

J.R. MOORE'S NOTEBOOK
OF MANX FOLK SONG
(CIRCA 1910)



In late August 1910, Sophia Morrison was in Laxey in the company of a Miss Cannell first visiting “Mrs Quayle, Ballamillghy[n.] I bagged some of her husband’s Manx M.S.S. & saw his Manx books.”¹ Miss Cannell then “went on to the Gibsons & I to Minorca where I spent the afternoon with an old weaver, Mr J.R. Moore in his little cottage named ‘Cronk Gennal.’”² Moore was preparing to emigrate to New Zealand and he was “in the act of packing his Manx Bible, Prayer-book, Chibber-yn-Çhiarn, & some Manx Sun cuttings of your poems into a box.”³ This letter was addressed to “Cushag,” Josephine Kermode, the Manx poet. Morrison went on to relate that:

To my great joy he gave me a note book in which he has been in the habit of jotting down Anglo-Manx dialect words & phrases. I am sorry that I did not find out about him sooner—it does seem a great pity that his treasure of Manx lore should be lost. If I can manage it & get company, I shall spend a week in Laxey before M^r Moore sails to N.Z.⁴

Note here the need for someone to accompany her on a visit, an indication of the social norms of the period. Cushag herself was to receive a letter the next month from Moore wherein he declared that “I am but a humble Manx fella [...]”⁵ and that “[s]ome day if spared I will tell your kind lady friend [*ie*, Sophia Morrison] or yourself the Witch story as I was told it as a boy [...]”

A number of Moore’s notebooks are amongst Sophia Morrison’s personal papers including one that contains a number of song texts, some seven in number and all in Manx. In order they are: (1) [“Moghrey laa Boaldyn”], (2) [“Hooïn dys yn yeastagh juan”], (3) [“Trooid y keyll trooid y keyll”], (4) “The Cormorant,” (5) “The Plover’s Lament,” (6) [“Buggane Gob ny schoot”], (7) [“Graith my chree ta ayns Ballaragh”], and written down as will be seen in somewhat idiosyncractic Manx. Just two texts have titles; first lines are used here as titles for the other sets of words.

¹ Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermode, 29 August 1910, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermode Family Papers, Box labelled “Josephine Kermode (‘Cushag’).”

² Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermode, 29 August 1910, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermode Family Papers, Box labelled “Josephine Kermode (‘Cushag’).”

³ Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermode, 29 August 1910, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermode Family Papers, Box labelled “Josephine Kermode (‘Cushag’).”

⁴ Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermode, 29 August 1910, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermode Family Papers, Box labelled “Josephine Kermode (‘Cushag’).”

⁵ J.R. Moore to [Josephine Kermode], 22 September [1910 or before], MNHL, MS 08979, Kermode Family Papers, Box labelled “Josephine Kermode (‘Cushag’).”

The inevitable question arises as to the status of Moore’s material—is he recalling songs once heard, or he is prompted by the interest in Manx vernacular culture manifested by figures such as Morrison to note down what he has heard recently? Interestingly, before “Trooid y keyll trooid y keyll” he notes:

I have heard the tune to which this is attached played a four nights ago the Ben y thie told me she learnt it from mother who got it from her father and he always told them he learnt it of the lil ones themselves.⁶

The tune in question is clearly “Yn Bollan Bane.” It is equally clear too that Moore was present at a gathering where vernacular music was still being performed.

Moore did in the end emigrate to New Zealand—and not before Morrison was able to “have a cooish with the old weaver”⁷ as she wrote (again) to Cushag. “He sails to N.Z. on Oct. 14th He told me a charming folk-lore story about the Mermaid of Gob-ny-Ooyl—a point of land near Bulgham—of a sailor who planted an apple tree there for ‘the children of the sea.’”⁸

There, though, he was not to be forgotten by Morrison:

I get an occasional letter from my dear Friend Miss Morrison of Peel from whom I have received Mr J.J. Kneens Direct Method, Mr Faraghers Aesops Fables, Dr Clague’s Reminiscences in which Im greatly disappointed. I expected something more racy from the genial old Doctor. And a few days ago The folklore collection of that grand old salt Bill Cashen.⁹

William Cashen’s Manx Folk-Lore,¹⁰ published in 1912, the year after *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh*,¹¹ was more to his taste, as he wrote to the person who had gifted it to him, namely Sophia Morrison:

I have again to thank you for sending on to me dear Old Bill Cashen’s Folklore with a portrait of the grand old salt. [...] To my mind his folklore is more racy reading than that of Mr Moore and is nicely spiced with Gailck.¹²

This is a touching gesture, one that speaks so well to the character of Sophia Morrison. We have now another name to add to the list of known collectors of Manx vernacular song as well as a number of texts that call for further study.

