

UCD*scholarcast*

Series 12 (Spring 2015)

Modalities of Revival

**Series Editors: Giulia Bruna & Catherine
Wilsdon**

General Editor: P.J. Mathews

© **UCD***scholarcast*

An Cultúr Gaelach ó Pheirspictíocht an Linbh:

Cín Lae Chailíní Scoile Chiarraí (1916-1918)

Ríona Nic Congáil

Is ionann eispéireas an pháiste aonair agus ceann de na ceistanna is casta agus is coitianta i léann stair na hóige. Cén chaoi a bhfuilimid in ann tuiscint a fháil ar bhraistintí na bpáistí ag tréimhse ar leith nuair nach bhfuil mórán foinsí scríofa ar fáil ina ndearna siad cur síos ar a n-eispéireas agus a dtuairimí faoin domhan a raibh siad ag maireachtáil ann? Agus fiú nuair a dhéanaimid staidéar ar pháistí aonaracha, a bhfuil cín lae, litreacha agus scéalta cumtha acu, cén chaoi a bhfuilimid in ann idirdhealú a dhéanamh idir tionchar an eagarthóra nó an mhúinteora fhásta, agus meon agus glór an pháiste féin? Má scríobh páiste ar leith cuntas ar a shaol, an féidir a rá go seasann an cuntas sin do thuairimí na bpáistí uilig, go háirithe má chuirtear san áireamh nár cuireadh go leor béime ar an litearthacht i measc aicme an lucht oibre go dtí deireadh an naoú haois déag agus tús na fichiú haoise? Agus, ar ndóigh, níl i gceist anseo ach comhthéacs Iarthar an Domhain.¹

Tagann na ceistean seo uilig chun solais i gcomhthéacs na Gaeilge. Sa chaint seo, díreoidh mé ar chín lae a d'fhoilsigh triúr cailíní scoile as Gaeltacht Chiarraí sa nuachtán áitiúil, *An Lóchrann*, idir 1916 agus 1918. Is iad seo na samplaí is luaithe de chainteoirí

¹ Féach ar Peter N. Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 5.

óga dúchais ag foilsíú trí mheán na Gaeilge agus cuireann siad peirspictíocht na gcailíní ar fáil beagnach fiche bliain sular foilsíodh dírbheathaisnéis Pheig Sayers.² Tugann cín lae na gcailíní scoile dúshlán don tuairim go raibh cailíní agus mná na Gaeltachta neamhliteartha sa Ghaeilge go dtí gur ghlac an Saorstát seilbh ar an gcóras oideachais sa bhliain 1922, agus cuireann siad cuntas saibhir ar fáil ar shaol chailíní na Gaeltachta go luath san fhichiú haois. Is iad seo na chéad iarrachtaí chun cumhacht a thabhairt do chainteoirí óga Gaeltachta, ag ligean dóibh a dtuairimí a léiriú i bhfóram poiblí an nuachtáin agus tugann glór na bpáistí seo dúshlán don íomhá rómánsúil agus shoineanta de pháistí na Gaeltachta a chruthaigh Pádraic Mac Piarais roinnt blianta roimhe sin. Ach is gá a dhearbhu go raibh ardchumas léinn ag na cailíní seo i gcomparáid le páistí eile ar comhaois leo, agus gur éirigh leo bheith ag scríobh agus ag foilsíú trí Ghaeilge mar gheall ar thionchar idé-eolaíocht Chonradh na Gaeilge agus an mhodheolaíocht nua leanbh-lárnach a cuireadh i bhfeidhm sna scoileanna náisiúnta ón mbliain 1900 ar aghaidh.³ Bhain cín lae na gcailíní scoile le hidirthréimhse: idir aois na hóige agus aois mná; idir an cultúr traidisiúnta Gaelach agus modhanna nua-aimseartha an tsaoil; agus idir cultúr na litríochta béil agus cultúr an chló. Tá téama na hidirthréimhse lárnach i gcín lae na gcailíní.

² D'fhoilsigh Clólucht an Talbóidigh dírbheathaisnéis Pheig Sayers sa bhliain 1936. Sa bhliain 1923, bhí bean óg 23 bliain d'aois ann darbh ainm Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin - deirfiúr Mhuiris Uí Súilleabhán – agus choinnigh sí cuntas dá saol ar feadh bliana. Níor foilsíodh an cuntas seo go dtí an bhliain 2000, áfach. Féach ar Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin, *Cín Lae Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin*, eag. Máiréad Ní Loingsigh (Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim, 2000).

³ Mhair Clár Athbhreithnithe na Scoileanna Náisiúnta ó 1900 go dtí 1922. Fuair sé réidh leis an gcóras a chuir fócaíocht ar fáil de réir na dtorthaí scrúdaithe; agus chuir sé tús leis an modheolaíocht leanbh-lárnach a thug aghaidh ar réimse leathan cumais trí ábhair nua cosúil le cócaireacht, líníocht, agus corpoideachas a chur le siollabas na scoileanna. Féach ar John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structures* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005), 34.

Cuireadh *An Lóchrann* ar bun sa bhliain 1907 mar fhoilseachán dátheangach, agus dhírigh sé ar phobal léitheoireachta i gCiarraí agus i gCorcaigh thar éinne eile.⁴ Athsheoladh *An Lóchrann* mar nuachtán lán-Ghaeilge sa bhliain 1916 agus Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha (1883-1964), nó ‘An Seabhac’ mar is fearr aithne air, ag feidhmiú mar eagarthóir an nuachtáin. Ba é an Seabhac an té a chothaigh seánra na dírbheathaisnéise i nGaeltacht Chiarraí, agus is eisean an t-aon duine a raibh baint aige leis na dírbheathaisnéisí cáiliúla go léir a d’eascair ón mBlascaod Mór:⁵ bhí sé mar eagarthóir ar *An tOileánach*; agus bhí sé mar eagarthóir coimisiúnaithe agus comhairleach do Chlólucht an Talbóidigh sna 1930í nuair a foilsíodh *Fiche Blian ag Fás* agus *Peig*.⁶ An buntáiste a bhain leis *An Lóchrann* ná gur lig sé don eagarthóir grúpa beag scríbhneoirí a mhealladh agus a chothú i gceart, rud nach raibh eagarthóirí na nuachtán náisiúnta in ann a dhéanamh. Is é Tomás Ó Criomhthain an duine is aitheanta i measc scríbhneoirí *An Lóchrann*.

⁴ Féach ar ‘An Seabhac’, *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach .i. Meascra de Bhéaloideas Ilchinéal ó ‘An Lóchrann’ [1907-13]* (Baile Átha Cliath: Institute Béaloideasa Éireann, 1933), vi.

⁵ Is gá go leor aitheantais a thabhairt do Bhrian Ó Ceallaigh i gcomhthéacs dhírbheathaisnéisí Chiarraí chomh maith. Spreag seisean Tomás Ó Criomhthain, Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin agus Míchéal Ó Guithín le scéalta a mbeatha a bhreacadh síos. Féach ar Brian Kelly, ‘How He Came To Write’, *Sunday Independent*, 14 Márta 1937, 12; ‘Ní Shúilleabháin, Eibhlín (1900–1949)’. www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=2164. Ar ndóigh, tháinig Ó Ceallaigh faoi thionchar Uí Shiochfhradha agus é ina fhear óg, agus mhol Ó Siochfhradha dó tréimhse a chaitheamh ar an mBlascaod Mór. Féach ar ‘Ó Ceallaigh, Brian (1889–1936)’. www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=56

⁶ Maidir leis an mbaint a bhí ag Ó Siochfhradha le *Fiche Blian ag Fás*, féach ar Chomhfhreagras George Derwent Thomson - Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha (1932-1933), LNÉ LS G 1,419. Féach freisin ar Declan Kiberd, ‘The Blasket Autobiographies,’ in *Irish Classics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 520-542.

