Word and Music in Medieval Cornish Drama

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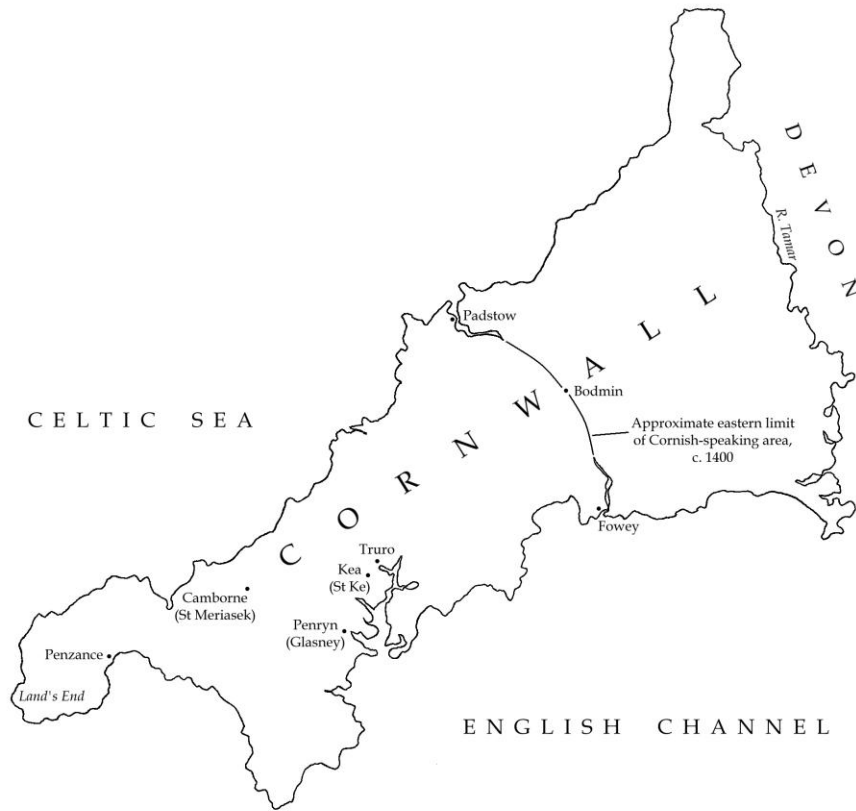
1. The Cornish Language and Cornish Vocal Music

The history of the Cornish language differs from that of the other five Insular Celtic languages in one very important respect. Unlike Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton, which are universally recognized as living (albeit endangered) languages, Cornish is often regarded as a dead language. And unlike Manx – the other modern Celtic language that is commonly described as "dead" – there are no recordings or reliable phonetic transcriptions of native speakers, and no chronological overlap between the last native speakers and the beginning of the movement to revive the language in the twentieth century. Because Cornish ceased to be a community language sometime in the early eighteenth century, and ceased to be spoken at all by the beginning of the nineteenth, many aspects of Cornish-speaking culture were irretrievably lost, including most if not all of the traditional vocal music of Cornwall.

Although Cornwall effectively lost its independence to England in the ninth and tenth centuries, it took another eight hundred years for the English language to wipe out the last traces of Cornwall's indigenous Celtic speech. At the start of the second millennium C.E., the Cornish language was spoken throughout almost the whole of Cornwall, from Land's End to the Tamar, except for a few areas of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the northeast and southeast.[1] By around 1400, the period when the earliest known works of Middle Cornish (ca. 1200-ca. 1575) literature were written, the isogloss which divided Cornwall into Cornish- and English-speaking zones had likely retreated as far as Bodmin, and although the western half of Cornwall was still largely Celtic-speaking, there were undoubtedly a number of Anglophones and bilinguals living within this area, particularly in the towns.[2] This state of affairs is represented in the map below:

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[1] Ken George, "Cornish," in *The Celtic Languages*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin J. Ball and Nicole Müller (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 489-490; Matthew Spriggs, "Where Cornish Was Spoken and When," *Cornish Studies* (Second Series) 11 (2003), pp. 242-243.

[2] Gloria Betcher, "A Reassessment of the Date and Provenance of the Cornish *Ordinalia*," 448; Benjamin Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, 318; Oliver J. Padel, "Oral and Literary Culture in Medieval Cornwall," in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. Helen Fulton (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), p. 96.

DEVON

R. Tamar

CORNWALL

CELTIC SEA

Padstow

Bodmin

Approximate eastern limit
of Cornish-speaking area,
c. 1400

Truro

Kea
(St Ke)

Camborne
(St Meriasek)

Penryn
(Glasney)

Penzance

Land's End

Fowey

ENGLISH CHANNEL

By 1700, the language was confined to a few communities in the far west, and was known only to members of the lower social classes and to a handful of "gentlemen-scholars" who sought to preserve it as a cultural artifact.[3] By 1800 the last fluent speakers of traditional Cornish had died, and while some fragments continued to be passed on from parent to child, and scholars like Edwin Norris and Whitley Stokes produced editions and translations of medieval Cornish texts, the language had effectively died with them. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the first faint stirrings of a movement to revive Cornish as a spoken language; today there are a small but growing number of fluent speakers, and literature and music are once again being

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[3] Brian Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, pp. 131-132; see also P. Berresford Ellis, *Cornish Language and Its Literature*, pp. 95-124.

produced in Cornish. However, since Cornish dropped out of use for a period of over a century between ca. 1800 and 1904, no one knows exactly how traditional Cornish of any period sounded, and modern revivalists have had to reconstruct the phonology and syntax of the language based largely on textual evidence and comparison with Breton and Welsh.

This one-hundred-year hiatus in the transmission of Cornish as a spoken language is paralleled by a comparable break in the history of vocal music in Cornish. Users of revived Cornish today know many songs in the language, but nearly all of these are either translations of folk songs originally written in English, Welsh, or Breton, or represent new original compositions, sometimes set to a traditional Cornish instrumental tune. In examining the surviving literature from the traditional period, we find only a handful of texts which can be clearly identified as songs, and in most cases only the lyrics have survived.[4] In addition, all of these song texts date from the Late Cornish period (ca. 1575-ca. 1800), a time during which Cornish literature and the Cornish language itself came increasingly under the influence of English. Much of the surviving material from this period was written by scholars and antiquaries who were native speakers of English and had learned Cornish only as a second language.[5] Due to the scarcity of Cornish source material, there is no way to tell to what extent – if any – their verse derives from an indigenous tradition of Cornish composition, and to what extent it is simply an imitation of English forms. Judging from the prosody of these works, which differs noticeably from that of the Middle Cornish period, I am inclined to agree with Brian Murdoch's assessment that "the content and style of these later pieces are essentially English."[6] In order to find a distinctively Cornish tradition of vocal music, therefore, we must turn to older material – and even then, there is little clear evidence to be found.

2. Medieval Cornish Versification

During a period of over two hundred years from the end of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the seventeenth century, a distinctive tradition of verse composition flourished in Cornwall. Nearly all of the surviving indigenous Cornish literature from this period is religious in nature, and all of it is in verse;

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[4] For examples, see Henry Jenner, *Handbook of the Cornish Language* (London: David Nutt, 1904), pp. 35-37; P. Berresford Ellis, *Cornish Language and Its Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 92-94.

[5] Ken George, *Pronunciation and Spelling of Revived Cornish* (Saltash: Cornish Language Board, 1986), p. 53.

