



‘Strange Habits’

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

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‘Diana’s Shrouds’ and ‘Black Tempests’: Pre-Roman Rite of Passage in Marlowe’s *Dido Queen of Carthage*

“These Lybian deserts” (1.1.228), i.e. Carthage, is a decisive stage in Aeneas’s journey as a surviving Trojan and future founder of Rome. During this brief stay, Aeneas’s identity as a foreigner is submitted to clothing rituals and meteorological influences. Indeed, Scarcely know[ing] within what clime [he is]” (1.2.44), the once Trojan prince now dressed in “base weeds” is soon invested by Dido “king of Carthage” with “wealthy robes” (2.1.65) she brought from Tyre, herself a “wanderer” (the meaning of her name) made Queen in Carthage. Aeneas’s liminal status in Carthage is further stressed by the sylvan surroundings inhabited by mortals and anthropomorphic deities dressed in hunting gears, dyed in Tyrian “purple” (1.1.206), the future colour of the Roman Empire and of the English royalty. Lastly, the elements and the atmospheric changes authored by whimsical gods and culminating in the exceptional “hurly burly in the heavens” (4.1.10), interfere to reroute the trajectory of Aeneas’s destination/destiny towards Rome.

This paper addresses Marlowe’s representation of English nation’s Roman genealogy through the episode of its ancestor, “exiled forth Europe and wide Asia both” (1.1.229) – Aeneas being the great-grand father of Brutus, the first British king according to the medieval legends. The superstitious constructions of the climate in Early Modern England as well as the Renaissance travel narratives intersect to enhance the primitive and devilish dimensions of the outlandish climes named Punic, Lybian, Carthaginian and Afric. The ritualized transition through Carthage appears, from an anthropological perspective, like a rite of passage that looks to the establishment of “a statelier Troy”, “clad [...] in a crystal livery” (5.1.2,6), not in Carthage as first planned, but in Italy.