Shakespeare

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rshk20

Inimitable Rarities?: Feather Costumes, Indigenous Artistic Labour and Early Modern English Theatre History

John Kuhn

To cite this article: John Kuhn (2023): Inimitable Rarities?: Feather Costumes, Indigenous Artistic Labour and Early Modern English Theatre History, Shakespeare, DOI: 10.1080/17450918.2023.2183087

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2023.2183087

Published online: 24 Mar 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rshk20

SHAKESPEARE
https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2023.2183087

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Inimitable Rarities?: Feather Costumes, Indigenous Artistic Labour and Early Modern English Theatre History

John Kuhn

English, General Literature and Rhetoric, Binghamton University SUNY, Binghamton, NY, USA

ABSTRACT

In the seventeenth century, English audiences were dazzled by the display of indigenous artwork in London's theatres. Red and white feather costumes, constructed by indigenous craftsmen out of scarlet ibis feathers, shone on white actors playing 'Indian' priests; audiences marvelled at the novel display of an indigenous-made hammock displayed onstage; and actors playing conquistadors lazed in a grotto littered with other 'Indian rarities'. This essay attends to one subset of these objects: feather costumes directly made by indigenous artisans or inspired by indigenous designs.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 21 December 2022
Accepted 17 February 2023

KEYWORDS
America; indigenous technology; Tupi; featherwork; Dryden; Chapman; colonialism

Introduction

In the seventeenth century, English audiences were dazzled by the display of indigenous artwork in London's theatres. Red and white feather costumes, constructed by indigenous crafts people out of scarlet ibis feathers, shone on white actors playing 'Indian' priests; audiences marvelled at the novel display of an indigenous-made hammock displayed onstage; and actors playing conquistadors lazed in a grotto littered with other 'Indian rarities'. This essay attends to one subset of these objects: feather costumes directly made by indigenous artisans or inspired by indigenous designs. In doing so, I contribute to a substantial body of scholarship that has focused on early modern English theatre and its relationship to indigenous groups in the Americas. Much of this scholarship has understood this relationship as predominately one in which indigenous peoples were passive objects of European-controlled representations. These accounts have shown us important things about the ways in which representations of American indigenous groups were part of European dreams of racial superiority and imperial dominance.[1] Though nominally sympathetic

CONTACT John Kuhn jkuhn@binghamton.edu English, General Literature and Rhetoric, Binghamton University SUNY, P.O. Box 6000, Binghamton, NY 13902-6000, USA

[1]Most scholarship on these issues in the post-war theatre has focused on Dryden's 'Indian' plays. The definitive account of their politics in relation to the Black Legend and English attitudes about Spanish colonial expansion can be found in Bridget Orr's work. Orr, like many critics, focuses on the representational content of the play and the way in which it is both linked to other dramatic products and ideologically useful for English audiences.

© 2023 John Kuhn

to indigenous groups, these scholarly accounts underestimate their artistic influence on the English theatre. In other words, English playmakers may have mounted productions that fantasised about colonial growth and imperial mastery, but a *material* account of these productions shows how these same playmakers opened themselves up to and were dependent upon complex indigenous technical and aesthetic traditions like featherwork. In this essay, I demonstrate this by focusing on a case study: featherwork costumes in seventeenth-century English performances, both in Dryden's Restoration 'Indian' spectaculars *The Indian Queen* and *The Indian Emperour*, as well as in earlier productions like Chapman's *Memorable Masque* (1613).[2] I argue that these objects reveal a transcultural history of English stagecraft, one in which indigenous artisans functioned as partial co-creators of some of the period's most spectacular visual effects.

In making this argument, I draw on what is sometimes referred to as the 'new theatre history', a wave of recent work that has focused on early modern theatre as an institution. Scholars have demonstrated how playing spaces, repertory structures, acting styles, properties and costumes, and other institutional aspects influenced the creation of drama.[3] One of the most important interventions of this scholarship has been its willingness to de-centre both the creative labour of the individual playwright and the play-as-book. In doing

Laura Brown's summary essay, 'Dryden and the Imperial Imagination', makes a similar point: the 'Indian' plays are ultimately a useful way for the English to think about and justify their own imperial ambitions. Though these accounts regularly mention staging and properties, they do not think about the commodity chains that produced these properties and if they might show us other relationships between the English and indigenous groups. Roach, in his discussion of the *Indian Emperour* in *Cities of the Dead,* similarly describes Aztec society functioning as a 'distant mirror of the sacrifice-saturated culture it reconstructs and appropriates' in which Europeans saw themselves reflected. Ayanna Thompson, similarly, sees the plays as a device to reinforce white supremacy. Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660–1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chapter 5; Laura Brown, 'Dryden and the Imperial Imagination', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. Steven Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 59–74; Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 152; Ana Elena González-Treviño, '"Kings and their Crowns": Signs of Monarchy and the Spectacle of New World Otherness in Heroic Drama and Public Pageantry', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 42, no. 1 (2013): 103–21; Ayanna Thompson, *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2008), chapter 4. Studies of pre-war drama and indigenous groups have taken a similar approach. See, among others, Gavin Hollis's, *The Absence of America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Some recent scholarship on the theatre and intercultural exchange has used material histories of stage objects, though not in relationship to the Americas; for a beautiful example of this kind of analysis, see the discussion of the trade in mummy in Ian Smith's 'Othello's Black Handkerchief', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2013): 1–25.

[2]William Van Lennep, ed., *The London Stage, 1660–1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, and Afterpieces, Vol 1: 1660–1700* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), 74, 87.

