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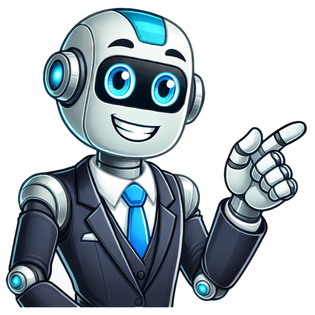

We’re delighted to announce that our first print edition of 2024/25, “Rites of Passage” is now available to read online! This edition looks at our journey through life’s stages, and both the celebrations and challenges which accompany these transitions, across 34 captivating articles. Retrospect Journal are hosting their 2025 AGM on Friday 28th March at 6.30pm via Teams! We have a range of executive and non-executive committee positions to elect for the 2025/26 year, so if you’re interesting in being involved with an exciting student-led history, classics and archaeology journal, we invite you to stand. Visit our AGM page for more information on each of the positions, as well as details on how you can apply. We publish new submissions every week, so make sure you subscribe to Retrospect Journal to receive our latest posts straight to your inbox. You can also subscribe to our weekly mailing list for the latest news and updates here. 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The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. From Folk-lore of Shakespeare by T. F. Thiselton Dyer: New York, Harper. The wealth of Shakespeare's luxuriant imagination and glowing language seems to have been poured forth in the graphic accounts which he has given us of the fairy tribe. Indeed, the profusion of poetic imagery with which he has so richly clad his fairy characters is unrivalled, and the "Midsummer Night's Dream" holds a unique position in so far as it contains the finest modern artistic realisation of the fairy kingdom. Mr. Dowden in his Shakespeare Primer (1877, pp. 71,72) justly remarks: "As the two extremes of exquisite delicacy, of dainty elegance, and, on the other hand, of thick-witted grossness and clumsiness, stand the fairy tribe, and the group of Athenian handicraftsmen. The world of the poet's dream includes the two -- a Titania, and a Bottom the weaver -- and can bring them into grotesque conjunction. No such fairy poetry existed anywhere in English literature before Shakespeare. The tiny elves, to whom a cowslip is tall, for whom the third part of a minute is an important division of time, have a miniature perfection which is charming. They delight in all beautiful and dainty things, and war with things that creep and things that fly, if they be uncomely; their lives are gay with fine frolic and delicate revelry." Puck, the jester of fairyland, stands apart from the rest, the recognisable "lob of spirits," a rough, "fawn-faced, shock-pated little fellow, dainty-limbed shapes around him." Judging, then, from the elaborate account which the poet has bequeathed us of the fairies, it is evident that the subject was one in which he took a special interest. Indeed, the graphic pictures he has handed down to us of "Elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves; And ye, that on the sands with printless foot, Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him When he comes back; you demy-puppets that By moonshine do the green-sour ringlets make Whereof the ewe not bites," &c., show how intimately he was acquainted with the history of these little people, and what a complete knowledge he possessed of the superstitious fancies which had clustered round them. In Shakespeare's day, too, it must be remembered, fairies were much in fashion; and, as Johnson remarks, common tradition had made them familiar. It has also been observed that well acquainted, from the rural habits of his early life, with the notions of the peasantry respecting these beings, he saw that they were capable of being applied to a production of a species of the wonderful. Hence, as Mr. Halliwell Phillipps1 has so aptly written, "he founded his elfin world on the prettiest of the people's traditions, and has clothed it in the ever-living flowers of his own exuberant fancy." Referring to the fairy mythology in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," it is described by Mr. Keightley2 as an attempt to blend "the elves of the village with the fays of romance. His fairies agree with the former in their diminutive stature -- diminished, indeed, to dimensions inappreciable by village gossips -- in their fondness for dancing, their love of cleanliness, and their child-abstracting propensities. Like the fays, they form a community, ruled over by the princely Oberon and the fair Titania. There is a court and chivalry; Oberon would have the queen's sweet changeling to be a "knight of his train to trace the forest wild." Like earthly monarchs, he has his jester, "the shrewd and knavish sprite called Robin Goodfellow." Of the fairy characters mentioned by Shakespeare may be mentioned Oberon, king of fairyland, and Titania his queen. They are represented as keeping rival courts in consequence of a quarrel, the cause of which is thus told by Puck ("Midsummer Night's Dream," ii. i): "The king doth keep his revels here to-night: Take heed the queen come not within his sight; For Oberon is passing fell and wrath, Because that she as her attendant hath A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king; She never had so sweet a changeling; And jealous Oberon would have the child Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild; But she perforce withholds the loved boy, Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy; And now they never meet in grove or green, By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen," &c. Oberon