The Art of Writing a Life:

Heimatsuche and Bohemianism in the Poetry of Lasker-Schüler

by

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Abstract

This study explores how the poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945) creates a personal space—a *Heimat*—through the poetic process. Through close readings of a selection of the poet’s works, I demonstrate the paradoxical relationship between physical structures and emotional or psychic freedom. I show how this association between form and fluidity reflects the poetic genre itself, while also drawing parallels to Lasker-Schüler’s biography and her relationships with the *Berliner Bohème*.

Lasker-Schüler’s work has been viewed through many different lenses: Expressionism, Judaism, and feminism. Such interpretations can be problematic, as they impose limitations on the poet’s work and are thereby contradictory to the fluid qualities conveyed in her poems. Through close analysis of the formal and aesthetic aspects of Lasker-Schüler’s poetry, I illuminate this often neglected, but most important aspect of the fluctuating, creative space.

Lasker-Schüler’s life circumstances forced her to live an unsettled life, but poetry seems to have functioned as a means of accessing the internal *Heimat* or *Seelenlandschaft*. The lyrical “I” of Lasker-Schüler’s poetry wanders throughout the poet’s collective works, her voice undergoing metamorphoses, leaving the reader to question this elusive poetic identity. The bohemians, who offered Lasker-Schüler an inspiring creative community, mirror this internal poetic world externally, as they embraced art and performance to create their chameleon-like identities. In turn, the bohemian mentality is reflected in the poet’s work; this constant movement and state of flux creates a poetic space, the very transience of which is what allows it to become a personal utopia, a *Heimat*, for the homeless soul.
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Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................. iii

CHAPTER 1
Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 2
"Herzdichtung: Writing a Life
Drawing Parallels Between Lasker-Schüler’s Poetry and Biography ................................................. 8

CHAPTER 3
Biographical Overview .......................................................................................................................... 14

CHAPTER 4
Lost and Restless: The Lyrical Expression of Heimatlosigkeit
Banished from the Elberfeld Paradise .................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER 5
The Berlin Years: Lasker’s Search for a new Heimat .......................................................................... 27

CHAPTER 6
Bohemianism: The Discovery of a Social Space for the Expression of the Inner Soul ...................... 35

CHAPTER 7
Coffee, Friends and Conversation: The Importance of Café Life and Influence in the Work of
Lasker-Schüler ...................................................................................................................................... 48

CHAPTER 8
Metamorphoses of the Self: Der Lenz in the Poetry of Lasker-Schüler ............................................. 52

CHAPTER 9
Bohemian Love: Search for and Expression of the Self ..................................................................... 61

CHAPTER 10
Heimweh: Lasker-Schüler’s Exile Years ............................................................................................... 68

CHAPTER 11
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 85

Bibliography ......................................................................................................................................... 88
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

WIR BEIDE

Der Abend weht Sehnen aus Blütensüße,
Und auf den Bergen brennt wie Silberdiamant der Reif,
Und Engelköpfchen gucken überm Himmelstreif,
Und wir beide sind im Paradiese.

Und uns gehört das ganze bunte Leben,
Das blaue große Bilderbuch mit Sternen!
Mit Wolkentieren, die sich jagen in den Fernen
Und hei! die Kreiselwinde, die uns drehn und heben!

Der liebe Gott träumt seinen Kindertraum
Vom Paradies—von seinen zwei Gespielen,
Und große Blumen sehn uns an von Dornenstielchen...
Die düstere Erde hing noch grün am Baum. (Der Siebente Tag, 1905)\footnote{All poems by Else Lasker-Schüler are cited from the 1997 Suhrkamp edition, \textit{Die Gedichte}, unless otherwise stated.}

The rich imagery of Else Lasker-Schüler’s (1869-1945) poetry, such as in “Wir Beide” above, transports the reader to an exotic land, where the air is seemingly always sweet as springtime, light dances atop the mountain peaks, and the palm trees’ branches together with the stars of the night skies are reflected onto the cool ocean waters. In this land, love between souls becomes a means to return to a lost paradise and the shining stars of the heavens form a canopy, enveloping humanity in blissful unity, and providing even the loneliest traveller with a universal sense of \textit{Heimat}. Yet in the last line of the poem the mood shifts; the dreamer, caught up in this imagined paradise, is sent back to the dim, gloomy world of reality, only to be reminded that this beautiful place now only exists in fantasy.

Many of Lasker-Schüler’s poems visit this utopian sense of home or \textit{Heimat}, but slowly the poems change form, exposing a foundational sadness. The lyrical lines, although
undoubtedly beautiful, purport a sense of loneliness and reveal a constant restlessness in which the poetic “I” struggles to find a place, both physical and psychic, of belonging. Through the act of writing, a space seems to be generated within the lyrical “I’s” imagination, which Kerstin Decker refers to as a “Seelenlandschaft.” This landscape created by the soul acts as a source of inspiration for both the author’s and the readers’ imaginations and thereby assists in the construction of an internal Heimat.

Lasker-Schüler chose to embrace a variety of different personae, perhaps in the attempt to temporarily adapt and find a Heimat in a world full of groups and borders, none of which provided her with a sense of true belonging. Always finding herself in the in-between, Lasker-Schüler failed to completely fit in with any particular social group. She was born and raised in a Jewish household, yet her brother, Paul, influenced her with his teachings about the Christian religion; she was female, yet from early childhood she dressed in pants and climbed trees like the boys in her neighbourhood. And as an adult she often adopted masculine clothing, choosing to present herself as neither male nor female, but rather as androgynous; her work is considered to be Expressionist, although she continued to publish her work long after the Expressionist period had been replaced by other movements. Lasker-Schüler refused to ally herself with any artistic movement, electing instead to create her own philosophies on art, taking inspiration from a variety of different sources.²

Other criticism on Lasker-Schüler posits her lyrical works as being the direct product of her “Jewishness” or her femaleness. Although it is indisputable that these categories had a

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² Lasker-Schüler’s work does exhibit characteristics of the Expressionist period, such as the expression of a subjective world, and the representation of the emotional experience rather than of reality. Furthermore, Lasker-Schüler’s work was published in Herwarth Walden’s controversial magazine, Der Sturm, which first used the term “Expressionism.” Expressionism, however, was an artistic movement driven by politics; Lasker-Schüler’s use of the formal poetic elements of this movement not only during this era but throughout her entire career suggests that she did not consider her work Expressionist, but that she was interested in the artistic forms of articulation attributed to this movement.
profound effect on Lasker-Schüler’s identity, the very idea that she chose to separate herself from them indicates that any one of these readings hinders the complete exuberance of her self and of her character. In my view, these critics disregard a major component of Lasker-Schüler’s work that comments on how rules, structures, and certainty dampen the imagination, forcing so much beauty to go unnoticed. In response, I will suggest that it was precisely because she inhabited liminal\(^3\) poetic and social spaces that Lasker-Schüler created her home or Heimat as an imaginative space, in which her creative inspiration could reign. This home, however, may not be seen as bound by a physical space, but as an internal space of her inner character that is externally reflected through her poetry.

In the *Peter Hille Buch* Lasker-Schüler writes: “Wer seine Heimat nicht in sich trägt, dem wächst sie doch unter den Füßen weg“ (qtd. in Decker 115). A liminal space, neither here nor there, must be regarded as unlivable, as it, by definition, ceases to exist. In turn, Lasker-Schüler’s self-imposed vagabond lifestyle meant that she had to forge a new space or Heimat for her creativity. The bohemians with whom Lasker-Schüler allied herself complemented this embrace of the in-between; regarded as self-marginalized artists and dissidents who first emerged in the 1800s in Paris, the bohemians were social outcasts, either because they thwarted social norms or just failed to fit with social expectations. It is under the umbrella of this elusive group that Lasker-Schüler found a space that would further the inspiration for her art, while allowing her to externally materialize the fantastical world of her imagination in her reality.

In this thesis, I argue that Lasker-Schüler created a Heimat as a borderless utopia through the poetic process, and that it was among the colourful, free-thinking bohemians that she was

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\(^3\) A “liminal space” is an undefined space in between fixed identifications. In this space, boundaries dissolve and what is left is often referred to as a space of transition, a threshold, or a grey area. The bohemians may be regarded as occupying a liminal space, as they are an extra-societal group, representing society’s ever-changing and indescribable “other.”
able to materialize this world of her inner psyche. By performing close readings of a selection of Lasker-Schüler’s poems and by focusing on metapoetic language, I will illuminate parallels between the poet’s fluid and self-reflexive identity and the rapid interchangeability between imagination and reality. I will draw further parallels to the creative exchange between reader and author.

The bohemians’ borderless existence is paralleled in the relationship between Lasker-Schüler’s reality and her art. Her biography and letters (signed with the names of various personalities) demonstrate that she seemed to be constantly donning different personae, disguising herself to appear like the different characters springing from her imagination and presented in her works: “Lasker-Schüler uses writing, performance, and visual art as the means for rewriting and transforming herself and her life story into something entirely new” (Lindenmeyer 33). She embodies her own alter-ego represented in her poetic works. Her biography becomes inspiration for her reality and vice versa, until the margins between reality and fantasy break away, creating a new space, in which categories of gender, race, and religion are called into question and subsequently replaced by art.

With this borderless exchange between her internal and external world, many interesting questions arise about Lasker-Schüler’s true identity, the most complete answers to which may not be found in her biography, but in her written word. As Anneliese Guerin quite rightly asks:


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4 “Metapoetic language” refers to the poeticty of the language and how it self-reflexively invokes the poetic means of expression. In other words, “metapoetic language” comments on the poetic process and on the act of writing itself.
By making life a performance, the lines of reality, fantasy, and the written word become blurred and the borders of identity disappear. As Kerstin Decker writes, “Heimat ist dort, wo die Welt noch selbstverständlich ist. Wo alles Antwort gibt. Heimat ist ein Resonanzraum. Sie ist dort wo der Mensch sich nicht erklären muss“ (57). Within the “other” world of her poetic works the poet may take on any identity she wishes to, while donning an ever-fluid identity that moulds itself to the reader’s individual perception.

Bohemianism was a propelling force behind Lasker-Schüler’s shifting identity and in the following pages of this study I will closely examine the representation of the lifestyle and sentiments of bohemianism in Lasker-Schüler’s poetic works. By allying herself with the bohemian “other,” the poet created an imagined utopian space for herself within the liminal spaces of society. Here, unable to fit into the rigid niches of her contemporary society, she could fulfill her artistic vision and create the world by and through her imagination. This “Weltflucht” in her “Meinwärts” becomes a mechanism for coping with her harsh reality, while providing her with a vital space to create her own utopian Heimat within herself. As the creation of any identity, I argue that this search is a true process, an internal pilgrimage, transporting the reader into the poet’s world, while prompting readers to journey into the exotic depths of their own imaginations.

I will begin my textual analysis by investigating the sense of chaos and confusion often present in Lasker-Schüler’s works; this chaos seems to emanate from Heimatlosigkeit as the loss of place and space and show how this, in turn, incites an inner and aesthetic pilgrimage. The chaotic disorder is conveyed through a consistent sense of “irr” and “wirr” throughout the poet’s writings and there are strong feelings of restlessness and ceaseless propulsion within the free verse of the poetic line. Since this pilgrimage and Heimatsuche is a process, I will be
constructing my analysis chronologically and will begin by looking at Lasker-Schüler’s poetry in relation to the loss of Elberfeld, the *Heimat* of her youth.

Next, I will examine how her poetry progressed during her time in Berlin. The years in Berlin were especially artistically productive for the poet, perhaps due to her avid association with the inspirational, free-spirited characters of the *Berliner Bohème*. I will show that the bohemian “other,” with whom the poet identified, enabled her to bring the *Heimat* of her borderless “Meinwärts” into the material world—it is the bohemian identity that became a means for the poet to exist within the reality of her imagination. These “other” spaces and identities are portrayed as overwhelmingly elusive and indescribable, yet these very qualities are what make them so malleable for the imagination. The exotic Orient and the mysterious shifting group of the free-spirited bohemians act as stages upon which everything imagined has the opportunity to come to fruition through performance. Furthermore, the bohemian community, most often associated with the frequenting of cafés, provided Lasker-Schüler with a space of collective influence and inspiration, where her ideas could come to life.

The poet’s written work during these years in Berlin is filled with energetic, fiery inspiration and with the recurring images of romantic love and springtime. The lines and structures of the poems often have a free structure and exude a playful attitude. Spring and creativity seem to be closely related for Lasker-Schüler; both are processes full of potential energy and it is in this energy that the hope for renewal and metamorphosis of the self exists.

When the poet writes about spring it is as though she has the aspiration to try new identities on and to change herself in order to discover her space within the world. Writing allows the space of her imagination to become materialized as part of her reality and it is through the writing process that she is able to create a space for herself, a *Heimat*, in which she may feel
at home. But how is home, a physical space, created within the intangible realm of the imagination through writing and how may writing act as a means to unify these elements? The poetry of Lasker-Schüler seems to hint at an answer to this relationship between freedom and form, while at the same time embracing the creativity and artistic beauty that emerge from this paradox. Through the process of writing, the exchange between the imagination and the physical becomes fluid; fantasy cloaks reality and a space in life is created that is very much like a dream.

This dream world becomes suffocated by the fog of reality in Lasker-Schüler’s late works. In the last section of my thesis I will be exploring how the free structure displayed in the poet’s earlier works becomes more restrained during her exile years in Jerusalem. An uninspiring world seems to incite the loss of this imagined utopian space for the poet. The writing process seems laboured and the liberating creative fervour appears to have been weighed down by the world’s heavy reality.
CHAPTER 2
“Herzdichtung:” Writing a Life
Drawing Parallels Between Lasker-Schüler’s Poetry and Biography

“Ich...lasse alles Gedichtete hart werden wie eine Erde, wie ein Stern, der zur Erde wird. Dann nehme ich meine Erde zur Hand und spiele mit ihr Ball.” (Lasker-Schüler qtd. in Decker 125)

Poetry may be regarded as a most unique and individual experience for both author and reader. The author plays with the medium of words, looking to convey images and rouse emotions in such a way that they are most accurately representative of that given moment. It is the work of an extraordinary poet, however, which leaves much for the active imagination of his or her audience to play with. It is this ability to transcend time and space which makes a lyrical work eternally relevant.

This creation of a unique aesthetic moment for the souls of both author and reader accurately describes the reading experience of the lyrical works of Lasker-Schüler, whose poems act as snapshots of her soul throughout the various stages of her life, while transporting the reader into the exotic depths of their own imaginations. The first line of “Ein alter Tibetteppich”—“Deine Seele, die die meine liebet”—expresses this connection between author and reader, who, as Markus Hallensleben notes, seem to become interchangeable within this poem (18). Like the strands of the Tibetan rug which are woven together so tightly that they can no longer be distinguished from each other, the souls and feelings of author and reader become one by means of the poem as an aesthetic object.

In a late poem entitled “An Mich,” Lasker-Schüler alludes to her transitory yet omnipresent self throughout her poetry: “Meine Dichtungen, deklamiert, verstimmen die Klaviatur meines Herzens” (371). Poetry declaims the depths of her heart and soul, but this process becomes endless, as the state of her inner self is in constant flux. As soon as the words
have manifested themselves on the page, they no longer seem accurate, having affected the very state of the soul from which they came. As Michel Foucault writes in his essay, “What is an Author?” writing must not be seen as something completed, but as a practice (101). This constantly moving and evolving nature of the writing process aligns itself well with the writing of Lasker-Schüler, who regarded poetry as the breakdown of borders, and the creation of a fluid space. As Decker writes, writing for Lasker-Schüler was “ein Flüssigwerden” (Decker 125), through which human souls may gain a universal understanding of each other. As a result, it may be said that the role of the author becomes equivalent to the role of the reader in the poetic process, with the souls of the author and the reader merging by means of the body of the text. As Foucault suggests, “[writing] referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, […] is identified with its own unfolded exteriority” (102). Thus, the writer and the reader play a sort of game, the object of which is not to assign an absolute subject or meaning to the text, but to “[create] a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (102), allowing the text to take on a unique meaning through the aid of the reader’s imagination.

“[Der] Betrachter [wird gezwungen] weiter zu denken, da wo das Bild nicht mehr zeigen kann” (Haslinger 41). This poetic game is directly referred to in many of the poet’s works, such as in “Die schwarze Bhowanéh” and “Vagabunden,” which I will discuss in greater detail later.

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5 Foucault describes the author as the instigator of a creative process, one which is then completed by the reader who brings their own interpretation into a work. This point is vital to my analysis of Lasker-Schüler’s work, as her poetry should be regarded as something that is never complete and that thus any analysis in this study is only one possible interpretation. Foucault also writes that through the act of writing an author becomes immortal, having captured moments of time and by extension of their self on the page. I feel this to be important with regards to Lasker-Schüler because writing for her was a means to create a world and that thus her fantasy is further explored and experienced, while the physical world continues to interact with her spiritual self.

6 This idea of a fluid text is important with regards to my analyses, as any conclusions I come to are mere suggestions, only looking through my own lens of experience. I am left with the sense that I am only ever scratching the surface of the poet’s works, but in the way in which the work of Lasker-Schüler’s critics has expanded my understanding of the poet’s lyrical works, I hope that my analyses will reflect engagement in conversation with the poet and will thus further the Denkansätze in the larger collaborative effort of reading Lasker-Schüler.
In “Mein blaues Klavier,” one of Lasker-Schüler’s most famous poems, the shared experience between author and reader becomes especially clear. The first stanza of the poem reads as follows:

Ich habe zu Hause ein blaues Klavier

Und kenne doch keine Note.

