

# National Orphans and a Nation's Trauma: Experience, Emotions, and the Children of the 1916 Easter Rising Martyrs

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**Abstract** This article begins the work of recovering and understanding children's unique experiences during the Irish Revolution by exploring the history of a diverse group of children and young people bound together by their fathers' politics during and after the 1916 Easter Rising. In tracing the children of the executed and martyred rebel leaders of the Easter Rising, I seek to challenge and extend the way trauma has been conceptualized and applied by historians of Ireland's revolution, instead arguing that the methodologies of the history of emotions and experience offer more fruitful terrain to explore. In this way, trauma is not an essentializing state of being but instead is navigated, renegotiated, and resurfaced throughout one's life, frequently into old age. Leaning into the inherent uncertainty that writing about children's emotional experiences entails, I read into, across, and against fragmentary and diverse sources to recover the stories of these children who were plunged into national prominence by their fathers' executions. I also acknowledge my own emotional response to these children's stories and seek to explore the methodological value of this affect in the archive for historians of the Irish Revolution.

**I**n 1920s Dublin, at a screening of Charlie Chaplin's war satire *Shoulder Arms*, a small boy had a panic attack in the cinema and had to be taken out of the theater. The reason for the child's panic was not the depiction of bombardment nor the squalor of trench warfare: it was an instinctive reaction to the uniforms on the screen. The boy was Donagh MacDonagh, son of Thomas MacDonagh, an executed leader of the Easter Rising in 1916. Soldiers in uniform were at the heart of the young MacDonagh's earliest and most vivid memories, as British troops raided the family home on 3 May 1916, just hours after his father had been executed. Donagh MacDonagh, then aged three, left the house with his mother wheeling his baby sister in her pram, past "men in khaki uniforms lying on the pavement with their rifles trained on the house."<sup>1</sup> For years afterwards, he cried whenever he saw men in uniform, reliving the terror of that May morning. In the incident in the cinema, the sensory overload of a war film with nonstop images of soldiers in uniform, a laughing audience, and darkened room overwhelmed the child.

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<sup>1</sup> Donagh MacDonagh, "Blue Print," *Studies* 51, no. 204 (1962): 521–28, at 522.

Fear of soldiers in uniform was common for those children who lived through the Easter Rising and who had more reason than most to be frightened of British troops. Writing some fifty years after what is often referred to simply as the Rising, Fiona Connolly Edwards, youngest daughter of another executed leader, the socialist leader James Connolly, recalled with clarity her cold terror every time she passed a British soldier on the street in the aftermath of the rebellion.<sup>2</sup> Nor was this response necessarily limited to those children whose fathers were executed: the former Irish Party MP Tom Kettle was also on the sharp end of this, heartsick when his three-year-old daughter, Betty, ran away at the sight of him as he returned home on leave in his British Army uniform in May 1916.<sup>3</sup>

Such incidents suggest a number of new lines of inquiry for approaching the history of the Irish Revolution. The first is the story of children who have long been inscribed into political struggles as well as national and international conflicts as witnesses to, victims of, and participants in military and paramilitary violence.<sup>4</sup> The destabilizing psychological effects of war and revolution on children and young people and the attempts by their societies to ameliorate, suppress, or exploit those effects are the subject of a growing body of scholarship that includes studies of “heroes’ children” of Great War Hungary, the emergence of modern psychoanalysis in interwar Britain, and the reconstruction of national unity around the suffering of children and families post-World War II, all of which have echoes in this article.<sup>5</sup> But although a best-selling book by the Irish broadcaster Joe Duffy has traced the stories of the forty children killed during the 1916 war rebellion, we still know relatively little of what it was like for children living through the foundational event of Irish independence, the Easter Rising.<sup>6</sup> Glimpses appear of Dublin working-class children observing the disruption, joining joyfully in the looting that followed the initial outbreak of hostilities, gorging themselves on sweets and chocolates, and carrying off toys and fireworks.<sup>7</sup> The meticulous detailing in Eunan O’Halpin and Daithí Ó Corráin’s *The Dead of the Irish Revolution* of Rising casualties, alongside the forty children killed during the violence of that week, offers brief sightings of

<sup>2</sup> Fiona Connolly Edwards, “A Child’s Memories of Easter Week,” *Irish Democrat*, January 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Memoir: My Life and Themes* (Dublin, 2000), 17.

<sup>4</sup> James Marten, introduction to *Children and War: An Anthology*, ed. James Marten (New York, 2002), 1–10, at 8. This process also applies to the case of the Northern Irish Troubles, the impact of which on children from the 1960s onward has been explored by scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. See, for example, the following: Ed Cairns, *Caught in Crossfire: Children and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Belfast, 1987); Bill Roulston, *Children of the Revolution: The Lives of the Sons and Daughters of Activists in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 2011); Orla Muldoon, “Children of the Troubles: The Impact of Political Violence in Northern Ireland,” *Journal of Social Issues* 60, no. 3 (2004): 453–68. Historical treatments of this topic are relatively rare.

<sup>5</sup> Friederike Kind-Kovacs, “The Heroes’ Children: Rescuing the Great War’s Orphans,” in “1918, 1945, 1989: Childhood in Times of Political Transformation: Part 1,” special issue, *Journal of Modern European History* 19 no. 2 (2021): 183–205; Michael Roper, “From the Shell-Shocked Soldier to the Nervous Child: Psychoanalysis in the Aftermath of the First World War,” *Psychoanalysis and History* 18 no. 1 (2016): 39–69; Stefania Bernini, “Mothers and Children in Post-war Europe: Martyrdom and National Reconstruction in Italy and Poland,” in “Growing Up in the Shadow the Second World War,” special issue, *European Review of History* 22, no. 2 (2015): 242–58.

<sup>6</sup> Joe Duffy, *Children of the Rising: The Untold Story of the Young Lives during Easter 1916* (Dublin, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Marjorie Deleuze, “1916: Dublin Youth’s Sweet Revolution,” working paper, Dublin Gastronomy Symposium, 2016, <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1074&context=dgs>.

the many other children who witnessed the deaths of parents, siblings, or friends.<sup>8</sup> But the effect of these deaths on these largely anonymous children is difficult to trace, indicative of broader historiographical trends: as Sarah-Anne Buckley and Susannah Riordan have pointed out, the history of childhood in Ireland has tended to be written through an institutional lens.<sup>9</sup> The history of *children* is much harder to recover. In this article, I recover and analyze children's unique experiences during the Irish Revolution by exploring the history of a diverse group of children and young people, bound together by their fathers' politics during and after the Easter Rising.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, I do not claim that these children's experiences were representative; I argue that their status as "national orphans" after the post-rebellion executions meant that theirs was a distinctive community of experience, at the precise intersection of a common private grief and a very public sacrificial national politics.<sup>11</sup> But their story does help historians to consider children's experiences more widely.

I also unpick—or perhaps consciously entangle further—the skein of trauma, emotion, and experience of these children during the Irish Revolution. The history of trauma in Ireland is an emerging but increasingly vibrant field. Following Guy Beiner's important study of the traumatic public history narratives of 1916 in unionist and nationalist Ireland, attention has shifted in recent years to considering trauma in a more focused way, particularly among revolutionary combatants.<sup>12</sup> New perspectives are also emerging: a growing body of work examining the effects of male violence against women during the revolution demonstrates the devastating impact of serious physical and sexual assaults.<sup>13</sup> The victims of the Irish Revolution

<sup>8</sup> Eunan O'Halpin and Daithí Ó Corráin, *The Dead of the Irish Revolution* (New Haven, 2020), 26–88.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah-Anne Buckley and Susannah Riordan, "Childhood in Ireland," in *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*, ed. Eugenio Biagini and Mary Daly (Cambridge, 2017), 327–43, at 328.

<sup>10</sup> For pioneering work in this field, see the contributions in Ciara Boylan and Ciara Gallagher, eds., *Constructions of the Irish Child in the Independence Period, 1910–1940* (London, 2018). See also Marnie Hay, "Centuries of Irish Childhood," in "The History of Irish Childhoods," ed. Marnie Hay, special issue, *Irish Economic and Social History* 47, no. 1 (2020): 3–9; Sarah-Anne Buckley, Marnie Hay, and Riona Nic Congáil, eds., "Children and Childhood in Ireland," special issue, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9, no. 2 (2016): 195–323.

<sup>11</sup> See Colm Tóibín, "Flann O'Brien's Lies," *London Review of Books* 34, no. 1 (5 January 2012), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v34/n01/colm-toibin/flann-o-brien-s-lies>. There is an echo of the "national orphan" in "Children of Destiny," a never-completed novel-by-committee begun by Brian O'Nolan, Niall Sheridan, Denis Devlin, and Donagh MacDonagh in University College Dublin in the 1930s. The manuscript has not survived. One strand of it revolved around the son of a 1916 hero becoming the first Irish-Catholic president of the United States. See Niall Sheridan, "Brian, Flann and Myles," in *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*, ed. Timothy O'Keefe (London, 1973), 32–55, at 42–43.

<sup>12</sup> Guy Beiner, "Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, the Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland," *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007): 366–89; Siobhara Aiken, "The Women Who Had Been Straining Every Nerve: Gender Specific Medical Management of Trauma in the Irish Revolution," in *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture*, ed. Melania Terrazas Gallego (Oxford, 2019), 133–58; Ian Miller, "Pain, Memory, and Trauma in the Irish Revolution: Remembering and Contextualising Irish Suffering," in *The Body in Pain in Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. Fionnuala Dillane, Naomi McAreavey, and Emilie Pine (Basingstoke, 2016), 117–34. See also Michael Robinson, *Shell-Shocked British Army Veterans in Ireland, 1918–1939* (Manchester, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Linda Connolly, "Sexual Violence in the Irish Civil War: A Forgotten War Crime?," *Women's History Review* 30, no. 1 (2021): 126–43; Susan Byrne, "'Keeping Company with the Enemy': Gender and Sexual Violence against Women during the Irish War of Independence and Civil War," *Women's History Review* 30, no. 1 (2021): 108–25; Lindsey Earner-Byrne, "The Rape of Mary M.: A Microhistory of Sexual Violence and Moral Redemption in 1920s Ireland," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 1 (2015): 75–98.

were not only those who lost their lives or suffered physical injury: like those who survived physical attack, those who were bereaved lived with the effects for the rest of their lives.<sup>14</sup> I trace the psychic effects of that victimhood within a small group of children and young people who occupied a particular space in the public sphere in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Ireland: they were national orphans, children of the martyred dead of the Easter Rising. Their grief was publicized, their loss politicized, and their personal bereavement inscribed into an overwhelming national trauma. Although I do not delve deeply into the children's role within the evolution of commemorative culture in Ireland—worth a study in its own right—I do reflect on the relationship between their public visibility as the bereaved republican elite and their private grappling with that bereavement.