first appears in the old French romance of "Huon de Bourdeaux," and is identical with Elberich, the dwarf king of the German story of Otnit in the Heldenbuch. The name Elberich, or, as it appears in the "Nibelungenlied," Albrich, was changed, in passing into French, first into Auberich, then into Auberon, and finally became our Oberon. He is introduced by Spenser in the "Fairy Queen" (Book ii., cant, i., st. 6), where he describes Sir Guyon: "Well could he tournay, and in lists debate, And knighthood tooke of good Sir Huon's hand, When with King Oberon he came to faery land." And in the 10th canto of the same book (stanza 75) he is the allegorical representative of Henry VIII. The wise Elficleos left two sons, "of which faire Elferon, The eldest brother, did untimely dy; Whose emptie place the mightie Oberon Doubly supplide, in spousall and dominion." "Oboram, King of Fayeries," is one of the characters in Greene's "James the Fourth."3 The name Titania for the queen of the fairies appears to have been the invention of Shakespeare, for, as Mr. Ritson4 remarks, she is not "so called by any other writer." Why, however, the poet designated her by this title, presents, according to Mr. Keightley,5 no difficulty: "It was," he says, "the belief of those days that the fairies were the same as the classic nymphs, the attendants of Diana. The Fairy Queen was therefore the same as Diana whom Ovid (Met. iii. 173) styles Titania." In Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale," Pluto is the King of Faerie, and his queen, Proserpina, "who danced and sang about the well under the laurel in January's garden."6 In "Romeo and Juliet" (i. 4) she is known by the more familiar appellation, Queen Mab. "I dream'd a dream to-night," says Romeo, whereupon Mercutio replies, in that well-known famous passage "O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you" -- this being the earliest instance in whicch Mab is used to designate the fairy queen. Mr. Thorns7 thinks that the origin of this name is to be found in the Celtic, and that it contains a distinct allusion to the diminutive form of the elfin sovereign. Mab, both in Welsh and in the kindred dialects of Brittany, signifies a child or infant, and hence it is a befitting epithet to one who "Comes In shape no bigger than an agate-stone On the fore-finger of an alderman." Mr. Keightley suggests that Mab may be a contraction of Habundia, who, Hey wood says, ruled over the fairies; and another derivation is from Mabel, of which Mab is an abbreviation. Amongst the references to Queen Mab, we may mention Drayton's "Nymphidia" "Hence Oberon, him sport to make, (Their rest when weary mortals take, And none but only fairies wake), Descendeth for his pleasure: And Mab, his merry queen, by night Bestrides young folks that lie upright," etc. Ben Jonson, in his "Entertainment of the Queen and Prince at Althrope," in 1603, describes as "tripping up the lawn a bevy of fairies, attending on Mab, their queen, who, falling into an artificial ring that there was cut in the path, began to dance around." In the same masque the queen is thus characterized by a satyr: "This is Mab, the mistress fairy, That doth nightly rob the dairy, And can help or hurt the cherning As she please, without discerning," etc. Like Puck, Shakespeare has invested Queen Mab with mischievous properties, Which "identify her with the night hag of popular superstition," and she is represented as "Platting the manes of horses in the night." The merry Puck, who is so prominent an actor in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," is the mischief-loving sprite, the jester of the fairy court, whose characteristics are roguery and sportiveness. In his description of him, Shakespeare, as Mr. Thoms points out, "has embodied almost every attribute with which the imagination of the people has invested the fairy race; and has neither omitted one trait necessary to give brilliancy and distinctness to the likeness, nor sought to heighten its effect by the slightest exaggeration. For, carefully and elaborately as he has finished the picture, he has not in it invested the 'lob of spirits' with one gift or quality which the popular voice of the age was not unanimous in bestowing upon him." Thus (ii. i) the fairy says: "Either I mistake your shape and making quite, Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite, Call'd Robin Goodfellow: are you not he That frights the maidens of the villagery; Skim milk; and sometimes labour 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?" The name "Puck" was formerly applied to the whole race of fairies, and not to any individual sprite — puck, or pouke, being an old word for devil, in which sense it is used in the "Vision of Piers Plowman:" "Out of the poukes pondfold No maynprise may us feeche." The Icelandic puki is the same word, and in Friesland and Jutland the domestic spirit is called Puk by the peasantry. In Devonshire, Piskey is the name for a fairy, with which we may compare the Cornish Pixey. In Worcestershire, too, we read how the peasantry are occasionally "poake-ledden," that is, misled by a mischievous spirit called poake. And, according to Grose's "Provincial Glossary," in Hampshire they give the name of Colt-pixey to a supposed spirit or fairy, which, in the shape of a horse, neighs, and misleads horses into bogs. The Irish, again, have their Pooka,8 and the Welsh their Pwcca — both words derived from Pouke or