
The Three Stack Sisters: A New Perspective on 20th-Century Irish-Language Women's Writing

Ríona Nic Congáil



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/13373>
DOI: 10.4000/etudesirlandaises.13373
ISSN: 2259-8863

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Caen

Printed version

Date of publication: December 15, 2022
Number of pages: 71-87
ISBN: 978-2-38185-180-8
ISSN: 0183-973X

Electronic reference

Ríona Nic Congáil, "The Three Stack Sisters: A New Perspective on 20th-Century Irish-Language Women's Writing", *Études irlandaises* [Online], 47-2 | 2022, Online since 08 November 2022, connection on 17 November 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/13373> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.13373>



The text only may be used under licence CC BY 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

The Three Stack Sisters: A New Perspective on 20th-Century Irish-Language Women's Writing

Abstract: Within 20th-century Irish-language writing, it is rare to find Irish-speaking women who have documented their lives in print form. To find three sisters who have published their thoughts through the medium of Irish is rarer still. The sisters in question are Cáit, Brighid and Áine Stack and they grew up in the 1900s and 1910s – the height of the revivalist period – in the Irish-speaking stronghold of Smerwick, Co. Kerry. This essay will trace the writing careers and analyse the published work of the Stack sisters, from childhood in the case of all three sisters, to old age in the case of Áine Stack. Through this approach, we will gain a singular insight into girlhood within Gaelic culture in the 1910s; we will witness the opportunities available to, and trajectories of, educated, yet poor, Irish-speaking girls and women in the 1920s; and through the writings of the youngest sister, Áine Stack, we will gain a fresh perspective on the new Irish educational system that accompanied the Free State.

Keywords: Irish language revival, women writers, history of childhood, religious life, emigration.

Résumé: Dans l'écriture en langue irlandaise du XX^e siècle, il est rare de trouver des femmes de langue irlandaise qui ont documenté leur vie sous forme imprimée. Trouver trois sœurs qui ont publié leurs pensées par le biais de l'irlandais est sans précédent. Les sœurs en question sont Cáit, Brighid et Áine Stack et elles ont grandi dans les années 1900 et 1910 – l'apogée de la période de la renaissance gaélique – dans le bastion irlandophone de Smerwick, dans le comté de Kerry. Cet article retracera les carrières d'écrivaines des sœurs Stack et analysera leurs publications, de l'enfance dans le cas des trois sœurs, à la vieillesse dans le cas d'Áine Stack. Grâce à cette approche, nous aurons un aperçu singulier de la condition des jeunes filles au sein de la culture gaélique dans les années 1910; nous nous intéresserons aux opportunités et aux trajectoires des filles et des femmes irlandophones instruites mais pauvres dans les années 1920; et à travers les écrits de la plus jeune sœur, Áine Stack, nous aurons une nouvelle perspective sur le nouveau système éducatif irlandais qui a accompagné l'État libre d'Irlande.

Mots clés: renaissance de la langue irlandaise, femmes écrivains, histoire de l'enfance, vie religieuse, émigration.

Introduction

Within 20th-century Irish-language writing, it is rare to find Irish-speaking women who have documented their lives in print form.¹ It is vanishingly rare to find three

1. For the most extensive overview of Irish-language women's writing in the 20th century, see Riona Nic Congáil, Máirín Nic Eoin, "Writing in Irish, 1900-2013", in *A History of Modern Irish Women's Literature*, Heather Ingman, Cliona Ó Gallchoir (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 334-364.

sisters who have done just that, who have not only written privately about their lives but have published their thoughts through the medium of Irish. The sisters in question began to publish their work in newspapers during their girlhood in the 1910s; one would later become a diarist; and another would proceed to write two memoirs that spanned much of the 20th century. These are the Stack sisters: Cáit, Brigid and Áine. They grew up in the 1900s and 1910s – the height of the revivalist period – in the Irish-speaking stronghold of Smerwick, Co. Kerry. Their father was a fisherman and farmer; their mother was a housewife. Seven Stack children were listed in the 1911 Census. Neither parent could read or write, and in the same Census, both parents were listed as speaking Irish and English. The Census return was filled in – in Irish – by their eleven-year-old daughter, Brigid.² Though little is known about their mother, their father was well-known as a fountain of folklore, steeped in oral literature and culture, telling tales by the fireside during long dark evenings.³ Yet it was the children who could read letters and newspapers and books to their parents, and it was the children who would write letters and fill in Census returns on behalf of their parents.

The Stack family background was not exceptional but the girls' ability to write in their native language was. This ability contrasts with the most notable extant accounts of Irish-speaking women's lives: in the case of Peig Sayers and Róise Rua Mhic Grianna, for example – both of whom were closer in age to the mother of the Stack sisters –, their voices were mediated by others through the process of transcription, rather than being in a position to pick up a pen and paper and write their own autobiographies.⁴ Combining the exceptionality of the Stack sisters with their typicality in other ways, this essay will trace the writing careers and analyse the published work of Cáit, Brigid and Áine Stack, from childhood in the case of all three sisters, to old age in the case of Áine Stack. Through this approach, we will gain a singular insight into girlhood within Gaelic culture in the 1910s; we will witness the opportunities available to, and trajectories of, educated, yet poor, Irish-speaking girls and women in the 1920s; and through the writings of the youngest sister, Áine Stack, we will gain a fresh perspective on the new Irish educational system that accompanied the Free State. If there is humour and lightness of touch in many of their writings – which are among the reasons to continue reading them today – their personal lives reveal the harsh circumstances faced by many girls and families in Irish-speaking Ireland in the early decades of the 20th century.

The writing careers of the Stack sisters were facilitated through the confluence of three new initiatives. The first was the establishment of a branch of the Gaelic League in their locality of Ballyferriter in the year 1900, where much emphasis was placed on intergenerational transmission of the Irish language, from grandparents

2. National Archives of Ireland, Census of Ireland 1911.

3. "Editorial", *The Kerryman / Corkman*, 23 January 1981, p. 8.

