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"GOD'S LITTLE RASCAL":

A FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL VIEW OF ELSE LASKER-SCHÜLER'S PROSE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Germanic Languages and Literatures in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

"GOD'S LITTLE RASCAL": A FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL VIEW OF ELSE LASKER-SCHÜLER'S PROSE

by

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The German Jewish modernist, Else Lasker-Schüler, was, at heart, a spiritual avant-gardist, or "God's little rascal" as she once called herself in a poem. This study is an inquiry into the author's prose and its relation to the ideologies of traditional, Jewish patriarchal theology and male-dominated German literary culture. In the past, scholars have often presented the profound connection between God and the "maleness" of God too simplistically when discussing Lasker-Schüler's writings, or they have overlooked the androcentrism of Judaism altogether. Through the lenses of feminist theology, Lasker-Schüler's writings show a disruption and subversion of traditional Jewish doctrine and a struggle to articulate her particular feminine marginality within the androcentrism of religion.

The frustration of positioning her spiritual thinking within the dominant discourse of male letters was a problem Lasker-Schüler never escaped, and yet, the bind of the "maleness" of God also compelled her writing. Indeed, Lasker-Schüler's literary production as a whole can be viewed as a search for

God and faith in a world of images and meaning controlled and shaped for the most part by men. The author cultivated a fidelity to her Jewish roots through her writing. This was a radical act on her part, for it was a fidelity based not on tradition, learning and ritual, but one based on her own lyric, literary terms.

Like Lasker-Schüler's writings in her own time, Jewish feminist theology, a field of thought still very much in its infancy today, bears marginal status within academia. Without these new theoretical tools of gender inquiry into religion, however, feminist writing on Lasker-Schüler would be incomplete. Her literature begs for such an approach, for it can easily be situated within the history of Jewish spiritual writings by women which have been mapped by feminist scholars thus far.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Dr. Corrine Tekavec, and to Emma Missouri, without whom I would have no models. It is also dedicated to my son, Elijah Wapner, whose strength and courage are an inspiration to me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, Germany for allowing me to conduct research on Else Lasker-Schüler and the German modern period. Special thanks also goes to the Rosenzweig Institute for German Jewish Culture at Hebrew University, Jerusalem for a generous grant which allowed me to study Else Lasker-Schüler's writings, letters, and unpublished manuscripts in the Else Lasker-Schüler Archive of the Hebrew National Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem. I express my additional gratitude to the archivists and staff at the Hebrew National Library for their kind help and support in my research there. I must also thank the City University of New York for its support in my research by awarding me with university fellowships through my years as a graduate student, as well as with a stipend to participate in a Mellon Dissertation Seminar conducted by Professor Nancy Miller.

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Contents

"[I]ch zweifle nie an mir. Kann man ein gläubigeres Wort sagen?"
(Else Lasker-Schüler, *Mein Herz* 156, 159)

Chapter 1

Introduction

"Je tiefer ein Volk, desto unsichtbarer sein Gott" (*Theben* 343).[1] Else Lasker-Schüler wrote these words in 1925. She was 55 years old at the time and living in Berlin, having spent the previous two decades establishing a literary career there. Antisemitism was on the rise in Germany, and Lasker-Schüler's Jewish peers in letters—most of them men—were scrambling to understand themselves within the swirl of economic depression and inter-war racial and political polemicizing which had taken hold in Europe. The intellectual efforts of these men spanned a wide spectrum of thought regarding Jews and Judaism: Martin Buber's theology and his study of Chasidic culture, Franz Rosenzweig's translation of the Torah into German (along with Buber), Theodor Herzl's Zionist movement, Freud's studies in psychoanalysis, Karl Kraus' social criticism and satire, as well as political swelling around the theories of Karl Marx.

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[1]My method of citation throughout this study involves brief, parenthetical documentation within the text. These individual entries refer to the complete bibliographical information found in "Works Consulted" on pages 218-231. Also, refer to the abbreviations listed on page 219 for the full titles of Lasker-Schüler's works. For example, *Theben* is the abbreviated form of Der Prinz von Theben und andere Prosa. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986. Rpt. of Gesammelte Werke in Drei Bänden, Bd. 2. Prosa und Schauspiele. 1962.

Like her contemporaries, Lasker-Schüler was scrambling to understand herself, too: "Je tiefer ein Volk, desto unsichtbarer sein Gott." Her words intimate the fundamental Jewish principle of monotheism without image, that is, belief in one God without recourse to idolatry. They resonate both historically and personally for the author, expressing a depth of experience, a layering of legend, suffering, and fullness of emotion which she knew as a Jew and as an individual. Her life's pursuit of writing, however, was marked by a profound dilemma. How does one comprehend an "invisible" God when "he" is so thoroughly imbued with maleness in image, in language, and in ideology? Living and writing within patriarchal religious culture—which in itself possesses aspects of idolatry (Plaskow, *Jewish Theology* 76)—was confusing to say the least. The only recourse Lasker-Schüler had in exploring her particular contour of faith was to trust her own experience. The frustration of positioning her spiritual thinking within the dominant discourse of male letters, both literary and spiritual, was a problem she never escaped, and yet, the bind of the "maleness" of God and of androcentric religious and literary practice was also what compelled her writing. Indeed, her literary production as a whole can be viewed as a search for God and faith in a world of images and meaning controlled and shaped for the most part by men—and this during a most violent era of twentieth-century history, through the two World Wars.

My study of Else Lasker-Schüler's prose is an attempt to untangle some threads about her life as a Jew and a woman writing first in Germany, and later in exile in Switzerland and Palestine. My theoretical framework is feminist, and

I draw upon recent writings in Jewish studies, particularly in theology and biblical studies. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum describe a recent blossoming within the field of feminist Jewish studies:

> Paralleling the development of feminist scholarship within each discipline, feminist scholars in Jewish studies have approached their subjects with skepticism toward established knowledge. They have deconstructed classical and contemporary texts to uncover the hidden assumptions about women's roles and place and have shown that the normative status of maleness underlies theological categories (such as the attributes of God) as well as contemporary studies of Jewish history, sociology, and literature. The growing body of feminist scholarship makes it evident that a thorough understanding of Jewish texts, thought, and social life requires a gendered analysis, since the division of society by gender is such a fundamental component in the construction of Jewish culture. (3)

In my feminist theological approach, I discuss Lasker-Schüler's prose. I have limited myself to the prose for practical and critical reasons. In her 1991 dissertation on Lasker-Schüler and the literature of exile, Sonja Hedgepeth bemoans the paucity of studies involving the author's prose, adding that it has rendered Lasker-Schüler's stories, novels, essays and other non-fiction "unbekannt" and "daher auch zu Unrecht als zweitrangig" (*Everywhere I Search* 106-107). Calvin Jones confirms this blind spot in his history of Lasker-Schüler

criticism from 1901-1993 (43). Also in 1991, Meike Feßmann published her poetological analysis of Lasker-Schüler's early fiction. Feßmann's and Hedgepeth's studies of the author's prose, like much scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s, are the outgrowth of Sigrid Bauschinger's very important biography and groundbreaking analysis of the author's *Gesamtwerk*[2] published in 1980, which, for the first time in Lasker-Schüler criticism, included longer discussions of her prose.[3]

Since Bauschinger's initial survey of the prose and the studies of the early 1990s indicated above, a small wave of interest in the author's fiction and non-fiction, not to mention new interest in gender issues, has ensued.[4] These inquiries include Donna Heizer's dissertation on orientalism in the writings of German Jewish authors (1992, published in book form in 1996), Marianne Schuller's article on gender and masquerade in Lasker-Schüler's early stories (1995), Alfred Bodenheimer's study of the author's years in exile in Palestine

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[2]Though the term *Gesamtwerk* is not entirely accurate, it best describes the breadth of Bauschinger's study. Currently, a multivolume critical edition of Lasker-Schüler's collected writings is being compiled and edited under the auspices of the Franz Rosenzweig Center for German Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

[3]In addition to Sigrid Bauschinger's very thorough research into Lasker-Schüler's writings, her predecessor, Margarete Kupper, was instrumental in the 1960s in uncovering and reporting on much of the author's unpublished writings and correspondence.

[4]In the 1980s, some early studies in feminist issues and Lasker-Schüler's work appeared. These include Hasecke (1982), Schlenstedt (1985), Kuckart (1985), and Friedrichsen (1988).

(1995), Mary Elizabeth O'Brien's article on masquerade and gender (1992), Vivian Liska's discussion of autobiography in the early prose (1998), Dagmar Lorenz' inquiry into Jewish women writers and urban experience (1995), and Jennifer Redmann's dissertation on gender and identity (1996). However, compared to the entire history of Lasker-Schüler criticism—which for about eight decades has dealt almost exclusively with the writer's poetry—these studies which include discussions of the author's prose are a mere drop in the bucket. My study is another contribution to the still limited analysis of Lasker-Schüler's prose.

Another motivation for my interpretation of the fiction and non-fiction is that very little of it has been viewed through the lenses of Jewish feminist theology, though the work absolutely begs for it. Some attention has been paid to Lasker-Schüler's *verse* within this theoretical framework. Both Jennifer Redmann and Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien discuss the author's early poems about the biblical Eve while commenting on feminist theological issues. Additionally, Lasker-Schüler's famous book of poems, *Hebräische Balladen*, has also been studied by Redmann in this light (Redmann 234). This collection of adaptations of characters and motifs from the Torah (such as Joseph, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) has attracted a great amount of analysis generally. The *Hebräische Balladen* are commonly viewed as highly original in relation to Jewish textual tradition, bearing "only a superficial resemblance to biblical accounts" (Kahn 146).[5]

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[5]In addition to Lothar Kahn, see Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 78 and Pazi 70-71.

In his study of German Jewish writers of the modern period, Lothar Kahn remarks on the "intensely personalized" religiosity (146) of the ballads as well. A number of other scholars have also emphasized the author's subjectivity.[6] I take my research cues from these views of Lasker-Schüler's *Hebräische Balladen* and other works.[7] My readings in feminist theology have shown that the author's departure from the Torah which Kahn and others speak of, not to mention the "intense subjectivity" and religious self-referentiality of her writings, are actually indicators of a subversive spiritual process, in this case, the subversion of Jewish patriarchal tradition and of patriarchal religious tradition generally (including Christianity and Islam). I take my research cues from Lasker-Schüler as well, who called herself "God's little rascal" ("Gottes Schlingel,"*Gedichte* 46). I view her writings as provocative adaptations of traditional Jewish texts and textual practice, as an "amplification" of Torah, as theologian Judith Plaskow would describe it (*Sinai* 32-33).

Patriarchy begins with the figure of the father. It is significant for my study that Lasker-Schüler's writings involving her own father, not to mention her grandfather who was a rabbi[8], are found only in her prose (*Von Papa*, selected

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[6]In addition to Lothar Kahn, see Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 145, 257 and Hessing, *Else Lasker-Schüler* 117.

[7]For example, discussions of the author's relationship to Judaism, such as those of Mali and Dane, have directed me to a feminist theological study of Lasker-Schüler.

[8] Zwi Hirsch Cohen was a rabbi in Geseke.

essays of *Konzert*, *Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona*, and *Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter*). Sigrid Bauschinger points out that while the author's poetry addresses the mother, "Ihm [the father] allein ist kein einziges Gedicht, geschweige eine Sammlung zugedacht. Dafür tritt er in den Prosaschriften . . . um so ausführlicher in Erscheinung" (*Werk und Zeit* 24).

This brings me to another point regarding the parameters of my subject matter. In the chapters to come, I pay close attention to the male figures of the author's life, whether they are her contemporaries and friends, her family members, or characters arising from her literary imagination. These figures are fathers, uncles, religious rulers, theologians, politicians, and male writers and artists. As a rule, men populate the author's prose in far larger numbers than women do. Sigrid Bauschinger comments that "Else Lasker-Schüler fühlte sich überhaupt mehr zu Männern hingezogen als zu Frauen" (*Werk und Zeit* 117). This preference for male subjects has a lot to do with the literary culture of the time, during which but a handful of women were presenting themselves publicly as writers. Biddy Martin's study of Lasker-Schüler's contemporary, Lou Andreas Salomé, has helped me to comprehend the author's predilection for male characters and to place her within the complex, male dominated literary society of her time.

Of equal importance in my concentration upon men are the "maleness" of the traditional Jewish God and the androcentric ideology of the Torah, for Lasker-Schüler is in constant dialogue with these issues. Althaya Brenner writes:

> Mythology and theology have traditionally been a cherished male domain, almost exclusively if not entirely so. The Bible itself . . . has largely been viewed as a predominantly male textual document, read for centuries as if it has been mostly composed and edited by males. It has been interpreted and transmitted as such within male-centered communities for thousands of years, and has been enlisted to promote and justify the social order it by and large reflects. Its interpretation and teaching have been performed almost exclusively by males, and exploited to further the gender-specific interests of their dominant social group. (15)

Androcentric ideology is present within Lasker-Schüler criticism itself, as some critics make assumptions about the author's view of "God" and "man" that are uninformed by feminist theory. Jacob Hessing, in a discussion of Lasker-Schüler's poem "Weltende," unwittingly describes the author's difficult situation within patriarchal religious discourse as he writes: "im bleiernen Schatten der Todesfurcht verbinden sich die Liebe zu Gott und die Liebe zum Mann" (*Else Lasker-Schüler* 78). However, Hessing does not see the author's deathly bind as a gender issue in need of further investigation. Similarly, Werner Hegglin writes that after the death of Lasker-Schüler's son Paul in 1927, "sucht die Dichterin Zuflucht in der biblischen Welt ihrer Kindheit, vor allem bei Joseph und David. Bei den Vätern findet sie von da an die eigentliche Wohnung ihrer Suche—ihre himmlische Welt" (30). Hegglin idealizes the spiritual refuge the author supposedly found in the traditional "Väter" of the Torah all too much.

Lasker-Schüler does not turn to the patriarchs for safe haven in so much as she attempts, in spite of them, to stake out her own religious turf.

My critical inquiry into Jewish patriarchal theology attempts to analyze this *Verbindung* between God and man which is often presented too simplistically when discussing the author's writings and experience of Judaism. In doing so, I selectively interpret the author's prose while discussing some of the fundamental principles of Judaism, such as the unsayable God, God wrestling (from the Hebrew word "Israel," meaning "one who wrestles with God"), or the concept of chosenness.[9] I present moments in the author's writings where she depicts her marginality within Judaism, both consciously (through irony) and unconsciously, as well as moments where she disrupts or subverts patriarchal religious tradition. In much criticism, this disruption and subversion is largely overlooked, or it is left alone as an inexplicable mystery or an exaggerated stylistic embellishment. For example, Leon Yudkin writes:

> Her [Lasker-Schüler's] experience as a Jew in Germany marked her for the sort of marginality which was then exaggerated to become her hallmark. Her personal extravagances, her private mythology, her social isolation, her literary marginality even within a marginal movement, may well underpin a specific expression of Jewishness. (84)

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[9]One area of importance which I regrettably do not cover in my study because of its scope is that of Jewish mysticism and the Kabbala. For discussions in this area, see Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 204, Mali, Weissenberger, and Hegglin.

The "specific expression of Jewishness" Yudkin hints at but cannot name is the author's "feminine" experience of Judaism. Lothar Kahn writes with similar suspicion and a sense of mystery regarding the author's depictions of Judaism:

> It is remarkable that this Bohemian child-woman, with her wild humor, boundless imagination, and grotesque life-style, should have written some of the finest verse about a religious tradition that is rocklike in its consistency. (147)

Else Lasker-Schüler was born in Wuppertal and lived as 80% of the German Jewish population of the time did, in an "assimilated" bourgeois Jewish household. Sigrid Bauschinger describes the author's childhood and later adult perception of her Jewishness as follows:

> Obwohl die Familie Schüler zum assimilierten jüdischen Bürgertum gehörte und jüdisches Brauchtum nur in beschränktem Maße pflegte—man feierte den Sederabend und besuchte am Versöhnungstag die Synagoge—, stellte sich Else Lasker-Schüler bewußt in die jüdische Tradition. (*Zur Biographie* 88)

Although Bauschinger was instrumental in correcting older, misinformed views of Lasker-Schüler's supposed talmudic or orthodox upbringing, she is too quick to assume that practicing the *Brauchtum* is what constitutes one's Jewishness. As David Sorkin and Marion Kaplan have shown, whether one was "religious" or not as a Jew in turn-of-the-century Germany, one was still of the German Jewish "subculture" which brought with it a set of assumptions about private and public behavior, as well as a felt marginality within the dominant German

culture. Lasker-Schüler's fidelity to her Jewish roots was a radical act on her part, for it was a fidelity based not on tradition and *Brauchtum*, but on her own terms. Thus, when Bauschinger writes of the author's "höchst eigene und eigenwillige Vorstellung vom Judentum" (*Ich bin Jude* 86), she is in essence pinpointing Lasker-Schüler's feminine voice of experience, a voice which had had a very small history of expression within Judaism, as I shall discuss later.

Jacob Hessing's approach to Lasker-Schüler's position within Jewish culture and religion is historically determined. He rightly criticizes "die meisten Veröffentlichungen der Nachkriegsgermanisitik" as "werkimmanent" (*Dichterin im Vakuum* 8), pointing out that, unlike what has been presumed in a large portion of post-war criticism, "Weder das talmudische Judentum noch das Christentum waren die relevanten Kategorien ihres Lebens" and decries the "verzerrtes Bild" this made of the author's Judaism (9). Hessing describes Lasker-Schüler's childhood as well, framing it within such important historical events as the law of emancipation passed in Westfalen in 1869 (the same year Lasker-Schüler was born) which gave Jews "staatsbürgerliche Gleichberechtigung" and which was the apparent culmination of Jewish emancipation (*Else Lasker-Schüler* 28). The so-called emancipation was impermanent and ended in tragedy. Hessing shows how, with the rise of antisemitism and Nazism, the author writes her way through an important *Wendepunkt* in Jewish history. However, as he demonstrates this, he frames her experience of Judaism so strictly within male models of antisemitic and assimilatory experience that the issue of her gender is largely ignored:

> Es sind die späten Folgen einer trügerischen Emanzipation, die in der Dichtung Else Lasker-Schülers ihren Ausdruck finden. Zwischen dem bürgerlichen Lager ihres ersten Ehemannes Berthold Lasker und dem radikalen Lager ihres zweiten Ehemannes Herwarth Walden verliert ihr Leben seinen Halt. Beide Spielarten dieser jüdischen Assimilation stossen sie ab, weil sie auf die wesentlichsten Teile einer eigenen Kultur verzichten, die ihr unentbehrlich sind. (*Else Lasker-Schüler* 132)

In her analysis of the poem "Mein Volk," Hedgepeth describes Lasker-Schüler's dilemma somewhat differently:

> Das Dilemma der Dichterin ist zweifach—einerseits ist sie an das im Exil lebende jüdische Volk gebunden, das sich nach seiner Urheimat sehnt und mit dem Blick nach Osten "zu Gott schreit", andererseits will sie dem jüdischen Volk entkommen, da sie auch von ihm nicht verstanden wird. (62)

The reason why Else Lasker-Schüler is misunderstood by the Jewish community and the reason why the male models of assimilation which Hessing describes repel her can be further clarified within a study of patriarchal religious culture. As historians Aviva Cantor and Ute Frevert have shown, Jewish women have experienced a kind of double marginality, firstly as Jews within dominant Christian culture and secondly as women within patriarchal religious ontology.

This brings me back to Bauschinger and Hessing, both of whom identify the isolation Lasker-Schüler experienced within her own religion, yet

inadequately explain this isolation because a gender view of her work is necessary to articulate more fully her experience as a woman writing spiritually compelled texts within androcentric literary and religious culture. Bauschinger tends to describe the author's marginal religiosity as an artistic self-creation; I see it as an unstinting dialogue with male religious culture, even as it rejects her. Jacob Hessing situates the author sensitively within her time; however, he points out that some questions remain unanswered:

> Sind die Erlösergestalten ihrer Dichtung auch ein Ausdruck kollektiver jüdischer Sehnsucht—oder nur die Phantasiegebilde einer ihrem Ursprung entfremdeten, seelisch vereinsamten Dichterin? Fehlt ihr am Ende der Halt, den Martin Buber im ostjüdischen Chassidismus noch gefunden hat? Sind der Peter Hille ihres Buches, der Friedrich Nietzsche ihres Essays, ja selbst der eigene Vater in ihrem späteren Schauspiel über Arthur Aronymus nur die Projektionen einer Wunschvorstellung, die aus ganz privater Not erwachsen ist? (*Else Lasker-Schüler* 98).

Historian Marion Kaplan has studied turn-of-the-century German Jewish history and particularly the history of women. Her important publications shed light on the questions Hessing asks but cannot solve, and they have helped me to situate Lasker-Schüler within her cultural and historical context more carefully. Kaplan has spent much time articulating the process of acculturation and gender difference in Wilhelmine Germany:

> [W]hen concentrating on them [Jewish women], we can see both

> the attempt to become like other Germans and the resistance to homogenization especially within the family and the Jewish community . . . . Although painfully aware of their position in a society increasingly intolerant of heterogeneity, most Jewish women saw no conflict between being German while retaining their religious or cultural legacy. (*Gender and Jewish history* 201f.)

Kaplan is writing specifically about the *normative* German Jewish woman of the period, a woman who married, raised a family, and preserved Jewish life in the home. In light of Kaplan's research, it is important to identify places where Lasker-Schüler shares in the spiritual experience of "most Jewish women" and where she departs from it in her marginal life as an artist. She possessed, for example, a common bond with other Jewish women in their exclusion (because of their gender) from certain Jewish rituals and textual study. This resulted in an experience of Judaism as "less formalized and more internalized" than their male counterparts (Kaplan, *Gender and Jewish history* 213), and it explains Lasker-Schüler's predilection for the personal discussed earlier. Kaplan remarks that "Such gender-specific private observance was probably perceived as less important by both women and men, since men defined status and prestige in terms of public observance" (*Gender and Jewish history* 214). Women's "public behavior," on the other hand, was not a measure of their relationship to their religion, but rather of their "maintenance of 'Jewishness' in the home" (*Tradition and Transition* 205). This is where Lasker-Schüler departs from the norm, for in producing texts as literature, she advances quite publicly

her spiritual expression, even if her own subordination in patriarchal culture is—at times quite unselfconsciously—expressed in them.

This places Lasker-Schüler in a difficult position. In going public, she runs the risk of separating herself from other women as she articulates her own particular Jewish observance. The result is an internalized misogyny, as some of her fictional depictions of women show.[10] Additionally, Lasker-Schüler's form of "observance," her writings, had little "feminine" textual or ritual history to rely upon—other than in dialogue with the status quo of patriarchal Judaism and its traditions of text and ritual. The result were stories and essays quite radical in nature, often misunderstood and despised by various milieus which constituted the public. At heart, Lasker-Schüler was a spiritual avant-gardist.

A number of voices in the field of feminist Jewish theology and biblical studies have informed my theoretical approach to Lasker-Schüler's prose. Like Lasker-Schüler's writings in her own time, Jewish feminist theology, a field of thought still very much in its infancy, bears marginal status within academia.[11] Without these tools of gender inquiry into religion, however, feminist writing on Lasker-Schüler would be incomplete. As I mentioned above, her writings beg for such an approach, for they can easily be placed within the history of German

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[10]Although my focus in this dissertation is primarily on male figures, I do discuss briefly the topic of reconciliation and Lasker-Schüler's depiction of women in Chapter 5.

[11]For a discussion of the "belated" influence gender studies has had upon religious studies (compared to other fields), see King 2-3, and for a picture of Jewish feminist theology and its place in academia today, see Plaskow, *Jewish Theology* 62.

Jewish spiritual writings by women which have been mapped by feminist scholars thus far. Judith Plaskow describes the nature of this history:

> Gluckel of Hameln, whose memoir captures a sentiment of Jewish life and faith in seventeenth-century northern Germany, the women who wrote or recited the tkhines, even as bold a figure as Montagu, were all trying to define their own religious lives within the context of a male-defined Judaism, be it traditional or Reform. Where they departed from tradition—or in Montagu's case, the Reform theology of Montefiore—they did so unselfconsciously. (*Jewish Theology* 74)

In my study, I place Lasker-Schüler's works somewhere between conscious and unselfconscious writing in relation to the patriarchal religious culture in which she lived. The irony of her texts and the fact that she was writing centuries later than a Gluckel of Hameln indicate that she was situated on an important cusp of awakening self-awareness as a Jewish woman. Her texts also show that as she ages, her faith becomes stronger, possessing an ever greater legitimacy in her own eyes. This is particularly characterized by the shift from fiction to non-fiction in the later years, from a narrative voice embellished by character stylizations to a direct essayistic voice devoid of the "gender maneuvering" of the earlier prose.

Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton offer a brief history of Jewish women's spiritual writings, remarking that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "traditional Jewish society simply did not create either the motivation

or the opportunity for women to write spiritual literature. If anything, such efforts would have been actively discouraged" (3). What *was* written (in part) by women and used exclusively by them were the *tkhines*, "voluntary prayers that focused on important religious events in women's lives" which "reflected a personal rather than communal understanding of faith" (4-5). Though Lasker-Schüler did not write or recite prayers as these women of earlier centuries did, her literary production marks a historical place in the evolution of Jewish women's personal understanding of faith.

Later, in the mid-nineteenth century and the period of Lasker-Schüler's formative years as a child, "Jewish women began writing essays, poems, and prayers that voiced their spiritual concerns and aspirations." This was due in part to similar developments among Christian women who were in the process of reevaluating "their own religious identification" (Umansky 7). Feminine voices of the Jewish Reform movement also emerged at this time, criticizing the separation of women in the synagogue, deeming their removal to the gallery an "old-fashioned 'orientalism.'" They also called for the abolishment of "the traditional benediction recited by Jewish men thanking God for not having been created a woman," and they demanded that women receive religious instruction and be counted among the *minyan.* (Umansky 9) During this time, women's perception of God shifted from a deity "to whom one owed gratitude, obedience, and humility" to one "who demands moral and social action" (Umansky 11).

This tradition of social action among Jewish women was continued in the early twentieth century with the work of Bertha Pappenheim. Like Lasker-

Schüler, Pappenheim lived in Berlin where she founded the *Jüdsicher Frauenbund* (JFB) in 1904. "During the thirty-five years of its existence, the JFB fought for women's equality in Germany and in the Jewish community both as an end in itself and as a means of reinvigorating German Jewish life" (Umansky 18). This, however, is where Lasker-Schüler departs from the communities of women who were actively engaged in shaping and exploring religious identity in this manner. Lasker-Schüler rejected ideology and was repulsed by the *Frauenrechtler* (Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 117). Her aversion to such activism was probably because it did not satisfy her needs as an artist: "Einrahmungen sind Einengungen, Unkunst, Grenzen, die sich kein Gott, aber ein Gottdilletant zieht" (Lasker-Schüler, *Mein Herz* 101). Aviva Cantor offers a view of the "woman's organization" of this period in European history that is helpful in explaining Lasker-Schüler's rejection of such groups:

> The woman's organization, by functioning in the public sphere, gave its members a sense of *vicarious* [my italics] feminism. It gave the woman the opportunity to function in the public sphere through the organization. Her membership in it, and her participation in making and implementing collective decisions in and for it, gave her a public role *without her having to struggle to attain one directly as an individual.* A direct struggle would have required consciousness of the injustice of both the traditional Jewish women's exclusion from public roles in the religious and political life of the community (from, for instance, performance of

> public rituals, serving on communal councils) and of their repositioned enabler role, which excluded them from public *economic* life, and would have led to confrontation with the men. Both the consciousness and the willingness to be confrontational were absent. (320-321)

Thus, although she was a mother, Lasker-Schüler was not like "other" Jewish mothers of her time, and, although an activist in her own right, she was not like "other" women activists of her time. The "vicarious feminism," the public role a woman gained "without her having to struggle to attain one directly as an individual," was most likely a dissatisfying prospect for Lasker-Schüler, whose work and life reflect an awesome allegiance to *Lebensnähe* and an obvious desire, after her two marriages, to support herself independently, even if it required the humiliation of asking for help from others in times of need.

Additionally, Lasker-Schüler was fighting battles on other fronts, particularly within male literary culture. Sigrid Bauschinger describes the reception of Lasker-Schüler's works during her early years in Berlin:

> Diese Leser, und besonders die Literaturkritiker, die sich mit der neuen Erscheinung innerhalb der "Frauenlyrik" bekanntzumachen hatten, waren ausnahmslos Männer, und wiewohl es keinem von ihnen in den Sinn gekommen wäre, Gedichte männlicher Verfasser unter dem Oberbegriff "Männerlyrik" zu vereinen und zu untersuchen, wurde die dichtende Frau offenbar immer noch als eine solche Seltenheit betrachtet, daß allein ihr Geschlecht den

> ersten und wichtigsten literaturkritischen Gesichtspunkt abgab, unter dem ihre Arbeiten gesehen wurden. (*Werk und Zeit* 311)

This sort of public response to the author's work most likely caused her to reject some of the feminine roles of the Jewish woman outlined above and to style herself on male roles so as to protect the legitimacy of her art. Jennifer Redmann's important study of gender and identity in the works of Lasker-Schüler demonstrates how "the author identifies her own identity as an artist within inherently masculine paradigms of the artist as an autonomous individual, genius, bohemian" (70). She remarks that during this time in history

> the independent, autonomous masculine ego [was] unreconcilable with the often denigrated "feminine" drive for connection with others. Given her own position on the divide between the genders, it is thus not surprising that Lasker-Schüler experienced conflicting desires for *both* "masculine" individuation *and* feminine attachment. (281)

With this profile of Lasker-Schüler's spirituality and literary position now in place, I offer readings of her prose in the pages that follow. Each chapter addresses fundamental principles of Judaism, offering views of the author's stories and non-fiction from a feminist, theological vantage point. In Chapter 2, I discuss the early fiction of *Das Peter Hille-Buch* (1906) and *Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads* (1907), framing my analysis within the concept of feminine beholdenness to the male God figure. The important issues of God language and imagery, as well as the Jewish notion of the unsayable God, are the central

motifs of my discussion.

The title of Chapter 3, "God Wrestling/Gender Wrestling," is a play on the word "Israel" which has its biblical source in the story of Jacob. Here I adapt the Jewish concept of God wrestling to "gender wrestling" and apply it to the author's gender costuming and gender obscuring of characters in *Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads* (1907) and *Der Prinz von Theben* (1914). I also discuss the emergence of Else Lasker-Schüler's most famous narrative self-stylization, Jussuf Abigail, a hybrid figure based upon the biblical Joseph of Egypt and the matriarch Abigail.

Chapter 4 is a feminist analysis of Jewish chosenness. In this portion of my study, I place Lasker-Schüler within the literary context of "prophet-writer," a persona adopted by many male writers of her time. In doing so, I discuss her particular form of "Auserwähltheit" as arising from her twofold marginality as a Jew and a woman writer living in Germany. I also continue my discussion of Jussuf Abigail in this Chapter, particularly his culmination as an ideal spiritual figure in the author's novella *Der Malik* (1919).

Chapters 5 and 6 both address the theme of reconciliation, which has had a long and controversial history in Lasker-Schüler criticism. In Chapter 5, I focus on the author's relations with her male contemporaries, including Martin Buber, Peter Hille, and Gottfried Benn. The dialogues of religion and spirituality which the author constructs around and with these men are necessary in understanding what is perhaps the most important factor that compels her writing: the desire to come together, to reconcile, to cross gender, ethnic, and

religious boundaries. In addition, I offer a brief discussion of Lasker-Schüler's female characters depicted in *Der Malik* as a means of showing her unreconciled, sometimes misogynist, stance in regard to other women and her own womanhood. I also include discussion of the author's collection of essays, *Konzert*, which won her the Kleist Prize in 1932.

Chapter 6, a continuation of the reconciliation theme, also draws upon selections from *Konzert*, as well as from the author's story of her father, *Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter* (1932), *Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona* (1921), her final book of non-fiction, *Das Hebräerland* (1937), and her *Nachlaß*. My analysis of these works addresses reconciliation between religions and ethnic groups—particularly the oppositions of Jew/Christian and Jew/German—and the role of gender in these oppositions. Chapters 5 and 6 together offer a new look at reconciliation within the tradition of Lasker-Schüler scholarship, particularly because of their specific study of male and female roles within the hierarchical structures of patriarchal religion. In all the chapters that follow, the feminist theological criticism of "hierarchical separations" (Plaskow, *Sinai* 96)—the subordination, oppression, or silencing of groups of people because of their gender or ethnicity—is my theoretical "roter Faden" and a problem which, I believe, was the spiritual point of departure for Lasker-Schüler in her writing.

Chapter 2

The Beholden Disciple

In Lasker-Schüler's early prose, the author often frames her main character as Tino, a girl in a beholden position. Generally speaking, it is some dominating, male figure imbued with God-like power to whom Tino is beholden. For example, in *Das Peter Hille-Buch* (1906), the author's first book of prose, Tino adulates her spiritual mentor Petrus with the words: "als ich zu ihm reden wollte, erreichten ihn meine Augen nicht, höher war er gewachsen wie der Mond" (*Theben* 10). What results in much of the early prose are relational constellations consisting of a superior, older male figure and an inferior, beholden girl who is the narrator of the story. This dyad appears in such forms as father/daughter, guru/disciple, ruler/subject, God/believer. In *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, Tino worships her spiritual mentor Petrus. In fact, her very identity manifests itself by way of the narration of events she experiences with this guru-figure modeled on Lasker-Schüler's literary friend, Peter Hille. The book opens with Tino's first encounter with Petrus:

> Ich war aus der Stadt geflohen und sank erschöpft vor einem Felsen nieder und rastete einen Tropfen Leben lang, der war tiefer als tausend Jahre. Und eine Stimme riß sich vom Gipfel des Felsens los und rief: "Was geizst Du mit Dir!" Und ich schlug mein Auge empor und blühte auf, und mich herzte ein Glück, das mich auserlas. Und vom Gestein zur Erde stieg ein Mann mit hartem

> Bart- und Haupthaar, aber seine Augen waren samtne Hügel. Und kleine Kobolde kletterten über seinen Rücken und beklopften ihn mit ihren Hämmerchen und nannten ihn Petrus. Und wir stiegen ins Tal hinab, und der Mann mit dem harten Bart- und Haupthaar fragte mich, von wo ich käme—aber ich schwieg; die Nacht hatte meine Wege ausgelöscht, auch konnte ich mich nicht auf meinen Namen besinnen, heulende hungrige Norde hatten ihn zerrissen. Und der mit dem Felsennamen nannte mich Tino. Und ich küßte den Glanz seiner gemeißelten Hand und ging ihm zur Seite. (*Theben* 7)

Tino is immediately located in a beholden position in relation to Petrus. Physically, she is beneath him at the foot of the cliffs. She relates their encounter in a language that is biblical in tone. Lifting up her eyes to the booming voice, she discovers "Petrus den Felsen" as he descends from above. His manner is fatherly and condescending ("Was geizst Du mit Dir!"). The religious symbolism is important, as Marianne Schuller explains:

> Der Name Peter Hille wird typologisch umgeschrieben: Hin auf den Apostel, der den Funktionsnamen Petrus, der "Fels", empfangen hatte: Sein Zeugnis sollte zu jenem Fels werden, auf den die Herrschaft Gottes sich gründen kann. (75)

This inferior/superior relation between the two characters is marked by a spiritual exchange modelled on androcentric, hierarchical religious paradigms common to both Hille's Christian and Lasker-Schüler's Jewish faiths. Petrus is

> der Prototyp der Stifter-Figur einer Gemeinde, der zugleich als legendärer Himmelspförtner volkstümlich Züge trägt. Wird dieser Petrus auch an Poseidon und an Wotan angekoppelt, wird auch der hohe biblische Ton von Redensarten im Genre-Stil unterbrochen, so setzt sich der Bezug zum Neuen und zum Alten Testament doch formierend durch. So appelliert die Eingangsszene zum einen an Petrus, und wenngleich versteckter, an Mose. (Schuller 75)

Das Peter Hille-Buch is Lasker-Schüler's homage to her literary and spiritual mentor. In it she portrays Petrus as the source of Tino's identity and the site of her spiritual devotion. Werner Hegglin writes: "Für die suchende Dichterin war er [Hille] eine Inkarnation des Göttlichen" (99). Though it is difficult to fully assess whether Hegglin is correct in his view of the *personal* relations between Lasker-Schüler and Hille, an analysis of the author's situation as a woman writer and a German Jew in the early part of this century does shed light on the repeated incidence of feminine beholdenness to the male god-figure that occurs so often in her early prose.

One central theme of *Das Peter Hille-Buch* related to feminine beholdenness involves names and the act of naming. Throughout the entire book, Tino never addresses her spiritual mentor directly by his name, "Petrus." In the passage above, for example, it is the task of the mythological goblins crawling on his back to introduce him as a character. This makes for a complex narrative strategy that reveals the nature of Lasker-Schüler's early

preoccupation with gender and spirituality. Although Tino never refers to him by name, Petrus possesses the authority and power to bestow hers. As the story opens, she has forgotten her previous name altogether. This leads Petrus to label her the moment he discovers her. Meike Feßmann points out that Petrus' act of naming violently separates Tino from her history and religion. This is because her old name, which is never revealed in the story, "steht zugleich ein für das Judentum Else Lasker-Schülers" (153). I don't agree entirely with Feßmann that it is Lasker-Schüler's Judaism that is at stake here, but rather the author's particular expression of Judaism which is limited not only by her marginality as a German Jew, but also as a Jewish woman.

With a new identity determined and secured by the presence of the male god-figure, the story of Tino's "self-discovery" now begins. "Ohne Hille," writes Sigrid Bauschinger, "davon war sie [Else Lasker-Schüler] überzeugt, wäre sie nicht Dichterin geworden. Darin liegt der Grund für ihren Hille-Kult" (*Werk und Zeit* 58-59). To complicate matters further, *Das Peter Hille-Buch* is an account of the author's awakening not only to a new spiritual identity, but also to a new literary life. The book contains dense, lyrical musings on authorship and spirituality.

Petrus' power to bestow a name places him in a superior position to Tino, "denn das Vermögen zur Ernennung besitzt nur jemand, der im Rang höher als derjenige ist, den er ernennt" (Feßmann 155).[1] In traditional historiography, philosophy, and theology, naming has been a male activity. For centuries, the

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[1]For a view similar to Feßmann's, see Redmann 65.

male perspective has almost exclusively defined and shaped epistemology and human existence in most parts of the world. Lasker-Schüler, a writer of early twentieth-century Germany, multiply marginalized by her gender, her religion, and her existence as a writer and artist, must turn to necessary, experimental narrative strategies that attempt to loosen the epistemological subjugation of minority expression. In her poetological study of the author's work, Meike Feßmann finds that

> Von Anfang an ist Tino nicht einfach ein Alter ego Else Lasker-Schülers. Sie ist eine Sprachfigur, insofern sie dem Akt der Benennung entsprang, und eine Initiationsgeste, weil sich mit dieser Benennung eine Ernennung—zur Dichterin—verband. Durch diesen Ursprung ist die Tino-Figur geradezu prädestiniert, die Konflikte, die sich aus der Autorschaft ergeben, in gleicher Weise zu umgehen wie darzustellen. (146)

This problem of both skirting and representing the conflicts of authorship at one and the same time are clearly evidenced in the issue of naming in *Das Peter Hille-Buch*. Because she cannot utter his name, Tino refers to Petrus by tropic euphemism, repeated figurative phrases that point out the philosophical impossibility, indeed the taboo, of direct naming. In short, they poetically express the feminine struggle to negotiate meaning within an androcentric world view.

