

“THERE OCCUR SEVERAL ERRORS”

TWELVE MANX FOLK SONGS

MONA DOUGLAS IN DISPUTE WITH
THE MANX LANGUAGE SOCIETY (1928)



In 1928, Margaret Creer of the Manx Language Society sent a letter to Mona Douglas, the full text of which reads as follows:

Baldwin Schoolhouse

May 1th 1928

Dear Miss Douglas,

The Executive C'tee desire me to draw your attention to the song in Manx recently published by you, and in which there occur several errors. They request that you submit the text to an authority via the Executive so that the errors may be avoided in your future editions.

With best wishes for your success in your new sphere.

Yours sincerely, | Margaret Creer ¹

The “new sphere” refers to her *Twelve Manx Folk Songs with Manx Gaelic and English Words*, the first number (or Set as it was so designated) which had appeared that same year published in London by Stainer & Bell.² There was a further issue of another twelve songs the next year.³ The trilogy of titles as it became was completed only as late as 1957, with a final batch of twelve songs.⁴

The tone of the letter strikes one as being somewhat high minded, especially as the song text in question is not named nor the nature of the errors pointed out, and then there is the injunction to pass in any future work “to an authority via the Executive.” It certainly struck Mona Douglas as being high minded as her reply shows, a copy letter of her response is fortunately extant amongst her personal papers. Written from

¹ Letter from Margaret Creer to Mona Douglas, 1 May 1928, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 15, [Folder] Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh.

² Mona Douglas, *Twelve Manx Folk Songs with Manx Gaelic and English Words: Translated by Mona Douglas, Arranged with Pianoforte Accompaniment by Arnold Foster*, Set 1 (London: Stainer & Bell, 1928).

³ Mona Douglas, *Twelve Manx Folk Songs with Manx Gaelic and English Words: Translated by Mona Douglas, Arranged with Pianoforte Accompaniment by Arnold Foster*, Set 2 (London: Stainer & Bell, 1929).

⁴ Mona Douglas, *Twelve Manx Folk Songs with Manx Gaelic and English Words: Translated by Mona Douglas, Arranged with Pianoforte Accompaniment by Arnold Foster*, Set 3 (London: Stainer & Bell, 1957).

London, where she was then living and working, she comes straight to the point in the opening paragraph:

I am in receipt of your letter of the 1st inst. re a Manx song recently published. Although you do not say so, I presume that you mean the arrangement of “Graih my Chree” with Manx and English words just published by Messrs. Stainer & Bell.⁵

After pointing out that it would have been cheaper (and easier) for Stainer & Bell to have simply omitted the Manx texts, they had appeared at her insistence, “because I think that the more things published in Manx the better for the language movement [...]” She then came to the point with a wonderful sucker punch:

In the case of Graih my Chree, I may perhaps point out that the Manx words were simply reprinted from a leaflet version of the song published by the Manx Society a number of years ago, of which I have a copy at Ballarragh, but not here.

In the letter she also describes her approach overall as regards the texts, in large part taking as source material those to be found in Moore’s *Manx Ballads and Music* (1896),⁶ and that:

my manipulation of the Manx words only consists of omitting certain verses and in some cases combining two or more good half-verses and in some cases combining two or more good half-verses into one whole; and in one or two cases I may have to alter or add a very few words in a particular part (say bass) to make them fit the arrangement without sacrificing the sense.

This is slightly more than the phrase “only consists of” would perhaps suggest, but in any case the textual policy was made explicit in the Preface itself to *Twelve Manx Folk Songs*:

It is true that several sets of words are sometimes recorded as having been sung to one air; but in such cases I have tried to choose the best words available. I have also, in some cases, found it desirable to select the best verses from songs which had too many for all to be printed.⁷

Turning to the issue of having the texts looked over further, she wrote that “I am afraid that your demand [...] would take too long in operation, as the proofs have to go through quickly.” She was, however, willing to make a concession, that if either J.J. Kneen or H.P. Kelly were willing to “return the proof to me within three days of

⁵ Copy letter of Mona Douglas to Margaret Creer, 10 May 1928, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 15, [Folder] Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh. All subsequent quotes are taken from this letter.

⁶ A.W. Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896).

⁷ Mona Douglas, “Preface to *Twelve Manx Folk Songs with Manx Gaelic and English Words*, Set 1 [1928],” “*Restoring to use our almost-forgotten dances*”: *Writings on the Collection and Revival of Manx Folk Dance and Song by Mona Douglas*, ed. Stephen Miller (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004). 13.

its receipt, I should be very pleased for either of them to do so.” Her letter then concludes with the final paragraph:

I should like to say in conclusion that I feel it would be a gracious act on the part of the Society to give any support in their power to this effort on behalf of our Manx songs. Their attitude so far seems to be one of strict neutrality rather than of approval.

