

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 286 (which corresponds to Litir 590). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

We have a nice song in Gaelic. It's a lullaby. It's name is Uiseag Bheag Dhearg. In the song a child is speaking to a lark. The lark tells where it was sleeping. It slept badly in the bramble bush. It slept badly at sea. But it slept well between two leaves. If it works well, the child will be asleep before the end of the song.

At the end of the chorus there is this line: where did you sleep last night in the "ì"? "Ì" means "night". Where did you sleep last night? But we sing "san ì" rather than "san oidhch'". That proves it is a Manx song. It's originally from the Isle of Man. For oidhche mhath, the Manx say oie vie. And in Gaelg – Manx Gaelic – ushag means "any small bird", rather than a lark.

But how did the song get into Scottish Gaelic? Well, recently, I found that out. I was reading a book about the late Mona Douglas. She was a famous woman from the Isle of Man. She encouraged [the use of] the language and culture of the island. In the book there is a transcription of an interview she

Tha òran snog againn ann an Gàidhlig. 'S e tàladh a tha ann. 'S e an t-ainm a tha air *Uiseag Bheag Dhearg*. Anns an òran, tha pàiste a' bruidhinn ri uiseag. Tha an uiseag ag innse càite an robh i a' faighinn cadal. Fhuair i droch chadal anns an dris. Fhuair i droch chadal aig muir. Ach fhuair i deagh chadal eadar dà dhuilleig. Ma dh'obraicheas e gu math, bidh am pàiste na chadal ro dheireadh an òrain!

Aig deireadh na sèiste tha an loidhne seo: càite na chaidil thu raoir san "ì"? Tha "ì" a' ciallachadh "oidhche". Càite an do chaidil thu a-raoir san oidhch'? Ach seinnidh sinn "san ì" seach "san oidhch'". Tha sin a' dearbhadh gur e òran Manainneach a tha ann. Tha e à Eilean Mhanainn bho thùs. Airson *oidhche mhath*, canaidh na Manainnich *oie vie*. Agus ann an Gaelg – Gàidhlig Eilean Mhanainn – tha *ushag* a' ciallachadh "eun beag sam bith", seach lark.

Ach ciamar a fhuair an t-òran a-steach do Ghàidhlig na h-Alba? Uill, o chionn ghoirid, fhuair mi sin a-mach. Bha mi a' leughadh leabhar mu dheidhinn Mona Douglas nach maireann. B' ise tè ainmeil à Eilean Mhanainn. Bha i a' brosnachadh cànan agus cultar an eilein. Anns an leabhar

gave. In the interview she named the song with a Manx name – Ushag Veg Ruy.

She said that Manx songs were spreading among the Gaels in Scotland and Ireland. She put Ushag Veg Ruy in print. That was in the twenties or early thirties in the twentieth century. A teacher in Scotland got hold of the song. Douglas was thinking he was from Tiree.

This teacher wrote to Douglas. He asked permission from her to translate the song to Scottish Gaelic. Sometime after that, a pupil from his school sang Uiseag Bheag Dhearg at the Mod – as a Scottish song. He won a prize! And that's how it happened. Many a young person in Scotland sings that song to this very day.

tha tar-sgrìobhadh de dh'agallamh a rinn i. Anns an agallamh, dh'ainmich i an t-òran le ainm Manainn-each – *Ushag Veg Ruy*.

Thuir i gun robh òrain Mhanainn-each a' sgapadh am measg nan Gàidheal ann an Alba is Èirinn. Chuir i *Ushag Veg Ruy* ann an clò. Bha sin anns na ficheadan no toiseach nan tritheadan anns an fhicheadamh linn. Fhuair tidsear ann an Alba grèim air an òran. Bha Douglas a' smaoinichadh gur ann à Tiriodh a bha e.

Sgrìobh an tidsear seo gu Douglas. Dh'iarr e cead bhuaipe an t-òran a chur ann an Gàidhlig na h-Alba. Uaireigin às dèidh sin, sheinn sgoilear às an sgoil aige *Uiseag Bheag Dhearg* aig a' Mhòd – mar òran Albannach. Bhuannaich e duais! Agus sin mar a thachair e. Bidh iomadh fear is tè òg ann an Alba a' gabhail an òrain sin chun an latha an-diugh.