Es steht im Dunkel der Kellertür,

Seitdem die Welt verrohte. (1-4)

The lyrical “I”—“Ich”—appears consistently throughout Lasker-Schüler’s work, but as is suggested by Karl Josef Höltgen, this lyrical “I” must be seen as representative not only of the Lasker-Schüler herself but of the modern person in general (6). Most of her poems employ the lyrical “I” as the subject, supporting the notion that her work is highly reflective of her identity. Foucault writes further that “the text always contains a certain number of signs referring to the author” (110), although the first person pronoun in a work may not refer directly to the author and to the moment in which he or she writes. Instead Foucault suggests that the lyrical “I” acts as an alter-ego, who contains some of the author, but whose true identity changes throughout the work.⁷

“Mein blaues Klavier” begins with this lyrical “I” and with what seems to be the specific Heimat of that “I.” Nevertheless, upon reaching the last line of the stanza, it becomes clear that the lyrical “I” acts as an example for the general human condition and thus readers are prompted to introspectively examine the feelings these lines have roused within their own souls. “Seitdem die Welt verrohte” (4) has this macrocosmic effect because it is a generalization of the world in which we all live, a world which has become vulgarized and has affected each individual and

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⁷ This regard for the lyrical “I” as the author’s alter-ego is especially intriguing in relation to Lasker-Schüler, whose biography notes her constant performance of different characters and embrace of different personae and identities. Creating an alternative reality was a focus in both the poet’s work and in her reality.
their own perception of *Heimat*. The repetition of the short consonant stops—“k,” “d,” and “t”—amidst the long vowels cuts the resonating structure into ever-shorter segments. This seems to represent the loss of fluid harmony within the world. The “Klavier” may be read as a metaphor for *Heimat*, and that the lyrical “I” knows not one note on this piano is demonstrative of a *Heimat* which has grown so strange that it has become absolutely unrecognizable. Like the piano that stands in the shadow of the basement door and has become dusty, the *Heimat*, once so familiar, has not been visited in a long while. Although it still exists as a physical place, it no longer feels like a home at all.

For Lasker-Schüler, the process of writing was the search for a long lost *Heimat* and the creation of a temporary home, a space in which her soul could, albeit ephemerally, feel at peace with the world: “Nur im Bereich der Sprache konnte sie den Weg zurück in die Heimat finden” (Hedgepath 12). As Kerstin Decker writes, the poet wrote out of necessity for her own sense of expression; her work may be considered “Herzdichtung” (195), and few have written as directly from the heart as she did. Enriching the experience of reading Lasker-Schüler’s poetry with her biography provides the reader with a greater multiplicity of meaning and seems most valid, as Lasker-Schüler did not merely write her imagination, but also lived it. About the biographical accuracy and the extent of speculation of Lasker-Schüler’s biography in relation to her works during this process, Karl Josef Höltgen writes:

Allgemein bleibt bei der Betrachtung ihres Werkes zu berücksichtigen, wie sehr die Kraft der spielenden und steigernden Phantasie den äusseren Umriss des Geschehens bei der

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8 “Mein blaues Klavier” is most often read in a socio-political context in relation to the destruction and hardship caused by the Nazi takeover and the beginning of the Second World War. Although I am treating Lasker-Schüler as a rather apolitical author, it is important to note that such historical and social discourses are intrinsic elements of the fabric of the poet’s *Heimat* and identity. I believe that Lasker-Schüler’s association with the bohemians demonstrates her desire for a space isolated from politics; in turn, although the poet’s art was undoubtedly influenced by her environment, it may also be read free of such social and political contexts.
Umsetzung in die Dichtung veränderte. [...] Das manche Detailfragen [ihres Lebensganges] nicht zu beantworten sind, fällt für die Werkinterpretation nicht so ins Gewicht. (7)

I agree with Höltgen that although it may be speculated by looking at Lasker-Schüler’s work in conjunction with her biography that many poems have been inspired by her reality, this reality has become altered through fantasy and through the writing process. It becomes impossible to unravel fantasy from reality and to make assumptions about the poet herself merely through analysis of her poetic works. Nevertheless, I feel that because Lasker-Schüler’s life was so defined by her poetry and vice versa, it is most fruitful to refer to her biography while interpreting her poetry and I will be referencing the poet’s biography in my close readings of her poems. There are certain dangers involved with relying too much on biography, as biographies themselves are most often based on speculations and opinions. As Redmann states, Lasker-Schüler herself had the “tendency to embroider the truth” (50), allowing fantasy and reality to become intertwined. Consequently, instead of trying to read her poetry parallel to her biography as so many critics have done, I would like to suggest that her poetry is constitutive of a different sort of biography that concentrates more on the characters of her fantasy. If writing was a means for Lasker-Schüler to form or give physical body to an imagined world, this uninhibited flow between the physical and her personal fantasy should both be regarded as vital in the creation of her reality.

The borders between fantasy and reality become dissolved, a state the poet seemed to enjoy inhabiting and one where her creativity thrived. Jennifer Redmann writes: “Although it is clear that the author’s sense of self and her experiences of the world influenced her work profoundly [...], many scholars fail to acknowledge the complexity of this relationship by
posing it in terms of a simple equation: life as poetry equals poetry as life” (12). As an alternative, Redmann refers to a quotation from Fritz Martini: “[Lasker-Schüler’s] Dasein war ihr Dichten” (14). In this expression, the relation between poetry and life is presented as being active, meaning that Lasker-Schüler’s existence was not her poetry, but rather the writing of her poetry. The poet’s works now act as artefacts of her life, but the poetic Hauch is set in motion anew with each reader, continuing the poetic process: “In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be entangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, ‘run’ (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath; the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced” (Barthes 1469). This statement acts as a strong complement to the recurring theme of threads and weaving in Lasker-Schüler’s poetry; this metaphor compares poetry to a woven textile, in which different poems, ideas and interpretations become woven together, forming a universal fabric of meaning.

The rich, yet vague images created in Lasker-Schüler’s poetics may never be absolutely interpreted by the reader, but, similarly, neither may Lasker-Schüler’s reality- riddling persona-bending disguise and performance. Borders between reality and thoughts must be allowed to become fluid and only partially formulated; sometimes the experience of an impression is more valuable than anything concrete or absolute.
CHAPTER 3

Biographical Overview

“[Lasker-Schüler] schuf sich eine eigene Welt, in der allein sie die Wirklichkeit bestimmte.” (Kampling 145)

Lasker-Schüler was born in 1869 in Elberfeld, Germany to a bourgeois Jewish family. Young Schüler, however, grew up with influences from both the Jewish and the Christian faiths, as her brother Paul introduced her to Christianity. Her family was very important to her and the sequential deaths of her brother in 1877, her mother in 1890, and her father in 1897 had a tremendous effect on her emotional well-being. The death of her mother, to whom she was especially close, sent Lasker-Schüler into a deep depression; she regarded the death of her mother to be the banishment from the paradise of Eden, from “der ursprünglichen Heimat” (Decker 209). Lasker-Schüler’s marriage in 1894 to Dr. Jonathan Berthold Lasker resulted in her relocation to Berlin, where she pursued studies in illustration. In 1899 her first son, Paul, was born and in 1903 Lasker-Schüler divorced, following her refusal to embrace the domestic roles of a doctor’s wife. Later that year she was remarried to the author Georg Lewin, to whom she assigned the pseudonym Herwarth Walden.

While residing in Berlin, Lasker-Schüler came to identify with the city’s so-called bohemians, a group of artists and eccentrics, who sought out alternative lifestyles. Their discussions were most often based around the arts and their regular meetings and conversations in such coffee houses as Das Café des Westens created a sort of makeshift space, where these marginal individuals found a “castle in the air, a chameleon environment, a shimmering bubble suspended in the urban atmosphere, [where they] cast off their cares and their poverty and became the geniuses of their dreams” (Wilson 37). If Lasker-Schüler was ever able to identify

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9 In this thesis, I will be using “Jewish” as a all-encompassing term to refer to the Jewish religion, race, culture, etc.
herself with a group, it must have been with the bohemians, for they, like her, were the misfits of society, rejecting social norms.

Bohemia attracted its self-chosen citizens for many different reasons. It was a refuge, a way station, a stage. For some it was a permanent home, for others a transient port of call. Just as the Bohemian was a protean character, so Bohemia was a land of fantasy that could be shaped to fit the dreams of those who visited or dwelt there. (Wilson 73)

Bohemianism originated as a movement in France around 1800 in reaction to the industrial revolution. People left the bourgeoisie in protest of industries’ destruction of nature for monetary gain during the period of industrialization. While the bohemians were anti-bourgeois, they were not allied with leftist, communist, or socialist politics. The bohemians may perhaps be better described as being apolitical, focussing more directly on humanity and arts. Elizabeth Wilson writes:

Bohemia was a Western phenomenon that lived off its critique of Western society. It was therefore not surprising if in their search for an escape from industrial civilization, bohemians turned a romantic eye on distant cultures, and searched for a spontaneity and authenticity in simpler societies which, they felt, no longer existed in their own. (140)

The term “bohemian,” for these self-marginalized and impoverished individuals, originated in Paris in the early 19th century when artists began to reside in lower class gypsy neighbourhoods. These gypsies were referred to as “Bohémien,” as they were Romani people who had reached Western Europe via Bohemia. The artists co-residing in these neighbourhoods were thus given the similar name of the “bohemians.” The figure of the bohemian artist is often romanticized in literature, because the example of living as a wanderer, adventurer or vagabond is regarded as the ultimate expression of freedom. The term “bohemian” has become associated with
marginalized members of society, who express their anti-establishmentarianism through voluntary poverty, frugality, and free love.

Perhaps Lasker-Schüler’s identification with this free-spirited bohemian character left her unwilling to embrace the static role of a woman and of a wife in society and in 1910 her relationship with Herwarth Walden came to an end and their divorce was finalized in 1912. It was later rumoured that she had numerous relationships with different individuals, among them Gottfried Benn, Georg Trakl, Karl Kraus, Peter Hille and Franz Marc.

In 1927 Lasker-Schüler’s life was again struck by tragedy, with the death of her son, Paul, from tuberculosis. This loss of her last familial relationship seemed to dissolve Lasker-Schüler’s ties to Berlin and she began travelling incessantly, as if in search of a new Heimat. This self-imposed exile of sorts demonstrates the sense of Heimatlosigkeit Lasker-Schüler felt years before her ostracism by the Nazis and perhaps explains the sense of hopelessness felt early on in her poetry. In 1932 her Jewish heritage and her “Expressionist” style caused her to be harassed by the Nazis, after which she sought refuge in Zurich, Switzerland. But here, too, she was unable to work and subsequently travelled to Palestine in 1934, and finally settled in Jerusalem in 1937. In 1938 she was stripped of her German citizenship and was denied re-entry into Germany. Her health at this time was deteriorating and she died of a heart attack in Jerusalem in 1945.
CHAPTER 4

Lost and Restless: The Lyrical Expression of Heimatlosigkeit
Banished from the Elberfeld Paradise

“Schon wieder hat sie eine Heimat verloren, die ursprünglichste.“ (Decker 209)

The lyrical “I” in Lasker-Schüler’s works strongly conveys that it has become lost within the world and is now a weary traveller with no place to call home. This recurrent sense of Heimatlosigkeit and the restless search for a space to settle may reflect the loss of so many people whom the poet loved throughout her life.

It is important to distinguish the terms of place and space, as they are often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this discussion of Lasker-Schüler, I will be using “place” to describe a mere physical locale or a passive setting, while I will be using “space” to mean a place that is infused with emotion and experience, and thus with inspirational energy. John Gray states: “‘Space is a practiced place,’ (Certeau) where historically and culturally situated people create a locality of familiar heres and theres” (224). By extension, space does not have to be a fixed place or setting, but can be an individual’s personal bubble of experience, consisting of the relationships and memories they have. Place thus only becomes important in conjunction with relationships and in providing a physical setting where these experiences may come to fruition. In turn, as Mana Dietzel Papkyriakou writes, Heimat and the feeling of Heimweh, undoubtedly felt by Lasker-Schüler following the passing of her family and her leaving Elberfeld, is bound to the loss of the pleasant associations with her hometown:

Denken ist ohne Zeit und Raum nicht möglich. Erinnern, das Zurückschauen hat wie jedes Denken neben der Zeit Komponente immer eine räumliche. [...] Heimweh [stellt]
Thus, we may surmise that Lasker-Schüler’s loss of her *Heimat* perhaps coincided with a sort of identity crisis that left her character fluid to try on different personae.

The fond memories Lasker-Schüler had of her childhood town of Elberfeld were arguably mostly bound to her family, with whom she had very close ties. The successive deaths of her brother, mother, and father diminished her bonds to this place. Particularly the loss of her mother in 1890 gave rise to feelings of being banished from paradise, from the Garden of Eden, meaning the place of origin associated with innocence and love.

In “Eva” (*Der Siebente Tag*, 1905) the poet writes: “O, meine Seele ist das vertriebene Sehnen” (6). The interjection “O” is indicative of a deep sorrow, a sentiment which goes beyond language and in which the deep meaning lies in the expression and not in the words themselves. Lasker-Schüler often embellished her handwritten manuscripts with small pictures and shaped her written letters in such a way that they themselves added to the meaning of the poem. Unfortunately, this added significance is lost in the presentation of the text in printed form, but the vowel “O” stands alone, as to suggest that it itself is highly significant. The circular letter “O” represents an infinite cycle, such as that of life or of mourning. Furthermore, a circle has no beginning and no end and thus creates a feeling of inescapability.

Lasker-Schüler’s exile from her home and from her *Heimat*, her Eden, following the death of her mother is felt in the poem “Volkslied” (*Styx*, 1902), which anticipates her later endless wandering and search for belonging:

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10 Lasker-Schüler was heavily influenced by the symbolist Stefan George and thus the structure and visual appearance of the individual characters and graphemes holds significance. That the poet dots her “i’s” with stars, for example, may be seen as a symbolic representation of each “ich” or person as a star in the sky and that collectively all these people are connected in the way in which all these stars make up the universe.
Verlacht mich auch neckisch der Wirbelwind,
--Mein Kind, das ist ein Himmelskind
Mit Locken, wie Sonnenschein.

Ich sitze weinend unter dem Dach,
Bin in den Nächten fieberwach
Und nähe Hemdchen aus Leinen.

Meiner Mutter Wiegenfest ist heut,
Gestorben sind Vater und Mutter beid’
Und sahen nicht mehr den Kleinen.

Meine Mutter träumte einmal schwer,
Sie sah mich nicht an ohne Seufzer mehr
Und ohne heimliches Weinen.—

First of all, the use of the verb “verlachen” followed by “Locken” suggests “verlocken” and thus once again alludes to Eve’s temptation and her subsequent banishment from Eden. The “Wirbelwind” builds up a sense of chaos and confusion; with the circular motion the wind causes no forward propulsion in any direction, but rather a sense of local destruction. This seems symbolic of the destruction of a Heimat and life that was like her11 paradise on earth. Furthermore, “Wirbelwind” is often represented as a spiral, a common symbol for insanity and inescapability. This circular pattern is echoed in relation to the circle of life that is alluded to by mention of both the birth and the death of the poetic “I’s” mother. What remains are dreams and memories of the mother, and in this case the poet writes of the recollection she has of her mother’s dream that predicted the heaviness of the life her daughter, Else, was destined to live. The dream is described as “schwer,” and the “Seufzer” are demonstrative of the lyrical “I’s” painful longing. The use of long vowel tones, as in “träumte” and “ohne” and through the alliterations of “s” and “m” the poem becomes heavy, like the feet of a ceaseless traveller with no place to settle or to feel entirely at home.

11 Because of the direct thematic correlation of this poem with the poet’s life, I will be assuming this to be an instance of “Herzdichtung” and that the poetic voice is thus synonymous with that of the poet.
Although “Volkslied” exudes much sorrow and longing, it also quite playful in its characteristics and seems to refer to the unity between the heavens and the earth and that all living and departed souls are at home within the macrocosm of the universe. Returning to the first stanza of the poem, “Verlacht mich auch neckisch der Wirbelwind/ --Mein Kind, das ist ein Himmelswind/ Mit Locken, wie Sonnenschein,” we see that there is a beautiful childish innocence emanating from the lines and an interesting contrast between youthful vitality and the wariness that comes with age. The word “neckisch” in the first line is playful and light-hearted and conjures up images of a childish lyrical “I” playing with the wind and imagining the wind as a means to come closer to the heavens and thus to the soul of her deceased mother. This wind may be seen as the poetic Hauch.

The “Dach” alludes to a physical space, perhaps in which the poet may engage in the writing process. This roof, however, may also reference the ceiling of the sky, of the heavens, under which the lyrical “I” sits and feels closer to her mother. The word “nähe“ parallels this relationship, as the verb “sewing” may refer to the poetic craft, while the noun, “die Nähe,“ refers to closeness and proximity. The feverish wakefulness may reference the light of creative energy that surges through the darkness, inspiring the poet to create. Furthermore, the fashioning of shirts “aus Leinen“ references clothing and weaving, a motif often present in the poet’s work that may be seen as symbolic of the process of composing a text and intertwining ideas to form a material object. “Leinen” is similar to the word “die Leine,” which translates to “line” and creates a parallel with the lines of a poem.

Overall it may be said that the poem constructs a space under this “Dach” and that the poetic process comforts the lonely lyrical “I.” Writing becomes a means of creating a reality that may transcend time and which includes lost loved ones. It is as though the lyrical “I” is in
conversation with her mother in heaven and that her mother is telling her of the little golden
locked angels who give her company there. “Locken” seems to have a double meaning, referring
both to the angels’ curls, while also insinuating the verb “locken,” meaning to lure; it is as
though the lyrical “I” is being lured from reality, into the richness of a heavenly utopian world.
The second line of the poem seems to bring earth and the heavens closer together still, as lyrical
“I’s” mother addresses her as her child, as “mein Kind.” The “Himmelskind” acts as an alter-ego
of the lyrical “I” that is created through the writing process. The souls of the lyrical “I” and of
her physically absent mother are united in the created space of the poetic “I’s” Heimat of her
imagination.

The last line of the poem constructs a thought-provoking tension between the different
connotations of the word “heimlich,” which may either refer to the sentiments felt for one’s
Heimat or home, while also meaning to do something in secret. The “Volkslied” ends with a
period, but then, as though the poem, like the wandering homeless soul, to whom it refers,
continues with a thought line, indicating that the contemplation is not yet complete and that the
wanderer must continue in search of a place to settle outside of this Heimat, away from this Volk.
It may also be read as though the sad ending of the poem is not the ending at all, but that the
lyrical “I” will once again be reunited with her mother in the heavens. Furthermore, the period
followed by the thought line may be hinting that something which seems final and definite—like
death—is not the end, but that there may always be something unknown yet significant that goes
beyond. This omnipresence of something deeper may be seen as a metapoetic reference to the
poem’s own rhetorical means; there are always further nuances of meaning to be found in a text.

