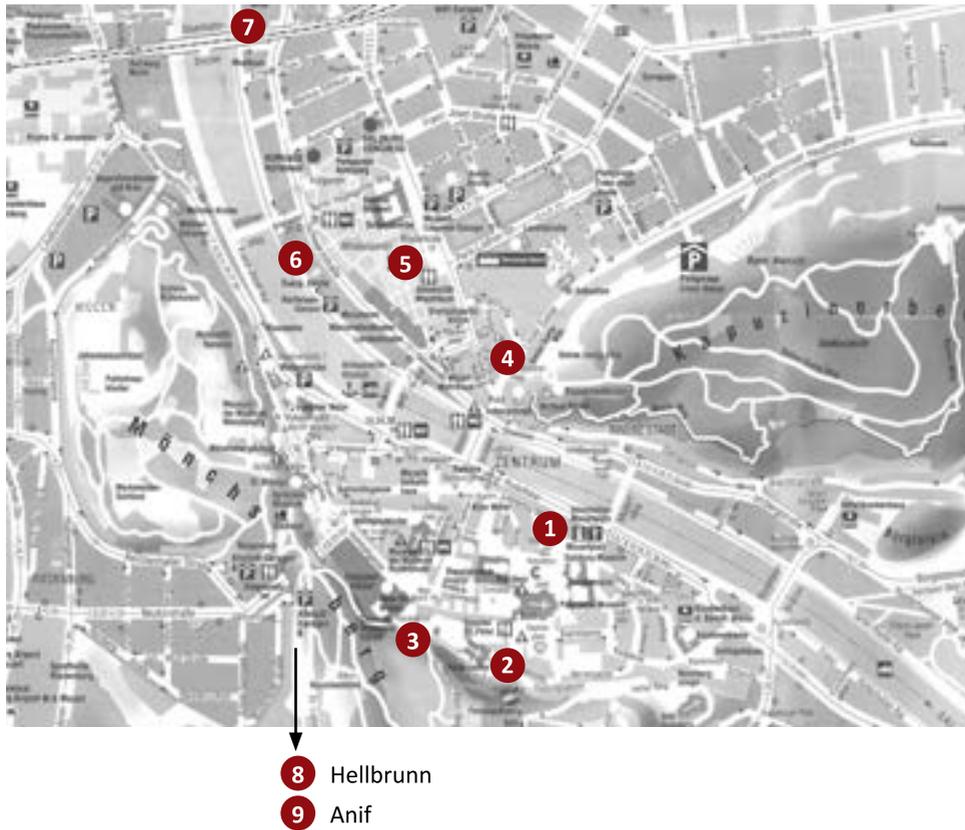


Georg Trakl - The 'Salzburg' Poems

Translation: Will Stone





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Georg Trakl was not only born in Salzburg, he also lived in the town with his family until he was twenty-one years old. Later he returned for several stays of varying lengths. Thus the poet's formative experiences are connected to certain localities in the town and find their echo in his poems and prose. Some poems mention certain sites in Salzburg by title, while others are suggested in their pictorial metaphorical language by the architecture and different localities of the town. Since 1985, no less than nine plaques with poems engraved on them, have been mounted at such Trakl-related sites. It must be born in mind, that where he begins with external stimuli, Trakl goes on to form interior states and spaces of thought. Often he expresses images and experiences from memories of childhood. Besides images accrued from his acute sensibility for beauty, silence and human intensity, there are others that allude to an underlying feeling for transitoriness and decline. His school friend Erhard Buschbeck affirmed that to Trakl writing poetry was "his innermost concern and most lonely commitment."



Georg Trakl employed in this poem images and impressions he would have absorbed from the window of his paternal residence at the Mozartplatz (Mozart Square) in Salzburg. They are, however, images of memory, because at the time of writing this poem he was, in fact, residing in Vienna in order to study Pharmacy. This poem stands at the crossroads between the exclusively traditionally rhymed verse from the "1909 Collection", and the second, more mature period of his poetry – "the arduously won style, which forges together in four stanza lines four single parts of an image from a single impression," as he wrote in a letter to his friend Buschbeck. The specific form of the framing rhyme supports this intention.

1 **Where?**

On the north side of Trakl's birthplace, at Waagplatz 1 a plaque is located, which a sculptor has rendered in bronze.

The Beautiful Town

Old squares sunlit silence.
Deep spun in blue and gold
Dreamily hasten gentle nuns
Under the sultry beech trees' silence.

From brown illumined churches
Gazes death's pure images,
Fine armorial bearings of mighty princes.
Crowns shimmer in the churches.

Horses plunge out of the fountain.
Blossom claws threaten from trees.
Confused in dreams boys play quietly
At evening there by the fountain.

