Estudios Irlandeses, Issue 21.2, 2026, pp. 43-53.
https://doi.org/10.24162/EI2026-15130
AEDEI

Samuel Beckett and Blanaid Salkeld: Connections, Critique, and Collaboration

Gráinne Condon
Independent Scholar

Copyright (c) 2026 by Gráinne Condon. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged for access.

Abstract. This paper traces some of the connections between the canonical Samuel Beckett (1906-89) and the almost-forgotten Blanaid Salkeld (1880-1958). Both were involved with the Irish literary scene, had mutual friends, and moved in the same social and creative circles. During the 1930s, the second decade of the Irish Free State, while Beckett travelled between Ireland and other European countries, Salkeld remained living and immersed in Dublin's artistic activities. In August 1934, under the pseudonym Andrew Belis,[1] Beckett's opinion piece "Recent Irish Poetry" was published in *The Bookman*. Here, Beckett distinguishes between the "antiquarians", poets invested in Ireland's past and who then dominated the Irish poetry scene, and "others" who display more modern tendencies in their verse (1934: 235). Nestled within Beckett's polemic, which is predominantly focused on male poets, is his views on Salkeld's debut collection, *Hello! Eternity* (1933). Explored here are Beckett's cross-generational friendships with the Salkeld family, his perspective on Blanaid Salkeld's poetry as well as his intended contribution to her successful broadsheet series: *Dublin Poets & Artists* (circa. 1939–43). Intertwined in this examination are associations with three small, private presses: the Europa Press, which was founded by their mutual friend George Reavey, the Cuala Press, which was set up by Elizabeth "Lolly" Yeats and Susan "Lily" Yeats, and Salkeld's Gayfield Press, which she co-founded with her son, Cecil, in 1937. Also informing this examination are new findings from this author's discovery and ongoing analysis of Blanaid Salkeld's private literary archive.

Key Words. Irish Free State poetry, Irish Modernism, canon of modern Irish poetry, private presses (Gayfield, Cuala, Europa), women's literary archives.

Resumen. Este artículo rastrea algunas de las conexiones entre el canónico Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) y la casi olvidada Blanaid Salkeld (1880-1958). Ambos estuvieron vinculados a la escena literaria irlandesa, compartieron amistades y se movieron en los mismos círculos sociales y creativos. Durante la década de 1930, la segunda década del Estado Libre Irlandés, mientras Beckett viajaba entre Irlanda y otros países europeos, Salkeld permaneció viviendo e inmersa en las actividades artísticas de Dublín. En agosto de 1934, bajo el seudónimo Andrew

[1] Belis was the (slightly misspelled) surname of Beckett's maternal grandmother, Anne (née Belas).

ISSN 1699-311X

Belis, el artículo de opinión de Beckett "Recent Irish Poetry" fue publicado en *The Bookman*. En él, Beckett distingue entre los "antiquarians", poetas centrados en el pasado de Irlanda y que dominaban entonces la escena poética irlandesa, y "others", que muestran tendencias más modernas en su poesía (1934: 235). En el seno de esta polémica, centrada principalmente en poetas masculinos, se incluyen sus valoraciones sobre el primer poemario de Salkeld, *Hello! Eternity* (1933). Este trabajo examina las amistades intergeneracionales de Beckett con la familia Salkeld, su perspectiva sobre la poesía de Blanaid Salkeld, así como su intención de colaborar en su exitosa serie de pliegos: *Dublin Poets & Artists* (circa. 1939-43). Este análisis también aborda las conexiones con tres pequeñas editoriales privadas: la Europa Press, fundada por su amigo común George Reavey; la Cuala Press, creada por Elizabeth "Lolly" Yeats y Susan "Lily" Yeats; y la Gayfield Press de Salkeld, que co-fundó con su hijo Cecil en 1937. Asimismo, el estudio se nutre de nuevos hallazgos derivados del descubrimiento y análisis en curso por parte de la autora del archivo literario de Blanaid Salkeld.

Palabras clave. Poesía del Estado Libre Irlandés, modernismo irlandés, canon de la poesía irlandesa moderna, editoriales privadas (Gayfield, Cuala, Europa), archivos literarios de mujeres.

Beckett: The Salkeld Family Friend

The context of the Irish Free State is an important backdrop for considering the linkages examined here between Samuel Beckett and Blanaid Salkeld. In December 1922, tensions over the partition of the island of Ireland, formalised by the constitution of the Irish Free State, sparked a civil war which ended a year later with the victory of the Free State over the Republican forces. The trauma and disruption of this conflict cast a long shadow throughout the decades of the Irish Free State and Éire (1922-49). In 1929 the Censorship of Publications Act came into force. This legislation is an example of the increasing legitimisation of the restriction of artistic creation instituted in the nascent post-colonial State. Thousands of publications were banned, from Irish writers including Samuel Beckett to international authors including William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and Emile Zola. This Act and other restraints were the product of a political administration that "found the problems of establishing its legitimacy exacerbated by the unexpected but lethal and intense events of the civil war" (Horgan 2018: 62). Despite literary and cultural restrictions, in the 1930s and 1940s, there was a vibrant creative community in the Free State.

