

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 478 (which corresponds to Litir 782). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the poet Allan MacDonald, Allan the Ridge. He was from Mabou in Cape Breton. He lived between 1794 and 1868. Effie Rankin wrote a book about him.

Allan was a Lochaber man. He was close to his dùthchas. But homesickness for the old country didn't come into his poetry. Allan reckoned he was better off where he was.

We see his opinions in the poem In Praise of Nova Scotia. He wrote this as a response to another poet who had been praising Scotland.

*You have boasted loudly
Of great subjects in your verse,
Your speech is offensive to me
For I was well acquainted
yonder:
In cold Scotland, though it be
far from me
It is no great loss,
The reason for the gloominess
is the hardship of its poor
inhabitants.*

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun bhàrd Ailean Dòmhnallach, Ailean an Rids. Bha e à Màbu ann an Ceap Breatainn. Bha e beò eadar seachd ceud deug, naochad 's a ceithir (1794) agus ochd ceud deug, seasgad 's a h-ochd (1868). Sgrìobh Oighrig NicFhraing leabhar mu dheidhinn.

Bha Ailean na Abrach. Bha e dlùth ri a dhùthchas. Ach cha robh cianalas airson na seann dùthcha a' tighinn a-steach don bhàrdachd aige. Bha Ailean dhen bheachd gun robh e na b' fheàrr dheth far an robh e.

Chì sinn na beachdan aige anns an dàn Moladh Albainn Nuaidh. Sgrìobh e seo mar fhreagairt do bhàrd eile a bh' air a bhith a' moladh Alba.

*Chuir thu bòilich sìos is bòsd
Air cùisean mòr nad rann,
Searbh a' ghlòir leam cainnt do
bheòil
Oir bha mi eòlach thall:
An Albainn fhuar, ge fada bhuam
i
Suarach leam an call,
B' e fàth an gruaim an càramh
cruaidh
Bh' air truaghain bho chd' a bh'
ann.*

<i>Why was he so hard on Scotland? Because the gentry – the landlords – were so unmerciful.</i> The land you left is a land without friendship. A land without compassion for tenants, But they are sad to leave it and distressed at the ocean voyage: Poor people, descendants of cottars who were without stock or cattle, It's woeful they criticised the land of joy in which they became gentlemen. <i>We see another side of the bard in his poems about drink. Allan left Mabou in 1847. He went to live in Antigonish on the Nova Scotian mainland. That place was also Gaelic in character. But the Catholic Church had gone against drink there. And Allan wasn't pleased. He wrote A Song to Drink. Here is a snatch of it:</i> It's the law the Pope made That changed my merriment to sadness And led me to dejection Since he banished the drink. <i>Allan the Ridge wrote many poems – on many topics. It's good that the Gaels of Nova Scotia are keeping his legacy alive.</i>	Carson a bha e cho trom air Alba? Bha a chionn 's gun robh na h-uaislean – na h-uachdarain – cho an-ìochdmhor. <i>'S i 'n tìr a dh'fhàg thu 'n tìr gun chàirdeas Tìr gun bhàigh ri Tuath,</i> <i>Ach gu tùrsach iad ga fàgail 'S ànraidh thar a' chuain: Daoine bochda, sìol nan coitear Bha gun stoc gun bhuar,</i> <i>'S mairg a chàin iad tìr an àigh San d' fhàs iad nan daoine uaisl'.</i> Chì sinn taobh eile dhen bhàrd anns na dàin aige mu dheidhinn deoch làidir. Dh'fhàg Ailean Mabu ann an ochd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a seachd (1847). Chaidh e a dh'fhuireach ann an Antigonish air tìr-mòr na h-Alba Nuaidhe. Bha an t-àite sin Gàidhealach cuideachd. Ach bha an Eaglais Chaitligeach air a dhol an aghaidh deoch làidir an sin. Agus cha robh Ailean toilichte. Sgrìobh e Òran dhan Deoch. Seo criomag dheth: <i>'S e 'n lagh a rinn am Pàpa Thug m' àbhachd gu tùrsa 'S a tharraing mi gu smuairain Bhon dh' fhuadaich e 'n drùdhag.</i> 'S iomadh dàn a sgrìobh Ailean an Rids – air iomadh cuspair. Tha e math gu bheil Gàidheil na h-Alba Nuaidhe a' cumail a dhìleib beò fhathast.
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