Girls standing in gateways
Gaze shyly on life's gladness.
Their moist lips quiver
And they linger by the gateways.

Fluttering chimes the bells sound.
Marching beat and call of the guard.
On the steps strangers listen.
High in blueness the organs sound.

Shining instruments sing.
Through the leaf frame of gardens
Whirs the laughter of lovely women.
Tenderly the young mothers sing.

Stealthy odour by flowering windows
Scent of incense, tar and lilac.
Silvery weary eyelids shimmer
Through flowers at the windows.

Georg Trakl had a particular affection for this cemetery in the old town of Salzburg. He refers to this “dream enclosed garden” in the poem “Sebastian in Dream” (“Or at evening holding the icy hand of his mother / He passed through St Peters autumn churchyard, / A tender corpse lay still in the darkness of the chamber.”) and in his autobiographically underlaid prose text “Dream and Derangement” it is said: “His dreams filled the old house of the fathers. At evening he loved to cross the decayed cemetery, or he peered into the dusk of the death chamber at the corpses, the green blotches of decomposition on their beautiful hands.” Melancholy turns into mourning.

The poem was written in 1909. Trakl probably sent it from Vienna to the “Salzburger Volksblatt” (Salzburg Peoples Newspaper), whose editorial office was located in front of the Trakl family home at Waagplatz. It was first published there on the 10th of July, 1909.

2 Where?

On a wall on the side of the rock face, near the entrance to the churchyard, close to the funicular to the fortress.

St.-Peters- Churchyard

Rock loneliness is all around.
The pale death flowers shudder
On graves, which in darkness mourn –
Yet this mourning knows no pain.

Calmly heaven smiles down
Into this dream-enclosed garden,
Where peaceful pilgrims await it.
Over every grave the cross keeps watch.

The church towers up as to prayer
Before an image of grace eternal,
Many a candle burns beneath the arches
And mutely petitions holy souls –

Meanwhile the trees blossom by night,
That death would his countenance conceal
Within their beauty’s shimmering fullness,
Which makes the dead dream deeper still.

During his walks, Trakl liked to linger on top of the Mönchsberg, the central mountain in the city of Salzburg. Here he was able to withdraw from the demands and expectations of school and family and though in the midst of the town, he was close to nature. The “bony path” leads into the mysterious world of myths and legends.

Georg Trakl composed this poem in Innsbruck, after a sojourn in Venice in the autumn of 1913. He dedicated the first version to the architect Adolf Loos, who financed his trip to Venice; the second version was published on 1st November 1913 in the journal “Der Brenner” – without this dedication.

3 **Where?**

*On the Mönchsberg bastion, above the St Peters cloisters, under the Edmundsburg.
Reachable via the Toscanini steps in the historical festival district.*

On the Mönchsberg

Version II

Where in the shadow of autumn elms the decayed path sinks down,
Far from the huts of leaf, sleeping shepherds,
Always the dark form of coolness follows the wayfarer

Over the bridge of bone, the hyacinth voice of the boy
Softly chanting the forgotten legend of the woods.
And more gently a sick thing now the brothers wild lament.

So stirs a touch of green the knee of the stranger
The hardened head;
Nearer the blue spring murmurs the womens' lament.

In this poem, Georg Trakl forms the opposition between people who are united in a loving community and the lonely one to whom the darkness permits access to an alternative reality. It emerged from the poem "Along the Walls" and was first published in "Der Brenner" on 14th March 1914 under the title „Ever Darker“. For the collection "Sebastian in Dream" Trakl gave the poem its present title "In Darkness".

4 **Where?**

On the façade of the 'Engel-Apotheke' (Angel Pharmacy) along Linzer Gasse, where Georg Trakl practiced pharmacy for three years from 1905-1908 and then worked for a period of only a month. The pharmacy is now housed in a neighbouring building.

In Darkness

Version II

Silent speaks the soul to blue springtime.
Beneath damp evening branches
Sank in shivers the brows of lovers.

O the greening cross. In dark discourse
Man and woman know each other.
By the bare wall
The solitary changes with his stars.

Over the moonlit paths of the forest
Sank the wilderness
Of forgotten hunts; blue glance
Breaks from decayed rocks.

Through an open window the observer gathers images of a park, whose morbid beauty speaks to him. The eerie foreboding infiltrates the outer as well as the inner world and a “white stranger” comes upon darkness and destruction. The musical motif lends the poem a frame and makes it a “composition of words” in the manner of Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

During the first transcript of 1909, Trakl gave this poem the title, “Colourful Autumn”. In 1912, in a revised version for the collection „Poems“, he rewrote the last stanza and changed the title.

5 *Where?*
On the eastern wall of the Mirabell Gardens.

