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EDITORS

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Kirsten Sandrock, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, Englische Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft, Am Hubland, D-97074 Würzburg (kirsten.sandrock@uni-wuerzburg.de)

Lukas Lammers, Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Englische Philologie, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin (l.lammers@fu-berlin.de)

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RETHINKING SHAKESPEARE SOURCE STUDIES: SHAKESPEARE'S TRANS*TEXTUAL ENCOUNTERS AND THE PLAUSIBILITY OF AFRICAN RE*SOURCES

by

SUSAN ARNDT

1. Introduction

Literature is, as Ottmar Ette (2004) argues, a transnational storage medium of transcultural life knowledge on the move. Authors are at home in the libraries of the world. They inhabit the space of global narrations and their histories. The lack of language competencies might, of course, be compensated by the merits of translation. Yet, this is still far from a 'happily ever after' cosmopolitanism of flying libraries. Literary encounters have always been shaped by global histories of power, even in our digital age. Influence does not happen. It is done. In the midst of global power constellations.

Literary creations are interlinked polydirectionally by entangled histories, thus intertwining nations and languages, discourses and knowledge, imagination and aesthetics. Thus framed, a global and multilayered net of literatures emerges which functions as a "poetics of (global) relation" (Glissant 1990) and guarantees a "unity of liberating diversity" (Glissant 1996: 14, 71). This diversity does not operate in any linear manner. It works rhizomically. This rhizomic pattern is as unpredictable as difficult to pin down. Rhizomically, literature spreads out, encountering and cross-linking texts in an unpredictable, fluid and polyphonous way.

Power has always also affected the ways in which global literatures and their encounters have been perceived and discussed, studied and mapped. Correspondingly, authors and texts have received uneven recognition due to a politics of canonisation, which has in turn affected source studies in general and Shakespearean source studies in particular. So far, this discipline has been burdened by a Eurocentric and script-centred attitude. The dominant guideline is summarised by Robert Miola as follows: "Shakespeare created much of his work from his reading" (Miola 2000, 1) of published texts written in or translated into languages he is believed to have been able to (at least) read, namely above all, (Medieval) Latin, Greek, English and Italian. Consequentially, when suggesting that a source could be anything "that an author previously knew or read" (Miola 2000, 19), Miola has mainly the Roman-Italian tradition in mind. But writing also exists in African or Asian languages; and knowing has always been informed by what you read and what you encounter otherwise. Along these lines Stephen Greenblatt maintains that Shakespeare's muse was also kissed by English cultural events such as morality plays and plays performed by travelling theatre troupes (e.g., *commedia dell'arte*) which he might have come across as a child, for instance during festivities (28-30). Greenblatt's point might lead us to consider the significance of other forms of

popular culture circulating orally, such as folktales. Thus, Artese points out that “[o]ral tradition played a great [...] role in Shakespeare’s culture” (5). Folktales, in particular, provided him with a “common [discursive] ground” (Artese 3) with his audience. And Shakespeare would not have failed to exploit them at the Globe. The importance of orality to Shakespeare’s work can be deduced from the observation that some of his characters speak of the art as well as the power of storytelling. So, for example, when accused of having used magic to seduce Desdemona, Othello counters: the “only [...] witchcraft I have used” is that of storytelling. This point was elaborated on earlier by Othello in the course of his famous story-telling monologue. For example, Othello stresses: “I will a round unvarnished tale deliver / Of my whole course of love, what drugs, what charms” (1.3. 91-92), while also hinting at the fact that Brabantio and Desdemona urged him to tell stories: Brabantio “bade me tell it” (1.3.134) and “loved ... oft invited” (1.3.129) him to “tell” “the story of my life (1.3.129-34). And Desdemona “bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, / I should but teach him how to tell my story / And that would woo her” (1.3.164-67).

