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Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid

## **Schooling the National Orphans: The Education of the Children of the Easter Rising Leaders**

The Easter Rising of 1916 has popularly been recognized as the foundational moment of the Irish state. Its central narrative is straightforward: on April 24, 1916, a small group of Irish rebels seized a number of buildings in central Dublin. They held out for a week, until the combined force of infantry troops and heavy artillery bombardment forced a surrender. Over a period of twelve days in early May, fifteen of the leaders were executed in Kilmainham and Cork gaols; a sixteenth was hanged in London four months later. These leaders, the “sixteen dead men,” were quickly elevated to the foremost position in the pantheon of Irish revolutionary martyrs, their “blood sacrifice” sanctifying the new state. A rebellion staged by poets, ideologues, socialists, and militants, the public personas of the leadership have been well-established.<sup>1</sup> The political legacies they left behind have similarly been dissected and, with the centenary of the Rising to the fore, a re-examination of their lives is underway, helping to complicate and add nuance to the often stilted hagiographies which dominated much of twentieth-century Ireland. An important component of this reassessment might be to examine the intimate relationships of these rebel leaders; similarly a new way of approaching their varied legacies might be to consider the experiences of their direct descendants in the new state shaped so profoundly by their revolutionary imprint. These founding fathers of the Irish Republic were also flesh-and-blood fathers, leaving a number of children behind. The futures of these children was a matter of acute concern for their fathers as they faced their executions. James

Connolly spent much of his last hours with his wife and eldest daughter “trying to plan [their] lives for them,” while Thomas MacDonagh recorded his hope that “my country will take [his children] as wards.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the aftermath of the Rising and the early years of the Irish state, many of these children were considered “national orphans.” Their images, along with those of their widowed mothers, were used in the Catholic Bulletin to pique public sympathy for the executed rebels and to solicit donations to a number of welfare agencies providing financial aid to republican families affected by the Rising.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most pressing question concerning the futures of these “children of the Rising” was their education. Education in Ireland, from the republican perspective, was not merely about pedagogy: rather it was a fundamental vehicle for the development of nationalist sentiment and the creation of a new citizenry. Eoin Mac Néill, the first Minister for Education in the Irish Free State, reflected this attitude in 1925: “the chief function of Irish education policy is to conserve and develop Irish nationality.”<sup>4</sup> The schools chosen for these children, and the proprietorial interest taken in their educational futures by these welfare organizations, reveals much about the way in which republican Ireland attempted to take ownership of the futures of these children. Conversely, allegations of favouritism and a hierarchical approach to the 1916 families blighted some of the official activities, and exposed the frayed tempers behind the smooth state-building narrative.

Many of the dead men of Easter week left children behind them, of varying ages and with varying educational needs. These children of the martyred revolutionary elite were the prototypical new citizens; as such, they merited an education worthy of the sons and daughters of the Rising leaders, the founding fathers of the new state. This examination of their schooling both before and after the Rising illuminates the very broad range of educational experiences evident in Ireland in the

early twentieth century, from elite secondary schools to the truncated education of the working classes, along with the question of female education, the prevalence of religious orders, and the embedding of republican ideals into education. It also reveals the highly variegated class profile of the Rising leadership, which continued to shape the lives of their children thereafter and which was only partly alleviated by official welfare provision. This essay shall explore these issues, as well as the tumultuous effect of the Rising on the families of its leadership, illuminating a frequently underplayed story of trauma and loss.

### **The Educational Landscape**

The children left fatherless after May 1916 were concentrated in seven families. The largest was the family of James Connolly, who had six children in 1916: Nora, aged twenty-three; Aideen, aged twenty-one; Ina, aged nineteen; Moira, aged seventeen; Roddy, aged fifteen; and Fiona, aged eight. Next were the children of Michael Mallin: Seamus, aged twelve; Seán, aged nine; Úna, aged seven; and Joseph, aged two. His wife, Agnes, was five months pregnant with their fifth child, Máire, born in August 1916. Thomas J. Clarke had three sons: Daly, aged thirteen; Tom Jr., aged eight; and Emmet, aged six. Thomas MacDonagh had two children: Donagh, aged three, and Bairbre, aged one. Éamonn Ceannt had a single son (Rónán, aged ten) as did John MacBride (Seán, aged twelve). This study shall also consider the children of another celebrated casualty of Easter Week: Michael (“The”) O’Rahilly, killed in action on April 28. There were, of course, many rebels killed in action, leaving approximately fifty children behind. Yet O’Rahilly stands out: during the rebellion itself, he was the most senior casualty of the Irish Volunteers, the separatist paramilitary organization which provided the bulk of the rebel forces. Moreover,, he had been an extremely well-known (even ostentatious) figure within advanced nationalism before the Rising,

and the pathos of his death (in a doorway on Sackville Lane, in central Dublin, after penning a farewell note to his wife and writing his name in blood on a wall) merely added to his celebrity. O’Rahilly had four sons in April 1916: Mac, aged twelve; Aodogán, aged eleven; Niall, aged nine; and Maolmhuire, aged four. A fifth, Rory, was born in July 1916.

