

An Imperfect Atonement

The life and death of Georg Trakl

A RADIO PLAY

By

Colin Pink

CAST: (all of the minor parts to be doubled/tripled)

Georg Trakl: A poet in his twenties.

Grete Trakl: Georg's sister, in her twenties.

Tobias Trakl: Georg's father.

Maria Trakl: Georg's mother.

Ludwig von Ficker: friend and editor of Der Brenner.

Ludwig Wittgenstein: a philosopher.

Officer 1: An Austro-Hungarian army officer.

Officer 2: An Austro-Hungarian army officer.

Various soldiers.

Dilettante 1: An Austrian pseudo-intellectual.

Dilettante 2: An Austrian pseudo-intellectual.

Pharmacist Georg's boss.

Mathias Roth, Trakl's military orderly at the Cracow hospital.

Erhard, student friend of Georg's

Franz, student friend of Georg's

GRAMS _____ EERILY TAPPING WOODBLOCKS AND SLIDING STRINGS FROM ADAGIO OF BARTOK'S "MUSIC FOR STRINGS, PERCUSSION AND CELESTA".

F/X EXT IN THE FOREST, FOOTSTEPS, LEAVES
UNDERFOOT, BRANCHES SNAPPING, BIRDCALLS,
RUSTLING IN THE UNDERGROWTH.

GEORG In my dreams I'm walking in a forest, always a forest. Trees all around. So many the eye cannot see. Impossible to tell how big the forest or how small. I can only see as far as the next tree, and the next, then another. And it is all trees, no left and right, no north, no south, just trees in all directions. And the sound of a scream echoing across the canopy above my head, sweeping over the forest like a blanket.

F/X EXT IN THE FOREST A BIRD SCREECHES LIKE A
SCREAM.

GEORG And I wake up, it's me screaming, it's my blanket. (PAUSE.) My first book of poems was published in nineteen thirteen. When the war broke out I was immediately called up. I was in the reserve. The Austrian Imperial Army. Medical Corps, on account of my training as a pharmacist. (BEAT.) Before long I was on the Russian front near a place called Grodek.

F/X EXT MAXIM GUN FIRING IN SHARP SHORT BURSTS
IN THE DISTANCE.

OFFICER 1 Most of the men are first rate material. First rate.

OFFICER 2 Glad to hear it.

OFFICER 1 But poorly organised, you see, that's the problem.

OFFICER 2 Quite.

OFFICER 1 We're short of officers. Short of material. Short of food.

OFFICER 2 What about - ?

OFFICER 1 I was coming to that.

OFFICER 2 Sorry.

OFFICER 1 Short of weapons. Short of ammunition.

OFFICER 2 It sounds -

OFFICER 1 The men are tired. Too many forced marches, too little sleep, but they are resolute. First rate.

OFFICER 2 Glad to hear it. Expect no less.

F/X EXT SHELLS COMING IN, FALLING, BURSTING
OVERHEAD.

GEORG (Reading letter.) My dearest Grete. You would not like it here. Everywhere is ugly. Everything is ugly. The men are crude. We are all covered in filth. I like to think of you in Berlin. Safe. With your music. I hear it in my head – the soothing notes you summon from the piano, your hands playing lightly over the keys, caressing the sound from the silence. Oh the purity of that imagined sound! Abstract. Pure. True. So utterly different from all that we are here. (BEAT) My dear sister, I

think of you and send you my love.

OFFICER 1 What do you think of the new medical officer?

OFFICER 2 Lieutenant Trakl?

OFFICER 1 That's the fellow.

OFFICER 2 Odd fish.

OFFICER 1 Yes, I thought so.

OFFICER 2 Seems a bit (BEAT) preoccupied.

OFFICER 1 I'm not surprised. (Confidential tone) They say he's a poet.

OFFICER 2 That explains it.

OFFICER 1 I'm short of ammunition and what do they give me – a poet!

OFFICER 2 I understand he came with the highest recommendation. Been in the Imperial Army, then the reserves.

OFFICER 1 We don't want poets around here. Bad for morale.

OFFICER 2 Do you think so?

OFFICER 1 Lacking in moral fibre, head in the clouds, poets.

OFFICER 2 But we do need a medical officer.

OFFICER 1 Feet on the ground – that’s what we need – feet on the bloody ground!

