

## Combining the Epic with the Everyday: David Greig's *Dunsinane*

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David Greig's *Dunsinane* is a sequel to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. It premiered at the Hampstead Theatre (London) in 2010 and was revived in Scotland at the Royal Lyceum (Edinburgh) in 2011. The play dramatises what occurs after the overthrow of a 'tyrant' (Woods 2010 and Edwardes 2010) in 'an occupied country' (Allfree 2010) and examines the complexities of the situation after the take-over by a new leader. It focuses on the problem of the relationship between the occupier and the occupied by unveiling a whole range of situations, tensions, and preconceived notions that more often than not lead to misunderstanding and bloodshed. The play is set in eleventh-century Scotland and yet resonates with contemporary occupations in the Middle East, namely in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this respect, Greig told Joyce McMillan in an interview:

I began the play very clearly wanting to talk about the present day and about the conflicts we are involved in and there a sense in which any piece of writing that you do is always about this present moment, you can't avoid that (2011).

Greig contextualises his motivation for writing *Dunsinane* by claiming in an interview he gave to the Royal Shakespeare Company during the rehearsal period:

[a]bout five years ago, I think, I had noticed that there was a lot of productions of *Macbeth* around the place and I could sort of see why there were productions of *Macbeth* because at that time we had just, I say we, Britain and America, had just invaded [...] Iraq and occupied Iraq and so it seemed to me there's an element of looking at the military.<sup>1</sup>

Greig continues by explaining his approach to the idea of the tyrant in the same interview: 'as I was watching these plays what really was interesting was not so much the overthrow of the tyrant but just that question of what happened after you overthrow a tyrant'.<sup>2</sup>

From this preliminary positioning, the play appears as a combination of the epic and the everyday. *Dunsinane* clearly looks at epic issues – war, history, overthrow of a tyrant – and yet, very self-consciously, it looks at the everyday experience of people during occupation once that historical overthrow has occurred. The idea of a tyrant's being deposed corresponds to the epic and what happens after such a deposition has more to do with the everyday: the range of situations that brought the overthrow and the consequences of such an event. In this context, war operates as an epic frame; occupation suggests the everyday routine of war.

Our argument in this article is that the epic and the everyday appear crucially intertwined; constantly mapping onto one another in relation to different aspects that *Dunsinane* explores, highlighting an ethico-political dimension. The next section examines the theory with which we frame our argument; all subsequent sections consider in different ways the thesis of the combination of the epic and the everyday.

### **The Epic and the Everyday: Leaks and Links or the Association Paradigm**

Bertolt Brecht defined Epic Theatre as the 'broadest and most far-reaching attempt at large-scale modern theatre, and it has all those immense difficulties to overcome that always confront the vital forces in the sphere of politics, philosophy, science and art' (1964, p. 76). On the one hand, epic embeds the idea of large-scale<sup>3</sup> which is so commonplace in Greig's work. Brecht argues:

Today, when the human being has to be seen as 'the sum of all social circumstances' the epic form is the only one that can embrace those processes which serve the drama as matter for a comprehensive picture of the world itself (1964, p. 46).

On the other hand, as in most Epic Theatre and also in Greig's epic works, the idea of the epic coalesces with that of history. As Caridad Svich has stated: 'Greig's plays are often epic in scope and historical in nature, whether the emphasis is on recent or

ancient history' (2007, p. 51). Brecht's theoretical writings also provide a connection between the epic and the everyday in theatre: 'The theatre is so to speak the most human and universal art of all, the one most commonly practiced, i.e. practiced not just on the stage but also in everyday life' (1964, p. 152).

Without abandoning Brecht's Epic Theatre tenets, an extension into a new paradigm has been argued by David Barnett in 'Toward a Definition of Post-Brechtian Performance' (2011). Barnett puts forward five theses in order to define post-Brechtian Performance. Three of those belong to Brechtian tenets, namely, 'epistemological uncertainty', 'dialectics', and 'emphasis on showing' (2011, p. 337). In *Dunsinane*, contradiction is commonplace; the play's dialectic tension does not lead to moralistic determinations; and the play shows rather than tells. If there is a message in *Dunsinane* it is, according to Julie Carpenter, that 'imposing "peace" on another country whose political situation and terrain you do not understand can have devastating consequences' (2011, p. 167). The two last of Barnett's theses is where the expansion of the definition into post-Brechtian performance lies. A criticism of Brecht's interpretative system is made and 'the stage is no longer concerned with interpretation but association' (2011, p. 337). The non-dogmatic, non-resolute presentation of conflicts triggers in *Dunsinane* a wish to understand, to arrive at meaningfulness. In order to understand, it is necessary to be able to connect phenomena, the ability to relate, to associate. Therefore understanding becomes associative. Such presentation exposes the failures in communication through conflict and activates links in the audience's collective mind: engaged audiences can strive for connections between their experience, memory and knowledge and their everyday lives in order to grapple with the phenomena presented in the play.

