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Inhalt

Alderik H. BLOM <i>lingua gallica, lingua celtica</i> : Gaulish, Gallo-Latin, or Gallo-Romance?	7
Benjamin BRUCH Medieval Cornish Versification: An Overview	55
Lukas J. DORFBAUER Trunksucht in Blütenlesen: Die beiden Sprüche ' <i>Ebrietas abluit memoriam... Sobrietas salvat memoriam...</i> '	127
Alexander FALILEYEV 'New' Gaulish Personal Names	163
Aaron GRIFFITH The Old Irish Deponent Suffixless Preterite	169
Anders Richardt JØRGENSEN Irish <i>báeth, báes, bés, ammaid</i> and Breton <i>boaz, amoed</i>	189
Ranko MATASOVIĆ Adjective Phrases in Old Irish	195
Dagmar SCHLÜTER Zwischen Göttinnen und Verliererinnen. Gender als Kategorie in der Keltologie: eine erste Bestandsaufnahme	211
David STIFTER Notes on Châteaubleau (L-93)	229

Rezensionen	245
Wolfgang Meid und Peter Anreiter, <i>Heilpflanzen und Heilsprüche. Zeugnisse gallischer Sprache bei Marcellus von Bordeaux. Linguistische und pharmakologische Aspekte</i> . <i>Studia Interdisciplinaria Aenipontana</i> 4, Wien: Edition Praesens 2005 (Alderik H. Blom)	245
Andrew Carnie, <i>Irish Nouns: a reference guide</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008 (Theresa-Susanna Illés)	248
Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, <i>Neuirisches Lesebuch. Texte aus Cois Fhairrge und von den Blasket Inseln</i> . Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2008 (Theresa-Susanna Illés)	254
Gérard Cornillet, <i>Wörterbuch Bretonisch-Deutsch. Deutsch-Bretonisch</i> . Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag ³ 2006 (Patrick J. Zecher)	258
Patrice Lajoie, <i>Des dieux gaulois. Petits essais de mythologie</i> [= <i>Archaeolingua Series Minor</i> 26], Budapest: Archaeolingua 2008 (Andreas Hofeneder)	261
Iwan Wmffre, <i>Breton Orthographies and Dialects. The Twentieth-Century Orthography War in Brittany</i> . <i>Contemporary Studies in Descriptive Linguistics</i> 18 and 19, Oxford – Bern – Berlin – Bruxelles – Frankfurt am Main – New York – Wien: Peter Lang 2007 (Albert Bock)	269
John Carey, <i>Ireland and the Grail</i> . <i>Celtic Studies Publications</i> 11. Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications 2007 (David Stifter)	276
Nora White, <i>Compert Mongáin and Three Other Early Mongán Tales. A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, Textual Notes, Bibliography and Vocabulary</i> . <i>Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts</i> 5, Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland, Maynooth 2006 (David Stifter)	281
<i>Law, Literature and Society. CSANA Yearbook</i> 7. Joseph F. Eska Editor. Dublin – Portland Or.: Four Courts Press 2008 (David Stifter)	287
<i>Studies on the Book of Deer</i> . Katherine Forsyth Editor, Dublin: Four Courts Press 2008 (David Stifter)	290
Abstracts	297



Medieval Cornish Versification: An Overview

Benjamin BRUCH

1. INTRODUCTION¹

The history of the Cornish language is customarily divided into the following chronological periods (terminology largely that of JACKSON 1953: 5–6; dates after GEORGE 1993b: 410):

1. Primitive Cornish (ca. 600–ca. 800).
2. Old Cornish (ca. 800–ca. 1200).
3. Middle Cornish (ca. 1200–ca. 1575).
4. Late Cornish (also called Modern Cornish) (ca. 1575–ca. 1800).
5. Revived Cornish (ca. 1900–present).

Only the three most recent of these periods have left literary remains. Old Cornish is known from place-names, personal names, glosses, and a lengthy vocabulary list, but no literature from this era has survived. The earliest continuous text in Cornish dates from the second half of the fourteenth century, well into the Middle Cornish period.

Cornish literature may therefore be divided into three periods, which roughly correspond to the last three linguistic divisions given above:

¹ Much of the material presented here also formed part of my doctoral dissertation on medieval Cornish metrics (BRUCH 2005). I would like to thank Prof. Patrick K. Ford, Prof. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, and Dr. Oliver J. Padel for their excellent advice and unwavering support, without which this work could never have been undertaken, let alone completed.

1. Medieval Cornish literature (ca. 1350–1611), which deals largely with religious themes, and much of which is associated with the Roman Catholic Church.
2. Late Cornish literature (17th and 18th centuries), which is much more varied in scope if not in extent, generally secular or Protestant in its outlook, and in many cases written by authors who were not themselves native speakers of Cornish.
3. Revived Cornish literature (19th century–present), which resembles modern Western literature in other languages, and is invariably the work of writers who learned Cornish as a second language.

All three of these periods have produced works in verse. Much Late and Revived Cornish poetry shows a significant degree of English influence, which is not surprising considering that most writers from these two periods were native speakers of English (see JENNER 1904: 51; POOL 1982; MURDOCH 1993: 131–132; GEORGE 1993b: 414; WILLIAMS 2006a: 152–157). Medieval Cornish verse presents a very different picture, however. Nearly all of the surviving indigenous Cornish literature produced between 1350 and 1611 is religious in nature, and all of it is in verse.² While only six verse texts are known, and at least two of these are incomplete, medieval Cornish writers seem to have composed poetry on a grand scale: even the shortest of the complete works that are known today is over 2000 lines long. These six texts (in rough order of composition) are:

1. The *Charter Endorsement (CE)*, three dozen lines of verse written ca. 1350–1400 on the back of British Library MS. Add. Ch. 19.491, an “Indenture of Final Concord” dated 1340 (JANSEN 1991: 91). It is thought to be an actor’s part from a play or interlude (JENNER 1915: 45–46; NANCE 1932: 35; CAMPANILE 1963: 62–64; NEWLYN 1996), although a few recent editors have suggested it may be a secular poem (TOORIAN 1991: 18–22; EDWARDS 1994: 2).
 2. The Cornish *Ordinalia*, a collection of three 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.
- 2 The two major prose texts from this period, the *Tregear Homilies* (written after 1555) and *Sacrament an Aulter* (written after 1576), are translations of material originally written in English (dates after FROST 2007: 27–28).

tury manuscript, Oxford MS. Bodl. 791.³ Evidence in the manuscript suggests that a fourth play dealing with the Nativity or Christ's childhood may also have existed, but this has not survived (HAWKE 1979: 53–54, referencing HARRIS 1964: 324–325; GEORGE 2006b: 3–6).

3. *Pascon Agan Arluth (PA)*, 'The Passion of Our Lord', a poem written ca. 1400 and known from a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript, British Library MS. Harleian 1782. *Pascon Agan Arluth* shares some lines with *Passio Christi*, the middle play of the *Ordinalia* cycle, although the relationship between the two texts is unclear. NANCE (1949: 368) suggests that the poem is the older of the two texts, as does MURDOCH (1981: 823–826), while FOWLER (1961: 104–111) takes the opposite view.
4. *Bewnans Ke (BK)*, 'The Life of St. Ke', possibly composed ca. 1500 and known only from a fragmentary and imperfect copy of the later sixteenth century, National Library of Wales MS. 23.849D.⁴
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 recopied or rewritten in the mid-sixteenth century.⁵
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 but containing at least some material also found in the first 1258 lines of the fifteenth-century *Origo Mundi*. The text as we have it is subtitled "the first daie of playe" and ends with a call for the audience to 'come on time tomorrow' (GB 2542)⁶ to see the next instalment, which has not survived, if indeed it was ever written (see NEUSS 1983: xviii–xix).

All but the last of these works date from the Middle Cornish period, while *Gwreans an Bys* is a Late Cornish play that shows a number of Middle Cornish features, and which clearly belongs to the Middle Cornish literary tradition (GEORGE 1986: 10).⁷ For the sake of convenience, however, and despite the

3 Line numbers cited for these three plays are those of NORRIS' *Ancient Cornish Drama* (1859).

4 Line and stanza numbers cited for *Bewnans Ke* are those of the THOMAS & WILLIAMS edition (2007).

5 Line numbers cited for *Beunans Meriasek* are those of STOKES' edition (1872).

6 Line numbers cited for *Gwreans an Bys* are those of STOKES' edition (1864).

7 It should be noted that George no longer considers *Gwreans an Bys* as a Late Cornish text, and would now describe the play as Middle Cornish (personal communication, 1 January 2005).

sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dates of the three later works, all six texts may be described as works of ‘medieval’ literature, since they form part of the medieval European traditions of religious poetry and mystery or miracle plays. 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–ca. 1500, 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 in which the six- and eight-line stanzas of Middle Cornish verse were divided into smaller ‘segments’ or ‘half-stanzas’ which could then be rearranged into new patterns (see BRUCH 2005: 356–376). 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 used in the later works had not yet been codified.

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 (BRUCH 2005: 314–325; dates after WHETTER 1988: 3, 31; see also THOMAS & WILLIAMS 2007: xlii–xliii).⁸ 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 (2005: 97; see also WHETTER 1988: 111). The rise of Cornish religious drama in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was likely an unforeseen consequence, as individual members of the Glasney community began composing plays in Cornish for performance in parishes within the college’s sphere of influence.⁹ The rules of prosody which govern the *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, *Bewnans Ke*, and *Beunans Meriasek* may therefore be Glasney’s

8 As D. H. FROST has convincingly shown, the two principal Cornish prose texts from this period (the *Tregear Homilies* and *Sacrament an Aulter*, both written in the second half of the sixteenth century) were also produced by men with ties to Glasney College (2007).

9 Saints Ke and Meriasek were the patron saints of Kea and Camborne, respectively, and both parishes had ties to Glasney at the time *Bewnans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek* were written. A brief discussion of the evidence linking the *Ordinalia* and the two saints’ plays to Glasney may be found in BRUCH 2005: 314–317; see also PADEL 2005: 97–99.

rules. The differences in versification between *Gwreans an Bys* and the saints' plays – which are far greater than those between the saints' plays and the older *Ordinalia* cycle – may result at least in part from the fact that after the dissolution of Glasney in 1549 there was no institution dedicated to preserving and passing on the tradition of Cornish verse composition.

At first glance, medieval Cornish versification appears to be a very complex system with few hard and fast rules. Together, the four central texts of this study comprise over 18,000 lines of verse divided into roughly 2,800 stanzas, and among these more than two hundred distinct stanza forms can be identified. However, a closer analysis 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. The same general rules of rhyme and metre apply to all four of the central texts and to *Gwreans an Bys* as well.

Over the course of the past two centuries, very little research has been done on Cornish metrics and versification, and still less has been published. The earliest writer to treat the subject in any detail was Edwin NORRIS, who described the stanza forms and metrical features of the *Ordinalia* in the appendix to his 1859 edition of *The Ancient Cornish Drama* (II 446–452; see also HARRIS 1964: 36–40). Few subsequent editors of Cornish texts have devoted as much space to metrics as Norris, but THOMAS & WILLIAMS (2007: lxxv–lxxviii) and STOKES (1872: xiii–xvi) provide lists of the verse forms found in *Bewnans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek* in their respective editions. FOWLER (1961: 105–111, 120–124) and MURDOCH (1981: 824–825) present differing views of the textual relationship between *Passio Christi* and *Pascon Agan Arluth*, basing their arguments in part on stanza forms and metrical features. The unusual prosody of the *Charter Endorsement* is discussed by JENNER (1915: 44–45), NANCE 1932, CAMPANILE (1963: 66), TOORIAN (1991: 22–26), EDWARDS (1994: 3), and BRUCH (2005: 331–349); BRUCH (2005: 354–382) also provides the only detailed description currently available of the verse forms used in *Gwreans an Bys*.

Two early general works on Cornish metrics are those by Henry JENNER (1904: 178–191) and Joseph LOTH (1902: XI 204–216), and a brief treatment of prosody is also presented in MURDOCH's survey of *Cornish Literature* (1993: 15–17). Ken GEORGE discusses medieval Cornish rhyme in two publications devoted to phonology (1984: 119–122; DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997: 93–100), while Nicholas WILLIAMS articulates a contrary point of view in *Towards Authentic Cornish* (2006b: 179–183). A pair of articles by T. D. CRAWFORD published in the journal *Old Cornwall* (1981, 1984) provide detailed analysis of the stanza

forms found in the *Ordinalia* and *Beunans Meriasek*. Although the present study does not use Crawford's classification system for rhyme schemes and metrical patterns, Crawford's work nonetheless represents a tremendous step forward in the study of Cornish metrics, and should not be overlooked.

This article aims to present an overview of medieval Cornish versification, with particular focus on the four central works of Middle Cornish literature. In its treatment of Cornish metre, rhyme, and stanza structure, it summarises and expands upon material originally presented in BRUCH 2005, the first complete study of medieval Cornish metrics to examine all six of the surviving texts from the *Charter Endorsement* to *Gwreans an Bys*. While much previous scholarship has focused on individual texts and parallels between Cornish and other Celtic literary traditions, this study will highlight features shared across the entire Middle Cornish corpus, and will explore the possible relationships between Middle Cornish and Middle English versification.

2. METRE

Like much traditional Irish, Welsh, and Breton poetry, medieval Cornish verse was written using a purely syllabic metre, which allowed for considerable variation in the number and arrangement of stress accents in a line. As Table 1 illustrates, the majority of lines in the texts (over 85%) contain seven syllables, while most of the remainder (over 11%) contain four. Lines of other lengths from two to twelve syllables are attested, particularly in *Bewnans Ke* and *Gwreans an Bys*, but many of these metrical irregularities may be explained as the result of copying errors, linguistic shifts, and in the case of *Gwreans an Bys*, the breakdown of the medieval Cornish verse tradition following the dissolution of Glasney College in 1549.

Table 1. Line Length in Medieval Cornish Texts, ca. 1350–1611 (%).

<i>Length</i>	<i>CE</i>	<i>OM</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>RD</i>	<i>Ord.*</i>	<i>PA</i>	<i>BK</i>	<i>BM</i>	<i>GB</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>incompl.</i>	—	< 0.1	—	—	< 0.1	0.3	1.6	—	—	< 0.1
2	—	—	0.1	—	< 0.1	—	0.1	—	—	< 0.1
3	—	—	0.1	—	0.1	—	0.7	—	0.2	0.1
4	8	6.0	9.5	22.6	12.4	—	26.0	8.5	4.7	11.5
5	22	0.1	—	< 0.1	< 0.1	—	1.8	0.3	0.3	0.4
6	8	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.5	2.8	0.2	2.3	0.9
7	25	93.3	89.6	76.6	86.8	97.6	65.0	90.2	88.2	85.3
8	17	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.4	1.6	1.9	0.6	4.0	1.3
9	6	—	—	< 0.1	< 0.1	—	0.2	< 0.1	0.4	0.1
10	—	< 0.1	< 0.1	0.1	0.1	—	< 0.1	0.1	< 0.1	< 0.1
11	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	< 0.1
12	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	< 0.1
4 or 7	33	99.3	99.1	99.2	99.2	97.6	91.0	98.7	92.9	96.8

* The column headed *Ord.* gives the total for the *Ordinalia* as a whole.

The variation in the percentage of four-syllable lines between the various texts is due to the different combinations of stanza forms used in each, since certain stanza types are more likely than others to contain short lines. *Pascon Agan Arluth* is entirely lacking in short lines, as the poem uses only one type of stanza throughout: a form where all lines contain seven syllables. Tetrasyllabic lines are therefore found only in the dramas.

2.1. Syllabic vs. Accentual Metre

The earliest discussion of Middle Cornish metrics appears in William BORLASE'S *The Natural History of Cornwall* (1758). Borlase suggested that Cornish verse was recited with an artificially regular trochaic rhythm, and that the opening lines of *Origo Mundi* should therefore be read with stress falling on the odd-numbered syllables of each heptasyllabic line:

Eñ Tās-ā Nēf-ym Gyl-wyr
 Fōrmŷ-ēr pūb-trā vŷth-gwrŷs, &c.

(BORLASE 1758: 296)¹⁰

It has been observed, however, that Borlase’s proposed scansion of the first line of *Origo Mundi* is exactly the opposite of the normal stress pattern of Cornish speech. Assuming that Cornish – like Welsh and most dialects of Breton – stressed polysyllabic words on the penultimate syllable, the line quoted above should read *Ēn tās ā nēfŷm gylwŷr* ‘I am called the Father of Heaven’ (Fowler 1961: 121). Likewise, Borlase’s interpretation of the second line (*Formyer pup tra a vyt gwrys* ‘Shaper of all that will be made’) involves omitting the relative particle *a* before the verb *vyt[h]* ‘will be’ and treating *Formyer* as a three-syllable word with stresses on the first and last syllables, rather than the more logical disyllabic *Fōrm-yēr*.

