, so that one hesitates even in calling Lasker-Schüller an 'imagist': in Giselheer dem Heiden the seventh couplet contains no concrete images yet has something like the imprint of imagery on it:

Ich bin vielreich,
Niemandwer kann mich pflücken; (G 204)

There is more than a touch in Lasker-Schüller of the 'extreme' modernism that is self-reliant and dissociative almost to the point of dadaistic nonsense, especially in the phase of couplet-poems with their free, alogical associations (as in the couplet above), although it is in this very region of camouflage that her poetry does after all become most significant. She took evident delight in a cabaret performance in which it was her role simply to mumble unintelligibly.² The early poem, Weltflucht, registers the rebound of the poetic ego into itself for an experience unsubsumed by the external world:

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1. In Die Gesammelten Gedichte, Munich, 1920, Vollmond bears the dedication: "Meiner Stadt Theben".
 2. See Angelika Koch, Die Bedeutung des Spiels bei Else Lasker-Schüller, Bonn, 1971, p. 51.

Ich will in das Grenzenlose
Zu mir zurück,
Schon blüht die Herbstzeitlose
Meiner Seele,
Vielleicht ists schon zu spät zurück.
O! ich sterbe unter euch!
Da ihr mich erstickt mit euch.
Fäden möcht ich ziehen
Wirrwarr endend!
Beirrend,
Euch verwirrend,
Zu entfliehn
Meinwärts. (G 80)

Weltflucht illustrates the anti-imagistic aspect of dissociation in Lasker-Schüler. It only contains two concrete images, the thinned out one of Fäden and Herbstzeitlose; the flower (autumn crocus) in Herbstzeitlose cedes to the abstract complex of meanings in this word: -los with its double-meaning suggests something like 'autumnal destiny' as well as 'autumn-timelessness'. Wirrwarr is a peculiarly onomatopoeic word because it is also abstract, especially here, since the concrete representation of the confusion it represents has vanished, as the whole world vanishes in Klein Sterbelied in the couplet: "Ein tiefer Schall - / Nacht überall." (G 213). In a late poem, Abendzeit, the poet reflects on this abstraction herself: "... Jedwedes Ding erlebe ich im Schaume./Der Mensch, der feindlich mich ereilt, zerschellt!/ Und ich weiss nur von ihm im Traume./ Und so erlebe ich die Schöpfung dieser Welt, / Auf Erden schon entkommen ihrer Schale." (G 344)

The dynamic of Weltflucht, accelerating that of Romantic withdrawal and self-reliance, seems to aim like an arrow into the very heart of the world from which it flees. The tendency of H.W. Cohn to treat such impulses as symptomatic of withdrawal from relationships¹ is inadequate, because it is precisely from this

1. Cohn, op. cit., p. 44ff in particular.

furthest point meinwärts, outside the world of rationalised and antagonistic purposes, that she would like to reach people, as it were, for the first time, and it is in this region that her love-poems crystallise. The asphyxiating world from which they emerge tentatively is reflected in a memoir in The Era of German Expressionism. According to Peter Scher, a contributor to Der Sturm and Die Aktion, the editors, although they stood for radical alternatives, automatically assumed the role of economic competitors. Scher had some difficulty in maintaining friendly relations with the two editors: "Both papers snarled at one another continually of course, as one might expect in such circles. Pfemfert called Walden" - Lasker-Schüller's second husband - "who had acquired a mane of blond hair, the "peroxide Somali" and Walden accused him of letting his Russian wife wear the breeches."¹ The principle of individuality and survival established at the expense of others has become second nature; it is in this context that Lasker-Schüller's withdrawal needs to be understood. In the first version of Mein stilles Lied several verses (later omitted) are a direct complement to Peter Scher's recollections and refer to the same circle:

Verhöhnt habt ihr meine Lippe
Und redet mit ihr.

Doch ich griff nach euren Händen,
Denn meine Liebe ist ein Kind und wollte spielen.

Einen nahm ich von euch und den zweiten
Und küsste ihn,

Aber meine Blicke blieben rückwärts gerichtet
Meiner Seele zu.

Arm bin ich geworden
An eurer bettelnden Wohltat.

(G. 134)

Since this antagonism is applied throughout Lasker-Schüller's poetry to her own empirical constitution - and her

1. The Era of German Expressionism, ed. Paul Raabe, London, 1974, p. 333f. Richard Sheppard also discusses these virulent antagonisms. (See Modernism, London, 1976.) They had a decisive influence on Lasker-Schüller's evasive attitude.

poetic ego represents itself as an erased or half-erased being - the feeling of personal arrogance is suspended in advance: The last of these verses refers to a world in which charity is a substitute for a more selfless generosity in relationships. Through impulses, labelled too easily by critics as 'regression', 'withdrawal' and 'narcissism' (Cohn uses all three words in the passage cited above) Lasker-Schüller, as a poet, found words for a love that is altogether rare and intermittent in the history of any nation. Originality, as the medium of such love is expressed in the most complete inversion of normal values.

Inverted withdrawals, actually seeking to penetrate the world, and the overlapping of first and last principles are frequently thematic and formally constitutive in Lasker-Schüller. Thus the last star in Der letzte Stern is also the first speck of a new consciousness: "Und ein Punkt wird mein Tanz/ In der Blindnis" (G 146); the eye of the hieroglyphic ego in Mein stilles Lied is at the summit of time after its aggressive withdrawal from the immediately surrounding world: "Und mein Auge/ Ist der Gipfel der Zeit" (G 286); in Mein Wanderlied, belonging to the early phase of dialectical fermentation, the striving to emerge out of the past is formulated most distinctly:

Zwölf Morgenhellen weit
Verschallt der Geist der Mitternacht,
Und meine Lippen haben ausgedacht
In stolzer Linie mit der Ewigkeit.

Torabwärts schreitet das Verfllossene,
Indes sich meine Seele in dem Glanz der Lösung bricht,
Ihr tausendheisses, weisses Licht
Scheint mir voran ins Ungegossene.

Und ich wachse über all Erinnern weit -
So ferne Musik - und zwischen Kampf und Frieden
Steigen meine Blicke, Pyramiden,
Und sind die Ziele hinter aller Zeit.

(G 143)

There is a sense in this poem of breaking into completely fresh, virginal territory ("ins Ungegossene") and of a consciousness unravelling itself out of time at a precise moment. Few poems illustrate Lasker-Schüller's peculiar inversion of 'enlightenment' more vividly than this one. On the one hand, time, which has been usurped by the functionalised world, is suspended in eternity; it is a time outside time, a consciousness that has passed beyond living memory like distant music. But time dissolves and ~~cr~~crystallises simultaneously. It is measured in Morgenhellen; with each chime of the midnight clock a new dawn is struck into consciousness and the poet's glances, rising up between war and peace, become the goals behind all time once more. It is as if her lyrical ego is emerging from the night of Novalis into the light of day; the mythical domain of night dissolves and the portrayal of pyramids rises out of it as a distinctive image. But while night dissolves, the poet's newly awakened consciousness too breaks, as the poem puts it, in the light of its solutions. Das Verflossene and das Ungegossene are equally indeterminate, and yet, in their very dissolution cede to a strikingly determinate vision. This poetry is like the neo-romantic music of Lasker-Schüller's contemporaries when it was in the process of losing the traditional logic of Classicism and had not yet forged the new logic of the Schönberg School. The music of Zemlinsky and Schreker, the poetry of Peter Hille, produce a dissociated logic of their own and the feeling of art "breaking in the light of its solutions." This progression of music into atonality corresponds to Lasker-Schüller's logic of alogical combinations as in Morgenhellen and

tausendheiss, in the vision perceived in glances and in the association of these immaterial glances with oriental pyramids. The two meanings of originality converge: the very impulse to suspend the rationality of the modern world results in strikingly modern images.

The fact that a return to origins cannot be taken literally is self-evident in the poem called Giselheer dem Tiger. Both childhood with its game of Red Indians and a primitive past are provocatively evoked:

Über dein Gesicht schleichen die Dschungeln.

O, wie du bist!

Deine Tigeraugen sind süß geworden

In der Sonne.

Ich trag dich immer herum

Zwischen meinen Zähnen.

Du mein Indianerbuch,

Wild West,

Siouxhäuptling!

Im Zwielflicht schmachte ich

Gebunden am Buxbaumstamm -

Ich kann nicht mehr sein

Ohne das Skalpenspiel.

Rote Küsse malen deine Messer

Auf meine Brust -

Bis mein Haar an deinem Gürtel flattert.

No-one will assume that Lasker-Schüler really wished to return to a world in which she was liable to be scalped. Much of the poem's charm is nevertheless in its exotic primitivism, with its jungles and the tiger as well as the Red Indian (in her lover) as strange non-bourgeois beings. All this primitivism has been translated into the language of love-play and is articulated in a modern poem worlds removed from the actual tiger or scalping Indian. Then there is a lethally modern reference in the Skalpspiel and the rote Küsse to Gottfried Benn's profession as a surgeon. One would not have to know this to feel the edge of sado-masochism cutting into the utopian exoticism of the poem. This streak of cruelty in love-play is used humourously to elicit the characteristic image of an erased ego; as in the poem in which only the ego's knees remain as scarabs for an emperor's ring after the lover has eaten her up (G 209), so here it is only her hair that remains fluttering on his belt.

That anyone who has observed the emergence of such images in Lasker-Schüler is able to take the idea of origins literally can only be explained by an ideological hold of the concepts of Ursprünglichkeit and archetypes on intellectual trends. Ironically it was a particularly German preoccupation, transposed by the poet and some critics with varying motivations into a Hebrew dimension. At worst this can degenerate into the Zionist equivalent of a Blut und Boden Ideologie.¹ The very strangeness of Lasker-Schüler's idiom - its dissociative modernism - is seen as a mystical resuscitation of Hebrew. Even a critic as reputable as Fritz Martini wavers half-way between the alternatives and cedes naively to a literal-minded notion of originality: "Das Moderne war bereit für die Formen des Archaischen; das Archaische gab dem Modernen die Zauber (sic) in Bild und Klang ... es bedeutet die produktive Erweckung orientalisches-hebräischer Bilder

1. Schalom Ben-Chorin, Else Lasker-Schüler und Israel, in Literatur und Kritik, Salzburg, June, 1976.

Werner Hegglin, Else Lasker-Schüler und ihr Judentum, Zürich 1966

und Klänge, für sie so nahe dem Ursprünglichen."¹

The particularly German nature of the preoccupation with origins becomes evident if one compares the words Ursprünglichkeit and originality; the Germanic word, retaining something concrete and immediate in its root, a mutation of Sprung and springen, has been supplanted in English by an abstract Latin word. Anyone who has tried to translate Lasker-Schüler's poem Mein Volk will have been immediately confronted by this difference. To translate "der Fels...dem ich entspringe" as "the rock from which I originate" would result in complete falsification, a loss of the immediacy essential to the German; the logical function of which would also introduce something quite alien where German can modify its definite article. German never fused as English and still more French did with Latin civilisation; this was viewed in Germany from the 18th century onwards as an imposed culture to be cast off. Lasker-Schüler's Ursprünglichkeit belongs still to the revolt against this yoke.

The concepts of an abstractly subsuming rationality are avoided entirely by her and Trakl. The few theoretical words retained by Lasker-Schüler have more immediately concrete roots in them: in words like Dasein, unbegreiflich, Erkenntnis, Widersprüche and Gedanke verbal roots or their nominal mutations are recognisable: greifen, sprechen, denken or danken. Gottfried Benn,² partly because he had a more

1. Fritz Martini, in Der deutsche Expressionismus, Göttingen, 1965, p. 6.

Karl Josef Hölzgen, Untersuchungen zur Lyrik Else Lasker-Schülers, Diss., Bonn, 1958. Hölzgen makes much of a "Rückbesinnung auf jüdisches Volks- und Glaubenserbe" (p 31) and "die unüberwindliche Bindung des Blutes und des Geistes an ihr Volk," (p 40).

Georges Schlocker, Else Lasker-Schüler, in Expressionismus, Heidelberg, 1956. Schlocker manages to bring the two nationalisms together. The poet, he claims, wanted to realise "das heilige jüdische Reich deutscher Nation" (p 140).

2. Benn, op. cit., pages given above.

speculative temperament, partly to introduce a Verfremdungseffekt, used words like Substanz (p. 59), Begriffsgenesen (p. 59), Irrealität, transzendent, konstruktiv (pp. 70, 71), as well as a large range of more concrete foreign words: Haschisch, delphisch, phrygisch, Sansibar, Bougainville (pp. 76, 77). There is no trace in the poetic spirits of Lasker-Schüller, Benn, Trakl of narrow-minded German nationalism. In Trakl,¹ the Austrian, foreign elements return in a Verlainian as also Salzburgian rococo, in Melancholie, Gitarrenklänge, nymphische Hände (p. 53), Tritonsteich, hyazinthenes Haar (p. 143). In Lasker-Schüller, who is supposed to be the real foreigner, there are far fewer foreign words. Her early poetry (very occasionally) echoes the Verlainian Arcadia in words like Syrinxliedchen, Faunsaug (G 83), Saphiraugen (G 103), Marmorwolkenfresken, verzückte Arabesken (G 123); the ego as Sphinx and Hieroglyph and the Pharaonenwälder in Heimweh (G 168) - among the more rare foreign words of her later poetry - are inserted into 'primal' German as art nouveau ornaments. Here one has a clue to Lasker-Schüller's inverted rationality: primal German itself is an art nouveau fiction in her, but, as Adorno puts it, more than a fiction, also the expression of a profound necessity.² In German words of Latin origin (among others) add an oblique dimension. Lasker-Schüller's special art - her originality - consisted in opening this dimension in the German language itself and making the simplest formulations sound like those of a foreign language, in a sense, to reconcile German as it is with the most complete inversion imaginable.

1. Trakl, Dichtungen, op. cit., pages given above.

2. See Chapter 6, p. 100.

In Clemens Heselhaus' essay¹ on Lasker-Schüller the concept of originality is modified in accordance with the philosophy of Husserl. (Whether this has been understood must remain an open question). At least, Heselhaus takes over the idea of pure essences which he feels are realised in Lasker-Schüller's generation of poets. There is something of this in my interpretation of the poet's dissociation from the prevailing world and its functionalised rationality: the lyrical ego, for example, emerges as something distinct from an empirical ego. The striving for a pure essence is seen as a gesture of emphatic dissociation seeking to exclude all representations of the industrialised capitalist world, the whole phase of bourgeois history; but this dissociative asceticism has been seen in my study precisely in its historical determinations. Misunderstanding of this historical dimension and its constitutive role in the aesthetic media lead Heselhaus into the following misconceptions: "Das war eine Rückführung auf Grundelemente des Lyrischen. Man kann das mit dem Verfahren der Phänomenologie vergleichen, das damals von Husserl entwickelt wurde. Indem man alles abzieht was rational erklärbar ist, erhält man das Wesen

1. Clemens Heselhaus, in Deutsche Lyrik der Moderne, Düsseldorf, 1961, p. 214.

einer Erscheinung. So wurde das Gedicht aller seiner rational-technischen Elemente entkleidet, und zurück blieb das Wesen des Lyrischen: Die Ergriffenheit der Lasker-Schüler, die Metapher Trakls, der Rhythmus Benns." Metaphor is already the result of a complex rationality; most of Benn's poetry is not very rythmical and gravitated quickly into the form of Statische Gedichte.

Lasker-Schüler's poetry is written in grammatical German with all the rational and technical elements intact. Where her German is ungrammatical as in the Plattdeutsch of Die Wupper she employs the device of dislocating linguistic norms. She objected to the rationality of the prevailing world because it was schematic and repressive. In one of several poems

identifying her lyrical ego with the enigma, it is called thought or idea. Of herself and another person (presumably her sister) she writes in the early poem Unser stolzes Lied: "Unsere Leiber ragen stolz, zwei goldene Säulen,/ Über das Abendland wie östliche Gedanken." In Senna Hoy the negation of conceptuality, Begrifflichkeit, is itself a concept: "Und ich bin unbegreiflich unseren Freunden/ Und ganz fremd geworden." (G 189). Every syllable belongs within a chain of grammatical particles and elaborates or modifies an idea.

Unser stolzes Lied may be somewhat overladen with imagistic juxtapositions,¹ but as an example from the period of intensive fermentation, one of its verses will serve well to illustrate the rational-technical processes at work in such poetry. The entire poem is quoted:

Aber fremde Tage hängen
Über uns mit kühlen Bläuen,
Und weisse Wolkschollen dräuen,
Das goldene Strahleneiland zu verdrängen.

1. Although this very technique seems to provide a model for much of Georg Heym's most convincing and eloquent poetry.

Auch wir beide sind besiegte Siegerinnen,
Und Kronen steigen uns vom Blut der Zeder,
Propheten waren unsere Väter,
Unsere Mütter Königinnen.

Und süsse Schwermutwolken ranken
Sich über ihre Gräber lilaheiss in Liebeszeilen,
Unsere Leiber ragen stolz, zwei goldene Säulen,
Über das Abendland wie östliche Gedanken. (G 122)

This is one of the few, notably early, poems actually representing a transparent fiction of origins, this time of pre-bourgeois forefathers who were prophets and queens. The fictional lineage is characteristic of Neo-Romanticism in particular. Rilke thought of himself in the same way¹ and George, evidently while travelling in Spain, had presentiments about a strange, illustrious past: "mir dämmert wie in einem zauberbrunnen/ die frühe zeit wo ich noch könig war."² He too was a 'besiegter Sieger', cultivating a humiliated, self-styled aristocracy as the post of the outlaw aesthete in the modern world, confronting the philistine provocatively with the idea of a more dignified human condition.

The last verse illustrates the technical and rational procedures which were certainly treated with greater subtlety and simplicity in the couplet phase, or else, more effectively blended, as in Ein alter Tibetteppich.³ For this reason the latent scaffolding is more evident. Apart from the transparently grammatical language and its logical progressions there are the accumulated significances of compound words: melancholy is associated with clouds in Schwermutwolken, heat and colour in lilaheiss. The other two combinations in this verse, Liebeszeilen and Abendland, are established ones, but their significance as compounded

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1. Rainer Maria Rilke, Gesammelte Gedichte, Frankfurt, 1962, p. 151, Der Letzte.
 2. Stefan George, Hymnen, Munich, 1966, p. 27.
 3. See p. 102f.

ideas re-emerges in a context of such concentrated relationships. The Liebeszeilen are spun out of a string of associations, alliterations and assonances: "süsse Schwermutwolken ranken/Sich...lilaheiss in Liebeszeilen"; -zeilen is joined by an oblique half-rhyme to Säulen in the next line. If one had taken the word Abendland for granted the concentration of meanings here makes one aware once more of the two images joined in it, and Abend reflects the lilac clouds and golden pillars reaching over

it. Two or three ideas may be compounded; thus in the last two lines there is an association of three images: Leiber, Säulen and Gedanken, together with their attributes, stolz, golden, östlich, and further grammatical determinants. The three-ideas-in-one are assembled spatially in an oblique plane: "ragen...über das Abendland." Thus a series of inter-determinant linguistic elements enter a complex spiral of significance. - The idea or metaphor of "eastern thoughts" ("wie östliche Gedanken") is achieved most completely in the hieroglyphic couplets when the simile falls away and the literal reference has dissolved.

In Heimweh, one of the poems to emerge first in the couplet-form in Meine Wunder, the fictional East, it was noted, is shown dissolving in the last lines:

HEIMWEH

Ich kann die Sprache
Dieses kühlen Landes nicht,
Und seinen Schritt nicht gehn.

Auch die Wolken, die vorbeiziehn,
Weiss ich nicht zu deuten.

Die Nacht ist eine Stiefkönigin.

Immer muss ich an die Pharaonenwälder denken.
Und küsse die Bilder meiner Sterne.

Meine Lippen leuchten schon
Und sprechen Fernes,
Und bin ein buntes Bilderbuch
Auf deinem Schoss.
Aber dein Antlitz spinnt
Einen Schleier aus Weinen.
Meinen schillernden Vögeln
Sind die Korallen ausgestochen,
An den Hecken der Gärten
Versteinern sich ihre weichen Nester.
Wer salbt meine toten Paläste -
Sie trugen die Kronen meiner Väter,
Ihre Gebete versanken im heiligen Fluss. (G 168)

The poet is utterly self-estranged in the German language. Ironically, the statement that she cannot speak this language is written in the simplest German: "Ich kann die Sprache dieses... Landes nicht." She calls it a cold country, ein kühles Land, and this word kühl, together with the negative particle, is the first indication of a divided consciousness, of something dissociating the poet from the language she is using. We know that she is referring to a cold rationality, to Nüchternheit and Berechnung ("Ich will lieber Menschenfresser werden als Nüchternheit wiederkauen", (PS 401)), but even if we didn't, this is clearly implied in the poem. What unfolds is a subtle Berechnung after all. One feels a slight dissonance in the first accented nicht, for one's instinct expects the infinitive that is implied. This expectation is then fulfilled with an unexpected verb, gehn, and this time the accent is lifted off the second nicht. There is something of a walking pace in the rhythm: this emerges effectively out of the change from trochaic to iambic meter and in the onomatopoeic suggestiveness of the word Schritt.¹ Such disembodied sounds are a characteristic feature in Lasker-Schüller, as when she hears footsteps sighing behind a hedge in Ruth: "Ich höre deine Schritte seufzen." (G 126). The field of intelligibility is quite

1. Onomatopoeia: "The use of words whose sounds seem to express or reinforce their meanings." Beckson & Ganz, A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms, London, 1966.

uncannily extended in such footsteps and more still in the indecipherable clouds in the next verse of Heimweh. The rhythm is quickened once more and one feels something like a change from walking to floating:

Ich k̄ann die Spr̄achē
Diesēs k̄ühlē Ländēs nicht,
Und sēinen Schrit̄t nicht gēhn.
Auch die W̄olken die v̄orbeiz̄iehn,
Weiss̄ ich nicht z̄u deutēn.

A pronounced stress on auch as on the last nicht would introduce an alien metrical scheme in this poetry. Lasker-Schüller may not have calculated her rhythms consciously but this would be irrelevant to the effect they produce. What is clear is that she was hyper-sensitive about the placing of every syllable and every nuance: "Jeder Herzschlag war ein Tanz" (PS 388). After the floating rhythm of the second verse the accent falls with a certain gravity on Nacht and Stief- in the next line:

Die N̄acht ist eine Stiefk̄önigin,

and into the realm of absolute estrangement which is also that of hieroglyphic metaphor: a remote world of happiness and fulfilment, where the Pharaonenwälder are, where a strange, differentiated being would emerge out of the logical tyranny that often insists on a fixed identity. By now, in Heimweh, the simple German of the first lines has been lodged into the structure of a 'foreign' German; the title, Heimweh, really stands for a world that is dispossessed in itself. The alien mechanisms determining people's immediate relationships disclose epic dimensions of homelessness. The marginal presence of the Pharoan forests and of the prayers -sinking down in the sacred river, beckon through such desolation. Memory of the past is particularly evocative here in the image of language streaming away in a sacred stream in lost realms of richness and fulfilment. This language leaves its articulate residue or half-blinded remnants behind in the poem itself, in the glowing lips speaking of distances and the stultified world shutting these out.

Chapter 4: HIEROGLYPH

The very symbol of oriental strangeness, the Hieroglyph, belongs within a European, more particularly a German tradition. Both Shelley's Alastor and Keats' Hyperion, emphatic expressions of the modern lyrical ego, are involved in a dynamic struggle to break out of a negative or dissociated predicament. Keats had difficulty in bringing his conception to a positive conclusion, whereas Shelley's ends in the death of Alastor. When Hyperion, in Keats' poem, withdraws in anger from his fellow Gods, who are sinking passively into their exiled, negative condition, he, as the Sun-god, throws lightning shapes across the sky as hieroglyphics:

The planet orb of fire, whereon he rode
Each day from east to west the heavens through,
Spun round in sable curtaining of clouds;
Not therefore veiled quite, blindfold and hid,
But ever and anon the glancing spheres,
Circles, and arcs, and broad-belting colure,
Glow'd through, and wrought upon the muffling dark
Sweet-shaped lightnings from the nadir deep
Up to the zenith - hieroglyphics old,
Which sages and keen-eyed astrologers
Then living on the earth, with labouring thought
Won from the gaze of many centuries:
Now lost save what we find on remnants huge
Of stone, or marble swart; their import gone,
Their wisdom long since fled.¹

Lasker-Schüller's whole world of pyramids, sphinxes and ancient cities like Jerusalem and Thebes - projections of the modern ego as though it were hidden from itself in the remote past - is contained in Shelley's Alastor:

1. The Poems of John Keats, London, 1909, p 270f.

His wandering step
Obedient to high thoughts, has visited
The awful ruins of the days of old:
Athens, and Tyre, and Balbec, and the waste
Where stood Jerusalem, the fallen towers
Of Babylon, the eternal pyramids,
Memphis and Thebes, and whatso'er of strange
Sculptured on alabaster obelisk,
Or jasper tomb, or mutilated sphynx,
Dark Aethiopia in her desert hills
Conceals.

This epic distance divides the articulate aesthetic ego from its empirical counterpart in the modern world. For Shelley's Alastor the hieroglyphics buried in this distance held the secret to the birth of time out of prehistory:

Among the ruined temples there,
Stupendous columns, and wild images
Of more than man, where marble daemons watch
The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men
Hang their mute thoughts on the walls around,
He lingered, poring on memorials
Of the world's youth, through the long burning day
Gazed on those speechless shapes, nor, when the moon
Filled the mysterious halls with floating shades
Suspended he that task, but ever gazed
And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind
Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw
The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.¹

Like Alastor, Lasker-Schüller, seeking a way out of social imprisonment, fled into remote, turbulent nether regions in her first volume of poems, Styx, strove for a rebirth of time in Der siebente Tag and struck on the secrets of concealed time in Meine Wunder in her hieroglyphic couplets.

1. Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Complete Poetical Works, London, 1948, p 17f.

In Germany the poet's enigmatic 'Hebrew' or 'Arabic' as she first called it, derives from the romantic revival of German culture and the ferment of linguistic explorations in Hamann and others. Hamann in particular had discovered the Bible and its pictorial language; some of his reflections, expressed in splintered prose, gravitate towards Lasker-Schüler's cubistically telescoped imagism: "Reden ist Übersetzen - aus einer Engelsprache in eine Menschensprache, das heisst, Gedanken in Worte, - Sachen in Namen, - Bilder in Zeichen; die poetisch oder kyriologisch, historisch oder symbolisch oder hieroglyphisch - und philosophisch oder charakteristisch sein können." (Kreuzzüge des Philologen, 1762). Hamann is concerned with hieroglyphic articulation in his reflections on signs and symbols and on the creation as God's language. Lasker-Schüler too would like to translate the entire secular world into a divine language. Where Hamann writes: "der Buchstabe ist Fleisch, und eure Wörterbücher sind Heu!" She describes a man in her Peter Hille-Buch who carries his soul in a book "voll von eitlen Buchstaben": she rejects him to follow Peter Hille, who is a wandering landscape. (PS 9 & 10). Hamann established the tone and style of mystic-didactic essays that were Lasker-Schüler's favourite prose-medium in later years: "Gott offenbart sich - der Schöpfer der Welt ein Schriftsteller." Hamann also touches on the theme of Jewish mysticism when he refers to his own style as rhapsody in cabbalistic prose.¹

For Novalis the dialectic of empirical ego and 'absolute' ego is expressed in hieroglyphic self-realisation: in accord with the interpretation, that the ego in Lasker-Schüler's poetry seeks a rebirth in reality, Novalis poses the problem: how does the absolute ego become an empirical ego? He gravitates toward Lasker-Schüler's succinct lines about the ego as hieroglyph in the following formulations:

1. Hamann is cited from The Emergence of German as a Literary Language by Eric A. Blackall, Cambridge, 1959, p 426ff.

Kann ein Ich sich als Ich setzen, ohne ein anderes Ich oder Nichtich - /Wie sind Ich und Nichtich gegensetzbar/

Das Ich hat eine hieroglyphistische Kraft.

D(ie) Handlung, dass Ich sich als Ich setzt muss mit der Antithese eines unabhängigen Nichtich und der Beziehung auf eine sie umschliessende Sphäre verknüpft sein - diese Sphäre kann man Gott und Ich nennen.

The dialectic of egos is registered by Novalis in fragmentary notes: retrospectively it seems to be fulfilled and self-consciously articulated as poetry in Lasker-Schüller's broken forms. Novalis too gropes for anti-synthetical syntheses: "Das absolute Ich kann man auch das/absolut synthetische Ich/nennen. Es ist die Synthese des Ich, inwiefern es keine eigentliche Synthese ist -"¹. Novalis also touches on the 'oriental' dimension in Lasker-Schüller: "Die Poesie löst fremdes Dasein in eigenem auf."²

Nietzsche describes himself in one of his Dionysos-Dithyramben as umspinxt;³ the contradicting ego becomes passionately, violently rebellious, argues for the transformation of all values, and claims, "Ich widerspreche, wie nie widersprochen worden ist..."⁴. The element of satanic turbulence in the first edition

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1. Novalis Werke, Munich, 1969, p. 296f.
 2. Ibid., p. 381.
 3. Friedrich Nietzsche, Der Antichrist Ecce Homo Dionysos Dithyramben, Leipzig, 1930.
 4. Ibid., p. 185.

of Lasker-Schüller's Styx-poems might well derive from Nietzsche; I have it on verbal authority only from someone who knew her that she considered all modern poetry to have originated in Nietzsche. Benn frequently acknowledged his importance; while sharing less of the protesting, challenging rebelliousness of both Nietzsche and Lasker-Schüller, he steadfastly juxtaposed the solitary, dissociating 'absolute ego' to the empirical world: "Nach aussen starr sein und schweigen, jeden Zug des Gehabens, der mimischen Besonderung dämpfen und innen mit Kompressor arbeiten, schichten, schneiden, schälen, bis der Ausdruck dasteht, wie die verborgene, im Hintergrund wirkende, nie hervortretende, ewig unbekannt bleibende Gestalt es wollte, die Gestalt im Schatten, die von Schleiern umwogte anfängliche Figur, das gesichtslose, aber Züge entwickelnde Sein, das Urwort, das alte Wesen, die Hieroglyphe."¹ Unlike the mediating ego in Novalis, intellectual isolation (not only adopted, primarily imposed by external pressures) became an *idée fixe* in Benn, a variation on Lasker-Schüller's Weltflucht or Furie des Verschwindens. For them only extreme dissociation and asceticism toward the prevailing world could hope to reach it once more. Lasker-Schüller's blindverstossene Einsamkeit, (G 95), Benn's akausales Dauerschweigen, strove for the hieroglyphic transformation of language; this necessarily involved continual affirmations of emptiness and meaninglessness in relation to external 'sense', repressively imposed. "...das gesichtslose, aber Züge entwickelnde Sein" wrote Benn, in the passage about hieroglyphic articulation cited above, suggesting something more than a mere affirmation of meaninglessness; the release of an expressive self, "das Verlöschen des Inhalts zugunsten der Expression."

The suspension of content, allows content, in another sense, expressively articulated, to emerge out of a repressive rationality: "das Unbewußte bewußt zu machen...die in anderen Menschheits-epochen mühsam erkämpften Automatismen...individualistisch

1. Gottfried Benn, 'Einleitung' in Lyrik des expressionistischen Jahrzehnts, ed. Max Niedermayer, Munich, 1962, p 10.

zu lockern."¹

In an early poem, when Lasker-Schüler was discovering her hieroglyphic self to her own amazement, it emerges as something quite dissociated and strange, "more distant than eternity":

Mein Blick

Ich will Dich anseh'n

Immerzu.

Aber mein Blick irrt über alles Sehen weit,

Floh himmelweit, ferner als die Ewigkeit.

Du! locke ihn mit Deiner Sehnsucht Sonnenschein, -

Er wird mir selbst ein Hieroglyph geworden sein. (G 40)

The poet's evasive poetic persona withdraws from an empirical encounter as absolutely as can be imagined (the term "absolute ego" can be interpreted in this sense); but it is precisely from this distance that she would like to be enticed by her lover. Secretly, she is enticing him. In the couplet-phase, it will be seen, lovers only meet in the sphere of enigmatic transformation; the rest of their being is erased. It is significant that the poet's eyes err ("mein Blick irrt"), because the domain of the non-ego, if it were one of pre-established certainties, would simply complement the socialised world. In this sense, too, the aesthetic ego reaches into the nebulous void for fresh, virginal territory, more than merely nebulous because of its acute sense of contradiction, eliciting a differentiated idiom.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Mein Blick was left out of the second edition of Styx by Lasker-Schüler. For this edition some of the earlier poems were laconically abbreviated. In the case of Mein Blick she would probably only have been left with two insufficient lines:¹

Mein Blick irrt über alles Sehen weit,
Er wird mir selbst ein Hieroglyph geworden sein.

The last line is also somewhat clumsy and over-explanatory compared with the later formulation: "Ich bin der Hieroglyph/Der unter der Schöpfung steht." While the first lines could easily have appeared in a couplet-poem ("Ich will dich ansehen/Immerzu") relocated as distanced intimacy with the inverted comma left out of anseh'n, the fourth and fifth lines, brimming with neo-romantic inwardness and enthusiasm, would have been omitted. From the start Expressionism was accompanied by an almost anti-expressive process of articulation as conceived by Gottfried Benn (above).

In a later poem belonging to Der siebente Tag the dialogue of contradictory egos is more subtle than that of Mein Blick:

SPHINX

Sie sitzt an meinem Bette in der Abendzeit
Und meine Seele tut nach ihrem Willen,
Und in dem Dämmerlichte, traumesstillen,
Engen wie Fäden dünn sich ihre Glanzpupillen
Um ihrer Sinne schläfrige Geschmeidigkeit.

Und auf dem Nebenbette auf den Leinennähten
Knistern die Spitzenranken von Narzissen,
Und ihre Hände dehnen breit sich nach dem Kissen,
Auf dem noch Träume blühen aus seinen Küssen,
Herzflüster Duft auf weissen Beeten.

Und lächelnd taucht die Mondfrau in die Wolkenwellen
Und meine bleichen, leidenden Psychen
Erstarken neu im Kampf mit Widersprüchen. (G 148)

1. Here I am describing typical procedures adopted by Lasker-Schüler as she progressed from her early poetry to the next phase. These are discussed in Chapter 8, Genesis.

The whole poem is in Lasker-Schüler's neo-romantic vein, but while the second verse belongs entirely to an early type of piquantly demonised paradis artificiel recalling Stefan George ("Palmen mit den spitzen fingern stechen")¹, there are transitions in the outer verses from Neo-Romanticism to the enigmatic mode of the couplet-phase. The dialogue of two identities, the Sphinx and the Ich will be resolved so as to leave only the residual Ich of the couplet-poems. Whereas the poet, unwittingly touching on the Es of Freudian psychoanalysis, had written "es dichtet in mir" in her letter to the Zürcher Zeitung,² and identified herself directly with the sphinx in Weltschmerz, the agent of aesthetic articulation in the poem under consideration, also a sphinx, is called Sie. The aesthetic subconscious or expressive self is a strange, other being; it might well have been suggested by the presence of a cat; the narrowing eyes in the first verse are clearly those of a cat-creature. The poet feels her will cede to that of the sphinx, and "schläfrige Geschmeidigkeit" emphasises both the suspension of the rational ego's intentions and the subtle remoulding of these, as in the peculiar focus of the intermediate lines:

Und in dem Dämmerne, traumesstillen,
Engen wie Fäden dünn sich ihre Glanzpupillen.

One of the other principal figures of the poet's imaginative world, the lover, appears in the second verse, also in the third person, as 'he' rather than 'you'. He is no longer present and the sphinx stretches out her hands toward the pillow on which his dreams and kisses still bloom. The moon-lady who dips smiling into a sea of clouds personifies the impulse of transcending lyricism, detached from earthly bonds. In Mein stilles Lied the role of the moon-lady is given to the poet's dead mother, who, even during her earthly sojourn, had never found a world ("Meine Mutter hatte goldene Flügel,/Die keine Welt

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1. Stefan George, Die Bücher der Hirten- und Preisgedichte, Darmstadt, 1966, p 112.
 2. See page 36.

fanden." - see below). Thus she is dissociated from socialised purposes. In Sphinx the figure of the Mondfrau is also presented in the third person. She does not necessarily have to be identified with the mother; both could be considered as projections of the lyrical ego, or as figures within its projected domain, particularly since they will be entirely absorbed into the sphere of this lyricism in the couplet-phase. In one of the couplets of Ein Trauerlied (G 186), for example, only a vestigial enigma remains in the lyrical element, associated with Wolkenwellen in Sphinx: "Im schwarzen Wolkenkelche/Steht die Mondknope." Such feminine imagery in Lasker-Schüler has unmistakable sexual connotations. In the place of 'penis envy' much of Lasker-Schüler's poetry projects sexual images with a subtle potency of their own. The vagina is not a non-entity next to the penis. The towering masculinity of much early Lasker-Schüler penetrates the logic of the male-dominated history-determining world, directly represented in poems like Streiter¹ (G 140) and in the image of the snake: "Wir sind von der Schlange noch nicht ausgetragen." (Geheimnis, G 129); nowhere more directly than in Unser Kriegslied in which poet and lover are allied in their struggle:

Unsere Willen sind zwei harte Degen
Und sie haben nie verfehlt gestritten,
Und wir dringen bis zum Erzkreis vor, in seiner Mitten,
Fällt nach dürrer Ewigkeiten Freudenregen... (G 124)

Sphinx still reflects the "Kampf mit Widersprüchen" in order to resolve such logic into the realm of the smiling moon-lady, into the bud-like imagism of the couplet-phase, the peculiar realisation of a feminine potency, all the more eloquent, next to more passively feminine poets, for having broken through the prevailing rationality itself. The detached and communicating identities of Sphinx, Mondfrau and Ich will be drawn into the one vestigial identity of the lyrical ego with the lover's Du

1. Quoted and discussed on page 149

as its counterpart. In Sphinx the detached Mondfrau leaves the struggling psyches of sphinx and ego behind it: in the couplet-phase the Widerspruch itself is realised in an idiom as laconic, threadlike and disarmingly cunning as the sphinx's narrowing eyes. The poet's eyes resemble those she sees in a lover: "Seine Augen kommen und gehen/ Wie Nilwellen." (G 161). A complete fusion of the Mondfrau, Sphinx and Ich now becomes apparent in the couplet about the evanescent lyrical ego in Dem Mönch:¹

Zwischen Dunkel verlischt mein Leben
Im scheidenden Anlitz des Mondes. (G 242)

In the second version of Mein stilles Lied - one of the most crucial moments in the evolution of Lasker-Schüler's poetry - the struggle of contradictions has been drawn into the identity or non-identity (Nicht-Ich) of the hieroglyph in a context of broken identities: mother, ego, disappointing lovers and God are detached figures in a broken world; the ego becomes the hieroglyph in order to bring them into focus. The hieroglyph could be considered as the 'masculine' agency in metamorphosis, God and the struggle of contradictions ("Kampf mit Widersprüchen"), traditionally the province of male endeavour, are the medium of hieroglyphic transformation through which the lyrical (feminine) principle will be released. This will leave the domain of socialised justice² and will find just fulfilment in that of God, in Gottes Saum. In this horizon the dialogue of contradictions will be released; thus, the lyrical tone of the verses about the poet's mother returns only in the last line, while the intervening verses are more discursive in tone. The Ich of the couplet-poems will then be left as the sole mediator of poetic justice in relation to the other Ich or Du who rises, in moments of being in love, out of the lover. This figure does not appear in Mein stilles Lied, only his other self or selves, who are accused for remaining in the antagonistic world. Before this accusation the Ich drinks wine from the moon, the mother's realm of night and dissociation; during the accusation the Ich becomes

1. See p 26

2. Socialised, here, in the sense of nature-dominating.

the mediating hieroglyph on behalf of the worldless dissociation depicted in the first part of the poem and touches on the horizon of fulfilment:

Mein stilles Lied

Mein Herz ist eine traurige Zeit,
Die tonlos tickt.