The poem preceding the period is a completed thought, an expression caught on paper, in
which case the thought line is an indication that the reader needs to find new significance for the
poem and to keep the thoughts in motion. The “Wirbelwind” from the beginning of the poem thus also seems to take on a new significance. Instead of representing a dissociative force, it may collect everything in its path and keep things together by means of its inward centripetal force. It may then be said that the heavens and the earth are held together by the force of the universe and that a universal *Heimat* exists that goes beyond the world of physical perception.

This loss of *Heimat* is further expressed in Lasker-Schüler’s poem entitled “Mutter,” in which she writes:

Ich fühle mein nacktes Leben,
Es stoßt sich ab vom Mutterland,
So nackt war nie mein Leben

[…]  
...Meine Mutter ist heimgegangen. (7-9, 17)

These lines convey the sense of being naked and without character and thus not knowing who one is. The abundance of such soft consonants as “m,” “n,” and “l” is comforting, like the “Mutter” to whom the lyrical “I” is referring. The use of the words “Leben” and “Mutter” in alternating lines suggests that these two elements are tightly interwoven so that the life of the lyrical “I” is meshed with the presence of the “Mutter.” Also suggestive of the self-reflexivity of the poem to the poet herself, is the three-time repetition of “mein.” The separated prefix “ab” from the verb “abstoßen” calls attention to itself within the poem, standing alone as a short, succinct vocal amongst the long, flowing words. It is as though the “ab” has been cut off from the separable prefix verb like the lyrical “I” has been physically separated from her mother and now stands alone and exposed. With the mother’s absence, the “Mutterland” is no longer a *Heimat*; it has become unfamiliar and the poetic “I’s” identity has literally been stripped away.
In the poem entitled “Chaos” (Styx, 1902) the poetic “I” expresses feelings of isolation and loneliness. This chaos may parallel the disorder of the poet’s life following the loss of her mother and within her unhappy marriage.

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 lieg’ von mir weltenweit  
Zwischen grauer Nacht der Urangst...

Ich wollte, ein Schmerzen rege sich  
Und stürze mich grausam nieder  
Und riß mich jäh an mich!  
Und es lege eine Schöpferlust  
Mich wieder in meine Heimat  
Unter der Mutterbrust.

Meine Mutterheimat ist seeleleer,  
Es blühen dort keine Rosen  
Im warmen Odem mehr.—  
....Möcht einen Herzallerliebsten haben!  
Und mich in seinem Fleisch vergraben. (Styx, 1902)

In this poem, darkness is a great force, trying to swallow the lyrical “I” in its foreboding nothingness. The darkness seems to have great arms, which engulf the lyrical “I,” between “grauer Nacht der Urangst…” and, as the ellipses demonstrate, an unknown other place. The sense of chaos that ensues is mirrored in both the title of the poem and in the poem’s irregular rhyme scheme. It is as though order is to be regained at various points throughout the poem by the establishment of a regular rhyme scheme. Lines 6 and 7 rhyme, as do lines 4 and 9. In the third stanza lines 9, 11 and lines 12, 14 rhyme and similarly in the next stanza, lines 15 and 16 rhyme. The lines between these rhymes do not correspond with each other, introducing new
rhymes into the poem’s structural “chaos.” It is as though the rhyme scheme mirrors the state of the poetic “I,” who has been banished from the “Mutterheimat” and is now struggling to find consistency and to escape chaos. The use of “Mutter” together with “Heimat” is most illuminating. In line 14, “Mutter” comes beneath “Heimat” mentioned in line 13 and is indented, as though to suggest that the idea of the “Mutter” is deeply rooted within the concept of “Heimat.” Then, in line 15, “Mutter” and “Heimat” combine to become a compound noun—“Mutterheimat”—thereby emphasizing their interdependence and making “Mutter” and “Heimat” almost synonymous with each other.

In the line “Mir ist: ich lieg’ von mir weltenweit,” we sense a separation between the mind, soul and the body; the inner self has separated from the outer self residing in reality. The alliteration of the “w” in “Weltenweit” seems to expand time and space, while establishing a relationship between the here and now, and the absent. This may be best compared to an echo in which a vocal message is sent, a delay follows, and then the message repeats itself. Most significant is that this poem seems to call upon the distinctions between place and space and what happens when a space that was once filled with love and feelings of stability becomes disrupted. With the death of the mother, for example, all meaningful sentiments connected to the space are stripped away, leaving a mere, meaningless place. The third stanza is filled with the consonant “r,” evoking an aggressive energy. This energy wishes to restore order, returning the poetic “I” to his or her Heimat and to the safety of the “Mutterbrust” that is tucked away into the heart of the poem. Lasker-Schüler writes, “Meine Mutterheimat ist Seeleleer,” which suggests the chaos that results when the emotional soul is left empty and meaningless.

The word “seeleleer” is visually interesting with the five-time repetition of “e” and the two-time repetition of “l.” When “seeleleer” is handwritten, it is as though all the letters making
up the interior of the word between “s” and “r” are loops or squiggles, evoking the out-of-control “Wirbelwind” or tumbleweed effect. This sensation of losing control is referenced in much of the poet’s work and seems representative of drifting and not being able to find one’s place.12 “Seeleleer” is a neologism in which long “e” vowels encompass a short “e” vowel. This sets up a parallel within the word, hinting at mimicry, such as perhaps the close interwoven similarity and the close relationship between mother and daughter. The short “e” typographically seems caught between the two walls of the “l” consonants, representing a lyrical “I” that is isolated from the surrounding world.

The lonely lyrical “I,” now homeless, longs for a lover, a “Herzallerliebsten,” who will once again provide her13 with the necessary spiritual connections to create a new Heimat, a new space. In the word “Herzallerliebsten” as in the word “seeleleer,” there is a repetition of the consonant “l.” This evokes the soothing sense of Lallen, as though the comforting space the mother used to occupy may also be found within a lover or a “Herzallerliebsten.” Max Rieser writes that Lallen in poetry is a means to enter a new realm of consciousness by relaxing into the unconscious mindset (30). In turn, the lulling effect of the “Herzallerliebsten” may suggest that this new space with the “Herzallerliebsten” exists in the inner world of the poetic “I’s” “Meinwärts.”

This internal retreat from the physical to the soul is portrayed as being a rather violent process: “Ich wollte, ein Schmerzen rege sich/ Und stürzte mich grausam nieder/ Und riß mich jäh an mich!” There is a sense of vital necessity between the connection of the spiritual and the

12 As mentioned earlier, Lasker-Schüler was heavily influenced by the work of such Symbolists as Stefan George. In the symbolist movement the construction and deconstruction of words is considered to be important in the production of meaning. Consequently, I find it most valid and interesting to deconstruct words used by the poet and to relate these word fragments back to the meaning of the poem as a whole. The physical and graphical repetition of words is also characteristic of the symbolists, and thus examining the structure of such words as “Seeleleer” seems most relevant.
13 The lyrical “I” seems gendered here, as she, like the poet, searches for a male lover or “Herzallerliebsten.”
body for a person to feel complete; the “Fleisch” gives comfort in the way in which poetic form and structure provide the intangible psyche with a body. The last two lines begin with ellipses, as though to indicate a distant longing for a “Herzallerliebsten.” In the neologism “Herzallerliebsten” the Lallen is once again recreated through the three-time repetition of the letter “l.” This Lallen may be seen as the re-creation of the sense of comfort the mother provided the lyrical “I” as a child and which she now once again seeks out in a lover.

The poem concludes with a rhyming couplet. This restores a sense of order to the chaos introduced by the preceding lines. Noteworthy is that this sense of security within the unstable world of the poem and of the cosmos it reflects is not anything tangible or real, but a wish. This creates a link with the first lines of the poem which conjure up images of stars; stars and thus dreams may not be attainable in the present, but illuminate moments of darkness in the same way in which the creative process allows the escape to the warm core of the inner self.
CHAPTER 5

The Berlin Years: Lasker’s Search for a new Heimat

“Sie ist eine Weltenfinderin, eine Weltenschöpferin, eine Eigenweltbewohnerin, auch—darin liegen ihr Glück und ihre Tragik zugleich—eine Eigenweltinhaftierte.” (Decker 18)

With the loss of her mother, Lasker-Schüler seemed to be pushed out of Elberfeld, resettling in Berlin with her new husband Dr. Berthold Lasker. Her biography indicates that she was most unhappy in this marriage, and that she found it difficult to embrace her new socially determined role as a housewife. Decker suggests that Lasker-Schüler married because she desired to once again have a home, but the indication of the disintegrating marriage leaves Decker to question, how lonely an unhappy marriage can be: “Kann ein junges Mädchens ahnen, dass man nirgends so in der Fremde sein kann wie in einer Ehe?” (89). It may be surmised that Lasker-Schüler found this marriage to Dr. Lasker especially unsatisfying because she did not feel that she was able to express herself and develop her identity in such a way that she felt comfortable and at home in her reality. In her later association with the bohemians, costume and dress attire became a primary method through which Lasker-Schüler materialized the comforts of her inner world. Her new “home” with Dr. Lasker in Berlin, failed to become a Heimat for her, as it was merely a performance and a role that she did not wish to play. Home, “exists as a cultural symbol primarily with its relationship with gendered roles” (Sargeant and Winkel qtd. in Moore 5), and Lasker-Schüler’s embrace of the androgynous self already suggests that home for her was something that went far beyond this socially constructed physical space.

“Home is both an imposed ideal and a potent and cultural and individual ideal” (Moore 6) and this ideal seemed far more important for the poet than the real. Heimat becomes a process that undergoes a dialectical progression through time; part of this process lies in an “inner
emigration” (Jones 7), during which one determines what defines one’s unique home idyll. The definition of Heimat as a space that is in accord with the inner ideal is repeatedly alluded to within Lasker-Schüler’s work and seems to uphold her personal philosophies and lifestyle. As her constant moving around demonstrates, the poet could not find Heimat within the fixed borders of society. Instead, I would like to suggest that Lasker-Schüler’s poetic process was her means of creating a Heimat. She could immigrate to her imagination, accessing and retreating into her unique, idyllic world. The writing process thus acts as a means of giving this space physicality.

A closer look at Lasker-Schüler’s poem “Weltflucht” illuminates this desire to externalize the idyllic world of her imagination:

Ich will in das Grenzenlose
Zu mir zurück,
Schon blüht die Herbstzeitlose
Meiner Seele,
Vielleicht—ist’s schon zu spät zurück!
O! Ich sterbe unter Euch!
Da ihr mich erstickt mit Euch.
Fäden möchte ich um mich ziehn—
Wirrwarr endend!
Beirrend,
Euch verwirrend,
Um zu entfliehn
Meinwärts! (Styx, 1902)

The free verse of the poem is indicative of the uninhibited flow between the borderless worlds and exchange of the inner and external realms of existence. Furthermore, the poetic line seems to be propelled forward, as if there is a driving force pushing the lyrical “I” and the reader of the poem into the inner worlds of their imaginations—into their “Meinwärts.” This escape inwards, as Sonja Hedgepath notes, may be representative of Lasker-Schüler’s stifling relationship with Berthold Lasker, which had ended shortly before the composition of this 1902 poem. With the
deterioration of her marriage, Lasker-Schüler once again lost hope in the recreation of the *Heimat* she had lost with the death of her mother, father, and brother. Accordingly, “Weltflucht” describes the feeling of being cast out with nowhere to go: “Das Gefühl des Nirgends-zu-Hause-Seins, die Erfahrung, von der Umwelt ausgestoßen und unberührbar zu sein, durchzieht das Gedicht” (Hedgepath 174). “[Das lyrische Ich] muss hier nach Innen fliehen, damit es nicht an den Mitmenschen zugrunde geht” (Hedgepath 175).

A noteworthy opposition is created between the thought lines that seem to denote apprehension and uncertainty, and the urgency of the exclamation marks. The repetition of the word “Euch” in the center of the poem creates a pivot point or an axle from which the tension stems and the lyrical “I” is fleeing. As readers, we question whether “Euch” is a direct address to us. Is this perhaps a metapoetic comment on how the author’s voice becomes lost as the reader reads and twists words in an attempt to impose a meaning on the text? About the appearance of the word “Fluch” in the title “Weltflucht” it may be speculated that the poetic “I’s” “Flucht” is caused by this “Fluch.” The “Fluch,” a curse, has a double meaning here, hinting at both a “Fluch” that causes the lyrical “I” to flee “Meinwärts” and also at the verb “fluchen,” meaning that the lyrical “I” curses the world and curses whomever is represented by the central “Euch” of the poem. The interjection “O” is used once again, in demarcation of a soul in stress and the emotional process of introspection or of embarking on an internal pilgrimage. The “O” also acts centering because, as a long continuous vowel, it does not have a harsh beginning or end. In this way it acts as a sort of internal centering mantra, like “om,” allowing the lyrical “I’ to enter his or her emotional core or their “Meinwärts.”

A parallel is created through the constant repetition of the “z” consonant throughout the poem and the structure of the poem on the page; the many indentations create a general zigzag or
“z” pattern. This overall “z” shape is indicative of trying to flee, but in a confused or uncertain state of not knowing where to go, as is mirrored with the sense of insanity expressed by the “irr” near the end of the poem. Unlike a straight line definite in its intent, a zigzag pursues many different directions, still making progress, but on an indirect path. The last line of “Weltflucht” is indented further than the rest, suggesting a breaking away from the constant pattern and moving from the pivot point of the margin to a new plane—to a new realm of internal consciousness. The centre of the poem is aesthetically heavy and stable with four lines that are not indented, are flush with the margin, and are all comparable in length. As mentioned earlier, it is as though the “Euch” is deeply rooted in the centre of this central block in the poem. Hence, it is as though the chaotic zigzagging escape stems from this centre.

“Weltflucht” has no fixed rhyme scheme, but displays many identical rhymes, in which words are used more than once at the ends of lines. Lines 1 and 3 both end with “lose,” lines 2 and 4 with “zurück,” lines 6 and 7 with “Euch,” and lines 9, 10 and 11 with “end.” This repetition plays with the reader or perhaps with the “Euch,” causing “Verwirrung” and confusion. A disorienting effect is created that allows the lyrical “I” to escape from the cause of chaos. The eleventh line states this desire and ability to confuse, “Euch verwirrend.” This prompts the chaotic “Irren” that follows in the last five lines. “Wirrwarr endend” is an especially interesting construction, with the two “w” graphemes paralleling the zigzag pattern mentioned above. The grapheme “w” is, like the “z,” zigzagged in its visual representation on the page. The word “wirr” is set next to the word “warr,” a homonym with the word “wahr,” meaning truth; this creates tension within the word “wirrwarr,” as someone whose thoughts are “wirre” would be unable to find what is “wahr” or true amidst the jumbled mess. Mirroring the symmetrical word “wirrwarr” is “endend,” which, when divided, reads “end” twice. But this is not the end of
the poem and the double presence of “end” almost seems to cancel out an end. Most compelling is the three time repetition of the root “irr” in the words “Wirrwarr,” “Beirrend,” and “Verwirrend.” The word “irr” continuously becomes disguised with new meaning and it becomes difficult to distinguish the difference between the words. The word “irr” indicates a sense of madness or insanity, as though the influences of the outside world, a world full of borders and restrictions, may cause mental instability; the retreat into the depths of the free world of the mind are thus a way to escape this insanity and to flee into one’s own exotic paradise. The use of the root “irr” three times in different contexts seems to wish to confuse the reader, and while we are still contemplating these three forms of “irr,” and are stuck in our zigzagged thought pattern, the lyrical “I” escapes, into his or her “Meinwärts.” The exclamation mark acts as a sigh of relief—the poetic “I” has successfully fled.

During Lasker-Schüler’s years in Berlin, she considered herself to be part of the bohemians, perhaps because they, like her, sought to create an alternative to society and thus also an alternative to their reality. Writing, like bohemianism, allows for the creation of another present moment and brings the borderless imagined world into reality.

In a further poem entitled “Trieb” (Styx, 1902) this drive into the borderless world of the internal mind is also thematized:

Es treiben mich brennende Lebensgewalten,
Gefühle, die ich nicht zügeln kann,
Und Gedanken, die sich zur Form gestalten,
Fallen mich wie Wölfe an! (1-4)

In these lines the “Lebensgewalten” of the external world have an alienating effect, unleashing feelings and thoughts that must be bridled in order to be accepted in the society of the real world.
The inner thoughts run wild in the borderless imagination, threatening and haunting the lyrical “I,” as they begin to take form on clear form and structure. The poem continues:

Ich irre durch duftende Sonnentage…

Und die Nacht erschüttert von meinem Schrei.

Meine Lust stöhnt wir eine Marterklage

Und reisst sich von ihrer Fessel frei. (5-8)

The word “irr” is once again used, demonstrating the disorienting nature of reality and the suffocating manner in which reality encroaches on the lyrical “I.” The lyrical “I” seems to have lost all agency and, as the ellipses demonstrate, the pleasant “duftende Sonnentage” of a contented spiritual soul fade away into a state of terror. The graphic physical imagery in this poem cries out to the audience, awakening readers’ visual imaginations and conveying painful urgency. As the title “Trieb” suggests, there is an inescapable force driving the lyrical “I” further and further towards an ominous fate.

The image of the martyr trying to escape the chaining “Fessel” is reminiscent of Schiller’s classical poem “Der Spaziergang,” in which a lonely traveller takes a metaphorical walk up a mountain and sees before him a recollection of the development and subsequent degeneration of mankind and human morals. The man bound by the “Fesseln” is prohibited from thinking freely, as it is this free thought in the face of such a scene of a “developing” society which holds the power to change this society. Through free thought, mankind may be able to return to a reality and homeland that is comforting in its boundless opportunities and in its liberated social structure, free of class and power.