Erika Fischer-Lichte is another post-Brechtian theatre theorist who highlights the paradigm of association. In chapter 3 of her *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008) entitled 'The Emergence of Meaning', she explains how association bears an element of the unexpected and is generated in the spectator in contrast to interpretation: 'One cannot foresee which meanings will be generated associatively' (2008, p. 150) and '[a]ssociations [...] occur without being called for or sought out. They simply arise in the consciousness of the perceiving subject' (2008, p.

143). Secondly, ‘the associative generation of meaning strikingly differs from an intentional process of interpretation. Interpretation depends on searching for meanings which might “match” according to certain criteria’ (2008, p. 143). These criteria might be understood as a cul-de-sac for new thoughts or ideas, in short, for imagination. In *Dunsinane*, this enclosed system is called by Malcolm ‘circular paths’ (Greig 2010, p. 52) and in ‘Rough Theatre’ – in Greig’s sense of the term<sup>4</sup> – it might be referred to as ‘narrative superstructure’ (Greig 2008).

Brecht’s ideas on theatre and Barnett’s and Lichte’s association paradigm connect stage and audience<sup>5</sup> and this leads us to the everyday and our interest in ethics. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst state in *Audiences* (1998) that ‘the qualities and experiences of being a member of an audience have begun to leak out<sup>6</sup> from specific performance events which previously contained them, into the wider realms of everyday life’ (1998, pp. 36-7). Alice Rayner, in ‘The Audience: Subjectivity, Community and the Ethics of Listening’, considers Brecht’s Epic Theatre’s aesthetic ‘determinedly ethical’ (1995, p. 14). Alan Read, in *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*, argues that ‘Everyday Life places these questions of ethics, poetics and politics within the context of the quotidian’ (1993, p. x). In her chapter about *Dunsinane*, ‘Unfinished Business’, Clare Wallace points to an ‘unresolved ethical crisis’ derived from the encounter between cultures (2011, p. 199). According to her, ‘[w]hat *Dunsinane* does is to propose a way of perceiving a contemporary ethical and political impasse in terms of a semi-familiar fictional narrative, and to suggest correlations between apparently incommensurate situations and states of difference’ (2011, p. 210). This is again a way to read the epic (incommensurate situations) and the everyday (states of difference). Besides, Read has considered the everyday as a concept and crucially linked it with ethics and responsibility: ‘The everyday is at once the most habitual and demanding dimension of life which theatre has most responsibility to’ (1995, p. 103).

The audience, then, has access to varied viewpoints and angles. Author, play and audience might work together to generate meaning, sharing, therefore, responsibility. The artistry consists in generating a possible perception of meaning without telling what that meaning is and in spectators taking their roles as sensing

subjects and witnesses of the emergence of meaning. From this multifaceted involvement and surpassing quality of theatre and performance, the combination of the epic and the everyday operates inside and outside the theatre in critical and political contexts, Greig's Rough Theatre, the playwright's identity and *Dunsinane's* content, form, strategies and elements.

### **Critical and Political Contexts of the Epic and the Everyday**

The combination of the epic and the everyday is to be found not only in *Dunsinane*, but also in much contemporary British theatre. Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer and Aleks Sierz claim in their introduction to *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights* (2011) that contemporary British playwrights are interested in a 'middle ground [... between] everyday life [... and] political concern [... and] self-reflexive moments in drama [... with] the more overtly political intentions of Epic Theatre' (2011, p. xv). Howe Kritzer considers Epic theatre a common trend in contemporary British political theatre. She traces this development in *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing: 1995-2005*, stating 'Styles from the past used alone or in combination include epic theatre, social realism, absurdism, and satire' (2008, p. 24). In addition, Janelle Reinelt suggests that epic theatre in the British tradition sometimes includes Shakespeare (1996, p. 9), just as it occurs in *Dunsinane*.

