

# The Truth in Clothing: The Costume Studies of John White and Lucas de Heere

Michael Gaudio

Through the Middle Ages, Europeans tended to imagine peoples at the furthest reaches of the earth through the classical paradigm of the ‘monstrous races’. Taking their cue from the descriptions of Pliny and others, artists gave visual form to such creatures as the Blemmye and the Sciapod. According to Pliny, Blemmyes – like the one that appears in an English manuscript dating from the second quarter of the 11th century (Fig. 1) – inhabit the interior of Africa and are reported ‘as being without heads; their mouth and eyes are attached to their chest’. The Sciapod, or umbrella-foot – as portrayed, for example, in a woodcut from the *Nuremburg Chronicle* (1493) (Fig. 2) – could be found in India and was reputed to have amazing speed with its single foot; to protect itself from the heat, it could also lie on its back and relax under the shade of this versatile foot.<sup>1</sup> Monstrous races were fantastic hybrids that inverted or exaggerated normal human appearances and behaviors, and for this reason they served very well as markers of the limits of the known world. The Latin *monstrum* in fact derives from the verb *monēre*, meaning to ‘warn’ or ‘instruct’, and this is just what the monstrous races did: as prodigious inversions of the norm, they warn us, instruct us, about the

limits of human knowledge. To stray so far from the center of a sacred Christian geography that one begins to encounter creatures with faces on their chests, or with feet that provide shelter from the sun, is to stray beyond order itself.

But even as the tradition of the monstrous races continues into the 16th century, we see an alternative approach to the representation of human difference emerging within Europe, an approach that we might label – using a modern term – an ‘ethnographic’ impulse. One of the chief forms that early modern ethnography took was the costume book, an early example of this type of collection being François Desprez’s *Recueil de la diversité des habits*, first published in Paris in 1562. The *Recueil* actually includes examples of the monstrous races, as in the case of the Cyclops (Fig. 3). But the Cyclops, with its single eye, oversized ears, and pendulous breasts, is more the exception than the rule in the *Recueil*; indeed in the verses below the image, Desprez is reluctant fully to endorse its existence: ‘*It is said*’, he writes, ‘that this line still endures’ [my italics].<sup>2</sup> A more typical image from the same volume displays a Tupinamba man of Brazil (Fig. 4). Although he hails from an exotic locale, when considered alongside a figure like the French courtier (Fig. 5) he appears in his physical make-up essentially like a European: both men, happily, have two legs, two eyes, and heads on top of their shoulders. What distinguishes one from the other, what establishes their respective places in the world, is not their inverted or exaggerated physical characteristics, but their costume. The Brazilian holds bow and arrows and wears a feathered headdress and the *Enduap* (the fan-shaped feathered arrangement worn on the lower back).<sup>3</sup> These items, carried in the hand or worn on the body, set him apart from the courtier, whose body is almost lost beneath an outlandish slashed doublet and ballooning breeches. These figures do not instruct about the limits of knowledge; rather, they are the products of an ethnographic desire to know, an impulse to describe and indeed fully account for peoples by depicting the fabrics and ornaments worn on the body. 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.

My concern in the following pages will be this ethnographic mode as it is pursued in England under the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, and especially – though not exclusively – as it is pursued in the late 16th-century watercolor drawings of John White and Lucas de Heere, the latter a Flemish painter and poet who lived in England in the 1560s and 70s as a Protestant refugee. Both of these artists were very much part of the costume book tradition.<sup>4</sup> Their visual descriptions of American Indians and the ancient and modern inhabitants of Europe, Asia and Africa contributed directly towards the Renaissance collection of customs and habits, towards the construction of a ‘theater’ of the peoples of the world. In one of his best known



**Figure 1** *Blemmye*, watercolour, pen and ink (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Cotton Tiberius B. V, Part 1, f.82)



**Figure 2** *Sciapod*, in Hartmann Schedel, *Liber chronicarum* 1493, woodcut (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. IC.7452)



**Figure 3** Cyclops, in François Desprez, *Recueil de la diversité des habits*, Paris, 1562, woodcut (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Douce CC 129 (2) fol. 6r)



**Figure 4** Brazilian man, in François Desprez, *Recueil de la diversité des habits*, Paris, 1562, woodcut (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Douce CC 129 (2) fol. 68r)



