

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*Each week the **West Highland Free Press** publishes the text for Roddy Maclean's*

*"Letter to Gaelic Learners" on **BBC Radio nan Gaidheal (103-105 FM)**.*

The programme is broadcast at 11.50 every Friday morning

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... O gabhaibh mo lethsgèul. Uill, cha b'è mise a bha a' deanamh an fhuaim, greannach 's ged a tha mi uaireannan. ... Nach ist thu! ... Tha sin nas fheàrr. Tha e air ais na bhocsa a-nise mar bu chòir.

Nach e fuaim diabhlaidh a bh'ann? Agus dè am beathach a bha ga dhèanamh? Uill, cuiridh mi geall nach eil mòran agaibh air a leithid fhaicinn, neo a chluinntinn, a-riamh leis nach eil e ri lorg ach ann an aon eilean air an t-saoghal, agus tha sin fad air falbh o Bhreatainn. Agus timcheall an dearbh eilein, tha am maorach air an robh mi a' bruidhinn an t-seachdain 's a chaidh, a' chluas-mhara, neo *abalone*, gu math pailt. (Bidh sibh a' cuimhneachadh gu bheil a' smaoinneachadh mun chluas-mhara àrach ann an Alba.) Agus dè an t-eilean a th'ann far a bheil an dà chuid seo? Uill, àite air a bheil mi fhìn gu math eòlach leis gu robh mi a' fuireach ann iomadach bliadhna – Tasmania.

'S e am beathach greannach mamail beag ris an canar an Diabhal Tasmanianach, neo *Tasmanian Devil*. Ged a bha e uaireigin ri lorg air tìr-mòr Astràilia, chan fhaighear a-nise e ach ann an Tasmania fhèin. Tha e dubh le ceann mòr is fiaclan biorach. Agus tha e beag, cho mòr ri cù *corgi*. Ach cha bhiodh a' Bhàn-rìgh a' coimhead cho rìoghail le diabhal na cois 's a tha i le corgi, chanainn! 'S dòcha gum faigheadh i barrachd spèis, ge-tà, ann an dùthchannan eile nuair a bha i a' tadhal orra! Faodaidh an diabhal a bhith gu math fiadhaich.

O chionn bliadhna bha mi ann an cèidse mhòr, ann an sù, ann an Tasmania, còmhla ri diabhal airson a ghuth a chlàradh le inneal-clàraidh is miocrofòn. "Cum a dol a ghluasad," thuirt am fear-stiùiridh rium, "bu chòir dhut a bhith sàbhailte mar sin."

"Bu chòir?" dh'fhaighnich mi. Cha robh mi ro chinnteach co-dhiù bu chòir dhomh bhith anns a' chèidse idir.

"O aidh," ars' am fear eile, "ach ma stad as tu, bidh an diabhal a' smaoinneachadh gur e ablach a th'annad."

"Dìreach mar mo charaidean aig an taigh," smaoinich mi rium fhìn.

"'S e ablaich is cloaichean as motha a dh'itheas iad," thuirt am fear-stiùiridh rium. "Feòil nach eil a' gluasad, 's e biadh a th'ann dhaibh. Na stad!"

Uill, ghabh mi a chomhairle agus tha mi ann an seo fhathast, agus a h-uile corrag is òrdag agam cuideachd. Tha iad gu math measail, na diabhlanan, air corrigan dhaoine mar a tha iad air an leathar a gheibhear ann am brògan. Ach 's fheàrr leam-sa, feumaidh mi ràdh, na cluasan-mara. Tha an diabhal a' fuireach anns na coilltean; tha a' chluas-mhara ri lorg faisg air làimh air creagan anns a' mhuir, faisg air a' chladach ach fo ìsle mhara. Feumaidh tu dàibheadh air an son le snorgal.

Ach tha iad furasta gu leòr fhaighinn. Cha leig thu leas ach sgian a thoirt leat airson am faighinn far nan creag. Agus, chan eil iad a' sabaid air ais mar a bhiodh diabhal.

Ach a-nise an ceum as duilghe – an còcaireachd. Feumaidh tu an fheòil a phronnadh is an uairsin a ròstadh gu math sgiobalta. Ma nì thu gu ceart e chan eil biadh nas fheàrr ann. Ach ma ròstas tu ro fhada i, thig i a-mach cho cruaidh ri leathar. Gun fheum sam bith do dhuine - ach 's dòcha fhathast na bhiadh math do dhiabhal dubh acrach greannach ann an coilltean Thasmania.

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Faclan na seachdaine: greannach: *ill-tempered*; diabhal, diabhlaidh: *devil, devilish*; maorach: *shellfish*; mamail: *mammal*; tir-mòr Astràilia: *the mainland of Australia*; biorach: *sharp*; spèis: *respect*; cèidse: *cage*; sù: *zoo*; ablaich is closaichean: *carrion and carcasses*; leathar: *leather*; dàibheadh: *diving*; snorgal: *snorkel*; còcaireachd: *cooking*; pronnadh: *bashing (to tenderize)*; ròstadh: *roasting*.

Abairtean na seachdaine: nach ist thu: *won't you be quiet!*; cuiridh mi geall: *I bet*; timcheall an dearbh eilein: *around that very same island*; an dà chuid seo: *both these things*; cho mòr ri cù corgi: *as big as a corgi dog*; faodaidh an diabhal a bhith gu math fiadhaich: *the (Tasmanian) devil can be pretty wild*; airson a ghuth a chlàradh le inneal-clàraidh is miocrofòn: *to record its (masc) voice with a recording device and microphone*; bu chòir dhut a bhith sàbhailte: *you should be safe*; ma stad as tu, bidh an diabhal a' smaoinichadh gur e ablach a th'annad: *if you stop, the devil will think you are carrion (but ablach can also be used as an extremely impolite term for another human being, hence the following sentence which is a joke at my own expense)*; a h-uile corrag is òrdag agam: *all of my fingers and toes (NB in next week's letter we will look at some of the names of the fingers in Gaelic)*; fo ìsle-mhara: *below low tide mark*; an ceum as duilghe: *the most difficult step*; cho cruaidh ri leathar: *as tough as leather*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdaine: [bha] mi a' fuireach ann iomadach bliadhna: *I was living there (for) many years. Have you ever noticed how many instances of plural concepts in Gaelic involve the use of the singular form of the noun, where the plural form is used in English. Gaelic learners sometimes make the mistake of pluralising the noun when it is not required. A good example is iomadach (or iomadh) bliadhna, NOT iomadach bliadhnaichean. Similarly, corra uair (on some occasions) NOT corra uairean. Many examples are to be found in counting eg fichead turas (twenty times) NOT fichead tursan; dà fhichead duine (forty men) NOT dà fhichead daoine; mìle beannachd (a thousand blessings) NOT mìle beannachdan. And, of course, the same applies to cia mheud? (how many?) Cia mheud gille a chunnaic thu? (how many lads did you see). Keep your eyes and ears open for other examples.*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: Cha bhiodh a' Bhànrigh a' coimhead cho rìoghail le diabhal na cois 's a tha i le corgi: *the Queen would not look as royal with a devil at her feet as she does with a corgi. This is one of the idiomatic uses of cas which we looked in Litir 13 (August 13 1999). Na cois literally means "at her foot", but it can be used to mean "in her company, along with her". If it was a masculine person eg an Rìgh, we would lenite cois and say na chois. Chunnaic mi an Rìgh agus bha cù na chois (I saw the King and he had a dog with him). The plural would be nan cois. Chunnaic mi an Rìgh 's a' Bhànrigh agus bha trì coin nan cois (I saw the King and Queen and they had three dogs with them.)*

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