Puck. Mr. Keightley9 thinks, also, that the Scottish pawkey, sly, knowing, may belong to the same list of words. It is evident, then, that the term Puck was in bygone years extensively applied to the fairy race, an appellation still found in the west of England. Referring to its use in Wales, "there is a Welsh tradition to the effect that Shakespeare received his knowledge of the Cambrian fairies from his friend Richard Price, son of Sir John Price, of the Priory of Brecon." It is even claimed that Cwm Pwcca, or Puck Valley, a part of the romantic glen of the Clydach, in Breconshire, is the original scene of the "Midsummer Night's Dream."10 Another of Puck's names was Robin Goodfellow, and one of the most valuable illustrations we have of the "Midsummer-Night's Dream" is a black-letter tract published in London, 1628, under the title of "Robin Goodfellow: His Mad Pranks, and Merry Jests, full of honest mirth, and is a fit medicine for melancholy."11 Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps,12 speaking of Robin Goodfellow, says, "there can be no doubt that in the time of Shakespeare the fairies held a more prominent position in our popular literature than can be now concluded from the pieces on the subject that have descended to us." The author of "Tarlton's News out of Purgatory," printed in 1590, assures us that Robin Goodfellow was "famosed in every old wives chronicle for his mad merry pranks;" and we learn from "Henslowe's Diary" that Chettle was the writer of a drama on the adventures of that "merry wanderer of the night." These have disappeared; and time has dealt so harshly with the memory of poor Robin that we might almost imagine his spirit was still leading us astray over massive volumes of antiquity, in a delusive search after documents forever lost; or, rather, perhaps, it is his punishment for the useless journeys he has given our ancestors, misleading night-wanderers, "and laughing at their harm."13 He is mentioned by Drayton in his "Nymphidia:" "He meeteth Puck, which most men call Hob-goblin, and on him doth fall," etc., "hob being the familiar or diminutive form of Robert and Robin, so that Hobgoblin is equivalent to Robin the Goblin, i.e., Robin Goodfellow."14 Burton, in his "Anatomy of Melancholy," alludes to him thus: "A bigger kinde there is of them, called with us hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellows, that would, in superstitious times, grinde corne for a mess of milk, cut wood, or do any manner of drudgery work." Under his name of Robin Goodfellow, Puck is well characterized in Jonson's masque of "Love Restored." Another epithet applied to Puck is "Lob," as in the "Midsummer-Night's Dream" (ii. i), where he is addressed by the fairy as "Thou lob of spirits."15 With this we may compare the "lubber-fiend" of Milton, and the following in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Knight of the Burning Pestle" (iii. 4): "There is a pretty tale of a witch that had the devil's mark about her, that had a giant to be her son, that was called Lob-lye-by-the-Fire." Grimm16 mentions a spirit, named the "Good Lubber," to whom the bones of animals used to be offered at Manseld, in Germany. Once more, the phrase of "being in," or "getting into Lob's pound," is easy of explanation, presuming Lob to be a fairy epithet — the term being equivalent to Poake-ledden or Pixy-led. In "Hudibras" this term is employed as a name for the stocks in which the knight puts Crowdero: "Crowdero, whom in irons bound, Thou basely threw'st into Lob' s pound." It occurs, also, in Massinger's "Duke of Milan" (iii. 2), where it means "behind the arras:" "Who forc'd the gentleman, to save her credit, To marry her, and say he was the party Found in Lob's pound." The allusion by Shakespeare to the "Will-o'-the-Wisp," where he speaks of Puck as "sometime a fire," is noticed elsewhere, this being one of the forms under which this fairy was supposed to play his midnight pranks. Referring, in the next place, to the several names of Shakespeare's fairies, we may quote from "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (iv. 3), where Mrs. Page speaks of "urchins, ouphes, and fairies" -- urchin having been an appellation for one class of fairies. In the "Maydes Metamorphosis" of Lyiy (1600), we find fairies, elves, and urchins separately accommodated with dances for their use. The following is the urchins dance: "By the moone we sport and play, With the night begins our day; As we frisk the dew doth fall, Trip it, little urchins all, Lightly as the little bee. Two by two, and three by three. And about goe wee, goe wee." In "The Tempest" (i. 2) their actions are also limited to the night: "Urchins Shall, for that vast of night that they may work, All exercise on thee." The children employed to torment Falstaff, in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (iv. 4), were to be dressed in these fairy shapes. Mr. Douce regards the word urchin, when used to designate a fairy, as of Celtic origin, with which view Mr. Thoms compares the urisks of Highland fairies. The term ouphe, according to Grimm, is only another form of the cognate elf, which corresponds with the Middle High-German ulf, in the plural ulve. He further proves the identity of this ulf with alp, and with our English elf, from a Swedish song published by Asdwiddson, in his "Collection of Swedish Ballads," in one version of which the elfin king is called Herr Elfver, and in the second Herr Ulfver. The name elf, which