

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Uilleam Hare (1)

Each week the West Highland Free Press publishes the text for Ruairidh's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal (103.5-105 FM). Broadcasts are as follows: 2:55pm on Sunday as part of BBC Radio nan Gàidheal's hour-long learning zone, following the Gaelic Learners' programme 'SpeakGaelic Extra', with a repeat at 10.30 pm on Wednesday. This is Litir 1,368. There is also a simpler version – An Litir Bheag – which is broadcast at 2:30pm each Sunday. Litir Bheag 1,064 corresponds to Litir 1,368. The Litir is also available at www.bbc.co.uk/litir and www.learnghaelic.scot/litir. Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learnghaelic.scot.

O chionn còrr is fichead bliadhna, chaidh iarraidh orm leabhar beag a sgrìobhadh – ann an Gàidhlig – do dheugairean. B' e cuspair an leabhair cunntasan de mhurt – cuspair air a bheil mòran daoine measail, a rèir choltais! 'S e an tiotal a th' air an leabhar **Mort Mhòr!**

Tha an cunntas mu dheireadh mu dhithis a bha an sàs ann an gnothaichean sgriosail ann an Alba. B' iad sin Uilleam Burke agus Uilleam Hare – dithis Èireannach a bha a' fuireach ann an Dùn Èideann.

Aig an àm sin – anns na ficheadan dhen naoidheamh linn deug – bha Dùn Èideann ainmeil airson teagasg mu eòlas-bodhaig agus sgianadaireachd. Am measg nan eòlaichean a bhiodh a' teagasg nan sgilean sin, bha Raibeart Knox. Bha Knox gann de chuirp airson teagasg agus sin far an tàinig Burke agus Hare a-steach.

An toiseach bhuineadh na cuirp a bhathar a' cleachdadh do phrìosanaich a chaochail no do dhaoine **a chuir làmh nam beatha fhèin**. Ach cha robh cuirp gu leòr aca. Thòisich feadhainn air cuirp a bha ùr-thiodhlaicte ann an cladhan a chladhach suas. Bhiodh iad a' reic nan corp do Raibeart Knox. 'S e dòigh mhath a bh' ann airson airgead a chosnadh – suas ri deich notaichean airson gach corp.

Thug Burke is Hare an gnothach ceum na b' fhaide, ge-tà. Cha do dh'fhuirich iad gus an robh daoine air bàs fhaighinn gu nàdarrach. Mhuirt iad feadhainn agus reic iad na cuirp aca do Raibeart Knox. Thathar a' smaoineachadh gun do mhuirt iad suas ri sia duine deug airson an cuirp a reic.

Nuair a bha iad air an cur an grèim, bha Dùn Èideann na bhoil. Bha clann na sràide ag aithris rann:

*Up the close an' doon the stair,
But an' ben wi' Burke an' Hare.
Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief,
Knox the boy that buys the beef.*

Carson a tha mi a' bruidhinn air a' chuspair seo? Tha mi cinnteach gu bheil gu leòr agaibh eòlach air. Uill, 's e an rud a thachair an dèidh làimhe a tha air m' aire. Bha cùis-chùirte ann. Thug Hare fianais an Rìgh an aghaidh Bhurke. Tha sin a' ciallachadh gun do dhearbhadh e le fianais gun robh Burke ri murt. Ach bha Hare fhèin saor bho dhèidh, ged a bha e cho ciontach ri Burke.

Bha Burke air a chrochadh gu bàs ann an Dùn Èideann. Ach dè thachair do Hare – am murtair a bha a-nise saor? Uill, 's e sin a' cheist. Am measg nan àiteachan far am facas e – math dh'fhaodte – bha taobh siar Siorrachd Rois air a' Ghàidhealtachd – coimhearsnachd dham buin mi fhìn. Ach an e an fhìrinn a tha sin – no dìreach beul-aithris gun susbaint? Tha mi a' dol a thoirt sùil air a' cheist sin.

Bha Hare air a chumail an grèim ann an Dùn Èideann airson seachdain an dèidh bàs Bhurke. Bha sin airson a chumail slàn, sàbhailte oir bha gu leòr ann an Dùn Èideann fiadhaich gun robh e saor, gun dìteadh. Bha e air a chur air bòrd coidse a bha a' dol a Dhùn Phris ann an ceann a deas na h-Alba. 'S e sin an turas mu dheireadh a tha fios againn le cinnt ca' robh e. Ach, anns an ath Litir bheir sinn sùil air far am 'facas' e, mas fhìor.

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Faclan na Litreach: deugairean: *teenagers*; gnothaichean sgriosail: *terrible matters*; dithis Èireannach: *two Irishmen*; fianais an Rìgh: *King's evidence*.

Abairtean na Litreach: B' e cuspair an leabhair cunntasan de mhurt: *the subject of the book was accounts of murder*; cuspair air a bheil mòran daoine measail, a rèir choltais: *a subject on which many people are keen, it appears*; na ficheadan dhen naoidheamh linn deug: *the 1820s*; bha Dùn Èideann ainmeil airson teagasg mu eòlas-bodhaig agus sgianadaireachd: *Edinburgh was famous for the teaching of anatomy and dissection*; gann de chuirp airson teagasg: *short of bodies for teaching*; bhuineadh na cuirp a bhathar a' cleachdadh do phrìosanaich a chaochail: *the bodies they were using belonged to prisoners who died*; 's e dòigh mhath a bh' ann airson airgead a chosnadh: *it was a good way to make money*; ceum na b' fhaide: *an additional step*; mhuirt iad feadhainn agus reic iad na cuirp aca do Raibeart Knox: *they murdered some folk and they sold their bodies to Robert Knox*; bha Dùn Èideann na bhoil: *Edinburgh was in tumult*; bha clann na sràide ag aithris rann: *the street kids were saying a rhyme*; 's e an rud a thachair an dèidh làimhe a tha air m' aire: *it's what happened afterwards that is under my attention*; bha Hare fhèin saor bho dhìteadh, ged a bha e cho ciontach ri Burke: *Hare himself was free from prosecution, although he was just as guilty as Burke*; air a chrochadh gu bàs: *hanged to death*; coimhearsnachd dham buin mi fhìn: *a community to which I belong myself*; an e an fhìrinn a tha sin – no dìreach beul-aithris gun susbaint?: *is that the truth – or just unsubstantiated oral tradition?*; airson a chumail slàn, sàbhailte: *to keep him safe*; air a chur air bòrd coidse a bha a' dol a Dhùn Phris: *put on board a coach that was going to Dumfries*; far am facas e, mas fhìor: *where he was seen, allegedly*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **Mort Mhòr!:** *Literally this means Great Murder!* However, it is a Gaelic expression roughly equivalent to 'Good Grief!' although perhaps a little stronger. You will also hear people say 'Murt!' in a similar way. Now, there is an issue of spelling i.e. mort v murt. The publishers of the book went with mort but murt seems more natural to me, and that is the form in the Essential Gaelic Dictionary (GOC did not give a recommendation). Both can be considered correct.

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: **a chuir làmh nam beatha fhèin:** *who committed suicide*.

Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoineachadh le MG ALBA