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Elements of folklore in Shakespeare's plays Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream and The

Tempest

MASTER THESIS

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Abstract

The following research will discuss and compare the differences between superstitious and mythical elements in specific Shakespeare's plays and original British folklore. The plays were compared to the original folktales and myths originating in Great Britain. The supernatural creatures pictured in the plays were analyzed in two ways: one being their role in the play; the second being their deviation from the original source. British folklore was used as the base for all definitions and theory in this research.

The plays used in this research are *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. These three plays were chosen because of their abundance of supernatural characters, including witches, fairies, ghosts, and the overwhelming presence of magic in them. The focus of this research is on analyzing the physical and behavioral traits of mythical creatures in Shakespeare's plays and comparing them to the original sources of British folklore. The main idea is that Shakespeare used specific creatures in his plays to amplify the character's traits relying solely on an image that already existed in the common folk tales.

The research has shown that Shakespeare did not stay true to the original descriptions in all of his works, quite the contrary he gave some creatures a different appearance and emphasized their human-like emotions (e.g. the feeling of jealousy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). He also used the supernatural and magic to incline possible psychological problems and mind deviations within his characters (like the role of Witches in *Macbeth*). Another interesting point is that Shakespeare used non-British mythical beings and even deities in his works, such as the goddess Artemis and Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Roman deities Ceres and Juno in *The Tempest* or the Greek mythical creature Harpy in *The Tempest*. It is believed that common folk did not know much about other countries Folklore, so the actual reason behind the usage of these creatures was analyzed.

The conclusion of this research indicates that Shakespeare did indeed use the familiarity between British folk and British Folklore in his plays to emphasize certain traits of his characters. The link between his characters and their original roles in British Folklore made it so much easier for common people to understand and grasp the idea that Shakespeare had in mind when creating his plays. On another note, there are many different theories regarding the meanings behind Shakespeare's characters and also a belief that they might have been impersonating real people of that age. Due to a variety of opinions and hypothesis existing nowadays, this topic is open for further analysis and research.

Key words: Shakespeare, *folklore*, *witchcraft*, *fairies*, *duality*, *myth*

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1. Folklore

The idea of Folklore has existed for a long time and people usually connect it with the stories people from hundreds of years ago used to describe the world around them, both real and imaginary. Surprisingly, the word 'folklore' appeared for the first time in 1846. and was created by William Thomas, under the name Ambrose Merton, in a letter sent to The Athenaeum (Dundes 1965, 4-5). The word was meant to include many things related to culture of the olden days, such as manners, fashion, stories, superstition, customs, proverbs etc. under one umbrella term - namely 'folklore'. The word 'folklore' consists of two words, or two ideas - one being 'lore' as in the stories and verbal and nonverbal literary forms, such as myths, ballads, beliefs, epic poems and similar; the other word is 'folk' or literally the people these stories come from. The blunt translation of the word would be 'stories of the people', specifically 'people of the lower classes'. The 'folk' were usually peasants and farmers, uneducated people, therefore the term 'folklore' has often been looked at as 'non-literary' and not having literary finesse. The language that is used in folklore is plain, often filled with slang common at the time among people from different areas where the folklore originated from.

In the *International Encyclopedia of the social sciences*, the term folklore has been defined as under:

"Folklore means folk learning; it comprehends all knowledge that is transmitted by word of mouth and all crafts and techniques that are learned by imitation or example as well as products of those crafts". (Sills, 497)

Folklore is a very delicate form. Unlike written literature, art and music, folklore has been passed on from one person to another, orally and on different occasions. The reception of given information depended on the situation in which it was performed, the mood of the performer, his emotions, expressions, gestures, tone of voice, the music it was accompanied by, if there was any music at all. The performers talent played a big role as well, as not all people are equally good at narrating or singing. The reactions of the audience were important as well; if they accepted it with laughter one would believe it was a funny or happy tale, if they felt horror or sadness it would be classified as a tragic tale. The form of a folktale could have changed hundreds of times before it was finally written down. What we now know as folklore might have had a different

origin long time ago, and because of this inherent duality it is never easy to decipher the true meaning and message behind a piece of folklore. “In spite of this diversification, it is possible to distinguish three basic conceptions of the subject underlying many definitions; accordingly, folklore is one of these three: a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a kind of art. These categories are not completely exclusive of each other.” as stated by Ben-Amos. (1971, 5)

As previously mentioned, folklore is perceived as a piece of knowledge that was passed on for a reason. Oftentimes we know that something ‘should be done’ or something else shouldn’t simply because we heard it from older people when we were children. We don’t necessarily need to know how or why this information was created, but in our minds it has been fixated. This way people could protect themselves and their families from dangerous acts or events by simply labeling them as ‘mystic’. Superstition in folklore is the strongest tool people had against all kinds of misfortunes. But superstition could also cloud one’s mind by preventing them from seeing the obvious. That is where folklore as a form of thought comes into play. Since all ideas start in people’s heads, they can have great impact on a person’s perception of their surroundings. Folklore carries a lot of symbolism in it, mainly because people gave all kinds of meanings to their thoughts. Psychologically, folklore could be viewed as a form of escapism from everyday life by infusing reality with magic and fantastic creatures. It holds great significance because beliefs often include rituals and incantations that should be performed in order for the ‘magic’ to happen. These rituals most likely originate from simple everyday actions people used to do, like weaving, cutting grass or washing clothes. By mixing everyday life with mysticism people gain more interest in performing these actions. Thus, if we exclude the ‘magical’ part from folklore we simply get a picture of how people used to live hundreds of years ago. Quoting Bronner: “Folkloric evidence is different from historical documentation because it often constitutes fantasy, but that does not detract from its truthfulness or significance.” (Dundes 2007, 3)

Folklore was the same for everyone. Peasants or nobles, everyone believed in the same superstition because it was impressed upon them by their elders. They performed customs simply because it would be ‘unlucky’ not to perform them. These traditions have had a hold upon their minds regardless of who they were, noble or plebeian, and no education or force of civilization could eradicate this from their consciousness. Rich and poor alike cared about not angering the forces ‘above’ them, or inflicting misfortune on themselves and their families. (Laurence & Gomme 1916, 4-5)

In their study about psychological anthropology, Bock and Leavitt explain that in order to understand “the relation of culture to the individual, one needs to recognize that people are motivated to believe what they believe.” They explain how a cultural belief needs to captivate the believer on a psychological basis in order to continue existing. (2018, 210) This theory can be expanded by taking in Freud’s outlook on religion and the psychology behind the need to believe. He defined people’s need to believe in a higher being as “infantile need for a powerful father figure.” Comparably, religion was necessary in the early development of civilization in order to restrain people’s violent impulses and establish a functional hierarchical system. (Armstrong 1993, 357)

The need to believe in something, the need to feel in favor or mercy of nature and its rulers has always been deeply rooted into the human psyche. Even before organized belief systems (religion), people needed the harvests to be bountiful, they needed the diseases to stay away from their children, they needed to lead a life full of happiness and love, and because of that they needed someone to pray to or give offerings to. They needed someone to be afraid of, because they needed to scare their children and make sure they stay away from dangerous places and people. They needed excuses and reasons to have holidays and hold festivals, they needed a special ‘mark’ that would make their local area famous across the country. That is why people needed the supernatural and why they created folklore. Over the years, decades and centuries folklore has evolved into something even greater. Folklore has given the people identity. It allowed them to associate themselves with other people, an area and nation. It became heritage that was passed down from one generation to another, giving people a sense of belonging. Through folklore people continued to form ties with others, passing on knowledge to their offspring and keeping the tradition alive. (Putnam 1964, 365)

Folklore is “so human in its origin and in the philosophy it teaches; it appeals so strongly to characteristics which reside in varying proportions in all of us; it is so rich in local associations; it tells such a wonderful story of man’s past and helps so exactly in the understanding of man’s present; it is so pathetic, and in many branches so beautiful, that it is difficult to get rid of its fascinations when once one has begun to understand it.” (Laurence & Gomme 1916, 4)

British folklore has been greatly influenced by other ‘outlandish’ aspects - such as the Greek and Roman mythology and polytheism described by the ancient authors who were adored by the educated masses and the authority the Bible and Church had over all people. The latter served a

great purpose by giving birth to ghosts, demons and witchcraft which we can see in many legends and tales. Shakespeare used this ambiguity - the Christian presentation of pagan creatures and their original form, giving us plenty of material to discuss the true meaning behind his supernatural characters.

1.1 Influence of mythology on story-telling

According to Thomas A. Green “myths are central to the religions of the world”. In his work *Folklore: An encyclopedia of beliefs, customs, tales, music and art* he talks about the origin of folklore and mythology, their effects on development of culture and history, and how they continue to influence modern society. (Green 1997, 235) Myths are often at the core of a culture and are considered to be accurate explanations of the origins of the universe, the beginning of mankind and often the end of the world. They provide us with valuable information on how different cultures saw the creation of life on Earth and how they coped with the greatest enigma of humankind - death. Many cultures share similar myths, or to be more precise, they share similar characters and events. The pantheon hierarchy in many European cultures is more than just similar, they are often copies of each other. As nations and cultures develop they tend to borrow parts of different, often more developed cultures. Similarly, as society advances simple myths evolve into more complex rituals and religious practices. They offer answers to many questions humanity had before the rise of science. For this reason we are able to find various interpretations of the same historical event through records from different countries and eras. Even though mythology served as the basis for cultural development, there has always existed a difference between reality in myths and the physical reality of the people who created these myths. While myths provided an almost unlimited abundance of freedom to their creators, the reality they lived in was far from mythical. There remains an insatiable need for magical and supernatural which people have felt since the beginning. But there is only so much a person can

invent in their small underdeveloped environment. This is why we see a number of similarities not only between different cultures, but also across different timelines. Due to the lack of scientific knowledge, people frequently mixed reality with myths. Consequently, myths have been found to be highly unreliable sources of information, even if they included real historical events and people. The reason being: mythical time and real time work in different ways. “Historical time is linear, continuous, and composed of unique events, but mythic time is cyclical and repetitive.” (Green 1997, 235)

Mythology requires beliefs and rituals with which those beliefs can be practically expressed. Rituals consist of words and symbolic acts in their basic form. Words, often in the form of a chant, may develop further into a narrative, similar to how the symbolic act may need an explanation. This explanation may in turn lead to a new ritual, and this is how myth becomes a religion and branches out. As the intellectual horizons of the nation widen, the narratives become more complex, incorporating new events and characters. Instead of just one deity, people start differentiating multiple minor and major divine beings, each becoming a new target of worship. As the popularity of said divine beings rises, so does the number of their worshippers. The advancement of the culture dictates its popularity among neighboring cultures, or as was often the case in history, through trade and war, one culture would absorb another, or be inspired by it. There are many examples of ‘culture absorption’, but probably the most popular one is the influence Greek mythology had on the Roman culture. We can draw literal parallels between the Ancient Greek pantheon and the Roman pantheon. However, its full power can be seen only after the Roman conquest of Europe. Rome conquered all of Southern and much of Western Europe, and “imposed late Greek mythology in Latin dress upon these lands.” (Nutt 1972, 34) Yet in Western Europe, Ireland completely and Britain partially, escaped Roman influence. The myths in these lands continued to develop at their own pace, preserving the originality of Celtic and British folklore and mythology. Be that as it may, the Celtic mythology lagged behind the Greco-Roman in terms of civilization. While Celtic myths continued to be heavily influenced by the primitive agricultural creed, the Greco-Roman myths slowly developed into literature. (Nutt 1972, 35)

Following the spread of Christianity in Europe, and among its territories Ireland and Britain, we notice a raise in more romantic and epic myths, oftentimes inspired by Christian themes. Many of the myths merged with real historical events, incorporating mystical, magical characters and holy

artifacts. One such myth-turned-legend is the Legend of King Arthur. Even though it existed for centuries, it has been subjected to changes in plot and dramatized for purposes previously mentioned. Most of the British and Celtic fairy mythology lived on as ‘Arthurian romance’ in England, until Shakespeare created his fairy world in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. As if the old fairy world never existed, people shifted their beliefs in fairies completely after this play was published.

“Since his days, fairydom has become, chiefly owing to the perfection of his embodiment, a mere literary convention, and has gradually lost life and savour.” (Nutt 1972, 37)

Christianity has had a great influence on diminishing the importance of old folklore and mythology across Europe. However, we can trace back to its origins through transformed characters. Interestingly, most characters stem from the same source, and I personally find it amazing how Shakespeare managed to present us with many valuable examples in his works.

2. Witchcraft and Sorcery

Witchcraft has existed since the very beginning of human civilization. Not always referred to as 'witchcraft', it had many names, but its purpose has always been interacting with the spirits of the nature, spirits of the deceased, Gods, higher beings; bestowing good fortune and bad fortune over people, protection, blessings; foreseeing the future, etc. The practitioners of witchcraft, I will address them as witches in accordance with the following text, had various social standards in human civilization. In ancient times they were respected and worshipped as the ones closest to gods and spirits of nature. Oftentimes they were at the top of the hierarchy together with chieftains, tribe leaders and later emperors. They 'communicated' with the higher beings, asking them for favors, blessings and fortune. Over time, people started classifying 'good' from 'bad', and similarly, 'witches' came to be different from 'priests'.

As the rule is with any civilization, as soon as a new change in 'worldly affairs' occurs, such as a new emperor emerging, conquest or colonialisation, the change in its 'spiritual' order is to follow. With new 'spiritual leaders' to bow their heads to, people would turn their backs to old ones, thus resulting in the occurrence of 'fallen' gods and their worshippers, often referred to as heretics. Witches were frequently assigned the ability to use 'magic'. The word 'magic' most likely comes from the Old Persian 'magu'. The word applied to a person conducting religious practices at the time, but it is unclear what the function was about. The term was later adopted into Ancient Greek, somewhere around the end of sixth and the beginning of fifth century BC. However, the meaning of the word had a negative connotation, referring to religious rites that were considered dangerous and unconventional. One of the reasons for this change might have been the difference in religious practices in Old Persia and Old Greece, as each empire had its own pantheon of gods.

Over time, the term 'magic' lost most of its correlation to religion. Randall Styers claims in his study that the attempt to define magic results in distinction between "other social practices and modes of knowledge" such as 'religion' and 'science'. (Styers 2004, 25) Another study by Davenport explores how the status of witches changed through the centuries. The witches of the ancient times were usually mysterious women who could use powerful spells in order to control nature. And this is the most crucial difference between witches and magicians. Witches as

women who could use magic were connected with earth, nature, night and the moon, namely the 'female' elements. Their magic was also deemed to be of 'lower status' unlike the magic magicians used, as magicians were mostly educated men (i.e. Prospero in *Tempest*).