The traumatic history of this particular group of children opens up important interpretative and methodological questions about how historians approach the history of children as historical agents (as distinct from the history of childhood as an evolving social construct) and the history of trauma more generally. I seek to lean into the uncertainties raised by both of these topics. Firstly, I argue for a reorientation of Irish historians' invocation of that much-used term *trauma* from a small number of diagnosed or diagnosable historical actors toward the more expansive possibilities offered by the history of experience. This does not mean bypassing the question of trauma or the history of emotions; rather the history of experience is here understood as a way to integrate the history of emotions with the history of memory and sensory history, along with all the complexities of subjectivity and agency engendered when writing the history of children, as a more fruitful way of thinking and writing about the history of trauma.<sup>15</sup> Interpreted thus, writing about trauma in the past is neither a matter of retrospective (mass) diagnosis, nor is it a narrow medicalized category.

The problems posed by these binaries have been recognized by other scholars. Graham Dawson has recently explored the relative inutility of both medicalized definitions of trauma and broader cultural theory understandings of trauma as a mass psychic wound. As he suggests, such an approach neglects the multiple ways in which individuals renegotiate, accommodate, and process their trauma over time.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Peter Leese and Jason Croumathel argue for a “third wave” of trauma studies by attending to the “subjective sites where individuals narrate trauma dynamics.”<sup>17</sup> Certainly, a medicalized definition of trauma seems inappropriate here. None of the children who form the object of this study showed any of the classic markers of neurasthenia or post-traumatic stress disorder nor any major emotional disturbance (beyond a fear of soldiers)—or at least no traces survive in the

<sup>14</sup> This theme has also been explored in Anne Dolan, “‘The Shadow of a Great Fear’: Terror and Counter-Terror in Ireland,” in *Terror in Ireland, 1916–1923*, ed. David Fitzpatrick (Dublin, 2012), 26–38.

<sup>15</sup> Javier Moscoso, “From the History of Emotions to the History of Experience: A Republican Sailor's Sketchbook in the Civil War,” in *Engaging the Emotions in Spanish Culture and History*, ed. Luisa Elena Delgado, Pura Fernández, and Jo Labani (Nashville, 2016), 176–91, esp. 176–79.

<sup>16</sup> Graham Dawson, “The Meaning of Moving On: From Trauma to History and Memory of Emotions in ‘Post-conflict’ Northern Ireland,” *Irish University Review* 47 no. 1 (2017): 82–102.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Leese and Jason Croumathel, introduction to *Languages of Trauma: History, Memory, and Media*, ed. Peter Leese and Jason Croumathel (London, 2021), 3–26, at 25. See also Edgar Jones et al., “Flashbacks and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: The Genesis of a 20th-Century Diagnosis,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 182, no. 2 (2003): 158–63, at 163.

archival record. Yet they undoubtedly experienced something traumatic—or a series of traumatic events. Losing one's father as a national martyr in secret executions following a failed rebellion that paved the way for a national revolution is surely a compelling example of what clinicians would today describe as “childhood traumatic grief.” But in the records that survive of these children's experiences, such observations—even of an “anxious child,” deeply “affected” by a father's execution—rarely arise.<sup>18</sup> As do Dawson and other historians of trauma, I conceptualize trauma as an unstable, elastic category for these children as they grew to adulthood, sometimes glimpsed in retrospect; sometimes haltingly, belatedly, or obliquely articulated; sometimes kept at bay forever; and always culturally and historically determined.<sup>19</sup> Their negotiation and renegotiation of that trauma meant living with, through, and alongside a series of emotions from the immediate aftermath of the Easter Rising through the turbulence of the War of Independence and Civil War and on into independent Ireland.

Secondly, I grapple with the question of writing about children who left sparse contemporaneous traces in the historical record.<sup>20</sup> Although I have uncovered contemporary material wherever possible, it is frequently drawn from observations of these children from adults around them. The relative absence of their voices as children requires us as historians to think carefully about how we can tangentially approach the history of children, how childhood memories are created, how and when they are recalled, and what the relationship between experiences as children and their articulation as adults constitutes.<sup>21</sup> By practicing what Mona Gleason has termed “empathic inference” to “think deeply and critically about how children and young people may have responded” to turbulent and traumatic events, I read into, across, and against fragmentary and diverse sources to recover the stories of these children who were plunged into national prominence by their fathers' rebellion.<sup>22</sup> In reflecting on my own emotional responses to their stories, I acknowledge the effect that empathic inference has in turn on researchers, bringing us ever closer to our historical subjects. My aim is to recover the texture of those emotional experiences—mine and theirs—following Ville Kivimäki, Sami Suodenjoki, and Tanja Vahtikari's innovative formulation of the history of experience as inherently iterative, “synchronically and diachronically constructed processes which blend into memories—and shaped by the person's or social group's earlier experiences and memories.”<sup>23</sup> Attending to the texture of children's experiences—albeit impressionistic,

<sup>18</sup> Anthony P. Mannarino and Judith A. Cohen, “Traumatic Loss in Children and Adolescents,” *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma* 4, no. 1 (2011): 22–33.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Lerner and Mark S. Micale, “Trauma, Psychiatry, and History: A Conceptual and Historiographical Introduction,” in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930*, ed. Paul Lerner and Mark S. Micale (Cambridge, 2001), 1–27, at 20–21.

<sup>20</sup> Some of these challenges have been explored by Kristine Alexander in “Can the Girl Guide Speak? The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Research,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4, no. 1 (2012): 132–45.

<sup>21</sup> See Sarah Maza, “The Kids Aren't Alright: Historians and the Problem of Childhood,” *American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1261–85.

<sup>22</sup> Mona Gleason, “Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education,” *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 446–59, at 458n8.

<sup>23</sup> Ville Kivimäki, Sami Suodenjoki, and Tanja Vahtikari, “Lived Nation: Histories of Experience and Emotion in Understanding Nationalism,” in *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in*

Table 1—Children of the Executed Leaders of the Easter Rising

Father	Child	Age in May 1916
James Connolly	Nora	23
	Ina	21
	Aideen	19
	Moira	17
	Roddy	15
	Fiona	7
Thomas J. Clarke	Daly	10
	Tom Jr	8
	Emmet	4
Thomas MacDonagh	Donagh	3
	Bairbre	1
Eamonn Ceannt	Rónán	10
John MacBride	Seán	12
Michael Mallin	Séamus	12
	Seán	9
	Úna	7
	Joseph	2
	Máire Constance	b. August 1916

tentative, or only voiced in retrospect—can offer an alternative picture of domestic and intimate relationships in a narrative of revolution that has afforded relatively little space for social or cultural histories. This is a history from below, written through the bodies, emotions, and memories of babies, children, and young people growing into adulthood in the shadow of a national foundation myth.

### BEFORE: FAMILY LIFE BEFORE THE RISING

Who were the children of the Easter Rising? The sixteen dead men of the rebellion left behind them seventeen children at the time of their executions in May 1916, with an eighteenth born later that summer.

I also trace the children of two other notable casualties of Easter week: Michael O’Rahilly and Francis Sheehy Skeffington. “The O’Rahilly” was killed in action on 28 April 1916. There were, of course, many rebels killed in action, and these left approximately fifty children behind. Yet O’Rahilly stands out: the most senior Volunteer killed in action, he had been an extremely well-known, colorful figure within advanced nationalism before the Easter Rising, and the pathos of his death (in a doorway on Sackville Lane, after penning a farewell note to his wife and writing his name in blood on a wall) merely added to his celebrity. At his death in April 1916, O’Rahilly had four sons: Mac, age twelve; Aodogán, eleven; Niall, nine; and Myles, four. A fifth, Rory (named for Roger Casement), was born

*Finland, 1800–2000*, ed. Ville Kivimäki, Sami Suodenjoki, and Tanja Vahtikari (Basingstoke, 2021), 1–28, at 12.

in July 1916. Francis Sheehy Skeffington, along with two others, was murdered by Captain Bowen Colthurst while in military custody. The attempt to cover up his murder caused a political scandal, and the efforts of his widow, Hanna, to expose the truth of what had happened to her husband made Francis the best-known civilian casualty of Easter Week.<sup>24</sup> Francis and Hanna had a seven-year-old son, Owen.

This core group of twenty-four children who lost their fathers during the Easter Rising was thus bound together, but the circumstances of their losses mattered. Despite being a notionally egalitarian movement, Irish republicanism had an acute sense of status, tied as much to pedigree as it was to personal record. That status anxiety also extended to these national orphans, who were placed in the hierarchy of victimhood. At the apex were the children of the signatories of the Proclamation, below them the children of the other executed men, further down still the children of those killed in action. Sitting slightly outside them all was Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, whose father had not willingly sacrificed himself for the sacred cause of the Irish Republic. This distinction was significant, not merely for how Owen was viewed publicly but also how he dealt with his bereavement. Other differences were similarly important—age, class, degree of politicization, position within the family—resulting in a varied jigsaw.<sup>25</sup>

A common thread, however, was the degree to which these children were socialized into Irish nationalism prior to the Rising. This was not entirely down to paternal influence—many of the children's mothers were equally committed advanced nationalists. Nor were these children exceptional—many Irish children participated in advanced nationalist activities and organizations in the years leading up to 1916.<sup>26</sup> But in their retrospective narration of their childhoods, that early politicization loomed large, providing a tangible shared link to their fathers, a common purpose, even for those who did not remain politically active. The influence of affective relationships in shaping political identities in Ireland has been noted; as Katie Barclay has argued, the family is “a more dynamic site for the production of political relationships than is often considered.”<sup>27</sup> Roy Foster's work also suggests that familial dynamics were central in the formation of political identities within the revolutionary generation, although antagonism featured just as strongly as affection in shaping those identities.<sup>28</sup> For these children, sharing their parents' (and particularly their fathers') ideology became fused with honoring their father's memory, leaving little space for the articulation of grief itself. Family life, in almost every case, had revolved around politics: the parents frequently met through political or cultural nationalist activities, and this shared commitment shaped the household, with fathers regularly absent on organizing trips, and older children sometimes accompanying them.

<sup>24</sup> See Margaret Ward, *Fearless Woman: Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Feminism, and the Irish Revolution* (Dublin, 2019), 202–69.

<sup>25</sup> The sixteen books in the 16Lives series, published in Dublin by O'Brien Press, 2014–2016, are the most up-to-date biographical treatment of the executed leaders.