4. Peig Sayers, *Peig: a scéal féin do scríobh Peig Sayers*, Máire Ní Chinnéide (ed.), Baile Átha Cliath, Clóluacht an Talbóidigh, 1936; Pádraig Ua Cnáimhsí, *Róise Rua*, Baile Átha Cliath, Sáirséal Ó Marcaigh, 1988.

and parents to children.⁵ The second was the implementation of the bilingual programme in some national schools in Irish-speaking areas from 1904 onwards, including the Stacks' own school, which enabled them to learn subjects through the medium of Irish. The third was the emergence of Irish-language children's print culture later in the same decade. Although English-language children's print culture in the form of the children's newspaper column had been popular in Ireland since the 1880s, there were no such children's newspaper columns in the Irish language until the 1900s. As a result of the bilingual programme of 1904, a core group of native Irish-speaking children were able to actively participate in the new Irish-language children's print culture: reading, sending letters to, and entering competitions in children's columns, most notably in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, *Catholic Bulletin*, and *An Lóchrann*. Foremost among the participants in this children's print culture were those attending the girls' school in Ballyferriter, the Stack sisters among them.

When the Stack sisters began corresponding with newspapers in the 1910s, they were part of a wave of Irish-speaking Kerry readers and writers, including Tomás Ó Criomhthain (1855-1937) and the younger Micheál Ó Guithín (1904-1974), son of Peig Sayers, who actively engaged with the new Irish-language press. It was in newspapers that first-person narratives about growing up in the Kerry Gaeltacht first emerged, and these narratives appealed to local audiences. The Stack sisters were among the first to narrate their daily lives in print form, and their first-person narratives of girlhood on the Kerry mainland were precursors to the Irish-language autobiography genre associated with the Great Blasket Island from the 1920s. Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An t-Oileánach* (1929)⁶ was met with great acclaim upon publication.⁷ This was followed by Muiris Ó Súilleabháin's (1904-1950) *Fiche Blian ag Fás* (1933),⁸ a well-known autobiography about growing up on the Great Blasket Island, and later by *Peig: a scéal féin do scríobh Peig Sayers* (1936). Nóra Ní Shéaghda's (1905-1975) work, *Thar Bealach Isteach* (1940),⁹ came towards the end of this high tide. But there were other autobiographical works relating to the same period that did not see the light of day: for example, both Micheál Ó Guithín and Eibhlín Ní Shuilleabháin (1900-1949) from the Great Blasket kept a diary during the year of 1923.¹⁰ The early writings of the Stack sisters, then, must be analysed within the broader context of the emerging Irish-language autobiography genre in the Kerry Gaeltacht.

5. "Gaelic League in Ballyferriter", *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 24 February 1900, p. 796; "Ballyferriter", *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 21 July 1900, p. 296.

6. Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *An t-Oileánach: Scéal a Bheathadh Féin*, An Seabhac (ed.), Baile Átha Cliath, Muinntir C. S. Ó Fallamhain i gcomhar le hOifig an tSoláthair, 1929.

7. Brian Kelly, "How He Came to Write", *Sunday Independent*, 14 March 1937, p. 12.

8. Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, *Fiche Blian ag Fás*, Baile Átha Cliath, Clólucht an Talbóidigh, 1933.

9. Nóra Ní Shéaghda, *Thar Bealach Isteach: Leabhar Eile ón mBlascaod Mór*, Baile Átha Cliath, Oifig an tSoláthair, 1940.

10. Eibhlín Ní Shuilleabháin, *Cín Lae Eibhlín Ní Shuilleabháin*, Máiréad Ní Loingsigh (ed.), Baile Átha Cliath, Coiscéim, 2000. In the case of Ó Guithín, see Seán Ó Coileáin, "Tomás Ó Criomhthain, Brian Ó Ceallaigh agus an Seabhac", *Scríobh 4*, Seán Ó Mórdha (ed.), Baile Átha Cliath, An Clóchomhar Teo., 1979, p. 174.

Cáit Stack

In early 1912, the first publication from the Stack household, “Bhfuil an Ghaedhilg dá Aithbheodhachtaint im Pharróiste Dhúthchais” [“Is the Irish language being revived in my native parish”], appeared in “Éire Óg”, the children’s column of the Gaelic League’s bilingual newspaper *An Claidheamh Soluis*. The eldest of the sisters, Cáit Stack, born in 1897, was then fifteen years of age, and her name soon appeared regularly in the column. Stack was quick to acknowledge the educational advantage that the new bilingual programme in national schools offered to native speakers such as herself, as well as the difficulty inherent with the previous system, which prevented children learning through their mother tongue:

*Nách breágh ar fad dúinn-ne é clár a dá theangan do bheith againn! Nách ar an mhuinntir a dh’imthig rómhainn do deineadh an éagcóir. Ba bheag an mhaitheas dóibh a bheith ar sgoil mar ná tuigidís focal dá mbíodh ar siúbhal ar feadh an lae agus gan cead ag na múinteoiribh Gaedhilg do labhairt leo. Ní mar sin atá anois, buidheachas mór le Dia. Bíonn gách níd dá mhúineadh as Gaedhilg dúinn agus cigire Gaodhlach dár sgrúdúghadh. Sin athnuadhchaint ceart.*¹¹

Isn’t it great for us to have the bilingual programme! Weren’t the generations that came before us wronged. It wasn’t much good to them being at school when they didn’t understand a single word used during the whole day and their teachers not allowed to speak Irish to them. That’s not how it is now, thanks be to God. Everything is taught to us through Irish and an Irish-speaking inspector examines us. That’s a real change.

Stack knew the ideological persuasion of her readership and she was not going to let her readers down: according to Stack, there was no revival needed in her native parish, because the language had never been lost. She claimed: “*Níl focal Béarla ag m’athair ná mo mháthair ná ag aon athair ná máthair eile sa bhaile*”¹² [“Neither my father nor my mother has a word of English, nor does any other father or mother in the village”]. This claim does not tally with the information recorded by her younger sister Brigid a year earlier in the 1911 Census return, in which her parents are stated to be bilingual. The likelihood is that both Cáit Stack and her parents were stretching the truth: Cáit, coming under the influence of the revivalist movement that promoted the Irish language, wanted her parents to appear as monolingual Irish speakers; however, her parents may have wanted to present themselves as fully bilingual. In reality, they probably had a better command of Irish than English; indeed, Irish was clearly the main language spoken at home, with the youngest children in the family, not yet of school age, speaking Irish only.¹³ The fact that the Stack parents wanted to be viewed to outsiders as bilingual was not an uncommon occurrence: there are many examples of Irish-speaking parents in this period wanting to learn English in

11. Cáit Stack, “Bhfuil an Ghaedhilg dá Aithbheodhachtaint im Pharróiste Dhúthchais”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 4 May 1912, p. 10; all translations are mine.

