



# ‘Strange Habits’

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

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### ‘Handy dandy’, which is the Hand, which is the Glove? Love and Gloves in Shakespeare

As Peter Stallybrass and Ann Jones put it, “[i]n the Renaissance as today there were many practical functions for gloves, whether to protect hands from heat and cold or from the rigors of labor. [...] But the gloves of aristocrats and gentry—male and female alike—usually operated to display hands to which such labor was alien. The function of these gloves—for both men and women—was to occupy the hands in the manufacture of the immaterial.”<sup>5</sup>

This paper will examine the functions of the glove in Shakespeare, generally seen as a token or metonym of love and desire, rather than as a protection against severe climatic conditions. The glove in Shakespeare is presented as a ghostly hand, as an extension of one’s own self (“O that I were a glove...”, Romeo imagines when Juliet appears above him at her window, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.24), as a symbolic object or item of clothing which connotes both presence and absence. But the glove is also for him a personal signature referring to his own origins and identity: the importance taken by the glove in his work (there are some 56 occurrences of the word in the canon) indeed testifies to the handicraft filiation from father to son as the latter moved from the glove to the Globe, from the local Warwickshire manufacturing shop to the London entertainment industry.

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, “Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe”, *Critical Inquiry*, The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 28, No. 1, “Things” (Autumn, 2001), pp. 114-132, p. 118.