

An Litir Bheag le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 233 (which corresponds to Litir 537). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

We were taking a wee look at the poetry of Rob Donn last week. Rob was a Gaelic bard in the Mackay Country in the Eighteenth Century. He never spoke English. He wasn't highly educated either.

Today I'm going to have a wee look at a poem he wrote. It's about the environment – particularly in the Mackay Country.

Two sisters speak to each other in the poem. Ishbel likes the environment. Mary doesn't like the environment so much. Mary's been at school in Thurso. She picked up the ways of the Lowlander. Mary says:

Anyone doing as I have done
Would be eternally the worse for it
Going to the mountain against my will,
It ruined me and my health.

On the other hand, Rob Donn really enjoyed being a herdsman on the hill. Ishbel (or is it Rob himself?) answers Mary's accusations.

What reason have you for your antipathy
To the high slopes?
Don't you see when the cattle come
How useful they are with their off-spring?

Bha sinn a' toirt sùil bheag air bàrdachd Rob Dhuinn an t-seachdain sa chaidh. Bha Rob na bhàrd Gàidhlig ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh anns an ochdamh linn deug. Cha robh Beurla riamh aige. Cha robh no mòran sgoile.

An-diugh tha mi a' dol a thoirt sùil bheag air dàn a sgrìobh e. Tha e mu dheidhinn na h-àrainneachd – gu sònraichte ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh.

Tha dithis pheathraichean a' bruidhinn ri chèile anns an dàn. Tha Iseabail measail air an àrainneachd. Chan eil Màiri cho measail air an àrainneachd. Tha Màiri air a bhith san sgoil ann an Inbhir Theòrsa. Thog i dòighean nan Gall. Tha Màiri ag ràdh:
*Cia b' e dhèanadh mar rinn mis',
Bu mhist' e e gu bràth,
Dhol don bheinn an aghaidh m' inntinn,
Mhill e mi 's mo shlàint'.*

Air an làimh eile, chòrd e gu mòr ri Rob Donn a bhith na bhuachaille air a' bheinn. Tha Iseabail (no an e Rob fhèin a tha ann?) a' freagairt casaidean Màiri.
*Ciod am fàth mun tug thu fuath
'S ann do na bruachaibh àrd?
Nach fhaic thu fhèin nuair a thig an sprèidh
Gur feumail iad len àl?*

<p><i>Mary, however, continues with her argument. She criticises the winter. The Mackay Country is alright in the summer but things aren't attractive in the winter – according to Mary, at least.</i></p> <p>What was true in your song As long as the summer was warm It changed on Halloween And the winter will extinguish it.</p> <p><i>Again, Ishbel has an answer to Mary's accusations. I like this verse. And this verse represents with clarity the beauty of spring in the Highlands:</i></p> <p>The land will hide until summer It is hibernating just now Birch and hazel on the day of Beltane Promising growth. There will be crowdie and churning in the straths And the snowdrifts will melt. How sweet the spectacle, glens a-spouting Calves and milk and cream.</p>	<p>Tha Màiri, ge-tà, a, leantainn le a h-argamaid. Tha i a' càineadh a' gheamhraidh. Tha Dùthaich MhicAoidh math gu leòr as t-samhradh ach chan eil cùisean tarraingeach anns a' gheamhradh – a rèir Màiri, co-dhiù.</p> <p><i>Na bha fìrinneach de d' amhran Fhad 's a bha 'n samhradh blàth, Rinn e tionndadh Oidhche Shamhna, 'S bheir an geamhradh 'shàr.</i></p> <p>A-rithist, tha freagairt aig Iseabail do chasaidean Màiri. Is toigh leam an rann seo. Agus tha an rann seo a' riochdachadh gu soilleir bòidheachd an earraich air a' Ghàidhealtachd:</p> <p><i>Glèidhidh 'n talamh chun an t-samhraidh Sin a chrann e 'n-dràst; Beith is calltainn Latha Bealltainn Gealltanach air fàs. Bidh gruth is crathadh air na srathaibh 'S teirgidh 'n cathadh-làir. Nach binn an sealladh, glinn a' stealladh Laoigh is bainne 's bàrr.</i></p>
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