Music in the Mirabell

Version II

A fountain sings. Clouds stand
In clear blueness, white, tender.
Thoughtful people wander silent
At evening through the old garden.

The ancestral marble has gone grey.
A flight of birds streaks to the distance.
With dead eyes a faun gazes
After shadows, gliding in darkness.

From the old tree the leaves fall red
And circle down through open windows.
Firelight glows in the room
And paints bleakspectres of dread.

A white stranger steps into the house.
A dog dashes through decayed passages.
The maid turns out a lamp.
Nightly are heard the sounds of sonatas.

Following his only public reading on 10th December 1913 in Innsbruck, Georg Trakl composed this poem, which numbers among one of his most famous. A scene from the short novel "Of Podvelez," which the author Robert Michal had recited the same evening, may have proved an influence. In this tale, a man freezes to death under the most humiliating circumstances. The situation depicted in the poem does not refer directly to this, but points to the "vision" of bread and wine. If this "Last Supper" is prepared for the wanderer, remains unspoken.

Initially the poem had the title "In Winter;" Trakl revised it several times, especially the last stanza and changed the title at the moment of going to press. He sent a version to the revered Karl Kraus, whom he had formerly, at the bequest of "Der Brenner," characterized in a poem.

In the evangelicals Christus-Kirche, Trakl was baptized five days after his birth on 8th February 1887. In the rectory nearby, he took part in the protestant religious instruction.

A Winter Evening

Version II

When the snow falls against the window,
Long the evening bells are tolling,
For many is the table prepared
And the house is in good order.

Many a wayfarer on his journey
Comes to the gateway by dark paths.
Golden blooms the tree of grace
Out of the cool sap of the earth.

Wayfarer steps silently inside;
Pain has petrified the threshold.
Then in purest radiance shines
On the table bread and wine.

6

Where?

Near the entrance on the north side of the Christus-Kirche on Salzachkai.

During his walks heading north along the Salzach, Georg Trakl would pass by, on the right hand side, beyond the railway bridge, the area of the municipal slaughter houses. Today, this is the site of a heating plant. A series of observations and perceptions about this locality are transmogrified into this poem. At the close, phantasmal dream-like images take the place of the morose and repellent slaughterhouse scenery.

Georg Trakl composed this poem at the end of 1911, read it to his friend Erhard Buschbeck, who lived not far from the abattoir, and reworked it according to his objections. "It is much improved on the first version, as it is now more impersonal..."

In this form it was sent to Ludwig von Ficker, the editor of the Innsbruck journal "Der Brenner," who published it – as the first of over sixty poems by Trakl – in the May edition of 1912.

7 *Where?*

On the right hand side of the Salzach, between Eisenbahn bridge and Lehener bridge, opposite the main section of the heating plant.

Suburb in the Föhn

At evening the area is brown and desolate,
The air heavy with a greyish stench.
Thunder of a train from the arch of a bridge –
And sparrows flutter over bush and fence.

Huddle of huts, wild scattering of paths
In gardens confusion and movement,
Sometimes out of this dull stirring rises a howl,
In a group of children a red dress flies.

A rat choir whistles amorously by the swill.
In baskets the women carry entrails,
Repulsive procession of squalor and filth,
They emerge out of the dusk.

Suddenly a sewer spits fatty blood
From the slaughterhouse into the calm river.
To frugal flowers the Föhn lends colour
And slowly red creeps through the flood.

A whisper, that drowns in troubled sleep.
Above the water ditches juggle shapes
Memories perhaps of a former life,
That rise and fall on warm breezes.

From clouds plunge shimmering avenues,
Filled with fine coaches and bold riders.
Then you see also a ship founder on rocks
And sometimes rose coloured mosques.

The park of Hellbrunn palace to the south of Salzburg was one of Georg Trakl's preferred destinations for his walks. He may have used the Stem tramway, which at that time passed by on its way from the main station to the Untersberg. The atmosphere of the location, with the palace, the trick fountains, the hills and ponds appealed powerfully to him. He is said to have even spent the night there to better sense the uncanny atmosphere. Several motifs can be traced back to these intense perceptions, for example Orpheus (the Orpheus grotto in the trick fountains) palaces and hills, cypresses and tritons.

The first lyrical arrangement concerning the different nature of the three ponds originates from 1909; on the 8th April it was published in the "Salzburger Volksblatt". But he continued to be preoccupied with this theme and in the same year he produced a second version, which he continually revised again and again until 1914.

8 **Where?**

In the water gardens of the castle park of Hellbrunn, on one face of the octagonal building next to the most southerly, smallest pond holding the triton sculpture.