GEORG Cocaine, cocaine, my perfect companion, my loyal friend, how I miss you, how I want you, now. Before the war I wrote poems. They were published – some of them. I have been paid – occasionally. But you cannot make a living out of poems. As my father would say -

F/X INT. SUDDEN CHANGE TO INTERIOR ACOUSTIC;
LUGUBRIOUS TICKING OF GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

TOBIAS Poetry is not a career. A man needs a career. You should study something useful.

F/X INT. RUSTLE OF NEWSPAPER AS TOBIAS TURNS IT
OVER.

TOBIAS Take up a profession. Be of use to society. Poetry is for weekends.

GEORG Oh for a life of weekends! (BEAT.) So I studied to become

F/X INT. SHARP RINGING OF BELL AS SHOP DOOR IS
OPENED.

GEORG a pharmacist.

TOBIAS Make something of yourself my boy.

GEORG I wasn't good at exams. Father was disappointed. He wanted me to become a doctor. But the exams for pharmacy are easier.

TOBIAS You should have persevered. Chekhov was a doctor. Do you know that? Eh? But at least you have a profession. You can earn a living – you won't starve.

GEORG I won't starve. Pharmacy was the ideal profession for me. Because, well, you see, I needed the drugs. I could prescribe for myself. Father was right; I would never starve.

TOBIAS Responsibility will do him good.

MARIA I'm sure you're right dear.

TOBIAS Get his head out of the clouds.

MARIA Yes dear.

TOBIAS Feet on the ground.

F/X EXT. HECTIC SOUNDS OF HORSE-DRAWN AND
MOTORISED TRAFFIC IN A BUSY CITY STREET.

GEORG The clouds above, the dirt below, and me stumbling between. I was so defenceless. So – open – everything. Pressing in on all sides. I couldn't keep it out and I couldn't stand it without the drugs. They made it bearable – kept reality at a distance, where I could look at it. When

you are too close to something you can't see it, it gets blurry and too big, but from a distance all is clearer, purer.

F/X EXT HONKING OF OLD MOTOR HORN.

GEORG I started, while still at school, experimenting with chloroform. It was so luxurious. Floating in that world between consciousness and oblivion. It was a land I loved to explore, discovering the peaks and hidden valleys. I followed the paths that took me down out of the cold wind of reality.

F/X INT. ECHO EFFECT ON THE FOLLOWING WORDS.

GEORG Back to the womb.

F/X INT. HAND BANGING TABLE.

PHARMACIST Georg . . . Georg? Have you made up Mrs. Schinkel's embrocation?

GEORG Umm?

PHARMACIST Are you listening to me?

GEORG Yes, sir.

PHARMACIST Then get a move on!

GEORG Yes, of course, yes.

F/X INT. RATTLE OF PILL JARS, CLINK OF TINCTURE BOTTLES.

PHARMACIST (SIGHS.)

GEORG (CLOSE.) Rub it in, rub it in; embrocation, humiliation, incantation.

PHARMACIST We haven't got all day, Trakl.

GEORG No, sir.

PHARMACIST Time is money.

GEORG Yes, sir.

PHARMACIST Just try and concentrate for once, Trakl.

GEORG I will, I will; sir.

F/X INT LOUD INSISTENT TICKING OF A CLOCK.

GEORG And then there was the boredom. I had to cope with the boredom. I was so bored it was like a physical pain. And the drugs they helped with that too. I will survive this nonsense. Just pop into the store-room and inject a little cocaine. Just enough for some (DISTORTION) perspective.

PHARMACIST You'll never have your own shop if you don't apply

yourself, Trakl.

GEORG The pharmacist is King in his own little world. But he does not know there are bigger worlds, bigger worlds, a louse, a bug, a crawling beggar, a washer woman of life's waste, a broker of broken dreams, seams splitting endlessly, always making do and paying later paying later paying later . . .

WITTGENSTEIN What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent.

GEORG The world is a drug. A drug I love and hate. We're all chemicals, alchemy, unstable mixtures: bubbling. The world shakes. I try to hang on. First this way, then that. But every compensation requires another and another. A never-ending dance just trying to stay upright.

WITTGENSTEIN It is as if we observed a man struggling in a gale from indoors and could not make sense of his movements because we could not *feel* the storm he was experiencing.

GEORG I get out my hypodermic and shoot the cocaine into my arm. Pure. Innocent. (SIGHS) Wonderful. I feel it race through my vein like a sleek automobile, it surges through me. And everything is crystal clear. My mind is free and floating at last. Cast off from all moorings into the ocean of bliss. (BEAT) Such utter clarity before the darkness.

PHARMACIST Trakl! What do you think you are doing?

F/X INT. ANGRY RATTLING OF PILL BOX.

