Two Glimpses of the Baroness

Klaus Martens

Recent else von freytag-loringhoven (EFL) research has increasingly focused on her role as an independent actor on the literary stage of New York between, roughly, 1918 and 1923.[1] Most of what we know—and of what interests us so keenly—has emerged from the concentration on the fascinating role she played as a recognized figure in American Dada and Surrealist circles. During these years of her much-deserved rediscovery, however, why has she been exclusively categorized as a Dada author? As a maker of striking assemblages, herself the subject of art works, and as an artist who seems to have surfaced abruptly into Dada existence, somehow fully formed, EFL has been made to appear as a kind of unchaste Athena Parthenos sprung from the head of Zeus. There is no doubt as to her strong involvement in New York with such artists as Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Morton Livingston Schamberg, and her prominent part in "The European Art Invasion."[2] Although EFL took part in many of the activities of the artists who came to New York from Europe before, during, and after the Great War, she did not, as Davidson writes in 1996, come to New York from Germany in 1913 (223). Davidson clearly follows an early remark (since corrected) that she had gone "from Cincinnati to New York and from there back to Germany," eventually returning, with the Baron, to New York (Hjartarson, "Of Greve" 283). But wherever she came from in the United States before she first surfaced in Pittsburgh, did she know of the Armory Show at the time? There is no indication of that or of her having met Duchamp at the scene of his earliest and greatest American successes. Meeting Duchamp then, and witnessing the scandal involving the Frenchman and his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*, might indeed have caused her to turn towards an art more experimental than that which she had known as Felix Paul Greve's (FPG) companion.

We do know for certain that Freytag-Loringhoven left Germany in 1910, finally drifting to New York after she had been deserted by her lover in the hinterland of Kentucky (Hjartarson, "Of Greve" 282; Martens, *F,P. Grove* 240-47). What deserves emphasis then is this: from June 1910 to late 1913 she had no way of becoming acquainted or influenced by Dada artists-to-be, including those whom she later joined in New York, were they Europeans or Americans, In fact, she could hardly have been in contact with those early Expressionists and Futurists who gathered around such leading Berlin publications as *Der Sturm* after 1911. Thus, she would not have known of Jean (Hans) Arp, Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck, Kurt Schwitters or Tristan Tzara, the earliest Dada artists to surface in Switzerland and Germany, in their very self-consciously played roles as "new" artists, roles that helped them achieve welcome notoriety. She certainly could not have been a harbinger of the good Dada news from Zurich and the Cafe Voltaire to New York, since the Swiss beginnings of Dada did not occur before February 5, 1916 at the first performance in the Cafe Voltaire, as recorded by Hugo Ball (Dohl 719). What Freytag-Loringhoven, in New York, did have in common, however, was the immigrant status shared by these artists from different nationalities in Zurich during the

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL JANUARY-MARCH 2002 MARS-JUIN
0319-051X/2002/29.1/1

Great War: Ball and Huelsenbeck were Germans, Arp was a bilingual Alsatian, and Tzara was a Romanian. They were united in what they opposed: war, "ideas," the individual person, meaning. Regarding their art, they did not flaunt so much their outrageous artistic inventiveness as their collagistic restatement, exacerbation, and, finally, synthesis of existing trends in Expressionism, Futurism, and other isms of their day. "Dada zielte auf Provokation...Und das Medium seines Protests war die Kunst oder auch Anti-Kunst, aber nur, wenn man Anti-Kunst auf die traditionellen Vorstellungen von Kunst bezogen sieht" ["Dada aimed at provocation...and the medium of this protest was an anti-art, if anti-art is understood as reacting against traditional ideas of art"] (Dohl 727). Hugo Ball tried to pin down Dada's specific manner and *materia poetica*:

> Was wir Dada nennen ist ein Narrenspiel aus dem Nichts, in das alle hoheren Fragen verwickelt sind; eine Gladiatorengeste; ein Spiel mit den schabigen Uberbleibseln; eine Hinrichtung der posierten Moralitat und Fiille. Der Dadaist liebt das Auftergewohnliche, ja das Absurde: Er weift, dass sich im Widerspruche das Leben behauptet und dass seine Zeit wie keine vorher auf die Vernichtung des Generosen abziehlt. Jede Maske ist ihm datum willkommen: jedes Versteckspiel, dem eine dvipierende Kraft innewohnt. Das Direkte und Primitive erscheint ihm inmitten enormer Unnatur als das Unglaubliche selbst.
>
> What we call Dada is a fool's game from nothingness in which are gathered all higher questions; it is a gladiator's gesture; a game with the worn out remnants; an execution of posed morality and bounty. The Dadaist loves the extraordinary, yes, the absurd. He knows that life survives in contradictions and that his own time, as no time before, aims at the elimination of the generous. Any kind of mask, therefore, is welcome to him. Any game of hide-and-seek that is inhabited by a power of deceit. The direct and primitive appear to him in the midst of such enormous non-nature as the incredible itself. (Dohl 725-26, my translation).

In addition, and maybe most importantly, these early dadaists shared a profound distrust of language which, at first, resulted not in a language of their own invention but in a recombination of traditional vocabulary, confronting "the nonsense of the time by art's no-sense" (Dohl 730). Only their performances of the *poeme simultan* (simultaneous poem) and Ball's own invention of the *Klanggedichte* (sound poems) promised something new (732, 734). Ball turned away from Dada in 1917, the Zurich experiment ended in 1919, and new groups of artists sprang up all over Europe, interpreting Dada in their own ways.

Among these, it should be noted, was Kurt Schwitters who, from 1919, singlehandedly developed his own idiosyncratic version of Dada which he called "Merz." In a letter from Berlin to Djuna Barnes, Else von Freytag-Loringhoven calls one of Schwitters's pictures a "senseless truly idiotic— mimicking 'modern' picture" and finds the painter "mediocre." She adds: "Seldom have I seen anything so offensively impotent of any inner necessity— or *outside cleverness*—by him! It is shameful imitative—*nothing else*—without any flourish! Fi!"[3] Else was apparently not merely flattering her American correspondent to whom she always praised everything American to the skies and from whom she expected salvation from the depths in which she found herself after her return to Germany in 1923. It is important to note that while she was in Germany in the twenties she remained aware of developments in art in spite of her dire poverty and frequent depressions. She knew of Schwitters's work and she put it down (whimsically, because of Schwitters's homely first name, Kurt). Schwitters, however unfairly treated by her in her despair, is the only second-generation dadaist she mentions at any length. Freytag-Loringhoven, when still in New York, herself belonged to this second generation that surfaced towards the end of the Great War. John Rodger indirectly acknowledged this in *The Little Review* (1920), although his time-frame, too, was a little off: "Paris had had *Dada* for five years and we have had Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven for two years" (Naumann, *New York Dada* 168). At the time of her writing to Barnes from Germany, Dada, in its many new incarnations, was all over Europe in what might be called a third wave. Was EFL's

reaction to Schwitters merely the invective of a rival who had lost her (New York) audience? It was more than that, since she perceived a marked difference between Schwitters and herself: she castigates the other artist for his "outside cleverness," that is, his cleverness publicly displayed, and his lack of "flourish."

