
Introduction

Joachim Frenk and Lena Steveker

The prologue of Thomas Heywood's tragicomedy *The English Traveller*, which was first performed around 1627 and first printed in 1633, seeks to focus the minds of its audience on what is to follow on stage:

A Strange Play you are like to haue, for know,
We use no Drum, nor Trumpet, nor Dumbe shew;
No Combate, Marriage, not so much to day,
As Song, Dance, Masque, to bumbaste out a play: [...]
(*The English Traveller*, n.p.)¹

The prologue announces that the strangeness of this play will be created by the absence of conventional Jacobean theatrical devices, by dispensing with the stage machinery that has been established to create strangeness on stage. The use of instruments, songs and dances, masques and dumb-shows was a performative convention which, by the 1620s, had become such an integral part of theatrical entertainments that they had lost their edge and sensational quality. Relying on less is more, Heywood's prologue argues, and it alerts the audience that his play's strangeness will achieve its theatrical effect through the playwright's denial to meet the audience's expectations. Stripping the dramatic text of all visual and acoustic ornaments is marked as a strange theatrical experiment, and the play will put this theatrical reduction to the test to see 'if once bare Lines will beare it' (*The English Traveller*, n.p.).

From the beginning of the early Stuart epoch, strangeness was often invoked on stage. The years after the death of Elizabeth I and the accession of James I brought with them many events and developments that were strange, events contemporaries struggled to fit into their cognitive and philosophical frameworks.² Under the pressure of the epoch's strangeness, world views were changing. Shakespeare probably wrote *Othello* around 1603/04, at the time of the regime change from the last Tudor queen to the first Stuart king. Desdemona's repetitive comment 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange' (*Othello*, 1.3.160),³ while in the play directly referring to the stories Othello has told her about his life, can also be read as a comment on the early Stuart *zeitgeist*.⁴

However, the bare lines of a play quoted in Heywood's prologue were by no means the only performative practice that could delineate, circumscribe, transform, question, subvert or affirm the ever-shifting category of the strange

in early Stuart discourses. Paintings and sculptures, buildings and furniture, clothes and fashions, new scientific findings and their dissemination – all kinds of texts and objects that cut across the spectrum of cultural production contributed to shifting notions of strangeness. The very idea of strangeness made it possible to take into view, and to deal with, the urban, social, political and religious changes and developments that caused the categories of the self and the other to be scrutinised and redefined in the early Stuart period. Strangeness was an open and highly adaptable concept, and both its vagueness and its promise of the transgressively interesting were employed in ongoing early modern debates of contested cultural territories.

Strange fashions and tastes were eagerly embraced by the Jacobean and Caroline courts. The self-conceptions of the English elites were increasingly shaped by the ostentatious and splendid performances of power and wealth of their European counterparts. Linda Levy Peck has observed that members of the courts of both James I and Charles I ‘copied, imported, and at times ... tried to produce or reproduce international style’.⁵ Wealthy collectors of strange objects were inspired by continental European models which they appropriated into English versions of the *Wunderkammer*. Grand building schemes drew on continental styles and patterns. The evolving new spaces and practices did not merely serve as material performances of power and wealth, but also showed to which degree elements that were ‘strange’ to early modern minds were instrumental in making these performances effective.

Unsurprisingly, London was the stage for many of these performances. The metropolis was caught in a whirlwind of urban development which might have evoked wonder and fear, shock and awe in its inhabitants, who found themselves confronted with a cityscape that was metamorphosing to an unseen extent. In addition to the numerous building projects, the opening up of new spaces and the conversion of old spaces to new purposes, London saw a constant influx of strangers from all over the British Isles and Europe (and, in a few cases, beyond). The burgeoning market in printed news provided yet another space to negotiate notions of strangeness. ‘Strange’ news, both religious and political, became a stock element of a quickly proliferating news culture.⁶ The contentious issue of religion also served to negotiate strangeness, as various forms of Protestantism struggled for dominance in opposition to a monarchy suspected of seeking a rapprochement with Catholicism. Politics, too, became increasingly strange as the gaps between political factions deepened into the unbridgeable chasm of the civil wars which brought an end to the early Stuart period with the beheading of Charles I in 1649.

