

REVELATORY LOVE, OR THE DYNAMICS OF DISSIMILATION

Franz Rosenzweig and Else Lasker-Schüler

In this final chapter, I turn to two German Jewish modernists who at first sight may not seem to have much in common: Franz Rosenzweig and Else Lasker-Schüler. Rosenzweig was a philosopher who, after writing a dissertation on Hegel and a classic of modern Jewish thought, *The Star of Redemption* (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, written in 1918–19, published in 1921), went on to reform and revitalize Jewish adult education in Weimar Germany. Lasker-Schüler was a bohemian artist who mixed elements of high and low culture and played with conventions of gender and religious identity. What these two writers share, however, is a rather emphatic vision of interfaith encounters in and through love. They are notably less concerned with the racial discourses with which other modernists were contending. In the previous chapter we saw how Arthur Schnitzler rehabilitates Eros as a mode of Christian-Jewish rapprochement only indirectly, by juxtaposing a love story and a social plot. In this chapter, I show how Rosenzweig and Lasker-Schüler more unequivocally valorize love as a model of Christian-Jewish relations as they turn toward religious conceptions of love. They are post-secular thinkers who revisit Jewish religious traditions after secularization has taken hold, both in the Jewish families in which they were raised and in the German society in which they lived and wrote.

Rosenzweig himself called the return of many of his Jewish contemporaries to Jewish religious traditions “dissimilation.”¹ More precisely, he considered dissimilation a transhistorical phenomenon, an enduring and productive tension between Jews and the people among whom they lived. The term has since come to refer more specifically to the process of Jewish self-reflection and self-renewal at the beginning of the twentieth century. As such, dissimilation is often understood to be a reaction to the rise of racial antisemitism during the late nineteenth century and its exacerbation during the First World War, developments that called into question earlier ideals of emancipation and assimilation.² It is noteworthy, however, that Rosenzweig himself rarely addressed antisemitism but was more broadly concerned with the destructive effects of nationalism. He famously began writing *The Star of Redemption* in the trenches of the First World War, which he believed was caused by an excessive nationalism that had perverted the biblical notion of divine election. His project in *The Star of Redemption* was to restore the true meaning of Jewish separateness—namely, the idea that Jews live withdrawn from history and symbolically anticipate redemption.³

In this chapter, I read *The Star of Redemption* in the light of the letters Rosenzweig wrote around the same time to his Christian lover Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy. Their love affair occurred during a period of transition for Rosenzweig, the time when he decided to leave academia for good and devote himself entirely to Jewish adult education. The correspondence with Rosenstock-Huessy shows that his emphatic decision for a Jewish life—which included marriage to a Jewish woman and establishment of a Jewish household—developed in a close dialogue with his Christian friends and his Christian lover. Reading *The Star of Redemption* in conjunction with these letters does not reduce philosophy to autobiography. Rather, it brings out the sociopolitical dimension of Rosenzweig’s thinking. In the first part of this chapter, I show how Rosenzweig develops a concept of revelatory love—which can be experienced in the encounter with God or with the human-as-stranger—as the foundation of a new kind of universality. In the second part, I read Lasker-Schüler’s bold reinterpretation of biblical stories in *Hebrew Ballads* (*Hebräische Balladen*, 1913) as a poetic performance of such love. Both Rosenzweig

1. See the diary entry from April 3, 1922, in Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften I, Briefe und Tagebücher*, vol. 2, 1918–1929, ed. Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann, with the cooperation of Bernhard Casper (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 770.

2. On the concept of dissimilation, see Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256–75; and Jonathan Skolnik, *Jewish Pasts, German Fictions: History, Memory, and Minority Culture in Germany, 1824–1955* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014), esp. 7–9. Taking his cue from Rosenzweig, Skolnik expands “dissimilation” into a concept suited to analyze German Jewish culture at large.

3. On Rosenzweig’s philosophy of history and its reflection on the First World War, see Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism,” in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988), 138–61; and Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshaw (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 17–61.

and Lasker-Schüler depict love as a force that proliferates differences rather than creates a union, and, in so doing, offer new models for living together in an inescapably pluralist world. Finally, I turn toward the darker vision of Lasker-Schüler's "The Wonder-Working Rabbi of Barcelona" ("Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona," 1921). This short, cryptic text, which juxtaposes a Christian-Jewish love story and the depiction of a brutal pogrom, suggests that antisemitic violence is a *failed response* to revelatory love.

Rosenzweig on Singularity and Universality: *The Star of Redemption*

Franz Rosenzweig's major work, *The Star of Redemption*, is many things: a critique of German Idealism, a founding document of modern existentialism, a revival of the concept of revelation, and a vision of how Jewish particularity can be realized within modern, secular German culture. But it is also a book about love, both divine and human, and the role of love in the constitution of human communities. In two of the middle chapters of the book, Rosenzweig defines revelation as an outpouring of divine love, and redemption as an infinite series of acts of neighbor-love. Together these chapters articulate a paradox that also occupies contemporary theorists who seek to reinstate love as a model of social and political relations: that love, which is focused on an object in its singularity, may become the foundation of a new kind of universality.

Revelation in Rosenzweig is an act of divine love in which God addresses a human being and thereby ensouls her and makes her a subject. Although conceived as a personal experience, it is modeled on the historical revelation at Sinai, where God gave the Decalogue to the people of Israel, a small and powerless group of ex-slaves undistinguished by special talents or virtues. This lack of distinction is crucial, for divine love is groundless. It enigmatically seizes upon an object to confer on it a radical singularity. Divine love "transfixes [*ergreift*] individuals—men, nations, epochs, things—in an enigmatic transfixion [*Ergreifen*]. It is incalculable in its transfixion except for the one certainty that it will yet transfix also what has not yet been transfixed. This would seem to imply a constriction of the concept of divine love, yet this apparent narrow-mindedness first turns this love into veritable love."⁴ This is why the sounding of the proper name is the signature linguistic event of revelation. When God calls upon man by this name, he tears him out of the generic context of a social group: "That which has a name of its own can no longer be a thing, no longer everyman's affair. It is incapable of utter absorption

4. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 164–65. All further citations of *The Star of Redemption* refer to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

into the category [*Gattung*] for there can be no category for it to belong to; it is its own category" (186–87).

Rosenzweig's conception of divine love as an act of singularization resonates with several contemporary theories of love. According to Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, the beloved's uniqueness defies linguistic predication. Predication specifies but also abstracts an object by subsuming it under a class of objects with similar properties. The beloved, in contrast, cannot be described through any attributes, except for "adorable," which captures the excessive quality of his or her being: "The other makes language indecisive: one cannot speak *of* the other, *about* the other; every attribute is false, painful, erroneous, awkward: the other is *unqualifiable*."⁵ In his book *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben similarly views love as an expression of singularity and takes note of the ways that the beloved eludes categorization. We may love someone else *for* being smart, petite, brunette, and so on, but not *because of* these characteristics—which can therefore never be entirely abstracted from *this* person who is in *this* place. Because love neither hinges upon nor glosses over the other's concrete qualities, it can enter the particular into a new relation with the universal.⁶

Like Agamben, Rosenzweig does not settle on a notion of pure particularity but rather envisions new modes of connecting particulars. Love in all its registers provides this mode. Divine love is intensely focused on one object yet capable of moving from one object to the next one. God shifts his attention from one place to the next until, in an infinitely distant future, he will love everything. Rosenzweig is eager to distinguish this kind of progressive love from universal love: "Love is no all-love. Revelation knows of no 'all-loving' father; God's love is ever wholly of the moment and to the point at which it is directed, and only in the infinity of time does it reach one point after another, step by step, and inform the All [*das All*]" (164).

Rosenzweig elaborates the idea of an infinite connectivity between particulars in his discussion of neighbor-love, which is the main subject of the chapter on redemption in *The Star of Redemption*. Neighbor-love, which carries divine love into the world, is the foundation of human communities and the principal path to redemption. Neighbor-love ushers in a process in which a circle of people expands and contracts again. Rosenzweig pictures the emergence of community as a succession of individual voices uniting in a chorus. Acts of neighbor-love are calls that elicit incalculable responses from others: "It is quite indefinite, however, which sequence this global migration will observe. The reveille is always answered by the highest voice; but it is not for the bugler to choose which it will be. He never sees more than the next [*das Nächste*], the neighbor [*den Nächsten*]" (235). This process continues until the different voices join together into the redemptive We. The description of

5. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 35; Barthes's emphasis.