12. *Ibid.*

13. National Archives of Ireland, Census of Ireland 1911.

order to impart the language to their children. English was the language of commerce and science and the language that would be used by the children when they grew up and emigrated. Yet the revivalists involved in the Gaelic League denounced the use of English, and we can see that Cáit Stack had come under their influence:¹⁴

*tá foth leanbh i nár measg a thagann ar sgoil gan focal Gaedhilge. Galántacht a bhíonn ag cur ar a muinntir so, agus go deimhin is é an Béarla briste a bhíonn dá labhairt sa bhaile leis na páistíbh bhochta san. "Carry me a gabhál móna." "Who with the leabhar?" "We did get great duadh from it." "We are dead aby it." Is ortha san a bhíonn an mustar is an mhórchúis ag teacht ar sgoil leis an ráiméis sin gan éifeacht ach is gearraid go gcuireann an mháighistréis i númhail dóibh nach lúgha léi súbhadh an adhartadh ná an Béarla briste sin.*¹⁵

there are a few children amongst us who come to school without a word of Irish. The parents of these ones just want to be posh and, indeed, it's this broken English they speak at home to those poor children. "Carry me a ghabhál móna [armful of turf]." "Who with the leabhar [whose is the book]?" "We did get great duadh [trouble] from it." "We are dead aby it [it's killing us]." Those ones are full of airs and self-importance coming to school with their nonsensical talk, but the mistress soon lets them know that she hates that broken English more than soot on the hob.

Stack's examples of language use among the children "without a word of Irish" reveal both code-mixing and code-switching: the children are caught between the two languages and cannot use either language to communicate effectively. Such code-mixing was common in the language shift from Irish monolingualism to English monolingualism.¹⁶

The role and influence of the schoolmistress, Máire Ní Mhainín, on the girls' attitude towards the Irish language clearly cannot be underestimated. It was Ní Mhainín who encouraged the schoolgirls to correspond with the children's column in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, and the names, letters and essays of several classmates of the Stack sisters also appeared in print in the newspaper, providing an insight into many aspects of youthful exploits and culture in rural, Irish-speaking Ireland. Indeed, the editor of the children's column made specific reference to the bulk of correspondence received from the girls attending Scoil Chailíní Bhaile an Fheirtéaraigh [Girls' School, Ballyferriter].¹⁷

Cáit Stack's correspondence with newspapers extended beyond *An Claidheamh Soluis*. By 1912, she and her schoolmates were actively engaging with *An Lóchrann*, a bilingual publication established in 1907, catering for a local community of

14. See *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 25 January 1902, p. 763; *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 5 November 1904, p. 8.

15. Cáit Stack, "Bhfuil an Ghaedhlig dá Aithbheodhachtaint...", p. 10.

16. For more information on the historical use of code-mixing in Ireland, see Liam Mac Mathúna, "The Growth of Irish (L1) / English (L2) Literary Code-Mixing, 1600-1900: Contexts, Genres and Realisations", in *The Celtic Languages in Contact* (papers from the Workshop within the Framework of the XIII International Congress of Celtic Studies, Bonn, 26-27 July 2007), Hildegard L. C. Tristram (ed.), Potsdam, Potsdam University Press, 2007, p. 217-234.

17. "Cómhrádh", *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 4 May 1912, p. 10.

Irish speakers in Kerry and Cork. As Cáit Stack wrote in a letter published in *An Claidheamh Soluis*:

Bidhmíd ag sgríobh go dtí “An Lóchrann” agus faighimid a lán leabhartha mar duaiseannaibh. Tugaimíd na leabharta ar iasacht dá chéile [...] Do fuair mo dhearbhsúir bheag foclóir ó “An Seabhac” lé déidheanaighe agus do fuaireamair “Cath Fionn Trágha” ó thimthire na Gaedhilge do bhí annso tamall ó shoin.¹⁸

We write to “An Lóchrann” and we get a lot of books as prizes. We lend the books to each other [...] My little sister got a dictionary from “An Seabhac” recently and we got “The Battle of Ventry” from an Irish language organiser who was here a while ago.

This letter once again offers an insight into reading culture – both the types of books and circulation patterns – practised by the Kerry schoolgirls. “An Seabhac”, or Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, was then a local writer, the editor of *An Lóchrann*, and an omnipresent activist within the revivalist movement. He would go on to have an influential role in the writing career of Cáit’s younger sister, Brighid. As for Cáit, she ended her correspondence with Irish language newspapers upon finishing school, and she soon emigrated to Chicago. There she married and raised her own family in an Irish-American community.

Brighid Stack

Cáit’s younger sister Brighid, born in late 1899, soon followed in her sister’s footsteps by corresponding with *An Claidheamh Soluis*. Brighid’s early prominence, from the age of twelve, was in part due to the fact that her schoolmistress decided that one of the schoolgirls should be selected to take charge of the school’s correspondence with the newspaper, and it was Brighid’s name that was pulled out of a bag.¹⁹ Brighid took charge of the “Éire Óg” club in her school, affiliated with the “Éire Óg” newspaper column, and she quickly set about increasing the membership of the club, in the hope of being awarded a silver medal by *An Claidheamh Soluis* for signing up the most new members. Incentives of this kind were often promoted within children’s newspaper columns in the hope of increasing readership and sales. Although unsuccessful in her effort to obtain a silver medal, she did receive a “Prize Volume” for her effort in recruitment.²⁰

It was the schoolmistress, Máire Ní Mhainín, who brought copies of *An Claidheamh Soluis* into the schoolhouse for the girls to read, and one of Brighid Stack’s letters, dated November 1913, reveals that the girls learnt about current affairs by reading *An Claidheamh Soluis*.²¹ Stack mentions “*leanbhaidhe lucht na*

18. Cáit Stack, “Bhfuil an Ghaedhilg dá Aithbheodhachtaint...”, p. 10.

19. Nóra Ní Lúbhaing, “Litir”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 7 December 1912, p. 10.

20. *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 21 December 1912, p. 10.

