

**The Sense of (Un)Belonging:
David Greig's (Un?)Scottishness in *Pyrenees* and *Damascus***

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David Greig's biographical journey and theatrical trajectory blend his Scottish *roots* with wider transnational *routes*. His relation to the ideas of 'home' and 'belonging' is intriguingly complex. As the playwright declared in a 2009 interview with Mark Fisher (2011: 15), 'I don't really have anywhere that I'm from'. His entire family was from a tiny place in Aberdeenshire, while David was born in Edinburgh in 1969, raised in Nigeria (where his father worked in construction) and educated in an American Baptist school. He returned to Scotland in 1980, with no traces of accent: initially, he sounded American, while now he defines his speaking as 'RP neutral' – so neutral that taxi drivers in Edinburgh and local people frequently ask him 'How long are you up for?' (see Pattie 2011: 54-55). Greig's early dislocation from Scotland, his subsequent relocation to another hemisphere, and the journey back inevitably trouble his notion of 'belonging', generating a strong sense of displacement and alienation:

I was born in Edinburgh, then brought up in Africa. So when I meet my family, I stand out like a sore thumb. I'm not like them; I don't share the experiences that they do. But, of course, I'm not Nigerian either, in any way that makes sense (Fisher and Greig 2011: 15).

Moreover, in 1987 Greig moved south to study English and Drama at the University of Bristol. After graduating, he felt that he had to settle permanently north of the border to become a writer, thus stressing how roots are crucial to the 'textualisation' and creative re-negotiation of identity:

I was in Bristol where I had been at university and I toyed about between London and Bristol for a while, producing theatre in pubs, in the very early-1990s. At that point, I thought I'd probably be a director and then I wrote a play – I really knew it was a play – and it got a little bit of interest. It became *Stalinland* in the end. I got paid a small amount of money to have a reading of it in Leeds. I still remember the moment very clearly when I thought, 'Right, are you going to be a writer or not? And, if you are going to be a writer, you're going to have to go back to Scotland.' Even at the time, I remember thinking, 'Why? Why do I have to go back to Scotland? Why can't I write in London?' The answer is, 'I don't know,' but I had a powerful feeling that I had to be living in Scotland in order to write (Fisher and Greig: 16).

Greig's words give a sense of his ambiguous and problematic relationship to his motherland, a topic that, as Clare Wallace (2013: 69) has underlined, the playwright 'approaches with palpable circumspection' throughout his exceptionally prolific dramatic output. In keeping with this, when asked about his Scottish legacy and allegiance during a 2007 interview with Caridad Svich (quoted in Pattie 2011: 54), Greig answered cautiously:

I rarely write directly or recognizably about Scotland ... But I am always writing from Scotland: Of it? About it? Despite it?... [My] experience of being Scottish is one of being intensely and viscerally attached to a place in which I am perceived as a stranger.

This statement, which may seem elusive at first, accurately reflects the inherent ambivalence of Greig's ongoing dialogue with Scotland. On the one hand, Greig is a deracinated writer, exiled in his own country and 'othered' by his biography and fellow Scots, among whom he tends to feel out of place. On the other hand, it can hardly be denied that he is the most successful contemporary Scottish playwright, who has

deliberately decided to settle in Fife in order to write for the theatre, and – more specifically – for Scotland’s new writing theatre, the Traverse: ‘It was to do with that particular audience. I knew that what I wanted to say was for those people. It was a conversation with them’ (Fisher and Greig 2011: 23). Paradoxically, the playwright who is reported to have said ‘I certainly hate Scotland’ (quoted in Pattie 2011: 54) is the same who defines himself as ‘a geek about Scottish culture’, an artist fascinated by his roots who has ‘drilled down and investigated as a critical reader the marginalia of the culture I am coming from’ (Fisher and Greig 2011: 24).

From a creative point of view, this personal tension has proved to be extremely fertile. Scotland – as well as the fluid notion of Scottishness – can be defined as a ‘present absence’ pervading Greig’s drama, a theatrical landscape in which ‘much of the significance and salience [...] lies precisely in an attempt to interrogate these questions of home and belonging’, as Jacqueline Bolton and James Hudson (2016: 4) observe in their Introduction to a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* entitled *David Greig: Dramaturgies of Encounter and Engagement* and entirely devoted to the playwright’s work.