Despite these difficulties with Borlase’s analysis, his description of Cornish metre was later referenced by Edwin NORRIS (1859: II 447–448) and Henry JENNER (1904: 179–180), and even influenced R. Morton NANCE in compiling his 1938 *Cornish-English Dictionary* (1990: [xi]). JENNER refined Borlase’s theory, stating in a 1915 article that “the metre of the Ordinalia and [*Pascon Agan Arluth*] is always trochaic in the seven-syllabled lines, and iambic in the four-syllabled” (45). Such a rule would ensure that every line of verse ends in a stressed syllable, a development which has important implications for the study of rhyme in medieval Cornish texts.¹¹

In general, end-rhyme in Cornish involves only the final syllable of each line, and JENNER felt that such monosyllabic rhymes must always be “masculine” (1904: 180) – that is, must be rhymes between two stressed syllables. This interpretation was likely coloured by Jenner’s intuition as a native speaker of English, since English versification only recognises rhymes involving stressed syllables. Such stressed rhymes may be further classified as masculine (monosyllabic) rhymes like *cāt* : *hāt*, feminine (disyllabic) rhymes like *mātter* : *lātter*, or dactylic (trisyllabic) rhymes like *nátional* : *rátional*, depending on the

10 The text of *Origo Mundi* as printed in Borlase’s *Natural History* contains a number of copying or typesetting errors, and the English translation provided is likewise poor; both are likely derived from one of John Keigwin’s late seventeenth-century transcriptions of the *Ordinalia*, rather than from the original manuscript.

11 See HARRIS (1964: 37–38) for a critique of Borlase’s theory as elaborated by Norris, Jenner, and Nance.

number of unstressed syllables which follow the final stressed syllable of a line. Rhymes between a stressed and an unstressed syllable, like *tén* : *childrén* or between two unstressed syllables, like *louděr* : *softěr* are “no rhyme at all” to an English-speaker’s ear (NORRIS 1859: II 447). When confronted with Cornish rhyming pairs like *dá* ‘good’ : *guellă* ‘better’ (*OM* 534–536) or *lahă* ‘law’ : *hennă* ‘that one’ (*PC* 1978–1980), it is therefore hardly surprising that Norris and Jenner imagined that the polysyllabic words should be recited with an unnatural stress on the final syllable (*dá* : **gwellă*; **lahă* : **hennă*) to provide a ‘true’ rhyme.

Much more likely, however, is that Cornish poets followed largely the same rhyming rule used by their counterparts in Brittany and Wales. In traditional Breton and Welsh verse, rhyme usually involves only the final syllable of each line, and rhymes between stressed and unstressed syllables are common. If Cornish writers intended their verse to be read with a trochaic rhythm, we should expect medieval Cornish texts to show a preference for masculine rhymes or lines ending in a stressed syllable. As Table 2 illustrates, however, most lines in the corpus have a ‘feminine’ or iambic ending, if we assign a ‘normal’ (penultimate) pattern of stress to polysyllabic words:

Table 2. Line-Endings in Medieval Cornish Texts, ca. 1350–1611 (%).

<i>Type</i>	<i>CE</i>	<i>OM</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>RD</i>	<i>Ord.</i>	<i>PA</i>	<i>BK</i>	<i>BM</i>	<i>GB</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>masculine</i>	53	36.0	37.6	42.9	38.7	24.3	45.1	34.0	36.0	37.0
<i>feminine</i>	47	59.7	59.3	53.3	57.6	73.0	52.2	62.8	60.2	59.7
<i>other*</i>	—	4.3	3.1	3.8	3.7	2.7	2.6	3.2	3.8	3.4

* This includes lines with a dactylic cadence (where the stress falls on the antepenultimate syllable) as well as those where the stress pattern is uncertain.

The only text where masculine endings outnumber feminine ones is the *Charter Endorsement*, which is only thirty-six lines long, and which does not observe a regular syllabic metre in any case (BRUCH 2005: 331–337).

2.2. *Svarabhakti and Scansion*

While medieval Cornish verse uses a syllabic metre comparable to that found in Middle Welsh poetry, Cornish poetic practice differs from Welsh regarding the treatment of epenthetic vowels.¹² In Welsh prosody, epenthetic vowels – which were often indicated in writing in Middle Welsh manuscripts, although they are not represented in Modern Welsh orthography – do not contribute to the syllable count of a line of poetry (EVANS 1976: 12–13). In Cornish, however, epenthetic vowels do count for the purpose of determining the number of syllables in a line (GEORGE 1986: 75). In an unpublished paper on the Cornish place-name *Truro*, Oliver PADEL has suggested that this change in the perception of epenthetic vowels as syllabic may have occurred around the middle of the thirteenth century (personal communication, 17 July 2009), putting it well before the date of the earliest known Middle Cornish verse. Thus the word for ‘rough’ (Breton *garv*, Welsh *garw*, Cornish *garow*) is pronounced and scanned as one syllable [garv, garw] in Breton, pronounced as two syllables [‘garu] but scanned as one in Welsh, and pronounced and scanned as two syllables [‘garow] in Cornish (GEORGE 1986: 74–75).

One of the few exceptions to this rule involves the third person singular verb ‘dies’. This verb is found twice in *Origo Mundi*, spelled *verow*, and in both cases it must be read as disyllabic to provide a seven-syllable line, in accordance with the principle outlined above. In the two saints’ plays, however, the verb appears a total of seven times – twice as *vyrwe* in *Beunans Meriasek* and five times as *verew* in *Bewnans Ke* – in lines which indicate that the word was scanned (and, before a vowel, possibly also pronounced) as one syllable: [verw] (BRUCH 2005: 135–136; THOMAS & WILLIAMS 2007: lxiii). The closely related adjective *marow* ‘dead’ (Breton *marv*, Welsh *marw* [‘maru] with svarabhakti) is always scanned as two syllables, however, and is frequently rhymed with words like *parow* ‘equals, peers’ and *galarow* ‘pains’ where the *-ow* is a plural ending rather than the result of svarabhakti on a final [rw] cluster.

12 On the nature of svarabhakti in Cornish and Welsh, and its absence from Breton, see JACKSON (1953: 337–338).

2.3. *Words with Variable Scansion*

Some common words in Cornish verse exhibit a degree of metrical flexibility, and can add or drop a syllable if this is necessary to preserve scansion. This is the case with the word *emperour*, whose spelling and etymology suggest a trisyllabic pronunciation, but which seems almost always to have been scanned as two syllables in Middle Cornish poetry. Nearly all the examples of this word use a contraction of some sort to represent the sound or sounds that come between the *p* and the *o*, so the transcription *emperour* may be slightly misleading; however, there are six instances in the *Ordinalia* where scansion indicates a trisyllabic pronunciation, and justifies the trisyllabic reading *em-per-our* rather than *em-prou* in at least these cases. All of the instances of *emperour* in the saints' plays require a two-syllable reading, however, as do two of the six cases in *Resurrexio Domini*.¹³ Most tellingly, at line 2053 of *Origo Mundi* the word is spelled *emprou* with no contraction, indicating that even in the *Ordinalia* (where the pronunciation seems to fluctuate) the word could be pronounced as two syllables.

The word *paragh* 'endure' presents a similar difficulty, since it is likewise always written with a contraction of some sort (*paragh*); like *emperour*, it seems to have had one fewer syllable than the number of syllables indicated by the spelling. All three examples of this word in the corpus appear in *Beunans Meriasek*, in lines which indicate a monosyllabic pronunciation [parx]; in two cases (*BM* 1184–1885, 2487–2488), this word is even rhymed with *margh* [marx] 'horse'. Perhaps the spelling is intended to indicate an epenthetic vowel (see GEORGE 1993a: 243), but if so, it is unclear why the word *margh* would not be similarly affected. Nor would svarabhakti provide a convincing solution to this problem, since epenthetic vowels usually count for metrical purposes in Middle Cornish verse, as discussed above.

Most other examples of metrical flexibility involve proper names, like that of *Meriasek*, the eponymous central character of *Beunans Meriasek*. This name appears 128 times in the play, and most lines containing it can be read as seven or four syllables given a trisyllabic pronunciation: *Mer-ia-sek*. In twelve instances, however – roughly 9% of the time – a trisyllabic pronunciation would yield a line of only six syllables. Six-syllable lines are not anywhere

¹³ Interestingly, these two latter cases both occur in close proximity to lines with trisyllabic pronunciations.

near this common in the play as a whole: there are only twenty-two of them in all, representing less than 0.5% of all lines, and over half of these contain the name *Meriasek*. It therefore seems more likely that in these twelve cases, the name is to be read as four syllables: *Me-ri-a-sek*, which would yield a standard heptasyllabic line.

A similar variation in syllable count is found with the name *Noe* ‘Noah’ in *Origo Mundi*. Although proper scansion requires a monosyllabic pronunciation of this name [nɔːj] in three instances (*OM* 933, 1157, and 1207), there are three other lines (*OM* 941, 973, and 1096) which would be one syllable short if *Noe* is treated as a monosyllable. Since there are only three other six-syllable lines in all of *Origo Mundi*, it is unlikely that all three of these instances involving *Noe* represent metrical faults; rather, it makes sense to assume that *Noe* can have a disyllabic pronunciation as well: *No-e*. In one other case at *OM* 931, a line has been rewritten by the corrector (Norris’ scribe B), and the emended version (*yn ol an beys sav noe*) also calls for a disyllabic reading of the name. B’s *an beys* ‘the world’ appears to be written over the original scribe’s *nor veys* ‘Earth, world’, and may have been substituted to correct a line which was lacking a definite article.¹⁴ This suggests that the line may have originally read *yn ol an nor veys sav noe*, with a monosyllabic reading of *noe*, but that the scribe who copied our manuscript of *Origo Mundi* omitted the article *an*; later, the corrector – presumably content to scan *noe* as two syllables – emended *nor veys* to *an beys* in order to fix this grammatical mistake.

In addition to the examples cited above, the spelling *noy* is used at *OM* 1017 and 1231, where it clearly represents one syllable. *Noy* or *Noye* is also the spelling used throughout *Gwreans an Bys*, where this name occurs ten times, and where it is always a monosyllable. Two of these appearances of the name ‘Noah’ in *Gwreans an Bys* are in lines derived from *Origo Mundi* which originally had a disyllabic pronunciation of this name: *saw noye in oll an bys ma* (*GB* 2227) from *yn ol an beys sav noe* [no-e] (*OM* 931), and *noy mar lenwys ew an byes* (*GB* 2245) with *noe* [no-e] *mar luen yv an beys* (*OM* 941). In each case, an additional syllable has been added elsewhere in the line to restore the scansion.

NORBERG discusses a comparable phenomenon in medieval Latin verse, where “proper nouns frequently received a completely arbitrary treatment” in scan-

14 *An nor veys* ‘the Earth’ would be expected in this context, but there does not seem to be enough room under B’s *an* for the first scribe to have written both *an* and *nor*.

sion, and where “in the same poem, or in the work of the same author, one can find at the same time *Nōe* and *Noë*, *Isāias* and *Isaiās*, *Isāac* and *Isaïc*, *Moÿses*, *Mōÿses*, *Möÿses*, and *Mōÿses*” (2004: 24). It should be noted, however, that in Cornish texts this phenomenon occurs with both Biblical names (which often contain elements that are alien to Cornish phonology) and native names like *Meriasek*, which – as proven by the change of the original medial [d] of *Meriadoc* to [z] – was clearly fully integrated into the phonological system of Middle Cornish.

2.4. Language and Metre

Middle Cornish verse contains a number of words, phrases, and lines in other languages, notably English, French, and Latin. Generally speaking, the metre of lines containing French or English words is no different from lines which are entirely in Cornish.¹⁵ It has even been claimed (FOWLER 1961: 120–124; see also THOMAS & WILLIAMS 2007: xlvi) that Cornish texts can be dated on the basis of whether or not the English phrases they contain show final *-e* to have been silent. Even in cases where several lines of verse consist solely of English or French words, the metre remains syllabic, as in the following stanza from *Bewnans Ke*:¹⁶

15 See FOWLER (1961: 122) on the regularity of the syllabic metre for English lines in the *Ordinalia*.

16 Here and elsewhere in this article, information on the rhyme, metre, and accentual pattern of each stanza quoted is provided in three columns. The first column indicates the number of syllables (or, in English poetry, the number of stressed syllables) per line. The second column shows the rhyme scheme of the stanza, with upper-case letters (**ABC**) being used for long (heptasyllabic) lines and lower-case letters (**abc**) being used for short (usually tetrasyllabic) lines. The third column gives information about the accentual pattern of the syllables involved in the end-rhyme: **S** if the line ends in a stressed syllable; **U** if the line ends in an unstressed syllable which makes only monosyllabic rhymes with other lines; **SU** if the line forms a feminine or iambic rhyme with another line; and **Su** in lines of Middle English verse where the final word ends in an *-e* which might have been pronounced as schwa, but could also have been silent, depending on the date of composition.

PRIMUS PONTIFEX ¹⁷	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Dv vous gard an bon matyn	7	A	S
I pray you gentyl cosyn	7	A	U
whetherward be you goyng	7	B	U
SECUNDUS EPISCOPUS			
Brother god save you an se	7	C	S
I go to lord myld & fre	7	C	S
to arthur our myghty kyng	7	B	S

(BK 1385–1390)

The situation is very different with respect to Latin phrases, however. A disproportionately high number of the lines in the corpus which do not conform to the usual rule of seven or four syllables are ones which are wholly or partially written in Latin. Some apparent irregularities in the metre of these Latin lines may no doubt be accounted for by elision, synaeresis (the contraction of two adjacent vowels into a diphthong), or unexpressed syncope, features which are common in medieval Latin verse (NORBERG 2004: 23–30). However, a number of cases remain which no amount of phonological manipulation can explain away. These generally involve quotations from Biblical or liturgical sources, such as the line *in nomine patris et filij*, which occurs five times in the corpus (OM 2020; PC 406; BM 555, 2177, and 4156). This line cannot possibly be scanned as fewer than eight syllables, and likely had at least nine, even assuming that the final *-ij* of *filij* counts as one syllable. The same can be said of *ego sum alpha et omega*, the opening line of *Gwreans an Bys*, and *gloria in excelsis deo*, which appears at RD 2528.

In all of these cases, as with the Biblical quotation *A tas ely eloy / lama zaba-tany* ‘O Father, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which appears in a couplet of six-syllable lines at PC 2955–2956, it is likely that the authors of Middle Cornish texts did not feel they could modify quotations from Scripture or the Mass. Since these formulae would likely have been familiar to the audience, it may have seemed inappropriate to alter them merely for the sake of metrical regularity. The line from *Resurrexio Domini* quoted above is immediately followed by a stage direction reading *tunc cantent omnes angeli Gloria in excelsis deo*, and the introduction of a musical interlude might well have provided ample reason to

17 All Cornish quotations in this article are drawn from the author’s own database of medieval Cornish verse literature (BRUCH 2009), which has been checked against digital photographs of the original manuscripts. Some readings may therefore differ from published editions of the texts.

depart from the normal heptasyllabic metre. However, considering the number of other examples of five-, six-, and eight-syllable Latin lines in the texts, many of which do not seem to be direct quotations of Biblical or liturgical material, it may simply be the case that Cornish playwrights observed looser rules with Latin lines than they did with lines in Cornish, English, and French.

2.5. Linguistic Shifts

Other apparent metrical irregularities in medieval Cornish texts can be explained as the result of linguistic changes that took place between the date of a work's original composition and the date of its earliest surviving manuscript version. In some cases, there is a considerable time lapse involved. *Beunans Meriasek* is known from a manuscript completed in 1504, but the first ten pages of the play were recopied (or rewritten) in the mid-sixteenth century (see DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997: 63, where a date of "perhaps c. 1540" is suggested). *Bewnans Ke* may be even older than *Beunans Meriasek* – THOMAS & WILLIAMS suggest that it was written as early as 1453–1460 (2007: xlvi) – but is preserved in a manuscript of the later sixteenth century (THOMAS & WILLIAMS 2007: xlv). The manuscript of *Gwreans an Bys* dates from 1611, but the text contains a number of lines which also appear in *Origo Mundi*, a play which may have been composed ca. 1400 (BETCHER 1996: 443), and which is known from a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript (JENNER 1904: 28–29).

The sixteenth century was a time of transition for the Cornish language, and *Beunans Meriasek*, *Bewnans Ke*, and *Gwreans an Bys* all show evidence of the linguistic changes which took place during this period. Many purely phonological changes, like the pre-occlusion of $-n(n) > -dn$ and $-m(m) > -bm$ illustrated by words like *bednath* (BM 198, 224, 225) and *tabm* (GB 774) – which appear in *Gwreans an Bys* and the rewritten portion of *Beunans Meriasek* alongside the earlier Middle Cornish forms *banneth* (BM 201) and *tam* (GB 625 etc.) – had no effect on the overall metre of lines containing these words. In other cases, however, lexical shifts and morphological changes resulted in extra syllables being added to lines which were originally metrically regular. Some of these shifts can provide useful evidence about the history and relative chronology of medieval Cornish texts.

