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John Ford's Strange Truth

From the 1620s to the 1630s, John Ford looked back at Shakespeare and made him strange. Both his most famous play, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and *The Broken Heart* revisit *Romeo and Juliet*, but *'Tis Pity* offers us a relationship which is troublingly endogamous rather than unacceptably exogamous, and *The Broken Heart* shows not passion but fragile, isolated people radically estranged from their own emotions. (Patricia Cahill suggests that *The Broken Heart* also echoes *Hamlet*: 'In much the same way as Laertes encounters the mad Ophelia in the fourth act of *Hamlet*, Ithocles comes upon his sister Penthea and discovers she is mad in Act IV of John Ford's *The Broken Heart* ... but Ford actually makes a significant departure' in that Laertes is stirred to action and Ithocles is not [Cahill 2015:15]). *Perkin Warbeck* is a sequel to *Richard III*, but it is a sequel which undoes its original, for the story it tells is fundamentally incompatible with Shakespeare's. *The Lover's Melancholy* is almost equally destabilising in that it echoes both *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*, collapsing the distinction between comedy and tragedy.

Above all, Ford reworks *Othello*, which lies behind the plots of four of his plays, *Love's Sacrifice*, *The Lady's Trial*, *The Fancies Chaste and Noble* and *The Queen*, published anonymously but now generally recognised as his. The quality of Ford's engagement with Shakespeare is such that he might almost be termed Shakespeare's first critic, but the estranging effect produced by these reworkings is also important in its own right: the subtitle of *Perkin Warbeck* is 'A Strange Truth', and the idea is underlined by the fact one of *Perkin Warbeck*'s characters is a member of the Stanley family, whose titles included that of Baron Strange. Of Ford's eight single-authored plays, the word 'strange' appears twice in *The Broken Heart*, eight times in *Perkin Warbeck*, nine times each in *The Fancies Chaste and*

Noble and *The Queen*, four times in *The Lady's Trial*, ten times in *The Lover's Melancholy*, eleven times in *'Tis Pity*, and five times in *Love's Sacrifice*. It also occurs seven times in *The Witch of Edmonton*, which he co-wrote with Dekker and Rowley, and five in *The Sun's Darling*, which he co-wrote with Dekker alone. This essay will argue that Ford uses a Shakespearean base-layer, which he expects to be familiar to his audiences, in order to highlight the strangeness of the stories which he himself tells.

The simplest use of 'strange' and its cognates in Ford is the term 'stranger', meaning either a foreigner or someone permanently or temporarily outside the community. An example of the first use comes from *The Lover's Melancholy*, where Amethus says of Thamasta's infatuation with the supposed Parthenophil, 'Dote on a stranger?' (4.1.1): Amethus is outraged that his nobly-born sister, who has scorned his own best friend Menaphon, should be ready to throw herself away on someone who is (as far as Amethus knows) not even from Cyprus, but was brought back by Menaphon from his travels abroad. Examples of the second use are found in *Love's Sacrifice*, where the Duke tells Bianca 'They shall be strangers to my heart / That envy thee thy fortunes' (I.i.194-5),¹ and in *The Broken Heart*, where Calantha says of Penthea 'I present 'ee / A stranger here in court, my lord' (II.ii.62) and Ithocles reproaches her,

We had one father, in one womb took life,
Were brought up twins together, yet have lived
At distance like two strangers.

(III.ii.34-6)

So far, so apparently simple: yet there is in fact a lurking complexity in the use of 'stranger' to mean 'foreigner' in that it implies a very tightly defined sense of community which is presumably shared and subscribed to by all those belonging to that community. The Ford who moved from Devon first to Oxford and then to London (and who if the prologue to *The*

Fancies Chaste and Noble is to be taken literally may also have travelled elsewhere) is unlikely to have had a 'You're not from round here' mentality, but he does implicitly ascribe such a stance to many of his characters. Frion in *Perkin Warbeck* is French - say no more; Grimaldi in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is a Roman, and seems not to be valued by anyone in Parma except the Cardinal, to whom he is related; Vasques in the same play is Spanish, and at the end of the action he explicitly distances himself from the community of which he has, it seems, been only ever temporarily and provisionally a part; and at the beginning of *The Broken Heart* the Spartan Crotolon indignantly demands what on earth his son wants to go to Athens for - isn't Sparta good enough for him?