Lean Ó Siochfhradha cur chuige na nuachtán náisiúnta, ar nós an *Weekly Freeman* agus *An Claidheamh Soluis*, agus d'fhógair sé comórtais scríbhneoireachta do pháistí, mar aon le duaiseanna a bhí curtha ar fáil ag conraitheoirí saibhre ó Bhaile Átha Cliath agus ag Coláiste an Daingin.⁷ Bhí cur chuige gealchroíoch aige maidir leis an óige, agus is léir ó leathanaigh *An Lóchrann* gur theastaigh uaidh an greann a chur chun cinn i measc na n-óg.⁸ Ní raibh téama an ghrinn mar chuid lárnach den obair a bhí idir lámha ag na díograiseoirí teanga eile ag an am: chuir siad béim ar an óige mar thodhchaí na teanga, rud a bhí i bhfad níos tábhachtaí ná cur chun cinn an ghrinn dar leo. Ach bhí na páistí antógtha le cur chuige Uí Shiochfhradha agus spreagadh cuid acu chun dul i mbun pinn trí mheán a dteanga dúchais. In eagrán na Samhna 1916 de *An Lóchrann*, fógraíodh comórtas scríbhneoireachta do dhaoine óga ar ábhar a bhain le duine, file nó ceoltóir greannmhar.⁹ Bhí cead ag daoine óga faoi bhun seacht mbliana déag d'aois iarratais a sheoladh isteach agus fuarthas sé iarracht déag. Faoi mbliain 1916, bhí an córas leanbh-lárnach dátheangach curtha i bhfeidhm i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus bhí méadú ag teacht ar líon na bpáistí a raibh scríobh na Gaeilge ar a dtail acu.¹⁰ Spreag roinnt

⁷ *An Lóchrann*, Samhain 1916, 4.

⁸ Feictear an spéis a bhí ag Ó Siochfhradha sa ghreann sa chnuasach scéalta *An Baile Seo Againne*, a foilsíodh in 1913.

⁹ *An Lóchrann*, Samhain 1916, 4.

¹⁰ Sa bhliain 1904, mar gheall ar stocaireacht Chonradh na Gaeilge, cuireadh clár dátheangach ar bun sna scoileanna Gaeltachta agus in áiteanna dátheangacha ina raibh na múinteoirí cumasach go leor agus toilteanach an Ghaeilge a úsáid sa seomra ranga. Féach ar Thomas A. O'Donoghue, *Bilingual Education in Ireland, 1904-1922* (Murdoch: Centre for Irish Studies, 2000), 34-46; Séamas Ó Buachalla, 'Educational Policy and the Role of the Irish Language from 1831 to 1981,' *European Journal of Education*, 19.1 (1984): 82.

múinteoirí bunscoile a gcuid daltaí lena saothar a chur chuig na colúin do pháistí in *An Claidheamh Soluis* agus *The Catholic Bulletin*.¹¹

Trí na comórtais scríbhneoireachta in *An Lóchrann*, chothaigh Ó Siochfhradha an scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach agus an féinléiriú, agus chruthaigh sé nasc idir scileanna scríbhneoireachta an tseomra ranga agus an pobal áitiúil. Ag an am céanna, bhí Fionán Mac Coluim (Finghín na Leamhna) ag tacú le cur chuige Uí Shiochfhradha trí chomórtais chumadóireachta do pháistí a chur chun cinn ag feiseanna áitiúla.¹² Ar an dá bhealach seo - trí chomórtais sa nuachtán agus ag feiseanna - a tháinig an bheirt fhear trasna ar thriúr cailíní scoile a raibh féith na scríbhneoireachta iontu: Máire Ní Shéaghdha agus Brighid Ní Shíothcháin as Uíbh Ráthach, agus Brighid Stac as Baile an Fheirtéaraigh. Idir 1916 agus 1918, le cúnadh ó Mhac Coluim, d'fhoilsigh Ó Siochfhradha cín lae na gcailíní scoile seo in *An Lóchrann*, ina ndearna gach cailín cur síos ar mhí dá saol. Ní léir go ndearna Ó Siochfhradha cinneadh comhfhiosach saothair chailíní a fhoilsiú seachas saothair bhuachaillí, ach is léir go raibh sé lánsásta tacú le glórtha na gcailíní i bhfóram nua. Ní hamháin gur chuir Ó Siochfhradha an idé-eolaíocht leanbh-lárnach chun cinn in *An Lóchrann*, ach tugann na cailíní scoile thuasluaite léargas ar a dtaithí féin ar an gcóras

¹¹ Bhí comhfhreagras idir múinteoirí chailíní scoile Chiarraí agus an colún do pháistí in *The Catholic Bulletin*.

¹² Féach ar an réamhrá a chuir Fionán Mac Coluim le leabhar Mháire Ní Shéaghdha agus Bhrighid Ní Shíothcháin, *Laethanta Geala: Cunntasáí Cinn Lae do Scríobh Beirt Chailíní Sgoile* (Baile Átha Cliath: Brún agus Ó Nóláin, 1922).

oideachais comhaimseartha. Níorbh fhada gur foilsíodh cín lae na gcailíní mar théacsleabhair bheaga d'fhoghlaimoirí óga agus aosta.¹³

Ba í Máire Ní Shéaghdha, a bhí ag freastal ar Scoil Chill Mhic Ciaráin in Uíbh Ráthach, an chéad chailín a chuir cín lae i dtreo *An Lóchrann*, agus aimsir na hInide a bhí ann. Seo mar a chuir sí tús leis an gcín lae:

Márta a 1, 1916 – Lá aonaigh an lá indiu. Lá fliuch fuar ag na daoinibh atá ag déanamh cleamhnaistí. Chuala go raibh cleamhnas Phártholáin ó'n mbaile seo briste. Ní haon iongnadh é leis mar tá a cheann liath le haois. Ní raghadh aon chailín chuige. Ceapann siad gur as a mheabhair atá sé chun bheith ag pósadh an taca so dá shaoghal.¹⁴

Ón tús, cloisimid glór mí-ómósach an chailín scoile, agus í ag trácht ar dhuine fásta – ní hionann í agus an íomhá de chailíní deasa múinte soineanta a cuireadh chun cinn i meánscoileanna na gcailíní agus i measc na gcailíní saibhre in Éirinn. Agus ní hionann an glór seo agus an léiriú a tugadh ar chailíní na Gaeltachta i bhfoilseacháin na hathbheochana ach an oiread.¹⁵ Tugann Ní Shéaghdha tús áite don chleamhnas, ócáid lárnach i saol na mban, ach tapaíonn sí an deis le bheith ag spochadh as Pártholán bocht, ag tabhairt soine don údarás agus don chóras patrarcach. Déanann Ní Shéaghdha cur síos ar roinnt eachtraí uafásacha agus ní léir an raibh sí ag insint na fírinne nó ag iarraidh

¹³ Máire Ní Shéaghdha, *Laethanta Geala: Cailín Scoile i gCiarraige Do Scríobh* (Baile Átha Cliath: Muinntir Fheallamhain, 1917); Brighid Stac, *Mí dem' Shaoghal* (Baile Átha Cliath: Muinntir Fallamhain, 1918); Máire Ní Shéaghdha agus Brighid Ní Shíothcháin, *Laethanta Geala: Cunntasáí Cinn Lae do Scríobh Beirt Chailín Sgoile* (Baile Átha Cliath: Brún agus Ó Nóláin, 1922).

¹⁴ *An Lóchrann*, Deire Fógmhair 1916, 1.

¹⁵ Féach, mar shampla, ar an léiriú a thugann J.M. Synge ar chailíní Árann ag tús na fichiú haoise. J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands*, ed. Tim Robinson (London: Penguin, 1992), 31.

uafás a chur ar a cuid léitheoirí. Ní fios ar scríobh sí a cín lae gan aon tuiscint a bheith aici ar choincheap agus chumhacht na léitheoirí, nó ar thuig sí go maith céard a bhí ar siúl aici agus gur theastaigh uaithi na léitheoirí a ionramháil ar mhaithe le spraoi. Chuile sheans gur fiordhuine a bhí i bPártholán Liath a raibh sí ag spochadh as: de réir an daonáirimh 1911, bhí Pártholán nó dhó ag cur faoi sa cheantar sin.¹⁶ Níos faide ar aghaidh sa chín lae, luann Ní Shéaghdha go bhfuil a cat i ndiaidh puisíní a thabhairt ar an saol, nó ‘na rudaí salacha’, mar a thugann sí féin orthu, agus deir sí ar bhealach díreach gur chaith sí isteach san abhainn iad. Bhí Ó Siochfhradha ar an eolas faoin ngluaiseacht ar son leas ainmhithe a bhí ag bailiú nirt i measc na meánaicme ag tús na fichiú haoise, agus bhí feachtais ann in irisí Éireannacha agus i gcolúin do pháistí sna nuachtáin chun aire a thabhairt d’ainmhithe agus d’éin agus gan na huibheacha a sciobadh.¹⁷ Ach is léir nach raibh na feachtais seo i ndiaidh dul i bhfeidhm ar chailín scoile Chiarraí: bhí sciobadh na n-uibheacha mar chaitheamh aimsire i measc na n-óg ar feadh tréimhse fhada ina dhiaidh sin.