6. See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 1–2; see also my introduction, above, pp. 10–11.

how this We defines itself by alternately reaching out to and excluding others is one of the most frequently cited and hotly debated passages of *The Star of Redemption*:

The We encompasses everything it can grasp and reach or at least sight. But what it can no longer reach nor sight, that it must eject from its bright, melodious circle into the dread cold of the Nought: for the sake of its own exclusive-inclusive unity, it must say to it: Ye . . . Yes, the Ye is dreadful. It is the judgment. The We cannot avoid this sitting in judgment, for only with this judgment does it give a definite content to the totality of its We. This content nevertheless is not distinctive; it subtracts nothing from the totality of the We. For the judgment does not distinguish a distinct content as against the We, no other content, that is, than the Nought.

(237)

This passage is at the heart of an ongoing controversy about whether Rosenzweig is a communitarian thinker or a theorist of alterity, whether he advances a holistic theory of community or opens up new venues to think about ethical encounters with others. Peter Gordon, the main proponent of the first view, argues that the passage is indebted to conservative political theories, including communitarian doctrines that posit the necessity of a community's inner uniformity, and the work of Carl Schmitt, who stresses the importance of an ultimately arbitrary distinction between friend and enemy.⁷ In contrast, scholars who seek to enlist Rosenzweig for an ethics of alterity, such as Eric Santner and Kenneth Reinhard, point out that the community he envisions shares neither an essence nor a nameable enemy; that the distinction between the We and the Ye is devoid of positive content.⁸ I believe there is a lot to be said for this second view. Consider the question of who or what is a neighbor. The neighbor is neither a family member nor a blood relative; she does not possess any talents or virtues of interest to me; she does not need to be like me. As Rosenzweig writes, the neighbor is the "Anyone" (236) who happens to be next to me at this very moment. Communities based on neighbor-love could never take the form of, for instance, a group of white Christians distancing itself from a group of black Muslims. Yet neither does the We dissolve such predicates into an all-encompassing category such as human being. What keeps the community together is the shared fidelity to the event of neighbor-love, which can infinitely recur and propagate in new directions. Precisely because the We potentially includes everyone, it needs to temporarily demarcate its boundaries to remain tangible. The momentary contraction of the community prevents it from lapsing into empty generality.

7. See Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), esp. 11–12, 199, 215.

8. See Eric Santner's critique of Gordon's definitions of neighbor and community in Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard, *The Neighbor*, 106–10.

The scholarly debate about the nature of community in *The Star of Redemption* reflects a real tension in the work that merits further attention. In the chapter on redemption, Rosenzweig describes the community based on neighbor-love as a spontaneous and unpredictable development. He does not characterize this community in more specific terms because it potentially includes everyone. Neighbor-love is the basis of a social bond that dissolves fixed social identities. In subsequent chapters of *The Star of Redemption*, however, Rosenzweig offers detailed analyses of two religious communities, Jews and Christians, and their different roles within the divine economy. Briefly summarized, the Jews are already with God and serve as a messianic reminder on earth; the Christians are perpetually on the way to God and capable of spreading his word. Rosenzweig deems religious ritual and social cohesiveness central to the fulfillment of the Jewish mission in particular. Only because the Jews live separate from the other nations as a “blood community” can they anticipate the redemption of everyone.⁹ How can these two very different notions of community—the infinitely open neighborhood and the unchanging religious community—go together?¹⁰

The Personal and the Political in the “Gritli” Letters

The correspondence between Franz Rosenzweig and Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy, which was first published in 2002, offers new answers to this question.¹¹ Margrit

9. See, for instance, the following: “Christianity must proselytize. This is just as essential to it as self-preservation through shutting the pure spring of blood off from foreign admixture is to the eternal people” (341). It is important to note that the notion of a “blood community” in Rosenzweig is not a racial concept. Rather, blood signifies a specific temporality that is also realized in the liturgical tradition of Judaism and that enables Jews to anticipate eternity within historical time. On the discourse of blood in Rosenzweig and other modern German Jewish writers, see also Battegay, *Das andere Blut*; and Katja Garloff, “Kafka’s Racial Melancholy,” in *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Stanley Corngold and Ruth Gross (New York: Camden House, 2011), 89–104.

10. Leonora Banitzky resolves this tension by pointing to the structure of *The Star of Redemption*, which does not present a series of progressive arguments but rather a sequence in reverse order: part 1 (on logic) is predicated on part 2 (on love and experience), which is predicated on part 3 (on community). The possibility of a modern (pluralistic) neighborhood arises from the existence of a traditional (Jewish) community. However, Banitzky does not explain how exactly the closed religious community leads to a broader, inclusive neighborhood. See Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 62–79.

11. Rosenzweig’s letters were first published in Franz Rosenzweig, *Die “Gritli”-Briefe: Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy*, ed. Inken Rühle and Reinhold Mayer (Tübingen: Bilam, 2002). This edition is incomplete, and some scholars have argued that its many omissions and abridgments amount to censorship. For an even-handed critique of the edition, see Michael Zank, “The Rosenzweig-Rosenstock Triangle, or, What Can We Learn from *Letters to Gritli*? A Review Essay,” *Modern Judaism* 23, no. 1 (2003): 74–98. Zank’s main point of critique is that the Rühle/Mayer edition downplays the importance of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy in both the relationship and the correspondence. Shortly after the appearance of the Rühle/Mayer edition, the Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy Society issued a complete electronic edition, *The Gritli Letters (Gritli Briefe)*, transcr. Ulrike von Moltke, ed. Michael Gormann-Thelen and Elfriede Büchsel, <http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/>. All quotations from the letters I use in this chapter can be found in both the print and the electronic versions; in what follows, I provide the date of the letter in parentheses. It should also be mentioned that only one

Rosenstock-Huessy—whom Rosenzweig affectionately called “Gritli”—was a Christian and the wife of his best friend, Eugen. A born Jew who converted to Christianity as a young man, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy in the summer of 1913 attempted, and almost succeeded, to persuade Rosenzweig to follow his path and become a Christian. The conversation created a grave crisis for Rosenzweig, ultimately leading to his decision to remain Jewish and live a more consciously Jewish life. In June 1917, Rosenzweig met Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy’s wife and in the following year began a passionate love affair with her. (Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy knew about the affair between his wife and his best friend and, after initial bouts of jealousy, seems to have approved and in some sense felt a part of it.) Rosenzweig completed *The Star of Redemption* between August 1918 and February 1919 while writing to Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy on an almost daily basis. He later called the book, and in particular the chapter on revelation, his and Rosenstock-Huessy’s “child” (01/17/20) and the “seal” (12/04/20) that would have to substitute for their wedding ring. In what follows now, I read his correspondence with Rosenstock-Huessy not as an autobiographical document but as a thought experiment that complements *The Star of Redemption*. In other words, I do not argue that the book reflects his impossible love for Rosenstock-Huessy, but that his letters to her instantiate the theory of love developed in *The Star of Redemption*.¹²

Rosenzweig’s letters to Rosenstock-Huessy exhibit the same tension between established and spontaneous communities as *The Star of Redemption*. He insists on the separation between Jews and Christians and believes that Jewish endogamy is crucial to this end.¹³ At the same time he depicts modes of interreligious contact through love and believes that the triangle of himself and the Rosenstock-Huessys exemplifies such love. He calls their bond a “revelation” and a “miracle” occurring between individuals (09/06/19 and 08/03/19), and distinguishes it from the institutionalized communality that binds him to other Jews. Yet he considers both necessary. If his love for Margrit and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy testifies to the possibility of “new names” in life, the “old names,” including established religious institutions, are God’s testament in the world (09/06/19). While *revelation* (love) ushers the lovers into a world of possibility, these established institutions anticipate *redemption* in the actual world. Rosenzweig’s belief in the necessity of religious institutions explains his indignation at any attempt, on the part of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and others, to alienate him from the new Jewish life he was trying to build for himself. He explains to Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy his dual commitment to the Jewish

side of the correspondence still exists, since Rosenzweig’s wife, Edith, destroyed Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy’s letters after his death.

12. The most extensive reading of the Gritli letters thus far has been undertaken by Ephraim Meir, *Letters of Love: Franz Rosenzweig’s Spiritual Biography and Oeuvre in Light of the Gritli Letters* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006). Meir reads the correspondence as an intercultural dialogue that respects the other’s alterity.

