

## PUBLISHED IN PARIS: SAMUEL BECKETT, GEORGE REAVEY, AND THE EUROPA PRESS

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Mr Denis Devlin and Mr Brian Coffey are without question the most interesting of the youngest generation of Irish poets. [...] They have submitted themselves to the influences of those poets least concerned with evading the bankrupt relationship referred to at the opening of this essay – Corbière, Rimbaud, Laforgue, the *surréalistes* and Mr Eliot, perhaps also to those of Mr Pound – with results that constitute already the nucleus of a living poetic in Ireland. (Beckett, *Disjecta* 75-76)

### A Living Poetic in Paris

Samuel Beckett's claim of a new "nucleus of a living poetic in Ireland" – made in his polemic essay "Recent Irish Poetry" for the London review *The Bookman*<sup>1</sup> – arguably points to a new centre of Irish poetry around the young poets Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey, and Beckett himself, whose poetry owes more to continental influences, notably the Surrealists, than to the Irish tradition of Yeats and post-Revival poets, derided by Beckett as "our leading twilighters" (71). While Beckett critics, such as his biographer Anthony Cronin, have rejected the notion of a formal 'movement' as "one of the many false starts of modernism in Irish poetry" (194), Beckett in his essay is at pains to distinguish between those poets who have come under the influence of modernism and those evincing "awareness of the new thing that has happened [...] namely the breakdown of the object, whether current, historical, mythical or spook" (70). Thus Beckett argues that "contemporary Irish poets may be divided into antiquarians and others, the former in the majority" (70). Eschewing Irish literary tradition – condemned by Beckett as the "antiquarians" and "leading twilighters" – he prefers the "no-man's-land" of modernism, even if its propagators (the "others") had been derided by Yeats as outcasts, "the fish that lie gasping on the shore" (70). Less than a year within the appearance of "Recent Irish Poetry," Beckett, Coffey, and Devlin were in the throes of a new Irish poetic venture, initiated in Paris by the enterprising Irish-Russian poet and publisher George Reavey. Perceptively entitled "The Europa Poets," Reavey's announcement of a list of Irish poets, which featured in his own collection *Nostradam*<sup>2</sup> in spring 1935, marks a decisive moment in Irish literary modernism. The initial list of numbered "limited editions" consisted of a series of six titles,

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- 1 Beckett's review (in *Disjecta* 70-76) was first published in *The Bookman* (London, 1891-1934) in August 1934 under the pseudonym Andrew Belis, according to Cronin "the maiden name of his maternal grandmother, slightly misspelled" (193).
  - 2 Loosely based on the ominous *Prophecies* by the French astrologer Michel de Notre-dame (1503-1566), Reavey's collection draws parallels with the post-war Modernist *zeitgeist* of the 1930s.

which would all be released by Reavey in the lifetime of the Europa Press (1935-1939), albeit under different titles and in a different sequence:

1. – *Nostradam* by George Reavey
2. – *Image At The Cinema* by Brian Coffey
3. – *Signes d'adieu* by George Reavey
4. – *Echo's Bones, and Other Precipitates* by Samuel Beckett
5. – *Poems* by Denis Devlin
6. – *Quixotic Perquisitions* by George Reavey  
(Reavey, *Nostradam* 30)

Reavey's cycle of love poems, *Signes d'adieu*, published in French translation from the manuscript *Frailty of Love*, replaced the second title by Brian Coffey, who abandoned his earlier manuscript *Image At The Cinema* in favour of the poems collected in *Third Person* (1938). Samuel Beckett's *Echo's Bones, and Other Precipitates* appeared as the third Europa Press title in December 1935, while Denis Devlin's *Poems* became *Intercessions* in 1937. Reavey's *Quixotic Perquisitions* bookends the series in 1939 shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, but the initially purely Irish list became internationalised when the Europa Press in 1936 released *Thorns of Thunder*, the first English-language collection of Paul Éluard's love poetry, followed in 1937 by *The Garden of Evil* by the American expatriate Charles Henri Ford, with a critical introduction by poet William Carlos Williams.