[3]The field is large and a full survey is impractical here, but some recent examples of these various strands of inquiry will suffice. For repertory structures, see, among others, Roslyn Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queans on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For acting styles, see, among others, Tiffany Stern and Simon Palfrey, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), or Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); for properties and costumes see Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Natasha Korda, *Labours Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); for one example of playing space analysis, see Sarah Dustagheer, *Shakespeare's Two Playhouses: Repertory and Theatre Space at the Globe and the Blackfriars, 1599–1613* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

so, this scholarship has demonstrated the extent to which English plays were a composite of visual, verbal, sonic, and olfactory elements created by many hands. Nowhere is this insight more sharply put than in work by Natasha Korda, which has attended to the networks of female labour that supported the English theatre and the strategic occlusion of this labour by the playing companies as they sought public legitimation.[4] By investigating the role that indigenous art-makers played in the creation of English theatrical spectacle, I follow Korda's suggestion that we broaden our sense of the labour involved in theatrical productions.

This is not to say that theatre history has not acknowledged the extent to which stagecraft was an international affair. Theatre history – particularly Restoration theatre history – has always been aware of the extent to which English stagecraft was influenced by developments abroad. It is, for example, a critical truism that many aspects of post-Restoration scenic design were influenced by French theatrical technology as the Stuart court returned from exile on the Continent.[5] In the study of pre-Civil Wars drama, a vibrant new scholarship has emerged that focuses on what its practitioners call 'inter-theatres'. This scholarship, which focuses primarily on relationships between England and Continental Europe, traces the transmission of generic materials through transnationally-mobile conduits like travelling troupes.[6] Similarly, the signal items I will discuss – the feather garments produced by indigenous featherworkers near English Suriname – have long been known by scholars to be of indigenous make. However, despite the frequent citation of this fact, scholars have not attempted to seek more information about these costumes, their creators, their transport, or the range of cultural meanings they originally embodied, nor have they noted that these feather objects were part of a larger constellation of indigenous-made art displayed in Dryden's 'Indian' plays.[7]

Finally, and most significantly, this essay draws on a wave of scholarship produced in the humanities under the broad banner of the 'material turn', which has attended to material objects and craft knowledge with a renewed vigour. In early modern studies, one subset of these investigations has illuminated the extent to which indigenous forms, particularly textile, food, and drug technologies, began to rewrite the face of Europe. Many of these influences – which Marcy Norton has referred to as 'subaltern technologies' – were denied by early

[4]Korda, *Labours Lost*, 1–53.

[5]This is a standard feature of accounts of the Restoration theatre, but for one example, see Edward A. Langhans, 'The Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

[6]See, among others, Anston Bosman, 'Renaissance Intertheatres and the Staging of Nobody', *ELH* 71, no. 3 (2004): 559–85; and Pamela Brown, 'The Traveling Diva and Generic Innovation', *Renaissance Drama* 44, no. 2 (2016): 249–67.

[7]Gonzalez-Trevino refers to it as a 'celebrated anecdote', 107. See, among others, Margaret Ferguson, 'Feathers and Flies: Aphra Behn and the Seventeenth-Century Trade in Exotica', in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, eds. De Grazia, Qulligan, and Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 242–43; Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 125 and 145; Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, 143.

modern Europeans eager to avoid the taint of cultural contamination and, subsequently, by a historiography that unconsciously repeated their claims.[8] Despite the explosion of work in this area, however, the insights of the material turn – particularly in reference to indigenous technology – have not filtered into the subfield of English theatre history. This essay explores what this scholarship has to offer theatre history and, even more narrowly, the study of properties and costumes. In doing so, I hope to give us a richer sense of the extent to which the English theatre was a site at which indigenous artistic forms penetrated into Europe.

Importing the Inimitable: Carib Featherwork in Dryden's 'Indian' Plays

Scholars have long known that the featherwork costumes that appeared in Dryden's 'Indian' plays were not of domestic manufacture; Aphra Behn famously reported in *Oroonoko* that she had been 'presented' with a 'set' of 'little short habits … glorious wreaths for their heads, necks, arms, and legs, whose tinctures are unconceivable' from local Carib peoples and that these were subsequently used in the English theatre.[9] Though this fact is rotely noted in Behn scholarship and work on the Dryden 'Indian' plays, scholars have not explored the history of these items or thought through the implications of the English stage's dependence on them as an aspect of its spectacle. Luckily, in the past few decades, a robust scholarly literature has developed on indigenous featherwork in the Americas and its spread into Europe, and from these accounts we can infer much about these items and their origins. While much ink has been spilled on different regional feather traditions across the Americas, most especially the complex feather artistry of the Mexico Valley and its ritual and political functions, scholars have also attended to robust featherwork traditions practiced in the various societies of the Andes, as well as in Tupi Brazil.[10]

Scholars who have examined Dryden's 'Indian' plays and their relationship to indigenous societies, notably Roach and Gonzalez-Trevino, have discussed these works primarily in relation to Mexico, which is the subject of the play's plot. A material history of the play's *costumes*, however, indicates another

[8]For an overview of this scholarship and a discussion of subaltern technology, see Marcy Norton, 'Subaltern Technologies and Early Modernity in the Atlantic World', *Colonial Latin American Review* 26, no. 1 (2017): 18–38.

[9]Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7. Behn's text, drawing partially on the French romance tradition, is full of fabrications, exaggerations, and distortions, but Janet Todd has convincingly demonstrated that she was, in fact, in Suriname. See Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (Ontario: Pandora Press, 2000).

