

MOMENTS

A performance within the framework of the 'Bridging Generations' Project

Authors: Ewa Staroń and Piotr Michałowski

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MOMENTS - intergenerational performance

Directed by Ewa Staroń, founder of the dance theatre 'Independent Manufacture of Dance' and initiator of the Centre for Artistic Initiatives in Wrocław.

Live music by Piotr Michałowski.

The performance was presented at the final event of the Bridging Generations project under the title 'Kunst des Errinerns' on February 14th, 2016 in Dresden.

General information about the performance:

A group of artists presented a performance called 'MOMENTS' based on the biographical narratives -life-stories that have only been kept in the minds of seniors- recorded in Lower Silesia, Poland during the 'Bridging Generations' project. The group consists of inhabitants of the community of Oleśnica, Poland with each member of the group representing a different generation and the stories being a cross-generational connection. The story begins during WWII through children's lives who witnessed all the political and economic changes coming to today's generation of children who don't know much about the "sad past". The performance shows the creating of our common identity that brought us a valuable result: our Chamber of

Memories of the Oleśnica Community. By using several precious symbolic mementoes gathered in the Chamber of Memories the performance shows the story of one family that will be underlined by the afore mentioned mementoes as visible plot connectors. The old photos and video material collected in the archive of our Chamber of Memories are going to be used (recorded by Monika Małobęcka, Specialist for Culture from the Community Culture Centre of Oleśnica).

Performers:

- Helena Mąkosa
- Alfreda Schmidt
- Ewa Staroń
- Monika Małobęcka
- Nikola Ślęzyk
- Dorota Chrzanowska
- Wiktoria Bodo
- Piotr Michałowski
- Marek Chotnicki

Research, elements of the performance:

The performance starts with the song of the Polish Poet Julian Tuwim "Przy okrągłym stole" / "At the roundtable" which very much coincides with the last song used in the performance, "Lili Marlene", mostly known through the performance of Marlene Dietrich for the numerous Allied troops during WWII.

Julian Tuwim (born 13th of September 1894 in Łódź, died 27th of December 1953 in Zakopane) was a Polish poet of Jewish origin, author of vaudevilles, sketches, operetta librettos and of lyrics. He was one of the most popular poets of the inter-war period. During The War he had to escape from Poland living in Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and New York. Author of numerous nostalgic poems.

Text of the poem "Przy okrągłym stole" / "At the roundtable":

Przy okrągłym stole

A może byśmy tak, najmilszy,
wpadli na dzień do Tomaszowa?
Może tam jeszcze zmierzchem złotym
ta sama cisza trwa wrześniowa...

W tym białym domu, w tym pokoju
gdzie cudze meble postawiono,
musimy skończyć naszą dawną
rozmowę, smutnie nie skończoną.

Więc może byśmy tak, najmilszy,
wpadli na dzień do Tomaszowa?
Może tam jeszcze zmierzchem złotym
ta sama cisza trwa wrześniowa...

Jeszcze mi tylko z oczu jasnych
spływa do warg kropelka słona,
a ty mi nic nie odpowiadasz
i jesz zielone winogrona.

Ten biały dom, ten pokój martwy
do dziś się dziwi, nie rozumie...
Wstawili ludzie cudze meble
i wychodzili stąd w zadumie.

A przecież wszystko tam zostało!
Nawet ta cisza trwa wrześniowa...
Więc może byśmy tak, najmilszy,
wpadli na dzień do Tomaszowa?

Jeszcze ci wciąż spojrzeniem śpiewam:
Du holde Kunst... - i serce pęka!
I muszę jechać... więc mnie żegnasz,
lecz nie drży w dłoni mej twa ręka.

I wyjechałam, zostawiłam,
jak sen urwała się rozmowa.
Błogosławiłam, przeklinałam:
Du holde Kunst! Więc tak? Bez słowa?

A może byśmy tak, najmilszy,
wpadli na dzień do Tomaszowa?
Może tam jeszcze zmierzchem złotym

ta sama cisza trwa wrześnieowa.

Jeszcze mi tylko z oczu jasnych
spływa do warg kropelka słona,
a ty mi nic nie odpowiadasz
i jesz zielone winogrona...

Lyrics: Julian Tuwim

Music: Zygmunt Konieczny

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At the Round-table – English translation

My darling, what about dropping in to Tomaszów for a day?
Maybe there is still the same September silence in the golden dusk...
In this white house, in this room, where they put in other people's furniture,
We have to finish our former conversation that was left unfinished so sadly.