Moreover, Shakespeare refers to folktales and his plays mobilise folktale motifs, while also utilising plot elements similar to those found in folktales. And yet, “[g]enerations of Shakespeare scholars have [...] largely neglected” (Artese 2) his folktale sources. Despite acknowledging that “folktales show a remarkable ability to transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries” (Artese 8), Artese herself maintains a largely Eurocentric point of view. More than two-thirds of the 43 folktales compiled in her anthology are European; and only 13 originate from India, the MENA region, the African diaspora and Chile. This premise leads her to the equally Eurocentric conclusion that the Bard’s drawing “from the tales in the culture of the time” (Artese 4) help to understand Shakespeare predominant role for the Western literary canon. Yet, why culture, in the singular? Why focus on European folktales, especially given the fact that an understanding of Europeanness was only to emerge in early modern times. Why not think of literary encounters in a more global way, especially given the fact that colonialism accelerated the mobility of people and textualities that had brought stories from all around the globe within Shakespeare’s reach? (Elhanafy 2023)

So, why not consider that Shakespeare might indeed have known folktales from all around the world, including Africa? Even if these had not been translated into and written down (in English) in Shakespeare’s time, he could have encountered them in retellings, which is the actual gist of storytelling – isn’t it? In other words, why not consider a vaster narrative landscape and think of ‘library’ in a more metaphorical sense? This would open the door to also considering African oral literatures (orature) as Shakespeare’s sources. This option has been nearly completely ignored by Shakespeare source studies scholars (with the exception of, for example, Simrock (1870), in the late nineteenth century), including Artese. This systemic abnegation is to be challenged in this paper. In doing so, it struggles with methodological challenges that need to be solved.

2.0. Methodological Challenges and Responses

The pursuit of determining whether African orature might have inspired Shakespeare's imagination and narratives involves numerous methodological challenges. First of all, they were mainly documented in writing in post-Shakespearean times. Neither their dates of composition nor their original authors are truly traceable. Secondly, textual parallels need to be distinguished from archetypes (Genette 1992, Propp 2013). Thirdly, while being bound to certain plot elements, didactic dynamics and conflict resolutions, African (like all) folktales, myths or legends grant their performers aesthetic liberties every time they are renarrated – and thus the possibility of adapting them to new social contexts (Arndt 1998). Inasmuch as oral texts spread rhizomically through times and places, Shakespeare might have become familiar with different, complementary local versions, upon which he then applied his creativity (cf. Artese 2). And the less Shakespeare would know the culture, the more independent he might have felt when adapting the oral text. We also have to admit that there is a gap between whatever we read today and how a folktale was narrated some centuries ago. Or, as Artese puts it, folktales contemporaneous to Shakespeare might not be “his sources” but the “later members of the genus of his sources” (2).

Much of this also applies to Shakespeare's indebtedness to European folktales and none of this should stop scholars from looking into Shakespeare's indebtedness to folktales in general and to African ones in particular. After all, the history of these (re)narrations is what is present in his plays, palimpsest-like.

So how to proceed from here?

1. Firstly, it might be helpful to talk about possibilities. How could Shakespeare have encountered African oral literature?
2. Secondly, plausibility could be looked at. To me, acknowledging the presence of Black knowledge and perspective in his work makes it very plausible that Shakespeare did inhabit spaces in which he could have also met African folktales.
3. Thirdly, textual similarities between Shakespeare's plays and African folktales can be traced.

2.1. Possibilities: Meeting of persons and (their) texts

As a dedicated writer and businessman, whose work had to bring profitable revenue to the Globe Theatre, Shakespeare must have actively sought inspirations for new ideas for plots and characters. While visiting libraries or people with letterpresses, he might have read books that could also entail Africa-related travel literature or histories, including unpublished ones. Shakespeare could have also been impressed by narrative illustrations or other visual adaptations featured in carpets, paintings, or tableware.

Moreover, it would not be far-fetched to imagine him approaching European travellers, traders, seamen and enslavers who had been in personal contact with Africans. Given the violent framing of such “encounters” (Pratt 33-40), *white* European travellers would maybe not see actual performances and would anyways rather summarise than renarrate the folktales for fellow English people. But the material would

be out there. Or, perhaps, Shakespeare was a traveller himself and thus encountering early modern “contact zones” (Pratt 33-40) with colonial spaces and narrations directly?

Another group of people who could have made African (oral) literatures available to Shakespeare in London, even in vivid performances, are Black people in London, most of whom would be enslaved people. The case of Lucy Negro is particularly noteworthy: she might have been an enslaved woman of African descent, forced into prostitution, as well as the figure whom Shakespeare might have versified in his so-called Dark Lady Sonnets (Salkeld 2016). Another Black person within Shakespeare’s reach would be Reasonable Blackman, who lived at Southwark and, as a silk weaver, also made theatrical costumes for London’s stages (Kaufmann 2017). We might not be able to provide definitive proof of such encounters, but it was not only possible for Shakespeare to encounter Black persons and Black narratives; it was also very probable.