<sup>26</sup> Marnie Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann and the Irish Revolution, 1909–1923: Scouting for Rebels* (Manchester, 2019). See also Sinéad McCool, *Easter Widows* (Dublin, 2014), for details on the political careers of the widows of the rebellion's leaders.

<sup>27</sup> Katie Barclay, “Happiness: Family and Nation in Nineteenth Century Ireland,” *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 43, no. 2 (2021): 171–90, at 173.

<sup>28</sup> R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London, 2014), 1–5.

The images of fatherhood that emerge from the retrospective accounts of the children of the 1916 families were of course idealized; yet by reading carefully and juxtaposing them with contemporary material, it is possible to reconstruct something of the inner life of the household. In almost all cases, the fathers emerge as attentive, loving parents, intensely interested in their children. Some of the intimate correspondence makes for painful reading in light of what was to come. The MacDonagh family papers overflow with affirmations of spousal and parental love, mantras to bolster Muriel MacDonagh's fragile mental health. "I feel dreadfully sentimental about you both," her husband wrote. "You love me. I love you. Don loves us. We love Don."<sup>29</sup> Ten months later, after she had recovered from what seems to have been postnatal depression, Muriel wrote that she felt "that the cloak of my life is wrapped firmly and tightly round me and securely fastened."<sup>30</sup> Among the papers are a series of letters Thomas MacDonagh wrote to his son, carefully saved amid the turmoil and upheaval that followed. The poem MacDonagh wrote for his son, "born on Saint Cecilia's Day," is well known; these were private treasures. "We hold our happiness in your little gripping hands"; "We want to see you open like a flower day by day, all through the spring and summer and on to this time next year"—reminders that once they were a young family with their lives before them.<sup>31</sup> Also in the correspondence are three-year-old Donagh's poignant letters to his father, away organizing the Volunteers, along with a "wee wee leaf" he had carefully selected:

Dear Dadden,  
 How do you do? Please come home soon Dadden. Don loves Dadden and Mammam.  
 How do you do? Please Dadden come home soon. Dear Dadden, good Dadden.  
 Your loving little son, Don.  
 Dear Dadden here is a wee wee leaf.<sup>32</sup>

Donagh later commented he had "no memory whatsoever" of writing these letters.<sup>33</sup> But he evidently had looked at them, had held the crumpled enclosed leaf in his hand, and continued to keep them safe, precious relics of an obliterated family life. And he confronted, in his allusive ego writing, the void of his childhood memories.

The Ceannt papers—of Eamonn Ceannt, his wife, Áine, and her two sisters, Lily and Kathleen O'Brennan—had fewer literary flourishes but similar personal items, including a hand-drawn book of their marriage with Celtic lettering charting their family history. The only page in ecstatic color, bedecked with swirling triskeles, marks the day the couple's son, Rónán, was born.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Seán MacBride had virtually no relationship with his father. John MacBride and Maud Gonne had

<sup>29</sup> Thomas MacDonagh to Muriel MacDonagh, 3 January 1913, MacDonagh Papers, MS 44,319/4, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as NLI.)

<sup>30</sup> Muriel MacDonagh to Thomas MacDonagh, 13 November 1913, MacDonagh Papers, MS 44, 320/7, NLI.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas MacDonagh to Donagh MacDonagh, 22 December 1912, MacDonagh Papers, MS44,321/1, NLI.

<sup>32</sup> Donagh MacDonagh to Thomas MacDonagh, 19 June 1915, MacDonagh Papers, MS44,321/3, NLI.

<sup>33</sup> MacDonagh, "Blue Print," 521.

<sup>34</sup> Book of calligraphic inscriptions, Ceannt Papers, MS13,069/56, NLI.

separated within the first year of Seán's life, amid accusations of cruelty and drunkenness, and allegations of MacBride's abuse of Gonne's ten-year-old daughter, Iseult. The rancorous separation and accusations against his father resulted in an entirely strained relationship: occasional postcards and a handful of visits was all Seán MacBride could recall some seventy years later.<sup>35</sup> Tom Clarke, in contrast to his taciturn public persona, emerges from personal correspondence as an expressive, reflective man, utterly devoted to his wife above all else—even, sometimes, their children. "Life without you Katty wouldn't be worth living," he wrote in 1908. "Daly too [their eldest son] has my heart but the love is different to that which centres around your own darling self. There now I am perhaps writing like a sentimental ass—anyway if I didn't feel as I do about my wee wife I would be an ass—so there."<sup>36</sup>

He was moved to tears when their second son was born but seems to have been a strict father, all told.<sup>37</sup> He was wary of Daly being "spoiled with petting from his aunts," and in a rare surviving letter to him, warned that his mother would have to "whack your botty for being a bad boy."<sup>38</sup> This seems to have worried Kathleen Clarke, who urged her husband to "be more loving to [Daly], as I believe he is more easily influenced that way than being abused," suggesting an occasionally divergent approach to parenthood. Life with three small boys was not always easy for the fifty-something Clarke, who had been profoundly affected by fifteen years of hard labor for Fenian activities.<sup>39</sup> "God Almighty! What an obstreperous child I discovered Emmet to be when I was at close quarters with him for the two days" was Clarke's verdict on Christmas Day 1910 to John Daly, his fellow prisoner, old comrade, and Kathleen's uncle.<sup>40</sup>

Overt expressions of love may have been rare, but there were many ways that fathers could demonstrate their love for their children. Materially providing for one's family, as Laura King has shown, was part of a deeply embedded code of virtuous fatherhood that functioned across the United Kingdom.<sup>41</sup> Even committed socialists like James Connolly had internalized it: his daughter Nora's memoir opens with her father and mother weeping as he struggled with the physical strain of his laboring job. He was a "poor husband," he declared, "no use."<sup>42</sup> The only hint of marital discord in the Connolly household occurred when James wished the family to leave relative prosperity and comfort in the United States to return to the darkening political clouds in Ireland in 1912.<sup>43</sup> Michael Mallin and his wife,

<sup>35</sup> Seán MacBride, interviewed by Gay Byrne, *The Late Late Show*, RTÉ, 21 January 1984, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0120/499062-sen-macbride-a-man-with-an-extraordinary-career/>.

<sup>36</sup> Tom Clarke to Kathleen Clarke, [March, 1908], Clarke Accession Papers, box 1, folder 1.ii.13, NLI. Note that these files were consulted before the collection was fully catalogued. They are now available as MS 49,351–49,357, MS 49,424–49,425, and MS 49,819.

<sup>37</sup> Tom Clarke to Kathleen Clarke, March 1908, Clarke Accession Papers, box 1.ii.12, NLI.

<sup>38</sup> Tom Clarke to Daly Clarke, 15 August 1905, Clarke Accession Papers, box 1, folder 1.ii.6, NLI.

<sup>39</sup> One of Clarke's former comrades told his biographer, Louis Le Roux, that "they often used to surprise Tom sitting on a chair in the same position as, when a convict, he used to sit on a stool in his cell, trunk erect, gazing into the distance, his eyelids hardly moving, his hands resting on his knees." L. N. Le Roux, *Tom Clarke and the Irish Freedom Movement* (Dublin, 1939), 111–12.

<sup>40</sup> Le Roux, *Tom Clarke and the Irish Freedom Movement*, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914–1960* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Nora Connolly O'Brien, *Portrait of a Rebel Father* (Dublin, 1935), 20–21.

<sup>43</sup> Ina Connolly Heron, "James Connolly—A Biography," *Liberty*, April 1966, 24.

Agnes, like many of their class, provided a stable emotional life for their children despite the struggle of keeping house and home together. The family moved frequently in the decade prior to the Easter Rising and supplemented their income through a number of side ventures.<sup>44</sup> The Clarkes also struggled at times; as Kathleen Clarke wrote in a pen-portrait of her husband, “Except for the lack of this world’s goods their marriage was ideally happy.”<sup>45</sup>

The emotional tenor of the households before the Rising, and in particular the father-child relationships, shaped the children’s identities, especially their political identities. Many of the children frame their accounts of their political formation as a set of emotional responses. Involvement in their father’s political activities was a great source of pride, notably to the Connolly children. Ina Connolly recalled that she was “a very proud girl delivering [a] short speech by my father’s side” after his release from prison following his hunger strike during the 1913 Lockout.<sup>46</sup> Nora Connolly’s 1935 memoir *Portrait of a Rebel Father* is suffused with her pride at her particularly close relationship with her father. This pride was visceral at times: hearing the wave of applause from immigrant workers in New York after James Connolly addressed them in Italian, Nora was overcome: “[H]er cheeks were flushed, her hands clenched tight, her knees shaking, and her heart was singing, ‘There’s not another daddy like him in all the world.’” He was her “Socialist Silver Tongue daddy,” a fond early nickname, and she wondered as she accompanied him around political meetings in America and Ireland, “[D]o they all know I’m his daughter?”<sup>47</sup> In due course, Nora became politically active in her own right. “I’ll always want your approval,” she recalled telling him, as he tutored her in defending her political position as one of Belfast’s Young Republican Party, a short-lived body that emerged from the nationalist boy scouts organization, Fianna Éireann.<sup>48</sup>

Conversely, not living up to one’s father’s political expectations could produce negative emotional responses still vivid fifty years later. Séamus Mallin clearly remembered feeling ashamed as a ten-year-old when his grandfather brought him onto a tram during the Lockout, when all Irish Transport and General Workers Union members and their supporters were boycotting the Dublin Tramway Company. Returning to the family shop, the boy’s shame was reinforced by his cold reception by his father: “I felt that I was guilty of something against the working class, my own people.”<sup>49</sup> The consequences of having a political father could weigh heavily on a child. Owen Sheehy Skeffington, aged six, experienced an “emotional shock” when his father Francis was released after a week on hunger strike following his conviction for anti-recruiting activities in 1915. In 1964, Owen remembered clearly the moment his father returned home:

<sup>44</sup> Brian Hughes, *Michael Mallin* (Dublin, 2012), 53–55.

<sup>45</sup> Kathleen Clarke, character sketch of Tom Clarke, Clarke Papers, box 2, folder III.ix, NLI.

<sup>46</sup> “James Connolly in Dublin 1913, No 2,” Radio Talk Scripts, RTÉ Written Archives, P260/354, University College Dublin Archives. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as UCDA.)

<sup>47</sup> Connolly O’Brien, *Portrait of a Rebel Father*, 89–90.

<sup>48</sup> O’Brien, 170. See also Marnie Hay, *Bulmer Hobson and the Nationalist Movement in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), 103–4.

<sup>49</sup> Séamus Ó Meallain Memoir, P62, UCDA.