So, my dear, what about dropping in to Tomaszów for a day?
Maybe there is still the same September silence in the golden dusk...
Only a salty little drop is running down from my bright eyes to my lips,
But you don't answer me at all and you're eating white grapes.

This white house, this dull room, it is wondering up to now, it doesn't understand...
People have put in other people's furniture and went out of here with thoughtfulness.
All was left there though, even this September silence is still there,
So, my dear, what about dropping in to Tomaszów for a day?

So I still sing out to you with my glance: Du holde Kunst... - and my heart is breaking,
I have to go... so you say farewell to me, but your hand is not trembling in mine.
So I've set out, I've left, the conversation was interrupted like a dream,
I blessed, I cursed: Du holde Kunst! Well so? Without a word?

My darling, what about dropping in to Tomaszów for a day?
Maybe there is still the same September silence in the golden dusk...
Only a salty little drop is running down from my bright eyes to my lips,
But you don't answer me at all and you're eating white grapes

.....
Interpretation of the poem "At the Round-table" and necessary background information for the performance 'MOMENTS':

The poem begins with a question to a beloved person. One can therefore conclude that the theme of the poem is 'love' but this love is not a lasting feeling, rather one which has been broken in some way. The place is especially marked by emotions and located in Tomaszów city,

in a room. In the local, white house he and his beloved broke up. The only possibility to give a chance to feelings, is to return once again to that city. There, everything was left as they "left"; perhaps the emotions would come back again when those two people would sit at a round-table. Apparently for the protagonist it was the only real feeling in his life. Everything that took place earlier or later is not so important compared to those moments spent in Tomaszów, in the white house, in that room.

Today, however, in that room full of memories "other people's furniture were placed." That wording and references to songs of Franz Schubert (*Du holde Kunst*) build a mood of nostalgia. The "Du holde Kunst" phrase can be translated as follows: "Oh, a pleasant 'art', between so many 'grey' hours..." Exactly because this poem is mostly about those 'grey' hours. Memories of those moments with one's beloved person seem to be simply depressive. The poet dreams, as we see in the first verses, to return to those moments, when the future of love was weighed.

At that time the woman showed no interest in him and he honoured this and did not ask for her attention. However, this moment of apparent dispassion when she (as if it were nothing) was eating green grapes, grows in retrospect to the level of drama. How is it possible that they so easily ruined their feelings? Even objects (furniture, the room itself) cannot understand how can people act in this way; foolishly rejecting the most important things (This white house, this dull room, is wondering up till now; it doesn't understand...).

"At the Round-table" is a poem about a very nostalgic and wistful mood. Even the reference to Schubert indicates that it treats melancholy. These 'grey' hours progress continuously since that September's day. In the poem there are many signs of vanishing: in the room other people's furniture was brought in, which means that most likely someone else began to build their happiness there. After all this time spent together, now there is only silence and the spell of oblivion. He manifests then his hope that by revisiting Tomaszów everything will be again possible.

The poem of Julian Tuwim combines elements of love, poetry and a reflection on transience. Without exaggeration, it can be considered as one of the most beautiful (and most original!) Polish erotic poems.

Why have this poem as a part of the performance 'MOMENTS'?

By the usage of this poem Ewa Staroń created an atmosphere of nostalgia which was underlined by the scenography (old suitcases, vintage costumes). Music played by Piotr Michałowski was related to the plot but also to the patchwork scenes – underlining the Moments of fear, the Moments of sadness, the Moments of nostalgia and the Moments of annihilation. The action is placed in the WWII times according to the narratives of senior citizens gathered during the Bridging Generations project. The motive of travel of the civilians (so obvious) is shown through symbols – waiting (for the train, for the departure, for the expulsions, etc.) Through those clearly legible symbols the story becomes more universal than being only “Polish”.

The concept of the performance was based also on a superstructure made to collide the opening poem of Julian Tuwim with the song Lili Marleene, popularised by Marlene Dietrich. She, being Anti-Nazi, had to escape from Germany and become a U.S. citizen but felt a certain nostalgia toward Germany. She has said:

*„America took me into her bosom when there was no longer a country
worthy of the name, but in my heart I am German – German in my
soul”.*

This situation of huge importance very much coincides with the one the protagonist of Julian Tuwim's poem “At the Round-table” experienced; he and her had to leave the place that they loved. Their circumstances were possibly different, possibly very much alike. We can guess that Julian Tuwim, himself a war fugitive, felt a huge nostalgia for his country. As the protagonist had to leave that meaningful room in Tomaszów, Marlene Dietrich had to leave her country, escape, feel said huge nostalgia and be socially engaged on the other side of the barricades...