**Figure 5** Courtier, in François Desprez, *Recueil de la diversité des habits*, Paris, 1562, woodcut (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Douce CC 129 (2) 6th image)

costume studies of the Algonquian Indians he encountered in Virginia in 1585, White depicts, according to his own gloss, ‘The manner of their attire and painting themselves when they goe to their generall huntings, or at their Solemne feasts’ (Fig. 6). It is often noted that in pictures such as this one, White pays close attention to racial difference by showing the tawny skin color of his Native American subjects, although skin color – as we will see – was far from a stable signifier of ‘race’ in early modern England, and indeed was itself often understood as a kind of removable costume. Lucas de Heere, in a watercolor drawing from his manuscript at the British Library titled *Corte beschryuinghe van Engheland, Schotland, ende. Irland* [A Short description of England, Scotland and Ireland], displays the costumes of various inhabitants of Ireland: a ‘noble woman’, a ‘bourgeois woman’ and two ‘wild Irish’ (Fig. 7). How do we account for this interest, in the latter decades of the 16th century, in costume as a – and perhaps as *the* – defining characteristic of humans? What did it mean to know the peoples of the world by the clothes they wore and by the ornamentation and color of their skin?

A good place to begin considering this question is the small title page White placed at the beginning of his album of watercolors. Here White describes the contents of his album as ‘The pictures of sondry things collected and counterfeited according to the truth in the voyage made by Sr: Walter Raleigh knight, for the discouery of *La Virginea*’. White’s choice of the word ‘counterfeited’ is a significant one, because it directly places his pictures within a special class of Renaissance images intended to provide immediate access to the world of facts.<sup>5</sup> Counterfeits were stand-ins for things; their truth value lay in the authority of the eyewitness, in the fact that someone actually observed the particular object, person or event being pictured. The identity of the particular witness, however, is not of primary importance in the counterfeit, and it is not

accidental that the title page of White’s album makes no mention of the artist’s name. The counterfeit is not about the invention or ingenuity of an individual; it is about recording that which anyone could have seen, had he or she been there to see it. John White’s contemporary, Sir Philip Sidney, helps to clarify the nature of the counterfeit in his *Defence of Poesie* (written during the 1580s but not published until 1595). Sidney distinguishes between



**Figure 6** The manner of their attire and painting themselves, John White (BM 1906,0509.1.12)



**Figure 7** Irish man and women, Lucas de Heere, in *Corte beschryuinghe van Engheland, Schotland, ende Irland*, 1570s watercolour (© British Library Board, All Rights Reserved. Add MS 20330,34)

the meaner sort of Painters, who counterfeyt only such faces as are set before them, and the more excellent, who having no law but wit, bestow that in colours upon you, which is fittest for the eye to see, as the constant, though lamenting looke of Lucretia ..., wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a vertue.<sup>6</sup>

White would certainly fall under Sidney's 'meaner sort of Painters'. Sidney, immersed in a courtly aesthetic that valued painting and poetry according to their potential for moral instruction, has no patience for counterfeiters with their deficiencies of 'wit'. He prefers his painters to depict abstract virtues like beauty rather than the mere surfaces of the world. The counterfeiter, in contrast, delves only skin deep, and indeed this superficiality could be cause for some anxiety. Surfaces are unstable; they are the sites of fleeting fashions and dissimulation. Hence the negative associations that the word 'counterfeit' begins to take on in this period: one need only think of antitheatricalism in England at this time, with its virulent rejection of all the counterfeiting that occurred on the stage. The Puritan Stephen Gosson, for instance, complained in 1582 of playwrights who 'have got such a custome of counterfeiting upon the Stage, that it is grown to an habite and will not be left'.<sup>7</sup> But while the imitation of outward appearances – whether pictorial or performative – could be cause for suspicion, the exterior of the body was also a place where order was sought. The costume book, after all, seeks a deep truth through the counterfeiting of surfaces; it declares that through costume we can find order in the world by mapping the enduring habits of peoples and nations.<sup>8</sup>

