

The Appearance of Fairies in Necromancy:
Treatment, Uses, and Powers

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out how fairies were represented in necromancy after they began to be called on by British conjurors from the 1550s onwards. Before that, fairies only existed in folklore. This paper starts by discussing what fairies are and where they came from and determining what contemporaries thought about fairy magic in a time when any Catholic form of magic was illegal. The research begins with discerning fairy names from names of other spirits so that the two groups can be compared. The main manuscript used for research was the Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.b.26 and some additional manuscripts were used for filling in the gaps and providing supporting evidence. Descriptions of physical appearances in the Offices of Spirits – which is a list of spirit names and descriptions of what the spirits can be used for – and emotional expressions such as insults and praises in conjurations showed that fairies were held in higher regard than other spirits. Finally, a discussion of powers and uses that fairies have and other spirits do not have, indicated that fairies were a valuable addition to necromancy. Fairies could do all the things demons could do and more, but at the same time were deemed less evil.

Keywords: fairy, magic, necromancy, Oberion.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic context

In 1953 Katharine Briggs (re)discovered that fairies appeared in necromantic manuals in the late Middle Ages. In that year she wrote an article called “Some Seventeenth-Century Books of Magic”, which features fairy conjurations from *MS Ashmole 1406*. Briggs notes that the conjurations very much resemble those used for other spirits, because the fairy is treated in the same precautionous way.¹ Since then, the existence of fairies in demonic magic has been firmly established, but scholars have only started making careful assumptions during the last decade. As a result, fairy magic is still relatively under investigated with only a limited number of scholarly articles on the topic.

Frank Klaassen dedicated about half a paragraph to fairy magic in his book *Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*. He points out that fairies were conjured alongside demons by British practitioners from the mid-sixteenth century onwards and that they started to appear in necromancy manuals.² He quotes Lauren Kassell by saying that fairies in folklore simultaneously appeared to become less popular.³ “Achieving Invisibility and Having Sex with Spirits: Six Operations from an English Magic Collection ca. 1600” is an article Klaassen wrote in collaboration with Katrina Bens. They discuss *MS Sloane 3850*, a manual featuring instructions on how to have sex with a spirit after conjuring it.⁴

Daniel Harms, who has only been active for a couple of years, has already written some useful books and articles on fairy magic, which also contain modern editions of late-medieval texts. In “‘Of Fairies’ An Excerpt from a 17th Century Magical Manuscript”, a contemporary voices his ideas on fairies. Harms has made editions of the Bodleian Library MS e Mus 173 (henceforth called Bodleian manuscript) and the Folger Shakespeare Library V.b.26 (henceforth called Folger manuscript). James Clark and Joseph Peterson also contributed to these editions. Peterson is the author of the Esoteric Archives website, which hosts a great amount of information on magical manuscripts. The webpage Angel Registry is most useful to this paper, as it is an ‘Index of Angel names, magical words, and names of God,’ but it also includes names of demons and other spirits.⁵

¹ Briggs, “Seventeenth-Century Books of Magic,” 459.

² Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic*, 176.

³ Kassell, “All Was this Land Full Fill’d of Faerie.”

⁴ Klaassen and Bens, “Achieving Invisibility,” 4.

⁵ Peterson, “Index of Angel Names.”

Richard Kieckhefer states that the conceptions people had about the morality of the fairy folk differed depending on the benevolent or mischievous traits fairies decided to show. Kieckhefer's book *Magic in the Middle Ages* provides a description of the condemnation of magic which explains why fairy magic became associated with demonic rather than angelic magic. It seems that the authorities were so adamantly against most sorts of magic because of the inherent 'possibility that magic might be demonic even when it seemed innocent.'⁶

Historical background

In the Middle Ages, religious institutions distinguished between black and white magic. Black magic was illegal because it could only be used for malevolent purposes, while white magic could only be used for good.⁷ Theurgic or angelic magic was also a form of white magic, which meant that magicians could conjure up angels to do their bidding. Both types of magic involved invoking God and the Saints to make the conjuration more convincing. This meant that both types of magic contained Catholic elements, which became a problem when Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1534.⁸ Over the following decades, Protestantism – which did not allow the glorification of Saints – became more popular in the British Isles, and Catholicism started to be repressed. In 1563, Elizabeth I eventually banned all magical incantations after a Catholic plot was discovered to determine the date on which she would die.⁹ In practice there were only few punishments as everyday rituals were allowed to remain, and there was a reluctance to use methods of torture like those in the Inquisition on the continent. As Kassell said, by this time accounts of fairies in daily life became less attested, reportedly because recent innovations such as the printing press and gunpowder had scared them away.¹⁰ Curiously, while magic was illegal and people stopped believing in witchcraft, magic still became an interesting topic for discussions at the highest levels of society.¹¹ Improved education gave rise to new writers and thereby more works on magic, such as Walter Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* in 1584.¹² The Elizabethan fascination with fairies resulted in more literature on fairy magic and started discussions about how fairies could be incorporated into necromancy. It is around this time that most magical manuscripts

⁶ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 181-182.

⁷ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 81.

⁸ Harms, Clark and Peterson, *The Book of Oberon*, 3.

⁹ Harms, Clark and Peterson, *The Book of Oberon*, 4.

¹⁰ Kassell, "All Was this Land Full Fill'd of Faerie," 121-122.

¹¹ Harms, Clark and Peterson, *The Book of Oberon*, 4-5.

¹² Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, 6.

containing rituals for fairies are written. From the 1590s onwards, writers such as Shakespeare and Marlowe began to include fairies in their stories.¹³

Research statement

The main question on which I will base my research is: How are fairies represented in necromantic manuals such as the Folger manuscript? Sub questions are: How were fairies portrayed and were they treated differently than other spirits in conjurations? What powers did fairies have in necromancy and what were they used for?

My hypothesis is that fairies were conjured in the same way as demons. The use of fairy magic was relatively new in the mid-sixteenth century, and it had to be incorporated into the existing practise somehow. Magicians decided to merge them into demonic magic rather than theurgic magic, because the mischievous personality characteristic of fairies meant that they could not be called absolutely good. Fairies in folklore often are blamed for any minor accident and love playing tricks on people. Keeping this in mind, they probably will not possess great powers, so they can only be conjured for small errands. Nature-related errands are most likely, as fairies are creatures that supposedly live in the hills.

Relevance within field of research

Studying fairy magic has helped me learn more about how fairies appeared in necromantic rituals. Explaining the incorporation of fairy magic into necromancy might inspire readers to do more research on fairies, fairy magic, or magic in general. As mentioned before, fairy magic is still relatively under investigated. An explanation for this could be the fact that many of the primary sources have not been converted to modern editions yet. My eventual thesis will include edited excerpts from several manuscripts that contain fairy conjurations. The edited excerpts will be beneficial to the field because more editions of magical texts will promote further research. My research will not be groundbreaking, but it will help progress in the field and provide more insight into the existence and use of fairy magic.

Thesis structure

The academic and historical context has already been discussed in the Introduction. The first chapter will serve as the theoretical framework and will be used to further explain

¹³ Harms, Clark and Peterson, *The Book of Oberon*, 5-6.

some more substantive subjects, such as necromantic conjurations, what fairies are, and where they came from.