The lack she perceived in Schwitters helps us to characterize her own peculiar qualities in New York: her panache and the congruence of her striking costumes and appearance with her radical state of mind. In EFL, art and the person form a unity. That also marks the vast gap between her and the artists of the New York circles in which she moved. If, as her contemporary and acquaintance, the poet Wallace Stevens, was to note later, "the poem is the cry of its occasion," then EFL's artistic expressions as *objects d'art* or her own bodily appearance are, quite unmelodramatically, the artistically expressed *cri de coeur* of a woman left and lost and without the mastery of the language she needed. To express herself, she developed a language that rendered palpable that cry of hurt and protest. She may have turned her linguistic shortcomings in English to advantage by developing her own pointedly naive and stunned "da-da"—in contrast with and striking parallel to her European colleagues' crass protest against the even crasser horrors of the war—out of her own multilingual poetic being, her body language, and the language of art objects. The painting of the body, however, even though she may have arrived at it on her own, she cannot have witnessed in even a proto-Dada context in Europe at or before the time she developed as an artist in New York. DeVore, incidentally, is the only critic to claim that Else was in Europe after 1918 (and before 1923) and thus could have experienced European Dada at first hand (76).

How, then, did EFL arrive at the outrageous art, provocative outfits, and challenging presentations of herself that led to her acceptance as the New York Dada queen? The timing is not right. She may have absorbed a good deal, although unspecified, from those artists she first met in New York. However, I am going to argue that the transcendence of ordinary bounds of language, the use of masks and other striking features of her art had been practised by her in Germany prior to her arrival in the New World during the time she spent in Cottbus, Berlin, and Munich about which, also, not much is known.

Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven: Theatrical Beginnings

Much as in the German and Canadian novels and autobiographical writings of Frederick Philip Grove *aka* Felix Paul Greve, EFL's surviving autobiographical statements in her letters and the account of her early life written for Djuna Barnes contain fact and fiction in the form of fictionalised and highly selective autobiography. If FPG gave the heroines of his two German novels, *Fanny Essler* and *Maurermeister Ihlcs Haus*, numerous details from the career of his then life-partner, Else, using her early life as the pattern for his fictionalised elaboration of it, then EFL used the pattern of some of the years spent with FPG as the basis for her autobiographical account of these years from her perspective. The result is a surprising narrative both severely narrowed by her omissions, the limited viewpoint of the selections she made, and by the slant given by the writer's intentions, one of which, apparently, was 'to get even' with her most important implied reader, FPG, whom she correctly assumed was still living on the American continent. The ensuing fragmented narrative she wrote for Barnes was also meant to secure the American writer's help in obtaining a visa for France. EFL's memoirs were, then, emphatically, a narrative with more than one purpose.[4]

Compared to the relative wealth of material from and about the Baroness's activities during and after the period she spent in New York as an artist active among some of the outstanding figures of high modernism—Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and others— there

is no published first-hand and little surviving second-hand evidence of her activities before her marriage to August Endell and the approximately nine years she spent in the company of FPG in Germany and the United States. There is only what she wrote in the memoir and letters to Barnes and what FPG used for his 1905 and 1906 German novels based on her youth in Swinemiinde and her career in Berlin and elsewhere.

Thanks to Irene Gammel's research, apparently conducted parallel to mine, we now have a somewhat fuller, though still incomplete, account of Else's life in Germany. It, too, unavoidably draws on Else's own memoirs and letters, published since 1986, but it includes a good deal of new and original, on-site research that helps to narrow some of the previous gaps in our knowledge of that period of Else's life and of her development as a writer and performer. I have written elsewhere about some of the possible sources of the Baroness's Dada approach to writing poems and making art objects (Martens, *E.P. Grove* 215-20), also first pointing up the unavoidable parallels to Else Lasker-Schuler's career. Here, I am mainly concerned with the Baroness's beginnings as a performer. Gammel quite rightly points to circumstantial evidence of the young woman's role in Berlin as a model and her posing in variety shows of the "Wintergarten" kind (Gammel, *Baroness Elsa* 60-62). In this context, Gammel makes a case for Else's sexual adventures as a chorus girl, linking these to her thesis regarding the importance of such early encounters for the provocative later life of the artist in America. There is, however, little new evidence of other artistic activity on Else's part after her "work as a chorus girl at Berlin's Zentral Theater" (Gammel, *Baroness Elsa* 65-66). For the period 1896-98 we know that EFL met the artist Melchior Lechter and the writer Karl Wolfskehl. During the same period she may also have had an affair with the playwright Ernst Hardt before eloping in the "early summer...with Hardt's friend Richard Schmitz" and, a little later in the year, with Richard's brother, the writer O.A.H. Schmitz.

In Felix Paul Greve's 1905 novel Fanny Essler, a source text of the first importance for Else's biography (Martens, *E.P. Grove* 63, 94), the reader learns that Fanny/Else had been employed at the Kleines Theater in the city of Cottbus, a medium-sized town near the border of what today is the Czech Republic (FE 243). The year given is 1902. In 1902, of course, Else was married to the architect and designer August Endell and was living in Munich; she met Greve at the Wolfkehl's and had moved back to Berlin, ending the year in a sanatorium on the island of Fohr (Martens, *E.P. Grove* 130-32). The Cottbus trail seemed cold, after all, and my inquiries while I was at work on the German version of my FPG biography (1997) showed that there had been no Kleines Theater in that city (although there had been one in Berlin). Conversely, however, I have found that, as a rule, the large majority of FPG's fictionalised accounts in both his German and Canadian works usually rest on fact; that is, they were slightly 'doctored' and used in altered contexts. Since *Fanny Essler* also contains an account of time spent at a Berlin Acting School sometime between October 1894 and August 189 5, since Greve's novel makes mention of an impressive array of plays she (Fanny) studied—by Ibsen, Goethe, Schiller, Hauptmann, and Richard Voss—I felt that EFL must have had some experience acting in real plays, outside an acting school or a hypothetical chorus line. Keeping that in mind, I again went to look for myself.