This strongly developed sense that some people are of the group and others are strange to it helps power the mainspring of Ford's drama, which is his sustained interest in relationships which transgress norms. Bianca in *Love's Sacrifice*, Castamela in *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, and Perkin Warbeck all marry spectacularly above themselves (the technical term is hypergamy). Annabella mates with her own brother. Penthea in *The Broken Heart* marries a man much older than herself, Auria in *The Lady's Trial* is also older than his bride, and Eroclea in *The Lover's Melancholy* is threatened with rape by her prospective father-in-law. The heroine of *The Queen* marries a subject, and Calantha in *The Broken Heart* would like to do the same. Nancy A. Gutierrez has argued that *The Broken Heart* makes marriage itself strange :

While Spartan values are maintained in the public arena, the play's story of unfulfilled love demonstrates the cost to the private realm that adherence to such sterile guidelines demands. The social practice of the arranged marriage thus provides both the instigation and the complication of the plot of the play.

(Gutierrez 2003: 67)

Moreover, she suggests that it does so in a way which might well make the audience seem strange to each other: 'it is probable that audience reaction to Penthea's plight would have been divided, rather than collective' (71).

In all these cases what is most significantly strange is the idea or actuality of a sexual relationship which is contrary to social expectation. In *The Broken Heart*, Phulas is interested only in novelty: 'O my lord, / The rarest, quaintest, strangest, tickling news' (II.i.43).

However what is truly strange is Calantha's behaviour: Croton when the news of the king's death is confirmed to Calantha says 'Most strange!' (V.ii.34) and Armostes thinks 'Tis strange, these tragedies should never touch on / Her female pity' (V.iii.94-5). Jessica Dyson suggests that the reactions of those around Calantha 'may be admiration for her Spartan stoicism ... [but] ... could also be seen as critical of the Caroline court's attempts to mask disorder in the state through the orderly veneer of the masque form' (Dyson 2015), but for both Croton and Armostes what is fundamental here is that laws of gender are in their view being violated. That is characteristic, for most often in Ford the word 'strange' is attached to gendered, usually specifically sexual behaviour. In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, the word 'strange' functions as a *leitmotif*. Florio says, 'My lord Soranzo, this is strange to me, / Why you should storm, having my word engaged' (I.ii.53-4). Philotis says to Richardetto 'Alas, I fear / You mean some strange revenge' (II.iii.14-5); Vasques says to Soranzo 'the next news I tell you shall be wonders' (IV.iii.161);² and when Giovanni says 'tell him more, I will come' Vasques replies, 'These words are strange to me' (V.iii.49-50). In the final scene Vasques makes four pronouncements of strangeness: 'What strange riddle's this?' (V.vi.29); 'Tis most strangely true' (V.vi.60); 'Strange miracle of justice!' (V.vi.108); and 'this strange task being ended, I have paid the duty to the son which I have vowed to the father' (V.vi.110-12). Finally the Cardinal declares, 'never yet / Incest and murder have so strangely met'

(V.vi.156-7). Each of these uses relates to an actual or potential sexual relationship, the first to Soranzo's courtship of Annabella, the second to Hippolita's adultery with Soranzo and the rest all directly or indirectly to the incestuous relationship between Giovanni and Annabella. As Catherine Silverstone observes, the strangeness of human sexual behaviour is powerfully troped by heart imagery, conventional in love poetry but here made shockingly and savagely strange by the presence of a *real* heart on stage, even if in performance it is likely to have been only an animal's: 'Although these characters assert that physical anatomization will reveal the essential truth of the heart and its desire, the reality of an anatomized heart achieves a quite different result' (Silverstone 2010: 83). When those present at the banquet fail to recognise Annabella's heart, the core of human identity is thus made strange to itself and to us.

In *Love's Sacrifice*, too, what is strange is the heart, albeit in a less literal sense. Fernando says to D'Avolos on being told that Fiormonda is in love with him, 'Sure you are strangely out of tune, sir' (I.i.227), and to Fiormonda herself,

I must acknowledge, madam, I observe
In your affects to me a thing most strange,
Which makes me so much honour you the more.

(I.2.121-3)

Fiormonda meanwhile tells her brother that the boys of Pavia 'will invent / Some strangely shaped man-beast that may for horns / Resemble thee, and call it Pavy's duke' (4.1.36-8) and Fernando that

No merit can be greater than your praise,
Whereat I strangely wonder, how a man
Vowed, as you told me, to a single life,

Should so much deify the saints from whom
You have disclaimed devotion.