The second chapter will contain my research and the discussion of the sources. I will predominantly use the Folger manuscript and any other manuscripts as necessary. The chapter will be divided into sections which will each discuss a different aspect of my research. The sections will be introduced, excerpts from the manuscripts will be given to illustrate my point, and then these excerpts will be discussed and speculated upon.

In the conclusion I will combine all of the sections into one coherent conclusion. I will revisit my hypothesis and reflect on my research.

Editorial procedure

The text has been converted to running text, but folio numbers are maintained for referencing. Corrections in the manuscript have been left out of the edition. Abbreviations are expanded in italics. Latin words are explained in the footnotes or in discussions in the text. Plural ρ has invariably been expanded as *-es* and β has been changed into *and*. *.N.* has been replaced by [Nomen], indicating that the word has to be substituted by the name of the spirit addressed during the conjuration. The interchangeable *u* and *v*, and *i* and *j* have been adapted befitting their function as either vowel or consonant, and *y* has been replaced by *th* where this was the intended meaning. The definite article and the pronoun *thee* have not been distinguished but appear as they did in the manuscript. Punctuation and capitalisation have been modernised, the virgule (/) replaced by a comma in most cases and a full stop when this was more suitable. Capitals are maintained at the beginning of the sentence but turned into lowercase elsewhere. Varying word spellings have not been standardised so words appear in their original form.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conjurations in necromancy

In order to understand how fairies appear in necromancy, it might be helpful to understand what necromancy is. It literally means ‘divination (*mantia*) by conjuring the spirits of the dead (*nekroi*).’¹⁴ Over time it also became used to refer to the conjuring of demons, which resulted in necromancy being titled as black, demonic magic.

Let us briefly look at how conjurations are built up. Richard Kieckhefer’s *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* provides a great amount of information on conjurations. According to him conjurations are generally made up of four elements that can be found in nearly every conjuration: the declaration, the address, the series of invocations, and the instruction.¹⁵ These are all important in their own way. The declaration signifies that the intention of the conjuration is to order someone to do something. It introduces the conjuration with phrases such as ‘I conjure’, ‘I adjure’ and ‘I exorcise’, all synonyms of ‘to command’.¹⁶ The address is the person or thing the conjuror is seeking to rule over. Generally speaking the address looks like ‘I conjure you, O [Nomen]’, where [Nomen] is replaced by the name of the spirit.¹⁷ The invocations name the entities that the conjuror draws power from to threaten the spirit into submission: ‘by the holy names of God, etc’. The invoked entities can be God, sacred names for God or Christ, events from the life of Christ, the saints, the Virgin Mary, the angels, material creatures, the Last Judgement, the rulers of the demons, and many more.¹⁸ Finally, the instruction section of the conjuration is often introduced by ‘that’ and serves to instruct the spirit on what it is that he is expected to do.¹⁹

Fairies in folklore

Fairies have been part of British culture for as long as people can remember. Christiansen names the supernatural a ready-to-go-to answer for all ‘questions of untimely deaths of young people, of mysterious epidemics among cattle, of climatic disasters, of both

¹⁴ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 152.

¹⁵ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 127.

¹⁶ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 127.

¹⁷ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 133.

¹⁸ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 134.

¹⁹ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 141.

wasting diseases and strokes, of infantile paralysis and the birth of mongol and otherwise deficient children.’²⁰ Folklore and superstitions have been passed on from generation to generation. The stories have changed quite a bit over time, so it is not always clear how modern-day beliefs once came into being. I will name the most relevant theories on the origin of fairies so that we will have a clear understanding of what kind of creatures fairies actually were and how they came to be, according to the people who believed in them. This will be useful to know before we move on to discussing the opinions that people had about fairies.

There are many theories about the origins of fairies. By the end of the Middle Ages, by far the most popular theory among the educated people in the British Isles, both clergymen and laymen, is that the fairies originally were fallen angels.²¹ The theory had most likely been created by the Church when Christianity was introduced there, because heathens would be more inclined to convert if their own beliefs were acknowledged and incorporated into the religion. The story goes that Lucifer rebelled against God because he was jealous of the humans, and that he was cast out of Heaven for this disobedience.²² On his way out, Lucifer enchanted many innocent angels to follow him. God noticed that Heaven was rapidly thinning out and quickly closed the gates of Heaven. The angels that were still in Heaven recovered, but ‘those who were already descending stopped in their tracks, some in the sky, some in the sea, some on mountains and in woods, some further on their way towards Hell, in bowels of the earth, and the foremost angels, wholly committed to evil, in the burning lake.’²³ These latter angels became the real devils, whereas all the angels that stopped somewhere halfway in their fall became the intermediary creatures. Later these became the fairies of the air, streams, forests, etc. This theory explains why fairies were included in demonic magic rather than in theurgic magic. As is mentioned in the Introduction, magic in the Middle Ages was divided in black and white magic. Any type of magic that fell in between or contained even the slightest hint of demonic contact was condemned as black magic and was therefore illegal.²⁴

In Scandinavia the people adhere to a different theory, though a watered-down version of the story can also be found in Wales.²⁵ It is believed here that fairies had originated from the hidden children of Eve. Adam and Eve had many children after they had been thrown out of Paradise. There were so many that Eve was ashamed of them and of how dirty they were.

²⁰ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 28.

²¹ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 143.

²² Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 30.

²³ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 30.

²⁴ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 80-81.

²⁵ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 147.

When one day God asked Eve to present her children to Him, she did not have the time to wash them all and only presented half of them. But God knew that she was hiding the other half, and told her: ‘Let those who were hidden from me, [...] be hidden from all Mankind.’²⁶ These children who were hidden in the woods, among the rocks and by the streams came to be known as “the Huldre”, or, “the hidden people”. In a different version of the theory the children were those of Adam’s first wife, Lilith, rather than those of Eve. Lilith left Paradise because she refused to be subservient to Adam, and is said to then have had children with the archangel Samael.²⁷ According to this version then, fairies are half human and half angel.

A third theory involves the burial sites of prehistoric people. Modern excavations have indicated that the people buried in these places were of a regular size, but back then people thought that the burial hills were the homes of rather dwarfish people, because the hills were so small. David MacRitchie even suggests that the tales stem from a time when this race of people was still alive. ‘[They] used flint arrows, had much knowledge of the hidden parts in their country and were credited with power over weather and other magical skills.’²⁸ To support this claim, Briggs mentions a folktale called Sanntraigh, which was about an argument over a kettle with a woman from this dwarfish tribe. The British woman from whose point of view the story is told was probably afraid of her because they did not understand each other’s habits. When at one point in the story the kettle started bouncing up and down, this unusual activity was attributed to the strange woman from the dwarfish tribe. There are some aspects of this theory that are in line with properties of fairies in both folklore and necromancy, such as their size and their knowledge of hidden parts.

