

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 832 (which corresponds to Litir 1,136). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

Today I'm going to finish my account of the old song 'Griogal Cridhe'. It's about the death of Griogair Ruadh. Apparently, it's from singers in other places – perhaps on Skye – that the form 'Griogal' of his name came.

His widow, Marion, was bereft about his death. She wrote:

*Although others' wives are at home,
Lying and sleeping peacefully,
I'm at the edge of my bed, Beating
my two hands.*

Marion married another man after Gregor's death. She called him 'the stingy Baron of the river-meadow'. He had a nice house close to a river. They were wealthy enough. But Marion would have preferred to be outdoors with Gregor:

*Much would I prefer to be with
Gregor, in the woods and heather,
Than to be with the stingy Baron of
the river-meadow, In a house of stone
and lime.*

The academics, Martin MacGregor and Virginia Blankenhorn, have examined the song. It has a long history. It was transferred orally for two hundred and fifty years before it appeared in

Cuiridh mi crìoch an-diugh air a' chunntas agam mun t-seann òran 'Griogal Cridhe'. Tha e mu dheidhinn bàs Ghriogair Ruaidh. A rèir choltais, 's ann bho sheinneadairean ann an àiteachan eile – 's dòcha anns an Eilean Sgitheanach – a thàinig an dreach 'Griogal' air ainm.

Bha a bhantrach, Mòr, troimhe-chèile mu a bhàs. Sgrìobh i:

*Ged tha mnathan chàich aig baile, Nan laigh 's nan cadal sèimh,
'S ann bhios mis' aig bruaich mo leapa, A' bualadh mo dhà làimh.*

Phòs Mòr fear eile an dèidh bàs Ghriogair. Ghabh i fhèin 'Baran crìon na dalach' mar ainm air. Bha taigh snog aige faisg air abhainn. Bha airgead gu leòr anns an sporan. Ach b' fheàrr le Mòr a bhith còmhla ri Griogair air a' bhlàr a-muigh:

*'S mòr a b' annsa bhith aig Griogair, Air feadh coille 's fraoich,
Na bhith aig Baran crìon na dalach, An taigh cloich' is aoil.*

Tha na h-eòlaichean, Màrtainn MacGhriogair agus Virginia Blankenhorn, air sùil gheur a thoirt air an òran. Tha eachdraidh mhòr aige. Chaidh e bho bheul gu beul airson dà cheud gu leth bliadhna mus do nochd e ann an clò. Nochd e bhon

print. It has appeared since then in a number of written collections.

At the same time, the song was still being transferred orally in various areas. Frances Tolmie collected a version of it on Skye. The song was also sung in the Western Isles.

‘Griogal Cridhe’ was collected again in the 20th century from a man from the shores of Loch Tay – the area to which it belonged. His version was like one that was in print. It’s not clear if he had learned the song from a book or from oral tradition. But it’s amazing that somebody in the area from which the song hailed was able to sing it four hundred years after it was created.

To finish my account, here is another verse from ‘Griogal Cridhe’. Though there should be blizzards, And a day of appalling weather; Gregor would find me a small crag, Where we’d sleep in shelter.

uair sin ann an grunn chruinneachaidhean sgrìobhte.

Aig an aon àm, bha an t-òran a’ dol fhathast bho bheul gu beul ann an diofar sgìrean. Chruinnich Frances Tolmie dreach dheth anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Bha an t-òran air a sheinn cuideachd anns na h-Eileanan Siar.

Bha ‘Griogal Cridhe’ air a chruinneachadh a-rithist anns an fhicheadamh linn aig fear à taobh Loch Tatha – an sgìre dham buineadh e. Bha an dreach aigesan coltach ri fear a bha ann an clò. Chan eil e soilleir an robh e air an t-òran ionnsachadh bho leabhar no bho bheul-aithris. Ach tha e iongantach gun robh cuideigin anns an sgìre às an robh an t-òran comasach air a sheinn ceithir cheud bliadhna an dèidh gun deach a chruthachadh.

Airson crìoch a chur air mo chunntas, seo rann eile de ‘Griogal Cridhe’.
*Ged bhiodh cur is cathadh ann, Is latha nan seachd sian;
Gheibheadh Griogair dhomhsa creagan,
San caidlimid fo dhìon.*