Focusing on *Pyrenees* (2005) and *Damascus* (2007), two plays in which Scotland exists exclusively *in absentia* and/or in relation to the ‘Other’, this article explores Greig’s linguistic and cultural geographies of (trans)national identity. Set in ‘non-places’ outside Scottish borders (two anonymous hotels located in the South of France and in Syria, respectively), these plays offer a globalised version of Caledonian culture and identity, made up of clichés and frequently subsumed by Englishness or Britishness. Permeable, multifaceted, protean and (un)written *sous rature*, Greig’s Scotland functions, in David Pattie’s terms (2011: 55), ‘as the silent partner in a never-to-be-completed conversation;

as though the country has no substance in itself, but acquires meaning only through a process of continual re-engagement’.

First performed at the Tron Theatre, Glasgow, on 9 March 2005 under the direction of Vicky Featherstone, Greig’s *Pyrenees* was part of a season of plays, entitled ‘This Other England’, celebrating Paines Plough’s thirtieth anniversary. *Pyrenees* can be considered as a companion piece (or, more precisely, a sequel) to *The Cosmonaut’s Last Message to the Woman He Once Loved in the Former Soviet Union*, which was first staged by Paines Plough at the Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal, Bath in 1999. In a 2013 interview, when asked by Verónica Rodríguez about the role of intertextuality within his output, Greig stated that he had always conceived his dramas ‘as a body of work’ and that he intended to keep tracing the journey(s) of the two characters who first appeared in *The Cosmonaut’s Last Message* at the end of the 1990s to later come back in *Pyrenees*: ‘I am going to write a third play about Keith and Vivienne. I might also write a fourth or a fifth play about Keith and Vivienne. I’m sure Keith and Vivienne will come back. I don’t know but it wouldn’t surprise me.’ (Rodríguez 2016: 92-93). Wallace (2013: 132) adds that this third play about the Scottish couple, provisionally entitled *Vo/vo*, is to be directed by Featherstone – just like the two before it.

The protagonist of *Pyrenees* is a man in his fifties who is found lying unconscious in the snow, clutching a scallop-shell medallion ‘in one of the high passes [...] on the pilgrims’ way to Santiago de Compostela’ (Greig 2005: 39). Since he suffers from amnesia, The Man is taken to a quiet hotel in the area, where he is subsequently interviewed by Anna, a beautiful, kind, and insecure young woman from the British Consulate in Marseilles, who falls in love with him while he is struggling to determine his national identity. Even if he cannot remember anything about his past, this man with a preference for full English breakfast firmly believes he is British: ‘Why would I feel proud

of the British Diplomatic Service? / Unless I was British?' (17). Anna records the interview thinking that examining his accent carefully may help her understand who this mysterious figure is and where he comes from. When Anna was an actress, her voice coach indeed told her that 'people carry a landscape in their voice' (13). Here, Greig incorporates into the text the first reference to Scotland and Scottishness, based on linguistic evidence and, at the same time, perpetuating cultural stereotypes: 'She said that, you know, if a person's from Glasgow their voice would be low, held in the back of their throat, like this: 'Hullo'. Because in Glasgow it's always raining, you see, so everybody has their heads down' (13-14).

Unfortunately, apart from a slight lilt when he becomes animated, The Man does not have a pronounced accent suggesting a specific place of origin. Rather, his voice sounds neutrally soft. If accent is not helpful in this case, '[t]he words are a clue' (19). For instance, when he looks for the right term to indicate a small stream: '[...]'Buh ...' 'Buh ...' / It's on the tip of my tongue' (19), Anna guesses wrong: she suggests *brook* and *beck* – a word which would imply 'some connection with the north [of England]' (19). However, as we will find out towards the end of the play, the missing word is the Scots equivalent of stream, that is *burn*. In line with this, The Man later uses the old term *clanjamfrie*, which in Scots means 'Jumble. Noise. Mess [...]' (44), to describe the chaotic situation he finds himself in. Again, Anna is not familiar with this unusual expression:

THE MAN: Don't you know the word?

ANNA: No.

THE MAN: It's like 'palaver'. Or ... 'shenanigans'.

ANNA: Is it Welsh? It doesn't sound Welsh.

THE MAN: It's an old word.

Everybody knows it. It's an old word people use with children.

Your mother comes into your bedroom and looks around and says –

‘Goodness me, what a clanjamfrie’ (44).

