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Modernist Presses and the Gayfield Press

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Authors	Brady, Deirdre
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Title: Modernist Presses and the Gayfield Press

A brief description of the Gayfield Press is outlined in the Liam Miller's history of The Dolmen Press which Miller owned and edited. Miller's first publication was Thomas Kinsella's *The Starlit Eye* which he printed on a wooden press: "loaned from Cecil French Salkeld, who used it to publish his Gayfield Press series of Dublin poets and artists".¹ Since the publication of Miller's text, the Gayfield Press has received little attention and its history has been lost or forgotten. Furthermore, the role of Blanaid Salkeld as a publisher has been virtually erased from literary studies of the period. This paper sheds light on this little-known feminist press, and foregrounds the key role of Salkeld as a contributor, editor and publisher of the Gayfield Press. The consideration of this press as a feminist enterprise reinstates Salkeld back into the narrative of Irish publishing and enhances our understanding of private printing presses as a vital force for female creativity.

Blanaid Salkeld (1880-1959), was born in India and brought up in Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin. Her early influences included poet John Keats and the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, a friend of her father, whom she met as a young girl in India.² She married an Englishman in the Bombay civil service in 1902 but was widowed and returned to Ireland in 1906 with her son, the artist Cecil French Salkeld (1903-1969). She joined the Abbey Theatre, appearing under the stage name Nell Byrne and took the lead role in George Fitzmaurice's *Country Dressmaker* in 1907. One of the early members of the Gaelic League, she attended AE's (George Russell) Sunday evening gatherings and subsequently held her own salon, in her home at 43 Morehampton Road, Dublin.³ Her house became the site of

¹ LIAM MILLER, *An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press 1951-1976*, Dublin, Dolmen, 1976, p.5. Another reference to this quotation can be found in DERVAL TURBRIDY, *A Hazardous Venture'. The Dolmen Press*, in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Vol V/The Irish Book in English 1891-2000*, edited by Clare Hutton, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp.576-591.

² *The Irish Times*, 19 Dec. 1957, p.5.

³ The Gaelic League was an organisation set up in 1893 by Douglas Hyde to promote and preserve Irish language, culture and traditions. AE was the pseudonym of George Russell who was an Irish writer, poet and painter.

regular ‘at home’s for Irish poets and writers, including Patrick Kavanagh, Ernie O’Malley and Flann O’Brien. It would later become the site of publishing for the Gayfield Press in 1938. Her son, Cecil Salkeld was one of the leading artists of this period. He received his academic training at Dublin’s Metropolitan School of Art where he studied with contemporaries such as Sean Keating and James Sleator. From there in 1921 he moved to the Kunstakademie in Kassel under Ewald Dulberg, a print maker and theatrical designer who had a lasting impression on him. According to S. B. Kennedy, Cecil Salkeld was the only Irish painter of his generation to look beyond France for inspiration and it is due entirely to him that any trace of the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement or *New Objectivity* is to be found in Irish painting.¹ His artistic influences are manifest in many of the illustrations published by the Gayfield Press. They illustrate the social, political and cultural conditions of the time and encapsulate the aesthetic vision of its owner and editor.

The examination of the careers of autonomous figures in publishing throws light on the importance of the publisher in the dissemination of texts. Alistair McCleery suggests the significant role of the individual, as an agent of change in the history of books, is often overlooked:

If book history emerges from the dynamic interaction of “the cultural nation” with “the political nation”, it must find room in that for the individual actor participating in both these spheres.²

A deeper examination of the communications circuit of the artistic milieu of the period and the means in which cultural texts were produced and published, sheds new light on the role of women in print culture and reclaims agency for women in the material production of modernist and experimental literature. Newspaper reports, private correspondence and official documentation have revealed the existence of what Trysh Travis calls an »alternative

¹ S.B. KENNEDY, *Irish Art & Modernism 1880-1950*, Belfast, Irish Institute of Irish Studies. 1991. For the purposes of this paper, Cecil Salkeld will be referred to as Cecil Salkeld in the text.

² ALISTAIR MCCLEERY, *The Return of the Publisher to Book History: The Case of Allen Lane*, «Book History» V, 2002, pp.161-185.

communication circuit« which consists of women readers, writers, editors and publishing women, which »transforms manuscripts into books and brings them to market«. ¹The telling of the history of the Gayfield has been hampered by an astonishing lack of documentary records about the press, as well as the underlying assumptions that publishers were male. For example, the aforementioned Miller, who also described his first printing press as «set in twelve point Bodini, a gift from Cecil French Salkeld, who gave us the type and the wooden handpress he and his mother had used to print their Gayfield Press editions». ² Other examples include a newspaper article which described the Gayfield Press as a »collaboration with her son Cecil Salkeld, the artist«; alongside contemporary digital websites which described Cecil Salkeld as the «owner« of the Gayfield Press or as «Cecil Salkeld’s Gayfield Press». ³ The privileging of male influence was commonplace in public discourse of the period, but it serves to obscure the long tradition of publishing women. ⁴ As George Bornstein writes:

The absence of women from most New Critical construction of modernism now looks like a scandal and so does the absence of many ethnic groups. Not only are well-known writers like H.D. or Marianne Moore rightly assuming central roles, but so will myriads of women less often thought of in this way, like George Yeats. So, too, will the extraordinary network of female editors and publishers who first produced and distributed so many modernist texts. ⁵

The Cuala Press was managed by the Yeats sisters, Susan (Lily) and Elizabeth (Lolly), and in its latter years, by George Yeats, as Bornstein rightly states. It was one of the first initiators of private printing presses in the Anglo-phone tradition in the early-twentieth century that provided inspiration for other women-led publishing enterprises. However, the discussion of

¹ This term, alternative communications circuit, is coined by Trysh Travis in her study of women in the print movement history. See TRYSH TRAVIS, *The Women in Print Movement History and Implications*, »Book History« XI, 2008, pp.275-300.

² LIAM MILLER, *An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press 1951-1976*, Dublin, Dolmen, 1976.

³ *The Irish Press*, 25 Oct. 1937. Contemporary website examples include www.apollogallery.ie who claim that Cecil Salkeld was the »owner of The Gayfield Press« and digital databases such as www.ricorso.net where it is claimed that Ewart Milne published his first collection on «Cecil Salkeld’s Gayfield Press», 1938. At the time of writing, the Apollo gallery was closed.

⁴ See also Janet Marek’s study of Bryher’s and H.D.’s publishing history for examples of the invisibility of women in literary history. JAYNE MAREK, *Toward International Cooperation: The Literary Editing of H.D and Bryher*, in *The Book History Reader*, II, David Finkelstein, Alistair McCleery, eds., London and New York. Routledge, 2002, pp. 377-385.

⁵ George Bornstein has written extensively on this topic. For further information, see GEORGE BORNSTEIN, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.33.

this press, like the Gayfield Press, is often seen as a «pendicle of the poet W. B. Yeats, his family firm, and notable chiefly for his fine selection of modern literary texts».¹ Simone Murray has challenged this version of history and the legitimacy of reading the history of the Cuala Press through the interpretative lens of its male editor, W. B. Yeats. Instead, Murray has called for a consideration of the press as a gendered publishing enterprise, bringing attention to the prominent role of Elizabeth Yeats in this press.² Likewise, the consideration of the Gayfield Press as a feminist press, brings to light the critical role of Salkeld, and her controlling role as owner and editor, in this modernist press.

The material evidence verifies that business ownership, and consequently financial and editorial power, rested with Salkeld (Fig. 1). Headed notepaper of the period provides material proof of this feminist venture with its list of services advertised as »Poetry, Belles Lettres, Music & Fine Arts, Etc.«, positioned on the top right-hand side with the name «Blanaid Salkeld» and underneath »Cecil ffrench Salkeld« positioned on the top left-hand side.

¹ GIFFORD LEWIS, *The Yeats Sisters and The Cuala*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1994, p.116.

² SIMONE MURRAY, *The Cuala Press: Women, publishing, and the conflicted genealogies of feminist publishing*, »Women's Studies International Forum«, XXVII, 2004, pp. 489– 506.