While Reavey had a pragmatic motive for setting up a small imprint – being “very fed up with English publishers [who] were always turning down books of poems, not only by me, but by various other of my poet friends” (Knowlson, “George Reavey” 10) – he also had a higher ambition to produce an exquisite series of “limited editions – poets illustrated by various engravers” (Reavey, *Nostradam* 30). In the four-year lifetime of the Europa Press, Reavey commissioned artworks by the German Surrealist Max Ernst, the Spanish Cubist Pablo Picasso, the Russian painter Pavel Tchelitchew, and by the British experimental print-maker Stanley William Hayter,<sup>3</sup> at whose Paris studio *Atelier 17* these artists collaborated.

A keen follower of Surrealist art, Reavey had befriended the English printmaker S.W. Hayter in Paris in the early 1930s, and the pair collaborated on Reavey's first collection, *Faust's Metamorphoses*, published in 1932 by New Review editions. In the inter-war period, marked by a world-wide economic crisis and the rise of fascism in Europe, Reavey found a recurring mask in the dark and dualistic character of Faust and his descent into peril. He found an empathetic collaborator in Hayter, who later recalled that his own “apocalyptic preoccupations of that time did agree very closely

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3 Descending from a long line of English artists, Stanley William Hayter (1901-1988) had settled in Paris in 1926, experimenting with drypoint, woodcuts, and aquatints. He set up his first studio in 1927 to develop print-making as an art form, which took on the legendary name of *Atelier Dix-Sept* [Atelier 17] when Hayter moved it to 17 rue Campane-Première in Montparnasse in 1933.

with George's image" (Hayter, "Tributes to George Reavey" 6). In response to the poems, Hayter produced several engravings, and their creative synergy in the case of *Faust's Metamorphoses* clearly inspired the founding objectives of the Europa Press, as Reavey later revealed in an interview with James Knowlson:

At the [...] time, I was very closely in touch with Stanley William Hayter, the famous engraver, who ran Atelier 17 in Paris, and my idea was to get some books of poems illustrated by people out of the school at the beginning. (Knowlson, "George Reavey" 10)

In May 1934, Atelier 17 had its first group show at the Galeries Pierre, on the Rue des Beaux-Arts, and featured 22 artists.<sup>4</sup> Reavey later selected four of these – Max Ernst, Roger Vieillard, S.W. Hayter, and John Buckland-Wright – to illustrate Europa Press publications. Max Ernst designed the striking cover illustration for Éluard's *Thorns of Thunder*, the French artist Roger Vieillard provided original engravings for twenty special edition copies of Reavey's *Signes d'adieu*, and New Zealand-born John Buckland-Wright, Hayter's right hand man at Atelier 17, illustrated the final Europa Press collection, *Quixotic Perquisitions* (1939). The literary and artistic legacy of the Europa Press is all the more remarkable, considering Reavey's youth, relative inexperience, and complete lack of financial resources.<sup>5</sup>

Reavey arrived in Paris in 1929 from Cambridge, where he had studied History and English at Gonville and Caius College. Of mixed Irish-Russian parentage, he was born in Vitebsk, Belarus, in 1907, where his Northern-Irish father, Daniel Reavey, managed flax spinning mills in the booming linen industry of the Russian Empire. The family spent lengthy periods in Russia but returned to Belfast in 1918 during the Russian Civil War (1917-1923) before settling in London in the early 1920s. At Cambridge, Reavey wrote poetry, developed an expertise in Russian literature, and emerged as a central figure of a group of undergraduates, including William Empson, Jacob Bronowski, Kathleen Raine, Humphrey Jennings, and others, who founded the legendary review *Experiment*. Modelled closely on the Paris avant-garde review *transition*, the interdisciplinary *Experiment* covered an eclectic mix of poetry and prose alongside film reviews, essays on psychology, and art criticism. *transition*, in turn, acknowledged *Experiment's* 'modernity' when in June 1930 editor Eugene Jolas devoted over 30 pages of double issue 19-20 to a handpicked list of fourteen *Experiment* contributors including Reavey, who is represented with his first Paris publication, the prose poem "Quel che non fu fatto, io lo sogna!" [What was not done, I dreamed] – a homage to Gabriele D'Annunzio's poem "Maia."

In Paris, Reavey's growing expertise in Russian literature brought him to the attention of the American expatriate publisher Samuel Putnam, who introduced him in his

4 The George Reavey archive at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, contains an original exhibition poster from the show, which opened in May 1934 at the Galerie Pierre.