These ‘various linguistic conundrums’ (Pattie 2011: 58) are highly enigmatic for a non-Scottish audience as they ‘pass through their conversation as parts of the riddle, not as the solution’. Through the slipperiness of linguistic games and the hackneyed representation of national stereotypes – ‘THE MAN: I must have been a git. [...] A Jock. [...] A mean-spirited, depressed, dour, violent, Jock. Making everybody miserable /... / No wonder I went mad’ (36-37) – in the first act of *Pyrenees*, Greig perceptively (un)stages Scotland’s elusiveness, its state of transit(ion) and the impossibility of being crystallised into the reiteration of old riddles and clichés. When rootedness gives way to evanescence, a homeless, porous, and unstable Caledonia effaces itself from the geographical and dramatic map, thus becoming ‘a present absence; [...] an unspoken name, somewhere between the characters and the audience’ (Pattie 2011: 58), but also a continuously re-imagined country with a palimpsestic identity able to open up possibilities, being ‘in constant states of production, which are never complete and subject to the play of history, culture and power’ (Holdsworth 2003: 25).

Scotland will ‘appear’ on the stage, albeit obliquely, in the second act of the play through the character of Vivienne, who claims to be the wife of the unnamed pilgrim. The woman helps him piece together the jigsaw of his life: The Man’s name is Keith Sutherland, and he is a Scottish civil servant in the Fisheries Department who has left his wife for a younger woman, staged his own suicide and embarked on a long journey across Europe. Vivienne, who has followed him in an old Volvo, reconstructs Keith’s identity: Edinburgh is their current home but, originally, he comes from Fyvie, a small place near Aberdeen. To convince The Man of her sincerity, she shows him some photographs from the past: one of them – an image portraying her younger self, a bearded Keith, and his parents – was taken in the place where he was brought up. The

low hills previously mentioned by Keith – ‘ANNA: [...] Maybe you come from a soft landscape? / THE MAN: Somewhere with rolling hills. Low hills’. (14) – do not look typically Scottish to him: ‘That’s not Scotland. / Scotland has mountains’ (67). However, Vivienne can locate precisely the farming area depicted in the photograph, the Howe of the Mearns (Aberdeenshire), characterised by rolling hills, rather than mountains. Pattie (2011: 59) suggests that this place can be highly evocative, at least for a Scottish audience, being ‘one of the archetypal landscapes of Scottishness, the location of Louis [sic] Grassic Gibbon’s *Sunset Song*’. Vivienne also determines Keith’s (seemingly neutral) accent:

VIVIENNE: You have a Scottish accent, Keith.

It’s very light.

But it’s there.

THE MAN: I wondered if it might be West Country.

VIVIENNE: No, it isn’t West Country.

It’s posh Edinburgh.

With a tiny amount of residual Aberdeenshire.

...

Your father was a schoolteacher.

He was keen you spoke properly.

When we lived in Africa, our friends were all English.

We both unconsciously tempered our accent.

But it’s there.

THE MAN: Africa?

VIVIENNE: For a few years.

Nigeria.

Lagos. (83)

This excerpt is interspersed with autobiographical echoes: like Greig’s own (trans)national identity and sense of (un)belonging, Keith’s Scottish self is multilayered and far from being manifest. This placelessness is suggested by Keith’s ‘modified,

smoothed-over version of Scots' (Pattie 2011: 58), tempered by the encounter with the English Other in a postcolonial context. In keeping with this intersection of voices, the character of Anna – whose epilepsy seems to suggest a disconnection from herself comparable to Keith's memory loss – is a Welsh woman, brought up in Essex, who went to school in Yorkshire and to university in Brighton before living in Tel Aviv, Gaborone, and Marseilles.

The identity of the most comic character in *Pyrenees*, The Proprietor of the hotel, is even more plural and fluid: Pedro claims to be simultaneously English, Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese, French, Galician, New Yorker, and Basque, as well as both male and female, both the proprietor of the hotel and a waiter. Wallace (2013: 131) observes that, through this polymorphous character, a myriad of 'national, cultural and racial stereotypes are playfully referenced, undermining the limitations of their clichés and, as so often is the case in Greig's work, underscoring the inevitable and necessary plurality of identity per se'. This is well exemplified by the following passage from the first act of the play, in which The Proprietor and Anna speculate on The Man's national identity. Formulating his hypothesis merely on the basis of cultural stereotypes, The Proprietor argues that the anonymous pilgrim comes from Britain, more precisely from England, thus effacing his Scottish origins:

THE PROPRIETOR: Oh, he's definitely British.

