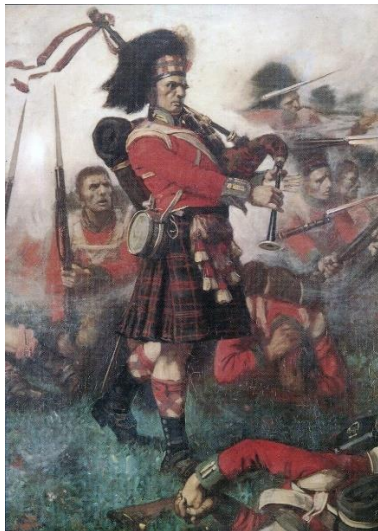


# Gael-Talk

## Learning Gaelic Year 1 Caibideil 10

*Nas fheàrr a' Ghàidhlig bhriste n' a' Bheurla chliste*

A little reminder –  
We really should pay the piper  
(*mòran taing* to those who have!)



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This week we will learn ...

- Sean fhacal na seachdain
- Personal Pronouns
- Preposition: air

- Òran na seachdain -
- Dualchas nan Gàidheil -

### **Note on painting:**

Piper Kenneth MacKay at Waterloo, June 1815--The 1st Battalion 79th Cameron Highlanders. Immediately before the main Battle of Waterloo, after a miserable night in the fields when the regiment was under constant attack by the French infantry and cavalry, the regiment proceeded to the site that would become known as the battlefield of Waterloo. They arrived wet, hungry, and tired after their long march.

As the battle commenced, at a very critical moment, in the face of an attack by the French forces arrayed against them, an astonishing event took place. Piper Kenneth MacKay stepped outside the battle formation known as the "square and played the ancient rallying tune (pibroch) "Cogadh no Sith" (War or Peace) and inspired his countrymen -- his fellow Gaels -- in their fight against the enemy.

By nightfall the Great Army of Napoleon had been destroyed.

*'S coma leam, 's coma leam cogadh no sith;*

*Marbhar 'sa cogadh, no crochar 'san t-sith mi.*

I don't care, I don't care, war or peace

(I'll be) killed in war or hung in peace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dQdrbsYWr0>

## Sean fhacal na seachdain

Clanna nan Gaidheal 'an guailibh a chèile!

The clans of the Gael shoulder to shoulder!



This is one of the best known and most often quoted of all Gaelic sayings. Literally it is 'in each other's shoulders,' i.e., each with his arm round the shoulder of the other, as Highlanders would do in crossing a deep water together.

This reminds us that Gaelic culture was (and is) a *collectivist* rather than an individualistic culture, which makes sense especially in our present context in that if we are to preserve our heritage and our language, it must be *together* that we do so. (One can't speak a language all by oneself!)

There are other *seanfhaclan* (old sayings) that reverberate with the same sentiment:

Cha duine duine 'n a aonar,

A man alone is no man.

Cha'n fhiach duine 'n a aonar.

It is not good that a man should be alone.

Is lag gualainn gun bhrathair, 'an àm do na fir teachd 'an lathair.

Weak is the shoulder without brother.

When men are meeting one another.

Cha nigh na tha dh' uisge 's a' mhuir ar càirdeas.

All the water in the sea won't wash out our kinship.

This last one is intensely Gaelic, in its use of the same word, '*cairdeas*,' for “kinship” as is used for “friendship.”

## **amaladh-cainnte**

(tongue twister)

Distinguish between the 'ch' at the beginnings, middle, and endings of words, and the 'c'

Mo chreach! Tha mi às mo chiall! Chan eil mi a' creidsinn nach eil an cù agam air chall anns a' choille eadar a' chuan 's a' mhachair! Nach eil mi brònach!

My dear! (My goodness! My ruination! Good lord! Alas! -- connotation dependent upon context.) - I am out of my mind! I don't believe that my dog isn't lost in the woods between the sea and the field! (that is, that the dog is lost) Aren't I sad (miserable, doleful, pitiful)!

## Possessive pronouns



**“Tha an teadaidh agamsa!”**

There’s another way of saying that something belongs to us besides the aig + form that we’ve learned.