Of this group of twenty-three children, three had finished their education by the time of the Rising (the elder three Connolly daughters). Six were yet to begin their schooling. But although the Rising had a transformative effect on the lives of the children, including their educational trajectories, the socio-economic background of their parents to a large degree determined the educational profile of the children in the years prior to 1916. Indeed, the highly stratified nature of education in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is reflected in the biographies of the executed leaders and that of their wives. The overwhelming dominance of the Catholic Church in providing education at all levels and across society is immediately striking: despite an official aspiration of non-denominationalism when Irish education was formalized in the 1830s, the emergent system was highly sectarianized. By the late nineteenth century, this had been reinforced by the “devotional revolution” in the Catholic Church, confirming the essential religiosity of the Irish educational landscape.<sup>5</sup> With three exceptions, all the parents of these children of the Rising were Catholics, and thus underwent a Catholic education. Yet this common religious character obscured a high degree of variation. Some, like Thomas Clarke, Thomas MacDonagh, and Michael Mallin, attended ordinary national schools with lay teachers and clerical oversight. James Connolly, who spent the early part of his life in Edinburgh, had a similar education in St. Patrick’s School in the Cowgate in Edinburgh. Others were educated by the Christian Brothers, the teaching order

established in 1802 to provide education to disadvantaged Irish youth. John MacBride and Éamonn Ceannt were among those whom historian Roy Foster has dubbed “the revolutionary generation” who passed through Christian Brothers’ national schools. There, they received an education as robustly Irish nationalist as it was Catholic; the recurrence of a Brothers’ school in the biographies of the revolutionary elite both before and after 1916 has been much noted.<sup>6</sup>

Even a cursory examination of the educational background of these families reveals the importance of class in determining access to education, despite the democratizing gestures of the Catholic Church. Free education was limited to primary level, and so many left school by their early teens. Michael Mallin joined the British Army aged fifteen, James Connolly worked as a printer’s “devil” aged ten or eleven, although the bright Thomas Clarke was retained as a teenaged assistant teacher in St. Patrick’s National School in Dungannon until falling numbers made his position unsustainable. Only those farther up the social scale had a chance at intermediate or secondary education. Éamonn Ceannt, the son of a Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) head constable, received exhibition scholarships to continue at the Christian Brothers School in North Richmond Street, completing his education there and entering Dublin Corporation as a clerk aged nineteen. John MacBride’s prosperous merchant family funded his secondary education at St. Malachy’s College, the leading Catholic school in Belfast. Thomas MacDonagh’s teacher parents sent him to the prestigious Rockwell College, County Tipperary, run by the Holy Ghost Fathers, where he developed a short-lived vocation. The most privileged of all was Michael O’Rahilly, who went from the national school in Ballylongford, County Kerry, to the exclusive Clongowes Wood College, County Kildare, the Jesuit boarding school immortalized by James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Higher education

was the privilege of an elite few. Michael O’Rahilly enrolled as a medical student in the National University of Ireland, but his studies were interrupted by tuberculosis. Thereafter he described himself as a “licensed loafer”, bankrolled by inherited and marital fortunes. Thomas MacDonagh, after losing his vocation for the priesthood, taught at a number of diocesan schools before joining the staff at St. Enda’s, Patrick Pearse’s innovative school outside Dublin; while there, he pursued a BA in English, French and Irish at University College Dublin (UCD) and later an MA, all the while growing in reputation as a writer and teacher.<sup>7</sup>

Female education was similarly determined by class. Secondary education for girls was more rare: amongst less affluent families, boys’ education was prioritized, and as such female secondary education tended to be concentrated amongst the upper classes and the rising Catholic elite. Yet it appears that the wives of the Easter Rising leaders were relatively well-educated. We know little of what education Agnes Mallin or Lillie Connolly received. It appears likely that Mallin, who worked as an attendant in mental asylums in Ireland and the Isle of Man and later as a nurse, had some standard of primary education, while Lillie Connolly, a Protestant from County Wicklow, rose from domestic servant to become governess to a stockbroker’s family in Dublin. The bright Kathleen Daly, later Clarke, established her own dressmaking business aged fifteen, thus curtailing her formal education. But some of the future wives of the Rising leaders had a more substantial education. Fanny O’Brennan, later known as Áine Ceannt, received a progressive education at the Dominican Convent at Eccles Street, Dublin, and worked as a clerk in an accountancy firm before her marriage. Muriel Gifford, later MacDonagh, attended the elite and progressive Alexandra College, Dublin, the first Irish school to prepare women for entrance to university. French education was especially prized by those at the top of the social

spectrum. The Irish-American Nancy Brown, later O’Rahilly, received an elite education at an Ursuline convent school in Paris. Maud Gonne, later MacBride, was also educated partly in France, as well as by private tutoring with a governess.<sup>8</sup>

