

Signing a Pact with the Devil: Hermeticism in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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ABSTRACT

The Renaissance was an enlightening period in which new ethics and world views emerged. A move from a zealous Christian creed to an interest in worldly pleasures and the cult of the self and beauty were preached.

Running parallel to these big discoveries and giant progress in different spheres, Renaissance England still bore the vestige of credence in what is considered as "weird" to contemporary man as ghosts, apparitions, and witches. Magic continued to be evoked and practices of witchcraft bore its fruition back then. What is noticeable is that despite the overall *ambiance* of a prevailing rational mood and thirst for the palpable, Hermeticism had a strongly felt presence in the new social milieu.

This paper seeks to turn an analytical eye on hermeticism that was vividly present during Shakespeare's time through his tragedy, *Macbeth*. Above all, it sheds light on the evil practices that were conquering the Elizabethans despite the progressive era that the nation was witnessing.

Keywords: Hermeticism, *Macbeth*, magic, mystic.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Renaissance or the Italian *rinascimento* was like no other period in the history of Europe. It was a period of great florescence and proliferation in the different layers of life. This era is still considered by historians as a momentous shift that helped mold the new contours of early modern Europe. It helped instill the early foundations of the modern state as it marked the passage from Medieval Europe to Modern Europe. The Renaissance witnessed a boom in the arts. The legendary works of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo stamped the progress of a growing artistic Florentine city that spread all its genius and authentic works to the rest of Europe and neighboring countries.

II. THE RENAISSANCE AS AN ENLIGHTENING AGE

The Renaissance paved the way for Humanism. It believed in the potential of man to reach the highest scales of life. From the vintage point of Humanists, Man was perceived as a super-hero, a semi-god capable of attaining unprecedented truths and reaching to the stars. Such coming of age ran against the darkness and ignorance that characterized the Middle Ages. The Renaissance was an enlightening period in which new ethics and world views emerged. A move from a zealous Christian creed to an interest in worldly pleasures and the cult of the self and beauty were preached (Walker, 1992). No more was the Universe an enigma that puzzled those who desperately tried to grasp it. Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Johannes Kepler were three main Renaissance names that ushered into the world of modern sciences. The "Copernican Revolution" in the field of astronomy waved by Copernicus, for instance, was a turning point in this interval. Copernicus challenged the long old belief that the earth was placed at the center of the universe. For him, it was rather the sun that ought to be placed at the heart of the universe. (Ibid). Running parallel to these discoveries and giant progress in different spheres, the Renaissance man still imported with him remnants of far-fetched beliefs. The traces of the dim ages do not seem to have been totally erased from the practices of the common and educated Renaissance men alike. Renaissance England still bore the vestige of credence in what is considered as "weird" to contemporary man as ghosts, apparitions, witches, and magic continued to be evoked and practices of witchcraft bore its fruition back then. The symbiotic relationship between astrology and magic was highlighted.

III. RENAISSANCE HERMETICISM

It is hard to cover the Renaissance period without stopping at a significant phase of the period which remarkably marked the whole epoch: Hermeticism. This is because the Renaissance period is regarded as a bridge channeling the mediocrity of the former epoch with the new burgeoning theological and philosophical paradigms that came to mark the new age. In such a mix, Hermeticism served as a transitional interval generating a new consciousness mind. The Renaissance helped forge the early features of Hermeticism. The formation of the new doctrine served to change the face of the medieval age as the British society was ushering into a new covenant. New ideas were shaped to adapt with the new rules of the time, namely ideas based on the potency of the mind and the rational thinking. The new age was set apart as it helped raise a new consciousness based on the experimental and mathematical. This transformational thought helped the medieval age to move with ease towards a new credible paradigm and into a new term of philosophical reflection. Renaissance Hermeticism had its peak in Shakespeare's time. It untangled a close linkage between man and the universe. Man was not merely a human existent being, but an active agent and an operator in the universe. He could fairly control nature through the power of reason and science. Despite the overall *ambiance* of a prevailing rational mood and thirst for the palpable, supernatural phenomena had a strongly felt presence in the new social milieu as hermeticism bore in its maze the magic element that has long stamped the medieval age and has continued into the new age. Magic advocated by Florentine humanists such as Bacon and Ficino reinforced the link between Hermeticism and experimental sciences (Georgi & Strugnelli, 1971). For Ficino, magic did not contradict Christianity and that created stars in the cosmos were meant to influence people's lives and affect their destinies. Ficino's doctrine was based on using elements of nature and the stars to conjure the spirits of the heavenly bodies and bring them into the humanly body and spirit (Debus & Merkel, 1998). Stars and planets conquered an important space in Hermeticism, and magicians were seen as representatives of God on earth trying to bring to earth the celestial aura above. Thus, hermetic ideas served as significant transition to the renaissance and formulated the reflections of many Renaissance thinkers.