⁶ Notebook (undated) in the hand of J.R. Moore, MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 5.

⁷ Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermode, 28 September 1910, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermode Family Papers, Box labelled “Josephine Kermode (‘Cushag’).”

⁸ Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermode, 28 September 1910, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermode Family Papers, Box labelled “Josephine Kermode (‘Cushag’).”

⁹ Letter from J.R. Moore to William Cubbon, [21 March] 1913, MNHL, MS 2355/I C.

¹⁰ William Cashen, *William Cashen’s Manx Folk-Lore*, ed. Sophia Morrison (Douglas: Manx Language Society, 1912).

¹¹ Dr John Clague, *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh: Manx Reminiscences By the Late Dr John Clague* (Castletown: M.J. Backwell, n.d. [1911]).

¹² Letter from J.R. Moore to Sophia Morrison, 17 March 1913, MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 3.

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Note: I wish to acknowledge a great debt of thanks to Robert Carswell for not only reading over (and correcting) my initial transcript but also in providing a full linguistic commentary on the text and doing it with speed but not haste. These notes will appear when this piece is republished as part of the *Manx Notes* series.

REFERENCES

- Cashen, William. *William Cashen's Manx Folk-Lore*. Ed. Sophia Morrison. Douglas: Manx Language Society, 1912.
- Clague, Dr John. *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh: Manx Reminiscences By the Late Dr John Clague*. Castletown: M.J. Backwell, n.d. [1911].

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THE SONG TEXTS

(1)

[“MOGHREY LAA BOALDYN”]

- 1 Moghrey laa Boaldyn ec brishey y laa
Ny ushagyn va singal as y biljyn lane dy vlaa
Myr ren me wal-kal magh er jeeaghyn foddey jeam
Honnick me my graih as ee sollys myr yn ghrian
- 5 Ny lhiaggar'n eck va jairg as yn foilt eck shinal bwec
Va ny sooillyn eck ny skinnal ny rollaghyn syn oie
My yisheg as my vummig te orrow-syn dy graa
Dy vel me shooyl er meshtey dy whoilley oie as laa
Cha nel mish geerie jogh as cha nel mish geerie bee
- 10 Houd as va my arpyn nagh row veg fo
Horragh my graih maryms trooid snaightey as rio
Agh nish ta my arpyn er chroggal jeams
Hig my graih meen shar as cha loar ah rhym
Ge thie oase ayns yn valley shid hoal
- 15 Ta my graih goll stiagh as te soie ayn
Te goail nane elley er y lhuin
Trimshey trimshey eyn-yms duish kys
Ta na smoo dy verchys eck ny ta i-mys

Nee nare ec skeilley as y boid caghlaa
20 As be ee gorr-ymss ta hig y traa

(2)
[“HOOIN DYS YN YEASTAGH JUAN”]

I I Hooin dys yn yeastagh juan
Ta moghrey foine aalin ayn juan
Cur lhesh dty vurling as dty reamlagh
Hooin dys yn yeastagh juan

(3)
[“TROOID Y KEYLL TROOID Y KEYLL”]

I I Trooid y keyll trooid y keyll
Trooid y keyll ghilley veg
Trooid y keyll ghilley veg
Sy laa as ayns yn oie.

(4)
“THE CORMORANT”

I I Hug ad tay da'n shag ayns mheddyr
Loo yn shag na' row ah mie
Sheh pison teh esht clap ah skianyn
As deeyrt ah oilley n tea fud thie.

(5)
“THE PLOVER'S LAMENT”

I I Lhon dhoo vel oo chit vel oo chit
Giall oo dy darragh oo
S'foddey my-riallagh oo
Cha jig dy braa cha jig dy braa

(6)
[“BUGGANE GOB NY SCHOOT”]

- I 1 Buggane Gob ny schoot
Myr der oo errey er em
Cha der em errey ort
As myr ver oo [errey] er m's
5 Nee m booilley dhyt dyn toyrt.

(7)

“GRAIH MY CHREE TA AYNS BALLARAGH”

- I 1 Graih my chree ta ayns Ballaragh
Ben as cloan cha vaik'm's arragh
My groddagh yn kay yinnin fakin y ghrian
Yioym shilley reesht er Vannin Veen.
2 5 Vannin my chree ta slane fys aym er
Yn boayl t'ad ceau nyn braagyn thanney.

