

Manx Notes 76 (2006)

“ABOUT TRANSLATING THE BALLADS I HAVE MY DOUBTS”
LETTERS FROM T.E. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (1892–96)

[1] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (8 NOVEMBER 1892)

Ramsey Nov. 8 / 92

Dear Mr Moore,

Thank you very much for your kind invitation, and, more particularly, for your generous offer as regards the “collections.” About translating the Ballads I have my doubts. I might succeed in producing imitations more or less agreeable, but these verse translations merely cross the scent. They may have merit of their own, but that is not the point. An extremely close prose translation is what is wanted.

I think you said the other night that some of the poems could hardly be called ballads. But what then is the parallel to be, what the type to be conformed to? Probably the type is not Ballad: then we ought not to give it Ballad form, I could not do so without forcing it, and, I should say, distorting it, and gives a wrong notion of its style and method. But prose leaves all this open, exposing the native ore, and not compelling it to take the shape of any goods in chattels familiar to us, not even as men do with pigs of iron.

I can judge better about this, however, when I come, and go over the poems with you. It is enough for the present to say “Hands off!” to all bards and versifiers.

Most Truly Y^{ts} | TE Brown
A.W. Moore Esq.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 8 November 1892, MNHL, MS I277/24 A.

[2] REV. T.E. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (6 DECEMBER 1892)

Ramsey | Dec. 6 / 92

My Dear Mr Moore,

With regard to your collection of Manx Songs, I am very decidedly of opinion that you should ~~translate them as closely as possible into [unreadable] prose~~. ‘putting them [rest unreadable]’¹ Translation into verse would be excessively difficult. The attempt, in such translations, to discriminate the relative values of the compositions, would be simply impossible. The essence would absolutely evaporate, and the form would be most inadequately represented.

~~If it will answer any good purpose to~~ 'You [*rest unreadable*]¹ preface them with a short Introduction, it would give me great pleasure to ~~undertake that friendly office, friendly I would say, rather than critical.~~ do so.

Most Truly Y^{rs} | TE Brown
A.W. Moore Esq.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 6 December 1892, MNHL, MS 1277/25 A.

[3] **REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (19 JANUARY 1894)**

Ramsey | Jan. 19 /94

Dear Mr Moore,

Please send me the Songs, with the music, the Manx, and the Prose Transl.

I cannot definitely promise to make a Transl. in verse until I have seen the compositions. I think that it would be very advisable, with a view to the general public, to have such Translations, and, in all probability, I shall see my way to executing them. You showed me the originals with prose Transl. before, but I must now clearly make up my mind whether they will bear rendering into English verse. Also, I shall have to consider whether, in some cases, entirely new words may not be necessary, not even imitations, however distant.

However, you may confidently rely upon my doing my best under the circumstances. I am exceedingly concerned to hear of baby's trouble, and hope that you will soon be relieved from your anxiety.

With kindest regards to M^{rs} Moore, | Ever y^{rs} | TE Brown.
A.W. Moore Esq.

P.S. I regard Clague & the Gills as wholly desparate. | TEB

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 19 January 1894, MNHL, MS 1277/32 A.

[4] **REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (13 APRIL 1894)**

Ramsey | April 13 /94

Dear M^r Moore,

Will I frecken ye? This dreadful Illiam Dhoan has completely put my pipe out. It is inconceivable that any one in his senses should ever want to sing such rubbish. Fancy the quantity alone! I really can't attempt it; and this reopens the general

question. Is it possible to give these songs a modern press? Can they be dressed up for the drawing-room? That they should ever get beyond that circle is wholly desparate. I am willing to look at a few of the shorter songs. Crammed and choked as I am just now with the Illiam Dhoan saw-dust, I doubt whether I can make much of the more fragmentary compositions.

Oh dear! oh dear! We are a dreadfully prosaic race, we “Little Manx Nation”!

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Bye the bye, I find I have M^r Colin Brown’s “Scotch Songs” among my books.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 13 April 1894, MNHL, MS 1277/34 A.

[5] **REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (14 NOVEMBER 1894)**

Your good offices I prize very highly, but I am chiefly interested now in your Tunes, a much more important matter. I am delighted to hear of your progress. When will you want my Essay? A few hints dotted down by my Glasgow namesake would be very helpful to me, unless, indeed, he too is going to write something for the book.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 14 November 1894, MNHL, MS 1277/37 A.

