

Introduction: Territory, Politics and Performance in Tudor Britain

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Of all the old and important words we use to think about human history and the events and chronicles that constitute our past, perhaps ‘territory’ is the among the most significant and evocative. Derived from the Latin *terra* (meaning ‘earth’), it defines the places where we walk around, build our homes, and lay the dead to rest. Our territories tell us where borders and jurisdictions exist – they separate and connect. As a starting point, knowing more about the word’s origins is useful, because it seems inherently related to the processes of civilisation that govern and define modern societies. According to David Storey, ‘in the Roman era, the word *territorium* was associated with both community and territory’, whereby ‘the idea of owing allegiance to the territory began to supersede allegiance to a lord, or a God’.ⁱ Territory’s history is, however, more complex than it seems; and it bears witness to the spatial dimensions of power structures, and how they have changed over time. As a scholarly concept, though, territory has received surprisingly meagre theorisation – we are only beginning to understand its complex intersections with ideas of space, mobilities and the (geo- and bio-) politics of specific places. For the political theorist and geographer Stuart Elden, political theory still ‘lacks a sense of territory’ and ‘territory lacks a political theory’.ⁱⁱ More complex than a simple *bordered-and-therefore-controlled* space, territory is an instrument of change and control in and of itself; it is ‘a requirement and tool of power’. Elden terms it an ‘extension of the state’s power’: ‘a bundle of political technologies’ which ‘comprises techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain’.ⁱⁱⁱ Territory is one of the state’s primary languages of power, and in 2019’s political contexts – in Britain and elsewhere – we can hear its words spoken loudly and often. To understand more about territory today, we need to learn what we can about the contexts of its development over time; and part of that process demands the deconstruction of stories, myths, and broader textual expressions that relate to these themes and ideas.

We might, then, see the title of Elden’s recent publication, *Shakespearean Territories*, as instructive. Here Elden argues that Shakespeare’s writing can teach us valuable things about how concepts relevant to territory fascinated thinkers in the early modern period.^{iv} In response to the rhetorical question ‘why should people interested in territory read Shakespeare?’, Elden finds within Shakespeare’s writing distinctive ways of thinking about geopolitical power structures:

[T]o grasp territory we need to examine a number of registers beyond a narrow sense of the political. Territory encompasses economic, strategic, legal and technical concerns. It is a process, a series of processes, the making and remaking of spaces and the political control and struggle over them. This includes practices such as bordering and dividing, conquering and defending, enclosing and excluding, measuring, surveying, cataloguing and mapping.^v

Understanding that Shakespeare was fascinated by the political technologies of territory (and seeing this wider disciplinary recognition gaining traction) is a useful and welcome starting point; and these ideas are of course applicable to other writers of the period. But Elden's ideas are not revelatory. Literary scholars have been probing the relationship between literature and the politics of spatial power, control and measurement for decades.^{vi} Myriad critical works emphasise that this period's changes in practices of travel, economics, trade, land surveying, cartography, and more abstract intellectual processes of thinking about history, religion, and philosophy, precipitated radical changes in spatial thinking; and these changes influenced and informed (and were influenced and informed by) literary texts. Shakespeare belonged to a dynamic intellectual culture vexed by changing territorial thinking, and factional, fractious and unpredictable political and social change.

Understanding more about what literature from this period can tell us about concepts relevant to territory is valuable to how we think about the political and spatial in Britain and Ireland today. In the year of the Scottish Independence Referendum (2014), Linda Colley wrote that

[a]lthough 'Britain' is still sometimes viewed as an old and peculiarly stable country, these are selective visions. Historically speaking, Great Britain, and still more the United Kingdom, are comparatively recent and synthetic constructs that have often been contested and in flux in the past, just as they continue to be contested and in flux now.^{vii}

Myths of historic British unity continue to cloud and distort discussions of Britain's future, at a moment which values the intellectual and cultural utility of studying English literature with increasing negativity. Many of these myths of British territorial stability and coherency have origins in the Tudor period, at a time of heightened nationalistic propaganda and myth-making. This special issue thus argues for literature's value to how we continue to advance knowledge of the narratives, stories and mythologies of the past, in ways meaningful to the present. The evidence at the disposal of literary scholars (and historians of literature) for studying territorial thinking is formidable; and this evidence intersects with the territorial beginnings of the British Union, its Empire, and subsequent colonial expansions.

The essays in this issue thus unpack some of the ways that we can use Tudor literature to think about how subjects encountered and understood the territories that they inhabited, and the ideologies that shaped their experiences of these territories. Darcy Kern's 'Making England Great Again: Tudor Politics and Roman Exempla in the Early Tudor Period' explores the popularity of morally didactic anecdotes from Roman history. At this time, the territorial legacy of the Roman Empire inhabited the intellectual drive of humanist scholars without the later demonization of many Romish practices and beliefs. Roman exempla provided early Tudor thinkers with ways to think about the present through the past, providing 'a communal precept for individual behaviour and self-representation'. For subjects who saw the translation of the concerns of the past to the present as a morally (as well as intellectually) enabling act, print technology enabled the dissemination of this material on an unprecedented scale. Printers like William Caxton and translators like Alexander Barclay were motivated by more than financial gain, and their choice and treatments of Roman exempla suggests a determination to adapt and deploy the political past of Rome to improve their political present. Histories of

Roman political division and discord, in particular, had much to teach the early Tudor political regime.

