

Memory Garden

Binaural radio play by Merzouga based on motifs from the work of Ilse Helbich.

With Dörte Lyssewski & Ilse Helbich (soundbites)

Accordion: Dorrit Bauerecker

Direction & composition: Merzouga (Eva Pöpplein & Janko Hanushevsky)

Dramaturgy: Sabine Kuchler

Production: DLF/ORF 2020

First broadcast: 24 October 2020 (DLF)

Actress (young)

I have many hiding places./

Some are very difficult/

Many are also forbidden./

Where I like to be most/

Anyone could find me there -/

They'd only have to raise their eyes./

I'm lying on the roof/

I'm lying on the roof of the tool shed./

My roof is very warm from the sun/

Here I lie for a long long time/¹⁾

Title

Memory Garden.

Radio play by Merzouga based on motifs from the work of Ilse Helbich.

Actress (young)

I turn on my back/
look at the sky/
the clouds pass by slowly/
when I've looked for a long time/
the trees over there also start to flow on/¹⁾

Actress (old)

sings:

May bug fly,
Your father is at war
Your mother is in Pomerania,
Pomerania has burnt down,
May bug fly.

Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire and your children all gone;
All except one and that's little Ann,
And she has crept under the warming pan.

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

What triggers memories at the moment is an attempt to hold on to my old life. And it's not a successful attempt at that. It's a futile attempt to reconstruct something that's no longer there.

Actress

A sea of silence arches over Vineta, one that's not even interrupted by the striking of individual sounds – not the rolling of the heavy wagon wheels over the cobblestones, not the squealing of the brakes of the tramway as it stops at the station, not the sound of the carpet beater from here and there, not the jingle of the organ grinder either, "Roses from the South", every Thursday at four o'clock in the afternoon in front of the ice cream shop,...²⁾

Actress (young)

I have many hiding places./

Some are very difficult/

Many are also forbidden./

Where I like to be most/

Anyone could find me there -/1)

Actress

...wagons rumble, pigeons coo, two children's voices,...

... maybe still the bells, whose peals seem present even when they're silent....

...the peal of bells from everywhere at many an hour, slow peals and urgent, solemnly admonishing ones, too.²⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

At the moment, the feeling of life without memories is present, also no future.

Actress

Vineta. A sunken world, lost kingdom of childhood.

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

... yes, (laughs) even a narrative that you give to yourself.

Actress (young)

I'm lying on the roof of the tool shed./

I watch those/

who are walking below me./

Behind the fence they're walking with tool bags/

with shopping bags with plastic bags/

with briefcases/

they're walking fast./

When the children come out of the ice cream shop/

I crawl back into the lilac shade/

otherwise they'll want to come up to me/

but this is my hiding place all my own.¹⁾

Actress

Over on the other side of the street is the wooden hut of Mrs Moll, who sells sweets there, but only the cheap ones; her selection is very small.

The vegetable woman next door. When the warped wooden door opens and the gardener steps out with a knife and secateurs...

Radishes freshly pulled from the ground, large heads of lettuce or runner beans from the bush.

Each of the small shops next to each other is a world of its own, each with its own wares, its own smell and its various owners: world next to world, when you walk from one shop to another it's like being on a journey that changes again and again in many stops along the way.²⁾

Actress (young)

I turn on my back/

it is blue/

the clouds pass by slowly/

when I have looked for a long time/

the trees over there also start to flow on/

dizzily/

I lie still I watch the flowing/¹⁾

Actress (old)

Cloudland and what lives there has remained a mystery....

Swallow writing...³⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

Back then, as a child, I already had very strong impressions of something else. Not visions or anything like that, but we had a construction company back then, and before there were lorries, there were draught horses.

I used to sneak into this stable in the evenings; I'd sit on a very high window ledge and just watch the horses. And that was an atmosphere where this world was, as it were, completely there, with buzzing flies banging against the high windows, the dusty ones, and with the horses that ate oats from their wooden mangers, and sometimes one would turn to me with its horse harness clanking so softly, so it was both the sensuality that was very much there, but there was something else behind it. A tremendous peace, and when I left and went home to eat, it came with me, this peace, or this inner sense of being at home, somewhere.

Actress

Being at home, in this world of secrets, some of which want to be revealed and most of which only cast their shadow into my day.

Unknown worlds tower around me and within me.

The smooth surface of the water reflects the empty sky.

Quiet movement in the brown branches. A noiseless flap of wings, black and white whirring. The secrets come to light. I face their gaze.³⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

I can remember my unity when I think I have lost it.

Something that is present for me, not describable, without categories, I would find such an expression as God too restrictive for me, and which, when I think I've lost it for a while, for a few hours, I can't feel it, I can, however, bring it home to me again through my memory.

Actress

In the sea of silence that spreads over Vineta swim isolated sounds: the rumble of carriages, the cooing of pigeons, two children's voices, the screech of tramway brakes, church bells everywhere and the echo of carpet beaters in the morning hours.

Sound, reverberation, echo.

These sounds are a language. It's as if members of a foreign tribe were shouting their messages to each other.

Sounds that glide over roofs and treetops, flow through the open window, fill the room.