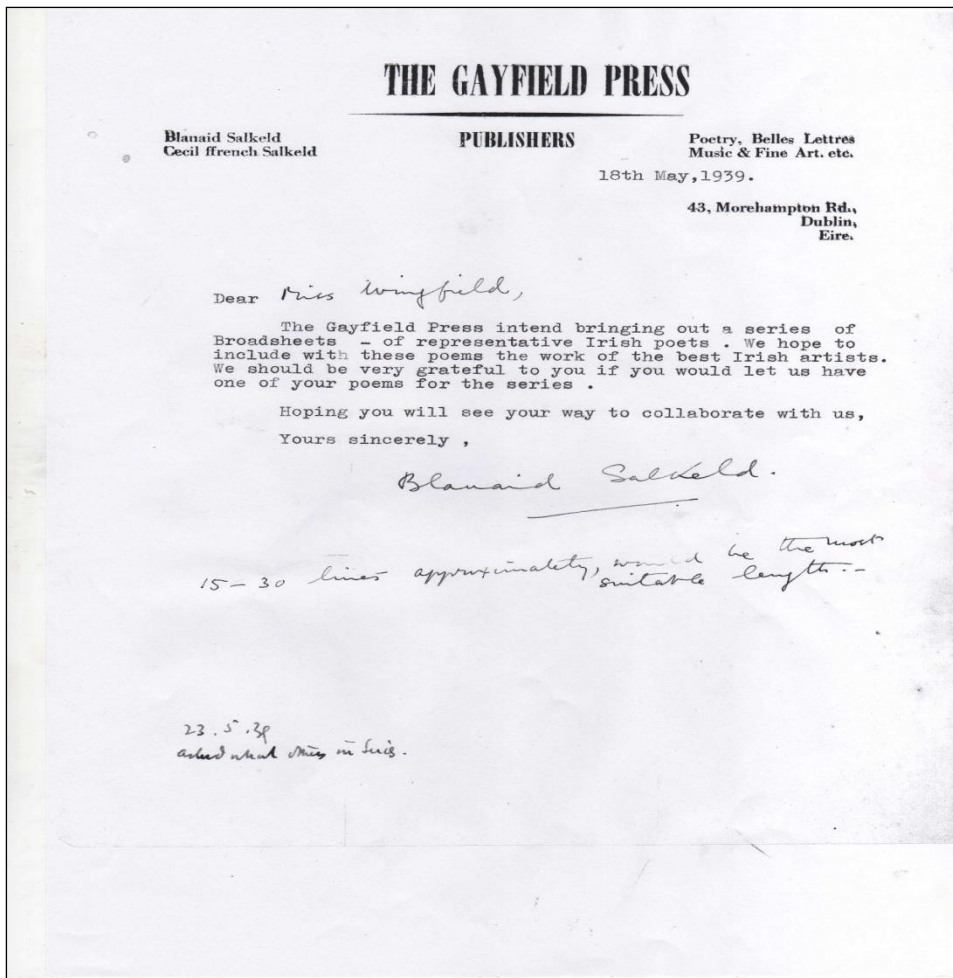


Fig. 1 Salkeld to Wingfield, 18 May 1939 (N.L.I. Sheila Wingfield Papers, 107, MS29047 /34).

Furthermore, accounts in the Irish government Companies Registration Office illustrate that Salkeld established the Gayfield Press as a legitimate business, registering it under the name, The Gayfield Press, on October 7, 1937. This was signed by «Florence» [Blanaid] Salkeld with an official address, 43 Morehampton Road, Donnybrook, Dublin (Fig. 2).¹ If ownership confers power and intellectual freedom then the establishment of a private printing press created literary freedom – as the familiar maxim goes: »freedom of the press belongs to

¹ Blanaid regularly signed her letters «Florence» [her English name].

those who own one «.¹ As her contemporary Virginia Woolf declared after establishing the Hogarth Press with her husband Leonard in 1917,


It's very amusing to try with these short things, and the greatest mercy to be able to do what one likes – no editors, publishers, and only people to read who more or less like that sort of thing.² Equally, ownership of The Gayfield Press provided Salkeld with the opportunity to create her own literary mark in the publishing industry and augment her reputation as a poet.³

¹ This point is also made by Simone Murray in her analysis of The Women's Press. See SIMONE MURRAY, *Books of Integrity: The Women's Press, Kitchen Table Press and Dilemmas of Feminist Publishing*, «The European Journal of Women's Studies», V, 1998, pp. 171-193.

² JOHN H. WILLIS, *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917-41*, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1992.

³ *Ibidem*

Business Name Printout



Business 19770 **THE GAYFIELD PRESS**

Previous Name(s)

Registered Office 43 Morehampton Road
Dunmybrook
Dublin

Type Business Name - Body Corporate

Date Registered 07/10/1937

Designation Normal
Date of Designation

Business Name Owners

Florence Salkeld
43 Morehampton Road
Dunmybrook
Dublin

Date Received

** Indicates documents have been scanned for the submission*

Submission Status Explanations

CERTP CERTIFICATE PRINTED
CERTS CERTIFICATE SCANNED
DATA DATA ENTERED
RRC RECEIVED
RECOR RECORDED
REG REGISTERED
RETAM RETURNED AMENDED
SCAN SCANNED

End of Particulars

Date 12/07/2012 Company: 19770, THE GAYFIELD PRESS Page 1 of 1

Fig 2. Evidence of company owner which lists Florence (Blanid) Salkeld as the owner of The Gayfield Press (Irish Company Registration Offices (C.R.O.) Copy of Business Name Printout).