[6] **REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (22 NOVEMBER 1894)**

Yes, by all means let me have the Ballads before me in type. I shall not begin my essay before that.

I emphatically congratulate you on having the cooperation of M^r Nicholson. I should like very much to have an idea what his illustrations will be like. I could help him, and he could help me. With men like Nicholson “the wind bloweth where it listeth,” fitful and way ward they must be. But it would be a great point if I kept step with him, and in my Essay, referred to the Illustrations. We should thus have a vinculum tending to bind together the whole book.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 22 November 1894, MNHL, MS 1277/38 A.

[7] **REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (28 NOVEMBER 1894)**

[7.1] I fancy your book will be a very taking one.

[7.2] I shall with the greatest interest expect M^r Nicholson’s pictures.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 28 November 1894, MNHL, MS 1277/39 A.

[8] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (22 MAY 1895)

W. Gill never came near me, but I wrote some days ago, particularly enquiring about Shepperd, and his MSS. No doubt I shall soon hear, and will write you result.

Gill was to have had a great function at “The Society of Organists”: he sent me a Programme, very attractive and interesting. One ‘feature’ was curious enough—‘Molly Charrane’ arranged as a sacred piece, to words beginning “Mollee yn Chiarn,” or something like that = “Praise the Lord.” Ingenious; but the minor key must rather clash with the (presumably) joyous words. I confess I feel, with him, the necessity of new words for this grand old tune. Of course, I take it for granted, this is merely an experiment, and that in his book, if he publishes one, ‘Molly’ will appear in its original and enigmatical form.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 22 May 1895, MNHL, MS 1277/46 A.

[9] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (4 DECEMBER 1895)

I rather think you had an idea of including it [*ie*, “Here comes three Dukes a-riding”] in your Collection of Manx Songs. But it is not Manx, and cannot properly enter into your scheme.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 4 December 1895, MNHL, MS 1277/49 A.

[10] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (29 MAY 1895)

I have heard from Gill.

There seems to be noting in the Sheppard business, a mere tradition, I should say, of a man and a method, no MSS, no recovery of ancient, popular music, no remains that can in any way concern you, or modify your plans. The course is clear.

I go to Baldwin on Saturday, and shall be there till the following Saturday. Probably I shall look you up at Woodbourne.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 29 May 1895, MNHL, MS 1277/46 A.

[11] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (19 FEBRUARY 1896)

Ramsey, | Feb. 19 /96

My Dear M^r Moore,

I have your Introduction, also two fasciculi of the Ballads down to page 77, also (not paged)

Courting Song—
My Cruel mistress—
Mother and daughter—
Wedding Song.

I have none of the Love songs (indecent), which I think you intend publishing in Manx only.

But, most important, I have not a single Tune.

I cannot but think you gave me the tunes. Still no where are they to be found. Without them I can make no progress.

Of “The Manx Note Book” I have only an imperfect set, including sundry duplicates. This is exasperating. I seem to have lost that singularly important No. containing the “Fin as Oshin,” with Deemster Heywood’s letter.

To-night I examined my Ossian thoroughly, to see if I could find any trace of the fragment. All I can determine is that our Fin as Oshin is utterly un-Ossianic—a good sign.

But the main thing is the “Tunes”

I fear I give you no end of trouble.

And have I the Words (as above indicated) complete?

Up a considerable tree, but not losing heart—

Ever y^{rs} | TE Brown.

A.W. Moore Esq:

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 19 February 1896, MNHL, MS 1277/50 A.

[12] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (13 MARCH 1896)

Ramsey, | March 13 /96

My Dear M^r Moore,

How time runs on!

I refer to the date of your last letter (Feb. 22).

I think I have now the whole collection—words and music. Introduction. Music pp. 5, 6.

Would you mind reading carefully from “And indeed it is clear that —— to “a century ago.”

I don’t follow the argument.

Do you mean it to stand thus—?

1 a priori, The geographical position of the I. of Man renders it unlikely that it should have produced many original tunes.

But a great quantity of tunes has, at one time or another, flourished in the Island.

∴ They cannot (the great majority) have been original tunes.

If this is what you mean, I think you might make it clearer. The word as, in a passage of reasoning, is rather a slippery concern, tending to ambiguity. It also tends to long sentences, which, themselves, tend to ambiguity. Witness the length of the sentence to which I refer.