(4.1.237-241)

Finally Fiormonda when Roseilli's disguise is revealed exclaims 'Strange miracle!' (5.3.8).

In *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, too, strangeness goes hand in hand with sexuality. Flavia says 'I could, indeed la, / Long for some strange *good things* now' (2.1.34-5; italics in original); her intention is to suggest that she is pregnant. The word also occurs when Camillo and Vespucci are discussing Flavia's attitude to her former husband Fabricio:

CAMILLO [*Aside*]

Why 'tis possible,

Shee ha's not yet forgot a' was *her husband*.

VESPUCCI [*Aside*]

That were strange, oh 'tis a *precious trincket*.

Was ever puppet so slipt up?

(2.1.55-8; italics in original)

As so often in Ford, what is strange here is at the same time uncannily and inappropriately familiar: Flavia was once one flesh with Fabricio, but is now completely disconnected from him. Divorce, unusual and indeed almost unthinkable in the seventeenth century, occurs both here and in *The Lady's Trial*, and Ford might also have been aware that the historical equivalent of Huntly in *Perkin Warbeck* had been divorced from Princess Annabella of Scotland (whom he may have supposed to be Katherine Gordon's mother). The word divorce also occurs, albeit metaphorically, in *The Broken Heart* (II.iii.57). The reason for the recurrence of the idea is surely that divorce is in a seventeenth-century context the most surprising estrangement of all, putting asunder what was once declared indissoluble and

making two separate entities of what had once been declared one flesh. Flavia refers to herself as one of

those wives whose innocence

Stranger to language, spoke obedience onely.

And such a wife was Flavia to Fabricio.

(2.1.104-6)

Since her divorce from him, she has in effect become estranged from herself, and the result is an estrangement also from language, since we learn later that every word she has spoken to Camillo and Vespucci has been insincere.

Flavia is not the only character in *Fancies* whose sexual history is made to seem strange.

Troylo-Savelli remarks of his uncle's supposed impotence that

'Tis strange,

Such naturall defects at no time checks

A full and free sufficiency of spirit.

(2.2.46-8)

Morosa tells Castamela that the Marquis will do no more than feel 'Your hands to kisse them, Your faire, pure, white hands. What strange businesse is it?' (2.2.199-200?) and Castamela when she begins to understand encourages Morosa, 'Be plainer: I begin to like thee strangely' (2.2.227?). As the plot begins to be wound up Octavio declares, 'We shall quickly order / Strange reformation, Sirs, and you will finde it' (5.1.8-9), while Secco tells of a strange event:

Strange, and scarce to be credited; a gelding was lately seene to leape an old Mare;

and an old man of one hundred and twelve stood in a white sheet for getting a wench of fiftene with childe, here hard by, most admirable and portentous.

(5.2.86-9)

This refers to Old Parr, who came to court in September 1635, said to be aged 152 years. He was clearly quite a celebrity for the brief period before his death on 14 or 15 November 1635. An autopsy was performed by William Harvey and John Taylor wrote a verse pamphlet about him called *The Old, Old, Very Old Man* telling the story of how he had impregnated Katherine Milton when he was 105 and had to do penance in Alberbury parish church. The DNB comments that ‘John Taylor gave Parr’s supposed longevity a moralistic slant: Parr was an emblem of old England, subsisting on a simple diet and hard physical labour, and uncorrupted by metropolitan luxury. His sudden demise on arrival in London proved that it was intemperate living which explained why people could no longer emulate the longevity of the biblical patriarchs’ (NDNB). For Ford, though, what is of interest is not the old man’s alleged longevity but his unusual sexual prowess, which apparently enabled him to impregnate a woman when he was over a hundred years old. Finally when Flavia interrogatively repeats Octavio’s definition of the Fancies themselves (his nieces Floria, Silvia, and Clarella) as jewels he assures her that ‘No strangers eye ere view’d them’ (5.3.40), which officially suggests chastity but also, in the context of this salacious, innuendo-laden play, might just carry a faint whiff of incest.

The explicit or implicit sexuality of the word ‘strange’ in all these uses may make us suspicious of its occurrence in *The Lady’s Trial*. Aurelio in his first speech says,

Had I been
No stranger to your bosom, sir, ere now
You might have sorted me in your resolves
Companion to your fortunes.

