

Cyntefin Ceinaf Amser / Sadness in Springtime

Welsh text (with modernized spelling), mostly from Gwyn Thomas, *Y Traddodiad Barddol* (Caerdydd, 1976), pp.106–7, alongside Tony Conran's translation (*Welsh Verse*, p. 136) of stanzas 1–3, quoted in Johnston, *Literature of Wales*, and my own thereafter (with reference to Marged Haycock's edition¹).

Cyntefin, ceinaf amser!
Dyar adar, glas called,
Erydr yn rych, ych yng ngwedd,
Gwyrdd môr, brithotor tired.

Month of May, loveliest season,
The birds loud, the growth green,
Plough in furrow, ox in yoke,
Green sea, land cut dapple.

Ban ganont gogau ar flaen gwŷdd gwiw
Handid mwy fy llawfrydedd —
Tost mwg, amlwg anhunedd —
Gan ethynt fy ngheraint yn adwedd.

In the fine treetops when cuckoos sing,
My sadness is greater:
Smoke smart, manifest sleep-lack
For my kinsfolk gone to rest.

Ym mryn, yn nhyno, yn ynysedd môr,
ym mhob ffordd ydd eler,
Rhag Crist gwyn nid oes anialed.

In hill, in dale, in isles of the sea,
Wheresoever one may go,
From blest Christ there's no escaping.

Oedd ein chwant (ein câr) ein trosedd
Treiddaw ddi dir dy alltudedd.
Saith saint a saithugaint a seithgant
A want yn un orsedd:
I gyd â Crist gwyn, ni phorthynt-wy) fygyled.

Our desire – our friend – our feat
[would be to] attain the land of Your 'exile'.
Seven, seven times twenty, and seven hundred saints
went in one assembly:
in the company of holy Christ, they did not suffer fear.

Rheg a archaf-i, ni'm nacer:
Yrhof â Duw, dangnofedd.
A'm bo ffordd i borth rhiedd;
Grist, ni bwyf i drist i'th orsedd.

I request a gift, let me not be refused:
[namely] peace between myself and God.
And that there be a path for me to the gate of glory;
Christ, let me not be sad in Your assembly.

- Why is the poet sad, having admired the beauties of Maytime and on hearing the cuckoo's voice?
- Is there something inherently sad about the sound of a cuckoo? (Not in the Irish 'May-Day' poem!)
- Or is it because his surroundings are so beautiful, with nature flourishing and human life going on in the form of ploughing, and yet his friends are gone?
- Is the fact that the cuckoo is a transitory visitor also reminding him of their loss?
- Is the poet, or the speaker of the poem, comforted or disquieted by the idea that Christ is everywhere?
- Is the land of Christ's 'exile' (*alltudedd*, in the fourth stanza) the Holy Land, i.e. the place on earth to which Christ was 'exiled' at His birth? Or is it Heaven, where He went when He died? Is the poet thinking of pilgrimage, or death and salvation?

A general hint:

Even if you are not (yet!) a fluent Welsh speaker, now and then you might like to look up significant or problematic words like *alltudedd* in the University of Wales's historical dictionary, *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* < <http://geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html> >. You can change the interface language from Welsh to English by clicking the link on the top right, and if you hover over the various abbreviations they should expand ('fig.' = 'figurative' is one you will see a lot!). It cites historical examples showing usage over the centuries.

Likewise, for Irish texts: **eDIL - Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language** < <http://edil.qub.ac.uk/> >.

¹ Marged Haycock (gol.), *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Ganu Crefyddol Cynnar* (Abertawe, 1994), poem 16. The bullet points all derive from Professor Haycock's introduction to the poem, which discusses a lively scholarly debate on these issues, involving Ifor Williams, R. Geraint Gruffydd, Jenny Rowland and Nicolas Jacobs.)

Transcription of the same poem, for comparison (i.e. text as written in the manuscript), from A.O.H. Jarman's *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Caerdydd, 1982), p. 15. Most modern editions of Welsh poetry standardize spellings according to Modern Welsh conventions (e.g. *c* rather than *k*, and *f* rather than *v*) and sometimes they make amendments where scribal errors are suspected, drawing attention to these in textual notes.