[10]For Peru, see Heidi King, ed., *Peruvian Featherworks: Art of the Precolumbian Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). For Mexico, see Alessandra Russo, Gerhard Wolf, and Diana Fane, eds., *Images Take Flight: Featherwork in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700* (Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2016), passim. For Brazil, see Amy Buono, '"Their Treasures Are the Feathers of Birds": Tupinamba Featherwork and the Image of America', in Alessandra Russo, Gerhard Wolf, and Diana Fane, eds., *Images Take Flight: Featherwork in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700* (Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2016), 179–88.

relevant indigenous context, that of the northern Atlantic coast of South America, where the costumes were sourced. In using feather costumes from northern South America to represent 'Mexican' and 'Incan' figures, Dryden and Howard's plays participate in a broader process that Sturtevant has referred to as 'Tupinambization', in which Tupi signifiers – particularly feather costumes – became used as general signifiers in Europe for a range of indigenous groups.[11] Boone has described a very similar process through which the figures in Weiditz's early *Trachtenbuch* images were 'Brazilianized'.[12] In the Dryden and Howard plays, these Carib-made feather costumes were used to represent Incan and Mexican figures in ways that did not accord well with Mexican or Incan dress. If we think about the origins of the featherwork in Dryden's play, we can see that Carib craftspeople – however much they might be occluded by the play's representational content and its fantastical, transtemporal conflation of indigenous societies – nonetheless played an essential, co-creative role in the play's most spectacular scenes through their material contributions.

Few early modern sources document featherwork in Suriname, where Behn would have acquired the featherwork costumes in the early 1660s. However, Behn's descriptions indicate that these featherwork items may have been visually close to those produced by the nearby Tupi, a number of which are preserved in European collections today.[13] According to Behn, the costumes used in these plays were red and white, a colour that features prominently in extant Tupi featherwork from the early colonial era. Amy Buono, in her work on the scarlet capes produced in Brazil in the early colonial period, suggests that the red feathers used in their production may have come from the scarlet ibis (Old Tupi: guará), which shares a root in Old Tupi with the term for the feather-capes (guará-abucu).[14] One English inventory of the later seventeenth-century that contains a red cape specifically mentions the scarlet ibis as a source used for red and white feathers in Brazil, noting (correctly) that the 'sea-curlew' or 'guara' molts through a range of colours as it ages, shifting from black to ash to white to scarlet and finally to crimson, 'which grows the richer dye, the longer he lives'.[15]

Records of Tupi garments may offer a guide to what these costumes looked like. According to the census conducted by Amy Buono, the bulk of extant Tupi

[11]William Sturtevant, 'La Tupinambisation des Indiens d'Amerique du Nord', in *Les Figures de l'Indien*, ed. Gilles Thérien (Montreal: Quiversité du Quebec à Montreal, 1988), 283–303.

[12]Elizabeth Hill Boone, 'Seeking Indianness: Christoph Weiditz, the Aztecs, and Feathered Amerindians', *Colonial Latin American Review* 26, no. 1 (2017): 39–61.

[13]Amy Buono, *Feathered Identities and Plumed Performances: Tupinamba Interculture in Early Modern Brazil and Europe*, PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007.

[14]For Tupi capes and their coloration, see Amy Buono, 'Crafts of Color: Tupi Tapirage in Early Colonial Brazil', in *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments 1400–1800*, eds. Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 238.

[15]Nehemiah Grew, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis, or, a Catalogue and Description of the Natural and Artificial Rarities Belonging to the Royal Society and Preserved at Gresham Colledge* (London: 1685), 66 and 373. Early English Books Online (EEBO) / Harvard University Library, Wing G1952A.

objects in European collections today are capes or bonnets, which do not match Behn's description of the Surinamese costumes as 'short habits' of feathers, and 'glorious wreaths for their heads, necks, arms, and legs'. While extant objects do not corroborate Behn's description of the objects' form, it is possible that other early European records of Tupi costumes can show us what these may have looked like. The 'arm' wreaths may resemble, for example, a contemporary 'Bracelet for the Wrist' made of red feathers, found in a slightly later English inventory.[16] Ulinka Rublack has argued that a well-scrutinized 1599 court festival in Stuttgart, in which Duke Frederick of Wurttemberg appeared as 'Lady America', incorporated Tupi costumes. The garments involved in this production were a hybrid mix: some were imported artifacts made by Tupi craftsmen, and some were a 'skilful German re-crafting of an Indian look', perhaps modelled directly on the 'clothes made of Brazilian feathers' from the collection of Bernhardus Paludanus.[17] If the costumes used in the parade were imitations of indigenous styles, or a 'translational technology' (to use Rublack's term), rather than whole-cloth inventions, they may provide a rough guide to the appearance of the Surinamese costumes in question. Many of the costumes involved in the Stuttgart parade do feature the basic set of garment types described by Behn, including a short feather skirt as well as leg, arm, neck, and head coverings; many of the costumes, too, feature red feathers (see Figure 1). Other early records of Tupi dress, as well, describe feather skirts, headdresses, and arm- and ankle-bands that seem similar to those Behn relates (see Figure 2).