[6] Brian Murdoch, *Cornish Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), p. 140; see also Jenner, *Handbook*, pp. 187-189.

the one prose text from this period, the *Tregear Homilies*, is a translation of works originally written in English. Although only six verse texts are known, and at least two of these are incomplete, medieval Cornish writers seem to have composed verse on a grand scale: even the shortest of the complete works that have come down to us is over 2,000 lines long. These six texts are as follows:

1. The *Charter Endorsement* (*CE*), written ca. 1350-1400 on the back of British Library MS. Add. Ch. 19,491, an "Indenture of Final Concord" dated 1340.[7]

2. The Cornish *Ordinalia*, a trilogy of Biblical plays known individually as *Origo Mundi* (*OM*), *Passio Christi* (*PC*), and *Resurrexio Domini* (*RD*), written ca. 1400, and known from a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript, Oxford MS. Bodl. 791.[8]

3. *Pascon Agan Arluth* (*PA*), "The Passion of Our Lord," written ca. 1400, and known from a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript, British Library MS. Harleian 1782.

4. *Bewnans Ke* (*BK*), "The Life of St. Ke," probably composed in the second half of the fifteenth century, and known only from a fragmentary and imperfect copy of the later sixteenth century, National Library of Wales MS. 23,849D.

5. *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.[9]

6. *Gwreans an Bys* (*GB*), also known by its English title *Creacion of the World*, found in Oxford MS. Bodl. 219, a manuscript written in 1611.[10]

All but the last of these works date from the Middle Cornish period (ca. 1200-ca. 1575). *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.[11] For the sake of convenience, however, and despite the

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[7] J.P.M. Jansen, "The Manuscript [of the *Charter Endorsement*]," in *The Middle Cornish Charter Endorsement: The Making of a Marriage in Medieval Cornwall*, ed. Lauran Toorians (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, 1991), p. 91.

[8] Line numbers cited for these three plays are those of Norris's *Ancient Cornish Drama*.

[9] Line numbers cited for *Beunans Meriasek* are those of Stokes's edition.

[10] Line numbers cited for *Gwreans an Bys* are those of Neuss's edition (*Creacion of the World*).

[11] 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

sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dates of the later works, all six 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.

The earliest and the latest of these six works differ significantly from the other four in terms of the stanza forms used and, in the case of the fourteenth-century *Charter Endorsement*, in terms of metrical features as well. However, the four "central" texts from the *Ordinalia* to *Beunans Meriasek*, which span the period ca. 1400-1504, all conform to a single set of compositional principles. The prosody of *Gwreans an Bys* clearly has its origin in this system, but represents a further stage of evolution.[12] The *Charter Endorsement*, by contrast, seems to have been written according to very different principles, and may even have been composed at a time when the "rules" of Cornish versification that are used in the later works had not yet been codified.[13]

Interestingly, all four of these central texts may be linked, either directly or indirectly, with a single site in Cornwall: Glasney College, a college of secular canons in Penryn that was founded in 1267 and dissolved in 1549 following the Reformation.[14] As Oliver Padel has suggested, the bishop of Exeter may have founded Glasney in west Cornwall at least in part to serve as "an outpost for episcopal leadership and for encouraging the provision of Cornish-speaking clergy" for this still largely Cornish-speaking region of his diocese.[15] When Cornish-language religious drama became popular in the late fourteenth century, Glasney may have taken on the task of composing plays in Cornish for performance in the communities within its sphere of influence.[16] The "rules of prosody" which govern the *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, *Bewnans Ke*, and

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as Middle Cornish (personal communication, January 1, 2005; see also George, "Cornish," p. 493).

[12] See Benjamin Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms and the Evolution of Cornish Prosody* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2005), pp. 349-381.

[13] See Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 326-349.

[14] Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 314-325; dates after James Whetter, *The History of Glasney College* (Padstow: Tabb House, 1988), pp. 3, 31.

[15] Padel, "Oral and Literary Culture," p. 97; see also Whetter, *History*, p. 111.

[16] Saints Meriasek and Ke were the patron saints of Camborne and Kea, respectively, and both parishes had ties to Glasney at the time *Beunans Meriasek* and *Bewnans Ke* were written. A brief discussion of the evidence linking the *Ordinalia* and the two sixteenth-century saints' plays to Glasney may be found in Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 314-317; see also Padel, "Oral and Literary Culture," pp. 97-99, Jane A. Bakere, *Cornish Ordinalia: A Critical Study*, 2nd ed. (Bodmin: Kesva an Taves Kernewek, 2009), pp. 37-61, and Graham Thomas and Nicholas Williams, *Bewnans Ke. The Life of St. Kea: A Critical Edition with Translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), pp. xlii–xliii.

Beunans Meriasek may, therefore, be Glasney's rules. The differences in versification between *Gwreans an Bys* and the earlier saints' plays (which are far greater than those between the saints' plays and the older *Ordinalia* cycle) may be due in part to the fact that after the dissolution of Glasney in 1549, there was no institution dedicated to preserving and passing on the tradition of medieval Cornish verse composition.[17]

At first glance, medieval Cornish versification appears to be a very complex system with few hard and fast rules. Together, the *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, *Bewnans Ke*, and *Beunans Meriasek* comprise over 18,000 lines of verse divided into roughly 2800 stanzas, and among these more than 200 distinct stanza forms can be identified. A closer analysis, however, suggests that nearly all of these forms may be described as a variant of one of three basic stanza patterns, each of which may be modified by altering the number or length of individual lines. A full description of medieval Cornish rhyme, meter, and stanza structure can be found in the present author's historical survey of *Cornish Verse Forms*,[18] but for the purposes of this study, the following summary of Middle Cornish versification will suffice:

1. Cornish meter is syllabic, like Welsh or Breton verse, rather than stress-based in the manner of much English poetry. Unlike Latin and Greek quantitative verse, or English syllabo-tonic verse (such as the iambic pentameter lines of a Shakespearean sonnet), lines of Cornish verse resist regular division into metrical feet. Despite the claims of several early scholars[19] that Cornish used a fixed meter that was "always trochaic in the seven-syllabled lines, and iambic in the four-syllabled,"[20] my own research suggests that the number and position of accented syllables in a line is, if not entirely a matter of chance, certainly not governed by any strict rules.[21] The usual length of a line of Cornish verse is seven syllables, and 85.3% of the lines in our six medieval texts are heptasyllabic. Four-syllable lines are also quite common, accounting for a further 11.5% of the corpus. Departures from this rule of seven or four syllables per line are unusual, and – with the exception of the *Charter Endorsement*, which likely did not employ a syllabic meter – are quite rare before the time of *Bewnans Ke* (a

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[17] Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 375-376.

[18] Ibid., pp. 112-221; a more concise analysis can be found in Bruch, "Medieval Cornish Versification."

[19] William Borlase, *The Natural History of Cornwall*, p. 296; Jenner, *Handbook*, p. 179; R. Morton Nance, *New Cornish-English and English-Cornish Dictionary*, [p. xi].

[20] Jenner, "Descriptions of Cornish Manuscripts," p. 45.

[21] Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 52-53, 116-118

work written in the second half of the fifteenth century, and known only from a much later manuscript).

2.   Rhyme in Cornish (except in *Bewnans Ke*, which frequently uses an English-style rhyming rule)[22] usually involves only the final syllable of each line. Owing to the predominantly penultimate stress pattern of polysyllabic words in Cornish, this means that Cornish poets often rhyme a stressed syllable with an unstressed syllable, as with *dá* (good) and *guélla* (better) (*OM* 534, 536), or rhyme two unstressed syllables, as with *láha* (law) and *hénna* (that [one]) (*PC* 1978, 1980; also *PC* 2169, 2170). While such rhymes would be considered "no rhyme at all" in English,[23] this practice is comparable to the rhyming rules that govern Welsh and Breton verse, where rhyme between stressed and unstressed syllables is common.[24]

3.   Three main types of stanza may be identified:

Type I: ABABABAB. In this verse form, alternate lines rhyme. Generally, there are only two different rhymes in a single stanza, and all the lines in a stanza are the same length (usually seven syllables, rarely four). The main variation in this type of stanza involves the number of lines: four, six, eight, ten, or twelve, with eight- and four-line stanzas being by far the most common. The basic Type I form is illustrated by the opening stanza of *Origo Mundi*:[25]

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[22] Bruch, "Medieval Cornish Versification," pp. 76-79.

