

'The Dirk Dance of the Kings of Man': Genuine Tradition or Cultural Invention?

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1. Introduction

1.1. 'The Dirk Dance of the Kings of Man', or simply 'The Dirk Dance' or 'The Sword Dance', as it has now come to be known, has held a certain mystique among Manx dancers in the Isle of Man since its "discovery" some ninety years ago from a fisherman of Port Mooar, Kirk Maughold (see Miller below). Also equally as much scepticism about its authenticity has languished equally long among its detractors (see §7.1 below). The story goes that it was a ritual dance allegedly performed originally within the royal circles of the former Kings of Man of the Scandinavian period (10th-13th centuries),¹ later continued into modern times within the Kermode family of Maughold. This dance manifested itself in the early decades of the twentieth century through the efforts and enthusiasm of Manx folkdance / folksong collector and revivalist the late Mona Douglas (1898-1987), Ballaragh, Lonan.² In order to set the Dirk Dance in context comments made by Mona Douglas on the dance and its performance along with details of informants and performers, from the earliest in 1928 to the latest in 1983, lie in the hand of Mona Douglas herself and are supplied in the Appendix for reference.³ First in recent times to initiate discussion on this dance and its provenance is Stephen Miller who (2004: 99) introduces his presentation on the Dirk Dance as follows:

What began as a "Manx sword dance (solo)" in 1928 (and merited only one line of description) became the "Dirk Dance" in 1937, the "Dirk Dance of the Kings of Man" in 1949, "The Kirk Maughold Sword Dance of the Kings" in 1957, and finally, pulling everything together, "The Kirk Maughold Sword Dance of the Kings of Man" in 1973 (Miller 2004: 99).

1.2. It was apparently this ritualistic dance that inspired Mona Douglas (1981: 5) to collect further:

Another great stimulous - really the one which started my serious collecting and noting - was being taken by my own Irish grandfather to see Jackie Kermode of Port Mooar, Maughold, perform the famous "Sword Dance of the Kings of Mann",⁴ of which he was the last traditional dancer (Douglas 1981: 5).

1.3. Stephen Miller (2004: 99) then adds:

In 1973 it is still her grandfather, a change from that of 1958, when it was Mrs. Callow of Cardle Veg [Maughold], who "having first prepared me by telling me the old traditions about it." In 1949 Mona Douglas wrote, "I noted this dance some years ago from a Maughold fisherman named Kermode, and the air to which it is performed from the singing of his wife, who always acted as his accompanist". Kermode's son, who would have carried on the tradition, was unable to do so due to an accident (Miller 2004: 99).

1 For an overview of the Scandinavian period in Man see Kinvig (1975: 54-85); For further details see Sellar (.2000: 187-218).

2 For details of Mona Douglas's life and times, see Bazin (2004), for her writings, see Miller (2004: i-xiii Introduction). For an assesemnt of Douglas's collection and 'restoring to use' of Manx traditional dances see Carswell (2004: 15-28), for her songs see Broderick (2008: 193-247).

3 see also Stephen Miller (2004: 99-109).

4 The spelling 'Mann', with double final *n*, is antiquarian in form; normally written with a single *n*, viz. 'Man'.

2. The informant

2.1. Mona Douglas tells us (1937: 113) that her informant for the Dirk Dance was a certain John (Jack) Kermode of Maughold. When I visited Mona Douglas on Saturday 22 September 1979 I brought a list of twenty-five Manx dances with me which I had prepared with the help of Manx dance expert Bob Carswell. With regard to the Dirk Dance, about which there was much speculation at the time as to its authenticity, I asked Mona Douglas specifically when did she first visit Jack Kermode. She said 1909-10, and on two or three occasions thereafter. Mona Douglas, who was born on 18 September 1898 (Bazin 1998: 129), would therefore have been a child of 11 or 12 years on her first visit. To set matters in context background details of John Kermode and his family circumstances from various Manx census records are herewith supplied

2.2. John Kermode appears in the following Isle of Man census registers for Kirk Maughold:

1851: John Kermode, 10, 1841, scholar, of Maughold, f. William Kermode, 39, 1812, "Proprietor Farming 105 Acres, Employs 5 Lab.", m. Eleanor, 36, 1815, of Maughold, living in Ballajora, Maughold (HO107 2524 9 39). Nothing more is heard of John until the 1881 census, probably because he was away at the fishing.

1881: John Kermode, 38, 1843, married, fisherman, of Maughold (vessels *White Star*, moored at Douglas) (RG11 5605 53 2).

1891: John J. Kermode, 49, 1842, fisherman, of Maughold, living with his wife Margaret A., 48, 1843, of Ramsey, at Port Moar (*sic*), Maughold, along with their children John T., 17, 1874, fisherman, of Ramsey, Edward, 13, 1878, scholar, of Ramsey, George, 7, 1884, of Ramsey, and Julia J., 7, 1884, granddaughter, also of Ramsey (RG12 4684 F? 42).

1901: John Thomas Kermode (thus entered), 57, 1844, fisherman, of Maughold, living at Port Moar with his wife Margaret A., 55, 1846, and their son Edward, 23, 1878, fishmonger, all of Maughold (RG13 5302 9 54). Only John is entered as "Both", i.e. a speaker of both Manx and English, his wife and son Edward as English only.

1911: John S. Kermode (thus entered), 69, 1842, mar. 48 yrs. [1863], fisherman, living with his wife Margret (*sic*), 69, 1843, mar. 48 yrs., along with their son George, 28, 1883, "Son Working at Fishing", at Port Moar, Maughold. The birth-places of John and Margret are entered as "Isle of Man" only, while that of son George is entered as "Ramsey, Isle of Man". As with the 1901 census only John is entered as a Manx speaker, his wife Margret and son George, English only (UK Census Online).

John James Kermode died, aged 76, and was buried in Maughold on 25 April 1918 (Lawson Index of Burials, IMFHS online, Manx BMD).

3. Noting the Dirk Dance

3.1. As can be seen from her statements listed in the Appendix, Mona Douglas is somewhat variable in the detail she gives of this first visit to Kermode and of Kermode's interpretation of the history of the dance. My own view is that the most reliable description of that first visit is that made in 1973 where Mona Douglas tells us what happened without allowing herself time to insert speculative detail. This version is particularly telling in its description of the performance that unfolded:

From very early days I had heard quite a lot about what was called "The Kirk Maughold sword dance of the Kings of Mann", but I had never actually seen it performed until "Pat" [MD's Irish grandfather] gave me the opportunity of collecting it. He used to make business calls on a number of people in Maughold, one of whom was Jacky Kermode, the dancer from whom I learnt it. One day "Pat" took me with him to Kermode's cottage on Port Mooar beach and asked the old fisherman if he would "Let the child (me) see his sword dance." Without much demur Kermode took off his sea-boots, reached down a short, thin old sword from hooks above the chiollagh [open fire-place], and made ready to start. His wife poured out and brought to him a pewter beaker of whisky,⁵ which he drained and handed back to her, and then she crouched down beside the turf fire and began to sing. He stood perfectly still through the first phase of the air, holding the sword upright before his face, and then he began to dance, at first slowly, then gradually quickening and moving with more vigour as the sword flashed about his body and was slashed over his head, and on to the thrilling final leap and salute, for which he knelt in the open doorway as though saluting the sun - as he said the young princes of the Manx royal line used to do when they took arms.

That was my first and greatest experience of true traditional art which was an evocation of sheer beauty, and it will be remembered as long as I live: the low-beamed white-walled kitchen where the fireglow from the chiollagh mingled with sunlight coming in through the open door, the old woman crouched by the hearth crooning the noble air in a vivid and continuous rhythm, and the tall old dancer, vigorous and graceful despite his years, so utterly absorbed in the dance of which he carried on the tradition from far mists of antiquity (Douglas 1973: 39-40).

3.2. Note that in the last paragraph there is no mention of a text, only that the wife was "crooning the noble air in a vivid continuous rhythm".

3.3. With regard to the origins of the dance itself Mona Douglas first treats of it in 1937 as follows (Douglas 1937: 113):

I noted the dance some years ago from a Maughold fisherman named Kermode and the air from the singing of his wife, who always used to sing it as the accompaniment to his dancing. Kermode told me that he had learnt it from his father, who said it was "the dance the old Kings of Mann was using to do before now, when they would come to be King"; and that he believed none but members of his own family had danced it in the old days, and not all of them, but that one to whom it was taught had to have "the build and making of a dancer." Other fishermen of the district, though able to dance the usual reels and stepdances, never attempted the Dirk Dance [...] (Douglas 1937: 113, also 1949: 54).

3.4. Kermode presents his own alleged view of the history and tradition of the Dirk Dance, as noted down by Mona Douglas (1957a: 32) as follows:

It used to be said that "Only one man in the Island can dance the Kirk Maughold Sword Dance" - and that was probably true, at any rate by the time I came to note it down, for Jack Kermode, its last traditional performer, was the last man of his family able to dance. He had a son, and would normally, I suppose, have taught him the dance as his father had taught it to him, but owing to an accident the boy was a cripple. Kermode claimed that his family had been the only performers of the dance for generations back, but until now there had always been one or two Kermode boys who knew it, and he was very sad about the break in the tradition, but gave his whole hearted approval when I proposed to teach it to some other Manx boy. He accepted the transition from his own family philosophically, saying: "Well, first it was done at the Kings, and then they gave it to the Kermodes, to be King's Dancers, and now it must go to some person else - but see ever that the one you teach it to has the build and making of a dancer, for that was the day it was taught from the beginning, not just to every boy of the house. The Sword Dance of the Kings is not for every person to do" (Douglas 1957a: 32).