Tha bean agam, tha taigh agam, – I have a wife, I have a house

tha allt aig ceann an taigh agam – I have a stream at the end of the house

tha bun de shiabonn geal agam – I have a mound of white soap

‘s mo lèine salach grannda – but my shirt is dirty and horrible

De ni mi gun lèine ghlan – What shall I do without a clean shirt

gun lèine gheal, gun lèine ghlan – without a white shirt, without a clean shirt

De ni mi gun lèine ghlan – What shall I do without a clean shirt

‘s mi falbh an taigh a-màireach? – and I leaving home tomorrow?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmiV96Y049o>

And of course, not to be narcissistic about it, we have learned to expressed possession for others besides ourselves, as well.

	<b>English equivalent</b>	<b>Literal translation*</b>
Tha taigh agad	You have a house	Is a house at you
Tha taigh aige	He has a house	Is a house at him
Tha taigh aice	She has a house	Is a house at her
Tha taigh againn	We have a house	Is a house at us
Tha taigh agaibh	You have a house (pl. / form.)	Is a house at you (pl./form)
Tha taigh aca	They have a house	Is a house at them

\*Keep in mind that this 'literal' translation is given to provide you with an idea of the Gaelic syntax in a word-by-word translation. Be careful though: Because of the Gaelic verb-first structure (what linguists call VSO – verb-subject-object – structure), the Gaelic 'literal' translation might be misunderstood in English as a question, as in English, questions begin with the verb. Of course, this is not the case in Gaelic. As we have seen, a question sentence in Gaelic begins with a question marker, such as

	English equivalent	Literal translation
A bheil taigh agad?	Do you have a house?	Is a house at you?
An robh taigh aice?	Did she have a house?	Was a house at her?

Now, with that refresher, we are ready to learn the other way to express possession in Gaelic, which is to use possessive pronouns such as we have in English (but with one crucial difference, which we will also learn).

The possessive pronouns in English are

- My
- Your
- His
- Her
- Our
- Your (plural)
- Their

In Gaelic, the corresponding pronouns are

mo	My	ar	our
do	Your (familiar)	Ur	Your (pl / form)
a	His	An / am	Their (according to bfmp rule*)
a	Her		

\*bowl-of-fluffy-mashed-potatoes rule 😊

There are other uses for these possessive pronouns other than what we have in English, but for now, you can think of them as functioning very much like their English counterparts ... with one important difference!

First, some usage notes:

The first three of these possessive pronouns in the list lenite the object of the possessive, that is, the word that follows, the 'thing' possessed.

So,

- Mo **ch**eann – my head
- Do **sh**ròn – your nose

- A bhean – his wife

It is important to note that the possessive pronoun for “her” – *a* – (which otherwise looks just like that for “his”) does not lenite. In fact, this is how we tell the difference between **his** and **her**:

- a cheann – his head
- a ceann – her head
  
- a mhac – his son
- a mac – her son
  
- a bhean – his wife  
(and these days, you might encounter:)
- a bean – her wife

and to be even-handed about it:

- a duine – her husband
- a dhuine – his husband



### Special usage note:

Another distinction between the **a / her** and **a / his** is that they are treated differently when used in front of a noun that begins with a vowel. In short, the **a / his** disappears in this case, which the **a / her** takes on an h- in front of the noun.

For example,

- Bha athair a’ bruidhinn – **his** father was speaking
- Bha each a’ ruith – his horse was running (bha each aige a’ ruith)

but ...



- Bha a h-athair a' bruidhinn. – **her** father was speaking.

- Tha òrdag goirt. – **His** thumb is sore.

but ...

- Tha a h-òrdag goirt. – **Her** thumb is sore.

In a like fashion, ar – our – changes a following noun/possession by adding an n- to the noun that begins with a vowel:

- **Ar n**-athair – our father
- **Ar n**-òrdagan – our thumbs

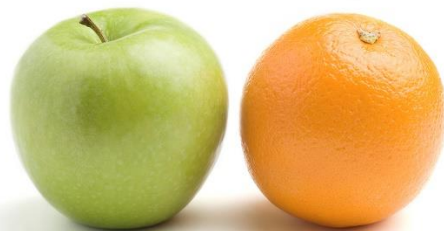
Which leaves us with ...