In relation to the epic, Middeke *et al.* state that in fact Greig's work 'thoroughly exhibits epic features' (2011, p. xiv). Greig's Brechtian influence is not unique to *Dunsinane*: "Clare Wallace describes *Europe* as a Lehrstück, Nadine Holdsworth discerns an epic structure in *Victoria* and [... Janelle Reinelt has] also commented on the epic features of *Europe* and here, of *The American Pilot* and *Damascus*" (Reinelt 2011, p. 216).<sup>7</sup> Even some reviews of the production registered an interest in its epic quality: Claire Allfree observes that 'in one of the most energetic productions to hit Hampstead in some time, director Roxana Gilbert gives it an epic, bawdy scope: this is pacy, muscular theatre, wreathed in Celtic songs, fire, snow and blood' (2010, p. 167). We would contend, indeed, though such an argument is not

within the scope of this article, that the combination of epic and everyday is not an isolated characteristic, exclusively belonging to *Dunsinane*. Indeed, the mingling of wider and smaller frames of some kind is a persistent feature of Greig's work, which includes the blending of outer and inner space (*The Cosmonaut's Last Message*, 1999), the macro and the micro (*San Diego*, 2003), the international and the regional (*The American Pilot*, 2005), the global and the local (*Damascus*, 2007) and so on. Needless to say, magnitude does not necessarily equal prominence. As in *Dunsinane*, the stake lies in the mingling of elements.

Nonetheless, it seems pertinent to link the idea of an epic quality to globalisation, since Greig's theatre is thoroughly preoccupied with the changes wrought by globalising processes. In fact, the use of epic elements is a response to globalisation. Global times provide an epic framework, as Siward puts it in *Dunsinane*: 'a picture of the world which everyone agrees true' (2010, p. 48), and where 'thinking [...] is so full of traps, [that] you have to walk around in [...] circular paths' (Malcolm 2010, p. 52). The epic frame of globalisation exerts an enormous impact on everyday life. Reinelt observes that: 'What is recognized and criticized throughout Greig's work is the damage to the environment, local economies and *quality of everyday lives* in the wake of neoliberalism and late capitalist expansion into globalisation' (2011, p. 217; emphasis added). As Reinelt observes, Greig's dramaturgy and politics are connected in his everyday life (2011, p. 217).

### **Rough Theatre: Superstructure vs. Imagination**

We do not engage in this article with the contexts of Greig's political dramaturgy. However, one central event needs explanation because it relates to the writing of many of his plays referring to, set in or partly set in the Middle East. In the early 2000s, funded by a Royal Court project in the West Bank, Greig travelled to Palestine.<sup>8</sup> At the 'In-Yer-Face Conference' in 2002,<sup>9</sup> he gave a paper entitled 'Rough Theatre', published in Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders's *Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s* (2008), where he talked about his experiences in Palestine. During that time, he collaborated on writing a play for the Al Kasabah Theatre in Ramallah 'where theatre can only exist among bullets and bulldozers' (Greig 2008, p. 210). He believes that our imagination is managed by power 'in the

form of global capital' (2008, p. 214), which prevents us from thinking outside what he calls narrative superstructure. He argues that theatre is the best place to resist this superstructure's commands.

Those circular paths Malcolm talks about in *Dunsinane* refer back to Greig's narrative superstructure outside which we cannot think of the world in the everyday (2008). Because it is a 'super' structure, this has to do with the epic. When the everyday is colonised, the possibility left is imagination. Narrative superstructure is an epic framework that cannot just be criticised; it must be understood if it is to be resisted. The battlefield is the everyday and the weapon imagination. What theatre does is activate awareness of both and foreground a shifting of positions that might destabilise the narrative superstructure and illuminate an alternative everyday. Living in the new millennium after his experience in Palestine, Greig is in search of an answer to the question 'How can I, as a theatre-maker, explore, map and advance a progressive agenda?' (2008, p. 218). From 2006, he was also involved in the Royal court project in Syria.<sup>10</sup> His knowledge and connection to the Middle East has been a source of material and inspiration for Greig, and a shaping of his transnational identity.

### **The Politics of Scottishness: Identity as Combination**

Greig is frequently grouped with David Harrower and Chris Hannan in representing a new wave of Scottish playwrights over the last decade (Blandford 2007; Fisher 2008; Mountford 2002; Rebellato 2006 and 2007; Sierz 2000). This decade is one of significant change in Scottish political life following the establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh in 1999. Greig has indeed been writing plays that often characterise Scottish settings and characters. However, the concerns, settings and characters of his plays tend to be intensely cosmopolitan and international, embodying and problematising the individual's place in a vast global world. On the one hand, his work foregrounds an epic scope and, on the other, the plays are intensely concerned with the everyday of people within globalisation. In this context, identity is not a fixed category but, as regarding any identity, 'being Scottish is a work in progress' (Sierz 2011, p. 126).