Meine Mutter hatte goldene Flügel,
Die keine Welt fanden.

Horcht, mich sucht meine Mutter,
Lichte sind ihre Finger und ihre Flüsse wandernde Träume.

Und süsse Wetter mit blauen Wehen
Wärmen meine Schlummer

Immer in den Nächten,
Deren Tage meiner Mutter Krone tragen.

Und ich trinke aus dem Monde stillen Wein,
Wenn die Nacht einsam kommt.

Meine Lieder trugen des Sommers Bläue
Und kehrten düster heim.

- Ihr verhöhnt meine Lippe
Und redet mit ihr. -

Doch ich griff nach euren Händen,
Denn meine Liebe ist ein Kind und wollte spielen.

Und ich artete mich nach euch,
Weil ich mich nach dem Menschen sehnte.

Arm bin ich geworden
An eurer bettelnden Wohltat.

Und das Meer wird es wehklagen
Gott.

Ich bin der Hieroglyph,
Der unter der Schöpfung steht

Und mein Auge
Ist der Gipfel der Zeit;
Sein Leuchten küsst Gottes Saum. (G 285)

The last verses belong within a German tradition that goes back to Angelus Silesius¹ and his appeal: "Mensch werde wesentlich" (acclaimed by the Expressionist generation) and also to his conception of man and God as interdependent. In this one could read the implication that a reconciliation of God and self would suspend the separate, broken identity of each, while a transfigured ego, absorbing both in a new entity, would realise its essential nature. As in Weltschmerz,² the dissociative ego in Mein stilles Lied is telescopically projected as a salient image in its very act of withdrawal. In its dissociation it also becomes a darkened enigma in relation to God, whose nearness emerges in a distant horizon.³ In other words, the poetry shrinks into its own enigmatic margin. This acts as a filter which is also Gottes Saum but not the fully-fledged rebirth of reality in the light of divine justice. Hence the darkened enigma from both sacred and secular points of view. God's horizon is the boundary between man and the realisation of his essence. In the couplet-poems (of which Mein stilles Lied is the first emphatic example) the lyrical ego seeks to suspend everything that does not belong within this Saum. Significantly, God recedes in favour of the lover in the couplet-phase. It is only when the secular world fails to awaken in the lover, when the poet addresses God, saying: "Und weckte doch in deinem ewigen Hauche nicht den Tag" (G 321) that the appeals to God increase; the poet remains fully aware that this emphasis expresses a broken relationship, a failure.

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1. Angelus Silesius, 'Cherubinischer Wandersman' in Die Silberfrucht, Frankfurt, 1955, p. 21ff.
 2. See Chapter 1.
 3. Lasker-Schüller's dialectics are so complex here that even the clearest presentation of them must produce something of a puzzle. The simultaneous nearness and distance of God is one of the poet's favourite ideas. See p. 99.

Chapter 5: MOTHER-TONGUE

Fulfilment of Lasker-Schüller's hieroglyphic idiom - in its very fragmentation and incompleteness, since it could only be fulfilled ultimately in reality - aims at the most complete identification of modern German and the lyrical ego, drawn in from a seemingly infinite distance, "verwunschen in der Ewigkeit der Ferne." (G 342). Hence the foreign and alien identities circling around the ego as hieroglyph until they have been absorbed into pure German as it might be spoken if the contemporary world could awaken from its heavy nightmare in paradise. Negative imagery would then appear as a self-translating rationality reaching into strangeness out of estrangement. **Non-ego, representing repressed nature, would become the emancipated ego.**

Peter Hille evidently identified Lasker-Schüller's lyrical ego with Jewishness some time before she herself was really willing to do so.¹ The more literal such assertions became in her the more they sound forced: in the Hebräische Balladen and Das Hebräerland, a prose essay of later years that comes closest to Zionism, one feels something of an unspontaneous categorical imperative, historical pressures to which the lyrical ego cannot cede except fatally.² The late poetry suspends all assertions of Jewishness for the sake of German lyricism and a further articulation of the ego's fluctuating position in it. Earnest and literal-minded Zionism often brought a streak of aggression out of the poet; she was apparently not comfortable in Martin Buber's circle, and her letters to him are usually apologies or justifications for unpleasant scenes or for falling asleep while he was talking (BI 127). "Ich hasse die Juden" she writes angrily in one of these letters written before 1914 (BI 117); in a letter written two years before her death in Jerusalem, again to Buber, she dissociates herself explicitly from Zionism:

1. Else Lasker-Schüller, Gesammelte Gedichte, Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1920, p 7f.

2. See p 215f.

"Adon Professor, ich bin keine Zionistin, keine Jüdin, keine Christin; ich glaube aber ein Mensch, ein sehr tief trauriger Mensch. Ich war ein einfacher Soldat Gottes; ich kann mich aber nicht mehr uniformieren. Ich ströme mit einem Tag nach dem andern hin. Vielleicht glaubt Gott der Weise an mich, ich weiss nicht in meiner Menschlichkeit wie ich an den Ewigen denken kann glauben.? Und liege doch vielleicht in seiner unsichtbaren Hand." (BI 128)

The word Mensch cannot but sound alien and unreal in Lasker-Schüler's vocabulary. Elsewhere she writes that she is strange everywhere and would be even more strange in the feelings of a 'person' (BII 69). Personality is modified in various ways the moment it is mentioned; in this letter it is dissociated from hardened ideologies, characterised as deeply sad, and "ein einfacher Soldat Gottes." Then, faithful to her lyrical genius, she dissolves the notion of fixed personality ("ich ströme...hin"); God is questioned and the ego is transposed into an infinite distance again as a ciphre in his invisible hand. Had H.W. Cohn understood this pattern in the poet he would not have been able to misinterpret the lines, "Ich fürchte mich vor der Frühe,/Sie hat ein Gesicht/Wie die Menschen die fragen,"¹ as an attempt to overcome fear of the "ordering, sense-giving questions of the morning."² "Die Menschen" as a category are taboo in Lasker-Schüler - "Von wo ich kam hat nie ein Mensch gewusst"³ - and could never arise in her poetry except in a negative sense; "die Menschen die fragen" refers to the conversational glue in questions like "how are you?" conjuring up traumatically the whole world of (often tactical) interests experienced as utterly alien.⁴ Also, in Mein stilles

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1. From the poem Und suche Gott..., (G 167).
 2. Cohn, Else Lasker-Schüler, op.cit., p 140.
 3. From the poem Abendzeit, (G 344).
 4. See Edeltrud Aker, Untersuchungen der Lyrik Else Lasker-Schülers, Diss. München, p 3: "... die Dichterin zeigt kein Interesse für 'die Menschen' ..."

Lied (G 285), when the poet writes that she longed for "dem Menschen" he appears quite alien. Der Mensch as opposed to die Menschen does enter the late poems, hardly less strangely and in gestures of helplessness: "Die Welt erkaltete, der Mensch verblich" (G 347).

The Peter Hille-Buch contains an episode, Petrus and die Jerusalemiter, in which Jewishness is associated with the presentiment of a remote, enigmatic identity. The Jerusalemites call on Tino and Petrus and regale them with gifts. They are afraid, however, that Petrus has guessed their secret wishes and may precede them into the holy land of their forefathers. He replies: "Wer seine Heimat nicht in sich trägt, dem wächst sie doch unter den Füßen fort." The Jerusalemites play a trick on Tino: to remind her of a distant identity they place a turban on her head: "Aber der jüngste der Fremdlinge setzte mir seinen Turban auf, und eine Trauer kam über mein Leben, wie die Schwermutwolke über den Goldhimmel, und meine Hände sehnten sich mit Sternen zu spielen." (PS 45f). The Jerusalemites react with malicious merriment and take their harps secretly to play dissonances on them. The banished aesthetic psyche is afflicted with demonism. Petrus scolds the Jerusalemites and they depart.

In an earlier episode, Petrus und der Nazarener, the enigmatic distance has a German-Christian aura: "...aus Petrus Palmsonntagsaugen standen selige Erinnerungen auf." (PS 18). The two friends visit a church; later they go to a Jewish temple and Petrus comments on Hebrew letters as enigmatic script: "Wundervoll ist die Gestalt dieser alten Sprache; wie Harfen stehen die Schriftzeichen, und etliche sind gebogen aus feinen Seiten." (PS 24). In Chronica, the first poem in the first version of Styx, Lasker-Schüler gives a kind of primal history of her family, mixing Jewish and Christian elements:

Und wisset wer meine Brüder sind!
Sie waren die drei Könige, die gen Osten zogen
Dem weissen Sterne nach durch brennenden Wüstenwind. (G 11)

For herself and her sisters the primal identity is Egyptian:
Denn drei sind wir Schwestern,
Und die vor mir träumten schon in Sphinxgestalten
Zu Pharaozeiten.

Although Peter Hille, who died in 1903, had emphasised Lasker-Schüller's Jewishness, an Arab identity, amid a mixture of others, is by far the most predominant one in letters and prose, at least until 1910: "... ich las lauter arabisch, es klang gewiss so, wenn es auch in deutscher Sprache geschrieben ist ... und nachts schlafe ich unter einer Bambusweide, die wiegt den Mond. Und bin doch die Nichte des Kalifen und meine Stirne ist ein Blatt des Korans ..." (BI 45). A letter to Max Brod is concerned with the cabaret performance in which Lasker-Schüller was to mumble unintelligibly:

"Ich spreche doch syrisch, ich bin doch mein halbes Leben in Asien gewesen, ich habe meine Dichtungen, die in Asien und Afrika spielen übersetzt ins Syrische. Ich möchte als Syrerin auftreten mit meinem herrlichen Nasenkopf und meiner unschätzbar wertvollen Schleife. Auch dudle ich auf meinem Dudelsack nachdem ich den Fakir gelesen habe, blase die Posaune meinem Urgrossvater dem Scheik, flöte und trommele Sie müssten nur hören wie Syrisch sich anhört herrlich, wie Vögel in der Wüste,. Böser Gesang, süsse Triller und dazwischen Sandsturm! Châ machâ lâaaooooo!!!!

(BII 26)

An Arabian world is still predominant in the prose-phantasies of Der Prinz von Theben, completed in 1913, more or less at the same time as the Hebräische Balladen, with their emphatic Te-turn towards Jewishness. As late as 1933 the poet is writing to Klaus and Erika Mann how much she would have liked to have been a child in Cairo, (BI 229) possibly in order to clarify the fiction of her Egyptian past which they might have taken literally; in her very last published message to the world at the end of Mein blaues Klavier - the volume appeared in Jerusalem in 1943 - she returns to the Arabian East: "Ich sitze noch heute sitzengeblieben auf der untersten Bank der Schulklasse, wie einst ...Doch mit spätem versunkenen Herzen: 1000 und 2-jährig dem Märchen über den Kopf gewachsen." (G 371)

The mixture of 'primal' identities in a letter to Jethro Bithell signed 'Tino von Bagdad' includes a Germanic past: "... mein letzter Brief war nun doch zu bunt; 'sie ist doch eine leichtsinnige, oberflächliche Prinzessin.' Nicht doch - aber ein Ratcliff, Joseph aus Egypten im Vorleben, Tristan alles mit einer langen grünen Glaskette ich bin morgen Indianer der Häuptlingssohn vom Geschlecht der Aasgeyer." (BI 50). The Prince of Thebes, who took over from Tino of Bagdad, was called Yussuf and was partially associated with the biblical Joseph who had lived in Egypt and been an interpreter of dreams. In this way the Egyptian and Jewish identities become mingled (G 298). Joseph is at home in a foreign country; he has been betrayed by his brothers; he becomes a prominent figure in Egypt and a favourite with the Pharaoh. There was undoubtedly the phantasy in Laskerschüler of an outcast or orphan - "die Nacht ist eine Stiefkönigin" - acquiring a position of acknowledged importance among the natives; as a stranger she would have a distanced perspective on their dreams, and so she would, in a sense, articulate their language for them: "An seinem Traume hingen aller Deutung Garben." (G 298). Estrangement in Germany is transposed to Egypt. Pharaoh is shown rejecting natives for the sake of Joseph:

Pharaoh verstösst seine blühenden Weiber,
Sie duften nach den Gärten Amons.

Sein Königskopf ruht auf meiner Schulter,
Die strömt Korngeruch aus.

Pharao ist von Gold.

Seine Augen gehen und kommen

Wie schillernde Nilwellen. (Pharaoh und Joseph, G 299)

The image of Pharaoh's eyes coming and going like scintillating Nile-waves insinuates the elusive hieroglyphic non-ego into the German language. - The experience of betrayal by brothers is ambivalent; the poet must have had a much stronger sense of betrayal in Germany than in relation to orthodox Jewry. In a prose piece written during the Nazi period she associates a café-meeting with the New Testament Passover and accepts the

role of Judas with her German friends: "Ich nehme die Ungeheuerlichkeit ungestritten, um der Liebe willen auf mich. Verstossen aber feiere ich jeden Abend mit euch in Gedanken das kleine heilige Abendmahl..." (PS 672). In Lasker-Schüller's view, Judas' betrayal was atoned for by his death. During the period of increasing Nazi persecution and exile there is an understandably pathetic preoccupation with the themes of atonement, redemption and reconciliation. The play, Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter, published in 1932 by the Rowohlt Verlag in Berlin, is a fairytale of reconciliation between the Jewish and Catholic communities of Westphalia, poised on the brink of catastrophe. By this time a much more penetrating reconciliation of the lyrical ego and the German language had been achieved in Lasker-Schüller's best poetry, a reconciliation achieved paradoxically, though, through rigorous dissociation from appearances.

In the poetry itself, Arab, Jewish and other identities dissolve; the one foreign identity above all others is that of the lyrical ego or non-ego fluctuating on the margins of non-existence. In the second, abbreviated edition of Styx even the association of this exiled ego with Satanism and Bhowaneh, Goddess of the Night (G 17), is severed, and it is involved much more immediately in its own predicament:

Die Sterne fliehen schreckensbleich
Vom Himmel meiner Einsamkeit,
Und das schwarze Auge der Mitternacht
Starrt näher und näher.

Ich finde mich nicht wieder
In dieser Todverlassenheit,
Mir ist, ich liege von mir weltenweit
Zwischen grauer Nacht der Urangst. (Chaos, G 92)

This ego is "zwischen Nacht", "zwischen Dunkelheit" (G 244), "zwischen weiten Nächten...alleine" (G 275). It strives for a rebirth, primarily through love, but for this reason, in a world that crushes spontaneity, it remains vulnerable, uncertain,

fluctuating in its being;

Und meine Seele färbte sich in Matt,
Dampf läutete noch einmal Brand mein Leben
Und schrumpfte dann zusammen wie ein Blatt. (Schuld, G 102)

The immaterial ego is a subtle, glimmering presence between lovers in a poem that gravitates toward the suspended mosaic of the couplet-phase:

Von weit
Dein Herz ist wie die Nacht so hell,
Ich kann es sehn
- Du denkst an mich - es bleiben alle Sterne stehn.
Und wie der Mond von Gold dein Leib
Dahin so schnell
Von weit er scheint. (G 159)

Only in the Hebräische Balladen, then, does the lyrical ego withdraw behind or transpose itself into the positive fiction of a foreign identity. For H.W. Cohn "the 'objectification'¹ of personal experience found in most of these" poems plays a major part in making the Balladen "the most evenly excellent of all her collections";² in my view they constitute the weakest moment in Lasker-Schüller's poetry. The disagreement helps to clarify my interpretation. Cohn considers what he calls the 'I-poems' to have "little relation to the reality around her",³ whereas it has been attempted in this study as a whole to demonstrate that by far the most powerful relationship to reality in Lasker-Schüller is expressed precisely in the poetry of dissociation. In the withdrawal of the ego behind the biblical stories Cohn sees an aesthetic application of T.S. Eliot's theory of the 'objective correlative'. Words like 'objectification' sound altogether

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1. Cohn, op. cit., p 123f.
 2. Ibid, p 124.
 3. Ibid., p 56.

false in relation to Lasker-Schüler and the theory of the objective correlative loses its validity. Remove the shadowy Ich-Dichtung with its dissolving objectivity and little if anything remains of Lasker-Schüler and the provocative idiosyncracies constituting her genius. One cannot help wondering whether Cohn would have been attracted to Lasker-Schüler were it not for the traits in her which he finds discomfoting. Poets like her dislocate the blind second nature of historically determined realities with such force and with so powerful a grasp of objectivity that one is attracted and then tempted to reimpose the categories which have been questioned and suspended. Lasker-Schüler throws out the challenge of her Ich-Dichtung in the last lines of Weltflucht:

Fäden möcht ich um mich ziehen
Wirrwarr endend!
Beirrend,
Euch verwirrend,
Zu entfliehn
Meinwärts. (G 80)

The Hebräische Balladen are not more objective than such lines; on the contrary, their biblical fiction is much more subjective and less articulate. The assertion of an Ur-identity has something naively artificial and forced about it.¹ Under the pressure of Nazi persecution the poet did develop Judaistic traits in her essays and conversations, but her instinct as a poet led her to suspend all this entirely in the poetry written after the Hebräische Balladen. Over-anxious assertion of an identity, like that of the Germans under Hitler, knows secretly that it has lost itself; Lasker-Schüler's enigmatic ego reveals this secret, and, by risking the loss of self, gropes for the spontaneous rebirth of a German or simply humane identity. How little room

1. See p 215f. for a more detailed discussion of the Hebräische Balladen.

she really had for Judaism and the Hebrew fiction as a poet is revealed by the fact that only ten poems were specifically conceived as Hebrew ballads; the remaining poems, which are also the best in the collection, were taken over from her earlier volumes.

In the Hebräische Balladen themselves there is something of a mixture of identities and geographical projections. Some episodes are situated in the South American jungle (Jakob, g 297); Hagar and Ismael are portrayed as negroes (G 295) and Africa also provides the image for lovers locked in a kiss in David und Jonathan: "Du Ring in meiner Lippe Haut." (G 303). Primal identity also reverts in a characteristic way to pre-human creatureliness: Jacob is described as "der Büffel seiner Herde" and his face is an Ochsgesicht (G 297). In the poem about Abigail and Saul an Osterlammlein appears inappropriately in the fourth verse from the New Testament (G 304). Earlier in Styx Lasker-Schüler had seen her brothers in the three kings following the star of Bethlehem. One feels that it is really this star which returns in the Hebräische Balladen when Joseph falls asleep beneath a star in the desert (G 298) and in the star depicted in Abigail: "Und auch sein spätes Sternlein glitzerte ganz hell und weiss;/ Man konnte es noch funkeln sehen im Winde." (G 304). In the refrain of Versöhnung, transposed into the Hebräische Balladen from a previous collection, the star echoes the annunciation: "Es wird ein grosser Stern in meinen Schoss fallen." (G 291).

On reflection it has to be conceded that Christianity is a much more determinative influence on Lasker-Schüler than Judaism. It is not that she could ever have been a partisan of Christianity, but rather that this was an inescapable cultural heritage. When she writes to Jethro Bithell with Islamic fervour, therefore, "ich habe die Christenhunde immer mit Steinen geworfen", (BI 45) she follows the same self-negating principle that strives for a transformation of the empirical ego and his language. To some degree, however, Christianity, like all the religions, was an ally of Lasker-Schüler's negative principle because it precedes

the modern secular world and opens out a vast dimension beyond it. Angels emerged like the hieroglyphic non-ego from a seemingly infinite distance, from the invisible realm of God, himself the invisible being. The angels evoked in a poem called An den Gralprinzen, as the title indicates, are those of a Christian childhood. The poem in itself is quite trivial; within Lasker-Schüler's lyrical cosmos it reflects an aura of distance; triviality blends just sufficiently with the suspended being, the nothingness and invisibility of the poet's hieroglyphic domain, for her hyper-discriminating intelligence to have let it pass:

Wenn wir uns ansehen,
Blühen unsere Augen.

Und wie wir staunen
Vor unseren Wundern - nicht?
Und alles wird so süß.

Von Sternen sind wir eingerahmt
Und flüchten aus der Welt.

Ich glaube wir sind Engel. (G 195)

Lovers in their erotic entrancement seem like beings from the beyond. Here again the empirical egos have vanished. But the poet writes: "Ich glaube wir sind Engel", modifying any flat assertion of angelic being; the nascent being is quite uncertain of itself and quite strange to itself; our empirical ego could not posit itself in a liberated dimension except in its own already pre-constituted terms.

Another Christian persona favoured by Lasker-Schüler is the monk. In the titles of three poems she addresses the man she loves as a monk (G 242f), probably more of the poems are addressed to him; the distanced aura in them pervades much of the verse of the couplet-phase in particular. Unlike God and the Angels, the monk, like the poet, comes from the secular world, but withdraws from it in order to relate to it from a different point of view.

He withdraws, like the homosexual boys of the David and Jonathan poems, from the self-generating secular world. In Lasker-Schüler, however, the dissociated ego reaches back much more specifically for a reconstituted secularity: most of her verse is love-poetry; withdrawing from the lover on one level, she strives unceasingly to find him again and persists in her late poetry, in advancing age, in this one all-important search, even when increasing disappointment led her to turn partially to the invisible love of God:

Ich liebe dich...

Ich liebe dich

Und finde dich

Wenn auch der Tag ganz dunkel wird.

Mein Lebelang

Und immer noch

Bin suchend ich umhergeirrt.

Ich liebe dich!

Ich liebe dich!

Ich liebe dich!

Es Öffnen deine Lippen sich....

Die Welt ist taub,

Die Welt ist blind

Und auch die Wolke

Und das Laub -

- Nur wir, der goldene Staub

Aus dem wir zwei bereitet:

- Sind!

(G 364)

The final - Sind! with its double-meaning is characteristic of the powerful thrust into secular emancipation, the secret goal of all dissociation in Lasker-Schüler. Christianity, therefore, has to be understood as the cultural background to which she referred more naturally and unselfconsciously. The Peter Hille-Buch echoes the New Testament. Hille is called Petrus der Felsen

and also Sankt Peter; the Hille-Buch also proceeds in episodes showing the two friends wandering from one place and situation to another. The episodes called Petrus und ich auf den Bergen are based on the transfiguration of Jesus when he meets Moses and Elijah on a high mountain. Style and tone are biblical, for example, when Tino does not want to go down again: "Und Petrus zeigte auf die hungernde Stadt und betonte: 'Sie wird dich nicht zerreißen um meinetwillen.'² (PS 48). In this case the transfiguration also stands for the death of Petrus, his departure from the secular world: he wanders on from star to star, divided from his friend by thick mists (PS 53); this is the same distance through which the poet's lyrical ego tries to reach the world.

Many of the most significant moments in Lasker-Schüller's poetry echo the New Testament: in one moment of cataclysmic self-suspension she feels the lips of Gabriel burning on her heart (G 37); elsewhere the banished ego is represented by the foolish virgins or their weeping voices waiting "auf der Stufe des dunklen Tors." (G 119). The Catholic world of Westphalia has left something of its cult of Mary in Marie von Nazareth (G 172), Verinnerlicht (G 217), and Der Mönch (G 242). The blue and gold of icons are favourite colour symbols ("Goldene Heiligenbilder/Sind deine Augen", G 194). In a poem to Gottfried Benn Lasker-Schüller writes: "Ich liebe dich und nahe weiss/Und verklärt auf Wallfahrtzehen." (G 219). In Verinnerlicht she sees herself as an icon deprived of its pilgrim or lover: "Ich wollte ich wär still Heiligenbild/Und alles in mir ausgelöscht./Träumerisch färbte Abendrot/Meine Augen wund verweint." Verinnerlichung is an inconceivable concept in the Judaism of the Old Testament. It has to be remembered that the Old Testament as we know it is translated by Christians and is therefore thoroughly Christianised in its language. The words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth", for example, in the Authorised Version, are imbued with Christian overtones.¹ Lasker-Schüller's poetry from the couplet-

1. Job, Chapter 20, verse 25, Authorised Version.

phase on and in her late poetry is imbued with such overtones. Words like Odem, from the German Bible, recur in an atmosphere saturated with mystical feeling: "Mein Odem schwebt über Gottes Fluss" (G 350). It is difficult to read these words without thinking of the River Jordan in negro spirituals. In the spiritualised overtones one cannot disentangle the influences of Romanticism and mystical pietism. A German friend who read Klein Sterbelied immediately recited a German child's prayer on which it was evidently modelled. I have not been able to identify this prayer again,¹ but no evidence is needed to sense its presence within the expressionistic metamorphosis of the poem:

So still ich bin,
All Blut rinnt hin.

Wie weich umher.
Nichts weiss ich mehr.

Mein Herz noch klein,
Starb leis an Pein.

War blau und fromm!
O Himmel komm.

Ein tiefer Schall -
Nacht überall.

(G 213)

Modern concepts of the soul, the spirit - Geist - and the immortality of the soul, constitutive in Lasker-Schüller, derive from the Christian era; previously the individual had not been conceived in relation to eternity, God had not become a human being. Die Stimme Edens, although its idea is taken from the Old Testament, portrays the soul of God spiralling in and out of human consciousness and into infinity. Eve, addressing herself, says, as she bears her child:

1. A child's prayer beginning: "Mein Herz noch klein/O mach es rein" is cited by Karl Joseph Höltingen. Untersuchungen, op. cit., p 121.

Riesengross

Steigt aus deinem Schoss
Zuerst wie Erfüllung zagend,
Dann sich ungestüm raffend,
Sich selbst schaffend
Gottesseele....

Und sie wächst

Über die Welt hinaus,
Ihren Anfang verlierend,
Über alle Zeit hinaus,
Und zurück um dein Tausendherz,
Ende überragend....

(G 156)

In a late poem called Genesis the poet's quest is for the Holy Ghost of the New Testament: "Mein Geist hat nach dem Heiligen Geist gesucht." (G 326). The spiritualised concept of Geist arose with Christianity and passed from the terminology of scholasticism into German philosophy and popular usage.

Partly in association with such Christianity, archetypal German words and images appear in the poetry. Stiefkönigin, in the poem Heimweh (G 168), brings associations from German folklore: the step-mother of Hänsel and Gretel and the Queen of the Night in The Magic Flute. In Sulamith (G 37) the word Herzeleid is medieval; knights, kings, princes, monks abound in the love-poems, among them Tristan, Giselheer, the grail-prince. The poems to Senna Hoy, despite his easternised name, begin with mock-ballads in "medieval" manner: "Trotzendes Gold seine Stirn war,/Süsser Todstrahl sein Haar,/Seine Lippen blühten am Altar." (G 177). Most of the love-poems of the couplet-phase are addressed to German men, many are drenched in gold and blond ("Immer schüttelst du Gold über mich" - G 199), symbols of erotic entrancement, and, at the same time, the nostalgic mirror of a nordic world. In the letter-novel Mein Herz Lasker-Schüler writes as an Islamic Arab betraying her people with her love for Tristan:

Ich habe an Tristan geschrieben: Süßer Tristan, nachts
versammeln sich alle meine Vorfahren in meinem Zelt,
Kalifen und Derwische und Paschas in hohen Turbanen.
Und auch ein Häuptling, der mir das Tanzen beibrachte
über die Leiber der Ungläubigen, droht mir nun mit
Allahs Zorn. Tristan, du bist ein Ungläubiger, aber
ich liebe dich, Tristan, und mit dem Golde deiner
Locken blende ich das Auge des Gesetzes im Koran. (PS 350f)

The relationship with Tristan represents that with Germany: the poet withdraws into an utterly strange and antagonistic identity - as though she were an Islamic Arab - secretly in order to awaken the love of the Germans. Similarly the hieroglyphic enigma withdraws in order to be re-absorbed into German, transforming it and being transformed by it, until both are quite absorbed by one another. The eye of the law in the Koran is another image for the eye of the hieroglyphic ego at the summit of time. Lasker-Schüller allows this eye to be 'blinded' by her love for Tristan: at the height of her withdrawal and antagonism, when she has reached the furthest point meinwärts, when the hieroglyphic ego is most sharply focussed in the couplet-phase, she both penetrates the German language and cedes to it. All the mixed identities, often illogically joined and juxtaposed to one another, gravitate to this point.

An understanding of this evolution of Lasker-Schüller's poetry makes some sense of her often seemingly indiscriminate and inappropriate combinations. Sometimes the sheer articulate power or beauty of poems makes one forget these; at other times they serve as the most essential means of articulation; at all times there is a deeper logic behind their illogic. The title Sulamith, for example, refers to the Song of Solomon, whereas it is the angel Gabriel who figures in the poem itself:

Sulamith

O, ich lernte an deinem süßem Munde
Zuviel der Seligkeiten kennen!
Schon fühl ich die Lippen Gabriels
Auf meinem Herzen brennen....
Und die Nachtwolke trinkt
Meinen tiefen Zederntraum.

O, wie dein Leben mir winkt!
Und ich vergehe
Mit blühendem Herzeleid
Und verwehe im Weltraum,
In Zeit,
In Ewigkeit,
Und meine Seele verglüht in den Abendfarben
Jerusalems.

(G 310)

The rhythm of this poem moves with such intensity from the burning kiss of Gabriel into its final self-suspending cadence, its whole idea is so compellingly articulated, that objections to historically dissonant mixed metaphors lose their force and the mixed metaphors themselves touch on the deepest significance of Lasker-Schüller's poetry. The enormous distance between geographical regions and historical eras stands for the devastating distance that divides people from themselves in the modern world, the empirical ego from its essential (hieroglyphic) self. Even the Romantic-Christian immortality of this self is relinquished ("ich vergehe...verwehe...meine Seele verglüht...") and it is in the risk of such utter self-suspension that the beckoning life of the lover - one could say, of the other person - is so devastating. Only by giving herself up can the poet hope to reach other people, while the very gesture risks annihilation. This realisation reflects precisely the blind self-interest of a world that buries humanity out of sight and threatens to extinguish it altogether. In Sulamith it is erotic love and nearness that open up the immense distances of the poem so that the divided selves reach almost through aeons for one another. This is the feeling conveyed by the representations of Sulamith standing in one isolated word outside the poem itself, and by the lover's kiss in which the poet feels the lips of Gabriel. Nearness and distance are continually absorbed into one another, also in the night-cloud drinking the dream of cedars. Sulamith belongs to the Old Testament if she is speaking the poem then her experience is so intense that she already feels the shattering experience of love and desolation

brought into the world by the angel Gabriel. These associations arise spontaneously in Lasker-Schüler; they need, therefore, to be interpreted within the terms of her poetry itself; pedantic investigations into the identity of Gabriel could only intervene between reader and poet.

In Mein Volk the metaphor of split identities and distances, of the ego and its community are more indissolubly joined in a unified conception, though one hesitates to use a term like 'unified conception' for one of such passionate self-surrender and disintegration:

Mein Volk

Der Fels wird morsch,
Dem ich entspringe
Und meine Gotteslieder singe...
Jäh stürz ich vom Weg
Und riesele ganz in mir
Fernab, allein über Klagegestein
Dem Meer zu.

Hab mich so abgeströmt
Von meines Blutes
Mostvergorenheit.
Und immer, immer noch der Widerhall
In mir,
Wenn schauerlich gen Ost
Das morsche Felsgebein,
Mein Volk,
Zu Gott schreit. (G 292)

Here the juxtaposed domains are quite fused into one another even insofar as the conception is a broken one. The ego is shown breaking out of the community and hearing the echo of its distant cry.

All the Eastern, Germanic and other dimensions tend to dissolve and leave an enigmatic residue culled out of German words and sounds. Few of the actually foreign words with their

tendency to metamorphosise into German words like Niemandwer (G 204) or into the enigmatic couplet remain; these remain as articulate ornaments, closely associated with the German words as half- or unabsorbed foreign particles, eliciting an oblique dimension in the language. Apart from Hieroglyph, Sphinx and Skarabäus, Pharaoh is one of the more suggestive of such words, most particularly when it appears in Heimweh, one of the most evocative poems of mixed identity, in the fourth verse: "Immer muss ich an die Pharaonenwälder denken/Und Küsse die Bilder meiner Sterne." (G 168). The German word Wald has a flavour and associations of its own and retains the romantic overtones of darkened spirituality and withdrawal into the enigmatic being of nature. Pharaonenwälder would be a group of palm trees; if the nomadic Eastern tribe in Mein Volk is the alter-ego of the German people, then these palm-forests are like the distant hieroglyphic transpositions of the German Wald. The foreign and the German word are completely absorbed into one another and associated with the archetypal images of German poetry, Stern and Bild. In the composite image, Pharaoh, reaching through its adverbial ending -onen, absorbs the Wälder into itself and an oblique dimension is derived from the compound. This concept, again, has a suggestiveness of its own, and acquires a distinctive meaning, so that neither Pharaoh nor Wälder can be geographically located or literally identified any longer. Lasker-Schüller's language, on the other hand, can be located as that of modern German poetry.

Chapter 6: OVERVIEW

In this the Void inside of Eternity, which if enter'd into
Endures a Night?

William Blake

Ich sage nicht was eine Nacht ist, doch ich habe
an einer tausendmal Stern gesehen im Himmel

Friedrich Nietzsche

PART 2: THE EVOLUTION OF IDENTITIES

It is a sad irony that the achievement of Peter Hill, giving us a glimpse into the mind of a man who has survived primarily on the margins of literature, is in the British Museum one is given an old-fashioned leather edition of his collected works. The binding and certain script was once almost disappearing in appearance. The London library only has a copy because of the order of Herzogliche und Kurfürstliche Bibliothek issued by the Grand Duke Peter of Hesse in 1957. Perhaps it is not so surprising - that the very world whose existence is suspected in Hill's poetic spaces should in turn obliterate him. And then there is also the fact that speculative rationalistic systems are far now into every aspect of life that we really have to go to museums and libraries, to paintings and books, for the spontaneity and allusion - an unworldly experience of things - lost by the world outside. Heiner Schiller's insistence on a spontaneous experience outside "literature", already afflicted with a demonic sense of estrangement, as long as we remain contemplative withdrawal from hopelessly manipulated spontaneity above seems capable of revealing some of the last humanity. It may seem inappropriate after all that Hill's approach, however much it is regarded as chaotic, like the book lying out of dusty drawers in heaven is one of Heiner Schiller's last pages (G 30). One can see, however, in Hill's last few paragraphs one final dark landscape, wide open, as unbounded as the sky above.

1. Peter Hill, Geistliche Kunst, Berlin, 1910.

Chapter 6: OVERFLOW

Is this the Void Outside of Existence, which if enter'd into
Becomes a Womb?

William Blake

Ich sage euch: man muss noch Chaos in sich haben,
um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können.

Friedrich Nietzsche

It is a sad irony that the achievement of Peter Hille, striving to break out of formal literature, now survives primarily on the shelves of libraries. In the British Museum one is given an old-fashioned looking edition of his collected works; the binding and Gothic script now seem almost Biedermeier in appearance.¹ The London Library only has a slender volume in the series of Verschollene und Vergessene issued by the Franz Steiner Verlag of Wiesbaden in 1957. Perhaps it is not so surprising - that the very world whose existence is suspended in Hille's poetic cosmos should in turn obliterate him. And then there is also the fact that manipulative rationalisation extends so far now into every aspect of life that one really has to go to museums and libraries, to paintings and books, for the spontaneity and aliveness - an unfolding experience of things - lost by the world outside. Lasker-Schüller's insistence on a spontaneous experience outside 'literature', already afflicted with a demonic sense of entrapment, no longer seems tenable: contemplative withdrawal from hopelessly manipulated spontaneity alone seems capable now of regaining some of the lost immediacy. It may not be inappropriate after all that Hille's suspended universe should be concealed on shelves, like the moons rising out of dusty drawers in heaven in one of Lasker-Schüller's late poems (G 361). Once the obstacles to Hille have been penetrated one finds open landscapes, wide seas, an unbounded universe of still extraordinary freshness

1. Peter Hille, Gesammelte Werke, Berlin, 1916.

and intensity. In its very unboundedness this universe seems to relinquish its hold on posthumous fame. Together with all self-assertive security, a secure position among the 'immortals' is given up; where Lasker-Schüller struggled in her spell-bound, raging sphinx with fetishised genius, something in Hille's tone and style, in his poem Cosmos for example, allows it to lapse.¹

Und ich finde nicht Ruh
In allen den wandernden Wogen
Des auseinander
Geratenen Meeres.²

When Lasker-Schüller expresses this sense of a simultaneously dispersed and liberated being in Hinter Bäumen berg ich mich, her impulsiveness has been caught up in the determinations of her couplet-phase and she registers a greater sense of entanglement within conflicting realities; partly, because the lover and the society he represents are a crucial medium for her:

Mein Herz liegt bloss,
Mein rot Fahrzeug
Pocht grausig.
Bin immer auf See
Und lande nicht mehr. (G 211)

In both poets humour always underlies the imaginative conceptions. The lines from Hille's Cosmos contrast with Lasker-Schüller's restless search for a sharper focus, for a speck in the blindness: "Und ein Punkt wird mein Tanz/In der Blindnis." (G 146). "Wir sind von der Schlange noch nicht ausgetragen/Und finden das Ziel nicht in ihrem dunklen Bewegen", she writes in Das Geheimnis (G 129); all her poetry is motivated by this search; entering her couplet-phase, she starts the poem called Ankunft with the words: "Ich bin am Ziel meines Herzens angelangt." (G 154). Hille only holds himself enough to regain

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1. i.e. fetishised art and genius as categories resisted by Hille and Lasker-Schüller. See Introduction and first chapter. Art as an end in itself is seen here as a fetish. G. Benn thinks such art might be a Totentier (See p.232)
 2. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p. 34f.

the impetus for letting himself go:

Draussen suchen, was man nicht in sich findet.
Feierlich suchen, nur um sich halt zu geben,
Innerlich weiter zu suchen in den weichend, neckischen Kräften
Und die doch tückisch aufbauen, wo uns die Geduld ausgeht.

He characterises himself - or his aesthetic ego - in this poem, Myrrdhn mit der Wünschelrute,¹ as a living Irrweg wanting to cast a flowing stream off his material being: "Rauher Riese, du Fels./Wirf deinen rieselnden Quell." This self-addressing ego, resisting social incarceration, is echoed in Lasker-Schüler's Die Stimme Edens: "Eva, kehre um vor der letzten Hecke noch!/Wirf nicht Schatten mit dir,/Blühe aus, Verführerin." (G 137). The lyrical ego as stream flowing off a rock appears in Mein Volk, suffering a much more violent impact of opposing and interdependent realities:

Jäh stürz ich vom Weg
Und riesele ganz in mir
Fernab, allein über Klagegestein
Dem Meer zu. (G 292)

Hille's example, both as a person and poet, is responsible for the impression Lasker-Schüler's poetry gives of seeming to come from nowhere within the tradition of German poetry. This impression is then fortified by Hille's lapse into historical oblivion. Following her impulse toward a sharper focus Lasker-Schüler orientalised the inward domain in such a way that she seems to emerge from another world altogether, in this way misleading some admirers, not excluding the poet herself in later years, into the myth of Hebrew origins and of a Hebrew vocation. What really happens is that the poet's empirical (bourgeois) ego has given itself up in Hille's suspended cosmos and returns, metamorphosised, as hieroglyphic non-ego. While it would be unjust to consider Hille simply as a Wegbereiter - his poetry has its own independent significance - Lasker-Schüler's entire

1. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 45.

aesthetic originates in him; many of her convictions and motifs and even of her most characteristic formulations.