PHARMACIST These pills you made up. They are supposed to be five milligrams not ten!

GEORG Sorry, sir.

PHARMACIST Are you trying to kill us all?

GEORG Yes.

PHARMACIST What!?

GEORG I mean no.

PHARMACIST Just do it again, Trakl.

GEORG Yes, sir.

PHARMACIST And Trakl.

GEORG Yes, sir?

PHARMACIST Do it right this time. Concentrate. You can concentrate, can't you?

GEORG Yes, sir.

F/X EXT HURRIED FOOTSTEPS AS GEORG WALKS
ALONG A BUSY CITY STREET.

GEORG Jobs. Jobs. Jobs. Jobs. I can't do it. I just can't do it.
No matter how hard I try I get it wrong. It is too slippery.
How do people keep hold? They make it look so easy but
I know it is not so. Sometimes I think I belong in a
different element. A sea creature stranded on the shore
clumsy and gasping.

F/X EXT. GUNFIRE IN THE DISTANCE. HORSE-DRAWN
CARTS ROLLING ALONG A ROUGH ROAD, DROVERS
SHOUTING.

OFFICER 1 So, what've you got for us?

OFFICER 2 Fodder for the horses. Tinned food for the men. Ammunition.
Letters from home.

GEORG And it helped with my nerves. My nerves are bad. Life makes
me nervous. It doesn't (BEAT) it doesn't have to do anything.
Just being is enough.

OFFICER 1 About time too.

GEORG The only respite was poetry.

OFFICER 2 The roads are very bad.

OFFICER 1 Where is Trakl?

F/X EXT. CLICK OF HEELS.

GEORG Here, sir.

OFFICER 1 Ah yes, Trakl. I want you to take your men and set up a field hospital in that barn.

GEORG The barn?

OFFICER 1 Yes, the barn.

GEORG Umm.

OFFICER 1 Do you understand me?

GEORG Yes, sir.

OFFICER 1 Then just do it Trakl.

GEORG Yes, sir.

OFFICER 1 See what I mean? Head in the bloody clouds.

F/X INT. SHARP TRANSITION TO THE ACOUSTIC OF A LITERARY SALON; THE TINKLE OF COFFEE CUPS, GLASSES, MURMURED POLITE CONVERSATION.

DILETTANTE 1 Hell of a mess – bloody Serbs.

DILETTANTE 2 We should teach them a lesson.

DILETTANTE 1 I feel sure we will dear boy. It's just a matter of time. Mark my words. Just a matter of time.

GEORG It was just a matter of time before the world would understand my poetry. I felt like a messenger sent from the future. But no one could understand the messages I brought. They were written in another language.

F/X EXT. SHELLS EXPLODING IN THE DISTANCE.
SOUND OF MEN GROANING.

SOLDIER 3 Here ya go. Ninety of 'em. I counted 'em for ya. They're all yours sunshine.

GEORG But, what?

SOLDIER 3 Sign this.

GEORG What?

SOLDIER 3 I'd love to stick around an' chat but I 'ave to go an' get some more.

GEORG But what am I, am I, going to do with them?

SOLDIER 3 That, mate, is entirely up to you ain't it. Once they're at the

field hospital my job is done.

GEORG But this, this barn, this, this is not a Field Hospital.

SOLDIER 3 Oh yes it is. That is how what it is designated on my field map so that is what it is.

F/X EXT/INT. CREAKING OF BARN DOOR, AS GEORG
ENTERS FADE UP SOUND OF MEN SCREAMING IN
AGONY.

GEORG (CLOSE.) The wounds are unbelievable, unbelievable.
What can I do to help? What? What! I have no medicine.
No anaesthetic. No –

SOLDIER 1 Help me! Help me!

GEORG Yes, of course, yes.

SOLDIER 2 Mum. Mum. I want my Mummy.

GEORG How can men still be alive in such pieces? They are held together with ragged bandages. Best not to touch. Everything I do makes things worse. I try to help; must change his dressing. But as soon as I loosen the field dressing his intestines spilled out like fish slithering from a net.

SOLDIER Aaargh! God oh God oh God oh God!

DILLETANTE 2 Me neither. Care for a drink?

DILLETANTE 1 Don't mind if I do.

F/X EXT. PANTING AS GEORG RUNS ACROSS A MUDDY
FIELD, SOUND OF GUN-FIRE IN THE DISTANCE.

SOLDIER The prisoners are here, Sir.

OFFICER 2 Very well. Line them up then. Line them up.