[23] Edwin Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, p. 447.

[24] For a comparison of the rhyming rules used in medieval Breton, Cornish, and Welsh, see Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 387-411.

[25] All quotations from medieval Cornish plays are drawn from my own database of Cornish verse (*Medieval Cornish Texts*), derived from computer files originally compiled by Andrew Hawke and Oliver Padel, which I subsequently checked against photographs or facsimiles of the original manuscripts (British Library MS. Add. Ch. 19,491, British Library MS. Harleian 1782, National Library of Wales MS. Peniarth 105b, National Library of Wales MS. 23,849D, Oxford MS. Bodl. 219, and Oxford MS. Bodl. 791). Except where noted, English translations are substantially my own, although they are to some degree indebted to the work of previous editors and translators, including Chubb et al., *Origo Mundi*; Combellack, *The Camborne Play*; Joyce and Newlyn, *Cornwall*; Nance and Smith, *Gwreans an Bys*; Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama*; Sandercock, *Christ's Passion, Resurrection*; and Stokes, *Beunans Meriasek*. All source materials are listed in the bibliography.

DEUS PATER	*GOD THE FATHER*
En tas a nef ym gylwyr	*I am called the Father of Heaven,*
formyer pup tra a vyt gvrys	*shaper of all that will be made,*
onan ha try on yn gvyr	*We are one and three, in truth,*
en tas han map han spyrys	*the Father and the Son and the Spirit,*
ha hethyv me a thesyr	*and today I desire*
dre ov grath dalleth an beys	*to create the world through my grace.*
y lauaraf nef ha tyr	*I say, "Let heaven and earth*
bethens formyys orth ov brys	*be formed according to my will!"*
(*OM* 1-8)	

Type I forms account for some 23.0% of all stanzas in our four central texts; nearly three-fourths of these adhere to the eight-line **ABABABAB** form illustrated above.

Type II: AABCCB. In this stanza type, rhymed couplets alternate with single lines (the **B** lines), and these single lines rhyme with one another – a form known as "tail-rhyme," owing to the traditional way in which stanzas of this type were written in manuscripts, with each **B** line written singly in a separate column to the right of the preceding **A** or **C** couplet, extending from the main body of the text like a tail. Many variations of the Type II stanza are found, including forms with all four-syllable lines (**aabccb**),[26] forms with one or more short **B** lines (**AAbCCB**, **AAbCCb**), forms where both couplets have the same end-rhyme (**AABAAB**), and forms with five (**AABAB**) or eight lines (**AAABCCCB**). A more exotic variation involves two quatrains that alternate with single lines, all the lines in this form typically being four syllables long (**ababcdedec**); stanzas of this type are always written in a layout that closely resembles the usual Type II (**AABCCB**) form, however. The most common variety is that found in the example below, the opening stanza of *Resurrexio Domini*:

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[26] Here, as elsewhere in my work on Cornish metrics, I use a lower-case letter (**a**) to indicate that a line is only four syllables long rather than the usual seven.

PILATUS
Ih*es*u[27] a fue anclethyys
hag yn beth a ven gorrys
   gans ioseph ha tus erel
y leuerys ef ynweth
datherghy an tressa deth
   y wre pur wyr hep fyllel
(*RD* 1-6)

PILATE
Jesus was buried
and placed in a stone tomb
by Joseph and others.
He said also
that he would rise on the third day,
very truly, without fail.

Type II forms are by far the most common in our texts, comprising 62.7% of all stanzas. Of these, nearly half (about 46%) have the simple **AABCCB** form illustrated above.

Type III: ABABcDDC. Stanzas of this type can be divided into two parts on the basis of a change in rhyme scheme (**ABAB|cDDC**). The first part of the stanza (also called the *frons*) is usually an **ABAB** quatrain, or, less often, a six- or eight-line sequence with alternate rhyme. It may also be an **AABCCB** stanza, yielding an **AABCCBdEED** pattern. The second part (or *cauda*) of a Type III stanza is normally a quatrain with **aBBA** rhyme or some variant thereof, such as **aBBBA**. The first line of the cauda (the "bob") is generally short, and usually is grouped syntactically – and graphically, in the manuscripts – with the frons (**ABABc|DDC**). Because it comprises two parts with different structures, I have described this type as a "hybrid" stanza form. There are several variant forms of the Type III stanza, but the most usual structure is that found in the opening speech of *Beunans Meriasek*:

[PATER MEREADOCI]
Me yw gylwys duk bryten
   ha seuys a goys ryel
ha w*ar* an gwlasc*ur* chefte*n*
   nessa ჳen myterne vhell
      ky*n*g conany

MERIADOC'S FATHER
I am called the Duke of Brittany,
and descended from royal blood,
and [am] chieftain over the realm
next after the High King,
King Conan.

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[27] Contractions and suspensions in the original Cornish manuscripts have been expanded here (and elsewhere in this article) through the use of italics.

aye ly*m*nyeth purwyr yth of	*Very truly, I am of his lineage,*
gwarthevyas w*ar* gvyls ha dof	*master over wild and tame,*
dout*is* y*n* mysk arlyʒy	*feared among lords.*
(*BM* 1-8)	

Some 12.4% of the stanzas in our texts are Type III forms; about 44% of these conform to the basic **ABABcDDC** pattern illustrated above.

3. Music in Medieval Cornish Drama

There are several references to music in medieval Cornish drama. It seems clear that musicians were involved in the productions, even if only to provide dance music after the play ended. *Origo Mundi*, *Resurrexio Domini*, *Gwreans an Bys*, and both halves of *Beunans Meriasek* (the latter play intended to be performed in two parts on two successive days) conclude with a speech in which a character urges the minstrels (*menstrels*) or pipers (*pyboryon*) to "pipe" (*peba*) "so that we may go dancing" (*may hyllyn mos the thonssye*, *RD* 2646; compare *BM* 2512, *BM* 4565, *GB* 2547). Although no such passage appears in the surviving portions of *Bewnans Ke*, it should be noted that our manuscript of this play, which is likely to have been staged as a two-day cycle,[28] is missing the conclusions of each day's performance. Among the complete dramas, only *Passio Christi* lacks such a reference to music and revelry, and this is doubtless because it ends on the somber note of Christ's burial.[29]

Nor is the conclusion of the day's performance the only place where musicians appear in our texts. In *Origo Mundi*, King David commands:

REX DAVID	*KING DAVID*
Whethoug menstrels ha tabours	*Blow, minstrels and tabors,*
trey hans harpes ha trompours	*three hundred harps and trumpeters,*
cythol crowd fylh ha savtry	*dulcimer, crwth, viol, and psaltery,*
psalmus gyttrens ha nakrys	*shawms, zithers, and nakers,*
organs in weth cymbalys	*organs, [and] also cymbals,*
recordys ha symphony	*recorders and hurdy-gurdy.*
(*OM* 1995-2000)	

Although it is unlikely that all of these instruments would have been represented at an actual performance of *Origo Mundi*, this passage strongly

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[28] George, *Bywnans Ke*, p. 4; Thomas and Williams (*Bewnans Ke*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv), on the other hand, suggest that the drama was performed as a three-day cycle.

[29] Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, p. 66; Sally L. Joyce and Evelyn S. Newlyn, *Cornwall*, pp. 542-543.

suggests that musicians may have been on stage at times during the play, and that Cornish drama featured "incidental" music of an instrumental nature. Additional evidence can also be found in church and borough records from the sixteenth century, which include examples of "payments for musicians associated with drama."[30] Many of the instrument names recorded here (*harpes*, *organs*, and so forth) are loanwords from English.[31] It is particularly interesting that the crwth – an instrument that originated in Wales, as its name implies – is listed here under its English name *crowd*. Presumably, English music and musical instruments were well-known to both the author of *Origo Mundi* and the play's Cornish-speaking audience.

