

Module Title: The Irish Small Press & Little Magazine since 1950: Seizing the Means of Production

Dr Will Fleming

will.fleming.17@ucl.ac.uk (TCD email pending)

10 ECTS

Senior Sophister Option

Module Description:

To what extent does our study of Irish small presses and little magazines enable us to ‘take the pulse of a particular period’, as Frank Shovlin puts it? How much credence should we give to the claim, leveraged by Robert Kiely, that Irish ‘small-press publishers provide some inkling of the real dissent’ within cultural discourse? In this module, we will engage with the full operational remit of a diverse range of presses and publications—including, for instance, Field Day Pamphlets, *The Stinging Fly*, Tramp Press, and even Trinity’s own *Icarus Magazine*—blending archival research with close textual analysis in search of answers to these kinds of questions. Given this mixed methodological approach, our focus will alternate from week to week: between book-historical sessions on individual presses and publications operating across various periods since 1950, and sessions centred on close reading the literary products of this small-press labour against the many social, political, and economic issues to which they respond in each case. In these former book-historical sessions, we will look at an array of archival documents, manifestos, written editorials, paratextual materials, and other ephemera pertaining to each of the presses and publications under scrutiny, in order to understand their diverse material and aesthetic circumstances. In the latter literary-critical sessions, we will read works by the likes of Seamus Heaney, Claire-Louise Bennett, Catherine Walsh, Thomas Kinsella, and Maurice Scully against the backdrop of five major topics specific to the module’s timeline: nationalism, the North, financialisation, feminism, and austerity. This blended critical approach will allow us to consider how—if at all—such outlets successfully seized the means of cultural production, and whether this in turn blurs entrenched distinctions between canonical and marginal literatures in modern Ireland.

Module Content (subject to change):

Week 1: *Icarus Magazine* & Literary TCD

Week 2: Nationalism: Trevor Joyce & Thomas Kinsella

Week 3: *The Lace Curtain*, *Broadsheet* & the Counterculture

Week 4: The North: Field Day Pamphlets & *The Honest Ulsterman*

Week 5: *The Belle*, *The Beau* & Coelacanth Press

Week 6: Financialisation: Maurice Scully’s *5 Freedoms of Movement* (1987)

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: hardPressed Poetry, Coracle Press & the Celtic Tiger

Week 9: Feminism: Catherine Walsh & Ellen Dillon

Week 10: *The Stinging Fly*, Banshee Press, *Gorse* & Small-Press Publishing Now

Week 11: Austerity: Eimear Walshe & Christodoulos Makris

Week 12: Conclusion

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module, a student should be able to:

- Delineate the contours of a small-press literary tradition in Ireland since the middle of the twentieth century, as well as identify some of its major outlets and practitioners;
- Recognise the outsize impact that small-press publishing has had on the wider course of cultural production in modern Ireland, even from the putative margins;
- Combine analyses of individual literary texts with archival perspectives on the material, social, and political conditions out of which such texts emerge to contribute more nuanced scholarship on modern Irish cultural history;
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of some of the major political and social events which have intersected in interesting ways with the field of cultural production in Ireland over the last 75 years.

Learning Aims:

This module aims to provide students with the skills to:

- Undertake archival research in support of more focused literary-critical analysis;
- Critically evaluate a number of small-press texts, detailing how they respond to the intricate sociopolitical contexts out of which they emerge;
- Speak articulately to some of the major social and political issues and events in Ireland's history since modernisation;
- Recognise the important position that a small-press tradition occupies within a wider, fuller history of cultural production in Ireland since modernisation.

Assessment Details:

- *Number of components:* 2
- *Name/Type of Components:* (1) Essay; (2) Archival Project & Report
- *Word Count of Components:*
 1. Essay: 5,000 words
 2. Archival Project & Report: 1,000 words
- *Percentage Value of Component(s):*
 1. Essay: 80%
 2. Archival Project & Presentation: 20%

Preliminary Reading List:

Primary Reading:

Much of the primary reading for this module will consist of extracts and excerpts from various different rare and out-of-print little magazines and small-press publications, and as such scans will be circulated in advance. Texts under scrutiny will include the following, many of which can be accessed via the library:

- Claire-Louise Bennett, *Pond* (Stinging Fly Press, 2015)
- Seamus Deane, *Civilians and Barbarians* (Field Day Publications, 1983)
- Ellen Dillon, *Butter Intervention* (Veer2, 2022)
- Wendy Erskine, *Dance Move* (2022)
- Seamus Heaney, *An Open Letter* (Field Day Publications, 1983)
- Trevor Joyce, *The Poems of Sweeny Peregrine* (New Writers' Press, 1976)
- Thomas Kinsella, *Butcher's Dozen* (Peppercanister Press, 1974)
- Thomas Kinsella, *The Tain* (Dolmen Press, 1969)
- Christodoulos Makris, *It Reeks of Radio* (BLR Editions, 2023)
- Maurice Scully, *5 Freedoms of Movement* (Galloping Dog Press, 1987)
- Catherine Walsh, *Optic Verve* (Shearsman Books, 2009)
- Eimear Walshe, *The Land for the People* (National Sculpture Factory, 2021)

Suggested Secondary Reading:

- Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Field Day, 2007)
- Maurice Coakley, *Ireland in the World Order: A History of Uneven Development* (Pluto Press, 2012)
- Lucy Collins, *Contemporary Irish Women Poets* (Liverpool University Press, 2015)
- Tony Farnar, *The History of Irish Book Publishing* (The History Press, 2018)
- R.F. Foster, *Luck & the Irish: A Brief History of Change, 1970–2000* (Penguin, 2007)
- Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork University Press, 1996)
- Sinéad Kennedy, 'Irish Women and the Celtic Tiger Economy', *The end of Irish history? Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger* (Manchester University Press, 2003)
- Robert Kiely, *Incomparable Poetry: An Essay on the Financial Crisis of 2007–2008 and Irish Literature* (Punctum Books, 2020)
- Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons & Michael Cronin, *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society & the Global Economy* (Pluto Press 2002)
- David Lloyd, *Ireland after History* (Cork University Press, 1999)
- Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland, 1969–1992* (Four Courts Press, 2000)