



‘Strange Habits’

Clothes, Climes, and the Environment in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries

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DEMOUX, ANNA (Université Clermont Auvergne)

anna.demoux@etu.uca.fr

Changing Habits in the Quarto and Folio Versions of *Every Man in his Humour* by Ben Jonson

Critical consensus generally posits that, in the comedy of humours, the clothes, shoes, accessories, fabrics and colours worn by the gallant or malcontent character types are signs of affectation in these “fantastical” characters pointing at “the perennial problem of sartorial folly [which] provoked official disapproval and sumptuary legislation.”¹ This paper will shift away from this socio-cultural perspective to investigate the potential consequences of the presence (or absence) of references to climes in relation to clothing in this dramatic genre that became very fashionable in the late 1590s. The preliminary investigations will address these issues with a specific focus on *Every Man in his Humour* by Ben Jonson: it is a particularly interesting case study because of the emendation of the location from Florence to London between the quarto edition (1601) and the folio edition (1616). It is usually assumed that ancient or foreign cities represent London with a distorting, anamorphic perspective in early-modern drama but this paper will address this dramaturgical choice of relocation in terms of clothing vocabulary and rhetoric in the economy and ecology of the play. Since a quarto edition is not necessarily a bad version of a later folio edition of the same play, this paper will reconsider the relationship between the two texts: each version will be read in its own context and the quarto play will be reassessed as source material for the folio edition, in a form of “recycling” process. The conclusions drawn will aim at defining to what varying degrees both versions of the play highlight a shifting English point of view on, as well as their knowledge and representation of, Italian fashion and fashioning of clothes in relation to climes. Then, these elements will be used to shed fresh light on other plays belonging to the Jonsonian canon, with a specific emphasis on *Every Man out of his Humour*.

¹ Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*, ed. Robert S. Miola, Manchester & New York, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 19.