There are also references to vocal music in the dramas, including stage directions noting that a particular character or characters are to sing. In *Resurrexio Domini*, the third play of the *Ordinalia*, the following chorus is sung three times by the three Marys mourning the death of Christ:

[*cantant*]   *[they sing]*
Ellas mornyngh y syngh mornyng 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* 733-734)

This refrain is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is the only speech in the dramas which is specifically marked as text to be sung rather than spoken – and sung, moreover, by three characters at once, as the plural verb form *cantant* "they sing" makes clear. Second, it is in English, and although (as illustrated by King David's speech above) English words, phrases, and even whole lines of verse are not at all unusual in Cornish drama, passages of this length are not a very frequent occurrence in the *Ordinalia*. Third and most important, this refrain is remarkable for its metrical structure, since it does not adhere to the usual rule of seven or four syllables per line. This rule is observed with great regularity elsewhere in the *Ordinalia* cycle, even in passages containing lines in English or French.[32] Even if we assume that "ellas" stands outside the metrical structure of the refrain – a justifiable assumption, although the presentation of the text in the manuscript provides no support for it – we are still left with a couplet of eight-syllable lines, and neither octosyllabic lines nor free-standing couplets are

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[30] Sally L. Joyce and Evelyn S. Newlyn, eds., "Cornwall," in *Records of Early English Drama: Dorset/Cornwall* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 410

[31] I would like to thank Oliver Padel for bringing this fact to my attention (personal communication, 2006).

[32] Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 138-139; "Medieval Cornish Versification," p. 67.

common in Middle Cornish verse. This suggests that the refrain was borrowed from an English source: additional evidence that English music had some currency in Cornish-speaking western Cornwall during the fifteenth century. Regrettably, the tune to which the words should be sung is not indicated in the manuscript.

This is not the only point in Cornish drama where a stage direction refers to singing, although it is the only instance in which the text to be sung is written out in the manuscript. After line 421 of *Resurrexio Domini*, we see the remark "tu*n*c surrexit ihc a mortuis et iet v*bi*cu*nque* uolu*eri*t & cantant angeli cristus resurgens" (Then Jesus rose from the dead, and he shall go wherever he likes, and the angels sing "Christus resurgens");[33] this hymn is presumably what is referred to at line 515, when a soldier remarks on Christ's resurrection "with song and many angels" (*gans can ha m*ur *a eleth*). Towards the end of the same play, following line 2528, another stage direction reads "tu*n*c cantent om*ne*s angeli Gl*or*ia in excelsis deo" (Then let all the angels sing "Gloria in excelsis Deo").[34] In *Beunans Meriasek*, the Dean who is overseeing St. Meriasek's funeral rites at the end of the play commands "Leme*n* canens an clergy / in hanov du a v*er*cy" (Now let the clergy sing, in the name of merciful God) (*BM* 4504-4505), followed a few lines later by the stage direction "Hic cantant" (Here they sing), although no hymn title is given here. All of these examples almost certainly refer to Latin hymns rather than to Cornish songs, however, and no music or lyrics (beyond the titles themselves) are provided in the manuscripts. In the seventeenth-century play *Gwreans an Bys*, we find the stage direction "Lett Adam be buried in a fayre tombe wth som Churche song*s* at hys buryall" at line 2078, while at line 2492 Noah remarks, "ᵣag hedna gwren ny cana / in gwerthyans ȝen tase om*m*a" (therefore let us sing here in praise to the Father), accompanied by the stage direction "Som good Church song*s* to be songe at the alter." In this post-Reformation work, of course, the "church songs," like the stage directions, would probably have been in English rather than Latin – or, for that matter, Cornish.

Vocal music in Cornish drama is not confined to Christian worship. *Beunans Meriasek* contains a "Black Mass" scene (*BM* 3369-3443) in which a Tyrant and his wicked servants offer sacrifices to their pagan gods (who, in the framework of this Christian mystery play, are represented as demons). After the last of the sacrifices has been made at line 3419, we find the stage direction "& Canta*n*t om*n*es tortores" (And all the torturers sing). Regrettably, we are not told what song the torturers sing; presumably, the choice of music was left up to

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[33] Edwin Norris, ed. and tr., 1859, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), p. 35.

[34] Ibid., 2, p. 191.

the actors in this scene. This is, however, the one point in the dramas where we might reasonably surmise that the stage direction calls for a Cornish song, and probably a bawdy or sacrilegious one at that.

4. Dialogue: Sung or Spoken?

Of course, all of these references to singing relate to songs and hymns that stand outside the primary text of the drama – what we might describe as "incidental music" – and few lyrics and no music are provided. This leads to the question of whether any of the dialogue in the dramas (other than the English chorus mentioned above, which is explicitly marked as verse to be sung by the three Marys) was intended to be sung rather than spoken. Certainly, there is no musical notation to be found in the manuscripts of medieval Cornish drama, nor even the name of a tune to which a particular stanza or sequence might be sung, but there is occasional mention in the dialogue of characters "singing" their lines. For example, in *Origo Mundi*, the verb *cane* (sing) is used by Eve and then by Adam to describe the voice of the serpent who has tempted her to pluck the apple and offer it to her husband:

EUA	*EVE*
My pan esen ov quandre	*When I was strolling about*
clewys an nyl tenewen	*I heard from one side*
vn el ov talleth cane	*an angel beginning to sing*
a vghaf war an wethen	*above me in the tree.*
. . . .	. . . .
ADAM	*ADAM*
A out warnes drok venen	*A curse upon you, wicked woman,*
worto pan wrussys cole	*that you trusted him,*
rag ef o tebel ethen	*for he was an evil bird*
neb a glowsys ov cane	*whom you heard singing.*
(*OM* 213-224)	

It is unclear, however, whether this should be taken as evidence that the serpent's speeches were sung, since the Latin stage direction at line 148 (immediately preceding the serpent's remarks to Eve) uses the verb *loquitur* (speaks). In any case, since the serpent and Eve use the same verse forms throughout this scene – the Type I stanza (**ABABABAB**) and its four-line variant (**ABAB**) – and on occasion even divide such a stanza between them, it is hard to imagine that some stanzas or lines were sung while others were spoken. While it is possible that both actors sang throughout the scene, it seems more

likely that all of the dialogue was simply spoken, and that the use of the verb "sing" here is only a poetic device. It should be noted, however, that in the equivalent scene in *Gwreans an Bys*, a play which contains a significant amount of material derived from *Origo Mundi* including slightly altered versions of the lines quoted above, a stage direction after line 538 tells us that "The s*er*pent Singeth in the tree," and Eve responds to him with the question "Pew ostashe es in wethan / a wartha gans troes ha can / marth ew genaf thath clewas" (Who are you who is in the tree above with noise and song? I am surprised to hear you) (*GB* 549-551).

Another musical reference appears in one of the opening scenes of *Beunans Meriasek* in which a schoolboy falters in his recitation of the alphabet:

PRIMUS SCOLARIS	FIRST SCHOOLBOY
Du gveras a. b. c	*God help A, B, C…*
an pen ca*n* he*m*na yv d	*the end of the song, that's D.*
ny won na moy y*n* liu*er*	*I don't know any more in the book.*
ny vef y*n* scole ru*m* levte	*By my faith, I wasn't in school*
bys y*n* newer g*or*ʒewar	*until yesterday evening.*
ʒu*m* gothvas wosa lyfye	*I know that after lunch,*
me a ʒysk moy ov mest*er*	*I'll learn more, master.*
(*BM* 99-105)	

It is tempting to imagine that this speech relates to some medieval equivalent of the modern "Alphabet Song"; if so, the words *Du gveras* (God help) may have formed part of the lyrics, or, much more likely, may represent the schoolboy's earnest wish not to forget how the rest of the song goes. It is interesting that the phrase used at line 100 is *an pen can* (the end-song), or perhaps "the chief song," rather than *pen an can* (the end of the song), which would seem to fit better and which would scan equally well.[35] Perhaps *pen can* is a medieval Cornish musical term, but if so, its exact meaning is uncertain: "coda," "cadence," or "refrain" would be appropriate in this context.

