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Else Lasker-Schüler's Collaborative Avant Garde:  
Text & Image in Berlin c. 1910

By

Jennifer Cashman Ingalls

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

German

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Elaine Tennant (chair)

Professor Chenxi Tang

Professor John Efron

Spring 2017

Else Lasker-Schüler's Collaborative Avant Garde:  
Text & Image in Berlin c.1910

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Jennifer Cashman Ingalls

## Abstract

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Professor Elaine Tennant, Chair

Between 1910-1914, the German poet Else Lasker-Schüler formed her infamous alter ego, Prinz Jussuf von Theben, in her frequent publications in the expressionist periodicals *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*. The publishing opportunities in these periodicals allowed Lasker-Schüler the space to explore genre conventions and to begin including her own graphic art. Central to Lasker-Schüler's creation of Prinz Jussuf and her increasing incorporation of visual art, were her unsuccessful and successful collaborations with Oskar Kokoschka and Franz Marc. The texts published in the two periodicals ranged from short theater, book, and art gallery reviews to her poetry and two epistolary novels. In *Der Sturm*, Lasker-Schüler serially published *Briefe nach Norwegen*, a series of letters written to her husband and *Der Sturm* editor Herwarth Walden on his two-week trip to Scandinavia. The letters were published over nine months and chronicle life in bohemian circles in Berlin, merging Lasker-Schüler's emerging fantasy world into her artistic practice. Later published as *Mein Herz*, the letters have previously only been analyzed within the context of this later novelization and never within their original context of a weekly periodical. By analyzing the texts within their original context, check by jowl with other texts, illustrations, and advertisements, Lasker-Schüler's idiosyncratic engagement with contemporary life in Berlin is brought into high relief. Lasker-Schüler's second epistolary novel was published in *Der Sturm's* competitor, *Die Aktion*, after Lasker-Schüler's divorce from Walden. *Briefe und Bilder* was addressed to Franz and Maria Marc, and corresponds to a rich private correspondence between Lasker-Schüler and the Marcs. In *Briefe und Bilder*, Lasker-Schüler incorporates her emerging Kingdom of Thebes, and regularly references her simultaneous private correspondence with Marc, confusing and blending the boundaries between public and private, as well as the real and the fantastic. Later published after Franz Marc's 1916 death at Verdun in an expanded form as *Der Malik*, Lasker-Schüler's text in its *Briefe und Bilder* form has been ignored in existing scholarship. Utilizing biography and historiography to responsibly read these texts, this dissertation approaches Lasker-Schüler's frequent publications in weekly periodicals to understand how her identity as Prinz Jussuf von Theben was formed in the public sphere and how her multimedia practice emerged.

To Gma & Gpa

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This dissertation would not have been possible without one of those magical library experiences special to the American open stack system. When I was 19 and a sophomore at UC Berkeley, wandering the main stacks of the library, I stumbled across a collection of German poems from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Hundert Gedichte des Jahrhunderts* [One Hundred Poems of the Century], edited by the then literary pope, the late Marcel Reich-Ranicki. When I opened the volume, it opened to a poem by Else Lasker-Schüler, “Ein Liebeslied” [A Love Song], and it was love at first sight. My German was perhaps not good enough to understand everything, but the sounds and rhythms of Lasker-Schüler’s poetic voice took my breath away. I still read that poem and find myself transported by the languid language and possibility present in a mere eleven lines. As my love affair with the poetry of Lasker-Schüler expanded, I began to take on her prose and plays and visual artwork and found myself more and more fascinated with her entire oeuvre, and this dissertation is my exploration of a part of her art, written and visual, that I could never find a satisfying answer to.

First, I am astonishingly thankful and grateful to my advisor, Elaine Tennant. This dissertation would not have happened had she not encouraged me to continue (and finish) working on what I love, and her sound advice and example have been my lodestar since I took Middle High German with her all those years ago (2007!). She has given me the encouragement and space I needed to write this dissertation and all too often provided the pep talk I needed when I stumbled. I know no finer speaker of the English language, am ever amazed by your turn of phrase, and constantly encouraged by your vitality and spirit. Thank you, Elaine.

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Ich bin in Theben (Ägypten) geboren, wenn ich auch in Elberfeld zur Welt kam im Rheinland. Ich ging bis 11 Jahre zur Schule, wurde Robinson, lebte fünf Jahre im Morgenlande, und seitdem vegetiere ich.

-Else Lasker-Schüler, 1920<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

If there was ever a quotation that solidified a thousand myths, this is it. Written as a biography for Kurt Pinthus's seminal poetry anthology *Menschheitsdämmerung: Symphonie jüngster Dichtung* (1920), Else Lasker-Schüler's brief two sentences encapsulate the contradiction that is at the core of her self-fashioning and self-presentation, and much of the scholarship on her and her work. According to the laws of physics, Lasker-Schüler could not have been born in two places. But on a more metaphysical level, it is not impossible to contemplate feeling as though one were born, or meant to have been born, in a place different from one's actual birthplace. By 1920, Lasker-Schüler had effectively solidified her alter-ego of Prinz Jussuf von Theben as indivisible from her legal existence as Else Lasker-Schüler, often using both names interchangeably among friends and in print. She was reported to walk the streets of Berlin in the guise of Prinz Jussuf—silk harem pants, bangles, and turban—and to have delighted in giving highly performative poetry readings. If we are

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<sup>1</sup> I was born in Thebes (Egypt), even though I also came into the world in Elberfeld in the Rheinland. I went to school until 11, became Robinson, and lived for five years in the Orient, and since then I have been vegetating.

Ed. Kurt Pinthus *Menschheitsdämmerung: Symphonie jüngster Dichtung*, p.294.

to believe the historical accounts (and there are too many not to believe them), she would frequently place a older photo of herself on a table, behind a candle, and demand the audience look at her photo and imagine the photo was reading the poems, not she. The two photos she frequently used (Figures 1 & 2) show her as young woman. In each photo Lasker-Schüler presents a different idealized form: the young bride in a flower crown; the gender-bending Arab prince. She would throw her voice as she read, asking the audience to imagine the poems were in Hebrew, in Arabic, and not the in German on the page. As the story goes, during her exile in Palestine, a fan complimented the collection *Hebräische Ballade*



**Figure 1:**  
Else Lasker-Schüler at  
her first wedding, 1894  
©Stadtbibliothek  
Wuppertal, Else Lasker-  
Schüler Archiv

and suggested they be translated into Hebrew. To which she replied, *they already are*. The poems had not yet been translated into Hebrew, and were not written in Hebrew. They can only already exist in Hebrew if one can be born both in the Rhineland and in Thebes.

There is a certain seductive quality to these stories. They are so far beyond “normal,” that we hunger for more and all too easily incline to label them “crazy” when we cannot reconcile the impossibility of being born in two places at once. And over one hundred years after the fact, these stories become all the more foreign to us, and our temporal distance from them makes even mundane realities of Wilhelminian Germany, like Zeppelins flying overhead and drawing with a Koh-i-noor pencil, seem fantastic. In this dissertation, I bridge this historical distance and to re-contextualize Lasker-Schüler’s fantastic reality within its historical specificity. Rather than take Lasker-Schüler entirely at her word, or immediately label her a madwoman,

I seek to place things in their context, and to treat the contradictions in her self-presentation as intentional. I seek, to the extent possible seventy-two years after her death, to put Lasker-Schüler back in control of her own narrative.

This is not a biographical study *per se*, as I am not attempting to prove or disprove the various entwined threads of reality and fantasy that make up Lasker-Schüler’s self-propagated biographical narrative; nor am I attempting to understand her idiosyncratic poetry, prose, and visual art through the details, love affairs, and tragedies of her life. Rather, this is a biographical study in the sense that I am interested in resuscitating the use of biography in literary analysis to complete a historical picture of the environment in which the objects under analysis were created. Biography in literary studies leaves a bad taste in the mouths of some literary scholars. While there are



**Figure 2: Lasker-Schüler  
playing the flute, 1910,  
Private Collection  
©Leonhard Steckel**

many reasons for this reflex, one of the main objections to biographical criticism is that it often leads readers to an interpretation of a text, when the text should remain at the beginning of all literary analysis. And sometimes, this biographical impulse can lead to incorrect or imprecise interpretations. In the case of Else Lasker-Schüler, this is most evident in interpretations of her poetry that scholars have attempted to reach through her biography, particularly her romantic relationships. The most famous example of this imprecision are readings of Lasker-Schüler's poem "Höre" ("Listen") together with Gottfried Benn's poem "Hier ist kein Trost" ("There is no consolation here"). For decades, the prevailing wisdom was that Lasker-Schüler wrote her poem first, and Benn wrote his poem as a response. The connection was made through readers' knowledge of their failed romantic relationship, Lasker-Schüler's fate in exile as a German Jew, Benn's opportunist Nazism, a penchant for teleological historiography, and a few lines of each poem. When we look at the poems together, keeping all of these things in mind, the conclusion is easy to draw. Here are both poems in their entirety:

Höre (1912)

Ich raube in den Nächten  
Die Rosen deines Mundes,  
Daß keine Weibin Trinken findet.

Die dich umarmt,  
Stiehlt mir von meinen Schauern,  
Die ich um deine Glieder malte.

Ich bin dein Wegrund.  
Die dich streift,  
Stürzt ab.

Fühlst du mein Lebtum  
Überall  
Wie ferner Saum?

-Else Lasker-Schüler

Hier ist kein Trost (1912)

Keiner wird mein Wegrund sein.  
Laß deine Blüten nur verblühen.  
Mein Weg flutet und geht allein.

Zwei Hände sind eine zu kleine Schale.  
Ein Herz ist ein zu kleiner Hügel,  
um dran zu ruhn.

Du, ich liebe immer am Strand  
und unter dem Blütenfall des Meeres,  
Ägypten liegt vor meinem Herzen,  
Asien dämmert auf.

Mein einer Arm liegt immer im Feuer.  
Mein Blut ist Asche. Ich schluchze immer  
vorbei an Brüsten und Gebeinen  
den tyrrenischen Inseln zu:

Dämmert ein Tal mit weißen Pappeln  
Ein Ilyssos mit Wiesenufern  
Eden und Adam und eine Erde  
aus Nihilismus und Musik.

-Gottfried Benn

It is so easy to read "Ich bin dein Wegrund" [I am your side of the road] "Keiner wird mein Wegrund sein" [No one will be my side of the road] as part of a poetic conversation. This is

all the more true when it supports the view that Lasker-Schüler was left heartbroken by a cold Dr. Benn who rejected her advances once she had helped his career enough. Both mention flowers! Both are addressed to an unnamed you! They were both written in 1912! But, as demonstrated by Markus Hallensleben, this interpretive narrative falls apart when more precise dates are brought to bear.<sup>2</sup> Benn wrote his poem first. And both poems were written before the two had even met. Even with the correct dating, however, the reading of the poems together continues.<sup>3</sup> Everyone loves a love story, and a tragic one is even better.

Returning to Lasker-Schüler's duality as the "real" Else Lasker-Schüler and her alter-ego Prinz Jussuf von Theben, I am interested not in why Lasker-Schüler created a persona as a man, and an Arab Muslim one at that, but rather in *how* she created this identity. How did she convince people to call her Prinz Jussuf? How did she form this identity? Was it purely by word of mouth? Was it through planned publicity events? Was it a whole life as performance? Throughout this dissertation, I look at Lasker-Schüler's publications in avant-garde periodicals from 1910-1914 in order to understand her performance and creation of her own biography. This period is important because it saw Lasker-Schüler at her most productive. In addition to her poetry collections *Meine Wunder* (1911) and *Hebräische Balladen* (1913), she also published two collections of short stories, *Geschichte, Essays, und andere Geschichten* (1913) and *Der Prinz von Theben. Ein Geschichtenbuch mit 25 Abbildungen nach Zeichnungen der Verfasserin und 3 farbigen Bildern von Franz Marc* (1914), as well as an epistolary novel, *Mein Herz. Ein Liebesroman mit Bildern und wirklich lebenden Menschen* (1912). This last was initially published serially in *Der Sturm*, an expressionist periodical that Lasker-Schüler started (and named) with her second husband, Herwarth Walden. After their divorce in 1913, she started publishing another epistolary novel under the rubric *Briefe und Bilder* in the competing periodical *Die Aktion*. In addition to all these publications, she appeared nearly weekly in *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*, writing theater, gallery, and book reviews, as well as publishing poems.

Because of the frequency of their appearance, and the sense of the ordinary inherent in weekly publications, I have selected texts by Lasker-Schüler in *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion* to focus on.<sup>4</sup> Lasker-Schüler's biographical sketches of her contemporaries in *Der Sturm* and her two serial epistolary novels, *Briefe nach Norwegen* (later published in a collected volume as *Mein Herz*) and *Briefe und Bilder* (later published in an expanded form as *Der Malik* [1917]). How better to understand the face she presented to the world, than through her weekly letters to the reading public? In these publications in *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*, I analyze four main trends—the emergence of Prinz Jussuf von Theben, Lasker-Schüler's collaborative incorporation of her contemporaries into her fantastic world, her hyper-contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> Hallensleben, Markus. "Deonstruktion einer Liebesgeschichte" in *Else Lasker-Schüler: Avantgardismus und Kunstingenieurung*.

<sup>3</sup> On multiple levels this is the case. In her biography, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Eine Biographie*, the eminent Lasker-Schüler scholar Sigrid Bauschinger cites Hallensleben's corrected chronology, but concludes that the poems can still be read in conversation with each other (p. 209). Any quick search on the internet involving both poem titles together turns up countless reports by German high school and university students reading the poems together biographically.

<sup>4</sup> In working with these original documents, there are frequent misspellings and errors. In most cases I have maintained the errors rather than standardize Lasker-Schüler's prose.

engagement with events and objects around her (that are reflected in the other articles and advertisements in the magazines), and the emergence of her visual art as a part of her literary production. Chapter One explores Lasker-Schüler's emerging public identity in *Der Sturm* through her profiles of her contemporaries that accompany Oskar Kokoschka's series of visual portraits. Chapter Two focuses on her first epistolary novel, *Briefe nach Norwegen*, the emergence of visual art in her practice, and the merging of fantastic and everyday realities into Lasker-Schüler's emerging idiosyncratic world. Chapter Three takes up her second epistolary novel, *Briefe und Bilder*, published in *Die Aktion*, and focuses on her collaborative relationship with Franz Marc, the further integration of her fantastic reality into everyday life in Berlin, and her eventual submersion into the Kingdom of Thebes.

Prinz Jussuf is not a figure isolated in the world, but rather a member of a complex private world that can be more or less grafted onto Lasker-Schüler's life in Berlin. Karl Kraus visits it from Vienna as "Der Cardinal" or "Der Dalai Lama"; Gottfried Benn is eventually defeated in a bloody, violent battle as "Giselher" (interchangeably joined with "der Tiger" or "der Barbar"); Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele writes her poems as "Tristan"; Franz Marc is Jussuf's one true brother "Reuben"; and hundreds of others flit in and out of Lasker-Schüler's novels, poems, and stories in their real and fantastic identities. They become collaborators as she builds the Kingdom of Thebes. Yet not all are willing playmates. Karl Kraus bristles at his inclusion in her serial epistolary novels and tells her she is wasting her time on gossip when she should be writing poetry. Oskar Kokoschka refuses even to acknowledge her attempts to include him in her world. Franz Marc is her willing conspirator, writing her letters addressed to "Prinz Jussuf" and sending illustrated postcards with images of scenes from Jussuf's court life: dancers at feasts and animals both at the hunt and in the menagerie.

Lasker-Schüler often places her coterie in events or situations that were incredibly timely in their original context. She describes trips with Minn, a prince from Morocco, to the Egyptian exhibit, details how it feels when Zeppelins fly above her Charlottenburg apartment, and spends a day drawing with "der Bischof," using her Koh-i-noor. Without the knowledge (then commonplace) that the Egyptian exhibit is at Lunapark, that Zeppelins were flying over Berlin on a nearly daily basis in 1912, or that Koh-i-noor is a brand of drawing pencil, these details make the text stranger, instead of grounding it. I unearth these historical details and reintroduce them to Lasker-Schüler's texts in order to make them less strange. That is not to say that her texts suddenly become logical or merely journalistic through the reintroduction of this historical context, rather, the truly strange, idiosyncratic elements of the texts take on a heightened status without distractions created by historical distance.

At the core of this study is Lasker-Schüler's introduction of her visual artwork into her literary production. Lasker-Schüler's visual artwork was present nearly from the beginning of her literary career. Starting with *Das Peter Hille Buch* (1906), nearly every cover of Lasker-Schüler's published volumes featured one of her own drawings (Figure 3). But it was not until her publications in *Der Sturm* that Lasker-Schüler's graphic art became an integrated element of the texts. Her publications in *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion* document the

process by which Lasker-Schüler began to incorporate her own visual artwork into her literary production and present herself as a visual artist. Lasker-Schüler first conceived of her visual artwork within the framework of collaborations with other artists. She reached out to Oskar Kokoschka when both were regular contributors to *Der Sturm*, but their interactions fell short of actual collaboration. It was rather through an unsolicited partnership with Franz Marc that Lasker-Schüler found her playmate and collaborator and fully realized her identity as Prinz Jussuf von Theben.



Figure 3: Das Peter Hille Buch, 1906



CHAPTER ONE:  
ELSE LASKER-SCHÜLER & *DER STURM*

INTRODUCTION:

When thinking about Berlin and Modernism, one pictures groups. Groups gathered at small round tables in cafe houses, cabarets, and dusty *Bierkeller*, sitting at *Stammtische*, where they read one another's manuscripts, critique the latest gallery show, debate some political scandal, and drink. Yes, they drink veritable gallons of beer, wine, and coffee. Maybe our vision has jazz softly playing in the background and a soft lens providing a rosy hue. With or without these late additions, this is a romantic image to be sure, but one that is not entirely without historical accuracy (Figure 4). So let us go deeper into this nostalgic image and ask—how did these groups work? How did the individual members understand and form their group membership and identity? It is certainly romantic to imagine an organic membership, built through harmony, mutual kindness, and consensus, but this would be an image indeed without precedent in the historical record. Rather than concern myself with all groups inhabiting those dimly lit corners of late-Wilhelminian Berlin, I approach this question of group identity and membership through one figure and her unique strategies for group membership and identity, Else Lasker-Schüler.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The cafe as Lasker-Schüler's "artistic playground" was previously and evocatively illustrated by Sigrid Bauschinger in her lovely article "The Berlin Moderns: Else Lasker-Schüler & Cafe Culture," in *Berlin Metropolis: Jews & The New Culture 1890-1918*, pp. 56-83.



**Figure 4: "Von Berliner Stammtischen. Die "Modernen" an ihrem Stammtisch in einem Café des Westens" [From Berlin Stammtische: The "Moderns" at their Stammtisch at a Café des Westens]. Der Welt Spiegel. Illustrierte Halbwochen-Chronik des Berliner Tageblatts. Nr. 41. 21. May 1901. Else Lasker-Schüler and Herwarth Walden are seated together to our right.**

Else Lasker-Schüler was born in Elberfeld (now part of Wuppertal) in 1869 and came east to Berlin with her first husband, Berthold Lasker, doctor and chess master, in 1894.<sup>6</sup> By 1899, Lasker-Schüler had published her first collection of poetry, *Syx*, and spent her days with the literary and artistic avant-garde. She became friends with Peter Hille and started a new life as “Prinz Tino von Baghdad,” Hille’s name for her.<sup>7</sup> By 1903, she had divorced her husband, had a son by a “traveling prince,”<sup>8</sup> and remarried, this time to one of the other members of her avant-garde associations, Georg Levin, who was quickly and eternally rechristened Herwarth Walden by his new bride. But this story truly begins in those dimly lit cafes. The period is 1910-1914, when Lasker-Schüler begins to shake off the name and identity given to her by another, Prinz Tino, and to forge her own identity and biography as “Prinz Jussuf von Theben,” the name and identity she would continue to inhabit and shape until her death in Jerusalem in 1945.

In order to shape her identity as Prinz Jussuf, Lasker-Schüler required two things: a forum in which to shape her image and people to play with her as she shaped her identity—interlocutors. This spirit of play fills Lasker-Schüler’s oeuvre. She is eternally looking for a playmate, and it is her hope that this playmate will contribute to her fantasy and help to

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biographical details are according to Sigrid Bauschinger’s wonderful biography, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Eine Biographie*.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Hille (1854-1904) was an author and wandering bohemian, as well as Lasker-Schüler’s first mentor. For more on this early relationship, see: ed. Walter Gödden and Michael Kierecher. *Prophet und Prinzessin: Peter Hille und Else Lasker-Schüler*.

<sup>8</sup> Bauschinger, p.66.

shape its contours. This identity formation does not happen locked away in a secret tower, but in the public sphere, the public sphere of cafes and the pages of modernist periodicals. She is very much an interactive performer, and it was in conjunction with others in the public sphere that Lasker-Schüler created and crafted this new persona. Initially and rather conveniently she shaped her identity through the forum of *Der Sturm* and with the collaboration of the early contributors to it. Or rather, through Lasker-Schüler's attempts at collaboration.

## LASKER-SCHÜLER & PORTRAITURE IN *DER STURM*

From the first edition of *Der Sturm: Wochenschrift für Kultur und die Künste* on March 3, 1910 until Else Lasker-Schüler's divorce from her husband Herwarth Walden in July 1912, nearly every issue featured work by Else Lasker-Schüler. These works include not only poems, but also theater reviews, short feuilleton pieces about other expressionist artists, short stories, and an epistolary novel published serially over the course of ten months.<sup>9</sup> Lasker-Schüler's public persona and voice developed in tandem with *Der Sturm*, and gradually, as *Der Sturm* began to develop its visual identity, Lasker-Schüler's verbal contributions found a visual counterpart in the graphics of Oskar Kokoschka as the two embarked on portraiture projects published in *Der Sturm*. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a periodical attempting to create an identity for an artistic movement, the portraits were primarily of early contributors to *Der Sturm*. Published over the course of a year, Kokoschka's visual portraits, eventually titled "Menschenköpfe," and Lasker-Schüler's verbal ones work in tandem and with varying degrees of tension to shape the identity of the new publication. Although Kokoschka and Lasker-Schüler are ostensibly engaged in the same project of making portraits of their friends and contemporaries, their portraits are perhaps more contradictory than complementary.<sup>10</sup> While the portraits are occasionally of the same figures (i.e. Karl Kraus and Alfred Kerr), the portraits by the two artists reveal different conceptions of the membership of *Der Sturm* and its role within the modernist landscape. In their complementary and contradictory nature, the compositions dialog with one another, and through this multi-media conversation, tensions and identities emerge. In the case of Lasker-Schüler, her texts reveal conscious self-fashioning and tension about her membership in the larger *Sturmkreis*.

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<sup>9</sup> *Briefe nach Norwegen*, later published in novel form as *Mein Herz* is the focus of Chapter Two.

<sup>10</sup> As far as I know, the only time in which Lasker-Schüler and Kokoschka's portraits have been analyzed or even placed together, outside of their initial publication, is in the very curious volume from 1954, *Künstler und Poeten: Bildniszeichnungen. Literarische Porträtskizzen von Herwarth Walden, Else Lasker-Schüler und anderen Schriftstellern aus dem Künstlerkreis Der Sturm. Ausgewählt und eingeleitet von Hans-Maria Wingler*. Kokoschka is not the author, although he is listed as such, and despite the title, there is no portrait of Lasker-Schüler. The text is actually a very slim volume that places Kokoschka's *Sturm* images in the context of various Lasker-Schüler texts that are about, or mention, the pictured figure. The combinations imply a sense of intentionality between the original compositions and do not include any commentary.

## DER STURM NUMMER 1

“Mir wern kan Richter brauchen, um zu entscheiden,  
daß Wien schöner ist als Berlin. Aber das ist ja gerade das Unglück.”

-Karl Kraus

As with many new publications, the first issue of *Der Sturm* functions something of a manifesto.<sup>11</sup> A short note on first page of the magazine serves this function:

Zwei Worte

Zum vierten Male treten wir mit einer neuen Zeitschrift in die Oeffentlichkeit. Dreimal versuchte man, mit gröbsten Vertragsbrüchen unsere Tätigkeit zu verhindern, die von den Vielzuvielen peinlich empfunden wird. Wir haben uns entschlossen, unsere eigenen Verleger zu sein. Denn wir sind noch immer so glücklich, glauben zu können, daß an die Stelle des Journalismus und des Feuilletonismus wieder Kultur und die Künste treten können.

### **Die Schriftleitung der Wochenschrift DER STURM**

Berlin im Februar 1910

[Two Words

For the fourth time we appear in public with a new periodical. Three attempts were made to impede our activity, with the crudest breaches of contract, which many too many found embarrassing. We have decided to be our own publisher. For we are still fortunate enough to persist in the belief that culture and the arts could appear again supersede journalism and feuilleton.

### **The Editorial Board of the weekly DER STRUM**

Berlin, February 1910.]

As far as opening manifesto statements go, this one is pretty mild.<sup>12</sup> The most pointed section of the statement is the fact that this is the fourth attempt to publish the periodical. The professed aims of *Der Sturm* are elliptically established through the expression that art and culture are more important than journalism, and suggest that there is a gap in the established Berlin press for such a publication. While this statement is quite brief and does little to expand upon the particular aims, aesthetics, or interests of the periodical, the other

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<sup>11</sup> In understanding manifestos and the rhetorical strategies of modernist manifestos in particular, Mimi Parent's article "The Poetics of the Manifesto" in *Manifesto: A Century of isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, pp. ix-xxi, has been especially helpful. In it, Parent lays out the use of "we" and "they" in a manifesto's language, and in the creation of explicit conditions for audience reception.

<sup>12</sup> Although *Der Sturm* is generally considered an expressionist journal, it never defines itself as such. And unlike the other myriad -isms of the day, expressionism never had a manifesto like futurism, dadaism, etc.

contributions in *Der Sturm* do implicitly signal these leanings. By taking a deeper look at the texts and paratexts that comprise the first issue, the cultural aims and stakes of the early *Sturmkreis* become evident and Lasker-Schüler's poetics part of a larger, less isolated context.

Other than this short statement, presumably written by Herwarth Walden, the rest of the first page is entirely taken up by an article by Karl Kraus, "Die Operette." For *Der Sturm* to put Karl Kraus on the cover of its renewed series is quite telling. Editor of *Die Fackel* in Vienna, Karl Kraus had established himself as a sort of muckraking cultural journalist there. From 1899 to 1936, Kraus's *Fackel* functioned as his personal organ for the regular dissemination of his critiques of the hypocrisy of modern Viennese life and politics, as well as a forum for established and emerging writers active in early Modernism.<sup>13</sup> Herwarth Walden consciously modeled *Der Sturm* on *Die Fackel*.<sup>14</sup> The original name for *Der Sturm* was in fact *Der Komet*, following more closely Kraus's enlightenment rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> Kraus was a key player in the early days of *Der Sturm*, regularly offering critical and minute feedback to Walden, ranging from praise for his wife's poetry to a regular list of every typo and grammatical error made in *Der Sturm*, as well as crucial financial support. Kraus's article in *Der Sturm* is a short attack on the operetta as a genre and cultural phenomenon. The subject of this article is not especially related to the other content of the magazine, and its appearance in prime position in the new journal is perhaps best understood as a salute to Kraus as patron and inspiration.<sup>16</sup> Several other articles in the first issue are similarly unrelated to one another and placed prominently because of the author's position. Rudolf Kurtz<sup>17</sup> wrote a short piece, "Programmatisches," ostensibly a statement on the artistic aims of *Der Sturm*, but actually a wandering diatribe on art and the specialness of *Der Sturm*'s historical moment. There is also a section, "Glossen," which appears to be a version of Kraus's aphorisms, but it is less successful, lacking the social bite of Kraus.<sup>18</sup> Adolf Loos<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Although *Die Fackel* was published from 1899 to Kraus's death in 1936. From 1911 on Kraus, a notorious perfectionist, for whom a misplaced comma was a sign of the world's corruption and decline, became the sole author of *Die Fackel*.

<sup>14</sup> *Der Sturm* and *Die Fackel* were initially in regular contact. Karl Kraus ran an ad in *Der Sturm* in nearly every issue and often referenced the periodical in *Die Fackel*. This cozy relationship lasted until he and Herwarth Walden fell out over Walden's support of the futurists and his printing of their manifesto in *Der Sturm*, an event that coincided with Lasker-Schüler's divorce from Walden in 1912. Volker Pirsich. *Der Sturm: Eine Monographie*. Nordhausen.

<sup>15</sup> In piecing together the early days of *Der Sturm*, see *Der Sturm: Eine Monographie* and *Feinde in Scharen: Ein wahres Vergnügen dazusein: Karl Kraus, Herwarth Walden Briefwechsel 1909-1912*.

<sup>16</sup> Kraus probably put up the funds to enable the initial publication of *Der Sturm* and would continue regularly to send Walden money until their falling out 1912.

<sup>17</sup> Kurtz (1888-1960) was a dilettante who was on the expressionist scene for much of the early twentieth century. He wrote the first book on expressionism and film (*Expressionismus und Film*. Berlin: Verlag der Lichtbühne, 1926), but never really emerged as a force of any sort in expressionist or other circles.

<sup>18</sup> An example of one of Kraus's famous aphorisms: "Der Teufel ist ein Optimist, wenn er glaubt, daß er die Menschen schlechter machen kann." [The devil is an optimist, if he believes he can make people worse.]

<sup>19</sup> Adolf Loos (1870-1933) was a Viennese architect active in Secession circles and a close associate of Karl Kraus (serving as the Catholic convert's godfather).

contributed a short story, “Vom armen reichen Mann,” and performs a function similar to Kraus’s, by adding Viennese cultural heft to the new Berlin-based publication.

The marked Vienna connection is balanced by Rene Schickele’s<sup>20</sup> cycle of poems “Berlin,” describing life there largely through a focus on the modern women of Berlin. But lest the Vienna connection be lost, the very next entry is a short text by the then Vienna-based journalist Felix Stössinger, “Einheitliche Konzert,” a meditation on the state of music. After Stössinger’s text, there appears to be a twofold return to Berlin with Lasker-Schüler’s text “Peter Baum” and a short piece by Salomo Friedlaender,<sup>21</sup> “Ausgelachte Lyrik,” seemingly a reflection on his own poetry’s recent reception, as well as a brief history of poetry reception in general. In continuing the Berlin tenor of the second half of the first issue is Samuel Lublinski’s open letter about his feud with Theodor Lessing.<sup>22</sup> The last contribution is another open letter, ostensibly to Herwarth Walden, that is signed by most of the contributors to the magazine, as well as a few other later prominent contributors.<sup>23</sup> The letter mentions Walden’s previous endeavors and seems to suggest an excuse for Walden’s transition to this latest publication project. In a sense, we could read much of the content of *Der Sturm*’s first issue as engaging in a process of community and identity formation. The members of the group, as well as their interests are laid out, and the audience is left with an impression of just what this periodical means by “art and culture.” The advertising section of the first issue furthers this impression; it mostly consists of advertisements for books and cabarets by the contributors, or other periodicals closely linked to *Der Sturm*. Lasker-Schüler’s contribution, a portrait of Peter Baum, is her contribution to the identity formation of *Der Sturm* and its readership, albeit on a micro level.

## PETER BAUM

Peter Baum (1869-1916) was a contemporary and fellow writer from Elberfeld who, like Lasker-Schüler, also moved to Berlin shortly before the turn of the century and was a member of the *Kommenden* and the *Neue Gemeinschaft*, two groups in which Lasker-Schüler and her mentor, Peter Hille, had also been active. He died in 1916, after volunteering for the army, and is now almost entirely forgotten. While it initially seems surprising that Lasker-Schüler does not publish a poem, short story, or indeed any piece of fiction in the first issue of *Der Sturm*, it is perhaps not surprising that she does not limit her first publication to what

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<sup>20</sup> Rene Schickele (1883-1940) was a French-German writer from Alsace, noted for his pacifism.

<sup>21</sup> Salomo Friedlaender (1871-1946), often known by his pseudonym Mynona (“anonym” backwards), was a close associate of Herwarth Walden and Lasker-Schüler; he was also active in the more intellectual Jewish literary circle in Berlin (Buber, et. al).

<sup>22</sup> In January 1910 of that year, Theodor Lessing had published a vicious literary satire in which he parodied Lublinski as an exaggerated Talmud Jew from the provinces, as someone who could not escape his Jewishness, apparently unlike the assimilated Lessing. The dispute involved claims of anti-Semitism and was picked up by Thomas Mann, who entirely supported Lublinski.

<sup>23</sup> The letter is signed by: Dr. Rudolf Blümner, Dr. Alfred Döblin, Ferdinand Hardekopf, Dr. Siegmund Kalischer, Rudolf Kurtz, Else Lasker-Schüler, Ludwig Rubiner, Rene Schickele, Mario Spiro, and Felix Stössinger.

we would now deem to be the genres over which she had mastery.<sup>24</sup> Journalistic profiles of now forgotten literary figures are generally not considered part of an established author's canon. Yet, Lasker-Schüler's profile does more to promote herself and her preferred identity than any poem possibly could. Two elements of her rhetorical strategy can be gleaned from a short excerpt of "Peter Baum": the simultaneous promotion of both the author and her subject and the creation of at least two audiences—the general and the informed public audience.

Und doch hat St. Peter Hille einmal gesagt: Peter Baum sei der sensibelste Mensch, den er je kennen gelernt habe. Peter Baum ist ganz blau. Das heißt übersetzt: Er ist ein Dichter. Sternenpalme hat er gedichtet für die Harfe Davids, für das Herz Salomos, des Dichterkönigs von Juda. Und doch ist Peter Baum der leibliche Sohn und Erbe des Evangeliums. Seine Väter waren die Herren von Elberfeld im Wupper-Muckertale. Sie beteten zu Luther und wachten auf in Sonntagsfrühe beim ersten Schrei des Kirchenhahns. Manchmal erscheinen sie ihrem Urenkel im Schlafe, weniger der jüdischen Psalme, aber seines abtrünnigen Romans „Spuk“ wegen. Es ist ein Roman im Kaleidoskop; die Bilder kommen buntartig und schwinden blendend wie teuflische Spiegel. Ein flackerndes Fleckenspiel hinter geschlossenen Augen. O, und seine wundervollen Novellen „Im alten Schloss“ brachte er mir eines Abends, seine große Tannengestalt erschien mir noch eine Krone höher, so aufwärts wie der Graf seines Buches, ein wetternder Weihnachtsbaum, der seinen Schmuck abgeschüttelt hat. Die Wochenschrift „Sturm“ wird Peter Baums neustes Werk bringen, das spielt zur Rokokozeit und ist in geblümter Seidensprache geschrieben. Wie tief seine Dichtungen doch ihn erleben und er sich an ihnen verwandelt!<sup>25</sup>

[And indeed, once St. Peter Hille said: Peter Baum is the most sensitive person whom he has ever met. Peter Baum is completely blue. Translated, that means: he is a poet. He composed starry-palms for David's Harp, for the heart of Solomon, the poet-King of Judah. And yet, Peter Baum is the bodily son and heir of the Gospel. His fathers were the Lords of Elberfeld in the Wupper-Mucker Valley. They prayed to Luther and woke up early on Sunday mornings with the first cry of the church rooster. Sometimes they appeared to their great-grandchildren in their sleep, less for the sake of Jewish Psalms, than for his renegade novel "Spook." It is a novel in a kaleidoscope; the images come colorfully and depart blindingly like devilish mirrors. A

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<sup>24</sup> Lasker-Schüler's literary reputation at that point was primarily as a poet. For more on Lasker-Schüler's reception and reputation in general, and specifically for the scope of my study, see Calvin N. Jones, *The Literary Reputation of Else Lasker-Schüler: Criticism, 1901-1993*, pp. 1-20.

<sup>25</sup> *Der Sturm*. Nummer 1. 3. März, 1910, pp. 5-6. All issues of *Der Sturm* are available through the digitized collection "Blue Mountain Project: Historic Avant-Garde Periodicals for Digital Research," hosted by Princeton University. <http://library.princeton.edu/projects/bluemountain/>. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

lambent play of spots behind closed eyes. Oh, and one evening he brought me his wonderful novellas “In the Old Castle,” and his great pine tree figure appeared to me even a crown higher, upward reaching like the count of his book, a raging Christmas tree that has shaken off its ornaments. The weekly periodical *Sturm* will publish Peter Baum’s newest work, which is set in the Rococo period and is written in a decorated silken language. How deeply his poetry experiences him and how he transforms himself with it!]