The bohemians with whom Lasker-Schüler later began to associate while in Berlin, were an alternative to this bourgeois society. As Hedgepath comments, Lasker-Schüler’s divorce from
Berthold Lasker may be seen as being representative of her “Abkehr von der bürgerlichen Welt” (175). It was amongst the bohemians—the free-thinkers or the “neue Gemeinschaft” (Hedgepath 175)—that Lasker-Schüler began to deconstruct the chaos of relationships around her and to rebuild her reality in such a way that it reflected the paradise and the Heimat she saw before her mind’s eye. In such a natural paradise like the Garden of Eden, to which Lasker-Schüler so often makes reference, it was much easier to materialize the ideal Heimat envisioned in her inner self, without having to shape her identity in order to parallel that of the predetermined world.

In this retreat to her inner self in search of an alternative world, Lasker-Schüler seems to create an existence comparable in its “otherness” to the Occident’s view of the Orient. In turn, it is significant that Lasker-Schüler also wrote “Weltflucht” in her very own “Oriental” language:

Elbanaff:
Min salihihi wali kinahu
Rahi hatiman
fi is bahi lahu fassun—
Min hagas assama anadir,
Wakan liachad abtal,
Latina almu lijádina binassre.
Wa min tab ihi
Anahu jatelahu
Wanu bilahum.
Assama ja saruh
fi es supi bila uni
El fidda alba hire
Wa wisuri—elbanaff! (qtd. in Hedgepath 175-176)

Through this act, a new world beyond reality is created, as the language of the present world cannot adequately describe this new space. As Wittgenstein writes, “die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt” (qtd. in Haslinger 46). With this new language, the poet facilitates the transcendence of the physical and makes the access to new realms of experience possible. Because the inner space of Lasker-Schüler’s imagination is ephemeral, it is most fitting
that the language used to describe it is unique to the space itself. Words of the German language cannot adequately describe this foreign place of her inner *Heimat*, where everything is so very different than it is in the realm of reality. Kerstin Decker describes how the creation of this individual language causes the real world to fall away and the text to become materialized as the new reality for the lyrical “I”:

Die Flucht des lyrischen Ichs aus der Welt wird zur unsteten Eigenbewegung, zur Karawane: Es kreist nur noch um sich selbst, so wie die Silbenlaute ihre semantische Heimat verloren haben. Die Reduzierung der Sprache auf bloße Phoneme [...] ist Ausdruck dieses Subjekts, das sich schließlich—durch den fehlenden Rückverweis auf seine Herkunft in der definitorischen Abgrenzung von Welt—ganz im Text verliert. (66)

The concept of the borders of language also applies heavily to Orientalist literature,\(^\text{14}\) as the description of the exotic other cannot ever be accurately described by language, especially by a language and by an author who is not native to this other world. Language is constructed so that it describes what it needs to describe, so it cannot fully portray a reality that is entirely other from its own. In Lasker-Schüler’s invented oriental language the poem loses its original meaning, but what remains is the essence of something “other,” an alternative that is expressed through the sounds of the vowels and phonemes. Lasker-Schüler often held public readings and performances of her works and one could speculate that a performance of such a poem in an unknown tongue must have been rather alienating to its audience. The rhythm and sonority of the languages, however, remains intact and it is this element of poetry that connects an audience to their own emotional core and transports them to their “Meinwärts.”

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\(^{14}\) “Orientalism” is an old literary tradition in which occidental writers thematically represent the Orient as the exotic “other.” This, like Edward Said notes, is problematic, as it stereotypes and limits the East through a western perspective. As Antje Lindenmeyer writes, Lasker-Schüler goes the other way, speaking from within her own “other” and making her “Orient” deliberately strange to her audience, highlighting the individual nature of her personal “Meinwärts” (28).
While living in Berlin, Lasker-Schüler became a central figure of the bohemian movement there. It was amongst the so-called bohemians that she found the creatively infused space in which she could express her alternative point of view and allow her artistic nature to flourish. It may be said that Lasker-Schüler found her long sought-after Heimat amongst the bohemians, but it may be more correct to say that she felt so at home as part of this eclectic group because they, like herself, embraced a free-spirited lifestyle within the liminal spaces of society: “Bohemia was above all a quest, less an identity than a search for identity, less a location than a utopia” (Wilson 11). This utopian vision was considered unique for each individual and most important was the means to create and express this self-generated vision.

In order to align Lasker-Schüler with the bohemians it is important to understand what the bohemian culture is and to take their basic values into account. Unfortunately, the term “bohemian” is most difficult to define, as “the ‘impossible’ nature of bohemian consciousness, [is] always longing for its opposite” (Wilson 38) and is thus in constant flux with the society which surrounds it: “Das Bohème-Dasein hat seine Quelle in der Sehnsucht nach Ungebundenheit, es war und ist Protest gegen Vermassung, Auflehnung gegen Herrschaft und Konvention” (Kretuzer 4). For many, the term “bohemian” brings forth ideas of an artistic and eccentric individual, who wears elaborate clothing and spends their days in coffee houses and lives what perhaps may be best described as a sort of free-spirited vagabond lifestyle. Although
this stereotype of bohemians contains many elements of perceived truth, Wilson loosely defines “bohemianism” as follows:

Bohemia is the name for the attempt by nineteenth and twentieth-century artists, writers, intellectuals and radicals to create an alternative world within Western society (and possibly elsewhere). Despite the exaggerated individualism of its citizens, Bohemia was a collective enterprise; the bohemians created and participated in a social milieu created against the dominant culture. (2-3)

Because the bohemian culture always strives to be the eccentric alternative to what is considered the dominant society, they become elusive in their very nature, changing their views and values in order to challenge conventions: “Bohemia first emerged as a counter-space in opposition to the repressive authority of bourgeois society […] It was the other of bourgeois society, that is to say it expressed everything that the bourgeois order buried and suppressed. In that sense it was an image of utopia” (Wilson 240). This idea of the creation of a utopia is particularly interesting in conjunction with Lasker-Schüler, as her poetry often evokes utopian lands comparable to the Garden of Eden, which are full of beauty and possibilities. At the same time, Lasker-Schüler’s poetry is filled with a perpetual sadness, comparable perhaps to the omnipresence of the crumbling bourgeois world surrounding her; this knowledge dampens the joy in much of her poetry and often, as mentioned earlier, her poems begin blissfully, but then end on a melancholy note. Reality acts as a strong force and pulls the lyrical “I” back from this imagined land of wonder. This demonstrates that although the bohemian culture constructed a microcosm outside of society, the larger world of their surroundings never failed to affect them.

Lasker-Schüler was perhaps so attracted to the bohemian culture because she found herself unable to fit into the facets of the regular society and the bohemians gave her a space—
albeit perhaps a more emotional space than a physical one—in which she could materialize her imagined world and work as a means to unleash and form this utopian vision. Philippe Couton writes that utopia is “a place that is distant, but delimited, open to travellers, but self-contained, fantastical, but plausible” (104). As the etymology of the word utopia (u-topos, the non-place) suggests, utopia is “a negation of place” and therefore, frictionless in nature (111). If utopia may be seen as a place that essentially does not exist, while being plausible and thus attainable all at the same time, it becomes a fluid space which is constantly changing and restructuring itself. This fluidity is represented in both Lasker-Schüler’s work as well as in her lifestyle itself. The actualization of this personal inner world called for the embrace and outward representation of it. With regard to Lasker-Schüler, this did not only mean expressing herself through art, but also personifying and acting out this inner self. As Hallensleben notes, art and life overlap, until both become equally dependent on each other and then indiscernible, so that art is what defines life and life is defined by art—“Kunst als Lebenspraxis” (41).

Lasker-Schüler seems to embrace this life philosophy whole-heartedly, taking on the roles of many of her own created characters, such as the eastern Prinz Jussuf von Theben and Tino von Baghdad. Through the act of performing, art becomes life, a philosophy most common amongst the eccentric bohemians. Bohemians are often regarded as eccentrics in their behaviour and in their dress, both of which contribute to their identity being one of performance. As Elizabeth Wilson writes, performance is a key element of the bohemian lifestyle, intertwining life with art until they become synonymous with each other:

The performative and even illusionist element of café life has misled many commentators into dismissing cage bohemians as poseurs, but it was rather that theirs was a different approach to life, an approach which made of performance the truth of life. Life was artifice, was even art. The opposition between the natural and the artificial, between the true and the false, the meretricious and the authentic, was replaced by a commitment to life as drama, life as a work of art. (37-38)
This embodiment of life as art was a philosophy which Lasker-Schüler undoubtedly lived to its full potential and it seemed to spur on her creativity, while also allowing her often difficult and lonely life to be supplemented with the beauty and lure of the exotic world of her imagination. Considered to be one of the central figures in the *Berliner Bohème*, Lasker-Schüler is often remembered for her costume-like attire and eccentric personality: “Eine Frau läuft durch München. Sie trägt bunten Schmuck um den Hals, um Arme und Finger und ist absonderlich gekleidet. Schärpen hat sie immer gemocht, vorzugsweise grüne oder rote. Aber solche hat sie noch nie getragen. Dreifarbig sind sie: schwarz, weiß, rot. Trägt der Prinz von Theben” (Decker 264). Clothing is a most powerful medium, as it allows the wearer to embody a certain physical identity and is most often also telling of what the inner identity of a person is—their hopes, desires, beliefs, etc. For many female bohemians, for example, dressing as a man allowed them to have access to all facets of the city without the accompaniment of men (Wilson 113). Furthermore, gender-bending attire allowed for the exploration of sexual ambiguity, which “[questioned] the very nature of gender in a manner for which there was no adequate language at the time” (Wilson 113). The option to present herself as male gave Lasker-Schüler the opportunity to somewhat free herself from her physical body and to become merely a persona, who could change forms in order to best reach and experience this imagined utopian *Heimat*. In turn, the gender of her lyrical “I” may be regarded as sexually ambiguous, as neither masculine or feminine, but as “ich.”

In Lasker-Schüler’s poem “Weltflucht,” discussed earlier, the lyrical “I” writes of a longing to escape from the people she encounters in the harsh world of reality and the wish to flee into her imagination, to her “Meinwärts.” She writes: “O, ich sterbe unter Euch!/ Da Ihr mich erstickt mit Euch./ Fäden möchte ich um mich ziehn.—“ (6-8). These threads she wishes to
pull around herself are reminiscent of a cocoon, and thus of the creation of a space in which she may be safe and undergo her very own metamorphosis. In addition, these threads may also be seen as being representative of the weaving of textiles and the creation of clothing, as in “Tibbetteppich.”

Through this act of performance, the fluid boundaries between art and life become clear; borders disappear and a space is forged in reality in which everything imaginable becomes possible: “Ihre Kunst ist Auferhaltung des Unmöglichen als Möglichen” (Hallensleben 245). In keeping with the exchangeability of art and life, Lasker-Schüler lived what she wrote and thus wrote what she lived, perhaps promoting the rich imagery and expression of feelings that are so deeply felt by the readers of her lyric poetry. The poetic text becomes a means of performance that prompts the deterioration of borders between the psyches of readers and the author, in which identity is dictated through performance.

In her lyrics there is most often a very deliberate form created through the choice and structural presentation of the words. The auditory experience of her words, however, unleashes a sense of freedom and fluidity, especially when the piece is performed aloud. In her poem entitled “Orgie” (Styx, 1902) the image of intertwining bodies or souls is represented through the fluid lines of the poem:

Berauscht vom Most der Lüfte.
Ich knüpfte mich an Dein Leben an,
Bis dass es ganz in ihm zerrann,
Und immer wieder Gestalt nahm
Und immer wieder zerrann.
Und unsere Liebe jauchzte Gesang,
Zwei wilde Symphonieen! (23-29)

As readers, we are unable to discern who the subject of the poem or with whom the lyrical “I” is interacting. Is it a lover? Is the entire poem an artistic expression of the fruitfulness of a
collaborative instance of inspiration such as could be found within the community of the bohemians and the coffee house culture? Or is it perhaps the active and inspiring exchange that occurs between reality, life, and the imagination? The word “zerrann” invokes the image of something becoming fluid and the phrase “ganz in ihm zerrann” suggests that the lyrical “I” is having an experience that goes beyond the rigidity of the body. Similarly, the image and sentiments the poem strives to release in its readers goes beyond its structured form on the page. The aesthetic structure acts as a vessel of signifiers and transports an expression to readers, while the overall fluidity of the process remains intact. The structure, however, is dissolved during the reading process, with the reader decoding the information and processing it, in his or her own unique way. Thus the message becomes changed with each new reader actively contributing to the fluidity of the artistic process: “Und immer wieder Gestalt nahm/ Und immer wieder zerrann.” The mention in the last line of symphonies supports this notion, as sheet music is merely the structural system for preserving a musical thought; only through performance does a musical message come to life, growing and shifting form, shape, and impression by resonating with its audience.

It may therefore be assumed that fluidity for Lasker-Schüler was an integral part of the creative process. The poet’s character and lifestyle also suggest that she sought out means to induce and maintain this sense of fluid inspiration, while continuously searching for her momentary utopia, a Heimat in which her creativity could thrive. The fluid vagabond lifestyle associated with the bohemians was fitting for this search for an unattainable utopia, as it may be deduced that the only way to find a place that is constantly shifting into something new demands that the seeker, too, keep moving.
In Lasker-Schüler’s poem “Die schwarze Bhowanêh,” the carefree gypsy and bohemian plays the central role and the sense of freedom and uninhibited, fluid energy the poet seemed to admire so much amongst this alternative culture becomes clear. A great sense of excitement and liveliness permeates this poem and it is this vigour which seems to drive the lines of the poem forward ceaselessly, like a restless vagabond. The first stanza is filled with a lust for life and love and the poetry, the act of writing fuels this passion, while also bridling it and containing it in an aesthetic form.

Die schwarze Bhowanêh  
(Die Göttin der Nacht Zigeunerlied)

Meine Lippen glühn  
Und meine Arme breiten sich aus wie Flammen!  
Du musst mit mir nach Granada ziehn  
In die Sonne, aus der meine Gluten stammen...  
Meine Ader schmerzt  
Von der Wildheit meiner Säfte,  
Von dem Toben meiner Kräfte.

Granatäpfel prangen  
Heiß, wie die Lippen der Nacht!  
Rot, wie die Liebe der Nacht!  
Wie der Brand meiner Wangen.

Auf dem dunklen Schein  
Meiner Haut schillern Muscheln aus Schnüre gezogen,  
Und Perlen von sonnenfarbgem Bernstein  
Durchglühn meine Zöpfe wie Feuerwogen.  
Meine Seele bebt,  
Wie eine Erde bebt und sich auftuh  
Dürstend nach Luft! Nach säuselnder Flut!

Heiße Winde stöhnen,  
Wie der Odem der Sehnsucht,  
Verheerend wie die Qual der Sehnsucht...  
Und über die Felsen Granadas dröhnen  
Die Lockrufe der schwarzen Bhowanêh!
It is difficult to describe the immense energy “Die schwarze Bhowanéh” exudes; it is a poem brimming with rich poetic imagery, and the careful selection of words creates a strong vivacity. It is a poem about the spirit of inspiration and the subsequent necessity to create art. The title is exotic and we, as readers, imagine a mysterious darkness in which gypsies dance through the night. The word “Bhowanéh” functions as a non-semantic utterance because we do not know what to imagine under this unfamiliar signifier. Phonetically, the word sounds similar to “Bohème” or “bohemian,” which supports this exoticism and the image of the Zigeuner. Furthermore, when the separate phonemes of “Bhowanéh” are isolated, the word “wahn” appears, a word for delusion and illusion. This sense of illusion relates well to the sharp contrast of darkness and light in the poem, as darkness and shadows trick the eye into seeing things differently from how they actually are. The word “Bhowanéh” also contains the non-semantic utterances “O” and “eh”; these sounds demarcate the unbridled expressions of the soul and thus function beyond language on a level of sentiment.

In the title, we are introduced to a mysterious darkness through the words “schwarz” and “Nacht.” The first line breaks this darkness with the glowing lips of the poetic “I.” The mention of the lips, the mouth, reflects on the Odem mentioned so often throughout Lasker-Schüler’s poetry. Unlike the breath and the voice of the poet, the glowing lips mentioned here suggest the burning desire to express all of this passionate excitement and to cool these burning lips with the Hauch. The urgency is expressed through the absence of the “e” in “glühn.”

The second line continues to break through the darkness with the lyrical “I’s” arms spreading out like flames. This sense of limbs as fire is reminiscent of dancing, in which the arms and legs move with such vivacious energy that they no longer seem rigid, but rather on fire. Dance was central to the bohemian movement and such Parisian dancers as La Goulue and Jane
Avril became famous for their soulful dances in the legendary *Moulin Rouge* on Montmartre. The homophonic similarity between “Gluten” and “Glieder” creates a semantic shadow, in which the fiery rays of the sun are like the limbs of a body. In dance, body and soul are united, and the intangible soul creates movement through the vessel of the body.

The mention of parts of the body continues all throughout the poem and this creates the impression that the body is directly affected by the inner musings of the soul and by the imagination—the internal becomes externalized in the same way in which a body of poetry gives the imagination physicality. In the third line the lyrical “I” addresses a “du” and we are once again left wondering to whom the poetic “I” is referring. Is the poetic “I” addressing poetry in general? Or is the poetic “I” addressing us as readers, meaning that we will be transported to Granada through the reading process? Because of the sensuality and repetition of physical features and the body, it may also be speculated that the lyrical “I” is addressing a lover.

Granada is a city in Spain and this once again plays with the notion of exoticism within the poem. By mentioning Granada, the poetic “I” is given a space in which to be inspired and in which to express his or herself. It is important that Granada frames the poem and acts as a sort of red thread, as this reinstates the presence of this place throughout and seems to give the poem a solid foundation. This may perhaps be related to the need for the poet to have a space in which to create, as without a space the physical body and, therefore, poetry cease to exist.