The verb *cane* (sing) may also be found at lines 544-546 of *Origo Mundi*, where Lucifer orders Beelzebub and Satan to fetch the soul of the slain Abel, with the words "kyrghough the dre an guas / may hallo cane ellas / nefre yn tewolgow tew" (fetch the lad home, so that he may sing "Alas!" forever in heavy darkness). A few lines later, Satan tells Beelzebub:

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[35] I would like to thank Oliver Padel for bringing this fact to my attention (personal communication, April 2005).

SATANAS
Dun ganso the dre war not
    thagan arluth Lucifer
my a gan an conternot
    ha ty dyscant y*m* keuer
(*OM* 559-562)

SATAN
Bring him back on the note,
to our lord Lucifer.
I will sing the counternote,
and you descant about me.

The expression *war not*, literally "on the note," has been translated as "simultaneously, all in concord, all at once,"[36] an expression which clearly relates to music and sets up the joke in lines 561-562 in which Satan offers to sing the counternote to Beelzebub's descant. Longsworth observes that "the melodic line is noticeably absent from this assignation of parts, since both the counter note and discant were parts used for harmonic elaboration,"[37] but I would speculate that the third part here is that of the damned soul, whose "song" of *ellas* (Alas!) provides the melody line as he is being dragged off to hell *war not* "on the note."

Perhaps the most unusual reference to vocal music in the Cornish dramas occurs in the *Mors Pilati* sequence in *Resurrexio Domini*. At this point in the play, Pilate has committed suicide rather than face a death sentence, and the Roman emperor has ordered that the body be set adrift in a boat. A number of devils and demons come to claim the corpse, and the episode concludes with the following exchange:

SATHANAS
Ha ty corf bras mylyges
    the yfarn gans the enef
gynen y fythyth tynnes
    the cane a vyth goef

SATAN
And you, great accursed body,
to Hell, along with your soul,
you shall be dragged by us;
your song will be "woe is he"!

BELSEBUK
Le*m*myn pup ol settyes dorn
    yn keth schath ma thy tenne
ha ty Tulfryk pen pusorn
    dalleth thynny ny cane

BEELZEBUB
Now let everyone set his hand
on this very boat, to drag it,
and you, Tulfric, begin to sing
a refrain to us.

TULFRYK
Ye regy*m*my tol ow guen
rak yn mes yma y pen

TULFRIC
Yea, may you kiss my backside,
for its end sticks out,

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[36] R. Morton Nance, *New Cornish-English and English-Cornish Dictionary*, (Redruth: Dyllansow Truran, 1990), [1], p.178.

[37] Robert Longsworth, *The Cornish Ordinalia: Religion and Dramaturgy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 110.

sur pur hyr*e* a ves thu*m* tyn	*surely, a long way out from my rump!*
Belsebuk ha Sattanas	*Beelzebub and Satan,*
kenough why faborden bras	*you sing a big bass,*
ha me a can trebyl fyn	*and I will sing a fine treble.*
(*RD* 2347-2360)	

While the humor in Satan's line in *Origo Mundi* is purely musical, this passage takes the joke to a deeper, more bawdy, level. Here, Tulfric, whose name a Cornish-speaking audience would likely have heard as *tol fryk* (Nose-hole or, somewhat redundantly, Nostril-hole), shakes his rump at the other devils, offering them access a different hole – *tol ow guen*, which may be translated "the hole of my anus" – while simultaneously offering to sing the treble note to their "big" bass. In addition to the Middle English musical terminology in Tulfric's speech (*faborden*, *trebyl*), Beelzebub's lines contain another Cornish musical term: *pen pusorn* at line 2353, which is assembled from the roots *pen* (head, end, chief) and *pusorn* (bundle, bale, burden).[38] The phrase has been translated as "burden of chant, refrain of song"[39] or "principal refrain in plain chant,"[40] and may perhaps be related to the term *pen can* from *Beunans Meriasek*, quoted above.

Both here and in the preceding exchange, the condemned soul is described as "singing" his grief: "your song will be 'Woe is he!'" (*RD* 2350), "so that he may sing 'Alas!'" (*OM* 545). This may be compared to the admission by the demon who has offered Eve the apple in *Origo Mundi*, "my as temptyas / the behe may fe ellas / aga han kepar ha my" (I tempted them to sin so that "Alas!" would be their song, as it is mine) (*OM* 308-310), or Satan's declaration that he will sing "Woe!" (*may canaf trew*, *PC* 150) after his failure to tempt Christ in the wilderness in *Passio Christi*. *Cane* (sing) seems to be the verb associated with exclamations of anguish in medieval Cornish verse, and, although this may be a poetic device, it is one which is used consistently throughout the entire *Ordinalia* trilogy. The descriptions of damned souls and devils singing their woe in three-part harmony, however, do give the impression that the medieval Cornish playwright imagined hell, like heaven, to be a musical place.

Interestingly, Middle English literature also provides examples of characters who "sing" their grief.[41] One definition of the verb *singen* in the Ann

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[38] Ken George, *An Gerlyver Meur Kernewek-Sowsnek, Sowsnek-Kernewek. Cornish-English, English-Cornish Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Bodmin: Kesva an Taves Kernewek, 2009), p. 544.

[39] Nance, *English-Cornish and Cornish-English Dictionary*, p. 284.

[40] George, *Gerlyver Meur*, p. 513.

[41] I would like to thank Oliver Padel for bringing these examples to my attention (personal communication, January 10, 2006).

Arbor *Middle English Dictionary* is "to lament, cry out in pain; express (sorrow, pain), lament (misfortune, etc.); also endure (sorrow, pain, etc.)," a meaning attested as early as the middle of the thirteenth century, and seen in the line "Absolon may waille and synge allas" from Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*.[42] Another Middle English use of *singen* – "to make a cheerful sound; of a musical instrument: make music, give forth a melody; of the anus: make noise" – sheds additional light on the exchange between the three devils in *Resurrexio Domini*. In illustration of this usage, the *Middle English Dictionary* quotes the Cornishman John Trevisa's Middle English translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*: "As ofte as sche spak afterward, afterward her ers wolde synge…wiþ a foule noyse."[43] In any case, as these Middle English parallels show, the use of the verb *cane* in Cornish drama is not in itself sufficient evidence to prove that a particular passage involved singing, although this word and its derivatives do sometimes set up a joke that includes other references to vocal music or musical terminology.

5. Short-Line Stanzas

Although the passages discussed above all refer to (literal or metaphorical) singing, scholars who have suggested that some of the stanzas in the dramas were sung rather than spoken have often made this determination based on the metrical and structural features of the stanzas rather than on their content or context. This idea that particular stanza types in Middle Cornish drama may have been sung likely originated with Edwin Norris. In his discussion of the various verse forms in the Cornish *Ordinalia*, Norris characterizes certain varieties 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."[44] Based on the examples Norris cites under this heading, these "declamatory" forms include exotic variants of what I have termed the Type III stanza, as well as stanzas "constructed wholly of four-syllable verses variously arranged."[45] It is presumably these stanza types to which Norris is referring when he observes that the "agreeable variety" of verse forms in the trilogy "occasionally rises, in emphatic passages, to what must be felt, even now, as a musical recitation; producing the belief that such stanzas

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[42] *Middle English Dictionary*, *s.v.* "singen [1d]."

[43] Ibid., *s.v.* "singen [5b]."

[44] Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, p. 450.