Identity is normatively formulated as a grand, epic frame, which can easily be pigeonholed. However, identity is crucially formed by daily experiences and encounters with people and places becoming less graspable and more fluid. An example of an epic account of identity suggested by the play is Siward's 'I'm England'. His body becomes a country. In this case, epic versions of national identity are put forward by the play in the form of metonymies. In another instance, a soldier thinks that Gruach eats babies (epic) creating one of the funniest moments (everyday) in the play.

We argue that this peculiar combination also has to do with Greig as a Scottish playwright. That is, Scottish identity also suggests the idea of combination. Scotland is a country defined in opposition to England, the auld enemy and yet inclined towards the continent. Those are not oppositions but co-existing realities. *Dunsinane* is a clear example of this complex conceptualisation of Scottishness. Scotland appears as an epic place in *Dunsinane*, a place of tribal rivalries, of proud heritage and yet a place where people – or at least the invaders – are not meant to live, where the everyday becomes unbearable according to the play. We learn from the English soldiers that so far as they are concerned England is more welcoming with regard both to weather and to food.

Greig lives and works in Scotland, but the issues his plays problematise are frequently global. He is distinctive in his consistent, although ambivalent, depiction of national identity and homeland. He is Scottish and defines himself as an internationalist. Although he is Scottish, he feels an uncomfortable and dislocated sense of belonging – a sense of internal exile. He refers to Theodor Adorno's expression when he says that '[i]t's part of my morality not to feel at home in one's home'. For him, there is a simultaneous pull to belong and a rejection of feeling at home: this has become a driving force in boosting the writer's imagination (Greig 1994, p. 8). He claims that by mapping the imaginary, Scottish writers make places 'real' (Greig 1994, p. 8). He argues that when Scottish writers represent Scotland they actually 'invent' it (Greig 1994, p. 8) putting forward 'a geography of the imagination' (Greig, 1994, p. 9) introducing 'shape, order and insight' into the world they live in as they inventively recreate it (Greig 1994, p. 10).

This is how the combination occurs. In order to re-invent Scotland's everyday, the play refers to the epic frame and the everyday of characters by insistently using

imagination. And in order to represent Scotland, which is in Greig's words 'a damp, crabbit, northern country on the fringes of the continent' (Greig 1994, p. 10), he holds a responsibility to expand the ways the country is conceptualised and understood. In writing *Dunsinane*, he has overtly shown this concern. Certainly, Greig has a unique attachment to Scotland. This is true of ideas of nation and globalisation and crucially their mutual permeation. Correspondingly, Blandford reviews Greig as a playwright who avoids any 'simplistic or sentimental excursions into a "Scottishness" of romanticised, historical myth or victimhood' (2007, p. 98). Reinelt states that 'Greig's career has been characterized both by and beyond his Scottish identity' (2011, p. 203). Epic frames are interlaced with the attention to everyday detail. Thus, identity and imagination provide manifold combinations that involve epic frames with daily matters and concerns.

### **A Contemporary *Macbeth*: A 'Tale' of Occupation**

This section considers, then, the combination of epic frames with daily matters in *Dunsinane* in terms of the play itself, its basic content and its central issues. Both local and global, about Scotland and the Middle East;<sup>11</sup> it focuses on the human tragedies that occur after a tyrant is overthrown under occupation. Although the play presents epic events in the eleventh-century Scotland, it also implicitly suggests contemporary history in Iraq or Afghanistan, re-imagining notions of democracy, order, peace and war under globalisation's impact. Greig not only problematises such notions, but engages the audience in reflecting on present world conflicts, focusing on the Middle East within his medieval Scottish setting and framework. In these, he examines the consequences of invasion and regime change on both invader and invaded. The history of eleventh-century Scotland is refracted now as epic; the Middle East connection points to our everyday. As a Scottish playwright, he needed to write 'the Scottish play' from a Scottish perspective with the real story of Macbeth, who was actually an admired and able monarch (McMillan 2011). Despite the fact he has written *Dunsinane* from a Scottish point of view, that of the invaded, dialectical tension remains centre-stage. As Jane Edwardes puts it, 'Greig sympathetically

illuminates a tricky relationship between the invader and the invaded without ever being dogmatic' (2010, p. 167).

Siward struggles to carry on his mission in Scotland – a land of 'rock, bog, forest and loch' (Greig 2010, p. 12). However, eventually confused by alien politics and harsh topography he finds himself drawn towards the tyrant's (Macbeth's) powerful widow Gruach, in search of someone to share his responsibility. Mark Fisher argues that the audience empathise with the occupied nations of the Middle East as they watch the English army seek to impose order after the death of Macbeth and try to get to grips with the alien land (Fisher 2011). Cristopher Gray remarks that *Dunsinane* offers a more accurate picture of Scottish history than *Macbeth* (2011). Greig's aim, however, is to use a set of historical circumstances to create a dramatic fiction that allows parallels to be drawn with modern colonial wars without seeking to claim that such an analysis could apply to the actual Scotland of Malcolm Canmore. His Gaelic soubriquet, as Ian Brown points out (Brown 201, p. 29), translates as Malcolm 'the Great', the only Scottish king to have been ascribed that title for his perceived effectiveness as a ruler. But, then, is *Dunsinane* only aiming at adapting history and fiction?