The Three Ponds of Hellbrunn

Version II

Walking along black walls
The evenings, silver sounds the lyre
Of Orpheus in the dark pond
But spring drops in showers
From branches in wild showers
The night wind sounds silver the lyre
Of Orpheus in the dark pond
Dying against the greening wall.

In the distance shine castle and hill
Voices of women who died long ago
Weave tenderly and darkly coloured
Over the white nymphs' mirror.
Lamenting their bygone fate
And the day flows into the green
Whispering in reeds, in waves returning—
And with them a song thrush jokes.

The water shimmers greenish blue
And calmly breathe the cypresses
And their measureless melancholy
Drifts upwards in the blue evening.
Triton emerges from the flood,
Decay trickles across walls
In green veils the moon is swathed
And slowly walks above the flood.

Georg Trakl probably knew the village of Anif, to the south of Salzburg, not far from the Hellbrunn palace, from his far-reaching walks. The poem contains several memories; the first word opens this sequence. It is grounded by an awareness of the "guilt of the born."

Trakl wrote a first sketch probably in Vienna, a little later in December 1913 in Innsbruck, he produced a fair copy with the typewriter. It appeared in this form in "Der Brenner" on 1st January 1914.

9

Where?

At the municipal pavilion in Anif, near the entrance to the municipal library.

Anif

Memory: Gulls gliding over the dark sky
Manlier melancholy.
Silent you dwell in the shade of the autumn ash,
Rapt in the righteous measure of the hill;

Ever you walk down the green river,
When evening has come,
Sounding love; peacefully encounters the dark prey,

A rosier man. Drunk with bluish weather
The dying leaf stirs the brow
And thinks the Mother's grave countenance.
O, how all sinks down into darkness;

Stern rooms and the old implements
Of the ancestors.
These stir the stranger's breast
O, you signs and stars.

Great is the guilt of the born. Woe, you golden shudder
Of death,
When the soul dreams cooler blossoms.

Ever in bare branches the night bird calls
Above the moon-one's steps.
By village walls an icy wind resounds.

Chronology

1887 3rd February: Georg Trakl is born in the evening at the Schaffner house on Waagplatz in Salzburg. Parents: Tobias Trakl, Dealer in Metals, born 1837 in Ödenburg (Sopron) and Maria Catharina Trakl, born Halik, 1852 in Wiener Neustadt.

1892 Trakl enters the Übungsschule des Lehrerenseminars (primary school). Religious instruction in the protestant rectory.

1897 Trakl enters the humanist k.k. Staatsgymnasium (state secondary school).

1905 Trakl does not continue to seventh grade, but instead determined to train as a pharmacist and leaves school. He embarks on a period of work practice in Carl Hinterhubers pharmacy "Zum weissen Engel" ("At the White Angel") on the Linzer Gasse.

1906 Performance of "Totentag" ("Death day") and "Fata Morgana" in the Stadttheater Salzburg.

1908 First appearance of a poem ("Morning Song" in the "Salzburger Volksblatt"). Termination of pharmacy practice, enrolls to study pharmacy at the University of Vienna.

1909 At the suggestion of Erhard Buschbeck, he gathers together his poems for a first collection, or „Collection 1909“ as it is unofficially known.

1910 Meeting with Oskar Kokoschka. Achieves his Master's degree in pharmacy. Death of his father. Enters voluntarily for a year's military practice.

1911 End of military practice in Vienna. Handles prescriptions at the pharmacy „Zum weissen Engel“, Salzburg.

1912 April: Assumes a position in the pharmacy of the Garrison hospital in Innsbruck. Meets the publisher of the bi monthly journal "Der Brenner," Ludwig von Ficker, who regularly publishes his work. In autumn, enrolled in the reserves.

1913 Acceptance of manuscript "Poems" by Kurt Wolff Publishers (Leipzig). Moves to Vienna. Works as an accounts clerk in the war ministry. Communication with Karl Kraus and Adolf Loos. Trip to Venice. Returns to Innsbruck. Offered to give a lecture.

1914 Submits the manuscript of "Sebastian in Dream" to Kurt Wolff Publishers. Travels to Berlin to see his sister Margarethe. Meeting with Else Lasker-Schüler. Settles on the Hohenburg near Igls with Rudolf von Ficker. Receives financial aid from Ludwig Wittgenstein. War breaks out.

24th August: Departs on a military convoy. Trakl's unit, Field Hospital 7/14, are stationed in Galicia and are obliged to care for the traumatised wounded following the battle of Grodek. Stationed in West Galicia; admission to the garrison hospital in Krakow following a mental collapse and attempt at suicide.

24/25 October: Visit of Ludwig von Ficker to Krakow.

3rd November: Georg Trakl dies of heart failure following a dose of cocaine smuggled into his cell. Buried in the Rakoviczer cemetery in Krakow.





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