

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill (1)

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 rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 731. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 427 corresponds to Litir 731.

Tha mi a’ dol a dh’innse dhuibh ainmean a th’ againn airson creutair air am bi sibh uile eòlach, ged nach eil e cumanta. *Fiolan-fada, Gille-nan-corc, Ana-bhiorach, Mial-chòsach agus Iol-chasach.* A bheil sibh eòlach air? Uill, seo ainmean eile airson an dearbh rud – *Fiolan nan ceud cas agus Gobhlachan mòr nan ceud cas.* Tuigidh sibh gur e an *Ceud-chasach* a th’ ann. Ann am Beurla – *centipede.*

Tha ceist agam dhuibh co-cheangailte ris a’ cheud-chasach. A rèir beul-aithris, thug ceud-chasach air fear de na bàird Ghàidhlig as ainmeile dàn ainmeil a sgrìobhadh. ’S i mo cheist – cò am bàrd agus dè an dàn?

Tha mi a’ dol a dh’innse beagan dhen dàn dhuibh. ’S dòcha gum bi fios aig feadhainn agaibh cò fear a th’ ann. Tha an earrann seo mu dheidhinn stoirm aig muir:

Nuair a thuiteamaid bho bhàrr nan àrd-thonn giobach, gur beag nach dochainneadh a sàil an t-aigèal sligheach. An fhairge ga maistreadh ’s ga sluistneadh roimh a chèile, gun robh ròin is mialan mòra ’m barrachd èiginn.

Anfhadh is confhadh na mara, is falbh na luinge, sradadh an eanchainnean geala feadh gach tuinne. Gach mion-iasg a bha san fhairge, tàrr-gheal tionndaidht’, le gluasad confhadh na gailbhinn, marbh gun chunntas.

A bheil fios agaibh dè an dàn a tha sin? Dè ach *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill* le Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. Bha Alasdair, a bha beò eadar sia ceud deug, naochad ’s a còig (1695) agus seachd ceud deug is seachdad (1770), na bàrd air leth. B’ e *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill* fear de na dàin a b’ fheàrr aige. Bha e stèidhichte air turas mara ann am birlinn eadar Loch Aoineart ann an Uibhist a Deas agus Carraig Fhearghais ann an ceann a tuath na h-Èireann.

Bha Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair na bhàillidh aig Clann Raghnaill ann an Canaigh eadar seachd ceud deug, ceathrad ’s a seachd (1747) agus caogad ’s a dhà (1752). Thathar a’ smaoinichadh gun do thòisich e *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill* ann an Canaigh ’s gun do chuir e crìoch air ann an Uibhist fichead bliadhna às dèidh sin.

A rèir beul-aithris, thòisich am bàrd air an dàn nuair a bha e na laighe anns an dorchadas fo bhata a bha bun-os-cionn ann an àite ris an canar Lag nam Boitean. Tha e coltach gur e cleachdadh cumanta a bh’ ann o shean. Seo na sgrìobh Màrtainn MacIlleMhàrtainn aig deireadh an t-seachdamh linn deug mu mar a bhiodh bàird Ghàidhlig a’ cruthachadh bàrdachd: *They shut their Doors and Windows for a day’s time, and lie on their backs, with a Stone upon their Belly, and Plaids about their Heads, and their Eyes being cover’d, they pump their Brains for Rhetorical Encomium or Panegyrick...*

Chan eil fhios agam an robh clach air brù Mhic Mhaighstir Alasdair nuair a bha e a' cruthachadh Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill. Ach, a rèir beul-aithris, nuair a bha e na làighe fo shlige an eathair, thuit ceud-chasach far tobhta. Bha an creutair bun-os-cionn ann an glumag uisge, agus a' dèanamh spàirn le chasan. Chuir sin ràimh birlinn ann an inntinn a' bhàird, agus thòisich e air an dàn! Uill, chan eil mi cinnteach mu cho firinneach 's a tha an sgeul, ach tha an ìomhaigh gam dhèanamh nas toilichte mu dheidhinn Pàrlamaid na h-Alba. Carson? Innsidh mi dhuibh anns an ath Litir.

* * * * *

Faclan na Litreach: mion-iasg: *small fish*; bàillidh: *factor*; Canaigh: *Canna*; Lag nam Boitean: *the hollow of the sheaves*; Màrtainn MacIlleMhàrtainn: *Martin Martin*; brù: *belly*; glumag: *puddle*.

Abairtean na Litreach: ainmean eile airson an dearbh rud: *other names for the same thing*; thug ceud-chasach air fear de na bàird Ghàidhlig as ainmeile dàn ainmeil a sgrìobhadh: *a centipede inspired one of the most famous Gaelic bards to write a famous poem*; nuair a thuiteamaid bho bhàrr nan àrd-thonn giobach: *when we'd fall from the tops of the ragged high waves*; gur beag nach dochainneadh a sàil an t-aigèal sligheach: *seldom would her keel not hit the shelly seabed*; an fhairge ga maistreadh 's ga sluistneadh roimh a chèile: *the ocean was churning and mixing together*; gun robh ròin is mialan mòra 'm barrachd èiginn: *that seals and whales were in more trouble*; sradadh an eanchainnean geala feadh gach tuinne: *dashing their white brains through each billow*; tàrr-gheal tionndaidht': *white bellies turned [upwards]*; le gluasad confhadh na gailbhinn, marbh gun chunntas: *with the raging motion of the storm, dead in their thousands*; turas mara ann am birlinn: *a sea voyage in a birlinn*; eadar Loch Aoineart ann an Uibhist a Deas agus Carraig Fhearghais ann an ceann a tuath na h-Èireann: *between Loch Eynort in South Uist and Carrickfergus in northern Ireland*; gun do chuir e crìoch air: *that he finished*; na laighe anns an dorchadas fo bhata a bha bun-os-cionn: *lying in the darkness under a boat that was upside-down*; gur e cleachdadh cumanta a bh' ann o shean: *that it was a common practice in olden times*; nuair a bha e na làighe fo shlige an eathair: *when he was lying under the hull of the boat*; thuit ceud-chasach far tobhta: *a centipede fell from a thwart*; a' dèanamh spàirn le chasan: *struggling with its legs*; tha an ìomhaigh gam dhèanamh nas toilichte: *the image makes me happier*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: Gaelic has many words for the centipede. The standard word, universally understood, is *ceud-chasach* (meaning the same as the English). But there are many other names – *fiolan-fada* 'long insect', *gille nan corc* 'lad of the knives' (its legs look like knives), *ana-bhiorach* 'very sharp one', *mial-chòsach* 'small animal abounding in recesses', *iol-chasach* 'many-footed one', *fiolan nan ceud cas* 'insect of 100 legs' and *gobhlachan mòr nan ceud cas* 'big earwig of 100 legs'. There is also another name – *madadh-ruadh* which reflects the colour of some centipedes but could be confused with a mammal of the same name!

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: **Anfhadh is confhadh na mara:** *the rage and fury of the sea.*

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