Since the ancient times the hierarchy among deities was organized in such a way that the highest position always belonged to a male deity. Even after Christianity became widespread, God as the highest being was served by his male priests. Women who still 'served' a higher being were connected with the God's counterpart. As in the past, opposite of sun was moon (the female concept), such became the Devil, as opposite of God. Witches soon became heretics who turned away from 'the light' and who were thought to have worshipped Satan. Witches were also believed to have sold their souls to the devil in order to gain powerful skills. Soon the rituals once dedicated to old gods and goddesses became ceremonies to please the devil. Sabbat, as it was given a new name, was a celebration where witches would dance and give offerings to their master. (Davenport-Adams 1889, 203-208)

Davenport further explains that witchcraft was already existent in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testament. The Bible warns about witchcraft serving evil and its practices being dangerous. The Church became ruthless towards witches and their families, alienating them from society and branding them as heretics. They were looked down upon by others, and often chased out of communities. Beginning with the 12th century, witches would become the main target of trials and executions. Witchcraft was portrayed as a wide selection of activities and even appearances. People, majority of them women, would be accused of practicing witchcraft if they did anything that might have been seen as sorcery, satanic rituals, evoking of spirits or casting curses. Even though there were no proper definitions of what real sorcery looks like, or how to conduct these rituals, anything that did not adhere to what the church was promoting was seen as the 'devil's work' and acts against God. (Davenport 1889, 213-217) People started to associate specific physical traits to witches such as young witches having red hair, bright (usually green) eyes and exceptional beauty. If a woman was popular with other men, people would assume she 'bewitched' them. Older witches were seen as ugly, evil women, often with certain handicaps or facial features, such as a hump on their back, crooked noses, sharp chins and tiny beaded eyes. Long fingernails were also attributed to witches as well as husky or high-pitched voices. They often wore black robes and capes, and some used sticks or brooms for their magic.

During the Elizabethan era a strict legal prosecution against witchcraft was established. Witchcraft became an ever-present factor in society, contributing to the overall atmosphere and culture among people. (Davenport-Adams 1889, 209-210)

2.1 Witchcraft in Elizabethan England

According to Herrington witches appeared late in Elizabethan England. He uses many examples of famous plays portraying witches, among them Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In his study he mentions that sorcery and magic were used frequently, although used by male magicians and sorcerers. On the other hand, female practitioners of magic were rarely portrayed. One of the main reasons was the fact that women who were in some way involved with magic and using magical powers were rejected by society and seen as indecent. (Herrington 1919, 447; 465) As mentioned before, women who practiced magic had different statuses in society over centuries. In England, prior to Elizabethan era, these women were seen as 'wise women', but now with new social standards and ever rising influence of church, magic was slowly becoming taboo.

Nearing the 1600s topics and discussions about witchcraft and similar themes became more active. People claiming to have supernatural powers, charlatans and scammers appeared across England deceiving people offering guidance and help. People were familiar with the concept of wise women and witches, but their originally good nature was slowly shifting towards evil in the eyes of commoners. It is clear why such characters started appearing more and more in literature since people could easily relate to them. (Herrington 1919, 467-470)

Interestingly enough the witches who were condemned by the Elizabethan law were considered to be different from wise women. Wise women were seen as those who offer a helping hand to those in need, usually without asking anything in return. But witches, under Elizabethan law, had no professional status. They practiced witchcraft in order to fulfill their own selfish desires and punish those they held grudges against. Typically coming from the lowest social ranks, witches lived in perishable sheds, often on the outskirts of towns and villages, far away from people.

People believed they kept animals such as dogs, cats, toads or other small critters and reptiles as ‘familiars’- namely familiar spirits whom they made contracts with in order to serve their lord - the Devil. These animals were thought to have supernatural powers and would often serve as the eyes and ears of the witch. Birds such as crows and owls were often connected with them - the first one because of its eerie black plumage, and the second one for being a night creature. Although owls were deemed to be ‘wise’ even before the Elizabethan era, they were quite frequently connected to wise women.

The witches in Elizabethan time obtained their power by selling their soul to the Devil, thus being automatically ostracized by church, considering the soul was seen as the main ‘tool’ for obtaining otherworldly life in heaven. Not having a soul meant not being seen as a human, and witches were often seen as supernatural human-like beings. Obscene qualities were attributed to them, some of them including sexual relations with their animal familiars and even the Devil himself, sometimes alone or in orgies with other witches.

Witches were guilty of many random natural disasters, tragedies that befell other people, illnesses, spoiled crops, dead cattle, fights among family members or neighbors; the accusations were infinite. If black cats or any black animals, or just animals associated with witches were seen near a household, people would instantly assume there was a curse placed on them. During these times we can easily say the witches took all the blame. People would even mistreat this situation for their own benefit. If there was any bad blood in the community, or if there was any injustice towards someone, people found guilty would seek forgiveness under the excuse that they were bewitched or that they didn’t know what they were doing. Interestingly, witches were given so much power over others, that it’s almost humorous how most of these women eventually died at the hands of the very humans they supposedly had control over.

The topic of witchcraft and witches had become so popular, that almost everyone knew at least one or two ‘old hags’ with a bad reputation. Gossip and slander were entertainment for the masses, and prosecutions served as a remainder to not let the topic fade away. In some parts of the country, particularly in Middlesex and the neighboring counties, trials were held almost every 2 years, solely for the purpose of entertainment. These were also great opportunities for anyone who had a grudge against an older woman, sometimes a man, be it a neighbor, fellow resident or even a relative, to ‘lawfully’ dispose of them. Such events could be compared with today’s

yellow press and scandalous news that often reach the headlines of cheap second rate newspapers.

Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen have written that: “[m]agical thinking was universal in the age of Shakespeare”. This ‘magical thinking’ was not related solely to the existence of witchcraft, but to a much wider realm of spirits who resided beyond what was seen as the real world. Indeed, it was not the magic itself that changed, but the people’s perception of magic. Magic and sorcery, and ever so growing in popularity, witchcraft have become forbidden by law, after the statute against witchcraft and ‘conjuring evil spirits’ was enacted by Parliament in 1563. (Bate & Rasmussen 2007, 2)

This statute claims that a magic-user gains control over the Devil by conjuring evil spirits. He or she would then acquire power, special abilities or would have their wish or desire granted. But witchcraft was not free; it always came with a price, most commonly a blood sacrifice or even a mortal soul. (Sisson 1958, 72)

What is exceptionally interesting in terms of witchcraft and the law prohibiting it, is that masses started separating ‘white’ and ‘black’ magic. Namely, magic that focused on the summoning and control of the demons and spirits was deemed to be evil and thus forbidden. However, Queen Elizabeth herself had consultants of rather ‘suspicious’ calling, among them the court astrologer John Dee. (Sofer 2009, 3) Astrology, alchemy and other divination practices were considered magical as well. They were common hobbies especially among noble families who either invested in various research by others or performed rituals and experiments themselves.

About one hundred years before the Elizabethan statute, a different law was recorded in Italy by Pico della Mirandola. In his writings he differentiates two forms of magic, the following being: magia or the ability to be superior to demons and spirits, and goetia or witchcraft which was the opposite of magia and required obedience to demons. (Logan 2007, 214) According to his study not all forms of magic are bad. In Elizabethan law, however, all magic and witchcraft were forbidden, but all the magic described in it was what Pico della Mirandola calls ‘goetia’ - the submission to demons. Due to the teachings of the Church, humans who were created by God were above Demons who were created by Satan. So it was seen as humiliating to the Maker, if a person did form a contract with a spirit or a demon. This is also the reason why astrology and alchemy were not seen as necessarily bad, but oftentimes even useful. As long as the person

performing magic had control over the lesser beings, namely demons and spirits, he or she wouldn't have been prosecuted by della Mirandola's law, but the Elizabethan law would still punish him.

The above mentioned forms of magic can be perfectly matched to some of the well-known Shakespeare's characters - The Three Weird Sisters, Hecate and even Lady Macbeth are ideal examples of 'goetia', whereas Prospero fits the image of a scholarly mage who performs 'magia'. Sycorax would most likely fall under both of these descriptions, yet we only know about her through the words of others.

2.2 Witches as presented by King James

In his work *Daemonologie* King James VI writes about witches, among other unholy beings, and witchcraft, among other forms of magic and sorcery. There he clearly states who witches are, how they live and interact with people, how they perform their rituals and for what reasons, and lastly, he declares a punishment for those who practice witchcraft - death. His work has been published in England as well, after his accession to the English throne in 1603, as King James I. King James was exceptionally proud of his work, but some critics believe his study on the existence of witches was highly subjective. Albright points out that as a king he had the power to destroy evidence that proved against his beliefs. In this specific case, King James ordered that books who questioned the existence of witches to be burned. (Albright 2005, 226)

King James would often ask himself in his work, questions like: "What is a witch?" "What drives people to become witches?" And then, he provides the answer, rather subjectively:

"Curiositie in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great poverty. As to the first of these, Curiosity, it is one lie the inticement of Magiciens, or Necromanciers: and the other two are the allureres of the Sorcerers, or Witches."

For the first time we meet with a new division of magical terms, specifically magicians, necromancers, sorcerers and witches. According to this statement, those who are curious about

new inventions or science would aim to become magicians and necromancers, whereas those who are impoverished, greedy or revengeful become sorcerers and witches. (Albright 2005, 226)

There is clearly a gap between these two ‘types’ of magic users. When reading it, a person might feel a slight approval of the first two types, because they are aimed at ‘great inventions’. But necromancers are known in the world of fantasy literature and modern fantasy overall, to be some of the more eviler magic users. Their specialty is contracting demons, raising the dead and even leading armies of undead. However, according to both Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries, there is no difference between a magician, a sorcerer, a witch and a necromancer. They are all classified as ‘magic users’ and there is nothing else added that might somehow help define them further.

Continuing to contradict himself, King James goes on to explain the meaning of ‘witchcraft’ which he claims is nothing more than another way of phrasing the Latin word ‘sorcery’ “which is taken from the casting of the lot. . . The cause wherefore [sorcerers] were called sortiarij, proceeded of their practiques seeming to come of lot or chance: Such as the turning of the riddle”. In old Scottish a ‘riddle’ is a “coarse-meshed sieve”. *1 “Turning the riddle” is a form of divination used for identifying thieves in the past. This form of divination is popular even today in many different forms like looking into beans, or bones of an animal and even tea leaves or coffee grounds at the bottom of a cup. Sorcerers or witches would perform similar rituals in order to predict future events or gain knowledge about others. The more chaotic or random the shapes are, the higher the possibility of revelation. (Albright 2005, 227)

3. Hecate

“In early modern drama Hecate is regarded as the Greek and Roman goddess of witchcraft. Associated with night, the moon, liminal spaces, sorcery, crossroads, magic and the dead, she took a triple or many-faced form and once also had a more positive side as an agricultural goddess. But in Christian Europe in early modern times this aspect was overwhelmed by her perceived evil qualities.”(Gibson & Esra 2014, 126)

Hecate has been greatly worshipped in Greece, especially in Athenian households. She was regarded as the protecting deity and was often seen as benevolent, bestowing prosperity and blessings on the family. In the book *The Goddess Hecate*, Ronan interprets various perspectives on Hecate. Hecate held the status of a ‘great goddess’ in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, although it is little known about her origin. In the *Greek Magical Papyri* she was attributed with titles such as ‘goddess of ghosts, magic and the moon’ and ‘three-headed goddess’. (Ronan 1992, 5)

She was connected to magic, witchcraft, sorcery and even necromancy. Her domains were the crossroads, entrance-ways, as well as knowledge of herbs and poisonous plants. Although many historians claim her to be one of the pivotal deities in Greek Pantheon, “she is more at home on the fringes than in the center of Greek polytheism. Inherently ambivalent and polymorphous, she straddles conventional boundaries and eludes definition.” (Morritt 2010, 7)

As mentioned, Hecate was often portrayed as ‘three-headed’ or ‘triple-bodied’. In terms of her ‘three-headed’ depiction, she had the heads of three animals, namely: a dog, a serpent and a horse. The dog was the closest association with Hecate, often sacrificed in her name. “In art and in literature Hecate is constantly represented as dog-shaped or as accompanied by a dog. Her approach was heralded by the howling of a dog.”(Franklin 1921, 67) The howling of a dog, and later a wolf, has stayed a distinct feature of ‘witchcraft’ as often seen in modern movies and audio/video adaptations. The ‘triple-bodied’ Hecate is connected to the ‘moon goddess’. This is her changeable characteristic, addressing to the waning and waxing of the moon. The three phases of the moon are correspondent to the Maiden (new moon), the Nymph (full moon) and the Crone (waning moon). The Maiden is the ‘young girl’ or the innocence. She has yet to experience romance and discover her sexuality, and thus her being is pure. The concept of new moon is rebirth and renewal, beginnings, budding of flowers and planting of the seeds. The Nymph is

often phrased as the Whore, having in mind that according to Greek mythology nymphs were young, beautiful women at the peak of their sexual activity, and unlike human women, were not bound by marriage but were free to be sexually engaged with whomever they wished.

Coincidentally, the Mother is also attributed to the second phase. The full moon is the phase when the moon is shining the brightest. Similarly the Nymph, the Whore and the Mother are all representing a sexualized woman, and a dangerous woman since her sexuality is what gives her power; the power to seduce a man, to use a man and to carry his child, hence binding him to her. The Nymph is still young and beautiful; she is the object of male desire even though she is still untouchable. In a way she is still pure, but only until she is married off. Even then, her pureness can be sustained since marriage is socially acceptable. On the other hand, the Whore is a woman who has embraced her sexuality and by doing so has fallen out of favor with society. She is seen as an outcast, violating social norms by choosing her own partner, be it a man or a woman, rejecting marriage or engaging in prostitution. The Mother is seen as the evolution of the Nymph and the Whore - she discovered her sexuality, experienced it, but she ascended the physical aspect of sex because through it she acquired the ability to give life. Through the concept of Mother, sexuality and sex are seen as morally acceptable aspects of society, since all women are potential mothers. But this ability to give birth to children is what makes a woman powerful in a patriarchal rule. She is a necessity, but also a danger. The full moon has been a symbol of harvest, ripening of fruits and blooming of flowers. It is the peak of the lunar cycle, and similarly it is connected to the woman's menstrual cycle.

The Crone is a woman whose fertile cycle has finished. She is no longer able to have children, her beauty has faded and she is often perceived as ugly and old. If the woman had a socially fulfilling life, meaning she was married and had children, she was seen as a wise woman. However, if that weren't the case, she would be proclaimed mad, evil and oftentimes a witch. The waning moon suggests death, endings and the withering of flowers. The transition between the Maiden, the Nymph and the Crone was not only relevant to the moon and women, but was also a reflection of seasons. In classical mythology the period between the Maiden phase and the Nymph phase represented marriage and mid-summer. Contrary, the period between the Nymph and the Crone marked the death (or murder) of the husband and symbolized mid-winter. (Graves 2001, 45, 53; Downing 1981, 72)

Shakespeare managed to present Hecate in all of her forms. She was the model for his Fairy Queen Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as the Witch Queen Hecate in *Macbeth*. The Three Weird Sisters were also made according to her triple-bodied persona. Thanks to these seemingly different presentations I will be able to analyze and elaborate on the mutual characteristics that have been looked upon in contrasting fashion under various influences, namely - church, society and folklore.