5 By contrast, Edward Titus's Black Manikin Press, which famously brought out the 1929 Paris edition of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was financed by the cosmetic empire of his wife Helena Rubinstein.

interdisciplinary journal *The New Review* as “a young poet just down from Cambridge” and “a specialist in and an authority on Russian literature since the revolution” (Putnam, “Notes on Contributors”). Significantly, Putnam put the young poet in charge of a substantial project as editor of the Russian section of a 1931 pioneer anthology of European post-war literature, entitled *The European Caravan*. Having passed on the *Caravan*'s “England and Ireland” section to fellow *Experiment* editor Jacob Bronowski, Reavey's editorial influence is nevertheless palpable as the inclusion of several poems by his fellow Irish expatriates Samuel Beckett and Thomas MacGreevy demonstrates. MacGreevy is introduced by Bronowski (and, arguably, Reavey) as “a friend of Joyce and Yeats” and “perhaps the only Irish writer who has not been influenced by either; as well as one of the few Irish writers who has kept in touch with the work of Eliot,” while Beckett is praised as “the most interesting of the younger Irish writers” (Bronowski 475, 493).

Reavey had befriended Beckett and MacGreevy during Beckett's tenure as Trinity College's exchange lecturer at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, an appointment he had taken up in 1928. By 1930, when his term at the École Normale had ended, Beckett was back in Dublin as a junior lecturer in French at Trinity College. Yet, unable to settle down into an academic career, he resigned from his post and spent the next seven years moving somewhat erratically between Dublin, London, Paris, and Kassel in Germany, home to his cousin Peggy Sinclair and her family, before finally settling in Montparnasse in 1937. The friendship between Beckett and Reavey endured these wandering years, as Reavey became increasingly aligned with Beckett's writing. Poems by Samuel Beckett, such as “Return to Vestry” and “Text,” began to appear regularly in Putnam's *New Review*, of which Reavey had become an associate editor from issue No. 4, published in Winter 1931-1932. In the same issue, Reavey also published a passionate defence of Thomas MacGreevy's monograph on T.S. Eliot, which had been negatively reviewed by Richard Thoma in *New Review* No. 3. Representing the interests of a growing circle of writer friends and acquaintances, Reavey became a ‘natural’ literary agent and co-founded, in 1932, with Russian émigré Marc Slonim (1894-1976) the appropriately named *Bureau Littéraire Européen* [European Literary Bureau]. Between them, the business partners had unrivalled access to Russian, French, and English language writers in the Parisian avant-garde, as Reavey later recalled:

Among the Russian émigré authors, for whom we got publishers, were Bunin and Berdyaev. Among the French, were Georges Duhamel, André Malraux, André Gide, Céline, Maritain, and others. Obviously we were not after best sellers or popular fiction, but after more serious writers. Finally, Samuel Beckett became one of them. (Reavey, “Some Background”)

Reavey's efforts as Beckett's literary agent culminated in 1938, when he secured, after over 40 rejections, the publication of Beckett's experimental novel *Murphy* with London publishers Routledge. The most enduring legacy of their professional re-

lationship remains, however, the release of Beckett's first poetry collection, *Echo's Bones, and Other Precipitates*, by the Europa Press in 1935.

### ***Echo's Bones, and Other Precipitates***

Published in late 1935, *Echo's Bones* came at a crucial point in Beckett's early writing career – a whole five years after his surprise success at winning, with “Whoroscope,” the Hours Press poetry prize for the best new work dedicated to time. Although Beckett's London publisher Chatto and Windus had released his *Proust* monograph in 1932 and his short stories *More Pricks Than Kicks* in 1934, they subsequently turned down these poems, which marked an important development for Beckett since the work he had published in *The European Caravan* in 1931.

Beckett's decision not to include any of the *European Caravan* poems can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to reposition himself as poet. The poems collected in the “*Bones*,” as Beckett would refer to the collection, are generally simpler and more concise than the ambitious, wordy verses chosen by Bronowski for *The European Caravan*. For example, Beckett's long poem “Casket of Pralinen for a Daughter of a Dissipated Mandarin” creates startling imagery – such as the “radiant lemon-whiskered Christ” – from obscure personal references (the “blood-faced Tom” is Thomas MacGreevy) and ‘Joycean’ multi-lingual vocabulary.