I'll go further than that. He's English. I'd put my shirt on it.

I haven't lived in England since I was a tiny boy.

Who'd want to?

Really.

I occasionally go to London on business.

Dearie me.

But I can tell an Englishman when I see one.

We still carry a certain bearing. (31-32)

The Proprietor provokes Anna, who becomes more and more uncomfortable as the conversation continues. By drawing parallels between nationalities and typical sexual behaviours, this chameleonic figure entertains the audience with his identity roller-coaster, emphasising the multifacetedness of his plural and changeable self:

THE PROPRIETOR: Suggestion.

Ask him if he likes to spank or be spanked.

I've never known an Englishman who doesn't like one or the other.

For a Spaniard, like me, to have sex is to enter into a zone of ritualised combat between oneself and death.

The German in me thinks of sex like eating – a gustatory business, all fingers, juices and smells.

My Italian side requires an audience and applause.

The Portugese [*sic*] in me simply wants to weep at the sadness of beauty.

Ah well.

Do you like to spank or be spanked?

ANNA: ...

THE PROPRIETOR: You're embarrassed. It's well seen you're English.

ANNA: Actually I'm not. As it happens I'm Welsh.

THE PROPRIETOR: Fiery.

Don't mind me. I flirt with all the clientele.

It's the Frenchman in me.

You mustn't take me seriously. (32)

Similarly, changeability and liminality are the distinctive traits of the omniscient narrator in Greig's *Damascus*, the 'unexpected by-product' of the fruitful collaborations (promoted by the British Council, amongst others) that the Scottish playwright 'ha[s] been privileged to have' (Greig 2007) with young theatre artists in Syria and Palestine since 2000: 'These workshops were aimed at introducing young Arab writers to the techniques of new British playwriting but – whatever the Arab writers learned – the workshops ended

up teaching me an enormous amount about the complexities of relations between the West and the Arab world' (Greig 2007). Like the figure of The Proprietor in *Pyrenees*, the Ukrainian hotel pianist Elena – probably the most fascinating character in the play – demonstrates that the notion of identity is far from being fixed, particularly in 'a place of changes' (Greig 2007: 75) such as Damascus, where any kind of metamorphosis or transition is possible. Coalescing traditionally opposed traditions – 'I'm a Christian Marxist. / Orthodox. / Both.' (75) – and crossing boundaries as a transsexual character, Elena dwells in an in-between zone, defined by Sandra Heinen (2011: 182) as 'a third space outside the dichotomy of West vs. Arab world'. Thus, accompanying the reader/spectator throughout the play with her shrewd comments and musical arrangements disrupting and simultaneously reconstructing the narrative flow, this protean storyteller holding an MA in Psychology and oscillating between a Brechtian narrator and a Greek chorus, 'creates multiple atmospheres in the generic space of a hotel lobby, aurally undermining a sense of stable, singular or authentic identity there' (Wallace 2013: 154).

A play in which Scottishness is merely reduced to a stereotype subsumed by Britishness (or, more generally, 'Westernness') and exists exclusively in relation, *Damascus* was commissioned by the Traverse Theatre and first performed there on 27 July 2007, under the direction of Philip Howard. After enjoying a considerable success at the Edinburgh Festival, during the following year the production travelled to Toronto, New York, and Moscow. In 2009 *Damascus* transferred to the Tricycle Theatre, London, and then was revived on a controversial British Council tour to Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Palestine (Howard 2013: 215), where the play was accused of conveying an orientalist vision of the Middle East:

Do I have the right to write someone from a culture other than mine?

So I have to overcome that and I try to find ways of doing so. In *Damascus* (2007), I went very head-on. I imagined two characters who were Arab characters. I trusted my knowledge, in spite of the fact that that play, when it toured in the Middle East, was accused in some quarters of orientalism. It's very difficult. I wouldn't make a huge defence of that. It probably is. I don't know. I just felt that I could write what no one else would.

So, on the one hand, writing about *Damascus* when I had spent quite a bit of time amongst people in that city seemed reasonable, because I had been there. And yet on the other hand, I'm participating in a very long tradition of representing Arab people from my position of a white westerner.