One such shift involves the pronouns *pynag* and *penagel* 'whosoever, whatsoever'. Both forms are found in the *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, and *Beunans Meriasek*, but later manuscripts from the *Tregear Homilies* (ca. 1555)

onward use only the trisyllabic form *penagel*. In *Bewnans Ke* and *Gwreans an Bys*, however, nine of the ten lines containing *penagel* have an extra syllable:

	<i>syllables</i>
ow arluth penagol avo (<i>BK</i> 458)	8
penagel nath car (<i>BK</i> 1792)	5
Penagel na vyn (<i>BK</i> 1853)	5
penagel na dew (<i>BK</i> 2492)	5
Penagel A gows er ow fyn (<i>BK</i> 3077)	8
Pennagel ew na lavara (<i>GB</i> 178)	8
pynag[e]ll for ytha an game (<i>GB</i> 810)	8
Pynagell dean a weall henna (<i>GB</i> 1374)	8
ha penagle a wra henna (<i>GB</i> 1640)	8

In their edition of *Bewnans Ke*, THOMAS & WILLIAMS (2007: 347, 382–383, 396, 408) restore a heptasyllabic or tetrasyllabic metre in the five lines listed above by emending *penagel* to *penag*; a similar restoration is justifiable at *GB* 178 and 1640 as well, although the status of the other two lines where *pynagell* is used adjectivally (‘whichever way’, ‘whichever man’; see WILLIAMS 2006b: 239) is less clear. In both these texts, it seems likely that *penagel* represents a revision by a copyist writing in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, but that the lines in question are derived from an older source that had the disyllabic form *pynag*.

A similar situation arises with the words *prag* and *praga*: both of these may be translated ‘why’, but in the *Ordinalia* and *Pascon Agan Arluth* the two words are employed in different contexts. The monosyllabic form (spelled *prag* or *prak*) is used directly before a finite verb in questions like *prag yth yw ruth the thyllas* ‘why is your clothing red?’ (*RD* 2529). Elsewhere, the polysyllabic form (spelled *praga*, *prage*, or even *pyraga* with three syllables) is preferred (BROWN 2001: 65, 212). This includes situations like *Pylat a vynnas scrife / [...] acheson / praga dampnys re bee* ‘Pilate wanted to write [...] a reason why he had been condemned’ (*PA*, stanza 187), where the past participle *dampnys* ‘condemned’ comes between *praga* and the verb *re bee* ‘had been’, or like *ha reson yv ha prage* ‘and there is a reason and a wherefore’ (*OM* 927), where the word ‘why’ is not linked to any verb at all.

By the time *Beunans Meriasek* was written (no later than 1504), *praga* was already beginning to spread at the expense of *prag*. *Beunans Meriasek* provides numerous examples of *praga* preceding a finite verb, including *Praga na ruk y sesya* ‘Why didn’t he seize him?’ at line 1032 or *Praga yth eth mes*

an pov ‘Why did he go out of the country?’ at line 2236. Since both of these cases occur in regular heptasyllabic lines, it is likely that the author of *Beunans Meriasek* originally wrote these lines using *praga* instead of *prag*, suggesting that this lexical shift was well underway by ca. 1500. The *Tregear Homilies*, which were translated into Cornish sometime after 1555, use *praga* almost exclusively in all contexts.¹⁸

The manuscripts of both *Bewnans Ke* and *Gwreans an Bys* likewise reflect the spread of *praga* in the sixteenth century. *Praga* is the only form found in *Bewnans Ke*, where the word is attested six times; the twenty-two instances of ‘why’ in *Gwreans an Bys* are evenly split between monosyllabic *prag(e)* and disyllabic *praga*.¹⁹ Of the half-dozen cases in *Bewnans Ke*, five have *praga* preceding a finite verb, and in at least four of these cases, the form *prag* must be restored to provide a heptasyllabic or tetrasyllabic metre:

	<i>syllables</i>
Lyvyryns theugh praga ema (<i>BK</i> 1836)	8
ha praga e rug dyelha (<i>BK</i> 1838)	8
praga e tevons (<i>BK</i> 2133)	5
praga e fuldrys ow Cosyn (<i>BK</i> 2286)	8

THOMAS & WILLIAMS make these emendations in their edition of the play (2007: 383, 388, 391; see also POLKINHORN 2004: 43, 49, 52), and also emend line 741 *ny won praga efeugh vas* to *Ny won prag e fyeugh vas* ‘I don’t know for what you’d be any use’ (2007: 76–77, 353) on the assumption that *feugh* ‘you might be’ in the manuscript is a corruption of the disyllabic *fyeugh* ‘you would be’. Most likely, these examples of *praga* before a finite verb in *Bewnans Ke* date from the sixteenth century, and were introduced by a copyist who did not have monosyllabic *prag* in his own Cornish; however, the scansion of the lines sup-

18 A similar distinction occurs with *fatel(l)* and *fatla* ‘how’: in older texts the former is used before finite verbs, and the latter in other contexts (NANCE 1990: 56; BROWN 2001: 210). This distinction is recognised in all the fifteenth-century texts, the two saints’ plays, and the *Tregear Homilies* (translated ca. 1555), while the later sixteenth-century text *Sacrament an Aulter* and the seventeenth-century play *Gwreans an Bys* tend to use *fatla* in all cases. This lexical shift has no affect on scansion, however, since both words are disyllabic.

19 The two cases of *prage* at *GB* 156 and 302 are potentially ambiguous, as this spelling is used for the disyllabic form of the word in *Origo Mundi*. The scansion of both lines requires a monosyllabic pronunciation, however, and the final *-e*, here as elsewhere in *Gwreans an Bys*, is likely an English-style ‘silent *e*’ which marks the preceding vowel as long.

ports THOMAS & WILLIAMS' theory that *Bewnans Ke* may actually be an older work than *Beunans Meriasek* (2007: xli–xlvi); presumably, an earlier version of the text had *prag* in these cases.

While the manuscript of *Gwreans an Bys* is even more modern than that of *Bewnans Ke*, *Gwreans an Bys* contains at least some material that is older than the saint's play, and this may account for some of the instances of monosyllabic *prag* in this text. Certainly, *prag* at GB 866 and 883 corresponds to *prag* in the equivalent lines of *Origo Mundi* (258, 277), and may simply have been copied into *Gwreans an Bys* from a fifteenth-century exemplar. *Gwreans an Bys* also contains at least five examples of disyllabic *praga* in lines where restoring *prag* would provide correct scansion:

	<i>syllables</i>
praga na wreta predery (GB 206)	8
Eva praga na theta nes (GB 542)	8
<i>compare</i> Eua prag na thuete nes (OM 149)	7
me ny won Leverall praga (GB 1173)	8
<i>compare</i> my ny won leuerel prak (OM 595) ²⁰	7
praga na v ^l an Chorle adam (GB 2036)	8
praga ew genas she omma (GB 2297)	8

Two of these lines also appear in *Origo Mundi*, and in both cases the older play has monosyllabic *prag* or *prak*; the other three lines do not correspond to anything in the *Ordinalia*, but may derive from some other fifteenth-century source, or a fifteenth-century forerunner of *Gwreans an Bys*.

3. RHYME

Cornish rhyme, like Cornish metre, follows principles which are substantially similar to those of Breton and Welsh poetry: only the final syllable of a word is involved in rhyme, and the position of the stress accent is largely irrelevant (WILLIAMS 2006b: 179). But here the similarities between the three traditions

20 In this line, it is actually *Gwreans an Bys* that has the 'correct' reading according to Middle Cornish rules, since we would expect *praga* rather than *prak* in a sentence where 'why' does not immediately precede a finite verb ('I do not know why'); *prak* in *Origo Mundi* is necessary to provide a rhyme with *gvak* 'hungry' in line 593.

end. Middle Welsh and Middle Breton writers developed complex rules of versification that required internal rhyme, *cynghanedd*, and other ornamentation within each line of verse, but generally employed very simple patterns of end-rhyme including monorhyme stanzas (*aaaa*) and couplets (*aabbccdd*). Middle Cornish writers, by contrast, relied solely on end-rhyme for ornamentation, and thus developed ever more elaborate stanza forms as a way to vary patterns of end-rhyme, while keeping individual lines of verse completely unadorned. Although the medieval Cornish corpus provides a few notable examples of alliteration or internal rhyme (as at *BK* 1159–1164), these stand out precisely because they are so rare, and there was certainly no requirement for poets to add any such embellishment. A discussion of rhyme in Cornish must therefore confine itself largely to end-rhyme, the fundamental building block of the medieval Cornish stanza.

3.1. Monosyllabic Rhymes

Since nearly 60% of the lines in medieval Cornish texts have a feminine or ‘iambic’ ending, rhymes between unstressed syllables (*lahă* : *hennă*) or between stressed and unstressed syllables (*dă* : *guellă*) are commonplace. There are even stanzas in which all rhymes are between unstressed single syllables:

DOCTOR	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
A haha me a woþya	7	A	U
bakcheler jen kyn in preytha	7	A	U
heth ov lefer a fysek	7	B	U
dok hy in dan the gasel	7	C	U
ha grua theyg ov gormel	7	C	U
ov boys fecycyen connek	7	B	U
(<i>BM</i> 1416–1421)			

Masculine rhymes involving stressed monosyllables like *dă* ‘good’ : *wrá* ‘does’ (*OM* 141–143) are also fairly common, and on average one line in four participates in such a rhyme. In stanzas where many lines rhyme with one another, there may be several different combinations of stressed and unstressed rhymes:

DEUS PATER	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Drog yw genef gruthyl den : ²¹	7	A	S
precyous ha haval thum fas	7	B	S
rag cola worth vn venen :	7	A	U
gylan ef re gollas an plas	7	B	S
am lef thyghyow awrussen :	7	A	U
thy wythe an geffo graas	7	B	S
pan wruge dres ov dyfen :	7	A	U
fest yn tyn ef rum sorras	7	B	U

(OM 417–424)

While this stanza provides a set of three masculine rhymes (the stressed monosyllables *fás*, *plás*, and *gráas*), these three words also rhyme with the final unstressed syllable of *sórrás* in line 424. Similarly, *dén* at the end of line 417 is a stressed monosyllable, but rhymes only with the unstressed final syllables of *véññ*, *wrússññ*, and *dýfññ*.

3.2. Polysyllabic Rhymes

Although most Cornish rhymes are monosyllabic, some 10% of all lines in the four central texts participate in a feminine or iambic rhyme, where the last two syllables of a polysyllabic word or phrase with penultimate stress are duplicated, as in *guéllă : péllă*. Since in Cornish verse (as in Welsh or Breton poetry), penultimate syllables are usually irrelevant in determining end-rhyme, any such duplication may simply be a coincidence – an extra embellishment that could be considered fortuitous when it occurred, but which would not necessarily be of prime concern to the poets. Such may be the case in stanzas like the following, where only some of the **A** rhymes are polysyllabic:

21 The colon (:) is used here and elsewhere in this study to indicate places where a line divider appears in the manuscript. The stanza quoted here contains eight lines of verse, but it takes up only four lines on the page because the lines are written side by side in pairs consisting of one **A** line and one **B** line with a raised point separating them. See BRUCH (2005: 222–261) for further information about the presentation of Cornish verse on the manuscript page.

[ADAM]	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Yn mes am ioy ham whekter :	7	A	U
res ev keskar dre terros	7	B	U
rag fout guest ha goscotter :	7	A	SU
namna vyrwyn rag anwos	7	B	U
ny wothen rag ponvotter :	7	A	SU
pytheen yn gveel py yn cos	7	B	S
ow holen gvak dyvotter :	7	A	SU
rum kymmer hag awel bos	7	B	S

(OM 359–366)

Here the **A** rhymes all involve a final unstressed syllable, and the amount of phonological duplication involved increases with each line, from three segments (*-tēr*) to five (*-óttēr*) to six (*-vóttēr*); however, it is clear from the stanza form used that all four lines are intended to rhyme with one another, even though only three of the rhymes are disyllabic.

In other cases, however, the use of feminine rhyme clearly appears to be intentional, as in the following stanza from *Pascon Agan Arluth*, where all four **B** rhymes are disyllabic:

	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Suel a vymmo bos sylwys :	7	A	U
golsowens ow lauarow	7	B	SU
a ihesu del ve helheys :	7	A	U
war an bys avel carow	7	B	SU
ragon menough rebekis :	7	A	U
ha dyspresijs yn harow	7	B	SU
yn growys* gans kentrow fastis :	7*	A	U
peynys bys pan ve marow	7	B	SU

(PA, stanza 2)

* To be read *grows* to preserve the syllable count?

Certain words are particularly likely to participate in a feminine rhyme. The three most common classes (in descending order of frequency) are:

1. Words ending in *-arow*. These include both cases where the *o* in the final syllable is the result of svarabhakti (*garow*, *marow*) and cases where the final *-ow* represents a plural ending (*galarow*, *lavarow*, *parow*). The poets make no distinction between these two groups of

words, however, and presumably there was no difference in pronunciation between their endings.

2. Words ending in *-ena* or *-ene(f)*, including *lowene*, *tremene*, *ene(f)*, *gene(f)*. Particularly in later texts, the final *-f* of *enef* ‘soul’ and *genef* ‘with me’ may be dropped, and in manuscripts from the sixteenth century onward the final vowel is usually spelled *-a* rather than *-e*.
3. Words ending in *-adow*, like *ar(g)hadow*, *caradow*, *casadow*, *falladow*, and *plegadow*.

In addition to feminine rhymes, *Bewnans Ke* and *Gwreans an Bys* also contain a few examples of dactylic or trisyllabic rhymes. Because most polysyllabic words in Cornish are stressed on the penultimate syllable, dactylic rhymes are rare, and nearly all of them appear in lines containing English loanwords or Latin phrases, as in the A lines of the stanza below:

SECUNDUS EPISCOPUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
<i>Arthurō sit gloria :</i>	7	A	SUU
an gwelha corf a thug gv	7	B	S
<i>tua vita floria :</i>	7	A	SUU
chyf an bysma os heb dowl*	7	B*	S
menovgh prevys	4	c	SU
the <i>omthe gyans</i> ew worthy	7	D	U
<i>contys</i> in mysk arlythy	7	D	U
neffra ny vyth ankevys	7	C	SU
(BK 1610–1617)			

* This may be a copying error; THOMAS & WILLIAMS emend to *gow* to provide a rhyme with *gv* ‘spear’ in the second line (2007: 166, 379).

3.3. Rhymes in *Bewnans Ke*

Whereas the rhyming rule that is found elsewhere in Cornish literature – including the *Charter Endorsement* and *Gwreans an Bys* – is similar to that of Breton or Welsh verse, *Bewnans Ke* seems to prefer a rule similar to that used in English poetry. In English prosody, two words rhyme only if they are phonologically similar from the final *stressed* vowel onwards (KALUZA 1911: 168, 171). Thus in English verse *drīnkīng* rhymes with *thīnkīng*, but not with *sīng* or *hōpīng*. In Cornish verse, on the other hand, *guéllă* ‘best’ rhymes with *péllă* ‘farthest’ but also with *dă* ‘good’ and *vără* ‘bread’. Since the stress accent

almost certainly fell on the penultimate syllable in most polysyllabic Cornish words, a text that followed the English rhyming rule would likely contain a large number of feminine rhymes in lines with a feminine (iambic) ending, and would show a higher than usual percentage of masculine rhymes among lines with a masculine (stressed, typically monosyllabic) ending.

Such seems to be the case in *Bewnans Ke*, where over two thirds of all lines participate in either a masculine or a feminine rhyme. Stanzas like the following, in which every line ends in a stressed monosyllable, are certainly much more widespread in *BK* than they are elsewhere in the corpus:

ARTHURUS, sedens	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Stowt & gay & symly syr :	7	A	S
I am sitting on my se	7	B	S
nvm ankevyr ve pur wyr :	7	A	S
hedre vo nef in e le	7	B	S
fers of ha freth	4	c	S
penagel am sorr <i>gans</i> cam	7	D	S
ef an gevyth tebal lam	7	D	S
awos own an jowl hay <i>vam</i>	7	D	S
om yskerans me a feth	7	C	S

(*BK* 1469–1477)

There are also a few stanzas in which every line ends with a feminine rhyme:

SECUNDUS PASTOR			
By god te a ve marow	7	A	SU
ha me avel mordarow	7	A	SU
owth ola hag owth owtya	7	B	SU
PRIMUS PASTOR			
Owtya a ren ha crya	7	C*	SU
ha parugy the fya	7	C*	SU
drog e the <i>gan</i> † ow towtya	7	B	SU

(*BK* 22–27)

* These lines are probably intended to contrast with the **B** rhymes *owtya* : *towtya*.

† or *gam*

Of course, stanzas featuring a combination of masculine and feminine rhymes are much more common, and there are enough unstressed monosyllabic rhymes

in the play to make it clear that its author was familiar with the traditional Brittonic rhyming rule as well as the English one. The following stanza is typical:

[TERTIUS PASTOR]	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Saw vn voys whek a belder	7	A	SU
a vghaf in vhelder	7	A	SU
ow kowsal cler	4	b*	S
a leveris pur ylyn	7	C	U
devethys o the dirmyn	7	C	U
saw lemmyñ vn marth a wher	7	B*	S
der vyrtu a pyjadow	7	D	SU
te a dryl heb faladow	7	D	SU
dyl vyn dv ath prernas ker	7	B*	S

(BK 13–21)

* These lines are probably intended to contrast with the feminine rhymes of *belder* : *vhelder*.

Here, the **A** and **D** couplets exhibit English-style feminine or disyllabic rhyme, while the **C** couplet has a monosyllabic rhyme between unstressed syllables (*ylyñ* : *dirmyn*) of a sort which would not be considered a rhyme in English prosody (although the similarity of the vowels in the preceding syllable could conceivably represent a kind of assonance or ‘extended rhyme’). The **B** lines involve a masculine rhyme between stressed monosyllables, a form which is acceptable and common in both English and Cornish prosody. Under the Cornish rhyming rule, these **B** lines would share a rhyme with the **A** couplet, since all five lines end in *-er*, but it seems likely that a contrast between the **A** (*-éldēr*) and **B** (*-ér*) lines is intended here.