Cottbus today is a very lively city, proud of its many, freshly renovated *Jugendstil* buildings and fancy shopping malls. There is also an impressive art nouveau *Stadttheater* (municipal theater)—beautifully situated in a little park, and dedicated to "German Art," as the inscription reads—with its

own archive, located elsewhere. No traces of Else could be found in either the splendid theater or in its archive. As it turned out, there had been no Stadttheater in Cottbus before 1908 (when FPG and Else were living in Berlin). However, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the city of Cottbus had indeed had places unofficially designated "*Stadttheater*" prior to the building of the 1908 edifice officially baptised with that name. During the 1905, shows and theater performances by local and by travelling companies, directed by different personalities as the theater seasons changed, had been held at a large hotel and restaurant owned by the Hatrtmann family, the *Hotel Goldener Ring (Zwanzig Jahre* 32), located centrally on the south side of the *Altmarkt* (Old Market), number 21.

This hotel had been well known to citizens of Cottbus and its surroundings. It prided itself on a large and ornately decorated festival hall with a regular stage at one end. Around the end of the nineteenth century, it was familiarly referred to in the local press as the *Stadttheater*.

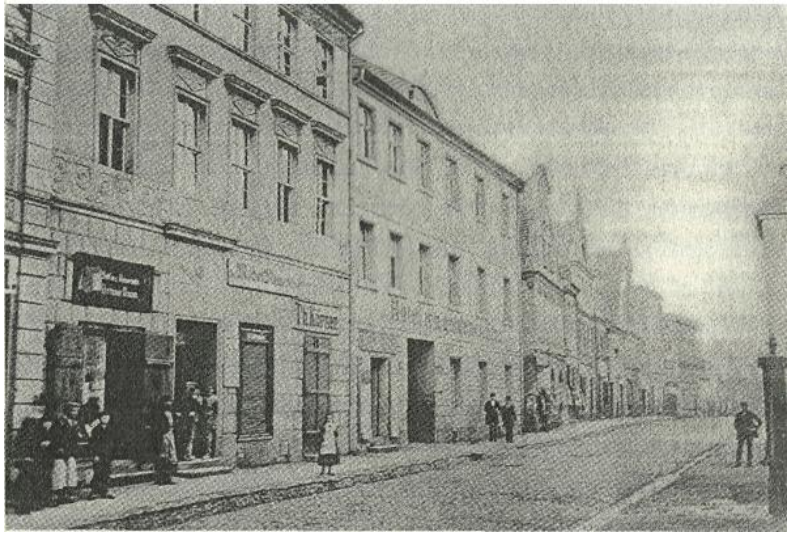


Figure 12: View of the Hotel Goldener Ring (second building from the left).

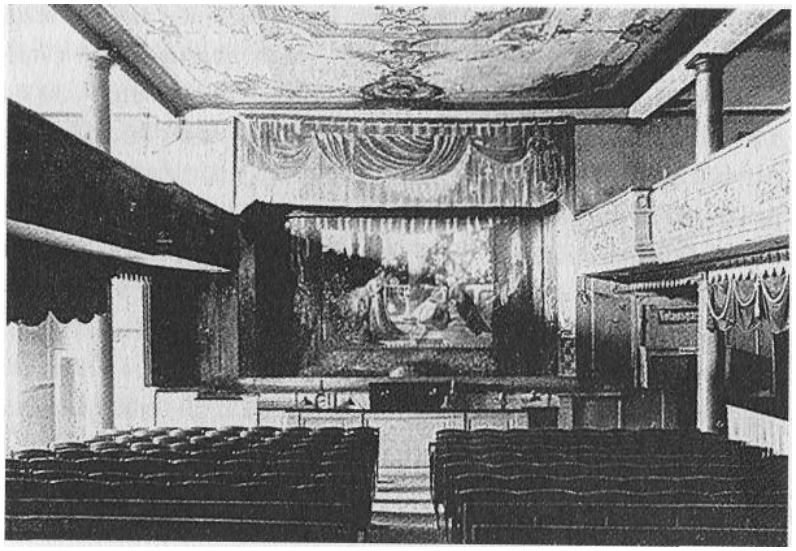


Figure 13: The "Old Theater" in the Hotel Goldener Ring. View of the Stage *(Zwanzig Jahre 21)*.

This "theater-in-a-hotel" represented a not uncommon solution to the need for a place of manifold cultural expression in many provincial centres in the absence of sufficient municipal funds for a new building. The *Hotel Goldener Ring* was later acknowledged to have been "the place for real artistic endeavour and elevating enjoyment." In spite of the "cramped situation and the insufficient equipment," "famous luminaries of the stage and even world-renowned touring companies" found their way to Cottbus. Many a "talented and ambitious person who here entered the stage received exposure for the first time or, if he managed to slip in for a further season, made a name for himself" (*Zuranzuj Jahre* 32). The drawback was, of course, that there was a constant flux of companies and directors. This was also the unstable situation in the winter season of 1897-98, when the then well-known actor-director Max Walden, "formerly accredited to the Russian Court," bought advertising space in the local paper, hoping to draw subscribers for the coming season (*Cottbuser Anzeiger*, 4 September 1897). On 23 September 1897, judging from the large announcement in the local paper, he presented his motley company, drawn from theaters all over Germany, to the theater-going public of Cottbus and environs. Young Else Plotz, listed as being "formerly of Berlin's *Central-Theater*," was among the actors. Since the season at the *Central-Theater* had ended somewhat prematurely, on 18 April 1897, and most employees had options of working elsewhere written into their contracts, Else was free to go to Cottbus.

Her experience at the Berlin *Central-Theater* must have gone beyond that of a mere sexually alluring chorus-girl, since she soon found employment as an actress. This was a much better "springboard for a fabled career" than the role of the cheap chorus-girl could provide (Gammel 66). In addition, during the 1896-97 season just ended, the *Central-Theater*'s director had specialised in wholesale parodic performances, extraordinarily funny send-ups of operas, operettas, and serious plays—by such authors as Arno Holz, Hermann Sudermann, and Gerhart Hauptmann—then being performed at Berlin theaters of high standing, such as the renowned *Deutsches Theater* (Windelboth 262-64). It would not have been particularly difficult for the young actress to switch over to "serious" versions of productions similar to those she had helped parody once she had found employment for the coming season. Her experience in—and talent for—parody would again show up later when she parodied for Greve men she had met (Martens, *F.P. Grove* 94-95) or in her recollections for Djuna Barnes (*Baroness Elsa*, passim).


Stadt-Theater.

Direction: Max Walden, Kaiserlich Russischer Hofschauspieler a. D.
Wintersplelzeit 1897.–98.

Personal-Verzeichniss.

Direction: Max Walden (Führt die Oberregie).
Bureau-Chef: Ludwig Piorkowski (Directions-Stellvertreter).
Regisseure: Ernst Epstein, Walter Ruhtisch.
Kapellmeister: Paul Buchwald v. Müllendorff.
Musikdirector: Eichenbach, R. Wilde.
Souffleur und I. Helfer: Julius Voss.
Garderobe und Bibliothek: Willy Tiedt.

