

## Dilemma of Magic and Witchcraft: It's Relation with the Ethnicity of Elizabethan Age

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### Abstract

This study explores the elements of supernaturalism and witchcraft as the prominent theme in Shakespeare's play "Othello". However, it does not have any direct allusion to ghosts and witches but the role of magic is eminent in this play. It can be overlooked by abundant references to bewitchment, prominent among which are the magical history of handkerchief and the allegation of Brabantio against Othello. This will bring to light that cultural background has a prominent impact on Shakespeare's plays and the role of magic in Othello imposes threats on Venetian society. Shakespeare's work will be analysed in the light of New Historicism Theory, which explores the work of art and literature in relation to its cultural context. The study has brought the role of witchcraft and magic to the surface which is ambiguous in the play and has prominent impact on society and culture of that time.

**Keywords:** Supernatural Elements, Magic, Bewitchment, Magical History, New Historicism, handkerchief, Venetian Society, Witchcraft

### Introduction

Shakespeare's plays are universal in their appeal as they belong to all ages. However, they are primarily outstanding representatives of the belief-systems practiced in the Elizabethan Age. The plays not only reflect these belief systems, rather they are equally instrumental in shaping them;

A play by Shakespeare is related to the context of its production, the economic and political system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England and the particular institutions of cultural production as far as culture is made continuously and Shakespeare's text is reconstructed, reappraised and reassigned all the time through diverse institutions in specific contexts. (Dollimore & Sinfield Viii).

Shakespeare's play 'Othello' does not contain any explicit reference to ghosts and witches in the tradition of the supernatural plays. However, the elements of magic and witchcraft are prominent, as it witnessed numerous allusions of bewitchment; among them Brabantio's accusations against Othello and the latter's own account of the magical history of the handkerchief. Shakespeare's plays are the product of his contemporary socio-political and socio-religious environment. Cultural background has a far-reaching impact on Shakespeare's dramas. Shakespeare's works help to shape the socio-political and socio-religious environment.

Moreover, magic usually worked with several formulaic practices. Most of the times, it is channelized through incantation and charms. Othello's act of incantation through which he enchants Desdemona, originates from his stories. He reads the mantra of his strange stories to beguile Desdemona. He employs oral charm of his rhetoric to affect Desdemona. He overpowers Desdemona's senses by his magical narrations of his adventures. Othello ends his eloquent narration of the circumstances, in which he fell in love with Desdemona, with a confession, "This only is the witchcraft I have used" (1.3.169). Of course, he aims at to deny the possibility of magic in his love for Desdemona but the magic of words and the oral incantation, is a reality. Then he employs an object, the handkerchief, to strengthen his control on Desdemona. In this regard the handkerchief gets a talismanic stature. Othello's declares in Duke's court that his account of wondrous adventures won Desdemona's love, "If I had a friend that loved her / I should but teach him how to tell my story. / and that would woo her" (1.3.164-6). Duke also acknowledges at the end the proceedings, "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (1.3.171). Hence, it is the eloquent but at the same time mysterious account of Othello's ventures that enthralled Desdemona and impressed Duke.

### Function of Magic

Magical aspect of the play is not devoid of entertainment. It has certain comical overtones as well. Taking into consideration contemporary attitude to magic and witchcraft, Shakespeare might have found it as an interesting motive to ridicule superstitious beliefs of the Orthodox people. Shakespeare's motive might have found expression in the selection of a moor to deride his primitive beliefs. Michael Bristol suggest that Othello "would have been seen as comically monstrous" (143) in the Renaissance. Othello's colour and foreignness might have turned him to be "a kind of blackface clown, a monstrous and funny substitute who transgresses the norms." (147). Robert Hornback connects the comical aspect of the play with the popular Jacobean tragedy, "Othello would have recalled such traditional visual emblems of the natural fool as blackface, fool's coat, and

"muckender" or fool's handkerchief" (70).

Hence magic and race move side by side to provide entertainment to the viewers. The magical dimensions of the play, *Othello*, have implicit moralisation as well. The spectacle of beastliness practised in the name of beliefs in the superstitions prepares the readers/audience to be cautious against the traps of delusions. In case, *Othello*'s claimed story of the handkerchief was true and his killing of Desdemona was more on religious grounds than ethical basis, he was really a threat the Christian Venetians.

The element of magic endows mysteriousness to *Othello*'s character. Oddness of his beliefs estranges him from so-called civilized behaviour and enlightened rationality. Further it highlights *Othello*'s remoteness from Venetians. As a result, his primitiveness provides plea to justify social prejudice and bias against the foreigners. The practices of witchcraft, in Shakespeare's time, had many-sided functions. On the top of it was to establish the authority of church. Believers were persuaded to strengthen their beliefs and heretics were invited to see the miraculous wonders. Barbara Rosen notes in her "Introduction to Witchcraft in England", 1558-1618, "Catholics secure in the rites of exorcism, declared themselves the true Church on the strength of their cures of possessed girls—cases which made a great impression on the heretical majority" (33). The politics of exorcism of both the Catholic Church and the Puritans was practiced in order to challenge the Church of England and to attract converts (Su 79). Contrary to its religious service exorcism was also perceived to play a secular role. Exorcism, according to Harsnet, posed a serious threat to the social structure in England. Exorcism happened to "withdraw the hearts of her Majesty's Subjects from their allegiance and from the truth of Christian religion professed in England" (410).

Nevertheless, in order to have thorough evaluation of Shakespeare's sources, modern readers are required to grasp the crux of his play, *Othello*. Using the New Historicist approach, we have discussed in this study whether Shakespeare supported the contemporary dominant religious ideology or whether he proposed subversion in his play '*Othello*'. We shall also discuss how Shakespeare's play *Othello* provides an insight into alternative views that challenged the dominant culture and how inner contradictions dramatized in the play, i.e. with regard to the efficacy of magic, highlight the value set upon the prevalent socio-culture order.

### Research Questions

Following research questions are addressed in the study:

- What role do magic and witchcraft play in *Othello*?
- What threats does *Othello*'s magic inflict on Venetian society?
- How is magic related to the foreign element that is supposed to be a negative force threatening the cultural purity?

### Literature Review

Shakespeare's writing partook in the prevailing discourses and ideologies of his age. Even so, his art had the power to 'bend' the conventions of his time to a limited extent. He surpassed the legacy and the futurity of his age by proposing subversion to the dominant ideology. Anyhow, supernatural elements are evident in Shakespearian plays. Inclusion of the motif of exorcism, in Shakespeare's plays, has multiple functions. It provides a realistic picture of the social and cultural developments of the Elizabethan life style. It also presents a critical examination of the cultural practices carried out in the name of religious beliefs. Essentially Shakespeare was a sceptic. He questions the validity of the existing beliefs and the social practices. Shakespeare, like the other dramatists of the period, Dyer says, "has generally treated the subject with ridicule, showing that he had no sympathy with the grosser opinions shared by various classes in those times" (53). Shakespeare's reaction to the contemporary dilemmas caused by exorcism was part of artistic concern; "It was only expected that Shakespeare should introduce in his writings' descriptions of a creed which held such a prominent place in the history of his day and which has made itself famous for all time by thousands of victims it caused to be sent to the torture-chamber, to the stake, and to the scaffold" (Dyer 18). John Dryden's tributes to Shakespeare as "the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul" (247) can be taken as a guiding principle to specify latter's position. The comprehensive soul of Shakespeare could not afford to restrict his poetic range to the projection of the contemporary belief systems and the socio-cultural practices.

James George Frazer describes the law of contagion in his book *Golden Bough*. According to this law "things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been served" (10). *Othello*'s handkerchief can be viewed in terms of the law of contagion. *Othello*'s mother was counselled by the charmer "while she kept it, / 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father / entirely to her love"

Belief in witchcraft was a commonplace phenomenon in Shakespeare's times. Contemporary evidence of haunting by witches suggest that supernatural occurrences were commonplace and they posed a serious threat to the social structure. George Lyman Kittredge describes the public anxiety regarding the perils of witchcraft in England. He refers to numerous cases of bewitching, demonic possession and exorcism that show a common

preoccupation with supernatural occurrences (6-12). Likewise, Mary Glover's record in 1602, who was supposed to be charmed by a charwoman Elizabeth Jackson, provides an insight into the witchcraft phobia prevailing in Shakespeare's times. It shows the far-reaching impact of witchcraft on judicial as well medical systems. This case shows the wide occurrence of the practices of witchcraft. The jury's verdict was against Elizabeth Jackson. She was declared guilty of witchcraft and sentenced to a year's imprisonment (MacDonald xviii).

Renowned publications on witchcraft prior to Shakespeare, including James I's *Daemonology*, Samuel Harsnett's *Declarations of Egregious Popish Impostures* and Edward Jorden's *Brief Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, bring out the widespread public notions of the Elizabethans. These contemporary publications on the topic of witchcraft are not only convey an overall image of the general problems associated with supernatural beings but also verify the far-reaching impact of these publications on Shakespeare's plays. Plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries, including Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* (1605), Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*, also known as *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy* (1600), Richard Brome's *The English Moor* (1637), and Elkanah Settle's two plays, *The Empress of Morocco* (1673) and *The Heir of Morocco* (1682), dramatize general superstitious beliefs of the common people. One of the central features of these plays is the projection of racial dissimilarity to describe the "stock passionate, cruel and irrational Moor" (Smith 32). Giovanni Botero's *Relations of the Most Famous Kingdoms and Commonwealths throughout the World*, first published in 1592, could have been a source of inspiration for Shakespeare: "Moors were comely of body, stately of gait, of sufficient constitution to endure any work or travail, implacable in hatred, treacherous, tumultuous, and superstitious" (60).

There was controversy regarding to the efficacy of black magic whether sorcerers possessed genuine supernatural power or it was merely illusion provoked by the natural causes. King James established the authority of witchcraft by means of scriptural and empirical evidences that "these unlawful arts in general, have been and may be put in practise" (4). However James gradually "abandoned or greatly moderated his earlier enthusiasm for witch-hunting and turned Grand Inquisitor, delighting in uncovering false claims of bewitchment" (MacDonald xlvi-xlix) when he got the possession of throne. Stephen Bradwell's "Mary Glovers Late Woeful Case" (1603) and John Swan's "A True and Briefe Report of Mary Glovers Vexation and of Her Deliverance by the Meanes of Fasting and Prayer" argue in the favour of the efficacy of exorcism. Contrarily, Reginald Scot argued in his treatise that the power of the witches was illusory. He ascribed the wonders of the magic to excess of melancholy humor. He declared that spells and conjurations appeal only to "children, melancholike persons and papists" (389). Harsnett has highlighted the deceitful practices of the catholic exorcists. He has exposed the sham of their techniques by which they raise or chase away the demons, "naught else sue close packing, cunning juggling, feat falsehood, and cloaked dissimulation" (3). The physician Jorden also calls into question the trustworthiness of supernatural powers. He denies exorcist treatment for physical ailments in his *Brief Discourse*; "diverse strange actions and passions of the body of man, which in common opinion, are imputed to Diuell, have their true natural causes" (2). Moreover he condemns the ignorance of the laities who ascribe supernatural attributes to natural occurrences, "which are ignorant of the strange affects which natural causes may produce ... have sought above the Moon for supernatural causes, ascribing these accidents either to diabolical possession, to witchcraft, or to the immediate finger of the Almighty" (2). F. David Hoener mentions this phenomenon in *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance*; "Yet in the Middle Ages and still in Shakespeare's time, epileptic and other suffocating fits were commonly confused and the symptoms often attributed to possession by devilish spirits, from which the unfortunate victims needed to be exorcised, after appropriate repentance" (199). This account of various superstitious practices prevalent in Elizabethan times enables the reader to establish connections between Social display of belief in superstitions and its dramatization in Shakespeare's play, *Othello*.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This academic research is a qualitative-exploratory study based upon New Historicism Theory of textual analysis. The primary source and the sample of study comprises of Shakespeare's play "Othello". Close textual analysis of the play within the theoretical framework of "practical criticism" or New Criticism" is done to construct the spirit of four "enabling presumptions" of new historicism in Genre, which have acquired the force of law.' They are:

1. Literature has a historical base and literary works are not the products of a single consciousness but many social and cultural forces. In order to understand literature one has to take recourse to both culture and society that gave rise to it in the first place.
2. Literature is not a distinctive human activity hitherto believed, but another vision of history. This has obvious implications for both literary theory and the study of literary texts.
3. Since literature and human beings are both shaped by social and political forces, it is not possible to talk of an intrinsic human nature that can transcend history. And since history is not a continuous series of events but ruptures, there is no link between one age and another or between men belonging to different

ages. This being the case, a Renaissance man is rooted in his Renaissance idiosyncrasies just as a modern man is rooted in his. A modern reading of a Renaissance text cannot be the same as a Renaissance reading. At most a literary interpretation can reconstruct the ideology of the age through a given text.'

4. Caught in his own historicity, a historian cannot escape the social or ideological constraints of his own formation. And, therefore, he cannot fully understand the past objectively on its own terms.

The critical material for the research was collected from relevant avenues of literature, mainly, theoretical concepts and critics. In addition, numerous academic journals, online interviews available on writers 'blogs' and even video sources also made up the secondary sources of the research paper. Many solicited internet sites were referred too and online articles were read and quoted in order to enhance the validity of the arguments being presented and to enrich the quality of the research. Moreover, inter-textual and intra-textual references and inferences are developed to substantiate the arguments presented in order to promote an incisive understanding and to make it a plausible study.

### Discussion

Shakespeare's England was the home of various superstitions. The efficacy of amulets and charms was widely endorsed. Amulets and charms were used "to ward off diseases and to avert contagion" (Dyer 506). Brabantio's first reaction at the elopement of his daughter is surprising. When he fails to believe such mismatching unity of a Venetian and a Negro in wedlock, he ascribes it to charms and magic, "Is there not charms, by which the property of youth and maidhood / may seem abused? Have you not read, Roderigo / of some such thing?" (1.2.170-3). The given extract indicates that the use of love charms was familiar in Shakespeare's times, "there is scarcely a disease for which a charm has not been given" (Dyer 506). Love charms were used to unite the lovers (360). Brabantio lists the possible impact of charms on Desdemona when he first accuses Othello of witchcraft;

**Thou hast practised on her with foul charms,  
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals  
That weakens motion: I'll have't disputed on;  
'Tis probable and palpable to thinking,  
I therefore apprehend and do attach thee  
For an abuser of the world, a practiser  
Of arts inhibited and out of warrant. (1.2.73-9)**

Brabantio's speech deals with the procedure of the practices of witchcraft popular in Shakespeare's England. Drugs, minerals and charms, according to Brabantio hamper the sensibility of the victim. He supposes that Othello duped his daughter by using charms. "The aura of the exotic encourages Brabantio, says Bella Mirabella, to so quickly link Othello with mountebanks since both are outsiders, "others" who partake in the exotic" (158). Brabantio reminds the Duke that magic is a prohibited art, condemnable as well as culpable. He insists that Othello must be punished according to the "Bloody book of law" (1.2.67). Love-charms and love-potions were, in Shakespeare's times, used "to secure the affections of another" (Dyer 359). Othello is accused of using such love-charms by Brabantio. His charges against Othello affirm that Shakespeare's text resonates with the discourses on witchcraft, medical and juridical of his time and age. It was a common practice to attribute every unusual happening to witchcraft in Shakespeare's times. When Brabantio fails to comprehend the possibility of his daughter's secret marriage to Othello, he takes it at once as a working of witchcraft. He assumes that it might be the impact of charms or drugs that beguiled his daughter.

Magic is associated with Otherness in the play. The main motif of Desdemona's father in accusing Othello, of practising witchcraft on the former's daughter, is to detach him from the so-called civilized Venetian society. Both, foreign element and the magic are supposed to be a serious threat to the cultural integrity of the Christian Venetians. Brabantio reports to the duke that the elopement of his daughter is not his personal but a social matter. He draws the attention of the senators to the gross issue of cultural impurity by the mixing of the blood with the foreigners:

**Mine's not an idle cause: the duke himself,  
Or any of my brothers of the state,  
Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own;  
For if such actions may have passage free,  
Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be. 1.2.95-9.**

Venetian social and political order was governed by a policy of detachment from the foreigners. Foreigners were supposed to serve the state without affecting the social order. Othello, for instance, remains dear to Brabantio as long as he is harmless to the latter's domestic integrity. As soon as he takes liberty to mix with the Venetian, by marrying Desdemona, Brabantio considers him fiend, "O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter? / Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her" (1.2.62-3). Hence, the allegations of witchcraft are rooted in social structure; "uncanniness arises as the result of an extended social order" (Bruster 84) Venetians are not

ready to entertain conjugal advancements of aliens.

Despite of being a convert to Christianity, Othello's old beliefs and dogmas are threat to the Venetian society. Iago shrewdly brings Othello's superstitious beliefs on the surface. He arouses the Moor's primitive being by his witticism. He manipulates Othello's limited knowledge about Venetian life and poisons his mind thus;

**I know our country disposition well;  
In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks  
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience  
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown. 3.3.204.**

Fortune-telling and prophecies were the part of the discourse and practices regarding the supernatural. This formulaic element of supernatural stories, in which the future events are foretold, takes place in the play Othello, too. Fortune-telling was a common practice in Renaissance. Charles Vallancey describes the practices of the fortunes-tellers; "In the Highlands of Scotland a large Chrystal, of a figure somewhat oval, was kept by the priests to work charms by; water poured upon it at this day, is given to cattle against diseases : these stones are now preserved by the oldest and most superstitious in the country. They were once common in Ireland." (Collectanea xiii 17). Othello's mother was foretold by the sibyl that she will receive the affections and love of her husband as long as the latter keeps the handkerchief. However, Predictions of the charmer, in Othello, play havoc than rendering any positive service. It seems apt to deny, at least in context of the play Othello, the validity of the prophecies. Othello falls prey to the illusion of the predictions. He takes the words of the charmer as final one and weaves his doom. Shakespeare seems to suggest that believing in prophecies and trusting the fortune-telling results only in catastrophe.

Brabantio's rich vocabulary, denoting magical practices, shows his in depth knowledge of witchcraft. The nature of Brabantio's accusations against Othello reflects that the former is concerned more with the magical practices than with the elopement of his daughter. It seems as if the witchcraft is more heinous crime than the elopement. He seems almost indifferent to the matter of the elopement, "If she confesses that she was half the wooer / Destruction on my head" (1.3.175-6). The Duke promises Brabantio, "the bloody book of law / You shall yourself read in the bitter letter / After your own sense" (1.3.68-70). Parliament passed a new witchcraft law in 1604 that recommended strict penalties against witchcraft, conjuring evil spirits, digging up corpses and killing with spells (Robbins 50).

In this regard, distanced fanciful depiction of magic seems to be more effective than explicit condemnation of the practices of m Magic and witchcraft is associated with an alien who is derided on owing to his Otherness in colour and race. Othello is presented as a magician in the play. His possession of the handkerchief is suggestive of his reliance on the supernatural forces, "Othello's handkerchief is an authentic element from his exotic and fabulous past" (Andrews 276). He inherits an ominous handkerchief from his mother by which he woos and wins Desdemona's love. His Otherness is marked by his mysterious practices, strange possessions and the colour of his face. No doubt racial prejudice against Othello culminates in public accusations of witchcraft and magic. Brabantio's accusations to Othello for using charms and witchcraft wanes the worth of his argument. He has no evidence to substantiate his argument that Othello is a charmer. It is only his bias and resentment that makes him to call Othello a charmer. He is annoyed at Othello's trespassing into his domestic sovereignty. Othello elopes with his daughter, causing both personal as well as social harm. At personal level he is deprived of his daughter who is the only member of his family. While at social level his reputation is scandalized by the elopement of his daughter. It is a stigma for Brabantio to face public insult. Iago provokes Brabantio's rage by reminding the latter of his social humiliation, "Awake the snorting citizens with the bell/ Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you" (1.1.89-90). Magic and witchcraft deny the efficacy of magic.

Iago uses human intelligence to handle different situations in a diabolic way. Othello, on the Contrary, draws on his intuition to grapple with hostile circumstances He considers his beliefs a final authority to adhere to. Othello's blind trust, for instance, on the authority of charmer's words regarding to the functionality of the handkerchief, "if she lost it / Or made gift of it, my father's eye / Should hold her / loathed and his spirits should hunt / After new fancies" (3.459-62) reveals his deep-rootedness in world of charms and magic. It seems almost impossible for Othello to come out of these supernatural mayhems. He prefers to sacrifice his love, Desdemona, as well as his life for the sake of his beliefs in magic and honour, "A murder, which I thought a sacrifice" (5.3.167).

Othello relates the story of the handkerchief to Desdemona to describe its unusual worth. He recounts the history of this family token of love. His account of the origin of the handkerchief is central in the plot of the play because it is nucleus of all discussions on magic and witchcraft. Othello seems to highlight the significance of the handkerchief by ascribing magical qualities to it:

**That handkerchief  
Did an Egyptian to my mother give;**

**She was a charmer, and could almost read  
The thoughts of people: she told her, while  
she kept it,  
'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father  
Entirely to her love, but if she lost it  
Or made gift of it, my father's eye  
Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt  
After new fancies: she, dying, gave it me;  
And bid me, when my fate would have me wive,  
To give it her. I did so: and take heed on't;  
Make it a darling like your precious eye;  
To lose't or give't away were such perdition  
As nothing else could match. (3.4.54-67)**

### **Iago's associations with Witchcraft**

Iago, like a skilful sorcerer, creates delusions in the play. For instance, in Bianca-Cassio scene, Iago hypnotises Othello to see what the latter is directed to see. Othello's senses are blocked by Iago's oral conjuring. As a result he starts using Iago's language. Roderigo is spell bounded by Iago and he follows Iago's dictations and evil plans. Desdemona seeks Iago's advice to assuage Othello's anger. Cassio depends on Iago to get restored to his lost lieutenantcy. Iago's manipulations by which he takes hold on different characters in the play are in line with the general practices of the sorcerers. King James's Daemonology refers to some motives that move the sorcerers to take the possessions of their victims. Most of the time they are; "thirst for revenge" and "greedy appetite for gear caused through great poverty" (8). Iago's enmity against Othello is driven by his sense of revenge. He feels wronged against Cassio's selection of lieutenantcy by Othello. He shares his plan of revenge with Roderigo, "I follow him [Othello] to serve my turn upon him" (1.1.42). Final scene in which Othello fails to kill Iago strengthens this notion that Iago is diabolist, "I look down towards his feet; but that's a fable / If that thou best a devil, I cannot kill thee" (5.2.284-5). Devil was supposed to be taking possession of soul. Othello asks Cassio to inquire, demi-devil, Iago "Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body"? Iago owns up his devilish nature in his soliloquy, "Divinity of hell! / When devils will the blackest sins put on / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows" (2.3.335-7).

### **Desdemona as an Enchantress**

Desdemona's role as an enchantress is in line with the magical interpretations of the play. Othello is bewitched by "Fair devil" Desdemona's tenderness. He gives in to her overpowering advancements and alluring sympathies. Othello's previous heroic valour vanishes at his contact with Desdemona. Desdemona assumes the semblance of beautiful form, just like the witches in the conventional stories, to bring about Othello's downfall. She can be taken as a persona of misplaced identity. Her true identity remains hidden to both Brabantio and Othello. Iago warns Othello to be cautious against disguised witch, Desdemona, "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see / she has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.290-1). Othello's soul is captured by Desdemona's charm. Just as Marlowe's Dr. Faustus is bound to deliver his soul to Beelzebub on owing to his agreement with the devil, Othello is, too, compelled to remain adherent to Desdemona. Othello confesses in his soliloquy that his soul is trapped by Desdemona, "Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul, / But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (3.3.91-3). Othello's welcome speech at the arrival of Desdemona in Cyprus is parallel to Dr. Faustus' warm welcome to Mephistopheles. The striking similarity lies in capturing the soul. Dr. Faustus is ready to pledge his soul for the sake of voluptuous enjoyments in this life. So is Othello in calling Desdemona, "O my soul's joy" (2.1.179). Othello, also, shows readiness to face the storms destroying the earth for the sake of Desdemona. Apart from surrendering his soul to Desdemona, the enchantress, he is ready to die happily;

**It gives me wonder great as my content  
To see you here before me. O my soul's joy!  
If after every tempest come such calms,  
May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!  
And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas  
Olympus-high and duck again as low  
As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,  
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,  
My soul hath her content so absolute  
That not another comfort like to this  
Succeeds in unknown fate. (2.1.178-87)**

Othello admits Desdemona's power of enchantment when he decides to kill her, "Get me some poison, Iago; this

night: I'll not / expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide / my mind again (4.1.97-9). Gradually, Othello realizes Desdemona's devilish nature, "Her name that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black" (3.3.388-9). Moreover, Othello's final killing of the enchantress, Desdemona, results in the loss of his own life. Othello admits that Desdemona is a devil but she is a fair devil, "furnish me with some swift means of death/ for the fair devil" (3.3.477-8). Iago as a sorcerer uses Desdemona-witch to take hold of Othello. Othello seems possessed by Desdemona's ghost. Brabantio's charges of witchcraft against Othello are of crucial importance to understand Desdemona's character. He might be suspicious of the human identity of his daughter. He might have considered the possibility of Desdemona's identity as a witch, because she could not have been won other than sorcery. It might have been his primary motive to confirm Othello's identity as a sorcerer. However, in the play Othello, there is no explicit commitment to guard the handkerchief. Othello has gifted the handkerchief to Desdemona as token of love. Desdemona protects and loves this love-token simply as an object. For her, it does not symbolise or signify anything except as a gift of love. Othello does not share the religious quality of the handkerchief with Desdemona, that it was made by a prophetess to control the feeling of love. Desdemona might have taken additional heed to protect the handkerchief for the sake of Othello, had she known its mythological aspect. Moreover, Othello's killing of Desdemona just for the sake of the handkerchief, or at least trusting the loss of the handkerchief as a final proof of infidelity, suggests that the handkerchief was perceived to possess supernatural powers.

### Conclusion

Shakespeare tries to win the public opinion by means of his rhetoric. Iago manages to win the sympathies and attention of the most of the characters as well as of the audience. It is Iago's perspective that dominates the play. At the end the reader/ the audience is convinced that the story of the handkerchief was false. The loss of the handkerchief does not make Desdemona faithless. Accordingly, Iago brings Moor's primitive savagery on the surface. He proves Othello's superstitious beliefs in the trifle handkerchief counterfeit. No doubt, Iago does not state any motive for his villainy at Othello's behest, "Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body"? (5.2.300). Iago has, as a matter of fact, nothing to say explicitly because his point of view is conveyed, at the end of the play, that the superstitious beliefs in magic and witchcraft are spurious.

Anyhow, Shakespeare seems to negate Othello's beliefs in superstitions. There is no heroism in Othello's self-killing. It is not an act of valour but an act of remorse, guilt and self-loathing. Although it remains controversial whether magic was real or unreal in Othello, yet it is clear that the most of the complications arise, in the plot, due to the ambivalence regarding to the efficacy of magic. The core of the issue is not if the magic was real or unreal but to what extent it represents or reflects Shakespeare's contemporary practices. No doubt the play Othello cannot be hailed as purely a magic or supernatural play. It reflects many contemporary dilemmas regarding to witchcraft. Othello is not a magician in the strict terms.

However, the concept of the magic can be taken on its symbolic and metaphorical level. Almost all of the possibilities of witchcraft discussed in this essay are mainly the probabilities. It is an effort to suggest that magic and sorcery played an important role in Shakespeare's times that was reflected in his plays. Even though the theme of magic does not find omnipotent expression in the play, yet we do not miss the richness of suggestively it alludes to. The very realisation that we are reading / watching Shakespearian play keeps us vibrant to feel the mysterious tincture of magic and witchcraft. Magic and witchcraft not only overflow from the vein of the text of the play, but also springs from its historical context that forms its motifs. The very fact that Shakespeare wrote his play at the verge of hot discussions on the validity of magic and witchcraft determines its discourse and intended meanings. Literary and non-literary sources directly or indirectly contribute in shaping the texture of Shakespeare's play. The controversy regarding to the truth of the efficacy of magic delineated in the contemporary texts is reflected in the play Othello. Shakespeare seems to avoid the controversy whether magic and witchcrafts were real or unreal.

Contrary to it, he was content to voice the beliefs of his contemporary fellows impartially. New historicist readings of Shakespeare's play suggest that various literary and non-literary sources influenced Shakespeare's text in Othello, "Shakespeare's self-consciousness is in significant ways bound up with the institutions and the symbology of power it anatomizes" (Greeblatt 117). Lastly, Shakespeare's verbal overtones of magic and witchcraft enrich the play with the supernatural connotations. Even though, it does not always imply supernatural aspects, yet the richness of vocabulary can be taken as an indicative of the prevailing social concerns for witchcraft.

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