4. Macbeth

Shakespeare created *Macbeth* sometime around 1606. It is a general idea that the play was created to celebrate the accession of King James VI of Scotland to the throne of England, as King James I, after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603. It is also believed that *Macbeth* 'sealed' the old beliefs and expressed new, Christian views on the myths and folklore of England and Scotland. In just ten years, what were once thought to be jolly and benevolent dwellers of the forest, became evil spirits, demons, and servants of Satan. King James had pride in his education, particularly in his research of witchcraft which he later published as *Daemonologie* in 1597.

In order to appease James's ideology, Shakespeare shapes his witches to suit the image of those described in *Daemonologie*. The witches in *Macbeth* are either ugly old women filled with malice; or they are "evil incarnate, multiple Satans in drag" (Albright 2005, 226) - as they are bearded hags. However, the witches do not play a 'fixed' role in the play. They are 'character-clouds' ready to be modified in various ways for the purposes of plot development. (Albright 2005, 226) The witches themselves "account for nothing . . . it is in fact extremely difficult to specify what, if anything, they do or even what, if anything, they are". (Greenblatt 1993, 122-3)

Shakespeare took it upon him to explore the extent of human destiny. While he enabled Oberon to control the outcome of fate in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, he withheld that power from the witches in *Macbeth*. Their duty is to provide "empty space, in which vagrant ugly desires can manifest themselves, in which deeds without names (4.1.49) can take place." (Albright 2005, 227) Unlike the 'shadow king' Oberon, they do not carry the burden of future events, rather they provide a blank slate to each character and leave the destiny to their respectful owners. *Macbeth* is one of the more 'aesthetic' plays Shakespeare created. The play relies heavily on effects and imagery, thus fog, night, shadows and silhouettes play a crucial role in delivering the story.

Around the time *Macbeth* was created, witch hunts were thoroughly practiced across Scotland. Numerous women were executed and imprisoned on the basis of witchcraft. Due to political and social pressure, Shakespeare found himself forced to compromise to James's religious beliefs. There are seven female characters in *Macbeth*, five of which are in one way or another involved with witchcraft. The three Weird Sisters and Hecate are considered 'true witches', while Lady Macbeth only practices witchcraft, yet does not possess any actual powers. However, many of

Shakespeare's contemporaries would agree that the word 'witch' defines both human and supernatural creatures. (Harris 1980, 2) Hecate was previously discussed, though her character in *Macbeth* has been reduced to that of a lowly worshipper of Satan. The influence of the Jacobean church prohibited any sort of worshipping other than the Christian God almighty. Pagan gods and demi-gods were seen as Devil's spawns and their worshippers judged as witches and warlocks.

Lady Macbeth is the only character neither completely human nor otherworldly, thus I will not analyze her in further chapters. It is noteworthy, though, that her transformation from 'human wife' to 'bloodthirsty witch' is unlike any other character in *Macbeth*. Macbeth himself undergoes a huge transformation, yet Lady Macbeth is one of the roots of this very transformation. She is not like the Weird Sisters, she is 'fair' and wise, but also calculative and greedy. She is the one who interprets the 'prophecy' and the one who 'guides' Macbeth to his downfall. As she slowly loses her humanity she begins to suffer mentally, she sleepwalks and in the end commits suicide. We never see her take her own life, as she dies off-stage, but it is mentioned that she died by "self and violent hands." (5.8.71) It is almost certain that her suicide was intentionally planned by Shakespeare, as yet another way to appease to King James. Suicide is considered a grave sin in Christianity, and those who commit suicide were not allowed proper burial. Nonetheless, such an ending is quite befitting of the sinful Lady Macbeth - the witch.

4.1 The Weird Sisters

The Weird Sisters or the 'Three Witches' are the ones to open the stage. Through their dialogue, the audience learns of Macbeth, and their 'wicked' talk sets the tone of the play:

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Hover through the fog and filthy air."

(1.1.12-13)

In this manner, they describe both their outer and inner ugliness, and ugliness in others. What is beautiful to them, is not to others, and vice versa. The ‘fog and filthy air’ can be understood as the atmosphere in the castle and in the land. Scotland is at war with surrounding countries of Norway and Ireland, and with war comes a number of other tragedies.

Similar to their mistress, Hecate, the Weird Sisters originate from centuries-old beliefs. The archetype of ‘three sisters’ emerges from the goddess of destinies in Greco-Roman mythology. Holinshed was one of the first to portray their existence in England, and he would compare them to nymphs and fairies. Lucky for him, both society and religion were quite tolerant to his writings during the Elizabethan era. He enjoyed the freedom to describe the three women as he pleased, attributing as much mystery to them as necessary. However, King James was not fond of books and writings that glorified supernatural beings or described them in any other way aside from being the Devil’s associates. In *Macbeth*, the three witches are called the ‘Weird Sisters’, and while the modern audience may think of ‘weird’ as ‘strange’, which they definitely were, the old meaning is much closer to their origin. As the Merriam-Webster definition of ‘weird’ says:

“Weird derives from the Old English noun *wyrd*, essentially meaning "fate." By the 8th century, the plural *wyrde* had begun to appear in texts as a gloss for *Parcae*, the Latin name for the Fates—three goddesses who spun, measured, and cut the thread of life. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Scots authors employed *werd* or *weird* in the phrase "weird sisters" to refer to the Fates. William Shakespeare adopted this usage in *Macbeth*, in which the "weird sisters" are depicted as three witches.” *2

Traditionally witches were neither positive nor negative. They often brought balance to the world. Yet, their presence in *Macbeth* is perceived as a bad omen. To further add to their viciousness, Shakespeare uses all sorts of ugly and disgusting ingredients for their potions, such as a snake and a lizard’s leg. Their physical appearance isn’t any better, and they are described as old, ugly and masculine - they have beards. The presence of excessive facial hair in women is normal from a scientific point of view. Many women who suffer from hormonal unbalance develop this disorder, as well as women who enter menopause. Considering the weird sister are both hairy and old, the latter is more likely to be true. Unfortunately, common medical knowledge wasn’t widespread among people of the seventeenth-century England. Beardedness was seen as an anomaly driven by ‘unnatural masculine heat’. (Johnston 1988, 2) There is an underlying issue with bearded women even existing since facial hair was often seen as a

masculine trademark. For centuries men groomed their beards for various reasons, quite often they were seen as a symbol of power and patriarchy. Bearded women thus threaten the traditional patriarchal system and need to be removed from such a society. It is no wonder that women who grew facial hair were commonly thought of as witches in pre-modern England. Women were called witches as a form of discrimination. Status and class played a crucial role in determining who was a witch, thus the majority of witches were middle or lower class women. These women often, but not always, had some amount of medical knowledge either by being midwives or by gathering herbs, and the like. Women were lacking in education, so those who were naturally smart and knew how to use their knowledge in a practical manner were often thought to be 'guided by the Devil'. Similarly, women who expressed financial and/or sexual independence did not have a place in a society dominated by men, hence they were labeled as witches. (Johnston 1988, 190) The (bearded) weird sisters represent the "erotically autonomous, un(re)productive, or otherwise uncooperative" (Johnston 1988, 190) women.

Another common trait of witches, as described by King James, is their need for familiars. In *Macbeth*, these familiars are clearly defined, and they are all animals 'of the night':

"First Witch: Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.

Second Witch: Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

Third Witch: Harpier cries 'Tis time, 'tis time.'" (4.1.1-3)

The first witch has a 'brinded' cat familiar, which is a very common belief, especially if the cat is of a darker color, like gray or black. The second witch's familiar is a hedgehog or 'hedge-pig' as it was called in old English. The hedgehog is not a common familiar for a witch, but it was often described as an ingredient in potions (the spikes of a hedgehog), and it is also a nocturnal creature. The third witch calls her familiar a 'harpier', probably making a connection to the Greek creature harpy - a creature that is half bird and half woman. Owls have often been thought to have 'human faces', specifically the barn owl. Wise women, the predecessors of witches, often had owls as their familiars. However, the third witches' familiar 'cries out' and while owls do make unique noises, they are not capable of human speech. On the other hand, a raven is perfectly able to imitate sounds and learn human speech in captivity, making a good candidate for a familiar. Not only do they have animal familiars, they also transform into animals and sacrifice them for rituals. Shakespeare even made a reference to an actual witch trial that happened in 1590 in

Scotland. A woman by the name Agnes Sampson, accused of treason, confessed in a trial that she and other witches traveled in a sieve on the Halloween night. She further claimed that with Satan's help they aimed to destroy the King. (Smith 1893, 567) Similar to her, Shakespeare's first witch transforms into a 'rat without a tail', and sails in a sieve to find the Captain of the Tiger in order to torment him for days and nights. (1.3.8-11) In that same dialogue, the second witch says that she has been 'killing swine'. (1.3.2) During Shakespeare's time, there was a strong belief that witches were spreading diseases like the plague, in order to kill livestock. 'Killing swine' refers to pestilence spread by witchcraft.

While the weird sisters display all sorts of spells and skills, they do not use them as much as the audience would expect them to. Their appearance at the very start of the play makes the audience anticipate they will somehow twist the fate or bestow some kind of curse on the characters. And while they didn't cast a 'real' curse on Macbeth, they did plant the seed of 'doubt' in his mind. As they foretell the future, the witches speak in riddles, and when the thanes want to know more, they disappear. The Weird Sisters are always seen together; they appear and leave the scenes at the same time. Additionally, there is always lightning and/or thunder when they appear or leave the scene.

The Weird Sisters carry a symbolic meaning of three. Besides the obvious meaning, that there are three of them, they keep repeating the word 'thrice', and there are parts of dialogues that are repeated three times in the play.

“The Weird Sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus go, about, about,
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace, the charm's wound up.” (1.3.33-38)

There are three apparitions later in the play: the armed head, the bloody child, and the crowned child that also carries three in his hand. The number three has long been considered a mysterious and magical number, and it is an important part of many cultures and religions. Knight believes that the Weird Sisters turn from Fates to Furies in their last scene, the apparition scene:

“The Weird Sisters who were formerly as the three Parcae or Fates, foretelling Macbeth’s future, now, at this later stage of the story become the Erinyes [the Greek Furies], avengers of murder, symbols of the tormented soul. They delude and madden him with their apparitions and ghosts.” (Knight 2001, 176)

He does not elaborate his statement; however his explanation sparks a question - why do the Weird Sisters punish Macbeth if they were the ones to lead him onto this path? One explanation may rely on King James’s presentation of witches, namely that they are evil and malicious, and they harm people for no particular reason. They may have simply wanted to enjoy the suffering of others. Another explanation incorporates a more philosophical approach, the idea that the witches don’t have power over fate and that Macbeth created his own destiny. The witches themselves are a duality: one part of them depicts the ‘lowest class’ witch from pre-modern England, while the other part has the divinity of an Oracle. As Albright states:

“Shakespeare combined the rudimentary terror of popular superstition (old women with the power of the evil eye, for example) with an intelligent, philosophical sort of terror, the ‘Destiny of the ancients’.” (Albright 2005, 231)

“The comical witches’ alter egos are the prophesying Weird Sisters, and the Weird Sisters’ alter egos are the witches. They are the ‘other self’ of themselves.”(Whalen 2012-3, 60)

Macbeth makes a fatal mistake the moment he believes the prophecy. The Weird Sisters, in a way, represent Macbeth’s dark impulses and desires, and it is only logical that he would willingly follow what he believes is true. In their final scene, the witches mock Macbeth for allowing them to fool him with their prophecies implying that witchcraft was never meant to be taken seriously, and this is probably the core idea of Macbeth. Even though Macbeth was the only play at the time to realistically portray witchcraft, it was done so under the influence of King James I. The final result had to align with the ideology of the king and the church.



The Witches Date, 1863, woodcut print

4.2 The Witch Queen - Hecate

It is important to distinguish *Macbeth's* Hecate - the Witch Queen, from divine Hecate. This small fragment of her is used only to enrich the plot and mysticism. She needs to be the intermediary between the witches and their 'master', the Devil. For this reason, I will discuss only her role and presentation in the play.

Nowhere in the play do we find a description of Hecate's appearance; it is either unnecessary or unimportant. Her behavior is closer to that of a witch rather than a goddess. Her words are filled

with wrath and malice when she lashes at her minions. She calls herself the ‘mistress of (their) charms’ (3.5.6) insinuating that she is the source of their powers. Ironically, she is not the goddess Hecate, which would make more sense in this situation; rather she is just the Witch Queen, making her ‘power-providing’ abilities absurd. On another note, she may refer to her being their ‘teacher’ of witchcraft. The Witch Queen is the strongest witch of all. She possesses immense magic and she especially loves flying:

“I am for the air; this night I'll spend
Unto a dismal and a fatal end:
Great business must be wrought ere noon:
Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;
I'll catch it ere it come to ground:” (3.5.20-25)

Interestingly, Shakespeare did not miss this opportunity to correlate Hecate and the Moon. For those unknowing, the Moon may be just a symbol of the night; however, those who are familiar with the classic myth would surely recognize the goddess Hecate. It is almost as if Shakespeare cannot let go of his earlier beliefs, and he continues to give small ‘clues’. During her second appearance, Hecate calls for her underlings to gather around the cauldron, and dance:

“And every one shall share i' the gains;
And now about the cauldron sing,
Live elves and fairies in a ring,
Enchanting all that you put in.” (4.1.40-43)

Here Hecate compares ‘fairies’ and ‘elves’ with the ugly, old witches. This was undoubtedly written with a purpose, however, whether Shakespeare wanted to give a small tribute to the ‘wise women’ of the past, or was this an attempt to claim all supernatural beings as ‘devil spawns’, remains a debate.

5. Fairies

Fairies have existed as part of the mythical world for centuries. They have had many different names and were given various properties and appearances, but their presence was prominent in many countries' folktales and legends. The oldest recorded fairies in England were described in the early 13th century by the historian Gervase of Tilbury. *3

The word 'fairy' comes from Old French 'faerie', from 'fae', from Latin 'fata' (the Fates), plural of 'fatum' (Fate). *4

The correlation between the word 'fate' and 'fairy' might stem from the idea of fairies having supernatural powers, namely powers to control nature and thus having an impact on humans' lives.

