

-OMANCY FANCY: A DIVINATION GUIDE

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In Gregory Benford's novel, In the Ocean of Night, one of the characters asks her husband for the daily horoscope. The husband, apparently bored with the daily horoscope routine, offers to "nip out for a small goat, put him to the knife and give . . . a prognosis". Such, he believes, is a more gutsy form of fortune-telling. Indeed.

Benford's passage is noteworthy because it illustrates two points: first, fortune-telling in one form or another appeals to most everyone, and second, there are alternatives to the daily horoscope. More than one hundred of these alternatives are listed below, each a compound word ending in "-mancy" (from the Greek "-manteia", meaning "divination").

All of the "-mancy" words presented here can be found in either Webster's 2nd or the Oxford English Dictionary. A dozen or so additional "-mancy" words were discovered while researching this article, but they have not been included because they do not appear in either the W2 or OED.

The vast majority of "-mancy" words actually end in "-omancy", hence the title of this article. Only seven words listed below delete the "o": onimancy, onymancy, scapulimancy, spatulamancy, spatulamancy, arithmancy and tephramancy.

Group I (for the literate): readers of Word Ways will probably appreciate the forms of divination presented below.

BIBLIOMANCY - divination by books or by verses of the Bible
GRAPTOMANCY - by handwriting
LOGOMANCY - by words
ONOMOMANCY, NOMANCY, ONOMANCY - from names or the letters of a name (number of vowels, etc.)
RHAPSODOMANCY - by picking a passage of poetry at random
STICHOMANCY - by lines of verse in books taken at random

Group II (for the gourmet): the foods listed below may not be haute cuisine, but they can be used to tell your fortune.

ALEUROMANCY - divination by means of meal or flour
ALPHITOMANCY - by means of barley-meal
HALOMANCY, ALOMANCY - by means of salt

OENOMANCY, OINOMANCY - by means of wine
 OOMANCY - by means of eggs
 TYROMANCY - by means of cheese

Group III (for the anatomically inclined): the following forms of fortune-telling are based on observations of the human anatomy. Note, however, that gastromancy has a second, totally unrelated definition.

CHEIROMANCY - divination by means of the hand
 CHIROMANCY, CHYROMANCY - by the hand (palmistry)
 GASTROMANCY - by the belly; also, by crystal-gazing
 ICHNOMANCY - by traces of posture, position, and footsteps
 METOPOMANCY - by the forehead or face
 OMPHALOMANCY - predicting the number of children a mother will have by counting the knots in the umbilical cord of her first born
 ONYCHOMANCY, ONIMANCY, ONYMANCY - from the finger-nails
 PODOMANCY, PEDOMANCY - from signs derived by inspection of the feet
 SCHEMATOMANCY - personal history inferred from an individual's form and appearance
 SPASMATOMANCY - diagnosing the disease by which a person is about to be attacked by observing the convulsive twitches of the limbs
 STERNOMANCY - by the breast-bone

Group IV (for the naturalist): the list below is the largest category of "-mancy" words. They are all based on observations of either plants, animals, or the spoor of animals.

ALECTOROMANCY, ALECTRYOMANCY - by means of a cock with grains of corn
 AMNIOMANCY - by means of the embryonic sac
 ARMOMANCY - by shoulders of animals
 BOTANOMANCY - by plants
 CEPHALOMANCY - by means of a head (boiling an ass's head on burning coals)
 CRITHOMANCY - by meal strewn over sacrificed animals
 HEMATOMANCY, HAEMATOMANCY - by blood
 HIPPOMANCY - from the neighing of horses
 ICHTHYOMANCY - by means of heads or entrails of fishes
 MYOMANCY - by the movements of mice
 OPHIOMANCY - by means of serpents
 ORNITHOMANCY - by means of the flight and cries of birds
 OSTEOMANCY - from bones
 PHYLLOMANCY - by leaves
 SCAPULIMANCY - by studying a charred or cracked shoulder blade
 SCATOMANCY - by the examination of feces
 SPATILOMANCY, SPATALAMANCY - by observing animal droppings
 SPATULAMANCY - by an animal's shoulder blade
 STIGONOMANCY, STIGNOMANCY - by writing on tree bark
 SYCOMANCY - by figs or fig leaves
 THERIOMANCY - from the movements of animals
 XYLOMANCY - with pieces of wood

ZOOMANCY - by observing the actions of animals

Group V (more for the naturalist): the fortune-telling words in this category are based on observations of natural phenomena. Note that sideromancy has a second unrelated definition.