Table 3 shows the percentage of lines in the Middle Cornish corpus which participate in masculine, feminine, or dactylic rhymes:

Table 3. Rhymes in Middle Cornish Texts (%).

<i>Type</i>	<i>OM</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>RD</i>	<i>Ord.</i>	<i>PA</i>	<i>BK</i>	<i>BM</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>masc. rhymes as % of:</i>								
<i>all lines</i>	23.9	22.7	26.8	24.3	17.8	38.3	20.6	25.1
<i>lines with masc. ending</i>	66.3	60.5	62.6	62.9	73.2	84.8	60.5	67.7
<i>fem. rhymes as % of:</i>								
<i>all lines</i>	5.7	3.8	7.3	5.5	5.7	29.7	6.8	10.0
<i>lines with fem. ending</i>	9.6	6.4	13.7	9.5	7.9	56.8	10.8	16.8
<i>dactylic rhymes as % of:</i>								
<i>all lines</i>	—	—	—	—	—	0.3	—	0.1
<i>lines with dact. ending</i>	—	—	—	—	—	25.6	—	4.5

It is immediately clear that *Bewnans Ke* differs from the other texts in its high frequency of both masculine and feminine rhymes. In the *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, and *Beunans Meriasek*, about 22% of all rhymes are masculine, and masculine rhymes occur in 63% of lines with with a masculine ending. Feminine or iambic rhymes are much less frequent, accounting for less than 6% of rhymes overall and less than 10% of rhymes in lines with a feminine ending. In *Bewnans Ke*, by contrast, nearly 85% of all lines with a masculine ending form a masculine rhyme, and feminine rhymes are more than five times as common as they are in the other texts.

Cornwall was almost certainly a more bilingual country at the end of the fifteenth century than it had been at the close of the fourteenth, so it is perhaps not surprising that *Bewnans Ke* should show more ‘English’ tendencies than do works like the *Ordinalia* or *Pascon Agan Arluth* which were likely composed some fifty to one hundred years earlier. It is worth noting, however, that neither *Beunans Meriasek* (which is contemporary to or later in date than *Bewnans Ke*) nor *Gwreans an Bys* (a play written several decades later, at a time when Cornish was in rapid retreat) show any significant trace of the English rhyming rule – suggesting that the answer has to do more with the person who wrote the text than with the time at which he was writing. In any case, the author of *Bewnans Ke* used substantially the same kinds of stanza forms as his fellow Cornish dramatists, which implies that despite his English ear for rhyme, he had learned the fundamentals of his craft from the same source as they.

3.4. Identical Rhymes

Identical rhyme – rhyming a word with itself – is rare in Middle Cornish texts apart from *Pascon Agan Arluth*, which contains at least two dozen examples of identical rhyme in the course of 2074 lines. The prevalence of identical rhyme in *Pascon Agan Arluth* may be due to the fact that this poem is written almost entirely in eight-line stanzas rhymed **ABABABAB**, and the poet may have found it difficult to find two sets of four different rhyming words for each stanza (see GEORGE 2006b: 10).

Gwreans an Bys may also be considered to have a high number of identical rhymes, depending on how the verse forms of this Late Cornish text are interpreted. In general, *Gwreans an Bys* groups lines into short verse ‘segments’ which often correspond to half a Middle Cornish stanza, and which may contain unrhymed lines that share an end-rhyme with one or more lines in the preceding or following segment (BRUCH 2005: 356–370). There are a number of instances in which two adjacent segments contain identical rhymes:

[ENOCH]	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Rag voydya an perill na	7	A	U
scryffes yma thym p ^b tra	7	A	S
a thallathfas an bys ma	7	A	U
may fova leall recordys	7	B	U
a vyns tra es ynna gwryes	7	B	S

[*iiij bookes to be shewed*]

An leverow y towns y omma	8	A	U
why as gweall wondrys largya	7	A	U
ha pub tra oll in bys ma	7	A	U
skryffes yma yn ryma	7	A	U
dowt na vans y ankevys	7	B	U

(GB 2171–2180)

Here, the phrase *an bys ma* ‘this world’ appears twice, at lines 2173 and 2178. Cases like the following, which features three identical rhymes in one segment (including the repetition of the whole phrase *mam(m) ha tase* ‘mother and father’), may be an indication that the text is corrupt, however:

[CAYNE]	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Par del osta ow fryas	7	A	U
haw hoer abarth mamm ha tase	7	A	SUS
gallas genaf sor an tase	7	A	S
rag latha abell pen braas	7	A	S
ynweth molath mam ha taes	7	A	SUS
reis ew thymo moy es cans	7	B	S

(GB 1335–1340)

In addition to true identical rhymes, there are also a few cases where writers rhyme two homophonous words, as at lines 1462–1463 of *Passio Christi*, where we find the Cornish phrase *may fo* ‘that he may be’ rhymed with the phonologically identical Middle English *by godys fo* ‘by God’s foe’. In general, however, even this sort of rhyme – equivalent to *meet* : *meat* in English – is not particularly widespread in the corpus.

3.5. Phonology and Rhyme

Both Ken GEORGE (1984; DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997) and Nicholas WILLIAMS (2006a; 2006b) have discussed the significance of rhyme in books dealing with the historical phonology of Cornish. A full examination of their work and of the phonological implications of medieval Cornish rhyme is beyond the scope of the present study, and further research into the subject is clearly needed. However, a few important points should be noted, as these may help to explain differences in rhyming rules across texts which can be attributed to phonological shifts that occurred during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. Some sound changes that took place during the Middle Cornish period affected the final syllables of words, and thereby altered the rules governing rhyme. For instance, there are a few stanzas in the Cornish *Ordinalia* which distinguish between unstressed final *-a* and *-e* in rhyme, even though these two vowels fell together at a relatively early date:

PILATUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ny amont travyth hemma :	7	A	U
cayphas ny yllyn spedye	7	B	U
yma ol tus an bys ma :	7	A	U
yn certain worth y sywe	7	B	U

(PC 439–442)

Here, the verbal nouns *spedye* ‘succeed’ and *sywe* ‘follow’ are written with final *-e* and appear to contrast with *hemma* ‘that’ and *an bys ma* ‘this world’ (GEORGE 1986: 119–122; see also WILLIAMS 2006a: 40; HARRIS 1964: 40). While the *Ordinalia* and *Pascon Agan Arluth* usually show the older spellings in *-e* for words like these (EDWARDS 1996: 8), the saints’ plays have generalised final *-a* in all positions, as in the following stanza from *Beunans Meriasek* where *sywa* (from earlier *sywe*) ‘follow’ is rhymed with *in pov ma* ‘in this land’:

BRITONUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Sur ty yv den benygays	7	A	U
lues den eff re lathays	7	A	U
ha flehys prest in pov ma	7	B	U
thyso gy sensys ass on	7	C	U
at eva kepar hag on	7	C	S
avo doff orth 3 ^e sywa	7	B	U

(*BM* 1117–1122)

Beunans Meriasek provides numerous examples of rhymes which George would classify as “poor” (DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997: 93), since they involve pairs of words with historically different vowels. Often, the scribe must alter the spelling of one or more words in a stanza to show that two phonetically dissimilar words are intended to rhyme. This is the case, for example, with the **B** lines in the following stanza, where *meneth* ‘mountain’ is rhymed with *pur goeth* ‘very old’:

AGNATUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Oma yma meryasek	7	A	U
ov corthya du galosek	7	A	U
poren in top an meneth	7	B	U
myl pas in ban a lemme	7	C	U
then chapel purguir ymae	7	C	S
acontis gans tus pur goeth	7	B	S

(*BM* 1974–1979)

The word ‘old’ in Cornish is usually spelled *coth* [kɔ:θ], which would be lenited to *goth* after the adverb *pur* ‘very’; here, an *e* has been added to provide an eye-rhyme with the final unstressed syllable of *meneth*, a word that likely contained an unstressed [ə] at the time *Beunans Meriasek* was written.

WILLIAMS (2006b: 179–181) considers rhymes like *méněth* : *gó[e]th* to be evidence for the neutralisation of all unstressed vowels in Middle Cornish, a

sound change which he believes took place in the twelfth century (2006b: 29). According to WILLIAMS, this resulted in a prosodic system where “the neutral vowel schwa could be written in a variety of ways to give an eye-rhyme with syllables of varying stressed vowels or with syllables that also contained schwa” (2006b: 179). Yet while the rhymes in both *Beunans Meriasek* and *Gwreans an Bys* show considerable evidence of vowel neutralisation in unstressed syllables, the plays of the *Ordinalia* cycle (probably composed ca. 1400) are much more likely to maintain distinctions between historical *e*, *a*, and *o* in final position. WILLIAMS credits this to a conservative scribal tradition in which “the authors of the plays clearly learned to write Cornish as though unstressed /e/, /a/, and /o/ were all distinct” even though these three vowels “were falling together, if they had not fallen together already” in the spoken language (2006a: 43; see also 2006b: 15–23). The actual date of the Prosodic Shift proposed by Williams is still a hotly debated topic in Cornish phonology (see, for example, DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997: 153, where a date of “c. 1625” is suggested), but although George disputes Williams’ dating for this sound change, he also acknowledges that the rhyme schemes of *Beunans Meriasek* and *Gwreans an Bys* do not distinguish as many final vowels as do those of the *Ordinalia* (DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997: 97), which the present author accepts as conclusive evidence that the sounds in question had largely fallen together by the end of the fifteenth century when *Beunans Meriasek* was written.

Another distinctive feature of Cornish rhyme concerns the historical development of final *-y*, *-u*, and various diphthongs. In all Middle Cornish texts, words ending in *-oy*, *-ay*, and *-ey* may be rhymed with words ending in *-y*, as illustrated by the rhyme between *dry* ‘bring’, *pray* ‘pray’ and *ioy* ‘joy’ in stanza 21 of *Pascon Agan Arluth* (see also HARRIS 1964: 39). WILLIAMS attributes this to an early diphthongisation whereby final *-y* [i:] in words like *dry* came to be pronounced [ej] or [əj] (2006a: 10; 2006b: 86–91), leading writers to rhyme this sound with other *y*-diphthongs. GEORGE, on the other hand, contends that this process of diphthongisation was not complete until at least the sixteenth century, and suggests that the explanation of this phenomenon lies instead in the scarcity of potential rhymes for words in *-oy* and *-ay*, diphthongs which occur primarily in loanwords (1986: 110; DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997: 49–50).

A similar phenomenon can be observed with words ending in *-u*, which are rhymed with a variety of *w*-diphthongs as well as with each other. For example, the name *Ihesu* occurs frequently in *Pascon Agan Arluth*, *Passio Christi*, *Resurrexio Domini*, and *Beunans Meriasek*, where it is rhymed with words like *tru* ‘alas’, *tu* ‘side’, and *vertu* ‘virtue’. Even more often, however,

it is paired with a word ending in a diphthong: *yw*, *yv* ‘is’; *byv* ‘alive’; *d(e)v* ‘God’; *guv* ‘spear’; *gyvw*, *gyw* ‘worthy’; *hetheu*, *hythev*, *hythyv* ‘today’; and *myn reyv* ‘greybeard’. WILLIAMS posits that final *-u* [y:] fell together with the diphthong [ɪw] at an early stage, and that the resulting [ɪw] sometimes alternated with [ew], a scenario which explains rhymes like *Ihesu* : *gyvw* or *Ihesu* : *reyv* as well as the variation in spelling observed in words like *tu*, *tew* ‘side’ and *pyw*, *pew*, *pu* ‘who’ (2006a: 17–18, 35–37, 2006b: 139–150). This conclusion is disputed by George (DUNBAR & GEORGE 1997: 110–119), who once again argues that the sounds in question remained distinct in the spoken language until quite a late date, but that “the paucity of perfect rhymes forced the composers of the plays to use near-perfect ones instead” (1997: 113).

In a small number of cases, lines of Cornish verse are considered to rhyme despite the presence or absence of a sonorant consonant – typically [r] – which follows the final vowel of one of the rhyming words. This occurs, for example, at stanza 166 of *Pascon Agan Arluth*, where *darn* in the fifth line is rhymed with *yn ban*, *beghan*, and *wan*:

	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ena pan sevys yn ban :	7	A	S
hy a gewsys del ylly	7	B	U
nyngew ow faynys beghan :	7	A	U
vs lemyn <i>war</i> ow sensy	7	B	U
ow holon yntre myll darn :	7	A	S
marth yw gene na squardhy	7	B	U
pan welaff ow mab <i>mar</i> wan :	7	A	S
ow town kemys velyny	7	B	U

(*PA*, stanza 166)

Other cases involving words ending in [rn] can be found in stanza 81 of *Pascon Agan Arluth* (*ezewon* : *scovern* : *honor* : *colon*), *PC* 1252–1258 (*yethewon* : *scoforn* : *map bron* : *dyscyblon*), *PC* 2286–2287 (*scon* : *scouorn*), *PC* 2528–2529 (*dorn* : *yethewon*), *RD* 211–214 (*anken* : *yfern*), and *BK* 2097–2098 (*dorn* : *gon*). While it is tempting to attribute these poor rhymes to a scarcity of words in *-orn*, words like *corn* ‘horn, corner’, *dorn* ‘fist’, *horn* ‘iron’, and *torn* ‘turn, time’ actually occur fairly frequently in the texts. Similar cases involving different final clusters appear at *RD* 1507–1508 (*veggars* : *dyllas*) and *BM* 3475–3478 (*grath* : *warth*); in stanza 180 of *Pascon Agan Arluth*, it is an [n] which is omitted in the rhyme of *trosheys* with *dozyans*, *betegyns*, and *wrusens*.

3.6. *Special Cases*

As Cornish literature frequently includes words or phrases in English, French, or Latin, Cornish poets are often faced with the challenge of finding rhymes for foreign words whose phonological shape may not be compatible with Cornish phonotactics. This is handled in a variety of ways in the texts. In some cases, particularly in *Bewnans Ke*, the solution is to rhyme an English, French, or Latin word with another word from the same language. In fact, *Bewnans Ke* contains a number of stanzas in which two rhyming lines are entirely in English, French, or Latin. In many cases, these two lines are the two **A** lines of an **ABABcDDC** stanza, and thus are separated by an intervening line of Cornish, as in the following example:

PRIMUS PONTIFEX	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
<i>Aue pater rex splendens :</i>	7	A	SU
an gwelha corf a thug gv	7	B	S
<i>larga gratis in pendens :</i>	7	A	SU
arluth cortys os ath rv	7	B	S
menovgh prevys	4	c	SU
the <i>omtheygans</i> ew worthy	7	D	U
contys in mysk arlythy	7	D	U
neffra ny vyth ankevys	7	C	SU

(BK 1602–1609)

Just as foreign words often present a challenge for Cornish poets, so too do some of the Biblical or historical (and thus non-Cornish) names which appear in the corpus. In some cases, it is clear that the name in question had a Cornish equivalent, whose pronunciation is not always reflected in the spelling. For example, the name ‘David’ appears in *Origo Mundi* and *Passio Christi* both as *Dauid* and as *Daveth*, *Daueth*, or *Dauyth*. Although the first of these looks as if it should end in [ɪd] – not a common ending for Middle Cornish words, owing to an earlier sound change of final [d] > [z] – rhymes with the words *a vyth* ‘will be’ (OM 2382) and *yn weyth* ‘also’ (PC 278) make it clear that the name could be pronounced with a final [ð] even when spelled *Dauid*. This pronunciation, exemplified by the spellings in *-th*, has its exact parallel in Welsh *Dafydd*, and allows the name to be rhymed with many different Cornish words ending in an interdental fricative.

In other situations where a final consonant violates normal rules of Cornish phonotactics and no Cornish equivalent is available, poets must either avoid

placing the name at the end of a line, or must find loanwords (typically English loanwords) which can rhyme with the foreign name. Such is the case with the name *Pilat* or *Pylat* which occurs frequently in both *Pascon Agan Arluth* and the *Ordinalia*. As there are few indigenous Cornish words which end in a dental stop, there are not many rhyming possibilities for this name. The poet of *Pascon Agan Arluth* uses this name almost four dozen times, but never ends a line with it. In the *Ordinalia*, by contrast, *Pylat* or *Pilat* often appears at the end of a line, but the rhyme is always provided by words like *smat*, *plat*, *sad(t)*, *bad(t)*, and *gladt*, all of which are of English origin.