Behn's *Oroonoko* is full of fictionalisation and exaggeration, but her suggestion that she directly sourced the feather garments in Suriname seems feasible when we consider the existence of similar historically-attested European-indigenous feather trades in northern South America in the early colonial period. In the 1630s and early 1640s, Johan Maurits, the newly-arrived governor of nearby Dutch Brazil, received gifts from local Portuguese elites as well as from local indigenous groups interested in currying favour and developing trade relationships. The gifts offered to Maurits included exotic birds and monkeys, plants, sugar, and – most significantly for our purposes – feathers and featherwork.[18] Behn's list of indigenous trade goods offered to the English in Suriname includes similar items: 'little parakeetoes, great parrots, macaws' and 'marmosets', as well as other zoological and technological curiosities (7). The case of Maurits demonstrates that there were other examples of indigenous groups offering featherwork objects as diplomatic gifts in the greater region in the

[16]Grew 373.
[17]Ulinka Rublack, 'Performing America, Featherwork and Affective Politics', in S. Burghartz, L. Burkart, C. Göttler, and U. Rublack (eds.), *Materialized Identities: Objects, Affects and Effects in Early Modern Culture, 1450–1750* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 213.
[18]See Mariana Francozo, 'Global Connections: Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen's Collection of Curiosities', in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*, ed. M. van Groesen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 108–09.

Figure 1. The queen of America or Procession of Stuttgart, detail, 1599. Graphische Sammlungen, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, inv. no. kk 209, Weimar, Germany.

Figure 2. Early German woodcut of Brazilians (1505). Courtesy of the Spencer Collection, New York Public Library Digital Collections, Image ID 54645.

mid-seventeenth century, and this lends credence to the basic contours of Behn's account.

Behn claimed that once in England, these costumes were used in *The Indian Queen.* Janet Todd has speculated, based on a letter from Byam to Robert Harley, that Behn returned to England in the early months of 1664; this timeline

roughly lines up with the earliest productions of *The Indian Queen*, which was first staged in January.[19] Though scholars have sometimes implied that the feather costumes were used by the entire cast or by the villainous queen Zempoalla, it seems more likely they were instead used in a localised manner by the priest characters during the temple scenes that appear in the play and its sequel.[20] The confusion about who wore the costumes has arisen as a result of scholars assuming that a much later illustration of Anne Bracegirdle as an 'Indian Queen' depicts the staging of Dryden's 'Indian' plays in the 1660s, when Behn delivered the costumes. There are several reasons to think that this identification is incorrect. First, the costume in the Bracegirdle illustration does not resemble those described by Behn; though Bracegirdle wears a feathered headdress and holds a feathered fan, she does not sport a 'short habit' of feathers, nor does she have the leg, neck, or arm wreaths specified by Behn. Second, Bracegirdle, born in the early 1670s, was not even alive during the premiere runs of Dryden's two *Indian* plays. Third, Bracegirdle appears in the dramatis personae of Behn's much later play, *The Widow Ranter*, as a different 'Indian Queen', Semernia; this role seems like a much more likely candidate for the subject of the illustration. Though the Bracegirdle illustration indicates the continued use of feathers to indicate indigeneity onstage, it is not a reliable guide to the appearance of Zempoalla's costume in the 1660s. Nor is there any indication that Montezuma in *The Indian Emperour* wore a feathered headdress, as Gonzalez-Trevino has claimed. These claims are not borne out by the text of the play, which clearly assigns the feather costumes to the 'Indian' priests, and otherwise does not specify their use.

We can see this use at the top of act five of *The Indian Queen*, which features a scene of attempted (but ultimately averted) human sacrifice that draws very loosely on accounts of Aztec ritual. The stage direction reads: 'The Scene opens, and discovers the Temple of the Sun all of gold, and four Priests *in habits of white and red Feathers* attending by a bloody Altar, as ready for sacrifice' (emphasis mine).[21] This is the only time the play explicitly mentions feather costumes, and it seems likely that these 'habits' are the same 'habits' mentioned by Behn. The prologue to the play's sequel, *The Indian Emperour*, directly suggests that the costumes were reused in the second production, suggesting that 'the Scenes are old, the Habits are the same / we wore last year, before the Spaniards came'.[22] It thus seems likely that the costumes were reused in a similar 'Temple'

[19] *London Stage* 74.

[20] Roach suggests that Zempoalla wore a feathered costume in *Cities*, 145. Orr points to a history of scholars assuming this (though she does not exactly quite endorse this viewpoint herself) in *Empire*, 143. Gonzalez-Trevino asserts that Montezuma 'could reasonably be expected to have worn one' in *IE*, in 'Kings', 107.

[21] John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden Volume VIII: The Plays*, eds. John Harrington Smith, Dougald MacMillian, and Vinton Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 220.

[22] John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden Volume IX: The Plays*, eds. John Loftis and Vinton Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 29.

scene of *The Indian Emperour*, which opens with the direction 'A Temple, and the high Priest with other Priests' (32). If the 'high priest' wore this costume, it means the feathered garments would have made an additional appearance in the scene in which he is tortured to death alongside Montezuma (98–101).