The fourth line leaves everything illuminated with the mention of the sun. The expression, “aus der meine Gluten stamen,” conjures up images of the mythological phoenix that is reborn from the flames. “Gluten” seems to be a pluralisation of “Glut,” which suggests that there are different embers and hints at the constant rebirth of the lyrical “I.” This idea relates very well to poetry in general, as the poem and thus the subject of the poem are recreated.
differently by each reader. An interesting parallel may also be drawn to Lasker-Schüler herself, who put so much value on performance and on the embrace of different roles both within her work and in her own personal character. “Stammen” seems to refer to these different origins, as it relates to “Stamm,” meaning familial line. The “g” sound appears once in each of the first four lines. This guttural tone is indicative of something being directly at the back of the throat and wanting to be released.

The last lines of the first stanza are much shorter, so as to indicate that the need for expression is becoming more urgent and thus the rate of articulation more rapid. The painful vein insinuates a direct link of the body to this desire to create and brings to mind the common expression used in conjunction with someone who has a creative streak, a “kreative Ader.” The “Wildheit” of the blood and inspired excitement causes the blood to pump through the veins at a high pressure. “Kräfte” may refer to the artistic ability and potential of these creative juices flowing throughout the body. The first lines of this stanza do not have a steady rhyme scheme, so the rhyming couplet at the end acts balancing, and, overall, the poetic structure becomes a means of bridling this wild, lustful passion and creativity. The centre of the poem acts as a visual focal point, with the structural similarity of the lines and the repetition of “Nacht” in lines 9 and 10. With only four lines, the third stanza is the shortest and the lengths of the individual lines are also the shortest, drawing the attention to the rapid excitement found at the poem’s core. The third stanza appears to glow with the colour red with the mention of the red pomegranate, the hot lips, the warmth of love, and the burning cheeks. The use of the word “Brand” relates to the theme of fire throughout the poem, but also hints at “Brandwein” and thus intoxication. In addition, the “r” consonant is often repeated in the stanza and thus the word “Rand” in “Brand” begins to stand out. “Rand,” or the edge calls to mind something that is about to spill over a rim.
If we hear “Wie der [Rand] meinen Wangen,” we may create an image of ideas waiting to be articulated lining the inside of the cheeks and burning the lips while waiting in anticipation to be released as the warm *Hauch*.

At this point, the poem undergoes a transition and the heat seems to dissipate. A seaside is described and the crashing waves pull the poetic “I” into the current, envelop the poetic “I” in a moment of climactic release, and soothing the burning desire. In the first line of this stanza the elements of dark and light prominent throughout the poem are mentioned: “Auf dem dunklen Schein.” The selection of the word “Schein” immediately calls to attention to the idea of *Schein* und *Sein*, referring to the disconnection between what is perceived and what actually is. This relates well to the poetic genre, as the impression created by the words on the page generate visions unique to each individual reader. In the writing process, the dark body of the poetic “I” becomes illuminated, with the amber pearls and opalescent shells shimmering and reflecting different colours of the sun’s rays. Through the creative process being represented here, the dark, lifeless body becomes a display of sparkling colour that is constantly shifting under different light. Similarly, a poem takes on many different moods and colours depending on the reader’s lens.

The stanza continues with the “beben” of the earth and of the soul. It is as though the core of the lyrical “I” pulses like the ground during an earthquake and the soul is ejected from the body to the outside world in an intense moment of climactic creative exteriorization. The need to create has been satisfied. The long vowels in this stanza pull the soul of the reader into this moment of creative process as well. The use of long “e” vowels in “Seele,” “bebt,” and “Erde” is especially effective in creating a pushing and pulling sensation, like that felt by waves crashing over the body. In the first stanzas the lips glowed in anticipation and now they have been cooled.
by having released the contents of the inner soul they were restraining. It seems that there was so much to disclose, such fervour, that the lungs are now gasping for breath: “Dürstend nach Luft!” The desire for the flood to come demonstrates the need for the poetic “I” to become replenished and to wait for the next wave of inspiration.

The pomegranate mentioned in the second stanza introduces a complex symbol with a multitude of different associations. The pomegranate is considered to not only be the heraldic device of Granada, but the word for pomegranate or “Granatapfel” is “Granada” in Spanish. This constructs a strong parallel between the fruit and the city or province of Granada mentioned in the poem. It is also important to note that the pomegranate is a highly symbolic fruit in many religions. In Judaism, for example, the pomegranate is the symbol for righteousness, the symbol for fecundity and sensuality, while also acting as the forbidden fruit of Eden. In Christianity the pomegranate is regarded to be representative of the sweetness of the heavenly kingdom. In “Die schwarze Bhowanéh,” pomegranates thus seem to symbolize the fecundity and passion which infuses the lyrical “I.” Most interesting is the intense sensuality pervading this poem, with eros or corporeal love and fecundity acting as metaphors for inspiration and artistic creation. In this context, the pomegranate becomes an overt symbol of sexuality and fertility. In the same way that bodily love acts as a physical expression of otherwise invisible and intangible emotions and sentiments, poetry and art act as necessary “bodies” for the expression of the inner soul.

With this loaded sexual imagery, the writing process becomes equated with giving birth. The water in the last line of the third stanza seems symbolic of the process of writing and the water of the womb breaking and the gasping for breath draw parallels to birthing and labour pains. The last stanza of the poem begins with the mention of air or wind, completing the reference to the four original elements for sustaining life: earth, air, fire and water. This implies
that all elements required for creation must be present in this writing process. Once again, the writing process draws a parallel between the earthly body and the corporeality of a piece of art.

The poetic voice is referred to in this stanza with the hot gnawing winds being like the *Odem*. The repetition of the word “Sehnsucht” stands out by saying that both the *Odem* and the “Qual” are full of longing and desire. *Odem* and “Qual” thus become equated and that, as this last stanza suggests, this taxing process may be exhilarating, but is also utterly exhausting. “Verheerend wie die Qual der Sehnsucht” suggests that this taxing process is often not one executed by free will, but out of necessity for survival. It is like a disastrous war within the soul. The last two lines suggest the beginning of the process again, the alluring cries of the “Zigeuner” beckoning the poetic “I” into the exotic land of Granada. “Dröhnen” and “stöhnen” suggest the constant deafening cries of inspirational energy and the poetic “I’s” laboured sighs of having to satisfy this urge; the lyrical “I” is once again consumed by the inspirationally laden world of their “Meinwärts.”

It is worth noting the subtle inclusion of Lasker-Schüler’s given name, Else, embedded in the word “Felsen.” This calls into question the identities of the subject and object of the poem, with the poet becoming the object of the poetic utterance. As a poet who was regarded to write directly from the heart—“Herzdichtung”—it is quite plausible that this poem thematically represents Lasker-Schüler’s interpretation of her own poetic process and is a means of giving structure to the otherwise indescribable practice of her work.
CHAPTER 7

Coffee, Friends and Conversation:
The Importance of Café Life and Influence in the Work of Lasker-Schüler

“Das Café, das als Ort des Austauschs und der Anregung für Else Lasker-Schüler eine so große Rolle spielte, ist wieder in seiner Doppeldeutigkeit gefasst: Einerseits ist es der Zigeunerkarren, Sinnbild des ungebundenen Künstlertums, andererseits die Börse, an der man abschließt.“ (Klüsener 60)

For any individual group to exist within society, a space is needed in which members may communicate and thereby mould their collective identity. The bohemians too needed a space to foster a sense of community in which their often artistic and socially alternative ideas could be shared and encouraged. For the elusive bohemians, a space which was similarly always in flux like its members was a necessary complement to the bohemian vagabond lifestyle. As Lyon writes, liminal existence without the demand for a firm foundation within society is embraced in bohemian culture:

Bohemians inhabit a terrain put into motion by their own divagations. Not least among them are the bohemians whose programmatic commitment to the transgression of boundaries, both territorial and conceptual, placed them on the side of a kind of urban nomadism; they were, in Tyer’s words, ‘not lodged’ outside the city, but ‘dislodged’ within it and wilfully so. (703)

The bohemian identity, it may be said, is thus one of choice in where movement and change are the constituents of identity; through this constant “irr” and “wirr” energy the artistic mind is inspired and continues the ceaseless search for this elusive utopia. Phillippe Couton writes:

The opening of space *qua* space—roaming rather than journeying to a new place—is the source of contemporary utopian imaginations, the process rather than the destination. In
the dyadic cycle of openness and closure […] our hegemonic utopias are now chiefly those of free movement and placeless space, ‘replacing ‘roots’ with ‘routes. (101)

Bohemians during Lasker-Schüler’s times are most often associated with the frequenting of cafés. Cafés are in essence a sort of placeless space, as their nature and atmosphere is in constant flux depending on the patrons visiting that café at any given time: “Above all, the café was an actually existing castle in the air, a chameleon environment, a shimmering bubble suspended in the urban atmosphere. Here the bohemians cast off their cares and their poverty and became the geniuses of their dreams” (Wilson 37). As Elizabeth Wilson notes, the café is a transient port of call in which people may move about freely as they wish; it is the “meeting place of free spirits” (Wilson 240). The sense of persistent metamorphoses present in Lasker-Schüler’s work is closely aligned with the image of the chameleon that changes colours to fit in with his current environment. In the café Lasker-Schüler found a space amongst like-minded people, who furthered her creativity and in which she found the inspirational support to create the utopia of her dreams: “Was sie [im Café] suchte, war das Gespräch” (Bauschinger 122).

The café is merely a structure, a space for conversation and, for the bohemians, a space to find like-minded individuals with whom to engage in creative thought and conversation. The café, like the form and aesthetic structure of a poem itself, acts as a physical means to the creative process.

As Couton later mentions, there is a “great tension between movement and space” (110) and it is perhaps through this tension that art and creativity may grow and thrive. This relates back to my earlier comment about the relationship between structure and expression within a body of poetry itself—both are inseparable from each other in the mode of poetic communication: “The two sides of the binary opposition, [systemic fixity or unfettered mobility],
require each other to exist, generating each through opposition” (Kaplan qtd. in Couton 113).

Couton also puts much emphasis on utopia being a “process rather than a destination,” so it may be said that the café culture set the search for this artistic utopia in motion, with its participants transcending beyond the hollow space of the café into the fluid utopias of their imaginations. The “roots” of a Heimat lost in childhood become replaced with the “routes” to an indefinable utopia that is in constant flux and is spawned by means of the creative process.

The café, in turn, may be regarded as a place of great fluidity in which the poet’s utopian imaginings may become part of reality through discussion, writing, and also through performance: “The café is not just a room full of tables and chairs, it is a Zigeunerwagen and Zelt, a place for fantasies, a sphere of the literary imagination” (Redmann 370). As mentioned earlier, Lasker-Schüler played a central role and was a prominent figure within the Berliner Bohème. She wore elaborate costumes representative of her imagination.

Through this act of disguise, even gender becomes fluid, as Lasker-Schüler, by donning gender-bending costume attire that transformed her into such fictional characters as Prinz Jussuf, embraced masculine roles: “Located between the public and private spheres, the café provided an ideal realm for a woman walking the boundary between genders” (Redmann 368-369). The café community fostered this performance persona and, in turn, the café’s clientele fostered the ambiance of the space.

Many artists regarded cafés as a sort of home and in return created the aesthetic space so characteristic of the café. Consequently, Lasker-Schüler and other artists believed that their
presence in the café resulted in a sort of cache that attracted customers. In turn, the artists believed they deserved much better treatment than they received. Lasker-Schüler expresses this opinion in “Unser Café” (1913): “Wir Künstler haben sozusagen das Café des Westens mit auf die Welt gebracht” (qtd. in Redmann 372). In reality, artists like Lasker-Schüler were seen as a nuisance for cafés from an economic standpoint, often spending many hours at a café without purchasing any products. In turn, the poet began to regard the café less as a meeting space for free spirits and more as an example of an economically driven place of business that she and the bohemian community so abhorred.

Redmann comments: “Ultimately, the café loses its charm for Lasker-Schüler, leaving her feeling alone and empty—in a sense, homeless” (373). The café experience assisted the poet in her writing and thus in her escape from the reality of her world. By being cast out from the physical space that cultivated her imagination and promoted the retreat into her internal utopia, Lasker-Schüler found herself heimatlos once again.

The ability to escape reality to this “Utopie des besseren Daseins” (Haslinger 209) demands a state of being in flux and the ability to see things differently; the café’s chameleon environment, brought about by the changing personalities and subsequent varied conversation, fostered this fluidity between static space and ever-changing reality. I believe this constant state of flux may explain the recurring theme of the changing season of springtime in Lasker-Schüler’s poems, imagery I will explore in the next section.
CHAPTER 8
Metamorphoses of the Self: Der Lenz in the Poetry of Lasker-Schüler

Mein heißer Leib erglüht in seinem Hauch,
Er zittert, wie ein junger Rosenstrauch,
Geküsst vom warmen Maienregen.

--Ich folge Dir ins wilde Land der Sünde
Und pflücke Feuerlilien auf den Wegen,
--Wenn ich die Heimat auch nicht wiedergefinde. (“Sinnenrausch,” 7-12)

Springtime is a recurring theme in the poetic works of Lasker-Schüler. As in the second stanza of “Sinnenrausch” above, this motif of spring with its blooming flowers and budding trees is often mentioned in conjunction with the motif of love. In this section, I will be taking a closer look at some of Lasker-Schüler’s poetry directly related to the themes of springtime and love. I argue that the bohemians, as a culture, provided Lasker-Schüler with a space that was always undergoing a metamorphosis like she herself was; amongst the changing social environment of the bohemians, as in the constantly altering experience of the café culture, the poet found a home of sorts, where she could foster a feeling of belonging and find inspiration for her work. I will demonstrate that the dynamics of this association with the bohemians formed real ideals that perhaps became reflected inwards and thus become dominant motifs in the poet’s creative expression of Heimat.

In “Sinnenrausch,” the warm breeze of the spring air and the May showers bring life to the rose bushes, while the language alludes to a romantic sexual encounter. The lover’s kiss is like the warm May rain and the lover’s breath causes the Poetic “I’s” “Leib” to quiver. The lovers become lost in each other’s bodies, finding comfort there, although it may lead them to the exotic land “der wilden Sünde.” As Wilson writes in her essay entitled “Bohemian Love”: “The belief in romantic passion as a fatal destiny was ceding to the idea of eroticism as sexual
liberation: a move from the tragic to the ecstatic, from the doomed to the utopian, from emotion to sensation” (117). In turn, spring, love, and utopia are all linked, as they all demonstrate the desire for growth and change, and for the formation of a fruitful, engaging space. The last line of the poem demonstrates the transient nature of traditional, space-bound Heimat, while insinuating that the need for Heimat is met when love satisfies the emotional soul.

Furthermore, like springtime, relationships change and with each new relationship, there is a feeling of rebirth and of recreating and rejuvenating the soul. This sense of new relationships may also be seen in relation to the bohemian circle. After Lasker-Schüler’s relationship with her second husband Herwarth Walden came to an end, she never again married, but was rumoured to have had many unconventional relationships with artists from her circle. As Wilson notes, this alternative sexual lifestyle was a “rejection of bourgeois marriage and conventional family norms” (111), and because it “involved the exploitation of forbidden areas of experience, it permitted the assumptions of new identities” (115). As a result, this eroticism acted “as a source of inspiration and as the raw material for works of art” (111). Perhaps it was in these various relationships that Lasker-Schüler searched for herself and that her wandering soul could try on different identities and be exposed to various sources of inspiration. For the bohemians, who were classified as travelling drifters, home was not found in a constant place, but in their personal relationships.15

“Frühling“ demonstrates how love provides the lyrical “I” with the necessary safe space or Heimat in which new ideas or creative inspiration may blossom.

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15 The recurring theme of Lasker-Schüler’s lost mother is an example of this conversation between poetry and reality. Poetry becomes a medium through which the poet may communicate with her absent mother and through which her mother may be reincarnated in Lasker-Schüler’s inner Heimat. Because of the consistent references to her mother, we see how fruitful the influence of this figure was to the poet’s inspiration.
Wir wollen wie der Mondenschein  
Die still Frühlingsnacht durchwachen,  
Wir wollen wie zwei Kinder sein,  
Du hüllst mich in Dein Leben ein  
Und lehrst mich so, wie Du zu lachen.

Ich sehnt mich nach Mutterlieb’  
Und Vaterwort und Frühlingsspielen,  
Den Fluch, der mich durch’s Leben trieb,  
Begann ich, da er bei mir blieb,  
Wie einen treuen Freund zu lieben.

Nun blühn die Bäume seidenfein  
Und Liebe duftet von den Zweigen.  
Du musst mir Mutter und Vater sein  
Und Frühlingsspiel und Schätzelein!  
--Und ganz mein Eigen... (Styx, 1902)

Firstly, the poem begins with the word “Wir,” demonstrating that this poem is not one of loneliness, but one in which the lyrical “I” is accompanied by someone else. But who, once again, is this “du” referring to? Is it a lover? Or is it perhaps the poetic process or an address to the internal self? This ambiguity leaves the reader in a liminal state, prompting fluid thinking and echoing the “Flüssigwerden” thematized in much of the poet’s work. The lyrical “I” and this “du” become fused, as the use of the word “wir” suggests. The sense of two becoming one is continued in the first stanza, by the line “Du hüllst mich in Dein Leben ein,” a phrase that evokes images of two bodies becoming fluid and melting into each other to become one. The lyrical “I” wishes to lose itself in the other body, by having a sort of cocoon envelop them. A cocoon is a place of safety and it may also be seen as a space in which something—the lyrical “I,” in this case, may change and undergo a metamorphosis.

The alliterated soft “w” sound, such as in the first and third lines, “Wir wollen wie,” acts soft and comforting and seemingly cradles the lyrical “I.” If we relate this to both mentioned nuances of the character of “du,” then poetry becomes equated to a lover and the writing process
becomes the foundational necessity of life. The repeated “I” consonants create a lulling sound reminiscent of a lullaby and both the lyrical “I” and the reader relax into the free worlds of their dreams. “Frühlingsnacht” indicates a time of change and transition. These changes, however, are occurring in the darkness of night, which suggests that they are not part of reality and can only be accessed through the unconscious dream world. “Durchwachen” insinuates staying up through the night to witness these subconscious dream processes. The prefix “durch“ hints at looking through the night, penetrating darkness with the glowing flame of creative energy. “Durchwachen” may also imply watching out for danger, which is perhaps representative of a world undergoing many political and economical changes at the turn of the century.