Radiant lemon-whiskered Christ  
and you obliging porte-phallic-portfolio  
and blood-faced Tom  
disbelieving  
in the Closerie cocktails that is my  
and of course John the bright boy of the class  
swallowing an apostolic spit  
THE BULLIEST FEED IN 'ISTORY  
if the boy scouts hadn't booked a trough  
for the eleventh's eleventh eleven years after.  
(*The European Caravan* 476)

Beckett's 1929 essay “Dante ... Bruno . Vico .. Joyce,” commissioned at Joyce's request for *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* – a collection of essays conceived by Joyce and Shakespeare and Company – had publicly established him as a follower and defender of Joyce. For example, the writer and critic Richard Aldington, who had awarded Beckett the Hour Press poetry prize for “Whoroscope,” referred to him in his 1941 memoir *Life For Life's Sake* as a “splendidly mad Irishman who was James Joyce's white boy and wanted to commit suicide” (319).<sup>6</sup> *Echo's Bones*, on the other hand, marked a long-awaited opportunity for Beckett to *break away* from the image of being one of Joyce's disciples. Beckett

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6 Aldington, who wrote his memoir in 1941 prior to Beckett's most successful postwar period, does not even name Beckett but refers to him simply as MacGreevy's “successor” at the École Normale Supérieure.

deliberated long over the title, which is a reference to Echo, who mourns for the dead Narcissus and turns into stone in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and wrote to Reavey in March 1935: "Not Poems after all, but: Echo's Bones, and Other Precipitates. C'est plus modeste" (*Letters* I: 264).

Among the poems collected in *Echo's Bones* are (in order of their publication) "The Vulture"; "Enueg 1" and "Enueg 2"; "Alba"; "Dortmunder," named after a German beer; "Sanies 1" and "Sanies 2"; "Serena 1," "Serena 2," and "Serena 3"; "Malacoda"; "Da Tagte Es," and the title poem "Echo's Bones":

### **Echo's Bones**

asylum under my tread all this day  
 their muffled revels as the flesh falls  
 breaking without fear or favour wind  
 the gantelope of sense and nonsense run  
 taken by the maggots for what they are (*SP* 32)

According to Beckett critic John Fletcher, the literary influences on Beckett in this collection were manifold – from the Surrealists' disregard for punctuation, "metric anarchy [and] the presence of the image over the sense" (23-24) to Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, from which Beckett included a quotation (in his own translation) at the end of the poem "Enueg 1": "Ah the banner / the banner of meat bleeding / on the silk of the seas and the arctic flowers / that do not exist" (*SP* 16). Beckett, who had studied French literature at Trinity College Dublin, wrote several poems as variations on traditional models of Provençal poetry, such as "Enueg 1" and "Enueg 2," which are composed "in the form of a Provençal dirge or lament," and the love poem "Alba," based on the "Provençal song of the dawn, lamenting the separation of the poet from the beloved" (*SP* 187). French troubadour evening poems became the model for "Serena" 1, 2, and 3, while the German *minnesänger* Walther von der Vogelweide provided the model for the poem "Da Tagte Es." A fragment from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "Harzreise im Winter" ("Dem Geier gleich") was the inspiration for the haunting opening poem of the collection, "The Vulture," which Beckett arranged simply in three sets of two lines, opening on the existential statement: "dragging his hunger through the sky / of my skull shell of sky and earth" (*SP* 13).

While the poetic form follows external models, the content of these poems is highly internal and personal, as images of death, decay, and suffering are omnipresent. In 1933, the poet's father had died in Dublin of a heart attack, and two poems in particular – "Malacoda" ("thrice he came / the undertaker's man") and "Da Tagte Es" – have been linked to this traumatic experience for Beckett. In the same year, his cousin and, for some time, his lover Peggy Sinclair also died from tuberculosis and references to her illness – "tired of my darling's red sputum" (*SP* 14) – pervade these poems. The quatrain "Da Tagte Es" appears to have translated these painful experiences into a concise poetic statement that reflects on the transitory nature of love and life itself:

**Da Tagte Es**

redeem the surrogate goodbyes  
 the sheet astream in your hand  
 who have no more for the land  
 and the glass unmisted above your eyes (SP 31)