(1.1.130-3)

Aurelio thinks Auria should have been frank with him about his financial difficulties, which he correctly diagnoses to have been incurred by Auria's marriage. Spinella will later suggest that what really motivates Aurelio is jealousy:

Whiles you, belike,
Are furnished with some news for entertainment
Which must become your friendship, to be knit
More fast betwixt your souls by my removal
Both from his heart and memory.

(2.4.64-68)

It is never explicitly stated that there is a homoerotic element to the two men's relationship, but the suggestion is clearly there, and it is underlined by the fact both the play's two other uses of 'stranger' are implicitly connected to sex. Levidolche says to Martino,

I from a stranger's table rather wish
To earn my bread, than from a friend's by gift
Be daily subject to unfit reproofs.

(2.2.65-7)

Martino in turn uses the same language back to her when he asks,

Are you grown so rampant
That from a private wanton thou proclaimst thyself
A baggage for all gamesters, lords, or gentlemen,
Strangers, or home-spun yeomen, footposts, pages,
Roarers or hangmen?

(5.1.14-18)

The first time the word is used, Martino suspects Levidolche of sexual misconduct; the second time he is sure. In fact, she is technically innocent: although she has been tempted to

infidelity her new love is her estranged husband, to whom she is now determined to prove faithful. Technical innocence, however, does not really mask the fact that Levidolche, like Bianca in *Love's Sacrifice*, has been subject to strange desires.

The one common element in the otherwise radically opposed perspectives of Martino and Levidolche is the idea of the stranger. This is ironically inflected by the fact that the supposed stranger is actually familiar, Benazzi being Levidolche's previous husband, but this is merely an addendum to the basic question of whether one should or shouldn't sleep with strangers. Elsewhere in the play, Piero says that despite her natural advantages Amoretta is 'yet possessed so strangely' with the desire to marry a nobleman (1.1.84) and Auria declares,

if I must lose

Spinella, let me not proceed to misery

By losing my Aurelio. We through madness

Frame strange conceits in our discoursing brains

And prate of things as we pretend they were.

(3.3.150-154)

Soon after, when Auria's sister-in-law Castanna says she does not know where his wife Spinella is, Auria declares 'Strange! Nowhere to be found out?' (3.3.192). Later the sisters' cousin Malfato says 'Listen / To a strange tale, which thus the author sighed' (4.1.30-1), while Adurni, who had tried and failed to seduce Spinella, tells Auria,

Oh, strange! By all the comforts of my hopes

I found a woman good - a woman good!

(4.3.79-80)

In all these uses there is a latent erotic charge. Amoretta is strange about her marriage; Auria's unanchored and apparently impersonal observation about strange conceits could

apply as readily to his friend Aurelio as to his wife Spinella, and increases the sense of a potential homerotic element to their friendship. It is strange that Spinella should disappear, but strange too that she should be chaste, and most typically for Ford, Malfato has a strange feeling for her, which he fears comes close to incest because they are cousins. Here strangeness means too close a relationship, and yet sometimes it means not like a relation at all: Castanna says to Malfato, 'Your late strangeness hath bred marvel in us' (4.1.85). A similar idea lurks behind Auria's reproach to Spinella that,

Yet in sooth,

My dearest, I might blame your causeless absence,
To whom my love and nature were no strangers;
But being in your kinsman's house, I honour
His hospitable friendship, and must thank it.

(5.2.171-5)

This apparently simple passage is in fact essence of Ford. Auria should not be a stranger to his wife (yet apparently is); on the other hand, his assumption that all is well because she is at the house of a relation is savagely undercut by the fact that that relation is guiltily in love with her, and desires a connection which he believes to be incestuous.

The Queen offers a similar pattern of uses of strangeness, to the extent that this one word alone might seem to testify to Ford's authorship even if there were no other signs of it. In the first occurrence of the word, Almada asks,

Fy, Alphonso,
Will you commit another strange commotion
With your unruly tongue[?]

