



‘Strange Habits’

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

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De Heere's Theatre of Costumes: Staging New Ecologies

"In the costume book, you are what you wear, a logic that opens up the world to a new kind of order based on descriptive taxonomy"¹. Following Michael Gaudio's discussion of "how closely the English preoccupation with costume was related to concerns about the stage"², I would like to discuss the development of a visual formula(tion) which accompanied the rising popularity of the costume book as a genre.

In order to do so, I will be focusing on Lucas de Heere's "Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre avec leurs habits et ornemens divers, tant anciens que modernes, diligemment dépeints au naturel", dated around the 1570s.³ Besides the "theatricality" transpiring through the very title of this book, I would like to engage into a material analysis of De Heere's *production* – meaning the way in which his costumes are *staged*. I will be looking at and into two aspects of De Heere's *Théâtre*. First, this growing interest in costumes interestingly coincides with the rise of a visual pattern which tends to represent the costume-wearing subject against an increasingly empty white background, so that these figures seem deprived of "a local habitation".⁴ I will then turn to the use of watercolour as another defining characteristic of costume books and studies in early modern England, whose development contributed to this ethnographic impulse.

¹ Michael Gaudio, "The Truth in Clothing: the Costume Studies of John White and Lucas De Heere", in Kim Sloan (ed.), *European Visions: American Voices*, British Museum Research Publication, n° 172, 2009, p. 24-32, p. 24. See also *Engraving the Savage. The New World and Techniques of Civilization*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2008,

² Michael Gaudio, "The Truth in Clothing", *op. cit.*, p. 27.

³ De Heere's *Théâtre* can be seen at the Library University in Ghent, and is also available online at the following address: https://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/000/794/288/BHSL-HS-2466_2009_0001_AC.pdf

⁴ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (1979), 5.1.17