There is a return to the innocent days of childhood wished for in this poem, which draws parallels to Lasker-Schüler’s carefree days as a child in her Eden of Elberfeld with her parents. A child has not been introduced to the harsh realities of the world and thus the world is still a limitless paradise to them, in which they may become whomever they wish to be—their metamorphosis has not yet occurred. In “Frühling” love is compared to childhood, as it recreates this paradise and this intact world. Everything seems to fall away and “wir” is all that remains. Höltgen writes: “Die Liebe bietet die Möglichkeit zur Überwindung der Weltillusion, sie schenkt uns noch einen kleinen Paradiesfleck, der sich nicht der Illusion Verdichtung unterwarf“ (91). If the “wir” refers to the poetic “I” and his or her inner dream world that is accessed through the poetic process, then it becomes the only necessity for the poetic “I,” giving material substance to otherwise fleeting ideas.

The second stanza of the poem may be a direct reference to Lasker-Schüler’s parents, whom she often remembers throughout her poetry. The lyrical “I’s” longing for his or her original Heimat and original paradise, seems to have become satisfied by the finding of a new
love. This new love recreates paradise and restores the world to one which is safe and leaves the poetic “I” hopeful and inspired. The safe cocoon references the “Fäden” which the poetic “I” wanted to pull around him or herself in “Weltflucht.” This metaphor of threads and of weaving is a recurring theme in the poet’s work and may suggest pulling red threads of intertextuality between different poetic works to form a universal woven textile of collective thought and experience. This presence of a lover, for example, parallels “Chaos,” in which the poetic “I” longs for a “Herzallerliebsten” to fill a body that is “seeleleer.” The line, “Den Fluch, der mich durch’s Leben trieb” creates an intertextual reference to the previously discussed poem “Weltflucht,” in which the poetic “I” was also driven from the “Fluch” of the central “Euch” in the poem. In “Frühling,” the poetic “I” first curses the “Fluch” that has ceaselessly pushed him or her through life like a weary wanderer. However, because the “Fluch” stayed with the poetic “I,” it has become a good friend over time. The exhaustive yet rewarding nature of the demanding creative process is alluded to in “Die schwarze Bhowanéh,” while this poem alludes to the satisfaction this taxing task produces.

The rhyme scheme of this poem is regular with lines 1, 3 and 4 and lines 2 and 5 rhyming in each stanza, giving the poem a spirited, songlike quality. This sense of order in the poem may be representative of the sense of order that the “du” provides the lyrical “I.” If this “du” is seen as a body of poetry, then the poetic structure and form provide ordered regularity to otherwise slippery, formless thoughts. In addition, the poem is composed of three stanzas, a number regarded to have great stability. The central stanza of the poem makes many metapoetic references to the act of writing. The first line ends with the shortened word for “Mutterliebe,” “Mutterlieb.” In turn, it easily reads like “Mutterlied,” playing on the songlike nature of this poem. It also looks similar to the word “Mutterleib” and thus comments on physicality, creating
a body through writing. “Vaterwort” further builds on this sense of giving words a body and a lineage. “Frühlingsspiel” brings to mind the many mentions of games in “Vagabunden” that comment of the riddled nature of poetry and on the game the author plays with the reader in the poetic exchange process. Lines 7 and 10 are the only lines in which the regular rhyme scheme becomes strained, with the rhyme between “Frühlingspielen” and “lieben” appearing laboured. Is this perhaps a means of drawing the reader’s attention to the poetic game and to the elements of springtime and love which are so essential to the processes of inspiration and creative thinking?

Love becomes synonymous with spring, and nature seems to flourish and bloom with this presence of love: “Nun blühn die Bäume seidenfein/ Und Liebe duftet von den Zweigen.” The lyrical “I’s” love becomes a replacement for everything that has become lost in a lifetime, while also providing promise for everything good that is to come from this dynamic relationship.

The “ein” tones and endings from the first stanza return in the last stanza. This repeated “ein” resonates throughout the poem, creating a melodious accord in the songlike poem, or Einklang. At the same time, however, it seems to emphasize a loneliness; the sole lyrical “I” is alone, “einsam.” The poetic “I” longs for “Mutterlieb” and there is a sense at the end of the poem that the “du” threatens to become absent and thus the lyrical “I” is possessive over him or her—“—und ganz mein Eigen.” This last line acts as an afterthought that is loosely attached to the poem with the thought line. The poetic “I” proclaims that this “du” belongs solely to them; although the evocation of jealous sentiments is hinted at, it may also be viewed as a secret guilty pleasure of sorts. The poetic “I” seems to have begun the retreat into the depths of the imagined world of their “Meinwärts” and we, as readers, are no longer permitted to follow. This lyrical “I” sneaks away, leaving the ellipses to act as traces or footprints; the poetic voice gradually fades in the distance, like a lingering tone in the air after a singer has chanted the final note.
In Lasker-Schüler’s poem entitled “Lenzlied,” this transition from frigid solitude to the revival of the self through finding love is expressed metaphorically with the seasons of winter and spring:

Dass Du Lenz gefühlt hast  
Unter meiner Winterhülle,  
Dass Du den Lenz erkannt hast  
In meiner Todstille.  
Nicht wahr, das ist Gram  
Winter sein, eh’ der Sommer kam,  
Eh’ der Lenz sich ausgejauchzt hat.

O, Du! schenk’ mir Deinen gold’nen Tag  
Von Deines Blutes blühendem Rot.  
Meine Seele friert vor Hunger,  
Ist satt vom Reif.  
O, Du! gieße Dein Lenzblut  
Durch meine Starre,  
Durch meinen Scheintod.  
Sieh, ich harre  
Schon Ewigkeiten auf Dich! (Styx, 1902)

The poem begins with the demonstrative adjective “Dass” and thus gives the impression of something appearing suddenly and interrupting a process, not much unlike when the intense sunshine of spring finally appears after what seems like an endless winter. The “Todstille” of Winter becomes interrupted by this love for whom the lyrical “I” has been waiting, with the Odem seemingly resuscitating the paralyzed and dying lyrical “I.” The “Winterhülle” enveloping the poetic “I” is a very strong visual image, while evoking ideas of being blanketed in a heavy, colourless cloak of snow and feeling somewhat lifeless and unresponsive to the exterior world. This “Winterhülle” establishes a parallel with the cocoon mentioned in “Frühling”; in the same way in that a larva undergoes a metamorphosis and emerges from the cocoon as a butterfly, the blanket of snow melts and nature’s dormant plants become rejuvenated and grow again. Applying this thought to Lasker-Schüler herself, it seems that her exterior
identity underwent constant costume changes in order to reflect the changing interior world of her imagination.

The fifth line of the poem refers to “Gram” in reference to the emotional stress or heartache of being in a permanently frozen state, in which winter takes over and there is no longer the warmth of summer to replenish the soul. The repetition of the word “eh’” seems to comment on how quickly time passes in which one feels warm, happy, and loved in contrast to how time expands in times of grief until sadness seems to be all that remains. Once again, we see the repetition of the interjection “O” in the second stanza; this time it is always followed by the indicative pronoun “Du” and it is as though the lyrical “I” is begging their love to stay and to melt this “Winterhülle” indefinitely by bringing the fiery energy of inspiration back to a body that has become so cold. Spring and love possess the warmth to revitalize the frozen soul, causing blood to once again flow through the veins. In “Die schwarze Bhowanéh,” the lyrical “I’s” vein “schmerzt/ von der Wildheit [der] Säfte” (5-6), meaning that there is such an abundance of creative energy surging through the poetic “I’s” body that he or she is close to bursting with creative expression. Here, the soul has become cold with the absence of this creative inspiration. Thoughts and ideas have become old and stale. The lifeless poetic “I” longs for “Lenzblut”—the blood filled with the potential energy of change and transformative power—to rouse his or her body, rekindling it with the warmth of creative fervour.

“Lenzlied” expresses the power of love and belonging and it is noteworthy that this poem was published in 1902 in Styx, Lasker-Schüler’s first released collection of poetry, since it was during this time that she first began associating with the bohemians in Berlin. After Lasker-Schüler’s marriage to Berthold Lasker, this association with this new eclectic community must
have felt like a metamorphosis of sorts, during which the poet became exposed to so many new worlds and perspectives.

In the last lines of “Lenzlied,” the poetic “I” becomes freed from this “Scheintod” and it seems that the inspirational energy for which the poetic “I” has been longing arrives. The final exclamation mark in “Lenzlied” exudes positive feelings of relief and it appears that the lyrical “I” has been uplifted and invigorated. The motif of spring and also the idea of song—“Lenzlied”—are very fitting for this energizing process and as a reader of this poem it seems unfitting to not feel uplifted like the lyrical “I.”
As the previous section sought to demonstrate, springtime is a recurring theme which is within Lasker-Schüler’s earlier works. Spring is most always expressed by conjuring up delightful images full of colour, while calling forth positive emotions and feelings of hope and happiness. In Lasker-Schüler’s poetry these feelings of warmth are most often mentioned in conjunction with feelings of love and affection, and there is a true sense of the lyrical “I” blossoming and finding freedom in a new, previously uninhabited personal space. It is intriguing that the poetry in which spring and love are central motifs was composed during Lasker-Schüler’s years in Berlin before her exile, as it was during this time that she must have felt invigorated by the positive artistic influences present amidst the bohemians.

By allaying herself with the bohemians of Berlin, Lasker-Schüler became part of a community in which creativity and inspiration were the most integral components of home. In this creatively fuelled atmosphere, Lasker-Schüler found the malleable space that would conform to all the different identities and personae with which she played. Through performance she was able to blur the lines between art and reality and become a sort of wandering vagabond of this fluid liminal space. This lack of a static physical space may be seen as what fuelled her creative spirit and as what fostered the creation of an internally driven, omni-changing Ersatzheimat; this private world, this “Seelenlanschaft” is one full of potential and different from an often stark and disappointing reality. As Höltgen writes, the environment of the bohemians allowed her to foster her own “Weltbild”: 

Wie ein heimlicher Brunnen
Murmelt mein Blut,
Immer von Dir, immer von mir. (“Mein Liebeslied,” 1-3)
Obwohl die Dichtung Lasker-Schülers zum großen Teil irrational Spiegelung einer visionären, unterbewuften Binnenwelt der Seele ist [...], wächst diese Dichtung dennoch auf dem geistigen Boden einer eigenständigen Gedankenwelt. [...] Wie jeder Dichter, so emotional und intuitiv sein Schaffen und sich auch vollziehe, verarbeitet Lasker-Schüler ihre Existenzerfahrungen an Hand gewisser vorschwebenden Denkmodelle, verleiht ihnen künstlerische Formung im Rahmen eines eigenen Weltbildes. (Höltgen 77)

As this quotation demonstrates, reality supported the intense created world of Lasker-Schüler, but central to her work was still the expression of the soul. The soul and its emotions are represented throughout her poetry as being fluid in nature, always changing and leading to a different perception and outlook on life. It seems that much of what Lasker-Schüler created demands “ein Flüssigwerden,” a dissolution of the borders between reality and the imagination and that it is in this liminal state that creativity may flourish.

In “Vagabunden” this sense of freedom and the breakdown of borders is portrayed:

O, ich wollte in den Tag gehen,
Alle Sonnen, alle Glutspiele fassen,
Muss in trunk’ner Lenzluft untergeh’n
Tief in meinem Rätselblut.
Sehnt mich zu sehr nach dem Jubel!
Dass mein Leben verspiele mit dem Jubel.
Kaum noch fühlt’ meine Seele den Goldsinn des Himmels,
Kaum noch sehen können meine Augen,
Wie müde Wellen gleiten sie hin.
Und meine Sehnsucht taumelt wie eine sterbende Libelle.
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,
Und sünd’ge Launen alle Teufel fleh’n
Und Wahnsinn werden uns’re Frevel sein,
Wie bunte, grelle Abendlichter surren;
Irrsinnige Gedanken werden diese Lichte sein!
Ach Gott! Mir bangt vor meiner schwarzen Stunde,
Ich grabe meinen Kopf selbst in die Erde ein! (Styx, 1902)

The title “Vagabunden” immediately calls to mind the image of the wandering bohemian.

Thematically, this poem coincides well with the previously discussed “Die schwarze
“Bhowanéh,” as both poems have a vivacious rhythm and employ motifs of the body and of fire and light. The poem begins once again with the continuous consonant “O,” denoting a strong longing; “O” acts as a long sort of meditative consonant which transports the reader into a dream-like state and encourages internal reflection, as well as activating emotions. “O” also seems to promote fluid thinking, meaning that there is never merely one acceptable answer or interpretation of anything. Rather, thinking needs to be a continuous process, with no beginning and no end. The light sources—the sun and the embers—illuminate the lyrical “I’s” surroundings and ideas. The “Sonnen” and “Glutspiele” mirror the imagery of “Die schwarze Bhowanéh,” in which fire symbolizes inspiration and the transient and ever-changing nature of poetry. Here, too, the lyrical “I” is unable to touch the light sources, suggesting that poetry, like flames, is always in motion, shifting its meaning depending on the reader. The word “Glutspiele” suggests that the manner in which the light produces shadows and plays with its subject will always produce new views and challenge the observer to see things differently. The use of the word “Rätselblut” and the second mention of the word “spielen” in the sixth line also seem to indicate this riddling effect that hopes to challenge its audience to push past borders and boundaries and to expand the mind.

Like the reference to “Brandwein” and intoxication in “Die schwarze Bhowanéh,” “Vagabunden” also insinuates an altered state of mind: “Muss in trunk’ner Lenzluft untergeh’n.” The statement asserts the need for the intoxicating air of springtime for renewed inspiration. “Untergeh’n” suggests drowning in this “Lenzluft,” reflecting the way in which the lyrical “I” gasps for air in “Die schwarze Bhowanéh” and gasps for air after a moment of ecstatic creativity. Springtime is a season of change and transition, brimming with the emergence of new life and developing new possibilities; consequently, it symbolizes creativity and the rejuvenation of
ideas. “Lenzluft” stands out with its internal “l” alliteration and overall the poem uses many “l” consonants. This creates the comforting lulling effect and as Rieser writes, causes the unconscious mind to open up (129). Rieser also describes rhyme as “[evoking] that lulling narcotic effect of repetition, of uniformity, the sought for duelling of consciousness” (30). This coincides well with the “Lenzluft” being the narcotic of choice to achieve this drunken state of the lyrical “I.”

There is much repetition throughout this poem, a trait which Rieser notes as another means to connect with the unconscious mind. Lines 5 and 6 both end with “Jubel,” lines 7 and 8 begin with “kaum noch,” and there are many words with double consonants, such as “Himmel,” “Wellen,” “Libelle,” “Gassen,” “Knurren,” and “Surren.” The interrupted words “trunk’ner” and “untergeh’n” in line 3 insinuate that the poetic “I” is gasping for breath, as though hoping to fill his or her lungs with this intoxicating “Lenzluft.”

The onomatopoeic word “Jubel” forms an identical rhyme between lines 4 and 5. This non-semantic cry comments on the release of the great unbridled excitement brewing in the soul. The doubling of the word “Jubel” emphasizes the joyfulness, freedom, and perhaps also sense of rebellion that is felt when reality becomes expanded and takes on extraordinary meaning. The repetition of “kaum noch” in conjunction with the senses “fühlen” and “sehen” seems to demonstrate the transition from the “other” world into the unconscious realm of the soul. “Wie müde Wellen gleiten sie hin” brings to mind a wave of inspiration rolling over the poetic “I,” pulling him or her into the unexplored world of the unconscious. The line, “Muss in trunk’ner Lenzluft untergeh’n” seems to comment on the entry into an exhilarated state of mind, in which reality becomes distorted and fluid with the imagination. The lyrical “I” compares the process to a dying dragonfly. The dragonfly is born in the water as a larva and then undergoes a
metamorphosis, developing wings and taking flight. The dragonfly appears to represent this process of “Flüssigwerden” between reality and the imagination, as it too occupies two different states and thus has access to different realms of experience.

Within the short second stanza the poem undergoes a transition that is represented through both content and structure. The lines are short and indented and it is as though a “Gasse” has been reached and the poetic “I” now takes a new turn. The second stanza begins with the command to set fire to life, meaning to infuse life with excitement, energy and vigour, and to revive the fire with new creative sources. The second line continues with the lyrical “I” wanting to err, or to accept irrationality and disorientation. Allowing the mind to err and embark on a new adventure alludes to the discovery of deeper facets of the self. “Brand” cannot be poured, so this seems to reference the “Brandwein” in “Die schwarze Bhowanéh” and thus implies the intoxication of the senses to assist the mind in this retreat to this unexplored inner world. An image is created, whereby the “Brand” is poured into the blood of the poetic “I” and permeates the body, unleashing passionate excitement and perhaps, like in “Die schwarze Bhowanéh,” the lips burn with the lust to release this boiling creative energy. The line “Ich irre mit dir” suggests the soul, body, and conscious mind letting go of their controlled grasps on reality and becoming disoriented with the alluring “du” of the lustful unconscious mind.

Line 12 introduces this “du” and, following this two-line transition of the second stanza, the “du” and “ich” combine, forming “wir.” The enjambement between lines 12 and 13 suggests the fluid fusion between the physical and interior world. The “wir” subjects becoming vagabonds, wandering aimlessly “duch alle Gassen” and embracing the idea of going astray together. This sense of “irren” corresponds well with this game motif, as one must sometimes surrender control in order to make progress, especially in the game of reading a riddling text.
Does the “du” then perhaps refer to us as readers? Do we become vagabonds of language, exploring many paths, but always facing dead ends?

In line 14 “un” is repeated three times, suggesting like the prefix “un” that everything we think and which seems apparent may quickly become distorted and unclear. The alliterated “h’s” in “hungernde Hunde” are both followed by the “un” sounds and it is as though the exhaled Hauch of the poetic voice starves into the nothingness of “un.” In this stanza, the dark underworld is referenced. The imagery of Hell seems to indicate the lustful and impulsive facets of the subconscious. This exploration and representation of the inner self are characteristic of both the bohemians and the Expressionists. It was often this articulation of the repressed desires of the soul that roused shocked responses in society and which had followers of these movements labelled as eccentrics. The Nazi party classed such art as “degenerate” and the works of many Expressionist artists were destroyed.