(sig. B2v)

Here what would be strange is something which is ostensibly primarily political, Alphonso's refusal to render obedience to the queen, but at the root of that lies a simple and radical misogyny, coupled with a potential glance back, as so often in Ford, at the career of the second Earl of Essex, condemned to death by Ford's own great-uncle Lord Chief Justice Popham for rebelling against Elizabeth. Essex had once been the queen's favourite, and it is clear from the outset that there is also a potential erotic charge to the relationship between Ford's fictional queen and Alphonso, making it entirely credible that his apparent hate should so quickly convert to love; Almada is lacking in insight when he says, 'Tis strange my Lord / Your love should seem so mighty in your hatred' (sig. F1v). When the queen speaks to him Alphonso says 'She would perswade mee strangely' (sig. C2v), hinting at a sexual undertow, while Velasco assures Salassa, with whom he is in love,

You dare not sift the honor of my faith
By any strange injunction, which the speed
Of my glad undertaking should not cheerfully
Attempt, or perish in the sufferance of it.

(sig. C4r)

After Salassa has revealed what she wants Velasco to do - abstain from using his sword - she says cruelly, 'Your friends think we have done strange things this while' (sig. C4v), that is, they think the couple have been having sex, but in fact what Salassa has done is to emasculate Velasco. As a result of Salassa's injunction, Velasco himself becomes strange: once he was 'The wonder of the time' (sig. D4v), but now Alphonso says of his apparent cowardice: 'Is not this strange Muretto?' (sig. D1v). Even when Velasco resolves to break the injunction and act as the queen's champion, she accuses him of drawing his sword 'upon a ground so giddy / That thou art but a stranger in the cause / Thou wouldst defend' (sig. F2r). As a result of his love for Salassa, Velasco has become strange to himself and others.

It is therefore no surprise that the Shakespeare play to which Ford is most consistently drawn is *Othello*, in which a black man strangely marries a white woman, and where Gratiano when the death of Desdemona is revealed says ‘’Tis a strange truth’ (5.2.185). There are echoes of *Othello* as well as of *Romeo and Juliet* in *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, in the shape of Soranzo’s murderous jealousy, and the debt is unmistakable in two other plays, *Love’s Sacrifice* and *The Lady’s Trial*. In the first of these, both the initially Italian setting and the basic plot premise of *Othello* are reprised as Philippo Caraffa, the Duke of Pavia, goaded into suspecting that his wife is having an affair with his closest friend, murders them both. The Iago character, Roderico D’Avolos, has names which echo both the actual name of Roderigo and the supposed diabolism of Iago; the Desdemona character, the Duchess Bianca, has a name which echoes that of the courtesan who loves Cassio. The Duke doubly recalls the language of Othello himself when he says ‘I am a monarch of felicity, / Proud in a pair of jewels rich and beautiful’ (1.1.132-3), recalling both Othello’s initial happiness - ‘I cannot speak enough of this content’ (2.1.89) - and his subsequent comparison of Desdemona to a pearl (5.2.345) and to a chrysolite (5.2.141). D’Avolos’ interpretation of what he takes Bianca and Fernando to be saying recalls Iago’s similar glossing of Cassio’s alleged dream (2.3.53ff), and Fernando clearly shares Cassio’s scale of values when he reacts with lightning speed to a perceived threat to his reputation: ‘How’s that? My reputation? Lay aside / Superfluous ceremony. Speak, what is’t?’ (1.1.213-4), just as Cassio regards his reputation as ‘the immortal part of myself’ (2.3.259-60). Bianca proposes to intercede for Roseilli (1.2.171-5) and later for Mauruccio (4.1.122-3) as Desdemona does for Cassio (3.3.45-51); and the Abbot of Monaco, who is Bianca’s uncle and arrives on a visit, echoes Lodovico. Also as in *Othello* there are games played with the audience’s sense of time: Bianca says at 2.1.141 that this is the third time Fernando has told her he loves her, but it is the first such declaration that

we have seen. We also experience as preternaturally short the time elapsing between the revelation of Julia's, Colona's and Morona's pregnancies and their entrance each with a baby in her arms. Ford's final rewriting of *Othello* comes in his last play, *The Lady's Trial*, which is also set in Italy (this time in Genoa), and here the parallels are even closer in that the hero Auria first wars against the Turks and is subsequently sent to govern the island of Corsica. Again, too, it is the hero's friend and most trusted counsellor who assures him that his wife is unfaithful, and again the warrior husband is older than his wife. However, though each of these echoes *Othello*, none of them reproduces it, something which is most strikingly noticeable in *The Queen* where the Iago figure is well-intentioned. *Othello* itself is thus made strange even as Ford echoes what is strange within it.