Early modern critics have noted for some time that the exploration of strangeness is a promising undertaking, but the enormous potential of the term for the understanding of early seventeenth-century culture has only been gradually realised. The essay collection *Cannibals, Witches and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance* (1987),⁷ edited by Marjorie Garber, is more focused on the project of productively defamiliarising the Renaissance in and for the late twentieth-century readers and on processes of othering than it is interested

in what early modern texts have to say about strangeness. John Demaray, in *Shakespeare and the Spectacles of Strangeness* (1998), argues that *The Tempest* is firmly rooted in the genre of the courtly masque genre, which the play in turn helps to develop in new directions. For Demaray, the play is strangely spectacular in that its specific generic and structural qualities combine with the audience reaction of wonder.⁸ While Demaray focuses on generic issues and does not enter into a definitory discussion of strangeness, Emily C. Bartels, in her *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation and Marlowe* (1993) promotes a specific understanding of strangeness as an Elizabethan term: 'To enter upon the Marlovian stage is to enter a landscape filled with strangers and strange lands'.⁹ In the fashion of the New Historicism, Bartels posits that, written at a critical juncture of nascent English imperialism and a burgeoning theatrical scene, Marlowe's drama testifies to and engages with a growing concern with strangeness in various manifestations. In doing so, the Marlovian canon immediately responds to England's overseas expansion and its encounters with foreign countries and cultures which produced the need to affirm and enforce the distinctions between self and other. For Bartels, therefore, early modern strangeness connotes little more than the first meaning given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'Of persons, language, customs etc.: Of or belonging to another country; foreign, alien'. This meaning has hardly shifted from the etymological root of the word 'strange', which, as the *OED* records, was transmitted into English via the Old French *estrange* that in turn developed from the 'Latin *extrāneus* external, foreign'.

The semantic field of the foreign is certainly a crucial element in the multiple meanings of strangeness, but many dramatic texts from the early Stuart epoch insist that it is by no means the only one. To take one example, in one of the pivotal scenes of Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (c. 1623/24), the scheming Livia is the enabler of the ruin of the beautiful Bianca, who has been brought from Venice to Florence as the wife of Leantio, who keeps her locked up as 'a gem no stranger's eye must see' (*Women Beware Women*, 3.1.175).¹⁰ On behalf of the Duke, who desires Bianca, Livia invites Leantio's mother to her own house and lets Bianca also be brought there so that she can be seduced or raped by the Duke. In the play's chess scene, Livia employs a rhetoric of unnatural strangeness to make Leantio's mother stay in and Bianca come to her house:

LIVIA [to the Widow] You make yourself so strange, never come at us;
And yet so near a neighbour, and so unkind. [...]
MOTHER My thanks must need acknowledge so much, madam.
LIVIA How can you be so strange then?

(*Women Beware Women*, 2.2.139–182)

Livia turns the mother's alleged making herself strange into a charge. She marks the mother's strangeness as the opposite of the normality of neighbourly familiarity Livia pretends to wish for. She has thus laid the ground for her demand that the mother stay:

LIVIA I swear you shall stay supper. We have no strangers, woman;
 None but my sojourners and I, this gentleman
 And the young heir his ward. You know our company. [...]
By my troth, wench,
 I'll keep you while I have you. You have great business, sure,
 To sit alone at home! I wonder strangely
 What pleasure you take in't.

(*Women Beware Women*, 2.2.171–182)

The manipulative rhetoric of strangers and strangeness in the sense of foreignness predominates, but Livia employs the adjective 'strangely', at the end of the line and preceded by the verb 'wonder'. She thus undertakes a semantic shift in her mock rebuke of the mother's homeliness; strangeness is transformed from the quality of being foreign to a marker of perceptual irritation and moral rejection. Using unmannerly strangeness as a category of reproach, Livia bullies the mother into staying and entering into a game of chess with her. Pretending to learn only then that Bianca is waiting at home, waiting for the mother's return, Livia then insists, in her false pose of accommodating hostess, on welcoming Bianca as a stranger – of the sort she has just ruled out in her household:

LIVIA O, what's become
 Of the true hearty love was wont to be
 'Mongst neighbours in old time?
 MOTHER And she's a stranger, madam.
 LIVIA The more should be her welcome. When is courtesy
 In better practice than when 'tis employed
 In entertaining strangers?