Damen:

Clara Böhme, vom Stadttheater in Elbe.
Lucie Boghaty, vom Stadttheater in Hanau.
Anna Collani, vom Stadttheater in Gießen.
Charlotte Claar, vom Stadttheater in Frankfurt a. M.
Anny Dewitz, v. Friedrich-Wilhelmstädt. Theater, Berlin.
Gertrude Engel, vom Stadttheater in Lübeck.
Ida Jäger, vom Stadttheater in Königsberg.
Margarethe Kappes, vom Ateliö-Theater in Kiel.
Meta König, vom Schauspielhaus in Potsdam.
Emmy Peters, vom Stadttheater in Breslau.
Elsa Plötz, vom Centraltheater in Berlin.
Erna Reichelt, vom Concerthaustheater in Breslau.
Elsa Roth, vom Hoftheater in Braunschweig.
Irene Stardi, vom Stadttheater in Mönch.-Gladbach.
Olga Terpka, vom Stadttheater in Bromberg.

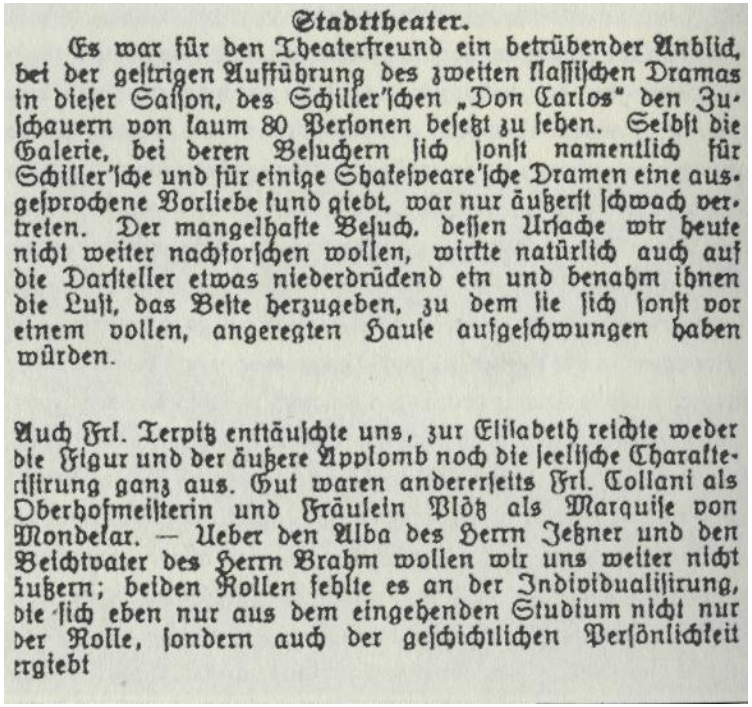
Herren:

Georg Borgwardt, vom Friedrich-Wilhelmstädtischen Theater in Berlin.
Eugen Brehm, vom Stadttheater in Meißen.
Ernst Epstein, vom Friedrich-Wilhelmstädtisch. Theater in Berlin. (Regisseur.)
Willy Krussynski, vom Städtl. Theater in Breslau.
Richard Leopold, vom Stadttheater in Görlitz.
Edgar Reinecke, vom Stadttheater in Schweidnitz.
Leopold Rafalski, vom Stadttheater in Stettin.
Arthur Rotenburg, vom Deutschen Theater in Berlin.
Walter Ruhtisch, vom Stadttheater in Rostock. (Regisseur.)
Otto Tumbe, vom Sallon-Theater in Freienwalde.
Ludwig Piorkowsky, vom Reichshoftheater in Berlin.
Carl Eckert, vom Sallon-Theater in Freienwalde.

Technisches Personal:

Theater-u. Maschinenmeister: Louis Wallrouter, vom Theater des Westens in Berlin.
II. Theatermeister: Hans Wallrouter.
Obergarderobier: Rainhold Müller, vom Stadttheater in Görlitz.
Garderobiere: Emma Stefany, vom Stadttheater in Meißen.
Friseur: Paul Niedergesäß.
Theater-Orchester wird von der Regimentsmusik gestellt.

Figure 14: Advertisement in the CottbusAnzeyer for Max Walden's with"ElsaPlotz."



Stadttheater.

Es war für den Theaterfreund ein betrübender Anblick, bei der gestrigen Aufführung des zweiten klassischen Dramas in dieser Saison, des Schiller'schen „Don Carlos" den Zuschauern von kaum 80 Personen besetzt zu sehen. Selbst die Galerie, bei deren Besuchern sich sonst namentlich für Schiller'sche und für einige Shakespeare'sche Dramen eine ausgesprochene Vorliebe kund giebt, war nur äußerst schwach vertreten. Der mangelhafte Besuch, dessen Ursache wir heute nicht weiter nachforschen wollen, wirkte natürlich auch auf die Darsteller etwas niederdrückend ein und benahm ihnen die Lust, das Beste herzugeben, zu dem sie sich sonst vor einem vollen, angeregten Hause aufgeschwungen haben würden.

Auch Frl. Terpitz enttäuschte uns, zur Elisabeth reichte weder die Figur und der äußere Applomb noch die seelische Charakterisirung ganz aus. Gut waren andererseits Frl. Collani als Oberhofmeisterin und Fräulein Plötz als Marquise von Mondekar. — Ueber den Alba des Herrn Jeßner und den Beichtvater des Herrn Brahm wollen wir uns weiter nicht äußern; beiden Rollen fehlte es an der Individualisirung, die sich eben nur aus dem eingehenden Studium nicht nur der Rolle, sondern auch der geschichtlichen Persönlichkeit ergiebt

Figure 15: Unsigned review of Schiller's Don Carlos, naming "Miss Plotz" (excerpt).

It appears that Else Hildegard Plotz of Swinemimde (today's Swinoujscie), had changed her given name from "Else" to "Elsa," a slight alteration which nonetheless evokes reference to the well-known figure of "Elsa" from Richard Wagner's opera *Lohemjrin*. It is the kind of slight vowel change Greve employed when he decided to call himself Grove (Martens, *F.P. Grove* 236), also re-creating himself.

The weekly advertisements and regular reviews over the next five months of the travelling company's program in the local paper, the *Cottbuser Anzeiger*, quickly reveal the astonishiAg versatility of the company with regard to the number of new and different plays put on at the theater in the Hotel Goldener Ring. There was a good deal of light fare—situation comedies of the day, farces, and folk plays with titles like *Der Sohn der Wildnis* or *Der Millionenbauer*— but there were also classics and serious modern plays: Henrik Ibsen's *Stutzen der Gesellschaft*; soon followed by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*; William Shakespeare's *Romeo und Julia*; an opera, Mozart's *Figaros Hochzeit*; and Gustav Freytag's recent and controversial play, *The Journalists* (*Cottbuser Anzeiger*, September-December 1897). Clearly one of the high points was the staging of Friedrich Schiller's tragedy, *Don Carlos*, on 17 October 1897 and on later dates. This is the only occasion on which the reviewer of the Cottbus paper, otherwise quite critical of some of the actors, takes positive note of one of the youngest members of the cast, "Elsa Plotz": "Miss Collani as the *Oberhofmeisterin* and Miss Plotz as the Marquise de Mondecar, on the other hand, acquitted themselves well."