There is, therefore, a very broad range of educational backgrounds and patterns among the parents, ranging from postgraduate degrees (MacDonagh) to national school only (the Connollys and Mallin). These reflected substantial social differences. At the apex of the social scale was the privileged Catholic gentility of the O’Rahilly family: a childhood of privilege in the exclusive Dublin suburb of Herbert Park, with servants, ponies, and motor-cars, tinged with increasingly radical nationalist sentiment. At the other extreme lay the poverty endured by the Connolly and Mallin families, who eked out precarious existences in tenements in Ireland, Scotland, and the United States. The middling ranks in between nonetheless contained significant variation, from the professional privilege of the Giffords to the solid respectability of the MacDonaghs and the MacBrides, and thence to the lower middle-class aspirations of the Ceannts, Dalys, and Clarkes. The importance of education to all of these families, regardless of social status, is notable: the enormous spread of primary education in Ireland during the nineteenth century penetrated all social classes, and represented a route to social mobility for the very bright. This bred a utilitarian approach to education, reflected both in broader social attitudes and in the overwhelming focus on examinations and results, particularly at intermediate level. These expectations, that educational success was essential to their children’s future, can be traced in some of the parents’ discourse surrounding their children’s education, both before and after the Rising. Yet the educational landscape shifted somewhat between the parents’ and children’s generations: a program of educational reform prompted by critiques of the rigidity of the national curriculum was commenced in



1897, resulting in significant changes to the primary school system from 1900. These children were among the first to benefit from these changes, which attempted to modernize primary education in Ireland: a broader curriculum was introduced, infant education was transformed, and a less mechanistic approach to teaching and learning adopted.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Gaelic Revival and an “Irish” Education**

The parents’ experience of and attitude towards education profoundly influenced their children’s educational trajectories prior to 1916, and to a large extent the children’s profile mirrored that of their parents. There was, however, an additional factor: the radicalization of the parents’ political beliefs and the broader context of the Gaelic revival. A further aspect of Irish education in the late Victorian and Edwardian period was the explosion of Irish evening classes and summer schools, particularly as the Gaelic League politicized sharply after 1907.<sup>10</sup> Almost all the parents had felt the effects of this explosion of nationalism—the Ceannts had met through the auspices of the Gaelic League, for example—and the imperatives of providing their children with a suitably “Irish” education added a further layer to decisions about their schooling. A common thread which emerges is the recurrence of St. Enda’s, the school established by Patrick Pearse in the Dublin suburbs. It was founded with the express intention of “awakening a spirit of patriotism” and inculcating a sense of civic and social duty amongst its pupils, in what Elaine Sisson has described as “an instructional training ground in national identity and masculinity.”<sup>11</sup> St Enda’s was a reaction against what Pearse perceived as the imperialist Anglocentric education system in Ireland. In his searing critique of Irish education in 1912, *The Murder Machine*, Pearse denounced “the English thing that is called education in Ireland [which] is founded on a denial of the Irish nation.”<sup>12</sup> Foster has likened the ethos and atmosphere of St. Enda’s to a

“madrasa,” and certainly, the influence of Pearse’s increasing militarism after the school’s relocation to the Hermitage in Rathfarnham, Dublin, in 1910 raised concerns. But as Foster has also noted, it was not merely the militancy which attracted parents: the child-centred philosophy, coupled with an emphasis on Gaelic identity and Irish nationalist values, appealed across the nationalist spectrum. St. Enda’s blended Irish-Ireland ideals with a progressive educational philosophy which echoed aspects of the New Education Movement in Europe. However, as Brendan Walsh has pointed out, St. Enda’s diverged from the child-centred nature of New Education in its focus on the role of the teacher: Pearse’s conception of teacher as guide or saoi [wise man] combined with his theories of education as a method of cultural resistance to create a school that was “pedagogically sound and politically suspect.”<sup>13</sup>

Pearse’s school was popular within the cultural nationalist group known as Irish-Irelanders, and had the sons of both advanced and moderate nationalists amongst the student body. Irish Party MP Stephen Gwynn sent his son Denis there, who became a favourite of Pearse. Rónán Ceannt was enrolled as a day pupil aged seven, the elder two O’Rahillys were there as well, and the redoubtable Madge Daly paid for her eldest nephew, Daly Clarke, to attend from the summer of 1915. Maud Gonne MacBride made enquiries about sending her son Seán to St. Enda’s in the summer of 1914, in what appears to be a signal that fears of his abduction by his estranged father were lessening. In the event, the European war intervened, and Seán MacBride went instead to an exclusive Jesuit lycée in Paris. On the other hand, the senior Irish Party figure John Dillon, arriving at the school for a visit to consider whether to send his sons there, was put off at the sight of pupils “playing hockey in skirts” (in fact, playing hurling in kilts), and sent his sons elsewhere.<sup>14</sup>