[S]eeing this man whom I'd seen hale and fit, he was never a fat man but he was wiry and muscular, I'd seen him ten days before and now I was seeing a man who looked very like a skeleton being helped up the path . . . all he said in a voice that I can still remember as being a rather croaking voice, er, he said "Hello laddie." I just said hello and I can still remember a kind of emotional hesitancy as to whether I should go up to him or whether I should go into the house after him or what should I do, and in fact I just remained playing in the garden.<sup>50</sup>

Witnessing their fathers' political commitments thus produced a range of emotional responses among the children: pride at sharing in them, shame at not living up to them, or horror at the consequences of them.

For some of the older children, vicarious pride at sharing in their father's political activities had time to blossom into political identities of their own. Fianna Éireann drew many of the 1916 children into its ranks: the older O'Rahilly boys, Mac and Aodagán, joined E Company with their cousin Emmet Humphries in May 1915 and promised to "work for the independence of Ireland, never to join England's armed forces, and to obey my superior officers."<sup>51</sup> Nora and Ina Connolly were among the earliest members of Belfast's Betsy Gray Sluagh, one of a very small number of girls' branches. Their brother Roddy was a member of the regular boys' branch there, while Séamus Mallin was in the Inchicore Sluagh.<sup>52</sup> Their involvement in the events leading up to the Easter Rising was, again, recalled in emotional terms. Ina Connolly was "heartbroken . . . overcome with joy and disappointment" when she and her sister were excluded from the Fianna's part in the Howth Gunrunning in September 1914, at least partly at the prospect of having to tell her father: "How could we face back to Belfast and my father and say we knew nothing and did less."<sup>53</sup> The Connolly sisters did, in the end, assist with the dispersal of the illicit guns, and as they arrived home, "Father was there to greet us and clap us on the back."<sup>54</sup> As the republican movement stepped decisively into the political spotlight at the funeral of old Fenian dynamiter Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in August 1915, republican youth also played its part. Séamus Mallin remembered seeing Roddy Connolly's "manly air . . . in charge of a little troop of Fianna."<sup>55</sup> More prominent roles were assigned to the three sons of Tom and Kathleen Clarke (although they do not appear to have been Fianna members): alongside Volunteers, Citizen Army, and Cumann na mBan members, Daly, Tom Jr, and Emmet Clarke laid wreaths at Rossa's coffin as he lay in state in City Hall. The two younger boys, ages seven and five, were lifted by their mother to gaze on the face of the dead patriot and thus be publicly inscribed into the Fenian tradition. Their participation was part of the intricate, emotive choreography of the funeral, culminating in P. H. Pearse's famous graveside oration. The official commemorative booklet for the funeral reinforced the point: "The bier of Rossa was as a shrine at which people poured out love and homage, as an altar to which fathers brought their children even

<sup>50</sup> BBC interview with Owen Sheehy Skeffington, MS15,015(1), NLI.

<sup>51</sup> Emmet Humphries Memoirs, P106/348, UCDA.

<sup>52</sup> For a definitive treatment of the organization, see Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*.

<sup>53</sup> Connolly Heron, "James Connolly," 19.

<sup>54</sup> Connolly Heron, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Séamus Ó Meallain Memoir, P62, UCDA.

as Hamilcar Barca brought his son, Hannibal, to swear eternal vengeance on the enemies of his country.<sup>56</sup>

### DURING: LIVING THROUGH THE RISING

Easter Week saw these children in different places. Some were combatants, some onlookers; some witnesses to their fathers' last hours, some passive recipients of the news that turned their lives upside down. Among the most active—for they were the oldest—were the Connollys. Nora and Ina Connolly spent most of the Easter Rising traveling between Belfast, Tyrone, and Dublin in an attempt to convey new orders to the northern Volunteers after the confusion of Eoin MacNéill's countermanding notice on Easter Sunday. Struggling to get back to the city and to their father once the rebellion had started, they walked fifty miles from Dundalk to Dublin. They found their family in a state of severe distress: a tabloid newspaper had reported that Connolly was dead, but the two girls were able to report that he was alive, albeit seriously wounded and a prisoner in Dublin Castle.<sup>57</sup> Their brother, Roddy, had been in the General Post Office, acting as aide-de-camp to his father until the Wednesday, when James Connolly sent him away in the hope of keeping his son from the grasp of the authorities. Nonetheless, Roddy was arrested in the aftermath of the surrender and held in Richmond Barracks, where he shared a cell with Tom Clarke, Seán MacDermott, and John MacBride. He gave a false name—Alfred Carney—and stuck to it. Released on 8 May, he made his way back to his mother and sisters to wait as word of the executions came filtering through.

The interminable waiting was the experience of most of the families. Kathleen Clarke sent her children to her family in Limerick before the Easter Rising, to keep them safe and out of Dublin. The Clarke home there was raided, torn apart, after the surrender, and Kathleen was arrested and held in the Castle. The Daly home in Limerick, however, was equally beleaguered. Kathleen's only brother, twenty-four-year-old Ned Daly, another commandant of the Volunteers, was arrested and awaiting court-martial after the surrender.<sup>58</sup> Michael Mallin's family went to his brother's house to be away from the trouble around their Kilmainham home, and spent the week praying.<sup>59</sup> Thomas MacDonagh's wife and children remained at their home on the south side of the city within a mile of the fighting.<sup>60</sup> Éamonn Ceannt's house in Dolphin's Barn was the scene of chaos on Easter Sunday; the next day, ten-year-old Rónán watched his father leave. He and his mother spent Easter week in the home of Mrs. Cathal Brugha in Rathmines, safely away from the line of fire.<sup>61</sup> The O'Rahilly boys had spent the weeks before the Rising assisting their father in the home production of ammunition. After Michael O'Rahilly left the family home on Easter Monday to join in the rebellion, the family was split up.

<sup>56</sup> Padraic Pearse et al., *Diarmuid O Donnabháin Rossa, 1831–1915: Souvenir of Public Funeral to Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, August 1st 1915* (Dublin, 1915).

<sup>57</sup> Nora Connolly [O'Brien], *The Irish Rebellion of 1916: Or, The Unbroken Tradition* (New York, 1918), 171–72.

<sup>58</sup> Madge Daly Memoir, 102, P/2, folder 78, University of Limerick; Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, 71.

<sup>59</sup> Witness Statement of Thomas Mallin, 3–4, WS382, Bureau of Military History, Dublin.

<sup>60</sup> McCool, *Easter Widows*, 234.

<sup>61</sup> Witness Statement of Áine Ceannt, 28–30, WS264, Bureau of Military History.

Nancy O'Rahilly stayed in their home with her two younger sons, her sisters-in-law, and her niece, while the two older boys were sent to a friend's house in Ballyboden in the south Dublin countryside; there, with Eoin MacNeill they prepared to fight to defend the house.<sup>62</sup> Maud Gonne and her son spent the Easter holidays at their house on the Normandy coast as usual, hastily returning to Paris as news of the rebellion filtered through.<sup>63</sup> Owen Sheehy Skeffington was at home in Rathmines as both his parents went out over successive days to try to find out what was unfolding.<sup>64</sup>

From such a bald outline of where these children were during Easter week, we might ask: Where can we find the trauma? A close reading of these children's accounts, contemporaneous and subsequent, suggests it was frequently encoded in sensory memories. The sights and sounds of the Rising itself took center stage, recalled vividly even at the distance of fifty years. Rónán Ceannt's abiding memory of the turmoil in their house on Easter Sunday, as Volunteers arrived to regroup following the confusion of the countermanding order, was an image of bicycles littering the front garden and the soundscape of the wounded Volunteer officer Douglas Ffrench-Mullen playing "Dead March" from Handel's *Saul* on the family piano.<sup>65</sup> Ina Connolly remembered her father "splendid. . . in the uniform of Ireland's green" and Thomas MacDonagh's "laughing eyes" as he joked with the Cumann na mBan women tasked with bringing news of the Easter Rising to the northern Volunteers.<sup>66</sup> Roddy Connolly recalled the incongruous vision of Joseph Plunkett in the General Post Office, "gorgeously apparelled in uniform. . . [with] a sword and a white scarf around his neck."<sup>67</sup> Nora Connolly remembered the boom of the heavy guns, audible from thirty miles outside Dublin, and the smell of burning buildings and stench of dead horses as she and her sister Ina crossed the city center on their way to find their mother.<sup>68</sup> Another sister, Fiona, safe in the cottage in the Dublin mountains, had only one memory of Easter week: standing on a large rock, looking down on the city, "the reflection of fire in the sky. I heard them say 'That is Dublin burning.'"<sup>69</sup> For Nancy O'Rahilly, five months pregnant in her villa in the Dublin suburbs with two of her children, "the nights were terrible, rifle firing and machine guns and the sounds of burning houses."<sup>70</sup> Owen Sheehy Skeffington's "first memory" of the Easter Rising was the sounds of a volley of shots and of shattering glass as soldiers from the Royal Irish Rifles raided the family home: "[O]ne of my personal memories as a little boy is of the appearance of this broken glass in the

<sup>62</sup> Aodogán O'Rahilly, "Memories of Easter Week," O'Rahilly Papers, P102/524, UCDA; Emmet Humphries Memoirs, P106/348, UCDA.

<sup>63</sup> Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, *Seán MacBride: A Republican Life* (Liverpool, 2011), 17–20.

<sup>64</sup> Andrée Sheehy Skeffington, *Skeff: A Life of Owen Sheehy Skeffington, 1909–1970* (Dublin, 1991), 15–17.

<sup>65</sup> Rónán Ceannt, interview, *Portraits of 1916*, RTÉ, 21 November 1965, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1993-easter-1916/portraits-1916/792499-portraits-1916-ronan-ceannt/>.

<sup>66</sup> Witness Statement of Ina Connolly Heron, 108, 110, WS919, Bureau of Military History.

<sup>67</sup> Roddy Connolly, interview, *Portraits of 1916*, RTÉ, 9 January 1966, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1993-easter-1916/portraits-1916/765689-portraits-1916-roddy-connolly/>.

<sup>68</sup> Connolly, *Irish Rebellion of 1916*, 169–70. See also Connolly O'Brien, *Portrait of a Rebel Father*, 310.

<sup>69</sup> Connolly Edwards, "Child's Memories of Easter Week."