The role of the Marquise de Mondecar in the tragedy is a small one indeed; she is one of the "three ladies in waiting to the Queen," Elisabeth of Spain. She has few appearances and fewer lines to speak in Act I, Scenes 3-6 before she is banished by the King. Still, her small part requires a good deal of silent acting in important scenes that help set the stage for the ensuing tragic development. Unfortunately, the reviewer says, there were only eighty people in the audience. Clearly, the taste was for more popular kinds of entertainment. The staging of the classics in provincial towns like Cottbus, however, also served an educational purpose and attendance was more or less mandatory for Gymnasium students (who would certainly have paid special attention to one of the youngest and most attractive of the visiting actresses).

There is no further mention of "Elsa Plotz" in the pages of the *Cottbuser Anzeiger*. We have no further printed proof that she played roles in other plays staged by Walden, although this, in all

likelihood, must have been the case, since she was a member of the cast assembled for the season. We do not know whether she stayed on as a member of the company until the end of the winter season, in March, or prematurely dissolved her contract to return to Berlin. We are, finally, struck by the coincidence that FPG, whom she presumably did not meet until the summer of 1902, did a similar stint of acting as a student in Bonn in 1898 at the Bonn *Stadttheater*, also figuring in "classic" plays by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Friedrich Schiller, although not the same ones, and he certainly never figured in comedies, farces or folk-plays, like Else (Martens, *F.P. Grove* 33-35). Still, their youthful experiences were similar indeed, preparing EFL for her later challenging public role in New York and FPG for his somewhat more traditional later life in the major cities and all of the provinces of Canada.

Orientalism, Else Lasker-Schuler, and the Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven

Of the baroness's life in Germany, we know what little she chose to acquaint us with in the letters and memoirs written for Djuna Barnes. We also suspect some rather uncertain odds and ends as mediated through Felix Paul Greve's two German novels and through the observations of her contemporaries in Munich and Berlin prior to her departure for the United States. What else do we know of that early period? It has been surmised that Else was more than the sexually desirable creature given a literary identity to fool her lover Felix Paul Greve's creditors, as he presented "her" to his publisher J.C.C. Bruns and to Andre Gide. She provided him with material to be mined for his writings and he did not hesitate to plunder her memories, or so it seems. Although aware of the long-misused woman's perspective on Else, we must not be overprotective. It may be safely assumed from Felix and Else's long partnership and short marriage that whatever Greve used for his fictions was taken *not without her consent*. If, and to what extent, she may have had a hand in the actual writing of Greve's fictional works we do not know, since she neither asserted herself at the time nor in her memoirs written for Barnes.

Some evidence, however, indicates a small, but not very likely chance that she contributed to Greve's translation work, sharing the incredible textual load under which he staggered. That she herself may have translated Keats's poetry must be doubted in view of the linguistic shortcomings she later demonstrated in New York.[5] We do get a first inkling that in America she was not merely the helpless discarded lover, touchingly inexperienced in the twisty ways of literature, who stumbled onto the New York scene, only to miraculously evolve into that stunning new public persona.

EFL was not "well-born" like the struggling writer, translator, lover and Munich muse of gifted men, Franziska von Reventlow, who, like the Baroness, had also once intended to become a painter (Egbringhoff 105-06). She certainly was not well-connected like the occasional translator Helene Klages, platonically adored by Felix before Else won him over to her (Martens, *F.P. Grove* 87-95). Finally, she was not as conspicuous as that other contemporary "dame-de-lettre," the wonderful poet, dramatist, and painter Else Lasker-Schuler (1869-1945), then residing in Berlin. The Baroness-to-be, however, shared these women's ironic view of the cerebral men surrounding them. Like these three, Else Greve had learned to forestall utter poverty by attracting well-to-do and artistically minded men (Hjartarson and Spettigue i39f). This pattern would repeat itself in New York in her attitude toward, and reaction to, such modernist artists as Marcel Duchamp, William Carlos Williams and George Biddle, among others.

In Berlin, she had escaped her all-too-bourgeois marriage to the noted architect August Endell much as Else Lasker-Schuler, that other, and, until recently, much better known Else, had escaped her marriage to the well-to-do physician Dr. Lasker,

supporting herself through periods of near squalor before becoming the spouse (1903-1911) of Herwarth Walden, from 1910 the famous editor of the leading Expressionist magazine *Der Sturm* (Klusener 65f.). Felix Paul Greve, too, had aimed at becoming the editor of a magazine patterned on the *Mercure de France* (Ernst and Martens 128). The lives of both Elses appear to parallel each other at a few important points. These I propose to investigate.

While in 1906 and 1907 Felix and Else were "working together" on the translation of the twelve-volume edition of the *Arabian Nights*, then considered very erotic and exotic, Else Lasker-Schuler was preparing and publishing tier third book of poetry which she called *Die Nachte Tino von Bagdads* (The Nights of Tino of Bagdad). Clearly, if Felix and both Elses profited from the strong oriental vogue in Berlin—which had increased since the 1896 Berlin Colonial Exposition with its large-scale reproductions of Cairo and the pyramids in the suburb of Treptow (even the waterworks, still surviving, were built in the shape of a mosque)—then Lasker-Schuler drew on the same vogue that enabled her to take unheard-of liberties in her writing, clothing, and public behaviour. It was, after all, a period when the Near East vvas on the political agenda of several competing European nations and the Kaiser visited Turkey and Palestine to help enforce German claims (Berman).

There was also a more substantial contemporary European literary trend behind it all, coterminous with the political developments, not to mention tlie preceding almost three hundred years of German literary orientalism.[6] Before Felix and the two Elses—and contemporaneous with them—books vvith oriental themes and titles had been published to much public acclaim. Among these was the notable eccentric writer and designer Paul Scheerbart— a friend of Lasker-Schiiler's—whose *Tarub, Bagdads beruhmte Kochin* (Tarub, The Famous Cook of Bagdhad) was published in 1900 under the imprint of Gireve'.s publisher J.C.C. Bruns (Martens, *Bruns* 72-73), also the publisher of the German translation of Gustave Flaubert's oriental extravaganza *Salammbo* (Martens, *F.P. Grove* 211). Better known to a larger reading audi-e nee than Scheerbart was the successful novelist Helene Bohlau. She had married a German gentleman, an engineer working in Turkey, who had assumed a Turkish name. After their divorce, she gleefully continued to appear in public in the appropriate costumes (and continued to sign herself) as "Madame Al-Rashid Bey" (Martens, *Bruns* 54-55). Madame Al-Rashid Bey was the only long-time, bestselling author of the J.C.C. Bruns firm. An eclectic, often biblically-based Orientalism was the order of the day also among other turn-of-the-century artists, from Oscar Wilde to Aubrey Beardsley, in their treatment of the Salome theme. (Greve translated Wilde's
Salome and owned a set of Beardsley's drawings).