The influence of Hille in Lasker-Schüller's early poetry is both clearly discernible and utterly suspended and metamorphosed. Most important for Lasker-Schüller was the radical step into an imaginative dimension outside repressive socialisation, the overflow of lyricism derived by Hille himself from the Sturm und Drang movement, from the free rhythms of Klopstock, Goethe and Nietzsche, breaking through all restrictions and uprooting the heart of the world ("Wonne entwurzelt das Herz der Welt"):

Weisse Flammen taumeln,
Tanzen den jauchzenden Feuerreigen
Glühender Welt.
Leuchtende Gewitter blühen,
Klaräugige Stürme, Wolkenjäger
Wischen den sprühenden Schweiss
Von hämmernder Stirn.
Und wilder Segen ist,
Himmeltaumelnde Trunkenheit,
Zausen starker Neckerei.
Dankbar blüht da Lächeln aus tauig tummelndem Grunde.
Safttollende Kelche strotzend frischer Feuer bluten.
Weiss geschürzte Reigen,
Drängend leuchtende Gewitter
Drücken ihrer schwellenden Früchte
Berauschend erquickenden Saft
Auf diese weiss geschürzten selig auf -
Schmachtenden Reigen,
Warme Wolken gleiten glückleuchtend spazieren.
Umtaumelnd Mutwill, fromm die Erde, fürchtende Freude.
Wie sie ausbricht, die jubelstrotzende
Leidenschaft zusammenziehender Höhen.
Nachtigallenstürme aus wonnewankenden Wäldern.
Weichstark Dringen klingender Seele -
Jubelnd stirbt sich's am Lied.¹

1. Ibid., p 40: Pfingstgewitter.

The term 'subjective', as it is popularly used, is misapplied to this poetry, since it knows how to distance itself from the objective world and is capable of multiplied distinctions and combinations extending the range of articulation between subject and object. The nature-dominating subject surrenders its control not in order to abdicate but to release a richer being from within itself: an emergent objectivity. In Hille's Pfingstgewitter this emergent reality is reflected in the spring-heralding conflagration of an April storm. A storm is a natural phenomenon independent of the conceptually moulded perceptions man imposes on nature. At the same time Hille's storm is everything but a merely natural phenomenon: it is completely saturated with the rationality it transcends, reshaping this in its own freer impulses. There is a feeling therefore of consciousness reborn out of nature and of nature born into consciousness.

Hille's poetry contains one of the most exhilarating moments of self-discovery outside prevailing norms during the period of drastic schism expressed in Neo-Romanticism and Expressionism. This exhilaration more than anything awakened Lasker-Schüler's lyrical genius. More than Hille, however, she had a strong sense of the obstacles to lyrical expansiveness. It was impossible enough for a poet of this period not to register the manipulative stranglehold of the inimical world - Lasker-Schüler refers in Die Stimme Edens to stifled skies ("Himmel ersticken, die sich nach Sternen bücken" (G 157) -: in Hille musical effects, Wagnerian assonances and alliterations tend to turn around somewhat compulsively and repetitively in circles permitting more penetrating flashes of enigmatic illumination here and there. In Lasker-Schüler the opposing domains are more completely absorbed and more penetratingly articulated through one another. The impulse

1. A more thorough study of Hille's poetry would probably alter one's appreciation of it.

towards expansive lyricism is blocked from the start and leaves only a few remnants, visibly modifying their own principle. Der letzte Stern (G 146) is one of these; in it the surge of Hille's streaming cosmos draws back into itself; its richness is denied ("Und doch küsste nie das frische Auftagen, / Nicht das jubelnde Blühen eines Morgen mich"); the awakening lyrical ego has a sense of hollowness; this is conveyed in the poem as a whole by a transposition of the cosmic landscape into the indeterminate darkness of the womb - there is something in the imagery like the release of an orgasm, the last star in this inverted universe being the seed of a new consciousness -; the vagueness that leaves the whole conception unspecifically suspended between womb and open cosmos (itself a dark womb with stars hurtling through blindness) and between orgasm and a landscape of torrential waters gives the poem its precise significance - the feeling of a tentative rebirth, urged through an inner void:

Der letzte Stern

Mein silbernes Blicken rieselt durch die Leere,
Nie ahnte ich, dass das Leben hohl sei.

Auf meinem leichtesten Strahl

Gleite ich wie über Gewebe von Luft

Die Zeit rundauf, kugelab,

Unermüdlicher tanzte nie der Tanz.

Schlangenkühl schnellt der Atem der Winde,

Säulen aus blassen Ringen sich auf

Und zerfallen wieder.

Was soll das klanglose Luftgelüste,

Dieses Schwanken unter mir,

Wenn ich über der Lende der Zeit mich drehe.

Eine sanfte Farbe ist mein Bewegen

Und doch küsste nie das frische Auftagen,

Nicht das jubelnde Blühen eines Morgen mich.

Es naht der siebente Tag -

Und noch ist das Ende nicht erschaffen.

Tropfen an Tropfen erlöschen

Und reiben sich wieder,

In den Tiefen taumeln die Wasser
Und drängen hin und stürzen erdenab.
Wilde, schimmernde Rauscharme
Schäumen auf und verlieren sich,
Und wie alles drängt und sich engt
Ins letzte Bewegen.
Kürzer atmet die Zeit
Im Schoss der Zeitlosen.
Hohle Lüfte schleichen
Und erreichen das Ende nicht,
Und ein Punkt wird mein Tanz
In der Blindnis.

As always in Lasker-Schüler, the flight into ahistorical boundlessness is inverted by the urge to strive back from this darkness into history again ("Kürzer atmet die Zeit/Im Schoss der Zeitlosen"). Inwardness in her is really a kind of outwardness: it does not hold itself preciously like Rilke's exquisite Roseninnere¹ in a dream in a room in the summer; rather, the withdrawal from repressive social determinations into the self goes so far that it falls entirely out of the sphere of self-contained personality or self-contained being into a cosmic womb of emptiness and desolation, as in the last lines of the poem associated with the death of the poet's mother:

So nackt war nie mein Leben,
So in die Zeit gegeben,
Als ob ich abgeblüht
Hinter des Tages Ende
Zwischen weiten Nächten stände,
Alleine.

From this position outside time something like a shadowy remnant of ego-feeling turns toward a re-awakened time; in Der letzte Stern the last star becomes a speck in the blindness.

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, Gesammelte Gedichte, Frankfurt, 1962, p 378.

This non-ego can never really open its eyes except in an entirely reborn world. But the return from boundlessness into a refocussed distinctiveness distinguishes Lasker-Schüler from Hille. Der Letzte Stern differs most strikingly from Hille's Pfingstgewitter in the drastic simplification of means; the superabundance of word-combinations, alogical associations, assonances and alliterations is reduced and more subtly blended into the logic whose perspectives the poet wishes to release. In the first lines;

Mein silbernes Blicken rieselt durch die Leere,
Nie ahnte ich, dass das Leben hohl sei,

the s, z, and r-sounds run like a fine thread through the play of contrasting consonants; the succession of i's and e's and their combinations is continually varied, especially in the final cadence on 'Leere'; in the next line, then, the i- and e-sounds culminate in the emphasis of nie, while this introduces a variation of sound patterns, less echoing, except insofar as there is a dull echo in hohl. Karl Kraus pointed out (in his discussion of Ein alter Tibetteppich) how Lasker-Schüler can make words like this rhyme precisely by not rhyming.¹ Word-combinations are relatively few: rundauf, kugelab, schlangenkühl, erdenab, Rauscharme, and are more inconspicuously balanced within the flow of words out of which they arise.

Hille's poem, Brautseele, seems to touch precisely on the awakening being of Lasker-Schüler's poetry, the suspended being of her poetic ego:

So träume ich vom eigenen Blute
Und bin so wach
Von mir.
So erschrocken
Wie man wohl aufhorcht
Im flüsternden Herzen der Nacht.

1. See DD 570.

Wie Sterne die nicht schlafen können,
So stehn meine Augen...¹

As in Lasker-Schüler one feels the schism of a divided reality going through these lines, the sudden, surprised awareness of an awakening outside the empirical domain. Hille herself made the comment that the world broke apart for Lasker-Schüler.² The dissociated association of stars and eyes; nearly all the other words too belong to her vocabulary, particularly Herz, Nacht, Blut, flüstern. "Täubchen das in seinem eignen Blute schwimmt" is the refrain of one of her poems; Dehmel wrote the line as a tribute and it was taken by Lasker-Schüler as a profound insight into her nature.³ This blood-imagery recurs frequently, as for example, in the opening lines of Klein Sterbelied: "So still ich bin./All Blut rinnt hin." (G 213). Whispering is one of the most characteristic attitudes for the most suspended couplet-phase. The poet refers to it in one of her poetic letters in Mein Herz: "Herwarth, Du musst auch flüstern lernen, man hört das Echo der Welt ganz deutlich." (PS 338). Whispering is closely related to listening, as in the Hille poem; in Der Letzte Lasker-Schüler shows herself listening for the world's echo: "Ich lehne am geschlossenen Lid der Nacht/Und horche in die Ruhe." (G 144). Throughout Hille's poems there are countless correspondences of this kind. In Mein Drama by Lasker-Schüler the poetic self-discovery of Hille's lines cited above is echoed in expressionistic turbulence, registering, again, a much more violent impact of opposing realities:

Es weint ein bleicher Engel leis in mir versteckt,
Ich glaube tief in meiner Seele;
Er fürchtet sich vor mir.

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1. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 22.
 2. Hille, DD 565.
 3. The poem was dedicated to Dehmel (G 390) and is evidently a response to the citation.

Im wilden Wetter sah ich mein Gesicht!
Ich weiss nicht wo, vielleicht im dunklen Blitz,
Mein Auge stand wie Winternacht im Antlitz,
Nie sah ich grimmigeres Leid. (G 95)

Some of Hille's poems seem to have served, probably unconsciously, as models for his friend. His Waldesstimme, for example:

Wenn deine grüngoldenen Augen funkeln,
Wald, du moosiger Träumer,
Wie so versonnen deine Gedanken dunkeln,
Saftstrotzender Tagesversäumer,
Einsiedel, schwer von Leben!

Über der Wipfel Hin- und Wiederschweben:
Wie's Atem holt

und näher kommt
und braust,

Und weiter zieht

und stille wird
und saust!

Über der Wipfel Hin- und Wiederschweben,
Hochoben steht ein ernster Ton,

Dem lauschten tausend Jahre schon

Und werden tausend Jahre lauschen.

Und immer dieses starke, donnerdunkle Rauschen.¹

Apart from the refrain in the middle section adopted by Lasker-Schüler in various poems (Versöhnung, G 155), the musical effect of fluctuating images in the spaced triplets of the second verse was treated by her with greater subtlety in at least two poems:

1. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 36.

Kühle

In den weissen Blüten
Der hellen Rosen
Möchte ich verfluten.

Doch auf den Teichen
Warten die starren, seelenlosen Wasserrosen
Meiner Sehnsucht Kühle zu reichen. (G 91)

Von Weit

Dein Herz ist wie die Nacht so hell,
Ich kann es sehn
- Du denkst an mich - es bleiben alle Sterne stehn.

Und wie der Mond von Gold dein Leib
Dahin so schnell
Von weit er scheint. (G 159)

Having followed Hille's impulse to suspend metrical schemes in free rhythms - to an even more radical degree - it was characteristic of Lasker-Schüler then to allow succinct forms to crystallize of their own accord. Thus in the first poem, Kühle, the impulse to stream away in what might have been a long poem is restrained and held back by the frozen imagery in the next verse, and the poem breaks into two overlapping but distinct halves. In Von Weit the image of stars standing still restrains the fluctu-

ating imagery.¹ Another feature taken over from Hille is the combination of free rhythms with a rhapsodic employment of rhymes. ~~The regular pattern of rhymes in Kühle is rare and probably accidental; it falls away in Von Weit.~~

A small poem of Lasker-Schüler called Mein Lied could have been written as a counterpart to Hille's Waldesstimme:

1. Here one senses the magnetic attraction to the poet's couplet-phase, the couplets being the stationary moments in her fluctuating universe. This becomes more clear in my discussion of the genesis of her forms. (Chapter 8)

Schlafend fällt das nächtliche Laub,
O, du stiller dunkelster Wald....
Kommt das Licht mit dem Himmel.
Wie soll ich wach werden?
Überall wo ich gehe,
Rauscht ein dunkler Wald;
Und bin doch dein spielender Herzschem, Erde,
Denn mein Herz murmelt das Lied
Moosalter Bäche der Wälder.

(G 284)

The Sausen and Brausen of Hille's poem fall away as though Lasker-Schüler were too deeply buried in the forest and felt only a dark internal Rauschen; the sense of heaviness elaborated by Hille is composed into the feeling of the poem. Similarly, there is no high tone above the forest ("Hochoben steht ein ernster Ton"); instead the question, "Wie soll ich wach werden?" the dark rustling of the forest and the murmuring streams elicit a listening, attentive response in the reader. Hille's lines about the daylight-shunning darkness of the forest ("Wie so versonnen deine Gedanken dunkeln,/Saftstrotzender Tagesversäumer") correspond to a much simpler statement in Lasker-Schüler: "Kommt das Licht mit dem Himmel,/Wie soll ich wach werden." The vitalism of saftstrotzend is subtly buried in the murmuring stream and its "spielender Herzschem." Hille's repeated evocation of thousands of years is replaced by the one word moosalt, his line, "Und immer dieses starke, donnerdunkle Rauschen", again, by a simpler statement, "Überall wo ich gehe,/Rauscht ein dunkler Wald." The adverbial expressions überall and immer with their indeterminate, suspended feeling were derived by Lasker-Schüler from Hille. (Other examples: Hille in Brautseele:¹ "Und wohlilig will es werden/Nun überall in der sprossenden Erden./Wie wir uns regen,/Da ist immer ein leises, süßes Bewegen,/Da ist die Quelle ein rieselnder Spiegel"; Lasker-Schüler in Die Stimme Edens: "Überall das taube

1. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 23. The words are indeed derived from Hille and not from general usage. They are favourite words of both poets and idiosyncratic ones.

Getöse" (G 157), and in Mein Liebeslied: "Immer das schlängelnde Geriesel/Auf meiner Haut" (G 142). Gottfried Benn was later to detach such adverbs and articulate them independently, in the line "niemals und immer" in Palau¹ (p 62) and in his poem about Schumann's Träumerei: "noch heute sendet sie Streifen/aus Einst und Immer und Nie",² (p 463) transforming them, in this case, into nouns.

The two forest-poems by Hille and Lasker-Schüler differ also in their personification of nature: in Hille it is a projected personification; in Lasker-Schüler forest and lyrical ego are much more closely associated. The ich and du of the poem are completely blended into one another. Something dark and shadowy intervenes between the ego and its consciousness, the darkness and somnolence of the forest itself, evoked with indefinable suggestiveness in the alliteration and imagery of the first lines:

Schlafend fällt das nächtliche Laub,
O, du stiller dunkelster Wald....

As always, suspended and tentatively awakening consciousness are locked into one another. The ego, striving to awaken, hears a blurred language in the dark rustling of the forest. The spell of darkness hanging over Licht and "dein spielender Herzschem" and the alliterative and rhythmical suggestion of running water introduce a luminosity, all the more intense for being shrouded. Something like light is reflected in the brightness of vowels, in the assonance of e's and modified a's in the last verse:

Und bin doch dein spielender Herzschem, Erde,
Denn mein Herz murmelt das Lied
Moosalter Bäche der Wälder.

This adds to the feeling of a secretive language transposed out of the every-day world and awakening out of the darkest heart of nature.

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1. Benn, Gedichte, op. cit.
 2. Benn, Gedichte, op. cit.

Bright vowels mingle with the sombre sounds of murmelt and Moos - and the hieroglyphic ego peers out of the word Schelm, released from the heart to which it is joined by the (explosive) z (ts). The sly charm of these lines is a variation on the opening lines of Hille's poem:

Wenn deine grüngoldenen Augen funkeln,
Wald, du moosiger Träumer,
Wie so versonnen deine Gedanken dunkeln...

Together with this feeling for nature - quite detached from any rustic idyll and speaking through modernist individuality - a feeling that pervades Lasker-Schüller's language - she inherited from Hille her sense of a transcendent consciousness in God. God is associated with an overflow of consciousness: "So viel Gott strömt über" (G 291): in his being the hieroglyphic ego would be transfigured and the light of day would be truly awakened in the secular world. "Und weckte doch in deinem ewigen Hauche nicht den Tag" she wrote, when disappointed. (G 321). He is the most invisible, incommensurable essence of hieroglyphic being, transposed beyond all denominational allegiances and all narrow, repressive calculations.¹ For both poets, therefore, words from the sphere of religion like fromm and Andacht lose their narrower significance and represent the ardour of dissociation; in Lasker-Schüller, with her eyes always evading her immediate surroundings,² a provocative mystical ecstasy, at odds with a soberly calculating world. Reverence is a form of attentiveness to the secret, hidden essence of things, to a realm from which some other being than that of the prevailing world might emerge. For Hille's Brautseele the feeling flows in pantheistic fervour out of buried expectations: "Fromm atmet in uns eine Andacht,/Und wohlig will es werden/Nun überall in der sprossenden Erden."³ In Ein Lied by Lasker-Schüller the reverence of a 'bride-soul',⁴ originating in Peter Hille, is suspended with the finest sensitivity between the invisible distances of migratory birds and a tentatively re-emergent being, in the moon, in the feeling of a

1. See BII 68.

2. See p. 27.

3. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 23.

4. See p. 91.

nearing dawn and of the suppressed chirping of birds. Love and lyrical poetry belong for Lasker-Schüller to the sphere of religious experience. Weissenberger's entire thesis on her, Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, Zwischen Stein und Stern¹, treats her language as one of mystical mediations; my emphasis is on the secularising mediations. Mein Lied has been chosen, therefore, as an example of transfigured secularity in which the religious element has dissolved:

Hinter meinen Augen stehen Wasser,
Die muss ich alle weinen.

Immer möchte ich auffliegen,
Mit den Zugvögeln fort;

Buntatmen mit den Winden
In der grossen Luft.

O ich bin so traurig----
Das Gesicht im Mond weiss es.

Drum ist viel samtne Andacht
Und nahender Frühmorgen um mich.

Als an deinem steinernen Herzen
Meine Flügel brachen,

Fielen die Amseln wie Trauerrosen
Hoch vom blauen Gebüsch.

Alles verhaltene Gezwitzcher
Will wieder jubeln,

Und ich möchte auffliegen

Mit den Zugvögeln fort. (G 245)

While religion itself is not thematic, it has left a distilled essence, something of Hille's pantheistic enthusiasm, in the feeling of the poem and its Andacht. The restrained and pulsating creaturely being of Gezwitscher is a metamorphosis of the sphinx-head imprisoned in stone in Weltschmerz.²

1. Klaus Weissenberger, Zwischen Stein und Stern, Bern, 1976, p 5ff.
2. The gradual transformation and release of a demonically trapped consciousness - here verhalten - is considered in Chapter 8, Genesis.

In terms of the vacillating nearnesses and distances in Ein Lied, the goal of migratory birds would represent the remotest possible distance. With a characteristic touch of prosaic non-chalance Hille evokes the possible transposition of his ego into this distance in relation to God:

An Gott

Deine Himmel sind mir viel zu süß:
Gib mir, mit freier Brust zu ragen,
Mit dir die Welten zu ertragen,
Wo du bist!¹

Where Hille would reconcile God and self in a sudden volte face, as he does with death and a transposed life in Myrrdhn Todeston ("Dass wir uns dann wieder haben./Und es wird hell und wir sind da"),² the nearness and intimacy of God's utopian being - like that of lovers - remains utterly strange and distant in Lasker-Schüler, in the last lines of O Gott:

Könnte ich einmal Gottes Hand fassen
Oder den Mond an seinen Finger sehn.

O Gott, O Gott, wie weit bin ich von dir! (G 214)

and in the last verse of An Gott:

Ich möchte nah an deinem Herzen lauschen,
Mit deiner fernsten Nähe mich vertauschen,
Wenn goldverklärt in deinem Reich
Aus tausendseligem Licht

Alle die guten und die bösen Brunnen rauschen. (G 171)

The overflow of consciousness in God that cannot be resolved into the calculations of the socialised world is closely associated in both Hille and Lasker-Schüler with the projections of Neo-Romanticism. God himself is seen wearing a moon, like an art nouveau ornament on his finger. Even in moments of most intensive articulation, for example in the projections of Mein stilles Lied, the ego as hieroglyph retains something of the nature of the orna-

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1. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 36.
 2. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 52.

ment in its mediations between God and the world. Adorno, in an essay on Stefan George, interprets aspects of Jugendstil that also found expression in Hille and Lasker-Schüler: "Das neue Schönheitsverlangen...war kein anderes als das des Jugendstils, das nach einer gleichsam Luftwurzeln treibenden, frei vom Subjekt gesetzten, noch die eigene Ohnmacht mitgestaltenden Schönheit. Sie behält im Wesen seltsam unbestimmt etwas vom blinden Fleck."¹ Such poetry was "die des erfundenen Ornaments, einer Unmöglichkeit; in der Nötigung es zu erfinden aber mehr als bloss ornamental, Ausdruck eines ebenso kritischen wie hoffnungslosen Bedürfnisses."

Neo-romantic affinity with art nouveau in Hille and Lasker-Schüler is expressed in the self-generating reality of their poetry, the transposition of experience outside the empirical domain. In both these poets humour is always a reflex, directly or indirectly, of the spirit that knows its own unreality. Hille personifies the free-flowing impulses of poetry as Schelme in Myrddhin und Vivyan:

Ach ihr Schelme!

Ihr träumenden!

Ihr leichten, gewandigen, zierlichen Flammen!

Wie so schelmisch ihr tanzt - Barden auf Kugeln.²

Hille's poetic impulses are called Schelme, perhaps because he knew, as a poet, that they had transgressed the boundary of the 'possible'. Something of this attitude of devious pleasure in airy imaginings was present also in Shelley's The Witch of Atlas.³ Though Hille for the most part preferred the airier tendrils of beauty ("Luftwurzeln treibende Schönheit"), these also crystallise, at times, in their own peculiar way, in more material images of decorative ornamentation. In a poem called Abendröte he sees the sunset as

.....Schmuck goldspielender Brokate,
Des Samtes tiefenweiches Blut,

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1. T.W. Adorno, Noten zur Literatur IV, Frankfurt, 1974, p 58.
 2. Ibid., p 50.
 3. Shelley, Poetical Works, op. cit., p 372.

Gebettet in des Schnees nachtgeflamnte
Flockenzarte Wärme: den hehren Hermelin.

The more essential affinity with Lasker-Schüler has been considered in a more immaterial and 'released' or unbounded type of lyricism. The younger poet did however write some poems like Abendröte in a peculiar blend of concrete and immaterial Neo-Romanticism, which also echoes a Verlainian arcadia:

Zwischen den Gerben
Und Schilfrohrruten
Steigen Schlummer auf aus Farben.

Und von roten Abendlinien
Blicken Marmorwolkenfresken

Und verzückte Arabesken. (Unser Liebeslied G 123)

In design and the applied arts the element of superfluous decoration was expressed and frozen in a material form (for example, in the wrought iron of the Paris Metro entrances belonging to this period). In its very stylisation, 'beauty' seems to express its entrapment in the functionalised world. In Weltschmerz the sphinx-head trapped in stone is a metamorphosis of this motif. The image of intertwining creepers caught in their own stylised gesture is particularly characteristic both of art nouveau and Lasker-Schüler: "Und süsse Schwermutwolken ranken/Sich.... lilaheiss in Liebeszeilen./Unsere Leiber ragen stolz, zwei goldene Säulen,/Über das Abendland, zwei östliche Gedanken." (G 122). This verse from Unser stolzes Lied shows Eastern thoughts as a metamorphosis of the art nouveau ornament. In this sense the Hebräische Balladen have more to do with art nouveau fabrications than with Zionism. Benn and others should not have been so surprised that orthodox Jews did not feel comfortable with the poet's Judaism,¹ in which they must have sensed that something was 'wrong', and would, in this, have been more sensitive than the critics who impose a crass type of Zionism on the poetry. - The image of creepers appears again in David und Jonathan: "In

1. Benn, Essays, op. cit., p 538.

der Bibel stehn wir geschrieben/Buntumschlungen" (G 162), in Senna Hoy: "Auf deinem Grabe blühe ich schon/Mit den Blumen der Schlingpflanzen" (G 189) and in Ein Lied der Liebe: "Um schlanke Säulen schlinge ich mich/Bis sie schwanken." (G 185). An imaginary medievalism - such as had already emerged in Romanticism and in the English Pre-Raphaelites - was one of the characteristic guises of a substitute reality. The names alone of the hero and heroine in Hille's unfinished lyrical drama Myrrhdin und Vivyan - indistinctly situated somewhere between romantic medievalism and the Ossian - evoke the entire art nouveau fiction.¹ Germanic medievalism determines the world of Lasker-Schüler's Peter Hille-Buch and reappears intermittently in her later work after she had switched to Orientalism; in the Hebräische Balladen the fiction is associated with her own distant Hebrew origins. The self-generating fiction is cultivated further in allogical associations, colour-symbolism and neologisms, all of these overlapping: in Der letzte Stern, for example, "eine sanfte Farbe ist mein Bewegen" (G 146); in Giselheer dem Heiden an abstract person is characterised as Niemandwer and star is treated as a colour: "Sieh meine Farben,/Schwarz und Stern." (G 204). A Tibetan carpet is transformed by inversion into a world of its own, Teppichtibet. The poem, Ein alter Tibetteppich, is one of the most literal illustrations of the invented ornament, here the carpet into which the whole world of two lovers is woven. A peculiar logic places the lovers both inside and outside the carpet, in this way conveying the ambivalent nature of its transcendent dimension, the conflicting impulse of the ornament to crystallise self-sufficiently and to reach out of itself:

Deine Seele, die die meine liebet,
Ist verwirkt mit ihr im Teppichtibet.

Strahl in Strahl, verliebte Farben,
Sterne, die sich himmelang umwarben.

1. Hille, Auswahl, op. cit., p 37.

Unsere Flüsse ruhen auf der Kostbarkeit,
Maschentausendabertausendweit.

Süsser Lamasohn auf Moschuspflanzenthron,
Wie lange küsst dein Mund den meinen wohl
Und Wang die Wange buntgeknöpfte Zeiten schon? (G 164)

This is one of several outstanding poems leading into the couplet-phase; in this phase itself the poet has, as it were, entered completely into the world of Teppichtibet: the couplets are spread out in space like the stitches in the adjectival expression maschentausendabertausendweit. The technique of parataxis dissociates them from the norms of logical synthesis and the world to which they belong. Subsuming logic is supplanted by imagistic syntheses contracting into themselves; the magnetic attraction of such dissociating syntheses is so great in Ein alter Tibetteppich that one feels a powerful impulse to join all words together into one word; if one has followed the dialectic of Lasker-Schüller's poetry as a whole the individual imagistic couplets begin to resemble single words or word-complexes with separating spaces instead of hyphens, spaces, like those between the verses themselves, that still do maintain a certain logical tension. While the couplets are crystallisations of 'the ornament' they are suspended, in contradistinction to real ornaments, in a kind of post-existence:

LEISE SAGEN

Du nahmst dir alle Sterne
Über meinem Herzen.

Meine Gedanken kräuseln sich,
Ich muss tanzen.

Immer tust du das was mich aufschauen lässt,
Mein Leben zu müden.

Ich kann den Abend nicht mehr
Über die Hecken tragen.

Im Spiegel der Bäche
Finde ich mein Bild nicht mehr.

Dem Erzengel hast du
Die schwebenden Augen gestohlen;

Aber ich nasche vom Seim
Ihrer Bläue.

Mein Herz geht langsam unter
Ich weiss nicht wo -

Vielleicht in deiner Hand.

Überall greift sie an mein Gewebe. (G 163)

Here material and immaterial being are suspended in one another and in the couplets or crinkled thoughts; what had been carpet in Ein alter Tibetteppich is a much more intangible Gewebe. Few poets provide a better illustration of one of the traits Adorno sees in the art nouveau ideal of beauty: "Sie behält im Wesen seltsam unbestimmt etwas vom blinden Fleck."¹ The distinctively articulated blur in consciousness is registered also in Klein Sterbelied, in the lines, "Wie weich umher./Nichts weiss ich mehr," and "Ein tiefer Schall -/Nacht Überall." (G 213). The dislocation is registered as a shock of which the entire couplet-phase is really a residue. In Die Stimme Edens, when Eve is portrayed in a state of Angst because of the sense that her transcendent dimension of consciousness is being undermined and is about to lose itself to the secular world, this world itself is only represented in the words "Überall das taube Getöse", and in the word Geschehn in these lines: "Singe, singe, horch den Rauscheton/Spielt die Nacht und weiss nichts vom Geschehn." (G 157). Überall and immer recur in Leise sagen as a favourite blurring device; night erases the daylight world and the Rauscheton, also derived from Romanticism, is an onomatopoeic representation of the blur in consciousness.

1. See p.100

In another poem the world is responsible for its own blindness: "Die Welt ist taub,/ Die Welt ist blind." (G 364). One of Lasker-Schüler's couplets conveys this sense of the world's blindness with the utmost clarity and distinctiveness, with something of Hölderlin's heilige Nüchternheit, outdoing the inimical world itself in coolness and sobriety:

Und mag den kühlen Tag nicht,
Der hat ein Glasauge. (Giselheer dem Heiden, G 204)

In the simplification of her idiom Lasker-Schüler was to some extent following the tendencies of constructivism. The first edition of Mein Herz was dedicated in 1912 to Adolf Loos whom she admired both as a friend and as an architect. Gesichte, Essays und andere Geschichten of 1913 contained a portrait of Loos (PS 234) and somewhat ambivalent praise of his hostility to decorative tendencies. He is always called "der Gorilla" by the poet: "...ein affenböser Künstler, reisst er dem die Perücke von dem Kopf ..." Apart from the fact that the gorilla does not fit so easily into the atmosphere of functionalised architecture, his soul in Loos, as perceived by Lasker-Schüler, develops much more neo-romantic traits: "Senkt Loos den Kopf, neigen sich seinem Ohr die Lippen zu; o, wie sanft er die Lider hängen lässt - man hat ihn dann lieb, die Lotosseele unter den Gorillen." The poet admires his attack on over-ornate architecture and oppressively ornate interiors: "Ein handgreiflicher Philosoph ist er, dem die Verschnörkelung der Architektur ein Greuel, ein verwirrtes Knäuel ist, den er rücksichtslos löst ... Wie viele sitzen und schwitzen in fremden vier Häuten, denn die Wände unseres Gemaches sollen unser passendstes Kleid sein, sie sollen die Schrift unseres Atems tragen." Lasker-Schüler herself simplified her idiom so that it would bear the inscriptions of her breathing soul.¹ This touches on the linear mode favoured by Blake and a feature both of Jugendstil and Lasker-Schüler's own drawings.²

1. See p. 199 f.

2. See Sämtliche Gedichte, op. cit., for example.

The "breathing" script of her poetry stems from this linear approach, which, as in Blake, is more stylised in her drawings than in her poetry.

Something of the art nouveau ornament is retained through all expressionistic turbulence and later simplifications; rather than being eliminated, the ornament is absorbed into the process of articulation. Ein alter Tibetteppich and Leise sagen - have been cited as examples. In Leise sagen - crinkled thoughts are an articulation of the ornament, not unlike the "verwirrtes Knäuel" opposed by Adolf Loos; the poet has lost her stars and her eyes to her lover. Stars and eyes are dislocated ornaments. In Heimweh (G 168) the eyes of birds in the poet's stultified phantasy-world are corals, blind ornaments, and have been removed ('ausgestochen'). In one of the most humorous treatments of this motif the articulation of the ornament is portrayed in Das Lied des Spielprinzen. The poet sees herself being eaten up by her lover until she wakes one morning to find only her knees remaining as scarabs for an emperor's ring:

Und in deines Kinnes Grube
Bau ich mir ein Raubnest -
Bis - du mich aufgefressen hast.

Find dann einmal morgens
Nur noch meine Kniee,
Zwei gelbe Skarabäen für eines Kaisers Ring. (G 209)

Laconic simplification is an essentially humorous undertaking, not aimed at denying the ornament, but at bringing it into a revealing enigmatic focus. In this too the Lasker-Schüler imagery fluctuates between "kalte Totenaugen" and "Saphiraugen" (G 143), shadowy Ich-Dichtung in the couplet-phase and more substantially ornamental identifications in the poems to friends and the Hebräische Balladen. In all this the poet went

far beyond Peter Hille, who died in 1903; but every word seems to have grown out of her friend's poetic universe and to have been written in a way that would have delighted and moved him.

Es ist dort, im warmen Abendlicht
die Sonne, die über die Welt
des Lichts.

Karl Peter

1. The Hourglass Self

Whereas the poetic self-life had been projected in the Peter Hille-Buch into an early Romantic and medieval phantasy-world (taken over from Hille and Neo-Romanticism) this is transposed in the prose-book Die Nächte der Frau von Zandag (1907) to the Orient and expressionistically magnified. The expressionistic feeling is more powerful still in the prose-epic of Der Prinz von Babylon, although this was published later, it may well have been written at the same time as the earlier book. This is suggested by the style which had been abandoned in other works by the time Der Prinz von Babylon was published; also because the poet retained an Arab identity, whereas the shift to a Hebrew identity had occurred in the Hebräische Balladen of 1913. The inwardness of Neo-Romanticism develops nightmarish traits. A heavy spell hangs over the Arabian prose-book: whole populations are under a curse, large numbers are made to bleed or lose their heads or are trampled under the feet of horses: "Unter die Hufe wühlender Tierbeine wiefen sich unglückliche Leiber. - Ein Blut das Blut schon auf den Lippen. Blutverbrei entströmt den Türen der Stadt." (Pg. 104). This population recalls one trait of its extreme Slave-New-World counterpart. Its blood is flowing in the Nile and the inward or transcendent dimension of subjectivity is devastated:

Der Nil ist rot gerollt, ich verschlage dir die Stirne
an den heißen Mauern der Häuser, ich bin in Finstern,
meine Augen tränen. Ich habe in Grauen meiner
heimlichen Leiber mein Jenseits verloren, es fiel in
Jenseits-Jenseits, der Nixen, Sphären. In der warmen Milch
einer Kassaba habe ich meine entsetzten Flügel, aber
mein Gesicht legt sich schon in Wind und Seele." (73-107)

1. See p. 115.

Chapter 7: FERMENT

The strangest creations of sleep
seem here, by some appalling
licence, to cross the limit of
the dawn.

Walter Pater

I. The Repressed Self

Whereas the poetic shadow-life had been projected in the Peter Hille-Buch into an early Germanic and medieval phantasy-world (taken over from Hille and Neo-Romanticism) this is transposed in the prose-book Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad (1907) to the Orient and expressionistically magnified. The expressionistic feeling is more powerful still in the prose-pieces of Der Prinz von Theben; although this was published later, it may well have been written at the same time as the earlier book. This is suggested by the style which had been abandoned in other works by the time Der Prinz von Theben was published; also because the poet retained an Arab identity, whereas the shift to a Hebrew identity had occurred in the Hebräische Balladen of 1913. The inwardness of Neo-Romanticism develops nightmarish traits. A heavy spell hangs over the Arabian prose-books: whole populations are under a curse, large numbers are made to bleed or lose their heads or are trampled under the feet of horses: "Unter die Hufe unzähliger Tierbeine werfen sich unzählige Leiber. Mir klebt das Blut schon auf den Lippen. Blutweihrauch entströmt den Poren der Stadt." (PS 104). This population reminds one again of its extreme Brave-New-World counterpart.¹ Its blood is flowing in the Nile and the inward or transcendent dimension of subjectivity is devastated:

Der Nil ist rot gemalt. Ich zerschlage mir die Stirne
an den harten Säulen der Häuser, ich bin im Finstern,
meine Augen frieren. Ich habe im Grauen seiner
heimlichen Gräber mein Jenseits verloren, es fiel in
Ismael-Hameds, des Hirten, Schoss. In der warmen Milch
einer Kamelkuh badet er meine erstarrten Flüsse, aber
mein Gesicht legt sich schon im Wind zur Seite." (PS 107)

1. See p. 19f.

Lasker-Schüler's play, Die Wupper, appeared in 1909, two years after Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad. In the play a naturalistic dimension is allowed to emerge out of the apocalyptic schism of Expressionism. One of the earliest English historians of modern German literature, Jethro Bithell, was evidently so impressed by Die Wupper that he came to the extraordinary conclusion that Lasker-Schüler was a naturalist in origin,¹ this despite the fact that he knew her and her earlier works and received some of her most beautiful and imaginative letters.² He sees the play as "a sordid depiction of low life in the Ruhr district...though fantastically coloured." If the lyrical poetry suspends the identity of integrated subjectivity, the poet's naturalist sympathies are attracted to the proletariat as negative subject of history, as the anti-bourgeois. In Die Wupper its cause is therefore identical with that of the poetic non-ego, and it is this quite unprogrammatically and unintentionally in a writer who consistently refused to adopt a political platform in her work. "Ob ich nun in einem Herzen eine Revolution machte, darum bleibt meine Wupper zunächst eine künstlerische Welt.... Ausserdem kommt es nicht auf das Motiv der Kunst an, aber wie es gedichtet ist." (BI 191). The ferment of proletarian revolution of the time is a brooding presence in the play and inseparable from its expressionistic naturalism. Workers are heard in the background singing "Denn unsre Fahn' ist rot." (PS 989). Red is the colour of expressionist intensity as of proletarian resistance. Pendelfrederech, who belongs to the wandering proletariat of the play, frightens people with his exhibitionism and wears a patch over one bloody eye:

Lange Anna (lacht): Von de Türen rannten de Kochmamsells, und die Herzen fielen ihnen in de Buxen. (Er klopft Pendelfrederech auf die Schulter und lacht noch höher auf). Mit dich mach ich oft so'ne Opern.

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1. Jethro Bithell, Modern German Literature, London, 1959, p 335.
 2. See BI 29-76.

Amadeus: Und das de Polizisten dich nicht kriegen tun,
Pendelfrederech.

Lange Anna: Die lachen selber.

Amadeus: Was hast de eigentlich von de Sauerein?

Lange Anna: Und guckst man immer so mit das eine Aug in dein
Kopf rein?

Pendelfrederech: Rot seh ich immer, lauter Rot (murmelt grausig).

Amadeus: Die Mutter Pius hat ein Mittel dafür. Aus dem Zucht-
hauskirchhof holt sie die Totenköpfe und reibt sie zu Zucker.

(Sie lachen alle drei....)

PS 987)

Here, as in the Arabian prose-books, a whole population and individual relationships are under a curse, personified by the character of a working-class grandmother, Mutter Pius, whose role is demonised as that of a fortune-teller. The scenes of 'low life' alternate with those depicting a bourgeois factory-owning family, helplessly caught up in their own mechanisms and conflicting interests. The three tramps cited above belong outside the pale of society; they are a blend of an actual wandering proletariat and a projected image of a middle-class intellect that wishes to dispossess itself of its own positive identity: "...denn ich bin ja auch identisch mit den drei Herumtreibern; ja der Amadeus bin ich, wäre ich wenn ich nicht E. Lsch wäre." (BI 191).

Lasker-Schüler still had a servant while she was married to Herwarth Walden and in one or two rare glimpses of her mundane life she reveals a clumsy relationship (PS 304, 346). It is evident from the Peter Hille-Buch that she and Hille were involved at some point in an awkward association with partisans of the proletariat. In this chapter, Petrus unter den Arbeitern, the two poets are treated with suspicion by a politicised working class but eventually accepted: "...ich fürchtete um Petrus, denn manche von ihnen hatten die derben Hände geballt und drohten." At the same time it is evident, in the very description of these men, that the poet is attracted to the rebelliousness of "Sennulf, der Kämpfer...Ludwill, der Misstrauische...Gorgonus, der Starre. Der hatte schillerndes

Haar und einen toten Vipernmund..." (PS 35f). In another scene, this time with peasants Tino and Petrus are concerned with the burial of a poet friend who had become estranged from his family. In this case hostility and misunderstanding are not overcome and Petrus takes away the body of his friend in order to bury it himself. (PS 39f). Here again there is an evident attraction to a pre-individualistic human condition and this chapter contains the whole proletarian world of Die Wupper in a germinal form. Lasker-Schüller evidently rescued a low German identity from her childhood, again, one of the unintegrated features of her world which she liked to stress. The dialect of Die Wupper which she often used in conversation¹ and which recurs in her prose works (see Mein Herz) represented broken form, an ungrammatical language, an oblique relationship to high German, a distorted soul, an antidote to the soulfulness which marred the work of contemporaries like Dauthendey and Mombert, an affinity with the poetic ego as hieroglyph or as the stone-sphinx-head raging at the heavens in Weltschmerz. (G 94).