⁵ As already noted by Bob Carswell (2004: 19), the two accoutrements of the dance, the sword and the pewter beaker, are no longer extant, which, along with the dance notes allegedly belonging to Mona Douglas's great-grandfather, Philip Quayle of Glentramman, Lezayre, and perhaps MD's own copies of them, appear to have been destroyed when on loan to Cecil Sharp House during the Second World War (Carswell 2004: 20).

3.5. With regard to the dance movements themselves, evidently learned from Kermode, Mona Douglas (1937: 114) has this to say:

Dancer carries dirk round in a circle at arms' length forward, point upward, then lays it down, salutes it, and dances round it. Then he picks it up and does side-steps and leaps, kicking dirk at head level. Then lays it down again, dances round it, and salutes four times. Then he lifts it and makes slashes over his head and about his body, passing dirk between his legs. Finally, he carries it around again, and finishes kneeling to the dirk (Douglas 1937: 114).⁶

3.6. With respect to the sword itself Mona Douglas (1957a: 31) supplies the following details:

In the popular mind there is a deeply-rooted feeling that this dance has something to do with the bearing of the Sword of State before the representative of the Ruler of Mann in the annual Tynwald Ceremony. The weapon used by Kermode in the dance was 21 inches long. It was narrow-bladed, very thin and flexible, and sharpened on both edges. The hilt was of silver, or a metal closely resembling it, the cross-pieces were curved back from the blade, and at the conjunction of blade and cross-piece on each side was a small raised boss, one of these bearing the Three Legs device and the other what seemed to be a representation of the sun with rays; but both carvings were very much worn down (Douglas 1957a: 31).

3.7. Kermode makes conditions for performing the Dirk Dance (Douglas 1957a: 33):

When I learnt it from Kermode, he would never allow me to go right through it, saying it would be "unlucky mighty"; and he made me promise that if I taught it to any boys I would only show them a bit at a time. Apparently, it was only the complete dance which formed the ritual - to practise sections of it was innocuous. He also said the dance must never be performed to any other tune; and as a matter of fact this would hardly be possible, so closely are movements and music welded together (Douglas 1957a: 33).

3.8. However, in an undated notebook containing material collected by her concerning Manx folklore, dances, tunes, etc., (cf. Miller 2016:1), Mona Douglas candidly notes the following:

Sword Dance [MD's underlining]. Danced by J. Kermode, Port Mooar: tune sung by Mrs Kermode, & noted. Have not found any corresponding air in Gill or Clague. K. said it was "the dance the old Kings of Mann" (*sic*) were using to do before now", & he had learnt it from his father. He thought there would be a number of men in the Island that could do it, but it had never been a well-known dance as far as he knew. I got the impression that there was something ceremonial about it, but could not find out by questioning that it was concerned with any special season, or custom, or that it was anything but just a dance executed for its own sake. The sword that he used, which he called simply a skynn [Mx. 'knife'], was quite a small thing, very short & light, & it looked fairly old. He said it had been in his family a long time (Douglas n.d. quoted in Miller 2016: 1).

Douglas then goes into considerable detail as to how the dance was performed, step for step (*ibid.* 1-2).

4. The tune

4.1. In the 1937 exposé of the Dirk Dance Mona Douglas (1937: 113) in fact mentions the tune, adding that she had heard variants of it elsewhere (Douglas 1957a: 33):

⁶ For a fuller description of the dance movements see Mona Douglas's "Undated notebook" (Miller 2016: 1-2), as well as *Rinkaghyn Vamin* n.d. [1983]: 37-38.

It is curious that the air to which our Dirk Dance is done was previously noted in Skye *as a lullaby* [MD's italics] (Douglas 1937: 113).

However, I have also heard that air played, without the dance, by a traditional fiddler in the west of the island, and when Arthur Darley,⁷ the Irish fiddler and folk song collector, visited the island some years ago he told me he had found an air of somewhat similar character in Galway - in the guise of a love-song (Douglas 1957a: 33).

4.2. A note at the bottom of p. 113 (above) indicates that the "lullaby" can be found in the Frances Tolmie Collection printed in the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* IV/16 (1911): 160. On looking up the tune it turns out to accompany the song *Òran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge* ('the lullaby of the water-horse'), sung by Mary Ross, Killmaluag, Isle of Skye, 1897, one of three songs concerning the *each-uisge*, either as a lullaby or as a lament. The tune is provided here for comparison with that of the Dirk Dance, which reveals that in both cases we have in reality the same tune. The text to the Skye song runs as follows (trans. GB):

<i>O-hó! bà a leinibh, hó!</i>	(O-hó! sleep, child, hó
<i>O-hó bà a leinibh, ha!</i>	O-hó! sleep, child, ha!
<i>Ba, a leinibh, hó-bha-hó!</i>	Sleep, child, hó-bha-hó!
<i>Hó-bà a leinibh hao-i ha!</i>	Sleep, child, hao-i ha!
Refrain:	
<i>Hi hó! hó-bha-hó!</i>	Hi hó! hó-bha-hó
<i>Hi hó! hao-i ha!</i>	Hi hó! hao-i ha!
<i>S'luath dha d'chois tha, hó-bha-hó!</i>	Swift of foot are you, hó-bha-hó
<i>'S mór 'nad each thu, hao-i ha!</i>	and much are you of horse, hao-i ha!
<i>O-hó! m'fheudaìl am mac, hó!</i>	O-hó, my darling son, hó
<i>O-hó, m'eachan sgèimheach, ha!</i>	O-hó, my comely wee horse, há
<i>'S fhad o'n bhail' thu, hó-bha-hó!</i>	far from home are you, hó-bha-hó
<i>Nìtear d'iarraidh, hao-i ha!</i>	you will be looked for, hao-i ha!").

4.3. I personally heard this song discussed and sung by Ailean Dòmhnallach (Allan Macdonald) at a lecture he was giving at the *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig* Conference (21-24 June 2016) in Sabhal Mór Ostaig, Isle of Skye, on Tuesday evening 21 June 2016. I recognised the tune and spoke to him the following day about it and its use for a Manx ritual dance.

4.4. The reference to the *each-uisge* in this and two succeeding Scottish Gaelic songs from Skye in the Frances Tolmie Collection (JFSS IV/16 (1911): 160-162) is discussed in detail by Ann G. Gilchrist,⁸ one of the four editors of and commentators on the Tolmie Collection (JFSS IV/16 (1911): 163):

These three "Water-Kelpie" tunes all appear to be Norse in origin. Rhythmically, they are closely akin to two tunes attached to the folk-ballad of "Agnes and the Mermaid" (Agnete og Havmanden) in *Danmarks Melodier* [below], and even in the probably modernised form in which those tunes are there given, there are at several points close correspondences in phrase and melody. [...] We may have here, in these Water-Kelpie songs, a very interesting Norse survival, and it seems possible to trace the particular form of water-spirit known as a "kelpie" to an origin in that huge uncouth creature of arctic waters, the walrus (literally whale-

7 Arthur Warren Darley (1873-1929), Irish fiddle player, composer, music teacher and examiner, as well as a traditional music archivist. Co-composer with Patrick Joseph McCall of the "Wexford Ballads", viz. *The Boys of Wexford, Boolavogue & Kelly the Boy from Killaane* (Arthur Warren Darley, wikipedia, accessed 09.08.2016).

8 Anne Geddes Gilchrist was also the editor of and commentator on the Clague Collection of Manx songs / tunes, as well as some collected by Mona Douglas herself, in JFSS VII/28-30 (1924-26) (qv). For further on A. G. Gilchrist see Miller (2013, 2015).

horse), *rosmer* (i.e. sea-horse) in Danish - a sea beast of whom strange reports would, as we may suppose, be brought home by voyaging Norsemen. The Scandinavian mermen may also, I think, be supposed, on the naturalistic side, to be descended from the walrus genus, just as the Hebridean and north of Scotland mermen and mermaids claim kinship with the "sea-folk" (who also seem to be mixed up with human wearers of seal clothing - Lapps or Finns). It is significant that one of the mermen of the "*Rosmer Hafmand*" (*hafmand* = merman), and he carries the casket containing the heroine of the story in his mouth - as the most convenient way - and the hero on his back, to the surface of the sea. The walrus, it may be interpolated, when full grown, attains the length of 18 or 20 feet [c.6-7m)] [...].

The legendary pony of the Faroe Isles, which draws whoever touches it down into the sea and drowns him, and possibly also the magic horse of the malevolent "water man" (in another Danish ballad), which is formed out of "clear water" (a misunderstanding of "water-horse"?) seem to be other forms assumed by the spirit-horse of the sea, after its original embodiment, the walrus, (if here rightly guessed) had become a mere symbol of oil and ivory to its hardy hunters. But both the Water-Kelpie and Agnete's husband are gentler and more lovable forms of *Nyker*⁹ than most of the Danish mermen - AGG (JFSS IV/16: 163).

Tales of the sea-man ("bodach mara") are still told in Sutherland - GH (JFSS IV/16 (1911): 163).

The thesis here, according to Gilchrist, is that the three aforementioned Scottish Gaelic songs from Skye show Scandinavian origins, both in their references to the *each-uisge* 'water-horse' and to the tunes used for them.