2.2. Black Knowledge & Perspectives

The plausibility of Shakespeare encountering African orature can also be deduced from the fact that some of his works stage Black knowledge and perspectives that even display a critical stance on colonialism and slavery. I am particularly thinking of the Sonnets, *Othello* and *The Tempest* here.

There have been disputes about the meaning of “black(ness)” in the so called “dark-lady”-sonnets. The verses “In the old age black was not counted fair / [...] But now is black beauty’s successive heir” (127, 1, 3) as well as other traces offered in Sonnets 127-152 suggest that the lyrical I praises the beauty of Blackness in a very literal sense of referring to a racial and/or religious other rather than to a white woman with darkish brunette hair – particularly since “dark” is used only once in the entire so called “dark-lady”-sonnets. Reading Blackness literally, though, suggests that what the lyrical I praises as the beauty of Blackness is in fact that of Africanness. At least, Shakespeare’s lyrical I does not mind having the beauty of Blackness allude to Africanness. This, however, would so obviously fly in the face of Elizabethan moralities and the emergent racism thereof that stating it bluntly and brazenly could have landed Shakespeare in “a sea of troubles,” (3.1.58) including imprisonment. In a way, to him, there was no other way to celebrate African beauty than by leaving traces in his works that are ambiguous enough to both disguise and disclose this idea (Arndt 2015).

It is true, the lyrical I’s praise of Blackness is not tantamount to Shakespeare having met a Black person. And yet, his take on Blackness lays more than one trace towards Shakespeare having encountered Black perspectives and narrations. This is also supported by looking at *Othello* and *The Tempest* (Arndt 2009). After all, Othello is the first Black protagonist on an Elizabethan stage. And even though the femicide is outrageous and the fact that Othello murders Desdemona out of rage seemingly confirms racist stereotypes of his time, *Othello* invites empathy and understanding, because the play is about how Iago’s racism rages him into this deed. As for *The Tempest*, Caliban is neither the monster nor animal the white characters blame him to be. Rather, he insists on being human and on being treated accordingly. He longs for freedom, thus giving Prospero a very hard time on the island. This is a perspective on colonialism that is hardly shared by any other white British person at that time.

Acknowledging the presence of Black knowledge and perspective in Shakespeare's work makes it very plausible that he did indeed inhabit spaces in which he could have come across African folktales. Seen the other way around, ignoring Black narrations as re*source of Shakespeare*s work was a systemic necessity to defend the British Empire's claim of superiority by appropriating Shakespeare: we have Shakespeare, and whom do you have? This narrative needed to comprise controlling the ownership of Shakespeare by controlling how he was read and mapped. As a result, Shakespeare scholars, like Harold Bloom (1998), whitewashed the sonnet's Black woman, denied that *Othello* stages racism critically and that *The Tempest* stages colonialism to challenge it. To acknowledge this would have opened the option to diversify Shakespeare beyond being an icon of white superiority. By reconfiguring such policies of silencing, Shakespeare's indebtedness to Black knowledge may be restored. And playing along the rules is totally possible in this respect as well.

2.3. Textual parallels

According to Gillespie, sources may be identified along modes of adaptation, imitation and borrowings that refer to "thematic functions," "story or plot," "motif," "characters and their constellations," "conflict composition and resolution" as well as "structural parallelism," "scenic form," "ide-ational or ima-gistic conca-te-nation" and "rhetorical strategy" (Gillespie 3). Most of such elements of source study analysis (not all of them) can be mobilised when looking at the relatedness of African oral literatures and Shakespeare's work.