21. Although Máire Ní Mhainín did not come to much public attention during her lifetime, she was one of only two women (along with over a hundred men) who gave evidence to the Gaeltacht

stailce” [“the children of the strikers”] in this letter, a reference to an article on the first page of the newspaper three weeks earlier.²² Stack states that even before reading the article, her schoolmistress had already told the schoolgirls about the plight of strikers’ children in Dublin.²³ Although Brigid Stack was aware of current affairs, her earliest writings foreground her favourite pastimes and her family’s Christmas customs, with an emphasis on house decoration, religious customs, and Christmas lunch, but a notable absence of gifts:

An lá roimh Lá Nodlag bímid ag bailiughadh eadhneáin & coilinn le cur mórtimcheall ar na coinnlibh & dá socrughadh leis mór tímcheall na cistine & na seomraí. Bímid annsan ag cur cártaí ar crochadh ar a mbíonn sgríobhta “Nodlaig Shonasach,” & rudaí mar sin.²⁴

The day before Christmas Day we gather ivy and holly to put around the candles & arrange them around the kitchen and rooms. We then hang up cards that have the words “Happy Christmas” & such things written on them.

In early 1914, Brigid Stack, along with her classmates in Ballyferriter, turned their attention to a new children’s column entitled “A Circle for the Young People” in the national publication, the *Catholic Bulletin*. Stack’s first “Special Prize Letter” tells us much about reading culture among native Irish-speaking children in Kerry:

Táim ag scríobhadh na litre seo i nGaedhilg mar is í is fearr liom agus is í is fearr atá agam. Ní raibh focal Béarla agam go ndeachas ar scoil. Is i mbaile beag cois taoide a chómhnuidhim, agus ní thagann leabhar ná páipéar riamh isteach ann acht amháin an “Claidheamh” agus an “Lóchrann”. [...] Is mór go léir an maitheas a dhéanfaidh an cúinne beag úd .i. cúinne na leanbh, ‘san Bulletin, mar ceannóchaidh leanbhaidhe scoile feasta é agus béaraidh leo abhaile é. Annsoin léighfidh na daoine fásta é ‘nuair gheobhaidh siad fé n-a lámhaibh é.²⁵

I am writing this letter in Irish because Irish is my favourite and it’s what I know best. I didn’t have a word of English until I went to school. I live in a small seaside village and books and newspapers never arrive here except the “Claidheamh” and “Lóchrann”. [...] This little corner, i.e. the children’s corner in the Bulletin will do a lot of good because the school children will buy it from now on and bring it home. Then the adults will read it when they get hold of it.

Commission in the 1920s. See *Report of Coimisiún na Gaeltachta*, Baile Átha Cliath, The Stationery Office, 1926, p. 71.

22. “Imirce na Leanbhaidhe: Baile Átha Cliath Tré Chéile”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 1 November 1913, p. 1.
23. Brigid Stack, “Litir”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 22 November 1913, p. 10; Karen Hunt, “Women, Solidarity and the 1913 Dublin Lockout: Dora Montefiore and the ‘Save the Kiddies’ Scheme”, in *A Capital in Conflict: Dublin City in the 1913 Lockout*, Francis Devine (ed.), Dublin, Dublin City Council, 2013, p. 107-128.
24. Brigid Stack, “Nodlaig na nGaedheal”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 14 December 1912, p. 20.
25. Brigid Stack, “Special Prize Letter”, *Catholic Bulletin*, February 1914, p. 138.

What Stack reveals in this initial letter is that she and her peers were consumers, with access to money, and that their choice of reading material could influence that of the adults in their families. In response to Stack's letter, the editor of the children's column wrote:

students cannot do better than copy out and learn by heart the letter by Brighid Stac, a little girl of eleven. It is one of a sheaf from Ballyferriter, that comes like a blessing from St. Brendan. The style and flow of language of these letters give earnest that Pierce Ferriter did not live and write in vain, that there will be women writers of Irish in Ballyferriter.²⁶

While Brighid Stack and her classmates were publishing letters and essays in *An Claidheamh Soluis* and the *Catholic Bulletin*, they were also corresponding with the aforementioned local Irish-language publication, *An Lóchrann*. In 1916, *An Lóchrann* was relaunched as an Irish-language newspaper and its editor, An Seabhac, quickly introduced children's writing competitions and prizes, often sponsored by wealthier Dublin-based language enthusiasts.²⁷ An Seabhac understood the potential of engaging local children – who were by then among the most skilled readers and writers of Irish – in collecting and transcribing folklore from their elders, and the competitions were often in this vein.²⁸ Children from Scoil an Bhloscaid [Basket Island School], as well as children from the mainland, including Scoil Chailíní Bhaile an Fheirtéaraigh, sent in entries and correspondence.²⁹ Brighid Stack was the most prolific and talented young correspondent, with her humorous tale *Donnchadha na n-Óspairtí* [*Donnchadha of the Misadventures*] being awarded a special prize.³⁰ Stack was then entering her late teens and was working as a “monitress” or teaching assistant in her school, Scoil Chailíní Bhaile an Fheirtéaraigh.³¹ An Seabhac would later write of her: “dá óige í do bhí tréithe iongantacha innti chun eólas a mhéadú i n-aigne na leanbh mbeag a bhíodh fé na cúram”³² [“in spite of her youth she was very skilled at increasing the knowledge in the minds of the little children under her care”].

From late 1916 to 1918, An Seabhac published the diaries of three Kerry schoolgirls in *An Lóchrann*, with each diary detailing a month in their lives. Brighid Stack was among them. These diaries or “Cín Lae” are the first substantial publications by native Irish-speaking girls, almost two decades before the appearance of Peig Sayers' autobiography.³³ I have discussed these diaries in

26. “A Circle for the Young People”, *Catholic Bulletin*, February 1914, p. 139.

27. *An Lóchrann*, October 1916, p. 4. Lord Ashbourne and Liam Ó Domhnaill were among those who provided prize money for the children's writing competitions.