Marlene Dietrich – another dimension / same dimension?

Marie Magdalene "Marlene" Dietrich (born 27th of December, 1901 – died 6th of May, 1992) was a German-American actress and singer.

In her personal life, Dietrich was a strong opponent of the Nazi government in Germany. She had been asked to return to Germany by people associated with Adolf Hitler in the late 1930s

to make films there, but turned them down. As a result, her films were banned in her native land. She made her new country her official home by becoming a U.S. citizen in 1939. During World War II, Dietrich travelled extensively to entertain the Allied troops, singing such songs as 'Lili Marlene' and others that would later become staples in her cabaret act. She also worked on war-bond drives and recorded anti-Nazi messages in German for broadcast.

Source: [Biography.com](https://www.biography.com)

Before and during The War Goebbels tried to persuade Dietrich to return to Germany, thereby preventing her from entertaining the Allies. Hitler also tried to lure her back with an offer that she could make films of her choice in Germany.

Source: [The Telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk)

Marlene Dietrich used to say:

"The Germans and I no longer speak the same language".

In the late 30s Dietrich created a fund with Billy Wilder and several other Germans to help Jews and dissidents escape from Germany. In 1937 her entire salary for *Knight Without Armor* (\$450,000) was put into escrow to help the refugees. In December 1941 the U.S. entered World War II and Dietrich became one of the first celebrities to raise war bonds. She toured the US from January 1942 to September 1943 (appearing before 250,000 troops on the Pacific Coast leg of her tour alone) and was reported to have sold more war bonds than any other star.

Source: [Wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)

Lili Marlene – interpretation and background

The song was based on a poem written by Hans Leip around the time of World War I. The poem was put to music by Norbert Schultze in 1938.

That song was Lili Marleen.

To some Lili Marleen is a street walker. To others she is one's true love. To every soldier in the desert, be it the Desert Rat or Afrika Korps, she was the woman he left behind. Indeed, the song Lili Marlen is often called the Anthem of the Desert Warrior.

Neither the Nazi leaders or the Allied Command embraced the song officially. In fact both tried to ban the song at one time or another. But in the end, the emotions of the average soldier, German, French, British, American and every other nationality that served in the North African

desert looked upon the song as "their song". In fact the British actually took the German song and had it translated for their troops.

But even with the English versions being played, the warriors of the desert always looked upon the original "auf Deutsche" version to be theirs.

(...)

In 1939, Lale Andersen recorded the song under protest, not wanting to be associated with a "march" song. Joseph Goebbels hated the song and promptly banned it from playing but it eventually made the air ways and by the time Rommel landed in North Africa the song was being played over Radio Belgrade in Nazi occupied Yugoslavia. Rommel liked it and asked for it to be played more often. It became a hit.

Lale Andersen, Vera Lynn, and Anne Shelton would all later produce wartime English versions. German versions were also recorded by Willi Fritsch and Mimi Thoma. Eventually Marlene Dietrich, a former German star who came to Hollywood to escape the Nazis, recorded it in English for the Americans. She also recorded the song in German. Those who did not already know the song, knew it once Dietrich sang it.

The BBC produced an anti-Hitler parody of the song in 1943 titled Lucy Mannheim.

Source: Hegewisch.net

Lyrics of the song below (in Polish and English):

Lili Marlene

Przed koszarami, koło wielkiej bramy Stoi latarnia, pod nią stają damy. Tam chciałbym Ciebie spotkać znów, Dziewczyno z koszarowych snów. Ciebie, Lili Marlen. Jak dawniej, Lili Marlen.

Oba nasze cienie, jeden tworzą cień, Niech się nic nie zmienia, Niech wiecznie trwa ten dzień. Niech wszyscy ludzie widzą nas, Pod tą latarnią cały czas. Ja i Ty, Lili Marlen. Ty i ja, Lili Marlen.

Już capstrzyk wzywa, już głośno trąbka dmie. Ta trąbka natarczywa do koszar woła mnie. Kolego daj mi jeszcze czas, Bym mógł popatrzeć jeszcze raz Na mą Lili Marlen. Na Ciebie, Lili Marlen.

