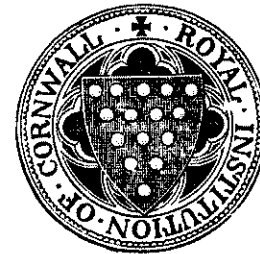


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VERSE STRUCTURE AND MUSICAL PERFORMANCE  
IN *BEWNANS KE*  
Benjamin Bruch

Medieval Cornish literature presents an unusual picture for those more accustomed to the other Celtic literary traditions of the Middle Ages. As with Irish, Welsh, and Breton, much of the surviving corpus of medieval Cornish writing is in verse. But whereas in Ireland and Wales the emphasis during this period was on complex and highly ornamented poetry composed by a class of educated professional poets, most of the Cornish verse literature that has come down to us takes the form of religious drama: mystery plays and saints' plays composed in a simple style almost entirely devoid of alliteration, assonance, *cynghanedd*, or any of the other ornaments so prized by Irish and Welsh writers and their wealthy patrons. In this the Cornish tradition is much closer to that of Brittany, England, France, and Germany, places where vernacular plays depicting the lives of saints and stories from the Bible were extremely popular during the Middle Ages, and in some cases persisted well into the modern period.<sup>1</sup>

Yet even within this common western European genre, there are some significant stylistic features which distinguish the Cornish dramas from those of England, France, and Brittany. The Cornish plays are written in stanzaic verse and make little or no use of the rhymed couplet which is so prevalent in French and English works of the time. They follow a rule of end-rhyme which is similar to that used in Breton verse, but lack the long lines and complex internal rhymes of Middle Breton drama. And while the content of the Cornish plays is substantially similar to that found in other medieval literary traditions, it is evident from the range and types of source material used and the wealth of local references in the dialogue that these plays are not simply translations or adaptations of works originally written in another language.<sup>2</sup>

The principal surviving works of medieval Cornish drama are as follows:

1. The Cornish *Ordinalia*, a trilogy of Biblical plays known individually as *Origo Mundi (OM)*, *Passio Christi (PC)*, and *Resurrexio Domini (RD)*, written c. 1400, and preserved in a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript, Oxford MS. Bodl. 791.
2. *Beunans Meriasek (BM)*, 'The Life of St Meriasek', found in National Library of Wales MS. Peniarth 105b, a manuscript written in 1504, but whose first ten pages were rewritten in the mid-sixteenth century.
3. *Bewnans Ke (BK)*, 'The Life of St Ke', probably written c. 1500–20, and known only from a fragmentary and imperfect copy of the later sixteenth century, National Library of Wales MS. 23,849D.
4. *Gwreans an Bys (GB)*, also known by its English title *Creacion of the World*, preserved in Oxford MS. Bodl. 219, a manuscript written in 1611.

The first three of these works date from the Middle Cornish period (c. 1200 – c. 1575), while *Gwreans an Bys* is a Late Cornish play which shows a number of Middle Cornish features, and which clearly belongs to the Middle Cornish literary tradition.<sup>3</sup> For the sake of convenience, and despite the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dates of the three later works, all of these texts may be described as works of 'medieval' Cornish literature, since they all form part of the medieval European tradition of religious poetry and verse drama.

Although religious drama in Cornish seems to have remained popular well into the 1500s, the tradition likely came to an end sometime during the century following the Reformation, and a number of plays were lost. Of the four works cited above, only two (the *Ordinalia* cycle

and the play *Gwreans an Bys*) were known to scholars at the start of the nineteenth century. The manuscript of *Beunans Meriasek* was discovered in Wales in 1869,<sup>4</sup> and most published scholarship on Cornish drama (including Brian Murdoch's landmark study *Cornish Literature*) is based on these three texts, which share a number of common features. In 1999, a hitherto unknown Cornish manuscript was found among the papers of the late Professor J. E. Caerwyn Williams, and although incomplete, this has provided us with a substantial portion of another saint's play, *Bewnans Ke*.<sup>5</sup>

The recent addition of *Bewnans Ke* to the corpus of medieval Cornish drama has enabled scholars to test long-held assumptions and theories about the nature and historical development of the genre in Cornwall. In many respects, the play conforms to the patterns of the earlier dramas. It uses verse forms very similar to those of *Beunans Meriasek*, and like *Meriasek*, the play tells the story of a local Cornish saint. It does present a few new puzzles, however, among which is the remarkably tedious and repetitious nature of the dialogue in the second half of the play. It has been suggested that this extensive use of repetition could be a sign that the scenes in question were intended to be sung to music.