People have been equally fascinated by and terrified of these creatures to the point they started to believe fairies were responsible for all kinds of misfortunes and blessings that would befall them. Some of these myths include the disappearances of husbands for periods of time (most commonly a week) when something in the house would become damaged or broken. Most historians believe such stories had a different meaning, one that was much more common and logical. As women and household attendants were the ones in charge of cleaning and housekeeping, these kinds of stories would prevent them from neglecting their duties and also make sure they stay attentive to their homes. At the same time, men who were the heads of their families and carried the burden which is the family name and reputation could easily blame their spouse or attendant whenever they wanted to spend some time outside of home, for whatever reasons. Other myths include finding wealth in desolate or magical places, such as the famous 'pot of gold' many Irish believe lies at the 'end of the rainbow'. Often fairies were aides to heroes, helping them overcome difficult quests, providing them with magical powers or legendary weapons. On the other hand, in many stories they pose as the main threat a future king or knight has to defeat in order to be recognized by his people or to earn the hand-in-marriage of a beautiful princess. Fairies have nourished people's imagination for centuries, and this can be seen in many classic epics, such as *Beowulf* and the Arthurian Legend.

There exists no accurate record of when fairies first came into people's minds. Different cultures call them different names, and historians have had difficulty distinguishing the existence of actual

people and races from the imaginary fairy folk. The Irish mythic literature provides us with records of a mysterious race known as the Tuatha de Danann. These people are described as the folk of the goddess Danu, the hypothetical 'mother goddess' or the goddess of fertility and nature. Some of the oldest Irish tales, namely those between 8th and 10th century, call them a name similar to that of the late 19th century Irish peasants - 'aes sidhe' - the folk of the sidhe or the fairy folk. (Monaghan 2014, 168)

Throughout history the descendants of the Tuatha de Danann have had similar names and attributes across the whole of Great Britain. Both Irish and English peasants, whose main concerns were those related to agriculture, glorified them as "bestowers of increase in flock and herd, protectors and fosterers of vegetation, jealous guardians of ancient country rites".

Not only in Great Britain but in most European countries, peasants weaved fairy tales akin to those in Ireland, not because one culture would borrow from another, but because all people had the same seed of belief in them. This has been proven multiple times based on a variety of resources, some of them being stories collected by the Brothers Grimm in Germany, in Serbia by Vuk Karadzic, and many others across the world. The general idea is that people thought of the same phenomena and found similar explanations in their environment. This also correlates with the existence of various pagan religions that had similar hierarchies and roles among their deities.

During the second half of the 12th century, Pope Adrian IV authorized Henry II to invade Ireland in order "to proclaim the truths of the Christian religion to a rude and ignorant people". *5 Soon after Christianity became the main religion in Ireland, tales of the Tuatha de Danann and the old gods became a debatable topic among literary and priestly classes. People's belief in the fairy folk was deeply rooted and this caused a threat to the Christian propaganda. Henceforth the stories of the old acquired a new appearance; the fantastic supernatural and magical elements were minimized and turned into 'strong faith in God'. The heroes and kings now did not receive help from the fairy folk, rather they would be guided by angels or God's messengers. While such changes were made and generally accepted by the public, the original tales survived in rural places across Ireland. (Evans-Wentz 1990, 167)

In England the same Christian reforms have been made, however with more success. By the end of 13th century The South English Legendary established a new systematic structure for the magical figures. One such change defined 'elven' as "former angels banished to the earth for

remaining neutral during the war in heaven which ended in the expulsion of the rebel angels to hell. There they took the shape of beautiful women who danced and played in secluded places, and men could have sex with them, but at their peril". (Hutton 2014, 12) As much as the fairy world stayed untouched in Ireland, it seems the English had lost sight of fairies' origin. The difference between the Irish and English image of fairies, post Shakespeare time is almost as that between Puck and Oberon. The Irish kept their original temperament and powers through folklore, but the new fairy world in England was completely shaped by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Over the coming years fairies started losing their 'power' over humans. Furthermore they have become feared and despised entities due to newly established witch phobias. (Lewis 1994, 138; Thomas 1973, 725) The negativity towards fairies gained more support during the 16th and early 17th century, after the witch hunts came to exist. (Lewis 1994, 125) There were a lot of similarities between how people saw fairies and the way Christianity depicted demons and the Devil. Among those, Puck had the closest similarity to Satan, partially because of his looks - being a satyr put him on the same pedestal as the goat-shaped nemesis of God. Not only that, Puck was known as a prankster and had the demonic ability to multiply himself, making him akin to the "great deceiver", Satan. (Kott 1966, 216) Some critics agree that the Puck of folklore was indeed dangerous to some extent, however due to Shakespeare his character was toned down to such a degree that most people forgot about it. Interestingly, another important fairy character, the fairy king Oberon, accommodates the pseudo-demonic title 'king of shadows'.(MND 3.2.347) Perhaps this was intentional in order to categorize his powers, similar to how we know Titania rules the Moon. Considering they are the male and female counterparts of each other, king and queen of the fairy world, if Titania rules the light, it is understandable why Oberon rules the shadow. Many critics discussed about Oberon possibly possessing demonic powers, however he clearly dissociates fairies as a species from "Damn'd spirits". It is not further explained who the damned spirits are but, besides fairies, the folklore had a variety of other beings, many not nearly as benevolent as fairies were. Beings like banshees and the Sluagh were feared long before the Christian demons came to the British Isles. When talking to Puck, Oberon says:

"But we are spirits of another sort". (MND 3.2.387)

The Elizabethan audience had a distorted picture of what or who fairies actually were, and it was easy to further warp that image through Christian propaganda. The best example of this distortion

is seen in how witches in *Macbeth* were described. We know they were inspired by fairies because Shakespeare himself made the connection. In one scene Hecate urged the three witches to dance around the cauldron “like elves and fairies in a ring.” (*Macbeth*, 4.1.42)

5.1 Fairies in Elizabethan Era

The Elizabethan Era was a turning point for the fairy myth. It is interesting to see how much the image of fairies changed in less than a century. This phenomenon might be one of the better examples of how easy it is to change the viewpoint of the masses under the influence of media (theatre) and politics. Even though folklore isn't something that greatly defines a nation and its culture in modern times, in the past, where people had only a fraction of today's common sense, it had a much greater effect. The two biggest influencers on fairy mythology during the 16th and 17th centuries were Shakespeare and King James.

Shakespeare's fairies are depicted as (partially) harmless tricksters and pranksters, who eventually end up helping the people they initially tricked and solving the problems they have caused. Even though he softened their menace, reduced their presence in both physical and abstract sense, and, to a degree, beautified their overall appearance, Shakespeare tried to preserve their role as the primordial rulers of nature. However, Shakespeare added new characteristics to fairies, some which were much closer to the Elizabethan social structure and norms, namely civilization, marriage, gender roles, and the like. In the beginning Oberon presents the audience with behavior seen as most adequate of a fairy in Elizabethan England. Due to his enormous anger caused by his jealousy, he unleashes the forces of nature upon the world without any regard. He is entitled to this kind of behavior because he is a king, he is Titania's husband and he is a fairy, meaning he wields unimaginable power. Fairies were also portrayed as passionate, somewhat unreasonable beings that would claim possession of anything that catches their interest. However, the end of the play shows Oberon as a benevolent fairy king, in much contrast

to the folklore of the time. He becomes a tolerant husband who thinks of his wife as his equal, and redeems himself by blessing the couples and bidding them farewell unharmed.

Elizabethan fairies were believed to be exceedingly beautiful beings and this seems to be their only real distinguishing trait. (Latham 1930, 82) Since the age of heroism started to fade in favor of culture and education, it was not strange to favor beauty even among men. For this reason, both male and female fairies were seen as possessing otherworldly beauty. Shakespeare used the newly established trend among the Elizabethans to incorporate his own version of fairy beauty, specifically Titania and Oberon. The two most outstanding fairies, possessed beauty that was inspired by Greco-Roman myths. The 'Dream' in the play is located in Ancient Greece; however, Shakespeare liked to ignore the geographical boundaries by incorporating folklore from different cultures. Among many beautiful fairies Puck sticks out like a sore thumb as he is neither beautiful nor is he of the same origin. Puck or Robin Goodfellow is a typical hobgoblin native to Ireland and Britain; yet he may have some resemblance to satyrs and the like. Shakespeare made many modifications to the existing folklore and some of those modifications changed the perception of fairies for centuries to come.

The physical appearances of fairies were deliberately changed to Shakespeare's liking, beauty being among those changes. Not only did he beautify them, but the size of fairies drastically changed from human-sized to "diminutive, insectal beings with characteristic floral affinities". (Nutt 1972, 5-6) Two of the lesser fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* even carry flower-like and insect-like names, namely Peaseblossom and Cobweb. They have become nature's caretakers rather than it's rulers, with flowers being their concern in particular. There are many critics who agree that "inappropriateness in the rustic fairies of fertility prompted Shakespeare to invent a new world of minuscule fairy spirits" (Hunter 1957, 87). And indeed, the fairies in the play are tiny. Shakespeare provides us with an abundance of details such as their clothing and habitat. Even though she is the biggest of all female fairies, Titania sleeps in the "enamell'd skin" (MND 2.1. 255) of a snake and wears the "leathern wings" (MND 2.2.4) of bats for a coat. Her servant fairies are even smaller, in fact they are so small they sometimes "Creep into acorn-cups" (MND 2.1.31) in order to escape their master's arguments. Contrary to traditional depiction of fairies and elves, Shakespeare's fairies are simply "not concerned with mischief as traditionally depicted". (Hunter 1957, p98)

The role fairies played in society preserved, though the concept changed a little. Some of the beliefs stayed the same, such as using fairies as an excuse for mishaps within one's household. Often negligent servants and maids put the blame on the fairy folk for broken or damaged items. Inspired by Shakespeare, the people of Elizabethan Era added a new figure to their everyday life, namely the 'Fairy Queen'. During the 16th century, fairy belief helped to reinforce "some of the standards upon which the effective working of society depended" (Thomas 1973, 732). The proverbial assumption that the Fairy Queen hated "sluts and sluttery", a dirty household, immorality and neglect (Latham 1930, 130), helped to keep domestic order among the poorly educated to some degree. The Elizabethan fairy belief was akin to astrology and magic, considering every unusual phenomenon and occurrence had a ready "self-confirming" explanation. (Thomas 1973, 733) Ironically while providing a look into the unseen world of fairies, revealing the powers that lie behind the unexplained, Shakespeare hastened the disappearance of fairies as "credible entities". (Latham 1930, 177) In his attempt to present fairies as these small, benevolent creatures living in their own world, away from human civilization, Shakespeare stripped them of the power ancient fairy folk once had. The Elizabethan Era has managed to set in stone a new fairy lore, one that was "primarily a store of mythology, rather than a corpus of living belief". (Thomas 1973, 726)

Many critics believe that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* led future writers and poets astray, as his depiction of the fairy world, and with it a part of British folklore, was inaccurate. This was not Shakespeare's only work about fairies, considering he wrote *The Tempest* a decade later, but it was his most popular. Shakespeare's fairies served as inspiration to many novels, plays, poems and later, movies and TV shows. Fairies became the cute, beautiful, benevolent creatures that protect nature and are always on the 'good' side fighting evil. However, people have forgotten the original nature of fairies, and how they are:

"Beings of ancient and awful aspect, elemental powers, mighty, capricious, cruel, and benignant, as is Nature herself." (Nutt 1972, 37)

6. A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream was written sometime between 1590 and 1595. No other Shakespeare's play has had such an immediate and enduring influence on literature like this one. The fairy kingdom Shakespeare presented inspired generations of poets and writers, and still continues to exist as a classical example of its kind. For the longest time people did not question the originality and accuracy of Shakespeare's vision of the fairy realm. Rather it was accepted as the ideal presentment and served as the basis of knowledge for the average post Elizabethan Englishman. In more recent times, the world of literature knows of Shakespeare's detachment from original folklore, however his version of the fairy kingdom became an entity of its own. It claimed integrity and persisted for centuries in literature and art, and has proven itself as an original style and form. To this day and in the days to come, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will continue to inspire others to create magnificent works of art. Yet, no matter how inspiring he may be to others, Shakespeare was a "man of profit". He may have created marvelous comedies and heart-wrenching tragedies, but he did have practical reasons for doing so. Writing plays was his job, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was no exception.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was created with a specific purpose and for a particular audience. Some historians believe it was made on a request from a noble, possibly the Earl of Derby or the Earl of Essex. (Olson 1957, 95) The theme and characters were carefully catered to the upper classes and the marriage doctrines of 16th century England. The occasion was most likely a wedding; hence the theme of the play incorporated ideas of love, marriage and partnership. The attendees would have been educated men and lovers of literature, especially those who were familiar with the recent publications, such as: *The Faerie Queene* (1590), *The Countesse of Pembroke's Yvychurch* (1592) and Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590). The tone and atmosphere of the play required a fun and somewhat emotional story in order to entertain the guests and further strengthen the bond of the married couple. (Olson 1957, 96-97)

Elizabethan England glorified marriage for multiple reasons, but the two most important ones were the order it gave to the social structure and acceptance through Christian doctrine. Marriage was seen not only as a positive social value, but also as spiritual achievement. Through marriage a man and a woman would become 'whole' and they would vow on their love in front of God.

The unification of two people often correlated with the unification of the mind and emotions, or God and the soul. The unconditional love towards God was seen as the ultimate goal, but a person would slowly achieve it through loving their neighbors, parents, spouse and children. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we can draw connections between the marriage rituals in Renaissance and those in the play, as well as what was deemed socially appropriate in terms of male-female relationships. Parents were the ones who found suitable matches for their children, usually with social status and wealth in mind. However, parents were advised to allow their children to at least choose among the available candidates. This was established due to the Christian belief that all humans are born equal, and to “have respect for God's ordinance, and to the right ordinate consent of the parties...” Children on the other hand were counseled to have respect for their parents' choices, and to not commit to marriage without their parents' permission. (Olson 1957, 100)

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play that operates in accordance with the normal Aristotelian laws of psychological causality. Because of this, critics have expected to find in it ancient fertility myths and rituals. However the ritual described in the play is after all the marriage rite. And the symbolism does not stem from the Celtic twilight but rather, from more conscious and intellectual literary traditions. “Shakespeare was able to celebrate the marriage occasion at the noble mansion with archetypes more alive to the noblemen of his time than the superstitions of their Druidic ancestors”. (Olsen 1957, 118) With this play, Shakespeare managed to present certain truths about wedlock that were either completely unknown to the young couple or complete abstractions to the audience. He combined the wild and the civilized through the image of ancient Athens and the woods, between the world of humans and the world of fairies. Although the most important theme, marriage is not the main focus of the play. We see the social structure of the characters, we see their family relations, their interactions, unrequited love, obsessive love, gender roles and power struggles. Everything present in the play, even if seemingly unimportant, is not trivial. To his audience, Shakespeare presented a world that was ever so intriguing yet unbelievably familiar and realistic. He showed “that society in which sexual mores are governed well, in which marriage is relatively unselfish, may exhibit a deeper unity in other matters. It is in terms of such values that the dream becomes more than a fanciful illusion and grows, in Hippolita's phrase, ‘to something of great constancy’ (MND 5.1.26)”. (Olson 1957, 119)

On another note, and this might be pure speculation, Shakespeare may have chosen Midsummer for a different reason. As previously stated, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was created for the purpose of entertainment, most likely during a wedding. Coincidence or not, June or the Midsummer season was seen as the best time for young couples to get married. This belief comes from the Roman goddess Juno (for whom June is named). The goddess Juno, or Hera - her Greek counterpart, was the goddess of marriage and protector of women and childbearing, much like Diana. Women believed that if they were to get married in June their marriage would be a blessed one, thus the term 'June bride' came to exist. June weddings were also popular in Celtic culture. According to the Celtic calendar, on May Day (May 1), young couples would start courting for three months in order to be wed on Lammas Day (August 1). However, many couples were insisting on getting married earlier, leading to the courting period being shortened to mid-June, thus adding to the popularity of June weddings.

