

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 448. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 144 corresponds to Litir 448.

Nach iongantach an lus an t-seamrag? Tha àite sònraichte aice ann am beul-aithris is dualchas na h-Èireann. Ach a bheil na thathar ag ràdh mun t-seamraig fìor? Uill, seo agaibh rann ann am Beurla mun dearbh lus (agus gabhaibh mo leisgeul):

*There's a dear little plant that grows in our isle,
'Twas Saint Patrick himself, sure, that set it;
And the sun of his labour with pleasure did smile,
And with dew from his eye often wet it.*

*It grows through the bog, through the brake, through the mireland
And they call it the dear little Shamrock of Ireland*

Seadh. Uill, tha cuid ag ràdh gur e Naomh Pàdraig fhèin a thug an t-seamrag a dh'Èirinn. Rinn e sin às dèidh gun do chuir e teicheadh air na nathraichean. Tha fuath aig nathraichean don t-seamraig, a rèir beul-aithris. Lìon Naomh Pàdraig Èirinn le cluaintean dhen t-seamraig. Rinn e cinnteach mar sin nach tilleadh nathraichean don eilean.

Ach a bheil e uile-gu-lèir soilleir dè an lus a th' anns an t-seamraig? O shean, b' e a' Ghàidhlig air *clover* – *seamar*. 'S e seamar beag – *seamrag* no, ann an Gàidhlig na h-Èireann, *seamróg*. 'S ann bhon Ghaeilge a thàinig am facal Beurla – *shamrock*. 'S e an t-seamrag bhàn a chanas Gàidheil na h-Alba ri *white clover*. Tha am facal a' nochdadh an siud 's an seo ann an ainmean-àite – mar eisimpleir ann am Beinn na Seamraig anns an Eilean Sgitheanach agus ann an Loch na Seamraig air a' Pharbh.

Anns na h-eisimpleirean sin, tha mi an dùil gur e an *clover*, *Trifolium repens*, an lus air a bheil “seamrag”. Ach tha lus eile ann air a bheil “seamrag” uaireannan. 'S e sin *Oxalis acetosella* – *the wood sorrel*. Tha na duilleagan trì-bhileach, dìreach mar a tha duilleagan *Trifolium*.

Tha feadhainn ag ràdh gur e *Oxalis*, seach *Trifolium*, a chleachd Naomh Pàdraig ann an leasan ainmeil. Cò aige tha fios dè an lus a bh' ann ach tha e cinnteach gun robh e trì-bhileach. Thog Naomh Pàdraig e nuair a bha e a' mìneachadh teagasg na Trianaid. Thuirt e gun robh Athair, Mac agus an Spiorad Naomh fa leth ach nan aon, dìreach mar a tha duilleagan na seamraig.

'S dòcha nach robh e doirbh do na pàganaich Ghàidhealach gabhail ris an àireamh a trì mar rud sònraichte no eadhon naomh. Bha trì sònraichte dhaibh co-dhiù. 'S ann tric a tha an àireamh sin a' nochdadh ann an sgeulachdan traidiseanta.

Ach chan eil mi buileach cinnteach càite a bheil sin a' fàgail na seamraig air a bheil ceithir bileagan air gach duilleig. *The four-leaved clover*. Ann am mòran chultaran, tha a leithid

a' toirt deagh fhortan don duine a lorgas e. 'S e a' Ghàidhlig air *four-leaved clover* “seamrag nam buadh” – *the shamrock of the virtues*.

Bhiodh na Gàidheil, co-dhiù ann an Alba, a' dèanamh ceangal eadar an t-seamrag agus searraich – eich òga. Bhathar ag ràdh gum fàs seamrag nam buadh far an do rugadh searrach. Bhiodh muinntir Bharraigh, anns an naoidheamh linn deug, a' tiodhlacadh stuth a bhiodh searrach, **a bh' air ùr-bhrèith**, a' cur a-mach. 'S e “dubhliath” a chanadh iad ris an stuth. Agus bha iad a' creidsinn gun nochdadh seamrag anns an àite far an robh an dubhliath tiodhlaicte seachd bliadhna às dèidh sin. Sin àireamh shònraichte eile – seachd!

Ach dè nì thu ma lorgas tu seamrag nam buadh? Uill, bhiodh na seann Ghàidheil ag ràdh – ma chuireas tu fod theanga i, gun tig comasan ùra thugad – comasan mar an dà-shealladh!

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Faclan na Litreach: Am Parbh: *Cape Wrath (NW Sutherland)*; trì-bhileach: *trifoliate*; seamrag nam buadh: *four-leaved clover*; searrach: *foal*; dubhliath: *stuff coughed up by newly born foals (lit. dark-grey)*; an dà-shealladh: *the second sight*.

Abairtean na Litreach: nach iongantach an lus an t-seamrag?: *isn't the shamrock an amazing plant?*; a bheil na thathar ag ràdh mun t-seamraig fìor?: *is what is said about the shamrock true?*; mun dearbh lus: *about the same plant*; às dèidh gun do chuir e teicheadh air na nathraichean: *after he expelled the snakes*; tha fuath aig nathraichean don t-seamraig: *snakes hate [the] clover*; lìon Naomh Pàdraig Èirinn le cluaintean dhen t-seamraig: *Saint Patrick filled Ireland with meadows of clover*; rinn e cinnteach nach tilleadh nathraichean: *he made certain snakes would not return*; a bheil e uile-gu-lèir soilleir dè an lus a th' anns an t-seamraig?: *is it completely clear which plant is the shamrock?*; an siud 's an seo: *here and there*; cò aige tha fios dè an lus a bh' ann: *who knows what plant it was*; nuair a bha e a' mìneachadh teagasg na Trianaid: *when he was explaining the doctrine of the Trinity*; gun robh Athair, Mac agus an Spiorad Naomh fa leth ach nan aon: *that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were separate but the one*; nach robh e doirbh do na pàganaich Ghàidhealach gabhail ris an àireamh a trì mar rud sònraichte: *that it wasn't difficult for the pagan Gaels to accept the number three as a special thing*; a' toirt deagh fhortan don duine a lorgas e: *brings good luck to the person who finds it*; far an do rugadh searrach: *where a foal was born*; muinntir Bharraigh: *the people of Barra*; far an robh an dubhliath tiodhlaicte: *where the dubhliath was buried*; ma chuireas tu fod theanga i: *if you put it under your tongue*; gun tig comasan ùra thugad: *that you will get new abilities*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *There are claims made that the Arabic word shamrakh, meaning a trifoliate plant, is the original for the English shamrock. But the Irish have a strong case. Seamair or saimeir is well known as the Gaelic for clover; seamair is still the standard Irish word for the plant, whereas the diminutive seamrag has become standard in Scotland (the Irish for “four-leaved clover”, by the way, is seamair Mhuire – the Virgin Mary's clover). Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's famous 18th Century poem “Allt an t-Siùcair” contains “gach saimeir, neòinean 's masag” (every clover, daisy and little red berry) and Alexander Macbain's Etymological Dictionary gives the Early Irish form semmor as a precursor to the modern Gaelic forms. But if any of you have further information on the Arabic connection, I'd be delighted to hear from you (roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: stuth a bhiodh searrach, **a bh' air ùr-bhrèith**, a' cur a-mach: *material that a new-born foal would cough up.*

** Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoinachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.*