

# Book of Pheryllt

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## Synopsis:

Astrocelt shares his research into a controversial subject concerning the Book of Pheryllt. At the same time unravelling some interesting connections through an Inquiry into 'The Book of Pheryllt' and the 'Spell of Making'.

## **An Inquiry into 'The Book of Pheryllt' and the 'Spell of Making'.**

The initial aim is to provide a translation for the "Spell of Making." However it has transpired to fully understand the implication of "Pheryllt," there is a need to comprehend what it actually might imply. It has often been suggested its implications were held within a book or within a possible medieval manuscript. Alternatively it has been often translate as Virgil. Therefore an inquiry is necessary, as to whether such a notion existed. In its course it will endeavour to trace its origins. Together with the extent of sources which are involved. These are from both an antiquarian touching on the Celtic revival of the 18th and 19th century; and the scholarly prospective will also be consulted. If indeed, "pheryllt" is part of its scheme them some enlightenment on this matter might emerge.

The first thing is to identify Pheryllt. There are no entries within Vol. III of R.J Thomas, Academic University Dictionary of Welsh Language printed at Oxford in 1987-98. The first reference within the literature suggests it is available in 1945 through the writings of Lewis Spence, where the "Book of Pheryllt" is connected to Ceridwen. Additionally two references are located within the original copy of Lady Charlotte Guest Mabinogion. However two variants of spelling are introduced, the text from the Red Book of Hergest circa 1400's cites llfrau pheryllt - "Book of Pheryllt." When Lady Guest translation arrives at the "Book of fferyllt." Consequently this translation is still available in the 1997-unabridged Dover edition of the Mabinogion. Earlier translations by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones 1949, Jeffery Gantz 1972 omit the story of Taliesin within their translations.

It is interesting how Pheryllt has actually become translated to fferyllt described in the Red Book of Hergest. Does this suggest that the Mss used might indicated a manuscript error in its spelling or a natural development over time has occurred.

Although Lady C Guest informs one that the Rev J. Jones of Oxford produced the copy used for her translation. One also has to bear in mind that Lady Charlotte Guest learnt Welsh through her interests and involvement with her husband's employees at the steel works. There too is the possibility the spelling of fferyllt originates from south Wales or is a regional variant? Nonetheless Edward Davis uses a text and enlightens one to 'fferyll'. Additionally this form is pointed out by the digital medieval list and used by the poet, Dafydd ap Gwylim (1350) which has been highlighted from the studies of Rachael Bronwich. The question one might ask is whether the definition has been retained which has been interpreted 500 years later?

Rev. Edward Davis revealed the "Book of Pheryllt" in 1809 connecting it to astronomy and the hours of the planets indicating this process was also involved botany. Along with Pheryllt meaning also indicated to equate with Virgil. Nonetheless there is a certain amount of doubt shown specifically concerning "Pheryllt," being related to 'chymist or metallurgists. However a suggestion that it refers to 'ancient priests' is given. Interestingly Edward Davis draws one attention to a document of Dr. Thomas Williams, who noted the 'Celvddyddau Pheryllt,' which is translated as 'the arts of the pheryllt.' The most interestingly observation that Rev. Edward Davis reveals is an alternative spelling for fferyllt when drawing on fferyll, prior to his translation of the Cad Goddeu. The latter fferyllt is confirmed within the facsimile and text of the Kat Godeu Manuscript, additionally this form is used within the selected poems translated by Dr. J Gwenogvryn Evans. Rev E Davis also undertook a similar model a hundred years earlier, along with D.W. Nash both of whom follows this theme. Nonetheless, D. W. Nash utilizes the fferyll spelling within his work on the Romance of the History of Taliesin where it's indicating fferyll is likely to be much older than the 13th century. This could suggest an even earlier understanding of fferyllt or fferyll. Alternatively fferyll in manuscript form exists in documentary evidence, although its definition and meaning might be in doubt to those previously given.

Enquiring into the definition for either fferyllt or fferyllt, the modern dictionary edited by H Meung Evans notes various attributes and also associated definitions: -

fferylliaeth - pharmacy

fferyllol - chemical pharmaceutical

fferyllyd - pharmacist

fferllfa (feydd) - dispensary

Evans H.M, Y Geiriadur Cymreag Cyfoes-The Dictionary of Modern Welsh, Dyfed 1981 p. 62