The launch of the press and Blanaid Salkeld's publishing and literary credentials can be traced in the columns of the national newspapers. In an article entitled 'Woman Poet' in *The Irish Press* on 25 October 1939, Salkeld first book with the Gayfield Press was announced: Blanaid Salkeld is to have a new volume of poetry out shortly, I hear. It is called »...*the engine is left running*. " Mrs Salkeld, who has been published in the "Spectator", "London Mercury" etc., has a poem in the current number of the "criterion" edited by T.S. Eliot.»¹ Salkeld's shift from poet, dramatist and saloniere, to business woman and publisher, was also revealed in this column: »Till now, she has been the hard-working Hon, /secretary of the Women Writers' Club, but recently resigned the secretaryship owing to pressure of business«.² Salkeld was keen to promote her press as a publisher of de luxe editions of Irish writing, and must have delighted in the exposure it received in *The Irish Press*: «I gather the Gayfield Press intends specialising in limited editions, fine art productions, handwritten MSS, and many things for the connoisseur, as well as ordinary publications.»³ From the beginning, then, Gayfield Press was situated in the context of a specialty book publisher, distinctly separate to mainstream publishing houses."⁴ Salkeld's creative energy also went into promoting the Gayfield Press. At the first Irish Book Fair, held in the Mansion House in Dublin in 1941, she exhibited her press under the "wings" of the main distributor, Easons & Son; alongside other regional publishers such as the Quota Press, Dundevalgan Press and the Waterford- based Carthage Books.⁵ During the Fair, Irish booksellers and publishers erected professional displays, earmarking best-selling authors in glass cases with first editions, paintings, manuscripts, literary curios and special bindings. Talks were given by well-known writers such as Denis

¹ *The Irish Press*, 25 Oct. 1937, p. 5.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *The Irish Independent*, 19 Mar.1941, p.4. The Sign of the Three Candles, the printing press established by Colm Ó Lochlainn, was on display at this Book Fair. Included on his display was a Charles Lamb painting 'Hearing the News'.The 'first prayer book in Irish', printed in 1608, was also on display.

Johnston and Elizabeth Bowen and it drew crowds of six thousand people over four days.¹

Participation in this Fair, ensured that the Gayfield Press was perceived to be part of the social and artistic movement that promoted Irish writers and Irish books, as well as a distinct and separate publisher of rare editions.

At the same time, Salkeld was actively promoting her press in the public sphere. At a post-Book Fair event, entitled ‘Authors, Books and Booksellers’, organised by Irish P.E.N. and publicised in *The Irish Times*, she spoke to the audience about the book trade. Speakers on the night included »Miss Rosamond Jacobs, Mrs Blamad (*sic*) Salkeld (The Gayfield Press), Mrs Hilda Nolan (Browne & Nolan).«² Her presence amongst the networks of women publishers, librarians and literary women, provides ample evidence of a significant female presence within publishing circles, and suggest that her role as owner of The Gayfield Press was recognized amongst fellow- intellectuals. Also among those who spoke about the difficulties for Irish books was W. B. Lyons, editor of the influential Talbot Press, whose mainstream publishing house concentrated on popular genres in lucrative nationalist, devotional (Catholic) and educational markets. Lyons stated that Irish books needed special encouragement and hoped the interest shown at the Book Fair might not be «transitory»³ For mainstream publishers such as the Talbot Press, the business of books depended on the reading public and profitable ventures. As Lyons explained to an aspiring poet:

It would probably cost £50 or £60 to bring out the book in a form worthy of the poem. And if you could sell 500 copies at 2s or 2s.6d each, you would make a profitable venture. It is, however, very difficult to sell 500 copies of a volume of poetry.⁴

¹ *The Irish Independent*, 19 Mar.1941, p.4. The Sign of the Three Candles, the printing press established by Colm Ó Lochlainn, was on display at this Book Fair. Included on his display was a Charles Lamb painting ‘Hearing the News’.The ‘first prayer book in Irish’, printed in 1608

² *The Irish Times*, 1 Apr. 1941, p.8.

³ *Ibidem*

⁴ 381 books were published in Ireland between 1938 and 1943 where in Britain 14,900 were published before wartime shortages limited production. See TONY FARMER , *Financial and Market Factors, 1895-1995*, in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book*, cit., pp. 209-243.

Mainstream publishing houses such as the Talbot Press, as Lyons explained to his audience, focused on mass-market readership and profit, which was achieved through the sale of popular low-brow books. The Gayfield Press, on the other hand, adopted a different strategy for pricing of its limited editions (Fig. 3).

The cost of publishing meant that high risk strategy of publishing new experimental works needed to be offset against publishing works by established writers or by private commissions. It is likely that the following publications were commissioned by the authors: Marcella Ecclesine's children's book, *Once Upon a Time. Being Stories about a fierce Ogre and a small Boy, and a little Princess and a tiny Bird* (circa 1938);¹ Kathleen Kirwan's political tract, *Towards Irish Nationalism: A Tract* (1938);² and Fergus N. Fitzgerald's anti-war text, *Sennet for Coriolan: a Chorus for Six Voice* (1941). Works by popular authors of the period, such as Moirin Cheavasa and Patricia Lynch, commanded higher prices for their books. This strategy appears to have paid off. Publications such as *Sennet for Coriolan* was charged at a standard book price of 2/6 (the following year, Robert Graves *No More Ghosts* by Faber was priced at 2/6) while Cheavasa's *The Fall of the Year* (1940) was priced at 7/6, and Lynch's *Lisheen at the Valley Farm and other Stories* (1946) was priced at 5/6.³ This gives the impression that the Gayfield press produced less in order to make a higher profit, aiming their books at speculators and wealthy subscribers – not general consumers.

