

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.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 614. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 310 corresponds to Litir 614.

Seo criomag de dh’òran à sgìre Loch Carrann ann an Ros an Iar. Saoil cò air a tha e a-mach? *Fhuair sinn nuas bho Àrd Mhic Shimidh, Bò mhaol dhubh ’s i air leth-shine, ’S iomadh fear a thig le sgilig, Dh’iarraidh dileag de ’cuid bainne.*

Uill, tha e a’ coimhead coltach gur ann air bò is bainne a tha e a-mach. Ach An ann? Seo an dàrna rann: *Latha air dhomh bhith ’n Càrn nan Ruadhbhan, Bu mhaith air mo ghillean buaile, Bò mhaol dhubh le adharc ’s cluais, ’S ann mun cuairt oirr’ bhiodh na feara.* Tha sin a’ ciallachadh gum biodh na fir mun cuairt **air a’ bhoim mhaoil dhuibh**. Carson, ge-tà?

Tha mi cinnteach gu bheil sibh a’ tuigsinn nach e bò a tha am facal “bò” a’ ciallachadh. Tha e a’ seasamh airson rudeigin eile. Tha a h-uile càil a’ tighinn am follais anns an treas rann: *Siud far an robh a’ bhò bha neònach, Bidh luchd mionaich innte an-còmhnaidh, ’S tric a thug mi fhèin mo leòr dhith, Sùgh an eòrn’ as fheàrr san talamh.*

Aha! Sùgh an eòrn’ as fheàrr san talamh. Uill, nach eil sin ag innse dhuinn mu chuspair an òrain. Sùgh an eòrna – uisge-beatha! ’S e a’ bho mhaol dhubh a’ phoit dhubh – an uidheamachd a bh’ aig na seann daoine airson uisge-beatha a dhèanamh gu mì-laghail. Bhiodh na poitean dubha aca a-muigh sa mhonadh. Agus bha “bainne” a’ ciallachadh “uisge-beatha”.

Ach dè mu dheidhinn na loidhne anns a’ chiad rann – *’S iomadh fear a thig le sgilig?* Bha mise a’ smaoinichadh gun robh sin a’ ciallachadh gun robh iad a’ tighinn le airgead – sgillinn no sgillig – airson mac-na-bracha a cheannach. Ach, a rèir faclair Dwelly, tha am facal *sgilig* ann agus tha e a’ ciallachadh “shelled grain”. An tigeadh daoine le ’n cuid gràin airson uisge-beatha a dhèanamh? Ge-tà, dh’fheumadh an gràn a bhith air a bhrachadh mus **dèante** uisge-beatha leis. Saoilidh mi fhathast gu bheil e a’ ciallachadh “airgead” – ach ma tha sibh eòlach air gnìomhachas an uisge-bheatha – laghail no mì-laghail – ’s dòcha gum bi beachd eile agaibhse.

Chaidh an t-òran – *Òran na Poite Duibhe* – a chruinneachadh le Arthur Geddes bho fhear Fionnladh MacCalmain. Cha d’ fhuair mi a-mach cà’ robh a’ phoit dhubh anns an òran. Ach tha an t-sèist ag ainmeachadh “fear donn a’ bhealaich”. Thathar a’ smaoinichadh gum b’ esan an t-uachdaran no fear-taca – is gun robh e taiceil don ghnothach: *Hùg o air fear donn a’ bhealaich, Òigear sunndach, sùrdach, fearail, Hùg o air fear donn a’ bhealaich.*

Bha an t-eagal air luchd-dèanaimh an uisge-bheatha gun tigeadh na gèidsearan is gun cuireadh iad stad orra, oir bha e an aghaidh an lagh. Tha sin a' tighinn am bàrr anns a' cheathramh rann: *Nuair a theann sinn air cur foidhpe, Bha a' bhò dhubh agus laogh òg aic*, 'S eagal oirnn gun tig na seòid, 'S gum fàg iad sinn gun bhò 's gun bhainne.

Ach, ged a bha an t-òran a' moladh na poite duibhe, bha an t-ùghdar mothachail gum bi deoch làidir a' dèanamh cron cuideachd. Fàgaidh mi sibh leis an rann mu dheireadh: 'S tric a thug i air fear stòlda, A bhith gleadhach, bruidhneach, òlmhor, 'S tric a thug i air fear gòrach, A bhith strì ri dhòrn a tharraing.

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Faclan na Litreach: Loch Carrann: *Lochcarron*; Ros an Iar: *Wester Ross*; dileag: *drop [of liquid]*; neònach: *strange*; poit dhubh: *illegal whisky still*; Fionnladh MacCalmain: *Finlay Murchison*; gèidsearan: *gaugers, excisemen*; laogh: *calf [collecting vessel for the distillate]*.

Abairtean na Litreach: Saoil cò air a tha e a-mach?: *what do you reckon it's on about?*; nuas bho Àrd Mhic Shimidh: *down from Fraser of Lovat's Aird [perhaps meaning they got the still on the Fraser lands at the Aird, Beaully Firth]*; air leth-shine: *with half an udder*; bu mhaith air mo ghillean buaile: *my lads would like a cattle fold*; a' tighinn am follais anns an treas rann: *becoming obvious in the third verse*; bidh luchd mionaich innte an-còmhnaidh: *she always carries a belly load*; 's tric a thug mi fhèin mo leòr dhith: *many a time I got my fill of her*; sùgh an eòrn' as fheàrr: *the best barley juice*; an uidheamachd airson uisge-beatha a dhèanamh gu mì-laghail: *the equipment to make whisky illegally*; airson mac-na-bracha a cheannach: *to buy [single malt] whisky*; tha an t-sèist ag ainmeachadh "fear donn a' bhealaich": *the chorus names "the brown-haired lad of the pass"*; òigear sunndach, sùrdach, fearail: *contented, cheerful, manly young man*; nuair a theann sinn air cur foidhpe: *when we began to put her under [away]*; 's eagal oirnn gun tig na seòid: *with us afraid that the lads [gaugers] would come*; bha an t-ùghdar mothachail gum bi deoch làidir a' dèanamh cron cuideachd: *the author was also aware that strong drink causes damage*; 's tric a thug i air fear stòlda a bhith gleadhach, bruidhneach, òlmhor: *many a time it caused a sober, steady man to become noisy, talkative and keen on drink*; 's tric a thug i air fear gòrach a bhith strì ri dhòrn a tharraing: *it often caused a foolish man to put up his fists*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: gum biodh na fir mun cuairt **air a' bhoin mhaoil dhuibh**: *that the men would be around the hornless black cow (meaning the illegal still)*. Mun cuairt *on its own* would take the genitive case and we would say mun cuairt na bà for "around the cow". But mun cuairt air (because of the "air") takes the dative. The traditional dative form of bò is boin (you will still hear it among older speakers in a number of dialects) and the lenition and slenderization in the inflected noun carry into the adjectives, thus air a' bhoin mhaoil dhuibh. Many today wouldn't apply the old dative inflection; they would say air a' bhò mhaol dhubh.

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: dh'fheumadh an gràn a bhith air a bhrachadh mus dèante uisge-beatha leis: *the grain would have to be malted before whisky could [would] be made with it*.

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