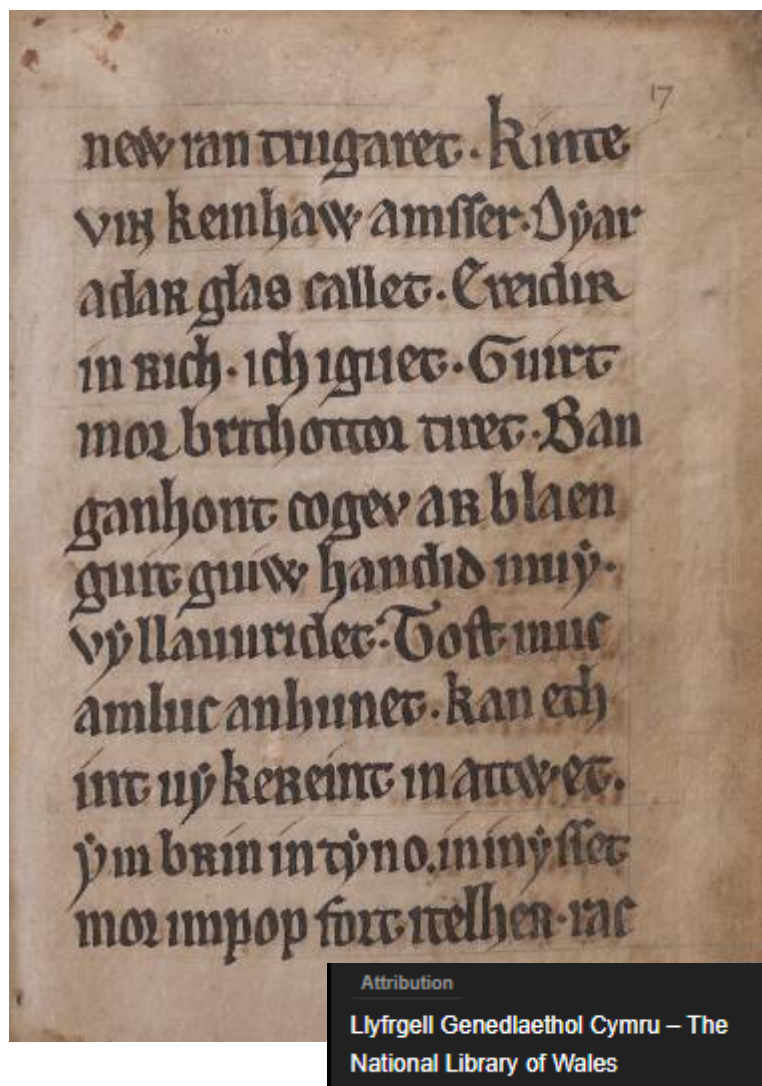
Kintevin keinhaw amsser.
Dyar adar glas callet.
Ereidir in rich. ich iguet.
Guirt mor brithottor tiret.

Ban ganhont cogeŵ ar blaen guit guiw
handid muy. vy llauridet.
Tost muc amluc anhunet.
kan ethint uy kereint in attwet.

ym brin in tyno. in inysset mor
im pop fort it elher.
rac crist guin nid oes inialet.

Oet in chuant in car in trosset treitau
ty tir dy alltudet.
Seith seint a seithugeint. a seithcant.
a want in un orsset.
Y gid a crist guin. ny forthint ve vygilet.

Rec a archaw e nim naccar.
y rof a duv. dagnouet.
Am bo forth. y porth riet.
Crist ny buv e trist yth orsset.



Attribution

Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru – The
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This is the page from the Black Book of Carmarthen containing the first part of the poem (it starts at the end of the first line on the page). This manuscript, written in the mid-thirteenth century, is 'believed to be the earliest surviving complete manuscript written in the Welsh language'. See the information on the National Library of Wales website (<http://hdl.handle.net/10107/4623419>), where you can view a digital version of the whole manuscript.

Note that this manuscript has a particularly small page-size. And not all medieval Welsh manuscripts are as beautiful or as easy to read as this!