13. He speaks, for instance, of the “danger of mixed marriage” (10/02/19).

community and his Christian friends and lover(s): “I adhere in the world to that which God *has* rendered *real* here, to the institutions that have been put onto the earth as sources of divine inspiration, visible to all. They are testimonies of God on our to-be-redeemed and redeemed earth, testimonies just as real and as much part of this world as the miracle of revelation in the narrow magic circle of our hearts” (09/06/19; Rosenzweig’s emphasis).

What is striking about Rosenzweig’s letters is how they project his lover into the place of revelation. He describes Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy as the major force behind the composition of the revelation chapter of *The Star of Redemption*: “This book II 2 that I am now writing belongs to you. . . . It is not ‘for you’ but—yours. Yours—as I am. Sometimes I feel as if I were a child who cannot write but wants to very much, and you are guiding my pen” (11/02/18). From his letters it appears that Rosenzweig in his personal life tried to follow the path from revelation to redemption laid out in *The Star of Redemption*. After Rosenstock-Huessy’s love has opened up his soul, he searches for a female “neighbor” with whom he can contract a marriage and create a Jewish home—and finds her in Edith Hahn. The power of this construction also explains what may otherwise seem psychologically quite implausible: Rosenzweig hopes that his love for Rosenstock-Huessy, whom he cannot marry, both because she is married to someone else and because she is a Christian, will inspire his affection for his soon-to-be Jewish wife. He describes his love for Rosenstock-Huessy in various metaphors as a “stormproof tree” that protects the “tender shoot” of his love for Hahn (01/06/20) and as a live-giving juice that sustains his relationship with Hahn (01/18/20). He also claims that Rosenstock-Huessy’s letters restore to him the possibility of language, enabling him to read Hahn’s letters on one occasion (3/13/20) and to speak with her after a deadening day of silence on another (6/26/20). Again, I do not suggest that the letters offer an accurate psychological analysis of Rosenzweig’s feelings, but that they construe his Christian lover as a human source of revelation: as the force that opens him up to language, to the world, and to others.

I call the experience of an overpowering address from an Other that inspires all future relations to others “revelatory love.” To be sure, for Rosenzweig, all love ultimately flows from the same source, which is why he also speaks of Rosenstock-Huessy as his “next one” or neighbor (05/06/19). Yet his encounter with Rosenstock-Huessy is revelatory in that it is said to spark in him the very ability to love. The idea of revelatory love is part and parcel of what Eric Santner has called Rosenzweig’s “*postsecular* thinking.”¹⁴ Like other recent commentators, Santner views Rosenzweig as a post-Nietzschean thinker for whom redemption leads *into* life rather than beyond it. Yet redemption in Rosenzweig still depends upon a force extraneous to the subject, a notion Santner compares to the psychoanalytic understanding of

14. Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard, *The Neighbor*, 133; Santner’s emphasis. See also Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

the cure: "There is really no such thing as self-analysis; one cannot give to oneself the possibility of new possibilities. Something must *happen*, something beyond one's own control, calculations, and labor, something that comes from the locus of the Other."¹⁵ Santner's comparison between Freud and Rosenzweig hinges upon a materialist conception of desire according to which human drives are formed through social interpellation. Social and political laws structure the desire of individuals, creating "deep individual and social patterns of servitude" that help sustain the existing sociopolitical order.¹⁶ What Rosenzweig calls revelation, and Freud calls the psychoanalytic cure, allows us to break such patterns by making us conscious of them and opening us up to an encounter with our neighbor. Revelation enables us to attend to what is agitating, strange, and unresolved in others rather than reducing them to a set of attributes or making up fantasies about them. In Santner's reading, Rosenzweig the postsecular thinker invokes God in order to reimagine the social bond.

The work of modern German Jewish writers shows that cultural difference is a privileged source of such Otherness that straddles the lines between religious and secular thought. Witness Freud's bold construction, in *Moses and Monotheism* (his final published work), of the biblical Moses as an Egyptian, a "great stranger" who imposes a new and demanding religion on the Hebrews. Like Rosenzweig, Freud could not imagine that a new and superior truth—namely, monotheism and the instinctual renunciation it requires—can emerge from within a people. Such a truth has to come from the outside. The construction of Moses as an Egyptian allows Freud to suggest an external force without recourse to a notion of divine intervention. Rosenstock-Huessy's Christianity and Swiss nationality are another example of religious and cultural otherness taking the place of God's otherness. This kind of otherness cannot be expressed in a series of predicates but rather disrupts the very processes of linguistic predication and social identification. When Rosenzweig states that Rosenstock-Huessy's Christianity and Swiss nationality were never truly important to him (10/06/19) this is consistent with his view that revelatory love propels people out of their social identities. In love, markers of social, cultural, or religious identity matter only insofar as they are integral and inalienable aspects of the other's being. Lovers cannot reduce each other to representatives of another religion. As Rosenzweig writes to Rosenstock-Huessy, "You see *my* Jewishness, but I am not, for you, 'the' Jew" (08/19/19; Rosenzweig's emphasis). In other words, the religious difference between the lovers matters, but it cannot be reified and abstracted from the context of their lives. Religious difference becomes a question of place rather than identity.¹⁷

15. Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard, *The Neighbor*, 123.

16. Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard, *The Neighbor*, 132.

17. Stéphane Mosès notes that Rosenzweig's emphasis on place reflects his belief in the plurality of religious truth. Already in his 1916 correspondence with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Rosenzweig attempts "to show that Judaism and Christianity are equally *true*, or at the very least that they have equal rights in their relation to truth. Two years later, in *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig would show

The emphasis on place is an important feature of Rosenzweig's thought and a reason, I suggest, why his work is a rich resource in the contemporary search for a conception of the universal that does not eliminate the particular. Throughout the correspondence it is clear that Rosenzweig's love for Rosenstock-Huessy does not diminish his sense of religious difference or bring Jews and Christians closer together as a group. Theirs is an encounter that momentarily suspends differences but ultimately makes each of them more aware of their particular place in life. Rosenzweig's various attempts to explain Judaism to Rosenstock-Huessy, for instance, are not hermeneutical exercises meant to reduce differences in and through interpretation. Thus he warns her that a Christian's understanding of Jewish Bible commentaries must remain limited because Judaism is to be lived rather than understood. What she nevertheless comprehends, she owes to the fact that she lives part of his life with him—and this togetherness is of course limited in all sorts of ways: "One is not *supposed* to understand the Bible, one is supposed to become more alive. But because this life is now a Jewish life, the Christian reader is barred from the commentary. What you do still understand, you can understand only because you live my life with me" (11/07/19; Rosenzweig's emphasis). Over the course of the correspondence, the irreducible distance between the lovers becomes the hallmark of revelatory love, and in fact of all love.

Revelatory love, whether experienced in the encounter with God or with the human-as-stranger, becomes Rosenzweig's model for social relations. A striking passage from the "Gritli" letters sums up Rosenzweig's theory of love. At the time he considered publishing *The Star of Redemption* with a publisher specializing in Christian works, which made him think intensely about Christian-Jewish relations and his own position vis-à-vis the Christian world. In this context Rosenzweig describes love as a mode of rapprochement that enhances a sense of separateness, that does not create a union but sustains a dualism. As the end of the letter shows, this model of distance-in-proximity also applies to his relationship with Rosenstock-Huessy. I suggest reading the "Yours," which here and in other letters replaces the proper name as a signature, as a sign of devotion rather than possession. This "Yours" shows how love reorients the self toward the other without collapsing the difference between the two:

"Rapprochement" exists only if there is no *fusion*. If an I and a You become *one*; if the I does not remain I, and the You, You; if the little word "and" is disavowed—that is Tristan and Isolde—"thus we die now inseparable, eternally one without end etc."—and thus not love. Love recognizes the separateness of places, it presupposes this

that no 'objective discourse of truth is possible, but rather that all knowledge refers to truth from the perspective of a particular point in space and time. Truth is not present in an absolute sense but is rather revealed *hic et nunc*, forever varied, to the experience of subjects already placed in one point or another in the world." Stéphane Mosès, "On the Correspondence between Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy," in *The German-Jewish Dialogue Reconsidered: A Symposium in Honor of George L. Mosse*, ed. Klaus L. Berghahn (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 109–23; here 113.

separateness, or perhaps even establishes it for the first time. (For what would prevent, in the world of loveless things, one thing from occupying the place of another!) Love does *not* say I am You *but*—and now you have to understand me completely and agree with me—: I am

Yours.