- **A h**-athair – **her** father
- Athair – **his** father (or could be, a father, depending on context)
- **Ar n**-athair – our father

Or

- **A h**-òrdagan – her thumbs
- òrdagan – his thumbs (or just thumbs, depending on context)
- **Ar n**-òrdagan – our thumbs

*And now for something  
totally different!*



The possessive pronouns in Gaelic are used in a way that distinguishes them from their English counterparts. In short, they are used to identify “possessions” **from which we cannot be separated**. (There are other ways to describe this usage, but this is as good as any to give you a quickie guide.) These include “possessions” (note we’re constantly using the scare-quotes around the word) such as

- Parts of the body (at least we hope you don’t try separating yourself!)
- Relatives (can’t live with ‘em, can’t shoot ‘em)
- Immutable parts of your identity – your race, your heritage, perhaps something like your birthplace, your family

So, we might say,

- Mo mhac – my son
- Ar bràthair – our brother

But not

- \*Mo chù – my dog (even though some people are closer to their pets than they are to their relatives)
- \*Ar taigh

We would say,

- Do cheann – your head
- An casan – their legs

But not

- \*Do chàr – your car (though in California, people do identify their cars almost like a body part!)
- \*A pheann – his pen

We would say,

- A gàirdean – her arm
- A chluas – his ear

But not

- \*A gàrradh – her garden
- \*Ur cupan – your cups (form, plural)

We would say,

- Ar dùthchas – our heritage

But not

- \*ar taigh – our house

\*Remember our symbol for ‘does not occur’ – or, in a word, WRONG!



These are not hard-and-fast rules. No Gaelic Grammar Nazi is going to leap out of the bushes and send you away to Gaelic Concentrate on your Possessive Pronouns Camp!



Which is not to say that we don't have rules of usage in Gaelic, for we do, but as we sometimes joke, these are sometimes more *suggestions* than hard-and-fast, do-or-die mandates.

Because of colloquial usage, or slippage, or just trying to express an idea or relationship, you might find somebody saying something like ...

- Mo chù – (We've felt that way about dogs we've owned) – my dog
- Mo chàr – (definitely, a California thing) – my car

In the same way, very often somebody might say

- An duine agam – my husband (the husband/man at me)
- A' bhean agam – my wife (the woman at me)

instead of what you might expect ...

- Mo dhuine – my husband
- A bhean – his wife

Don't be too disturbed by these variations when you encounter them (though do try to follow the guidelines).

## Eacarsaichean

Now you try it!

### Eacarsaich a h-aon (#1)



(As a kind of two-for-one deal, you will learn some new vocabulary here, too)

Practice forming the possessive with both the **aig +** form (agam, agad, etc) and the new possessive pronoun formation (**mo, do**, etc), making the distinction between which form to use according to the guidelines above.

The form of the word with the definite article (“the”) is given. If you use the possessive pronoun, you have to shift from the “the” to the possessive pronoun.

For example, the first item a' bhean would be

- A' bhean aige – his wife (the wife at him)
- A bhean – his wife (using the possessive pronoun a / his)

But if you wanted to say *your wife*, it would be

- A' bhean agad – your wife (the wife at you)
- Do bhean – your wife (using the possessive pronoun do / your)

Or *her wife* would be

- A' bhean aice – her wife (the wife at her)
- A bean – her wife (using the possessive pronoun a / her)

Note: the difference between

- A' bhean – the wife
- A bhean – his wife

The definite article – “the” – takes the apostrophe

- a'

whereas, the possessive pronoun does **not**

- a

Word	English	Possessive	Gaelic
1. A' bhean	Wife	His	A bhean
2. A' ghàirdean	Arm	Your	Do ghàirdean
3. An càr	Car	Our	An càr againn
4. An coimpiutar	Computer	Your (formal)	An coimpiutar agaibh
5. Am fòn-làimh	Cell phone	My	Am fòn-làimh agam
6. Am bràthair	Brother	Her	A bràthair
7. A' chupa	Cup	His	A' chupa aige
8. A' chroit	Croft / Farm	Their	A' chroit aca
9. Am plèan	Plane	His	Am plèan aige
10. A' bheachd	Idea	My	Mo bheachd
11. An cas	Foot	His	A chas
12. A' cheann	Head	Her	A ceann
13. An t-sròn	Nose	Your (familiar)	Do shròn / ur sròn
14. An leabhar	Book	Her	An leabhar aice
15. An clàr-ama	Schedule	Our	An càr-ama againn
16. An t-òrd	Hammer	His	
17. A' chraobh	Tree	Their	
18. Am flùr	Flower	Her	
19. An eun	Bird	His	
20. An cat	Cat	Her	
21. na speuclanan	Glasses	My	
22. a' phiuthar	Sister	Their	
23. a' mhàthair	Mother	His	
24. an t-athair	Father	Her	
25. an seanair	Grandfather	Your (plural)}	
26. an t-seanmhair	Grandmother	Our	
27. am brògan	Shoe	His	
28. an leinne	Shirt	Her	
29. an t-airgead	Money	your	
30. an t-òran	Song	My	
31. an t-aodann	Face	Her	

