Modernist Presses and the Gayfield Press

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Abstract:
Liam Miller's first publication for his Dolmen Press was Thomas Kinsella's 'The Starlit Eye' which he printed on a wooden press: "loaned from Cecil ffrench Salkeld who used it to publish his Gayfield Press series of Dublin poets and artists". Since the publication of Miller's text, The Gayfield Press (1937-1946) has received little attention and its history has been lost or forgotten. Furthermore, the role of its editor, Blanaid Salkeld, is virtually erased from cultural memory. Drawing on archival material and official documentation, this paper sheds light on this little-known feminist press, and foregrounds the central role of Blanaid Salkeld as a contributor, editor and publisher of the Gayfield Press. Ownership of the press provided Salkeld with the opportunity to create her own literary mark in the publishing industry and augment her reputation as a poet. It also afforded her the freedom to produce and distribute cultural texts of her choice and publish texts of her circle of female writers. The Gayfield Press published poetry from young emerging poets such as Ewart Milne and Sheila Wingfield. In addition to book publishing, it published a series of broadsheets featuring the poetry of established poets such as Austin Clarke and Padraig Colum, with illustrations by leading artists of the period such as Cecil ffrench Salkeld and Jack B. Yeats. 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.

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