is frequently used by Shakespeare, is the same as the Anglo-Saxon alf, the Old High-German and the Middle High-German ulf. "Fairies and elvs," says Toilet, "are frequently mentioned together in the poets without any distinction of character that I can recollect." The other fairies, Peas-blossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed probably owe their appellations to the poet himself. How fully Shakespeare has described the characteristics of the fairy tribe, besides giving a detailed account of their habits and doings, may be gathered from the following pages, in which we have briefly enumerated the various items of fairy lore as scattered through the poet's writings. Beauty, then, united with power, was one of the popular characteristics of the fairy tribe. Such was that of the "Fairy Queen" of Spenser, and of Titania in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." In "Antony and Cleopatra" (iv. 8), Antony, on seeing Cleopatra enter, says to Scarus: "To this great fairy I'll commend thy acts, Make her thanks bless thee." In "Cymbeline" (iii. 6), when the two brothers find Imogen in their cave, Belarius exclaims: "But that it eats our victuals, I should think Here were a fairy."17 And he then adds: "By Jupiter, an angel! or, if not, An earthly paragon! behold divineness No elder than a boy." The fairies, as represented in many of our old legends and folk-tales, are generally noticeable for their beauty, the same being the case with all their surroundings. As Sir Walter Scott,18 too, says, "Their pageants and court entertainments comprehended all that the imagination could conceive of what were accounted gallant and splendid. At their processions they paraded more beautiful steeds than those of mere earthly parentage. The hawks and hounds which they employed in their chase were of the first race. At their daily banquets, the board was set forth with a splendor which the proudest kings of the earth dared not aspire to, and the hall of their dancers echoed to the most exquisite music." Mr. Douce quotes from the romance "Lancelot of the Lake," where the author, speaking of the days of King Arthur, says, "En celui temps estoient appellees faees selles qui sentre-mettoient denchantemens et de charmes, et moult en estoit pour lors principalement en la Grande Bretaigne, et savoient la force et la vertu des paroles, des pierres, et des herbes, parquoy elles estoient tenues et jeunesse et en beaulte, et en grandes richesses comme elles devisoient." "This perpetual youth and beauty," he adds, "cannot well be separated from a state of immortality;" another characteristic ascribed to the fairy race. It is probably alluded to by Titania in "A Midsummer Night's Dream' (ii.i): "The human mortals want their winter here." And further on (ii. i), when speaking of the changeling's mother, she says: "But she, being mortal, of that boy did die." Again, a fairy addresses Bottom the weaver (iii. i) — "Hail, mortal!" — an indication that she was not so herself. The very fact, indeed, that fairies "call themselves spirits, ghosts, or shadows, seems to be a proof of their immortality." Thus Puck styles Oberon "king of shadows," and this monarch asserts of himself and his subjects — "But we are spirits of another sort." Fletcher, in the "Faithful Shepherdess," describes (i. 2) — "A virtuous well, about whose flow'ry banks The nimble-footed fairies dance their rounds, By the pale moonshine, dipping oftentimes Their stolen children, so to make them free From dying fllesh, and dull mortality." Ariosto, in his "Orlando Furioso" (book xliii. stanza 98) says: "I am a fayrie, and to make you know, To be a fayrie what it doth import. We cannot dye, how old so e'er we grow. Of paines and harmes of ev'rie other sort We taste, onelie no death we nature ow." An important feature of the fairy race was their power of vanishing at will, and of assuming various forms. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" Oberon says: "I am invisible And I will overhear their conference." Puck relates how he was in the habit of taking all kinds of outlandish forms; and in the "Tempest," Shakespeare has bequeathed to us a graphic account of Ariel's eccentricities. "Besides," says Mr. Spalding,20 "appearing in his natural shape, and dividing into flames, and behaving in such a manner as to cause young Ferdinand to leap into the sea, crying, 'Hell is empty, and all the devils are here!' he assumes the forms of a water nymph (i. 2), a harpy (iii. 3), and also the Goddess Ceres (iv. i), while the strange shapes, masquers, and even the hounds that hunt and worry the would-be king and viceroys of the island, are Ariel's 'meaner fellows.'" Poor Caliban complains of Prospero's spirits (ii. 2): "For every trifle are they set upon me; Sometimes like apes, that mow and chatter at me. And after bite me: then like hedgehogs which Lie tumbling in my bare-foot way, and mount Their pricks at my footfall; sometime am I All wound with adders, who, with cloven tongues Do hiss me into madness." That fairies are sometimes exceedingly diminutive is fully shown by Shakespeare, who gives several instances of this peculiarity. Thus Queen Mab, in "Romeo and Juliet," to which passage we have already had occasion to allude (i. 4), is said to come "In shape no bigger than an agate stone On the fore-finger of an alderman."19 And Puck tells us, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. i), that when Oberon and Titania meet, "they do square, that