(07/01/19; Rosenzweig's emphasis)

Revelatory Love in Else Lasker-Schüler's *Hebrew Ballads*

Else Lasker-Schüler's turn to Jewish culture and religion is another instance of Jewish dissimilation, if an idiosyncratic one. Born into an acculturated German Jewish family, in 1894 Lasker-Schüler married a Jewish physician and moved with him to Berlin, where the couple divorced a few years later. In Berlin she joined a bohemian circle of artists and writers, published her first volume of poetry in 1902, and became affiliated with the Expressionist movement. She also made the acquaintance of several thinkers dedicated to the renaissance of Jewish culture, including the philosopher Martin Buber and the Hebrew writer Shmuel Josef Agnon. Lasker-Schüler's understanding of Judaism remained eclectic, and her writing an example of what Paul Mendes-Flohr has termed the "aesthetic affirmation of Judaism" fashionable among Western European Jews of the time.¹⁸ Her affirmation involved playful masquerades, both in literature and in real life, that reversed gender roles and combined different cultural and religious traditions. She accompanied her literary portrayals of "wild" and "Oriental" Jews with a flamboyant self-stylization as a Jewish-Muslim Oriental, often appearing in the coffeehouses of Berlin in caftan, wide trousers, and with gold rings around her ankles. She also claimed a special affinity to Semitic languages. On one occasion she wrote proudly: "Theologians often tell me that I am writing German like Hebrew or Aramaic";¹⁹ and on another she told Ari Zvi Greenberg, an acclaimed Hebrew poet who wanted to translate some of her poems: "But I am writing in Hebrew."²⁰

In what follows, I argue that Rosenzweig's theory of revelatory love sheds light on the work in which Lasker-Schüler most clearly embraces the Hebrew tradition, her *Hebrew Ballads*. Interfaith romance features prominently in this poetry cycle, which originally comprised fifteen poems, though Lasker-Schüler repeatedly expanded and rearranged it.²¹ Some of the poems build on existing biblical

18. Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 77–132; here 100.

19. Else Lasker-Schüler, *Gesichte: Essays und andere Geschichten* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1913), 20.

20. Quoted in Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 137.

21. In what follows, I cite from the second, augmented edition of *Hebräische Balladen* as reprinted in Else Lasker-Schüler, *Werke und Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Norbert Oellers, Heinz Rölleke, and Itta Shedletsky (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996–2010), 1.1:155–67.

models, such as those of Esther and Ruth. Others boldly retell biblical stories to turn them into visions of a love that crosses religious, national, and other boundaries. Even the poems that do not explicitly refer to biblical stories are shot through with religious vocabulary. Lasker-Schüler not only works from a religious text, however idiosyncratically, but recounts instances of divine love throughout the cycle, couching her visions of erotic love in allusions to divine love and vice versa. Thus the poem "Reconciliation" ("Versöhnung") conflates the religious service on Yom Kippur, the high Jewish holiday devoted to fasting and repentance, with a scene of reconciling lovers who attempt kisses and redden each other's cheeks. The poem simultaneously secularizes the religious holiday and renders erotic love religious. The title of another poem, "Sabaoth" ("Zebaoth"), refers to the divine attribute commonly translated as "heavenly hosts." This poem both cites and disrupts the Romantic tradition of conferring the divine powers of creation on the poet. As the speaker addresses God first as "you godlike youth" and then as "you poet," these apostrophes recall the Romantic image of the poet-prophet.²² However, the speaker's inability to reach her addressee preserves a sense of radical alterity. The term *postsecular* captures this kind of stalled secularization and the potential for sociopolitical renewal it harbors.

Christanne Miller has argued that Lasker-Schüler's emphasis on love rather than politics is itself a political gesture. Writing on the eve of the First World War, Lasker-Schüler rejects the masculinist, militarist culture of her time, which also influenced some sectors of the Jewish public sphere. Her portrayals of unions between people of different religions or social classes conjure alternative modes of bonding and alternative models of community. Love in this view can, if not overturn, at least diminish social differences and hierarchies.²³ I believe that Miller is right about the political impetus behind Lasker-Schüler's work but wrong in her conception of love as a form of social leveling. The poems in *Hebrew Ballads* are far from creating seamless fusions between people from different backgrounds. The recurrent themes of exile, departure, and abandonment indicate that the unity of the biblical figures conjoined in the poems remains incomplete. The two poems about Ruth and Boas provide one example. Lasker-Schüler turns the biblical story

22. In the German original, "du Gottjüngling" and "Du Dichter." Lasker-Schüler, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:162. All further citations of *The Hebrew Ballads* refer to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text. I have drawn on the following existing translations, which I have, however, frequently combined and/or changed: Else Lasker-Schüler, *Hebrew Ballads and Other Poems*, trans. Audri Durchslag and Jeanette Litman-Demeestère (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980); and Else Lasker-Schüler, *Star in My Forehead: Selected Poems*, trans. Janine Canan (Duluth, Minn.: Holy Cow! Press, 2000).

23. See Cristanne Miller, "Reading the Politics of Else Lasker-Schüler's 1914 *Hebrew Ballads*," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (April 1999): 135–59. Miller sums up: "Lasker-Schüler . . . models an ideal of tenderness between people of different nations and unequal power where the ostensibly less powerful is more honored" (150). Miller seems unaware of the Christian biases of her argument. For instance, when she remarks that "legalistic judgment bows to affection and mercy in 'Abraham and Issac,'" (150), she forgets that legalism and lack of love are stock images of the antisemitic repertoire.

of Ruth, which is primarily about loyalty, economic security, and communal recognition, into one of unfulfilled yearning for love and nostalgic longing for home. Ruth's integration into the new community remains conspicuously incomplete.²⁴ In what follows, I will show that this is true of the *Hebrew Ballads* in general: if love reconciles people separated along social and religious lines, it also introduces new divisions along new lines. As in Rosenzweig, love in Lasker-Schüler leads to the proliferation of differences rather than the creation of unity.²⁵

The poem "Jacob and Esau" ("Jakob und Esau") draws on a particularly rich trope for interreligious relations. Both Jews and Christians have used the story of the brothers turned enemies typologically to depict group relations. Already in the biblical book of Genesis, the story takes on a paradigmatic character in God's statement to Rebecca, the mother of Jacob and Esau: "Two nations are in your womb, / Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; / One people shall be mightier than the other, / And the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). In Genesis, Jacob and Esau reconcile after Jacob flees to his uncle and later returns as a rich man. However, God's oracle about future tensions between their descendants (which is echoed by Isaac's blessings of his sons on his deathbed) still stands and raises the question of what kind of antagonist Esau is, a potential ally or a particularly treacherous enemy. This ambiguity in the brothers' relationship explains, perhaps, why the story of Jacob and Esau has become a privileged trope to figure and refigure the relations between Jews and non-Jews. Rabbinic commentators successively linked Esau to the Edomites, the Romans, and the Christians and conjured his image to warn their fellow Jews against the enemies of Israel. Christian theologians identified Esau with the Jews and read the story as evidence that the first-born Jews have to serve the later-born Christians. Enlightenment and emancipation gave birth to a number of retellings that were, however, still overwhelmingly focused on Esau's otherness. Among the few exceptions is Samson Raphael

24. The first poem, "Ruth," departs quite dramatically from the biblical narrative in its portrayal of two lovers who cannot come together. The second poem, "Boaz," highlights the incompleteness of Ruth's integration into the people of Israel. Its last lines describe the movement of Boaz's heart—here figured as a stalk of grain—toward Ruth: "[Boaz's heart] sways so high / In his grain gardens / Toward the foreign reaper." ("Boas Herz") wagt ganz hoch / In seinen Korngärten / Der fremden Schnitterin zu" (165). Both the incompleteness of the heart's movement and Ruth's status as a foreigner suggest that the process of rapprochement is still ongoing. The characterization of Ruth as a reaper or cutter of barley (rather than a gatherer of leftovers) further casts her as an uprooting force, as she literally tears Boaz's heart out of its native soil. While I won't interpret these two poems in more detail in this chapter, I will show how other poems from *Hebrew Ballads* create a similar sense of separation in and through love.