At its core, “Peter Baum” serves to introduce Peter Baum and his works; and in terms of the identity formation goals of the first issue of any ideologically motivated periodical, it tells us what Lasker-Schüler sees as *Der Sturm*’s publishing role. Working from the beginning to unpack this passage, the reader first notices the invocation of “St. Peter Hille.” Although Peter Hille had already died in 1904, and this is 1910, her inclusion of Peter Hille (or as she regularly referred to him, “St.” Peter Hille) serves to place herself and Peter Baum within his sphere. Hille had been Lasker-Schüler’s mentor, and it was through their friendship, begun in 1899, that she is generally considered to have first become part of the literary avant-garde.<sup>26</sup> The fact that she calls him “St. Peter Hille,” underscores the religious thread running throughout the text and also establishes him as a sort of patron saint of literature. Sigrid Bauschinger indeed goes as far as to call Hille “the rock upon which [Lasker-Schüler] built her church of art.”<sup>27</sup> Beginning the passage with Peter Hille’s estimation of Peter Baum also makes Lasker-Schüler’s assertions essentially impossible to argue with. You can’t argue with a dead man. Beyond creating an impervious argument, Lasker-Schüler also creates a genealogy of praise, mentorship, and support that extends from Peter Hille to both herself and Peter Baum with a branch also extending from her to Peter Baum. The fact that this closed circle of mentorship is opened up to a reading public establishes that public as eligible to participate in this legacy. By appreciating Peter Baum, they are like Peter Hille and Lasker-Schüler and they also become part of the literary taste-making set.

When looking closely at Lasker-Schüler’s depiction of Baum, one sentence immediately jumps out: “Peter Baum ist ganz blau.” [Peter Baum is completely blue]. In German, the expression “X ist blau,” implies drunkenness; but in the next sentence, Lasker-Schüler redefines this idiom and gives it a new, and perhaps double meaning. She declares that “blau sein” means “X is a poet,” but perhaps also still indeed that he is drunk—a sly wink to the audience about her earlier statements regarding Peter Hille’s estimation of Peter Baum. In addition to the usual German meaning, in Lasker-Schüler’s idiosyncratic semiotics blue is often associated with expressionism and creativity. But, perhaps demonstrating some awareness of the idiosyncratic nature of this Lasker-Schüler does not let this idiom speak for her, she continues to praise Peter Hille as a poet, and through her praise extends the various religious allusions and metaphors in the text. This strategy—an almost contentious and certainly mystical statement made flat out as fact, then followed by exposition—is one of the hallmarks of Lasker-Schüler’s rhetorical style.

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<sup>26</sup> Bauschinger, pp .51-103.

<sup>27</sup> Bauschinger, p. 61. “Für Lasker-Schüler war >>St. Peter Hille<< der Fels, auf den sie ihre Kirche der Kunst erbaute.”



Moving further through the excerpt, Lasker-Schüler continues to praise Baum through careful definition of his qualities. She names him a poet and then sets out to refine what it means that he is a poet. Baum writes poetry, but not just poetry, he writes veritable psalms, aligning his work with the highest order of biblical poetry and Hebrew, a link to Lasker-Schüler's own Jewish identity. It is through this metaphor of Baum as a Hebrew poet that Lasker-Schüler navigates Baum's religious position and identity, and through this exploration, her own. For although he writes to Hebrew melodies and in the tradition of the poet-kings of Judah, he is of Lutheran stock. The tone of surprise and consolation with which Lasker-Schüler imbues this section, deserves closer attention. She presents as a surprise the fact that Baum is Christian. In order for this to be a surprise, the expectation would be that he is not Christian, and in this constellation, Jewish. Through this expectation, Lasker-Schüler *suggests* that poets are most often Jewish, or that the best poets are Jewish, and that Baum overcomes his Christianity to write beautiful poetry worthy of the Hebrew Bible. This is a dramatic reversal of what would be expected, in majority Christian Germany, and quite cheeky, as Lasker-Schüler cloaks such a statement in biblical fantasy. She makes Baum almost Jewish in order to establish his aesthetic bona fides. The degree to which Baum is worthy of praise seems to be directly related to the surprise that Lasker-Schüler demonstrates in the depth of Baum's Christianity. She suggests this surprise through her pastoral sketch of Baum's ancestors—evoking a detailed image in broad strokes: a rooster waking believers for prayers, the mention of a more pastoral Wuppertal.

Having established the general framework of her relationship with Baum, as well as his general merits as a poet, Lasker-Schüler then smoothly transitions to her next point of focus—Peter Baum's latest work—and her general focus becomes specific. It is on Baum's latest novel, *Spook*. Through the inclusion of *Spook*, Lasker-Schüler again praises Baum, and provides a synopsis for the type of literature that will be published in *Der Sturm*, namely—work like Baum's. The praise of the latest work also demonstrates Lasker-Schüler's fascination with the links between Christianity and Judaism, for Baum's novel is “like a Christmas tree that has shaken off its ornaments.”<sup>28</sup> This statement can be taken at least two ways. The first imagines an earlier Christianity and its unadorned nature. The second calls to mind Christianity's Jewish heritage and particularly a cartoon of the period mocking Jewish assimilation (Figure 5). Despite their adherence and membership to different faith traditions—Lasker-Schüler and Baum are united through their aesthetics and their art. Indeed, all of this praise and careful positioning establish the two as members of the same group—an inside group that now, through the issues of *Der Sturm*, will become known to the broader public. There is a careful slight of hand at work here, as the inside is kept inside in that it contains language best or even only understood by the inner circle, but the inside is expanded at the same time to include the likeminded readership of *Der Sturm*. This illusion of

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<sup>28</sup> Sigrid Bauschinger has done very suggestive work on Lasker-Schüler's interest in early Christianity, in particular focusing on the mediating role Lasker-Schüler often plays between the two traditions. “Judenchristen”: Else Lasker-Schüler über die verlorene Brücke zwischen Juden und Christen. *Else Lasker-Schüler: Ansichten und Perspektiven, Views and Reviews*. Ed. Ernst Schürer and Sonja Hedgepeth, pp.59-70.

a closed circle made open, or at the least transparent, is central to the rhetorical strategies *Der Sturm* initially used. As a new publication, *Der Sturm* must create an identity, and this identity is formed as much through aesthetic choices as it is through the formation of group identity.



**Figure 5: “Wie sich der Chanakaleuchter den Ziegenfellhändler Cohn in Pinne zum Christbaum des Kommerzienrats Conrad in der Tiergartenstraße (Berlin W.) entwickelte.” [How the hanukiah of the leather dealer Cohn in Pinne evolves into the Christmas tree of the commercial counselor Conrad on Tiergartenstraße in West Berlin.” *Der Schlemiel* 2 (1904).**

Leaving the specific world of “Peter Baum,” here are a few rules and strategies evident in Lasker-Schüler’s portraiture: regardless of personal connections, she draws others into relationship with herself; through a flattering portrait of her subject, Lasker-Schüler promotes herself, as well as her subject; and in either the case of a friend or an acquaintance, she attempts to draw her subject into her fantastic world. In the first year of *Der Sturm*, Lasker-Schüler wrote similar portraits of other figures within the orbit of the Berlin avant-garde: Karl Kraus; Oskar Kokoschka; Marie Böhm; William Wauer; Max Brod; Alfred Kerr; Franziska Schultz. And at the same time when Lasker-Schüler was defining the readership and membership of *Der Sturm* through her portraits, Oskar Kokoschka began to embark on a similar project, *Menschenköpfe*, a series of illustrations of many of the same or similar people: Karl Kraus; Adolf Loos; Herwarth Walden; Paul Scheerbart; Alfred Kerr; Alfred Dehmel; Karin Michaelis; Yvette Guilbert; Professor Levin Ludwig Schückring. These portraits have had a much longer afterlife than Lasker-Schüler’s, and their origin in *Der Sturm* is typically ignored.<sup>29</sup> While Kokoschka’s images came to define the early visual aesthetics of *Der Sturm*, they perform a role beyond this aesthetic formation. Much like Lasker-Schüler, Kokoschka engages in community formation through his portraits, and plays with artistic notions and traditions of patronage, but in a different way. This difference in engagement is not merely by dint of medium, but also related to the different ways in which the two define their place

<sup>29</sup> The continuing afterlife and reception of these images no doubt has to do with the greater interest in Kokoschka in general, as well as the fact that contemporary to their publication in *Der Sturm*, the images were also part of Kokoschka’s gallery show at Paul Cassierer’s gallery in Summer 1911.

within the larger artistic community. These differences are highlighted by comparing three portraits that Lasker-Schüler and Kokoschka published together in *Der Sturm*: two portraits of Karl Kraus and Lasker-Schüler's portrait of Oskar Kokoschka. While there is no complementary portrait of Lasker-Schüler, there is a self-portrait of Kokoschka much of the tone that Lasker-Schüler develops in her own. Lasker-Schüler's portrait of Kokoschka is extremely cryptic; in it she impressionistically paints an image of Kokoschka's Cassirer gallery show in 1911, and this portrait demonstrates perhaps best the ways in which a biographical reading of Lasker-Schüler's work can clarify what would otherwise be completely indecipherable.

## KARL KRAUS

Karl Kraus is one of the most interesting figures of the twentieth century, and although he was very well known in the pre-World War I German-speaking world, it is still initially surprising to find that his presence in *Der Sturm* so substantial. When one considers his close business and personal relationships with Herwath Walden and Lasker-Schüler, this becomes less odd.<sup>30</sup> There are three aspects of the relationship between Lasker-Schüler and Kraus to consider: power dynamics, mutual benefit, and the forum in which the relationship takes place. Both Kraus and Lasker-Schüler were at home in publication and their forum was the press. In his own publication, *Die Fackel*, Kraus called her "der größte Lyriker des heutigen Deutschland, die Lasker-Schüler."<sup>31</sup> And Lasker-Schüler did similarly for Kraus in *Der Sturm*.

A key element of Lasker-Schüler's friendships is the use of nicknames. Lasker-Schüler was a great bestower of nicknames and had many for Kraus. All suggest a hierarchical relationship, one of patron and protegee. The most common form of address in her letters to him is "Lieber Herzog von Wien," and she regularly refers to him in print and letters as "Der Cardinal," "Der Dalai-Lama," and occasionally "Der Papst." Each nickname places Kraus in a position of power. The most common, "Herzog" draws on the same system of the noms-de-plume Lasker-Schüler bestows on herself, e.g. Prinzess Tino von

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<sup>30</sup> The letters of both Else Lasker-Schüler and Herwarth Walden to Karl Kraus elucidate this relationship. So does Lasker-Schüler's and Walden's reliance on Kraus for money. Lasker-Schüler frequently wrote to Kraus under the pretense of secrecy for Walden's sake, complaining of money troubles. This is followed by a wire transfer from Kraus, and concludes with a letter of thanks from Walden, alluding to even deeper money troubles. After Kraus and Walden fell out, allegedly over Walden's support of futurism, the last communication between the two was a letter in 1920 from Walden to the *Die Fackel* with a transfer for 1000 Marks, repaying Kraus for his earlier generosity. There is no response from Kraus. The money to Else Lasker-Schüler continued fairly regularly until at least 1928. Kraus regularly took up collections for Lasker-Schüler in *Die Fackel*, and while after 1911 he essentially published no work in *Die Fackel* other than his own, he regularly advertised Lasker-Schüler's publications. He also arranged readings in Vienna and regularly called the German public out for their lack of support for the greatest poet of contemporary Germany.

<sup>31</sup> *Die Fackel*. Volume XIX. Heft 454-456. 1.4.1917. p. 37.

Bagdad and Jussuf der Prinz von Theben, royal ones.<sup>32</sup> The other names for Kraus are religious, both Christian and Buddhist. The suggestion that the Jewish apostate and Catholic convert<sup>33</sup> Kraus is a religious figure, and not merely a figure, but a leader of a faith tradition, is essential to Lasker-Schüler's formation of her world and the figures in it, as is a lack of division between the various faiths.<sup>34</sup> If we look back to "Peter Baum," Lasker-Schüler demonstrates a similarly willing dissolution of the divides between Judaism and Christianity when she compares Baum to a biblical psalmist and praises his writing through Christian images. This lack of religious division, especially between the three Abrahamic faiths, is an essential feature of Lasker-Schüler's worldview.<sup>35</sup> Drawing Kraus into her pan-religious network marks two essential features of Lasker-Schüler's understanding of him—that they are of the same sensibility and that he belongs in and to her private, idiosyncratic world. Looking more broadly at Lasker-Schüler's use of nicknames, we could say that they perform at least two functions: the nickname brings the object of the nickname into a personal relationship with Lasker-Schüler and establishes the power dynamics of the relationship. In the case of Kraus and his myriad monikers, Lasker-Schüler attempts to establish their relationship as one of a supplicant and benefactor. The second thing accomplished by the bestowal of a nickname has to do with Lasker-Schüler's world formation. Her nicknames always have one foot in reality and another in fantasy, creating a new fantastic reality. The mirroring of reality, albeit through a fantastical glass, allows the boundary between this private world and the broader world to blur. Returning to the specific focus of *Der Sturm*, this blurring of such boundaries is central to Lasker-Schüler's creation of a community in the public sphere of the periodical. The audience members are presented with enough details from reality to enable them better to dive into the private world and community offered to the readership of *Der Sturm*, but enough are elided to maintain some of Lasker-Schüler's privacy, as well as a sense of mystery. The strategies employed by Lasker-Schüler in her sketch of Peter Baum are also present in the sketch of Karl Kraus, but paired with Oskar Kokoschka's portrait of him, the effect is entirely different.

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<sup>32</sup> Much has been written on Lasker-Schüler's gender politics and orientalism in her adoption of these nicknames. For more, see Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, "Ich war verkleidet als Poet...ich bin Poetin!!: The Masquerade of Gender in Else Lasker-Schüler's Work." Pp. 1-17.

<sup>33</sup> Kraus was born into a wealthy assimilated Bohemian Jewish family, who moved to Vienna when he was young. He attacked Zionist Theodor Herzl for being anti-assimilationist in 1897 and renounced Judaism in 1899. He converted to Catholicism in 1911 and left the church in 1923 due to rising anti-Semitism within the Catholic Church in Austria.

<sup>34</sup> Designating the Jewish convert Kraus as a member of the Catholic Church's highest echelon also suggests implicit support of Kraus's decision to convert to Catholicism.

<sup>35</sup> Sigrid Bauschinger wrote most extensively on Lasker-Schüler's mediating position between Christianity and Judaism, arguing that Lasker-Schüler uses Islam (in the form of Jussuf von Theben drawn as an Islamic rather than Jewish figure and functioning as an outsider to both Judaism and Christianity) as a middle or outside ground between the two. Lasker-Schüler's ultimate hope was the reemergence of early Christian practices that stressed the links between Judaism and Christianity, rather than the irreconcilable differences between the two. See Bauschinger, Sigrid. "Judenchristen?: Else Lasker-Schüler über die verlorene Brücke zwischen Juden und Christen."



Figure 6: Karl Kraus, Der Sturm N. 12 May 19, 1910

Lasker-Schüler's short text, "Karl Kraus," appears sandwiched between the end of a longer René Schickele piece on Theodore Roosevelt and an excerpt from Paul Leppin's controversial 1905 novel *Daniel Jesus*. The facing page is the full-page illustration of Karl Kraus by Oskar Kokoschka (Figure 6). Without any surviving contemporary documentation, it is impossible to say how the image and the corresponding text came to be. Did Lasker-Schüler write her text to provide a *Wortgemälde* for Kokoschka's image? Did Kokoschka read Lasker-Schüler's text and supply a visualization of Lasker-Schüler's prose poem introduction to Kraus? Did the two emerge from the same commission, at the same moment, yet independent of one another?<sup>36</sup> Alas, the letters that could possibly answer these questions are not extant. The existing letters suggest the two artists were not well acquainted. While Kokoschka's image in a sense speaks for itself (though not entirely!), Lasker-Schüler's portrait of Kraus becomes richer, and more intelligible with the boon of biography.

<sup>36</sup> Although it is unclear how the two portraits came to be published together, it is clear that the drawing of Kraus becomes the beginning of a longer series of caricatures of contemporary cultural figures that Kokoschka published in *Der Sturm*. Subsequent drawings feature the heading "Menschenköpfe" followed by a number. The series begins with "Menschenköpfe II," after the Kraus drawing had been published, implying that the Kraus illustration was the first in the series, serving as a retroactive number one.

Lasker-Schüler's portrait of Kraus begins, in fact, with herself. Much in the vein of "Peter Baum its ganz blau," she starts the article with an entirely elliptical statement and proceeds to clarify and further cloud the issue. Here she begins with a description of her mystical connection to Karl Kraus, in which she claims to have met Kraus in spirit as a child in her contemplation of a framed letter to her mother:

Im Zimmer meiner Mutter hängt an der Wand ein Brief unter Glas im goldenen Rahmen. Oft stand ich als Kind vor den feinen pietätvollen Buchstaben wie von Hieroglyphen und dachte mir ein Gesicht dazu, eine Hand, die diesen wertvollen Brief wohl geschrieben haben könnte. Darum auch war ich Karl Kraus schon wo begegnet -- in meinen Heimatjahren, beim Betrachten der kostbaren Zeilen unter Glas im goldenen Rahmen. Den Brief hatte ein Bischof geschrieben an meiner Mutter, ein Dichter.<sup>37</sup>

[On a wall in mother's room hangs a letter under glass in a golden frame. As a child I would often stand before the fine, pious letters as before hieroglyphs and thought up a face to go along with them, a hand that could indeed have written this valuable letter. Thus I had already encountered Karl Kraus—in my years my home region, while contemplating the precious lines under glass, in a golden frame. The letter had been written by a bishop to my mother, a poet.]

If we were to draw an analogy, or chasmic structure, from this opening salvo, it would be that as Lasker-Schüler's mother is to the bishop, so is Lasker-Schüler to Karl Kraus. The audience is helped along the way to this understanding in many ways: 1) the audience knows that Lasker-Schüler is a poet, so naming her mother's correspondent a poet makes the correlation even stronger; and 2) Lasker-Schüler associates Kraus with the bishop who wrote the letter. From our position as informed readers, we also know that Lasker-Schüler often called Kraus "der Bischof." The connection between Karl Kraus and the bishop is continued in the next few sentences:

Blau und mild waren seine Augen, und sanftbewegt seine schmalen Lippen und sein Stirnschatz wohlbewahrt, wie bei Karl Kraus; der trägt frauenhaft das Haar über die Stirn gekämmt. Und immer empfangen seine Augen wie des Priesterdichters Augen gastlich den Träumenden. Immer schenken Karl Kraus' Augen Audienz.

[His eyes were blue and gentle and his thin lips were gently moved and his forehead treasure was well preserved, just like Karl Kraus; he wears his hair combed over his forehead like a woman. And, just like the priest-poet's eyes, his eyes always receive the dreamer hospitably. Karl Kraus's eyes always grant audience. ]

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<sup>37</sup> Lasker-Schüler. "Karl Kraus." *Der Sturm*. Nummer 12. 19. Mai, 1910. p. 2.

The physical description of Karl Kraus pairs his appearance with that of the bishop who had written her mother a letter, but there are small cues that designate the literary quality of Kraus's bishopric. The first cue is the color of Kraus's and the bishop's eyes—blue. While this detail may seem small, for Lasker-Schüler, blue is shorthand for poet and/or artist. Authority is also established through this physical description of Kraus. The forehead is a repository of treasure (“Stirnschatz”), a wonderful neologism, but Kraus's forehead is covered by his hair, brushed like a woman's over his brow. Lasker-Schüler seems to hold intimate knowledge about Kraus and knows what his hair hides. Yet even as his forehead is covered, Kraus's eyes are quite expressive; they “receive the dreamer hospitably” and “always grant audience.” These formations “empfangen gastlich den Träumenden” and “schenken Audienz,” carry a somewhat courtly connotation, calling to mind receptions at court and some sort of gift economy. The person who has the power to receive and grant, is in a position of power, a position of some authority. Kings and popes grant audiences and graciously receive guests. Lasker-Schüler's language here is the language of court. This language of court establishes Kraus as the arbiter of favor and power, yet he wields this power gently and with generosity, as does any enlightened ruler: he always grants audience to his supplicants and indeed welcomes the dreamer (i.e. poet) to his court. But Kraus is not entirely painted as a secular ruler; rather, he is also a religious one, a palimpsest of the bishop who wrote Lasker-Schüler's mother the treasured letter. Kraus's generous religious court calls to mind Peter Hille, whom Lasker-Schüler painted as a Christian saint. Both are ecumenical in spirit and practice, welcoming a multitude to their tables.

After Lasker-Schüler lays the groundwork for a correlation between a religious court and Karl Kraus, she writes a courtly scene, a scene taking place in her court—the cafe. She presents a reality, but a reality filtered through a fantastical glass. This fantastic reality continues the thread of courtly experience, and presents a private scene for public consumption:

Ich sitze so gerne neben ihm, ich denke dann an die Zeit, da ich den  
 Schreiber des Briefs hinter Glas aus seinem goldenen Rahmen beschwor.  
 Heute spricht er mit mir. Ich bewundere die goldgelbe Blume über seinem  
 Herzen, die er mir mit feierlicher Höflichkeit überreicht. Ich glaube, sie war  
 bestimmt für eine blonde Lady; als sie an unseren Tisch trat, begannen seine  
 Lippen zu spielen. Karl Kraus kennt die Frauen, er beschaut durch sie zum  
 Denkvertreib die Welt. Bunte Gläser, ob sie fein getönt oder vom  
 einfachsten Farbenblut sind, behutsam behütend, feiert er die Frau.  
 Verkündet er auch ihre Schäden dem Leser seiner Aphorismen—wie der  
 wahre Don Juan, der nicht ohne die Frauen leben kann, sie darum haßt –im  
 Grunde aber nur die Eine sucht.

[I sit so gladly next to him; I think of the time when I conjured the author of  
 the letter behind glass out of its golden frame. Today he speaks to me. I  
 admire the gold-yellow flower over his heart that he offers to me with  
 solemn politeness. I believe it was meant for a blonde lady; as she  
 approached our table, his lips began to play. Karl Kraus knows women; he

looks through them to banish all thought of the world. Colorful glasses, whether they are subtly tinted or of the simplest color—blood, protectively protecting, he celebrates the woman. If he also proclaims her misdeeds to the reader of his aphorisms—like the true Don Juan, who cannot live without women, [and] therefore hates them—he is, however, basically seeking only the one.]

Lasker-Schüler is seated next to Kraus—as a beloved member of court would be. She contemplates the gold-yellow flower over his heart, and describes how Kraus passes the flower to her. What follows is a description of Kraus’s relationship with women. The gesture of the flower is two-fold. First, in a courtly scenario it is the woman who gives the man the flower as a sign of her favor and also as designation that he is her champion. Kraus’s gift blurs the gendering of Lasker-Schüler and also establishes their relationship as one of service. She is a poet in service to Kraus, and the flower is a mark of this bond and of his favor. Second, in a more contemporary idiom, a flower given to a woman by a man is a gesture of romantic favor; according to the coded color language of Victorian flower practice, a yellow flower is a flower of friendship. This coded ceremony of gift giving, coming on the heels of a description of Kraus’s courtliness, suggests that he is effectively Lasker-Schüler’s patron. And if Kraus is indeed Lasker-Schüler’s patron, this is her portrait of him, a portrait she has drawn herself into.

Let us pause for a moment and consider what conditions the patron/artist relationship implies. On a basic level, the ability to patronize implies a higher social/financial position than the one patronized; there is an often explicit, but certainly implicit hierarchy established through patronage. The protegee is generally given two things: a means of living and increased visibility/recognition for their art through their patron, often in terms of an artistic network or more commissions from the patron’s associates. What the patron may expect or receive in return is more varied. Most traditionally, it was social capital; patrons had the means to support something as superfluous as the arts, signaling their wealth and ability to invest money without concern of financial return. The goals could be more altruistic, as well—perhaps the patron has no motive other than to support the arts. Or the aims could be more sinister. By making the protegee a dependent, the patron has the power to demand recompense or remuneration that may or may not be ethical—musical or other artistic performance, but also sex, political support, etc. Returning to Lasker-Schüler, she recognizes the potential implicit connotations of a patronage relationship and therefore goes to some pains to define her relationship with Karl Kraus as non-sexual, as well as to, in a sense, defend his honor in that regard. It seems he is a more honorable “Don Juan.” He indeed knows women, but he is looking for one in particular, as Lasker-Schüler makes it clear that it is not she! She is merely at the table. Looking into the biography of the figures involved, this blonde woman could be Kete Parsenow, the actress who was Lasker-Schüler’s close friend and linked romantically to Kraus.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lasker-Schüler called Kete Parsenow “Venus von Siam,” furthering the oriental link between Kraus, “der Dalai-Lama,” and Parsenow. ed. Friedrich Pfäfflin, *“Du bist dunkel vor Gold” Kete Parsenow und Karl Kraus, Briefe und Documente.*



The next section rhapsodizes on Kraus's own literary output, portraying Kraus as an artistic equal, but the main thrust of the section is a demonstration of Kraus's cultural capital and power, an ego stroke meant to motivate Kraus to act on Lasker-Schüler's behalf:

Ich begegne Karl Kraus am liebsten unter „kriegsberatenden Männern.“ Seine dichterische Strategien sind Strophen feinsten Abschätzung. Ein... gestiefelte Papstfüße, die den Kuß erwarten. Manchmal nimmt sein Gesicht die Katzenform eines Dalai-Lama an, dann weht plötzlich eine Kühle über Raum—Allerleifurcht. Die große chinesische Mauer trennt ihm von den Anwesenden. Seine chinesische Mauer, ein historisches Wortgemälde, o plastischer noch, denn alle seine Werke treten hervor, Reliefs in der Haut des Vorgangs. Er bohrt Höhlen in den Samt des Vorhangs, der die Schäden verschleiert schwer. Es ist geschmacklos, einen Papst zu hassen, weil sein Raunen Flüsternde stört, weil sein Wetterleuchten Kerzenflackernden heimleuchtet. Karl Kraus ist ein Papst. Von seiner Gerechtigkeit bekommt der Salon Frost, die Gesellschaft Unlustseuche.

[I encounter Karl Kraus most gladly amongst “men counseled in war.” His poetic strategies are verses of the finest depreciation. A booted pope's foot which expects the kiss. Sometimes his face takes on the cat-like form of a Dalai-Lama; then a coolness suddenly blows across the room—fear of every kind. The great wall of China separates him from those present. His Chinese wall, a historical word-painting, but more sculptural still, because all his works stand out, reliefs in the skin of the event. He bores hollows into the velvet of the curtain that hardly covers the defects. It is tasteless to hate a pope, because his thunderclap lights the way home for those who with flickering candles. Karl Kraus is a pope. The salon gets frost from his righteousness and society a plague of aversion.]

The depiction of Kraus in this passage, in which he rules a salon as a pope, adjudicating in matters of taste, places Lasker-Schüler on the inside; indeed she can never be the object of his scorn, because she enjoys witnessing his take downs so much! Lasker-Schüler reserves special glee for the disdain Kraus holds for warmongers, who were among the favorite targets of Kraus, who was a confirmed pacifist. Having first established Kraus as a bishop, Lasker-Schüler begins to weave Kraus's other identities into her narrative; he is compared to the Dalai Lama and proclaimed to be a pope. *A pope?* That is seemingly a contradiction in terms, for there cannot be more than one pope, and yet Kraus is “ein Papst.” Kraus's designation as a pope specifically refers to his behavior in salons with others. The scene of the salon draws a certain artistic and literary milieu, and it is Kraus who is the decided taste maker, as well as the arbiter of certain rectitude in Lasker-Schüler's depiction of him. In this context, Kraus's identification as a pope takes on a slightly different meaning than the purely religious.

While pope certainly has a religious connotation, it also has a special charge in German literary and cultural spheres. *Literaturpapst* is a title given half-ironically to the leading literary critic of a generation.<sup>39</sup> It connotes the “infallibility” of the critic’s taste and positions as the leader of the literary world. Lasker-Schüler’s text and nickname are clear attempts to position Kraus as a type of *Literaturpapst* for the reading public and community of *Der Sturm*, in opposition to the reigning *Literaturpapst*, Alfred Kerr. Indeed, she never uses the definite article. Kraus is “ein Papst,” never “der Papst,” in this short text, implying or suggesting the existence of other popes, whom the reader might know to be Alfred Kerr. Lasker-Schüler’s designation of Kraus as a flawless arbiter of taste is perhaps a bit self-serving, especially considering Kraus’s opinion of her as Germany’s best contemporary poet; but it is also a continuation of Lasker-Schüler’s play at creating a patronage relationship. In the end, however this patronage system is upended; it is not a top-down system. Lasker-Schüler is a poet, therefore below Kraus in terms of influence and power within a system of patronage. Yet she is the one who designates him as an arbiter of taste. Lasker-Schüler’s designation of Kraus as a *Literaturpapst* is a subtle upending of literary, gender, and cultural dynamics. In Lasker-Schüler’s estimation, Kraus is both an arbiter of cultural taste in his role as pope, but also a producer of cultural output. This dual nature of his position further challenges the concept of a *Literaturpapst*. Lasker-Schüler’s presentation of Kraus as a cultural figure places importance on the fact that he himself is an artist. Indeed, she defines Kraus as a word-artist, creating “Wortgemälde” through which words become statues, are as delicate as reliefs, and naturally pack critical punch. His position as an artist places him and Lasker-Schüler on the same plane, and functions as a sort of credential for his criticism.

Following the blueprint of “Peter Baum,” Lasker-Schüler mentions Kraus’s text, *Die chinesische Mauer*, his 1910 essayistic attack on the hypocritical sexual morals of the period, published initially in 1909 in *Die Fackel*, again in a printed volume in 1910, and most famously in a 1914 edition illustrated by Oskar Kokoschka.<sup>40</sup> It is through this moralist tract that Lasker-Schüler further connects Kraus to the idea of the papacy. His position of authority allows him to “bore hollows in the velvet curtain veiling misdeeds.” This is indeed Kraus’s favorite role to play—the muckraker exposing the hypocrisy of an age—and Lasker-Schüler’s recognition of this role serves two audiences simultaneously. One audience is Kraus; through her short analysis and praise of his work she is able to demonstrate understanding, to close the in-circle including the two of them, and also to flatter him. The other audience is the reading public. Through her presentation of Kraus, and her advocacy of his literature, she is in effect, acting as a type of literary arbiter. She tells the audience to read Kraus and establishes his credentials and essentially acts a *Literaturpapst*. If Lasker-Schüler’s affection and support of Karl Kraus was unclear before, it is made abundantly clear in the next lines. Lasker-Schüler loves Karl Kraus, and once more signaling the plurality of popes,

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<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the title had already been bestowed upon Alfred Kerr, the literary critique for the *Berliner Tageblatt*. Kraus and Kerr were engaged in a feud beginning as early as 1911, flaring up periodically through the 1920s and 30s. Edward Timms. *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna*.

<sup>40</sup> Kraus, Karl. *Die chinesische Mauer*.

she suggests love for all such popes, “diese Päpste.” The last few lines further establish—in a triumphal manner—the effect of the work of Karl Kraus:

Ich liebe Karl Kraus, ich liebe diese Päpste, die aus dem Zusammenhang  
getreten sind, auf ihrem Stuhl sitzen, ihre abgestreifte Schaar, flucht und  
sucht sie. –Männer und Jünglinge schleichen um seinem Beichtstuhl und  
beraten heimlich, wie sie den grandiosen Cynismusschädel zu Zucker reiben  
können. O, diese Not, heute rot – -- morgen tot! Unentwendbar inmitten  
seiner Werkstadt ragt Karl Kraus ein lebendiges, überschauendes Denkmal.  
Er bläst die Lufttürme um und hemmt die Schnellläufer, den Königinnen mit  
gewinnendem Lächeln den Vortritt lassend. Er kennt die schwarzen und  
weißen Figuren von früher her von Neuem hin. Mit ruhiger Papsthand  
klappt er das Schachbrett zusammen, mit dem die Welt zugenagelt ist.

[I love Karl Kraus, I love these popes who have emerged from the context  
and sit upon their throne, their discarded flock, flee and seek them. Men and  
youths sneak around his confessional chair and secretly take counsel, as to  
how they could grind the grandiose skull of cynicism into sugar. Oh, this  
distress, red today ----dead tomorrow! Unavoidable in the middle of his  
workshop, Karl Kraus looms a living, over-looking monument. He blows  
over the towers of air and blocks those running quickly away, in order to  
allow the queens with winning smiles precedence. He knows the black and  
white figures of before anew. With a pope’s quiet hand he folds together the  
chessboard, with which the world is nailed shut.]

Just as his words have the power to become three-dimensional statues standing against  
hypocrisy, Kraus creates further monuments. He blows down towers of air and pens in  
those who would flee. He is able to accomplish this because of his knowledge of the black  
and the white. As the an infallible cultural pope, Kraus is able to discern and judge with  
absolute certainty, without influence from the vagueries of time and fashion influencing him.  
The last image the reader encounters before the Kokoschka image on the facing page, is that  
of Kraus, swiftly shutting the chess board shut tight. Looking at “Karl Kraus” as a whole, it  
is a piece more engaged with traditional patronage structures and religious identity and play,  
than with mainline expressionism. The world presented, the one that Lasker-Schüler and  
Kraus inhabit, is a world of light, cafes, and flowers. Oskar Kokoschka’s portrait highlights a  
different artistic perspective and relationship with Karl Kraus.

Oskar Kokoschka’s image of Karl Kraus in *Der Sturm* is not a visualization of the  
image of Kraus that Lasker-Schüler created on the opposite page. If Lasker-Schüler creates  
an idealized patron in her description of Kraus, albeit one filtered through her relationship  
with Kraus, Kokoschka upends the tradition of patronage portraiture emphatically. The pen  
and ink drawing done exclusively in black presents an image of Kraus in motion—perhaps  
in-between words in a conversation. His hands are expressive with long, bony fingers  
gesturing at unnatural angles. He is wearing a crumpled suit with the suggestion of a pocket  
square above his left breast and no other adornment save a pair of eyeglasses and a tie.

Kraus's hair is close cropped, shaved on the sides and cut short along the top. His chin is adorned with stubble and his general air—taking this and the wrinkled suit into account, is that of a man busy with matters other than his appearance. It is not an idealized image, nor a necessarily realistic one, but one that presents a less romanticized view of the subject than Lasker-Schüler. The harried nature of Kraus's appearance in the Kokoschka representation is at odds with Lasker-Schüler's depiction of Kraus, where his buttonhole flower is carefully chosen and his hair is combed like a woman's over his forehead. At first blush, the two hold nothing more in common than the subject of study. The positioning of the two images, one verbal and the other visual, opposite one another presents an image of Kraus that is multi-faceted, refracted through the prisms of expressionists and other artists. Can we draw more from the juxtaposition of these two portraits of Karl Kraus? In a sense, they offer competing views of Karl Kraus and of the portraitists' relationship to their subject. While Kokoschka's own image is absent from his portrait of Kraus, he inserts himself into the drawing in a different way. In the lower right hand corner is Kokoschka's signature, "O.K.," which becomes a part of the image, merging with the folds and wrinkles on Karl Kraus's jacket to become a part of the fabric; his signature is graphically part of the portrait.

While Kokoschka arguably inserts himself less prominently into his portrait of Kraus than Lasker-Schüler does in her effusion on the bishop's letter, both Kokoschka and Lasker-Schüler are actively engaged in the project of drawing the Viennese avant-garde into Berlin, whether to legitimize *Der Sturm* or to establish a more multi-national German-language modernism, or both. Kokoschka is in a unique position to negotiate the two worlds, since he is a temporary resident of Berlin, via Vienna. Lasker-Schüler is all Berlin. The coordination of these two views of Karl Kraus presents a bridge between Berlin and Viennese modernisms.<sup>41</sup> While the connection between Berlin and Vienna modernism has been noted previously, the pivotal role played by Else Lasker-Schüler has been overshadowed by Herwarth Walden's tempestuous relationship with Karl Kraus. To date whenever these shorter texts have been mentioned, cited, or quoted, they have served as window dressing for arguments about other people and their impact on the relationship between modernists in the two cities.

## OSKAR KOKOSCHKA

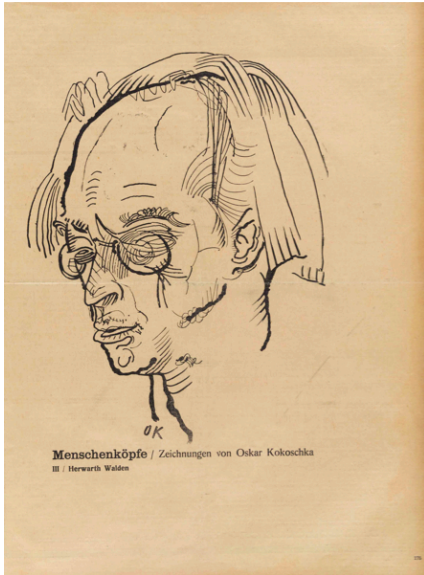
Kokoschka published seven portraits in *Der Sturm* as "Menschenköpfe." These images bridged modernism between Berlin and Vienna by placing central figures from each city in the same series appearing in the pages of *Der Sturm*. Adolf Loos, the



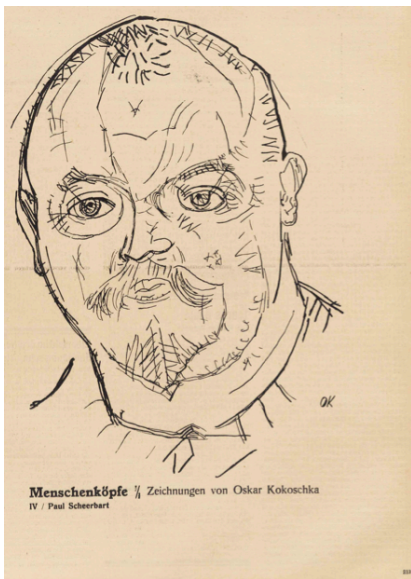
Figure 7: Adolf Loos

<sup>41</sup> The connection between Viennese and Berlin modernism(s) has most recently been explored through a traveling exhibit: Wien/Berlin: Kunst Zweier Metropolen.