The alliterated “l” consonants mentioned earlier become more prominent and it is as though we are being lulled into the depths of our shadowed unconscious. The mention of devils and sin in line 16 stand out semantically, as both have been shortened by the removal of the final vowel. When reading this, it seems as though we must swallow these vowels and are left with empty spaces. This may metaphorically represent the reading process, in which empty spaces emerge that cannot be filled with meaning. “Wahnsinn” and “Irrsinnige Gedanken” once again make reference to the often nonsensical microcosm of the poem in relation to the external world. Amidst the darkness, however, “non-sense” becomes the guiding light, burning brightly with strong colours. This is perhaps a comment on the importance of merely perceiving an impression and being satisfied in this indefinable state. As Max Rieser writes, poets create an impression and not things (143-144), and thus the reader plays the continuous game of chasing a stable or
concrete meaning in a text. The “surren” acts as white noise and unless it is acknowledged, it fades into the background. In this same way, the light or the impression left from reading a poem may be acknowledged and then fades away, not demanding that everything be deciphered. The poem continuously resonates and when the attention of the reader is turned to the poem, different elements become apparent.

The last two lines change the poem’s mood greatly from one of intense vivacity to one of contemplative foreboding. This invigorating sense of basking in the light becomes swallowed in the darkness of the awaiting “Schwarzestunde.” The exclamatory “Ach Gott!” acts as a great soulful sigh and the poetic “I” is once again isolated and alone, with the “du” having disappeared. The poetic “I” buries his or her head in the earth, as though wishing death to come soon if the light of inspiration will never appear again. The act of writing for the poet “functioned as a means of survival” (Redmann 268), and thus because Lasker-Schüler’s identity was based on her work, the end of inspiration becomes might be equated with the disintegration of the self.

When Lasker-Schüler was forced into exile she travelled to Jerusalem, the exotic of land of her dreams. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, however, Lasker-Schüler was greatly disappointed and the poetry written during this stage of her life that I will be exploring in the next section demonstrates the melancholic existence and what might be considered the tragic demise of an uninspired artist.
CHAPTER 10

Heimweh: Lasker-Schüler’s Exile Years

Wo soll ich auch noch hin—von Grauen überschattet—
Die ich vom Monde euch mit Liedern still bedacht
Und weite Himmel blauverausendfach. (“Ich liege wo am Wegrand,” 4-6)

Lasker-Schüler’s early lyrical works express the desire to escape the world around her and to seek out an “other” place by going into exile in her exotic imagination. Such early poems as “Weltflucht” are representative of this inner exile, while exhibiting Lasker-Schüler’s personal, youthful style. As Karl Josef Höltgen writes, the author’s early poems are rich in imagery or Bildersprache: “Durch die Reihung vieler schöner Symbole [deutet Lasker-Schüler] auf eine geheimnisvoll-verhüllte, vieldeutige Sache [hin]” (33). In the evocation of these images through words within her early poetry, the poet mostly uses nouns, adjectives and verbs in their infinitive forms, while such figures of speech as articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs are less prominent: “Im Rahmen sprachlicher Konzentration auf das Wesentliche der Dinge schwellen die Bedeutungstragenden Wörter an, während die Funktionswörter schwinden” (66).

Because Lasker-Schüler had not yet visited the Middle East at the time these poems were composed, it may be said that she, like writers of the Orientalist tradition, conjured up distinct, yet segregated images in their minds about how the exotic eastern lands must be. Never having experienced these places firsthand, the images remain separate, as though this separation permits the images to be more fluid within the imagination: “Die Dichter [...] beziehen ihr Wissen vom Orient allerdings meist aus zweiter Hand, wodurch ein Spielraum für ihre eigenen Projektionen entsteht“ (Haslinger 78). These seemingly exotic lands depicted in Lasker-Schüler’s early poetry allude to her desire to escape her present reality and to flee into this exotic “other” land of her imagination. In this fluid, ever-changing image of this amorphous land, there must surely be a
space where the exotic conjectures of her imagined utopia could exist beyond her poetry. Höltgen, for example, suggests that the Orient, for Lasker-Schüler, symbolized her personal secrets (45). By extension, all the sentiments the poet repressed in her present reality, found a space in the elusive and exotic world of her “Meinwärts.” It may perhaps be said that she developed her own personal mythology around the Orient, in which she blended stereotype and mythology.

Her later works also express this need for exile, but during the composition of these poems, her exile became a true circumstance of her physical existence. With Hitler’s rise to power, the Jewish Expressionist writer, Lasker-Schüler, found herself the object of the scrutinizing gaze of the Nazis very early on. Although she was awarded the Kleist Prize in literature in 1932, the constant harassment and threats of the Nazis drove her to seek exile in Zurich, Switzerland on April 19, 1933. But there, too, she found herself uninspired and unable to work. Consequently, as Lasker-Schüler writes, Zurich failed to become a home for her:

Dieses Land ist doch keine Heimat, es ist ein Waisenhaus und nur manchmal liegt unter meinen Augenlidern eine andere Welt traumhaft und manchmal eine Welt mit einem Himmel. Von der weiß kein Mensch, der hier mir auf den Treppen oder in den Corridoren begegnet. Überhaupt wohl Niemand in Zurich. (qtd. in Decker 389)

Lasker-Schüler resumed her restless travelling, seemingly in search of a place that would give her the creative space she so desired. In the next couple of years she travelled from Switzerland to Egypt and Palestine various times and then finally settled in Jerusalem in 1937. Lasker-Schüler’s poetry is highly representative of this sort of nomadic lifestyle, revealing influences from both Europe and Asia. Kirschnick suggests that Lasker-Schüler seems to have been born in this indefinable space between Europe and Asia (162) and that neither continent would ever fully
satisfy her in her *Heimatssuche*. As Decker writes, “Die Dichterin ist in Palästina, im Heimatland ihrer Träume. Wie oft hat sie über den Orient geschrieben? Gesehen hatte sie ihn noch nie“ (393). Unable to find happiness in Europe, Lasker-Schüler had already sought out emotional comfort in the idyll of her imagined Orient for many years, transplanting herself and those people dear to her to this Oriental space within her imagination and within her work. About this complex weaving between the poet’s real and imagined worlds, Antje Lindenmeyer writes:

Lasker-Schüler writes prose texts and poems set in a fantastic Orient, but at the same time she populates them with clearly recognizable friends and acquaintances. She often uses elements of her own biography—her loves and friendships, her divorce, and the birth of her son.[...] But looking for the “real” life within the fantastic is pointless: the constructed, fantastic “second” life and the “Prince Jussuf” self are, for the author, more real than the “real” life could ever be. (26)

Lasker-Schüler finally found herself in this other land that had been the setting for the paradise of her imagination for such a long time, but Jerusalem did not meet her expectations and she found herself once again as the outsider, as the homeless other: “Passt sie nicht tatsächlich nirgendwo weniger hin als in den Orient? Sie sucht in den Mauern der neuen Stadt nach den Spuren ihres alten traumöstlichen Jerusalems, diese Stadt am Rande des Irrealen“ (Decker 424). This real Jerusalem failed to meet the expectations of the rich eastern land she had constructed in her imagination, and Palestine,¹⁶ now known as Israel, quickly became “Misrael” (Decker 444).

In 1938, Lasker-Schüler was stripped of her German citizenship, thus barring her from returning to her German *Heimatland*. Jerusalem, her new place of residency, failed to inspire her creatively and thus did not become a *Heimat* for her. Her poems written during this time demonstrate a new degree of loneliness and feelings of being an outsider. This sense of

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¹⁶ Lasker-Schüler visited Jerusalem during the period of the British Mandate of Palestine (1917-1948). Following the Jewish-Arab conflict over the land of Palestine, the state of Israel was founded in 1948. It is important to note that in Jerusalem Lasker-Schüler was once again residing in a land that, like Germany, was experiencing an unstable political climate. In turn, the poet once again failed to find refuge in a peaceful external *Heimat* and poetry once again became a retreat to her inner “Seelenlandschaft.”
separation from her fellow human beings was amplified by her inability to speak Hebrew and thus to communicate: “In Jerusalem wird seit Kriegsausbruch in der Öffentlichkeit nicht mehr Deutsch gesprochen. Das macht sie einsam, sie versteht nicht, was die Leute auf der Straße sagen“ (Decker 431). In Jerusalem, Lasker-Schüler’s imagination and her writing became her refuge, creating the only space where she felt at home. However, in this uninspiring city, away from the people dearest to her, she was perhaps unable to fully retreat into the utopia of her imagination: “Sie gehörte zu niemand. Und so war sie mitten unter Leuten von Einsamkeit umhüllt, als würde sie ihre Zelle mit sich herumtragen, wie eine Schnecke ihr Schneckenhaus“ (Decker 446). It was here in Jerusalem that her earlier words written in the Peter Hille Buch gained true relevance: “Wer seine Heimat nicht in sich trägt, dem wächst sie doch unter den Füßen weg“ (Decker 115).

Of note is that Lasker-Schüler’s exile seems to have taken on the form of a pilgrimage, as she travelled to different lands, finally settling in the holy city of Jerusalem. This external pilgrimage was, however, an utter disappointment and secondary to her constant internal pilgrimage. As a result, her works during this time reflect a continuation of the introspective search for herself that is so prominent in her earlier poems. In her later works, however, the poet seems to have put greater emphasis on poetic structure and form, suggesting that the process was not one of spirited fervour and vivacious inspiration, but rather laboured.

The 1902 poem, “Chaos,” discussed earlier, expresses Lasker-Schüler’s fears and feelings of desperation that arose after her mother’s death, and, in turn, the loss of her “ursprüngliche Heimat.” The reference to the flowers that will no longer grow in the Odem seems to be representative of the lost breath of the mother that inspired the poet’s art. With the absence of this breath, her Heimat is no longer fruitful to her expressive creativity: “Meine
Mutterheimat ist seeleleer,/ Es blühen dort keine Rosen/ Im warmen Odem mehr.—” (15-7). The roses, a symbol for love, will no longer grow and flourish in this place and thus, without any love between people, the place becomes uninhabitable. As Jakob Hessing writes, “Der Odem, der keine Rosen mehr zum Blühen bringt, ist der Atem der gestorbenen Mutter, unter deren Herz sich die Dichterin zurücksehnt” (181).

Another poem, “Die Verscheuchte,” from her late 1943 series entitled *Mein blaues Klavier*, functions as an extension or re-examination of the poem “Chaos,” as it carries on this motif of the *Odem*—the breath. But now the chaos has become utterly unbearable and the physical surroundings of the lyrical “I” are suffocating, halting the *Hauch* by extinguishing all sources of creative inspiration. As Hessing writes ““Die Verscheuchte’ […] ist der Zusammenbruch total [und] das Gedicht vom Ende der Inspiration” (181). “Die Verscheuchte“ reads as follows:

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Es ist der Tag im Nebel völlig eingehüllt,
Entseelt begegnen alle Welten sich—
Kaum hingezzeichnet wie auf einem Schattenbild.

Wie lange war kein Herz zu meinem mild...
Die Welt erkalte, der Mensch verblieb.
--Komm bete mit mir—denn Gott tröstet mich.

Wo weilt der Odem, der aus meinem Leben wich?
Ich streife heimatlos zusammen mit dem Wild
Durch bleiche Zeiten träumend—ja ich liebte dich...

Wo soll ich hin, wenn kalt der Nordsturm brüllt?
Die scheuen Tiere aus der Landschaft wagen sich
Und ich vor deine Tür, ein Bündel Wegerich.

Bald haben Tränen alle Himmel wegespült,
An deren Kelchen Dichter ihren Durst gestillt—
Auch du und ich. (*Mein blaues Klavier*, 1943)
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From an aesthetic point of view, this poem’s structure is different from many of Lasker-Schüler’s other poems and is representative of her later works. Unlike her earlier poems that have lines of dramatically different lengths, no rhyme regular rhyme scheme, and irregular metre, “Die Verscheuchte” is very regular and steady in its form. The lines are all comparable in length and the poem is separated into five stanzas, each consisting of three lines. As a result, the poem appears far less free and playful, but rather like a work that was following a classic form or an established structure. It is as though the spirited, young and free voice has been tamed and that the older poetic “I” exhibits greater control and restraint. Furthermore, the poem uses only three different endings; these endings do not come in a distinct order and sometimes the rhymes are laboured, especially in the last stanza. This gives the impression that the poet was working very hard to make them fit into this determined template.

There is an abundance of long vowels and assonance in the poem, such as in “entseelt begegnen,” and “wo weilt der Odem.” The long “e” and “o” tones give the impression that time has slowed. If we relate this to Hessing’s comment that this poem thematically represents the loss of inspiration, then perhaps this retardation and expansion of time may symbolize how a mind once brimming and oozing with creative inspiration is running dry. The poet markedly uses many double consonants, such as in the words “völlig eingehüllt,” “Schattenbild,” “Weggespült,” and “gestillt.” This has a lulling effect, while also stretching out the poem, as though there are moments in which little progress is made. In addition, the way in which day is entirely enveloped in a blanket of fog, the graphemes are surrounded by or are being embraced by other graphemes.

The first stanza of the poem portrays a world that is entirely chaotic and unclear, with all borders and definitions becoming blurred and unrecognizable. The hazy fog embracing the world makes everything appear as a shadow, shifting shape and form and becoming one large, dark,
meaningless mass. The “Nordsturm” may symbolize the war that is raging in the poet’s *Heimat*, Germany, which has left her trapped outside, like a caged animal. Interesting is the phrase, “durch bleiche Zeiten,” because it calls forth ideas of all colour being faded and unclear, like in the presence of fog or shadows. In this darkness, creativity cannot flourish, because, like a shadow, it can never truly express its form and instead becomes a one-dimensional representation of an idea; expression becomes slippery and like shifting shadows that change form with different lights, nothing can be expressed so that it makes sense. Perhaps this alludes to Lasker-Schüler’s new residency in Jerusalem and the hindrance and lost sense of belonging she feels in not being able to communicate in the Hebrew language. Language and communication are fluid and facilitate the exchange of ideas; perhaps the desolate, lifeless landscape represented in the poet’s exile work is representative of this absence of language.

“Die Verscheuchte” contains many metapoetic comments about the process of writing, once again correlating with Hessing’s comment that this poem is about the end of inspiration. Firstly, the title contains the word “Vers,” as though to hint at this central theme of poetics. The title also contains the word “euch,” which implicates the reader as part of this poetic process. The day which is compared to the illuminating light of inspiration has been smothered by the fog.

“Kaum hingezeichnet wie auf einem Schattenbild” seems to extend this thought, meaning that inspiration fades and the central thing that forms the shadow or the words on the page—in this case the creative force of the poet—is absent. The lyrical “I” questions, “Wo weilt der Odem?” Where is the poetic voice, the breath which communicates these ideas and sets the stream of creation in motion? The absence of breath questions the sustainability of life without the power to create. The “Odem” has disappeared, perhaps symbolizing the loss of the poetic “I’s” voice and subsequent inability to express his or herself through language. As a human without
language, the poetic “I” feels comparable to the wild animals of the forest: “Ich streife heimatlos zusammen mit dem Wild.”

Once again, we must question the identity of this “dich” whom the lyrical “I” addresses. Is it perhaps the “Odem,” “der aus ihrem Leben wich?” If so, is it the absence of this “Odem,” of the Hauch of poetic creation which makes the lyrical “I” feel heimatlos? The ninth line suggests that the “Odem” was steadfast in bad times, giving “bleiche Zeiten” new life by allowing the escape to some dreamscape through the poetic process. “Ja, ich liebte dich” confirms the absence and the thought line and ellipses isolate and centralize this idea in the poem. The word “bleich” may be deconstructed, revealing the word “Blei,” meaning lead and echoing the heaviness of the hard times. Also, the embedded word “Eiche” may be symbolic of a long history, perhaps of the many generations of “Dichter” mentioned in line 14 who acted as an inspiration and represent a tradition of poetics. The last line of the fourth stanza reads, “Und ich vor deine Tür, ein Bündel Wegerich.” This line suggests the reduction of the poetic “I” to an insignificant bundle of seaweed that is seemingly incapable of entering this great door or overcoming this threshold. Like the “Wegerich” that has been stranded on shore and has dried out, the poetic “I” seems displaced and lost, having been cast out of his or her element; like seaweed needs water to live, the poetic voice has become dehydrated of his or her creative juices. The word “Wegerich” is a most interesting construction, as it is composed of the three words “weg,” “er,” and “ich.” This creates a compelling connection with the title of the poem, as it suggests that “er” and “ich” are “weg” or have been “verscheucht.” In line 13 the word “weg” is repeated in the word “weggespült,” carrying on this theme of dissolution and absence. The last stanza mentions “Tränen” and how these tears have blurred the poetic “I’s” vision of paradise and thus made access through writing and poetry impossible. The last line, “Auch du und ich,” deliberately uses
two separate pronouns—“you” and “I”—instead of saying “wir.” This emphasizes the separation of the “du” from the poetic “I” and that they are unable to function separately.

The poem concludes as it began, addressing how everything is becoming blurred and is washing away. The heavens and the utopias to which the poet and other poets like her could once retreat to fulfill their creative thirsts have disappeared, and all that remains are empty bodies in an empty, meaningless place. As the title, “Die Verscheuchte,” suggests, they have been chased out of their homes and are now thirsty for inspiration, but it is nowhere to be found, not even in Jerusalem, the land of the mythical Eden, the paradise and source of all creative energies. This is paradoxical, as if the poet has been drained of all creative energy, then how is it that such a brilliant poem could still be composed? Was Lasker-Schüler perhaps experiencing a sort of Sprachkrise17 in her exile, as she found herself in a land in which she could not speak the language and could thus not communicate? Language for the poet may best be seen as a “Flüssigwerden” that dissolves the borders between reality and the dream world. In turn, with the absence of language, everything becomes rigid and, as Deceker writes, “Das Ich ist […] nicht mehr weltlöslich, es steht der Welt gegenüber” (125). This expulsion into an uninspiring, cold world is further represented in “Jersulaem” and the paradox between the theme of despair and the rich poetic utterance is once again present.