AEROMANCY - by air, including augury (flight of birds)

ANTHRACOMANCY - by inspection of burning coals

ASTROMANCY - by the stars (astrology)

AUSTROMANCY - from observation of the wind

CAPNOMANCY - by smoke

CERAUNOMANCY - by thunderbolts

EMPYROMANCY - by fire

HYDROMANCY, HIDROMANCY, YDROMANCY - by signs derived from water, its tides and ebbs, or spirits therein

LITHOMANCY - by signs derived from stones

MARGARITOMANCY - by pearls

METEOROMANCY - by observations of meteors

PEGOMANCY - by springs or fountains

PYROMANCY - by fire, or by signs derived from fire

SELENOMANCY - by observation of the moon

SIDEROMANCY - by means of the stars; also, by watching burning straw

SPODOMANCY - by means of ashes

Group VI (for the technocrat): the methods of divination presented here involve the use of man-made objects.

ASPIDOMANCY - by means of a shield

ASTRAGALOMANCY - by means of dice or huckle-bones

AXINOMANCY - by means of an axe-head

BELOMANCY - by means of arrows

CARTOMANCY - by playing cards

CATOPTROMANCY, CATOPROMANCY - by means of a mirror

CHALCOMANCY - by means of vessels of brass

CLEIDOMANCY, CLIDOMANCY - by means of a key

COSCINOMANCY - by the turning of a sieve held on a pair of shears

CRYSTALLOMANCY - by means of crystal

CUBOMANCY - by the throwing of dice

DACTYLIOMANCY - by means of a finger-ring

ENOPTROMANCY - by means of a mirror

IDOLOMANCY - by idols

LAMPADOMANCY - by the flames of a torch

LYCHNOMANCY - by lamps

PSEPHOMANCY - by drawing marked stones from a vessel

RHABDOMANCY - by means of a rod (divining rod)

SCYPHOMANCY - by means of a cup

Group VII (for the necromancer): these forms of divination delve deep into the occult, much more so than all the others listed.

ANTHROPOMANCY - divination by the raising of dead men, or by the

entrails of men

DEMONOMANCY - by demons

PSYCHOMANCY - through communication with spirits of the dead

NECROMANCY - by means of communication with the dead; magic in general

NECYOMANCY - by summoning Lucifer

SCIOMANCY - by communication with the shades of the dead

Group VIII (miscellaneous): the following "-mancy" words defy categorization, but they are by no means less intriguing. There are some delightful entries here -- note, for example, the word gyromancy.

AMBULOMANCY - by walking

ARITHMANCY, ARITHOMANCY - by numbers

CEROMANCY - from the figures produced by dropping melted wax into water

CHRONOMANCY - divination to determine the favorable time for action

CLEROMANCY - by lots, or with dice

GEOMANCY - by means of figures or lines

GYROMANCY - by walking in a circle until felled by dizziness -- the divination is based on the point of falling

HIEROMANCY - from sacred things; from observation of objects offered in religious sacrifices

JUDAEOMANCY - by means of Jews

LECANOMANCY - by inspection of water in a basin

LOGARITHMOMANCY - by means of logarithms

MOLYBDOMANCY - by noting motions and figures in molten lead

PSEUDOMANCY - consciously false or pretended divination

ONEIROMANCY - by dreams

TEPHRAMANCY, TEPHROMANCY - with ashes from an altar

THEOMANCY - by oracles or others supposed to be immediately inspired by some divinity

URINOMANCY, UROMANCY - diagnosis of diseases by examination of the urine

Group IX (for the skeptic): if none of the above divinations sound plausible, and if you're not particularly fascinated by your daily horoscope, then you might be inclined to classify all fortune-telling as

MOROMANCY - foolish divination

But if you believe it's all moromancy, you might well be in the minority. A lot of people have had to be interested in fortune-telling to come up with all these variations.

Interestingly, Webster's 2nd lists a total of eight "-mancy" words which do not refer to a form of divination. Of these eight, four are technical terms (adiathermancy, athermancy, diathermancy and electrothermancy), and two more are rather obscure (aldermancy, the position of aldermen; labiomancy, lip-reading). The final two are more common, and they are not long or difficult. Can you guess them? If baffled, see Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.