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## Three Poems by Else Lasker-Schüler New Translations and Notes

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### **Note on the Author**

Else Lasker-Schüler (11 February 1869 – 22 January 1945) was a German-Jewish author who, besides her eccentric lifestyle, is known for being an Expressionist poet and one of the most influential writers of early twentieth-century German literature. Lasker-Schüler spent most of her life in Berlin where she was well connected within the circles of the Berlin Bohème around 1900. She counted painter Franz Marc, poet Rainer Maria Rilke, poet Peter Hille, and critic Karl Kraus amongst her close friends. Under threat of Nazi persecution, she travelled to Palestine in 1934 and finally settled in Jerusalem in 1937. The outbreak of World War II prevented her return to Europe. In the winter of 1945 she died and was buried in Jerusalem.

Her poetry is rich in evocative imagery and is especially resonant with French and English poetic tropes of Decadence, aligning her with some of her European female predecessors who helped shape a female notion of Decadence. Lasker-Schüler also published plays, journal articles, and several prose pieces. Her most notable collections of poetry include *Styx* (1902), *Der siebente Tag* (1905), *Meine Wunder* (1911), *Gesammelte Gedichte* (1917), and *Mein blaues Klavier* (1943). Some of the poems have previously been published in translation; her most widely read collection of poems *My Blue Piano* was translated by Brooks Haxon and published by Syracuse University Press (2015).

## Note on Translation

The following are literal translations that alter the rhyme scheme of the original German. They are given in preference over available translations by other poets because they capture more faithfully the themes of Lasker-Schüler's work. The following poems are taken from *Else Lasker-Schüler: Sämtliche Gedichte*, ed. by Karl Jürgen Skrodzki (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013): 'Karma' in *Styx*, 1902, p. 23 / 'Weltenende' in *Meine Wunder*, 1903, p. 149 / 'Frau Dämon' in *Gedichte, 1899 bis 1944*, p. 230.

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### Karma

Hab' in einer sternlodernden Nacht  
den Mann neben mir ums Leben gebracht.  
Und als sein girrendes Blut gen Morgen rann,  
blickte mich düster sein Schicksal an.

### Karma

In a night aflame with stars  
I killed the man by my side.  
And when his cooing blood trickled towards dawn,  
his fate stared at me, sombrely.<sup>1</sup>

### Weltenende

Es ist ein Weinen in der Welt,  
Als ob der liebe Gott gestorben wär,  
Und der bleierne Schatten, der niederfällt,  
Lastet grabesschwer.

Komm, wir wollen uns näher verbergen ...  
Das Leben liegt in aller Herzen  
Wie in Särgen.

Du, wir wollen uns tief küssen –  
Es pocht eine Sehnsucht an die Welt,  
An der wir sterben müssen.

### World's End

There is lamenting in the world,  
As if the Lord had died,  
And the leaden shadow, dropping down,  
Weighs heavily, as a grave.

Come, let us hide closer ...  
Life lies in everyone's heart  
As if in coffins.

Oh, my dear, let us kiss deeply –  
A yearning knocks on the world,  
From which we must die.

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<sup>1</sup> 'girrendes': In German, the word evokes the high-pitched sound of a cooing bird (low-pitched would be 'gurren'). It thus suggests desire, urgency, and audible courtship display. Blood as a symbol or metaphor for life is metonymically linked with expression of lust. The English counterpart does not have the same sound qualities, so the suggestive potential is not quite matched. But the German also has a slightly catachrestic effect. With thanks to Professor Frank Krause.

