

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 530 (which corresponds to Litir 834). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

What is the Gaelic for 'smile'? How do we say 'she was smiling'? Would we use gàire? Bha i a' dèanamh gàire? Well, perhaps that means 'she was laughing'. Is Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa laughing? I don't think so.

I was fortunate to go to the Louvre in Paris one time. I saw the Mona Lisa. And what description would I give of her? We have many words for 'smile' – for example, fiamh-ghàire, faite-gàire and snodha-gàire. Perhaps it is fiamh-ghàire that you'd say is on the face of the Mona Lisa. But I don't know. To tell the truth, when I was looking at the picture, I wasn't too sure if she had any sort of smile [on her face]!

The word gàire is in my head just now because I saw another famous picture recently. I was at The Wallace Collection in London. It is a big house. It is full of paintings and furniture and weaponry that is amazingly valuable.

Perhaps the most famous painting in the collection is one by

Dè a' Ghàidhlig air smile? Ciamar a chanas sinn she was smiling? An cleachdadh sibh fhèin gàire? Bha i a' dèanamh gàire? Uill, 's dòcha gu bheil sin a' ciallachadh she was laughing. A bheil am Mona Lisa aig Leonardo da Vinci a' dèanamh gàire? Cha chreid mi gu bheil.

Bha mi fortanach a dhol don Louvre ann am Paris turas. Chunnaic mi am Mona Lisa. Agus dè an tuairisgeul a dhèanainn dhith? 'S iomadh facal a th' againn airson smile – mar eisimpleir fiamh-ghàire, faite-gàire agus snodha-gàire. 'S dòcha gur e fiamh-ghàire a chanadh tu a tha air aodann a' Mhona Lisa. Ach chan eil fhios a'm. Leis an fhìrinn innse, nuair a bha mi a' coimhead air an dealbh, cha robh mi buileach cinnteach an robh i a' dèanamh gàire de sheòrsa sam bith!

Tha am facal gàire nam cheann an-dràsta oir chunnaic mi dealbh ainmeil eile o chionn ghoirid. Bha mi ann an Cruinneachadh Uallais ann an Lunnainn. 'S e seann taigh mòr a tha ann. Tha e làn dealbhan is àirneis is buill-airm a tha iongantach prìseil.

'S dòcha gur e an dealbh as ainmeile anns a' chruinneachadh fear leis

the Dutchman Frans Hals. It's title is The Laughing Cavalier. He is not laughing, however, but has a smile of some nature [on his face]. It's The Smiling or The Smirking Cavalier it should be called, rather than The Laughing Cavalier. He has a moustache that goes up at both ends. That gives the pretence that the shape of his mouth is the shape of a smile perhaps.

It's not known for sure who the man in the picture is. But he was wealthy. His clothes are beautiful. In that way, the picture is more attractive than the Mona Lisa. But there is one thing in common between the two pictures. The subjects' eyes are looking directly at the observer. That's true even when the observer moves from side to side, or up and down. They are both wonderful paintings by master painters.

an Dùitseach Frans Hals. 'S e an tiotal a tha air *The Laughing Cavalier*. Chan e lachanaich no gàire mhòr a tha e a' dèanamh, ge-tà, ach fiamh-ghàire de sheòrs' air choreigin. 'S e *The Smiling* no *The Smirking Cavalier* a bu chòir a bhith air, seach *The Laughing Cavalier*. Tha stais aige a tha a' dol an-àirde aig gach ceann. Tha sin a' toirt a' chreidsinn gu bheil cumadh a bheòil ann an cumadh fiamh-ghàire 's dòcha.

Chan eil fios le cinnt cò e am fear anns an dealbh. Ach bha e beartach. Tha a chuid aodaich àlainn. Anns an dòigh sin, tha an dealbh nas tarraingiche na 'm Mona Lisa. Ach tha aon rud sa chumantas eadar an dà dhealbh. Tha sùilean nan cuspairean a' coimhead gu dìreach air an neach-amhairc. Tha sin fìor eadhon nuair a ghluaiseas an neach-amhairc bho thaobh gu taobh, no suas is sìos. Tha iad le chèile nan sàr-dhealbhan le sàr-dhealbhadairean.