Léimeann cín lae Mháire Ní Shéaghdha ó ábhar go hábhar, mar mhacalla ar achar airde an pháiste: luann sí an cleamhnas agus an bás i ndiaidh a chéile. Cé go bhfuil sí easurramach, agus go dtugann sí cuntas áibhéalach ar eachtraí áirithe, tugann sí spléachadh ar imeachtaí seachtracha agus an tionchar a bhí acu ar Ghaeltacht Chiarraí. Mar shampla, tugann sí le fios go bhfuil páistí ag teacht chun na scoile gan bhróga, gan stocaí, agus go bhfuil praghas an tae agus an tsiúcra imithe as smacht mar gheall ar

¹⁶ Is é an trua é nach bhfuil aon rud sa daonáireamh maidir le dath gruaige.

¹⁷ Ríona Nic Congáil, ‘‘Fiction, Amusement, Instruction’’: The Irish Fireside Club and the Educational Ideology of the Gaelic League,’ *Éire-Ireland* 44.1&2 (Earrach/Samhradh 2009): 98.

impleachtaí an Chogaidh Mhóir. Léiríonn sí tuiscint éigin ar chúrsaí idirnáisiúnta nuair a luann sí gurb é Meiriceá an t-aon tír nach bhfuil páirteach sa Chogadh Mór (sa bhliain 1917 a thosaigh Meiriceá ag troid sa chogadh). Tá tionchar Chonradh na Gaeilge le brath anseo óir bhí scolaíocht Ní Shéaghdha trí mheán na Gaeilge agus bhí sí go maith in ann bheith ag scríobh trí Ghaeilge. Ach is léir óna cuntas gur shamhlaigh an Conradh go raibh feidhm phraiticiúil ag baint le páistí mar bhailitheoirí airgid ar son na cúise: tugadh bratacha Éireannacha di le díol aimsir Lá le Pádraig ar mhaithe le ciste na teanga. Déanann Ní Shéaghdha cur síos gairid ach spéisiúil ar scoil na gcailíní: mar chuid den churaclam leanbhlnach, bhí dlúthbhaint ag an scoil leis an timpeallacht agus pobal áitiúil, agus bhuaileadh daoine fásta ón gceantar isteach sa scoil, agus nuair a bhíodh na páistí préachta leis an bhfuacht, shocraigh an múinteoir iad a chur ag rince sa seomra ranga.¹⁸ Luann Ní Shéaghdha an chócaireacht mar ábhar scoile agus tugann sí le fios go héadmhar go raibh a deartháireacha ‘ag foghlaim an drumá’ i scoil na mbuachaillí.¹⁹ Cé is moite den sampla seo, ní thugann sí aon eolas faoi scoil áitiúil na mbuachaillí. Cé nach bhfuil mórán ar eolas againn faoi léitheoirí an leabhair seo, luaigh Fionán Mac Coluim sa dara heagrán go raibh ‘éileamh maith air mar ‘léightheoir’ ins na scoileanaibh, is fiú amháin bhí sé in úsáid i mbuidhin Ghaedhilge bhí ag na príosúnaigh ó Éirinn thall i gCarcair Reading san mbl.1917.’²⁰ Thug sé le fios freisin gur imigh Máire Ní Shéaghdha ar imirce go Meiriceá thart ar an mbliain 1920, mar ba nós le cailíní Ghaeltacht Chiarraí.

¹⁸ *An Lóchrann*, Deire Fógmhair 1916, 1.

¹⁹ *An Lóchrann*, Deire Fógmhair 1916, 2.

²⁰ Féach ar réamhrá Mhic Coluim in Ní Shéaghdha agus Ní Shíothcháin, *op. cit.*

Faoi Dheireadh Fómhair na bliana 1917, nuair a d'fhoilsigh Brighid Stac an chéad chuid dá cín lae - a bhain le mí na Bealtaine 1917 - bhí aitheantas agus duaiseanna bainte amach aici in *An Lóchrann* agus ba ise an scríbhneoir ba chumasaí agus ba bhisiúla i measc na gcaoilíní scoile. D'fhreastail Stac ar Scoil Chailíní Bhaile an Fheirtéaraigh agus ós rud é go luann sí scrúdú iontrála do mheánscoil na gcaoilíní sa Daingean, is dócha go raibh sí thart ar dhá bhliain déag d'aois nuair a scríobh sí a cín lae, agus go raibh sí ag barr a ranga. Bhí Brighid Stac díograiseach agus urramach go leor agus í i mbun pinn. Tugann a cín lae an cuntas is gléine ar an gcur chuige leanbhlánach sna scoileanna náisiúnta agus an cíocras léinn a bhain léi féin. Léiríonn sí féin gur rud neamhghnách a bhí sa chíocras léinn seo i nGaeltacht Chiarraí:

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 seandúine 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 chómhrsanaibh. 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.'²¹

Thuig Stac go raibh a cuid alt á léamh agus á meas ag baill den phobal áitiúil, mar a thugann sí le fios sa chuntas seo a leanas a bhaineann lena comharsa, Tadhg:

'Is dócha gur ar an bpáipéar chífear mo chaint sara fada fé mar bhí sgéal mo 'sheana lady' cheana agaibh. Baineadh leathadh as mo shúilibh agus as mo bhéal nuair a léig Pádrúig amach as an bpáipéar dam é; ach tá's ag

²¹ *An Lóchrann*, Meadhon Fómhair 1917, 4.

fiadh ná bead-sa ag foidhneamh libh níosa shia.’ Is amhlaidh a bhí Tadhg ag díol bó ar aonach a’ Daingin lá agus d’fhiafruigh an ceannugtheóir de – ‘what do you want for th’ oul’ lady?’ Bhí fearg ar Thadhg. Mise chuir an scéal go dtí an ‘Lóchrann’ agus leig Tadhg air go raibh fearg air chughamsa.²²

Ní bhfuair Stac aon chead ó Thadhg chun scéal magaidh faoi a chur chuig *An Lóchrann*: níor thuig sí go raibh iarmhairtí breise ag baint leis an bhfocal clóite i gcomparáid le focal beo na scéalaíochta béil. Is cinnte gur thuig Stac a pobal léitheoireachta, ach ós rud é gur fhoilsigh sí an dara scéal grinn faoi amaidí Thaidhg, is léir nach raibh tuiscint aici ar chlúmhilleadh ná ar bhuaine an fhocail chlóite. Taispeánann a cuntas an dinimic chumhachta idir an páiste léannta agus an duine fásta neamhléannta. Ar ndóigh, b’fhéidir nár cheap sí go gcloisfeadh Tadhg faoina scéal, ós rud é nach raibh léamh aige; ach is cinnte gur ócáid phobail a bhí i léamh an nuachtáin do na daoine fásta, murab ionann is an gníomh aonair a bhain leis an léitheoireacht do dhaoine óga a raibh scil na léitheoireachta sealbhaithe acu. Mhaígh Ó Siochfhradha gurbh iad na páistí scoile a léigh *An Lóchrann* amach os ard do na daoine fásta sa phobal, agus ba iad na páistí céanna a bhailigh béaloideas ó na daoine fásta sa phobal agus a chuir blúiríní béaloidis chuig *An Lóchrann*.²³

Ar bhealaí, b’ionann an taithí saoil a bhí ag Stac is a bhí ag Máire Ní Shéaghda. Ghlacadh sí lena cúraimí tí, dhéanadh sí roinnt cócaireachta agus thugadh sí tae do na fir a bhíodh ag obair amuigh sna páirceanna an lá ar fad. Ar nós Ní Shéaghda, luann sí

²² *An Lóchrann*, Deire Fógmhair 1917, 5.