6.1 Titania

Titania is the lead female character in the world of fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Her name and appearance tend to confuse many critics as there seems to be a gap between the two. The first impression the reader might get from Titania's name is that she is a tall, imposing and powerful female, since her name reminds us of the great Titans from classical Greek mythology. Furthermore, she allegedly had an affair with Theseus, who was known as a majestic and tall mortal. However, what is later presented to us is a description of a minuscule fairy, at least physically. Titania's power is the very power of nature, she controls the weather, the growth, the change of seasons, in other words, she has enough power to completely destroy humanity. It could be that Shakespeare intended to use the name Titania to address her powers, rather than her physique. Yet, other resources imply that her name was taken from Ovid's *Metamorphose* in which Titania is used as a synonym for Diana.

Traditionally, Diana was the goddess of the Moon, but also the goddess of the hunt and nature. She was the ruler of the woodlands, similar to Titania. She was also seen as the 'triple goddess' - namely Diana, Luna, and Hecate. This is further confirmed through Puck's statement that the fairies run "By the triple Hecates teame (MND 5.1.391)." It is interesting that Shakespeare chose Hecate and not Diana to make this comparison with. While Hecate is often used as the main title of the triple deity, she was also seen as an individual goddess, and the individual goddess Hecate was that of witchcraft, magic, crossroads, borders and the underworld. She was also revered for her vast knowledge of herbs and poisons which, at the same time, is quite befitting Titania's character and is very much ironic. Coincidentally, the 'triple Hecate' could also be understood as the seasons or the life cycle itself. There have been suggestions that Titania might have been based on the character of Proserpina from Ovid's classic. To the Renaissance audience familiar with the classics, Titania may have looked like a recognizable character, specifically her appearance and her powers. The myth of Proserpina is to this day a famous one, and it has served as inspiration for many works of literature and art. According to the myth, Proserpina had power over the change of seasons; she is the vegetation goddess, sometimes even called the fertility goddess. It is necessary to mention that, even though Proserpina rules over all the seasons, this is only partially true, considering that the last season, winter, is actually her absence from the world of mortals, in order to join her husband in the Underworld. Hence, Proserpina's rule over the three 'fertile' seasons - namely spring, summer, and autumn, matches almost perfectly with the triple deity of Hecate.

Titania rules the seasons, she rules the nature and the flow of life, she is the goddess of fertility similar to Proserpina and Diana. However, there seem to be many contradictions in the case of Titania's character, especially her comparison to traditional Diana. One of the many existing differences between Diana and Titania is their chastity. Even though Diana is the protector of women and childbirth, she herself swore never to marry. In many instances, Diana is the first phase of the goddess Hecate, the virgin goddess. Contrary to her, Titania is known for her erotic body and seductive nature, and above all, she is the wife of the fairy king. However, Titania regards herself as chaste, and her chastity is even mentioned in the play, by none other than her husband:

"At a fair vestal throned by the West,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow

As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
And the imperial vot'ress passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free." (2.1.158-164)

Another contradiction can be found in the title of the play which suggests the time of the events, namely the midsummer. Midsummer is the period of time centered upon the summer solstice. Traditionally there were many festivals and holidays held around this time, most of them celebrated at night with people gathering in circles around bonfires. If we follow the ideas of changing seasons, the 'triple Hecate' and Proserpina; if thus Diana is the beginning - spring, and Hecate is the end - autumn, that leaves Luna to be the one ruling summer. Luna, or Selene, is yet another Moon goddess, and while Luna (the Roman version) was mostly seen as the 2nd form of the 'triple deity', in the original Greek myth she is an entity of her own. This is where we can draw similarities between Selene and Titania. Selene had many lovers, some of them being Zeus, Pan, and the mortal Endymion. Similar to her, Titania had an affair with the mortal king Theseus, and numerous non-human lovers. The biggest connection these two share, in my opinion, is through Titania's name, as Selene was the daughter of Titans Hyperion and Theia. Critics have already pointed out this connection through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where 'Titania' serves as a title to daughters of Titans. Looking back at the seasons and the 'triple deity', Selene the erotic goddess suits summer, the bright, bountiful season, the most. Summer is the time when fruits ripen and when plants reach their peak growth before harvest, making Titania, a woman in her most feminine and seductive form, quite like the season itself.

Some critics suggest that the forest, which is said to represent Titania's body, carries the symbolic meaning of eroticism and lust both of which were denied in Elizabethan patriarchal society. There is even a suggestion that the expression going to "see the fairies" refers to "illicit sexual encounters". (Lamb 2000, 303) As previously stated, Titania's body was often seen as the physical embodiment of the forest and its growth. Her mood and emotions control over the land and the weather, hence the various representations of her inner struggles. One of the most obvious examples is her obsession with the changeling boy which in turn leads to an overgrown garden. Due to her not tending to the garden, her generative energy overflowed. The seasons

became ‘entangled like weeds’, ‘producing snow and roses, ice and summer buds at the same time’. The image the readers perceive is one of uncontrollable growth that leads to decay and imbalance in nature expressed through the rhyme, “flowers out of season, sorrow without reason.” (Roy 2004, 47)

Even though we know all about Titania’s sexual tendencies, nowhere in the play is it mentioned that she has children. Not with Oberon, nor any of the other love interests of hers. We could, therefore, believe that she actually never had any children, but even then she is far from being a chaste ‘virgin’ wife. As a married woman, or fairy in this case, Titania had a certain level of obligation and duties she needed to fulfill towards her husband, Oberon. As mentioned before, both of them had frequent contact with the mortal world, unlike the ancient pagan gods. The gods and goddesses from ancient times used to reside in their own realm, and they rarely interacted with mortals. Even then their intentions were not always those of goodwill, often involving trials, blackmail, abduction, and sexual assaults. (Latham 1930, 181) Unlike them, Shakespeare’s fairy monarchs have an almost altruistic and beneficent attitude towards mortals. Titania herself made a friend of a mortal woman, whose child she took in after the woman’s death. We notice that Titania develops a genuine affection towards the little Indian boy, although it is sometimes difficult to tell whether it’s motherly love or simply domination. Titania claims that she took in the boy because of a promise made to his mother. From her point of view, she did a deed of goodwill. However, Puck reveals that Titania stole the boy:

“Because that she as her attendant hath

A lovely boy stolen from an Indian king.

She never had so sweet a changeling” (2.1.21-23).

In contrast to Titania’s belief, Puck does not even consider the link between the fairy queen and the changeling as that of a mother and son. He proceeds to call the Indian boy her attendant, thus completely disregarding their familial bond. According to Goddard, the action of Titania stealing the boy from the Indian king “as a female claiming a male’s property and offspring and „perforce“ withholding him” - portrays the resistance of female power under male dominance. (Goddard 2013, 26) Titania is a powerful woman, she is respected by fairies and feared by mortals. The only person who doesn’t regard her as superior or even an equal, is her husband, Oberon. This may be due to her unwillingness to conform to his will and equally possible due to

his jealousy of her numerous affairs. It is also interesting to notice that Titania is the only woman in the play to become a victim of a magic spell, quite ironic considering she is literally the epitome of Hecate. However, Titania's magic powers don't have an important role in the comedy. Considering she does not use her powers at all, unlike Oberon, her behavior and her role as a fairy and Oberon's wife are of bigger importance in the play. Moreover, the idea of civilization, marriage, and monarchy among the fairy folk was relatively new.



Titania, Paton, 1850

Fairies were seen as forces of nature as well as supernatural beings, thus their behavior was often unlike that of humans. The creation of a fairy king and queen was not completely unheard of, as the titles have existed, but the fairy rulers never had names like Oberon and Titania. Similarly, fairies of the past did express love and affection, however, marriage among the fairy folk was never openly mentioned. Indeed, there exist stories where a mortal man would ask for the hand in marriage of a fairy, but until Shakespeare, the 'fairy matrimony' did not explicitly exist. As

previously mentioned, Titania is another name for Diana, and Diana was the name often given to the famous English Queen - Elizabeth, in royal poetry. It is a popular belief among many critics that the character Titania is, in fact, Shakespeare's tribute to the actual human queen. Montrose, being one of the mentioned critics, explored Queen Elizabeth's presence in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in both content and context. He came to the conclusion that Titania perfectly embodies the queen's feminine principles, while also interrogating sexual identity and power. She resembles Elizabeth on a much personal level as well, expressing much of her character qualities such as being loveable but equally instilling fear, being possessive, conveying motherly love, jealousy, and sexuality. Titania loves the Indian boy in the same way Elizabeth loved her country, they are both protective and maternal. While Titania felt possessiveness and jealousy towards Bottom, Elizabeth demonstrated her jealous behavior towards the love lives of her courtiers. The obvious connection lies in their titles - the queens, and the rulership over 'land'. While Elizabeth is the queen of England, Titania is the literal queen of the land, the earth, and nature. (Montrose 2006, 31)

6.2 Oberon

The most powerful male figure and Titania's counterpart in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon, is quite a mysterious character. While many allegations have been made regarding Oberon's origin and character, he continues to serve as an ongoing research topic. The name 'Oberon' has become a synonym for the 'king of fairies', and has been widely used in literature, movies, games, and art. However, critics and historians came across various results while researching his name and character, and while many Shakespearean characters can be traced to or are linked with myths or folklore, there was very little to be found about Oberon.

“‘Oberon’ or ‘Oberion’ was borne by a demon who had been frequently conjured by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century wizards, long before the title became associated with the King of Fairies.” (Keith 1973, 727)

“In 1510 Oberion was raised near Halifax, but the conjurer confessed himself a trickster.” (Kittredge 1956, 208)

“Earlier still, in 1444, a man was pilloried in London, “the whyche wrought by a wycked spyryte the whyche was callyd Oberycom”.” (Briggs 1959, 114)

These examples came to be before the translation of Bouchier's *Huon of Bordeaux* arrived in England in 1533. According to *Huon of Bordeaux*, Oberon is the son of Julius Caesar and Morgan La Fay, and he is only three feet tall. Greene also mentions him in *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, however, he doesn't have many appearances in the play. Spencer included him in his poem *The Faerie Queene*, as well. (2.1.6.9 and 2.10.75.8) *5 - (The Shakespeare Name Dictionary, Oberon, 673)

In *Huon of Bordeaux*, Oberon is a guardian figure who leads and protects Huon on his quest to Babylon. The Oberon in this story is centuries old, he was born around forty years before Christ and never ages. Surprisingly, his place in Paradise has already been appointed for him, once he leaves the mortal realm. He also possesses some rather unique artifacts or magical tools, such as the ‘cup from which only the guiltless can drink’. Many have compared Oberon's cup to the holy grail in Arthurian legend and Christian myths, and it definitely might have been inspired by it.

The Oberon of Greene's play calls himself ruler:

“Of quiet, pleasure, profit, and content,
Of wealth, of honor and of all the world.”

He also serves as the main narrator of the play's Boethian moral: “content is virtue and the love of worldly things vanity.”(Olson 1957, 108)

The name ‘Oberon’ equals the French pronunciation of ‘Auberon’, which comes from the Old French ‘Alberon’, which is further derived from Middle High German ‘Alberich’. ‘Alberich’ literally means elf king (alb- "elf" and -rîh-, "ruler", "king"). The connection between Alberich and Oberon can be traced both etymologically and through shared narratives, features and story events. They also share similar roles in stories, both serve as guides, matchmakers and magic wielders. Both Auberon from *Huon of Bordeaux* and Alberich from *Ortnit* originated sometime

in the thirteenth century. They meet their respective heroes and embark on a journey to a faraway land, seeking adventure and love. Shakespeare's Oberon does not provide the same sort of help, especially in terms of romance, however, he does play matchmaker, and he does love to mingle with the mortals, even if only to jest with them. This is probably the most typical characteristic of a 'fairy king', he is jolly, yet powerful, he is helpful, but also destructive. He possesses the power to make things appear and disappear in an instant - Alberich materializes whole armies, Auberon makes castles appear and disappear, while Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* makes himself invisible and is able to teleport (from Athens to India). And while Alberich had the form of a dwarf, short and muscular, Auberon had a more ambiguous appearance. He was described as short with a hunchback, however, he was exceedingly beautiful. Only through the creation of Auberon does the 'fairy king' acquire his 'noble' lineage. And this is probably the reason why Shakespeare's Oberon, as was fashion in Elizabethan England, seems more like a diplomat and poet, rather than a warrior.

Similar to his character's nature, Oberon's powers weekend with each tale. The Germanic Alberich held immense strength, both physical and magical, as was usually the case with many Scandinavian and Germanic heroes. The French Auberon, on the other hand, became more cunning and calculative. He resorted to trickery and illusions, and as one of the characters stated, he could conjure up "a grete rynnynge riuer, blacke and depe" before the travelers, still 'ye may passe it at your ease, and it shall not wete the fete of your horse for all is fantesey and enchauntmentes." (Lee 1884, 64) This proves Auberon to be equally terrifying as he is harmless. "The great black river suggests a dark and frightening side of the fairy king, while the insubstantiality of that river reduces the ominous dark threat to an almost laughable trick." (Aydelotte, 3) It is also important to mention that all three fairy kings have a strong sense of justice. While Alberich and Auberon make sure to point out violations of the chivalric code and many other wrongdoings, Shakespeare's Oberon does a similar thing when he finds out that Puck has messed up. He makes sure Puck has fixed all his mistakes and he even blesses the young couples, wishing them well. Unlike his predecessors, Oberon uses Puck as a proxy for his 'darker deeds' as well as the intermediary between the fairy and the mortal realm. This way he creates and maintains a distance from the human world he has such a big influence on. It could almost be said that he watches over the world of humans 'from the shadow'.