White's practice of counterfeiting demands, therefore, that we approach his work while keeping two conflicting notions in mind. First, we must recognize that in early modern England the identity of an individual, a people, or a nation is located in the clothing one wears, and more generally in the way one ornaments the surface of the body. Identity, in other words, lies in surface qualities that can be truthfully counterfeited by an

observant painter. Second, we must also recognize that there is a basic instability to this external notion of identity, precisely because it is a surface phenomenon, precisely because it can be counterfeited. This tension between the potential for order and the potential for disorder inherent in costume plays a defining role in late 16th- and early 17th-century English culture. One way to bring it into focus is through a scantily clad fellow painted by Lucas de Heere in the 1570s (Fig. 8). In addition to his *Short description of England, Scotland and Ireland*, de Heere was the author of another illustrated account of customs and manners, housed at Ghent University Library in Belgium, titled *Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre avec leurs habits, et ornements diuers* [*Theatre of all the peoples and nations of the earth with their habits, and diverse ornaments*]. De Heere's curious picture of a nearly naked man holding cloth and scissors appears as the final illustration of that manuscript. The picture is somewhat difficult to decipher at first, but we are fortunate to have some commentary from the period that sheds light on it. Lucas de Heere happened to be the teacher of Karel van Mander, a Dutch artist who is best known as the author of an important book, first published in 1604, called *Het Schilder-boeck* [*The Book of Painters*], which comprises the lives of the eminent Netherlandish and German artists. Van Mander's book includes a biography of de Heere, and it specifically discusses the picture in question. Here is what van Mander has to say about it:

It once happened that when [Lucas de Heere] was in England he obtained a commission to paint in a gallery for the Admiral in London [the Lord High Admiral, Edward Clinton] in which he had to paint all the costumes or clothing of the nations. When all but the Englishman were done, he painted him naked and set beside him all manner of cloth and silk materials, and next to them tailor's scissors and chalk. When the Admiral saw this figure he asked Lucas what he meant by it. He answered that he had done that with the Englishman because he did not know what appearance or kind of clothing he should give him because they varied so much from day to day; for if he had done it one way today the next day it would have to be another – be it French or Italian, Spanish or Dutch – and I have therefore painted the material and tools to hand so that one can always make of it what one wishes.<sup>9</sup>

Van Mander then says that the Admiral showed the picture to Queen Elizabeth, who took it as an occasion to decry the



**Figure 8** Naked Englishman, Lucas de Heere, in *Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre avec leurs habits, et ornements diuers*, 1570s, watercolour (University Library Ghent, BHSL.HS.2466)

fickleness of English dress. And there is every indication to suggest this story is true, because this very picture was in fact mentioned in the 'Homily Against Excess of Apparel' that Elizabeth commanded to be preached in churches, as an example of the sartorial decadence of the English.<sup>10</sup>

De Heere's confused Englishman suggests that in Elizabethan England, one's position within the social order is defined on the surface of the body, and that it is precisely because of this that one's social position could so easily be put into question – and this is true whether we are speaking of national identity (English, Spanish, French, Italian, etc.) or gender. A good example of the gender confusion that could be located in one's outer garments becomes particularly visible in the early 17th century, during the gender wars waged under James I. James was fed up with women cross-dressing as men, and he had the churches preach vehemently against the practice. Two popular pamphlets, titled *Hic-Mulier* and *Haec-Vir*, both published in 1620 and both with illustrated title pages, were very much part of this outcry (Figs 9–10).<sup>11</sup> The first of the pamphlets to appear, *Hic-Mulier; or, The Man-Woman*, is directed against cross-dressing women. The woodcut on the title page depicts a woman having her hair cut short (left) and admiring her new masculine hat in a mirror (right). The answer to this pamphlet was *Haec-Vir; or, The Womanish-Man*, which turns around and accuses men of having, since Elizabeth's day, indulged in gender confusion by affecting womanish dress and ornaments. This pamphlet is staged as a dialogue between the man-woman, who on the title page holds a pistol and wears a sword and spurs, and the womanish-man, who appears in tights holding a battledore and shuttlecocks.

*Hic-Mulier* and *Haec-Vir*, with their condemnation of

gender-counterfeiting, are in a sense antitheatrical pamphlets; at the very least they show how closely the English preoccupation with costume was related to concerns about the stage. As I have already suggested, costume and the ease with which it could be changed was the scandal of the theater in early modern London. The theater was a place where actors of low social status could put on the finest clothes and counterfeit gentlemen, lords, and kings; where boys regularly dressed as women; in short, it was a place where actors had the license to flaunt, temporarily, the very strict sumptuary laws of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. The theater was in this sense dangerous, but of course it was also exciting; audiences were drawn to it not least of all because it allowed this play with identity. I emphasize the theatricality of costume because it can help us to understand why an artist like Lucas de Heere felt the need to make a drawing such as his study of Irish costume (see Fig. 7). It is a type of picture that proliferated during this great age of costume books but which, because of its simple format and lack of narrative action, is difficult to find interesting unless we grasp the motives that compelled artists to return, again and again, to the outer garments and ornaments that the peoples of the world presented to them.