²³ Féach ar ‘An Seabhad’, *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach .i. Meascra de Bhéaloideas Ilchinéal ó ‘An Lóchrann’ [1907-13]* (Baile Átha Cliath: Institute Béaloideasa Éireann, 1933), vii.

imeachtaí idirnáisiúnta agus impleachtaí na n-imeachtaí sin ar a pobal áitiúil: tá easpa siúcra ann mar gheall ar an gCogadh Mór agus admhaíonn sí go n-éiríonn sí go moch chuile mhaidin le cinntiú go bhfaighidh sí siúcra sula mbeidh sé uilig imithe.²⁴ Cáineann sí sprionlaitheacht shiopadóirí an Daingin agus iad ag tomhas na milseán sula ndíolann siad le páistí iad – toradh eile an Chogaidh Mhóir, dar léi.²⁵ Rud idirnáisiúnta eile a chuaigh i bhfeidhm ar an saol laethúil i gCiarraí ag an tráth sin ná Meán-Am Greenwich. Cuireadh tús le Meán-Am Greenwich ar an 1 Deireadh Fómhair 1916 – cinneadh a chuir isteach go mór ar lucht an náisiúnachais – agus ar feadh tréimhse gairide, bhí ceithre chóras ama in úsáid in Éirinn, gan trácht ar sholas na gréine a mheas.²⁶ Seo mar a dhéanann Stac cur síos ar theacht an tsamhraidh, nuair a athraíodh na cloig:

Is breágh luath a bhímíd 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 bhímíd ar maidin do dhlighthibh Shasana nár fhág an ghrian mar uaireadóir againn. ‘Ní fada go mbainfid glaoch an choilig de,’ arsa seandúine sa bhaile seo againn-ne.²⁷

Murab ionann is cuid mhaith de na daoine a scríobh dírbheathaisnéisí faoi shaol na Gaeltachta, is léir gur bhain Stac an-taitneamh as a taithí scoile. Déanann sí cur síos ar an idirghníomhaíocht idir na páistí móra agus na páistí beaga sa teach scoile, agus taispeánann sí go raibh codanna den Chlár Athbhreithnithe curtha i bhfeidhm i Scoil Chailíní Bhaile an Fheirtéaraigh. Bhí an Ghaeilge agus an stair mar chroí-ábhair sa

²⁴ *An Lóchrann*, Deire Fómhair 1917, 4.

²⁵ *An Lóchrann*, Meadhon Fómhair 1917, 7.

²⁶ C. Mangan, ‘Greenwich Time in Ireland’, *Catholic Bulletin* 8.2 (1918): 390-395.

²⁷ *An Lóchrann*, Meadhon Fómhair 1917, 5.

churaclam agus chuaigh téama an tírghrá, a bhí go smior sna téacsleabhair staire, go mór i bhfeidhm ar an gcailín seo. Ní raibh aon amhras uirthi maidir leis an dualgas a bhí le comhlíonadh aici sa saol: an ‘teanga bínn bríoghmhar’ a choinneáil beo.²⁸ Chomh maith leis sin, bhí leagan den chorpoideachas nó ‘cleasa géag is corp’ mar chuid den churaclam freisin. Spreagadh páistí le triail a bhaint as gníomhaíochtaí éagsúla nár bhain leis an acadúlacht amháin, ar mhaithe lena réimsí cumais a chothú agus a fhorbairt. Luaigh Stac seisiún grianghrafadóireachta ar scoil: ba rud nua é an seisiún grianghrafadóireachta i gcomhthéacs na scoile agus is léir nach raibh mórán taithí ag an ngrianghrafadóir ar a cheird: sa ghrianghraf féin, bhí an ceann bainte de na páistí móra toisc go raibh siad ró-ard do fhráma an lionsa. Insíonn Stac go leor scéalta greannmhara sa chín lae, mar shampla, nuair a bhuaileann sí le Seana-Mhícheál sa chomharsanacht agus leabhar scoile á léamh aici. Luann sí leis an seanfhear go gcasann an domhan ar a ais, rud atá díreach léite aici sa leabhar scoile. Níl sa tuairim sin ach raiméis de réir Sheana-Mhíchíl:

‘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 bhainfí asainn agus dá olcas iad mo sheana chnámha bochta, bheidís níos measa agam dá m’fhíor an leabhar san.’²⁹

Léiríonn an scéal grinn seo go raibh páistí i nGaeltacht Chiarraí ag foghlaim faoin eolaíocht nua-aimseartha ar scoil, agus taispeánann sé an bhearna léinn idir na daoine óga agus na daoine fásta a bhí ag méadú mar gheall ar an oideachas scoile.

²⁸ *An Lóchrann*, Meadhon Fómhair 1917, 6

²⁹ *An Lóchrann*, Meadhon Fómhair 1917, 5.

Bhí an-chion ag Brighid Stac ar na hainmhithe. Sa chín lae, feictear go bhfuil tábhacht agus spraoi ag baint le sicíní beaga agus uibheacha i saol an pháiste. Nuair a bád dhá shicín i dtobán uisce, trí fhaillí Bhrighid, déanann sí iarracht iad a cheilt óna máthair agus cuireann sí i gcré iad. Ach tagann an cat ar na sicíní, ceapann máthair Bhrighid go bhfuil an cat i ndiaidh iad a mharú, agus bagraíonn sí an bás ar an gcat. Ag an bpointe seo, insíonn Brighid an fhírinne mar níl sí ag iarraidh go marófar an cat bocht. Ar an dul céanna leis an scéal faoi Thadhg, foilsíonn Stac an scéal seo cé nach aon dea-theist uirthi féin an rud a rinne sí: ach thug sí tús áite do ghreann an scéil thar aon rud eile. Tháinig críoch thobann leis an mbaint a bhí ag Stac leis an *An Lóchrann*: críoch bhrónach seachas greannmhar. In Aibreán na bliana 1919, d’fhoilsigh Mícheál Ó Guithín (mac Pheig Sayers, fear óg cúig bliana déag d’aois) caoineadh a chum sé in ómós di.³⁰ Bhí Brighid Stac fós sna déaga luatha nuair a fuair sí bás – thart ar cheithre nó cúig bliana déag d’aois, is dócha. Luann Ó Guithín gur bhain a bás leis an ‘phláig chruaidh nimhe seo’.³¹ Tá sé ag tagairt don Fhliú Spáinneach, a scaip ar fud na hEorpa ag deireadh an Chogaidh Mhóir. Idir 1918 agus 1919, thóg suas le 800,000 Éireannach an phlá seo, agus mharaigh sí breis is 20,000 Éireannach, Brighid Stac ina measc.³²

Ba í Brighid Ní Shíothcháin an tríú cailín scoile a d’fhoilsigh a cín lae, agus bhí sí ag freastal ar an scoil chéanna le Máire Ní Shéaghda in Uíbh Ráthach. Baineann a cín lae

³⁰ Féach ar ‘Ó Gaoithín, Mícheál (1904–1974)’. www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=738.

³¹ *An Lóchrann*, Abrán 1919, 3.