32. an dùthchas	Heritage	our	
33. an teaghlach	Family	their	
34. an taigh	house	His	
35. an duine	Husband	Her	
36. an cù	Dog	My	
37. am peann	Pen	Your	
38. an leinne	Shirt	Her	
39. a' bhriogais	Pants/trousers	His	
40. a' bhraicist	Breakfast	Our	
41. an caraid	Friend	My	
42. am bòrd	Table	Their	
43. a' chathair	Chair	His	
44. an rùm	Room	Our	
45. an seòmar	Room	Their	
46. an leabaidh	Bed	Her	
47. am preas	Cupboard	Their	
48. an leòmhan	Lion	His	
49. an ròin	Seal	Their	
50. an +làraidh	Truck	His	

## Ecarsaich a-dhà (#2)

Now, we'll incorporate what we've just learned into a little review practice:

Translate the following sentences into Gaelic using the verbal noun construction (the -ing form), and of course, apply the *appropriate* possessive.

The first one has been done for you as an example:

1. I fell and broke my arm

**Bha mi a' tuiteam agus bha mi a' bristeadh mo ghàirdean.**

Now, you try it:

2. They built their new town hall.

**Bha iad a' togail an talla-bhaile ùr aca.**

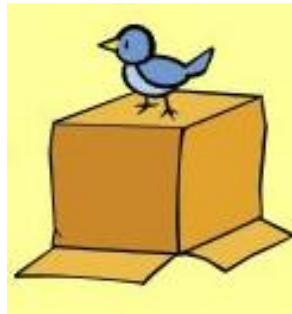
3. I saw his new film.
4. We read her new book.
5. My family sold their house.
6. The town wants its new park.
7. Mary ran her race.
8. Seumas lives in his own house.
9. My friend bought a new table at the store yesterday.
10. Alasdair and Mary flew to New York to see their friends.
11. Isabel ate her cold dinner in the kitchen.
12. I helped Susan with her work.
13. The dog ran away from our home today.

14. The ball hit Iain in his eye.
15. John ate his breakfast on the train.
16. The bird returned to its nest.
17. Seonaidh spoke to my father.
18. They made my dinner last night.
19. His mother liked the flowers.
20. They heard my new song.
21. I like to eat dinner with my family.
22. I like to walk with my dog.
23. I like to watch my television.
24. She like to swim with her brother.
25. He likes to swim with his sister.

## A' rumastaireachd ann am bogsa nan roimhearan Rummaging around the preposition box

**Air:** on, upon

(sometimes 😊)



**First a note:** *air*, like many other prepositions (though not all) takes the dative case, or perhaps more precisely, *imposes* the dative case upon the noun that follows. Second, sometimes, it might make more sense to think of the “dative” case as the **prepositional** case, as that is where it makes its appearance in Gaelic – after a **preposition**.

In some of the examples given, *air* does not translate literally as ‘on, upon’ as it would be used in English. This is illustrated in the phrase *cha d’fhuair mi càil air* -- I got nothing *for* it – where the underlying meaning is of a price / value being **on** something (rather than “for” it).

Sometimes it is used as it is in English:

- Bha a’ bhiodag na laighe **air** an làr -- the dagger was lying on the floor
- Tha ceann math **air** a’ bhalach -- the boy has a good head (a good head is on the boy)
- Bha e **air** an rathad dhachaigh - he was upon a road home
- Bha an cat **air** a’ bhòrd. The cat was on the table.

It can even work in the figurative sense:

- Bha e a’ sgrìobhadh leabhar **air** a’ chuspair sin – He was writing a book on that subject.