The Indian Queen and *The Indian Emperour* incorporated feather costumes into their visual design in a way similar to other uses of indigenous-made feather garb across Europe. Francozo, in her analysis of a red Brazilian featherwork cape used in a Dutch masque in 1655, has observed that, unlike many other exotic objects that returned to European wunderkammern, featherwork was uniquely mobile: it was borrowed and lent, worn in portraiture and in festivities, and altered and remade.[23] Alessandra Russo has noted the way that Mexican featherwork from post-conquest shipments wound up in ecclesiastical hands across Europe, where they were often used by clergy in Christian services.[24] Similarly, Ulinka Rublack, in her analysis of the Stuttgart festival that mixed imported featherworks with domestically made ones, has described a similar phenomenon.[25] The connection between the Dryden plays and these other European uses is underscored by the fact one of the ladies who featured in the aforementioned 1655 Dutch masque analysed by Francozo was none other than the English king Charles II's sister, Mary of Orange, and the new king received a letter describing the event from his aunt, Elizabeth of Bohemia.[26] He would come into possession of a portrait of his sister wearing this Tupi cape sometime in the early 1660s.[27] Charles II was among the earliest spectators of *The Indian Queen,* which was 'acted before their Majesties' in January 1664, and his knowledge of his sister's involvement in the 1655 Dutch performance would surely have primed him to understand the spectacle of these imported garments in *The Indian Queen* as similar to the displays put on for the benefit of aristocrats on the Continent.[28] For Charles II, his sister Mary of Orange, and his aunt Elizabeth of Bohemia, these two mid-century performances may also have recalled family memories of the elaborate feather-filled 'Virginian' masque put on decades before for Elizabeth of Bohemia's own wedding in 1613, to which I will now turn.

[23]Marina Francozo, 'Beyond the Wunderkammer: Brazilian Featherwork in Early Modern Europe', in *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, eds. Gerritsen and Riello (New York: Routledge, 2016), 109.
[24]Russo 186.
[25]Rublack, 'Performing America', 213.
[26]Mariana Francozo, '"Dressed Like an Amazon": The Transatlantic Trajectory of a Red Feather Coat', in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. K. Hill (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 191–93.
[27]For information on the portrait owned by Charles II, see Oliver Millar, *Tudor, Stuart, and Early Georgian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, Volume 1* (London: Phaidon, 1963), 115.
[28]*London Stage* 74.

Imitating the Inimitable: Indigenous Craft Influences on Domestic 'Indian' Feather Costumes in Chapman's *The Memorable Masque*

It is tempting to see the indigenous-made featherwork in *The Indian Queen* and *The Indian Emperour* as unique, as no other English documentation in the period describes feather costumes that were directly sourced from indigenous artists (as far as I have found). Behn herself described the feathers as 'inimitable'; a miniature argument about the inability of the English theatre to achieve similar aesthetic effects on its own (7). But in the next few pages, I will argue that much of the featherwork produced in England since the early seventeenth century, though not directly made by indigenous artisans, nonetheless was modelled on indigenous practices and aesthetics by creators who were trying to imitate the very indigenous garments Behn later would deem 'inimitable'.

Many scholars have noted that early modern English performances invariably deploy feathers in their representations of indigenous groups. The fact that these representations are not geographically precise – part of the Tupinambization of indigenous figures in early modern Europe – has been used to characterise them as fundamentally disconnected from any indigenous reality. As Suzanne Boorsch put it in her analysis of early modern 'Indian' performances in civic and royal festivals, 'where there is treatment of the realities of the New World, it is on a very superficial, usually abstract or symbolic, level. Most appearances of America have nothing to do with the realities'.[29] But befeathered 'Indian' costumes did have an aesthetic origin in specific indigenous material practices, even if these costumes were used representationally in inaccurate ways as shorthand for all kinds of 'Indians'. As Ulinka Rublack has observed, European craftsmen sometimes altered extant indigenous featherwork, or bought exotic feathers with the intent to produce their own versions of indigenous feather designs. In other words, featherwork that was modelled on indigenous forms, even if not made by indigenous craftspeople, might thus be considered a form of technological transfer or translation and therefore a species of indigenous influence on European craft forms. If we think of these imitations as a form of influence, the indigenous-made costumes that appeared in the Dryden 'Indian' plays appear not as anomalies, but as merely the logical endpoint of a history in which earlier attempts to imitate the techniques of indigenous feather art eventually trended toward the acquisition of the real thing.

Armed with this insight, let us return to the other feathered 'Indian' figures found in early seventeenth-century English performances and the aspects of actual indigenous featherwork processes that subtended their production. Berger's index of characters in English drama records twenty-three

[29]Suzanne Boorsch, 'America in Festival Presentations', in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old, Volume 1*, ed. Fredi Chiapelli, Michael J. B. Allen, and Robert Benson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 512.

performances in the pre-1660 era in which 'Indian' characters appear.[30] A number of these performances specifically mention feathers as a component of 'Indian' outfits. *The Temple of Love* (1634) featured a painted ornament of an 'Indian' figure whose 'tire and bases' were 'of severall coloured feathers'.[31] A 1633 entertainment in Edinburgh, put on for the benefit of Charles I, featured the allegorical figure of New Caledonia, whose 'attyre was of divers coloured feathers, which shew her to bee an *American*'.[32] *The Marriage of Oceanus,* an unperformed masque written by Richard Flecknoe to celebrate Cromwell's imperial expansion, imagined a similar spectacle in which America would be 'swarthy in a feathered garment'.[33] Davenant's *Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* (1629) featured both a Priest 'cloth'd in a Garment of Feathers longer then any of those that are worne by other Natives, with a Bonnet whose ornament of Plumes does likewise give him a distinction from the rest, and carryes in his hand a guilded Verge', as well as miscellaneous unnamed indigenous figures described as dressed in 'feather'd Habits and Bonnets', 'in their feather'd habits of *Peru*', and, later, as 'known by their *feather'd Habits, Claves,* and *Spears*'.[34] Dekker's *London's Tempe* associates its 'Indian' with exotic featherwork in another way, featuring a wooden 'Estridge' on which 'rides an Indian boy, holding in one hand a long Tobacco pipe, in the other a dart. His attire is proper to the Country'.[35] In this description, *London's Tempe* describes the ostrich-riding boy's costume in frustratingly tautological terms that may nonetheless suggest the involvement of feathers: the attire of the boy is 'proper to the Country'. Other entertainments repeat this formula: *The Triumphs of Honor and Industry* describes its 'Indians' as 'attired according to the true Nature of their Country'.[36] *Londini Status Pacatus* uses the same locution, featuring a chariot drawn by camels, each with 'an *Indian* mounted, and habited according to the manner of their Country'.[37] *The Masque of Flowers* features 'Indian' bearers attired 'like