³² Catriona Foley, *The Last Irish Plague: The Great Flu Epidemic in Ireland 1918-19* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 8.

siúd leis an tréimhse Márta – Aibreán 1918, agus foilsíodh í i mí na Bealtaine 1918, ach ní thugann sí léargas chomh maith céanna ar an saol sa Ghaeltacht le cín lae Ní Shéaghdha agus Stac. Luann Ní Shíothcháin gur iarradh uirthi móin a bhailiú ach gur imigh sí ag marcaíocht asail ina áit sin, agus tugann sí cuntas ar an ribín glas a cheannaigh a hathair di ar lá an mhargaidh, agus an t-éad a bhí ar na cailíní eile ar scoil, a mhaslaigh a folt rua dá bharr. An rud is spéisiúla faoin gcín lae seo ná an cuntas a thugann sí ar shaol an chailín aimsire: caitheann sí seachtain ag tabhairt aire do theach agus do chlann Bhean Uí Dhonnchadha: ó am go chéile, chuir daoine meánaicmeacha fógraí in *An Lóchrann*, agus cailíní aimsire le Gaeilge á lorg acu.³³ Is léir go bhfuil Bean Uí Dhonnchadha níos saibhre ná gnáthmhuintir na háite, agus níl taithí ag a clann ar an nGaeilge. Creideann Ní Shíothcháin go bhfuil dúshláin mhóra ag baint leis an obair seo, agus tagann faoiseamh uirthi nuair a bhíonn an tseachtain oibre thart. Maidir leis an nGaeilge, tá an méid seo a leanas le rá aici:

Ní labhram focal Beurla chun na leanbhaí ach go deimhin níl breis Gaeluinne acu. Tá siad ag teacht isteach ar í thuisgint uaim anois. Nach mór a truagh na leanbhaí bheith ag fás suas gan focal dá dteangan fein acu. Cad é an t-iongnadh ach é bheith chomh furuisde dhóibh í fhoghlaim annso san áit a bhfuil sí ag gach éinne. Tá Máirín [an leanbh] ag foghlaim Gaeluinne ar gach aon rud ar fuaid a tighe uaim-se. Is dóigh liom gur fiú mé níos mó ná leath-choróinn sa tseachtain dos na daoinibh seo.³⁴

³³ Féach, mar shampla, *An Lóchrann*, Eanáir 1917, 4; Márta 1917, 2; Brian Ó Conchubhair, *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge: Darwin, an Athbheochan agus Smaointeoireacht na hEorpa* (Indreabhán: An Clóchomhar, 2009), 118-9; 290, f/n 105, 106.

³⁴ *An Lóchrann*, Bealtaine 1918, 1.

Ní raibh aon drogall ar Ní Shíothcháin a tuairimí faoi dhaoine áitiúla a chur i gcló. Ach tá nóta curtha lena cín lae in *An Lóchrann* a thugann le fios nach bhfuil ach cuid den chín lae sin foilsithe. Ardaítear ceist, mar sin, maidir le tionchar Uí Shiochfhradha ar an gcín lae: níl aon fhianaise ann go ndearna sé cuid mhaith eagarthóireachta ar shaothair na gcailíní scoile, agus ní aon fhianaise ann a thugann le fios cén fáth ar fágadh cuid de chín lae Ní Shíothcháin ar lár. Murab ionann is saothair na beirte eile, luaitear go sonrath in *An Lóchrann* go bhfuil cín lae Ní Shíothcháin dírithe ar léitheoirí óga.³⁵ B'fhéidir gurb é seo an fáth a bhfuil cuid den chín lae fágtha ar lár: sa chás sin, caithfidh go raibh tuairimí dochta ag Ó Siochfhradha faoin am sin maidir leis na hábhair a bhí oiriúnach do pháistí.

Ar ndóigh, i dtaobh litríocht Ghaeilge na n-óg de, níl aon cháil ar Ó Siochfhradha mar eagarthóir chín lae na gcailíní scoile: tá aitheantas bainte amach aige mar údar *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* a céadfhoilsíodh mar shraithscéal in *An Lóchrann* sa bhliain 1919. Ba é an bhréagdhírbeathaisnéis fhicseanúil seo an leabhar Gaeilge do pháistí ba rathúla san fhichiú haois. Ach ní buille faoi thuairim a bhí i gceist ag Ó Siochfhradha: thuig sé go maith céard a thaitin le páistí na Gaeltachta óna gcomhfhreagras leis *An Lóchrann*. Tugadh aitheantas don údaracht a bhain le *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* sna chéad léirmheasanna a scríobhadh ar an leabhar, cé nár luadh an nasc seo idir Ó Siochfhradha agus Ní Shéaghdha, Stac agus Ní Shíothcháin. Mar sin féin, is riléir go raibh cín lae na gcailíní scoile, scríofa sa chéad phearsa, ag feidhmiú mar amhábhbar do bhréagbheathaisnéis Jimín. Is féidir a mhaíomh gur réamhtheachtaithe iad cín lae na gcailíní scoile a foilsíodh in *An Lóchrann* ó 1916-1918, agus *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* in

³⁵ *An Lóchrann*, Bealtaine 1918, 1.

1919, ar sheánra na dírbheathaisnéise Gaeilge, ar chuir Tomás Ó Criomhthain tús leis nuair a foilsíodh a dhírbheathaisnéis sa bhliain 1929. Agus ar chúiseanna éagsúla, níl cuntais faoin óige a chum leithéidí Thomáis Uí Chriomhthain, agus é imithe in aois, chomh hiontaofa céanna le cuntais a chum páistí díreach i ndiaidh eachtra ar leith.³⁶

Dhírigh an chaint seo ar chín lae a chum triúr cailíní scoile i gCiarraí i rith thréimhse na hathbheochana. Ní bheidh tuiscint againn choíche ar an tionchar a bhí ag a múinteoirí scoile agus ag a n-eagarthóir, Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, ar a gcuid scríbhinní. Ach taispeánann na cailíní scoile go raibh bearna mhór idir fíorpháistí na Gaeltachta agus an páiste teibí Gaeltachta a chuir Pádraic Mac Piarais chun cinn. De réir Mhic Phiarais, b'ionann an cainteoir óg Gaeilge agus 'the fairest thing that springs up from the soil of Ireland, more beautiful than any flower, more graceful than any wild creature of the fields or the woods, purer than any monk or nun, wiser than any seer.'³⁷ Tugann scoláirí comhaimseartha tús áite do thuairimí Mhic Phiarais i dtaobh na hóige Gaelaí de, ach níor mhiste athmhachnamh a dhéanamh ar an tuiscint atá againn ar an óige Ghaelach. Tuigimid anois go bhfuil foinsí a scríobh páistí i rith thréimhse na hathbheochana fós ar fáil, agus go n-aimseimid iad má théimid ag tochailt, agus go gcaitheann na foinsí úd solas úr agus glé ar an óige Ghaelach idir dhá thréimhse.

³⁶ Féach ar Máirín Nic Eoin, '“Lessons for life”: the Representation of Adult-Child Relationships in Twentieth-century Irish-language Autobiographical Writing,' in *Children, Childhood and Irish Society, 1700 to the Present*, ed. Maria Luddy and James Smith (Dublin: Four Courts Press 2014), 219-240.

³⁷ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 5 Eanáir 1907, 7.

**Gaelic Culture from the Child's Perspective:
The Diaries of Kerry Schoolgirls (1916-1918)**

Ríona Nic Congáil

One of the most complicated and persistent questions in the study of childhood in the past relates to the experiences of individual children. How can we know how children perceived the world around them when they have left little written evidence of their own experience and interpretations of their world? And even when studying the individual children who have written diaries and letters and stories, how can we tell the extent to which adult editors and teachers were involved in shaping their writings, and indeed the extent to which these children were representative of childhood more generally, given that mass literacy among children is a late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century phenomenon, and that only applies to the West?³⁸

These questions are as relevant in the Irish-language context as in any other. In this talk, I will focus most specifically on the diaries of three Kerry schoolgirls published in the Irish-language newspaper *An Lóchrann* from 1916 to 1918. These are the earliest known substantial examples of children's writing in the Irish language; they are also the first works to be published by native Irish-speaking females, almost two decades before the appearance of Peig Sayers' autobiography.³⁹ The Kerry schoolgirls' diaries dispel the

³⁸ See Peter N. Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 5.

³⁹ Peig Sayers's autobiography was first published by the Talbot Press in 1936. Although Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin, sister of Muiris Ó Súilleabhán, wrote a diary about life on the Great Blasket at the age of 23

view that all native Irish-speaking females were illiterate in their own language until the Irish Free State took over the educational system in 1922, and they provide a rich account of the daily lives of girls in early-twentieth century rural Ireland. They are also the first notable attempts to empower the Irish-speaking child by allowing children's voices to be heard in a public forum, and they challenge the romantic and innocent representation of Gaeltacht children fashioned by P.H. Pearse several years earlier. However, it must also be acknowledged that these three girls were clearly more academically minded than most of their peers, and that their writings were made possible through the influence of Gaelic League ideology and the newly-implemented child-centred methodology within the educational system.⁴⁰ These girls wrote their diaries in a period of transition: between childhood and womanhood; between the traditional Gaelic culture and the modern way of life; and between oral and print culture. Transition in all its forms is thus a prominent theme within their diaries.