A fourth theory is that fairies are derived from the ancient gods. When the British Isles were converted to Christianity, the pagan religion became illegal. All of the heathen gods and nature spirits the people used to believe in were considered devils by the Church from that moment onwards. In the same way that the ancient Irish gods became fairies in Ireland, so too did ‘the lesser deities, nymphs, fauns, satyrs and so on’ in Greek and Roman cultures.²⁹ The French fairies derived from the Fata, the three goddesses who were said to weave everyone’s fate together. Later they became the fairy godmothers who even visited christenings to bestow gifts or put curses on the newborn child that would shape its character and determine its future life.³⁰ These ‘fays’ were brought to England in medieval times when French romances

²⁶ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 31.

²⁷ Kvam et al., *Eve and Adam*, 220-221.

²⁸ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 33.

²⁹ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 10.

³⁰ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 37.

became immensely popular there. But fairies in England were already known to be relatively malignant spirits, and the word 'fai-ery' eventually came to be used to 'convey the idea of a malignant disease of spiritual origin which could be cured only by charming or exorcism.'³¹ Some folklorists, however, believe that the ancient gods were deified ancestors.

This brings us to the fifth and last theory that we will discuss here, which is that fairies are in some way or another connected to the dead. This theory is well-represented in folklore and can therefore be said to be most popular among the common people, especially those living in small villages with plenty of nature around them to enforce superstitions in the form of fairy hills, lochs and marshes. In some parts of Britain, people referred to fairies as 'spirits', which makes it likely that fairies were considered to be ghosts by these people.³² In *Folktales of England* Briggs includes many stories starring the deceased among fairies. In the stories, a person living with the fairies is often recognised because they have died only recently and were known by the human visitor, or they died a famous death a long time ago and were still remembered. Curiously, those who died eventually start haunting places themselves, as many mischievous domestic spirits such as brownies and hobgoblins were said to be ghosts of people who used to live there.³³ That being said, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between actual fairies and the spirits of people who have lived with them for a long time. As a result people drew their own conclusions as to whether fairies were the captors and guardians of the dead or whether they were the dead themselves. Even then, they would not be just the regular kind of dead, but those who died under special circumstances: murdered, perhaps, or someone who died after being cursed, someone who was killed by supernatural beings such as water-horses or mermaids, or simply someone who still had unfinished business when they died.³⁴ Will o' the Wisps, tiny balls of light that mislead travellers into marshes at night, are often said to be the ghosts of people who have hidden a treasure, and the traveller would be led straight to it if they followed the light.³⁵ An elderly man whose account is recorded in *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature* believed 'that the fairies were those killed before their time, who had to live in Fairyland till their allotted time of death.'³⁶ Pisgies, for example, tiny white moths especially active in the evenings, are said to be the souls of stillborn and unbaptized children.³⁷ Fairies were generally

³¹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 607.

³² Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 141-142.

³³ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 52.

³⁴ Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, 117.

³⁵ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 52.

³⁶ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 141-142.

³⁷ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 52.

small, ranging from the size of insects to just under the average human length. Because of that, it was fairly easy to think of them as human souls, bearing in mind that a soul was often considered ‘a miniature form of the man which came out of his mouth in sleep or trance.’³⁸

While the preceding theories only mention possible origins of fairies of which no aspects can be seen to return in everyday folklore, this last theory also provides a framework of beliefs in ghosts that much of the country’s folktales are based on. Of course, the fallen angel theory is the most relevant theory with regard to necromancy, because the educated clergymen that often were the writers of necromantic manuals believed in that theory. But where the fallen angel theory fails to provide information on fairy nature, scribes of magical manuscripts will naturally look to folklore for inspiration.

Witch hunts

As we have seen, many people believed in fairies in the Middle Ages, but expressing their faith was not without danger. Back then, nearly everyone was religious and the Church considered fairies to be devils. As Briggs formulates it: ‘fairy-lore was near to heresy, and it was unwise to exhibit too much knowledge of the fairies.’³⁹ Witch-hunts were popular at the time, so the slightest suspicion could lead to a human scapegoat burning at the stake. But that did not stop people from passing folklore on from generation to generation and whispering about fairies whenever something inexplicable happened. On the contrary, suspected witches all-too readily confessed to dancing and flying with them. Sir Walter Scott suggests that the witches had maybe hoped that claiming to be acquainted with fairies ‘would be more leniently treated than a pact with the devil himself.’⁴⁰ It probably did not make much of a difference. As intermediary creatures, fairies were classified as belonging to demonic magic, and traffic with them would likely be punished as such. Answering this question would require research into witch trials, which I do not have the time nor space for in this thesis. Let us assume for now that dealing in the dark arts was illegal regardless of whether the spirits that were conjured were fairies or demons.

³⁸ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 37.

³⁹ Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, 6.

⁴⁰ Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, 19.

Fairy morality

Fairy morality is up for discussion, though. Edward Bever says that the inhabitants of the fairy world are ‘morally ambiguous, capable of doing either good or bad depending on circumstances’.⁴¹ In folklore this can be seen by the gifts of good and bad luck that fairies bestow on their human acquaintances when the humans’ behaviour pleased them or left something to be desired, respectively.⁴² Fairies were often called ‘Good People’ ‘from the anxious courtesy of fear’ rather than because they deserved this compliment.⁴³ In necromantic rituals the morality of the fairy depended on the magician’s intentions. Like all other spirits, fairies were commanded to do the magician’s bidding regardless of whether his intentions were good or bad. The practice of invoking God and other heavenly powers to coerce the spirit into submission because the spirit was supposedly frightened by these entities suggests that fairies were considered to be directly opposed to Christianity. As we will see, however, their treatment in the Folger manuscript might prove differently.

The Elizabethan situation

Before 1500, conjurations were only used to call on angels, demons, and spirits of the dead. But from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, fairies began to be called upon as well.⁴⁴ At the same time the number of accounts of fairy sightings dwindled. Contemporaries complained that recent inventions such as the printing press and gunpowder had chased them away by bringing ‘wars, [...] liberty of conscience and liberty of inquisition.’⁴⁵ Though they may have been absent from daily life, fairies still proved to be an excellent source of entertainment. Elizabethan writers such as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Edmund Spenser were fascinated with the supernatural and included fairies in some of their works. In spite of the religious controversies of the time, magic became a popular topic of discussion among the higher levels of society, including the court of Queen Elizabeth I.⁴⁶ Among the things that would have been discussed is the question of how fairy magic could be connected to ritual magic.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 94.

⁴² Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 154.

⁴³ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 154.

⁴⁴ Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic*, 176.

⁴⁵ Kassell, “All Was this Land Full Fill’d of Faerie,” 121-122.

⁴⁶ Harms, Clark and Peterson, *The Book of Oberon*, 5-6.