[45] Ibid., 2, p. 450.

were sung, or at least declaimed in operatic style, and perhaps accompanied by music."[46]

　　As Norris himself notes, many if not most such verse forms have precisely the same structure with respect to rhyme scheme as the ordinary Type I and Type II stanzas of Cornish literature, with only the length of the lines being altered (**abababab**, **aabccb**).[47] Another variety with an **ababcdedec** rhyme scheme is clearly related to the common **AAbCCb** variant of the Type II stanza with alternate-rhyme tetrasyllabic quatrains (**abab**, **dede**) being substituted for the more usual heptasyllabic couplets (**AA**, **CC**), a link which is confirmed by the similar appearance of these two types of stanza on the manuscript page.[48] These forms constructed entirely of short lines do provide a decided change of pace, and may perhaps be indicative of heightened emotion, excitement, or more rapid movement. Some sense of the dramatic effect of these short-line stanzas may be conveyed by the sequence from *Passio Christi* given below. Here, the torturers have persuaded the blind centurion Longinus to stab Christ with his spear. He does so, and after wiping his eyes with the hand that is covered with Christ's blood, his sight is miraculously restored. His appalled reaction is expressed in three **aabccb** stanzas which provide an abrupt change of rhythm in the midst of a sequence of entirely or predominantly heptasyllabic forms:

LONGEUS	*LONGINUS*
Arluth thym gaf	*Lord, forgive me,*
del yth pysaf	*as I pray to you*
war pen dewlyn	*on my knees;*
an pyth a wren	*I knew not*
my ny wothyen	*what I did,*
rag ny wylyn	*for I did not see.*
Hag a quellen	*And had I seen,*
my ny*n* grussen	*I'd not have done it,*
kyn fen lethys	*though I were slain,*
rak del won sur	*for as I know surely,*
map dev os pur	*You are the Son of God,*
yn beys gynys	*born into the world pure,*
A vaghtyth glan	*of a chaste maiden.*
vn vap certan	*You are surely*
os then tas du	*an only son to God the Father.*

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[46] Ibid., 2, p. 447.

[47] Ibid., 2, pp. 450-451.

[48] Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 237-238.

ow hamwyth bras	*O Father, forgive me*
gaf thym a tas	*my great misdeed*
dre the vertu	*through your power!*
(*PC* 3019-3030)	

Whether such a change in pacing or emotion was also combined with a shift from spoken to sung dialogue is difficult to know. Because of the sudden change in tempo, the dramatic impact of short-line stanzas would likely have been felt even in the absence of any musical accompaniment. And there is certainly no evidence in the manuscripts, either in the form of stage directions or in the graphic arrangement of the stanzas on the page, to suggest that sequences like the one quoted above should be treated any differently from the speeches which precede or follow them. The fact that such forms are (but for the lengths of the lines) identical in structure to the more usual **ABABABAB**, **AABCCB**, and **AAbCCb** stanzas also argues against the notion that they were sung, unless we assume that dialogue written in heptasyllabic lines was also sometimes set to music, a possibility discussed further below. Since the idea that these passages were sung has been advanced by more than one commentator on medieval Cornish drama, however, this possibility should not be dismissed out of hand.[49]

Another sequence of speeches with possible musical associations involves the seven boys (*pueri*) who welcome Christ into Jerusalem in *Passio Christi* (lines 229-306). Like Longinus's speech quoted above, this section of the play also contains several short-line **aabccb** stanzas, a verse form that Norris associated with musical performance. Oliver Padel has suggested to me that this sequence might have been set to music based primarily on the repetitious quality of the speeches themselves.[50] There are also other reasons to suspect a musical context for these lines. As Longsworth notes, the phrase *pueri ebreorum* (the term used to refer to the boys in a stage direction which follows line 228 of *Passio Christi*) "is taken from one of the antiphons sung when the palms are distributed on Palm Sunday," and "the boys utter a translated version of the last

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[49] Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, pp. 450-452; T. D. Crawford, "Composition of the Cornish *Ordinalia*," *Old* Cornwall 9, p. 171.

[50] Personal communication, 2005. A link between repetitive dialogue and musical performance has also been proposed for *Bewnans Ke*. At a seminar on *Bewnans Ke* presented by Padel in February 2005 at the University of Edinburgh, Philip Bennett made the suggestion that some highly repetitious sequences in *Bewnans Ke* may have been sung rather than spoken, drawing a parallel with medieval French drama, which contains some examples of "lyric interludes" with recurring refrains (Philip Bennett, personal communication, January 2006). This possibility is explored in greater detail in Bruch, "Verse Structure and Musical Performance in *Bewnans Ke*."

antiphon" at lines 253-254.[51] Bakere remarks that "it is significant that Christ should be met by seven children of the Hebrews" since this is the number specified in the *Sarum Missal* to sing the hymn *Gloria Laus* on Palm Sunday, thus showing that "the liturgical ceremony is clearly responsible for the number of children in the play,"[52] a theory also offered by Longsworth, and, before him, Henry Jenner.[53] The dialogue in this part of *Passio Christi* also provides evidence that this sequence may have been sung. At line 432, Pilate asks Jesus about "an fleghys vs ow cane" (the children who are singing). One of the boys remarks: "pebol war pen y dev glyn / a gan yn gorthya*n*s dotho" (everyone, on his knees, will sing to Him in praise) (*PC* 247-248), while another declares: "me a thystryp ow dyllas / hagh as set y dan y treys / hagh a gan thagan sylwyas" (I will strip off my garment, and place it beneath His feet, and will sing to our Savior) (*PC* 250-252).

The boys' speeches contain a number of short-line stanzas with an **aabccb** rhyme scheme, which, as discussed above, is a form that Norris associated with "declamatory or lyrical passages" in Cornish drama.[54] It should be noted, however, that only six of the seventeen speeches delivered by the *pueri* are of this type. Of the remainder, eight are of the more common heptasyllabic Type II form **AABCCB** or **AABAAB** (four in each rhyme scheme). The other three appear much later in the scene (*PC* 419-430), and are written as heptasyllabic quatrains (**ABAB**), even though they immediately follow a tetrasyllabic **aabccb** stanza (*PC* 415-418) spoken by a different character. It should also be noted that the stage direction after line 228 which introduces the first speech by one of the *pueri* reads "et dicit p*rimus* puer" (and the first boy says), using the verb *dicit* (says) rather than *cantat* (sings). Even if we interpret this as definitively marking the following stanza as text to be spoken rather than sung, however – a view which the present author does not feel is entirely warranted – this opening speech is one of the heptasyllabic **AABAAB** stanzas in the sequence, and it might be imagined that subsequent tetrasyllabic **aabccb** stanzas may still have been set to music. In any case, the evidence presented by Longsworth, Bakere, and Jenner linking this text to a Palm Sunday hymn suggests very strongly that the entire *pueri ebreorum* sequence could be interpreted as a musical interlude, and implies that (stage directions notwithstanding) the more common long-line **AABCCB** stanzas of Cornish verse could also on occasion have been sung. Certainly, but for this difference in line length, the

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[51] Longsworth, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 109.

[52] Bakere, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 79.

[53] Longsworth, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 109.

[54] Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, p. 450.

structure of the stanzas is consistent throughout the scene, all of them being six-line Type II forms with similar rhyme schemes.