SOLIDER Move along now, come on you scum!

OFFICER 2 Bloody traitors, the lot of them!

OFFICER 1 Deserters and insurgents, every man jack of them.

SOLDIER A bullet's too good for 'em.

OFFICER 2 String them up.

SOLIDER With pleasure.

GEORG The boughs creak. Men swing from the trees, their legs
fight the air, trying to grasp onto anything, anything, but all
is weightless, there is no support, there is nothing, nothing,
nothing.

F/X EXT. PANTING AS GEORG BEGINS TO RUN AGAIN.

F/X EXT. SOUND OF STRUGGLE, GRUNTING.

GEORG Let go.

SOLDIER Oh no you don't.

F/X EXT. STRUGGLE CONTINUES, GASP AS GEORG IS PUNCHED IN THE STOMACH.

OFFICER 2 Arrest him. Trakl has clearly lost his wits.

SOLDIER Yes, sir.

OFFICER 2 And give me back my revolver.

SOLDIER Here it is, sir.

OFFICER 2 Can't have this sort of thing. Most irregular.

GEORG (Howling in rage and despair.)

OFFICER 2 Oh shut up, Trakl. We can't have you blowing your brains out. Bad for morale.

F/X INT. SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS IN ECHOING CORRIDOR, JANGLING OF KEYS.

GEORG I was taken to the garrison hospital at Cracow. People say I am crazy but it's not true. The world is crazy. I am doing the only thing a sane man can do in the face of the insanity of this world. All of life is an imperfect atonement for the

mistake of being born. And like so many mistakes it is not one that we have made ourselves but we are saddled with its consequences nonetheless.

(RECITING) Over the white pond

The wild birds have travelled on.

In the evening an icy wind blows from our stars.

Over our graves

The broken brow of the night inclines.

Under oak trees we sway in a silver boat.

Always the town's white walls resound.

Under arches of thorns,

O my brother, blind minute-hands,

We climb towards midnight.

F/X INT. GRETE PLAYS THE OPENING BARS OF 'ONDINE'
FROM RAVEL'S "GASPARD DE LA NUIT".

GEORG I hear the piano and remember the way my sister Grete plays. Fingers so deft. The notes so tender. Rippling past the mind, in a hurry, never staying, one and then replaced

by another and another. She moulds the air with her fingers, speaks through the music, tells me things she dare not say, things I dare not acknowledge. In this cowardly world who has the courage for an honest passion?

F/X INT. SHARP SOUND OF PAPER KNIFE SLITTING
OPEN A LETTER.

TOBIAS Another bill. (BEAT) Who would have thought piano lessons could cost so much?

MARIA But worth it, dear. Listen to her play. You have only to listen and know.

TOBIAS Yes, lovely, but she's so good, why does she still need lessons?

MARIA Everyone needs lessons, dear.

F/X INT. THE PIANO MUSIC CONTINUES.

GEORG I used to watch her fingers on the keyboard; fingers so long, so slender, white. (PAUSE) And I used to pretend that the keys were me. Her fingers on me. Playing me. (PAUSE) Such sweet music. (SIGHS.)

TOBIAS Georg, you never had any application. Right from a child. Look at your sister. *She* has application. She practices on the piano for hours. But all you can do is sit and watch. You never stick at anything.

GEORG (Overlapping end of previous sentence.) Stick – stick – stick – stick; words are a stick we use to beat each other. Where are the kindly words, the homely words, words of solace, words of (BEAT) love? (PAUSE.) Those also serve who only sit and watch.

TOBIAS What is he going on about? Is that a quote? I won't have you quoting in this household; acting superior.

GEORG The day is a toad that sits and stares and dares me to move. And if I do it will stick out its tongue and wrap me into its mouth and I'll never get out. (PAUSE.) All my life I feel I am waiting for something to happen. It never does. But expectation never dies. Like a castaway I scan the ocean of time for signs of rescue. There are none.

F/X INT. SHARP CHANGE OF ACOUSTIC, CRACKLING FIRE, SOUND OF NIB SCRATCHING ON PAPER.

GEORG (Reading letter.) My dearest Grete, just when I was beginning to despair of finding my way in the world the most extraordinary thing has happened. Someone called Wittgenstein has contacted my friend Ficker and given me twenty thousand crowns! He must like my poetry very much.

F/X EXT. CARRIAGES ROLLING ALONG COBBLED STREETS. CLICK OF HEELS.

WITTGENSTEIN Good day Mr. Ficker.

FICKER Good day Mr. Wittgenstein.