In the passage above, Petrus first appears to Tino as a disembodied voice booming from the cliffs, and twice he is referred to as "ein Mann mit

hartem Bart- und Haupthaar." This euphemistic identification of Petrus marks one aspect of the author's early literary grappling with traditional gender roles and spirituality. The indirect reference to the superior male is important because although Tino the literary character never names Petrus, Lasker-Schüler the author *does*. The reader is given the god-figure's name, but not from the mouth of Tino. This textual contradiction creates a kind of authorial self-reference that is unstinting in its articulation of feminine existence and its relation to the dominant male order.

Tino also refers to Petrus as "Der mit dem Felsennamen," perhaps the most succinct example of Lasker-Schüler's use of euphemism. All these forms of reference to the spiritual elder involve some form of disembodiment. He is not a character, but an ephemeral entity who, other than synecdochally, has no tangible presence. As I mentioned earlier, this raises questions involving spiritual issues. In another passage, Tino recounts a dialogue between herself and Petrus:

> "Nun sind wir ein Sternenleben zusammen gewandert,"—erinnerte mich Petrus —"und Du hast mir nie meinen Namen genannt." Und ich sagte: "Jeder Nachtwolke, jedem Tag habe ich Deinen Namen genannt, und die Sonne hat ihm einen Altar gestickt...und einmal wird mich ein Leben Menschen wie Mauern umschließen, die Deinen Namen hören wollen. Und meine Stimme wird ein Ozean sein. *Du heißt wie die Welt heißt!*" Petrus nickte, und als ich zu ihm aufsah, strahlten

> unzählige Firmamente aus seinem Angesicht und es war grenzenlos, und ich mußte mich abwenden, um nicht blind zu werden. Aber ich fühlte meine Kraft, die sich losstieß, und ich bäumte mich und streckte mich, und meine Augen blieben weit vor all der Majestät. (*Theben* 36)

When Petrus says to Tino, "Du hast mir nie meinen Namen genannt," she still does not utter his name in response, but glorifies him as one would a prophet or a god. Speaking in characteristically euphemistic fashion, she answers: *"Du heißt wie die Welt heißt!"* Once again, she cannot say the unsayable. Petrus is not an embodied human being, but a metaphysical experience. He is practically Creation itself. This trope, "Du heißt wie die Welt heißt!" appears at the end of the story as well, as the final line of *Das Peter Hille-Buch* (*Theben* 55). The fundamental nature of Lasker-Schüler's spiritual thinking, though it undergoes tremendous change and development during her literary lifetime, is in many respects encapsulated in this phrase. Hers is a spirituality that defers and refers to the male as its source and guide, yet at the same time, her language grapples for independent spiritual expression.

Das Peter Hille-Buch is often viewed by Lasker-Schüler scholars as the author's narration of her initiation as a poet.[2] Through Tino and Petrus, she symbolically documents her emergence as a writer. When Tino looks up to her mentor to find "unzählige Firmamente" beaming "aus seinem Angesicht," she

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[2]See Feßmann 146 and Bauschinger's chapter in *Werk und Zeit*, "Die Jüngerin."

must turn away so as not to be blinded. Yet in the same moment, she also feels a "Kraft, die sich losstieß, und ich bäumte mich und streckte mich, und meine Augen blieben weit vor all der Majestät." This encounter with Petrus is fraught with expressive conflict and power. The verbs themselves demonstrate the internal contortion *and* flexibility of the feminine character. Tino looks upward at Petrus, but then she must turn away. She balks, but then she stretches and expands. She is experiencing transformation. The result is artistic self-discovery and vision. A beholden disciple experiencing her own spiritual expression, she attributes these new-found powers to the god-like Petrus.

Hille and Lasker-Schüler demonstrate some similarities in their literary work in that both writers concern themselves with spiritual matters.[3] Their friendship was based largely on their affinity for religious concerns. Lasker-Schüler met Hille when her literary career was just on the rise and when her presence in cultural Berlin was being felt. Hille promoted her work and coined the oft quoted description of her as "Der schwarze Schwan Israels" (Albrecht 253). His writings are based upon Christian principles as well as a philosophy of religious unity professed by the *Neue Gemeinschaft*, a cultural association founded by Heinrich und Julius Hart in the first decade of this century. Through Hille, Lasker-Schüler also involved herself with the *Neue Gemeinschaft*, and its

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[3]There are a number of brief discussions that compare their work, including Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 64-68, 78-82, Wallmann 5-11, and Albrecht 252-263.

> eklektizistische[n] Weltanschauung . . . die mit ihrem religiösen Enthusiasmus, ihren gnostischen Schöpfungsmythen, ihrer radikalen Zeitenthobenheit und ihrem voluntaristischen Einheitsdenken offenbar Resonanz bei ihr [Lasker-Schüler] fand. (Egyptien 36)

Meike Feßmann writes that "Peter Hille hat Else Lasker-Schüler nicht einfach nur zur Dichterin ernannt, sondern er wollte, daß sie die repräsentative Dichterin der Versöhnung zwischen Judentum und Christentum werde" (146-147). Slogans of religious unity were common currency in the cultural circles of the time. These early interactions with Hille and groups like *Die Neue Gemeinschaft* influenced Lasker-Schüler's literary and spiritual development and are evidenced in her later writings as well. Sigrid Bauschinger points out another theme common to Hille, Lasker-Schüler, and *Die Neue Gemeinschaft*: a strong spiritualization of the natural world whereby nature is a vehicle for expression of the metaphysical (*Ich bin Jude* 84-85). In *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, however, the metaphysical is transferred through the natural metaphor and placed on Petrus, the male figure. Bauschinger refers to this beholden stance exhibited by Tino as the author's "Hille-Jüngerschaft" (*Werk und Zeit* 68).

Tino's posture in relation to Petrus as a believer and disciple is marked by one of the most fundamental principles of Judaism: the unsayable God. In the Torah, God is not referred to by name, but euphemistically. He is YHWH, a transliteration of the Hebrew letters "יהוה." In liturgical practice these letters are considered unpronounceable. When Jews read "YHWH" in the Torah, they

utter a euphemistic trope in its place, such as "Adonai" or "Lord." Historically, the euphemisms have been strictly male in gender.[4] This tradition is one of the religion's oldest keystones, and its development has invited a number of theological explanations.[5]

From a feminist standpoint, Lasker-Schüler's Hille narrative can be read as a theological grappling with the basic Jewish principle of the unsayable God. Tino's euphemistic identification of Petrus, her inability to say his name directly, is a reenactment of a religious ideal deeply rooted in androcentric Judaism. Her beholdenness to Petrus reflects a beholdenness to maleness generally, and to a male-gendered god.

More than 25 years later, in a book of essays titled *Konzert* (1932), Lasker-Schüler looks back on her early portrayal of Hille with the eyes of a matured spiritual thinker. She still possesses some vestiges of beholdenness to the male figure: "Er [Hille] war ein Wunder" (*Konzert* 102). Yet she gently mocks her past innocence: "Als ich Peter Hille kennenlernte, wie man so sagt, war ich noch ganz klein" (95). I point this out because although a grappling with the androcentrism of religion will always be present in her prose, the author's spiritual development changes over time.

For example, in the writings following the Tino period, Lasker-Schüler

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[4]For Jewish feminist views of male God language and the Torah, see Exum 11 and Plaskow, *Jewish Theology* 69.

[5]Everett Fox's introduction to his translation of *The Five Books of Moses* discusses the basic elements of the name of God in historical and theological terms. See the section titled "On the Name of God and Its Translation."

begins to cultivate a new literary persona as artist-prophet. In *Ich räume auf!* (1925), she writes:

> Die Dichtung bettet sich neben Gott. Wie könnten sonst die von der Dichtung vergewaltigten Auserwählten die unmenschliche Verantwortung der Weisheit auf sich nehmen? Der Prophet, des Dichters ältester Bruder, erbte die Zucht des Gewissens direkt vom Schöpfer. . . . Die Dichtung ergibt also, von erwählten Dichtern niedergeschrieben: den Extrakt höherer Weisheit. (*Konzert* 190)

In this way, the author's beholdenness is not one of complete deferral to maleness, but rather a constant struggle to perceive her own spiritual expression within the dominant discourse. Latent intimations of this self-perception as prophet figure are present even in the Tino narratives. These early signs create an important textual tension, for they intimate how the author is working *within* and *against* the patriarchal religious structure. Tino is a beholden disciple spreading the word of Petrus and celebrating his name. Yet her own powerful, prophetic vision competes with this role as disciple to the male god-figure. The spiritual conflicts that arise from this relational constellation are found in the author's narrative strategies of euphemism, which on the one hand mimic the fundamental, Jewish ideal of the unsayable God, yet, on the other hand, express woman's lack of an alternative means of spiritual expression to the androcentric model of belief. In *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, Tino, not to mention the author, is in a creative and spiritual bind as she defers to the male gendered god-figure as the source of her own self-constitution. In

later years, she overcomes this "schwärmerische Jüngerschaft" (Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 79), writing with a more immediate recognition of her own imaginative powers: "Heute aber drängt es mich, ungeschmückt zu beantworten die Frage: *Warum Peter Hille ein Prophet war?* Ich liebe wie er die Klarheit der Phantasie, Klärung des Gedankens ist ja eben Wortwerdung" (*Konzert* 99). In effect, she views not only Hille but herself as a prophet, too, making herself into his equal both spiritually and literarily.

Lasker-Schüler's relations with the men in her life are an important aspect of any analysis of gender and religion in her writings. In addition to Hille, her relationship with her father plays a distinct role in her formation as a writer. In an unpublished anecdote about her childhood titled *Von Papa*, which she apparently used as an introduction to one of her literary readings,[6] there is further insight into Lasker-Schüler's position as a woman writer and a spiritual thinker in dialogue with patriarchy:

> [K]am ich im Kleid in einer der ihm verhaßten [Farben],—Papa am Sonntagvormittag im Weinrestaurant abholen, empfing mich geradezu eine Sturmflut von Drohungen. Bis jemand den Geschmack der kindlichen Robe bewunderte und ihre Stickerei: Er hatte sich dann überhaupt ja *gar nicht* tadelnd geäußert. Und heute mal gar nicht! er [sic] trug ein Gedicht in der Westentasche

[6]Though the manuscript is undated, it was written as an introduction to the author's public reading of a story based on the life of her father, *Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter* (1932), which she later adapted for the stage (1936).

(von mir gedichtet) bei sich. Entfaltete es geschmeichelt und begann es den Mitzechenden vorzutragen! *Vorher* betonte er es habe den I. Chokoladenpreis erhalten von der Carnevalsnummer der Kölnischen Zeitung.

Gedicht—

"Wie konnte ich je ahnen, mein kleinstes Kind dieser ungeratene 8 jährige Sohn, ein zweiter Schiller? Ihm sogar zum verwechseln ähnlich!! . . . Gerade die schlechten Eigenschaften hat der Junge von mir gelernt!!" äußerte Papa sich oft mich gerührt beschauend. Er mochte mich nicht als "Tochter" anerkennen.[7]

It is important to make clear that any analysis of Lasker-Schüler's work cannot be done by conventionally employing autobiographical sources as a method of explicating her literary production. The story recounted above both is and isn't autobiographical.[8] In Sigrid Bauschinger's words: "Else Lasker-Schüler ist hinter der Legende verschwunden, die sie selbst zu schreiben begonnen hatte. Schon ihre autobiographischen Mitteilungen tragen Legendencharakter" (*Werk und Zeit* 21). In spite of this complexity, *Von Papa*, like *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, demonstrates another instance of feminine internalization of the male point of view. The narrator of *Von Papa* is beholden to a superior male figure, her

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[7]See document 2:5, pages 4-6, Else Lasker-Schüler Archive, Hebrew National Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

[8]See Redmann 9-11 and her comments on Lasker-Schüler's subversion of traditional autobiography, and Liska's essay on autobiography and the stories of the *Nächte* collection.

father, and the very source of her authorship lies with him: "er [sic] trug ein Gedicht in der Westentasche (von mir gedichtet) bei sich." The unusual syntax, not to mention the parenthesis in which Lasker-Schüler subsumes reference to herself, style the father as the source of the young girl's identity and literary expression.

Lasker-Schüler's authorship is embedded in traditional maleness. It was not uncommon for women writers of the modern period to adopt male pseudonyms. In *Von Papa*, the author points out that from the male point of view, and perhaps more significantly from the paternal point of view, she is "ein zweiter Schiller." Schiller's name is a cue. It represents the traditional "canon," or androcentric epistemology, and to be included in the "canon," one must either be male or assume attributes of maleness. In *Von Papa*, the writing itself demonstrates an internalization of the paternal view, even if it is unclear whether this view is generated by the speaker or her father. In other words, the text itself shows the author's own conspiring role in this patriarchal tale. Whether the story is "fact" or "fiction" is less at issue than whether the writing of it functions to exclude the speaker from her own femininity. It demonstrates, with a keen sense of irony and literary sophistication, the impossibility of being a woman, of being a daughter, of being a writer without assuming some form of maleness. In many ways, Lasker-Schüler is probing the very fundamental questions of feminism which Simone de Beauvoir presents thirty years later in her book, *The Second Sex*: "Are there women, really?" de Beauvoir asks in her preface (xix). In the chapters that follow, she proceeds in defining the feminine

Other:

> And she [woman] is simply what man decrees; thus she is called "the sex," by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (xxii)

Theologian Judith Plaskow brings the question of woman as Other into the arena of Judaism: "This is the starting point of the feminist critique of Judaism: that a woman is not simply a Jew but always a female Jew (as in 'a *woman* rabbi'), always the one perceived as Other in relation to a male norm" (*Jewish Theology* 69). In Lasker-Schüler's time, the experience of being a Jewish woman was, in many respects, similar to that of a being a woman writer, for both are living marginally within patriarchally determined environments. In *Von Papa*, Lasker-Schüler writes the word "daughter" in quotes, much in the same way that de Beauvoir's treatise asks whether there is such a thing as woman, and whether she is simply the construct of male projection. Lasker-Schüler's texts constantly point to this awareness of the complexity of an identity derived through the male view, an identity that emerges, so to speak, from daddy's vest pocket. By becoming a boy, and in her later prose, a prince of obscure gender, Lasker-Schüler both internalizes maleness and salvages her authorship

through gender and religious experiment.[9] She uses male projection onto the female as a means of literary investigation, often turning the projection back onto itself. The result is the creation of new subjectivities which at the time of her life were often misunderstood in their intellectual sophistication.[10]

Lasker-Schüler's second book of prose, a collection of short texts titled *Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads*, was published in 1907, one year after *Das Peter Hille-Buch*. The narrator is once again Tino, but this time she is the Princess of Baghdad. Unlike the Tino of *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, the voice of *Nächte* is less devotional of its male counterparts. Nearly all the stories of this collection feature main characters who are male rulers, often of high religious rank. They generally have some sort of familial relationship to Tino, as fathers, uncles or cousins. The stories themselves are fairy-tales, set in fantastic Middle Eastern lands reminiscent of the *Arabian Nights*. Although the Tino of *Nächte* is more overtly subversive than she was in *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, she is still beholden to the powerful male figures around her. It is an enforced beholdenness, sustained by patriarchy through its politics and religion. As Tino bears witness to the crimes these rulers commit, she mournfully narrates how they kill others, how they abuse their power, and how they oppress women. Exposing the

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[9]As early as *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, there are rare yet anticipatory references to Tino as a boy. See *Theben* 16, 22 and 46. They are anticipatory because in her later stories and novels, Lasker-Schüler begins to model the narrative voice on the figure Jussuf Abigail who possesses more overt aspects of maleness than the Tino of the early prose.

[10]Jennifer Redmann's dissertation is devoted to mapping such subjectivities, particularly in chapters three and four of her dissertation.

transgressions of these male counterparts, she also finds herself departing from the community of women. In most of the stories, she presents herself as "different" from other women. At the opening of the book, for example, she describes her own physical location *outside* the harem:

> unter der großen leuchtenden Kuppel lag der Harem, und ich starre auf das Fenster meines verlassenen Gemachs mit seinen blauen Wänden. Neben der stolzen, leuchtenden Kuppel erhebt sich die schwere Fahne des Botschafters wie eine fremde, abwehrende Hand. Ich bin endlos traurig—es ist, als ob ich ersticke unter der Traurigkeit wie unter einer Wüste von Sandtropfen. Ich habe nie eine Prinzessin oder einen Prinzen so geliebt wie mein blaues Gemach. Wie eine Mutter hat mich sein wiegender, blauer Arm umschlungen, und tiefere blaue Augen hat nie ein König des Abend [sic] gehabt wie mein hehres, blaues Gemach. (*Theben* 60-61)

Lasker-Schüler conveniently uses the harem as a means of expressing the situation of the oppressed female. In fact, throughout the entire book of *Nächte*, women are generally presented not as subjects in themselves, but as faceless numbers existing in groups.[11] The blue room is a complex metaphor for Tino's feminine independence and spiritual isolation. The vantage point of the narrator is outside the dome where the harem lives. She has left the women,

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[11]See Sonja Hedgepeth, *Überall* 123-124, for a similar view of the "Haremsfrauen."

and in doing so she is able to identify herself as a subject independent of a defining male counterpart. The dome ("Kuppel") and the messenger's flag are phallic symbols of dominance. The passage is foreboding in tone. Tino is at risk for leaving, but distancing herself from the harem leads to the articulation of that which exists within the walls of the blue room: her spirituality.

It is difficult to read the words "blaues Gemach" without thinking of Virginia Woolf's important feminist essay, *A Room of One's Own.* In *Mein blaues Gemach*, Lasker-Schüler, like Woolf, is addressing the necessity of independence. For Wolf, the main point is economic independence (4), for Lasker-Schüler it is spiritual. For example, in the passage above there is no obvious reference to God or the metaphysical in conventional, male-gendered terms. There is also no evidence of displacement of the metaphysical onto a male character, as was found in *Das Peter Hille-Buch.* Instead, the color blue is the metaphysical vehicle. Studies of Lasker-Schüler's writing have shown that the author's symbolic use of the color blue often refers to the divine.[12] I find the author's use of color expressive of a probing, independent spirituality. In *Mein blaues Gemach*, the character Tino recognizes her independence, but also its harsh ramifications.

The imagery of *Mein blaues Gemach* suggests gender multiplicity and spiritual expression that are beyond gender privileging. The color blue, for example, bears no connotation of sex. Other images in the passage cited

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[12]See Weissenberger 107, Hegglin 41, Muschg 143, Politzer 220, and Guder 175-87.

above also point to a multiplicity of gender. Speaking of the blue room, Tino says, "Ich habe nie eine Prinzessin oder einen Prinzen so geliebt wie mein blaues Gemach." Not only does this phrase include both of the sexes, it also intimates heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual love. Further imagery concerning the room offers more examples of this multi-valance: the cradling arm of a mother, the blue eyes of the king of evening. Such suggestive images counter the notion of a male-gendered god.

In her feminist theology, Judith Plaskow writes of a "hegemony of the omnipresent 'he'" and of "the nonnormative Other in a hierarchical system" such as that found in traditional Judaism (*Sinai* 136). She explains further that

> Feminist God-language does not simply reject this sense of Otherness, but seeks actively to address and undermine it through finding divinity in what has hitherto been despised. In imaging God as . . . a myriad of other metaphors . . . we reexamine and value the many forms of Otherness, claiming their multiform particularity as significant and sacred. (*Sinai* 167)

This "myriad of other metaphors" is everywhere present in Lasker-Schüler's writing. However, along with this imagery that attempts to transcend gender hierarchies, there are continued examples of the superior male/inferior female model in the stories of *Nächte*. This is the fundamental conflict of the woman writer and spiritual thinker Else Lasker-Schüler: she is working both *within* and *against* the dominant patriarchal order.

Der Fakir von Theben, another story of the *Nächte* collection, begins with

Tino's telling of an encounter with a group of holy men on the road to her city:

> Priester in weißen Gewändern gingen über die Landstraße, die nach Theben führt; ich beugte mich vor ihrem heiligen Leben und bat sie, mich in ihre Mitte zu nehmen. Und die frommen Männer lächelten gütig, nur der Fakir, er war schon einige Male begraben gewesen und hatte die Kräfte der Erde gesammelt, runzelte die Stirn, als ich meine Bitte aussprach. Er haßte die Frauen, sie zu vertilgen, war eines seiner frommen Werke. (*Theben* 69)

This presentation of the superior male/inferior female model is more critical in tone than that found in *Das Peter Hille-Buch*. Tino is beholden to the group of priests, but she now describes her deference to them satirically. The priests are "gütig" and avuncular, while the fakir is portrayed as an outright misogynist. He possesses supernatural religious powers which he uses to kill the women of the city by causing them to bleed to death. Meike Feßmann offers insight into the menstrual symbolism in this story (182-183) which can be directly related to the notion of female impurity and the historic, halakhic isolation of women in Jewish religious practice during this monthly period (Plaskow, *Sinai* 174-175). Lasker-Schüler plays on the impurity myth, placing the cause of the "Seuche" on the fakir. One touch of his "fleischlose Hand" causes one fourth of "der blühendsten Frauen der Stadt" to suffer and bleed for forty days. (*Theben* 69)

The text satirically refers to this "grausiger Heilige" and his program to annihilate the women as his "fromme Werke" (69-70). Yet Tino, the girl observer and narrator who is accepted into the circle of priests at the beginning

of the story, is spared by the fakir because he covets her opalescent ring. Her specialness places her outside the nameless, faceless group of suffering women and into a position of power in relation to the dominant and destructive male figure of the fakir. At end of the story, when Tino denies him her ring, the fakir's bony hand withers, and he loses all power.

In *Der Fakir*, Lasker-Schüler is exploring feminine autonomy in the face of threat. The fantastic, fairy-tale nature of the story highlights the unequal relational constellation of superior male/inferior female and makes it into a parable of sorts. The sexual symbolism of Tino's ring, the women's bleeding, and the fakir's aggression are all framed within a narrative world of priests and men such as the fakir who possess mysteriously destructive spiritual powers. When Tino denies him her ring, she metaphorically denies him her body and her own destruction. In doing so, she thwarts destructive male projection onto the female and exposes this holy man whose status is sustained only through abuse of the feminine Other.

In *Der Khedive*, Tino isn't threatened as ominously, but her very existence is still dependent upon the power of the male rulers who surround her. In this case, she is favored by another ruler, the khedive, as he proclaims her "zu seinem Gemahl über alle Frauen seiner Liebe und seines Palastes" (*Theben* 72). The passage continues:

> Und immer, wenn er sie fragte über ihrer Lippen süßes Gemurmel, verbarg sie ihr Angesicht in den Spitzenkelch des Schleiers. Und ihre Glieder glühten von den rauschenden Farben ihrer

> Gedanken. Ein Feuerberg war sie, der an seinem Feuer verdorrt, eine bunte Quelle, die nicht von ihrem Schäumen erzählen darf und in ihrem eigenen Gesprudel ertrinkt. (72)

Marriage to the khedive means the squelching of feminine expression. Tino's mumbling and stammering are actually songs and stories which she cannot express within the androcentric order in which she lives. At the end of the story, she dies. Her father stages her death as a means of punishing the khedive for insulting him. In essence, Tino becomes the victim of a patriarchal world at odds with itself, unable to settle its inherent conflicts without using women as intermediaries. Tino's songs and stories are never truly heard until after her death, when the priests proclaim their praise of her: "Von den Gipfeln der Pyramiden sprechen Priester zu allen Rosenmonaten ihre [Tinos] Märchen, und es ist bald niemand mehr im Lande, der sie nicht kennt" (73).

In the stories of *Nächte*, Lasker-Schüler experiments with silence and the repressive containment of feminine emotion, art and spirituality. In *Der Großmogul von Philippopel*, Lasker-Schüler investigates the phenomenon of woman's spiritual silence by switching traditional gender roles in her characters. However, the outcome does not lead to empowerment for Tino. Instead, the princess is banished from her city and, at the end of the story, becomes a poor shepherd bearing male attributes. The sequence of events leading up to this end are an uncovering of the feminine Other, as the author defines it over against the privileged male perspective. More than anything, *Der Großmogul von Philippopel* demonstrates how difficult and complex, perhaps

even impossible, emancipation of the feminine Other is:

> Der Großmogul von Philippopel sitzt im Garten des Reichspalastes in der Sultanstadt; kommt ein fremdes Insekt von Abend her und sticht ihn auf die Spitze seiner Zunge. Er hat nämlich die Angewohnheit, sie beim Nachdenken auf der Unterlippe ruhen zu lassen. Und trotzdem die Ärzte dem Unfall keine weitere Bedeutung beilegen, geschieht es dennoch, daß der erhabene Herr sich einbildet, nicht mehr reden zu können. Und auf andere Weise sich verständlich zu machen, lehnt er mit Finsternis ab; das ist ein unabsehbarer Schaden für das Land. Züge von kasteienden Priestern ziehen durch die Straßen Konstantinopels, und auf den Knieen vor Allah liegt der Sultan. Seine beiden Söhne ruft er zu sich in sein Privatgemach: "Buben, ihr müßt ein Handwerk erlernen!" (*Theben* 75-76)

Lasker-Schüler's narrative is mocking in tone. It is also seriously at work uncovering the fallacies of patriarchy. In this brief passage, she exposes male dominance of politics and religion. The narrative strategy of silencing the ruling mogul at the onset of the story inverts the traditional male-female relation by denying him a speaking voice. The author also "feminizes" the mogul by making his inability to break his own silence a mystery to himself. The sting of the fly, it turns out, isn't the true source of his muteness. Instead, it comes inexplicably from within him. Despite what the doctors say, he convinces himself that he can no longer speak. I find this mysterious silence traditionally

feminine in nature because a built-in repression accompanies it. By transferring silence to the male ruler, Lasker-Schüler frees herself to explore more deeply the causes and complexities of this phenomenon.

Tino is a poet. Unlike the mogul, she speaks. Her aunt is Diwagatme, who, incidentally, is the only woman character of *Nächte* other than Tino who possesses subjectivity. Diwagatme manifests identity because her husband is dead. She "ist eine der dreißig Frauen meines reichen Oheims gewesen," says Tino, "er aber und ihre Nebenfrauen sind an ihrer Klugheit gestorben" (*Theben* 76). Tino and Diwagatme are strong women, aware of their repressed existence within the order of men, and yet they are endowed with identity because they attempt to assert themselves within this dominant order.

Diwagatme encourages Tino to compose verses that will heal the mogul, so that he may regain his speech and continue to rule the country which is now in shambles. Following her aunt's advice, Tino sneaks into the palace past the priests and wise men who are guarding the mogul's rooms. When she finds the mogul, she offers him her poems and, in doing so, is able to recover his speech. But the recovery is only partial. The rub is that the mogul can now speak only to Tino. She becomes his favorite at court, lives in his company at all times, and is treated royally. However, her life is slave-like and mundane, for she must repeat her verses to him all the day long: "ich bin schon ganz müde vom Wiederholen meines erdichteten wundertätigen Trostes" (*Theben* 77). As in other stories of *Nächte*, when Tino expresses herself, the male order attempts to harness her powers and use them for its own end of sustaining patriarchy. In

the company of the mogul, she is privy to the male culture of politics, religion and economics, but she must act as the ruler's sole medium to the rest of the city.

One day, Tino is also stung by the fly and becomes silent with the mogul. However, it is unclear whether her speech is partially or entirely gone, for she continues to communicate with the sultan and other ministers of the city. I view Tino's silence as a silence that exists *in spite of* speech, for any word she utters is entirely at the service of the male order and therefore not her own. By the end of the story, she grows weary of her function as a cog in the machine of male politics, and she breaks her silence: "Ich habe dem Großmogul von Philippopel gesagt, daß ich wieder reden könnte" (79). The consequences are grave:

> Leise schleicht die Kunde durch die Sternenstadt: Der Großmogul von Philippopel sei tobsüchtig geworden. Man reißt mir das Gewand vom Körper, den Schleier vom Antlitz, schneidet meine langen Locken ab, und der Sultan hat den Zorn über mich gesprochen—und vertrieben werde ich . . . Eseltreiber bin ich geworden, meinen geschorenen Kopf bedeckt ein alter Fez, ich fand ihn im Sand am Ufer. Und abends liegen wir unter dem großen Mondhaupt, mein Esel und ich, und ich deute mein Geschick, die eingeschnittenen Bilder seiner haarigen Haut! (80)

Tino's exile marks a spiritual transformation. She is now alone in a desert-like landscape. Her head is shorn like that of a monk, and she lives in rags as a religious ascetic would. Isolation and ostracization are Tino's fate for breaking

the silence, for crossing the line of beholdenness. Ironically, in her spiritual exile, she becomes boylike, assuming male attributes. Much like the author's anecdote, *Von Papa*, rejection by the superior male leads the inferior female to the assumption of maleness.

In addition to the problem of naming discussed earlier and the problem of women's silence, Lasker-Schüler also explores imagery and women's spiritual suppression within patriarchy. In *Der Sohn der Lilame*, Tino tells a story about Mehmed, the son of the *Großwesir* of Constantinople. Mehmed is the laughing stock of the city because he has unusual blue hair. However, those who laugh at him in public take their lives into their hands, for as the *Großwesir's* son, he has the power to have them executed. Tino is Mehmed's cousin. She tells of her attempts to redirect his aggression by revealing to him that his blue hair is a precious symbol of his spirituality:

> weil er sie [seine Locken] so liebte, begann er seine außergewöhnlichen Haare mit flüssigem Kalk zu weißen. Und als ich ihn eines Abends also tun sah, trat ich in den Garten zu ihm, er saß am Rand des Spiegelsees, und sein Haupt war wie ein Stückchen Himmel, das in das kleine Wasser gefallen war. "Was beginnt Mehmed, mein lieber Vetter?" Und ich wehrte ihn, sein Vorhaben weiter auszuführen, denn ich empfand Allahs Willen im Leuchten seiner hellblauen Haare. "Mehmed, du bist ein Weiser und bist ein Narr, da du es nicht weißt . . . Ich zeigte in den See. "Deine Stirne ist mit Gold beschrieben, wie sollten die

> Unwissenden ihre Sprache deuten können, und deine Augen blicken in eine andere Welt." (*Theben* 83)

Tino's words put a stop to Mehmed's aggression. He no longer hides his blue hair as he did before and lets it grow long, but now his vanity is aroused.

> und eines Abends am Spiegelsee offenbarte er [Mehmed] mir [Tino], ihn beseele die tiefe Erkenntnis, er sei tatsächlich ein Weiser und größer als alle seine Nebenmenschen, als Mond und Sterne. Und er könnte seine unumstößliche Erleuchtung nur damit begründen, daß er ein Zwilling Allahs sei. (86)

Mehmed's understanding of the divine is based upon what Judith Plaskow calls "hierarchical separations," or "the suspicion and ranking of difference" (*Sinai* 96). When he perceives his own spiritual significance through Tino's loving help, he immediately feels himself superior to his *Nebenmenschen*. In fact, he believes himself to be God's twin. Tino's view of the divine is not based upon such patriarchal religious assumptions. Her symbolization of god is not in male terms. For her, the color of Mehmed's hair is a metaphor of transcendence, a genderless modifier that points beyond his maleness. She sees God *in* Mehmed, perceiving his spiritual individuality *in* his blue hair. Unlike the transference found in *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, where Tino adores Petrus like a God, here the author presents a more complex relationship that exposes the hierarchical self-interest of the male in the construction of religious identity. Tino's remarks to her cousin do not cause him to see his own spirituality, but only bring out in him the patriarchal fantasy of a male god. In this way,

Lasker-Schüler is subverting traditional (patriarchal) readings of Creation in Genesis: "God created man in *His* image" (Gen. 1:26-27, italics mine). She is criticizing the biblical tradition of framing God as male as vanity, perhaps idolatry, as Mehmed, enamored with his own reflection in the water, believes himself to be Allah's twin.

Lasker-Schüler's earliest prose significantly sets the course for her later spiritual writings. Though I agree with Sigrid Bauschinger that the author makes very few direct references to Judaism in her early stories (*Ich bin Jude* 86), I do not believe the early prose is devoid of religious and spiritual discourse. As I have shown here, Lasker-Schüler is seriously at work addressing the fundamental hierarchical structure of the patriarchal religious paradigm. She is preoccupied with the phenomenon of the beholden female disciple, of woman's deferment to the male gendered God. Her use of euphemism in *Das Peter Hille Buch* uncovers key issues of woman and the male God, not to mention the conflict of framing one's belief in a theological system that is engineered to silence feminine expression. Additionally, though Judaism dismisses idolatry as a fundamental aspect of its theology, it is difficult to get past the fact that in speaking of God, the religion has traditionally based its expression of the metaphysical on male imagery and language (Plaskow, *Jewish Theology* 76). The Torah and other foundations of Jewish belief—monotheism, Jewish law, and midrashic practice—have been pursued and shaped exclusively by men and sustained by them as a doctrine that

systematically excludes women.[13] This discursive undercurrent, even if it is not dealt with in immediately religious and Jewish terms in the early prose, is ever present in all of Lasker-Schüler's writings.

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[13]For sources that delineate general feminist concerns in Jewish theology, see Plaskow, *Sinai* 1-24 and Heschel 268-279.

I will be there howsoever I will be there.
(Exod. 3:14)

Chapter 3

God Wrestling/Gender Wrestling

In Chapter 2, I discussed the gender dyad of the superior male imbued with divinity and the beholden female disciple that is often found in Lasker-Schüler's early narrations. In some of these stories, traces of a shift in gender representation beyond the hierarchical, heterosexual dyad begin to occur, leading to the author's subsequent prose where gender takes on ever more flexible variability in the construction of identity.

Written before, during, and shortly following World War I, the prose I discuss here, spanning from 1906 to 1919, is an experiment in gender beyond the normative heterosexual model of the time. It is necessary to contextualize this development within the events of Lasker-Schüler's life, such as World War I and her two marriages, not to mention the aftermath of two divorces. Her first marriage to physician Berthold Lasker (from 1894 to 1900) brought Else Lasker-Schüler to Berlin. Her life with him was basically a continuation of the bourgeois home life she had had growing up as a child in Elberfeld. There are obscure indications by the author in her writings that she felt oppressed and unhappy living with Lasker.[1]

Around the turn of the century, however, Lasker-Schüler began to depart

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[1]See Bauschinger, *Ich bin Jude* 90-91, as well as Liska's article on the author's autobiographical fictions in *Nächte*.

from the bourgeois mold. She set up her own atelier in 1896, studied painting, and began publishing her first poems. The most significant aspects of her departure from bourgeois life were her friendship with Peter Hille and the birth of her illegitimate son, Paul, in 1899, the father of whom remains unknown to this day. The divorce from Lasker immediately followed Paul's birth in 1900.

Hille and Lasker-Schüler experienced their high years as friends participating in the cultural circle *Die Neue Gemeinschaft,* attending and performing in the cabaret, and gallivanting in the city. During the years with Hille, she met her second husband, Herwarth Walden. Lasker-Schüler's married life with Walden from 1903 to 1912 was a collaboration of sorts. She contributed regularly to the expressionist magazine, *Der Sturm*, which was founded and edited by Walden. In 1909 the marriage began to fade and was officially annulled in 1912. The author documents their separation in a series of letters which first appeared in *Der Sturm* and then came out later in book form as *Mein Herz* (1920).

In the aftermath of nearly two decades of married life and in the context of the first World War, Lasker-Schüler wrote *Der Prinz von Theben* (1914) and *Der Malik* (1919). Her entry into "middle age" and her solitary existence without a male partner in life led to radically new forms of gender experimentation in her writing which I call "gender wrestling." Multidimensional characters possessing a spectrum of gender possibility appear in the prose of this time, particularly the important self-stylization of Jussuf Abigail. Meike Feßmann finds that Lasker-Schüler's separation from Herwarth Walden had a great deal to do with the

development of Jussuf Abigail:

> Das Scheitern der Ehe mit Herwarth Walden bedeutete nicht allein den Verlust des Liebes- und Lebenspartners, sondern auch den Verlust des künstlerischen Rückhalts. Und dies betraf nicht nur die Person Waldens, sondern auch den *Sturm*-Kreis und die von ihm herausgegebene Zeitschrift. Obwohl ihre Dichtung nicht der von ihm vertretenen Richtung zuzurechnen ist, vermittelte er doch ein Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit. Daß dies gleichzeitig mit der Trennung von Walden verlorenging, verschärfte ihre Lage und wird zur spezifisichen Ausformung der Jussuf-Figur beigetragen haben. (205-206)

I view this period as a rite of passage for the author, a necessary grappling with gender before she moves into the later spiritual prose (found in *Konzert* [1932], *Das Hebräerland* [1937] and the *Nachlaß*) which is characterized by a more solitary, contemplative narrative voice devoid of gender embellishment. Sigrid Bauschinger sees this development in similar terms and also frames it within the author's spiritual development: "Aus diesem orientalischen Reservoir [of the early prose] von Figuren, Bildern und Motiven löst sich allmählich immer deutlicher ein Komplex heraus, der nach Werner Kraft . . . eine 'durch und durch jüdische Substanz' vorweist."[2] As I mentioned in the previous chapter, although it is true that specifically Jewish issues are not overtly raised in the

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[2]See Bauschinger, *Ich bin Jude* 86. In the quote above, Bauschinger cites Kraft, *Nachwort* 151.

early prose, an underlying struggle with key principles of Judaism, particularly the male God and androcentric religious culture, are detectable in these narrations. The years of World War I are a period of gender struggle for Lasker-Schüler as she attempts to locate herself as a woman writer within German and German-Jewish culture. She does so by experimenting with gender roles, biblical legend, and her own personal relationships with male friends and lovers.