An Lóchrann [*The Guiding Light*] was established in 1907 as a bilingual publication, catering for a local community of Irish speakers in Cork and Kerry for the most part.⁴¹ It was relaunched as an Irish-language newspaper in 1916, with Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha as

in 1923, this diary was not published until the year 2000. See Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin, *Cín Lae Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin*, eag. Máiréad Ní Loingsigh (Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim, 2000).

⁴⁰ The Revised Programme for National Schools in 1900 (which lasted until 1922) did away with the payment by results system that had been previously been in operation and it drew upon child-centred methodology to include the facility for kindergarten and to allow for the study of new subjects that catered for a wide variety of talents, including drawing, cookery, and physical drill. See John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structures* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005), 34.

⁴¹ See 'An Seabhac', *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach .i. Meascra de Bhéaloideas Ilchínéal ó 'An Lóchrann' [1907-13]* (Baile Átha Cliath: Institute Béaloideas Éireann, 1933), vi.

editor. Ó Siochfhradha (1883-1964), also known as ‘An Seabhadh’ [‘The Hawk’], was the person who kick-started the Blasket autobiography genre and is the only person to be able to claim involvement in the publication of all three of the major Blasket autobiographies.⁴² He was the editor of *An tOileánach* (*The Islandman*) and while working for the Talbot Press in the 1930s, he was the consulting editor and publisher of *Fiche Blian ag Fás* (*Twenty Years A-Growing*) – another treatise on Gaeltacht childhood relating to the same period as the three schoolgirls’ diaries – and also of *Peig*.⁴³ The intimacy of the local and community-based newspaper, *An Lóchrann*, allowed Ó Siochfhradha to develop and foster a select group of Irish-language writers, in a way that was not achievable in the case of editors of national newspapers. The most celebrated of these was Tomás Ó Criomhthain, who regularly published his writings in *An Lóchrann*.

Ó Siochfhradha also followed the example of national newspapers, from the *Weekly Freeman* to *An Claidheamh Soluis*, by introducing children’s writing competitions and prizes, often sponsored by wealthier Dublin-based language enthusiasts and by the newly-established Coláiste an Daingin [Dingle College].⁴⁴ He took a lighthearted approach to childhood and a perusal of *An Lóchrann* testifies to Ó Siochfhradha’s interest

⁴² The role of Brian Ó Ceallaigh must also be recognised in the context of the Blasket autobiographies. It was Ó Ceallaigh who urged Tomás Ó Criomhthain, Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin and Míchéal Ó Guithín (son of Peig Sayers) to record their lifestories. See Brian Kelly, ‘How He Came To Write’, *Sunday Independent*, 14 March 1937, 12; ‘Ní Shúilleabháin, Eibhlín (1900–1949)’. www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=2164. Ó Siochfhradha was a strong influence on Ó Ceallaigh and it was he who encouraged Ó Ceallaigh to spend time on the Great Blasket. See ‘Ó Ceallaigh, Brian (1889–1936)’. www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=56.

⁴³ For more information on Ó Siochfhradha’s involvement in *Fiche Blian ag Fás*, see George Derwent Thomson’s letters to Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha (1932-1933), NLI MS G 1,419. See also Declan Kiberd, ‘The Blasket Autobiographies,’ in *Irish Classics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 520-542.

⁴⁴ See *An Lóchrann*, November 1916, 4.

in promoting the humour of the Irish language among children.⁴⁵ Humour was not a priority of, and was largely absent from, the work of other Irish-language enthusiasts involved in children's culture: for them, language continuity through inculcation of the young was far more important a task than promoting fun. Yet lightheartedness appealed to Irish-speaking children and motivated them to write and publish work in their own language. In the November 1916 edition of *An Lóchrann*, a special children's writing competition was announced, for an account of a funny person or poet or musician.⁴⁶ The competition was open to children under the age of seventeen, and sixteen entries were received, several of which were published over the following months. By 1916 the child-centred curriculum had been implemented in Gaeltacht schools. So too had the Bilingual Programme, which, since 1904, and after much lobbying on the part of the Gaelic League, introduced a syllabus through the medium of the Irish language at national school level. The syllabus was used in Irish-speaking and bilingual areas by individual teachers who were willing and able to teach through Irish.⁴⁷ By 1916, a growing number of children were thus able to express themselves through the written word in their native language, and with some schoolteachers encouraging them to publish their writings in the

⁴⁵ Ó Siochfhradha's interest in providing humorous reading material is also visible through his earlier collection of stories, *An Baile Seo Againne*, first published in 1913.

⁴⁶ *An Lóchrann*, November 1916, 4.

⁴⁷ Thomas A. O'Donoghue, *Bilingual Education in Ireland, 1904-1922* (Murdoch: Centre for Irish Studies, 2000), 34-46; Séamas Ó Buachalla, 'Educational Policy and the Role of the Irish Language from 1831 to 1981,' *European Journal of Education*, 19.1 (1984): 82.

children's columns of *An Claidheamh Soluis* and *The Catholic Bulletin*, they were becoming more skilled at and interested in writing.⁴⁸

Through such competitions, Ó Siochfhradha engaged with native Irish-speaking children, a large and underprivileged social group who had never before had their views visible in print. He encouraged creative writing and self-expression, while also linking the writing skills of the classroom with the wider community. At the same time, Fionán Mac Coluim of the Gaelic League was supporting Ó Siochfhradha's approach by organising children's writing competitions at local Gaelic League feiseanna.⁴⁹ It was through this combined effort that they discovered three young Kerry writers of merit who also happened to be schoolgirls: Máire Ní Shéaghdha and Brighid Ní Shíothcháin from the Iveragh peninsula, and Brighid Stac from Ballyferriter. From 1916 to 1918, with the help of Mac Coluim, Ó Siochfhradha published the diary of each of these Kerry schoolgirls in *An Lóchrann*, with each diary detailing a month in their lives. It is unclear whether Ó Siochfhradha made a conscious decision to publish the work of girls rather than boys in order to address the gender balance of *An Lóchrann's* columnists; however, it is clear from this example that he espoused female education and perhaps the more radical idea of female involvement in the public sphere. Beyond Ó Siochfhradha's promotion of child-centred ideology in *An Lóchrann*, the diarists' accounts of their daily lives also provide an insight into their own

⁴⁸ The schoolteachers of all three of the Kerry schoolgirls had encouraged their involvement in the children's column of *The Catholic Bulletin*.

⁴⁹ See Fionán Mac Coluim's introduction to Máire Ní Shéaghdha's and Brighid Ní Shíothcháin's book, *Laethanta Geala: Cunntasáí Cinn Lae do Scríobh Beirt Chailín Sgoile* (Baile Átha Cliath: Brún agus Ó Nóláin, 1922).

experience of the contemporary school system. These diaries were soon published in book form by the educational publishers as classroom texts.⁵⁰

Máire Ní Shéaghdha, the first-published diarist, was a student in Scoil Chill Mhic Ciaráin, Iveragh peninsula, and her Shrovetide diary begins as follows:

March 1st, 1916 – Market day today. A wet cold day for the people who are matchmaking. I heard the match of Bartholomew from this townland has fallen through. That’s no surprise also because his hair is grey with age. No girl would get involved with him. They think he’s out of his mind to be getting married at this stage of his life.⁵¹

From the outset, we hear the irreverent voice of a schoolgirl whose manner certainly does not correspond with the virtuous, self-effacing behaviour that was promoted in the Irish girls’ secondary schools and expected of wealthier girls. Nor does the voice align here with the representations in early revivalist publications of shy and quiet Irish-speaking girls.⁵² Ní Shéaghdha foregrounds matchmaking, a central event in the lives of women, yet she also seizes the opportunity to ridicule the appearance of the man in the match, thus undermining authority and patriarchy. Ní Shéaghdha’s irreverence extends surprisingly far: her diary contains some episodes, like the one above, where it is difficult to know

⁵⁰ It is likely that Ó Siochfhradha had some involvement in the publication of these diaries as school textbooks, given that they were published very soon after their appearance in *An Lóchrann*. Máire Ní Shéaghdha, *Laethanta Geala: Cailín Scoile i gCiarraige Do Scríobh* (Baile Átha Cliath: Muinntir Fheallamhain, 1917); Brighid Stac, *Mí dem’ Shaoghal* (Baile Átha Cliath: Muinntir Fallamhain, 1918); Máire Ní Shéaghdha agus Brighid Ní Shíothcháin, *Laethanta Geala: Cunntasáí Cinn Lae do Scríobh Beirt Chailín Sgoile* (Baile Átha Cliath: Brún agus Ó Nóláin, 1922).