5. The Manx text

5.1. The Manx text to the Dirk Dance runs as follows (trans. GB):

Purt y beayll

<i>O hi-o y varriaght O</i>	[O hi-o the victory O
<i>O hi-o, my skian gial</i> (x2)	O hi-o, my shiney dirk
<i>She mish [ta] cur ooashley, o[o]ashley diu</i>	It is I (who) worships you
<i>O hi-o, my skian gial</i> (x2)	O hi-o, my shiney dirk
<i>Hi-o, y varriaght O</i>	Hi-o the victory O
<i>Hi-o, my skian gial</i>	Hi-o, my shiney dirk
<i>Reeaghyn dy Vannin O</i>	kings of Man O
<i>O hi-o, my skian gial</i>	O hi-o, my shiney dirk
<i>O hi-o y varriaght O</i>	O hi-o the victory O
<i>O hi-o my skian gial</i>	O hi-o, my shiney dirk
<i>Reeaghyn dy Vannin O</i>	kings of Man O
<i>O hi-o, o hi o ho.</i>	O hi-o, o ho o ho']

5.2. Mona Douglas classes the Manx text as "port-y-beayll" ('mouth music', 'diddling', 'lilting'). So far as is known, she first uses this term in 1958 when referring to a photograph of fisherman John Kelly of Baldrine taken from an Isle of Man Tourist Board film of 1936 "dancing to the *port-y-beayll* [MD's italics] of a traditional singer, Robert Kewley." (Douglas 1958: 157).¹⁰ However, the

⁹ In a Manx context it might be mentioned here that the Lonan place-name "Nikkesen's Pool" (or just plain "Nikkesen") (on the Glen Roy river) refers to the Old Norse sea-goblin *nykr*, OE *nicor* 'the nick', a fabulous water-goblin, mostly appearing in the shape of a grey water-horse (Mx. *cabbyl-ushley*, ScG. *each-uisge*), emerging from lakes to be recognised by its inverted hoofs (cf. PNIM/IV: 340).

¹⁰ Referred to also by Bob Carswell (2004: 20). Unfortunately neither the film nor the photograph taken from it has to date been traced. The latter may yet appear, as Carswell hopes (2004: 20), among MD's effects in the thirty or so boxes containing her *Nachlass* housed with Manx National Heritage.

concept of "port-y-beayll" is otherwise unknown in the Manx language and literature, as well as in the Manx song tradition, so far as is known. Mouth music is, however, known in Scotland where it is termed *port-a-beul* ('mouth-music'; Dwelly 732) and in Ireland as *port-béil* ('lilt'; Ó Dónaill 965), or simply *port* 'a tune or air, sung or played' (Dinneen 854). The term "port-y-beayll" here and elsewhere almost certainly derives from Mona Douglas herself, culling it seemingly from the Irish / Scottish Gaelic song / dance tradition. There is no known term in Manx Gaelic for *port-a-beul*.

5.3. Comments on the text:

5.3.1. The text used for the dance does not seem to be original. There is no evidence that Kermode's wife sung any text at all, as she was not a Manx speaker (§2.2), but that she apparently only provided the tune accompaniment - i.e. liltng.

5.3.2. The vocables bear close similarity to those in the Skye song *Òran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge*.

5.3.3. The earliest attestation of (part of) the Manx text, if genuine, appears in 1949¹¹ (Douglas 1949: 56) in the sentence "while the old woman crouching by the hearth, sang swaying and beating her foot to the throb of the air: *O-hi-io y varrey ho! O-hi-io, my skian giall* [my italics - GB]" (Douglas 1949: 56). Here the text is used merely to identify the tune.

5.3.4. The form *O hi-io y varrey ho!* (Douglas 1949: 56) contains the word *varrey*, not *varriaght* (cf. §5.1. above), and, if genuine, may therefore perhaps echo ScG. *bodach mara* 'sea-man' (cf. §4.4).

5.3.5. In the third line the text should read: *She mish ta cur ooashley, ooashley diu*, with the 3sg. unmarked present relative of the substantive verb *ta*, which is necessary here in this cleft sentence. In any case *ta* can easily be fitted into the rhythm of the line.

5.3.6. The form *Reeaghyn dy Vannin* 'Kings of Man', with the use of the preposition *dy* 'of' (+ lenition), is modelled on English usage and is a common feature of the Late Manx period c.1860 and of the Manx Revival until the Second World War.¹² Normally we would expect *Reeaghyn Vannin*, as in the Biblical *Reeaghyn Yudah* 'Kings of Judah' 1 Samuel 27: 6 *et passim*, *Reeaghyn Israel* 'Kings of Israel' 2 Chronicles 35: 18, etc.

5.4. The idiosyncratic Manx formulations above bear similarity to those found in Mona Douglas's songs (cf. Broderick 2008). In such circumstances it is my view that the so-called "port-y-beayll" text to the Dirk Dance is not original, but rather created afterwards by Mona Douglas, modelled, it seems, on the ScG. song *Òran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge*.

6. Social and ritual dances

6.1. As we are told that the Dirk Dance was a ritual dance, it might perhaps be pertinent at this point to outline the differences between social and ritual dances. Robert (Bob) Carswell, an acknowledged authority on Manx dances and the Manx dance tradition, tells us (Carswell 2004: 16):

Social dances, by their nature, are easier to do, and their setting does not generally require special steps, being danced in circumstances where steps do not matter, and enjoyment, and perhaps drink, are part of the social scene. This suggests that ritual dances with distinctive steps and movements may have a better chance of transmission and survival because they are considered to be special in some way, even if later perpetrators do it simply to keep up a custom - *Mannagh vow cliaghtey cliaghtey, nee cliaghtey coe* ['if custom does not beget custom, custom will weep' - Manx proverb] (Carswell 2004: 16).

11 No text appears in the first known published version of the tune and dance in 1936 (cf. Douglas 1936: 6-7).

12 Mona Douglas, as we have seen, was particularly active in promoting Manx dances during this phase of the Revival.

6.2. Carswell (*ibid.*) adds here that Morris dancing has survived probably because it is distinctive and ritualistic. He then continues (Carswell 2004b: 21):

Looking at the dances, accepting that dancers may have taken the trouble to learn more complicated steps for ritual dances, the overall conclusion is that very few of them [i.e. Manx dances] are genuinely social dances. Whilst Mona makes play of the fact that they were learned first by the Albert Road School team, the point is that they had to be learned. They are generally so complicated as to require special training (Carswell 2004: 21).

6.3. Carswell (*ibid.*) notes that of the twenty-nine dances recorded by Mona Douglas, nine can be regarded as ritual dances, including the Dirk Dance. Of the twenty remaining dances, three contain figures which are repeated, possibly with progression to dance with another partner or with another set of people, while a further four may be repeated *ad infinitum*, making seven social dances in all. Ritual dances have to be learned and, as Carswell tells us (*ibid.*), require special training. For this reason a ritual dance of this sort is likely to survive and come down through the generations, more so than social dances.

7. Authenticity of the Dirk Dance

7.1. Because of the import and circumstances of the dance its authenticity and credibility have seemingly been challenged more or less from the moment it came to public notice. Mona Douglas was only 11-12 years old when she was first taken to see Jack Kermode, fisherman, of Port Mooar, Maughold. In this regard, the late Constance Radcliffe, Ramsey, co-author along with her husband, the late William Radcliffe also of Ramsey, of *A History of Kirk Maughold* (Radcliffe 1979) and who knew of the Kermodes of Port Mooar (but do not mention them in their book), told me when I visited them c. 1980 that Jack Kermode was well known as a local character of acknowledged powers of persuasion and exaggeration who could captivate people with his exotic dancing, and they took the view that children, especially, could be easily taken in by such performances.¹³ In this respect, Mona Douglas herself (1958: 158) admits that she could be so captivated through her "childish eyes", as she put it, in regarding Mrs. Callow of Cardle Veg, Maughold, as "an ancient Druidess translated into my own day."

7.2. Nevertheless, it was not until 1937 that Mona Douglas herself expressed some doubt as to the authenticity of the dance, since she could find no official record of it either associated with Tynwald or at all:

Of the dance itself, however, I can find no trace in the records of Tynwald, so that if it ever was actually performed as part of the Ceremony, it must have been discontinued at an early date. I think it possible, however, that the performance of the dance as ritual may have passed long ago from the King to some officer of State who would pass on the hereditary privilege to his descendants, and that later the actual dance may have passed out of State usage but remained as a tradition in a certain family or families. This is pure surmise, of course, and I do not know of any similar traditional "privilege" dance (Douglas 1937: 113-114).

7.3. However, Bob Carswell (2004: 19) takes the view that there may in fact be a grain of truth in

¹³ Along with many other people in Man at the time the Radcliffes were particularly sceptical about the authenticity of the Dirk Dance, regarding it as pure invention on Mona Douglas's part primarily to serve the interests of the Manx cultural revival of the 1920s and 1930s, etc.

the validity of the dance for the following reasons:

Mona appears definitely to have witnessed something, and that was corroborated by Jackie Kermod's daughter, who saw him dance it, something that comes anecdotally from the Bradford family of Ramsey. Paul Bradford, the great-grandson of Jackie Kermod, was encouraged by Mona to learn the dance, which he did from Mr. Jimmy Druggan¹⁴ of Ramsey, who went up to Ballaragh [where Mona Douglas lived] to learn it from Mona. Mona herself, speaking in 1979, says that Jackie Kermod came to Ramsey to teach the dance to Philip Leighton Stowell [1897-1978]¹⁵ (Bazin 1998: 98) but here she is evidently mistaken as Jackie Kermod died in 1918, whilst Mona's collaboration with Leighton Stowell did not come until about 1928 (though there is perhaps some suggestion that this may have come a little earlier in about 1924-25) (Bazin 1998: 97, Carswell 2004: 19).