2.4. Yes, but: From Source to Re*Source as Categories within Rhizomic Re*Mixing

Within the current confines of Shakespeare source studies – namely, identifying a direct impact traceable to a written document – it is impossible to claim beyond doubt that Shakespeare's work was influenced by African orature. This makes it somewhat impossible to label African folktales as "sources." This, however, is in no way reason enough to rule this hypothesis out. But rather than using the present parameters of Shakespeare source studies to argue against considering (African) oral literature as having influenced Shakespeare, Shakespeare source studies may accommodate new approaches that enable scholars to look beyond the pattern of written and European texts only, while both retaining and reconfiguring its established methodology. This is more than justified given the fact that Shakespeare studies have been framed, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by *white* supremacist interests to sell Shakespeare as a proof of *white* superiority (Cf. e.g. Muir 2009). Acknowledging Black impacts on Shakespeare's oeuvre or even the fact that Shakespeare criticises racism and colonialism, would have been counter-intuitive to this goal. Therefore, it feels legitimate to now cancel the cancel culture that has ignored the possibility of Shakespeare's being connected to textualities from beyond Europe – thus also transferring contemporary postcolonial Shakespeare studies (Hall 1998, Lomba 1998; 2002; Habib 2001, 2007) to the field of Shakespeare source studies.

To facilitate this move, Artese's "genus of sources" and Miola's notion of "remote sources" that points towards a concept that may be termed "indirect source" may be mobilised and advanced – just as much as Lynch's claim that "[t]he study of sources goes beyond focussing on specific pre-texts; rather, they are read as "interventions in preexistent fields of textuality" (1). Thus framed, I would like to propose complementing the concept of "source" with that of "re*source": while source is a clearly identifiable asset, a re*source is much more encompassing as a materiality, a meaning, an action or a strategy. A re*source is basically everything that might have affected the un*conscious knowing of a writer (Jameson 1981). In doing so, it is available for being adopted to create something new, energise it or make it happen – continuously yet differently every time. The fluidity between "source" and "re*source" may be expressed via the asterisk's visualization of opening up into all directions. Thus tuned, 're*source' expresses the complexity of textual encounters that crisscross spaces, genres and media, while amalgamating direct and indirect contacts into a mode of rhizomic remixing.

This is to say that text C may have influenced text D, yet text C did not spring out of a vacuum; rather, text C has a shared history with texts A and B. Consequently, when text C impacts text D, the latter contains texts A and B as well – regardless of the authors' or the readers' awareness of these processes, or lack thereof. Even if the author of text D never heard of text A or B; they might still be there, like a palimpsest, because of text's C bridging them all, while allowing re*sources to traverse in*direct and un*traceable routes.

To give an example, Shakespeare's *Othello* is known to have been influenced by many texts, primarily by George Peel's "Battle of Alcazar" (1594) or Cinthio's "Un capitano moro" (1565). "Un capitano moro" and *Othello*, in turn, contain similarities to the "Tale of Three Apples" from *Alf Layla wa Layla* and to the famous West African folktale of the "Handsome Stranger." In addition to that, each of these texts has been part of other textual flows, such as *Othello* being impacted by Leo Africanus's "Descrittione dell'Africa" (1550) as well as by the trickster character of West African folktales (Arndt 2018, Burton 1998, Whitney 1922). Ahmed Yerima's play *Otaelo* (2002) adapts both the folktale of the "Handsome Stranger" and *Othello*, and by remixing them, he makes their parallels apparent, while other pre-texts are present, too (Arndt 2018). Having Ahmed Yerima's play at hand is a gift that grants cultural memory as gaze from the present onto its past. Cultural memory describes the phenomenon that African directors or playwrights cannot help but see African oral literatures as palimpsest-like re*sources of Shakespearean plays. This often causes them to have their plays allude to certain trans*textualities.

This rhizomic relationship is to be discussed briefly in the following, focussing on the triangular relationship between *Othello* and its re*sources the "Handsome Stranger" and "Un capitano moro." In doing so, I rely on Gillepsie's categories of modes of adaption, imitation and borrowing. While following the plot's grammar to trace textual parallels, given dis*continuities are traced.