Returning to Vol. I of the academic dictionary, fferyllt and fferyllt can be located. However the definitions are different being given as 'chemist, druggist, alchemist and magician.' It is interestingly that Thomas notes past manuscripts where these words can also be located. This include various works from the 1700's, alternatively the same spelling is included within John Davies 'Dictionarum Duplex' an early dictionary published in 1632. This is in fact is eighty-seven years after the first dictionary became published under crown license by William Salesbury. However in 1852, Daniel Silvan Evans, in his Modern Welsh Dictionary brought science and literature up to date but here regional variation are located in Denbigh, N.E. Wales: -

Alchemic - arfferyllig, arfferylig

Alchemical - arfferyllol, arfferyllig

Alchemist - arfferyll, arfferylliad

Alchemistic - arfferyllol

Alchemistical - arfferyllaid, arfferyllaodol

Alchemy - arfferylliaeth

Evans D. An English and Welsh Dictionary: Adapted to the Present state of Science and Literature, Denbigh 1852 p. 26

Similar definitions appear to be retained and supported by J. Anwyl edited edition in 1917 Welsh-English Dictionary, with out the prefix, returning us back to fferyllt or fferyll, to those defined in this academic dictionary as: -

"fferyll (t) -ion, fferylliad, iaid, noun, alchemist, magician, artificer."

Anwyl J, Welsh-English Dictionary, Caermarthen, 1916, 7th edition p. 157

Rev William Evans explains the prefix of 'ar', in the regional variation of fferyll(t) as referring to an 'edge, coast or border.' This could suggest it is correct when dealing with chemistry or its predecessor alchemy, when combining chemical elements of plants together. Scholars have often referred to this with assisting in the breakthrough towards modern science and Newtonian thinking. In itself, it would certainly be touching the edge and the boundary of the known world in seeking out Truth held within a natural philosophical context. Where as modern day science tends to pull on natural philosophy, further dissecting it, to find its working

components. Although such a process certainly brings about a greater understanding of its working parts, there is a tendency to remove its mystical understanding. Similar to familiar comment from antiquity relating to the known world its old perception where the entire world and landmass is surrounded with water at its edge. Alternatively one might take the presumption that 'arfferylliaeth' was moving its participant towards the outer limits towards new understanding. This might result in its prefix being added, however the modern variant of 'ar' is defined as 'on, upon or over.' This also could have implications relating to a similar process when reaching for understanding or moving beyond, and over into new realms.

Although fferyllt and fferyll appears to be well established in the manuscripts of the Red Book of Hergest, and in Hanes Taliesin. One has to consider the role of Thomas ab Einion (1300-50) whom is credited with the collecting Taliesin poems together. This is inclusive of recording the story of Ceridwen, Taliesin and Elphin of which scholars suspected some corrupting of the sources could have occurred. Yet one is still unable to answer the questioning concerning definitions. Was the word fferyll in the Kat Goddua defined the same as used by John Davis in 1632, and those later? Indeed is it relevant to the way the world was understood within the thinking held in the 1300's? Rachel Bromwich suggests that some styles noted in the poetry of the Hanes Taliesin pushes the manuscript recording date to circa 9th century. While other scholars push the date further back to circa 6th century. Although transcribed in c. 1275, only six poems are attributed to Taliesin. On the other hand the Cad Goddua is not among them. It is also pointed out the complete version of Hanes Taliesin did not appear, until the 16th century through Elis Gruffyd. Irrespectively, it is interesting to note various scholars' agrees that: -

"The bards were the custodians of historical records in which these were embodied; that is to say the verse orally preserved"

Lewis C, 'Historical Background of Early Welsh Verse' in Jarman A. O.H and Hughes G,

A guide to Welsh Literature, Vol. I, Cardiff 1992 2nd edition pp. 18-19

This could indicate that although the Cad Goddeu, was not in its written and recorded form, in the 1300's, it could well exist in the oral tradition prior to or before this period. One could easily suspect outside influences might be the cause for the introduction of fferyllt specifically when the Red Book was compiled between 1375-80 AD. It to contains the brut y tywysogyon, 'The chronicle of the Princes.' Here the word fferyll is also used under the entry for the years of 1193-6 AD. It therefore would appear that fferll – fferyllt was at least in use within the vocabulary at the time

of writing the book or possibly since the late 12th century. However it cannot be presently deduced whether it holds the same definition of proceeding years.

If one takes John Davis fferyllt definition for example, did it have any effect on the community? Alternatively was fferyll held within the cognitive framework as it led to the creation of Taliesin. Whom gains a 'shining brow' when the brew was really intended to lighten the utter darkness of Ceridwen's son. The literature of the Mabinogion hints at an obscure ceremony dealing with making 'fferyllt' or fferyllt via botony. Yet it doesn't describe its ingredients but hints towards the process of alchemy, the forerunner to chemistry. But we have seen the compiler of the Ceridwen story could have contributed this in the 1300's. Although the tale is centred on Llyn Tegid, the present day location being Bala Lake the early Christian Church also knew of the lake importance along with that of the River Dee. During the 6th century it held similar reverence as Rev Owen Morgan, when discussing Abbot Dunawd, is said to have: -

"ordered an army to drink the sacred water of the Dee,  
in memory of the blood of Jesus and kiss the earth in  
memory of his body."