In his book, *A Proliferation of Prophets*, Michael Hamburger offers an important view of the German literary environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Based on Hamburger's reading of primarily male authors[3], one can conclude that Lasker-Schüler was surrounded and highly influenced by a kind of cultural prophet syndrome. Hamburger describes the type of writer-prophet he finds in Germany at this time:

> more often than not these German writers assumed prophetic or priest-like functions. . . . In an age of cultural pluralism . . . [they] claimed or assumed that their work was of exemplary importance as a source of spiritual or moral leadership. The claim or assumption goes back to a time when secular literature and philosophy took over functions that had previously been the prerogative of the clergy—to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and to Weimar

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[3]These include Nietzsche, Rilke, Trakl, George, Mann, Benn, Hofmannsthal, Kraus, Walser, Musil, and Kafka among others.

classicism. (2-3)

Lasker-Schüler had close relations with some of the men Hamburger studies in his book, particularly Trakl, Benn and Kraus, and Peter Hille could easily be added to Hamburger's list of writer-prophets. The question arises as to whether one should group Lasker-Schüler among these men. Her self-stylization as Jussuf Abigail—an adaptation of the biblical prophet, Joseph of Egypt, combined more subliminally with a rendition of the matriarch Abigail—in *Der Prinz von Theben* and *Der Malik* points in this direction. Additionally, the author herself made constant claims to the poet's gift of prophecy.

Hamburger mentions Lasker-Schüler in his book from time to time, but only as an incidental figure, and gender considerations play no role in his investigation.[4] He finds the tradition of writer as self-styled prophet peculiarly German, arguing that it is a product of cultural values that favor "private virtues" over "public virtues" (2), a socially accepted "cult of inwardness" that is typical of the German writer-prophets (3).

This cult of inwardness and isolation Hamburger describes is readily found in Lasker-Schüler's writing. The self-referential, spiritual worlds she constructs are reminiscent of poets like Rilke in their highly refined, "intense inner life" (Hamburger 3). On the other hand, Hermann Korte views Else Lasker-Schüler as a kind of "zeitgenössische Kontrafaktur" to the male literary norm, particularly in relation to the expressionists, many of whom were her

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[4]See Hamburger 52, 56, 130-32, 167, 185, and 283.

friends (31). This makes it necessary to investigate more closely her relationship to these male models. Additionally, the picture is further complicated by religion. As a woman *and* a Jew, Lasker-Schüler does not easily fit the mold that Hamburger presents us with. Given her double Otherness, she manifests some elements of the dominant writer-prophet model, but is also well outside it.

Like her male peers, Lasker-Schüler's self understanding as writer-prophet is deeply embedded in literary modernism, and expressionism in particular. Jürgen Egyptien writes:

> Wenn es einen Typus gibt, der den Grundgestus des Expressionismus verkörpert, so ist es der von messianischem Sendungsbewußtsein erfüllte Prediger. Auch Lasker-Schülers Werk, und insbesondere die Prosa, ist nicht frei von Erlösungstaumel, Pathos und Verzückung, prophetischer Übersteigerung und einem willkürlichen, alle Menschheitsmythen vereinenden Synkretismus, dessen universaler Anspruch, die gottferne, entfremdete Welt der Moderne zu heilen, wenigstens in dieser ästhetischen Gestalt nicht mehr aufrechtzuerhalten ist. (40)

Egyptien places Lasker-Schüler in the context of male expressionist writers, identifying in her works some common elements. Leon Yudkin also sees some similarities between Lasker-Schüler and her male peers:

> She did not have the immediate literary involvement in the events of her time that found direct expression in the books of her

> contemporaries. But this is the nature of her own brand of borderline expressionist ecstaticism. This is related to the Jewish experience, but it is related to it tangentially. It seeks the form, not of twentieth century Jewry in Berlin, but of the Biblical hero, facing man (and woman) through the agency of a God, understood quite personally. (84)

Both Yudkin's and Egyptien's analyses of Lasker-Schüler do not involve gender inquiry. Egyptien's focus is stylistic for the most part, while Yudkin unwittingly delineates the gender line. He points out the author's "personal" understanding of God as something that sets Lasker-Schüler apart from her (male) contemporaries and makes her writings less directly expressive of events of her time, and, in his mind, less expressive of Jewry. However, as theologian Judith Plaskow points out, "the emotionality and intimacy of women's piety and its relation to ordinary life" are what most characterize Jewish women's spirituality historically (*Jewish Theology* 71).

Approaching Lasker-Schüler from a theological angle, Anya Mali associates what she views as the author's personal mystical orientation both with expressionism (163) and with the budding Jewish theologies of the early twentieth century, such as those articulated by Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. Though she does not include gender issues in her study, Mali situates Lasker-Schüler more carefully within the theological influences of her time:

> Das Menschheitsethos und die brüderliche Liebe, die viele Expressionisten postulierten, lassen sich mit dem Du-Konzept,

> das als zentrale Lehre der menschlichen Haltung im Personalismus und in der dialektischen Theologie hervortrat, vergleichen. Der religiöse Bezug des Expressionismus und die dialogische Begrifflichkeit der Theologie um die Jahrhundertwende zeugen von einem moralischen Streben, das für die Zeit charakteristisch war, und das bei Else Lasker-Schüler eine mystische Ausrichtung bekam. (163)

If Lasker-Schüler is, on the one hand, unlike her male contemporaries because of the personalism of her writing, yet on the other hand like them because of the personalism of her theological expression, where does one accurately place her? Lothar Kahn, in his study of modern Jewish writers, compares the marginality of the woman writer to that of the Jewish male writer:

> Throughout the nineteenth century, male Jewish writers and female Christian authors knew that they were bound together by the bond of oppressed status. George Eliot wrote about the problems of Jews in *Daniel Deronda*. Though George Sand wrote only rarely about Jews, she wrote frequently about other oppressed groups—to wit, workers and peasants. Like Jews, women writers—whatever their origin—could not always write naturally or spontaneously any more than Jews could. While Jews worried about being too Jewish and not German enough, women were fearful of appearing aggressive, unfeminine, and male. Women writers realized . . . [their] status involved a degree of role

playing and assumed hypocrisies. (143)

The "role playing" and "assumed hypocrisies" Kahn speaks of are a key to the problem of locating Lasker-Schüler within the "personalisms" described above. The years before, during, and just after World War I are a time of extreme gender preoccupation for the author, as her literary characters undergo frequent gender switching, gender disguise and costume. Similarly, there are moments of religious obscuring in the prose of this period. For example, Tino, who is initially Muslim in the early stories, gradually develops into a Jewish character in *Der Prinz von Theben*, until the eventual emergence of Jussuf Abigail. The name Jussuf Abigail itself is fraught with multiple reference to religion and gender. Not only is he a hybrid consisting of a male prophet and a matriarch of the Torah, but, additionally, "Jussuf" is the Arabic rendition of the Hebrew form of the name Joseph. These literary moments of obscured gender and religion in the author's texts often lead to spiritually self-constitutional events for the characters.

This is why I call this period a time of "gender wrestling." In doing so, I am adapting the Jewish principle of "God wrestling" to include woman's struggle within patriarchal religious ontology. God wrestling is a Jewish ideal which finds its source in the biblical story of Jacob who wrestled with his brother Esau in his mother's womb in a struggle to become the first born (Gen. 32:28-29). Later in life, Jacob wrestles again, with an angel sent by God. The angel is disguised as a man. Although he is wounded in the skirmish, Jacob succeeds in subduing the angel and forces him to give a blessing. The result is

traditionally perceived by Jews as a moral and spiritual transformation in Jacob, as he is given a new name from God. The new name is "Israel" or Hebrew for "God wrestler." This notion of wrestling, negotiating, or arguing with God has become a rhetorical cornerstone of post-biblical Jewish literature in the form of law and midrash. (Telushkin 39-40)

In *Standing Again at Sinai*, Judith Plaskow articulates a feminist understanding of God wrestling, particularly as it relates to the Torah:

> I understand Torah, both in the narrow sense of the five books of Moses and in the broader sense of Jewish teaching, to be the partial record of the "Godwrestling" of part of the Jewish people. Again and again in the course of its existence, the Jewish people has felt itself called by and accountable to a power not of its own making, a power that seemed to direct its destiny and give meaning to its life. In both ordinary and extraordinary moments, it has found itself guided by a reality that both propelled and sustained it . . .
>
> The term "Godwrestling" seems appropriate to me to describe the written residue of these experiences, for I do not imagine them à la Cecil B. deMille as the boomings of a clear (male) voice or the flashing of tongues of flame, publicly visible, publicly verifiable, needing only to be transcribed. I imagine them as moments of profound experience; sometimes of illumination but also of mystery, moments when some who had eyes to see understood

> the meaning of events that all had undergone. Such moments might be hard-won, or sudden experiences of clarity or presence that come unexpected as precious gifts. But they would need to be interpreted and applied, wrestled with and puzzled over, passed down and lived out before they came to us as the Torah of God. (32-33)

This is where Lasker-Schüler's self-stylization as writer-prophet comes into play. As a kind of spiritual avant-gardist, her literary production is an *amplification* of Torah in the sense that Plaskow describes. It is a means of expanding religious experience to include a woman's perspective. Plaskow's presentation of "Godwrestling" is couched in the experience of revelation and the struggle to live out and articulate what has been learned. Abraham, Moses, David, Jacob, Joseph, as the fathers of Israel, as the leaders and preservers of a people, undergo moral skirmishes with themselves and God. The outcome is a honing of religious experience and a deeper articulation of Jewish experience. Lasker-Schüler felt her religious experience to be of similar make. One issue that complicated her experience, however, was the androcentric religion of which she was supposed to be a believing member.[5]

My feminist reading of God wrestling, then, particularly in regard to Lasker-Schüler, is best termed "gender wrestling." The author is not only

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[5]J. Cheryl Exum's study of androcentric religious culture in the stories of the patriarchs and prophets of the Torah sheds much light on Lasker-Schüler's situation. See Exum 13.

struggling with the deity in her narrations, but, just as importantly, with a deity imbued with maleness and within a religious epistemological tradition of God wrestling reserved primarily for males. Her strategies in the wrestling are those mentioned earlier: gender switching, gender costume, and gender obscuring. She makes use of these "gender maneuvers" as a means of investigating the powers that be (God, male discourse) and her relation to them. For her, displacing fixed and normative gender designations leads to revelation, new visions, and new texts. Meike Feßmann describes this maneuvering as an attempt to loosen opposition in the male-female dualism:

> Dennoch besetzt Else Lasker-Schüler nicht einfach das Weibliche positiv und das Männliche negativ. Worauf es in allen Erzählungen ankommt, ist das Spiel mit dem Geschlechtsunterschied. Dabei geht es nicht allein um die erotische Aufladung der Erzählungen, sondern . . . um das Spiel mit Doppeldeutigkeiten, das der Schreibweise Else Lasker-Schülers ihre rhetorische Biegsamkeit verleiht; Ordnungen, die aufgebaut werden und den Erzählverlauf wesentlich bestimmen, werden immer zugleich auch zersetzt. Die Unterminierung des starren Oppositionspaares männlich/weiblich verzichtet nicht auf den Reiz des Unterschieds, weder in der Privilegierung eines Geschlechts noch in der Neutralisierung des Unterschieds beider Geschlechter durch Androgynität. (179-180)

In her early prose, *Das Peter Hille Buch* (1906) and *Die Nächte Tino von*

Bagdads (1907), the beginnings of such gender displacement are present. Tino's occasional longing to be a boy (which I discussed in Chapter 2) or her involvement in relational triangles as a medium between men are two examples. These gender maneuvers begin to occur at a high frequency in Lasker-Schüler's subsequent prose, causing perspective shifts not only in the narrator, but in the other characters involved. At times she constructs figures who evoke a *range* of gender possibility beyond the constraints of a normative, heterosexual dyad.

In a number of instances in *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, for example, Tino and Petrus are involved in a relational triad with Petrus' other disciples. This group of *Jünglinge* is often presented as one entity. They are all male and styled on artists and writers the author knew at the time of her friendship with Hille. Because of her singularity as the token female in a male society, Tino finds herself privy to the fraternity of men[6]:

> Auf den Bergen konnten wir nicht mehr sein und auch nicht auf den Wiesen, und die Bäume der Wälder glichen mächtigen Eissäulen. Und wir froren und waren ohne Obdach. Und die Jünglinge hatten sich entzweit mit ihren Angehörigen . . . Aber eines Tages kam Bugdahan, der Häuptling; er hatte eine Höhle entdeckt, nahe seinem Zelte. Und wir machten uns auf . . . Und es

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[6]I must point out that there are female characters in the book, but they are not presented as disciples of Hille. They play peripheral (though not insignificant) roles. Tino, on the other hand, is not only a disciple, but Petrus' favorite. This religious status gains her entry into the men's society.

> gesellten sich noch viele von den anderen Jünglingen zu uns, die obdachlos waren und die von unserer Unterkunft wußten. Und wir zimmerten für Petrus einen Sessel aus weißem Birkenholz und polsterten ihn mit Farren und Moos. Und in der Frühe losten wir untereinander, wer tagsüber auf Raub ausgehen werde. Und wir brachten süße Sahne und Weizenbrot heim, die wir vor den Türen reicher Häuser fanden, plünderten große Kaufläden, und Grimmer raubte für Petrus einen Pelz, der wog einen Zentner schwer. Und die Abende wurden gefeiert; wir sassen um kleine Feuer, rauchten aus Pfeifen und tranken von den eroberten Weinen, und Petrus lehrte uns Zigeunerlieder. (*Theben* 22-23)

This passage describes the fraternizing nature of the group. They smoke cigars, drink wine, steal and forage for the basics of simple living in the "forest." The cave evokes familiar scenes found in Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*[7], an important point, for it reflects both the writer-prophet culture described earlier, not to mention the author's association with expressionist circles.

The expressionists looked toward Nietzsche's modern prophecy of the death of God and the ideal of the *Übermensch* as their literary inspiration. The author's relationship to her male peers is framed within this intellectual context. Hermann Korte writes about the "Bruderverse" which the early expressionists often wrote, poems that celebrate "den Männerbund verschworener

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[7]See Nietzsche and the chapters titled "Die Begrüßung" and "Das Abendmahl."

Kameraderien im Vorschein menschheits- und welterlösender Visionen" (28). In these poems, he sees the "maskuline Gebärde" of German expressionism as an "Allmachtsphantasie":

> Anders bei Lasker-Schüler fügen sich in einer Vielzahl vor allem spätexpressionistischer Gedichte Pathos, Verklärung und Stilisierung einer monumentalistischen Porträttechnik. Diese malt Vereinungsmythen aus und reicht in ihren Adaptionen männlicher Rituale zuweilen gar . . . bis zur Beschwörung geheimnisvoller Blutsverwandtschaft. (30)

As the singular woman writer surrounded by men, perhaps Korte's notion of *adaptation* is the best way to view Lasker-Schüler's writings—as adaptations of dominant male discourse. In his book, *Literary Life in German Expressionism and the Berlin Circles*, Roy Allen maps the various clusters of expressionist artists and writers who collaborated or formed groups during the first years of this century. Generally, a male is the central figure of each group (Herwarth Walden, Franz Pfemfert, Paul Cassirer to mention a few), and most members in the group are male as well. Allen devotes a chapter to each of these men, many of whom, interestingly enough, published works of Lasker-Schüler (*v-vi*). Looking at expressionism in this loosely demographic manner, it can be described as a number of male cultural societies, each possessing its own artistic, spiritual, and political purposes.

There are key scenes in *Das Peter Hille-Buch* that serve as cues to the nature of the author's discursive activity within these male societies. For

example, Tino's role in the gender triangle between Petrus and his disciples is, on the one hand, sexual, on the other hand fraternal. Because she is Petrus' favored disciple, she has access to the fraternity of men, or dominant discourse. However, her membership requires her to function as an erotic medium between them. In this way, she must perform different gender roles, wrestling with each discursive context.

> In *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick postulates an erotic triangle which is not an ahistorical, Platonic form, a deadly symmetry from which the historical accidents of gender, language, class, and power detract, but . . . a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment. (27)

As a part of her study, Sedgwick suggests new ways of thinking about triangles of desire, offering alternatives to the "deadly symmetry" articulated by Sigmund Freud in his Oedipal theory and later applied to the European novel by René Girard.[8] Because of its fundamental interest in maintaining patriarchy, this

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[8]Freud's Oedipal triangle, for example, is formulated so as to maintain the heterosexuality of the father over time, which in turn serves as a means of sustaining patriarchal dominance. The Oedipal theory is founded upon the father as the organizing element of gender constitution for males *and* females. This is most obvious in the androcentricity of his theory of penis envy. See Freud 673-675.

Eve Sedgwick uncovers the Freudian ideology present in René Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* in which Girard "sees the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being . . . more heavily determinant of actions and choices . . . than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and beloved. And

triangular model squelches empowering gender expression and experience.

In the following passage, Lasker-Schüler provides a sort of gender map of Tino's triangular relations with Petrus and his boys. I read it primarily in Sedgwickian terms, as the author's way of negotiating with her society (the male literary circles) for voice:

> Und auf einmal war ich ihm [Petrus] weit vorangegangen—er stand mitten auf der Wiese und dichtete. "Ich werde mich nie von ihm trennen," sagte ich ganz laut zum hellen Himmel, aber er hörte es gar nicht in seinem Lenzübermut. Doch die Jünglinge hatten es gehört; aus einem Versteck schallte ihr vierlauniges Lachen. Und sie hoben mich über den Dorn und banden mich mit Bastfäden. "Du mußt uns jetzt sagen, wen Petrus von uns am liebsten hat." Ich weigerte mich, da verbanden sie mir die Augen und greifen sollte ich den Liebling seines Herzens. Und ich konnte nur noch ein kleines Tröpfchen Morgenschein sehn und darunter Antinous, und ich ergriff ihn, und er klatschte in die großen, schlanken Hände und tanzte mit mir einen ungestümen Tanz. "O Du herzige Petrusbotin!" Und er küßte mich unzählige Male. Und dann setzten wir uns alle nebeneinander auf das

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within the male-centered novelistic tradition of European high culture, the triangles Girard traces are most often those in which two males are rivals for a female; it is the bond between males that he most assiduously uncovers." See Sedgwick 21.

Additionally, feminist biblical scholar, J. Cheryl Exum, has applied Sedgwick's theory to erotic triangles found in the Torah. See Exum 163-167.

> frische Grün, und sie drangen unbändig in mich, zu gestehen, wen ich von ihnen am liebsten hätte—und ich zeigte nach der Reihe auf jeden von ihnen. "Euer Leben spielt in Tönen vor mir hin, und ich liebe Euer Lied wie das hohe [sic] Lied, das alle tausend Jahre wieder aufklingt." Und die Jünglinge riefen: "Sie hat zuviel von den grünen Lüften getrunken,"—aber ich war tief bewegt, und um meine Rührung zu verbergen, sprach ich salbungsvoll wie ein Prediger. Und hinter dem Zaun stand Petrus und lachte und schwang seinen Riesenbleistift über unsere Köpfe! "Eine Quelle ist Eure Freundin, die nicht mündet, eine Quelle, die aufsteigt und Euch plötzlich überströmt." (*Theben* 27)

Here we find Tino expressing her usual adulation of Petrus, and the disciples are quick to respond to this tension within the triangle. Wanting to rectify loyalties and keep them in their proper place, the boys force Tino to reveal who the guru's favorite disciple is. The erotic interaction that ensues—the touching ("greifen"), the kissing, the tying up and blindfolding of Tino, the boys' symbolic "penetration" of Tino ("und sie drangen unbändig in mich")—takes place in lieu of direct contact between the guru and his boys. As Sedgwick might view it, the "homosocial" contact (1-5) is made, but only by means of the feminine medium, Tino. Though the erotic interaction is playful on the surface, a latent model of male domination, as well as Tino's collusion in her own binding, are present. In this way, the boys and Tino reenact the normative, heterosexual scene of dominant male/yielding female (similar to those discussed in Chapter 2).

Everything remains in its proper place: the boys' bonds of fraternity with the guru remain intact, while the threat of homosexuality is averted through Tino, the medium.

However, the moment this relational aspect of the triangle is uncovered, the moment Tino chooses Petrus' favorite disciple, the author quickly poses another relational perspective within the triad. This is a typical maneuver for Lasker-Schüler, and it explains the often misunderstood density and complexity of her prose. When now asked whom *she* loves best, Tino points to *each* of the disciples, invoking the *Song of Songs.* She turns to the spiritual in this moment to express, and perhaps momentarily resolve, the gender conflicts she experiences. In other words, overwhelmed by the prospect of relational determination and limitation (choosing only *one* boy and becoming his devoted girl) and thereby repeating the normative ideal of monogamy and feminine submission, she chooses *all* the boys.

Tino's reference to the *Song of Songs* expresses an eroticism and love removed from a compulsory notion of gender. In Jewish theology, the *Song of Songs* has been viewed in various allegorical terms throughout history. Althalya Brenner points out that "Judaism interpreted it [*Song of Songs*] as the story of the metaphorized, covenantal love between God (the male lover) and his people (the female lover)" (30). She adds:

> Such allegorical interpretations are secondary readings, in the sense that their symbolical values depart from the primary signification of the readerly-textual discourse. As ancient and

> continuous traditions of hermeneutics based on love lyrics testify, this secondary layer of interpretations is closely linked to the problem of sex and gender, their dichotomy and combination. (30)

Lasker-Schüler makes use of the *Song of Songs* in this particular narrative instance to free herself of conventional notions of marriage and sexuality. Intuitively, she turns to a most controversial Jewish religious text.[9] I say intuitively because, like her stories featuring characters of obscured gender, there is similar gender blurring in *The Song of Songs*:

> All the ordinary mooring points of identity are so tentatively established in this famous love poem—a dramatic dialogue with remarkably diffuse boundaries—that the reader is left feeling deeply uncertain as to exactly *who* is doing the talking, much less what sex the person is. (Merkin 240)

Tino's recourse to this religious text in a moment of gender confusion is both a subversive act and a form of self-protection. She admits in her narration that she pretends to speak like a preacher, so as to hide her vulnerability and fend off the boys. Her "unctuous" tone separates her from them, encircling her in a protective shell of religious posturing. The disciples are perplexed by this paradoxical response. She wants all of them, yet she pushes them away at the same time. In their confusion, they relegate her to Otherness: "Sie hat zuviel

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[9]See Daphne Merkin 240, who describes the *Song of Songs* as a "frisky colt of a text—canonical glitch or deliberate oversight, Jewish original or Persian derivative, holiest of holies or pure, unadulterated smut."

von den grünen Lüften getrunken." Their words reveal another aspect of Tino's discursive activity within the male society. The absolute metaphor of drinking the green air lyrically expresses Tino's outsider status in the eyes of the boys. The moment she assumes a religious posture, they are threatened by her spirituality.

Meanwhile, Petrus, standing behind a fence which separates Tino and the boys from him, catches wind of their exchange and shakes his giant pencil at them, which I read as the pen of literary production. Then he offers *his explanation of Tino to the boys.* The language he uses is orgasmic and biblical. Shaking the phallic pencil, he says, "Eine Quelle ist Eure Freundin, die nicht mündet, eine Quelle, die aufsteigt und Euch plötzlich überströmt." Tropes of male fear of feminine sexuality and creative power are repeated here. Tino is a "Quelle, die nicht mündet." Her spiritual and creative powers remain a "contained" mystery, yet when they surface, it is like a sudden flood that threatens to drown the male.

Tino's narratives are always situated in worlds of male rulers of high religious and political rank. In *Ached Bey*, a story from the *Nächte* collection, she is living with her uncle, the caliph of Baghdad. The setting is the ruler's palace. Tino describes her life there:

> Mein Oheim, der Kalif, grüßt mit seiner großen Hand. Indessen ich durch heimliche Gänge über verwitterte Steinböden schleiche an vergessenen Götzengebilden vorbei—ich möchte kämpfen mit ihren schaurigen Krallen, aber der Duft der schwarzen Naëmirose

> seines Daches schwelgt mir entgegen. Naëmi...es wissen alle am Hofe von der Jüdin seiner Jugend. Mein Oheim, der Kalif, hebt seine große Hand: die schwarzen Fächerträger und Sudanneger gehorchen, nur der greise unter den Palastdienern nähert sich demütig seinem Ohre (ich bin unverschleiert), aber mein Oheim, der Kalif, wehrt ihm mit seiner großen Hand. Wir rauchen aus samtumspannten Pfeifen Opium und trinken blaue Getränke aus Diamantkrügen, und ich beuge mich über die Hieroglyphen seiner großen Hand. (*Theben* 63-64)

In a familiar fraternizing scene, Tino spends the days with her uncle in his rooms, drinking and smoking pipes of opium. Though it is forbidden, she is also allowed to (or required to?) remove her veil in his presence. In this sense she is like a disciple of Petrus in *Das Peter Hille Buch*, favored by the patriarch and therefore included in male activities. Yet she lives in fear, creeping around the palace through hidden passageways filled with forgotten idols. Perhaps these idols refer to ancient goddess-worship, or at least to a multiplicity of gods, which has no place in the Muslim world Tino lives in.[10] Tino wants to do battle with these idols and engage discursively with the past, but her uncle's sexual

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[10]See Frymer-Kensky 32. She poses similar questions: "Were women better served by polytheism, which created a symbolic straightjacket of what a female and a male can be, and which nevertheless afforded women an undeniable and unremovable part of the sacred, or were women better served by monotheism, which does not *necessarily* limit the roles and characters of women, but which was clearly used for patriarchal purposes? Can the Bible be the inspiration for a truly liberated monotheism, free of patriarchy and all other forms of oppression?"

presence and violent power overwhelm this pursuit. He is a tyrant. The synechdochal device of his powerful hand is contrasted with Tino's constrained and fearful life in the palace.

In his youth, the Muslim uncle once loved a Jewish girl, Naëmi, but the affair failed mysteriously. This loss fires the uncle's religious hatred. The tyrant seeks revenge for lost love by ordering executions. Disguised as a boy, Tino attends the executions:

> Am andern Morgen müssen mir meine Sklavinnen Knabenkleider anlegen, und einen Dolch mit dem smaragdbesetzten Griff trage ich im Gürtel, und wir reiten auf grauen Tierriesen nach den Vorhöfen, dort werden die Verräter des Landes enthauptet.....Mein Oheim, der Kalif, ruht zwischen zwei Marmorsäulen auf einem Kissen, das ist rot wie ein Mal, und er hebt und senkt die große Hand blutstrafend in den Tod. Enthauptete Söhne edler Mohammedanergeschlechter lehnen an Ungläubige. (*Theben* 64)

The executed men are both Muslim traitors of Mohammed and "nonbelievers" (Jews). In this narrative instance, Lasker-Schüler performs an acrobatic shift of perspective: although she, as author, is a Jewish woman, she is writing here in the voice of a Muslim girl disguised as a boy. From this displaced perspective, Tino sees the Muslims and the Jews executed by the caliph as suffering the same injustice. She presents them as religious peers or brothers. This is where expressionist influences of *Bruderliebe* and religious unity are most

apparent. However, beyond such common expressionist tenets is Lasker-Schüler's particular perspective as female witness to male culture and patriarchal religious structures. After the execution, the headless bodies of the victims lean against one another in a morbidly erotic scene. Like the disciples in *Das Peter Hille-Buch*, this group of executed men serves as a third entity in a relational triad in which Tino functions as the medium of eroticism and violence between men. Perhaps it is homoeroticism expressed as violence because patriarchy does not allow for what Sedgwick calls a "continuum" in male social relations (1-5). This forces the emotional burden and pain of violence onto the female of the triad.

Suddenly, as she is wont to do, the author introduces a new figure into the story to further displace the existing triad. A mysterious Jew, referred to as "the young stranger," still awaits his execution:

> nur der Kopf des jungen Fremdlings sitzt noch trotzig im Nacken. Dreimal holten sie ihn und dreimal brachten sie ihn—die knurrenden Henker—zurück in die vergitterte Nacht. Die große Hand meines Oheims flattert in meinen Schoß, aber ich kann den sich aufbäumenden Hieroglyphen im Pochen seines Pulses nicht deuten. Er senkt endlich seine große Hand. Durch die Risse der Steintore tropft des Fremdlings Blut über die rauhen, breiten Steine der Höfe hinweg bis vor die Füße des Kalifen. Nie hörte ich einen ewigeren Fluß. Er singt, wie die Jehovapriester an ihren Feiertagen, wie der Mosegipfel des Sinai. (*Theben* 64)

As he doles out orders for murder with a wave of his hand marked by the inscrutable hieroglyph, the caliph is also committing sexual abuse. The moment he gives the sign for execution, Tino feels his hand flutter in her *Schoß*. In this unusual triad, the violence the stranger experiences becomes a real physical sensation for Tino as well. She is once again a medium, a witness to male violence and the surviving site of its memory. Applying Sedgwick's triangle, the lack of male continuum—the inability to relate homosocially without the oppressive use of the feminine medium—causes stresses on the female entity who serves here as the bearer of pain and destruction. The homosocial frustration, hatred and violence between men rather than *Bruderliebe* causes woman to suffer.

The passage cited above makes for dense reading because of the gender *and* religious obscuring of Tino. In the triangle with the stranger and the uncle, she is the location where taboos, such as incest and religious infidelity, are expressed. She is the medium, the middle. The uncle's hand invades her sexual center precisely in her moment of empathy with the Jewish stranger. Immediately following this passage, the caliph is found dead: "Mein Oheim, der Kalif, liegt im Palast tot auf seiner großen Hand" (*Theben* 64). Though not directly stated, the uncle's mysterious death could be Tino's deed. She is wearing a dagger; the uncle is found dead, lying on his own hand of violence. An important, rectifying transference occurs here in that Tino's act of murder (or desire to murder) is executed by the uncle against himself. The fantasy of the male oppressor murdering himself is logically placed on the phallic symbol of

the dagger. In this way, the dagger, also a synechdochal device like the uncle's hand, is disassociated from the male and rendered usable for Tino's liberation.

Lasker-Schüler's triads in *Das Peter Hille-Buch* and *Nächte* explore her position as woman writer in a literary culture dominated by male discourse. Tino is in the unusual position(s) of being an insider, a medium, and an outsider to the club of men. Either she assumes male qualities as "one of the guys," joining in their fraternizing, or she is an erotic medium between them ("O du herzige Petrusbotin!"), or her gender separates her experience from them altogether ("Sie hat zuviel von den grünen Lüften getrunken."). In this way, the triad usefully demonstrates the "role playing and assumed hypocrisies" that Lothar Kahn describes as typical of women writers and Jews of the time (143). In order to participate in a society dominated by male culture, Lasker-Schüler must wrestle with acting like a man, functioning as sexual medium between men, and being excluded for being a woman. This is precisely where Jussuf Abigail, Lasker-Schüler's famous self-stylization comes in, for this character will provide a different kind of discourse within the literary and spiritual men's club. Lasker-Schüler's process of arriving at Jussuf Abigail, however, is complex. His gradual development from the early prose until his culmination in *Der Malik* is most traceable when viewed as "God wrestling" and "gender wrestling."

Feßmann dates the transition from Tino to Jussuf Abigail at roughly 1910, a development characterized by what she sees as an "Aufforderung zum Mitspielen" (146):

> Die "Vermännlichung" zu Jussuf bedeutete keineswegs den

> Verzicht auf das eigene, weibliche Geschlecht, ebensowenig auf Erotik und Liebe, sondern sie definierte nur die Art der Liebe neu: als eine kämpferische, herrschaftliche Liebe, die mit dem Geschlechtsunterschied spielt, aber die konventionellen Geschlechterrollen zurückweist. (200)

Feßmann's view is similar to mine, with the exception that I refer not simply to "Jussuf," but to "Jussuf Abigail." The reason for this is that in most Lasker-Schüler scholarship, little heed is paid to the fact that the author referred to this character variously as "Jussuf," "Abigail," "Jussuf Abigail," and "Abigail Jussuf."[11] Perhaps as a matter of convenience, the blanket name "Jussuf" has been favored in scholarship for many years. However, the variability of the name itself underscores the gender ambiguity of Jussuf Abigail which, as I shall argue, makes him into an ideal spiritual figure.[12]

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[11]Sigrid Bauschinger does refer to this character more selectively than most scholars, and she also takes a little more time to analyze the biblical figure Abigail. See Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 117 and 179.

Sonja Hedgepeth points out that the name "Abigail," "weist auf die Verbinding zum patriarchalischen System hin, da dieser Name, der eigentlich ein Frauenname ist, auf Ivrit soviel wie 'Freude meines Vaters' heißt." See Hedgepeth, *Überall* 133.

Although Jennifer Redmann offers an important discussion of the author's "propensity for multiple names," her commentary, devoted primarily to an analysis of Lasker-Schüler's particular form of autobiography, only addresses the biblical Joseph and omits any mention of Abigail. See Redmann 63-65.

[12]I must point out that I refer to Jussuf Abigail here using masculine pronouns because Lasker-Schüler did so herself. I read this as the author's way of demonstrating how multiple expression of gender is subsumed by the masculine.

The name "Abigail" is extremely significant. In the Torah, Abigail is involved in a triad with two men, Nabal and David (1 Sam. 25:3). She is the wife of Nabal. Perceiving the threat of war between her husband and David, whose request for provisions was refused by Nabal, Abigail saves both men from destruction by secretly providing food for David and his troops. When Abigail informs her husband of her deed and how close he was to death at the hands of David, Nabal is paralyzed with fear and dies. David then marries Abigail.

Frymer-Kensky describes the biblical Abigail as a "determined woman. . . influential far beyond the formal confines of patriarchy" (23). She adds that

> Abigail is both wealthy and noted for her bold initiative . . . Realizing that David must be angry at her husband because of his refusal to pay David, Abigail acts immediately. She deduces correctly that David might attack her household and quickly intercepts him while bearing him gifts. Her insight saves both Nabal and David from catastrophe, her brilliant rhetoric convinces David not to kill every male in Nabal's house, and David blesses her and God, who sent her to him. (22-23)

As I mentioned above, though much of Lasker-Schüler criticism largely ignores the name Abigail when discussing the character Jussuf Abigail (often focussing entirely on "Jussuf" and the author's adaptation of the story of Joseph of Egypt), Lasker-Schüler did identify deeply with Abigail. Her literary adaptation of this biblical woman, however, plays a more subliminal role in the text than that of

Joseph. The sublimation is indicative of ontological issues regarding feminine spirituality within the dominant androcentric religious paradigm. While reading Lasker-Schüler's texts, the biblical legend of Abigail is far less present in the mind of the reader than that of Joseph. This mirrors the androcentrism of the Torah itself.

Lasker-Schüler's struggles during the writing of *Der Prinz von Theben* and *Der Malik* involve a profound, internal assessment of sexuality and spirituality both in her literature and in her public persona. During this time, she engages in "spiritual drag,"[13] cross dressing as Jussuf Abigail. In my view, it is a special form of cross dressing, for Lasker-Schüler is not attempting to *appear* male.[14] Instead, she is dressing so as to evoke a multiplicity of gender.[15] It is during these years that she begins wearing exotic costumes of satin pants and tunics, not to mention the symbolic dagger. She cuts her hair in the dutch-boy style and has visiting cards printed that bear her new name, *Prinz von Theben.*

The opening story of *Der Prinz von Theben* begins with the sentence: "Mein Vater hat mir schon so oft die Geschichte aus dem Leben meines Urgroßvaters erzählt, ich glaube nun, ich habe sie selbst erlebt" (*Theben* 93).

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[13]A term coined, in conversation, by feminist activist and actor Emma Missouri.

[14]In the Middle Ages, cross-dressing was forbidden by Halacha. See Cantor 87.

[15]Jennifer Redmann's approach to gender is similar to mine, though her study emphasizes a *spectrum* of identity *roles* more than spiritual and theological issues. See Redmann 7.

This statement is extremely significant in its description of the patriline and the narrator's internalization of that order. However, it is unclear at this point *who* is speaking, not to mention whether the narrative voice is male or female. Whatever the case, in these opening lines, the voice speaks of an androcentric ontology that history (the only *known* history, expressed as stories of the great grandfather) has taught it to embody. As the narration of the *Theben* collection proceeds, the speaker's gender will never be determinately fixed. Instead, it flip-flops from Tino to Jussuf, or Jussuf Abigail. Often it hovers ambivalently in unidentifiable terrain.

In *Theben*, what I call "gender wrestling" is unremitting, more so than in the author's previous books of prose. I view the collection as a series of experiments that progress toward an ideal spiritual character, Jussuf Abigail. It is a collection of stories on the road to the author's subsequent work, *Der Malik*, where she comes closest to her ideal. But first, Lasker-Schüler must do battle with history, with the hierarchical, androcentric structure that is both Tino's and Jussuf Abigail's (not to mention her own) legacy.

The story *Der Derwisch* is typically set in a Middle Eastern city of ancient times where religions often cross paths:

> Die englischen Damen reiten jeden Abend auf ihren Eseln die heiße Gräberstraße entlang, die heiligen Katzen hinter den Gittern der Gräber blicken schon weltlich. Der Derwisch tanzt. Die Ladies mit den hellen Augen like the spring hören auf zu zwitschern, aber die blauen Schleier ihrer Hüte zittern. Mein Herz

> wird täglich magerer in der Brust, wie die Mondhälfte in den Wolken. Die zarten Hälse der Abendländerinnen heben sich aus dem Rand ihrer durchsichtigen Kleider, darinnen ihre Leiber wie in gläsernen Vasen stehen. Ich aber trage den lammblutenden Hirtenrock Jussufs, wie ihn seine Brüder dem Vater brachten. Und die jungen Dromedare und Kamäle weide ich, tränke sie mit Wasser der Brunnen. (*Theben* 101)

It is important to note that the speaker in this instance does not name him/herself "Jussuf," but describes him/herself as *being like* Jussuf. This creates an underlying ambiguity in the narrative voice, for one is never certain as to the gender of the speaker. Interestingly, the narrator is preoccupied with gender, comparing him/herself to the "occidental women" riding past on their donkeys. The occidental women are fragile and transparent. Their bearing and their transparency—the narrator can *see* their bodies through their transparent clothes—express a determinacy regarding gender. The "Ladies" are female; there is no question about it. The gender of the speaker, however, is obscure. Unlike the ladies, the narrator is cloaked in the opaque mystery of the shepherd's robe, emphasizing, by way of reference to the biblical Joseph of Egypt, his/her separateness, ostracization, and erotic enigma.

The comparison with the occidental women also points to mysteries regarding the narrator's obscure spiritual identity which seems to go hand in hand with obscure gender. The occidental women with their light eyes and obvious femininity are without doubt Christian. They are not presented as

characters involved in gender or religious struggles, but rather as determined personae. Gender wrestling only appears to preoccupy the narrator as he/she grapples to understand him/herself in the world. Some pages later, there is a more overt articulation of Jussuf. It is a birth of sorts:

> Am Tigris steht ein Palast, der gehört meinem Vater und meiner Mutter, die schlummern schon sieben Jahre im Gewölbe. Meiner Mutter Hände sind zwei einbalsamierte Sterne, und der Bart des weißbärtigen Paschas fiel: ein silberner Vorhang über stolze Vorfahren. Und ich vertauschte den Prinzessinnenschleier mit dem armseligen Rock der Weide. (*Theben* 103)

Jussuf emerges here, abandoning the veil of the princess, most likely Princess Tino. In this narrative instance, he no longer presents himself *as if* he were Jussuf, as in the citation above, but directly as Jussuf. However, this emergence doesn't lead to gender determinacy, it is simply a new embodiment of gender marked by spiritual transformation. Jussuf dons the robe of a poor shepherd, associating this act with the loss of his parents. In this way, the dead mother and father mirror the unusual duality of the narrating voice. The orphaned child, in an act of self-constitution necessitated by loss, recognizes the parents as figures that inform his/her own spiritual and sexual constitution.