Oberon and Titania, illustration

Interestingly enough, statements were made regarding the nature of fairies, Oberon included, after the publication of King James's *Daemonologie*. Oberon was often called the 'king of Shadows', whether that was understood in literal meaning or that of his role in the play. There has been a lot of discussion on Oberon's potential connection with Greek/Roman gods, similar to Titania's connection with Diana/Hecate. One specific comparison seems to resonate well with the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As previously discussed, Titania shares some similarities with Proserpina, the goddess of fertility and vegetation who is, coincidentally, married to the lord of the Underworld - Pluto. Pluto is traditionally seen as a dark and powerful ruler, the god of death. And while many Christian enthusiasts gladly compared this 'dark lord' to Satan and the Devil, as seen in Hobbe's *Leviathan*: "(fairies) have but one universal king, which some poets of ours call King Oberon, but the Scripture calls Beelzebub."(463) Yet, all these allegations are dismissed during a dialogue between Puck and Oberon. Here Puck points to the damned spirits running away from the light of dawn:

"At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
Troop home to churchyards. Damned spirits all,...
They wilfully themselves exile from light,

And must for aye consort with black-browed night.” (3.2.381-28; 386-87)

Oberon immediately replies by rejecting the very idea of him being of the same kind as those ‘damned spirits’. He reminds Puck that he loves the morning, and says:

“But we are spirits of another sort.

I with the morning’s love have oft made sport...” (3.2.387-88)

Hence, Oberon loses all connection to the dark lord of the Underworld. Instead, he starts to resemble his bright and cheerful counterpart - Jupiter. Throughout history, there has always been a need for pairs - the light and dark, the male and female, the evil and good, etc. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it is obvious that the whole play centers on the male-female balance, or the lack of thereof. While Jupiter isn’t the ‘shadow king’ much like our ‘fairy king’, he is a prankster and a lover of women. Jupiter is Zeus’ Roman counterpart, so in a similar fashion, he too has seduced quite a number of women, both human and non-human. Similarly, Jupiter is also married, and to none other than the goddess of marriage and protector of women – Juno; the same Juno who rules over Midsummer. Quite like our pair of fairy monarchs, the ‘divine pair’ has had multiple outbursts of anger and fights. Nevertheless, they represent the perfect pair, the finest qualities of both feminine and masculine - quite like Oberon and Titania.

In Elizabethan fashion, and in need of a plot twist, the trigger for all the chaos is a fight between the two. If we closely examine, the power struggle has nothing to do with their individual characters, rather it correlates with their statuses and titles. Oberon is the ‘fairy king’ and above all, he is Titania’s husband. Previously I mentioned how Titania’s powers did not play as big of an importance, as her role of a wife did.

The fight in question is related to the ownership of the little Indian boy, the changeling. While Titania feels the need to protect the boy out of respect for his deceased mother, Oberon thinks otherwise and requests she give him the boy since it is her duty as his wife. Hendricks points out that “Oberon’s desire for the boy seems very much connected to the desire for dominion over Titania” (Goddard 2013, 53), similar to how Titania’s need to possess the changeling is connected with her matriarchy, as well as her friendship, with the changeling’s mother. Oberon further feels powerless since the changeling is not his and Titania’s biological child. Hence he lacks authority over the child and at the same time feels excluded. Oberon, as the embodiment of masculine, has no place in a maternal relationship between a child and a mother. If by chance, he

did impregnate her, and they had a child together, he could have used that power over her, in demonstration of his masculine potency and authority as a father figure. Another interpretation states that it was not the king who controlled the authority, but the fairy queen herself. She had enough power, she had enough freedom, she enjoyed sexual relations with her captives, etc. She is not disobedient by default, but she is seen as disobedient when she refuses to comply with Oberon's will. This powerlessness is driving him crazy, and in a fit of anger he unleashes the powers of nature in order to punish Titania:

“As in revenge have sucked up from the sea
Contagious fogs which, falling in the land,
Hath every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents.

(...)

The human mortals want their winter cheer.
No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases so abound.”

Since unleashing his powers did nothing more than cause destruction for the human world, he resorts to spells and potions in order to humiliate Titania. By doing this he feels that he will once again have superiority over her. However, things don't turn out as he planned, and Titania falls in love with Bottom to the point she no longer even notices Oberon. Because she is under a spell, she does not perceive her reality the way others do, in her eyes Bottom is an 'angelic being'. She wants him to stay with her forever. In her disarray, she even hands the changeling boy to Oberon, the very 'reason' of the argument. It is then that Oberon realizes what he had done. Contrary to the belief of many critics, Oberon does reflect on his actions. The popular Elizabethan interpretation of Oberon's actions claims that upon feeling satisfied with Titania's humiliation, Oberon finally cancels the spell. This is seen as his cruel and malicious way of imposing his

authority, but he is right to do so since he is the dominant male. However, Oberon cancels the spell because he cannot bear to look at Titania hugging and kissing Bottom. To the very end, it is his jealousy, as a man, as the king, as her husband, to see her with a man other than himself.

6.3 Puck - Robin Goodfellow

Puck or Robin Goodfellow as his original name denotes is probably the most popular and most controversial fairy character in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He is the first fairy creature to enter the stage and speak the first line in Act 2 of the play.

The other fairy introduces him as:

“Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villagery,
Skim milk, and sometimes labor in the quern
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn,
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm,
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that “Hobgoblin” call you, and “sweet Puck,”
You do their work, and they shall have good luck.
Are not you he?”

In the play Puck is seen as a prankster, but not entirely an evil one. All the pranks and jokes he does are to make people smile or to make himself smile. He fulfills the wishes of others, but he often acts on his own causing more complicated situations to arise. Shakespeare uses him as the perfect character to introduce new twists into the storyline without them standing out too much, due to the nature of Puck's character. Puck is unpredictable, so the viewers and readers should be prepared for all kinds of new turns of events. He is a laughable and comical character, often portrayed as a dwarf-like fairy, wearing tattered clothes. His appearance is mostly human-like, even though he can change his form at will. Puck's character is not always as sweet and jolly in old British Folklore, as presented in the play. Shakespeare himself calls him a 'hobgoblin' and even though his real name is Robin Goodfellow, fairies call him 'Puck'. He is often called a 'spirit' hinting that he might not be of the same kind as other fairies.

A 'hobgoblin' is, by old English belief a type of goblin, where 'hob' might refer to 'home' or countryside, as hobgoblins are more often found outside of cities and towns (Scott 1895, 96). They are believed to be house spirits who delve in shady corners of the house and help out with housework while the residents are sleeping. Sometimes they cause random mischief, like hiding household items or clothes. Some critics looked deeper into the etymology of the word 'Hob', offering quite an interesting explanation; the given name 'Hob' most likely refers to a nickname derived from the name Robert or 'Rob' for short. Due to the natural occurrence of shortenings of words in the English language, such as 'our Rob' or 'your Rob' the 'r' in Rob would disappear, and 'ob' would be left. Similarly, many people would pronounce 'Hob' by eliminating the 'h' sound (Scott 1895, 96). Considering that this particular hobgoblin has the name 'Robin' we could enthusiastically assume that this is no coincidence or maybe even a play of words, as the two words (namely 'Robin' and 'hobgoblin') rhyme. Another explanation for the word 'hob' might relate to an actual place or geographical spot, as stated here:

“Hob - The appellation of a spirit, or being of elf-nature, who must once have occupied a prominent place in the belief or popular faith of the people of the district.” (Scott 1895, 97)

Apparently, these goblins haunted specific places with the prefix 'Hob' in front of them, such as 'Hob's Cave, Hob croft, Hob-field, Hob-yard' (Scott 1895, 97), and thus earned the name 'hobgoblins'. Sometimes the term 'hobgoblin' carried an aggressive meaning:

“Hob Goblin, hob-goblin, hobgoblin, a spirit, usually of terror: a familiar equivalent for goblin.”
(Scott 1895, 99)

Goblins, in general, have many roles in folklore. At times they are good-natured:

“Goblin, a demon, often of a friendly disposition.” (Scott 1895, 14)

On occasion they are evil, and parents would often use them to scare their children saying things like ‘If you are not good, the goblins will take you away.’ The word ‘goblin’ might have come from various sources, some of them being ‘cobalus’ meaning ‘malignant spirit, a rogue’. (Scott 1895, 14) Hobgoblins have been through periods of love and hate with people. Sometimes they were loved; sometimes they were feared and hated. A 'hobgoblin' has been recognized as an imp or devil after local folklore and Christianity intertwined. Similar to most fairy creatures and mythical beings who were seen as 'devilish' and 'pagan', hobgoblins were seen as something 'impure' and even 'evil'. In Oxford's *A Dictionary of English Folklore* it is stated that 'Rob Burton included Robin (a hobgoblin) in his list of terrestrial devils... as they are most conversant with men, so they do them most harm.' (Simpson & Roud, 298) In popular culture, hobgoblins are often portrayed as an ‘evolved’ form of regular goblins. Especially in video games or comic books, these creatures are known as ‘low level’ or ‘easy to defeat’ monsters, but if they attack in groups they can be dangerous. They are almost categorized as ‘pests’ as they tend to ‘multiply’ rather quickly. This modern interpretation shows goblins and hobgoblins as ugly, stupid and feral beings, probably resulting from Christianity branding the once-popular mythical creature as the devil’s companion or even the devil himself.

Hobgoblins were described as small, hairy, ‘friendly, yet lonely’, men who were fond of pranks, jokes and the shape shifting. The ones who inhabited human houses did various tasks such as dusting, ironing, needlework and even churning the butter. In some myths, they did work in return for treats, while in others they would angrily leave the house if the owner were to leave a gift for them. There are also variations of these examples, such as hobgoblins who would voluntarily work until the owner leaves a piece of garment for them, freeing them that way, and they would leave happily. However, another version of the same example describes the anger hobgoblins would feel if clothing was left for them since they despise wearing new and clean clothes.

The most famous hobgoblin in English myths is none other than Robin Goodfellow, also known as Puck. Even before Shakespeare's time, he was often talked about and quite many tales were told about him or had him as a side character. He was perceived as a mischievous hobgoblin who would often sweep houses in exchange for bread and cream/milk. Here and there he would also play a prank on someone, but his deeds were never seen as 'evil' or 'malicious'. Shakespeare's Robin Goodfellow continues to preserve the same roguish behavior, yet Shakespeare 'promoted' his rank by making him related to fairies (which hobgoblins were not originally). Shakespeare continues to confuse us with just introduction of the character itself. Immediately, he is labeled a sprite (a spirit; an airy, immaterial being), but just a few lines later he is also a hobgoblin ('from the French 'gobelin', from Greek κόβᾶλος, 'impudent rogue' or 'arrogant knave'; a being etymologically as different from a sprite as can well be imagined')(Ostling, Forest, 549).

Naming this creature Robin Goodfellow he invokes the familiar prankster of English folklore, intentionally or not defining his origin as an English native being, unlike the other fairies that carry Greek or French names. (Latham 1930, 223) His 'surname' had a similar meaning to 'hobgoblin'. Sometimes these two would suffice as synonyms:

"Good Fellow, written also Good-fellow and Goodfellow (in Robin Goodfellow), a friendly or euphemistic name for a goblin of the house, such as Lob Lie-by-the-fire, or the spirit cald especially Robin Goodfellow." (Scott 1895, 93)

Finally, he addresses him as 'Puck', a term frequently used to address a devil or demon ('Middle English pouke, the Irish pooka, Scandinavian puki and pukje, and Baltic puuk or pukiš, creatures variously associated with the dead, the domicile, and the devil').(Ostling, Forest, 549-550) Some etymologists claim the name 'Puck' comes from the medieval term 'Pouk'. As mentioned here:

"'Pouk' was a typical medieval term for the devil. Sometimes Puck was pictured as a frightening creature with the head of an ass, or as a queer little figure, long and grotesque, or as a rough, hairy creature, or as the representation of the Greek god Pan." (Bhattacharjee 2013, 1)

'Puck' can also relate to the very being Robin is - a hobgoblin. In Welsh 'Pwka' (pooka) means literally 'hobgoblin'. A woodcut print of Robin Goodfellow was included in a pamphlet from the 17th century portraying him as 'a phallic, goat-footed, horned figure like Pan or Satan', implying his connection to the devil. (Simpson & Roud, 298) Indeed Robin Goodfellow was often

compared to the Greek Satyrs, who would play their flutes and enjoy the company of maidens, play pranks and such.

Robin Goodfellow was also known for his shape shifting abilities. He could transform into animate and inanimate objects equally, and he would often use this ability to play pranks on people.

“Sometimes I’ll take the shape of a horse,
sometimes I’ll take the shape of a hound or a pig or a headless bear.

Sometimes I’ll turn into fire!”

Shape shifting has been a popular trait in folklore and religion alike, although it was seen as a ‘dark art’ more often, and attributed to the devil, witches and other ‘creatures of the night’. The night has always been a symbol for things unknown to the human eye - fairies would dance during the night, hobgoblins and brownies would clean houses during the night, witches would cast spells during the night, etc. Robin Goodfellow too was credited as a night creature or rather ‘a night-walking spirit’. This attribute might be especially interesting given the fact that some writers allude to him being the son of Oberon and a human girl; he was later granted his powers by his father and taken to the elf world. (Simpson & Roud, 298) Previously it was mentioned that Oberon could pose as the Roman god Jupiter (and Greek Zeus) since both enjoyed love affairs in a similar fashion. Often, children were born from these affairs, some with quite unique traits as well. If a great amount of liberty is taken to relate to Oberon as the ‘higher deity’ and Robin Goodfellow as his son, we might see a connection between Christian God and Lucifer, the ‘fallen angel’ - the devil. As Hudson mentions in his essay;

“It has been widely acknowledged for two hundred years that the character Puck or Robin Goodfellow bears two different traditional names for the Devil.” (Hudson 2011, 44)

In some Christian folk stories, the Devil would often disguise himself and walk among people on Earth, tricking them and tempting them. Similarly, Robin Goodfellow or Puck would use his shape shifting abilities to trick people. Throughout the play, we often get this feeling of ‘greater than thou’ attitude from Puck. Even though he has a master he serves, he enjoys quite a lot of freedom in doing whatever comes to his mind. Puck might see himself as the ‘master of puppets’, where mortals equal his playthings. He enjoys setting up ‘stages’ for his personal plays, completely disregarding other’s emotions. He takes advantage of humankind’s greatest weakness

- love. For him, love is a bother and 'falling in love' is just an excuse to fool around with humans who are stupid enough to fall into it. He even clearly states the following:

"Up and down, up and down I will lead them up and down: I am fear'd in field and town; Goblin, lead them up and down." (3.2.16.408-412)

Interestingly, one of the most famous quotes in the play comes from Puck:

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

This quote perfectly captures the contrast between humans and fairies. Humans, with their mortal lives being completely absorbed in their emotions, and the everlasting fairies, with centuries ahead of them, impish and never too serious. (Bhattacharjee 2013, 10) Puck is often seen as just, but also cruel to others. He would often make comments or judge people. After he mistakenly put the love potion on Lysander's eyes and got scolded by Oberon for what he had done, he calmly stated:

"In that case, it must be fate.

That's the way of the world.

For every man who's faithful to his true love,
a million end up running after a different lover."