I still think that the pronunciation of Manx from Philip's time to the present not having changed is little short of a miracle. But that it should have not have changed from the beginning of Manx history to the present day would be a fact unparalleled in the annals of literature. To claim this for Manx would be to claim for an unwritten language an advantage in point of fixity over a written language.

In any case, I suppose we must not ~~regard~~ call "Fin as Oshin" an ancient composition. It is, probably, not as ancient as the "Mannanan," if the "Mannanan" was written any where near 1507. "From what height fallen!" from Epic! Epic, did we not say?

Aw, bless your rou! Ye muss dthrop y anthem. "Ballad" is big enough for it.

I suspect that "Mannanan" too must come down the ladder, though it is difficult to say why this anthem broke off at 1507, if he lived much after that.

Love Songs—

According to D^r Clague these are almost all horribly indecent. He says that one verse, or, at the utmost, two, may be tolerated, but 'invariably' the rest is absolute dirt. Moreover he declares that these songs are exceedingly numerous.

I suppose you will allude to this as one of the [*unreadable*] reasons for excluding a large body of ~~songs~~ compositions. It involves a reflection on the moral and intellectual character of our people; but they deserve it, and historical truth demands the sacrifice of our national feelings.

For the Preface—you can, I dare say, give me a few months more. The fact is, I shall be a good deal occupied towards July. However, please state the [*unreadable*] and of my tether.

The Music

I take it for granted that these proofs have not been revised. They contain several mistakes which could not have escaped the eye, or the avenging pencil of Miss Wood.

I have an idea that the finest and (for it means much the same thing) most ancient 'Manx' tunes ~~have~~ were originally composed without words (Lieder ohne Worte), or if with words, that they, some time or other, lost them, and, when words were felt to be wanted, a poorer, baser, and more crudely imitative generation supplied them. You see you have already [*unreadable*] several tunes without words, not a few of them self-declared dance tunes. I am though inclined to the belief that the violin, so markedly and significantly mentioned by Chaloner as our favourite instrument, was

originally used for dance-music. Waldron also seems to have associated our music with “Weddings” (unquestionably dances). Quayle gives quite the same impression when speaking of music as performed at Mheillias.

Wherefore “what-and-if” this would prove ‘to be’ the historical analysis of Manx songs?

1. Music without words.—Dance music
2. — with words. Ancient songs. Words, for the most part lost long ago.
3. — re wedding of tunes to inferior words.
4. — a few obstinate old Batchelor tunes still stand out.

Ever y^{rs} | TE Brown
A.W. Moore Esq.

“The Demon Lover” | surely Scotch. | TEB.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 13 March 1896, MNHL, MS 1277/52 A.

[13] **REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (16 MARCH 1896)**

Ramsey | March 16 / 96.

Dear M^r Moore.

I quite follow your argument as expressed in its latest form.

It is gratifying to think that you have reason for mistrusting D^r Clague’s estimate of Manx Love Songs.

In illustration of this matter, and by way of final reference to it, I would suggest the fertility of the indecent field in all countries. I have no doubt, with the Doctor, that there is an abundance of filth seething all around us, that it cannot, however, be called literature, and yet, in the absence of poetry, has come to take its place. Which is little more to say that, generally, in a country and among a people where literature, and especially poetic literature, is at a low ebb, indecency is apt to be rife—filthy songs and so forth. So we need not lay the blame on Manx human nature, but on human nature in the aggregate, when subject to such conditions. the absence of poetry still remains to be accounted for, that absence which gave indecency its chance.

Anything that struck sterility into the Manx poetical mind would be largely responsible for the crop of nastiness, which I doubt not exists, and which I know existed some 60 years ago in a way and to an extent little suspected by the better class of parents. You have suggested as one cause for this sterility Methodism. I am much disposed to agree with you. Add^d, on the other hand,¹ the rigid Church discipline of Barrow and Wilson, and I believe you will have a gone a long way to solve the

problem. Slaves are always a foul and filthy breed. The terrors of Ecclesiasticism in this world and of Methodism in the next, two forms of discipline really springs from one root—there you have the source of our Poetic poverty. If you want any further cause, you may conjecture it in the tyranny and depressing influence of the Derby regime before the Act of Settlement.

As regards the two main sources—it is instiructive perhaps it is a bit ghostly, to have to trace Manx indecency to the High Church system of the late Derby Episcopate and to Methodism.

Music. I will point out some manifest errors of the press, but the others I can only leave to Miss Wood, or M^r Colin Brown, with a general caveat.