<sup>70</sup> Nell Humphries to Nora O'Conolly, [May 1916], O'Rahilly Papers, P106/84, UCDA.

drawing room, big plate-glass and I learned for the first time how thick plate-glass is, I can still see the thickness of that glass.”<sup>71</sup>

These sensory impressions, so prominent in these children’s narratives of the Easter Rising, functioned as gateways into their lived experience, both for themselves and for their audiences. Recreating the sights, sounds, and smells of the Easter Rising was an essential precursor to entering into the emotion of those events, in what Rob Boddice and Mark Smith have argued is the fundamental connection between emotions and senses in the production of human experience.<sup>72</sup> As such, this sensory framing serves in itself as a form of emotive capable of creating an emotional response in us as readers even at a distance of over a hundred years.<sup>73</sup> And as we read these accounts of shattering glass and burning buildings, we, too, enter into a sensory imaginary, a fast track to historical empathy.

These memories of the shock of seeing, hearing, and smelling Dublin burn, of witnessing homes raided and ransacked, were a framework in later life for accessing memories of the greatest trauma: the execution of their fathers. This key moment in the children’s emotional formation built on their previous politicization, applying it to a seismic personal event. As Stephanie Olsen has noted, emotional formations were frequently significant components of children’s development as proto-citizens, teaching children “what they should or should not feel or what they should or should not display.”<sup>74</sup> This process, I suggest, drew on multiple overlapping emotional communities, each embedding their own norms: the social conventions around mourning practices, sometimes distinctively Irish, sometimes drawing on wider Edwardian rituals; the changes to those mourning practices driven by the Great War; the politicized habits of feeling, in particular around service and sacrifice, inculcated by their fathers before the Easter Rising and accentuated by the republican movement in the post-Rising period. This patriotic emotional formation was also visible at the most intimate of levels: in the ways these children learned, particularly from their mothers, how to process, grieve, and ultimately sublimate their personal loss in the service of the emerging nation. Like all emotional formations, it was a dynamic process, shaped in turn by the child’s response, which itself was subject to change and negotiation over time. Thus, while common features can be identified, the children experienced and remembered their father’s deaths differently depending on their age, sex and personality, as well as the nature of the relationship beforehand.

Goodbyes were also experienced very differently. Some were explicit. Ina Connolly remembered her last moments with her father, snatched in the chaos of Easter Monday morning as she prepared, reluctantly, to leave Dublin for the north: “Clutching him tightly, I begged him to let me stay with him. Framing my face with his hands, he said: ‘It is not what you want, nor what I want, but what is required of

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Owen Sheehy Skeffington, MS15,015(1), NLI.

<sup>72</sup> Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience* (Cambridge, 2020), 18–30.

<sup>73</sup> On emotives, see William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), 96–97. The value of sensory history for approaching revolutionary history has been vividly demonstrated in Jan Plamper, “Sounds of February, Smells of October: The Russian Revolution as Sensory Experience,” *American Historical Review* 126, no. 1 (2021): 140–65.

<sup>74</sup> Stephanie Olsen, “Children’s Emotional Formations in Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, around the First World War,” *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 5 (2020): 643–57, at 644.

us that counts.”<sup>75</sup> This motif of emotional sacrifice and self-abnegation in service of the nation was a common feature of the emotional economy of the Easter Rising among the rebels, but it faltered as the realities of defeat became clear. Two days later, James Connolly said goodbye to his fifteen-year-old son, Roddy, who some fifty years later recalled his father's tears: “It was to me rather strange to see him cry, and at our parting in the GPO I saw the tears drip down his cheeks—it was actually our last goodbye . . . I never saw him again.”<sup>76</sup> Seven-year-old Fiona Connolly was brought in to see her father as he lay wounded in Dublin Castle; it was, she remembered later, a strange, discombobulating moment of “utter, complete happiness” to see her “loving, merry father again.”<sup>77</sup> Only Nora Connolly, the eldest daughter, saw her father on the eve of his execution. Her account of their last meeting was pointedly emotive, invoking admiration for her father's bravery, her mother's grief, and her own stoicism. It was initially recounted to her siblings on the night of the execution, then refined for lecture-hall audiences across Irish America, printed in *Pearson's Magazine* and the *Atlantic*, then in her quickly published *The Unbroken Tradition*, later in her *Portrait of a Rebel Father*, again and again at Irish political meetings in the 1920s and 1930s, and once more for television cameras in 1965—compulsive reiterations of the traumatic event.<sup>78</sup> By 1965, her telling had lost none of its emotive power; if anything, it was heightened by the passage of time. Nora Connolly O'Brien's voice was even then tremulous, her eyes glistening with tears, punctuated by heavy sighs, as she relived the emotion and strain of that last meeting and James Connolly's famous words to his family: “Wasn't it a full life, Lillie, and isn't this a good end?”<sup>79</sup>

Even within one family, then, there were multiple experiences of farewells. The grief of the other Connolly children, difficult to trace in the archives, can only be glimpsed obliquely as the first silent audience of that last goodbye. “They were all huddled together, sobbing and crying. Mama still stood at the window watching the sky, moaning . . . ‘Mama, will you listen while I read Daddy's last words. Children, stop crying and listen to me.’ With many stops, amid the sounds of stifled sobs, Nono read [Connolly's last statement].”<sup>80</sup> Some of the children also adopted and adapted their sibling's memories; there are striking similarities between Ina Connolly's unpublished memories of the Dublin cottage and Fiona Connolly's published ones, suggesting a degree of conscious or unconscious collaboration, perhaps particularly relevant for younger siblings who may not have known what were their own direct memories and what they had imbibed from familial retellings.<sup>81</sup> Frequently, learning of their father's death was a communal experience. The O'Rahilly boys were told in a lane outside the General Post Office by their seventeen-year-old

<sup>75</sup> Ina Connolly Heron Memoir (Fragment), MS 33718/G, NLI.

<sup>76</sup> Roddy Connolly, “Easter Memories,” *Easter Commemoration Digest* (Dublin, 1966), 159.

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, “Child's Memories of Easter Week.”

<sup>78</sup> Nora Connolly [O'Brien], “Last Interview with My Father,” *Pearson's Magazine* 36, no. 4 (October 1916): 359–62; Nora Connolly [O'Brien], “Easter,” *Atlantic* 18, no. 5 (November 1916): 682–85; Connolly O'Brien, *Irish Rebellion of 1916*; Connolly O'Brien, *Portrait of a Rebel Father*.

<sup>79</sup> Nora Connolly O'Brien, interview, *Portraits 1916*, RTÉ, 30 October 1965, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0615/795836-final-farewell-for-james-and-nora-connolly/>.

<sup>80</sup> Connolly O'Brien, *Portrait of a Rebel Father*, 324–25.

<sup>81</sup> Edwards, “Child's Memories of Easter Week”; Ina Connolly Heron Memoir (Fragment), MS 33718/G, NLI.

cousin Sighle Humphries as they walked back to the ruined city; their last goodbye was a note written hastily as their father lay dying: “tons and tons of love to you dearie and to the boys . . . it was a good fight anyhow.”<sup>82</sup>

The Mallin family had perhaps the most intense collective experience of all as the only ones taken together to visit their father before his execution. Four children were present at this highly emotional scene, yet only one shared his memories publicly at the safe distance of fifty years later: Séamus Mallin, by then a senior civil servant in the Department of Agriculture, published his recollections in 1966 in the Irish-language newspaper *Inniu*. The four Mallin children, aged from twelve to two, were woken in the middle of the night and taken to the Kilmainham Gaol. Although there was no explanation, they knew from the demeanor of their relatives that something terrible was happening.<sup>83</sup> Once inside the gaol, they were taken through dimly lit corridors past murmuring police and soldiers to their father’s cell. He broke the news baldly—“I’m going to die tomorrow”—and their mother collapsed crying. The family grew so distressed that sounds of their weeping and wailing could be heard all the way down the corridor, prompting a priest ministering to another condemned rebel to come in to try to alleviate their distress.<sup>84</sup> Twelve-year-old Séamus had been something of his father’s confidante; he was accustomed to thinking of himself as a grownup. But in that dark cell, with the sounds of his mother and brothers and sister sobbing, he described himself as “only a little child with no understanding of life’s events.”<sup>85</sup>

Mallin’s recollection of his emotional state in the condemned’s cell is vivid, and the juxtaposition of the adult writer with the child’s sensibility is a striking illustration of the way traumatic memories were resurfaced and renegotiated, particularly around significant anniversaries. Joseph Mallin, only two at the time, could not remember anything of that midnight visit in 1916, but in later life, he memorized his father’s lengthy, rambling, passionate final letter to his family. Ninety years later, on a rare visit home to Ireland from his Hong Kong Jesuit missionary community, he returned to Kilmainham Gaol. A frail, stooped figure, he walked along the dank corridor and spent time in his father’s cell where they had all been crying ninety years before. He spoke openly about not being able to remember but clearly wished to share something of what it had been like, even secondhand, as the last surviving sibling.<sup>86</sup> It is in these renegotiations that we can see how trauma, memory, emotion, and aging all combined in a tangled spool of experience. That tangle also encompasses the reader, both the contemporary audience and the subsequent historian. In dissolving the distance between the event, its emotional effects, its memory, and its recounting fifty years later, the Mallins’ recollections allow the reader too to enter into an experiential world brimming with emotion.

<sup>82</sup> Aodogán O’Rahilly, *Winding the Clock: O’Rahilly and the 1916 Rising* (Dublin, 1991), 222.

<sup>83</sup> Séamus Ó Meallainn, “Cuimhneacháin,” *Inniu*, 23 September 1966.

<sup>84</sup> Piaras MacLochlainn, *Last Words: Letters and Statements of the Leaders Executed after the Rising at Easter* (Dublin, 1971), 127.

<sup>85</sup> Ó Meallainn, “Cuimhneacháin.”

<sup>86</sup> Father Joseph Mallin, interview, RTÉ News Report, 3 May 2006, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0428/784809-arbour-hill/>; “Michael Mallin’s Son Knows by Heart His Final Letter,” RTÉ News Report, 15 April 2006, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0414/781829-letter-from-patriot-father/>.

Like Joseph Mallin, many of the younger children had no such vivid memories to draw upon. Donagh MacDonagh wrote baldly that he remembered almost nothing of his father save for a few scraps of memories of him in a Volunteer uniform or riding a motorcycle. Donagh's younger sister Bairbre, just fifteen months, remembered nothing of her parents at all.<sup>87</sup> In 1966, Rónán Ceannt remembered his father wheeling his bicycle away down the road on Easter Monday morning, his knapsack on his back and his bushranger-style Volunteer hat on his head, a fragmentary snapshot frozen in time.<sup>88</sup> Rónán was not brought into Kilmainham Gaol to say goodbye to his father on the eve of his execution, but his mother made sure to take a photograph of her son on 8 May 1916, preserving forever the slightly blurry image of a smiling boy on a sunny May morning.<sup>89</sup> Encountering this photograph in the National Library of Ireland was for me a curious experience: I gazed on Rónán Ceannt's happy, cherubic face, squinting in the sunshine, before turning the photograph over and realizing with a jolt the date inscribed. Was it taken before Áine Ceannt broke the news to her son, I wondered, preserving forever a final moment of childlike innocence? Or was it taken afterward, once the initial grief had abated, demonstrating the resilience of childhood? It is an essentially ambivalent item, capacious enough to take whatever interpretative gloss we choose to place on it.