The emergence of a resistant under-current of consciousness from underneath the prevailing social order is a powerful aspect of Lasker-Schüller's imaginative life. It towers demonically out of her early poetry in the portrayal of a social outlaw - the one example among her poems of Naturalist-Expressionism:

BALLADE

(Aus den sauerländischen Bergen)

Er hat sich

In verteufeltes Weib vergafft,

In sing Schwester!

Wie ein lauerndes Katzentier

Kauerte sie vor seiner Tür

Und leckte am Geld seiner Schwielen.

1. Ernst Ginsberg, Abschied, Zürich, 1965, p 153ff.

Im Wirtshaus bei wildem Zechgelag
Sass er und sie und zechten am Tag
Mit rohen Gesellen.

Und aus dem roten, lodernden Saft
Stieg er ein Riese aus Zwergenhaft
Verklümmerten Gesellen.

Und ihm war, als blickte er weltenweit,
Und sie schürte den Wahn seiner Trunkenheit
Und lachte!

Und eine Krone von Felsgestein,
Von golddurchädertem Felsgestein
Wuchs ihm aus seinem Kopf.

Und die Säufer kreischten über den Spass.
"Gott verdamme mich, ich bin der Satanas!"
Und der Wein sprühte Feuer der Hölle.

Und die Stürme sausten wie Weltuntergang,
Und die Bäume brannten am Bergeshang,
Es sang die Blutschande.....

Sie holten ihn um die Dämmerzeit,
Und die Gassenkinder schrien vor Freud
Und bewarfen ihm mit Unrat.

Seitdem spukt es in dieser Nacht,
Und Geister erscheinen in dieser Nacht,
Und die frommen Leute beten.

Sie schmückte mit Trauer ihren Leib,
Und der reiche Schankwirt nahm sie zum Weib,
Gelockt vom Sumpf ihrer Tränen.

- Und der mit der schweren Rotsucht im Blut
Wankt um die stöhnende Dämmerglut
Gespenstisch durch die Gassen.

Wie leidender Frevel
Wie das frevelnde Leid,
Überaltert dem lässigen Leben.

Und er sieht die Weiber so eigen an,
Und sie fürchten sich vor dem stillen Mann
Mit dem Totenkopf.

(G 99)

If Lasker-Schüler is drawn to a negative subject of history in the proletariat of Die Wupper, there is no evidence in the play of its transformation into a positive one. Rather, in the last scene of the play, middle-class, aspiring working-class and tramps all lapse together into a negative condition; the Ballade from Styx ends with a Totenkopf. It is in the Hebräische Balladen of 1913 that the poet comes nearest - in something of a false short circuit¹ - to the conception of a positive subject: even though the world of Old Testament biblical characters is a transparent fiction in these poems, they are juxtaposed to modern man as the models of a preferable, pre-industrial type. Instead of the undermined subjectivity of early poems and couplet-poems, which emerge before the Hebräische Balladen and culminate in the collected poems of 1917 - positively conceived characters are portrayed: the ego as hieroglyph or sphinx or non-ego is at an opposite pole from these as the most extreme realisation of dissociative subjectivity. Ich in Lasker-Schüler is always Nicht-Ich (particularly in the poetry) since it is only permitted by her as something distinct from an empirical ego. (The fluctuating impulses of the poetic ego are observed in various stages of their evolution). In Mein Herz the poet makes it clear that she has no character. Character she defines as "wenn man seine Eigenschaften eingeschachtelt mit sich trägt." (PS 333).²

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1. Short-circuit; electric circuit made through a small resistance, especially one acting as shunt to one of greater resistance; form of this due to a fault that allows current's escape to earth. Shorter Oxford Dictionary. My italics. Commonly used as metaphor.
 2. See p. 215ff.

Another feature of the early poetry closely allied to the undercurrents that break through the surface of modern civilisation is a citation of the Volkslied or the romantic transmutation of it. This too represents a pre-industrial world; in its romantic transmutation it expresses a sense of homelessness and desolation in the alienated lyrical ego. In its happier transmutations too, as a type of 'popular melody', the folk-song inspired a lyrical fulfilment that was alien in relation to the modern world, even as the medium of an ultra-modern sensibility and its self-discovery. In an early poem called Die Liebe there is an echo of the romantic lyric derived from the folk-song. While Lasker-Schüler adopts the tone of the romantic lyric the words of the poem are a conscious evocation of the past going beyond the castles and olden times in Eichendorff: Lasker-Schüler, following her characteristic impulse of dissociation, goes beyond the romantic fiction of folk-song, almost to time before time, to Urzeiten, so that even the grace of this 'melody' touches lightly, in passing, on the more devastating dimension of alienation in the lyrical ego:

Es rauscht durch unseren Schlaf,
Ein feines Wehen, Seide,
Wie pochendes Erblühen
Über uns beide.

Und ich werde heimwärts
Von deinem Atem getragen,
Durch verzauberte Märchen,
Durch verschüttete Sagen.

Und mein Dornenlächeln spielt
Mit deinen urtiefen Zügen,
Und es kommen die Erden
Sich an uns zu schmiegen.

Es rauscht durch unseren Schlaf
Ein feines Wehen, Seide -
Der weltalte Traum
Segnet uns beide.

(G 116)

For Peter Hille the echo of German folk-song in Lasker-Schüller, whom he saw as a dark and passionate Jewess, was particularly attractive. No-one has touched more precisely on the link between folk-song and her poetry: "...und so berührt so etwas wie deutsche Volksweise, wie Morgenwind durch die Nardengassen der Sulamith überaus köstlich."¹ Discounting the word köstlich (it seems too limited in its aesthetic evaluation) Hille sensed the 'something like' folk-melody touching on Lasker-Schüller's poetry, rather than a folk-song really absorbed and transmuted as it had been in the 19th century. Sigrid Bauschinger suggests convincingly that cultural references were picked up by Lasker-Schüller at meetings and readings arranged by bohemian circles in Berlin rather than in any systematic study.² In the same way features of the conventional Lied are echoed here and there in the poet's neo-romantic and expressionist effusions, and only rarely, as if by accident, do all the lines and verses of a poem fall into a more or less regular scheme. Like all identity in Lasker-Schüller, that of form too remains fluctuating and unfixed. Unlike Sigrid Bauschinger, I cannot really identify distinct categories of strict forms alongside free ones in the collected editions.³ Only one poem in Der siebente Tag, which Bauschinger mentions in particular, seems to fall into a regular scheme due to the humorous theme and the corresponding rhythmic lilt. There is a fairly free arrangement of iambic and trochaic metre with some dactyls in this poem, Schulzeit (G 127); regularity increases as the imagery becomes playful ("Strickpöcknädelspitzē Äugēn"). Metre is evidently not chosen but produced by the poem as it develops. Four accents to a line are maintained throughout - in this poem alone. There are rhymes throughout, but their arrangement is irregular. The quatrain was, of course, the easiest conventional feature to pick up without any studious effort; in most of the early poetry lines vary in length, rhythmic flow only allowing the occasional insinuations of metrical pattern.

1. See DD 565.

2. Sigrid Bauschinger, Else Lasker-Schüller, p 565, op.cit. p 67f.

3. Ibid., p 77.

The rhythm in Die Liebe seems to travel through the formal entity of the quatrain with a free impulsiveness of its own:

Es rāuscht durch ūnsērēn Schlāf
Ein feīnēs Wehēn, Seidē,
Wie pōchēndēs Erblūhēn
Über ūns beidē.

Und īch wērdē heīmwärts
Von deīnem Ātem gētrāgen,
Durch verzāubertē Mārchen,
Durch verschüttētē Sāgen.

Und meīn Dornēnlācheln spielt
Mit seīnen ūrtiefen Zūgen,
Und es kōmmen die Erdēn
Sich an ūns zū schmiegen.

Es rāuscht durch ūnsērēn Schlāf
Ein feīnēs Wehēn, Seidē -
Der wēltältē Traum
Sēgnēt ūns beidē.

Here, not even the rhythmic refrain in the last verse maintains that of the first. Throughout the poem accents vary from two to four to a line, and only one line has four accents. The pervasive feeling of Lasker-Schüler's poetry leads one to put the accents on ich and heim- in the first line of the second verse. Alternatively, "Und īch wērdē heīmwärts" would introduce a fatal plodding metre into this poem and would impede the free, impulsive motions of its melody, whereas accents on ich and heim-, following a natural emphasis of the most significant words, also accelerates the speed of the fine, silken breeze and its pulsating motions, drawing these deep into the spell-bound fairytales and buried legends.

In Liebesflug impulsive accentuation, following the patterns of emotional significance, is self-evident:

- 1 Dr̄ei St̄urm̄e liebt̄ ich̄ ihn̄, eh̄er w̄ie ěr m̄ich,
2 J̄äh schrīen̄ sein̄e L̄ipp̄en,
3 W̄ie d̄er ḡöffn̄et̄ Ěrdm̄und!
4 Und̄ Ḡärt̄en b̄eräuscht̄en̄ an̄ M̄air̄eḡen̄ s̄ich.
5 Und̄ wir̄ gr̄iff̄en̄ un̄s̄er̄e H̄änd̄e,
6 Diē verl̄öbt̄et̄en̄ w̄ie R̄inḡe s̄ich;
7 Und̄ ěr spr̄anḡ mit̄ mir̄ auf̄ diē L̄üft̄e
8 Ḡöth̄in, bis̄ d̄er Āt̄em̄ ver̄str̄ich.
9 D̄ann̄ kam̄ ěin̄ leucht̄end̄er̄ S̄omm̄ert̄ag,
10 W̄ie ěin̄e gl̄ücks̄el̄iḡe M̄utt̄er,
11 Und̄ diē M̄äd̄ch̄en̄ blick̄ten̄ schw̄ärmer̄isch,
12 Nur̄ mein̄e Seel̄e l̄aḡ müd̄ und̄ z̄ag. (G 114)

In Lasker-Schüler's Liebesflug there is often a stress on conjunctions or adverbial prepositions, on jäh, wie, die, dann for emphases with a particularly neo-romantic flavour. In several lines the accents are placed on what might be considered as unusual syllables; in lines 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, particularly in

line ten, after the stresses of the previous line (Sömmertäg), the lifting of accentual stress on the first three syllables, followed by two successive stresses on glückselig seem appropriate to the Ausdruckskunst of this period. These scansion might be subject to some variations, depending on a reader, or even different readings by the same person, following a spontaneous impulse to stress different words. (E.g. line 9: "Dann kam ein leuchtend etc."; line 10: "Wie eine glückselige Mutter etc.," line 12: "Nur meine Seele lag müd etc."). What seems vital is that Lasker-Schüler's rhythm should be lifted out of the order of regular metricality. Once a feeling has been developed for the poet's freer rhythms, then even the occasional appearance of metre in the traditional sense sounds different.¹

The echo of folk-song and romantic lyric has been transformed in any case in Liebesflug by the elan of neo-romantic vitalism. Another poem, Dasein, brings back the thematic content of Volkswaise in Lasker-Schüler. When she writes:

Hatte Hände muschelrotweiss,
Aber die Arbeit verzehrte ihr Weiss, (G 89)

this is a projected image of the self in someone whose background was that of a wealthy and sophisticated bourgeoisie, although Lasker-Schüler did experience severe destitution when her first marriage ended. Among the few folkloric images that return later, in the couplet-phase, there is the ghost of a beggar-woman who appears as the poet's alter-ego, and whom she hears singing her own songs:

Vor meinem Herzen sitzt immer eine Tote
Und bittelt um Almosen.

Und summt meine Lieder

Schon einen weissgewordenen Sommer lang. (Dem Daniel Jesus Paul,
G 231)

1. The subject of metre and rhythm is resumed in Chapter 9, p. 199 ff. To me the very indications of metrical scansion in conventional signs brings something false into Lasker-Schüler's poetry.

II. Instinct and the Mask of Evil

Whether with God, angels or *destitute creatures*, the lyrical ego's identification always remained with an experience that lies entirely outside the prevailing norms. But if folk-song in the modern world is an irredeemable art form, then the most articulate poetry of the lyrical ego comes nearest to fulfilling the role which folk-music once did in Europe. In this sense, Thomas Mann wrote about the poetic ego ("das dichterische Ich") which finds a voice for the community ("die Allgemeinheit") by concentrating on its own expression entirely: " - und zwar ohne dass das innere Schicksal eigentlich dasjenige vieler, also durchschnittlich und normal wäre. Es mag und muss vielleicht sehr sonderbar, leidvoll, ja krankhaft sein."¹ For this individuality whose articulation becomes an expression of its society - a society, in Lasker-Schüller's era, which has cut itself off from its own essential being - the general interest is located entirely outside the prevailing patterns of sociability, until there seems to be almost no connection between artist and community and the mother in one of Baudelaire's poems curses the abortion of a son who was born a poet,² while Gottfried Benn speaks of his double-life.³ Both souls live in the same breast and are ^{tey} independent; the artist derives his negative perspective from the sociable world, and a real severance would result in the absolute loss of self. In Lasker-Schüller, it has been observed, there are momentary illuminations of the schism and of the impact of antagonistic realities. These are registered with an

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1. Thomas Mann, Leiden und Grösse der Meister, Frankfurt, 1977, p. 50.
 2. Baudelaire, Selected Verse, London, 1961, p 165f.
 3. Gottfried Benn, Autobiographische und vermischte Schriften, Wiesbaden, 1961.

almost vengeful intensity by Aldous Huxley in an essay on Baudelaire;¹ Grudgingly he comes to the same conclusion as Thomas Mann. After pages of angry denunciation of the poets of dissociation, whom he identifies as 'Satanists', he closes his essay with the acknowledgement that Baudelaire is the representative of the modern world in poetry and that he wrote the most extraordinarily beautiful verses.

Huxley's notion of Satanism is appropriate to the first collection of poems published in 1902 and entitled Styx, where Lasker-Schüller descends into a poetic underworld; all positive subjectivity is swept away by a lava-stream of hectic turbulence. Moments of quasi-primeval vitalism, jubilantly casting off the shackles of civilisation are rare (G 28); for the most part, the inner explosion is demonic and overwhelming, casting the ego into banishment, darkness, death. Erotic passion rises with the force of a natural catastrophe leaving a shattered being with hyenas creeping in brooding darkness over its dreams (G 64) or with the dance music of centuries bursting out and leaving the soul smashed in a thousand pieces (G 66). Thwarted eroticism adopts the masks of Satanism, evil and sin:

Ach, ich irre wie die Todsünde
Über wilde Haiden und Abgründe... (G 73)

Heisse Winde stöhnen,
Wie der Odem der Sehnsucht,
Verheerend wie die Qual der Sehnsucht...
Und über die Felsen Granadas dröhnen
Die Lockrufe der schwarzen Bhowaneh! (G 17)

Giesse Brand in mein Leben!
Ja, ich irre mit Dir,
Durch alle Gassen wollen wir streifen,
Wenn unsere Seelen wie hungernde Hunde knurren.
An allen Höllen unsere Lüste schleifen,

1. Aldous Huxley, Do What You Will, London, 1929, p 171ff.

Und sünd'ge Launen alle Teufel fleh'n
Und Wahnsinn werden uns're Frevel sein!
Ach Gott! mir bangt vor meiner schwarzen Stunde,
Ich grabe meinen Kopf selbst in die Erde ein! (G 72)

Buried in such passions and devastated landscapes, the poet suspends the conscious will of socialised subjectivity (Meine Lust stöhnt..../Und giebt der Natur sich willenlos")(G 19) illustrating the paradox of an individualist poet surrendering individuality, desiring like Gottfried Benn to give the self beyond the self ("O gib das Ich dem Ich vorbei"¹). In an inversion of the Freudian dictum that Id should become Ego, it is the Ego, which,

in a sense, becomes Id. Here the poets align themselves clearly on the side of those who believe that the purpose

of art is freedom from purposes, specifically alien social purposes, following, nevertheless, an indirectly social purpose: the transvaluation of all values. The mask of evil as an agent of the repressed self derives from Baudelaire and Nietzsche. In Blake there had already been an elaborate inversion of values, a ferment of language, releasing a whole new range of fluctuating meanings in words. In this he foreshadowed Expressionism even more closely than the German Sturm und Drang. If 'virtue' and 'goodness' have become perverted by social purposes then words like 'sin' and 'evil' can function as the code of a transformed language. By naming the forbidden words poets evoke a whole realm of inexpressible beauty and fulfilment, denied and driven into demonic exile by the prevailing codes of morality. These codes make no sense to the aesthetic ego. "Ich kenne keine Sünde..." Lasker-Schüler writes in Mein Herz (PS 356). Since this ego cannot acknowledge any repressive instance whatever without eliciting the protest of our expressive being, its language implies the fulfilment of happiness in mankind and of

1. Benn, Gedichte, op. cit., p 120.

its moral being. In Lasker-Schüler's case the more obvious paraphernalia of provocative Satanism is dropped already in the revised selection of poems from Styx. In the last verse of a later poem, An Gott, cited in a different context, the German word for evil is effectively transfigured and adds a rich colour to the projected overtones of transcendent happiness and fulfilment:

Ich möchte nah an deinem Herzen lauschen,
Mit deiner fernsten Nähe mich vertauschen,
Wenn goldverklärt in deinem Reich
Aus tausendseeligem Licht
Alle die guten und die bösen Brunnen rauschen. (An Gott, G 171)

The self-surrendering ego in Lasker-Schüler raises a thwarted world into consciousness. The rebellion of her instinctual self is thematic in one of the poems excluded from later selections:

TRIEB

Es treiben mich brennende Lebensgewalten,
Gefühle, die ich nicht zügeln kann,
Und Gedanken die sich zur Form gestalten,
Fallen mich wie Wölfe an!

Ich irre durch duftende Sonnentage...
Und die Nacht erschüttert von meinem Schrei.
Meine Lust stöhnt wie eine Marterklage
Und reisst sich von ihrer Fessel frei.

Und schwebt auf zitternden, schimmernden Schwingen
Dem sonn'gen Thal in den jungen Schoss,
Und lässt sich von jedem Mai'nhauch bezwingen
Und giebt der Natur sich willenlos. (G 19)

A familiar experience is described: the moments when some completely other being seems to rise from within ourselves and to push aside our more conscious intentions, when the pen one is holding outspeeds one's mind and seems to know better what it wishes to say. Conscious intentions are cast aside. At the same time the stream of hidden consciousness or of the unconscious cannot articulate

self-sufficiently, because it reshapes our conscious thoughts and feelings: the ceding intellect becomes the ally of its antagonist and helps it in the process of articulation. This becomes particularly evident in revisions which often transform the quality of art and bring out the unconscious dimensions that might otherwise still have been lost left merely to their own devices. Margarete Kupper's research has revealed that Lasker-Schüller was much more critically involved in revisions than is generally assumed.¹ It will be seen that this critical faculty was active in a series of revised and modified procedures in her poetry.

Trieb illustrates the dialectic of unbridled phantasy (here the passionate protest of an instinctual self) and logical-intellectual organisation. The controlling ego describes the upheaval by which it is afflicted, and partially cedes to this in the imagery of wolves, shattered nights, groaning pleasure or lust, shimmering wings, and the feeling of being utterly pliable to every breath of wind in May. In the very submission to nature and its unbridled forces a powerful form-giving principle arises: the instinctual drive moves progressively from life-force to feelings to thoughts assailing the poet like wolves and taking shape in determinate forms. A buried intellect, much stronger and more rigorous than that of the rationalising ego, is released. It encompasses and suspends the Ich of the following verses. What all this conveys is that the poet has an iron grip on the logic with which her inner self contends in order to break its hold on life. Throughout the poem images of constraint and painful release, compulsion and self-surrender alternate; natural free-rhythm impulses are still released in lines of varied length, but are held in check by rhyming quatrains. The regular metre of four stresses to a line is so rare in Lasker-Schüller that it was most probably inadvertent; her verses never look formally designed (like those of George). In its very act of self-surrender the ego gives itself up to an emergent consciousness

1. Margarete Kupper, 'Materialien zu einer kritischen Ausgabe der Lyrik Else Lasker-Schüllers', in Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch, for the Görres-Gesellschaft, ed. Hermann Kunisch, New Series, IV, 1963.

bearing no resemblance to the ego as we have known it. It is for this reason that Lasker-Schüller in her couplet-phase of most complete enigmatic inversion will address her lover asking, "Sage - wie ich bin?" (G 194) and "Wie soll ich dich rufen?" (G 218). For Rilke too, we would, in this sense, become nameless, according to his poem Der Schauende¹ (as in Lasker-Schüller the angel is a mediator or representative of trans-figured subjectivity and Rilke too refers in this poem to the pre-industrial, pre-capitalist Hebrews of the Bible);

liessen wir, Ähnlicher den Dingen,
uns so vom grossen Sturm bezwingen,-
wir würden weit und namenlos.

Compared with the upheaval of Lasker-Schüller's poetry this formulation, for all its suggestiveness, has something precious about it, with its feeling of being the vehicle of great and wonderful things. The language is somewhat tainted with an inwardness, thoroughly eviscerated in Lasker-Schüller. In her the projected 'namelessness' and its emergent hieroglyphic being contend with an obliterating reality. Her instinctual self rebels more vehemently against all obstacles and is therefore thrown back on itself by its principle obstacle: the functionalised, totalitarian subject of modern history. Inwardness in Lasker-Schüller bears the corroding imprint of the world she denies. While she suffers the breach of Expressionism - or demonised inwardness² - the opposing realities, internal and external, are at the same time more thoroughly locked into one another and determined by one another in her broken form.

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1. Rilke, Gesammelte Gedichte, Frankfurt, 1962, p 215.
 2. This is intended as one of several definitions of Expressionism, which was, of course, many-faceted. The change from Neo-Romanticism to Expressionism in the Schönberg-School was obviously one of increasingly demonised inwardness. The same is true of early and late Trakl, Heym.

Chapter 8: GENESIS

Wo mag der Tod mein Herz lassen?
In einem Brunnen der fremd rauscht.-

Else Lasker-Schüler

In dreams, perhaps under some secret
conflict of the midnight sleeper,
lighted up to the consciousness at the
time, but darkened to the memory as
soon as all is finished, each several
child of our mysterious race completes
for himself the treason of the
aboriginal fall.

Thomas de Quincey

In one of her later essays, Lasker-Schüler describes a wall obstructing the view from her window, but insists on embracing it in her transcending perspectives. The very recognition of the wall invokes the world that lies beyond it: "Versperrt er (der Steinrücken) mir auch die Aussicht auf Strassen und Wiesen, so deutet er hin auf die Ewigkeit..." (PS 630). In this way the socialised world was challenged in terms of its own rationality. In its earlier stages, this rationality had also implied emancipation and cities are still the centres of cultural ferment. In faithfulness to this potential the poet preferred city-walls to the sentimentalised nature that lay beyond them. When friends provided her with idyllic country retreats she fled in a kind of panic back to her room in the middle of Berlin.¹ Instinctual rebellion in her early poetry was demonic rather than idyllic and strove to break the hold of repressive socialisation itself. In Weltschmerz she entered obstructing stone as the raging sphinx head; in a later poem, Abend, she has become a stone column and

1. Michael Schmid, Lasker-Schüler, Wuppertal, 1969, p 28.

imagines a weeping angel from the domain of transcendence writing an inscription on it:

Nun prägt in Sternen auf meine Leibessäule
Ein weinender Engel die Inschrift. (G 166)

In this sense, the dissociating lyrical ego allows itself to be absorbed into the inimical world, so as to absorb its rationality in turn into a hieroglyphic rebirth. On a more comprehensive scale her collected poems urge the dialectic of Weltschmerz. After the demonic dissociation of Styx, the title of the next volume, published in 1905, Der siebente Tag, registers the movement towards rebirth:

Es nahte der siebente Tag -
Und noch ist das Ende nicht erschaffen.

Kürzer atmet die Zeit
Im Schoss der Zeitlosen.
Hohle Lüfte schleichen
Und erreichen das Ende nicht,
Und ein Punkt wird mein Tanz
In der Blindnis. (Der letzte Stern, G 147)

While the poems of Styx struggle with incarceration and death, they begin to cede in the second version of this collection to a death representing the only hope of resurrection. Der siebente Tag cedes still further until all poetic being is absorbed into the suspended hieroglyphics of the couplet-phase, beginning in the poems of Meine Wunder. The power of all-encompassing death and the passionate longing that must cede despite itself are interlocking aspects of the last poem in Der siebente Tag:

WELTENDE

Es ist ein Weinen in der Welt,
Als ob der liebe Gott gestorben wär,
Und der bleierne Schatten, der niederfällt,
Lastet grabesschwer.

Komm, wir wollen uns näher verbergen...

Das Leben liegt in allen Herzen

Wie in Särgen.

Du! wir wollen uns tief küssen -

Es pocht eine Sehnsucht an die Welt,

An der wir sterben müssen.

(G 149)

This is the death Benjamin sees in his Hölderlin-essay¹ as commitment to the danger which threatens the world (p 43) and as innermost identity of poet and world (p 44), the poet's death being the focus of all relationships. Lasker-Schüler's transformation of the struggle with death into the realisation of death is reflected in Benjamin's words: "Die Umwandlung der Zweiheit von Tod und Dichter in die Einheit einer toten dichterischen Welt, "mit Gefahr gesättigt", ist die Beziehung, in der das Gedichtete....steht." (p 44) "In die Mitte des Lebens versetzt, bleibt (dem Dichter) nichts als das reglose Dasein, die völlige Passivität, die das Wesen des Mutigen ist; als sich ganz hinzugeben der Beziehung." (p 44). This is another way of describing the self-suspension of the nature-dominating, destructively self-preserving ego, allowing itself to become the medium of a totality of relationships - all of these suspended in one another - and thus of the destiny of mankind. Formal articulation in poetry is the vessel of such concentrated identity: Benjamin associates form in the sense of 'das Gedichtete' with the mythical element of our expressive being in its thinking determinations (p 24).

The remarkable analogy between Lasker-Schüler and Benjamin, even though he was writing about Hölderlin, suggests that both were developing similar conceptions, aesthetic and critical, under historical pressure. Benjamin, it has already been observed, also registered a pressure leading to a metaphorically orientated form. He opposes the metaphor of Egyptian art to that of classical Greece. It will be seen as my analysis

1. Benjamin, Illuminationen, op. cit.

progresses that a cogent paradox brings the most pliant, 'living', language out of Lasker-Schüler's poetry as it enters its suspended mosaic of couplets. In Styx the struggle with death is still turbulent and rebounds into frozen rigidity:

WINTERNACHT

(Cellolied)

Ich schlafe tief in starrer Winternacht,
Mir ist, ich lieg' in Grabesnacht,
Als ob ich spät um Mitternacht gestorben sei
Und schon ein Sternenleben tot sei.

Zu meinem Kinde zog mein Glück
Und alles Leiden in das Leid zurück,
Nur meine Sehnsucht sucht sich heim
Und zuckt wie zähes Leben
Und stirbt zurück

In sich.

Ich schlafe tief in starrer Winternacht,
Mir ist, ich lieg' in Grabesnacht. (G 22)

In its formal articulation Winternacht shows the poet's powerful resilience drawing into itself, into the increasingly abbreviated lines of the second verse, and then into the self-encapsulation of the last, detached couplet. This illustrates the tendency of all Lasker-Schüler's poetry towards abbreviation and a telescoped articulation. In Sterne des Fatums, again, turbulent demonism contracts (as often already in Styx) into a small poem and into a single line splitting off at the end:

Deine Augen harren vor meinem Leben
Wie Nächte die sich nach Tagen sehnen,
Und der schwüle Traum liegt auf ihnen
Unergründet.

Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde,
Eisenfarb'ne mit Sehnsuchtsschweiften,
Mit brennenden Armen, die Liebe suchen

Und in die Kühle der Lüfte greifen.

Sterne in denen das Schicksal mündet. (G 45)

The suspended life of the poem - its stars and eyes - are locked in a heavy dream like the sultry dream lying on the lover's eyes; impulses of soaring movement and burning love in sehen, schweifen, greifen, are frozen by the contradictory motions of harren and starren: the stars are iron-coloured and the arms searching for love grasp into cold air and into the cold assonance of Kühle and Lüfte. There is a barrier, a resistant element, checking the movement of an amorphously drifting cosmos and urging it into a concentrated interplay of contradictory forces. This becomes a unifying principle, breaking apart again as it crystallises. Thus the outermost rhymes, unergründet and mündet, lock the poem's dynamic into itself, while at the same time it is released or fulfilled in the last line, detaching itself from the whole. In a shifted perspective the stars searching for love in a deathly void become identical with the destiny of the world. That this very realisation suspends the power of destiny is indicated by the word mündet; the stars of destiny would become the stars of transcendence:

Sterne in denen das Schicksal mündet.

All Lasker-Schüler's poetry will be resolved into her couplets as into these stars. While the ferment of spell-bound vitalism finds its goal in the last detached line of Sterne des Fatums, the procedure is inverted in the original version of Weltschmerz. Here it is in the poem as a whole that the broken unity has crystallised, and the last line is an ejected piece of early vitalism, to be dropped in the second version of Styx:

Ich, der brennende Wüstenwind,
Erkaltete und nahm Gestalt an.

Wo ist die Sonne, die mich auflösen kann,
Oder der Blitz, der mich zerschmettern kann!

Blick' nun: ein steinernes Sphinxhaupt,
Zürnend zu allen Himmeln auf.

Hab' an meine Glutkraft geglaubt. (G 43)

Removal of the apostrophe and colon from "Blick' nun:" also reflects a simplifying and unifying tendency.

Duality of poet and death was seen in Benjamin's essay as a weakness; in the best of Lasker-Schüler's early poems or fragments of poems it can be a strength, since the dilemma itself is articulated as a broken identification. In a much more totalitarian world than that of Hölderlin, Lasker-Schüler must confront poet and death in order to release an interpenetrating dialogue. Death is also ambivalent in Lasker-Schüler: in one sense it is reflected in the banishment of the lyrical ego; at the same time this reflects an imposed death in the socialised world. In Ballade (Aus den sauerländischen Bergen)¹ death appears in the ghost of a social outlaw, the man with a Totenkopf, one metamorphosis of a tentatively reincarnated hieroglyphic ego (G 57); in other poems death is represented by the prevailing world resisted by the lyrical ego. One poem urges the duality of a death that threatens to become all-encompassing:

Der Tod selbst fürchtet sich zu zwein
Und kriecht in seinen Erdschrein,
- Aber ich pack ihn mit meiner Tatze. (G 98)

The title of this poem, Selbstmord, gives its divided reality a powerful thrust into such identity as was achieved in poems like Weltschmerz.

The whole of Styx survives in two separate versions. The second consists of the poems retained and (partially) revised for inclusion in the collected edition of 1920. The critical tendency reflected in Lasker-Schüler's revisions is one of concentration and simplification; the obvious vitalism and Satanism dissolve, long poems are dropped, others abbreviated. The total

1. See p. III

number of poems is reduced from 62 to 29, not counting four that were transposed into different contexts in later cycles. Some strong and characteristic formulations are sacrificed with the more superfluous effusions, so the established practice of publishing both versions alongside one another ensures that a volume with a character of its own, which it would be regrettable to lose, is retained.

As if to illustrate Benjamin's idea that a poet's commitment is realised in a motionless self-suspending passivity, three lines detach themselves from a poem in the first version of the Styx-poems and will become the motto of the second version. Both are cited here:

MUDE

All' die weissen Schläfe

Meiner Ruh'

Stürzten über die dunklen Himmelsäume.

Nun deckt der Zweifel meine Sehnsucht zu

Und die Qual erdenkt meine Träume.

O, ich wollte, dass ich wunschlos schlief,

Wusst' ich einen Strom, wie mein Leben so tief,

Flösse mit seinen Wassern.

(G 62)

STYX

O, ich wollte, dass ich wunschlos schlief,

Wusst ich einen Strom, wie mein Leben so tief,

Flösse mit seinen Wassern.

(G 78)

While the second version is still Ich-Dichtung, the more personalised feeling of cosmic weariness has vanished and the residual triplet has moved into a much closer identity with the conception of a buried inner stream of the unconscious. Against the theories tending to existentialise the unconscious or pure states of Being underneath merely historical experience, it has to be indicated that the poet's Ich does not simply dissolve. One only has to think of the raging sphinx and the vehement

struggle of its poetic being to re-enter the history it has negated. As the ego submerges in a mythical stream it draws this into a process of articulation; the expressive (non-conceptual) self penetrates the rational determinations that are releasing their repressive hold; the poet's language remains half-conscious and enigmatic as Vorwelt insofar as it seeks to give birth to historical experience wrung out of pre-history. The ego that wants to sink away in Styx longs for a release from suffering and anguish, from the burden of repression: it bears the whole weight of modern history and of its own tyrannical identity that wants to find release. As the first version puts it, "die Qual erdenkt meine Träume." In the 'thinking dreams' the opposing egos fuse into the distinctive Ich of Lasker-Schüller's poetry.

There is no clear dividing line between early and late poetry, between expanding and contracting tendencies. The shortest, most concentrated of early poems, like Weltschmerz, are characterised by the phase of demonic fermentation - by the duality of poet and death - while the one surviving expansive poem in Meine Wunder, Die Stimme Edens, reflects the atmosphere of the couplet-poems, illustrating the transition from one phase into the next better than any other poem. The appearance of this poem in Der siebente Tag, in a more effusive and vitalistic version, illustrates Lasker-Schüller's poetic metamorphoses all the more revealingly. This version was called Erkenntnis:

Schwere steigt aus allen Erden auf
Und wir ersticken im Bleidunst,
Jedoch die Sehnsucht reckt sich
Und speit wie eine Feuerbrunst.
Es tönt aus allen wilden Flüssen
Das Urgeschrei, Evas Lied.
Wir reißen uns die Hüllen ab,
Vom Schall der Vorwelt hingerissen,
Ich nackt! Du nackt!

Wilder, Eva, bekenne schweifender,
Deine Sehnsucht war die Schlange,
Ihre Stimme wand sich über deine Lippe,
Und biss in den Saum deiner Wange.

Wilder, Eva, bekenne reissender,
Den Tag, den du Gott abrangst,
Da du zu früh das Licht sahst
Und in den blinden Kelch der Scham sankst.

Riesengross

Steigt aus deinem Schoss
Zuerst wie Erfüllung zagend,
Dann sich ungestüm raffend,
Sich selbst schaffend
Gott-Seele.....

Und sie wächst
Über die Welt hinaus,
Ihren Anfang verlierend,
Über alle Zeit hinaus,
Und zurück um dein Tausendherz
Ende überragend...

Singe, Eva, dein banges Lied einsam,
Einsamer, tropfenschwer wie dein Herz schlägt,
Löse die düstere Tränenschnur,
Die sich um den Nacken der Welt legt.

Wie das Mondlicht wandle dein Antlitz....

Du bist schön....

Singe, singe, horch, den Rauscheton,
Spielt die Nacht auf deinem Goldhaar schon.

"Ich trank atmende Süsse

Vom schillernden Aste
Aus holden Dunkeldolden.

Ich fürchte mich nun
Vor meinem wachenden Blick -
Verstecke mich, du -

Denn meine wilde Pein
Wird Scham,
Verstecke mich, du
Tief in das Auge der Nacht,
Dass mein Tag Nachtdunkel trage.
Dieses taube Getöse, das mich umwirrt!
Meine Angst rollt die Erdstufen herauf,
Düster her, zu mir zurück, nachthin,
Kaum rastet eine Spanne zwischen uns.
Brich mir das glühende Eden von der Schulter!
Mit seinen kühlen Armen spielten wir,
Durch seine hellen Wolkenreife sprangen unsere Jubel.
Nun schnellen meine Zehe wie irre Pfeile über die Erde,
Und meine Sehnsucht kriecht in jähem Bogen mir voran."

Eva, kehre um vor der letzten Hecke noch!
Wirf nicht Schatten mit dir,
Blühe aus Verführerin.

Eva du heisse Lauscherin,
O, du schaumweisse Traube,
Flüchte um vor der Spitze deiner schmalsten Wimper noch! (G 111)

This poem itself looks as though it might be an abridgement of a longer version.¹ The first verse is clearly separated from the rest of the poem as though indicating conceptions that no longer fit organically into one another. The first verse presents the primeval lovers rediscovering themselves in the modern world, whereas the ensuing verses are a dialogue between lyrical ego and Eve. In the later version Adam and Eve will be dropped, Eve and the lyrical ego will be drawn closer together into one self-addressing ego relating to God. Eve's reply in the first version sets an effusive outpouring against a new, supple form of abbreviated versification.

1. See Kupper, Materialien, op. cit. Margarete Kupper's research reveals earlier, longer versions of this poem. My concern is primarily with edited poetry which the poet retained for her collected works and the evolution they reveal.

The two half-extraneous verses (1 and 8) could have belonged to the first version of Styx; the first as a typical eruption of 'primeval' vitalism, the second as a somewhat demonised version of the free verse lyricism derived from Peter Hille. These remnants show how the evolving phases of Lasker-Schüler's poetry grow out of one another. Continual metamorphoses result in a dynamic and fluctuating vocabulary such as one finds in dialectical philosophy: particularly the idea of hieroglyphic transmutation eludes fixed definition and is continually changing. The static form of the couplet-phase too will resemble the gravitation of such philosophy into a Dialektik im Stillstand,¹ reflecting the opposing forces of dynamic progression and totalitarian rigidity in the modern industrialised world.

Vorwelt, for example, in the first verse of Erkenntnis, is an ambivalent term: it stands both for primeval nature preceding repressive socialisation and, in a much more immediate sense, for pre-history in accordance with the Marxian notion that history has not yet begun, and projected by Lasker-Schüler as world that is about to begin, urged by the dialectical impulses of her poetry toward the seventh day of the creation. Adam and Eve, or the naked Ich and Du of the first verse, do not emerge from a facile return to nature, but out of violent struggling conflict with the modern rationality they oppose or seek to transform into an open-ended rather than closed rationality. The latter is equated with original sin.² Eve has become self-conscious (seen the light) too early; she ought to have let her being flower more fully, ought to have resisted the light of common day, the shades of the prisonhouse, conceded philosophically by Wordsworth in his Intimations of Immortality.³ The actual appearance of the primeval couple in Erkenntnis half-contradicts the sense of the poem as a whole insofar as it throws back primeval nature into a dimension preceding the birth of consciousness, the seventh day of the cycle of poems. Nevertheless, Adam and Eve represent

1. See p. 165

2. i.e. because Eve loses her primeval innocence by entering the modern, nature-dominating world.

3. William Wordsworth, Selected Poems, London, 1975, p 107.

the urgency of the dynamic thrust toward a rebirth, the intention of the hieroglyphic ego to burst all bonds and emerge in flesh and blood. In the verse as a whole this rebirth is wrenched out of heavy, spell-bound atmosphere. This version of the poem, therefore, retains an independent validity despite the flaw of too obviously fictional vitalism.

Lasker-Schüller's subdivision of the poem suggests her own sense of insufficiently articulated contradictions. Her correspondence indicates that her critical faculty might also have been nurtured at least partially as a result of criticisms by friends. Richard Dehmel must have objected to the primeval vitalism judging from Lasker-Schüller's reply to a letter of his: "Dass Ihnen das Sterbelied gefiel, hat mich beglückt, aber dass Sie von erdachten Wilden in Evas Lied schreiben - ist mir unklar - da ich nie denke und viel zu dämlich bin." (BII 12). This was written in 1903; by 1911 she had absorbed the criticism enough to dispense with Urgeschrei and to leave out the first verse of Erkenntnis.