⁴⁷ Klaassen and Bens, “Achieving Invisibility,” 6.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

TREATMENT OF FAIRIES

Fairy names

In order to find out how fairies were treated we must first know which of the spirits mentioned in necromantic manuals were fairies. They generally did not go by the same names that they were known by in folklore. As a result, the incorporation of fairies into ritual magic is difficult to track. They were quietly included in the already existing body of spirits, and few writers bothered to make a distinction between fairies and other spirits. One way of knowing which spirits are fairies is to compare necromantic manuals from the middle ages and from the renaissance. Most manuals contain a section called the Offices of Spirits, which lists the spirits that can be conjured, identifies what office – or spirit group – they belong to, and sometimes even includes a description of their uses and appearance. Any names that occur in the renaissance manuscripts which are absent from the medieval manuscripts could possibly be fairy names. I say possibly, because the scribes that wrote them are known to have made mistakes, such as misspelling names and thereby creating additional spirits, skipping a name during the copying process, or adding a name that they came across in another text.⁴⁸ As a result, magical texts are very unstable and often exist in many varieties. In most Offices, however, all of the spirits that are named are kings and other rulers, of which for each king it is mentioned how many legions he has under his command. Any common spirits and thereby also any common fairies are unlikely to appear on this list, because they remain nameless in these legions. A spirit named in the Offices that we can be sure is a fairy is a spirit called Oberion. We know this because he appeared in epics and fairytales long before he became famous as Oberon, the king of the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁴⁹ He is also explicitly called 'king of the fairies' in some manuscripts on magic, such as the Folger manuscript.⁵⁰ Oberion is not the only fairy identified here: Mycob is listed as queen of the fairies on the following page, and there are 7 fairy sisters identified: Lillia, Restillia, Fata, Falla, Africa, Julia, and Venalla, though their exact names often vary.⁵¹ In a recipe for a magical ointment, the manuscript also names Sibilia as the empress or princess of all fairies, and her servants Julia, Hodelfa, Ivafula, Sedamilia, Roavian, Segamexe, and Delforia, of

⁴⁸ Harms et al, *The Book of Oberon*, 17.

⁴⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 609.

⁵⁰ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 80.

⁵¹ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 81.

which the latter is also called an empress at some point.⁵² Sloane 1727 further lists the names Florella, Micol, which could be a variant of Mycob, Tytan, which could be a variant of Shakespeare's queen of the fairies Titania, and Mabb, 'lady to the quene'.⁵³ It appears that mostly fairy royalty is awarded the distinction of being called a fairy, and that the common fairy is quite indistinguishable from the other spirits. It is true that Oberion and his queens are often not identified as fairies either, but taking into account that there are multiple queens and therefore multiple hierarchies, the scarcity of common fairy names in conjurations – such as Elaby Gathen, Margaret Barrance, and the seven sisters and servants – must mean that there is a whole legion of common fairies that is not identified as a fairy or even mentioned by name at all.⁵⁴ This makes finding fairy conjurations a difficult task, because any conjuration for any kind of spirit could be a fairy conjuration when it is unclear to what office the spirit belongs. There is, however, another way to determine whether a spirit is a fairy. Oberion appears in quite a few conjurations, and he is often not the only spirit being invoked. Sometimes the conjuror calls upon his counsellors to persuade Oberion to appear:

I conjure *and* adjure you o Storax, Carmelion, Caberyon, Severion, *and* nowe I call you all together *and* commande you to goe nowe *and* that without delaye to Oberyon whose speakinge with I desiere.⁵⁵

It can be assumed that any spirit who answers to Oberion belongs to the same group, which would mean that Storax, Carmelion, Caberion and Severion are all fairies. This is where it becomes confusing. In another conjuration, the conjuror calls upon a group of different spirits to do the same thing:

I conjure you [...] Tantavalerion, vel Golgathell, emperour of all spirites *and* you 7 senatours, Orymell, Tygra, Danall, Salarica, Asmoo, Pastarie, *and* Boell, *and* you 4 kinges Orience, Paymon, Amaymon, *and* Egin, and you Temell vel Semell, Alphassis, Emlon Rodobell, *and* all others.⁵⁶

These spirits also answer to Oberion, but they certainly are not all fairies. Oriens, Paymon, Amaymon and Egin are the demon kings of the four cardinal directions, and names ending on –el, which in Hebrew means 'of God', usually belong to angels.⁵⁷ It must be noted that these names could also belong to fallen angels, so an –el suffix does not automatically entail that

⁵² Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 139.

⁵³ British Museum MS Sloane 1727, 37.

⁵⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole MS 1406, 50v-51v.

⁵⁵ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 195.

⁵⁶ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 116.

⁵⁷ Dr. Sándor Chardonnens, discussion with author, May 29, 2019.

the angel is a good one. There is no way of knowing for certain whether all of the remaining names belong to fairies, because fairies are apparently invoked in close proximity to (fallen) angels and demons. Rather than a black-and-white distinction, there seems to have been a spectrum of malicious spirits. But as the suffix –el can help us classify spirits, so too can the suffix –ion. Four out of five of the male fairy names we have thus far identified possess the suffix, so it is safe to say that there is a pattern. A quick search in the angel and spirit names registry on the Esoteric Archives shows that 149 out of 17582 names contain –ion, perhaps a bit less due to double entries with different spellings.⁵⁸ All of these names could possibly belong to fairies, but it would take some time to find out whether or not they do. In the conjuration mentioned above, Tantavalerion could also be a fairy name, were it not for the fact that it is directly followed by ‘vel Golgathell’. Vel in Latin means ‘or’, so the spirit in effect goes by two names, one of which might be an angel name because of its –el suffix. There are a couple of possible explanations for this varied collection of spirit names. It could be that writers of necromantic manuals were as unsure about to which offices spirits belonged as we are today, but it could also mean that it did not matter all that much to which office a spirit belonged, as long as it did what was required of it. Finally, the spirits could have been collected in one conjuration because of a different reason. Rather than taking care to not mix spirits from different offices, the writer decided to put these names together because they belonged to the most powerful spirits available: Tantavalerion, the emperor of all spirits, his seven senators, and of course the four demon kings. If any spirit should be able to convince Oberion to appear to the magician, these spirits should.

Physical appearance

The description and portrayal of spirits in manuscripts can provide us with new insights into how fairies were perceived in the Elizabethan era. The ancient art of physiognomy, which is the practice of judging someone’s character by their appearance, had been very popular until Henry VIII ordered beggars who practiced it to be punished in 1530.⁵⁹ But the art itself had not been made illegal, so people continued to quietly judge books by their covers. As such, writers of necromantic manuscripts expressed their contempt towards spirits by describing them as hideous as they thought was appropriate. If we look at the Offices of Spirits in the Folger manuscript, we can see that some spirits are given pretty horrific descriptions, which is common for demons:

⁵⁸ Peterson, “Index of Angel Names.”

⁵⁹ Stimson, “Popular Law-making,” 82.