7.4. In this latter context Stephen Miller (2004: 100) notes that among Leighton Stowell's papers there is a note¹⁶ that Mona Douglas also recorded a version of the dance in 1925 from an Eleanor Garrett of Ramsey:

Miss Bella Garrett of Ramsey told me that she had seen the dance performed when she was a girl, but its ritual was different. The young Celt or Norseman was dedicating the dirk to the service of a god of whom he knew nothing but whom by his agility and skill he wished to honour [...] (Miller 2004: 100).

7.5. Miller (*ibid.*) then adds:

This is the first [known] reference to the 'Dirk Dance' by anyone but Mona Douglas herself. Although here we are dealing not with Kings, but with the Old Gods (Miller 2004: 100).

8. Conclusion

8.1. The Dirk Dance, with its ritual and symbolism, has come to epitomise the special position it holds within the Manx dance tradition and the spell it exercises over many of its adherents, deriving, as it is maintained, from the period of the Kings of Man who ruled in Man and the Hebrides during the Scandinavian era. At the same time, and probably because of its alleged origins, its detractors challenge its authenticity as an exercise in "make-believe" to serve the interests of Manx cultural aspirations (§7.1). The main architect of all this, as we have seen, is the Manx traditional song and dance collector and revivalist, the late Ms. Mona Douglas. The promotion of the Dirk Dance owes much to her charisma and dynamism in teaching Manx dances to generations of Manx children over the years, c.1928 - c.1976.

8.2. The informant for the dance, we are told, was Jack Kermod (1842-1918), a fisherman of Port Mooar, Kirk Maughold, who danced it for Mona Douglas when she was taken to see him 1909/10 as a child of 11-12 years (§2.1). He tells her of the dance and its history, how it came down to the Kermodes of Port Mooar¹⁷ (§3.4) and that it is to be danced to only one tune (§3.7).

8.3. Jack Kermod, the dancer, is given a pewter beaker of whisky by his wife to drink to get him in

14 Jimmy Druggan and his wife Shirley ran ballroom dancing evenings in Ramsey during the 1960s and after - GB.

15 Dance teacher at Albert Road School, Ramsey.

16 Miller expresses gratitude to Wendy Thirkettle, Deputy Archivist, Manx National Heritage Library, for drawing this note to his attention following a general enquiry of his about the papers of Leighton-Stowell (Email: 04.12.2004).

17 Earlier of Ballajora (cf. §2.2).

the mood. He begins to dance slowly, then works up into a quasi-frenzy towards the end. His wife crouches by the turf-fire and croons the melody as he dances (§3.1).

8.4. Mona Douglas tells us that the tune to which the Dirk Dance is danced was previously noted in Skye as a lullaby (§4.1). In fact, it is the same tune as that used for the Scottish Gaelic Skye lullaby *Òran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge*, as found in the Frances Tolmie Collection (JFSS IV/16 (1911): 160). Mona Douglas also tells us (*ibid.*) that she had also heard the tune played by a traditional fiddler "in the west of the island" (i.e. of Man) and also from the Irish traditional fiddler Arthur Darley (1873-1929) when he visited Man "some years ago" (i.e. pre-1929; possibly in 1921 when the Celtic Congress was held in Man?).¹⁸

8.5. The commentator on the lullaby and the two following "water-kelpie" songs, Anne G. Gilchrist, demonstrates that these songs and their melodies are probably Scandinavian in origin (§4.4). That is to say, that the melody associated with the Dirk Dance is probably also of the same provenance.¹⁹ In this regard Mona Douglas herself (1941: 6) had previously mooted that the Dirk Dance may be a variant of a sword-dance of the sort found in Scotland which had survived in Man, and that it is of possible Scandinavian origin:

[...] and there is nothing else in these islands just like our 'Dirk Dance' with its ancient and virile symbolism - though both in that and in the 'White Boys Dance' some of the steps danced over and around the dirk or the crossed swords on the ground are slightly reminiscent of the Scottish Sword Dance. To my own mind, however, the chief influence shown in these two dances is Scandinavian [...] (Douglas 1941: 6).

8.6. The association of the dance with the Kings of Man may seem far-fetched, given that there is no known record of it at all associated with that period or even with Tynwald, the Manx parliament, as from that period onwards (§3.1). On the other hand, it is not impossible that both dance and tune could have remained alive in Manx tradition over a prolonged period without any written attestation. In this regard Dr. Virginia Blankenhorn, ethnomusicologist in the School of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, draws my attention to the case of the Scottish Gaelic song *Griogal Cridhe* which was known to have been composed in or shortly after 1570, but which did not surface in print until 1813 in the Turner Collection (cf. Broderick 2016: 199). It had clearly circulated in oral tradition all of that time, and apparently continued to do so down to the twentieth century (cf. Blankenhorn 2014). In the case of the Dirk Dance such a survival is theoretically possible, though we would need to postulate a period of several hundred years of non-attestation before it eventually surfaced in the early twentieth century.

8.7. Whether the tune came into Man early or later on is not known. However, we must also bear in mind that Mona Douglas, in her capacity as secretary of the Manx branch of the Celtic Congress (1917-1952), would visit the other Celtic areas, including Ireland and Scotland, where she would come into contact with the song and dance traditions of those countries. She said as much to me when we were talking about all this at her home in Ballaragh in 1975. She told me then that songs and tunes can go two ways: she intimated to me that on one visit to the Isle of Skye she sang the Manx traditional lullaby *Ushag Veg Ruy ny Moaney Dhoo* 'little red bird of the black turf-ground'.²⁰ Her Skye listeners were apparently so enthralled with the song (probably because it was easy to understand) that a Gaelic version came out some years later. In fact, it was translated from the orig-

18 The Dirk Dance tune must have been equated with the Skye lullaby (*Òran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge*) before Darley came to Man, suggesting that Mona Douglas had heard it in Skye beforehand, perhaps some time during the 1920s, or even on a date between her becoming secretary of the Manx branch of the Celtic Congress (1917) and the 1921 Celtic Congress in Man?

19 For other tunes of alleged Scandinavian origin in Manx tradition see JFSS VII 28-30 (1924-26).

20 For the full text see Moore (1896: 42-43).

inal Manx text by Annie Mackenzie (Anna Sheumais) an aunt to Margaret Macleod of the Scottish Gaelic traditional music group *Na h-Òganaich*.²¹ I well remember Anne Lorne Gillies singing it one time on the Scottish TV programme '*S e ur Beatha* ('you're welcome') in 1975.²² Mona Douglas could well have returned to Man with the melody to *Òran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge* and applied it to the Dirk Dance? We have no sound-recording of the tune crooned by Kermode's wife, only Mona Douglas's testimony that she in fact had crooned a tune to the dance, and that this tune was similar to "a Skye lullaby". In this regard, in a series of comments on Manx traditional songs and dance-tunes made by Anne Gilchrist in 1931, quoted in Miller 2013: 10-13,²³ Gilchrist has the following to say about the tune used for the Dirk Dance:

I have found the Sword (Dirk?) Dance tune, almost note for note, as the "Lullaby of the Water Horse" in the Tolmie collection which I helped to edit for the F[olk] S[ong] Journal in 1910-11. It would be of considerable interest to know whether Miss Douglas obtained this tune from a traditional source, and from a person who had learnt it traditionally. The Gaelic song about the water horse is obviously old, and Miss Tolmie took it down from her maid, Mary Ross, a native of Skye, in 1887. It is very curious to find it practically note for note [Gilchrist's underlining] as a sword dance tune in the Isle of Man, without words or, apparently, a title, as one would not expect it to have been introduced into the Island from Skye at any recent period. Perhaps Miss Douglas can throw some light upon it (Gilchrist "typescript comments" 19.02. 1931, quoted in Miller 2013: 12).

As can be seen, Gilchrist casts serious doubt on the authenticity of this tune being traditional in Man. There is to date no known reply to this letter from Mona Douglas, or from her papers.

8.8. As noted earlier, the dance has its detractors who are sceptical of its authenticity and believe it was created to serve the interests of Manx cultural aspirations. Foremost in this scepticism, as noted above (§7.1), were authors William and Constance Radcliffe of Ramsey who regarded Jack Kermode as a "charlatan" (their actual term) who, they believe, misled the 11-12-year-old child Mona Douglas in the matter of the Dirk Dance when she first came to visit him 1909/10. According to the Radcliffes, he was apparently known for dancing while holding a whisky bottle in one hand and brandishing a sword in the other. Along with others, the Radcliffes believed that the Dirk Dance was a product of Mona Douglas's imagination designed to serve the Manx cultural revival. In support of this belief is the evidence that Mona Douglas also passed off songs she had composed in Manx for the revival as genuine material (cf. Broderick 2008).