Reavey was aware of Beckett's personal background to these poems and later recalled "that a lot of the poems that appeared in *Echo's Bones* were written in the London period, about 1934" (Knowlson, "George Reavey" 9). The "London period" was a difficult time for Beckett, marked by physical ill health, severe depression, and recurring anxiety attacks, on account of which he attended psychoanalysis, as his biographers James Knowlson (*Damned to Fame* 173) and Deirdre Bair (184-186) report. A strong sensation of resignation and paralysis pervades these poems; the poetic self is described in "Enueg 2" as "tired of dying" with his "feet in marmalade / perspiring profusely," which can be biographically interpreted as a reference to the night-sweats Beckett experienced at the time. When asked by James Knowlson whether Beckett's later poetry, such as "Dieppe" and "Saint-Lô," had a "greater consciousness and purity," Reavey replied that, although the "early poems had many allusions and references," he "liked the rhythm of them very much" (Knowlson, "George Reavey" 10).

**Thorns of Thunder – The Influence of Paul Éluard**

A mutual influence on both Beckett's *Echo's Bones* and Reavey's *Signes d'adieu* was the French Surrealist Paul Éluard, whom both knew personally. Both Reavey and Beckett 'borrowed' stylistic innovations from Éluard, such as the use of repetition and absence of punctuation, relying instead on rhythm to convey meaning in the poem. Reavey extensively translated Éluard, whom he deeply admired as "one of the few genuine love poets writing in an out-of-love world," and *Signes d'adieu* profoundly echoes the sensuality of Éluard's love poetry (Reavey, *Signes d'adieu*, vii). Reavey had written the short but intensely emotional poems in rapid succession, almost diary-like, following the death of his lover Andrée Conte. Not much is known about the circumstances of Andrée Conte's death, but both Reavey's letters to Julian Trevelyan and references in the poems to "fever-toss" and "love bespattered" indicate that tuberculosis was the likely cause – the same illness that caused the death of Samuel Beckett's beloved cousin Peggy Sinclair.<sup>7</sup>

While the collection of poems, entitled *Frailties* or *The Frailty of Love*, has never been published in the English original, Reavey selected fourteen poems for the French edition *Signes d'adieu* in a translation by Pierre Charnay. Reavey shared these poems among his group of Irish friends in Paris and recalled that "Beckett admired

7 See the poems no. 4, "O false Why Icarus," and no. 18, "Night of anguish," in the unpublished TS *The Frailty of Love*, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Reavey Collection, Box 14, Folder 5.

them very much" (Knowlson, "George Reavey" 11). The cycle opens with the foreboding sound of the swing of the bell ("la branle de la cloche"), evocative of the death knell and heralding the presence of death, while the sudden loss has cast the lover from the world of certainty into emptiness:

La branle de la cloche  
 marque la cadence et le cœur  
 s'élançe de chute en chute  
 du monde certain  
 vers le vide où remue le vent  
 mais rien ne bouge O mon amour  
 où donc est mon amour?

(Reavey, *Signes d'adieu* 9)

Reavey's imagery enters the Surrealist realm on several occasions, for example in the penultimate poem of the collection, in which the voice compares the affections and caresses of women to the "farewell of falling stars" ("signes d'adieu d'étoiles mourantes") only to realise resignedly "the inconsequence of all" ("l'inconséquence de la plupart"):

Femmes si réelles votre réalité n'est pas sûre  
 quant à ce qui est des caresses  
 signes d'adieu d'étoiles mourantes  
 apposition des mains mésintelligence  
 des lèvres et des yeux  
 l'enchaînement de certains moments  
 et l'inconséquence de la plupart  
 (SDA 21)

Women of reality  
 less real  
 for what are caresses  
 farewell of falling stars  
 hands' touch lips'  
 eyes' miscomprehension  
 the sequence of some moments  
 and the inconsequence of all.<sup>8</sup>

Beckett was equally familiar with Éluard's œuvre, having translated several Éluard poems for the Paris-based journal *This Quarter*. Published in September 1932, in the magazine's special "Surrealist Number," Beckett's renditions were praised by editor Edward Titus as "characterizable only in superlatives" (6). In 1936, Reavey republished several of Beckett's Éluard translations when the Europa Press landed its biggest coup to date with the first English-language edition of a selection of Éluard's love poetry, entitled *Thorns of Thunder*. The collection also had the biggest Europa Press print run with 600 copies, almost twice that of *Echo's Bones* (327) and more than three-times that of *Nostradam* (150). Reavey chose Beckett's accomplished translation of Éluard's sensual love poem "L'Amoureuse" to open the collection:

#### L'Amoureuse

Elle est debout sur mes paupières  
 Et ses cheveux sont dans la miens,  
 Elle a la forme de mes mains,  
 Elle a la couleur de mes yeux,

#### Lady Love

She is standing on my lids  
 And her hair is in my hair  
 She has the colour of my eye  
 She has the body of my hand

8 Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Reavey Collection, Box 14, Folder 5.

