

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 939 (which corresponds to Litir 1,243). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

We shall be farewelling Murdo MacFarlane, the Melbost Bard, today. But, before that, we'll look at two of his famous songs. Firstly – the one we had last week – Mhòrag, Leat Shiùbhlainn. It's a love song. In the second last verse, Murdo reminds us that he was living when some [men] from the islands were hunting the whales out of South Georgia.

*I'd willingly leave for [South] Georgia,
And I'd cast a harpoon into the great whales,
And I'd suffer cold and heat and torment,
I wouldn't appeal for any reward,
my love, but your kisses.*

The final line is nice, isn't it? Chan agrainn duais ach, a luaidh, do phògan. I would appeal for no reward, my love, but your kisses. Chan agrainn duais ach, a luaidh, do phògan.

Finally, I want to take a brief look at Murdo MacFarlane's most famous song. That is Cànan nan Gàidheal [the language of the Gaels]. Murdo strongly defends the reputation of Gaelic in his poetry and life. The song starts like this:

Bidh sinn a' fàgail soraidh aig Murchadh MacPhàrlain, Bàrd Mhealaboist, an-diugh. Ach, roimhe sin, bheir sinn sùil air dà òran ainmeil aige. An toiseach – am fear a bha againn an t-seachdain sa chaidh – Mhòrag, Leat Shiùbhlainn. 'S e òran gaoil a tha ann. Anns an dàrna rann mu dheireadh, tha Murchadh a' cur nar cuimhne gun robh e beò nuair a bhiodh feadhainn às na h-eileanan a' sealg nam mucan-mara a-mach à South Georgia:

*Dh'fhalbhainn deònach gu ruige Georgia,
'S shàthainn sleagh anns na mucan mòra,
'S dh'fhuilinginn fuachd agus teas is dòrainn,
Chan agrainn duais ach, a luaidh, do phògan.*

Tha an loidhne mu dheireadh snog, nach eil? Chan agrainn duais ach, a luaidh, do phògan. I would appeal for no reward, my love, but your kisses. Chan agrainn duais ach, a luaidh, do phògan.

Mu dheireadh, tha mi airson sùil bheag a thoirt air an òran as ainmeile aig Murchadh MacPhàrlain. 'S e sin Cànan nan Gàidheal. Bha Murchadh a' dìon cliù na Gàidhlig gu mòr na bhàrdachd agus na bheatha. Tha an t-òran a' tòiseachadh mar seo:

<p><i>It wasn't the snow and frost from the north; It wasn't the sharp, cold, biting wind from the east; It wasn't the rain and storms from the west; But the disease from the south that blighted; The blossoms, foliage, trunk and roots; Of the language of my race and my people.</i></p> <p><i>The bard was making clear that it wasn't the bad weather of the Highlands that caused the decline of Gaelic but 'the disease from the south'. He was meaning the language and culture of the non-Gaels.</i></p> <p><i>Murdo was understanding how the language had gone quiet in the glens of the Highlands, but that it was still spoken by the people of the Western Isles. Here is the refrain:</i></p> <p><i>Come, join us, come with me to the west To hear the language of the Fianna, Come, join us, come with me to the west To hear the language of the Gaels.</i></p> <p><i>It's a powerful song. It reminds us that we should stand up for the rights of our language. My blessing on Murdo MacFarlane.</i></p>	<p><i>Cha b' e sneachda 's an reothadh o thuath, Cha b' e 'n crannadh geur, fuar on ear, Cha b' e 'n t-uisge 's an gailleann on iar, Ach an galar a bhlian on deas Blàth, duilleach is stoc agus freumh, Cànan mo thrèibh is mo shluaigh.</i></p> <p>Bha am bàrd a' dèanamh soilleir nach e droch aimsir na Gàidhealtachd a bu choireach ri crìonadh na Gàidhlig, ach 'an galar on deas'. Bha e a' ciallachadh cànan is cultar nan Gall.</p> <p>Bha Murchadh a' tuigsinn mar a bha an cànan air a dhol sàmhach ann an glinn na Gàidhealtachd, ach gun robh i fhathast aig muinntir nan Eilean Siar. Seo an t-sèist.</p> <p><i>Thig thugainn, thig còmh' rium gu siar Gus an cluinn sinn ann cànan nam Fèinn', Thig thugainn, thig còmh' rium gu siar Gus an cluinn sinn ann cànan nan Gàidheal.</i></p> <p>'S e òran cumhachdach a tha ann. Tha e a' cur nar cuimhne gum bu chòir dhuinn còraichean ar cànan a sheasamh. Mo bheannachd aig Murchadh MacPhàrlain.</p>
--	--