8.9. The testimony of Jack Kermode's daughter (§6.3) combined with that of Eleanor Garrett, Ramsey (§6.4), could perhaps be seen as supporting the case for a genuine tradition of the Dirk Dance in Man. But, in the first case, the evidence may be regarded at best as circumstantial, relayed "anecdotally", as we are told (Carswell 2004: 19), by the Bradford family of Ramsey. In the second case, we only have Mona Douglas's word for this testimony (albeit transmitted by Leighton Stowell). In addition, as we have seen, Mona Douglas herself (Douglas 1937: 113-114) had doubts about the authenticity of the dance (§7.2. above). These "doubts" must now be seen in the light of Gilchrist's

21 I am grateful to the Scottish Gaelic singer Anne Lorne Gillies, Glasgow, for this information (pc. 07.08.2017).

22 For the Scottish Gaelic version cf. CSD01 Jenna Cumming *Tàladh*, also Màiri MacInnes *Uiseag Bheag Dhearg*, <http://www.celticlyricscorner.net/macinnes/uiseag.htm>. For an Irish version, cf. Gráinne Holland *Uiseag Bheag Ruaidh* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoMHBaz47NM>.

23 cf. "Remarks and comments by Miss Gilchrist", a typescript comment forwarded with letter from Douglas Kennedy to Mona Douglas, 19.02.1931 (MNHL MS. 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 15; Miller 2013: 10-13). Miller (2013: 13-14) notes: "This must relate to Mona Douglas, 'Manx Folk Dances: their Notation and Revival,' *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* iii.2 (1937): 110--16. Evidently, the article was published much later after the correspondence that it entailed; for those letters, see Douglas Kennedy to Mona Douglas, 19 February 1931, W. D. Croft to Mona Douglas, 23 February [1931], 22 March [1931]."

comments of 1931 (§8.7 above).

8.10. Nevertheless, she saw the potential of such a dance in terms of the Revival and, as Bob Carswell (2004: 23) points out, rather than indulge in an exercise in scientific collection of a dead or moribund piece of folklore, Mona Douglas sought to use the Dirk Dance (and other dances for that matter) in an ongoing process to establish a new Manx dance tradition based on the foundations of the old (recorded just in time), and to encourage dance groups to consolidate and stabilise the new tradition and carry it on into the future.

8.11. On the evidence at our disposal I am inclined to agree with Bob Carswell (2004: 19) that "Mona appears definitely to have witnessed something". But if so, she has seemingly embellished that "something" with a history going back to the Kings of Man, supplying a *port-a-beul* text seemingly modelled on the Skye lullaby *Óran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge*, providing ritualistic dance movements, etc., in order to serve the interests of the Manx cultural revival. In this regard, as with her songs, Mona Douglas felt it was important to show that the Isle of Man had something to offer culturally at a time when English traditional songs and dances were in the ascendant, as witnessed by the English Folk Dance Society Easter Vacation School held in Douglas in 1929. In so doing, Mona Douglas, in the Dirk Dance, has provided a symbolism and background that is very striking from a nationalistic perspective, encouraging a willingness to believe, and a ritual dance regarded by many today as one of the most spectacular and charismatic²⁴ of such dances in the Manx cultural repertoire, even though patently possessing no traditional pedigree.

9. Abbreviations

AGG - Anne G. Gilchrist.	L - left (hand / foot).
BMD - Births, Marriages, Deaths.	m. - mother.
EFDS - English Folk Dance Society.	MD - Mona Douglas.
f. - father.	Mx. - Manx.
GB - George Broderick.	OE - Old English.
GH - George Henderson (editor / commentator, Tolmie Coll. JFSS IV/16 (1911)).	PNIM - Place-Names of the Isle of Man (Broderick 1994- 2005).
IMFHS - Isle of Man Family History Society.	R - right (hand / foot).
JFSS - Journal of the Folk-Song Society.	ScG. - Scottish Gaelic.

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²⁴ So spectacular and charismatic is the dance that its performance by Manx schoolboy Billy Cain to an arrangement of the tune played by the London Symphony Orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall, London, in January 1930 was apparently rapturously received by the audience (cf. Douglas 1981: 4-5).

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APPENDIX

Descriptions of the Dirk Dance by Mona Douglas

1928

There is also a Manx sword dance (solo) which is not quite like either the English or the Scottish sword dances though nearer to the latter. The dance starts with the sword on the ground before him, picks it up and makes certain passes with it during the dance, and finishes in a kneeling position (Douglas 1928: 20).

1937

It is curious that the air to which our Dirk Dance is done was previously noted in Skye as a *lullaby*!²⁵ [MD's italics]. How this virile air could ever have been used effectively for that purpose is beyond me; but from the earliest times almost down to the present day communication between Mann and the Hebrides has been continuous and fairly close, so that the actual fact of the air being known in both places presents no difficulty. I am inclined to think that both this air and the dance itself may be Scandinavian in origin; perhaps introduced into Mann during the period of the Kingdom of Mann and the Isles,²⁶ and possibly later into Skye by some Manx fisherman who has not passed on the dance but only the air. I noted the dance some years ago from a Maughold fisherman named [John] Kermode and the air from the singing of his wife, who always used to sing it as an accompaniment to his dancing. Kermode told me that he had learnt it from his father, who said it was "the dance the old Kings of Mann was using to do before now, when they would come to be King"; and that he believed none but members of his own family had danced it in the old days, and not all of them, but that the one to whom it was taught had to have "the build and making of a dancer." Other fishermen of the district, though able to dance the usual reels and step-dances, never attempted the Dirk Dance. In this connection, it is curious that although Mr. [Philip Leigh-ton-]Stowell and I taught this dance to a number of boys in the Ramsey school,²⁷ there is still only one generally recognised exponent of it, young Billy Cain,²⁸ who has himself very much the build and manner of old Jack Kermode. Coincidence, certainly, but it fits very aptly into traditional feeling here. There is another interesting point about the

25 Footnote: "By Frances Tolmie, see *Folk Song Journal*, vol. iv, ii. 160 (No. 16 - 1911)."

26 For details of the history of the Kingdom of the Isles, see Broderick (1979), McDonald (1997, 2007), Sellar (2000). For details of contact between Man and Skye, see Broderick (1979: f.42v, 43r.), Sellar (2000: 193), McDonald (2007: 92-95).

27 i.e. Albert Road Primary School, Ramsey, now demolished.

28 For further information here see Appendix s.a. 1981 below.

dance. Its obvious aspect is that of having originated in sword worship, but I am inclined to think that long ago it formed part of Manx State ritual. The oral tradition of its performance by the Kings of Mann at their accession points to this, and it is perhaps worth noting that all through our recorded history the Manx Sword of State has borne an important part in the Tynwald [Fair Day] Ceremony which is the centre of our nation and government, and it still does so. In the early fourteenth century a state instruction to a newly arrived "foreign" Lord of Mann gave minute and particular details as to the bearing of the Sword of State and the position and attitude of the Bearer during the Tynwald Ceremony, while no other article of regalia or officer's position was even mentioned. And the attitude given for the Sword Bearer (still observed at Tynwald today) is the same as the kneeling attitude with which the Dirk Dance ends.²⁹ Of the dance itself, however, I can find no trace in the records of Tynwald, so that if it ever was actually performed as part of the Ceremony, it must have been discontinued at an early date. I think it possible, however, that the performance of the dance as ritual may have passed long ago from the King to some officer of State who would pass on the hereditary privilege to his descendants, and that later the actual dance may have passed out of State usage but remained as a tradition in a certain family or families. This is pure surmise, of course, and I do not know of any similar traditional "privilege" dance (Douglas 1937: 113-114).

Dancer carries dirk round in a circle at arms' length forward, point upward, then lays it down, salutes it, and dances round it. Then he picks it up and does side-steps and leaps, kicking dirk at head level. Then lays it down again, dances round it, and salutes four times. Then he lifts it and makes slashes over his head and about his body, passing dirk between his legs. Finally, he carries it around again, and finishes kneeling to the dirk (Douglas 1937: 114).

1941

[...] and there is nothing else in these islands just like or 'Dirk Dance' with its ancient and virile symbolism - though both in that and in the 'White Boys Dance' some of the steps danced over and around the dirk or the crossed swords on the ground are slightly reminiscent of the Scottish Sword Dance. To my own mind, however, the chief influence shown in these two dances is Scandinavian [...] (Douglas 1941: 6).

1949

But probably the most unusual of all our ritual dances is the 'Dirk Dance of the Kings of Man' which you will see performed at the close of this paper by its most famous modern exponent, Billy Cain (Douglas 1949: 54).

I noted the dance some years ago from a Maughold fisherman named [John] Kermode and the air from the singing of his wife, who always used to sing it as an accompaniment to his dancing. Kermode told me that he had learnt it from his father, who said it was "the dance the old Kings of Mann was using to do before now, when they would come to be King"; and that he believed none but members of his own family had danced it in the old days, and not all of them, but that the one to whom it was taught had to have "the build and making of a dancer." Other fishermen of the district, though able to dance the usual reels and step-dances, never attempted the 'Dirk Dance'. In this connection, it is rather interesting to note that when the dance was noted and revived, although Mr. Leighton Stowell and I taught this dance to a number of boys in the Ramsey school, which was the cradle of our Manx folk dance revival, and though since then it has been taught to quite a number of boys and men in various parts of the Island, there has always been only one man recognised as its typical modern interpreter Billy Cain, who was chosen unanimously to interpret it years ago in Ramsey by both his schoolmates and Mr. Stowell and myself, and also by the traditional

²⁹ This is evidently not the case. The earliest known protocol regarding the role and composition of Tynwald lies in a detailed declaration of 1417, when Sir John Stanley II, the second of the Stanley family to be King and Lord of Man, visited the island to deal with a serious uprising against his governor (Gill 1883: 3). Meeting at Castle Rushen, Castletown, on Tuesday, 18 January 1417, Tynwald declared a number of customary or traditional laws, the first of which concerned the form of Tynwald itself (Gill 1883: 3-4). Here the only reference to the Manx Sword of State is quite terse: "And upon the Hill of Tynwald [the King] sitt in a Chaire, covered with a Royall Cloath and Cushions, and your Visage into the East, and your Sword before you. holden with the Point upward [...]" (Gill 1883: 3). For details regarding the Manx Sword of State, see Blair (2003).