In analogous ways, Amy Lidster's 'Challenging Monarchical Legacies in *Edward III* and *Henry V*' looks to how Tudor drama of the 1590s (penned, at least in part, by William Shakespeare) also drew on exempla of English territorial past in light of turbulent presentist political-military concerns. Edward III and Henry V were perceived as England's most glorious military leaders, yet the staged representations explored here were vexed by the actual danger of 'England on the brink of national disaster'. Delving beneath the chivalrous veneer of their protagonist kings, Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the collaborative *Edward III* staged modes of monarchical critique, by addressing the personal shortcomings of both kings. Furthermore, these texts deconstruct mythologies of the 'just war' being peddled by other types of literature (especially Elizabethan war manuals) at a time when fortuitous English military victories were being lauded far in excess of the state's actual ability to defend its territories (which had, by the late-Elizabethan period, fully retreated from their mainland European holdings). Ultimately, the value of foreign conquests is questioned by these texts, and the stage provides a discursive way to question (and perhaps shape) popular perceptions of the mythologies of the past.

Many Tudor writers were similarly sceptical about the value of Empire, as Andrew Hadfield's 'Spenser, Raleigh, Harvey and Nashe on Empire' avers. Turning to the formative years of the British Empire, Hadfield finds 'widespread indifference, even hostility' to the idea of overseas expansion, fuelled by palpable fears of economic loss. Initial literary responses to the new world may well have framed colonial enterprise as a new Eden, but Hadfield finds resistance to the idea of Empire closer to home in Spenser's writings of England's problematic Irish territories. Where writers like Gabriel Harvey waxed lyrical about the 'international outlooks' and achievements of English explorers, the satirist Thomas Nashe 'was fired by what we might think of as more modern conceptions of nation and people'. Through parody and regional analogues, Nashe's writing rejects 'what he saw as grandiose and dangerously deluded visions of imperial expansion', dispelling the emerging mythologies of England's international reach.

The historical poet, editor and translator, John Higgins, was similarly sceptical about territorial ambition. Harriet Archer's "'The earth...shall eat us all': Exemplary History, Posthumanism, and the legend of King Forrex in Elizabethan Poetry and Drama' engages with current ecocritical discourses to explore how late sixteenth-century authors placed the abuse of land at the heart of their critiques of politics and society. In particular, Higgins's 1587 retelling of the legend of Gorboduc, which had been dramatized by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton in 1561/62 at the Inns of Court, draws on the contemporary association of environmental exploitation with bodily injury to advance a warning against worldly ambition. The ancient British king Gorboduc had, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth's myth, divided his territory between his two sons, and thus brought about the nation and dynasty's violent downfall. Higgins's version elides territorial demarcation of this kind with the physical carving up of land required by early modern enclosure, mining, and agriculture. In the process, though, Higgins also takes apart the premise of exemplary history itself, by hinting that Gorboduc and his sons' tragic fate is dwarfed by the inevitable consumption and decomposition of all human

bodies by an animated earth. The moral message of Higgins's poem gets lost, as he focuses instead on the significance of the nonhuman.

Jessica Winston's '*Gorboduc* Now! The First English Tragedy in Modern Print and Performances' also focuses on Sackville and Norton's play; but its territorial focus falls upon the British and American afterlives of the text, from the early twentieth-century to the present, in print and performance. According to Winston, in modern times *Gorboduc* 'formed part of cultural knowledge that educated people were assumed to have or desire', serving as a touchstone of refinement which gradually fell into total obscurity. Nevertheless, Winston documents resurgent interest in adapting the play in more recent times through, for example, one 2013 performance which 'paid homage to the play's past, while also inviting connections to contemporary issues' (including the build-up to the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum). Winston in fact argues that despite its marginal status, '*Gorboduc* may be especially suited to presentist readings, given its focus on absolutism, national division, and political counsel'. The first English tragedy still has, in Winston's reading, much to say about critical geopolitical issues and concerns today and in the future.

ⁱ David Storey, *Territories: The Claiming of Space*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p.2.

ⁱⁱ Stuart Elden, 'Land, terrain, territory', *Progress in Human Geography* 34.6 (2010), pp. 799-817 (p.799).

ⁱⁱⁱ Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp.322-324.

^{iv} Elden, *Shakespearean Territory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

^v Elden, 'Why should people interested in territory read Shakespeare?', *Territory, Politics, Governance* (2018), pp. 1-8.

^{vi} It would be impossible to comprehensively list relevant works here, but some keystone critical works include Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2001); Andrew Hiscock, *The Uses of this World: Thinking Space in Shakespeare, Marlowe and Carey* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004); Lisa Hopkins, *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border-Crossing in the Tragedies and the Henriad* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Andrew McRae, *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Matter of Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

^{vii} Linda Colley, *Acts of Union and Disunion: What has held the UK together – and what is dividing it?* (London: Profile Books, 2014), p.4.