

הרי אריאל אריאל סגור אנד זיוו

Ho, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped (Isaiah 29,1)

אריאל ariel

A Quarterly Review
of Arts and Letters in Israel

Jerusalem / Number 41 / 1976

“Else” (Homage)

Israel Eliraz

The life of Else Lasker-Schüler was one long yearning for communication with her surroundings. After the death of her dearest mother – when the poetess was twenty-one – and that of her beloved son, at the age of twenty-seven, Else endeavoured without success, to communicate with the world around her.

Her failures caused the poetess to create an imaginary world, not confined within the limits of her poetical creativity, but spilling over into all aspects of her life. She dressed in exotic costumes, called herself by fanciful names (Yussuf of Thebes, Tino of Baghdad, amongst others). She graced her few friends with various titles: Peter Hille is “King of Bohemia,” Max Brod is “Prince of Prague,” Richard Mayer – “Fakir,” Franz Werfel – “Panther,” etc. Reality and fantasy are to her both diversion and place of refuge.

She often wrote about biblical figures (“Hebräische Balladen”). The one Else Lasker-Schüler loved above all was Joseph – the dreamy youth in the striped coat, the handsome eccentric hated by his brothers, who is delivered into bondage and who rises to greatness in a foreign land. Did Else not identify her fate with his? “And you never will believe me, dearest King, that I am Joseph the Egyptian.”

Her encounter with Palestine (“Das Hebräerland,” 1937), the biblical dreamland, was not crowned with success. Eccentric, strange and neglected, she died in Jerusalem on 22nd January, 1945.

The unfruitful search for human contact brought her to the one true and total connection of her life – God, and her unification with Him in death; two themes which continually recur in her poems.

“Else” (Homage) – the search for a dialogue with Jerusalem, with its children, with her memories, her friends, with God – contacts which are to end in disillusionment, failure, loneliness and death.

On the stage – by means of words and music, two-way communication is intermittently established between vocalist and narrator; and between her and one instrument, or a group of orchestral instruments in various combinations, participating in each section.

“Else” (Homage) is not a biography of the poetess but a “homage” to her, influenced by the particular magic emanating from her poems and using freely motives distinctively her own.

The music was composed by Joseph Tal for a mezzo-soprano, narrator and four instruments (viola, cello, horn and piano). It was first performed at the Israel Festival in the summer of 1975.

(A rocking chair. A hanger with brightly-coloured clothes and strings of beads. A small writing desk)

1

(Narrator)

Else wrote in the language of men who burnt
her books. She saw the First World War in which
her beloved Georg Trakl died; she saw
the Second World War in which Arthur Aronimus died;
she saw what was harder still than war – her life. She
fled from the flames to be consumed by the fire in Jerusalem:
Hotel Vienna Jaffa Street; Hotel Atlantic Ben-Yehudah Street,
not far from the Sochnut, from Krakower, who lives
in the house of Schatz.

2

(Soprano)

Palestine the spinal column of the Lord
A unique bone in it Jerusalem
Planetarium of the world.
Without the eight chapters of the Song of Songs
What will sustain the mountains around?
The lintels of the houses are daubed
With the blue of Paradise. An Arab,
In the robe of David, tarbush becrowned, straight as a Vizier,
Sheep of gold before him,
Lights up a moon on the verge of the wadi
Beyond This World.

I cut stripes for myself from the Bible
Soft the rain that falls on me
and on Mama.

3

(Soprano and Narrator)

– “Else! Else!”

– No, let them be, sir, they are the last of the mischievous ones
Who play with me at Prince and King.

I, Yussuf, dreaming in Jerusalem,
Prince of Thebes I am
The Great Emir, exiled in the city of
Malik David.

I – Shah Else!

4

(Soprano)

He that was here is no more
He that is now – is too much
Even the suffering is not a
local product
On the mountain Eternity rests
like a traveller’s bag.
I am in Jerusalem
my City is far off.
The promise, between my
fingers,
A dream of sand,
Time, the inflammable material,

(Narrator simultaneous with
Soprano)

In a strange room, without a
bed, sleeping in a chair,
Rocking in the darkness,
wrapped
in a blanket of rags,
and entwining in the holes
flowers of coloured wool.
From the windows –



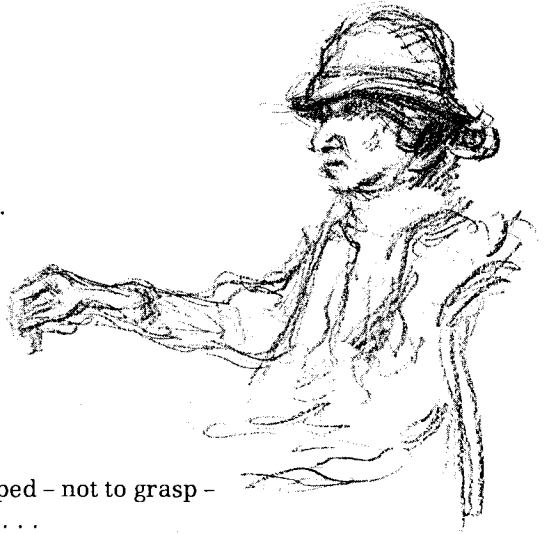
the mountains of Moab,
Bluer than blue, behind a fence.