This family photograph, kept private for forty years, can be juxtaposed with the images of all the children under discussion here made public for the purposes of propaganda efforts after the Easter Rising. In December 1916, the *Catholic Bulletin* published portraits of twenty-three of the families whose men had been killed or executed during the rebellion.<sup>90</sup> Framing them as conventional studio portraits, the *Bulletin* confronted the reader with the reality of childhood bereavement and the destruction of the ideal of the happy national family at the hands of British imperialism. Notably, the images of the families of Michael Mallin and Michael O'Rahilly included the babies born in the summer of 1916, reinforcing even more the "simultaneous presence of death and life."<sup>91</sup> The affective force of these sorrowing photographs was considerable. Ana Carden-Coyne has explored the "militarised cuteness" at work in photographs taken of Allied soldiers and their sons before departure for the front; in this case, it was "bereaved cuteness" that tugged on the reader's heartstrings.<sup>92</sup> The grief of the family was equated with the grief of the Irish nation, and the somber, clear-eyed gazes of the widows and (half-)orphans, swathed in black, were politically potent images, all the more so in an era of wartime censorship.<sup>93</sup> The *Bulletin* politicized these children, if they had not been politicized already, using their orphanhood as a lever to solicit political and financial support

<sup>87</sup> MacDonagh, "Blue Print," 521; "Tragedy of Thomas MacDonagh's Family Left Orphaned after Rising," *Irish Times* (Dublin), 9 July 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Ceannt, *Portraits of 1916*.

<sup>89</sup> Photograph of Rónán Ceannt, Ceannt Papers, MS 41,817/8, NLI.

<sup>90</sup> Orla Fitzpatrick, "Portraits and Propaganda: Photographs of the Widows and Children of the 1916 Leaders in the *Catholic Bulletin*," in *Making 1916: Material and Visual Culture of the Easter Rising*, ed. Lisa Godson and Joanna Gruck (Liverpool, 2015), 82–90, at 82–83.

<sup>91</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Post-Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 19.

<sup>92</sup> Ana Carden-Coyne, "Boy Mascots, Orphans, and Heroes: The State, the Family, and Cultural Heritage," *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 5 (2020): 597–626, at 604.

<sup>93</sup> Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, "The Irish National Aid Association and the Radicalization of Public Opinion in Ireland, 1916–1918," *Historical Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 705–29.

for republican organizations.<sup>94</sup> Yet we know nothing of what these children felt about being instrumentalized in that way. For some, it may have further encouraged their own political identities; for others, it may have contributed to a later desire to lead relatively anonymous lives. In some cases, these photographs of the children are the only public images we have, their grave little faces staring out at the viewer serving only to emphasize their silence in the historical record.

### AFTERWARD: LIVING THROUGH A REVOLUTION

Beyond the immediate trauma of the executions, a further ordeal was the disruption of family homes. All the children of the Easter Rising were subject to violent military raids both during and after Easter Week, and in many cases, their homes were abandoned forever. The Clarke home in Fairview was ripped apart, and the children never returned to live there, spending much of the following years traveling between Limerick and Dublin as their mother balanced her own political activities with recovery from a nervous breakdown. Rónán Ceannt's home in Dolphin's Barn was the scene of chaos on Easter Sunday as the confusion about the countermanding order spread; by Monday, he and his mother had left to spend the week in an adjacent suburb further from the line of fire. When they returned, they found their home torn apart—windows smashed, doors broken down, cupboards ransacked, and tin cans bayoneted.<sup>95</sup> Seven-year-old Owen Sheehy Skeffington witnessed the raid on their family home as a British Army party ransacked the house looking for incriminating evidence to justify the murder of Francis; among the items they seized was Owen's drawing of a Zeppelin. After narrowly escaping being shot while fleeing, Owen was held at bayonet point with his mother and a maid in the drawing room while the search took place. This event had an enduring effect on the boy; a year later, on a publicity tour in the United States, he was interviewed by the New York newspaper the *Call*: "They killed my daddy, the soldiers did. They broke into my home, broke my toys, and I thought for several days they were going to kill my mother too. . . I don't like to be killed by soldiers. I want to die by myself."

The American journalist went on to note that every time an enquiry was made as to what he thought of the soldiers, the youngster's eyes filled with tears and the only reply that could be solicited from him was "they killed my daddy."<sup>96</sup> Fifty years later, the sounds and sights of the shattered family home were still at the heart of Owen's memories. For Donagh MacDonagh, whose affecting account of his lingering fear of soldiers we have seen, the Easter Rising signaled the end of a secure, happy childhood. His mother could no longer bear to remain in their home in Ranelagh, and she and her children spent the next twelve months traveling from temporary lodging to temporary lodging. In May 1917, at the age of four, Donagh contracted tuberculosis from a botched BCG (bacille Calmette-Guerin) inoculation, spent

<sup>94</sup> This was with the permission of their mothers, who brought the children to be photographed, provided family photographs, and supplied details of their husbands' lives. See Letters to JJ O'Kelly from Relatives Etc. of Participants in Easter Rising, 1916–17, MS18,555, NLI.

<sup>95</sup> Aine Ceannt Witness Statement, 33, WS264, Bureau of Military History.

<sup>96</sup> "Skeffington's Son Tells of Soldiers Raid on His Home," *Call*, 6 January 1917, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 40,560/7, NLI.

months in hospital, and was permanently disabled.<sup>97</sup> While he was hospitalized, a further tragedy befell the family. A children's seaside holiday organized for the families of the 1916 martyrs at Skerries, County Dublin, intended to provide an emotional refuge and a space of healing, turned to disaster when Muriel MacDonagh died of heart failure while swimming.<sup>98</sup> She had promised to bring some shells home to her son, sending him daily postcards detailing the progress of shell collecting, along with "love and millions of pógas [kisses] from Babilly [Bairbre] and Mamilly [Mother]."<sup>99</sup> The incident deeply affected the other 1916 families there, and many were directly implicated. Séamus Mallin, playing with his brothers and sister, had first raised the alarm when Muriel failed to return to shore; Ina Connolly had been looking after two-year-old Bairbre, and the younger Connolly children were also present in the house that day. In the turmoil that followed, Bairbre slipped away from her caregivers and was discovered banging on the door where her mother's body was laid out, calling for "Mamilly." Muriel's funeral was an occasion of great republican pomp and ceremony; her coffin was followed by masses of marching Volunteers and the children from the ill-fated seaside holiday, carrying wreaths. Donagh, still in hospital, was brought to the window to watch his mother's funeral procession pass by, the first he learned of her death. He never, his sister recalled, "forgot the shock he received then."<sup>100</sup> Following their mother's death, the MacDonagh children were taken into the care of their father's family in County Clare after a nasty custody dispute, but rural Clare was no idyll. Donagh MacDonagh later commented that he learned "as much in Clare of the squalor of life as he learned in over twenty years at the law in Dublin" and noted that his vocabulary at the age of nine rivaled that of "Lady Chatterley's gamekeeper."<sup>101</sup>

Raids continued throughout the revolutionary period, as many of the widows of the 1916 leaders maintained their republican activism. Their homes, such as they were reconstituted after the Rising, served as meeting places and safe houses for those on the run and were frequently targeted both by British forces during the War of Independence and by Free State forces during the Civil War. The home of the Mallin family, Emmet Hall in Inchicore, was attacked on Armistice Night in 1918; four-year-old Joseph Mallin remembered his mother grabbing him at the bottom of the stairs and shielding him from drunken soldiers attempting to break in.<sup>102</sup> The children were thus often exposed to repeats of that initial trauma, heightened further by the apparent threat to their surviving parent. But this too was rationalized as part of their emotional formation, which continued to be intensely

<sup>97</sup> MacDonagh, "Blue Print," 522; Dr. Kathleen Lynn to Sr. Francesca MacDonagh, 31 May 1917, MacDonagh Papers, MS44,323, NLI. Other accounts ascribe his disablement to falling down a marble staircase while posing for a photograph and breaking his back in three places; see Lucille Redmond, "The Strange Death of Muriel MacDonagh," *Evening Herald* (Dublin), 12 December 2008.

<sup>98</sup> "Sad Bathing Accident at Skerries," *Weekly Irish Times* (Dublin), 14 July 1917.

<sup>99</sup> Muriel MacDonagh to Donagh MacDonagh, 8 July 1917, MS44,321/5, NLI. The box of shells is now in Kilmainham Gaol Museum.

<sup>100</sup> "Bairbre MacDonagh Remembers," *Irish Press* (Dublin), 9 July 1969; McCool, *Easter Widows*, 286–88.

<sup>101</sup> MacDonagh, "Blue Print," 522.

<sup>102</sup> Joseph Mallin interview by Maurice O'Keeffe, Irish Life and Lore Oral History Collection, <https://www.irishlifeandlore.com/product/fr-joseph-mallin-s-j-b-1913/>; Joseph Mallin letters to Brian Hughes, private collection. I am grateful to Brian Hughes for sharing this material with me.

politicized. When Kathleen Clarke was arrested as part of the German Plot in May 1918, she told her three sons, “I was being arrested by the British who had murdered their father and their uncle, and that I did not expect to be back with them until the end of the war.” She was explicit about what was required of the children: “[W]hen I say goodbye to you in the presence of these men who are arresting me, there must be no tears. Remember, these men are our country’s enemy, and you are the sons of a patriot and martyr.”<sup>103</sup> Kathleen Clarke’s instincts were correct: she was held in Holloway Prison and not released until February 1919. Her cellmate in Holloway, Maud Gonne MacBride, also worried about her son, fourteen-year-old Seán, whom she glimpsed running after the police car, holding out her fur coat.<sup>104</sup> Later, the prisoners were joined by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, arrested in August 1918. The children of three widows of the Easter Rising were left alone, thrown on the charity of friends and relations. They managed to varying extents. Seán MacBride and Owen Sheehy Skeffington responded with increased self-reliance, arguing with the authorities for the right to visit their mothers or stoically getting on with their schooling. The Clarke children, taken in by their Daly aunts, were “a bit nervy,” a rare glimpse of the inner lives of these frequently silent children.<sup>105</sup> Kathleen Clarke did her best to boost her children’s spirits, writing to them on Christmas Eve 1918 that “we are all soldiers of Ireland, we are at war with our enemy England, I am taken prisoner. These things will happen when a people are at war and there’s no use going to war if you are not prepared to take things as they come, in the soldier’s way, ‘live for the day’ . . . The B[ritish] G[overnment] is giving you boys some splendid lessons for the future.”<sup>106</sup>

The winter of 1918 had brought further turmoil. Both Tom and Emmet Clarke had the flu during the pandemic of 1918, as did Rónán Ceannt and the two of the O’Rahillys, away at school in County Wexford.<sup>107</sup> The cumulative impact of surviving a pandemic must be therefore added to living through a rebellion, the loss of the family home, the execution of one parent, and, in some cases, the imprisonment of the other.