While Oberon is the main bringer of order at the end, he was the one who caused the chaos in the first place. Puck, on the other hand, remained neutral throughout the play; he did stir up drama, but he did help resolve it, though unwillingly. Unlike Oberon and Titania who possess human-like emotion and reasoning, Puck is true to his origin, he is a hobgoblin body and 'soul'. He may not be interested in human affairs aside from occasional pranks and the like, but he certainly knows how to deliver a good message. Even though Oberon is the 'highest form of moral' in the play, Puck is ironically the most relatable. We, as humans, may never in our lifetimes reach the moral level of a fairy king, but we can definitely cope with that of a lowly hobgoblin.

7. Ariel

Ariel is yet another supernatural character that is difficult to define. Starting from his appearance, to the 'type' of being he is, there are many theories yet none are definite. While some describe him as a 'benign satyr' (Vaughan and Vaughan 1999, 12), others claim he is an 'ayrie spirit' (Edwin, 16). Additionally, Ariel becomes a sort of a water spirit, when he takes the form of a 'nymph o' th' sea' (1.2.301), and then a monster in the form of a harpy (3.3.83). Interestingly, a harpy is a composite creature, having a bird's wings and claws, but the body and face of a woman. Ariel's gender is never completely confirmed since Prospero never uses a pronoun to address Ariel. He only ever calls him 'my Ariel' stating his possession over the spirit. More importantly, Ariel is only visible to Prospero, his 'master'. 'Sea nymphs' and 'harpies' are widely popularized as predominantly female beings, making us rethink Ariel's gender. Nonetheless, many critics have previously stated that supernatural beings such as angels and fairies often lack 'gender' or they simply possess both, which may be the case with Ariel as well. The harpy is traditionally seen as a figure of divine vengeance. (Onions 1986, 126) In Greek mythology, it is the personification of the storm and hurricanes. Unlike Puck and the fairies of the 'Dream', Ariel is thought to be of human size, and almost identical in appearance to the average human during the Middle Ages (Latham 1930, 69).

Another study points out that Ariel is not really a fairy, but rather a 'sylph' (Briggs 1959, 179). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a sylph is "One of a race of beings or spirits supposed to inhabit the air". In addition, Ariel's name may be a simple play on the word 'aerial', confirming the previous statement. Quite like air itself, Ariel is immune to physical attacks as seen in the scene where Alonso's and Sebastian's swords are unable to pierce him. His 'invulnerability' definitely serves as credible proof of his immortality. Coincidentally, both Prospero and Sycorax would've threatened to destroy him, or even attempt to do so, if they could. Yet, the only thing Sycorax could do to punish Ariel's disobedience was to cast a magical seal on him, by capturing him inside of a 'cloven pine'. Being a sylph and controlling winds and air, it can easily be said that Ariel is an Elemental. Another proof is the fact that Ariel is invisible to the human eye, and maybe even immaterial. He is light enough to "run upon the sharp wind of the north" (1.2.254), but he is a master of other elements as well as he is able "to fly, / to swim, to

dive into fire, to ride / On curl'd clouds" (1.2.190-192). Ariel, like many fairies and spirits, possesses the ability to transform, and while he can change his shape like Puck for example, into different creatures, he can also turn himself into inanimate objects and pure bursts of energy. In one scene Ariel transmogrifies into a laser-like beam, stronger than 'Jove's lightnings' (1.2.201). Ariel practically becomes a weapon of mass destruction. In terms of power, he is closer to Oberon and Titania, who can control weather and nature.

Ariel behaves in such a way that it is difficult to tell whether he is good or evil. For the most part, he is as neutral as fairies/spirits can be. Much like his element suggests, Ariel changes moods every so often. His 'emotions' fluctuate all the time, one moment he is afraid of Prospero, next he 'loves' him. Ariel's unstable character is the result of his need for freedom and self-protection. He tries to please his master in order to secure his own safety, he is both cunning and loyal in his attempt to fulfill Prospero's wishes. In comparison to Puck who is rather unfeeling and ignorant of human emotions and morals, Ariel expresses self-conscious awareness, which may be proprietary to 'spirits'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a 'spirit' as 'A supernatural, incorporeal, rational being or personality, usually regarded as imperceptible at ordinary times to the human senses, but capable of becoming visible at pleasure'. Since Ariel is only visible to his 'master', it proves how 'performative acts are forms of authoritative speech' (Butler 1948, 108) considering all Ariel's actions are envisioned by Prospero. His identity is thus, as well, modified under Prospero's influence. As previously mentioned, Ariel's gender is never defined, which leaves us to our own imagination on how to interpret Prospero's and Ariel's 'relationship'. In her study, Butler claims how '[g]ender is neither a purely psychic truth, conceived as 'internal' and 'hidden', nor is it reducible to a surface appearance; on the contrary, its undecidability is to be traced as the play between psyche and appearance'. (Butler 1948, 111) Ariel goes as far as to actually ask Prospero, 'do you love me, master? No?' (4.1.1752), expressing a desire for a relationship more advanced than just that of master and slave. Critics have suggested a possible 'homoerotic' bond between the two, however, Ariel not being identified with a 'specific gender' renders this argument untrue. (Butler 1948, 113)

The moment Prospero freed Ariel from the cloven pine, he enslaved him once again. Various historical records confirm that slave trading bloomed in the seventeenth century Europe, with the top slave traders being the Dutch. Most trades were done across the Mediterranean sea, as well as parts of Atlantic ocean closest to France and England. (Postma, 1-2,4) As a multi-dimensional,

ethereal being, Ariel is unrestricted by space and time that govern Prospero's human reality. Prospero is aware of the fact that Ariel is much more powerful than he is, hence he resorts to skillful fear manipulation. He knows Ariel's biggest weakness, and by maintaining the role of a 'merciful' master, one that is unlike Sycorax, he manages to keep the spirit under control. He promises Ariel that if he complies with his wishes and fulfills them without objecting, he will grant him his freedom back. Patterson argues that by 'holding out the promise of redemption' the slave-owner 'provides himself with a motivating force more powerful than any whip. Slavery in this way was a self-correcting institution: what it denied the slave it utilized as the major means of motivating him.' (Cohen 1996, 157) The slave is inclined to follow his master's orders because of the hope of one day finally being set free. The freedom of the slave relies solely on the owner's decision, and he can withdraw it at any given time, for any random reason. The psychological damage of such treatment is highly detrimental to the slave's perception of freedom.

Ariel is often praised for his 'intelligence' and adorned with compliments such as 'my industrious servant'. (4.1.33) He diligently informs Prospero of all the events and plots unraveling on the island. He literally becomes his 'eyes' and 'ears', and Prospero further increases their 'bond' by intentionally adding possessive pronouns to his name or titles ('my Ariel'; 'my servant'; etc.). Ariel treats all tasks given to him with the utmost care and equal importance. Since he is a being not of this world, he is 'organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce'. (Blake 1969, 576) It could also be said that Ariel's ego is regularly fed by such statements. As a being with high intelligence, he holds himself in high regard, and if the same was done by others, in this case, his 'master', Ariel wouldn't feel the need to escape such fate. On the other hand, Ariel knows that Prospero needs him to protect him from Caliban. Caliban is the vile, aggressive, barbaric offspring of the witch Sycorax. Besides his physical strength, he doesn't have much to offer to Prospero, but it is exactly this strength that scares the 'powerful mage'. Caliban yearns for freedom in order to fulfill his own desires; however, Ariel doesn't really have a purpose. He simply exists, immortal, without a need for community or descendants. (Cohen 1996, 160)

Ariel has been carefully 'groomed' into becoming dependant on his masters. To him, freedom only comes in the form of a gift. Ariel's self has been defined through servitude and enslavement, and he has never thought about rebellion. At the end of the play, when Prospero releases

everyone, Ariel is promised his freedom upon finishing his last task. He has to take the ship with all the passengers safely to Milan, and only then will he be free. However, the play is finished before that happens, so whether Ariel gained his freedom or not is a debate.



Ariel approaching, Gustave Janet

8. Prospero

Aside from Oberon who is a natural wielder of magic, a fairy king, an elf; Prospero is the only other male character that actively wields magic. Unlike Oberon's natural, inborn magic, Prospero uses his magic through his spirit Ariel and through wizardly knowledge. Previously I discussed the difference between 'magic' and 'witchcraft' and by stating those differences we can claim that Prospero is the only male witch or more commonly, a wizard among all Shakespeare's plays. His description and background in *The Tempest* provides us with some ideas where his magic comes from: He is a scholar of magic, but he became one only after he gave up on his worldly power, namely his dukedom. Prospero was a rich and powerful man - the Duke of Milan - before his exile. He was a man engrossed in studying logic, geometry, grammar and astronomy, while he left the political affairs and managing of the state to his brother. In an act of betrayal, his brother overthrew Prospero, and had him and his three-year-old daughter banished. Not only did he lose his status and land, he almost lost his life as the state of the boat he and his daughter were put on, resembled a "rotten carcass". It is only after this that he picks up magic, developing it over the next 12 years and using it to rule the island's inhabitants.

In contrast to Oberon, whose main focus is his wife Titania and submitting her to his authority, Prospero's priority is his daughter and her future, specifically her marriage. In a way both Oberon and Prospero depict a typical husband and father figure in Elizabethan English society, with the difference of them eventually overcoming their male 'supremacy'. It is precisely this growth of character that makes it difficult to label Prospero as a 'bad' character. Sometimes he seems like a villain, especially through his treatment of Cannibal and Ariel, but he is also a much better father to his daughter than many other Shakespearean fathers. Another duality in Prospero's character is his very name. 'Prospero' most likely comes from the word 'prosper', which at its root means to 'make/become successful', but as we have seen, his success bloomed and withered. Similar to his ambiguous character, his magic is also seen as sometimes being malevolent while at other times it seems protective.

Through the ages the view on magic and witchcraft changed, and according to most critics 'good' and 'evil' magic, indeed exist. The differences are described as 'good' magic (sometimes called 'white' magic) being the control over spirits or powers of nature through studying (wizards),

whereas the 'evil' magic (often called 'dark' magic or witchcraft) is conducted through a contract with a demon or the Devil, where the demon/Devil has the control over the magic user. 'Evil' magic often requires sacrifices and offerings in blood and flesh, while 'good' magic exists through benevolent 'borrowing' of the spirit's/nature's powers. This definition clearly has flaws which we see in case of Prospero and Ariel. Ariel being the spirit of wind should be as free and untamed as his element suggests, yet his status is that of a slave under Prospero's control. According to Vaughan and Vaughan, Prospero's magic can be perceived as evil precisely because of his treatment of Ariel. Even though his magic was acquired through scholarly methods and by borrowing spirit's power, his tyrannical behavior towards his familiar is closer to that between a master and his slave. Vaughan and Vaughan continue to compare Prospero's magic with that of Sycorax, stating that even though both of them used elements and spirits (specifically Ariel), her magic was seen as 'demonic'. Prospero claims his magic is 'benevolent' by saying 'There's no harm done' (1.2.15), until he finally decides to reject his magical powers by calling them 'rough':

“But this rough magic
I here abjure, and, when I have required
Some heavenly music, which even now I do,
To work mine end upon their senses that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.”

Another interesting change we see in Prospero at this same moment is that he only compares himself to Medea when he decides to abandon his powers. His speech, or rather declaration of rejecting his powers, is Medea's original invocation found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* book VII. This was a clever move on Shakespeare's part as he knew that all academics and classics lovers would recognize this citation. It is interesting how, even though Prospero - a male magic user - was not directly involved with Hecate, yet he was compared to Medea, who was often described as Hecate's priestess and sorceress. However, while Medea boasted about her powers and

absolute control over elements, showing her almost inhuman nature, Prospero's "is precisely the opposite achievement: having renounced his magic, Prospero resumes his former place in the world and his former identity as the fallible, wronged, and utterly human Duke of Milan, sadly aware of his own fragile mortality" (Miola 1992, 213).

Here is where we begin to see Prospero as more human, in the end he decided to throw away his powers and reclaim his role as the Duke of Milan. On the other hand, by comparing himself to Medea, and Sycorax at the same time, he is providing us with unusual information regarding the nature of his magic. And while the majority of sixteenth and seventeenth century nobility might regard Prospero as a 'good' magician, his actions speak otherwise. Shakespeare managed to portray the state of society at the time in perfect disguise, which sometimes was not much a disguise in all honesty.

Many critics see perfect examples of slavery and colonialism themes in *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare doesn't even try to blur the lines between Ariel's and Caliban's status as slaves, even though he uses the term 'servant'. (Cohen 1996, 154) Ariel has been freed from a 'cloven pine' just to be shackled by Prospero again. Caliban is the son of Sycorax, a dark skinned witch, which leads us to believe he is also dark-skinned himself. Both Ariel and Caliban are treated with cruelty and are threatened into submission. While to many Elizabethans this treatment seemed normal, especially towards Caliban, it tells us a lot about Prospero's character as a former noble (Duke). Shakespeare uses social norms and ethics of his time to portray a benevolent character, especially at the end of his play. He relies on the fact that slavery was a normal occurrence, and uses it to his advantage to bring forth forgiveness to his character. To the audience of Elizabethan England Prospero's decision to release Ariel and give him freedom may look almost heroic. Similarly, when Caliban realizes Prospero is a much better master than 'drunkard' Stephano, he decides to follow him of his own free will. It is obvious why to many readers and critics Prospero may seem like a good magician. His actions are often justified by the facts that he was betrayed, exiled and that he cares deeply for his daughter, and thus does things in her favor.

According to Elizabethan law, Prospero did not fall in the witchcraft category as his control over Ariel cannot be seen as a 'contract'. Prospero doesn't give anything to Ariel in return for his servitude. On the contrary, he threatens Ariel and the fear of being sealed in the pine tree is the only reason why Ariel follows his orders. Prospero did not summon Ariel, nor did he capture him using the name of God. Ariel is a spirit of the island they live on, he belongs to the island.

Because of this, people of Elizabethan England never questioned the magic Prospero used. In their eyes it was not witchcraft as he neither contracted a spirit, nor did he conjure magic through forces of evil, namely the Devil. He was a scholar and of noble birth, so he was seen as a good character by default.

By quoting Bate, Vaughan and Vaughan claim that Shakespeare deemed all forms of magic as evil and as such should be abhorred. As mentioned earlier, magic is difficult to define mainly because the whole idea of magic is abstract and non-existing in reality. While there are many writers and many readers, every one of them would perceive magic in a different way. Same as how some may see Prospero as a benevolent master, a good father and scholar, others may claim he is a tyrant and abuser of his power. In the end, magic might not be either good or bad, but rather a bit of both, similar to how people's characters are.



Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel, 1797

9. Sycorax

Yet another witch depicted in one of Shakespeare's plays, Sycorax, mother of Caliban and the only character talked about but not actually present in *The Tempest*. Sycorax is long dead when Prospero and his daughter take the stage, but her presence is felt everywhere on the island, and one can easily notice how she has become Prospero's only rival, however a non-existent rival, against whom he would never be able to test his might. She is believed to have been a great sorceress, exiled to the island for her strong (black) magic. What makes Sycorax so interesting is that she doesn't have a single line in the play, and all the information that we get about her is from other characters.