Viennese architect, is the subject of the second portrait on June 30, 1910 (Figure 7). The portrait evokes Loos's iconoclast's repudiation of *Jugendstil* through its strong simple lines and unfinished quality; Loos stares out the side of the portrait, his hands busy sketching what he sees, but his head melts into the white of the page, not defined by the pen. After the Viennese focus, Kokoschka's eye moves to Berlin and the specific platform for his sketches, *Der Sturm*, through a portrait of Herwarth Walden himself on July 28, 1910 (Figure 8). While the portraits of Kraus and Loos had been from the torso up, the image of Walden embraces the title of the series "Heads of People" and only represents Walden's head—a floating entity cut off at the neck. Walden's representation is much less forceful than those of Kraus or Loos—the lines are lighter and more shading is present. While both Kraus and Loos have eyes clearly focused on a task, and their



**Figure 8: Herwarth Walden**



**Figure 9: Paul Scheerbart**

hands are engaged in some sort of task, Walden's glasses obscure his pupils, and his eyes melt into his glasses. Walden's uneven haircut and a scar running under his left cheek, in addition to his obscured vision, make him a slightly devious, and wholly unknowable figure. His lips seem to be sneering and the entire presentation seems at odds with the suited Viennese gentlemen, busy at work, lost in their own worlds.<sup>42</sup> The Berlin focus continues, with the fourth installment of *Menschenköpfe*, in a portrait of Paul Scheerbart on September 1, 1910 (Figure 9). The Scheerbart image has much in common with that of Walden; both are presented from the neck up, and feature the same shading and hatching that is less present in the images of Kraus and Loos. While Scheerbart is also wearing glasses, his glasses do not make his eyes opaque. Although photos suggest that Scheerbart was equal to Loos's impeccable grooming, the portrait by Kokoschka recalls the sloppiness of Walden. Photographs show Scheerbart with a well-waxed and clipped mustache and pointed goatee, but the Kokoschka portrait shows his

<sup>42</sup> In the case of Loos, this seems to be an entirely accurate representation. Every photograph of Loos shows him dressed impeccably, hair pomaded and pocketaire perfectly folded. Photos of Walden document a less-well turned out man. His clothes are a little rumpled, his tie is askew, and the tailoring is far from perfect. Kraus is indeed somewhere in the middle, well dressed, but a little harried. By no means the dandy that Loos presents, his tailoring is nevertheless better than Walden's. It is Kraus's hands that truly capture his character in Kokoschka's portrait—they are busy and full of nervous energy.



**Figure 10: Paul Scheerbart**  
Phillip Kester's portrait of Scheerbart, 1910.  
© Münchner Stadtmuseum, Sammlung Fotografie,  
Archiv Kester

Oskar Kokoschka himself on July 21, 1910.<sup>43</sup> 1910 was an important year for Kokoschka in Berlin. While his images were regularly published in *Der Sturm*, Kokoschka also published his one act play, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*, in the periodical. At the same time, he had an exhibition of his paintings in Berlin at the Paul Cassirer gallery.<sup>44</sup> An ad for the exhibit appeared every week in *Der Sturm*. Lasker-Schüler also engaged in a bit of idiosyncratic publicity for the show and Kokoschka himself. Her short piece “Oskar Kokoschka” was published in the same July 21, 1910 issue of *Der Sturm*.<sup>45</sup> It is much the same as her praise piece on Karl Kraus, laying out a scene familiar, if unusually presented, to a contemporary Berlin audience. It begins with Lasker-Schüler entering the gallery, “einen Zwinger von Bärinnen, tappischtänzelnde Weibskörper aus einen altgermanischen Festzuge,” [a cage of she-bears, clumsily dancing women’s bodies straight out of an old Germanic pageant] and, from her impression of the guests, moves on to the first accounts of Kokoschka’s art. Lasker-Schüler attempts a sort of praise prose poem to describe Kokoschka’s art, initially drawing Kokoschka as a counterpoint to fellow Viennese painter Gustav Klimt: “Warum denke ich plötzlich an Klimt? Er ist Botaniker, Kokoschka Pflanzer. Wo Klimt pflückt, gräbt Kokoschka die Wurzel aus—wo Klimt den Menschen entfaltet, gedeiht eine Farm Geschöpfe aus Kokoschkas Farben.” [Why do I suddenly think of Klimt? He is a botanist and Kokoschka a planter. Where Klimt plucks, Koksckha digs the roots out—where Klimt

facial hair to be a bit unruly (Figure 10). Is the slight difference in style meant to suggest the divide between Vienna and Berlin? Are these different presentations coincidental, or does Vienna represent the sophisticate and Berlin the upstart? Kokoschka’s styles suggests something of this divide.

While Kokoschka is sketching figures from Vienna and Berlin, and through these sketches, drawing them into conversation, Else Lasker-Schüler has been busy sketching her own portraits of important Berlin figures. After the opening salvo dedicated to her friend Peter Baum, and the coordinated images of Karl Kraus, Lasker-Schüler turned her focus to

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<sup>43</sup> This edition also featured more images for Kokoschka’s play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*, which had been published the previous week in *Der Sturm*.

<sup>44</sup> Kokoschka’s show was held at Salon Cassirer in the summer of 1910. At the heart of this exhibition were the caricatures featured in the pages of *Der Sturm*, often under the rubric of “Menschenköpfe.” The Paul Cassirer Archive in Zurich kindly provided me with a complete list of the works included in Kokoschka’s 1910 show in Berlin.

<sup>45</sup> *Der Sturm*. July 21, 1910. Number 21. p. 4

unfurls people, a farm of creations thrives on Kokoschka's colors.] Lasker-Schüler's rhetorical strategy relies on parallel comparisons between the two painters—comparisons that toe the line between mutual praise, with Kokoschka eventually coming out the better. The comparison is built on the similar use of natural forms by the two artists. Yet where Klimt is a “botanist,” Kokoschka is a “planter.” This comparison is further fleshed out—Klimt plucks things—presumably a branch, a flower, a leaf here and there, where Kokoschka unearths the entire plant—roots and all. Lasker-Schüler continues the botanical metaphor throughout her rhapsodic prose-poem descriptions of Kokoschka's painting:

Ich schaudere vor den rissig gewordenen spitzen Fangzähnen dort im bläulichen Fleisch des Greisenmundes, aber auf dem Bilde der lachende Italiener zerrt gierig am Genuß des prangenden Lebens. Kokoschka wie Klimt oder Klimt wie Kokoschka sehen und säen das Tier im Menschen und ernten es nach ihrer Farbe. Liebesmüde läßt die Dame den schmeichelnden Leib aus grausamen Träumen zur Erde gleiten, immer wird sie sanft auf ihren rosenweißen Krallen fallen.

[I shudder at the fang teeth that have become cracked in the bluish flesh of the old man's mouth; but in the picture the laughing Italian, tugs greedily at the enjoyment of resplendent life. Kokoschka like Klimt, or Klimt like Kokoschka sees and sows the animal in man and reaps it according to their color. Love-tired, the lady allows her flattering body to glide down to earth out of gruesome dreams; she always fall gently on her rose-white talons.]

Lasker-Schüler's description of Kokoschka's painting is an impressionistic collection of images: fanged teeth in blue flesh, an old man's mouth, a laughing Italian. The manner in which the scene is drawn makes it confusing to know if Lasker-Schüler is describing Kokoschka's paintings or even Klimt's paintings, the people at the gallery, or some sort of vision induced by viewing the paintings both alike. Yet, if we compare these seemingly elliptical statements to the catalogue of paintings exhibited at Paul Cassirer's gallery, the descriptions become startlingly clear. At this point, *Der Sturm* was an entirely black and white periodical, although it would eventually embrace color printing. The majority of the works shown in the exhibition were Kokoschka's pen and ink caricatures in black and white, the same one that were being published in *Der Sturm*, and Lasker-Schüler identifies many of the figures represented by Kokoschka: the “Dalai Lama” Karl Kraus; “den Wiener bekannten Architekten,” recognized through his “bösen Gorillenspupillen,” Adolf Loos; and “her” blond Hamlet Herwarth Walden. With the exception of Herwarth Walden, none of the other figures are referred to by name, but rather by Lasker-Schüler's nicknames of them. Although she makes reference to Kokoschka throughout the narrative, she provides a fleeting glance of him through a nickname at the beginning of the text: “Mein Begleiter flüchtet in den großen Saal zurück, er ist ein Troubadour.” [My companion flees back into the great hall, he is a troubadour.] Kokoschka was Lasker-Schüler's troubadour, and apparently her companion at the gallery opening as well. Whether or not Kokoschka accompanied Lasker-Schüler to the exhibition, this initial use of a nickname sets the tone for the type of relationship she is establishing between herself and Kokoschka. Just as in the Kraus piece,

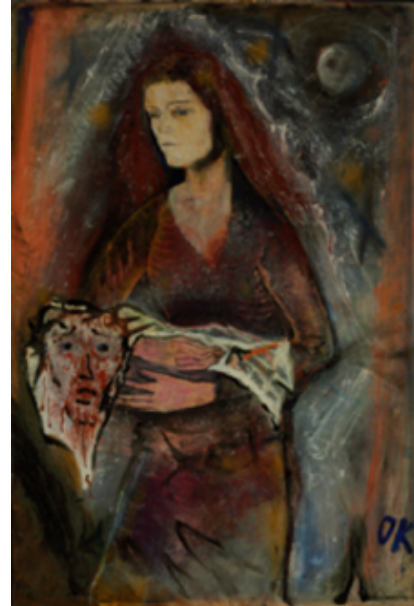
the nickname creates a relationship between Lasker-Schüler, the inner circle she is describing, and the reading audience. The readers are made a part of her inner world when she shares this private information. They are made privy to an exclusive world and given clues to decipher the inside with Lasker-Schüler as their informant.

Returning to the catalogue of images I mentioned earlier, Lasker-Schüler's true virtuosity emerges when she describes the non-caricature portraits of the exhibition. In her sustained rhetorical strategy to make the world come alive for those outside of it, she focuses on the color images the reader would not have had access to. Each of her images corresponds to one of the paintings in the exhibition, but the contemporary reader, not presented with the title of the images, or any type of narrative regarding the individual paintings, is left with a jumble of images, all melding to form an overarching impression of Kokoschka's art. It is only if they have visited the show, and are able to remember the paintings, that Lasker-Schüler's text will make any sense. Her attempt to describe the colors used in Kokoschka's paintings acts as a bridge between the black and white images printed in *Der Sturm* and the reader who can only recall or imagine them. Lasker-Schüler uses incredibly vivid descriptions to evoke the colors for her readers, exploring more the emotive power of colors than their actual hues. Lasker-Schüler attempts to capture Kokoschka's art through her words, and mimics Kokoschka's visual style through the highly expressionistic prose she uses to describe the paintings. The grotesque, the harsh line and focus on impressionistic detail are much more prevalent in her description of Kokoschka's work. This expressionist timbre is slightly buffered by some of Lasker-Schüler's usual soft focus:

Aus der Schwermutfarbe des Bethlehemhimmels  
reichen zwei Marienhände das Kind. Viele  
Wolken und Sonnen und Welten nahen, Blau tritt  
aus Blau. Der Schnee brennt auf seiner  
Schneelandschaft. Sie ist ehrwürdig wie eine  
Jubiläumsvergangenheit: Dürer, Grünewald.

[Two Mary-hands reach the child out of the  
gloom-colored sky of Bethlehem. Many clouds  
and suns and worlds draw close, Blue strides out  
of Blue. The snow burns upon its snow  
landscape. It is venerable like an the past of an  
anniversary: Dürer, Grünewald.]

When paired with the list of the Kokoschka artworks present at the Cassirer salon, these impressionistic images become descriptive statements. The first two sentences could be a description of "Veronika mit Schweisstuch," (Figure 11) the third, of "Eislandschaft," (Figure 12). And after her emotive descriptions of Kokoschka's paintings, Lasker-Schüler



**Figure 11: Veronika mit Schweisstuch. Oskar Kokoschka, 1910. © Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest**





**Figure 12: Eislandschaft, Oskar Kokoschka, c. 1910. Missing**

makes a less subtle connection between the greats and Kokoschka—this time to Dürer and Grünewald.<sup>46</sup> The comparison is a puzzling one, because except for their shared acclaim as great German artists, Dürer and Grünewald were almost opposing figures. Dürer is the German painter most closely associated with the Renaissance and Grünewald was perhaps the last “medieval” painter. However, if the use of Dürer and Grünewald is extended to the comparison between Klimt and Kokoschka, it becomes a bit clearer. Perhaps Grünewald is Klimt, whereas Kokoschka is Dürer—exceptional and at the vanguard of modernity. It is unclear,

but the pairing suggests a parallel reading with the earlier focus on Klimt and Kokoschka as contemporaries, but contemporaries engaging with modernism in different veins.

Lasker-Schüler’s laudatory description of Kokoschka’s show at the Cassirer Salon ends with a short paragraph describing her view of him and his painting, a perspective that speaks to the distant, admiring relationship she had with him:

Oskar Kokoschkas Malerei ist eine junge Priestergestalt, himmelnd seine blauerfüllten Augen und zögernd und hochmutig. Er berührt die Menschen wie Dinge und stellt sie, barmherzige Figürchen, lächelnd auf seine Hand. Immer sehe ich ihn wie durch eine Lupe, ich glaube, er ist ein Riese. Breite Schultern ruhen auf seinem schlanken Stamm, seine doppelt gewölbte Stirn denkt zweifach. Ein schweigender Hindu, erwählt und geweiht—seine Zunge ungelöst.

[Oskar Kokoschka’s painting is the figure of a young priest, his blue-filled eyes heaving, and hesitant and arrogant. He touches people like objects and places them, merciful little figures, smilingly on his hand. I always see him as though through a jeweler’s loupe, I believe he is a giant. Broad shoulders rest upon his slender trunk, his double arched forehead thinks twice. A silent Hindu, elect and consecrated—his tongue unresolved.]

As in Lasker-Schüler’s short text on Karl Kraus, she uses religious imagery, both Christian and non-Christian, in her mystical analysis of Oskar Kokoschka; this mystical religious imagery places Kokoschka in the same sphere as herself. She compares his painting to the figure of a young priest and in the last sentence, compares Kokoschka himself to a silent

<sup>46</sup> The painters Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) and Matthias Grünewald (1470-1528).

Hindu. It is in the guise of a priest that Kokoschka's superiority is established, in a very similar vein to that of Karl Kraus. Kokoschka's blue eyes are "heavening and hesitant," and like God, he seemingly manipulates people at will. Yet whereas Lasker-Schüler was Kraus's companion, sitting by his side in a café, she is only able to view Kokoschka through a loupe. "Loupe" or a jeweler's loupe is a magnifying glass in English. The image of Lasker-Schüler viewing Kokoschka (or perhaps his works) through a loupe is an arresting one, suggesting the precision with which she, the word artist, considers Kokoschka's art, like a jeweler examining a precious stone's clarity and purity. It also places Lasker-Schüler in a slightly higher position than Kokoschka—she is observing him, albeit he is not rendered life-size through the loupe, but rather larger than life—a giant. In Lasker-Schüler's charged religious language, it is hard not to consider the image in terms of 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly." ("Wir sehen jetzt durch einen Spiegel in einem dunkeln Wort.") Lasker-Schüler's possible allusion to this biblical passage refers to the distortion of Kokoschka's works through her words and suggests a new parallelism—Kokoschka is the creator and Lasker-Schüler is the chronicler, akin to the author of Corinthians, Paul.<sup>47</sup> Through her praise of Kokoschka, Lasker-Schüler elevates both him and herself. The level of elevation, the magnitude of Lasker-Schüler's praise of Kokoschka, is such that he appears as a giant to her. He is monumental. It is with this figure, a monumental, silent Hindu, with wide shoulders, chosen, elect, that the audience is left.



**Figure 13: Neue Nummer, Oskar Kokoschka 1910.**

While Kokoschka does not present himself in the series *Menschenköpfe*, that is not to say that he does not include a self-portrait in *Der Sturm*. Kokoschka's self-portrait is featured in a lithograph that was done to advertise the new periodical (Figure 13). Originally painted in 1910, the image presents Kokoschka with a recently shaved head, bare-chested, and gesturing to a wound on his chest. The advertisement for the new issue, "Neue Nummer," is on his chest, seemingly carved into his flesh. This image of Kokoschka has been called messianic, and there is certainly something of the messianic here.<sup>48</sup> His very signature, the "O K" stretching across the back of his palm, suggests the stigmata, as does the wound on his palm. Kokoschka presents himself as a veritable messiah of expressionism. The colors of the lithograph, red, cream, a touch of blue, and black, allow the viewer to be drawn to the central image. Appearing early in the New Year in 1911, Kokoschka's image pairs interestingly with Lasker-Schüler's account of him. The religious element is still

<sup>47</sup> Lasker-Schüler has a special affinity for Paul as well. It was the name of her favorite brother, a brother who died tragically young, as well as the name of her only son, who also died when quite young. Her images often feature coded references to Paul, often under the guise of the Arabic form Bulus.

<sup>48</sup> Eskilson, Stephen. *Graphic Design: A New History, Second Edition*. p. 92.

present, yet it is very different in tone from Lasker-Schüler's religious focus. Kokoschka is firmly in a Christian idiom, while his style has strong primitive elements. Lasker-Schüler is firmly oriental, and all the more ecumenical in her use of religious imagery; she uses all tools, allusions, and religions that are available to her. The self-portrait of Kokoschka and Lasker-Schüler's portrait of him raise more questions about their relationship than they answer.

The image Lasker-Schüler sketches of Oskar Kokoschka: a towering figure, great, unknowable, contrasts with her presentation of Kraus. The relationship Lasker-Schüler felt she had with Kraus accounts for this difference and their familiarity. In her letters to Kraus, Lasker-Schüler frequently uses the informal "du" form<sup>49</sup> and exudes a certain warmth and friendship. It is impossible to know to what degree Kraus returned these sentiments, since his letters in response to Lasker-Schüler have been lost. Kraus's correspondence with Lasker-Schüler's husband, Herwarth Walden, provides a few clues. Kraus regularly praises Lasker-Schüler the poet to her husband, and occasionally asks that Walden let Lasker-Schüler know he cannot publish more of her poems at this time. Both the praise and the refusal to publish more suggest Kraus's desire to have a measure of distance between himself and Lasker-Schüler, but also his sensitivity to her feelings and his respect for her as an artist. There are few surviving letters from Lasker-Schüler's *Sturm* period to Kokoschka, and, as with Kraus's replies, any possible replies from Kokoschka are no longer extant. Yet even from one side of the correspondence, Lasker-Schüler's different relationships to the two men is clear. Lasker-Schüler's first mention of Kokoschka in her correspondence occurs in a letter to Fritz Stahl, encouraging him to attend the Cassirer Gallery to see Kokoschka's exhibit.<sup>50</sup> In this letter, Lasker-Schüler stresses the fact that she and Kokoschka are essentially strangers. While this could be a rhetorical strategy to encourage Stahl to attend the gallery and to convince him that Lasker-Schüler has no subjective interest in this, her presentation of Kokoschka in the brief sketch supports the insistence that she and Kokoschka knew each other well.

The first extant letter Lasker-Schüler that wrote to Kokoschka, after his return to Vienna in 1911, sheds further light on their relationship. Before this point Lasker-Schüler had written of and indirectly to Kokoschka in her regular missives to Kraus. In each of these mentions, there is the suggestion that Lasker-Schüler has been rebuffed by Kokoschka. In

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<sup>49</sup> Lasker-Schüler switches back to the formal "Sie" in 1911 after Kraus fails to publish more of her poems, or to address her in turn with "du."

<sup>50</sup> "Ich weiß nicht, ob Sie es wissen—bei Cassirer (Salon) Victoriast. 35 ist augenblicklich eine Kokoschka-Ausstellung. (Nur noch einige Tafel.) Sie müssen die Bilder sehn, die Schneelandschaft, die meisterhaften Köpfe und die Zeichnungen...so bitte ich Sie, Herr Stahl darüber zu schreiben. Nicht weil ich befreundet bin mit O. Kokoschka—ich bin ihm fast fremd—ich möchte es rein im Interesse dieser merkwürdiger Malerei, die ein Ereigniß mir ist von Farbe und Tiefe." [I do not know, if you know this—at Cassirer's (Salon), Victoriast. 35, there is a Kokoschka show. (Not just one canvas) You need to see the paintings, the snow-landscape, the masterful heads, and the drawings...so I ask you, Mr. Stahl, to write about them. Not because I am friends with O. Kokoschka, he is basically a stranger to me, but I want to bring this remarkable painting to your attention. For me, it is an event of color and depth.] Lasker-Schüler, Else. *Die Briefe Vol. I*. Brief an Fritz Stahl. (5. Juli 1910).

one postscript, she writes to Kraus, “Und einen ungeren gesehenen Gruß an Tantris-zeuxis das its O. Kokoschka der Maler der Stadt,” [And one unwelcome greeting to *Tantris-zeuxis*, that is O. Kokoschka, the painter of the city],<sup>51</sup> suggesting that Kokoschka was unhappy to receive her greeting. The nickname given for Kokoschka here, is “Tantris-zeuxis,” is a most beguiling choice. Tantris comes from the medieval Tristan story. In the story, after Tristan has killed Morold, brother to famed Irish healer Queen Isolde, he washes up on shore, wounded from Morold’s poisoned blade, and pretends to be a traveling minstrel. Queen Isolde recognizes that his wound is poisoned and agrees to heal Tristan if he tutors her young daughter, also named Isolde (and for fans of the Tristan story, the more important Isolde). When he is asked his name, Tristan calls himself “Tantris,” a recombination of his name Tris-tan, to prevent the enemy Irish from recognizing him as the warrior who has killed their own hero, Morold.<sup>52</sup> “Zeuxis” is the fifth-century B.C. Greek painter, whose painting techniques are generally considered to have led to the development of chiaroscuro. Placing Tantris and Zeuxis together suggests a degree of great artistry, but also of deception. On the same day that Lasker-Schüler sent this letter to Kraus, she also penned a letter to Kokoschka. Lasker-Schüler’s letter to Kokoschka further complicates and confuses any understanding of her relationship with him.

Ollet Rind, wat schenken Se’ meck ens däm fised, schwaten Caplan no hier?  
 Sie hab ömm geschenkt, dat hä meck beobachten cut, dat Se’ wat tu  
 Klatschen han. Hä seit, Se löten (ließen) meck größten on eck soll öwer sing  
 Utsellung hier schriewen. Wat gon meck sinne Klecksereien on! Ewer  
 kommen Se’ bitte wacker no hier, Se ollet Rind, dat eck eene Fröde han denn  
 wir beleedigen uss so nett. Aujust. Die Lüte spräken Alle so wie Sie met eene  
 gummerte Zonge. Eek verston nu die Sprake, Mensch. Kömme Se ens, eek  
 kenn Polen, die loten seck molen van Deck.

Attempts at translating this missive into English are perhaps best avoided, as the letter is written entirely in pseudo-*Plattdeutsch*, a northern dialect with which Lasker-Schüler, hailing from just outside of the Ruhrgebiet, would have been familiar.<sup>53</sup> Written in May, the gist is that Lasker-Schüler is coming to Vienna in August for a reading tour. She has recently met people who speak with the same accent as Kokoschka, i.e. with a “rubber tongue.” Kokoschka grew up in the small town of Pöchlarn in Lower Austria, and moved to Vienna at 18 when he was accepted to the Kunstbewerberschule. He was certainly not a speaker of the Northern German dialect that Lasker-Schüler addresses him in. Although the letter is written in dialect, an almost intimate choice, Lasker-Schüler addresses Kokoschka

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<sup>51</sup> Lasker-Schüler, Else. *Briefe. Vol. I. 1893-1913*. Brief an Karl Kraus (17. Mai. 1911).

<sup>52</sup> This is by no means the only appearance of the Tristan story in Lasker-Schüler’s confusing network of textual references. Generally speaking, Tristan is Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele, a poet friend of Lasker-Schüler’s who was killed at the Eastern Front in 1915. After his death, Lasker-Schüler published a collection of poems dedicated to him, including a cycle of Tristan poems.

<sup>53</sup> Given Lasker-Schüler’s fairly upper-middle class origins, it seems unlikely that she was a speaker of Plattdeutsch. Accounts of Lasker-Schüler’s speech and dialect suggest that she had a very strong Wuppertal accent, something for which Rilke derided her, comparing her at one of her poetry readings to “a barking dog.”

throughout with the formal “Sie.” Kokoschka was not the only person to receive letters from Lasker-Schüler written in dialect; she addressed numerous letters to Karl Kraus and Peter Baum in the same approximation of written *Plattdeutsch*. In the case of Peter Baum, a fellow native of Wuppertal, this makes a surface sense. In terms of Karl Kraus, it perhaps makes less sense, but as the two were regular correspondents, this speaks to the frequency and quantity of their correspondence, rather than Kraus’s receptiveness to northern German dialect. Read in light of the other recipients of such letters, Lasker-Schüler’s letter to Kokoschka takes on a new hue. Her use of dialect is an attempt to establish familiarity and a connection with Kokoschka, it could also be a teasing wink at the audience, reminding them of the linguistic space between Berlin and Vienna. It does not seem she was entirely successful in this endeavor. While she continues to refer to Kokoschka in her letters to Karl Kraus, the content is a repeated demand that Kokoschka send her six marks.<sup>54</sup> Apparently he owes her this sum for a print of her sketch of him that appeared in *Der Sturm* as part of her *Briefe nach Norwegen*. Then there are no more letters to Kokoschka.

## CONCLUSION

In Lasker-Schüler’s portraits of other artists published in *Der Sturm*, a key element of Lasker-Schüler’s emerging poetic process is evident. It was inextricably linked with her poetic milieu and interlocutors and features repeated attempts to create or rewrite her world with and through these relationships. Indeed, rather than operate under the myth of lone artistic creativity, Lasker-Schüler consciously sought out artistic partners and groups that would give her a context for her artistic creation. *Der Sturm* was such a place for Lasker-Schüler’s emerging poetic process. The periodical served as a stage for her creative output and placed her in contact with other expressionist artists. Lasker-Schüler’s rhetorical strategies for initiating play with her colleagues become clear through close readings of her shorter prose pieces in *Der Sturm*. In the three short texts analyzed in this chapter—“Peter Baum,” “Karl Kraus,” and “Oskar Kokoschka”—Lasker-Schüler follows a basic recipe. She creates a relationship with the object of the praise piece, often through the invention of a different identity for each party, and uses this new identity to link the two creatively. She briefly mentions work of theirs, often obliquely, and through the play between in-crowd knowledge and general knowledge establishes the illusion of inclusion for the general reading public. With each portrait, Lasker-Schüler takes control of her modernist milieu and attempts to forge connections with its other members.

In analyzing the “partnership” between Oskar Kokoschka and Else Lasker-Schüler in the pages of *Der Sturm*, it is clear that this relationship and collaboration is less explicit and perhaps less intentional than the word *partnership* would suggest. The pairing of Kokoschka’s illustration of Karl Kraus with Lasker-Schüler’s text demonstrates both the uncomfortable partnership between the two artists, as well as their different interpretations of expressionism. Lasker-Schüler’s text is romantic—both in content and in style—and most assuredly flattering. Kokoschka’s rendering of Kraus is much harsher—a figure cast in harsh

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<sup>54</sup> Lasker-Schüler mentions Kokschka in her letters to Karl Kraus through 1911, asking after his health and demanding the six marks he owes her.

fluorescent light rather than in the soft glow of friendship. As Lasker-Schüler strives to develop a relationship with Kokoschka, encouraging others to attend his show and writing a laudatory review of it, Kokoschka rebuffs collaboration; but this does not put an end to Lasker-Schüler's attempts to create intimacy between the two. If we take these portraits as one project, we can view them as an extended literary exercise. To use a more modern journalistic term, Lasker-Schüler's portraits are not her only "longform" experiment in *Der Sturm*. From 1911-1912, Lasker-Schüler's epistolary novel, *Briefe nach Norwegen* would be published serially as it was written in *Der Sturm*. In the individual letters of this novel, Lasker-Schüler reaches out again to Kokoschka, and indeed to the entire Berlin avant-garde, in her attempt to sketch her world as she saw it and wished it to be. Her illustrations of this cafe world are not only verbal, but also visual, for it is *Briefe nach Norwegen* that Lasker-Schüler begins to incorporate her own drawings into her art. The combination of verbal and visual images, as well as contemporary historical events and Lasker-Schüler's fantastic reality, make *Briefe nach Norwegen* one of the most fascinating and under-appreciated texts of Lasker-Schüler's oeuvre.

CHAPTER TWO:  
*BRIEFE NACH NORWEGEN*

INTRODUCTION

The text is, to some extent, fixed. The words on the page do not change, yet the context in which the words are read and understood is far from static. Readers effect this change with their own experiences, their environment, and the circumstances of their reading, thus opening the text beyond the limits and expectations of the author. The publisher effects this change through material choices involving the printed text, deciding if it is to be read on thick, heavy paper, or on bible-thin tissue. Or today on a backlit screen or the analog page. Is the print large and the font clear, or closely printed and on the cheap? The text can also be placed in various contexts by stroke of the author's intent. Else Lasker-Schüler's *Briefe nach Norwegen* is one such unstable text. An epistolary novel, its original publication was in the context of the avant-garde magazine *Der Sturm*, with groups of letters published as they were written over the course of six months. In *Der Sturm*, the letters are given a hyper-contemporary context: the magazine's publication dates serve as a time line for the letters; and the articles, theater reviews, and art works surrounding Lasker-Schüler's letters provide a multi-media cultural context, often further elucidating events and figures that appear in Lasker-Schüler's half-fantastic, half-journalistic accounts of her life in bohemian Berlin. These texts and paratexts form the environment and ecosystem of Lasker-Schüler's version of Berlin. As the letters progress, Lasker-Schüler creates a fantastic version of her Berlin and

of reality, she also repeatedly breaks the wall between the constructed world of the text and the “real,” outside world. Shortly after the completion of the letters’ print run in *Der Sturm*, Lasker-Schüler published them as a novel with a new title, *Mein Herz: Ein Liebesroman mit wirklich lebender Menschen* (1912). While the collected form is almost entirely composed of the same text and images that appeared in *Der Sturm*, the context of the letters is entirely altered and the experience of reading the them is radically different.

Yet despite this radically different experience of reading the letters as they appeared serially in *Der Sturm* as *Briefe nach Norwegen*, one in which temporal tension and suspense is created, and the other articles and illustrations in *Der Sturm* become supporting paratexts adding depth and coherence to Lasker-Schüler’s letters, all the existing scholarship on the letters is focused exclusively on their subsequent publication in book form as *Mein Herz*. Markus Hallensleben’s extremely influential study on Lasker-Schüler’s engagement with various avant-garde groups in Berlin, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Avantgardismus und Kunstinszenierung*, entirely ignores the original publication of *Mein Herz* as *Briefe nach Norwegen*.<sup>55</sup> There are many possible reasons for this elision. The letters of *Briefe nach Norwegen* are materially identical to *Mein Herz*. Not a word is changed between the two, although some original errors and typos are corrected. All of Lasker-Schüler’s images published with the letters in *Der Sturm* are present in *Mein Herz*. But that is where the similarities end. In *Der Sturm*, the letters were serialized across 23 consecutive weeks from September 16, 1911 until February 24, 1912. But they only come to an end with the letters published twelve issues later on June 8, 1912, letters Lasker-Schüler claims were lost in the mail and only recently recovered. This timeline creates letter units that form an interior timeline within six months of publication and produce a sense of immediacy. The weekly publication of the letters, without any sense of how long they will continue, also serves to generate suspense and tension in the narrative constructed by Lasker-Schüler—will the letters continue to arrive next week? Is this the end?

The letters are published *Mein Herz* without dates. Their original groupings in *Der Sturm* are not maintained, and the letters take on a timeless, unfixed quality. None of these differences address the violence that the layout of *Mein Herz* does to the original relationship between word and image in *Briefe nach Norwegen*. In *Der Sturm*, Lasker-Schüler’s images are printed in close proximity to her text; the images often break up the text mid-sentence and even mid-word, and the interplay between the text and image becomes central to Lasker-Schüler’s rhetorical strategies of inclusion, exclusion, and humor in *Briefe nach Norwegen*. In *Mein Herz*, the images are separated entirely from the text on blank white pages, with some editions even further divorcing the images through blank white facing pages. The delicate interdependence of text and image is completely sacrificed to book publishing conventions. Throughout this chapter, I highlight four individual appearances of *Briefe nach Norwegen* in *Der Sturm*. Each appearance features artwork by Lasker-Schüler and a variety of paratexts in *Der Sturm* that are central to understanding Lasker-Schüler’s representation of “real-time” life in Berlin in the her creation of her own fantastic reality. For the contemporary audience in

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<sup>55</sup> Hallensleben, Markus. *Else Lasker-Schüler: Avantgardismus und Kunstinszenierung*, pp. 151-185.



1911 and 1912, to read each installment of *Briefe nach Norwegen* was to be fully enveloped by Berlin and its bohemia, and not only Lasker-Schüler's version of it.

## BRIEFE NACH NORWEGEN DEBUTS



**Figure 14: Der Sturm cover.**  
September 16, 1911.

When the first handful of letters were published on September 16, 1911, *Der Sturm* readers found themselves fully submerged in bohemian Berlin, from cover to cover. On the front cover, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner treated can-can girls of the nightclubs to a primitive touch (Figure 14), and within the short eight pages of the magazine, readers could also sample the Aristotelian philosophy of Max Zerbst, a short story by Alfred Döblin, a poem by Paul Zech, and a long editorial note on the freedom of the press in regard to the Agadir Crisis. Lasker-Schüler's contribution, *Briefe nach Norwegen*, is the last content piece before two pages of advertisements. To the modern reader, these authors and events evoke a variety of contexts and associations. Students of art history or expressionist art enthusiasts may recognize Kirchner, and certainly any reasonably literate German speaker is familiar with Döblin. Paul Zech is familiar to a smaller group, and perhaps only students of philosophy remember Max Zerbst. Other than the ephemeral

advertisements for vegetarian guest houses and Otto Teutscher, hairdresser (Figure 15), it is the Agadir Crisis that is perhaps furthest from our historical memory.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> In July of 1911, the French empire was moving to secure southern Morocco, and Germany decided it was an ideal moment to engage in the game of empire. Germany was then enveloped in an arms race with Great Britain; and in an attempt to push the British closer to German interests and away from the French, the German navy sent a warship to the small Moroccan port city of Agadir, claiming to protect German business interests in Morocco. In the German context, this is the most famous example of gunboat diplomacy. Yet, the plan did not go as intended. The British, concerned that their naval base at Gibraltar was threatened, sent warships to support the French and kept to the Entente Cordiale. Confronted with the combined power of the French and the British, the German navy was forced to back down. At the same time as this maneuvering was taking place on the Mediterranean, Germany was hit by a financial crisis. The stock market plunged thirty percent in one day; there was a run on banks as concerned Germans traded their paper money for gold; and, as a result, Germany was almost forced off the gold standard. Agadir came to be seen as the final conflagration of competing European colonial interests—featuring arms races, domino-effect treaties, and tone-deafness to the situation at home—before the slow windup to the First World War.



**Figure 15: Advertisement for Otto Teutscher, Der Sturm, September 16, 1911. p.8**

Gertrude flirts with a bearded Arab and Lasker-Schüler meet Minn, the son of the sultan of Morocco. Her latest love.