all their elves, for fear, Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there." Further on (ii. 3) the duties imposed by Titania upon her train point to their tiny character: "Come, now a roundel and a fairy song; Then, for the third part of a minute, hence; Some to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds, Some war with rere-mice for their leathern wings, To make my small elves coats." And when enamoured of Bottom, she directs her elves that they should — "Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes; Feed him with apricocks and dewberries. With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries; The honey bags steal from the humble-bees. And for night tapers crop their waxen thighs And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes. To have my love to bed, and to arise; And pluck the wings from painted butterflies To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes." We may compare, too, Ariel's well-known song in "The Tempest" (v. i): "Where the bee sucks, there suck I: In a cowslip's bell I lie; There I couch when owls do cry, On the bat's back I do fly After summer merrily. Merrily, merrily shall I live now Under the blossom that hangs on the bough." Again, from the following passage in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (iv. 4) where Mrs. Page, after conferring with her husband, suggests that — "Nan Page my daughter, and my little son, And three or four more of their growth, we'll dress Like urchins, ouphes, and fairies, green and white. With rounds of waxen tapers on their heads. And rattles in their hands." it is evident that in Shakespeare's day fairies were supposed to be of the size of children. The notion of their diminutiveness, too, it appears was not confined to this country,20 but existed in Denmark," for in the ballad of "Eline of Villenskov" we read: "Out then spake the smallest Trold; No bigger than an ant;— Oh! here is come a Christian man, His schemes I'll sure prevent." Again, various stories are current in Germany descriptive of the fairy dwarfs; one of the most noted being that relating to Elberich, who aided the Emperor Otnit to gain the daughter of the Paynim Soldan of Syria.21 The haunts of the fairies on earth are generally supposed to be the most romantic and rural that can be selected; such a spot being the place of Titania's repose described by Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (ii. i):22 "a bank where the wild thyme blows, Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows, Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine, With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine: There sleeps Titania some time of the night, Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight; And there the snake throws her enamell'd skin, Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in." Titania also tells how the fairy race meet "on hill, in dale, forest, or mead, By paved fountain, or by rushy brook. Or in the beached margent of the sea." In "The Tempest" (v. i), we have the following beautiful invocation by Prospero: "Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves; And ye, that on the sands with printless foot Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him When he comes back —" Their haunts, however, varied in different localities, but their favorite abode was in the interior of conical green hills, on the slopes of which they danced by moonlight. Milton, in the "Paradise Lost" (book I.), speaks of "fairy elves, Whose midnight revels, by a forest side Or fountain, some belated peasant sees, Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth Wheels her pale course, they, on their mirth and dance Intent, with jocund music charm his ear; At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds." The Irish fairies occasionally inhabited the ancient burial places known as tumuli or barrows, while some of the Scottish fairies took up their abode under the "door-stane" or threshold of some particular house, to the inmates of which they administered good offices.23 The so-called fairy-rings in old pastures24 — little circles of a brighter green, within which it was supposed the fairies dance by night — are now known to result from the outspreading propagation of a particular mushroom, the fairy-ringed fungus, by which the ground is manured for a richer following vegetation. An immense deal of legendary lore, however, has clustered round this curious phenomenon, popular superstition attributing it to the merry roundelays of the moonlight fairies.25 In "The Tempest" (v. i) Prospero invokes the fairies as the "demy-puppets" that "By moonshine do the green-sour ringlets make, Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you, whose pastime Is to make midnight-mushrooms." ....As Mr. Thoms says, in his "Three Notelets on Shakespeare" (1865, pp. 40, 41), "the writings of Shakespeare abound in graphic notices of these fairy revels, couched in the highest strains of poetry; and a comparison of these with some of the popular legends which the industry of Continental antiquaries has preserved will show us clearly that these delightful sketches of elfin enjoyment have been drawn by a hand as faithful as it is masterly." _____ Footnote 1: "Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of ' A Midsummer Night's Dream,'" 1845. Footnote 2: "Fairy Mythology," p. 325. Footnote 3: Aldis Wright's "Midsummer Night's Dream," 1877, Preface, pp. xv., xvi.; Ritson's "Fairy