To be precise: "Orientalism" was increasingly the preferred and pointedly ambivalent mode of public commitment to their heritage on the part o f writers and artists of Jewish descent. "Oriental" vaguely denoted both anything Jewish as well as anything from Palestine and the rest of the Arabic Near East. Else Lasker-Schuler, driven out of Nazi Germany in 1934, settled in Jerusalem. Karl Wolfskehl—Stefan George's most ardent and gifted disciple, and, for a time, a friend of Felix and Else's—was Jewish and proud to be called an "Oriental Dionysos" because of his impressive beard and wide, loosely-hanging clothing (Hoerschelmann 128). Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Else Greve's would-be mentor, likewise loved his oriental designs and clothing. The "orient" in Lasker-Schuler's poems remains, as in Scheerbart's work, an imaginary, a composite place of the imagination, often used, on the one hand, against the then current mood and tone of an increasingly tired aestheticism and, on the other, against the still strong naturalist modes of writing (also practised by Greve in his two novels).

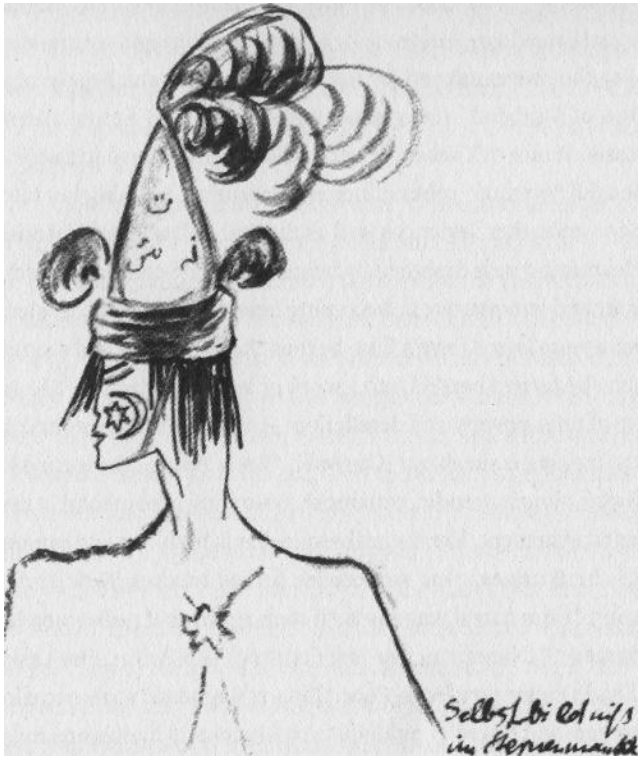


Figure 16: Else Lasker-Schuler. Else Lasker-Schuler's drawing of herself as "Prince Yussuf" ("Selbstbildnis im Sternenmantel"). Schiller Nationalmuseum, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach Germany.

From 1907, Else Lasker-Schuler, then almost destitute, began offsetting her real threadbare existence by assuming an imaginary oriental persona.[7] Using the title employed for her book of poetry, she began calling herself "Tino of Baghdad" (later assuming the name of fictive oriental royalty, "Yussuf, Prince of Thebes") and flamboyantly appeared in public in flowing, colourful "oriental" robes of her own invention, painting her face with half-moons and other devices as well as the Star of David and covering her head with amazing gear designed by herself. Lasker-Schuler, in short, was living her art and incorporating it, becoming herself the work of art she had made. Twelve years later, Greve's Else, by then the Baroness, used a similar method when she turned herself into a work of art called dadaist. She too—in her state of utter poverty and dereliction—tailored her clothes and painted her body, making it speak out (Gammel, "Body Talk"). She turned herself into a risque, almost parodic, ornament, becoming ornamental, aversion of an oriental statement, like the arabesque that is both text and ornament.

If the Baroness was sometimes forced to shun New York's finest— leaping "from patrol wagons with such agility that policemen let her go in admiration" (Naumann, *New York Dada* 169)—in Berlin, Else Lasker-Schuler had had similar problems. Poor "Tino of Baghdad" stole occasional books from her (and Greve's) publisher Axel Juncker's bookstore and the owner had somebody chase after her. She always escaped by timing her theft in such a way that she could jump on the platform of a passing tram, sticking out her tongue at her pursuers (Lasker-Schuler II 524-25).[8] One is reminded of the Baroness's poverty-induced thefts and near-arrests in Greenwich Village.

It becomes clear that before the Great War both Elses moved in overlapping circles of the Berlin literati and publishers and followed the same trends. They were subject to similar influences and they had emancipated themselves to follow independent careers as women writers. Orientalism and *Die Frauenfrage*—the issue of women's liberation—were closely allied. The oriental costume, the oriental ornament, and the oriental name made a defiant statement. The bearer begged to differ, and not at all humbly. A woman in oriental costume

proclaimed her independence of the ruling, paternally structured, culture. Her allegiance was to an imaginary realm of the imagination, transcending drab everyday reality and the limits imposed on the female sex.[9] It was a way of going to extremes in order to carve out a place for themselves.

The most famous predecessors and older contemporaries of both "misbehaving" Elses were—in addition to Madame Al-Rashid Bey—such famous and politically influential German fighters for the emancipation of women as Helene Lange and Helene Stocker, then much in the public eye (Peterfy 44-45). Among other European women writers published in the circles in which Felix and Else moved was Marguerite Vallette (1860-1953). She was the wife of Gide's publisher, Alfred Vallette, and wrote under the pen-name Rachilde. Before that, she had been known as "Mile. Baudelaire." She may have been another model, prolific, eccentric, and self-confident (Martens, *Bruns*109-11). These women writers were unconventional also in their private lives: they left their parents' houses early; they declined to follow lives laid out for them by others; and they entered into relationships with or married men of their own choice and divorced them when they felt that the independence they praised and had fought for was threatened. All of these were championed by Greve's publisher Bruns. They probably would not have escaped Else's attention.