Mosacus appeareth in the forme of a giant with the snowte of an elephant, fiery eyes, havinge 2 heades in his brest. The head one the right brest a doges head *and* one the left brest the head of an asse. *And* in the middest of his 2 armes, one every arme the heade of 2 bloode houndes. [...] He hath 2 eyes in the middest of his belly *and* at his knees the heades of 2 blood hounds. His hands *and* feete like the feete of a goosse, but beinge commaunded he appeareth like a child with a red head.⁶⁰

The larger part of the kings, though, is described as being majestic rather than gruesome. Some appear as angels, some as soldiers, but most appear in hybrid form, such as winged dogs or men with lion's heads.⁶¹ Compared to them, the description given of Oberion is quite plain: 'Oberyon Rex he appeareth like a kinge with a crowne one his heade. He is under the governmente of the [sun] *and* [moon]. [...] He is a great *and* mighty kinge *and* he is kinge of the fairies.'⁶² The scribe could intentionally have left out any vivid descriptions because he thought that Oberion was not as evil as he was made out to be. The editor, Daniel Harms, calls the Folger manuscript *The Book of Oberion* (BoO), because there are so many conjurations and fairy-related recipes included.⁶³ If the scribe was interested enough in Oberion to dedicate almost an entire book to him, he must have had at least some fascination for the fairy. However, the lack of any – horrific or otherwise – descriptions could also be explained by the relative newness of fairies to the world of necromancy. The use of fairies in necromancy was not naturalised yet, so any fairy conjurations are often limited to conjurations of Oberion. Because other spirits had been described in offices of spirits for centuries, their descriptions could easily be copied from other manuscripts. Perhaps there was no information for Oberion yet, and the scribe intended to add a description when he succeeded in conjuring him and had a sense of what Oberion looked like. The manuscript clearly shows that there was a large space left blank between the description for Oberion and the next entry, but which was later filled in by another scribe in a different hand and ink colour (fig. 1). If the first scribe did intend to include a description, he either forgot or Oberion never showed up at all.

⁶⁰ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 80.

⁶¹ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 76.

⁶² Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 80.

⁶³ Harms, Clark and Peterson, *The Book of Oberon*, 2.

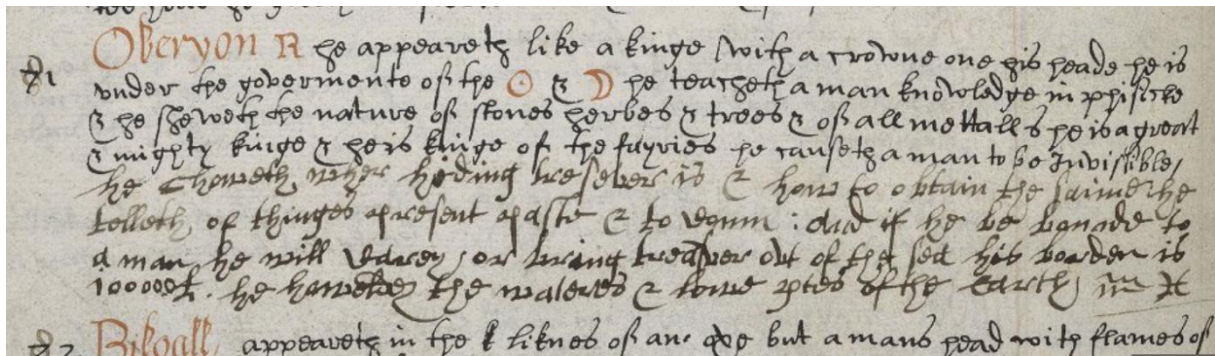


Figure 1: Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, fol.80.

Curiously, despite the lack of a physical description in the Offices of Spirits, the same manuscript does feature drawings of Oberion and several other spirits later on. The drawings in figures 2, 3 and 4 are all of Oberion, and they are quite flattering, all things considered. The facial and bodily deformities are common in manuscripts that were illustrated by the same person who wrote it. That is likely to have been the case for this manuscript, because professional illustrators might tip off the authorities about illegal dealings in witchcraft. The scribe probably found some examples in other books and decided to try copying them himself.⁶⁴ He could have chosen to make three drawings because he was not sure yet what Oberion would look like, or he wanted to focus on different aspects of the spirit. In the first drawing he depicted Oberion as a ghost, which makes sense as fairies are believed to be spirits. In the second drawing Oberion is portrayed as a king with a mighty sword, and in the third as a soldier in chainmail. This suggests that, like all other kings in the Offices, Oberion is supposed to have an army under his command, but there is no mention made of numbers of legions under him in his description in the Offices.

The fourth drawing that I have included here, however, belongs to Mosacus (fig. 4). Compared to him, Oberion looks a good deal less horrific even with his imagined supernatural characteristics. This suggests that the scribe of the manuscript did think that Oberion and maybe even fairies in general were not as evil as the other spirits mentioned in the book. This is further strengthened by the description that is made for Mycob, the queen of fairies: ‘Mycob is queene of the fayres, and is of the same office that Oberyon is of. Shee appeareth in greene with a crowne one hir head and is very meeke and gentell.’⁶⁵ Her description also lacks any appalling bodily features, but it does describe the fairy’s character. Mycob is meek and gentle, which is something that will probably never be said about any of the other entries

⁶⁴ Harms, Clark and Peterson, *The Book of Oberon*, 8-9.

⁶⁵ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 81.

in the Offices of Spirits. But then again, it could also be explained by the fact that Mycob is a female spirit and that such soft descriptions did not befit any of the spirit kings who were supposed to lead their armies into battle.



Figure 2: Folger MS Shakespeare Library, fol. 185.



Figure 3: Folger MS Shakespeare Library, fol. 185.

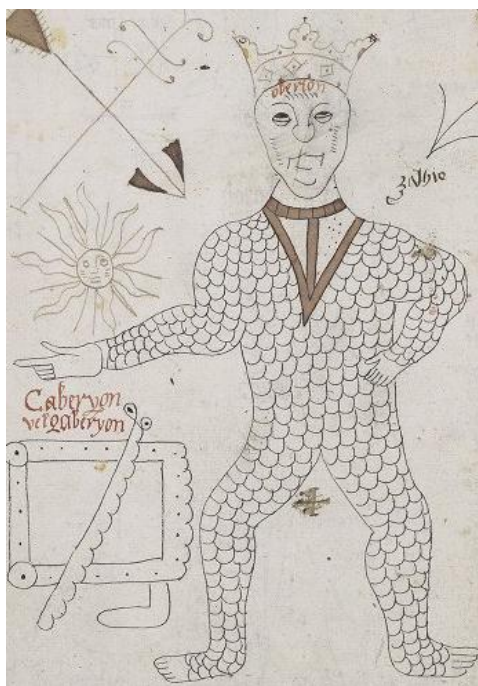


Figure 4: Folger MS Shakespeare Library, fol. 186.



Figure 5: Folger MS Shakespeare Library, fol. 181.

Clues in conjurations

We have seen that the scribe of the Folger manuscript likely thought that fairies were less hideous and therefore less malevolent than other spirits, but this assertion is only hypothetical if the scribe did not put it in practice. To find this out, we must look at the conjurations in which fairies appear and determine whether they are treated any different than other spirits. Most conjurations name the spirit for which the conjuration is written maybe once or twice and then start replacing their name with ‘N.’, which stands for Latin ‘*nomen*’, and means ‘name’. It is a designation that can be filled by any name, but in this context it most likely is a spirit name. The conjurations in which Oberion appears call him by name a couple of times but eventually also replace his name with ‘N.’. This could be explained by the fact that scribes used many contractions in their manuscripts to save time, space and ink, but the abbreviation is still written in red ink, as are all other names in the Folger manuscript (fig. 6). Switching pens each time a name occurs in the text can take up a lot of time, so this reason seems unlikely. A more likely benefit of abbreviating names in this way is that the scribe could minimize mistakes such as getting names wrong. He could mindlessly scribble along without paying much attention to the subject of the conjuration, because all conjurations effectively are composed of the same elements and often even the same sentences. But it could also suggest that conjurations for Oberion could be used for other spirits as well, or the other way around.⁶⁶ Rather than making up an entire new conjuration specifically tailored for Oberion, scribes could have taken a conjuration for a different spirit and simply replaced that spirit’s name with Oberion.