John White, of course, felt this same need, and as the exhibition *A New World: England's first view of America* makes abundantly clear, his interests in costume extended well beyond the studies of Native Americans for which he is best known. Watercolor drawings from the Sloane volume, for instance, include pictures of the Doge of Genoa and a Roman soldier, both dating from the 1570s or 80s and executed either by White himself or by a copyist (Figs 11–12). The ancient Roman subject further reveals how this Renaissance

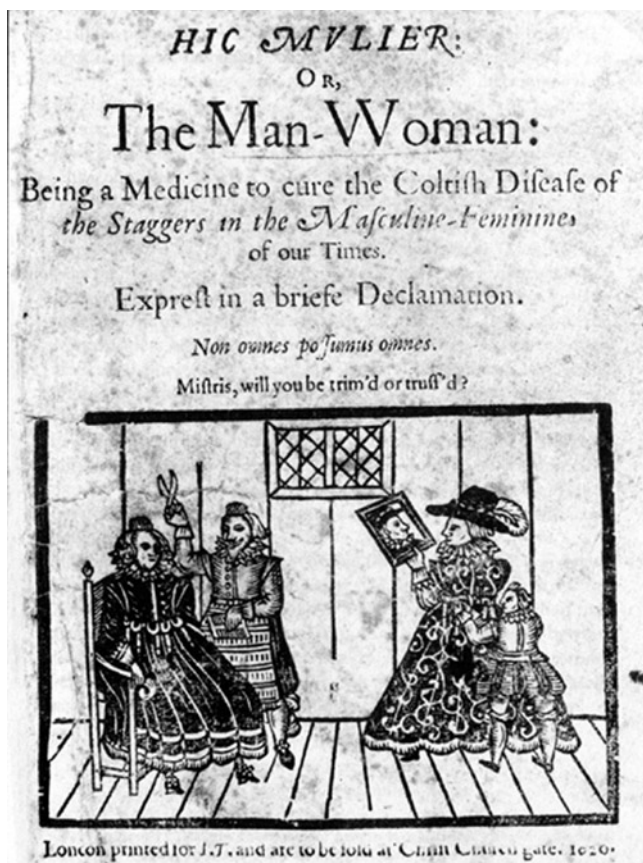


Figure 9 Title page to *Hic-Mulier; or, The Man-Woman*, London, 1620. Woodcut (© British Library Board, All Rights Reserved. C.40.d.27.(1))

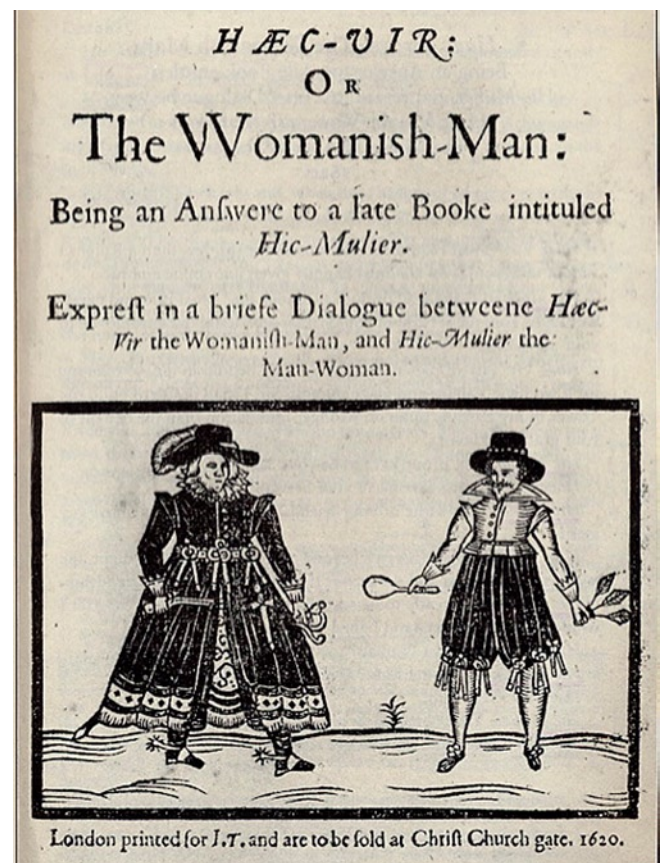


Figure 10 Title page to *Haec-Vir; or, The Womanish-Man*, London, 1620. Woodcut (© British Library Board, All Rights Reserved. C.40.d.27.(2))