25. When she first published *Hebrew Ballads*, Lasker-Schüler was involved in a relationship with Gottfried Benn. They had met in the fall of 1912, around the time of Lasker-Schüler's divorce from her second husband, Herwarth Walden. In 1913–14, Benn and Lasker-Schüler carried on a poetic dialogue, each writing several poems to or about each other. In retrospect, the relationship seems particularly fraught since Benn, who is regarded one of the greatest German poets of the twentieth century, supported the Nazi regime in the early 1930s. Helma Sanders-Brahms 1997 film, *Mein Herz—Niemandem!* (*My Heart Is Mine Alone*), uses their love affair as an allegory for German-Jewish relations. I would argue that Lasker-Schüler's Benn poems continue the poetics of disjunction she developed earlier in *Hebrew Ballads*.

Hirsch's 1867 commentary on Genesis, which evinces optimism about the future of Christian-Jewish relations, based on the reconciliatory trajectory of the biblical story.²⁶ At the time, however, nobody had gone as far as Lasker-Schüler in depicting a peaceful harmony between the brothers.

Jacob and Esau

Rebecca's maidservant is a heavenly stranger
A garment of rose petals garbs the angel
And in her face a star.

She always looks to the light,
And her gentle hands enfold
A repast out of lentils gold.

Jacob and Esau blossom in her presence
And do not quarrel over the sweets
That in her lap she breaks to make the meal.

The brother leaves the chase to the younger
And his birthright for the maidservant's favor;
And wildly flings the thicket over his shoulder.

Jakob und Esau

Rebekkas Magd ist eine himmlische Fremde,
Aus Rosenblättern trägt die Engelin ein Hemde
Und einen Stern im Angesicht.

Und immer blickt sie auf zum Licht,
Und ihre sanften Hände lesen
Aus goldenen Linsen ein Gericht.

Jakob und Esau blühen an ihrem Wesen
Und streiten um die Süßigkeiten nicht,
Die sie in ihrem Schoß zum Mahle bricht.

Der Bruder läßt dem jüngeren die Jagd
Und all sein Erbe für den Dienst der Magd;
Um seine Schultern schlägt er wild das Dickicht.

(163)

26. On the different readings of the story of Jacob and Esau, see Malachi Haim Hacoheh's *Jacob and Esau: Jewish European History between Nation and Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). I would like to thank Hacoheh for sharing with me parts of the work in draft form and for responding to my queries.

Lasker-Schüler's most striking departure from the biblical story is the invention of the figure of Rebecca's maidservant, the "heavenly stranger" whose love generates more love and eases the competition between Jacob and Esau. What is most conspicuous about this figure is the ambiguity that surrounds her: Is she a human or an angel? A mother or a lover? Kin or stranger? The poem expands here on a sense of ambiguity already present in the Bible. There is no biblical model for the maidservant, but Rebecca herself is an Aramaic—and a member of Abraham's extended family—who comes to Canaan only after Abraham sends a servant to his former hometown to find a wife for his son.²⁷ Rebecca is thus both kin and a stranger, just as Jacob and Esau are both brothers and enemies. Here and elsewhere in the *Hebrew Ballads*, Lasker-Schüler elaborates on the rifts, ambiguities, and double entendres found in the original biblical stories. While the care Rebecca's maidservant lavishes on Jacob and Esau makes her a mother figure, the predicate "heavenly stranger" highlights her status as a foreigner. She is a "Gritli" figure whose ethnic or cultural otherness is the source of her positive transformative power. An ambiguous eroticism is part and parcel of this representation, notably when the brothers harmoniously share the sweets "that in her lap she breaks to make the meal."

At this moment of eroticization, however, love turns into a force that separates rather than unites, that brings the brothers together while creating new divisions between them. In the end only one of them receives the maidservant's "favor" (*Dienst*), and the poem concludes with a scene of departure rather than with reconciliation. The poem introduces here an interesting ambiguity: which of the brothers actually receives the maid's service or favor? The lines "The brother leaves the chase to the younger / And his birthright for the maidservant's favor" can be read in two different ways. First, as a scene of exchange: Esau gives Jacob his hunt and inheritance *in exchange for the maid's favor*. This reading would correspond to the biblical story, where Esau's marriage to two Canaanite women is said to be "a source of bitterness" for his parents (Gen. 26:35). The maidservant in the poem could be such a foreign woman who disrupts the family genealogy. However, a second scenario is suggested by the possibility of reading "for" (*für*) as a consecutive preposition. In this scenario, Esau gives his hunt and inheritance to Jacob *so that* Jacob can obtain the maidservant's favor, while Esau himself departs into the wilderness (*Dickicht*) with nothing at all. This would be a scene of radical departure rather than social exchange, an overturning of any quid-pro-quo logic. And Rebecca's maidservant would be another Ruth, the stranger-turned-kin who is absorbed into the family genealogy while inscribing a trace of otherness into it. These two readings are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the second reading brings out what is already implied in the first: that the rapprochement in and through love upsets the existing social order.

27. The Bible mentions a wet nurse and several maidservants who accompany Rebecca on her way to Isaac (Gen. 24:59, 61), but none of these play any role in the story of Jacob and Esau.

This disruption of the social also occurs on the level of representation. “Jacob and Esau” takes its figures out of the context of typological readings by undermining the historical thinking upon which such readings depend. Rather than point to later incarnations of the two brothers the poem maintains a strict focus on the present. Unlike the biblical prophecy, which anticipates later developments in the future tense, the poem creates a static present through locutions such as “She *always* looks to the light” (my emphasis) and the concluding evocation of a departure that leads nowhere. The image of Esau roaming alone through the wilderness and propelled out of each and every social order, however, takes nothing away from the poem’s overall positive tone. Here and elsewhere in the *Hebrew Ballads*, Lasker-Schüler combines images of isolation, separation, even violence, with images of a social harmony based on love. The slippages between the familiar and the exotic, the divine and the erotic, are constitutive of the poems’ social visions. The diffuse sensuality of the poems individualizes biblical figures and works against their deployment as social types or paradigms. While this representation participates in the modern discourse of love that pits individual freedom against social conventions, it ultimately serves to reimagine the social bond. The poems in *Hebrew Ballads* disrupt processes of social identification in order to create new connections between singularities.

Another biblical figure and social archetype that plays a particularly important role in Lasker-Schüler’s imagination is Joseph. The biblical Joseph exemplifies the position of power to which a minority member may rise if protected by the majority ruler. Lasker-Schüler’s poem “Pharaoh and Joseph” (“Pharao und Joseph”) transforms this political partnership into a homoerotic bond. The poem stands at the beginning of her lifelong identification with Joseph, or more precisely, with the Prince Yussuf of Thebes, an imaginary figure that conflates aspects of Joseph and the Pharaoh. Whereas the biblical Joseph owes whatever power he has to the foreign sovereign, Yussuf is the sovereign ruler of Thebes, a priestly king who embodies absolute power.²⁸ In the poem, Pharaoh and Joseph are still two separate figures, yet united in love.

Pharaoh and Joseph

Pharaoh dismisses his blossoming wives—
They are fragrant as Amon’s gardens.

His royal head rests on my shoulder,
That emanates the scent of grain.

28. The Arab spelling of his name already hints at the difference between Yussuf and the biblical Joseph. Doerte Bischoff argues that the figure of the Pharaoh plays practically no role in Lasker-Schüler’s prose because Yussuf the Prince of Thebes unites all powers within himself. See Bischoff, *Ausgesetzte Schöpfung: Figuren der Souveränität und Ethik der Differenz in der Prosa Else Lasker-Schülers* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2002), 313.

Pharaoh is made of gold.
His eyes come and go
Like shimmering Nile waves.

His heart, though, lies in my blood—
Ten wolves went to my watering place.

Pharaoh always thinks
About my brothers,
Who threw me into the pit.

In sleep his arms become pillars—
And threaten.

But his dreamy heart
Ripples in my depths.

So my lips compose
Great sweets
In the wheat of our morning [tomorrow].

Pharao und Joseph

Pharao verstößt seine blühenden Weiber,
Sie duften nach den Gärten Amons.

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

Pharao ist von Gold.
Seine Augen gehen und kommen
Wie schillernde Nilwellen.

Sein Herz aber liegt in meinem Blut.
Zehn Wölfe gingen an meine Tränke.

Immer denkt Pharao
An meine Brüder,
Die mich in die Grube warfen.

Säulen werden im Schlaf seine Arme
Und drohen.

