

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.macleam@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 468. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 164 corresponds to Litir 468.

Ann an Litir mu dheireadh bha mi a’ toirt sùil air ainmean nan corragan ann an Gàidhlig, agus gu seachd àraidh a’ chorrage ris an canar an *ring finger* ann am Beurla. Bidh cuimhne agaibh, ’s dòcha, gun robh mi a’ cur air adhart smuain gun tàinig an t-ainm *mac an aba* bho *mac an fhada*, no *mac an mhedir fhada*.

Uill, bhon uair sin tha mi air a bhith a’ toirt sùil air an fhaclair as sine a th’ againn ann an Gàidhlig. Chaidh a chur ri chèile le Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair ann an seachd ceud deug, ceathrad ’s a h-aon (1741), agus tha stuth prìseil ann. Agus dè na h-ainmean a bh’ aigesan air na corragan? Uill, seo iad – agus tha mi gan sgrìobhadh mar a sgrìobh Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair iad.

The thumb: An Ardog; *the forefinger* – An Chorrage; *the middle finger* – An Méur meadhoin; *the ring finger* – Màthair na Laodoige agus *the little finger* – An Laodoig. Tuigidh sibh gu bheil mòran a’ gabhail *lùdag* air an laodaig. An dèidh sin, chaidh mi gu Faclair Dwelly. Agus tha e ann an Dwelly cuideachd – *an ring finger* – màthair-na-lùdaig. Chì sibh mar a thathar a’ cleachdadh an fhacail *màthair* airson tè mhòr a tha ri taobh tè nas lugha. Agus tha e ciallach gu leòr *mac* a chleachdadh anns an aon dòigh airson corrag no meur a tha ri taobh meur a tha nas motha.

Co-dhiù, fàgaidh sinn na corragan an sin. Bu mhath leam rudeigin annasach a dhèanamh anns a’ chòrr dhen Litir. ’S e sin a bhith a’ toirt sùil air samhraidhean Gàidhlig. Tha mi an dùil gum bi sibh eòlach air samhraidhean no *similes*. *Cho rudeigin ri rudeigin*. Mar eisimpleir *cho fuar ris a’ phuinnsean*, *cho dubh ri tòn poite* is mar sin air adhart.

Uill, o chionn ghoirid, thàinig mi tarsainn air samhraidhean air an cur còmhla an ìre mhath mar rann. Cha chan mi “bàrdachd” ris, ach ’s dòcha “rannaidheachd”. Nochd e ann an clò ann an iris Ghàidhlig ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad ’s a sia (1876). Seo e agus tha mi an dòchas gun còrd e ribh:

Cho fliuch ri iasg, cho tioram ri seich,
Cho beò ri eun, cho marbh ri cloich;
Cho brisg ri glainne, cho righinn ri teud,
Cho mall ri seilcheag, cho luath ri steud;
Cho làidir ri each, cho lag ri caod,
Cho milis ri siùcar, cho neo-bhlast’ ri sgaot;
Cho geal ri lili, cho dubh ri sùith,
Cho mear ri piseag, cho tinn ri cù;
Cho dòmhail ri peatraid, cho sùmhail ri sgadan,
Cho reamhar ri muc, cho bochd ri radan;
Cho dìreach ri saighead, cho cam ri bogha,

Cho bàn ri lèine, cho dubh ri gobha;
 Cho carrach ri creag, cho lom ri bòrd,
 Cho geur ri sgian, cho maol ri òrd;
 Cho cruaidh ri spor, cho bog ri ìm,
 Cho luaineach ri sìd', cho cinnteach ri ùim;
 Cho fìor ris an t-soisgeul, cho fealls' ris an duine,
 Cho caochlach ri bean, cho deimhinn ri gunna;
 Cho teth ri àmhainn, cho fuar ri sneachd,
 Cho lag ri cuileag, cho làidir ri seachd;
 Cho aotrom ri ite, cho trom ri luaidh,
 Cho glas ri feur, cho ruadh ri luaith;
 Cho mall ri as, cho bras ri tuil,
 Cho geal ri latha, cho dearg ri fuil;
 Cho garbh ri ròcas, cho binn ri bàrd,
 Le mìle samhll' eile riuth' seo ann an càird.

* * * * *

Faclan na Litreach: meur, corrag: *finger*; Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair: *Alexander MacDonald, famous Gaelic poet*; lùdag: *the little finger*; màthair-na-lùdaig: *the ring finger*; samhladh, samhloidhean: *simile, similes*; rannaidheachd: *versification*; brisg: *brittle*; seilcheag: *snail*; steud: *steed*; neo-bhlasta: *ill-tasting*; sgaot: *I presume this is dialectal for sgait, a skate*; sùith: *soot*; cam: *curved*; bogha: *bow*; lèine: *shirt*; gobha: *blacksmith*; carrach: *rocky*; lom: *bare*; soisgeul: *gospel*; feallsa: *deceitful*; caochlach: *fickle*; deimhinn: *certain*; luaidh: *lead*; luaith: *ashes, dust*; as: *ass*; ròcas: *rook*.

Abairtean na Litreach: mar a thathar a' cleachdadh an fhacail X: *as the word X is used*; tè mhòr a tha ri taobh tè nas lugha: *a big one [fem] that is next to a smaller one*; ri taobh meur a tha nas motha: *next to a finger that is larger*; thàinig mi tarsainn air: *I came across*; air an cur còmhla an ìre mhath mar rann: *pretty much put together as verse*; cho tioram ri seich: *as dry as a hide [animal skin]*; cho rìghinn ri teud: *as durable as [a harp] string*; cho lag ri caod: *as weak as St John's wort*; cho mear ri piseag: *as playful as a kitten*; cho dòmhail ri peatraid, cho sùmhail ri sgadan: *I am not clear on the meaning of "peatraid" but take it to be one of the various names for the storm petrel (or possibly puffin) ie "as bulky as storm petrel, as unbulky (easily-packed) as herring" – if you know to the contrary please tell me!*; cho reamhar ri muc: *as fat as a pig*; cho bochd ri radan: *as poor as a rat*; cho maol ri òrd: *as blunt as a hammer*; cho cruaidh ri spor: *as hard as flint*; cho luaineach ri sìd': *as changeable as weather*; cho cinnteach ri ùim: *as certain as time*; cho aotrom ri ite: *as light as a feather*; cho glas ri feur: *as green as grass*; cho bras ri tuil: *as impetuous as a torrent*; cho geal ri latha: *as bright as day*; cho binn ri bàrd: *as melodious as a poet*; mìle samhlladh eile riutha seo ann an càird: *a thousand other similes related to these*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *In this Litir and the previous one we have considered alternative meanings of màthair and mac to the usual "mother" and "son". Màthair can sometimes refer to the source or prime example of something eg màthair-adhbhar (primary cause), màthair-uisge (reservoir, fountainhead), màthair-bhaile (metropolis). Mac can refer to a derivative of something eg mac-leabhar (copy of a book), mac na bracha (malt whisky, "son of the malt"), mac-talla (echo, "son of the rock"), mac-samhail (replica, "son of the likeness").*

Samhladh na Litreach: cho dìreach ri saighead: *as straight as an arrow*.

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