(*Women Beware Women*, 2.2.216–221)

As soon as Livia has engaged the mother in the chess-powerplay, her accomplice Guardiano can take Bianca on a tour upstairs: 'The gentlewomen, / Being a stranger, would take more delight / To see your rooms and pictures' (*Women Beware Women*, 2.2.270–272). After the Duke has seduced/raped her, the dishonoured Bianca turns from the contented wife of Leantio into a bitter and increasingly luxury-seeking liability in Leantio's house. Leantio's mother wonders what has changed her daughter-in-law: "'Tis the most sudden'st, strangest alteration, / And the most subtlest, that e'er wit at threescore / Was puzzled to find out' (*Women Beware Women*, 2.3.63–65). The stranger Bianca undergoes the superlative 'strangest alteration', and the mother's puzzlement is equalled by her rejection of it. When Leantio realises that he has lost Bianca to the Duke, he enters into a monologue that will procure him the love of Livia. Leantio cannot handle the change he has to face: 'So new it [this affliction] is / To flesh and blood, so strange, so insupportable / A torment' (*Women Beware Women*, 3.2.248–252). By parallelism, 'strange' is here aligned with 'insupportable' – Leantio struggles to live with the strange change of Bianca and his loss of her. Bianca, when left alone by her former husband, comes to see the trajectory of her life and fortune in (what we may anachronistically call) gendered terms: 'How strangely woman's fortunes come about! / This was the farthest

way to come to me' (*Women Beware Women*, 4.1.23–24). Bianca expresses her bewilderment and lament about her fortunes, which correspond to Leantio's and his mother's states of mind and their uses of strangeness, by resorting once more to 'strangely'. Throughout *Women Beware Women*, strangeness is a quality that fluctuates between the subject that is strange – for instance, the Venetian Bianca in Florence – and multiple perceptions and expressions of strangeness by the *dramatis personae*. Strangeness is a protean term that is meant to signify uncertainties it is not intended to resolve.

In his recent encompassing and thorough exploration of strangeness in Jacobean drama, Callan Davies concludes:

'Strange' is a major term in the Jacobean theatrical vocabulary and it is more broadly a fundamental concept within the early modern English cultural imagination. While the term is surprisingly – perhaps bewilderingly – flexible, it is not altogether indefinable: it signifies a combination of abstract and literal thought – particularly when used to describe an event, visual manifestation, or figure; it is almost always highly moralised yet contains paradoxical value judgements – of attraction and repulsion, power and impotence, admonition and disapproval; it connotes national, geographical, emotional, and sexual distance – what might be termed a mixture of both longing and belonging; and it is highly euphemistic, able to express indirectly and to masquerade, for instance, as a visual account without providing any physical detail at all.¹¹

Davies lists many important aspects of strangeness in Jacobean drama that are also applicable to early Stuart drama and other texts in general. The sprawling syntax of his attempt at an inclusive definition of strangeness indicates the multifaceted and ultimately elusive character of strangeness. It is an attraction of strangeness that it is able to transgress boundaries of meaning; it can be a marker of a perceptual uncertainty and of an avowed incapability to understand what the early modern subject is confronted with. In this respect, strangeness operates at the limits of early Stuart world views.

The contributions to this volume address very different ways in which early Stuart drama engages with strangeness. They probe into the richness of strangeness's semantic potential at a time when it was used remarkably often in performative texts. In "As a Stranger Give it Welcome": Foreignness and Wonder in Jacobean London', Lois Potter is concerned with how the Jacobean stage negotiates attitudes to the 'stranger' at a time when a Scottish king and his followers arrived in London in 1603–04. Discussing a wide range of plays, and also a pageant, Potter argues that they represent the 'stranger' both as pathetic victim and as someone outside Anglophone language and culture. She reads *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), *Sir Thomas More* (1600), *King Lear* (1605/06), *Hamlet* (c. 1600), *The Tempest* (1610/11) and other plays by Shakespeare alongside Dekker's and Jonson's entertainment performed on the occasion of King James's entry into London on 15 March 1604, *Westward Ho!* (by Dekker and Webster, 1604) and *Eastward Ho!* (by Chapman, Jonson and Marston, 1605), showing that in these texts the meaning of 'strange' oscillates between 'weird', 'foreign' and 'wondrous'.

