

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 645 (which corresponds to Litir 949). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was speaking about Iain Lom. There is another famous poet buried in the same cemetery – Cille Choirill. He was Dòmhnall mac Fhionnla' nan Dàn. It's him that wrote 'the song of the owl' at the end of the sixteenth century.

I named Iain Beag MacDonald who had oral tradition about Iain Lom. He also had oral tradition about Donald. Here are two of his anecdotes about Donald.

Donald was skilful with the bow and arrow. He took a trip to Argyll. In addition to being a poet, he was a hunter. He saw a beautiful stag.

He killed the animal with an arrow. The local people told the clan chief what had happened. Anyone who killed a deer then, it's the gibbet that awaited him. But the clan chief was told that Donald made an incredible shot with the arrow.

'Well,' said the clan chief, 'he'll be good in my company.'

Donald was taken in front of the clan chief. 'I've heard,' said the old man, 'that you killed a deer. But you'll be forgiven if you remain on my land.'

Bha mi a' bruidhinn mu Iain Lom. Tha bàrd ainmeil eile air a thiodhlacadh anns an dearbh chladh – Cille Choirill. B' esan Dòmhnall mac Fhionnla' nan Dàn. 'S e a sgrìobh 'Òran na Comhachaig' aig deireadh an t-siathamh linn deug.

Dh'ainmich mi Iain Beag Dòmhnallach aig an robh beul-aithris mu Iain Lom. Bha beul-aithris aige mu Dhòmhnall cuideachd. Seo dhuibh dà naidheachd aige mu Dhòmhnall.

Bha Dòmhnall sgileil leis a' bhogha is saighead. Ghabh e cuairt a dh'Earra-Ghàidheal. A bharrachd air a bhith na bhàrd, bha e na shealgair. Chunnaic e damh-fèidh brèagha.

Mharbh e am beathach le saighead. Dh'inns muinntir an àite don cheann-chinnidh aca gu dè bh' air tachairt. Duine sam bith a mharbhadh fiadh an uair sin 's e a' chroich a bha a' feitheamh ris. Ach chaidh innseadh don cheann-cinnidh gun do rinn Dòmhnall urchair iongantach leis an t-saighead.

'Uill,' thuirt an ceann-cinnidh, 'bidh e math nam chuideachd.'

Thugadh Dòmhnall air beulaibh a' chinn-chinnidh. 'Chuala mi,' thuirt am bodach, 'gun do mharbh thu fiadh. Ach gheibh thu maitheanas ma dh'fhanas tu air an talamh agam fhin.'

*'I'll stay,' agreed Donald.
He stayed for a while. But he tired of it. He said to the clan chief that he was leaving.*

'I'm very sorry,' said the clan chief. 'I'll give you more land.'

'I'd prefer one strip on the side of Loch Treig than all you possess,' said Donald. Donald went to live beside Loch Treig.

One day he was on the speckled mountain in the dun corrie. The witch, the hag of the speckled mountain, was living there with her hinds. She would milk the hinds. She had a special hind they called 'the fair hind'. Donald came.

'What do you want?' she asked.

'The fair one,' said Donald.

'You'll not get her,' said she.

'Yes, I shall,' said he.

'No you won't,' said she. 'Leave the fair one,' she said, 'and I'll give you any wish.'

'Will you take the nose(s) off the hinds?' he said.

'Yes,' said the Cailleach.

And it's said that a hind from that day on never got wind of Donald son of Finlay, the hunter.

'Fanaidh,' dh'aontaich Dòmhnall.

Dh'fhuirich e ann dreis. Ach dh'fhàs e sgìth dheth. Thuir e ris a' cheann-chinnidh gun robh e a' falbh.'

'Tha mi glè dhuilich,' thuir an ceann-cinnidh. 'Bheir mi dhut an còrr talamh.'

'B' fheàrr aon sgrìob taobh Loch Trèig na na bheil agad uile,' arsa Dòmhnall. Chaidh Dòmhnall a dh'fhuireach taobh Loch Trèig.

Latha a bha seo, bha e air a' Bheinn Bhric anns a' Choire Odhar. Bha a' bhana-bhuidseach, Cailleach na Beinne Brice, a' fuireach ann cuide ri a h-aighean. Bhiodh i a' bleoghann nan aighean. Bha agh shònraichte aice ris an abradh iad 'an agh bhàn'. Thàinig Dòmhnall.

'Dè tha a dhith ort?' dh'fhaighnich i.

'An tè bhan,' thuir Dòmhnall.

'Chan fhaigh thu i,' ars ise.

'Gheibh,' thuir esan.

'Chan fhaigh,' ars ise. 'Fàg an tè bhàn,' thuir i, 'is bheir mi dhut guidhe sam bith.'

'An toir thu an t-sròn de na h-aighean?' thuir e.

'Bheir,' thuir a' Chailleach.

Agus thathar ag ràdh nach d'fhuair agh riamh on latha sin gaoth air Dòmhnall MacFhionnla', an sealgair.