The perception of St. Enda's as the destination of choice for radical nationalist parents did not merely depend on posthumous reputations; rather, the boys were encouraged to celebrate their parenthood:

nearly every boy in the boy-corps of Scoil Éanna [St. Enda's] is the son or brother or nephew or cousin of some man or woman who is graving a mark in the history of contemporary Ireland . . . It is much for a boy to be able to start life with the conscious knowledge, "I am the son of a good father."<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to the shabby compromises of broader political culture, bitterly critiqued by Pearse in other writings, the identity nurtured and constructed at St. Enda's was that of a class apart, a "happy few" destined to lead Ireland in the struggle for nationhood. Numbers were small, however, dropping to sixty in the years prior to the Rising. For all of its idiosyncracies, this remained a privileged education, with fees beyond the reach of those farther down the social spectrum. The remaining children of the Rising had more mundane schooling, at least before the watershed of 1916. Although James Connolly valued education—he was essentially an autodidact—his three elder children left school in their early teens, entering the work-force in Belfast. The fourth, Moira, showed distinct promise, benefiting from the broad education she received in New Jersey during the family's stint in the United States. This talent appears to have been nurtured further after their return to Ireland in 1910, and by 1916 the seventeen year old was, unusually for someone of her class background, still in education.<sup>16</sup> Reflecting the family's somewhat peripatetic journey around the Dublin south-side working-class districts, the Mallin children changed schools several times. The elder boys, Seamus and Seán, had nonetheless been thoroughly socialized into advanced nationalism, which caused some difficulty in their time at the national school on the Coombe in 1914-15:

it was in that school that I understood for the first time about Anglicisation. It wasn't just that all the boys were fiercely against the Germans, but that every boy in the school was happy to wear English badges. I didn't go along with them in this, and there wasn't a day that I didn't have to stand my ground against them. I often had a black eye coming home.<sup>17</sup>

### **Education after the Rising**

The Rising represented a period of immense disruption and trauma for all of the families. Apart from the bereavement, their homes were turned upside-down: raided and torn apart by successive British search parties, in many cases they had to flee their homes and seek refuge with friends and families. This meant that the children's education was frequently interrupted, not least because St. Enda's had been raided and closed until the autumn of 1916, with significant disruption to its staffing thenceforth. Even more problematic was the fact that most of these families had lost their breadwinner; the fee-paying education which they had enjoyed before was therefore placed in jeopardy. Into this gap stepped the Irish National Aid Association and Volunteer Dependents Fund (INAAVDF). This, a philanthropic organization set up in the aftermath of the Rising to provide financial support to the dependents of those executed, killed in action, imprisoned, or interned, embarked on a massive fundraising drive between 1916 and 1919, drawing in vast sums of money particularly from overseas.

With this money, among other expenditure the INAAVDF made a series of grants to the families of the 1916 leaders for immediate relief, made investments to provide them with a future income, and established a Schools Sub-Committee to coordinate the financing of the children's education.<sup>18</sup> The two of James Connolly's daughters still in education had their fees paid at Eccles Street and at the Convent of St. Louis in Kiltimagh, County Mayo; Moira, the cleverest of them, went on to the Royal College of Physicians in 1919 as a medical student. St. Enda's was, again the

initial natural choice for most of the sons. This had a certain logic: the INAAVDF was also supporting the Pearse family and securing the future of the school by increasing the attendance figures made financial sense.<sup>19</sup> The heroes' sons were an important component of the new cohort: in early 1917, Rónán Ceannt wrote to his aunt Lily that "Daly Clarke, Jim Larkin, the two Mallins, Ciaran Lawless are in my class—they are all the sons of rebels."<sup>20</sup> Fifteen-year-old Roddy Connolly did not remain amongst the student body at St. Enda's. Having briefly served as his father's aide-de-camp in the rebel headquarters of the General Post Office up to the Wednesday of Easter Week 1916, he was perhaps understandably resistant to the thought of returning to education, and by October 1917 he had left the school.<sup>21</sup> There were other, involuntary, withdrawals: the Clarke boys were sent to their Daly aunts in Limerick after their mother was arrested during the "German Plot" of 1918, an alleged conspiracy between Irish republicans and the German government.