[30]Berger's list: *Orlando Furioso*, *James the Fourth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Chrusothriambos, The Masque of the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn*, *The Triumphs of Honor and Industry*, *The Triumphs of Honor and Virtue*, *London's Tempe, Tempe Restored, Londini Scaturigo, The Temple of Love, The Triumphs of the Prince d'Amour, Porta Pietatis, Londini Status Pacatus, Four Plays in One, The City Madam, London's Triumph for Thomas Allen, Roxana, The Masque of Flowers, The Entertainment at Edinburgh, The Marriage of Oceanus and Brittannia*, and *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru.* Thomas Berger, *An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama, 1500–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57. Berger's index does not distinguish between 'Indian' to mean indigenous versus South Asian; as many scholars have noted, many seventeenth-century writers also did not make this distinction, and could sometimes freely mix cultural signifiers between East and West 'Indians'.

[31]Inigo Jones and William Davenent, *The Temple of Love* (London: 1634), A3r. EEBO / British Library, STC 14719.

[32]Anonymous, *The Entertainment of the High and Mighty Monarch Charles King of Great Britaine, France, and Ireland, Into His Auncient and Royall City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: 1633), 6. EEBO / Folger Shakespeare Library, STC 5023.

[33]Richard Flecknoe, *The Marriage of Oceanus and Brittania An Allegorical Fiction* (London: 1659), 33. EEBO / Huntington Library, Wing F1230A.

[34]William Davenant, *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* (London: 1658), 1, 2, 10, 23. EEBO / British Library, Wing D321.

[35]Thomas Dekker, *Londons Tempe, or, The Feild of Happines* (London: 1629), B2r. EEBO / Huntington Library, STC 6509.

[36]Thomas Middleton, *The Tryumphs of Honor and Industry* (London: 1617), A4v. EEBO / British Library, STC 17899.

[37]Thomas Heywood, *Londini Status Pacatus* (London: 1639), B4r. EEBO / Harvard Library, STC 13350.

Floridians'.[38] These texts unhelpfully inform us that their 'Indians' are, well, dressed like 'Indians'; however, given the strong association between these figures and feathers, it seems possible these descriptions may record further traces of the use of featherwork costumes in London civic performances.

But one seventeenth-century English performance far outstrips all the rest, both in terms of the scale of featherwork involved and in the documentation that survives. For *The Memorable Masque of the Middle Temple and Grey's Inn* we have a costume illustration; detailed costume descriptions; and a series of account records that enable us to know more about the networks of labour and knowledge that brought these feather costumes into existence. This masque, with text by George Chapman, was performed in 1613 for the marriage of the young Elizabeth of Bohemia, the very same aunt who would, forty years later, inform her nephew Charles II about his sister Mary of Orange's turn in a Tupi cape. The masque costumes, as they are described in Chapman's text, dripped with featherwork. The chief Maskers who were 'in Indian habits' had, 'betwixt every pane of embroidery … a rowe of white Estridge feathers' as well as 'about their necks, Ruffes of feathers, spangled with pearl and silver' and 'on their heads high-sprig'd feathers, compast in Coronets'. The chief masquers also had 'greaves or buskins' that were 'enterlac't with rewes of feathers, altogether estrangfull, and Indian like'. The torchbearers who accompanied the procession were 'showfully garnisht with several-hued feathers'. Finally, the chief masquers were preceded by chariots containing 'Virginian priests' who wore 'robes … tucked up before, strange hoods of feathers and scallops about their necks, and on their heads turbans, stuck with several coloured feathers, spotted with wings of flies of extraordinary bigness'.[39]

Chapman's text specifically singles out the 'rewes of feathers' as being 'estrangefull, and Indian-like', indicating that, here as elsewhere, featherwork was seen as a particularly indigenous form. The 'Indian-like' nature of these costumes came not just from the presence of feathers, but also from the way that the costumes generated the aesthetic effect central to indigenous featherwork: its iridescence. The light effects generated by indigenous featherwork were the subject of a great deal of European comment; indeed, Alessandra Russo and others have argued that the play of light and shadow was the most essential aesthetic feature of featherwork. In Russo's account, the brilliance of feathers was a central feature of their appeal in both pre- and post-Conquest contexts. For the Aztecs, the brilliance of feathers was an indication that they were an especially-intense expression of *tonalli,* a term meaning various things including 'irradiation', which was used to describe the animating element imbued in all things by the sun. This same brilliance would, post-

[38]Anonymous, *The Maske of Flowers* (London: 1614), B3v. EEBO / British Library, STC 17625.
[39]This text from Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong, *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 256.