The other (eighth) verse resembling an interpolation from Styx was to be drastically abbreviated in the process of evolution, at the expense of some vivid formulations. The first Peter Hille-ish lines have an acute feeling of awakening consciousness: "Ich trank atmende Süsse/Vom schillernden Aste/ Aus holden Dunkeldolden." The last line recalls Hille's device of accumulating internal rhymes. Breathing sweetness is that of a newly quickened consciousness; the apple is transformed here into an agent of fulfilment (as is the snake in the second verse - "Deine Sehnsucht war die Schlange" - and in another poem, Das Geheimnis - "Wir sind von der Schlange noch nicht ausgetragen/Und finden das Ziel nicht in ihrem dunklen Bewegen" - G 129). "Sin", as a positive force in Lasker-Schüller, is only regretted as a premature fulfilment, before emancipated and socialised ego were identical. In the last lines of Eve's speech the rebound of thwarted fulfilment is registered in demonic imagism reminiscent of surrealist painting; here the unleashed dynamic is frozen in the one word 'kriecht':

Nun schnellen meine Zehen wie irre Pfeile über der Erde,
Und meine Sehnsucht kriecht in jähem Bogen wir voran.

All this has necessarily to be forfeited for the new version
of the poem published in Meine Wunder and now called Die Stimme
Edens:

DIE STIMME EDENS

Wilder, Eva, bekenne schweifender,
Deine Sehnsucht war die Schlange,
Ihre Stimme wand sich über deine Lippe,
Und biss in den Saum deiner Wange.

Wilder, Eva, bekenne reissender,
Den Tag, den du Gott abrangst,
Da du zu früh das Licht sahst
Und in den blinden Kelch der Scham sankst.

Riesengross

Steigt aus deinem Schoss
Zuerst wie Erfüllung zagend,
Dann sich ungestüm raffend,
Sich selbst schaffend,
Gottesseele....

Und sie wächst
Über die Welt hinaus,
Ihren Anfang verlierend,
Über alle Zeit hinaus,
Und zurück um dein Tausendherz,
Ende überragend....

Singe, Eva, dein banges Lied einsam,
Einsamer, tropfenschwer wie dein Herz schlägt,
Löse die düstere Tränenschnur,
Die sich um den Nacken der Welt legt.

Wie das Mondlicht wandle dein Antlitz,
Du bist schön....

Singe, singe, horch, den Rauscheton
Spielt die Nacht und weiss nichts vom Geschehn.

Überall das taube Getöse -
Deine Angst rollt über die Erdstufen
Den Rücken Gottes herab.

Kaum rastet eine Spanne zwischen ihm und dir.
Birg dich tief in das Auge der Nacht,
Dass dein Tag nachtdunkel trage.

Himmel ersticken, die sich nach Sternen bücken -
Eva, Hirtin, es gurren
Die blauen Tauben in Eden.

Eva, kehre um vor der letzten Hecke noch!
Wirf nicht Schatten mit dir,
Blühe aus, Verführerin.

Eva, du heisse Lauscherin,
O du schaumweisse Traube,
Flüchte um vor der Spitze deiner schmalsten Wimper noch! (G 156)

In Der siebente Tag, when the poet was still close to the first confrontation of her lyrical ego with an antagonistic world, the poem was called Erkenntnis; now that she has gained the strength to rediscover the voice of nature in socialised man, the poem becomes Die Stimme Edens. Contradictory tendencies of expansion and contraction, immaterial transcendence^e and material fulfilment are drawn into one dynamic conception suspending the early poetry and the couplet-phase in one another. There is a movement going back from the tip of Eve's thinnest eye-lash through the entire poem, into the dimension of unrestricted overflow; simultaneously this draws back into itself, attracted irresistibly into the world it opposes and into the eye-lash, the last differentiating speck between the interpenetrating domains. Chaotic turbulence and violent juxtapositions give way to a self-releasing transitional fluidity and a completely transfigured tone. The divided reality is echoed now in breathless excitement and disquietude and a language saturated with the more immaterial lyricism of the couplet-phase. When Eve has been absorbed by the reality she resists, her being will be suspended in the mosaic of reified couplets, while these in turn, as the last shreds of negative transcendence, will suspend

the reality into which they have been absorbed. Reification and spiritualisation will be interpenetrating moments. The sphinx of Weltschmerz will have been released, projected, in a sense, into an immaterial materialisation. Struggle with death becomes a risk of the complete loss of self in its effort to find a voice for the world. The raging sphinx becomes a "heisse Lauscherin", a "schaumweise Traube" and the sense of imprisonment is registered in new tones:

Singe, Eva, dein banges Lied einsam,
Einsamer, tropfenschwer wie dein Herz schlägt,
Löse die düstere Tränenschnur
Die sich um den Nacken der Welt legt.

Every verse registers fluctuating dynamics: here Eve must risk an ever greater loneliness to find a redeeming voice. As the ego had previously become the stone-sphinx-head so her poetry will itself become the string of tears in the couplet-phase, dialectically transposed far beyond any private sentimentality. Later, in a poem published after her death, she was to write, "Ich legte mein Geschick in harten Händen/Und reihe Tränen auf, so dunkle Perlen ich nie fand." (VPSN 123). Lasker-Schüler used the incorrect dative, "in harten Händen", evidently because it permitted a rhyme with Wänden in the previous lines.¹

Eve implores herself, then, to cling to a self-risking transcendence, to let her beauty wander away like moonlight, to bury herself in the eye of night so as to bring its (mythical) darkness into the light of day, to return to Eden before the last dividing hedge and to allow her being to flower before it is too late. The sense of lateness of the historical hour is reinforced by the lateness of Lasker-Schüler's development as a poet - Styx appeared after she was thirty - and by the resultant feeling that she might already be too deeply absorbed into the socialised world to break out of it. Hence the cataclysmic shock of revelation coinciding with that of Expressionism in the early poems and the half-blind, half-emprisoned residue it leaves in the couplet-phase. Hence also the Nachklänge of a poem (of that title) in Der siebente Tag:

1. The line should read: "Ich ~~reichte~~ mein Geschick in harte Hände."

Tanze, tanze, meine späte Liebe,
Herzab, seelehin -
Arglos Über stille Tiefen....
Über mein bezwungnes Leben. (G 131)

A passage in Mein Herz identifies the asceticism that stems from the very impulse of overflowing self-abandonment: "Ich habe alles abgegeben der Zeit wie ein voreiliger Asket, nun nimmt der Wind noch meine letzten herbstgefärbten Worte mit sich. Bald bin ich ganz leer, ganz weiss, Schnee der in Asien fiel." (PS 365) Into such autumn-coloured words the apostrophising ego of Die Stimme Edens will disappear.

Formally and thematically the third and fourth verses of Die Stimme Edens illustrate the fluctuation of expanding and contracting tendencies:

Riesengross
Steigt aus deinem Schoss
Zuerst wie Erfüllung zagend,
Dann sich ungestüm raffend,
Sich selbst schaffend,
Gottesseele....

Und sie wächst
Über die Welt hinaus,
Ihren Anfang verlierend,
Über alle Zeit hinaus,
Und zurück um dein Tausendherz,
Ende Überragend....

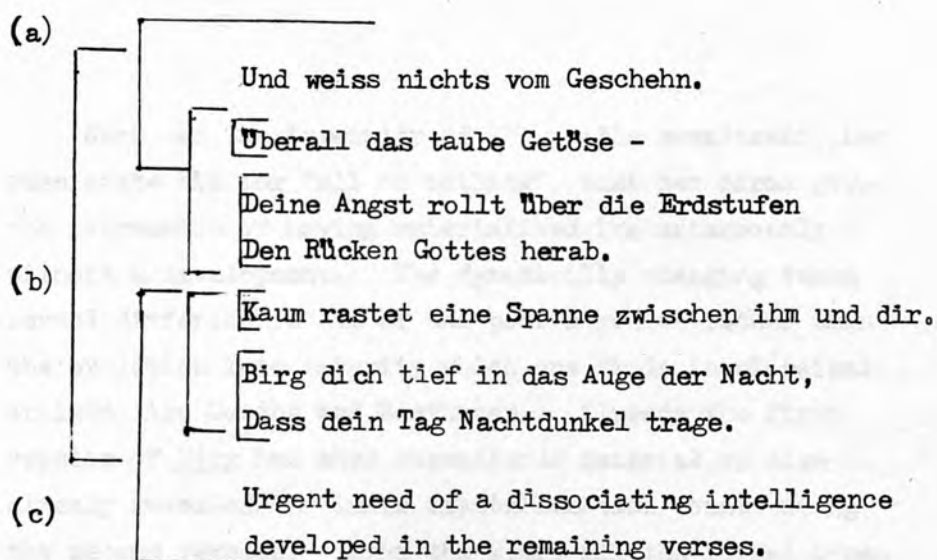
God emerges as the immaterial soul in man. Following the inverted logic of all Lasker-Schüler's poetry (and again of Hegelian dialectics) first and last principles, the material and the immaterial, are determined by one another. In powerful images of pregnancy and childbirth the soul of God is depicted thrusting itself out of the material world. The self-addressing ego identifies the primeval mother with all motherhood; Eve is the focus of the infinitely spiralling soul in man, the finite heart in a thousand hearts. Like the spiralling soul, the burgeoning verse

might have filled pages, but breaks apart into two contracting verse-paragraphs. In the surrounding verses (1, 2, 5 and 6) the free rhythms contract still further into freely articulated quatrains with lines of varied length; rhymes and half-rhymes too register a reflux of ideas, images and sound-patterns into more concentrated unities. The last five verses are reduced further still to triplets, a characteristic formal type immediately preceding the final reduction to couplets. The triplets allow for a slight extension of the discursive logic that will be entirely absorbed in the couplet-mosaics. When Eve measures the distance between herself and God, for example:

Überall das taube Getöse -
Deine Angst rollt über die Erdstufen
Den Rücken Gottes herab.

Kaum rastet eine Spanne zwischen ihm und dir.
Birg dich tief in das Auge der Nacht,
Dass dein Tag Nachtdunkel trage.

These verses could almost, but not quite, be divided according to the principle of the couplet-phase (also containing single lines): the dynamic pressure flowing through Die Stimme Edens is too great, the fusion of tendencies too compelling, so that the whole conception resists the frieze in which it is about to lose itself. In these two verses there is a partial parataxis. The relationship to God encompasses both verses; at the same time each verse splits off as independent nucleus; each nucleus, in turn, contains self-sufficient lines or couplets that are nevertheless knit into the logic of the whole poem. In terms of the couplet-phase lines like "Überall das taube Getöse -" and "Dass dein Tag Nachtdunkel trage" might have stood on their own as single lines. The simultaneously fragmented and interpenetrating poetic ideas could be bracketed as follows:



This diagram is a necessarily speculative illustration of the way Lasker-Schüler might have divided these lines in her couplet-phase. The triplets are bracketed as formal unities resisting this subdivision. The larger brackets indicate the association of ideas (a) blindness to the surrounding (secular) world, (b) dissociation and Angst, (c) Eve's urgent desire to save something of her primeval 'innocence'.

When the dissociating overflow of Die Stimme Edens has been absorbed into the world it resists, the lyrical ego awakens in the couplet-phase, half-blinded, with shreds of its lost transcendence. This has been interpreted elsewhere as the tentative awakening of a utopian being from out of an obscuring rationality. The fluctuating spirals of the early poetry crystallise then in the simplified formulations of the couplet-poems. Before considering the couplet-poems themselves some of the preceding forms still remain to be considered. As a transitional poem Die Stimme Edens, in its two versions, absorbs daemonic *vitalism* into its supple fluidity.

Such was the intensity of the poet's commitment, her passionate bid for "all or nothing", that her forms give the impression of having materialised instantaneously without a development. The dynamically changing forms reveal different facets of the poet's genius rather than the evolution into maturity which one finds in classical artists like Goethe and Beethoven. Already the first version of Styx had shed superfluous material or else already revealed the inner crystallisation constituting the second version. From the start all the formal types of Lasker-Schüller's poetry are already there. Like Styx, her poetic achievement as a whole gives the impression of one instantaneous fermentation of forms with couplets as its inner kernels. At the same time, these suddenly illuminated moments of poetic insight emerged late, after she was thirty, and then resulted only in a small number of poems during a relatively long period reaching into old age. This contradiction of instantaneousness and slowness ("...meine Sehnsucht kriecht in jähem Bogen mir voran") also contributes to the telescoped quality of the poetry. While the impulse toward unrestricted lyricism never resulted in streaming effusions like those of Shelley, Swinburne, Borchardt or Hille, telescoped concentration conveys the feeling of huge dimensions in poems like Die Stimme Edens and Ballade (Aus den sauerländischen Bergen), short poems by other standards, but two of Lasker-Schüller's longest ones. This largeness is

complemented by a no less striking minimalism in the short poems; they seem much more diminutive than short poems normally do. The cross-currents favour compression and result almost in the disappearance of poetic solutions as in the music of Webern or the sculpture of Giacommetti. Allowing oneself to be absorbed by this tendency in Lasker-Schüller's poetry, with its residual margin of articulate forms, one has the feeling that they might all have vanished leaving only the tip of Eve's thinnest eye-lash in Die Stimme Edens. The absence of development in Lasker-Schüller arises partly from an economic situation whose dynamic cuts off the past and a gradually unfolding experience in people. This would also explain the passionate evocation of primeval vitalism and the repressed unconscious, as if to recapture the possibility of an organically unfolding experience, disconnected by the modern world and thrown back into the remote past. The clash of epochs and the demonic release of one in the other is vividly portrayed in a poem from Styx:

Mein Tanzlied

Aus mir braust finstre Tanzmusik,
Mein Seele kracht in tausend Stücken;
Der Teufel holt sich mein Missgeschick,
Um es ans brandige Herz zu drücken.

Die Rosen fliegen mir aus dem Haar
Und mein Leben saust nach allen Seiten,
So tanz ich schon seit tausend Jahr,
Seit meiner ersten Ewigkeiten.

(G 104)

The continual state of flux in Lasker-Schüller's early poetry resulted at various points in the spontaneous crystallisation of specific formal types. Many appear once only and are never repeated. The most distinctive of these, Styx, Weltschmerz, Die Stimme Edens, Mein Volk and others, are also the most significant. Illustration of the continually changing forms would involve citation of the majority of early poems - each a special case - so the evolution of types will be loosely resumed and occasionally exemplified.

One only has to begin to consider the various articulations of the triplet-form to become aware of the continual metamorphosis from one example to the next. Styx, for example, is the only example of one isolated triplet; it had found itself inadvertently within the more expansive impulses of a longer poem.¹ It also differs from all the other triplet-poems or verses in its suspension of fluctuating dynamics. These are echoed in the invocatory "O, ich wollte..." but portray an absolute, motionless stasis of conscious will, releasing a one-way stream into the unconscious: a deep wish for complete deliverance from the anguish and turmoil of the Styx-volume as a whole:

O, ich wollte, dass ich wunschlos schlief,
Wusst ich einen Strom, wie mein Leben so tief,
Flösse mit seinen Wassern. (G 78)

Triplets derived from free-rhythms are an unusual form in German poetry and Lasker-Schüler is perhaps their most eloquent exponent. In contrast to Styx, for example, a tense conflict with death characterises the triplets of Selbstmord:

Wilde Fratzen schneidet der Mond im Sumpf.
Es kreisen alle Welten dumpf;
Hätt ich erst diese überstanden!
Mein Herz, ein Skarabäenstein;
Blüht bunter Mai aus meinem Gebein
Und Meere rauschen durch Guirlanden.
Ich wollt, ich wär eine Katz geworden;
Der Kater schleicht sie lustzumorden
Im vollmondblütenden Abendschein.
Wie die Nacht voll grausamer Sehnsucht keimt -
Sie hat in mir oft zart geträumt
Und ist entstellt zur Fratze.
Der Tod selbst fürchtet sich zu zwein
Und kriecht in seinen Erdschrein,
- Aber ich pack ihn mit meiner Tatze. (G 98)

1. See p. 131.

In Ballade, re-cited here, the contracting form of triplets is characterised by the counter-tendency of a monstrously expanding being rising out of the demonised instinctual self:

BALLADE

(Aus den sauerländischen Bergen)

Er hat sich
In ein verteufltes Weib vergafft,
In sing Schwester!

Wie ein lauerndes Katzentier
Kauerte sie vor seiner Tür
Und leckte am Geld seiner Schwielen.

Im Wirtshaus bei wildem Zechgelag
Sass er und sie und zechten am Tag
Mit rohen Gesellen.

Und aus dem roten, lodernden Saft
Stieg er ein Riese aus zwergenhaft
Verklümmerten Gesellen.

Und ihm war, als blickte er weltenweit,
Und sie schürte den Wahn seiner Trunkenheit
Und lachte!

Und eine Krone von Felsgestein,
Von golddurchädertem Felsgestein
Wuchs ihm aus seinem Kopf.

Und die Säufer kreischten über den Spass.
"Gott verdamme mich, ich bin der Satanas!"
Und der Wein sprühte Feuer der Hölle.

Und die Stürme sausten wie Weltuntergang,
Und die Bäume brannten am Bergeshang,
Es sang die Blutschande.....

Sie holten ihn um die Dämmerzeit,
Und die Gassenkinder schrien vor Freud
Und bewarfen ihn mit Unrat.

Seitdem spukt es in dieser Nacht,
Und Geister erscheinen in dieser Nacht,
Und die frommen Leute beten.

Sie schmückte mit Trauer ihren Leib,
Und der reiche Schankwirt nahm sie zum Weib,
Gelockt vom Sumpf ihrer Tränen.

- Und der mit der schweren Rotsucht im Blut
Wankt um die stöhnende Dämmerglut
Gespenstisch durch die Gassen.

Wie leidender Frevel,
Wie das frevelnde Leid,
Überaltert dem lässigen Leben.

Und er sieht die Weiber so eigen an,
Und sie fürchten sich vor dem stillen Mann
Mit dem Totenkopf.

(G 57)

While one could divide the poems of Trakl and Benn into groups, and single out representative examples, every poem in Lasker-Schüler's early and late phases tends to be an isolated example of a formal type. Only in the couplet-phase is there a representative type that remains constant in a relatively large number of poems. Thereafter the Hebräische Balladen gravitate toward a mannered triplet-form, exhausted after a few examples. Static forms are partially released again in the couplets, triplets, quatrains and freer forms of the late poetry. In all her poetry, it has already been observed, Lasker-Schüler retains something of the feeling of free rhythms.

Der siebente Tag as a whole has much of the transitional feeling of Die Stimme Edens, a pliant lyricism and more naturally accumulating flow of verses released from the preceding struggle of Styx:

Und die keimende Liebe ist meine Seele.
O, meine Seele ist das vertriebene Sehnen,
Du liebzitterst vor Ahnungen -

...Und weisst nicht warum deine Träume stöhnen. (Eva, G 121)

Without betraying her unyielding resistance toward the antagonistic world, there is a feeling as if the poet is striving to blend dissociation into words released from their previous violence. The divided reality is frequently represented by ceding hedges, as in Ruth:

Und du suchst mich vor den Hecken.
Ich höre deine Schritte seufzen
Und meine Augen sind schwere dunkle Tropfen.

In meiner Seele blühen süß deine Blicke
Und füllen sich,
Wenn meine Augen in den Schlaf wandeln.

Am Brunnen meiner Heimat
Steht ein Engel,
Der singt das Lied meiner Liebe,
Der singt das Lied Ruths. (G 126)

The separating hedges - in Die Stimme Edens they stand between the secular world and paradise - divide the suspended being of lovers in a contrapuntal image-cluster from which the last verse rises like a melody of the utmost simplicity. It reveals an innermost intention of Lasker-Schüler's poetry: a love-song for the German people. The "Brunnen meiner Heimat" is a citation of Schubert's "Brunnen vor dem Thore", a song recalled by the poet in Das Hebräerland when she herself was homesick during her exile (PS 949). - A hedge cedes again in Mein Liebeslied, giving way to a murmuring fountain, a secretively rustling stream of sounds, and the characteristically supple free rhythms of Der siebente Tag:

Wie ein heimlicher Brunnen
Murmelt mein Blut,
Immer von dir, immer von mir.

Unter dem taumelnden Mond
Tanzen meine nackten, suchenden Träume,
Nachtwandelnde Kinder,
Leise über düstere Hecken.

O, deine Lippen sind sonnig ...
Diese Rauschedüfte deiner Lippen...
Und aus blauen Dolden silberumringt
Lächelst du...du, du.

Immer das schlängelnde Geriesel
Auf meiner Haut
Über die Schulter hinweg -
Ich lausche...

Wie ein heimlicher Brunnen
Murmelt mein Blut.

(G 142)

Nevertheless, a small group of poems in Der siebente Tag resume - at a more advanced level - the tense conflict of Styx. In Streiter, for example, there is a powerful concentration of images, ideas and free rhythms within the confines of rhyming quatrains:

Und deine hellen Augen heben sich im Zorn,
Schwarz, wie die lange Nacht, und morgenlose.
Des eitlen Stimme brüllt in toter Pose,
Wie durch ein enggebogenes Horn.

Und zwischen übermütigem Tausendlachen
Der Einen und der Zweiten und der Vielen
Zerbersten Wort an Worten sich aus Wetterschwielen
Wie reife Härten auf den lauten Schwachen.

Und Abendwinde, die von her und dort sich trafen
Und schrill in Kreiseleile sich beschielen,
Aufpiffen fröstelnd über die gebohten Dielen.
Ich konnte nachts vor Träumerei nicht schlafen.

Und meine Seele liegt wie eine bleiche Weite
Und hört das Leben mahlen in der Mühle,
Es löst sich auf in schwere Kühle,
Und ballt sich wieder heiss zum Streite.

(G 140)

If Lasker-Schüller wrote later, "Der Mensch der feindlich mich ereilt, zerschellt!/Und ich weiss nur von ihm in Traume" (G 344), then it is in Streiter that the inimical world,

poisoned by conflicting interests, leaves its strongest imprint on the dream. It also shows how the poet's passivity, while suspending the will of the conscious ego, by definition an agent of the inimical world, cedes to an intensely active inner consciousness rising up in fierce self-defence. Against the expanding and contracting tendencies poems like Streiter gather a great strength into themselves.

While the predominant tendency of Lasker-Schüler's poetry is that of concentration and abbreviation - monadic reduction - there are one or two moments when the opposing tendency, instead of telescoping itself in cellular units, breaks out of containment most effectively in catastrophic self-surrender. These too were sudden illuminations, brief, unrepeatable moments. It could not have occurred to Lasker-Schüler to treat the most striking example, Mein Volk, as a formal type or to write another poem like it:

Der Fels wird morsch,
Dem ich entspringe
Und meine Gotteslieder singe...
Jäh stürz ich vom Weg
Und riesele ganz in mir
Fernab, allein Über Klagegestein
Dem Meer zu.

Hab mich so abgeströmt
Von meines Blutes
Mostvergorenheit.
Und immer, immer noch der Widerhall
In mir,
Wenn schauerlich gen Ost
Das morsche Felsgebein,
Mein Volk,
Zu Gottschreit. (G 137)

As if to illustrate the consequences of such self-abandonment the poem immediately preceding Mein Volk in Der siebente Tag shows the lyrical ego in its demonic imprisonment:

Weisst du einen schwereren Gefangenen,
Einen böseren Zauberer, denn ich.

Und meine Arme, die sich heben wollen,
Sinken...

In this poem, the first version of Mein stilles Lied, the poet strikes, as if by accident, for the first time, on the fully-fledged form of her couplet-poems. In its length and feeling, however, it still contradicts the minimalism and suspended lyricism of the couplet-phase itself:

MEIN STILLES LIED

Mein Herz ist eine traurige Zeit,
Die tonlos tickt.

Meine Mutter hatte goldene Flügel,
Die keine Welt fanden.

Horcht, mich sucht meine Mutter,
Lichte sind ihre Finger und ihre Füße wandernde Träume.

Und süsse Wetter mit blauen Wehen
Wärmen meine Schlummer

Immer in den Nächten,
Deren Tage meiner Mutter Krone tragen.

Und ich trinke aus dem Monde stillen Wein,
Wenn die Nacht einsam kommt.

Meine Lieder trugen des Sommers Bläue
Und kehrten düster heim.

Verhöhnt habt ihr mir meine Lippe
Und redet mit ihr.

Doch ich griff nach euren Händen,
Denn meine Liebe ist ein Kind und wollte spielen.

Einen nahm ich von euch und den zweiten
Und küsste ihn,

Aber meine Blicke blieben rückwärts gerichtet
Meiner Seele zu.

Arm bin ich geworden
An eurer bettelnden Wohltat.
Und ich wusste nichts vom Kranksein,
Und bin krank von euch,
Und nichts ist diebischer als Kränke,
Sie bricht dem Leben die Flüsse,
Stiehlt dem Grabweg das Licht,
Und verleumdet den Tod.
Aber mein Auge
Ist der Gipfel der Zeit,
Sein Leuchten küssst
Gottes Saum.
Und ich will euch noch mehr sagen,
Bevor es finster wird zwischen uns.
Bist du der Jüngste von euch,
So solltest du mein Ältestes wissen.
Auf deiner Seele werden es fortan
Alle Welten spielen.
Und die Nacht wird es wehklagen
Dem Tag.
Ich bin der Hieroglyph,
Der unter der Schöpfung steht.
Und ich artete mich nach euch,
Der Sehnsucht nach dem Menschen wegen.
Ich riss die ewigen Blicke von meinen Augen,
Das siegende Licht von meinen Lippen -
Weisst du einen schwereren Gefangenen,
Einen böseren Zauberer, denn ich.
Und meine Arme, die sich heben wollen,
Sinken...

The second version of Mein stilles Lied was brought into the focus of the couplet-phase. Bänisch's claim that Lasker-Schüller removed the demonic images in order to present herself in a good light is surely unconvincing.¹ He overlooks an impulse in the poetry itself to recapture - in a telescoped projection - the virginal territory of traditional lyricism, redeeming tones culled out of negation and asceticism. Bänisch also overlooks the role demonic conflict played in releasing such lyricism. The demonic principle is conspicuous in its absence and the drastic reductionism of the couplet-phase is hardly imaginable without it. Later, when Lasker-Schüller realised that her poetry had failed in its one purpose, to awaken a spell-bound world, demonic images return, and she calls herself a Jew with the head of Baal (G 325). Since the hieroglyphic ego is a negative agent in relation to its socialised antagonist, it does not really make sense, in any case, to identify it with Lasker-Schüller as a person. There is still an echo of demonism in the second version of Mein stilles Lied; once one has read the whole poem its title acquires overtones of suppressed aggression. In the first verses the poet depicts her mother in the realm of death and lyrical transfiguration in which all her poetry was about to experience its most invisible incarnation, while the evil enchanter of the first version, an agent of the thwarted self, has become the hieroglyphic ego, so that it would now be inappropriate to include them both in the same poem. This ego is projected from the early poetry into the heart of the poet's achievement:

MEIN STILLES LIED

Mein Herz ist eine traurige Zeit,
Die tonlos tickt.

Meine Mutter hatte goldene Flügel,
Die keine Welt fanden.

Horcht, mich sucht meine Mutter,
Lichte sind ihre Finger und ihre Füße wandernde Träume.

1. Bänisch, Else Lasker-Schüller, op. cit., p 8.

Und süsse Wetter mit blauen Wehen
Wärmen meine Schlummer

Immer in den Nächten,
Deren Tage meiner Mutter Krone tragen.

Und ich trinke aus dem Monde stillen Wein,
Wenn die Nacht einsam kommt.

Meine Lieder trugen des Sommers Bläue
Und kehrten düster heim.

- Ihr verhöhntet meine Lippe
Und redet mit ihr. -

Doch ich griff nach euren Händen,
Denn meine Liebe ist ein Kind und wollte spielen.

Und ich artete mich nach euch,
Weil ich mich nach dem Menschen sehnte.

Arm bin ich geworden
An eurer bettelnden Wohltat.

Und das Meer wird es wehklagen
Gott.

Ich bin der Hieroglyph,
Der unter der Schöpfung steht,

Und mein Auge
Ist der Gipfel der Zeit;

Sein Leuchten küssst Gottes Saum.

To recapitulate the overlapping phases out of which the poetry of the couplet-phase was elicited: Expressionism evidently came in several waves over the turn of the century. The Cry by Munch was painted in 1893; the waves of colour in the blood-shot sky swirling around the screaming man, for all their intensity, still have something of decorative stylization in them. In Lasker-Schüler's Mein Volk all such mannerism dissolves. When her expressionistic turbulence was just crystallising into the broken forms of her couplet-phase in a kind of Dialektik im

Stillstand the so-called "expressionistic decade" began in Germany around 1910 with Benn, Heym, Trakl and others. Trakl's 'cry' appeared some ten years after Mein Volk and about twenty years after that by Munch:

KIAGE

Schlaf und Tod, die düstern Adler
Umrauschen nachklang dieses Haupt:
Des Menschen goldnes Bildnis
Verschlänge die eisige Woge
Der Ewigkeit. An schaurigen Riffen
Zerschellt der purpurne Leib.
Und es klagt die dunkle Stimme
Über dem Meer.
Schwester stürmischer Schwermut
Sieh ein Ängstlicher Kahn versinkt
Unter Sternen,
Dem schweigenden Antlitz der Nacht.¹

Something of the frozen dialectic of Lasker-Schüler's couplet-phase nevertheless occurs in all the other poets mentioned. Trakl's rhymed quatrains correspond to Lasker-Schüler's couplets and he characterises his own procedure as "meine bildhafte Manier, die in vier Strophenzeilen vier einzelne Bildteile zu einem einzigen Eindruck zusammenschmiedet".² This is another arrangement of the technique of hieroglyphic mosaics, though Lasker-Schüler disconnects her verses rather than fusing them. Even in some of Trakl's later poems in which an emotional pressure breaks through the static forms, they still accumulate a succession of freely associated but closely knit images. In Georg Heym demonic Expressionism and static form are immediately suspended in one another; most of his poems consist of metrically regular, rhymed quatrains. In Gottfried Benn the phase of explosive Expressionism was brief and soon to be absorbed into static patterns and an immaterial loneliness:

1. Georg Trakl, Das dichterische Werk, Munich, 1972.

2. Ibid., p 319.

Nur deine Jahre vergilben
in einem anderen Sinn,
bis in die Träume: Silben -
doch schweigend gehst du hin.¹

Lasker-Schüler's static poems differ from those of her contemporaries in their subtle laconicism, their peculiarly blurred and shadowy Ich-Dichtung, in their blend of free verse and static form and in the suspension of rhymes. There is, in a sense, a return to neo-romantic inwardness, except that it is a hollowed inwardness, keenly aware of its own insubstantiality and half-consciousness. The domain of inwardness has been ravaged. In this sense the couplet-poems are post-expressionist. The first poem of Meine Wunder seems to say, "the storm of Expressionism is over" and then to depict a posthumous existence of the lyrical ego:

NUN SCHLUMMERT MEINE SEELE

Der Sturm hat ihre Stämme gefällt,
O, meine Seele war ein Wald.

Hast du mich weinen gehört?
Weil deine Augen bang geöffnet stehn.
Sterne streuen Nacht
In mein vergossenes Blut.

Nun schlummert meine Seele
Zagend auf Zehen.

O, meine Seele war ein Wald:
Palmen schatteten,
An den Ästen hing die Liebe.
Tröste meine Seele im Schlummer.

(G 153)

1. Benn, Gedichte, op. cit., p 299.

Chapter 9: MIRAGE

Das Ferne war seltsam nah, und das
Nahe

war seltsam Fern.

Georg Heym

Ich bin am Ziel meines Herzens
angelangt.

Weiter führt kein Strahl.

Else Lasker-Schüler

I

Lasker-Schüler's lyrical ego emerges fully in the collection of poems published in 1911 and appropriately entitled Meine Wunder, for these are indeed her own miracles, her "most invisible incarnation" rising in its purest form out of poetic camouflage in this volume and in the ensuing couplet-poems to the men she loved: Senna Hoy (Johannes Holzmann), Tristan (Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele), Giselheer (Gottfried Benn). Erotic love was an agent of dissociation and lyrical transcendence, estranging people from their ordinary selves and conjuring the fata morgana of unburdened nature in man. In such poetry Lasker-Schüler had culled a new language out of her previous neo-romantic and expressionist phase. Elements of both tendencies remain, but they have been absorbed completely into slender hieroglyphic mosaics. Their articulation reaches further than anything else she wrote into a kind of consciousness outside consciousness in its pre-determined socialised forms:

Unsere Augen sind halbgeschlossen,

Wie sterbende Himmel -

Alt ist der Mond geworden.

Die Nacht wird nicht mehr wach.

Du erinnerst dich meiner kaum.

Wo soll ich mit meinem Herzen hin? (Ich bin traurig. G 165)

This distilled consciousness evidently results - like that of self-negation discussed earlier - from historical pressures because it characterises much art that was produced precisely during these years around 1911. The small lyrical poems of Der siebente Ring by George appeared in 1907 and seem to be culled from the same region, as if by accident, amid his more 'serious' endeavours.¹ The poetry of Trakl, although a second wave of Expressionism travels through it with fluctuating impulses, is poetry of extreme loneliness and dissociation, also something of a shadow-life-after-death, as the titles alone suggest: Gesang des Abgeschiedenen, Herbst des Einsamen.² This was the period of atonality in music, when systematically rationalised structures dissolved and left a residual cluster of tones deriving their structure without a schematic framework. Referring to Webern's music of this period in an introduction to the Six Bagatelles op. 9, Schönberg made the remark that a single sigh represented a whole novel.³ The same tendency is represented in the visual arts of Klee, Kandinsky and others.

In the following consideration of the couplet-phase, four poems have been chosen for particular comment. They have been taken as representative examples and read in relation to the couplet-phase as a whole. They will be considered in a group because of the essentially cyclical nature of the couplet-poems: the more one reads them, the more each poem and each couplet acquires significance in relation to the whole cycle. Individual examples do not shrink into genre-like miniatures but crystallise as monadic cells in relation to a larger totality, both within their own microcosmos of revolving imagery and in their dissociation from the prevailing world. Further discussion of couplet-

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1. Stefan George, Der siebente Ring, Düsseldorf & Munich, 1965.
 2. Trakl, Die Dichtungen, op. cit.
 3. Webern, Sechs Bagatellen, op. 9 (miniature score), Philharmonia Partituren, Wien-London, undated.
Schönberg's remark is in the Introduction.

poems follows in the ensuing chapters. The four selected for discussion here have been taken from the group dedicated to Senna Hoy (G 184-189).

EIN LIED DER LIEBE

Seit du nicht da bist,
Ist die Stadt dunkel.

Ich sammle die Schatten
Der Palmen auf,
Darunter du wandeltest.

Immer muss ich eine Melodie summen,
Die hängt lächelnd an den Ästen.

Du liebst mich wieder -
Wem soll ich mein Entzücken sagen?

Einer Waise oder einem Hochzeitler,
Der im Widerhall das Glück hört.

Ich weiss immer,
Wann du an mich denkst -

Dann wird mein Herz ein Kind
Und schreit.

An jedem Tor der Strasse
Verweile ich und träume;

Ich helfe der Sonne deine Schönheit malen
An allen Wänden der Häuser.

Aber ich magere
An deinem Bilde.

Um schlanke Säulen schlinge ich mich
Bis sie schwanken.

Überall steht Wildedel,
Die Blüten unseres Blutes.

Wir tauchen in heilige Moose,
Die aus der Wolle goldener Lämmer sind.

Wenn doch ein Tiger
Seinen Leib streckte
Über die Ferne, die uns trennt,
Wie zu einem nahen Stern.
Auf meinem Angesicht
Liegt früh dein Hauch.

EIN TRAUERLIED

Eine schwarze Taube ist die Nacht
...Du denkst so sanft an mich.
Ich weiss, dein Herz ist still,
Mein Name steht auf seinem Saum.
Die Leiden, die dir gehören,
Kommen zu mir.
Die Seligkeiten, die dich suchen,
Sammele ich unberührt.
So trage ich die Blüten deines Lebens
Weiter fort.
Und möchte doch mit dir stille stehn;
Zwei Zeiger auf dem Zifferblatt.
O, alle Küsse sollen schweigen
Auf beschienenen Lippen liebentlang.
Niemehr soll es früh werden,
Da man deine Jugend brach.
In deiner Schläfe
Starb ein Paradies.
Mögen sich die Traurigen
Die Sonne in den Tag malen.
Und die Trauernden
Schimmer auf ihre Wangen legen.

Im schwarzen Wolkenkelche
Steht die Mondknospe.
...Du denkst so sanft an mich.

SASCHA

Um deine Lippen blüht noch jung
Der Trotz dunkelrot,
Aber auf deiner Stirne sind meine Gebete
Vom Sturm verwittert.

Dass wir uns im Leben
Nie küssen sollten...

Nun bist du der Engel,
Der auf meinem Grab steht.

Das Atmen der Erde bewegt
Meinen Leib wie lebendig.

Mein Herz scheint hell
Vom Rosenblut der Hecken.

Aber ich bin tot, Sascha,
Und das Lächeln liegt abgepfückt
Nur noch kurz auf meinem Gesicht.

SENNA HOY

Seit du begraben liegst auf dem Hügel,
Ist die Erde süß.

Wo ich hingehge nun auf Zehen,
Wandele ich über reine Wege.

O deines Blutes Rosen
Durchtränken sanft den Tod.

Ich habe keine Furcht mehr
Vor dem Sterben.

Auf deinem Grabe blühe ich schon
Mit den Blumen der Schlingpflanzen.

Deine Lippen haben mich immer gerufen,
Nun weiss mein Name nicht mehr zurück.

Jede Schaufel Erde, die dich barg,
Verschüttete auch mich.

Darum ist immer Nacht an mir,
Und Sterne schon in der Dämmerung.

Und ich bin unbegreiflich unseren Freunden
Und ganz fremd geworden.

Aber du stehst am Tor der stillsten Stadt
Und wartest auf mich, du Grossengel.

While the death of the empirical ego is a precondition of awakening in Meine Wunder, this realisation becomes particularly acute in the poems addressed to Senna Hoy. It coincides with his physical death and intensifies the poet's feeling for the natural world into which he has become absorbed: beyond this there is an echo of his vanished being, while this echo itself is the poetic mirage of a new-born consciousness. Death erases the whole domain of empirical experience; in the bereaved it leaves an acute sense of corresponding unreality. All this contributes to the suggestive evocation of a transfigured identity. Death, in this sense, is the medium of love, happiness, fulfilment, of lyrical transfiguration; it is also the intervening shadow, the epic distance that divides the lyrical ego from its empirical counterpart, or, in another sense, people in the modern world from one another and from themselves. If the ego of the everyday world has slipped into the grasp of functionalised socio-economic processes, then responsive poetry speaks for the unconscious, exiled self with its sense of being driven to the margins of non-existence. Particularly in her couplet-phase, Lasker-Schüller's poetry risks itself on these margins. At the same time these poems are a residue of the dialogue between estranged selves. In the couplet-poems death and enigmatic dissociation are most eloquently focussed through one another, allowing the ego to blend into a more freely associative logic

and into the inanimate world as well as that of creatures and plants.

Darkness, shade, penumbral twilight infiltrate the imagery of the poems: darkness falls on the city and is collected in the shadow of palms. Even in Ein Lied der Liebe, addressed to Senna Hoy before his death, there is a sense of deathly absence. Night is a black dove; the poet feels that she has been buried with her friend and so always has a feeling of night about her. She too has become transformed through her experience of death into enigmatic non-identity: she is dead, inexplicable, completely strange. At the same time she gropes for images and sounds to penetrate the darkness and transform the enigma into something real and immediate emerging out of shadowy esotericism into a reborn identification of self and world. In the lines about an ever-present darkness after the death of Senna Hoy there is also a sense of regained immediacy:

Darum ist immer Nacht an mir
Und Sterne schon in der Dämmerung.

The last line evokes the evenings when stars become visible before darkness has descended. The realm of death or of another distant reality is present, near already in the light of self-estranged everyday experience. The immediacy of "Sterne schon" recalls other similar moments: "Schon glühen meine Lippen/
Und sprechen Fernes" (G 168). Nearness and distance speak through one another.

Wenn doch ein Tiger
Seinen Leib streckte
Über die Ferne, die uns trennt,
Wie zu einem nahen Stern.
Auf meinem Angesicht
Liegt früh dein Hauch.