¹ This quarto book on printed card featured four monochrome plates by Cecil Salkeld. There is no further information on Ecclesine. It is possible this was a private commission and the publication was not for public distribution.

² Kathleen Kirwan (Sister Mary Bega) was a missionary Franciscan Sister. She spent some time in Cairo, Alexandria and Rome in the 1930s and 1940s and had to flee Palestine. To date, it is difficult to find any information about the author, save for a newspaper article, which claims she possibly settled eventually in Pittsburg, USA. *Drogheda Independent*, 14 Mar. 2012.

³ *Lisheen at the Valley* was a collaborative project by writers Patricia Lynch,, Helen Staunton and Teresa Deevy. Illustrations for *Lisheen* were drawn by Beatrice Salkeld, grand-daughter of Blanaid and daughter of Cecil French Salkeld.

Author	Book Title
Blanaid Salkeld	<i>...the engine is left running</i> (1937)
Ewart Milne	<i>Forty North, Fifty West</i> (1938)
Marcella Ecclesine	<i>Once Upon a Time</i> (c.1938)
Kathleen Kirwan	<i>Towards Irish Nationalism: A Tract</i> (1938)
Ewart Milne	<i>Letter from Ireland</i> (1940)
Moirin Cheavasa	<i>The Fall of the Year</i> (1940)
Fergus N. Fitzgerald	<i>Sennet for Coriolan</i> (1941)
Helen Staunton, Patricia Lynch, & Teresa Deevy	<i>Lisheen at the Valley Farm and Other Stories</i> (1946)

Fig. 3 List of publications of The Gayfield Press (1937-1946)

The success of the Gayfield Press, then, rested on its ability to publish a wide diversity of texts. Salkeld's modernist credentials surfaced in its first publication, with a collection of her poetry, [...] *the engine is left running* (1937), which presented her dissident philosophies on feminism, nationalism and religion.¹ This was followed in 1938 and in 1940 by Ewart Milne's *Forty-North, Fifty West* (1938) and *Letter to Ireland* (1940). The inspiration to publish the unknown Milne was influenced by trends established by international presses of the early twentieth century. This included Harriet Munroe's Chicago-based journal *Poetry*, whose open door policy included publishing works by new poets. Salkeld's link with *Poetry* was established when the editor T.S. Eliot published a series of Irish poems for a special edition in January 1935, which featured Salkeld's poem, 'One in Dublin'. Furthermore, the ideas expressed by the Marxist poet Milne undoubtedly appealed to the radical Cecil Salkeld, whose previous experience in publishing, included the short-lived periodical *To-morrow*, edited by Cecil Salkeld and Francis Stuart in 1924. *To-morrow* was a controversial newspaper-styled periodical in which Yeats contributed his unpublished poem, 'Leda and the

¹ Moynagh Sullivan has written extensively on Blanaid Salkeld's poetry. See MOYNAGH SULLIVAN, *I Am Not Yet Delivered of the Past': The Poetry of Blanaid Salkeld*, »Irish University Review«, XXXIII, i. 2003, pp. 182-200, and, EADAM (2012), *The Woman Gardener': Transnationalism, Gender, Sexuality, and the Poetry of Blanaid Salkeld*, »Irish University Review«, XLII, i. pp. 53-71. See also KATY D'ARCY, *Almost Forgotten Names: Irish Women Poets of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s in Irish Literature*, in *Feminist Perspectives*, Patricia Coughlan, Tina O'Toole, eds., Dublin, Carysfort Press. 2008, pp.99-124.

Swan' and Salkeld published two poems; 'Marriage Song' and an untitled poem. It also included work by well-known Irish writers, Lennox Robinson, and Liam O'Flaherty. *To-morrow* folded after two issues when Robinson's story, 'The Madonna of Slieve Dun', caused a furore, due to the description of a rape scene in the story.¹ The reaction to the magazine foretells the introduction of the Censorship of Publications Act 1929, as the Irish Free State became increasingly conservative and dominated by the Catholic Church. Liberals such as the Salkeld's and their artistic milieu formed part of a resistance movement to this act, but it was widely accepted by the general public.