Figure 11 *The Doge of Genoa*, after John White (BM P&D SL,5270.8v)



Figure 12 *A Roman Soldier*, after John White (BM P&D SL,5270.8r)



Figure 13 *Doge of Venice*, in *Album Amicorum* of Paul van Dale (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Douce d. 11 fol. 5)

ethnography could collapse time and space, so that temporal and geographical difference are both subsumed under a broader set of differences based on what one wears. Such images could be put to a variety of uses, from patterns for festivals and plays, to incorporation into geographies and chorographies, to the *album amicorum* (or ‘friendship album’). The making of *alba amicorum* was a common practice for students in the period throughout Europe. These albums would often include costume studies of social types encountered on their travels, either commissioned or drawn by the student himself, such as a study dating from the 1570s of the Doge of Venice, taken from the album (now in the Bodleian library) of a Flemish traveler named Paul van Dale (Fig. 13).<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting that the word most commonly used to describe the subject of such studies was ‘habits’, a word that refers to the outward appearance or fashion of a person – in

other words, habits in the sense of clothing (the distinctive cap, for instance, worn by the Doge) – but also to cultural habits, to ways of life ingrained, at the deepest level, in one’s behavior. ‘Habits’, then, is a word that conflates and synthesizes the related concepts of a person’s costume and his or her culture and morals.<sup>13</sup> Thus when van Dale went to Venice and there inscribed his picture of the Doge and pasted it into his album, or when White and de Heere pictured the Inuit men brought back by Martin Frobisher from his first and second expeditions to Baffin Island in 1576 and 1577 (Figs 14–15), these artists were doing more than merely representing outward appearances; they were collecting culture in the deepest sense, since for them culture – or rather habits – inhered in the very surfaces they were counterfeiting. To look at such pictures, to carry them around in your own costume book or in your friendship album, was to know the world in the most material sense. And



Figure 14 (left) *Inuit man*, Lucas de Heere in *Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre avec leurs habits, et ornements diuers*, 1570s, watercolour (University Library Ghent BHSL.HS.2466)



Figure 15 (right) *Inuit man*, Kalicho, John White (BM 1906,0509.1.29)

this returns us once again to the connection between the picturing of costume and theatrical performance, for, like the theater, costume studies provided occasions for audiences to experience civilization itself as a matter of exploring possible roles through costume, costume that could reveal but also conceal one's social status, one's gender, one's nation, one's civility.

White's and de Heere's studies of Inuit men are records of a cultural encounter that demonstrates precisely this kind of theatricality. In 1576, Martin Frobisher returned to London from his first voyage to Baffin Island with an Inuit captive, the man depicted in de Heere's drawing, who died about two weeks after his arrival. But he did live long enough to have portraits made: after Frobisher's return, arrangements were promptly made for a Flemish artist resident in London, named Cornelis Ketel, to paint a series of pictures.<sup>14</sup> The portrait by John White actually depicts a captive, named Kalicho, who was brought back on Frobisher's second voyage in the following year, 1577; Cornelis Ketel portrayed Kalicho as well. But none of Ketel's paintings of Kalicho or the captive from the previous year survive. We do, however, have a verbal record of what those lost portraits of the 1576 captive looked like. Of the several full-length portraits that were made, there were three types.<sup>15</sup> The first type, which accounts for most of the commissions, were depictions of the man 'in his [native] apparell'. The studies by White and de Heere both correspond to this type of costume study, and it is entirely possible that de Heere's, and perhaps both, are copies of the Ketel portraits in native dress. These portraits suggest an ethnographic interest in the strangeness of different peoples, from different places, of different skin color, wearing different dress. They emphasize cultural difference, and clothing serves in these instances to fix the subject's status as a foreigner, a savage: 'Homme Sauvage' reads the text at the top of the de Heere watercolor.