However, sometimes, English would use a different preposition to communicate the idea:

- boinne **air** bhoinne -- drop by drop



- beag **air** bheag = little by little
- thoir buille **air** a' bhuille – retaliate, give blow on blow / blow *for* blow
- chaochail e **air** a' bhliadhna seo -- he died this year (“on” this year)
- **air** an ceann bha Calum Dòmhnallach –at (on) their head was Calum MacDonald
- cheannaich mi seo **air** sia sgillinn -- I bought this for six pence (remember, price is on something)
- thoir (ainm) **air** (cuideigin) give (someone) (a name) / call -- give a name on somebody: Tha iad a' toirt Mairead **oirre** -- They call her Margaret / They give (the name) Margaret on her.
  - Dè an t-ainm a th' oirbh? What name is 'on' you?

Note that sometimes whereas in English we might use the preposition “in” ... in Gaelic, we would use “air” – “on” –

- **air** Ghalldachd is **air** a' Ghaidhealtachd – in (on) the Lowlands and in (on) the Highlands
- **air** an t-saoghal -- in the world
- fad **air** falbh – far in the distance / far away
- a' bualadh **air** a' mhuir - diving into the sea
- **air** an dòigh seo – in (on) this way, thus, so
- ar n-athair a tha **air** nèamh -- our father who *art* in (on) heaven
- tha toll **air** -- there's a hole in (on) it (tha toll ann air an lèine agam ... there's a hole in my shirt)

### **air** is often associated with illness or trouble

- Dè tha ceàrr **ort**? what's wrong with (on) you?
- Dè tha ceàrr **air** Màiri? What is wrong with Mary?
- Tha an cnatan **orm** -- I have a cold (the cold is on me)
- Tha an cnatan **air** Seumas. – Seumas has a cold (a cold is on Seumas)
- Tha eagal **orm** ro leòmhannan -- I'm afraid of lions (fear is **on** me ...)
- Tha eagal **air** Mìcheal ro leòmhannan – Michael is afraid of lions (fear is on Michael before\* lions).
- tha an t-acras air -- he is hungry (hunger is on him)
- Tha an t-acras air Billy-Bob – Billy-Bob is hungry
- Tha an t-acras orm! I'm hungry!

\*note: you're afraid "before" something – *ro*.

### Phrasal verbs that use **air**

A phrasal verb is a verb construction of more than one word that means something different than the root verb. English has many of these. For example, consider the English verb *put* – the meaning differs sometimes considerably when it is combined with a preposition:

- I won't **put up** with this!
- He's **putting on** that he's so smart.
- She's **putting on** a sweater.
- We're **putting through** your request.
- She's really **put out**.
- She's **putting up** her hair.
- I **put aside** my work.
- They felt **put upon** by the visitors who wouldn't leave.

Anyway, you get the point.

Here some convenient phrasal verbs with *air* :

- Cuir **air** – put on –
  - Bha e a' **cur** na brògan aige **air**. – (He was putting on his shoes.)
- Cuir **air chois** – put in order, organize –
  - Tha mi a' cur an rùm agam **air chois**. (I am putting my room in order.)
- Thoir **air** – make (somebody) do something:
  - Bha mo mhàthair a' toirt orm a bhith ag ithe brocail, ach cha bu toil leam e idir idir idir! (My mother made me eat broccoli, but I didn't like it at all!)
- Cum **air** – continue, keep on:
  - Cum **ort**! (Continue / go on / keep on).
  - Tha e a' cumail **air leis** an gearan aige. (He's continuing with his complaining.)
- **Air falbh** – away, distant:
  - Bha iad a' dol **air falbh**. (They are going away.)

At this point, we should make note of the **prepositional pronouns for air**:

Or <b>m</b> – on me	Air + <b>mi</b>	Oir <b>nn</b> – on us	Air + <b>sinn</b>
Or <b>t</b> – on you (familiar, singular)	Air + <b>thu</b>	Oir <b>bh</b> – on you (pl / fml)	Air + <b>sibh</b>
Air – on him*	<b>Air</b>	Orra – on them	Air + iad
Oirre – on her	Air + <b>i</b>		

\*It's pretty common that the prepositional pronoun for the singular masculine closely aligns with the root preposition.