As well as with sexuality, strangeness is coupled with truth. In *Love's Sacrifice*, when Bianca visits Fernando in his bed he asks 'Is't possible 'tis you?' and Bianca replies "'Tis possible' (2.4.13). In *The Lover's Melancholy*, Pelias very early on asks 'As I am modest, I protest 'tis strange; / But is it possible?' (I.i.7-8). He proves to mean sailing in rough seas, but his is a question that in Ford can apply to almost anything. In *The Lady's Trial*, Malfato says his story is 'Exceeding wonderful, / Beyond all wonder; yet 'tis known for truth' (4.1.47-7). In *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, Troylo-Savelli's assurance to Livio that all will be well is greeted with "'Tis strange, is't possible?' (5.1.142). The coupling of strangeness with truth is most resonant in *Perkin Warbeck*, where everything is strange, even the genre: Miles Taylor elegantly suggests that '*Perkin Warbeck* is a history play about the end of history plays' (Taylor 2008: 395), that is that it makes its own shape and nature strange. Mario DiGangi notes that 'The problem of truth is central' to the play, but that 'the play's complete title - *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck, A Strange Truth* - reveals the stress points of Ford's rhetorical claim to truth' (578). Henry says Lambert Simnel has passed

‘From the scullery to a falc’ner; strange example!’ (I.i.66); strange indeed, and in fact unique - history affords no other instance of a pretender famous primarily for inventing a kind of cake - so arguably not an example at all, since there is no one else like him; in short, just strange. Perkin declares that ‘our misfortunes since / Have ranged a larger progress through strange lands’ (II.i.56-7) and Crawford says,

’Tis more than strange; my reason cannot answer

Such argument of fine imposture, couched

In witchcraft of persuasion, that it fashions

Impossibilities, as if appearance

Could cozen truth itself

(II.iii.1-5)

This is not only a strange truth, but a strangeness that makes truth itself strange.

There is also an added quality to the word in this particular play. When the treason of Sir William Stanley is revealed to Henry Durham says to the king ‘You alter strangely, sir’ (I.iii.89), and Henry himself says of Sir William’s defection ‘My sad soul / Divines strange troubles’ (I.iii.125-6). One of the titles of the Stanley family was Lord Strange, a title most famously held by Ferdinando Stanley, later 5th earl of Derby, the patron of Strange’s Men. It is sometimes said that this was pronounced ‘strang’, but there are puns of the period which clearly assume the pronunciation strange: Ferdinando’s motto was *Sans changer ma verité*, and ‘The Stanley Poem’ refers to the alleged origin of the eagle and child myth as ‘the like so straunge a thing a thing hath not beene seene’ (Second Fytte, l. 11). I have observed elsewhere that *Richard III* is virtually the only Shakespeare play where the word ‘strange’ never occurs at all, and suggested that this may well have been because it would have embarrassed the Stanley family to mention that name in connection with the succession to the

Crown and the replacement of one dynasty by another (Hopkins 2006). Like *Othello*, though, *Richard III* is itself made strange by Ford. *Perkin Warbeck* presents itself as the sequel to *Richard III*, and when Dalyell says Perkin was ‘bought and sold’ (V.i.68) he directly echoes the warning to Norfolk in Shakespeare’s play that ‘Dickon thy master is bought and sold’ (5.3.305-6). Both plays present themselves as telling a historical truth, yet both cannot be true, for in *Richard III* Richard has both the Princes in the Tower murdered and in *Perkin Warbeck* one of them has apparently survived (on the question of Perkin’s veracity, see for instance Monsarrat). Moreover, Ford confuses the issue by including echoes of *Richard II* as well as *Richard III* (Allen 2017: 344; Candido 1980: 313; see also Anderson and Leggatt). Strangest of all, then, is ‘Perkin, the Christian world’s strange wonder’ (V.ii.36), and the strange truth the play tells about him, which suggests that what we think we know to be true may not be true at all, and that truth itself may be strange.

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Notes

¹ Later Julia says to Morona 'Madam, though strangers, yet we understand / Your wrongs do equal ours' (3.1.151-2).

² There is a similar craving for novelty in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, where Bergetto declares 'O uncle, I have heard the strangest news that ever came out of the mint' (I.iii.30-1) and adds 'this fellow hath a strange horse' (I.iii.37).