Though the government launched severe threats to minimize the exercise of witchcraft, this practice remained and with it the souls of the many were still oscillating between the ephemeral and the pertinent, the imaginary and the real, the fearful and the fearless. Many were still clinging to the fact that "magic" and "supernatural" were not hallucinatory, but rather part and parcel of real life, that witches were in effect present to perform some supernatural acts to bring back fertility to barren lands and sterile women, to cause changes in the climate, and to curse some, among others. In a double twist of attachment and repulsion, people feared such hermetic phenomena and paradoxically resorted to it for some personal needs. Elizabethans, at the time, had the feeling that they were "carried away" beyond oneself (Pike, 1992). As a matter of fact, Hermeticism is deeply rooted into a literature that saw the light in the early dawn of the centuries that followed Jesus Christ. The Greek Hermes Trismegistus, the mythical figure and founder of the movement, is thought to be a contemporary of Moses (Fowden, 1986). As a philosophical movement, Hermeticism is associated with the sciences of astrology, alchemy, spiritual illumination, and magic. *Corpus Hermeticum* is regarded as the cornerstone of hermeticism. It comprises a series of treatises considered as the foundation of the hermetic doctrine bearing the traces of Hellenistic Judaism, Christian creed, and Persian culture. Suggested texts affiliated with hermeticism are mystical, theurgical, and occult. They function within a religious-philosophical framework and imply, in part, the intervention of magic. Hermeticism became widely popular and poignant during the Renaissance as many Elizabethans were being drawn to the mystical world. People's belief in the occult had some reason. During Shakespeare's time, there appeared a group of astrologers as W.R Elton puts it,

(...) although controversial, beliefs in the influence of the stars upon man's life were held by a majority of Shakespeare's audience. Indeed great astronomers such as Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler were practicing astrology, and the eminent physicist, William Gilbert physician to Queen Elizabeth maintained astrology views. Astrologers agreed that man's fate was determined by his planetary conjunctions (...) They continued to dispute whether the determining moment was that of conceptions or that of birth (Elton, 1986: 17).

With its exalted longing to the deep and solemn, Hermeticism is philosophically and religiously laden. It takes its roots within an astrological framework and displays an orientation towards magic. During Shakespeare's time, Hermetic writings continued to be ardently read thanks to the translation of Ficino (Copenhaver, 1992). The leverage of the *Hermetica* found its way even to the church which condemned its magic part. Some passages pertaining to magic from the *Asclepius*, the philosophical book thought to be written by Hermes Trismegistus himself, were precluded while for Renaissance philosophers, magic was the most appealing part of the whole manuscript.

