Bart Philipsen

**Heym,** **Georg** (1887–1912)

Georg Heym was one of the leading poets of the early expressionist movement in Berlin. The introduction to Van Hoddis’ and Hiller’s *Der Neue Club* (*The New Club*) and his reading performances in *Das neopathetische Kabarett* (*The Neo-Pathetic Cabaret*) meant his breakthrough as a poet. It lead to a collection of poems entitled *Der ewige Tag* (*The Eternal Day*, 1911), the first and only publication during his lifetime. Inspired by the visionary metaphorical language of Hölderlin, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and others, Heym developed a poetic vocabulary with poignant simultaneous images of death and destruction, of outcasts and of the metropolis as a “demon”. Typical of Heym’s style is the repudiation of the lyrical I, which is sometimes replaced by a universal but impersonal ‘We’. Technology, media, industry and other aspects of modern capitalist society are the source of Heym’s uncanny mythological landscapes, evoking a ghostly, netherworldly atmosphere which ominously prefigures the battle fields of World War I. Heym died while sledding; he drowned as he tried to save a friend who had fallen through the ice. He was 24 years old. Posthumously, his friend published *Umbra Vitae* (1912), Heym’s most renowned collection of poems. The expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) designed and illustrated the reprint of 1924, including original woodcuts and a very special, bold typography.

List of works and further reading

Schneider, Karl Ludwig (ed.) (1986): *Dichtungen und Schriften*, München: Beck.

Heym, Georg (2004*): Poems*, Translated, with an introduction and notes by Antony Hasler (1st ed.), London: Libris (Re-edition: Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006)

Patrick Bridgewater (1991): *Poet of Expressionist Berlin. Life and Work of Georg Heym*, London: Libris.

Paratextual Material

The 1924 reprint of Umbra Vitae, designed and illustrated by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, via the Moma Archive:

<http://www.moma.org/collection//browse_results.php?object_id=26707>

By Georg Heym [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons:

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Umbra_vitae.jpg>