It is clear that music played a significant role in the performance of the Cornish plays, and there are numerous references to music, musicians, and singing within the manuscripts of the dramas themselves.<sup>6</sup> The most striking example of vocal music in the corpus is the following 'refrain', which is sung three times in *Resurrexio Domini* by the three Marys who are mourning Christ:<sup>7</sup>

[cantant]	[they sing]
Ellas mornyngh y syngh mornyngh y cal	Alas, mourning I sing, mourning I call,
our lord ys deyd that bogthe ovs al	Our Lord is dead that bought us all.
(RD 733-4) <sup>8</sup>	

This marks the only point in the dramas where the words of a song are actually provided in full in the script (assuming, of course, that this is not simply the opening couplet of a longer lament), accompanied by a stage direction (*cantant* 'they sing') which clearly marks them as text to be sung rather than spoken. However, there are many other instances in the plays where a stage direction indicates that a hymn is to be sung at a certain point in the action. Sometimes, as after lines 421 and 2528 of *Resurrexio Domini*, a particular hymn is specified by name, while elsewhere, as in *Gwreans an Bys*, we are simply told that 'Som good Church songs' are to be sung (GB 2491; see also GB 2078).<sup>9</sup> Nor is all the music in Cornish drama of a religious nature: after line 3419 of *Beunans Meriasek*, for example, we find the stage direction '& Cantant omnes tortores' (And all the torturers sing).<sup>10</sup> In the context of this scene — a 'Black Mass' in which the torturers have offered animal sacrifices to their pagan gods — this probably refers to a secular or even sacrilegious song of some kind, and unlike the Latin hymns of the pre-Reformation *Ordinalia* or the presumably English 'Church songs' of the post-Reformation *Gwreans an Bys*, this may well have been an occasion when a song with Cornish lyrics might have been performed.

Instrumental as well as vocal music featured in the plays, and it seems likely that nearly every performance of Cornish drama ended with festive music and dancing. Sixteenth-century church and borough records from Cornwall record 'payments for musicians associated with drama,'<sup>11</sup> and *Origo Mundi*, *Resurrexio Domini*, and *Beunans Meriasek* all end with a call for minstrels (*menstrels*) or pipers (*pyboryon*) to strike up a tune 'so that we may go dancing' (*may hyllyn mos the thonssye*, RD 2646; compare BM 2512, BM 4565, GB 2547). Although no such reference appears in *Bewnans Ke*, this may simply reflect the incomplete nature of the manuscript: if, as seems likely, *Bewnans Ke* represents a two-day cycle comparable in scope to

*Beunans Meriasek*, the lacunae in our surviving text include what would have been the ends of both the first and second days' action. *Passio Christi* also lacks a reference to minstrels, but this can doubtless be explained by its solemn subject matter: Christ's passion, death, and burial, which would not have been a suitable prelude to revelry.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to hymns, songs, and musical interludes which are referred to in stage directions or dialogue, some scholars have also hypothesised that certain speeches in the plays were set to music. Since none of the dialogue in the dramas (apart from the English refrain sung by the three Marys in *Resurrexio Domini*) is explicitly marked in the manuscripts as text to be sung, the suggestion that a particular stanza or sequence of stanzas may have been set to music has usually been based upon the content of the passage or the verse forms used.<sup>13</sup> The idea that particular verse forms might be indicative of sung rather than spoken text seems to have originated with Edwin Norris. In his discussion of the various stanza forms in the Cornish *Ordinalia*, Norris characterizes certain varieties — notably those constructed of shorter, four-syllable lines — as being common in 'declamatory or lyrical passages', adding that 'sometimes they seem to be like the bits of rhyme occurring mingled with the blank verse in the writings of our old dramatists, or the songs in what is sometimes called the English Opera.'<sup>14</sup> This idea is taken up by T. D. Crawford, who also suggests that a series of metrically 'anomalous' stanzas in *Resurrexio Domini* (lines 835-92) might represent 'a scene set entirely to music.'<sup>15</sup>