(Greig in Rodríguez 2016: 91)

Set 'in the foyer of a small hotel in Damascus' (Greig 2007), Greig's drama depicts the troubled personal and linguistic encounter and complicated business transaction between Middle Eastern culture and Paul Hartstone, a jet-lagged and hypochondriac TEFL teacher coming from Scotland, who has lost his sense of smell and would rather be at home with his wife celebrating Valentine's Day. Despite feeling out of place in the lobby of a mediocre hotel in 'a war zone' (10), the Scotsman struggles to sell his English-language textbook series 'Middleton Road' – as well as the vision of 'a contemporary, multicultural Britain' (15) it promotes – to the Dean of a Syrian college, Wasim, whose beautiful assistant and former lover, named Muna, acts as an interpreter during their difficult and fruitless negotiations. Since he does not understand a word of Arabic, Paul switches to his rudimentary French to try to communicate with Wasim and verbal misunderstandings cannot help proliferating. The Dean, who speaks better French than Paul, mocks him and simultaneously tries to seduce Muna in the name of their romantic past, when Wasim was 'an inspired professor and poet and she was an idealistic student' (Reinelt 2011: 214). The young woman, who manipulates language by translating very freely and arbitrarily what the two male characters say, is in turn sexually attracted to

Paul. This intricate verbal and cultural meeting, in Wallace's terms, 'showcases the language barrier as a source of discomfort and as a tool of thinly veiled aggression' (2013: 149).

Another transnational encounter taking place in the foyer is that between the Scottish teacher and Zakaria, the young receptionist/porter of the hotel, a character through which Greig, as Dawn Fowler (2011: 145) suggests, 'explores ideas of dominance and moral exclusion imparted by global conflict'. This young man, an aspiring Hollywood scriptwriter who is deeply dissatisfied with his miserable life in Damascus and will tragically shoot himself at the end of the play, is absolutely fascinated by the Western world and the endless possibilities this utopian universe seems to offer. Zakaria has never heard of Paul's country:

ZAKARIA: [...] Where are you from?

PAUL: Scotland.

ZAKARIA: Scotland.

PAUL: You know it?

ZAKARIA: No. (12)

However, Zakaria soon comes up with a clichéd, globalised, and commodified idea of Scotland and Scottishness, 'an invention designed for cross-border consumption' (Rebellato 2002: xvi):

ZAKARIA: Scottish. [...] Mel Gibson. *Braveheart*.

PAUL: Yes.

ZAKARIA: Freedom!

PAUL: Yes. Freedom. (22)

‘[D]esperate for some new experiences, especially sexual adventures’ (Reinelt 2011: 214), Zakaria instinctively associates the contemporary Western lifestyle with freedom and fantasises about uninhibited Scottish girls having sex, drinking, and taking drugs on the beach at night. Thus, he conjures up a vision that, as Paul points out, is just a figment of his imagination:

ZAKARIA: Scottish girls are very free, I think.

PAUL: Not really.

ZAKARIA: I see Scottish girls and men play naked in the sea. [...] Scottish men and Scottish girls naked, and then when it is dark they come out of the sea. They touch each other. They lie on the beach. The moon is big. They drink. They smoke hashish.

PAUL: Do you mean Scottish girls?

ZAKARIA: Scottish girls.

Beat.

Come to the mosque.

PAUL: Look Zakaria, what you’ve seen, it’s actually quite uncommon for Scottish girls to be naked, Zakaria. Particularly not the ones you pick up in mosques. (33-34)

The various transcultural encounters and linguistic misunderstandings between East and West, Paul and the Other, often rooted in blind prejudices and popular stereotypes, compel the Scottish teacher to question and re-negotiate his cultural position as a British citizen, as one of those imperialist subjects who are prone to lecture Syrian people about democracy and human rights:

MUNA: After Balfour – after Sykes-Picot – after Mossadeq – after Suez – and always always support for Israel – after Guantanamo – after Iraq ... After all this *you* are coming here to lecture *us* about human rights.

PAUL: Right.

MUNA: After your allies, the Americans, send their prisoners to us in unmarked planes for torture.

PAUL: Point taken.

MUNA: You come to tell us how to live.

PAUL: Look, I agree. It's terrible. I'm terrible. Britain's terrible.