Aber sein träumerisch Herz
Rauscht auf meinem Grund.

Darum dichten meine Lippen
Große Süßigkeiten
Im Weizen unseres Morgens.

To understand the dynamic of separation and entanglement in this poem we need to abandon any conception of love as fusion. As I have argued, Rosenzweig proposed an alternative conception of love that anticipates the more recent theories of Barthes, Agamben, and others. For these thinkers, love is an encounter that preserves the other's otherness, a form of recognition without knowledge. Knowing means to bestow a mental representation on something and make it commensurate with other things, whereas recognizing means to sense a presence without subsuming it to existing representational forms. In Rosenzweig's work, this form of encounter is realized in divine love and in neighbor-love, where contiguity outweighs similarity. Linguistic predication is disrupted in both cases. In neighbor-love the object is so indeterminate that its attributes no longer matter; in divine love the object is so specific that its attributes cannot be abstracted from it. Agamben and Barthes similarly postulate that love makes it impossible to separate the other's being from his or her attributes. In contrast to the pop-psychological notion that we are bound to fall for a certain "type," love in this view does not aim at the other's qualities in a way that would allow for categorization.

Lasker-Schüler realizes this idea of love in a poetic language that makes personal characteristics nontransferable, nondetachable from a particular person and a particular place. In "Pharaoh and Joseph," the process of substitution in which Joseph takes the wives' place changes the character of love. The poem shifts from metaphorical to metonymic constructions that embed a person's qualities in his or her being. The depiction of Pharaoh's wives by means of an attributive participle—"blossoming"—suggests that Pharaoh's love for them was based on properties such as beauty, youth, fragrance, and so on. In contrast, the synecdoche of the shoulder that emanates corn scent effectively fuses Joseph with the cornfield: Joseph does not smell like an ear of corn, he is one. The description of Pharaoh is similarly lacking in attributive structures that would allow a distinction between an individual and his or her properties. For instance, by omitting the definite article that most modern German Bible translations use before "Pharaoh," Lasker-Schüler transforms the political title into a proper name.²⁹ This change not only highlights the equality of Joseph and Pharaoh but also undermines the very function of political titles, which assign a social position rather than express a person's singularity. Furthermore, the depiction of Pharaoh as "of gold" ("von Gold" rather than the more idiomatic "aus Gold") emphasizes the material over the thing made of it. The Pharaoh appears to be a manifestation of goldenness rather than a person with the quality of goldenness.

The metonymic quality of the language contributes to a sense of persistent conflict in the poem. The vision of revenge in the sixth stanza, for instance, calls into

29. For instance, the 1905 edition of the Elberfelder Bible translation uses the definite article throughout, as does the 1951 edition of the Schlachter Bible translation (which first appeared in 1905). The 1912 edition of the Luther Bible uses the definite article only in some passages. See <http://bibel-online.net>.

question the opposition between militarist and loved-based communities posited by Miller and others. Just like “Jacob and Esau,” “Pharaoh and Joseph” omits the conciliatory ending of the Bible, highlighting instead the conflict between Joseph and his brothers. The love between Joseph and Pharaoh seems only to deepen the rift between Joseph and his birth family. And even the symbiosis between Joseph and Pharaoh, which to some extent counteracts the atmosphere of menace, is not as seamless as it first looks. If this symbiosis culminates in the writing of poetry that expresses their harmonious union, the poem’s possessive adjectives tell a slightly different story. While the “our” in the last line signals a newfound unity, it differs in tone and meaning from the other possessive adjectives in the poem. It is part of a genitive attribute and combined with an abstract noun, and a future-oriented one at that—since “unseres Morgens” can mean either “of our morning” or “of our tomorrow”—which gives the bond between Joseph and Pharaoh a fragile, utopian quality. This “our” cannot make the reader forget the physical separateness highlighted in the first seven stanzas, which relentlessly pit the possessive pronouns “his” and “my”—and the different body parts associated with them—against each other.

I wrote above that Rosenzweig rejects the Romantic idea of love as fusion, which in his mind ultimately leads to death and which materializes “if the little word ‘and’ is disavowed.”³⁰ He considers the lack of fusion essential for any kind of inter-religious rapprochement through love. It is interesting in that regard how Lasker-Schüler highlights the word “and” in the titles of *Hebrew Ballads*. Whereas most of the titles feature an individual biblical figure, some feature a couple, linking two proper names together with an “and.” Yet as I have shown, the poems are marked by a sense of abiding separation and unfulfilled longing. While they blur the boundaries between the figures and blend their images, their abrupt and inconclusive endings undermine any rhetoric of fusion. The copula “and” in the titles anticipates the proliferation of differences in the main part of the poems. While conjoining the names, the “and” exhibits the space between them and draws attention to the disjunction created in love. This disjunctive effect also extends to the poems’ structure of reference. Although the *Hebrew Ballads* actualize the biblical stories best known to both Christian and Jewish readers, they do not necessarily, as one critic contends, “foreground a common inheritance.”³¹ Rather, Lasker-Schüler’s idiosyncratic take on biblical figures tears them out of their narrative context and singularizes them, thereby restoring the original function of proper names.³²

30. Rosenzweig, “Gritli”-Briefe, 358. In *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig also emphasizes that the “and” of revelation does not create a synthesis (255–26).

31. Miller, “Reading the Politics,” 151.

32. It fits with this emphasis on singularity that Lasker-Schüler never attempted to create a narrative sequence out of the poems (this was done by her editors only after her death), although she repeatedly changed their order. In later editions, she used the metapoems to frame the ones on individual biblical figures, but she still avoided building a narrative sequence. Thus the poem “In the Beginning” (“Im Anfang”) is the very last poem in the second edition of *Hebrew Ballads*, and the sixth-to-last poem in the third edition.

Revelatory Love and Antisemitic Violence

As we have seen, in *Hebrew Ballads* the view of love as reconciliation contrasts with a darker sense of exile and separation. Lasker-Schüler praises the conciliatory power of love while registering the irreducible distance between the lovers. I have suggested that this apparent contradiction resolves once we understand love along with Rosenzweig as revelatory. In both Rosenzweig and Lasker-Schüler, love connects singularities and in so doing proliferates the differences between them and within each of them. In this final section, I will explore the idea of revelatory love in one of Lasker-Schüler most openly political texts, “The Wonder-Working Rabbi of Barcelona.” This is a story about a pogrom in medieval Spain, which the author probably wrote in response to the increase of antisemitism in her own time. The violence described in the text recalls the pogroms in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, about which the avid newspaper reader Lasker-Schüler was likely well informed, and the spread of antisemitic prejudice in Western Europe in the wake of the First World War. “The Wonder-Working Rabbi of Barcelona” also hints at several Jewish responses to antisemitism, including cultural and political Zionism, without clearly endorsing either of them.³³ Interspersed in this story about antisemitic violence is the love story of a Jewish girl and a Christian boy, who in the end escape the brutal pogrom with the help of a ship that mysteriously appears in the middle of the town. As I will show, their love is revelatory also in the sense that it allows the differences between them to emerge.

The language of revelation informs the text on several levels. In a letter to Karl Kraus, Lasker-Schüler describes her own writing process: “Now I wrote the Wonder-Rabbi, who came over me like a revelation, and I was shattered [*zerschlagen*].”³⁴ The word *zerschlagen* registers a violence that resonates with Rosenzweig when he describes revelatory love as a shattering, even traumatic event. Such love tears the subject out of self-containment, leading to a sudden change in consciousness: “And yet—love would not be the moving, the gripping, the searing experience that it is if the moved, gripped, seared soul were not conscious of the fact that up to this moment it had not been moved nor gripped. Thus a shock was necessary before the self could become beloved soul” (*The Star of Redemption*, 179). As I will show, in “The Wonder-Working Rabbi” interfaith romance effects just such a disruption, and—even more provocatively—antisemitism results from the failure to find an adequate response to such disruption. “The Wonder-Working Rabbi”

33. On the context of “The Wonder-Working Rabbi of Barcelona,” see Sigrid Bauschinger, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Biographie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 268–73. My reading of the text is indebted to two detailed interpretations that appeared in recent years. In *Jewish Pasts*, 105–46, Jonathan Skolnik offers a richly contextualized reading that emphasizes the story’s critical engagement with nineteenth-century Jewish historical novels, and in particular with the representation of Spanish Jewry in these novels. In *Ausgesetzte Schöpfung*, 409–42, Doerte Bischoff focuses on figures of disruption in the story.