Other commentators have used content rather than metrical form as their guide. For example, Henry Jenner, Robert Longworth, and Jane Bakere have all discussed the relationship of the scene in *Passio Christi* where seven boys (*pueri*) welcome Christ into Jerusalem to the Palm Sunday hymn *Gloria Laus* from the *Sarum Missal*, which is sung by seven boys.<sup>16</sup> Not only does the source material for this sequence (a hymn) imply that the boys' greeting in the play was intended to be sung, but there are also formal and contextual elements that support this view. The boys' speeches include a number of short-line stanzas of the type that Norris associates with musical performance, and the boys even describe themselves as singing to Christ: 'pebol war pen y dev glyn / a gan yn gorthyans dotho' (everyone, on his knees, will sing in praise to Him) (PC 247-8).

While the *Ordinalia* may have used such musical interludes, often involving unusual stanza types, to highlight the drama or pathos of certain episodes, a rather different situation obtains in *Bewnans Ke*. Although this play is known only from a single fragmentary manuscript copy, the original drama seems to have comprised two large sections which relate the life of St. Ke and episodes from the life of King Arthur, respectively. The Arthurian portion of the play is particularly notable for the highly repetitious nature of its dialogue. As Oliver Padel has described it, the majority of this part of the play is concerned with protocol rather than action, as a steady stream of kings, dukes, bishops, legates, senators, and other dignitaries pay their respects to King Arthur or the Roman emperor. Many of these long sequences of greetings involve the repetition of stanza forms, lines, or even whole sections of dialogue by a series of similar characters, and the overall effect is monotonous to the modern reader, if not to the medieval spectator.

At a seminar on *Bewnans Ke* presented by Oliver Padel in February 2005 at the University of Edinburgh, Philip Bennett of the university's French department made the suggestion that these passages might have been sung rather than spoken, by analogy with medieval French drama which contains some examples of 'lyric interludes' with recurring refrains.<sup>17</sup> Unlike most of the passages which writers on Cornish drama have associated with musical performance, however, these lyrical passages in the French plays are often marked in the stage directions as text to be sung, and unlike at least some of the Cornish material, the transition from spoken to sung dialogue seems generally to correspond to a shift in versification from the

more usual octosyllabic couplets of French drama to other forms like 'rondeaux, ballades, chansons, [and] serventois.' Bennett is also quick to acknowledge that extensive and detailed catalogues of nobles and dignitaries are commonplace in medieval literature, and that spectators used to such long lists of characters, feats, and finery might have found nothing at all objectionable in the repetitious dialogue of *Bewnans Ke*. Nonetheless, the possibility that such scenes might have been intended for musical performance is worth considering, since it is easier to imagine an audience sitting through twelve verses of a song than through a sequence of twelve largely identical speeches — especially considering the large number of such sequences which occur in the play.

There are many instances in the Arthurian part of *Bewnans Ke* in which a block of text comprising several lines is repeated or echoed in a number of consecutive stanzas. This 'refrain' forms part of the normal metrical and rhyme patterns of the stanza, often comprising all or part of the *cauda* (or 'tail', usually the last four lines) of an ABABcDDC stanza or similar verse form.<sup>18</sup> Such is the case in the following sequence, where the same four-line unit is used to conclude three successive speeches:

<p><b>AUGELUS</b> Ave pater Arthore lowena thys hag oner turba gentis futuræ a record the vonas flowr mer ew [t]he fves the vannath hath ryelder a ra the gorf in pelder nyth ankevyr bytthyth brves</p>	<p><b>AUGELUS</b> Ave pater Arthore [<i>Hail, Arthur, father (of the people)!</i>] <i>Joy to you and honor!</i> Turba gentis futuræ [<i>All posterity</i>] <i>will record that you are perfect!</i> <i>Great is your fortune.</i> <i>Your blessing and your royalty</i> <i>will spread your fame far and wide.</i><sup>19</sup> <i>You shall not be forgotten till Judgement Day.</i></p>
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<p><b>MORRYDUS</b> Lowena thum arluth mas lowena then gwelha govr lowena the berhan ras lowena thys barth yth towr mer ew the fves the vannath hath ryelder a ra the gorf in pelder nyth ankevyr bytthyth brves</p>	<p><b>MORRYDUS</b> <i>Joy to you, my good lord!</i> <i>Joy to the best of men!</i> <i>Joy to a master of grace!</i> <i>Joy to you, in your tower!</i> <i>Great is your fortune.</i> <i>Your blessing and your royalty</i> <i>will spread your fame far and wide.</i> <i>You shall not be forgotten till Judgement Day.</i></p>
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<p><b>CADORUS</b> Lowena ha lvne rowath theso war ver lavarow rag bos in yth elonyth ny ve genys the barow mer ew the fves the vannath hath ryelder a ra the gorf in pelder nyth ankevyr bytthyth brves (BK, fol. 10v, stanzas 222–4)<sup>20</sup></p>	<p><b>CADORUS</b> <i>Joy and full dignity</i> <i>to you, in few words,</i> <i>for being in high lineage (?) !</i> <i>No man born is your equal.</i> <i>Great is your fortune.</i> <i>Your blessing and your royalty</i> <i>will spread your fame far and wide.</i> <i>You shall not be forgotten till Judgement Day.</i></p>
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Such regular repetition is reminiscent of musical performance, with the same 'refrain' appearing at the end of each new verse. Like many a musical refrain, the *cauda* of an ABABcDDC stanza is heralded by a change of metre, as the line length decreases from seven to four syllables.

Stanzas 256–70 of *Bewnans Ke* (fols 12r–v) show a similar use of repetition or refrain to link adjacent speeches. In this scene, a series of twelve legates sent by the Roman emperor are greeting King Arthur. The legates addressing the king using one verse form (ABABcddC), while Arthur responds in another (ababcdedec). The legates' speeches are grouped in pairs, and the final three or four lines of each pair are identical, as in the following example:

<p><b>SEPTIMUS LEGATUS</b> Lowena theugh a vyghterne hag onors drys an tasow the yskerans a dres spern mara meryth in fasow sertan heb mar a pes syrrys hath voth terrys nyth wortesa gwyls na whar</p>	<p><b>SEVENTH LEGATE</b> <i>Joy to you, O king,</i> <i>and honours from the senators (?) !</i> <i>Your enemies shall go through thorns</i> <i>if you look them in the face.</i> <i>Certainly, without doubt,</i> <i>if you were angered,</i> <i>and your will broken,</i> <i>neither wild nor tame would withstand you.</i></p>
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<p><b>OCTAVUS LEGATUS</b> Lowena thys myghtern stowt in vhelder in the se pob ath wormol nynoges dowt hedre vo bys in e le ha suer heb mar a pes syrrys hath voth terrys nyth wortesa gwyls na whar (BK, fol. 12v, stanzas 264–5)</p>	<p><b>EIGHTH LEGATE</b> <i>Joy to you, stout king,</i> <i>on high upon your throne!</i> <i>Everyone will praise you, there is no doubt,</i> <i>as long as the world is in its place,</i> <i>and surely, without doubt,</i> <i>if you were angered,</i> <i>and your will broken,</i> <i>neither wild nor tame would withstand you.</i></p>
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Here, the last four lines of the two stanzas are identical, except for the synonymous words *sertan* 'certainly' and *suer* 'surely'.

The overall structure of this scene is likewise interesting for the alternation of verse forms between the legates who consistently use an ABABcddC pattern, and the king who often uses a different form (ababcdedec). If this scene were set to music, presumably the two different stanza forms would be sung to different melodies. The structure is as follows:

Stanzas 256–7:	First and Second Legate (ABABcddC).
Stanza 258:	King Arthur (ababcdedec).
Stanzas 259–60:	Third and Fourth Legate (ABABcddC).
Stanzas 261–2:	Fifth and Sixth Legate (ABABcddC).
Stanza 263:	King Arthur (ababcdedec).
Stanzas 264–5:	Seventh and Eighth Legate (ABABcddC).
Stanzas 266–7:	Ninth and Tenth Legate (ABABcddC).
Stanzas 268–9:	Eleventh and Twelfth Legate (ABABcddC). As it appears in the manuscript, stanza 269 has an irregular ABABccD form, but would become a regular ABABcddC stanza if we restore a (lost) line after line four by analogy with stanza 268. <sup>21</sup>

**Stanza 270:**

King Arthur (**ABABcddC**). The actual pattern of this stanza as it appears in the manuscript is **ABABccDd**, but this is almost certainly a copying error, and the final line of the stanza as written was probably the original fifth line of a regular **ABABcddC** form.