In 'The *Tempest* and *The Faerie Queene*: Shakespeare's Debt to Spenserian Strangeness', John Roe continues the discussion of Shakespeare, more specifically of *The Tempest*, which he sees as distinguishing itself by its depiction of strangeness in terms of both character and incident. Roe argues that, in deploying and developing his understanding of the strange, Shakespeare takes his cue to a degree from the first Folio edition of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* (1609), whose allegorical method also employs the odd and the unfamiliar as well as reactions to these. With an observant eye for textual detail, Roe demonstrates how Shakespeare's late play 'explores strangeness in ways that reconfigure Spenser's poetic originals ... radically and unusually'.

With Katherine M. Graham's "'You Mean Some Strange Revenge': The Jacobean Intersections of Revenge and the Strange", the special issue turns towards questions of genre. Graham considers the rhetoric of strangeness within Jacobean revenge tragedy, working to unpack the interrelationships between the revenger, the strangeness of their affective experience and the strangeness of the act of revenge itself. Focusing on Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1604–07) and Francis Beaumont's and John Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* (?1610), Graham traces the plays' shifting evocations of strangeness due to which revenging subjects become less strange and vengeful acts become stranger. This realignment creates what Graham calls 'a moral uncertainty about the revenger's actions' and, consequently, about the revenger's culpability.

In his article 'Turkish History on the Early Stuart Stage: Strange Spectacles in the Plays of Thomas Goffe', Marcus Hartner is also concerned with Jacobean tragedy but from a different vantage point. He analyses the interplay between otherness and strangeness negotiated in Goffe's *The Raging Turke, or, Baiazet the Second* (c. 1613–18) and *The Courageous Turke, or Amurath the First* (1618). Hartner delineates how, on the one hand, Goffe's tragedies are invested in James I's foreign policy with its critical attitude towards the Ottoman Empire. Reflecting crude clichéd representations of Turkish culture, the plays' sultan figures correspond to stereotypes: they are emotionally unstable, cruel and bloodthirsty tyrants, whom the Jacobean audiences are invited to see as complete others. On the other hand, these complete others become familiar strangers as each play 'inadvertently offers potential points of (emotional) contact and recognition between the audience and the Turkish characters on stage'.

Like Hartner, Anja Müller-Wood discusses a play which negotiates early modern stereotypes of Islam. However, as she argues in her article 'Putting Strangeness in Perspective: John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*', she does not link the notion of strangeness to the tragicomedy's representation of religious and cultural otherness. Instead, she conceptualises strangeness as a performative phenomenon directly related to the growing multiperspectivity of early Stuart drama. In multiperspective plays such as Fletcher's, each character 'represents an individual point of view accessible to others only within limits[;] all characters are potential strangers to each other'. Müller-Wood reads *The Island*

Princess (1621) as centring on 'a deep-seated potential for alienation' which supersedes the cultural conflict that recent criticism has ascribed to the play. Applying a 'functionalist notion of strangeness' in her analysis of Fletcher's tragicomedy, Müller-Wood supplements existing contextual and thematic explanations of the early modern stage's particular fascination with the odd, the outrageous and exotic to identify strangeness as a feature that potentially undercuts such contextual and thematic claims.

With Susanne Gruss's contribution, the thematic focus returns to strangeness as a phenomenon of early Stuart genre. In 'Massinger's Strange Pirates: Strangeness, Law(s) and Genre in *The Double Marriage* and *The Unnatural Combat*', Gruss discusses the ways in which strangeness is crucial to depictions of piracy as well as to the plays' generic status. In both plays, the main pirate figure becomes, quite unexpectedly, a morally upright anti-hero rather than a strange outsider. As an unstable signifier denoting unnaturalness, strangeness (and with it, piracy) becomes 'contagious' as it moves from the pirate figures to other characters in the plays, thus serving to parade the instability of the social status quo. Linking her discussion of (pirate) characters to that of genre, Gruss claims that strangeness and unnaturalness are not merely features of the plots, they also inherently affect the generic structure of both plays. While *The Unnatural Combat* (1624–26) highlights generic strangeness in the excessively intertwined public and private personas of Malefort Sr., which eventually lead to the play's tragic conclusion, and a revenge plot which becomes obsolete with the death of his pirate son Malefort Jr., *The Double Marriage* (1619–22) becomes strange itself through its undermining of genre expectations.