One final case involves the name ‘Modred’ in *Bewnans Ke*, which appears in both Cornish and non-Cornish spellings and pronunciations. This name appears as *Modredus* in the Latin speech headings, but is realized in a variety of different ways in the text of the play itself. Some spellings, like *Modret* at lines 3080, 3100, and 3164 and *Modred* at line 3115 strongly suggest a pronunciation with final [d], which is borne out by rhymes with English words like *deed* and *speed* at *BK* 3020–3021, or else a devoiced final [t], which is suggested by rhymes with *let* and *set* at *BK* 3102–3103. The form *Modreth* is also fairly common, appearing at lines 1487, 2779, and 3265, and suggests a final [ð] or [θ], although GEORGE argues that the possible rhymes with *let* and *omset* at *BK* 2780–2782 could imply [t] as well, at least in this one instance (2006a: 244). Most interesting from a linguistic point of view, however, are the spellings *Modres* and *Moddras*, attested at *BK* 3179 and 3295 respectively, since these exhibit the regular Middle Cornish sound change of final [d] > [z] (see GEORGE 2006a: 244 for further discussion).²²

4. VERSE FORMS

While the basic rules of rhyme and metre used in medieval Cornish verse closely resemble those of traditional Welsh and Breton poetry, the stanza forms employed by Cornish poets are quite a different matter. Although Joseph LOTH attempted to link certain unusual stanza forms in the *Ordinalia* and *Beunans Meriasek* to the Welsh *rhupunt* metres (1902: XI 205–206, XI 213), the evidence is far from convincing. Breton verse, like Cornish, makes use of a six-

22 This form of the name ‘Modred’ is also found in the 1327 Lay Subsidy for Cornwall (National Archives [London], E179/87/7, membrane 7d, column 2), which lists a “Lucas Modres” in St Agnes parish (Oliver PADEL, personal communication, 18 July 2009).

line stanza rhymed **AABCCB**, but this is a common Western European pattern, and is found in medieval English, Latin, and French poetry as well (see KALUZA 1911: 225–226, MARTINON 1911: 1, 220–221 for examples). In fact, the distinctive patterns of end-rhyme found in Middle Cornish verse most likely have their roots in the stanza forms used by the writers of Middle English religious drama (BRUCH 2005: 418–446; see also ELLIS 1974: 104; TRISTRAM 2002: 293). Between the late fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the rules of prosody followed by Cornish poets and playwrights underwent a degree of transformation. During this period, the number of ‘standard’ verse forms available to Cornish writers expanded, as did the number and types of variant forms allowed. Some forms which are quite rare (and probably metrically somewhat suspect) at the time of the *Ordinalia* become comparatively commonplace in *Bewnans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek*, suggesting that what had begun as unusual variations were gradually accepted as part of the normal system of versification. At the same time, stanza forms which were quite common in the older texts – notably the **ABABABAB** stanza and its variants – were displaced by newer and more complex forms. Nonetheless, despite a number of idiosyncrasies which can likely be attributed to the tastes of individual writers, what is most striking about the four great works of Middle Cornish verse is the overall similarity of the verse forms used, and, in particular, the fact that the majority of stanzas in each work belong to one of a very small set of basic types.

In the four central texts of Middle Cornish verse (the *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, *Bewnans Ke*, and *Beunans Meriasek*), a stanza normally comprises a sequence of four to thirteen lines of seven or four syllables which are linked to one another according to one of a small number of permitted end-rhyme patterns. Stanzas of fewer than four lines are rare, as are stanzas of more than thirteen lines. Unrhymed lines are generally not allowed, and are so uncommon that when one does appear it is often taken as an indication that the text is corrupt.

Of the 207²³ different stanza patterns attested in these four texts, some forty-six can be classified as either irregular or incomplete, and with one exception – the rhymed couplet – none of these is found more than once or twice in the entire corpus. The remaining 160 forms may be described as variants of one of the three basic stanza types. Among these, eighty-one forms – over half – are at-

23 For a complete list of these stanza forms, along with statistics on their distribution in the *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, *Bewnans Ke*, and *Beunans Meriasek*, see BRUCH 2005: 466–477.

tested only once in the corpus, suggesting that they are nonstandard or *ad hoc* variants, introduced perhaps when the poet was lazy or stuck with an intractable rhyme. In fact, there are only twenty-eight different forms which account for more than 1% of the stanzas in any individual text. Table 4 below lists these twenty-eight patterns as well as the percentage of stanzas in each of the main Middle Cornish texts which conform to each of them:

Table 4. Most Common Stanza Forms in Middle Cornish Texts (%).

<i>Type</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>OM</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>RD</i>	<i>Ord.</i>	<i>PA</i>	<i>BK</i>	<i>BM</i>	<i>Total</i>	
I	ABABABAB	24.7	9.6	5.9	13.2	96.9	—	5.8	17.1	
	ABAB	15.2	7.6	2.7	8.5	—	—	1.6	4.7	
	abababab	X*	0.7	1.6	0.8	—	—	—	0.4	
II	AABCCB	31.3	41.0	24.1	32.8	—	15.1	40.2	28.7	
	AABCCBCB	—	—	—	—	—	—	4.3	1.0	
	AABCCCB	—	—	—	—	—	0.7	1.9	0.6	
	AAbCCb	2.0	7.8	44.0	17.0	—	—	1.0	8.9	
	AAbCCB	—	—	X	X	—	0.7	4.8	1.3	
	AABCCb	—	—	X	X	—	—	2.4	0.6	
	AABccb	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.3	0.3	
	aabccb	2.4	2.8	0.7	2.0	—	2.4	0.6	1.6	
	aabccb (<i>pentasyll.</i>)	—	—	—	—	—	1.3	—	0.2	
	AABAAB	15.4	23.1	5.0	15.1	—	2.4	3.6	9.0	
	AAbAAb	1.5	3.5	5.5	3.5	—	—	—	1.8	
	aabaab	—	X	1.1	0.5	—	—	X	0.3	
	ABAAB	—	—	—	—	—	4.7	—	0.7	
	AABAB	X	—	—	X	—	2.0	2.8	1.0	
	AAbAB	—	—	—	—	—	1.8	—	0.3	
	AAABCCCB	2.9	—	3.0	1.8	—	X	—	1.0	
	AAAbCCCb	—	—	2.3	0.7	—	—	—	0.4	
	ababcdedec	0.7	—	X	0.3	—	5.8	—	1.1	
	III	ABABcDDC	—	—	—	—	—	23.8	6.5	5.4
		ABABcDDDC	—	—	—	—	—	2.0	1.9	0.8
AbAbcDDC		—	—	—	—	—	5.8	X	1.0	
ABABcddC		X	—	—	X	—	3.1	—	0.5	
AABCCBdeeD		X	—	—	X	—	1.3	—	0.2	
AABAABcddC		—	—	—	—	—	1.3	—	0.2	
<i>Other</i> AA (<i>rhymed couplet</i>)		—	—	X	X	—	1.6	X	0.3	

* An X in any column indicates that a given form is attested only once or twice in that text.

Among these twenty-eight verse forms, only six – those marked in **bold** in Table 4 above – account for more than 10% of the stanzas in any individual text, and nearly three-fourths of all stanzas in the four central texts conform to one of the half-dozen patterns listed in Table 5:

Table 5. Basic Stanza Forms in Middle Cornish Texts (%).

<i>Type</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>OM</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>RD</i>	<i>Ord.</i>	<i>PA</i>	<i>BK</i>	<i>BM</i>	<i>Total</i>
I	ABABABAB	24.7	9.6	5.9	13.2	96.9	—	5.8	17.1
	ABAB	15.2	7.6	2.7	8.5	—	—	1.6	4.7
II	AABCCB	31.3	41.0	24.1	32.8	—	15.1	40.2	28.7
	AAbCCb	2.0	7.8	44.0	17.0	—	—	1.0	8.9
	AABAAB	15.4	23.1	5.0	15.1	—	2.4	3.6	9.0
III	ABABcDDC	—	—	—	—	—	23.8	6.5	5.4

These six forms and the dozens of regular variants derived from them can be classified on a more fundamental level as either Type I (alternate rhyme), Type II (tail-rhyme), or Type III (hybrid) stanzas according to the system first described in BRUCH (2005: 166–197). Each of these three basic types will be discussed below, its most common variants enumerated, and its relationship to verse forms in other medieval languages examined.

4.1. *The Type I Stanza*

In Type I stanzas, alternate lines rhyme (**ABABABAB**).²⁴ Generally, there are only two different rhymes in a single stanza, and all the lines are the same length: usually seven syllables, occasionally four. The main variation in this type of stanza involves the total 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*:

24 CRAWFORD classes all alternate-rhyme stanzas or part-stanzas as type “W” in his studies of versification in the Cornish *Ordinalia* (1981: 147) and *Beunans Meriasek* (1984: 433); GEORGE employs the abbreviation “A8” for the basic **ABABABAB** Type I form (2006b: 10).

DEUS PATER	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
En tas a nef ym gylwyr :	7	A	U
formyer pup tra a vyt gvrys	7	B	S
onan ha try on yn gvyr :	7	A	S
en tas han map han spyrys	7	B	U
ha hethyv me a the syr :	7	A	U
dre ov grath dalleth an beys	7	B	S
y lauaraf nef ha tyr :	7	A	S
bethens formyys orth ov brys	7	B	S

(*OM* 1–8)

Type I forms account for some 23% of all stanzas in the four central texts; nearly three-fourths of these adhere to the eight-line **ABABABAB** pattern illustrated above, while most of the remainder are four lines long.

Similar verse forms with *abababab* rhyme schemes are found in many Western European traditions, including Latin, French, and Middle English, whence the following example:

	<i>stresses</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Yf mon is riche of worldes weole.	4'	A	<i>Su</i>
hit makeþ his heorte smerte <i>and</i> ake.	4'	B	<i>Su</i>
If he dret þat me him stele.	4'	A	<i>Su</i>
þenne doþ him pyne nyhtes wake.	4'	B	<i>Su</i>
Him waxeþ þouhtes monye <i>and</i> fele.	4'	A	<i>Su</i>
hw he hit may witen wiþ-vten sake.	4'	B	<i>Su</i>
An ende hwat helpeþ hit to hele.	4'	A	<i>Su</i>
al deþ hit wile from him take.	4'	B	<i>Su</i>

(*A Luue Ron*, lines 57–64; text from MORRIS 1872: 95; quoted in KALUZA 1911: 217)

In his study of English versification, Max KALUZA describes this form as being “common in the religious poems of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (1911: 216–217). It is interesting to see this stanza type associated with religious poetry, as it is a close analogue of the Cornish **ABABABAB** verse form which is employed throughout the poem *Pascon Agan Arluth*.

Among the dramas, alternate-rhyme verse forms are very common in the first part of *Origo Mundi*, and are used extensively throughout the *Ordinalia*. However, they are much less usual in *Beunans Meriasek* and completely unattested in the surviving portions of *Bewnans Ke*. This suggests that the Type I stanza had become less popular with Cornish writers by the end of the fifteenth century, perhaps because they found it difficult to compose in a verse form requiring

four **A** rhymes and four **B** rhymes. As KALUZA notes, English poets sometimes found the *abababab* pattern “difficult” as well, and preferred a stanza with an *ababbcbc* rhyme scheme (1911: 218). Although this pattern is not found in Cornish, a few stanzas in *Pascon Agan Arluth* in which the rhyme scheme shifts after the fourth line (**ABABACAC**, **ABABCBCB**, **ABABCDCD**) may represent a similar phenomenon:

	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Tays ha mab han speris sans :	7	A	S
wy a bys a levn golon	7	B	U
re wronte ʒeugh gras ha whans :	7	A	S
ʒe wolsowas y basconn	7	B	U
ha ʒymmo gras ha skyans :	7	A	U
the ʒerevas par lauarow	8	C	U
may fo ʒe thu ʒe worthyans :	7	A	U
ha sylwans ʒen enevow	7	C	U

(*PA*, stanza 1)

4.2. *The Type II Stanza*

In this stanza type, rhymed couplets alternate with single lines (**AABCCB**), and these single lines rhyme with one another – a pattern 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 (KALUZA 1911, 183–184).²⁵ The most usual variety is that found in the opening stanza of *Resurrexio Domini*:

PILATUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ihesu a fue anclethyys	7	A	U
hag yn beth a ven gorrys	7	A	U
gans ioseph ha tus erel	7	B	U
y leuerys ef ynweth	7	C	S
datherghy an tressa deth	7	C	S
y wre pur wyr hep fyllel	7	B	U

(*RD* 1–6)

25 CRAWFORD classifies all six-line tail-rhyme stanzas as type “X” (1981: 147; 1984: 433), while GEORGE uses the abbreviation “S6” for an **AABCCB** stanza (2006b: 10).

Type II forms are by far the most common in the Middle Cornish corpus, comprising 62.7% of all stanzas. Nearly half of these have the simple **AABCCB** form illustrated above.

The most frequent variant of the Type II stanza has an **AABAAB** rhyme scheme; it is particularly prevalent in *Passio Christi* and *Origo Mundi*:

ADAM	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ythanwaf bugh ha tarow	7	A	SU
ha margh yw best hep parow	7	A	SU
the vap den rag ymweres	7	B	SU
gaver yweges karow	7	A	SU
daves war ver lavarow	7	A	SU
hy hanow da kemeres	7	B	SU

(OM 123–128)

Many Cornish Type II stanzas also shorten one or both of the tail-rhyme lines. This is especially common in *Resurrexio Domini*, where stanzas with two short **B** lines predominate:

PETRUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
A ihesu crist guyn ow bys	7	A	S
clewas y vones seus	7	A	U
yn mes an beth	4	b	S
rak me a wor fest yn ta	7	C	S
y vos map the varia	7	C	U
ha dev yn weth	4	b	S

(RD 929–934)

The **AAbCCb** pattern illustrated above is also found in *Beunans Meriasek*, but many more stanzas in that play have only a single short **B** line (**AAbCCB**, **AABCCb**) or other combinations of long and short lines (**aaBCCB**, **AABccB**, **AAbccb**, **aabccb**, **AABccb**).

The tail-rhyme stanza is well-attested in medieval Latin, French, and English poetry (KALUZA 1911: 225; MARTINON 1911: 1, 220–221). Tail-rhyme stanzas in Middle Breton are also known, but these typically feature lines of eight or more syllables and complex patterns of internal rhyme that are not duplicated anywhere in Cornish verse; a typical example is the poem *Buhez Mab Den* from Roparz HEMON's collection *Trois poèmes en moyen-breton* (1981: 76–101). According to KALUZA, the most usual form of the tail-rhyme stanza in Middle English is **aa⁴b³cc⁴b³** (1911: 225). A common variation, in English

as in Cornish, is one in which the two couplets share a rhyme, as illustrated by the following stanza from Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*:

	<i>stresses</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Listeth, lordes, in good entent,	4'	A	S
And I wol telle verrayment	4'	A	S
Of myrthe and of solas;	3'	B	S?
Al of a knyght was fair and gent	4'	A	S
In bataille and in tourneyment,	4'	A	S
His name was sire Thopas.	3'	B	S?

(*Tale of Sir Thopas*, lines 712–717; text from ROBINSON 1957: 164; see also KALUZA 1911, 226)

The difference in length between the couplets and the **B** lines is very like that in the Middle Cornish **AAbCCb** stanza, although in the Cornish form the contrast is more dramatic (seven versus four syllables, rather than four versus three stresses). Other forms of the English tail-rhyme stanza with an equal number of stresses – typically either three or four – in each line are also well-attested (KALUZA 1911: 227). Since most heptasyllabic lines of Cornish verse also have three or four stresses, and most tetrasyllabic lines have two (BRUCH 2005: 116; CRAWFORD 1981: 152–153n8), it is certainly possible that the Type II stanzas of Cornish verse could have been inspired by English forms like those illustrated above.

An eight-line tail-rhyme stanza is the principal verse form used in the Chester cycle of Middle English mystery plays. This 'Chester stanza' has the same distribution of four-stress **A** and **C** lines and three-stress **B** lines as in the more conventional six-line tail-rhyme form:

[DEUS]	<i>stresses</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Now will I make the firmament,	4'	A	S
in myddeste the water to bee lent,	4'	A	S
for to bee a dividant	4'	A	S
to twynne the waters aye;	3'	B	S
above the welkyn, beneath alsoe,	4'	C	SU
and 'heaven' hit shalbe called thoo.	4'	C	S
This comen is morne and even also	4'	C	SU
of the seocond daye.	3'	B	S

(*Drapers' Play* [II], lines 17–24; text from LUMIANSKY & MILLS 1974: 14)

This may be compared with the eight-line Type II stanzas (**AAABCCCB**, **AAAbCCCb**) found in *Origo Mundi* and *Resurrexio Domini*:²⁶

ABRAHAM	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
A thev ker re by gorthys	7	A	U
bos ov map thymmo sawyys	7	A	U
ow colon yv sur yaghys	7	A	S
nyns us arluth vyth saw ty	7	B	S
yn gorthyans thotho omma	7	C	U
offrynnye an keth mols ma	7	C	U
yn le ysac y settya	7	C	U
war an alter the lesky	7	B	U
(<i>OM</i> 1379–1386)			

Tail-rhyme stanzas with both couplets expanded to triplets are virtually unknown outside the *Ordinalia*, but *Beunans Meriasek* contains several examples of Type II forms in which only one couplet (usually the second) has been expanded to a triplet or even a quartet of rhymed lines. The following example is typical:

JUSTUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Na vragyogh brays lafarov	7	A	SU
y a veth pur guir marov	7	A	SU
rag cafus sur age goys	7	B	S
an empour flour they golhy	7	C	U
may fo tekkeys eredy	7	C	U
kefys yv der an clergy	7	C	U
sav in delma y hyl boys	7	B	S
(<i>BM</i> 1597–1603)			

Type II stanzas may be extended in other ways as well. Both saints' plays feature nine-line variants in which an extra couplet and **B** line has been added to a regular six-line stanza:

26 Such eight-line tail-rhyme stanzas are classified as type “Y” in CRAWFORD’s article on the Cornish *Ordinalia* (1981: 147), but this designation is applied to a different verse form in his later work on *Beunans Meriasek* (1984: 433).