William Shakespeare was a contemporary to this extra-phenomenal experience and penned exquisite plots about it epitomizing the fullest extent of Elizabethan belief shaping the mystic into outstanding plots. Mysticism was a way to approach God and unveil the creation of the universe through deep contemplation and spirituality. Through its metaphysical process, mysticism aims, first and foremost, to know what is beyond the boundaries of human reason and what is perceived by the senses. It implies the inconcrete, the ecstatic, the miraculous, and the unusual. Thus, enchanting stories of witches, ghosts, fairies, apparitions, and magic adorn many of Shakespeare's most popular plays and chronicle a significant juncture in the life of Elizabethans. McNamara (1992) states that the fairies from Shakespeare's work are 'modernized gods': "Like Ovid's gods, Shakespeare's fairies are menacing and powerful, with a control over nature and men, even if they are ultimately more benign." Mystic philosophers during the Renaissance believed that God and the Universe were to be reached through extrasensory experience and that the spiritual world was to be diagnosed through extrasensory dimension of reality. The perceptible materials and substances in the world are elements where intelligible connections should be made to get beyond the concrete. Extrasensory meditation was to be performed via imagination, the mind, the soul, or nature. For long mystics have considered nature as a ripe source of knowledge in their journey towards understanding God and the rules of the universe. For them it was an undeniable translucid reflection of divinity and called for a deeper realization.

In this respect, Elizabethan England was a society governed by the dualities of the natural and the supernatural. It was common among folks to sometimes feel or even see apparitions, a phenomenon best illustrated in the mythical play, *Hamlet* by Hamlet himself while seeing the ghost of his dead father, King Hamlet in the castle of Elsinore. This phenomenon was not restricted to the limits of one single play in Shakespeare's theatrical repertoire but transcended it to a *pleiade* of plays including: *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth* which is at the core of our analysis. Shakespeare lived in a spatio-temporal sphere where esotericism and Hermeticism were not separable from daily life. In some of his most influential plays, like *Macbeth*, which have struck the memories of readers and theatre-goers alike, we find a vibrant presence for the enigmatic and mysterious element which shaped the contours of a whole historical period. The world of myths and fairies and the theme of the hermetic bond between the natural world and man's deeds are poignant. In Shakespeare's time, Hermeticism was regarded as a landmark impacting the religious Reformation and giving a share in what came to be known as the Renaissance. England saw the light of Hermeticism via the political figures of Anne Boleyn and Queen Elizabeth's I who was manifested a passion *vis-à-vis* the world of alchemy (Sterner, 1970).

The Elizabethan age was fraught with a potent belief in the hermetic, the mystical, and the esoteric. It was impregnated with the prophecies of Nostradamus, the philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus, and the works of alchemy and astrology. The latter in particular left an impressive mark and a lasting impact upon generations of Elizabethans and above all upon Queen Elizabeth who was interested in some of the most significant astrologers of the time like John Dee and Edward Kelley who were among the most popular astrologers of the time (Elton, 1986). The magnitude of Hermeticism was an essential part of the history of the Renaissance and liable to the explanation of a whole set of beliefs and practices that left its imprints in the Elizabethan society. Hermetic philosophy which lies at the heart of the Renaissance culture genuinely combined the teachings of Greek and Roman philosophies such as Neoplatonism, stoicism, Gnosticism, Christianity, and magic. The rebirth of Hermeticism also promoted the proliferation of the scientific revolution and Copernican heliocentrism. It praised "Man" as a superhero and active agent in the cosmos. Shakespeare was one of those artists who were profoundly influenced by the Hermetic trend during his epoch. He was a contemporary and a best witness of what was taking place of "weird" behavior and awkward conduct amongst his countrymen. Such demeanor was finely illustrated and described in his tragedy, *Macbeth*, with the conspiracies that were being knotted in Inverness castle. The world of myth and fairies were strikingly felt in this masterpiece where the realm of the supernatural was closely intertwined with the world of reality. This hermetic bond between these two worlds was exquisitely captured in the outright address of the three witches to Macbeth and in their obscene attitudes and manners throughout the play. In Act Three, scene one, for instance, the first witch recounts to her sisters how a woman minded handing her some "chestnuts" upon asking her "give me!" (1.3.4) and in act of retaliation, the three sister-witches promise to take revenge upon the woman's husband, a sailor on a ship, by casting a spell on him. In the third act, one of the three witches promises to gather "a vap'rous drop" that hangs from "the corner of the moon" for the end of raising "artificial sprites" (3.5.23–3.5.27). In Elizabethan society, this act of revenge often followed a scene of exasperation further enhancing the fears stemming from the witches. Shakespeare genuinely captivated the effects of witchcraft in *Macbeth* to build an overall atmosphere of Gothicism and suspense. His three witches could not only be linked to the esoteric world, but transcend it to monopolizing the destiny of the play's main character, Macbeth. Macbeth, himself, though an educated man occupying a prominent political position as he has a colossal estate in the state, finally succumbs to the potency of the witches. The uncertainty and ambiguity that the witches within the play leaves one perplexed. They seem to hold in hands a certain magical potential that an ordinary man could not withstand.