The scene thus begins with a pair of **ABABcddC** speeches followed by an **ababcdecd** response from Arthur; then two pairs followed by a similar response; and finally three pairs followed by a response which is given in the **ABABcddC** form of the legates' speeches. This pattern of alternation and accretion, which we might represent graphically as **X Y XX Y XXX Y'**, seems too regular to be mere accident, and suggests that an overarching structure — possibly a musical form of some kind — governs the sequence as a whole.

Likewise, stanzas 338–52 (fols 16r–v), all but one of which are written in the same **AABCCBdeeD** form, consist of a similar series of greetings, here from kings and dukes paying homage to the Roman emperor. Although there is no repetition of lines between adjacent stanzas, all of the nobles' speeches have a parallel structure:

**EXERCES REX ITURIORUM,  
SECUNDUS REX**

Lowena thys ser Lucy  
ow arluth emperor worthy  
ny re deth thys gans an ger  
the sogys hath wostoyth on  
byth lowaneys the golan  
ath yskar na berth awher  
arluth worthy  
me Excerces  
ew gverror fers  
ha myghtern in Inury

**EXERCES, KING OF THE ITURIANS,  
SECOND KING**

*Joy to you, sir Lucius,  
my worthy lord Emperor!  
We have come to you at [your] word.  
We are your subjects and your followers.  
Let your heart be cheered;  
Have no anxiety about your enemy,  
worthy lord.  
I, Excerces,  
am a fierce warrior,  
And King in Inury.*

**ALPHATINA REX HISSPANIE,  
TERTIUS REX**

Hail thewhy ha lowena  
ny re dueth theugh thum ena  
the wostoyth an gylasow pel  
Arthor rag e the venya  
ef a verew kyn tremena  
kyn fe vyth mar ver e nyel  
ny scap rum pen  
ca tristyough thyn  
me Alphatyn  
myghtern Spain an deg the sen

**ALPHATINA, KING OF SPAIN,  
THIRD KING**

*Hail to you, and joy!  
We have come to you, by my soul,  
your people from far lands.  
Arthur, I have come for revenge on him (?);  
he shall die before crossing (?).  
No matter how great his power,  
he shall not escape, by my pate!  
Yea, trust in us,  
I, Alphatine,  
the king of Spain will bring him low.*

**MICYPPA REX BABILONIÆ,  
QUARTUS REX**

Lowena thum arluth mas  
ny re dueth a lyas gwlas  
pan glowsyn the vos serrys  
genegy rag syngy cas  
pen the yskar ren ow thas

**MICYPPA, KING OF BABYLON,  
FOURTH KING**

*Joy to my good lord!  
We have come from many lands,  
since we heard that you were angry,  
so that we could wage war [along] with you.  
By my father, the head of your enemy*

in ol hast a with terrys  
der vras colan  
me Micyppa  
ew gwerryor da  
ha myghtern in Babylon  
(*BK*, fol. 16r, stanzas 340–2)

*shall be cut off in all haste  
through [my] great heart!  
I, Micyppa,  
am a good warrior,  
and king in Babylon.*

Each stanza begins with a greeting formula — typically a variation on the common Cornish salutation *lowena thys* 'joy to you' — followed by a promise to fight the Emperor's enemy Arthur. In the *cauda* of each stanza, the speaker states his name, his title, and the name of his country. As in the previous sequence, there is also a larger overall pattern of versification at work in this section of the play:

**Stanza 338:**

Emperor (**AABCCBdeeD**).

**Stanzas 339–44:**

Kings nos. 1–6 (**AABCCBdeeD**).

**Stanza 345:**

Emperor (**AABCCCB**).

**Stanzas 346–51:**

King no. 7 and Dukes nos. 1–5 (**AABCCBdeeD**).

**Stanza 352:**

Emperor (**AABCCBdeeD**).