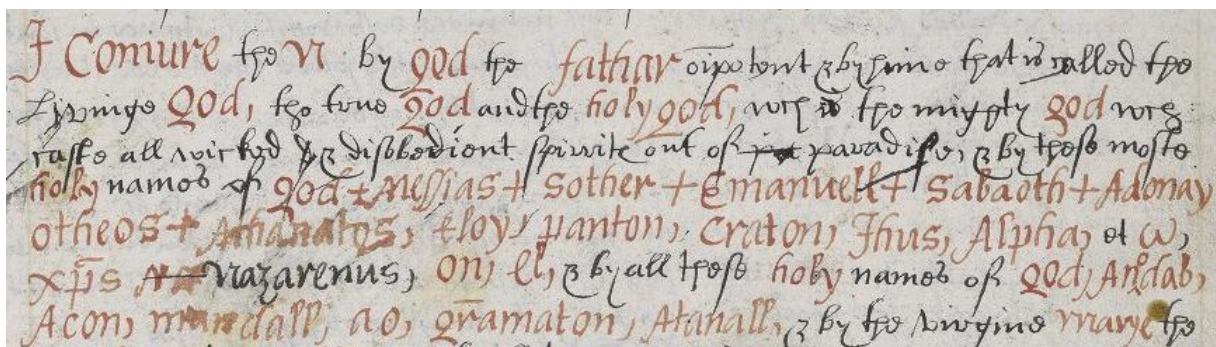


Figure 6: Folger MS Shakespeare, fol. 192.

⁶⁶ Harms, “Hell and Fairy,” 68.

There is one major difference between conjurations for Oberion and those for other spirits, though. Oberion is abundantly praised, while other spirits in similar conjurations are not. On a single page, Oberion is repeatedly called noble, worthy, excellent, loving and even gentle.⁶⁷ The conjurations for Satan, Baron, Romulon, and Mosacus on the preceding pages are, while in Latin, completely void of such praises.⁶⁸ It can be said that in this way only, conjurations for Oberion resemble those for angels, who are called holy and good on numerous occasions.⁶⁹ Of course, Oberion is unlikely to ever come close to the high regard that angels enjoy. The scribe does seem to support the theory that fairies used to be angels, as he calls Oberion's four counsellors 'his 4 Aungells'.⁷⁰ He also says the following about Oberion: 'O *nomen* most gentell *and* worthy spirritt *which* waste sometye an Aungell of light.'⁷¹ On the other hand, this excerpt could also be a remnant of a conjuration for a different spirit, such as Lucifer.

Conjurations in different manuscripts for a fairy called Elaby Gathen and the seven sisters do not appear to have any parts that would help distinguish them from a conjuration for other kinds of spirits.⁷² But conjurations are often followed by maledictions, when the spirit who is being called on refuses to show up and the conjuror starts to lose his patience. It is common for spirits to be insulted at this point. Looking at occurrences of insults could help us determine whether conjurors kept their good manners when fairies decided to test their patience. At first, Oberion is mainly called an 'unbeleavinge spirit', which is a fairly kind insult, so to speak.⁷³ But later he is also called 'most wicked ungratious *and* rebellious' and 'wicked dissobedient *and* contumate'.⁷⁴ This however is limited to only two occasions. The spirits that are called on in the abovementioned conjuration for Tantalaverion are insulted on no less than four occasions in the malediction.⁷⁵ On top of that, they are called incontinent and repugnant in the conjuration itself, so they are definitely treated worse than Oberion.⁷⁶ It is not clear whether this is the case because Oberion is a fairy, because it is unknown to what office the spirits in the latter conjuration belong. His royalty is also unlikely to be the cause of this better treatment, as the spirits in the latter conjuration are all kings and as such there is no

⁶⁷ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 190.

⁶⁸ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 172-184.

⁶⁹ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 94-95.

⁷⁰ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 195.

⁷¹ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 190.

⁷² Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 1406, 50v-53r. Bodleian Library MS e Mus 173, 15v-16v. British Library MS Sloane 1727, 23r.

⁷³ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 191.

⁷⁴ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 192-193.

⁷⁵ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 118-119.

⁷⁶ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 116-118.

difference in rank. Insults aside, Oberion and all other fairies are still conjured in a manner that was the same for all spirits: they are invoked by the power of God, which is supposed to scare them into doing the conjuror's bidding, and they are threatened with eternal damnation and the pains of hell if they do not comply. This suggests that fairies, though better than demons, were still much more malicious than angels.

Powers

We will now look at the powers that fairies were credited to have in necromancy. In addition to describing what and who Oberion is, the Offices of Spirits in the Folger manuscript also lists the sort of things he can do:

Oberyon R [...] he teacheth a man knowledge in phisicke *and* he sheweth the nature of stones, herbes *and* trees *and* of all mettalls. [...] He causeth a man to be invissible, he sheweth wher hiding treaseuer is *and* how to obtain the saime. He telleth of thinges present, paste *and* to comm, and if he be bounde to a man he will Carey or bringe treasuer out of the sea. His borden is 100.000£. He howeldes the wateres *and* lowe partes of the earth.⁷⁷

This kind of information is also included in the descriptions for Mycob: 'Shee showeth the nature off hearbes, stones, *and* trees. She sheweth the usse of medicines *and* the truth. She causeth the ringe of invisibillitye to be geven to the invocator.'⁷⁸ And the seven sisters: 'These 7 sisters is for to shewe *and* teache a man the nature of hearbes, *and* to instruct a man in phisicke. Alsoe they will bringe a man the ringe of invissibillity.'⁷⁹

Most powers on these lists do not exclusively belong to fairies. In fact, nearly all of them are shared with other spirits named in the Offices. Especially knowledge in the sciences, knowing the whereabouts of hidden treasures, invisibility, and fortune-telling are powers that many spirits possess. But also seemingly fairy-specific skills such as nature-related knowledge occur more than once in entries of other spirits. The only power that Oberion shares with no other spirits is his affinity with water. This could have something to do with the belief that spirits could not cross running water because of its purity, which prevented any sinful entities from interacting with the water.⁸⁰ This also explains why witches were found guilty if they floated on water rather than sinking to the bottom. The belief apparently does not apply to fairies, because if that was the case Oberion would not be able to interact with the

⁷⁷ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 80.

⁷⁸ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 81.

⁷⁹ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 81.

⁸⁰ King James, *Daemonologie*.

sea. Either fairies were not deemed sinful enough or their history in folklore plays a role. There are numerous water-spirits in fairy folklore who are not hindered by water at all, such as kelpies, water-bulls, and selkies. In fact, out of all the fairy creatures there are, Briggs lists only one spirit which is unable to cross a freshwater stream: the Nuckelavee.⁸¹

So, the affinity with water can be explained by folklore. But the other powers that the fairies are credited with, though not exclusive to fairies, might also have found their origin there. Let us start with knowledge of herbs, trees, stones and metals. This is fairly straightforward, as fairies are nature spirits. Spirits who live in the ground, in forests, hills, and streams naturally know a lot about their surroundings. Some trees like hawthorn were said to belong to fairies because people who cut them were mysteriously punished.⁸² Herbs such as fernseed, broom, and mugwort and flowers such as tulips and snowdrops were ascribed magical properties and as such were also connected to the fairies.⁸³ Metal ores and precious stones can be found in the ground and in caves, where fairies lived. And because they were so close to nature's hiding spots, they would at the same time know when and where humans hid their valuables. Will o' the Wisps in particular were said to be fairies who could lead someone to hidden treasures.