WITTGENSTEIN Thank you for sparing some of your valuable time.

FICKER It is a pleasure to be of service.

WITTGENSTEIN On the death of my father I have inherited a considerable fortune. This is most troublesome.

FICKER It is?

WITTGENSTEIN Yes, it is. I do not want it.

FICKER You don't?

WITTGENSTEIN No, I don't. Money will make it impossible for me to think.

FICKER I sometimes find it impossible to think because of the lack of money.

WITTGENSTEIN Indeed?

FICKER Yes.

WITTGENSTEIN For me it is different. And I have seen it happen to others, minds gone to waste through luxury. Therefore I have decided to dispose of this money before it has time to contaminate my mind.

FICKER What does this have to do with me?

WITTGENSTEIN It is customary in such situations to donate a sum to charitable causes. I trust you. Karl Kraus thinks highly of you. Der Brenner is one of the few magazines of true quality and independence of mind.

FICKER Thank you.

WITTGENSTEIN One hundred thousand crowns. Dispose of it as you see fit. I insist that you use ten thousand for the continued publication of Der Brenner. The rest is up to you.

FICKER That is very generous of you.

WITTGENSTEIN Not at all. You no doubt know of true artists who are in need of money.

FICKER Most certainly.

WITTGENSTEIN Good.

FICKER Might I suggest that the main beneficiaries be Rilke and Trakl— say, 20,000 crowns each.

WITTGENSTEIN As you see fit.

FICKER What did you think of the poems by Trakl that I sent you?

WITTGENSTEIN I do not understand them, but their *tone* makes me

happy. It is the tone of true genius.

GEORG

(Reading a letter.) My dearest Grete, though we are far apart we have the same garden of stars above us. I look up into the night sky and I meet you among the stars, in our secret garden, hidden in full view of the blind world. (PAUSE) The world is such a difficult place. It's impossible to get things right. We who love too much will never be safe. Not in this world. What is wrong with love! I look at all the smug faces. The bloated, simpering, scorn-filled faces. And sometimes I think we belong to a different species, you and I. (PAUSE.) When I walk along the street I feel bombarded from every side. My nerves are flayed, shredded, hooked on every passing obstacle. How can they stand it? Do they not realise the city is tearing them limb from limb?

F/X

EXT. TRAFFIC IN THE STREET HONKING CAR HORN AS GEORG AND FICKER HURRY ACROSS THE ROAD.

FICKER

Come on Georg! We must get to the bank before they close.

GEORG

Perhaps we should go tomorrow.

FICKER

No time like the present.

GEORG

I'm not feeling well.

FICKER

We're almost there.

GEORG (PANTING) Quite breathless.

FICKER Not far now, the bank is on the next corner.

GEORG Why do we have to go to the bank?

FICKER It's where they keep the money.

GEORG Let's leave it.

FICKER No. You must use it.

GEORG But banks. They -

FICKER Yes?

GEORG They scare me.

FICKER There is nothing to be scared of.

GEORG They are so forbidding. All the clerks look at me so suspiciously.

FICKER Don't worry, Georg, you're with me, I'll look after you.

GEORG I really don't need the money.

FICKER Yes you do. Mr. Wittgenstein wants you to have it.

GEORG That's very considerate of him. But look at the time, they'll be closing, wanting to get away, to their (BEAT) families.

FICKER There's plenty of time. They don't close for another half-hour. And we're almost there.

GEORG (DISAPPOINTED.) Oh.

FICKER Here we are!

GEORG I can't do it!

FICKER What?

GEORG I can't. I just can't.

F/X EXT. GEORG FLEES, RUNNING FOOTSTEPS ON THE COBBLES.

FICKER (Calling after him.) Georg! (BEAT) Georg!

F/X EXT. FICKER STARTS RUNNING TOO.

FICKER (PANTING) Come back, Georg!

F/X EXT. THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS BECOMES THE SOUND OF CHILDREN PLAYING, THE PATTING OF LITTLE FEET, AND GIGGLING.

YOUNG GEORG Grete! . . . Grete . . . Where are you?

YOUNG GRETE (Excited sing-song tone.) Can't catch me-ee, can't catch
me-ee.

YOUNG GEORG Can!

YOUNG GRETE Can't!

YOUNG GEORG Can so!

YOUNG GRETE (Giggles with anticipation.)

YOUNG GEORG I'm coming to get you.

YOUNG GRETE (More giggles, attempts to suppress them.)

YOUNG GEORG (Sing-song voice.) I know where you're hiding.