34. Lasker-Schüler, *Werke und Briefe*, 7:219.

is much more polemical than Lasker's Schüler's *Hebrew Ballads* or Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*. While Rosenzweig views Judaism and Christianity as two different but equally valid religions, Lasker-Schüler's "The Wonder-Working Rabbi" offers a trenchant critique of a specifically Christian concept of revelation. The story suggests that this concept is implicated in the antisemitism that suppresses revelatory love and the new forms of community such love entails. If revelatory love founds the possibility of an infinitely open neighborhood, the antisemitic violence depicted in "The Wonder-Working Rabbi" thwarts this possibility.

Although "The Wonder-Working Rabbi" lacks temporal markers, its portrayal of a Jewish community in Barcelona situates it in medieval times, before the 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The story's main theme is the precarious relationship between Jews and Christians at the time. While the title figure, a rabbi named Eleazar, commands the deep respect of both religious groups, conflicts regularly break out during Eleazar's annual journeys to Asia, when the Christians launch pogroms against the Jews. This year the Jewish elders decide to inform Rabbi Eleazar about the pogroms and to entreat him not to leave. In an allusion to the rising movement of Zionism, they begin to plan their departure to the Holy Land. One day a ship suddenly and inexplicably appears in the middle of the city. A delegation of Spaniards led by the mayor seeks Eleazar's advice about the ship, but he refuses to receive them. Roused by this refusal, the Christians launch a more murderous anti-Jewish pogrom than ever before, leaving behind them a scene of total destruction. As Eleazar becomes aware of the pogrom, he wrangles with God and then takes violent revenge on the Christians, who have begun to repent their deeds. Embedded in this story about interreligious conflict and violence is an interfaith love story. Amram, the daughter of the Jewish architect Arion Elevantos, and Pablo, the son of the Christian mayor of Barcelona, first meet when a fall from a ladder lands Amram at Pablo's feet. Still children at the time, they sustain their connection through dreams, visions, and conversations as they grow up. The appearance of the mysterious ship, which triggers the destruction of the communities into which Amram and Pablo were born, allows the couple to escape, although we do not know where to—they simply disappear from the text.

The three main plot elements—the Christian-Jewish conflict, the interfaith romance, and the journey of the mysterious ship—are structurally equivalent in that they all hark back to a single, enigmatic event. Initially, the narrator explains the pogroms that regularly befall the Jewish community in terms of sociopolitical conflicts: the Jews undercut the prices of the Christian merchants, they engage in protosocialist politics, and so on. But ultimately the violence goes back to a single event, the character of which remains unclear: "But no matter how the Jews behaved, they aroused resentment, which in truth originated from a single, disappointed Spaniard who once had had some sort of awkward conflict [*Auseinandersetzung*]

with a Hebrew.³⁵ The word “disappointed” suggests a personal, emotional conflict that does not necessarily spring from larger sociopolitical tensions. The German word used here for conflict—*Auseinandersetzung*—literally means “setting apart” or “positing apart.” All we know about the first Christian-Jewish conflict is that it created a tear in the social fabric.

The same is true of the Christian-Jewish love affair, which begins with an accident. After climbing up to the crest (in German, *Krone* or *Kuppel*) of the palace her father is building for Eleazar, Amram suffers a fall: “Descending the ladder that led from *the still unattached crest [der noch unbefestigten Krone]*, little Amram in her haste fell from the sacred building on to a sandy hillock where Pablo, the little son of the mayor, was playing” (227/11; my emphasis). Significantly, the crest that arches over the building is unfinished, indicating a gap in the social order: there is no social authority that could initiate or validate the love between Pablo and Amram. More broadly speaking, Amram’s accident or *Unfall* literalizes the contingency of the love event. We have seen in Rosenzweig that divine love (and its equivalent, erotic love) enigmatically seizes upon an object with little regard to its specific qualities. Neighbor-love, which aims at the person who is near me rather than like me, is likewise contingent—namely, upon proximity: the neighbor is whoever happens to be next to me. Amram’s fall, which lands her in a place devoid of social meaning, captures such contingency. The sandy hills that receive Amram show no trace of human intervention; they are but the place next to Pablo.

As the love story unfolds, it conveys a sense of what Franz Rosenzweig and Alain Badiou claim to be true of all love: that love creates a disjunction, a structure of Twoness. Love fails to build bridges between the religions in “The Wonder-Working Rabbi” not only because of the antisemitism of the Christian environment but also because of the divisive character of love itself. Amram first falls from the tower—and in love with Pablo—because there is no *Kuppel* (cupola) arching over the children, an image that also evokes the absence of *Kopplung* (coupling) and *Kuppelei* (matchmaking). At another time, Amram experiences a momentary estrangement from Pablo when drunken Christians knock on the door of the synagogue. The text portrays this estrangement in an image that repeatedly comes to describe Jewish difference—namely, the split gaze: “Amram felt a foreign continent growing between herself and Señor Pablo, the mayor’s son. The commandments in the Jews’ prayer books were read from the outside to the inside, and so, ever since their birth, their Jewish eyes had to be pointed in a different direction from those of all other nations. Eyes that dared not remain fixed on their object,

35. Else Lasker-Schüler, “The Wonder-Working Rabbi of Barcelona,” in *The German-Jewish Dialogue: An Anthology of Literary Texts, 1749–1993*, ed. and trans. Ritchie Robertson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 224–32; here 225 (trans. modified). For the original German, see Lasker-Schüler, “Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona,” in *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:9–17; here 9–10. Further citations from these editions will be included parenthetically in the text, with the page number in the English translation followed by the page number in the German edition in italics, as here (225/9–10).

eyes that hid in the book's stitching, and that always fled back to the split" (228/13; trans. modified). The sewing that is supposed to hold the book together is actually a gap that splits the book into two halves. The eyes that turn inside are lost in this inner split rather than securing a sense of self-identity. This scene is also significant because of what the eyes are *not* doing—namely, meeting the lover's eyes. In Romantic literature, the lovers' wordless exchange of glances suggests that love is a seamless, effortless communication that eschews the divisive medium of language. In contrast, in Lasker-Schüler the gaze of the beloved signifies the impossible union of the lovers and the equally impossible unity of the self.

The appearance of the ship that carries the lovers away is another instance in the series of enigmatic events that make up the story's plot. The ship appears suddenly in the middle of the marketplace, where it disrupts the usual exchange of commodities. At one point the narrator suggests that the ship was called forth by the lovers' longing for each other; the ship "had given ear to two people's yearning overnight" (229/14). Its movement, then, instantiates the ambiguous agency of individuals possessed by the erotic drive. As the lovers depart from the city, they are both active (since their love drives the ship) and passive (since they are carried away by the ship).³⁶ The disappearance of the couple is a loss for both Christians and Jews, and neither side seems to be responsible for it. Nor do we know what happens between the lovers, who remain hidden behind the ship's sail: "Transfigured by immense love, they remained invisible behind the wing of the sail" (229/14). The text's refusal to explain the events or depict the relationship is meaningful because the ship is an ancient metaphor of the metaphor, or the transport from one word or concept to another. The ship in this story, however, is coming from nowhere and going nowhere. As Bischoff notes, its movement articulates a "passage that cannot be described as regulated relationship between two sides, but as a radically discontinuous passage that unsettles all firm stances and perspectives (the Jewish and the Spanish)."³⁷

What the major events in "The Wonder-Working Rabbi"—the first Christian-Jewish conflict, Amram's fall, and the appearance of the ship—have in common is that they disrupt patterns of social exchange. The text's greatest accomplishment, I would argue, is that it renders antisemitic violence legible as a *failed response* to such disruptions of social life. The cyclically recurring pogroms, for instance, are a ritualization and instrumentalization of the disappointment that first separated, or set apart, one Jew from one Christian. While the details of this first Christian-Jewish conflict are no longer known, the vague memories of it are used to stir up "resentment, which . . . was transferred to the people" (225/9–10), and to provide a pretext for the pogroms. Similarly, when their chance encounter establishes a

36. See also Markus Hallensleben, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Avantgardismus und Kunstinszenierung* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000), 221.