### **Eacarsaichean**

Translate into Gaelic:

1. She was putting a red coat on.

**Bha i a' cur còta dearg oirre. !!**

2. The story "White Fang" is about a dog.
3. The little boy is hungry.
4. Màiri is not afraid of spiders. (damhain--allaidh)
5. They did the work little by little.
6. Seumas is going away.
7. I have a bad cold.
8. We are continuing on the road.
9. We are doing the work in this way.
10. I like to live in the Highlands.

## Òran na Seachdain:

*Tha mi sgìth*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLmp76A0Hxc>

*Tha mi Sgìth* is supposedly a fairy song. The song is also known by another title, "Buain na Rainich" which means "Cutting The Bracken." (Bracken is a kind of fern, which is eaten in some parts of the world – even though it can be toxic. However, in the Gaelic context, it's the roots that are probably used for thatching cottages or boiled for coloring textiles red. Incidentally, although cattle and most sheep avoid the plant, Soay sheep – native to the Hebrides – readily feed on its roots.)

There are many variations of the story relating to this song, but one version says that the song was sung by a fairy who caught sight of a beautiful girl when he was cutting bracken, and they fell in love. When her family learned of the love, they stopped the girl from seeing the fairy and they locked her away. His song mourns the situation. The tune of this song is very old and is often used as a lullaby.

Chorus:

Tha mi sgìth 's mi leam fhìn,  
Buain na rainich, buain na rainich,  
Tha mi sgìth 's mi leam fhìn,  
Buain na rainich daonnan

'S tric a bha mi fhìn 's mo leannan,  
Anns a' ghleannan cheòthar,  
'G èisteachd còisir bhinn an doire,  
Seinn sa choille dhòmhail

O nam faicinn thu a' tighinn,  
Ruithinn dhol nad chòdhail,  
Ach mur tig thu 'n seo gam shireadh,  
Ciamar thilleas dòchas?

Cùl an tomain, bràigh an tomain,  
Cùl an tomain bhòidheach,  
Cùl an tomain, bràigh an tomain,  
H-uile là nam ònar

Ann's an t-sithean, o, gur sgìth mi,  
'S tric mo chridhe ga leònadh,  
Nuair bhios càch a' seinn nan luinneag,  
Cha dèan mis' ach crònan.

Chorus:

I am tired and I am alone,  
Cutting the bracken, cutting the bracken,  
I am tired and I am alone,  
Forever cutting the bracken

Often, my love and I,  
Were in the misty glens,  
Listening to the sweet choir of the grove,  
Singing in the corpulent forest

If I saw you coming,  
I would run to meet you,  
But if you don't come here to search for me,  
How can hope return?

Behind the hill, the top of the hill,  
Behind the lovely hill,  
Behind the hill, the top of the hill,  
Every day, alone

In the fairy hill, oh, I will be tired,  
And often my heart is wounded,  
When others sing their songs,  
I can do nothing but groan.

## *Ceàrn an Dualchais*

### *Culture corner*

*“Tha duine a’ dol ri dhualchas seachd uairean san latha”*

A person does with their heritage seven times a day. /

In other words, You can't escape your heritage

The song “Tha mi sgìth a’ buain na rainich” actually relates to the cultural item of the week. You’ll have noted that the song contains a reference to a *fairy lover* – a fairy who has been “wounded” by being abandoned by his (or her?) human lover.



In Gaelic folklore

Many tales in Gaelic folklore about a supernatural lover of a human

- Remember, the 'fairies' in Gaelic folklore were not the miniature beings depicted in modern Disney-type stories ...



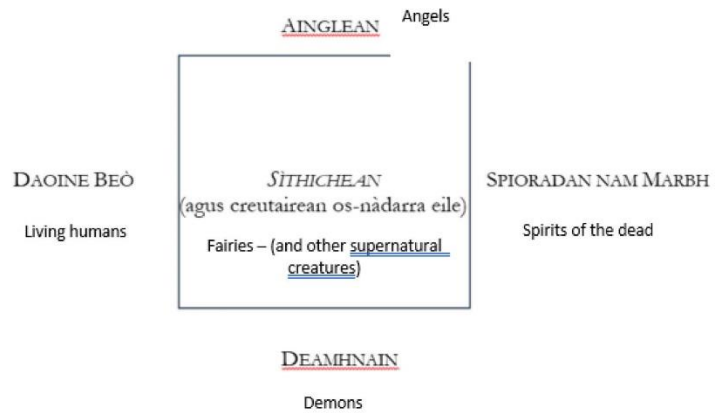
but were a human-sized *other race* of beings