At the centre of Dublin's literati, Blanaid Salkeld was active and involved in many endeavours as a poet, actor, playwright, reviewer, translator, publisher, and activist. Reflecting this eclecticism, Salkeld had a wide social network and her "immediate circle consisted of a community of male and female writers, activists, publishers and journalists" (Brady 2024: 160). Salkeld's relationships traversed many spheres of Irish life, Brady remarks on her familiarity with "key political and literary figures with international profiles" as well as her "close personal connection" with Samuel Beckett (2024: 160).

Salkeld was also a *salonnière* and hers was one of several "at homes" during these years; "in those days Sunday was [George] Russell's night, Monday Yeats', Tuesday afternoon Sarah Purser's" (O'Connor 1968: 214). Their common friend Seumas O'Sullivan [James Starkey], with his artist wife Estella Solomons, hosted their salon on Sunday afternoons. Brian Fallon observes that it was at the Starkey's "at home" that the "young Samuel Beckett infringed etiquette by turning up obviously more than a little drunk" (1998: 81). His misconduct ultimately resulted in his exclusion from the Sharkey's residence: Beckett's "ill mannered" and

"eccentric behaviour became too much for the shy, retiring Estella […] he was barred from the house" (Bair 1990: 133).

Salkeld's son, the artist Cecil Ffrench Salkeld, was a contemporary and friend of Beckett's.[2] Between 1921 and 1924 Cecil studied Art in Kassel, Germany. Beckett himself says that Cecil's presence was among the reasons that his beloved aunt Cissie (Beckett) Sinclair and her family moved from Dublin to Kassel in the early 1920s; "there was a friend […] there: the poet (and painter) Cecil Salkeld. He was there. That's why he [William Sinclair - Cissie's husband] chose Kassel. I met him [Cecil] when I was there" (Beckett, cited in Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 35). Pursuing his artistic development may not have been Cecil's sole reason for pursuing his studies in Germany, moving there may also have presented him with an opportunity to avoid Blanaid's influence. As Anthony Cronin facetiously remarks; Cecil "found Germany a good place to escape from his mother to" (1996: 75). At one point, Cecil was a love rival of Beckett's for Cissie's daughter, Peggy Sinclair, "at first, her [Peggy's] affections seem to have been divided between her cousin and the talented young Irish painter Cecil Salkeld, whom she had known for some time in Kassel" (Knowlson 1996: 91). The Salkeld family connection with Beckett would extend to another generation, to Blanaid's granddaughter[3] Beatrice, and her husband Brendan Behan. Beatrice recalls how Beckett helped them when they were in Paris where "Samuel Beckett had befriended him [Brendan] and paid his landlady's bill" (Behan 1973: 61).

During the decade of the 1930s, Blanaid Salkeld made a move aimed at enhancing women's position within the extant restricted literary and creative milieu. Aware of the power of female solidarity, on 7 September 1933, Salkeld founded the Women Writers' Club which was initially run from her home at 43, Morehampton Road, Dublin. This group "fostered a literary canon that was distinctive and modern, and decidedly female" (Brady 2015). Reflecting Salkeld's extensive network, fifty-five people attended the first annual banquet of the Club including Dorothy Macardle, the Earl and Countess of Longford [Edward and Christine Packenham], Mary Devenport O'Neill, Professor Mary Hayden, Winifred Letts [Verschoyle], Salkeld's son Cecil, her cousin Madeleine ffrench-Mullen, Mainie Jellett, and Con Leventhal.[4] Met with early skepticism and generally dismissed as a social gathering for women writers, Brady argues that this was an erroneous assumption: "this was no frivolous social club. On the contrary, the Club was a united, politicised female group of writers connected through cultural and social networks, who were fully intent on using the power of the pen to express their art in a form that was determinedly female, oppositional and in many cases radical" (Brady 2024: 54). In existence for over two decades until the year of Salkeld's death in 1958, the Women Writers' Club "served as a fulcrum for much creative life in Ireland at that time" (Sullivan 2012: 53).

A year after the founding of the Women Writers' Club, in 1934, Beckett would stage his own intervention into the Irish literary landscape and wherein he would connect with Salkeld.