conquest, be assimilable to Catholic aesthetic frameworks that used both numinosity and bird imagery as ways to represent the Holy Spirit.[40] Brilliance and iridescence were central to Incan feather aesthetics as well, a fact not lost on early European arrivals.[41] The brilliance of feathers was often metaphorically linked to that of precious metals and jewels, which were often complementary parts of the same artistic products. This mixing of metal surfaces with featherwork had been a feature of indigenous craft practices in both the Andes and in the Mexico Valley.[42] This tradition of mixing metals and feathers, in turn, was noted in Europe as a feature of indigenous costume in books like Vecellio's, as well as in the illustrations of the Stuttgart parade.[43]

The Memorable Masque draws on this aesthetic tradition, mixing lavish feather and metallic effects together to create heightened light effects. The show's second defining feature, after the extensive presence of feathers, is its absolute saturation with gilded materials. The two triumphal wagons were gilded (probably with orsedine, a cheap gold substitute); the 'ground cloth' worn by the chief masquers was silver, embroidered with suns of gold thread; they had 'sprigs' of gold and silver plate mixed into the rows of white ostrich feathers; neck-ruffs 'spangled' with pearl and silver; and silk stockings embroidered with gold. Gold and silver featured prominently, too, in the costumes of the horse attendants, torchbearers, and the other main characters of the masque, including, appropriately, the god Plutus.[44] Chapman's description pauses twice to dwell on the iridescence of these metallic-befeathered costumes, noting that 'the rays of the like plate, that mixing with the motion of the feathers, shewed exceedingly delightful and gracious' (256). The 'humble' feathers of the torchbearers, as well, 'stuck off the more amply, the Maskers high beauties, shining in the habits of themselves; and reflected in their kind, a new and delightfully-varied radiance on the beholders' (256). A contemporary eyewitness account, by praising the 'glittering show,' also seems to have responded to the light effects produced by these costumes.[45] A surviving illustration of one of the torchbearer costumes also appears to show a skirt with a feather base on which metallic medallions are overlain, perhaps modelled on a

[40]Alessandra Russo, *The Untranslatable Image* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), chapter 'Relics of Ixiptla'. See also the wonderful discussion of tonalli's role in indigenous featherworking processes found in Allison Caplan, 'The Living Feather: Tonalli in Nahua Feather Production', *Ethnohistory* 67, no. 3 (2020): 383–406.
[41]Stefan Hanß, 'Material Encounters: Knotting Cultures in Early Modern Peru and Spain', *The Historical Journal* 62 (2019), 589–91.
[42]Hanß 590–91.
[43]For Vecellio, see Jones and Rosenthal, 503. Rublack mentions gold as a component of the feather costumes in the Stuttgart parade in 'Performing America', 200–01, and these are visible in the illustrations she reproduces, especially 214. For the use of gold and silver threads in European featherworking and the connections between Continental featherworkers and goldsmiths, see Stefan Hanß, 'Making Featherwork in Early Modern Europe', in S. Burghartz, L. Burkart, C. Göttler, and U. Rublack (eds.), *Materialized Identities: Objects, Affects and Effects in Early Modern Culture, 1450–1750* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 153–55.
[44]Orgel and Strong 256.
[45]Orgel and Strong 255.

similar skirt worn by a 'Centurion of Virginia' in Vecellio's 1598 costume book, which Jones knew.[46]

By combining metallic and feathery materials to generate iridescence effects, the costumes in *The Memorable Masque* modelled themselves on indigenous aesthetics, even if these costumes were not directly produced by indigenous craftspeople. In fact, we know these costumes were produced in London by one Robert Jones – presumably the same Robert Jones who, when being given a pensioners' place in 1638, is identified as 'late his Majesty's haberdasher'.[47] Jones was paid the substantial sum of £190 for supplying the feathers and trimming suits and headpieces.[48] Stefan Hans, in his work on European feather artisans, has noted that haberdashers often had side-lines in feather manufacturing, and so this does not seem unusual.[49] It is not clear where Jones sourced the majority of his feathers, and they may well not have been of American origin; the only indication of their nature is that one set is described as 'estridge', or ostrich. Ostrich, a particularly high-value feather, passed into Europe from Ottoman traders, who originally sourced them in West Africa.[50] The metallic embroidery techniques used by the tailors who assembled the costumes were not American either, but rather drew on gold-work embroidery techniques known in Europe for centuries; similarly, the 'orsedine' gilding process used on the pageant wagons was a technique that had been known in England for some time.[51] But though these materials and techniques may have been Old World, they were used to cobble together spectacles that tried to imitate the distinctive aesthetic qualities of New World featherwork.

I have dwelt at length on this masque in particular because it provides an example of the more indirect ways in which indigenous featherwork aesthetics

[46]The illustration is reprinted in Orgel and Strong, 263. Orgel and Strong somewhat puzzlingly suggest that the costume is adapted from Vecellio's illustration of an *Indo Africano* (which they also reprint). I think they are correct to point to Vecellio as a source, but disagree with their diagnosis of which illustration Jones was drawing on. Vecellio description for the 'African Indian' explicitly notes that there are two Indies, and that this figure is from the East; and, more importantly, the costume does not contain the feathers which are the central feature of the Inigo Jones costume. The basic silhouette – headdress, greaves, skirt – of the torchbearer does resemble that of the 'Indo Africano' illustration, but Jones has also borrowed aspects of the Virginian illustrations, including the 'colored feather' crest of the 'Leader on the Battlefield' illustration, and the combination of precious metals and feathers found in the 'Centurion of Virginia' illustration, whose skirt strongly resembles the torchbearer skirt in the surviving Jones illustration, with a feather base added by Jones. Vecellio images reprinted with translation in Cesare Vecellio, *Cesare Vecellio's Habiti Antichi et Moderni: The Clothing of the Renaissance World*, eds. Margaret F. Rosenthal and Ann Rosalind Jones (London: Thames and Hudston Ltd, 2008), 503–04. Vecellio's illustrations were drawn from the engravings in de Bry's *Les Grands voyages,* which were in turn based on underlying drawings by Jacques le Moyne and Richard White, as part of the Ribault Florida expedition (1564) and the Hariot North Carolina expedition (1587), respectively. See Jones and Rosenthal, introduction, 35–37.