Sycorax has long been an interesting topic for many critics, especially feminist critics who claim she is being 'demonized and ridiculed for being a threat to men' (Duarte 2015). She is mentioned exactly seven times in the play, which may or may not be a coincidence as number seven is often attributed with magical power and frequently used in superstitions. In this indirect way we actually get to know much more about her than any other character in the play, as she is constantly being mentioned in the dialogues. However, her existence is much more complex than what seems at first. I will further discuss about Sycorax's appearance in the play, her origin and her role in Elizabethan society.

Her story is interesting, tragic and a little disturbing, although we can't know with absolute certainty if the information given to us is accurate or false storytelling. We have three main sources of information about Sycorax; her son Caliban, the sprite Ariel and Prospero, the sorcerer. Caliban and Ariel are the only ones who had known her in person, as Prospero only knows about her from what he heard from previous two. Ariel is a sprite that was imprisoned by Sycorax upon her arrival on the island, and has served her for many years as her slave. His interpretation of her has to be taken in with caution as he resents her. From his story we learn how powerful she was:

“one so strong

That could controle the Moon ; make flowes and ebs...”

With regards to her power, Prospero's opinion about her is not any better as he sees her as a threat to his reputation as a powerful sorcerer. He is trying to stain her name by calling her a 'wretched blue-eyed hag', and to nullify her abilities as a fellow sorceress by exclusively calling her a witch or hag. Even though the terms sorceress and witch are related to the same type of person, namely one that is able to use magic and sorcery, the term 'witch' has taken a bad connotation after the Middle Ages and the witch hunts by the inquisition. 'Witches' are exclusively women, and ones that have had contact or intercourse with the devil, as that became the general interpretation of the source of their power. Somewhere along the way 'sorcerers' became the 'good ones' and witches the 'bad ones'. Prospero implies to Caliban that he too, was conceived with a devil.

Other types of information, such as her possible physique, we can get by observing Caliban. Others describe him as a 'black man' so we can assume, Sycorax too was a dark skinned woman. It is mentioned that she had blue eyes, which is quite unusual for an African woman with dark skin, but this only adds to her mysteriousness. We are told that the pregnant Sycorax was chased away from her home city in Algiers on account of her "mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible". (1.2.264) It is unclear why she was exiled, but the reason might have been more influenced by the Elizabethan social and ethical norms, rather than those coming from Algiers. We know that Shakespeare used foreign countries as stages for his plays, but he never actually travelled to any of those countries. Thus we can claim his idea of foreign laws and social structure was completely off the mark. Many critics agree that 'The Tempest' was based on colonialism era that started mid-15th century and lasted for a few hundred years. The play was written somewhere between 1610 and 1611, and until then there were plenty of events that might have inspired Shakespeare. He chose Algeria as the home country of our 'evil sorceress'. Beginning of the 16th century Algeria was reconquered by Christian Spain. Algeria's official religion is Islam, and it is obvious that followers of non-Christian religions would get retribution from the conqueror. If we compare Sycorax to Prospero, we can outline two very obvious similarities. First similarity is that they are both parents, and more importantly they are single parents. They probably got a lesser punishment due to this situation. Second possible similarity might be their status. Prospero was the Duke of Milan, and his social status and power allowed him to be exiled rather than executed. The reason why I think Sycorax might have had a high social status in her home country is quite clear. Algeria is a Muslim country where patriarchy is

strongly rooted into its society. Women have had even less power than in Europe. Sycorax was a ‘sorceress’, but the Islamic society had greater interest in science, religion and scholastic. During the Middle Ages, North Africa was home to many famous scholars and saints. Witchcraft and magic were not much of an interest to Algerian society. One of the reasons might have been how Islam prohibits having and worshipping idols other than Allah. Yet here we have Sycorax, a woman from an Islamic country, worshipping a pagan god ‘Setebos’, being exiled rather than executed. Even if she was from noble birth or had similar social status as Prospero, the Islamic law and strict religion would not simply forgive a woman, much less a heretic. Shakespeare might have known about these historical and cultural facts, but chose to intentionally make it more exotic and mystical.

The name ‘Sycorax’ has long been a discussion topic among many scholars. In ‘The Shakespeare Name Dictionary’ we can find some clues regarding her name, but as is similar with many Shakespeare’s characters, it is not certain which one is correct. Nowadays scholars have access to an abundance of information which most certainly was not the case in Shakespeare’s time. This lead to many critics deriving different theories and having opinions that often clash with one another. In *The Shakespeare Dictionary* it is stated that the description of Sycorax ‘owes much to Ovid’s portrayal of Medea in *Metamorphoses*, 7’. However, the name is never mentioned in any source. Davis and Frankforter then continue to list possible sources of the name among ancient Greek classics and Arabic language:

“ It most likely derives from the Greek words for sow (sys) and raven (corax), both animals associated with witchcraft. The name may derive from a description of the raven in ‘Batman uppon Bartholome his booke De proprietatibus rerum’ (1582), an encyclopedia, which suggests the wording of Caliban’s first speech at 1.2.324. Heartbreaker (psychorrhax) has also been suggested, as well as the Greek words for fig (sukorn) and spider (rax). Another possibility is from Arabic, shokoreth ‘deceiver.’ The Coraxi were a tribe in Colchis, a center for witchcraft, where Circe, the famous witch of mythology, was born. Pliny locates the Chalybeates (who have been proposed as the source for Caliban) as living near the Coraxi. Circe was exiled to an island in the Mediterranean (like S.) and her name derived from a bird (hawk, kikros), also.” (Davis & Frankforter 1995, 904)

Bormann mentions in his study that ‘His mother, be it remembered, was Sycorax a south-wind-witch of the worst sort’, and he continues to explain ‘If the term Caliban (as is generally

assumed) is an inversion of the word Canibal, so, too, does the word Sycorax put us in lively remembrance of the word Sirocco.’ (Bormann 1895, 16) Bormann quotes Bacon by stating ‘Bacon calls the sirocco a burning air without flame; Prospero says of Caliban: “he do’s make our fire.”’ Previously it was mentioned how Sycorax may be connected to the word ‘raven’ and Bormann proceeds to again quote Bacon giving us additional explanation:

“The raven , in contrast with the owl , is , according to Bacon, the foreteller of bad weather...The name Sycorax is thus compounded out of Sirocco = South-wind and raven, implying the bird of the south-wind.)” (Bormann 1895, 18)

It is indeed interesting to notice how Shakespeare may have applied the connection between weather and forces of nature to his characters’ names. On the other hand, King presents us with a humorous and creative idea - the name Sycorax might have been a misheard word Shakespeare picked up during one of his drinking sessions. It is well-known that many scholars, poets, writers and ancient Greek conosciences used Classical Greek in various situations, mostly to appeal to others or improve their reputation. King explains that in one such outburst of inspiration, some of Shakespeare’s drinking buddies may have sworn by saying ‘Es Korakas’ which translates to ‘Go to Hell’. (King 1990, 1-3) Even though it looks like a far stretch, if we look back to the meaning of Prospero’s name - to prosper, to make/become successful; Sycorax’s name would be the complete opposite. In a way this perfectly aligns with Shakespeare’s shrewd sense of humor, establishing the duality of the two characters simply through their names. Besides, this is not the first time Shakespeare uses a name to define a character’s temperament, social status or role.

Earlier I mentioned how Sycorax had been tailored to suit Elizabethan society rather than her ‘original’ Algerian. She has become a popular topic for debate on many topics including gender inequality, feminism, colonialism and slavery, sexism, racism and many more. Elizabethan society, even though usually associated with advances and renewal, was a patriarchal society at its core. Women have always struggled through limitations placed on them through their roles of mothers, daughters or wives. There was nothing more for a woman regardless of her social status - a noble or a peasant, women were often used as pawns for political gain through marriages, and after being married they only had to give birth to an heir. The general perception of women was that they could not sustain themselves without a man, so they had to depend on their father or husband - even though Queen Elizabeth was an unmarried woman herself. Women were allowed to work but only as cooks, servants and maids in households. Men were the main breadwinners,

and a woman could work only if the family was extremely poor or she was a widow/spinster. Women who were 'lucky' to have a financially reliable husband or family spent all their time taking care of the household and raising children. Majority of the lower class women were illiterate as education was available only through tuition. Universities or any other kind of public school were out of reach for all women, yet those from prosperous families could afford tutoring at home. Women were allowed to write, however only about 'appropriate' topics - namely religion and the like - and never for the public. This practice continued for a long time, thus we saw many female writers posing under male pseudonyms in order to get published.

Sycorax was everything that normal Elizabethan women were not. She was powerful, independent, exiled but free to rule her island as she pleased. She was with a child but without a husband. She ruled over nature, which is seen as a feminine aspect, but she also ruled the wind and the skies, which were historically seen as 'masculine'. Finally, Sycorax died. She became invisible, but ever-present. This is where her wild and alien character mixes with the traditional through the words of Prospero who is somewhat a contemporary man to Elizabethan England. Prospero labels Sycorax as everything Elizabethan society despises, he demotes her rank to the lowest position. He uses her race, gender and magic against her only to draw a clear line between the two of them. He desperately tries to make himself look better and more powerful while forgetting that she paved the road for his success by ruling the island prior to him and 'entrusting' Ariel and Caliban to him. In Elizabethan society women had only two ways to prosper - either by being born to or getting married into a wealthy family. Their success is provided to them by their father or husband. Of course there have been cases of a family inheriting a fortune on the woman's side, mostly through dowry, but in Prospero's case, he 'inherited' everything. To be more precise, it is Caliban who inherited everything, but due to Prospero being a white, noble man who uses magic, it was easy for him to conquer the small uninhabited island.

Prospero was the ideal Elizabethan man - powerful, rich, Caucasian, educated and although he wasn't quite a Christian soul, he did possess strong ethics. It was easy to forgive Prospero for doing what he had done simply because of his character design, whereas Sycorax was branded as something evil for the exact same deeds. To Elizabethans a woman with absolute power and absolute freedom was something vile and pagan. When we look back to Shakespeare's previous work, all the women in his plays ended up married, the ones who fought like men, the ones who were dedicated to God, the ones who were omnipotent like Titania, they all had a man above

them in the end. Some exceptions are the Three Witches in Macbeth - although they are in no need of a man, there is someone above them, the even more powerful goddess Hecate. It is not completely clear to me why Shakespeare would make such a powerful female character right at the time when witches and magic were hated the most. He might have wanted to emphasize Prospero's character and power, but ridicule him at the same time. Prospero gave up his magic in the end, so is this how Shakespeare promoted his idea that magic is something one should never practice no matter how powerful it may be?

I chose to leave Sycorax at the very end of this analysis because she is the intangible embodiment of what was left of magic and witchcraft. She is the perfect example of how wise women evolved from good, welcomed characters to those that must be banished and destroyed - those not even worth existing. Sycorax is Hecate's last stage, and I strongly believe Shakespeare made a direct connection between all his female magic users through Hecate, the ancient Moon Goddess. First we had the benevolent young and mature form of Hecate shown in Titania as the beautiful goddess of fertility in pre-Elizabethan England. Next we had the Weird Sisters as examples of Hecate's hag form, the goddess of witchcraft and one that was hated and despised. Lastly we have Sycorax in the form of a non-existent Hecate, one that no longer has a place among people, the one chased away by the Church. The last Hecate is how she would remain as people's beliefs changed and superstition got replaced by prayer, and rituals replaced by Sunday Mass.

Conclusion

Witchcraft and Fairy tales have served as a way for humans to express their ideas and beliefs for centuries. Long before science and education became a norm, people's need for explaining phenomena around them led to all kinds of creative outlets. Religion and mythology are based on similar ideas, and they have often intertwined in the past. Polytheism allowed multiple deities and their minions and associates, thus leading to the creation of various gods and goddesses and supernatural beings. However, history changes and so do people's beliefs. Under the influence of politics and new religions, old customs needed to be erased or overwritten. This is obvious in the case of Shakespeare's plays whose characters were inspired by the same fantastical beings, yet their reputation varied from one age to another.

Shakespeare was a little different from modern-day playwrights and poets. Not only was his main purpose of writing to earn a living and maintain a certain lifestyle, but he often wrote pieces by order, as requested by his benefactors. Unlike contemporary writers, he had less freedom in expressing himself and his characters were often based on real-life figures and inspired by ancient mythical characters. Due to the strict law at the time, he had to be very creative with how he presented his characters and dialogues to the public. His characters were often quite different from what the folk knew about them, specifically in cases of mythical and folklore characters. As was seen in his presentation of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he completely changed their temperament and physical appearance, reducing them to minuscule beings. While this was absolutely original at the time, it had led to the creation of modern-day fairies, serving as a kind of blueprint for future creators. On the other hand, his descriptions often confused critics and etymologists, leaving them to ponder over who or what his characters were meant to represent, as we can see in the case of Sycorax. Shakespeare might have done this on purpose since his plays often include controversial themes such as witch hunts, forced marriages, slavery and of course gender inequality. It is indeed very interesting to see how Shakespeare managed to use one female deity as the main inspiration for multiple important characters in his three plays. Hecate was present as the Fairy Queen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, she was the Witch Queen in *Macbeth* and she most certainly served as inspiration for Sycorax in *The Tempest*. Whether this was laziness on the author's part, considering he may have been uninterested in searching for other sources for his female characters; or if it was pure genius, being able to convey the transformation of a female character in such an obvious way, remains a debate.

Historically, we can say that fairies have fallen out of favor among the people, due to religion and various laws forced upon them. Beings that were once glorified, became pawns of the Devil. Similarly, the role of women changed outside of Shakespeare's plays. While Queen Elizabeth ruled over England, we could notice a gentlemanly, marriage-oriented mindset. Titania was

presented as the gorgeous, powerful Fairy Queen, the Shakesperean version of Roman Diana (Luna). However, once King James came into power with his witchcraft-hating attitude, the role of women drastically changed for worse. Not only were witch hunts ever-present in real life, but the very idea of 'friendly neighbors' was pushed out of people's minds. No longer the beautiful Fairy Queen, now the evil Witch Queen took over the stage. The political pressure was strong, and we can feel that in Shakespeare's writing. The Weird Sisters and Hecate were described as complete abominations, old, ragged women with beards, wearing dark flimsy clothes. Yet, even then, we can feel slight defiance in Shakespeare's attitude. Instead of pushing all the blame onto the witches, he chose to blame the humans for believing in 'fate'. Of course, this may have been another way to appease King James by claiming 'fate' does not exist, according to Christian belief; however, by choosing to dismiss the prophecy and destiny, Shakespeare provided a different outlook on witchcraft, namely one that states that people give power to what they believe in.

Finally, Shakespeare presented a type of magic that didn't exist in the world prior to his plays. He combined different mythologies and folklore into one cohesive form, one that continues to develop with every new piece of literature even today. People's imagination is infinite, however, imagination cannot exist without a base. We need things that inspire us in order to create new things, and that is exactly what fairy tales and folklore do.

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