Returning to the relational triads discussed earlier, Jussuf's "birth" can be compared to the Freudian model of the Oedipal triangle. During the same years that Lasker-Schüler was writing her Jussuf stories, Freud was elaborating his famous, familial triad:

> [I]n the first years of infancy, the relation known as the *Oedipus complex* becomes established: boys concentrate their sexual wishes upon their mother and develop hostile impulses against their father as being a rival, while girls adopt an analogous attitude. All of the different variations and consequences of the Oedipus complex are important; and the innately bisexual constitution of human beings makes itself felt and increases the number of simultaneously active tendencies. Children do not become clear for quite a long time about the differences between the sexes; and during this period of *sexual researches* they produce typical *sexual theories* which, being circumscribed by the incompleteness of their authors' own physical development, are a mixture of truth and error and fail to solve the problems of sexual life. (Freud 22)

I refer to this passage because of its synchronic resonances[16] with Lasker-Schüler, particularly in regard to bisexuality and self-constitution. In essence, one can employ Freud's theory as a literary model, reading Lasker-Schüler's gender scenes as "sexual researches" in themselves, scenes in which each narrative instance serves as a point for "sexual theory." The

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[16]Although this passage is extracted from Freud's *An Autobiographical Study*, published in 1925 and later than Lasker-Schüler's Jussuf Abigail period, it serves as a summary of what Freud produced and articulated in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* first published in 1905. The male-centeredness of Freud's oedipal theory is also of importance here. See Freud 239-292.

result in Lasker-Schüler's case is literature: "a mixture of truth and error" that "fail[s] to solve the problems of sexual life." Put another way, determinacy regarding gender is impossible. Rather, it is an ongoing process of wrestling for self-constitution. This is why Lasker-Schüler's tales from this period of gender wrestling move along at a clip, proceeding from gender scene to gender scene, with Jussuf Abigail as the symbol of constant and unrelenting transformation. Employing Freud, one can see that the problems of sexual life are not *solved* in Jussuf Abigail, but they are mapped.

On a more critical note, Freud also attributes other important cultural developments to the Oedipal complex which relate to my discussion of Lasker-Schüler's spirituality. In *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913), also written during the time that Lasker-Schüler was involved with her Jussuf Abigail stylization, Freud writes:

> the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex. This is in complete agreement with the psycho-analytic finding that the same complex constitutes the nucleus of all neuroses, so far as our present knowledge goes. It seems to me a most surprising discovery that the problems of social psychology, too, should prove soluble on the basis of one single concrete point—man's relation to his father. (Freud 510)

Despite the "innately bisexual constitution of human beings" put forth by Freud in the quote above, the psychoanalyst's emphasis on the "single concrete point—man's relation to his father" refers to the androcentric ontology of gender

with which Lasker-Schüler contended in her time and in which her literary figures take part in. Once again, I find myself quoting the opening line of *Theben*: "Mein Vater hat mir schon so oft die Geschichte aus dem Leben meines Urgroßvaters erzählt, ich glaube nun, ich habe sie selbst erlebt" (*Theben* 93). Freud sees "religion, morals, society and art" resulting from the Oedipal triad of familial relations as it is lived out from generation to generation. Lasker-Schüler's identification with the biblical prophet, Joseph of Egypt, and her adaptation of him as Jussuf Abigail, is worthy of investigation in its relation to this Freudian model, for it agrees with this model on ancestral terms, yet also goes against the grain of it. That is, the author constructs patriarchal (biblical) hierarchies in her stories as the ontological frame, while at the same time making sexually obscured characters like Jussuf Abigail who call that world into question. The complex shifts from Tino to Jussuf and later from Jussuf to Jussuf Abigail, not to mention the gender maneuvers associated with these shifts, allow Lasker-Schüler new narrative possibilities and experimentation within the traditional (androcentric) triangular model.[17]

I have referred to the post-Tino figure predominantly as Jussuf Abigail. There is a reason for this. Initially, Lasker-Schüler refers to this character simply as Jussuf. However, the final story of the *Theben* collection, titled *Das Buch der*

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[17]Sander Gilman's writing on Freud and Jewish identity in turn-of-the-century Vienna provides an additional spin on my discussion of gender wrestling. Gilman's comparison of the marginality of the Jewish male with that of woman leads him to an enlightening discussion of the theory of penis envy in which the clitoris itself "became a sign of masculinity" for Freud. See Gilman 39.

Drei Abigails, presents a new adaptation of Jussuf. *Das Buch der Drei Abigails* is a trilogy that describes the history of the ascendence of Prince Jussuf to the throne where he bears the new title of King Jussuf Abigail. The narrative structure of the trilogy is reminiscent of the stories of the Jewish patriarchs in the Torah, for everything is narrated in terms of the patriline.[18] In Lasker-Schüler's lineage, however, these male figures assume a woman's name, the *same* woman's name in fact—Abigail—as they succeed one another to the throne:

> Abigail des Spätgeborenen [Abigail I] ältester Vetter Simonis saß auf dem Thron zu Theben nur einen Tag und langweilte sich und verzichtete auf die Krone zu Gunsten seines Bruders Arion-Ichtiosaur. Der nannte sich Abigail der Zweite—wie er vorgab,—zum Angedenken seines vetterlichen, spätgeborenen Vorgängers. (*Theben* 114)

On the surface, the lineage of Abigails appears androcentrically determined, but there are fundamental disruptions which Lasker-Schüler intimates in sarcastic tone (such as in the name "Ichtiosaur"). Abigail I, afraid to leave his mother's womb, was born too late to ever really rule as melech. His cousin-successor, Simonis, is too bored with the inherited post and passes it on to his brother, Ichtiosaur who assumes the name Abigail II. In this way, male succession is

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[18]J. Cheryl Exum offers a discussion of endogamous marriage structures in the Torah—the marriage of men to women from their own patriline—and finds that endogamy not only guarantees patrilineal descent, but also guarantees the male exclusive authority over his wife sexually, religiously, and economically. See Exum 107-120 and 157-169.

maintained, but the author parodies and subverts it by interrupting the direct father-son succession, by presenting these rulers as lazy, fearful, and disreputable, and most significantly, by giving them all the feminine name "Abigail."

Abigail II proves to be ineffectual, lacking in sensitivity and necessary human empathy. He is inept at understanding women and lazy in his relations with his subjects. He has his "Lachweiber" and his "Tränenweiber," slave women who express his emotions for him. He has his "Grüßer" too, "ein edler Jüngling mit freundlichem Wuchs, an dem sich der Melech des Grüßens Anstrengung jedem Vorbeischreitenden immer wieder höflich enthob" (*Theben* 116). This Abigail is a tyrant. He forbids the meeting of political and religious groups and begins to set up an autocratic state. At this point, Prince Jussuf enters the scene as the leader of insurgents. The group calls itself the *Zebaothknaben*. "Zebaoth" is a Hebrew name for God, the root meaning of which is "host" or "army."

> Nur die Zebaothknaben, die jüngsten Bürger Thebens, hielten trotz des Melechs Verbot ihre heimlichen Zusammenkünfte, deren Oberhaupt der begabte Sohn des obersten Priesters war. Jussuf warf sich schon unter seinen jungendlichen Anhängern zu ihrem Prinzen auf. (*Theben* 117)

Parallels with the modernist literary circles of the time as described by Roy Allen and Michael Hamburger are evident here. Jussuf, through self-election as Prince, makes himself into the leader of the resistance and spearheads the

overthrow of Abigail II's reign.

As the plot thickens, the characters begin to assume obscured gender roles. This is particularly evident in the rather burlesque marriage scene, as Abigail II marries Marjam. An erotic triangle emerges:

> Jussuf, des Oberpriesters Sohn, liebte die junge Königin Marjam, seines verhaßten Melechs ausersehene Braut, und sein Herz eifersüchtete giftig nach seinem gekrönten, alten Nebenbuhler. (*Theben* 117)

At first, Lasker-Schüler puts together a Girardian love triangle, but the multivalent nature of Jussuf's gender renders the usual androcentric props of marriage and male competition ineffectual and silly. The wedding scene becomes a parade of gender masks and gender obscuring, precisely in the moment of political upheaval. Just as Abigail II enters the marriage celebration with Marjam, the *Zebaothknaben* are found hiding among the guests, plotting a coup:

> Und hinter den lachenden und weinenden Weibern hielten sich eine Anzahl Zebaothknaben verborgen und kitzelten den Tränenfrauen in die Hüften, so daß die ein Lachen bei der Zeremonie des Empfanges ansetzten, welches dem Melech höchste Verlegenheit bereitete. (*Theben* 118)

When the boys tickle the "Tränenfrauen" and make them laugh, Abigail II becomes vulnerable to attack. The women's laughter is caused by their male counterparts hiding behind them. In this way, they serve as feminine masks,

hiding the male source of their laughter. This confusion causes the ruling melech to question himself, "da er in Frauenempfindungen sehr wenig Erfahrungen gesammelt hatte" (*Theben* 118). The decorum of Marjam and Abigail II's wedding is disrupted by the burlesque gender scrambling instigated by the insurgent *Zebaothknaben*. Marjam leaves the melech in a huff, annoyed by his insensitivity and reliance upon his "Sklavinnen" for emotional cues. Later that night, he dies mysteriously:

> Nach der Tafel führte der Melech seine hohe Braut durch die Menge der Gäste, aber sie verließ mit gnädigem Nicken ihres ernsten, hochmütigen Kopfes gekränkt den verblüfften Hof, die Stadt Abigails des Wunderlichen, der, wie sich seine Bürger erzählten, gestorben sei, weil seine Erklärer ihm nicht den Kernpunkt seiner Tafel seltsamer Anekdote deuten konnten. In Wirklichkeit hatte ihn aber in derselben Nacht Jussuf, der Sohn des Oberpriesters, durch einen Dolchstoß ins Zwerchfell getötet. Jussuf, der Prinz von Theben, ließ sich zum König Abigail den Dritten ausrufen von seinem kleinen Heer, das zählte 1000 Zebaothknaben; mit ihnen sammelte er die aufatmenden Bürger der Stadt. (*Theben* 118-119)

Jussuf now rises to the title of King Abigail III. A gender and spiritual transformation takes place along with his elevation to king. His name becomes feminized, and he is now a ruler of stature similar to that of the male priests and rulers found in the early *Nächte* stories.

> Abigail der Melech baute prunkvolle Paläste und Gotteshäuser und diente seinem jungen Gotte Zebaoth. Einmal sagte er seinen Knaben: "Ich möchte *Ihn* einmal sehen oder auch nur seinen Finger, an dem der Mond leuchtet." Und er salbte sechs der wilden Juden zu Häuptlingen und gab ihnen Königsnamen. (*Theben* 121)

The new society is now complete. Abigail III surrounds himself with his own disciples, the "wilde Juden," as they worship their young god *Zebaoth* and build a new life in the city.

Returning to the Girardian and Freudian triangles, it is important to acknowledge the importance of Lasker-Schüler's choice of Abigail III as the new name for the prince turned king. In her study of the matriarchs of the Torah, J. Cheryl Exum discusses the Girardian triangle and finds that biblical narratives involving triangles of two men and one woman often reflect the paradoxical male fear of and desire for woman:

> [W]e can only speculate about what lies behind the fear and the desire. It could be the need to have the woman's erotic value confirmed by other men, what René Girard describes as the mechanism of triangular desire. . . . His fear for his life at the hands of other men disguises the fact that it is really the woman's sexual knowledge that is life-threatening for him. It is 'safer' for him to fear other men than to acknowledge his fear of the woman's sexuality. (159)

Thus in the Torah, Nabal dies in fear of David, rather than in fear of the loss of his wife Abigail to another sexual partner. Lasker-Schüler comprehended intuitively the problem of such triangular relations, the problem of being woman *between* men. She was a gender wrestler *and* a God wrestler, challenging entrenched oedipal triangles while styling her emerging character Jussuf Abigail as an ideal, experimental figure whose unremitting gender flux provided her with new ways of probing spirituality within androcentric religious and literary culture.

Chapter 4

Chosenness

In this chapter, I turn to the author's novel, *Der Malik*, in which she brings the character Jussuf Abigail to his culmination. Published in 1919, this significant work is couched in events that took place just before and during World War I. At bottom, the novel is a pacifistic indictment of the war with Jussuf Abigail portrayed as a chosen figure. As ruling melech of Thebes, he is the focal point of conflicting armies at battle outside his kingdom (the Aryans and their allies who are in war with the Indians) and of opposing political-religious groups *within* his country (the *Zebaothknaben* and their fathers who live in the city of Irsahab). In spite of the responsibility he bears as ruler and his refusal to partake in the racial religious war with the Aryans who are seeking allies in the war against the Indians, Jussuf Abigail comes to the harsh realization that his voice of peace is powerless in the face of such violence. Though couched in fiction, the war in *Der Malik* makes obvious reference to World War I, and the deaths of characters in the novel are actually cloaked accounts of the deaths of some of Lasker-Schüler's friends.[1] Depressed and isolated by the conflicts that surround him in his kingdom, Jussuf Abigail resorts to suicide at the end of the story. I read *Der Malik* as a

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[1]Johannes Holzmann died as a political prisoner in Russia in 1914. Georg Trakl died the same year of an overdose of cocaine in a Cracow hospital. Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele died in battle in 1915. In 1916, Franz Marc fell near Verdun and Peter Baum, Lasker-Schüler's childhood friend, also died in battle.

narrative of the disenfranchisement of women in times of war. In spite of his anti-war morality and sense of duty toward his *Volk*, Jussuf Abigail's voice goes largely unnoticed amidst the destruction and political intrigue.

World War I and its aftermath marked a turning point for many writers in Europe. For German Jewish writers, it gave rise to a complex set of issues regarding race, politics and religion. Lasker-Schüler's killing off of her chosen figure Jussuf Abigail at the end of *Der Malik* signals one of the most important post-war changes that occurred in her own writing, for after this novel, she gradually begins to write prose in a voice that is no longer filtered through fictional self-stylizations such as Jussuf Abigail or Tino.

Lasker-Schüler can be situated along with her male contemporaries within the spectrum of ideas and artistic proliferation that developed among German Jewish artists and thinkers during the post-war years. In *Judentum und Modernität*, Leon Botstein describes the "Vielseitigkeit" and "Kompliziertheit" of modern German Jewish intellectual life that ranged from Herzl's political Zionism to radical attempts at assimilation (173). Botstein finds that the emancipation and assimilation of the Jews in modern Germany bore two fundamental impulses: an "Umwertung des religiösen Wesens" and an "Entwertung des im traditionellen Sinne Religiösen" (172). In Lasker-Schüler's case, we find both tendencies at work in her writings, particularly when viewed within the paradigm of Jewish chosenness.

Der Malik is Lasker-Schüler's articulation of her own marginal status as a woman, a Jew, and a writer within German Jewish culture and within German

patriarchal society during a time of war and militant nationalism. When the novel was published in 1919, however, it was read "in aller Ahnungslosigkeit" of such complexities regarding identity and society (Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 321). As Bauschinger points out, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of January 25, 1920 described *Der Malik* far too simplistically as a book "das sich 'nur an die Gemeinschaft des Blutes' wendet, dessen 'hebräische Tafeln' und dessen Symbolsprache und Bilder nur der Ewige Jude begreift" (*Werk und Zeit* 321-322).

As I showed in chapter 3, Jussuf Abigail embodies divergent genders within a single character. His biblically symbolic position as medium between conflicting groups (Abigail) as well as his ostracization (Joseph) can also be viewed as Lasker-Schüler's attempt to sort out the many divergent voices, both Jewish and non-Jewish, which surrounded her in Germany during and after the war years. As a means of portraying his singular status within the political and religious swirl of nationalism, violence, and military alignments, Lasker-Schüler frames Jussuf Abigail within the paradigm of the chosen figure, while at the same time subverting traditional, elitist and nationalistic understandings of chosenness.

Chosenness can be articulated both in Jewish theological as well as in feminist terms. This is due mainly to its rootedness in marginalized experience. A chosen figure or a chosen group of people live on the margin. In the Torah, the covenant of God with the Jews at Mount Sinai is deeply associated with Jewish marginalization. Crossing the desert with Moses in search of a new

home metaphorically expresses the Jews' outsider status. Their exile, their suffering as slaves in Egypt, and their monotheism endow them with a distinctiveness that is different from other peoples. In traditional Jewish thinking, God favors this chosen people: "If you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. . . you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5-6). Proclaiming this to Moses and the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, God passes down the Torah in which are contained the very laws of conduct that define, both ritually and ethically, the Jews' specialness. In this way, chosenness is also profoundly associated with text (Torah) and the interpretation of text (midrash). This religious legacy, as well as the ideal of *Bildung*—which was central both to German Enlightenment and Jewish assimilation in Germany—has great bearing on Lasker-Schüler's unusual self-presentation and outsider status as an anti-intellectual and non-reader.

From a feminist viewpoint, the status of women in relation to dominant, patriarchal culture involves elements of suffering and distinctiveness that are similar to Jewish chosenness. The marginalization of women, that "sometimes oppressive, sometimes privileged madness" (Gilbert, *Newly Born Woman* xi), is a chosenness of a kind. Chosenness, however, is a concept fraught with controversy. The experience of group difference, whether it is the group's self-perception or the external world's perception of a particular group, often leads to what theologian Judith Plaskow calls "hierarchical separations." In Plaskow's mind, these separations—if they are motivated by ranking the

so-called superior above the so-called inferior—are the primary source of social conflict among ethnic groups, countries, religions, and men and women (*Sinai* 96). Plaskow locates such separations in traditional Jewish theology in the paradigm of chosenness:

> Thinking of itself as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," the Jewish people understood its own holiness partly in contradistinction to the beliefs and behavior of surrounding nations. Serving the Lord meant shunning and destroying foreign gods and morality, thus refusing the "snare" of a different religious system (Exod. 23:23-33). Paralleling external differentiation were a host of internal separations that set apart distinct and unequal objects, states, and modes of being. On a religious level, to be a holy people was both to be different from one's neighbors and to distinguish between and differently honor pure and impure, Sabbath and week, kosher and non-kosher, Cohen, Levi, and Israel (grades of priests and ordinary Jews), and male and female. On a social level, the Otherness of women was the first and most persistent among many inequalities that have marked Jewish life. (*Sinai* 96)

In this way, Plaskow points out the very important aspect of gender and its role in the Jewish understanding of chosenness. Traditional constructs of Jewish identity based upon separations of groups hierarchically have forced sacrifices upon women. Aviva Cantor calls this the "double jeopardy" of the Jewish

woman (15). A nesting of oppression occurs, first by the Jew living as outcast in dominant culture, then by the Jewish woman living marginally within her own culture and religion. Cantor writes:

> The Jews' condition in Exile is analogous in many ways to the oppression of women, who are also powerless under patriarchy and are affected by power struggles they are not part of and by their outcome. Lacking self-determination over their own destinies, Jews were, as are women, object rather than subject, forced to be reactive rather than active and to respond to others' demands. . .
>
> Women under all patriarchal systems are programmed to be enablers. One of the two components of this female role is to facilitate the work that men designate as theirs, which is defined by men as the most important and prestigious in the society and as that which gives men power. The other element is to withdraw or accept/endure exclusion from that work turf, which, in women's absence, defines manhood.
>
> Jews in Exile have often been forced to be enablers of the society's ruling class. The ruling class tried to track them into occupations and roles that it believes will facilitate its wielding economic, political, and military power; and tried to exclude them from those it believes could provide a viable basis for self-defense against its power. . . (14-15)

Lasker-Schüler's experience of a marginal life within androcentric Judaism and within German patriarchal society led her to Jussuf Abigail, the chosen one. He exhibits the "double jeopardy" Cantor speaks of. Through him, Lasker-Schüler explores the nature of her spirituality and the points of conflict she feels with Judaism and with patriarchal culture.

Many Lasker-Schüler scholars have associated the author with chosenness. Marianne Schuller, for example, views the emergence of Tino in the author's early prose as an "Initiation zur Auserwählten" handed down by the "väterliche Hand" of Peter Hille (76). This could be said of Jussuf Abigail as well, with the fundamental difference that Jussuf Abigail is an example of self-chosenness, rather than a chosenness determined by the God-like Hille. Erika Klüsener finds Lasker-Schüler's abandonment of bourgeois life and her entry into cultural bohème closely linked with the motif of chosenness (44-45), while Sigrid Bauschinger describes her "Auserwähltheit" as similar to that of Stefan George (*Werk und Zeit* 203).

Gotthard Guder also associates chosenness with Lasker-Schüler, stating that "Die Vorstellung der Auserwähltheit und der damit verbundenen Würde ist bei der Intensität ihres Leidens immer mitbestimmend" (25). In Jewish theological terms, suffering is the chosen figure's or the chosen people's destiny before God. As a means of addressing this suffering, the paradigm of chosenness has traditionally served the important psychological purpose of countering the oppressive treatment Jews have experienced as exiled people living as minorities in cultures all over the world. Cantor calls this "spiritual

resistance":

> Spiritual resistance required the creation of national myths comprising memories of the past, interpretations of the present (an explanatory style), and visions linking both to the future. Only the hope that continuing to uphold in the bleak present a commitment to an identity and culture that had originated in a glorious past and that would lead to a bright future provided Jews the motivation and the courage to endure suffering and persecution without cracking individually or collectively. (34)

In this way, chosenness is a religious tool in the project of maintaining self esteem, independence, and survival in the face of abuse and marginalization.

In addition to marginalization and the pain of minority existence, however, Jewish chosenness is also associated with the ideal of responsibility. "The covenant is understood as a two-way relationship: The Jews are to keep God's laws, and He is to watch over them" (Telushkin 54). Judith Plaskow carefully explores this mutual responsibility between God and the Jews, as she attempts to unlock the self/Other conflicts inherent in traditional religious interpretations of chosenness:

> There is a strand in Jewish thinking that attributes chosenness to special qualities in the Jews and that argues for Jewish hereditary spiritual uniqueness and supremacy; by and large, however, Israel's election is viewed not as a matter of merit or attributes but of responsibilities and duties. When the notion of chosenness first

> appears in the Bible simultaneously with the establishment of Israel as a covenant community, there is no apparent motive for Israel's special status but God's steadfast love and (itself unexplained) earlier promise to the patriarchs (Deut. 7:7-8). Israel's standing as God's "own possession among all peoples" (Ex. 19-5; Deut. 7:6) is linked to acceptance and observance of the covenant; this constitutes its specialness in its own eyes and in the eyes of others (Deut. 4:5-7). (*Sinai* 97)

Plaskow is careful to point out that the "specialness" is constituted in Israel's "own eyes and in the eyes of others." She calls attention to the fact that what is regarded as the covenant between God and the Jews is deeply related to both self-perception among the Jews *and* the gaze of the world from outside the Jewish community. In its deepest sense, then, Jewish chosenness is a search for identity, a struggle within the self/Other construct to define a people and a religion and to ensure its survival. Lasker-Schüler viewed her own experience within this paradigm of chosenness, writing:

> Die Dichtung bettet sich neben Gott. Wie könnte sonst die von der Dichtung vergewaltigten Auserwählten die unmenschliche Verantwortung der Weisheit auf sich nehmen? Der Prophet, des Dichters ältester Bruder, erbte die Zucht des Gewissens direkt vom Schöpfer. (*Konzert* 190)

Quoting this same passage, Anya Mali writes of the author's "dichterische Verantwortung" (158) which, according to her, is characterized as mystagogical

in nature: "Ohne Zweifel verstand sie [Lasker-Schüler] diese Dichtung als eine Dienstleistung, nicht nur an den Menschen sondern auch an Gott" (162). Mali also points out the sense of spiritual duty that many German Jewish writers felt during the early part of the century. She situates Lasker-Schüler within this theological culture:

> Jüdische Schriftsteller wie Leo Baeck, Martin Buber und Franz Rosenzweig wollten das Judentum als eine persönliche geistige und innere Erfahrung neu beleben. Die Antwort solcher Schriftsteller auf die Krise des modernen Juden brachte eine mystische Dimension mit sich. In diesem neuen Verständnis des Judentums sehen wir das zweiseitige Anliegen des modernen Juden, der, ethisch gesehen, eine Verantwortung gegenüber seinem Mitmenschen fühlt und der, rein religiös gesehen, Gott näher kommen möchte. (164)

As I proceed with my reading of Lasker-Schüler's *Der Malik*, I analyze structures in Jussuf Abigail that exhibit elements of chosenness or attempts to subvert traditional chosenness founded upon patriarchal hierarchies. As a general guide, I make use of the key attributes outlined here: marginalization, suffering, distinctiveness before God, and duty to one's people, religion and God.

Nearly the first half of *Der Malik* is comprised of a series of letters, written and published between September 1913 and August 1915, from the author to her friend, expressionist painter Franz Marc. Lasker-Schüler met Franz Marc and befriended him and his wife Maria around the same time that she and

Herwarth Walden divorced. The correspondence was engaging for both artists, as they regularly sent postcards to one another with drawings on them.[2] In their exchange, the author reports on the events of her life in Berlin in symbolically veiled terms. Initially, her correspondence with Marc documents her loneliness and hardship after her separation from Herwarth Walden. The tone of the opening letter, for example, is one of isolation. "Ich bin allein auf der Welt lebendig . . . und ich werde täglich allein begraben," she writes, adding

> In der Nacht spiele ich mit mir Liebste und Liebster; eigentlich sind wir zwei Jungens. Das ist das keuscheste Liebesspiel auf der Welt; kein Hinweis auf den Unterschied, Liebe ohne Ziel und Zweck, holde Unzucht. (*Malik* 7-8)

This masturbatory scene is, in a sense, a spiritualization of her aloneness. Most significant about the passage is the author's construction of gender. She first describes masturbation in heterosexual terms using the cliched expression, "Liebste und Liebster," whereby both man and woman appear to be psychologically necessary in the sexual enactment of aloneness. However, the author immediately amends this gender structure, juxtaposing it with a same-sex scene: "eigentlich sind wir zwei Jungens." Changing the two metaphorical lovers to boys endows the masturbatory act with a spiritual self-sufficiency that is free of the conflicts of traditional, heterosexual (marital) relations. It is "das keuscheste Liebesspiel auf der Welt."

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[2]The postcards and drawings have been documented in Marc.

The subversiveness of Lasker-Schüler's language is clear. It not only uncovers social-religious taboos of masturbation and homosexuality, but it also exploits religious language in doing so. This is most evident in words such as "keusch," "hold," and "Unzucht." Something of the divine is experienced in this self-satisfying act, free of gender difference: "kein Hinweis auf den Unterschied, Liebe ohne Ziel und Zweck." Unlike this idealized, same-sex love between two boys, however, gender difference—particularly that expressed in traditional heterosexual relations—causes the writer conflict and suffering. In fact, during this time of separating from Walden she seems to view heterosexual relations as a less spiritual affair. For example, in another letter to Marc, Lasker-Schüler makes reference to her struggles with the men of her two marriages:

> Mein Liebster hat mich nie etwas gefragt, weil meine Lippen so gern tanzen wollten. Aber viel gehen mußte ich, weil ich so schwer vorwärts kam, und wäre doch so gern einmal *gefahren* mit dem Auto oder in einer Sänfte. Ich kannte aber noch vor ihm einen böseren Menschen, der ließ mich immer barfuß über Nägel gehen; seitdem hängen viele Narben unter den Sohlen, die tun weh. (*Malik* 9)

The nature of the author's marital relationships were burdensome, unsustainable, and at times abusive. In extreme contrast to the masturbatory passage cited previously, there is no idealized, spiritualized notion of relationship and sexuality.

In regard to chosenness, I find in these letters to Marc what Biddy Martin

has also identified in the works of Lasker-Schüler's contemporary Lou Andreas Salomé as "efforts to conceive and to enact positions other than oedipal ones" (22). Like Salomé, Lasker-Schüler is in pursuit of alternative forms of relationship and alternative forms of gender construction that are not based upon the androcentric model of the oedipal triangle discussed in Chapter 3. As the author identifies the oppressive social aspects of this complex in real life situations, she turns to the literary to pose alternatives to gender constructions she views as failed. In regard to chosenness, the letters depict the writer as an isolated, suffering figure. They map what Jennifer Redmann describes as

> not simply a conflict between isolation and connection, or even between masculinity and femininity, but also an implicit dissatisfaction with women's restricted social position, as well as a desire for an *alternative* to this dualism of gender, one which she would . . . attempt to achieve in visions of a unique, multidimensional self. (87)

Soon the letters begin to depict more fictionalized scenes, eventually shifting to small narratives in which Jussuf Abigail figures as the main character. Other characters emerge as well, stylizations of the author's friends, nearly all of them men, or stylizations of specific male groups, such as the fathers of Irsahab who represent traditional male Jewish learnedness.[3] This process of fictionalization

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[3]Feßmann sees Lasker-Schüler's "Konflikte mit dem orthodoxen Judentum" represented in Jussuf Abigail's relations with the fathers of Irsahab. See Feßmann 253. I agree with this view only partially. More important than their supposed orthodoxy is their broader representation of traditional (male)

proceeds until the second half of the novel, which is no longer composed of letters to Marc, but of straight narrative which is set in the kingdom of Thebes.

This gradual process of fictionalization in *Der Malik* relates to the topic of chosenness. In the third letter, for example, Lasker-Schüler begins referring to Marc as "Ruben." In the Torah, it is Joseph's brother Ruben who attempts to save him from being killed by the other brothers (Gen. 37:39-50). For Lasker-Schüler, the biblical relationship of Ruben and Joseph serves as a narrative point of departure that has midrashic possibilities. Similar in approach to her lyric cycle, *Hebräische Balladen*, published in 1913, the author appropriates and reinterprets biblical characters of the Torah as a means of investigating her own spiritual and gender construction.[4] In her adaptation of the biblical story of Joseph, the chosen figure becomes a fundamental motif.[5] For example, she writes to Marc:

> Mein sehr geliebter Halbbruder. Es ist kein Zweifel, Du warst Ruben und ich war Joseph, Dein Halbbruder zu Kanazeiten. Nun träumen wir nur noch Träume, die biblisch sind. Manchmal narrt mich so ein Traum, wie heute Nacht. O, ich hatte einen boshaften Traum; allerdings mein sehnlichster Wunsch erfüllte sich—ich war

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Jewish culture.

[4]For a similar discussion of her appropriation of the feminine character, Eve, see Redmann 128-146.

[5]Redmann also associates Jussuf Abigail with chosenness. See Redmann 246 and 256.

> plötzlich König, in Theben—trug einen goldenen Mantel, einen Stern in Falten um meine Schulter gelegt, auf dem Kopf die Krone des Malik. Ich war Malik. (*Malik* 11)

She closes the same letter with:

> Ich bin überhaupt heute etwas unglücklich—ich weiß niemand, wodrin ich mich verlieben könnte. Weißt Du jemand? Dein verraten und verkaufter Jussuf Abigail. (11)

This letter is important in all its biblical inference and gender tension. As in the story of Joseph of Egypt, Lasker-Schüler's Jussuf Abigail is also betrayed and ostracized by his "brothers." In the context of *Der Malik*, these brothers are multiply symbolic, referring to the author's past husbands, to her (male) contemporaries, and to the Jews and the Germans of the country she lives in.

Like Joseph of Egypt, Jussuf Abigail is a visionary and interpreter of dreams. In the passage above, his dream serves as means of coping with loneliness and isolation. It is also a scene of self-election, for Jussuf Abigail is choosing for himself the role of melech and prophet. What results is an expression of self-sufficiency similar to the earlier masturbation passage. By imbuing herself with maleness and by transferring herself as a character into a new version of the story of Joseph of Egypt, the author attempts to overcome the suffering and isolation she feels as a woman and a Jew living on the margin.[6]

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[6]Quoting Ute Frevert, Redmann articulates this marginality most clearly: "Constructed by two discourses simultaneously, that of race and that of gender, the Jewish woman at the turn of the century thus found herself in the proverbial double bind; in the words of Ute Frevert, 'ihre [weibliche] 'Sonderart' wurde

Put another way, she offers up alternatives to the oedipal snare of normative, heterosexual identity and patriarchally determined religious expression (marriage, Jewish male practice of studying and making texts), as she investigates new forms of self-constitution through her literature.

Self-election, or self-chosenness, is a recurring motif in Lasker-Schüler's writing. Often associated with isolation and suffering, her literary scenes of self-election usually occur at night, as the narrator describes a state of extreme desperation which is then resolved by self-elevation to a ruling position. "In der Nacht meiner tiefsten Not, erhob ich mich zum Prinzen von Theben," Lasker-Schüler writes in 1925 in the self-published pamphlet *Ich räume auf!,* recalling the significant moment of self-stylization (or self-realization?) as Prince Jussuf (*Theben* 330-331). This act of self-election is repeated elsewhere in the body of her writing, beginning with the forging of Jussuf the prince in *Nächte* and *Der Prinz von Theben*, then Jussuf the king in *Der Malik*, culminating in Jussuf Abigail the emperor (melech) in *Der Malik.*

In *Der Malik*, Jussuf Abigail's rise as melech takes place in a fictional world that is initially shared by the author and Marc in the letters: "Es ist kein Zweifel, Du warst Ruben und ich war Joseph, Dein Halbbruder zu Kanazeiten. Nun träumen wir nur noch Träume, die biblisch sind" (*Malik* 11). In this way, the author not only chooses herself but her male friend Marc as well to participate in

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beschworen, während die jüdische 'Eigenart' ausradiert werden sollte.' This, however, constituted a contradiction in terms, since the Jewish woman's sexual 'Sonderart' and racial 'Eigenart' intersected within a single body." See Redmann 223-224 and Frevert 80.

the literary world she constructs. Marc, as a counterpart in the relationship, is necessary in the author's search for new manifestations of gender relation. In fact, in Lasker-Schüler's adaptation of the Joseph story, Ruben actually pulls Jussuf Abigail out of the pit, an event which does not occur in the Torah. (Gen. 37:18-30) In this way, self-election becomes couched in the midrashic act of reinterpreting the Joseph legend. In the Torah, Joseph's visionary dreams indicate his specialness as a prophet, as one chosen by God. But because of this, he also suffers separation and alienation from his brothers. Jealous of his favored status and threatened by it, the brothers ostracize and disown Joseph. Though persuaded by Ruben not to kill him, they sell him off to Pharaoh's soldiers.

Jussuf Abigail, like his biblical model Joseph of Egypt, possesses the gift and burden of visions. I point out these qualities, for they too contain Jewish elements of chosenness: responsibility and marginalization. Weissenberger views the Jussuf Abigail stylization as an "Aufschwung auf die Stufe des messianischen Welterneuerers," a "Selbstmythisierung" that is based upon the "Verwirklichung des messianischen Auftrags der Welterneuerung" (102). Though I agree with Weissenberger that an "Auftrag" of a kind is involved—Jussuf Abigail's sense of duty is felt here—I don't feel the thrust of the figure is necessarily messianic in nature. This is too extreme an assessment of the author's self-perception. More in keeping with the author's sense of responsibility is Anya Mali's mystagogical explanation of Lasker-Schüler's writings, for according to Mali, the author identified in herself a responsibility to

give voice to her spiritual experience in dialogue with God and the world (158), rather than a responsibility to save the world. Just as the biblical Joseph has a vision of the future and of his spiritual role in the world—he foresees the plagues and later, after their reconciliation, saves his brothers from suffering—Lasker-Schüler possesses a similar sense of responsibility.

By situating herself as an adaptation of Joseph within a new interpretation of the biblical story, the author becomes a sensitive register of the inequities of male-dominated culture. As she appropriates the religious text, she goes about rectifying a centuries-long silence both textually and ritually of Jewish women within their own faith and within society at large. She causes the religious text to tell her own legend, which fundamentally is the story of the ostracized woman.[7] In another letter to Ruben, Jussuf Abigail writes:

> Lieber Ruben aus der Bibel . . . Wie schön war es, als wir am Gibon lebten, da war ich noch konzentriert und einfältig—Du holtest mich oft aus der Grube: um mein Herz lag ein Blutkranz. Der ist noch nicht verblüht. Ich bin immer schwermütig, keine Landschaft kann mich trösten, aber über die Linien einer Hand möchte ich wandeln, jeder ihrer Wege müsse zum Himmel führen, hunderttausendmal würde ich entschlummern in einer solchen Hand. Kennst Du so eine ewige Hand? Deine...Dein frommer

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[7]J. Cheryl Exum's study of the androcentrism of the Torah, in which "the female perspective is muted, if not altogether excluded," describes the situation Lasker-Schüler found herself in. See Exum 10.

Bruder Jussuf Abigail. (*Malik* 16-17)

Here the author makes reference to the pit that the biblical Joseph's brothers threw him into before selling him off as a slave to Pharaoh's soldiers. In the author's version, however, Ruben actually removes Jussuf Abigail from the pit. This friendship and loyalty between the brothers is juxtaposed with a longing for another kind of partner. In this instance, however, the desired partner is no longer imbued with gender, as we saw in previous letters to Marc. It is simply a hand which Jussuf Abigail desires, the hand of God, perhaps, for it is "ewig."

The closing of the letter is curious. It seems initially to imply a female writer with the word "Deine", but it can also refer to Ruben's hand as its antecedent. The tone of the passage is erotic, as the author slips briefly into a male-female construct of desire. She then "corrects" herself immediately, changing the personal pronoun "Deine" and all its ambivalent meaning to the male pronoun "Dein." In this way, heterosexual intimations (love between Ruben and a female writer) is pushed aside, and replaced with male brotherhood.[8]

As the letters in *Der Malik* become more fictional, and as the events of the author's life become ever more couched in the literary world of Thebes, other important aspects of the author's use of pronouns emerges. In the 21st letter,

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[8]Brotherhood is among the chief religious-ethical motifs of *Der Malik*. As in the author's previous stories discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, there are many scenes of fraternity. In *Der Malik*, however, Jussuf Abigail is a member of a male society of chieftains and soldiers over which he presides as ruler, whereas in past stories, such as the Tino narratives, the main character is a member of a society over which a strong male religious figure presides.

for example, she begins capitalizing many first-person personal pronouns that refer to Jussuf Abigail:

> Ruben, . . . ich ziehe in den Krieg gegen eines [sic] der wilden Stämme, werde Selbst Mein Heer anführen, in der vordersten Reihe kämpfen; man erschlafft—ich will wieder Ehrfurcht vor Mir bekommen. Gedenke Meiner! . . . Dein Krieger! (*Malik* 24)

This capitalized form of self-reference did not occur in the previous 20 letters, yet it persists from this point throughout the rest of the book, including the narrative prose section where Jussuf Abigail is sometimes referred to in the first person, "Ich" and "Mein," and sometimes in the third person, "Er" and "Sein." This shift in pronoun usage marks an obvious change in the presentation of Jussuf Abigail in the novel. In regard to the topic of chosenness, the pronouns themselves emphasize the act of self-election, for the moment the author begins to use them, she also begins to elaborate Jussuf Abigail's world more fully, describing its landscape and its characters. She begins to commit herself to this fiction as its creator.