YOUNG GRETE (Under breath, breathy voice.) Can't catch me can't
catch me can't -

YOUNG GEORG (Pouncing on Grete.) Got you!

YOUNG GRETE (Squeals of excitement.)

YOUNG GEORG Got you got you got you.

YOUNG GRETE I let you find me.

YOUNG GEORG Didn't.

YOUNG GRETE Did.

YOUNG GEORG Didn't!

YOUNG GRETE Did! Did! Did!

YOUNG GEORG Now I've caught you you have to pay a forfeit.

YOUNG GRETE What's a forfeit?

YOUNG GEORG You have to do what I want.

YOUNG GRETE Says who?

YOUNG GEORG Says me.

YOUNG GRETE (Exaggerated sigh.) What do you want?

YOUNG GEORG (Voice tinged with excitement.) You have to kiss me!

YOUNG GRETE Urgh yuk no.

YOUNG GEORG Why not?

YOUNG GRETE It's yukie.

YOUNG GEORG No it's not. Come on, it's your forfeit. I'll show you how.

F/X INT. SOUND OF KISSING.

YOUNG GEORG See. It's all right. Like I told you.

YOUNG GRETE (Giggles.) Now you have to hide!

GEORG (CLOSE.) Childhood memories. Are they true? How do we know? (BEAT) In the garden we played games, we had our own world, free from the strictures of the adult world. A world of pure delight. This is a world we can never return to. But I tried to approach it, in my poems. It is a world where there is no separation – where everything waxes and wanes as a whole. (PAUSE) But childhood ends and we have to grow into the shapes of the people we despise. In order to finish my training as a pharmacist I had to go away to study in Vienna.

F/X EXT. STATION PLATFORM, TRAIN BUILDING UP
STEAM, PASSENGERS OPENING DOORS ETC.

TOBIAS Hurry up Georg or you'll miss your train.

GEORG (WEARILY) Yes, father.

MARIA Have you packed your good tie?

GEORG Yes, mother.

MARIA Are you sure you have enough warm clothes?

GEORG Yes, mother.

GRETE Oh Georg I'm going to miss you when you're studying in Vienna.

GEORG I know Grete, and I'll miss you too, horribly, horribly. But it won't be for long.

GRETE Write to me.

GEORG Of course. I write only for you.

GRETE Just write.

TOBIAS Ready Georg?

GEORG Yes father.

TOBIAS You had better get a move on lad; the train to Vienna does not vary its timetable for the convenience of 'poets'.

GEORG No father.

TOBIAS And Georg.

GEORG Yes.

TOBIAS Work hard.

F/X EXT/INT. THE CLATTERING OF THE TRAIN ON THE TRACKS AND THE HISS OF STEAM MERGES INTO THE HUBBUB OF A CROWDED BAR. GEORG AND HIS FRIENDS ARE CAROUSING. EVERYONE IS DRUNK.

SEVERAL VOICES (Georg, his friends and others in the bar are drunkenly and boisterously singing a round song.)

Ooooooooooh a dog came in the kitchen

And stole a crust of bread

Crust of bread!

Then the cook up with a ladle

And beat him till he was dead.

Then all the dogs came running

And dug the dog a tomb

And wrote upon the tombstone

For the eyes of dogs to come.

Ooooooooooh a dog came in the kitchen

And stole a crust . . .

ERHARD (Breaking off and shouting above the singing which continues in the background.) This could go on forever.

GEORG That's the whole point. It does go on forever.

ERHARD I'm getting bored, tell you what, let's go to Madam Krupski's whorehouse and get laid.

FRANZ Great idea Erhard.

GEORG I don't know. I don't fancy it. Let's stay here.

FRANZ Come on Georg you'll have fun.

GEORG You two go.

FRANZ We can't go without you. Come on. Be bold.

ERHARD Georg is saving himself, aren't you Georg.

GEORG Don't talk rubbish.

FRANZ Who's the lucky lady? Who you saving yourself for Georg?

GEORG I'm tired of whores, that's all. They have no conversation.

FRANZ It isn't their conversational skills I'm interested in. (LAUGHS.)

ERHARD Georg is saving himself for Grete.

ERHARD Then the cook up with a ladle.

ALL And beat him till he was dead!

TOGETHER

F/X INT. ABRUPT CHANGE TO SALON ACOUSTIC,
SHUFFLING FEET, SCAPING CHAIRS, MURMURED
CONVERSATION.