### ***Dunsinane: Macbeth, History and Imagined Lives***

The scope and magnitude of the issues *Dunsinane* is tackling and its approach to history and fiction inflect the play with an epic and everyday quality. The fictional elements added by Greig usually serve the purpose of showing a character's everyday more forcefully. This section considers the combination of epic and everyday in terms of genre and resulting form. What is *Dunsinane* formally? We look generally at *Dunsinane* as an adaptation, where the epic and the everyday coalesce. However, if one scrutinises the play further, one comes to notions like appropriation for the present time, with a particular set of decisions taken which finally arrive at *Dunsinane*. The play has been defined in terms of dealing with the aftermath of *Macbeth*, as starting at *Macbeth*'s climax and as follow-up to *Macbeth*.<sup>12</sup> In Greig's words *Dunsinane* 'is set in the aftermath of the play *Macbeth* when the English force has toppled Macbeth and are garrisoned in the castle of Dunsinane and are trying to

establish Malcolm on the throne and pacify the local population' (Fisher and Greig 2011, p. 22).

The most common description of *Dunsinane* is the succinct 'sequel' (Billington 2010; Carpenter 2010; Ferguson 2010; Marlowe 2010; Mountford 2010; Shenton 2010 and Dawson Scott 2011).<sup>13</sup> All in all, however, Greig's *Dunsinane* is a prism (epic) that refracts the asymmetries of the global militarised world (everyday). Indeed, adaptation has become 'one of the most important cultural and aesthetic prisms through which the real, dysfunctional, conflicted world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has refracted its own image' (Hall 2004, p. 2). Gil Hochberg claims that 'works of art not only reflect historical and sociopolitical realities but further compete with them, introducing alternative actualities, which might find expression only at the level of cultural imagination' (2007, p. 3). *Dunsinane* adapts history and fiction complicating an easy definition. *Dunsinane* becomes a web-like structure in which many dimensions are at play, inserted into a series of ethico-political decisions of appropriation.<sup>14</sup>

In an interview (2011), Greig told Joyce McMillan that he thought the story in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was not truthful. *Dunsinane* is more than just a sequel; the play combines the adaptation of history and fiction at least in the following ways. (1) While Shakespeare's tragedy declares that peace is restored in Scotland under Malcolm's new kingdom, Greig's witty play pronounces the opposite so as to show that Scotland is too complex, tribal and territorially distinctive ever to be understood by the English (Billington 2010). (2) As opposed to Shakespeare's Macbeth, who was portrayed as the murderer and usurper, in *Dunsinane* he was a king of the Scots whose rule was marked by efficient government, a view taken by most modern historians. (3) In *Dunsinane*, Lady Macbeth is alive, adapted as Queen Gruach who is a powerful ambitious widow. What is more, she has a 15-year-old son by her first marriage whom she and the house of Moray regard as the rightful heir to the throne. (4) In historical fact, no English soldiers remained in Scotland as an occupying force after the fall of Macbeth. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon royal family found refuge in Scotland as a quite independent entity after the Norman invasion – that is how Malcolm, found his wife Margaret, a scion of the ancient Anglo-Saxon royal family, but not of Harold's, he being himself a usurper in England.

Indeed, this diversity of contrasting dramatic and historical ‘fact’ is born out of the need to express the intricacies suggested by *Dunsinane*. Greig’s imagination destabilises the notion of *Dunsinane* as merely sequel and/or adaptation, in which different elements are worked on to bring *Macbeth* to a new audience. Greig has said in an interview:

My guiding principle in adaptation is to try to discover the effect which the original author was hoping to achieve and then to bring that effect to a modern audience in such a way that they don’t notice it has come from the past at all, but simply experience it directly, as new. (Rodosthenous 2010, pp. 10-11)

One critic, Maxwell, in describing Greig’s playwriting process arrives at a triangular structure ‘between Shakespeare, the 11<sup>th</sup> century and [Greig’s] [...] sensibility’ (Maxwell 2010, p. 166). This is the dramaturgical process whereby elements merge and diverge so that the ethico-political dimension emerges. To sum up, *Dunsinane* is a sequel that (1) adapts historical fact as well as fictional elements, both related to (2) Shakespeare’s play and (3) Greig’s own imagination and sensibility. *Dunsinane* is an ethico-political appropriation of *Macbeth*, one that revisits and revises history and fiction (epic) and repositions the story of the overthrow of a tyrant and its consequences in the contemporary world by imagining the lives of people then and now (everyday).