A second type of portrait commission had the Inuit man depicted by Ketel 'in Englishe ap[par]ell'. The idea of a portrait in *English* dress would seem to spring from a desire to collapse the very cultural difference established by the portraits in native dress. The portrayal of an Inuit counterfeiting an Englishman exhibited the power of clothing, not to fix one's identity, but to transform it. Although we do not have the surviving portrait, we can let a different one stand in for it – the well-known engraving by Simon van de Passe, dating from 1616, of Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan who famously saved Captain John Smith from execution and later came to visit England herself as the wife of John Rolfe (Fig. 16). She too, like the Inuit captive, was pictured in English dress shortly after her arrival. The engraving portrays Pocahontas as Rebecca, the English name she adopted. But it is important to recognize that this portrayal of Pocahontas as an Englishwoman is not meant to conceal her cultural difference, but rather to dramatize the transformation that can occur through a change of clothes. This is not simply Rebecca; according to the inscription in the oval frame, it is Matoaka (her original name) AL[IA]S Rebecca. The inclusion of both names suggests that to look upon this portrait is not to see Pocahontas as she 'is' essentially – as if identity could somehow lie deeper than the things you wear – but to imagine the process of change itself, a conversion through clothing. Indeed, for a Jacobean audience, the very costume she wears surely

played to social anxieties over the ease with which clothing could transform a woman into a man, and *vice versa*. While she holds certain feminine props (namely the fan), her feathered hat in particular recalls the headgear of the man-woman on the title page of *Hic-Mulier*. According to a 1619 sermon on apparel, the defining features of the Jacobean man-woman were in fact her short hair (which Pocahontas also sports) and the hat 'wagging a Feather to defie the World'.<sup>16</sup> According to *Hic-Mulier*, Pocahontas' French doublet hanging open is yet another sign of the cross-dressing woman. De Passe's engraving seems to record a latent anxiety surrounding the ease of social and cultural cross-dressing. But there is, of course, an imperial ideology at work here as well – this transformation of the heathen savage into the habit of a Christian Lady, however ambivalent it may be in regard to gender, is a demonstration of the civilizing process.

The third type of portrait commissioned from Ketel, in addition to those in native dress and English dress, was a portrait of the Inuit man *naked*. And once again, because the portrait itself does not survive, we will have to imagine it. White's portrait of Kalicho is perhaps more helpful for this exercise than de Heere's portrait, since the tight-fitting seal-skin coat, revealing his navel, abdomen and pectoral muscles, does indeed invite us to see through clothes to what may lie beneath. And what lies beneath, what White asks his viewer to contemplate, is an undefined nakedness. The lost portrait of the naked Inuit commissioned from Ketel, in other words, would seem to be based on a desire to display an essential,



Figure 16 Pocahontas/Matoaks, Simon van de Passe, 1616, engraving (BM 1863,0509.625)



Figure 17 A Pictish Warrior, John White (BM 1906,0509.1.24)

unaccommodated man, a man without identity because he is without the external trappings that are the very essence of identity. Its closest surviving counterpart just might be de Heere's naked Englishman, who doesn't know who he is because he doesn't know what he wants to wear.

I have been discussing the performance of identity through costume, but what about this savage body that lacks clothing, the unaccommodated body whose nakedness is understood as a sign of the absence of civilization? Nakedness is of course a critical theme in the texts as well as pictorial works that represent non-English peoples in early modern England, especially those peoples deemed to be exemplary savages – American Indians like John White's painted Algonquian (see Fig. 6), Africans and the inhabitants of a British past, like the ancient Picts and Britons who were the subject of a number of fantastical images at the time, including John White's painting of a savage Pict (Fig. 17). Skin represents something more permanent than clothing; unlike clothing, skin is part of the body and cannot simply be shed. Yet like clothing, it too is a surface that can be marked on, ornamented in various ways, made to signify. Thus while the naked body is the emblem of a natural state, precisely because of this it becomes a critical site for testing what is and is not natural. Is the darker skin color of Americans and Africans, for example, a natural state or the result of some tampering with nature? It was actually a widely held belief at this time that natives of the New World were not dark skinned by nature but were in fact innately white-skinned, only appearing brown and tawny due to the sun and to substances like bear grease that they rubbed on their skin.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the question of skin color, how are we to make