In Shakespeare's England, witches were expected to bring rain, know the future, create storms, appear and disappear suddenly and invisibly, and even make women infertile. They could turn day into night, cause drought, and put an end to the lives of their foes. In the aftermath of their first meeting, the witches propose to meet another time while discussing the weather state that will unite them, by themselves. Hermeticism is crystalized in *Macbeth* through the subsistence of the daggers, witches, and ghosts. For Bailly, "the tragedy of *Macbeth* is the greatest murder in Shakespeare, done in the most supernatural atmosphere, and by Shakespeare's greatest poet." (Tilak, 1997). In the play, the hermetic is a substantial part of the structure of the plot. It provides a catalyst for action, a deep discernment into character, and helps foster the major events. The way the play opens accredits a special mysterious "taste" to the lines of events. The witches' apparition highlights the mystic stamp from the outset. They are the first characters to loom to the audience and their presence onstage leaves no room for any tranquility. They speak paradoxically and make enigmatic hints that leaves one bewildered. The witches' recurrent reference to some paradoxical terms like a day "foul and fair", "day and night", "light and dark" is indirectly reminiscent of the biblical version on the creation of the cosmos. The witches are implicitly hinting to their potency to command the world as semi-gods. They can create disorder around and by a token of some mysterious force can settle it down back again. However, the witches' existence is made all the more frightening, there is a piece of truth to believe in their words. At first, Macbeth is amazed at knowing that the witches could foretell that he has been named Thane of Cawdor. This further instills in him a feeling of security that the rest of the witches' predictions will turn a reality. The witches' words foster Macbeth to plot, along with Lady Macbeth, to get rid of the presence of Duncan and Banquo as potential threats. Their very presence weighs heavy upon an aspiring future ruler. Therefore, in the very beginning of the play the reader feels a sinister overwhelming mood that hovers the whole place. The witches in their first appearance accentuate an acute feel of severity, unease, and horror. They are described as thin, ugly, manlike and drawn to the underworld. You cannot discern their gender as they look like women but grow beards like men, which leaves Banquo perplexed. They are creatures endowed with miraculous powers but "they are not supernatural themselves", according to Emma Smith (2007). Not only can the freakish sisters darken the clouds, create storms, and raise violent winds able to overthrow ships but in their very existence, there is a poignant feeling of intimidation and bluster. These witches had the power to create antagonism, kill ordinary people, and shed blood among royal characters within the castle. In *Thinking with Demons*, Stewart (1997) notes that within the popular memory, witches are associated with disarray and destruction. He states that it is, "the impression of Europeans who saw disorder and witchcraft as mutually entailed phenomena permitting multiple transfers of meaning" and that it was "natural to set the scene for treatments of one by invoking the other-natural-that is for Shakespeare (...) to let demonism introduce disorder". They drag Macbeth into an ominous play ending tragically and made him "start and seem to fear/ things that do sound so fair" (I.3.49-50). The whole kingdom was entangled into a wicked conspiracy which ultimately led to the killing of the king. The demonic sisters proudly cite the case where they pushed people to meet "a dismal and a fatal end" (III.5.21). When they first appear, the witches can already tell the future of Macbeth. They greet him as Thane of Glamis, Thane Cawdor and the king respectively. Yet the future of Banquo they can prophesize remains a mystery. The witches could, in advance, predict Banquo's lofty future as a forthcoming father of kings. Yet, "while Macbeth is beside himself with excitement and transported with guilty thoughts and imaginations, Banquo remains calm, unexcited and self-poised" (Ibid). In this scene, it becomes obvious that Macbeth is moved by the witches' words. The latter tempt him to hasten the future of the prediction, while Banquo remains unmoved by what he heard. Cosmology during the Renaissance and in *Macbeth*, in turn, acquires a notable significance. It is uncontrollable by human race and transcends the ability of human beings. Yet, in the play, nature possesses a mythical dimension. It becomes commendable at the hands of the witches who seem to intrude into the metaphysical world and fixes it according to their own will. After meeting the sister witches, Banquo is left in a state of puzzlement. He wonders,