This is one of the moments when an expansive impulse reaches from one couplet into the next counteracting the tendency of each towards monadic contraction. All the more uncanny, then, is the isolation of the last couplet. The breath that lies

across the poet's face is that of death, absence and intimacy in one.

The feeling of epic distance through which a new immediacy is regained is expressed in these lines:

Du liebst mich wieder -
Wem soll ich mein Entzücken sagen?
Einer Waise oder einem Hochzeitler,
Der im Widerhall das Glück hört.

The tenuous, vulnerable moment of requited love produces an echo of love in the poetic imagination. The orphan and the wedding-guest who hear it are like figures in the epic landscape of Des Knaben Wunderhorn, folkloric figures, like the soldiers whose nearness to death or homelessness gives an unreal poignancy to the idea of "home". The possibility of real fulfillment for the poet awakens the jubilation of the following lines:

Ich weiss immer
Wenn du an mich denkst -
Dann wird mein Herz ein Kind
Und schreit.

But happiness is still an echo in the domain of death or deathly absence. The lover himself is not present, only his thoughts and his image painted by the dreamer on the walls of houses. Again, one becomes aware of the conspicuous absence of an empirical ego. Only a reflected image of it is painted in slanting shadows across the walls of houses. In this way the poems fluctuate continually between death, absence, the void, and regained immediacy; as they cede to death, so the outlines of a new life emerge, and the tension between the two poles is registered in a whole range of modifications and subtle nuances. If the lover's shadow cast across the walls of houses associates poetic spirituality uncannily with the inanimate world, the moment of most absolute, deathly stillness occurs in the next poem, Ein Trauerlied:

Und möchte mit dir stille stehn;
Zwei Zeiger auf dem Zifferblatt.

This is the moment in which all time stands still in the poet's imagination. The clock is a product of technology and one of the impulses of art nouveau had been to express a spirituality frozen in technology.¹ In Lasker-Schüler's couplet there is still the characteristic commitment of poet and lover, but all the wayward spirituality of Neo-Romanticism dissolves in this image of indicators standing still on a dial's face. (Here one recalls the timeless passage of time in Mein stilles Lied: "Mein Herz ist eine traurige Zeit,/Die tonlos tickt"- G 285). The lovers are seen nevertheless as indicators on the face of time, enigmatic pointers to a different order of being.

Once more there is a remarkable parallel in the ideas of Walter Benjamin: "Zum Denken gehört nicht nur die Bewegung der Gedanken, sondern ebenso ihre Stillstellung. Wo das Denken in einer von Spannungen gesättigten Konstellation plötzlich einhält, da erteilt es derselben einen Chok, durch den es sich als Monade kristallisiert. Der historische Materialist geht an einen geschichtlichen Gegenstand einzig und allein da heran, wo er ihm als Monade entgegentritt. In dieser Struktur erkennt er das Zeichen einer messianischen Stillstellung des Geschehens, anders gesagt, einer revolutionären Chance im Kampfe für die unterdrückte Vergangenheit.....Der Ertrag seines Verfahrens besteht darin, das im Werk das Lebenswerk, im Lebenswerk die Epoche, und in der Epoche der gesamte Gesellschaftsverlauf aufbewahrt ist und aufgehoben. Die nahrhafte Frucht des historisch begriffenen hat die Zeit als den kostbaren, aber des Geschmacks entratenen Samen in ihrem Innern".² The expression "messianische Stillstellung der Zeit" could have been written with Lasker-Schüler's couplet-phase in mind and the couplets themselves resemble seeds in time. Benjamin's notion of such seeds as "kostbar aber des Geschmacks entraten" corresponds to the ascetic or laconic tendency in Lasker-Schüler modifying the sweetness of lyrical transfiguration. Nowhere is this modified more poignantly than in the last two lines of a later poem, Gott hör (G 321):

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1. See my comments on page 101.
 2. Benjamin, Illuminationen, op. cit., p 278.

Der rote Wein wird schon in seiner Beere schal...
Und überall - die Bitternis - in jedem Kern.

A messianic stillness pervades the whole of Ein Trauerlied. Its opening lines are among the most sensitive addressed to the Du of Lasker-Schüler's poetry:

Eine schwarze Taube ist die Nacht
...Du denkst so sanft an mich.

Ich weiss, dein Herz ist still,
Mein Name steht auf seinem Saum.

Die Leiden, die dir gehören,
Kommen zu mir.

Die Seligkeiten, die dich suchen,
Sammele ich unberührt.

This stillness is secretive and revealing at the same time, utterly strange, yet intimate and familiar. The poet seems to reach for untouched sounds in the German language as she gathers, in her mind, the untouched blisses that seek her lover. Like these blisses, assonances and alliterations are gathered freely and yet with a subtle cogency; in the varied rhythms and lengths of lines one feels unburdenment from the constraint of more outwardly formal versification. The couplets touch on the most subtle margin between the opposing domains of repressive secularity and transcendence. Nothing remains of the alien world, while, for this very reason, the words sound alien in their intimacy. Hence the dissociation of sorrows and blisses from empirical psychology, so that they may leave old associations and enter new ones. The half-personified qualities one finds, particularly in Lasker-Schüler and Trakl,¹ are not merely a device, therefore, but essential constituents of a changed perspective. Sorrows and joys are redeemed from a society that was abusing them.² Linguistically one could follow the sensitive and tactful transformation of sounds

1. Trakl: "Mond, als träte ein Totes/Aus blauer Höhle" etc. in George Trakl, Die Dichtungen, op. cit., p 169: Abendland.

2. This idea may seem as odd to some readers as the personifications in poetry. But, surely, one of the main impulses of lyrical poetry is to find redeeming tones.

and meanings as they reflect from the focal word Saum, which stands for the poet's residual margin of experience. From its resonance an alliteration of s's spreads through the surrounding verses, blending with other sound-patterns and concepts in their soft and feeling (tastende) expressiveness (Nacht, sanft, still), as conveyed in the image of searching blisses. There are variations in alliteration, as in the relatively more resonant d's in the third verse; its second line accumulates m's that proliferate as unobtrusively as the s's. M's are formed on the lips (Lippen being a recurrent word, as in the line: "Alle Lippen halten den Atem an" - G 181). The combination of m's and s's release the remaining vowels and consonants in a whispered or softly resonant language: the secret, untouched German elicited from that of prevailing violence and repression. In a language of such 'released' concentration every sound becomes distinctive, and, at this point, eludes conceptual analysis, or crystallises in a transformed conceptuality.¹ A structuralist examination of minutest particles would be foiled by the disarmingly simple and unquantifiable residue of experience in words like Nacht, Herz, Leiden. However, one can still note the way in which a self-releasing rhythm and the onomatopoeic suggestiveness of the r's and the modified vowel in unberührt are echoed in the previous verse, in the phrase "die dir gehören".

The softness of the lover's thoughts follow in a freely associative way from the image of night as a black dove, yet nothing could enhance the sense of secretive communication in the night more effectively than this identification with the dark creaturely being of the dove. The first line almost evokes dove-calls buried in the night: the tender 'calls' or whisperings that follow one another in the couplet-phase, nevertheless, do not imitate other creatures, but correspond to their language, rather, in a humane transmutation as a distinctive voice of awakening nature, as though human beings had become the creatures of nature in a divine creation. This idea had been expressed in the moment of reaching into the couplet-phase in Mein stilles Lied:

1. Setting aside the elucidation provided above, I am inclined to agree with Edith Sitwell's objection to "prosodists" who claim such interpretation of sound-patterns is subjective - and who seize on silence to ignore subtleties to which half the beauty of poetry is due. The Pleasures of Poetry, Vol. I, London, 1930, p 9.

Ich bin der Hieroglyph,
Der unter der Schöpfung steht

Und mein Auge
Ist der Gipfel der Zeit;

Sein Leuchten küsst Gottes Saum. (G 286)

The image of night as a black dove is complemented at the end of Ein Trauerlied by that of moon, plant and cloud fused into one image of secretive communication and enigmatic dissociation, one of the most tenderly feminine yet laconic of couplets in Lasker-Schüller:

Im schwarzen Wolkenkelche
Steht die Mondknospe.

Often the focal moment of dissociation comes in the penultimate verse or just before the end of a poem, in Mein stilles Lied, for example ("Ich bin der Hieroglyph"), and in Senna Hoy ("Und ich bin unbegreiflich unseren Freunden/Und ganz fremd geworden"). This is one of the ways in which one feels the poet's dispersed, freely associative imagism counteracted by a force of logical concentration, of Dichtung, even where the dissociative impulse is not gathered thus into the ending. But there are several other examples of this procedure: in the second last couplet of Giselheer dem Heiden (G 205) enigmatic dissociation is transposed with characteristic aggression onto the inimical world ("Und mag den kühlen Tag nicht,/Der hat ein Glasauge"); in Nur dich (G 218), on the other hand, this moment in the last two couplets is one of almost awakening into a reborn world:

Vielleicht ist mein Herz die Welt,
Pocht -

Und sucht nur noch dich -
Wie soll ich dich rufen?

In Dem Barbaren (G 221) the poet characterises her own enigmas in the second last verse ("Dich beglückt das erschrockene Rauschen/Meiner Muscheln") and in the last lines of O ich möchte aus der Welt (222 G) she is a "Flackerlicht/Um Gottes Grab".

Another mode of logic in Lasker-Schüler is the contrast between lyrical dissociation and disappointed rebound. Despite the elusiveness of her imagism, it is possible to discern the following characteristic pattern in Ein Trauerlied:¹

Eine schwarze Taube ist die Nacht] ...Du denkst so sanft an mich.	Strangeness
Ich weiss, dein Herz ist still, Mein Name steht auf seinem Saum. Die Leiden, die dir gehören, Kommen zu mir.	Transcendence
Die Seligkeiten, die dich suchen, Sammele ich unberührt. So trage ich die Blüten deines Lebens Weiter fort.	
Und möchte doch mit dir stille stehn; Zwei Zeiger auf dem Zifferblatt. O, alle Küsse sollen schweigen Auf beschienenen Lippen liebentlang.	Rebound, impoverishment
Niemehr soll es früh werden, Da man deine Jugend brach. In deiner Schläfe Starb ein Paradies.	
Mögen sich die Traurigen Die Sonne in den Tag malen. Und die Trauernden Schimmer auf ihre Wangen legen.	
Im schwarzen Wolkenkelche } Steht die Mondknospe. }	
... Du denkst so sanft an mich]	Enigma
	Residue of transcendence

1. For further examples see p. 182-186. Cited here, they would interrupt my more general consideration of logical coherence in the couplet-poems.

The constitutive experience is that of estrangement from the prevailing social reality. This is registered first in dissociative imagery. Dissociation itself is the medium of lyrical transcendence; it has been considered, also, as the medium of a regained immediacy, often introduced by the word schon.¹ Behind the sensitive lyricism of the couplet-poems, therefore, there is still the aggressive, unyielding impulse of dissociation: the antagonistic world has been erased. The images of immediate transcendence, still imbued in varying degrees with the undertones of estrangement or strangeness, then recede as they recall the world that precludes the fulfilment of the lyrical ego. As if to compensate, the dissociative impulse gathers itself into a projected enigma. Often this is followed by shreds or a residue of the poem's transcendent imagery.

It should be self-evident that Dieter Bänisch's theory of a logic, so broken that the couplets are inter-changeable, is a misreading.¹ His thesis as a whole seems to apply the very bull-dozer logic which it had been the poet's aim to elude. Not only does the poetry follow general patterns (like those indicated above) but there is also a hypersensitive associative progression from one couplet to the next. Nevertheless, Bänisch's impression probably implies a quite acute response, for there is indeed a tendency toward monadic disintegration in Lasker-Schüler: it belongs to the innermost intention of the poetry itself. In Ein Trauerlied the last couplet before the single-line refrain is the most independent and separable hieroglyph ("Im schwarzen Wolkenkelche/Steht die Mondknospe"), though, apart from its characteristic function of gathering the poem's enigmatic intentions into itself, it is also the reflex (like the image of the hieroglyph in Mein stilles Lied) of a sense of deprivation in a calculating and unimaginative world. The image of the moon-bud is also a reflex of the 'soft thought' beginning and ending the poem; this image

1. See p. 163ff.

2. Bänisch, Else Lasker-Schüler, op. cit., p. 19f.

is itself also the flowering of such thought. In the first lines, too, "...Du denkst so sanft an mich" with its intervening punctuation and the linking particle "so" follows from the preceding line about night as a black dove, releasing a muted resonance between the two lines, as also the impulse of immediate transcendence. There follows the music of muted consonants running through the first couplets with the first full resonance coming on 'seinem Saum' in the lines: "Ich weiss, dein Herz ist still, /Mein Name steht auf seinem Saum", considered earlier as the resonating Saum¹ of all the poetry. "...Du denkst so sanft an mich" is also a rondo-like refrain, coming at the beginning and the end². The feeling of soft thoughts or "untouched blisses" in the couplet-poems, of a listening attentiveness, results in a responsive accumulation of images, burgeoning out of silence and the void, beyond the sphere of oppressive logic:

Ich lehne am geschlossenen Lid der Nacht
Und horche in die Ruhe.

Alle Sterne träumen von mir,
Und ihre Strahlen werden goldener,
Und meine Ferne undurchdringlicher. (Der Letzte, G 144)

Another relatively early poem, "Täubchen das in seinem eigenen Blut schwimmt", contains a quite literal image of half-opening buds as a reflex of desolation:

Und mein braunes Auge blüht
Halberschlossen vor meinem Fenster
Und zirpt.-

A sense of dispersed and dissolving logic is as essential to this lyrical mode as the subtle suggestion of ideas threaded into one another or separating in paratactical distinctions.

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1. See p. 167
 2. As in Versöhnung, G 155, Wo mag der Tod mein Herz lassen, G 160, in Rast and An Gott, G 170-1, there are varied refrains, Der Letzte, G 144, Ein Lied, G 245.

In poems like Ein Trauerlied the friction of loosened, para-tactical synthesis becomes the mode of an unburdened lyrical expressiveness. The first couplet is followed by a subtle interplay of hieroglyphic monads with a logical progression of thoughts and images. The individual lines in the second couplet reply to one another ("Ich weiss, dein Herz ist still, / Mein Name steht auf seinem Saum"); then the partial personifications of sorrows and blisses as the blossoms of Senna Hoy's life are associated as well as forming three distinctive images; in the next verses logical particles appear as links (So trage ich... Und möchte doch... Niemehr..."); Senna Hoy's broken youth is then associated with the paradise that died in his temples and with the desolate world he has left behind.

These verses in the second part of Ein Trauerlied leave something like the threadbare residue of enigmatic communications, although the two tendencies of transcendence and rebound are not really separable and blend into one another, not only logically, but also in the feeling, tone and texture of versification.¹ An impoverished reality is implied in transcendence and there is an echo of transcendence in the images of impoverished reality. One of the acutest moments of such interpenetration has been observed in Ein Lied der Liebe, in the lines about the orphan and the wedding guest:

Du liebst mich wieder -
Wem soll ich mein Entzücken sagen?
Einer Waise oder einem Hochzeitler,
Der im Widerhall das Glück hört.

¹ The terms 'transcendence' and 'rebound' should not be confused with H.W. Cohn's 'swing of the pendulum', his exposition of the poet's negative and positive responses to the world. I have been considering the most negative impulses of the poetry as, in an inverted sense, their most positive aspect. Where for Cohn religious transcendence is the way out of negation or withdrawal, it belongs in my analysis, to the negative sphere (for better and worse). This is particularly clear in Mein stilles Lied in which it is through rebound from reality and association with God that the hieroglyphic ego crystallises. See p. 39f and p. 71f. for my essential argument with Cohn.

One of the saddest and most beautiful transitions occurs in Mein stilles Lied, as the poet moves from thoughts about her mother to her immediate reality:

Horcht, mich sucht meine Mutter,
Lichte sind ihre Finger und ihre Füße wandernde Träume.

Und süsse Wetter mit blauen Wehen
Wärmen meine Schlummer

Immer in den Nächten,
Deren Tage meiner Mutter Krone tragen.

Und ich trinke aus dem Monde stillen Wein,
Wenn die Nacht einsam kommt.

Meine Lieder trugen des Sommers Bläue
Und kehrten düster heim.

-Ihr verhöhntet meine Lippe
Und redet mit ihr.-

In Ein Trauerlied the poet feels that a whole promise of fulfilment, of paradise on earth, have died with Senna Hoy. This affirmation loses nothing of its significance if one does not know that Senna Hoy (Johannes Holzmann) was an anarchist revolutionary who died in a Russian prison;¹ the implication of such radicalism is inscribed into nearly every verse of Lasker-Schüler's. The couplet, "In deiner Schläfe/Starb ein Paradies", reminds one of the real fulfilment which is the motivating force in Lasker-Schüler's dissociative lyricism. The promise is inextricable from the theme of death (of the empirical ego) as the precondition of a reborn world. The interpenetration (Ineinanderstimmen) of lost paradise, orphaned promise and impoverished reality is registered in these couplets:

1. See J.P. Wallmann, Else Lasker-Schüler, op. cit., p 52: "Senna Hoy....hatte um 1904 in Berlin die anarchistische Zeitschrift "Kampf" herausgegeben und war nach Russland gegangen, wo er im März 1907 wegen Beteiligung an revolutionären Unruhen zu 15 Jahren Zuchthaus verurteilt wurde. In den Gefängnissen des zaristischen Russland wurde er infolge der unmenschlichen Behandlung geisteskrank, so dass er 1912 in eine Irrenanstalt eingeliefert (contd.)"

Mögen sich die Traurigen
Die Sonne in den Tag malen.

Und die Trauernden
Schimmer auf ihre Wangen legen.

There is an unmistakable aura of reification or commercialisation in these verses.¹ Earlier in the same poem the motif of romantic negation of the prevailing secular world, of the day and its harnessed rationality, had recurred: "Niemehr soll es früh werden,/Da man deine Jugend brach". Artists have to paint a sun into their day; their happiness, like that of kitsch, is a substitute happiness. The sun itself is like a piece of kitsch in a functionalised world, and the aura of death makes it seem all the more unreal. This awareness pervades the feeling of the couplet-poems and they do not really resemble art, eluding fixation in established categories of plaster-cast genius or of the standardised classic. Hence the risk of triteness and insubstantiality, perhaps the feature of Lasker-Schüler's poetry that most resists comprehension. Even Karl Kraus, who admired the 'unyielding' nature of her genius, begins to misunderstand her at this point: "Trotz einer Stofflichkeit unter Sonne, Mond und Sternen (und mancher Beiläufigkeit, die solches Ausschwärmen begleitet) ist ihr Schaffen wahrhaft neue lyrische Schöpfung".² Precisely in this

werden musste, in der er mehrere Selbstmordversuche unternahm....

"Im Winter 1913/14 schliesslich unternahm Else Lasker-Schüler selbst eine Reise nach Russland, um sich dort für Senna Hoy einzusetzen...Dass diese Reise tatsächlich stattgefunden hat, beweist eine Postkarte Else Lasker-Schülers an Karl Kraus, die sich heute in der Wiener Stadtbibliothek befindet und die den Poststempel von Petersburg trägt."

1. It is difficult to 'prove' this aura of commercialisation; to me it is unmistakable. 'Survivors' in the 'wrong' world have to paint their sun instead of enjoying a 'real' one. They have to find experience in art rather than in reality; then they have to sell those experiences. Lasker-Schüler also tried to earn with exhibitions of paintings and drawings. Since most of what we do consists of buying and selling ourselves or our work (and it was in this world that Lasker-Schüler felt impoverished), critics should not have too much difficulty in detecting an echo of commerce in art. See pages 175 and 177 for further evidence.

2. In DD 571

realm of the incidental Lasker-Schüler poetry - what she calls her most invisible incarnation (PS 370) - really crystallises. Laconicism coincides with extreme spiritualisation and lyrical unburdenment ("Von einem jähen Hauche - kann der Vers verwehen - G 341) as also with the risk of an evaporating substantiality, of the sheerest purposelessness in a world of all-pervading purposes.

In Mein Herz, immediately after the poet had cited some of her most perilously evanescent couplets, a characteristic statement appears: "Aber was geht es mich an, ich habe kein Interesse für das Wohlergehen dieser Welt mehr, schwärme nur noch für ihren ärmsten Tand; Schaumglaskugeln in allen Farben...." (PS 355). In this the parallel with Walter Benjamin is resumed. Of him Adorno writes: "Kleine Glaskugeln, die eine Landschaft enthalten, auf die es schneit, wenn man sie schüttelt, zählen zu seinen Lieblingsutensilien.....(-).....Seine Vorliebe für minimale Objekte wie Staub und Plüsch...steht komplementär zu jener Technik, die von all dem angezogen wird, was durch die Maschen des konventionellen Begriffsnetzes hindurchschlüpfte..."¹ Weissenberger misunderstands Lasker-Schüler when he seeks to locate words like Herz within the vocabulary of mystical aspiration and equates this with poetic articulation as such.² Words like heart and star belong to a forsaken cheap currency of poetic vocabulary. Lasker-Schüler's stars make this reader think of a large café he used to slip into as a schoolboy in Cape Town: it was called the Del Monico, was covered by a large black dome full of scintillating stars, and had an orchestra surrounded by a décor of palm trees. It is here, rather, that the lyrical transitions of Lasker-Schüler's vocabulary need to be located, from here that they are drawn into her laconic mode of imagism. Herz then becomes the clownish toy which hides its pain in playfulness, the heart that juggles around the lover's sweetest fountain, or is painted red, like the thigh of a lady of pleasure (G 165).³

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1. T.W. Adorno, Über Walter Benjamin, Frankfurt, 1970, p 17 and p 27f.
 2. See p 199f. where Weissenberger's assessment of Atem in Lasker-Schüler's vocabulary is considered. Herz was included by him in the same criticism.
 3. i.e. a prostitute. The poem with the image of the prostitute is cited on page 177.

In contrast to poets of lofty sentiment, Lasker-Schüller knew that she was living in a heartless world when she wrote in Der Malik: "O, ich könnte direkt meine Seele (meinetwegen) mit Syndetikon an eine zweite kleben. Syndetikon klebt auch Glas und Gold. Wenn doch jemand seine Lieblingsblume neben meinem Herzen pflanzen würde, oder einen Stern giessen würde in mein Herz..." (PS 399). In this clowning and juggling with hearts and stars there is a concealed desolation; only a poet who sensed as precisely as Lasker-Schüller, what was happening to her world, could feel the heart as she did in Weltende:

Komm, wir wollen uns näher verbergen...
Das Leben liegt in aller Herzen
Wie in Särgen.

Du! wir wollen uns tief küssen -
Es pocht eine Sehnsucht an die Welt,
An der wir sterben müssen. (G 149)

Karl Kraus, again, was really one of the few critics to respond to the poet's language at its own point of transition between imagery and articulation: "Else Lasker-Schüller", he wrote, "deren ganzes Dichten eigentlich in dem Reim bestand, den ein Herz aus Schmerz gesogen hatte..."¹ To remove the heart and even the 'kitsch' from Lasker-Schüller's poetry would be to remove its soul.

More still than the feeling of an artificial happiness in those who paint a sun into their day, the image of people putting shimmer on their cheeks in Ein Trauerlied strikes a chord in which the aura of commerce and of transcendent spirituality blend. Without naming it, this verse seems to conjure the whole feeling of the modern city, popularised and commercialised sociability, rouge and lipstick, the cafés of the twentieth century. If Walter Benjamin criticised the aura of traditional art, its origin and continued involvement in superstitious cult, 'aura', here, in the word Schimmer, has become a threadbare residue: vanishing aura and a redeeming crystallisation of form meet in a momentary glimpse, here, as in the whole couplet-phase. Cutting through all Parnassian allures, the

1. In DD 570.

poet's sympathy is with impoverished spirituality and cultishness in the modern world.¹ Lasker-Schüller is more sparing still than Trakl in the use of images of normalised modernity, but, as with him, those that do penetrate the taboo present the world in its impoverished, vulnerable and threatened aspects. One of the very few such images (cited above) to enter her poetry occurs in Ich bin traurig:

Um deinen süssesten Brunnen
Gaukelte mein Herz.

Nun will ich es schminken,

Wie die Freudenmädchen

Die welke Rose ihrer Lende röten.² (G 165)

With characteristic asceticism, in Ein Trauerlied, even such images are omitted or transformed and the word Schimmer has a metamorphosised significance; while it registers a sense of impoverishment it also blends into the feeling of transfigured communication in the poem as a whole. This culminates, then, in the projected image of the moonbud and subsides in the echo of the last line:

"...Du denkst so sanft an mich."

After Senna Hoy's death all kisses must be silent on the glowing lips of transfigured communications:

O, alle Küsse müssen schweigen
Auf beschienenen Lippen liebentlang.

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1. Benjamin, Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, an essay in Illuminationen, op.cit., see p 154 in particular.
 2. This poem, read together with the Senna Hoy poems, brings out the "unmistakable aura of commerce" discussed on p 174ff.

In the next poem, Sascha, the poet writes: "Dass wir uns im Leben/Nie küssen sollten." The 'we' here also stands for those who look through a glass darkly now, but 'then' will meet from face to face. ("Ich suchte ewig dich - es bluten meine Flüsse -" (G 366). One aspect of this utopianism is a peculiar taboo on the kiss or hesitation before it. In Dem Mönch there is the disconcerting couplet:

O wir möchten uns küssen,
Aber es wäre wie Mord. (G 243)

In several of the prose-poems in Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad a mythical spell prevents the couple from enjoying the kiss they desire. One piece is entitled Apollydes und Tino sind Zagende und träumen unter der Mondscheibe:

Wir wissen nicht, in welchem Lande wir sind, heiss ist es, und in der Ferne steigen schwarze Feuer auf, die prangen oben tief in schillernden Rosen. Wir berühren kaum unsere Hände, aber wenn der Blutstropfen hochsteigt in unseren Schläfen, dann drängen sich unsere Lippen zusammen, aber sie küssen sich nicht, sie drohen zu zerbrechen im Wunsch.

(PS 83)

When the kiss finally does occur, Apollydes is called away and then disappears forever. (Apollydes is called der Griechenknabe¹ like the father of Lasker-Schüler's son who

1. See p 28.

evidently vanished in a similar way). A limited psychological view of Lasker-Schüller's attitudes to sex would be inadequate. It is apparently true that she considered erotic fulfilment was only possible for her in a romantic attachment (DD 579). In Mein Herz she feels that love should only be allowed between Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde and similar figures (PS 343f); together with the entire prevailing social reality she also taboos its sexuality. This analysis does not intend to suggest that an advanced aesthetic position in such artists implies a ban on real sex; rather, it follows the contrasting perspectives of poetry in which all experiences are modified and appear in a different light. Accordingly one needs to distinguish between Lasker-Schüller's poetry and her life. At one point she defended herself bitterly against rumours that she enticed young men to her room in order to recruit supporters.

Most of the love poems were nevertheless addressed to men with whom Lasker-Schüller never really found fulfilment; the love was unrequited or very briefly requited. In poetry love hesitates before the kiss or asks for the silencing of all kisses ("alle Küsse sollen schweigen"), because it is to be the all-redeeming kiss. The kisses of David and Jonathan are those of boys outside self-reproducing norms, and they are parting kisses: "Immer nimmst du still im Kusse Abschied -" (G 162). Even in the most complete fulfilment, in another poem to Senna Hoy, the lyrical Ich still searches for lips behind a thousand kisses and the lovers are peculiarly hidden behind a screen of darkness, invisibility and inverted imagery:

1. Bauschinger, Else Lasker-Schüller, op. cit., p 133.

Immer suche ich nach deinen Lippen
Hinter tausend Klüssen.

Eine Nacht aus Gold,
Sterne aus Nacht...
Niemand sieht uns.

Kommt das Licht mit dem Grün,
Schlummern wir:

Nur unsere Schultern spielen noch wie Falter. (G 183)

Moments of such fulfilment are rare. So long as love is not fulfilled in the world poetry represents this possibility and tends to be ascetic towards fulfilment within the prevailing terms. In the last two poems under consideration, Sascha and Senna Hoy, Lasker-Schüler's inversion of values is particularly evident: the dead friend becomes the living being while the living poet sees herself as dead. Senna Hoy is the angel standing on her grave, or she feels as though every spade of earth that buried him covered her too. In this way a particularly close identification with nature, with a more impersonal experience infiltrates the domain of self-consciousness. Something other than a separate and dominating subjectivity finds expression in the utterances of the Ich. The poet follows the monadic principle of individualism to the point of self-suspension:

Das Atmen der Erde bewegt
Meinen Leib wie lebendig.

Mein Herz scheint hell
Vom Rosenblut der Hecken.

In Senna Hoy the domains of life and death, subjectivity and nature, self-surrender and self-discovery, are most intricately mingled. The burial of Senna Hoy gives the poet her sense of absolute estrangement:

Und ich bin unbegreiflich unseren Freunden
Und ganz fremd geworden.

One recalls a sentence in one of Lasker-Schüler's letters: "Ich bin ja überall fremd und würde noch fremder im Gefühl eines

Menschen sein." (BII 69) In Senna Hoy the 'feeling of a person' has dissolved into an identification with the earth, sweetened by the sense of the friends' fusion with it, and with the blood of roses. The Ich of this poetry is no longer afraid of death, because it has become the moment of transfigured self-realisation:

Ich habe keine Furcht mehr
Vor dem Sterben.

Auf deinem Grabe blühe ich schon
Mit den Blumen der Schlingpflanzen.

The image of creepers entwined in one another in Schlingpflanzen is particularly characteristic in its expression of commitment, Hingabe. Seen in terms of complete estrangement, its tender humourousness and intimacy elude any false familiarity. The verse contains the typical schon of immediate dissociation which is nevertheless culled out of a labyrinth of mediated lyrical reflections. The image of the Ich as creeper has appeared already in Ein Lied der Liebe:

Aber ich magere
An deinem Bilde.

Um schlanke Säulen schlinge ich mich
Bis sie schwanken.

Here there had been a more perilous intensity in the poet's commitment and a corresponding sense of the Ich growing thin (as the whole couplet-phase does) on its dialogue with the world or its representative Du.

At the end of Senna Hoy this Du is the angel standing at the gate of the quietest city. Much more than a supernatural being in the popular sense, he is the "you" which all Lasker-Schüler's poetry awaits and who represents another reality. The search and tentative awakening from the prevailing one continually risk uncertainty and the unknown ("Ich taste überall nach deinen Schein./ Suchst du mich auch?" Dem Mönch G 243) and in later years there is increasing disappointment: "Nie aber kam mein Ebenmensch mir

je entgegen." (Ewige Nächte, G 325). At the same time Lasker-Schüler did not simply transpose messianic awakening into the hereafter but expected it to materialise in every lover in the same way that she actually wanted to be the other self of her phantasies in Berlin, renaming the city and her friends. So long as such attempts remain thwarted, poetry represents their possibility and, in a sense, their reality, and not simply an unreal projection of nostalgia. The scintillating monads of Lasker-Schüler's couplets are perhaps one of the most finely sifted residues of a qualitatively differentiated experience in the German language surviving from the Expressionist phase.

II

The patterns of dissociation, transcendence and rebound that were considered in Ein Trauerlied change continually, but they are reflected in all the couplet-poems. They are particularly evident in some of the most memorable poems, in Senna Hoy, Mein stilles Lied and Heimweh. These poems, in which the 'aimless' play of couplets touches most perceptibly on large conceptual dimensions, are cited and briefly compared here.

In Senna Hoy the enigma is expressed conceptually as inexplicability and strangeness, and in the preceding verses there is a complete fusion of the images of transcendence and dissociation in the poet's reflections about death. The rebound into disillusionment has also been blended - almost suspended - so that it can hardly be extricated and separately identified. Its modified impulse culminates in the image of enigmatic self-projection:

SENNA HOY

Seit du begraben liegst auf dem Hügel,
Ist die Erde süß.

Wo ich hingehge nun auf Zehen,
Wandele ich über reine Wege.

O deines Blutes Rosen
Durchtränken sanft den Tod.

Ich habe keine Furcht mehr
Vor dem Sterben.

Auf deinem Grabe blühe ich schon
Mit den Blumen der Schlingpflanzen.

Deine Lippen haben mich immer gerufen,
Nun weiss mein Name nicht mehr zurück.

Jede Schaufel Erde, die dich barg,
Verschlüttete auch mich.

Darum ist immer Nacht an mir,
Und Sterne schon in der Dämmerung.

Und ich bin unbegreiflich unseren Freunden
Und ganz fremd geworden.

Aber du stehst am Tor der stillsten Stadt
Und wartest auf mich, du Grossengel.

Strangeness and
transcendence.

(rebound)

enigma

residue of
transcendence

In Heimweh dissociation is registered more specifically in relation to country and language. Enigmatic projection of the self is included more playfully with the transcendent images as a "buntes Bilderbuch". Rebound and a more generalised enigma are fused in the next verses: the whole imaginative dimension takes the place of the hieroglyphic ego as the critical dividing line between antagonistic dimensions. Beyond its frozen and blinded identity, the residue of transcendence subsides with the prayers that sink away in the sacred river!

HEIMWEH

Ich kann die Sprache
Dieses kühlen Landes nicht,
Und seinen Schritt nicht gehn.

Auch die Wolken, die vorbeiziehn,
Weiss ich nicht zu deuten.

Die Nacht ist eine Stiefkönigin.

strangeness

Immer muss ich an die Pharaonenwälder denken
Und küsse die Bilder meiner Sterne.

transcendence

Meine Lippen leuchten schon
Und sprechen Fernes,

and

Und bin ein buntes Bilderbuch
Auf deinem Schoss.

enigma

Aber dein Antlitz spinnt
Einen Schleier aus Weinen.

rebound

Meinen schillernden Vögeln
Sind die Korallen ausgestoche,

and

blinded enigma

An den Hecken der Gärten
Versteinern sich ihre weichen Nester.

Wer salbt meine toten Paläste -
Sie trugen die Kronen meiner Väter,
Ihre Gebete versanken im heiligen Fluss.

subsiding
residue of
transcendence

(G 168.

Mein stilles Lied is itself the dividing line between the early poetry and everything that followed. The progression of responses is clearly discernible in five sections, the third of which provides the lengthiest exposition of the poet's disillusionment and the most explicit reference to its causes. These, it has been observed before, were still more explicit in the first version of Mein stilles Lied, which was evidently shortened so as to bring the contrasting moods and ideas into a more tactful focus with one another. The more discursive references to the inimical world are resumed in the later poetry:

MEIN STILLES LIED

Mein Herz ist eine traurige Zeit,
Die tonlos tickt.

Meine Mutter hatte goldene Flügel,
Die keine Welt fanden.

Horcht, mich sucht meine Mutter,
Lichte sind ihre Finger und ihre Füße wandernde Träume.

Und süsse Wetter mit blauen Wehen
Wärmen meine Schlummer

Immer in den Nächten,
Deren Tage meiner Mutter Krone tragen.

Und ich trinke aus dem Monde stillen Wein,
Wenn die Nacht einsam kommt.

Meine Lieder trugen des Sommers Bläue
Und kehrten düster heim.

-Ihr verhöhn^{ter} meine Lippe
Und redet mit ihr. -

Doch ich griff nach euren Händen,
Denn meine Liebe ist ein Kind und wollte spielen.

Und ich artete mich nach euch,
Weil ich mich nach dem Menschen sehnte.

Arm bin ich geworden
An eurer bittenden Wohltat.

Und das Meer wird es wehklagen
Gott.

Ich bin der Hieroglyph,
Der unter der Schöpfung steht

Und mein Auge
Ist der Gipfel der Zeit;

Sein Leuchten küsst Gottes Saum

strangeness

transcendence

rebound

enigma

residue and
projection of
transcendence

(G 285)

Leise sagen- is cited as an example in which the pattern of responses is less discernible as a progression of entities. An apparently lost lover has robbed the poet of her transcendent self and world. Enigmatic dissociation is expressed in the idea of crinkled thoughts. There is something like the characteristic residue of transcendence in the last two verses, in the heart that lost its sense of direction and goes down, while the lover's hands grasp at the fabric (Gewebe) of the poet's being.

LEISE SAGEN

Du nahmst dir alle Sterne
Über meinem Herzen.

Meine Gedanken kräuseln sich,
Ich muss tanzen.

Immer tust du das, was mich aufschauen lässt,
Mein Leben zu müden.

Ich kann den Abend nicht mehr
Über die Hecken tragen.

Im Spiegel der Bäche
Finde ich mein Bild nicht mehr.

Dem Erzengel hast du
Die schwebenden Augen gestohlen;

Aber ich nasche vom Seim
Ihrer Bläue.

Mein Herz geht langsam unter
Ich weiss nicht wo -

Vielleicht in deiner Hand.

Überall greift sie an mein Gewebe.

(G 163)

If one had to choose the most idiosyncratic of all Lasker-Schüller's poems, it would perhaps be this one with its registration of eccentric and humourous impulses, one could say, its transmutation into poetry of neurotic impulses. The charm and peculiarity of combinations in each verse and in the succession

of verses are quintessential Lasker-Schüller. Crinkled thoughts are the reflex of compulsive dancing and this compulsiveness is transmitted to the next verse, as though the love affair were going around in circles, wearying the poet's transcendent (upward looking) impulses. This results in a series of images whose originality speak for themselves. Particularly charming is the image of the stolen eyes and of the poet nibbling from the surface (Seim) of their blueness. Such poems are categorised as lesser achievements by critics like Angelika Koch¹ perhaps because she, somewhat like H.W. Cohn,² is pre-occupied with the poet's empirical psychology and does not follow the transitions into aesthetic articulation. Leise sagen-, of all poems, eludes the grasp of institutionalised categories, whether they be those of mysticism, psychology or conventional aesthetics. And to speak of 'tricks'³ (however much every artist necessarily cultivates devices) is to miss the element of disarming spontaneity and tenderness.⁴

III

Within the residual mirage of poetic form in the couplet-phase certain linguistic features overlap in a particularly characteristic way. There are elements of 'normal' German with subject-predicate constructions, paratactical fragmentation of these allied to a dislocating imagism, and a residual music of assonance and alliteration. The latter is inseparable from sense but often leaves the impression of a skimmed surface,

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1. Koch, Die Bedeutung des Spiels, op. cit., p 28ff
 2. See pp 39f. + 71f. and footnote on p 172
 3. Koch, Ibid., p 34ff.
 4. See p 203f. for further comment on this poem.

almost like a sprinkling of notes in the most evanescent phase of atonal music. The art of such momentary accumulations is in their concealed strength and penetrating dialogue with the whole burden of imposed reality. If it was a principle of Jugendstil to treat the greatest fragility as the greatest strength (a definition suggested by Adorno),¹ then some of the poets and composers of Expressionism took this tendency to its furthest extreme.

Lasker-Schüler was able to treat all these overlapping features with the most artless simplicity. This seems to have been a precondition in both music and poetry of immaterial spirituality and lyrical unburdenment, particularly in song-like forms. While these reveal a great intensity of Dichtung or concentration and an acutely graded distinctiveness, any signs of laboured construction would contradict their idea or change their essential nature. This is characterised by a certain self-forgetfulness and an ability to let forms speak for themselves: the rationalising ego reduces its linguistic or musical system of schematic logic so as to allow a more instinctual self to find its own voice. ("Es dichtet in mir. Der Dichter beabsichtigt...Überhaupt nie etwas.." PSN 45). Only in this way are the elements of language refashioned, with the least degree of violence, if the voice of nature, or of a more untrammelled consciousness is not to become repressive in its turn, while nevertheless effecting the most complete transformation of sense.

The release, in this way, of a kind of second nature in language, was perhaps the reason why Karl Kraus singled Lasker-Schüler out among the Expressionists as the poet who did no violence to the language; although she was resistant, "völlig unwegsam dem Zeitverstand", she was also (or for this very reason) "der wahre Expressionist aller in der Natur vorhandenen Formen, welche durch andere zu ersetzen jene falsche Expressionisten am Werke sind, die zum Misslingen des Ausdrucks leider die Korruption des Sprachmittels für unerlässlich halten."² Marianne

1. Adorno, Noten zur Literatur IV, op. cit., p 59.

2. Quoted from DD 571.

Lienau, on the other hand, in her angry attack on the poet's anarchical self-indulgence,¹ misses the point that her best achievements are unimaginable without such impulsiveness and that this is remarkably tactful in its relationship to language. Simplicity, economy of words coincide with blind antagonism and the risk of immateriality bordering on nothingness.