On her part, Else Lasker-Schuler, poor and acting independently, combined both outlandish elegance and literary activity. She was the outstanding example of the self-made literary woman, holding court in one of Berlin's most famous literary hangouts, the *Cafe des Westens*. She presented herself in public as a pied-piper of the movement. To sum up: both Lasker-Schuler and "the Greves" had a stake in literary orientalism. They shared publishers (Juncker and Oesterheld). They may have known of each other, after all, for both Elses had worked as illustrators. We still do not know enough of the period 1906-1908 they spent in Berlin to confirm or reject the possibility. Lasker-Schiiler's very public example may have helped, directly or indirectly, to tailor EFL as a person and author.

As an author, the Baroness may have profited from the orientalism in setting, mood and reference found in Lasker-Schiiler's poems. Indeed, the lines of a 1918 poem by the Baroness, then still explicitly identifying herself

Figure 17: Else Lasker-Schiiler with flute, 1909-10. Schiller Nauonalmuseum, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach Germany.

by her less-than-flamboyant German first name—"Else von Freytag von [sic] Loringhoven"—are as conventionally orientalistic as anything by Lasker-Schiiler:

Mefk Maru Mustir Daas
The sweet corners of thine mouth Mustir
So world-old tired tired to nobility
To more to shame to hatred of thineself
So noble souled so weak a body
Thine body is the prey of mice

And every day the corners of thine tired mouth Mustir
Grow sweeter helpless sneer the more despair
And bloody pale-red poison foams from them
At every noble thing to kill thine soul
Because thine body is the prey of mice
And dies so slowly

So noble is thine tired soul Mustir
She cannot help to mourn out of thine eyes
Thine eyelids nostrils pallor of thine cheek
To mourn upon the curving of thine lip
Upon the crystal of thine pallid ear
To beg forgiveness with flashing smile
Like amber-coloured honey

The sweet corners of thine tired mouth Mustir
Undo thine sin. Thine pain is killed in play
Thine body's torture stimulates in play
And silly little bells of perfect tune
Thou art a country devasted bare Mustir
Exhausted soil with sandy trembling hills
No food no water and ashamed of it
Thou shiver and an amber-yellow sun

Goes down the horizon
Thou art desert with mirages which drive the mind insane
To walk and die a-starving.

The poem, in its orientalism, not only recalls Lasker-Schuler, but is also as vaguely oriental as Felix Paul Greve's poems in his 1902 volume Wanderungen with their jm-de-siede sensibility, undetermined desert settings, and ominous atmosphere (Martens, *F.P. Grove* 72-73). Only the title is mildly anticipatory of the Baroness's later American poems, apparently a somewhat oriental sounding name but also partly homophonically allusive to German words and phrases (*Musst ihr das*?). Apart from the poem's curious tide, fragments of which are repeated throughout the text, there is little of the European Dada poets' *Lautgedichte* (sound poems) of the kind written by Hugo Ball (Dohl 734). In addition, considering the vague oriental references shared with Greve's early poetry, the possibility cannot be discounted that the poem is indeed a look back over her shoulder at her former companion's poems she called "wellcut gems of languagejuggling." In the memoir written for Djuna Barnes, she would indirectly identify her former lover Greve as desert-like when she called him "infertile within himself" (Hjartarson and Spettigue 162,119). Addressing "Mustir" as a "country devasted bare" in her first poem in *The Little Review*, she also seems to describe the very young F.P. Greve whom she had first met a few months after the publication of his volume of poems with vaguely oriental or African settings. In this context, incidentally, the German hidden in the title of Freytag-Loringhoven's New York "Mustir" poem sounds like a rueful look back: *Musst ihr das*? (Do you have to?). The somewhat macaronic linguistic method the Baroness employed in the poem just quoted is not far removed from the striking linguistic liberties Lasker-Schuler took in some of her writings, occasionally assuming an "*Ursprache*" (Ur-language) she claimed to have rediscovered and which, she suggested, had been "spoken in the time of King Saul, the Royal Wild Jew." I quote an excerpt:

Elbanaff:
Min salihihi wali kinahu
Rahi hatiman
fi is bahi lahu fassun--
Min hagas assama anadir
Wakan liachad abtal
Latinaalmulijadinabinassre... (Lasker-Schuler II, 520-21)

This linguistic concoction of pseudo-Latin, pseudo-Arabic, some German and pure fun indeed resembles texts by Ball, Huelsenbeck, Schwitters and other German dadaists of the igios and 2os, including Freytag-Loringhoven's own part-English, part-German and occasionally invented language in her later poems, written after 1918.

Just as Else Lasker-Schuler wrote and performed the colourful "Ur-language" of her own making under her assumed names "Tino von Baghdad" and "Prince Yussuf of Thebes," one ought not to be surprised that the Baroness also first submitted the "Mefk Maru Mustir Dass" poem under the oriental-sounding pseudonym "TaraOsrik" (Hjartarson, "Of Greve" 271). "Tara Osrik," indeed, sounds like a name from the deserts of Tartary. Another poem by the Baroness in the "oriental" mode to follow was her "Klink-Hratzvenga (Deathwail): Narin-Tzarissamanili (He is dead!)." Apparently, the oriental colouring was known to her and came easily to her at this early period of her American career. While Else Lasker-Schuler developed her "Ur-language," oriental poems, and colourful personal appearance in Berlin, Felix Paul Greve, having already translated Wilde's play *Salome*, translated and published Andre Gide's little play *Saul*, dealing with exactly that "King Saul, the Royal Wild Jew" Lasker-Schuler had in mind when making up her very own pseudo-ancient linguistics.

These, then, were some of the experiences she had had and the influences that acted upon Else Greve in Germany, helping her, in New York, to form her public Dada persona as the Baroness, beginning where she had left off in Berlin, with the Oriental mode.

Conclusion

As a prominent figure in New York Dada and Surrealist circles of painters, poets, photographers, and sculptors, the Baroness Elsa used and further developed the roles and patterns of artistic and public appearance and behaviour she had first adopted in her youth spent as a professional actress in theatrical performances in Berlin and Cottbus. Later as the companion and wife of Felix Paul Greve, she moved in the circles of writers and artists in Munich and Berlin.

Inferred first appearances as a member of the cast at the Berlin Central-Theater, in 1896-97, do not prove, I believe, that young Else had been a kind of *demi-monde*. The Berlin *Central-Theater* was no Montmartre cabaret, luridly lighted, with scantily clad girls available in *chambres separe'es*. It was, on the contrary, a well known playhouse of solidly bourgeois reputation. Occasional appearances on that stage, surrounded by a large cast of dancers and actors, in the light comedies and farces of the day, would have taught her the function, the value and the techniques of parody and satire as well as the effects of the distortion of the familiar on an audience. She learned, in short, the tricks of the actor's trade. She would also have learned to consciously use and recognise body language. The young and inexperienced girl from the Baltic coast of Pomerania would have used rehearsals and public performances in Berlin and—under the expert direction of Walden—in Cottbus, to acquire self-confidence in the public display of unusual dress and undress. To some degree, the typical dadaist's "power of deceit," mentioned by Hugo Ball, the delight in "any kind of mask," was prefigured for the Baroness in her early acquisition of the skills of the professional actor.