Mythology," 1875, pp. 22, 23. Footnote 4: Essay on Fairies in "Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare," p. 23. Footnote 5: "Fairy Mythology," 1878, p. 325. Footnote 6: Notes to "A Midsummer Night's Dream," by Aldis Wright, 1877. Preface, p. xvi. Footnote 7: "Three Notelets on Shakespeare," pp. 100-107. Footnote 8: See Croker's "Fairy Legends of South of Ireland," 1862, p. 135. Footnote 9: "Fairy Mythology," 1878, p. 316. Footnote 10: Wirt Sikes's "British Goblins," 1880, p. 20. Footnote 11: This is reprinted in Hazlitt's "Fairy Tales, Legends, and Romances, illustrating Shakespeare and other English Writers," 1875, p. 173. Footnote 12: "Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of the Midsummer-Night's Dream," printed 'for the Shakespeare Society, p. viii. Footnote 13: Thoms's "Three Notelets on Shakespeare," p. 88. Footnote 14: Mr. Dyce considers that Lob is descriptive of the contrast between Puck's square figure and the airy shapes of the other fairies. Footnote 15: "Deutsche Mythologie," p. 492. Footnote 16: See Keightley's "Fairy Mythology," pp. 318, 319. Footnote 17: Showing, as Mr. Ritson says, that they never ate. Footnote 18: "Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft," 1831, p. 121. Footnote 19: Agate was used metaphorically for a very diminutive person, in allusion to the small figures cut in agate for rings. In "2 Henry IV" (i. 2), Falstaff says: "I was never manned with an agate till now; but I will inset you neither in gold nor silver, but in vile apparel, and send you back again to your master, for a jewel." In "Much Ado About Nothing" (iii. i) Hero speaks of a man as being "low, an agate very vilely cut." Footnote 20: See Grimm's " Deutsche Mythologie." Footnote 21: Thoms's "Three Notelets on Shakespeare," 1865, pp. 38, 39. Footnote 22: See Keightley's "Fairy Mythology," 1878, p. 208. Footnote 23: Gunyon's "Illustrations of Scottish History, Life, and Superstitions," p. 299. Footnote 24: Among the various conjectures as to the cause of these verdant circles, some have ascribed them to lightning; others maintained that they are occasioned by ants. See Miss Baker's "Northamptonshire Glossary," vol. i. p. 218 ; Brand's "Pop. Antiq.," 1849, vol. ii. pp. 480- 483; and also the " Phytologist," 1862, pp. 236-238. How to cite this article: Dyer, T. F. Thiselton. Folk-lore of Shakespeare. New York: Harper, 1884. Shakespeare Online. 20 Aug. 2000. (date when you accessed the information) < >. _____ Related Articles A Midsummer Night's Dream: The Complete Explanatory Notes Shakespeare's Fairies: The Triumph of Dramatic Art A True Gentleman: Examining Shakespeare's Theseus A Midsummer Night's Dream: Plot Summary Shakespeare's Language Shakespeare's Metaphors and Similes Life in Shakespeare's London (Section on Fairies) Shakespeare's Reputation in Elizabethan England Shakespeare's Impact on Other Writers Words Shakespeare Invented Why Study Shakespeare? Shakespeare's Queen Mab Top 10 Shakespeare Plays Shakespeare's Blank Verse Elements of Comedy How many plays did Shakespeare write? In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. One of the most noticeable and entertaining elements of Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream is the presence of the fairies. Titania, Oberon, Puck, and the attendant fairies all affect the human beings in the woods, and provide hints into the fairy kingdom. Although Shakespeare applies several important aspects of the Elizabethan belief in fairies to A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare changes the idea of fairies not only within the context of the play, but for all time. One aspect of fairies that Shakespeare left intact was their enjoyments. Shakespeare's fairies in A Midsummer Night's Dream enjoy dancing and music, which was the favorite pastime of the fairies of Elizabethan folklore. Fairies were thought to dance in fairy circles, which humans were forbidden to see. Any person spying on fairy circles would be punished by pinching. Shakespeare's correlation of fairies to night is also consistent with the folklore of his time. Although the fairy "hours" were midnight and noon and fairies were occasionally known to work magic in the day, the main time for fairies was night. Fairies were also active in the summer, and not known to appear after All Hallows' Eve (Halloween). Shakespeare is consistent with this idea of "fairy time" in the play. While the idea of Oberon as the fairy king was familiar to the Elizabethans, the name of Titania fbor the fairy queen was not. Titania's name was probably taken from Ovid's Metamorphosis, which describes the fairy queen in a similar vein to the moon goddess Diana. Despite this difference, Titania's train is consistent with the folklore—her time is from midnight to sunrise, she and her fairies sing and dance, she has jewels, and she has possession of a changeling. Shakespeare does add flowers to Titania's image, which had not been previously associated with fairies. It should be noted that although Oberon was a familiar name to the Elizabethans, the fairy queen was considered to be the reigning monarch of the fairies. Oberon's character in the play appears to be consistent with the folklore in the beginning, but changes significantly by the end of the play. When Oberon and Titania meet, Oberon's anger over Titania's refusal to give him the Indian boy has caused Oberon to take his frustrations out on the weather and on the humans around him. He also