Earlier in the letter, she had mentioned a more specific reason for having the Manx texts appear:

I had an idea that the Manx words and the arrangements might prove useful to the Cruinnaght Committee, who I know are sometimes at a loss for satisfactory test pieces in their choral classes, particularly with Manx words.

This suggestion was taken up and it was passed on to Kneen to come up with an opinion as to their suitability. An undated typescript of his remarks survives, though it is not to be found amongst his own personal papers, but in a scrapbook held by the MNHL,⁸ and only recently come across by accident. His attitude was not one of approval but the very opposite: “Most of the Manx would be useless for the Cruinnaght. The whole lot would require to be modified and reconstructed.”

STEPHEN MILLER,
VIENNA, 2016

DOCUMENTS

I. LETTER FROM MARGARET CREER TO MONA DOUGLAS (1 MAY 1928)

Baldwin Schoolhouse
May 1th 1928

Dear Miss Douglas,

The Executive C'tee desire me to draw your attention to the song in Manx recently published by you, and in which there occur several errors. They request that you submit the text to an authority via the Executive so that the errors may be avoided in your future editions.

With best wishes for your success in your new sphere.

Yours sincerely, | Margaret Creer

Source: Letter from Margaret Creer to Mona Douglas, 1 May 1928, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 15, [Folder] Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh.

⁸ Undated typescript [1928?] of comments by J.J. Kneen on Mona Douglas, *Twelve Manx Folk Songs*, Set 1 (London: Stainer & Bell, 1928). MNHL, Scrapbooks, inserted between J48/13xf/11 and /12.

2. COPY LETTER OF MONA DOUGLAS TO MARGARET CREER (10 MAY 1928)

4 HILL ROAD,
ST. JOHNS WOOD,
LONDON, N.W.8.

10/5/28

Dear Miss Creer,

I am in receipt of your letter of the 1st inst. re a Manx song recently published. Although you do not say so, I presume that you mean the arrangement of "Graith my Chree" with Manx and English words just published by Messrs. Stainer & Bell.

I am quite ready to admit that I am no expert on the Manx language but merely a student who tries as far as possible to advance its interests. It would of course be much simpler (and cheaper) for Messrs. Stainer & Bell to omit the Manx texts entirely in these songs; but I have insisted upon their inclusion, partly because I think that the more things published in Manx the better for the language movement, and partly because I had an idea that the Manx words and the arrangements might prove useful to the Cruinnaght Committee, who I know are sometimes at a loss for satisfactory test pieces in their choral classes, particularly with Manx words. In the case of Graih my Chree, I may perhaps point out that the Manx words were simply reprinted from a leaflet version of the song published by the Manx Society a number of years ago, of which I have a copy at Ballarragh, but not here. The first verse is identical with that printed under the music in Moore's Ballads; the second, I believe though I do not know, is an adaptation into the Graih my Chree metre of the first four lines of Rutter's Creggyn Scarleode as printed in Moore's Ballads, with one misprint overlooked in the proof—"M" for "RN" at the end of the last line; the third verse is virtually a repetition of the first.

With regard to further songs to be published, I may say that in all cases the Manx is taken from Moore or some similar recognised text, and my manipulation of the Manx words only consists of omitting certain verses and in some cases combining two or more good half-verses and in some cases combining two or more good half-verses into one whole; and in one or two cases I may have to alter or add a very few words in a particular part (say bass) to make them fit the arrangement without sacrificing the sense. In one case (the Arrane Qwheeyl-Nieuee) I am using two additional verses to that given by Moore, noted by myself from a Lonan singer some years ago. I am afraid that your demand that I should "submit the Manx words to an expert via the Executive" would take too long in operation, as the proofs have to go through quickly; but if Mr. Kneen or Mr. H.P. Kelly would undertake to revise the Manx and return the proof to me within three days of its receipt, I should be very pleased for either of them to do so.

I should like to say in conclusion that I feel it would be a gracious act on the part of the Society to give any support in their power to this effort on behalf of our Manx songs. Their attitude so far seems to be one of strict neutrality rather than of approval.

Yours sincerely, | The Secretary, | The Manx Society.

Source: Copy letter of Mona Douglas to Margaret Creer, 10 May 1928, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 15, [Folder] Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh

3. **TYPESCRIPT COMMENTS BY J.J. KNEEN ON MONA DOUGLAS, TWELVE MANX FOLK SONGS, SET I (1928)**

GRAIH MY CHREE.