Beckett: Reader and Critic

Beckett's provocative 1934 opinion piece, "Recent Irish Poetry", was published at a time in Ireland which was characterised by, what Terence Brown calls, an "absence of that urge to make it new which so informed the manifestos […] which in Europe had stimulated Modernist experiment" (2010: 91). During the 1930s, despite moving between Ireland, France, Germany,

[2] See, for instance, Cronin (1996).
[3] Beatrice was Cecil's daughter.
[4] These attendees were reported in an article: "Women Writers' Club Annual Banquet", in *The Irish Times*, 11 December 1934: 8.

and England Beckett remained interested and engaged in Ireland's literary culture, wherein, Morin argues, "signs of his [Beckett's] participation are everywhere to be found" (2014: 209). In his "anachronistic essay RIP" which mapped the extant poetic landscape, Beckett sets up a binary opposition between Revivalists ("antiquarians") and Modernists ("others") (Nixon 2005: 45; Belis, 1934: 235). In this controversial paper, Beckett argues that the "antiquarians" are poets associated with the Celtic Twilight movement, preoccupied with Irish legends, myth, and folklore who issue their "Ossianic goods" with the "altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael" (1934: 235). For Beckett, these "antiquarians" dominated the contemporaneous terrain of Irish poetry and included William Butler Yeats, Austin Clarke, James Stephens, Rev. Monk Gibbon, and F.R. Higgins. In his polemic Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett opines, occupies an "intermediate" position between the traditionalists and the more modern versifiers (1934: 236). Among the "others" who represent the progressive tendencies within Irish poetry, Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey are, Beckett declares, "without question the most interesting of the younger generation of Irish poets" (1934: 236).

Beckett's use of a pseudonym indicates that he may have anticipated the uproar his article would provoke. James Knowlson posits this as a reason for this subterfuge arguing that Beckett "thought his article might offend those Irish poets whom he criticised adversely" (1996: 180). Whatever his rationale for using an alias, within mainstream Irish literary circles, the twenty-eight-year-old Beckett's essay created a storm. Soon after its publication, Devlin wrote to MacGreevy that, while he was "flattered" by the review, "it appears that Yeats was furious; it appears that Austin Clarke is vindictive by nature and will pursue Sam to his grave; it appears Seamas (sic) O'Sullivan[5] thought he might have been mentioned at least" (Schreibman 2012: 2).

Among the poets, and one of the few women included in "Recent Irish Poetry", is Blanaid Salkeld.[6] The presence of *Hello! Eternity* illustrates Beckett's up-to-date knowledge of the Dublin literary scene. Misrendering the title of her collection, Beckett observes of Salkeld's verse that "there is much […] that is personal and moving, when not rendered blue in the face by the sonnet form" (1934: 236). A generation older than Beckett, Salkeld's first published poetry collection *Hello! Eternity* was issued when she was fifty-three years old. Almost half of the forty-five poems in the collection are sonnets which attracted Beckett's ire. Indeed, Beckett was so incensed with this traditional form that he calls for "free verse to sit on the sonnet and put it out of action for two hundred years at least" (1934: 236). In his critique, while disliking the form of Salkeld's poetry, Beckett remarks positively on its emotional resonances.

Beckett may have over-concentrated on the form of Salkeld's verse without fully appreciating its subversive potential in *Hello! Eternity*. As, in this collection, while predominantly using a conventional form, Salkeld considers contentious themes. Examined in her volume are controversial issues of gender, the social institutions of marriage and the Catholic Church, the impacts of modernity, and the role of women and the woman writer within this extant restrictive (Irish) social and cultural milieu. This tendency is recognised by Ciara McGrath, who remarks that, in her inaugural collection, Salkeld "establishes a set of new and modern, pioneering themes and concerns" which she would revisit in her later works (2013: 47). In *Hello! Eternity*, by housing challenging content within a traditional poetic form, Salkeld commences her experimentation with what Beckett might consider, as more "modern" verse. This tendency would develop and become more overt in her poetry as the decade of the 1930s

[5] Seumas O'Sullivan (James Starkey) was a writer, editor and publisher who set up and edited *The Dublin Magazine* from 1923-58.

[6] The other women who are briefly mentioned in this article are Pamela [P.L.] Travers (who authored the *Mary Poppins* novels), Irene Haugh, and "Miss Large" (who may be fictitious).

progressed.[7] Beckett's view of the formal properties of Salkeld's poetry may also have resonated with the poet herself as, in her two subsequent collections, *The Fox's Covert* (1935) and . . . *the engine is left running* (1937), while still focusing on subversive and controversial themes, Salkeld increasingly innovates with poetic form.

