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How Beckett's late-night scribbblings divided the critics

BY ROS DRINKWATER

A headline lot in Adam's Works on Paper sale next week makes it clear that Samuel Beckett began as he meant to go on. In 1930, his first published poem, *Whoroscope*, bamboozled critics, comments ranging from high praise to philistine outrage.

"What do you call a 100-line poem narrated by a grumpy and delirious René Descartes while he anxiously awaits being served an egg that better have been hatched between eight and ten days or else, and that is - mother of mercy! - annotated by its author?" That was antiquarian book dealer Stephen J Gertz's verdict.

Desperate to meet a deadline for a poetry competition held by shipping heiress Nancy Cunard, Beckett penned the poem one night in Paris, finishing at 3am. It won first prize of £10 and was published by *The Hours*, Cunard's small publishing house, priced at five shillings for one of 100 signed copies, one shilling for one of 200 unsigned.

Adam's being Adam's, the copy on offer is signed; estimate €2,000-€3,000. I should mention the sale has enough

Beckett material to warrant a sale of its own - novels, plays, poems, cassette tapes et al.

Headline lots from the collection of Hugh and Ann Iremonger are a book of copper engravings of Jesus and the Twelve Disciples by Lucas van Leyden (€3,000-€5,000), *Ti-*

bet and China. Jesuit Missions 1624-26 (€2,000-€3,000) and an album of nearly 500

humorous sketches and caricatures by antiquarian Captain Francis Grose (€3,000-€5,000). While completing his *Antiquities of Ireland* in Dublin in 1791, the captain suffered a stroke and died. He is buried in Drumcondra cemetery.

Collectors on a tight budget should note that the Iremonger collection offers a feast, with estimates starting at €30-€50 for *A Patrick's Day Hunt* by Ross and Somerville.

A title to consider, if your idea of bliss is cosying up with a book and a glass of the good stuff, is *Truths About Whisky*, 2nd edition, London 1879,

with tinted lithographs of the Dublin distilleries - published by them to warn about inferior products (€200-€300).

Works on paper can provide a window into an artist's experiments, at a price much lower than the later oil on the same subject. The most affordable options are prints and lithographs. The sale has several Jack B Yeats hand-coloured Cuala Press prints, estimates €400-€600, and a Marc Chagall lithograph, *Le Soleil and La Lune* (€500-€700).

Bookending the sale are Abraham Ortelius's *A Map of Ireland* from the 1606 English edition of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (€800-€1,200), and from 2014, *Impressions*

of Dublin 8, from the verse anthology *'If Ever You Go'*, Dedalus Press, designed and illustrated by students of Visual Communications NCAD, all signed by poet and artist (€400-€600).

The fragility of paper sounds alarm bells for many collectors. It shouldn't: paper is amazingly robust. There

ought to be no problems, provided it has been professionally framed behind protective glass that filters out light at the damaging end of the spectrum, and hung in a stable temperature.

Works on Paper, March 12; Adam's, 26 St Stephens Green, Dublin 2; see adams.ie

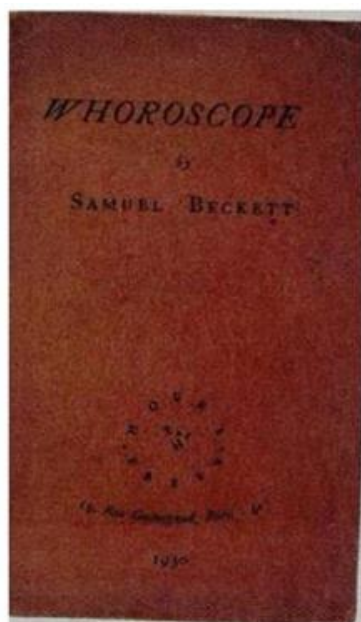


At the Bar by Colin Middleton



Fiddler by Jack B Yeats

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A signed copy of Whoroscope by Samuel Beckett; left: A Patricks Day Hunt by Ross and Somerville



Impressions of Dublin 8. illustrated by NCAD students