The descriptions in the Offices also mention teaching knowledge in physicke, or healing. Fairies were known to bestow gifts on people who treated them kindly. Sometimes these were gifts of money, sometimes a helping hand on the farm or in the household, but they were also known to gift skills. Folklore relates stories of people who became an excellent carpenter or bagpiper overnight because the fairies had gifted them this power.⁸⁴ There are also some accounts of poor people being given healing skills or a white healing powder so they could support themselves as a physician, though they often got caught up in witch trials due to their carelessness.⁸⁵

The ability to tell of things that happened in the past, in the present, or things that would happen in the future, i.e. fortunetelling, could be explained by the fairy world itself. People who were stolen by the fairies and managed to return to their own world often found themselves in a different time than when they had left it. But the time difference was not consistent: even after spending just hours or days in the fairy world, they sometimes returned hundreds of years later or earlier, sometimes less, while at other times they were returned to

⁸¹ Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies*, 311.

⁸² MacManus, *The Middle Kingdom*, 62-63

⁸³ Briggs, *Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 86.

⁸⁴ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 136.

⁸⁵ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 135.

their own world at the exact point in time that they had left it. To us, time in the fairy realm seems unpredictable. But perhaps fairies had control over time and could decide at what point in time they entered into our world. And because of that, fairies knew exactly what would happen and when, anytime they were conjured up and asked to share this knowledge.

The last power that is mentioned in the Offices is invisibility. Spirits in necromancy generally had the power to appear invisibly if the magician forgot to close such loopholes by including something like this in his conjuration: ‘that thou [...] appeare quickly [...] *and* that perfectly to our sight soe that we maie perfectly see thee.’⁸⁶ In folklore, fairies also had this power, which Briggs calls glamour, and by means of which fairies could make themselves appear however they wanted to be seen by humans.⁸⁷ This also includes transfiguration, which was something that fairies and other spirits are implied to be able to do as well:

I admonishe thee [...] to take unto thee, *videlicet* a fayre body, a comely body *and* a humane body, even a bodye like to a childe of the age of 3 yeres old, *and* in the same body o [Nomen] thou spirrit of greate power I praye thee, [...] come speedely unto me.⁸⁸

In folklore, only specific types of fairies could transform themselves. Selkies, for example, who looked like seals, changed into a human form when they shed their skin. If the skin was taken from them, they would not be able to return to their home in the water, and there are many folktales about men obtaining a Selkie wife in this way.⁸⁹ Fairies in general were able to transform objects as well, and often did this to play tricks on people. All fairy glamour, however, could be counteracted by means of a magical ointment.⁹⁰ It could be made up of four-leaf clovers, or the grease that had accumulated on a bucket of water left overnight for the fairies to wash themselves with.⁹¹ This latter recipe was well-attested in folklore and continued to be used in necromantic rituals.⁹² Some other necromantic rituals used the blood of several supposedly magical animals instead, such as lapwings, black hens and black cats.⁹³ It seems to have depended on the scribe whether any lack of information about fairies was complemented by taking traditions from folklore or traditions from necromancy.

⁸⁶ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 190.

⁸⁷ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 119.

⁸⁸ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 190.

Videlicet] Originally viz. (Latin) which stands for *videre licet*, meaning ‘it is permitted to see’. It is generally used as a way to introduce examples and can also mean ‘namely’, ‘which is’, ‘that is to say’, and ‘as follows’.

⁸⁹ Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies*, 353-355.

⁹⁰ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 119.

⁹¹ Briggs, “Some Seventeenth-Century Books of Magic,” 460.

⁹² Bodleian Library MS e Mus 173, 72v.

⁹³ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 138.

Some other powers that fairies had in folklore, but for which I have not found evidence in any magical manuscripts, are power over the weather, levitation, and bestowing either good luck or ill luck, which could lead to illnesses in both humans and livestock.⁹⁴

Uses

Now that we know which powers fairies were credited with, we can determine what fairies were used for in necromancy. A regular conjuration for any kind of spirit will likely include the following demand:

that thou [...] make me a true aunswere of all such thinges as I or my fellowes shall aske or demaund of thee, *and* to doe the uttermost of thy office to fullfill my request *and* desiere in all thinges *that* I shall bidd *and* commaunde thee.⁹⁵

The spirit is basically commanded to do the magician's bidding and to always speak the truth. Some fairies, like the counsellors of Oberion, are called on only to convince their lord to appear to the conjuror, and nothing else is demanded of them: 'I conjure *and* adjure you o Storax, Carmelion, Caberyon, Severion, [...] that nowe you goe to *and* cause Oberyon your lord to appeare to me here.'⁹⁶ Oberion himself, on the other hand, is commanded to bring with him a quantity of gold or silver, as can be seen when the conjuration continues: '[...] *and* that with this some of golde, of good *and* perfitt gold to the valewe of one 100.000£ without frawde or guile.'⁹⁷ The spirit is often left free to decide where it will retrieve this treasure from, though the conjuror sometimes suggests stealing it from a nearby king who the conjuror probably did not like very much. As a result it was not always clear where the spirit got the precious metals from, but keeping in mind that fairies used to dwell in the ground – where all the metal ores are – perhaps the gold and silver came from there. This could also be said of the gifts of money that fairies used to make in folklore. They could have gotten that money from the same hiding places of treasures that they lead travellers to. Oberion's description in the Offices of Spirits says that 'he will carey or bringe treasuer out of the sea'.⁹⁸ This will more likely refer to sunken ships with large amounts of money on board. The Spanish Armada ship Girona, for instance, which was sunk in 1588 around the time the Folger manuscript was written, had loads of treasure on board.⁹⁹ As modern excavation techniques to

⁹⁴ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 120-129.

⁹⁵ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 190.

⁹⁶ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 195.

⁹⁷ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 195.

⁹⁸ Folger MS Shakespeare Library V.b.26, 80.

⁹⁹ Burns, "An Introduction to the Book of Magic."

surface this treasure were not available to people from that time, it only seems logical for magicians to try and get their hands on sunken treasures by means of supernatural powers.