The Dirk Dance of the Kings of Man: genuine tradition or cultural invention?

dancer Jack Kermode, who saw Billy perform it in the school without his knowledge:³⁰ coincidence, certainly, but in this instance it fits very aptly into traditional feeling! (Douglas 1949: 54-55).

There is another interesting point about the dance. Its obvious aspect is that of having originated in sword worship, but also it probably once formed part of Manx State ritual. The oral tradition of its performance by the Kings of Mann at their accession points to this, and it is perhaps worth noting that all through our recorded history the Manx Sword of State has borne an important part in the Tynwald Ceremony which is the centre of our nation and government, and it still does so. In the early fourteenth century a state instruction to a newly arrived "foreign" Lord of Mann gave minute and particular details as to the bearing of the Sword of State and the position and attitude of the Bearer during th Tynwald Ceremony, while no other article of regalia or officer's position was even mentioned. And the attitude given for the Sword Bearer (still observed at Tynwald today) is the same as the kneeling attitude with which the Dirk Dance ends, and which is known traditionally as the 'Salute of the Sword' and given as an honour to the most important person before whom the dance is performed (Douglas 1949: 55).

[...]. One of these dance-singers, the wife of the dancer, sang our 'Dirk Dance' when I used to see it as a child and when I first noted it down [1909/10]; and although since then I have heard it played many times on various instruments, and once in the fine orchestral setting of Mr. Arnold Foster,³¹ it has never since given me the same thrill of sheer beauty that I felt in those old days in the fisherman's cottage by the singing tides, when a tall old man danced and leapt and knelt to his shining blade between the sunlight from the opne door and the red glow of the turf fire, while the old woman crouching by the hearth, sang swaying and beating her foot to the throb of the air: 'O-hi-io y varrey ho! O-hi-io, my skian giall' (Douglas 1949: 56).

1957a

It is a curious fact that our most distinctive Manx ritual dance has become generally known in its modern presentation, by a name which was never used for it traditionally in the Island. The original name has been lost and the present title is quite modern.

In my childhood, long before I ever saw this dance, I used to hear it spoken of as something very mysterious and difficult. I do not think I ever heard the word 'sacred' used, but certainly the way it was always mentioned with a respectful lowering of the voice suggested something sacramental; most of the Northside parishes of the Island knew it by reputation as "The Kirk Maughold Sword Dance of the Kings", and when I was actually taken to see Jack Kermode perform it I had the feeling of an important and exciting event. There was ceremony on his approach to the performance. In his thatched cottage on the sea beach the weapon hung in the place of honour over the big *chiollagh* [MD's italics], or open hearth-fire, and he removed his shoes and his cap as his wife took it down and handed it to him. Then she poured and handed to him a beaker of whisky, which he took in his left hand to drink, while holding the sword, point upright, in his right hand. Then he handed the beaker back to her, she set it down on the table, and crouched down beside the fire to sing, the *port-y-beayll* [mouth music], while he danced.

In the popular mind there is a deeply-rooted feeling that this dance has something to do with the bearing of the Sword of State before the representative of the Ruler of Mann in the annual Tynwald Ceremony. The weapon used by Kermode in the dance was 21 inches long. It was narrow-bladed, very thin and flexible, and sharpened on both edges. The hilt was of silver, or a metal closely resembling it, the cross-pieces were curved back from the blade, and at the conjunction of blade and cross-piece on each side was a small raised boss, one of these bearing the Three Legs device and the other what seemed to be a representation of the sun with rays; but both carvings were very much worn down.

It used to be said that "Only one man in the Island can dance the Kirk Maughold Sword Dance" - and that was probably true, at any rate by the time I came to note it down, for Jack Kermode, its last traditional performer, was the last man of his family able to dance. He had a son, and would normally, I suppose, have taught him the dance as his father had taught it to him, but owing to an accident the boy was a cripple. Kermode claimed that his family had been the only performers of the dance for generations back, but until now there had always been one or two Kermode boys who knew it, and he was very sad about the break in

³⁰ Mona Douglas is clearly in error here, as John Kermode died in 1918 (cf. §2.2. above).

³¹ Responsible for the arrangements of the tunes in Mona Douglas's dance and song books. For details see Miller (2004b).

the tradition, but gave his whole hearted approval when I proposed to teach it to some other Manx boy. He accepted the transition from his own family philosophically, saying: "Well, first it was done at the Kings, and then they gave it to the Kermodes, to be King's Dancers, and now it must go to some person else - but see ever that the one you teach it to has the build and making of a dancer, for that was the day it was taught from the beginning, not just to every boy of the house. The Sword Dance of the Kings is not for every person to do".

Kermode's own version of the traditional origin of this dance is somewhat ambiguous, as such things often are. He attributes the earliest teaching of it to "the Druids" but goes on to speak of "The Kings from the North". Now, the Druid traditions, in Mann at any rate, are purely Celtic - the Norse pagan religion was quite different from the ancient Celtic, or Druidic, faith - yet "The Kings from the North" must mean the Norse-Manx rulers of the isle. The inference seems to be that the dance is of Celtic origin, and I believe it is now generally accepted that the Celts show a strong Eastern influence in some of their traditions (in this connection Don Nikolai Giovannelli has a pertinent note on some affinities of the Manx dance);³² but that the Norsemen, like the early Christian Church, adopted and perpetuated this and other ritual practices already operating in Mann when they came to its throne.

It would seem that the dance was, in fact, an important piece of State ritual long after the Norse period; for when, in 1445 Sir Thomas Stanley was installed as the first of his house to become Lord of Mann, precise instructions were given him, and recorded in a State Paper still extant, regarding the positions of the Sword of State and Sword Bearer in the final salute of the dance at Tynwald, and also that he himself must have 'His visge unto the East'. The relative positions of the Governor and Sword Bearer remain unchanged in the ceremony to the present day, but the kneeling salute is no longer offered, nor is the dance performed.

The description of Kermode's tradition, in his own words, is as follows:-

"It's the dance the young Kings of Mann were doing one time, when they would come to be men, and the Druids were teaching it to them. They had to move around the way of the sun, and finish saluting the place of the sun's rising, to bring light and liberty to the people. It's all the old history, how the Kings from the North stopped doing the dance themselves and made a Manxman dance it before them at Tynwald, and that's how the Kermodes first came to be King's Dancers, and have been ever since, or the name means Mac y Mod, the son of the assembly. But when the old Kings went, the new Lords didn't regard the dance, and it was left out of Tynwald, but they still had to have the Sword held up before them and face the rising sun, and the Governor does that in Tynwald to this day."

The air to which the dance is performed was noted from the singing of Kermode's wife, along with the mnemonic words, which in this case seem to have a definite link with the dance, though many *port-y-beayll* words are just nonsensical syllables made up to fit the tune. Kermode always danced to her singing, and he told me that it was the right thing for a woman of the family to accompany the dancer in this way, for it was a fairy tune that was first taught by a woman of the sea to the mother of one of the ancient Kings, who sang it for her son and then for her grandson. It used to be always the mother of the dancer who sang for him; later any woman of the family might do it. But no woman must ever perform the dance.

When I learnt it from Kermode, he would never allow me to go right through it, saying it would be

32 Note to text: "In a note to Miss Douglas's paper Don Nikolai Giovannelli (Isle of Man) suggests that the dance has affinities with ritual dances which he has seen abroad, notably one in Persia, another performed by Malayan natives and a third in Shanghai. All three had certain movements in common with the Manx Dance, but the Persian dance, which had suggestions of state ceremonial, was the closest to it. The Malayan dance was part of a marriage rite, as was also a Bedouin dance which the writer saw in North Africa. He also refers to a sword dance performed by the Syrian Jews in connection with marriage rites in which the bridegroom is called "The King" during the seven days of ceremony and treated with great deference on account of his temporary royalty."

Nikolai Giovannelli was Mona Douglas's erstwhile lover. He suffered from a deficit in credibility. On the occasion c. 1980 that I visited Mona Douglas, I had a longish chat with Baron Leonida Nikolai Giovannelli (to give him his full title) (1906-early 1980s), an Italian national from Abruzzo in central Italy, in MD's house while she was preparing tea and scones for us. He told me that he had been an ardent supporter of Benito Mussolini before the Second World War. He said he joined the Italian navy before taking a job in the Italian embassy in London. In June 1940 the British government introduced internment of 'enemy aliens' (nationals living in Britain of a country then at war with Britain). As an Italian national Giovannelli was interned in Douglas. However, after the British authorities were satisfied he was not a threat to Britain, he was allowed to join work-parties sent out to work on the farms. His work-party was sent to Clarum farm above Laxey, then owned by the Douglas family. It was there that Nikolai met Mona, and the liaison between the two lasted until his death in the early 1980s (cf. also Baron Leonida Nikolai Giovannelli, wikipedia, accessed 01.08.2016).