I shall have a word or two to say about the harmonies as arranged in this book.

And you may expect, I hope, before Easter, the Preface, which will be short, but, I trust, carefully done.

Ever y^{rs} | TE Brown.

A.W. Moore Esq

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 16 March 1896, MNHL, MS 1277/53 A.

[14] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (22 MARCH 1896)

Ramsey, | March 22 /96

My dear M^r Moore,

The Preface will soon be ready. It is a hindrance that the music proofs are not paged. When I have occasion to refer to a tune, I should like to mention the page without giving either the Manx or English Title. Perhaps, you could fill them in, as they occur.

In these last proofs I can find only two palpable errors.

The first occurs 'how handy the page No. would be here for instance!¹ in—

Tappagyn jiaragey, at bar 5.

The second in—

Car y phoosey^{f'ee}, at bar 3.

I have corrected these in the margin of the rough proofs, which I enclose. The same errors are repeated in the copies last sent, which, as you kindly permit, I retain.

“Shegin Dooin (We must).

(No words)”

Would it not be as well to have a uniform use?

Yet you omit the “(No words)”

with “Jemmy as Nancy,”

“False Isabel”

“The White Wort (Baldwin)”

“Marish ny Fiddleryn,”

and

“Three Easteyryn Boghtey.”

Of the last there is no translation of the title (in the Tunes).

In the Preface I should like to emphasize the beauty of three tunes—

viz. “My caillin veg dhone,”

“Keayrt va mee aeg.”

And

“Three easteyryn boghtey.”—

and should indicate the pages on which they can be found if I could.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 22 March 1896, MNHL, MS 1277/54 A.

[15] **REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (23 MARCH 1896)**

Ramsey. | March 23 /96

My Dear M^r Moore

Have you seen 1st number of “The Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie”?

It contains a Manx song. In part it is your “Marish ny Fiddleryn.” But whereas yours is a matter of 16 lines, and obviously, I think, a ~~fragment~~ fragment, this extends to 52 lines, and seems complete. The article is signed J. Strachan, Marple, Cheshire, England. The Manx text is written in some bastard phonetic of M^r Strachan’s own invention, and a Transl. is given into English

As it stands now, it is so fine a song that I am unwilling you should miss the chance of including it, without mutilation, in your collection.

Strachan got it from one Tho^s Kermode of Bradda, a blind fisherman.

Do you know him?

The Preface will be ready by Saturday next at latest.

Ever yrs | T.E. Brown.

A.W. Moore. Esq.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 23 March 1896, MNHL, MS 1277/55 A.

[16] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (25 APRIL 1896)

25 April 1896

I am glad you like the Preface. But I want to make one alteration, an omission, in fact. Upon mature reflection, I am disposed to think that Clague's charge against the morality of Manx Love-Songs is not to be treated as of much importance. All races produce that kind of growth. After all, the complaint we have to make against our Love-Songs is that there is so little Love in them, so little genuine passion. We might perhaps, comparing our Literature with that of other nations, be content to let indecency control indecency, in short, to neglect a factor common to all Literatures, and only a disgusting accident, which can no more be helped than any other function of the lower nature.

The phlegm of the race erotically, except in the direction of the *Ερως άντερως*, is deeply to be regretted, and does suggest ~~the~~ some such reason as I have assigned.

With ~~that~~ this view, I should like to make a slight omission as well as alteration. And it would, I think, be just as well for me to have the MS back for an hour or so, unless it is in the Printer's hands.

I quite agree with you upon the principle of independence which should actuate both the preliminary essays. But, when I have independently thought better of a point, and the alteration tends to promote identity of treatment, I think it would be a pity not to change what is a novel than a matter of tone, 'being' a question, indeed, of fact and fairness.

Poor Willy Gill is hors-de-combat. He too has been overdoing himself. His printer has been worrying the life out of him. I expect your book will be out first.

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 25 April 1896, MNHL, MS 1277/56 A.

[17] REV. BROWN TO A.W. MOORE (27 DECEMBER 1896)

What a delightful book! Exceeding many thanks.

It has its place, and will hold its own. Willy Gill's has great merit, but the condescension to the mob (genteel or otherwise) leans towards vulgarity. See the Cover!"

Source: Rev. T.E. Brown to A.W. Moore, 27 December 1896, MNHL, MS 1277/57 A.

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STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2006