Most figures in *Briefe nach Norwegen* have a real corollary, Karl Kraus is mentioned as *der Cardinal* and *der Dalai-Lama*, Kokoschka appears as himself and *der Troubadour* and later, *Tristan* appears, also known as the poet Hans Ehrenbaum Degele. Gertrude Barrison appears under no other name than her own, and if the reader flipped back a few pages to the advertisements in the *Der Sturm*, they would be encounter an advertisement for Barrison's appearance at the Verein für Kunst (Figure 16). Yet Minn does not appear. He seemingly belongs purely to the realm of Lasker-Schüler's fantasy, and does not have a "real-life" counterpart. Minn is not an entirely new figure, he also appears in *Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad* (1907), Lasker-Schüler's first collection of short stories. The four years between Minn's appearances have brought Morocco a very different connotation. Minn has lain dormant until 1911. His reemergence is no coincidence. The content of the letter speaks to the reason for his reappearance:

Aber bei den Bauchtänzerinnen ereignete sich eines der Wunder meines arabischen Buches; ich tanzte mit M i n n, dem Sohn des Sultans von Marokko. Wir tanzten, tanzten wie zwei Tanzschlangen, oben auf der Islambühne, wir krochen ganz aus uns heraus, nach den Löckten der Bambusflöte des Bändigers nach der Trommel, pharaonenalt, mit den ewigen

While Lasker-Schüler's later reputation as a Orientalist and an indulger in fantasy par excellence, both notions suggest that she was not one to engage seriously, or even superficially, with political events and global politics.<sup>57</sup> The context of the Agadir crisis brings new light to Lasker-Schüler's contemporary engagement. In the first letter in *Briefe nach Norwegen*, Lasker-Schüler describes a day spent with American vaudeville actress Gertrude Barrison at the Lunapark, Berlin's amusement park. After visiting the Egyptian exhibit, the pair spend the evening in a cafe where



**Figure 16: Advertisement for Gertrude Barrison, Der Sturm, September 16, 1911. p.8**

For more on Agadir, please see Geoffrey Barraclough. *From Agadir to Armageddon: Anatomy of a Crisis*.  
<sup>57</sup> Calvin N. Jones, *The Literary Reputation of Else Lasker-Schüler: Criticism, 1901-1993*.

Schellen. [...]Minn und ich verirrten uns nach Tanger, stiessen kriegerische Schreie aus, bis mich sein Mund küsste so sanft so inbrünstig, und ich hätte mich geniert, mich zu sträuben.

[But along with the belly dancers appeared one of the miracles out of my Arabic book; I danced with *Minn*, the son of the sultan of Morocco. We danced, danced like two dancing snakes up on the Islam-stage, we crept out of ourselves to the tones of the bamboo flutes of the tamer, of the drum, old as pharaoh, with the eternal bells. [...] Minn and I got lost on the way to Tangier, shouted out war cries, until his mouth kissed me so softly, so ardently, that I would have been embarrassed to resist.]<sup>58</sup>

It is a surprise to Lasker-Schüler herself that Minn, a figure from her storybook, has suddenly appeared to dance with her. His appearance is a miracle! Everything about their meeting is cloaked in the language and imagery of the orient, romantic imagery that paints experiences through emotive objects and language. Although the story begins with Minn and Lasker-Schüler meeting in a cafe in Berlin, by the end of the evening, they get lost on the way to Tangier. It is on the way to Tangier that heavy flirting transitions into physical contact. And it is on this road to Tangier that both “shout out war cries” that gradually become kisses. In the novel form, this encounter does not stand out, except for its especially beautiful language. Yet in the periodical version, coming as it does on the heels of an article that details the abuses of the freedom of the press occasioned by the Agadir crisis, this encounter has a different weight and nuance. While Minn and Lasker-Schüler get lost on their way to Tangier, it is no coincidence that they do not make it, as the Agadir crisis was still going strong.<sup>59</sup> The threat of war was still very possible when *Der Sturm* was published, and only twelve days after Germany’s own black Monday, when the stock market dropped thirty percent in one day, Lasker-Schüler’s image of war cries melting into kisses is not only beautiful and poetic, it is perhaps also a political statement cloaked in opaque poetic language. In the novel form, with any supporting contemporary context lost, the potential political message is elided.

## CRITICS & FUTURE PLANS

When *Briefe nach Norwegen* were published, in addition to speculation about the identities of the various fantastic figures, there was already debate about the poetic or journalistic quality of the letters. If the skepticism of one of Lasker-Schüler’s greatest promoters, Karl Kraus, is anything to go by, there was concern over this latest project of hers. In the letters exchanged between Lasker-Schüler’s husband Herwarth Walden and Kraus, Kraus expressed his doubts multiple times:

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<sup>58</sup> *Der Sturm*. N. 77. September 16, 1911, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> It was not until November 28, 1911 that the German warship *Eber* withdrew from the coast of Morocco.

“Der Schluß des >>Briefes<< hat auch mir sehr gefallen. Aber ob dem Dichter E[lse] L[asker]-Sch[üler] mit der Drucklegung dieser Sachen ein Dienst erwiesen wird, scheint mir zweifelhaft. Der Tibetteppich ist schöner als die Mittheilung, daß der kl. J[acobsohn] 23 Nummern bezogen hat, und sogar aktueller.”<sup>60</sup>

[I really liked the end of the “letter.” But whether or not publication of these things has done the poet Else Lasker-Schüler a service, seems doubtful to me. The Tibetan rug is more beautiful than the communication that little Jacobsohn has moved into number 23, and even more current.]

“Was soll man jetzt sagen? —Noch eins: stellen die Briefe nach Norwegen so hoch, und es ist gewiß viel Dichterisches darin, dort wo die Informationen aus dem Café des Westens...aufhören.”<sup>61</sup>

[What should one say now? —One more thing: you value the letters to Norway so highly, and there is certainly much that is poetic in them, in the places where the information about the Café des Westens...stops.]

Were Lasker-Schüler’s letters journalism? Mere diary entries? A poetic experiment? Walden attempts to respond to Kraus’s questions about the poetic quality and nature of *Briefe nach Norwegen* by mentioning Lasker-Schüler’s plans to publish the letters as a novel:

“Ich finde die Briefe außerordentlich. Unerhört dichterisch und gestaltet. Die aktuellen Begebnisse sind ganz gleichgültig, ich meine, daß sie benutzt wurden. Sie werden durch die Behandlung meines Erachtens geradezu unaktuell. Im >Sturm< hören sie jetzt übrigens auf, sie sollen als Buch erschienen.”<sup>62</sup>

[I think the letters are extraordinary. Incredibly poetic and constructed. The current events are entirely indifferent, I mean, that they have been used. In my opinion, they become anything but current through their treatment. By the way they are ending now in the *Sturm*, they will appear as a book.]

“Über die >Briefe nach Norwegen< können wir uns also nicht einigen. Vielleicht gefallen sie Ihnen später im Buch als Ganzes besser.”<sup>63</sup>

[We cannot agree about the Letters to Norway. Maybe you will like them better later in their entirety as a book.]

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<sup>60</sup> Letter to Herwart Walden, 12.10.1911. *Feinde in Scharen. Ein wahres Vergnügen dazusein: Karl Kraus-Herwarth Walden Briefwechsel 1909-1912*, p. 391.

<sup>61</sup> Letter to Herwarth Walden, 10.23.1911.

<sup>62</sup> Letter to Karl Kraus. 10.14.1911.

<sup>63</sup> Letter to Karl Kraus. 10.20.1911, p. 374.

The genre of a novel and the publication plans are presented as some sort of legitimation of the project as a whole. The suggestion is that by making the letters less contemporary and less tied to current events the text would be elevated from ephemeral, poetic, and journalistic diary entries into something more, indeed into a *novel*.

The contemporary contexts of *Briefe nach Norwegen* are central to understanding how Lasker-Schüler combines poetic and journalistic elements to create a unique perspective on her artistic milieu and period. It is through the loose, serial format that she is able to challenge genre expectations and experiment with a fantastic version of Berlin life. This chapter demonstrates the importance of such a reading in two ways. Working from inside Lasker-Schüler's text, I focus on the ways in which Lasker-Schüler's text and images are integrated in *Der Sturm*. In the periodical, the text and image are printed in close proximity, allowing their interdependence to magnify humorous elements and highlight Lasker-Schüler's growing multi-media approach. Yet in *Mein Herz*, the images are separated from the text—appearing isolated with blank facing pages, often separated from the appropriate text. Then, working on the broader context of *Briefe nach Norwegen* in *Der Sturm* and more broadly speaking, Berlin in 1911/12, I explore a few instances in which knowledge of now-forgotten events, captured in *Der Sturm* allow the seemingly closed world of the text to open up and engage with contemporary discourses and events. The “in-real-time” aspect of the letters in their serial format is highly important to an understanding of the historical and social context of these texts, and also to an understanding Lasker-Schüler's self-fashioning and presentation of herself as an artist to the broader avant-garde world and beyond. As the letters continue, Lasker-Schüler responds to criticism of their “gossipy” nature and gradually becomes more confident as a visual artist. While she labels her first image as “dilletantisch” [dilletantish], she abandons this characterization as she begins to unapologetically experiment with form and medium in the serial letters, allowing the reader (both yesterday and today) to observe her creation of a public artistic face.

NOVEMBER 4, 1911:  
Zeppelins and Event Calendars

The eighth installment of *Briefe nach Norwegen* is the first time Lasker-Schüler's graphics appear alongside her writing. Remembering Lasker-Schüler's first publication in *Der Sturm*, it is fitting that the first image is a caricature of Peter Baum (Figure 17).<sup>64</sup> Baum is frequently mentioned in *Briefe nach Norwegen*; in the first letter he has moved house and accidentally packed his wife into the moving van (!). The presentation of the image and a few resultant problems demonstrates nicely the disconnect in the differing publication styles between *Briefe nach Norwegen* and the subsequent novelization, *Mein Herz*.

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<sup>64</sup> See Chapter One.

Lieber Herwarth, ich habe den Pitter Boom bemalen für den Sturm. Seitdem er sich den ganzen Hiddenseesommer nicht um mich bekümmert hat, sieht er gar nicht mehr aus wie ein Großfürst, sondern wie ich ihn in Katerstimmung als Langohr gemalen hab. Ich zeigte ihm sein Bild, aber er weigerte sich das Cliché zu bezahlen. Nun wende ich mich mit diesem Brief an seinen Vetter. Bitte, Herwart, mach du die Kommas; der ist gebildet, er schrieb ein mathematisches Buch über Geburten und Todesfälle.<sup>65</sup>

[Dear Herwarth, I sketched Pitter Boom for the Sturm. Ever since he spent the entire hidden-lake-summer not bothering about me, he doesn't look at all like a grand duke, but rather like the long-eared rabbit with a hangover that I've drawn him as. I showed him his picture, but he declined to pay for the print. So with this letter I'm turning to his cousin. Please put in the commas for me, Herwarth; he's educated; he wrote a mathematical book on births and deaths.]

Playing with the inside/outside dichotomy, Lasker-Schüler presents the fiction that this letter is addressed exclusively to her husband, Herwarth Walden, although it includes the text of her letter to Baum's cousin for Walden to edit for her. She begins by mentioning her latest activity—a drawing of “Pitter Boom.” Pitter Boom is Peter Baum; Pitter Boom is the approximation of Baum's name in the Plattdeutsch dialect native to the Wuppertal region, whence both Lasker-Schüler and Baum hailed. Lasker-Schüler often addressed Baum in a version of Plattdeutsch in order to demonstrate the fact that they were from the same region and shared a connection beyond the poetic pursuits; she attempts to build community through use of dialect. The use of the special personal name follows with the tone of the letter and the mention of the teasing image of Baum. There is a coziness created through the informal tone and the fiction that the letter is meant to be read exclusively by her husband. The letter is both an accounting of her current activities and also the set up for a letter within a letter—she needs Herwarth to check her comma usage for the letter to be sent to Baum's cousin. Within the letter to Baum's cousin, Lasker-Schüler adopts yet another alternate identity, that of Amanda Wallbrecker, a figure who only ever appears in this passage. She is a worker in a button factory and is attempting to sell her portrait of Baum for some extra money. Lasker-Schüler closes this letter with her expectation of the two talers she has requested for the print and plans for their use—a trip to the circus with “der



Figure 17: Peter Baum, *Der Sturm*, November 4, 1911. P. 5

<sup>65</sup> *Der Sturm*. N. 84. November 11, 1911, p.5.

Slawe.”<sup>66</sup> The letter is followed immediately by another letter, giving the reader the sense of time, as time must have passed for her to have sold the print, but also of immediacy—did her plan work? Indeed, the next letter, published immediately below, records the success of her plan: Lasker-Schüler has both sold the print and gained a new subscriber to *Der Sturm*.<sup>67</sup> In her success, she names herself a “Großkaufmann,” [a big merchant] and decides to add onto her sketch of him. The addition is a “Wörtchen” [little word], meant to be read together with his portrait. It is again in Plattdeutsch, and I have attempted a translation:

Pitter, dat De so een dommer Moolesel böß, nä, dat han eck nich gedacht. Wie kannst De meck so eene alberne Karte schriewen ut Hiddensee! Doför möss De bestraft wörn. Eck wörd nu all Sinne Extravaganzen on Hokospokos on Sinne ganze heelege Familie en usse Vorwärts brengen, on Sinne Neegongen on Sinne Settlechkeetsverbrechen. Ook Dän artegen Bruder Hugo wörd eck entlarven. Dat glöw eeck Önk, dän Sommer on dän Herbst en die Badeörter herömflanieren. on die Portemaries dän Lüten ut de Mäntels kiebitzen. on eck sitt hier biem leeren Kochpott. Van wäm häst De dann dat Geld all? Völleecht van Ding Tante ut die Waffelbude oder van die Riesendame? Die Erbschaft Dinnes Urgroßvatters, däm Derektor on Professor vom Olympiaflohtriatier häst De doch opgefreten on Deck heemlich doför eene nur Boschse on eenen Schabbesdeckel gekauft? Genau wie een Pastor stehst De met der longen Piepe im Mahl vor die Thöre van Sinne Filla op die Groschenskarte on de Hugo klickt ut däm Fenster wie Ding Hilsprädeger. On eene Eölsharfe steht ook op däm Dach; wer speelt die? Dinge tröhe Amanda.

[Peter, that you are such a bad dumb mule, well, I had never have thought that. How can you write me such a dumb card from Hiddensee! You must be punished for this. I will expose all his extravagances and hocus pocus and his entire holy family ... Also I will unmask your good brother Hugo. I also believe that to saunter about in summer and fall in the spas without a wallet, well the people and the girls just complain [kibitz]. And I sit here with an empty cooking pot. Who did you get all that money from? Perhaps from your aunt with the waffle iron or from the giant lady? The inheritance of your great-grandfather, the director and professor of olympian theater, did you secretly buy him a Shabbat cover? You stand there exactly like a pastor with a pipe in your mouth before the throne of your daughter upon the penny-card upon which Hugo clicks and go out the window like your holy

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<sup>66</sup> The identity of “Der Slawe,” remains a great mystery, as it was in Lasker-Schüler’s own time. It seems, like Minn, to be a character created entirely out of Lasker-Schüler’s fantasy world and to have no real referant.

<sup>67</sup> The fact that Peter Baum’s cousin has now subscribed to *Der Sturm* seems to suggest that Lasker-Schüler’s fantasy of Amanda Wallbrecker was a thin one. How else would Johannes Baum know to subscribe to *Der Sturm* if he didn’t know he was corresponding with Else Lasker-Schüler? This contradiction highlights the lack of consistency within the internal logic of the text.

preachers. You also stand on the roof without a harp. Who plays it? Your loyal Amanda.]

The text that Lasker-Schüler adds to the image is another letter. This letter may be difficult for some readers to access, as it is in dialect. The use of dialect achieves multiple goals, first and foremost, it thrust the reader into the private world of Lasker-Schüler and Baum, the world in which non-standard German is used. For many in the audience of *Der Sturm*, the Plattdeutsch used would be slightly indecipherable, although Berlin itself is a Platt-speaking region. This slight or perhaps major comprehension problem works to both draw the reader closer to and distance the reader from Lasker-Schüler. The readers of *Der Sturm* are included in her private correspondence with Baum but also excluded from it linguistically. The use of dialect allows Lasker-Schüler the fiction that only Baum will be able to read and understand what she writes. This fiction of privacy through dialect also seems to give Lasker-Schüler a greater freedom in terms of subject matter. It is difficult not to notice the much more frequent references to Jewish practice in the Plattdeutsch text. In addition to freer content, there is also a certain playfulness about the use of dialect. It shows Lasker-Schüler trying on multiple identities within the space of the letters. All at once she is a factory worker trying to sell her art, the author Else Lasker-Schüler writing to her husband for help with commas, Amanda unmasked and teasing Peter Baum in dialect, and by the end, a sort of cultural reporter.<sup>68</sup>

The interplay between the public and private and the contemporary and the fantastic are central to Lasker-Schüler's construction of her literary persona in *Briefe nach Norwegen*; and in order for this play to work, she needs to convince her audience that she is writing to her husband. Yet there are cracks in the set-up. Lasker-Schüler begins the letter with "Lieber Herwarth, ich habe den Pitter Boom bemalen für den Sturm," [Dear Herwarth, I sketched Pitter Boom for the Sturm]. And indeed, we are both reading this in *Der Sturm* and seeing Peter Baum's image as a long-eared rabbit immediately below. The experience of reading this in *Mein Herz* is entirely different (Figure 18).

In the publication of *Mein Herz*, the small sketch of Peter Baum is made much larger and taken out of direct relationship with the text. Rather than functioning as a part of the text, and acting as an integral part of the letter, it becomes merely an illustration. As this image also shows, the individual letters that make up each installment of *Briefe nach Norwegen* are given more individual status through increased spacing and separation between the individual letters. The elements present in *Der Sturm* work together to create a unit. These elements are entirely lost in *Mein Herz*. Here it is completely unclear that this installment of

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<sup>68</sup> A later letter in *Briefe nach Norwegen* does suggest that she received some criticism for writing in Platt: "Ich habe der Schwärmerin versprochen, nicht mehr Platt zu sprechen in meiner norwegischen Korrespondenz: liegt auch im Grunde nur Brüderschaft in der ollen Umgangssprake twishen Pitter Boom on mek." [I promised the enthusiast that I wouldn't speak any more Platt in my Norwegian correspondence: the whole point is really just the brotherhood of the old slang between me and Pitter Boom.] *Der Sturm*, "Briefe nach Norwegen." February 3, 1912. p. 3.



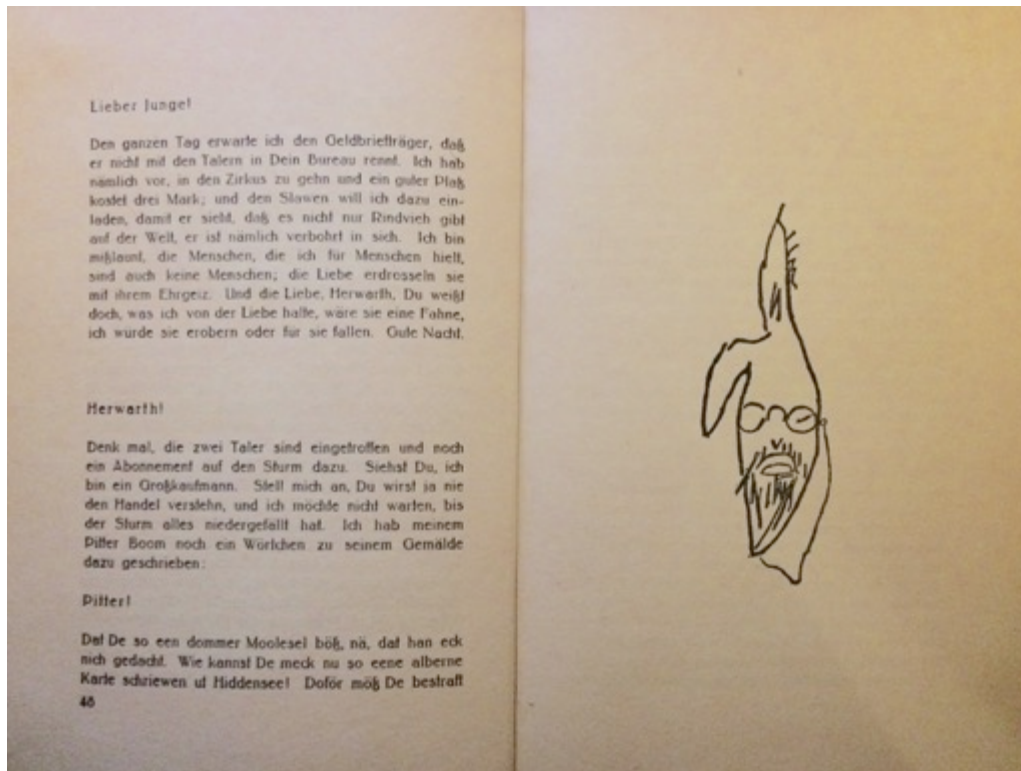


Figure 18: *Mein Herz*. First Edition from 1912. Pp. 48-49.

*Briefe nach Norwegen* includes three letters. It is slightly difficult to tell where a letter begins and ends, but if we follow general letter conventions, namely that there are opening and closing salutations, there are three letters published together on November 4, 1911 in *Der Sturm*. The first letter is the initial accounting of the Peter Baum drawing and the attempt to get his cousin to buy a print of it. The second letter fast forwards to Lasker-Schüler's receipt of the money for the sketch, the image of Peter Baum, and a brief accounting of "Cajus Majus"<sup>69</sup> and his plans for the latest literary cabaret at "Gnu."<sup>70</sup> If readers flipped to the advertisements composing the last two pages, they would find an ad for that very evening (Figure 19). The letters give the reader a sense of immediacy—Lasker-Schüler writes of events that may have happened the evening before, but also of events that are quite literally just happening that week. A charming example of this is Lasker-Schüler's description of a Zeppelin flying over the house:

Herwart, Kurtchen. Zeppelin kommt wieder über unserm Haus vorbei. Ich sitz eingeschlafen am Schreibtisch, wird plötzlich die Erde aufgerollt—modernes Gewitter, die Welt geht unter, ich hab keine Zeit mehr die Koffer zu packen. Wahnsinnige Stimmung in der Luft; Meer rauscht über unsern Dächern und Häusern—wo ist Himmel geblieben, wo will der Wallfisch da

<sup>69</sup> Cajus Majus is Kurt Hiller, the intellectual and journalist.

<sup>70</sup> Gnu was a literary cabaret that emerged from members of the Neopathetisches Cabaret. Lasker-Schüler was a frequent contributor.

oben hin gemächlich durch die Wolkenfluten. Adieu, adieu, ich lauf rash  
hinunter die Wiese.

Else

[Herwarth, Kurty. A zeppelin is passing over our house again. I sit asleep at  
the desk, the earth suddenly rolled up—modern storm, the world is ending, I  
don't have any time left to pack my suitcases. Crazy mood in the air, the sea  
is raging over our roofs and houses—where has heaven gone, where is the  
whale going sedately up there through the cloud-floods? Adieu, adieu, I'm  
running quickly down the meadow.

Else]

Reading this text today, the idea of a Zeppelin flying over the house seems quite astonishing, and indeed, in 1911 it was also quite astonishing! Lasker-Schüler may have witnessed the LZ 10 Schwaben flying by. Only one week later, Crown Prince Wilhelm and his wife Duchess Cecilie would take a trip over Berlin on the same zeppelin, the first commercially successful zeppelin in Germany.<sup>71</sup> Lasker-Schüler's experience of the zeppelin is a terrifying one—

her understanding of the zeppelin is that it breaks the laws of nature and therefore is a sign of the apocalypse. Yet she undercuts such a dramatic reading at the same time in her very first sentence, "Zeppelin kommt *wieder* über unserm Haus vorbei."<sup>72</sup> This is not the first time she has experienced such an event. Her apocalyptic vision is one of oceans covering roofs and houses, and whales swimming through the floods of clouds. The sky has become the sea, and perhaps these great whales are the zeppelins themselves. Commercial zeppelin service ran in and around Berlin from July 1911 until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. When this letter was initially published on November 4, 1911, zeppelins and the possible future they heralded were extremely current; zeppelins were advertised everywhere. Postcards were created for visitors to send their friends after a free promotional trip (Figure 20), and even a short film featuring the Kaiser was made to promote them. Lasker-Schüler's encounter with the Zeppelin is quite timely and dependent upon the contemporary moment for full appreciation. The apocalyptic tone of this letter is further undercut by the fact that another letter immediately follows after. Clearly the zeppelin has not heralded the end of days after all.



Figure 19: Gnu advertisement in *Der Sturm*, November 4, 1911. p.8

<sup>71</sup> "THE Crown Prince and Princess of Germany were passengers of the "Schwaben" on the 10<sup>th</sup> inst., and made an excursion out to Potsdam, crossing Berlin on the way. The Crown Prince travelled in the pilot's cabin in order to study the operation of the controlling the aerial liner, but the Princess and the suite remained in the passengers' cabin."

From *Flight* magazine. November 18, 1911. Accessible at:

<http://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive/view/1911/1911%20-%201007.html>

<sup>72</sup> Emphasis mine

Erstens: Dr. Alfred Döblin hat sich als Geburtstagshelfer und noch für „alles“ niedergelassen. Auf seinem Schild in der Bücherstraße 18 am Halleschen Tor steht geschrieben, daß er Oberarzt am Urban war. So eine Reklame!

Zweitens: Leonhard Frank hat wieder einen himmelblauen Mädchenleib gemalt, nun glaube ich wirklich an seine Sattlerei.

Drittens: Scherl will mich für die Verbreitung der Gartenlaube in Tripolis anstellen. Ich wohne bei Enger Bey im Krieg.

Viertens: Der unvergleichliche Baron von Schennis war gestern Nacht wieder im Café.

Fünftens: Alle Jungfrauen Berlins hat Poiret eingeladen zu seiner Ausstellung bei Gerson.

Die sammelten sich, eine Mauer zur rechten und linken des Durchgangs. Zwischen blond und schwarzem Frauenhaar, ein Spalt der noch zu haben war, sah ich die Mannequin wundersam. Sie war nicht in der Stadt geboren, man wußte nicht woher sie kam.

Sechstens: Das Café und alles was drum und dran liegt, Berlin und Umgegend, grüßt Euch Möwen!

[First: Dr. Alfred Döblin has established his practice as a helper for birthdays and everything else. On his sign at Bücherstraße 18 near the Hallesches Tor, it is written that he has been senior physician in Urban. Such an advertisement!

Second: Leonhard Frank painted another sky-blue girl's body, now I truly believe in his saddlery.

Third: Scherl wants to hire me for the extension of the garden arbor in Tripoli. I'll live with Enger Bey at war.

Fourth: The incomparable Baron von Schennis was at the café again last night.

Fifth: Poiret invited all young women in Berlin to his exhibit at Gerson's. They assembled, a wall to the right and left of the passage. Between blond and black ladies-hair, a crack that was still to be had, I saw the wonderful model. She wasn't born in the city, one didn't know where she came from.

Sixth: The cafe and everything that lies around it here and there, Berlin and its environs, sends its greetings, you seagulls!]



**Figure 20: LZ 10 Schwaben Postcard, 1911**

This reportage of current events reads a little gossipy, listing the goings-ons of mutual friends at Café des Westens and mentioning her friends by her idiosyncratic nicknames for them. It also has an interesting corollary within the pages of *Der Sturm*. On the first page of the same issue, a recurring column is printed under the pseudonym “Trust.” The column runs in *Der Sturm* for the next few months and regularly features reviews of cabarets and gallery shows. In this issue the column includes a review of a gallery show by Michels Reinfall, a new exhibit on “Zeichnenden Künste” at the Berliner Sezession, and notes on the Berliner Künstlerbund—the variety show at the Wintergarten—and the cabaret at the Metropolpalast. While the column is much longer than Lasker-Schüler’s, the two present a complimentary view of the Berlin art scene, especially considering the initial lines of the review of Michels Reinfall’s gallery show concerning to Oskar Kokoschka:

Ich erhielt einen Prospekt, geschmückt mit zwei Bildern, die ich für Kopien,  
für schlechte Kopien frei nach Oskar K o k o s c h k a hielt.

[I received a brochure, decorated with two images, which I took to be copies,  
bad copies loosely based on Oskar *Kokoschka*.]

The artist in question, Michels Reinfall, seems to have presented his work to the discerning Berlin public, only to have it assessed as poor copies of Oskar Kokoschka’s work.<sup>73</sup> This scandal is nearly forgotten today, yet at the time, it was perhaps the most pressing issue within the developing expressionist art world. Reinfall had had a gallery show at the Max Oppenheimer gallery in Munich that was far from successful. After Kokoschka’s Berlin success, Reinfall’s works were decried as cheap copies of Kokoschka’s style. The controversy surrounding Kokoschka in general is picked up by Lasker-Schüler as part of her attempt to draw Kokoschka out and into friendship, and it features prominently at the end of her issue of *Briefe nach Norwegen*. Lasker-Schüler’s repeated evocation of Kokoschka is evidence of her continuing hope that he would engage in some sort of literary and/or artistic exchange with her. Despite the fact that Kokoschka had recently returned to Vienna, he was clearly much talked about in Berlin at this time, and Lasker-Schüler sustains hope that he would become a sort of interlocutor in her artistic network. This desire does not become a reality, but Lasker-Schüler continues to use Kokoschka as a reference point in her own developing style and experimentation with multimedia art. Lasker-Schüler’s text repeatedly references Kokoschka, and also includes an image of him by her:

Hört nur, Kokoschka wird steckbrieflich verfolgt in der neuen, freien Presse;  
er wirkte doch immer schon rührend, fing er von der Villa an zu simulieren,  
die er seinen Eltern schenken würde. Er aß sich nur immer objektiv satt aus  
dem Idealzweck. Tut mir wirklich leid! Wenn er mich auch nicht leiden mag.  
So bin ich ja gar nicht! Ein Modell, ein Holzhäuschen, soll er in der Nacht  
vom fünfzehnten auf den sechzehnten Oktober einfach gestohlen haben. Ich  
schneide Euch hier sein Bild aus, es ist dilettantisch gezeichnet und gerade

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<sup>73</sup> This is apparently a recurring phenomenon for Kokoschka; Lasker-Schüler is involved in another such “plagiarism” case one month later concerning the Munich exhibit of Max Oppenheimer’s work.

seine charakteristischen Verbrecherzüge sind gemildert. Ob er sich auch in einer guten Pension versteckt hält, die für ihn sorgt? Rattke, der Ober vom Cafe, bei dem er hier in Berlin gewohnt hat, meint auch, wenn er nur gut wo gepflegt wird.

[Listen up, there's a warrant out for Kokoschka in the new free press; but he has always made a touching impression, started to pretend to talk about the villa he'd give his parents. He always only ate himself objectively full because of the ideal objective. I'm so sorry! Even if he can't stand me. I'm just not like that. A model, a little wooden cottage—he's supposed simply to have stolen it on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 16th of October. I will cut his image out for you here, it is drawn in a dilettantish way and precisely his characteristic criminal qualities are softened. Has he hidden himself in a good little hotel that's taking care of him? Rattke, the *maitre d* at the cafe, at whose place he lived here in Berlin, also says, "if only he were well taken care of somewhere."]

The image that splits up this text is a rough approximation of Kokoschka, with a rough shaved head, newsboy cap, and long eyelashes (Figure 21). Kokoschka's image comes in the middle of a sentence, strategically preceding "seine charakteristischen Verbrecherzüge," [his characteristic criminal traits]. This strategic placement first introduces the drawing and allows Lasker-Schüler to preface the audience's reading of the work. Then after they have viewed the image, she provides a reading of her depiction of Kokoschka. Lasker-Schüler's claim that the image is "dilettantisch gezeichnet" ("dilettantishly drawn"), speaks to the fact that the two images appearing in *Der Sturm* are in fact her first images published in the journal. These two images appear on the same opening of the *Der Sturm* and present the reader with an immediate view of Lasker-Schüler's developing artistic style (Figure 22).

When comparing this single page view with the subsequent publication as *Mein Herz*, the separation of the individual images from their corresponding text, as well as from the other images with which they are in conversation, becomes all the more dramatic and violent. Peter Baum and Oskar Kokoschka are presented in *Der Sturm* on the same page—almost in dialogue with one another. Peter Baum's ear is raised, and Kokoschka's mouth faces Baum's ear—as if they are about to speak to each other. These images are effectively Lasker-Schüler's first graphic works to appear in print. A few of her images had appeared as book covers for her publications, but publishing an image in *Der Sturm* was an entirely different



**Figure 21: Der Sturm November 4, 1911.**

matter. In the issue of November 4, Lasker-Schüler's two images are the only ones that appear in the magazine.<sup>74</sup>



Figure 22: *Der Sturm* November 4, 1911, p. 5

Bankier Oppenheimer” by Sigmund Kalischer (a figure entirely lost to history). After this cache of short stories, Lasker-Schüler's latest epistles to Norway appear. The letters are short. This is notable for two reasons: it is the second time that one of Lasker-Schüler's images appears in the *Briefe nach Norwegen*; and it is the first time that Lasker-Schüler acknowledges that the premise of the letters is no longer true, if it ever had been, and admits that Herwarth and Kurt have returned from Scandinavia.

The image and the letter are intimately tied together. The piece is composed of two letters and a coda to the last. The first is primarily concerned with a recent encounter with “der Bischof,” a figure whose identity is never revealed, but is perhaps some version of Karl Kraus or Lasker-Schüler's perfected image of him. The arrangement of the letter is central to the interplay between text and image.

Heute war der Bischof bei mir; wir flüstern bei jedem Zusammensein leiser.  
Ich bin so empfindlich am Herzen, ich höre mit meinem Herzen und das

## DECEMBER 2, 1911: Experiments with Form & Breaking the Fourth Wall

On December 2, 1911, *Der Sturm* begins with old news. The Jugendstil couple Lothar and Gertrud von Kunowski lament the departure of Hugo von Tschudi from the Nationalgalerie Berlin for the Neue Pinakothek in Munich. Hugo von Tschudi, who brought impressionism to Berlin, left Berlin after his purchase of Gauguin's *Birth of Christ*, which depicts Christ's birth to a Pacific Islander. He took the Gauguin with him when he left. But this had all happened in 1908. It is now December 1911. Next comes a short story by Alfred Ehrenstein, “Ritter Johann des Todes,” from his recently published collection, illustrated by Oskar Kokoschka. And it is with this short story that one focus of this issue of *Der Sturm* emerges—the short story. This issue is particularly full of short stories, from Alfred Döblin's “Mariä Empfängnis” and Otto Rung's serial “Der Vagabund,” to “Der reiche

<sup>74</sup> This excludes the advertisements on the last two pages. A wigmaker also has an image of a woman.

sanfte Sprechen tut ihm wohl. Er saß an meinem Lager, (Du Herwart, ich habe mir direkt ein Zelt eingerichtet mitten im Zimmer,) und spielte mit seinem Muschelbleistift; ich zeichnete mit dem Kohi-noor den Mond auf, bis er schwebte —so: Zwi-

schen der weißen Nacht des Papiers ganz alleine ohne Sterne und ohne Erde. Wie grausam man zeichnen kann, aber ich bat den Bischof, mit seinem rauschenden Bleistift ein Meer unter den Mond zu setzen. So geht es mir aber auch mit Nasen, die ich hinsetze oder Mündern oder halben Gesichtern, ich muß sie vervollständigen, damit ihnen nicht ein Sinn fehlt und dabei versäumt man sich selbst so oft, und das Herz liebt so selten bis zu Ende. Herwart, Du mußt auch flüstern lernen, man hört das Echo der Welt ganz deutlich. Wenn der Bischof und ich flüstern, werden die Wände leise und die Möbel erträglich, ihre Farben mild. Und die Spiegel der Schränke sind Bäche, und unsere Liebe ist ein Heimchen oder eine Grille, eine Pusteblume, daraus sich die Kinder Ketten machen.

[Today the bishop was at my place; every time we're together, we whisper more quietly. I am so sensitive at heart, I hear with my heart and the gentle speaking does it good. He sat in my camp, (Oh, Herwarth, I put up a tent right in the middle of the room,) and played with his shell-pencil; I drew the moon with the koh-i-noor, until it hovered—thus: Be-

tween the white night of the paper, entirely alone, void of stars and without earth. How terribly one can draw, but I asked the bishop to place an ocean under the moon with his raging pen. But it's the same with noses for me, which I place or mouths or half faces; I have to complete them, so they don't lack a meaning and in doing this one often makes oneself late, and the heart so rarely loves to the end. Herwarth, you must also learn to whisper; one hears the echo of the world very clearly. When the bishop and I whisper, the walls become quiet and the furniture bearable, its colors soft. And the mirrors of the wardrobes are streams, and our love is a little home or a cricket, a dandelion that children make chains with.]

