

Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh. *Quiet Revolutionaries: Irish Women in Education, Sport and Medicine, 1861-1964.* Stroud: History Press, 2011. 256 pp. \$17.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-84588-696-7.



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Commissioned by Nicholas M. Wolf (New York University)

This publication is a compendium of essays that have been crafted over the years by Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh on the subject of Irish women and their historical relationships to education, medicine, and sport. The book therefore provides a concise and powerful statement of her voluminous research in the area of Irish women's history, addressing material spanning over one hundred years and multiple areas of thematic interest.

Education is the first theme tackled in *Quiet Revolutionaries*, constituting six chapters in the collection along with a seventh that overlaps with the theme of health. Ó hÓgartaigh takes up the question of women's experiences as students and teachers, with a slightly heavier emphasis on the latter. The essays range from the legislative changes in the nineteenth century that regularized secondary education and finally allowed women access to the universities, to examining education from the viewpoint of personal memoir. Together the essays give a clear exposition of the key moments and players in the expansion of

the educational sphere for women. Ó hÓgartaigh rightly points out that this expansion did not translate into women's full access to the professions once they were educated. Furthermore, the gendered nature of the rhetoric of the time is highlighted, from fears about women's physical capacity to learn in the nineteenth century to the battles for equal pay and status for teachers in Ireland that continuously cropped up.

A second section focusing on medicine and health has nine dedicated essays, in addition to the comparative essay on women in nursing and teaching, although these are not of equal length. These essays draw on Ó hÓgartaigh's work on individual women in the medical profession and are supplemented by interesting case studies from diverse geographical locations, including comparisons between Ireland and the United States and Australia. Comparative histories are difficult to write, thus Ó hÓgartaigh is to be commended for this approach. She points out that pioneer women in the medical profession often gravitated toward maternal and fetal care, developing

pediatric care in Ireland and establishing hospitals for women and children. This was partly influenced by society's views of women and appropriate feminine characteristics that could be applied to the field: kindness, empathy, and "natural" maternal instincts. According to Ó hÓgartaigh's analysis, some Irish women in the medical field appropriated this rhetoric, focusing on women's special role as mothers as being important in promoting public health. However, women's important role in the elimination of tuberculosis is also highlighted, thus Ó hÓgartaigh's essays allow for a more complex view of women in the medical field to emerge. What is interestingly alluded to is the class dimension of the approach to medical and social care in twentieth-century Ireland, something that marred the efforts of those involved in social and moral welfare. The tragic and complicated histories resulting from these interventions have been increasingly coming to light in recent years.

Margaret MacCurtain's foreword encourages the author to delve deeper into the histories of women in sport in Ireland, and indeed, with just two essays on sporting themes, the collection could have included more material on this interesting and under-researched topic of women's modern lives. Women and sport in Irish history is a newer vein of inquiry and these essays may provide the jumping off point for scholars interested in mining new territory. Ó hÓgartaigh makes the interesting point that women in Ireland were playing camogie before women were allowed to compete in the track and field competitions of the Olympics. She further highlights the fact that the participation of women in athletics was condemned as "unfeminine" and improper by the Catholic Church. Both these findings merit further exposition: did the condemnation of Pope Pius XI have an impact at the local community level in Ireland where sport was so integrally connected with politics and national identity? Possibly the most intriguing essay comes in chapter 19 on women's use of tampons and vigorous physical

exercise in public, the inimical attitudes of John Charles McQuaid surfacing again to oppose women's participation in mixed athletics in the 1930s. Ó hÓgartaigh satirizes thinking by the bishops in the 1940s that tampons were a contraceptive, and interestingly she speculates that "the more pertinent fear was that women might derive sexual stimulation from tampax" (p. 177). This intersection of medical and moral concern over women's personal hygiene products, a topic that gets right to the heart of historical questions over long-standing anxieties centering on the feminine body in sport, is one that deserves further attention as more scholars follow Ó hÓgartaigh's lead.

The collection ends with an essay on women in paid work in Ireland built around the comments of a local Kells, county Meath, councilor printed in 1925 in the *Meath Chronicle*, using the published views as an entryway for understanding the position of professional women in Ireland of the time. The chosen councilor, Mr. Tully, espoused traditional views of women's place as being within the home rather than the public sphere, predicting calamity for the country as a result of women's increasing participation in paid work. This was fairly standard rhetoric of the time, and Ó hÓgartaigh's approach is to analyze his statements in depth, breaking down his claims one by one, and providing evidence to refute much of his overblown statements.

It would be helpful if the chapter titles indicated in a note where and when they were originally published as is often done with reprinted academic works. Although the table of contents lists where each chapter was originally published, this information does not appear in the titles of the chapters themselves. This is particularly relevant in the first chapter, a scan of sources, which has much relevant information in it, but does not include any online source material, being written in 1999, before the advent of many of the important digital databases now available on Irish women's history. Ó hÓgartaigh could perhaps

have updated this chapter to reflect what source material, or even archival catalogues, are now available online. It is to be assumed that none of the other chapters were updated either in light of republication--this is not a critique, but rather it could have been made explicit.

Quiet Revolutionaries will appeal to a wide audience, and the brevity of many of the essays will mean that it is a book that will bear nonlinear and thematic reading. The format will also make the book useful as a teaching tool, with helpfully concise essays that could easily enliven an undergraduate course, particularly those on women in education and the professions.

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