6. Type III Stanzas

Norris describes the opening stanzas of *Passio Christi* (lines 1-46) which feature a number of **abababab** sequences, as "a combination of rhymes which appears to be particularly pleasing" and feels that these verses "must have been sung to music."[55] This idea is taken up by T. D. Crawford, who also suggests that a similar series of metrically "anomalous" **abababab** stanzas in *Resurrexio Domini* (lines 835-892) might represent "a scene set entirely to music."[56] The first four stanzas of *Passio Christi*, which together comprise Christ's opening speech, are unusual variants of what I have termed the Type III stanza form, and consist of an eight-line alternate-rhyme frons of tetrasyllabic lines (**abababab**) to which a four- or five-line tail-rhyme cauda of heptasyllabic lines (**CDDC**, **CDDDC**) has been added:

IHC	*JESUS*
Thyvgh lauara	*I say to you,*
ow dyskyblyon	*my disciples,*
pyseygh toyth da	*pray with good speed,*
ol kescolon	*all with one heart,*
dev dreys pup tra	*to God over all things*
evs a huhon	*who is above us*
theygh yn bys ma	*[that He] send his grace*
y grath danvon	*to you in this world,*
yn dyweth may feugh sylwys	*that in the end you may be saved.*
gans an eleth yw golow	*With the angels who are bright,*
yn nef agas enefow	*your souls will dwell forever*
neffre a tryg hep ponow	*in heaven, without pain,*
yn ioy na vyth dywythys	*in joy that will never end.*
(*PC* 1-9)	

Crawford suggests that "there is good reason to suppose" that the **CDD**(**D**)**C** segments here and in other Type III stanzas that appear in the *Ordinalia* represent a later stratum of textual addition to what were, in this case, at least, originally simply **abababab** stanzas like the following:[57]

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[55] Ibid., 2, p. 452.

[56] Crawford, "Composition of the Cornish *Ordinalia*," p. 175 n. 46; see also ibid., p. 171.

[57] Ibid., pp. 167-168.

PETRUS	*PETER*
A mester whek	*O dear master,*
gorthys re by	*may you be praised,*
pan wreth mar tek	*since you teach us*
agan dysky	*so beautifully.*
ass on whansek	*How desirous are we*
ol the pysy	*all to pray,*
lettrys ha lek	*lettered and lay,*
war thu mercy	*to God for mercy.*
(*PC* 35-38)	

In all, this scene comprises seven stanzas: the first four are extended Type III forms, all spoken by Christ, while the following three are simple Type I forms, spoken by Peter, Andrew, and Christ, respectively. Whether or not the **CDD**(**D**)**C** caudae of the first four stanzas are later additions, the section as a whole is unified by the repetition of short-line **abababab** sequences and is metrically distinct from the following series of speeches in which "Satan appears, and speaks in the ordinary six-syllable [*recte*, six-line, seven-syllable **AABCCB**] stanza, which forms so large a portion of the work."[58] It is true that this opening sequence contains verse forms with three different lengths: two thirteen-line **ababababCDDDC** stanzas, two twelve-line **ababababCDDC** stanzas, and three **abababab** stanzas. This might argue against the notion that these lines were sung, but as *Passio Christi* is the only one of the medieval Cornish dramas that does not end with festive music, it would be appropriate if the play began with an uplifting Cornish song.

Nor is Christ's opening speech the only source of unusual Type III stanza forms in *Passio Christi*. Murdoch refers to the "poetically distinctive *planctus*" uttered by Mary at lines 2591-2602 which is echoed at lines 2931-2942 and which, like the first four stanzas of the play, is written in an unusual verse form that is not attested anywhere else in the (admittedly small) corpus of medieval Cornish literature.[59] R. Morton Nance found these speeches so remarkable that he suggested that they, in combination with four other stanzas of more conventional form, represent the remains of a short religious poem "broken up so as to fit…into three separate scenes" of *Passio Christi*.[60] Nance's reconstruction of this "poem" runs as follows:[61]

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[58] Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, p. 452.

[59] Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, p. 64.

[60] Nance, "A Cornish Poem Restored," p. 368.

[61] As elsewhere in this study, the Cornish text is drawn from my own database of Cornish verse (Bruch, *Medieval Cornish Texts*). The translation is largely my own, although influenced by the work of previous editors, Nance included. Nance's text and translation may be found in "A Cornish Poem Restored," pp. 369-371.

1. MARIA

Ellas a c*ri*st ow map ker
   yn m*ur* payn pan yth welaf
ellas dre kveth yn clamder
   then dor prag na ymwhelaf
dre ov map pyth yv ow cher
   pup vr ol yn bynygaf
ellas ny won py tyller
   byth moy py le y trygaf
     eyghan
rag y fynner
mara kyller
gans paynys mer
    ow dyswul glan

2.

Ogh go vy ellas ellas
guelas ov map m*ar* dyflas
   ga*n*s tebelwesion dyghtys
a vap the gveth ru*m* lathas
na allaf gueles yn fas
   ky*m*mys daggrow re olys

3.

Go vy ny won pendra wraf
gallas ow colon pur claf
   dre pryderow
ny allaf seuel yn fas
war ow treys ellas ellas
   rak galarow
(*PC* 2591-2614)

4.

Ellas ellas ogh tru tru
   yn ov colon as yw bern
pan welaf ov map ih*e*su
   a dro thy pen curyn spern
hag ef map dev a vertu
   ha gans henna guyr myghtern
treys ha dyvlef a pup tu
   fast tackyes ga*n*s kentrow hern
    ellas

MARY

Alas, O Christ, my dear son,
that I see you in great pain!
Alas, why do I not fall to the ground
in a faint, for sorrow?
Because of my son, what state am I in?
I bless him at all times.
Alas, I know not in what place
or yet where I shall live.
Woe!
For people wish,
if they can
to undo me completely
through great pain.

Oh, woe is me, alas, alas!
to see my son so disgracefully
treated by evil men.
O son, your sorrow has killed me;
I can hardly see,
so many tears have I shed.

Woe is me! I know not what I shall do;
my heart has become full sick
through worry.
I can hardly stand
upon my feet, alas, alas!
for grief.

Alas, alas, oh woe, woe!
What a weight is on my heart
when I see my son Jesus
with a crown of thorns upon his head
(and he the son of God of power,
and what is more, a true king!),
with his hands and feet on each side
nailed fast with iron nails.
Alas!

es byth deyth brues   *On Judgment Day you shall have*
mur a anfues   *great misery,*
y kyk hay knes   *his flesh and skin,*
    nep an guerthas   *who sold him.*

5.
Ogh go uy rak ow map ker   *Oh, woe is me for my dear son,*
the weles yn keth vaner   *to see him [treated] in the way*
  may whelaf le*m*myn dyghtys   *I now see [him] treated!*
ellas na varwen yn weth   *Alas that I might not die as well,*
na fe ky*n*se ow dyweth   *that my end might not be sooner*
  ys dyweth ow map yn beys   *than the end of my son in this world.*
(*PC* 2931-2948)

6.
My a yl bos morethek   *I can be full of grief,*
guelas ow map m*a*r anwhek   *seeing my son so cruelly*
  dyghtys del yv   *treated as he is.*
nep yv arluth luen a ras   *He who is the Lord full of grace!*
go uy vyth ellas ellas   *Woe is me, forever, alas, alas!*
  ragos ihe*s*u   *for you, Jesus.*
(*PC* 3187-3192)

The six stanzas of Nance's "poem" may be divided into two groups of three, each of which shows the same progression of verse forms: **ABABABABcdddc**, **AABCCB**, **AAbCCb**. The first three stanzas (*PC* 2591-2614) comprise a single speech in the play, and Nance appears to have assembled the fourth, fifth, and sixth stanzas of the "poem" from two later scenes in order to create a second series of three stanzas that duplicate the metrical structure of this sequence. As noted above, the two long stanzas (*PC* 2591-2602, 2931-2942) are quite distinctive, both for their length (thirteen lines) and for their two-syllable bobs (*eyghan* and *ellas*). The latter are unlike anything else in medieval Cornish verse, where the shortest standard line length even for a bob-verse is four syllables.[62] In addition to the similarities of form between these two widely separated stanzas, there are also textual parallels, like the repeated use of *ellas* (alas), which lend credence to Nance's theory that while these two thirteen-line stanzas appear in different scenes, they share a common origin as part of an independent poem.