As we have seen, the descriptions for Oberion, Mycob, and the seven sisters also mention that they can make a man become invisible. They do this by providing him with a ring, which is interesting because most fairies in folklore have no need of magical artefacts to become invisible. Only Scandinavian dwarves need a cap to do so, and some spirits need their caps to transport themselves underwater like Selkies need their skins.¹⁰⁰ The idea of a magical ring therefore does not seem to have originated in folklore but earlier on in history. The philosopher Plato first speculated on whether human morality would hold up if there was a ring that could make the wearer invisible and therefore able to do whatever he wanted without consequences.¹⁰¹ The ring, referred to as the Ring of Gyges, is a much sought-after object in magical manuscripts and can also be obtained from other spirits. It is likely that Tolkien, an Anglist by profession, got his inspiration for his *Lord of the Rings* from there as well. Klaassen and Bens found a conjuration in Sloane 3850 that commands a fairy to give the conjuror this ring of invisibility: ‘Coniuro te, virgo, per ceptram et veritatem virtute quorum huc venistis quatenus mihi data Anulo invisibilitatis et ad hunc lectum accedere sine mora festines et nuda ibidem quiestas.’¹⁰² They conveniently included a translation for readers illiterate in Latin:

I conjure you, virgin, by the sceptre and the truth by virtue of which you have come here that you hasten to give to me a ring of invisibility and to approach this bed without delay and lie down nude.¹⁰³

This second part of the excerpt may come as a surprise, because it seems to not have been the original intent of the conjuration to have sex with the conjured spirit. Klaassen and Bens, however, explain in their article that the writer of the manuscript consciously chose to include this part in the conjuration because fairies were favoured over demons for operations involving sex. Normally, the conjuror would summon a demon who would then provide the conjuror with a woman of his choice to spend the night with. The question remained whether this woman was the actual woman that the conjuror desired or the demon in disguise, because afterwards the woman would not remember any of it happening. The popularity of fairy-lore and stories about fairy wives in Elizabethan times gave this conjuror the idea to summon a

¹⁰⁰ Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 122. Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 129.

¹⁰¹ Plato, *Republic* 2:359a-2:360d.

¹⁰² Klaassen and Bens, “Achieving Invisibility,” 13.

¹⁰³ Klaassen and Bens, “Achieving Invisibility,” 13.

fairy instead, because fairies were supposed to be actually female while demons only gave the illusion of being female.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Klaassen and Bens, "Achieving Invisibility," 5.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, fairies in necromancy seemed to appear largely the same as demons. Regular conjurations called on fairies without specifying that they were a fairy. Like with any other spirit, God and other heavenly powers that the spirit was supposed to fear were invoked to coerce fairies into appearing in front of the magician. Fairies were threatened with eternal damnation and the pains of hell like any other spirit would if they took their time to appear. In general, fairies were simply included in existing necromantic traditions, but where these traditions were insufficient, scribes of magical manuscripts often included rituals that originated in folklore, such as recipes for fairy ointments. Other times when information on fairies was lacking, scribes made something up in accordance with their own opinions. The scribe of the Folger manuscript apparently thought that fairies were better than demons and treated them accordingly. They were not described as hideous monsters like other spirits were, and were insulted less frequently when the magician's patience was tested. Oberion even was praised in much the same way as – though a bit more reserved than – angels were, and he was the only spirit in the Folger manuscript to receive this kind treatment. So, fairies were definitely treated better than demons, and this likely had something to do with the popular conception that fairies were fallen angels who had not fallen all the way down to hell, but were condemned to live their lives as intermediary spirits. As such, fairies were a useful addition to necromancy, because contact with intermediary creatures, a bit of a grey field which fell between black and white magic, was punished less harshly than dealings with real demons. Klaassen sums it up nicely: 'Fairies may have been regarded as a kind of morally neutral spirit between demons and angels, making possible a kind of powerful necromantic magic that was a little less dubious and dangerous.'¹⁰⁵ In addition to that, fairies were able to offer something to magicians that other spirits could not. Water-spirits were widely attested in folklore, and because of that they could access treasures that lay underwater. Demons could not interact with water because its supposed purity prevented sinful entities from entering. Fairies further possessed any powers that demons also had, which made them an attractive alternative to demons. Magicians did not have to cut back on possibilities because fairies could do everything demons could do and more, and fairy magic was less condemned by society. Finally, the supposed authenticity of fairy femininity compared to the likely artificial

¹⁰⁵ Klaassen, "The Transformations of Magic," p176.

female disguise of demons made fairies the only type of spirit consciously conjured for the magician to have sex with.

Implications

As expected, this research provided me with major and minor new insights into fairy magic that may or may not have existed in other authors' minds but which were never recorded in their books or papers. Insights that are especially important for my thesis are that fairies were able to retrieve treasure from underwater while other spirits could not do this and the perception that especially Oberion was not insulted as much as other spirits and even praised like an angel. Other insights are the observation that fairy names often end with –ion or a similar spelling which indicates that other names ending on the suffix could also be fairy names. Furthermore, descriptions of spirits were subject to physiognomy and reflected the opinion of the creator of the portrayal. Readers who are interested in conducting research on fairy magic themselves can now build on these new insights.

Self-evaluation

Because of this thesis I learned that I find doing research way more fun than writing. I read six of Briggs' books on fairies from cover to cover to find out more about fairies in folklore before starting my actual research. I enthusiastically started transcribing manuscripts before even bothering to find out whether there were editions already available, simply because I loved puzzling the late Medieval characters into a coherent story. Even when I did have access to editions, I came back to the manuscripts for each excerpt to make sure that the transcription was correct. Every book and article that I came across was too interesting to be left unread, and while I thought that I had collected every source available when I started writing this thesis, I kept finding new sources in hidden corners of the Internet. As a result I probably spent too much time doing research which led to a time shortage when I was writing the thesis. My planning thus leaves a lot to be desired, though my slow writing should not be free of blame, either. Distractions, obligations and some personal issues made progress tediously slow. In spite of many lost hours of sleep at the end, I still very much enjoyed researching fairy magic and writing this thesis.

Suggestions for further research

In the second chapter I mentioned the Angel Registry on the Esoteric Archives website. The list features about 149 names that ended with –ion or –yon. These names are not

classified as fairy names, but they could be. Research is needed to determine whether some of those names belong to fairies. If there are more fairy names known, it will become easier to distinguish fairy conjurations from conjurations for other spirits. The newly discovered fairy conjurations could then be added to the corpus of materials that can be used to research fairy magic.

Frank Klaassen recently wrote a book called *Making Magic in Elizabethan England: Two Early Modern Vernacular Books of Magic*, which is scheduled to be published in August. I have been told that, in his book, Klaassen speculates on a newly emerging trend specific to necromantic rituals in the vernacular to politely request spirits to comply with the conjuror's demands rather than threatening and cursing them if they refuse.¹⁰⁶ Not wanting to steal Klaassen's ideas and knowing too little about his findings to draw conclusions about them myself, I decided not to mention his theory, though it would have been a valuable addition to the discussion in this thesis. When the book is published, it could be interesting to see whether my speculations will still hold up or whether they need to be revised.

Suspected witches often claimed to be acquainted with fairies rather than demons because they hoped that their punishment would be less severe. Whether that is the actually case I do not know. As I mentioned in the first chapter, I did not have the time nor space to deal with this question in this thesis, because it would involve looking at a completely different range of manuscripts and other sources in which witch trials are recorded and discussed. Research on this topic would greatly contribute to this thesis, because it would provide an insight into the reality of ritual magic. Manuscripts on magic can often be seen as fiction, because there is no guarantee that any of the rituals can be performed successfully. Accounts of witch trials can generally be trusted to be real.

¹⁰⁶ Dr. Sándor Chardonens, discussion, June 11, 2019.

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