"unlucky mighty"; and he made me promise that if I taught it to any boys I would only show them a bit at a time. Apparently, it was only the complete dance which formed the ritual - to practise sections of it was innocuous. He also said the dance must never be performed to any other tune; and as a matter of fact this would hardly be possible, so closely are movements and music welded together. The same air has been found in the Hebrides as a lullaby, and that seems very strange to me, for to Manxfolk the air seems to hold all the vigour of the dance itself. However, I have also heard that air played, without the dance, by a traditional fiddler in the west of the island and when Arthur Darley, the Irish fiddler and folk song collector, visited the island some years ago he told me he had found an air of somewhat similar character in Galway - in the guise of a love-song.

The actual movements of the dance are obviously symbolic, but also practical: the crouch and pick-up after the first dance round the sword is a demonstration of the performer's speed and surety of attack; the kicking of the sword is a test of both the weapon's strength and the dancer's agility; the slashes and changing of the sword from right hand to left show that he can fight on, even if wounded in the sword-arm (the old Gaelic tradition of the hero as one who is "never down till he is dead" is still strong in Mann); and the carrying of the sword in honour, emphasised in the words of the *port-y-beayll*, prior to the final salute, is symbolic of the highest authority subject only to the Sun or Supreme Power. The young King of Mann in ancient times would offer his sword only to the Sun; the King's Dancer offered it only to the King - and the echo of that rule is heard today in the living tradition for the final posture of the dance: the performer kneels in the Salute facing East, except when offering it to the Ruler of Mann, when he faces West, because the Ruler or his representative in the Tynwald Ceremony is still seated "with his visage unto³³ the East" (Douglas 1957a: 31-33).

1957b

Only one of our Manx ritual dances is known outside the Island: the 'Dirk Dance' ("Reeaghyn dy Vannin"), traditionally performed at one time by the young Kings of Mann on their taking of arms, and later by a specially trained dancer before the King, the honour of being King's Dancers being hereditary in one particular family, from a descendant of which I noted it; and as this dance has been described in a former article [viz. 1957a] I shall pass over it with this brief mention [...] (Douglas 1957b: 75).

1958

Kelly,³⁴ however, never performed the Dirk Dance. That was the special privilege of Jack Kermode of Port Mooar, who claimed that it had been handed down in his family for generations, ever since the first King's Dancer was appointed. It is certainly curious that although many other fishermen were good dancers none but Kermode ever, to my knowledge, performed this dance. A photograph of his cottage on Port Mooar beach was taken by me about the time when I recorded the dance [1909/10]; but I would never have dared to suggest taking one of Kermode actually performing it. He would certainly have regarded that as "unlucky" - which useful word could, in this case, be taken as a euphemism for sacreligious (Douglas 1958: 157). [...] Mrs. Callow³⁵ it was who first took me to see Jack Kermode perform the Sword Dance of the Kings, having first prepared me by telling me the old traditions about it (Douglas 1958: 158).

33 The original Tynwald Protocol of 1417 here has "into the East" (Gill 1883: 3).

34 i.e. John Kelly the fisherman, Baldrine, Lonan. Of him Mona Douglas says: "[...] Kelly is the only traditional dancer of whom I have been able to secure a photograph taken in action. In 1936 he appeared in a film of a traditional wedding taken for the Isle of Man Tourist Board, and I am indebted to the Secretary, Mr. L[eonard] Bond, for obtaining for me a "shot" of Kelly dancing to the *port-y-beayll* [MD's italics] of a traditional singer, Robert Kewley" (Douglas 1958: 157)

35 Earlier on in the same paragraph Mona Douglas says of Mrs. Callow, "Perhaps the most impressive of all my teachers [...] was old Mrs. Callow of Cardle Veg, Maughold. To my childish eyes she seemed like an ancient Druidess translated into my own day, and apparently there was nothing she did not know about traditional lore, be it song, dance or custom [...]. To her, too the ancient sea-god and first King of Mann, Mananan mac Leirr, was no meaningless name out of a forgotten past but a living presence for ever about us [...]." I myself witnessed such sincerity from Charles Craine, Ballaugh, in 1974 when he told me he sincerely believed in aspects of the older Celtic religion, e.g. in the *Dooimney-Oie* 'night-man' ("[...] a real friend to the farmers, warning them of coming storms, and when they heard him blowing his horn, they knew it was time to get their sheep and cattle into shelter" Killip 1975: 160).

1973

From very early days I had heard quite a lot about what was called "The Kirk Maughold sword dance of the Kings of Mann", but I had never actually seen it performed until "Pat" [MD's Irish grandfather] gave me the opportunity of collecting it. He used to make business calls on a number of people in Maughold, one of whom was Jacky Kermode, the dancer from whom I learnt it. One day "Pat" took me with him to Kermode's cottage on Port Mooar beach and asked the old fisherman if he would "Let the child (me) see his sword dance." Without much demur Kermode took off his sea-boots, reached down a short, thin old sword from hooks above the chiollagh [open fire-place], and made ready to start. His wife poured out and brought to him a pewter beaker of whisky, which he drained and handed back to her, and then she crouched down beside the turf fire and began to sing. He stood perfectly still through the first phase of the air, holding the sword upright before his face, and then he began to dance, at first slowly, then gradually quickening and moving with more vigour as the sword flashed about his body and was slashed over his head, and on to the thrilling final leap and salute, for which he knelt in the open doorway as though saluting the sun - as he said the young princes of the Manx royal line used to do when they took arms.

That was my first and greatest experience of true traditional art which was an evocation of sheer beauty, and it will be remembered as long as I live: the low-beamed white-walled kitchen where the fireglow from the chiollagh mingled with sunlight coming in through the open door, the old woman crouched by the hearth crooning the noble air in a vivid and continuous rhythm, and the tall old dancer, vigorous and graceful despite his years, so utterly absorbed in the dance of which he carried on the tradition from far mists of antiquity (Douglas 1973: 39-40).

1981

Another great stimulous - really the one which started my serious collecting and noting - was being taken by my own Irish grandfather to see Jackie Kermode of Port Mooar, Maughold, perform the famous "Sword Dance of the Kings of Mann", of which he was the last traditional dancer (Douglas 1981: 4).

[...] We worked very hard all through the winter [for the English Folk Dance Society Easter Vacation School, Diuglas, 1929], and by the start of the Easter holidays all the boys of the top form had been taught the "Sword Dance" and the mixed team had learnt "[Çh]yndaa yn Bwoailley" and "Eunyssagh Vona". We were ready for the demonstration - almost; but we still had to choose one boy to demonstarte the solo "Sword Dance". Finally the choice was made on the voting of the boys themselves, and it was unanimous: Billy Cain, a nephew of the Rector of Bride. As we know, Billy later won fame both for himself and for the Manx dances in London and many other folk dance centres, his first triumph being an immediate invitation from Douglas Kennedy, President of the English Folk Dance Society, to perform the "Sword Dance" at the All-England Festival in the Royal Albert Hall the following January [1930], to a special arrangement of the air commissioned from Arnold Foster and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra" (Douglas 1981: 4-5).

n.d. [1983]

REEAGHYN DY VANNIN

A Dirk Dance collected by Mona Douglas. Solo.

Reeaghyn dy Vannin, the Sword Dance of the Kings of Mann, has a unique place in the Manx dance tradition, for it is said to have been originally part of the ancient Celtic Tanist Ceremony in which the heir to the Manx Throne took arms and was recognised before the people. The tradition is that when the Norse rulers came in they were athletes but not dancers, and so instead of the Crown Prince performing the ceremonial dance himself a Celtic chieftain was appointed to perform it on his behalf, and the clan so honoured were designated King's Dancers. This was the family of Mac Diarm[u]id, the later Manx form having become Kermode, and Jack Kermode of Purt Mooar, from whom the dance was first noted [1909/10], claimed that it had been handed down in his family from Norse times. The Manx Gaelic names used by

The Dirk Dance of the Kings of Man: genuine tradition or cultural invention?

Kermode for the various parts of the dance were Cur Arrym (giving honour), Curteish (saluting), Combaasal (encircling), Prowal y Cliwe (testing the sword), Giaraghyn (slashes), Gymmyrkey ayns O[o]asle (bearing in honour) and Casherickey (dedication). The *putt y beayll* to which it was traditionally performed should by tradition be sung by a close female relative of the dancer, and when first noted it was sung by Jack Kermode's wife after she had offered him a ceremonial beaker of whisky, a little of the drink being poured on the ground³⁶ (Douglas n.d. [1983]: 37).

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *Òran Tàlaidh an Eich-Uisge*
(ex: Frances Tolmie Coll. JFSS IV/16 (1911): 160).
2. *Dirk Dance*
(ex: *Rinkaghyn Vannin* n.d. [1983]: 37).
3. *Agnete og Havmanden*
(ex: Frances Tolmie Coll. JFSS IV/16 (1911): 164).
4. Photograph of Jack Kermode and his wife Anne outside their home in Port Mooar, Maughold, c.1900.

³⁶ This is the first reference to a little whisky being poured on the ground (as a form of offering to the "infernal deities"). For a similar practice of (in this case) drinking a little rum to the health of the Buggane of Kione Dhoo near Port St. Mary by fishermen on the way to the fishing, see Broderick (1981: 122): *Esh dooyrt Ned mooar y chellys dy row eh tra dy gheddyn lane pytt ushag ass yn boteil, as dy ieu gys slaynt bogane yn kione dhoo* 'then Ned Mooar y Cheylls said that it was time to get a bird's vagina-full (of rum) out of the bottle and to drink to the health of the Buggane of Kione Dhoo' (cf. also Lewin 2014: 34). But I suspect this feature is to be seen as part of the "growth" of comment around the Dirk Dance referred to earlier.