This dispersal of the "sons of rebels" may have been driven by the decline in St. Enda's in 1917 and 1918, closing temporarily in 1919. An alternative presented itself in the form of Mount St. Benedict: a Benedictine foundation and a sister-school to the famous Downside Abbey, in Somerset, England, where upper-middle-class Irish Catholics had been sending their sons for generations. It was essentially a labor of love of its founder and headmaster, John Francis Sweetman, a member of a renowned Catholic nationalist family with long-standing links to the Catholic hierarchy and Sinn Féin, the republican political party. Sweetman, or "the Reverend man" as he was known to his students, was himself a product of Downside, and after having acted as chaplain to the British forces in South Africa in 1900, returned to teach at the abbey.<sup>22</sup> The transformation in Irish political opinion in the months following the Easter Rising was also felt at the Mount, and whereas Dom Francis was

previously “most enthusiastic to persuade anyone who was available to join the British army,” the school soon gained a reputation as the ideal place to receive an Irish nationalist education.<sup>23</sup> Among the boys educated there after 1917 were Seán MacBride, Rónán Ceannt, the four O’Rahillys, and, for a time, Daly Clarke.<sup>24</sup> This injection of republicanism into the school was not without tension, which revolved principally around James Dillon (son of John Dillon), a senior prefect who had been in the school since his father had driven away from St. Enda’s in disgust. While John Dillon struggled to hold back the tide of Sinn Féin in 1917 and 1918, his son James waged a lonely battle against the sons of the republican elite. To Aodogán O’Rahilly, Dillon was “the most conceivable fool on earth,” unjustly handing out two hours detention to him of which “I only deserved half an hour which I got for fooling in the hall.”<sup>25</sup> These simmering tensions came to a head when Dillon, as Librarian, banned pupils from signing the library book in Irish and refused to order Arthur Griffith’s *The Resurrection of Hungary*. In protest, the boys organized a petition, and had Dillon replaced by a Sinn Féin-dominated committee.<sup>26</sup> In more ways than one, the sons were fighting the battles of their fathers.

But the laxity of the school authorities in the context of a rapidly transforming political situation had serious consequences: Sweetman’s eccentricity and increasingly radicalizing republican sympathies combined with dangerously lenient regulations to create a situation of inadequate supervision. This culminated in an “attack” on a local RIC barracks, when a group of school-boys from the Mount terrorized the policemen inside with homemade explosions from matches, nails, keys, and metal pipes. This incident was not merely tolerated by the school authorities: after the police came to the school to investigate, Sweetman was “chuckling away to himself about it, not exactly encouraging us but more or less saying to ‘about time

somebody put the RIC out of this country.”<sup>27</sup> The reputation the school had for high political feeling contributed to its ultimate failure as an institution.<sup>28</sup> The school was raided a number of times during 1919 by the British military, and the resultant negative publicity in the local area led the Catholic Bishop of Ferns to formally request that Downside authorities close Mount St. Benedict.

### **The Irish Language Question**

The evolution of education at Mount St. Benedict—from an imported English public school model to a school considered suitable for the republican elite—illuminates the rapid penetration of Irish-Ireland ideals into the educational landscape after 1916. To a certain extent, this had already been present even beyond the walls of St. Enda’s: the Irish language was taught at Christian Brothers’ schools since the late nineteenth century, along with a forcefully nationalist version of Irish history. These twin components—the Irish language and a history centered on nation-building—were adopted wholesale into the new educational program of the Irish Free State after 1922. Yet, as Akenson has argued, the Irish language was identified as the principal vehicle for the renewal of national identity, and the emphasis placed on the language in the new curriculum reflected this position. Yet even in the suitable schools, language provision was frequently haphazard. At Mount St. Benedict, the first Irish teacher was Victor Collins, a former drinking companion of John MacBride, who apparently displayed an amazing inability to learn the language despite immersion in an Irish-speaking community.<sup>29</sup> He was replaced by Francis Ormsby, an alumnus of the Irish summer school in Spiddal, County Galway, but to a large extent the drive behind the Irish language at the Mount appears to have come from the pupils. Shortly after their arrival, the O’Rahilly boys and their Humphries cousins established an

“Irish-only” table in the dining hall, and taught the school chaplain how to say the Hail Holy Queen prayer in Irish.<sup>30</sup>

