

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 937 (which corresponds to Litir 1,241). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

<p><i>The winter night is long to me, Long, long, long to me, And all I see is the empty prairie, I can't hear a wave coming on the shore.</i></p> <p><i>Fàili, fàili, fàili, hó ró Fàili, fàili, fàili, hó ró Fàili, fàili, fàili, hó ró It's a long long time since I left Lewis.</i></p> <p><i>Those words are from the song 'S Fhada Leam an Oidhche Gheamhraidh. It was written by the Melbost bard, Murdo MacFarlane. A beautiful, big book came out last year about Murdo's life and legacy. It's called 'Doras gun Chlàimhean'. Clàimhean means a door bolt or latch. The book was compiled by Catriona Murray. She did praiseworthy work.</i></p> <p><i>Murdo belonged to Melbost, a wee village near Stornoway in the area of Point. He was born in 1901.</i></p> <p><i>In 1924, Murdo emigrated to Canada. But, in time, he returned home to Lewis. The bard explains the matter in the song 'S Fhada Leam an Oidhche Gheamhraidh.</i></p>	<p><i>'S fhada leam an oidhche gheamhraidh, 'S fhada, 's fhada, 's fhada leam i, Is chan fhaic ach prèiridh lom mi, Cha chluinn tonn a' tighinn gu tràigh mi.</i></p> <p><i>Fàili, fàili, fàili, hó ró Fàili, fàili, fàili, hó ró Fàili, fàili, fàili, hó ró 'S cian nan cian on dh'fhàg mi Leòdhas.</i></p> <p><i>Tha na faclan sin bhon òran 'S Fhada Leam an Oidhche Gheamhraidh. Chaidh a sgrìobhadh le Bàrd Mhealaboist, Murchadh MacPhàrlain. Thàinig leabhar mòr, brèagha a-mach an-uiridh mu bheatha is dileab Mhurchaidh. 'S e an t-ainm a tha air 'Doras gun Chlàimhean'. Tha clàimhean a' ciallachadh 'door bolt no latch'. Chaidh an leabhar a chur ri chèile le Catriona Mhoireach. Rinn i obair ionmholta.</i></p> <p><i>Bhuineadh Murchadh do Mhealabost, baile beag faisg air Steòrnabhagh ann an sgìre an Rubha. Rugadh e sa bhliadhna naoi ceud deug 's a h-aon (1901).</i></p> <p><i>Ann an naoi ceud deug, fichead 's a ceithir (1924), rinn Murchadh eilthireachd gu ruige Canada. Ach, an ceann greis, thill e dhachaigh a Leòdhas. Tha am bàrd a'</i></p>
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Do you know the phrase at the end of the refrain? 'S cian nan cian on dh'fhàg mi Leòdhas. It's a long long time since I left Lewis. The word cian means 'a long way away' in time and/or in distance. The phrase o chian nan cian means 'since time immemorial'.

Cian carries a flavour of sadness. We see that in the word cianail which means 'sad'. Cianalas means 'homesickness'. Murdo was homesick when he wrote the song. The bard had been too long away from the isle of his birth.

In the first verse, there is this: And I can only see a bare prairie, I can't hear a wave coming to shore. The bard, where he is, can only see the prairie. He is a long way from the sea. Where he is, he can't hear the swash of the waves on a beach.

In the next Litir, we'll look further at this song and at the life of the Melbost bard.

mìneachadh a' ghnòthaich anns an òran 'S Fhada Leam an Oidhche Gheamhraidh.

A bheil sibh eòlach air an abairt aig deireadh na sèist? 'S cian nan cian on dh'fhàg mi Leòdhas. It's a long long time since I left Lewis. Tha am facal cian a' ciallachadh 'fad air falbh', ann an tìm agus/no ann an astar. Tha an abairt o chian nan cian a' ciallachadh 'since time immemorial'.

Tha blas de bhròn air 'cian'. Chì sinn sin anns an fhacal cianail a tha a' ciallachadh 'brònach'. Tha cianalas a' ciallachadh 'homesickness'. Bha an cianalas air Murchadh nuair a sgrìobh e an t-òran. Bha am bàrd air a bhith ro fhada air falbh o eilean a bhreith.

Anns a' chiad rann, tha seo: *Is chan fhaic ach prèiridh lom mi, Cha chluinn tonn a' tighinn gu tràigh mi.* Chan fhaic am bàrd, far a bheil e, ach am prèiridh. Tha e fada bhon mhuir. Far a bheil e, cha chluinn e sluaisreadh nan tonn air tràigh.

Anns an ath Litir, bheir sinn sùil a bharrachd air an òran seo agus air beatha Bàrd Mhealaboist.