⁵¹ *An Lóchrann*, October 1916, 1.

⁵² See, for example, J.M. Synge’s representation of Irish-speaking girls on the Aran Islands at the beginning of the twentieth century. J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands*, ed. Tim Robinson (London: Penguin, 1992), 31.

whether the purpose is to accurately depict reality or to shock the reader. Ní Shéaghda either wrote her diary without any understanding of the concept and power of readers, or else she wrote it with absolute knowledge about how to manipulate and amuse readers. It is more than plausible that when she refers to Bartholomew in this quotation, she is referring to a real person, as there were several men of that name listed in her locality in the 1911 census.⁵³ Later in her diary, she mentions that her cat gave birth to kittens – which she refers to as ‘na rudaí salacha’ [‘the dirty things’] – and she recounts, in her direct manner, that she threw them into the river. Ó Siochfhradha, of course, would have been well aware of the animal welfare movement that was growing in momentum in middle-class Ireland, and editors of children’s newspaper columns encouraged children to protect birds’ nests by overcoming the desire to rob eggs.⁵⁴ However, these pro-animal ideas seemed not to make their way as far as Gaeltacht children for several decades: egg robbing remained a favourite pastime among them.

Ní Shéaghda’s diary jumps from topic to topic, replicating a child’s attention span, and dealing with matchmaking and death all in one breath. Nonetheless, although her tone is flippant and her account of happenings perhaps exaggerated, she does make reference to real external events and their influence on the Kerry Gaeltacht. For example, she states that as a result of the Great War, and the inflation caused by it, children come to school without shoes and socks, and the price of tea and sugar has become exorbitant. She also shows some knowledge of international affairs when she mentions that America was the

⁵³ Unfortunately, however, the 1911 census does not provide information on hair colour.

⁵⁴ Ríona Nic Congáil, ‘‘Fiction, Amusement, Instruction’’: The Irish Fireside Club and the Educational Ideology of the Gaelic League,’ *Éire-Ireland* 44.1&2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 98.

only country that the war had not impinged upon (America became involved the following year, 1917). The impact of the Gaelic League is clear through the fact that Ní Shéaghdha's schooling was through the medium of Irish and that she could write well in Irish; however, her account also shows that the Gaelic League made use of schoolchildren by giving them Irish flags to sell as part of an effort to collect money for the Irish-language fund in the run up to St. Patrick's Day. Ní Shéaghdha also provides a brief yet insightful account of her experience in the girls' school she attended: in keeping with the child-centred curriculum, this school was very much linked with the local environment and community, with local people stopping by the school, and the teacher keeping the children warm in the cold classroom by teaching them Irish dances.⁵⁵ Ní Shéaghdha refers to cooking at school and mentions with envy that her brothers, who were attending the local boys' school, were learning to play the drum.⁵⁶ Beyond this example, there is no information on the extent to which the curriculum differed in the local boys' and girls' schools. Although we don't have much evidence as to Ní Shéaghdha's readership, Fionán Mac Coluim mentions in its second edition in book format that there was a demand for it as a textbook or reader in the schools, and it was also being used by the Irish nationalist prisoners in Reading Jail in 1917.⁵⁷ He also states that Máire Ní Shéaghdha had emigrated to America around the year 1920, just like many other young women from the Kerry Gaeltacht.

⁵⁵ *An Lóchrann*, October 1916, 1.

⁵⁶ *An Lóchrann*, October 1916, 2.

⁵⁷ See Mac Coluim's introduction to Ní Shéaghdha and Ní Shíothcháin, *op. cit.*

By October 1917, when Brighid Stac published the first part of her diary covering the month of May 1917, she was already a published and regular prize-winning writer within the context of *An Lóchrann*. She was certainly also the most talented prose writer of Ó Siochfhradha's three young diarists. Stac attended the girls' school in Ballyferriter, and given that she mentions sitting an entrance exam to a girls' school in Dingle, we can assume that she was around twelve years of age and at the top of her class. Brighid Stac was diligent in her diary writing and was more respectful than irreverent. Her diary provides the clearest insight into the child-centred approach within the national schools and shows her eagerness to engage in school activities. Her studious nature was, according to herself, something of an anomaly in the Kerry Gaeltacht:

It's often said to me at home when there's something to be done & I have a book in my hand. 'Oh indeed, the learning will go to your head, Bríghid,' and when an old man from our townland saw me with a pencil a while ago, what he said was: 'Ara, put it away and don't be writing about your neighbours. You are making a laughing stock of them in the 'Lóchrann'. People who engage in mockery don't always get away with it, girl. You'd better watch out.'⁵⁸

Stac shows awareness here that her published work would be read and interpreted by members of the local community, as she relates the episode of meeting her neighbour Tadhg:

'I suppose that what I said will be seen in the paper before long, just as the story about my 'old lady' already was. My eyes and mouth were opened wide when Pádrúig read it out for me from the paper; but heaven knows that I won't have any more patience with you.' The fact of the matter is

⁵⁸ *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, 4.

that Tadhg was selling a cow at the Dingle fair and the buyer asked him – ‘what do you want for th’ oul’ lady?’ Tadhg was angry. I sent the story to the ‘Lóchrann’ and Tadhg pretended he was angry with me.⁵⁹

Stac clearly did not think to check with Tadhg whether he would mind her publishing the anecdotal story in which he was implicated: for this young diarist, print was only an extension of the oral tale, with no consequences beyond. The fact that she proceeded to publish the above account, her second story about Tadhg, serves to strengthen the point that although she was aware of her audience, she had little understanding of the permanency and potential defamation or libel within the print medium. It also reveals the reversed power dynamics between the literate child and the illiterate adult. Of course, she may not have expected Tadhg to be able to access the story, given that he couldn’t read; however, it is clear that reading the newspaper was then a community event among older people, rather than the individual pursuit that it became in an age of mass literacy. Ó Siochfhradha later claimed that it was the children who had learned to read Irish through the educational system who read *An Lóchrann* to the adults in their community; and it was the same children who could write in Irish who extracted folklore from their elders and published it in *An Lóchrann*.⁶⁰

Stac’s childhood experience was similar to that of Máire Ní Shéaghda. She performed household duties of cleaning and baking cakes and bringing evening tea to the men who had been working in the fields all day. Like Ní Sheaghda, Stac refers to the impact of

⁵⁹ *An Lóchrann*, October 1917, 5.

⁶⁰ See ‘An Seabhac’, *An Seanchaidhe Muimhneach .i. Meascra de Bhéaloideas Ilchinéal ó ‘An Lóchrann’ [1907-13]* (Baile Átha Cliath: Institute Béaloideas Éireann, 1933), vii.

international and national changes on the Kerry Gaeltacht: sugar shortages are affecting the local community due to the Great War, and she admits to getting up early in the morning so as to receive her share of sugar before it runs out as the day progresses.⁶¹ A clear sign of the War, from Stac's own experience, was the miserliness of Dingle shopkeepers as they measured the amount of sweets they sold to children.⁶² Another major event that impacted on life in the Kerry Gaeltacht was the introduction of Greenwich Mean Time in Ireland. GMT was introduced on 1 October 1916, to much disgruntlement among nationalists and others, and initially there were four time systems in operation in Ireland, not to mention telling the time by the level of sunlight.⁶³ The transition to summertime, when the clocks were changed, is remarked upon by Stac as follows:

We get home from school good and early every afternoon since the new time began but we have to get up an hour earlier every morning and we are neither thankful nor grateful in the morning to English laws which didn't leave the sun as our watch. 'It won't be long before they remove the crow from the cock,' said an old man in our town.⁶⁴

Unlike most retrospective autobiographical accounts of Gaeltacht schooling in the early twentieth century, Stac admits to enjoying school. She relates the interactions of older and younger children, and shows that aspects of the Revised Programme were introduced in the girls' school in Ballyferriter. The Irish language and history were core subjects, and the patriotism promoted within the school history books impacted upon Stac. She was

⁶¹ *An Lóchrann*, October 1917, 4.