The image of the moon floating in the sky is literally framed by the word “zwischen” [between] (Figure 23). This placement plays on the inbetween-ness described by the text. The moon is enveloped by lines that seem to hold it up, as though in an embrace. But the image of

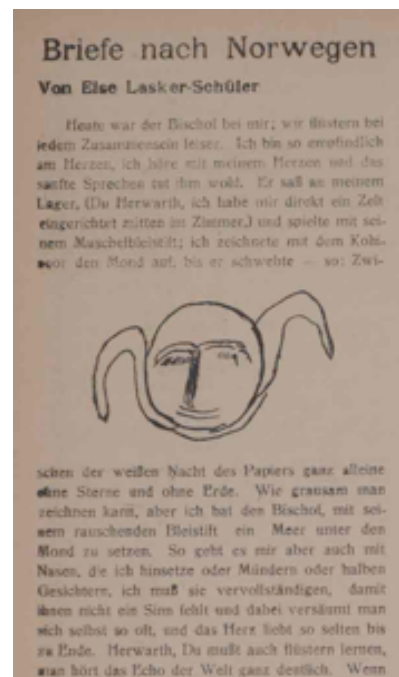


Figure 23: : Der Sturm  
December 2, 1911. P. 4

the moon protected and loved is undercut by Lasker-Schüler's text that surrounds the drawing; the moon is isolated, without stars and a connection to the earth. She tells the reader that the bishop has drawn the ocean below it to make the moon less lonely, but in this image, all we see are the words of the letter below—above and below, embracing the moon. While the text could be called an ocean—it is written by Lasker-Schüler and none other. The swaying lines that hold the moon up are in fact two inverted sides of a heart. The heart is broken and inverted, speaking to the first lines of the letter describing Lasker-Schüler's delicate heart. The two ends of the heart also call to mind the shape of the top of an ear, linking back once more to the text and Lasker-Schüler's claim that she "hears with her heart." The moon has a face, simply sketched with two eyes, eyebrows, a straight Roman nose, and a slight smile. Without reading the text, the face makes the image appear as a portrait, like Lasker-Schüler's portraits of Peter Baum and Oskar Kokoschka; but with the text, different readings are available. One is simple—the man in the moon. The second follows Lasker-Schüler's numerous suggestions of loneliness in the letter. Her moon is lonely, with neither stars nor earth to keep it company, just as Lasker-Schüler is lonely. Following the premise of the letters, Herwarth, her husband is out of town; and she seems to be holed up in her apartment, receiving visitors willing to engage in her various fantasies with her. The image of the moon, held up by two halves of a heart, could be read as a portrait of Lasker-Schüler, buoyed by the soft conversation and the power of whispers.

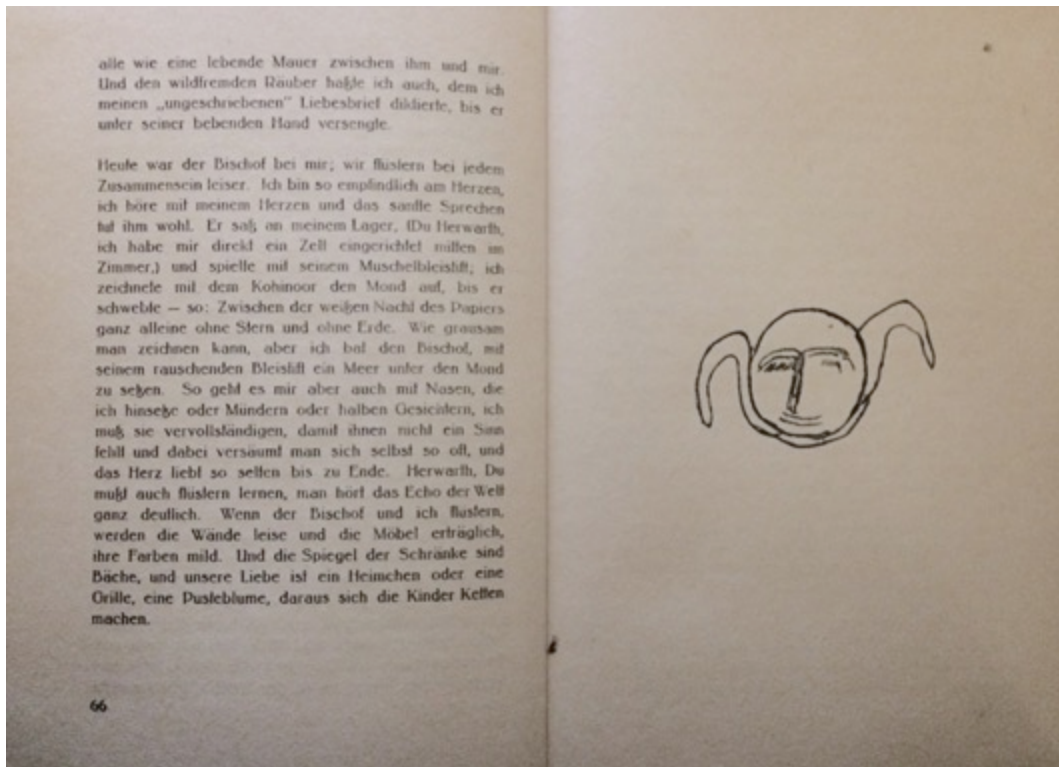


Figure 24: : *Mein Herz*. First Edition from 1912. Pp. 66-67.



In the representation of this delicate interplay in *Mein Herz*, all delicacy has been lost. The image itself is entirely divorced from the text and presented on a plain white page (Figure 24). This isolation of the image increases the sense of isolation articulated in the text, and it also makes the image itself far more abstract. No longer the moon it has been reduced simply to shapes. In the text the act of drawing is made incredibly material through Lasker-Schüler's description of it, especially in her focus on the bishop's pen. The pen is described as a shell-pencil and as the koh-i-noor. Koh-I-Noir is, of course, the giant diamond now part of the British Crown Jewels; but it is also a brand of fine drawing and writing utensils, Koh-i-noor Hardtmuth. If you know that koh-i-noor is a brand of pens and pencils, Lasker-Schüler's mention almost becomes some form of product placement; but if you don't, it seems a fantastic way to refer to your writing utensil, and the oriental flair of the name contributes to a distinct exoticism favored by Lasker-Schüler. Even if she was drawing with a koh-i-noor, the choice is no accident; she wants to evoke both the diamond and the pencil. The act of drawing with such a valuable pencil is part of her play with the bishop, and this play is more interactive than simply using another's pen. The bishop also participates in the act of drawing, creating the ocean below the moon. But the ocean is missing from the published drawing of the moon. Perhaps the bishop, though invited to participate, did not actually put pen to paper. The letter is about a moment, and the impressions tied up with that moment. The ephemeral nature of the afternoon spent with the bishop, whispering as Lasker-Schüler plays at camping in her Berlin apartment's living room, is perfectly captured by the drawing, which is not studied or perfected, but a simple sketch with quick, confident lines. The fleeting, ephemeral quality to the drawing is also characteristic of the other two letters contained in this entry of *Briefe nach Norwegen*. The second letter continues the letter-within-a-letter structure that Lasker-Schüler introduced early in the series. She describes a postcard she has recently received from a group dining at the Weinhaus Rheingold<sup>75</sup> in Berlin, suggesting that Lasker-Schüler's time in her living room tent has left her quite isolated. The letter also finally reveals that Walden and Nieman are no longer in Scandinavia:

Liebe Jungens, heut bekam ich eine Massenpostkarte aus dem Rheingold in Berlin: Liebe, beste Frau L.-Sch., Sie werden von uns allen vermißt!!! Loos. Liebe, unbekante Frau! Herr Loos hat über Ihnen solche Lobdudeleien gemacht, daß ich beinahe fürchte, Sie kennen zu lernen. Keine Dichterin in ganz Deutschland schrieb Verse wie die Frau L.-Sch., das ist das wenigste, was er sagt, und dann zitiert er den Tibet-Teppich von Morgen bis Abend. Aber hoffentlich sind Sie doch, wie er sagt. Und einmal werden wir uns doch begegnen. Viele Grüße Karin Michaelis.  
Arnold Schönberg. Webern. Beste Grüße Ludwig Kainer. Ada und Emil Nolde. Kurtchen. Besten grüßt Albert Ehrenstein. Herwarth Walden. Döblin —immer mal wider. Erna Reiß. Gustav Wallascheck. Hede von Trapp. William Dauer. Lene Kainer. Also seid Ihr beide doch wieder in Berlin; ich

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<sup>75</sup> Weinhaus Rheingold was a cavernous restaurant in Berlin that could accommodate over 4000 people. It was composed of various halls around different themes. Located in the Bellevue neighborhood of Berlin and built in 1905, it was destroyed by Allied bombs. Glaser, Karl-Heinz. *Aschingers „Bierquellen“ erobern Berlin*.

habe das ganz vergessen, laßt Euch ja meine Briefe aus Norwegen zurückschicken.

Else

[Dear boys, today I received a group postcard from the Rheingold in Berlin: Dear, best Mrs. L.-Sch., We all miss you!!! Loos.

Dear, unknown madame! Mr. Loos has praised you to such heights, that I am almost afraid to meet you. No poetess in all of Germany writes verses like Mrs. L.-Sch., that is the least of what he says, and then he recites “The Tibetan Rug” from morning till night. But hopefully you are indeed as he says. And one day we will surely meet. Best regards, Karin Michaelis. Arnold Schönberg. Webern. Best greetings Ludwig Kainer. Ada and Emil Nolde. Kurty. Best wishes Albert Ehrenstein. Herwarth Walden. Döblin—again and again. Erna Reiß. Gustav Wallascheck. Hede von Trapp. William Dauer. Lene Kainer. So you two are both back in Berlin after all; I completely forgot that, have my letters from Norway sent back to you.

Else

The group gathered at Weinhaus Rheingold, a giant restaurant and social gathering place on the Bellevue Straße in Berlin, is a fairly good representation of much of Lasker-Schüler’s social circle, the readership of *Der Sturm*, and more specifically the *Briefe nach Norwegen*. It is also fairly representative of those writing and advertising for and in *Der Sturm*. Adolf Loos, the architect, was the subject of one of Lasker-Schüler’s first profiles in *Der Sturm*, a frequent contributor to *Der Sturm*, and as reported by Karin Michaelis’s statement on the postcard, the esteem between the two artists was apparently mutual. Michaelis praise anticipates some of the criticism Lasker-Schüler was experiencing as she wrote *Briefe nach Norwegen*. With this criticism, we return to omnipresent figure of Karl Kraus. For her great friend, though a keen fan of Lasker-Schüler’s poetry, wrote to Herwarth Walden expressing his skepticism about the letters and concerned that she was essentially wasting her time the project:

Glauben Sie, dass jedes ihrer Gedichte, jeder Ihrer Zeilen auf der unglaublichen Höhe des Tibetteppich oder von >Es ist ein Weinen<<sup>76</sup> steht? Gerade diese Welt liegt oft unerschaffen da—in ihrem Stofflichsten.<sup>77</sup>

[Do you think that each of her poems, that each of her lines reaches the unimaginable heights of the Tibetan Rug or “There is a crying in the world”? This world often lies there incoherent—in its most material.]

As Lasker-Schüler experiments with form and attempts to expand beyond the merely poetic realm, it is difficult not to feel a great deal of sympathy for her. To have her work constantly measured by one great poem must have been very taxing. This criticism is especially acute

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<sup>76</sup> This is the first line of Lasker-Schüler’s poem “Versöhnung” [Reconciliation]. It was published in *Hebräische Balladen* in 1912, and originally in *Der Sturm* on August 4, 1910.

<sup>77</sup> Letter to Herwarth Walden, 1.1.1912.

when one takes into account the fact that Lasker-Schüler was publishing the installments of *Briefe nach Norwegen* as she wrote them. Any criticism had the potential to affect or even end the project. Returning to the postcard's signatures, analysis of the signatories further elucidates the Berlin-Vienna relationship. Arnold Schönberg, the Austrian composer who was then living in Berlin, signs, as does Anton Webern, Schönberg's Second Viennese School colleague. The poet Albert Ehrenstein was also of Viennese origin and a frequent contributor to Kraus's *Die Fackel*. Returning to Berlin proper, we find Ludwig Kainer, the doctor and artist, as well as his famous artist wife, Lene, and sitting next to them, the controversial German-Danish painter and printmaker Emil Nolde and his wife Ada. Buried in the middle, the reader encounters "Kürtchen," our own Kurt Niemann, Herwarth Walden's travel companion. And after Niemann's signature, we find that Herwarth Walden has also signed the postcard, including both his first and last names. The list continues with the novelist and journalist Alfred Döblin and his then fiancé Erna Reiß, the art-editor Gustav Wallascheck, Austrian poet Hede von Trapp (today perhaps most famous for her famous brother, Captain von Trapp of *Sound of Music* fame), and William Wauer, the sculptor and silent film director. A careful reader would notice that the travelers, ostensibly still in Scandinavia, are in fact sitting near Potsdamer Platz, at the Weinhaus Rheingold in Berlin. Lasker-Schüler does not leave readers to observe this themselves, but claims to have forgotten that the travelers are home and asks that they send for her letters that have arrived in Norway after they left and returned to Berlin.

If this letter were the last of the bunch, Lasker-Schüler's revelation about Walden and Niemann would seem quite final, no more *Briefe nach Norwegen*! Yet it is not the last letter; it is immediately followed by another letter detailing Karl Kraus's criticism of Lasker-Schüler's latest project, criticism partially anticipated by Michealis's comments from the Weinhaus Rheingold postcard:

Der Dalai Lama meint, einige meiner Modelle haben nicht den Anspruch auf meine Kunst. Anders kann ich mir nicht des Ministers Worte deuten. Aber es kommt ja nur darauf an, wie ich die Modelle zum Ausdruck bringe. Ich habe weiter nichts mit ihnen zu tun. Und meine Dichtung werde ich später verkaufen, meine Seele an einen Verleger verschachern, und dennoch hat der Dalai Lama mir die Augen geöffnet; ich empfinde seitdem mein Dichterinensein für ein Pfandleihum, immer bewerte ich die Menschen, fast ohne Ausnahme, zu hoch. O, diese Verluste!

[The Dalai Lama thinks some of my creations have cannot claim to be my art. I can't interpret the minister's words any differently. But it really depends on how I express the creations. I won't have anything more to do with them. And later I will sell my writing, barter my soul away to a publisher, and still the Dalai Lama has opened my eyes; since then I take my poetic essence to be something pawned; I always assess people, almost without exception, too high. Oh, these losses!]

On its own, this letter is fairly mysterious. Kraus is skeptical of the merits of some of Lasker-Schüler's attempts, that much is clear. She seems also to express a general disappointment in the way others have behaved. The reference to "bartering [her] soul away," may refer to an eventual attempt to publish a novel and through it perhaps achieve commercial success. The claim that the "Dalai Lama has opened my eyes," seems more biting, especially as he has opened her eyes to the unflattering possibility that her "poetic essence is something pawned." The mention of Kraus as the Dalai Lama and his critique of *Briefe nach Norwegen* becomes far more clear when put into context with the letters Lasker-Schüler sent to Kraus, and those exchanged by Walden and Kraus about Lasker-Schüler's project. Three weeks before this installment of *Briefe nach Norwegen* was published, Lasker-Schüler had written Kraus the following letter:

Werter Herr Minister.

Ich will nicht behaupten, sie können meine Schrift lesen—namentlich dann wohl nicht wo sie zu Hieroglyphen wird. Aber ich mache Ihnen einen Vorschlag—die Lupe v e r g r ö ß e r t alles. Mir geht es schlecht; und ich habe eine Antwort von Ihnen an mich Selbst erwartet. Ich bin nicht zu verwöhnen, Sie brauchen keine Angst haben. Ich mache mir nie eine Ehre aus etwas. Ich erkläre hiermit—: unsere freundschaftlichen sowie diplomatischen Beziehungen für erledigt. Der Prinz von Theben. Ich mißbrauche Ihre Briefe nicht. Ich werfe jeden Brief nach gelesener Thatsache fort.<sup>78</sup>

[Esteemed Mr. Minister.

I do not want to claim that you can read my writing—especially not when indeed it turns into hieroglyphs. But I have a suggestion for you—a loupe *enlarges* everything. I'm not doing well; and I expected an answer from you to me personally. I can't be spoiled, you need not be afraid. I never flatter myself. I make it known here —: our friendly, as well as our diplomatic relations are hereby over. The Prince of Thebes.

I will not abuse your letters. After reading it, I throw each letter out.]

Kraus does not respond to Lasker-Schüler directly, but rather to her husband, multiple times:

“Ihre l. Frau hat mir einen Brief geschrieben, den ich nur zum kleinsten Teil verstehen bzw. lesen kann. Sie ist ganz grundlos beunruhigt. So viel entnehme ich daraus. Grüßen Sie sie herzlich von mir!”<sup>79</sup>

[Your dear wife sent me a letter, of which I can understand or even read only the least part She is troubled without any reason whatever. This much I do understand. Greet her cordially from me!"]

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<sup>78</sup> *Else Lasker-Schüler: Briefe Vol. 1 1893-1913* pp.210-211.

<sup>79</sup> Letter to Herwarth Walden. 11.10.1911

“Viele herzliche Grüße, auch an Ihre Frau, die zu einem >>Abbruch der diplomatischen Beziehungen<< zwischen mir und der Türkei nicht den geringsten Grund hat.”<sup>80</sup>

[Many cordial greetings to your wife, who has not the least justification for a “break of diplomatic relations” between me and Turkey.]

Lasker-Schüler’s anger at not being taken seriously and, especially in Kraus’s case, not being responded to directly—but rather via her husband, and at the criticism she faced over the letters began to come to a head. To Walden’s credit, he refused to act as an intermediary for Kraus, responding to each complaint with a demurrer.<sup>81</sup> The anger and isolation felt by Lasker-Schüler is palatable throughout the letters between the three, and reaches a crescendo at end of this series. This crescendo takes the letter exchange out of the private realm and into the public realm of *Der Sturm* and *Briefe nach Norwegen* when Lasker-Schüler addresses the Dalai Lama’s comments. Kraus rises magnanimously to the bait with yet another letter addressed to Walden: “Letzter Norwegen-Brief *sehr* schön, außerordentlich. Im vorletzten die Dalai-Lama-Sache ein gröbliches Mißverständnis, das Sie hätten beseitigen können.” [Last Norway-letter was *very* beautiful, extraordinary. In the previous one, the Dalai-Lama-matter was a gross misunderstanding that you [Herwarth Walden] could have left out.]<sup>82</sup>

When we return to Lasker-Schüler’s text on December 2, 1911 in *Der Sturm*, Kraus’s later complaint is also anticipated:

Lieber Herwarth, willst Du im Sturm veröffentlichen lassen, daß sich alle Vertreter unseres gemeinschaftlichen Cafés melden mögen, die den Wunsch hegen, nicht mehr in den Briefen an Euch erwähnt zu werde. Ich gewähre ihnen freien Abzug.

[Dear Herwarth, if you would publish in *Der Sturm*, that all the representatives of our cafe community might speak up who no longer wish be mentioned in the letters to you two, I will guarantee them safe passage.]

In this final passage, Lasker-Schüler does two things: she explicitly acknowledges the real world outside of the letters and further engages with the criticism her *Briefe nach Norwegen*

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<sup>80</sup> Letter to Herwarth Walden. 11.14.1911. p. 382.

<sup>81</sup> “Mein lieber Freund. Ich weiß nichts über den Briefwechsel zwischen Ihnen und meiner Frau. Ich habe ihr Ihre Worte mitgeteilt. Sie ist, glaube ich etwas beleidigt, daß Sie ihr nicht selbst einmal schreiben.” [My dear friend. I know nothing about the correspondence between you and my wife. I have relayed your words to her. She is, I think, somewhat offended that you haven’t even written her directly.] Letter to Karl Kraus. 11.12.1911. p. 380.

“Zu den Sachen meiner Frau schreibe ich prinzipiell nichts, sie würde es sich auch nicht gefallen lassen.” [On the matters concerning my wife, I am deliberately writing nothing. She would not like it.] Letter to Karl Kraus. 11.19.1911. p.386

<sup>82</sup> Letter to Herwarth Walden, December 17, 1911. p. 391

have met with. As with many of Lasker-Schüler's letters, it is unclear where one letter begins and the other ends. This passage comes out of a letter that is initially addressed to both Walden and Niemann, and it establishes for both Lasker-Schüler and the reader that two have long since returned to Berlin. In the final coda, beginning with "Lieber Herwarth," Lasker-Schüler responds to the criticism that her letters are gossipy, nothing more than an accounting of goings-on amongst the café set. This is very much the criticism of Kraus in the correspondence with Walden. It also suggests that others in Lasker-Schüler's circle are irritated to find themselves in the lines of her published letters *Der Sturm* and in fact have asked not to be included. There is a certain contradiction present in this collection of letters. In the one, Lasker-Schüler reveals the return of the addressees Walden and Niemann to Berlin and asks that they request her letters back from Norway. In this final coda, she claims that she will respect the wishes of her contemporaries who do not wish to be mentioned in her published letters and leave them out. The first comment (to Kraus) suggests the letters will come to an end; the jig is up. But the second (to Walden) suggests that there will be more letters to come. The reader is left in an uncertain place—will the letters continue? Is this an angry, short goodbye?

No clues are given in the rest of the issue. *Briefe nach Norwegen* is followed by a short article on the current state of art, "Die Nachfolger der Impressionisten," by Michel Puy; a stark woodcut of three women bathing, "Akte," by Kirchner; and a long column by Trust<sup>83</sup> touching various current events and topics—the German Kaiser, the term Scandinavia, and the downfall of theater director Martin Zickel due to his numerous affairs with leading ladies, despite his married state. The non-advertising content of *Der Sturm* ends with a poem by Ernst Hardt. When this issue of *Briefe nach Norwegen* was published, the reading public was largely in on the falseness of the premise; if they frequented any of the public spaces of bohemian Berlin, they knew Herwarth Walden and Kurt Niemann had long since returned from Scandinavia. In the context of *Mein Herz*, this contemporary reality loses its punch. The readers of *Mein Herz* are a different audience. They are an audience presumably more removed from the immediate realities in Berlin and a more broadly German-speaking audience, as published novel presumably has a larger reach than a Berlin-based avant-garde periodical. On a textual level, the suspense produced in the week between these letters and the next set a week later, is entirely missing. The text flows smoothly from this turning point to the next letter. Any break rupture in the sense of time is entirely lost. And yet this series of letters on December 2, 1911, serves as a turning point for *Briefe nach Norwegen*. In them Lasker-Schüler has faced her critics, has acknowledged that her husband has returned (although perhaps not to her), and has continued to provide her readers with her own version of Berlin.

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<sup>83</sup> "Trust" is a pseudonym for the anonymous column, but all signs point to its having been written by Herwarth Walden. Walden's absence from the content of *Der Sturm* during the publication of *Briefe nach Norwegen* helps perpetuate the conceit that he is away in Scandinavia when Lasker-Schüler writes to him.

DECEMBER 9, 1911:  
Criticism & Hearts on a String

One week after facing criticism from her contemporaries and admitting that Walden and Niemann have returned from Scandinavia, Lasker-Schüler's letters become even more fantastic and introspective, and only refer fleetingly to the acknowledgement that the pair have returned. She also returns to an earlier nickname, Tino von Bagdad, bestowed upon her by Peter Hille. While she does not acknowledge the pair's return, the criticism of *Briefe nach Norwegen* weighs heavily on her. She brings it up multiple times, first in regards to a recent conversation with "Cajus-Majus," a.k.a. Kurt Hiller:

Was brauch ich ihn zu fragen, ob den Leuten meine Norwegischen Briefe gefallen? Er wird immer jemand wissen, der streikt. Gestern hat sich Dein Doktor stirnrunzelt bei ihm beklagt über sein Vorkommen in meinen Briefen an Euch. Da war ich ja nun platt. Ferner will sich ein Urenkel Bachs das Leben nehmen, (er hat es Cajus-Majus versprochen), falls ich ihn erwähnte in meiner Korrespondenz. Schade um ihn, er hat ein rosiges glorreiches Lächeln um den Mund. Er wird sich nun in die Wellen des heiligen Antonius stürzen, weil eine Dichterin ihm ein Ständchen brachte verwegen mitten im Sturm.<sup>84</sup>

[Why do I need to ask him, if people like my Norwegian letters? He will always know someone who objects. Wrinkling his forehead yesterday, your doctor complained to him about his appearance in my letters to you both. With that I was just done. Beyond that, a great-grandson of Bach is supposed to be threatening to take his life, (he has promised it to Cajus-Majus), should I mention him in my correspondence. Too bad about him, he has a rosy, glorious smile around his mouth. Nevertheless, he will plunge into the waves of St. Anthony, just because a poetess boldly brought him a serenade in the middle of the Sturm.]

The criticism faced by Lasker-Schüler mentioned here, is the most sensational—that some great-grandson of Bach's was threatening to commit suicide! My attempts to situate this account within Lasker-Schüler's own time line have been futile; but if we simply take this statement at face value, the account speaks to her perception that the critical tide was turning against her. Even Hiller's doctor didn't care to be mentioned in her letters! Also included in this passage is Lasker-Schüler's own understanding of the role of her letters within *Der Sturm*, that they are "a serenade in the midst of the storm," Well, "Sturm" or storm. Storm is the literal translation of "Sturm," and also the name of the periodical. Lasker-Schüler, not known for being very funny, is making a pun. But she is also defining her view of the environment of *Briefe nach Norwegen*—as linked to their position within *Der Sturm*. A serenade can always be a serenade, but a serenade in a storm certainly carries more weight than a

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<sup>84</sup> *Der Sturm*. 12.9.1911. pp. 4-5.

serenade outside of a storm. In the reading of this text as *Mein Herz*, this pun almost entirely disintegrates and is sundered from its contemporary context.

Looking beyond the criticism Lasker-Schüler addresses in this issue, this installment of the letters is the most elaborately illustrated of all, featuring four different images within the five letters. On the visual level, the increase in graphic images is dramatic, with four images spread out across a single opening (Figure 24). When one compares the initial relationship of the images and



Figure 24: *Der Sturm* December 9, 1911. Pp. 4-5

text to their representation in *Mein Herz*, the difference is dramatic. In the original layout the images and the letters become part of a fluid text; they inform one another's interpretation and are presented without individual emphasis; in *Der Sturm*, they are part of a network of text and image. The intimacy of the text and image and the images with one another is lost in *Mein Herz*.

Looking at the individual images and the corresponding text, the initial impression becomes more complicated. Constant in these letters is the entreaty to Herwarth Walden, that he include her comments in *Der Sturm*, "Herwarth, Du kannst folgendes im Sturm veröffentlichen," [Herwarth, you can publish the following in the Sturm]. What Walden is allowed to publish is a gruesome illustration, "Unter blinder Bedeckung Heinrich Manns, reichte der Abbé Max Oppenheimer den Kritikern München das Blut Kokoschkas," [Under the blind cover of Heinrich Mann, Abbé Max Oppenheimer offers the blood of Kokoschka to the critics of Munich] (Figure 25). The drawing and text refer to a recent exhibition in



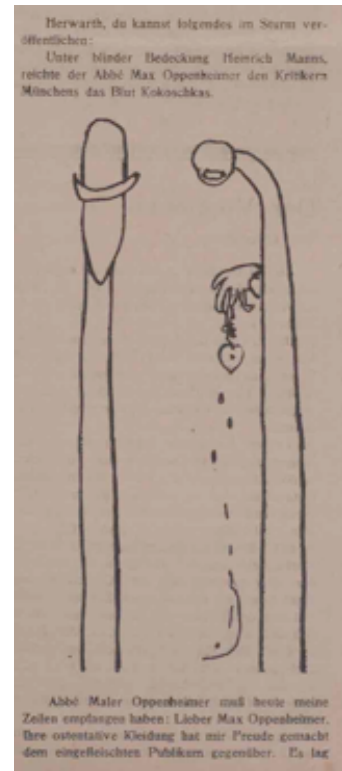
Munich of the Austrian painter Max Oppenheimer.<sup>85</sup> The text that follows details Lasker-Schüler's criticism of Oppenheimer as a cheap imitator of Kokoschka, although Lasker-Schüler does seem to extend to Oppenheimer the possibility that he was simply over-influenced by Kokoschka:

“Sie sind, nehme ich an, in Kokoschka verliebt und Ihre Bilder sind abgeplückte Werke, darum fehlt ihnen die Wurzel... Man kopiert doch ehrlich in den Museen die alten Meister und setzt nicht seinen Namen darunter. Kokoschka ist ein alter Meister, später geboren, ein furchtbares Wunder.”

[You are, I gather, in love with Kokoschka and your images are plucked works, and for this reason their roots are missing... One copies honestly the old masters in the museums and does not place his own name under them. Kokoschka is an old master, born later, a terrible miracle.]

Lasker-Schüler returns here to her visual metaphor of Kokoschka's artistry, that he is a plant, and that he creates plant life—roots and all through his creations. The accompanying graphic by her is a disturbing one. It shows two long snake-like figures standing upright next to each other. One wears a bowler hat and is presumably a representation of the critics of Munich.

It has a face, but the face is blank and without any features, and together with the bowler it evokes images of cold businessmen in Edwardian suits. The figure opposite is slightly taller and is drawn with a rough mouth and a single misshapen hand protruding from its body. A bloody heart is connected to the middle finger. The faceless critic and the blind artist speak to Lasker-Schüler's ability to get maximum effect with few lines. The image below, presumably an image of Kokoschka is the opposite of that of Oppenheimer and the critic (Figure 26).<sup>86</sup> Kokoschka is fully human, with a face, ears, clothing, bushy eyelashes, and a close shaven head. The earlier caveat that Kokoschka was drawn in a dilettantish fashion is gone. That omitted statement as well as the number of images speak to Lasker-Schüler's growing confidence, or perhaps to her contrarian nature in the face of criticism. Below the image is the short text: “Wer zweifelt an seinen Urwüchsigkeit? Er nimmt gern seine erste Gestalt an als bäurischer Engel.” [Who doubts his earthiness? He gladly takes on his first form as a rustic angel.] In the novelized form, both images, which in *Der Sturm* are part of

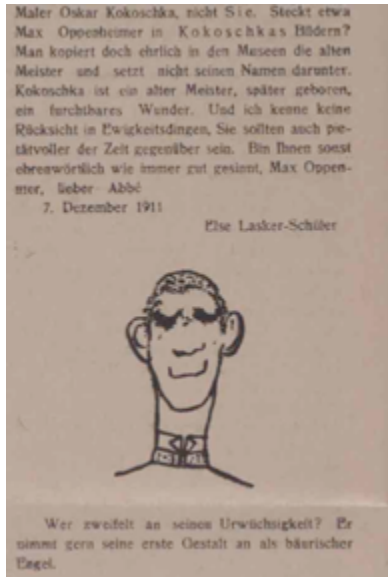


**Figure 25: Der Sturm**  
**December 9, 1911. P. 4**

<sup>85</sup> Max Oppenheimer was heavily influenced by Kokoschka and lived in Berlin from 1911-15. He collaborated with *Die Aktion* at this time, the chief rival of *Der Sturm*.

<sup>86</sup> The text below suggests that the caricature is Kokoschka, but does not state explicitly state that it is indeed he. If you compare this image to Lasker-Schüler's explicit drawing of Kokoschka, it is clear that the two represent the same subject.

the columns of text and no larger than a third of a column in the case of the Max Oppenheimer and critics images and a quarter or less for the one of Kokoschka, are blown up and set alone on blank pages. The interaction between the text and the image is gone and the relationship of the two is now left for the reader to discern.



**Figure 26: Der Sturm**  
December 9, 1911. P. 4

In addition to a newfound confidence with her artwork, Lasker-Schüler asserts her artistic bona fides by returning to her royal persona. She recreates Berlin in the royal vein, speaking of a walk on which she is accompanied by her maidservant through the “Friedrichsuherpeterbaumstraße in Halensee” on which she ruminates on the time when St. Peter Hille, the prophet, was still alive and on the nature of who is allowed to love. The rest of this letter is deeply personal and introspective. In it she leaves the artistic world and its peccadilloes and laments those who are able to love. It seems she does not include herself in this list. She recounts her day-to-day activities in a way that takes the ordinary and weaves it into the fantastic. In one section, she describes a visit from Georg Koch and the bonbons he brought her:

Georg Koch [...] brachte mir Chokoladenbonbons mit. Ich aß alle die süßen Dingen mit Marzipan und Zuckerfüllung hintereinander auf. Die waren in silbergrünes Papier eingewickelt mit Goldsternen. Ich spielte die ganze Nacht damit; erst trug ich einen Mantel aus dem seligen Märchenschein, dann standen meine Füße in silbergrünen Schuhen mit Sternen, eine Krone glänzte in meinen Haaren, ich saß plötzlich im Zirkus mit Lorchen Hundertmark, die durfte mich begleiten [...]Es hat kein Mensch gehört, alles guckt in die große runde Manége und viele, viele Hände klaschen. Lieschen Hundertmark hat eine Kommode, darauf stehen: ein Muschelkästchen, in seinen Spiegel starrt der goldene Porzellanengel von Sockel. Ein kleiner, blauer Glasleuchter mit einer gelben, gerippten Weihnachtskerze und ein glitzernden Osterei, man sieht darin das Feenreich. Und daneben liegt ein Gebetbuch aus grünem Samt, aus ihm hing ein Buchzeichen aus silbergrünen Glanzstaniol mit goldenen Sternen.

[Georg Koch... brought me chocolate bonbons. I ate all the sweet things filled with marzipan and sugar filling one after the other. They were wrapped in silver-green paper with gold stars. I played with them all night; first I wore a shimmering coat out of the holy fairytale radiance, then my feet stood in silver-green shoes with stars, a crown glimmered in my hair, I suddenly sat at the circus with Lorchen Hundertmark, they were allowed to accompany

me...Not one person had heard it, everyone looked into the great round menagerie and many, many hands clapped. Lieschen Hundertmark has a chest of drawers, on top are: a little shell box, in its mirror the golden porcelain angel stares from a pedestal. A small, blue glass candlestick with a yellow, ribbed Christmas candle and a shimmering easter egg, inside one sees the fairy realm. And next to this lies a prayer book of green velvet, hanging out of it a bookmark of silver-green tin-foil with golden stars.]

This passage in particular illuminates the magic of Lasker-Schüler's prose, she turns an entirely mundane object—a candy wrapper—into an object with transformative powers. The simple foil chocolate wrapper transforms into a coat, perhaps Joseph's coat when considering Lasker-Schüler's dual identity as Jussuf Prinz von Theben. The candy wrappers, silver-green with gold stars, are not static; they also become the shoes on her feet, a crown, an easter egg, as well as a prayer book by the end of the passage. The chocolate wrappers also have the ability to change the setting multiple times. The transportive properties of the chocolate wrappers take Lasker-Schüler from her apartment to the circus, and finally to Lieschen Hundertmark's apartment and the collection of objects on her dresser.<sup>87</sup> The text is written in a circle, or perhaps a spiral, consistently returning to the motif of the silver-green candy wrappers with gold stars. After this meditation on candy wrappers, Lasker-Schüler transitions into more impressionist accounts of her days. Lasker-Schüler passes on some gossip: Paul Zech is moving to Berlin from Elberfeld. The final missive addresses the tangible lack of focus of this collection of letters. The acknowledgement that Walden and Niemann have returned clearly weighs heavily on Lasker-Schüler. In passing, the reader gains further insight into how Lasker-Schüler has made this discovery that they were back—it was not through the names signed to a postcard, but presumably through a chance encounter with Herwarth Walden himself on the streets of Berlin.

Lieber Herwarth, ich habe diese Nacht wieder verbummelt geträumt. Ich schlenderte über den Kurfürstendamm wie ein Strolch angezogen, in zerlumpten Hosen und grünlich, abgetragendem Rock, ich dachte nur stumpfe Dinge, auch war ich angetrunken —aus—Traurigkeit.—Der Wind heulte meine rote Nase an. Du kennst doch so einen Zustand—gemildert—bei mir, wenn Du verreist warst und wiederkamst, und mich hier oben am Henriettenplatz trafst, als ob ich obdachlos sei.<sup>88</sup>

[Dear Herwarth, again I walked the night away in dreams. I ambled across the Kurfürstendamm dressed like a vagabond in ragged trousers and a greenish, threadbare skirt. I thought only obtuse things, also I was drunk out of sadness. The wind howled at my red nose. You know this kind of

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<sup>87</sup> In understanding Lasker-Schüler's love of the circus, her access to oriental objects and culture, an generally speaking, her every day life, Sylke Kirschnick's *Tausend und Ein Zeichnen: Else Lasker-Schülers Orient und die Berliner Alltags- und Populärkultur um 1900*, has been very helpful and informative.

<sup>88</sup> *Der Sturm*. 12.9.1911. p.5.

condition in me—a milder version—when you were away and came back, and you met me up here at Henriettenplatz as though I were homeless.]

This passage very raw, very emotional, and especially startling. In attempting to analyze such a text, the rhetorical strategy of the text is a good place to start. Above all else, Lasker-Schüler letter uses a circular path, linking events and language to provide unity. The paragraph centers on Lasker-Schüler's sense of homelessness, a realization that gradually builds up. She ambles the night away dressed in worn clothing and drunk. Not drunk on alcohol, but rather on sadness. One of the common signs of drunkenness, a red nose, is also present. The red nose is not caused by alcohol, but rather by the howling wind, an element that adds to the overall bleakness of Lasker-Schüler's setting. And this contemporary setting recalls the time when Lasker-Schüler initially encountered Walden back from his trip, encountering her as though she were homeless. Lasker-Schüler leads readers to gradually feel as though they too are with her on the icy street in Berlin, the wind howling and the warmth of the cafe a far away memory. The image beneath this short letter is quite disturbing (Figure 27). At first glance, it looks like a heart-shaped kite.

The heart has a human face and wears glasses. It is frowning. But when we turn back to the initial image of Max Oppenheimer offering the bleeding heart of Kokoschka to the critics of Munich, the heart in that image hangs from a chain with links like the kite's tail. Reading these two images in conjunction with one another provides a different context for the second image. The image could also be a magnification of the earlier heart. Working against such a theory is the orientation of the image. Oppenheimer holds Kokoschka's heart by the chain connected at the top of the heart. This heart is connected at the point. Although these hearts may not be the same heart, the similarities between the two provide a different valence of interpretation for the second. If one reads the second heart like the first, this image is equally disturbing. Is it Lasker-Schüler's heart? Has her encounter with Walden at Henriettenplatz resulted in such a violent removal of her heart from her chest?