While criticizing Salkeld's formal poetic choices in his 1934 polemic, Beckett does recognise the potential of her verse. Positioning Salkeld alongside the more modern cadre of Irish poets, Percy Arland Ussher, Thomas MacGreevy, Denis Coffey, and Denis Devlin, Beckett is including her among the group of writers he considers as forming "the nucleus of a living poetic in Ireland" (1934: 236). Here, Beckett is tracing the outlines of an Irish poetic Modernist canon. Throughout the 1930s Salkeld continued to develop her writing style to craft a suitable form of poetry to adequately reflect her position as an equal and autonomous citizen of an emergent nation state. In this, her most prolific decade, Salkeld's verse moves freely between established and innovative poetic forms and beyond Irish borders to consider and incorporate international themes. Perhaps Beckett's recognition of Salkeld within the early Modernist formation in Irish poetics also influenced her creative evolution and willingness to experiment during the 1930s.

In the early aftermath of its publication, Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry" was generally considered in "either-or" terms; that Irish poetry was polarised between verse tethered to Ireland's past and traditions contrasting sharply with more future-orientated and experimental writing. However, with the passage of time, more balanced and nuanced readings have emerged. Emilie Morin describes Beckett's essay as a "curious exercise in literary politics: Beckett adopts the stance of a reader with no apparent stake in Revivalist and neo-Revivalist endeavours, and yet his detailed overview of the development of modern Irish poetry betrays his involvement at every step" (2014: 209). Despite his complex relationship with Irish literature and spending time away from the country of his birth, Beckett remained connected with and networked in the contemporaneous Irish literary and artistic community. Alex Davis and Lee Jenkins argue that Beckett's paper was a timely and important "strategic intervention", a rallying cry to "make it new" within Irish poetics as well as a "critique of recent Irish culture in line with those made by writers antipathetic towards literary modernism" (2000: 143). In a similar vein, Brown cites "Recent Irish Poetry" and Mainie Jellett's [8] opinion piece on the state of Irish art, "Modern Art and the Dual Ideal of Form Through the Ages", which was published in *Motley* in 1931, as "two indisputably Modernist Manifestos of the 1930s" (2010: 93). Beyond its heated contemporaneous reception, principally among the Irish poetic community, and with the passage of time, the strategic significance and enduring legacy of the young Beckett's intervention into the 1930s Irish poetic landscape is being increasingly and critically recognised.

The French Connection

Acknowledging Beckett's complicated relationship with the country of his birth and his sustained involvement within the Irish arts scene, Mark Nixon argues that it "would be misleading to think of Beckett as entirely shunning the Irish cultural scene of the thirties […] Beckett was eager to be published not only in Parisian magazines but also Irish literary magazines" (2005: 46). Throughout the 1930s *The Dublin Magazine* published some, but not

[7] See my chapter "Blanaid Salkeld's Poetry of the 1930s: 'Peculiarly in and out of her Time'" in *A Nation, not A Parish: The Homewhere-s and Elsewhere-s of 1930s Irish Culture*, edited by Germán Asensio Peral, Madalina Armie, Verónica Membrive, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2025), 101-124.

[8] The pioneering artist Jellett and Beckett, both well-known to Blanaid Salkeld, were contemporaries. They moved in the same artistic and intellectual circles in the 1930s. Both Beckett and Jellett lived in Dublin and Paris and they likely met at one of the many Dublin salons or within the Parisian art scene of the early to mid-20th century.

all, of Beckett's submitted poetry. Reviews of Beckett's "Alba" (1931), "Gnome" (1934), and "Casando" (1936) featured in the periodical.[9]

Paris, which was in the early to mid-twentieth century an important site for a "transnational metropolitan modernism", would also become a significant location for the manifestation of Beckett's 1934 vision of a modern Irish poetics (Davis and Jenkins 2000: 251). A catalyst for making this vision a reality was the establishment of the Europa Press imprint. Support for this perspective is offered by James Matthew Wilson who argues that "Beckett's claim, of 1934, for a school of 'others' in Irish poetry was brought into substantial being" by the creation of the short-lived but influential Europa Press (2023: 158). This small publishing house was founded and operated by Beckett's friend, the Irish-Russian George Reavey. Reavey had befriended Beckett during his tenure, between 1928 and 1930, as an exchange lecturer at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. The Europa Press, which ran from 1935-39, was initially located in Paris before moving to London. While Europa only existed for a short period, its existence is, Sandra Andrea O'Connell argues, a "decisive moment in Irish Literary modernism" (2022: 65). Two of "six limited editions" issued by Europa in the 1930s were authored by the "other" writers praised by Beckett in his "Recent Irish Poetry": *Image at the Cinema* by Brian Coffey and *Poems* [which later became *Intercessions*] by Denis Devlin. Beckett's *Echo's Bones, and Other Precipitates* was issued by Europa in December 1935. Reavey's own collections accounted for the remaining three of these limited editions.[10]

While the initial list from the Europa Press was comprised solely of Irish writers. This changed in 1936, when Europa published *Thorns of Thunder: Selected Poems*, which was the first English-language collection of Éluard's love poetry, the Press became "internationalized" (O'Connell 2022: 66). This anthology was edited by Reavey, prefaced by Herbert Read, and included a drawing by Pablo Picasso. *Thorns of Thunder* comprises Éluard's poems translated from French into English by Beckett, Devlin, David Gascoyne, Eugene Jolas, Man Ray, Ruthven Todd, and Reavey. Beckett's translation of Éluard's "L'Amoureuse" opened the collection.[11] Beyond their friendship with Reavey, this anthology reveals another connection between Beckett and Salkeld.