As the War of Independence gathered pace, crown forces increasingly targeted these families’ homes. Kathleen Clarke wrote of her cold terror as Black and Tans raided her home in the early hours of the morning, pulling her sixteen-year-old son, Daly, out of bed and holding his face up to the candlelight to see “if he was shaving” and thus old enough to be arrested. On another occasion, Auxiliaries sat for half an hour at the family dining table, questioning the children, smoking, and puffing smoke in their faces. During yet another raid, down in Limerick, the children saw a drunk Black and Tan push his rifle repeatedly into Kathleen Clarke’s chest.<sup>108</sup> The Ceannt home was similarly targeted, especially during the Civil War, as were the Clarke, MacBride, O’Rahilly, and Sheehy Skeffington homes.<sup>109</sup> Civil War raids were

<sup>103</sup> Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, ed. Helen Litton (Dublin, 1991), 151.

<sup>104</sup> Nic Dháibhéid, *Seán MacBride*, 22.

<sup>105</sup> Madge Daly to Kathleen Clarke, [2 July] 1918, Daly Papers, University of Limerick, P/2, folder 45.

<sup>106</sup> Kathleen Clarke to Daly Clarke, 24 December 1918, Clarke Papers, box 3, folder 3, NLI.

<sup>107</sup> Rosamond Jacob Diaries, 28 October 1918, MS 32,582/35, NLI; Aodogán O’Rahilly to Nancy O’Rahilly, [12 November 1918], O’Rahilly Papers, P102/527(1), UCDA; Kathleen Clarke to Agnes Daly, 16 November 1918, Daly Papers, P/2, folder 64, University of Limerick.

<sup>108</sup> Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, 178–81.

<sup>109</sup> Eastern District Command, List of Raids Carried Out, CW/OPS/07/24–25, Military Archives Ireland, Dublin.

all the more bitter for being conducted by erstwhile comrades, and the damage wrought on homes and possessions had a painful, personal, sacrilegious quality. In Oakley Road, a cherished photograph of Eamonn Ceannt was “disfigured beyond recognition and the picture of the Sacred Heart was deliberately cut in five places.”<sup>110</sup>

But beyond the recovery of the detail of these raids, how can we assess their impact on the children who lived through them? We know relatively little about how these children felt about the turmoil that came with living through a revolution. Their experience is always approached tangentially, through the accounts of others or at the distance of decades. Daly Clarke was described by his aunt as “wild with indignation” at being touched by crown forces during the raid in which they examined his face; when they returned the following night, “in his natural desire to avoid a repetition of the humiliation of the previous raid, [he] went to climb out of his window at the back of the house when his mother caught him. Had he done so, without doubt he would have been shot, as the house was surrounded by troops and any excuse was good enough at that time.”<sup>111</sup>

Other children were described as displaying little signs of distress even if they were directly targeted by crown forces. Owen Sheehy Skeffington was observed by the ever-attentive diarist Rosamond Jacob to have had “the time of his life” during a raid at Belgrave Road in October 1920 and “could describe all their clothes and actions afterwards.”<sup>112</sup> Joseph Mallin, reflecting in his hundredth year, “rather thought these events were part of life—seeing despatch riders, always two, at full speed, lorries, searchlights, the rattle of machine guns at night or single shots, snipers on roofs.”<sup>113</sup> Mac O’Rahilly was arrested by Black and Tans while on a cycling tour in Limerick in August 1920, returning to his traveling companion “quite dishevelled and not quite sure what had happened to him. They had beaten him about the face, kicked him, and pummelled him in the stomach with their closed fists.”<sup>114</sup> But while these raids were undoubtedly destructive and possibly traumatic, they were also potentially validating—reassuring the widows and children of the executed rebels that they were playing their own part in the republican struggle, that they were carrying on their father’s work, and that his enemies were now their enemies.

The Civil War brought a new stage of conflict to these children, some of whom had grown to adulthood by the outset of hostilities in June 1922. Following in their fathers’ footsteps became a bloody reality. Three sons of 1916 martyrs fought during the Battle of Dublin in June 1922. Seán MacBride was part of the Four Courts republican garrison that surrendered, marching, as his father did, down the quays to be imprisoned. He was taken to Mountjoy Gaol—not Kilmainham—but in another echo of the Easter Rising, was a cellmate of one of the four Irish Republican Army leaders executed as reprisals in December 1922. Roddy Connolly fought as head of the Communist Party of Ireland under the Dublin Brigade before escaping to the south, to England, and eventually to the Fourth Comintern Congress in

<sup>110</sup> Áine Ceannt to Lily O’Brennan, 25 February 1922, Lily O’Brennan Papers, P13/34, UCDA.

<sup>111</sup> Draft of Memoirs of Madge Daly, 223, Daly Papers, P2, folder 78, University of Limerick.

<sup>112</sup> Rosamond Jacob Diary, 4 October 1920, MS32,582/37, NLI.

<sup>113</sup> Fr. Joseph Mallin, S. J. (b. 1913), interview by Maurice O’Keeffe, Irish Life and Lore, Part 1, <https://www.irishlifeandlore.com/product/fr-joseph-mallin-s-j-b-1913/>.

<sup>114</sup> Emmet Humphries Memoirs, Humphries Papers, P106/648, UCDA.

Moscow.<sup>115</sup> Séamus Mallin showed his illicit revolver to his eight-year-old brother, Joseph; then, “not long afterwards he did not come home.”<sup>116</sup> He was arrested in possession of a firearm, a capital offense, along with three others in November 1922. His comrades were sentenced to death, but the government, conscious of the outcry that would result if the son of an Easter Rising martyr were to be executed by fellow Irishmen, instructed the Military Court to impose a sentence of five years’ imprisonment. He spent the remainder of the Civil War in prisons and internment camps, like MacBride, and both undertook short-lived hunger strikes. Even the sons who were not politically active fell under suspicion: “particular inquiries” were being made about Rónán Ceannt, believed to be “on the run” by National Army forces in the spring of 1923.<sup>117</sup> The echoes of the Easter Rising were even more acute for Nora Connolly, who had married Seamus O’Brien in February 1922 and spent the Battle of Dublin running a republican field hospital with her sister Ina during the intense fighting in the city.

The activities of republican women were rapidly becoming a key Civil War battleground, and raids soon progressed to arrests. A large contingent of republican women were imprisoned during the Civil War, including widows, sisters, sisters-in-law, and daughters of republican martyrs. Some were in and out relatively quickly—Maud Gonne and Kathleen Clarke were held for only a couple of nights—but others had longer stays, including in Kilmainham Gaol, which was reopened after closure since 1916 to rehouse female prisoners. Thus it was that the Easter Rising was commemorated inside Kilmainham Gaol for the first time on 24 April 1923, with mass in the prison chapel and a procession to the stonebreakers’ yard where “the girls all took little souvenirs . . . and we marched back to the compound where the tricolour was unfurled and Nora Connolly, Grace [Gifford Plunkett] and [Lily O’Brennan] read papers. Faith of our Fathers was sung at the unfurling, and after the papers we took the republican oath.”<sup>118</sup> During the evening concert, Iseult Gonne, by then married to the writer Francis Stuart, recited Patrick Pearse’s poem “The Fool.”<sup>119</sup> Just being in Kilmainham brought up complex emotions. Sighle Humphries, niece of Michael O’Rahilly, remembered that “walking on the same flagstones . . . nearly made me burst with pride.”<sup>120</sup> For others like Kathleen Clarke, however, Kilmainham was a “chamber of horrors.”<sup>121</sup> The memories of 1916 were ever present, even for those outside: Lily O’Brennan wrote to her nephew Rónán that she had “kept her eye on your Daddy’s cell.”<sup>122</sup> The Easter 1923 commemoration was a moment of solemnity amid these conflicting emotions, its authenticity only heightened by the perception that those commemorating were tied by blood and by continuing political commitment to the earlier martyrs. Still,

<sup>115</sup> Charlie McGuire, *Roddy Connolly and the Struggle for Socialism in Ireland* (Cork, 2008), 58–59.

<sup>116</sup> Fr. Joseph Mallin to Brian Hughes, 20 April 2011, private collection.

<sup>117</sup> Áine Ceannt to Lily O’Brennan, 31 March 1923, P13/46, UCDA. Rónán Ceannt was by all accounts entirely nonpolitical and away at school for the whole of the Civil War.

<sup>118</sup> Lily O’Brennan to Áine Ceannt, 25 April 1923, P13/60, UCDA.

<sup>119</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900–1923* (Dublin, 2003), 121.

<sup>120</sup> “Reminiscences of the Civil War,” Sighle Humphries Papers, P106/1046, UCDA.

<sup>121</sup> Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, 201.

<sup>122</sup> Lily O’Brennan to Ronan Ceannt, 14 March 1923, Lily O’Brennan Papers, P13/43, UCDA.

we can only approach through that “empathic inference”<sup>123</sup> what it was like to be there in the stonebreakers’ yard, reading the Proclamation, reading into our knowledge of the emotional formation and traumatic experiences of these young people to recover something of the experience—emotional, sensory, ideological—of how the Irish Revolution ultimately ended.

### TOWARD EXPERIENCE: TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND RESILIENCE

Trauma, particularly unmedicalized trauma, is difficult for historians to approach. However, it can be glimpsed in many forms. It is found in silences, in half-voices, and in compulsive retellings of the traumatic event. Sometimes it coexists in the same person: Nora Connolly O’Brien, well-versed since 1916 in telling the story of her last visit to her father, went “very silent” when her husband told gruesome stories about Civil War executions, where “the military took 12 minutes to get the men finished [off].”<sup>124</sup> Empathic inference, in this case, might wonder whether Nora Connolly was thinking of her own father, who had to be tied to a chair to be executed, slumping and half-conscious. What images flashed before her mind as her husband regaled their friends with stories of protracted deaths and agonizing last moments? Sometimes trauma is mediated through stock phrases, like Moira Connolly’s twee poem from 1918:

Although we miss them sadly  
Our heroes brave  
They urge us on to Freedom  
From the grave.<sup>125</sup>

Sometimes children kept parts of themselves hidden even from their surviving parent. Kathleen Clarke was astonished when her son Daly was found to have had a keen interest in the military progress of the Revolution; he revealed this only when out of Ireland and away from his family, to his parents’ old friend, the Fenian John Devoy, who hosted him in the United States on a rest cure for what seems to have been an unspecified nervous condition.<sup>126</sup> Was he wary of the prospect of being encouraged to take up his father’s fight, as others had done? Or was this an act of bravado, trying to live up to the expectations of his father’s old comrade?