As with all of Lasker-Schüler's letters in *Briefe nach Norwegen*, there is no letter in response. The letters exist in isolation; they are attempts to engage Walden and Niemann, as well as the broader bohemian community of Berlin in a dialogue and are never answered. Or perhaps are answered with silence.

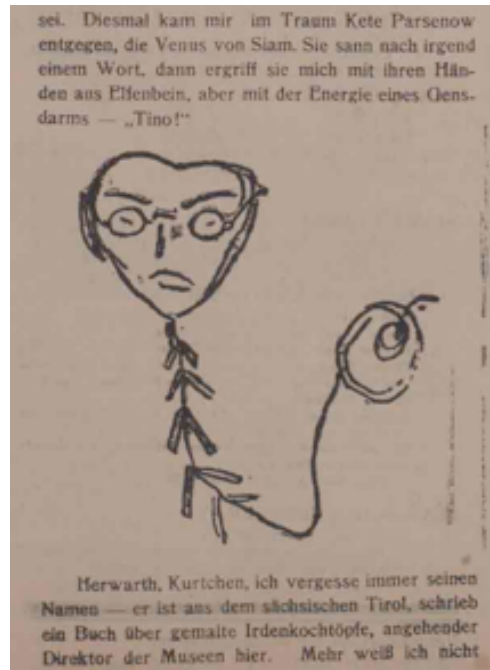


Figure 27: Der Sturm December 9, 1911. P. 5

JANUARY 27, 1912:  
An End?

*Briefe nach Norwegen* almost comes to an end with a short collection of letters on January 27, 1912. The last letter is classic *Briefe nach Norwegen*: Lasker-Schüler reflects on contemporary developments in the Berlin cultural scene, reflects on the criticism met by the letters, and comments on the length of Walden and Niemann's trip to Scandinavia (three months!). Although *Briefe nach Norwegen* often reached out to *Der Sturm*, mentioning its contributors and reviewing the same events advertised, the relationship between the author and the journal wasn't quite reciprocal. There is a sort of semi-permeable membrane that is established—Lasker-Schüler can cross from the world of her letters into the “real” world of 1911-12 Berlin, but those on the outside cannot cross into her world. Within *Der Sturm*, the *Briefe nach Norwegen* aren't mentioned, and although the letters are written in part to Herwarth Walden, the editor of *Der Sturm*, he never responds. But this installment includes an intervention by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, an illustration of “Der Prinz von Theben” smack in the middle of Lasker-Schüler's last letter. In many ways, this last entry in *Briefe nach Norwegen* provides a fitting end, or non-end, to Lasker-Schüler's project, and the inclusion of another's perception of her establishes the success of her attempt to fashion her own identity through the serial publication project.

The final letter begins with the account of a recent cultural activity:

Ich schrieb:

Heute Mittag aß ich die Erstgeburt, zwar nicht Linsen, aber dicke Erbsen. Es schwämmen Bröckchen darin und die Ueberreste eines Schweinsohrs. Ich bin aufgebläht, aber Ihr Antlitz, Cajus, hat Monderweiterung bekommen. Wie dürften Sie Sich erlauben, uns, vor allen Dingen mich, in Ihrem Vortrag mit Idioten anzureden; zumal Sie genau wissen, ich bin Idiot. Aber erinnern brauchen Sie mich nicht daran, das ist unzart, das ist direkt ordinär von Ihnen. Ich komme nicht mehr ins Gnu, ich hab genug.<sup>89</sup>

[I wrote:

This afternoon I ate the first-born, but not lentils, rather fat peas. Little crusts swam in it and the remains of a pig ear. I was bloated, but your countenance, Cajus, has taken on the extension of the moon. How could you permit yourself to address us, and above all me, along with idiots in your lecture, especially as you know for certain that I am an idiot. But you do not need to remind me of it, that is indelicate, it is downright vulgar of you. I won't come to Gnu again, I've had enough.]

This is not the only time that Lasker-Schüler has mentioned the cabaret the Gnu led by Kurt Hiller; and from the beginning, her mentions of the cabaret have been fraught—she is unsure if she likes the cabaret or not. As a result of competition among the initial founders

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<sup>89</sup> *Der Sturm*. 27.1.1912. pp.3-5.

of the Neopathetisches Cabaret, Georg Heym, Kurt Hiller, and Jakob von Hoddis, among others, Kurt Hiller founded the competing Cabaret Gnu.<sup>90</sup> Within the world of expressionism, expressing favor for either cabaret was a partisan issue, one that *Der Sturm* attempted to avoid, if the advertisements for each are anything to go by (Figure 28).

Lasker-Schüler's distaste for Cabaret Gnu was certainly a matter of taste, but in early 1912, it was perhaps also a statement against inevitability. With the death of Georg Heym in mid-January 1912, the Neopathetisches Cabaret came to an end, and the competition between the two models of expressionist cabaret was over, with only one left standing, Kurt Hiller's. Regardless of the internal politics of expressionism, Lasker-Schüler almost certainly felt herself made an object of fun by the cabaret, and her revenge, so to speak, comes later in the letter:

Lieber Herwarth, außerdem habe ich Direktor Cajus-Majus = Dr. Hiller in seinem Gnutheater am Vortragstisch auf der Bühne sitzend gezeichnet. Er spricht vom gescheckten Mondgnukalb —im seinem Hirne —elektrisch spiegelt sich die Birne.

[Dear Herwarth, besides, I've drawn Director Cajus-Majus = Dr. Hiller sitting at a lecture table on the stage of his Gnu-theater. He is speaking about the checkered moon-gnu-calf in his brain—the light bulb is reflected electrically.]

Below these two sentences, Lasker-Schüler includes a caricature of the theater director in question (Figure 29). Hiller is presented in a suit and tie, buttoned up to his chin. He really looks quite bourgeois! Hiller's hair continues the bourgeois presentation, completely bald except for two patches rounded over the ears, his bald head becomes a new space of play for Lasker-Schüler. Above his head hangs a bare light bulb. The light bulb is reflected on Hiller's forehead so that it also becomes a part of Hiller's face. The light bulb is connected by a cord, and as the light bulb itself is reflected on Hiller's shiny bald head, the reflection of the cord comes to define his nose. Without the light bulb cord, Hiller's nose



Figure 28: *Der Sturm* December 9, 1911. P. 8

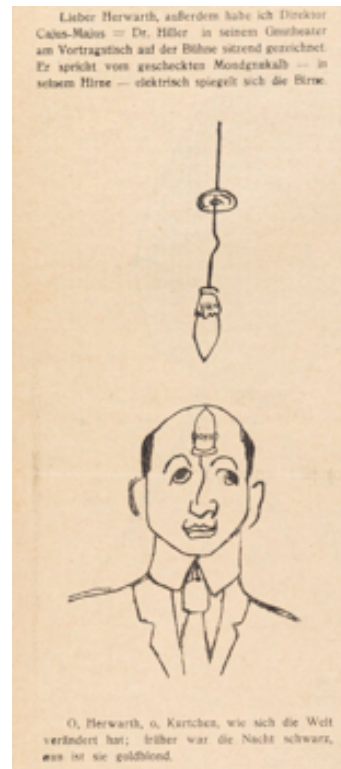


Figure 29: *Der Sturm* January 27, 1912. P.6

<sup>90</sup> Bauschinger, Sigrid. "The Berlin Moderns: Else Lasker-Schüler and Cafe Culture," in *Berlin Metropolis: Jews & The New Culture*, ed. Emily D. Bilski. pp. 64-65.

would essentially disappear from his face. Even more amusing is the relationship between the light bulb and the reflection of the light bulb. While the light bulb has a crown-like cover over it, this cover is missing from the reflection on Hiller's forehead. This is all the more beguiling when one considers the composition of the nose and the lightbulb cord. The cord has a slight curve in it, and this curve is replicated to form the shape of Hiller's nose. Across the reflected lightbulb, there is also another feature not originally present. Initially, the lines forming the crown of the lightbulb could be perceived as a shadow, rather than a reflection of the crown, but I think they are an original element not contained in the original light bulb. Although it is difficult to make out, there is some writing across the bulb, not entirely legible, it looks like ELOYIM. Now, as far as I know, eloyim doesn't mean anything, but it is awfully close to Elohim, one of the names of god mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. This is all a little confusing, until one considers the line below the image:

O, Herwarth, o, Kurtchen, wie sich die Welt verändert hat; früher war die  
Nacht schwarz, nun ist sie goldblond.

[Oh, Herwarth, oh, Kurty, how the world has changed; earlier the night was  
black, now it is gold-blonde.]

Lasker-Schüler's world is a changed one, a world once black, but now gold-blonde. This is a change that has been brought about by the advent of electricity and the electric lightbulb. The name of god across the top of this lightbulb links to the spoken first sentence of the Hebrew Bible: And God said, "Let there be light." In Hebrew, the name used for god here is indeed Elohim. The reference to light and the creation of light in this biblical context takes on a certain irreverent or tongue-in-cheek meaning, one perhaps linked to the apparent and maybe intentional misspelling of Elohim. Electric lights have changed night from its natural black, but it is not the light of full daylight, rather a soft gold-blonde. The change is unnatural and the lack of accurate reflection across the forehead echoes the unnatural, manipulated nature of the light, it is not a world formed or reformed by god, but rather one changed by man.

Kurt Hiller is not the only figure who receives treatment, but he is dealt the most explicit hand. A far more subtle treatment is extended to Gottfried Benn when Lasker-Schüler ruminates on the state of writing poetry:

Jungens, nun hab ich's raus mit den Künsten: man muß zeichnen, wie man  
operiert. Ob man ein Stück Haut zuviel skalpiert oder einen Strich länger  
zieht, darauf kommt es ja gar nicht an!

[Boys, I'm fed up with the arts: one has to draw the way one operates. If one  
scalpels away a piece of skin too much or extends a dash longer, that is not at  
all what it's about!]

Benn's famous poem, "Kleine Aster," written in 1911 and published in *Die Aktion*, was published in early 1912 as part of *Morgue und andere Gedichte*, Benn's first poetry collection.

Benn and Lasker-Schüler would later become famous for their relationship, but this poem was written long before they met, as was Lasker-Schüler's oblique reference to it. A deliciously morbid and decidedly creepy poem, "Kleine Aster" details an autopsy:

Kleine Aster

Ein ersoffener Bierfahrer wurde auf den Tisch gestemmt.  
Irgendeiner hatte ihm eine dunkelhellila Aster  
zwischen die Zähne geklemmt.  
Als ich von der Brust aus  
unter der Haut  
mit einem langen Messer  
Zunge und Gaumen herausschnitt,  
muß ich sie angestoßen haben, denn sie glitt  
in das nebenliegende Gehirn.  
Ich packte sie ihm in die Brusthöhle  
zwischen die Holzwolle,  
als man zunähte.  
Trinke dich satt in deiner Vase!  
Ruhe sanft,  
kleine Aster!

[Little Aster

A drunken beer-driver is stemmed on the table. / Someone clamped a dark-  
light-purple aster/ between his teeth./ As I cut out/ from the chest/under  
the skin/the tongue and the gums/with a long knife/ I must have disturbed  
it, because it slipped/ into the brain lying nearby./ I packed it into the chest  
cavity/ between the cotton wads/as one sewed him up./Drink your fill in  
your vase!/ Rest in peace,/ little aster!]

The similarities in language between Lasker-Schüler's complaint that poets must "draw as they operate," and be careful not to "scalpel away a piece of skin too much," and Benn's description of performing an autopsy with a large knife and sewing the flower up into the chest cavity suggest that Lasker-Schüler had read the poem and is responding to it in an oblique manner. There is the sense that Lasker-Schüler has more to say about Benn and his radically different brand of expressionism, but that does not happen within the space of the *Briefe nach Norwegen*. There is a certain tiredness at this point in Lasker-Schüler's writing. Just as she has had it with the cabaret at Gnu, she seems to have had it with these letters:

Ich schreibe nun schon drei Monate oder noch länger norwegische Briefe.  
Verreist Ihr beide nicht wieder bald? Vielleicht regt mich eine zweite Reise  
auch so an, wie Eure Nordpolfahrt. Ich habe zwar verlernt, mit Sonne zu  
schreiben; meine Vorfahrgeschichten verlangen Morgenland. Auch dem  
historischen Stil habe ich Schlittschuh angeschnallt, und ihn so mit



fortgerissen, es kam mir nicht darauf an. Ich schrieb also den größten Zeh; die Historie aber, kann man nur mit dem Herzen schreiben; das Herz ist Kaiser. Womit schreibe ich eigentlich meine Gedichte? Was glaubt Ihr wohl? Die schreibe ich mit meiner unsichtbarsten Gestaltung, mit der Hand der Seele, —mit dem Flügel. Ob er vorhanden ist—Sicher! Aber gestutzt vom böswilligen Leben. (Mystik.)

[I've already been writing the Norwegian letters for three months or longer. Aren't you two going to travel again soon? Perhaps a second trip would inspire me like your North Pole trip. I've indeed forgotten how to write with the sun; my ancestors' stories require the orient. And I've clamped ice skates onto the historical style, and taken off with it; it didn't matter to me. So I wrote the biggest toe; history, however, can only be written with the heart; the heart is emperor. What do I really write my poems with? What do you two really believe? I write them with my invisible formation, with the hand of the soul, —with the wing. Does it exist—of course! But only supported by mean-spirited life. (Mystic.)]

In this short paragraph, Lasker-Schüler once and for all dispenses with the fiction that Herwarth Walden and Kurt Niemann are still on vacation, and suggests another motivation for writing the letters instead of the original conceit of informing the pair about Berlin life while they are away. Lasker-Schüler acknowledges that she has been inspired by the trip. The trip has motivated her to artistic production. Wouldn't it be nice, she suggests, if they were to travel away again? Perhaps another trip would inspire her. This reaching into another's experience for her own artistic motivation is central to Lasker-Schüler's reliance on others to aid her artistic creation. She is looking for a playmate, someone to meditate on silver-green candy wrappers, or dance at Luna Park, or whom she can imagine as a north pole adventurer. And for a short time, *Briefe nach Norwegen* has given her that outlet. Although *Briefe nach Norwegen* has come to an end, the content of the edition in *Der Sturm* suggests that Lasker-Schüler's attempt at a creation, a collaboration, or interesting collaborator to work with has not been entirely in vein.

Facing Lasker-Schüler's text and encompassing an entire page, is the illustration of Lasker-Schüler as der Prinz von Theben by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (Figure 30). The image can be read as the culmination of all of Lasker-Schüler's hopes—she finally has someone interested in engaging with her. In *Briefe nach Norwegen*, the image of Lasker-Schüler as der Prinz von Theben is monumental. It takes an entire page, a page usually devoted three columns of text. In *Mein Herz*, the image is, like all others, isolated on a clean white page. The image is the same size as all the others, so whereas the majority of images are enlarged and expanded beyond their original small format, Schmidt-Rottluff's image of Lasker-Schüler is reduced. It is also not attributed to Schmidt Rottluff and thus masquerades as Lasker-Schüler's own work. In all of *Briefe nach Norwegen*, Schmidt-Rottluff's illustration is the only contribution by another artist; but this collaboration is lost in the pages of *Mein Herz*.

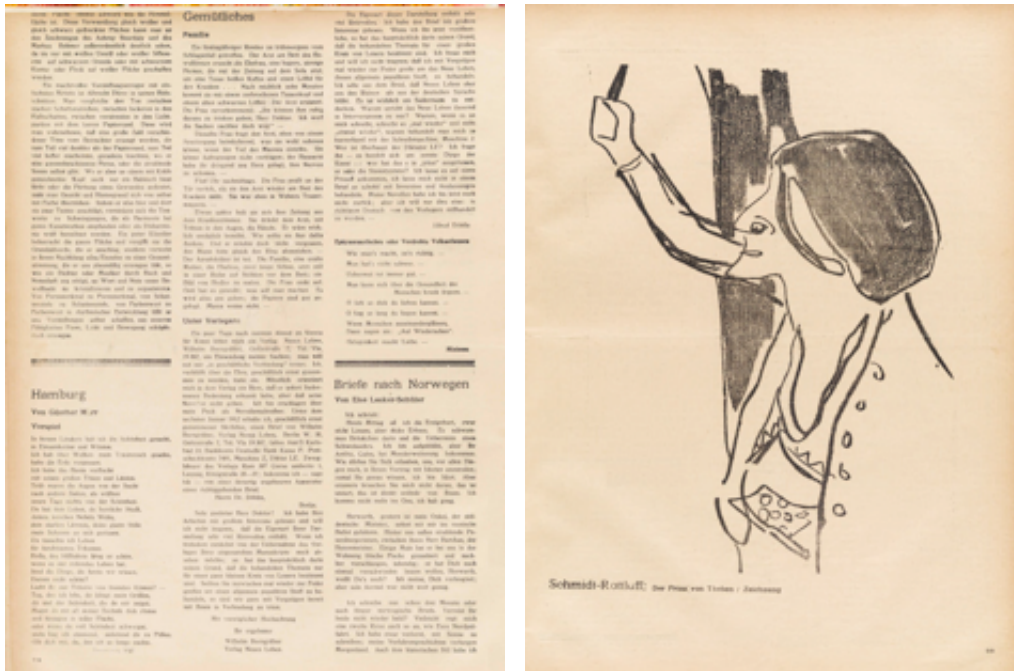


Figure 30: Der Sturm January 27, 1912. P. 4-5

There is an added text in *Mein Herz*, “Schmidt-Rottluff hat mich im Zelt sitzend gemalt.”<sup>91</sup> [Schmidt-Rottluff painted me sitting in a tent.] But this elucidating text is far from elucidating; there is little beyond artistic style to signal that this image on the facing page is in fact by Schmidt-Rottluff. This is especially true when compared to the original in *Der Sturm* with full attribution. Despite it all, has Lasker-Schüler finally found an interlocutor?

CONCLUSION:

Looking for an Interlocutor

The quest for an interlocutor is perhaps the central feature of Lasker-Schüler’s epistolary novel. For what else does Lasker-Schüler attempt to do, other than find friends and bring her current friends into deeper contact within the pages of *Briefe nach Norwegen*? It is their criticism and presence or absence that fuel her meta-reflections on her art and create the tension and suspense that fuel the novel. This collaborative environment, one in which Lasker-Schüler describes evenings spent at the same cabarets advertised in the back pages of *Der Sturm* and weaves current events into her reportage of Berlin’s bohemian cafe scene, is entirely lost in the subsequent publication of *Mein Herz*. In this chapter, I have chosen four appearances of *Briefe nach Norwegen* out of twenty-four total. These four are representative of the whole in their use of images, the way they fold current events into the narrative, and in

<sup>91</sup> Lasker-Schüler, Else. *Mein Herz*, p.114.

their emotional arch. While there are twenty-four installments of *Briefe nach Norwegen*, there are also patterns to *Briefe nach Norwegen*. Lasker-Schüler continues much in the same vein throughout the text: she veers back and forth between remembering or acknowledging that Herwarth Walden and Kurt Niemann have returned from Scandinavia, colors everyday life and events with a fantastic brush, and most importantly builds, or attempts to build, a public identity through her letters. Real and imagined contemporaries flit through the letters, and gradually more and more drawings are incorporated to humorous and narrative effect.

*Briefe nach Norwegen* has been called a *roman à clef*, and in many ways it is. At its most basic level it is a novel of real life, overlaid with fictional or rather fantastic elements. It is also literally a novel with a key—the key being knowledge of Lasker-Schüler’s complicated personal nickname system. And it is a novel with a key in another way: for the early twentieth-century reader, historical events and ephemera form the key to understanding *Briefe nach Norwegen*. Armed with knowledge of a crisis in Morocco (or having read the article preceding *Briefe nach Norwegen*), the surprising appearance of Minn, the son of the sultan of Morocco takes on a new political valence. Zeppelins flying overhead seem quaint and a little outlandish, but when paired with the media blitz organized by the zeppelin company and the royal zeppelin ride over Berlin, Lasker-Schüler’s encounter folds neatly into a contemporary moment. And then *Der Sturm* itself functions as a key to much of Lasker-Schüler’s documentation of Berlin bohemia. The characters in her letters have columns, short stories, and illustrations in *Der Sturm*; and the cabarets and gallery shows she writes about are reviewed by others and advertised in the back pages; her representation of Berlin is buttressed by the Berlin of her contemporaries.

As *Briefe nach Norwegen* comes to a close in *Der Sturm*, so does Lasker-Schüler’s access to publication in the periodical. In 1912, she and Herwarth Walden divorced and Lasker-Schüler no longer had immediate access to the public. The end of her marriage to Walden signaled the end of the relative financial security Lasker-Schüler had known, and precipitated a spate of publication. Suddenly Lasker-Schüler appeared everywhere. Her poems appeared in the pages of financial journals; she published multiple collections of poetry, *Briefe nach Norwegen* as *Mein Herz*; a collection of short stories as *Jussuf, der Prinz von Theben*; and she gradually developed a similar publication profile in *Der Sturm*’s main competitor—*Die Aktion*. In *Die Aktion*, Lasker-Schüler would publish in a similar array of genres as in *Der Sturm*. And she would publish *Briefe und Bilder*, the follow-up to *Briefe nach Norwegen*, for a new recipient—Franz Marc.

CHAPTER THREE:  
CHANGING GEARS, FROM *DER STURM* TO  
*DIE AKTION*

INTRODUCTION

Else Lasker-Schüler's last publication in *Der Sturm* was a surprise even to the author herself. In September of 1912, her poem *Versöhnung* was republished together with an illustration of the poem by Franz Marc on the cover of the magazine (Figure 31). The pairing was solicited by Franz Marc in a very polite letter to Herwarth Walden, in which he asked if Lasker-Schüler would be offended by the illustration of her poem or by the request that they be printed together in the magazine.<sup>1</sup> When Lasker-Schüler first published *Versöhnung* in 1910, she dedicated the poem to her husband Herwarth



Figure 31: Original cover of *Der Sturm* with Marc's print

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Franz Marc to Herwarth Walden, August 14, 1912.

Walden.<sup>2</sup> Since Lasker-Schüler recognized a certain versatility in the poem, including it in her short poetry volume *Hebräische Balladen* (1913) as well as in her collection *Meine Wunder* (1911), it is fitting that Franz Marc also perceived the multiple possibilities of *Versöhnung* and chose to illustrate the poem. For the friendship that was to develop between Marc and Lasker-Schüler, the choice to illustrate *Versöhnung* is especially important, as Lasker-Schüler interpreted the act as one of deep intimacy, demonstrating that Marc's spirit was akin to her own, and that he had understood the poem.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I will explore Lasker-Schüler's presentation of her and Franz Marc's friendship through her open letters to him in *Die Aktion* and consider the ways in which she constructed her artistic and personal identity through this friendship in the public sphere, manipulating intimacy and privacy.<sup>4</sup> But before we begin to dig deeper into the multi-media friendship that developed between the two, let us dive into the poem that started it all.

## VERSÖHNUNG

### Versöhnung

Es wird ein großer Stern in meinen Schoß fallen...  
Wir wollen wachen die Nacht,

In den Sprachen beten  
Die wie Harfen eingeschnitten sind.

Wir wollen uns versöhnen die Nacht—  
So viel Gott strömt über.

Kinder sind unsere Herzen,  
Die möchten ruhen müdesüß.

Und unsere Lippen wollen sich küssen,  
Was zagst du?

Grenzt nicht mein Herz an deins—  
Immer färbt dein Blut meine Wangen rot.

Wir wollen uns versöhnen die Nacht,

---

<sup>2</sup> *Der Sturm*, August 4, 1910. Marc refers to the publication of "Versöhnung" in *Meine Wunder*, a collection of most of Lasker-Schüler's previously published poems. "Versöhnung" was originally written in 1910, inspired by the dramatic appearance of Halley's Comet in Spring 1910. The comet passed by very close to the earth, and the earth actually passed through its tail, making a spectacular show. It also provided inspiration for Lasker-Schüler's poem "Weltende."

<sup>3</sup> This assessment is present in Lasker-Schüler's subsequent letters to Marc. I will return to these letters later to discuss them in more depth.

<sup>4</sup> The primary source for much of Lasker-Schüler and Marc's correspondence is Ricarda Dick's masterfully edited collection, *Else Lasker-Schüler – Franz Marc: Eine Freundschaft in Briefen und Bildern*.

Wenn wir uns Herzen, sterben wir nicht.

Es wird ein großer Stern in meinen Schoß fallen.

[Reconciliation

A great star will fall into my lap.../ We want to stay awake all night,/ We pray in tongues/ That have like harps been incised./ We want to reconcile ourselves all night—/ so much God overflows./ Children are our hearts,/ They would like to rest tiredly sweet./ And our lips want to kiss,/ Why are you hesitating?/ Doesn't my heart border on yours—/ Your blood always colors my cheeks red./ We want to reconcile ourselves all night,/ If we embrace, we won't die./ A great star will fall into my lap.]

This poem is very representative of Lasker-Schüler's poetic gifts. It is a subtle masterpiece, shifting tenses and addressees and playing with grammar to create a complicated picture of desire and communication between lovers. The poem opens with a general, somewhat mysterious opening line and image: "Es wird ein großer Stern in meinen Schoß fallen..." [A great star will fall into my lap...] The ellipses at the end of the line extend the mysterious quality of the image and serve almost as a breath before the reader plunges into the poem. The star falling into the speaker's lap serves as a point of departure and inspiration for the poem. The repetition of the line at the close of the poem, this time with a concluding period, closes the poem with the same image. The interior of the poem centers on the construction of desire ("reconciliation") and shared identity in a romantic relationship established through the use of personal pronouns. While the poem clearly identifies a speaker in the opening line (male or female it is one person's lap into which the star falls), the next line switches to a unified speaker, with "Wir wollen wachen die Nacht" [We want to stay awake all night]. If the opening line has a certain stately quality to it—both in the passive and grammatically correct construction of the sentence, the next line is an abrupt break. It is simple, direct, half the metrical length of the preceding line, and grammatically incorrect. On the scale of grammatical sins, it is a slight sin, one that does not impede understanding, but the arrangement of the verbs is outside standard rules of grammar. It *should* read "Wir wollen die Nacht wachen." The displacement of the infinitive verb is fairly common in spoken German, but in a poem, this is a choice denoting intimacy on a sociolinguistic level and, on the level of poetics, it creates strong alliteration with "Wir wollen wachen" and ends on an upbeat with "die Nacht."

Working from the assumption of unified speakers, the next verse begins to complicate the merged identities, "In den Sprachen beten/ Die wie Harfen eingeschnitten sind." [They pray in languages/ That like harps that have been incised.] The line's enjambment as well as its unclear pronominal referents, which are created through the colloquial use of definite articles for pronouns, make the verse especially elliptical. Literally rendered in English, the line scans as "in the languages pray/ that are like harps incised." This is fairly uncomfortable in English, and while the line has a certain artificial quality in German, it is not inelegant. German has more flexible word order than English, and a similar English construction could leave the reader with something like in my translation. The use of articles as pronouns is not

uncommon in spoken German, much like the unusually placed infinitive verb in the previous verse, this casual grammar causes the poem to speak in a colloquial voice.

The next verse picks up the unified desire of “Wir wollen,” but complicates the initial desire to wake all night with “Wir wollen uns versöhnen die Nacht—“ [We want to reconcile ourselves all the night—] and before the reader can determine what to make of this desire, whether the night is a third agent with which the two lovers are fighting, or if the night will provide the time of reconciliation, the image extends to the heavenly realm. The desires are so strong as to make god overflow, “So viel Gott strömt über.” [So much god overflows.] This is a powerful meditation on the power of a romantic partnership, which is able to affect even god. The speaker’s attempt to describe the power of the relationship and perhaps the love between the actors continues in the next verse as well, “Kinder sind unsere Herzen,/ Die möchten ruhen müdesüß.” [Children are our hearts,/ They would like to rest tiredly-sweet.] While the syntax of the verse is inverted, it can be broken down. Children are perhaps not literally the hearts of the lovers, but rather a metaphor for the innocent and simple nature of their hearts. The desire of these hearts to rest speaks to the stage of the argument at which the lovers find themselves—they are done fighting and ready for a rest. “Müdesüß” is an especially evocative image in German and entirely a creation of Else Lasker-Schüler. Literally tired-sweet, it functions as an adverb, but is placed after the verb and not before it, suspending the way in which the speakers wish to rest until the end of the line. This displacement highlights the strangeness of the verse in two ways, both syntactically and in lingering on the strangeness of the adverb by distending it and leaving it on its own at the end of the verse.

Until this point in the poem, other than the mention of “mein Schoß,” [my lap, but also my womb], the speaker has entirely spoken in the first person plural, we want, our hearts, etc. This unified language is a contrast with the perceived argument between the two lovers, which would seem to preclude unity of thought and action, but it is in line with the idea of “Versöhnung,” reconciliation. Yet the next verse breaks the collective pronoun and turns to a language more familiar to disputes—you and me. “Und unsere Lippen wollen sich küssen, /Was zagst du?” [And our lips want to kiss, /Why are you hesitating?] The structure of mutual desire is maintained in the first line, but the short staccato rejoinder serves as a break both on a formal level and in terms of content. The line is three short words, all beginning with sharp initial consonants. This is the climax of the poem. The thrust of the argument is contained in these lines, and it is here that the tension between the two is truly revealed. We, the readers, are on a precipice—what will the addressee do? Will there be a response? The shortness of the line in contrast with the preceding line makes the words hang there all the more, and as the unfilled beats continue in the mind of the reader, the answer, lack of answer, or rather lack of action is understood through the next verse, a plaintive attempt to regain the unity of the first person plurals, yet ultimately signaling the false hope of those first person plurals in the first place: “Grenzt nicht mein Herz an deins—/ Immer färbt dein Blut meine Wangen rot.” [Doesn’t my heart border yours—/ Your blood always colors my cheeks red.] This verse is the cry of a truth that one lover thought the other knew, and the sudden realization that this truth is not shared, despite evidence to the contrary. It is the emotive thrust of the climax. The image of one heart bordering on another is a contrast with

the earlier insistence of the unity of the hearts, both represented by tired, sweet children. These hearts are separate, and while next to one another, autonomous in their borders. Yet, one affects the other, the blood of one heart colors the other's cheeks, and is offered as proof of the assertion that the hearts border one another. After this rupture, the poem returns to the plural personal pronoun and produces an effect of resolution after the climax.

“Wir wollen uns versöhnen die Nacht, /Wenn wir uns Herzen, sterben wir nicht.” [We want to reconcile with the night, / If we embrace, we won't die.] The return to unified personal pronouns after the break into individual signals the resolution of the poem. The resolution is not complete. While there is unity of identity, there is still a plaintive cry—the speaker suggests, if her wishes are acceded to—immortality is the reward. The offer of immortality is the last image of the poem, after this verse, the poem returns to the image of a star falling into the speaker's lap. While the initial verse ended with ellipses, suggesting a point of inspiration and the beginning of a larger section, the conclusion ends with a period. The period closes the image and the poem, creating a full circle. While the promise of immortality is quite stately and formal, the central verb of the section is a contrast to this tone. *Versöhnung* is a lover's cry in the night as a relationship crumbles all around.

## MARC'S VERSÖHNUNG

Marc's visual interpretation of the poem (Figure 32) is a black and white riot of lines and shapes, figures and organic forms. Upon initial viewing, the eye is immediately drawn to the figure center left, bent on one knee, clutching its breast, with light radiating out from it. The light radiating out guides the eye as it moves across the woodcut. The eye initially comes to rest on a shadow-



Figure 32: “Versöhnung,” Franz Marc

like figure in the foreground before following the curve of a black and white rainbow and resting on a figure wrapping a cover around its upper body with one hand, and reaching out to the kneeling figure, nearly touching it, with the other. The radiating light nearly breaks the image in half and the sweep of the rainbow leads the eye to the sky of the upper-right corner, five moons at various stages and distances, as well as five stars. A large rock-like structure extends into the sky, and in its use of negative space, invites the eye to proceed for another sweep around the image, this time of the bottom the



scene. The lower quadrants of the image present the viewer with flora and fauna: plants and flowers, as well as a dog, head bowed behind the main kneeling figure. Upon full perusal of the image, the shadow figure in the left side of the image becomes an anomaly—it is seemingly a shadow of nothing in this image. The two human figures and the dog create a triangle. The image is an emotional rendering of Lasker-Schüler's poem, depicting the desire for connection and separation between two lovers, situated amidst cosmic forces and life's challenges. The prophetic falling star of the poem has fallen in the image, and is clutched by the central kneeling figure (perhaps a woman)—its light radiating out from its breast. There is a quietness about the poem that is exploded in Marc's visual interpretation. It is as though the private workings of a mind and imagination have been opened up to the world at large. It appears as though Marc has read Lasker-Schüler's mind.

## THE BEGINNING OF A FRIENDSHIP IN LETTERS

Lasker-Schüler's reaction to Marc's illustration is about as strange as could be expected. She writes two letters to Marc in quick succession:

9. November 1912. Samstag

Wertester Maler

Wenn ich nach München komme, (ich bin Jussuf der Prinz von Theben) soll ich Franz Marc besuchen? Die blauen Reiter schenken Sie mir dann eine Stunde und ich bringe Ihnen bunte Steine mit. Ich habe viele Gedichte gedichtet, auch die Versöhnung—warum haben Sie die Versöhnung gezeichnet—sind Sie auch so schmerzlich verloren wie ich, daß ich keinen Weg mehr habe nur Schluchten.

Ich hör immer: >>Schreib doch Franz Marc.<< Vielleicht freu ich mich wenn ich Sie seh nach all den Gesichtern groß und klein in Berlin ist alles Pein. Ich schreib morgen meinem Verleger Heinrich Bachmair. München. Kurfürstenstr. 39. er soll Ihnen mein neues Buch schikken darin ist mein Selbstbildnis, das ist getroffen genau so ist meine Seele wenn sie in den Krieg zieht. Aber nun lieg ich im Zelt und bin krank—vielleicht werd ich nie wieder gesund—immer muß ich weinen und bald bin ich gar nicht mehr fähig Gedichte zu schreiben. So verwundet bin ich, daß ich überall blute und zum Zeitvertreib zähl ich meine Blutstrophen. Und in einer Spelunke wohne ich—das ist mein Zelt vom Prinzen von Theben—das Zelt und es müßte so -sein- ich will es lieber nicht zeichnen. Also so sende ich Ihnen meine zwei letzten Bücher, und grüße Franz Marc und schreibe Sie mir Schönes über meine Bücher.

der arme

Prinz von Theben

(Else Lasker-Schüler)

[November 9, 1912, Saturday

Most worthy Painter

When I visit Munich, (I am Jussuf, the Prince of Thebes) should I visit Franz Marc? The Blue Riders will grant me an hour then and I will bring along colorful gemstones for you. I have composed many poems, including “Reconciliation”—why did you draw the Reconciliation—are you also as painfully lost as I am, so that I have no more path, just ravines.

I keep hearing, “Just write to Franz Marc.” Maybe I would take pleasure in seeing you after all the faces, big and small, everything in Berlin is pain. I’m writing tomorrow to my publisher Heinrich Bachmair in Munich, Kurfürstenstr. 39, he should send you my latest book, inside it is my self-portrait, which is accurate; my soul is just like that when it goes to war. Now I am lying in my tent and am ill—maybe I’ll never be healthy again—I have to cry constantly and soon I will no longer be capable of writing poems. I am so wounded that I bleed everywhere and as a pastime count my blood drops. And I’m living in a cave—this is my tent of the Prince of Thebes—the tent is, and it had to be so—I would rather not draw it. So I will send you my last two books, and greet Franz Marc and please write me something lovely about my books.

the poor  
Prince of Thebes  
[Else Lasker-Schüler)]

There are many strange features of this letter. Lasker-Schüler seems to have taken the illustration of “Versöhnung” as an intimate act—as an invitation to friendship—and returns this gesture with personal detail and attempts at connection. The tone of this letter is entirely idiosyncratic—a mixture of courtly graciousness and embarrassingly intimate detail—Lasker-Schüler promises to visit and bring Marc gemstones (i.e. her poems), but also lingers on her current pain and sadness, as well as her acute poverty. There is a certain gruesome quality as well, with Lasker-Schüler listing as her one diversion the of counting her falling drops of blood. The strangeness of the letter, in which Lasker-Schüler details living in a tent in a cave and describes her life as a series of ravines, becomes all the more odd with her follow-up letter, in which she attempts to void the initial letter:

14. November 1912. Donnerstag

Verehrter blauer Reiter.

Ich weiß von nichts! Bitte senden Sie mir den Brief der meine Unterschrift trägt. Eine üble Person hat schon zweimal hinter meinem Rücken sich erlaubt Briefe zu schreiben mit meiner Namenunterschrift und genauer Handschrift.

Ich grüße Sie und bitte Sie r e c h t sehr schon m e i n e t w e g e n mir sofort den Brief zu senden.