    The situation with respect to the other four stanzas in Nance's "poem" is a little less clear, however. In each case, Nance has provided a sequence consisting of a heptasyllabic Type II stanza (**AABAAB**, **AABCCB**) followed by

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[62] Bruch, "Medieval Cornish Versification," p. 100.

a Type II stanza with short **B** lines (**AAbCCb**). These three stanza types are the most common varieties in the *Ordinalia*, so unlike the two long stanzas, there is no reason to think that these lines must derive from an outside source based on their verse structure alone. Nevertheless, textual parallels such as *Ogh go vy* (Oh! woe is me!) at line 2603 and again at line 2943, or the use of *gueles* (see) in lines 2604 and 2944, do support the view that the two heptasyllabic stanzas (*PC* 2603-2608, 2943-2948) – stanzas 2 and 5 of Nance's "poem" – may share a common origin outside *Passio Christi*. It is worth noting that stanzas 1 and 2 (*PC* 2591-2608) and stanzas 4 and 5 (*PC* 2931-2948) are adjacent in the play as well as in the "poem," which also suggests that each of these nineteen-line sequences might originally have formed a single unit within a larger structure. The lack of a paragraph mark before line 2603 may also be significant: such a mark would normally be inserted at line 2603 to indicate the beginning of a new stanza spoken by the same character as the previous stanza, and its absence might imply that the scribe considered these two stanzas to comprise a single unit. While I am less certain about the status of the two **AAbCCb** stanzas (*PC* 2609-2614, 3187-3192; stanzas 3 and 6 in Nance's reconstruction) – particularly since the latter of them appears so much later in the play than the stanza it supposedly follows in the "poem" – it should be noted that these two stanzas do share some phrases (*go vy* [woe is me!] at line 2609, and again at 3191; *ellas ellas* at lines 2613 and 3191; *guelas* at line 3188), both with one another and with the other parts of the "poem."

In any case, I am inclined to agree with Nance's view that these lines – or at least the two thirteen-line stanzas – are sufficiently unusual that they may have had some sort of independent existence in Cornish verse outside of *Passio Christi*. Rather than imagining them to have originated as a poem, however, I would suggest that they may have been known to the writer of *Passio Christi* as a song or hymn. This would go further toward explaining the use of such an unusual verse form: the thirteen-line stanza with a two-syllable bob-verse may have been contrived to fit a particular melody, perhaps one imported from English verse, where a similar thirteen-line stanza form was popular in poetry during the Middle Ages and may have been used in music as well.[63] In counterpoint to the lewd and ironic references to vocal music made by the infernal characters in the *Ordinalia* who "sing" their suffering, this lament by Mary is a sober, serious outpouring of grief, one which might have been expressed most effectively through song.

Norris's notion that certain verse forms may signal passages that were "sung to music"[64] is a tempting one, but as we have seen, it does not always

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[63] Ibid., pp. 98-101; Bruch, *Cornish Verse Forms*, pp. 426-442.
[64] Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, p. 452.

provide the best match for the observable facts. There are certainly some sequences of short-line stanzas and other exotic stanza forms which, based on their content or context, seem likely to have been sung rather than spoken. There are other cases, however, as in the scene featuring the *pueri ebreorum*, where it is quite plausible to imagine that commonplace verse forms like the heptasyllabic **AABCCB** or **AABAAB** stanza may also have been accompanied by music. On the whole, I would argue that if any of the Cornish dialogue in the *Ordinalia* was in fact sung by the actors, it is unlikely that the shift from spoken to sung dialogue was *consistently* signaled by a change in the verse form, or, conversely, that the use of any particular verse form can be taken as a clear indication that a passage was intended to be sung. Nonetheless, there is likely to have been a correlation between short-line stanzas and sung dialogue, since both a shift from heptasyllabic to tetrasyllabic lines and a shift from speech to song would most likely have occurred at points of heightened drama. Considering that there are at least some instances where "normal" **AABCCB** stanzas – the most common verse form in medieval Cornish drama – may have been sung, it is possible that Cornish performers had at their disposal a number of melodies that fit stanzas of various types, and could thus choose an appropriate tune for any standard verse form in the plays that, due to dramatic considerations, needed to be sung. If there was a medieval Cornish song tradition that involved the tail-rhyme stanza or other verse forms common in the plays, however, it has left no trace behind.

7. Conclusions

While there is little surviving evidence to tell us how and to what extent vocal music played a part in medieval Cornish drama, there are some facts of which we can be reasonably certain. We know from references to minstrels (*menstrels*) and pipers (*pyboryon*) in the plays that instrumental music had a place in the performance. We know from stage directions and dialogue that hymns in Latin and English were sung at various appropriate points in the plays. Several speeches in the *Ordinalia*, *Beunans Meriasek*, and *Gwreans an Bys* use the words *can* (song) or *cane* (singing, to sing) in either a literal sense, referring to actual vocal music performed by the actors, or a metaphorical sense, as when devils and damned souls are said to sing "Alas!" or "woe is me!" leading to various musical jokes and puns. From some of these references, we know that medieval Cornish playwrights were familiar with the terminology of vocal music, including both English terms like *conternot* and *dyscant* as well as Cornish terms like *pen can* and *pen pusorn* whose precise meaning may never be known.[65]

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[65] Robert Longsworth, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 110.

Over the past hundred and fifty years of Cornish scholarship, various commentators have suggested that certain stanzas of dialogue that appear in the dramas may have been sung to music. In some cases, this assessment has been made on the basis of the verse forms themselves: Norris, for example, described those stanzas in the *Ordinalia* that consist entirely or predominantly of tetrasyllabic lines as having a more "declamatory or lyrical" quality than the usual heptasyllabic forms,[66] while in the present study I have suggested that many of the Type III stanza forms in *Passio Christi*, including Christ's opening lines and the unusual thirteen-line stanzas of Mary's *planctus* (which Nance identified as part of a poem broken up and inserted into the play) may have been sung.[67] Nonetheless, the verse form alone cannot tell us whether a particular stanza was intended for musical performance. Sometimes the notion that a given passage may have been set to music is based on the content of the dialogue or the probable source of the scene. Such is the case, for instance, with the lines delivered by the *pueri ebreorum* in *Passio Christi*, which Bakere, Longsworth, and Jenner have all identified as deriving from a hymn sung on Palm Sunday by seven boys in procession.[68]

It should be remembered, however, that in the entire corpus of medieval Cornish drama, there is no clear evidence that any individual stanza was sung rather than spoken. The only dialogue that is explicitly marked in our manuscripts as text to be sung is the English couplet "Ellas mornyngh y syngh mornyng y cal / our lord ys deyd that bogthe ovs al" (Alas, mourning I sing, mourning I call, our Lord is dead that bought us all) in *Resurrexio Domini* (lines 733-734), and nearly all of the other stage directions that mention singing can be read as referring to hymns in either Latin or English rather than Cornish. In addition, the stanza forms which Norris and others[69] have identified as unusual or distinctive enough to suggest musical performance are often simple variants of the **ABABABAB**, **AABCCB**, or **AAbCCb** stanzas, which argues against the idea that such speeches would have been delivered in any way differently from other dialogue presented in one of these three very common verse forms.

Nonetheless, while we cannot know for certain the extent to which vocal music formed a part of Cornish drama, some of the cases discussed above – particularly Mary's lament for Jesus and the scene involving the *pueri* in *Passio Christi* – deserve strong consideration as possible examples of Cornish verse

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[66] Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, p. 450.

[67] Ibid., 2, p. 452; T. D. Crawford, "Composition of the Cornish *Ordinalia*," p. 171.

[68] Jane A. Bakere, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 79; Longsworth, *Cornish Ordinalia*, p. 109.

[69] Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama* 2, pp. 450-452; see also Crawford, "Composition of the Cornish *Ordinalia*," p. 171, p. 175 n. 46.

written for musical performance. If these are genuine survivals of Cornish vocal music from the traditional period, they may very well represent the most "authentically" Cornish musical material available to modern scholarship, since unlike the handful of Late Cornish songs that have been preserved, they derive from a period when the language was still spoken throughout the western half of Cornwall, and would likely have been composed by native speakers for an audience of native speakers. Unfortunately, none of the tunes to which these songs may have been performed has survived.

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