Elle s'engloutit dans mon ombre  
Comme une pierre sur le ciel.  
(Éluard, *Selected Poems* 38)

In my shade she is engulfed  
As a stone against the sky  
(Éluard, *Thorns of Thunder* 1)

Beckett's rendition deliberately makes no attempt at a faithful translation, as is instantly evident in his playful title "Lady Love." Instead, his objective appears to have been to recreate the rhythm and sound of Éluard's poem. For this purpose, Beckett even rearranged the order of lines three and four, as the word "hand," ending on a consonant, gives a more finite ending to these lines with their parallel sentence structure "She has [...]." Even more defiantly, Beckett reordered the sentence structure of line five, thereby putting the emphasis on the 'lyrical I' and turning the lover into an object: "In *my* shade she is engulfed" [emphasis added].

At the time of publication, Beckett objected strongly to the collection and also turned down Reavey's request for new Éluard translations, as he was in the throes of finishing his experimental novel *Murphy*. Reavey ended up providing a large chunk of seventeen translations of the 44 Éluard poems, which must have added considerable strain to his editing and publishing activities. Other translations came from Devlin, David Gascoyne, and Ruthven Todd as well as from *transition* editor Eugene Jolas and Surrealist artist Man Ray.

The Irish circle of Beckett, Devlin, and Coffey expressed also considerable opposition to the involvement of the poet and art critic Herbert Read, as is evident from the following extract of Denis Devlin's letter to Thomas MacGreevy:

Brian was to edit this Éluard [*Thorns of Thunder*], give some translations himself and Sam and I were to give the rest. In his letter to me, Reavey mentioned that Herbert Read was to do an introduction, Picasso an engraving. I demurred at Read then I found that R. [Reavey] had not told Br. [Brian] and Sam about Read. Anyhow Br. + Sam refuse to appear with Read and I too.<sup>9</sup>

It is likely that the Irish poet friends objected to Read because they regarded his involvement as an act of opportunism on Reavey's part, who sought to align himself firmly with the English Surrealist Group. Read was an influential member of that group and had edited the critical study *Surrealism* (1936), with contributions by André Breton, Hugh Sykes Davies, Georges Hugnet, and Paul Éluard (in translation by George Reavey), to coincide with the First International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in June 1936.

Reavey, in turn, invited Read to write a critical introduction to *Thorns of Thunder*. However, somewhat unsatisfied by Read's rather short contribution, Reavey decided to add a significantly longer "Editorial Foreword" to the collection. Reavey was undoubtedly strategic about the publication of *Thorns of Thunder*, which he carefully timed to coincide with the opening of the First International Surrealist Exhibition. Reavey considered the large-scale, controversial, and highly publicised exhibition an

9 Letter from Denis Devlin to Thomas MacGreevy. Undated, post-marked envelope 16 March 1936. MS 8112/9, Trinity College Dublin.

ideal launch pad to relocate the Europa Press to London, a move he had considered for some time. Alongside Herbert Read, he became a member of the organising committee, which was headed by the Paris-based Surrealists Paul Éluard, André Breton, and Man Ray as well as the English artist Roland Penrose. Reavey took charge of a public Surrealist reading on 26 June 1936 at which Paul Éluard read from his poems, followed by renditions of other Surrealist works by Humphrey Jennings, Reavey himself, and E.L.T. Mesens as well as by the young poets David Gascoyne and Dylan Thomas.

