

# **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 810 (which corresponds to Litir 1,114). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk).

*I was telling you about the poem 'the thrush of Clan Donald' by John MacCodrum. In the first verse the thrush is sad. In the second verse, it is more hopeful. There is an opinion that the change represents the life of the poet. John was sad when his father died. But his father's death allowed the young man to be writing as he wished.*

*A short anecdote explains the matter. John was good at poetry even when he was young. There was a wedding in the area. But John was too young to go there. He wasn't pleased. He went to the wedding anyway, without permission. Then he wrote a caustic poem about the wedding.*

*His father was displeased. He asked John not to write that type of poetry anymore. John promised that he would follow his father's advice. He kept to that while his father was alive. After his death, however, John was free to write as he wished.*

*In the poem Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail, the poet praises the land of Clan Donald in the islands.*

*In the unnarrow [productive] land next to the sea, the beloved, friendly, mild land, the land of*

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun dàn 'Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail' le Iain MacCodruim. Anns a' chiad rann tha an smeòrach brònach. Anns an dàrna rann, tha i nas dòchasaiche. Tha beachd ann gu bheil an t-atharrachadh a' riochdachadh beatha a' bhàird. Bha Iain brònach nuair a chaochail athair. Ach leig bàs athar leis an fhear òg a bhith a' sgrìobhadh mar a thogradh e.

Tha naidheachd bheag a' mìneachadh a' ghnòthaich. Bha Iain math air bàrdachd eadhon nuair a bha e òg. Bha banais anns an sgìre. Ach bha Iain ro òg airson a dhol ann. Cha robh e toilichte. Chaidh e don bhanais co-dhiù, gun chead. An uair sin, sgrìobh e dàn sgaiteach mu dheidhinn na bannse.

Bha athair mì-toilichte. Dh'iarr e air Iain gun a bhith a' sgrìobhadh a leithid de bhàrdachd tuilleadh. Gheall Iain gun leanadh e comhairle athar. Chùm e ri sin fhad 's a bha athair maireann. An dèidh a bhàis, ge-tà, bha Iain saor gus sgrìobhadh mar a thogradh e.

Anns an dàn, Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail, tha am bàrd a' moladh tìr Chlann Dòmhnail anns na h-eileanan:

*'N tìr nach caol ri cois na mara, an tìr ghaolach, chaomhach, channach, An tìr laoghach,*

*calves and lambs and kids, the land of bread, milk and honey.*

*In the version of the poem in the old book 'The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry, the final verse names Sir James. The bard would toast him. And 'the one son of God' would protect the clan chief.*

*The famous poet, Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, met John MacCodrum at his house in Uist. They were thus acquainted with each other. And they were writing poetry at the same time.*

*But was Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetry a model for the other man? Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair wrote a famous poem 'Smeòrach Chlann Raghnaill'. Was that in John MacCodrum's head when he wrote Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail? Or did MacCodrum's poem appear first? We'll look at that question next week.*

*uanach, mheannach, tìr an arain, bhainneach, mhealach.*

Ann an dreach air an dàn anns an t-seann leabhar 'Sar-obair nam Bàrd Gàidhealach' tha an rann mu dheireadh ag ainmeachadh Shir Sheumais. Bhiodh am bàrd ag òl deoch-slàinte dha. Agus bhiodh 'aon mhac Dhè' a' dìon a' chinn-chinnidh.

Thachair am bàrd ainmeil, Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, ri Iain MacCodruim aig an taigh aige ann an Uibhist. Bha iad mar sin eòlach air a chèile. Agus bha iad a' sgrìobhadh bàrdachd aig an aon àm.

Ach an robh a' bhàrdachd aig Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair na modail don fhear eile? Sgrìobh Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair dàn ainmeil air an robh 'Smeòrach Chlann Raghnaill'. An robh sin ann an ceann Iain MhicCodruim nuair a sgrìobh e Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail? No an do nochd an dàn aig MacCodruim an toiseach? Bheir sinn sùil air a' cheist sin an-ath-sheachdain.