The Liedform of musical Romanticism, not unlike that of literature, was often based on four and eight bar constructions. These had also been a basic principle of classical form. While the Sonata Form had modified it dynamically within the perspectives of large dramatic and epic works, it was, paradoxically, reduced to more static sequences in the Liedform for the sake of lyrical immediacy. As in poetry, rationality is simplified in one sense in order to allow for expressive intensification in another. Often the two tendencies overlap or reinforce one another. The four and eight-bar arrangement (and similar ones) in music, often associated with a corresponding type in the poetry of Eichendorff, Heine, Rückert, Lenau and others, has come to be associated with lyricism per se, whereas it had served as an external pretext for the articulation of a momentary lyricism. In Robert Schumann schematic sequences either froze in motoric compulsiveness or allowed complex forms to emerge from the lyrical subconscious; at times he was capable of an inspired combination of both methods. In Webern's atonal phase schematic logic dissolves entirely in favour of the purest crystallisations of lyricism.

Lasker-Schüller's poems - and the couplet-phase in particular - represent a corresponding phase in German literature. Here again Dieter Bänisch misunderstands the poet¹ when he objects to her use of the word Lied for her poems: Ein Lied der Liebe, Ein Trauerlied, Palmenlied, Ein Lied. Somewhat like Webern's atonal pieces, Lasker-Schüller's couplet-poems are an expression of the sheerest lyricism or its distinctive moments, divesting themselves

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1. Lienau, 'Anarchie nach Innen', in Lasker-Schüller, ed. Michael Schmid, Wuppertal 1969.
 2. Bänisch, Else Lasker-Schüller, op. cit., (page references above).

as completely as possible of material burdens, linguistic or otherwise. The whole feeling of the couplet-phase is registered in these words to Senna Hoy: "Deine Worte sind aus Lied geformt." (G 179) Of course, words are not the same as tones, and I would be citing one of Adorno's favourite themes, in saying that poetry achieves its 'musicality' best in its own terms, and not by imitating musical effects.

In his discussion of Mein stilles Lied, Bänisch writes: "Wird auch das Titelwort "Lied" in seiner vertrauten Bedeutung nirgends gerechtfertigt." (p 7) This is stated as a self-evident fact with no real specification. Later (p 20) he resumes the discussion and asks: "Ist der Satz vom Hieroglyph ein Vers? Immerhin enthält keines der angeführten Gedichte ein metrisches Schema." After considering whether the word Lied might be justified by its derivation from the free rhythms of Goethe, who referred to his Harzreise as a Lied; Lied would then stand for subjective confession, "subjektive Erkenntnis". (p 21) But Lasker-Schüler used a regular succession of couplets, so this destroys the analogy for Bänisch after all, and he cannot find any others that would be more satisfactory. Finally he comes to the conclusion that the poet wrote sentences and not verses: "eine Reihe von Sätzen, in denen die Zeilenbrechung von sprechmotorischen, oder inhaltlich-psychologischen Faktoren diktiert wird." (p 21) But even in this definition Bänisch finds contradictions (p 22ff). That the poems elude this systematic assault speaks for their achievement, and almost defines their lyrical genius.

It is true that Lasker-Schüler's couplets elude definition. In this study they have been called couplets more often than verses, and the word "verse" was never written without a certain hesitation. This difficulty should be ascribed to Lasker-Schüler's dissociative genius, and to her impulse to elude established norms and categories. In Mein stilles Lied it would nevertheless be difficult to overlook the lyrical tone in the opening verses concerning the poet's mother: "Horcht, mich sucht meine Mutter, /Lichte sind ihre Finger und ihre Füße wandernde Träume Und ich trinke von dem Monde stillen Wein, /Wenn die Nacht einsam kommt." (G 285) And

when the poet sees her eye at the summit of time in the last verses and her eye that kisses God's horizon ("Sein Leuchten küsst Gottes Saum") this kiss also touches on the margin of her most 'absolute' lyricism. The intermediate verses in this poem are an accusation precisely of the anti-lyrical world and are more declamatory or prosaic in tone. These have already been considered as the verses in which Lasker-Schüller is mediating the relationship of her rational mind (the struggle with contradictions as portrayed in Sphinx) and her lyrical genius.

The first version of Mein stilles Lied was more discursive than lyrical in tone. In neither version does the title lose something of its aggressive undertone, and stilles Lied is an understatement for the accusations that are to follow. But the lyrical passages and the quiet tones for the poet's mother only gain in intensity from this ambivalence. The lyrical spirit is antagonistic by its very nature to a calculatingly prosaic world. The second version of Mein stilles Lied, it has been assumed, was abbreviated so as to blend it into the lyricism of the poetry from Meine Wunder onwards, into the dissociated margin of lyricism of the couplet-poems. The tone of sheer lyricism is unmistakable: "Meine Zehen wurden Knospen,/ - Sieh, so komm ich zu dir." (Dem Mönch, G 244). Lyricism is expressed in spiritualisation, in dissociation from functionalised norms, in release from the pressure of a rationalised world. Lips glow, toes become buds. Lasker-Schüller's lyricism is one of Zehenspitzen like that of the dancers who went on points in the 19th century. "Nun schlummert meine Seele/Zagend auf Zehen," she writes in Meine Wunder, when she finds her lyrical ego in its suspended poetic residue after the storm of youthful Expressionism (G 153). There is something musical too, without being literally musical, in freely associative imagery; it arranges words and ideas according to other principles than those of discursive logic: "Eine Nacht aus Gold,/Sterne aus Nacht..." (Ein Liebeslied, G 183). Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that Lasker-Schüller's poems, without having any obvious resemblance to conventional Lieder, have in their own idiosyncratic way something song-like about them, of germinating lyrical seeds in

language, or of lyrical essences distilled from the prose-poetical syntax of free verse.

The first of the four poems to Senna Hoy cited above, Ein Lied der Liebe, is particularly rich in examples of Lasker-Schüller's characteristic mode of lyricism.

The first couplet illustrates the principle of extreme simplification:

Seit du nicht da bist,
Ist die Stadt dunkel.

The simplicity of this assertion is touched by a nuance of poetic dissociation: darkness is lifted out of its more literal associations and results from the absence of Senna Hoy. Another feature of the verse is the absence of a direct object. The next verse, resuming the motif of darkness, contains an object which is immaterial and alogical (by normal standards):

Ich sammle die Schatten
Der Palmen auf,
Darunter du wandeltest.

In the next couplet the direct object is a melody:

Immer muss ich eine Melodie summen,
Die hängt lächelnd an den Ästen.

The construction is normal enough, although the object is, once more, an immaterial one, and the melody is smiling and hangs on branches. The adverbial 'immer' recurs here with its suggestion of indefiniteness; at the same time it contains a distinctive feature in the alliteration of m's running through the first line, while the modified a's of the following line colour the imagery of the smile. (Later the other favourite particle, 'überall' appears: "Überall steht Wildedel,/Die Blüten unseres Blutes"). Generally direct objects are avoided, particularly with their more customary associations and the resultant language is threaded with the adverbial expressions like 'immer' and 'lächelnd'. Angelika Koch touches unwittingly on this feature of the poet's genius: "Das Erlebnis wird also nicht mehr vom Gegenstand bestimmt und getrieben",¹ while criticising the poet's narcissism, which I have considered as a love thrown back on itself and seeking a new relationship to the world. The material world in Ein Lied der Liebe is reflected either in a subject like the city, lodged in alogical constructions, or in adverbial expressions, for example: "An den Kästen...an allen Wänden der Häuser...um schlanke Säulen schlinge ich mich...ich magere an deinem Bilde." Prepositions like an, in and um are naturally favoured by these oblique dimensions; an appears frequently and gives an indistinct distinctiveness to the association of night with the lyrical ego in the line: "Darum ist immer Nacht an mir", in Senna Hoy. This intensifies the impression of an erased objectivity. Thus the indistinct linguistic particles become the medium of a sharpened focus. (See p 51f).

1. Koch, Die Bedeutung des Spiels, op. cit., p 42.

One of the few more direct of direct objects comes in the phrase: "Du liebst mich wieder" in the fourth verse, and the determining verb is love, which, for Lasker-Schüller, transcends all functionalised calculations. To the latter belongs love in its normal sense, as an expression of interests and needs, a kind of pact or deal. Love, for Lasker-Schüller, is a word that can only arise in a language lifted entirely out of such spheres of interest.

The only other direct object in a concrete sense comes in the phrase: "Wenn doch ein Tiger/Seinen Leib streckte". The object 'Leib' is nevertheless an extension of the subject, it is determined within an as-if construction, and represents the biggest imaginative thrust of the poem:

Wenn doch ein Tiger
Seinen Leib streckte
Über die Ferne, die uns trennt,
Wie zu einem nahen Stern.

In poetry that refuses objects in the antagonistic world, these verses reach across the dividing distance for a conciliation of subject and object in entirely different terms, eluding a calculating and sober logic (berechnend and nüchtern being two of the most pejorative terms in the

poet's vocabulary).¹ Earlier, the orphan and the wedding-guest had appeared in an oblique perspective within a dative construction and in relation to the echo of happiness:

Wem soll ich mein Entzücken sagen?

Einer Waise oder einem Hochzeitler,
Der im Widerhall das Glück hört.

The 'objects' here are Entzücken and Glück, and they are transposed into an echoed dimension. Strangeness, distance and a certain blindness in the poetic psyche are evoked by the word 'hört', since happiness is not felt or seen but heard. In all this one recalls Gottfried Benn's words about the poet's eyes and their evasive, inexplicable look.²

Through such oblique imagism, and almost beyond it, Lasker-Schüller extends her idiom into accumulated linguistic patterns of the finest distinctiveness. In the line

Immer muss ich eine Melodie summen,

1. See BII 67ff.

2. See p 27.

for example, Melodie is the only image, and this not a concrete one, since melodies, while they have a distinctive shape, are invisible; only the humming of the melody is suggested by the onomatopoeic resonance of the last word, summen, otherwise the word Melodie is quasi-melodic in its cadence. The line as a whole expresses something more immaterial, a kind of imagism: without imagery. Not only is language, with elusive concepts like immer, the poet's medium; there is also a particularly shadowy and expressive blend of reflection with sound-patterns that seem to touch on the margins of their own consciousness. The more concrete images in Ein Lied der Liebe, tiger, star and slender columns, for example, are suspended in this sense in an immaterial mosaic of hieroglyphic formulations.

In one of the couplets of Ein Trauerlied there is a particularly felicitous blend of imagery and linguistic pattern:

O, alle Küsse sollen schweigen
Auf beschienenen Lippen liebentlang.

A whole landscape, lifted out of any concrete setting, stretches out on these lips; the only sensuous image is that of lips and this is illuminated by the spiritualised feeling of "beschienenen...liebentlang" and by the play of vowels and consonants. The proliferation of -en and -ien sounds in both lines, varies and echoed in other vowels and consonants, brings out one of Lasker-Schüler's most characteristic signifying particles. She was fond of words like Königin, Prinzessin, Weibin. Weibin appears in Höre in a verse saturated with similar particles:

Ich raube in den Nächten
Die Rosen deines Mundes,
Dass keine Weibin Trinken findet. (G 215)

Something of an interpretation of these particles may be derived from the conclusion of Die Stimme Edens (G 157) when the lyrical ego feels itself drawn into the concentration and simplification of the couplet-phase: "Eva....Verführerin....heisse Lauscherin....Flüchte um vor der Spitze deiner schmalsten Wimper noch." As the transcendental overflow of lyricism vanishes

leaving laconic remnants in the couplets, the -in and -en sounds, rather like the thinnest eye-lash in Die Stimme Edens, represent the finest elements on the margin of nothingness, while still being suffused with a chastened sensuousness and the light of transcendence, as in the image of illuminated lips. In Klein Sterbelied the acutely emphasised -i's and -in's in the first couplet are absorbed more completely into darkness, since the poem expresses a dynamic sense of obliteration and consists of a minimalist arrangement of the smallest words and syllables:

So still ich bin,
All Blut rinnt hin.¹ (G 213)

Within the rarefied atmosphere of such poetry, the expelled object (including the I and Thou of normality) only returns when it has cast off the burden of its pre-determination in established society. Given the previous metamorphoses of the ego in history it is difficult to know what 'I' would be, and what language would be in a world free of pressure. Lasker-Schüler gives us a glimpse of a transfigured Ich, or rather of a modulated transition towards it. Thus the lover's hands in an earlier poem, Heim, are joined with a different order of reality entirely: "...am Abend legen Innigkeiten/Mit Engelaugen ineinander unsere HÄnde." (147) Here the inwardness is still quite neo-romantic; in the couplet-phase a new

1. Against scepticism I have to insist that such features are essential to the poet's laconic reductionism.

intimacy and absolute estrangement are more distinctively focussed, as in the image of the tiger and the star. The Senna Hoy poems are particularly beautiful expressions of the transformed subject-object relation; this does not disappear itself, as some would like to claim, since Lasker-Schüler obviously registers a breach, both within her poetry and in her response to the surrounding world.

In Versöhnung (G 155) again, there is the hesitation of the kiss before the most complete, all-embracing fulfilment. The title of the poem names the innermost intention of the couplet-poems, conciliation of the divided world which it is also the aim of the couplet-poems to realise most acutely:

VERSÖHNUNG

Es wird ein grosser Stern in meinen Schoss fallen...
Wir wollen wachen die Nacht,

In den Sprachen beten,
Die wie Harfen eingeschnitten sind.

Wir wollen uns versöhnen die Nacht -
So viel Gott strömt über.

Kinder sind unsere Herzen,
Die möchten ruhen müdeslöss.
Und unsere Lippen wollen sich küssen,
Was zagst du?
Grenzt nicht mein Herz an deins -
Immer färbt dein Blut meine Wangen rot.
Wir wollen uns versöhnen die Nacht,
Wenn wir uns herzen sterben wir nicht.
Es wird ein grosser Stern in meinen Schoss fallen.

IV

I therefore have produced a variety
in every line, both of cadences and
number of syllables.

William Blake

In close association with themes, images and language, Lasker-Schüller's rhythm has a subtlety and spontaneity of its own derived from the feeling of Peter Hille's poetry. Her own intensified expression of it is characterised in a line from Gebet: "In Gott/gehüllt den dunklen Atemschlag." (G 288) The rhythm here is dark and pulsating: throbbing heart and breathing consciousness, shrouded and revealing imagery, are drawn into one line. In Erkenntnis the moment of awakening consciousness is that of a distilled, breathing sweetness: "Ich trank atmende Süsse/Vom schillernden Aste/Aus holden Dunkeldolden./ Ich fürchte mich nun/Vor meinem wachenden Blick -" (G 112). Weissenberger has surely underestimated the poet's feeling for a breathing expressivity when he considers that Atmen and Odem are inadequate in their

mediation of mystical experience in Lasker-Schüler (this being the theme of his study): "Else Lasker-Schüler hat es.....nicht vermocht, diesem Bild zu einer poetischen Verwirklichung zu helfen. Sie kommt über die Stufe des Nennens nicht heraus."¹ Perhaps the change of emphasis in my study, which sees a renascent secularity rather than a transition to mysticism in the poet, brings out mediations overlooked by Weissenberger. In Sascha the ego is affected in its physical being by the motions of a breathing earth: "Das Atmen der Erde bewegt/Meinen Leib wie lebendig." (G 188) The feeling of a secular awakening is also conveyed in the line: "Vielleicht ist mein Herz die Welt,/Pocht -" (G 218).

Breathing expressivity is an essential mode of articulation in Lasker-Schüler, and, as the word Atemschlag suggests, the word Pochen is closely associated with it, in Weltende, for example: "Es pocht eine Sehnsucht an die Welt,/An der wir sterben müssen." (G 149) Pochen is one of the most darkly resonant words in its rounded 'o' and its associations with the heart and the pulsating flow of blood. Darkness and strangeness are the associations in Wo mag der Tod mein Herz lassen?

Immer tragen wir Herz vom Herzen uns zu.

Pochende Nacht

Hält unsere Schwellen vereint. (G 160)

Pochen echoes other recurrent words like Blut and Murmeln: "Wie ein heimlicher Brunnen/Murmelt mein Blut" (G 142); murmeln in turn is echoed in Flüstern, Lauschen, Küssen and, really, in every syllable of the poetry. In this way the ascetic margin of dissociative imagism reveals a secretly nascent secular being; hence "in Gott gehüllt den dunklen Atemschlag".

In two of the most beautiful verses in all Lasker-Schüler, the passage of time, as an indicator moves across the sun-dial's face bringing the shadow of night, the beating heart of the observer, and the sense of dark, enigmatic transition, are blended into one conception:

1. Weissenberger, Zwischen Stein und Stern, op. cit., p 110f.

Es bringen ferne Hände mir nach Haus
Aus gelben Sichel'n einen frommen Strauss.
Der Zeiger wandelt leise um das Zifferblatt
Der Sonnenuhr, die Gold von meinem Leben hat.

Sie glüht vom Pochen überwacht
Und läutet zwischen Nacht und Mitternacht.....
Da wir uns sahen in der rätselhaften Stunde -
Dein Mund blüht tausendschön auf meinem Munde. (G 344)

Abendzeit is a late poem. The predominantly iambic metre with lines of changing length is characteristic of later years; in a poet who ^{hardly ever} ~~never~~ chose a strict metre, it is all the more eloquent as a 'natural' rhythm in which one senses weariness and the steady passage of time in the pulse of changing images. "Oh Gott, ich bin voll Traurigkeit..." conveys the rhythm and the reason for it (G 338): "Mit einem Kleid aus Zweifel war ich angetan, / Das greise Leid geweiht für mich am Zeitrad spann." (G 349)

In the couplet-phase there is no such regularity. The play of images in the last two verses of Siehst du mich corresponds to the play of rhythms:

Ich liegē unter deinem Lächeln
Und lernē Tag und Nacht bereiten,
Dich hinzaubern und vergehen lassen,
Immer spiele ich das einē Spiel. (G 182)

The pattern of stresses alters from verse to verse and from line to line. One hesitates in referring to iambic or trochaic metre: the traditional terms seem inappropriate to Lasker-Schüler, since there is a feeling rather of a natural flow of rhythms and cadences, inherited from the free verse tendencies in German poetry. This flow seems to transcend, not only the Romance system of quantitative metre, but also the contrasting type of regularised accentual metre, and yet to be finely calculated. A pronounced rhythmic stress on unter in the first line above, on und in the third line, would destroy the feeling of the poem. The second couplet could be read in a way that lifts the still unavoidable stresses on und and ich:

Dich hinzaubern und vergehen lassen,
Immer spiele ich das eine Spiel.

But the shades of rhythmic patterning cannot really be fixed. Stefan George, Lasker-Schüler considered on one occasion, had put poetry into a corset;¹ her couplets are at an opposite pole of released flow in versification. They are neither spoken nor obviously musical, but suspended in the peculiar residual margin of language and imagery in the couplet-phase: released from the weight and burden of the antagonistic reality. A subtle half-spoken, half-lyrical pulse might serve as a tentative description.

In the succession of couplets themselves there is the feeling of something like a beat or pulse, in the paratactically broken succession of images, varied lengths of lines and varied transitions between couplets. The following verses from Mein Liebeslied illustrate some of these variations:

Auf deine Wangen liegen
Goldene Tauben.

Aber dein Herz ist ein Wirbelwind,
Dein Blut rauscht wie mein Blut -

Stuss

An Himbeersträuchern vorbei.

(G 180)

The image in the first couplet is contained in one phrase, drawn as it were in one stroke of the pen, and so, in a sense, represents one pulse or motion. The next couplet contains two such phrases in an increased dynamic culminating in the stressed cadence on Stuss and its Abgesang.

As Lasker-Schüler progressed into her couplet-phase and then moved out of it, rhythmical patterns expanded and contracted with the fluctuations between quatrains, triplets, couplets and single lines. As the poetry was absorbed into the couplet-phase, we observed a subtle pliancy in the poet's changing language.²

1. Goldscheider, Wo ich bin, op. cit., p 52. George is not named but one assumes he is meant.

2. See p 147.

Behind the imagery of Vollmond, with its greater number of unstressed syllables (a touch of dactylic metre) one senses a dancing figure in a kind of trance as depicted in some of the prose pieces:¹

Leise schwimmt der Mond durch mein Blut... (G 163)

Schlummernde Töne sind die Augen des Tages

Wandelhin - taumelher -

Ich kann deine Lippen nicht finden...

Wo bist du ferne Stadt

Mit den segnenden Düften?

Immer senken sich meine Lider

Über die Welt - alles schläft. (G 174)

One could see the residue of a dance also in the imagery of Leise sagen - , not only in the association of crinkled thoughts with dancing, but also in the upward and downward gestures of the poem, in the weariness, and in the sinking heart and the hand movements grasping at a fabric in the last verses:

Du nahmst dir alle Sterne

Über meinem Herzen.

Meine Gedanken kräuselten sich,

Ich muss tanzen.

Immer tust du das, was mich aufschauen lässt,

Mein Leben zu müden.

Ich kann den Abend nicht mehr

Über die Hecken tragen.

Im Spiegel der Bäche

Finde ich mein Bild nicht mehr.

Dem Erzengel hast du

Die schwebenden Augen gestohlen;

Aber ich nasche vom Seim

Ihrer Bläue.

1. PS 61: Ich tanze in der Moschee.

Mein Herz geht langsam unter

Ich weiss nicht wo -

Vielleicht in deiner Hand.

Überall greift sie an mein Gewebe.

(G 163)

This is a hieroglyphic pas de deux, choreographed by Lasker-Schüller on the margins of non-entity. The first verse almost suggests a juggling with stars while dancing. "Du falscher Cankler," the poet writes elsewhere, "Du spanntest ein loses Seil." Humourously, imperceptibly, she slips in the image of the tight-rope or of the narrow, risky margin of her poetic perceptions, the fine edge of judgement often missed by critics, friends and foes alike. In the poet's best moments she brings together the joy of complete irresponsibility and her acutest judgements.

In the poems dedicated to Gottfried Benn there are triplets that belong in an idiosyncratic way to the couplet-phase. Of all the love-affairs during this phase of her life the one with Benn resulted in the greatest turmoil and disappointment. There is a return of the demonic conflict of earlier years, expressed now in drastically succinct abbreviation. Here the essential rhythm is in the conception as a whole, absorbed in one stroke into the imagery of annihilation. Within these poems the lines contract into themselves in a kind of Furie des Verschwindens. In Höre annihilation still leaves the residual Saum corresponding to the marginal post-existence of the couplet-phase itself:

Ich raube in den Nächten
Die Rosen deines Mundes,
Die keine Weibin Trinken findet.

Die dich umarmt,
Stiehlt mir von meinen Schauern,
Die ich um deine Glieder malte.

Ich bin dein Wegrund.
Die dich streift,
Stürzt ab.

Fühlst du mein Lebtum

Überall

Wie ferner Saum?

(G 215)

In O ich möchte aus der Welt the relationship to God is inverted, and he moves from the summit of time (in Mein stilles Lied) to his grave beneath the flickering poetic ego:

O ICH MÜCHT AUS DER WELT

Dann weinst du um mich.

Blutbuchen schüren

Meine Träume kriegerisch.

Durch finster Gestrüpp

Muss ich

Und Gräben und Wasser.

Immer schlägt wilde Welle

An mein Herz;

Innerer Feind.

O ich möchte aus der Welt!

Aber auch fern von ihr

Irr ich, ein Flackerlicht

Um Gottes Grab.

(G 222)

This is another of the crucial moments in Lasker-Schüller's inverted perspectives. The lyrical ego, as a distant, exiled, flickering light, has failed to realise its essence, and God's horizon has become his grave. The couplets, already something of a stylised mosaic, will take on the aspect of a mannerism. From the phase of most penetratingly dissociated imagism there is a return to more substantial imagery and versification.

Chapter 10: FRIEZE

Und ich, ein Punkt aber ein
tätowierter,
er ist nicht auszumerzen.

Else Lasker-Schüler

I. Couplet

Disappearing minimalism in European art in the period leading up to the two world wars reflects and resists the advance of totalitarianism. But for its momentary illumination of the vanishing interstices between manipulation and oblivion, such art would capitulate, one way or the other, to the pressures it resists. Even if minimalism - wrung out of an intensive dialogue of the opposing domains - were to become an artistic norm, the result would be a self-contradicting reification of the residual impulses of spontaneity. The historical moments of laconic reduction in art have accordingly been brief. Webern's music vanished into his pieces for violin and piano and into the even shorter pieces for cello and piano, lasting only a few seconds; in these seconds the idea of his minimalism had exhausted itself and he must have felt that continued experiments in the same vein would not make sense. Thereafter, he, Schönberg and others were concerned with the problem of articulating longer forms. After the dissociative inward dimension had been brought to the surface, dissolving external norms, it had to steel itself and develop its own norms. Constructivism and Neue Sachlichkeit replaced Expressionism as representative tendencies. In literature Gottfried Benn was one of those who developed a doctrine of self-sufficient formalism. In the introduction to Lyrik des expressionistischen Jahrzehnts he wrote as a 'surviving' Expressionist: "Ich bin sicher, und ich sehe und höre es von andern, dass alle die echten Expressionisten, die jetzt also etwa meines Alters sind, dasselbe erlebt haben wie ich: dass

gerade sie aus ihrer chaotischen Anlage und Vergangenheit heraus einer nicht jeder Generation erlebbaren Entwicklung von stärkstem inneren Zwang erlegen sind zu einer neuen Bindung.....Gerade der Expressionist erfuhr die tiefe sachliche Notwendigkeit, die die Handhabung der Kunst erfordert, ihr handwerkliches Ethos. Zucht will er, da er der zersprengteste war...."¹

The paradox of dissociative formalism is reflected in one way or another in the work of all artists - poets, painters, composers - in the modernist movements over the turn of the twentieth century. The fetishisation of form resisted so vehemently by Lasker-Schüller in Weltschmerz (Ich, der brennende Wüstenwind,/Erkaltete und nahm Gestalt an)² threatens all phenomena in a manipulated world; specialised disciplines - modernist poetry being among the most extreme and vulnerable examples - become functions, within the division of labour, of the very world they oppose: when the various branches of human activity become so self-sufficient that they lose the sense of a more comprehensive relatedness they become the doubly blind agents of the dialectic out of which they arose. Hence the term "safe abstraction" for a certain type of painting conceived in purely formal terms; the fact that it resists and excludes content is forgotten and loses its provocative sting. Consequently, such art deteriorates into harmless (or doubly harmful) aestheticism, blind to its own camouflage of a damaged condition. While its protagonists imagine that they have escaped socialisation, their work has become all the more helplessly socialised as a specialised genre within the division of labour. Art of this tendency does nevertheless respond to an inescapable pressure: in some sense spontaneous Expressionism necessarily had to steel itself in response to totalitarian pressures even at the risk of complementing their paralyzing influence.

Lasker-Schüller could never have adopted anything so alien to her nature as a doctrine or method of formalism.³ It is all

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1. Benn, Autobiographische Schriften, op. cit., p 388f.
 2. See p 15
 3. The following paragraphs are a recapitulation of the poet's development as elucidated and illustrated with examples in the previous chapters.

the more significant, therefore, that she was among the artists in whom something akin to the constructivist tendency was most powerfully manifested. The extreme dynamism of her poetry encompasses the interlocking and successive phases of Neo-Romanticism, Expressionism and Constructivism, all instantaneously projected in one another. From the start expressionistic impulsiveness had found itself contending with the spell of frozen form representing a blocked reality. Lasker-Schüller submitted to its influence only in order to strengthen her resistance to it; as her forms became more concentrated and simplified, the projected or telescoped inwardness of her lyricism became more articulate. Form in her poetry is never an abstract, self-sufficient category. Sometimes it is evident as content in the images of a frozen reality, sometimes it operates more independently in the pressure that curtails the impulses of expansive, chaotic Expressionism and results in the contraction of verse-paragraphs through quatrains and triplets into couplets. Simultaneously there is a concentration of elements within these verses resulting from the intensive interaction of form and content. By the time Lasker-Schüller's poetry had evolved into its minimalist phase the reification of inwardness or poetic spontaneity had already become a constitutive factor, formally articulated in the frieze of hieroglyphic couplets. (Reification stands here for the transformation of spontaneous impulses into thing-like requisites), Her spontaneity is inextricably involved in the manipulative world it opposes. What might otherwise have been a mannerism in the repeated formula of the couplets and their characteristic imagery is the articulate idea of her poetry.

Real eastern hieroglyphics are deciphered in order to recapture something of a life that has vanished: this becomes a metaphor for Lasker-Schüller; in an inspired transformation of the idea she makes it correspond to her predicament as a poet, to the tendencies of minimalism and inadvertent constructivism.

In this way her poetry speaks like hieroglyphics from the realm of death, from a world in which "the essential has slipped into the functional".¹ Her most articulate poetic being culminates in this paradox: it is when she enters the realm of death that she experiences the most living moments of lyrical transfiguration; when her genius has ceded to social determinations that she reaches beyond them. In this way form and even mannerism become articulate as the realisation of a social predicament, a kind of projected content rather than an ineffectually dissociated aesthetic. Lasker-Schüller anticipates the reification of inwardness, therefore, by conceding and projecting it in the frieze of couplets. Just as the word 'immaterial' contains its contradiction, so the alien reality is embraced, penetrated and transfigured in the moments of suspended lyricism. The eloquently spiritualised quality of the couplet-poems derives from this interpenetration of opposing realities and tendencies. All

1. This formulation of Brecht's is cited in T.W. Adorno's Noten zur Literatur IV, op. cit., p 138.

Lasker-Schüller's poetry aims instinctively for the most precise balance between these forces, so that it is in her dissociation from the classical heritage that she remains secretly faithful to a classical ideal.

Although formal stasis in Lasker-Schüller results in a relatively large number of poems, the couplet-phase nevertheless constitutes a 'moment' in her dynamic evolution. As a reliable technique it would contradict her commitment to spontaneity and purposelessness. Anormality would lapse into a norm. As it is, the static tendency is never entirely regularised: while the couplets remain relatively constant we have observed their impulsive alternation with single lines, triplets and, occasionally quatrains. The metre too remained that of free rhythms in lines of continually varied length.

No sooner had Lasker-Schüller embarked on the couplet-phase than different verse-types began to emerge simultaneously, firstly, in a group of couplet-poems addressed to friends and developing different traits from the main series of love-poems, and secondly, in the Hebräische Balladen with their relatively more substantial forms. The kaleidoscope of material images in the love-poems had been blended into immaterial lyricism. These revolving images of suns, moons, stars, clouds, flowers, eyes, lips, gold, blue, birds, lizards, were chosen instinctively so as to exclude any representation of the prevailing social reality and are therefore a projection out of it. The antagonistic world itself is a powerful indirect presence and is registered negatively by the images of lyrical transfiguration. In the poems to friends their spiritualised quality is somewhat relinquished for a relatively more concrete imagism, as though Lasker-Schüller were beginning to feel her way out of the attraction to self-dissolving lyricism. The vocabulary, suggested by the character, profession or achievements of the friends portrayed, is just that much more comprehensive, less ascetic in its lyricism. Since Leo Kestenberg is a pianist, he is pictured sitting at his instrument: a conventional (if

prejudiced) image, otherwise taboo, is allowed into the poetry, though it is necessarily treated with irony:

Seine Hände zaubern Musik durch stille Zimmer.
Zwischen uns sitzt dann der ehrwürdige Mond
Goldbehäbig im Lehnstuhl
Und versöhnt uns mit der Welt. (G 263)

When Kestenberg plays his own music the piano suggests the image of a heart of ebony ("sein schweres Ebenholzherz"). In this way the language of neo-romantic inwardness is given a more generalised substantiality. Where exotic imagery had become more and more rare and tended to disappear in the most subtle love-poems, transforming simple German words and concepts themselves, there is an increase of more literally hieroglyphic imagery in the poems to friends: a turban, the blood of centaurs, a Trojan priest or a head of mahogany, a werewolf or an avalanche (Lawin).¹ A play by Wilhelm Schmidtborn suggests the one-eyed cyclops: "Sein neuestes Versspiel stiert aus Einauge". (G 268) Milly Steger, a sculptress, is called a Gulliverin and her sculptures are described as

Böse Tolpatsche, ernste Hännkesken,
Clowne, die mit blutenden Seelen wehen.
Aber auch Brunnen, verschwiegene Weibsmopse
Zwingt Milly rätselhaft nieder. (G 262)

In lines like these, occurring here and there in the poems to friends, Lasker-Schüler allows a glimpse of an enigmatic idiom that does not recur anywhere else in her poetry, a more pointed imagism, a more peculiar pliability and obliqueness of language. The descriptions of Milly Steger's have something medieval in their quaint and diabolical naivety. There is an accumulation of identities from vulgar German, low German (Tolpatsche, Hännkesken, Weibsmopse) and English (Clowne). Like the three tramps in Die Wupper these figures, evil, secretive, with bleeding

1. See G 249, 261, 268, 269.

souls, thrive somewhere outside the pale of established norms. They suggest something of damaged nature in man (as clowns ordinarily do) parrying the impact of repression.

In most of the lyrical poetry, when the intention is to translate the norms of modern German itself into a dialect (ie. that of poetry) low German is avoided; in the poems to friends with their streak of more casual amusement, plattdeutsch is a natural adjunct of a slanted German. Peter Graetz, who may well have been the model for a dialect-speaking grand-father in Die Wupper, is called "Een ollet kränklich Ross, dat an der Seite tugenht." (G 266) Thus Platt, eastern and nordic exoticism, and couplet-lyricism ("O sie war eine Sternin", G 257) are all mixed into one brief enigmatic ferment in this series.

Here, as in the love-poems, playful intentionlessness is so essential that it often leads to critical underestimation or misunderstanding. Sheer triviality has been considered as one of the devious risks Lasker-Schüler takes, precisely in her most articulate phase. Secretly, we observed, it was a weapon of unyielding negation: the poems elude definition both as serious and as trivial literature. While, in the love-poems, intentionlessness coincided with immaterial lyricism, the poems to friends are more casual in their approach. If the weaknesses dissolve as one tries to pinpoint them, some do nevertheless remain. The most serious weakness is a paradoxical one, since it is precisely the more casual approach which makes room for some of Lasker-Schüler's more flat assumptions, popularised Nietzschean notions about artists as a God-like elite, whereas the refinement of lyrical responses in the love-poems is instinctively ascetic towards aquiescent notions. One cannot overlook the pretentiousness in one couplet of an admiring poem addressed to Ludwig Hart:

Von hoher Vogelreinheit inbrünstig
Ohne Makel klopft sein Herz.

(G 264)

Here the combination of poetic licence and elitism result in unpleasant dissonance and bad poetry, while the blend of irony and affection in the ensuing lines result in a more convincing portrait

of an aesthete with a streak of priggishness:

Und geharnischt ist seine Nase,
Seidene Spenderinnen die feinen Lippen,

Wenn sie die Verse Maria

Rainer Rilkes gastlich reichen. (G 264)

Some of the couplets in this series really do lapse into a trivialised, flat treatment of Lasker-Schüller's favourite themes, so that one has a sense of cliché:

Nun ist der Peter fern bewahrt

Im Himmel. (G 254)

The assumption has something fatally smug; in the great lyrical poems the heavenly beyond always has an echo of pain and dissonance, of a burdened reality in it. Other comments about friends acting or reading poetry in Berlin are intended for the immediate occasion:

Morgen wird er König sein -

Ich freu mich. (G 251)

Taken as a whole, the series of poems to friends (excluding the weaker ones published posthumously by editors) are more resistant to such criticisms than one is first inclined to assume. The portrait of Richard Dehmel, for example, does not have the pathos of 'great' poetry or 'significant' friendship as conceived by Rilke and George, but is compelling in its own way:

Aderlass und Transfusion zugleich;
Blutgabe deinem Herzen geschenkt.

Ein finsterer Pflanze ist er,
Dunkel fällt sein Korn und brüllt auf.

Immer Zickzack durch sein Gesicht,
Schwarzer Blitz.

Über ihm steht der Mond doppelt vergrößert. (G 248)

The pathos here is entirely humorous. The portrait is accomplished in a few simple yet inimitable strokes of the pen. The imagism, arranged in couplets, recalls surrealism and cubism in painting. The medical imagery from the modern world in the first couplet would never have found its way into the love-poems. In them Gottfried Benn's profession as a doctor is concealed in the lines, "Deine diamantenen Träume/Schneiden meine Adern auf," and metamorphosed in the imagery of scaping Red Indians in Giselheer dem Tiger (G 221 & 212). In the portrait of Richard Dehmel the transfused "blood-gift" is a distilled essence of experience elicited from the modern world; it touches on the constitutive reality and on a streak of almost clinical sobriety concealed behind Lasker-Schüler's apparently whimsical phantasies. Few lines in her poetry convey a more vivid sense of the historical hour than the following verses; the expressionist chasm that opens briefly in the clash of historical epochs is realised in an instantaneous flash, and the resultant intensification of experience is then registered in the image of the doubly magnified moon. - Like most portraits, Lasker-Schüler's are a mixture of the artist and the subject. Dehmel is portrayed as she would like to see him, almost in a kind of self-projection; the dynamism of the imagery is more characteristic of Lasker-Schüler than of her friend. The portrait of Georg Grosz is no less peculiar to her, yet, in this case, her own imagery is more thoroughly modified by her friend's artistic idiosyncracies. The poem is perfectly balanced between her casual and poetic modes and between her imaginative world and that of Grosz with its cartoons of society:

Manchmal spielen bunte Thränen

In seinen äschernen Augen.

Aber immer begegnen ihm Totenwagen,

Die verscheuchen seine Libellen.

Er ist abergläubig -

- Ward unter einem grossen Stern geboren -

Seine Schrift regnet,

Seine Zeichnung: Trüber Buchstabe.

Wie lange im Flusse gelegen,
Blähen seine Menschen sich auf.

Mysteriöse Verlorene mit Quappenmäulern
Und verfaulten Seelen.

Fünf träumende Totenfahrer
Sind seine silbernen Finger.

Aber nirgendwo ein Licht im verirrtten Märchen
Und doch ist er ein Kind,

Der Held aus dem Lederstrumpf
Mit dem Indianerstamm auf Dufuss.

Sonst hasst er alle Menschen,
Sie bringen ihm Unglück.

Aber Georg Gross liebt sein Missgeschick
Wie einen anhänglichen Feind.

Und seine Traurigkeit ist dionysisch,
Schwarzer Champagner seine Klage.

Er ist ein Meer mit verhängtem Mond,
Sein Gott ist nur scheintot.

(G 259)

II. Hebräische Balladen

In the Hebräische Balladen of 1913 the pictorial elements considered in the poems to friends are more substantial, and forms, in terms of single-verse structure, become more amplified. The poet's dissociative Weltflucht seems to have found a world: the fiction of a pre-industrial people associated with the Hebrews of the Old Testament. In this very fiction one senses the pressure of modern history and an element of passivity in the poet's response. In music Webern fetishised the twelve-tone system after it had grown out of atonality and also developed

a corresponding trust in mysticism.¹ Schönberg, who invented the twelve-tone system, also turned to religious authority; as a threatened Jew, he too rediscovered his Judaism and the ancient Hebrews became the subject of Moses and Aaron; as a composer he nevertheless continued to struggle, like Lasker-Schüller, with the need to express the inexpressible in new terms. This may well be why he left his opera unfinished. (The dilemma is very thoroughly treated by Adorno,² who participated in musical and literary developments of the time and objected from the start to the tendency of artists to transform their newly discovered freedom into rules once more, laws that had not grown out of history as spontaneously as the preceding ones in music and language, and were therefore more blindly autarchical).