Salkeld and Reavey were both fluent in Russian, founded their own printing presses, and their friendship may also have extended to creative collaboration. As, within Salkeld's papers are papers relating to *Thorns of Thunder: Selected Poems.* In this ad hoc archive are five separate English poems printed under the heading "THORNS OF THUNDER: Paul Eluard". On the bottom right-hand corner of each page are the typed initials "G.R.", likely George Reavey. This cluster of typed poems are: "Sequence", "Max Ernst", "The Game of Construction", "The World's First Night: To Pabl [sic] Picasso", and "Their Eyes Are Always Pure". It appears that these five poems in Salkeld's papers, which bear the initials "G.R.", may be some of Reavey's seventeen translations of forty-four Éluard poems in *Thorns of Thunder: Selected Poems*, as all five: "Suite", "Max Ernst", "Le jeu de construction", "Premier du Monde (a Pablo Picasso)", and "Leurs yeux toujours purs" are written by Éluard.[12] Explorations continue into Salkeld's papers to verify if these five poems are, in fact, those translated by Reavey in *Thorns of Thunder*. Salkeld's role in this endeavour is also being investigated.

---

[9] Beckett's "Gnome" as well as his review of MacGreevy's *Poems* (Heinemann) entitled "Humanistic Quietism" was published in *The Dublin Magazine* in July-Sept. 1934 (9.3), "Alba" was published by the periodical in Oct.-Dec. 1931 (6.4). "Casando" was published in the same journal in Oct.-Dec. 1936 (11.4).

[10] Reavey's three books are: *Nostradam,* (1935), *Signes D'Adieu* (1935)*, and Quixotic Perquisitions* (1939).

[11] See Sandra Andrea O'Connell's "Published in Paris: Samuel Beckett, George Reavey, and the Europa Press" for further information on *Thorns of Thunder: Selected Poems.*

[12] Éluard's "Premier du Monde (a Pablo Picasso)" is published in an English translation as "First in the World" in *Modern French Poets: Selections with Translations,* (New York: Dover, 1992), 176. "Max Ernst" was included in *Capital of Pain* which was originally published in 1926. "Le Jeu De Construction" first appeared in *Littérature, No. 8 (New Series),* edited by Louis Aragon, André Breton, and Philippe Soupault, on 1 January 1923, 6.

Beckett: The Contributor

Salkeld did not confine herself to promoting women's literature and pursuing her writing career. In 1937, she co-founded with her son Cecil a publishing house, the Gayfield Press, which she managed from her home. This was the same year that Beckett finally settled in Paris.

Salkeld's . . . *the engine is left running* is the inaugural publication of her Press, the first of two of her collected works issued by Gayfield. Co-founded and jointly operated by mother and son, Gayfield Press was in business between 1937-46. Gayfield Press operated in a strictly censored context. Brady argues that "privately owned printing presses were an effective means of circumventing censorship, with their limited editions and specialized readership" and perhaps Salkeld may have set up the Gayfield Press to bypass the strictures of the censorship laws. However, Gayfield Press may have had a broader vision than just censorship avoidance. This wider ambition is apparent in Gayfield's editorial policy, which is printed on the back cover of Ewart Milne's *Forty North, Fifty West* (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 of special interest" (Brady 2024: 151). Thus, it appears that Gayfield was driven less by a desire to publish material related to censorship concerns and more to maintain and promote artistic and creative autonomy in an increasingly authoritarian Irish State. The small circulation and artistic content of the Gayfield Press was also less likely to attract censor scrutiny, which is contended by Robin Skelton: "but what censor cares about a circulation of only 300 copies among the literary and artistic set?" (1964: 374).

The Gayfield Press did however attract the attention of the Censor which may also have been linked to a form of censorship specifically related to the Second World War and the product of the Emergency Powers Act (1939). This legislation granted the Irish government extensive authority through "Emergency Orders" which included censorship of the press and correspondence.[13] A number of letters in the archive received by the Salkelds had been opened prior to delivery. An example is a handwritten envelope addressed to "Cecil Salkeld Esq, 43, Morehampton Road, Dublin, IRELANDE" which has been unsealed and re-closed with a sticker "Opened by Censor" (number 123). The sender and address, handwritten on the back of this envelope, is "S. Beckett, 6, Rue des Favorites, Paris". Beckett moved to this address in April 1938 and remained for the next twenty years (see Mays 2009).[14] It is likely that the letter contained in this envelope, discussed later in this article, was related to Beckett's proposed contribution to the *Dublin Poets & Artists* broadsheet series. The opened letter confirms that the activities of Gayfield Press were subject to postal censorship during the Second World War.