MUNA: You British. You English. (50)

Here, overlooking local specificities, Paul re-positions his Scottishness within the more inclusive (and oversimplified) realm of Britishness. Similarly, Muna's Eastern gaze (once again) obliterates the Scottish reference, addressing Paul exclusively as 'You British. You English.' After all, in a distant and protean place, a city of transformations such as Damascus, where everything is subject to change and liminality, there is no subtle distinction. As Elena anticipates in the third scene of the first act, after identifying Paul as an Englishman rather than a Scot, 'Scottish, English, it's the same thing. / In Damascus, it is the same thing'. (14).

In both *Pyrenees* and *Damascus*, and throughout his entire output, Greig thus problematises a clichéd and monolithic idea of Scottish identity. As Pattie (2013: 195) suggests, '[t]here is something usefully unfixed' about the playwright's understanding and re-presentation of national and cultural identity, a vision 'chim[ing] with longstanding ideas of Scottishness as an identity which tries to escape fixed definition: of a national identity which places itself, self-consciously, on shifting sands'. A multifaceted, fluid, and performative notion of Scottishness originates from the idea of a contradictory, elusive, and frequently invisible country, which is equally difficult to encapsulate in a strict definition. As the character of Malcolm claims in *Dunsinane* (2010), Greig's sequel to Shakespeare's 'Scottish play' *Macbeth*:

It's quite ridiculous isn't it? I'm King of this country and even I don't understand it.

Sometimes I think you could be born in this country. Live in it all your life. Study it. Travel the length and breadth of it. And still – if someone asked you – to describe it – all you'd be able to say about it without fear of contradiction is – 'It's cold'. (29)

The harsh climate seems to be the only certainty in this cold, 'liquid', and slippery country, built on a sense of unfixedness and unpredictability. In his re-visionary account of what happens after Macbeth's deposition and Malcolm's subsequent accession to the throne, Greig ironically questions well-rooted stereotypes and cultural discourses by reinforcing the widely accepted thesis that Scotland's instability and 'queerness' are diametrically opposed to England's seeming stableness, 'normality', and 'normativity': 'Where everything that in England was normal – / Summer, land, beer, a house, a bed – for example – / In Scotland – that thing would turn out to be made of water – / This is what you learn here – nothing is solid' (39).

If the two countries are traditionally described as dichotomous and antagonistic dimensions, it is important to point out that Scotland itself is made up of binaries and extremes. In this light, what G. Gregory Smith defined as 'a zigzag of contradictions' (quoted in Pattie 2016: 20) almost a century ago is still identifiable in some of Greig's plays. For instance, in his unpublished text *Caledonia Dreaming* (1997), the character of Stuart McConnachie, a Member of the European Parliament who wants to bring the Olympic Games to Edinburgh, makes clear that the country is torn between irreconcilable contradictions:

Scotland is modern, yet old.

Urban, yet rural.

Friendly, yet canny.

Strong, yet compassionate.

Who is it?

Who's Scotland? That's the question we need to answer.

(quoted in Rebellato 2002: xi)

As Rebellato (2002: xi) observes in his Introduction to Greig's first collection of plays, the acknowledgement of Scotland's contradictory nature suggests that the prolific writer 'sees little merit in simplistic and narrow definitions of Scottish national identity because it's the very slipperiness of Scottishness that is its prime virtue'. Indeed, far from being a sign of weakness, the impossibility to be defined and the prismatic texture of Scotland, a country 'contain[ing] an infinity of experiences – too many to be encapsulated in any binary opposition' (Pattie 2016: 30), is a fertile ground for artistic experimentation and public debate. Despite its seemingly peripheral position, from its vantage point, this fluid territory can question itself and re-negotiate its relationship with a globalised and shifting world whose borders become more and more permeable. Drawing upon the sociologist David McCrone's work, Trish Reid (2013: 1-2) opens her study *Theatre & Scotland* (2013) by stating that it is extremely interesting to investigate the response of small territories such as Scotland, Wales, Norway, Catalonia, Québec or the Basque Country to large-scale events, changes, and pressures while nation-states are losing their absolute power. In line with this argument, Reid closes her book by writing that, among these countries, '[a]s a case study, Scotland is illuminating because its theatre, culture and politics have come significantly to benefit and prosper under the auspices of a new global zeitgeist suspicious of neat entities' (89). Living in the midst of global mutability, precariousness, and crisis, contemporary Scottish dramatists, including David Greig, Chris Hannan, and Stephen Greenhorn, do not aim to write and stage a definitive and defining map of Scotland and Scottishness (cf. Pattie 2008), an arduous task they are doomed to fail to complete. Rather, these writers seem interested in 'creating a sense

of identity in general that is fluid and constantly transforming itself – while at the same time showing themselves fully aware of how divisive and fragmented the experience of identity in the modern world might be’ (Pattie 2008: 156).