### **Instances of the Combination of the Epic and the Everyday in *Dunsinane***

The epic and the everyday are combined in many of *Dunsinane*’s strategies and elements. An epic technique is the use of monologues at the beginning of each scene, which corresponds with the narration of the current situation by the Boy Soldier, which bears an emphasis in daily experience. As the English army prepares for the battle, the Boy Soldier’s initial utterances are reflective of their hesitations and anxieties:

We boarded our ships at the Thames mouth. There were two thousand of us and also some horses for the knights to ride and animals for us to slaughter on the way. We stood on the Essex shore a mess of shingle, some of us new and eager for a fight and others not so sure but all of us both knowing and not knowing what lay ahead of us. Scotland. Scotland. Where we would install a king. (Greig 2010, p. 9)

The monologues intertwine epic characteristics and everyday preoccupations. As soon as the fleet landed in Fife, the Boy Soldier describes it as a wild place and compares it to Kent. Meanwhile, as the English Commander, Siward, attempts to re-establish order by installing a puppet king over Scotland, he is to be challenged not only by Gruach and her fugitive son, but also threatened by a brutal rebel uprising and warfare tactics causing defeat and discontent amongst his own inexperienced troops.

Time can also be considered to be epic in the play: *Dunsinane*'s time span is one year including references to the four seasons. In fact, the play's four acts take place across the four seasons from spring to winter. In relation to situation and emotion, Reinelt claims, referring to Brenton's Epic Theatre:

His plays are always more about situation than about character, although he has extended the capacity of epic form to include aspects of intense emotion and personal experience without losing control of the contradictions. (1996, p. 23)

Thus, Epic Theatre is not just about reason; a productive use of both reason and feeling can, in this sense, accord theatre an epic value, as ideas and emotions, both have to be taken up critically. According to Brecht, '[t]he essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason' (1964, p. 23). However, he states that 'at the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre' (1964, p. 23). Indeed, *Dunsinane* is riddled with compelling metaphors and emotionally charged moments.

Genre, songs, spaces, narrative, language and plot, character, values and descriptions embed aspects of the epic and of the everyday. Concerning the blurring of genre, Carpenter acknowledges elements of tragedy and comedy in *Dunsinane*:

‘pitched between comedy and tragedy the work also has a good sprinkling of Shakespearean in-jokes’ (2010, p. 167). An example of the epic that the playwright discusses in the above-mentioned RSC interview is not only the use of Gaelic songs and dancing, but also the atmosphere, which depends on the way those techniques are used. Songs are sung in everyday situations in the play, working indeed as combination: ‘a neat mix of electronic rock and Gaelic chant, which evokes two worlds: the past and the present’ (Sierz 2010, p. 168) blending ‘tradition with punk attitude’ (Marlowe 2010, p. 168). Celtic song evokes the epic and contemporary song style the everyday.

Epic Theatre can be defined by the grand scale of space it occupies. Space is epic in this play in the sense that the main settings are the castle of Dunsinane and varied external and nature-related locations like the forest, the sea, the mountains, the loch and the rock. The space evoked is also epic because it relates to historical sites, tribes, cultural tradition and linguistic heritage. The play, however, also emphasises what happens in rooms and the daily relations that take place in them. Narratives are juxtaposed in a Brechtian manner with a focus on accounts of the way the characters feel the everyday. The play, as we have noted, is interspersed with monologues at the beginning of each scene by the Boy Soldier, who gives personal, mundane accounts of his situation in the form of letters to his mother. He shows he is afraid and inexperienced: ‘I have not been on a boat before’ (Greig 2010, p. 9). The monologues balance the epic action and are accounts of the Boy Soldier’s everyday hopes and fears. One of the soldiers is unsure whether they won and surprised with victory: ‘Whoo!/ We won!/ We fucking won!/ First fight I’ve ever been in./ Whooo!’ (Greig 2010, p. 18).