As with the twelve-tone composers, Lasker-Schüller's enigma showed signs of becoming its own authority. Previously it had risked a greater spontaneity in the search for fresh territory and had been astonished at its own discoveries. "Noch nie solche Verse dagewesen, ganz neue Sprache", was the young poet's feeling when she began to discover her idiom (BII 21). Once it had been sifted out of the unknown it could be controlled and her authority as a poet asserted. The immaterial couplet gave way to the masterful genre of the Balladen; this seems to contradict the *raison d'être* of her lyrical ego and to show signs of failure. Karl Kraus could not admire the technique of Ein alter Tibetteppich enough³ - it was the poet's virtuoso piece of versification - and this might have encouraged the direction her poetry now took. Within the evolution of changing forms a new formal type emerges corresponding in a free way, as Ein alter Tibetteppich had done, to the sonnet. Hagar und Ismael, for example is arranged in four triplets with a scheme of over-lapping rhymes. As in the sonnet (rather than the terza rima) there is an ideal of succinctness, concentration and

1. See also p 233f.

2. The theme returns in my last chapter. Adorno's Philosophie der neuen Musik, Frankfurt, 1958, is primarily concerned with it.

3. See DD 566.

mastery within limitations:

Mit Muscheln spielten Abrahams kleine Söhne
Und liessen schwimmen die Perlmutterkähne;
Dann lehnte Isaak bang sich an den Ismael

Und traurig sangen die zwei schwarzen Schwäne
Um ihre bunte Welt ganz dunkle Töne,
Und die verstossene Hagar raubte ihren Sohn sich schnell.

Vergoss in seine kleine ihre grosse Träne,
Und ihre Herzen rauschten wie der heilige Quell,
Und übereilten noch die Straussenhähne.

Die Sonne brannte aber auf die Wüste grell
Und Hagar und ihr Knäblein sanken in das gelbe Fell
Und bissen in den heissen Sand die weissen Negerzähne. (G 295)

What had previously been a subtle enigmatic script became a more obviously pictorial play of images and rhymes, sometimes with a rather self-assured ring about them. Abraham converses much more confidently with God than the lyrical psyche had done previously - "Abraham...übte sich mit Gott zu reden" - and the redeemed sacrifice of Isaac is portrayed as follows:

Und Gott ermahnte: Abraham!!
Er brach vom Kamm des Meeres Muscheln ab und Schwamm
Hoch auf den Blöcken den Altar zu schmücken.

Und trug den einzigen Sohn gebunden auf den Rücken
Zu werden seinem grossen Herrn gerecht -
Der aber liebte seinen Knecht. (G 294)

There is something too facile in the achievement of this justice; sea-shells are used to decorate God's altar, but as symbols of the purposeless enigma they have both gained and lost their purpose. The altar represents an authority on which the previous poems did not depend. In Mein stilles Lied God's authority - still that of the invisible beyond, of Weltflucht - is reflected against the negative social condition, through the poet's hieroglyphic being. Now, this uncertain authority is

all-too positively depicted:

Als Moses im Alter Gottes war
Nahm er den wilden Juden Josua
Und salbte ihn zum König seiner Schar.
Da ging ein Sehnen weich durch Israel -
Denn Josuas Herz erquickte wie ein Quell.
Des Bibelvolkes Leib war sein Altar. (Moses und Josua, G 300)

Where the ego had been a hieroglyph, the hero is now a King, the people's body is an altar, and the poetry is bad. "...den wilden Juden Josua" and "des Bibelvolkes Leib" are among the poet's worst lines; they sound flatly and pompously assertive, like many formulations in the later prose, as though Lasker-Schüler were being drawn to qualities she most disliked. Where the poetry has been supposedly 'objectified' and leaves out the ego, one feels a projection of self-importance; in the Ich-Dichtung of the couplet-phase this dissolves. Perhaps this self-importance must be interpreted in Lasker-Schüler and Stefan George as a compensatory mechanism of the wounded and banished lyrical ego, the poète maudit. This corresponds exactly to the offended pride of a Jew in Germany. The Hebräische Balladen do not bear comparison with Schönberg's Moses and Aaron, but it is relevant to note that the impossibility of finding a language is thematic in the opera, and also that the conception was left unfinished. Lasker-Schüler's rebellious spirit is still alive in the Hebräische Balladen and sometimes struggles with its own assertions of monumentality. In Saul the vitality of the youthful poetry breaks through the picture-book of biblical scenes with an almost three-dimensional force:

Über Juda liegt der grosse Melech wach.
Ein steinernes Kameltier trägt sein Dach.
Die Katzen schleichen schein um rissige Säulen.
Und ohne Leuchte sinkt die Nacht ins Grab,
Sauls volles Auge nahm zur Scheibe ab.
Die Klageweiber traben hoch und heulen.

Vor seinen Toren aber stehen die Cananiter.
- Er zwingt den Tod, den ersten Eindring nieder -
Und schwingt mit fünfmalhunderttausend Mann die Keulen. (G 301)

In the struggle with death, there is the fierce compression of Eindring; the inflated ego is in a condition of ruin with demonic cats creeping about its pillars. The image of Saul's eye becoming a disc reflects the steeled inwardness of the post-expressionist phase in German art. Death, betrayal and exile are recurrent themes in the Balladen: Hagar bites the desert sand when she is cast out; Abel is betrayed by his brother; Jacob runs like a wounded beast into the forest to nurse his rebellious isolation and, in his hurt pride, is the first person to smile: "Und sein Ochsgesicht erschuf das Lächeln." (G 297); Joseph is sold into captivity; Moses cries out in anguish to his God in the moment of his death.

For some commentators lines like the following from Joseph wird verkauft are of the essence of genius and place the poet for once and for all in the ranks of the immortal: "Aegypten glänzte feierlich in goldenen Mantelfarben";¹ such lines have an all too poeticising strain; this has lost something of its vital connection with the wider predicament which determines aesthetic solutions. Such failure gives itself away in the fiction of immediate 'primitive' relationships between people and the pseudo-reality of these does not provide a convincing aesthetic correlative to the industrialised world. There is something pseudo-poetical in the well-turned formulations of the Balladen. They establish a category, when the early poetry had questioned every one including that of art. Institutionalised categories cut off the deeper probings in art and religion, while these had always sought a new reality - not self-assertion. Some of the pseudo-biblical portraits, compelling

1. Sigismund von Radecki, "Erinnerungen an Else Laske-Schüler", DD 578.

as they may be, begin to bear resemblance to a type of pseudo-primitive painting. Thus the poet relies on tested formulae and writes the following lines about Esther:

Esther ist schlank wie die Feldpalme,
Nach ihren Lippen duften die Weizenhalme
Und die Feiertage, die in Juda fallen.

Nachts ruht ihr Herz auf einem Psalme,
Die Götzen lauschen in den Hallen.

Der König lächelt ihrem Nahen entgegen -
Denn überall blickt Gott auf Esther.

Die jungen Juden dichten Lieder an die Schwester,
Die sie in Säulen ihres Vorraums prägen. (G 306)

Unlike the poems on Ruth, this one does not really add a subtle dimension of its own to the bible-story one remembers from childhood. The fraught situation of Esther in the Bible itself is infinitely more suggestive and more modern, insofar as the modern world has unleashed really 'primeval' barbarism. The primitiveness of this pre-industrial era appears in its true colours. At the same time, the deadliness of the conflict and the forces it unleashes speak in much truer images to the eroded enlightenment of the modern world.

However, there is no absolute dividing line between the ascetic poetry and its more acquiescent tendencies. In the first verse of Joseph wird verkauft, for example, in the tired desert breezes and the early darkness, there is an indefinable melancholy; the scene is touched on its surface by enigmatic tones; they transcend picturesqueness and recall earlier poems:

Die Winde spielten müde mit den Palmen noch,
So dunkel war es schon um Mittag in der Wüste... (G 298)

Joseph, when he has lost his father, runs over the mountains and falls asleep at a loss beneath a star: "Bis er dann ratlos einschlief unter einem Stern." The Star of David which had been emerging with a certain crassness as the Heimatstern in Moses und Josua acquires something of its appropriate aesthetic distance once more. This distance is maintained in the earlier poems included with the Balladen, and some of the new Ballads too are more appealing in their echo of the earlier poetry. Abel has the simplicity of Ruth and something of its suggestiveness. It could have dated earlier from the neo-romantic phase, especially with the expressive, tongue-in-cheek punctuation, when the poet questions Kain in disbelief at the deed he has committed. This does not lessen the implications of his enmity, but the question itself, with its humorous accumulation of question and exclamation marks, reveals a conciliatory impulse. Kain is the other person, the social counterpart on whom individuality depends; he represents the German brother who may betray Lasker-Schüller; already in biblical times he had been an economic competitor; now the provocative images speak for a more deeply buried inter-personal antagonism. The poem is balanced with greater subtlety than some of the ballads on a margin between biblical fiction and modern significance. In the 'childhood' of mankind good and evil actions have a certain innocence about them; the poet invokes something of this innocence, as though it might *defuse* an encroaching inhumanity. Kain is not Kain any longer; the cities' ditches are a metaphor for his arteries and for more concealed antagonisms:

Kains Augen sind nicht gottwohlgefällig,
Abels Angesicht ist ein goldener Garten,
Abels Augen sind Nachtigallen.

Immer singt Abel so hell
Zu den Saiten seiner Seele,
Aber durch Kains Leib führen die Gräber der Stadt.

Und er wird seinen Bruder erschlagen -
Abel, Abel, dein Blut färbt den Himmel tief.

Wo ist Kain, da ich ihn stürmen will:

Hast du die Süßvögel erschlagen

In deines Bruders Angesicht?!!

(G 293)

The poem is in a fairly light vein, and touches, with just the right poetic tact, perhaps, on a deeper trauma of betrayal and reconciliation. There is, however, something arbitrary in the inclusion of early poems when they happened to be on biblical themes, with those deliberately conceived in the new mode and its quasi-Zionistic sense of purpose. There was perhaps some sense in collecting all the pieces dealing directly with the fiction of a foreign tribe as counterpart to the Germans or modern Europeans. The poet always knew at heart that her 'Zionism' was a fiction - therein lay its seriousness, its reality.¹ In the Hebräische Balladen this fiction became constricted within narrower bounds. The presence of the earlier poems does do something to emphasise wider implications, and the choice of Versöhnung² as the introductory poem is a clue to the intentions of her poetry toward these Hebrews - in her more sociable guise she called them 'Indians'³ -: reconciliation with each other and with the world. The path to this was buried more deeply than the Hebräische Balladen would allow. That Lasker-Schüler did instinctively understand this dilemma is suggested by the retreat of her lyrical ego during the years after the publication of this collection.

1. See p 65f.

2. See p 198.

3. See Goldscheider, Lasker-Schüler, op. cit., p 54.
"Indianer" were the mediating link between dissociative ego and the prevailing social world.

III. Prose

Nineteen years passed before a new volume of poems and prose was published in 1932, in the era of National Socialism. This volume contains a considerable number of prose essays and only a slender collection of twenty new poems. The essays had always cultivated a quite different approach from the poetry and lyrical prose, while the last two genres were mixed in the two sequences of letters, Mein Herz (1912) and Der Malik (1919). For someone so essentially a lyricist the essays were initially a form of relaxation, rather like going to the Café des Westens to shake off the burden of concentration ("abzuschütteln die intensivste Last" - PS 379) - or so they appear to this reader. Most of her letters, the poet herself explains in Mein Herz, were written with her big toe, whereas her poems were written with the invisible hand of her soul (PS 370). In the letters and essays she could enter the everyday world of her life in Berlin or of her travels, a transitional domain between poetry, observation and reflection; here she nevertheless allows herself complete dispensation from empirical accuracy and cogently systematic thought, although there are continual flickerings of the latter, as one would expect from someone whose language had undergone such intensive articulation in poetry. Behind her she had the whole Aesthetic Movement with Oscar Wilde's essay on The Decay of Lying, so that autobiographical essays are completely free in their combinations of facts and phantasies. Often Lasker-Schüller runs the risk of lapsing between the media of fiction, poetry and ideas.

Since this study is primarily concerned with the poetry, only a few relevant features of the prose works are considered. As a transitional medium the prose is many-faceted and merits

an entire study in itself. Once one has accepted some of the dated attitudes and playful 'superficialities' of a work like Mein Herz, for example, it reveals a labyrinth of charming and original formulations alternating with moments of inspired intensity. Here again Lasker-Schüler tricks the reader into the verdict of superficiality only to make him guilty of superficiality himself. "Es ist so aufatmend," she writes in Mein Herz, "wenn einem auf einmal alle die verantwortlichen Gedanken und eingenisteten Gefühle von der Schulter gleiten und man eine Marionette ist am feinen Seidenfaden geleitet." (PS 306). From such formulations, with their subtle web of sound-patterns, threads extend into the entire fabric of Mein Herz. There is often a colourful charm in the imagery: "Ich habe Minn verloren, alle marokkanischen Träume und den tätowierten Halbmond an seinem vibrierenden Nasenflügel." (PS 307). The marionette is only one image in a continually fluctuating metamorphosis of identities. In most of the earlier prose works there are passages in which the apotheosis of the ego culminates in its complete suspension. Between the extremes there is a whole range of modulations from exalted, self-parodying egoism in all its neo-romantic and expressionistic colours to non-entity. Das Peter Hille-Buch: "Ich stürzte die Berge herab.....und konnte mich nicht wiederfinden." (PS 50). Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad: "Ich bin eine tanzende Mumie..." (PS 68). Mein Herz: "Ich suche in meinem Portrait das wechselnde Spiel von Tag und Nacht, den Schlaf und das Wachen." (PS 399f). A streak of sheer absurdity also belongs to the poet's camouflage: with it she seems to take the part of cafe-sociability against the more precious withdrawal of the poetic ego in George, Rilke and others.

At worst the prose-diary of Mein Herz seems self-indulgently whimsical, at best it is the medium of a more subtle imagination. Self-indulgence in Lasker-Schüler is double-edged: on the one hand it looks like a kind of fiddling while Rome burns; on the other hand it holds onto the notion of freedom from repressive social purposes that

would be indispensable to a humane society. In Lasker-Schüler's case this commitment was almost political; it was really self-abandoned in its renunciation of all security and in its risk of obliteration by the escalating power of the antagonistic social forces; it was characterised also by the most complete generosity, since everything, particularly money, was passed on and shared, so much so that the poet's more circumspect friends claimed that she "could not be helped."¹ A large number of her letters are pre-occupied with efforts to help friends and to negotiate jobs for them. Perhaps it takes an egoist not to be egoistic. Something of the poet's generosity, abandonment and desolation or Verwahrlosung is constitutive in the quality of the prose-writings and redeems them from mere narcissism. In this too she inherited Oscar Wilde's idea of a life-long romance with oneself; it was far too provocative and self-aware to be anything other than a camouflage, a way of parrying the ruthless pursuit of interests that is often disguised as sociability or social concern. The dedication of Mein Herz is -Niemandem; its author is well aware of an experience thrown back on itself in its very efforts to penetrate a realm of freer sociability. In one of her letters she writes despairingly of a love without calculations and Nebengedanken. (BII 68). Of these there is indeed little trace in the self-portrait that survives in her own writing and in the accounts of others.

In the first book of essays (published after their appearance in journals) there is still the avantgardist of earlier years, as the title Gesichte suggests, whereas Konzert is a more sentimental title invoking a communion with nature and people during the historical period of its annulment under National Socialism. The

1. Kraft in VP 154.

element of sentimentality is discomfoting, partly, because the Nazi movement itself and the projected German Reich of the George circle (to mention only one example) was also concerned with 'meaningful' and 'intense' relationships and quasi-religious communities. This provides another explanation for the more steeled inwardness, for the twelve-tone system in music and Benn's notion of Satzbau,¹ which grew out of the neo-romantic and expressionist movements; also, for the emphasis, in this study, on the recalcitrant, dissociative features of Lasker-Schüler's genius. They represent a humane consciousness more faithfully than ideological or sentimental assertions that are belied by prevailing inhumanity and even function on its behalf. For this reason Gesichte contains the more significant collection of essays. In them the young avantgardiste is still running circles around her opponents, in particular those who saw brain-damage in her poems; to them she responded with calculated displays of insanity or dissociative logic (PS 176 & 185). Then there is the essay Sterndeuterei about poetry as her most invisible incarnation (PS 145); in Handschrift she claims that letters reveal more in their handwriting than in their apparent content. The statement: "Ich kann mich für den Schreiber nur seiner Buchstaben wegen interessieren" is characteristic of the preoccupation with the smaller or subcutaneous particles of language that transcend a subsuming logic (PS 153). Essays about visits to the cabaret and the circus also belong to the period of elated modernism and bohemianism in Berlin. The essays of Gesichte were written at the same time as a series of portraits of friends in poetic prose. These correspond to the series of portraits written in the couplet-mode, so that all the characteristic features of the latter are more extensively elaborated in the prose medium.

From the start there had been a type of essay that was to be increasingly cultivated and is the most representative type in Konzert. Sterndeuterei (in Gesichte) had been the first emphatic example. Hostile to conceptual logic and its most abhorred protagonist, the school-teacher, the poet nevertheless wished to have

1. See p 232.

her ideas, and so cultivated a poetical-mystical mode for them, a mode with distinctly didactic traits. In this way she was also able to conduct a dialogue of discursive and expressive rationalities, something of which remains in the post-couplet poetry, written during three stages of exile, within Germany in the phase of Nazi persecution, after the flight to Switzerland - when one of the letters to a friend asks in dismay: "Wo ist unser buntes Theben?" (BII 143) - and then during the emigration to Palestine, where the poet apparently dreamed of returning to Europe (DD 598). Many of the essays are concerned in a touching way with trees, plants, animals, with the sea and with the seasons, although none of these juxtaposes a rustic idyll to city-life. Berlin, for better or worse, represented the most advanced stage of culture, its negative features had to be absorbed if they were to be transcended. (Die Wand, PS 630). In such reflections there is probably the instinctive knowledge that a retreat to 'nature', apart from being an impossibility, could be a way of ceding to the destructive powers of advancing technology. The poet took pride in the mechanical-mindedness of her son. (PS 315f). And God does not withdraw to a village, she wrote in her essay on Berlin (Die kreisende Weltfabrik, PS 638). An artist always returns to Berlin, "hier ist die Uhr der Kunst, die nicht nach, noch vor geht. Diese Realität ist schon mystisch." In the essay called Konzert the material world is considered, in accordance with established traditions of mysticism, as an illusion, although the poet is quick to observe that this illusion is an essential medium of spiritual experience (PS 625). That the modern world has expelled its own soul in the process of socialisation is suggested by these words: "So sucht die abgestossene Seele Heimat in der Schale ihrer Illusion." The essay ends with an affirmation of material fulfilment: "Mich verlangte es nur meine Gedanken und Gefühle zu inkarnieren, sie in Wort zu kleiden. Darum zerstöre nicht meine Illusion.... ich möchte doch den Sommer von Körper zu Körper erleben in seiner ganzen verschwenderischen Gestalt."

These reflections gravitate toward the view of spiritualisation as a reflex of repressive secularisation. According to Arnold

Hauser's conjectures about the earliest stages of art, animism was a feature of more highly organised societies and emerged in the transition "from the parasitical, purely consumptive economy of the hunters and food-gatherers to the productive and constructive economy of the cattle-breeders and tillers of soil." Apart from the phenomenon of the city, this change produces dualism, the confrontation of two worlds, art with autonomous patterns, "hundreds of philosophical systems expressed in the opposition of idea and reality, soul and body, spirit and form."¹ The mystical speculations of Lasker-Schüller's essays consist largely of generalised statements on such themes, whereas her poetry, in this study, has been considered as a much more specific articulation of dialectical oppositions in the twentieth century. The mystical camouflage of the essays and some of the later poetry has tended to serve as the basis of appreciation and criticism both for protagonists and antagonists.

The small number of poems written after the couplet-phase suggest that an 'autonomous' poetry of radical dissociation had become difficult, almost impossible for Lasker-Schüller. Hence the preponderance of essays in which the lyrical ego enters into dialogue with the poet's more theoretical mind and questions aesthetic solutions. In the late poetry she returns to her inverted perspectives, but not without a residue of questions. These often appear in the form of reflections about the earlier poetry:

Gott hör... In deiner blauen Lieblingsfarbe
Sang ich das Lied von deines Himmels Dach -
Und weckte doch in deinem ewigen Hauche nicht den Tag. (G 321)

The appeals and protests of such poetry refer more directly to historical realities, otherwise tabooed by the lyrical ego, although these realities themselves do not emerge, and Lasker-Schüller remains faithful to her transposed perspectives to the end. "Wie kann der Mensch verstehen," she now asks herself, "Warum der Mensch haltlos vom Menschtum bricht." (G 317). Der Mensch is

1. Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, Vol. 1, London, 1962, p 12f.

still an alien concept in relation to the wider concept of Menschtum; another late poem claims that God would weep if he saw through the eyes of man (G 315).

That the essay itself had become a difficult medium is shown by the longest one, published as a separate book and called Das Hebräerland. It documents the poet's journey to Egypt and Israel early in 1934. It seems to have been her main literary preoccupation during the next years, until it was published in 1937 in Zürich. The poet of spontaneity writes openly now about periods of infertility and about her initial difficulties with Das Hebräerland (PS 959-61). Mystical-didactic assertiveness, which had been building up in the previous essays, is now at its most strained in formulations like the following: "Palästina, nach Gottes Kinderzeichnung Meisterbild erbaut, Palästinas Flur ist das Meisterkinderwerk Gottes." (PS 907). Behind this assertiveness one detects the struggle to bring together the divided realities of Germany and Palestine, of exile as a poète maudit and as a political refugee, of a vision, both child-like and mature. Professions of faith in Palestine in the poet's most monumental and bolstered style are less convincing than the intervening and recurrent recollections of Germany and their homesickness (PS 948). One passage in particular shows how the poet looked back to her past for a confirmation of the future in Jerusalem: "Eines Morgens neigte sich meine unvergleichliche Mutter über mich Erwachende und lächelte.....Nach diesem Lächeln habe ich mich nach ihrem Heimgang zu Gott geseht ...seitdem...begann ich eine niegekante Freude und tiefes Verständnis zum Heiligen Lande zu empfinden." (PS 961). There are moments too, in which the recurrent hostility to literal-minded Zionism punctuates the prose of Das Hebräerland, for example, when Lasker-Schüler writes that she is a Hebrew for God's sake and not for the Hebrew's sake (PS 933). Elsewhere Palestine is transposed into the beyond of poetic dissociation: "Palästina ist mit keinem Lande dieser Erde zu vergleichen. Palästina ist nicht ganz von dieser Welt, grenzt schon ans Jenseits und ist....nicht zeitlich und räumlich zu messen." If this is an exaggeration, she goes on to say, exaggeration is precisely the function of a poet.(PS 792f)

Like Das Hebräerland, the last play Lasker-Schüler wrote in Jerusalem, Ich und Ich, is concerned, this time much more directly and consciously, with the divided realities of her life; unlike the essay, however, it dispenses with all monumentality or transforms this into a language of stilted parody. This is the prosaic dialect, full of foreign words, which now replaces the Plattdeutsch of Die Wupper. Only a fragment of the play has been published.¹ Lasker-Schüler appears in the play herself as Dichterin and scarecrow, and surrounding characters range from Faust and Mephistopheles to Hitler and Göring. The encounter of egos is treated as a stylised joke:

Wenn dem Enface begegnet sein Profil.
Und dem Profil begegnet sein Enface. (VP 88)

The dissolving alter-ego of the couplet phase is now parodied in the figure of the scarecrow:

Die Vogelscheuche: Habe keine Furcht, verehrte Dichterin,
ich bin, von vornherein bemerkt, aus Besenstroh ein
angemaltes höheres Wesen, mein Zopf ergraut stammt aus der
Truhe, aus Wolfgangs Zeiten Rokoko. Ein leidiger Asket,
erschaffe man mich auch im Leth, was hab ich zu vergessen
schon ---

(VP 97)

It remains to consider how all these dislocations and contortions are reflected in the poetry written after the couplet-phase and the Hebräische Balladen.

1. Since this thesis was written, and a few days before its submission, the whole play has been published as Ich und Ich and performed in German theatres. It had been withheld from publication by friends and trustees of the poet, who considered that it showed signs of mental decline and even derangement. Perhaps it required the passage of about forty years before the 'madness' of this play could reveal its acutely intelligent aspect. This will alter the whole view of Lasker-Schüler's achievement in the later years of her life. See Ich und Ich, Munich 1980.

The unexpurgated edition of the play reveals Faust and Mephistopheles as the main characters.

Chapter 11: EXILE

Von Herz zu Herz
Von dir durch mutwilliges Verschieben
Durch Schmerz und Schmerz
Mich im Liebesweh zu üben
O in der Dämmerstunde meiner
Traurigkeit ---

Else Lasker-Schüler
(from a posthumous sketch)

Lasker-Schüler, Benn, the atonal composers and artists of a similar tendency, after their initial break-through into new idioms, were faced by a dilemma so critical, that, in most cases, only a new generation - that of Celan, Beckett, Stockhausen, Pollock and Rauschenberg, as inheritors of dissociative modernism - could have had the capacity to articulate forms in their next phase: that of a still more radical dissolution of external appearances as also of fetishised abstraction in art. This generalisation, ignoring many fluctuations, overlappings and transitions (via Dadaism, for example), is particularly applicable to the German poets associated with Lasker-Schüler, to the Schönberg School and to central European artists like Kandinsky, Mondrian and Grosz; partly because their development was directly affected by the second world-war. Poets like Brecht had already turned from Expressionism to a 'realist' poetry of political commitment. Johnny Heartfield's change of attitude is typical of many Expressionists and Surrealists who turned to political commitment, in his case, to a phase of propagandist poster-painting. At times extremes meet, when such posters resemble the socialist realism officially favoured by totalitarian regimes. Adorno's view that art has never been less able to take itself for granted as a discipline, seems to be applicable to all tendencies since the second world-war.¹

1. Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, op. cit., p 9f.

Trakl died young and probably at the height of his achievement. It is difficult to imagine how he would have continued to write, and conceivable that he might not have committed suicide had he had even an inkling of his future as a poet. The examples of Lasker-Schüler and Benn, who had reached a similar point of articulate imagism, suggest that they had to regress in order to progress. Benn soon began to rely on a conception of unflinchingly autonomous art without sufficiently questioning the nature of such autonomy. This does not consist of a mysteriously dependable shell of formal self-sufficiency. He calls it Satzbau, perseveringly, in a poem of that title, though he does surmise, whether it is not a "Totemtier, / Auf Kosten des Inhalts ein formaler Priapismus," and he also assumes that it is a passing phenomenon: "er wird vorübergehen."¹ In such insights Benn goes beyond the absolute fetishisation of art within the division of labour; his remarks clearly register a wider context and the conflicts by which a work of art is traversed and even questioned.

Lasker-Schüler was never tempted by any deliberate undertakings to illustrate the autonomy of art with examples. For this she was too committed to her spontaneity. The Hebräische Balladen were brought out of her by historical pressures, by her evolution as a poet; they risked a poetical cul de sac, but it was not in her nature to institutionalise their procedures. After their publication in 1913 and of Konzert (with its small number of poems) in 1932, only one more volume of poems appeared thirteen years later during the poet's exile in Jerusalem: Mein blaues Klavier. Two years later she died at the age of seventy-five.

The early poets had registered a European catastrophe and the strivings of the lyrical ego to survive this. Reality - never better than any supposedly hyper-sensitive and neurotic poets imply; usually worse - overtook the poets and virtually buried the lyrical ego of European Romanticism for all time. It is now, in retrospect, that it seems as if Lasker-Schüler,

1. Benn, Gedichte, op. cit., p 249.

by portraying the extinction of poetic subjectivity, would, paradoxically, ensure its survival. The phase of poetically bolstered Hebräische Balladen, resisting this situation, was short and exhausted itself in a few poems (ten, excluding the reprinted early poems).

For the most part the poems of the exiled poet show her clinging to her German muse, unwilling to admit that its ground had been removed: this is her weakness. The devastating denial of a differentiated aesthetic experience by German society, the second world-war (Lasker-Schüler's achievement had culminated by the first), the bleak realities of Palestine and the Arab world: all these were things she could no longer face as a poet. Where her lyrical ego had been the agent of a penetrating negation, it was denied itself now, much more absolutely by the opposing forces. The phantasy-world shows passive and pathetic traits. A critique of Das Hebräerland which appeared in Moscow in 1937 emphasises the underlying dissonance: "Denn billigte man ihr schon...das Vorrecht zu, in dieser unserer Zeit unpolitisch zu sein, und weiss man auch, dass sie von ökonomischen Dingen gar nichts versteht - aber an aller und jeglicher Wirklichkeit vorbeigehn, das kann kein Dichter."¹ Even if this critic does not consider the indirectly social commitment of the poet's taboo, he does expose its helpless aspect. The lover of earlier years has been replaced to some extent by invocations of God, of the poet's dead son and mother, of her parental home and lost friends in Germany. God is not the same ally of dissociation as he used to be. Despite all this, however, the lover still remains, even for the aging poet, as the indispensable counterpart of the lyrical ego, the 'you' of estranged love. But the accent now is on the poet's desolation: loneliness in the early poetry had been a more penetrating experience; in its very

1. See Klüsener, Lasker-Schüler, op. cit., p 114.

dissociation it found the most compelling way of speaking for the world it denied. Nevertheless, an intense erotic feeling is still deeply expressive in some of the late poems:

Ich suchte ewig dich - es bluten meine Flüsse -
Ich löschte meinen Durst mit deines Lächelns Süsse.

(Dem Holden, G 366)

New images appear for the old imagery of blindness and distance between lovers:

.....Ich weiss du hältst wie früher meine Hand
Verwunschen in der Ewigkeit der Ferne....

(Es kommt der Abend, G 342)

The punctuation wants to say what even these words cannot, revealing an impotence for which one can hardly stricture the poet. The 'you' of the late poems is a more abstract representative of the 'other' on whom the regeneration of the world depended. Usually there is an unspoken admission of his unreality (even supposing the presence of a real person). This one senses in the lines from Es kommt der Abend; here he is still the lover in Germany, one could almost say Germany itself. Despairingly the poet affirms the link which has been severed. A new, shattered ego emerges from this exile:

In meinem Herzen spielen Paradiese.....
Ich aber kehre aus versunkenem Glück
In eine Welt trostlosester Entblätterung zurück.

(Ergraut kommt seine kleine Welt zurück,
G 348).

The poet of broken forms is broken and desolate herself:

So trübe aber scheint mir gerade heut die Zeit
Von meines Herzens Warte aus gesehen;
Es trägt die Spuren einer Meereseinsamkeit
Und aller Stürme sterbendes Verwehen.

(Ein Lied an Gott, G 348).

The appearance of relatively conventional formal types signifies a certain degree of resignation. A freely structured rhymed quatrain complements the free-verse couplets. These had absorbed the early type of quatrain used by Lasker-Schüller; now the precision of the couplet-phase and the versifying art of the Hebräische Balladen is released in new forms of a slightly expanded dimension. Sometimes there is an impression of tremendous expansion in long-drawn lines accumulating all the experience of a life-time. But in this maturity the poet remains faithful to her adolescence. To have 'grown up' and become wise, would, to her, have been a betrayal of her genius to a maturity which cannot thrive in prevailing social systems except on repression or repressive mechanisms.¹ In the late poems Lasker-Schüller's old age becomes the vehicle of a child-like helplessness, but often still in close association with the acute and rebellious instinct of her lyrical ego. This creates a peculiarly broken language. Often tonal colours are strung together and blended like echoes of deepest fulfilment into these desolate vistas. The two fragments above contain such lines. In a posthumously published poem Lasker-Schüller finds her own words for this art:

Ich schlafe in der Nacht an fremden Wänden
Und wache in der Frühe auf an fremder Wand.
Ich legte mein Geschick in harten Händen
Und reihe Tränen auf, so dunkle Perlen ich nie fand.

(VP 123)

The self-assurance of the Hebräische Balladen has vanished: the masterful imagist poet is numbed almost with a feeling of the fate poetry has suffered and of its vulnerability. Artful poeticising gives way often to a new expressiveness. There is a speechlessness in the freer flowing speech of these poems. It eats the bread and drinks the water of death. ("O Gott und bei lebendigem Tage, / Traum ich vom Tod. / Im Wasser trink ich ihn

1. One has to bear in mind here that regression has been the medium of aesthetic articulation more recently for authors like Samuel Beckett. To expect 'maturity' of the characters in his novels and plays would be absurd.

und würge ihn im Brot." (Gott hör, G 321). If words are found in a predicament for which there are no words, then they speak of their own helplessness. Often Lasker-Schüler reflects on this failure in succinct formulations: the knowledge of it is present in every syllable of the late poems. The last volume is entitled Mein blaues Klavier, and this blue piano has been left to rot in Germany. The integrity of the late years even surmises on the possible failure of the entire poetic oeuvre. The blue piano is depicted as one the poet never knew how to play ("Und kenne doch keine Note" G 337). Anything like scales and systematic learning would have contradicted her idea of spontaneity and also her aversion to institutionalised art. Rather, she preferred to grope half-blindly for her tones; a prose postscript to her last volume indicates that she also preferred such groping in her readers. ("Wenn es noch Kinder wären die auf meinen Reimen tastend meinetwegen klimpten" G 371). The ultimate goal has been represented in images, never to be fulfilled. These would have found fulfilment in the suspension of art as a compliant category within the divided world. In its survival art conceded its failure:

Ich habe die Welt, die Welt hat mich betrogen. (Abschied, G 318).

She is atoning, she confesses, for an unfulfilled prophecy; the hieroglyph has become a scar; her soul - that of the lyrical ego - has been lost, she looks everywhere for its traces, which still appear as erring glances in her eye; youthful rebelliousness returns in the defiance of Adam and Eve; with blasphemous fury she calls herself a Jew with the head of Baal.¹ In the fragment of a poem found among the manuscripts she left in Jerusalem, the demonic ego of the early poetry returns with a new uncanny sense of its exile:

Die Dämmerung holt die Sichel aus der Dunkelheit
Und steckt sie mir ans Wolkenkleid
Ich bin die Nacht

1. See G 348, 321, 322, 326, 325.

Verletz dich nicht an mir gib acht
Noch hat der Hirt die goldenen Lämmer nicht gebracht (VP 131)

Beyond any personalised demonism, there is an implication in these lines that a world which refuses to release its mythical or pre-rational past in an emancipated consciousness will become the victim of its own repressive forces. The motif of aggressive dissociation is repeated in a few lines included with the poems of Mein Konzert; the poet has been addressed by 'inquisitive' people on the beach; they represent prevailing interests and their words are erased in the poet's mind as they would be by the sea washing out inscriptions in the sand (G 327). More important than the apparent arrogance of this assertion - it really represents the poet's indispensable asceticism - , more important also than the antiquated trust in God in the last line, despite its as-if construction ("Als läge ich in Gottes weiter Hand"), is the faithfulness to earliest intentions. Perhaps the most stark moment of disillusionment in all Lasker-Schüler's poetry comes in a poem called Jerusalem:

Ich wandele wie durch Mausoleen -
Versteint ist unsere Heilige Stadt.
Es ruhen Steine in den Betten ihrer toten Seen
Statt Wasserseiden, die da spielten: Kommen und Vergehen.

Es starren Gründe hart den Wanderer an -
Und er versinkt in ihrer starren Nächte.
Ich habe Angst, die ich nicht Überwältigen kann. (G 334)

Stones in an arid landscape have replaced a scintillating play of waters, resembling the immaterial playfulness of the couplet-phase. Stones are a metamorphosis of the bead-like couplets, while the stultified holy city recalls the City of Thebes, which had never been directly represented in the poetry. The integrity that comes continually face to face with itself wrings compellingly expressive tones, after all, out of defeat and impotence. Against all probability, the old lyrical ego struggles with itself, finds its voice, and intermittently, lines and poems

appear which may yet prove to be among the most unforgettable ones in German poetry:

Ein fremder Vogel hat in dunkler Fröhe schon gesungen,
Als noch mein Traum mit sich und mir gerungen.

(Ein Liebeslied, G 361)

This strange bird is still the lyrical ego, the dissociated self, finding a way for its voice to reach the familiar world. Three of its best songs re-introduce the mode of the couplet-poems; one of them concerns the death of the poet's son. In it old and new tones are intermingled in the subtlest imagery and the greatest simplicity. The idea of functionlessness, of freedom from purposes, is remembered with inimitable justness in the image of the butterfly:

Wenn der Mond in Blüte steht
Gleicht er deinem Leben, mein Kind.

Und ich mag nicht hinsehen
Wie der lichtspendende Falter sorglos dahin schwebt.

(An mein Kind, G 335)

In Abschied this purposelessness is associated with the day of rest, the seventh day of the creation, which had given the title to Lasker-Schüler's second volume of poems; here the invisible God, associated with this secret purpose, has withdrawn from the disappointed poet; the relationship is broken:

Ich wache in der Nacht stürmisch auf hohen Meereswogen!
Und was mich je mit seiner Schöpfung Ruhetag verband,
Ist wie ein spätes Adlerheer unstät in diese Dunkelheit geflogen.

(Abschied, G 318)

Loss of the world and of the poetry which once deciphered its secret intentions is portrayed in Hingabe. Here the type of the couplet-poem returns in a new form; the lines are longer and the whole poem is knit together by the repetition of one rhyme throughout, with some variation in the length of vowels.

The mono-rhyme has the effect of making the poem turn around on itself, distorting the syntax in the third verse, and conveys effectively the feeling of thwarted intentions and of a dislocated ego:

Ich sehe mir die Bilderreihen der Wolken an,
Bis sie zerfliessen und enthüllen ihre blaue Bahn.

Ich schwebte einsamlich die Welten all hinan,
Entzifferte die Sternoglyphen und die Mondeszeichen um den Mann.

Und fragte selbst mich scheu, ob oder wann
Ich einst geboren wurde und gestorben dann?

Mit einem Kleid aus Zweifel war ich angetan,
Das greises Leid geweiht für mich am Zeitrad spann.

Und jedes Bild, das ich von dieser Welt gewann,
Verlor ich doppelt, und auch das was ich ersann. (G 349)

One of the most moving and beautiful aspects of Lasker-Schüler's poetry is the return of rhymes in later years, in the poems of farewell to her friends, to Germany and to the world. These farewells are not only those of the person; they speak also for the lyrical ego, coming too late and knowing its own lateness, an echo, when the historical hour of its death had struck:

Aus meinem Herzen fallen letzte Grösse
Vom Lebensfaden ab - dir schenk ich diese.

Die Sonne heftet im Kristall der Kiese
Noch scheidend ihren goldenen Augenblick.

(Ergraut kommt seine kleine Welt zurück, G 348)

In the pebbles Lasker-Schüler remembers the gravel path leading to the front-door at home (PS 597). The sight of them in the light of the setting sun may well have been one of the first images the child found for the expressive being which longs for a refuge from the claims of the socialised world. These are imposed early. Glittering pebbles correspond both to the hieroglyph and to the play of rhymes. One can well believe that the

poet loved these in early childhood; this would explain their return as memories of a forgotten world. By an extraordinary irony she is living in Jerusalem, and the realm of Weltflucht is situated in Germany. There are even touches of realism, of real memories now. The play of sounds in words and rhymes seems to compensate for a partial loss of abstraction; it is as if all the bitter-sweetness of lyrical poetry has sought refuge once more in these rhyming cadences, brimful of significance. False rhymes had evidently made the child cry in anger and frustration; (PS 518) now their dissonant harmony is handled with complete mastery:

Ich habe zu Hause ein blaues Klavier
Und kenne doch keine Note.

Es steht im Dunkel der Kellertür,
Seitdem die Welt verrohte.

Es spielen Sternenhände vier
-Die Mondfrau sang im Boote-
Nun tanzen die Ratten im Geklirr.

Zerbrochen ist die Klaviatur.....
Ich beweine die blaue Tote.

Ach liebe Engel Öffnet mir
-Ich ass vom bitteren Brote-
Mir lebend schon die Himmelstür-
Auch wider dem Verbote.

(Mein blaues Klavier, G 337)

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