FICKER Take your seats please, take your seats, the reading is about to
begin. (CLEARS HIS THROAT.) Thank you. Thank you.
Allow me to introduce to you a young poet from Salzburg.
Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Mr. Georg Trakl.

F/X INT. DESULTORY APPLAUSE.

GEORG (RECITING.) Corruption gliding through the crumbled room;

 Shadows on yellow hangings; in dark mirrors

 The ivory sorrow of our hands is arched.

F/X INT. SUDDEN CUT TO COFFEEHOUSE ACOUSTIC..

ERHARD Isn't it wonderful news! At long last Grete is to be married.

GEORG (Ironic.) Yes, wonderful news.

ERHARD And Mr Langen is so well placed. A real catch.

GEORG It's disgusting! He's old enough to be her father.

ERHARD Many young women find it very beneficial to make an alliance with an older, wiser, man.

GEORG And wealthier.

ERHARD Now, now Georg, anyone would think you didn't want your sister to get married.

GEORG It's so bourgeois.

ERHARD Really, Georg, where do you get these notions? It is only natural that she should want to settle down and start a family of her own.

GEORG She deserves someone better. Someone who will understand her.

ERHARD No one will ever be good enough for your little sister will they, Georg.

GEORG No, they won't.

GRETE (Reading a letter.) Dearest Georg, it was bound to happen. You must have known that. We are not allowed to be together and I cannot live my life alone. I had to marry. I had no choice. You must understand. Life is different for women. You know I love you, only you, but we must be practical. I have to live. There is no other way. I don't think Langen will be very demanding (BEAT) in that way.

GEORG (Reciting poem.)

Where you walk, there it is autumn and evening,

A blue deer under trees and its music,

A lonely pond in the evening.

GRETE My mind is made up.

GEORG How can you bear for him to touch you?

GRETE We all need to be touched.

GEORG With those old man hands?

GRETE His hands are better than none.

GEORG No.

GRETE Then hold me.

GEORG I always hold you – in my mind.

GRETE Minds aren't good enough.

F/X INT. FOOTSTEPS ECHOING DOWN A LONG COLD
CORRIDOR.

FICKER I've come to see Lieutenant Trakl.

SOLDIER Pass?

FICKER Here.

SOLDIER This way Mr. Ficker.

F/X INT. MORE FOOTSTEPS, SCRAPING OF KEY IN
LOCK. SOUNDS OF DEMENTED SCREAMING GET
LOUDER AS THEY PROCEED.

FICKER Is it always like this?

SOLDIER Like what, sir?

FICKER So (BEAT) noisy.

SOLDIER It's a madhouse sir, what did you expect? (PAUSE.) Here we
are.

F/X INT. KEYS JANGLING, TURNING IN A LOCK.

SOLDIER I'll be outside. If he gives you any trouble just yell.

FICKER Thank you.

SOLDIER You're welcome.

F/X INT SCRAPING OF CELL DOOR.

FICKER Georg?

GEORG My dear Ficker.

FICKER Georg!

F/X INT THEY EMBRACE, PATS ON BACK.

FICKER So good to see you.

GEORG Thank you for coming.

FICKER How are you keeping?

GEORG Oh (BEAT) all right.

FICKER You look tired.

GEORG I find it hard to sleep.

FICKER Is it always (BEAT) like this?

GEORG Sometimes it is quieter.

FICKER I have been in touch with the authorities. I'm quite hopeful
I can get you out of here.

GEORG I don't think they'll let me go.

FICKER Don't be pessimistic Georg.

GEORG They think I'm a deserter.

FICKER Surely not.

GEORG I abandoned my post in the midst of battle!

FICKER It wasn't your fault.

GEORG They won't think that. This is the army. They'll probably shoot me. That's what they do to deserters, isn't it.

FICKER Look, Georg, you're ill, that's all, ill. They know that. I'll get you out if it's the last thing I do. But you must be patient; these things take time, all the bureaucracy, you know.

GEORG Yes, yes, of course.

FICKER How do you pass the time in here?

GEORG I've written some new poems.

FICKER How wonderful.

GEORG The first for some time. Here, tell me what you think.

FICKER You read one out. I love to hear you read your work.

GEORG

No, I couldn't, no.

FICKER

Come on Georg, just read one. How about this one?

GEORG

(PAUSE THEN RECITING)

Sleep and death, the dark eagles

Around this head swoop all night long:

Eternity's icy wave

Would swallow the golden image

Of man; against horrible reefs

His purple body is shattered.

And the dark voice laments

Over the sea.

Sister of stormy sadness,

Look, a timorous boat goes down

Under stars,

The silent face of the night.