sense of the tattooing and painting of the body, practices that were subjects of European fascination and repulsion throughout the 16th and 17th centuries? The body painting displayed in White's watercolors of the Algonquian and Pict offer an interesting case, because the painted savage is shown, curiously, as simultaneously naked *and* clothed. That is to say, the body paint of these figures appears, particularly on the body of the Pict, as a kind of clothing, and indeed its colorful grotesques call to mind the suits of fantastical armor that appear in other works of Renaissance art. It would not be surprising if White found the model for his Pict's body paint in the theatrical armor of the Elizabethan theatre.<sup>18</sup> White's painted Pict is a paradoxical figure, in the sense that he is both completely naked and completely clothed, and he thus raises in particularly strong fashion the central problem of imagining a savage body. To signify a distinct cultural difference the body must be clothed (like the portrait of the Inuit in native dress), but to be natural, or savage, it must be naked (like the portrait of the naked Inuit). The skin thus becomes a clothing of its own on which all kinds of significance is heaped in the period. It is an essential yet unstable surface that oscillates between a sign of a natural, unaccommodated condition and a sign of cultural difference.

An interesting text in this regard is John Bulwer's *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd: or, The Artificial Changeling*, published in 1653 and so a bit later than the Elizabethan and Jacobean examples I have been considering, yet it is still an instructive text for our purposes. *Anthropometamorphosis* is an extended diatribe against practices of ornamenting the body that carries on and develops the preoccupation with the corrupted tastes of English fashion expressed earlier in the *Hic-Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* pamphlets. Bulwer's great cause is Nature, and he rails, rabidly, against all affectations that corrupt it, whether those affectations belong to the supposedly civil English or to monstrous savages. In reference to the tattooing practices of American Indians, for example, he writes that 'The Brasileans and Florideans, for the most part, are painted over the body, the armes, and thighs, with faire branches, whose painting can never be taken away, because they are pricked within the flesh'.<sup>19</sup> Here, then, is the difference between skin and clothing: while clothes can always be changed, skin cannot be. To tattoo the skin is to mark cultural difference permanently – and writers of the period including Bulwer note this fact with utter horror mingled with utter fascination, a fascination evidenced in the various woodcuts in *Anthropometamorphosis* that present the reader with the visual spectacle of this crime against Nature.

But as I have argued, the skin occupies a very ambiguous position on the nature-culture scale, constantly shifting between these poles. Tattooed skin could signify permanent cultural difference, a costume that cannot be removed. On the other hand, just as clothing could be removed, simple body paint could be washed off. Recall, moreover, that the darker skin of American Indians was considered an artificial alteration, a reversible one. And yet Africans represented a very different case. A great trope of the period was the idea of the African who was by nature black, an idea that has its source in Jeremiah 13:23: 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' To attempt to wash the black African was a literary conceit for the futility of altering nature's designs, as



**Figure 18** *Aethiopem lavare*, in Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises*, 1586, woodcut (© British Library Board, All Rights Reserved. C.57.1.2.)

expressed in an emblem from Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises* of 1586 (**Fig. 18**). Titled *Aethiopem lavare* ('To wash the Ethiop'), the verses below advise the reader to leave off with scowering the blackamore, because as soon as we withdraw our hand, Nature will return him to his former hue.<sup>20</sup>

Yet at certain moments nature can be trumped, as it is in the *Masque of Blackness*, written by Ben Jonson and with costumes designed by Inigo Jones (**Fig. 19**). Jones' costume study for a daughter of the River Niger is a case of theatrical design and ethnographic costume study literally overlapping. The *Masque of Blackness* was performed at the court of James I in 1605. In the *Masque* a courtier representing the River Niger comes to London with his black daughters, who are played by the Queen and her ladies, wearing black body paint. They come to London to see how the English sun can 'blanch an Ethiop' in Jonson's words; the River's aim is to make his daughters white and therefore, in English eyes, more beautiful. Ultimately the Queen and her ladies remove their paint, transforming from 'black Ethiops' to pure white Englishwomen. The representation of cultural difference through black skin thus becomes, in the end, a performance of Englishness.<sup>21</sup> It is an important early rehearsal of what will ultimately become a strong identification between the nation of England and racial whiteness. But it is definitely not a modern, biological concept of race that is at work here. The skin of Jonson's Ethiopian princesses demands the same kind of ambivalent readings as the skin of White's Algonquian, skin that is dark but possibly white underneath; skin that is mostly unclothed and therefore natural, but which is also painted and therefore cultured. In John White's England, skin, like clothing, is not a fixed marker of cultural or racial identity but a very fluid, ambivalent surface upon which culture is endlessly performed.