The language Jussuf Abigail uses to describe his kingdom often makes reference to war and tribal conflicts: "ich ziehe in den Krieg gegen eines [sic] der wilden Stämme, werde Selbst Mein Heer anführen, in der vordersten Reihe kämpfen" (*Malik* 24). Rather than an actual army, the "Heer" referred to here represents an internal mustering for a battle with the self, a self that was previously constructed under the normative, heterosexual expectations of the time. "[M]an erschlafft—ich will wieder Ehrfurcht vor Mir bekommen," says

Jussuf Abigail, the "Krieger," almost as a call for Else Lasker-Schüler the writer to muster her literary strategies and go off into battle with an identity overdetermined by failed, heterosexual constructs of relationship (*Malik* 24). In Jennifer Redmann's words, "There can be no peaceful coexistence of masculine and feminine principles in fin-de-siècle culture. . . She [Lasker-Schüler] knows that her destiny lies outside the realm of unambiguous womanhood" (86-87). Jussuf Abigail's self-election involves the assumption of the masculine aspect of waging war, but it is a war within the self as well as an indictment of World War I. In this instance, the essence of the biblical Abigail as intermediary between warring men comes to the fore.

Beyond gender issues, Jussuf Abigail's chosenness also possesses elements of duty. He elevates himself to the status of melech because of the responsibility he feels for his people, his *Volk*.

> Ich sitze fast den ganzen Tag auf dem Dach des Palastes. Mein Volk will immer seinen Kaiser sehn. Mein Volk blickt aus einem Zug zu mir empor, ruft nach Mir aus einem Mund. Ich habe nicht das Recht, Mich in Meine Gemächer zurückzuziehen, da Mein Volk nach mir hungert. Meine Verantwortung wuchs über Nacht vom Prinzsein zum Kaisertum grenzenlos. (*Malik* 28)

The familiar motif of self-promotion, from *Prinzsein* to *Kaisertum* is deeply associated with *Verantwortung*. Jussuf Abigail's *Volk* is an important narrative element of *Der Malik*, for it maps the self/Other structure of identity. The relation Jussuf Abigail/*Volk* is necessarily flexible and malleable. Both entities

intertwine and penetrate each other in mutual existence. Sometimes the subject (Jussuf Abigail) is obscured in this relation; sometimes it defines itself over against the community that surrounds it; or it relies upon this outside gaze as a means of constituting itself. The most important aspect of this complex relation is duty: "Ich habe nicht das Recht, Mich in Meine Gemächer zurückzuziehen, da Mein Volk nach mir hungert." A turning away from one's people, is, in essence, a turning away from oneself, for the two are inextricable. One of Lasker-Schüler's most widely read poems is itself titled *Mein Volk* (*Gedichte* 171). Like *Der Malik*, the poem maps the author's malleable relationship to Judaism. In her interpretation of "Mein Volk," Sigrid Bauschinger writes:

> Das ist Else Lasker-Schüler's jüdisches Dilemma: einerseits nimmt sie am religiösen Leben ihres Volkes nicht teil, will es auch nicht, lehnt die orthodoxen Formen des jüdischen Glaubens ab, andererseits wird sie sich von diesem Volk nie trennen können und wird immer von ihm dichten müssen. Sie ist die Dichterin, die einsam, "fernab" von ihrem Volk die Gotteslieder singt, aber das Volk schreit schauerlich gen Ost zu demselben Gott. (*Werk und Zeit* 171)

Like Bauschinger, I view this sense of obligation in the self/Other construct as a deep expression of the author's Jewishness, as well as her distinctive position in the society of her time. A constant attention to identity in the flux of life events and experiences is required of both the individual and the group for their

coexistence. Nationalism became a chief element in the constitution of identity in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Volk,* in its specific German context during the war years of the twentieth century, becomes politicized to the extreme, manifesting itself in elitist, hierarchical forms of chosenness. In *Der Malik*, the phrase "Mein Volk" can be interpreted as the swirl of communities that made up Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany. In Lasker-Schüler's case, these groups included the Jews and the various splinter cultures among the Jews that were being articulated, the urban population of Berlin, and non-Jews. For the author, such bonds of "brotherhood" demanded sharp scrutiny and criticism. With a war going on, she, as a woman writer, stood within a very specific vortex of national events.

Lothar Kahn describes the Jews' complicated role amidst the nationalism and antisemitism of World War I:

> [N]one of the anti-Jewish episodes. . . had as disillusioning an impact as World War I. Most Jews, writers included, hurled themselves into the fray with the same enthusiasm and abandon as their Christian brethren, though Jews seem to have entertained doubts earlier and withdrawn support sooner. While the main support for the national war effort derived from genuine patriotism, there was the additional motivation of becoming part of a brotherhood, even part of the nation itself. What better way of demonstrating their desire for oneness and their craving for community than through an offering of blood and life? Their

> dedication would show their desire for unity with the struggling German people and win them the very recognition that had been so long withheld. (xv)

Der Malik describes Lasker-Schüler's position in the midst of large-scale cultural movements which often manifested themselves in highly paradoxical terms. She saw many male friends, Jews and non-Jews alike, enter into a war which she was decidedly against. She documents these losses in *Der Malik*, not to mention her position against the war. For example, there are repeated references to her disappointment and anger at Franz Marc for his willing enlistment in the military (*Malik* 52, 73). As Kahn writes, the war brought into relief the conflicts of Jewish life in Germany. Acculturation played a large role in every aspect of life, and sorting through the many paradoxes of German society was the major preoccupation of many Jewish writers. Marion Kaplan describes the most fundamental aspects of German Jewish culture at the early part of the century. It is a time of accelerated assimilation and self-examination:

> Rather than rejecting their Jewish identities entirely through assimilation . . . the larger number of German Jews "acculturated" by accepting the external, objective behavior and standards of the dominant culture. They adapted to styles of dress and manners of speech, moved out of predominantly Jewish neighborhoods into newer ones. . . accommodated to contemporary middle-class attitudes toward work and achievement, and evinced a deep loyalty to the fatherland. They saw no contradiction between their

> Germanness and their Jewishness. Yet their sentiments and their perceptions often separated them from the rest of the population. They were also distinguished by their career patterns, celebration of Jewish holidays and life-cycle events, and attitudes toward conversion and intermarriage. Their social contacts, too, often isolated them from other Germans. . .The culture of the Jewish minority mixed an ancient heritage and contemporary German bourgeois practice but was identical to neither. (*Tradition and Transition* 203)

Though Lasker-Schüler, a writer of the bohème, is far outside the middle-class Jewish experience described by Kaplan above, she was not unaffected by it. Having departed from her bourgeois past, not to mention having left the institution of marriage, she did not espouse the nationalism that some segments of Jewish culture did. Instead, in the tradition of Heine[9], she expresses an ironic, critical distance to the "Vaterland," a term richly imbued with all the constraints she experienced as a Jewish woman writing literature in Germany. This makes her critical of her male contemporaries as well, and the culture of war that surrounded her.

The reader soon finds that Jussuf Abigail is the melech of a kingdom comprised of three cities: Mareia-Ir, Irsahab and Thebes (Tiba), and that he is surrounded by a circle of warrior chieftains, "wilde Juden" (*Malik* 42) whom he

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[9]See Shedletzky's article which compares the writings of Lasker-Schüler and Heinrich Heine.

has appointed as a sort of council to the throne. The "wild Jews" represent the governing forces of Jussuf Abigail's kingdom. Like the group of revolutionaries in the story *Das Buch der drei Abigails* from *Der Prinz von Theben*, Jussuf Abigail calls this fraternity the *Zebaothknaben*. Many of the characters of this brotherhood—with names such as Morderchei (sic), Gad, Salomein, Memed—are styled upon Lasker-Schüler's male friends. Jussuf Abigail compares this society he has chosen and of which he is a fraternal member to an "Altardecke" (*Malik* 31), giving the governing body of Thebes both spiritual and political power. In this way, Jussuf Abigail and his chieftains are chosen figures. They are a distinct group, and as in the covenant of God with the Jews, their chosen status also exacts responsibility of them. They are Lasker-Schüler's ideal vision of the modern Jew, "jene Mischung aus Indianer und Makkabäer" (Bauschinger, *Ich bin Jude* 94). Unlike their fathers, the generation who came before them and whom the author describes as the "vorsichtigen, leisen, gelehrten Hebräer" of Irsahab (*Malik* 35), the *Zebaothknaben* are revolutionary and wild. "Ich konnte die ganze Nacht nicht schlafen. Ich wache, seitdem ich Kaiser bin, oft mit dem Mond, manchmal zusammen mit den Häuptlingen für das Wohl meines Volkes," Jussuf Abigail writes to Ruben expressing the responsibility he and his warriors bear for the good of his people (*Malik* 31).

In the self/Other construct of identity, this fraternity functions as an external gaze to Jussuf Abigail, the chosen figure. They "säumten ihres Maliks Bild mit ihren goldenen Träumen und liebten den Kaiserschelm" (*Malik* 50).

The author refers to Jussuf Abigail as an image ("Bild"), referring in turn to herself as the creator of this ideal relation. Without this male gaze surrounding Jussuf Abigail with devotion and "goldene Träume," Jussuf Abigail himself would not exist.

When the author moves from epistolary to narrative form in *Der Malik*, a plot of sorts also begins to develop. She situates the pacifist Jussuf Abigail in an ethical-religious dilemma as he and his warriors are asked by another clan, the Aryans, to go to battle as allies in war against the Indians. His adamant refusal to enter the war throws his isolation into relief, as he comes into conflict with his *Volk* who eventually revolt. The fraternal male gaze of the Aryans, the *Zebaothknaben*, and the old fathers of Irsahab become a central means of narrating Jussuf Abigail's chosenness. In each instance, he is portrayed in relation to a group of males who represent aspects of patriarchy with which Lasker-Schüler struggled as a writer and a Jewish woman. Lasker-Schüler uses symbols of maleness and patriarchy—the phallus, the waging of war, and the making and studying of texts—as a means of articulating Jussuf Abigail's extraordinary position. In essence, the three fraternities represent different aspects of Lasker-Schüler's German Jewish experience as a woman in androcentric culture: she explores Jewish religious tradition (particularly textual tradition) through the old *Irsahabaner*, race and textual issues through the Aryans, and her own artistic community of male peers through the *Zebaothknaben*. As she does so, she makes use of gender symbols which articulate Jussuf Abigail's chosenness.

The boomerang, for example, is an important phallic symbol. Jussuf Abigail's virtuosity as "des Bumerangwerfens gefürchtester Krieger" (*Malik* 53) is known far and wide and sought out by the visiting Aryan host. In symbolic terms, the boomerang signifies Lasker-Schüler's authorship. She is in possession of this male attribute which makes her a part of the fraternity of men. In an important scene in the novel, the Aryans watch Jussuf Abigail from a high tower as he practices his art:

> Nicht wenig waren die Arier überrascht, als sie plötzlich auf dem weiten Spielplatz Jussuf Abigail erblickten im Kriegerschmuck; alle farben [sic] Perlen sangen um Seinen Leib, Ihn umgaben Thebetaner in Kampftracht. Der Malik schien keinen der Zuschauer oben auf dem Turm Seiner Stadt zu bemerken, und Oßman [Jussuf Abigail's alter ego/servant] riet schalkhaft den Soldaten, sich ja unauffällig zu verhalten. Der hohe Bumerangkrieger schleuderte Seine hölzerne Mondsichel leicht, fast virtuosenhaft durch die Luft und fing sie wieder auf im großen Kreis, jedesmal mit hellem Kriegsgeschrei, das von Seinen Getreuen begleitet wurde. Beim Mondaufgang begegneten dem wilden Kaiser Seine abendländischen Gäste im lebhaften Gespräch, erröteten noch vor Entzücken in der Erinnerung des erlebten Schauspiels. (*Malik* 69-70)

Like the *Zebaothknaben*, these Aryan guests, also called "die abendländischen Gäste," form a brotherhood. How they perceive Jussuf Abigail plays a part in

the identity structure of the chosen figure. His chosenness is described by his beauty and his virtuosity in boomerang throwing. These superlative military attributes are narrated from the point of view of the visiting warriors, which in turn is consciously constructed by the author. Lasker-Schüler symbolically situates the visitors in a high tower, within the phallus and within their own *maleness so to speak. They look down upon Jussuf* Abigail who is unaware of their presence. Lasker-Schüler manipulates the gaze upon Jussuf Abigail as a positive force in the self/Other structure. To be surrounded and adored, to be admired and respected for his talents is an indication of Jussuf Abigail's chosenness.

The boomerang scene is erotic. When the "abendländische Gäste" see Jussuf Abigail later that evening, they are filled with bliss and blush from the memory of his performance ("Schauspiel"). It is interesting that Lasker-Schüler uses the word "Schauspiel" here, referring in cloaked narrative terms to her art. The constitutive male gaze was necessary for her art at the time when men were practically the only publicly legitimized witnesses to her virtuosity, to her authorship. As Meike Feßmann writes:

> Läßt sich die Identifikation mit Jussuf unter biographischer und psychologischer Perspektive als ein Akt der Selbsterhöhung aus Notwehr verstehen, so zeigen andererseits die literarischen Texte, in denen Jussuf auftaucht . . . daß Else Lasker-Schüler um den Unterschied zwischen Selbsterhöhung und Ernennung gewußt hat und daß sie alles daran setzte, Jussuf von *anderen*

anerkennen zu lassen. (195-196)

Much of the narrative of *Der Malik* can be read as a dialogue between those "witnessing" (the male societies) and the one "being witnessed" (Jussuf Abigail). As the story proceeds, this exchange plays an important role in the political negotiations between Jussuf Abigail and the visiting occidental guests.

The Aryans arrive in Thebes not knowing whether "der Malik [sich] aber wohl bewegen ließ, auf seiten der verbündeten Mächte gegen die anderen Länder zu ziehen" (*Malik* 56). Just as Jussuf Abigail seduces the visitors with his boomerang, the "Ritter" attempt to win him over with their own tactics. Erotic relations are expressed through the language of war, as these "künstlerische Krieger" make plans to conquer his heart (56).

Knowing that Jussuf Abigail adores old legends, one of the Aryans makes a suggestion: "Was meint ihr, wenn wir uns dem Jussuf als seine Lieblingsgestalten alter Sagen repräsentieren?" (*Malik* 57). In this moment, the text becomes utterly self-referential, for the author has already framed these characters as such by calling them the "Ritter," the "Arier," and by giving them names that connote legendary figures of western (European) culture such as Giselheer the Nibelung, Tristan, and even Caspar Hauser. In doing so, the author causes her occidental characters, the "abendländische Gäste," to invite themselves into what appears to be their own discourse. In truth, however, she is subverting the male, literary canon. This is also evident in her "oriental" characters, the *Zebaothknaben* and other people of the kingdom of Thebes who bear names such as Zwi ben Zwi, Salomein, Gad, Memed, and most obviously

Jussuf Abigail. J. Cheryl Exum writes of "stepping outside the androcentric ideology of the biblical text" (9). In *Der Malik*, the author is stepping outside of both the eastern (biblical) and western (medieval epic) traditions. The result is a contrastive presentation of two literary worlds, both of which have a patriarchal ontology or "androcentric ideology" in common.

Familiar tropes of East and West, opposed here as biblical and medieval European literary realms, are exploited by the author as a means of presenting the history of male literary discourse and the centrality of war in this discourse. The difference between Jussuf Abigail's eastern tribe and the western soldiers is found in their religion and their culture. Jussuf Abigail acts as a medium between these two worlds. He is the site where these cultures and religions intersect, for both armies have a vested interest in him (just as David and Nabal both have a vested interest in the biblical Abigail). Their interest is sometimes expressed in erotic terms, much like the triangular relations described in Chapter 3 where the female figure functions as erotic medium between two male counterparts in the triangle. But in the end, Jussuf Abigail belongs to neither group entirely. His presence only serves to demonstrate that the westerners and easterners show little difference in regard to patriarchy.

Given the historical backdrop of World War I, it is important to point out again Jussuf Abigail's chosen status as mitigating force between groups. Despite his love for the visiting host, he refuses to join the Aryans in battle against the Indians: "Abigail Jussuf war fest entschlossen, unter keiner Bedingung sich an dieser Menschenschlacht zu beteiligen" (*Malik* 59). The

author often describes Jussuf Abigail as highly sensitive and temperamental in the presence of the collective male gaze in moments of disagreement regarding the war. He has emotional outbursts that alienate the warriors and that articulate his isolation all the more clearly:

> Die Ritter, welche sich wieder um Abigail versammelt hatten, baten Ihn, sie nicht unverrichteter Dinge ziehen zu lassen. Und sie erzümten den Kaiser mit dieser aufs neue aufgeworfenen Frage. Ob sie den Entschluß eines Ägyptischen Kaisers von einer willkürlichen Laune abhängig glaubten oder ob man Ihn nicht ernst nähme?!! Und Abigail, dessen Vorhaben es gewesen war, Sich würdevoll und gleichmäßig den arischen Kriegern gegenüber zu verhalten, bäumte Sich wie eine Welle, wurde wildes Wasser, rasender Ozean, und seine erschrockenen Gäste mußten sich gestehen, nie einen wilderen Gemütssturz je erlebt zu haben, und sie nannten Ihn heimlich unter sich den Tagâr, wie die thebetanischen Uferleute das reißende Wassertier nennen, den Wasserjaguar. Thron, Zeremonie und Krone schwammen auf der Hochflut Seines Blutes. (*Malik* 68)

We now find the gaze upon Jussuf Abigail constructed in a different light. He is no longer the idealized warrior, but emotionally imbalanced. Despite his attempts to contain his anger about the war, he loses rhetorical poise. This alienates his guests, the visiting male society that once regarded him so highly. They call Jussuf Abigail names that imply a volatile, threatening nature.

Discussing the various "myths of woman" in fin-de-siècle Germany, Jennifer Redmann describes Lasker-Schüler's situation:

> The prevalence of . . . objectifying and misogynist myths of woman impeded Else Lasker-Schüler's efforts to define herself as an avant-garde author, a role occupied by men, not women. In attempting to do so, she was forced to negotiate these many myths of the feminine—all of which positioned woman not as a figure of identification for any "real" women, but as a surface for the projection of masculine fears and fantasies. (72)

The Aryan soldiers fantasize about Jussuf Abigail's virtuosity with the boomerang, then call him names which imply that he is violent. As Redmann points out, the only way they are able to respond to Jussuf Abigail is to project their fear and fantasies onto him. This isolates Jussuf Abigail, not only from the Aryans, but from other groups within his kingdom. The "vorsichtigen, leisen, gelehrten Hebräer" of Irsahab (*Malik* 30), for example, are afraid of him:

> Mein Wort ertönt diesen verscheuchten Menschen wie Jägerruf. . . Mit Kummer vernehmen die bebenden Leutchen das Rauschen der vielen Muscheln und Perlen um Meinem Hals und gewahren spöttisch lächelnd die Nasenknöpfe in Meinen beiden Flügeln, und gutmütig lispeln sie über die Sterne und Monde Meiner Wagen. Mir sind die Leute unsympatisch ihrer unangenehmen Überlegungen wegen. . . Der Prophet gilt nichts in seinem Vaterlande! (*Malik* 35-36)

Jussuf Abigail is critical of the inhabitants of Irsahab, particularly the long-bearded fathers of the "gelehrten Goldstadt" (*Malik* 57), for they represent the patriarchal tradition of text and learning. He purposely flaunts his "Ungelehrsamkeit" (57) before these old fathers. His dislike of bookishness indicates Lasker-Schüler's anti-intellectual departure from the ideal of making and studying texts. In Judaism, studying the Torah and the law has historically been a male privilege. This privilege is in itself a form of chosenness based on hierarchical division, for historically only Jewish men have been allowed to practice what Cantor calls "spiritual resistance" (34) in the form of learnedness (the study of Torah and Jewish law). In feminist Jewish theory, the history of the written word and textual discourse are a manifestation of male dominance in society and religion, its self-perpetuation and self-justification. In this view, texts such as the Torah and Talmud document androcentric ideology.[10] Additionally, the male ideal of *Bildung* in German society was also an important element of Wilhelmine culture. David Sorkin writes:

> *Bildung* was a new ideal of individualism. It promised a form of secular salvation through the perfection of the whole man. Reason was to be applied to the creation of character, which was understood in aesthetic terms—the categories used to analyse the unity of a work of art were transferred to the understanding of

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[10]See Cantor 92 and her discussion of how the rabbis defined power "as knowledge, learning, and studying. They defined manhood itself in terms of commitment to and achievement in learning Torah."

> personality—and thus the ideal represented a form of aesthetic individualism. . . . The *Gebildeten* enunciated this ideal in a new public sphere of journals, sermons and literature, and institutionalized their independent standing as a new social group emerging from a corporate order disintegrating under the diverse pressures of political centralization and economic change in a new public social world of associations. (183)

For the Jews, Sorkin adds, the ideal of *Bildung* "increasingly came to be synonymous with emancipation" (183). Sorkin's assessment of Jewish *Bildung* and emancipation, however, does not include a view of woman. Instead, it delineates precisely what Lasker-Schüler was up against. Her response was to abandon *Bildung* as an ideal altogether. Marion Kaplan has investigated the Jewish woman's relationship to this "male model" which was not one that included women:

> Nineteenth-century bourgeois liberals urged Jews. . . . to develop intellectually as a way of integrating into class and nation, and Jews eagerly adapted. Jews then, and historians since, have given profound weight to the "education" element in Bildung. It meant developing one's own intellectual potential, self-cultivation, attainable through schooling and the university, a doctrine of aesthetic individualism—available to men only. (*Gender and Jewish history* 202)

Jussuf Abigail's approach to this problem is to defiantly ignore learnedness—an

ideal that in itself is patriarchal both in traditional Jewish theology and in non-Jewish German educational ideology—as an ideal principle altogether. In this way, Lasker-Schüler criticizes the long Jewish tradition of textual study and its role in the so-called emancipation of the Jews. In her view, it did not serve as emancipation. Jussuf Abigail is "ungelehrsam" in this respect, as Lasker-Schüler subverts both eastern and western traditions as they are represented by the male brotherhoods of *Der Malik.*

Soon political intrigue and traitorous actions among Jussuf Abigail's chieftains lead the kingdom to civil war. Calmus, one of Jussuf Abigail's chieftains, secretly incites Jussuf Abigail's people to rebel. It is known that Jussuf Abigail has fallen in love with the Aryan, Giselheer, a figure modeled on Lasker-Schüler's contemporary Gottfried Benn. The melech's "Untreue" is cause for revolt in Thebes. Political intrigue and infighting among some of the "wild Jews" destroy the ruler. He loses the trust of his *Volk* and Giselheer refuses him. Isolated and in despair, Jussuf Abigail, "der traurigste Mensch in Theben," climbs up to his sacred "Birkenhügel." In the branches of the birch tree

> schlummerte die Seele der Königin mit den goldenen Flügeln, darum Er den holden Baum nicht fällen wollte. So nannten die Ägypter die angebetete Mutter Jussuf Abigails. In den Stamm des Baumes schnitt er ein blaues Herz und unter ihm seine geliebte Stadt Tiba. Und wanderte und schlief auf einer Wiese ein und träumte, es wäre eine abendländische Dichterin in einem kleinen

> Kämmerlein hoch in einem Turme und spiele mit dem Mond und seinen Sternen Zickzack. Erwachte und kam am Abend heim, ermüdet die Hand auf einen Hirtenstab gestützt. Wer dem Trauervollen begegnete, glaubte, er sei eine Flügelgestalt. (*Malik* 98-99)

Jussuf Abigail is said to be the saddest person in all of Thebes. The birch tree, in which the soul of the queen with golden wings (Jussuf Abigail's mother) is sleeping, is one of the few direct references to the feminine in the novel. It is significant in that the figure of the mother appears now, so close to the moment of Jussuf Abigail's death. He falls asleep and dreams of a "Dichterin," alone in a high tower playing with the moon and the stars. Lasker-Schüler, the woman writer, presents herself here as Jussuf Abigail's subconscious, as the subject of a dream-world, exposing her "real" identity as a solitary, marginalized figure, sealed off in the phallic tower.

The tower, like other symbols of maleness, is also a means of depicting Jussuf Abigail's and the author's marginalization and chosenness. It points to the encasement and isolating aspects of living in androcentric society, and the failure at finding a place among or between the various groups of male cultures, such as those depicted in *Der Malik*. As the male friends in her life perish in the war, and as she becomes disillusioned by yet another failed love affair (with Gottfried Benn), the author kills Abigail Jussuf off.

The identification with the feminine before the suicide scene of the novel prompts Jussuf Abigail's rage toward his warrior chieftains, the "wilde Juden."

He begins to harbor "Ungeheures im Herzen gegen seine wilden Juden" (*Malik* 99). One night, he steals into the hall where they are sleeping with plans to murder them all. Anticipating his destructive rage, the chieftains place pillows in their beds and then hide in safety. Jussuf Abigail enters the room and stabs them all to death with his dagger. Thinking he has committed a terrible deed, Jussuf Abigail then kills himself: "der schon seit langer Zeit schwermütige Kaiser [erhängte sich] noch in selbiger unglückseligen Stunde" (*Malik* 100).

Chapter 5

Reconciliation

This chapter and the one that follows address a controversial topic which has been discussed at length in Lasker-Schüler criticism: reconciliation.[1] Though the author never presents it as a systematic theology, reconciliation between religions and ethnic groups is a cornerstone of her spiritual thinking and a primary motivation for her literary production. In my reading of Lasker-Schüler's prose, I identify a number of variations on the reconciliation theme, placing particular focus on gender issues. The problem of hierarchial oppositions—dualities which rank different groups by their religion, race or gender[2]—is most significant in my discussion. As many feminist theorists argue:

> [O]pposition and subjugation particularly characterize patriarchal modes of making boundaries and making sense. Consequently, in patriarchal societies the structure of thought itself predisposes us to split and separate rather than to perceive interconnections and interdependencies. (Adler 43)

Oppositions such as Jewish/Christian or Jewish/German preoccupied Lasker-

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[1]For a history of criticism on the topic of reconciliation and Lasker-Schüler's writings, see Jones 38-45.

[2]For a feminist theological discussion of hierarchical oppositions, see Plaskow, *Jewish Theology* 69.

Schüler throughout her life, and her writings demonstrate a keen awareness of the complexity of gender in the midst of such dualities. Her prose is often compelled by a desire to either reveal or construct an interconnectedness between opposing religious and ethnic groups, not to mention between men and women. Repeatedly, she constructs scenes of reconciliation in her prose. The outcome of such scenes varies; sometimes a reconciliation occurs, other times it is thwarted. The most important factor, however, is the author's unstinting attempt to capture, again and again, moments of interconnectedness between religious and ethnic groups, as well as men and women.

It is necessary to contextualize Lasker-Schüler's intense preoccupation with reconciliation, particularly because it has often been misunderstood and described variously as religiously superficial, naive, or approaching insanity. Born in 1869, and thus a child of the nineteenth century, she lived through a period of profound societal transformation during which nationality became a central element in the construction and political manipulation of identity. She lived out her childhood in a secular, assimilated, bourgeois Jewish household, entering into adult life at the dawn of the twentieth century, a time of extreme nationalism, world wars, and intensifying antisemitism.

The life of middle class German-Jews of the nineteenth century—traditionally characterized as "assimilated"—plays a large role in any discussion of Lasker-Schüler's writings on reconciliation, for this period marks the author's formative childhood years. David Sorkin carefully describes the nature of Jewish life in Wilhelmine Germany, pointing out the necessity of abandoning

concepts of identity that are typical of the twentieth century:

> The view that the encounter with secular culture and society [Wilhelmine Germany] entailed assimilation presupposed one of two views of Jewish identity: either the "Jew" is opposed to the "German", in which case assimilation meant denationalization—Jews claimed to be Germans and thus denied their nationality and the political and social structures that supported it; or the "Jew" is opposed to the "Christian", in which case assimilation meant Christianization—Jews attempted to enter German society and thus denied their own religion by making it conform to Christian standards or by renouncing it altogether. These categories are inappropriate since they are both static and anachronistic, imposing norms derived from twentieth-century ideologies—Judaism as either a national or a religious phenomenon—onto the nineteenth century. They thus preclude the possibility of recognizing an interplay of factors—secular and religious, political and social, external and internal—in the creation of Jewish identity in the nineteenth century. (178)

The resulting identity, Sorkin explains, was a "creative . . . encounter with German culture—the transmutation of the German into the German-Jewish," which led to the formation of a "subculture" among the Jews (178). Lasker-Schüler's literary reconciliations are informed by these formative years as well as by her gender. Her writings demonstrate a keen ability in identifying

hierarchical separations, because as an adult she was suddenly thrust into the twentieth century, a period when such separations became more prevalent in regard to nationality and religion.

The last book Lasker-Schüler published in Germany—before fleeing the country in 1933 and entering into a life of exile in Switzerland and later Palestine—was a collection of essays titled *Konzert* (1932).[3] In this publication, the author returns to thoughts of her long-dead friend Peter Hille. Although a familiar beholden posture (reminiscent of Tino's adulation of Petrus in *Das Peter Hille-Buch*) is evident in the three essays of *Konzert* devoted to Hille, the author's self-subordination is less extreme than it was in her early years in Berlin. This is because Lasker-Schüler has aged 26 years. She is now in her early sixties and has evolved from the victim-martyr figure of Tino, through her Godwrestling phase of experimental gender stylizations of Jussuf Abigail, to the present narrative voice of the *Konzert* essays.

The voice of *Konzert* is ruminative and solitary, as the author boldly addresses matters of faith, tradition, ethnicity and culture in a time when these elements of identity are being politicized in the extreme. In light of the times—the rise of Nazism in Germany—reconciliation is an identifiably significant, nearly programmatic motif of *Konzert.* Interestingly enough, the author brings up the topic of reconciliation in direct association with Peter Hille. For example, in "St. Peter Hille," she writes:

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[3]Lasker-Schüler won the Kleist Prize for *Konzert* only months before leaving Germany.

> Ein Papst wäre Peter Hille gewesen—der Allwelt. Denn er hätte die Völker in gleichem Masse beschienen. Allerdings eine Kosmische Politik, doch die höhere Gerechtigkeit. (*Konzert* 92)

Lasker-Schüler presents religious tolerance here as a high form of politics, and as an ideal embodied by her mentor Hille. Using the imagery of light often associated with sacredness and God to describe Hille, Lasker-Schüler assumes the same beholden posture found in *Das Peter Hille-Buch* published many years earlier. Most important for my topic is the underlying factor of maleness in the deity. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Lasker-Schüler transfers the maleness of God to Hille. A built-in subordination of woman to man as hierarchical separation is present when God is gendered male. In this way, the ideal of reconciliation itself is framed within a male religious ontology. Hille becomes the source of reconciliation ("Denn er hätte die Völker in gleichem Masse beschienen."), just as God is the source of light.

In another essay of *Konzert* also titled "Peter Hille," there is a similar tendency to unify all religions through the figure Hille. In this instance, he is portrayed as a reconciling figure of metaphysical proportion:

> Peter Hille war einer der auserlesenen Gäste dieser Welt; wohin sein Herz sich wandte, ordneten sich Unebenheiten. Sein Erscheinen schloß Versöhnung in sich. Ein weit gewaltigeres, umfassenderes Wunder als das begrenzte Wunder. (*Konzert* 94)

In still another essay, "St. Peter Hille," Lasker-Schüler writes:

> Daß ich gerade als innigste Hebräerin auf Peter Hille, den

> Katholiken, hinweise, beweist, daß es nur einen Glauben, wie einen Gott, eine Schöpfung, einen Himmel gibt. Die Religion, die Erbin vieler Namen und lallender Heidennamen, sich nur verschieden zu kleiden pflegt. So ruht man in St. Petrons blauem Worte vom himmlischen Sohne wie in Buddhas weiser Friedlichkeit, aber auch in Abrahams Schoß! Er liebte es, wenn ich von der starken Einsamkeit Jehovas erzählte, Zebaoth Psalme weihte. (*Konzert* 99)

Lasker-Schüler relies upon the doctrine of monotheism to bolster her vision of reconciliation. Her friendship with Hille is proof of the fact that there is "nur ein Glauben, wie ein Gott." Monotheism, historically speaking, is a direct expression of androcentric culture and male dominance of religious culture. Though much revisionist activity in Christianity and Judaism is being pursued today to include women as acknowledged shapers of religion (Plaskow, *Jewish Theology* 62-84), it was not practiced in Lasker-Schüler's time.[4] The reconciliation that takes place between Jew and Catholic (between Lasker-Schüler and Hille) in the passage above does so under the prevailing, patriarchal paradigm of a single, male God.

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[4]The work of Jewish feminist Bertha Pappenheim must be mentioned here, for she was the strongest Jewish voice and social organizer of women in Lasker-Schüler's time. Though Pappenheim achieved astounding results as founder of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund*, much of her writing is indicative of a period which had only just begun to question patriarchal doctrine. For a discussion of Pappenheim's work, see Umansky 148-152. Also see page 18 of this dissertation.

Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to point out that there are also places in the author's language where this religious ontology is slightly disrupted. In the above quote, for example, Lasker-Schüler lists figures who represent some of the major religions of the world—Christ, Buddha, Abraham. By inference, she also includes Hille among these figures. Even more interesting, however, is how she then proceeds to include herself in this list of religious figures. She does so by referring to Hille's appreciation of her own form of worship: "Er liebte es, wenn ich von der starken Einsamkeit Jehovas erzählte, Zebaoth Psalme weihte." In this way, Lasker-Schüler equates herself with Hille and his "blaue Worte vom himmlischen Sohne." Both writers worship in their specific fashions. Hille's acceptance of her faith, an act of reconciliation, leads Lasker-Schüler to include her feminine expression of spirituality among the illustrious spiritual figures she lists. Though she does not escape the implied patriarchal ontology of a male God (in this case, indirectly expressed through Hille's acceptance of her), reconciliation provides a means through which to validate not only her Jewishness but her own feminine stake in her religion. She describes herself as "innigste Hebräerin."

Feßmann argues that Lasker-Schüler's writings on reconciliation are due largely to Hille:

> Peter Hille hat Else Lasker-Schüler nicht einfach nur zur Dichterin ernannt, sondern er wollte, daß sie die repräsentative Dichterin der Versöhnung zwischen Judentum und Christentum werde. (146-147)

In wanting her to be a representative poet, Feßmann writes, Hille presents Lasker-Schüler with an "Aufgabe" that is paradoxical in nature. This is because her "Erhöhung" by Hille leads automatically to "eine Marginalisierung und Stigmatisierung" of the author (147). Her "Aufgabe" is "in der Realität . . . unmöglich zu lösen" (148). I don't agree with Feßmann entirely on this point, for I do not see Hille as the sole source of the author's preoccupation with reconciliation. Reconciliation was in the air, a common tenet of the expressionists[5] and groups such as the *Neue Gemeinschaft.*

Hille must also be given credit for recognizing in Lasker-Schüler a radical spiritual propensity. In what might best be called a "spiritual profile" of Lasker-Schüler, he describes the author with the words: "Sie tollt sich mit dem alterernsten Jahve," adding that she is "von dunkelknisternder Strähne auf heißem, leidenschaftsstrengem Judenhaupte" (Albrecht 253). In this same profile are also the oft quoted words: "Else Lasker-Schüler ist die jüdische Dichterin. Von großem Wurf. Was Debora. . . . Der schwarze Schwan Israels, eine Sappho, der die Welt entzwei gegangen ist" (Albrecht 253).

Hille correctly identified a key struggle in Lasker-Schüler's spirituality. It is a struggle that challenges religious patriarchy, the traditional "alterernsten Jahve." Comparing her to Deborah, the only matriarch of the Torah acknowledged as a prophet, Hille maps Lasker-Schüler's progressive spirituality with extraordinary insight. On the other hand, she is the "schwarzer

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[5]For a discussion of the expressionists' ideal of brotherhood, see Kahn 109.

Schwan Israels," an outsider to the Jewish religious-cultural community. The symbolism of the black swan and the reference to Sappho express a defiant marginality, not one caused by Hille's stigmatizing words (as Feßmann argues), but one which he witnessed as her lot in life.

Lasker-Schüler's literary processing of relationships with male friends is strongly associated with reconciliation, or the impossibility of reconciliation, particularly in her dialogues with Jewish theologians of her day. For example, a complex and rather obscure incident once occurred between Lasker-Schüler and her lifelong friend, Martin Buber. The incident took place in 1914, during the early years of their friendship in Berlin, and involved an argument about the German poet Stefan George. In a letter from Lasker-Schüler to Martin Buber, the author refers to their argument which most likely took place during a literary event in Buber's home. Lasker-Schüler evidently showed some emotion:

> Verehrter Herr von Zion.
>
> Ein Wolf war bei Ihnen—ein Oberpriester mit gepfeilten Zähnen, ein Basileus mit einem Wildherzen, eine Faust, die betet, ein Meer ohne Strand, ein Bett, das sich auftrank—und—Sie sprachen von Literatur—Sie lasen Gedichte und ich mag das nicht. Sie schämen sich, daß George Jude ist—und sind der Herr von Zion? Ich *hasse* die Juden, da ich David war oder Joseph—ich hasse die Juden, weil sie meine Sprache mißachten, weil ihre Ohren verwachsen sind und sie nach Zwergerei horchen und Gemauschel. Sie fressen zu viel, sie sollten hungern.