The combination of the epic with the everyday is also embedded in language, plot and character. Paraphrasing Keith A. Dickson, Wallace states in *Suspect Cultures* that ‘[l]anguage is unadorned, plot is simple’ (2006, pp. 281-2), something which brings Epic Theatre closer to everyday life. Critics’ opinions about Greig’s language are quite unequivocal: ‘Greig’s language is contemporary, allusive and forthright’ (Sierz 2011, p. 168), ‘[t]he overall impression is of a lively play that avoids the fustian language that is the bane of historical drama’ (Billington 2010, p. 168) and ‘Greig’s

language is like the set, plain and unadorned' (Feay 2010, p. 168). In relation to character, '[a]nother 'Brechtian' approach is a much greater awareness of the role of the common people in the events of the play', states Patterson in *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (2003, p. 143). Greig offers an instance in relation to characters and tone in which the everyday can be appreciated when he says in an interview: '[T]he elite, Siward and Gruach and Malcolm and Macduff, is counterpointed with a story of the ordinary soldiers who are kind of going about their business and a lot of that is very funny and very ordinary dialogue of desperation about their situation' (2010). As Fisher describes, *Dunsinane* is 'funny one minute, knotty the next' (2011, p. 678).

Characters are aware of the lack of epic quality in battle and express how battle dissolves into the everyday. Siward says, 'You'll be amazed how quickly a battle can disappear' (2010, p. 24). The play also denies the epic quality of positive personal traits like honour, justice and so on. Violence is rendered a cruel game and a result of misunderstanding. The Hen Girl, thinking that soldiers are aiming at her to kill her, kills a soldier in response and then kills herself. The epic qualities of battle, justice, democracy and so on, represented by Siward, are counterpoised by rough and ruthless daily matters like interest in commerce and money. Egham wants trade unmolested. Siward's good wishes do not prevent or stop bloodshed. Egham proves more apt for peace because he apparently generates less violence. The play also demystifies description. Ideas are not contained in single characters. They cut across very different characters, avoiding dogma and complicating audiences' associative efforts *Dunsinane* carefully puts in the mouth of different characters, namely Siward, Malcolm and Gruach, the same trend of thought. Siward tells us 'we can make a picture of the world which everyone agrees true' (Greig 2010, p. 48). Malcolm states '[t]he thinking in this country is so full of traps, you have to walk around in such circular paths, sometimes I forget that another type of thinking exists' (Greig 2010, p. 52). Gruach also says: 'Throw words at the tree and eventually you'll force me to see the tree just as you see it' (Greig 2010, p. 76).<sup>15</sup> When an epic frame is imposed, the everyday becomes unbearable.

Beyond simple juxtapositions, the everyday is not only referring to common people and daily practices but also to ethico-political surroundings. Despite the well-defined features of characters, '[they] are never autonomous in dialectical theatre; they are always in dialogue with society, the values it embodies, and the behaviours it permits' (Barnett 2011, p. 339). And society, its values and behaviour are performed in the everyday, the locus where, in combination and movement, the possibility of transformation lies. The audience must find stimuli somewhere when facing the dialectical nature of the multisided debate about tyranny and military occupation the play goes through. Joyce McMillan of *The Scotsman* suggests going and seeing *Dunsinane* for 'a brilliant, sexy, witty and challenging night out that will leave you with ideas and images to wrangle with for months to come' (2011, p. 678). Greig, both exploring contemporary concerns and retaining charm, proves once again that a way of making ethico-political theatre for the global age is possible.

### **Productive Collision and Blurring of the Epic and the Everyday**

We conclude with the destabilising notions of colliding and blurring. By this, we mean that aspects of the epic and aspects of the everyday emerge, fade, reappear and disintegrate, constantly shifting co-ordinates and destabilising any given framework, whereby an ethico-political dimension arises. This is precisely why the colliding and blurring are productive. The combination of epic and everyday not only operates theatrically in *Dunsinane* but also in the critical contexts of Greig's work, in his understanding of – and thinking about – drama and the world, in the play's content and form and finally in the play's strategies and elements. This article has demonstrated that the combination of the epic and the everyday operates in the play and outside the play at many levels. All in all, *Dunsinane* offers a combination of the epic and the everyday that can shatter narrow constraints of comprehension and illuminate association.

In conclusion, this article has concerned the combination of the epic and the everyday in Greig's *Dunsinane* and its ethico-political dimension. This dimension of contemporary theatre lies in the myriad combinations it presents, the complexity of emotion it transmits and the ways the writer and audience are permeated by such

complexity. Its implications relate to responsibility for the enterprise of understanding. Greig's play seems to suggest that the issue lies in lack of such understanding, a key word in the play. *Dunsinane* problematises '[t]he horrible complications that ensue when an invading force moves into a territory that it doesn't understand' (Maxwell 2010, p. 166). The idea of understanding is also part of the responsibility the author decides to take: '[T]he kind of political theatre Greig writes is joined to his own quest to understand his times' (Reinelt 2011, p. 217). This is tied up with his 'individual ethics'<sup>16</sup>. Facing uncertainty and denying isolation in understanding appear in *Dunsinane* as the bases of a possible way, combining the epic with the everyday, to rethink the present in the context of current ethico-political impasses.<sup>17</sup>

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This quote belongs to Veronica Rodríguez' transcription of an interview which can be accessed via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzSAyyKuRzQ>. In this interview, during the RSC production, Greig talks about *Dunsinane*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Large-scale is never meant to imply a totalisation of the picture, of grand vision, heavily criticised by Greig in his play, *The Architect* (1996), among others.