With St. Enda’s in decline, or deemed unsuitable, alternative methods for learning the Irish language were adopted. Private tuition was popular. George Irvine, a Protestant nationalist from County Fermanagh, tutored Daly Clarke and Seán MacBride in the language in 1918, while MacBride was also tutored by Claude Chevasse, an Oxford-born Gaelic revivalist who had been a founding member of Scoil Acla (an Irish language summer school) on Achill Island, County Mayo, in 1910. The recurrence of private tuition, particularly in these two families, is indicative of the continued turbulence which characterized many of these children’s lives. Both Kathleen Clarke and Maud Gonne MacBride were imprisoned in 1918, thus depriving their children of their remaining parent. Their education remained a matter of acute concern for their mothers from their prison cells. Whether fifteen-year-old Daly Clarke should be sent to the exclusive Mungret College (as his aunt proposed) or continue with private tuition was the subject of heated letters into and out of Holloway Jail. Kathleen Clarke was adamant, in the matter of her sons’ education as in everything else, that she knew best, but the dispute rankled, prompting a bitter estrangement of Kathleen from her sister Madge Daly in 1925.<sup>31</sup> A further solution to the language question was the Irish summer schools which were popularized in the early decades of the twentieth century. Daly Clarke and Seán MacBride attended Coláiste na Mumhan at Ring, County Waterford, in 1918 and 1919, the latter’s stay cut short by his summoning on “urgent national business.”<sup>32</sup> More than a decade later, the MacDonagh children also attended Coláiste Chonnacht in Spiddal, County Galway.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, some of the children of the Rising embraced the language. The Mallins, in particular, became enthusiastic Irish speakers into adulthood: **Seamus**



Mallin wrote a series of autobiographical articles in Irish, while Fr. Seosamh Mallin remains? fluent despite spending sixty-seven years in the Far East.<sup>34</sup> Others were less successful: Seán MacBride admitted in 1985 that one of his lasting regrets was his failure to learn the Irish language properly, while Aodogán O’Rahilly bemoaned “being illiterate in your own language” in the mid-1960s.<sup>35</sup>

But while Irish colleges served temporary solutions for the Clarkes and MacBrides, a more serious issue surrounded the MacDonaghs, Donagh and Bairbre, who were truly orphaned in July 1917 when their mother drowned off the County Dublin coast. Muriel MacDonagh’s death prompted an ugly dispute between her and her husband’s families over the future of the children, revolving primarily around which religion they would be raised in, a dispute symbolized through disputes over their education. The INAAVDF pompously tried to mediate in the dispute, pointing out loftily that Thomas MacDonagh had entrusted his children to the state. In 1919 the MacDonaghs were spirited away by their paternal relatives to Broadford, County Clare, and as Donagh later remembered:

[He and his sister] were thrown around amongst relatives, semi-relatives and complete strangers for many years. The years of the Black and Tan War we spent in Clare in incredible circumstances from which we were rescued only because when we came to Dublin our vocabulary rivalled that of Lady Chatterley’s gamekeeper—indeed I knew as much in Clare at the age of nine of the squalor of life as I learned in over twenty years at the law in Dublin.<sup>36</sup>

Education, for him and his sister, represented a sanctuary and a degree of normality amidst chaos: for Bairbre at Mount Anville, the Sacred Heart Convent on Leeson Street, both in Dublin, and later UCD; for Donagh at the elite Jesuit secondary school Belvedere, Dublin, and UCD where he was one of the talented literary generation around Brian O’Nolan (better known under his pseudonym Flann O’Brien). In 1930 he and his sister applied for special assistance from the state for their university education, successfully arguing that as their mother had died, they had been unjustly

deprived of the financial support of the Widows' Allowance for 1916 Commandants. This special statutory grant saw MacDonagh through his legal training and through the early lean years at the Bar until he was unexpectedly appointed as a District Justice for Wexford in 1941.<sup>37</sup> Financial support was also essential to the Mallin children, the elder of whom were the beneficiaries of an anonymous benefactor from the United States who offered through the good offices of the Catholic Bulletin to pay for the education of two children of "the fallen." Seamus and Seán Mallin were duly selected, and attended Knockbeg College in Carlow. The younger children had their education financed through the formal channels of the Widows' Allowance: Úna and Maura Mallin attended Loreto and Sisters of St. Louis convents, while Joseph Mallin was among the last pupils at St. Enda's in 1933.<sup>38</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The varied educational journeys undertaken by these children before and after 1916 underscore the great differences in their social backgrounds, which were flattened out by the essentializing narrative of the Rising. In this nation-building tale, the widows and children of the lost Rising leadership were reduced to sorrowing ciphers, vehicles of the grief of the nation, denuded of agency. Yet the picture was far more complex. The privilege of the O'Rahillys, independently wealthy and combining bourgeois gentility with the frisson of nationalist cordite, was a world away from the financial precariousness with which the Mallins, for instance, lived. These formative class experiences formed a fundamental backdrop to these children's subsequent trajectories: elite education, at second and third level, and an entry into the professions was arguably already on the cards for the O'Rahillys, the MacBrides, and the MacDonaghs. For others, like Rónán Ceannt or Séamus Mallin, the financial responsibility formally taken over by the state after 1919 opened new possibilities.