1st Verse.

Line 1, 2. Graih, in Vocative Case should be aspirated Ghrai.

Line 3. Yn graih my chree. The grammar here is bad. Yn is redundant. Should read graih my chree.

2nd Verse.

Line 2. Trimshey lane is impossible. Lane must precede the noun.

Line 3. Typo. error, this should be hie.

Last line, cheet er m'aym, untranslatable.

3rd Verse.

Line 1. O girree as tar hym. Here the present participle girree is used in place of imperative irree. Reads badly.

Line 3. Like same line in verse 1.

TAPPAGYN JIARGEY.

2nd Verse.

Line 2, rybbanyn ghoo should be rybbanyn doo.

Line 3, ven-rein should be ben-rein.

3rd Verse.

Line 3. toorit should be soorit. And even the latter is not good Manx.

USHTEY MILLISH SY GHAREE.

1st Verse.

Line 2. Sleih is a collective noun and takes a singular article. Ny sleih should be yn sleih.

(Ushtey Millish 'sy Gharee. cont.)

2nd Verse.

Line 2. shirrey should be hirrey.
ard-mwyllin should be ard wyllin.

3rd Verse.

Line 1. Va'n coorse yn ushtey should read va coorse yn ushtey.
Line 3. ollagh is a collective noun. Ny ollagh should be yn ollagh.

NY KIRREE FO NIAGHTEY.

1st Verse.

Line 2. kirree should be chirree.
vio " " bio.
eaynin " " eayin.
The older and better version was my ghuillyn.

2nd Verse.

Line 2. muilt should be mohlt. Mohlt is the old genitive plural and always follows scores, hundreds, and thousands.

3rd Verse.

Line 1. 'sy chlieau rea, middle word is impossible. Slieau is already eclipsed by the article to clieau, older Manx tlieau.

ARRANE SOOREE.

1st Verse.

Line 1. geurey should be gheurey.
ny lhie better my lhie.
Line 2. dorraghey should be dorraghys.

2nd Verse.

Line 1. geurey should be geuree.

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(Arrane Sooree cont.)

2nd Verse.

Line 2. ceua should be cheau.
Line 3. ny hassoo better my hassoo.
Line 5. cassyn should be chassyn.

3rd Verse.

Bad throughout.

Traditional has been altered and made worse instead of better (?)

4th Verse.

Last 2 lines weak.

BERREY DHONE.

2nd Verse.

Line 4. e chione should be e kione.

4th Verse.

Line 1. er chur should be er cur.

Hie ish er cur, she was put. Participial Phrase.

Several orthographical errors also, as in them all.

ARRANE QUEEYL NIEUEE.

1st Verse.

Line 6. Lesh my hene is bad Manx, although it may occur in the original, i.e.

Moore's Manx ballads, also in vv. 2 & 3.

3rd Verse.

Line 7. Tra bee y fidder cheet. Bad.

Tra vees y fidder cheet.

MY CHAILLIN VEG DHONE.

1st Verse.

Line 1. my caillin should be my chaillin.

Line 3. my aalin. aalin is never used as a noun. Ushag or some

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(My Chaillin Veg Dhone cont.)

such word would have been better. Aalin in Moore, but bad.

Line 4. Dys yn bwoaillee. Latter should be woaillee.

2nd Verse.

Line 1. goll shen should be goll dys shen.

3rd Verse.

Line 4. O dooinney should be O ghooinney.

TREE EEASTEYRYN BOGHTEY.

1st Verse.

Line 1. Eaisht is one syllable and cannot be sung on one note without a slur.

Should be O eaisht.

2nd Verse.

Line 4. gatt should be datt. Past tense not Present Participle.

3rd and 4th Verses. Not traditional. Badly constructed.

Moore's version is very amateurish and ungrammatical. The second verse, probably the best, is omitted.

MARISH NY FIDDLERYN.

1st Verse.

Line 1. yn traa Nollick should be traa yn Ollick.

Line 2. yn graih my chree. Bad. See same song.

Line 4. nyn hooree should be nyn sooree.

Several mistakes of a less serious nature.

ARRANE OIE VIE.

As goll dy lhie should be dy ghol dy lhie.

Most of the Manx would be useless for the Cruinnaght. The whole lot would require to be modified and reconstructed.

J.J.K.

Source: Undated typescript [1928?] of comments by J.J. Kneen on Mona Douglas, *Twelve Manx Folk Songs*, Set 1 (London: Stainer & Bell, 1928). MNHL, Scrapbooks, inserted between J48/13xf/11 and /12.