Prinz von Theben (Else Lasker-Schüler)

Werde überhaupt von Anonymen Briefen belästigt. etc.

Haben Sie von mir ein Gedicht illustriert, blauer Reiter?

Ich halte nicht den Sturm, habe sogar verboten dem Herausgeber von mir irgend Dinge zu bringen noch mich zu erwähnen. Ich kenne nur zwei

Gemälde von Ihnen gelbe Kuh, blaue Reiter. Mein Buch Roman mein Herz mit eigenen Illustrationen bekommen Sie bei Heinrich Bachmair. München. Kurfürstenstr. 39. Die Exemplare, die ich frei bekam, alle verschenkt, und ich habe keinen Pfennig und sitz in einer Spelunke.

[November 14, 1912, Thursday.

Esteemed Blue Rider.

I don't know about anything! Please send me back the letter that bears my signature. Twice already an evil person has gone behind my back and allowed himself to write letters with my signature and my precise handwriting.

I send greetings to you and ask you indeed and very much for my sake, to immediately send me the letter.

Prince of Thebes (Else Lasker-Schüler)

Am harassed in general by anonymous letters, etc.

Did you illustrate one of my poems, blue rider?

I don't receive *Der Sturm*, have even forbidden the publisher to present anything of my things or to mention me. I only know two paintings by you, yellow cow, blue rider. You can get my book novel, *My Heart*, with my own illustrations, at Heinrich Bachmair, Munich, Kurfürstenstr. 39. The copies that I received for free have all been given away, and I don't have a single penny and am living in a cave.]

In this letter, Lasker-Schüler claims that someone has stolen her identity and has written the previous letter. Despite the claim, there are certain undeniable common features between the two: the referring to the cave, addressing Marc as the "blue rider," and mentioning that she will send a copy of her latest publication to Marc from her publisher in Munich. Despite these similarities, Lasker-Schüler suggests that she hasn't seen Marc's visual rendering of her poem, claiming that she no longer reads *Der Sturm* and has cut off all contact and relationship with the publisher. The time between the two letters is five days, suggesting that Lasker-Schüler had received a response (although none is extant) and regretted sending the previous letter, either due to the lack of response or due to the response it elicited. No response is, after all, a response of a sort. No reply is recorded from Marc before she sends another letter two weeks later, an extremely short and perhaps more mysterious missive:

Grunewald, 28. November 1912. Donners

Blauer Reiter.

Ich *bin* aus Galiläa, ging dann nach Bagdad, kam dann nach Theben. So erklärt sich alles. Grüße dein Gemahl.

Der Prinz.

[Grunewald, November 28, 1912. Thursday

Blue Rider.

I *am* from Galilee, went then to Bagdad, came then to Thebes. This explains everything. Regards to your spouse.

The Prince.]

At first glance, these seem to be the letters of a crazy woman. When we look a bit deeper, we can see Lasker-Schüler performing an identity through contradictions. She is attempting to provoke a response and goes about creating a sense of friendship and intimacy in three ways.<sup>5</sup> First she speaks of the desperateness of her situation, and then she presents herself as isolated. Finally, she draws herself in a different guise as Jussuf. Lasker-Schüler's play with reality and identity places her in control of both and allows her to create the reality that she wishes others to see, a particularly effective plan if your correspondent lives elsewhere and is unlikely to see the actual reality firsthand.

Marc's recorded response seems to address none of these letters. Perhaps a wise choice—indeed how could he respond to Lasker-Schüler, resident of a major European metropolis, detailing her life in a cave? His response is a simple gesture of artistic friendship, an illustrated postcard with a small message written in the corner, in which he accepts Lasker-Schüler's terms and identity as Prinz Jussuf (Figure 33).



**Figure 33: Postcard from Franz Marc to Else Lasker-Schüler, December 8, 1912.**

Berlin, 8. Dezember 1912. Sonntag

Der Blaue Reiter präsentiert Eurer Hoheit sein blaues Pferd. Gruß von  
m. Gemahl,  
Euer Fz. M.  
*Berlin W. 2, Hinter der Kathol. Kirche/ bei Dir. Franck.*

[Berlin, December 8, 1912. Sunday.

The Blue Rider presents your highness with his blue horse. Regards from  
my spouse,  
Your Fz. M.  
*Berlin W. 2, Behind the Catholic Church/ c/o Dir. Franck.]*

This exchange sets up the general rules for the letters exchanged between Marc and Lasker-Schüler: Lasker-Schüler sends on average three letters to Marc's one. Lasker-Schüler's

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<sup>5</sup> One could also read Lasker-Schüler's series of letters as the product of embarrassment (i.e. she was overly familiar in her first letter to Marc, did not get the response she expected, and attempts to retract the missive).

letters are long on detail and light on small marginal drawings. Marc's are short and to the point, attempting to make plans to see Lasker-Schüler, asking about her health, and always featuring an illustration by Marc, usually in stunning color. It is the beginning of a strange and brief friendship, one cut short by Marc's death at Verdun in 1916.<sup>6</sup> Due in part to the geographical distance between Marc and Lasker-Schüler, letters form the core of their relationship, a relationship largely comprised of letters sent multiple times a day that formed the basis of an artistic exchange: poems and illustrations, fantasy worlds and nicknames.<sup>7</sup> For Lasker-Schüler, for whom there was little difference between public and private, these letters took on two forms, the private letters and postcards exchanged between her and Marc, and the epistolary novel published serially in *Die Aktion* that she addressed to Marc and would later publish in an expanded form as *Der Malik*.<sup>8</sup> As with her previous epistolary novel published in *Der Sturm*, *Briefe nach Norwegen*, Lasker-Schüler uses nicknames to half-hide the identity of her characters.

The interplay between Lasker-Schüler's two sets of letters, one public and one private, is striking. Often it is unclear what the boundary between real and imaginary is, and Lasker-Schüler plays with this boundary through her performance of public and private correspondence. Although she seems to want an interlocutor, in her terms a "Spielgefährte" (playmate), she uses the figure of Marc, rather than an actual collaborative partner, as foil and counterpoint. Throughout this chapter, I will look closely at the public and private correspondence exchanged between the two in order to understand how Lasker-Schüler plays with and creates her own fictive reality. At some points, Lasker-Schüler's letters in *Die Aktion* seem to meld into and take over her private correspondence with Marc. Throughout, Lasker-Schüler uses her developing relationship with Marc to create the Kingdom of Thebes in Berlin.

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<sup>6</sup> Marc (1880-1916) volunteered as a paramedic in the First World War and was killed in action.

<sup>7</sup> The frequency of postal deliveries made this all the easier. Major cities of the period had a very high number of deliveries each day. It was a major topic within the U.S. Postal Service at the time: "With respect to the number of deliveries made in London, Paris, and Berlin, the chief clerk of the Division of Foreign Mails informs me that in London 12 deliveries are made daily in the business section, that night deliveries are made all over the city, so that a local letter mailed in London as late as 6 p.m. is delivered in any section of the city not later than 10 p.m. the same evening. In Paris seven complete deliveries are made in all parts of the city and in Berlin nine deliveries are made." Post Office Appropriation Bill, 1912: Hearings Before the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, pp. 181-182.

<sup>8</sup> *Der Malik*, in its later, novelized, form, has often been studied by scholars interested in Lasker-Schüler's prose. What they have missed is the way that the original version in *Die Aktion* uses hypercontemporary publication and the serial format to create tension and excitement and a view of the art as it is conceptualized and created—functioning as a type of installation. In addition, *Der Malik* has two distinct lives. The first life in *Die Aktion* is a life in which Franz Marc was alive. The second life is the 1919 version and the letters, written once the First World War had begun (published in various magazines), a life in which Marc is at the Western Front, and then a life in which Marc has been killed at Verdun. Then *Der Malik* is conceptualized as an anti-war novel. For analysis of the novelized version of *Der Malik*, see Hallensleben, Feßman, and Bauschinger.

## FROM DER STURM TO DIE AKTION

1913 was a rough year for Lasker-Schüler. Recently divorced from her husband the year before, she lived in poverty and survived on little, regularly entreating friends to help her pay her son Paul's boarding school fees, or encouraging them to take up collections for her. Initiated with Karl Kraus's call to arms in *Die Fackel* at the beginning of the new year (Figure 34),<sup>9</sup> this campaign continued when Marc organized an auction in Munich of all the leading Expressionists art works to benefit Lasker-Schüler: Marc and Kirchner, Klee and Kokoschka, Macke and Schmidt-Rotluff, Kandinsky and Nolde. But no one came and no one bid—leaving the artists to buy one another's paintings.<sup>10</sup> In addition to helping her grapple with her financial woes, her friendship with Franz Marc and his wife Maria provided a new distraction from the daily desperation of poverty and loneliness. The letters are by parts overly-intimate, playful, and beautiful—Marc's painted postcards and Lasker-Schüler's intimate marginalia provide the reader with endless interpretive space. Marc illustrates the various animals and the court life of Lasker-Schüler's alter ego Prinz Jussuf's menagerie; and Lasker-Schüler sketches Thebes (Figures 35 & 36). In figure 35, "Tänzerin am Hofe des Königs Jussuf" (Dancer at the court of King Jussuf), Marc presents Lasker-Schüler with a stunning visual rendering of her oriental court, and if we pay attention to his title in the upper left corner, we even notice his incorporation of Lasker-Schüler's idiosyncratic use of the crescent moon and Star of David together. In an initial exchange lasting about a year, the Marcs regularly inquire after Lasker-Schüler's health and request that she write more regularly, and include news of her condition and that of her son, Paul. Lasker-Schüler responds with the usual fantastic anecdotes and reports from her cave. Occasionally she discusses art she sees in Berlin, her speaking



Figure 34: *Die Fackel* January 11, 1913. P.iii.

<sup>9</sup> “Die Dichterin Else Lasker-Schüler lebt in schwerer materieller Bedrängnis. Ihre Sorge um die Notwendigkeiten des Tages ist jetzt so ernst geworden, daß der unterzeichnete Kreis von Freunden und Verehrern sich verpflichtet fühlt, mit der dringenden Bitte um Unterstützung an alle jene heranzutreten...” [The poet Else Lasker-Schüler lives in extreme financial peril. Her worry over daily necessities has now become so serious that the undersigned circle of friends and admirers feel obliged to approach everyone with the urgent plea for support,...]

According to Kraus's biographer, Kraus agonized over whether or not to use *Die Fackel* as a forum to help Lasker-Schüler. He decided to help her and ran an add essentially shaming the German-speaking public for not supporting the best living poet of the language. Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist. The Post-War Crisis and the Rise of the Swastika*.

<sup>10</sup> In *1913: The Year Before the Storm*, Florian Illies reports they made 1600 Marks, about \$7000 today, but notes that the various art works would be worth well over 100 million Euros today, pp. 39-40.



**Figure 35: "Tänzerin am Hofe des Königs Jussuf" [Dancer at the court of King Jussuf], Letter from Franz Marc to Else Lasker-Schüler, January 26, 1913**

engagements, or new publication projects. In one memorable letter she gives her opinion of Wassily Kandinsky's work, which she has just seen for the first time:

...O, hättest du nie einen der Kandinsky je gesehn, zumal du ja *gar* nichts mit denen zu tun hast. Farbe ist ja nur wie Laut und Ton, Material und du bist ja *gerade* der, der formt lauter heilige Tiere, die meine Haine nun bewohnen; —dem kleinen Muhkälbchen, ein süß dick Tierchen, hab ich extra einen Stall aus Gold bauen lassen Also verherrliche ich deine Tiere.<sup>11</sup>

[Oh, if you had never seen a Kandinsky, especially because you have *absolutely* nothing to do with those [works of his]. Color is just sound and tone, material, and you are *precisely* the one who creates purely holy animals, the same that inhabit my fields—for the little moo-calf, a sweet fat little animal, I had a special

stall of gold built specially Thus I elevate your animals.]

To demonstrate her friendship, Lasker-Schüler elevates Marc over any perceived competition and in her comparison brings intimate details into play, here Marc's illustrations of various animals that he sends to her as part of Prinz Jussuf's menagerie. The personal exchange of illustrated postcards and letters continued for a year before Lasker-Schüler moved a section of the conversation into the open by initiating a new epistolary novel in the pages of *Der Sturm*'s main competitor, Franz Pflembert's *Die Aktion*.

In many ways, Lasker-Schüler's letters in *Die Aktion* are a continuation of those in *Der Sturm*.<sup>12</sup> Although the name has changed from *Briefe nach Norwegen* to *Briefe und Bilder* (a noteworthy shift, showing Lasker-Schüler's growing comfort with herself as a graphic artist) and the



**Figure 36: "Zitronenpferd und Feuerohse des Prinzen Jussuff" [Prince Jussuff's lemon-horse and fire-ox] Postcard from Franz Marc to Else Lasker Schüler, March 9, 1913**

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Franz and Maria Marc. Berlin, April 10, 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Nearly all of the existing scholarship on the two novels (Hallensleben, Feßman, Bauschinger, et al.) analyze them together and also exclusively in their published forms as *Mein Herz* and *Der Malik*. I have chosen to analyze them separately, and in their more ephemeral forms in their serial publications in *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*.

addressee has changed from Herwarth Walden to Franz Marc (and occasionally his wife Maria), the letters are in and of themselves very similar.<sup>13</sup> In her first letter in *Die Aktion*, Lasker-Schüler describes her life in Berlin. It's half-reality, half-fantasy, all cloaked in the nomenclature of her fantasy life as Jussuf, der Prinz von Theben, and drenched in her sorrow. While the letters were mostly published as they were written, Lasker-Schüler had tried to interest a new publisher in the project for some time.<sup>14</sup> In her first letter Lasker-Schüler is especially somber, switching between the absolutely dark and brief flickers of light:

1. Brief

Mein lieber, lieber, lieber, lieber blauer Reiter Franz Marc.

Du willst wissen wie ich alles zu Hause angetroffen habe? Durch die Fensterluke kann ich mir aus der Nacht ein schwarz Schäfchen greifen, das der Mond behütet; ich wär dann nicht mehr so allein, hätte etwas zum Spielen. Meine Spelunke ist eigentlich ein kleiner Korridor, eine Allee ohne Bäume. Ungefähr fünfzig Vögel besitze ich, zwar wohnen tun sie draußen, aber morgens sitzen sie alle vor meinem Fenster und warten auf mein täglich Brot. Sag mir mal einer was auf die Vögel, es sind die höchsten leben zwischen Erde und Grab. Meine Spelunke ist ein langer, banger Sarg, ich habe jeden Abend ein Grauen, mich in den langen, banger Sarg niederzulegen. Ich nehme schon seit Wochen Opium, dann werden Ratten Rosen und morgens fliegen die bunten Sonnenfleckchen wie Engelchen in meine Spelunke und tanzen über den Boden, über mein Sterbehemd herüber und färben es bunt; o ich bin lebensmüde. Feige und armselig sind die

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<sup>13</sup> While Lasker-Schüler's confidence was growing, she still sought help in convincing publishers that her graphic art is serious. She asks Marc to intervene on her behalf in the publication of *Der Prinz von Theben* with her own images: "Morgen geht neu Manuscript mit 3 des Fürsten von Cana nach Wolff ab... Fürst, *willst* du es ihm schreiben? Schreibe, daß du meine Bilder für wertvoll hält—*schreib* wenn du es *wirklich* empfindest. Es wird K. Wolff Sicherheit geben. Aber so aus dir ihm schreiben, als ob ichs nicht wüßte." [Tomorrow manuscript with three images of the Prince of Cana will go out again to Wolff... Prince, *will* you write to him? Write that you think my images are valuable and *write* it if you *really* feel it. It will give K. Wolff assurance. But, when you write to him, write as though I don't know.] Letter to Franz Marc. Munich, August 15, 1913.

Marc is apparently successful[?], and Lasker-Schüler also adopts three of his postcards into the publication, asking for permission after the fact: "*Dir* und Marie widmete ich den Derwisch im neuen Buch. Ich nahm *drei Karten*, die blauen Pferde, das Zwergkälbchen und das Kriegspferd für mein Buch. Ist es dir auch recht? Ich danke dir und dir und Maria noch einmal für *alles* schreibst du *sofort* an Kurt Wolff?"

[I am dedicating the Dervish section of my new book to *you* and Maria. I took *three cards* for it, the blue horse, the dwarf calve, and the war horse. Is that okay with you? Thank *you* and *you* and Maria once again for *everything*, will you write *immediately* to Kurt Wolff?]

<sup>14</sup> The lag time between the writing of the letters and the publication of the letters is very short with the subsequent letters, but Lasker-Schüler had been peddling this constellation of letters since at least February of 1913. Initially she hoped Alfred Kerr would publish the letters in *Pan*.

Letters from Else Lasker-Schüler to Franz Marc, February 23, 1913; March 10, 1913; March 25, 1913; April 10, 1913; April 26, 1913; May 24, 1913; May 30, 1913; June 15, 1913; August 19, 1913; August 22, 1913.



Kameraden, kein Fest, keine Schellen. Alle meine Guirlanden hängen zerrissen von meinem Herzen herab. Ich bin allein auf der Welt lebendig, auf der Hochzeit des leichtlebigen Monat mit der Blume, und ich werde täglich allein begraben und ich weine und lache dazu—denn meine Traurigkeit ist weißer Burgunder, mein Frohsein roter Süßwein. Wenn man die Auge zumacht, weiß man nicht, ob man froh oder traurig ist, da irrt sich der beste Weinkenner. 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. Die vergilbte Photographie über meinem Bett grinst dann, sie weiß, daß ich wirklich einmal einen Liebsten hatte, der mit mir Katz und Maus spielte. Einmal aber schenkte er mir eine kleine Krone aus Elfenbein und Tribut für meine Stadt Theben: fünf blanke Markstücke in einem Kästchen auf hellblauer Watte. Ich habe nun keine Stadt mehr, ich will auch nicht mehr Kaiser werden, es gibt keinen Menschen, den ich zur Kreuzungsfreier einladen mag. Ich weine auch nicht mehr, damit das kichernde Hurenmonstrum über meinem Bett nicht mehr mitleidig sein kann. Ich wär der arme Heinrich —sie meint nicht den König Heinrich, aber ihren versoffenen Stiefbruder, der jedes Jahr die Krätze bekommt. Mir fehlt was anders; einer meiner Freunde lauert schon immer auf meine Leichte—meinen Nachlaß zu ordnen. Er gratuliert sich schon den ganzen Tag und zur Uebung geht er auf alle Geburtstage und gratuliert den Sonntagskindern. Morgen hab ich Geburtstag; die Tante Amalie im Krinolin im Rahmen über meinem Bett stopft mir meine Strümpfe und gibt mir einen heimlichen Rat—wie ich die Miete ihrer Nichte nicht bezahlen brauch...Früher war ich in meinen Träumen bei meinem Oheim in Vampur und trug einen Palmenzweig in der Hand. Auch besaß ich viele, viele Feierkleider, die trägt jetzt meine Wirtin immer; wenn ich keine Miete hatte, nahm sie sich eins dafür; die hängen nun alle in ihrem Schrank und sind alle grau geworden. Aber ich muß ihr dankbar sein, denn sie will mir einen Kuchen backen und einen Spruch für meine Spelunke schenken unter Glas, damit ich zufriedener als früher, ich sehne mich wenigstens jetzt manchmal, wenn auch nur—nach einem—bösen—Menschen. 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 vor ihm noch einen böseren Menschen, der ließ mich immer barfuß über Nägel gehen; seitdem hängen viele Narben unter den Sohlen, die tun weh—so viel weh. Ich kann noch so manche traurige Geschichte erzählen; (die Tante im Rahmen summt aber immer dazu ihr Lieblingslied: >>Amalie was hat man dir gepufft!<<) Hör nur die Geschichte von dem kleinen Knaben, der am fremden Tisch saß und sich nicht laut freuen durfte über die süßen Speisen. Oder die Gesichte von einem anderen fremden Kind—das von der fremden Mutter spazieren geführt wurde, ihr eigenes Kind aber unter dem Herzen trug. Lieber, lieber, lieber, blauer Reiter—amen.

[1<sup>st</sup> Letter

My dear, dear, dear, dear blue rider Franz Marc,

You want to know how I found everything when I came home? Out of the gap in the window, I can grasp from the night a black lamb that guards the moon, then I wasn't so alone anymore if I had something to play with. My cave is actually a little corridor, a tree-lined land without trees. I own approximately 50 birds, of course they live outside, but in the morning, they all sit in front of my window and wait for my daily bread. Someone tell me something about birds, they are the highest life between earth and grave. My cave is a long, frightening coffin, every evening I have a terror of lying myself down in the long, frightening coffin. I've already been taking opium for weeks, so rats become roses and in the morning, colorful sun flecks fly into my cave like little angels and dance across the floor, across my shroud and tint it so colorfully; oh, I am tired of life. The comrades are cowardly and poor in spirit, no celebration, no bells. All of the garlands hang torn off my heart. I alone in the world am alive, at the wedding of the frivolous hearted month and the flower, I am buried alone daily and laugh and cry about it—because my sorrow is white Burgundy, my happiness red sweet wine. When one closes one's eyes, one doesn't know if one is happy or sad, and even the most astute wine connoisseur gets it wrong there. In the night I play with my nearest and dearest; actually we are two boys. It is the most chaste love-game in the world, no clue as to difference love without purpose or point, graceful depravity. The yellowed photo over my bed grimaces then, it knows that once I actually had a beloved who played cat and mouse with me. Once he gave me a little crown made of ivory and tribute for my city of Thebes: five cash marks in a little box on light blue cotton. I don't have a city anymore, and I don't want to become emperor anymore, there are no persons I want to invite to the crucifixion. And I don't cry anymore, so the cackling whoremongstrosity over my bed isn't sympathetic anymore. I would have been the poor Heinrich, she doesn't mean the King Heinrich, but his drunken stepbrother who gets scabies each year. I'm missing something else; one of my friends is constantly lying in wait for my corpse in order to organize my estate. He has been congratulating himself the entire day and to practice he attends all birthdays and congratulates the Sunday children. Tomorrow is my birthday: Aunt Amalie in a crinoline in the frame above my bed darns my stockings and gives me secret advice—how I don't need to pay rent to her niece... Previously in my dreams, I was with my uncle in Vampir and carried a palm frond in my hand. I also owned many, many fancy clothes, which my landlady always wears now, whenever I don't have any rent money she took one for herself for the rent, they now all hang in her closet and they have become gray. But I need to be grateful to her, because she went to bake me a cake and give me a spell for my cave under glass, so that I will be more satisfied than before, even if only—after a bad person. My beloved never asked me anything, because my lips wanted so much to dance. But I had to

walk a lot because it was so hard for me to move forward and I would so have loved to travel once by car or on a palanquin. But before him, I knew an even worse person, who always made me walk barefoot over nails, ever since ever since then many scars hang beneath my soles, they hurt so very much. I can tell many a sad story (the aunt in the frame always hums along her favorite song—“Amalie, who has made you so happy?” Just listen to the story of the little boy, who sat at a stranger’s table and isn’t allowed to reclaim out loud about the sweet dishes. Or the story about another strange child—who was led by a strange mother on a stroll, carrying her own child under her heart. Dear, dear, dear blue rider—amen. ]

This is seriously dark stuff. The sonic beauty of Lasker-Schüler’s word choice and rhythm of her sentences can barely hide the desperate content of the letter, which is exposed in English translation. She describes the grim little room in which she lives, calls it a cave, and laments the loss of her kingdom, a persistent theme throughout the letters. In this one letter, the sheer variety of images and metaphors is almost overwhelming. Lasker-Schüler dispenses her daily bread to the birds at her window and survives on opium and wine. She practices for her funeral and, in the guise of Prince Jussuf, mourns the loss of her beloved. It is her birthday and the only present her love seems to have left her are scars on her soles from her forced walks over nails. Yet Lasker-Schüler does not leave the reader in this pit of despair. Rather, she uses all of her poetic gifts to construct a tongue-in-cheek break in the second letter. Once again, the format of the serial, epistolary novel allows Lasker-Schüler to undercut the emotional impact of one letter by following it immediately with one in a different tone. This technique is very similar to that developed in Lasker-Schüler’s personal letters to Franz Marc. This first issue of *Briefe und Bilder* (September 6, 1913) includes five letters. The second letter immediately breaks the tragic spell cast in the first one, and begins: “Lieber, blauer Reiter, ich soll keinen so traurigen Brief mehr schreiben—wie soll ich auch nur können, da die Sonne so lieblich und aufmunternd scheint und ich gehe doch mit dem Wetter parallel.” [Dear blue rider, I shouldn’t write any more such sad letters—and how could I indeed be able to, since the sun is shining so dearly and encouragingly and I always walk parallel to the weather.]

Within this group of five simultaneously written letters, there is the suggestion that some time has elapsed, but without dates, the reader is left to read the collection of letters carefully, and discern how much time. This allows the five letters to play off of one another and build suspense and in many ways this undercuts the almost overwhelming sense of despair. This is achieved through various forms of play. The central form of play is already evident in the first letter—Lasker-Schüler’s reformulation of figures from her life into characters in her fantastic one—that of the Kingdom of Thebes. Thebes is initially grafted onto Berlin, with Lasker-Schüler running into people as Prince Jussuf on Kurfürstendamm and proceeding as though she were in exile from her kingdom. If the first letter suggests that she has lost her kingdom, and the second provides emotional relief, the third letter presents

the possibility of her kingdom's restoration, and pairs Lasker-Schüler as Prinz Jussef with his brother in exile, Reuben, that is, Franz Marc.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Brief

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 plötzlich König, in Theben—trug einen goldenen Mantel, einen Stern in Falten um meine Schulter gelegt, auf dem Stern die Krone des Malik. Ich war Malik. Als unsere Muselkinder wie kleine Kamelkälber meinem großen Prachtkamel nachrabten, und dazu kreisten in allerlei verzwickten Quitschtönen, (es war eigentlich zum Totlachen)! “Rex-Klecks, Rex-Klecks, Rex-Klecks! Klecks!!!” Wenn ich daran denke! Ich bin überhaupt heute etwas unglücklich—ich weiß niemand, worin ich mich verlieben könnte. Weißt Du jemand? Dein verraten und verkaufter Jussuf.

#### [Third Letter

My very beloved half brother. There is no doubt, you were Reuben and I was Joseph, your half brother in the times of Canaan . Now we just dream dreams that are biblical. Sometimes a dream drives me so crazy, like last night. Oh, I had such an evil dream; well, really my dearest wish was fulfilled—I was suddenly king, in Thebes—wore a golden coat, and a star was laid in folds around my shoulders, upon the star was the crown of the Malik. I was Malik. And the moslem children, just like little camel calves, trotted after my great luxurious camel, and circled around in all sorts of pinched squeaking tones (it was really enough to make you laugh to death)! “Rex-Klecks, Rex-Klecks, Rex-Klecks! Klecks!!!” When I think about it!

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<sup>15</sup> The significance of Franz Marc as Reuben cannot be underscored enough. Biblically speaking, Reuben was the biblical Joseph's one loyal brother, the one who spoke out against the other brothers' plans to kill Joseph out of jealousy (Genesis 37). Although she renames Marc Reuben, she does not accept the biblical narrative as fact. In one letter to Marc, she writes:

Die Bibel ist falsch übersetzt— es heißt so: als Ruben sah, daß seine Brüder den Lieblings Jakobs, den Sohn Rahels, ihren Halbbruder in die Grube werfen wollten, erschreck er sehr, aber ließ so geschehen. Am Abend jedoch, als die Brüder schliefen, ging er heimlich an den Ort, darin sein armer Halbbruder Jussuf schmachtete und holte ihn aus dem Graben, tauchte seinen Rock in Lammblood, daß seine Brüder Glaubens waren, ein wildes Tier habe Jussuf zerrissen. In Wirklichkeit aber verkaufte Ruben seinen Halbbruder Jussuf an die Händler.

Also geschah. [Image of bleeding heart spilling blood into a wine glass below]

[The bible is incorrectly translated—it should be: as Reuben saw that his brothers wanted to throw the favorite of Jacob, the son of Rachel, into the pit, he was very shocked, but allowed it to happen. But in the evening, as the brothers were sleeping, he went secretly to the place and dipped his garment in lamb's blood, so his brothers would believe that a wild animal had torn Jussuf to pieces. In reality he had sold his half brother Jussuf to merchants.

Thus it happened.]

Today I am somewhat unhappy, anyway—I don't know anyone I can fall in love with. Do you know anyone? Your betrayed and sold Jussuf.]

The third letter is revealing in two major ways: it further establishes her fantastic relationship with Franz Marc and intensifies the allusions to a recently ended love affair. The relationship with Franz Marc is almost created as though it were a past life. He *was* Reuben and she *was* Joseph. She is now Jussuf, and he is Franz Marc and now only dreams of their past remain. These dreams are biblical dreams, but even Lasker-Schüler's dreams seem unbearable. Part of this unbearable state is revealed in the near evocation of a past life. Lasker-Schüler's dual identity is one which both is and was. She was Joseph and she is Jussuf. And if she was/is the biblical Joseph, Franz Marc *was* Reuben, but is now only Franz Marc and Lasker-Schüler is alone in her dual identity, trapped in some sort of temporal pivot between Berlin c. 1913 and the biblical imaginary. The loneliness of her past/present identity is not left to the reader to speculate on, but is given a gloss of her recent tragedy in the realm of love, the only succor for the loss of her love is apparently the return of her kingdom of Thebes.

#### 4. Brief

Mein blauer Reiter, ich möchte eine Brücke finden, darüber eine Seele zu meiner käme, so ganz unverhofft. Eine Seele so ganz allein ist doch was Schreckliches!!! O, ich könnte direkt meine Seele (meinetwegen) mit Syndetikon an<sup>16</sup> eine zweite kleben. Syndetikon klebt auch Glas und Metall. Wenn doch Jemand seine Lieblingsblume neben meinem Herzen pflanzen würde, oder einen Stern gießen würde in mein Herz oder—mich ein weltentrückter Blick träfe—. Sei nicht böse, blauer Reiter, daß ich wieder sentimental werde, ich brauch mir ja jetzt nur Deine Karte ansehen mit dem Spielpferdchen; genau so eins, wie dieses steht noch auf dem Krimmskrammsboden oben in meinem Palast in Theben: Aus drolliger Spielfarbe, aus Herzkarmenrot.

Aber ich habe nun auch eine Karte gezeichnet, Dich und Deine Mareia. Denk mal, Du bist ja selbst ein Pferd, ein braunes, mit langen Nüstern, ein edles Pferd mit stolzem, gelassenen Kopfnicken, und Deine Mareia ist eine goldgelbe Löwin.

Dein lieber Jussuf.

#### [4<sup>th</sup> Letter

My blue rider, I would like to find a bridge, across which a soul would come to mine, entirely un hoped for. A soul so entirely alone is something indeed terrifying!!! Oh, if only I could glue my soul (on my behalf) directly to a second. Glue also sticks glass and metal. If only someone would indeed plant his favorite flower next to my heart, or would cast a star in my heart, or—reach me with a remote glance—. Don't be angry, blue rider, that I am becoming sentimental again, now I just need to look at your card with the toy

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<sup>16</sup> Syndetikon is/was a very powerful glue—again Lasker-Schüler engages with consumer culture.

pony on it; one just like this one is still in the junk office of my palace in Thebes: made out of droll play colors, out of heart-carmine-red.

But I have now also drawn a card in the meantime, it's and your Mareia. Just think, you yourself are a horse, a brown one, with long nostrils, a noble horse with proud, relaxed head nods, and your Mareia is a yellow-gold lioness.

Your dear Jussuf]

On the surface, this letter is a continuation of Lasker-Schüler's depressed persona, yet on closer analysis it features a great deal of linguistic play. Lasker-Schüler's longing for romantic attachment could also be perceived as longing for attachment to a community, such as *Die Brücke*, the expressionist artist group to which many of her friends belonged. Lasker-Schüler's sense of neither having someone to love, nor an artistic group to belong to, is described by her as being the most terrible thing possible. To be alone is to be most unfortunate, and in this state, Lasker-Schüler expresses her greatest desire to glue another person's soul to her own, so she will not have to suffer further. Yet Lasker-Schüler has found community with Marc and his wife, Maria. This is a community of the mind and letter. The physical realm of their community is limited to that of the physical page—the postcards exchanged between Marc and Lasker-Schüler, as well as to the fantastic world that they have created and off of which Lasker-Schüler feeds. Marc's depiction of their fantastic world is all the succor Lasker-Schüler requires when she feels her loneliness. The contradiction of Lasker-Schüler's public-private play is explored most thoroughly in the letters that explore the private nature of friendship—specifically in the secrets we tell our intimates and the ways in which Lasker-Schüler makes the entire reading public her intimate friend through the sharing of these deeply personal details. Lasker-Schüler's last letter, describes her blossoming romance with Giseler to her friend Marc. Lasker-Schüler's primary concern is that Marc keep Giseler a secret.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Brief

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<sup>17</sup> While it is readily known today that Giseler is Gottfried Benn, the extent to which it was known at the time is unclear. Today there is a veritable cottage industry that exists to discuss Benn and Lasker-Schüler's potential poetic influences on one another and the extent of their poetic conversation. The popular and mostly dominant narrative is a tragic one tied to Germany's post-Shoah mediation of its identity. Lasker-Schüler is the Jew betrayed by the latent Nazi Benn. Benn's 1952 speech at the British Center in Berlin about Lasker-Schüler, in which he calls her the "größte Lyrikerin, die Deutschland je hatte" [the greatest poetess Germany ever had] and references Peter Hille's classification of her as the "schwarze Schwan Israels" [the black swan of Israel], is read in the vein of Germany's collective, and Benn's personal, mea culpa for genocide. Taking the 1952 speech as a starting point for understanding their relationship, much of the analysis of their poetic relationship attempts to backread events in 1912 in light of Benn's Nazism and Lasker-Schüler's flight from Germany. In attempting to fit events 20-30 years prior into a later narrative, many scholars have been sloppy and relied on imprecise dating to build their arguments. Readings of Benn's poem "Hier ist kein Trost" as a reaction to Lasker-Schüler's "Höre" is a prime example of this. Both actually wrote the poems in question before they met.

Blauer Reitersreiter[...]O, blauer Reiter, wie die Liebe herabwürdigt, wie die Liebe herabwürdigt wird, wie die Liebe sich besaufen kann!! Ich bin doch auf die Idee gekommen, daß nur bedeutendes Blut sich vermischen darf mit Wein, mit Rausch, mit der Liebe. Nun ist es Nacht—überall—o, wir, wir wollen, Du, Mareia und ich, furchtbar zärtlich miteinander sein... Wir haben nicht verlernt, unsere Haut herumzureißen wie ein Feierkleid. Was ist denn noch anders los, als wie die Liebe; blauer Reiter, können wir von anderem leben wie von der Liebe, von Blut und Seele—ich will lieber ein Menschenfresser werden als Nüchternheit kauen, wiederkäuen; blauer Reiter, ich bin alleine fromm in der fremden Stadt. Kein Mensch kommt hier in den Himmel. Bitte gehe einmal über den Kürfürstendamm, bieg in die Tauentzienstraße ein, kannst Du Dir denken, vorstellen, daß ein Dirbegegenger in den Himmel kommt? Sag mir blauer Reiter, komm ich in den Himmel?

Du blauer Reiter, ich möcht' Dir noch privatim was erzählen, aber sag es Niemand wieder, auch Mareien nicht. Ich hab mich doch wirklich wieder verliebt. Wenn ich mich tausendmal verliebte, ist es immer ein neues Wunder; eine alte Natur der Sache—wenn sich ein anderer verliebt. Du, er hatte gestern Geburtstag. Ich schickte ihm eine Schachtel voll Geschenke. Er heißt Gisellheer. Er ist aus den Nibelungen. Meine Stadt Theben ist nicht erbaut davon. Meine Stadt Theben ist ein islamitischer Priester. Meine Stadt Theben ist ein Bürokrat. Meine Stadt Theben ist mein Urgroßvater. Meine Stadt Theben paßt mir auf bei jedem Schritt. Meine Stadt Theben ist ein—Ekel. 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: einen Grabsoldaten aus Holz, eine Chokoladentrompete, eine Spielfahne meiner Stadt Theben, einen Becher, einen silbernen Federhalter, zwei Seidentücher, eine Pettschaft aus Achad und viel, viel Siegellack. Ich schrieb dazu: Lieber König Gisellheer, ich wollte, Du wärest aus Kristall, dann möchte ich Deine Eidechse sein, oder Deine Koralle oder Deine fleischfressende Blume.—Aber ich darf mich jetzt gar nicht so viel mit der Liebe befassen, ich muß—deklanieren! Bald im Gnutheater lesen: St. Peter Hille, dann meine teuren Pragerkameraden: Paul Leppin, Otto Pick und Franz Werfe, den Wiener Schwärmer: Richard Weiß, die verehrten Berliner Paschas: den Gnudirektor, Kurt Cajus Maus Hiller, den Peter Baum, Ernst Bloß, Albert Ehrenstein, Paul Zech, Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele, Rudolf Kurtz, den Blutkalifen Richard Dehmel und Gottfried Benn. Der ist Frauenarzt, nebenbei kuriert er die zehn Musen und hätte mich und Ritter Boom wohl ein paar Tage in seinem Krankenhaus aufnehmen können, wir hätten uns so schön ausgeruht bei ihm, er konnte ganz gut ein Auge zudrücken; nämlich der Pitter und ich haben den Abend die bunten Stifte verwechselt mit denen wir uns die Rödeln beibrachten, er hatte lila Rödeln und ich grüne. Nun hab ich Dir nix mehr zu schreiben, lieber Reiter, auch kann Franz Pfemfert nichts mehr drücken in der AKTION; andere Leute wollen auch dran. Die Neurosenpathetiker laufen

alle herum, als ob sie eine Blindschleiche im Blinddarm haben, wir kommen gar nicht mehr ans Ziel. Aber Cassirer will meine Illustrationen ausstellen unter schwarzes Glas—da sieht man doch nix! Der Oppenheimer hat Schuld, zwischen uns sitzt die Kabale. Gestern ist er von seinem Schaukelpferd gestürzt, gerade vor dem Café des Westens, den Pressianern die Schilderung der Katastrophe nahe zu legen. —Lieber, lieber, lieber, lieber blauer Reiter, grüße...Ich umarme Dich, o, blauer Reiter! Ewig Dein Jussuf.