It is interesting that the only stanza which does not use the **AABCCBdeeD** verse form is stanza 345, a speech by the Emperor which occurs exactly in the middle of the sequence. That the kings' and dukes' speeches are divided symmetrically in groups of six is of note as well, since it might have made more sense to group the seventh king with the first six for reasons of status. The careful symmetry of this scene as a whole (**X YYYYYY X' YYYYYY X**), like the additive pattern we observed in stanzas 256–70 (fols 12r–v), could conceivably represent a larger musical structure.

The above are just a few of the methods employed in the Arthurian portion of *Bewnans Ke* to group stanzas into larger units. In stanzas 235–40 (fols 11r–v) and 242–7 (fols 11v–12r), in which the legates address the Roman Emperor in a series of **ababcdecd** stanzas, each speech begins with a similar phrase: 'hayl pryns of myght,' 'hayl arluth fre' (hail, free lord), 'hayl syr emperour,' 'hayl arluth heel' (hail, generous lord), 'hayl arluth ker' (hail, dear lord), and 'hayl arluth bold' (hail, bold lord). Stanzas 204–16 (fols 10r–v), in which a series of kings and other nobles address Arthur, employ a similar device known as *concatenatio*, in which each speech begins with a repetition of the word or phrase with which the preceding speech ends:

**REX GODLANDIE, QUINTUS**

.....  
orth e socra mar pyth rys

**KING OF GOTHLAND, FIFTH [KING]**

.....  
*helping him, if need be.*

**REX CRAGOW, SEXTUS**

Mar pyth rys war ow forth hyr  
.....

**KING OF CRACOW, SIXTH [KING]**

*If need be, on my long way*  
.....

wel myght he be stowt ha gay

*well might he be stout and gay.*

**ARTHURUS sedens**

Stowt & gay & symly syr  
.....

**ARTHUR, sitting**

*Stout and gay, and seemly, sir,*  
.....

om yskerans me a feth

*I will defeat my enemies.*

REX CASTYL, SEPTIMUS  
Me a feth ren arluth dv

.....  
the yskerans der gras christ

MODREDUS NEPOS REGIS ARTHUR  
Der gras christ agen pernas

.....  
(BK, fol. 10r, stanzas 209–13)

KING OF CASTILE, SEVENTH [KING]  
I will defeat, by the Lord God,

.....  
your enemies, through the grace of Christ.

.....  
MODRED, NEPHEW OF KING ARTHUR  
Through the grace of Christ who redeemed us,

Of course, neither of these types of repetition is restricted to musical contexts: both are found in poetry and both are ideally suited to drama, as they help actors remember their cues. Nonetheless, the Arthurian portion of *Bewnans Ke* contains a surprising number of such sequences of linked stanzas, and might be seen to contain still more if the text of our manuscript were less corrupt.

I have elsewhere compared *Bewnans Ke* to 'a Broadway revue: full of bright lights, big production numbers, and tunes you can whistle — but without much of a plot.'<sup>22</sup> Certainly, all of the sequences described above seem to have been written with the aim of filling the stage with a veritable chorus line of kings, dukes, and dignitaries. The author of the Arthurian section of *Bewnans Ke* appears on the whole to have been more concerned with providing pomp and pageantry than with creating a well-crafted drama. It is possible that the textual repetition and overarching verse structures discussed above are simply compositional techniques used by a writer of limited imagination who was fond of creating complex verse forms at the expense of plot development. Perhaps, as Oliver Padel has suggested, the playwright wished to provide a number of small parts for local actors, and felt it would be easier for such players to remember their lines if repeated 'refrains' and similar cues were incorporated into the dialogue. In light of these possibilities, and bearing in mind medieval writers' propensity for long-winded description of nobles and their finery, we need not assume that the repetitive sequences in *Bewnans Ke* are anything but ordinary dialogue.

