

# **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 809 (which corresponds to Litir 1,113). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

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| <p>Cho binn ri smeòrach air geug. As melodious as a song thrush on a branch. My attention is on the thrush in this Litir. We'll look at two famous poems in which there is a thrush. They were written by renowned poets.</p> <p>The first poet is Iain mac Fhearchair 'ic Ìomhair from North Uist. You will perhaps know him as John MacCodrum. The other was Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.</p> <p>I'll tell you about MacCodrum to begin with, and his poem 'the thrush of Clan Donald'. Here is the chorus:</p> <p><i>Hoilibheag hilibheag hó ail il ó,<br/>Hoilibheag hilibheag hó ró i,<br/>Hoilibheag hilibheag hó ail il ó,<br/>Smeòrach le Clann Dòmhnail mi.</i></p> <p>Hoilibheag hilibheag are just vocables, or the song of the thrush.</p> <p>Why was a member of the MacCodrums writing about Clan Donald? Well, the chief of the MacDonalds was giving John strong support. Here's how it transpired.</p> <p>John wrote [a] dispraise [poem] about the work of Uist tailors. The tailors were angry. They refused to</p> | <p>Cho binn ri smeòrach air geug. As melodious as a song thrush on a branch. Tha m' aire air an smeòraich anns an Litir seo. Bheir sinn sùil air dà dhàn ainmeil anns a bheil smeòrach. Chaidh an sgrìobhadh le bàird chliùiteach.</p> <p>'S e a' chiad bhàrd Iain mac Fhearchair 'ic Ìomhair à Uibhist a Tuath. Bidh sibh eòlach air 's dòcha mar Iain MacCodruim. B' e am fear eile Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.</p> <p>Innsidh mi dhuibh mu MhacCodruim an toiseach, agus an dàn aige 'Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail'. Seo an t-sèist:</p> <p><i>Hoilibheag hilibheag hó ail il ó,<br/>Hoilibheag hilibheag hó ró i,<br/>Hoilibheag hilibheag hó ail il ó,<br/>Smeòrach le Clann Dòmhnail mi.</i></p> <p>Chan eil ann an <i>Hoilibheag hilibheag</i> ach briathran gun bhrìgh, no òran na smeòraich.</p> <p>Carson a bha ball de Chlann 'ic Codruim a' sgrìobhadh mu Chlann Dòmhnail? Uill, bha ceann-cinnidh nan Dòmhnallach a' toirt taic mhòr do dh'Iain. Seo mar a thachair e.</p> <p>Sgrìobh Iain dì-mholadh mu obair thàillearan Uibhist. Bha na tàillearan feargach. Dhiùlt iad uile aon ghrèim eile</p> |
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*sew one more stitch for the poet. In due course John's clothes were tattered.*

*The clan chief, Sir James MacDonald, saw him. 'Why are your clothes falling apart, John?' he asked. John recited the poetry that [had] angered the tailors. Perhaps the clan chief was worried that John would write something of the same ilk about him! Anyway, he gave him work and a place to stay!*

*At the beginning of Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail, the bard puts himself in the guise of a thrush. The bird is sad. In the second verse, however, the thrush finds itself in a better situation:*

*I am a thrush on a mountaintop,  
Looking at the sun and clear skies;  
I shall come steadily to the wood  
And I shall live on other sustenance,*

*In her book 'Songs of Gaelic Scotland', Anne Lorne Gillies says that perhaps the change from sadness to reflects the poet's own life. Why? Well, I'll tell you next week.*

fhuairigheal don bhàrd. An ceann greis, bha aodach Iain robach.

Chunnaic an ceann-cinnidh, An Ridire Seumas Dòmhnallach, e. 'Carson a tha do chuid aodaich a' tuiteam às a chèile, Iain?' dh'fhaighnich e. Dh'aithris Iain a' bhàrdachd a chuir fearg air na tàillearan. 'S dòcha gun robh an ceann-cinnidh a' gabhail dragh gun sgrìobhadh Iain rudeigin dhen aon seòrsa mu dheidhinn-san. Co-dhiù, thug e obair is àite-fuirich dha!

Aig toiseach Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail, tha am bàrd ga chur fhèin ann an riochd smeòraich. Tha an t-eun brònach. Anns an dàrna rann, ge-tà, tha an smeòrach ga lorg fhèin ann an suidheachadh nas fheàrr:

*Smeòrach mis' air mullach beinne,  
'g amharc grèin is speuran soilleir;  
Thig mi stòlda chòir na coille,  
's bidh mi beò air treòdas eile.*

Anns an leabhar aice 'Songs of Gaelic Scotland', tha Anna Latharna NicGillÌosa ag ràdh gur dòcha gu bheil an t-atharrachadh bho bhròn gu dòchas a' comharrachadh beatha a' bhàird fhèin. Carson? Uill, innsidh mi dhuibh an-ath-sheachdain.