**Figure 19** *Masquer: A Daughter of Niger*, Inigo Jones, 1605, watercolour (© Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Reproduced by permission of Chatsworth Settlement Trustees)

#### Notes

- 1 Pliny the Elder (J.F. Healy, trans.), *Natural History: A Selection*, London, 1991, 57, 78.
- 2 'On dit encore que ce lignage dure'. F. Desprez, *Recueil de la diversité des habits, qui sont de present en usage, tant es pays d'Europe, Asie, Affrique & Isles sauvages, le tout fait apres le naturel*, Paris, 1564, D6r.
- 3 For an early description and illustration of the *Enduap*, see H. Staden (M. Letts, trans.), *The True History of His Captivity, 1557*, London, 1928, 144.
- 4 On White, de Heere, and the costume book tradition, see K. Sloan, *A New World: England's first view of America*, Chapel Hill, 2007, 147–53.
- 5 See P. Parshall, 'Imago Contrafacta: Images and Facts in the Northern Renaissance', *Art History*, 16(4), 1993, 554–79.
- 6 Sir Philip Sidney (A. Feuillerat, ed.), *The Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, vol. 3, Cambridge, 1962, 10.
- 7 Gosson quoted in T. Murray, 'From Foul Sheets to Legitimate Model: Antitheater, Text, Ben Jonson', *New Literary History*, 14(3), 1983, 642. The slipperiness of the verb 'to counterfeit', which could imply both honest imitation (as in White's use of the term) and false imitation (as in Gosson's) is evident in the entry for the word in the OED, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1989.
- 8 A. R. Jones and P. Stallybrass examine this deep truth contained in Renaissance clothing – or 'deep wearing' as they put it – in their important study, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge, 2000.

- 9 K. van Mander (H. Miedema, ed., J. Pennial-Boer and C. Ford, trans.), *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, Doornspijk, 1994, 281.
- 10 See M. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, New York, 1992, 27.
- 11 On these two pamphlets see S.G. O'Malley, ed., 'Custome Is an Idiot': *Jacobean Pamphlet Literature on Women*, Urbana, IL, 2004, 251–306.
- 12 On White's costume studies in the Sloane volume, see Sloan, *supra* n. 4, 146–7. On van Dale's album, see J.L. Nevinson, 'Illustrations of Costume in the Alba Amicorum', *Archaeologia*, 106, 1979, 167–76.
- 13 V. Traub, 'Mapping the Global Body', in P. Erickson and C. Hulse, eds, *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, Philadelphia, 2000, 51; also see Jones and Stallybrass, *supra* n. 8, 6.
- 14 For a thorough account of all of the depictions of Inuits resulting from Frobisher's voyages, see W. C. Sturtevant and D.B. Quinn, 'This New Prey: Eskimos in Europe in 1567, 1576, and 1577', in C.F. Feest, ed., *Indians in Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, Aachen, 1987, 61–140.
- 15 For a discussion of these three portrait types in terms of 'competing hypotheses about the meaning of Frobisher's savage', see S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Chicago, 1991, 112. My own analysis of these lost portraits is indebted to Greenblatt's insightful reading.
- 16 Quoted in Jones and Stallybrass, *supra* n. 8, 79.
- 17 See K.O. Kupperman, *Indians & English: Facing Off in Early America*, Ithaca, 2000, 58–9.
- 18 For example, the body paint of White's Pict is very similar in appearance to the armor worn by Carlo Crivelli's *St. George* (1472), reproduced in S.W. Pyhrr and J.-A. Godoy, *Heroic Armor of the Italian Renaissance: Filippo Negroli and his Contemporaries*, New York, 1998, 14. The authors suggest that Crivelli's *St. George* may have been inspired by theatrical armor.
- 19 J. Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd: or, The Artificiall Changling*, London, 1653, 459.
- 20 G. Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes, and Other Devises*, Leyden, 1586, 57. Also see A.T. Vaughan and V.M. Vaughan, 'Before Othello: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 54(1), 1997, 19–44; and A. Korhonen, 'Washing the Ethiopian white: conceptualising black skin in Renaissance England', in T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, eds, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, Cambridge, 2005, 94–112.
- 21 On the *Masque of Blackness* see M. Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama*, Cambridge, 2003, 111–31.