Yet as Philip Bennett has observed, these repetitious scenes may have a parallel in the 'lyric interludes' which appear in some medieval French dramas. And although the text of *Bewnans Ke* that has come down to us lacks some of the overt references to singing, dancing, and minstrelsy that are found in the other known works of medieval Cornish drama, there is at least one allusion to vocal music in the manuscript, and it appears in the Arthurian portion of the play, when Arthur speaks of returning to his palace 'gans cannow' (with songs) (BK, fol. 13r, stanza 276). While neither Bennett nor I would assert that the evidence presented here proves that music *must* have played a role in the staging of *Bewnans Ke*, it is worth entertaining the possibility that at least portions of the Arthurian section of the play were intended for an 'operatic' performance of the kind Edwin Norris envisioned for certain scenes in the *Ordinalia*.<sup>23</sup> If, as seems likely, the main aim of the playwright was to fill the stage with actors in colourful costumes, the pageantry would only have been heightened by the addition of music to the spectacle. Regrettably, due to the fragmentary nature of the only surviving manuscript, we may never learn how *Bewnans Ke* was meant to be performed; and so for now, at least, the question remains open.

Notes (for bibliography see p. 66)

1. On parallels between medieval Cornish texts and works in Breton, English, French, and German, see Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, pp. 5–6.
2. On source material for the *Ordinalia*, *Gwreans an Bys*, and *Beunans Meriasek*, see Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, pp. 41–126, and Bakere, *Cornish Ordinalia*, pp. 50–108. The extent to which oral sources and local legends were incorporated into Cornish saints' plays is discussed in Padel, 'Oral and Literary Culture in Medieval Cornwall'.
3. George, *Pronunciation and Spelling*, p. 10. It should be noted that George no longer considers *Gwreans an Bys* as a Late Cornish text, but would now describe the play as Middle Cornish (personal communication, 1 January 2005).
4. Meyer, 'The Middle-Cornish Play *Beunans Meriasek*', p. 54.
5. Padel, 'Bewnans Ke: The Life of St Ke', p. 1.
6. For a fuller discussion of these references, see Bruch, 'Word and Music in Medieval Cornish Drama' (forthcoming).
7. All quotations from medieval Cornish plays are drawn from my own database of Cornish verse, which I derived from computer files originally compiled by Andrew Hawke and (for *Bewnans Ke*) Oliver Padel, and which I checked against photographs or facsimiles of the original manuscripts.
8. Line numbers cited for *Origo Mundi*, *Passio Christi*, and *Resurrexio Domini* are those of Norris's *Ancient Cornish Drama*.
9. Line numbers cited for *Gwreans an Bys* are those of Neuss's edition (*Creacion of the World*).
10. Line numbers cited for *Beunans Meriasek* are those of Stokes's edition.
11. Joyce and Newlyn, *Cornwall*, p. 410.
12. Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, p. 66; Joyce and Newlyn, *Cornwall*, pp. 542–43.
13. See Bruch, 'Word and Music in Medieval Cornish Drama' (forthcoming) for a more detailed discussion of the particular stanza forms that may be associated with musical performance.
14. Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama*, II, p. 450.
15. Crawford, 'Composition of the Cornish *Ordinalia*', p. 175 n. 46; see also *ibid.*, p. 171.
16. Bakere, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 60; Longworth, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 109.
17. All quotations in this paragraph are from personal communications with Philip Bennett, dated 26 and 30 January 2006.
18. Here, as elsewhere in my work on Cornish metrics, the letters in a sequence like **ABABcDDC** indicate the pattern of end-rhymes in a stanza, with each letter representing one line. Capital letters (**ABAB**) are used for seven-syllable lines (the most common line length in Cornish verse), while lower-case letters (**c**) are used for four-syllable lines (the next most common length).
19. The line *a ra the gorf in pelder* literally means 'will make your person in the distance', and is difficult to translate idiomatically. The sense, however, seems to be something like 'will make your reputation [your "person"] known in distant times and places'. If we imagine that the playwright was familiar with the tradition that Arthur will one day return to lead his people, we might also be tempted to translate this line as 'will preserve your body in perpetuity'.
20. The stanza numbers used in references to *Bewnans Ke* are those of Padel's transcription of National Library of Wales MS. 23,849D. They were communicated to Dr. Padel by Graham Thomas, and should correspond approximately to those in the forthcoming edition of *Bewnans Ke* by Thomas and N. J. A. Williams. The English translations provided here and elsewhere in this paper are considerably indebted to Michael Polkinhorn's translation of 'Bewnans Ke', although I have at times preferred my own rendering to a line of Polkinhorn's.
21. Bruch, 'Cornish Verse Forms', p. 303.
22. *ibid.*, p. 308.
23. Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama*, II, p. 447.

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