Like countless others, education was the key to social mobility for these children, equipping them with the means to make their living in an Ireland where even their name alone would not have compensated. Rónán Ceannt qualified as a solicitor in 1934 (from Trinity College Dublin, unusually, perhaps influenced in this by his great friend Owen Sheehy Skeffington) and was swiftly appointed to a fairly comfortable sinecure in the State Solicitors Office. A striking number of these children ended up in state- or semi-state employment, including Donagh MacDonagh, Seamus Mallin, Roddy Connolly, and Daly Clarke.<sup>39</sup> They were shepherded by the state through education and into “jobs for life.”

Even attitudes towards the Irish language were mixed. While almost all parents were Gaelic League enthusiasts before 1916 and the educational provision for their children even after the Rising reflected this, this enthusiasm did not always filter down into an abiding commitment to the language amongst their children. Indeed, alongside the Irish-Ireland ideals which animated their parents’ decisions about their children’s education was a certain pragmatism. The O’Rahillys alternated between Mount St. Benedict, County Wexford, and Belvedere College, Dublin, Rónán Ceannt had a stint at Terenure College, Dublin, and similarly traditional institutions were strongly considered for Daly Clarke and Seán MacBride. The schools chosen for daughters of the Rising leadership were uniformly traditional establishments run by religious orders. This clash between revivalist radicalism and social conservatism was present in decisions made about the children’s education, revealing a tension between the highly personal and the intensely political. In many cases, this study reveals that pragmatism won out.

Along with these class and ideological variegations there is a gendered set of experiences, unsurprisingly, given the particular version of Irish boyhood and Irish

masculinity promulgated in St. Enda's and Mount St. Benedict. However, the new educational pathways opened up after the smoke of the Rising cleared were arguably more transformative for sons than for daughters: outside of the church (Úna Mallin joined the Loreto Sisters in the 1920s), there were relatively few career paths open for women in early twentieth-century Ireland. The most successful was Moira Connolly, who after graduating from the Royal College of Physicians, worked as a GP in England for the rest of her life. Those who remained in Ireland married, had children, and with the exception of Nora Connolly O'Brien, led relatively private lives. Yet despite class, gender, or ideological differences, education was one of the immediate challenge which confronted the families of the 1916 leaders after the Rising. The battles surrounding the educational futures of these children reveal a deeper conflict between the personal and the political. They would fight many such battles, of an increasingly serious nature, over the coming years.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1935); Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: the Triumph of Failure* (London: Gollancz, 1977). For an incisive overview of the Rising more generally, see Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> "Nora Connolly O'Brien Interview 1965," YouTube video, 27:40, posted by "Stair na hÉireann," accessed December 2, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkBnUQoFcpg>; Last Will of Thomas MacDonagh, MS 44,319(6), National Library of Ireland [NLI].

<sup>3</sup> *Catholic Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (December 1916): 55.

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Donald H. Akenson, *A Mirror to Kathleen's Face: Education in Independent Ireland* (London & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970); Emmet Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75," *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 3 (1972): 625-52.

<sup>6</sup> R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1916* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 48-58.

<sup>7</sup> For biographical details on the leaders, see C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961); Brian Hughes, *Michael Mallin: Sixteen Lives* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2012); Mary Gallagher, *Eamonn Ceannt: Sixteen Lives* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2014); Donal Fallon, *John MacBride: Sixteen Lives* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2015); Michael T. Foy, *Tom Clarke: The True Leader of the Easter Rising* (Dublin: History Press, 2014); Shane Kenna, *Thomas MacDonagh: Sixteen Lives* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2014); Patrick Maume, "Michael Joseph O'Rahilly," *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Caitriona Clear, *Social Change and Everyday Life in Ireland, 1850-1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 43; Ciarán O'Neill, *Catholics of Consequence: Transnational Education, Social Mobility and Irish Catholic Elite 1850-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10-13. For details on the education of the Easter Rising widows, see Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman: My Fight For Ireland's Freedom*, ed. Helen Litton (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1991), 15; Lorcan Collins, *James Connolly: Sixteen Lives* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2012); Anne

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Clare, *Unlikely Rebels: The Gifford Girls and the Fight for Irish Freedom* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2011), 55ff; Entry on Nancy Brown O’Rahilly at the O’Rahilly Family Tree website, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://humphrysfamilytree.com/ORahilly/brown.html>; Margaret Ward, *Maud Gonne: A Life* (London: Pandora, 1990), 6-8; Sinead McCool, *Easter Widows* (Dublin: Doubleday, 2014), *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981), 34-36; Brendan Walsh, *Boy Republic: Patrick Pearse and Radical Education* (Dublin: History Press, 2013), 57-58.

<sup>10</sup> Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 48-58.

<sup>11</sup> Elaine Sisson, *Pearse’s Patriots: St. Enda’s and the Cult of Boyhood* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>12</sup> P. H. Pearse, *The Murder Machine* (Dublin: Whelan, 1916, repr. 1959), 16, 21-22.