28. *An Lóchrann*, April 1916, p. 4; “An Seabhac”, *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach .i. Meascra de Bhéaloidéas Ilchínéal ó “An Lóchrann” [1907-13]*, Baile Átha Cliath, Institute Béaloidéasa Éireann, 1932, p. vii.

29. *An Lóchrann*, March 1917, p. 4.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

31. For more information on the role of the monitor in the Irish educational system, see John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structures*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, 2005, p. 22.

32. An Seabhac, “Brid Stac”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 22 March 1919, p. 3.

33. Peig Sayers, *Peig: a scéal féin do scríobh Peig Sayers*.

unison elsewhere;³⁴ here, I will focus on the diary of Brighid Stack. The diary of Brighid Stack details her life in the month of May 1917, and it was published in October 1917. Stack was diligent in her diary writing and her diary provides the clearest insight into the child-centred educational ideology within the national schools. Her studious nature was, according to herself, something of an anomaly in the Kerry Gaeltacht:

*Is minic a deirtear liom sa bhaile nuair a bhíonn rud le déanamh & leabhar im' dhorn agamsa. "Ó mhaise eireóchaidh an léigheann id' cheann, a Bhríghid," agus nuair chonaic seanduine ó'n mbaile seo againn-ne, peann luaidhe agam ó chianaibh sé dubhairt sé: "Arú cur uait agus ná bí ag cur síos ar do chómharsanaibh. Táid 'na ndreóilínibh spóirt sa 'Lóchrann' agat. Ní i gcómhnuidhe a ritheann le lucht magaidh a chailín. B'fhearra duit aire a thabhairt duit féin."*³⁵

It is often said to me at home when there is something to be done & I have a book in my hand, "Oh indeed, the learning will go to your head, Brighid," and when an old man from our village saw me with a pencil a while ago, he said: "Ara, put down that [pencil] and don't be writing about your neighbours. You are ridiculing them in the 'Lóchrann'. Things don't always turn out well for those who ridicule others. You would be better off minding your own business."

Stack's childhood experience, as relayed in her diary, involved household duties of cleaning, baking cakes and bringing evening tea to the men who had been working in the fields all day. She referred to the impact of international and national changes on life in Kerry: sugar shortages affected the local community due to the Great War, and she admitted to getting up early in the morning so as to receive her share of sugar before it ran out.³⁶ A clear sign of the War, from Stack's own experience, was the miserliness of Dingle shopkeepers as they began to measure the amount of sweets they sold to children.³⁷

Another major event that impacted on life in Kerry was the introduction of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) in Ireland. GMT was introduced on 1 October 1916, to much disgruntlement among nationalists, who saw this as yet another example of Britain imposing its will on Ireland.³⁸ Those who were in favour of the time alignment cited the importance of GMT for train scheduling and in helping the Great War effort.³⁹ Initially there were four time systems in operation in Ireland.⁴⁰ When summertime arrived in 1917 and the clocks were changed, people arose more

34. See Riona Nic Congáil, *An Óige agus an Athbheochan*, Baile Átha Cliath, Cló Léann na Gaeilge, 2022, p. 183-206.

35. *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, p. 4.

36. *An Lóchrann*, October 1917, p. 4.

37. *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, p. 7.

38. Ben Shorten, "Here Comes the Summer: How Daylight Saving Time Came to Ireland", online: <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/here-comes-the-summer-daylight-saving-1916-ireland>.

39. *Ibid.*

40. C. Mangan, "Greenwich Time in Ireland", *Catholic Bulletin*, 1918, p. 390-395.

than an hour earlier than the previous summer. The time transition is remarked upon by Stack as follows:

Is breágh luath a bhímid ag baile gach tráthnóna ó sgoil ó thosnuig an t-am nuadh ach caithfimid eirighe uair a chloig níos luaithe gach maidin agus ní buidheach ná beannachtach a bhímid ar maidin do dhlighthibh Shasana nár fhág an ghrían mar uaireadóir againn. “Ní fada go mbainfid glaoch an choilig de,” arsa seandúine sa bhaile seo againn-ne.⁴¹

We get home from school good and early every evening since the new time has begun but we have to get up an hour earlier every morning and we are not one bit thankful for England’s laws in the morning, for not leaving us with the sun as our watch. “It will not be long before the crowing of the rooster will be taken from him,” said one old person in our village.

Unlike most retrospective autobiographical accounts of schooling in the early 20th century, Stack admitted to enjoying school and she related the interaction of older with younger children and showed that aspects of the Revised Programme of 1900 were introduced in the girls’ school in Ballyferriter. The Irish language and history were prioritised in this school, and it is clear that the patriotism promoted within the school history books impacted upon Stack. She was also in no doubt that it was her duty to keep her “*teanga binn bríoghmhar*” [“sweet lively language”] alive.⁴² “Drill” or physical exercise was also part of the new curriculum and is described by Stack as follows:

Bhí caitheamh aimsire ana-dheas againn lár a’ lae – “Cleasa géag is corp” nó drill. Bhí slis nó “club” ins gach láimh againn – chuir an mháistréas so dhúinne agus bhí cailín ag seinm cheoil & sinn-ne ag oibriú na maidí go tiugh nó go mall do réir an cheoil agus do réir mar a teasbántaí dúinn [...] níorbh fhada a bhí glaoidhte isteach orainn nuair a tháinig an sagart chun ár bpeictiúirí a dhéanamh.⁴³

We had a very nice pastime in the middle of the day – “arm and body Exercises” or drill. We held a lath or “club” in our hands – the mistress set this up for us and a girl was playing music & us working the sticks fast or slow depending on the music and as was shown to us [...] it was not long after we were called in that the priest came to take our pictures.

The photography session mentioned here was a new development within the school and when photographs of the pupils were developed, it was found that the heads of the older pupils had been cut off as they were sitting too high up on the stools. Stack related many humorous incidents of this kind in her diary, one of which happened when she told an old man in the locality that she was reading a schoolbook which claimed that the world was always turning on its axis. This was a

41. *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, p. 5.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

43. *An Lóchrann*, October 1917, p. 5.

ridiculous claim, according to Seana-Mhícheál, who took it to be another example of the idiocy of academics:

*“is minic a chuala,” ar seisean, “go mbíonn meascán mearaídhe ar lucht léighinn. Measann siad an dubh a chur ‘na gheal orainn is dócha. Dá mbeadh an domhan ag casadh tímcheall is mó barra-thuisle a bhainfi asainn agus dá olcas iad mo sheana chnámha bochta, bheidís níos measa agam dá m’fhíor an leabhar san.”*⁴⁴

“I have often heard,” he said, “that learned folk are confused. They try to fool us, I suppose. If the world were turning around we would stumble a lot and bad as my poor old bones are, they would be worse if that book were true.”