...But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us our harm
The instruments of darkness tell us truths Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence (I.3.122–126)

Throughout the play, Shakespeare most often resorts to the adjective "strange" to describe the awe and scare engendered by the overall mystic ambiance. The eccentricity of Banquo's words emanates from the opacity of the obscure sisters who possess supernatural powers and are able to "tame" nature according to their own will. The witches in the play are portrayed as strange creatures who can relate physical body to aerial spirit. They are sub-human making feel that they have come from a different world than ours. yet, they have an incredible power to command earth and people around. They have a disruptive presence and at once a healing remedy to the aspirations of Macbeth through their prophecies. They can foretell the future and enlighten him about it. Such colorful predictions made Macbeth crave for a hasty concretization of it

and thus hasten his murderous plan. The witches are in part whimsical: they hide within their hands the keys of the future. Similarly, they seem to have their feet on earth. They embody the mystical aspect of the “other” world but still feel “real” in their presence and treatment of the rest of characters in the court. They are endowed with a sense of the “bizarre”. Shortly after their disappearance, Banquo wonders about the nature of the witches. They are so vague that he cannot discern their true belonging. This trait of “ineffability” or indescribability is a remarkable sign of the “mystic” characterizing the age (James, 1958). Shortly after they have vanished Banquo wonders,

Banquo: The earth has bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them; wither are they vanished?
Macbeth: Into the air, and what seemed corporal, melted,
As breath into the wind (I.3.80-84)

Banquo is caught oscillating between what he deems a “real world” and the irrational. He mistakes the real for the non-real and vice versa. A state of puzzlement or “negation” where at once he rejects the reality but feels attracted to it. Jantzen makes an analogy between the “irrational” and the mystic thinking that it becomes one and where the mystic experience is chased from any “human pursuits” as it is not an inherent part of the rational discourse, and thus situates it within the sphere of the “emotional” (Jantzen, 1994). The witches are stamped by a changing nature; they are corporal and airy. They look so mysterious in shape and acts that it is hard to disclose their origins, intentions, and nature. Their sudden disappearance provokes unanswered interrogations as they are capable of appearing suddenly and disappearing as mysteriously as their first presence. Banquo believes that the earth as well as the water have bubbles and the witches do not differ much from these substances, “and these are of them” (I.3.82), he utters. The sheer fact that Banquo draws a parallel between bubbles explicitly meaning something ‘intangible’ slipping between the hands in a non-catchable way, is the ultimate proof that the witches are escapable and hardly catchable. Their presence is a mystery and so is their absence. Thus, the nature of these semi-human creatures is elusive and thought-provoking. Their words turn out to be a reality and their predictions are a certitude. The freakish sisters are potent. They imbue the air with bubbles breeding an endless array of puzzlement and inquest. Their odd behavior calls into question the connection between mysticism and moral behavior as mysticism erases the distinction between the subject and others (Stace, 1996). According to Caciola (2000), the church believed that given the fragile nature of their physiology, women were more vulnerable to devil than men. Thus, their very presence in the play from the outset raised suspicions about their nature: Banquo and Macbeth suspected that they might have been evil possessed. Following their augury, Macbeth’s soul becomes animated by greed and rapacity. He longs to be a king without waiting for the natural occurrences of his destiny. Evil thoughts jumped into his mind and embellished the future in front of his eyes. Macbeth is ready more than any other time to take whatever way that might help him make the prediction true. In so doing, he accelerated a bath of bloodshed in the castle. Macbeth has a free will and could have prevented a massacre from happening. Yet, he is drawn by an implacable desire to race with destiny. The witches knew Macbeth’s flaws and accentuated it. Though they did not directly push him to commit a crime and end the lives of those around him in the most atrocious way, still they had a play within the genocide by deceiving and tempting him. Macbeth’s thoughts are scattered, and his vision is unclear. He does not seem to have a sense of immediacy. He is overwhelmed by the jocose news “of the imperial theme” while thoughts of murder start wrapping his mind. He is “helpless as a man in a nightmare, he may struggle, but he cannot fight; he can no more resist than a rabbit resists a weasel’s teeth fastened in its neck, or a bird escapes the serpent’s transfixing eye.” (Smith, 2004). Shakespeare’s deliberate choice to include the element of the mystical and the meretric in the play should be taken, under no circumstances, for granted. The recurring apparitions of the witches is a reminder that a catastrophe is about to happen. Their presence is foreboding. The use of paranormal powers on the part of the witches to foresee the future generates a feeling of nuisance. The witches are used by Shakespeare to create fear and dread. With their prophecies, they spread terror and anxiety among all. They elevate the strain for all characters and boost panic and horror, which helps foreshadow an imminent tragedy. In the play, Macbeth makes a pact with the witches in exchange for some unknown prophecies.