Almost from its origin, the Gayfield Press was situated within a framework of feminist international printing presses, as a publisher of deluxe limited editions. Private printing presses that had increased in popularity in post-war Britain; in particular women-run printing presses such as Harriet Shaw Weaver's magazine *The Egoist*, the aforementioned magazine *Poetry*, and Winifred Ellerman Bryher's publishing company, Brendin Publishing.² New opportunities, previously the reserve of men, opened up for professional women printers, encouraged by the apparent success of presses such as The Cuala Press. Indeed, presses headed and staffed by women provided what George Bornstein describes as "the first material incarnations of an astonishing number of modernist works," including W. B. Yeats major volumes of poetry, T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations*, Marianne Moore's *Poems* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*.³ Important support for new artists was provided by women such as Dora Marsden, editor of *The Egoist*, who agreed to serialize Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in her private press. So too, the Gayfield Press

¹ Periodical culture in Ireland in the 1920's was marked with the publication of experimental and radical magazines which was both transgressive and radical in intent. When Lennox Robinson's story was published in the magazine *To-morrow*, it created an uproar in the Carnegie Library Committee, in which he was a member, and eventually led to the resignation of the provost of Trinity. Further information can be obtained in NICHOLAS ALLEN, *Cabaret, Sex and Independence: Publishing in the early Free State*, in *Print Culture and Intellectual Life in Ireland, 1660-1941*, edited by Martin Fanning, Raymond Gillespie, Dublin, The Woodfield Press, 2006, pp.186-205.

² GEORGE BORNSTEIN, *Material Modernism*, cit., pp. 82.

³ *Ibidem*

published the first collection of poetry by emerging poets such as Ewart Milne and Sheila Wingfield. In publishing new writers, the Gayfield Press gave a forum to new voices of the period, and created a space for modernism in the Irish poetic tradition.¹

Women's involvement in 'little presses' contributed to the development of modernist aesthetics. This was supported by salon life which brought together an artistic community with the aim of expressing new ideas and drawing attention to new and innovative work.² These networks are evident in the private correspondence of literary women and the circles of influence in Dublin's literary scene. Salkeld's letter to Sybil Le Brocquy illustrates the development of their networks: »Jack S. has sent my book to the woman poet [Marianne Moore] and sent me on the nice letter she wrote about it«. ³ Furthermore, Salkeld's link with T.S. Eliot, one of the leading modernist poets of the time, demonstrates the dynamic and influential milieu in which Salkeld circulated: « Aiken has a long talk with T.S. Eliot chiefly about my poems! The only phrase he quoted was that he thought my blurb on the jacket very wonderful ». ⁴ Salkeld is referring to the following editorial in Milne's *Forty North, Fifty*

West:

It was enough for him [Milne] to pick up a copy of T.S. Eliot on a second-hand book-cart, to realise that poetry – even for an able seaman, is the only way out⁵

This description collapses the notion that poetry was written for an educated elite and foregrounds Salkeld's idea that poetry was not the reserve of wealthy intellectuals. This democratic view of modernist poetry has links with the more liberal, less élitest modernist

¹ Milne's poetry continued to gain critical attention and he published in influential British literary journals such as John Lehmann's *New Writing* and *The New English Weekly*. Wingfield published seven more collections of poetry with various publishers, including two with the Dolmen Press.

² This point is made by Jayne Marek in her discussion of modernism, 'little' magazines and presses. See JAYNE MAREK, *Magazines, presses and salons in women's modernism*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers* edited by Maren Tova Linett, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010. pp.62-77.

³ Blanaid Salkeld to Sybil Le Brocquy, 15 Oct.1955 (National LibraryIreland, Le Brocquy Papers, MS 24,2321/1).

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ EWART MILNE, *Forty North, Fifty West*, Dublin, The Gayfield Press, 1938, n.p.

women writers such as Marianne Moore, Virginia Woolf, Nancy Cunard and others.¹ Their political ideology included the rights of individuals, and in particular, women, to education and participation in the cultural sphere; a conviction which Blanaid Salkeld and her fellow-intellectual shared.

The establishment of the Gayfield Press raises a question of intent. Was it a revolt against censorship, a means of negotiating access to the cultural sphere for women writers, or, an attempt to promote and defend a place for poetic expression in a rapidly declining marketplace?

Certainly, the Gayfield Press had a radicalizing intent. It was used to challenge dominant cultures, publish seditious material, and provide a vital forum for publishing experimental books, without interference from Church or State. Private printing presses were an effective means of circumventing censorship, with their limited editions and specialised readership.² The Gayfield Press successfully evaded the watchful eye of the censorship board, despite the subversive material printed on its Albion press. Examples include Fergus N. Fitzgerald's book, *Sennet for Coriolan* (1941), that portrayed the effect of war on three generations of a German family, at a time when security policy ruthlessly censored any discussion of the Second World War. Similarly Ewart Milne's collection of Poetry, *Letter from Ireland* (1940) avoided censorship, despite its anti-war and Marxist sentiment. As Robin Skelton stated: »But what censor cares about a circulation of only 300 copies among the literary and artistic set?«³ The collective efforts of the literati to protest against censorship meant that this small close-knit community of intellectuals and activists were often the focus

¹ Further information on modernism and gender is available in RACHEL POTTER, *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900-1930*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

² Robin Skelton makes the point that the Cuala Press could have been censored, had they been produced commercially, but were below the radar of the censors due to the limited amount produced. ROBIN SKELTON, *Twentieth-century Irish Literature and the Private Press Tradition: Dun Emer, Cuala and the Dolmen Presses 1902-1963*, in »Massachusetts Review«, V, ii, 1964, pp. 368-377.