Morgan O, The Light of Britannia, Cardiff 1893 p. 415

Abbot Dunawd is credited from various sources, including Bede, for founding the monastic site and school at Bangor-Is-Coed, which is situated on the river course in Flintshire. The river importance to an associated river goddess from a pre-Christian period by the Romans, which has, or appears to be supplemented into the Church era. The recording of the local tradition preserved in its oral form concerning Llyn Tegid held a continual importance within the mindset of the inhabitants. Whether the folklore dealing with Ceridwen was also present in its oral form prior to the Roman period of occupation remains speculative.

Irrespectively is fferyll correct, when viewed as alchemy? Alchemy has been considered to be the transformation of a material substance from one state into another. For example joining tin and copper together will produce bronze metal alternatively joining plant essences together in another form. The preparation is dealing with a transition of combining herbs for medicinal purposes in early medicine. It too reaches into the use of various other natural materials. The process can be traced into the past and antiquity. Transforming herbs in early medicinal forms have been found in monastic archaeological context from the early part of the medieval period. Alternatively the process of mixing natural herbs reaches back to

the 3rd millennium BC to the Neolithic period, in the archaeology record. One might take the presumption that together, there is a form of involvement relating to fferyllt or fferll, alchemy/chemistry when using the definitions from the 16th century. Overall its a practice which suggests it is culturally defined and used worldwide spanning many civilizations. While modern cosmologists equated the commencement of the universe through the Big Bang, a chemical action which creates a transformation via chemistry, and the appearance of light.

Alternatively the use of herbs suggests a medicinal effect on the human biological state, and contributes towards relieving illness or pain. In Ceridwen case it was to produce a few drops of concentrated essence of "inspiration," a magical act in itself, having followed the instructions in the Book of Pheryllt, fferyllt or fferyll. Indeed one might attribute the title of a magician to her. That is, perhaps without the knowledge and understanding available in the 21st century concerning chemistry. If the cause is not understood on how the state of transformation is reached, it logically stands, being proficient in the art of fferyllt through the various definitions, could be seen, or even proscribed to unseen mystical forces bt others. Alternatively those administering these practices would carry certain privileges within the communities. The action Ceridwen suggested caused the fferyllt and created the inspiration through alchemy, a magical and official process by the definitions presented. The collection of herbal plants, governed by the movement of the stars through the course of a chronological year. It suggests its describing a preparation in a particular manner, one that implies intent; to create a chemical transformation using plants appears to be in progress. Such a process the translators of the mabonogion agree appears to have benefited Gwion Bach, having stired the ingredients of the Cauldron. Whether the tale is indeed created by the court poets as suggested, or indeed an archaic oral memory that has continued in the area, is likely to remain speculative.

There is still the Cad Goddeu to unravel and its fferyll implication. Although Nash gives two examples of the last three lines by both Rev E Davis and Dr Owen Pughe; Only Pughe actually translate fferll to be a chemist. Yet Patrick Ford regarding this poem points out that one: -

" sees the concept of transformation and metamorphosis within such phases as, 'I am', 'I have been'. The same applies to the Lebour Gabala."

Ford P, The Poetry of Llywarch Hen, London 1974 p. 60

It too suggests that there is no 'ritual provenance'. Yet there is a tendency to indicate its 'suggestive of such bardic rites,' and later adds 'the poets were fully conscious of them.' The Cad Goddeu is a poem, which might suggest all the various implications of fferyllt or fferyll being present, when approached by this enquiry. Therefore its definition of fferyllt or fferyll is likely through additional questions concerning the poem attributed to "Taliesin the Chief Poet," becoming a hereditary title; thus producing numerous poems attributed to Taliesin when collated together. It could be suggestive that Taliesin, a title of the chief Bard had obtained Awenddion, as described by Giraldus Cambrensis in the 12th century.