Gayfield Press - *Dublin Poets & Artists* broadsheet series

Examined here, in another association between Salkeld and Beckett, is Gayfield's successful *Dublin Poets & Artists* broadsheet series. A folder in Salkeld's archive provides a rich vein of information on this successful initiative.[15] Salkeld's papers reveal that planning for the series was underway in the summer of 1939. To elicit contributions the mother and son team leveraged their "extensive connections in the literary community" (Brady 2024: 163). The spread for

[13] The Emergency Powers Act, 1939 permits the Irish Government to do "any of all" of the following: "authorise and provide for the censorship, restriction, control, or partial or complete suspension of communication by means of all or one or more of the services maintained or controlled by the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs or by any other means, whether public or private, specified or indicated in such emergency order" Section 2.2 (*h*). The full Act is available here: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1939/act/28/enacted/en/print#sec2

[14] The source is Mays, J.C.C. "Beckett, Samuel Barclay, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, https://www.dib.ie/biography/beckett-samuel-barclay-a0533

[15] Some snippets from Salkeld's archive are reproduced here by kind permission of Salkeld's great grandson.

Dublin Poets & Artists comprises an illustration and a poem. A typed list of proposed contributors, dated 30 August 1939, includes the poets W.B. Yeats, Padraic Colum, Seumas O'Sullivan, Denis Devlin, Philip Francis Little, Sheila Wingfield, Flann O'Brien, and Lyle Donaghy. Beckett was fourth of the twenty listed poets. Jack B. Yeats, Estella Solomons, Sean O'Sullivan, Harry Kernoff, and Mainie Jellett are included as proposed contributing artists. Gayfield had its own printing press which meant that, for the most part, the printing of the series could be undertaken in-house. This is a detail, in Salkeld's papers, which the writer is keen to highlight in Salkeld's draft letter dated 18 May 1939, soliciting a contribution from Beckett. Here, Salkeld points out that "we now have a Hand Press etc. and hope to produce the poems and pictures in the best style!". Notwithstanding Beckett's earlier critique of Salkeld's *Hello! Eternity*, relations between them are cordial. This letter, which is addressed to "Dear Sam", introduces the series and explains that each issue comprises "a poem and picture (not exactly an illustration) - representative of Dublin poets. We should be extremely grateful if you would give us one of your poems for the Series". The message also refers to Beckett's aunt, Cissie [Sinclair] and Nancy [her daughter] about whom Salkeld remarks that they "looked well when we saw them last".[16]

Beckett's response to Salkeld's request was swift. In his handwritten reply, within Salkeld's personal papers, dated May 1939, Beckett writes "Dear Blanaid, Thanks for your letter […] I have a few poems in French but nothing in English except 2 very short ones, I think 4 lines each. You are welcome to either of these. It would leave plenty of room for the illustration. Let me know if you want it. Good luck with the series". That Beckett did send Salkeld his proffered poem is confirmed by an entry within his "timeline" in his archive in Emory University which reads: "by 6 June 1939, Samuel Beckett sends a four-line poem to Blanaid Salkeld, following her request for a contribution to the Gayfield Press *Dublin Poets and Artists* series". At the time of writing, investigations continue into Salkeld's archive to find this Beckett short poem.

The four-line poem with pared down language, concision, and contraction is a recurring aspect of Beckett's oeuvre. Beckett's bleak, rhyming quatrain "Da Tagte Es", written after his father's death on 26 June 1933, was included in *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*, although he "failed to get published in *The Dublin Magazine*" (Mukim 2022: 205). As earlier noted, his four-line "Gnome" did get published in this journal. Beckett's "Saint-Lô", influenced by the location of the mobile Irish Red Cross Hospital group in Normandy where he served as a driver in the Second World War, was published in *The Irish Times* on 24 June 1946 (Knowlson 1996: 490).[17] While stand-alone, four-line poems are not a feature of Salkeld's poetics, quatrains reoccur in the structure of her verse. For instance, each of the final two ballads in *Hello! Eternity* comprises rhyming quatrains. The six-quatrain "Grieve Not" is written from the point-of-view of a predeceased lover who reassures their grieving partner that they will welcome them into "our safe house" when they too die. Written mainly in ABBA rhyme scheme, "Grieve Not" commences: "I stepped out before your coming. / That was a happy circumstance. / I shall make off too in advance, / To set the feast against your homing" (1933: 59). Later, in Salkeld's . . . *the engine is left running*, which is predominantly written in free verse, the quatrain reappears in "The Wild Heart". This cautionary poem, which praises the courage of men with "wild hearts", may be anticipating the Second World War by recalling how, in the First World War, the bodies of fallen soldiers were not repatriated and their decaying bodies were left to fertilise foreign lands: "Others, called to strew chill seeds, / To rake the crumbled clay - / Flowers may suck the soldiers' breed, / When blood's drained away" (1937: 11).