<sup>4</sup> Greig explains 'rough as in a rough draft' (Greig 2008, p. 210), as produced quickly, unfinished, childish, transcendent, cheap, dangerous, threatening, with texture, near, useful, fragile and dislocated (2008, pp. 213-4). The original quotation reads: '[S]omething done quickly, a sketch. 'Rough' as in 'not smooth' – something with texture, a form whose joints and bolts are visible. 'Rough' as in the 'rough boys' whom one was not encouraged to play with at school – something threatening and dangerous and even perhaps adolescent. 'Rough' as in 'rough approximation' – not exact or precise but near and useful. 'Rough' as in 'I'm feeling rough this morning' – emotionally fragile, discombobulated, dislocated from time and place, hung over. 'Rough' as in "unfinished"' (2008, p. 214).

<sup>5</sup> Audience – she who listens – and spectator – she who sees – are used interchangeably in the article. Either audience/s or spectator/s is understood in this article as she who senses and witnesses.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of 'Link and Leaks' introduced in the heading has been respectively inspired by Barnett's notion of association and Abercrombie and Longhurst' idea of 'leaking out'.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, this article attempts to be a contribution to the epic readings of Greig's dramaturgy along with those of Clare Wallace, Nadine Holdsworth and Janelle Reinelt.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/project/palestine>

<sup>9</sup> Greig, D. 2002. *Rough Theatre*, paper given at 'In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama in the 1990s Conference', University of the West of England, Bristol, 6-7 September.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/project/syria>

<sup>11</sup> Other Greig plays, not already mentioned, concerned with Middle East conflict and West-East relations include *Not about Pomegranites* (2000, conceived both by David Greig and Rufus Norris and written by David Greig), *When the Bulbul Stopped Singing* (2004), *Miniskirts of Kabul* (2009), and *Ramallah* (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Reviewers have labeled *Dunsinane* as a play that asks ‘what happened in Scotland after the death of Macbeth’ (Sierz 2010, p. 168) and that looks ‘at the aftermath of the 11<sup>th</sup> century English invasion of the northern kingdom’ (Sierz 2010, p. 168), as a ‘a tale of invasion’s vexed aftermath’ (Marlowe 2010, p. 168), as set ‘at the climax of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*’ (Marlowe 2010, p. 168), as a ‘follow-up to *Macbeth*’ (Maxwell 2010, p. 166), as a play starting ‘where Macbeth ends’ (Maxwell 2010, p. 166), ‘in the final moments of Macbeth’ (Koenig 2010, p. 167) or ‘more or less where Shakespeare’s play finishes’ (Dawson Scott 2011, p. 678). Other critics, like Carpenter, revert to the clear-cut idea of aftermath, climax and follow-up by defining *Dunsinane* as ‘a comment on England’s involvement in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan transposed to medieval Scotland’ (2010, p. 167).

<sup>13</sup> Re-working on the idea of sequel, for Allfree it is a mischievous, revisionist sequel to *Macbeth* (2010, p. 167) and for Neil Cooper, an audacious one (2011, p. 677).

<sup>14</sup> Adaptation proves a useful category throughout. However, since adaptation works consciously indeed at many levels, it is preferable to speak ultimately about appropriation. And yet, the difficulty of labeling *Dunsinane* is best expressed with statements like ‘inventive response to history and Shakespeare [that] resonates compellingly in our present’ (Marlowe 2010, p. 168). Many critics decided to emphasise imagination, be it in relation to history (Copper 2011, p. 678) or in relation to fiction (Sierz 2010, p. 168).

<sup>15</sup> A quote repeats in this comparison. However, we need it to support the argument.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> This article, in the case of Verónica Rodríguez, has been financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO) through the research project ‘The representation of politics and the politics of representation in post-1990 British drama and theatre’ (FFI2009-07598/FILO). In the case of Dilek İnan, her research on David Greig has been supported by BIAA (British Institute at Ankara). This article is a substantially revised and rewritten version of a piece of work with the same title previously presented as a joint paper at the 11th Conference of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE), Bogaziçi University (Istanbul), 4-8 September 2012.

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