This anecdote reveals that children in the Kerry Gaeltacht were learning about modern science at school, while it also shows the growing chasm between the older and younger members of the community.

Brigid Stack’s diary was published in booklet format as *Cúnntas Cinn Lae* [Diary Account] by *An Lóchrann* in 1917, and as *Mí dem’ Shaoghal* [A Month of my Life] by Muinntir Fallamhain in 1918. This diary was stated to be “sanctioned as a junior reader for national schools”.⁴⁵ However, Stack’s literary career ended abruptly and prematurely on a note of pathos. The final mention of her appeared in *An Lóchrann* in April 1919, when the fifteen-year-old Michaél Ó Guithín, son of Peig Sayers, composed a keen for her on her death. Stack was just nineteen when she died, and Ó Guithín attributes her death to “*an phláig chruaidh nimhe seo*” [“this hard, venomous plague”].⁴⁶ The plague he refers to was the Spanish Flu which infected over 800,000 Irish people between 1918 and 1919 and killed over 20,000.⁴⁷ Several national and local newspaper tributes were published upon Stack’s death.⁴⁸ In these, Stack was portrayed as a talented young writer and a symbol of the best of Irish girlhood: “a typical Irish girl, the kind of which has caused Irish womanhood to be revered in other lands”.⁴⁹ Her bilingual ability was highlighted in the *Kerry News*, and offered as proof that young native speakers of Irish could also become fluent in the English language, without sacrificing their mother tongue.⁵⁰ An obituary written by An Seabhac while he was interned in Durham prison was the most insightful, due to the fact that he knew her well:

*Do bhí an chlann ar fad fíor-cheanúil ar an nGaedhilg agus do bhí cleas an scéalaíde sa pheann aca go léir. Do bhí dúthchas ionnta ón athair, agus fuaireadar togha an mhúinte i scoil na gcailíní i mBaile an Fhirtéaraigh.*⁵¹

44. *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, p. 5.

45. *Kerry News*, 17 March 1919, p. 4.

46. *An Lóchrann*, April 1919, p. 3.

47. Caitriona Foley, *The Last Irish Plague: The Great Flu Epidemic in Ireland 1918-19*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2011, p. 8.

48. An Seabhac, “Brid Stac”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 22 March 1919, p. 3; “Death of Brigid Stac”, *Kerry News*, 17 March 1919, p. 4; *Kerry Weekly Reporter*, 15 March 1919, p. 3.

49. “Death of Brigid Stac”, *Kerry News*, 17 March 1919, p. 4.

50. *Ibid.*

51. An Seabhac, “Brid Stac”, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 22 March 1919, p. 3.

The entire family was very fond of the Irish language and they all had the knack of the storyteller in their pen. They inherited this from their father, and they received the best of teaching in the girls' school in Ballyferriter.

The Stack father that An Seabhac mentions had died not long before Brigid.

Áine Stack

Following Brigid Stack's death, her younger sister, Áine, wrote to the *Catholic Bulletin* to inform the readers of "A Circle for the Young People" of her older sister's untimely passing. Áine, born in 1905, was five years younger than Brigid – she was fourteen years of age at the time of Brigid's death and that of her father – and she followed in her sisters' footsteps by corresponding with the *Catholic Bulletin*. When Áine received a prize for her written work, she wrote:

*Do bhí árd-áthas orm an duais d'fhagháil agus do chuir sé luthgháir ar mo mháthair leis, ar shon gur chuir sé uaigheas uirthé nuair a chuimhnigh sí ar ár mBrighidín a bhuaigh na duaiseanna go léir.*⁵²

I was delighted to receive the prize and my mother was thrilled too, but she became lonely when she remembered our little Brigid who won all the prizes.

In July 1919, Áine Stack published a diary in Irish, detailing a week of her life: she was one of four schoolgirls to do so. The writing style of each of these girls appears to have been influenced by Brigid Stack's own writing: they are humorous in their narration of events, and enjoy exaggerating, while also providing a clear account of growing up in the Kerry Gaeltacht. Áine Stack's diary refers to school, finding birds' nests, working on the bog, attending mass and spending time on the beach. The only unusual event in her week is meeting "*gluaisteán mór na saighdiúridhe*" ["the soldiers' big vehicle"] on the road when she and a friend are on a donkey ride to the local town.⁵³ Stack claims that when faced with the soldiers' vehicle, the donkey toppled the girls into a ditch. This was at a time when the War of Independence was underway, and it is a stark reminder of the intrusion of a coming modernity on the traditional world in which donkeys were used as a mode of transport.

Similar to Brigid, Áine Stack stayed on at Scoil Chaíliní Bhaile an Fheirtéaraigh in the role of monitress, though she never attended secondary school. A newspaper article published in 1981 stated that: "in 1926 [she] got 30th place in Ireland in the King's Scholarship for entry to Carysford Training College for teachers", where she spent two years before entering the Presentation Convent in Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry.⁵⁴ In 1932, she was one of thirteen women to receive "the Holy Habit of

52. Áine Stac, *Catholic Bulletin*, July 1919, p. 372.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 372-373.

54. "Editorial", *The Kerryman / Corkman*, 23 January 1981, p. 8.

the Order” in Tralee.⁵⁵ While a nun, she proceeded to teach generations of primary school children. When Stack retired from teaching in 1972, she immediately returned to her studies at St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth. There she became acquainted with Irish-language scholar, writer, and publisher Fr. Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, who encouraged her to write a memoir.⁵⁶ This she did, and her first memoir, *Thar Balla Isteach*, was published in 1975 by Ó Fiannachta’s publishing house, An Sagart. Stack later wrote a more extensive English-language version of her memoir, *As We Lived It!* (c. 1981).⁵⁷ Her final publication, *Ard na Caithnia: Súil Siar* (1987)⁵⁸ provides an account of the history and traditions of her youth in Smerwick. The linguistic dexterity, humour and lightness of touch that defined her youthful writing are still palpable in her later work.