MAGISTER	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Messeger na 3ovt an cas	7	A	S
my an dysk na vo yn gvlas	7	A	S
<i>gramarion</i> v ^t ay parov	7	B	U
devgh se3ovg mereasek*	7*	C	U
yn myske an flehys <i>pur</i> dek	7	C	S
ha merovgh <i>agis</i> leffrov	7	B	U
pedyth munys kewsovgh wy	7	D	S
let vyeth orth <i>agis</i> dysky	7	D	U
ha <i>mur</i> <i>nynsyv</i> an gobrov	7	B	U

(*BM* 90–98)

* Reading *mereasek* as four syllables.

Another common variation in *Beunans Meriasek* involves adding a pair of lines to the end of the stanza which repeat the rhyme pattern of the preceding two lines:

TYRANNUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Dar dufe hy the henna	7	A	U
thage herhes mars ama	7	A	U
me as pee in dan <i>onen</i>	7	B	U
may teffons thymo <i>pur</i> schaff	7	C	S
<i>martesen</i> gans keher claff	7	C	S
dethe a pup tenewen	7	B	U
dyso gy y comondyaff :	7	C	U
wele dyn pob y welen	7	B	U

(*BM* 3287–3294)

About one in every twelve Type II stanzas in *Beunans Meriasek* has an extension of this type, but the form is not found in any other text.

Type II stanzas may be shortened as well as lengthened, typically by replacing one of the couplets with a single line. Either the first or the second couplet may be so reduced; however, the resulting single line must rhyme with the couplet in the other half of the stanza, since unrhymed lines are not permitted in Middle Cornish verse. This variant is only attested once in the *Ordinalia*, but is considerably more common in the saints' plays:

CONSTANTINUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Helm yv tra a yl boys grueys	7	A	S
tormentor ^{is} desempys	7	A	U
tormentor ^{is} scon thym dugh	7	B	S
tormentor ^{is} gans mur greys :	7	A	S
tormentor ^{is} dufunugh	7	B	U

(BM 1522–1526)

While only the **AABAB** variety of this five-line stanza is found in *Beunans Meriasek* and the *Ordinalia*, *Bewnans Ke* has both, and uses the **ABAAB** form more extensively.

In rare cases, one of the couplets in a Type II stanza shares a rhyme with the tail-rhyme lines, producing patterns like **AABBBB** or **AAABBA**:

MAGISTER	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Dyske moy gans ʒe coweʒa	7	A	U
pan vymogh eugh ʒe lyvya	7	A	U
meryasek wek eugh gansa	7	A	U
rag wy yv tender yn oys	7	B	S
ha flehys yonk agar boys	7	B	S
ham bevnans vy yv henna	7	A	U

(BM 112–117)

Although rhyme schemes like these do not resemble the usual Type II pattern (**AABCCB**), such stanzas are invariably written in the manuscripts using the normal tail-rhyme layout, implying that they were considered Type II forms by the scribes – and, presumably, by the poets as well – despite the duplication of rhyme.

4.3. The Type III Stanza

Stanzas of this type can be divided into two parts on the basis of a change in rhyme scheme (**ABAB|cDDC**).²⁷ The first part of the stanza (the *frons*) is usually an **ABAB** quatrain or, less often, a sequence of six or eight lines with alternating rhyme. It may also be an **AABCCB** stanza, yielding an **AABCCBdEED**

²⁷ GEORGE uses the abbreviation “S8” for the basic eight-line **ABABcDDC** Type III form (2006b: 10).

pattern. The second part (or *cauda*) of a Type III stanza is normally a quatrain with **aBBA** rhyme or a quintet of lines rhymed **aBBBA**.²⁸ The first line of the cauda (the ‘bob’) is generally short, and is usually grouped syntactically – and graphically, on the manuscript page – with the first section: **ABABc|DDC**. Because it consists of two parts with different structures, the Type III may be described as a ‘hybrid’ stanza form. There are several variants, but the most usual structure is that found in the opening speech of *Beunans Meriasek*:

[PATER MEREADOCI]	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Me yw gylwys duk bryten :	7	A	U
ha seuys a goys ryel	7	B	U
ha war an gwlascur cheften :	7	A	U
nessa zen myterne vhell	7	B	U
kyng conany	4	c	U
aye lymyeth purwyr yth of	7	D	S
gwarthevyas war gvylys ha dof	7	D	S
doutis yn mysk arlyzy	7	C	U

(*BM* 1–8)

Some 12.4% of the stanzas in the four central texts may be classified as Type III, and about 44% of these conform to the basic **ABABcDDC** pattern illustrated above. Type III forms are most prevalent in *Bewnans Ke*, where they account for over 47% of all stanzas. In *Beunans Meriasek* they are much less common than Type II forms, but outnumber Type I forms two to one. Among the plays of the Cornish *Ordinalia*, only *Origo Mundi* and *Passio Christi* contain any Type III forms, and most of the small number that do appear differ substantially from the eight-line **ABABcDDC** form typically found in the two saints’ plays. Some Type III stanzas in the *Ordinalia* may have been created by grafting additional lines (an **aBBA** or **aBBBA** cauda) onto an existing Type I or Type II stanza as part of a process of textual revision,²⁹ while others may represent earlier stages

28 CRAWFORD does not recognise the Type III stanza as a single verse form, and treats the frons and cauda as separate stanzas because of the change in rhyme. In his study of versification in the Cornish *Ordinalia*, he includes the **aBB(B)A** caudae of Type III stanzas under type “Z” (“Other”) since such forms are comparatively rare in that text (1981: 147); in his work on *Beunans Meriasek*, these caudae are assigned to a separate class, type “Y” (1984: 433).

29 That at least some Type III stanzas in the *Ordinalia* represent a more modern stratum of textual revision is confirmed by the manuscript in two places (*OM* 2838–2846 and *PC* 3239–3242) where the lines needed to convert a Type II stanza to a Type III form have been added in a different, later hand (BRUCH 2005: 92). CRAWFORD suggests that these and similar

in the evolution of the Type III stanza, ‘missing links’ that help to prove the connection between Middle Cornish and Middle English verse forms.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a number of English poets and dramatists composed verse using a distinctive thirteen-line stanza rhymed *abababacdddc*, known to modern scholarship as the ‘thirteener’. Although there are several different forms of thirteener, each named for the text or writer most closely associated with that variety, all of them share the basic rhyme scheme presented above. This thirteen-line sequence comprises an eight-line frons featuring alternate rhyme (*abababab*) and a five-line cauda – normally involving a different pair of rhymes – with a *cdddc* pattern. The first line of the cauda is often shorter than the surrounding lines, and frequently groups syntactically with the frons; the final line of the stanza (the other C line) may be reduced in length as well.

Perhaps the most famous form of the thirteener in Middle English verse is the ‘Wakefield stanza’, so named because it features in a number of plays within the Towneley cycle which are thought to have been revised by the same anonymous poet, the ‘Wakefield Master’, who favoured this verse form:

[PRIMUS PASTOR]	<i>stresses</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
I thank it god :	2'	A	S
hark ye what I mene	2'*	B	<i>Su</i>
ffor euen or for od :	2'*	A	S
I haue mekyll tene	2'*	B	<i>Su</i>
as heuy as a sod :	2'*	A	S
I grete w ^t myn eene	2'*	B	<i>Su</i>
when I nap on my cod :	2'*	A	S
for care that has bene	2'*	B	<i>Su</i>
and sorow	1'	c	SU
all my shepe ar gone	2'*	D	<i>Su</i>
I am not left oone	2'*	D	<i>Su</i>
the rott has theym slone	2'	D	<i>Su</i>
now beg I and borow	2'	C	SU

(*First Shepherds' Play* [XII], lines 27–39; text from CAWLEY & STEVENS 1976)

* These lines could also be interpreted as having three stresses (KALUZA 1911: 223; STEVENS & CAWLEY 1994: xxx)

insertions may have occurred “at the time when the three plays were brought together as a cycle” (1981: 168, 172), although it is not necessary to postulate a separate origin for the three plays simply in order to explain the addition of new lines.

With its short lines, the Wakefield stanza is reminiscent of two Type III variants involving tetrasyllabic lines that appear in *Passio Christi*. Its frons may be compared to the frons found in Christ's opening speech, a sequence of eight four-syllable lines rhymed **abababab**:

IHC	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Thyvgh lauara :	4	a	U
ow dyskyblyon	4	b	U
pyseygh toyth da :	4	a	S
ol kescolon	4	b	U
dev dreys pup tra :	4	a	S
evs a huhon	4	b	U
theygh yn bys ma :	4	a	U
y grath danvon	4	b	U
yn dyweth may feugh sylwys	7	C	U
gans an eleth yw golow	7	D	U
yn nef agas enefow	7	D	U
neffre a tryg hep ponow	7	D	U
yn ioy na vyth dywythys	7	C	U

(PC 1–9)

The cauda of the Wakefield stanza may be compared to the cauda of another thirteen-line form, in which four tetrasyllabic lines are preceded by a two-syllable bob:

MARIA	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ellas ellas ogh tru tru :	7	A	S
yn ov colon as yw bern	7	B	S
pan welaf ov map ihesu :	7	A	U
a dro thy pen curyn spern	7	B	S
hag ef map dev a vertu :	7	A	U
ha gans henna guyr myghtern	7	B	S
treys ha dyvlef a pup tu :	7	A	S
fast tackyes gans kentrow hern	7	B	S
ellas	2	c	S
es byth deyth brues	4	d	S
mur a anfues	4	d	U
y kyk hay knes	4	d	S
nep an guerthas	4	c	U

(PC 2931–2942)

This stanza type appears twice in *Passio Christi*, both times as a speech delivered by Christ's mother Mary. These two 'Mary' stanzas (PC 2591–2602 and 2931–2942) are exceptional for their two-syllable bob. This is unusually short for a line of Cornish verse, but this variation may have been introduced in order to preserve the usual difference in length between the bob-verse and the rest of the cauda in a stanza where the lines in the cauda are tetrasyllabic. R. Morton NANCE considered the two 'Mary' stanzas so different from the other verse forms in the *Ordinalia* that he suggested that they might originally have formed part of a separate poem "broken up" and inserted into *Passio Christi* (1949: 368).

The 'Christ' and 'Mary' stanza forms, which account for six of the seven Type III stanzas in *Passio Christi*, and nearly half of the fourteen Type III forms found in the *Ordinalia* as a whole, both have an eight-line frons, like the Wakefield stanza and other Middle English thirteeners. Many of the Type III stanzas in *Passio Christi* are also thirteen lines long, as two of the four 'Christ' stanzas and both 'Mary' stanzas feature a five-line cauda with a triplet of **D** lines. Indeed, six of the fourteen Type III stanzas which appear in the *Ordinalia* cycle have a five-line cauda, a much higher proportion than is found in later texts: in *Beunans Meriasek*, only one in four Type III stanzas is extended in this fashion, and in *Bewnans Ke*, this figure falls to a mere 6%. Similarly, an eight-line frons, which is quite common in the *Ordinalia* – all of the examples, it is true, being found in one play, *Passio Christi* – is found in less than 6% of the Type III stanzas in *Beunans Meriasek*, and is unknown in the surviving portions of *Bewnans Ke*. All of this supports the interpretation that the Type III stanza in Middle Cornish began life as a form much closer to the Middle English thirteener, and suggests that Cornish playwrights may have borrowed or adapted this form from medieval English religious drama.

The Castle of Perseverance, a text dated to the first quarter of the fifteenth century (CRAIG 1955: 348), is an elaborate example of the Middle English morality play, and is remarkable for the circular stage plan which accompanies the only known manuscript version of the drama: a layout which closely resembles that of the Cornish *plen-an-guary* depicted in the manuscripts of the *Ordinalia* and *Beunans Meriasek*. The majority of *The Castle of Perseverance* is written in thirteeners with four or three stresses per line (*abababab⁴c³ddd⁴c³*), a form also found in the N-town cycle of English mystery plays, where it is known as the 'Proclamation' stanza (SPECTOR 1988: 7):

ADAM	<i>stresses</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
If we it ete oure self we kylle	4'	A	Su
as god us tolde we xuld be ded	4'	B	S
to ete y ^t frute · & my lyf to spylle	4'	A	Su
I dar not do aftyr y ⁱ reed	4'	B	S
EUA			
A ffayr aungell yus · seyde me tulle	4'	A	Su
to ete y ^t appyl take nevyr no dred	4'	B	S
so kumnyng as god in hevyn hille	4'	A	Su
y ^u xalt sone be w ^t rune a sted	4'	B	S
yer fore yis frute y ^u ete	3'	C	Su
ADAM			
Off goddys wysdam for to lere	4'	D	Su
& in kumnyng to be his pere	4'	D	Su
of thyn hand j take it here	4'	D	Su
& xal sone tast yis mete	3'	C	Su

(*Fall of Man* [2], lines 152–164; text from MEREDITH & KAHL 1977; see also SPECTOR 1991: 28–29)

While most Type III stanzas in the dramas begin with a four-line **ABAB** quatrain, there are some cases where this is extended to a six- or eight-line unit. Of these, the eight-line frons is somewhat more common, and is attested seven times in *Beunans Meriasek*. The resulting twelve-line verse form thus provides a close match for the Proclamation stanza:

MERIADOCUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Jhesu arlud nef han bys	7	A	S
3ys y raf ov peyadow	7	B	U
jesu arlud my ad pys	7	A	S
orth temtacyon dewolow	7	B	U
jesu crist gvyth vy pup prys	7	A	S
lel 3eth <i>servye</i> om dyzyow	7	B	U
jhesu ov corfe ham spyrys	7	A	U
ol ov nerth ham cowgegyow	7	B	U
rof 3eth gorthye	4	c	U
hag ath peys vvel ha clour	7	D	S
nefra na veua yn nor	7	D	S
trelyes 3e lust an bys me	7	C	U

(*BM* 142–153)

Although the bulk of the *Castle of Perseverance* is written in Proclamation stanzas, some 14% of the stanzas in the play are nine-line forms, equivalent to the usual thirteener with the first *abab* quatrain removed (KELLEY 1979: 38). This nine-line variant strongly resembles the eight-line Type III stanza of Middle Cornish verse, and both forms tend to place a syntactic break after the first C line: *abab⁴c³ddd⁴c³, ABABc|DDC* (BENNETT 1960: 10, quoted in PARRY 1982: 28–29; KELLEY 1979: 39; BRUCH 2005: 169). As noted above, over 14% of Cornish Type III stanzas feature a triplet (or quartet) of D rhymes in place of the usual couplet, yielding a nine-line variant almost identical to the nine-line *Castle of Perseverance* stanza:

PATER	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ellas ov map meryasek :	7	A	U
bythqueth 3e gore 3e scole	7	B	S
ty rum gruk vy morethek :	7	A	U
a skyans prest nynsus ole	7	B	S
ty the desky	4	c	U
ny a veth scorne ol an pov	7	D	S
pyth a an tyr han trevov	7	D	U
us thynny heb feladov	7	D	U
mar ny vynnyth domethy	7	C	U

(*BM* 363–371)

Occasionally, the frons of a Type III stanza comprises a six-line tail-rhyme sequence (**AABCCB** or **AABAAB**) rather than a quatrain. Such forms are much less common than the typical **ABABcDDC** pattern, but they occur sporadically in the *Ordinalia* and the two saints' plays, accounting for some 7.8% of all Type III stanzas in the corpus:

REX SAL.	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Banneth an tas reges bo	7	A	S
why as byth by godys fo	7	A	S
agas gobyr eredy	7	B	U
war barth ol gueel behethlen	7	C	U
ha coys penryn yn tyen	7	C	U
my as re lemyñ theugh why	7	B	S
hag ol guerthour	4	d	U
an enys hag arwennek	7	E	U
tregenver ha kegyllek	7	E	U
annethe gureugh theugh chartour	7	D	U

(*OM* 2585–2594)

In this example, the syntactic break comes before rather than after the bob, which CRAWFORD takes as a possible indication that the **aBBA** cauda was added to what had previously been an ordinary Type II stanza (1981: 167–168). A similar form with a tetrasyllabic couplet in the cauda (another common variant in Type III stanzas) appears in *Bewnans Ke*:³⁰

IMPERATOR	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Welcum arlythy gwlasaw	7	A	SU
gormolys theugh ha grasaw	7	A	SU
rag why am car me a wel	7	B	S
arthor a gel e rasow	7	A	SU
in spyt in e lagsow	7	A	SU
me am byth an lorgh han bell	7	B	S
ol thum talant	4	c	SU
fers of ha lym :	4	d	S
ha soccors grym :	4	d	S
asa allaf bos galant	7	C	SU

(BK 2707–2716)

A Middle English parallel for Type III variants like these can be found in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*, a work which is remarkable among the *Canterbury Tales* for employing tail-rhyme rather than the heroic couplet used in most of the other tales. Critics have generally regarded the poem as a parody of the Middle English romances both in terms of its content and its structure (GAYLORD 1982: 313–315), since the tail-rhyme stanza was a typical verse form for this genre (TSCHANN 1985: 6; KALUZA 1911: 228–232). Interestingly, while the poem begins with the standard Middle English tail-rhyme form discussed above, it quickly moves on to more complex stanza types, several of which contain a bob-verse and cauda reminiscent of the Cornish **AABAABcDDC** stanza:

30 Several stanzas of this type in *Bewnans Ke* likewise appear to have a syntactic break before rather than after the bob, but this may be because many of these caudae comprise largely formulaic passages that are repeated or echoed in several successive stanzas, as observed by BRUCH 2005: 200–203; 2006: 60–63 and THOMAS & WILLIAMS 2007: lxxviii.

