

## Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*Each week the West Highland Free Press publishes the text for Ruairidh's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" on BBC Radio nan Gaidheal (103.5-105 FM). This is Litir 612. There is also a simpler version – An Litir Bheag – which goes to air around 7.00pm on Monday evenings between Siubhal gu Seachd and Rapal. Litir Bheag 308 corresponds to Litir 612. Both programmes are available on the BBC website at [bbc.co.uk/foghlam](http://bbc.co.uk/foghlam).*

*'S e Fòghnan na h-Alba lus ainmeil nam buadh, Lus grinn nan dos calgach thug dearbh air bhith cruaidh; Seann suaicheantas mòrail tìr bhòidheach mo luaidh, 'S tric dh'fhadaich a dheagh chliù teine-èibhinn nam ghruaidh.*

Uill, tha mi an dùil gur dòcha gu bheil sibh ag aithneachadh an rainn a tha sin, no co-dhiù gum bitheadh sibh ga aithneachadh ann am Beurla: *O, the thistle o' Scotland was famous of auld, Wi' its toorie sae snod and its bristles sae bauld; 'Tis the badge o' my country, it's aye dear tae me; And the thocht o' them baith brings the licht tae my ee.*

Nuair a chuala mi an t-òran seo air a sheinn ann an Gàidhlig bho chionn fhada (tha mi an amharas gur e Seòras Clavey nach maireann a ghabh e), bha mi dhen bheachd gur e eadar-theangachadh a bh' ann bhon Bheurla. Cha robh fios agam gur ann sa Ghàidhlig a chaidh a sgrìobhadh an toiseach. B' e an t-ùghdar fear ainmeil à Earra-Ghàidheal, am bàrd Eòghann MacColla, a bha beò anns an naoidheamh linn deug. Agus 's e Calum MacPhàrlain a rinn an t-eadar-theangachadh gu Beurla.

Tha mi air dà thotal fhaicinn airson an dàin – *Fòghnan na h-Alba* agus *Suaicheantas na h-Alba*. Ach dè bh' aig an ùghdar fhèin air o thùs? Uill, fhuair mi lorg air o chionn ghoirid anns an leabhar anns an do nochd e an toiseach – *Clàrsach nam Beann* – a chaidh fhoillseachadh ann an ochd ceud deug, trithead 's a sia (1836). Agus b' e tìotal an dàin *Am Foghannan – Suaicheantas na h-Alba*. Tha an dà rud san ainm! Agus tha an t-ùghdar ag innse dhuinn gur e òran a th' ann a ghabhas seinn air an fhonn “Òran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach”.

Rugadh is thogadh Eòghann MacColla air cladaich Loch Fìne, faisg air an Fhùirneis, deas air Inbhir Aora. Feumaidh gur e *foghannan* am facal anns an dualchainnt sin airson *thistle*, mar a bhitheas aig mòran chun an latha an-diugh. Ach cluinnear facal eile airson *thistle* cuideachd – *cluaran*. An robh muinntir Loch Fìne eòlach air an fhacal sin cuideachd?

Seo an ceathramh rann: *Sluagh borb, le droch rùn dha, 's tric bhrùchd air a-nuas, 'S tric bhrùchd, ach gun taing dhaibh, a cheann chùm e suas; Nuair shaoil iad bhith buadhach, 's ann fhuair iad fàth bròin; Feuch! a' cinn thar an uaignean an cluaran gun leòn.* Bha am facal *cluaran* aca cuideachd. Agus seo an t-eadar-theangachadh: *Langsyne the invaders cam owre to our shore, And fiercely our thistle they scutched and they tore; When they maist thocht it deid, 'twas then it up bore, And it bloomed on their graves quite as strong as before.*

An ath-sheachdain innsidh mi dhuibh mu bheatha Eòghainn MhicColla. Ach an-diugh, fàgaidh mi sibh leis an rann mu dheireadh de dh'Fhòghnan na h-Alba. Seo a' Bheurla an toiseach: *My blessings be yours! Is there Scotsman ava, Wad stan' by and see ony harm on ye fa'? Is there gentle or semple what lives in our land, Wad refuse to drink a health to the thistle so grand?* Agus a' Ghàidhlig thùsail: *Mo bheannachd gu bràth air! Cia 'n Gàidheal no 'n Gall, Nach seasadh gu bàs e, ga theàrnadh bho chall? Cò, ìosal no uasal, bheir cluas do mo dhàn, Nach òladh leam “Buaidh leis” bho chuachannan làn?*

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**Faclan na Litreach:** fòghnan, cluaran: *thistle*; eadar-theangachadh: *translation*; Eòghann MacColla: *Evan MacColl*; Calum MacPhàrlain: *Malcolm MacFarlane*.

**Abairtean na Litreach:** lus grinn nan dos calgach: *neat plant of the prickly tufts*; thug dearbh air bhith cruaidh: *provenly hard*; seann suaicheantas mòrail tìr bhòidheach mo luaidh:

*magnificent old emblem of my beautiful beloved land; 's tric dh'fhadaich a dheagh chliù teine-èibhinn nam ghruaidh: often its fame brightened my face [lit. kindled a bonfire in my cheek]; ag aithneachadh an rainn a tha sin: recognising that verse; no co-dhiù gum bitheadh sibh ga aithneachadh ann am Beurla: or at least that you would recognise it in English [Scots]; tha mi an amharas gur e Seòras Clavey nach maireann a ghabh e: I suspect it was the late George Clavey who sang it; b' e an t-ùghdar fear ainmeil à Earra-Ghàidheal: the author was a famous man from Argyll; gur e òran a th' ann a ghabhas seinn air an fhonn: that it's a song that can be sung to the tune; cladach Loch Fìne, faisg air an Fhùirneis: the shore of Loch Fyne, near Furnace; deas air Inbhir Aora: south of Inveraray; sluagh borb, le droch rùn dha: a barbarous host of evil intent; 's tric bhrùchd, ach gun taing dhaibh: often sallied forth, but without thanks to them; a cheann chùim e suas: it kept its head up; nuair shaoil iad bhith buadhach, 's ann fhuair iad fàth bròin: when they thought they'd be victorious, they received a disappointment; mo bheannachd gu bràth air!: my blessing on it forever; cia 'n Gàidheal no 'n Gall: who [the] Gael or Lowlander; ga theàrnadh bho chall: saving it from loss; cò, ìosal no uasal, bheir cluas do mo dhàn: whoever, low or high, listens [gives ear] to my song; nach òladh leam "Buaidh leis" bho chuachannan làn: wouldn't drink its success with me from full quaichs.*

**Puing-chànain na Litreach: Feuch!** a' cinn thar an uaighean an cluaran gun leòn: **Look (behold)!** *Growing over the graves, the undamaged thistle. I've given the word the older and southern pronunciation ("faych" rather than "fee-uch" – it became diphthongized in the north) as it's how Eòghann MacColla would have known it. You probably know the word feuch as an equivalent to "try" – "feuch e!" (try it). But it can be used to mean "look!", "behold!", as an imperative, although some might consider it a bit old-fashioned or Biblical. It's still common in Irish Gaelic, where they spell it féach.*

**Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: Nach seasadh gu bàs e: who wouldn't defend it to [the] death.**

*Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoineachadh le MG ALBA*