Another area in which fferyll also appears, is in the laws associated with the legendary Dyvnwal Moelmund, in the term of fferylltaeth. This is later employed to denote the combination or union of three cultural positions held within society. Additionally descriptions within the Chirk Codex, an archaic law book, which forms part of the Laws credited to Hywel Dda of the southern kingdom Deheubarth; together with being a 'principle contributor' to the Red Book of Hergest. The Rev. Evan Evans an antiquarian, considers that fferyllt was split between the "Rural and Civil Arts." They were known as the rural art of 'saerniaeth' in which the fferyllt worked. It too applied to the civil arts through the medium of 'gwyddoniaeth'. The operatives appear to be known as 'fferyllt workers' within both mediums. They undertook work jointly for the purpose of the community, basically they are the 'pont bren' the 'royal bridge' builders. Alternatively they were the sovereign bridge makers creating the world in which the sovereign leader resided. The gwyddoniaeth fferyllt basically guided the sovereign; the King accordingly passed his judgements that formed the archaic laws. It further illustrates those who held 'fferyllt' were looked upon as an important member of the community, where their services, were regarded as necessary by the archaic laws of the kingdom.

Yet there also appears to be a material world of existence undertaken by the fferylltaeth, performed within the saerniaeth and gwyddoniaeth. They provided and brought forth life, a product of the mechanics of community survival, under the sovereign or king rulership. Whether engaged in the rural or civil arts, they all changed material forms from one state into another. Principally for the community's existence, it benefits the country its regional and its sovereign kingdom.

This then leads towards some form of conclusion of this enquiry on "Pheryllt", does it exist, this tends to indicate a suggestion it could. Yet it is held within the correct spelling of fferyllt and fferyll. First it is seen within the myth through Ceridwen translating fferyllt to produce the inspiration through the observance of its "book." Secondly this observance takes Gwion into a transmigration or reincarnation mode. To be reborn as Taliesin as he later became known. Alternatively a new child, after

experiencing nine months of darkness is born into the light. In actual fact it could be suggesting to be revealing a form of creation myth that brought forth life. Alternatively it could suggest it is a reworking of a familiar story known in the 1300's, which has been adapted. If indeed these tales were created then.

Therefore what is this "Spell of Making," cited within the 21 Lessons of Merlin? Does it include a further regional spelling of fferyllt or even earlier fferll, used within the compound word on the first line? Perhaps both words could rank as regional variations with similar definition. This then theoretically is using the definition cited from 1632, it could allow itself to be understood, therefore this spell has been cited as: -

" A elfyntodd dwyr sinddyn duw cerrig yr fferllurig nwyn;

Os syriaeth ech saffaer tu fewr echlyn mor, necrombor llun."

Munroe, 21 Lesson of Merlin (Llywelyn 1993)

Where fferll could in fact be translated within any of the following forms; fferyll; fferyllt or its possible Anglicisation of pheryllt. Therefore the question must be asked; is the spell indeed a 'pont bren' for the Ancient Britons, indeed is it relative to the linguistically classified branches defined as Celtic.

To unravel it towards a translation the following will occur, once the Latin word of necrombor is recognized. The Latin probably dates the written recording to c. 1500's. However this is not conclusive, as there were proficient scribes in Latin within Wales since circa 1100's. Alternatively other surviving manuscripts also testify to this. It neither verify the written use of fferll or whether it is indeed an earlier form of fferyll, developing to fferyllt. It does not unravel whether the suggested definition was in use before 1632. Yet it suggests that such understanding could be there, both within its early texts and even within its oral form.

To arrive at this translation, it has involved considerations noted by previous academics of copyist faults found in manuscripts. Inclusive of the translation of poetic shortened obsolete words, a process recorded by past antiquarians, enables a poet to speak in an elegant hypnotic rhythm. Alternatively, a poetic metric within its various definitions and forms becomes a song which fills the air, sang upon Cadra Idris, and a fulfilment to the universe. Therefore the suggested translation proposed:-

"Hast thou Universe / world dissolved two shares of alms deity Stone,

receiving elder alchemy / magical / official gases;



If stars speak of saffron, large regions of (the) lake, as evoking thy image."

Trans 2001

The spell of making through its translation does not necessarily suggest it's a "spell of making". In fact it could be suggesting it is a personal invocation, one that is calling for a transition. A transformation considered unknown unless the process of fferyllt defined as alchemy; a magician or an artificer is known. Such knowledge could well be contained within the understanding of fferylltaeth. These were the arts known as either 'saerniaeth' or 'gwyddoniaeth', which appear and suggest they were the material keepers of the fferyll. Consequently at present, no written book or indeed a medieval manuscript is to be uncovered titled the "Book of Pheryllt". Alternatively, it could be much simpler than these previous implications noted. A state of simply being human, individually progressing through the various stages from birth, childhood, to maturity, and to an elder. Thus each stage contributes towards its immediate community well being, while travelling through a material life; a continual movement towards pheryllt, fferyllt, fferyll or even the fferllurig could become part of life itself.

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