

Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866)

## 2 *The Cauldron of Ceridwen*

The sage Ceridwen was the wife  
Of Tegid Voël, of Pemble Mere:  
Two children blest their wedded life,  
Morvran and Creirwy, fair and dear:  
Morvran, a son of peerless worth, 5  
And Creirwy, loveliest nymph of earth:  
But one more son Ceridwen bare,  
As foul as they before were fair.

She strove to make Avagddu wise;  
She knew he never could be fair: 10  
And, studying magic mysteries,  
She gathered plants of virtue rare:  
She placed the gifted plants to steep  
Within the magic cauldron deep,  
Where they a year and day must boil, 15  
Till three drops crown the matron's toil.

Nine damsels raised the mystic flame;  
Gwion the Little near it stood:  
The while for simples roved the dame  
Through tangled dell and pathless wood. 20  
And, when the year and day had past,  
The dame within the cauldron cast  
The consummating chaplet wild,  
While Gwion held the hideous child.

But from the cauldron rose a smoke 25  
That filled with darkness all the air:  
When through its folds, the torchlight broke,  
Nor Gwion, nor the boy, was there.  
The fire was dead, the cauldron cold,  
And in it lay, in sleep uprolled, 30  
Fair as the morning-star, a child,  
That woke, and stretched its arms, and smiled.

What chanced her labours to destroy,  
She never knew; and sought in vain  
If 'twere her own mis-shapen boy, 35  
Or little Gwion, born again:  
And, vexed with doubt, the babe she rolled  
In cloth of purple and of gold,  
And in a coracle consigned  
Its fortunes to the sea and wind. 40

The summer night was still and bright,  
The summer moon was large and clear,  
The frail bark, on the spring-tide's height,  
Was floated into Elphin's weir.  
The baby in his arms he raised: 45  
His lovely spouse stood by, and gazed,  
And, blessing it with gentle vow,  
Cried 'TALIESIN!' 'Radiant brow!'

And I am he: and well I know  
Ceridwen's power protects me still; 50  
And hence o'er hill and vale I go,  
And sing, unharmed, whate'er I will.  
She has for me Time's veil withdrawn:  
The images of things long gone,  
The shadows of the coming days, 55  
Are present to my visioned gaze.

And I have heard the words of power,  
By Ceirion's solitary lake,  
That bid, at midnight's thrilling hour,  
Eryri's hundred echoes wake. 60  
I to Diganwy's towers have sped,  
And now Caer Lleon's halls I tread,  
Demanding justice, now, as then,  
From Maelgon, most unjust of men.

1829

(From *The Poems of Thomas Love Peacock*. Ed. Brimley Johnson. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1907)