	<i>stresses</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Til that ther cam a greet geaunt,	4'	A	S
His name was sire Olifaunt,	4'	A	S
A perilous man of dede.	3'	B	<i>Su</i>
He seyde, "Child, by Termagaunt!	4'	A	S
But if thou prike out of myn haunt,	4'	A	S
Anon I sle thy steede	3'	B	<i>Su</i>
With mace.	1'	C	<i>Su</i>
Heere is the queene of Fayerye,	4'	D	<i>Su</i>
With harpe and pipe and symphonye,	4'	D	<i>Su</i>
Dwellynge in this place."	3'	C	<i>Su</i>

(*Tale of Sir Thopas*, lines 806–815; text from ROBINSON 1957: 165)

While many of the Type III stanzas found in the *Ordinalia* bear a strong resemblance to the Middle English forms described above, the distinctively Cornish eight-line form rhymed **ABABcDDC** is by far the most common variety in the two saints' plays, and most of the Type III variants found in *Bewnans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek* take this as their point of departure. As JENNER notes, "it is evident that by varying the number of lines and rhymes to a stanza, varying the distribution of the rhymes, and mixing lines of different length, an almost infinite variety may be obtained, even with only two forms of line" (1904: 186–187), and the authors of *Bewnans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek* seem to have been determined to prove him right.

Bewnans Ke contains several Type III stanzas in which the initial quatrain has short (four-syllable) **B** lines (**AbAbcDDC**):

KELADOCUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Yf thow wylt her the clen ryght	7	A	S
truly syr kyng	4	b	S
my lord ys god of almyght	7	A	S
that mad al thyngs*	4	b*	S
both gret & smal	4	c	S
ha me a vyth gylwys ke	7	D	S
drys voer a golan in dre	7	D	S
nowyth e tof re vyhal	7	C	U

(*BK* 86–93)

* For *thyng*; the final *s* looks as if it may have been deleted by the scribe.

This is a particularly interesting variant, since the pattern **AbAb** seems to occur only in the alternate-rhyme section of a Type III stanza; in a four-line Type I stanza (**ABAB**), all the lines are normally the same length.³¹ Nearly one Type III stanza in nine has a frons of this type. Less common are variations in line length involving the first and last lines of the cauda. Normally the first of these – the ‘bob’ – is tetrasyllabic while the final line of the stanza is heptasyllabic. In a small number of stanzas, however, the first line is lengthened or the last line shortened, yielding a more symmetrical form (**ABABCDDC**, **ABABcDDc**).

Duplication of end-rhyme is fairly widespread in the Type III stanza, particularly in *Beunans Meriasek*, where one out of every four Type III forms contains a duplicated rhyme. Any pair of rhyme-sets may be merged, and in *Beunans Meriasek* we find all six possible permutations of the basic **ABABcDDC** form: **AAAAbCCB**, **ABABaCCA**, **ABABbCCB**, **ABABcAAC**, **ABABcBBC**, and **ABABcCCC**. It should be noted, however, that in most cases the duplication involves one set of rhymes from the frons and one set from the cauda: that is, the **C** or **D** lines usually share a rhyme with the **A** or **B** lines. The following typical example is drawn from *Bewnans Ke*:

CARCERATOR	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Re gorf astrot dv rajak :	7	A	SU
in ow holan a gara	7	B	SU
me a ra thekhyskajak :	7	A	SU
kyn neffra dybbry bara	7	B	SU
thyn* a bavrys	4	c	U
GARCON			
Gwra in della lagajak	7	A	SU
ha thys me a vith grajak	7	A	SU
fystyn dewhans me ath pys	7	C	S

(*BK* 362–369)

* Or *thym*.

The high percentage of Type III forms with duplicated rhyme may reflect a desire on the part of Cornish poets to bind the metrically dissimilar frons and cauda of the Type III stanza more closely to one another by carrying over a

31 There is only one example in the corpus of a Type I stanza with short **B** lines (an **AbAb** quatrain at *PC* 2349–2352).

rhyme from one section to the next. Some of these duplications may also arise from the fact that a Type III stanza requires four or more sets of end-rhymes, thus increasing the likelihood that a given end-rhyme will need to be repeated elsewhere in the stanza.

In *Bewnans Ke*, there are three examples of a Type III stanza in which the usual **D** couplet in the cauda is reduced to a single line that shares one of the rhymes of the initial quatrain. This form is the Type III equivalent of the five-line Type II stanza (**AABAB**, **ABAAB**) described above, but here there are *two* sets of rhymed lines in the frons with which the single line in the cauda may rhyme. In two cases (stanzas 299 and 300 at *BK* 2238–2251) it shares the **A** rhyme (**ABABcAC**), while in the third (stanza 366, below), it shares the **B** rhyme:

ARTHURUS, <i>in via</i>	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Lemmyn ow gwerrors gwelha :	7	A	SU
dun ahanan in vn rowt	7	B	S
gans gweras dv vhelha :	7	A	SU
ay lavarow nil ew stowt	7	B	S
my an gwra clor	4	c	S
rag ef a verew nynges dowt :	7	B	S
mar pith keyvys vgh an dor	7	C	S

(*BK* 2787–2793)

As with the Type II stanza, it is not uncommon for a Type III stanza to be lengthened by adding an extra section comprising three or more lines. Often, this an **aBBA** sequence that duplicates the metre and rhyme scheme of the normal Type III cauda:

TEVDARUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Yv helma ol an confort :	7	A	U
am bethe deworthugh wy	7	B	S
ay serys yma thyugh sport :	7	A	S
<i>pan</i> vs dewen <i>dymmo</i> vy	7	B	S
wel wel na for[s]	4	c	S
re appolyn ov du splan	7	D	S
kyns dyberth ny warth mas ran	7	D	S
me a pe <i>zen</i> hobyhors	7	C	S
hay cowetha	4	e	U
have* that <i>iiij</i> ^{ar} † lorel	7*	F	U
hag arta <i>perthugh</i> coff guel	7	F	S
<i>pendrelen</i> the comondya	7	E	U

(*BM* 1054–1065)

* Assuming that *have* is a two-syllable word, as is often the case in Cornish verse (see THOMAS & WILLIAMS 2007: xlvi for the possible implications of English silent *e* in the dating of *Bewnans Ke*).

† To be read *peswar*.

Another variant, in which the last three lines of a normal Type III stanza are transformed into a six-line tail-rhyme stanza, is also found in both saints' plays:

CARCERATOR, <i>inclinando</i>	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ny goyth the why arluth ker :	7	A	S
<i>an</i> blam warnaf e settya	7	B	SU
me a thotha gans an ger :	7	A	S
na ve ow maw thum lettya	7	B	SU
drog chawns thy ben	4	c	S
TETHARUS			
Taw taw harlot theth cregy	7	D	U
a throg thewath re wyrwhy	7	D	U
in mes <i>am</i> golak omden	7	C	U
CARCERATOR			
A gwef a dryst arlythy	7	E*	SU
mar whyth e hyl afflythy	7	E*	SU
<i>lemmyn</i> gyllys of <i>then</i> sen	7	C	S

(*BK* 467–477)

* The feminine **E** rhymes are probably intended to contrast with the masculine **D** rhymes.

In *Beunans Meriasek*, Type III stanzas may also be lengthened by adding a pair of lines at the end which repeat the rhyme pattern of the preceding two lines:

DUX CORNUBIAE	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ny seff henna yth galloys :	7	A	U
ty falge ky omschumunys	7	B	U
kynse me a scoyl the goys :	7	A	S
ha ty a veth devenys	7	B	U
avel losov	4	c	U
rum ena the guthel covle	7	D	S
pagya mergh es by my sowle	7	D	S
mea glowes in ze pov	7	C	S
pendra deseff an map devle :	7	D	S
dar vyngya war thuk kernov	7	C	U

(*BM* 2387–2396)

This latter type of variation is much less common with Type III stanzas than it is with Type II forms, however.

4.4. Variant Forms with Short Lines

Over 4% of the stanzas in Middle Cornish drama consist entirely of four-syllable lines.³² Four- and eight-line tetrasyllabic Type I forms (**abab**, **abababab**) are attested in the *Ordinalia*, and Type II forms like the following are found in all of the plays:

QUARTUS PUER	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Lowene thys	4	a	S
arluth an bys	4	a	S
ha nef yn weth	4	b	S
ro thymmo grath	4	c	S
a thos theth plath	4	c	S
gans the eleth	4	b	U

(*PC* 289–292)

32 In addition to classifying verse forms as type “W”, “X”, “Y”, or “Z” according to their rhyme scheme, CRAWFORD assigns stanzas to one of three classes on the basis of metre: group “A” comprises stanzas containing only heptasyllabic (or longer) lines; group “B”, those containing only short lines; and group “C”, those with a mixture of the two (1981: 146–147; 1984: 433).

Although pentasyllabic lines are rare elsewhere in the corpus, a sequence of six similar stanzas featuring *five*-syllable lines appears in *Bewnans Ke*:

FIRST SENATOR	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Welcum canhas ker :	5	a	S
pan geerth ha pan ger :	5	a	S
how faryth my lord	5	b	S
maren cvthys den :	5	c	S
rum fay ef an pryn :	5	c	S
nyn gvyth nerth nag ord	5	b	S
(BK 2458–2463)			

While stanzas like those above appear to be simple variations on the normal Type I and II forms (NORRIS 1859: 2:450–451), a more elaborate tail-rhyme stanza comprising ten tetrasyllabic lines is seen in both the *Ordinalia* and *Bewnans Ke*:

DEUS PATER	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Cous er the fyth :	4	a	S
a ver termyn	4	b	U
pandra synsyth :	4	a	U
yth luef lemyn	4	b	U
lauer moyses	4	c	U
MOYSES			
Guelen a pren :	4	d	S
a wraf synsy	4	e	U
ty yv chyften :	4	d	U
ha dev thynny	4	e	S
luen me a greys	4	c	S
(OM 1441–1446)			

Such stanzas may well have been developed from the common Type II variant with short **B** lines (**AAbCCb**), by expanding each heptasyllabic couplet to a quatrain of four-syllable lines. The following form, in which the **A** and **C** couplets have octosyllabic lines, is attested twice in *Passio Christi*, and may represent an ‘intermediate’ stage of development between the normal **AAbCCb** stanza and the ten-line **ababcdedec** stanza illustrated above:

[MARIA]	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ellas a vap : * myghtern yth tron	4+4	A	S
ellas gueles : tol yth colon	4+4	A	U
marow na vef	4	b	S
ellas bones : the treys squerdys	4+4	C	U
ol the yscarn : dyscavylsys	4+4	C	U
tel yth dyv luef	4	b	U

(PC 3169–3174)

* The line breaks separating the two halves of each **A** and **C** line appear to have been added by a later hand (Norris' scribe B) who also altered some of the words in the stanza.

Further evidence for the link between these two forms may be found in *Origo Mundi*, where there are two examples of stanzas in which only the second couplet of an **AAbCCb** stanza has been expanded to a tetrasyllabic quatrain:

REX D[AVI]D	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Dyskynnough ketep map pron	7	A	S
ote an gvel theragon	7	A	U
glas ov tevy	4	b	U
yn enour bras :	4	c	S
dagan dev mur	4	d	S
an guel a ras :	4	c	S
thy worth an lur	4	d	S
guraf the drehy	4	b	U

(OM 1983–1988)

Duplicated rhymes are relatively common in the ten-line variant of the Type II stanza illustrated above, probably because this verse form calls for five different pairs of rhymed lines, making it more likely that a poet will need to 're-use' a given end-rhyme. The stanza below (from *Origo Mundi*) shows the most common pattern of duplication found with this type; comparable forms can be seen in *Resurrexio Domini* and *Bewnans Ke* as well:

CONSULTOR	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Yn amendys :	4	a	U
ad pehosow	4	b	U
orden bos gureys :	4	a	S
temple golow	4	b	U
bras ha ledan	4	c	U
bethens kyrhys :	4	a	U
masons plente	4	d	U
ynweth guarnys :	4	a	U
tus an cyte	4	d	U
ketep onan	4	c	U
(OM 2259–2264)			

In all, nearly one such stanza in four involves a duplicated rhyme. *Bewnans Ke* contains four examples of a more exotic variety of the ten-line Type II stanza:

REGINA	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Gas the bythas :	4	a	U
rag nyngew vas	4	a	S
num gwreth the sergh :	4	b	S
orth lostow mirth*	4	b	S
drys algow kyn fen tymys	7	C	SU
nyngew ow thowl :	4	d	S
servya an jowl	4	d	S
le ew gena :	4	e	SU
war ow ena	4	e	SU
gans cletha bos debemys	7	C	SU
(BK 2932–2941)			

* For *mergh*.

This variant is remarkable for its arrangement of the shorter lines as rhyming couplets rather than quatrains with alternate rhyme, and its long **C** lines suggest that it is derived from a regular heptasyllabic **AABCCB** stanza rather than the **AAbCCb** form.

Stanzas like these in which every line is short provide a noticeable change of pace, and may perhaps have been used by dramatists to convey heightened emotion, excitement, or more rapid movement (HARRIS 1964: 36–37). NORRIS observes that these “declamatory or lyrical passages [...] seem to be like the bits of rhyme occurring mingled with the blank verse in the writings of our old

dramatists” (1859: II 450), and even goes so far as to suggest that the opening stanzas of *Passio Christi*, which feature a number of **abababab** sequences, “must have been sung to music” (1859: II 452). CRAWFORD likewise theorises that a similar series of metrically “anomalous” **abababab** stanzas at *RD* 835–892 might represent “a scene set entirely to music” (1981: 171, 175n46), and the possible relationship between music and verse forms in *Bewnans Ke* (first proposed by Philip Bennett) is discussed in BRUCH 2006.

4.5. Rhymed Couplets

Although the rhymed couplet is an extremely common unit in European verse (see, for example, KALUZA 1911: 144–152) and was used extensively during the Middle Ages in both poetry and drama, it is almost completely absent from the surviving Middle Cornish corpus, with the exception of the *Charter Endorsement*.³³ In the four central texts, there are only a dozen unambiguous examples of couplets, as well as two fragmentary stanzas (*BK* 700–703)³⁴ and one corrupt stanza (*BK* 3191b–3194b)³⁵ in *Bewnans Ke* which could conceivably represent couplets. Among these twelve couplets are three instances of an English refrain *ellas mornyngh y syngh mornyngh y cal / our lord ys deyd that bogthe ovs al* in *Resurrexio Domini* (*RD* 733–734, 753–754, 779–780). These three couplets are metrically irregular, comprising one line of ten syllables and one of eight – or, if the first word *ellas* is excluded, a pair of octosyllabic lines – and should probably be taken as an exceptional addition to the text, lying outside the regular system of Cornish prosody. This leaves a total of nine heptasyllabic Cornish-language couplets in the four central texts, of which one appears in *Resurrexio Domini*, one in *Beunans Meriasek*, and the remaining seven in *Bewnans Ke*, whence the following example:

33 Although the *Charter Endorsement* seems to have a stress-based rather than a syllabic metre, two of the twelve couplets or possible couplets in that text also consist of two heptasyllabic lines, while a further three comprise one seven- and one eight-syllable line (BRUCH 2005: 335–336).

34 In each of these two stanzas, only parts of two lines have been copied into the manuscript, and these fragmentary lines rhyme with one another, which allows for the possibility that they may have represented couplets in the original text. It is altogether more likely, however, that these fragments are the **B** lines of a Type II stanza (BRUCH 2005: 198n)

35 This couplet, which comprises only the first two lines of THOMAS & WILLIAMS’ stanza 427b (2007: 318–319), consists of one seven- and one four-syllable line, an irregular form found elsewhere only in the *Charter Endorsement* (lines 17–18; BRUCH 2005: 342).

SECUNDUS SENATOR	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Canhas gentyl na borth dowt :	7	A	S
awos arthor ny a rowt	7	A	S
(BK 2520–2521)			

It is possible that at least some of the couplets in the manuscripts are actually incomplete stanzas resulting from an error in copying or a damaged exemplar, although there is no clear evidence to support this. Certainly it is noteworthy that almost all of the couplets in Middle Cornish drama appear in *Bewnans Ke*, the text which is known from the most corrupt and fragmentary manuscript. However, none of these couplets seems obviously incomplete as it stands. In eight of the nine cases, the couplet has its own speech heading, and in six of these eight instances it represents a single, apparently complete speech made by a different character than the speaker of either the preceding or the following stanza. Since in Cornish drama one speech often equals one stanza (BRUCH 2005: 249), this strongly suggests that these couplets should be taken as distinct units of verse, equivalent to a full stanza. Some couplets, like the single Cornish example in *Resurrexio Domini* (lines 95–96: *grant merci syre iustis / vynytha syngys of thys*) appear at the end of a scene, where they may function as a kind of cadence or tag-line, rather like the couplet that comes at the end of a Shakespearean sonnet.