During the decades Stack spent in the convent, autobiographies about life on the Great Blasket Island had become a celebrated genre. Indeed, Stack’s *Thar Balla Isteach* echoes Nóra Ní Shéaghdha’s *Thar Bealach Isteach: Leabhar Eile ón mBlascaod Mór* (1940). Ní Shéaghdha and Stack were born in Kerry in the same year, and both of their works detail their years spent teaching: on the Great Blasket Island in the case of Ní Shéaghdha; and in the Presentation Convent school in the case of Stack. If Ní Shéaghdha’s book title suggests the separation between the mainland and island, then Stack’s book title also suggests that the “balla” [“wall”] of the Presentation Convent in Cahersiveen separated her from the rest of Kerry life.

Stack’s first memoir provides an insight into the life of a nun in 20th-century Ireland, from the day she entered the convent, or her “doom” as her cousins referred to the convent, to beyond her retirement.⁵⁹ As she was a national school principal from 1934 until 1972, she also presents a unique perspective on the evolving educational system, particularly in relation to the Irish language. Of the early years of the Free State, she relates with humour the ridiculous efforts of school inspectors to promote the “*Modh Díreach*” [“Direct Method”] of Irish-language instruction. Unsurprisingly, Stack encouraged her pupils to gather local folklore as part of the national folklore project, *Bailiúchán na Scol* [the Schools’ Collection], 1937-1939, stating that:

*Chuir sé breis oibre orainn sa scoil ach b’fhiú é an t-am a chaitheamh leis. Spreagadh suim na gcailíní i saol a muintire agus a sinsir agus chonacthas dóibh go raibh traidisiún ársa againn sa tír seo.*⁶⁰

It created more work for us in the school, but it was worth spending the time on it. The girls’ interest was aroused in the life of their family and elders and they saw that we had an ancient tradition in this country.

55. “Religious Ceremony at Oakpark, Tralee”, *Kerryman*, 7 May 1932, p. 10.

56. An tSiúr M. de Lourdes, *Thar Balla Isteach* [1975], Má Nuad, An Sagart, 1982, p. 104.

57. Sister Marie de Lourdes Stack, *As We Lived It!*, Kerry, The Kerryman, c. 1981, p. 231.

58. An tSiúr de Lourdes Stac, *Ard na Caithnia: Súil Siar*, Naas, Teangscéal, 1987.

59. Sister Marie de Lourdes Stack, *As We Lived It!*, p. 7.

60. An tSiúr M. de Lourdes, *Thar Balla Isteach*, p. 48.

Indeed, the substantial body of work compiled by these schoolgirls in the Presentation Convent, Cahersiveen, is available online as part of the Schools' Collection, and includes information on local history, superstition, death rituals, pastimes, and toys, among many other topics.⁶¹ Stack reminisces about the nuns' summer house, opened in Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry, in 1939. With an Irish language summer college nearby, the nuns went to this summer house to learn the Irish language; however, their list of "*deich n-aitheanta nua*" ["ten new commandments"] included not speaking to anyone on the beach, keeping to their own half of the beach, and making sure to wear a long dress while swimming.⁶² Rather than actively participating in the Irish college, the nuns had their own private language lessons. Stack, of course, did not require lessons. Those nuns who were national school teachers were expected to reach a high standard of Irish in order to teach the language to the schoolchildren.⁶³ Although Stack herself had taught her pupils through the medium of Irish in the early years of her teaching career, the medium later turned to English, due to the perception that the Irish language was of no advantage to children whose only future was to emigrate.⁶⁴

As We Lived It! builds on *Thar Balla Isteach*: Stack claimed that "a translation from one language to another is not successful unless done by an expert" and therefore described her English-language memoir as a more extensive "version" rather than a "translation".⁶⁵ Louise Fuller sums up this second memoir as "a valuable chronicle of religious life as lived in the early twentieth century".⁶⁶ Fuller comments that "Individualism, self-expression and questioning were actively discouraged" in the convent life as described by Stack.⁶⁷ Little wonder, then, that Stack refrained from writing for so many decades of her life. The oppressive nature of convent life is described by her on many occasions, including the rule of silence observed by the nuns:

Then it fell. The Great Silence. Like a thick blanket it wrapped the Convent in the profound stillness of its folds. It was almost a live thing. Sitting on the bed I was alone with my thoughts. This is a strange rule, I wonder who thought it up for nuns. Out in the homes all over the countryside tonight women would be visiting each other, knitting perhaps, or playing cards, but surely talking. They would be at parties or at dances. But here are twenty women shut up in their cells in deliberate custody. Is this

61. "An Clochar, Cathair Saidhbhín", National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Schools' Collection, online: <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4742132>. See also Caoimhe Nic Lochlainn, "'A Work of National Importance': Child-Adult Dynamics in Bailiúchán na Scol/The Schools' Collection, 1937-1939", *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2016, p. 203-213.

62. An tSiúr M. de Lourdes, *Thar Balla Isteach*, p. 51.

63. See Saorstát Éireann, *An Roinn Oideachais Tuarasgabhair 1927-28*, Baile Átha Cliath, Oifig an tSoláthair, 1929, p. 16.

64. An tSiúr M. de Lourdes, *Thar Balla Isteach*, p. 86.

65. Sister Marie de Lourdes Stack, *As We Lived It!*, p. 224.

66. Louise Fuller, "Spiritual and Religious Life-Writing in Ireland since 1900", in *A History of Irish Autobiography*, Liam Harte (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 89.