³ Ivi, pp. 371.

of surveillance during the ‘Emergency’. But this was circumvented through the printed press and its discerning readership.¹

To judge from Salkeld’s pioneering background as the founder of the radical Women Writers’ Club (1933-1958), a literary club for professional women writers, Salkeld’s conscious impulse was to promote and publish women’s writing. Five publications out of eight, were by women; predominately from her inner literary circle.² Furthermore, her coterie of female writers were active campaigners in the debates about women’s right to ‘earn a living’, which dominated Irish editorial columns during the 1930s. They formed powerful alliances with other feminist groups in the campaign against the draft Constitution 1937 and resisted any efforts by the Irish government to diminish their rights as citizens.³ The battle for financial independence was part of an overall goal to empower women to become fully participating citizens, a goal which failed to materialize, despite the success of achieving suffrage and the removal of barriers to education. In other Anglophone countries, and in particular, in Britain, discussions on women in the professions were on-going during the inter-war years. Women responded by setting up professional groups for women whom they could join according to trade or industry.⁴ In America, the rise of the professional woman occurred as opportunities were opening up for women, eased in particular by their ability to travel and an ideology that careers were possible for women: «Hallmarks of the professions were training and service, open to idealization by aspiring women – all you needed was

¹ The term ‘The Emergency’ was used in Ireland during the Second World War. Ireland maintained a policy of neutrality during this period (1939-1945).

² Helen Staunton (aka Sybil le Brocquy), Teresa Deevy and Patricia Lynch were prominent members of the Women Writers’ Club.

³ Much has been written about the the feminist campaign against the draft constitution. See SENIA PASETA , *Women and Civil Society: Feminist Responses to the Irish Constitution of 1937*, in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions*, edited by Jose Harris, J., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 213-229 and MARIA LUDDY (2005) *A ‘Sinister and Retrogressive’ Proposal: Irish Women’s Opposition to the 1937 Draft Constitution*, » *Transactions of the RHS*», XV, 2005, pp. 175-195.

⁴ Examples include the Federation of British Professional and Business Women, the Advertising Club, the Soroptomists, the Venture Club, and many more. See Linda Perriton’s work on the women’s organisation the Federation of British Professional and Business Women, a professional women’s group during the interwar years. LINDA PERRITON, *Forgotten Feminists: the Federation of British Professional and Business Women, 1933–1969*, in » *Women's History Review*«, XVI, I, 2007, pp. 79-97.

brains and commitment».¹ The appeal of professional status centred on the premise that the individual would be judged on personal merit and attainments, not on gender or class. They saw this as a means of relocating power within society in the belief that structured knowledge *is* power. An increased number of women entering into the professions became one of the key demands of feminists, especially in ‘learned’ areas such as law, medicine, academia and publishing.² By controlling the means of production, the act of publishing itself, was an important factor in maintaining and shaping a female-centred literary culture.

The bohemian creed of ‘l’art pour l’art’, espoused by Salkeld and her literary milieu is manifest in her efforts to promote and defend a place for poetic expression in a rapidly declining marketplace. During this period, many writers experienced difficulties in getting published; so too did Blanaid Salkeld. Prior to establishing the Gayfield Press in 1937, Salkeld had published two volumes of poetry with British Publishers, including *Hello Eternity* (1933) with L.K. Mathews and Marrot and *The Fox’s Covert* (1935) with J.M. Dent.³ Later in 1935, she sent her collection of poetry, ... *the engine is left running*, to the publishers Harrap & Co., and London Mercury, who turned down her request to publish her collection, indicating that the poems were not good enough for publication. It is likely the rejection of her work provided the impetus to set up her own press, free from editorial interference.

Thus, in 1939, the Gayfield Press embarked on a series of broadsheets entitled ‘Dublin Poets and Artists’. Like her international counterparts, Salkeld included male and female poets in her broadsheet publications; specifically inviting contributions from her network of established poets. This impressive list of poets included Austin Clarke, James Stephens, Padraig Colum and Seumus O’Sullivan; they were connected socially and culturally through

¹ See NANCY COTT, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987, p.217.

² Ivi, p.20.