3. Rhizomic Remixing and Re*sources in *Othello*

To start, there are many motifs that feature parallels between *Othello* and its re*sources the “Handsome Stranger” and “Un capitano moro.” For example, the folktale’s protagonist uses magic to charm his future wife into falling in love with him, while Othello is accused of having used magic to seduce Desdemona. This latter “witchcraft,” however, is the unique enchantment conjured by “storytelling.” Storytelling as such becomes a shared motif of all three texts. Cinthio’s “Un capitano moro” and *Othello*, though, also share a motif with the “Tale of Three Apples”: a token of love (handkerchief or apple) that the husband gives to his wife, who, in turn, loses it – which is then turned by the husband into alleged evidence of her infidelity. This might be a parallel that is archetypal in nature. And archetypal may be the fact that *Othello*, Cinthio’s short story and the folktale all feature a beautiful young woman who violates her society’s marriage conventions by marrying a “stranger” against her father’s/parents’ will. But the ways in which the conflict evolves into catastrophe features textual agencies beyond archetypal motifs. Immediately after the marriage, all three couples leave the bride’s home and shelter, resulting in the bride’s living beyond her parents’ and society’s reach and protection: forest or Cyprus. It is in this “third space”-setting that the tragedy unfolds and the husbands turn into ‘monsters’. In the folktale, the husband unmask himself, resuming his actual, monstrous shape. And in “Un capitano moro” and *Othello*, the husbands turn from love to rage. In Cinthio’s version Ensign stresses: “I will pluck [...] out that tongue of thine” (6). In this vein, Desdemona laments that her husband “has become another man” (9). Similarly, Othello turns into a “green-eyed monster” (3.3.168) of jealousy.

As for further character traits, all three husbands share the characteristic of being strangers who are both mistrusted and feared, yet also considered “esteemed” (Cinthio 1) – as long as they pretend to be somebody else – or, rather, somebody they can never truly be(come). The husband in the folktale is an “evil spirit,” often called “demon” or “devil,” who is sent by the ancestors to punish the beautiful protagonist for not obeying the marriage politics of her society. Although somewhat “esteemed” in this respect, he is despised by society nevertheless. Having the shape of an animal, he disguises himself as a handsome man:

He was very ugly, like all the other devils. He had one leg, one hand, one eye – and he was short. He wore tattered clothes, and his skin was covered with craw-craw. [...] He went to one man’s house and borrowed a leg. From another man he borrowed a hand; from another, an eye; from another, soft shiny skin; from another, rich and elegant robes. By the time he came to Adamma’s village, no one would have recognised the ugly devil. (Bordinat 89, cf. Ekwensi 1954, Umeasiegbu 1982, Egudu 1983)

And while the female protagonist falls for him, her folks warn her against marrying him: he is a stranger and this, in itself, is fearsome enough to them.

This is also narrated in Cinthio’s and Shakespeare’s Black husbands: they are “highly esteemed” (Cinthio 1) and yet meet with societal distrust and fear. Othello, in particular, is considered by some an “extravagant and wheeling stranger” (1.1.134) and antagonised as an animal and a devil. Aptonymically, OtHELLO and DesDEMONa refer to the demonic background of the folktales’ husband. In line with this, Brabantio, Iago and

Roderigo call Othello by all sorts of racist names such as “ram” (1.1.87) or “Barbary horse” (1.1.110) and “devil” (1.1.90). Accordingly, to Brabantio Othello must be “what she [Desdemona] fear’d to look on” (1.3.102). Quite aware of being “read” as a fearsome stranger by *white* people but trying to cope with it, both Cinthio’s unnamed protagonist and Othello pretend to be someone else while knowing all too well that being esteemed is but an illusion.

Regarding the characters, there is another parallel between “The Handsome Stranger” and *Othello*, which sets them apart from “Un capitano moro.” “The Handsome Stranger” and *Othello* have a trickster with a West African profile: he violates societal norms and is thus both reproached (for his overstepping of laws) and adored for it (because it feels somewhat right to the rest of the society and also because he is witty). Consequently, while gaining some reward, he nevertheless faces punishment by death in the end.

In the folktale, it is the husband who acts as the manipulative trickster. He represents societal norms and to restore them, he violates them. In doing so, he tricks and manipulates his (future) wife into learning a lesson the hardest way, by dying. Therefore, he is as accepted as feared. Since he acts on behalf of the ancestors, his murder may feel right to the descendants. And yet, he is somewhat punished, too. He dies again, committing a symbolic suicide. He will return to his home (which is a reward), while this home is where evil and death reside side by side with ancestral pride.

In Cinthio’s and Shakespeare’s texts, the role of manipulator is played by the “wicked Ensign” (3) in the former and by Iago in the latter. Ensign, though, is not a trickster. But Iago is. And one that corresponds to the profile of the West African trickster at that. Both the Ensign’s and Iago’s racist interventions into interracial marriage were sanctioned by societal conventions, for cosmopolitan Venice’s claim to faring unaffected by racism was ultimately far from the truth. What is hypocritically hidden by some at first is visible in Brabantio, Roderigo and Iago from the beginning. Iago’s Spanish name alludes aptonymically to Santiago de Matamoros, and thus to Spain’s orientalist racism as an alleged antipode to Venetian cosmopolitanism (Everett 2000, 66). Motivated by racist hatred (Cf.: “I hate the M.” 1.3.385), he uses his wit to manipulate Othello into murdering Desdemona. Despite reaching his goal of ending the marriage (which is his “reward”) and despite his success in scheming and outsmarting everyone, Iago is eventually caught and punished. Off stage, he faces torture and thus the very “hell pains” (1.1.171) that he hates as much as he hates Othello.

Thus framed, a decisive difference between “Un capitano moro” and *Othello* comes to light. In the absence of a trickster, Cinthio’s husband character is portrayed as a wicked simpleton – easily fooled when merely told that Desdemona has “betrayed him,” also because she has “taken an aversion to ... [his] blackness” (5). He simply fulfils *white* racist stereotypes of a stranger who should therefore be feared. Or to cite Desdemona: “Nay, but you m. are so hot a nature that every little trifle moves you to anger and revenge” (5). It is, however, much more challenging to deceive Othello: Iago has to go to great lengths to derail Othello’s trust in Desdemona. It takes Iago all his wit to drive Othello “into a jealousy so strong / that judgement cannot cure” (2.1.299-300). Yet the more trickster-wit Iago needs to expend, the more intelligence, pain and psychological depth is granted to Othello. Consequently, the audience becomes more

engaged with his character and can see the racist deed beyond the femicide, thus eventually mourning and condemning both intersectionally.

In line with the divergent profile of the husband's murder, the manner in which the three texts culminate in catastrophes that conclude the narration varies. All three women are punished with death, the husbands die, too. Ensign's death is a happy end. Othello's, however, is not. Cinthio's protagonist is brutally murdered and dies in disgrace. But just like the handsome stranger's suicide is about being respected by the ancestors, Othello regains some dignity and justice by committing suicide with a "sword of Spain" (5.2.251) that metonymically alludes to Iago's racism. This is very much in line with the textual conclusion.

While "Un capitano moro" and the folktale suggest that the woman's decision needs to be punished like this, *Othello* argues otherwise. Not Desdemona's marriage to Othello is the problem, but the society's racist disagreement thereof. While the folktale's husband returns to the dead with an accomplished mission, the Black husband and the Ensign in Cinthio's story are tortured and eventually killed. Though Iago is tortured, too, and Othello faces death as well, Shakespeare also seeks the audience's empathy for Othello's suffering and, finally, his suicide. Being committed with a "sword of Spain" metonymically alludes to Iago's role: Othello lives up to racist stereotypes that he had tried to repudiate, yet he is driven into them by racism itself. This is condemned symbolically by Iago's having to face the "hell pains" of torture.

The textual dynamics correspond to the folktale wife's concluding remarks as well as the text's own conclusion. The vicious murder of both the folktale's and Cinthio's Desdemona affirms their respective societies' codes of wedlock warning them not to marry strangers: "You were too choosy about a husband ... You chose" a handsome stranger and he "destroyed you" ("A Girl and A Python" 102). Likewise, in "Un capitano moro," Desdemona holds, "I fear that I shall prove a warning to young girls not to marry against the wishes of their parents, and that the Italian ladies may learn from me not to wed a man who nature and habitude of life estrange from us" (9).

While the folktale's didactic moral is geared towards prohibiting girls from marrying strangers, and Cinthio's "Un capitano moro" issues the racist verdict that a *white* Christian woman should not marry a Black man, Shakespeare's *Othello* turns this dogma upside down. What is more, the tragedy does not blame the failure of the marriage on the husband's being a stranger or a Black man marrying a *white* woman, but on the society's racist denial to facilitate a sense and space of belonging for whom they call a "stranger" and for a marriage of *white* and Black spouses. Shakespeare stages racism to challenge it. Thus, despite of thematic and plot parallels, the texts travel to different conclusions. "Un capitano moro" confirms the racism of his time, while it is challenged by Shakespeare's *Othello* (Arndt 2018).

4. Towards Trans*Textuality as Source Studies' Theoretical Frame

Given the theoretical and conceptual frame discussed above, the folktale of the "Handsome Stranger" and the trickster character in West African folktale as well as "Descrittione dell'Africa" and "The Tale of Three Apples" can be considered re*sources that have a rhizomic, palimpsestic presence in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Such textual

routes as well as the pillaring concepts of “re*source” and “rhizomic remixing,” in turn, may be best accommodated by the theoretical framework of “trans*textuality.”

My usage of trans*textuality sets itself apart from a specific and narrow interest in linear, direct textual encounters between two or more texts. Likewise, it differs from a most general understanding of intertextuality á la Kristeva as well as from the idea of archetypes. Like Genette’s transtextuality, it is oriented towards the agency of readers, but it also considers the authors’ creativity, textual agencies and the dominant power constellations as pertinent. In a nutshell, trans*textuality posits textual encounters as textual contact zones that have grown rhizomically, while being framed by power constellations and the respective scope of agencies. Trans*textuality is about a polylogicity that has been informed by the interplay of direct and indirect textual encounters, which thus accounts for the rhizomic roots and routes of remixing across genres and media.

First of all, trans*textuality stresses that any text is created out of and into a textual landscape in which texts are not clearly demarcated but rather blend into each other, as re*sources. This rhizomic remixing of re*sources also embraces pre-texts that travel via in*direct and un*traceable routes. Such landscapes and encounters are moulded by power and its discourses, as well as the agency of writers and readers. Authorship and readership matter inasmuch as texts do not simply happen; they are made by complementary agencies of writers, texts/textualities and readers that keep wrenching texts out of and into new contexts and discourses.

Accordingly, and secondly, trans*textuality is not about similarities and parallels alone. It also asserts that texts that know and serve one another as re*sources may still contradict each other – a strategy well known from the poetics of writing back, for example. In other words, re*sources or pre-texts may be wrenched “out of context” (Miola 2014, 4). This also comprises to be moulded by conflicting, competing and complementary (textual) agencies, interests and contingencies across genres and media.

Thirdly, trans*textuality holds that any text’s roots and routes can be found via its futures. This is what *cultural memory* is about: highlighting re*sources. When translating, adopting or staging (and thus culturally or linguistically translating) a play, the artist(s) may very well be aware of the presence of the literatures belonging to their own cultural histories in a certain Shakespearean text. They may therefore make this interface between the Shakespearean text and the oral text of their own culture visible by emphasising similarities between the two. This is, for example, the case with Ahmed Yerima’s *Otaelo*, which features the textual parallels between *Othello* and “The Handsome stranger,” while also emphasising the trickster-features of Iago as well as displaying parallels to Leo Africanus and the “Tale of Three Apples,” which are his re*sources. Thus tuned, trans*textuality is capable of framing the reconfiguration of Shakespeare source studies by looking at orality, beyond Europe, and in*direct, rhizomic encounters of remixing.

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Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel diskutiert die intertextuelle Verbindung zwischen Shakespeares *Othello* (1604) und westafrikanischer Oralliteratur im Allgemeinen und dem nigerianischen Märchen „The Handsome Stranger“ im Besonderen. Oralliteratur aus Afrika als Quelle Shakespeares herzuführen, versteht sich als eine Intervention in die eurozentristische Ausrichtung der Shakespeare Source Studies. Die dafür erforderliche theoretische und methodische Rahmung wird im Artikel hergeleitet, indem „re*source“ als Konzept und „Trans*textualität“ als Theorie diskutiert wird. Die ästhetische Präsenz afrikanischer Wissensproduktion, so die These des Artikels, korreliert damit, dass Shakespeares *Othello* eine Kritik am Rassismus in Szene setzt, der, insbesondere in Gestalt von Iago, Othello in den Femizid an Desdemona treibt. Diese intersektionelle Awareness in Shakespeares Tragödie wird als Gegenerzählung zu *Othellos* wichtigstem Quellentext, Cintios „Un capitano moro,“ hergeleitet.