67. *Ibid.*

the recollection so much stressed by the Irish saints? It is no joke! The writer of Irish proverbs must have felt somewhat the same as I do now when he said that quarrelling is better than loneliness.⁶⁸

The above passage is typical of Stack's prose style: she uses visual metaphors – “a thick blanket” – to describe a sensory feeling – “The Great Silence”. Then she juxtaposes life in the convent with the life that she knows to exist beyond the convent walls, producing a sense of longing in the prose, a contrast between convivial sound and lonely silence. Finally, she returns to the Irish language context, referring to a proverb in order to describe the loneliness she feels: “*Is fearr an t-imreas ná an t-uaigneas*” [“quarrelling is better than loneliness”]. In spite of the potency of her language describing herself and other young women as being “shut up in their cells in deliberate custody”, and her tentative questioning of how this “strange rule” came about, Stack does not follow the thought all the way through: she cuts herself off, and accepts this way of being. Reminiscing on her years in the convent, she was later quoted in the *The Kerryman / Corkman* as saying: “The individual is now allowed to develop whatever talents she has. Nuns today are looked on as adults. In our younger days we could not express our individuality. We lived a life that was governed totally by rule”.⁶⁹

What is largely absent from *Thar Balla Isteach* are references to Stack's own family. In *As We Lived It!* Stack makes reference to her living siblings, mentioning that her sisters sent her letters from Chicago:

In all these years they never failed, not only to write for every occasion, but to be ahead of time. They all had good handwriting – a characteristic of the pupils of Ballyferriter Girls school where the teachers wrote almost copper plate.⁷⁰

The final section of the memoir details Áine Stack's trip to Chicago to be reunited with her siblings in the 1970s. Cáit, later known as Kate, was now a widow, living alone in Chicago, with her adult children living nearby. Stack writes:

What pleasant hours I spent with her in the evening sunshine on the lawn outside her front door. As one might expect, recalling old times was all our talk and I was amazed at how aptly she'd use an Irish word when humour called for it. She remembered far more of my father's stories than I did because he died when I was young. She remembered An Seabhac, which means the hawk, the pen name of Patrick Sugrue, a popular Irish writer, visiting my father to collect his stories, and Kate [Cáit] herself wrote many of my father's folklore tales for him. Indeed, she contributed to the “Seanchaí Muimhneach” (Munster Storyteller) a book of stories which was published in 1932. She could quote many Irish rhymes.⁷¹

68. Sister Marie de Lourdes Stack, *As We Lived It!*, p. 15.

69. “Editorial”, *The Kerryman / Corkman*, 23 January 1981, p. 8.

70. Sister Marie de Lourdes Stack, *As We Lived It!*, p. 96.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 206. See also An Seabhac, *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach: measra de bhéaloideas Ilchínéal ó “An Lóchrann” 1907-1913*, Baile Átha Cliath, Institute Béaloideas Éireann, 1932.

Although Irish had been the home language of these sisters in their youth, it was clear that English was now their main medium of expression. What is noticeable in both memoirs is the absence of any mention of Brigid Stack.

In *As We Lived It!*, while in Chicago, Áine Stack transcribes a verse in Irish from her sister Cáit, which Áine then translates into English. Cáit attributes the verse to “*An Chailleach Bhéara*” [“The Hag of Béara”], otherwise known as “the Old Woman of Dingle”, a “nun-goddess” in the Gaelic tradition.⁷² This Hag is a metaphor for winter; for the ebbing of the tide of life; for Ireland; for the aging woman. The verse and translation provided by Stack are as follows:

*Iarraim ar Dhia arís a bheith óg,
Iarraim ar Dhia a bheith deas,
Agus na ruic a chionn fir óga i m’aghaidh
A bhaint as.*

I pray God to restore my youthful days
And my beauty fine
So the wrinkles young men see in my face
Would disappear line by line.⁷³

This could be read as a solemn reflection on aging; however, it is quickly followed up with Áine Stack remarking “There were no face-lifts in the Hag of Beara’s time. But the face doesn’t matter if you’re young inside”.⁷⁴ This type of humour was characteristic of the writing of all three Stack sisters, regardless of age.

In Áine Stack’s final work, *Ard na Caithnia: Súil Siar* (1987), she returns to the Irish language. This work is a homecoming, as it deals exclusively with Ard na Caithnia [Smerwick] where she spent her youth. This book has an intergenerational set-up: its main characters consist of a grandmother and two granddaughters. The granddaughters probe their grandmother about life in Smerwick when she was young, giving her the opportunity to describe housing, traditions, folklore, festivals and more. This set-up has echoes of Peadar Ua Laoghaire’s *Séadna* (1904), another Munster text, and the first attempt to create a modern Irish literature.⁷⁵ What is clear is that *Ard na Caithnia* is a substantial female text, providing insight into the lives, skillsets, interests and dress of women during Stack’s early years – and stretching back to the previous century – not to mention matchmaking and specific roles that women could take on, such as the local healer woman.⁷⁶ Part of the book’s

72. Eleanor Hull, “Legends and Traditions of the Cailleach Bheara or Old Woman (Hag) of Beare”, *Folklore*, vol. 38. no. 3, 1927, p. 225-254.

73. Sister Marie de Lourdes Stack, *As We Lived It!*, p. 214.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

75. For more on *Séadna*’s place within Irish language literature, see Philip O’Leary, “Seanchuidhthe, Séadna, Sheehan, and the Zeitgeist: Folklore, Folklife, and the New Prose”, in *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881-1921: Ideology and Innovation*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, p. 91-162; Peadar Ua Laoghaire, *Séadna*, Liam Mac Mathúna (ed.), Baile Átha Cliath, Cois Life, 2011.

76. An tSiúr de Lourdes Stac, *Ard na Caithnia...*, p. 63.

appeal is that the contrast between olden times and the lives and practices of the two granddaughters – presumably living in the 1980s – is discussed regularly. While Stack's religious persuasion is visible, she does not shy from exploring the superstitions that were part of daily life in the Smerwick of her youth.

Conclusion

There is much more to the writing of the Stack sisters than can be demonstrated by this essay alone. What became of the Stack sisters – one died young, one emigrated, married and had children, and one became a nun and schoolteacher – tells us much about the difficult environment and limited opportunities available to even the most intelligent and educated Irish-speaking girls from Gaeltacht regions in the early part of the 20th century. It is through the study of the history of childhood and youth that the writings of these sisters have been rediscovered and traced from childhood to adulthood, and no future study of 20th-century Irish-language women's writing will be complete without including the plentiful and often playful writings of the Stack sisters. However, with the work of these sisters having gone virtually unnoticed for so long, one wonders how many other 20th-century Irish-language women writers there are whose work has been overlooked too.

Ríona NÍ CONGÁIL

University College Dublin

This article is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 802695).



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission