Book review:
Thom, A. orcid.org/0000-0001-5280-4105 (2024) Review of: Shakespeare and the Denial of Territory: Banishment, Abuse of Power and Strategies of Resistance. Shakespeare, 20 (2). pp. 353-354. ISSN 1745-0918

https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2023.2284180

Shakespeare and the Denial of Territory: Banishment, Abuse of Power and Strategies of Resistance by Pascale Drouet (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 240pp, £85 (hardcover), ISBN: 9781526144041

Alexander Thom
University of Leeds, School of English

Pascale Drouet's monograph, first published in French in 2012, makes available for an English-reading audience an impressive fusion of French thought with one of Shakespeare's major plot motifs: banishment. By concentrating on three of Shakespeare's richest texts for this topic – *Richard II*, *Coriolanus*, and *King Lear* – Drouet leaves ample room to draw on an erudite back-catalogue of continental theory: from household names like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; to distinguished Francophone scholars such as Emmanuel Housset, Marcel Detienne, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and so forth, whose works have not been quite as extensively translated. This critical synthesis both supports and ornaments Drouet's direct, snappy readings of Shakespeare's drama.

In the book's first part, Drouet observes a running similarity: Shakespeare's banishments are often collocated with abuses of power. In other words, banishment is not only a feature of an unhappy court but often an unjust one. The collapse of these dysfunctional allegiances is often entwined with a critique of the spectacular demands of power, which Drouet terms 'theatrocracy', and its tyrannical purchase over individual codes of ethics (15). This model seems particularly persuasive in the case of Kent and Cordelia in *King Lear*, the play towards which the book often strains. The second and third parts of the book examines how Shakespeare's characters respond to banishment: the second focusing on strategies of revenge and retaliation in *Richard II* and *Coriolanus*; the third on dissembling and evasion in *King Lear*. In the fourth and most suggestive section, Drouet dwells on the interplay between endurance and exhaustion among Shakespeare's exiles; and the frailty of Stoic self-sufficiency in Shakespeare without a 'loving other' (216). Once noticed, this last observation is impossible to ignore.

A decade has passed since the French manuscript was first published, so the book is understandably not always in dialogue with recent scholarship. One of Drouet's best passages borrows from Foucault's late work on *parrhesia* (Gr. frank or free-speech), observing such unvarnished truth-telling often incites the event of banishment in Shakespeare (26-33). A more recent composition might have gestured towards David Hershinow's *Shakespeare and the Truth-Teller*, for example, which offers a subtle reading of Foucault's evolving thought in his final seminars.[1] However, this does not prevent the book from introducing useful nuance to this theme. After examining characters like Cordelia, Kent, and John of Gaunt, Drouet deftly notes Coriolanus's hostility falls short of the truly philosophical form of *parrhesia* due to his lack of care for the *ethos* of the plebians (30). The book further adds: '[i]n its uncontrolled manifestation, excessive honesty paradoxically comes close to abuse of power' (50). Drouet's highlighting of 'care' as a possible means for disaggregating the ethical conundrums of free-speech is a powerful and overdue intervention.

The Deleuze and Guattari citations seemed, to my eye, similarly judicious. The most important – though perhaps most cursory – inflects the book's title and premise: 'the denial of territory' is immediately qualified by the observation that, following Deleuze and Guattari, territoriality refers not simply to the geographic space dominated by a sovereign but also to a kind of Uexküllian *Umwelt* for the banished: 'they are forced to renounce all the marks (material, relational, emotional, imaginary) that transformed a geographically objective place into a familiar territory, *their own*, where their life was anchored and could safely develop' (1, their emphasis). In other words, the denial of territory is usefully framed to include the denial of a world; the denial of a habitual environment towards which the subject is not only attached but with which they identify. Likewise, the framework of the banished co-opting a 'war machine,' whose *ad hoc* composition implies 'a questioning of hierarchy,' offers a new dimension to the military ripostes of *Richard II* and *Coriolanus* (91). By doing so, they momentarily 'smooth' the 'striated space' of the sovereign state, thumbing out knots of power (96). But one wonders if these chaotic, charismatic insurgencies might not also collude with the theatrocracy of symbolic politics – and particularly the mirage of power as popular service – which the book otherwise critiques.

[1] David Hershinow, *Shakespeare and the Truth-Teller: Confronting the Cynic Ideal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

For the experience of exile, rather than its political consequences, Drouet offers new vocabulary and frameworks. In reading *King Lear*, Drouet cites Emmanuel Housset's remarks on the 'unthinkable self':

> It is not so much the self that questions itself as the self that accepts to be questioned, in a much more radical way, by the world, and, in doing so, it discovers the excess of what it can become compared to what it imagined it was.[2] (150, Drouet's translation of Housset's *L'Intériorité d'exil*, 313)

This is well-put and captures the qualified potential that Lear seems to discover in the latter scenes of the play. Clare Egan's excellent piece for *The Spenser Review* observed the portability of Drouet's distinctions between 'haptic space' (which one feels) rather than 'optic space' (which one sees) (163).[3] Drouet also usefully explores Housset's opposition of a 'closed interiority' (an interiority that consists in 'turning oneself into a spectacle') to an 'open interiority,' 'a mental space subject to any wind' where 'otherness can manifest itself' (181). In these counterpoints, Drouet finds the Pomfret-confined Richard and the heath-roaming Lear respectively.

The strength of Drouet's secondary material and conceptual offerings excuses where its style becomes more evocative than explanatory. If pressed for criticism, the dips into Tudor and Stuart history are situational and sometimes less confidently asserted but, for all that, rarely without value (19). A brief history of the gruesome punishments for sturdy burgers – burning, branding, marking – leads to Drouet's eloquent summary of Edgar's disguise: "It is impossible to become invisible, but possible to make people look away" (135). Pearls like that are worth the finding. While some readers might wish for more on Shakespeare's contemporaries or on his handling of source-material, to ask for this is to wish for a different book. For my part, I only wish I had read it sooner.

2

3 Clare Egan, "Pascale Drouet, Shakespeare and the Denial of Territory: Banishment, Abuse of Power and Strategies of Resistance," *Spenser Review* (Fall 2022).