[16] This is likely a reference to Nancy Sinclair who married the artist Ralph Cusack. Nancy was Peggy's younger sister and Cissie's daughter. See Cronin (1996).

[17] The full text of "Saint-Lô" is reproduced in Gerald Dawe's *Earth Voices Whispering: An Anthology of Irish War Poetry* (2008: 152).

Echoes of "Recent Irish Poetry"

Beckett's swift response and support for Salkeld's *Dublin Poets & Artists* initiative is intriguing given his somewhat chequered relationship with another privately owned and small Irish printing press. Beckett's supportive stance towards Gayfield Press may be read as sharply contrasting with his attitude towards another small Irish publisher, Cuala Press, formerly Dun Emer, which was founded in 1907 by Elizabeth and Susan Yeats, the sisters of William Butler and Jack Yeats. Housed in Trinity College Dublin, the "Cuala Press Project" outlines that the aims and objectives of the Cuala Press were "aligned with the nationalistic tenets of the Irish Revivalist movement, which (re)defined and celebrated Irish identity, culture and heritage". Cuala became associated with artists and writers of the Irish Literary Revival, many of whom were among Beckett's "antiquarians" and the focus of his criticism in "Recent Irish Poetry". As Karen Brown notes, "notably, several of the writers of the Irish Revival attacked by Beckett published literature with Dun Emer and Cuala Press, including George Russell (*AE*), Austin Clarke, Frank O'Connor, and John Lyle Donaghy" (2011:118).[18] Beckett's enthusiasm, just a few years later, to contribute his poetry to the Gayfield Press, may be attributable to both his friendship with the Salkelds and that publishing house's more "modernist" editorial aspirations.

Conclusions

Considered here under the themes of family friendships, critique, and contributions are the various associations between Samuel Beckett and Blanaid Salkeld; the former a lauded and canonical figure within Irish literary history and the latter an almost-forgotten Irish woman writer and entrepreneur. The lives of Beckett and Salkeld intersect in various and interesting ways. His friendships with the Salkeld family extend across three generations. In 1908, two years after Beckett was born, Salkeld had returned to Dublin from India, as a young widow, with two small sons, where she stayed for the rest of her life. During the 1930s, while Beckett travelled extensively across Europe before settling in France in 1937, Salkeld remained ensconced in Dublin's artistic and literary scene. Recognised by Beckett in his 1934 "Modernist manifesto" as being among the poets displaying modern poetic tendencies, in a context which was artistically restricted and censored, Salkeld continued to forge her own artistic and enterprising path (Brown 2010: 93). Intrepid and innovative, Salkeld made two separate interventions in Irish literature during the 1930s: founding the Women Writers' Club in 1933 and co-establishing the Gayfield Press in 1937. The editorial policy of the Gayfield Press is where, Brady argues, Salkeld set out her own "unequivocal literary manifesto" (2024: 150). Illuminated and explored here, with the help of this author's recent discovery of Salkeld's personal papers, are some of these linkages that include Beckett's support for *The Dublin Poets & Artists* broadsheet series of Salkeld's Gayfield Press. The correspondences examined here between Salkeld and Beckett form part of the still evolving tapestry of artistic and literary life during the years of the Irish Free State.

Works Cited

Bair, Deirdre (1990 [1978]). *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, 2nd ed. New York: Touchstone.
Behan, Beatrice (1973). *My Life with Brendan*, 4th ed. Los Angeles: Nash Publishing.

[18] Karen Brown acknowledges that the artist Jack Yeats "who had been actively involved in the [Cuala] Press until 1926" and hence could be regarded as falling within the Revivalist tenets of the Cuala Press, avoids Beckett in his 1934 opinion piece. Brown concludes that "it is worth considering that this artist would have situated himself in the camp of Beckett's 'others' by the 1930s" (2011: 118).

Belis, Andrew [Samuel Beckett] (1934). "Recent Irish Poetry." *The Bookman* (August): 235–36.

Brady, Deirdre (2015). "An Irish Literary Set That Was More Bloomsbury than Barstool." *Irish Times* (May 7). https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/an-irish-literary-set-that-was-more-bloomsbury-than-barstool-1.2203909

_____ (ongoing). "The Gayfield Press." *The Modernist Archives Publishing Project* (online database). https://www.modernistarchives.com/business/the-gayfield-press

_____ (2024). *Literary Coteries and the Irish Women Writers' Club (1933-1958)*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Brown, Karen (2011). *The Yeats Circle: Verbal and Visual Relations in Ireland, 1880-1939*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Brown, Terence (2010). *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cronin, Anthony (1996). *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*. London: Flamingo.