IV. THE WITCHES OF MACBETH

In *The Psychic World of William Shakespeare*, Sherman Yellen states that Shakespeare, “believed in prophecy, witchcraft, astrology, magic, and ghosts” (Ebon, 1972) and that his “fairies are menacing and powerful, with a control over nature and men, even if they are ultimately more benign.” (McNamara, 1992). In the play, the witches prophesize Duncan’s murder, tell accounts of past things that truly happened and were witnessed by other characters. They create storms often foreboding a dead end. Storms are fearful and insecure and so are the witches in *Macbeth*. Elizabethan habits and pattern of life were formed, and

informed mystery forces dictated by unseen forces. All classes of the English society running from the lower middle class going through the idle class and even reaching up to the upper class were connected to the idea of the “occult”. The latter infiltrated their lives to the minute details making believe that the thirteen of Friday was to be dismayed and walking under ladders was to be avoided as probable ordeals and misadventures were most likely to happen (Eton, 1986). Elizabethans were also, to a large degree, superstitious providing an irrational interpretation for life and death, disease and recovery. The circulation of tales about burnt women suspected of witchcraft was widespread as witchcraft was essentially linked to women. There are several instances propagated between folks about the mythic vigor and intensity of fairies. People would share stories about weird creatures (fairies) flying into the sky on straws, stealing provisions, or even devastating crops, stealing children and sometimes substituting them with one of their own with cases of putting empty bodies, harming animals by hitting them with elves. It is also recorded that these witches are vividly present and alive on some occasions like: Halloween, midsummer eve, or midnight. Incidents of dead childbirth or unexpected deceases were thought to be due do the witches’ intervention (Henderson & Edward, 2011). According to Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the courtiers of Queen Elizabeth, witches were governed by the power and commands of the Devil while for some others such as Reginald Scot, the existence of witches was merely a chimera and that there was nothing called “sorcery”. From his vintage point, women charged of witchcraft were suffering a mental illness causing them to be different in mind and acts. King James, himself, was not separable to what was taking place during his age. In his lenses, Fairies were merely a reproduction of the demonic universe. They might have been different in shape, but they bore the same evil intentions carried by demons. They could hold their grips on particular areas and sites and cause severe damages. They could even drive many to be consternated because of their mischievous deeds reaching turning the sane into the insane (Smith, 2004). For King James, fairies and demons were two sides of the same coin. Yet to these unwholesome creatures, there was another category of “grouped fairies and devils together, but implied some difference in kind” (Ronald, 2014). King James was well-aware of the deleterious deeds of the witches culminating in the trials that were taking place in the 16th century. For once, witches attempted to conspire against the king and put an end to his life through spells and sorcery colluding with the devil. In the aftermath of this event, King James published a book in London which he titled, *Demonology*. King James’s interest in magic was familiar in his surroundings and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* might have been an endeavor to please the crown using *Holinshed’s Chronicles* as his provenance (Smith, 2004). During King James’s times, the British Monarch’s belief in sorcery left its mark in the book written by the crown, *Daemonologie*, a text explaining his concern whose solicitude into this metaphysical phenomenon could not pass unnoticed. Though witches might have been of a notable grandeur under King James’s reign, witches were, by no means, the only cryptic juvenile in the English daily life. Some preternatural incidents like apparitions, dreams, and prophecies were equally considered and conquered a special place in Elizabethan culture.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Elizabethan age which opened the doors wide to a multitude of sciences still feared what they deem an unsurmountable power of demons and wizards. Elizabethans believed that witches were real beings that looked like normal people and who were “known to appear in visible and material form” (Latham, 1930). Besides witches, according to the popular mind of the time, were mostly associated with everything evil and wicked. They could create storms, break marriages, turn wells into dry ones, and ruin the natural order of the cosmos (Ibid). These “spirits of the devil” inhabited the earth rather than hell. They had demonic endeavors and were only meant to create troubles and animosities in the lived world. For this very reason, Elizabethans were fairly cautious of witches. Though they carried realizable messages from the world beyond, their appearance was more associated to curses than to blessings. Some common people were even carrying upon their bosoms charms and spells to execrate the manifestation of these witches into their lives as their coming on earth was significant of death. During Elizabethan times, most witchcraft scenes were happening among poor old women and widows who were begging for some food and provisions. In case, they are denied what they need, a profane mishap follows the person who rejects the demander’s plea. The resentment of these women would aggravate the situation as they would seek occult pursuits to take revenge upon themselves. These mischievous plots would often expose its practitioners to witchcraft trials. Significantly Elizabethans, during the Elizabethan epoch, immersed into vile practices of demonization that drove a majority of the population in a wave of witchcraft frenzy.

VI. CONCLUSION

Though there was an indescribable focus on religion during the Reformation, the minds of many folks were directed to fairy tales and witches. Peter Marshall captures this period by stating that, “[t]he

Reformation's emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God left no place for any such autonomous or semi-autonomous spiritual beings to exercise agency in the world".¹ He adds that, "[b]elief in fairies . . . was utterly incompatible with Reformed doctrine" (Ibid). With this intense conflict between morality and witchcraft, Elizabethans were struggling to find their way into a split world restricting them to tough ethical codes while at the same time driving them into a serpentine road of sorcery. In the face of this strife between divinity and Satan, "if what were traditionally thought of as ghosts and fairies had any objective reality at all, they could only be demons, subservient to Satan, and bent on the spiritual destruction of mankind" (Ibid). Reformers worked to instill the doctrines of goodness and benevolence. For them only righteousness should be established and preached. Sadly enough, it was the satanic sphere that was gaining a wider scope instead and attracting many adherents more than any other time as best illustrated in Shakespeare's tragic masterpiece, *Macbeth*.

The objectives of the reformers were undoubtedly well-intended and sincerely inspired, but by reinventing a world where there could only be the forces of good, upheld by God, and the forces of evil, controlled by the Devil, they destroyed the grey area once inhabited by fairies, ghosts and witches, and relegated them all to the dominion of Satan, whose power appeared to be growing ever stronger.²

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¹ Peter Marshall, "Ann Jeffries and the Fairies: Folk belief and the War on Scepticism in Later Stuart England." In *The Extraordinary and the Everyday in Early Modern England*, ed. A. McShane and G. Walker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), P. 140.

² Henderson and J. Cowan. *Scottish Fairy Belief*, P. 116.