5

(Soprano)

Offered upon Sorrow
Like Isaac, like my Paul.
Mama from a river of sadness
Stretches out to me a hand
Of a teddy-bear I lost,

To be grasped – not to grasp –
She hangs a star upon my tears . . .



6

(Soprano and Narrator)

Come tomorrow, Friday, 3 o'clock, 31st July / to me
Number 2, Hama'alot Street, the villa on the left / vis-à-vis
the big house. One step, from the street. G'veret Weidenfeld.
We'll drink chocolate, eat as well. / With me, the Black Swan,
you will find great / peace.

7

(Soprano)

To have a blue piano in Jerusalem
Leo

Kastenberg
is playing

Also Margaret.

Instead of painting, Krakower listens

And I étude.

From Birkat a'Sultan to King George Street

A sandstorm swirls:

CHA - MACHA - LAAAAOOOO!

8

(Soprano)

Sound of weeping in the City

I look back

I'm the one who weeps

And this evening
To whom shall I turn another cheek as lip to lip
To close on
Where are they

(Narrator)
The Prince of Prague Max Brod and
Peter Altenberg, for whom this name
is the most suitable name of all,
and Kokoschka, Werther the Gorilla and
Elvira Bacharach, cara mia, and Sascha?

Where are they
Where has he gone, Yussuf,
the Blue Panther

9

(Soprano)
Ever do I think about death
Taste of it in bread and water
Touching, entering, steeping myself in it up to the neck.
Ever alone, within the flame, within the evening,
With my little Caliph,
Red the rose in his mouth, in his breast a golden stifling dust,
White the veil of fear engulfing him, near Lugano.
I weep into the hands of Mama,
my Queenly Moon.

10

(Soprano)
Make to fall a peaceful night of blue
And pluck Thou, O *Kadosh*, my heart out of the pit
With
both
Thy
hands
aglow.
Oh, just once to hold the hand of Yah
To see a moon on His finger -

Oh, Jesus, Maria!
Embrace Thy daughter in the Splendour
Disperse my weary anguish among the stars.

11

(Soprano and Narrator)

Behind her coffin no children followed. No more:

“Else! Else!”

No Yussuf, Prince of Thebes, no Tino of Baghdad. A solemn
Moment of grace. Reconciled. Suddenly, on the threshold,
Like everyone else, with a sad end, with Rabbiner Wilhelm
Reading the poem *I know*.

ICH WEISS DASS ICH BALD STERBEN MUSS

Beneath the olives, within the mountain and its radiance,
end of January,

ES LEUCHTEN DOCH ALLE BÄUME

End of the World War (almost),

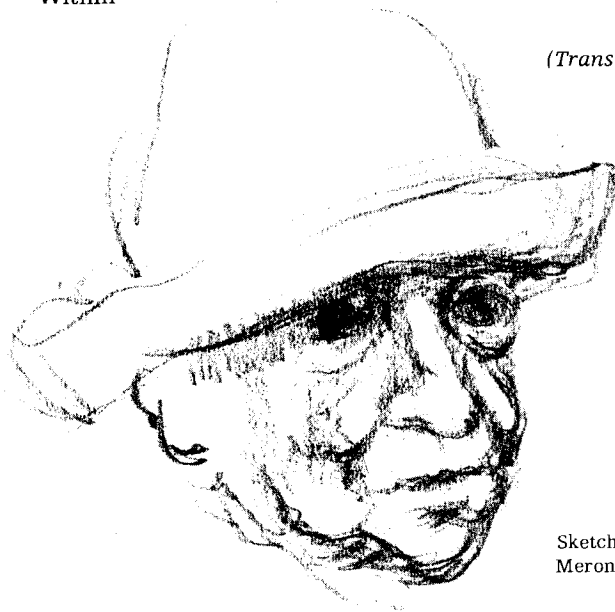
NACH LANGERSEHNTEM JULIKUSS

A woman vast as floods of pain,

To be closed like a crown

Within

(Translated by Gila Abrahamson)



Sketches of Else Lasker-Schüler by
Meron Sima, Jerusalem 1939-1945.