Sometimes the effects of these experiences carried on into adulthood and were transmitted to the next generation. This was particularly the case for the MacDonagh children, who were deprived of the stability of a surviving parent after their mother’s drowning death in 1917, with immense emotional consequences: “[A]nybody they loved, anybody to whom they became attached ‘went away’ and they did not see them again.”<sup>127</sup> Both Donagh and Bairbre MacDonagh’s children spoke of the emotionally frozen quality of their parents: Donagh “would not talk about [the Easter Rising]. He talked about nothing. It was all internalized”; Bairbre “did not

<sup>123</sup> Gleason, “Avoiding the Agency Trap,” 458.

<sup>124</sup> Rosamond Jacob Diary, 23 November 1923, Rosamond Jacob Papers, MS32,354/45, NLI.

<sup>125</sup> Moira Connolly, “Easter Morn,” *Southern Star* (Skibbereen), 2 March 1918.

<sup>126</sup> John Devoy to Kathleen Clarke, 3 November 1921, Devoy Papers, MS 49,353/7/4, NLI.

<sup>127</sup> “Tragedy of Thomas MacDonagh’s Family Left Orphaned after Rising,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 9 July 2017.

express emotion” and was described by her daughter as “damaged.”<sup>128</sup> Roddy Connolly almost never spoke of his experiences in the Easter Rising with any of his own children, only very rarely giving a brief answer if asked a direct question.<sup>129</sup>

For some, sorrows came in battalions, and the Easter Rising turned out to be just one in a series of traumatic events. Emmet Clarke was knocked down by a motor car when he was ten and went from being a boy “with a bright disposition” to being “sullen and morose”; his doctor, giving evidence, did not believe that he would recover “normal condition.”<sup>130</sup> Donagh MacDonagh’s first wife drowned in the bath after suffering an epileptic fit, in an eerie echo of his mother’s death. He later married his wife’s sister before dying unexpectedly at age fifty-five, in 1968.<sup>131</sup> Roddy Connolly’s first wife, Jessica Maidment, died of encephalitis lethargica in 1930, age twenty-nine. He, too, remarried, and in 1948 his two-year-old son Francis was hit by a car and killed outside the family home.<sup>132</sup> Among others of the national orphans, marriages faltered and separations occurred. But the Rising remained the great oblitative trauma, in the public sphere at least.

Tracing these children through the archives and memory events of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Ireland yields an incomplete jigsaw, as the above account suggests. Piecing together something of that puzzle and recovering some of the experiences of these children, some small, some silent, has meant grappling with the important question of where children’s voices can be found, if at all. The accounts quoted at the beginning of this article date from the 1960s, almost fifty years after the Easter Rising. That decade, with the golden jubilee, was for some the occasion of a cautious, crablike disinterment of their original experience. In some cases, as with Séamus Mallin, Joseph Mallin, or Fiona Connolly, it was the first time they had spoken publicly. Their retrospective accounts are appealing to the historian not least for their attempts to explicitly recreate their childhood sensibility. But at the distance of fifty years, do they meaningfully capture their experiences in 1916? Or do they reflect the cumulative effect of years of living with those memories? Is there a difference? What did it mean to speak semi-openly as an older person about what it was like to lose your father for the glory of Ireland as a small child, particularly as preparations for a national celebration of that anniversary loomed? It is not surprising that 1966 unloosed another wave of emotion; as Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan have noted, significant anniversaries prompted sometimes very deliberate reinterments of that initial trauma, when “healing may cease altogether and wounds may reopen.”<sup>133</sup>

<sup>128</sup> “Tragedy of Thomas MacDonagh’s Family Left Orphaned after Rising.”

<sup>129</sup> “John Connolly—Grandson of James Connolly of the Easter Rising,” *Ireland’s Calling*, accessed 8 June 2023, <https://ireland-calling.com/james-connollys-grandson-speaks-about-his-grandfather/?amp>.

<sup>130</sup> “Damages for Dublin Boy,” *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 3 May 1922. The accident occurred on 11 June 1920. Emmet Clarke did recover and went on to a successful career as a psychiatrist in Liverpool.

<sup>131</sup> Adding to the misfortune of the MacDonaghs, his second wife, Nuala, choked to death in a restaurant two years later, at age forty-eight.

<sup>132</sup> Entry in Register of Deaths for Dublin Union, Coolock and Drumcondra for Jessica Connolly, 4 February 1930, Irish Genealogy, [https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths\\_returns/deaths\\_1930/04923/4336743.pdf](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1930/04923/4336743.pdf); Entry in Register of Deaths for Bray No 1 District for Francis Connolly, 19 April 1948, Irish Genealogy, [https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths\\_returns/deaths\\_1948/04566/4206295.pdf](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1948/04566/4206295.pdf).

<sup>133</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge, 2009), 1–39, at 32.

Some children were highly visible in independent Ireland as they carved out political careers of their own that in part depended both on their privileged voice as an inheritor of their fathers' political legacy but also the silencing power of their sacred loss. But even so, with their experiences so immediately instrumentalized in the republican political project—sometimes at their own instigation—explicit discussion of their loss, their trauma, was difficult in the face of an overwhelming emphasis on the glorious sacrifice of their fathers. It had to be carefully framed, if it were addressed at all, the finger firmly pointed at the British state for the policy of executions rather than interrogating their fathers' decisions to stage a rebellion in the first place. Others can be found only obliquely, through other voices: their mothers, their teachers, or the multiple layers of Irish officialdom both before and after independence. Some remain entirely silent. What does that silence mean? One can interpret the silence as the numbing effects of trauma, but as Mary Vincent has pointed out, the “unknowableness” of silence gives it an “intrinsic ambivalence.”<sup>134</sup>

That ambivalence is doubly generated by the epistemology of childhood trauma. Because these categories make conventional empirical analysis difficult, practicing what Gleason has termed “empathic inference” and what Magda Fahmi has termed “voyeuristic empathy,” particularly for “inherently vulnerable” historical subjects, can help to open up the unknowable.<sup>135</sup> As such, this is also a story about affect in the archive, about recognizing that the public narration of these children's lives was intended to be moving, and about accepting that historians can also make use of their own emotions in approaching their historical subjects. In acknowledging their stories, we accept that power, and in enacting voyeuristic empathy for people at their most vulnerable—bereaved, homeless, frightened—we come closer to the experience of what living through a revolution was like: what it looked like, what it sounded like, and what it felt like.

Of course, approaching these children tangentially, often through their parents or through their adult selves, raises the question of agency. But agency is not just about finding voices in the archive. It can also be about silence, about choosing silence, and choosing when to break it. Daly Clarke's departure for America as the Irish revolution reached its peak was a deliberate turning away. Family lore suggests that he was “sick of being taken around to meetings and shown off as Tom Clarke's son.”<sup>136</sup> Neither he nor his brother Tom Jr. ever spoke publicly about their father. In 1991, Emmet Clarke, by then the sole surviving son, spoke publicly for the first time in an emotional interview on RTÉ radio in which he broke down and wept while remembering his father.<sup>137</sup> Sharing one's childlike self, as Fiona Connolly, Nora Connolly, or Séamus Mallin did in their published reminiscences, was an emotive rhetorical strategy, but it might also have been about reclaiming an agency that was taken

<sup>134</sup> Mary Vincent, “Breaking the Silence? Memory and Oblivion since the Spanish Civil War,” in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Jay Winter, and Ruth Ginio (Cambridge, 2010), 47–67, at 49.

<sup>135</sup> Gleason, “Avoiding the Agency Trap,” 458; Magda Fahmi, “Glimpsing Working-Class Childhood through the Laurier Palace Fire of 1927: The Ordinary, the Tragic, and the Historian's Gaze,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8, no. 3 (2015): 426–50, at 443.

<sup>136</sup> Laura O' Sullivan (cousin of Daly Clarke), interview by author, 12 March 2011.

<sup>137</sup> Emmet Clarke, interview by Donncha Ó Dualaing, RTÉ Radio 1, 7 April 1991. Copy of broadcast provided by RTÉ Archives.

from them in the years when talking about a child's bereavement was more difficult. The children themselves were witnesses to and participants in the narration of their own lives, by political movements into which they had been inscribed and into which they later inscribed themselves. Thinking about these children as political agents in their own right, whose sorrowing images helped to radicalize nationalist Ireland, helps us to recognize that agency takes many forms. Sometimes, it is about sharing private grief or personal trauma on a public stage; at other times, it is about stoicism. It is also, as Susan A. Miller has reminded us, about understanding assent, even silent assent, as a form of agency in and of itself.<sup>138</sup>

In examining the multiple ways these children lived with, through, and alongside their traumatic bereavement, the history of experience is a more fruitful, multivalent framework to explore what can be limited source material common to the history of children. By entering deliberately into their experiential world—material, affective, sensory, and emotional—we can transform the possibilities of such sources and use them to tell new stories of what the Irish Revolution felt like to those on the ground. As Bengt Sandin has suggested, making the case for the history of childhood is about “connecting children’s experience—past, present, and remembered—to political and social transformations of central importance.”<sup>139</sup> This is emphatically the case for the children of the Easter Rising leaders. They formed their own community of experience, bound together by the unique position of growing up in independent Ireland as the son or daughter of a martyred founding father. Writing a history of Ireland’s revolution through the experiences—emotional, sensory, and traumatic—of these exceptional children allows us to look beyond the gunmen, activists, and ambush sites of Ireland’s revolutionary years to the hearts, minds, senses, and memories of that wider group who were forced to live through it and live after it. In this way, we can find a new framework for understanding broader patterns of subjectivity, emotion, and historical experience during the Irish Revolution and its aftermath.

<sup>138</sup> Susan A. Miller, “Assent as Agency in the Early Years of the Children of the American Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9, no. 1 (2016): 48–65.

<sup>139</sup> Bengt Sandin, “History of Children and Childhood—Being, and Becoming, Dependent and Independent,” *American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1306–16, at 1310.