The carpet beaters in the morning, the organ-grinder on Thursday afternoons, and suddenly the plaintive, enticing shouts from the street: "The rag and bone man's here: old bottles, rags, junk from your attic, junk from your cellar! The junk man's here!"

The sounds are there first. Only then the image, matchstick-sized, the moment wakes up from the memory: the rickety cart full of jumble, the lean horse, the tiny, grey man next to the dusty animal, then the image disappears and the shouting is there, "Old bottles, rags...", quieter and quieter now, still there. ²⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

In my youth there were still “Werkelmänner”. An organ grinder, in North German. This nasal, loud blowing and this wrong beat – the organ grinder also somehow played waltzes to his own beat – I can still imagine it so clearly today. Or horse-drawn carriages, the trotting of horses’ hooves. The sound of the bells the horses had on their harnesses in winter. These are sounds I remember very, very powerfully.

Actress (old)

And? These few snapshots are all you have left from all your years and (...) decades – nothing else?

Nothing but silent sheet lighting in a night sky.³⁾

Actress (young)

I’m lying on the roof of the tool shed/

My roof is very warm from the sun/

the clouds pass by slowly/

when I have looked for a long time/

the trees also start to flow on/

I lie still I watch the flow/¹⁾

Actress (old)

Shake hands well,
washing motions in the air current,
the promise of rest of an old pink tablecloth,
and the delicacy of the first radishes.
Taming successful? 1)

Actress

Blossom tendrils surround me/
Lark trills flow through me/
Sun floods me/¹⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

Not only do I see next to nothing, I also hear very badly (laughs); touch now plays a very big role with me, the touching of something. I'm probably a person who's pretty geared towards sensuality.

When I go for a walk, I see surfaces, silhouettes, I sometimes see – if I try very hard – a flower that stands tall, very precisely. Then I close my eyes and the same image arises inside me that I saw outside of me, but in a purified form, but it has a different layer of depth.

Actress

When I feel in harmony with myself and the world, this is an experience that's inherent in all expressions of life, that I'm fine, and this experience on many levels, perhaps also on a spiritual level, is, at the same time, also a clearly physical experience.³⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

I believe that what I see then, with my eyes closed, is what is there, but through a filter.

And for me, this filter is, so to speak, what has been experienced. That which is alive from within in what one has seen. That's a radiance that suddenly gets everything.

Actress

A warm pulsing through to my toes and fingertips, (...) a very quiet, barely perceptible vibration of my body, as though it were being fed by an invisible force.

The buzzing transformer house of my childhood years.³⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

I don't think it's possible to distinguish whether what comes through as vitality and luminosity is, so to speak, something biological on this side, or whether it is, to put it stupidly, something otherworldly. That oscillates in my experience.

Actress

I feel as though this physical sense of existence is given to me for a split second as a kind of certainty.

But maybe I'm wrong, and it's my nature that plays its own tune and draws all the other impressions behind it. ³⁾

Actress

Noiselessly the blackbird's song.//¹⁾

I get stuck in the blue/

look and look with eyes wide open./¹⁾

The images from back then come, bright they are and I look at them.

I look across to Vineta, where I was at home back then. ²⁾

"If you dream you're a butterfly and dream the same thing over and over again, how do you know whether you're a human being dreaming you are a butterfly – or a butterfly dreaming you are a human being?" ³⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

I never think about dying. That's the future, which has nothing to do with me. But probably, this time is turned towards leaving. So maybe that already has a sense of looking over to the other side, or of no longer belonging here.

Actress

In the side windows of the car, the slender trunks of the spruces along the road in ever-changing groupings: letters of a hieroglyphic script, and legible. ³⁾

Actress (young)

I'm lying on the roof/

I hear my mother calling/

evening soon comes/

I climb down/

I've been far away/

but they don't know that./

At supper I hear the others talk/

in my country over there nobody talks/

in my country people are clouds are trees/

Heaven now always/

Sometimes I'm afraid there/

I fall very far/

Blue hole the walls of glass/

Can never go back/

You can't talk about it with anyone./

I alone know it/

I know ¹⁾

Actress (young)

Now the little man leans his ladder against the lamppost in front of the window, climbs up quietly and nimbly and – click – the gas lantern is already burning, while the lamplighter creeps on to the next one. (...) Behind the window pane it's now cosy and sheltered in the mild glow from outside, which, like moonlight, makes the darkness of the room bright. ²⁾

Soundbite from Ilse Helbich

I'm now sitting in a veranda from which I have a very nice view of the garden.

When I open the windows, I'm almost in the garden.

Actress

The murmur,/

The singing of the wandering river./

Now the hills sing wave upon wave/

With the drifting clouds,/

My tree sings/

And I sing with everything // ¹⁾

Credits

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Bibliography:

Quotes from the following works:

¹⁾ Helbich, Ilse: *Im Gehen. Gedichte*. Literaturverlag Droschl Graz – Vienna 2017, ISBN 978-3-99059-002-7

79 lines

²⁾ Helbich, Ilse: *Vineta*. Literaturverlag Droschl Graz – Vienna 2013, ISBN 978-3-85420-845-7

44 lines

³⁾ Helbich, Ilse: *Schmelzungen*. Literaturverlag Droschl Graz – Vienna 2015, ISBN 978-3-85420-964-5

26 lines