[5<sup>th</sup> Letter

Blue rider's rider [...] Oh, blue rider, how love debases, how love is debased, how love can intoxicate itself!! It occurred to me, that only important blood is allowed to mix itself with wine, with thrill, with love. Now it is night —everywhere—oh, we, we want, you, Mareia and I, to be terribly tender to one another...we haven't forgotten how to throw our flesh around as a party dress. What else is going on other than love; blue rider, can we live off anything else than love, blood, and soul—I'd rather become a cannibal that chews on sobriety, chews the cud; blue rider, I alone am pious in the foreign city. No person here goes to heaven. Please, cross the Kurfürstendamm sometime, turn onto the Tauentzienstraße—can you think, imagine that anyone who encounters you will get into heaven? Tell me, blue rider, will I get into heaven?

You, blue rider, I would like to tell you something most privately, but don't repeat it to anyone, not even Mareia. I have truly fallen in love again. If I fell in love a thousand times, each time it is a new miracle; you—it was his birthday yesterday. I gave him a box full of presents. He is called Giselheer. He is from the Nibelungen. My city of Thebes is not built of this. My city of Thebes is an Islamic priest. My city of Thebes is a bureaucrat. My city of Thebes is my great grandfather. My city of Thebes looks out for my every step. My city of Thebes is a —revulsion. I send the infidel knight simple toys, as if he were my little brother—because he has a red child's heart, because he is such a barbarian, because he still wants to have a homey playroom: a grave soldier out of wood, a chocolate trumpet, a toy flag from my city of Thebes, a mug, a silver pen holder, two silk scarves, a signet of agate, and lots and lots of sealing wax. To go along with this I write: Dear King Giselheer, if you were made out of crystal, then I would like to be your lizard, or your coral or your flesh eating flower. —But I shouldn't occupy myself now so much with love, I need to declame! Reading soon at the Gnutheater: St. Peter Hille, then my dear Prague colleagues: Paul Leppin, Otto Pick and Franz Werfel; the Viennese swarm: Richard Weiß; the revered Berlin paschas: the director of the Gnu, Kurt Cajus Majus Hiller, Peter Baum, Ernst Bloß, Albert Ehrenstein, Paul Zech, Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele, Rudolf Kurtz, the blood-calif Richard Dehmel, and Gottfried Benn. He is a gynecologist, and he, by the way, cures the ten muses and could have taken me and Knight Boom into his hospital for a few days, we could have relaxed so nicely with him, he could very well have closed an eye; but Pitter and I spent the evening



exchanging, mixing up the colored pencils with which we taught each other to scream, he had purple pencils and I had green. Now, I don't have anything else to write to you, dear rider, anyway Franz Pfemfert can't print anything else in the AKTION: other people want in. The neurotic-emotional people are running around, as though they have a slow worm in their appendix, we won't make it to our goal anymore. But Cassirer wants to exhibit my illustrations under black glass—then no one will see anything! Oppenheimer is guilty, and between us sits the cabal. Yesterday he fell off a rocking horse, right in front of Café des Westens, in order to show the member of the press the catastrophe close up.—Dear, dear, dear, dear blue rider, greetings...I embrace you, oh blue rider! Eternally your Jussuf.]

The letter begins with a continuation of the themes in the previous letters: Lasker-Schüler contemplates the nature of love and how it intoxicates. In doing so, she expands her language of amorous religiosity. Wine mixes with blood in an updated consubstantiation<sup>18</sup> and Lasker-Schüler laments her loneliness. Thebes and Berlin mix and become a holy city. One can walk the Kurfürstendamm on the way to heaven. In Lasker-Schüler's fixation on heaven and the real-life streets of Berlin, there is a certain concentration on the grotesque—who on the streets of Berlin could hope to get into heaven? It reminds one of then contemporary depictions of Berlin street life—well-heeled couples walking up and down the Ku'damm, their faces rendered slightly demonic (Figures 37).<sup>19</sup> Lasker-Schüler's main interest is to share news of her latest love—Giselheer, from the Nibelungen.<sup>20</sup> Lasker-Schüler entreats Marc to keep her news private, which is more than a little hilarious for two reasons. The first is obvious: she is publishing this statement in a periodical. The second requires a look into the main correspondence between Lasker-Schüler and Marc—the letters and postcards they exchanged from 1911-1916.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 37: Straße, Ernst Kirchner, 1913. Museum of Modern Art, New York**

Lasker-Schüler's play with various fictional worlds begs for a closer look. In the letter, she invokes three worlds. The first is the space of Berlin. It merged with the second, her individual city of Thebes. There is slight tension in the Berlin/Thebes mixture, or maybe

<sup>18</sup> This language also invokes Lasker-Schüler's visual language, in particular her regular sketches of a bleeding heart over a wine glass, often with the text, "Jussuf blüetet für seinen Volk," [Joseph bleeds for his people].

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Kirchner, *Straße, Berlin*. 1913.

<sup>20</sup> Gottfried Benn

<sup>21</sup> This is the focus of the second section of this chapter.

even more than a slight tension, because no one else occupies this city with her. Lasker-Schüler alone recognizes Berlin as Thebes and is its (only?) pious resident. The third reality is that of her new love, Giselheer—from the Nibelungen. Nibelungen is of course a reference to the late twelfth-century German epic centering on the ill-fated romance of Siegfried of Xanten and Kriemhild of Burgundy. Giselheer is one of Kriemhild's three brothers (Gunter and Gernot are the other two). The world of Giselheer, and more specifically that of *Das Nibelungenlied* is a medieval German one in which pre-Christian and early-Christian European society butt up against one another. There are glimmers of pagan magic and mystery, but much of the narrative happens in front of a cathedral. Lasker-Schüler's perception that the world of the Nibelungen does not mix with her city of Thebes as presented through the list of things that Thebes is and presumably the Nibelungen-world is not: Islamic, bureaucratic, Jewish (?), built for Lasker-Schüler, and yet, revolting. The Nibelungen world suggested by the name Giselheer is most certainly not Islamic or Jewish, and as it features fairly powerful kings and queens in a pre-constitutional monarchical world—certainly not bureaucratic. There are courtiers in the Nibelungen world, but much not else that we see on a bureaucratic level; and Lasker-Schüler's Giselheer is a barbarian.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 38: Maler Marc und Seine Löwin [Painter Marc and his lioness]

To bring the three together, Lasker-Schüler gives her new love gifts: a grave soldier out of wood, a chocolate trumpet, a toy flag from Thebes, a mug, a silver pen holder, two silk scarves, a signet of agate, and sealing wax. There are two distinct themes that unite gifts: the martial and the princely, as well as an overarching theme of children. The princely gifts mostly relate to communication; the pen holder, signet, and sealing wax all encourage the recipient to write letters, presumably to Lasker-Schüler. While Giselheer is the centerpiece of the letter, Lasker-Schüler sandwiches this centrality between some Berlin current events, namely the current cabaret at Gnu and Cassirer's plans to present a gallery show of her drawings. But in keeping with Lasker-Schüler's developing but still incomplete comfort as a visual artist, she suggests that Cassirer wants to exhibit them under black



Figure 39: Vereint! [United!]

<sup>22</sup> Giselheer as a barbarian is no slight thing. In the wide scholarship on the love poetry of Lasker-Schüler and Benn, Lasker-Schüler's two poems, "Dem Barbaren," published in 1911 in *Der Sturm* are read as poems to Benn.

glass—rendering them invisible! The mention of a possible show of the drawings brings us to the visual component of Lasker-Schüler's letters. In the first collection of letters, there are two illustrations. One is of Franz and Maria Marc and one is of four figures (Figures 38 & 39). The image of four figures shows two from behind as they are facing the other two, and it is completed with the words "Vereint" [united] handwritten and circled for emphasis.

Figure 38 suggests a simple profile, while the second, figure 39, is more complicated. In addition to the figures, there are also candles. The candles, taken together with the collars around the necks of the two figures with visible faces suggests priests. Taken together with the handwritten "vereint" below, is this perhaps a wedding scene? (Figure 39). Perhaps. The figures with their backs to us are quite a bit shorter than the facing figures, suggesting that they are women, or perhaps kneeling, as one does when taking communion in Germany. On the other hand, it could also be a wedding dance scene. The religious scene is certainly in keeping with some of the earlier imagery of the letters—Lasker-Schüler offering communion to the birds gathered outside her apartment, and perhaps also her mention of Cassirer's presentation of her drawings under black glass, evoking 1 Corinthians 13:12 "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Lasker-Schüler's use of black glass instead of dark glass intensifies the image, while also rendering it absurd. When looking at these images in the context of the images in *Briefe nach Norwegen*, they are similar, but they are also in keeping with the illustrations Lasker-Schüler draws on her personal letters of the Marcs. The main difference lies in the size of the images. Those in her personal letters are quite small, while those published in *Die Aktion* are much larger. The interplay of the published images and the private images becomes more important as Lasker-Schüler draws attention to it in the *Aktion* letters, in particular the fourth letter where Lasker-Schüler mentions her repeated contemplation of a card Marc had sent her, as well as her card with the drawing of the Marcs, with Franz Marc as a brown horse and Maria as yellow-gold lioness. This is clearly Lasker-Schüler's interpretation of the image labeled "Maler Marc und seine Löwin," in *Die Aktion* (Figure 38).

## PARALLEL CORRESPONDENCES

The inclusion of apparently private letters in the public correspondence published in *Die Aktion* is central to Lasker-Schüler's creation of an illusion of intimacy in the published letters. In the fourth letter, when Lasker-Schüler mentions one of Marc's personal cards to her—one that we, the audience cannot see (but one that we can imagine if we are familiar with Marc's work)—Lasker-Schüler draws the audience into the middle ground between the exchange and makes us part of the friendship. The friendship is validated because it is witnessed. Is there something voyeuristic about our viewing of this? Or perhaps something exhibitionist on Lasker-Schüler's part? The hints and puzzles that Lasker-Schüler gives her readers suggest rather that she enjoys leading the audience around by the nose—giving them enough to tease out other aspects of her secret code, but cloaking the reality or spinning the reality as she sees fit. In this way, she is able to cause the audience to imagine a reality that is more appealing than her actual reality. The interplay between the public letters and Lasker-

Schüler's correspondence is key to glimpsing the borders of this play. Does the mask drop in Marc's letters? The answer is a resounding no, leading us to speculate that there was very little separating Lasker-Schüler's performance of her private life from her actual private life. But this requires further evidence.

From the inception of *Briefe und Bilder*, and throughout Lasker-Schüler's attempts to publish her letters, she keeps Marc informed, updating him on talks with different publishers and about her hopes that her letters will be published soon. Right before the first batch is published in *Die Aktion* on September 6, 1913, she writes Marc, informing him of their imminent publication.<sup>23</sup> Her next private letter to Marc is very short, as she suggests that the letters in *Die Aktion* have replaced her personal letters to Marc:

Ihr meint ich sei ein sexueller Mensch, Ihr *kennt* mich nicht, das liegt viel tiefer.

Liebe Bruder,  
ich liege nun wieder zwei Tage in der Grube—alle Tiere haben mich angefressen, ich gehe nun zu Dirnen, die streicheln das Haar.

In der Aktion stehen die Briefe an dich weiter.

Jussuf.

Ich bin bis Montag mittag *nicht* zu Hause.<sup>24</sup>

[You think that I am a sexual being, you don't *know* me, it goes much deeper.

Dear Brother,

I have been lying in the hole again for two days—all animals have been eating at me, and I go to whores who caress my hair.

The letters to you continue in the Aktion.

Jussuf.

I am *not* at home until Monday at noon.]

The letter itself is very informal, beginning with an abrupt statement about Marc's supposed assumption of Lasker-Schüler's sexual nature and then actually commencing with a salutation addressing Marc as her brother. The letter clearly refers to her letters to Marc in *Die Aktion*, with mentions of the hole (presumably her cave), harkening back to her funerary practice, and the animals that have been gnawing at her—perhaps the very animals that she was feeding. If this letter is a sort of codicil to her letters in *Die Aktion*, it is either very tongue-in-cheek or very dark indeed. Given Lasker-Schüler's propensity for dark meditation undercut with a bit of play, it is perhaps both. Lasker-Schüler's reliance on her letter in *Die Aktion* in her personal letter to Marc suggests at least two audiences for the letters—the general public, and Marc himself. There is, however, a flaw in Lasker-Schüler's plan. The brevity of the letters and the mention of her continued writing to him in *Die Aktion* suggests that the published letters are now her main letters to Marc. But the fact that the public letters

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<sup>23</sup> Else Lasker-Schüler to Franz Marc, August 22, 1913.

<sup>24</sup> Else Lasker-Schüler to Franz Marc, September 20, 1913.

have largely replaced the private letters between Marc and Lasker-Schüler, at least from Lasker-Schüler's side, is ironic when one considers Marc's life in Sindelsdorf (a tiny village in Bavaria) and his noted difficulty at getting his hands on *Die Aktion*, a Berlin periodical with a rather small audience, perhaps one that did not extend to rural Bavaria. Marc writes of this difficulty to Lasker-Schüler, detailing the fact that he has yet to read any of her letters, except for the first.<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that Lasker-Schüler has cut off her main private correspondence to Marc, but rather that the private communications have become secondary to the public letters printed in *Die Aktion*. Lasker-Schüler writes shorter letters to Marc privately with the assumption that he has read her longer missives in *Die Aktion*. But, Marc is not actually reading the letters in *Die Aktion* in a timely manner. Lasker-Schüler's own acknowledgement that the letters are going unread by Franz and Maria Marc is given in a fairly offhanded manner in a private letter to the couple:

Ihr lieben blauen Reitersreiter, bekommt Ihr auch immer die *Aktion*? 4  
Aktionen mit Briefen an Euch sind nun heraus! Habt Ihr alle 4? Bitte  
Antwort. Habe so viel zu tun! Ich denke *immer* an Euch wenn ich auch wenig  
geschrieben hab.  
Euer Jussuf.

[My dear blue rider's riders, are you regularly receiving the *Aktion*? 4  
issues with letters to you two are out! Have you got all 4? Please reply. I have  
so much to do! I am *constantly* thinking of you two, even if I haven't written  
much.

Your Jussuf.]<sup>26</sup>

Lasker-Schüler presses the letters in *Die Aktion* for two main reasons—first, we can assume that she would generally like her friends, the Marcs, to read her latest publications. And second, she seems to suggest that the letters are a replacement for the letters she hasn't written exclusively to the Marcs. Lasker-Schüler has been so busy writing them letters in *Die Aktion*, that she simply doesn't have the time to write them shorter personal letters—just read *Die Aktion*! Marc's response to Lasker-Schüler's breezy suggestions is kind and reasonable—asking Lasker-Schüler to send them *Die Aktion* and entreating her to visit and give them news about herself and her son Paul.<sup>27</sup> If we try to grasp at Marc's opinion of

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Franz and Maria Marc to Else Lasker-Schüler, October 14, 1913.

<sup>26</sup> Else Lasker-Schüler to Franz and Maria Marc. October 14, 1913 and October 29, 1913.

<sup>27</sup> Franz and Maria Marc to Else Lasker-Schüler, October 29, 1913.

Lieber Jussuf,  
hab keine Aktion bekommen, selbst von meinem Buchhändler nicht, bei dem ich sie vor 10 Tagen  
bestellt. Kenne nur die beiden ersten (1. Brief u. Brief an Kraus). sonst nichts. Schick sie uns doch,  
Liebe, ja?  
Wie gehts? Wir und unsere beiden Rehe sind gesund,—die solltest du sehen!  
Herzlich dein Frz. M.  
[von Maria Marc]  
Liebe Schwester—geht Dir's gut? u. Paulchen? gieb liebe Nachricht! vom Herzen  
Deine Marcia.

Lasker-Schüler's letters, a comparison with Karl Kraus's response to her letters in *Der Sturm* is useful. Whereas Kraus thought Lasker-Schüler's letters were a gossipy waste of her time and talent, Marc doesn't have any comment initially, other than the fact that he has read very few. But, after he has presumably read the letters (or not?), he does give the following feedback:

Lieber Jussuff

Komm aus Deiner Grube zu uns auf den Traumfelsen. Dort kann man schweigen und sich lieben. Da kommt man nicht auf so thörichte Ideen wie die, mit denen Du Dein Briefchen anfängst. Berlin is ein kranker Traumgrund. Komm auf unsere Höhen. Wir fahren Dienstag früh. Montag Nach[m.] zu Hause gebunden.

[Behalt uns lieb! die Deinen.]<sup>28</sup>

[Dear Jussuff

Get out of your hole and come to us on the dream-cliff. There one can be silent and love. There, such foolish ideas don't occur to one, as those with which you began your little letter. Berlin is a sick dreamland. Come to our heights. We are leaving early Tuesday morning. Monday afternoon stuck at home.

Keep us dear! Yours.]

Marc is evidently concerned for Lasker-Schüler's mental health and perhaps for her physical wellbeing, as well. For all that he participates in her fantasy world-building through his illustrations, he seems to be no vocal critic and has little feedback to offer other than concern about her mental state.<sup>29</sup> Lasker-Schüler does not respond directly, per se, to Marc, but rather in *Die Aktion* letters that he is not receiving. "Lieber Ruben aus der Bibel. Du meinst, meine tollen Briefe klängen etwas nach Galgenhumor. Giselher meinte auch immer, ich könnte nicht so ganz traurig sein." [Dear Ruben from the Bible, you think that my crazy letters sounded somewhat like gallows humor. Giselher always thought too that I couldn't possibly be so sad.]<sup>30</sup> Lasker-Schüler perhaps perceives Marc's criticism as more than concern for her health, as in her *Aktion* letter, she creates further separation from her biblical brother, revealing his Christianity and her Judaism, a Judaism that further sets her apart from others:

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[Dear Jussuf,

haven't received a single *Aktion*, not even from my bookseller, from whom I ordered them 10 days ago. I only know the two initial ones (1st Letter and the letter to Kraus). Otherwise nothing. Send them to us, dear, yes?

Dear Sister—How are you? We, as well as our two deer, are healthy—you should see them!

Fondly, your Frz. M.

Dear sister—are you doing well? and little Pauly? give us some news! lovingly,

Your Maria.]

<sup>28</sup> Franz and Maria Marc to Lasker-Schüler, September 21, 1913.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Franz and Maria Marc to Else Lasker-Schüler, October 14, 1913.

<sup>30</sup> *Briefe und Bilder*. Die Aktion. October 11, 1913. p.4.

Franz, ich habe gestern gehört, du seist ein Christ, du, deine Mareia, dein ganz Haus; also nun bin ich denn hier der einzige vorsinthflutliche Jude noch; mein Skelett fand man neben einem versteinerten Ichtiosaurusohr und einem Skarrabäus in einer Felsspalte vor für die Nachwelt. Ich hab Geld nötig, ich wart den ganzen Tag auf die Nachwelt. Dein Mamuth.”

[Franz, I heard yesterday that you are a Christian, you, your Mareia, your entire household; so I am the only remaining pre-flood Jew; one can find my skeleton next to the fossilized Ichthiosaurus and a scarab in the rock crevice before the entrance to the afterworld. I am in need of money, and I wait all day for the afterworld. Your mammoth.]

Lasker-Schüler’s strategy is two pronged. On one side she establishes the ties between herself and Marc—addressing him as Rueben and uniting his perceived criticism of her writing with that of her lover Giselher. Yet she also reveals a point of difference between the two of them—their religions. Despite the confused biblical timeline (Joseph most certainly is not a contemporary of Noah), Lasker-Schüler places herself, in Jussuf’s guise, as a pre-flood Jew, comparing this status to other extinct species of dinosaurs and paleolithic mammoths. What is a pre-flood Jew? A sinful Jew? Some magical Jew that existed before Abraham’s covenant? Either way, certainly an anachronism.

Despite Marc’s lack of engagement with the letters in *Die Aktion*, Lasker-Schüler continues to combine features of both correspondence—especially on a visual level.<sup>31</sup> In her increasingly brief letters to the Marcs, she includes two versions of the same composition—Prinz Jussuf with a spear piercing his heart, a crescent moon and stars on his cheek, the same crescent moon inverted above, with a few more stars. In the second version there are stars forming a mantle around Jussuf’s shoulders. The letter text with both images is exceedingly brief, in one suggesting that the sketch is a self-portrait (Figure 40)<sup>32</sup> and in the second,



**Figure 40: Illustration from letter to Franz Marc, November 14, 1913.**

<sup>31</sup> Markus Hallensleben’s take on the role of Lasker-Schüler’s literary interlocutor is one that partially solves the issue of her and Marc’s minimal or nonexistent involvement, arguing that these figures “dürfen keineswegs als “Mitspieler” verstanden werden, sondern sind als Fortsetzung realer Persönlichkeiten ins Imaginäre zu begreifen.” (Hallensleben, 171). Yet this view minimizes Lasker-Schüler’s integration of Marc’s imagery into her stories and also her continued request for Marc’s opinion on the letters. I agree, Marc and Walden before him, are not “fellow players,” but perhaps a type of intermedial interlocutor with whom Lasker-Schüler has a real exchange of correspondence, as well as an artistic version of that correspondence in which she exercises more control to present their relationship as she sees fit.

<sup>32</sup> Image from *Elsa Lasker-Schüler—Franz Marc: Eine Freundschaft in Briefen und Bildern*. p. 71.

again asking if they have seen the letters to them in *Die Aktion*.<sup>33</sup> Drawn two weeks apart, the images show Lasker-Schüler playing with a motif of Prinz Jussuf wounded. Yet in her personal letters she does not reveal what has caused this pain—the picture is only completed through her fifth collection of letters in *Die Aktion* in which she reveals the cause, Giselher’s abandonment of her—he has bored a hole in her heart.<sup>34</sup> One month later, a version of the same image appears in *Die Aktion*—this time Jussuf wears a dark cloak and the image bears the caption “In der Schlacht” [In the Battle]. The accompanying letters are a series of dispatches detailing the horrific battle between Jussuf and Giselher. Giselher and his men are after Jussuf’s heart and stomach, wishing to cook them in a broth and eat them.<sup>35</sup> The description of the battle is gruesome—it anticipates First World War poetry yet to be written and the terrible colors and cosmic imagery of Georg Trakl’s Eastern Front poems.<sup>36</sup> Lasker-Schüler heightens the incongruity of poetry and war in her suggestions that Marc would paint the three who wish to eat her heart and stomach in green, yellow, and purple.<sup>37</sup> At this point, it seems that Marc has finally read Lasker-Schüler’s letters to him, or he has decided to respond positively regardless. His feedback is short, but positive: “Lieber Jussuff, wie schön sind Deine Briefe!! Wunderschön!! Prost-Neujahr!” [Dear Jussuff, your letters are so beautiful!! Wonderfully beautiful!! Happy New Year!] (Figure 41).<sup>38</sup>



Figure 41: Postcard from Franz Marc to Else Lasker-Schüler, December 30, 1913

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<sup>33</sup> “Vive la guerre!  
 Ich komme bald zurück.  
 Euer Brüder Jussuf  
 Habt Ihr alle Aktionen?  
 Buch mit Deinen Bildern kommt bald heraus. Erik Schwabach ist so entzückt davon.”  
 [Long live war!  
 I return shortly.  
 Your brother Jussuf  
 Do you have all the Aktionen?  
 A book with your images comes out soon. Erik Schwabach is so impressed by them.]  
 Letter and image in letter to Franz and Maria Marc, November 14, 1913.

<sup>34</sup> This passage in *Die Aktion* deserves a chapter of its own. Lasker-Schüler identifies Giselher as her heartbreaker and visits Dr. Benn for help. Dr. Benn is of course Giselher, a duality that makes the passage all the more absurd for those in the know.

<sup>35</sup> “...die aber hungern namentlich nach meinem Herzen; mein Herz und meinen Magen in ihrer Bouillon zu kochen.” p. 76

<sup>36</sup> “Im Osten” and “Grodek,” both written in 1914 come immediately to mind.

<sup>37</sup> “Du würdest die drei Gourmées sofort malen, grün, gelb und lila.” *Briefe und Bilder*, December 27, 1913.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Franz Marc to Else Lasker-Schüler, December 30, 1913.



The battle letter is a turning point for the letters in *Die Aktion*, with it, Lasker-Schüler's letters become more fantastic and ostensibly have less to do with her Berlin milieu. As Marc has been drawing the animals of Jussuf's menagerie, Lasker-Schüler begins to create her kingdom of Thebes and prepare for her reign as emperor.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion to Lasker-Schüler's initial letters in *Die Aktion* is a slow, courtly procession featuring Jussuf, preparing for coronation in Thebes and debating who to invite to his festivities. The references to life in Berlin have vanished and Jussuf has become a figure removed from exile in the Kingdom of Thebes. Freed from the constraints of reality, Lasker-Schüler's illustrations increase in number and in size in the letters. The last text in the letters is Prinz Jussuf's coronation speech, dedicated to Karl Kraus, as he takes the throne as Abigail Jussuf I. Basileus.

Die Krönungsrede.

Karl Kraus dieses kaiserliche Schreiben in Verehrung

Mein süß Volk! Die großselige Mumie Meines Urgroßvaters, des Scheiks, liegt nun 100 Jahre im Gewölbe. Er konnte sein Herz in die Hand nehmen und es strömen lassen wie einen bunten Brunnen. Ich aber werfe es unter Euch, Meine süßen, bunten Menschen und Ihr werdet es pochen hören und Ihr sollt Euch spiegeln in seinem Glanz. Mein Herz wird Euch ein Garten sein, ruht unter seiner Palma Schatten. Mein Herz ist ein Weinberg, ein Regenbogen Eures Friedens nach dem Sturm. O, Mein Herz ist der Strand der Meere, Mein Herz ist der Ozean: Ich will den Gaukler tanzen fühlen über Mein rotes Rauschen und den Gestrandeten untergehen in Meiner Welle. Aber den Heimgekehrten wird Mein Herz einlassen durch sein Korallentor und dem Liebenden will es ein Mahl bereiten von seiner Beere. Mein Herz möchte sich aufrollen dem Frommen, ein Teppich der Gnade und Demut; dem Betsüchtigen soll Mein warmer Tempel eine Heimat sein. So lieb Ich Euch, Ihr Brüder und Schwestern Meiner Stadt Theben, und Ich bin Euer Vater, Eure Mutter, Euer Bruder und Euer König und Euer Knecht. Denn wer nicht gehorchen kann, kann nicht regieren und wer nicht regieren kann, rühme sich der Demut nicht. Ich, der Malik, bin das Schloß zu der Kette, die Ihr bilden sollt; daß Ihr Mir den Malik ehrt! Und er das goldene Amen Eurer Rede ist. Aber auch in Kriegszeiten soll >>das Blutfließen einer Ader<< bedeuten, den Schauer der Schlacht laßt uns einen Mantel um unsere Schultern legen. Wer seinen Freund verläßt, ist ein Fahnenflüchtiger, aber wehe dem, der sich dem Feinde des Sieges rühmt. Ich will Kaiser sein über Kaiser. Jeder von Euch, und ist's der Aermste, heißt Mein Kaiserlicher Untertan. Wir wollen uns küssen auf den Mund. Ich, der Malik, einen jeden, jeder von Euch den zweiten. So pflegt Mir die Worte Meiner Liebe zart, daß sie zwischen dem Brot Eurer Wecker blühen. Immer sah Ich auf zum Himmel, o, Ihr müsst Mich lieb haben, und Ich bringe Euch Mein Herz ganz sanft wie eine Großnarzisse. Abigail Jussuf I. Basileus.

[The coronation speech

This imperial writing is in honor of Karl Kraus

My sweet people! The blessed mummy of my great grandfather, of the Sheik, has been lying for 100 years in the crypt. He could hold his heart in his hand and let it pour out like a colorful fountain. But I throw it out amongst you, my sweet, colorful people, and you will hear it pounding, and you should reflect yourselves in its radiance. My heart will be a garden to you, rest yourselves beneath the palm shade. My heart is a vineyard, a rainbow of your peace after a storm. Oh, my heart is the beach along the sea, my heart is the ocean: I want to feel the jugglers dance over my red swoosh and those stranded go down in my waves. But those who have returned home will allow my heart in through its coral gates and for loves it will prepare a meal of its berries. My heart would like to roll up for the pious ones a carpet of grace and humility; for those seeking beds, my temple should be a warm home. Thus I love you all, you brothers and sisters of my city of Thebes, and I am your father, your mother, your brother and your king and your servant. Because he who cannot obey, cannot rule, and he who cannot rule let him not boast of humility. I, the Malik, am the catch on the chain that you should create; that you should honor me, the Malik! And he is the golden amen of your speech. But even in wartimes, that should mean the bloodletting of a war, the observer of the battle allows us to place a coat around our shoulders. He who abandons his friend is a flag-evader, but woe to him who praises the enemy for the victory. I want to be the emperor above emperors. Each one of you, even the poorest, is my imperial subject. We want to kiss each other on the mouth. I, Malik, each one of you, each of you the second. Thus to attend to my words of my tender love, so that they blossom between the bread of your alarm. I always looked up to heaven, oh, you have to love me, and I will bring to you my entire heart, as soft as a great narcissus. Abigail Jussuf I. Basileus.]

The central element of Jussuf's coronation speech is the heart. The heart is offered to his people as shelter, a garden, a source of sustenance, and proof of his dedication as emperor to the people of Thebes. In addition to the heart rhetoric, Lasker-Schüler emphasizes family associations—Jussuf is father, mother, brother, as well as king and servant. Service through humility and grace is prioritized, and loyalty and honor are held up as exemplary. The constant refrain of “mein Herz” is difficult to disassociate from the subsequent title of Lasker-Schüler's first epistolary novel, originally *Briefe nach Norwegen* and later *Mein Herz*, and it perhaps signals to her moving beyond the difficulties of her divorce and poverty. The end of *Briefe und Bilder* is hopeful and triumphant.

As Lasker-Schüler's text comes to an end in *Die Aktion* with the coronation speech published on July 1, 1914, the First World War breaks out on July 28, 1914 and Franz Marc volunteers as a paramedic. Lasker-Schüler writes periodic letters to Marc as a continuation of the novel, letters which she continues even after Marc's death at Verdun in 1916. With

Marc's death and the traumatic end of the war in 1919, Lasker-Schüler entirely reconfigures the novel and publishes it as *Der Malik*. It then becomes an antiwar novel dedicated to Marc. The first edition even features reproductions of some of the images Marc painted on postcards to Lasker-Schüler. But the *Der Malik* is radically different from *Briefe und Bilder*. In addition to the loss of the hyper-contemporary original serial format, *Der Malik* is irrevocably tied to the First World War and the death of Franz Marc. It is a work of mourning, rather than a triumphant scramble out of Lasker-Schüler's ravines of grief and despair.

## CONCLUSION

### The Prince of Thebes is Born

Else Lasker-Schüler's coronation address marks the beginning of Prinz Jussuf's reign as Abigail Jussuf I. Basileus and the end of the publication of *Briefe und Bilder* in *Die Aktion*. The project is picked up again in various forms in different publications and is eventually published as *Der Malik*, an antiwar novel, after Marc's death. But these reconfigurations are ones that occur due to the radical rupture caused by the horrors of the First World War. To look at the book from this perspective is to read the project outside of its original context and to rob it of its earlier significance.



**Figure 42: Illustration by Franz Marc in *Der Prinz von Theben*, p. 105.**

Chronologically speaking, Lasker-Schüler's next project involving her persona as Prinz Jussuf comes directly on the heels of this coronation and is a further exploration of

this identity and biography. Referenced frequently in her letters to Franz Marc, Lasker-Schüler's *Der Prinz von Theben* is a collection of short stories and images that create a fantastic biography for Prinz Jussuf.<sup>39</sup> The first edition features three color images by Franz Marc (Figures 42 & 43) that were originally sent as postcards to Lasker-Schüler, and the slim volume also included 26 illustrations by Lasker-Schüler.<sup>40</sup> None had appeared previously in print and while many are akin to the simple sketches in *Briefe nach Norwegen* and *Briefe und Bilder*, there are also more complex illustrations featuring background scenery and multiple figures (Figure 44). Within the stories, Lasker-Schüler completely embraces her identity as Prinz Jussuf and does not flit between realities. The texts are often confusing and on first reading, appear to lack internal coherence. The stories take place in a fairy-tale time frame, one that is clearly in the past, but not easily identifiable as a particular period. It could be the biblical past, Moorish Spain, the Ottoman Empire, or some amalgamation of these periods. Jews and Muslims occupy the space together, and Prinz Jussuf claims both as his heritage, detailing both a sheik and a rabbi as his great-grandfathers and uniting the two religions in the figure of Mschattre-Zimt, a Jewish Sheik and friend of Jussuf's great-grandfather (Figure 45). New and fantastic figures like Tschandragupta and Bisam-Ö appear and as you read, the world of Prinz Jussuf begins to surround you and eliminate awareness of your surrounding reality. It is one of Lasker-Schüler's strangest and most difficult to access texts. The language is often intentionally archaic and a certain magic is wrought, as the reader sounds out the mellifluous names of people and places and gets lost in the strands of a unique and fleeting kingdom.



**Figure 43: Illustration by Franz Marc in *Der Prinz von Theben*, p. 109.**

With *Der Prinz von Theben* as the finishing point, both *Briefe nach Norwegen* and *Briefe und Bilder* become preparation for Lasker-Schüler's full dive into a new, fantastic reality. By presenting her readers with a palimpsest of life in Berlin and Thebes, she has prepared them for the total jump into life in Thebes under the reign of Prinz Jussuf. The only touchstone to the outside world is found in the frequent dedications. Nearly each section is dedicated to someone close to Lasker-Schüler: her parents, her son Paul, Franz and Maria Marc, Senna Hoy,<sup>41</sup> Kete Parsenow der Venus, Karl Kraus dem Cardinal, and various other figures.

<sup>39</sup> Lasker-Schüler, Else. *Der Prinz von Theben*. First Edition, 1914.

<sup>40</sup> After Marc's death, subsequent editions did not feature his artwork, as his wife, Maria, would not allow Lasker-Schüler permission to include them. The number of Lasker-Schüler's own artworks was halved in the two additional editions published.

<sup>41</sup> Senna Hoy (Yohannes reversed) was the name given by Lasker-Schüler to Johannes Holzmann (1882-1914). Much like Herwarth Walden, he embraced the name as his own and published under it. An anarchist, early gay activist, and writer, Senna Hoy died of typhus in Russia in 1914 (before the publication of *Der Prinz von Theben*), where he had gone to aid the international anarchist effort, and after Germany refused to allow him back into the country once he had been incarcerated by the Russian state.



Figure 44: Illustration from *Der Prinz von Theben*, p. 55 “Prinz Jussuf und seine Gefolge” [Prince Jussuf and his followers]



Figure 45: Illustration from *Der Prinz von Theben*, p. 9 “Der Sheik und sein Freund Mschattre-Zimt” [The Sheik and his friend Mschattre-Zimt]

These are the only references to the world outside of Thebes. Though he did not die in the First World War, Senna Hoy’s death in 1914 in Russia is the first of what would become a seemingly unending march of death and destruction.

The First World War was a catastrophic event for Lasker-Schüler. In addition to the shared German experience of the end of stability with the collapse of the monarchy and empire, as well as the financial collapse after the war, many of her contemporaries died. Lasker-Schüler rushed to Georg Trakl’s side after his suicide attempt in 1914, but didn’t reach the military hospital in Krakow before he died of a cocaine overdose. Her “Tristan,” the poet Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele, was killed in action in 1915 in Russia. Wuppertal compatriot Peter Baum died in 1916 on the Eastern Front. And Franz Marc fell at Verdun in 1916. By no means a complete list of all she knew who died, it points to the deep losses experienced by Lasker-Schüler and marks a rupture with the world she had known. The Kingdom of Thebes, already created through together with Marc and eternally inhabited by her now-dead friends, became her refuge.

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