Lasker-Schüler’s “Jerusalem” describes her disappointment with the city in which she had hoped to find a closer connection to God and to renew her inspirational energy. Instead she writes of a city that is no longer the fruitful and lively centre of creation, but which has become lifeless, turning to stone and incapable of rousing creativity:

17 This idea of a Sprachkrise is represented by Lasker-Schüler’s contemporary, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in the “Chandos-Brief.” In this short composition, Lord Chandos expresses a great concern about the ability of language to express the human experience in a letter to Francis Bacon.
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 ihre starren Nächte.
Ich habe Angst, die ich nicht überwältigen kann.

Wenn du doch kämest....
Im lichten Alpenmantel eingehüllt—
Und meines Tages Dämmerstunde nähmest—
Mein Arm umrahmte dich, ein hilfreich Heiligenbild.

Wie einst wenn ich im Dunkel meines Herzens litt—
Da deine Augen beide: blaue Wolken.
Sie nahmen mich aus meinem Trübsinn mit.

Wenn du doch kämest—
In das Land der Ahnen—
Du würdest eie ein Kindlein mich ermahnen:
Jerusalem—erfahre Auferstehen!

Es grüßen uns
Des ››Einzigen Gottes‹‹ lebendige Fahnen,
Grünende Hände, die des Lebens Odem säen. (Mein blaues Klavier, 1943)

The beginning of “Jerusalem” describes how this land, once so fruitful and blessed has become cold and fossilized, and thus almost uninhabitable. The lonely wanderer, like Lasker-Schüler herself, travelling to Jerusalem in search of the lost paradise, finds a land that is cold, dark and lifeless. In “Jerusalem” as in many of her later poems in the series Hebräische Balladen, Konzert, and Mein blaues Klavier Lasker-Schüler asks where God has gone. In “An Gott,” for example, she clearly writes: “Und meine Welt ist still—/ Du wehrtest meiner Laune nicht./ Gott, wo bist du?” (5-7). As Sigrid Bauschinger notes, a spiritual life had never been more important to Lasker-Schüler and more prominent in her life than during her years in Jerusalem. Her religious tendencies had always been rather “mystisch und verschwärmt” (165), and prior to her arrival in Jerusalem she had never spent much time studying the Bible, religious texts, or
participating in organized faith. In Jerusalem, however, she attended synagogue regularly, perhaps in the hopes of finding a community with which she could identify, or maybe simply in search of comfort and something to believe in. She was in need of guidance and inspiration and so very much desired some positive influence, since the world around her seemed to be disintegrating.

In the first word of “Jerusalem” the poetic “I” establishes his or her presence, as if to make a point that he or she is the subject experiencing the city of Jerusalem. The use of the word “wandele” is provocative in the first line, as “wandeln” means to stroll or promenade, but also means to change or to be converted. In turn, it may be postulated that the lyrical “I” or the object of his or her gaze will be undergoing some sort of change. It is also most easy for the eye of the reader, glancing across the line to accidentally read “ich wandere,” a word which makes an appearance again in line 4 as “Wanderer.” The second line stands out in the first stanza, as it is the only one that does not rhyme with the rest. The concluding words of lines 1, 3, and 4 are all long “e” vowels followed be the nasal “n” and line 2 ends with a sharp, masculine full stop. In this context the word “Stadt” becomes something rigid and cold that is “versteint,” lacking life and inspirational power. The stanza heavily plays with the contrast between organic living matter and lifeless stone and rock. The words “wandele,” “Seen,” “Wasserseiden,” and even “Vergehen” are phonetically gentle words and read fluidly. The words roll off of the tongue and seem mouldable and thus infused with the essence of life. The repetition of plosive “t” consonants in contrast is very harsh. The words “versteint,” Stadt,” “toten,” and “statt” are stiff and structured and add an uncomfortable rigidity to the first stanza. This contrast between life and death pulls together in the fourth line in which it seems that whatever is alive dies; where there was once seaweed dancing in the water, there is “Vergehen.” The isolation of
“Kommen und Vergehen” seems to act as a sort of final sentence, with the lyrical “I” acknowledging that coming to this place, to this fossilized city, results in death and demise. The word “Vergehen” also prompts the reader to think of the “Wanderer” and the act of “gehen.” “Vergehen” suggests in some way the situation of losing one’s path, or becoming lost—“verloren gehen.” The feeling of being lost is interesting in relation to the poet’s biography and Lasker-Schüler’s situation at the time when she was in Jerusalem, away from her home, and essentially a misplaced person, aimlessly wandering and heimatlos.

In the second stanza this theme of death continues with the word “starren,” reminding the reader of “starr,” meaning stiff or dead like a corpse in rigor mortis. “Gründe” has a double meaning, referring to the hard “Grund” or ocean floor, but also to “reasons.” The personification of these “harte Gründe” that stare into the face of the wanderer makes the lyrical “I” seem powerless in comparison. Perhaps this too may be related to the poet’s personal situation during the composition of this poem. With the war raging in Germany, there were many hard reasons as to why Lasker-Schüler was unable to return to her Heimat. Furthermore, “hart” is used as an adjective in this line. This repeated mention of the lifeless may be representative of how Lasker-Schüler felt during her time in Jerusalem. “Der Wanderer” in “Jerusalem” “versinkt in starren Nächten” meaning perhaps that the lyrical “I” becomes engulfed by darkness, a sensation mentioned in the previously discussed poem, “Die Verscheuchte.” Is this once again a comment about the inability to be inspired? Is the absence of light and stars representative of a lack of creative flow and dreams? The second stanza concludes with an inescapable feeling of fear or despair: “Ich habe Angst, die ich nicht überwältigen kann.”

In the beginning of the third stanza the mood shifts with the conditional expression “Wenn du doch kämest,” giving life to a world of possibilities that may arise with the appearance
of this “du.” The ellipses transport readers into the poetic “I’s” imagined dream world. Once again, the question arises, who is this “du” whom the lyrical “I” is addressing? Is it perhaps faith or God as the poetic “I’s” presence in Jerusalem, as a holy city with “Mausoleen” suggests? The “Alpenmantel” mentioned, for example, calls forth images of the gods in their long robes. Or is it an expression of hope for the appearance of creativity and inspiration? Or are both of these speculations perhaps relevant, as poetry and religion were so interconnected with each other in the life of the poet that the act of writing poetry becomes a religious act of sorts? This creativity and imagination could bring life to the dead city and furnish the darkness with ideas of light and colour. This “du” entity brings with it light and promises to rid the poetic “I” of the dark dusk, in which he or she is currently enveloped. In this stanza there are many exhaled words and sounds. The repetition of the exhalative “h” in “eingehüllt,” “nahmest,” “hilfreich” and “Heiligenbild” acts as though the “Hauch” of the poetic “I” is being put into motion. The final line of the stanza, “Mein Arm umrahmte dich, ein hilfreich Heiligenbild,” is rather interesting, as one would not expect the word “umrahmte,” but the word “umarmte” because it seems natural for arms to embrace. “Umrahmte,” however, leads to thoughts of art and inspiration, an idea echoed in the final word of the stanza, “Heiligenbild.” Finally, the masculine endings all throughout this stanza seem structured, as though the poetic “I” is trying to physically materialize this fluid, fleeting dream; the ellipses and thought lines separating the lines are captured at the end without a period.

The third stanza reiterates the darkness with the words “dunkel” and “trübsinn.” These words frame the stanza and rhyme, but the middle line, “Da deine Augen beide: blaue Wolken,” adds a core of light and colour. The eyes are often compared to the sparkling stars and are also known as the windows to the soul, meaning that they reflect the internal light of the soul outwards. Also, the colour blue suggests the presence of life and vitality. The “du” is the bringer
of this vitality. If Jerusalem is the darkness, then the “du” is the vital core resting within and holds the light to eliminate this darkness.

There is a definite shift in tone between the second and the third stanzas in “Jerusalem,” as there is a transition between the cold reality and a dream world in which “du” would come to earth and envelop the lyrical “I” in warmth and hope. The emergence into this dream world is pictographically represented by the heavy use of ellipses and pauses throughout the second half of the poem. Unlike reality which is constantly pushing forward, dreams are disconnected from physical reality and there is thus a delay while they bridge the gap from the unconscious to the conscious. The dream is constructed in two sections, each headed by the sentence, “Wenn du doch kämest,” demonstrating all the possibilities that could arise from the arrival of this “du.” The darkness would be lifted and the dreary skies would be filled with colour—“blaue Wolken.” If the “du” came to Jerusalem, the city would experience a revival—“Jerusalem—erfahre Auferstehen!” (18)—and would be rejuvenated and brought to life, as is demonstrated by the last line: “Grüne Hände, die des Lebens Odem säen.” The green colour of the hands is symbolic for spring, renewal and rebirth, all of which stand in stark contrast to the dark sky and lifeless stone of the first stanza. Furthermore, the word Leben—life—is present in the last line, as is the motif of sowing the seeds of life that produces the breath of life. In this context the breath of life may be seen as the “Odem” and that life for the poetic “I” is created through the Hauch and the ability to write. Furthermore, poetry seems to be equated to something living here, with the poet’s Odem creating life.

Many of Lasker-Schüler’s poems in the series Mein blaues Klavier express feelings of being chased out of one’s home and then being trapped on the outside, looking in, but not being able to return to this now lost space. The lyrical “I” seems to have been displaced and unlike
Lasker-Schüler’s earlier poems which often refer to spring and feelings of hope, these late lyrical works are covered in a heavy veil of misery. This veil, blurring the artistic vision and dampening all positive sentiments, takes on many literal forms throughout these poems. In “Die Verscheuchte,” a heavy fog surrounds everything, suffocating and drowning the light so that not even shadows may form: “Es ist der Tag im Nebel völlig eingehüllt./ Entseelt begegnen alle Welten sich—/ Kaum hingezeichnet wie auf einem Schattenbild” (1-3). In “Ich leige wo am Wegrand,” the colours of inspirational energy have also become muted:

Ich leige wo am Wegrand übermattet—

Und über mir die finstere kalte Nacht—

Und zähl schon zu den Toten längst bestattet.

Wo soll ich auch noch hin—von Grauen überschattet. (1-4)

Here, the lyrical “I” has become lost in the dark shadows of grey horrors that surround it and as the title suggests, the lyrical “I” has becomes somewhat paralyzed, lying on the wayside.

Furthermore, the title is evocative of a question, as though the lyrical “I” has become so displaced from a once familiar Heimat that the place he or she is now is simply an indefinable “wo?” The darkness takes over in the poem “Die Dämmerung näht”: “Die Dämmerung näht—im Sterben liegt der Tag..../ Sein Schatten deckt mich zu, der kühl auf einem Blatte lag” (1-2).

These poems demonstrate general feelings of losing one’s light and thus not being able to see and identify with one’s surroundings, leaving one feeling physically and psychically trapped.

In “Abendzeit” this motif of closing space is expressed again by the bay that seems to be surrounding the poetic “I”: “Ich bin von Meeresbuchten wie umstellt,/ Jedwedes Ding erlebe ich im Schaume” (5-6). The evening’s darkness envelops the lyrical “I” and with the fading light come feelings of lifelessness and a decrease in youthful vitality:
Erbläßt ist meine Lebenslust—…..

Ich fiel so einsam auf die Erde,/

Von wo ich kam hat nie ein Mensch gewusst,

--Nur du, da ich vereint einst mit dir werde. (1-4)

With the motif of the setting sun, this poem may be seen to represent the loneliness that Lasker-Schüler felt in Jerusalem, as well as her fading desire for life in her new surroundings. The tone of this poem is one of fatigue; the syllables are long and heavy, like the footsteps of a weary traveller who is reaching the end of a very long journey. It seems as though a dark mist is slowly enveloping the lyrical “I” in its darkness until he or she fades away: “Die Abendzeit verdüstert sehr mein Blut—/ Durchädert qualvoll meine Seele” (13-14). The lust for life apparent in Lasker-Schüler’s earlier poems is no longer present in “Abendzeit,” and there is a sense of a great disappointment that comes with having set out in search of something and returning empty-handed:

All meine Lebenslust entfloh

Im Dunkelm Gewande mit der Abendzeit.

Ich suchte unaufhörlich einen Himmel wo…..

Nur in der Offenbarung ist der Weg zu ihm nicht weit. (29-32)

When the poet composed such late poems as “Abendzeit,” she was nearing the end of her life and her old age and difficult life seem to weigh heavily upon her stanzas. The lines of her poetry exude a deep sorrow and the imagined paradise about which she wrote in her earlier poems, is no longer mentioned, having perhaps been extinguished by the reality of the harsh world around her. In an uninspiring world, the poet seems to want to be swallowed in the darkness of the unconscious. Death now seems comforting, as it will absolve her earthly existence and she will
disappear, becoming one of the many stars in the sky she so often refers to throughout her poems. She will return to her creator, to the Eden which she came from, and here she will finally find the peace and the home for which she so often longed. In “Abdenzeit” she writes:

Es bringen ferne Hände mich nach Haus
Aus gelben Sicheln einen frommen Strauß.
Der Zeiger wandelt leise um das Zifferblatt
Der Sonnenuhr, die Gold von meinem Leben hat. (21-24)

In these lines the lyrical “I” counts the time left until God will take her home to the sunny light of paradise.

In “Herbst” this motif of impending death is further expressed: “Ich pflücke mir am Weg des letzte Tausendschön…. / Es kam ein Engel mir mein Totenkleid zu nähen—/ Denn ich muss andere Welten weiter tragen.” (1-3). The title of the poem is telling, as “Herbst” is the season in which all of nature becomes dormant or dies and waits to be reborn again in a different form. It is interesting that Lasker-Schüler used this theme of autumn only near the end of her life, as her earlier poetry spoke of springtime and the therefore subsequent feelings of hope for the future. Lasker-Schüler died in Jerusalem on January 22, 1945 following a heart attack, but her poetry acts as a testimony to her life. Many critics agree that writing was life for Lasker-Schüler and it is through words that she created her own reality and Heimat for herself.
CHAPTER 11

Conclusion

“Was für eine Welt! [...] Das tiefste Element morgenländischer Dichtung und Sprache zugleich: dass in ihr alles Trope ist, alles Ableitung aus uralten Wurzeln, alles mehrfach denkbar, alles schwebend.” (Hofmannsthal qtd. in Höltgen 33)

As articulated by Lasker-Schüler’s contemporary, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, her poems have the power to transport readers out of the realm of their present realities and into the unexplored depths of their exotic imaginations. Achieving this is often a challenge, with the audience searching for a solid and definite meaning, but repeatedly failing to grasp the slippery, fluid body of the text. In this way, the poet plays a game with the reader and it is through this ceaseless pursuit that we, as readers, become travellers of our inner selves. Only by this constant motion do the restrictive borders of our regulated consciousness crumble, granting access to our desirous core—our individual utopia.

For Lasker-Schüler, poetry forged a space in which she could escape the rigid structures of a society that was so often harsh and cruel to her. As Seifert writes, Lasker-Schüler’s poetry “erfindet eine Ersatz-Realität“ (36) for both reader and poet: “Der Simulationsraum ist also die Phantasie. Er bedeutet eine Art des (Frei-) und (Spiel-) Raums, in dem (freigewordene) Trauer, (freigesetzte) Konflikte wie Pläne und Utopien miteinander—spielerisch—umgehen können“ (Seifert 38). A close analysis of the poet’s texts reveals that the creation of these fantastical universes acted as a means for the poet to enter her “Meinwärts,” “fleeing into the depths of herself, while making herself immortal at the same time” (Hedgepath 177). The act of writing, of bringing these poems to paper, enabled the poet to become part of these inner worlds, while also materializing the experience as part of her physical reality.
Amongst the bohemians, Lasker-Schüler found a community filled with people as elusive as she herself, who embraced artistic expression as a means of transcending into new realities beyond their present selves. Art enables the bohemian to construct an alternative existence and to generate a counter-societal space. Subsequently, the bohemian mentality aligned itself well with Lasker-Schüler’s personal exile into the “other” land of her imagination and with her escape from the physical reality surrounding her. Seifert writes about the power of the writing process:


(Seifert 28)

Fantasy and the bohemians are complementary of each other and by reading the poet’s work in conjunction with her biography reveals the inspirational influence associating with the bohemian community may have had on Lasker-Schüler.

The close textual analyses of such poems as “Die schwarze Bhowanéh,” “Vagabunden,” and “Frühling” written during the time of the Berliner Bohème demonstrate the fiery eruption of creative energy the poet experienced during this period of her life. The poems are also filled with themes of love and springtime, which allude to personal happiness, growth, and fruitful poetic creation. The poet’s later poetry composed during her exile years stands in stark contrast with this youthful style, with the weariness of old age and the hardship of the times permeating the stanzas. The correlation between the development of poetic form with Lasker-Schüler’s
biography is compelling and underscores the description of her poetry as “Herzdichtung.” The physical boundaries imposed upon the poet following her exile from Germany seem to become echoed in the structured regularity of her often melancholic *Exildichtung*, and “here, in this desperate land, poetry becomes a means for her survival” (Hedgepath 65).

Gone is the previous lust for life and it is as though the stony Jerusalem fossilizes the space within her heart which once wildly pumped the creative juices of inspiration through her veins. As Lasker-Schüler’s friend Fritz Martini stated, “Dasein war ihr Dichten” (qtd. in Redmann 14) and thus it may be said that “Dichten war ihr Dasein.” Consequently, the end of inspiration, in Lasker-Schüler’s case, may be seen as the end of the poet herself. Through the act of writing, however, Lasker-Schüler’s imagination and her soul have been immortalized within the aesthetic bodies of her poems. The act of reading becomes a means of resuscitating the poet, setting the *Hauch* in motion again, and accessing the poet’s exotic “Seelenlandschaft.” The reading of her poetry continues the poetic process and makes us all vagabonds of our “Meinwärts,” in which we may undergo a metamorphosis, becoming the stars of our dreams, and may always retreat to out very own *Heimat*. 
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89


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