(NORMAL VOICE) What do you think of it?

FICKER

It's very good Georg. Really, very good. But I think we

must get you out of here.

GEORG Take the poems; you must take the poems, in case they confiscate them, destroy them, they have a thing about words here, don't like them, scared of them.

FICKER Yes, yes, I'll take the poems.

GEORG Hide them well!

FICKER Yes, yes, all right. (BEAT) I suppose I had better go.
(PAUSE) It's a long journey.

GEORG It's so good to see you, my dear friend.

FICKER Do you remember Wittgenstein? The fellow who gave us all that money.

GEORG Oh yes.

FICKER He too is in the army, stationed not far from here. I told him about your situation, he's going to come and visit you. He said how much he was looking forward to meeting you.

GEORG How kind.

FICKER Yes. It will do you good to see him.

GEORG Everyone is suddenly very kind.

F/X EXT. TRAIN STATION.

WITTGENSTEIN Which is the platform for Cracow?

SOLDIER I wouldn't hurry, mate.

WITTGENSTEIN Why not?

SOLDIER You just missed it.

WITTGENSTEIN Damn! When is the next one?

SOLDIER Tomorrow.

F/X INT. SOUND OF MUFFLED DERANGED SCREAMING
IN THE HOSPITAL.

MATHIAS Can I get you anything Lieutenant Trakl?

GEORG No thank you, Mathias. (BEAT) I'm feeling tired. I think I'll
try to sleep..

MATHIAS Very good sir. Anything for the morning?

GEORG Black coffee.

MATHIAS Certainly, sir. Will that be all?

GEORG More than enough.

MATHIAS Good night.

GEORG Good night.

F/X INT. DOOR CLOSING AND BEING LOCKED FROM
 THE OTHER SIDE.

GEORG Now for peace.

F/X INT. GEORG RUMMAGES IN A BAG, TAPS GLASS
 PHIAL.

GEORG (CLOSE) They didn't find you, my beauty, did they. It is
 best always to travel with a syringe. One last journey.
 Then home at last. (GRUNTING AS HE INJECTS
 HIMSELF) Into the vein and out of the world. (SIGHS) Oh
 the icy clarity of stars.

GRAMS STRING/CIMBALOM SOUND FROM HENRI
 DUTILLEAUX'S MYSTERE DE L'INSTANT
 (LITANIES).

F/X INT. KNOCKING ON DOOR. SOUND OF SHUTTER
 SLIDING OPEN.

SOLDIER Who are you?

WITTENSTEIN I am Ludwig Wittgenstein.

SOLIDER What d'you want?

WITTGENSTEIN I have come to see Lieutenant Trakl.

SOLDIER Have you?

WITTGENSTEIN Yes, I have.

SOLDIER Too late.

WITTGENSTEIN What is too late?

SOLDIER You are.

WITTGENSTEIN What do you mean?

SOLDIER Lieutenant Trakl is dead. Died last night.

WITTGENSTEIN But (BEAT) how?

SOLDIER Overdose, cocaine, must've hidden it among his things. Crafty, see. (PAUSE.) Are you related? Only, I need someone to sign some paperwork.

GRAMS RUMBLING OPENING BARS FROM THE MARTIAL SOUNDING 'PRALUDIUM' OF ALBAN BERG'S THREE ORCHESTRAL PIECES, FADES UP DURING THE NEXT SPEECH, GRADUALLY ENGULFING THE WORDS.

FICKER After his death the orderly, one Mathias, who had been the last person to see Georg alive, wrote me a charming letter. (PAUSE) He said: 'Lieutenant Trakl always stood

up for me personally and that I will never forget in my lifetime. And one thing that makes me happy is that you, dear sir, did see your best friend; I do not wish to be with these people here anymore. (PAUSE.) Always and always I think about my dear, good superior, and that he had to meet his end in so pitiful a way. He still was well in the evening and heartily told me at 6:30 to bring him black coffee in the morning, and that I should go to bed. The next morning it was different and my dear gentleman did not need black coffee anymore because during the night the dear God had taken him.

GRAMS FADE DOWN BERG MUSIC.

FICKER When I heard of my friend Trakl's death I was filled with a profound sense of injustice. Why did he have to die? I would have got him out. If only he had waited, he could be here, with me, in an entirely different world.

WITTGENSTEIN The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy.

FICKER He makes me angry. Leaving like that. It is such a waste. He had so much to give. It makes no sense.

WITTGENSTEIN The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value – and if there were it would be of no value.

END