In any case, although the heptasyllabic couplet is a fairly unusual verse form in Middle Cornish verse – accounting for only about 0.3% of all the stanzas in the four central texts and only 1.6% of the stanzas in *Bewnans Ke*, where it is most common – it nonetheless occurs often enough that it should not be considered an irregular form. It should be noted, however, that the couplets in *Resurrexio Domini*, *Bewnans Ke*, and *Beunans Meriasek* are all found singly, inserted between stanzas of quite different types, rather than strung together in sequence (*aabbccdd...*) as is common in other European poetry of the period. While many of the best-known works of medieval English, French, and Welsh³⁶ verse are written entirely in rhymed couplets, there is no evidence that medieval Cornish poets ever made much use of this form. The *Charter Endorsement* does contain sequences of rhymed couplets, but it employs tail-rhyme stanzas and (possibly) quatrains as well (JENNER 1904: 181; CAMPANILE 1963: 66; TOORIAN 1991: 22–25; EDWARDS 1994: 3; BRUCH 2005: 337–345); no

36 The popular Middle Welsh *cywydd* metre, beneath the obscuring layers of *cynganedd*, *sangiad*, *cymeriad*, and other literary ornaments, is essentially a series of rhymed couplets.

known Middle Cornish verse text is written exclusively in couplets. Rather, the Cornish couplets, like the English refrain in *Resurrexio Domini* or the short-line stanzas scattered throughout the dramas, may have been intended to stand out from the surrounding text and could have been intended to highlight points of transition or heightened drama in a work otherwise containing only verse forms comprising four or more lines.

4.6. Larger Structures

Besides the English refrain *ellas mornyngh y syngh mornyngh y cal / our lord ys deyd that bogthe ovs al* mentioned above, which is presented in the manuscript of the *Ordinalia* as a separate stanza in its own right, there are a few instances where a ‘refrain’ or other additional text groups stanzas into a larger unit. In some cases, this refrain is grafted onto the end of what would otherwise be a normal verse form. This occurs in the Harrowing of Hell sequence in *Resurrexio Domini*, where the words *why princis* ‘ye princes’ are used three times, twice as an extrametrical tag or refrain. The phrase appears for the first time at the start of Christ’s opening speech at the beginning of the scene:

SPIRITUS CHRISTI	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Why princys an dewolow	7	A	U
scon egereugh an porthow	7	A	U
py mar ny wreugh y fyth guow	7	A	S
yn certan kyns tremene	7	B	SU
rak an porthow hep dyweth	7	C	U
a vyth y gerys yn weth	7	C	S
sur mayth ello aberueth	7	C	U
an myghtern a lowene	7	B	SU

(RD 97–104)

It then appears again at the end of each of Christ’s next two speeches, both of which would constitute a normal Type II stanzas if not for the additional line:

	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
LUCIFER			
Ny dal thys scornye gyne	7	A	SU
pyv myghtern a lowene	7	A	SU
a thesempys thym lauar	7	B	U
SPIRITUS			
Arluth cref ha galosek	7	C	U
hag yn bateyl barthesek	7	C	U
rak <i>hemna</i> ygor hep mar	7	B	S
why <i>princis</i>	3	d	U

.....

SPIRITUS			
Arluth gallosek ha cref	7	A	S
worto an porthow ny sef	7	A	S
yn certan <i>kyns</i> tremene	7	B	SU
drefen <i>mar mur</i> yv ow ras	7	C	S
ef yv gallosek yn cas	7	C	S
ha myghtern a lowene	7	B	SU
why <i>princis</i>	3	d	U

(RD 105–111, 118–124)

This use of *why princis* as a ‘refrain’ is quite remarkable, since it violates two of the usual rules of Middle Cornish prosody: firstly, the line in question is only three syllables long, which is not a normal length; and secondly, it does not rhyme with any other line in the stanza.

There are many other places in the dramas in which a block of text – usually comprising several lines – is repeated or echoed in a number of successive stanzas. This is particularly common in the Arthurian portion of *Bewnans Ke* (BRUCH 2005: 202; see also THOMAS & WILLIAMS 2007: lxxviii). Here, however, the ‘refrain’ is incorporated into the normal structure of the stanza, often forming all or part of the cauda of a Type III verse form. Such is the case in the following excerpt from *Bewnans Ke*, in which the sequence *mer ew the fves / the vannath hath ryelder / a ra the gorf in pelder / nyth ankevyr bytthyth brves* forms the cauda of each of three successive stanzas:

AUGELUS	<i>syllables</i>	<i>rhyme</i>	<i>ending</i>
Ave pater arthore :	7	A	U
lowena thys hag oner	7	B	U
turba <i>gentis</i> futuræ :	7	A	U
a record the vonas flowr	7	B	S
mer ew [t]he* fves	4	c	S
the <i>vam</i> nath hath ryelder	7	D	SU
a ra the gorf in pelder	7	D	SU
nyth ankevyr byttyth brves	7	C	S

* Probably a copying error for *the*.

MORRYDUS

Lowena <i>thum</i> arluth mas :	7	A	S
lowena <i>then</i> gwelha govr	7	B	S
lowena the <i>berhan</i> ras :	7	A	S
lowena thys barth yth towr	7	B	S
mer ew the fves	4	c	S
the <i>vam</i> nath hath ryelder	7	D	SU
a ra the gorf in pelder	7	D	SU
nyth ankevyr byttyth brves	7	C	S

CADORUS

Lowena ha lvne rowath :	7	A	U
theso war ver lavarow	7	B	SU
rag bos in yth elonyth :	7	A	U
ny ve genys the barow	7	B	SU
mer ew the fves	4	c	S
the <i>vam</i> nath hath ryelder	7	D	SU
a ra the gorf in pelder	7	D	SU
nyth ankevyr byttyth brves	7	C	S

(BK 1562–1585)

This use of repetition is one of a number of methods employed in the Arthurian portion of *Bewnans Ke* to group stanzas into larger units; other examples involve using variations of the same word or phrase in the first line of several adjacent stanzas, or using the word or phrase which appears at the end of one stanza to begin the next (a technique known as *concatenatio*). The first of these phenomena may be seen in stanzas 238–243 (BK 1670–1729), where a series of legates address the Roman Emperor using **ababcdedec** stanzas, each beginning his speech with a phrase like *hayl pryns of myght*, *hayl arluth fre*, *hayl syr emperour*, *hayl arluth heel*, *hayl arluth ker*, and *hayl arluth bold*. Similar

forms appear at the start of stanzas 245–250 (*BK* 1740–1805), which continue this sequence. The latter practice, in which each new stanza begins with the last words of the previous line, is reminiscent of certain types of *cymeriad* in Welsh poetry (BRUCH 2005: 402–405; ROWLAND 1990: 352), but is also found in many other medieval poetic traditions, including “Northern English and Scotch poetry” of the Middle English period (KALUZA 1911: 206), and should therefore not necessarily be interpreted as a ‘Celtic’ element in Cornish verse. Just as individual stanzas may be divided into smaller sections, so too can they be grouped into larger units, typically passages in which the same stanza form or a group of closely related forms is used repeatedly – a fact remarked by NORRIS (1859: II 451). The best illustration of this is the poem *Pascon Agan Arluth*, a work of over 2000 lines which consists entirely of Type I (**ABABABAB**) stanzas and a few simple variations thereof. Within the dramas, repetition of the identical stanza forms is more limited in scope, but such sequences can be found in the *Ordinalia* and both saints’ plays. In some cases, a change in stanza type corresponds to a change of scene, although this is less common.³⁷

5. CONCLUSIONS

Over a period of more than two hundred years between the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, Cornish writers produced a substantial body of religious poetry and drama. These medieval Cornish verse texts largely adhere to a single set of basic compositional rules, which may be summarized as follows:

1. Cornish verse uses a syllabic metre, in which the majority of lines are seven syllables long, and most of the remaining lines are four syllables long. It is possible that five-syllable lines may have formed a regular part of the system as well, although they are rare outside of *Bewnans Ke* (BRUCH 2005: 122–128). Exceptions to these metrical rules are often made for lines in Latin, particularly when these represent quotations from the Bible or the liturgy, but not for lines in English or French.

³⁷ Further information about sequences of stanza forms in the Middle Cornish drama and a list of examples drawn from the plays may be found in BRUCH (2005: 214–220; 2006: 60–64).

2. There is no evidence to support the idea put forward by William BORLASE in 1758 that lines of Cornish verse had a “trochaic” metre and ended with a stressed syllable (296). Accented syllables may fall anywhere in the line, and the majority of lines have a feminine (iambic) ending.
3. The epenthetic vowel which results from svarabhakti in words like *garow* [ˈgarow] ‘rough’ < [garw] counts as a distinct syllable when determining the length of a line of verse (GEORGE 1986: 75).
4. Rhyme generally involves only the final syllable of a line, except in the play *Bewnans Ke*, which often follows an ‘English-style’ rhyming rule. For two words to rhyme, they must be phonologically similar from the final vowel to the end, regardless of stress or vowel length. This rule results in many rhymes between unstressed final vowels, and rhymes between stressed and unstressed syllables are also common.
5. Feminine (disyllabic) rhymes are permitted, and occur in all medieval Cornish verse texts, but outside of the late fifteenth-century play *Bewnans Ke* there is no strong preference for feminine rhyme in Cornish verse, except perhaps with certain words. In some cases, the duplication of penultimate syllables between rhyming words may simply be fortuitous.
6. Identical rhyme (rhyming a word with itself) seems to have been allowed, as it is attested in all of the texts except the thirty-six-line *Charter Endorsement*. It is particularly prevalent in *Pascon Agan Arluth* and *Gwreans an Bys*, but seems generally to be avoided by the authors of the *Ordinalia* and the saints’ plays, and was probably not a preferred type of rhyme.
7. Every line in a Middle Cornish stanza must rhyme with at least one other line in the same stanza. The only significant exception to this principle is the extrametrical line *why princis* which appears twice in *Resurrexio Domini*.

These rules of rhyme and metre are sufficient to distinguish medieval Cornish prosody from that of medieval English, French, and Latin verse. English employs an accentual or accentual-syllabic metre, and the syllabic metres of French and Latin do not operate in the same way as that of Cornish. The rhyming rules of each language are also different, with English, French, and Latin all exhibiting a preference for stressed or polysyllabic rhymes (NORBERG 2004: 35–36; FLESCHER 1972: 177, 179; see also CRAWFORD 1981: 153n8). And while

there are many points of similarity between Cornish prosody and the systems used by Welsh, Breton, and Irish poets, Cornish verse differs from Irish in the nature of its rhymes, and Cornish lacks the ornamentation – alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, *cynganedd*, and *cymeriad* – that is commonplace in Irish, Breton, and Welsh poetry from the Middle Ages. In addition, none of these other Celtic traditions make use of the same range or types of stanza forms found in Cornish verse, although varieties of the tail-rhyme stanza are found in both Middle Cornish and Middle Breton literature.

Middle Cornish texts written between ca. 1400 and ca. 1500 all follow the same fundamental principles of stanza structure, although the distribution of different stanza forms changes over the course of the century. The three basic types of stanza used in texts from the *Ordinalia* through *Beunans Meriasek* are the Type I (**ABABABAB**) form, which is prevalent in the earliest texts but much less common in *Beunans Meriasek* and unknown in *Bewnans Ke*; the Type II (**AABCCB**), which is widespread in all of the dramas but not used in the poem *Pascon Agan Arluth*, and the Type III (**ABABcDDC**), which occurs only rarely in the *Ordinalia* but is quite popular in the later saints' plays. Although more than half of the stanzas in Middle Cornish verse adhere to one of these three forms, Cornish poets were free to vary them by adding or deleting lines or by reducing seven-syllable lines to four syllables. Perhaps as a result, each text – including each of the three component plays of the *Ordinalia* – may also be distinguished from the other works of Cornish verse on the basis of the presence or absence of certain variant forms or distinctive features, and the number and complexity of these variations appears to increase over time (BRUCH 2005: 312).

All four of the major works of Middle Cornish literature – the Cornish *Ordinalia*, *Pascon Agan Arluth*, *Bewnans Ke*, and *Beunans Meriasek* – obey these basic rules of rhyme, metre, and stanza structure. All four of these texts may also be linked to Glasney College in Penryn, a college of secular canons which was in existence for nearly three centuries from 1267 to 1549 (WHETTER 1988: 3, 31). The *Ordinalia* contains a number of place-names which refer to sites in the vicinity of Penryn, and both *Beunans Meriasek* and *Bewnans Ke* portray the lives of saints whose parishes had connections to Glasney or to men associated with Glasney (PADEL 2005: 97–9). Although *Pascon Agan Arluth* has not been directly tied to the college, some textual parallels show a connection between this text and *Passio Christi*, implying that the poem may also have been produced at Glasney or under its auspices. It is possible that the rules of versification we find in the four central Middle Cornish texts came into being

at Glasney, a place which as Oliver PADEL has suggested, could have served as “an outpost [...] for encouraging the provision of Cornish-speaking clergy” in western Cornwall (2005: 97) – and which may have become the principal source of Cornish-speaking drama as well.

The Late Cornish play *Gwreans an Bys* may also be viewed as part of the Glasney tradition, partly because it contains material (equaling about 7% of the total length of the text) derived from *Origo Mundi* and partly because its verse forms, while differing in many respects from those of the Middle Cornish dramas, are clearly descended from the Middle Cornish stanza forms that were used in plays like *Bewnans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek*. Most of these shorter verse ‘segments’ in *Gwreans an Bys* correspond to half of a Type I, II or III stanza, suggesting that the author responsible for the more modern sections of the play interpreted the syntactic break or ‘hinge’ point in these forms as the end of a unit of verse, possibly because he was more used to hearing Cornish drama performed than to reading it on the page (BRUCH 2005: 374–376).

The other surviving Cornish verse text from the medieval period, the fourteenth-century *Charter Endorsement*, is written according to a very different set of rules, and may be more heavily indebted to the traditions of Middle English versification than to the Glasney tradition represented by the other five texts, as discussed in BRUCH (2005: 346–347). *Bewnans Ke* also shows signs of English influence in its frequent (though by no means consistent) use of a stress-based rhyming rule similar to that of English verse. This may be related to the linguistic shifts that were taking place in fifteenth-century Cornwall, but it should be remembered that *Gwreans an Bys*, written at a much later time when English cultural and linguistic influence was even stronger, shows no sign of adopting English-style rhyme.

Although Middle Cornish poets developed their own distinctive set of compositional rules, they seem to have modelled many of their basic verse forms and rhyme schemes on stanza patterns drawn from other literary traditions. While Cornish metre and rhyme resemble those of other Celtic literatures, particularly Welsh and Breton, the verse forms used in these languages differ widely from those of Cornish, and it seems unlikely that Welsh, Breton, or Irish could be a source for the stanza types found in Middle Cornish verse (BRUCH 2005: 385–411). French and Latin are more suitable candidates, and indeed, the Type I and Type II stanzas – the most common verse forms in the fourteenth-century Cornish texts – have close analogues in these and many other medieval European literatures. However, the strongest evidence points to Middle English as the primary source for Cornish verse forms. Among the literatures with which Cornish writers would have had the most contact,

only English has fourteenth- and fifteenth-century examples of ‘hybrid’ verse forms that combine an alternate-rhyme or tail-rhyme frons with a tail-rhyme cauda introduced by a short ‘bob-verse’ that tends to group syntactically with the frons. Since hybrid verse forms appear in both Middle Cornish and Middle English religious drama, and seem to have caught on earlier in English than in Cornish, it is likely that medieval Cornish dramatists borrowed this form from their English counterparts. Medieval English drama also makes extensive use of the tail-rhyme stanza, and alternate-rhyme stanzas like those of *Pascon Agan Arluth* were “common in the [English] religious poems of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” (KALUZA 1911: 217), suggesting that Middle English could well have been the source for all of the basic verse forms found in Middle Cornish literature.

Nonetheless, while Cornish poets may have adopted and adapted English stanza forms, Cornish verse in the Middle Ages should still be regarded as an independent, parallel tradition, one which was quite capable of developing its own distinctive practices and features. The Middle Cornish Type III stanza shows a divergent evolution from the Middle English thirteener upon which it is probably based: while thirteen-line forms represent nearly half of the Type III stanzas in the *Ordinalia*, such forms are quite rare in *Beunans Meriasek*, and are not attested at all in *Bewnans Ke*, where the typical Cornish eight-line form (**ABABcDDC**) – unknown in the *Ordinalia* – predominates. As the large number of variant stanza patterns in the corpus attests, Cornish poets felt free to innovate, and by the time of the Late Cornish play *Gwreans an Bys*, it is difficult to find any trace whatsoever of the link between Cornish and English verse. Yet it seems very probable that Cornish versification as we know it from the texts arose from the interpretation of English, Latin, and French stanza forms according to a concept of rhyme and metre which may be thought of as typically Brittonic. Cornish verse texts of the medieval period can therefore best be understood as a hybrid tradition: a fruitful marriage of imported verse forms to indigenous metrical practices.

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BENJAMIN BRUCH

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BENJAMIN BRUCH

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