³ These letters are held in the depositories of Pennsylvania State University, USA. Pennsylvania State, University, ‘Blanaid Salkeld letters and poems, 1936-1937’, Rare Books and Manuscripts (#1976-0127R/VF Lit), available <http://www.worldcat.org/title/blanaid-salkeld-letters-and-poems-1936-1937/oclc/57457720>.

membership of literary clubs such as the Academy of Letters and Irish P.E.N.¹ In addition, contributions were sought from emerging poets such as John Irvine, Roy McFadden, Donagh Mac Donagh, Robert Greacan and Sheila Wingfield. This non-commercial venture highlights the ambition of the press to create a critical forum for artistic expression, during a period of harsh rationing and severe paper shortages.² This is suggested in a letter to the poet Sheila Wingfield: “We [The Gayfield Press] are not in a position to pay fees – as the scheme is a large one and not a commercial proposition – as you may understand”.³ And, like their predecessor, the Cuala Press, they included drawings by leading artists of the period, such as Jack B. Yeats, Cecil Salkeld and Leslie Owen Baxter. These publications were well received within Dublin’s critical circles. Miller considered the Gayfield Press editions as representative of »Poetry Ireland«; recognising the role of the press as a vital force for creative production.⁴

It is worth making the point that the history of the broadsheet publications is complex and contradictory. For reasons which remain unclear, notable absences from the list of ‘representative poets’ include female contemporaries such as Mary Davenport O’Neill, Temple Lane, and Lorna Reynolds; although she courted Wingfield incessantly, sending her three separate letters seeking contributions for her series in 1939. Further research may shed new light on this anomaly, particularly as new material emerges on this historical period.

¹ The Academy of Letters and Irish P.E.N. were literary organizations set up in Ireland in 1932 and 1935 respectively. Membership often overlapped and both voiced their strong opposition to censorship of literature. Blanaid Salkeld was a life-long member of Irish P.E.N., but there is no indication that she was a member of Irish Academy of Letters.

² Shortages of paper also caused hardship for the Cuala Press who were unable to source special paper that they used in their limited editions. According to Ann Saddlemeyer, this was one of the factors which led to the printing of their final book in 1945. The Cuala Press continued to publish greeting cards and hand-coloured prints until the death of George Yeats in 1968. See ANN SADDLEMYER, *The Creation of a Literary Industry*, in «Éire-Ireland», 35, 2000/2001, pp. 34-47.

³ Salkeld to Wingfield, 27 May 1939 (National Library of Ireland, Sheila Wingfield Papers, 107, MS 29,047/34).

⁴ TOMAS DILLON REDSHAW, (2012) ‘*The Dolmen Poets*’: *Liam Miller and Poetry Publishing in Ireland*, 1951-1961, in »Irish University Review«, XLII, 2012, pp. 141-154.

Some clues suggest a desire to remain independent and impartial. This policy was emphatically outlined in the editorial on the cover of *Forty North, Fifty West* in 1938:

The Gayfield Press publishes entirely at its own discretion - uninfluenced by fashionable tastes, cliques or coteries. It will continue to bring out limited and illustrated Editions [*sic*] of special interest”¹

At stake was the professional image of the press, as it embarked on its first years in the publishing trade. Notwithstanding, Salkeld’s ability to elicit poetry from traditional and modern poets, integrate visuals and text in her books and encourage new writing, ensured that the series had a diverse range of literary styles.

To date, no record exists of any publication of the press after 1946. The reason for its demise is yet not clear, although the ill-health of Salkeld from this period, together with Cecil Salkeld’s deteriorating mental health, are possible reasons.² It was a modest venture, yet its legacy can be seen through the prism of its creative success and its importance as a vehicle for facilitating the careers of emerging modernist poets and promoting women’s writing. As an agent of change, the press provided the first publishing platform for the Marxist poet, Ewart Milne; as well as a forum for the works of emerging Irish poets and artists. As a publisher it was radical in its intent and was well received in literary communities. Most importantly, the presence of a woman publisher challenged perceived notions of a male dominated business and signalled a central role for pressing women in the material production of modernist and experimental texts. The achievements of Blanaid Salkeld and her Gayfield Press were immense. She succeeded in publishing eight books and a variety of broadsheets against a background of scarce resources, a draconian censorship regime and an increasingly conservative readership. As a publisher of ‘connoisseur’ books, it is satisfying that the books published by the Gayfield Press now command high prices in the

¹ EWART MILNE, *Forty North, Fifty West*, cit., n.p.

² Beatrice Behan (nee Salkeld) states in her memoirs that her grandmother was an invalid for ten years and unable to attend her wedding to Brendan Behan in 1955. Also, Cecil experienced deteriorating mental health in the 1950s. See BEATRICE BEHAN, *My Life with Brendan*, London, Leslie Frewin, 1973, p.55.

contemporary book trade and the series of broadsheets are increasingly sought by art and book collectors.