⁶² *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, 7.

⁶³ See C. Mangan, 'Greenwich Time in Ireland,' *Catholic Bulletin*, 8.2 (1918): 390-95.

⁶⁴ *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, 5.

also in no doubt that it was her duty to keep her ‘teanga bínn bríoghmhar’ [‘sweet vigorous language’] alive.⁶⁵ Beyond language and history, ‘drill’ or physical exercise was also part of the new curriculum. Stac’s diary shows that the children were encouraged to participate in different activities in school, not always academic, in order to stimulate them. She also mentions a school photography session; however, 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 on the stools. Stac relates many humorous incidents like this 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 ridiculous claim, according to Seana-Mhícheál, who took it to be another example of the idiocy of scholars:

‘I’ve often heard,’ said he, ‘that learned people are often confused. They try to deceive us, I suppose. If the world were turning around, we would all be tripping up, and bad as my poor old bones are, they would be worse if that book was true.’⁶⁶

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 Stac’s attitude towards animals was one of affection rather than malice. In her diary, chicks and eggs are depicted as an important and exciting part of children’s lives. When two chicks drown in a tub of water through her own negligence, her immediate

⁶⁵ *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, 6

⁶⁶ *An Lóchrann*, September 1917, 5.

reaction is to hide the evidence from her mother by burying the dead chicks. However, the family's cat digs up the dead chicks and Brighid's mother threatens to kill the cat in response to his killing of the chicks. It is at this point that Brighid comes clean, as she does not want the black cat to suffer for her wrongdoing. Similar to the story about Tadhg, Stac chooses to publish this story, even though it does not reflect particularly well on her: but for her, it is the humour of her account that matters. Stac's involvement in *An Lóchrann* was to end prematurely on a note of pathos rather than wit, however: the final mention of her in the newspaper appeared in April 1919, when Michaél Ó Guithín (the fifteen-year-old son of Peig Sayers) composed a keen for her on her death.⁶⁷ The talented Stac would still have been in her early teens when she died, no more than fourteen in all likelihood, and Ó Guithín attributes her death to the 'p[h]láig chruaidh nimhe seo' ['this harsh bitter plague'].⁶⁸ The plague he refers to was the Spanish Flu, which infected up to 800,000 Irish people between 1918 and 1919 and killed over 20,000.⁶⁹

Brighid Ní Shíothcháin, who was also from the Iveragh peninsula, kept her diary from March to April 1918, and it was published the following month. It proves less insightful, however, than those of Ní Shéaghda and Stac. Ní Shíothcháin writes about being sent to collect turf but deciding to go donkey-riding instead, and about getting a green ribbon from her father on market day and the jealousy this new ribbon fostered among her friends at school, who responded by insulting her red hair. The most interesting part of

⁶⁷ See 'Ó Gaoithín, Micheál (1904–1974)'. www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=738.

⁶⁸ *An Lóchrann*, April 1919, 3.

⁶⁹ Catriona Foley, *The Last Irish Plague: The Great Flu Epidemic in Ireland 1918-19* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 8.

Ní Shíothcháin's account is when she is hired by Bean Uí Dhonnchadha for a week's work of looking after her house and children: this practice of hiring young Irish-speaking servants was not unusual, with several advertisements for such posts appearing in the pages of *An Lóchrann*.⁷⁰ Bean Uí Dhonnchadha is clearly a wealthier member of the community and her children are not used to hearing Irish. Ní Shíothcháin finds looking after young children challenging and is glad that it is only a week's work. Of the Irish language and its worth, she states that:

I don't speak a word of English to the children, but they don't have any more Irish. They are becoming accustomed to understanding it from me now. It's a great pity that children are growing up without a word of their own language. What's the wonder with it being so easy for them to learn it here in a place where everybody has it. Máirín [the baby] is learning the Irish for everything around the house from me. I think I'm worth more than half a crown a week to these people.⁷¹

Ní Shíothcháin, similar to her peers, has no problem using the print medium to let the local community know about her views. However, her published diary in *An Lóchrann* was accompanied by a note to the effect that only part of her month-long diary was being published. This raises a question concerning the extent of editorial control on the part of Ó Siochfhradha: there is no extant evidence as to whether he adopted a hands-on or hands-off approach when publishing these three diaries, nor is there any reason provided as to why part of Ní Shíothcháin's diary was excluded. It is also explicitly specified,

⁷⁰ There was a demand for Irish-speaking domestic servants in urban Ireland during the revivalist period. See, for example, *An Lóchrann*, January 1917, 4; March 1917, 2; Brian Ó Conchubhair, *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge: Darwin, an Athbheochan agus Smaointeoireacht na hEorpa* (Indreabhán: An Clóchomhar, 2009), 118-9; 290, f/n 105, 106.

⁷¹ *An Lóchrann*, May 1918, 1.

unlike in the cases of Ní Shéaghda and Stac, that Ní Shíothcháin's diary is intended to be read by young readers.⁷² This editorial decision to target young readers alone may well have been the reason for excluding part of Ní Shíothcháin's diary: if so, it reveals that Ó Siochfhradha had by then developed a clear idea of what was, and what was not, suitable for children.

Of course, in terms of Irish-language children's literature, it is not as editor of the three schoolgirls' diaries that Ó Siochfhradha is best known, but for his own work of fiction for children, *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg*, first serialised in *An Lóchrann* in 1919. This first person fictional and comical pseudo-autobiography about a thirteen-year-old boy growing up in the Kerry Gaeltacht was to become the single most successful Irish-language children's book in the twentieth century. Ó Siochfhradha was not merely guessing what children wanted to read: he knew exactly what interested and amused young people from the work of his three diarists. The authentic quality of *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* was recognised in its earliest reviews; however, no link was ever made between *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* and the schoolgirl diarists, even though several incidents recounted by Ní Shéaghda, Stac and Ní Shíothcháin, alongside their use of the first person narrative, were mirrored in Ó Siochfhradha's work of fiction. What we can say of the three diaries of schoolgirls published in *An Lóchrann* from 1916-1918 and the publication of *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* in 1919, is that they were all direct predecessors to the adult autobiography genre that began with Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* in 1929. Yet for several reasons, retrospective accounts of childhood such as that provided by Tomás Ó Criomhthain are

⁷² *An Lóchrann*, May 1918, 1.

not as revelatory as accounts written by children in the immediate aftermath of any given experience.⁷³

This talk has focused specifically on the published diaries of three Irish-speaking Kerry schoolgirls during the latter part of the revivalist era. We cannot be sure as to the extent of the influence of their schoolteachers and their editor, Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, on their writings; however, the diaries do show us that real Irish-speaking children were nothing like the romanticised abstraction promoted by the P.H. Pearse, who depicted the Irish-speaking child as ‘the fairest thing that springs up from the soil of Ireland, more beautiful than any flower, more graceful than any wild creature of the fields or the woods, purer than any monk or nun, wiser than any seer.’⁷⁴ Pearse’s conception of Irish childhood remains the most prominent and most cited one among contemporary scholars, but we now need to revise our understanding of Gaelic childhood, in the knowledge that Irish-language children’s writings from the revivalist period do still exist, and these writings can provide us with the most informative understanding of Gaelic childhood in an age of transition.

⁷³ See Máirín Nic Eoin, ‘“Lessons for life”: the Representation of Adult-Child Relationships in Twentieth-century Irish-language Autobiographical Writing,’ in *Children, Childhood and Irish Society, 1700 to the Present*, ed. Maria Luddy and James Smith (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 219-240.

⁷⁴ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 5 January 1907, 7.