> Ich verachte die Welt und war bei Ihnen und oft mit Cynismus. Lieb und herb, junge Akazien sind Ihre Kinder wie die zarten Bäume, die bei uns im Garten standen.—Sie sind bös? Und spreche doch die Wahrheit und schreibe mit Ekel und Abscheu und Einsamkeit und *Rührung.*
>
> Ihr Prinz von Theben (*Tiger* 117)

The letter is frank and provoking. Lasker-Schüler opens with a self-characterization that admits to her temperamental nature: "Ein Wolf war bei Ihnen..." She is also quick to point out a literary superficiality she perceived at the soiree and criticizes Buber for it. She then proceeds to claim that Stephan George is a Jew. This is significant, for George would in later years become a highly controversial figure in Germany. Some critics characterized him as having a fascist bent, others felt he was not antisemitic at all.[6] He also exuded a religious aura that apparently attracted some Jews to his elitist, cultural circle (Kahn 135). In an accusing tone, Lasker-Schüler tells Buber that he, the "Herr von Zion," is ashamed that someone such as George would be a Jew. Whether Lasker-Schüler wrongly claims George is a Jew because she is simply misinformed or because she is intentionally provoking Buber is unclear. In any event, it is provoking, controversial, and it delineates her own marginality within Judaism. "Ich *hasse* die Juden, weil ich David oder Joseph war," she writes, using the familiar motif of the ostracization and visionary strength of male

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[6]For an analyses of the issues surrounding George, see Kahn 130-131, Würffel, Grün, and Sparr.

biblical figures as a means of describing her outsider status among Jews. The fact that the claim about George's Jewishness is immediately followed by her criticism of the Jews initially smacks of antisemitic sentiment. However, a close analysis of the gender dynamic of this scene with Buber makes clear that the author is actually seeking a meaningful religious dialogue with him, one that does not exclude her experience of Judaism.

Alfred Bodenheimer offers an important discussion of Lasker-Schüler's relations with Jewish male theologians and philosophers of her time (65-69). These men, including Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Schalom Ben-Chorin, and Walter Benjamin, all shared an inability to grasp her particular religiosity or enter into dialogue with it, often responding to her gestures for dialogue with anger, irritation, or comments about her mental instability. "[F]ür Scholem," writes Bodenheimer, "war es nicht akzeptabel, daß eine bewußt ausserhalb jeder traditionsgebundenen Norm stehende Dichterin ihm ihre Offenbarungen mit solch kapriziös anmutendner Selbstverständlichkeit vortrug" (69). It is important to emphasize Bodenheimer's placement of Lasker-Schüler outside of "jeder traditionsgebundenen Norm." To express her particular spirituality and view of Judaism involved tremendous "Selbstverständlichkeit" to be sure. This independence and subversiveness are what posed a threat to Lasker-Schüler's male peers.

In "Jewish Theology in Feminist Perspective," Judith Plaskow writes that there is no specifically intratheological dialogue within feminist Jewish theology today:

> Although Christian (and non-Christian) feminists have analyzed the thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and numerous other thinkers, no parallel body of work exists that discusses Saadia, Maimonides, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, or other Jewish figures. (67)

Obviously, there was also no such intratheological discourse in Lasker-Schüler's time, and yet, her relations with Martin Buber demonstrate an attempt to initiate a dialogue. Oftentimes, such dialogue involved the topic of reconciliation.[7] By putting forth the preposterous notion that George is a Jew, using him almost as a catalyst for theological debate with Buber about Judaism, the author uncovers powerful tensions between men and women in Jewish culture. She also plays a typical gender trick by transferring her feminine voice to a symbolic male figure. In this instance, it is three figures: Joseph of Egypt, King David, and Stephan George.

Lasker-Schüler explains her marginalization within her religion associatively, closely relating George's supposed Jewishness to her own literary language, which she says is disrespected and disdained by the Jews. "[I]ch hasse die Juden, weil sie meine Sprache mißachten." I read this

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[7]One example is found in their personal correspondence. Many years after the Berlin incident described above, when both Buber and Lasker-Schüler were living in exile in Palestine, the author writes: "Ich bin keine Zionistin, keine Jüdin, keine Christin . . . wenn wir nur von seiner [Jesus'] einfachen Lehre wüßten, gäbe es heute noch Judenchristen und das wäre eine Brücke zwischen Juden und Christen." See Lasker-Schüler, *Tiger* 127.

statement as deeply feminist and theological in nature.[8] In order to get her point across, the author indirectly equates herself with George, a non-Jew. It is a subversive measure meant to challenge Buber theologically and to shed light on the fact of feminine spirituality. She ends the letter referring to her isolation: "Und spreche doch die Wahrheit und schreibe mit Ekel und Abscheu und Einsamkeit und *Rührung*."

Buber does not follow her cue, which is a request for dialogue. He is condescending, even demoralizing in his answer to her. On January 17, 1914, he writes:

> Liebe und Verehrte—
>
> Sie würden sich vergeblich bemühen, meinem Gefühl für Ihr Dasein auch nur ein Fünkchen zu nehmen. Ich bin also gar nicht "bös", auch nicht über die Absurdität, die Sie mir George gegenüber andichten. Können Sie wirklich nicht begreifen, daß jemand, der das Judentum mit Zorn und Sehnsucht *liebt*, die Methode nicht mitmacht, Leute zu Juden zu ernennen, die es *nicht sind*? George ist doch nicht *mehr* als ein Jude, sondern nur *anders* als ein Jude. (354)

As Lasker-Schüler appropriates and subverts male figures symbolically to

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[8] I see it as deeply feminist and theological in the same way that Susannah Heschel describes an imaginary "Franz Rosenzweig's sister" (just as Virginia Woolf postulates a sister of Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own*), stating that this sister had two choices. She "could either get mad, or turn away from Judaism altogether." See Heschel, *Feminist Confrontation* 269. Rather than turn away, Lasker-Schüler gets mad.

express her own feminine marginality in her letter, Buber defines in his retort precisely what the author is struggling against. He scolds her, saying that anyone who loves Judaism with the anger and passion that she claims to possess shouldn't engage in the practice of calling those who are not Jews Jews. "George ist doch nicht *mehr* als ein Jude, sondern nur *anders* als ein Jude." Here Buber is clearly marking George as Other, and, in effect, Lasker-Schüler as well. He is reinforcing hierarchical separations that many feminist theologians criticize as one of the main sources of oppression in patriarchally structured religion.

This relates to the topic of reconciliation in a profound manner. Buber says that Lasker-Schüler's naming of George as a Jew is absurd, and he is right to think so. The cue he misses, however, is Lasker-Schüler's implication that reconciliation, if framed within a religious or cultural ontology of hierarchical separations, *is itself* absurd. By calling George a Jew, Lasker-Schüler undoes these dualisms. She obscures the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews. Buber's letter also indicates that in their argument the author might have said something akin to "George was more than a Jew." I don't believe she is expressing antisemitic sentiment. Instead, she is arguing for a new approach to religious and cultural identity, one that does not classify according to traditional separations. Lasker-Schüler's letter is fundamentally reconciliatory and radically progressive in nature; Buber's is separatist. Both authors run risks in their thinking in regard to German-Jewish tensions in religion and culture, Buber by excluding and hierarchalizing in regard to women and non-Jews,

Lasker-Schüler by experimenting, at times recklessly, with cultural and gender boundaries.

I do not mean to imply that Buber is not involved in the project of reconciliation, on the contrary. His life's work was spent synthesizing and comparing many religious points of view, such as those found in the *Ekstatische Konfessionen* of 1909, a collection of mystical confessions written by various theologians and religious thinkers from around the world and throughout the course of time.[9] Also, in his later writings, such as the important book *I and Thou*, "the two traditions [Judaism and Christianity] interact and illuminate one another in a remarkable and moving way" (Smith vi). Most important to my discussion here, however, is the moment of dialogue, or failed dialogue, between Lasker-Schüler and Buber and the role of gender in the conflict.

Buber continues his letter to the author addressing the important issue of language:

> Sie hassen die Juden, weil sie Ihre Rede nicht hören oder nicht aufnehmen? Das ist schade. Ich meine, man sollte sich mehr darum bekümmern, wie man die Welt hört, als wie sie einen hört. . . . Sie aber sind unruhig um die Menschen und das verstört Sie. So fühlten Sie sich in meinem Hause verstört, weil Sie sich nicht oder nicht richtig gehört glaubten, und sprachen aus Ihrer Verstörung von Literatur und ließen sich von Literatur antworten.

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[9]See Goltschnigg 19-41 for a discussion of the *Ekstatische Konfessionen* and Buber's early thoughts on mystical experience.

(354)

Buber's tone is paternalistic and condescending. He finds it necessary to give Lasker-Schüler spiritual advice that borders on platitude. Telling her she should be more concerned about how she listens to the world than how the world listens to her only articulates more fully her isolation as a woman and a Jew.[10]

In Lasker-Schüler's novel, *Der Malik* (1919), another important friendship between the author and a male contemporary, the poet Gottfried Benn, is framed in a world of religious, ethnic and gender duality. In a letter to Ruben (Franz Marc), Jussuf Abigail characterizes his relationship with Giselheer, the heathen:

> Er heißt Giselheer. Sein Gehirn ist ein Leuchtturm. Er ist aus den Nibelungen. Meine Stadt Theben ist nicht erbaut davon. Meine Stadt Theben ist ein ehrwürdiger hoher Priester. Meine Stadt Theben ist die Knospe Zebaoths. (*Malik* 13)

In *Der Malik*, these two characters are fundamentally at odds, unreconciled from the very beginning. Giselheer is "aus den Nibelungen" and situated in the western tradition I discussed in Chapter 4. Jussuf Abigail is Jewish, as his reference to "Zebaoth" indicates, and he lives in the eastern land of Thebes.

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[10]See Granite 1-2 for a feminist discussion of Buber's works. Granite differentiates Buber's theological starting point from that of feminist theoreticians, stating that "Buber works toward relation, while feminists begin with relation." I find this basic conflict expressed in the letters between Lasker-Schüler and Buber cited here.

Throughout the entire novel, ethnic and religious dualities are the means by which the author highlights the impossibility of reconciliation between Giselheer and Jussuf Abigail. Sigrid Bauschinger finds that

> Die Dichterin wollte den germanischen Heiden zu ihrer Kunstreligion voller Wunder bekehren, denn in der Kunst wären alle tödlichen Unterschiede, auch die zwischen Juden und Christen aufgehoben. (*Ich bin Jude* 91)

I agree with this view in part, but wish to look more deeply into how the gender conflicts between Lasker-Schüler and Benn (Jussuf Abigail and Giselheer) symbolize larger ethnic and religious divisions in German society. As the novel progresses, scenes involving Giselheer emphasize a mounting tension marked by taboo desire. Jussuf Abigail's longing for Giselheer is fraught with religious and ethnic conflict, yet, at least in the beginning, it is also filled with a mysterious promise of intimacy between two disparate worlds:

> Ich schickte dem ungläubigen Ritter lauter Spielsachen, als ob er mein Brüderchen sei—weil er ein rot Kinderherz hat, weil er so ein Barbar ist, weil er noch ein heimatliches Spielzimmer haben möchte. (*Malik* 13)

The "heimatliches Spielzimmer" is a playful invitation for (sexual) intimacy and reconciliation. It is Jussuf Abigail's longing for Giselheer to cross boundaries of identity delineated by gender, race, and religion. The romantic tensions between Lasker-Schüler and Gottfried Benn are well-known and well-documented by critics and by the writers themselves. Lasker-Schüler

composed a number of love poems to Benn which he returned with rather disgruntled poems.[11] In another letter to Franz Marc, Lasker-Schüler describes how Benn has spurned her. In doing so, she performs an unusual analysis of her own writing, separating the fictional character Giselheer (referred to as G. in the letter) from the man Benn:

> Den Doktor Benn rief ich, der meinte, das Loch in meinem Herzen könnte man mit einem einzigen Faden zunähen. Ich vertraute ihm die Geschichte meiner Liebe an, zeigte ihm Giselheers Briefe und sagte ihm alles. Er behauptet, ich habe meine Welt in G. hineingelegt, und er habe keine Ahnung von mir. Wenn ich daran denke, wie G. einen Strich zog unter meinem Mantel wie unter die Lackschuhe einer Puppe—Wenn das je meine Stadt erführe, meine verehrten Häuptlinge und mein glaubseliges Volk erst,—nie würde ich Kaiser werden. Hätte ich nur meine Geschenke wieder, die ich "Ihm" sandte: meine Mondsichel, den Rosenkometen, meinen lila Brunnen und meine silberne Levkoie. "Er" schenkte mir eine Enttäuschung. Ich bin morgens bleich, um Mittag schluchze ich, aber am Abend lodere ich in allen düsteren Farben. Ich habe dem Doktor Benn ehrenwörtlich versprochen, nicht mehr an den armen König zu denken, der noch nicht einmal ein Herz besitzt zum Verschwenden. (*Malik* 20-21)

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[11]For a discussion of the literary exchange between Benn and Lasker-Schüler, see Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 133-134.

The passage demonstrates how the author constructs literary scenes as ulterior realities to real life situations in which reconciliation—the transcendence of hierarchical separations—is impossible. Scenes in *Der Malik* that involve Giselheer are compelled by this process of literary production, as Jussuf Abigail becomes a vehicle for addressing unreconciled love. Although Jussuf Abigail promises Doktor Benn that he will never think of Giselheer again, he returns, time and again, to the impossibility of their love. Indeed, it becomes the motivation for the fiction itself. The ulterior reality of literature becomes the place where Lasker-Schüler struggles with loss, composing ideal situations of resolution and reconciliation.

Gottfried Benn, a controversial German writer, would later express elements of fascist ideology in his works during the years just before Hitler's "Machtergreifung." Unlike some of his contemporaries who left Germany to live a life of exile, Benn stayed on in the "Vaterland," only to become disillusioned with his initial poetic ideal of a tragic-heroic humanity (Bahr 367-358). He eventually rejected Nazi polemic, comparing life in fascist Germany in 1942 to being "im Unrat der Welt" (Bahr 379).[12] As Sigrid Bauschinger points out, Lasker-Schüler was aware of the "großen Unterschiede" between Benn and herself (*Werk und Zeit* 134). The author intuitively recognized these differences early on, and she was compelled to explore the political and emotional ramifications of them. Somehow she recognized not only a profound inability to

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[12]For discussions of Benn's controversial position in regard to fascism, see Diereck, Strauss and Bahr 375-380.

reach Benn on a personal level—Jussuf Abigail describes Giselheer as having a "gezügelte Liebe" (*Malik* 96)—but also intuited in her relations with him a fundamental conflict within German culture, a conflict that they as lovers exemplified symbolically.

In later parts of *Der Malik*, encounters between Giselheer and Jussuf Abigail assume a more overtly political tone. The war has begun and Jussuf Abigail loses many friends. Viewed in this light, the ulterior reality the author constructs in *Der Malik* can be read as a commentary on the politics of war. Jussuf Abigail loves the enemy, Giselheer. The author politicizes his desire by placing him at the center of a battle between races and religions: "Wenn das je meine Stadt erführe, meine verehrten Häuptlinge und mein glaubseliges Volk erst,—nie würde ich Kaiser werden." In other words, if Jussuf Abigail's people and chieftains knew of his love for Giselheer, he would lose status in their eyes. The relationship is taboo because love for the enemy is a departure from the group that shapes ethnic and religious identity.

In another letter to Ruben, Jussuf Abigail writes, "Denke Dir, in meinem Heer herrscht Schreck und Verrat" (sic, *Malik* 26). This is because one of his own soldiers slipped into his tent one night, discovering a love letter Jussuf Abigail had written to "der Nibelunge." The letter reveals an infatuation with the enemy: "O, ich möchte auch so helle Haare haben wie Du," Jussuf Abigail writes to Giselheer, "so nichtsnutzige, nichtgläubige Augenwimpern wie Du" (*Malik* 26). If Jussuf Abigail wanted his beloved to enter *his* world of the "heimatliches Spielzimmer" earlier, here he expresses the desire to cross over

into the beloved's world. The boundary crossing is characterized by assuming Giselheer's physical features. The Nibelung's blonde hair stands for his Otherness. Additionally, he is a non-believer. Jussuf Abigail's desire to become like Giselheer in feature flies in the face of ethnic and religious dualities that demand separation rather than what Rachel Adler calls living "deeply within one another's boundaries" (87). The erotic nature of the passage spells out Lasker-Schüler's spiritual thinking that intimacy between men and women (not to mention men and men, since Jussuf Abigail is multiply gendered) is a vehicle for reconciliation.

However, as I mentioned above, Jussuf Abigail's affiliation with his "Volk" and "Soldaten" complicates the possibility of achieving reconciliation. These patriotic determinants of identity thwart his own project of crossing boundaries and cause internal rifts between him and the "Thebetaner":

> Ruben, Ich hab' mich lächerlich gemacht unter Meinen Soldaten . . . ich habe Mich verraten; glaube manchmal die Hunde knurren zu hören: *Ich* sei kein treuer Thebetaner und bevorzüge alle Nichtgläubige (sic) und liebe den Erdteil im Norden. (*Malik* 27)

In his love for the enemy, Jussuf Abigail assumes a mediating role between the politically and religiously juxtaposed worlds of orient and occident (referred to above as the "Erdteil im Norden"), between the believers (Jews) and non-believers (Christians). This mediating role, however, expels him from the group. Denied by Giselheer on the one hand, and by his *Thebetaner* on the other, Jussuf Abigail's vision of reconciliation has no real place in the world. A

growing mistrust begins to rise among his *Volk*, as they recall his past alignments with Giselheer:

> Die älteren Leuten gedachten des Kampfes, den sie unter der Anführung des noch damaligen Prinzen Jussuf gegen eine Arierschar erfahren mußten. Umschlungen auf einem Weizenfelde sah ein verwundeter Thebetaner die beiden Fürsten der feindlichen Heere im silbernen Brote stehn und sich inbrünstig küssen. Durch Theben aber tönte die Siegeskunde, der Prinz habe die Christenhunde in die Flucht geschlagen. In Wirklichkeit jedoch hatten sich die beiden verliebten Anführer: Giselheer und Jussuf Abigail, ihrer Heere geeinigt. (*Malik* 53-54)

Using the failed relationship with Gottfried Benn as a literary point of departure, Lasker-Schüler constructs an ulterior reality of unity in the face of animosity and the propaganda of war. As the people of Thebes proclaim the lie of their victory over the "Christenhunde," we find Giselheer and Jussuf Abigail passionately kissing in a field. Here the author plays upon the military "Bruderkuß," subverting it with implications of homosexual and heterosexual love. "In Wirklichkeit jedoch," she writes, "hatten sich die beiden verliebten Anführer . . . ihrer Heere geeinigt." "In reality," she says, insisting upon this constructed literary reality in the midst of a real war in Europe. The affair with Gottfried Benn and its portrayal in *Der Malik*, then, is not a simple telling of unrequited love. Instead, Lasker-Schüler harnesses the pain of loss to exemplify larger societal ills caused by hierarchical divisions.

In yet another passage, further mistrust is expressed by the *Thebetaner* as Jussuf Abigail asks the visiting Aryans where Giselheer is:

> "Kann Mir einer von euch sagen, ihr lieben Ritter, wo Giselheer Mein Nibelunge weilt?" In der Mitte des Vorraums tanzte ein Tänzer wie eine Schlange beweglich nach der eintönigen Musik der Holzinstrumente. "Aber ich", schrieb Zwi, "hörte, verhärtete Stirnrunzeln einiger Thebetaner knarren." Und Jussuf Abigails spielerische Menschen erröteten im Angedenken der Schande, die ihnen einst ihr damaliger Prinz Jussuf Abigail bereitet hatte, da Sein selig Herz den feindlichen Arierfürsten umgaukelte während des Krieges Ernst. (*Malik* 62)

Zwi is Jussuf Abigail's biographer. He follows his ruler's every move and records the events of his life. Zwi writes about the kingdom's disapproval of Jussuf Abigail's love for the "Arierfürsten" in the midst of war. The *Thebetaner* are a complex entity in the novel. On the one hand, they represent an internal voice, a racial and religious self-awareness that shapes Jussuf Abigail's (and the author's) own religious and racial identity. On the other hand, they also represent a group identity which Jussuf Abigail does not wish to be subsumed by, particularly if it is used as a means of articulating hatred for other groups and constructing hierarchical dualities that lead to war. In this way, Lasker-Schüler lays bare the problematic nature of race and religion. Jussuf Abigail's desire for Giselheer crosses both societal boundaries and personal boundaries. From the standpoint of the people of Thebes, the love relationship between the two

figures is taboo. The Nibelung is of another race. He is an Aryans, the enemy. From Jussuf Abigail's perspective, however, Giselheer is the site of potential transcendence of racial and religious conflict.

Toward the end of the novel, Oßman, Jussuf Abigail's right hand man, writes a secret letter to Giselheer, offering him Jussuf Abigail's kingdom if he will join Jussuf Abigail in what sounds like matrimony (*Malik* 95). As they await the answer, however, Jussuf Abigail loses hope. Traitors have overthrown his rule and have caused the people of Thebes to rise up against him. In this very moment, he comes to an important realization about Giselheer:

> täglich zerriß eine Glaubensfalte des Maliks, ihn befremdete das geflügelte Herz Giselheers mit seiner gezügelten Liebe, das sich vor willenloses, süßes Überströmen (sic) *standhaft* bewahrte. (*Malik* 96)

Jussuf Abigail's desire for reconciliation between kingdoms and religions, not to mention with his own people, fails. He loses faith ("täglich zerriß eine Glaubensfalte"). His disillusionment with national issues runs parallel to his disillusioned love for Giselheer, who is unable to cross boundaries ("Überströmen"). The destruction of World War I and the loss Lasker-Schüler experienced as some of her most meaningful friendships with men came to an end led her to write this book once the war had passed. It is her story of failed reconciliations and an indictment of destructive hierarchical divisions based upon gender, religion, nationality and race.

In all preceding chapters, my study of Lasker-Schüler has emphasized the author's relationships with men, both in her fiction and in her life. Her women friends and characters are more difficult to address. This is because while Lasker-Schüler documents her friendships with men with great care and literary motivation, her associations with women remain, generally speaking, undeveloped and obscure.[13] Her tendency to focus on relations with men is reminiscent of another woman writer of the period, Lou Andreas Salomé. The reason for this emphasis on documenting and exploring relations with men while expressing very little about purely feminine associations is an indication of the androcentricity of the time, not to mention the long history of literature as a pursuit practiced largely by men.[14] In a time when the number of educated women was increasing in German society,[15] women writers and artists of the

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[13]Bauschinger also makes this point. See Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 117. With the exception of her narrations and poems about her mother, the few female friends who figure in *Gesichte*, and the characters of *Der Malik* discussed in this Chapter, there is very little documentation of the author's relations with other women.

[14]For a depiction of Lasker-Schüler's literary contemporary, Lou Andreas Salomé, see Biddy Martin 12-13. Both of these women writers marginalize their connections with other women. Martin makes the insightful suggestion that "In a very real sense, the forgetting of these relations constitutes the contours of those accounts of her [Salomé] which have survived, constitutes the condition for her entry into literary and cultural history in any form." In this way, to be a woman writer in turn-of-the-century Germany was, in some degree, to exclude the subject of woman in writing.

[15]For a summary of the state of education for Jewish girls and young women in Germany from 1870 to 1918, see Kaplan, *Tradition and Transition* 213-217.

modern period were precariously situated between an internalized patriarchy and new discoveries of feminine experience. In spite of the fact that there are a handful of women publishing and presenting themselves publicly as writers, these women did not possess a language, culture, or identity independent of patriarchy. In *A Room of One's Own,* Virginia Woolf writes of the unprecedented event of female characters in relation to one another, so devoid is the heretofore male-dominated literary culture of such possibilities and explorations. (82-83)

In my discussion of reconciliation and gender, it is important to look at some of the author's female characters. In *Der Malik*, for example, the dynamic between Lasker-Schüler's female characters and her self-stylization as Jussuf Abigail indicates an unreconciled, alienated understanding of the feminine self. Through Jussuf Abigail, the author reveals her own internalized misogyny, as well as an ironic self-awareness of this internalization.[16]

In *Der Malik*, Jussuf Abigail is generally portrayed as angry, alienated, or suspicious in regard to women. Lasker-Schüler writes: "Jussuf Abigail verbarg seine Abneigung gegen alles Weib" (60). This passage can be interpreted variously in regard to Lasker-Schüler's presentation of woman. The fact that Jussuf Abigail hides his dislike for "alles Weib" indicates an awareness on the author's part of woman's internalization of male hatred and mistrust of her. As she writes phrases such as "alles Weib," Lasker-Schüler not only reveals

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[16]See Redmann 378-379 for a similar view of Lasker-Schüler's misogyny. Redmann also offers an insightful discussion on the prevailing myths of woman during the turn of the century and how these myths shape Lasker-Schüler's literary representations of women. See Redmann 105.

something of how the culture of the time values women, but also confesses that she, too, is taking part in their subjugation. The result is a text that is ambivalent. It is impossible to say whether the author purposefully portrays women as objects of male hatred as a means of laying bare the Otherness of women, or whether she does so in her own internalized misogyny and self-alienation.[17] For example, in a brief passage in *Der Malik*, Jussuf Abigail is found in a rare moment among the women of his court:

> Vor dem Palaste in den Wandelhallen bewegten sich die Frauen Thebens, manche ließen ihr Gesicht mit dem leisen Winde spielen, viele hatten Augen wie Mandeln oder wie Nachtschatten, oder sie schimmerten bunt und sanft wie der Fluß, an dem Thebens Wange lag. Um die Spaßmacher drängten sie sich, klatschten kindlich in ihre unschuldigen Hände, den unnahbaren Kaiser unter den Geringsten der Stadt nicht vermutend. Immer nur in Gala oder tief verschleiert hatte sich der Malik den Frauen Tibas gezeigt, und die glaubten an die Sage, daß Jussuf Abigail sie verachte noch seit Potiphars Weib. (*Malik* 76)

The women of the palace are counted among the "Geringsten der Stadt." Jussuf Abigail only goes near them when he is either dressed "in Gala" (and

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[17]It is necessary to point out that the misogyny I speak of here is a selective one. Lasker-Schüler was known for her generosity toward other women, particularly those in need. Interestingly enough, her dislike of "alles Weib" was more generally associated with strong, feminine figures such as women's rights activists or some of her feminine contemporaries in literature whom she felt were inferior to her as writers.

therefore clearly of the royal elite) or when he is "tief verschleiert" and his identity is concealed. In a sense, his costume protects him from becoming one of the nameless "Geringsten." In *Der Malik*, it is still necessary for the author to style herself as a male figure as a means of overcoming her subordination. Cross-dressing as Jussuf Abigail made it possible for her to leave the gender restrictions of the time. In doing so, however, she presents the female characters of her stories as lesser figures or objects possessing no identity. This was also the case in the early Tino stories, when the author singles out Tino among groups of faceless, nameless women of the harem.

The reference to Potiphar's wife is important. In the Torah, Potiphar is one of Pharaoh's officials. When Joseph's brothers sell him off into slavery, it is Potiphar who brings him to Egypt. Once in Egypt, Joseph becomes "a man of success" (Gen. 39:2). Recognizing that God is with Joseph, Potiphar looks kindly upon him and appoints him "over his house and over everything that belonged to him" (Gen. 39:5). This raises the issue of woman as property in traditional patriarchal Jewish culture.[18] Potiphar's wife desires Joseph, who is "fair of form and fair to look at" (Gen. 39:6), but he refuses her. One day, when all the servants are out of the house, Potiphar's wife pursues Joseph. She grabs him by "the garment," insisting "Lie with me!" Joseph runs out of the house, leaving his clothes behind. When Potiphar finds his wife with Joseph's clothes, he concludes that Joseph has slept with her and throws Joseph into the dungeon (Gen. 39:12-20).

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[18]For a discussion of Jewish law and marriage, see Plaskow, *Sinai* 4-5.

In the Torah, Potiphar's wife is never revealed by name, much in the same way the women of Jussuf Abigail's court are never given names or presented as individuals. Potiphar's wife embodies "alles Weib," or all that is deceitful and to be mistrusted. Lasker-Schüler's internalized misogyny is evident. Yet because she is more liberated in mind than many women of her time, she finds herself in the difficult position of both witnessing the oppression of patriarchy and necessarily partaking in it as a writer assuming maleness.

Lasker-Schüler also refers to the story of Potiphar's wife as a means of questioning the traditional, biblical image of the deceitful woman. She calls the story an "alte Sage," and the women of Jussuf Abigail's court believe his reason for disliking them is this very biblical source. In this way, the validity of the "Sage" of woman as scheming seductress and adulteress is undermined. If Jussuf Abigail feels mistrust for women, then he is compelled to veil himself before them. Lasker-Schüler is interested in the mystery of this. Why must a male hide his fear of woman? Feminist readings of the Torah beg the same question.[19]

In addition to the nameless ladies of the court, there are other female characters in *Der Malik* whom the author takes more time in developing. These figures do have names. They are Mareia, the Venus of Siam, and the mysterious Milli Millus who disguises herself as a man. On the whole, these women are peripheral to the main action of the novel, which involves primarily

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[19]For example, see Exum 166 for a discussion of Potiphar's wife.

the forging of male bonds and war-making. Yet these female figures enter into scenes that shed light on the topic of gender and reconciliation.

Mareia is Ruben's wife. She is modeled on Franz Marc's wife Maria. Jussuf Abigail names one of the three cities of his kingdom after her (Mareia-Ir), and he often sends greetings to her in his letters to Ruben. For the most part, Jussuf Abigail's relations with Mareia remain on a perfunctory level, until Ruben goes off to war—a fictionalization that mirrors Marc's actual military enlistment. Jussuf Abigail, who is against the war, is angered and frightened by Ruben's participation in it. He takes his anger out on Mareia:

> Rubens Weib, die Mareia, beschuldete [Jussuf Abigail] ungerechterweise, eiferte wider ihre weiße Abstammung, die seinen stolzen, friedliebenden Bruder veranlaßte, mit den abendländischen Völkern zu kämpfen. (*Malik* 53)

Gender and race are a vehicle for Jussuf Abigail's anger. He blames Mareia, the "Weib," and her "weiße Abstammung" as the reason for Ruben's enlistment in the army. It is difficult to ascertain whether Lasker-Schüler's misogynistic portrayal of Mareia is done entirely consciously or not. The text refers in many directions. The author uses derogatory language to describe her, making her into an object onto which Jussuf Abigail may project his own inadequacies and then later abandon once he has regained his male self-esteem.[20] On the other

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[20]See Lasker-Schüler, *Malik* 53 where Jussuf Abigail regains his self-esteem by explaining that in his outburst directed at the "Weib," Mareia, he "vergaß, daß sein starkwilliger Ruben einen ebenso selbständigen wie edlen Eigenwill besaß [wie er]." Obviously, Mareia does not possess these elite

hand, the irony with which these events are related indicates some amount of self-awareness on the author's part that she is exposing the ills of misogyny through her characters. Whatever the case, in my reading of the character Mareia, I see an internal block on the author's part regarding the feminine. Lasker-Schüler is unreconciled with herself as a woman living in male-dominated society and writing in male-dominated literary culture. Because woman exists in a world that keeps her in an unreconciled state with herself, she also practices misogyny and the objectification of the feminine. However, Lasker-Schüler is an ironist at heart, and so it is possible and necessary to unlock other readings of Mareia as well. In another passage of the novel, Jussuf Abigail foists his anger upon her once again:

> Wieder richtete sich sein Zorn gegen des großen Bruders Weib. Nicht, daß Er irgend zu Vorwürfen berechtigt gewesen wäre, aber Er zerriß in Seiner unbändigen Art Mareias unschuldige Bildnisse. Knurrend sprach er von der milchweißen Sarah, die sich so viel Macht über Abraham erwarb. Die hörte von Abigails Ingrimm und sandte Ihm durch Boten ein vorwurfsvolles Schreiben— "Abigail, daß Du Deinen Bruder nicht besser kennst!" Die schlichten Worte beschämten den Malik; so gerne hätte Er irgendeinem Menschen die große Schuld aufgeladen, da Er sich in den Nächten um das Leben Seines teuren blauen Reiters bangte. Aber da Er—Sitti—war, kam Ihm die rücksichtslose Beschuldigung gegen

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(male) qualities of independence and will.

eine Frau peinigend zur Besinnung. (*Malik* 73-74)

As in the previous passage, though some form of reconciliation occurs with Mareia when Jussuf Abigail becomes ashamed of himself for placing the blame on the woman, it is not a true reconciliation. The gender dynamic is still that of elevated male and subordinated female: "Aber da Er—Sitti—war, kam Ihm die rücksichtslose Beschuldigung gegen eine Frau peinigend zur Besinnung." Hierarchical divisions based on gender, race, and religion play a significant role in Jussuf Abigail's anger toward Mareia. The juxtaposition of "großer Bruder" with "Weib," for example, is fundamentally sexist. The text she writes here is in many ways a repetition of traditional male-centered texts, such as the Torah, in which woman is presented as subordinate, deceptive, or manipulative. In fact, the author refers to the Torah itself, comparing Mareia to "milchweiß[e] Sarah, die sich so viel Macht über Abraham erwarb."

Indeed, the biblical Sarah is portrayed as manipulative of Abraham. This is because the Torah itself is a male-centered text. As Exum points out, the androcentricity of the Torah causes any view of woman, including the matriarchs, to be a strictly male view of woman rather than a genuine telling of feminine spiritual history and experience. Androcentric narrative, writes Exum, "offers a picture of women as mean-spirited, deceptive, and untrustworthy—and for these reasons a threat to the patriarchal social order" (136). Because the reader senses Lasker-Schüler's feminine presence as the author in *Der Malik* (in spite of her assumed "maleness" as Jussuf Abigail), the real struggle in these scenes with Mareia is between two women, or perhaps woman and

herself. The negative biblical image of Sarah, perpetuated in the novel just as it is in the Torah, is a demonstration of how woman perpetuates her own subordination. When Lasker-Schüler puts Mareia down as manipulative, she is reinforcing a view of femininity constructed by males. In this way, the author's texts often seem to float in a limbo state of self-criticism and criticism of patriarchy when a female figure possessing some identity enters into the narrative.

Another female character of *Der Malik* is the Venus of Siam. Jussuf Abigail, urged at the beginning of the novel by the people of Thebes to marry, sends for the Venus of Siam who is renowned for her beauty. In fact, he has her kidnapped. In a letter to Ruben, he writes that he must have her: ". . . und wenn Ich ganz Siam hinmorden müßte im Kampf. Was der Basileus begehrt, gehört ihm" (*Malik* 32). This passage is much more humorous than those discussed previously, because of the obvious parody of male-female gender dynamic. Here the author uses Jussuf Abigail as a means of juxtaposing male sexual violence with woman as object. Throughout the novel, the Venus of Siam appears as a beautiful object and nothing more, while Lasker-Schüler maneuvers Jussuf Abigail through sexist responses toward women:

> Jussuf Abigail verbarg seine Abneigung gegen alles Weib, schon als Prinz von Theben. Und die geraubte Venus von Siam betrachtete er nur wie ein unvergleichliches Kunstwerk. "An dem starren Kultus, den der Malik um seine Mondfrau baut", so nannten die Menschen in Theben die siamesische Venus, "wird

> sie zu Alabaster werden." (*Malik* 60)

In this passage, Lasker-Schüler critically identifies the problem of a fixed male notion of femininity that threatens to remain fixed. The mythical figure of Venus threatens to turn to stone, "zu Alabaster werden." This petrification points to an inflexible male religiosity, for this male notion of feminine gender is revealed as a form of idolatry, "starrer Kultus."

The passage above immediately continues with passing reference to another matriarch of the Torah, Eve:

> Memed [another of Jussuf Abigail's chieftains] hatte Verständnis für des Kaisers Abneigung gegen Eva; trotzdem gerade das Himbeerträumerische in Jussuf Abigail, die Farbe der Prinzessinseele, ihn entzückte, aber er wagte nicht, die Beeren der Sträucher Seiner Seele zu pflücken. Manchmal begleitete er Ihn alleine auf den Hügel der Stadt; dort betete Jussuf Abigail so gern zu Gott. (*Malik* 60)

Jussuf Abigails "Abneigung gegen alles Weib" has now become his "Abneigung gegen Eva." It is significant that Eve is used here as a generic expression for woman, nearly interchangeable with "alles Weib." Lasker-Schüler constructs this textual echo purposefully. As with the matriarch Sarah, Eve is portrayed here as the male's disliked and mistrusted Other. The chieftains, representing traditional androcentric culture, support one another in their practice of relegating woman to Otherness; Memed has "Verständnis" for Jussuf Abigail's dislike of women. On the other hand, Lasker-Schüler is quick

to amend this duality that is so strictly defined by male notions of femininity as she reveals Jussuf Abigail's own femininity—"das Himbeerträumerische in Jussuf Abigail, die Farbe der Prinzessinseele." Memed must admit he is enthralled. In this way, Lasker-Schüler unlocks the strict relegation of supposedly feminine attributes to women and supposedly male attributes to men.

Jussuf Abigail's "Abneigung gegen Eva," then, demonstrates the author's awareness of women's experience in male culture and how the root of that culture can be traced to patriarchal religious structures, such as those found in the Torah. For the author, religion and spirituality are keys to subverting entrenched, derogatory, and oppressive notions of woman as inferior and suspicious.[21]

As in previous passages, we find Lasker-Schüler in an unusual position in regard to reconciliation. On the surface, it appears that she is merely perpetuating male objectification of woman when she describes the chieftains' disdain of women. Just as Virginia Woolf points out an absence of feminine self-knowledge due to the paucity of inquiry into woman to woman relations, Lasker-Schüler's writing marks an unreconciled attitude with her own femininity. At this time in her life, she is unable to directly narrate relationships styling herself as a woman in relation to other women. Instead, she must move between the lines of androcentric narrative and carefully subvert old notions of

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[21]Redmann offers a similar view in her discussion of Lasker-Schüler's poems about the biblical Eve. See Redmann 128-146.

woman and the old texts that support these notions. The passage above ends with Memed joining his Kaiser Jussuf Abigail as he prays to God. The soul of the princess—nested somehow in the soul of Jussuf Abigail—is actually the woman at prayer as she attempts to express her spirituality through all the trappings of a male religious ontology.

The third feminine character who appears in *Der Malik* is Milli Millus, also called Milila. Milila, "die Frau in Mannskleidern" (*Malik* 80), appears one day in Thebes seeking Jussuf Abigail's favor. This mysterious character is reminiscent of Lasker-Schüler in many ways, and she is actually styled upon the author's friend and sculptor, Milly Steger. Milila dresses as a man and gains entry into the club of fraternizing chieftains. In *Der Malik*, she practices "spiritual drag," much in the manner that Lasker-Schüler did when she presented herself publicly as Jussuf Abigail. For the author, costume that distorts or obscures gender is a means of summoning new and necessary spiritual views that reach beyond the restrictiveness and oppression of fixed gender roles. Jussuf Abigail welcomes Milila to his kingdom. He even chooses her to be one of his chieftains:

> Milila, die Frau in Mannskleidern, schlich hinter den Kaiser auf ihren breiten Tatzen, der aber hatte schon von ihrer Anwesenheit in Theben gehört und teilte nicht seines Knechtes [Oßmans] Mißtrauen. "Was wünschst du von mir, Milli Millus aus Mareia?" redete der Malik die Rotverblüffte an, "willst du etwa meiner Häuptlinge siebenter werden, sonst hast du keinen Wunsch",

> meinte Er scherzend! Daß sie eben nur dieser Wunsch Tag und Nacht beseele, ereiferte sich die Verkleidete, fiel vor den Basileus nieder, umschmeichelte sein Gewand und zeigte dem Kaiser die Bildnisse, die sie von Ihm in Marmorstein gehauen, und Jussuf Abigail in toller Geberlaune erhob die riesengroße Frau arglos zu seinem Häuptling. Setzte ihn zwischen Memed Laurencis und Salomein, seinem liebsten Spielgefährten, damit er den Unvergleichlichen immer von seines Herzen Höhe aus auf gewohntem Gedankenpfade erreichen konnte als goldenes Amen. (*Malik* 80-81)

Oßman, we read at the opening of the passage, is suspicious of Milila. Interestingly, Jussuf Abigail has no reason in this instance to feel suspicious of Milila. In fact, her feigned masculinity is welcomed by him. This is a departure from Jussuf Abigail's usual suspicion of women in the story (but it is a brief moment of trust). He is charmed by Milila and offers her what she covets most, a place among his warriors. The moment Milila is proclaimed a chieftain by Jussuf Abigail and seated between Memed and Salomein, she is immediately referred to in the masculine ("ihn") in the text.

The passage ends on a religious note. Jussuf Abigail seats Milila, "den Unvergleichlichen," in such a way that this new chieftain will always be visible and accessible to him. Her accessibility is not only determined by physical proximity, but by a spiritual proximity as well, and her obscured gender serves as a constant reminder to Jussuf Abigail of the divine. She is his "goldenes

Amen." It is perhaps at this point in the story where something of a reconciliation with the feminine self is truly evident. Milila is not the Venus of Siam. She is not an object of male projection or a woman Jussuf Abigail must marry to satisfy his country's demands. Her male costume transforms her into a character possessing identity, status, and acceptance among the males.

The moment of acceptance is brief, however. Not long after her promotion, Milila begins plotting against the Kaiser. She attempts to convince Jussuf Abigail's other chieftains to join her in overthrowing his rule. Her intrigues eventually contribute to his fall as ruler of Thebes. Though Milila is at times portrayed negatively, she is too complex a character to assume full responsibility for the destruction of the kingdom. In another scene, for example, Jussuf Abigail, painfully aware of a rising rebellion among his people, attempts to kill his chieftains in an act of desperation. Because the chieftains are aware of his emotional instability, they place pillows in their beds so as to trick Jussuf Abigail into thinking they are asleep when he slips into the room to kill them. Hiding elsewhere in the room, they watch the melech enter with his dagger, poised for murder. Milila plays an important role here, as she attempts to spare Jussuf Abigail of this painful and humiliating act:

> Milli Millus, die Frau in Häuptlingskleidern, empfand ein unwiderstehliches Mitleid mit dem hilflosen Kaiser, wurde aber von den gespannten Häuptlingen verhindert, sich dem schmerzbewegten geliebten Feind zu nähern. (*Malik* 100)

Here Jussuf Abigail is characterized from Milila's point of view as her

"schmerzbewegte[r] geliebte[r] Feind." This is an important moment in the novel in regard to reconciliation. The motif of the beloved enemy is not new in *Der Malik*. It is also found in the love relation between Giselheer and Jussuf Abigail. In this instance, it is Mililа who feels compassion for the enemy, Jussuf Abigail. The other chieftains hold her back and prevent her from revealing to Jussuf Abigail that he is not killing the men in their beds. Unknowingly, he thrusts his knife into the pillows placed beneath the blankets, thinking all along that he has murdered them. In this way, Mililа is witness to Jussuf Abigail's disempowerment.

In the next chapter, I continue my discussion of the reconciliation theme, focussing particularly on the author's later prose. After what is commonly referred to as Lasker-Schüler's "oriental period" and what I call her period of "gender wrestling," the author's prose becomes more overtly expressive of religious topics. Departing from the fantastic narrative settings reminiscent of the Middle Eastern lands of the *Arabian Nights*, she no longer styles herself upon fictional characters such as Tino or Jussuf Abigail. Instead, she turns to childhood memories, thoughts on antisemitism, and her experience of exile.

> Ach würden doch alle Herzen ineinanderfliessen. Es erhellte sich von neuem die Welt und ihr Geschöpf. Es keimte langsam wieder: Paradies.
> (Else Lasker-Schüler, *Hebräerland* 125)

Chapter 6

Reconciliation, Part 2

In Chapter 5, I traced manifestations of the reconciliation theme in Lasker-Schüler's friendships with men and in her depictions of female characters, focussing for the most part on *Der Malik*. In the years that followed the publication of this novella, the rise of Nazism in Germany and the author's later life in exile compel her to address reconciliation more urgently. Antisemitism becomes a constant preoccupation for Lasker-Schüler. The later prose works which address antisemitism[1] also become more directly religious in tone.

An essay from the author's *Nachlaß* titled "Der Antisemitismus" and composed during her last years in Palestine, opens bluntly and boldly with the statement: "Ihn [den Antisemitismus] erachte ich für eine Erbschaft vom Vater auf den Sohn" (*Nachlaß* 68). In this essay, Lasker-Schüler presents antisemitism as a patriarchal phenomenon that leads, in the end, to spiritual bankruptcy. These are strong words, particularly in their reference to men as

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[1]These works include: *Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona* (1921), *Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter* (1932), *Konzert* (1932), *Das Hebräerland* (1937), as well as various essays from the author's *Nachlaß*.

the generational perpetrators of antisemitism. As feminist writings on the Nazi period have shown, the patriarchally structured family and state in Germany were a key factor in the laying of foundations for antisemitism.[2] Given woman's marginal and disempowered role in Nazi Germany and given the Jewish woman's additional status as a marginal figure within the culture, it is important to sort out matters of gender when discussing the feminine experience of antisemitism.

In 1921, Lasker-Schüler published the short story "Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona." Eleasar, the "Wunderrabbiner" of child-like innocence, presides in Barcelona, guiding the minority population of Jews who live there. His home is a stately palace built by the "Baumeister" Arion Elevantos. Arion has a daughter, Amram:

> Es lebte eine Dichterin im Judenvolke Barcelonas, Tochter eines vornehmen Mannes, der mit dem Bau der Aussichtstürme der großen Städte Spaniens betraut war. Arion Elevantos im Wunsch nach einem Bauerben erzog Amram, seine Tochter, wie einen Sohn. Amram bestieg jeden frühen Morgen mit ihrem Vater die Neubauten, die höchsten Gerippe der Stadt, daß sie oft glaubte, bei Gott zu Gast gewesen zu sein. Auch hatten ihre Augen groß geschaut in die Höhle der Kuppel, die aus Libanonholz und purem Gold Arion wölbte über das Dach des herrlichen Hauses von den reichen Juden gespendet, ihren Wunderrabbiner zu

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[2]See Elaine Martin for analyses of the period.

schirmen vor Ungemach. (*Theben* 292)

Lasker-Schüler typically obscures the gender of her main character in this story. Amram is a girl, yet she bears a male name and is raised by Arion Elevantos like a son. The tower she ascends in the passage above is described in direct relation to the father Arion, and to God.[3] Jakob Hessing associates the tower with the child's fear of antisemitism.[4] I view it as a phallic symbol, and, in this context, as the "encasement" of woman by patriarchal religious culture. When Amram enters the tower she is filled with awe for the divine; and as she climbs the "höchsten Gerippe der Stadt" each morning with her father, she feels "bei Gott zu Gast gewesen zu sein." This wondrous experience of the tower and the powerful symbolism of the father as its builder inform Amram of a divinity that is male in gender. She is not male, but she is raised as such. This results in a struggle that characterizes the fundamental nature of Lasker-Schüler's spirituality. At the center of her religious thinking is a girl who attempts to be a boy—for the sake of a father who wishes her to be so, and for the sake of a male God who enthralls her. This is a precarious situation, however. The fact that she is but a "Gast" in the tower indicates impermanence, even danger, in regard to the deity styled on maleness. One day, Amram falls from the tower:

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[3]Hessing points out that the author attributed the building of many towers in her home town of Elberfeld to her father, Aaron Schüler. However, there is no evidence that these towers actually existed. See Hessing, *Else Lasker-Schüler* 41.

[4]For a discussion of the connection between the tower symbol and the author's fear of antisemitism, see Hessing, *Else Lasker-Schüler* 41-57.

> Beim Herabsteigen der Leiter, die von der noch unbefestigten Krone führte, stürzte die voreilige kleine Amram vom heiligen Bau auf sandigen Hügel, worauf Pablo, des Bürgermeisters Söhnchen, spielte. Und der Knabe dachte, die bleiche Amram sei ein Engel, der vom Himmelreich aus einer Wolke gepurzelt sei, und staunte sie an. Seitdem lächelte Amram im Traum, immer wenn Pablo an sie gedacht hatte. (*Theben* 292-293)

The seeming solidity of the tower, its symbolism of a spirituality centered on maleness, is disrupted by Amram's fall. She lands safely, however, right in the sandy playing area where the other central figure of the story, the boy Pablo, a Christian and the son of the mayor of Barcelona, is introduced. For Pablo, Amram's unexpected fall is a spiritual awakening of sorts. Being a Christian, he thinks she is an angel who has descended from heaven. It is a miraculous event. The children are filled with immediate love and compassion for one another, and so the sandbox becomes the site of religious reconciliation. Lasker-Schüler, aware of the insidious nature of learned prejudice, sets the reconciliation between Jew and Christian in the early years of life, in childhood, precisely at the time when one is conditioned by adult culture to adopt separatist attitudes toward others.

Henceforth, whenever Pablo thinks of Amram, the girl begins to laugh in her dreams. This boundary crossing from waking world to dreaming world is reminiscent of the exchange of physical traits found in the discussion of

Giselheer and Jussuf Abigail in Chapter 5.[5] Pablo and Amram are united in the subconscious, which, like physical features, is a most intimate expression of identity. The crossing of boundaries through the exchange of aspects of the self is repeated in a poem Amram writes to her new love, Pablo:

> Du stolzer Eingeborener, Pablo,
> Von deinem Angesicht atme ich fremde Liebeslaute;
> In deiner Schläfe aber will ich meinen Glücksstern pflanzen,
> Mich berauben meiner leuchtenden Blüte. (*Theben* 294)

Amram's love for Pablo is compelled by an awareness of their religious differences. Her poem expresses a desire to bridge these differences by mutually assuming one another's attributes. For example, Amram breathes in the "fremde Liebeslaute" of Pablo's face, metaphorically inhaling his foreignness. His "Liebeslaute" are "fremd" because he is an "Eingeborener," a Christian Spaniard who is not of Amram's culture and religion. But Amram's gesture of love requires the same of Pablo in return. After assuming his foreignness through the breath, Amram wants to plant her lucky star, the star of David, in Pablo's temple in exchange. She is aware that this will rob her of her "leuchtende Blüte," a necessary consequence of reconciliation. The boundary crossing is an exchange of differences, of cultural and religious markers that cause hierarchical separations and conflict between Christians and Jews. A

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[5]See Feßmann 177 for a similar view of the "Austausch von Attributen" which she describes as the "Verwirrung geschlechtlicher Attribute und verwandtschaftlicher Relationen."

willingness to give up something of oneself and a willingness to receive something from the Other is the high spiritual standard the author sets time and again in her writings.

The idealized child love between Amram and Pablo is an interruption of the patriarchally based antisemitism that the author so boldly defines in her late essay "Der Antisemitismus." Amram is an angel, an important symbol of the Christian faith. She descends from the heavens and appeals to Pablo's own spiritual identity as a Christian. The miracle causes him to abandon his "Erbschaft" of antisemitism. Pablo interrupts the patriarchal chain of racial hatred inherited from the father. In this way, Lasker-Schüler articulates the insight that reconciliation between Christians and Jews has a necessary gender element. When a feminine voice is allowed spiritual expression, the perpetuation of religious hatred is interrupted.

Some time passes, and in spite of disapproval from the Spanish townspeople, Amram and Pablo remain in love:

> Dem heranwachsenden Señor [Pablo] erschienen unvermutet Zeichen deren Deutung ihm die Beamten, seines Vaters Untergebenen höhnend als die Schrift eingebißener, verstockter Juden bezeichneten, die mit auflehnenden Schriften seinen Vater, den oberen Ratsherrn, belästigten. Gerne hätte der Bürgermeistersohn an den Palast des Wunderrabbiners gepocht, ihn seiner unerschütterlichen Gefühle Hochachtung für sein Volk zu versichern, aber er fürchtete das Gerede der Stadtleute und vor

allem seines Vaters Zorn. (*Theben* 294)

In his love for Amram, Pablo must contend with the hierarchical male world of public officials (his father who is the mayor of Barcelona, and his father's colleagues) and religious leaders (Rabbi Eleasar). I read the character Pablo as a religious fantasy, for Lasker-Schüler causes Pablo to undo the persecution his people practice against the Jews. Amram is not involved in this project directly. Her poems come to Pablo in his dreams, but she never confronts the male hierarchy herself. This is the second important point: It is not only the *Christian* Pablo, but the *male* Pablo who must interrupt patriarchy, for this is where his true responsibility lies. Reconciliation is situated in a coming together of not only two religions, but also of two genders, and in the active participation of the male to undo the suffering caused by patriarchy. In another scene of the story, antisemitic aggression is expressed exclusively by the Spanish males of the city:

> Hinter einem Gasthaus versteckt, in dem spanische Studenten in den oberen Räumen tanzten und lärmten, oder zwischen den Wänden Fechtübungen abhielten, lag das rätselhafte Bethaus der Juden. Manchmal trampelte die ausgelassene Schar vom heißen Wein entzündet an die Tür der Synagoge am Freitagabend. Die Frauen hinter den Gittern bebten leise, und Amram fühlte einen fremden Erdteil wachsen zwischen sich und dem Señor Pablo, dem Bürgermeistersohn. (*Theben* 294)

It is important that Lasker-Schüler makes no mention of the Jewish men in the

synagogue in this scene. Instead, she relates only the women's response: "Die Frauen hinter den Gittern bebten leise." The "Gitter" were and are a common form of separating the women from the men in the synagogue.[6] Lasker-Schüler displays the nesting quality of hierarchical division here, for the bars also isolate the women within their own religion. They are a bizarre from of protection from the male aggression outside, yet they are also a kind of imprisonment. As Jewish women, they are held captive to male aggression. The absence of the Jewish men throws the feminine experience of antisemitism into relief, particularly in Amram. She clearly feels the symptoms of hierarchical separations as a wall rises up from "fremder Erdteil," separating her spiritually and emotionally from Pablo. Further abuses in which the author links gender and religion occur in the story:

> [Pablo] gedachte der Heimlichkeit der Stunde, wie sie noch Kinder waren und Amram seine "Braut", diese Engelin der Heerscharen gegürtet, im Auge das Licht, ihm erzählte, sie habe wie der Prophet den Ägypter, der den Juden in seinem Sklavenjoch mißhandelte, den Schneider mit ihrem kleinen Dolch ermordet und ihn verscharrt in den Sand. (*Theben* 295)

In this passage, Lasker-Schüler frames the friendship between Amram and Pablo in the language and imagery of their respective religions. Amram is an

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[6]Cantor explains that "The fear of female 'distraction' is . . . a prime reason given by Orthodox apologists today for segregating women in the synagogue behind a *mechitzah*, a partition between worshipers of the two genders, or in a balcony section." See Cantor 105.

"Engelin der Heerscharen" in Pablo's eyes. Conversely, as she tells him her secret of killing Schneider, she alludes to the enslavement of the Jews by Pharaoh. As it turns out, Schneider is a "Zuckerwarenhändler" who sells candy to the children outside the school. It is rumored that he is a child molester. More specifically, he molests Jewish children. Amram tells Pablo that she stabbed the candy seller with her dagger and buried him in the sand. As I have shown in my discussion of the author's early prose, she employs the phallic dagger as a means of subverting patriarchy with its own tools.

Racist tension mounts in Barcelona. It is a time of societal and spiritual crisis. One day, a large ship appears on the market square. This causes a panic among the Christians of Barcelona. They take it as a bad omen and blame the Jews for its appearance. The streets become ominously deserted, as the ship stands quietly on the market square:

> Nur des Bürgermeisters großer langbehaarter Hund, Abraham, eilte unruhig durch die Stadt, durch Barcelonas Straßen, immer wieder das Schiff beschnüffelnd, das die Sehnsucht zweier tiefer Menschen erhört hatte über Nacht. Am offenen Steuer in der Sonne spielten unbekümmert Señor Pablo und Amram, die Judendichterin, genau so wie sie auf dem heiligen Hügel vor Eleasars Palast nach dem kleinen Unfall sich freuten als Kinder so oft ihrer Einfälle. Verklärt von übergroßer Liebe blieben sie unsichtbar hinter dem Fittich des Segels. (*Theben* 296)

More ominous than the deserted streets is Lasker-Schüler's transference of the

Jewish patriarch Abraham's name to a dog that is restlessly wandering through the town. The dog is a symbol of homelessness, of the Jews' exile. The ship has come specifically for Amram and Pablo. Reconciliation between Christians and Jews is idealized in the love between these children, as they escape the horror of death and violence that are about to ruin the city. For those who remain in Barcelona, destruction is at hand. The Spanish Christians launch a pogrom. In a final bloody scene, all the Jews of the city are killed. Amram's father dies in a particularly unsettling scene in which gender plays an important role:

> Die verwirrten Christen abergläubisch begnügten sich, die Fenster ihres guten, fröhlichen Bauherrn [Amram's father] einzuschlagen; vergaßen, daß er den Armen Barcelonas . . . unentgeltlich Obdach gab in seinen Bauten. Sie knebelten ihn . . . bis das Weib des Bürgermeisters nahte und die schon betroffenen Leute aufpeitschte, den Vater der Judentochter, die ihren Sohn entführt habe, zu töten. Sie selbst riß dem unschuldigen Opfer das Herz aus der Brust, einen roten Grundstein zu legen, daran die herrenlosen Hunde ihr Geschäft verrichten sollten. Und die Juden, die an den Namen Jahovas immer vom neuen erwacht waren, lagen alle verstümmelt, zerbissen, Gesichte vom Körper getrennt, Kinderhände und Füßlein, zartestes Menschenlaub auf den Gassen umher, in die man die Armen wie Vieh getrieben hatte. (*Theben* 297)

Lasker-Schüler articulates gender violence as a profound component of religious hatred here, just as she did in the synagogue scene and in Amram's story of killing the child molester. In this instance, the mayor's wife incites the Christians to kill "den Vater der Judentochter." The fact that the mother of the son, Pablo, and the father of the daughter, Amram, are the antagonist and protagonist here magnifies the aspect of gender. Pablo's mother has internalized patriarchy so deeply, she must kill the Jewish father who in her mind interrupts the antisemitic "Erbschaft" of her Christian son. She rips Arion Elevantos' heart out "[um] einen roten Grundstein zu legen."

This foundational stone, made of the "Baumeister's" heart, is metaphorically rich. As an earlier passage indicates, Amram's father had built homes for many of the poor Christians of the city who are now attacking the Jews. Referring back to the opening of the story and Arion Elevantos' wish for a son and "Bauerbe," the author gives *Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona* this most tragic closure. Reconciliation only occurs between the two children. Amram's departure in the ship with Pablo possesses an unusual tinge of rebellion against the father. Not only does she escape death, unlike all the other Jews of the city, but also the fate of being a "Grundstein" like her father. It is clear from this story that the author's struggle with antisemitism involved a strong critical inquiry into the complexity of patriarchal religion itself. As Itta Schedletzky points out, the biblical Amram is the father of Moses (21). In this way, Lasker-Schüler disrupts the patriarchal frame of the covenant of God with the Jews at Sinai, a moment of division that shaped Jewish belief and identity

structures within the paradigm of hierarchical separation (Plaskow, *Sinai* 133).

I now turn to Lasker-Schüler's novella, *Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter*, published in 1932 and later adapted for the theater in 1936. As in *Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona*, two children are the central figures in this exploration of antisemitism and reconciliation between Jews and Christians. In this instance, they are brother and sister: Arthur, who is styled on Lasker-Schüler's father, and Dora, who is styled on the author herself. Setting the narrative during the time of her father's childhood, Lasker-Schüler makes herself into his childhood peer. In doing so, she links their separate childhood experiences by way of the common bond of antisemitism. In the following discussion, I compare the gender roles of Arthur and his sister Dora in the face of antisemitism.

The story opens with a familiar device, as Lasker-Schüler frames it within patrilineal narrative:

> Wenn hinter den Fenstern der Häuser Westfalens die Weihnachtsbäume angezündet wurden, erzählte der Vater meines Vaters, also mein Großvater, seinen dreiundzwanzig Kindern die himmelsschreiende Tragödie aus seiner Jugendzeit, die sich am Heiligen Abend der Christenheit abspielte mit allen Schrecknissen beizender Gewürze. (*Theben* 355)

What follows is the grandfather's telling of the pogrom he was subjected to as a child on Christmas Eve. All of the grandchildren listen, a captive audience to the Jewish patriarch—all of them, that is, but Arthur Aronymus, who fidgets

impatiently in his seat. The reader soon learns that this prankish, easy-going "Bursche" is beloved by the Catholics in the town of Gesäcke (Geseke) where he lives with his family. Even the local priest, Bernard, is enamored with this "Lieblingskind". The friendship between Arthur and Bernard appears at first to be untouched by religious prejudice. As the story unfolds, however, an insidious antisemitism develops in the town which Bernard himself cannot entirely escape. The Catholic townsfolk confabulate the notion that Arthur is not really Jewish: "Sie munkelten, der Arthur Aronymus Schüler sei ein Christenkind, möglicherweise ein von der Amme verwechseltes Milchkind" (*Theben* 365). This gives them reason to justify their antisemitic behavior toward Arthur later in the story, when attempts are made to convert him to Christianity.

One year, on Christmas Day, Arthur is invited to join the priest in his home for the exchanging of gifts. Arthur's parents, worried by the situation, decide to accept the invitation and send the boy to the priest's home so as not to insult him and "der katholischen Welt keinen Anlaß zu einem Ärgernis zu geben und etwa ein Pogrom haraufzubeschwören" (*Theben* 367). The threat of persecution is always present in the minds of the Jewish adults of the story. Young Arthur, on the other hand, is overjoyed by the invitation. A religious innocent, he "konnte ja überhaupt . . . nicht begreifen, daß darum, weil sie Juden waren, nicht Weihnachten in ihrem Hause gefeiert wurde" (*Theben* 368).

However, at Bernard's, he experiences his first awful exposure to antisemitism. The incident involves Bernard's small niece Ursula who is also

there to celebrate Christmas. As the children are admiring the Christmas tree, Ursula, thinking that her uncle is not looking, steals a candy ornament. But Bernard catches her and scolds her: "Du willst doch nicht etwa ein kleines Judenmädchen werden?..." (*Theben* 370). When Arthur hears this racial slur, he is stung to the core. He leaves the priest's home panicked and dismayed, for what he once took for friendship has transformed quite suddenly into alienation.

> Arthur [trat] in sein Elternhaus, wissend, warum Vater und Mutter nicht Weihnachten feiern . . . Die Gedanken hinter seiner Kinderstirn, die sonst unbekümmert herumtummelten, hatten auf einem alle pechschwarze, feierliche Röcke an und konnten sich nur mühevoll weiterschleppen, ähnlich wie der arme Hausierer, der aus Galizien stammte, mit den Locken an den beiden Seiten unter dem flachen Hut. Ja, er war ihm auf einmal gut. Wie kam das? Bis jetzt pflegte er ihn doch immer auszulachen mit Kaspar und Willy. Und er heuchelte und log zum erstenmal im Leben, da er lachend seiner Mama um den Hals fiel und im Herzen bitterlich weinte. (*Theben* 370-371)

Arthur is male. His gender allows no place for the expression of his fear and confusion, particularly in the presence of his mother.[7] The disillusioning

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[7]Historian Marion Kaplan's description of the normative Jewish mother's role in the family during Imperial Germany is similar to that of the mother figure found in *Arthur Aronymus*: "As Jewishness became more and more privatized, something one spoke about, felt or acted upon only inside the family, mothers' tasks as cultural mediators became more central and more complicated. Their role was to help the family acculturate to a bourgeois Protestant culture, to

moment at Bernard's home, however, also proves to be an important event in the formation of Arthur's self-awareness as a Jew. In spite of the alienation Bernard's slur causes between Arthur and his mother,[8] it results in an awakening of Arthur's Jewish identity. It fills him with a newfound sense of solidarity with the "Hausierer," an Eastern European Jew whom he once mocked and laughed at with his Christian friends. Arthur overcomes class and religious differences between subgroups of Jews as his own identity sharpens. This is a reconciliation in its own right, for Arthur has transcended an internalized hierarchical separation between Eastern and Western Jews. More pertinent to my gender analysis, however, is that the development of Arthur's male Jewish identity represents a turning away from the mother and a turning toward the male figure of the "Hausierer."

Arthur's sister, Dora, on the other hand, experiences the burden of antisemitism much differently. She experiences alienation within the family just as Arthur does, but it takes form in ways that do not lead to self-knowledge and solidarity with other Jews. In other words, Dora's story does not follow the male-centered model of identity derived through patriarchal religion. She lives a

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prepare them for the world, to maintain a sense of family and tradition, and to provide the salve for the pain of an alienatingly conformist, ruthlessly competitive, frequently hostile environment. Contradictory and in constant flux, mothers had to raise proper German children, present a family in the appropriate light to a society intolerant of differences, maintain some of those differences and create a refuge for a minority to come home to." See Kaplan, *Gender and Jewish history* 205-206.

[8]Note also that the slur itself is gender related, for Bernard scolds his niece using the word "Judenmädchen."

multiply marginalized life. Her Jewishness is only one aspect of her Otherness, for in addition to her outsider status as a Jew, she is also a girl and a disabled person:

> Das arme Dörken, es konnte nicht mehr ruhig auf seinem Stuhl sitzen, es hatte den Veitstanz. Der Doktor zwar tröstete die Eltern: das käme in "den" Jahren öfters vor. (*Theben* 372)

The first thing revealed about Dora when she is introduced to the story is that she has St. Vitus' Dance, a neurological disorder that causes involuntary movement of the body, particularly the arms and legs or parts of the face. Lasker-Schüler had St. Vitus' Dance as a child, and as was the practice of the time, she was removed from school and tutored at home—an isolating event in itself. Additionally, Dora is presumably pubescent. In the passage above, her femininity and budding maturity are clearly denied by the male doctor, as he employs the euphemism of "'den' Jahren" to explain the cause of her "disorder." This medical (male) view of a girl's puberty points to a marginalization of feminine experience so profound, that it is no wonder the author turns in her adult life to this childhood "disease" as a source for her writings.[9]

Like the tower motif, Jakob Hessing traces a direct relationship between this neurological condition and the author's fear of antisemitism as a child (*Else*

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[9]It is important to mention Sander Gilman's comparison of the marginality of the Jewish male and that of women in his study of Freud. He summarizes that in "Freud's discussion of the nature of the female body [particularly in his theory of penis envy], the distinction between male Aryan and male Jew is repressed, to be inscribed on the body of the woman." See Gilman 40.

Lasker-Schüler 45). Jennifer Redmann, on the other hand, associates Dora's St. Vitus' Dance with the modern psychological notion of feminine hysteria (203). Most important to my analysis, however, is the fact that the reader is never privy to Dora's *internal* life, but rather to its external manifestation as St. Vitus' Dance. What results is an objectification of Dora by everyone around her, be they the doctor, the people of the town, or even her own family:

> Sie war überhaupt so komisch geworden, die Dora, verglotzte die Augen und betete die halbe Nacht. Immer begann sie von neuem wieder zu flehen, im Glauben, sie habe irgend eines der Geschwister zu nennen vergessen. Auch litt sie an fixen Ideen, schnappte Arthur Aronymus einmal von den älteren Brüdern auf. Immer bückte sie sich ein-, zwei-, dreimal mit dem wackelnden Körper, bevor sie auf der Wiese im Garten ein Gänseblümchen oder eine Butterblume abpflückte. . . In Paderborn war's an der Tagesordnung, Teufel auszutreiben. Hexen wurden verbrannt oder eingemauert. Und der Veitstanz war ein von Dämonen besessenes Geschöpf. Und mit Vorliebe plazierten sich die bösen Geister in jungfräuliche Judenleiber. (*Theben* 372)

All the elements of Dora's isolation—as a Jew, a girl, and a person with a disability—find themselves expressed here in the short but evocative phrase, "jungfräulicher Judenleib." The scene above describes an unstoppable, convulsive-like movement of the body that is reminiscent of a "betender Jude" (Hessing, *Else Lasker-Schüler* 45), or, as the superstitious Christians of

Gäsecke see it: "ein von Dämonen besessenes Geschöpf." Whatever the case, her isolation is extreme and her marginalization multiple. Her family finds her behavior compulsive and bizarre—note that it is the males, the older brothers, who feel this way about her—and the townspeople make plans to execute her. Her young convulsive body becomes a vehicle for a spiritual voice silenced by patriarchal ontology, but the voice is expressed with such untraditional, indeed unavoidable, force and singularity that her very life is threatened: "Die Christen in Gäsecke freuten sich schon auf die weihnachtliche Sensation, auf Dora auf dem Scheiterhaufen" (*Theben* 373).

As a means of alleviating the religious tension provoked by Dora's multiple Otherness, Bernard, the priest, approaches the girl's parents with a plan:

> "Lassen Sie Ihren Sohn Arthur Aronymus im katholischen Glauben erziehen. Mit diesem demütigen Entgegenkommen in Jesu geheiligtem Namen brechen Sie ein für allemal", betonte er, "jeder Gefahr, die Ihrer jungen Tochter Dora dräut, die Spitze ab." (*Theben* 374)

Lasker-Schüler clearly presents the manner in which the children suffer antisemitism as gender specific. Dora is persecuted by the threat of execution, while her brother Arthur is persecuted with the threat of forced conversion. The important distinction is that the feminine is not spared, precisely because of its gender. Hessing presents this as a dualism indicative of Lasker-Schüler's own "unerlöste[s] Judentum," as "Lichtseite" (beloved Arthur) and "Schattenseite"

(despised Dora) (*Else Lasker-Schüler* 57). However, he overlooks the crucial element of patriarchal religious ontology and the squelching of feminine voice.

I read *Arthur Aronymus* as a subconscious, spiritual reckoning of the daughter with the father as "Erlöserfigur" and therefore with a male gendered God, an ideology common to both Judaism and Christianity. In an interreligious dialogue between patriarchal belief systems that are founded upon hierarchical separations, Dora plays a specific role in the crossfire. As the girl figure, her existence is a hinge by which these two belief systems have found a way to negotiate their identities as distinct religions, yet still maintain their patriarchal dominance. Her fate in this interfaith dialogue becomes a question of life or death, but not one of identity. She is never allowed identity in the first place. As a "diseased" girl, she is an aberration to be dealt with within an androcentric dialogue that privileges the patrilineal ideology common to both religions, not within a spiritual framework that considers feminine experience.

Arthur, because he is a male and valued more highly within the patriarchal hierarchy, is allowed identity, but, as a son, he must first be a pawn for his own religion's continuity. His identity is threatened, spared, and then celebrated within the androcentric paradigm of the all important father-son lineage. The threat of conversion serves as a rite of passage into male Jewish adulthood. In this way, it is his father who speaks on his behalf when the priest requests to convert the boy:

> "Ich wie mein Vater noch meines hochseligen Vaters hochseliger Vater und dessen Väter, Väter, Väter, noch die Väter Frau

> Henriettens, meiner Gattin, in Gott ruhenden Väter, pflegten auf direktem Weg zu Gott zu gelangen, und ich sollte Seinem Sohne meinen noch unmündigen Sohn auf Umwegen zuführen lassen? Der Herr behüte uns vor allem Bösen." (*Theben* 374-375)

The element of irony can hardly be overlooked here. The author, in a mocking yet playful tone, nests the father's words in a pronouncedly male lineage based on father-son hierarchies. As he musters himself to speak out against Arthur's conversion, he conjures up an androcentric genealogy, referring even to the men of the maternal side of the family while excluding any sign of Jewish women of past generations altogether. By standing up proudly against the Christians and authorizing himself through his own male lineage, the Jewish male proves himself as the preserver of his people. No defense of Dora in her own right is made, and no reference is made to the mothers and grandmothers.[10] These voices remain silent. Arthur's conversion and Dora's execution are averted by the sheer historical power of male dominance and the possession of identity, not to mention Christian patriarchy's self-identification and respect for such ideology. Arthur is bequeathed this power in the important

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[10]In this way, I do not agree with Bauschinger that "würdig erhebt sich Arthur Aronymus' Vater und entgegnet ihm [Bernard] mit Worten, die bereits auf die Verschmelzung jüdischen und christlichen Glaubens hindeuten, die sich in Else Lasker-Schülers Denken vollzogen hatte." See Bauschinger, *Ich bin Jude* 93.

moment that his father refuses his conversion.[11]

Dora's averted execution, on the other hand, is not accompanied by an acknowledgement of her religious identity. As we have seen, it is framed within a stubbornly narrow discussion of male hierarchical religious values that exclude women altogether. However, the author takes the reader by surprise when she unexpectedly inserts a feminine presence on the heels of the scene quoted above:

> Dann beobachtete Arthur Aronymus ganz genau, wie sich der Vater zu seiner Mutter neigte, sie auf die weiße Stirne küßte. Das war gewiß das Werk der Nächstenliebe, von dem so oft der Bernard sprach. Denn so was Liebes, einer zum anderen, hatte er noch nie bisher erlebt. (*Theben* 375)

Lasker-Schüler suddenly places the mother in a scene previously centered on the father-son religious ideology. She uses the Christian tenet of "Love thy neighbor" to underscore what Arthur perceives as a reconciliation. From his perspective, the parents are the reconciling figures, expressing the high ideal of "Nächstenliebe" which his friend the priest had once told him about. In this way, the author subverts the ingrained androcentricity of the Jewish-Christian

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[11]Additionally, the Christian self-identification with the Jewish male also possesses economic and social attributes. Ute Frevert writes: "Tatsächlich aber gelang es den Juden—im Unterschied zu Frauen—im Verlauf des 19. Jahrhunderts . . . den 'Eintritt' in die Moderne zu vollziehen. Ohne die massiven Hindernisse ihrer Emanzipation unterschätzen zu wollen, schafften es Juden, genauer: jüdische Männer, sehr viel schneller und gründlicher als Frauen, in der bürgerlich-modernen Gesellschaft Fuß zu fassen und an ihrer Entwicklung aktiv teilzuhaben." See Frevert 80.

dialogue by inserting the presence of the mother and by mixing religious metaphors. In doing so, she implicitly remarks on the necessity of the feminine presence in the interfaith dialogue, offering an ideal vision of reconciliation as perceived through a child's eyes. When father and mother are reconciled, all danger is averted and all is good in the world.

Bernard, unable to convert Arthur, must resort to other, more responsible means of averting Dora's execution. Instead of sacrificing the son's Jewish identity through forced conversion, he writes a letter to the Bishop explaining the tense situation in the town. The Bishop responds with a proclamation to the Catholics of Gäsecke demanding that they desist from their superstitious hatred. Bernard reads the letter to his parishioners in a rather dramatic scene before the church. Lightning strikes, thunder crashes, and the townspeople are convinced the Bishop's order is a message from God.

Passover rolls around as the story comes to a close. We find Arthur telling his Christian classmates in his usual breezy manner that "Morgen ist Jüdisch-Ostern" (*Theben* 382). This is another example of Lasker-Schüler's sometimes jarring mix of religious metaphors. It is similar to the reconciliation scene above where the Jewish mother and father are described as expressing Christian "Nächstenliebe". On the day of Passover, the Bishop comes to Gäsecke for a surprise visit. As he and Bernard approach the children's home, they find Arthur and Dora playing outside with the neighborhood children:

> Den Zaun entlang tanzte der kleine Arthur Aronymus mit Händen und Füßen wie die krank gewesene Schwester Dora. Er hatte

> sich in eines ihrer Kleider heimlich gesteckt und ihren Hut trug er mit dem Kleeblumenkranz und den langen Samtbändern. (*Theben* 383)

Dora is now "cured" of her neurological condition. We find her in the garden with Arthur who is dressed in her clothes dancing and miming the movements she once made when she had St. Vitus' Dance. Lasker-Schüler's familiar device of cross-dressing and gender obscuring turns up again here. Though Bernard and the Bishop are oblivious to what the game is about, the reader sees that it is a reenactment of the averted tragedy: Dora's execution. In the scene, however, it is Arthur dressed as the girl Dora who is to be burned at the stake:

> Und nachdem die Schar der Henker die "Dora" an die Brandstätte gezerrt hatten, tanzten sie um ihr Opfer einen Teufelsreigen . . . Vorher aber hielt der finstere achtjährige Mönch der bösen Hexe sein großes Kreuz zum Kuße dar und geleitete nach der üblichen Weihe die Büßerin auf dem letzten Weg zum Scheiterhaufen. Ihn wirklich anzuzünden, traute sich keines der Kinder. Der heulenden Hexe aber, dem dampfenden Arthur Aronymus, wurde das Spiel—mit dem angeblichen Feuer—etwas zu heiß (*Theben* 384)

This scene, like others discussed above, can be read as an intergenerational and inter-gender spiritual reckoning with the father figure. Lasker-Schüler's

father treated his daughter like a boy.[12] In doing so, aspects of her femininity were denied. As an adult and a writer she came to understand this denial not only as a familial exclusion, but as symptomatic of patriarchal society as well. Here, the author costumes her own father in her feminine clothing and, for a brief moment, places him in the fate of her own gender when it is threatened by antisemitism. When little Arthur is at the stake and about to be burned by the Christians, it becomes "etwas zu heiß" for him, despite the fact that it is only "ein angebliches Feuer." The brief glimpse he gets of Dora's "feminine" experience of antisemitism frightens him to the core, and he abruptly abandons the game.

Later, inside their home, as the Passover seder is about to begin, the Bishop and priest sit down with the Jewish family to celebrate:

> Auf dem gestickten Vaterstuhl saß heute abend Seine Gnaden Lavater [the Bishop] und neben ihm der liebe Bernard. Dann kam der strahlende Arthur Aronymus, dann kam Dora, sie schien anmutiger wie vor ihrer Mädchenkrankheit. (*Theben* 385)

As in many of Lasker-Schüler's early narratives, we find the main female figure of the story included in the club of men, yet in a position of subordinated Other. Here Dora is seated among the male spiritual leaders, but hierarchically named *after* them and her brother. Her status is determined by her gender and by her former disability which is referred to as a "Mädchenkrankheit." Now "cured," she appears "anmutiger" than she did before. This is all we know of Dora and the aftermath of her averted death. In other words, she still possesses no identity,

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[12]See my discussion of the author's anecdote, *Von Papa*, in Chapter 2.

for this was never what was considered to be at stake for Dora in the first place.