[47]John Bruce and William Hamilton, eds. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I, Volume 13* (London: Longman and Company, 1871), 175.

[48]Payment records helpfully reproduced in Martin Wiggins, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue, Volume VI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 280–86.

[49]For overlap between haberdashers and featherworkers, see Stefan Hanß, 'Making Featherwork', 157.

[50]Ulinka Rublack, 'Befeathering the European: The Matter of Feathers in the Material Renaissance', *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 1 (2021): 24.

[51]Korda 200.

exerted an influence in Europe, as craftsmen attempted to imitate or translate their visual effects using whatever local materials and craft techniques were available. In other words, though the costumes featured later in the century in Dryden's 'Indian' plays provide an example of indigenous artisans directly participating in the creation of English theatrical spectacle, this influence could also take more indirect forms. Put yet another way, when Charles II and Mary of Orange respectively watched and wore indigenous-made feather garb in 1664 and 1655, and when their aunt Elizabeth of Bohemia watched London-made 'Indian' costumes at her wedding in 1613, these two generations of Stuarts were not witnessing fundamentally different spectacles, but rather different degrees of the penetration of indigenous artistic influence into England.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have suggested that theatre historians might fruitfully draw from the insights of labour history, the material turn, and indigenous studies. I have focused here on featherwork, but similar observations might be made about a whole range of foreign items that filled English theatres, many of whose origins have not been sufficiently attended to by theatre historians. In Dryden's *Indian* plays alone, there are other examples of indigenous craftwork, most obviously the 'Indian Hamock discover'd' as the curtain rises in *The Indian Emperour,* for example (93). Another indication that other forms of indigenous technology were displayed in these plays comes to us from an unusual manuscript of *The Indian Emperour*, now held at the Wren Library (MS R.3.10). The connection of the Wren manuscript to the King's Company productions of the play is somewhat obscure; Fredson Bowers speculated that the text may have been for a private performance either by the extended Howard circle in the country or during a separately documented early amateur production at court, about which little is known.[52] A note on the side of the text reads 'ffor my part', indicating that the manuscript was used at least once as a guide for a performance. The MS text mostly hews closely to the 1667 first printing of the play, with a few significant changes in the stage directions and speech-headings. One of these differences indicates that additional indigenous craftwork may have been displayed in an early production. Act 4, Scene 3 opens with the description: 'A pleasant grotto discovered Fountaine spouting in it Indian rarities round about. Vasquez Pizarro and other Spaniards lying carelessly disarm'd two Spaniards dancing a Sarabband'[53] This text, unlike the printed version, indicates that the fountain has

[52]Fredson Bowers, 'The 1665 Manuscript of Dryden's *Indian Emperour*', *Studies in Philology* 48, no. 4 (1951): 739.
[53]Trinity College MS R3.10, f. 28v. In the 1667 printed text this direction reads '*A pleasant Grotto discover'd: in it a Fountain spouting; round about it Vasquez, Pizarro, and other Spaniards lying carelesly un-arm'd, and by them*

'Indian rarities round about', though it does not specify what precisely these are. The phrase 'rarities', however, had a particular meaning in the mid-seventeenth century that can illuminate what these may have been; it appears as a term in wunderkammer catalogues like the Tradescant collection (printed in 1656 as *Musaeum Tradescantianum: or, A collection of rarities*) and the Royal Society's collection (printed in 1685 as *Musæum regalis societatis, or, A catalogue and description of the natural and artificial rarities belonging to the Royal Society*). These collections of 'rarities' contained a great deal of indigenous material that gives us an idea of the items that may have been involved in any production linked to the Wren manuscript. The Royal Society collections, by the 1680s, included everything from a canoe, a poisoned dagger, a 'tamahauke, or Brasilian fighting club'; a 'West-Indian Bow, Arrows, and Quiver' (367), wampum (371); various examples of bark-work, rush-work, and porcupine-quill containers; and other objects, in addition to featherwork and hammocks.[54] The origin of these 'rarities' is unclear, and will remain so without more research on the potential circumstances surrounding the performance indicated by the manuscript. Their presence, however, suggests that indigenous artisans may have been directly behind aspects of *The Indian Emperour's* spectacle beyond just the featherwork costumes and hammock.

While I have focused here on the Americas and the contributions of indigenous craftspeople to Restoration theatrical spectacles, this kind of analysis can offer us a more richly textured account of the theatre's connections to other global sites as well. Textiles, particularly, call out for this kind of analysis, like the 'turkey-work' covers for chairs or the 'silk habits' procured for the King's Company musicians in the early 1660s.[55] Attending to these objects has the potential to enrich our understanding of the many forms of labour and expertise – not all of them European – that underpinned the spectacular productions of the early modern stage.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

many Indian Women, one of which Sings the following Song'. John Dryden, *The Indian Emperour,* (London: 1667), 45. EEBO / Huntington Library, Wing D2288.

[54]Grew 360–79.

[55]Robert D. Hume and Judith Milhouse, *A Register of English Theatrical Documents* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 72.