- (think: the recent filmed version of *The Lord of the Rings*)
- In these stories, the fairy – *an síthiche* – appears in human form and is for all extent and purposes indistinguishable from a human
- Very often, it's only revealed or realized after the fact that the lover was in fact a *síthiche*





# The Gaelic Cosmology – a rich 'otherworld'



## Who were na sìthichean? (the fairyfolk)?

- Sometimes conflated with spirits (though they were not 'spirits of the dead')
- one explanation = *vanished race* theory
  - Sìdh = cnoc (hill/ mound)
  - Daoine-sìdh = people of the mounds
- Many legends of the fairies living in the "fairy-mounds" (actually exist as small hills in Gaelic countryside)
- Many stories about humans gaining entrance to the fairy mounds and encountering these mythological beings
- Legend: after the Gaels came to Ireland (and then to Scotland) the people who lived there before retreated to live in the fairy mounds





## legend might be a kind of mythologizing of history

- the Gaelic tribes that conquered Ireland were an iron-age people
- The people they displaced – the Tuatha de Danann (The Tribe of the Goddess Danu) -- had only bronze-age technology
- Accordingly, fairies were afraid of iron ... it is their kryptonite, their silver-bullet, which belief is contained in the folk traditions:
  - Nailing an **iron** horseshoe to a door repelled fairies (and evil in general)
  - Surrounding a cemetery with an **iron** fence was thought to contain the souls of the dead.
  - Burying an **iron** knife under the entrance to one's home was alleged to keep away ill-intentioned fairies.



## “Tam Lin”

- Not Gaelic, *per se*, but Scottish – possibly with Gaelic roots
- A young man is kidnapped by the queen of the fairies
- As a “fairy” he falls in love with a human – Janet – who becomes pregnant by him
- He can only be rescued by Janet on Samhain (Halloween) - once every 7 years -- when the fairies ride out into the world
- She must pull him down from his horse and hold him tightly even though he changes into all sorts of terrible beasts – a lion, a serpent, a burning coal
- Finally, he reverts to human form



## The maighdeann- mara – the selkie -- cycle

- The selkie is a different sort of supernatural being (i.e., not a fairy)
- Usually a *seal-maiden* (though occasionally a male)
- “kidnapped” by a human,
- Eventually escapes back to nature



“A Sister’s Curse” /  
“The Two Sisters and  
the Curse”



- Two sisters live alone in a small cottage
- From time to time, the older sister must go away, and then, the fairy lover appears to the sister who remains
- The lover warns her not to tell anyone – especially her sister – about him
- However, she lets the secret slip, and he is never seen again
- The abandoned sister goes out of her mind





## How to “explain” these stories?

- One way is socio-cultural –
- Many Gaelic households were isolated which allowed
  - “Courting / wooing [to be] conducted via nighttime visits – ... At night ... the unlocked doors yield those lovers but too easy access to their favourites. ...”<sup>1</sup>
- This practice was so usual that there was a phrase to describe the nighttime visitors:
  - “caithris na h-oidhche” – friend of the nights
- The rural nature of the Gaelic communities facilitated such a rendezvous to be outside in nature and outside the supervision of other family members
- And the coming and going of visitors who weren’t always known or didn’t want to be revealed

## “Real-life” circumstances are mythologized

- These affairs contained
  - certain inconvenient moral issues that society does not want to face and does not possess the vocabulary to describe ...
- Nor the cultural inclination to confront. There was no “Scarlet Letter” syndrome in traditional Gaelic culture –
- The Gaelic community was close-knit and cohesive – there was not the tradition of condemning and ostracizing members who were necessary for the community’s continuance –
- for the most part, “illegitimate” children (and their mothers) were not stigmatized)
- Which is not to say that people couldn’t see what was behind the stories
  - “in the Gaelic original the meaning of these stories would have been clear enough to those hearers equipped to understand them, for [the stories] operate on different levels.”





Of course, the other explanation is ...

*Na sithichean* are real!

# **Rud beag a bharrachd**

## **A little something extra**

An eight-hour !!! Youtube.com video to learn Gaelic while you sleep! Or, just to play in the background!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DD4sr\\_kWWFw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DD4sr_kWWFw)