Ona zna Twe kroki, ona wszystko wie. Świeci od zmroku, lecz już nie pamięta mnie. I wielki ból mi sprawia myśl, Że pod latarnią stoisz dziś, Z innym Lili Marlen. Nie ze mną Lili Marlen.

W moich wspomnieniach wciąż wielką rolę grasz, W moich marzeniach nadal widzę Twoją twarz. Gdybyś Boże chciał mi szczęście dać, To pod latarnią chciałbym stać Z Moją Lili Marlen. Jak dawniej, Lili Marlen.

Translation by: Sławomir Walczak

Lili Marlene **(in English)**

Right next to the barracks by the main gate
there stood a lantern and stands there up to date
We're going to meet there again
Next to the lantern we will remain
Like then, Lili Marlene
Like then, Lili Marlene

Our casted shadows appearing as one
and the love we had, clear to everyone
and to all people that was quite plain
when by the lantern we were stayin'
Like then, Lili Marlene
Like then, Lili Marlene

Already says the sentry, lights-out's being called
that can cost you three days, comrad let's not get stalled
We said goodnight right there and then
How I would love be with you again
With you, Lili Marlene
With you, Lili Marlene

It knows your nice walking, as you come along
every night it's burning, but it forgot me long
And if it comes and I'll be slain
Who by the lantern will be coming then
With you, Lili Marlene
With you, Lili Marlene
Off the lands of silence, off the earthly ground
in a dream it lifts me, your kiss leaves me astound
When the mist of night swirls into reign
There by the lantern I will be again
Like then, Lili Marlene
Like then, Lili Marlene

Source: [Lyricstranslate.com](https://www.lyricstranslate.com)

Synthesis – the performance 'MOMENTS'

In all the presented poems and within the used symbolism 'nostalgia' is a key word. Lili Marlene has many connotations but the whole song is related to the loss, the leaving somewhere of the love / person (it can be a country as well, like for example, in Marlene Dietrich's situation or in the situation of the Germans and Poles who were forced to leave their home territories because of the great expulsion after the WWII).

Like Marlene Dietrich was singing the Lili Marleene (originally a German song) in English in front of the Allied troops, Ewa Staroń decided to use this symbol as well in the performance. An original recording of Lili Marlene by Dietrich is part of the surprise / provocative concept. That is also the main reason why the audience is invited onto the stage during this song. This act has several meanings:

One of the interpretations is the abolition of the borders between artistic creation and life and a call for active participation of the viewers.

Another meaning is that this song was itself 'a call for action' – Allied troops were exposed to the singing of Marlene Dietrich as an incentive act to afterwards 'act' as soldiers in the fight.

Furthermore, this song (in German) was part of the ongoing, approved propaganda in e.g. Yugoslavia during The War and was often heard in the radio. People were also exposed to it elsewhere.

But one of the most important interpretations says that no matter if the masses are led by the sweet voice of Marlene or the straight and strict propaganda, when a crowd is growing and growing, there is never a clue as to what could be the result. Voters for Hitler in 1933, never once believed that the aftermath of his governance would be a world war. Never was it pure and clear for the Jews taken by the death transports to the death camps, that this is going to be their last trip. Never did the Poles taken by force to the Lower Silesia terrains after 1945 believe that they will never come back as a population to the previous Eastern Borderlands.

It's always easy to watch a war as a spectator from a distance (like during the performance 'MOMENTS'). But suddenly, through the leaving of one's own chair, the sense and zone of comfort is lost and one doesn't know what will happen.

This kind of fear was dedicated to the audience – compassion with a situation. This final scene

with the final song is there to 'shaken', incorporate reflection and perhaps shock. This was our goal, which was realised 100%.

Text by Ewa Staroń and Piotr Michałowski
(editing used materials and translation from Polish – Piotr Michałowski
Proof reader English: Artemis Nikolaidou-Vichou

Contact for further informations:

Gminny Ośrodek Kultury Oleśnica

[www.facebook.com/Gminny-Ośrodek-Kultury-Oleśnica](https://www.facebook.com/Gminny-Osrodek-Kultury-Olesnica)

Tel: +48 713140238



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Lead partner



Jugend- & Kulturprojekt e.V.

Bautzner Str. 49
01099 Dresden
Germany

Tel.: +49 351 8104766
Fax.: +49 351 89960544
E-Mail: info@jkpev.de
www.jkpev.de
www.facebook.com/jkpev.de