A particular coup for Reavey was also the striking cover design of *Thorns of Thunder* by the German Surrealist painter Max Ernst, a close friend of Éluard's. In Surrealist style, Ernst plays on the themes of masks and identities through the depiction of a harlequin figure, front and back, which appears to be a study on proportions. Yet, a closer comparison of the two views throws up questions of identity – as it is doubtful whether these are in fact two sides of the same figure. For the frontispiece, Reavey commissioned a portrait of Paul Éluard, executed in bold charcoal strokes by Pablo Picasso, who dated it “ce soir le 8 Janvier XXXVI” [this evening 8 January 1936]. Reavey was anxious to mark the collaboration between Éluard, Ernst, and Picasso as well as that of the poets/translators and prepared a special copy, No.1, which was printed on hand-made paper, signed by the author, the artist, and the translators and which contained Picasso's original drawing and an original MS by Paul Éluard. The Reavey Archive at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, contains a signed copy by Paul Éluard, to which Reavey, David Gascoyne, and Ruthven Todd all added their signatures on the night of the public Surrealist reading. Samuel Beckett's signature was added during one of Reavey's visits to Paris in 1972, marking his belated support of *Thorns of Thunder*, which was of great importance for Reavey. Beckett's skilful translations have also ensured the legacy of the collection.

Ironically, Reavey's controversial involvement of Herbert Read in the 1936 collection *Thorns of Thunder* would prove instrumental two years later when Read, as a reader for Routledge and Sons, accepted Samuel Beckett's novel *Murphy* from Reavey after a litany of rejections. The row over the Irish poets' contributions to *Thorns of Thunder* reveals, above all, the strong sense of ownership that Beckett, Coffey, and Devlin felt over the Europa Press.

## Conclusion

Even though there were many more titles planned in the Europa Poets series – such as a controversial collection of Dylan Thomas's short stories, *The Burning Baby*, and several of Reavey's own projects – the onslaught of the Second World War marked the end of the Europa Press. A precarious venture from the start, financed from advance subscriptions, small sales, and subsidies by the Europa poets themselves, the press was not without problems, particularly in the area of distribution, a task which Reavey handled mostly himself. A publisher's notice in Denis Devlin's *Intercessions*

for example states: “If you are interested in the Europa publications kindly write or order copies directly from Europa Press.” Beckett grew increasingly frustrated when, in the absence of an efficient distribution system, copies of *Echo’s Bones* failed to appear in bookshops in London and Dublin.

Yet, the diligence and care Reavey took with content, artwork, and production have ensured the immortality of these books today. Although Beckett “didn’t like the idea of having his book of poems illustrated” (Knowlson, “George Reavey” 10), Reavey paid careful attention to the typesetting, typography, paper, printing, and finishing of all Europa editions. He arranged the print-run of 327 copies into an ordinary and special edition, with 25 copies printed on specially selected “Normandy Vellum” and signed by the author. The dust wrapper features the title and author’s name in striking Modernist typeface and black lettering with “Echo’s Bones” emphasised through large capital letters.

*Echo’s Bones, and Other Precipitates* remained of life-long importance to Beckett, and the critic Hugh Kenner writes that the poems in *Echo’s Bones* “seem to constitute the only early work he values at all” (42). Beckett drew heavily on *Echo’s Bones* when Calder produced his *Collected Poems*, which contained “an acknowledgement to you & Europa,” as Beckett wrote to Reavey in November 1961.<sup>10</sup> Reavey’s persistent endeavours on Beckett’s behalf and their enduring friendship was attested to by Beckett’s moving dedication after Reavey’s death in 1976:

Adieu George,  
to whom I owed so much, with whom shared  
so much, for whom cared so much  
(“In Memoriam: George Reavey” 1)

The Europa Press was of central importance in the creative development of Samuel Beckett, Brian Coffey, and Denis Devlin. Its legacy lives on in the form of exquisitely produced books of poems, perceptively illustrated by leading contemporary artists. Ironically, the books, which Reavey produced without financial backing on a precarious system of advance subscriptions, today attract large sums of money.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, in the 1930s the Europa Press gave a voice to Irish poets who sought belonging within a wider European *zeitgeist*. It provided therefore not only a temporary refuge for these self-exiled poets but a permanent homeland for the wider legacy of Irish Modernist literature – written at the heart of Europe.

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10 Letter dated 9.11.61 from Samuel Beckett to George Reavey. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

11 A Europa Press copy of *Echo’s Bones* currently fetches between £1,500 and £6,000 from antiquarian booksellers, depending on whether it is part of the numbered or un-numbered series; see, for example, <[www.abebooks.co.uk](http://www.abebooks.co.uk)> (29 Feb 2012).

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