Moreover, had she appeared in a chorus line, for which I have seen no hard evidence, she would by no means have been regarded as a sexually pioneering woman in the forefront of the impending sexual revolution. No Caroline Meeber, she might have been in danger of being abused like many of her young female colleagues of the stage. First exposure to the public as one of many dancing girls, however, might have taught her to be free from stage fright and to develop a degree of ease in the handling of masks and costumes for the stage and, possibly, of a male audience eager to take her out. Whatever the real sexual adventures of young Else Plotz may have been, they would not have been out of the ordinary for a young girl cast out into the world of the capital city and the provincial centers. The bohemian life among young and still not very well-known artists and writers gathering, say, at the Berlin "Wintergarten," alone would not have been sufficient to prepare her for the role of the very public heroine of the New York *boheme*, playing the leading role in an artistically rendered version of her life.

When the Baroness, in her memoir, attacked the German dadaist Kurt Schwitters and accused him of a "lack of flourish," she certainly perceived the lack of a crucial actorly quality she herself had mastered from early on. She did not criticise the other artist in terms of aesthetic difference or even difference of method or school. By criticising Schwitters in the terms she did, she identified salient characteristics of her own public performances (shared with Lasker-Schiiler), her panache and flamboyance.

It appears that in her acting days at the *Central-Theater* in Berlin and the *Stadttheater Goldener Ring* in Cottbus, she had had ample occasion to study at firsthand the crucial difference between the techniques of "low" and "high" culture, as exemplified in low comedy, farce and extravaganza on the one

hand, and the plays of the modern "classics" of high culture on the other, that were both part of Walden's program. Popular low-comedy theater often profits from the caricature or parody of cultured manners, and it exploits folk characters and folk speech. Folk speech in low comedy flaunts the ungrammatical, indulges in misquotation and gleefully foregrounds "misunderstandings" of "high faluting" speech and manners of polite society. Parody in farce and low comedy subverts the pretensions of high culture. Some of these lessons learned during her acting days in Germany she put to good use in New York.

When we contemplate the Baroness's walking the streets of Greenwich Village, wearing "an inverted coal-scuttle" on her head and "metal tea-balls" as ear-pendants (Reiss 86), we cannot but notice that there is a good deal of able performance in this act containing, on the part of the spectators, hoped for "feats of association." In fact, the New York street now appears to supplant the German stage she knew, the street becoming "a 'scene' or a stage for dramatising the self as a performer" (Poirier 90, 86). Apart from this, in low comedy, the Baroness's curious dress and ornaments, a kind of "disguise," also might be regarded as a theatrical parody of the common housewife's lot and as a parody of the urge for costly dress and ornamentation of the conservative, moneyed ladies of society.

Not only Else Greve's and Else Lasker-Schuler's taste for flamboyant public display and role-playing, but also the early Expressionist's linguistic experimentation were essential for preparing Else for the New York Baroness's presentation of experimental language poetry, her version of both Lasker-Schuler's and the other dadaist's creation of one's own "Ur-Language." This language—in Lasker-Schiiler, Kurt Schwitters, and the Baroness herself—had to be comically ungrammatical to offend, to provoke, to subvert by doing violence to accepted linguistic standards, that is, the notion of "right speaking" as a mark of traditional high culture and its received notions of poetry and art. To what degree the Baroness's rejection of more traditional modes of poetry and prose—as practised, for instance, by FPG in Germany and Canada—and her resumption of techniques learnt from the German *avant-garde* poetry of Lasker-Schiiler, perhaps also profited from the linguistic conventions of German theater's low comedy, farce, and folk-play needs to be investigated further.

Thus the Baroness, as an outstanding artist personality in New York Dada and Surrealism, may primarily be seen as from an early date preparing for, and then sharing in, crucial aspects of the Modernist project. Finally, we can now fix the date and the occasion that set her on the road towards that impressive achievement. Back in Cottbus, while beginning, in September 1897, as one lowly member of Director Walden's acting troupe, she publicly changed her name from sober and girlish "Else" to glamorous "Elsa" of Wagnerian operatic fame. At this point, she began to make over and heighten her everyday self into an evolving extraordinary new ego, a role to be further developed and a life to be chosen. By once again assuming her German stage name "Elsa" in America, she also again highlights not only the interaction between high and low culture but the progress from an old to a new order in the arts, with the flamboyant performance becoming reality until we, the audience, become unable to tell the *danceuse* from the dance, and the actress from her act.

Endnotes

1. This article profits from Paul Hjartarson's discovery of the papers of Else von Freytag-Loringhoven (1986) and his edition, with D.O. Spettigue, of these papers (1992). Also, Gary Nelson's work on the subject was consulted. In addition, I wish to acknowledge Irene Gammel's recent work on this subject (see Works Cited).

2. "The European Art Invasion" is the term Davidson uses in his article in Naumann and Venn's catalogue, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*.

3. Quoted from p. 3-4 of an undated letter to Djuna Barnes, apparently written while Freytag-Loringhoven was still in Berlin, before moving to Paris. I thank the Archives & Manuscript Department of the University of Maryland's McKeldin Library for permission to quote.

4. EFL may, for instance, have been aware that she was providing Barnes with material that the American writer might one day use for her own purposes. Speculations regarding the sources for Felix Volkbein in Barnes's novel *Nightwood*, for instance, were based on Barnes's possible use of the material provided by the Baroness.

5. This is suggested by a reference to a lost manuscript much applauded by the poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal who praises a friend of his, a lady translator, who had previously participated in Bruns's Flaubert edition, "Else Greve," in short (Martens *E.P. Grove* 216). Hofmannsthal may have been uninformed of the titular role as translator Greve had caused to be bestowed on Else for legal reasons.

6. Edward Said's (and others') criticism of orientalism, pertinent as it is to the larger question, is not an issue discussed in my paper. A view both more detailed and general, profitable as it may be, is beyond the scope of the present investigation. Regarding German literary orientalism also see my discussion of Friedrich Schlegel and the "arabesque novel" (Martens, *Antinomische Imagination* 128-31).

7. I owe many of the details of Lasker-Schuler's fascinating life and work (as well as a first acquaintance with her drawings) to Sigrid Bauschinger's excellent biography of the poet.

8. Lasker-Schuler's next publisher, Oesterheld, confessed his impecuniousness during their first interview. Oesterheld published Gide's *Saul* in Felix Greve's translation.

9. The "oriental" as a way of escape into the realm of the imaginary also figures prominently elsewhere. Edward Said, for instance, points to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and the heroine's love of the *Arabian Nights* (271).