David, Alex, and Lee Jenkins (2000). *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Emergency Powers Act (1939). No. 28 of 1939, *Irish Statute Book*. https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1939/act/28/enacted/en/print#sec2

Fallon, Brian (1998). *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Horgan, John (2018). "In the Firing Line: Censorship, the Civil War in Ireland, and Its Aftermath." *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 22 (4): 62–77. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48669911

Knowlson, James (1996). *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury.

Knowlson, James, and Elizabeth Knowlson (2006). *Beckett Remembering Beckett: A Centenary Celebration*. New York: Arcade Publishing.

Letter of Samuel Beckett (ongoing). *The Interactive Index of the Letters of Samuel Beckett in Public Archives*, ARCHIVES (Chercher), Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. https://chercherbeckettletters.emory.edu

Mays, J.C.C. (2009). "Beckett, Samuel Barclay." *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. https://www.dib.ie/biography/beckett-samuel-barclay-a0533

McGrath, Ciara (2013). "Women's Modernism in Peripheral Catholic Europe: The Poetry of Blanaid Salkeld and Concha Méndez." PhD diss., University of Washington. https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/items/4f2c6ba4-7e20-4f4c-85e5-042574858608

Morin, Emilie (2014). "Odds, Ends, Beginnings: Samuel Beckett and Theatre Cultures in 1930s Dublin." In *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, edited by S. E. Gontarski, 209–21. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mukim, Mantra (2022). "Lyric Failure: Samuel Beckett and Poetic Form." Unpublished thesis, University of Warwick, Department of English & Comparative Literary Studies. https://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/id/eprint/173229/1/WRAP_Theses_Mukim_2022.pdf

Nixon, Mark (2005). "'A Brief Glow in the Dark': Samuel Beckett's Presence in Modern Irish Poetry." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 35: 43–57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3509324

O'Connell, Sandra Andrea (2012). "Published in Paris: Samuel Beckett, George Reavey, and the Europa Press." In *Ireland In/And Europe: Cross-Currents and Exchanges*, edited by Werner Huber, Sandra Mayer, and Julia Novak, 4: 65–78. https://www.efacis.eu/sites/default/files/ISE%204_Huber,%20Mayer,%20Novak%20vol%20IV-1-17.pdf

O'Connor, Frank (1968). *My Father's Son*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Salkeld, Blanaid (1933). "Grieve Not." In *Hello! Eternity*, 59. London: Elkin Mathews.
_____ (1937). "The Wild Heart." In . . . *the engine is left running*, 11–12. Dublin: The Gayfield Press.
Schreibman, Susan (2012). "Irish Poetic Modernism: Portrait of the Artist in Exile." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, edited by Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis, 130–44. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Skelton, Robin (1964). "Twentieth-Century Irish Literature and the Private Press Tradition: Dun Emer, Cuala and the Dolmen Presses 1902-1963." *Massachusetts Review* 5 (2): 374.
Sullivan, Moynagh (2012). "'The Woman Gardener': Transnationalism, Gender, Sexuality, and the Poetry of Blanaid Salkeld." *Irish University Review* 42 (1): 53–71. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24577099
Trinity College Dublin (ongoing). "The Cuala Press Project." A Schooner Foundation project. https://www.tcd.ie/library/research-collections/projects/cuala/
Wilson, James Matthew (2023). *Catholic Modernism and the Irish 'Avant Garde': The Achievement of Brian Coffey, Denis Devlin and Thomas MacGreevy*. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.

Permission

Some of the details of Salkeld's private archive are published here with the kind permission of her great grandson Paudge Behan.

Received: 01/10/2025 Final version accepted: 15/02/2026

Dr Gráinne Condon is an independent researcher who has concurrently engaged in lifelong business and academic pursuits. Through her research, Gráinne examines the ways in which themes of conflict, displacement, and creative innovation intersect in women's poetry of the early twentieth century, illuminating the transnational dimensions of Irish literary modernism and, within it, the legacy of women's voices. She has presented papers, authored articles and led seminars on these topics. Her chapter "Blanaid Salkeld: 'peculiarly in and out of her time'" is published in *A Nation, not a Parish: The Homewhere-s and Elsewhere's of 1930s Irish Culture* (2025). Her chapter 'Mary Devenport O'Neill's poetic reception of Marcel Proust' features in *The Irish Proust: Cultural Crossings from Beckett to McGahern* (2025). Gráinne is currently finalizing a monograph with Bloomsbury Academic Press: *Women's Poetry, War and Modernism: Transnational Symmetries in the Wartime poetry of Letts, Ridge, H.D., and Wingfield.*

grainnecondon3@gmail.com

- https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8382-0108