37. Bischoff, *Ausgesetzte Schöpfung*, 430.

telepathic connection between Amram and Pablo and allows their differences to emerge, the Christians of Barcelona are quick to translate these differences into cultural stereotypes. Thus Pablo's father, the mayor of Barcelona, labels the Jewish eyes that are hiding inside the Torah "eyes that steal" (228/13). And when Amram's love song conjures in Pablo's mind "signs . . . in ancient harp-writing" (227/12)—Lasker-Schüler's favorite metaphor for Hebrew letters—the Christian officials dismiss them as "the writing of dogged, obdurate Jews" (228/12). Like Pablo's father, the clerks translate the dream-like communication between the lovers into stock images of Jewish difference. They are unable or unwilling to understand that the love between Amram and Pablo developed outside of the social system that produced these stereotypes to begin with.

The starkest example of a failed response to social disruption is the final pogrom, in which the Christians brutally murder the Jews of Barcelona. The pogrom begins with an act of interpretive violence in which the Spaniards attempt but fail to make sense of the presence of the mysterious ship. As mentioned earlier, it remains unknown what actually happens on the ship, in part because there are no witnesses to its departure other than a stray dog (who is, ironically, named Abraham). The text's sudden change into the past perfect tense indicates that the moment of departure is unnarratable, that it has always already happened: "And only the dog *had witnessed* how the seas' enormous messenger . . . vanished through the gate as carefully as a solemn bridal carriage" (14/229; trans. modified; my emphasis). Meanwhile, the Christians begin to blame Rabbi Eleazar and Amram's father, Arion, for the appearance and disappearance of the ship; they gag Arion and smash the windows of his house. The violence escalates when Pablo's mother goads the others into killing Arion, whom she holds responsible for Amram's seduction of her son, that is, for being a *Kuppler*. However, it is clear that the Spaniards' outcry "Kill him, the old procurer [*Kuppler*]!!!" (229/15) misses what is most important about the encounter between Pablo and Amram: that no social or familial institution regulates the contact between them. If the text shows how the appearance of the ship gives rise to conspiracy fantasies, it repudiates these same fantasies on the level of imagery. For the *Kuppel* (cupola) that arches over Pablo and Amram is incomplete; it exposes but the gap that brings the lovers together.

The polemical thrust of "The Wonder-Working Rabbi" transpires most clearly in the act of revenge that ends the story. When Eleazar, who during the pogrom had been reading in the temple, finally turns his eyes toward Barcelona, the shock at the sight of the destruction splits his eye—an image that radicalizes the earlier image of Jewish eyes focused on the split in the Torah. Eleazar calls upon God, who awakens the Christians and causes them to repent. Unsatisfied with this repentance, Eleazar accuses God of rewarding the Christians' "atrocities with enlightenment" (231/17). Eleazar's final act of revenge, which evokes Jacob's wrestling with God and Samson's breaking of the pillars, puts an end to the endless repetition of violence. In lashing out against the Christians, Eleazar

suspends the cycle of pogroms, or the state of exception that upheld the social order all along:

All night [Eleazar] went out wrestling in riddles with God; darkened and broke away from Him. The priest shook the pillars of his house till they broke like arms. The roof rolled down in heavy blocks and shattered the houses in the street. An enormous quarry, He, the great wonder-working rabbi, a nation plunged from the sacred hill, which was transfigured by the golden fragments of the dome's mosaic, upon the Christians of Barcelona, who were penitently laying the last tortured Jew to rest, and extinguished their enlightenment [*erlosch ihre Erleuchtung*], crushed their bodies. (232/17; my emphasis)

It is noteworthy that Eleazar's revenge proceeds from the very site of Amram's fall, the sandy hill, and that this site has now become holy. This points to a deeper connection between the singularity of the love event and Eleazar's unique act of revenge. The curious phrase *erlosch ihre Erleuchtung* (extinguished their enlightenment) sums up the effect of Eleazar's act of violence, which is meant to end all violence. The immediate point of reference of this phrase is the idea that the murder of the Jews of Barcelona served the higher purpose of enlightening the Christians. The phrase also refers back to an earlier scene in which Eleazar, still unaware of the pogrom, reads about divine election in the fictional "atlas of creation" (230/15). The atlas describes how God took a star from his own dress and put it on the forehead of the Jewish people, thereby turning them into a people of enlightened prophets. This scene amalgamates ideas from several Judaic traditions.³⁸ However, any notion of Jews as enlighteners has now become implicated in the troublesome idea that the brutal pogrom served to "enlighten" the Christians, an idea to which Eleazar vehemently objects. Linguistically, the phrase *erlosch ihre Erleuchtung* stands out because it contains a paronomasia—that is, it combines words that are similar in sound but different in meaning—and a grammatical irregularity, since it uses the intransitive verb *erlöschen* transitively.³⁹ The irregular syntax and heightened rhetoricity draw the reader's attention to the phrase and, I would argue, to the true aim of Eleazar's act of revenge: the Christian ideology that bestows a redemptive meaning upon antisemitic violence.

38. The word *Entlichtung* (16; de-lightning) evokes the Jewish Mystical (Lurianic) concept of *tzimtzum*, according to which the creation of the world began with the self-contraction of the divine light that originally permeated everything. The scene also alludes to the idea of diaspora promoted by nineteenth-century German Reform Judaism, according to which the dispersed Jews have the mission to enlighten the Gentiles by setting an example of pure monotheistic faith. See Skolnik, *Jewish Pasts*, 140. Finally, the image of Jews carrying a star on their forehead also recalls Rosenzweig's notion, in *The Star of Redemption*, about the different roles of Jews and Christians in the divine economy.

39. There exists an older transitive form of *erlöschen*, but its past tense would be *erlöschte*. Skolnik points out that Lasker-Schüler's use of paronomasia and syntactic irregularities mimics stylistic features of Hebrew. See his *Jewish Pasts*, 132–33.

"The Wonder-Working Rabbi" can be read as a critical reworking of one strand in the tradition of literary representations of Christian-Jewish love. For the text explicitly associates interfaith romance with the Christian idea of revelation called *Erleuchtung* or *Erweckung*. Early on, the narrator depicts the Jews' attachment to Spain in the image of Jewish women who "with Jerusalem eyes had given Christians a painful awakening" (226/10–11). It is ambiguous who is feeling the pain—the Jewish women or the Christian men—but its mention recalls the literary cliché of the *belle juive*. Lasker-Schüler evokes here a stock character of nineteenth-century literature, the virtuous and beautiful Jewish woman whose suffering arouses compassion and love in Christians. The figure of Amram both evokes and thwarts this literary cliché. In her love song, Amram describes her role vis-à-vis Pablo in an image that recalls the idea of Jews as enlightened prophets: "But on your brow I want to plant my fortunate star, / Rob myself of my luminous blossom" (227/12). On another occasion, however, a bright-eyed Amram ("with light in her eye," 228/13) tells Pablo how she killed a Christian child molester. Amram, who bears a male name (the biblical name of the father of Moses and Aaron), engages in an act of destruction that recalls Moses's slaying of the Egyptian and anticipates Eleazar's act of revenge. The story's bold gender reversals transform the traditional *belle juive*, who enchants Christian men but in the end surrenders to her tragic fate, into a rather belligerent figure.

"The Wonder-Working Rabbi" does not simply reject the notion of the transformative power of love. After all, Amram and Pablo are able to leave the city. They alone are spared from death and destruction. Yet Lasker-Schüler prevents us from obtaining a facile meaning from their love, whether for purposes of scapegoating or of enlightenment. The modernist style of her prose works against any form of instrumentalization. As I have shown, the text is structured around a series of enigmatic events that are not further explained, described in detail, or causally connected to each other. They cannot even be clearly located in time: we learn that Amram each morning climbs up the new buildings with her father, when her fall is suddenly mentioned, without any indication about the timing. In the depiction of the lovers' departure from the city, the text's lapse into the past perfect tense suggests that the departure was not observable at the time of its occurrence. More than anything, Lasker-Schüler emphasizes the disruption brought about by these events, their ability to suspend cycles of repetitions or break a sense of stasis. The text's jumbled syntax, nonlinear narration, and oscillation between prose and poetry preserve the disruptive effect of an event on the level of form. In "The Wonder-Working Rabbi," Lasker-Schüler holds on to the idea of revelatory love—understood along with Rosenzweig as an encounter with the human-as-stranger that disrupts the existing sociopolitical order—while warning against the ideological narratives that come to fill the gaps thus created. She asks us to register the event of interfaith love without integrating it into any existing narrative, whether a cautionary or a redemptive one.