In the concluding article, the critical focus both moves back, to Shakespeare, and forward, to John Ford. In 'John Ford's Strange Truth', Lisa Hopkins illustrates how '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'. Hopkins demonstrates that many of Ford's Caroline plays rework *Othello* (1604) as they not only use strangeness as a marker of both social exclusion and socially transgressive sexuality but also link strangeness to truth. Hopkins argues that Ford's plays do not merely reproduce Shakespeare's tragedy but that they create an 'estranging effect' which makes '*Othello* itself ... strange even as Ford echoes what is strange within it'.

As the seven articles brought together exemplify, the notion of strangeness makes room for new insights into the intricate configurations and negotiations of the contested cultural territories that early Stuart drama is concerned with. An open and highly adaptable concept, strangeness goes beyond the difference and occasionally bridges the gap between selves and others, a binary opposition that has long been, and still is, central to the critical understanding of early modern literature and culture. From the critical readings offered in this special issue, strangeness emerges as a multifaceted and productive term which discloses, questions and renders visible the increasingly complex processes of inclusion and exclusion that mark the early Stuart period.

Joachim Frenk is Professor of British Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University, Germany. His research focuses on early modern literature and culture, Victorian literature, popular cultures and, most recently, posthumanism. Among other topics, he has published on early modern literature and material culture, Sidney, Shakespeare and Middleton, on British literary fairy-tales of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens, Victorian melodrama, James Bond and contemporary Irish novels.

E-mail: frenk@mx.uni-saarland.de; ORCID: 0000-0002-2425-2064

Lena Steveker is Assistant Professor in English Studies at the University of Luxembourg. Her research interests are early modern English drama, early modern pamphlets and early modern news culture as well as contemporary British fiction. In the field of early modern studies, she has published articles on Shakespeare, Middleton and Jonson, and on news pamphlets of the English civil wars. She is co-editor of *Early Modern Spectacles* (special issue with *Journal of the Study of British Cultures*), and she is co-reviews editor of *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*. Her current book project is a monograph on early Stuart drama and news culture. E-mail: lena.steveker@uni.lu; ORCID: 0000-0002-6234-6790

Notes

1. All references to *The English Traveller* are to the following edition: Thomas Heywood, *The English Traveller* (London, 1641).
2. Also see Lois Potter's contribution to this issue.
3. All references to *Othello* are to the following edition: William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015).
4. For the complex relations between *Othello* and strangeness negotiated in Caroline drama, see Lisa Hopkins' article in this issue.
5. Linda Levy Peck, 'Building, Buying and Collecting in London, 1600–1625', in *Material London, c. 1600*, ed. Lena Cowen Orlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 268–290, here 284.
6. Pamphlets reporting 'strange news' proliferate during the early Stuart age. See, for example, the anonymously published pamphlets *Strange Neves* (London, 1606), *More Strange Nevves* (London, 1607) and *Strange Nevves out of Kent* (London, 1609) as well as A.R.'s pamphlet *True and Wonderful: A Discourse Relating to a Strange and Monstrous Serpent (or Dragon) lately discovered [...] in Sussex* (London, 1614). Later examples include John Locke's *A Strange and Lamentable Accident that Happened Lately at Mears-Ashby* (London, 1642) as well as the anonymously published pamphlets *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster* (London, 1646) and *Strange Nevves from Scotland* (London, 1647).
7. Marjorie Garber, ed., *Cannibals, Witches and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

8. John G. Demaray, *Shakespeare and the Spectacles of Strangeness* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). For discussions of the importance of wonder in the early modern age and on its stages, see T. G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Peter G. Platt, *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Lorraine Daston and Katherine Parks, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).
9. Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 3.
10. All references to *Women Beware Women* are to the following edition: Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women: A Tragedy*, ed. John Jowett, *The Collected Works and Companion*, 2 vols, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), vol. 1, 1488–1541.
11. Callan Davies, *Strangeness in Jacobean Drama* (London: Routledge, 2020), 191.