<sup>13</sup> Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 21; Walsh, *Boy Republic*, 70, 250.

<sup>14</sup> Colin Reid, *The Lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn: Irish Constitutional Nationalism & Cultural Politics, 1864-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 86; Maurice Manning, *James Dillon* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1999), 17. Patrick H. Pearse to Madge Daly, May 11, 1915, P/2 Folder 28, Daly Papers, University of Limerick [UL]; *An Macaomh* 1.2 (December 1909); *Irish Press*, November 17, 1934; Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, *Seán MacBride: A Republican Life* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 15-17.

<sup>15</sup> *An Macaomh* 1.1 (June 1909).

<sup>16</sup> Nora Connolly O’Brien, *Portrait of a Rebel Father* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1935), 90; Ina Connolly Heron, “James Connolly – A Biography,” *Liberty* (April 1966).

<sup>17</sup> Seamus Mallin, *Inniu*, October 21, 1966.

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<sup>18</sup> Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, “The Irish National Aid Association and the Radicalization of Public Opinion in Ireland, 1916-1918,” *The Historical Journal* 55.3 (September 2012): 705-29.

<sup>19</sup> Nic Dháibhéid, “The Irish National Aid Association,” *The Historical Journal*, 717.

<sup>20</sup> Rónán Ceannt to Lily O’Brennan, January 4, 1917, MS 41,509/1, Ceannt-O’Brennan Papers, NLI.

<sup>21</sup> Lillie Connolly to INAAVDF, October 30, 1917, MS 24,357/2, Irish National Aid Association Papers, NLI.

<sup>22</sup> Aidan Bellenger O.S.B., “The post-Reformation English Benedictines and Ireland: conflict and dialogue,” in *The Irish Benedictines: a history*, eds. Martin Browne and Colmán Ó Clabaigh O.S.B. (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005), 150.

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Times*, September 16, 1981.

<sup>24</sup> MacBride, *That Day’s Struggle: A Memoir, 1904-1951* (Dublin: Currach Press, 2006), 17; Maurice Manning, *James Dillon: a biography* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1999), 20-1; Bellenger, “The post-Reformation English Benedictines and Ireland,” 153.

<sup>25</sup> Aodogán O’Rahilly to Madame O’Rahilly [n.d.1917?], P102/527, O’Rahilly Papers, University College Dublin Archives [UCDA].

<sup>26</sup> Aodogán O’Rahilly to Madame O’Rahilly, November 9, 1918, P102/527, O’Rahilly Papers, UCDA; John Sweetman to Mrs Sweetman, [n.d. November 1918?], 1190/28/4, Sweetman Papers, National Archives of Ireland.

<sup>27</sup> MacBride, *That Day’s Struggle*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> J. A. James, “The light and warmth within” (unpublished manuscript), quoted in Bellenger, “The post-Reformation English Benedictines and Ireland,” 152-3.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 43.

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- <sup>30</sup> Memoirs of Emmet Humphreys, P106/648, Sighle Humphreys Papers, UCDA.
- <sup>31</sup> Kathleen Clarke to Madge Daly, Various dates 1918, P/2, Folder 6, Daly Papers, UL.
- <sup>32</sup> Madge Daly to Kathleen Clarke, July 2, 1918, Daly Papers, P/2 Folder 45, UL; C. S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2001), 130.
- <sup>33</sup> Military Service Pension for children of Thomas MacDonagh, W1D341A, Military Service Pensions, Military Archives of Ireland.
- <sup>34</sup> See Seamus Mallin's series of articles in *Inniu*, beginning September 1966; "Páiste na Réabhlóide," *Raidió na Life*, November 30, 2011.
- <sup>35</sup> *Irish Independent*, August 20, 1985; Aodogán O'Rahilly to Sighle Humphries, [c. 1965], P102/542, O'Rahilly Papers, UCDA.
- <sup>36</sup> Donagh MacDonagh, "Blue Print," *Studies* 51 (Winter 1962): 522; Nic Dháibhéid, "The Irish National Aid Association," *The Historical Journal*, 718-719.
- <sup>37</sup> Various expense claims contained in Military Service Pension file for dependents of Thomas MacDonagh, MSP1D341, available via [www.militaryarchives.ie](http://www.militaryarchives.ie).
- <sup>38</sup> Hughes, Michael Mallin, 213; Various expense claims contained in Military Service Pension file for Mrs. Úna Mallin, MSP1D322, available via [www.militaryarchives.ie](http://www.militaryarchives.ie).
- <sup>39</sup> Reference for Rónán Ceannt from Arthur Cox, 15 March 1937, MS 41,488/4, Ceannt-O'Brennan Papers, NLI.
- List of dependents of those killed in action in 1916, or killed by the military, MS 41,521, Ceannt-O'Brennan Papers, NLI.