



‘Strange Habits’

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

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Mythical dress as identity in Browne's *Inner Temple Masque*

On Circe's magical island depicted in William Browne's *Inner Temple Masque*, or *Ulysses and Circe* (1615), two groups share the stage. On the one hand, there is the pastoral world of syrens and nymphs over which Circe rules as an all-powerful queen, whereas on the other are the foreigners, Ulysses and his sailors. This paper's aim is to investigate how the symbolic system of costumes in the masque defines Englishness in close relationship with the sailors and in opposition to the bucolic world represented onstage by the islanders.

Firstly, the island's idyllic climate goes hand in hand with clothes that are at the same time appropriate for a Mediterranean setting, and make the islanders into a uniform group. A cross-analysis of their clothes and of the climatic and natural elements will show that they bear a geographical and a mythical identity, marking their wearer as non-English. Secondly, a brief comparison with Circe's clothes in the *Ballet Comique de la Reine* by Baltazar de Beaujoyeulx (an essential influence on the *Inner Temple Masque*) allows us to pinpoint the originality of Browne's retelling of Homer. Indeed, his costumes are unique insofar as they act as an interface between the island and its dwellers. This symbiotic relationship allows them, in return, to transform the island through their singing and dancing. Meanwhile, the sailors are turned into animals and dance the antimasque until they can be harmoniously incorporated into the island's ecosystem and be given the choice to stay or leave : this metamorphosis is reflected in their new clothes. Ulysses, destined to leave the island, is the only one not undergoing such a transformation, which might indicate a somewhat less mythical costume, and explain why he is the only one whose clothes are not described, which sets him apart from his companions.