wants to use the love juice in order to make Helena run awayfrom Demetrius. This lack of regard for mortals is exactly what the Elizabethans would have expected from the fairy king. By the end of the play, however, Oberon orders Puck to resolve cure Lysander while leaving Demetrius under the love spell. Oberon has changed from the stereotypical fairy into a benevolent one for no reason other than to avoid any further conflict. Another difference in the depiction of fairy characters is Robin Goodfellow, or Puck. Robin Goodfellow was a familiar figure to the Elizabethans. His laugh, sense of humor, and reputation as a prankster made him a popular folk character. He was not, however, a fairy, because his tricks were never fatal. Only practical jokes and humorous accidents were attributed to him. Robin Goodfellow was also a spirit of the home, and was often depicted with a candle and a broom because he loved to clean houses as a reward for bread and cream. (This is the reason why he is shown with a broom at the end of the play). While Shakespeare maintains Robin Goodfellow's mischievous personality, he completely changes some significant facets of his character. As mentioned previously, Robin Goodfellow was not a fairy. Shakespeare not only makes him a fairy in A Midsummer Night's Dream, but he also makes him Oberon's jester and servant. The bbchange of Robin Goodfellow's name to Puck is also significant. A "puck" is a devil, not a joker, which directly contrasts Robin Goodfellow's character not only in Elizabethan folklore but in the play as well. Robin has no interest in the humans in the play other than for sport, and he has no association with the home save for carrying the broom. Although A Midsummer Night's marks Robin Goodfellow's first appearance on the English stage, only his sense of humor and prankish nature remain from the famous figure of Elizabethan folklore. 100%(1)100% found this document useful (1 vote)738 viewsThe document discusses the fairies in William Shakespeare's play A Midsummer Night's Dream. It describes their portrayal in the play, including their names, activities, and roles in influenc...AI-enhanced title and descriptionSaveSave fairies in A Midsummer Night’s Dream For Later100%100% found this document useful, undefined You are here >> Home » Shakespeare Works » Plays » Comedies » A Midsummer Night's Dream » Character Studies » The Fairies of A Midsummer Night’s DreamIllustration of Oberon, King of Shadows, and Titania, Queen of the Fairies in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s DreamThe fairies of A Midsummer Night’s Dream bring enchantment, mischief, and a touch of chaos to Shakespeare’s most magical play. They exist in a world separate from the humans, yet their actions shape love, confusion, and resolution in the story. Led by Oberon and Titania, with the mischievous Puck at their side, these fairies create both trouble and harmony in the forest. Their whimsical nature, poetic speech, and supernatural abilities make them some of the most memorable characters in Shakespeare’s work. They represent nature’s wild and untamed side. They remind the audience that love and magic often go hand in hand, yet not without complications. Like the invisible hands of fate, the fairies manipulate the events of the play, spinning a web of enchantment that both delights and deceives.Shakespeare introduces several key fairies in the play, each with a distinct role in shaping the story’s magical elements:Illustration of Puck, the mischievous fairy servant of King OberonOberon – The King of the Fairies, determined to control both his realm and the human world. He often uses his power to manipulate others, but his intentions, while sometimes mischievous, ultimately seek balance.Titania – The Queen of the Fairies, proud and strong-willed, refusing to submit to Oberon’s demands. She represents independence and resistance, showing that even magic cannot always bend free will.Puck (Robin Goodfellow) – Oberon’s playful and mischievous servant, responsible for much of the confusion in the play. Puck embodies trickery and fun, yet his mistakes drive the plot’s major conflicts. He’s like a windstorm—unpredictable and sometimes destructive but full of energy and life.Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed – Titania’s loyal fairy attendants, who serve her and entertain Bottom. They represent the whimsy and charm of the fairy court, adding lighthearted moments to the story.The fairies in A Midsummer Night’s Dream bring the supernatural to life, influencing both the mortal lovers and the events in the enchanted forest. The presence of these magical beings allows the play to blur the lines between dreams and reality.Each fairy has distinct traits that shape the story and contribute to the larger themes of magic and love:Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, MustardseedFairy servants of TitaniaOberon is authoritative, manipulative, and vengeful but ultimately seeks harmony. His command over magic gives him great power, yet he must correct the chaos he creates.Titania is strong-willed, proud, and kind, particularly in her care for the changeling boy. Her defiance against Oberon shows that love cannot be forced.Puck is mischievous, unpredictable, and playful, yet always loyal to Oberon. His antics are entertaining, but they also reveal the unintended consequences of magical interference.Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed are gentle, whimsical, and serve to emphasize the dreamlike nature of the play. They act as the supporting chorus of the fairy world, making Titania’s domain feel full of life and wonder.The fairies contrast with the human characters, highlighting the irrational nature of love and the supernatural forces that shape it. While the lovers may struggle, the fairies remind the audience that love is sometimes best left to fate rather than interference.The fairies in A Midsummer Night’s Dream serve several major roles in the play, not only adding magical charm but also driving much of the story’s conflict and resolution:Driving the Plot – Oberon’s jealousy over Titania’s changeling boy leads to the love potion mix-ups, setting the central conflict in motion. It’s first devised in Act I, Scene I and II, when Oberon decides to use the love potion on Titania to gain control over the changeling boy.Creating Chaos – Puck’s mistake in anointing Lysander instead of Demetrius causes the lovers’ quarrels, turning a love triangle into complete confusion. This crucial error occurs in Act II, Scene II, when Puck, following Oberon’s vague instructions, mistakenly enchants Lysander, leading to comedic and dramatic upheaval.Bringing Comedy – Puck’s trick on Bottom, transforming him into a donkey, adds humor and absurdity, showing the ridiculous consequences of unrestrained magic. This occurs in Act III, Scene I, when Puck mischievously enchants Bottom, leading to Titania’s enchanted love for him and setting up one of the play’s most comical moments.Restoring Balance – By the play’s end, Oberon and Titania reconcile, the lovers are correctly paired, and the magic fades, returning the world to order. This resolution takes place in Act IV, Scene I, where Oberon lifts Titania’s enchantment, restoring balance to both the fairy and human worlds.Without the fairies, the play would lose its sense of wonder and dreamlike quality. Their actions demonstrate that magic may enhance love, but it can never truly control it.The fairies speak some of the play’s most poetic and magical lines, emphasizing the whimsical and mysterious tone of the story. Here’s a few key examples:“Lord, what fools these mortals be!”Puck, Act III, Scene IIPuck, the mischievous fairy, declares this with amusement, pointing out how easily humans can be manipulated and how they often act without sense or reason. He delights in their folly, seeing their mistakes and misadventures as entertainment. It reflects his playful yet somewhat cynical view of human nature.“I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlips and the nodding violet grows.”Oberon, Act II, Scene IOberon, enchanted by nature, describes a serene and beautiful spot where fragrant herbs and delicate flowers thrive, painting a picture of a tranquil magical place. There he intends to place a love-spell on Titania as she sleeps“Be kind and courteous to this gentleman; hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes.” Titania, Act III, Scene ITitania, under the magical influence of Oberon, lovingly orders her fairies to shower Bottom with love and attention, despite his head now being that of a donkey. She urges them to play and dance around him, thus sparking a fleeting, magical attraction between the fairy queen and the weaver.“If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended.”Puck, Act V, Scene IAn odd, but poignant way for Puck to apologize for anything in the play that has upset the audience. If it has, he instructs them to consider the play a dream and an illusion. By doing so, all will be made right. When thinking about Shakespeare’s play A Midsummer Night’s Dream, in “New Illustrations of the Life and Work of Shakespeare,” Joseph Hunter asked an interesting question: “At the sight of such a title we naturally ask — Who is the dreamer?” This connects to what Puck says here at the end, suggesting that maybe the audience is the one dreaming, all caught up in the magical story.All four of the quotes above capture the magic, humor, and beauty that the fairies bring to the story. They’re a reminder that the play itself operates like a dream and like the lovers, the audience plays their part as well. It creates a fantasy world where reality and fantasy blend together.Shakespeare’s fairies continue to inspire modern audiences because they represent both the wonders and surprises of life. They influence literature, film, and fantasy storytelling. Puck uses trickery, Oberon and Titania engage in a power struggle, and Titania’s attendants display gentle whimsy. Through these actions, the fairies demonstrate that love, magic, and mischief are timeless themes.Many modern adaptations of A Midsummer Night’s Dream keep the fairies central to the play’s charm. Their supernatural presence reminds audiences that love is beyond reason, and sometimes, a little magic is needed to set things right. Stories of enchanted forests, magical interference, and fairy courts remain popular, proving that Shakespeare’s fairies still enchant audiences centuries later.The fairies of A Midsummer Night’s Dream are more than just background characters—they shape the story, add humor, and bring magic to Shakespeare’s most fantastical play. Their actions may cause chaos, but in the end, they ensure a happy ending for both the humans and themselves. Whether through Puck’s pranks or Titania’s poetic words, these fairies remain some of the most mesmerizing figures in all of Shakespeare’s works. They extend their influence beyond the st