Before concluding, the exploration of (un?)Scottishness in *Pyrenees* and *Damascus* might benefit from some further reflections on the ways in which Greig’s fluid relation to Scotland has evolved over the years. It might seem odd that a writer such as Greig, who – in an article published in *Theatre Scotland* in 1994 – claimed that ‘any playwright who tells you they’re a nationalist is either a bad playwright or a bad nationalist’ (quoted in Rebellato 2016: 9), was ‘one of the most tireless and persuasive advocates for Scottish independence’ (2016: 9) during the Scottish referendum campaign in 2014 and is widely acclaimed as the most talented and iconic contemporary dramatist in the country. However, this ambivalent position epitomises Greig’s contradictory rapport with Scotland (and Scottishness), an absent presence looming large over his entire output, even in plays set in seemingly neutral non-places outside the national territory, like *Pyrenees* and *Damascus*.

As has been said, after his studies in England, Greig immediately felt that he had to live in Scotland in order to write. In the early 1990s, with Graham Eatough and Nick Powell he co-founded Suspect Culture, an experimental theatre company based in Glasgow, for which he wrote several plays up to 2008. For Greig, who has always been deeply interested in communicating with Scottish audiences, collaboration and engagement have always been key aspects: his individual dramas have been produced in the main theatres in the country; between 2005 and 2007 he served as the first Dramaturg for the National Theatre of Scotland; in 2006 he joined the board of the Traverse Theatre and he is currently the Artistic Director of the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, whose successful 2016/17 season opened with his appropriation of

Aeschylus's *The Suppliant Women*. Despite Greig's inherent lack of rootedness, all these experiences 'constitute him as a self-consciously Scottish artist' (Reinelt 2011: 204).

Comparing earlier interviews with more recent statements, we can note how Greig's relation to his motherland seems to have changed over the past few years. On 14 September 2012, in a wide-ranging interview conducted by Wallace in Edinburgh, the dramatist stressed that identity is not a fixed notion and admitted that he had started to feel integrated in Scottish culture: 'The pie chart of identity does shift for me as I move through time. At the moment I do feel quite at home in this culture, established within it in literary and theatrical terms [...]' (quoted in Wallace 2013: 160). However, the playwright immediately added that the idea of belonging and becoming part of the Scottish theatrical establishment is something (productively) scary for him:

that's now something that's started to worry me.

[...]

I notice glimmers of the feeling of wanting to run away from that, wanting to rebel against it. I mean it's an interesting, hopefully a relatively creative tension. [...] There's something important in not feeling you've arrived.

A writer's own awareness of where they sit within a culture is a factor in the way that they write. Some people perceive themselves as outsiders, some people yearn to be accepted and it gives them fuel. [...] In my case, I think that I became aware over the last four or five years that within Scotland, and to some degree more broadly, I had become, in a sense, the establishment. The Scottish National Theatre was established, and I was part of that. When the Scottish National Theatre is doing three or four of your plays and your plays are being done by major companies in London, you can't be an outsider. You might wish that you were, but you're not. (160)

Despite the awareness of his central position in Scottish (and, more generally, British) theatre, it might be argued that this idea of ‘never arriving’ originates from Greig’s own displaced identity and that his urge to cross borders – constantly overcoming any rooted and unchangeable vision of himself, of his work, and of the world at large – is in line with the transnational gaze of a writer in transit. In Rebellato’s words (2002: xii), ‘[w]hether they are set in and around Edinburgh, like *The Architect*, in an unnamed central European country, like *Europe*, or whether they find themselves leaving the earth altogether as in *The Cosmonaut*, David’s plays are always about Scotland’. Hence, the (un)Scottishness typical of Greig might be defined as a ‘localism under erasure’ (Rebellato 2016: 14), interwoven with a sense of contingency and unbelonging. Indeed, Greig’s multifaceted output reflects his cosmopolitan mind and soul, his being an ‘internationalist’, as he prefers to be called (quoted in Rodríguez 2016: 91), rather than a ‘nationalist’, a writer, that is, with an interest in the global echoes of non-places, and who is able to combine *roots* and *routes* in the most fascinating way.

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