The story ends with a reconciliation scene between Christians and Jews. Arthur's father, the Bishop, and the priest are able to come to an agreement regarding their faiths, but it is on androcentric terms.[13] The author makes this clear when she frames their mutual "tolerance" within a religious ontology that, once again, legitimizes itself genealogically through the male line:

> Seine Gnaden bejahten aufmerksam jedes Wort des klugen Herrn Vaters, meines Vaters Vaters, mit wohlwollender Geste und beide Herren kamen darüber ein, "mit einem bißchen Liebe geht's schon, daß Jude und Christ ihr Brot gemeinsam in Eintracht brechen"— "noch wenn es ungesäuert gereicht wird", vollendete artig die Mutter meines nun auch schon in Gott ruhenden Vaters: Arthur Aronymus. (*Theben* 388)

Following directly on the heels of the oft repeated assertion of the father-son ontology, the author subversively gives the mother the final word in the story. She does so by having the mother speak of the traditional *matzot*, the unleavened bread. Lasker-Schüler's depiction of the mother is similar to

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[13]In this way, Bauschinger is correct in stating that "Die beiden Religionen stehen nicht im Wettbewerb." See Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 240. They are not in competition, however, not because they have achieved the ideal of reconciliation, but rather because they are aligned from the beginning in the androcentric project they both share as patriarchal religions.

Marion Kaplan's profile of the German Jewish mother in Imperial Germany.[14] As the mother speaks the final word, the author brings the story to a close referring to the death of both the mother and the son Arthur. This also interrupts the father-son, genealogical ideology that so permeated the dialogue of reconciliation before. Arthur, like his mother, is now dead. Their deaths make them equals, counteracting the male-centered genealogy that is repeatedly depicted in ironic terms throughout the story. This twist on religious historicity points to one very important aspect of Lasker-Schüler's understanding of reconciliation between androcentric religions: room must be made for a feminine voice.

In this way, I do not entirely agree with Hegglin that in Else Lasker-Schüler's writings "deutsche Tradition, Sprache und sehr viel christliche Symbolik mit dem Judentum eine Einheit gefunden [hat]" (107). Nor do I feel, as Bauschinger does, that in *Arthur Aronymus* Lasker-Schüler is creating her own "jüdisch-christliche Ideologie" (*Werk und Zeit* 188). The story is not an "ebenso rührende[r] wie hilflose[r] Versuch . . . dem Antisemitismus versöhnend

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[14]Kaplan describes the normative German Jewish mother of the period: "As busily as women moulded the bourgeois home and family, they also shaped the milieu in which traditional sentiments were reinforced. Jewish observance, more than that of other religions, took place in the home, in a familial setting. Family life, the observance of the sabbath and holidays (whether religiously or secularly marked), and dietary laws were most clearly within women's sphere of influence. Thus, in attempting to measure "Jewishness" or the retention by Jews of shared religious, cultural, or existential symbols and feelings, it is crucial to examine women's relationship to their religion or their ethnic heritage within the home, the extent of their specific ritual practices and sentimental associations, and their social contact with family and other Jews." See Kaplan, *Gender and Jewish history* 212.

zu begegnen und dem Publikum die Möglichkeit friedlichen Zusammenlebens von Juden und Christen vorzuhalten" (Bauschinger, *Werk und Zeit* 235). Instead, it is an inquiry into feminine experience of antisemitism and patriarchy's denial of that experience. It is a criticism of the "lie of reconciliation" when reconciliation is brokered by two mutually self-identifying androcentric ideologies of faith (Jewish and Christian).

Both in *Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona* and in *Arthur Aronymus*, Lasker-Schüler uses children as the site for analyzing the problematics of religious reconciliation. In "St. Laurentius," an essay from the *Konzert* collection, another reconciliatory situation involving children arises. In this piece, the author tells of the antisemitic abuse she experienced as a child in her home town. She describes how the Lutheran children yelled "hepp, hepp" at her in the streets, only to be "consoled" later by the Lutheran minister that "hepp hepp" means "Jerusalem ist verloren" (*Konzert* 127). That night, in a dream, Jesus appears before her to say, "Jerusalem ist nicht verloren, da es in deinem Herzen wohnt" (*Konzert* 127). Bauschinger is correct in concluding that "diese Erinnerungen [sind] auf Versöhnung und sehnsüchtige Idealisierung abgestimmt" (*Werk und Zeit* 198), but my gender study of this essay reveals a deeper questioning of the complexity of reconciliation on the author's part than Bauschinger ascribes to her. The key here, as it has been elsewhere, is the figure of the father who also appears in this essay.

After opening "St. Laurentius" with the childhood memories of persecution described above, Lasker-Schüler relates the story of a Catholic

school mate of hers, Adele. Initially, Adele was one of the author's "Angreiferinnen" in the name-calling, but she eventually apologizes and expresses a desire to be friends. The girl, we learn, is poor and has nothing to wear to the St. Laurentius parade, a religious holiday on which the Catholic children "zogen weiße Kleider an und waren an dem Tage—Engel" (*Konzert* 125). The tone of the essay is somewhat ironic. These children in white are not as angelic as they appear to be, for we know the narrator has suffered their persecution. In spite of Adele's past abuses, the author lends her a "weißes Kleidchen" to wear in the parade. It is in this moment that the father appears. He attends the parade with the narrator:

> Adele [war] am kommenden Laurentiustag das schönste Engelchen im Zuge, und mein Vater betappte mein Händchen, um sich zu vergewissern—er glaubte doch—einen Augenblick, ich sei Adele gewesen. Die aber schritt majestätisch und glorreich, aus der blanken Trompete geblasen, zwischen zwei anderen katholischen Engeln, vor dem Baldachin im Zuge—wahrscheinlich ins Himmelreich. (*Konzert* 129)

In regard to reconciliation, the passage is significant, for the author crosses religious boundaries with the familiar strategy of the costume. The little white dress comes to represent Adele's repentance and reconciliation with the author after having mistreated her with name-calling. The opportunity to be an angel is her reward for confessing and overcoming her cruelty. As in previous discussions of religious metaphors, Lasker-Schüler uses Christian (in this case

Catholic) tropes—such as the angel, the color white, and the confession—to ironically point out the hypocrisy of Christian dogma, yet she also subverts them to create ideal scenes of reconciliation.

The subversion is doubled when the narrator's father, upon seeing the white angel on the street in the parade, thinks momentarily that it is his own daughter. Precisely in this moment, both Adele's and the narrator's religious identities are obscured, not to mention the father's. He must reach for his daughter's hand for physical proof that she is standing there beside him and not marching along with the other Catholic children in the parade. This is an example of the whimsical, yet subversive side of Lasker-Schüler, who once called herself "Gottes Schlingel" ("God's little rascal") in a poem (*Gedichte* 46). Tricking the father is a religious prank that forces the two worlds of Judaism and Catholicism to come together and reconcile themselves, if only for a moment, in the form of mistaken identity. It is significant that the crisis in identity is situated in the father who is both an adult and male.

In "Der Versöhnungstag," an essay from the *Konzert* collection, still another reconciliation involving children takes place. The author describes a family scene at the dinner table on Yom Kippur, the Jewish high holiday of reconciliation. The father, humorously and notoriously known for his emotional outbursts, is upstairs making a racket as he dresses for the evening while the rest of the family waits for him at the table. It is a typical patriarchal scene in many respects, as all await his arrival before commencing the evening's ritual. When he finally makes it to the table, the author writes:

> Wir Kinder konnten uns das Lachen kaum mehr verbeißen, bis er selbst uns lachen rügte wegen der Dinge Ernst. Wir saßen nun rund um den Tisch, nicht wie eine Familie gerade, aber wie eine kleine Welt für sich, jeder von uns ein anders gearteter Mensch aus verschiedenen Blutfarben, die sich wohl ineinandermischten, zum Heil oder Unheil sich wieder absonderten. Länder einig an dem Tag Gottes. (*Konzert* 157)

The narrator, after poking fun at the authority of the father on this solemn occasion, describes all who are present not as a family, but as "eine kleine Welt für sich." In this way, Lasker-Schüler breaks with the traditional patriarchal paradigm of religious affiliation based upon family or clan ties.[15] She transforms her siblings into individuals representing "verschiedene Blutfarben, die sich wohl ineinandermischten." In this way, the children become a kind of cultural map of the world, each representing a different ethnicity at the table on Yom Kippur. The significance of this brief scene lies in the fact that it is couched in the author's memories of this Jewish high holiday. On Yom Kippur, a Jew is religiously obligated to make amends with those whom he or she has quarreled with or been in conflict. Reconciliation is the ethical imperative of the holiday. In this way, Lasker-Schüler transfers the family scene to an ideal notion of harmony in a world of diversity.

One reason why Lasker-Schüler turns to children as a vehicle for

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[15]For a more in depth analysis of the Jewish family and marital tradition, see a study of endogamous relations in the Torah in Exum 107-120.

exploring antisemitism and the reconciliation between religions is the child's religious innocence. Children are raw material subject to the adult world and its imparting of religious and cultural identity. This is why she also describes antisemitism as "eine Erbschaft vom Vater auf den Sohn." The reconciliation scenes discussed thus far have either been brokered between the children themselves as they refuse to repeat the animosity that pervades adult religious culture (*Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona*), or as they cause the adults to assess their own religious identity and negotiate peace between themselves instead of sacrificing their own children (*Arthur Aronymus*). In any instance of Lasker-Schüler's exploration of reconciliation and the child's position, there is an acute awareness not only of generational issues and their role in the complex, but also of the necessity she perceives for a feminine voice to play a role in the dialogue of reconciliation. In the texts discussed here, the feminine voice is often inserted in the reconciliation scene as a subversive element.

Das Hebräerland (1937), a book that documents the author's travels through Palestine, is in many ways Lasker-Schüler's most programmatic meditation on the theme of reconciliation.[16] In the opening pages of the work, she writes:

> Man bewegt sich keineswegs zwischen einzelnen Menschen in den Hängen und Gängen Zions, aber zwischen Völkern! Die sich gefundenen Stämme Judas ruhen methodisch geborgen, jeder einzelne Stamm der bunten Blöcke, im Stadtviertel seines

[16]For a similar view, see Bauschinger, *Ich bin Jude* 94.

> Bilderbaukastens. Um diese gewaltigen Stammbausteine bewegen sich die verschiedenartigsten morgenländischen und abendländischen Völker und Religionen. Und doch geht hier Jude und Christ, Mohammedaner und Buddhist Hand in Hand. Das heißt, ein jeder begegnet dem Nächsten mit Verantwortung. *Es ziemt sich nicht, hier im Heiligen Lande Zwietracht zu säen.* (*Hebräerland* 11)

Das Hebräerland is riddled with scenes of people of different religious groups, particularly Jews and Arabs, living together in harmony. In fact, the author seizes the opportunity to remark on religious and cultural tolerance every time it presents itself. In this way, a polemic of spiritual cooperation between Arabs and Jews begins to develop, as she describes numerous everyday scenes of life in Palestine. For example, in the theater:

> Die Araber lieben mit den Juden gemeinschaftlich, leidenschaftlich die Habimâh. Bewundern seine großen Künstler. Die beiden versöhnten Stiefbrüdervölker, ein jedes begabt, sich zu begeistern. (*Hebräerland* 50)

Or at the circus:

> Der Tanz der edlen Schimmel ergreift den wildhebräischen und arabischen Semiten zu Tränen. Wir alle, die wir da—wie erwartungsvolle Kinder sitzen auf den Bretterbänken und zuschauen mit fiebernden Wangen und sprühenden Augen den galoppierenden Pferden und den Artisten des Zirkus, wachsen

> zusammen in der kindlichen Freude einträchtig—wie wir alle einmal wieder in himmlischen Höhen leben werden vereint. (*Hebräerland* 185)

She also describes many street scenes in Jerusalem that insistently depict Arabs and Jews living together in harmony:

> Es berührte mich jedesmal so angenehm und sympatisch, sah ich auch "erwachsene" Menschen Hand in Hand durch die Straßen der gelobten Stadt wandeln. Meist waren es orientaljüdische und arabische Studenten, in den Ferien wieder daheim. Man kann die Züge dieser Zwillingsstämme kaum mehr unterscheiden; sie verflochten sich, mit der Zeiten gleicher Sonne Flachs gewebt, vom selben Wehen der Meere bespült. (*Hebräerland* 89)

As the book continues, the reader finds that not only are Jewish and Arab students reconciled, but these "Zwillingsstämme" live together in harmony in all sorts of situations. Her descriptions of scenes range from "semitische Stiefbrüder" (Arab nomads and Jewish farmers) who have "wirkliche Freundschaften" (*Hebräerland* 89), to construction workers working together side by side, to "die hebräische mit der arabischen Palästinafrau," as they carry jugs of water side by side from the well (*Hebräerland* 129). And the children on the streets, of course, are depicted ideally as reconciled figures:

> Arabische Kinderlein spielen mit hebräischen Kinderlein zusammen in den Quergassen der Jaffaroad. Gute Kinder, unschuldsvolle Himmelchen, die zusammen einen großen

> ausmachen. Auch wir großen Menschen hier ergeben zu Schabbatt einen großen Himmel, ein Jerusalem! Warum nicht alle Menschen aller Länder zusammen wenigstens *eine* Erde? (*Hebräerland* 128)

When one pieces together all the reconciliation scenes in *Das Hebräerland* such as the handful I have cited here, it becomes quite clear that the author is writing with a political and religious message.

In *Das Hebräerland*, Lasker-Schüler also presents a picture of herself as a necessary feminine voice in dialogue with androcentric religion. In the opening pages of the book, for example, she describes herself as follows:

> Mögen etliche auch die "Übertreibungen"—? einer Dichterin wohlwollend hinnehmen, aber—eine Dichterin mußte kommen, das gebendeite Land zu feiern. Nur der dichtende Mensch, der sich bis auf den Grund der Welt Versenkende, zu gleicher Zeit sich zum Himmel Emporrichtende, erfaßt, inspiriert von begnadeter Perspektive aus, Palästina, das Hebräerland! Und teilt mit dem Herrn die Verantwortung Seiner Lieblingsschöpfung. (*Hebräerland* 13)

Verantwortung is an important spiritual concept in *Das Hebräerland*, and it is closely linked to the author's preoccupation with reconciliation. In the passage above, Lasker-Schüler describes a responsibility for voice, for identity, which she must take charge in expressing. She is aware of the singularity of her position as a woman poet in a land historically shaped by patriarchal religions,

and she has come to express a vision of Palestine that, to some, might appear as "Übertreibungen." However, for her, the "Dichterin," it is a responsibility she shares with God, "dem Herrn." In this way, she places herself on equal footing with the male God, aware that she is both enveloped by this androcentric religious ontology, but also in dialogue with it.

A few pages later, she points out the significance of her gender, as she writes: "Der Dichter bedeutet, und erst die Dichterin, dem arabischen Volke ein Symbol, dem jüdischen Volke eine Erinnerung an König Salomos Hohelied" (*Hebräerland* 27). Once again, an even-handedness in representing both the Jews and the Arabs appears as it does in many reconciliation scenes throughout the book. In this instance, however, what is emphasized is how these two cultures view her, the poet. The woman poet in the Holy Land is a rare event.

Lasker-Schüler is always on her guard to maintain a genuine voice, representative not of the status quo (patriarchy), but of herself in dialogue with the status quo. She views the situation with some irony in this regard. For example, in a scene inside the foyer of the relief building in Jerusalem (where she is tempted to go for assistance, but then resists), she crosses paths with the director of the organization. He compliments her on her poetry and how it has contributed to the building of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. Her response to this praise is cautious: "Und leichtgläubig, wie ich mal bin, freute es mich, daß die Dichterin etwas gilt im Vaterland. (Ich lasse es ankommen auf die endgültige Blutprobe.)" (*Hebräerland* 31). The "Dichterin im Vaterland" is

an apt phrase for Lasker-Schüler, indeed, this phrase describes her entire literary career. She is a woman poet in the biblical land of the fathers, the fatherland or homeland of the Jews (Palestine).[17] The word "leichtgläubig" is certainly ambiguous, meaning both "gullible" and, more literally, "possessing faith easily." In regard to androcentric religion, this self-depiction makes perfect sense. It is difficult as a woman to separate oneself from the patriarchy that surrounds one; it is difficult to truly ascertain whether "die Dichterin etwas gilt im Vaterland" as she says. She herself will never know. All she can do is be the poet she is, express her own spiritual voice with conviction and leave the rest for posterity to judge.

Lasker-Schüler is often stigmatized for her *verklärte* depictions of Jews and Arabs living in harmony during a moment in history when extreme conflict characterized their relations in Palestine. This view, however, simplifies and washes over the theme of reconciliation too easily. For example, Sigrid Bauschinger writes:

> Trotz dieses mangelhaften Wissens, trotz ihrer eher oberflächlichen Begegnung mit der jüdischen Religion hatte Else Lasker-Schüler ein enges Verhältnis zu Gott. Ihr Gott war kein jüdischer Gott, sondern ein selbstgeschaffener, ein Kunstwerk. Ihre Toleranz gegenüber anderen Religionen und deren Gründern, Christus, Mohammed, Buddha, ist ein

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[17]I must add the important point that she also comes from another "Vaterland," Germany, which is now under Nazi rule.

> hervorstechendes Merkmal der lasker-schülerischen Religiösität. (*Werk und Zeit* 166-167)

For Lasker-Schüler, offering images of "tolerance" is important, but even more important is her attempt at asserting this religious ideal within the constraints of patriarchal religious culture. Additionally, to argue that her God was not a Jewish God is a rather mute point, because this assumes androcentric religious practice as the norm and determinant of what is Jewish religiously.

Bearing this in mind, I now discuss important scenes from *Das Hebräerland* where the author's spiritual and literary conviction is most pronouncedly felt, in the moment of gender conflict in Jewish ritual and custom.[18] For example, once, while visiting a sephardic synagogue in Jerusalem, Lasker-Schüler entered the building to find, much to her surprise, that "die Frauen saßen gemeinschaftlich mit den Männern im selben Raume auf den Bänken; und nicht getrennt hinter Gittern, auf Balkonen" (*Hebräerland* 41). She learns later, after a confrontational scene with the rabbi and the other men in the synagogue, that the women are not separated from the men in the usual manner because the building is actually a school that is converted into a

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[18]Aviva Cantor summarizes the nature of women's exclusion in regard to Jewish ritual and custom: "Women were exempted (i.e., excluded) from some of the positive time-bound mitzvot, most of which involve public performance of ritual at set times, such as praying in the synagogue at regular daily intervals and on Shabbat and holidays and performing various ceremonies there. They were excluded from participating in the *minyan*, the quorum of ten worshipers necessary to conduct an official prayer service, and from being called up for an *aliyah* . . . to read or bless the reading of the Torah portion in the synagogue." See Cantor 103.

synagogue on Shabbat. Before knowing this, however, she sits through Shabbat services enthralled by the experience, particularly by the men and their religious proximity: "Vor uns Frauen beteten andächtig verhalten die Señors" (*Hebräerland* 41). She continues:

> Eine kleine Spanne Hauch trennte uns Lauschende von der zum Märchendiwan verzauberten Priesterbank und seinem königlichen Priester. Ich beneidete zu seiner Rechten seines Bruders Sohn, zu seiner Linken seiner Schwester Sohn, der ab und zu ein Amen dem heiligen Oheim kredenzte. (*Hebräerland* 42)

In the account, she refers to the presiding sephardic rabbi as "der Wunderrabiner" (42) and compares the scene in the synagogue to a fairy tale. In awe of the men, she expresses her pleasure in this rare opportunity to witness them so closely as they practice their faith. But she is also envious. The rabbi, his brother's son, and his sister's son are all sitting together on the "Priesterbank," where no women are allowed to sit. Much like the father-son ontology presented in *Arthur Aronymus*, Lasker-Schüler finds herself excluded by this religious structure based upon the male line. In spite of the exclusion, however, she is still moved by the rabbi, the "königlicher Priester," and she wishes to show her gratitude:

> Nach der lieben Pfingstpredigt eilte ich über das Geröll der schmalen Gasse, über spitze und rundliche Steine, aber leicht wie ein Wild, über all die eckigen Hindernisse hinweg. Es galt für

> mich eine königliche Handlung zu vollbringen, einen Durstenden zu erfrischen . . . Mit dem Kristall zwischen meinen Händen, gefüllt mit goldenem Schaum der Beere Palästinas, kehrte ich zurück zur Stätte der Gottesliebe, in den zur Synagoge sich fromm umgekleideten Raum. Mit Entsetzen erfüllte mein hartnäckiges Vordrängen die im Vorhofe sich befindenden Männer und die in der Synagoge schon psalmierenden Rabbiner in smaragdenen und hyanzinthebraunen Festhemden; hoben drohend ihre stolzen Gesichter! Aber, Gott verzeihe mir die Sünde, da ich gewaltsam eindrang, wider das Gebot, in den Saal der betenden Männer, Seinem unschuldigsten Priester in Lammschuhen das stärkende Rebenblut der Weinstöcke Noahs zu reichen. (*Hebräerland* 43)

Lasker-Schüler's appreciation of the rabbi and the service is denied expression by the men praying in the synagogue, and also by the "Gebot" that forbids women to enter. She uses the word "gewaltsam" to describe her intrusion into the men's ritual of prayer. This is another moment of boundary crossing, in a situation, in fact, that calls for a reconciliation of sorts; for how is she to express her love for her own religion if the men of that religion won't allow it? Her words, "Gott verzeihe mir die Sünde," are sarcastic and angry.

Lasker-Schüler also appears to experience a form of self-identification in the figure of the rabbi. As in her early stories, she is preoccupied with such spiritual leaders. Intimations of wanting to be in the men's club are also present. In this way, many of the motifs found in the author's early years are

seen to persist throughout her writing career. More interesting than the scene cited above, however, is what follows. Still moved by the rabbi's service, Lasker-Schüler longs to have an encounter with him. Her longing becomes so strong that it reaches fantastic proportions. Fundamentally, it is the dialogue with male religious culture denied her that causes her to desperately seek out an encounter with this "Wunderrabbi":

> Vergebens versuchte ich noch Tage und Tage nach dem Pfingstfest, den zederalten und doch blütenjungen Wunderrabbi in den Synagogen oder auf den Straßen Jerusalems zu begegnen. Ich fand ihn auch in Tel-Aviv nicht, auch nicht irgenwo auf einer Pyramide sitzend, ein Gipfel über einem Gipfel. Oder in einer Karawane zwischen den Buckeln eines Dromedars ruhend. In jedem kleinen Garten suchte ich nach dem glitzernden Pfingstrabbiner, so sucht ein Osterkind nach einem himmlischen Osterei, ein Waisenkind nach seiner Mutter, die Mutter nach ihren ihr von dieser Welt genommenen Kindlein. Wie ich—nach meinem unvergeßlichen, jungen schönen, lieben Sohn...überall und allerwegen. Amen. (*Hebräerland* 43)

This passage demonstrates a spiritual urgency deeply associated with male-centered religion. Abandoned by the men and the rabbi in the synagogue, the author is reminded of all the loss involving the men of her life. Extremely concealed autobiographical elements can be found here. To begin with, the "Wunderrabbiner" is actually a hybrid reference to her two grandfathers, one of

whom, on her mother's side, was presumably of Spanish descent, while the other, on her father's side, was a rabbi. Additionally, the author searches for this "glitzernder Pfingstrabbi" in every garden she passes on the street. This reference is an obscured allusion to Lasker-Schüler's father and the garden of her childhood home which he tended with great care. In this garden were paths strewn with transparent, "glitzernde Kies" or "kristallisierende Kieselsteinchen" (*Konzert* 9, 11). The spiritual yearning moves full circle through the male line of the author's family, ending with the figure of the lost son. Lasker-Schüler's son, Paul, died of tuberculosis in 1927 at the age of 28. In a sense, the author transposes the entire male spiritual world, its dominating presence in her life as father figures (grandfather, father, rabbi) and sons (Paul) to the natural world. The God she seeks is as inaccessible as these men.

There is another incident recorded in *Das Hebräerland* in which the author comes into conflict with a male religious figure during a moment of ritual. Again, no reconciliation occurs because tradition stands in the way. The incident takes place on Shabbat in Jerusalem, in the home of the poet Agnon. Lasker-Schüler is one of the invited guests, along with a "Talmudmönch" (*Hebräerland* 54), most likely a young man studying at the Yeshiva. She describes the blessing of the wine and bread:

> Vom Pfeiler des Fensters bemerkte ich schon, vor meinem geblümten Teller, den kostbar gegossenen Silberbecher stehn, den nun der Dichter Agnon gerade im Begriff, zu füllen. Nach der Zeremonie trank ich aus ihm—auf das Glück seines Hauses. Ein

> strafender Seitenblick traf mich aus dem Auge meines Nachbars [the "Talmudmönch"], der mich erinnern sollte, ich sitze beim Heiligen Schabbattmahle und nicht an einer Geburtstagstafel. (*Hebräerland* 53-54)

Here we find the author crossing gender boundaries during the Shabbat blessing. By toasting the hosts, she interrupts traditional ritual. In spite of Agnon and his wife's attempts to appease their disgruntled guest, he "gab sich gewaltsam Mühe, mich [Lasker-Schüler] zu ignorieren" (*Hebräerland* 54). But the author is not satisfied with his refusal to engage with her:

> Ich aber blickte auf die sieben weißen Kerzen in den Kelchen des sonntäglichen Leuchters, in ihre kleinen reinen Feuer. Mitten auf dem Tisch stand er und brannte um den Schabbatt und der Schabbatt um ihn, hier und in allen Häusern der Juden. Ich wandte mich zu dem gestrengen Manne des Herrn neben mir und fragte ihn, ob er die sieben weißen Kerzen brennen sehe. Doch alle nach ihrer Art, "nach ihrer einigen, eigenen Flamme."—"Also wollen wir auch unsere Dichterin leben lassen, *wie sie ist*. Was sagt mein lieber Gast, der gestrenge Nachbar dazu?" beendete der Adoni des Hauses den religiösen Wortwechsel. (*Hebräerland* 54)

The incident clearly shows the clash between feminine and masculine religious voice ("religiöser Wortwechsel"). Lasker-Schüler openly demands her right for religious expression as she uses the analogy of the candles. The phrase she

chooses to describe how the candles burn—"nach ihrer einigen, eigenen Flamme"—is a metaphorical expression for religion without hierarchical separations. The poet friend, Agnon, ends the scene, passing out bread to each member at the table. Lasker-Schüler uses this opportunity to point out how the ritual of blessing the bread includes all Jews equally *and* individually.

The conflict with the "gestrenger Mann des Herrn," however, is not finished. Again, Lasker-Schüler inserts herself into traditional Jewish prayer and ritual in ways that threaten androcentrism:

> Gerne hätte mich hingegen der Talmude ferner meiner schlechten Judenschaft gerügt, es gärte in ihm; doch in mir, ihn eines Besseren zu belehren. Das ehrfürchtigste Gebet der Juden, das "Schmah"— wohlwissend dem Tische des Schabbatts nicht einverleibt—stürzte plötzlich und schäumte in hohen Intervallen über die Düne meines Mundes, aus seinem Bett getretener Strom. Der Beifall, den ich erntete von seiten des Adons und seiner Adona, und meine Frage an den frommen Gelehrten, ob ich nicht das "Schmah" vorbildlich zum Herrn gesprochen, befreiten den Mönch gänzlich von seiner Schüchternheit. Er betonte, aus sich vollends heraustretend, die Art und Weise, wie ich, seine Nachbarin, sich erlaubt habe, das ehrerbietigste Gebet zum Herrn zu sprechen, beleidige, ja kränke Seine Heiligkeit durch alle Seine Himmel. Der lege kein Gewicht, weder auf Aussprache noch Klangfarbe, die wohl den Habimâhregisseuren imponiere,

aber nicht Seinem Gotte, dem Gotte Israels. (*Hebräerland* 55)

Lasker-Schüler's recitation of the *Sh'ma*, a prayer which "comes closest to being Judaism's credo" (Telushkin 667), is reminiscent of the urgency and passion of Dora's religious expression in *Arthur Aronymus*. Although she knows it is not a part of the Shabbat ritual, the author cannot help herself; the words "stürzte[n] plötzlich und schäumte[n] in hohen Intervallen über die Düne meines Mundes." Unlike Dora, however, Lasker-Schüler, by now a mature woman, is confident of her spiritual legitimacy as she engages directly with this man whom she calls "der Talmude," a personification of Jewish law itself. Interestingly, in addition to its fundamental commandment of monotheism and the rejection of idolatry, the *Sh'ma* is also known historically as the prayer which many martyrs of Judaism have recited in the moment of death (Telushkin 667). In this way, Lasker-Schüler's apparent ritual *faux pas* is actually a gesture of spiritual self-constitution and self-defense. A few lines later she writes:

> Ich erlaubte mir, mich wiederum im Gleichnis zu verteidigen: "Es war einmal eine Hirtin im Volke Israel, die, wenn sie nicht die Lämmer hütete, Verse dichtete an den Herrn. Eines Morgens dürstete sie sehr und sie neigte sich tief über einen Brunnenrand, um zu trinken. Als über dem Quell ein Tropfen des Wassers der unzähligen Tropfen emporstieß, in dem sich die ganze Schöpfung wiederspiegelte, *der Schöpfer Selbst*. Und die Hirtin ging eine Schale zu suchen, die unaussprechliche Kostbarkeit zu bergen; aber sie fand nicht eine einzige, die der Schönheit des kleinen

> geschliffenen Wassers entsprach, weder in den Nischen der Tempel noch in den Gärten der Paläste. Da spann sie aus den roten Fäden ihres durchsichtigen klaren Herzens einen Kelch, kristallen im Klang und von holder Dunkelheit seiner Darreichung, und legte die bebende Ewigkeit, verwahrt in einem winzigen Tropfen, *den Demant* der Gebete, das 'Schmah'—zwischen den gesponnenen Wänden ihres gottgeopferten Herzens. Das 'Schmah', der heilige Hieroglyph auf dem Plan der Schöpfung, überlebt die Welt." (*Hebräerland* 55-56)

The author's "Gleichnis" is a counter-narrative to traditional, patriarchal ritual and law that excludes her from the shaping of religious culture and which the young Yeshiva student represents. Just as she interrupted the Shabbat ritual with her own "inappropriate" rituals of toasting the hosts of the dinner and reciting the *Sh'ma,* she also interrupts the Talmud itself by telling a story which offers a different version of Judaism. No reconciliation occurs, except within the poet as she maps in her counter-narrative her own "Art und Weise" of expressing faith in God. In essence, if she is to embrace a Jewish God framed within androcentric culture, then she must play the role of "Gottes Schlingel" (*Gedichte* 46) by defiantly making her own stories as "Dictherin" and by practicing her own rituals.

Concluding Remarks

In a letter written sometime between the years 1909 and 1912 and addressed to Herwarth Walden and his friend, Kurt Neimann, Else Lasker-Schüler characterizes what she calls her "religiöse Stimmung." She is in her late thirties to early forties at the time, just on the brink of her second divorce (from Walden), and she still has a long literary career ahead of her. Many of the core elements of the author's religiosity discussed in the preceding chapters of this dissertation can be readily traced in this early correspondence.[1]

> Meine religiöse Stimmung muß also einen Grund haben. Ihr meint wohl, mich plagt die Reue? Die Sünde ist mir erschienen, meint Ihr wohl, mit dem Fegefeuer in der Hand, oder die Schlange hat doch endlich Einfluß über mich gewonnen. Pfui Teufel, Ihr traut mir zu, daß ich eine religiöse Stimmung auf Pfählen baue, igendwo in die Sintflut hinein. Ich habe Vertrauen zu meinen guten und bösen Handlungen. Ich kenne keine Sünde . . . Lebe das Leben ja tableaumäßig, ich bin immer im Bilde. Manchmal werde ich unvorteilhaft hingehängt, oder es verschiebt sich etwas in meinem Milieu, auch bin ich nicht mit der Einrahmung zufrieden. Einrahmungen sind Einengungen, Unkunst, Grenzen,

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[1]The letter initially appeared in *Der Sturm*. It was one of a series of letters addressed to Neimann and Walden which were later published in book form under the title *Mein Herz* (1920).

die sich kein Gott, aber ein Gottdilletant zieht. (*Mein Herz* 101)

If Else Lasker-Schüler is God's little rascal, then her role as such is easily detectable here. Her irony in relation to fire-and-brimstone religious culture, her spiritual self-referentiality, and her rejection of the boundaries ("Grenzen") that ideology constructs are all expressed here with characteristic playfulness and literary wit.

Perhaps the author is most a rascal in her flippant rejection of the idea of sin ("Ich kenne keine Sünde"), and in her equal rejection of dogma which supports such a self-alienating notion. She has trust in her good and her bad actions, she tells her friends, as she relies upon a self-referential spirituality of lived experience (a "Grund"), rather than one built upon "Pfählen". Later in the same book, in another letter addressed to Walden and Neimann, Lasker-Schüler will even claim: "[I]ch zweifle nie an mir. Kann man ein gläubigeres Wort sagen?" (*Mein Herz* 156 and 159).

Just as prankish and bold as her self-referential belief is her self-equation with God in the final lines of the passage above. For Lasker-Schüler, to adopt ideological boundaries, religious or otherwise, is to construct "Grenzen," "Einrahmungen," "Einengungen." In her mind, such thinking is spiritually superficial, something only a "Gottdilletant" engages in, but not a God. Words such as "Grenzen" and "Einrahmungen" are actually metaphors for the hierarchical separations I have repeatedly discussed throughout my analysis of Lasker-Schüler's prose. They are the "roter Faden" which, ultimately, seems to be at the center of, indeed the impetus for, her writings.

The integrity with which Else Lasker-Schüler made her texts is very clear. What she has left behind can be read as an attempt to chart a feminine experience of Judaism in the advent of modernism, the struggle of two world wars, the rise of antisemitism and the Holocaust, and the experience of exile. Else Lasker-Schüler died alone and in poverty in Jerusalem in 1945, just months before World War II was officially over.

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Footnote Abbreviations:
Hebräerland (*Das Hebräerland*), *Tiger* (*Lieber gestreifter Tiger: Briefe von Else Lasker-Schüler, Bd. 1*), *Malik* (*Der Malik*), *Theben* (*Der Prinz von Theben und andere Prosa*), *Gedichte* (*Sämtliche Gedichte*), *Nachlaß* (*Verse und Prosa aus dem Nachlaß*), *Dramen* (*Die Wupper und andere Dramen*)

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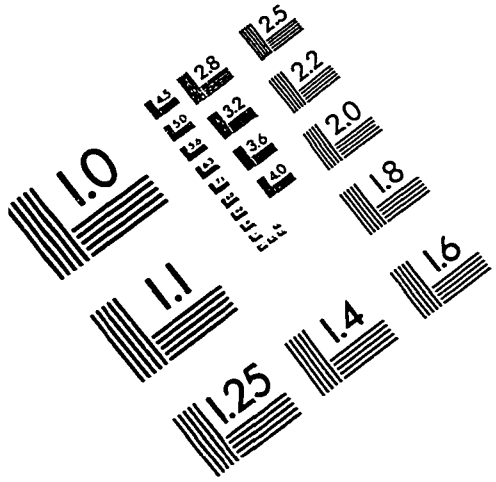

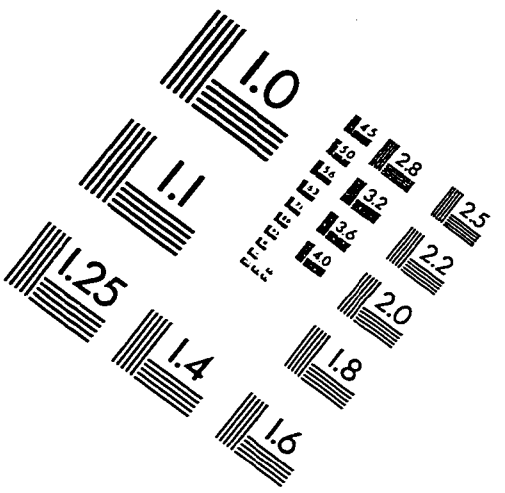

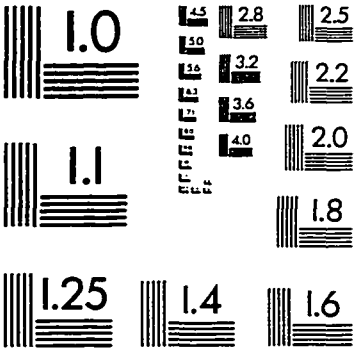

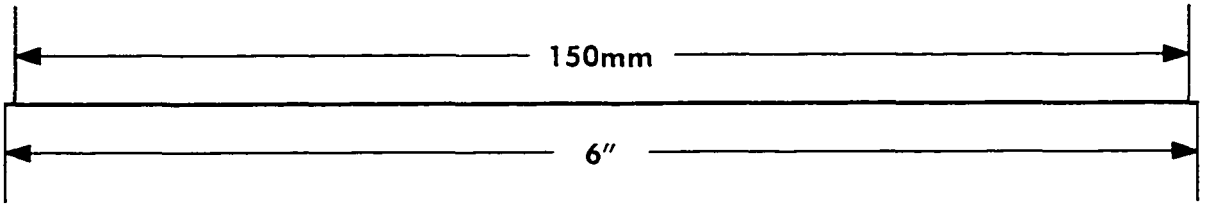

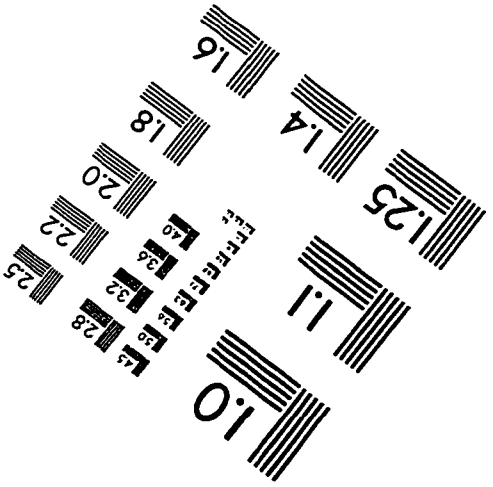

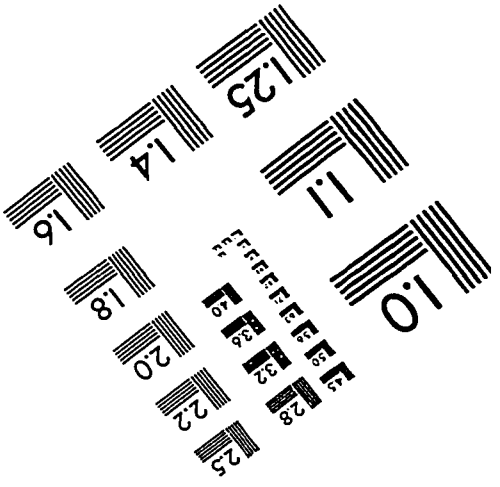

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