TRANSLATION.

Many a youthful maiden, bearing her first growth of hair, will go over, will go over, ere I return, ere I arrive from Uamh 'n Òir.

The above air, with Gaelic words, contributed by me, is in the *Gesto Coll.* (App. p. 23). For notes on the legend see "Uamh 'n Òir" (i.) in this Journal.—F. T.

This, termed in the *Gesto Coll.* a "pibroch," seems allied strongly to the Irish tune, "The Eagle's Whistle" (see *Petrie Coll.*, *Joyce's Ancient Irish Music*, and *Journal F.S.S.* vol. ii. No. 10). The printed Irish airs, though said to be for marching, are all in three-four time, but Dr. Joyce has lately noted a version in four time, which would bring this Gaelic air more into line with the Irish tune.—L. E. B.

5.—ORAN TÀLAIDH AN EICH-UISGE.

(THE LULLABY OF THE WATER-HORSE.)

Mode 1. a. (6-note scale.)

V. Moderate.



1. O - hó! bà a lein-ibh, hó! O - hó! bà a lein-ibh, ha!

R. Fast.



Bà, a lein-ibh, hó - bha-hó! Hó-bà a lein-ibh, hao - i ha! Hi hó! hó-bha-hó!



Hi hó! hao - i ha! 'S luath dha d' chois thu, hó-bha-hó! 'S mór 'nad each thu, hao - i ha!

2. O-hó! m'fhèudail am mac, hó!

O-hó m'eachan sgèimheach, ha!

'S fhad o'n bhail 'thu, hó-bha-hó!

Nitear d'iarraidh, hao-i ha! (Ref.)

TRANSLATION.

1. Ohó! sleep thou, child, hó! Ohó! sleep thou, child, ha! Sleep thou, child, hó-bha-hó! Sleep thou, child, hao-i ha! (Refrain: Hi hó! hó-bha-hó! Hi hó! hao-i ha! Swift art thou of foot, hó-bha-hó, and much art thou of the horse, hao-i ha!) 2. Ohó, the darling son, hó! Ohó! the comely little horse, ha! Thou art far from home, hó-bha-hó! and wilt be sought for, hao-i ha! (Ref.: Hi ho, etc.)

I have found an apparent variant of this tune attached to the Irish nursery-song, "Chip, chip, my little horse." Even if the words of "Chip, chip," be not a relic

of a Gaelic lullaby whose real meaning has been forgotten, the "little water-horse" seems at any rate to have suggested a tune for another nursery-song of a "little horse."—A. G. G.

6.—CAOIDH AN EICH-UISGE.

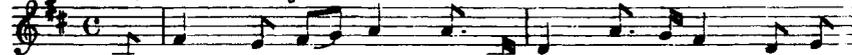
(LAMENT OF THE WATER-HORSE.)

SUNG BY MARY ROSS,

FROM KILLMALUAG, SKYE, 1897.

Mode 3. a. b [with 77th]. (7-note scale.)

Stow. V.



1. Och, Och - an 's mi dir - eadh, Och, Och - an 's mi tearn - adh; Och,



Och - an 's mi dir - eadh a caoidh na rinn m'fhàg - ail! A



dir - eadh's a tearn - adh, A tearn-adh's a dir - eadh; A dir - eadh's a tearn - adh, 'S mi



caoidh na rinn m'fhàg - ail. 2. A Mhór thoir a bhruth-ach ort, A



Mhór, thoir an gleann ort! A Mhór nach freag-air thu 'n fhead? A Mhór - ag bheag nan gamh-na!

TRANSLATION.

1. Alas, as I go climbing! Alas, as I descend! Alas, as I go climbing, and mourning for her who has left me! (Refrain: Climbing, descending, etc.) 2. Mór, go up the hill-side! Mór, go down into the glen! Mór, to my shrill cry [or whistle] wilt thou not respond? O little Mór, herding the year-old kine! (R.)

REEAGHYN DY VANNIN

A Dirk dance collected by Mona Douglas. Solo.

Reeaghyn dy Vannin, the Sword Dance of the Kings of Mann, has a unique place in the Manx dance tradition, for it is said to have been originally part of the ancient Celtic Tanist Ceremony in which the heir to the Manx Throne took arms and was recognised before the people. The tradition is that when the Norse rulers came in they were athletes but not dancers, and so instead of the Crown Prince performing the ceremonial dance himself a Celtic chieftain was appointed to perform it on his behalf, and the clan so honoured were designated King's Dancers. This was the family of Mac Diarmid, the later Manx form having become Kermode, and Jack Kermode of Purt Moour, from whom the dance was first noted, claimed that it had been handed down in his family from Norse times. The Manx Gaelic names used by Kermode for the various parts of the dance were Cur Arrym (Giving honour), Curteish (Saluting), Combaasal (Encircling), Prowal y Cliwe (Testing the Sword), Giaraghyn (Slashes), Gymmyrkey ayns Oasle (Bearing in honour) and Casherickey (Dedication). The purt y beayll to which it was traditionally performed should by tradition be sung by a close female relative of the dancer, and when first noted it was sung by Jack Kermode's wife after she had offered him a ceremonial beaker of whiaky, a little of the drink being poured on the ground.

The principal performer of the dance at present is a descendant of the Kermode family.

Purt y beayll.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| A1 Music — | O hi-o y varriaght - O
O hi-o, my skian gial! (repeated) |
| B Music — | She mish cur oashley, oashley diu
O hi-o, my skian gial! (repeated) |
| C Music — | Hi-o, y varriaght O!
Hi-o my skian gial!
Reeaghyn dy Vannin-O
O hi-o, my skian gial! |
| A2 Music — | O hi-o y varriaght O
O hi-o my skian gial!
Reeaghyn dy Vannin-O
O hi-o, O hi O ho! |

♩ = 69

Music Movements

- The Dirk is carried, vertically, with both hands, at arms length, point upwards.
- | | |
|-------------|---|
| A1 Bars 1-8 | 7 M.r.s. in a circle clockwise; on 8th bar 2 low springs with feet crossed (R in front, then L in front) and crouch to place the dirk lengthwise on the ground, the dancer finishing by standing behind the hilt, with feet together and arms folded. |
| B1 Bars 1-8 | Facing the Dirk the whole time, 15 cross back steps round it clockwise, finishing with a 'salute' on the last note. |

AGNETE OG HAVMANDEN.

FIRST TUNE.

Andantino.

FROM *Danmarks Melodier.*

Ag - ne - te, hun stan - der paa Hø - jen - lofts - bro, Strax
 kom der en Hav - mand, ham gav hun sin Tro. Haa, haa,
 haa! Strax kom, etc.

SECOND TUNE.

Allegretto.

Haa, haa, haa!

8.—BA-BÀ, MO LEANABH.

(SLEEP, SLEEP, MY CHILD.)

Mode 5. a. b. (7-note scale.)

PHRYGIAN INFLUENCE.

Rather slow.

FROM MRS. BOOG WATSON
 OF EDINBURGH, 1898.

Ba - bà mo lean-abh, Ba - bà, ba - bà. Ba - bà mo lean-abh, Ba - bà, ba - bà. Faill
 i faill ó, Faill éill o - ro - ho, Gu'n till na fear - a a dh'fhalbh thar sàil.

TRANSLATION.

Sleep, my child! Sleep, oh sleep! And may the men return who have gone over the sea!

The above variant of a well-known lullaby, with only a few words and the refrain, contributed by me to *Puir-a-beul*, p. 43, I received from Mrs. Boog Watson of Edinburgh, a true lover of national music, who learned it in her youth when staying near Appin in Argyll, from the late Miss Hughina Maclachlan of Lochaber.—F. T.

In Capt. Fraser's *Collection of Highland Music* there is a variant of this air, under the same title—inferior, however, to this most beautiful and tender melody, which has the character of the rare and singularly expressive Phrygian Mode—a mode whose minor 2nd (like a descending leading-note), lends it a peculiar pathos. Cf. "Caidh Màthar" and others in this present collection.—A. G. G.

9.—NA CREID IAD.

(BELIEVE THEM NOT.)

PENTATONIC.

Mode 3.

Moderate.

LEARNT IN INFANCY, AT UIGNISH, SKYE,
 AND HEARD AT BRACADALE MANSE, 1860.—F. T.

Na creid iad, a Ghaoil do Mhàth - ar! Na creid iad gu'm fàg - ainn thu. Ma
 dh'fhalbh-as mi'n diu, Thig mi'm màir - each, 'S na creid iad gu'm fàg - ainn thu!

TRANSLATION.

Believe them not, thou darling of thy mother! Believe not that I would forsake thee! If I go away to-day, I shall return to-morrow! Oh, believe not that I would leave thee!

10.—AM FACA TU'N GOBHA?

(HAST THOU SEEN THE SMITH?)

Mode 3. a (6-note scale.)

Slow.

FRAGMENT HEARD AT BRACADALE MANSE,
 SKYE, 1861.—F. T.

Am fac - a tu'n Gobh'? Chall eil - ibh ho ro ho. No'm fac - a tu'n
 Gobh - a? Chall o ho ro i. Cha téid mi a Mhuil - e; Cha dean mi ann

